



DARK

Rivals

A Chicago Mafia Romance

PENNY CRANE

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GREY

Of course it's fucking raining. What better weather for a funeral?

The Chicago streets are slick and cold, and everyone keeps looking at me. Even if they try to pretend they're not, I know they are. I catch their curious, straining gazes, not exactly sure what they expect from me. Do they want me to break down and cry? Do they want me to watch the funeral procession happening in front of me with smug satisfaction?

These are my own people, my own family. If the murder happened any other way, they probably would suspect it was me who killed my father. They *do* suspect it was me, I know that, because I'd be the perfect suspect—the oldest son, jealous of his father's place, thinking he can do business better than a stuck-up old man. It was no secret that I hated my father, but I didn't murder the bastard.

The onlookers are a mix of criminals, family, and the occasional civilian filled with morbid curiosity about my father and his death. He died less than twenty-four hours ago, and the news of his death spread like a wildfire—his body was barely cold before the entire city of Chicago knew about the

brutal killing of one of the most powerful mob lords in the country.

Of course, that news didn't reach me so fast. I was the last to know, too busy buried between a pair of milky thighs that I'd been after for weeks. And by the time I'd be done with her, everyone but myself knew that my father, the legendary Matthew Calvos, was dead.

“Are you ready now?” The somber voice breaks me out of my thoughts. Looking over, I catch the gaze of one of my father's captains—now my own. I can't remember his name. When I don't respond, he tries again, “Grey?”

“It's mine now, isn't it?” I murmur, more to myself than him.

The Calvos Family Syndicate is mine.

It's what I've always wanted. From the time I could remember walking into my father's office, from the time I could understand what exactly my family was in business doing, I wanted it. I craved the power, the wealth, the position. When my dad fucked things up, I wanted to fix them, do them better. I made no secret of the fact. My father knew it, all of his men knew it.

Which is why the captain's eyes gleam with a suspicion that will likely take weeks to kill. He'll learn, sooner than later if he knows how to survive, that I didn't murder my father. The facts are all there, if he'd just look.

Yes, I hated my father with every bone in my body, every breath in my lungs. No one would deny that. Matthew Calvos was a misogynistic bastard who didn't deserve to be where he was. But even though I hated him, I didn't murder him. Even though I hated him, I didn't like *how* he was murdered. I still don't.

Shot through the head with a smile ripping open his face, a signature Rossi kill if I ever saw one. Not that I actually saw my father's body, I didn't want to see that. I only looked at the pictures they shoved over my desk hours after it had happened. The pictures are still there, in the black folder, waiting to be filed away when the funeral is over. When he found out about my promotion to syndicate boss, my cousin, Henri Calvos, asked me what I would do first. I told him I would deal with the Rossi family.

The rest of the funeral passes like a blur. The crowds depart, those civilians and low life criminals with mouths gaping in awe at seeing the notorious Calvos family torn apart by grief. As we leave the church where my father requested to be buried in his will, my mother grips to my arm, feebly leaning against my body. Her grief is real, but my impassive face isn't hiding anything. Not sadness, not grief, not bitterness. Of course I'd like to figure out exactly who the fucker is that shot him, but I'm not pissed about his death.

Shit is actually going to get done now that he's gone.

"My condolences, Mrs. Calvos." Oliver, our family's driver, holds open the door for her.

My mother doesn't reply, collapsing into the car. The crowd pushes in, but security keeps them well away. Cameras flash, reporters and tabloids desperate for anything that will bring them clicks and reads.

It isn't until I'm about to get into the car that I catch one of the faces, our gazes snagging from across the street. She's well hidden, and if it wasn't for that sixth sense I seem to possess when only she's around, I wouldn't have noticed.

Arden Rossi cocks an eyebrow, watching me with smug satisfaction, and I duck into the car, a fresh wave of *pissed* rushing through me.

That shit ain't gonna fly as long as I'm in charge.

ARDEN

I t's pouring down freezing rain by the time I get back to the house, and the burst of warm air against my cold cheeks is welcome. The stately hallway is dark, but more importantly dry, and I shuck off my Wellingtons into a corner. A little jingle of a collar and tiny toes against the marble come a few seconds later, followed by the fluffy sight of my dog, Prince.

“Come here, boy,” I say, grinning as the little fluff ball of a Pomchi comes bounding toward me. When he reaches me, I pick him up, then head into the front room where I know my mother is waiting.

Delilah Rossi, the leader of the Rossi Syndicate and one of the very few females in the mafia scene in Chicago with high power and respect, sits in her favorite Victorian wingback chair, feet propped up on a matching cushion. Always old fashioned, she has today's newspaper opened, nearly covering her face.

The fire blazes and pops as I set down Prince, letting him run over to Delilah and jump up on the cushion, settling at her feet. A familiar spot for the dog to watch the goings on of our family.

“How was it?” she asks.

“It was bad,” I say absently, bending down to pet Prince again as I warm myself by the fire. “He probably suspects. Actually, he definitely suspects.”

Grey probably suspects. I hate him so much I can't even say his name. Though there may be peace between the families on the outside, old rivalries run deep, and the Calvos family and the Rossis haven't gotten along for centuries. There's always been hatred, but it's been contained. Now, I'm not so sure.

I could tell in the way our gazes caught right before Grey got into his car, my adrenaline still rushing through my veins like fire. I had hoped that he would see me—I didn't go out of my way *to* be seen, but I wanted him to know that I was there. Our family had nothing to do with Matthew's death, but I knew he would suspect it, especially considering the killer *did* use our family's signature style, and I wanted to taunt him. Make his blood boil just as much as he makes mine heat.

We're like the Hatfields and McCoys but worse. Because we've got drugs, guns, booze, money, and power. Chicago bows at our feet. Our feud isn't some backwoods squabble over a few acres of cheap land. We're the real mafia, organized crime on a scale that would make the government jealous, and people die when they get in our way.

My mother doesn't even look up from her paper, snapping the page contemptuously as she turns it over. “Of course he does. But he'll see very quickly it wasn't us. What business do we have disrupting a peace that has lasted almost a century?”

A lot, actually. I know for a fact that Matthew Calvos is one of the most hated men in the circles we run, and I know that if there was a club for hating Matthew, my mother would be the president. But I also know for a fact that we wouldn't dare lift a finger against one of the other syndicates.

Would we?

I cock an eyebrow, even though she's not looking at me. "We hate the Calvos Syndicate," I say slowly, never sure of my mother's volatile tempers. I don't *think* she would do something behind my back this big, but would she?

"Of course we hate them." She snaps the newspaper shut. "Everyone does. But even I'm not a big enough fool to murder Matthew Calvos, as much as everyone would like to think."

"I didn't mean to suggest—" I start, but wisely stop. She doesn't want to hear it.

"Just because I am the only woman syndicate leader in Chicago doesn't mean I get treated like a special snowflake." She sets the paper aside and gently pushes Prince off the cushion. She doesn't like when he sleeps at her feet, though it happens often enough. "In fact, quite the opposite. You'll know what I mean when you take over, Arden," she says, her voice softening a little bit this time.

"I know."

I *do* know. As much as my mother can have tempers, we're of the same blood, the same breed. I love her more than any other person in the world, and she's right.

“When does Lawson come back?” I ask suddenly, wondering about my older brother.

We’ve never been close, but I’ve missed him for some reason lately. Two years my senior, my mother makes it no secret that I’m her favorite—yes, she plays favorites. So much so that sometimes it seems like she couldn’t care less about him, which surprisingly never has made him bitter, or at least, he’s never *seemed* bitter. I know that someone like Grey Calvos would be pissed as shit if he had a *younger* sister who was going to become heir before him.

Delilah’s lips tighten into a firm line. She doesn’t like talking about it, but I still want to know. “I haven’t heard anything from him yet,” she says.

Lawson has been undercover for the past couple months now on a mission that, for some reason, I know nothing about. He was here one day and gone the next, leaving us with little explanation, though I get the feeling my mother knows more than she’s letting on. Why she isn’t telling me makes me want to throttle her, because she never keeps such important information from me.

“Delilah,” a deep, slightly accented masculine voice says from the hallway before I can comment on Lawson. Surprise filters through me when I recognize Kenny, one of my mom’s favorite freelance street criminals.

Yes, there is such a thing. Even among the lowly soldiers completely unrelated to the family, there’s always a hierarchy.

“Kenny,” I say, jumping up from the couch I’d sat down on. I stop myself before I accidentally do something stupid, like pull him into a hug. “What are you doing here?”

His gaze softens a little when he looks at me. Kenny and I were friends when we were little, but when I started getting more involved with the business, naturally, we had to spend less time together. Especially considering he’s not *actually* part of the syndicate, nor holds any position of power, someone like me can’t be fraternizing with him in any shape or form, even if it’s as simple as friendship. Besides, he’s technically neutral ground—loyal to no one but himself. To us, he’s a risk, even if to me he was once a friend.

“Hey, Ari,” he says, using my old childhood nickname, despite my mother’s frown. His flirtatious smile is just part of who he is, and I know it doesn’t mean anything. “You’re lookin’ good these days.”

I blush in spite of myself. “You too, Kenny.”

“What do you want?” Delilah says sharply, interrupting us.

Kenny gives me a small wink before turning his attention back to my mother. He is a professional, after all. “Good and bad news,” he says. “First off, I’ve checked with all of my connections and there doesn’t seem to be any word on the street about a threat to any other leaders. Good news, because if there was a rebellion going on, there would be talk of taking down the rest of you, but bad news, because that’s all I’m getting. People are staying quiet. They’re afraid. Might be a higher-up at work, someone in the ranks.”

“One of Calvos’ own?” Delilah asks.

Kenny just shrugs. “Not really sure. Matthew probably just fucked with someone he shouldn’t have fucked with, in my opinion.”

Delilah nods, her face going blank with thought for a few long seconds before she says, “Talk to Chris about payment.”

Kenny nods, glancing at me one more time before heading out. Like I said, a freelance criminal. Does shit for everyone, gets paid to do it. One of the last times I saw him I asked if he’d swear into our syndicate, but he told me that loyalty was asking to get him killed. Playing the field was the best way to ensure neither side wanted him dead.

He has a point.

“Even though it’s not our problem,” I say slowly, “we still need to be on alert if it is an outside attempt on assassination. If the killer has used our signature, it’s likely they’ll find an enemy in us as well.”

“We go on as usual,” Delilah says with confidence. “As we always do.”

I agree, and when Delilah opens her paper once more, I know the conversation is over for the night. My mother practices a very rigid work-life balance, and she’s not going to hear anything else about it tonight.

“Good night, mother,” I say, picking up Prince who had once again curled up at Delilah’s feet. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

She doesn't say anything, so I turn toward my own room to get ready for bed, then think better of it and decide to take Prince out for his usual night time shit. He's been a little antsy at night, and I'm not losing another minute of sleep over the dog, even though I love him.

I know the second I step outside of the back door it's too late. I know when I'm being watched without having to see eyes.

And even though I have training to help me protect myself against situations like this, he takes me off guard. The last thing I see before my vision fades to black is a crimson red suit.

Calvos.

GREY

Just looking at her I feel a rush of hot anger burn through me. Even with the layer of one-way glass between us, I hate the sight of her. I hate knowing she's there. I hate everything about her, because she represents everything I can't have.

And there's only one thing I can't have:

Her.

Arden Rossi is passed out on my interrogation table, head pressed up against the cold steel, her hair a limp mass of curls around her. There should be nothing attractive about her disheveled appearance, but the fact alone that it's *Arden* and not some other random criminal makes my pulse pick up in a way that has nothing to do with the fact that I've just kidnapped my rival.

It was entirely too easy.

Why haven't I done it before? I wonder, trying to pull my eyes away from her. I can't.

I gave the order and my men followed it perfectly. It was an in and out job, and, if we're lucky, we have about twelve hours before any of the Rossi family finds out. I plan on using those twelve hours wisely. Very wisely.

“Everyone out,” I growl, not tearing my gaze away from her. There’s a shuffle behind me, but no one leaves. “I said get the fuck out. This one is between me and Rossi. No one else. Cut the security feed in the room. If I catch any fucker lingering around the holding room, the interrogation room, or the rooms surrounding, they get a bullet to their brain.”

That gets their attention. They know I’m not kidding, not that I’ve ever been one for light-hearted jokes. I’ve been in power for less than twenty-four hours, but they’re learning to listen.

Tearing off the rich crimson blazer the Calvos family is known for, I throw it aside and slide my thumb under the buttons at my wrist. The cuffs around my arms loosen, and I shove the sleeve up my arm to my forearms.

I don’t mess with my men, and I certainly don’t mess the fuck with Arden Rossi.

When I look back up at the one-way glass, she’s awake, and those green eyes are staring right into my own. My heart does a stupid little flip in my chest.

This should be fun.

ARDEN

In the half second before I was knocked unconscious, I saw the red blazer and knew Grey had given the order, but that doesn't make me any less pissed to see the smug satisfaction on his face as the door swings open, rattling on its unoiled hinges. The fire behind his eyes barely contained his anger, and our gazes snap together like the electric end of two magnets.

My pulse rushes to life in my throat and my wrists strain against the chains that have me cuffed to the table. A fresh wave of hatred for Grey Clavos rushes through me, if it's even possible to like him any less—the Rossis and Calvos families have never mixed, and Grey and I are certainly no exception. In fact, we're the opposite. Maybe there was a time when our families could have been peaceable, but it died when Grey and I were born.

On the same fucking day, in the same fucking hospital.

“I hope you covered your tracks well,” I say, my voice husky and rough. “Because my mother is going to be after you. And not just my mother, my whole fuckin’ syndicate. My entire *family*.”

He knows that, of course, but I'm not going to let him go without hearing it from me.

Grey pushes aside the chair on the other side of the table. "Of course I did," he says, his hands flexing against the steel top as he leans against it. His bare forearms are framed by sleeves that have been pushed up, showcasing an erotic twist of veins through his skin. He's certainly strong enough to handle himself. "I'm not an idiot."

"And yet you kidnapped me," I say dryly. "Why do you want me here, Calvos?" I try to keep still, but everything in me wants to squirm, and not because of him. The cuffs around my wrist are keeping me from moving, and I hate being trapped. "I didn't think I did anything to piss you off."

I know exactly why I'm here, but I'm sure as hell not going to be the first to mention his dead father. I saw the photos for myself, I know that Matthew Calvos was murdered using our signature, but it wasn't us, and he knows that.

His jaw twitches. "You know why you're here."

"Because you think I killed your daddy?" I smirk. I can't help myself, I like messing with him. Poking at him. Like throwing sticks at a bear. "I know you're not sad about it, Grey. You couldn't look any more delighted."

He looks everything *but* delighted, but I know he certainly isn't mourning his father. No one is. Not even his most beloved captains.

Grey looks me dead in the eye. His are grey, just like his name. “I want you to tell me you had nothing to do with it.”

I cock an eyebrow. “I didn’t kill Matthew,” I say easily, because it’s true. I’m not a good liar, and he knows that. “And neither did anyone in my syndicate.”

A growl tears from the back of his throat as he pushes off the table, his hands flexing and then balling into fists at his sides. He’s barely keeping his anger in check, and I’m sure that if I was any other person, he’d be in a rage right now.

“What the fuck do you want me to do about it?” I yell, annoyed. “I can’t reverse what’s happened, and at this point, I’m not sure I can do *anything* to help you other than get out of here. My presence seems to be doing very little to help this situation, and my family isn’t involved. Do you *want* my family to be involved?”

He turns on his heels, moving back to the table in a swift second. His fist comes down on the top of the iron table, but I don’t even flinch. I grew up in the mafia. Intimidating theatrics were nothing new.

“It would sure be a whole hell of a lot easier if you were,” he mutters, rage simmering under his skin. It practically vibrates off of him, seeping out of his pores, the tips of his fingers, thrumming around his body. His toned, broad, shoulders are tense with burning anger, his jaw set and his eyes dark.

“You’re more attractive when you’re angry,” I whisper, just to piss him off.

But it's true. Grey Calvos has always been attractive, and it's one of the reasons why I hate everything about him. He makes me feel things. Dangerous things. Things that make my mind wander to other places where I've got handcuffs around my wrists, places that have nothing to do with being a prisoner.

Or maybe I am a prisoner. A prisoner to his body, to his touch. His tongue and his kiss and his cock. I may hate him, but that doesn't mean my body hates him.

"What do you want, Grey?" I ask, lowering my voice. I know there isn't anyone else on the other side of the one-way glass, and I catch my own reflection in the mirror. I look pathetic, but I don't care. "Was this just an excuse to get me here?"

My wrists strain against the cuffs again, and his eyes zero in on the movement. Flickering back to mine, they burn with a darkness that I want to let consume me.

You want me, I think. You want me as bad as I want you.

I cross my legs tightly under the table, trying to soothe some of the ache that's budding between my thighs. I could picture it now, him telling me to bend over the table, him making me watch myself in that mirror until I cum all over his cock...

"You will be staying with me," he says firmly. "You will be staying with me until I have what I want from you."

"And what is that?" I say, arching an eyebrow.

Grey inside of me, fucking me like I know he knows how to fuck a woman. Grey spreading my legs apart, tasting me with his tongue. Grey letting me ride him, but not letting me cum until I'm screaming and begging for him.

His eyes narrow and darken, as if he can read my thoughts. "You will call your family," he says, "and inform them that you are staying with me."

He pulls a phone out of his pocket with a number dialed up that I recognize as my mother's. I snap out of my fantasies instantly, realizing he's being fucking serious. I take it from him, still warm from his pocket, staring at the call button.

"I know that you know you'd be stupid not to," he says, taunting me. "You'd be stupid to tell them the truth."

"The truth being that you kidnapped me," I say flatly.

His eyes glow with cruel amusement. "You came here willingly. We both know that."

He's right, I'd be stupid not to tell his version of the truth. Because if my mother knew that I was forced here against my will, she wouldn't stop at just a war. She wouldn't stop until every one of them and every one of us had been killed. And even though he's my enemy, I know better than to piss off Grey. I'd rather keep my family safe than start a war because I'm being stupid. The casualties on both sides would be catastrophic. War will have to wait.

"Three days," I say, letting out a sharp breath. "Three days and no more."

“Deal.”

I press the call button, and my mother picks up on the first ring.

GREY

She was right. She always fucking is. As much as I'm never going to admit it to her, Arden is just as quick as she is beautiful—she knows that the only reason why I brought her here is because I want her.

I'll be damned if I have her, though. Because I refuse to ever *let* myself have her.

That doesn't stop me from wanting her. I want her more than I've ever wanted anyone else in my life. I want her with a physical ache in my body that can only be soothed by her, an animalistic desire to claim her as my own.

I may be an alpha with other women, but not with Arden. There's something about her that makes me weak, makes me want to submit to her. When she speaks, I want to listen, I want to obey, I want to do as she tells me.

I hate her for that.

Arden Rossi is here, in my house. I may be rooms and hallways away from her, but I can feel her presence. It clings to me, haunts me, lingers with me. Like a breath against my cheek, like the tips of her fingernails, digging into my skin.

Fuck.

I pull myself out of my chair,

I'm not sure exactly what the fuck I'm going to get from her in terms of business, but I had to have her. There wasn't enough evidence to convict the Rossis, to start a war against them, despite that being their style of killing. The Rossis haven't killed in more than a decade, and I'm not a fool—gangs try to pin things on other gangs all the time. Even though I hate her, I know Arden well enough to know she's a terrible fucking liar. If she had tried to play me, I would have seen it.

But my plan worked for some good, didn't it?

Because Arden Rossi is here, in my house. She's here to bend to my whims, whatever I decide to do with her.

Or let myself do with her.

As I straighten my jacket and throw back another shot of brandy, I know that the next three days are going to be hell—a hell I'm choosing to put myself through, because I didn't *have* to bring her back with me, force her to stay with me, but I did.

Closing the door to my home office and locking it behind me, I let my thoughts wander as I pace through the halls, eventually finding my way to the room where I know she's staying.

Touching her. Tasting her. Fucking her.

I've always needed Arden, always wanted her in a way that's different from any other woman. I've always imagined having her, being inside of her, fucking her. But as always, I

can't have her, because she's my enemy. I hate her. That doesn't stop me from being attracted to her. Sometimes the body refuses to listen to the mind.

"Does your family have any rivals?" I ask, walking into her room without asking. This is my house, and her door was open and unlocked.

Dick move, but the more I can get her to hate me, the better off I am. We *both* are. I think she knows that, too.

She barely glances at me over her shoulder from where she stands by the mirrored vanity.

"No," she says simply. "Now get out. I'm not answering questions unless we're around a table in a meeting."

I meet her gaze in the mirror. She cocks a challenging eyebrow, telling me to get the fuck out of her room, but I'm not leaving, not yet.

"I'm going to get dressed," she says slowly, unzipping a suitcase one of her family's soldiers had dropped off with a yank that shoots through my chest like a bullet. "I said get out."

"My house, my rules." I grin, but I turn around anyway. "Has your family had any threats recently?" I ask.

"No."

I can imagine her tugging her shirt over her head as a garment falls to the ground with a soft *thud*, and I'm suddenly not sure if it's safe to be in the same room as Arden Rossi

while she's naked, a fact that my cock is more than willing to tell me.

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely,” she says, and there's another yank of a zipper.

I plant my feet into the ground, trying to focus on anything but *Arden being naked in my house*. But it's too late, and my pants are already getting dangerously tight.

“Why are you so worried, Grey?” she asks.

“Would you be worried if your mother was shot and ripped apart?” I spit out.

“Absolutely,” she says, “but I'm not sure that I would think anyone from other syndicates I've been in harmony with would have anything do with it.”

Damning her, I turn on my heels. I'm about to say something snide about rivalries running deeper than alliances, but I'm confronted with the sight of her in a skimpy dress that barely cuts across her midthigh.

“Where do you think you're going?” I ask sharply, but really, all I can think about is the way that dress is laying on her body.

It hugs her breasts, sweeping dangerously low. So low, I can see all but the pink bud of her nipples, the swell of her breasts barely covered by fabric. The dress is printed like a wild tiger, just like the predator I know is lurking under her skin.

What would it be like to have you under me, Arden?

Would she play dirty, would she play submissive? Or would she want to dominate me, tie me down, fuck me until I didn't know my name?

I've never submitted to a woman before, but suddenly, I'm very, very curious.

"I'm not going to miss a party just because I'm staying with you," she says, pulling an expensive bottle of perfume out of her bag. She sprays it on, and the room is flooded with the scent of her.

My head spins.

She picks up her clutch and walks past me, swinging her hips. Over her shoulder, she asks, "Aren't you coming?"

ARDEN

I try to ignore him, I really do. In fact, if this were my own party, I'd kick him out. But it isn't, so I have to live with the fact that I know Grey's eyes are trained on my back the entire time, watching me with an intensity that makes my skin burn and the place between my thighs pulse and throb, slickness growing.

I swing my hips to the tempo of the music, trying to concentrate on the man that's dancing next to me, the way that my ass grinds into his groin as our bodies meet in the middle of the dance floor. Nothing gets my blood racing better than a good mafia party does, but this is a whole new high that I'm feeling.

It's overwhelming, consuming my senses. I know that Grey is watching, and I'm suddenly self-conscious while somehow also bolder than I usually am, wanting him to see me. Wanting him to want me. Need me.

I pull away from my unknown partner on the dance floor, muttering a string of curses under my breath. My body is slick with sweat as I make my way across the room to the bar, already crowded with people, shoving my way past them. At the same moment I make my way to the obsidian counter, the

bartender puts down a row of shots—a free for all of fine cognac and aged brandy. We don't pay for drinks when all the patrons have enough money to buy the entire venue, and I grab one readily, throwing it down.

The alcohol burns my throat and makes my breasts warm with a bloom of desire. When I swipe a hand across my mouth, I find Grey's eyes across the room, darkened and watching me with an interest that makes my skin go hot. He's not trying to hide the fact that he's watching me, pissed off, maybe something a little more.

I'm hoping by the outline in his slacks that it's something a little more.

Shoving the shot glass across the bar, it shatters as it falls over the other side, but no one bats an eye. I'm fucking Arden Rossi, a mafia princess with a knife strapped to my thigh beneath my dress. They know not to fuck with me. I do what I want.

I drop Grey's gaze as I slowly make my way out of the crowd of people and into a deserted hall, knowing that he'll follow me. Call me fucked in the head, but I like knowing he's following me, watching me, waiting for me. I like knowing that he wants me, he desires me.

Yes, he desires me.

I've just now decided that he doesn't hate me. No, he doesn't. He hates me just about as much as I hate him—for the sake of hating him, because that's what we've been taught to do our entire lives. The Calvos hate the Rossis. The Rossis

hate the Calvos. We're not going to stop hating each other just because we're reasonable adults who see no reason to. In fact, I'm not even sure I can tell you *where* the hatred for the rival syndicate even came from, just that it's always been there. Maybe we traded in the same illicit industry years ago, but those days are over. We stay out of each other's way.

But all of that—the decades of hate, the ways that we've been taught, the things that we've said to each other—that doesn't mean that we can't want each other. Desire each other. And I've decided after seeing him tonight, actually, after the moment I woke up on that interrogation table, that Grey doesn't actually hate me.

He wants to fuck me.

I turn the corner and find myself in a bathroom, and sure enough, Grey follows seconds later. I shut the door behind him, turning the lock. In half a second, he turns us around, his fingers brushing up against my dress as he cages me against the bathroom counter. A thrill goes up my spine, making my chest tighten almost painfully.

“Where the *fuck* do you think you're going, Arden?” he growls, keeping his body away from me, but entirely too close. The bathroom is small, just a sink and a toilet, and he's a big guy. If it weren't for the killer heels I was wearing, he'd tower over me. “You tryin' to escape?” he asks.

I smirk. “I'm going exactly where I want to be,” I say, and boldly grabbing onto his tie, I tug him closer. “And you're exactly where I want you to be.”

The bathroom is hot. Thick with tension. I can hear my heart rushing in my ears, and I can feel the heat of his hatred rolling off him and brushing up against my slick skin. He braces his hands on the counter behind me, his body inches away from mine, our gazes connected like a magnetic force.

I drop my voice to a murmur as I say, “I am planning on making these three days just as much hell for you as they are for me.” Dropping his tie, my fingernails brush up against the buttons at his collar, just as stiff as he is right now. “You must be so... warm right now,” I say, tugging at the knot at his throat. “I’m burning up.”

My gaze dips to the strong column of his neck, but he takes a hand off the counter and jerks my gaze back up to his. His hold on my chin is firm, almost painful, but I like the way he’s smirking, looking at me like a wolf who’s about to eat his prey.

“And how do you think you’re going to do that, *Arden*?” My name on his lips is like poison, like the sweetest, most dangerous poison.

“The only way I know how,” I say, cocking an eyebrow. “By using your weakness against you.”

“I don’t have a weakness,” he scoffs.

“You have one.” His grip slackens on my chin as he realizes what I’m doing. Dropping to my knees, I say, “It’s me.”

GREY

I don't stop her.

How *can* I stop her?

What is a man supposed to do when his rival, gorgeous and tempting in every way possible, drops to her knees like a willing slut in front of him?

I grasp the counter, my knuckles going white as she pushes her thumb against the button of my slacks, moving it aside. I want to stop her, I *need* to stop her before I do something stupid like let her proceed, but I can't. I just fucking can't. With a wicked smirk on her face, she glances up at me only for a second before reaching for the zipper and sliding it down slowly, slowly...

"Damn it, Grey," she mumbles. "You're so fucking huge. Too huge for me."

With those words, she slides her hands into my pants, her soft fingers covering my hardened cock with a possessive grip. As her nail scrapes against the underside of me, I swallow back a strangled noise that comes from the back of my throat, my cock so hard it fucking hurts.

She glances up at me, her cheeks flushed with a delicious pink. "Do you need a little help with that, Grey?" Her thumb

rolls across my head and I fight the urge to jerk into her hands. My grip tightens on the counter. “Let me help you...” Her voice drops into a soothing coo, so innocent, yet so sinful.

I want her. I need her. I want her.

And before I have time to realize what’s happening, her tongue surrounds me with her wet heat, drawing me into her mouth with a deep suck of her lips. I grasp the counter for balance, but my knees weaken with the feeling of her hot mouth wrapped around my cock, her tongue sliding across my head and tasting the liquid there. She glances up at me as she slides her mouth away, then takes me deeper into her mouth. My body shudders in pleasure as she does it again, then again, so slow, making sure that I feel every second, making sure I feel every deep pull of her mouth as she sucks me.

She slides off with a *pop*, her tongue darting out to lick my head before saying, “You taste so damn delicious, Grey.”

I groan, gritting my teeth. “You fucking tease, Arden, don’t think that you’re just going to—” She stops me with her mouth, placing a delicate kiss against my raging cock, silencing my worst fears of her walking away and just leaving me here.

“You think I’m doing this for you?” she asks softly.

Her pupils are dark, undiluted desire revealed in the depths of her green eyes. My brain is going a mile a minute, trying to catch up with what she’s saying, what she’s wanting... Only I don’t have time to, because she’s pulling me back into her

mouth with her red lips, that hot and wet sheath of her coming around me, sucking me.

This time, I don't hesitate. I can't hesitate. I can't control myself, the wild animal coming out of me faster than I can stop it, the beast wanting to consume her, take her, control her. My hips jerk into her, completely possessed by her mouth, her touch, until all I can think or say is her name.

Arden. Arden. Arden.

Frantic, slick, noises penetrate the bathroom with every one of my grunts as I fuck her mouth, my eyes shuddering closed as her head bobs, taking every inch of me deeper and deeper into her mouth. She touches me at the same time with her hands, making my thighs clench together as I can feel myself about to come undone into her mouth and sputter my liquid into her.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," I groan as I slam into her mouth, letting her red lips pull me in her hollowing with every deep suck, every roll of her tongue against me. I grab a fistful of her hair, the deep moan that comes from the back of her throat vibrating against my cock. *"Fuck, Arden, I'm going to fucking cum..."*

I can't control myself as I cum into her mouth in hot streams, her mouth sucking every drop of liquid with a greed that only makes me cum more. She milks my cock for it, wanting everything I have for her, and as the orgasm tears through me with the violence of a tempest, my legs shake, grinding up against her mouth with everything left in me.

Her name is a curse on my lips as Arden slips her mouth off of me, the warmth of her tongue instantly leaving. She isn't even rattled as she licks her swollen lips, saying, "Good luck feeling any better than I've just made you feel, Grey."

With those words, she slips out of the bathroom before I even have time to process that she's leaving me, and I slam a hand violently against the marble countertop, pain burning through my fingers and up my arm.

Fuck you, Arden. You want to tease?

I yank the bathroom door open.

Two can fucking play that game.

ARDEN

I'm barely out of the door when a possessive hand comes down around my wrist, yanking me back into the bathroom. With his taste still on my tongue, Grey slams the door shut with a kick of his foot, and another thrill goes through my body. He's fucking pissed, and if I thought I was going to get away with that... well, he's about to show me otherwise. Grey shoves my ass up onto the counter and steps between my knees, parting my legs with his solid thighs and a small laugh escapes my throat, a cheap taunt. He certainly doesn't like it.

“You think this is fucking funny?” he growls. “You think you can just tease me like that and then fucking walk away? No chance in hell, Arden.”

He doesn't ask permission, and for the first time in my life, I couldn't be more pleased that someone didn't ask permission. I'm sick of the simpering bastards who usually try to fuck me, try to woo me in with their knock-off gentlemanly manners and their knock-off Rolex watches.

Grey cuts the bullshit. He shoves a hand between my legs without warning, and a guttural sound rumbles out of my throat as his thick fingers connect with the slickness between

my thighs, diving into my wet folds. My pussy clenches in need before he's even inside of me, my thighs squeezing his wrist, my head spinning out of control.

His breath fans against my cheek as he slides a single finger into my sheath. I whimper, a pathetic, weak sound that he seems to like.

He smirks. "If you wanna tease me like that," he says, and all I want to do is grind up against his hand until I cum on him, "you're going to learn real fucking quick that I can play dirty just as well as you can. Look at me."

I do what he says. I can't *not* do what he says, not when he possesses me entirely with just a finger inside of me. When our gazes connect my breath catches, and he slides another finger into my pussy, slowly, stretching me out.

He's already hard in his slacks again, pressing up against the seam that's still unbuttoned and unzipped, but he doesn't give me time to think about that. Not when he's pulling his fingers out of me and sliding them through my wet folds, brushing his thumb against my pulsing clit with a possession that makes my entire body tremble.

Mine.

With one pump of his hand, my pulse flutters in my chest, my inhale catching almost painfully in my throat.

"You like that?" he says, his voice a low rumble. And as he speaks, he slides his free hand to his cock straining in his trousers, palming himself.

I try to respond, but all that comes out is another whimper of pleasure.

“Holy fuck, Arden,” he breathes, pushing his hand into his underwear. “You’re so fucking wet...”

When he grasps his own dick and begins touching himself, his entire body shudders against mine, leaning up against the counter for support as he touches me and himself so slowly it hurts.

“Grey,” I whimper, and our mouths are so close I can feel his breath fan against my lips as he slides into me once. Twice. Over and over again. “*Grey.*”

My whole ass lifts off the counter as I try to take his fingers deeper, harder, faster. He takes his hand from his cock only to grasp my hip hard enough to leave bruises, pressing me so hard onto the counter that I can’t move.

Our gazes connect as he presses his forehead to mine, never letting me look away from him. He smirks. “I’m going to make you cum so fucking hard you’re going to forget your own damn name, Arden,” he says as he curls his fingers so his knuckle brushes against my sensitive clit again.

My hips try to arch up off the counter as he takes two fingers and pumps them inside of me, twisting his finger up, begging me to cum for him. My whole body wants to surrender to his touch, but as the pressure starts building between my thighs, he slows down, not letting me.

“Grey,” I mutter, a warning.

He just raises an eyebrow, acting like he doesn't know what he's doing to me. Acting like he's innocent, acting like his hand isn't between my thighs, fucking me.

You wanna play like this? I think, and I somehow manage to gather my thoughts just enough to slide my own hand between us and into his pants. Before he has time to push me away, my hand wraps around his steel length, his hips jerking into mine, his fingers sinking a little deeper into my pussy.

We both groan at the same time, his *fuck* getting lost in my skin as he buries his face into my bare shoulder where my dress has fallen aside. His fingers stop in me only for a second as I take my hands and slide them up his cock and down, a smooth, slow stroke that's just as agonizing as the ones he's giving me, his whole body pressing into my grasp as he whimpers, a sound I'm sure he wouldn't let any other woman hear.

What the fuck is going on? I manage to think, my head spinning, drunk on him and the shots of expensive liquor from earlier.

He pulls away from my shoulder and our eyes meet in the darkness, a piercing second between us that will haunt me forever. For a moment, I think he's going to pull away, think he's finding that self-control of iron I hate him for, but instead, he does something I never thought would happen in my life—

Grey Calvos kisses me.

His lips find mine, somewhere in the dim light of the bathroom, connecting with my mouth in one time-stopping

moment. A moan shudders through my body as he tugs on my bottom lip, bites it, slides his tongue across it. He's begging to be let in, needing it more than a dying man needing life, more than he needs his next breath.

And holy *fuck* when I let him in—my mouth opening to his kiss and his tongue and his taste—have I unlocked a secret, a fucking good secret. Because when Grey begins to fuck my mouth with his tongue, the walls come down. His fingers slide out of me, only to pinch and play with my clit, a movement that makes me squeeze his dick so hard he groans into my mouth, jerking into my grasp.

We kiss and fuck and touch and my head spins with the effort to stay above the surface, to suck in a breath as his tongue and his kiss move to my chin, my neck, nibbling at my ear. My vision prickles with stars as he rolls his fingers against my clit, my legs falling open to give him better access, but when I let go of his cock for a second to press him deeper, Grey grasps my hand with a shaking one, shoving me aside. I know he wants to come into my hands just as much as I want to come onto his fingertips, but when he steadies his hands on my thighs and spreads me wide, I know that Grey has better ideas in mind.

Because Grey Calvos, my enemy from birth, gets down on his knees in front of me and pushes my thighs open wider. And when his tongue reaches my dripping pussy, I scream. I scream so loud the whole damn party can hear, but I don't care, not when my ass arches off the counter and grinds into his mouth as his tongue slides down my folds and laps up the

wetness at my entrance, only to make a slow path back up to my clit. He stops there for a second, only to take me into his mouth, rolling my clit with his tongue, giving one deep, heart-fucking suck.

My legs wrap around his face, thighs trembling as he strokes long and slow back down to my opening, dipping in with his tongue. “You taste so *damn* delicious, Arden,” he says, but the mocking edge to it is lost when he pulls away, only to slide two fingers into my pussy and draw the attention of his mouth back to my clit.

“Grey—” I beg, but I can’t get the words out, not as my inner walls squeeze up his fingers and try to pull him deeper. Harder. I’m writhing against him, tugging on his head and his hair, feeling him everywhere but not where I want him—inside of me.

He pulls away from me but before the protest can even escape my mouth, his mouth is slamming into mine, my lips parting to taste my own arousal on his tongue. A deep groan rumbles through his chest as our mouths fuck, as he reaches down between us and starts at his slacks with shaking hands, yanking his pants down to his knees.

His cock springs free, glistening and hard as steel as he picks me up off the counter, turning us around so my back slams into the bathroom door with a force that makes me see stars. I wrap my legs around him and my bare, wet, pussy grinds into his hardness as our gaze connects for the second

time, an intense, fucked up wave of pressure blooming between my thighs.

I stare at him, needing him. He doesn't look away. I want to tell him how much I need him, but I can't. Everything in my body is run by one need and one need only—

Him.

Our foreheads press together and our chests collide with every heaving breath we take, my hard nipples pressing up against my dress, straining to be licked, sucked, teased, pulled by his mouth. Fucked by his mouth, his cock, his body. Our bodies are slick with sweat and seconds pass as we both silently weigh the consequences, consider the repercussions that will come if we proceed...

He's my enemy. He always has been.

I need his body.

He suspects my family of murdering his father.

I need his cock inside of me, stretching me, filling me.

He hates me.

I need him.

I hate him.

Grey's grasp tightens around my hips and ass as he rolls his body into mine, hissing when my bare, wet pussy grinds against his exposed steel. I throb with need for him, aching, consuming need, need that's been there for years and years and years.

No matter how much it fucking sucks to admit it, I want him more than I want my next breath, I want him more than I want my mother's entire fucking syndicate.

When his lips brush against mine, his hips pull away for just a second. Our gazes connect, a silent, intense conversation passing between us, a conversation that takes less than seconds to have, but once it's decided, our fate is sealed forever.

Because when his hard cock slides deep into my pussy, stretching and filling me until our hips are pressed up against each other, I know there's no going back.

My whimper is caught in my throat as he buries his head into my neck, pressing into me so hard my vision goes black around the edges, the feeling of his cock buried inside of me forever seared into my mind.

And if I thought it couldn't get any better than that feeling, Grey pulls out of me.

Only to slam into me again.

Filling me deeper.

Harder.

He fills me so deeply I see stars, and only one pound of his hips against mine makes my body shudder, my thighs tremble. My nipples are so damn erect pressed against the fabric of my dress when all I want is to have his bare chest on mine, his skin pressed into me.

Thrust.

I moan, a deep, low sound that seems to well up out of the depths of me. My legs spread wider, and he penetrates me deeper, so deep I'm forgetting my own damn name, just like he said.

Fuck.

“You like that, Arden?” he says, doing it again. Completely filled by him, he grinds his body against my clit creating so much pressure I think I'm going to fucking explode. “You like it when I fuck you?” He pulls away from my neck, only to press his lips against mine. “You feel so wrong, baby, so fucking wrong for me...”

He's too slow. He's taunting me with his body as he rests inside of me, my pussy clenching against his huge cock inside of me, kissing my neck and sucking on my skin with his tongue. His hips roll against mine, and I feel him smile against my neck, a teasing, mocking smile, and the Grey I know is back.

Dominating.

Thrust.

Possessing.

Thrust.

Claiming.

Thrust.

I clench around him, my pussy trying to pull him deeper, even though that's not possible. I feel him everywhere—my

belly, my lungs, my throat.

My heart.

Thrust.

“Grey,” I moan, digging my nails into his shoulder blades.
“Grey...”

“I can’t hear you baby,” he says. “I can’t hear you.” The muffled sounds of the party coming through the door are too much for my soft, weakened voice to overcome.

Grey.

When I scream his name, something changes. Something desperate rushes through him like a hot wave and he’s thrusting into me so deep, his cock so thick and full inside of me, that I’m choking on his name and he’s choking on mine.

“*Oh, fuck, baby,*” he groans, his mouth covering mine. He doesn’t have to ask and I’m opening my mouth for him, sucking on his tongue as he fucks me hard with his cock.

His body slaps against mine with wet thrusts that fill the room, his groans and my whimpers making an erotic symphony of noises that betray our need, our desperation.

“You feel so fucking amazing, so tight, so wet,” he whimpers. Almost sobs. Because he needs me just as much as I need him.

Oh fuck, fuck, fuck.

We’re like Romeo and Juliet, but on crack—because we don’t believe in bullshit like love, just fucking. Just this. With

every thrust I'm grasping onto him tight, trying to pull him into my body harder and deeper and faster. With every slam of his body into my body, it's like we're trying to become one person, the walls shaking around us as we come undone in each other's bodies. With every groan of my name on his lips, I'm coming undone beneath him, pinned to the fucking bathroom wall.

"Fuck, Arden," his voice shudders against my throat. I squirm and writhe up against his body, never enough, my pussy clenching him so hard, so deep. "Keep grabbing me like that and I'm going to cum inside of you."

Thrust.

I'm choking on my own breath, feeling every inch of him stretching me and pulling me apart between my thighs. His legs are shaking, his arms barely holding me up as he pounds into me over and over and over again.

"Oh, *Grey,*" I scream. "I'm cumming... I'm fucking cumming for you."

As the world shatters into a million pieces around me, my head slams back into the door, my vision prickling with stars, wave after wave of pleasure rocking through my body with an intensity that threatens to destroy me. His own thrusts become sloppy, fast, hard, deep, aching as he whimpers, pounding my pussy as I cum around his cock.

Oh, fuck.

A guttural sound tears through his throat as he finishes inside of me, his hot load spilling and dripping down my thighs. And before he's even finished cumming, his mouth finds my mouth in a searing kiss, breathing me in, taking every damn part of me until I have nothing left.

GREY

I'm fucked up. Forever destroyed by her... her body, her scent, her touch. I'm completely messed up on the inside, ruined by her. Completed by her.

Holy fuck, is all I can think right now, still buried in her hot sheath, her muscles pulsing around my cock. Entirely spent, a whimper threatens to tear out of my throat as I rock up against her hips a few more times, needing to be deep in her, have her pussy completely wrapped around my cock.

My face pressed into her shoulder, with every heaving breath I take I'm more and more drunk on the scent of her perfume, mingled with sweat and some other scent that is completely and entirely her own—a scent that will haunt me, linger with me. Follow me into meetings about my father's assassination, into dreams filled with her skin, her breath, the beat of her heart against my chest.

I don't want to leave.

I don't want to fucking leave.

She's still pressed underneath me, and I know I need to pull away, compose myself. Get back to the party before some lowlife fucker who's just trying to spread information gets

ahold of this and ruin hard-won political alliances—or worse, we start round two.

But how the *fuck* do you just pull away from what happened between us? I've never been so fucking aroused in my life, never felt so destroyed and made new by a single woman. Never felt like I was wrecked and then put back together by her own hands, never felt like someone could have so much control over my body, my heart.

I'm ruined. I'm fucking ruined by her. For her. Because of her.

It was meant to be a joke. I was just going to go down on her—torture Arden like she'd just tortured me, but I knew the second I tasted her sweet pussy that it was going to be more than that. I knew the second I buried myself in her that I was completely and utterly fucked.

Her legs tighten around my waist as if she needs me still. As if she can hear my thoughts and knows that we need to pull away but she doesn't want me to leave. As if she's just as absolutely destroyed by what happened.

I'm kissing her neck without realizing it, my lips needing to taste her, touch her. They find her shoulder, her earlobe, and then finally—her lips. Arden's entire body arches to taste me, take my kiss with a mouth that opens without hesitation, my tongue slipping in and deepening the kiss. A crazed, maddened sound comes out of the back of my throat, one I can't control, and I'm already getting hard inside of her, wanting her, craving her, *needing* her.

Fuck.

She shifts underneath me, tugging my hand and shoving it down between our bodies so I feel her slick clit underneath my fingertips, swollen and thick for me. Her body shudders into my touch as she reaches her hands around my neck and kisses me so hard our teeth knock together, my hand beginning to stroke her clit and my cock growing harder and harder inside of her until I'm thrusting in her again and at the same time stroking her pussy.

Her thighs begin to shake, a cry tearing from her throat as I feel her clench against my cock over and over, biting down on my lip hard enough to draw blood as she cums on me again, slumping against my body as I thrust into her.

Again and again and again.

Until my body shakes and trembles, my knees so weak I don't think I can hold her up and we're falling to the floor and I'm finishing inside of her for the second time, wave after wave of stars flooding my vision as I cum in her pussy over and over again.

Seconds pass. I can't breathe. I can't think. I told Arden I would make her come so hard she would forget her own damn name, but now I can't remember mine.

All I can think is Arden.

All I can taste is Arden.

All I can feel is Arden.

Under my body. My cock buried in her pussy, but still not enough. Never enough. Not until I have her absolutely fucking naked under me, not until I can feel her skin burning into my skin, not until I can have her properly, like a fucking man, not a horny teenager who can't keep himself together.

We catch our breath on the bathroom floor, not saying anything. For the first time since I felt her pussy around my cock and everything else was lost to me, I meet her gaze, my heart stumbling inside of my chest. Her irises are dark, dilated, that look filled with something that makes it hurt to breathe.

She doesn't say anything. She doesn't reach up and kiss me again. I don't lean down and take her lips. Sucking in a breath, our chests collide and our hearts beat as one, but we don't do anything.

Until someone knocks on the bathroom door.

I stifle a groan, reality hitting hard. I hate it. I hate that I have to leave this moment, buried inside of her, without all the hate.

Have I ever really hated her? I wonder. Knowing how fucking good she felt, how could I have ever hated her?

The person knocks again, and this time I do groan, pulling myself out of her and tucking myself back into my pants. Offering her a hand, I help Arden up from the bathroom floor and she adjusts her dress as I adjust my suit, turning on the sink and using a towel to fix the smudge of lipstick on her cheek.

She gestures for me to come a little closer, putting the cold towel on my face and wiping gently. She hardly touches me, just a brush of her fingertips, but my whole body burns against her.

“There,” she says briskly. “Am I good?”

I’m not sure exactly what to say, looking over her crumpled dress and her tousled hair. She looks like she just got a good fuck, which no one would really notice anyway, not in a world where not a party would go by without quick fucks happening in every spare dark corner, but still, I gesture to her hair, not sure exactly what to say.

She looks in the mirror, frowning. “That needs to be fixed,” she says, taking those soft, beachy brown waves in her hands and managing to twist them up into a simple, elegant bun that sits low on her neck. She glances over me once, then says, “You look fine, too.”

I nod, but check my reflection in the mirror once, because I certainly don’t trust her. Smoothing back my own hair, I straighten my jacket and gesture for the door.

“Ladies first,” I say.

She just stares at me. Neither of us makes a move, because if she’s feeling anything that I’m feeling right now, I don’t want to fucking leave this little unexpected heaven I’ve found for the harsh reality that waits outside the bathroom.

The hating.

The despising.

The backstabbing.

Fuck.

Frowning, I yank open the door and step out without another word. Whoever needed the bathroom a few minutes ago clearly got the picture, and the hall is completely deserted, music thumping in the distance.

I clear my thoughts of anything that just happened, not looking back to see if Arden follows me.

I need a drink. Something strong.

Now.

When I get back into the hazy lounge, crowded with people dancing and grinding up against each other, I want to groan. Especially when I see Arden slipping back into the dancers from the other side of the room, apparently having found some alternate route back here without me.

And once again, as if she knows I'm watching, her eyes turn to me, and our gazes connect with the force of a magnet. And as if she knows what she does to me, she moves her body a little slower, a little naughtier. Because she *does* know what she does to me, now after everything that just happened in the bathroom between us, and she's going to use it to her advantage.

Just like a Rossi would.

My heart twists inside my chest, a bitter cocktail of anger and devastation rocking me.

It wasn't anything to me, I tell myself, just like I know she's telling herself right now as she rocks her pretty little ass against some fucker's dick, her eyes fixed on me. It wasn't anything special.

When the bastard grabs her waist with possessive hands, I see red.

But instead of marching over there and telling him to *fuck off*, I turn around and call my driver. I'm done.

ARDEN

I'm not sure when Grey left. One moment he was there, looking like he was going to beat the shit out of the guy who grabbed my waist, my pussy still throbbing from his fuck, the next moment he was disappearing into the crowd.

Around eleven, the party is just getting started, but my interest is absolutely fucking dead. The guy who I danced with seems to think—and fairly so, I was grinding up against him like the biggest slut at the whole party—that I want to go home with him, but the last thing I want right now is another fuck. I want a hot bath and my own bed. Only, I can't have either of those, because Grey still has me for the next two days at his will.

At his will.

The thought makes me cross my legs a little tighter against the budding ache between my thighs as one of Grey's drivers speeds down the highway, bringing me back to one of the many Calvos family mansions.

I try not to think about what happened between us in the bathroom, but I can't *not* think about it. It's not like I hadn't done it before, blowing a random guy in the bathroom, but when Grey pulled me back in, I didn't expect it to go *there*.

I didn't expect to be completely and entirely ruined by his body, his touch, his mouth. Even the damn noises that seemed to be strangled in the back of his throat, as if he was trying to keep control but rapidly losing it...

I'm tempted to let my legs fall open. I'm tempted to go down on that delicious soreness between my thighs, right here, right now, in the back of Grey's car while his driver is in the front seat, making a smooth turn down the street that I know will lead us to his house.

Fuck. Just don't think about it, I remind myself.

Pretty soon I'm stepping out of the car and stumbling my way into the underground entrance of Grey's house, only slightly buzzed from the alcohol. After Grey and I fucked, I knew I could have easily gotten drunk to try to forget about everything, but there was something in me that knew that even drunk I wouldn't be able to stop thinking about him.

His thick cock, dipping in and out between my dripping thighs, feeling every inch of him to my core.

His hands, squeezing my hips so tight I could already see the little bruises forming when he left me.

Fucking my mouth with his tongue, just like he was fucking my pussy with his cock.

Tasting myself on his lips.

Cumming on his cock as every single inch of him pounded me until his hot cum exploded inside of me.

Feeling his weight on me for a few precious seconds as we caught our breath on the bathroom floor, as I wondered what it would feel like to do that skin to skin.

“Never again,” I whisper as I find myself already in my room, slipping out of my dress. *It will never happen again.*

And yet, as I’m tightening my favorite red silk robe around my waist, I don’t hear a knock on the door but *feel* him lingering at the threshold with dark eyes full of lust. I don’t know how, but I know he’s there. I stop what I’m doing and begin untying my robe without a thought.

He opens the door. “Stop,” he commands, his voice quiet, like he’s barely able to keep himself contained. His head hangs between his shoulders, his hair limp around his face, and he looks just about as bad as I feel right now. “May I come in?”

I nod slowly, keeping my hands on the tie around my waist, ready to listen to him. Obey him. Drop my robe and crawl on all fours to him, begging—

I clear my throat. Tighten the robe. Cross my arms around my breasts.

“What do you want?” I ask, mentally cringing at the coldness in my tone. I don’t feel like that anymore... the coldness, the hatred.

No. I do. Do I?

I don’t know anymore, it’s all so confusing, and I barely understand the flood of emotions that have come with fucking my enemy. I thought that it would just be a fun, stupid little

game to let off some of the tension, some of the ache between my thighs, but no.

It fucking wasn't that.

It was something more. Something absolutely fucking devastating.

"I'm going to cut right to the chase," he says, keeping his eyes fixed firmly on my own. "I want you to go home."

"But we have two more—"

"I know," he says, silencing me. "I think it would be better this way. You will still come to one of my syndicate meetings tomorrow, I'll send over my driver with details when I get them."

When I realize my mouth is hanging open, I snap it shut, frowning. "Fine," I say at last, pissed off for some reason. Isn't this what I wanted? "I'll go now."

He doesn't move. He doesn't even seem pleased by my answer, in fact, he seems the opposite. Pissed. Upset. I don't know, because in a split second, it's gone, replaced by a stone-cold mask.

"Good," he says. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Then, without another word, he leaves the room. He just leaves, and I don't know whether to scream and be pissy about it or rejoice that I get to pack up my bags and sleep in my own bed tonight with Prince by my side.

No matter how I *wish* I could feel though, as I toss my garments and toiletries back into my bag with a mind swimming in confusion.

* * *

When I get home, my mother is waiting for me. Either she was informed of my early arrival or she vowed not to sleep until I came back, but she waits for me, looking immaculate and rested as ever, despite the fact that it's nearly two in the morning.

“What?” I deadpan, shocked by my own annoyance. I'm never rude to my mother.

Prince comes running down the hallway, his little toenails tapping cheerily on the marble and completely out of place in the tense moment. Delilah just stares at me.

My mother's lips are drawn into a tight line at her mouth, and it's a few seconds before she speaks. “What the *fuck* do you think you were doing with that Calvos boy, Arden?”

It's not a question. My mind flashes with images of him inside of me, pressing me to the bathroom door, but I somehow manage to keep my cool. “I told you on the phone, I was meeting with him for a couple days,” I say.

“Without telling me?” She's on me in an instant. “Leaving like that in the middle of the night, like you'd been

kidnapped? Do you realize how close I am to starting war with their syndicate, regardless of the fact we had nothing to do with that *bastard's* assassination?" she screams, shaking with rage. "Do you realize how scared I was? After losing Lawson, then—"

She stops. My heart pounds in my throat.

Is Lawson gone? Is she not telling me something?

I shake my head, forcing myself to talk to her about it tomorrow. Instead, I say, "The meeting was last minute, I'm sorry I didn't tell you. You and I both know it would be foolish to make war at a time as fragile as this—"

"I don't believe your bullshit, Arden, we've never been on good terms with the Calvos people," she says haughty.

"And why shouldn't we be?" I find myself saying, growing defensive of a specific Calvos person. "Why shouldn't we be interested in another syndicate's business, especially if someone could be possibly targeting syndicate leaders?" I raise a brow, and watch irritation flicker over her face, knowing I've made a good point. "I was meeting with Grey about it, that's all. I was going to stay with him for the sake of convenience, but we decided it would be better this way."

The half-lies roll off my tongue easily, and even though my mother is still less than pleased, she doesn't question my story. She doesn't question why formal meetings went well past the middle of the night, despite the fact that the mafia doesn't hold any hours.

When she doesn't say anything, I turn around to leave her to brood in her own silence, when my phone goes off. A few seconds later, my mother's phone repeats the signal, and I glance down at the text that's been blasted to the four syndicates in Chicago, the only alliance that goes between us.

Hit has been sent out.

I raise an eyebrow, glancing at my mother. Then another text sends.

All leaders. Meet now. Imperative.

It's from Grey, and we both know what it means. A hit has been put out on one of us, and regardless of feuds, this is something that now concerns all of the leaders of our four syndicates.

And it can't wait.

A flutter of nerves goes through my stomach, something I'm not used to. At the same moment, one of my mother's captains shows up, holding out his phone.

"Did you guys see this?" she says, looking between us.

I nod. "Tell Flynn to pull the car around. We're leaving now."

"No." My mother's lips make a single, defiant line.

But the captain's already left the room, so I'm the one who turns around and says, "No?" I stare at my mother. "What do you think this is, *Mom*? Child's play?"

She flinches at my use of *mom*, and doesn't say anything, but I can tell by the way her ass is planted into that chair, she's not moving an inch. I feel coldness spread through my chest, so intense it almost feels like a hot rush of anger. Or maybe not anger, but disbelief. Shock.

Fine.

I don't argue with her. She can sit here and pretend like nothing is going on.

I, for one, care about our syndicate.

And I maybe, just maybe...

I care about the man who is calling us together.

GREY

After the text blast goes out, it takes less than fifteen minutes for all of the leaders of Chicago's crime families to be assembled, far less time than it used to take a hundred years ago between our ancestors. Arden Rossi shows up first, alone. She watches me with a weariness in her eyes that I realize probably shines in my own, and she doesn't say a word as she takes the seat to my right hand.

Where she belongs.

My heart constricts with a feeling I'm not sure I understand—pride, warmth, something that shouldn't be there. But there isn't any time to think about it, not as the rest of the leaders file in one by one, each giving a curious glance to Arden's not so subtle position at my side.

"Where is Delilah?" I say after a moment, glancing at Arden.

To my surprise, she gives a bitter frown, avoiding my gaze. "She didn't think it was important," she says dryly, but there's a hoarse edge of something else in there—*hurt*.

I slip my hand under the table, grazing her thigh where I find her own hand. I pick it up and give it a gentle squeeze, letting it go after half a second, realizing what I just did.

I can't... She's my enemy.

Is she, though? All my life, I was taught by my father that the Calvos family hated the Rossis, but for what? For tradition? For some stupid feud between our families more than a hundred years ago?

“Why are we here, Calvos?” Helio Castillo, a hard man with graying but fashionable slicked back hair asks. His son, Danny, sits by his side, a near carbon copy of his father. Only his son is ten times the man Helio is. “We haven’t used the blast since the first time it was announced.”

“Which is the point,” Alexander Kova butts in. “We haven’t needed it.” He turns back to me, his dark eyes staring into mine accusingly. “I was in the middle of a pair of twins. This better be good.”

I mentally cringe. Alexander has a wife who is very much, and perhaps tragically, still in love with him. He makes it no secret that he likes to find pleasure outside of his marriage, and aside from my own father, he’s the third most misogynistic bastard I know.

The second being Helio, who I notice with no grim amount of hatred, hasn’t brought his daughter, Magnolia, with him. This is the twenty-first fucking century, and everyone else has their daughters and sons with them, leaders and heirs to the mafia. Hell, even Alexander’s oldest daughter, Dorian, sits at his side, looking blankly at the solid onyx table we sit around, lost in thought. I’ve never understood what her problem is, but I have a feeling it has to do with some feud between my cousin

Henri, who sits at my side, purposely looking anywhere *but* her.

Their problem, not mine.

“Where is your daughter, Helio?” I say slowly, staring at him.

He stares right back. “She’s back at home. Perhaps sleeping, perhaps watching a movie. Hopefully the first option. I don’t know.”

“Why isn’t she here?” I can feel the heat of Arden’s skin, her thigh so close to mine, but I ignore the ember of arousal in my chest.

“Because she isn’t part of the business,” he says with a tone that says I should have known better.

I glance at Danny, Magnolia’s older brother, and his best friend, Jackson. They’re both biting their tongues, knowing this is as stupid as I think it is, but Jackson’s eyes seem especially stormy, like he’s ready to punch Helio in the fucking teeth if he says another word.

“Well,” I say, leaning forward in my seat. I give each of the leaders and heirs a pointed look. “There is no easy way to say this. My father was killed, and there’s another hit that has been put out.” My gaze ends on Helio. “It’s for your daughter, Magnolia.”

Arden gasps next to me, and even Dorian looks up, her eyes wide with shock. A murmur goes through the room, interrupted as Jackson shoves his chair back with a scrape

against the floor, pounding his fist against the table. Catching his breath, he seems to realize that everyone is now staring at him, and he turns away from us to pace the room.

I don't know what's going on there, but again—

Not my problem.

What my problem *is*, is the fact that Magnolia's life is in danger, and her sorry-ass excuse of a father looks less than worried.

“I suggest you bring your daughter back so that we can discuss her safety with her present,” I say firmly.

“Why should I do that?” he counters.

My blood boils, but this time, it's Arden who reaches out underneath the table, putting a soothing hand on my thigh.

What the fuck has happened to us? I wonder in some distant place, some distant place that's still absolutely fucking reeling from what happened between us in the bathroom, with my cock buried in her pussy, with those sweet little noises she made that caused my head to spin and my knees to go weak.

I take a short breath, calming myself. Arden's hand slips away, and she stares at Helio.

“Are you not concerned for your own daughter's safety, Helio?” she asks. “It seems like of all people who should be here, learning about this hit, it would be the person whose life is in danger.” Arden glances at me.

I nod. Turning to Helio's bodyguard, I say, "Get Magnolia. We're not leaving this meeting until we've discussed this with her present."

Even the damn bodyguard knows who to listen to, because he doesn't question his master, making a move to turn out of the room.

"No," Jackson says suddenly, his voice strong and firm. "I'll do it. I'll go get her."

He doesn't leave us any choice—he's storming out of the room before anyone has time to stop him.

I turn back to Helio. The goddamn bastard needs to learn that his daughter has a place in his business, and I get a feeling that whoever this hitman is thinks that Magnolia is some precious flower that Helio wants to protect, when really I've seen enough of the family dynamic between the Castillos to know that Helio could care less for his daughter.

She's invisible to him.

I try to calm myself, but I have a feeling that the next couple hours are going to be a fucking try of my patience.

ARDEN

By the time the meeting is finished—Magnolia silently ushered off by an appointed bodyguard along with her brother and Jackson—the sun is beginning to rise over the buildings, creeping into the dark streets. Meetings like these aren't social calls, so after I say a quick informal hello to Dorian and Jackson's younger sister, Maren, to show them I'm not a stone-cold bitch, I'm lingering in the meeting room, my heart pulled in two directions.

Kenny, who showed up half-way through pretending like he didn't know there was an *all-leaders-assembled* mafia meeting, raises an eyebrow, glancing at me curiously. Usually I'm quick to leave these things, I hate them, but not tonight. I've got too much to think about, both involving Grey and involving the girl who just left, sobered by the reality of a contract on her life.

“You need a ride home, baby?” Kenny asks, his lips twisting into a sad smile. He caught enough of the meeting to know that shit just got bad.

I find myself looking at Grey instead, whose eyes have narrowed in on Kenny, assessing him. I *should* go home, but

instead I tell Kenny, “No. I took my own car here, I’ve gotta take it back.”

I have absolutely no intention of taking my car anywhere but Grey’s house, but Kenny seems to buy it. He gives me a small kiss on the cheek and leaves, following close behind Dorian. Even I don’t miss the way that Henri’s eyes stay on Kenny’s back, burning with hatred, but everyone knows that Dorian and Kenny never talk. Kenny isn’t interested in anyone’s business aside from mine, and that’s only because we grew up together. Henri can be kind of a prick to any guy who tries to show Dorian attention, and I think it has something to do with some shit they got themselves wrapped up in a couple years ago. It’s none of my business.

When it’s just Grey and me left, I turn on my heels and head out the door. The building we’re in is owned by the Calvos family, a bar and lounge with secret meeting rooms in the back known only to our families, and I’ve been here enough to know it well. At the end of the hall is an elevator that will take me down the parking garage, and I press the button, waiting for the doors to open. Grey is close behind, waiting with me silently, thoughtfully.

The doors open, we step in, and then they close. Not a word is said for the half a minute the ride takes, and when they’re open again, I find myself walking not to my car, but to Grey’s.

“Where are you going, Arden?” Grey says hesitantly, even though he knows where the fuck I’m going.

I'm done playing games.

Turning around, I want to be ashamed over the amount of raw vulnerability in my voice, but I can't. "I'm going home with you," I say quietly. "Where else could I go?"

I can't go back home and face my mother. I can't go back to my own bed, so cold and alone, without him. I can't go back to my old life, the life of hating Grey Calvos, after knowing how damn right it felt to be with him.

I can't.

He stares at me for a second, his gaze dark and stormy, but instead of saying anything, he unlocks the car and holds open the passenger door for me. I take my seat without hesitation, buckling in while he gets in on the other side and starts the car. I've got too much to fucking think about to be able to go home and he knows that, because he was there. He's the cause for my fucked-up head, heart, body.

And I desperately hope he's just as fucked up as I am.

As we drive out of the parking garage in silence and head back to his house, I'm not entirely sure what I want from him. All I know is that everything has changed, and my world has been rocked in more ways than one.

When he turns onto the highway, I finally break the silence. "I can't believe it, Grey," I say. "I can't fucking believe it."

He takes his eyes off the road for just a second. "Believe what?"

“Helio.” A lot of other things too, but the meeting is the safest topic right now. I’m not quite ready to talk about anything else.

He makes a noise from the back of his throat, his body going stiff with irritation. “That bastard needs to burn in hell already,” he says through gritted teeth.

“An understatement,” I say, glad he’s picked up on the topic change. It shouldn’t be strange, a syndicate leader and an heir talking business, but the lack of rivalry between us feels just that: strange. “He can’t even be worried about his own fucking daughter, thinking she’s not *important* enough to have a serious hit out on her. The absolute nerve of that man.”

“It’s no wonder he and your mother don’t get along,” he mutters. “Your mother is so... in-your-face about her position, and he’s the fucking opposite.”

It’s not a dig at my mother, even though it may sound like one. He’s right—my mother has always been very bold about the fact that *her* syndicate is led primarily by women, and the fact that even though I’m younger than Lawson by a good few years, I’m the next in line.

“Bastard is one way to put it,” I mutter under my breath.

But I don’t know what else to say for the rest of the drive home, and the car falls back into a lapse of silence. Not an awkward one by any means, but I try to keep my thoughts on the topic and not where I’m going. It isn’t hard.

I've always hated Helio, but tonight was something different. I don't know Magnolia very well, other than she's a sweet girl with a bit of a hidden edge to her when she's actually allowed out of the house at mafia gatherings, but I hate Helio all the more for not caring about her, because I know what it's like to not feel cared about, to feel like just another pawn in the scheme of things. Love isn't something we do in the mafia, but sometimes, just *sometimes*, I wish I could know what it felt like.

Do I? I glance over at Grey, not wanting to even think it.

"The poor girl looked fucking scared out of her wits when she heard," I whisper as the car pulls into the driveway. "She walked into that meeting so triumphantly, like she was proud to finally be included... and then *that* happened. I wish we could do something more, Grey."

I turn to look at him with pleading eyes, but he drops my gaze, flicking off the headlights as he stops the car, plunging us into an unnerving silence, everything black except the glow of buttons on the dash.

After a minute, Grey says softly, "She walked out with her head held high, Arden. There's nothing more that we can do. The rest is up to her father."

"Do you think they'll actually kill her?" I say, my voice small. Not her father, but the monsters who have put a hit on her.

Or maybe it will be her father who kills her first... by deciding not to take her protection seriously.

He doesn't say anything as he gets out of the car. A few seconds later, he's opening my door for me and helping me out, our palms brushing together as he offers me a hand and leads me inside.

But once we're inside, the meeting seems to fade away into a distant memory. I don't know Grey's house very well, but I know where we're going. Maybe it's a lucky guess, or maybe I know more than I thought, but when we show up at a closed door, his eyes dark with a searching question, I know exactly where we are.

"You could go to your own room," he says quietly, his tone dipping deeper. "Or you could..." His voice trails off.

My stomach does a little flip inside my chest, my heart racing to a steady but violent pulse in my throat.

I don't reply. I know what he's implying, what he's suggesting without him having to say it, and I reach up and take his chin in mine, rough with stubble from the late night. It's nearly five in the morning, but my body suddenly couldn't be more alive.

His gaze meets mine, intense and dark. Filled with promises that I fully intend to let him keep. The stress from the meeting barely an hour ago evaporates as if it was never there, tucked away in the back of my mind for only a few precious hours, hours I don't have to hesitate to choose how I spend.

When our lips connect, he lets out a deep groan and my mouth parts to let him in as I wrap my hands around his neck and press every inch of his body to mine. His breath becomes

my breath as the kiss deepens, lingers, neither of us pulling away until his body stumbles against the door and he's reaching behind him to turn the knob, pushing the door open.

I don't think about the fact that I'm in Grey Calvos's room, my enemy up until less than a day ago when we fucked and ruined ourselves in a bathroom. I don't think about the fact that my desire is mixed in with something else, something potent and dangerous, a feeling I can't afford to have for my enemy.

I shove all of that aside because right now, this isn't about any of that.

It's about *him*.

It's about this strange feeling that's been inside of me from the moment we slumped down on the bathroom floor, our heads spinning and our bodies still connected.

He breaks away only to groan out, "You're ruining me, Arden, you're fucking ruining me."

Then he's reaching for his clothes and I'm reaching for mine, working at buttons and zippers with shaking hands. I only realize once my dress is sliding off my body that we're still wearing the clothes we fucked in at the party, a memory that now seems so distant. Was it really only just a few hours ago? And now here I am, standing in front of him wearing nothing but my wicked red heels and a lacy black thong that makes me ache in all the right places, my heart beating wildly in my chest.

Grey's eyes go wide as they sweep down my body, lingering at the tips of my breasts, the spot between my legs that is already glistening with arousal, then snapping up to my gaze.

The look in his eyes makes my thighs clench.

“Completely naked,” he says hoarsely.

He's frozen, distracted by me as I step out of my heels, our height difference noticeable now, then I slide my thong off of my body, tossing it aside with my dress.

“Let me help you with that,” I murmur, stumbling towards him. My hands shake as I undo the last buttons on his shirt and pull it over his broad shoulders before reaching for his belt. He hisses as I bump into his hard dick, and I smirk. “You a little worked up there, Grey?”

He glares at me, hands seizing my wrists, stopping me from my mission. I pretend to pout, but inside, my heart drops to my stomach. He looks at like a wolf hunting its prey, but he forgets—he's not hunting a helpless little creature ready to submit to his whims, he's hunting a wolf who is hunting him right the fuck back.

I reach up, twisting a hand around his neck. His eyes are dark, hooded. “Let yourself submit, Grey,” I whisper. He leans in, but I don't let an inch of him touch me aside from my hand on his neck, and the faintest whimper tears from his throat. I've got him. “Give into me. Let me help you.”

I tilt my chin and kiss him softly, nibbling at his lip. He stumbles into my touch, and I reach between us for his belt, the metal clattering as I fumble with it and push it through the loop. I slide it aside and with one deft tug, his cock springs free for me, upright and eager.

“*Fuck, Arden,*” he shudders out as I wrap my hand around him.

I pull away, looking between us at his length in my hands. The sight of it makes my inner walls pulse and clench, needing it buried deep inside of me, making me fall apart. I run my hand across the bead of liquid at his tip, unabashedly admiring his thickness and wondering, *Was he really just inside me? Only a few hours ago?*

My gaze slides from his cock to his toned chest, then back down to his thighs, muscular and huge. I could come just grinding over that hard body, and I bite back the whimper that tears through my throat as he strokes the huge length himself once, then manages to force my gaze to his without saying a word.

The pulse between us is electric.

“I want you to listen to me, Grey,” I say softly. “I want you to do what I tell you.”

I’m taking a risk. I’m never one to play submissive myself, but I never dominate men in bed, either. There’s just something about him that’s different. I get the feeling that it’s the same for him—if the rumors are to be believed, he never

lets a partner take control. He's always the alpha. But he nods, his throat dipping.

“Get on the bed,” I tell him.

He listens to me without hesitation, flopping down onto the black silk in the middle of the bed, waiting for my next command. My body thrums with energy as I walk toward the bed slowly, my breasts aching with need. I stop when my thighs brush against the coolness of the sheets, making my nipples get even harder, my skin even tighter.

“Watch me,” I command.

His gaze follows my hands, trailing down my breasts, swirling around my nipples, my navel, before finally sliding down my aching pussy, plunging into my wetness. Fingers brushing against my clit and my folds, my mouth falls open with a moan and my eyelids flutter closed, imagining it's his thick cock inside of me and not just my fingers.

When I pull out and slide my fingers up to my mouth, tasting my own juices, he reaches for his cock, but I stop immediately. A groan tears from the back of his throat, guttural and raw, as he catches on quickly, his thighs straining with effort not to touch himself. Finally, he knows the game.

“Good boy,” I say, climbing onto the bed on all fours. He watches me with hunger, his eyes raking down my face, my lips, my tits. “Touch yourself, Grey,” I tell him in a low voice, husky with my desire. “Touch yourself and imagine it's me.”

He hesitates, but then he wraps a hand around his steel hard cock and slides down, reaching out to clutch the sheets with his other hand. He manages to hold my gaze until I reach down and stroke myself in time with his own thick slides, moans falling from my lips with every breath, his eyes shuddering closed.

I watch him, my body growing tense and aching with him. It's so damn arousing seeing him like that, so vulnerable for me, but I need more. I need to taste him, hear him. I crawl across the distance in the bed between us and clutch his thighs, his eyes flying open, and before he can protest, I take his cock in my own hands and guide it to my mouth.

“Oh, fuck, Arden,” he groans as my mouth closes over his head. He shoves his fingers through my hair and pushes deeper into my mouth so I can taste and feel every inch of him.

That's right, I think, say my name. Scream my name.

I keep my mouth on him and try to reach down between my legs to stroke the burning fire there, but before I have time to resist, he pulls away and shoves me under his body, all of his weight settling on me in a time-stopping second.

Holy fuck.

I think I see stars for half a second, feeling every damn inch of his naked skin on my own skin, already slick with sweat, his body caging me in as he pins me to the bed with his weight, and it takes me off guard so quickly I forget what I was doing, forget that I was ever in control. His gaze connects with mine before he's leaning down and kissing the fuck out of

me, our bodies going into overdrive as our limbs tangle and our mouths mesh together.

He manages to shove a hand between our bodies and pinch my clit, sending my body grinding into his. I can feel his hard cock pressing into my stomach, and I whimper as he begins to touch me, his body falling away from mine so he's laying at my side, watching me fall apart under his touch.

“That’s right, baby,” he says, sliding his fingers into me as I buck up against his hand. “I want to watch you cum... I want to watch you cum onto my hand.”

But I don’t want to cum onto his hands. I want to cum with his cock pounding in and out of me, and I roll over, straddling his body with mine, his hand still buried between us as I begin to ride his wrist, his mouth coming up to capture my breasts in his mouth, sucking hard.

I scream, but he reaches up and covers my scream with a kiss, rolling us over and shoving his knees between my thighs, spreading me open so fucking wide I think I can’t go any wider. Then he’s sliding down my body and burying his face in my pussy, sucking my clit like he’s worshipping my body, my skin, my very being.

I writhe and strain against the sheets, grinding up against his face as he sucks and licks and taunts me with his tongue, his fingers between my legs, but it’s not enough. It’s never going to be enough until I have his cock inside of me.

But Grey seems to sense my need before I can even think it, because he pulls away, his mouth shining from my pussy,

and he straddles my body with his thick thighs, holding his cock as he holds my gaze.

“You want this?” he asks, giving himself one long, agonizing stroke. I see a muscle quiver in his thigh and I whimper. He leans down, his voice dipping low, the tip of his cock brushing up against my entrance. “Because you’re going to get it, sweetheart.”

Time seems to stop for a second, our gazes connected more than our bodies. My heart does a funny flip in my chest that has nothing to do with the fact that he’s on top of me, naked, getting ready to fuck me. It has nothing to do with the fact that I know what it feels like to be stretched and touched by him. No, it has to do with something else entirely, something I don’t want to admit to even myself.

But before I have time to think about it, he’s kissing me again. Kissing me so hard, so desperately, I know he’s feeling that *something else* that I’m feeling, and even though we can’t talk about it, we both know it’s there. When his tongue begs to be let into my mouth, my own meets his, dancing with him as he kisses me. He angles his body perfectly against mine and in one smooth stroke, pushes into me.

Only this time, when he fills me to the hilt, his body shudders against my body as he falls onto my chest and buries his head in my shoulder, completely covering me with every inch of his skin, as if he can protect me from everything on the outside. The bullshit, the hate we’re supposed to feel, the danger.

I try to catch my breath, but all I can breathe in is him: his skin, his weight, his touch. I try to catch my breath, but I can feel every damn inch of his cock inside of me, pulsing as my pussy flutters around him, accommodating him, trying to pull him deeper. His skin is feverish, slick with sweat, his lips searching for mine.

He steals my breath away again when he pulls out of me... and thrusts so hard back in that my world rocks, his hardness grinding up against my clit with dizzying pleasure. Faster and harder and deeper he pounds into me, my world falling apart around me as he finds my mouth and makes my head spin with his kiss. His tongue dances with my tongue, his lips bruise my lips.

“Arden,” he moans my name, grasping my hands and pinning them above my head. He writhes into the sheets, pushing into me harder and harder, spreading my legs wider and wider.

Warmth beginning at my clit spreads up to my breasts, building and growing until it's so intense and raw that I see stars, tearing through my body. Feeling me start to cum around his cock, his thrusts get harder, messier, trying to keep up with me, my pussy squeezing around him and pulling him deeper.

“Grey,” I whimper, “I'm going to cum... I'm going to cum on your cock.”

I want to cry, it feels so good, so wrong, so right. His thrusts grow even harder as he catches up with me, and in one split second, the world falls apart. Wave after wave of pleasure

rocks my body, so intensely it almost hurts, so intensely all I know is the sound of Grey's name pouring from my lips as he releases inside of me at the same moment. A groan tears through his throat as he cums over and over again inside of my pussy, trying to keep his orgasm going, but he slumps up against me, finding my lips in one more breathtaking kiss.

My chest hurts with one emotion, one feeling, one thought—we've turned into something else. We *are* something else.

Because as Grey presses me into his body and holds me tight, I know that I can never go back to the way that things were before. Never.

GREY

Arden Rossi is in my bed, completely naked. It must be a dream. A fucked up, taunting, punishing dream because of what I did the other night in the bathroom with her. Because if she's in my bed, then I've died. Maybe I've been shot like my father, maybe this is just the devil's way of making me think that hell is paradise before I actually go there and see that it really is the pit of fire they make it out to be.

But this is real. I know because Arden's slow breaths are real, I know that my mind would never think to place that delicate little freckle on her hip, the one that I lean over and kiss, letting my mouth drag across her feverish skin until I find her mouth and settle there.

There.

Never mind the hating, the rivalry. Not when there is this—whatever it is, between us. I don't understand it, but it feels like something a little too close to love for my liking.

Damn, did I really just go there?

I've known Arden Rossi my entire life, a life that I've spent hating her and her family. It's not like I've fallen in love at first fuck, but then again, is that what it is? Love? That seems too real, too wrong, too vulnerable, too... frightening.

And I've seen a lot of shit in my lifetime; I don't find a whole lot *scary* anymore.

But love?

Whatever it is, I don't need to define it now. Maybe it's the start of love, maybe it's the start of a new attachment, a string of hookups that will eventually die down like all the others—but the latter seems impossible when I see her eyes flutter open, green and shining in the morning light, a sight that makes my breath catch in my throat.

Damn it, I think, I'm not letting a day go by that I don't get to see that.

I reach up and brush a finger across her lips, soft, warm, but it's not enough. I lean in and kiss her deeply, passionately, and when I pull away and look into her eyes, I know that she feels it too.

“What are we going to do, Grey?” she asks, almost shyly.

Shy? I cock an eyebrow. I've never seen Arden Rossi... shy.

“About this—” I gesture to our naked bodies tangled up in each other “—or the meeting last night.”

She lets out a sigh. “Us. The meeting. Both.”

I roll on top of her, my dick already hard again and aching as it presses into her silky soft thighs. “We'll deal with it, just like we always do.” I reach between her thighs, loving the way that her breath hitches and her mouth parts as I slide a finger between her folds. “Are you sore?” I ask.

“A little bit,” she admits.

“Do you need me to stop?” I curl a finger up against her clit.

“No,” she shudders out. “Please... don’t.”

But I stop. I prop my elbows up on either side of her face, afraid that if I look away, she’ll suddenly vanish.

“Arden, I need you to let me tell you something,” I whisper. “You don’t have to say it back, but I just want you to know—”

She reaches up and grabs my chin, silencing me. “I know.” I can feel her heart racing against mine. “I feel the same. And even if right now I can’t say it, I want you to know that I feel it.”

I lean in and kiss her neck, wanting to bury myself forever in that sweet spot between her chin and her collarbones.

“I feel something for you, Arden Rossi,” I say, brushing my lips against hers. “And it feels a lot like love.”

She smiles.

But she doesn’t say a word.

Chicago's Mafia...To Be Continued

Read on for a preview of Magnolia and Jackson's story in
Dark Desires by Penny Crane.

MAGNOLIA

I'm *not* too young.

I'm so sick of everyone saying that. Considering I'm the daughter of one of the biggest Mafia bosses in Chicago, you would think people wouldn't act like I'm a little girl. Especially now that I'm eighteen, Father should allow me to get involved with the family business like my brother. I should be treated with respect and fear just like everyone else.

The Rossi and Kova daughters got to go to the meetings from what my brother said. Even Jackson's little sister got to go to the meeting. I'm the only one who's left out, and it pisses me off that I got stuck with the old man who can't get with the times.

He's so misogynistic it makes me sick—stuck in the old ways with his head up his ass. That may be the way the syndicates worked when he was my age, but it all changed a long time ago. Hell, the Rossi's are led by a woman. Anything is possible, and if the old ways don't help, we cast them aside.

I know my father doesn't respect that kind of change either. He always spits on the Rossi name. Says he barely considers them an organization since they're led by a woman. If it was up to my father, I would probably be sent away somewhere where he would never have to see me again. Danny was the only reason I was a part of the family as little as I was.

Danny taught me everything I know. Without him I would be completely clueless and defenseless. Or I'd be dead by now. I can't wait until he takes over the family. I know he's going to make me his right-hand man along with his friend Jackson. We'll be mafia captains. Every day, I wake up wishing the time was here. Danny's going to make the Castillo name bigger than it already is.

I wander around the house, alone, fuming about being stuck here. To everyone else, I look cute and innocent, but I want to be where the action is. I know I can handle things on my own. I just don't know why my dad can't see that.

I may look small, but I'm tougher than that. I look utterly breakable, so I'm looked at like a joke. In reality, I could kill a man in the blink of an eye. My dad may have ignored me my whole life, but Danny didn't. Growing up, he taught me everything our father had taught him. He pushed me to my limits and then even further. He made me into the fighter I am today, even if I never got the chance to prove it in the field as a proper soldier.

I barely stand over five feet with a lithe frame toned by years of training. I have short chestnut hair cut at a sharp angle following my jawline. People say I have thin, slanted dark eyes and a tiny button nose that's dotted with freckles, but I don't see my face that way. It sounds too childish.

I walk away from the mirror in my room and collapse onto my bed. The room is small, nothing ostentatious like some of the other bedrooms in the house, but it fits me well.

It's late at night and there's no way I can sleep when I know there's a top-secret meeting going on. Of course, no one told me anything of substance. But I had suspicions it had something to do with the Head of the Calvos being executed and the killer using the trademark Rossi style. It has to be one of the most important meetings to happen in a long time.

Before Calvos was killed, things had been peaceful between the families for years. Some would even say boring. Well, as boring as the mafia can get in Chicago. But still, there hadn't been a war.

When Danny gets home, I'm going to beg him to tell me what happened. I'm not going to be left in the dark like our father wants. I don't care what I have to do to get information. I'm not going to let him box me out of being a part of the family. It's my birthright, and I wish he could just see that.

The only thing I can do now is try to watch something on television to get my mind off everything else that's happening. It's too late to do anything that requires concentration, and it sounds better than tossing and turning in bed for what could be hours. I walk down the stairs covered in plush red carpet into a room that is far too big for just watching TV. In fact, I'm almost positive I'm the only one who ever uses this room. On the wall to the left, there's a hundred inch screen that nearly covers the entire wall. There's an enormous gray sectional that sits in a U-shape in front of it. I sit on the farthest side that faces the door.

I want to know the minute someone comes home so I can figure out what's going on.

I flip through the channels, and it doesn't seem like there's anything good on this late. I pass a steamy looking movie before I turn it right back. I've been ridiculously sexually frustrated lately.

My brother's friend, Jackson, has been around more than ever since that Calvos man was killed. Even though he isn't family, he's a part of the syndicate too. There's only one problem with him being around all the time.

He's been driving me crazy.

I've thought he was hot for a long time, but now it's worse than ever. I sit around all day and watch him walking around looking so dangerous... and... delicious. My panties are always soaked the instant he walks into the room.

I'm constantly having naughty thoughts and dreams about him. I can only imagine the pleasure his strong hands could give me.

The biggest problem is that he doesn't notice me, and he never will. I'm stuck watching him from a distance and letting my imagination do the rest of the work. He probably still thinks of me as a little girl just like everyone else.

Luckily, the only thing I'm wearing is a big T-shirt and a pair of lacy black panties. It makes for easy access as I sit up to take off everything. Since no one is home, I'm going to take

advantage of being completely naked. Plus, being naked in a common area of the house makes it feel even more exciting.

I lock my eyes on the enormous screen in front of me. I watch as the actors grab at each other's bodies like they need them or they're going to die. The woman moans as the man slides his hands in her panties. The noise is quickly cut off by the man capturing her lips again.

There's only one man who I want to have that kind of passion with.

My mind transforms the actors until I'm imagining myself as the girl and Jackson as the man.

I can feel myself get wetter at the thought. It doesn't take much. My juices are practically dripping down my leg. There's nothing I wouldn't do for a night with him. I rub my clit at a steady pace, but I need more. My other hand slips a finger inside of me and starts pumping. I want to feel full like it's actually him inside of me.

I close my eyes so I can imagine it's Jackson's hands that are touching me, not my own.

Giving me pleasure.

Making me cum.

My hips buck as I add another finger inside my pussy, stretching me out.

I moan as I feel myself getting closer to the edge, thinking about my brother's best friend.

My moans fill the air around me and block out the television as I'm completely lost in my fantasy.

"I see you started without me."

I jump and my eyes snap open at the voice. I would know that voice anywhere, and he's the last person I want walking in and witnessing what I'm doing.

He probably heard me moan his name too.

I'm so embarrassed I can barely breathe. Out of all people to walk in why did it have to be him? Out of all the times to walk in, why did it have to be when I moaned his name while touching myself. I can feel my cheeks burn even hotter than my dripping pussy.

But he hasn't moved or turned around. He's still staring at my exposed body like it's something to look at, some prized piece of art hanging in a museum.

I think about jumping out of the chair and throwing the T-shirt over my head, but maybe this is my opportunity. Maybe this is my chance to make sure he doesn't look at me like a little kid anymore. I'll finally know once and for all what he thinks about me. So, I don't move my body. I leave my hands inside of me as I look him dead in the eye. A challenge. An invitation.

Jackson stands there, looking as terrifyingly beautiful as he always does.

To be continued in Dark Desires by Penny Crane

Also by Penny Crane

Chicago Mafia Romance

In suggested reading order...

Dark Rivals

Dark Desires

Dark Secrets

Dark Nights: Chicago Mafia Romance Bind-Up

About the Author

Penny Crane writes books and drinks lots of coffee. She's a loving mother to a handful of cats, a passionate reader, and an espresso aficionado. She lives in downtown Manhattan not far from Central Park and works during the day as a traveling business and finance consultant for the pharmaceutical industry.

Penny loves the outdoors, visiting new and interesting places, and indulging in new foods from around the world. Catch up with her at Penny Crane's Erotic Romance on Facebook: <https://readerlinks.com/1/1453522>