

9. nothing to lose

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I could tell he was trying not to grin at me from behind his coffee cup. That dickfucker.

"Date me." he said casually. A hint of amusement tugged the corner of his mouth.

I glared at him, tightening my grip on the strap of my Birkin. He had got to be fucking kidding me. "Fuck you."

Now, the bastard was full on grinning and I felt my blood boiled a bit hotter. "Take a man to dinner first, Jane."

"Goodbye, Elliot." I stated with gritted teeth.

He sat there. His grin turned into a frown. It looked almost innocently sad except I knew better. The bastard was probably scheming his next move. I didn't intend to stay and find that out. I had more important things to do like not ruining my father's sweat and blood.

The email Barbara sent me this morning flashed before my eyes and I visibly cringed at the statements imprinted on my brain. It had gotten so much worse in a span of one night. It was as if the whole world was crumbling in pieces and I was trying to hold everything together by myself because I was the only one to blame.

What the hell was I doing here anyways.

"Give me my glove back or I swear to fucking God I will kill you." I jabbed my finger at his face.

He raised a brow at me, crossing his arms over his broad chest. I subconsciously stared at the black ink peeking through his cuffs. My mouth dried and my throat closed up, remembering the way I carefully traced them all with the tip of my fingers. I whispered question, asking him the reason behind each one while he fucked me hard and slow. He got them for the hell of it. There was no meaningful story. He just thought it made him look cool. And, I had claimed he was stupid even though I thought it was rather charmingly adorable.

"I'm tall, smart and handsome. I have good manners and I respect women especially my mother. I can buy you diamonds and Chanel without asking my daddy for the money. One could say I'm quite the catch. Why wouldn't you want to date me?" His voice was like a slap across my face.

I snapped out of my disgusting daydream and took a deep breath in horror. The man was a fucking egotistic bastard. An unwanted annoying distraction. I couldn't possibly be attracted to him. Not anymore. Never again that night. I swore it.

"Explain your reason, Jane." He added, still sipping on his stupid coffee that I wished was still hot so I could dump it on his fucking head.

I took a step forward until I was in his face. "You have an ego the size of the fucking sun. I can't stand your face. Your voice makes me sick. I hate your tattoos and your suits. I loathe your cocky smile. And, your existence is testing the strength of my sanity."

I clenched my fists as I tried to ignore the headache pounding in my skull. I straightened my back and tipped my head to the cloudless sky. My phone stayed ringing away inside my coat. Everything was a mess and my life was going so wrong. The universe seemed to be punishing me.

And, this man was the worst version of Hell.

"Just give me back my glove and go away." I muttered without looking at him.

"Your phone keeps going off." He stated the obvious. I glared at the sky and let it mocked me back.

I felt the warmth on my skin and then a tug at my wrist. He dragged my chair around the table until it was next to his. I glanced down at him as he gestured me to sit down, again. Then when he seemed to finally accept the fact that I would never do as he told, the bastard had took it upon himself and abruptly stood up from his own chair just to picked me up and slammed me on the seat.

"Fucking stubborn woman." He grumbled under his breath, shrugging off his suit jacket and threw it over his chair.

"I have a business to run." I said.

"I have multiples but we're here anyways. Because you're my most important one." He nonchalantly replied, looking anywhere but my face.

He kept a firm hold around the back of my chair, holding me hostage. I stayed silent but glared at the side of his face as he looked ahead without acknowledging me again.

"For fuck's sake, Coop. Took you long enough. The woman was about to scratch my eyes right out." Elliot copied my glare and looked ahead.

I followed his gaze with curiosity, spying a tall man approaching our table with long precise strides. He looked as if he died years in the military and had been in about a dozen brutal street fights. I assumed he had by the white scar slashed across his jawline.

Coop, whoever the hell he was looked even bigger up close, standing two feet away. His wild gaze settled on the man sitting next me as he handed him a black folder.

"You do extraordinary things everyday, Boss. I can't keep up and I surely don't have a dating contract laying around." Coop sighed, tugging on his tie.

I kept looking between the two. I guessed he was his assistant but they both seemed rather comfortable and close. Because of course Elliot Salvatore had to hire and befriend his employee who's also a freaking military spy underground fighter.

Elliot chuckled as he shuffled through the papers. "Extraordinary things? You can say stupid shit, Coop."

"Do you need anything else, sir?" he asked, clearly done with the stupid shit.

"You can go."

I took the opportunity and rose from my seat. "I don't need your permission but Au revoir."

"Not you. Sit the fuck down, Jane."

He caught my hand mid air before it touched his cheek. I froze in place while he carefully placed his precious file down and cocked his head at me with a dimpled smile. I fucking hated his face. Cursing under my breath, I dug my heel harder to the concrete floor and imagined it was his fucking neck.

I narrowed my eyes as he carefully intertwined our fingers and pressed a hard kiss on my knuckles. "We have business to discuss, Jane. I only need five minutes."

"No." I snatched my hand back just for him to steal it again.

Only this time a stainless steel cuff snapped around my wrist like a cold snake. He was so fast I barely knew what the fuck was happening and when I did I was already cuffed down to the chair. I looked at it and tested tugging my hand.

"What make you think this will stop me? I will take the damn chair with me, asshole." I shouted at his amused face.

He pinched the bridge of his nose, looking at me with strange eyes and sighing to himself. "I have no doubts you will, sunshine."

"This is illegal. You can't hold me against my will. I will slam you with a lawsuit and sue you for all you're worth. You just fucking wait, Elliot Salvatore." I glared and I thought my nostrils were blowing fire.

I hoped they fucking did so I could burn his fucking head to ashes.

"Your little lawyer friend is a goldfish compare to my brother in court. Don't even bother. I have a hinge you hate losing and wasting your time." he chuckled while shuffling through his file for the second time.

Nicholas Salvatore was his elder brother. I heard about his law firm. Hell everyone who weren't living under a rock probably had heard about it. Although he barely went to court himself, it wasn't a mystery that he was more brutal than death. His words were nothing if not emotional damage. A lawyer who went against him last time had led the courtroom in tears.

I would never put Riley through that even as good as she was. I had one friend and I liked her to stay happy.

"One minute. Or I swear I will slam this very chair in your stupid face." I scowled and took the seat.

"I will invest ten million pounds in Carmen Corp." he said the same time he clicked his pen and signed the last page of the file.

Having a Salvatore with us right now would be the golden solution. They were the most powerful people in London. Everywhere they turned people followed. He was practically dangling drug in front of a desperate addict. Fucking Elliot had me right where he wanted.

My heart dropped to the ground as I clenched my fists under the table. He lifted his head from the paperwork and looked at me dead in the eyes, staring into my very soul.

"If, and only if you date me for seven months."

"Seven months?" I was halfway done calculating my whole life and my insanity by the time the words left my mouth.

He flashed me a lazy grin and leaned back. "That's how long it will take for you to fall in love with me."

When Hell fucking froze over.

"No." I matched his gaze with a fake smile of my own. He had his ego and I had my pride.

"Carmen Corp is on the verge of collapsing. You need investors and a better fucking board. With my name interacting with yours, they all will be scrambling to your feet by the end of the day."

I felt my lips flattened into thin line as my chest pounded with possibilities. Pride be damned. I knew he was right.

"I know you're strong and most definitely can turn things your way. But, I know you're also smart, Jane. I'm not even lending you my ladder up to the top. I'm taking you up by a fucking elevator. Take it with me." he finished, sliding the contract smoothly in front of me.

My eyes stuck on the words written across the pages and narrowed with the pen on top of it. This was insanity. An absolute disaster waiting to happen. I shifted my eyes to him again and watched the man in disbelief and fascination. He was out of his fucking mind but he was my only easy way out.

I wasn't one to believe whispers and tasteless rumors in this society but nothing had been truer than him. They claimed he was a shameless businessman whose words were sharper than any sword. He strikes deal with it. And, now I found myself on the receiving ends of his blade.

Desperation ran cold in my blood when my father's disappointed face blunked in front of me. I tipped my head down and took my phone out. The text from my assistant was the straw. Angry unread emails and worsened news. I was on the verge of losing my logical thoughts.

"Why are you doing this?" I clutched my phone inside my palm. "You don't know me."

"Because you're pretty." His chuckles snapped me out of my thought. I turned my head and glared at the bastard.

"I'm not taking this insane deal out of pretty privilege." I snarled.

He shook his head as if he had never heard such amusing thing. "I have my reason. Trust me, you're not the one gaining advantages here. I like you but not that much. Business is business."

"I know you enough. I did my research but it was adorable of you to be worried about me," he added with a wink.

The dickfucker. I grumbled under my breath and glared at him. "I'm worried about me."

"I'm the one giving you my money," he stated the obvious. As if I asked him for help.

"Explain your real reason." I demanded. He stared at me for a moment then nodded his head.

"Steven Salvatore enjoys his grandsons suffering. I need a serious girlfriend before my next birthday or he will take all my inheritance away. He thinks men are better with a woman standing behind them. I make my own money but I'm a greedy bastard and I like that I make him was going to leave me. So very much," he explained and I found it totally absurd. His grandfather sounded like a cruel mastermind.

"Plus I will be getting my profit from this investment. I have nothing to lose."

"You're the most perfect candidate. A liar almost as good as me. With us both in the same team we will fool the world, Jane. Are you up for it?" he grinned with anticipation.

His question hung in the air between us. I spent the rest of the day reading and rereading the contract until I knew every words and statements like the back of my hand. The sun was painting the sky orange by the time I finished. Elliot was on his fourth cups of coffee and was having dinner patiently. I closed the folder and checked my phone.

Riley demanded I find a therapist as soon as possible but had given the contract a green light. I wasn't selling my soul to the devil. It was just a casual but definitely an insane dating contract.

"I will sign it." I cleared my throat, rubbing my reddened wrist. He had let me out of the cuffs when he finally trusted that I wouldn't run.

The bastard was looking at me in disbelief. I glared back. As much as I hated this we were both using one another for the greater goods and that was fine with me. This sacrifice was nothing if it meant I could save my father's company. Like him I had nothing to lose.

"There will be no physical contact ever. Add that to his contract." I glared, taking the knife from his plate and pointing it at his chest.

"We fucked, sunshine." he deadpanned. "And, what kind of couple don't touch each other. We will have to act in love to convince the world and especially my grandfather."

I cursed out loud. I knew that. I just didn't want to touch him. "Fine. But, only when we absolutely really have to. I meant it, Elliot."

The corner of his lips rose into a smirk. "Fine with me."

"I don't like your suit." I said and made a point of eyeing it with distaste.

"What?" he asked, frowning. "This is Tom Ford."

"It's not Carmen Couture." I scooped as my heart pounded inside my chest at what was I about to do.

Seven months was nothing. I had endured far greater torture.

I picked up the pen and signed my name, muttering to myself and him. "This will be your worst mistake and my biggest win."

I held out my hand and finally looked at him. "Please use my business with you. Only one of us will come out of this alive, Elliot Salvatore."