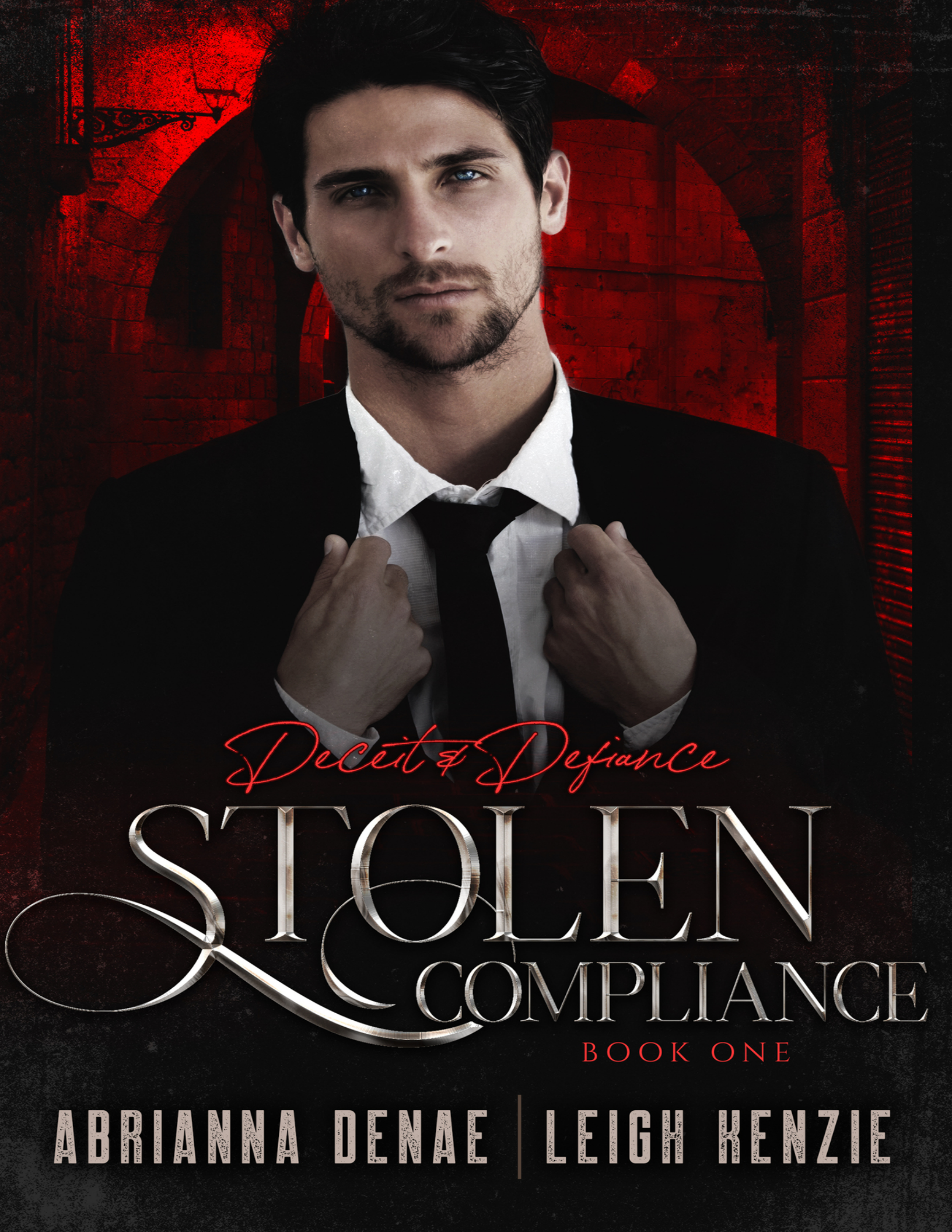




Deceit & Defiance

STOLEN COMPLIANCE

BOOK ONE

ABRIANNA DENAE

LEIGH RENZIE

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PLAYLIST

Find the Playlist for Stolen Compliance here:

<https://bit.ly/4xQo5wS>

“Dangerous” - Royal Deluxe
“Play with Fire” - Sam Tinnesz, Yacht Money
“Man or Monster” - Sam Tinnesz, Zayde Wølf
“Demons” - Imagine Dragons
“Heathens” - Twenty One Pilots
“My Songs Know What You Did In The Dark” - Fall Out Boy
“I Will Not Bow” - Breaking Benjamin
“Irresistible - Revised Audio” - Fall Out Boy, Demi Lovato
“DARKSIDE” - Neoni
“Glitter & Gold” - Barns Courtney
“Gasoline” - Halsey
“Panic Room” - Au/Ra
“Toxic” - 2WEI
“VILLAIN” - K/DA, Madison Beer, Kim Petras, League of Legends
“Morally Gray” - April Jai

“Wicked as They Come” - CRMNL
“PSYCHO” - AViVA
“Monster” - Willyecho
“Big Bad Wolf” - Roses & Revolutions
“Desire” - MEG MYERS
“Aimed to Kill” - Jade LeMac
“Run Boy Run” - Woodkid

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BLURB

Banished. Freed.

Torn from the Martelli Family, and the life he's always known, Luca Martelli is thrust into a new status quo. Forced to defend his place and compete with members of a Family he always thought he knew.

Broken. Strong.

The task of taking over this faction of Martellis turns out to be more complicated than he had hoped. Especially when faced with Dominic, the ruthless and cold Second in Command, and Teo, the charming yet confounding Heir. Both of whom have their own agendas.

Choices. Orders.

Luca may think he knows how to play the game, but in the Midwest, the question isn't how to excel, but how low must he go to survive.

Stolen Compliance is book 1 of the Deceit and Defiance series and ends on a cliffhanger. All books in this series must be read in order. This is a

dark MMM mafia story. Please see inside for the full list of TWs.

It is a spinoff from the Vendetta Series by Leigh Kenzie. It can be read as a standalone although best enjoyed after reading Vendetta. It does overlap with Crimson Bonds by Abrianna Denae and Leigh Kenzie. While reading that series will give more depth, it is not required.

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CONTENT WARNING

This book contains, but is not limited to:

Sex Trafficking

Violence

Torture

Sexual Torture

Noncon

Dubcon

Homophobia

Misogyny

Kidnapping

Drugging

Discussion of Child Abuse and implied Sexual Assault

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KINK LIST

This book contains, but is not limited to:

Watersports

Electrocution

Impact: Whipping, Caning

Use of sex toys: Nipple Clamps, Cock Ring

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AUTHORS' NOTE

Welcome to the first book in the *Deceit & Defiance* series! We're so excited for this series, it's been years in the making! For those who have followed from the *Vendetta* series, you've waited a long time for Luca's story. All we have for you is...be careful what you wish for.

Luca has...an interesting story to tell, one that will shock you, twist you up, and make you question your sanity. This is DARK. If you're coming from the *Crimson Bonds* and *Vendetta* series, this series will go darker than *Castigo*, *Frayed Threads*, and *Fractured Pieces* combined. It dives deep into the depravity and how far someone will go for love, power, and submission.

If this is your first book from us, we should probably apologize. Should, but won't. We hope you like our writing. Good luck.

We hope you take the warnings seriously, because there's no going back once you enter the Hell of the Midwest Martellis, but your mental health matters to us, so please proceed with caution.

For all the Luca lovers who have waited for his story, we thank you for trusting us and putting your faith in us. Giving him the ending he deserved is fulfilling, and we wouldn't be here without your support. Just... remember you asked for this, and not everything is as it seems.

For those who have read the *Crimson Bonds* series, this series will overlap that timeline. It begins shortly after the end of *Vendetta*'s timeline, and will end after the *Crimson Bonds* timeline. This first book spans the few months between the end of *Vendetta* and the start of *Crimson Bonds*. While we've done our best to mitigate spoilers, we highly suggest if you're starting with Luca's series, that you continue on and read the *Crimson Bonds* books. You will get a deeper look and understanding if you read both series.

As always, thank you for picking up one of our books, and if we haven't scared you off...enjoy. We highly suggest you grab some comfort items before diving in. Other than that...happy reading. And remember, you never know what's hiding in the dark...

Abri & Leigh

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DEDICATION

*To the Luca lovers who waited this long...
be careful what you wish for.*

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CHAPTER ONE

Luca



For a moment, I just stand and stare at the mansion in front of me. It's a weird feeling to take it in. It's been my home for the majority of my life now. Having just come from my last handover as a Second, it feels odd to know I'll be leaving. Even if it's at Il Padrone's command.

My heart clenches at that. Il Padrone. The Boss of the Martelli Family. At least, here on the East Coast. Allesandro. A man who was my best friend before his father stole me from my family and helped twist me into the first Boy.

Fuck. It won't make sense to anyone else, but what Il Padrone created was an inner circle of Boys, ones who were supposed to be completely loyal to him. To serve him. We served at his pleasure—for his pleasure. The sex, the violence, yet the loyalty was real.

Except I broke it once. The whisper is loud in my mind, and I shake my head, trying to dislodge it. It's a mark on my record as a Second. No matter how much he assures me this will always be my home, it feels wrong to follow his directive. To take over another's territory.

Sighing, I give up on the thoughts that taunt me, that twist me. The fear that lives inside me. Walking up the steps, I ignore the guards. Instead, I

enter the mansion and accept that the feeling of home, of right, is here. No matter how much blood has been spilled or how much innocence was stolen.

I turn and head toward Il Padrone's office. My brief knock is answered immediately, and I'm relieved. It means Allesandro's fiancé, Lio, isn't in the office as well.

Entering, I incline my head toward Il Padrone. A respect that's as natural as breathing. I take my seat without being offered. The one that's always been mine, except for the time I foolishly tried to take his place. Never strong enough to end that tie, however.

The Martelli Crest is hung behind the desk where Il Padrone sits. It taunts me. Haunting me. Loyalty. Courage. Victory. The words, in Italian, are meant as a reminder—and a warning. After all, it's in front of that motto that Allesandro handed me my father's gun and told me to prove my loyalty after my betrayal. Thank fuck there was only a blank.

Everything may have been forgiven after that, but a chasm was formed between us. One that has steadily grown. Nothing we've done has fixed it.

Il Padrone clears his throat, drawing my attention to him. Sighing, I look over his shoulder before asking tightly, "You really think I can do this?"

"Absolutely," Il Padrone responds confidently. "It won't be easy, but it needs to be done."

Taking over a territory is definitely the opposite of easy. But he's right, it needs to be done. While our ethics are...flexible, human trafficking is against our beliefs. Il Padrone's cousin doesn't feel the same.

"I know," I murmur, but concern fills me. "But will you be alright with this? Your cousin will likely die."

"You saw what the Martelli name was used for here," Allesandro says slowly—a reference to the fucked up way his family ran the territory, I'm sure. "We've fixed it as best we could. Now it's time for the Midwest to change. And the only way Sergio will allow that is by might. So yes, I know he will. I can't focus on that, though."

"I'll try to make it quick." It's the only words I can give him, even though he waves it away.

"You may not have a choice how it goes," he reminds me. "Just know that out of everyone, you're the one I trust to handle this. I know you'll be a good Boss."

“Is this where I’m supposed to compliment you and say I learned from the best?”

Chuckling, my friend says, “I’d prefer to think you learned from my mistakes, Luca.”

Humor dissipates as I think about what’s before me. I’ve asked before, but I try again. “Are you sure there’s nothing you can tell me about them? About what I face?”

Allesandro frowns, frustration flashing in his eyes as he shoves his fingers through his hair. A taunt silence fills the room. Finally, he sighs.

“There’s really nothing. I seem to remember Sergio being different. Kinder. Then again, that was years ago. I’m sure, like me, he was hardened to this life. You’ve gone over the report the same as me. The Second is supposedly ruthless.”

My stomach twists, hating this. But I force the words out. “I’ll make you proud.”

“I already am, Luca. And remember... this will always be your home. That’ll never change. Once a Martelli, always a Martelli.”

Instinctively, I respond, “Loyalty. Courage. Victory.”

With that, the meeting wraps up. I spare a thought to the man who will take my seat. I’ve trained him to be a Second. To hopefully meet the demands of the job. But it sits heavily on me.

Lio. The innocent college student who became Death, the nickname bestowed upon him. Yet, he’s joined the blood splattered world like it’s meant to be.

Even as I stand to take my leave, I know that I’ll always regret it. Nineteen and his whole future was stolen. His loss of a normal future is another ding on my soul, whether it was my choice or not.

I think of him and feel guilt, even though he’d hate that. The same as when I look at my friend and feel loss, knowing he’d turn away from it. Perhaps it is time for me to leave. To take what is poisoned and make it right. To lead the right way—the proper Martelli way.

CHAPTER TWO

Luca



“So my cousin finally grew some balls, huh?” Sergio chuckles, lounging on what can only be described as a fucking throne. Really, who the fuck needs a damn chair adorned with jewels and set in the front middle of a goddamn room?

With a tight-lipped smile, I incline my head respectfully. “He’s certainly eager to learn about a different revenue stream.”

Fuck you, you asshole. Human trafficking is so far below what Il Padrone does.

Keeping my thoughts off my face is harder than I thought it would be, but Il Padrone is giving me a chance—not only to take Sergio down, but to have my own territory. *Fuck.* To be equal to my former Master... mixed feelings swirl inside me from pride, fear, and worry. Missing is the arrogance I once held onto, though. For damn good reason.

Grunting, Sergio pulls my attention to him. “I spoil my cousin. I really do. I only agreed if he took care of Keegan. Still, Allesandro didn’t have the same opportunities I had growing up. I suppose teaching him to diversify can be my good deed for the year.

“My Second, Dominic, will show you to a guest room. I’m not sure how my cousin does shit, but here, we get our hands dirty. In fact, Dominic trained my son, Teo. Both of them will be in charge of you, because I don’t have time to babysit, even if it’s for my favorite cousin.”

Sergio laughs at that, and I try not to grimace. Considering the state of Il Padrone’s family... yeah, that’s not saying much. I didn’t even know Sergio had a son, and I’m certain Il Padrone didn’t either. Fuck. This just got more complicated. Unless I can turn the Second and the son...

I bow slightly, hating the submissiveness of it—especially to this slimeball. “Of course. I’ll be happy to learn from them.”

With the grace of a leopard who doesn’t change spots, he stands and slinks toward me, poking me with his finger. “Be prepared, though. Betray me, I’ll do more than slit your throat.”

Using my considerable restraint, I don’t snatch the finger and break it. If he was anyone else... oh, it would be so easy. Unfortunately, I don’t need my ass handed to me on the first day. Il Padrone taught me patience. And it looks like I’m going to fucking need it.

“I’d expect nothing less, especially from a Martelli. Fedeltà. Coraggio. Vittoria.” I repeat the Martelli motto by heart.

Sergio throws his head back, cackling. It fills the rather empty room, echoing loudly. Abruptly, he stops and stares at me, malice lurking deep in those murky Martelli blue eyes. “Here we don’t play by the old mottos. No, here you learn the real world. You live by my grace, follow the fucking rules, or you die by my hand. Even if it’s someone else holding the damn knife.”

With that lingering edict, he stalks out of the room. Only then does his Second appear at the doorway. I take a deep breath as he tilts his head to indicate I should follow him. This damn palace—because it’s too cold to be a home—feels like a fucking maze.

Clearing my throat, I attempt to make headway. “So, Dominic, I hear you’ll be part of my training. I’m looking forward to it.”

Scoffing, Dominic barely glances at me before speeding up. It forces me into a light jog, but his legs are far longer than mine—and I’m not even short. When he stops, I almost run past him. Annoyance twists inside me as I turn to face him.

His smug grin fills me with something else, perhaps rage? It’s been a long time since I’ve been treated like a damn kid, though, and I have no

patience for it. Still, I know better than to pick a fight, even if I briefly dream of smashing my fist into his face.

“Get some sleep, newbie,” Dominic says lightly. “You may have helped run the Martellis on the East Coast, but you have a lot to learn about real life. I suggest shoving your ethics somewhere, maybe your so-called Master’s ass. Then again, from what I hear, your head already lives there.”

He flicks a wave toward me before jogging off. For a moment, I fight the urge to go after him, to demand respect for Il Padrone. But this is what Allesandro warned me about. It’s still weird to taste his name on my tongue so carelessly. If we’re going to be equals, though, I need to break the cycle of thinking he’s my Master.

If only the heart made it easy. And if only I wasn’t surrounded by vipers who would be all too happy to see me die...

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CHAPTER THREE

Teo



Dominic stalks into the kitchen, his mood seeming darker than usual, which is fairly impressive. He barely flicks a look my way as I calmly drink my coffee before he scans the rest of the room. But aside from the cook and kitchen staff, there's no one else around. His dark eyes meet mine again, and I can see the disgust and burning fire buried deep within them.

"The newbie isn't up yet?"

I shrug. "Haven't seen him."

He shakes his head. "Fucking typical. Probably expects to be waited on hand and foot. He has a lot to learn if he doesn't want to be sent back to his precious *Master* in pieces."

I hum in acknowledgment, less than impressed with the guy already and I haven't even seen him. Still, there's part of me that understands. I was much like him not too long ago, not that it excuses him, but at least I know where the guy is coming from. I might know only the basics of where he comes from—my father only ever speaks of his distant cousin with pity and contempt—but that doesn't mean I don't expect better.

Knowing it'll be far saner, and safer for the guy's health, to have me fetch him, I drain the rest of my mug and set it aside.

"I will go get him and start imparting the rules."

Heading to the door, I'm stopped by Dominic getting in my face. Looking up at the taller bastard, I am careful to keep my face neutral, even if I want to shove him aside, too tired for his bullshit this morning.

"Remember, just because he's the fresh meat doesn't mean you're left off the hook on your training. I will take both of you down if I need to."

I let myself grin this time, equal parts amused and pissed at his unnecessary warning. "Father already said we get to share the shiny toy... Don't worry, you won't be left out."

Dominic's displeasure is clear, but he holds himself back—for now. I know I'll be hurting later, but fuck it. My training was complete, no matter what Dominic thinks or feels. He doesn't have to like it, but he won't go against my father's clear edicts, either.

Besides, as I've said, we have a shiny new toy to break in... Even if there's a limit to how far we can go for this trial period. If I had a heart still, I'd feel bad for the poor bastard for getting to experience Dominic, but this was on his "Master's" orders, so the guy will have to deal.

Knocking Dominic to the side as he won't move on his own, I brush past him and leave the kitchen, holding my head high and showing that he doesn't scare me, not anymore.

When I get upstairs to the guest room, I find it shut tightly, and I sigh, banging on it forcefully. It's opened to a blinking man around my height, half dressed in a suit, with honey-blond hair going everywhere.

"You're late," I tell him clippedly.

His mouth opens and closes a few times before he clears his throat. "Teo, I'm assuming?"

I narrow my eyes at him. "You have two minutes. We don't have all day to wait around for you."

He flushes, and I see the contempt in his eyes before he smothers it out. "My apologies. I wasn't given a time."

I don't respond because he'll find excuses don't fly here. Doesn't matter if Dominic wasn't specific—asshole hardly ever is—it's trial by fire here, and so far? This guy is going to be burned.

He scrambles back into his room and hurries to righten his clothes. Lounging in the doorway, I lose sight of him as he ducks into the ensuite,

but it takes more than two minutes before he's ready.

His hair is neatly combed, and he looks sophisticated, a true representation of his Boss and Family. Too bad none of it will save him.

I lead him downstairs and out the front door where our car and Dominic are already waiting. Dominic is, of course, glowering, but at least he thrusts one of the travel cups into my hands.

"Too bad you were late," I tell our new charge. "You could have gotten one of these."

I slip into the car after Dominic and wait for Luca to follow. He holds himself stiffly once he sits across from us, and I notice the way he watches me take a drink of my second coffee with longing.

"There's no trial process here," I tell him since Dominic won't. "We lead by example. You'll just be watching today, but you're going to get an up close and personal look at the merchandise that is waiting for shipment to their new homes. You will be seen but not heard. What you will witness here is a privilege, one we are graciously allowing because my father believes your Master needs the leg up. One wrong move and..." I shrug, letting him come up with his own conclusions—not that they'll be anything close to the truth.

Thankfully, the short drive is passed mostly in silence, until Luca ruins it by saying, "We weren't aware Sergio had a son..."

I snort. "We prefer to keep our personal business private." The *unlike you* goes unsaid, but the way his expression darkens before he forces himself not to react says he understood. He really does have a lot to learn if simple insults can get under his skin. I almost feel bad for him. Almost.

Our car stops outside the warehouse we keep the merchandise who are almost ready for auction and shipment. Before getting out, I cast one more measuring look at the fresh meat. "Remember, seen and not heard. You're about to enter the real world, and it is far crueler than your gilded cage."

With that, I step out of the car, whatever humanity I have left sloughing off completely as I embrace who I was turned into. Who the poor bastard will need to become.

If I felt pity anymore, this would be the time to utilize it. Instead, all I can offer him is advice I had to learn the hard way. Time will tell if he's smart enough to take it or not.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dominic



Soft. That's the only word that fits Luca Martelli. Although the fact Allesandro would give his Boys that last name turns my stomach. The stupidity of it all.

The Boss gave me instructions, though. Fix the asshole, just like I did with his son. I frown briefly at that. The son the Boss didn't know about, and worse, that I didn't realize existed. Luckily, Sergio didn't take that out on me. Bitch did a runner, and it was good riddance. But to take a man's son? Takes all kinds in this world, and most aren't worth spit.

The Boss does his meetings outside the warehouse, not needing to get his hands dirty anymore. Why should he? That's my job. Even if he sticks me with babysitting assholes who are too soft occasionally.

"Good to see you, Dominic," the guard at the first checkpoint grunts. He lifts an eyebrow at the addition of Luca but doesn't question it.

I wave him off, not needing a damn escort to get me through somewhere I could navigate with my eyes closed. The sounds don't bother me anymore—nor do the smells. Desperation, whimpering, tears... the fucking begging.

As a young kid, chosen to take over as a Second, it bothered me. Then older, seasoned, it annoyed me. Their screams, prayers. Fucking pathetic.

Now? Now, I'm immune to it. I recognize the profit as I walk past cages of men and women. All of them will be trained, sectioned off, sold. A couple will be unlucky enough not to be trained—Owners who want to break the merchandise themselves. Not my problem, but it's why the rest shouldn't bitch. At least they'll live. The Owners who break merchandise are frequent buyers for a reason.

It takes three more checkpoints to get to the heart of the warehouse. I step into the fancy office, with only a mild flicker of a desire for coffee. The fact Luca missed his brings me a jolt of joy. Today is the first test—fuck knows every day will be a test for this asshole.

I hope Allesandro didn't spoil his Boys too much. Unless the fucker screws up, I'm not allowed to throw him into full training. Some training can be done, but Sergio made it clear. Teach the asshole but try not to kill him because he belongs to Allesandro.

Teo sits on the couch, sprawling out. It's a far change from when I first brought him here. Sniveling at the time, arguing at the necessity of the business. I toughened him up, and the Boss thanked me for it. Never interfered like some fathers would—including Sergio's dad. Then again, Sergio is far better than his dad was as a Boss.

I take the single chair.

Luca takes in the room, a slight tightening of his eyes. I mark the weakness but am pleasantly surprised that's all I see. Perhaps not as soft as I thought, although we'll see how he performs.

The whole room has a sex club feel—rich, dark fabrics that hide bloodstains easily enough. Necessary instruments line the wall. And, on the scarred desk, a single phone that isn't hooked to the outside.

Once Luca sits on the couch, leaving a respectable space between him and the Boss's heir, I pick up the phone. "Send in the first."

We don't have long to wait before there's a knock at the door. Teo doesn't call out, merely stands and heads toward the door, opening it. This room is soundproof for the rare buyer we let through. Most sales don't take place here, but there are a few who've earned the right to see the merchandise in person before purchase.

The woman who enters is reasonably pretty—although it looks like we had to do a little work on her. She hands me her folder silently, and I grunt in acknowledgment. It's a good sign that she's proactively engaging.

When I flick my fingers, she immediately moves to the center of the room. The coy blush-pink pencil dress is far more conservative than what our usual merchandise wears. It suits her, as do the stylish pumps. If someone met her on the street, they'd expect she was merely a high-powered professional or, more likely, the wife thereof.

Flipping through the folder, I note that we did, in fact, have to give her larger breasts; looks like we straightened her teeth out as well. Worth the investment, but that means she needs to perform perfectly to help us recoup the money and turn a solid profit.

"Strip," I command, my attention not wavering from the file on my lap. Still, I hear the soft whisper of clothes falling. "Teo, you're up."

My attention is drawn to Teo as he stands, far more graceful than when he first got here. Without any hesitation, he walks to the woman and begins to touch her. Light, delicate touches at first. Seduction at its finest.

The woman doesn't flinch, doesn't make a noise. And we're watching for it. Teo automatically switches, not so gentle now. Harsh grabs, pinches, rough on the breasts, between the legs. Still, no fight and no sounds.

Hmm... I flip back to the first page. She's earmarked for Jean-Marc. Ah, yeah, she won't make a sound. Even if he was kind enough to give her an orgasm, she knows to keep her mouth shut. He doesn't want to hear the noise of a woman.

"She's rated for full service," I call out before setting the folder back and stretching out in the chair. "Give me the show."

Teo doesn't break away, merely pushes her down onto her knees, flicking the button of his jeans open. The woman takes it from there. She keeps good posture, submissiveness radiating off her. There's no hesitation as she takes him in her mouth, swallowing him down. And considering Teo's girth, she won't have any problem with Jean-Marc.

It doesn't take long for Teo to become hard. He isn't a fan of women, but he knows the score, and he fucks her throat harshly, choking her. I hum my approval of both Teo and the woman. Not one ounce of fight in either of them. Both get their jobs done.

When he pulls out and finishes by jacking off, spraying her with his semen, she doesn't swipe at it like some women do. Teo walks away, swiping a bottle from the fridge and taking deep swallows. I wait patiently to see what he does.

Turning around, he snaps his fingers, pointing to his feet. His voice—low, rough, and just on the right side of dangerous—rumbles out, “Crawl.”

Immediately, the bitch complies. No redness, no embarrassment. Good. Whoever trained her did well.

I feed Teo a little more information, wanting to see if he can actually fucking think instead of needing me to give him exact instructions. “She’s Jean-Marc’s.”

“Qu’est-ce que tu étudies?” Teo asks as he grips her hair, bending her backward.

“J’étudie la musique, Monsieur,” the woman responds effortlessly, showing no discomfort of her position.

“Quel instrument?” Teo pushes her further down, with his foot on her belly.

“Je joue du piano, Monsieur.” There’s a slight breathlessness to her voice as she begins to strain. Still...it’s acceptable. And, if anything, Jean-Marc will enjoy if it’s a hair away from perfect.

Shifting tones, he throws out, “How do you clean blood from clothes?”

“If fresh, cold salt water. If dried in, it depends on the fabric.” Despite the fact he hasn’t let her up yet, she doesn’t struggle as she answers.

Satisfied, he nods before turning his head toward me. He doesn’t ask a question, merely waits silently for my decision. It’s a shot of pleasure to my veins. To have the heir defer to me like this. He may eventually be my Boss one day, but for now? I have control.

“She’s all set. I’ve checked the trainers on deportment, etc. Jean-Marc will be a happy consumer. Full wife treatment without the nagging and emotional shit.”

Teo removes his foot but doesn’t bother to offer her a hand up. Coldly, he states, “You’re dismissed.”

After she leaves, he walks over to the couch and looks at Luca. The kid looks a little overwhelmed but keeps his silence. Teo rolls his eyes when he meets my gaze. Yeah, this is going to get interesting.

Picking up the phone, I call for the next one.

It’s not until the fourth one is tested and passes that Luca speaks up. “I understand that you’re testing them, but the terms you’re using: full, level one, level two, etc... What do they mean?”

“We’ll give you a full lesson later as we only have one more left, but each person has to meet the buyer’s expectations, or if there’s no buyer yet,

whatever the head trainer marks them for when they come in. The head trainer here is talented at figuring out what someone will excel at. And some of these don't have a specific buyer, anyway. They're just meant for the warehouses or streets," Teo answers as he stretches out his legs lazily, and I catch Luca's quick appraisal of it.

I almost laugh at it, but Teo knows how to use sexy to manipulate. If Luca falls for it, he's a bigger fool than I thought.

When Teo stands from the couch, I eye Luca a little closer. He's beginning to fatigue. The signs are there, a slight drag to his mouth, the tension in his shoulders... Yeah, it's a good place to stop today. The person Teo invites in actually is the perfect ending to the day.

I jerk my head to the side, silently instructing Teo to sit. Like a faithful dog, he listens. The woman is holding her folder tightly and doesn't move toward me. Chuckling darkly, I stand, strolling over to her as I pry the folder from her hand.

I toss it toward Teo. "D-31b. It's been a while. I'd ask how you're doing, but I don't even need to look at your file."

I tap her mouth, and after a beat of hesitation, she opens. Not very far, so I grab her roughly, prying it open the rest of the way. "Lost that tongue, huh? You healed up well. We are professionals, after all. I'm not seeing much gratitude from you. But we'll make this fair since it's your last chance.

"Luca, you're up. You test her. She'll either pass or fail. And trust me, she's not going to like what happens if she fails."

Luca stands slowly, awkwardly. His eyes flicker with something I hate... there's pity swirling in them. Disgustingly soft, just like I thought.

Instead of sitting in the chair, I sit next to Teo, dropping my arm around his shoulders. Luca stands there like a fucking idiot. Teo huffs in disgust.

"Was I really that bad in the beginning?" he asks me, his lip curled up in a sneer.

"Mmm... perhaps not that bad," I respond, far kinder than I normally am. "And it didn't take you long to learn. I have a feeling Luca would be in the same spot as D-31b."

Teo laughs. "Probably. Come on, Luca. We don't have all the time in the world. Get to it. She's only level one. Fuck her quickly, I still got shit to do."

Luca's head whips around toward us, breaking him away from staring at the cunt in front of him. "Uh... I'm gay. I'm not into women, at all."

The wide panic to his eyes sets Teo off, and he almost doubles over from laughing so hard. I merely shake my head in disappointment.

"Hey, idiot. Use your fucking brain. If you can't get it up, grab an instrument from the wall and fuck her with it. Does your so-called Master only have pussies working for him?"

It's an effective trigger, the insult to Sergio's cousin. I watch as Luca's eyes darken, and his hands curl into fists. I'm sure he'd love to use them on me if he had a chance. He won't get one, though.

"Test her or put a bullet in her. That's your choice," Teo demands as he wipes the mirth from his eyes, relaxing into my partial embrace.

Luca nods stiffly, grabbing a dildo randomly from the wall. It's only midsize, and I grudgingly respect that he didn't grab the smallest. But he didn't grab the largest either, so fuck it. I deduct yet another point from him.

The fucking awkwardness as he just stands there, holding the dildo... Irritation fills me as I glare at the fucker. I mean, really. How hard is it to follow instruction?

Teo pats me on the knee as he stands. "I'll help him this one time. But man... my cousin must really suck as a Boss."

Luca lets out a muted growl, but Teo ignores it. He walks toward D-31b. Grabbing her chin, he snaps out, "On your back. And I want those legs spread, whore."

The bitch goes to pull away, but Teo smacks her. Luca jumps at the casual display of power. He glances toward me, but I merely say, "This is her last chance. So far, she's not convincing me to give her a pass."

Teo pushes her away but doesn't return to the couch. Instead, he leans against an empty spot on the wall, watching Luca's every movement. The whore finally goes to the ground, spreading her legs. She's already naked as she's level one. But unlike the earlier level one, her entire body is tense.

Luca grips the dildo tighter and takes a deep breath. Slowly, he kneels. His hand barely brushes against her knee, and she's twitching unnecessarily. Thankfully, he positioned himself between her legs, because as soon as the dildo brushes against her opening, she tries to move away.

Does the bitch think Luca will suddenly disappear? I shake my head and flick my gaze toward Teo, who merely yawns at the fight in front of him. It

is somewhat amusing, I suppose. Luca fights the bitch, far too gently. Once he manages to get the dildo in her, she tries to reach down to pull it out.

Snorting, Teo walks forward, kicking her in the side, hard. “Stay still. You know the rules.”

She listens, fucking finally. I’m glad they cut out her tongue, though. The noises she’s making even without a tongue... damn. Well, if she passed, I would have recommended vocal cord removal.

It may have taken him a moment, but Luca is finally doing the damn job. In fact, I’m mildly impressed with how fast and hard he’s ramming the dildo in and out. Even Teo gives a nod of approval. I toss a measly point toward him for that.

Both of them failed, though.

“Alright, you can stop,” I state, narrowing my eyes as Luca lets out a sigh. Probably of relief. Too bad, he’s not done yet.

Standing, I walk toward them. Teo automatically does the same. “On your knees, D-31b.”

I smother a laugh of my own, since Luca left the dildo in and she’s trying to scramble to her knees with it still in her. Luca starts to rise, but Teo is right there, forcing him to stay down.

“Well, D-31b. You had three chances and failed. This is the end of the road for you.” I grab my gun, swinging it easily as I put it next to her head. Flicking my eyes toward Luca, I add coldly, “We give the merchandise three tries to pass. We don’t do that for the men. You get one chance only. And you both failed.”

Teo’s gun presses against the side of Luca’s head just as I finish speaking. He startles but doesn’t respond. No complaint, no begging. Huh. Maybe he’s not quite as soft as I thought.

Teo shrugs, and I tap the side of my gun three times. He nods in, and I count it off in my head. At three, we both fire. Both bullets hitting their mark.

Luca struggles to breathe, his hand coming up to his chest as he stares at the dead woman in front of him.

“Wha—?”

“Ah, so you can speak. Be thankful I’m in a good mood. Teo put his bullet in the bitch. Don’t expect mercy again, though. I can, and will, fuck you over far more than an easy death if you don’t straighten up.”

With that, I put my gun away, signaling Teo to do the same. Before I can throw out instructions, Teo is already on the phone with the cleaners. From the slightly traumatized look on Luca's face, I'll count this as a successful day.

It also makes me think that eventually I'll have the fucker underneath me. I wouldn't mind teaching him how to break the hard way. Hell, his so-called Master can send me a gift basket for fixing the asshole.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Teo



Even after a year, I still feel as if I need a shower after doing tests, or anything that involves touching the merchandise. I don't give Dominic, or any of the other men, the satisfaction of knowing I'm still "soft" in that way. My entire world flipped upside down when I began this journey, and for the most part, who I was before this is gone. There will still be those parts of me though, the human ones that can find compassion for the lives we alter, and the things I see will never leave my mind.

Doesn't mean I feel anything for D-31b or any of the others that fail to pass our tests. Hell, I barely feel for the ones that do anymore. It's business, simple as that. I might not actually enjoy the bullshit like Dominic and the others, but I learned a long time ago how to separate myself from the things we do. At the end of the day, it's all business, and that is what Luca will need to learn, or he will face the true horrors of this world. If I thought I could care for another still, I'd wish him luck.

I can see the exhaustion on his face, though he tries his best to hide it. Still, there's a dullness to his brown eyes that wasn't there before, and the corners of his mouth are turned down. *I wonder what he'd look like with*

pouty, puffy lips... My first thought to that idea is *fucking adorable*, but I shut that down quickly.

I know Dominic is itching to get the guy under him, to turn his world upside down and make him question everything he thought he knew. The newer, darker parts of me stir at that, wanting to watch someone like Dominic possess and enforce his power on someone such as Luca, who believes he knows what lives in the dark. Morally gray he may be, he and his Master don't know the first thing about what truly lives in the shadows of this world.

Seeing him debased, with tears in his eyes and his very foundation rocked... *fuck*, it makes my cock ache just thinking about it. Doesn't help Dominic already has me on edge with his casual touches and...kinder than usual demeanor.

I should hate him, anyone outside this life would, but...I can't. Yes, I hate when he lords over me and the power he has is greater than mine in some ways, but after being forced to accept his rough touch, any from him now is a nice zing to my system. Especially on days like today when all our tests are women.

"Are you coming back with me?" I ask Dominic.

"Yeah. Don't want to break the fresh meat on the first day," he replies, though his vicious grin and tone of voice say he wouldn't mind a little breaking.

I chuckle at that, especially the way Luca fails to hide his indignation, the exhaustion of the morning's activities weighing on him.

I lead the way out, the sounds of late morning training filling the air but not touching me. I remember my first introduction to this side of the business... I was lucky to escape with minimal damage after the fuss I made. In that, Luca has me beat, coming in far less innocent than I was.

Dominic sits pressed against me on the ride home, and I have no idea which of us he's fucking with—me or Luca. Most likely both, but I can't convince my poor dick of that, it's all too happy to have the object of our pain and pleasure showing us an ounce of attention.

"As a Second, I'm sure Luca has been around the block more than a few times; he doesn't need to shadow me to my meetings, so he's all yours for the afternoon," I tell Dominic lightly.

"Oh good. I do love babysitting," he drolls.

I chuckle and pat his thigh. "You're so good at it, too."

Luca's eyes narrow a little at being talked about as if he's not in hearing distance, but it's something else he'll have to get used to. No matter his position, or the esteem he holds on the East Coast, he is nothing here. A guest with limited privileges and just enough rope to eventually hang himself with. He can either figure that out and accept his place...or things will get very uncomfortable for him. It doesn't matter to us either way.

Back at the mansion, I leave Dominic and our charge and head to my father's office. It's no less ostentatious than his favorite meeting room, but at least his throne in here is somewhat muted simply due to the space.

"Well?" he asks, sitting back in his seat like the king he believes himself to be.

I shrug and stand before his desk, keeping my posture straight and my hands positioned where he can see them. "He may not fail anytime soon, but we don't hold hope he won't need some...encouragement down the line, especially as we get deeper into teaching him the finer points of the business."

My father nods. "Better than we could have hoped for; it's good to know our cousin hasn't completely squandered away his potential." He looks at me very carefully, searching for any leftover weakness before saying, "I do not want you to leave his training all up to Dominic. We are permitting him to stay here as a guest, as a favor to Allesandro, but our grace only extends so far. You will be an active participant in his formal training."

"Of course, sir. I know what's expected of me. I won't fail you." *Or Dominic.*

"Good. Now, set up for the meeting. The Albanians are rumored to be getting a new shipment in for their private sales, and they will not get the upper hand in the market."

My experience with business models and way with words became an asset my father capitalized on quickly—once he deemed me loyal enough.

He still makes all the final decisions, but more and more I've been taking over the meetings with our suppliers and finders. Determining the needs of our customers, finding that specific, exclusive type, and marketing it to the highest bidder, has become something I excel at.

Taking everything I ever learned about how to make a sale and applying it to this business shouldn't have been so easy, but...once again, business is

just that, and no matter where I once came from, this is where I've learned to thrive.

If Luca is lucky, he will learn how to adapt...or he'll find what the true meaning of "no mercy" is. I am not sure which scenario I want more...his compliance, or his blood staining our skin as Dominic and I fuck over his corpse...

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CHAPTER SIX

Luca



“Since I don’t trust you enough to show how we train the merchandise, I suppose you’ll have to trail around me like a damn baby duck while I take care of my responsibilities,” Dominic declares while pinching the bridge of his nose. He lets his hand drop as he studies me—making it obvious he finds me lacking.

I grit back my temper, my wish to snap at him. Fucking hell. I was Il Padrone’s Second, and certainly far better than this fucker. Still, I need him on my side if I’m going to take over. Not that I’d let him live...

“Whatever you want,” I respond tightly. “You are certainly... knowledgeable, and I’m glad to have this opportunity.”

Dominic scoffs. “Wow, did your Master train you to be such a suck up, or is that a natural talent of yours? Those doe eyes you’re sending me isn’t going to do anything except get you fucked over the nearest surface. So unless you want to give your ass up early, I’d suggest falling in fucking line.

“We’ve got a long day planned. Unlike the East Coast, we actually do shit here. Not sit on our laurels pretending to be all mighty. You pretend to be the big, bad mafia. Ha! You fuckers don’t know how the world works.

“This is a favor most wouldn’t be granted and you’re here only because Sergio, for some reason, actually is fond of his cousin, despite his weakness. Don’t fuck it up or we’ll send you back to Allesandro in pieces.”

Snapping, I storm into Dominic’s space, thrusting my hands out and pushing the fucker back. “That’s Il Padrone to you. You’re loyal to your Boss. I get it. But extend me the same damn courtesy, or I’ll be leaving you in pieces for the Boss to find.”

The word Boss tastes like ash on my tongue, but fuck knows, if I’m demanding courtesy, I have to give it. Not that I plan on giving Dominic any. Fuck that. The asshole is on my hit list, almost higher than Sergio at this point.

Chuckling, a slow smile spreads across Dominic’s face. “Well, well. The asshole actually has some fire. Maybe you’re not a completely brainless toy of Il Padrone’s. I guess we’ll find out.

“Go get a shower. You’ve got half an hour before you meet me back here in the foyer so I can get shit done. Just remember one thing, I may like fire, but I’m not the type to burn. Get too hot, and I’ll smother you.”

With that, he turns on his heels, heading to what I assume is his private quarters. I jog through the fucking palace, trying to find my room. I waste precious minutes just finding it. Fuck.

Darting in the bathroom, I turn the shower on. However, when I turn around, I catch sight of myself in the mirror. Horror blooms through me. That poor woman’s blood is all over me.

After holding a gun to my own head, I worry far less when one is pointed at me. I fully expected my life to end, but fuck knows, I’ve made my peace with that. My only worry was failing Il Padrone.

I tear off my clothes, marking them to be burned, and just barely make it to the toilet. There’s not much in my stomach to vomit, but fuck if my system doesn’t try to purge everything in me. The memories of earlier flash through my head. Taunting me, haunting me with their depravity. I shudder as I start to dry heave.

For a brief moment, I wonder if that’s the shit Lio went through with Peter. I fucking hope not. Especially knowing it’s my fault he ended up there. Had I not betrayed my Master...

I shut down the thoughts one by one. They linger at the edge of my consciousness, waiting to strike, but for now, I’m firm enough to stand,

only somewhat shaky. Glancing at my watch, I curse. I barely have enough time to shower.

Diving in, I wash quickly. As much as I'd love to linger, to scrub the sins of today off, there's not enough time. Hell, by the time I turn off the water, I barely manage to dry myself before jumping into my clothes and rushing out.

Dominic is leaning against the wall, typing on his phone when I make it to the foyer. He gives me a brief up and down look, scrunching his nose in distaste. "Well, I suppose you'll have to do... There must be something wrong with your watch, though."

"I'm exactly on time," I grit out. It may have been close, but the fucker knows I hit the half-hour mark perfectly.

Snorting, Dominic pushes away from the wall. "On time is late. Especially for the bottom rung."

He turns sharply, heading out and ignoring me as I scramble to keep up with him. I slide into the SUV after him, hating being near him. Twisted heat curls inside me, wanting to explode. The need to plunge a knife into him is strong enough my hands shake from it. But I refuse to shame Il Padrone like that.

The urge to call my friend, my former Master, and beg for help is strong, though. I want to blow these fuckers off the map. Hell, who cares about taking over when they need to be exterminated? But I can't. He made it clear. This is my job, my task. If I want to be a Boss, I need to figure it out.

Right now, the only thing I know is when I'm successful—because I refuse to consider anything else—Dominic will be first on his knees in front of me. He can beg all he wants, but I'll pull that trigger with no regrets at all.

"So tell me, what does a Second actually do on the East Coast?"

Dominic's question brings me out of my violent fantasies. I barely stop myself from cringing at his derisive emphasis on the East Coast. Fucker. We're better than the rest of the Organizations in this country. Hell, even the Amatos are better than these assholes, and that's saying something. They're a thorn in our side most of the time, although when I left, there were tentative plans to get together between the Martellis and them for Christmas.

“I did what’s needed,” I reply vaguely. “I...coordinated. Amongst the Boys, the suppliers, whatever needed done. I kept track of our assets, our plans. I helped strategize with Il Padrone. It wasn’t an easy job, especially as Il Padrone believes in leading from the front, so we definitely got our hands dirty regularly. But it was useful.”

“Was?” Dominic queries flatly, the corner of his eyes tightening as he watches me.

I flick the question away. “Yes, was. As in, right now Lio is acting Second. I’m here to learn, to study. After that, I’ll go home and assist with the new venture. I’ll be a project manager in a sense.”

“That’s quite a step down,” Dominic muses.

Considering I’m spewing bullshit... Still, I play it off. “That’s short-term thinking. Especially as you have all pointed out the profit margins on this. Not to mention, my position will always be secure.”

“Hmm. Odd. You know, I’ve never met anyone who has ever reclaimed their position after being effectively demoted. Even if they didn’t realize they were on their way out at the time. Perhaps your Il Padrone is hoping we’ll take you out. Food for thought, I suppose.”

It’s timed perfectly as the SUV stops and he’s out of it before I can form a rebuttal. Instead, I choke on the words, knowing they’re untrue but unable to explain why. Shaking my head, I scramble to follow.

Fuck. This. Day.

And fuck these assholes. I’ll play the game, but at the end they’ll learn. The East Coast always wins, including when one of us comes for our own fucking territory. Because these fuckers don’t deserve it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dominic



Fucking with the guy is almost too easy. So quick to trip over himself to defend his Boss, and not nearly as controlled enough to hide what a hot button it is for him. There's being loyal and then there's...a dog on a long leash. It's clear which side of the spectrum Luca falls under.

Disgust rolls through me at being saddled with him for the day. *Fucking Teo*. But...he was right, there are some secrets the fucker hasn't earned yet—if he'll ever get to that point. And with what Sergio is grooming his son for, I'm the unlucky bastard that gets babysitting. Joy. Just when I got rid of needing to drag Teo around with me to make sure he didn't fail the Boss, now I have this stuck-up asshole.

For all his claims that they got their hands dirty often...I find that hard to believe. The East Coast is soft, believing their legacy and names will keep them in power, stagnant and unwilling to expand; until now. It's all bullshit and enough to make me scoff, but if Luca wants to pretend he's a big, bad mafia Second, he can. I'll be keeping note of how many times he fails.

Leading him into one of the stash houses where we house the drugs before distribution, Luca follows me like a good little duckling, and it'd be

amusing if it wasn't so pathetic. At least the guy is good at the "seen and not heard" part. It doesn't give me charitable opinions of him and what he did for his Boss, but at least he doesn't give me a headache with his unnecessary chatter.

There's a brief pause in operation when I walk in with my charge and I make a note of that. They know better, nothing stops unless ordered to, and a trainee, or whatever the fuck Luca ends up being, isn't something that necessitates such orders.

The door to the small, cramped office in the back is open, and the man in charge of the distribution stands in the doorway. He greets me with a small incline of his head. "Everything is prepped and ready, sir."

"Good." Brushing past him, I'm happy to see the scales out, as well as the money counter; I hate wasting time with unpreparedness.

"This part of your duties?" I ask Luca, curious to know what type of bullshit job he actually had.

"...Not exactly. As I said, I coordinated with the Boys. Il Padrone believes in delegation, so he has trained Boys to oversee different parts of the operation, and I coordinated with them to make sure everything was on par."

I snort. I knew the whole "*got our hands dirty regularly*" was a crock of shit. They simply handed off all the hard parts and allowed someone else to do them.

I don't need to bring up my last check's numbers, but for show, I do, uncaring if Luca can see the profits we're working with. Let him take back to his Boss how successful we are in *all* avenues, not just the merchandise of the human variety.

I count the money first, careful to keep a log of what it should be versus what it is; it wouldn't do to be even a cent off. Lost money is lost money, and someone has to pay.

That done, I grab the scales and head back out to the main room. Like a well-oiled machine, all the packages are bundled and ready for the drug runners, they simply need to be weighed a final time and recorded so we can keep track of which area is bringing in the steady numbers.

It's tedious work, but someone has to do it. Each area is marked and checked, and almost all of them come up as they should.

On the second to last lot, some of the packages come up short. Most would probably let it go; it's negligible at best, but when every other

package before it was perfectly measured, these tiny discrepancies add up.

Looking at the man before me, I narrow my eyes. “You think we’re stupid?”

“Sir?”

“I didn’t stutter. Answer the question.”

“N—no, sir. I know you and the Boss aren’t stupid.”

“Then why are your weights off?”

“I...I don’t—”

I speak over his blubbering. “See, every other person in here knows how to measure and weigh the product. No more and no less. Or you thought you were clever, a few packages are just a bit more than should be, while others are under. You thought we wouldn’t notice, that we’d let it go. But you’re wrong. So...do you think we’re stupid and wouldn’t ask questions? Or are you just that ignorant?”

“I...sir. I don’t know what happened. I’ve done it the same every time. I am good at my job. I—”

“You using?”

Silence. I look the guy over carefully, not a hundred percent certain just by looking at him, but the way he refuses to meet my eyes and how shifty he’s acting...that’s the logical conclusion.

With a sigh, I pull my gun out, and as he opens his mouth to give some bullshit excuse, I pull the trigger.

His body falls unceremoniously to the ground, and I look around the room full of people. “Make no mistake, I don’t fucking care if you’re a junkie or not, but you know the rules: Don’t come to work high, and you buy your vice, not steal and try to cover it up. Because we will always find out, and you don’t get a second chance.”

Turning to the manager, I gesture at him with my gun. “Did you know?”

“N—no, sir. Of course not! I would have brought him to you myself if that was the case.”

I hum, wondering if I can believe him or not. Gesturing to the table in front of me, I put my gun away, but that doesn’t mean the fucker is safe. “Hand.”

“Sir?”

Reaching for him instead of repeating myself, I grab his left hand and slam it down on the table. Shoving the bundles of drugs out of the way, I pull out my knife.

“You gonna help?” I ask Luca.

He takes over, holding the guy’s hand securely on the table.

“Might want to stand back...don’t want to risk ruining another suit.”

I ignore the pleas from the asshole as Luca angles his body away while still keeping the arm steady for me.

It’s a hack job, my knife not made to cut through bone, but it works. After a few good whacks and sawing through the ligaments, muscle, and bone, the hand is successfully removed. Blood covers the table, the floor, my knife and hands, but that is a sign of a job well done for me.

“You’re supposed to be in charge here,” I tell the crying, worthless piece of shit. “You should know if your workers are using or not. You should know everything about them. Consider this your severance package.” Turning to the people, I say, “Your new boss will be assigned by the end of the day.”

Collecting my things, I make my way out of the building, Luca hot on my heels. We climb back into the car, and I look at him, noting a little blood got on his cheek, but deciding it suits him. “That what you mean when you say you and your precious Master get your hands dirty?”

I don’t really care about his answer, as shown by the way I pull out my phone to coordinate pulling new candidates to run this operation, and updating Sergio on the fuckery. My long day just got longer. Perfect.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Luca



Clenching my teeth essentially becomes my job as I follow Dominic around, acting like a good little boy. What he sees as success is merely inefficiency. He thinks he's a big dog, swinging his dick everywhere he goes. Makes me wonder how much he's overcompensating.

There should be no reason that, as a Second, he needs to go do some of that shit. Checking the very basic numbers, moving product himself, hell all of that just proves that Sergio doesn't have control of his men. Having to use Dominic as a fucking enforcer... pathetic. Hell, a captain could do his job.

Of course, Il Padrone is smarter—far more strategic. The use of Boys may look foolish to Dominic, but he'll never understand the tightness that comes from those bonds. Here there may as well not be any bonds, merely a disgusting form of mind control, a savage debasement of being stripped of all humanity until it's only the depraved pleasures of flesh that gets anything done.

The horrors I'm seeing... I know they only scratch the surface, but fuck. None of the Families we know would ever engage in this shit. I may not

think much about the Amatos, but fuck, even I know they wouldn't do this. If I get a chance to tell Allesandro about this, it'll break his damn heart.

And Dominic's harshness? The ease he kills someone? It's pitiful. Fear is a powerful motivator, but there's a proper way to do it. When Il Padrone wants to make an example of someone, he doesn't just put a bullet in their head or hack off a hand messily. No, we round people up and make it fucking obvious why you don't fuck with us.

Acid. Skinning. Sledgehammers. The fun shit. It doesn't stop until people are vomiting. And then we make them clean up their own vomit. But whatever. Dominic can pretend he's a badass. I know the truth.

Until you put a gun to your own head, or kill your own brother, those things matter. Foolish men running around because they can't find trust, not knowing how relationships work, well, I'm shocked they've even lived this long.

And where is Sergio in all this? He's supposed to be a Boss. What does he do every day?

Still, as we finally fucking pull into the palace, I'm ready to get away from this fucker. He makes my skin crawl. His inability to think, to see the truth... to honor those around him. It makes me sick. He plays the role of a Dom in a way, but a false one. The type who continually tries to prove he's strong because he doesn't know anything else.

I stop myself from taking a deep breath when we finally make it to the house. Hours near this asshole has me wishing for a shower in the worst way. Of course, when we walk into the house, it's to find Teo lounging against the wall. *What is it with these fuckers and walls?*

I will say this... While Sergio isn't much to look at, Teo has those sharp blue Martelli eyes. He's not as bulky as Dominic, but his lanky frame doesn't hide the power it contains. The main difference is his features are slightly more delicate. Likely taking after the maternal line. He's hot, and it fucking irks me.

"You're late," Teo comments as he glances up from the phone he's tapping on.

Dominic shrugs. "We ran into some problems. Plus...babysitting. He adds time to my day. There shouldn't be anything else on the list."

Teo snorts. "Of course not. But you really think the Boss would make Luca feel unwelcome on his first day of working with his best man? We've been invited to dinner."

“You mean commanded,” Dominic retorts flatly. “I’m sure you and Luca here would have a great time, but you know, I think I need to go wash my hair or something.”

“If I have to go through with it, so do you,” Teo calls out as Dominic starts to walk away.

For a moment, I’m curious as to how Dominic will react. After all, he’s the Second. But Teo, he’s the heir.

Dominic freezes. There’s no other word for it. Fuck, the foyer may be covered in ice just from the “*fuck you*” vibes coming from the asshole. Suddenly, he turns and stalks toward Teo. Fuck, I’ll give it to Teo, all he does is lift his chin and wait.

Bam. The sound of Teo hitting the wall causes me to wince. Not in sympathy, but the sheer power of it... fuck. Teo doesn’t stay down, and I shake my head at the stupidity.

Dominic bares his teeth as he pushes Teo into the wall again, this time his knife comes out, pressing against Teo’s neck. There are no words. Hell, I’m not sure if anyone is even breathing. An explosion is intermittent, and at this point, I’m not sure which one I want to win.

“Enough!” A new voice enters the fray. “Fighting in front of a guest? Children are better behaved than the two of you.”

I move to look at the newcomer. It’s certainly not what I expected. She reminds me of a cross between a favorite ally of Ignacio’s and Dr. Ranlen. The tough as hell look of a gang leader, all while wearing the heels and professional suit of Dr. Ranlen.

She’s probably five-eight with the heels on; her hair is a cascade of red curls—and more the type of red found in a bottle than nature. Her dusky skin and upturned nose add a certain charm to it all. Hell, from the way she shut those two fuckers down, I’m curious if she’s got elven blood in her or some shit.

Grinning at me, she steps forward and holds out her hand. “I’m Kari. It’s nice to meet you.”

Given the way she’s staring at me, which is far too expectantly, I want to groan. Not another test. *Fuck it.* I shake her hand firmly. Il Padrone doesn’t believe women are weak, and neither do the rest of us.

“As I’m sure you know, I’m Luca Martelli,” I respond simply. I don’t add anything else, not knowing what secrets she holds or her position here.

It's becoming evident that Sergio held a lot of shit close to his vest. Which means I'm not just acting on bad intel... there's fucking no intel.

With a throaty chuckle, she loops her arm in mine, sliding close enough to me that both men hiss behind me. She winks at me before holding up her middle finger. I stifle a smile, impressed with her style.

"Hmm, a Martelli, huh? I'd say that must make us relatives, but neither you nor I share a drop of blood, despite carrying the name." She drops her hand that was giving the other two the finger and pats my arm that she's still holding on. "Of course, that means we get to have far more fun."

"It seems you have me at a disadvantage," I say cautiously.

Huffing, she shakes her head, the swish of her curls drawing my attention. "It figures. Most people don't know me. Papa keeps it all hush-hush. Of course, now Teo is here and can take over for him. I was never in consideration, of course, being a female and all. Do you have women on your side?"

"Uh, we have Dr. Ranlen. It isn't quite possible for her to have a position similar to mine given the way Il Padrone...trains people. But anyone who misjudges Dr. Ranlen will find themselves on the wrong side of a scalpel—or even a pair of heels."

"Ah, so *you* at least recognize the importance of women. I'm glad. Now, you've been playing with the boys all day, so I'm sure you're tired. They're very boring, aren't they?"

My eyes widen, especially when Teo snickers. Fuck. How many traps does she want to lay down?

"I believe they barely got me started today. Both are exceptionally good at their job. But enough of my day, how has yours been?" I desperately try to redirect her, hoping she won't get me killed.

"Aww. You're sweet. Almost too sweet, but it's fine. I'll stop playing with your life," she retorts cheerfully before lowering her voice. "Be careful at dinner. Not everything is as it'll seem."

With that lovely warning in my ears, she pulls me into their version of a dining room. It's...ugly. There's no other way to put it. It's all glass and chrome, as if it's trying to be futuristic, only the chairs are a weird combination of chrome legs and a leather wingback. It's fucking atrocious. There's no other word.

"Papa!" Kari exclaims, dropping my arm as she crosses over and accepts a hug from Sergio. "I'm so glad you were willing to let us all get

together tonight.”

“Of course, dear. Now, come. Sit by my side and tell me what you’ve been up to. Luca can sit next to you. I’m sure he’ll be interested.”

From the calculating way that everyone looks at me—aside from Kari—I have a feeling I’m fucked. *I’m just not sure how...*

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CHAPTER NINE

Teo



It's difficult to smother a snicker at the way Sergio invites Luca to sit near Kari. He's so obvious it's not even funny. I'm sure he's aware of Luca's preference for men, but that doesn't mean he won't test the waters to see if he can't persuade his precious *daughter* to throw herself at the first suitable man to keep her content or whatever traditional ideals he has. Never mind that Kari is the one who gave me some of my first scars and would eat a man like Luca alive even if he wasn't gay.

The antipasto course is brought out as Kari starts going into annoying detail about what she's been up to the last few weeks: scamming men out of their money at the various clubs that are Family-run and keeping her small claim of the business running better than some of the others.

For all of my father's traditional views and beliefs that women can't go far in this world, he doesn't hesitate to use Kari for his own purposes; unafraid to use her brain, and her body, to further his cause.

"And have you considered my proposal?" Sergio asks after Kari is finished speaking.

She pouts. "I have...I don't think I'm ready yet, Papa. I like working and am not ready to stop. Our profits are up at the whorehouse, and you

can't deny that alcohol sales, as well as other sales, are up at the club on nights I'm there."

Sergio reaches out and pats her hand. "I know, but can you blame an old heart for wanting my Principessa to be settled and possibly give me grandchildren to enjoy in my eventual retirement? After all, one day Teo will be ready to take over, and you will no longer be needed. A comfortable life with a man who can provide for you, that is what I, and your father, would have wanted."

Kari sighs, playing along. "Of course, Papa. One day, but you're not retiring yet, and none of the men have been right." She wrinkles her nose. "I don't want to settle. If I'm going to marry and bear children, I need a man like you, not one of the men who only think they know what it means to be a man."

Dominic clears his throat and takes a drink of his water to cover what I'm sure is a snort. She's laying it on pretty thick tonight, whether for Luca's sake or because she wants something is yet to be determined, but I don't underestimate her and her ability to manipulate my father.

As shrewd as he pretends to be, he is easily swayed by a pretty face and a nice body...even if they're attached to someone who calls him *Papa*.

"Of course, of course. But you are not getting any younger, and the men who are vying for your hand are better than a fairytale."

"Yes, I know. Soon, just not yet."

He takes that for now and looks to Luca. "So? What did you think of your first day? Are you going to run to my cousin and tell him of what you've seen today?"

Luca is lucky enough to get time to formulate an answer as the staff swaps out the first course for the salad course. Because, of course, my father is showing off with a full course traditional meal tonight to "*welcome our guest*".

"It has been a rather...informative day. Don't worry, I won't be spilling your secrets to Il Padrone; I am here to learn, not undermine or spy on your operations. I understand being suspicious, of course, but I think we can all agree if anything wasn't up to snuff you never would have allowed me to be here."

There's a tense moment as we wait for Sergio's response. He studies Luca carefully, ice-blue eyes bright and calculating, though what goes on in

that head of his is a mystery to us all, even Dominic and Kari, as much as they want to claim otherwise.

Finally, he nods once. “That is good to know. What about our operations? You’ve spent the day with Dominic, how did you fare?”

Luca shifts in his seat, not squirming exactly, but he reaches for his drink, decently hiding his discomfort, but I am tuned to him after this morning’s activities. “I am interested to learn more. I had questions after the tests Dominic and Teo put the merchandise through but understand I have not earned the right to ask them. Dominic’s duties are far different from mine back home, but that is understandable with the type of operations you’re working with here.”

“Yes, Dominic is diligent and has a certain attention to detail that serve me well. He isn’t afraid to get his hands dirty and do what is needed. Speaking of...” He looks to Dominic. “Everything taken care of after this afternoon’s mishap?”

“Yes. The new manager is in place, and the old one is waiting on your final decision.”

“Hmmm...you removed his hand, but that is not enough for failure such as that...being unable to keep track of his own workers... Does he have children?”

“He does,” Dominic confirms. “A boy and a girl; both in college here in town. The girl is decently pretty—wouldn’t make much in an auction and not suitable for private sale, but good enough for a whorehouse. The son... he’s a pretty one. A bit bulkier than our usual fare, and sturdy. He works at the docks on the weekends, so he’s in peak physical condition, could make enough in an auction to make up for his father’s mistakes.”

Sergio smiles, a true one this time that would have turned my stomach once, but now only makes me glad they served wine with the risotto course. “You know what to do.” He meets my eyes. “I want you both on it. You can teach our guest a thing or two along the way.”

I incline my head. “Of course, sir.”

“A hand? Really? Getting soft in your old age, Dominic?” Kari bats her eyes at the man.

“I can show you how not soft I am...if you want,” Dominic says dryly, though we all know he doesn’t mean it. Kari is off-limits per the Boss’s orders; unlike me.

“Don’t even,” Sergio says unnecessarily.

Kari laughs, light and free and one hundred percent fake. “Don’t worry, Papa. I wouldn’t touch him if he was the last man on earth... Luca on the other hand... now maybe we should tell him the rules.” She grins slyly and leans into the man in question a bit.

My father grunts and says, “Luca knows how important family is, coming from my cousin’s. He wouldn’t dare touch someone who belongs to me without my permission.”

“Of course not. Don’t worry, your...daughter is safe with me.” He looks to my father for clarification on Kari’s role.

“Kari may not be my daughter by blood, but her father was a dear friend. She is mine and is very good at helping with her little corner of the world, but I look forward to the day she marries and settles down like a proper woman.”

I might not care for Kari because she’s a stuck-up, dangerous bitch with a temper that’d make you think she was a natural redhead, but our father’s blatant misogyny has me wincing on her behalf.

The next course comes out, and Kari turns to Luca, fluttering her eyelashes as she asks, “Is it true you all fuck each other over on the East Coast?”

I choke on the piece of meat I’ve just put in my mouth. Sergio admonishes with a stern “Kari,” and Dominic chuckles lightly, touching his foot to mine under the table.

Luca glances at Sergio, seeming to carefully weigh his words before he says, “I wouldn’t quite put it that way, but Il Padrone certainly has a rather...unique way of training his inner circle. We prefer to keep our bonds tight, to build trust and guarantee there are no weak links.” He flicks his eyes to Dominic briefly, and I smother a smile, sure with what he’s seen today he’s found the man lacking.

Dominic’s fingers tighten around his dinner knife, and I knock my foot against his, uncaring if it draws his ire to me. The scene in the foyer got my blood pumping, and my cock is upset that Kari interrupted. The bite of his knife to my throat was barely enough to scratch that delicious temptation that was awoken long ago, even if I remind myself that what he did to me, the games he played with my life, were nothing more than him being a puppet to the man sitting at the head of the table.

Doesn’t mean I don’t want to stab him and then make him fuck me with his blood... *Fuck, a trip to one of the whorehouses is in order if I’m*

fantasizing about fucking Dominic.

“Interesting...” Kari says, her gaze also flicking to me and Dominic. “I could potentially see the merit...”

Sergio scoffs. “Trusting too many with your secrets is how you get killed.”

Dominic nods in agreement, and it’s all I can do to not roll my eyes at what a suck-up he is.

“True, but when you establish loyalty, you strengthen your reach,” Luca says cautiously.

“I suppose. Can’t say I’m surprised by the path Allesandro went down, considering who his father was and the training he went through.” There’s pity in Sergio’s voice, and I truly believe he means what he says. He actually feels bad for the other Boss... an unexpected turn of events.

I can see the way Luca’s eyes darken and he adjusts his grip on his knife before relaxing. At least he’s not stupid enough to challenge the Boss, despite his hot button being pushed.

“It is very clear we have two different styles of leadership in the Families, and I am looking forward to bringing my suggestions and recommendations home at the end of my visit, and if you could allow, to give you counsel and insight into ways that may help your operations.”

Sergio gives Luca’s political answer with one of his own. “I’m sure learning more about my cousin’s side of things will be...enlightening.”

With that, the rest of dinner passes by mundanely, surface level conversation and the last few courses of the delicious but boring Italian meal. Thankfully, we don’t have to do these dinners often, only when my father is feeling inspired or like he needs to remind us of who is in charge. Most of the time dinner is taken with whoever is around, and they are much less elaborate. Half the time, I can get out of even that, much preferring my own company to anyone else’s at the table.

By the time dessert is finished and the final coffee served, I’m exhausted, ready to head to my quarters and lock the world out. Thankfully, Sergio doesn’t push too far past the two-hour dinner mark.

“I do hope you enjoy your stay with us, Luca. Despite today’s...mishap, don’t hold that against us; there is still so much for you to learn.”

Luca inclines his head. “I understand, more than most, when things go wrong. Today was...eye-opening. I am looking forward to seeing more.”

I almost believe him.

Sergio stands and my shoulders relax, knowing the pretense is almost over. “I will leave you then. Please, let Dominic or Teo know if you need anything. Principessa, you will join me for breakfast, yes? We can discuss more of your most recent dates and some suitors I believe you will like.”

“Of course, Papa. I look forward to it.”

Sergio nods, casts one last look at us all, and strides out of the room.

It’s as if a sigh settles over us, and I revel in the silence for a moment before Kari laughs and downs her coffee. “I don’t know about you boys, but I need a drink after this fabulous evening. Anyone up for joining me?”

“Pass.” I toss my napkin on the table and stand. “I am headed to bed.” I meet Luca’s eyes. “We start bright and early tomorrow, newbie. Don’t be late again.”

With that, I leave the dining room, exhaustion following my every step. By the time my door is shut and locked behind me, I take my first full, true breath all day, happy to shed the title of heir for the night.

CHAPTER TEN

Luca



Slipping into my room, I sigh deeply. Fucking hell. Today was... a lot. Allesandro tried to warn me. To make sure I knew these people lived in a level of darkness that would turn my stomach, but fuck. I've seen Allesandro do some shady shit, joined him gleefully at times, but for the most part, innocents were off-limits. Not to mention, his cousin's misogyny...

Kari is an interesting player, though. And it's very clear she's a player in her own right. Whether her father sees it or not... there's a layer of ruthlessness there that would be interesting to see develop.

It didn't escape my attention that I was being considered as a potential option for Kari. It also speaks highly of how much Sergio does care for Allesandro. As a Second, I normally wouldn't be considered. It's a dangerous game, but I'm sure Sergio knows that not all of Il Padrone's Boys are gay. Granted, I'm not like Marcus—women hold no sexual appeal to me—but I wonder if Kari is someone who can be leveraged in the future.

Risky... so risky. But if I'm going to take over, I'll need strong people beside me. And she certainly has skill. The question is... Could I ever trust her not to stab me in the back?

Shaking off everything I've learned today, I quickly take a shower and get ready for bed. Setting my alarm carefully, I hope I can fall asleep without trouble. Tomorrow promises to be a long day. Especially if we'll be going after innocents. And fuck, I'm glad Allesandro isn't here to see that shit.

Most who entered Allesandro's inner circle at least knew the score. Lio never did. It's the one time I saw Allesandro break the rules so egregiously. Yet as much as I occasionally hate Lio, even I wonder if Il Padrone merely saw the kid's potential. Death is certainly the right moniker for him...

Groaning, I put it aside, willing myself to sleep. After all, tomorrow is going to be another day of tests. If today was only a taste of the shit they're into, I fear it's going to get far worse. I may end up needing to call Il Padrone for backup, because some sins cling too hard, too long, that the blackness can't be scrubbed out completely.



When the alarm clock goes off, I curse but roll out of bed. Darting into the bathroom, I take care of my morning needs and start to get ready for the day. By the time I've finished, I'm a good hour earlier than when they dragged me out yesterday.

I don't bother to congratulate myself, merely head toward the kitchen in hopes they at least let me have coffee before throwing me to the wolves. When I walk in, I'm surprised to find Dominic is the only one there. I hesitate, unsure how to approach being around him this morning.

"Are you just going to stand there, newbie?" Dominic asks as he cuts a piece of toast before carefully placing it in his mouth.

My jaw drops at the sight. I thought he was a psychopath before, but what the fuck is that shit? It's a piece of toast! And he's eating it like a damn steak.

"Get what you want. Kitchen is open—at least until we leave. There's food in the warmers," Dominic grumbles before raising his dark eyes toward me. "Wait... do you even know how to do shit for yourself? Didn't I hear the East Coast was all richie rich and had everything catered to their whims?"

Snorting, I shake my head. “I have plenty of experience making my own meals. Although, to answer your question, Il Padrone believes strongly in family meals. Dinners if nothing else, but if he had his way, it would be every meal.”

“And yet he’s the big bad mafia Boss?” Dominic snorts as he cuts another piece of toast.

I quickly grab a cup of coffee and make a plate of scrambled eggs and bacon. Sitting down across from Dominic, I try to think of how to word it. Nothing I say will make a difference. Hell, I know that. And yet, I’m compelled to say something all the same.

“There are different ways to inspire loyalty,” I say slowly. “There is fear and there is care. He utilizes both as needed. As his Boys, we know that he cares, even if some would consider it in a fucked-up way. They don’t know him.

“That doesn’t mean he doesn’t know how to play the game. Many of us didn’t have a choice in becoming who we are now. For the most part, it worked out well.”

“Hmm.” Dominic shrugs as he takes a gulp of his coffee.

For a while, we don’t speak and I focus on my breakfast. Fuck knows shit will get hard later. It’s not a comfortable silence, but Dominic seems to be the type to enjoy putting people on edge. Considering I’ve ended up in the black room a time or two from Il Padrone, I’m far more used to discomfort than Dominic expects.

Teo walks in, heading straight for the coffee pot. After having his fix, he turns and leans against the counter. The sound he makes when he takes a sip... Fuck. I never knew a sound like that could come from drinking coffee and I spent too long around Lio.

Considering the way Dominic’s attention swivels toward Teo, I’m not the only man riled up. Teo blinks lazily as he straightens up and walks toward us. Gracefully, he sits next to Dominic, far closer than I expected. Given Dominic’s smirk, I’m not going to get a damn answer out of them regarding their relationship.

“So you survived yesterday. And kudos for managing the command performance. For fresh meat, you didn’t do half bad. I still don’t give you high odds of survival though,” Teo states before taking another sip of coffee. Suddenly, his face blooms with a sly smile. “It seems that Kari took a shine to you.”

Meeting his gaze steadily, I shrug one shoulder. “Your...sister...is quite charming. It was a pleasure to meet her.”

“Oh? Perhaps you’re not gay?” Teo asks lightly, his gaze sharpening as he studies me closely.

Laughing, I shake my head. “Oh, I am very much gay. I’m the wrong Martelli for her, and the ones who do go her way are already spoken for, quite firmly. But that doesn’t stop me from realizing she’s extremely charming and...formidable.”

Both Teo and Dominic snort at that before essentially dismissing me. Instead, Teo grabs Dominic’s attention.

“Are you going after both the daughter and son today?” Teo asks carefully.

Dominic quirks an eyebrow as he sets his plate aside, turning to face Teo. “Is that a problem?”

“Not at all,” Teo replies smoothly. “I just want to make sure you’re prepared. I’m not satisfied with the information I was given this morning.”

“That’s because you rely on traditional methods. I have everything under control. In fact, I thought I’d take the newbie with me. See how he handles pick ups.”

Teo bites his bottom lip but nods grudgingly. “Very well. The Boss wants me involved with assisting him. Do you want me along?”

“Do I ever?” Dominic retorts, drawing a blush from Teo. Dominic turns his head slightly and winks at me, shocking me thoroughly. “But I suppose we can make this game. Whoever impresses me the most wins.”

Teo’s expression changes from slightly hurt to anticipatory, a gleam I recognize well in his eyes. After all, there’s nothing a Martelli enjoys more than a challenge. And sure, he may be biologically a Martelli, but fuck knows I have the heart of one.

I swore after Lio, no more innocents. But if this is what it takes to bring them down, well, fuck knows I’m not going to be the one losing. Even if I’m not sure I’m ready to win whatever Dominic has planned.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Teo



Kidnapping...is not my favorite thing. Rather boring if you ask me, but Dominic laid down the challenge and I am nothing if not competitive. Though for picking up two innocents, it should be rather straightforward. Still, I don't trust information I don't gather myself. Call me old-school or traditional, but I prefer getting the lay of the land myself; easier to know what you're working with and less room for errors. Dominic, of course, knows that, but he likes to bait me. I hate I walked into his trap in front of Luca. I'm going to blame it on the early morning and caffeine that had yet to hit my system.

I haven't been on a university campus since my own college days, and I can't say I miss it.

Thankfully, the daughter lives in an apartment and not the dorms. Still on-campus, but a bit easier to get to and blend in. She exits her apartment alone, not paying attention to her surroundings as she is busy looking at her phone, even as she closes the door behind her.

It'd be easy to snatch her now, but my instincts tell me to wait, so I watch as she begins walking away, and then the door to the apartment opens, a guy around her age stepping out with a pink bag in his hand.

“Babe!” he calls out.

The girl spins around and smiles when she sees him. “I did it again?”

He jogs over to her, saying something that makes her laugh as he hands the bag over. Her laughter is bright and carries over the distance between us. As I watch the unexpected boyfriend kiss her before making his way back to the apartment, I shake my head. This is why I like doing the groundwork myself. I don’t care if they only had a few hours to gather information, whoever put the dossier on the girl together missed something very obvious and important. I have half a mind to wonder if Dominic didn’t do this shit on purpose.

The girl’s smile drops as soon as the boyfriend is gone, and she attaches the pink bag—which I’m assuming is a lunch bag—to the satchel slung over her shoulder and continues on her way.



Stalking is ridiculously easy on a college campus. Enough people are milling around that blending in isn’t a problem. It helps I’m dressed like one of them in jeans and a T-shirt; casual and unassuming.

The girl makes her way to one of the coffee shops near her apartment, and I consider following her in, but too many people seeing me, even if witness memory is unreliable at best, is not a good thing. I’m not sure what rubric Dominic is scoring this task on, but I’m positive whatever bullshit standards he has are going to be impossible to meet either way, so I don’t worry about moving too quickly.

When my mark steps out of the coffee shop, face glued to her phone once more, I step into her path, pretending to also be busy with my phone, clipping her slightly.

“I’m sorry.” I make myself sound contrite.

She looks up at me, and whatever indignation she might have had because of being knocked into disappears when she meets my eyes. Her cheeks flush, and her glossy lips drop open a bit before she finds her voice. “It’s fine. No harm done.”

“Still, I’m sorry. I really need to pay more attention—though I’m not sure how I didn’t notice a pretty thing like you.”

“Yeah...me too. Need to pay better attention, I mean.” She chuckles and shuffles on her feet a bit awkwardly, cheeks flaming red with embarrassment. I have to bite back my smile as she falls into the trap of my good looks perfectly.

I give her a bright smile. “Well, I better go. You have a good day.”

“You too!” she calls, giving me a little wave before she continues walking.

I wait until she turns a corner before following.



Wasting three hours of my life following my mark around is boring as fuck, there are plenty of other things I could be doing with my time, but this was the task that was set and I’m not going to rush it. Not with Luca and Dominic judging my every move. Both of them have more experience than I do, but I stopped letting that bother me long ago. Nothing good comes from comparing myself to others. Especially not when my way is usually so different from theirs.

The lecture hall for my mark’s third class of the day is up a set of concrete steps, and though it hurts at my pride a little, I let myself trip and fall down them, going faster than she is, so I land in her path.

“Oh my god! Are you okay?”

Groaning, I get up onto my knees and shake out my hand, checking the scrape on the heel of my palm. *That’s going to sting for the rest of the day.*

“Nothing hurt but my ego,” I say, looking up at her and feigning surprise when our eyes meet. “We have to stop meeting like this.”

She laughs, gentler than the one she gave her boyfriend this morning. “We do. You sure you’re okay?”

I stand and dust my pants off. “Yeah. Will probably be bruised, but what’s new. I’m a bit of a disaster, if you couldn’t tell.”

“I think you’re fine. I mean...” Her cheeks flame. “I think we all have weird days where nothing goes right.”

“Yeah. But still, embarrassing myself in front of a pretty girl? My friends will never let me live it down.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep your secret.” She winks, and I lower my face, acting bashful.

“Well, I will let you go. I’m sure you have class or something.”

“Actually, I was headed to the food court; the coffee from earlier is wearing off already.”

“Really? Me too. If it’s alright with you, do you mind if I walk with you? I mean, we’re going the same direction, anyway. Don’t want you to think I’m stalking you or anything.”

She bites her lip and looks up at me coyly from beneath her lashes. “I’d like that.”

We walk down the last few steps together. “I’m Teo, by the way.”

“Teo...I like that name. Different. I’m Amanda.”

“Nice to meet you.” When she offers her hand, I take it and give it a little squeeze, running my thumb across the top before letting it go.

She can’t hide her interest as she flushes and tucks her hair behind her ear as we walk. The food court is in the middle of campus, while her class is at the far end, clear on the other side of the school, so it’s a nice little walk to our destination, plenty of opportunity to maneuver her into my trap. There’s a bit more risk with the potential of people seeing us together, but it’s one I’m willing to take.

“Let’s go this way,” she says. “It cuts down on the walking time.”

It’s the same suggestion I was going to make, having scoped out this route while I waited for her to finish class. She’s practically begging to be taken, walking right into danger without a second thought...

We slip into an alley between two buildings, and while it’s more secluded, it still comes with risk being broad daylight. We’re the only ones around now, though, and unless I want to drag this out longer, it’s the chance I’ve been waiting for.

Letting her walk ahead of me, I pretend to “trip” over something and crash into her, causing her to stumble.

“I’m so sorry,” I tell her, unable to help the grin that slips across my lips as I grab her from behind, one hand going over her mouth and the other plunging the needle into her neck.

The sedative is fast-acting, meant for moments just like this. She stumbles as I withdraw the needle, pocketing it and shifting her so I can walk her off the path.

To everyone else, it might look like I’m simply helping a friend who might be drunk or high, not knowing her stumbling around is her body

trying to fight off the drugs as I force her in the direction of the campus health clinic.

Of course we're not going to the clinic but the parking lot.

Luca opens the door to the nondescript van we bring out for missions like this. It's less flashy than other vehicles, more suburban mom than rich sophistication.

He helps me get the girl into the backseat, and as soon as the door is shut behind me, the driver takes off.

Dominic looks over his shoulder at the girl who is quickly losing consciousness and then to me. "Boring," is all he says.

I snort and relax into my seat, shoving the knocked out girl over to Luca when her body tilts my way.

Whatever. I got the job done without a fuss or a mess; that is a win in my book.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Luca



I don't ask questions when we drop the girl off. Honestly, I don't want to know at this point. The idea of what I'm going to do turns my stomach. I didn't agree with what we did to Lio, making him pay for his brother's sins.

This? This is just as disgusting. Actually, it's worse as I listen to Dominic mutter about auctions. At least Il Padrone treated Lio as part of the Family... eventually. This is robbing an innocent of his entire life.

No matter how much I harden my heart, it doesn't stop the blackness from coating my soul. My hands are already drenched in blood that will never go away, to lose myself in this pitch-dark existence... Will I ever survive to be a Boss? Part of me worries about whether it's even worth it.

As we pull up to the fucking palace Sergio owns, I jump out and dash inside. Thankfully, the package I had delivered same day is already in the foyer waiting. As soon as I make it to my room, I start to pull off my clothes, needing to hurry.

Gone is the suit I habitually wear. Instead, I slide on jeans, a shirt that proclaims surfing is life, and then add a backwards hat and sunglasses. Hell, I even grudgingly put on the running shoes that I try to scuff up a bit.

Glancing in the mirror, I snort at the sight. There's no way anyone would tie me to today's excursion now. I put a windbreaker over my arm and jog back downstairs.

Dominic and Teo are lounging in the foyer, locked in their *will they-won't they* battle. Normally, it interests me. Right now? It just makes me fucking tired.

"Let's go," I call out as I exit the building, heading for the van.

I hear them muttering behind me, but I ignore it. Hell, I ignore everything except for the job. I slide a piece of paper to the driver. He grunts and nods but otherwise doesn't say anything. Which suits me just fine.

As soon as Dominic and Teo are in the vehicle, we take off. I pull out my phone, verifying that everything is on schedule. Thank fuck for social media and hackers that can pull user names off certain sites.

It doesn't take nearly as long as I expect to get to the beach I need. The city traffic, for once, isn't as bad. Of course, most of the drive is spent hugging the lakeshore. It would be a beautiful sight if I could actually appreciate it.

"This is an interesting location," Dominic murmurs as we pull into the beach.

I don't bother replying, merely check the time. It's a little early, but it'll still work. This beach isn't crowded, and since it's the offseason and, at the exact wrong time for visitors, I expect it'll be easy to find my quarry.

I step out of the van, putting the windbreaker on, but not zipping it up completely. Jogging down the pathway, I avoid the beach house and other facilities. Anyone who sees me will just assume a runner, nothing out of the ordinary here—especially in the offseason.

Once I hit the beach, I kick up the speed a little bit and sure enough, I clock the kid sitting in the sand, staring out at the water. For a moment, I ignore him, but as I get closer, I swipe my hat off. Shaking my head, I run my fingers through my honey-blond hair. There are times when looks matter, and right now is one of those.

Sitting my cap back on my head, I let my head swivel over to the kid. He's eyeing me in a way that's all too familiar. While it would normally send a shot of lust through me, right now it's only pity. I jog up to him, smiling even though my eyes are covered with sunglasses.

“Hey, I hope you don’t mind me bothering you, but are you local?” I ask, ducking my head like I’m shy.

“Uh, yeah. I am,” the kid responds, shrugging. He’s definitely eye candy, even if he’s far bulkier than I normally go for.

I sit down next to him, letting myself stare at the waves. “So...I know I’m really bad at this, but I’m in town for a bit and I’ve heard this is one of the beaches you can surf on. I don’t want to cause trouble, so I thought I’d ask a local. I’ve never done much freshwater surfing—the joy of living on the coast and all.”

“Ah. Yeah, we go out every now and then. This is one of those places—although it’s not open to surfers year-round. It’s not the best, to be honest. But I spend time here as a lifeguard when I’m not at school or working at the docks. Right now, there’s no lifeguard on duty due to the time of year, but it still brings me peace.”

“Busy man. I get it. Gotta go get the bread and shit. Surfing is good for the brain, though.” I shrug, hating the words coming out of my mouth. “Any tips?”

“Probably a million of them if you’re not used to freshwater surfing,” the boy says with a laugh. “Most importantly, I hope you’ve got the right equipment. Because that shit is cold and out-of-towners don’t take that into account.”

“Oh, don’t worry... I always make sure I have protection,” I purr, watching the blush bloom across the kid’s face.

“That was horrible!” he retorts, even as he laughs.

I shrug. “But it got you to smile. And that was the goal.”

He smiles softly at me, and guilt adds another layer to my soul. Nausea churns inside me, but I clear my throat, forcing the thick lump down. “Hey, you want to check my equipment before I head out? Or, I don’t know, grab coffee?”

“I think that sounds good. It’s certainly better than just sitting here and thinking about things I can’t change.”

I stand up and offer him a hand. Although he takes it, he barely gives me any weight. His strength is obvious, and I pity what will happen to him because, fuck, Dominic is right; he’d be great at an auction.

“Times are tough?” I prod gently, even though I’m not sure why. The last thing I need is to connect with him. Fuck knows I’m about to become the villain, even as he eyes me like a damn hero.

He shrugs a shoulder as we head back toward the parking lot. “Family shit. Can’t help who you’re born to, but fuck do I wish it were possible. I have plans, though. Getting away from them is at the top.”

Fucking hell. This kid is far more than temptation. He’s a damn warning sign ensuring I know I’m going to Hell for this shit. I mean, I always was headed there, but fuck knows I’m screwed if there are levels for that shit, because this just earned me a trip to the lowest pits.

“Well, at least we can choose our friends,” I remark lightly, even as the tension in my chest tightens. He nods, sending me one of those blinding smiles I know will haunt me in my sleep. Thankfully, the van is in sight, and with the way it’s parked, he can’t see anyone in it. I use my elbow to jab his side lightly. “Now come on and check out my gear. I always make sure to pack extra rubber...”

He bursts out in such a carefree chuckle, even as he groans. I tell myself at least I can make his last memory a good one. Because after this, all that’s left for him is pain and misery.

“Oh, that’s so bad,” he mutters as he shakes his head.

I sling an arm across his shoulders, helping to guide him toward the van. Right as we get to it, I draw him against the back of it. Slowly, I tilt his head up and steal a kiss, all while grabbing the needle out of my right pocket. I stab him quickly as I pour everything into the kiss, playing with his tongue and stroking his jaw with my free hand.

Despite jumping at the sharp insert, he’s so into it that he doesn’t break away. At least until the drug hits his system. As he sinks against the van, he stares at me, his eyes unfocused, but he still sees enough. The truth hits him as I wrap my arm around him and guide him inside.

Before we enter, he manages one word. It strips me raw. “Why?”

I don’t answer, merely helping dump him into the back of the van before I grab my seat. I don’t take off the sunglasses, not wanting Dominic and Teo to see the pain and conflict there. Instead, I glance at my watch.

“That was less than half an hour,” I state as I stretch out my legs.

I’m sure this whole game was rigged against me, that Dominic will come up with some bullshit to say I failed. And hell, that’s fine. Teo can keep him occupied tonight. All I want is to find a way to live with myself—and the quiet to do that in.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Dominic



“**Y**ou are both boring,” I tell them as we head to where we keep the new merchandise. “But Luca gets points for not chickening out. The kiss was a nice touch, and for that alone, I’ll give you this win.”

The sunglasses hide his eyes, but the way his mouth downturns tells me he’s not pleased. I’m sure he would have preferred to lose, but if that was the case, he should have taken Teo’s route and been less entertaining. Ah well, he will learn, and he’ll learn well.

We get to the warehouse, and the men drag the new merchandise out. Rather than doing a drop and go, I get out of the van. Teo and Luca quickly follow behind me, and I watch Luca carefully, seeing how he masks his reaction to being let inside. It won’t save him, but knowing he’s struggling with being here? That’s a nice boon to this day.

The checkpoints here are similar to the other warehouse, tighter even, as the merchandise we house in this location can be more...volatile before they learn the rules and their place.

Rather than leading them to the office, we end up in the welcoming room. Luca finally takes off those ridiculous sunglasses, revealing wary

brown eyes that can't quite hide his apprehension and displeasure.

Teo leans against one of the far walls, as not only did he lose, he can make an educated guess about what's coming.

They bring in the girl first. She's groggy but starting to jerk in her bonds as the men tie her to a chair. She moans and squints her eyes as she looks around the room. I can tell she recognizes Teo by the way she jerks again. "Y...you..."

Teo smiles blandly at her. "Hello, Amanda," he purrs, sounding dark and dangerous and far from the kid I met a year ago.

The boy is brought in next. He's slower to wake as the drug to reverse the effects of the sedatives take a few minutes to work.

I look between the two, noting that even if I didn't know they were siblings, their connection would be obvious. They have the same shade of light-brown hair, along with similar face shapes, though the girl—Amanda—has rounder cheeks and is tiny compared to her more well-built, classically handsome brother.

Standing in front of her, I run my fingers down her face. "You're prettier than your pictures, but really not much to look at, are you?"

She tries to struggle, crying out when I squeeze her cheeks and get her to open her mouth. Stuffing my fingers inside, I sweep the contours of her mouth, imagining my cock buried deep inside the small, warm cavern.

There's a groan from the other side of the room, and I release her, turning to watch as her brother shakes his head and his eyes roll back and forth before squinting against the lights.

"Oh, good, welcome back," I tell him.

"Wh...at."

Moving away from the girl, I stand in the center of the room, making sure to position myself so I'm not blocking their view of each other. "Luca, since you won our little challenge, you get to choose. Which one should we start with? You get to be the one to disrobe and inspect. Teo will take notes, but you get the fun part of finding all the identifying markers. After all, the buyers will want to know their attributes, whether they're renting for the night or buying for keeps..."

"Please..." the boy says, and he really is a boy, no matter how filled out he is by hard work. "D...don't hurt her."

I chuckle. "Are you volunteering? This is Luca's reward, not yours. Normally, we don't let the newbies touch the merchandise, but he's earned a

treat for not dying yet.”

The girl whimpers at my words while her brother uselessly tries to fight his bonds, but the drugs still working through his system make the movements sluggish and uncoordinated.

“Time’s ticking, newbie,” I tell him. “Do you want the girl or the boy? Both have to be done, but your cooperation will make it easier for one of them.”

I look at him expectantly, blood thrumming with anticipation of him either passing or failing... Either way, this will be fun—for me.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Luca



Fucking smug asshole who needs to die. If my thoughts could kill someone, Dominic would be dead. Only problem? I'm not sure if my hatred for him is also because I hate myself. Fuck, it probably is...

Alright, I've gone through shit before. It's time to lock in and get this done. The sooner it's taken care of the sooner I can get out of here.

Straightening, I shrug nonchalantly. "I'll take the girl this time. I got a taste of the boy already."

"You fucker!" the boy shouts.

Snorting, I glance over toward him. "I know you want my hands on you. But right now, this lovely young woman has my attention. Perhaps if there's anything left of you before you go to whatever your final destination is, I'll win another reward. Until then... shut the fuck up."

Coldness pours into me, and I'm unable to stop it. Part of me doesn't want to. The slight pinpricks of memories of forcing Lio to submit rush forward, and I dive into them. I follow that pathway with glee. It may have been what helped break me the first time, but I will not falter here.

I turn my head toward Dominic and ask, "Rules?"

He quirks his eyebrows up but gives me a sly smile. “Alright, newbie, the rules are simple. Finger penetration is fine. No fucking at this point. Call out the attributes and marks. Mostly, don’t permanently mar the merchandise; it takes away from profit.”

Nodding, I walk to the girl. Grasping her hair, I pull it back, eliciting a gasp. I watch as tears roll down her face, but merely grunt in annoyance.

“Light-brown hair. Her face is... hmm, heart-shaped. I’d suggest a diet; she’s got some fat she could stand to lose. I know some go for that, though. I’m sure you know your clientele better than I do.”

“Why? Why are you doing this?” the girl whimpers.

Making a disgusted noise, I snap out, “Because your father tried to fuck the Boss over. You’re both payment. Hell, I bet your parents were glad to get rid of you. Even if we may not make much of you—at least compared to your brother.”

Dominic makes a noise that sounds suspiciously like an aborted laugh. It makes the area between my shoulders tighten, but I force myself to carry on. There’s nothing else I can do.

“Pale-green eyes,” I call out as pry her mouth open, sweeping it with my finger. “All her teeth are there, it seems. They’re relatively straight. Bet she had braces at some point. You should probably thank your daddy for that, but really it just helps us pay down what he owes.

“Now, let’s get that top off you. I’m curious to see how much of your breasts are natural versus padding. I’m betting you needed some padding.”

She’s bound with her arms behind her so I can easily use my knife to cut through her shirt and bra.

Chuckling, I hold up the cut bra for Dominic and Teo to see. “Padded. I’d probably put her at a solid B cup—if that. Nothing identifying on the chest. Hmm, let’s see what’s below the waist, sweetheart, and then I’ll check the back.”

“He seems to be having too much fun with this,” Teo mutters, and I almost smile. It’s good when I can throw people off, and the way both him and Dominic have been treating me... Well, they need to see me embrace the darkness, so that’s what I’ll do. Somehow.

I stand her up to continue the inspection, managing to get the woman’s pants and underwear off, only making one lewd comment about the thong she’s wearing. I battle the shame that tries to fill me with the knowledge that I have to prove myself. That’s the only way I can make it in this

fucked-up world. Succeeding is the only option, because if I succeed? I can take them down. And right now, I'm so ready to bathe in their blood.

I insert my finger into her casually as she twists and screeches. Sighing, I take my finger out and casually backhand her. "Stop it!"

"You asshole!" the brother yelps, and I send a withering glare toward him.

I turn toward Dominic and shrug. "She's not a virgin, despite the way she whines, at least, vaginally. She's got a small birthmark on her right knee."

Forcing myself to take measured steps, I walk behind her. I move her hair up, carefully looking at every inch of her body. Tsking, I add, "There's a tattoo on her right shoulder. Chinese symbol. Not sure what it means."

"We'll take a picture of it," Dominic states calmly, as if he's merely watching golf.

Nodding, I continue my perusal, eventually lifting her feet one at a time to stare at the soles. Humming, I set the last foot down and smack her ass. "She's got a good bounce to her ass, but aside from the tattoo, there's nothing there. I'd suggest having her professionally groomed as well as the diet. I'm sure that's standard, though."

I step back, leaving her in tears and whimpering as she collapses to the floor. Her brother is still fighting his bonds, trying to get to her as he curses my existence. I ignore it all. It's pointless.

Walking around her, I stare at Dominic, waiting for what he'll say. Eventually, he gives me a slow nod. I'm assuming I've passed a test. At least for now.

I'm not sure how I feel about it. In some ways, I think there are lines in life that you can't cross, because if you do, you're too far gone. And I have a feeling this was one of those lines. But perhaps there will be some restoring of my soul after I take these assholes down.

At least that's the lie I tell myself. That's how I comfort myself. Because I once tried to take Il Padrone down and failed. This time, there's far more on the line. And if I fail, not only do I sacrifice the small bit that was left of my soul, but also the men and women in this territory.

Because one thing is clear. The East Coast Martellis are far different than the Midwest. And fuck, if I thought living under Il Padrone's rule was hard, this... this is torture I could never, ever imagine.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Teo



“**T**o what do I owe this pleasure?” Kari asks with a purr.
“Just enjoying a drink,” I reply, lifting my glass of bourbon.
“Only a drink?” she replies with a sly grin.

Shifting in my seat, I spread my legs and shove the head down there deeper onto my cock. “Might as well be... Who taught this one how to give a blowjob?”

Kari laughs. “So picky...” She comes around the table and grabs the hair of the man on his knees. Pulling his head up and saying, “You better give my brother the best head of your life...” She doesn’t finish her threat, but then she doesn’t need to.

Once she releases his hair, he falls back on my cock, swallowing it deeply and making me groan as my cockhead bumps the back of his throat.

“How was your day?” Kari asks, taking a seat across from me.

I shrug and take a sip of my drink before shoving the wet mouth further down. “Okay, I suppose. The fresh meat isn’t as fresh as we thought... I’m pretty sure Dominic was disappointed.”

She laughs. “He always is. Papa said he’s here to learn?”

I hum in agreement, letting the poor whore up to breathe before forcing my cock deeper into his throat until he gags around me. “Claims that the East Coast branch wants to expand. Dominic and I don’t buy it, but what can we do? Father gave us orders and we’ll follow them.”

“Of course you will,” she murmurs, barely audible over the sounds of chatter and the music playing overhead.

I roll my eyes because she’s as beholden to Sergio as we all are; she just gets away with more because she’s his pretty little *princess*.

Kari reaches for my drink and swallows it down. “I have new goods to sample...if you want more than a blowjob...”

Punching my hips up, I bite back a moan at the teeth that scrape along my cock. “How about both? I am feeling...keyed up.”

My sister laughs. “Very well. I’ll go unlock your room.”

She leaves and I pull my cockwarmer up, forcing his eyes to meet mine. “Is your ass better than your mouth?”

He grins. “Guess you’ll have to find out...”

I hum and shove him away from me, zipping my hard, wet cock away as I stand. Clicking my fingers, I gesture for him to follow me.

Heading upstairs, the soundproofing on the walls helps muffle the noises from the downstairs lounge area.

The second floor is full of private rooms that could be rented out for a few hours, or the whole night, but there’s always a room in all the whorehouses we own that is reserved for the Family.

Opening the partially ajar door all the way, I smirk at the sight before me. The whore Kari grabbed is built sturdier than the one following me like a little duck. His hair is caramel-brown with blond highlights, and though his pose is perfect, I can practically smell his fear.

“How long has he been here?”

“Three days,” Kari asks. “Was part of that new shipment we got in. I snatched this one up before anyone else could.”

I snort. “Eyes on me,” I order. Bright-blue eyes meet mine, the striking color inviting. I snap my fingers and the whore I brought up swiftly moves across the room to stand next to his counterpart. “Has he been broken in yet?” I ask.

“Just his mouth...” Kari teases.

I exchange a glance with her. “You do know me well.”

“I try.” With that and a flirty wink, she bounces out of the room.

The door shuts with a distinctive *click*, and I study the two men in front of me carefully. “Well?” I ask with a raised brow. “Earn your keep.”

The more experienced one jumps into action, bringing the newbie along, and they start to undress me. Closing my eyes, I lose myself in the sensations, getting lost in the feel of hands and mouths on me rather than asshole Seconds or suspicious newbies...



The mansion is dark when I arrive home. I yawn as I step through the front door, exhausted after the decent fuck and long day, and more than ready for bed now.

Thankfully, it's late enough everyone should be asleep, because the last thing I need is to run into someone else, namely Dominic. The whores may have taken the edge off, but I'm still thrumming, the last few days proving to be more entertaining than I thought they'd be.

Turning the corner, I run smack dab into someone. “Fuck,” I curse as their head smashes against mine.

“Shit,” they whisper.

I narrow my eyes as Luca rubs at his forehead. “There a reason you're sneaking around in the middle of the night?”

He huffs. “I wasn't sneaking.”

“Sure... Going for a late-night stroll then?”

“If I was?” he snarks.

I lean in, sure he can smell the alcohol, smoke, and sex that clings to me. “Then I'd suggest you find a way to relax and sleep.”

His brown eyes darken with hatred and something like interest he can't quite hide. “You offering?”

I laugh, low and dark. “Mmm, you haven't earned that yet, newbie. You might have gained Dominic's attention, but that's not necessarily a good thing. I'd tread carefully if I were you...his cock isn't for the faint of heart.”

Luca scoffs. “Not interested.”

“For a Second, you're a terrible liar.” Reaching out, I ghost my fingers down his cheek, noting he flinches at the touch but doesn't pull away. Long buried thoughts try to stir in me as I imagine actually touching him. “Don't be such an easy mark if you're so uninterested...” Straightening to my full

height, I yawn again. “As fun as this is, some of us weren’t blessed with natural beauty.”

He snorts. “Now you’re just fishing for compliments.”

I grin. “Go back to your room, newbie. Tomorrow comes early...and you never know what type of danger lurks in the dark.”

I brush past him, our shoulders knocking together. I can hear him curse softly but don’t turn around, content to leave him like that, even if my cock tries to stir in my pants, interested in the dangerous yet intriguing man. I blame Dominic for that...he broke the stupid thing, and now it likes playing with fire.

As I make it to my quarters, I force myself to not think of how sweet it would have been to have had Luca on his knees for me tonight. His tears I tasted, and his blood my teeth and blade had spilled...

Dangerous indeed, but nothing says I can’t play with the guy. After all, Dominic taught me well...

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Dominic



There are far too many fucking reports. It's my least favorite part of my job. Unfortunately, not even the mafia is immune to this shit.

After filing the day-to-day reports, I start on my special project. I read the updated notes, my brow furrowed as I take in each word.

There's something not right about Luca being here. I hate to admit—even in my own mind—that the newbie impressed me today. I expected him to crumble, to fall.

My plans for tonight were either going to be taking Teo's ass if he won the kidnapping challenge or beginning to put Luca through the paces when he failed inspection. Since neither of those are happening, I'm stuck being pissed off as I go through the notes the investigator has sent me.

What's worse is Teo made no secret that he was headed to the whorehouse. The challenging look he gave me... Fuck, I wanted to wipe that look off his face, but I know I can't. There are fucking rules. I can never touch the Boss's daughter, and his son is semi-off-limits. When he fucks up, I can play, but otherwise, all I can do is edge us both.

I shake my head, focusing on what's in front of me. No matter how hard I try, it doesn't make sense. Why would Allesandro suddenly be interested

in a new revenue stream? They've never approached human trafficking before. Yet, thanks to the investigator, I now have video evidence of what they did to the newest member, Emilio. Since he took over as a supposedly temporary Second, he was already on my list to investigate.

I've watched it repeatedly and there's irrefutable proof that Luca took part in what happened. Sure, it was unoriginal, but I could see evidence of my predecessor's methods. That, in itself, doesn't compute. It's there, though. So is the fact it was Luca. No matter how much they tried to hide with voice changers and what else, it's impossible to hide everything. His mannerisms, his word choice... Well, it seems the newbie may not be as soft as I thought.

Growling, I set the report and video aside. My alarm goes off, and I immediately stand, heading toward the Boss's office. I knock on his door and wait patiently. As soon as he calls out for me to enter, I step into his domain, closing the door carefully behind me.

I don't bother to sit. Instead, I fall into a rough version of parade rest. Sergio doesn't bother to speak to me at first, content to finish his work. I look around the office with disinterest. The gold accents no longer surprise me. Nor does the throne he favors, the heavy focus on scroll work on thick, hardy wood embellished with whatever the carpenters can find. The result is gaudy as fuck, but it's his office, not mine.

I'm careful to never, ever touch his desk. The one time I saw a visitor do it, they were treated to an almost hour-long lecture about how it was antique, imported all the way from Italy, with some sort of connection to the Martellis. I tuned most of it out and was only relieved when the lecture stopped, even if it was with a bullet to the visitor's head.

It was messier than normal, though, and I'm not sure if it was worth it because the Boss had to have the carpet replaced. If he's picky about merchandise, it's even worse when it comes to fucking decorations, including the damn carpet. It's nothing that can be found at a store for damn sure.

"Well, how did today go?" Sergio asks as he sets down his custom fountain pen. Not only is it gold, but it's covered in black diamonds and rubies. Ostentatious is an understatement with Sergio, but we make money hands over fists, so it's got to be used somehow.

"It was surprising," I state cautiously, forever careful. "Luca isn't as soft as I thought he was. I mean no offense to your cousin, but..."

“I understand,” Sergio grunts. “Allesandro does things far differently. It’s right to be suspicious. It makes you a good Second. Still, what surprised you?”

“I had Teo and Luca compete on kidnapping. Teo is very...methodical. He did good not relying on the information I gave him, but it took him a while. In the end, he successfully extracted the girl. He used the sedative and then ‘helped’ her toward the van.

“Luca spent most of that time on his phone. At first, I wasn’t sure what he was doing. It turned out he was deep diving on the boy. By the time the girl was dropped off, it lined up perfectly for Luca. He changed outfits and became a chameleon in essence. I know there’s another Boy marked as Ghost, but it appears your cousin cross-trains.

“He had the boy back to the van within half an hour. Distracted him with a kiss and used the sedative at that point. Since it took him less time, and he kissed the kid for distraction, I had to give him the win.

“I expected him to fail at inspection. He didn’t. Hell, he pushed further than I thought he would. It’s confusing. In some ways he seems soft; in other ways, he doesn’t.”

Sergio snorts. “I take it your special project isn’t going well.”

“I know you trust your cousin. I merely prefer to look at all options,” I reply with a shrug. Honestly compels me to add, “I did find some proof that he may be legitimate. There’s video evidence of what your cousin and Luca did to the youngest member of their circle. It’s far more than I thought they’d do. In fact, it looks a little like my predecessor’s teachings.”

Sergio grimaces. I wait patiently as he looks away, thrumming his fingers on his precious desk. Eventually, he stops, and his shoulders slump before he stares at me. There’s something in his eyes I don’t recognize. An emotion... memories? Fuck if I know. I’m not a damn therapist.

“You are an excellent Second,” Sergio says suddenly, which only puts me on edge. Compliments are not expected, or the sign of anything good. “Between the two of us, we have refined your predecessor’s techniques and instilled the same level of discipline without unnecessary losses.

“What I’m about to tell you isn’t something that I want to get out. Not only for the sake of this Organization, but for my cousin’s. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, Boss,” I respond automatically.

With an unhappy sigh, Sergio says, “My father was smart. Innovative. But not cruel. At least, not to his immediate family. As such, my training wasn’t the same as what you went through. Hell, Teo only underwent it because his bitch of a mom stole him from me. If he had been raised in this world... Well, it is what it is.

“Allesandro, however...his father was cruel in a way that honestly puts even your predecessor to shame. The man was like an uncle to me, but I can admit that he had certain, uh, issues.

“About the time I was learning the ins and outs of the world we live in, Allesandro was shipped out here. I was excited because he was my favorite cousin by far. He’s always been smart and, back then, had a certain zest for life.

“Unfortunately, his father had incredibly strict instructions. The training you went through? That was nothing compared to what Allesandro did. I... I couldn’t look at him the same. I didn’t know the full scope of what happened to him for many years. Not until my father was on his death bed, but I will tell you, what I knew at that time was bad enough.

“My father instructed me that if Allesandro ever needed help, I was to give it. And then he broke down what happened. Including my beloved uncle taking trips to the East Coast after that initial ‘training’. Although, really, I wouldn’t even call it training.

“It was breaking a man. Hell, he wasn’t even a man at that point. Hardly more than a child. There are few things my father ever regretted in life, but that one sin will always be our cross to bear.”

I can barely breathe, trying to imagine the horrors of what this guy went through. I mean, I couldn’t care less, but fuck. That is some tough level shit. How does anyone walk around after that? What mental gymnastics has to occur for them to not take their own life?

There’s a reason I refined the process. We were losing far too many men who simply...broke. Completely. And yet this other Boss supposedly went through something far worse? Then it dawns on me.

“So Allesandro must have used those methods on Luca. Interesting. Really, he’s far softer than I’d expect in that case. Although I’m surprised he didn’t break his chains and go after his Master,” I murmur.

Sergio shrugs. “I still expect him to fail at some point. You know this job is far harder than most can comprehend. When that happens, I expect

you to take care of it. But I want you to understand, what you will do to Luca? It won't ever be as much as Allesandro has faced in his life."

"That's why you're not afraid of upsetting your cousin. He knows the score."

The Boss doesn't answer, but he's given me far more of an explanation than I ever expected. I mean, hell. We don't speak of this shit. In fact, it's left me wanting a fucking hot shower because there are too many thoughts that go far too close to pity.

"Alright, I'll set it aside," I say grudgingly. "But I'll be prepared for Luca's failure."

"Good. Now, about Teo. I've seen your updates. I'm concerned he lost this time. Which, I do recognize is likely your way of testing him as well. But, while we know people are motivated by rewards, it's far better to instill that fear."

I tilt my head, curious to hear what Teo's father wants this time for the kid. "Of course, Boss. Fear is always effective."

"Then I think it's time to give Teo a reminder of what happens if someone fails. I'll leave it up to you, but may I suggest making it a group effort?"

I don't bother to respond as Sergio dismisses me. Walking away, it's hard to hide the evil chuckle inside me. Because fuck, daddy there just gave me permission to play with his boy. Not only that, but to rope Luca into it as well.

Fuck, I'd better hydrate because I have a feeling I'm going to get one hell of a workout...

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Teo



Being thrown out of bed after a long night is not my version of a good time. Lashing out, I strike my attacker, satisfaction thrumming through me as I hit flesh, but as my brain is still waking up, I'm unprepared as I'm shoved to the floor.

The blankets are tangled around me, impeding my defense.

Hands hold me down, and everything sharpens as a familiar scent hits my nose: spice and musk, smoky darkness that is as enticing as it is dangerous.

"What the fuck, Dominic?" I ask as I manage to untangle myself from the blankets, throwing him off me.

He returns before I can scramble to my feet, knocking the wind out of me. I'm not as weak or useless as I was once before, but he still has years on me—and had a hand in how I was trained so he can anticipate me well.

We grapple, neither of us getting the upper hand as I manage to finally find my feet.

The wind gets knocked out of me as I hit the wall, but I don't let that stop or slow me down. A punch to the gut has his grip loosening on me, and

I'm able to slide away from him. Grabbing his arm, I wrench it back, shoving him face first into the wall.

"What the fuck do you want?" I growl.

He chuckles, a wheezy, low sound that makes my hackles rise. "You lost the challenge..." he taunts.

I curse and shove his face into the wall. "I'm not your fucking plaything—not anymore."

Dominic laughs again, and I'm pulled away from him by a set of hands I don't recognize. As soon as my weight is lifted from Dominic, he helps my second attacker subdue me. "That's where you're wrong, Buttercup," he says, using that terrible nickname he gave me.

My stomach turns as I'm forced to the floor once more. Strong hands grip my wrists, holding them above my head, and I look up to meet Luca's eyes, seeing pity swirling in them.

I scoff. "Didn't get enough yesterday?"

Dominic thrusts my head down, neck bending uncomfortably as he settles himself on my legs. "Luca is still being rewarded...on the Boss's orders. You, on the other hand, failed. And you know what happens to failures..."

I try to fight, but they hold me down, and it's nothing for Dominic to spread my ass cheeks, since I didn't put anything on before crashing into bed last night.

Cold saliva hits my hole, and I flinch. Bile rushes up, but I swallow it back down, trying my best to relax, but my body remembers. It wasn't that long ago since I was last in this position that I've forgotten what's to come.

Dominic's belt jingles merrily as he undoes it, and I twist my wrists in Luca's strong grip, willing to break them if it means getting free.

"I'm going to fucking kill you," I tell Dominic.

He laughs before spitting again. "You know you've missed me," he taunts.

"Fuck you!"

"My pleasure," he purrs.

Throwing my head back, I bite my tongue until I taste blood as he shoves his hard and ready cock into my unprepared ass.

I see spots as I squeeze my eyes tightly. I thrash under them, but all it does is encourage Dominic to sink deeper into me.

“Fuuuuccckk... It’s too bad I can’t do this more,” he tells me. “You’ve always had such a tight ass. Nice and hot. I love breaking you in, Buttercup.”

I try my hardest to tune him out as he begins thrusting inside me. He pulls my hips up, shoving my torso into the floor as he takes what isn’t his.

Tears fall down my face from the burning pain of being fucked open on a rigid cock. My bottom lip bursts open as my teeth break through it, blood filling my mouth.

Lifting my head, I spit at Luca, satisfied when he grimaces as the blood and saliva hit him in the face.

“You just going to do nothing, newbie?” Dominic grunts, thrusting harder into me. “His throat hasn’t been tested in a while...”

“I fucking dare you,” I taunt Luca.

His eyes darken so much they look almost black, and for a moment, I think he’s going to refuse, but the guy has self-preservation...enough he releases me and shifts into a kneeling position.

Dominic leans over me, trapping me beneath him, causing me to cry out as I swear I can feel the delicate flesh of my ass tearing open as he fucks deeper into me...

Luca wastes no time grabbing my jaw in a firm grip and forcing my mouth open.

I keep his gaze as he shoves his cock into my mouth. His flesh is soft, smooth, and hot as he forces himself into my mouth.

I bite down, enjoying the way he curses and pulls out before striking me hard enough across the face that I see stars.

Distantly, through ringing ears, I hear Dominic laugh, the tone dark and sadistic and stomach turning even as my blood heats and my body aches for him.

My mouth is stuffed full again, and it’s all I can do is breathe through my nose as they use me from both ends.

“Maybe I’ll let you have his ass too,” Dominic muses. “After all, he deserves it for failing...”

I close my eyes as more tears spill over, the pain growing with every tandem thrust from them both.

My mind goes blank, and the world goes fuzzy, as once more I am turned into nothing more than an object to be used.

The remaining human parts of me shatter, as I retreat to that happy place in my mind, trying desperately to find the balance once more between pain and acceptance.

As they continue to use my body and show how not safe I am, despite the sham of being the heir, more pieces of my soul break off, and I get lost in the darkness...

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Luca



I make it to the bathroom, turning the shower on hot, before I fall to my knees in front of the toilet, gasping. My mind automatically plays the morning out from the beginning, forcing me to relive it all over again.

“Boss is giving you an extra reward. He’s not happy Teo failed. It’s time to put him in his place and remind him what happens when you fuck up.” Dominic smiles as the words hit me, tiny invisible needles drawing blood that can’t be seen, infecting me with a darkness that can never be undone.

Shaking, I purge what’s in my stomach. Hoping it’ll help. Tears drip down as I pray for relief, yet none can be found as what I’ve done comes in snippets faster than I can control.

“Do you have a plan or are we just fucking him up?” I ask casually, not willing to show the fear clawing at my heart.

Snorting, Dominic tosses out, “I plan on getting his ass. As for you, rape his throat. If he does a good enough job, maybe you can break his ass in, too. Impress me, newbie, because trust me, Teo won’t take it easy when you’re the one on the bottom.”

I shudder, knowing that’s the truth. Especially after I crossed such a line today. The shock that blossomed in Teo’s eyes, the fucking betrayal... My

stomach revolts again as sweat begins to drip down, mixing with the tears.

It's fucking brutal. The way Dominic chuckles darkly as he attacks Teo. I force myself forward, helping him pin Teo down. My mind shuts down, unable to accept what I'm doing.

I go through the motions, accepting the spit from Teo. When he bites me, I'm tempted to fucking choke him, but I bring myself back, just enough to follow through on the objective. Instead, I backhand him casually. Like it's nothing—when it's fucking everything.

Any pity inside me withers at the hatred Teo throws toward me. He can't be my friend. I can't save him. Hell, I can't even save myself. Did Allesandro know this would happen? Did my best friend set me up to be tortured?

I shake my head, that thought invading my mind again. I flinch from it. There's no way Il Padrone would do that... is there?

Eventually, there's nothing left in my stomach. I rinse out my mouth, carefully brushing my teeth before shakily getting to my feet and making it to the shower. I let the hot water beat down on me. Fuck, I wish it was boiling. I may die, but damn, I could use it to strip some layers of my skin away. Nothing will ever let me feel clean again.

"Come on, newbie. Switch with me. I want to see you take his ass. And more, I want to see you come. Bonus if you can get him to come during it, too."

I don't bare my teeth at him, but it's fucking close. Instead, I move back, listening to the gasps of Teo. He's gone quiet. To that place I know all too well, where you shut down. And it's exactly why Dominic wants me to make him come.

To bring him around. To force him to enjoy this. To know he's as fucked up now as the rest of us. These are lessons already branded in my soul, but I force myself to go ahead with it.

Words fall from my tongue, feeding more darkness to Teo's mind. Worse, it's not nearly as hard as I thought it would be. To find my pleasure. To make him find his. All of it done, as Dominic watches me, urging me to go further—to go harder.

The water starts to cool, spurring me into motion. Hell, I have no idea how long I've stood in this damn shower, taunted with pasts that keep merging. From here. From when Allesandro first broke me. From his fucking father's sadistic pleasures.

And now, it's come full circle. This time, I'm someone else's monster. And the weight... it tries to strangle me. Part of me wants to give into it, but I can't. Not until I take these fuckers down. Especially as that last part of the morning slides into me...

Dominic slaps me on the back after we come out of Teo's room. "He's going to be feeling that for a while. I have to say, I didn't think you'd have it in you. But damn. You were vicious. I was hoping I'd get your ass, too, but I can't lie. This was fun."

Whistling, he walks away, smug pleasure radiating from him. I force myself to walk toward my bedroom, to not run. Because there, buried in a compliment, is the threat that's been held over my head. Only this time, I know exactly what awaits me.

That last memory slips away, although it reverberates in my head. Fuck. I reach out my hand to turn off the water, unsurprised at the way it shakes. By the time I make it out of the stall, I'm breathing hard, as if I'm overcoming weeks of sickness. The problem? It's a sickness that lives in my head. An invisible, yet permanent mark that can't ever be expunged.

I dry off, forcing my thoughts to disappear. I slip into some sleep pants and then walk toward the bed. As I lay down, desperately trying to fall asleep, I try to recall the good times in my life. Yet, they've all disappeared on me. And all I see is the long stretch of darkness.

The only color comes as the darkness eats at my consciousness. Blue eyes sparkling in tears, pain, and hatred. And then dissolving into that state where everything shuts down... losing every bit of vibrancy they could ever hold. For that, there will be an absolution when I'm called to the other side.

I may save the lives of others when I finally burn this place to the fucking ground, but I sacrificed my soul to do it. Is it a fair trade-off? Maybe the future will tell. Right now, it doesn't seem possible.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Teo



I wake up on the floor. Everything hurts, from my hair down to my toes. It can be hours later or minutes, I don't know. Time is elusive after such things. I have huge swaths of those early days missing from memory.

Groaning, I take stock of my arms and legs, deciding I can move them. I know from experience that standing now is a bad idea, so I force myself up on my knees, teeth gritted as every movement makes my body ache. Slowly, carefully, I crawl to the ensuite. The cool tile beneath my hands and knees is a blessing as sweat coats my skin.

Crawling across the bathroom, I manage to fumble with the taps of the bath, getting it running as I force myself to the shower. Using the walls, I stand, wobbling slightly on my feet, but I stay upright, and that's all I'm going for right now.

The cold water is a welcome shock to the system, helping to reboot my brain as it heats. I don't bother waiting for the water to get warm though, scrubbing myself twice to make sure all the bodily fluids go down the drain.

Thankfully, there's a bench in here, so I can adjust the shower head and bend over it. Tears prickle the back of my eyes as I reach back and spread

my ass open, letting the water hit there to wash away the cum spilling from me.

I choke back a sob as I force myself to wash my asshole with the bodywash. It burns and stings, and the fucker definitely tore me open this time.

By the time I deem myself clean enough, I'm shaking from both the physical and soul-deep pain.

With clumsy fingers, I turn the shower off and step out.

The bath is ready now, so I turn it off and climb in. The hot water has me moaning, and I lean back, submerging as much as possible to help my sore muscles relax.

I lose the fight with my tears as I soak, reminded all over again that in the grand scheme of things I am nothing. This isn't new. Since I've been here, I've been *trained*. Taught by my father how the business works, prepared to one day take over the operations. My heart hardened to the suffering of others, but for myself? I haven't quite figured out how to protect my heart from direct hits. No matter how many times it happens.

This wasn't the first time, nor do I imagine it'd be the last, but fuck. Knowing I failed...that all my hard work was for nothing because once again I am reduced to nothing worthy...

It's a tough pill to swallow. Especially since, as much as Dominic would deny it, I know it's personal.

He hates what I represent, that I was made my father's heir, and that he cannot have complete control over me. In another life, I'd wonder if he liked me, in a fucked-up, toxic way, but here? I know he simply gets sick pleasure from my suffering.

I can accept the fact I failed and deserved the punishment, but the brutality of this instance... then bringing Luca in?

My stomach churns and I hop out of the bath as fast as I can without killing myself. My knees crack with how hard they hit the floor to kneel in front of the toilet, but that has nothing on the way my throat and nose burn as I vomit into the porcelain bowl.

I heave, expelling everything in my system as the recent memories try to creep in, mixed in with the old.

The taunts, the touching, the pain...and the humiliation of coming against my will. It's a jumbled mess, and I cry harder, unable to hold myself together.

But the real kicker? This latest rape does nothing to temper my attraction and crush on Dominic. If nothing else, the fucked-up, twisted freak they've turned me into is simply happy that he touched me.

When I have nothing else to empty, I flush the toilet and crawl back to the bath. I should wash my mouth out, but I don't have the energy to care right now, not when I ache like I got run over once or twice.

Fucking hell.

Closing my eyes as I lounge in the tub, I consider trying to drown myself here, but knowing them, they'd bring me back simply to start the process all over again. Besides, it's not death I want...but a chance to turn the tables.

Fucking Luca.

I told him last night he was a terrible liar, and while that's true when it comes to his own reactions, he's just like the rest of them. Able to hide his cruelty behind the mask of a soft, confused, lost, and sympathetic man who is way in over his head. It's all a lie, and as much as I pitied him for being thrown to the wolves, the realization that he fits right in hits hard.

It makes my stomach quiver despite being empty.

As the water grows cold, I turn the tap back on to fill it up, contemplating just staying here all day, knowing I've earned myself a "day off" after the fuckery.

But the rebellious part of me that's awoken after being here says fuck that. Pain or no pain, anal tear or not, I will not let them see me weak. I've worked too hard to gain more than contempt from Dominic. I refuse to let this set me back, even if it was on his whim that I "failed".

And yet, had the tables been turned, I'm not sure I would have done anything differently...after all, it's what we've been trained to do.

My heart clenches, and I squeeze my eyes shut so I don't shed any more tears over how fucked my life has become. Everything I thought I was, whoever I was once before, is gone. And in its place is an empty shell, barely surviving off the scraps of humanity I have left, and lusting after my main abuser. It's sick, it's twisted, and it's my reality for now and always.

The thought is enough to make my mouth water and wishing I could permanently sink into the happy place in my mind, but knowing despite how fucking hard he took me today, it was still tame. I can be grateful for that, at least. And therein lies the issue. As much as this has set me back, I know it can always be worse. I've learned what I can live with, have

acclimatized myself to the pain and suffering, and know, no matter how much it hurts today, tomorrow it'll simply be a blip on my radar. A necessary step in my training, and one I accept because I am a Martelli, and that is what I'm supposed to do.

I hate it. Hate my father. Hate Dominic. But most of all, I hate myself.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

Dominic



“**Y**ou seem...sexually repressed, my friend.”

I glare at the man across from me. Like always, it doesn't have a damn bit of effect on him. He's one of the men my predecessor trained and is far harder than most around here. Although, I suppose if I had any friends, he would likely be one. Possibly. He's a fucking asshole, but that fits me.

“Was that everything you had for me, Miles?” I say dryly, ignoring his comment.

Sighing, Miles drums his fingers across his scarred desk. It's certainly not like Sergio's office. No, this one is purely functional. As expected, of course, as it's in the middle of a whorehouse. One that Kari doesn't run—and likely doesn't know about.

“The new merchandise is working out. She's not going to last long. But the boy? I thought you were crazy not to put him to auction—would have picked up some fine money—but hell, we get people willing to pay an obscene amount for him because he's not broken in. And best of all is when they can use the sister against him.”

Miles is right in his assessment. I didn't think it would work either. Unfortunately, I can't even take the damn credit for this one.

"It was the newbie's idea. He pitched it to Sergio." My lips twist into a sneer, but fuck, there's a damn hierarchy on this shit and he should have brought it to me.

"Ah, and the truth comes out," Miles retorts with a smugness that makes my skin crawl.

Grunting, I ignore his stupidity. It's not his fault after all that both Teo and Luca are making my life hell right now. And so what if I'm a little frustrated? It's not like there's shit I can do about it.

Tsking at me, Miles prods further, "Come now. Talk to me. Rumor has it Teo has been slaking his urges with a new man every night and that you've been a right ass the last few weeks."

My fingers twitch, wanting my gun with a powerful urge. Unfortunately, Miles fills a hole most can't step into. There's black souls and men without souls. Miles is the latter, which lets him slither through this hellhole without an issue.

"It's fine," I bite off. And that's true. Just because both newbie's ass and Teo's are completely off-limits to me unless they fuck up...or that they've started this weird competition to see who does the best to get the barest sign of acceptance from me. *Fuck.*

It's like I'm being motherfucking edged all the damn time with a bunny and a puppy who all want to please me, but I can't fucking take either one. So instead they keep getting better, thinking that's the secret to my attention when it's the exact opposite of what lets me touch them.

Fucking Sergio.

The worst part? Seeing the bunny sit there and make overtures to Teo, repeatedly, only to be shut down cold each time. The pup knows who holds his damn leash, even if he goes off like a dog every night sniffing at bitches who don't deserve him.

All I need is for them to fuck up. Once. And I'll have them beneath me, begging for mercy. Except it. Will. Not. Come. Because there is none in me.

"Fine. Take that evil smile and get the fuck out of here, if you're not going to give me any details. I'm an old man, you know..."

Laughing, I shake my head, forcing myself to get back to business. Thankfully, it's already been completed. "Old my fucking ass. You'll still be

here when I'm dead. They say the good die young; I figure you sold out your soul a long time ago."

Miles cackles, throwing his head back and letting his thick hand fall onto the desk, rattling everything. I roll my eyes at his antics, but fuck if it isn't like stepping back into time when I visit him. A simpler time when it was easy to take what we were owed and said fuck the rest. Now we have to slither between agencies and politicians who don't realize the civil service we do.

"Alright, try to behave. I'm out of here. Keep an eye on the new merchandise, especially the boy. I expect newbie to fuck up at some point. And if he does, I think the boy may be an option for the impossible test."

That wipes the smile off Miles's face. Fuck knows we both know what that test is like... It makes us men, though. Men who can handle the pressures of this life without failing.

I stroll away from the den of debauchery, the screams still ringing in my ears despite the quality soundproofing. By the time I reach the SUV, it's merely yet another memory. It doesn't exist. Because in this life, you don't look back—only forward.

When I climb into the SUV, I give the driver the sign to go and pull out my phone. Tapping it against my leg for a moment, I try to figure out what I should do next. Shrugging, I decide to check in on my charges. By now, they probably want to kill each other. Not that I'm opposed, but I'd rather fuck them when they're alive.

Sending a text, I wait impatiently for a response. Thankfully, the damn pup knows I hold his leash and replies quickly. It's easy enough to reroute us after that.

I spend the rest of the drive checking in with the captains and soldiers. Snapping out commands, adding more shit to my list to check, and watching the network. There are high-powered CEOs who complain about the shit they go through, but fuck if they know what constitutes as stress.

A Second is the conductor of a blood-soaked symphony, where each note has to complement each other, and nothing can drop. Because the moment it does—the slightest amount of discord—it'll crash to the ground. Because silence... that's not just a pause in the fucking market. No, that's a catastrophe that means prison doors are shutting, or worse—a casket is closing.

“We’re here, sir,” the driver states as the car pulls into the parking lot of one of our restaurants. Thankfully, it’s a front spot because it’s starting to get brutally cold out.

Mixed in with our more interesting businesses are those that are what the tax guy would consider legitimate ones. Granted, I’m not sure how true that is when we all know some money laundering takes place, but fuck it. It’s still one of my favorite pizza places in the city.

Walking in, I immediately see Luca and Teo in a booth. I wave the hostess off and merely stop and stare for a moment. Both are leaning toward each other, arguing in what must be low tones. There’s a beseeching quality to Luca’s face... I can definitely see the bunny being the type to beg.

Teo? He leans back, putting more space between them. His face is all hard planes, like it’s set in granite, and he merely waves Luca off like a damn gnat.

Interestingly, Luca tugs at his hair, and I can almost feel his frustration from here. I’m tempted to let it play out, but Teo moves forward again, and that’s my sign. I quickly make it over there, sliding into the booth as I draw Teo back.

It’s not that I think Teo would hurt Luca, but I don’t need a lecture from Sergio if I’m wrong. Because while Teo may get in some trouble for it, the shit would fall mostly on me. And fuck that.

I force Teo to stay next to me, and he immediately ceases struggling when he notices it’s me. I put my lips next to his ear and whisper, “I hope you’re not fucking with the newbie. Especially while I’m not around. Did you forget who holds your leash? Or that more than I speak to your father?”

Teo shudders, an invisible moan on his face. It’s addictive, even as it plumps up my dick. Fucking hell. There’s a reason I took the break from them. Especially when I glance over and notice Luca’s brown eyes darkening with jealousy. Fuck. And there goes any chance of a meal with my cock not hard as a damn steel beam.

I pull myself away from Teo, even though it takes far more willpower than I expected. Forcing myself to breathe slowly, I pick up one of the discarded menus, even though I have the damn thing memorized.

“So... newbie. Are you headed back to the East Coast for Christmas? It’s right around the corner,” I comment offhandedly, desperate for something—anything—to distract myself from the scene these two make.

Luca takes a deep breath before shaking his head. “No, Il Padrone asked that I learn everything I could before coming back. I won’t let him down. I do understand if you’re busy, of course. I can occupy myself.”

Snorting, I glance at him, bemused. “Riiiiight. Like we let anyone scurry around our territory unescorted. I’ll leave it to Sergio and Teo on how... involved you are, of course.”

Luca merely gives me a tight smile, and I almost sigh happily. Hopefully, the waitress comes soon. If I can’t fuck Luca or Teo, the least I can do is have a good meal to settle one of my appetites.

Soon. Soon they’ll be under me. I’ll make it happen if I have to...

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Teo



Fucking Christmas comes again. I didn't like the holiday before this, now I despise it. But it's a great way to test Luca, if only someone else had to deal with him. Instead, I've been saddled with the asshole while Dominic only has to show up for days we're interacting with the merchandise. Which, since we haven't been given the go ahead to show in detail how we train the merchandise, means he gets to follow me around like a lost fucking puppy most of the time.

It wouldn't be so bad if the guy didn't try acting all innocent. But every time he tries to talk to me about anything except work...it grates on me and scrapes against the wounds that are still healing.

Fuck. If he just watched my humiliation, it would have been different, but he has firsthand knowledge of how fucked-up I am. Of how Dominic only touches me when he wants to, and the rest of the time plays with my head...and the emotions I pretend not to have. Not only that, but fucking Luca flirts with him. As if he doesn't know... I don't make it a secret, except from my father.

I work hard to banish those thoughts. No good can come from wanting things I can't have. Even weeks of having a different whore every night has

done nothing except make my skin itch and the need that's been growing in me hurts worse with every interaction.

Luckily, we're busy today. Two weeks before Christmas means an obscene amount of money on the table if we do our jobs right. Customers want a special gift for themselves or someone else, or even a party favor for their holiday gatherings. It means all hands on deck to get the merchandise prepared for sale.

We're dividing and conquering today. There's too much to do and barely enough time to pull it off. So while Dominic gets to play with the other trainers, I am taking fucking Luca down to see the merchandise already marked for sale. Double-checking everything is on the up and up since a few new pieces have been gathered for this special event.

The section of merchandise we're checking now is full of new, unbroken ones, since there's a particular brand of client that likes doing the hard work themselves... It saves us time and resources, but comes with risks. Though as far as I'm aware, we hardly ever get stuck with merchandise that doesn't sell. Customers really love being able to mold their wares to their specifications, even if the majority prefer to have us do the hard work for them.

Luca grimaces as we step into the section where the special merchandise is being held until auction. He's quick to clear his face of expression, but I see it. I can't say I blame the guy; I was much in his position last year, but I learned fast how to tune the cries and screams out.

Cage by cage, we stop by each one and make sure the piece inside matches the information on paper.

We make it down one side and start on the other when I come to a standstill, looking from the girl balled in a corner to the paper in my hand.

"What is this?" I hiss, looking at the warehouse worker tailing us.

"It's fresh merchandise," he responds slowly, like I'm stupid.

"Did you read her sheet?" I demand.

He nods. "I was with Joss when he brought her in..."

"And neither of you thought her age was a problem?"

He flushes. "Her birthday is on Christmas! So why does it matter? Close enough. Besides, we heard Mr. Greystone is attending again. He prefers the younger-looking ones."

"Younger looking," I snap out. "Not hardly legal."

The asshole finally clues into his fuck up as he pales. “We...well, we—”

“Enough,” I tell him. “Get Joss here. Now.”

Pulling out my phone, I send a text to Dominic and then finish the inventory check while we wait for him and the other fuckup to get here.

It’s hard to concentrate with the fury rolling through me. I itch to gut the fucking dumbass right here and now, but I know that’ll only get me attention I don’t want from Dominic and my father. But fucking hell, could you fuck up any more?

The dumbass is smart enough to stay quiet as Dominic and Joss enter the area. Dominic looks displeased to have been disturbed, and I can’t say I blame him. He’s been in a piss poor mood for weeks now, as if *he* was the one punished for a bullshit reason rather than me.

“What’s going on?”

I hand the paperwork to him and gesture to the girl. “These assholes think they’re in charge and can skirt around the rules.”

“Sir...” Joss tries to say, but Dominic gives him a withering glare.

“Come with me,” he barks out.

He leads the way out of the holding area to one of the rooms reserved for when people fuck up.

Luca and I grab the pair and wrestle them into the chairs, securing them while they try to protest.

That done, we step back and look to Dominic, whose expression makes me shiver as my cock perks up. The threat of violence gets my blood pumping, and I’d happily fall to my knees for him if he’d allow it.

“You know better,” Dominic says in a low, dark tone that does things to me. “You know to not touch underage...the last thing we need is for the fucking feds on our ass because we’re touching things we’re not supposed to.”

“Please...” Joss says. “She’ll be legal enough in two weeks. You and I both know that the clients pay better the younger they look.”

Dominic shakes his head. “That’s not how we operate. Especially not without the Boss’s approval.”

Joss pales, and he snaps his mouth shut, as if finally cluing in to how fucked he is.

Dominic grins, a twisted, sadistic look that promises nothing but pain. “Yes, now you’re getting it. Taking matters into your own hands isn’t what

you're paid to do." Dominic snaps his fingers. "Don't kill them...but you can start the lesson of why they don't make decisions for the Boss."

I smirk, anticipation thrumming through my veins at the fun to be had.

Turning to the tools laid out on one of the tables in the room, I take my time choosing, grabbing a few things and heading for Joss, leaving the other one to Luca.

My prey whimpers, and I hit him across the face. "Quiet," I tell him. "You brought this on yourself."

Grabbing his hand, I splay his fingers out, and when he tries to close his fist, I hit the top of it with the pliers I'm holding. He cries out, but I ignore him, gripping the nail of his middle finger and with a twist and a hard yank, the nail pulls cleanly from the bed.

He cries out, and I bite back my laugh. Not so tough now when he's facing the consequences of his actions. Fucking pathetic, but his cries are amusing at least.

I take every nail and nod at my handy work before standing up straight, stretching out my muscles from being bent over.

Rather than doing the other hand, I strike him across the face again, getting him to cry out so I can pry my fingers into his mouth.

"Hold his head," I tell Luca.

He doesn't hesitate to comply, holding the asshole still, even grabbing his chin to help force his jaw open wider.

I give a nod of thanks before reaching in with a different set of pliers. It's a bit harder to rip out a tooth than it is to do a nail, but I manage to yank four teeth before I get bored.

"You can release him." I head back to the stash of torture tools and drop my pliers on the table before grabbing the bottle of lemon juice we keep there.

Joss whimpers as he watches with tear-filled eyes. I keep his gaze and grin at him when I squirt the juice onto his bleeding nail beds. He clenches his teeth and screams, a guttural noise coming from deep in his chest as he flexes his broken hand, trying to ease the stinging pain running through him.

I tsk. "You're lucky the Boss will want to kill you himself for putting his business in jeopardy."

"That doesn't mean you can't play with him," Dominic says. "Why don't you give him a taste of the medicine he was trying to subject the girl

to?”

I laugh gleefully and head back to the torture tools. Deciding on a size is hard, but I decide to go with one in the middle, since we need him alive for Sergio.

“Help me get him on all fours,” I tell Luca.

Joss tries to fight, knowing what’s coming, but between the two of us, we get him on the floor. I chain his arms behind his back, and Luca holds him down. The newbie looks a little green when he realizes what’s coming, but I ignore that. Knowing firsthand it’s all part of his act.

Cutting Joss’s pants open, I expose his asshole, showing it off to Dominic before picking up the pipe and lubricant. I’ve never done this myself before, but I’ve seen Dominic do it, so it’s nothing to spread a light coat of lube over the metal.

Steadying Joss with a hand on his hip, I slide the pipe between his ass cheeks and steadily push the thing into his hole. It’s slow going because though it’s a medium-sized pipe, shaped specifically for this task, that doesn’t mean the body doesn’t try to fight it off.

Joss jerks and his cries are starting to give me a headache, especially as the other asshole starts to freak out as well. Dominic sighs and I hear the sound of flesh striking flesh, but don’t dare look away from my task.

Once the pipe is about three-quarters of the way in, I stop, leaving the rest sticking out of his torn open and bleeding hole.

It’s a glorious sight, his flesh clenching so tightly to the pipe inside him, even as he quietly whimpers from the pain of it.

My cock throbs, the need to be taken or to take rushing through me. It’s not the act itself that turns me on, but the power, the adrenaline, the pleasure of exerting my will onto others... *Fuck*. I’m going to need another whore or two tonight to help scratch this restless itch.

Sitting back on my heels, I wipe the sweat from my brow and look up at Luca with a smile. “Your turn, newbie.”

He meets my challenging stare with one of his own before he jerks his head in agreement and heads to the torture tools.

Standing, I move to lean against the wall near Dominic, content for now to simply be in his presence as we watch the newbie look at the knives before choosing one and going to the asshole still chained to the chair. I don’t even know his name, only that he worked with Joss on procuring new

merchandise and in the warehouse watching over them. After we're done with him, though, what his name is won't matter.

Dominic moves to get a better angle when Luca stands in front of the asshole, blocking our view. Jealousy flirts through me, and I squash it down, hating that the fucker can cause such useless feelings in me.

Curiosity has me following Dominic's lead, and I move to stand beside him as Luca starts skinning the flesh off the asshole's arm.

I'm surprised but impressed. Skinning is an art, one very few can master. I certainly can't get the flesh to smoothly peel away from the body the way Luca is managing. It's admirable, and I hate how hot competency looks on the guy.

When he's finished, he steps back and looks to Dominic. "You wouldn't happen to have salt, would you?"

Dominic laughs. "Should be with everything else."

Luca nods and heads back to the tools while Dominic slides closer to me. His lips brush against my earlobe as he whispers, "Jealously looks good on you, Buttercup."

I glare at him, and he smiles. His dark eyes are swimming with taunting, and I both want to punch him in his smug as fuck face and take his mouth with mine.

Luca returns to shake salt onto the open wound, and the asshole's screams only take my arousal up a notch, as does my admiration for the fucking newbie.

"Clean everything up," Dominic orders us. "I need to go call the Boss and let him know what's going on." With that, he pulls away, his fingers dragging down my arm in a suggestive manner that has my cock aching in my pants.

When it's just Luca and me in the room, I take a deep breath and focus on cleaning up the tools we both used, leaving the fuckups where they are.

"Are you going to give me the silent treatment forever?" Luca asks as I scrub down the pliers.

I eye him as he puts the salt and lemon juice away. "I'm just not buying your act anymore," I tell him clippedly.

He sighs but doesn't say anything else for a moment before he says, "So...the Boss draws a line at underage?"

I curse inwardly at how he doesn't seem to know how to get a fucking hint. "He's not like his predecessors, or so I'm told. For the right price, he'd

be happy with merchandise like the girl in question. But it is risky, and we take it very seriously. That's how you get fucking caught and thrown into prison, or dead. So no. It's not often, and never without a direct order."

With that, I leave the room, unable to stand being so close to the guy for long. He's so fucking...eager and unassuming, and it'd be easy to get drawn into his orbit. *He's just like the rest of them*, I remind myself. Though with every olive branch he tries to extend, my argument gets weaker and weaker and his earnestness and willingness to learn draws me in. It reminds me too much of the type of man I went for before *this* became my life. And that is a dangerous path to go down, especially with someone like him.

Fuck my life.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Luca



Fucking Christmas. The last place I want to be is here. A party with all of Sergio's... closest. It's not like when Allesandro's aunt had her Christmas party. Fuck, it's not even the chaos that Lio and Benjamin have brought to Il Padrone's.

Instead, it's this sickening undertone of greed, of evil. And sure, plenty will say that about Il Padrone, but fuck, we, at least, are a family. Whatever Sergio has going on here is not that. No matter how much Kari floats around in her dress, smiling and captivating guests, it doesn't change the situation.

Nor does Teo's ruthless, yet fucking charming demeanor. Although fuck if it isn't addictive. Even if he never turns it on me. Not that I'm fucking bitter over it. Ugh. Fine. I am, and it doesn't make sense. My loyalty is to Allesandro, yet something about Teo just draws me.

Dominic, at least, I understand. He stands off to the side of the ballroom, watching. Like any Second, far more concerned about the safety of others. I briefly consider flirting with him, just to get Teo's attention, but my heart isn't in it.

Hell, my heart isn't into any of this. Still, I force myself to go through the motions, knowing I'm representing the East Coast Martellis. There's no option, not if I'm to keep them from being suspicious of my real motives—take over this damn Organization and dismantle the evil.

I don't care how dramatic that sounds. Seeing the minor... I almost slipped. I'm not even sure how much I can take, and torturing those fuckers didn't do nearly enough to appease the way my stomach turned.

"I'm going to be offended if you keep scowling like that."

I manage not to jolt as I smile at Kari, who is grinning up at me. Her eyes clearly catch everything, though, which is terrifying. It doesn't matter how much her father wants to mold her into the perfect mafia princess, I can't see that happening. She'd probably kill her husband, take over his Organization, and then rule the world.

"Laughing?" Kari states tightly, her eyes flashing unhappily at me.

Shaking my head, I grin at her—a real one this time. "Not at you. I promise. In fact, I was thinking you could very well rule the world."

Chuckling, she beams at me. "If you hadn't made it so clear you're gay, I'd almost scoop you up just to get my father off my case. I'll forgive you. If you dance with me."

"Do you want me to be killed?" I hide the grimace, but the panic that has to be in my eyes can't be pushed down.

"I'll manage Papa. Now, come dance. Everyone else here has too much of an agenda—usually me. You're at least safe."

Snorting softly, I wonder what she'd think if she knew I planned to kill her beloved papa. I hope I don't need to kill her, but leaving her alive merely invites vengeance, and fuck knows I've seen how that goes. Do not need a repeat.

I bow to her before leading her to the dance floor. We join the others seamlessly, the practice Il Padrone's aunt insisted on at least made this easier. Most of all, I make sure to keep a very healthy distance between the two of us. The last thing I need is to give Sergio ideas, whether it's wedding bells or a fucking casket.

As soon as the dance ends, I make my escape. Thankfully, Kari must be in a good mood as she merely rolls her eyes at me playfully. If anyone here gives me vibes of home, it's her. Mainly because I think she's far too similar to Dr. Ranlen. Those two must never meet; they'd probably have me dead and buried within an hour.

From the glare Teo singles me with, I'm still on his shitlist as well. Sighing, I make it to the edge of the floor and lean against a wall. There's no way I can leave quite yet, but fuck. All I want is to get out of here, to be free of the sickening rage that exists deep inside me, that I smother daily, hell each fucking second that I'm forced to interact with these people. Even the ones who turn me on for some sick, twisted reason.

I'm so entranced in my thoughts, that when Dominic taps on my shoulder, I'm far more startled than I should be. From his snort, I don't hide it either.

"And what exactly are you dreaming of, little bunny?"

Fury coats me, but I shut it down, unwilling to give in to it. *That damn nickname...*

I force a smile as I respond, "I'm merely enjoying the wonderful party your Boss is hosting. It's quite an honor to be invited."

Dominic's lips twist into a grimace. "Right. So we're starting it off with a lie."

"I—"

Dominic waves his hand, cutting me off. "Never mind. Just follow me. Sergio wants to have a discussion."

Swallowing, I fall into line. I'm unsure why he'd take time away from his guests, but I'm guessing it's not a good reason. Hopefully, this isn't about Kari. Or worse, that he found out why I'm truly here.

I'm surprised when we enter an office. Aside from his throne room, I've really only interacted with Sergio when there's been an occasional dinner. Hell, I'm not even sure what the fuck he does on a daily basis. From my perspective, it must not be much, considering how busy Teo and Dominic are. He certainly doesn't lead from the front.

My gaze wanders around the room, and I suppress my distaste of the garish decorations. Fuck, most of it looks bedazzled. Worse is the sinking feeling when I notice the Martelli Crest. It's not as pronounced as the one Il Padrone has in his office. This one is far less imposing. As I stare at it, I note that the motto is completely different. I don't have time to catch which words they're using as Sergio interrupts my perusal.

"Luca! Welcome to my office. Not many get a chance to see it," Sergio exclaims loudly, like a joker instead of the king he appears to have styled himself after.

“It’s an honor to be invited in,” I reply smoothly. “I just congratulated you on such a wonderful party.”

Sergio grins, his eyes just a touch too unfocused. Likely from whatever alcohol he’s been imbibing.

“Thank you. It was good to see you dancing... are you sure that you aren’t swayed at all?”

Dominic makes a sound, likely an aborted laugh. Because fuck. This situation is far from hilarious to me, which is probably what amuses him so much.

“No, that’s not a possibility. Nor would I be nearly good enough for your daughter, especially as a Second.”

“I suppose that’s true, and I would hate for her to be so far away,” Sergio allows before sighing. “It would figure after what happened to my cousin he’d draw people of that persuasion, but I know he’s strong despite it.

“After all, he survived what many never would have. And you! I admit, I had some doubts at first, but I should have known my cousin learned well while he was here.

“You’ve impressed Dominic. And because of that, I’m going to let you start seeing more of the business.

“So far, you’ve seen our merchandise, and while training will remain off-limits, both Dominic and I agree that you should be able to handle meeting some of the suppliers and clients. The suppliers will especially be useful to you.”

Bowing my head, I murmur, “Thank you. That’s quite the honor.”

My mind is reeling as I try to keep up with the information Sergio randomly dropped. I force myself to push it to the side, though. Right now, it’s too dangerous. Not that I give a fuck about Sergio, but the way Dominic is watching me? That is what I can’t fuck up.

Not every Boss is as strong as Il Padrone. It’s my luck that to make up for it, Sergio had to get a damn Second that is every bit as ruthless—and observant—as Allesandro. Fuck. And if that doesn’t explain my issues, I’m not sure what will.

Thankfully, the chatter dies down, and I’m finally dismissed. Of course, by then I’m about convinced that my lips are surgically going to be stitched to Sergio’s ass with the amount of bullshit I scooped his way. But if

flattering him gets me out of here alive... Well, fuck it. I'll do what I need to, even as I can feel the steady darkening of Dominic.

I glance at my watch, determining I've put in enough time today, and head toward my bedroom. I expect Dominic to veer off at some point, but he doesn't. There's an eerie, unsettling feeling of being prey... of being stalked. Far more than when he pisses me off by calling me *bunny*.

There's nothing I can put my finger on, but I don't bother saying a word to Dominic. The silence steadily builds between us, yet the distance rapidly disappears. By the time we're at my door, he's almost on top of me.

I turn around, facing him. With a cocky sneer of my own, I ask, "Did you plan on coming in?"

Chuckling darkly, Dominic steps right into my personal space, our bodies nearly touching. His fingers trail down my cheek, and I barely resist a shudder. Yet from the gleeful, wicked smile stretching across his face, he didn't miss it.

"Hmm... I know what you want. But I can't give it to you—yet. One of these days, though, you'll be under me. Maybe even under Teo. I see the way you stare at him. The way you act like a faithful dog the moment Teo or I give instructions, like you're trying to curry our favor.

"But, Luca, I know who you are inside. Just a little bunny. One that could be snapped up so quickly when you're trying to play with the big dogs."

Gritting my teeth, I lift my chin, glaring at him. "Fuck. You. You don't know shit about me."

"Perhaps. You've surprised me so far, but keep this in mind... Right now, you're safe. Turn your back on us, mess up even once, and you'll be put through so much pain you'll be lucky if your mind is still intact. Your so-called Master survived. I don't care what prep he put the rest of you through. I'll take my odds against you. You'll break."

Dominic's hand trails down to my neck, circling it, before applying just the barest pressure. I capture his arm, squeezing it, and he lets go with a laugh.

Turning, he walks away, calling over his shoulder, "Merry Christmas, little bunny... Merry Fucking Christmas."

I wait until he turns the corner before I step inside my bedroom. While I lock the door, I know it won't keep him out. Fuck. I don't think anything will.

Both he and Teo are inside my head. And now, when I go to sleep, I'm sure both of them will turn up there as well. The only question is... are they what dreams are made of, or far more likely, are they going to be a new nightmare for me to live through?

Each day I'm here, there's a strip of sanity that's peeled off me. A hope for the future. A dream for what's better. All slowly start to disappear.

And no matter how many times my hand caresses my phone, desperate to call Il Padrone, I manage to make myself stop.

He gave me this opportunity. I have to prove to him I'm worth it. That I'm equal.

But for now, these thoughts and questions—including Sergio's vague comments—they all swirl together. There's no festive cheer in me, but at least the homesickness passes. There's no way to focus on that.

Not when the new year is coming, and hopefully a far brighter one, even if I suspect it will be spattered with the blood of this whole fucking family...

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Teo



The New Year's Eve party my sister throws at her favorite whorehouse is only marginally better than the sham of a Christmas party hosted by our father. Marginally. It's still all airs and for show purposes mostly, but she makes a nice profit and it keeps her occupied so she's not out giving Sergio reasons to marry her off without even the pretense letting her choose who she ends up with.

The day is coming, though. My father's obsession with turning his *principessa* into the perfect mafia wife will come to a head soon enough, but if Kari wants to pretend she has any say in her future, well, who am I to crush her fantasies?

The VIP table we're sitting at overlooks the main floor, where whores flit around the customers, flirting and vying for their attention with their scantily clothed bodies, each one aware of the clock ticking down, and the consequences they'll face if they don't have a client to give them a midnight kiss.

Luca looks about as enthusiastic to be here as I am, clutching his drink like it's a lifeline. Dominic has disappeared to fuck knows where, probably watching us from the shadows like the asshole he is.

I don't know what's worse—when the fucker is *right* there and I can't touch him, or when he's not and I have no idea what he's doing. *At least you don't have to worry about catching him with a whore.*

No, Dominic's brand of aggression and fuckery wouldn't be welcome, even with the loose "rules" that surround our more seedy whorehouses. Can't damage the goods after all, not when we need to make a profit off of them.

One of the whores I fucked sometime in the recent weeks sidles up to our table, flashing a bright grin and giving a wiggle of his hips to draw the eye down to his barely-covered dick.

"I see you don't have any entertainment for the New Year," he purrs.

I sip my drink, the smooth, expensive liquor going down my throat easily. I ignore the urge to down it like a cheap shot, knowing it'll do nothing but give me regrets in the morning.

"By design," I finally reply.

The whore pouts. "But I thought we had a good time?"

Clenching my teeth, I wonder what I ever saw in this one... As he bats his eyelashes at me, the glint from the dim lighting making his dark-brown eyes sparkle, Luca shifts beside me. Uncomfortable or turned on by the performance?

Either way, the reminder of his presence is exactly why I chose this one, brazen as he can be. His eyes, his blond hair—though his is as fake as his eyelashes—even the color of his lips, all remind me of the man sitting next to me. Luca is taller, more muscular, and has the hardened aura of a man who's seen the bloody side of this life, yet there are parts of him that are still soft, still innocent. Even after everything he's learned since being here.

It draws me in, and I hate it. That sick, twisted part of me ready to throw the hatred and humiliation to the side, no matter how much I am determined to hang onto my anger, and coax out the parts of him that scream how much he wants to be on his knees.

It'd be easy. He hasn't given up trying to make amends or be my friend or whatever the fuck he's doing. He's the timid yet energetic little bunny Dominic has labeled him as, and it calls to me in ways I haven't felt since Dominic twisted me up with his words and hands and unmatched violence.

Yet still I want him, need him even. And if that doesn't say how far down I've fallen, nothing will. Especially not when I have images of Luca

in the same position I was last year. Only worse, because there'd be two of us.

Fuck it. Downing the rest of my drink, I embrace the burn and stand.

The whore's face lights up and then falls just as quickly as I say, "Keep my friend here company, I'll be back."

I'm not worried about leaving Luca. There's security and Dominic and Kari are around. I simply need a few minutes to myself to cool down so I don't give in and fuck or kill the bastard.

Thankfully, the VIP lounge has its own bathroom, and I step inside to piss and take a few cleansing breaths, reminding myself why touching our special guest without permission from the Boss is a bad idea. The problem? The guy throws out *fuck me* vibes just by breathing.

It was easy to ignore when he first arrived, especially after he helped Dominic "put me in my place", but now? The pain and humiliation of the punishment has worn off and my resolve is being grounded down to nothing. Not when I can so easily see him skewered on Dominic's thick cock, or my own. Hell, we could probably get both in him and he'd take it.

But the risks aren't worth it. Not when my father is still keeping me at arm's length and the sting of that is hard to shake. I might not know what to make of the guy myself, but even now, after all the torturous training and the grooming that comes with being his heir, he still is setting up to sell his daughter to the highest bidder. Simply so he can have a backup plan should I disappoint him even more than I already have.

Gripping the edge of the sink, I shake my head to clear it. Nothing good comes from those thoughts. Trying to win the approval of a man like Sergio Martelli is the same as waiting around for Dominic to grow a pair of balls not attached to his position and training methods. Neither will ever happen.

Deciding I've hidden for long enough, I make my way back out. The party has somehow gotten louder in the few minutes I disappeared. Checking my watch, I see it's five to midnight, so I'm not surprised. I am thankful that means this day is almost over and I can soon crawl into my bed, where I'm safe enough to fantasize about things I'll never have.

A commotion across the way catches my attention, and I watch as Kari drops a big man to the ground at the table beside ours.

It's quite impressive, a spitfire like my adopted sister dropping grown men like they're nothing but kicked puppies. Whichever poor sucker gets stuck with her will learn quickly who is really in charge.

Kari says something to the guy sitting slack jawed at the table, and then she reaches up to touch her ear—I'm assuming to call security to escort the asshole on the floor out of the building.

Whatever she says, the other guy doesn't like it as he jumps up to rush at Kari, almost tripping over his downed friend in the process.

Before he gets there, though, Luca slides in, grabbing the fucker and taking him down even faster than Kari did the friend. He has the asshole on his knees, arm bent back behind him at an unnatural angle, and though I can't hear it over the music and crowd below, I'm sure he screams as Luca takes it a step further and twists his wrist the same time he bends the arm further back, surely snapping the bone.

It doesn't take long for me to cross the space. I check on Kari first, but she's only glaring daggers at both assholes, her sharp heel digging into the gut of the man she took down.

Luca's guy has tears rolling down his face, and I wince at the awkward way the newbie is holding his arm back. He's more than likely going to have a very long and unpleasant healing time. Good.

"Everything okay?"

"It will be once these fuckers are banned from my establishment." Kari spits on the one she's stepping on when he tries to wheezedly protest.

The security guys come up just then, and I beckon Luca away to let them and Kari take care of the issue. Kari won't appreciate us getting in her way.

I take Luca to the alcove near the bathroom and look him up and down. "You fancy yourself a hero? The Boss is going to only pay closer attention to you now after saving his principessa, and Kari won't do you any favors—she's capable of getting shit done."

He scowls. "I know. I was right there when she handled business. But what type of man does nothing when someone needs help? Man, woman, anybody. Fuckers are lucky I only broke his arm and didn't gut him for what he and his friend said to her."

The shadows of the alcove turn his eyes to molten dark chocolate, and his beauty stands out in a way that has my already-hard cock granite in my pants.

"Kari won't thank you for stepping in, but I will, newbie," I tell him, leaning in to ghost my lips against his. His breath catches, and I breathe him in, smoke, alcohol, and something uniquely him drawing me closer. "I

think...despite your protests, you're enjoying playing with fire. It's going to be fun watching you burn."

There's cheering and the ringing of bells and obnoxious confetti poppers sounding downstairs, cluing us to the tick over of the new year.

My mouth barely properly grazes his, catching the taste of whiskey on his supple lips, when, like a wraith, Dominic steps out of the shadows.

"Party's over, let's get the fuck out of here."

His presence, that I felt long before he actually appeared, only gets me hotter, but when I meet his dark stare over Luca's head, I know better than to push my luck.

Because no matter how much of a temptation Luca is, how badly I want to debase him and tear him to pieces...and then put those pieces back together, as absurd as that sounds, my stupid heart and cock still can't help being drawn to the man who is the source of all my pain, all my pleasure, and ultimately who holds the keys to my very life.

Pulling away from Luca, I brush past him, our bodies touching as much as they can as I do so.

"I didn't get a party favor," I tell Dominic with a flutter of my eyelashes and a pout. "Unless you wanna suck my cock, you can take the newbie home. I'll catch a ride with Kari."

Not waiting around to hear his protest, even if I can see the anger burning in his gaze, I head back out to find an available whore, one who doesn't resemble either of the forbidden fruits I am so desperate to have...

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Dominic



Luca and I slide into the limo, the tense silence crackling between us. Normally, I hate going in limos. It disrupts my line of sight too much. But right now? I'm fucking glad to have the privacy partition. I carefully chose to sit right next to Luca, giving him no space despite the roomy interior, even as the rage builds inside me.

Fucking Teo. Taunting me. Every. Single. Second.

And now he thinks he can take liberties with the bunny?

I flex my hands before curling them into fists. Fuck, if I had an object to unleash this coiled aggression inside me... I'd feel a hell of a lot better.

Then again, the precious little bunny is here. Just waiting. And fuck knows he needs toughening up. Stepping in to protect Kari was stupid. And just advertised to everyone that he's weak. Controlled by ethics that we don't have time for—Kari least of all.

There's no way he'll pass the impossible test if he clings to the feelings of right and wrong. No, he'll screw up and then all the work I put into breaking him will be useless because I'll need to put him down. What a loss...

Of course, that means that I should start his training a little early. Before Sergio makes it official. Since the Boss has such a protective streak for his cousin, this would really be my way of helping out.

Like a skilled conductor, I let the silence build to a crescendo, Luca's chopping breath lending dissonance. I'd cackle if I didn't want to undermine it all.

Timing... it's so important. A beat too soon—or late—the climax is stolen. And me? I never miss fucking timing. So once we're ten minutes away, when Luca begins to relax, I explode into movement.

I have him pinned against the seat as I straddle him, my left hand on his chest, and my knife perfectly placed against his neck with my right hand. The catch in his breath makes me smile as I press forward.

But...his rapidly hardening dick? *Fuck*. That has me off balance. Just damn. Who knew the baby bunny was into this shit?

Cackling internally, I draw the knife down his body and slide back, until I'm only straddling his knees. It's uncomfortable as fuck, but it lets me place my knife right near his hard cock that strains his dress pants.

This time, I laugh softly. "Well, looks like the innocent bunny isn't quite so innocent. Did your precious Master take a few tools of the trade home with him, hmm?"

"What. Do. You. Want?" Luca grits out, his body stiff as he tries not to aggravate me.

"Oh, bunny, you don't want to even know... Because the thoughts I have? They're not pure at all. I want to fuck you, to make you scream and to see. You. Bleed."

His cock actually twitches at the damn threat, and I can't stop the smile that spreads across my face.

"Ah, what fun we'll have. But only if you listen to the rules."

Luca's tongue slips out, wetting his lips. And fuck, my own dick is hardening rapidly at the thought of fucking his mouth. With a raspy voice, Luca croaks out, "What are the rules?"

"I'm so glad you asked. First, Teo is mine. You don't get him unless I say you can. And right now? He's not on the menu for either of us. As a guest, you should know better.

"Second, you remember that I'm in control. Always. You will live for me or you'll die. Hell, I'll do everything I can to make sure you do live. But you will break and I'm looking forward to that, little bunny. The thoughts I

have for what happens when you fuck up... you won't even know how to handle it. Just remember, I will own you. Your mind and soul."

Luca's eyes are wide, his chest heaving as his breathing speeds up. Still, annoyance fills his voice as he demands, "I don't want to be called a bunny."

I move the knife back up his body, setting it by his cheek. "Until you earn another nickname from me, you're going to be my bunny. And that's if you live long enough to prove yourself worthy."

Before he can complain, I move the hand from his chest to his hair, tugging his head back as I attack his lips. I press my ownership into him. Hell, I'm not surprised at the whine that comes from his throat or the way he tries to grind on me. What does surprise me is how fucking difficult it is not to give in so soon. But I can't. Not before I break him.

Pulling back, I slip my knife into its holster and slip off his lap. We ride the rest of the way in cooling silence, as his breathing gradually returns to normal—a fucking shame.

Before he opens the door to head into the mansion, I remind him one more time.

"Teo's mine... and soon enough, Luca, you'll be mine, too. Try to keep yourself alive."

My soft chuckle follows him as he races inside. And then I sit in the emptiness. For a moment, I'm unsure. Trying to decide whether to head back to the whorehouse and drag Teo out of that fucking whore's bed or to wait in his room and remind him exactly who carries his leash.

Decisions, decisions... Either way, Teo will remember tonight. Both of these men may have walked into my life not realizing they needed more. But that's fine. It's what I'm trained for—and fuck if I'll stop from claiming them. Even if I'm constrained by rules of my own.

Eventually, logic forces me to accept the need to wait, to let him have his follies. Fuck knows I'll add it to the scorecard I'm keeping, because he'll pay me back for each stolen moment away from me. For each transgression I'll make him beg for forgiveness, for mercy.

Taking a deep breath, I exit to limo, letting the driver know he can get the fuck out of here. It's an easy trip to Teo's room, and since I helped develop security, I can move through the mansion without being caught. Loopholes. Every Second's best friend.

The lock to Teo's room isn't worth shit. I pop it within a few precious moments, and then I'm in. I stand there, surrounded by his things, his invisible presence, and fuck, his smell. That combination of rich asshole with the barest undertone of sweet that I haven't beaten out of him—yet. Fuck, I'm not sure if it'll ever be possible.

Memories of the last time I was in this room play through my head, and my dick hardens quickly. Fuck, I could live in his damn ass. It's like it's made for me. Although, I'm certainly curious what Luca's must be like now.

Really, the thought of fucking Teo into Luca... now that's an idea that really turns me on. I cross over to the mini fridge Teo keeps in his room and open it, grabbing a bottle of water. I drain half of it as the memories and thoughts almost choke me with need. It doesn't do shit to cool me down, and I growl in impatience as the clock ticks along far too slowly.

I prowl the room, each step fanning the frustration and anger higher. That he would dare touch a whore instead of waiting here like a good boy, like the man I fucking own. But I don't, do I? Because he's the Boss's son, and I'll never be anything but a tool that's used in this business.

Shaking my head, I push that bullshit away. What the Boss doesn't know won't hurt him. And, if anything, I'm keeping his heir in line. Making sure he doesn't make risky decisions. Because as much as Kari tries, bad people slip through. And what would happen if the heir was hurt?

No, it's better I keep control. I let my fingers trail across the heavy mahogany furniture. It's sleek, manly, and expensive. Fitting for Sergio's son, although lacking in the gold and jewel embellishments his father prefers.

Time continues on. I add more marks to the scorecard. Because fuck if I'll let him stay out all night. No, this bullshit is coming to an end.

For a moment, I consider cutting up his delicate sheets and pissing on his bed, making him sleep in it all night long. But that would simply make the housekeeping staff gossip, and I have no patience for that.

Instead, I head toward his dresser and pull out a pair of his silk boxers. The kid I found was wearing fucking cotton from a ten-pack of boxers, and now he's in the very best of everything. But still he walks around like he owns everything.

Perhaps if Sergio raised him properly, from birth, that would be true. But just because his blood runs true, doesn't mean shit. He's still from the

wrong side, and that's perfect for me, because it'll be my fingerprints all over him.

Using one hand, I unbuckle my belt and undo my pants. Freeing my hard cock is easy enough, and as I grip it with the silk from Teo's boxers, I let the memories take over—and the dream of future fucks. Because I'll have him under me, panting, begging. I won't walk away until he admits it. That I own him, that I'm seared into his thoughts. And that even now, everything he does is because of me. I broke him and made him again. It's a bond that can't be broken. No matter how many whores he sinks himself into, no matter how far he tries to run. I hold that leash.

My breathing speeds up, and the pleasure finally crests as I start to come, unloading right into his boxers. I make sure to catch it all, wiping my cock with them, even though I wish I was wiping it on his fucking skin.

I shudder, feeling some of the stress I'm carrying dissipate. But fuck, if he's not back soon, I can't be held accountable for my actions. I toss the used boxers on the bed and quickly put myself all together again before sitting on the chair in the corner. And then I wait. And fantasize of all the punishments I'll put the fucker through.

Finally, I hear heavy footsteps in the hallway. Sneering, I stand up, grab the used boxers and hide to the side of the door where I'll be covered when he opens it. I'm ashamed he's walking so loudly. I swear to fuck I've taught him better. Just one more mark against the asshole...

The door opens violently, and I put my hand up to make sure I'm not crushed. I hear him stumble in, the smell of alcohol-soaked bad decisions hitting me from afar. I cringe at it, but it's not enough to keep me away from him. It never would be.

I close the door silently, even though he's only a few feet into the room. It's only when I'm right behind him that he stiffens, his inner radar for danger finally going off. About fucking time—although far too late.

I'm on him immediately, clamping his mouth shut and pushing him into the wall. He hits it with a heavy bang, but I don't give a fuck. Any bruises he gets he's earned. I take the cum-crusting boxers and force them into his mouth, ensuring he can't scream.

Once that's done, I turn him around and meet his eyes. Those molten blue eyes, a snarl on his face that merely makes me hard again. He's the whole damn package and I hate it, as much as I crave it.

Sliding out my knife, I put it to his neck, letting it bite in. He stops struggling immediately. He knows I'll go too far, and even as he dares me to do so, I refuse.

"Behave, Buttercup. We need to have a conversation."

I laugh at the muffled sounds from the gag. I'm sure there are some inventive curses being thrown my way, but fuck if I care. Hell, I wonder if I should keep him gagged all the time next time he's under me. Then again, I do like his screams.

"Fine. A lecture. Either way, shut the fuck up so I can speak."

He shudders under the force of my demand and stills. I gently run my fingers down his cheek, letting him feel how good we can be, when he just. Fucking. Listens.

"You're done with the whores. With the alcohol. I refuse to watch it, to see you parade your body in front of me and give it to others to slake your fantasies—ones only I can give you for real. Well, me and the bunny.

"I'm bound by the rules. We both operate in this world to the best of our ability. But fuck it. I'm calling in my marker. You remember this..." I drop my voice as I push my hips against his, feeling his hard cock next to mine. "Yeah, I thought so. You remember I own you.

"Your body. Your thoughts. Everything. The rules may stop me from touching you, from fucking you, as much as I want—which Teo, that's all the fucking time. But it won't stop me forever.

"We're both on chains, but I hold yours. Never forget that. The bunny will fuck up. And when he does, we'll take him apart—together. To do that, I need you to behave.

"Get your head in the game. And fucking play nice with the kid. He'll fuck up eventually. You did. So will he, because he's not nearly as strong as you. But when he does? Buttercup, we're going to fucking ruin him. And then? I'll ruin you."

I take the boxers out of his mouth, tossing them to the side. He moves his mouth, like he's trying to get rid of the taste or discomfort in his jaw. Who the fuck cares?

Instead, I swoop in, kissing him savagely. I let the knife sink into his flesh just a small bit as I do. And when I draw back, I note the thin rivulet of blood on his neck with a deep satisfaction. And more, the pleasure in my veins from knowing that the kiss we just had? It seared me right into his soul. And hell, it was sharper than my knife on his skin.

I slide the knife back into the holder, pinching his chin in my hand. For a beat, our entire bodies seem to sync. Our breathing, our thoughts, our needs. But then I pull away.

I have to, because even though I hold Teo's leash, his father holds mine. So it's not time. Not yet.

But before I leave, I make one more point. "You need to accept that the bunny dances to the same damn tune as the rest of us. He wants to make it up to you. Let him. Because when we take him down? I want maximum pain."

With that, I slip out of the room. Even though I know he has questions, I'm not interested in answering them. He'll either get with the program or he won't.

But fuck knows he better remember what it's like if he doesn't.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Teo



“Y ou need to accept that the bunny dances to the same damn tune as the rest of us. He wants to make it up to you. Let him.”

Dominic’s words from the other night echo in my ear, but they don’t mean shit when Luca seems to have given up making friendly overtures.

Sure, he’s polite and professional, but he no longer tries to draw me into casual conversation with his endlessly stupid questions. Though, to be fair, yesterday...was not a good day for me.

I got stuck doing the bitch work, making sure everyone and everything was accounted for after the holiday, and I had to do it all with a fucking hangover. My own fault, but that doesn’t mean much when the object of my aggression and frustration showed up in my room and turned me on so much I barely resisted coming in my pants.

“The rules may stop me from touching you, from fucking you, as much as I want—which Teo, that’s all the fucking time. But it won’t stop me forever.” Clear-headed now, Dominic’s words play over and over again as my confusion mounts.

I can understand being held back by his loyalty to my father. Fuck knows that's the reason he tracked me down and turned me into what I now am, but we all know Sergio plays favorites and I am not ranking on his chart. No, that'd be Kari, who can do no wrong in our father's eyes because she's a perfect princess; the future wife to whatever Boss makes the best deal. And Dominic, the loyal second who does what he's told and brought the innocent, unruly, and out-of-his-depth heir to heel.

Sergio may be grooming me to take over, but I know his backup plans have backups, and I'm not stupid enough to believe he trusts me. As if finding out who my father was wasn't a shock to me as well.

Not that any of that matters now, when I get the lovely job of dragging the newbie with me to a meeting with a supplier—as if they weren't hell enough.

Luca is quiet on the drive, but there's tension leaking off him, and I itch to order him to calm the fuck down.

I mourn the fact Dominic stayed behind. He's not needed. I've been handling the acquisition side of things on my own for months now. Not only that, I know what this is; another test for both me and the newbie. The opportunity for either of us to fuck up is right there. Luca? He might end up learning what the true meaning of training is, but me? I don't see myself surviving another round.

"He's not nearly as strong as you." If I didn't know any better, I'd say that was a compliment, but experience does know better. Dominic wanted me off my game, and I was just drunk and horny enough that he easily pulled it off.

It's confusing, and I had too badly of a pounding headache and not enough sleep yesterday to think things over. Now? I can't help but replay every little thing Dominic did and said to me in the wee hours of the New Year.

Thankfully, we pull up to the meeting place, a nondescript building that looks like every other restaurant on the block. Only this one is Bratva-controlled, and more than the city's best pelmeni gets made in those walls.

Luca glances at me when the car stops, but I ignore him, climbing out of the vehicle and barely pausing long enough to allow him to follow me.

The hostess is a familiar one, some distant relative to the man we're meeting if I'm not mistaken, and she knows the drill, grabbing menus and seating us in the far corner of the restaurant.

It's early enough in the day hardly anyone is here, and from a glance around, those that are either work directly or indirectly with our contact.

I let Luca slide into the booth first before sitting next to him, the space barely big enough for two grown men, but I don't think the bunny minds a little crowding.

Our waitress drops off glasses of water and a plate of blini topped with salmon.

"The Boss will be right out," she says.

I incline my head in thanks and wait for her to wander off before serving Luca and then myself.

I can feel his stare and meet his gaze, daring him to protest. Dominic only said I had to give the kid an opening, he didn't say how to do it. If the point is to rip the rug out from under him...then showing him sides of myself I've locked away should do the trick. I know what it is like to have your entire world come crashing down around you. And if Dominic wants maximum pain...then so be it. After all, he holds my leash.

Luca flushes and looks away first, conceding to whatever he can see in my gaze. I bite back a smile and tuck into the appetizer, knowing better than to throw our contact's generosity in his face.

Ten minutes later, Vasily Volkov slides into the booth opposite us, looking very much like he did the first time I met him; his graying hair is in disarray as if he forgot to comb it, his suit jacket is missing, top buttons of his shirt undone to show a hint of the tattoo underneath, and his smile is bright. His eyes, though... they are sharp and a history of blood and death lurks in the dark pools.

"Teo! So wonderful to see you again, and you brought a friend this time."

"I did. Luca Martelli. He is here to learn how we do things on behalf of our East Coast branch. Luca, this is Vasily Volkov, one of our newer, but highly rated suppliers."

"Ah, you flatter me," Volkov states. "I do pride myself on being the best."

As if on cue, the waitress drops off bowls of steaming soup, three glasses, and a bottle of vodka.

"Shchi," Volkov says. "Cabbage soup, good for the gross city winter."

With that, he digs into the food, and we follow his lead. I can't deny the warm soup is comforting in a homey way, reminding me of a time and place

that no longer exists.

When the soup is gone, the vodka is poured, and I cringe. Dominic gave an order but to refuse is to put the trust I've built with Volkov to waste.

I sip at the drink, fighting the urge to spit it back into the glass.

Talk flows easy between us, nothing more than formalities as we shoot the breeze and pretend there's not a thrum of anticipation crackling in the air.

I am nursing my drink still by the time the other two finish theirs, and Volkov eyes me carefully.

"Not up to your standards?"

I laugh it off. "Nah, not that at all. I simply indulged myself a little too much over New Year's. Should probably pace it."

"Bah." He waves me off. "No such thing. Vodka is good for you. Drink, then we can get to business and you can go be a pussy anywhere but my restaurant."

I laugh as expected and fight a cringe when I finish my drink, hoping Dominic understands I didn't have a choice.

Finally satisfied, Volkov wakes a tablet he set off to the side when he sat down and slides it over to us.

"There you are. Twenty beautiful men and women from various Eastern European countries. All ready to be tested and made useful." The dark tone to his voice has nothing on the seductive edge Dominic gets.

Luca tenses a little beside me, and I knock my knee against his, reminding him to play the game.

We study the merchandise together, looking over the basic stats that were collected,—gender, eye and hair color, and weight—flipping through each photo carefully.

Luca stops on the image of a young man with ruddy cheeks, large green eyes, and hair nearly the same shade of his own. He looks at the image for far too long before finally taking a breath and swiping at the screen. I file that interesting moment under "*Things To Inquire About Later*", and finish going through every piece of merchandise.

"How certain are you that the ages are accurate?" Luca asks when we're finished.

Volkov's expression darkens as his eyebrows bunch together. "Are you questioning my practices? I can guarantee I've been doing this for far longer than you've been alive."

“Of course not,” he replies smoothly. “I was just made aware that the Boss is very strict on the ages of the merchandise unless it is a special request. I apologize for my poor wording. I am still learning the ins and outs of how operations like this work. I did not mean to offend.”

Volkov studies Luca for a long moment, and my heart leaps into my throat, wondering if the fucker is about to die right next to me. Finally, the Russian nods and says slowly, “We might be living in the twenty-first century, but the old methods still work. Promises of a better life, job offers, glitz and glamour, it all attracts the young people. We do our due diligence.

“Do you know how hard it is to smuggle a person into the city in the dead of winter? I am good at my job because I know the who, the how, and can procure anything you want. You want underage? I can get them to you like that.” He snaps his pudgy fingers. “You want more boys like number twelve? I’ll get them for you. What about girls? Number eight is pretty. Slight, built like a bird. I saw her in person while I was visiting family. She will make a great whore.

“Do not come into my house talking nonsense. I know what your Boss ordered, and I delivered.”

Luca’s expression remains blank, but he leans forward a little. “Ah, but did you? I saw the parameters of the Boss’s order. Ten of each gender, with a healthy weight and average or above average height. Blond or light brown hair. He was very specific and yet your ‘built like a bird’ is under the required weight, short, and will need breast implants and probably even some facial work because angular features like that? They’re not going to fill out right even if we start her on a diet right this minute. Oh, and we have to wait for her hair to grow out because it’s cut shorter than the others and will also require regular maintenance because we’ll have to bleach it.

“So you are claimed to be the best but dropped the ball on this one. I think a...twenty percent discount off your fee will be adequate to make up for this fuck up.”

I sit back in my seat, watching Volkov carefully, dropping my hand below the table so I’m in easy reach of my weapon.

Instead of getting offended or enraged, Volkov throws his head back and laughs. “I should have known I wouldn’t have gotten anything over you. But can you blame an old man for testing the waters?” His grin is sharp, and I don’t trust it one bit. “Fine. You caught me.” He snaps his fingers, and one of his men at a nearby table picks up a phone. Moments later, another

man leaves the kitchen with a girl in tow. She's around Kari's height, with blonde hair hanging down to her hips, and built exactly as my father wanted. Her breasts fill out her shirt so much they almost spill out of the top of the tight garment, and her shapely legs would look good spread around someone's hips or tied wide open.

She's not dressed at all for the cold, but her skimpy outfit shows off all her best assets, as designed.

"This is the real number eight," Volkov says, tossing the file folder his man hands him onto the table.

I flick it open and give it a perusal before handing it to Luca for a glance over. "Rita?"

She glances up at me briefly, confirming that is in fact her name, before looking down at her bare feet again.

I look to Volkov. "We don't appreciate the fuckery. You're not the only supplier out there, even if you are the best. We could easily do business elsewhere if you're not going to take this seriously."

"No harm done. The girl is here, ready for you to take with you now, and the other is still safe with her family."

I clench my teeth. "How generous of you."

"I am a generous man." Volkov grins, acting as if he's the smartest in the room, and it grates I can't kill him without risking our lives. He knows it, too.

"We'll take the girl, but we are also taking the discount for our inconvenience."

He sighs. "You're no fun. But fine. I will send the updated invoice."

I nod and stand, grabbing the girl's arm and forcing her out of the restaurant with Luca in tow. It's not the sort of meeting you say goodbye after, especially while being jerked around.

The driver eyes me carefully as he opens the back of the car and we bundle the girl in before climbing into the backseat.

I sigh and thud my head against the headrest, wishing I had more alcohol to deal with the shitshow that was today.

"Thank you," I tell Luca, despite the words feeling like acid in my mouth. "I noticed the discrepancy but you handled it very efficiently."

"You did good, as well. You know what you're doing and handled yourself better than I would have had I been in the lead. Volkov very much

would have died, but you kept your composure, and I am assuming going to make plans with your father and Dominic about his...contract termination.”

I snort at his delicate wording, but we both know this fuckery won't fly. I don't care what type of test he was trying to pull or whatever bullshit he was trying to spin, he fucked himself. Just because he got to live today because he had us at a disadvantage doesn't mean he gets off scot-free.

“You're still new to this, aren't you? You're doing fine. I am good at my job because I was trained to be.”

I look at him, wondering if his training was anything like mine... “You've impressed Dominic, and that's hard to do, so you're more than just ‘good’ at your job.” I try to keep the bitterness out of my voice.

Luca huffs. “Don't worry. He made sure I was put in my place the other night.”

I look at him in confusion, not sure if I really want to know but... “What'd he say?”

Luca laughs a little. “Warned me off you because I'm a guest and you are...his.”

His. The word makes my heart skip a beat, and I want to touch the scab on my neck but don't dare draw attention to it.

I snort, fighting the urge to laugh because what a load of fucking shit. Despite the way I want to rejoice at being claimed, the hot and cold act is getting fucking old. Knowing he put the rule in place between me and Luca? It doesn't warm me, despite how desperately I want to be claimed.

The girl in the back whimpers, and I look over my shoulder at her briefly before focusing on Luca.

“He's a fucking asshole who thinks he runs things. You're a guest, not one of his fucking minions.” *Or even me.* “You're here to learn. Is putting me, a man with my own brain and desires, off-limits part of learning the trade?” I question, leaning closer to him.

His breath hitches at our proximity, and I see the want in his eyes.

“I respect those with more knowledge and authority above me. I'm here to learn for my Boss, and I don't mean to step on any toes.”

I laugh, low and dark. “You really are the perfect little bunny, aren't you?”

“Don't,” he spits. “That's not my name.”

“Oh, but it fits you so well.” I let my fingers drag along his hand as it rests on the seat next to his leg before pulling back. “Dominic may be

Second, but he doesn't run things. The hierarchy between us is...murky, but I want to make up for being a dick to you the last few weeks. I was...hurt and humiliated. I'm dealing with it better now."

His shock is palatable, but before he can say anything else, we arrive at the processing warehouse, and our conversation is essentially over as we have to get back to work and deal with the girl curled up in the back.

But...hopefully the seeds I planted take root. Whether that's what Dominic meant or not...well, fuck him. He has his way, I have mine. And he's going to have to deal with it.

His. Yeah, sure. I'll believe that when pigs fly.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Luca



My mind is a tumble of fuckery. Pride from stepping in with that fucker who dared try to take advantage of Teo. Fury over the bitterness Teo carries. And most of all, an unwelcome desire to get close to him. The same magnetism that I feel toward Dominic.

Loyalty. I promised it to Il Padrone. I've already fucked up more than once with him. To do it now? Especially with stakes this high? I can't. I can't let those who are encouraging evil live.

But...what if they're trapped? The same way Il Padrone lured Lio into his web. Not that Allesandro would ever sink to Sergio's level. I shake my head, unable to process it all. It doesn't matter, anyway.

I've been given a chance to claim this for me. To be equal to Allesandro. My best friend. My first love. My everything for so long.

And now Teo and Dominic... No. *Enough.*

"What are you thinking, bunny?" Teo whispers, startling me.

My lips twist at the stupid nickname. But this time I don't bother to defend myself. It's too pointless.

Sighing, I toss out some misdirection, even though it has a grain of truth in it. "I'm thinking of the East Coast. It's difficult to be separated for so

long. I'm protective of Il Padrone. But I trained my temporary replacement, and I know I'm doing what Il Padrone wishes."

Teo shakes his head. "I would have expected a Second to be more like Dominic. Strong, dominant. And yet, you seem completely submissive to your Boss."

"Don't mistake the relationship I have with Il Padrone for weakness," I state coldly, letting my experience flow through me instead of hiding it. Teo's eyebrow raises at it, but he doesn't say anything. "I'm not quite the bunny you both believe I am."

"Perhaps..." Teo trails off as his phone pings. With a scowl, he texts back before looking at me directly. "It appears we're being summoned. We're rerouting for home to check in with the Boss. The merchandise will be taken care of for us."

I nod as we lapse into silence. Truthfully, as much as I hate seeing Sergio, I'd rather avoid another instance of inspecting the merchandise. As is, I have to avoid rubbing my chest when my heart wrenches at the thought of Rita...and the boy who reminded me far too much of Lio.



It doesn't take nearly long enough before we're in front of Sergio. I notice the way Teo straightens before entering Sergio's domain. The fact he's in his throne room does not seem like an auspicious beginning. Fuck.

I glance worriedly at Teo, whose face is now a blank mask. Still, there isn't anything I can do to fix it. Hell, at this point, all I can do is hope I don't fuck us even more. It's not just Teo's ass that'll be on the line but mine, too.

Standing straight, I keep close to Teo. I'm not sure why. Perhaps because his father is an asshole. It's not like I have any actual power here, but fuck if I can stand to see him bullied. There's no words as Sergio stares at us, studying us as if he can tell our secrets with merely a glance. Considering I've infiltrated so much of his network already, I know it's not true. And yet...

The sound of footsteps behind me is like an itch between my shoulder blades. I want to turn, to see who it is, not liking having anyone at my back. But it's a lose-lose situation. There's a snake in front of me, ready to strike.

He may be a Boss, but fuck if he's earned any respect from me—and I doubt he has from his son.

Still, when it's Dominic who passes us, the uncomfortable sensation lessens. It doesn't disappear, because I know Dominic is perfectly able to kill me without a second thought, but he's at least a known quantity.

From the corner of my eye, I notice how Teo stiffens when Dominic stands at a parade rest next to the Boss. Like he's a favorite fucking pet. No, maybe it's better to say he's a fucking robot, just waiting on his orders.

Fuck. I hope I was never like that. Never so completely blind. I mean, shit, I know I did things I disagreed with, but from the way Dominic's face is completely blank, I'm positive he'd kill his own family without blinking an eye if that's what this fucking asshole masquerading as a Boss demands.

"Well," Sergio finally states, breaking the brittle tension. "It seems we have a situation. But I'm at a loss. Luca is the one who caught it instead of my son. On one hand, that should be rewarded. However, he also spoke out of turn. Remind me, Dominic, how do we feel about guests overstepping?"

"We hate it, Boss. It shows a weakness. One that shouldn't exist." Dominic's cool voice ignites an ember of fury in me. Still, I choke it back, waiting for this farce of a meeting to be over.

Sergio nods smugly. "Exactly. And, Dominic, what would you say that Luca caught the issue instead of Teo?"

"Unacceptable. I've trained Teo. That should never happen." The coolness disappears as some heat makes it into Dominic's speech. The first emotional reaction, and from the way Teo flinches, it's not a good sign.

Sergio crosses his legs, staring at us from his throne. None of us say a word as he weighs his options. Although fuck knows, he already has something intended. He may be an asshole, but he's a Boss for a fucking reason.

"Luca... Explain yourself," Sergio demands with a flick of his hand.

Gritting my teeth, I force myself to incline my head in a gesture of respect. Then I take a deep breath and in a bored tone respond, "Teo and Dominic have been showing me the ropes per your gracious allowance. Part of that learning has included tests, as every strong Boss utilizes.

"In this case, Teo gave me an opportunity with the test. He had already marked that there was something wrong but wanted to see how I'd handle the pressure. If I would merely allow it to go through, or if I could command the room as he knows I'll be working with suppliers on my own.

“I completed the test satisfactorily, Teo followed up, and then we left with the correct merchandise. Teo then informed you and explained that additional steps would be taken to make sure that supplier is given a lesson he’ll never get the chance to forget.”

Sergio lifts an eyebrow before zeroing in on his son. I have no idea if he buys my story, but fuck, I hope so. And hell, I hope Teo backs it. Otherwise, we’re both going to be paying the price—me more than him for adding the lie.

“Well, Teo. Is that correct?” Sergio’s voice carries doubt, but from the way his eye twitches, I’m inclined to think he wants to believe it. Now, I wait for Teo to decide if I’m screwed or if we both are...

Teo doesn’t hesitate to answer. “Yes. I wanted to see what Luca would do as I’d been finding him to be rather soft. I’m surprised he actually managed to speak up, but it appears that between your cousin and our instruction, Luca is more versatile than I expected.

“I’m not sure I’m satisfied with the invoice change, but I had planned to speak with Dominic about it after work tonight when we discussed how Luca did for the day.”

That right there is the nail in the coffin, but fuck it. It adds a layer of legitimacy, even as it stings.

Sergio turns his attention to Dominic, demanding, “Is that true?”

With his face blank again, Dominic merely shrugs a shoulder. “Mostly. Obviously, we had no advance notice our supplier would try to screw with us, but both Teo and I have had concerns over Luca. And Teo has seen me test him. I may not have given such a task to Teo just yet, but it seems reasonable and was successful.”

Sergio’s lips twist in distaste, unhappy we’re all backing each other. Then his eyes narrow at me. With a grunt, he gestures for me to move forward.

I immediately follow the instruction, ending up right in front of the dais that his throne sits on. He studies me before flicking his gaze to Dominic and then Teo. Even as I expect it, it’s startling when Teo suddenly grabs me from behind. I try not to fight, but it’s instinctual to throw the elbow back, trying to jab at my attacker. I end up with a blow to the back of my head before Teo forces me to kneel.

Sergio stands up, giving extra height between the two of us. It makes me angrier, but I take deep breaths, trying to behave. I’ve been through far

worse with Il Padrone, whose approval actually matters. This fucker isn't worth shit, and I can't wait to spit on him before I drag a knife across his throat.

"Teo may have given you a test, and you passed it on his level. Unfortunately for you, he's not the one in charge. Because to me? You failed. However, since I am gracious, and my cousin put your lessons in my hands—including punishments—I won't kill you this time. But I do believe that Dominic and Teo will make you understand... No matter what, you will not speak for this Family.

"Whatever your position is on the East Coast, here you're a guest—and only a guest. I expect you to do the job, but to never, ever interfere with what must be done. My son and my Second will control how things go. Not you."

I wait a beat, wanting to make sure he's finished before nodding my head. With a sick stomach, I do as Allesandro had suggested if I ever run into problems. It's harder than I imagined, but fuck knows I've lived through worse.

"Thank you, Sergio, for giving me the opportunity to learn."

From the snort behind me, even Teo finds that sickening. *Join the fucking club, asshole.* From the way Sergio's eyes light up, it works. With a pat to my head as he walks away, I'm assured I'll live through whatever these fuckers have planned.

From the smile on Dominic's face...I'm far more screwed than I thought. Well, hell. It can't be worse than the black room, right?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Teo



Fury rolls through me at how Luca utterly and completely almost screwed me over, but I swallow it down. Being punished would have been a lesser charge than my father losing what little trust he had in me.

Making the fucking bunny look like a competent Second is a pain in the ass, but arguing with him, exposing his lies...that would have come with a consequence I wouldn't wish on anyone.

Grabbing Luca by the hair, I tug him behind me as Dominic opens the hidden door at the back of the throne room. Luca stumbles as he tries to follow me. I'm sure it's painful on his head, since I'm gripping his hair so tightly, but that's the least amount of pain he'll experience with us.

We can't teach him a real lesson, not yet, but he's fucked himself just enough we can show that while the methods might have changed, there's still touches of the old ways ingrained in us.

Dominic helps me get Luca chained in the middle of the small room. The manacles make a satisfying *click* as they lock around his wrists. We don't lock down his legs—this time—and he's going to wish we did by the time we're finished.

Taking out my knife, I easily cut through his expensive suit, shaking my head in pity as the garments hang around him in tatters.

Moving around to the front, I expose the rest of him for my inspection, seeing the anger and hatred in his eyes as I tug on one of the torn edges. “Maybe this will teach you to not be such a clothes snob,” I comment lightly before circling around him again.

Dominic gives me the signal to let me know the camera is up and running. Sergio doesn’t care much about the prep work, far more interested in the action, the show. It disgusts me, but if it’s a show he wants, it’s one he’ll get.

Dominic chooses an instrument of torment for Luca, and our fingers brush when he hands it over. His face is blank, but his eyes can’t hide his displeasure mixed with heat. He gives me a subtle nod, and that’s all he can offer with the camera running.

Nerves threaten to swallow me, and I push them down. I’ve done this before—have put other men in their place. None of it has ever mattered so much before, but failure is not an option. Not now.

Taking a breath, I stretch out my neck and try to loosen the tension in my shoulders before getting into position and uncoiling the single tail Dominic handed me. It should be harder than it is to flick the impact toy through the air, muscle memory from hours of practice easily taking over. I don’t strike Luca with it—yet. Standing just out of range, but close enough he can feel the displacement of air, and the anticipation that builds at not knowing what’s coming but sensing that something is. It wasn’t that long ago I was in his position. Being driven out of my mind with the unknown.

Dominic, of course, is all about the edging. So in a break, where I readjust the distance between me and the bunny, he moves to stand in front of Luca. I can’t hear what he whispers in his ear, but the grin he shoots me has me clenching my teeth. It’s full of promise and expectation and fucking temptation.

Luca’s body trembles in his bonds as Dominic pats his hair and then trails his hands down his front. I can’t only imagine the things he’s whispering, the softness of his touch. Almost out of character for the man, but all part of the confusing, sadistic, and controlling package he is.

Trying not to think too much about it, I stop fucking around and make my move. The first bite of the whip across his skin has Luca crying out, his

body jerking in his bonds. Dominic is there to soothe him...or taunt him if the smile on his face is any indication.

The red mark across his left shoulder is enticing, and I want to see more, so I go again and again and again, until his back is crisscrossed in red lashes and his skin shines under the lights.

Keeping my breathing focused, I move in even closer, barely noting how Dominic moves out of range now. I focus on striking his ass to give his back a break, grinning at the yelp he lets out. My positioning allows for the tail to not only graze across his ass but wrap around his hip, leaving an angry lash that isn't going to be fun to sit on. Which, of course, is why I give it some friends.

Before I can start on his other ass cheek, though, Dominic stops me and hands me a new instrument. Still a whip, but this one is worse than the last.

My hard cock shrinks a little as I wrap my fingers around the leather handle of the new whip. I remember the feel of this one quite vividly. The heavy, thick bite that's meant to hurt...

Luca's sagging in his chains, his knees buckling under the weight of holding his body up while facing immense pain.

"Stand up, unless you want this to hurt," I order.

Luca groans but snaps to attention, straightening his body, even if his head hangs heavily between his shoulders.

"Brace yourself," Dominic warns.

It's not enough, of course. I know that firsthand.

Luca's unmarked ass cheek blooms a deep shade of red, and his scream echoes so beautifully in my ears. I don't have to make so many lashes on this side with this new single tail. The lashes are deep, and the final one overlaps most, cutting into the skin.

Luca sobs, his body trembling.

Meeting Dominic's eyes, he gives me a nod, and I take a moment to catch my breath before moving around to his front.

Luca peers at me with slightly unfocused brown eyes. Sweat mixes with the tears on his red face. Taking the risk, I reach out and gently smooth my hand over his cheek.

"It's almost over," I whisper. "Hold your head up so I don't catch your face."

He whimpers but manages to lift his chin and tilt his head back. His strength amazes me, and my cock perks up again. There's a part of me that's

been buried deep under the pain and fuckery of this life, but standing in front of Luca, seeing how fucking amazing he looks dazed and teetering on the edge of losing himself to the pain...that part of me wants to give him pleasure as well. It wants to reward him for being brave and strong, and it's a fight to rein myself in.

Forcing myself to relax, I try hard to not look to Dominic for reassurance. I can't show weakness. Not now, not so close to the end.

Stepping back, but staying in close range for maximum damage, I throw the first strike and bite my lip to smother the moan that wants to escape from seeing blood bloom on Luca's chest. His scream is weak, voice wrecked from his previous torment, but still so fucking beautiful.

Over and over again I continue his punishment. Though it doesn't last nearly as long as it did on the backside.

One of his nipples feels the stinging torment, and the way he rocks on his toes, as his torn clothes soak up his sweat and blood, is a heady sensation. And I think I can finally understand the pleasure Dominic gets from tormenting me...

Luca's fucked-out, tear-filled eyes meet mine, and I offer him the best smile I can. "One more," I whisper.

He whimpers, and I wonder if he can sense what's coming. Whether he knows or not, it doesn't prepare you.

The way the lash curls around his cock, cutting the skin, is a beautiful sight, especially when paired with the way Luca howls in pain.

I step back, disengaging, and swiftly moving around him to put the impact toy away. My breathing is rough, and I feel as if I'm going to vibrate out of my skin, but I go through the motions. At least until Dominic touches my elbow and whispers, "Camera is off."

"Oh, thank fuck," I breathe.

Tension leaks out of me, and I shudder.

Dominic's touch is soft as he holds me a moment. "Easy, Buttercup. It's okay. You did well."

I nod and swallow back the sob that wants to work its way up my throat. "Can I..."

He huffs. "You're still such a fucking soft touch. Go. But...remember the rules."

I don't look at him, knowing I'll collapse if I do. Instead, I make my way back to Luca. The pull between us cannot be denied. Stepping in front

of him, I try to catch his eyes, but he's studiously not looking at me. Either lost in the pain or trying to hide from the world, I don't know, but either way, that doesn't change what I need to do.

Carefully, I unshackle one arm, grabbing him and holding his weight up as I awkwardly do the other. His legs give way underneath him, and I follow him to the floor, cradling him in my arms.

It's weak. I'm weak. I'm sure Dominic will make me pay for this later, but right now, I don't fucking care. Not when the chains I've kept myself under for so long are breaking, and I get a taste of what it's like to hold a Boy in my arms.

It's stupid. It's selfish. And it could very well get him killed, but for a moment, he feels like mine, and I'm nothing if not diligent. I'm the one who gave him pain, and now I can ease him through it. Even if he hates me after. It's okay. Because I'll hate myself, too, but at least the guilt of letting him suffer won't be on my shoulders for once.

Dominic moves around the space, but I ignore him as I whisper nonsensical words to Luca and gently run my fingers over his sweaty and shaking body.

"You're okay. You're safe. I got you." The words feel like lies, but I force them out, anyway.

Tomorrow we can go back to hurting and hating each other, but for today, for this moment, I can let myself pretend we're choosing one another. So long as I can shut this door once morning comes, it won't matter. Luca probably won't remember, and I can lock these gentle parts of myself back up again.

Just this one moment. Just let me have this. Let me believe I haven't completely become a monster...

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Dominic



Fucking hell. This day... Just fuck. Getting a call from Sergio is never fun. Finding out he just tested his son—my responsibility—without my fucking knowledge? That's even worse.

And Luca... Luca fucked it all up. Sergio could have called Luca on the lie. But then he'd have to admit to Teo that the test was for him. While he doesn't trust his son yet, he's cautious enough to know not to break the kid.

So where does that leave us?

Fucked.

And worse, Teo is now hung up on the bunny...which means I have to somehow keep him alive. It doesn't matter what Sergio wants. Teo is never going to be the hardened shell he expects.

Hell, I put Teo through some of the toughest training we offer, and the kid didn't crumble. To still have enough heart left to cuddle the bunny? That's the sign of a man that will not shatter, and he won't bend to his father's desires.

Eventually, we're going to have to face it. The question is, what will Sergio do? We worked hard to find Teo. It's a fucking miracle that Sergio managed to have a kid. There's no fucking spare on this one.

And damn if Teo isn't lucky for that. Because the moment his father finds out he's still got a soft spot, Sergio is going to have to decide: toss the business to the woman he treats as his daughter or accept his son won't fit the mold no matter what.

For now, I keep my own counsel. But we're playing a dangerous game. My job is to make sure Sergio's heir is ready. Doing so keeps us both alive.

But Teo... he just won't fall in line. And the closer he gets to the bunny, the further away he is from the prize. No matter how much pressure I put on them or how much I manipulate them, there are limits to the mind.

The bunny seems to be far stronger than I thought he was, and that's not a good thing. I know Sergio well enough to understand he's not doing shit out of the goodness of his heart. He has an ulterior motive, and it means I need to stay two steps ahead, like usual.

There will come a time when a decision has to be made. And my gun will be ready. The question is...who will be in my line of sight?

Luca? Teo? Or...will it finally be time to face the lies we tell ourselves. Each time we move the goalpost a little further on our morality is yet another sin we have to answer for in this life and the next.

As I stand here listening to Teo's comforting murmurs, I'm beginning to wonder, just how those sins add up. Because sometimes... sometimes I wonder what it would be like to have my Buttercup and the bunny all to myself. Forever.

Pushing the rambling thoughts away, I force myself to close in on Teo and Luca. Coldly, I snap out, "I didn't think cuddling was part of the experience we offer here."

"Fucking hell, Dominic," Teo bitches. "I'm just making sure he's alright."

"It's not your business if he is or if he's not. Fuck, by rights your father could have told you to put a bullet in his head. That's what you need to keep in mind."

Teo shakes his head, visibly holding back his thoughts. I want to rage against it. How dare he hide anything from me? But right now, we don't have time. Not when I don't know when Sergio may be coming back.

"Get him up to his room," I command. "I'll deal with you later."

It's a struggle not to help him carry Luca's weight, but I force myself to stand quietly as Teo handles it. The truth is, something about the bunny

calls to me, too. But I already have one asshole I'm putting my life on the line for, I don't need another one.

Even if he does give his pain to us so very sweetly. And fuck knows I'll be keeping a copy of that tape for myself. The face the bunny made at the end?

I almost came right from that.

The thought of what the two of them could do together... predicament bondage... Fuck, if Buttercup is going to fall for the bunny, I may as well get something from it.

I finish cleaning up, then close the door and head in the direction of Teo's room. If he fucked up further, they'll be there. I'm hoping he just dumped Luca in the bunny's room and went to his own. Then again, if he has Luca with him, I have the perfect excuse to get my payment.

I've already been denied punishing Teo, the least he could do is make it up to me...

It's frustratingly slow to get to Teo's room. Not only am I careful about the camera placement, I'm also dodging staff that may be tempted to mention where I am to Sergio. Although most of the staff knows not to fuck with me, I'd never rely on one of them for secrecy. We all know the score in this Family. Protect yourself before another—or end up dead. Something that neither Luca nor Teo seem to understand.

I don't bother knocking. I'm not sure if I really expected Teo to have his door unlocked or not. I mean, it's fucking foolish, but on the other hand... I have to wonder just how much he does to provoke me. To need me...

My cock is already half hard at the knowledge as I open the door. Seeing Luca stretched out on Teo's bed only makes me shake my head and get fucking harder. Because not only is Teo breaking rules—again—but there's something touchable about the bunny, all marked up and fast asleep.

Hell, he looks like an innocent, marked by the devil and put away well satisfied. Which... hmm... I raise an eyebrow when Teo guiltily meets my eyes before looking away. Damn. I wish I had hidden a fucking camera in Teo's room because I bet that was some "comfort" he gave the bunny.

I crook my finger at him, and while his lips move in a silent grumble, he stands. Still, from the way he plants his feet and stretches out, he's making it clear he'll protect the bunny. I mentally roll my eyes—I don't have any intention of harming Luca right now—and walk right up to Teo.

Quickly, I grab the front of his shirt and tug him hard toward me, dragging him toward the walk-in closet. Once we're both in there, I flick on the light and softly close the door.

"What—"

I slap my hand over Teo's mouth. "Shut the fuck up. Especially if you don't want to wake the bunny."

He doesn't fight me, interestingly enough. Instead, he nods grudgingly. I catalogue that, knowing for the future just how much power a threat against Luca gives me, even if it's merely the fucker's discomfort. It irritates me, even as I realize how useful it'll be.

I let my hand drop, my glare warning him to stay in place. Looking around his closet, I sneer. For someone so judgmental against others' clothes choices, he's got a fucking addiction of his own.

I push some items out of the way, ignoring his outraged gasp when several fall to the floor. If he thinks that's the worst of what's going to happen to them... he's going to learn otherwise. Satisfied, I turn back toward him, greedily taking him in. Fuck, he's not even naked yet and I could come just from that pissed off expression on his face.

With a soft chuckle, I reach out and grab him around the waist, pulling him toward me and then pushing him until he's facing the wall I've helpfully made sure is clear. I give his ass a smack, grinning now that he can't see me. "Undress. Bend over. Hands on the fucking wall."

It's a testament to how well trained he is because he follows my instructions so fucking beautifully. Once he's naked and bent over, I let my hands dance along his skin, starting at his back, to his sides and down to his ass. Fuck. He's a masterpiece, who would only look better with marks on him that match the bunny's.

Bending over him, I whisper directly into his ear. "It seems you just can't help misbehaving. Not only are you coddling the bunny, but you brought him back to your room. You know how that would be taken..."

He shudders under my hands but doesn't say anything, doesn't try to defend himself. Then again, there isn't shit he can say. He knows the rules, and if his father found out he treated Luca with the barest amount of compassion... well, he'd be the one strung up.

Thankfully, since I'm so fucking gracious, I'm not going to tell Sergio his son still has a soft streak a mile wide. No, instead I'm going to be the devil who takes advantage of it. I've never claimed to be a good man, and

fuck, why should I? Not when I have someone like Teo to bend over for me whenever I want.

He gave me the excuse to touch him, and I'm fucking taking it.

Straightening up, I spit in my hand before grasping my cock. There's no lube nearby, and he hasn't deserved it. I'd make him beg for mercy, but there's none in me to give. Instead, I decide he should beg me for a whole other reason.

"I'm going to fuck you. I'm not even going to stretch you beforehand, and you'll take every fucking inch with gratitude because you know what I could do. Right now, my dick is your saving grace. Now, beg me to ruin you. To fuck you without prep because you know you deserve it. You *want* it."

"Fuck. You," he hisses, and I smack his ass twice, not holding back.

"Are you sure you want to go that route? I mean, I don't mind waking the bunny up. Hell, I'm sure he'd make a damn good appetizer before I fuck you. Is that what you want? Me to punish you until you're screaming? Wake him up. Watch me fuck him like I'm going to fuck you? Is that what gets you hot, Buttercup?"

"Fuck," he moans, shuddering.

I reach around and, with one finger, trace his hard dick. We're a fucked-up pair because the idea of torturing the bunny? Yeah, that gets us both going. Yet, I know he's going to give in. To be the fucking good guy. Because he can't resist it.

What must it be like, to live in a head that has such dual needs? Constantly fighting, trying to be good when all you want is to be bad. Fuck knows I'm glad I don't have to deal with that shit. Just take what you want and fuck the rest.

"Well? Should we wake the bunny so I can work him over? Maybe give him a little hint of what he'll face in the future? Because you know today was merely a way to whet our appetites. He'll fuck up, and then I'll put him through the paces. Like I did with you.

"You remember how it felt to lose everything? To become a thing? Because I can give Luca a taste of that if you want... But you'd better be prepared to come from it."

His dick twitches against my finger and I cackle softly, loving how I can draw out the villain in him. Such a sweet kid, turned into a demon by me. And yet, I know he'll give in and be good—this time. He'll break

eventually, and then we can gorge ourselves on the bunny's tears and screams.

"Please, Sir."

Two words. One Plea. A submission—an indicator that I've won, again. Like I always will when Teo plays his foolish games.

"Please, Sir, what? Go grab Luca?" My words are mocking, and I relish it, the way it heightens my anticipation, even as I add more spit to my cock.

"No, Sir. I... I want you to ruin me. To fuck me like only you can. To... punish me. However you want, because I live for it." Teo pushes the words out as I line up to ruin him, and then he drops four more words that steal my breath. "I live for you."

With a growl I can't contain, I surge forward, fighting his hole as I force my way in. Fuck, it's not the most comfortable, but I don't give a damn. Especially when my force pushes him up on his toes. I grip his hips, holding him still.

Sweat is covering both of us by the time I get in fully. For a moment, I stay there. Even as I want to thrust again, I relish this moment. This knowledge that he's mine. The words may never be said, fuck knows what Sergio would do, but here in the closet, surrounded by his precious, expensive clothes, he's mine. All. Fucking. Mine.

"Please, Sir... Ruin me."

"With. Fucking. Pleasure," I gasp out, his hole still strangling me as I pull almost all the way out.

I thrust forward hard, setting a punishing pace. It takes a moment for his ass to unclench and thank fuck for when it does. The friction was hurting like fuck. Hell, I wouldn't be surprised if I made him bleed.

Digging my fingers into his waist, I know it's not going to be much longer for me. From the way Teo is moaning, he's going to be coming soon, too—if I give him permission.

Glancing down, I notice a few of his clothes are underneath us and that makes my decision. I let go of his hips with one hand and move to grasp his dick, aiming it right for his clothes as I increase my strokes, nailing his prostate.

"Come, Teo. Now!" I snarl, and when his ass clenches down on me, I hurl over the edge right after him.

I'm breathing hard. Hell, I'm fucking shaking still by the time I'm done coming. With a satisfied sigh, I pull out quickly, wanting to add the extra

discomfort to him. And from the small streak of blood on my cock, I did what I came here to do.

Still, I'm nice enough to help him up as his limbs don't seem to be working too well. The blissed-out look on his face tells me he doesn't care his ass just got handed to him. I chuckle, surprised it comes out sounding... fond, as I push his sweat-soaked hair out of his face.

When his eyes finally lose their blissed-out look, he blinks and opens his mouth. I tap it with my finger, and he subsides. I don't want him to ruin what we just shared. Not when we both came.

Still, this was supposed to be a punishment. And fucking him until he comes isn't quite the right move—even if I know he's going to hurt from it. Part of me oddly doesn't want to punish him, and I push that weakness aside. I can't spoil the boy...

"You have a choice," I state roughly, "Because I was generous and let you come, you still need punished. You can either piss on your clothes or on Luca. What's it going to be, Teo?"

The horror in his face almost brings more laughter to the surface, but I force myself to glare at him. I'm going to force him to make a mess, it just depends where or what.

Although, part of me hopes he chooses Luca, because I can just imagine waking the guy up and forcing his mouth open for Teo to piss in. I mean, I probably should give Teo all the information to make an informed decision, but fuck that.

It's my game. And I don't have to give the rules.

"Make your decision, Teo. You're making a mess somewhere. In here or out there."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Teo



Choices. It always comes down to choices with him... Impossible, unfair, and mind-numbing choices. There's a small part of me that asks if I really have a choice when it's all orchestrated by him... the object of my pain. The source of my every pleasure.

One way or another, Dominic always gets what he wants. And yet no matter what I tell myself, how much I fight against him and my own fucked-up need, I always give in. Whether it's letting him punish me or offering up my body with the stupid hope he'll bring me just as much pleasure as pain.

And I'm twisted enough to believe he wants it—needs it—just as much as I do. He keeps coming back after all.

But this... This is a fucked-up choice. One that could firmly plant me as the weak link, the heir who will never measure up, or make me another villain in Luca's story...

Then again, we're all villains in someone's story. Sergio is mine, while Dominic is...complicated.

If I was a better person, I'd write him off. I'd hold strong and tell him to go fuck himself. I'd take one for the team and let him put me through my

paces for disobeying him. Or I'd disappoint him and take the coward's way out. The thing is? I might be weak, but contrary to popular belief, I *have* learned.

Dominic thinks I don't understand the rules, that I can't play the game. I just play a different one from the rest of them. Dangerous? Yes. Foolish? Perhaps. But it's the only thing that lets me do the job, live this life, and keep my sanity.

Sergio wants the perfect family. His princess to sell to the highest bidder and his heir who will step into his throne.

That's not me.

If I'm going to one day take over this Family, it'll be my way. Not Sergio's, and certainly not Dominic's; no matter how much he threatens me or bribes me with his dick.

"I don't have all night, Teo," he growls.

I meet his hard stare, hating how good he looks all mussed, the darkness in his eyes almost enough to get me going again. "You already ruined my fucking clothes."

He smirks, dark and dangerous. "Maybe that'd teach you to keep your mouth shut."

I scoff. "Like you weren't thinking it. The bunny walks around here like he owns the fucking place, wearing his suits with his perfect fucking hair. He might be decent at torture, and not completely useless, but that doesn't mean he knows how the real world works. Let's show him."

Striding out of the closet, I make to head into the ensuite, but Dominic stops me with a hand on my arm. "Where are you going?"

I look back at him incredulously. "To get a fucking towel. I don't want piss on my sheets."

He chuckles, the sound making the hairs on the back of my neck rise. "Don't worry about that. If the bunny knows what's good for him, he won't spill."

I swallow, heart racing as the realization hits me. I shouldn't be surprised. Not with the type of twisted fuckery I know happens in training. But fucking hell.

Well, decision has been made, no going back now. Not if I want both of us to come out of this unscathed.

Luca looks...almost peaceful asleep on my bed. The marks littering his back on full display, red and angry because there's no such thing as

aftercare or cream here...not for punishments. Hell, I doubt Dominic has even heard of *aftercare*. At least I was able to clean the blood from his skin where it beautifully slit open with the shorter, harsher whip.

Though I quite liked the way the red looked paired with his skin tone and almost can't wait until we're allowed to bring him deeper into our world. The other side of me, though, the one that was innocent before all this, recoils in horror. While the side Luca seems to bring out, no matter how much I try to fight it, enjoyed caring for him.

Dominic grabs Luca's hair and jerks his head up, startling him awake. My first instinct is to protest, to say he deserves to be woken gently, kindly...lovingly. I swallow that back and ignore the way my gut twists as I do so.

"Wake up, bunny," Dominic says. "We're not done with you yet."

Luca tries to pull away, but Dominic holds him tightly. "What? What could you possibly want now?"

Fuck, he sounds amazing. His voice wrecked from screaming and sleep. *I wonder if he'd sound like that after choking on my cock...*

"You sound thirsty, bunny," Dominic coos in a mocking tone. "Don't worry. Teo has something to help."

Thankfully, I'm already naked, so it's nothing to pad over to the bed. Dominic shifts to the side so I can sidle up to Luca while he readjusts his hold on the bunny.

"Don't fucking bite me," I warn.

Before Luca can protest, I grab his head. With both of us holding him down, he doesn't have a chance of fighting this.

Dominic reaches with his free hand to pry his mouth open, and I shove my cock in. *Fuck...* His mouth is warm and wet, even as he heaves and tries to push me out.

Shoving into the back of his throat, I let him choke on me, uncaring as he scrapes his teeth along the soft skin.

"This is a lesson for you, bunny," I tell him. "Don't fight us—because it's going to happen either way."

Luca blinks tear-filled eyes up at me, and my dick plumps at the beautiful sight: his lips stretched around my cock, tear tracks dried on his cheeks still, and brown eyes staring at me with hatred and a hint of submission. Because as much as he doesn't want this, he's like me; the sick and twisted gets him off.

Seeing that...fuck it *does* something for me. Something far more dangerous than harboring feelings for Dominic.

Pulling back, slapping him across the face when he tries to clamp down on my cock, I keep eye contact as my cock sits on his tongue, and the first splash of urine hits his mouth.

Luca jerks, and Dominic crowds into me so he can set a hand against Luca's throat.

"Swallow, bunny," he orders. "Don't you fucking dare waste an ounce of what we give you. Ever. Cum, piss, hell, it could be fucking dog shit, and yet you'll swallow every. Fucking. Morsel. Because you might not be mine—yet—but you will be. And I expect nothing but perfection and compliance from you."

I empty my bladder into Luca's mouth. I want to look away but find I can't. Because for every ounce of hatred, disgust, and sadness that enters his brown eyes, I find myself losing pieces to him. Parts I thought were lost or consumed by this life roar to the surface, and I am ensnared by them.

By the time I'm finished and pulling out of Luca's mouth, I'm half-hard. It wouldn't take much to get myself off, but I can't. Not yet. Not with Dominic watching my every move. Not with Luca looking at me as if I broke him.

Oh, bunny...this isn't even the start.

"Does he make a good urinal, Buttercup?" Dominic's dark, silky voice breaks through my thoughts, and I huff a laugh.

"Better than I thought, but we'll have to work on the teeth thing."

Dominic snorts. "You're bitey too, you fuck."

I grin at him. "You like it."

Dominic doesn't respond to that, of course he doesn't. Rather than letting it hurt me, I focus on Luca.

"You can go to your room now, bunny; you're obviously fine."

He sneers at me, and I hide how that look affects me, because while Dominic is right, I still want to care for him. As fucked as it is.

Luca carefully sits up, groaning as his ass touches the sheets. I have a pang of sympathy for him, knowing very well how it feels to be on that side of it. At least I helped him clean up a little.

"Can I borrow some clothes? You ruined mine."

I snort. "You'll be fine. You don't have anything we've never seen before."

He rolls his eyes and scoffs, but with impressive strength, he hauls himself to his feet. When he sways, I step forward and help steady him. Luca pulls back as if my touch burns, and I hate it, the distance growing between us when I finally feel as if we're getting somewhere.

As he shuffles his way out of my room, despite my every instinct wanting him to stay, I wonder if his submission is real, or just a way to cope. Can he separate the job and what needs to happen from the soft, caring side? Keeping the two in different corners. Or are we doomed to share a similar fate? To tie our pleasure, our hearts, to the one who ruins us...

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CHAPTER THIRTY

Luca



It's been four days, and I'm still not over what happened. It took me far too long to admit it, but I'm one of the least flexible of Il Padrone's Boys. My mind and body abhor being here. Interacting with Dominic and Teo. Pretending the way they acted didn't stain my soul in ways that I thought were finally over. And Sergio... Fuck.

I take a deep breath of the cold air. The beach is closed now. Thankfully, it's not snowing, although there's plenty on the ground and ice on the big lake. I may be used to seeing the ocean occasionally, but that's nothing compared to a freshwater lake that seems to stretch endlessly.

If anything, the power I see when I look out at it with the ice crusted waves is a reflection of the fucking shit I deal with over here. It's beautiful to look at—but it hides the danger that exists. The lake doesn't freeze over, but it stays churning, ready to take someone's life who foolishly tests it.

Dominic and Teo... both of them are so fucking handsome it churns my stomach at times. And yet, I know the moment I get close... The moment I give into the magnetism I feel is when I'll be tugged under the water, only to disappear in its icy embrace forever.

I shake my head, unable to think about it more. Not when it hurts my stomach so damn much. Because even though the wounds are finally closing and the acrid taste of urine has finally disappeared, the memories stay with me. Taunting me. Reminding me that nothing is safe here.

Taking out my phone, I call Il Padrone to check in. It's a pain in the ass, having to wait for these stolen moments of solitude, and even then not trusting that we're not being overheard. It's not like Sergio wouldn't expect me to keep in contact with my Boss, but caution is needed in this shadowy game of life and death.

"Hello." Il Padrone's rough voice carries easily over the phone connection, despite the wind around me. I shudder at the sound of him, the feeling of home embedded deep inside me.

"Padrone," I say respectfully. "I'm checking in per usual."

That's right, fuckers... nothing to see here.

I can hear him grunt on the other side of the phone and barely make out a whisper of Emilio's name. A blush steals across my face, and I try to convince myself it's merely from the cold wind blowing my way. The lies I tell myself... Even as my heart sinks lower.

"I'm back," Padrone states briskly, and I keep my eyes trained to the landscape before me. "*Catch me up, Luca.*"

"Things are progressing here. I've certainly learned a great deal that I think I can implement. But I did overstep and was punished for it."

Allesandro inhales sharply before cursing. It takes a moment before he responds in a flat voice, "*What happened? Are you still in a position to stay?*"

"I overstepped during negotiation. I'm fine. There was no permanent damage to me," I respond, even as the memories of what happened taunt me. "I believe it's still in our best interest if I stay."

It's hard to hear over the crashing sounds around me, but I can just barely make out the impatient tap of Il Padrone's fingers. I don't rush him, knowing he is considering all angles, deciding if it's truly safe for me to stay.

With a heavy sigh, he finally gives in. "*Alright. I trust you. You know what needs done. Should I expect a call from my cousin?*"

"I'm surprised he hasn't already. This happened four days ago."

"*Hmm... Perhaps he wanted to see if you'd bring it to my attention. I'll think about this further before doing anything. It may be best if I at least*

check in so he knows that you have been open with me, and I reassure him you have my full faith."

Pride explodes through me. Knowing that out of everyone, I'm the one who was selected to take his cousin out and to run this territory. He warned me going in that it wouldn't be easy. Part of me wonders if he knew just how bad it could be, but I refuse to think about that. There's no way he'd set me up like that.

"Thank you," I reply before moving us along. "How is everything there? Is Lio adjusting?"

"Emilio is exceptional. You taught him well. Although, I'll be lucky if we don't end up with a dead wedding planner. They're still working on invitations, but hopefully soon on that. If they stop annoying Emilio so much and if Benjamin doesn't try to take over with his binder."

I laugh, even as it hurts. I'm glad for my friend, for my former Master. But it hits too close to home occasionally. To watch him have with Lio, what I once thought would be mine.

"I'd suggest making sure Lio doesn't have access to weapons, but you already restrict that for good reason."

The sound of Il Padrone's chuckle soothes me like nothing else can. Before I can tease him further, he admits, *"There's some chatter that's mildly concerning. But Cristian is taking point. I have faith it'll blow over."*

"Cristian? The head of the Amatos?"

"We have formed a...tentative truce. Mainly due to Emilio and Roman, but Cristian and I do agree that since there is some smoke, we may need to keep a look out for a fire." I can almost hear him shrugging, and I can picture it if I close my eyes. The Master who worries about nothing, because fuck knows we've survived far worse.

Still, it doesn't sit right with me—especially trusting the Amatos. "Do you want me to come back? I can investigate."

"No," Il Padrone answers quickly—decisively. *"Keep to the plan. I'll see you soon enough. Focus on what we discussed. Your goal is far too important."*

"Right. I will. But you know you just need to call me, and I'll come home earlier than we planned."

"Good Boy, Luca. You do that. And I'll check in with my cousin later. I want to make sure they're treating you with respect."

Before I can protest his heavy handedness or point out that would make it worse, he hangs up. All that's left is the pain of being called a *Good Boy*. Because I could have been. Hell, I would have been for him.

And yet, somehow... it fights against two other voices. The whispered *bunny* is so real it may as well be right next to me, not carried on the wind blowing off the lake...

Fuck. My heart beats harder. Did I leave the man who twisted me, who hurt me, who fucking abused me, only to fall for two others who do the same?

Nobody's luck can be that bad, right?

It's merely...foolishness that makes me think of those two instead of my friend. Really, if anything, I should be worrying about those damn Amatos. If they're claiming there's chatter, there's a high chance it's them causing it. I hope to fuck Lio isn't too new to handle this. There are so many years of pain between our two Families... He's not the best choice to lead there.

If I'm forced to, I'll return and take care of it. I won't let Il Padrone down. Even if he does think his Emilio can handle it...

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Teo



Sergio hangs up the phone with his cousin and the smile he wore during the conversation slides off his face as if it was never there.

“Thoughts?”

Dominic stretches out in his chair, his long body enticing, and I force my attention on my father. “The newbie has some self-preservation, it seems. He’s not hiding from his Boss, but he is not giving all the details either, it sounds like.”

My father nods. “I agree. Allesandro can probably guess, based on how he was trained, and what he does to his own Boys, but nothing he said gave me any indication he knows what went down... Though I am tempted to send my cousin the tape, simply to show him how good his Boy looks strung up and made bloody.”

I force myself to sit still even though I want to shift in my seat as discomfort fills me. Sergio isn’t wrong. Luca looked like a fucking angel of desire while he hung, but the sadistic smile on my father’s face worries me for Luca. I know enough about how Sergio treats what he considers objects to be comfortable with his attention being focused on the bunny. He’s *ours*; mine and Dominic’s.

I shut that thought down quickly. Nothing good comes from that line of thinking. Dominic is back to his hot and cold bullshit, and Luca is avoiding us even while shadowing our every move.

“How is he doing overall?”

“He hasn’t cracked, even after being punished,” I answer. “He is far smarter than he appeared when he first got here, despite the...growing pains.”

My father hums and thrums his fingers on the desk before meeting Dominic’s eyes. “And him?”

Dominic shrugs. “On his best behavior besides his recent fuck-up.”

I curl my hands into fists but show no sign of anger or upset at being talked about while I’m sitting right fucking here. It was a hard lesson to learn, but eventually, I got it.

“They’ve both been handling the merchandise as expected?”

“Yes. Luca has gained a little finesse even.”

I snort but have to agree. The bunny might not like touching and being touched by the merchandise, but he doesn’t flinch so hard any longer. In that, he is better than I am.

Sergio leans back in his seat and looks between the two of us. “I think it’s time to introduce the next phase then. We can’t throw him into training as a guest, but...he is here to learn, is he not?”

My heart pounds at whatever comes out of my father’s mouth next is not going to be good for any of us.

“The auction at the end of the month... I believe we should bring Luca with us. After all, he will have to get used to how they work in order to buy and sell his product.”

I should have seen this coming, but fucking hell. The Christmas party was one thing, with my father’s...closest business associates gathered to enjoy a night of depravity. An auction is an entirely different beast. And the first of the year sets the tone for the rest of them.

Is he setting the bunny up to fail? As I stare into my father’s eyes, such a similar shade of blue to mine, I see nothing but cold apathy there.

Fuck.

There’s more going on here than simply testing Luca and introducing him to our business. I give a sideways look to Dominic, but of course, he’s a brick wall. The loyal Second who never shows anything he doesn’t want you to see.

I desperately want to ask him what he knows, but I'm not stupid enough to believe he'll tell me. My fear for Luca goes up a notch. Because despite our issues and the distance between us, I don't want to see him get swept up in my father's fuckery.

Take him apart and make him ours? Yes. The darkness that was awoken in me yearns for that. But actually seeing the bunny destroyed because my father has an agenda?

No. The...feelings building in me thanks to Luca scream that I need to save him from whatever Sergio has planned.

It's a confusing mess of contradiction that adds tension to my already-weighed down shoulders.

"We'll make sure he's ready, Boss," Dominic says.

"Good. Because it's the first of the year, and I want to show off a little... Compliance is going to be the theme of the night."

The way my father slides his gaze to mine as he says that spells nothing but trouble; thankfully, I learned very early on how to school my expression around him. Compliant I may not always be, but I've always been good at lying...at least to him.

"As Dominic said, we'll be ready."

"I hope so." The tone he uses says the complete opposite. As much as Sergio would be pissed if I embarrassed him in front of others, he wouldn't mind seeing me fail.

Fuck, we're so fucking screwed...

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Luca



There's an undercurrent dancing between Teo and Dominic that I don't understand. It's worse when they pull me into their shit, using words and touches that I can't interpret. Heavy emphasis on seemingly random words that when strung together gives me a bad fucking feeling.

Compliance. Behavior. Submission. Obedience. Acceptance.

Around and around they go. Invading my mind. Until even their whispers infect my dreams, or are they nightmares? Fuck. I can't tell anymore.

It's a dizzying life here, far away from the comforts I've come to expect. It may be drenched in gold, but it's all paid for in sins that not even Il Padrone would touch. But touch... that's the fucking issue.

Around and around it goes. Those little touches. Seemingly innocent. Bullfuckingshit. There isn't anything innocent about Teo and Dominic. Fuck. That.

It's been a week since I've checked in with Il Padrone, and for the most part, everything has been normal. Aside from those hints they sprinkle throughout the day and night. Today, though, the mood between them is chilly, focused, and honestly, scares the fuck out of me.

Dominic's perfect Second persona is locked down tight. Teo is desperately trying to mimic him, a loss before he even starts. From what I can tell, Dominic doesn't have a fucking heart, and Teo, despite what he's done to me, at least gives flashes of humanity.

Teo reminds me in some ways of Lio. A homicidal teddy bear. But for him, it's more like a kitten trying to be a lion. His claws can do some damage, fuck knows my body remembers, but there's enough heart in him to keep a small sense of morality. Even if Dominic and Sergio seemingly try to snuff it out regularly.

When we pull up to the training warehouse, my stomach sinks. I'm not allowed to view everything—and from the screams and cries I overhear; I don't want to see it. The last time we were here, though, it was a rough initiation. The gun to my head was nothing but forced to test the so-called merchandise still makes me feel dirty. The blood on my hands is nothing compared to that shit.

Still, I carefully keep my face blank as we stride toward the doors. The scent that lingers heavily in the air makes my stomach churn. It's more than the stench of sex, urine, feces, and blood. It's the utter despair and debauchery that permeates every fucking thing. I never knew those two emotions had a scent, but fuck if they don't.

Swallowing hard, I try not to breathe deeply. I'm surprised when we don't go all the way to the middle of the warehouse where the merchandise is tested. This time, we take a slow, winding stroll that lets me actually see how the trainers execute Sergio's vision.

Whatever I imagined is far weaker than what happens. It's savage. It's humiliating. Without context, the fact I'm being allowed to see these small visual vignettes worries me. Just what exactly is coming? Am I going to be forced to further torture these men and women who already endure far more than I've seen?

Hell, Il Padrone wasn't nice with his training, but fuck if I'll ever consider him truly savage after this. It's a damn good thing I skipped breakfast this morning. The air of expectation was too much for me.

Finally, I'm led back to where the merchandise is tested before they leave. It's taking everything not to throw up at this point. Considering the sly grin Dominic sends me, it's far too obvious. I've done too good of a job lately to make such a stupid fuck up. Yet... How can they both live like this? Watching such depravity, and hell, participating in it?

Carefully, I pull on my blank mask. It's impossible to fit a pleasant expression on. Not when I'm seriously having to consider killing both Teo and Dominic. It yanks at my heartstrings. I'm not sure why. There's just something about them that calls to me. It disgusts me how I want to kneel for Dominic like I used to for Il Padrone, and how I want to protect Teo, like I should have with Lio.

Hell, right now kneeling for my friend sounds like a fucking great plan. Being able to just snap all thoughts off. Maybe nobody understands when they look at us Boys that even though we were twisted, turned into something we never would have been otherwise, there was still happiness. Still peace. *If only my jealousy hadn't fucked that up for me...*

"This is the first time you've seen our training. And while you didn't get to see everything, it gave you a taste. What do you think?" Dominic asks as he sits in the damn chair like he's a fucking king. Leaving the couch, once again, for Teo and me.

"It's far more complex than I expected," I respond as neutrally as possible, but the smirk on Dominic's face lets me know I failed.

"We need our merchandise incredibly well trained. As you saw during the testing phase. Now, as an exciting opportunity, Sergio will be hosting an auction at the end of the month. The theme will be compliance. Meaning the people selected will have to perform flawlessly. There cannot be a single mistake." Dominic's eyes flick to Teo before returning to me.

"Compliance isn't easy to guarantee, but you certainly have qualified trainers here." I shrug a shoulder, pretending nonchalance.

Chuckling, Dominic nods. "It does make me wonder... just how well did your Boss train you?"

Confusion, with a hint of apprehension claws at me. "Il Padrone trained all of his Boys flawlessly. We're his crown jewels, of course."

The words come by rote, sentiments repeated through the years. Yet, somehow, they taste like ash to me. Especially after seeing what these fuckers count as training. But there's no doubt that Il Padrone treasured us Boys. There's a reason we weren't killed when we didn't perform perfectly. Whereas I've seen what Dominic and Teo do to toys that don't work right.

Teo shifts uncomfortably on the couch, his body tense as he tries to unravel the mystery of Dominic. *Good fucking luck.* Granted, he has far more experience dealing with this asshole, but damn. Every word out of his

mouth seems to have more than one meaning, even if it's not one recognized by any dictionary I know.

"Crown jewels, huh?" Dominic murmurs. "An interesting way to view people, certainly. But, alas, that does bring me to what we need to discuss.

"You see, compliance starts with us. The trainers. The handlers. The people in charge. And while you're a guest, Luca, you are, in fact, representing Sergio. Hence, he has concerns on whether you can show the same level of obedience that he demands from the rest of us.

"With that in mind, we're going to do a little competition. You've seen the training. Teo has been through a version of that. I don't know how your Boss trains, but Sergio assures me it's solid. But let's see who truly submits and who is merely a wannabe, not worth being in the business so to say."

Swallowing hard, I try not to panic. I wet my lips, noting the way Dominic zeros in on the action, and the sharp inhale of Teo's breath. Trying to show a confidence I don't feel, I respond calmly, "Compliance is important. However, there are limits to mine. Both as a Second and as one of Il Padrone's Boys. I'm sure you understand that there are things he would not wish for me to do..."

"Hmm. He allowed you to be punished, though. The call to Sergio proved that. Would you like me to phone him? See what he says about whether you need to go through this test or not?"

The air in me freezes, and for a moment, I don't fucking know what to do. I want to have faith in Il Padrone. In my friend. My former Boss. But he wants me to shut this down. Would he callously throw me to them?

He warned me it would be hard. That I'd see things that would make me sick. He never told me, however, that I would be tossed into a den of depravity, expected to act like a whore. When I try to find the threads of reason to give me an answer, it's like a damn kitten played with it and it's nothing more than a tangled mess.

I've seen him move us along like chess pieces. Now it's my job to use that knowledge. And. Not. Fucking. Fail.

"Well, Luca?" Dominic taunts me. "Want to see what your *Master* will do?"

I hold back my shudder, my self-doubts, and raise my chin as I stare at the cold monster in front of me. "If Teo can do this, so can I."

I look toward Sergio's heir, wondering how he'll take this situation. He stiffens, and I catch him mouth something... probably a curse. Thankfully,

Dominic isn't watching. No, his attention is now on his cell phone. Which terrifies me. Who else is he inviting to watch? To compel us?

When he slides it into his pocket, neither Teo nor I move. Not when we're in the sight of a snake that's wound up and ready to strike. Hell, I'm not even sure if we're breathing.

"Very well, then. Let's see how well you're trained. I'll even be gracious enough to take it in steps."

This time, Teo and I exchange an actual look, our eyes lingering as apprehension and determination dances between us. The need to be the best, to win Dominic's approval. Even if we both know whether we "win" or "lose", it doesn't matter. The only victor here is him.

"I want to see you both in the middle of the room. Undressed. I'll give you creativity points if you make it good."

Teo and I stand, mere puppets with Dominic pulling the strings. Do I want to get naked with them? In another situation, that sounds like heaven somehow. But this? Sounds wrong. My heart thuds hard, to the point I'm surprised they don't hear it. Maybe they do and just don't give a fuck.

When Teo goes to pull his shirt off, I stop him by putting my hand on his arm. He jerks back as if he's been burned, sending my heart plummeting. Still, he hesitates just long enough for me to move forward, leaving no room between us.

"He wants it to look good... Let's give him a show," I whisper in Teo's ear before running my nose along his neck, drawing out delicious shivers as I move my hands to his waist, playing with the top of his pants.

"You'd better be right about this, bunny, or I'll fucking kill you myself," Teo hisses at me, but I ignore it. Hell, with as much as I'd be threatened at home, I'm almost imperious to the damn things.

Shifting slightly, I brush a kiss to the front of his throat before grasping the bottom of his shirt and slowly stripping it off him. Even though it's not the first time I've seen him without a shirt, it catches me off guard each time.

He wears clothes fitting the heir of a Boss. But underneath them his body is a work of art. Even if the scars I see bring questions that I push away. Especially knowing that he's gone through whatever fucked up training these assholes do.

His Martelli blue eyes stare at me, as if they can see everything I've ever done. It's...bizarre. Like stepping back in time with another man who

once was softer, who could have been different. And then he smiles, and it breaks the illusion. Because Teo's smile is razor sharp, sarcastic, with hints of softness at the edges. Nothing like the man I once thought I knew.

I lightly trace his forearms, letting my fingers move to his chest and down. Teo's breath becomes heavier with each movement, and it's like a shot of power to me. This...seduction. It's new, something I've never experienced, and yet, even here in this office of depravity, it feels like more. I'm just not sure more *what*.

I flick open the buttons of his pants, watching as his expression turns to pure hunger. With a reckless need, I tug both his pants and underwear down, thankful when he kicks his shoes off. Teo steps out of his clothes and then carefully lifts each leg so I can remove each sock as I kneel before him.

For a moment, we stay exactly like that. Me, kneeling. Him, naked. The sound of our breath heavy with anticipation. Finally, I stand, but before I can do anything, he tackles me. His lips meet mine, demanding, hungry, and in control.

I don't try to fight it, not as his fingers dig into my sides and his tongue thrusts into my mouth. Instead, I...yield. Something that surprises me. But the growl that slips from Teo is heady, it's potent, like I want to please him, to give in.

"Well, that's quite a show... But only partially successful," Dominic calls out, and it has the effect of cold water being dumped over me.

Stepping out of Teo's arms, even as his hot gaze promises retribution, I turn to face Dominic. Placing a hand on my hip, I cock my head to the side and drawl, "I wasn't aware of the time limit. We were giving a show after all."

Dominic's fucking smirk makes me want to hit him—repeatedly. Somehow, he must pick up on that feeling, because it morphs into a wide grin. "Well, little bunny, I would have thought a Second would know that time is part of any assignment. It's on you for not asking the questions. It appears that right now, Teo is passing, and you're failing."

I drop my hand from my hip, my spine stiffening as I stare at the fucker. Me? Failing? That's fucking ridiculous!

I open my mouth to tell him exactly what I think, but Teo grasps my wrist and minutely shakes his head. Just enough for me to know it's not advisable. And while, in the past, I may have fought that, I know better

now. So instead, I choke down the words of anger, of disgust, of accusation. Because I won't let the fucker win.

Instead, I quickly strip. Once I'm naked, and my clothes are put in a pile, I turn to face Dominic again. The man's face is far too smug, and the way he's spreading his legs... yeah. Teo and I are fucking hot. And unfortunately, right now, he's holding the leash to us both.

"You know, I think I prefer if you kneel, Luca. You look good that way. And you certainly don't belong on the same level as Teo." Dominic leans forward, the challenge in his words perfectly clear.

Without allowing myself to think too deeply about it, I drop to my knees and wait. Teo makes a noise, but I don't look over at him. I keep my attention right on Dominic, just like he expects. I hate it, but fuck if I'll let him punish me for something so indiscriminate.

"That's perfect, bunny. In fact, why don't you crawl over here. I think it's time to focus on Teo since he won this round."

Swallowing my fury, I crawl over to him, hating it even as I want to preen at the way he stares at me. When I reach him, I sit back on my heels and wait.

"Ah, that silence... It's perfect. You are on your best behavior today. Not that it'll save you in the long run. Anyway, I want you to take out my cock and suck. Don't make me come though. I merely want you to play with me while I give Teo some instructions. And if you're a good boy, I'll give you something to drink."

My stomach sinks as I don't think he's talking about cum. And I have never been into watersports before. It's not my kink. But I force myself to take him out and then I start to gently lick him. Finally, I take him in my mouth, annoyed that he's not showing any signs of my ministrations, aside from his cock hardening steadily.

With a calm voice, he gives out his next order to Teo. I'd wince, but the fucker reaches out and pets me like a damn dog. *If only that little bit of attention didn't feel so damn good.*

I let myself fall into that, the constant little touches, once again, and the focus on his cock. Nothing else matters. Not the instructions he tosses out toward Teo or anything else. Merely existing...for him.

Fuck.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Dominic



I dly, I pet Luca, like he's a dog. Hell, less than that. And somehow he's enjoying it based on his sounds and the way his body completely relaxes. Teo, however, does not seem to be having such a good time.

"Do I need to repeat myself, Teo? Or are you upset I took away your toy?" I struggle to keep the laughter out of my voice as I study the heir to the Martellis—at least, this territory's Martellis.

Teo sneers at me—and Luca—and heads toward the wall of toys. It's an interesting task I've given him. I'm curious how he'll proceed.

He grabs the first item I mentioned, a pair of nipple clamps that I know he'll hate. As he turns back toward me, he awkwardly starts to put them on. Only for me to interrupt.

"You know better, Teo. Get those nipples hard. I want to see you pull them, squeeze them. Make it hurt. And then you put the clamps on."

I know how much he hates nipple play—at least rough nipple play. To make him do it himself is far more fun than I thought it would be. He does perform beautifully, eliciting a genuine gasp. When he finally goes to put the clamps on, both nipples are far more pronounced. I wonder if I should have him thank me for providing him with such good targets for the clamps,

but I let it go. I'm far too enamored by the sounds slipping from him to tease him this time.

For a moment, he stands there, chest heaving, fully nude and in the delicious throes of pain. I mean, it's not really anything too rough yet. But to make him do something I know he hates? That's beautiful.

When Luca whines, I roll my eyes. "Get on with it, Teo, while I give Luca some attention."

I grab Luca's hair, yanking him off my dick. His eyes are hazy, a true cock slut. It makes me wonder how Allesandro let him leave. I mean... it's almost illegal not to use his fucking mouth. Which gives me all sorts of ideas. *Like making him swallow cum and piss all day.* Unfortunately, now isn't the time to push the bunny so far. It's Teo's time, after all.

"Actually, Teo, stop," I interrupt Teo's hesitant perusal of the wall of fun. The sigh of relief makes me laugh. Shaking my head, I comment lightly, "I'm going to graciously allow some assistance by Luca."

"What!?" Teo demands, his eyes widening.

I wink at him before redirecting my attention to Luca. He's still a little zoned out, so I smack his face. Not hard. Hell, if anything it's far more humiliating this way. Luca blinks his eyes repeatedly before zeroing in on me.

Smiling kindly, I compliment him. "You did a good job sucking my cock. As a reward, I'm going to have you rim Teo until he's nice and soft. If you do a good job, I'll even let you help me with the next task."

Luca's eyes darken as he scowls at me, tugging ineffectively at the grip I have on his hair. I manage—barely—not to laugh. Instead, I give him an innocent look that from the way his eyes narrow falls far short.

"I believe you mean to say 'thank you, Sir'. Or are you looking to get punished? Because I can accommodate you since I'm so nice."

Luca inhales sharply, his teeth making an audible clicking noise as he gnashes them together. With a concentration I respect, he seemingly forces himself to relax. Only after he's under control does the bunny answer. "Thank you, Sir. I would love to help Teo."

"Good. Teo, hands and knees. Luca, crawl over there."

I relax in the chair, not bothering to put my dick away. It's too hard to stuff in the confines of underwear because fuck that. Hell, it's hard enough not to come from the sight in front of me, much less the noises.

When I told Luca to rim Teo, I didn't expect him to be so...enthusiastic. But damn. He's going after it like he's devouring the most delicious meal he's ever received. The slurping noises and Teo's fucking pornographic moans... Fuck, it's hard not to move it along faster so I can get mine.

Instead, I take deep breaths, waiting it out until I can see Teo trembling from the need to come. His dick is hard and leaking as Luca goes as deep as possible. Those delicious moans are now mixed with whines that tell me both of them are ready to come. Too bad they don't get to make that decision.

"Enough!" I exclaim, my voice brooking no argument. To my satisfaction, Luca immediately disengages, backing away rapidly. Teo falls into a heap that has me smirking. Poor guy... Too bad this is only the beginning for him.

Luca turns to face me, his face wet from spit. It bears repeating that it's a damn good look on him. I especially love how he kneels, putting his weight on his back heels like he's been trained to be a slave. Hell, maybe he has been, in which case when he does fuck up, the training I put him through will be even more delicious.

I let the silence build. Luca surprisingly handles it well, waiting like a good bunny for further direction. Teo, however, meets my eyes with a fire that fucking dares me to push him further. Truthfully, I'm not sure which I prefer: the submissive Second or the defiant heir. Fuck knows I want to ruin both of them.

"Can I finally take these damn nipple clamps off?" Teo demands, his face flushed red from both pleasure and pain.

Snorting, I shake my head. "You should know better than that, Teo. But, I promise, that'll be the last thing on your mind. Get the three other things I had ordered you to."

Luca tilts his head, questioning. This time I chuckle aloud, unable to stop it. The poor bunny was too enamored with my cock to hear what I told Teo originally. Admittedly, that goes to my head—technically, both of them. Although fuck knows it's impossible for me to get harder at this point.

Teo stands and heads over to the wall, plucking out the dildo, a very special lube, and a toy that was specially designed just for us. Personally, it's one of my favorites to use. Too bad it's Teo's least. Although he's only had it used once on him.

“Good job, Buttercup. I’ll even let Luca help you on this, if Luca would be so kind...” My voice is mocking, but it’s so easy to rile them both up.

Luca’s cautious glance toward me sparks joy. “What would you like me to do, Sir?”

Ah, one word that sings to my soul. Sir. The acknowledgment that I’m in charge. Although, to be fair, I can understand why his Boss prefers Master. It may be something I need to play around with.

“Well, Luca. You’re going to take that dildo and use the specially formulated lube to fuck him. Hard. I’d be very careful not to get any of the lube on you, though. It’s rather...painful.” To my surprise, Luca’s expression relaxes. I narrow my eyes at him as I demand, “No questions on it?”

The bunny shrugs. “I’m assuming it’s ginger and pepper. That’s what Il Padrone uses.”

“Impressive. It’s good to know your Boss isn’t totally inept.” Luca’s chest moves as he takes a deep breath, forcing himself to live with the insult. Always such a hot button for the bunny. “Before you do that, though, Teo, you need to put the other toy on. Then, hands and knees. But keep the remote close to you.”

Paling, Teo nods shakily. I study him carefully. The still-hard cock, his bare skin on display, and the way his hands tremble as he takes the device and slides it over his dick and fits his balls snugly in the pouch. It’s similar to a cock ring, just...with a little extra attachment around the balls. And a really fun accessory.

Once it’s on, he immediately goes to his hands and knees. I nod at Luca, prompting him to get on with it. Despite his previous laissez-faire attitude, he grimaces as he drizzles the lube on the dildo. It’s a thick one, but Teo has taken thicker. After all, he’s trained for my cock and I’m not an easy one to take. Hell, I’m surprised Luca was able to take as much as he did in his mouth.

Taking a deep breath and carefully holding it at its very end, Luca starts to insert it slowly. Part of me wants to hurry him, but I resist. Instead, I let Teo enjoy his moment. Because soon enough, the burn hits him and that slow, steady build up turns to torture.

I can’t let him focus too much on the pain in his ass, though. Not when I have another plan. “Teo, I want you to set the remote for five to start with.

And I want you to press the button, let's say, every eight seconds. That sounds fun."

Teo's already beginning to sweat, his body racked with the pain as Luca does start to actually follow my directions and fuck him hard. But now, to be forced to do this next part himself... The sadistic part in me crows from the success of knowing he has to hurt himself. I should probably think on that moral failing, but fuck that. They're here for my enjoyment and to prove a point.

We need their complete, total compliance. And just as I finish that thought, Teo presses the button and screams. Luca startles but doesn't stop. I count the seconds with Teo and am impressed when he actually does hit the button again, only to screech once more.

Over and over the button gets pressed. Only to deliver a strong electrical current straight to the balls. For those who think getting kicked in the balls is the worst ever, this is far more painful. It is, however, safe. At least according to the doctor, who may or may not have been drunk. It really doesn't matter, though. It's not like Teo is going to have a kid anytime soon.

At least he'd better not be fucking planning on it. The mere thought of him with some woman pisses me off, and I snap, "Take it up to the max, Teo. If you can survive that, maybe, just maybe, I'll let you off the hook. I'll let you have ten seconds in between. Don't disappoint me, or I'll make it far worse."

Sweat drips off him, but he turns the dial and hits the button. The deep breath he took did nothing but give him air to screech. I'm not sure he's hit that high of a range since puberty. It's fucking glorious. Still, I don't want to break my toys, so I halt him after the third press of the button.

"Luca, you can stop, too." I pretend not to notice the way Luca strokes Teo's ass as he takes out the dildo. *Fucking soft*. "Once you've recovered, Buttercup, go ahead and get a shower. Then get back here and grab something to drink. We're not quite done, but Luca and I will get started while you're taking care of yourself."

"Thank you, Sir," Teo gasps, and it sends a shiver down my spine. It's so rare he gives me that anymore. But damn, when he's pressed hard enough, he falls right back into his submissive stance. I enjoy both sides to him, but fuck knows I earn it when he gets all soft and cuddly himself.

"Come here, Luca." I point to my feet, thrilled when Luca crawls to me, not needing the extra instruction.

I keep him kneeling at my feet while Teo manages to finally unstrip his dick and then staggers out of the room, headed for the nearest shower I'm sure. It doesn't matter who's around at this point, none of the trainers or slaves will blink at nudity, nor the tears that I'm sure he's crying. Especially since he didn't bother to take the nipple clamps off, yet. If it wasn't soundproof in here, I'd bet we'd hear him all the way from the shower...

To distract myself, I pet Luca's hair, enjoying its softness. "So, Luca. Tell me... What won't you do?"

"Sir?" His brow furrows in confusion as he stares up at me, absolutely captivating.

"I'm not talking about hard limits, like kink—that shit you don't get a say in. I'm asking how far will you let me go? If I tell you to fuck yourself on my cock, will you?"

Luca's eyes widen, and he stiffens, although I don't believe it's in distaste when a blush steals across his body. Hesitantly, he responds, "If that's what you ask of me, Sir, that's what I'll do."

I blink, surprised he's given me that much room. I was sure he'd call on his Boss's name. His guest status. But either he really wants to be fucked by me, which fair, or he truly is going to give me whatever I want. I suppose I'll find out later on that. But for now, I direct him to grab me the regular lube.

When he hands it to me, I carefully lube myself up before tossing it to him. "You're going to want to open yourself as much as possible. Because no matter what you think you've handled in the past, my dick will fuck you up."

Luca pauses, seemingly surprised about my warning. To be fair, I honestly don't know why I'm being so kind. There's just something about the bunny that draws me in. I hate it and love it all at once. It's a complicated, yet intoxicating mix. The desire to hurt him and...not protect him, but maybe just go a touch softer on him.

I want both. To see him ruined and to hold him afterward. The only other person who has ever elicited this type of feeling from me is Teo. And somehow, Luca makes it far worse. Because I don't have the control with him, not when he belongs to another Master.

It's hard to watch him prepare his hole for me. I'm far too impatient. When Teo saunters in, albeit still somewhat shakily, I decide I've had

enough. “Alright. Fuck yourself on me, Luca. Make me come. If you do a good job, we’ll give you a treat.”

I meet Teo’s eyes and nod toward the fridge, thankful Luca’s back is to me. For a moment, I lose myself in Teo’s eyes. There’s a storm there. Hurt, anger, jealousy, need. It’s all there for me to see. But a blink and it’s gone. He merely walks over and gets a bottle of water before sitting on the couch.

Before I can ask him anything, Luca is lining himself up with my cock. And to my surprise, when he pushes down, he doesn’t hesitate. I groan as my cock is engulfed in the slick, tight heat.

I gnash my teeth as Luca takes a moment to adjust to me being in him fully. Fuck, I grip his hips tightly, digging my fingers in. I’m about ready to beg myself when he finally starts to push off me before dropping down again. The pace he sets isn’t bad, but it’s not nearly what I want.

Growling, I force him up and turn us around. “Hold onto the damn chair.”

Once he has a good grip on it, I start to fuck him the way I want to—deep, hard, fast. His body quivers under my exertion, but I don’t give a fuck. Nor do I care that he’s increasingly desperate to come.

“Fuck, please, Sir. Please, let me come,” Luca begs prettily.

For a moment, I consider it. So far he’s done everything right. Perhaps a little incentive is worth it. And perhaps I’m getting soft myself. His moans and begging, though...

“Come before me or you won’t be coming for a long fucking time,” I snarl, right as I’m on the edge of the precipice, ready to hurl over.

Normally, it would be unfair, but fuck, he shatters and starts to come just as I pump him full. By the time we’re done, we’re both sweaty, and I’m exhausted like I’ve run a damn marathon. When I pull out, I note with satisfaction that he winces.

Unable to resist his ass on display like that, I casually smack it. And then do it again, just for fun. Turning to Teo, I go to offer him the same pleasure, but his eyes are closed, which pisses me off enough to forget the joy of spanking Luca.

“Am I boring you, Buttercup?” I snap out, frustration burning inside me.

Teo’s pretty blue eyes open as he stares at me coldly. “I wasn’t aware you needed my input for this.”

“Such a sore loser. I’m sure you’ll get his ass, eventually. He proved his compliance on this part. But I think the next is going to be far harder for him.”

Teo quirks an eyebrow as a sadistic smirk crosses his lips. “Oh, is it time to give the bunny his drink?”

“I believe it is.” I shrug innocently as I pull Luca into a standing position. “Luca, kneel. Now.”

Luca sinks to his knees, horrified. He doesn’t argue, though, which gives me hope for the auction, even if I question what the fuck is wrong with him. Really? Not a damn complaint. It also makes me curious about his Master and how far I can push him before he does fight back.

I contemplate joining Teo on this but decide that I’ve had my reward already. “Go ahead, Teo. Give the bunny his drink...”

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Teo



My legs shake as I swear I can still feel the electric currents shooting through me, but it doesn't stop me from getting up and walking over to where Luca is kneeling.

Fuck, just the sight of him in such perfect, pretty posture has my cock begging to get hard. I can't remember the last person to kneel for me so exceptionally without being merchandise...if ever. My life before this was boring, listless, and *normal*—if there's such a thing.

Now, I have so much more. Including a perfect submissive waiting for his *drink*, and a sadistic fucker all too happy to elicit punishment on either of us should we fail the task at hand.

Grabbing Luca's hair, I tilt his head back a little, meeting his burning gaze. "Are you ready for your drink?"

He swallows hard enough I can see his throat working. I give him a little shake. "Answer me, bunny."

"I... yes, Sir." His words slide over me, and I have to take a slow breath.

Fuck, it's been far too long since those words willingly fell out of someone's mouth for me... Not even any of the whores can say it as prettily

as he just did.

His eyes are wide with his horror. I can almost see his mind working behind them; windows to the soul indeed.

As if giving himself over to the inevitable, he opens his mouth and lets me put my cock inside. I'm half-hard now, so it takes a bit of effort to force my bladder to cooperate.

Luca jerks and chokes at the first spray into his mouth. He tried to pull away, but I hold him tightly.

"Eyes on me," I order.

A tear slips down his face, mixing with the dried saliva there, and I want to lick it up. His gaze is unfocused as he swallows down every drop I have to offer, while searching for the happy haze of submission once again.

"Good bunny," I praise, unable to help myself.

Another tear escapes, and I hold my cock in his mouth for a long moment, even after the stream has ended, almost unable to pull away.

There's a heavy pulse thrumming between us, connecting me to him. More than simply my reward for playing Dominic's fucked-up games, but the heady feeling that comes between a dominant and submissive. A connection that lies deep in finding someone whose kinks match your own—willingly or not.

"Such a good boy," I tell him as I pull out, managing, just barely, to swallow back the rest of what I want to say.

I release his hair and caress his face softly, letting him feel the connection before backing away.

"I think you need to make sure he swallowed all of it," Dominic says, his tone rough but not as harsh as I know he wants it to be.

I don't bother looking at him, simply falling to my knees and taking Luca's mouth with mine. He submits so beautifully for me, and I'm able to sweep my tongue in his mouth even as my instincts try to flee from the taste of urine on his tongue.

It's a moment that's poignant, touching me in a way I've never felt before. And that word, that singular deep feeling I have to blurt out what I buried when I was taken from everything I've ever known, comes again, begging to be released, to be heard spilling from Luca's luscious lips...

I pull back, panting, head spinning, and seeking Dominic's approval.

His dark eyes are unreadable, and I swallow back the litany of promises I want to make, the assurance that I was only doing as I was told.

Until his expression shutters, and once again, he is my father's perfect Second, and the chasm between us gets that much bigger.

"Get dressed," he orders. "We still have shit to do."

His dark eyes bore into mine as I remove the nipple clamps finally, biting my lip until it bleeds as a scream tears up my throat. Fucking asshole smirks as sweat beads down my face from the blinding pain of releasing my poor numbed nipples from the clamps.

I am panting by the time the pain fades and I can shove it to the back of my mind. Putting on my shirt is going to fucking *suck*.

On legs that barely hold me up, I stand, and though I desperately want to, I don't help Luca, needing time and space from the bunny who is more than just a danger to my life...but to what remains of my heart.



I practically drag my tired body into my bedroom, not at all looking forward to the dog and pony show I have to put on for dinner. But Boss's orders. Apparently, he wants to hear all about the day we had with an overdone, stuffy meal.

The *third* shower of the day helps wake me up and loosen the tension that settled in as soon as we made our way back to the house. My nipples are still slightly sore from the clamps, though the teeth marks from them are already fading—thankfully.

My balls are swollen and sensitive to touch and, from experience, will be bruised and smarting for a few days. I can't hide the shiver that passes along my spine as I gently clean them. *At least this time I didn't vomit*. Not that I could have with the "toy" cranked all the way up to the maximum, stealing my breath and probably lowering my sperm count.

Out of the shower, I'm careful to pat dry my poor, abused balls before wrapping the towel around my waist and padding into the bedroom.

Spotting Kari sitting on my bed like she owns the place, I roll my eyes. "What are you doing here?"

"Can't I visit my favorite brother?"

I snort and head into my closet as I call out, "I'm your only brother."

"Semantics," she replies.

Pulling a suit off the rack, I head back into the bedroom. “Talk then,” I tell her, knowing it’s the only way she’ll leave.

“No underwear?” she asks as I drop my towel and reach for the suit pants.

“Mind your business.”

“So feisty today. Didn’t have a good afternoon with the bunny?”

I glare, but the bitch just smiles innocently, like she doesn’t know what she’s doing.

“If you want to talk before dinner...”

The warning is enough to have her huffing. “Fine, fine. You’re no fun. I need you to step up and be Papa’s perfect heir.”

I eye her as I thread my belt through my pants. “Why? Pretty sure that is the opposite of him passing the Organization over to you.” Not that I’d ever let that happen. I’ve worked too hard to get this far. But I know Kari wouldn’t hesitate to snatch the title of Boss out of my hands.

She looks down, her vibrant red hair curtaining her face as she smooths her hand over the skirt of her dress. “I met someone,” she says quietly. “I want to explore what that means.”

Shrugging into my shirt, I try to figure out how to respond. Kari...is a dangerous enigma, one I stopped trying to understand long ago.

She’s been molded and pampered by Sergio most of her life after her father passed, taught how to live in this world, but with the knowledge she’ll always be seen as weaker because what she has—or doesn’t have—between her legs. Then along comes the true Martelli child, with not only the DNA tests to prove it, but the tell-tale vibrant blue eyes that cannot be refuted.

Forced together as siblings, she’s the one who helped teach me quickly not to underestimate anyone in this life, giving me my first scars—*I can still feel Luca’s hands tracing them*. Though for all she was forced to give up once I came along, she has something I never will—my father’s affection and as genuine a love as someone like Sergio Martelli will ever have for another person.

Kari and I have had our ups and downs, but somehow, we’ve come out of it with a relationship that means we don’t want to murder each other all the time, just once in a while.

“So it’s serious?”

Kari shrugs. “I think it could be...if I let it. But I need you to stop pussyng around and really make Papa believe you’re ready. He is starting to lose patience with me—I can feel it, even if he never says it. I need the chance to explore this before he gets more involved with my marital status than he already is. Let him focus on you for once.”

I huff a strained laugh. “Pretty sure he favors Luca more than me, and he doesn’t even trust him, so I don’t know what to tell you.”

“So use him. You both...like the same things, use that, and him, and get Papa on your side so he stops trying to marry me off for five fucking minutes.

“I am not the perfect princess Papa wants me to be, and I want time to explore that with—” She cuts herself off before saying more but I can guess, at least about the gender of her someone special.

Another thing Kari and I have in common besides the constant competition to get Sergio to approve of us: we both swing the opposite way than what our father thinks is appropriate.

Ironic considering what happened between Dominic, Luca, and I this afternoon, but that was “just training” and can be excused away easily by Sergio and his level of depravity and delusion.

So long as Kari and I meet his standards and end up married to the people *he* wants, nothing else matters.

Which is why I’m the fucking idiot who agrees. “Fine. I’ll figure it out.”

Kari smiles, hopping off the bed. “Thank you, now come. We only have a few minutes. Let me fix your hair.”

She drags me into the bathroom, and I let her do what she wants, while trying to find a way to get Sergio to finally, officially approve of me... without truly making Luca hate me.

Because while I agree with my sister he’s the perfect cover, and a little hate-love action is fun when I have him on his knees, I don’t want him looking at me with anything but the utter submission and devotion he did earlier today.

I shiver as Kari runs her fingers through my damp hair, and thoughts of Luca calling Dominic *Sir* and me something a whole lot more potent run through my mind...

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Dominic



I'm antsy. There's no other word for it. And it pisses me off. I force myself to center, to let go of thoughts that shouldn't be there. Dinner was frustrating. For some reason, the idea of sharing Teo and Luca ruined my appetite—and my patience.

It shouldn't be that way. But memories continued to bombard me. The way they reacted. The pain Teo took. Hell, the way Luca let me fuck him like I owned him.

Now I'm forced to sit through another meeting with Sergio. As I wait for him to light up a cigar—an after-dinner indulgence for him—I wonder how Teo will change this room when the job passes to him. Somehow, I don't think gaudy as fuck is his decorating style.

It's hard to keep the distaste off my face as I note that Sergio has somehow added more to the damn room. Everything is perfectly monogrammed and cold. It makes me wonder, just what is his cousin's office like? Is it the same gilded cage that Sergio has created? Wrapped up in possessions because there's nothing else for him?

It also leaves me questioning... Will there be a place for me when Teo inherits this position? And if not, what will I do?

After far too long, Sergio finally speaks. “Tell me...how did it really go?”

Biting back a sigh, I respond, “It was successful. Far more than I expected.”

Sergio scowls in my direction, not necessarily pleased by this. He should be, but fuck knows his priorities change. Constantly. “They both just fell in line? Submissive to the core?”

Ah, and there the issue begins. I shake my head, relaxing in the chair across from him, even with the wide desk between us. “Not at all. Teo did what I’d expect. He complied, within reason. He also was defiant. It was... beautiful.”

Sergio tilts his head, narrowing his eyes at me. The warning is there, lurking behind the darkness that can’t be hidden in his icy-blue eyes. His thick, blunt fingers beat an annoying staccato against the desk, while his other hand almost crushes the delicate cigars gifted to him by one of the other Organizations we deal with.

My refusal to fill the silence forces him to speak. “Beautiful? My son is...*beautiful*...”

I wave my hand dismissively, hating that this became a word game. Sergio isn’t in the mood to be easily swayed and the beginning of a headache snakes in, pressing against me. There’s no option though but to defend myself, despite Sergio’s attitude.

“Of course. As someone who trains others, whether our own men or merchandise, it’s refreshing to see the Martelli attitude. To know that no matter what he’s faced, he’ll be a perfect Boss.

“Because he has the control. He knows how to lock himself down. But he also knows when to push back. He doesn’t lose his fire. Since he’ll be in charge one day, it’s a relief to see that.”

Sergio’s lips twist as he seemingly tries to find fault before grudgingly nodding. “Acceptable. Yes. I do...worry about him. About leaving this to him. It’s not easy knowing he didn’t grow up here. And there is only so much I can do to hurry on his education.

“Soon enough he’ll need to step up, though. Both he and Kari. I’d like her settled first, of course. Men can take their time, but women? Bah. Needs to start providing me with grandchildren. Finding her a husband, though...”

“I’m sure you’ll find a solution, Boss.”

Silently, I add, *it won't be one that works*. For either of his children, but Sergio knows how to stack the deck. So far it's just been threats, but I can tell he's getting closer to forcing the issue, especially as his eyes return to the picture of the Martelli crest on the wall—and the new one closer to his desk; this one is fucking *bejeweled*.

The smoke begins to choke me, but I stay still, even as my head pounds harder. While Sergio is open to me about most things, his children are at his whims and not even I am fully aware of his plans. Hell, I don't want to be at this point.

"What about Luca?" Sergio demands with a flick of his fingers. "How did he do?"

Frowning, I force myself to admit the truth. "You were right. Your cousin trained him exceptionally well. I didn't expect such perfect submissiveness."

Sergio snorts. "That must have hurt to say. I'm not surprised, though. Allesandro is very thorough. I still wish Luca was a contender for Kari. I'd prefer someone I can control. I'm not pleased with the list the lawyers gave me."

"Would you like me to take a look?" I offer, deliberately not thinking about Kari and Luca together. However, Sergio is rather insistent, which is never good. "You know Luca wouldn't be able to give Kari what she needs. To move into another's territory..."

The sound of Sergio's chuckle spreads cold fear through me. With a raspy voice, he states, "Ah, but this territory only goes to Teo if he proves himself. Otherwise, there are other contenders for it. Ones that I am sure I could trust and who would hold the position until my grandchild could take over."

I incline my head in agreement—even though I want to deny the possibility. The fury that stays dormant inside me sparks and briefly imagines the fucking satisfaction that would come from beating the shit out of Sergio before killing him. The only thing that brings me back to the center is the ruthless logic I've embraced since my own beginning here.

For one, there's no way he'd manage to make Luca and Kari have children. But he'll never understand sexuality. If he continues down this route, it's only if Teo dies. Something Sergio would never do. It wouldn't stop him from giving the order, though. I swallow hard at the idea of losing Teo.

“You know, Dominic, I see myself in you,” Sergio murmurs, his eyes hazy with memories of a long life—fucking too long now. “Perhaps you should have been born a Martelli. You have the belly for it. Sometimes, I wonder...”

He trails off, and I don’t bother to say anything. That’s not my job. I hide in the shadows, the Boss’s trainer, his pet executioner. Teo plays at the heir, and he’ll succeed—eventually.

Right now, I have no desire to take over. If I did, I wouldn’t need Sergio’s order. Because in this life, dirty secrets and skeletons hide everywhere. We excel at the shadows, cloaking ourselves in darkness. The blood we’re drenched in is hidden from the light, and fuck knows we’re thankful for that. But the problem is...nobody ever stops to think.

Just what else is hidden?

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Luca



I barely make it to my room before I collapse on the floor. There's nobody around to care—hell, not that anyone even exists to do that in the first place. Tears pool at the corner of my eyes, but I fight them back.

Replaying the lesson in compliance makes me sick. But not for the reason it should. And that is what I can't forgive myself over. Because it should be anger coursing through me, and not...this.

I hate myself. There's no other explanation for it. Because fuck why was I the perfect submissive? Why didn't I fight?

I'm supposed to be strong. A Second. Someone who is destined to become a Boss. To prove myself to everyone. My brothers. My former Master. And yet, it's like something happened, only I don't know what. If I could just put my finger on it, to fix it, to make it stop.

Instead, the thoughts keep churning around. The doubt. The confidence. The submission. The need to fight. The fucking *compliance*.

Everything here is confusing. Each step I've taken to a new life has been a dizzying array of experiences that I never expected, and fuck, most of them I've never wanted. Yet, it's also new. Exciting, even when terrifying—when fucking sick and depraved.

I draw my knees up, trying to comfort myself. To give myself warmth. Because I'm so fucking cold. In a way I've never experienced. It's the kind that burns me from the inside, that level of frozenness that feels hot—even when it's not.

Life with Il Padrone so often became repetitive. Especially after everything settled. Lio became his everything. His reason for living. The rest of us were tossed aside. But my Brothers had each other. And me? I was left alone. To suffer. Just in a different way than I do here.

Dominic and Teo look at me as if they see me and like they want me. Even when pushing my limits. Then again, Il Padrone used to test us, to push us. I understand it. After all, it's a form of love.

But then he found Lio. Fucking perfect Lio. Even if he's not. Even if he'll never be the Second I was. He can't be. *Because then, what was I?*

I shake my head, trying to stop the panic swelling inside me. Fuck. I hate this. The way the toxic thoughts invade my mind. Flashes hit me hard. The terror of being dragged to the Martelli house and thrust into "training". But I found myself. I made it as Il Padrone's Second. An honor.

That now belongs to Lio. Because I was shoved aside. No, that's not it. I was given an opportunity. Take out his cousin, end the sex slavery, and take over. Run the territory myself. And if there's a tiny kernel inside me that thought by doing so I'd gain Allesandro's approval, that I'd prove myself to be the better match for him, it's nobody's business but my own.

Except...suddenly there are two others who draw me in. Just like he did. *Temptation dipped in poison.*

I focus on my breathing. Remembering it could be worse. I could be invisible to them, like the wraith I became in the place I used to call home. Whose existence was nothing but an inconvenience to every. Fucking. One.

As fucked up as it is to be called bunny... at least it's something. Something I never had. Because every single Boy earned a nickname. Except me. I used to think that's because Allesandro saw me as the most important. The most versatile. Now I wonder if it's because he never saw me at all.

A sob rips free. It can't be stuffed down anymore. The problem is, I'm not sure what I'm crying over. The loss of Allesandro or the loss of myself. Hell, maybe it's because I bend over so fucking easily.

A plaything.

That's what we all started as with Allesandro. Before we become Boys. And then, we gain our position. It makes me wonder... have I merely been a plaything ever since I was ripped away from my childhood?

Is that why I never earned a nickname? A treasure denied to me, over and over?

It must be the truth if I bent over so easily for Dominic. If I gave myself so quickly to Teo. Enjoying the touches and the way his eyes lingered on me.

I'm not sure how long I stay on the floor, drenching the carpet with my sorrow. Suddenly the door opens, and I attempt to scramble up, but there's no strength in me. I wish there was, but fuck, maybe this explains why Death was given the job of a Second and not me.

"Shh, bunny... I have you," Teo croons roughly, and I shudder against it.

I let myself be moved into his arms, scooped from the floor and onto my bed. Only instead of being there alone like I am night after night, he curls around me. Protecting me.

He made me drink his piss, and I should hate him. I *do* hate him. I have to, there's no other reasonable response.

But deep inside, I know the truth. Somehow, once again, my tormentor became something else. Something *more*.

I chuckle, despite there being nothing funny. My chest heaves from the mixture of cries and laughter that catch in my throat. Through it all, Teo stays.

How? How is it possible?

Because fuck. If I did all this...came here to take over, only to end up a plaything for another Martelli... And worse, if I fall for the two abusers...

What does it make me?

What. Does. It. Make. Me?

Again and again, it spins around.

What. Does. It. Make. Me?

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Teo



I hold Luca through his panic, his pain is agony, pulling at the pieces of my soul that don't belong to Dominic. I shudder, the realization one that needs to be mulled over, in the privacy of my room, but I can't leave, not now. Not while Luca is falling apart at the seams and the only one who can put him together again is, well, me... me and Dominic, but I've been down this road before and know better than to think the other man would care.

No one was there to help stitch my wounds together—physically, mentally, or emotionally.

I came through the pain of my training alone. Made myself into who I needed to be in order to survive. And all I got in the end was a need, a fucked-up, toxic connection to the man who used, abused, and then threw me away like I was nothing.

Sure, Dominic comes back because he has to. Like me, he's beholden to the whims of Sergio, but it's all smoke and mirrors. Until it's not. Those rare moments when he lets his guard down and I can see the man beneath the monster, like today, when our eyes connected after I kissed Luca... Fuck, I can practically taste his need for me in those moments. But they don't last. And they never will.

I don't want that for Luca. One day soon, he's going to fuck up. He's going to lose his guest status and fall into the trap Sergio is setting. And my father expects me to take an active role in his training...

Luca, who is so perfect already. So submissive and eager to please... How could Il Padrone, his Master, send him here? Into the den of depravity where no one ever leaves the same.

Breaking him...it'll be too easy. And though part of me aches for that, I can't deny I want to see it. Him fucked over and over and over again. No pleasure to be seen because it's not about him. Until it is. His prostate milked and balls emptied... his mind thrown into chaos between pain and pleasure and never knowing which way is up or if you want it to stop or never end...

Whatever Luca thinks he knows, the small glimpse he got during our walkthrough at the training facility today... it's not even close to what Dominic and I plan to do to him once allowed.

My personal Hell will serve me well. Because I am intimately aware of how far the mind and body can be pushed.

I rose from the ashes. The death of who I was became the man currently cradling the broken bunny.

What will become of Luca? And do I care?

...Of course I care. I wouldn't be here, cuddling him, if I didn't.

Running my hand down his back, I press my lips to his hair, drinking in his scent. Though he showered before dinner, I swear I can smell Dominic's cum under the soap.

"It's okay, bunny," I tell him over and over as I rub his back. "I'm here. You're okay."

He whimpers and tries to bury himself into me, like the bunny we've marked him to be.

His fingers shake against me as he tries to undo my buttons.

I carefully pull away, and he cries out.

"Shhh. I'm not going anywhere. What are you doing, Luca?"

His eyes are full with tears and his lips tremble before he pushes out, "Please." He tries to once more undo my buttons, so I sit up and remove my shirt.

As soon as I do, I get a lap full of crying bunny as he buries his face into my throat and his fingers claw at my bare skin. He trembles, pressing so hard against me I'm convinced he's trying to burrow into my skin.

“Shh,” I soothe. “It’s okay. I got you.” Leaning over, I grab the soft throw from the bottom of the bed and toss it over us, cocooning him in warmth.

He snuggles even deeper into me, and I press a kiss to his head as he finally seems to relax.

“I got you...” I whisper. “It’s okay. You’re safe with me.” I don’t have control of myself anymore, words spilling out without any heed to who might be around, or how they sound.

“Not...wanted,” he mumbles. “No...name...no job...”

“Shhh. You’re wanted, bunny,” I assure him. “Daddy wants you.” He cries, tears soaking into my skin. “That’s right. Daddy’s here, Little Bunny Boy. I got you. You’re okay. It’s okay.”

I’m not sure which of us I’m trying to convince, but I repeat the words over and over until my throat dries, and my voice goes hoarse, and he finally falls asleep in my arms, right where he belongs...



My alarm going off startles us both awake. Luca shoots up, and I shush him, encouraging him to lay back down. “Sorry, bunny.”

Leaning over, I grab my phone and shut the alarm off. It’s far too early to be awake, but with the auction coming up in just a few weeks, and Kari’s impossible mission, there’s work to be done.

Sliding out of bed, I stretch, aware of eyes on me.

I meet Luca’s shuttered gaze as I dress in the clothes I discarded last night, wondering if he remembers what happened, the dangerous secrets we both confessed, before he passed out.

“You have ten more minutes of sleep before your alarm will go off,” I tell him, double checking I have all my things before striding out of his room.

Dominic is waiting for me in the hall, and my stomach swoops.

I took a calculated risk going to Luca last night. Comforting him... staying the night.

“Hope he is worth your life, Buttercup,” he says harshly.

I don’t dare look at the closed door behind me, holding Dominic’s gaze.

“As much as you are,” is the only thing I can say this early in the morning, too tired for word games and to pretend like we’re nothing to each other.

Dominic scoffs, but that he’s not dragging me in front of Sergio says more than his words and actions ever will.

Yesterday changed things for us all, whether we’re ready to admit it or not.

From the look Dominic gives me before walking away, I know he’s prepared to continue lying to himself.

Fine. I got this far despite him, I’ll continue moving forward, and if that includes dragging Luca through it too...so be it.

After all, they wanted me to become a monster...

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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Dominic



It's been almost two weeks, and I'm still pissed at Teo. He doesn't know how to move through the hallways without being caught. He's lucky that I was able to manipulate the video footage. *If his father found out...*

Sighing, I drink my coffee, pushing that fucking nuclear thought out of my head. It's getting closer to the auction, and I'm antsier than I should be. I'm not even sure why. Although it doesn't help that Luca is like a damn teddy bear that Teo and I are constantly tugging between us.

For the most part, the bunny hops along, automatically agreeing to whatever plan we put in place. Whether he's following me as I check more backend matters—the soldiers, the captains, the inner workings of the schemes we run—or if he's in Teo's fucking care with the clients and suppliers.

It's like we've ripped it down the center. I stay in the shadows, Teo steps into the spotlight. Really, it's what he'll do as Boss, anyway. It shouldn't matter. It sure the fuck shouldn't *hurt*.

And yet, it gnaws on me. The fact Teo has escaped my grasp for so long, and worse, tugs the bunny along occasionally. I want to insist that they're both mine, but under Sergio's far too careful watch lately I've had to

suffer in silence, like a good Second does when his plans flicker and die. Only, they won't die. I refuse to allow it.

Today will help ease that pounding headache that creeps up when they're not around. Because both of them will be in my hands today, under my observation. A direct order from Sergio. A testament of what's to come, and they'd both better remember their roles because if they don't... Well, fuck it. Even if they are a credit to me, I'll find a way to knock them down again, anyway.

Teo stumbles in first, as expected. His attention zeros in on the coffee maker as he ignores me. It doesn't surprise me when he gets down a second mug as well. After making sure his coffee is perfect, he then doctors Luca, who takes it far sweeter than either Teo or me.

I shake my head silently. He's going to spoil the bunny. It'll only make it harder on him when we put the bunny through his paces, but I keep my mouth shut. If anything, I'm looking forward to that. It's like an extra bonus for me. To see Teo crumble as the bunny breaks, both of them forced to turn to me even as I put them through Hell...

Teo grabs an apple as he sits across from me. Rolling my eyes, I stand up and head toward the breakfast buffet that's left out. I load a plate with scrambled eggs, breakfast potatoes and bacon. Cursing myself, I then make a second plate with sausage instead of the bacon.

Picking up both plates, I head back to the small table, putting one in front of Teo with a grunt and sliding one in the place Luca will sit. Sometimes I'm far too nice. Before I sit down, I refill my cup of coffee because it's far too close to empty. Unlike Teo and Luca, I don't bother to doctor it. I prefer it as black as my soul.

Teo is halfway through his plate before Luca rushes in. I note that his hair needs dealing with before we have the auction. It's become a little too long, although it looks good on him. Hmm... actually, if it's longer, it would open up some new, fun—for me—avenues.

"So what's today's plan? I don't have any meetings to attend," Teo asks as he finishes his plate while Luca is still eating his.

I shrug one shoulder and drink the last of my coffee. Setting my cup down, I glance at both men. "Let's take a look at the auction venue. I think it's partially finished."

Luca pauses midbite before wincing as he finishes eating it. He sets his plate to the side as he goes to stand, but Teo taps the table, giving him a

warning look. With a huff, Luca finishes the rest of his food under Teo's silent stare.

I catalogue it all. The way I can use them against each other. Teo's softness. Luca's flexibility. It's all there in ways that I can't wait to delve into. Perhaps I should worry about myself or be ashamed, but fuck that. In the end, I'll have them both where I want them. Under me. Torturing each other as I torture them.

It isn't long before I have them in the SUV headed toward the location Sergio chose. Even I'm unaware of everything that's being set up. This will be a tease to us all. And as fucked up as I am, I'm looking forward to it.

By the time we make it to the venue, both Luca and Teo are squirming in the best way. They're too well trained to do it in a way others could tell, but for someone who has spent time training merchandise...it's possible to tell. Teo's little finger moves minutely, not quite tapping, but close. Luca's shoulders flex, as if he's trying to relax, but just can't manage it.

It's fucking perfect.

"This isn't one of our normal spots," Teo comments, his brow furrowing as he takes it in.

Chuckling, I shake my head. "Not at all. Your father chose it. It's a rather unique event space that was acquired."

From the outside, it doesn't look like much. Yet, it's rich with a history they don't know. Because it used to be a small theater. One that was known for very adventurous acts. Which sadly led to it being shut down, and then picked up by Sergio, whose family had a strong tie to it, albeit not a direct one. And the auction? That'll be history repeating itself, only it won't end with the government so rudely crashing the party.

Luca's tongue darts out as he licks his lips. My gaze zeros in on it, and I force myself to turn my attention away from the damn tease. Hesitantly, he interjects, "It's rather small compared to what I expected."

"It'll do its job," I respond nonchalantly as I stroll forward, forcing them to follow me. The guard loitering outside quickly opens the door. Thankfully, this is tucked away from the city, well hidden from the eyes of those who would judge.

I stop and stare just a few feet inside, with Luca and Teo fanning out, but they've positioned themselves that I'm in the middle. It's addictive to know that despite how close they've become, they recognize that I'm the

one in charge. The one who will make them work—even if they don't realize it yet.

"This is..." Teo trails off, unable to finish his sentence.

I nod as I finish it for him, "Phenomenal. The men really outdid themselves."

"That was not what I was thinking," Teo mutters, but I ignore him.

Considering the stage is taken over by fun instruments that put the wall in the training office to shame, I'm not surprised. Still, the possibilities... All of them entice me. Especially the larger equipment, like the St. Andrew's Cross.

I lead them down the middle aisle of the theater before heading toward the stairs to reach the top of the platform. One of the men steps forward, waving me over. Luca and Teo follow me, albeit not enthusiastically.

"We're not completely finished yet. We're still bringing in some supplies and adding more decorative touches. But the lights for the stage are done. Would you like to see them, sir?" the worker asks me.

"Absolutely," I reply as I cross my arms, taking in the little touches that grace the stage. Everything is in perfect position and clearly either well taken care of or brand new.

The worker calls out to another man, and within a minute, the lights are dimming. It's not dark for long as spotlights pop up on the stage. It'll give perfect highlight to the merchandise while providing anonymity to those in the audience.

Whistling, I take everything in, fully satisfied. "This is great work. I'm going to look in the back, but are we on track to finish?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, I think we may finish early."

"That's what I like to hear," I reply as the lights come up.

I crook my fingers at Teo and Luca, who stay behind me but still follow. There's an occasional whisper between them, but I ignore it as I head toward the back. The front meets my expectations, but the back? Exceeds it.

"Is there a reason it looks like private sex dungeon quarters back here?" Luca says grimly.

Smirking, I turn and face Luca and Teo. "That would be because the bidders have an option on certain merchandise. A couple will be for, hmm, rent, I suppose is the best way to describe it. Overnight accommodations where they can do whatever their depraved minds take them—so long as the merchandise is in an acceptable condition upon return."

“And what makes it acceptable?” Teo asks in a bored tone, although I note the tightening at the corner of his eyes. He’s not nearly as calm as he pretends.

I laugh as I turn away to look at the delicious spread of depravity in front of me. I don’t need to see their expressions as I answer, “Acceptable is whatever I define it as, of course...”

Their sharp intake of breath says enough. Sometimes it’s best to have a tease, and this edges us all. Even if they’re not aware of it yet.

Teo clears his throat before asking, “Is there a schedule? And a plan for who is in charge?”

“I’ll be the one heading the auction. The merchandise was personally selected. As for you, you’ll be in charge of wowing the sellers. Your father is electing to not attend. He wants to see how you handle things.”

I mentally check off what has been done, and what’s missing still. There are a few touches in the back that could use some polish, like perhaps some sensory deprivation apparatus...

I’m so distracted, I must miss Luca’s question, until he touches my shoulder. I whirl around, and while he grinds his teeth, he surprisingly doesn’t step back. I lift an eyebrow, impressed at the bunny—for now.

“And what’s my job?” he asks, and from the way his hands clench, it must not be the first time.

For a moment, I merely study the bunny. It’s an innocent enough question, but there are so many answers. Finally, I settle on, “Well, bunny, you’re here to learn. To experience. And, most of all, I’d hope you both understand compliance now. Not that I’d mind showing you it again, but I’m not sure either of you’d survive that.”

Luca’s eyes widen, but his eyes darken, and fuck, that’s dangerous. Especially right now, surrounded by others. It’s far too soon to put my plans into action for either one of them. I tear my attention from them and head toward the front. This time, I don’t gesture for them, but sure enough, by the time I’m outside, both of them are by my side.

Such good little ducklings. Even if one is a mere bunny and the other is far more than he should be. But time and patience will solve it all.

Eventually, they’ll be under me. If I have my way, that’ll be permanent. Perfect little toys. *All for me...*

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Teo



Auction day... The day that could make or break us, especially since Sergio is putting trust in me... *Is he hoping I excel? Or is this a setup for me to fail?*

I try to shove the thoughts aside, but it's the reality when living under my father's thumb. I'm not ignorant to the way he manipulates situations to see him fit. His whims change with the day, and his tests aren't ones I'm always supposed to pass. Doesn't mean I don't try my hardest. Not for him, but to spite him.

He is the reason I'm here, after all. The reason my soul is as blackened as it is, and why my mind was as fucked beyond repair as my body. To fail now would be a waste of the work I've put in.

So I won't fail. Whatever comes for me tonight, I will take it in stride and succeed, despite what Sergio may want.

Kari lets out a whistle when I enter the foyer. "Hot, brother," she says with a wink.

I roll my eyes as my cheeks heat. The suit is more form fitting than I usually prefer, and I fight to not tug at the collar or sleeves. Kari and the

tailor will both kick my ass if I ruin the image of perfection they worked so hard to create before the night even starts.

Dominic looks me over, and I stand straighter under his perusal, his gaze almost a caress as he stares at me. There's heat there that ignites the fire in me, and I am tempted to saunter up to him and tease him. That won't do, though, not with our time constraints and the chance of Sergio popping up unsuspectingly.

His own suit fits him like a glove, all black and making him look dangerous—as if he needed help with that. His dark hair is untamed, and fuck, I itch to run my hands through it, to fuck it up more.

The sound of footsteps has me turning, and my cock hardens further when Luca steps into the foyer. He wears a suit far more often than Dominic and I do—outside the mandatory bullshit dinners—but this one... it only serves to highlight his beauty.

His honey-blond hair has been recently trimmed, though I already miss the way his messy locks fell into his eyes, giving him a younger, boyish appearance. His brown eyes are a mixture of hard and soft, and I want to see them melt as I put him on his knees... I want to dirty up the form fitting suit...tie his hands behind his back with the silk around his throat and see tears in his eyes as Dominic and I play with him.

"You clean up well, bunny," Dominic tells him, causing Luca to scowl, which only makes him more appealing.

Before he can say something snapping back, my father steps into the foyer, forcing us all to straighten to attention.

"Glad to see you all made it in time," he says, casting a glance to Luca who, even when he's early, is somehow still behind the rest of us; it's quite amusing. Sergio's ice-blue eyes meet mine, and if I stood any straighter, I'd snap in half. "I might not be there, but I will be watching. You are to act as if you are nothing but an extension of me..."

"I understand, sir. I will do you, and this Organization, proud."

He nods, not offering up words of encouragement or even a hint that he believes in me, which is honestly better; we'd all know they would be lies otherwise.

"Let's go," Dominic says.

"Good luck," Kari whispers when I pass her. I don't dare look at her, not wanting to bring Sergio's attention to her. After all, I'm supposed to be taking the attention so she can play house with whoever she's seeing.

The limo out front has me curling my lip, but I smooth my expression out quickly, unwilling to start the night off on a bad note. Letting Luca enter the car before me, I get to take a fortifying breath before sliding into the vehicle.

Luca sits between me and Dominic, and I scoot closer than is polite, but he doesn't protest. In fact, he drops his hand in the small space between our legs.

I don't dare take him up on his offer, but the gesture is enough to help settle me.

Dominic meets my gaze over Luca's head, and I can see the danger there, the smugness as there's not a damn thing we can do that escapes his notice, but fuck if I'm past the point of caring now.

His hot and cold, controlling bullshit is grating... The need I have for him hasn't dimmed once in the last few months...if anything, it's gotten stronger with jealousy because of the attention he gives the bunny. But the feelings Luca inflicts in me? Those are different... Pure, honest.

Fucked up in many ways because I'm itching to get my whip on his flesh again, and so much more...but I also want to piece his hurt back together—if only so the cycle could start all over. Messed up in so many ways, but fuck if I don't want it.

Pain and pleasure, agony and comfort... All of it blurs together, and I want it. With him.

The bunny who turned our world upside down...who reminds me of desires and needs I was forced to set aside...who gives far more than he intends...who is quickly stealing what's left of my heart despite it being owned by someone else...

Thankfully, we arrive at the venue before I can spiral any further.

Setting the back of my hand against Luca's, I press our fingers together before we leave the limo; it's the last bit of comfort either of us will receive tonight.

We enter the venue through the back door. Anticipation thrums through me, curious about the final touches, and yet anxious to put on a good show. Rather than lead to the back area where the private depravity will happen, we check in on the merchandise. It's a mixture of perfectly trained slaves, and newbies who are barely at the start of their journeys...perfect for an auction where the theme is *compliance*, as it means we get to show off what

our trainers can do, as well as advertise the possibilities with merchandise that is less refined.

I notice how Luca refuses to study the merchandise for long, the way his hands tighten at his sides, and how his jaw bunches before he forces himself to relax. I'd feel sorry for him if I didn't know it's going to get worse long before it gets better. Trial by fire.

We check out a few things backstage, make sure everything is in place, and allowing our guests to fill the theater before it's time to start.

Dominic smiles at Luca and I, the look smug and perfect, before he walks on stage once the clock ticks over.

Luca and I stand in the wings off stage, watching as Dominic stands on the stage like he belongs there, the blood red curtains the perfect backdrop as he greets the audience and starts his spiel.

"We have a special show for you tonight. Not only will we have the normal auction full of gorgeous merchandise for you to bid on, but there will be a small...demonstration of their compliance as well, along with opportunities for you to see just how far the merchandise can be pushed..." His words hang in the air, the dark promise of depravity thick and enticing.

My blood buzzes, anticipation and, dare I say, excitement filling me. My clinging humanity is nowhere to be found as Dominic continues his speech.

"Tonight, you have the rare treat of watching how the Martelli Family prefers to handle their business."

His words are my signal, and I step out of the shadows, walking onstage and fighting to not squint at the brightness of the spotlights.

The audience is dark, almost sinister, and if I didn't know any better, I'd think we were talking to ourselves, but I do know better. I can feel the bloodlust in the air, the desire for sex and violence, preferably both at the same time.

This first auction will set the tone for the rest of the year, and everyone is anticipating the heady feeling of compliance...and are prepared to revel in the crushing violence of failure.

It's a thrill, even if a bout of nerves shoots through me. Still...I can't let Dominic down. The twisted parts of me come alive as I smile out into the audience, though I can't see them.

"I think...before they start bidding, they get a tease of what they're buying." I play my part perfectly, the script rolling off my tongue as if it's

second nature.

The words are a cue for one of the trainers to bring out a piece of merchandise. This one so perfectly trained for auction she doesn't fight or freeze up even as she steps into the spotlight.

Her head is down, hands cuffed at the small of her back, and her sheer nightie not leaving anything to the imagination.

"Cuffed or uncuffed?" the trainer asks.

I grin. "Uncuffed. E-45a is a good girl."

The trainer undoes the cuffs and hands me the key before he slips back off stage.

I snap my fingers, and the girl goes to her knees, a perfect submissive pose. Running my fingers through her hair, I pet her before fisting the strands in my hand and saying, "E-45a has been through some of our best, more rigorous training. She is slated for sexual slavery and can please even the darkest of appetites..." Releasing her hair, I order, "Undress."

She slips her arms through the sleeves of her nightie and lets it fall. It gets hung up on her pert breasts for a moment before falling to the floor and pooling around her.

"We didn't have to do a thing, aside from basic maintenance: waxing, hair cutting, etc. She is a perfect specimen of desire and very agreeable. Stand."

The order is completed without hesitation, and when I move her to face the audience, she turns without resistance. "Bat those pretty eyes for your potential Master," I whisper, the mic picking up my words.

I make her stand there for a long moment, gazing out into the black abyss beyond the stage, before turning her around and putting pressure in between her shoulders. She's so well-trained, she knows all the silent cues, bending at the waist, grabbing her lower legs as she bends over, sticking her generous ass out.

Without a word, I stalk to the table at the back of the stage, grabbing the cane there.

"I will give you a quick demonstration of just how perfectly trained this slave is. If you're the type that loves to hear nothing but the *thwap* of instrument to flesh..."

Getting into position, I don't hesitate to smack her ass with the cane. It's brutal. Her skin instantly pinkening from the stiff, thuddy instrument

without any type of warm up. Five precisely executed strikes against her backside, and through it all, she doesn't make a sound...

"Of course, if you're the type who loves it when your prey cries..."

As if my words flipped a switch, E-45a begs, "Please, Sir, more. I deserve it."

That earns her four more hard-as-can-be strikes of the cane, her cries genuine if the hitch in her breath is any indication.

I give her a few more good whacks just for fun, the monster I was turned into in full control now. "What do you say, E-45a?"

"Thank you, Sir."

"I think you should thank me properly..."

She takes that as permission to get out of position and fall to her knees, her whimper soft as her tender ass sits against her heels. Pulling out my cock, I shove it into her mouth, letting the warm heat and gagging sounds as I fill her throat without preamble bring me to hardness.

I use her mouth, fucking her face with a brutality that has the lust in the air heightening. Of course, I don't come, not when the night's just begun, but I make sure I give a good enough show before pulling out.

"Are you finished?" Dominic drolls.

I huff a laugh even as I stuff my cock back into my pants—an almost impossible feat as his dark, velvety voice washes over me. "Almost. Let's show our guests a different specimen...and have some more fun."

The next piece of merchandise is brought in; one of the boys Luca and I picked up from Volkov a few weeks ago.

"This one hasn't been with us long, so he is...unrefined, but I know there are some who like that." E-45a stays where she is as I take the boy from the trainer. Before I move back to center stage, though, I beckon for Luca to come out with us.

He hesitates a moment before complying, gaze everywhere but the boy in front of me. This is the one he lingered on when we were reviewing the files...the boy with hair almost the same shade as his, and eyes a beautiful jade color.

"Compliance is important...and our merchandise goes through an intense training program to get as beautifully compliant as E-45a...this piece, however, hasn't even begun. Shall we give him a taste, Luca?"

Burning brown eyes meet mine, and I bite back my nerves as I wait for his answer that has the power to derail everything...

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CHAPTER FORTY

Luca



Evil. That's the only word that can apply to Teo right now. I let him see my hesitation over this boy. He's legal, but it's not by much. And now that brief moment of feeling is being used against me, a knife sinking deep into my back. Fuck, maybe my stomach from the way I want to throw up right now.

He looks so much like Lio...

The man's eyes beg me, just like Lio once did. But at least I knew Allesandro wouldn't auction him off. All of us Boys were cherished, even if the road there was hard. But this fake Lio? Lost. Forever.

My limbs are heavy as I step forward again, glancing toward Teo. I let him see the burning hatred I have for him before ruthlessly shoving it down. I'm in a nightmare of my own making, tasting betrayal on the tip of my tongue. And fuck, isn't that hilarious considering what I did to Allesandro? Karma's a fucking bitch who knows exactly how to get even.

I grasp the boy's hair, pulling his head back. To my surprise, he doesn't fight. In fact, he's just...vacant. I flick my gaze toward Teo, unsure what to do. However, the asshole just stares back, challenging me.

“Down,” I command harshly, pressing on the top of his head. He folds, but it’s not like a submissive would. Hell, if anything he seems drugged. But that would make this whole situation pointless.

Still, I need him to react. To do something. Anything. They’re expecting a man who fights so they can fulfill their fucked-up fantasies of breaking him—of ruining him. Until he’s nothing but a piece of trash they throw away and come back willingly, excitedly to another damn auction.

Swallowing, I backhand him. He falls listlessly to the side but doesn’t even attempt to get up. The urge to vomit is stronger now, because I just know what’s coming, and I want no part in it.

Whispers and an occasional boo reach my ears, even over the roaring sound of injustice within me. All I want to do is pick the boy up and run. Run back to Martellis that actually have honor. Not these fuckers.

“It appears, my friends, that we have a defective product. And we always guarantee you’ll be satisfied,” Dominic purrs, loud enough to be heard by the microphone. His voice drips dark promise, a sensuality that can’t be denied.

It’s met with laughter, cheers, and a level of anticipation even I can feel in the air. I don’t look away from the kid. It feels necessary for me to serve as a witness to what’s coming. Only... Dominic throws me off, forcing my attention to him.

“If he won’t react to this, let’s see how he takes being fucked. If that doesn’t work, then we’ll end him. Go ahead, Luca, you deserve this treat,” Dominic croons as he flicks his fingers toward me.

Horror fills me, but the challenge is there. It can’t be denied. As is the silent reminder in Dominic’s eyes about compliance. I’m sure he wouldn’t have a problem “correcting” me publicly. Likely in the same way he’s demanding me to ruin an innocent. I did that once before on someone’s orders and live with the guilt. Am I going to do it again? Just to save myself?

I reach down for the kid and realize that there’s no other option. There’s no way to abscond with him. Even if I did, so many would still be facing the same bitter consequence from these Martellis. Although, fuck if they should be allowed to have any ownership of that name. They don’t fucking deserve it...

Once the kid is in my arms, I head over to the spanking bench. I’m far more familiar with that than the St. Andrew’s Cross, since Allesandro

preferred manacles for the most part. Another man steps forward to help me buckle the kid in. Even from behind, he looks so much like Lio...

I clench my hands into fists before relaxing them. Thankfully, there's lube near the bench. I know better than to prep the merchandise, but at least this way I can more easily stroke myself to hardness. Fuck knows nothing about this is sexy to me.

I free my cock, liberally using lube as I pretend it's someone else in front of me. Maybe Teo. I wouldn't be opposed to that. Fuck knows I could use him as a receptacle to take my anger out.

Keeping that picture in my head, I force myself into the kid whose body struggles to take me. Yet, there's no scream, no cries. It tears me to pieces, but I grit my teeth, fucking him hard and rough, even as I imagine it's Teo.

Only, it's not possible to keep him in my mind. The kid is there no matter what, and I beg him silently, wishing he could fucking hear me, *Please, fucking react. Don't make me add more sins to the blackness of my soul...*

I don't come, but since I soften, I pretend I do. Quickly, I tuck myself in and turn toward Dominic and Teo. I hope they don't investigate it, that they fall for the lie. If they don't, it's not just his life on the line...

"Hmm, there's something to be said about someone who will just lay there and take it," Dominic throws out. "But let's put it to the audience. Keep or toss?"

The shouts of toss smother any that call for him to be kept and this time it's Teo's voice that condemns me. "As you wish. Luca, show them what we do when merchandise doesn't work. And then, let's get the good ones out here!"

The crowd goes nuts as I pull out my gun, and for a moment, I waver. I wonder just how many I can take down before they kill me. But all it takes is the reminder of what Allesandro asked, that I get rid of this evil, that has me ready to add more darkness to my heart.

I put the gun to the kid's head. It's impossible not to see Lio, and as I pull the trigger, my heart races. My hand trembles just slightly, although my aim is true.

I betrayed one Lio. And I killed another.

Quickly, I put the gun away, not needing the temptation when Dominic and Teo are on the stage. I meet each one's smug stare with one filled with cold hate. I finally figured out what Allesandro meant...

The cold will sustain me in a way the heat never would. And it'll be the cold that eventually lets me set fire to this entire Organization.

Fuck these false Martellis. *They deserve nothing but death.*

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CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Teo



The auction is brutal. Not for the reasons one may think, though. The actual auction itself goes off fine, selling our high-valued merchandise easily, while also getting offers on rentals for the weekend.

No, it's not the job itself that's hard, but the fact any goodwill and trust between Luca and I has been obliterated. I could feel his burning gaze from off stage as I helped Dominic parade our wares to the audience. Some more willing than others, and to the delight of Dominic, and our clientele, we even got to use the cross on one of the more unruly ones.

Though there was no pleasure in whipping them. Their screams didn't get me hard like Luca's once did. Their tears didn't move me, and even when I drew blood, all I felt was numb.

Still, I did what was expected of me. I put on a show, and all I can do is hope that was enough for Sergio to give me more of a chance.

By the time the night is over with, I'm exhausted, physically and mentally.

We climb into the limo, Luca tries to sit in the seat opposite us, but Dominic grabs him, holding him by the throat and shoving him to the carpet.

My heart pounds, and my throat dries up as I watch, helpless to do anything but let this play out because at least he waited until everything was over. It very well could have been Luca tied to the cross, or any of the other apparatuses in the back room. That he didn't...means he wants this to just be us. Which is honestly just as bad—maybe even more dangerous—than if he addressed the issue with others around.

Dominic tilts his head, and I slide to the floor, the limo just big enough for me to crowd behind Luca. It's not comfortable at all, with my back hitting the edge of the seat, but it will do, especially with the way I can lean forward and press myself against Luca's back, my cock rubbing against his ass as Dominic pushes him into me.

"Did you think we wouldn't notice, bunny?" Dominic's voice is dark and my cock hardens in the fucked-up Pavlovian response it's been conditioned to.

Luca jerks, trying to escape us, but I wrap my arms around him and hold him tightly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

I chuckle, though it's not a nice feeling. "We know what you sound like when you come, bunny. We had a front row seat not too long ago...did you think we wouldn't notice you faked it?"

He shivers as my breath ghosts over his skin, and I can't help but smile, letting my tongue flick out to taste his delectable flesh. "You're just looking for reasons to punish me. I did what I had to."

Dominic laughs. "Oh, bunny... it's not that we want to punish you... though that's a gift I'll never turn down. No, it's more you're *begging* for it."

"Fuck you," the bunny spits, but there's no heat, not as I slide my hand down to his cock and cup the soft flesh over his pants.

I hum into his ear. "You haven't earned it."

Dominic releases Luca's throat and sits back, spreading his legs wide and trapping Luca between them as I push him forward. "I think you forgot your place, but since you performed well enough, no one but us noticed you failed...we will only punish you a little bit." Dominic sounds as if that's a good thing and not probably the most fucked up part of this. Because is there ever such thing as a *little* punishment?

"Go ahead, Buttercup. You earned a treat. Take what you want."

I wish I could say my cock got soft at the implications, but fuck if I'm just as twisted as the man who made me.

Pushing Luca into Dominic so he can hold the bunny, I undo Luca's pants and almost get fucking kicked for the action, but there's no leverage on the floor, and with two against one, the bunny is screwed.

I meant what I said, he hasn't earned my cock yet, but soon. Very soon, he will...

Fisting his cock, I jerk him off until he hardens fully. He fights, fuck does he fight, trying to buck me off, even as Dominic suffocates him in his covered crotch, holding him down so I can tease, touch, and take my fill of the bunny without penetrating him with my fingers or cock.

That Luca is so resistant? That he wants to deny us both the pleasure? It only drives me up higher.

Grabbing his hips, I press against the seat behind me and flip him over, his body spread out on the floor of the limo, head cradled in Dominic's lap as he holds him there. His pants are shoved to his thighs and his cock is hard and leaking, because his eyes and mouth may say one thing, but his body says another.

"You were given a treat earlier," I tell him. "You denied us all the pleasure... You don't get a choice this time."

"Fuck. You," he snarls. Gone is the submissive that gave the perfect example of compliance just two measly weeks ago. Now is the Second who is determined to not give in, who wants to deny his soul is just as twisted as ours...well, fuck that. He will learn. Not today, but soon enough.

This...this is just a taste of what's to come.

With that, I bend over and take his cock in my mouth, holding his hands down to the floor and choking when he tries to buck me off by lifting his hips. All it does is slide his cock further into my mouth, though, and I moan around him at the sudden intrusion.

Dominic laughs as Luca moans, and there's a hitch to his breathy whimpers as I start giving him a half-decent blow job that further makes my cock harden.

I can't play with his balls since I don't trust him to have his hands back, so all I can do is my best to give him a fast and hard blow, scraping my teeth across the head of his cock and taking it as far down my throat as the cramped position allows.

Whatever fight he has leaves as his cock swells and he fills my mouth. His cries are so sweet, and I wish I could see his face as he comes—next time.

Pulling off his softening cock, I look into his tear-filled brown eyes that, if they could, would smite me dead right where I kneel.

Grabbing his face, I force his mouth open and spit his cum into it, because he might have earned the orgasm for his performance tonight, he doesn't have the right to have me swallow his seed, not when he also lied to us.

Forcing his jaw shut, I meet his gaze as I hold it closed so he has no choice but to swallow himself.

The hidden part of me mourns losing his trust, while the monster rejoices in taking what's ours.

Dominic's fingers in my hair make me flinch, but I allow him to bring my face up so our gazes lock. The darkness in his gaze makes me shiver, and my untouched cock throbs with need. "Good job, Buttercup."

He drags his thumb across the corner of my mouth, showing me the lingering cum he swiped away, before feeding it to me.

The limo finally comes to a stop, and I have to force myself not to run out of the vehicle. I should feel ashamed that I leave Dominic to clean the bunny up, but I can't. Feeling comes back as I escape to my room, the protective numbness I fell into at the auction sliding away and leaving me listless.

My knees barely hit the ground of my bathroom before bile burns up my throat, and I hunch over the toilet.

My humanity comes back with a vengeance, and it's all I can do to not fall apart, to not give into the twisting, dark hatred inside, knowing that if tonight was a test of how far I broke...how deep my compliance runs...I passed in the eyes of Dominic and my father, but failed in my own.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Luca



The lake is far moodier today than it has been lately. I'm still drawn to it. After the chaos of the auction, I need the reminder that there's something stronger than what I'm facing. Of course, the fact I chose this beach doesn't help.

It's here, after all, that I grabbed a man and tossed him to these evil Martellis. Not the good, like Il Padrone. I snort at the very thought. There was once a time I questioned my own loyalty to Il Padrone. But now? I see the truth far better than ever.

I've been the perfect puppet for the last three days, but I'm slowly unraveling. It's too much to look at them. To see their greed. And to know that even when I hate them, they can still make me feel something more. What that is I have no fucking clue, or at least, I hope I don't.

That fucking auction...

I grimace as I stare out unseeingly. To hear the men and women calling for death induces rage I've never felt. Worse is the greed that dripped from everyone. For sex, for power, for ownership from the fucking "clients". And for money from Teo. Dominic... I'm not even sure what he gets out of it. I don't think it's just money, though.

The memories play, over and over again. It's why I escaped here, needing to reset. Yet, I can't seem to outrun them. The smug grin of Dominic. The wounded look Teo gives me when I spur his false promises of support. Fuck!

How? How can he demand my submission when he tossed it aside? Punished me because I wouldn't perform like they expected, like they wanted. And to steal my pleasure—to fucking force it. I fall to my knees, curling into myself as a scream rips out of me.

I'd cry, but there aren't any tears that will come. It scares me, but I wonder if they've succeeded in breaking me. Allesandro never could truly do it, but these two working in tandem... they stole something from me that I don't even know how to get back.

I straighten, falling back on my ass as I try to get comfortable, despite the chill of the ground. It makes me feel weak, but I pull out my phone.

There's this heartbroken part of me that wants to talk to Il Padrone. To tell him the horrors of what happened. To get support from the man who was, at one time, my best friend. Before he was the Master of the Family. And before he laid this task on me.

My finger hovers over the button, even though I know it's not time for our check-in. But I don't want to fail him. And right now? That's what it feels like I'm doing.

The memory of killing the Lio look-alike is too strong right now. I can't face him, even through a phone call. I wouldn't be able to stop myself from telling him that I've already failed...

I go to put the phone away, but it rings. Il Padrone's name comes up on caller ID, and I answer it quickly, gratefully. Hell, even desperately.

"Hello?" I answer.

"Luca. Is there anything you want to tell me?" My mind blanks for a brief second, the voice isn't who I expected at all.

"Lio?" I say hesitantly before growling, "What the fuck! Why are you calling me right now? You know you're supposed to wait."

A pit forms in the bottom of my stomach. I'm not sure why, but I feel like everything is about to change. Again.

Lio confirms my fear with a disgusted huff, *"Yeah, well, I'd do that if Master wasn't missing. I'm wondering if that means you fucked up and Sergio put a hit out on him."*

“Are you fucking kidding me? Of course not. But what do you mean Il Padrone’s missing? For how long? What’s been done to track him?” My mind races as possibilities stack up. I know I’m not at fault for this, but fuck it’s far too much to put on Lio, he’s too new to this position.

“It’s recent. And we’re working on everything. Which is why I’m checking on you first. Since I have more duties to do, we’re done.” Lio’s short response pisses me off. It also reminds me that he never planned on this position, on being Death. It was my fault I didn’t save him from becoming a Martelli.

“Wait! I’ll be in as soon as I can get a flight,” I retort quickly. For once, I’m being given an opportunity. I can find Allesandro and protect Lio. It won’t get rid of the blood that just stained my hands, but maybe it’ll lighten it.

“Don’t bother. You know Master would want you to keep in place. I’ve got this.”

“Fuck you,” I snap out, tired of being dismissed like the way Teo and Dominic have done over and over again. “You haven’t been Second for long. You need me. I’m working for his cousin, anyway. I’m sure he’d understand if I need to come back.”

“Don’t you dare tell him Master’s missing. You know better! We will not look weak.”

Scoffing, I roll my eyes. Does he think I’m a fucking beginner? Impatiently, I say, “Of course I’m not going to tell him. I’ll think of something. I’ll send you a message for when to pick me up.”

Hanging up the phone, I take a deep breath, letting the scent wafting from the water calm me. Without hesitating, I open a tab and arrange a flight home. There’s no time to waste. Fuck, not even to stop in and make a damn excuse to Sergio.

I can’t let that sway me, though. I’m being given an opportunity to fix all the wrongs. I’ll be able to save Lio from taking on the responsibility of being a Boss and, maybe, when we find Allesandro I can admit the truth.

I’m too far in over my head here. And I need my friend’s help. This... this evil that permeates from these Martellis... it’s too much for one man’s soul to carry. I can’t do it alone. Not when I feel like my mind is already crumbling and one wrong move will drown me far easier than the icy lake in front of me.

To be continued...

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ABOUT ABRIANNA DENAE

Abrianna Denae is a queer author living in Northern California. An English major, they have always had a passion for writing.

Deciding to sit down and write one of the many stories that had plagued their mind for years was the easy part—finding the time to do it was a different story.

Caffeine is their best friend, and sleep is their worst enemy.

A lover of books that make the reader feel something, Abrianna tries to incorporate as much of their real-world views and feelings into their stories as they can.

Abrianna spends way too much time on Facebook. You can find them here too:

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You can also email them:

authorabridenae@gmail.com



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ABOUT LEIGH KENZIE

Leigh is a dark M/M romance author from Texas who writes villains of varying degrees.

She considers coffee a major food group and her family fears broken coffeemakers.

She writes in her spare time, forced to the keyboard by characters entirely too vocal in her opinion,
and often falls victim to plot monkeys.

In between creating mayhem with her characters and friends, her hope is to transport readers to
fictional places and provide darkness with a twist.

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