

## CHAPTER 2

### CAMILLO

I grimace at the loud laughter that fills the room. My headache is slowly blooming, and as much as I love my family, I'm definitely not enjoying this bonding time with the rugrats.

And that's the problem of sharing a mansion with my brothers—they treat me like an unpaid babysitter.

I'm twenty-seven years old and their enforcer, not some fucking nanny.

And a couple of hours spent looking after their six kids, aged between two and eight, is my idea of complete hell.

The rugrats are noisy, demanding, and hyperactive—basically, a handful to keep track of as they chase each other non-stop around the couches.

I scrub a hand along the stubble on my jaw, my eyes darting to the stairs where I know their moms are busy packing their things for their trip.

“Look what I drew!” A sticky piece of paper is shoved into my face, startling me from my thoughts and making me jolt backward against the couch.

I'm given no choice but to take the paper. Some rudimentary shapes and squiggles bombard my eyes, but I'd be lying if I said I knew what I was looking at.

“It's you!” Vincenzo says forcefully. Despite the lack of any resemblance, I try to look flattered as I hand it back to him.

“No, you have to keep it,” he pouts.

“For, um, how long?”

“Like, forever.” Yeah, like I said, they're hyperactive and demanding.

“Er, thanks.” I set the paper down on the coffee table as I scope the room. One of the kids is playing with some building blocks quietly, and for that, I'm thankful. But the others? The others are busy playing tag, and I wince as the eldest two collide right into each other.

I'm up before they can even start screaming their heads off. "Hey, hey." I crouch down, inspecting, assessing.

Maximo is rubbing his head, as is Xander. "You guys are good. That's what your skulls are for—to protect you from getting hurt."

But Xander's lip wobbles, and I know what's coming next.

"Nothing but a tiny bump," I reassure him, mussing his hair. Because if he starts wailing, then I'm in deep shit.

He sniffs and nods, accepting the small hand Maximo offers. They mumble apologies to each other and take off running again as if nothing ever happened.

"Don't run!" I holler after them.

"Hey! I wasn't done with that!" Fia screams from the dining table.

I pinch the bridge of my nose. What now? If it's not one thing, it's another. I glare up at the stairs. How long does it take to fucking pack for Italy? Sure, it's hard for the women to prepare when they don't know how long exactly they'll have to be away, but surely they know the safe house is going to be stocked.

"I'm still using it!" Fia snaps as she grabs the box of markers. "You can use it after."

"I want a turn with them!" Nora whines, yanking at the box.

I watch the scene in slow motion as the markers go flying into the air and scatter, sending both girls flying to the ground to retrieve them and crashing heads. For fuck's sake, am I going to get through today without any of these kids sustaining a concussion?

This. This right here is why there's no way in hell I'd ever willingly put myself in such a situation. Terrors, every single one of them, despite how angelic they look. A wife? Kids? It isn't worth the headache.

That's for someone else. Someone whose soul isn't pitch black and dark. Someone who isn't me...

My attention snaps back to the two kids wailing. Markers are laid all over the floor and papers are balled and crumpled around them. It's a fucking mess.

"Hey." I move in to kneel before them. "What's the problem?"

“Fia won’t share!”

“I wasn’t done with my turn!”

“I wanted a turn!”

“You hog them!”

Back and forth, they continue before I give a sharp whistle. Both cover their ears.

“What the fuck is going on down there?” The voice of my brother, Marco, booms from the top landing.

“Nothing! Everything is fine!” I holler back. “Go finish your shi... stuff.” I turn back toward the little cuddle monsters, eyeing every one of them. “Alright, enough,” I say in the best commanding tone I can muster. “We’re going to clean up the mess. And then, everyone is going to sit down and watch the movie I’m going to put on. Okay?”

There’s a chorus of “Yes, Uncle Millo” and “Yes, Uncle Millie,” Millo and Millie being the nicknames my family have given me. The children’s words are music to my ears. And that’s that. Peace and quiet at last. I sag back onto the couch and stare up at the ceiling.

The youngest, two-year-old Iris, clambers up beside me, taking in the paper with the scribbles done by Vincenzo. “You look so handsome in the picture, Uncle Millo,” she says in her sweet little voice. Then she rests her sleepy head against me, sticking her thumb in her mouth.

And I can’t help but smile down at her as I wrap my arm around her in a hug. It isn’t so bad looking after the rugrats.

Yeah, it isn’t so bad, but it’s still not for me...

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A few weeks have passed since the women and kids left for Italy. Our two younger siblings, Debi and Danio, have also flown out there—Danio is overseeing all the security arrangements while they’re there. It’s not safe for them to be in the States right now—the feds are on our backs and have been picking up Fratellanza wives and family members on spurious charges and trying to get information out of them.

I've just walked into the mansion's office to talk over some business issues with my older brothers when we hear my bedroom door slamming shut, and our latest maid, Savona, thundering down the stairs.

She bursts through the door and marches up to us. "That's it! I can't take any more! I'm out!" She jabs a finger in my direction. "What I have to go through in his room every day has left me traumatized for life!" And then she storms out.

Alessio looks surprised, I try to look innocent, and Marco looks like he wants to kill me.

As we watch her depart, I try to avoid looking at my brothers. "For fuck's sake, Camillo," Marco snarls. "What's been going on in your bedroom? Did you proposition her?"

My brows shoot up. "Did I what?"

"Did. You. Ask. To. Fuck. Her?"

I exhale a sigh through my clenched teeth. "No, I did not." I grit out the words as my brother continues to glare at me. "For God's sake, Marco, she must be at least seventy."

"So, what the hell did she see in there?" he demands. "It better not have been fucking porn magazines or something like a sex doll."

"Why do you always think the worst of me?" I exclaim in a slightly injured tone. Marco and Alessio practically brought up me and our youngest two siblings after our parents were killed, and they've never entirely got out of the habit of acting like parents to us. It's fucking annoying at times like this, but I try to remind myself how much responsibility they had to take on after our father murdered our mom—before our father was himself killed. Yeah, our family is pretty fucked up.

"Maybe we should try to persuade her to come back," Alessio suggests. "We can promise her that Millo will go to confession every day for the next week."

"I'm telling you, there are no porn mags or sex toys in my room," I insist.

But neither of my brothers are listening to me. "Nah, a week won't be enough." Marco shakes his head. "He'll have to go to confession daily for at least a month. That might swing it—you know how religious Savona is—"

I slam my hand down on the desk. “I’m not fucking going to fucking confession for the next fucking month!” I growl. “I’m telling you, she didn’t see any porn mags or sex toys.”

Marco narrows his eyes at me. “Then why the hell has she just run out on us after looking at you like you’re the devil?”

“It’ll be the goddamn mess in that pigsty that he calls his bedroom,” Alessio drawls as he sits back in his chair across from the desk.

“For fuck’s sake,” Marco snaps.

“It isn’t that bad,” I defend.

Alessio looks at me like I’ve grown two heads. “It’s like a warzone in there. I don’t know how you can even tolerate it.”

“Just because it’s not like your bedroom doesn’t mean that it’s a warzone,” I huff, my arms crossed over my chest as I glare at my brothers from where I lean against the bookshelf in the office.

Marco’s hands rest across his desk, and his expression tells me that I’m in for a good chewing out if I don’t play my cards right.

“Dealing with your room on a daily basis warrants hazard pay,” Alessio clips.

“We can’t all be obsessive neat freaks like you, dickfa—”

“Enough,” Marco growls. “She quit this morning because of your room, Millo. That makes it your problem to fix.”

“I hardly think that’s why—”

But his icy stare makes me snap my mouth shut. This is an order, not a suggestion.

“We have other things to be doing,” I start cautiously, hoping he’ll realize there’s a better use of my time. Things I need to be doing to ensure operations run smoothly. We each have a job to do—Marco as capo, Alessio as consigliere, and me as enforcer. And me ensuring that others are kept in line means that my brothers have the time to do what they do best: lead.

“Alessio and I will handle the business side. You fix the problem you created. It’s not up for discussion. You have forty-eight hours.”

“You want me to find someone within two days? You’ve got to be kidding me...”

“That’s more than enough time to vet and hire someone. I’m sick of this place looking like a complete mess.”

“Yeah, it’s disrupting my zen,” Alessio adds, probably just to annoy me. “And as we’ve no maid now, that means you’re cooking dinner tonight. And make sure it’s got some vegetables.”

Alessio’s so fucking fussy. I shoot him a dark look before turning back to Marco.

“Marco, come on...”

“What part did you not understand? Get the fuck out there, and fix the issue.”

I bite the inside of my cheek and nod. It isn’t worth it to argue. The moment he leveled that deadly stare at me, I was done. This is my job for now, whether I want it or not. “Fine,” I growl. I turn and leave his office, the door banging shut with a hollow thud behind me.

Two days. I can find someone in two days...

Making a pit stop at my room, I let my gaze move around the place. It’s not so bad, but maybe it might be a good idea to tidy up a bit later. Then, grabbing my gym bag, I jog down the stairs.

Between the time it’s taken to stretch and run the property as a warmup, I’ve called countless agencies and maid services. How can none of them have a single maid available?

The moment I mentioned our last name, each conversation halted with profuse apologies and the offer to put us on a waitlist until someone meeting our needs comes up. It’s a bunch of fucking lies.

The last agency I’d spoken with laughed at me. Actually laughed at me.

No, that’s a fucking understatement. The woman cackled a sound of extreme hilarity, and she didn’t stop for the next thirty seconds, finally catching enough breath to explain to me that none of the maids who were open for work would ever consider taking the job. The Marchianos have a reputation: hired one day and fired the next.

We’re not that bad; we simply have requirements—and no one seems to meet them. I shake my head. Marco is going to fucking kill me.

I growl in frustration before tossing my phone back into my bag and focusing on something I can control. Something that never fails to keep me grounded.

I'm in the gym we have in our mansion. The comforting thud, thud, thud of my wrapped knuckles against the canvas punching bag eases the tension riding my shoulders. Again and again, I jab at the bag before pulling my shirt from my head. A brief glimpse of the ink that decorates my arms and back catches my eye: an outward expression of the demon inside me.

Unlovable.

The word whispers through my head, and I swallow the bile that burns my throat. Monster. Thug. Beast. That's what the world sees when it faces me. A creature capable of only bloody and brutish things. A savage. I was more than glad to fill the role they chose for me before I knew what was happening or what it meant. I'm their villain.

My hands squeeze tighter, and I hit the bag harder, feeling my wrapping stretch and snap. I don't care. I need the sting to keep my mind in here, in the gym, rather than where it has no fucking business going.

Thud, thud, thud.

Even the metallic scent of blood doesn't make me stop.

Finally, putting my hands on my knees, I gulp air like a drowning man. Each inhalation through my nose feels like torture and heaven all at once. I suck down more oxygen before I stand up. Reaching for my water bottle, I squeeze my eyes shut and let the cold water pour over my hair and neck.

The knot holding the long, thick strands of my hair back from my face unravels, my strands swishing back and forth against my skull as I shake them out like the animal the world thinks I am.

The irony of it isn't lost on me, but I have better things to fucking deal with than how acceptable my hair is to society.

I scrub my battered hand down my face. Our mansion is a complete mess right now, and dealing with my furious brothers is a pain in the ass. I know I need to fix this fucking mess—but how the hell am I going to do it in only two days?

