

## CHAPTER 32

ROSA

The atmosphere of the house has shifted.

It's different. Buzzing with excitement and anticipation.

It's palpable as I set down breakfast in front of Ethan. My thoughts haven't stopped tumbling since the other morning with Camillo.

Divorce.

He made it sound so simple when he brought it up. It's anything but. Grayden is too well connected, too entangled into Chicago's world of money and power that he'll find a way to ruin me and take Ethan away.

And he'll take Camillo down with us.

There's no quick solution. Money can't fix it like Camillo suggested.

And yet a part of me yearns to see it happen—so that I can be Camillo's in body, heart, and soul.

It's a fantasy, of course. A pipe dream that keeps me up when he's fallen asleep.

He asked me if I was his. I want to be, but that fear in the back of my mind won't go away. What if he gets his fill of me? What then? What's my backup plan?

“So, what's the plan?”

The conversation at the table snaps me back to the present. The family is returning from Italy today—well, Marco and Alessio's wives and children are; Debi and Danio have decided to stay a little longer in Italy. The threat from the feds has finally been dealt with, so it's safe for the family to start coming home.

“They'll land in about an hour,” Alessio says. “We'll pick them up and get lunch. Then, I'm not sure.”

“Then we’ll clear out for a few hours so that you two can spare us the nightmares.” Camillo’s taunting smirk doesn’t quite light his face like it usually does.

“You’re not any better,” Alessio replies.

“We’ll make sure food gets delivered to your room.”

“You’re hilarious,” Alessio says in a dry tone, but there’s a spark in his eyes—something warm and longing.

“Thanks for noticing,” Camillo quips.

“Rosa.” Marco says my name like an order. I’ve gotten used to it, but it still jolts me in my chair—I’m too preoccupied with my own thoughts.

“Yes?”

“Can you prepare a special dinner tonight, please? I’d appreciate it.”

“Of course. What did you have in mind?”

“I’ve left a list.”

“What the special dinner for?” Ethan pipes up.

“The family is coming home,” Camillo says gently to Ethan. “They’ve been, uh, away on vacation.”

“More family?” Ethan asks around his bite of eggs. I can see the anxiety bubbling in his eyes. New people, despite how comfortable we’ve gotten here, bring unexpected challenges. Loud sounds and new temperaments to learn.

“A few more. Every bit the traditional big Italian family.”

“Should I make sure their rooms are ready?”

Camillo’s brow scrunches. “No. They’re already as clean as a whistle. You don’t have to do anything extra, Rosa.” He leans closer to me, his lips pressing to my temple.

“They’re going to love you.”

The conversation around me blurs, as does the rest of the day. Despite what Camillo said, I spend a little more time in the rooms than normal. There’s not a speck of dust to be seen, nor a single item out of place. I even give Camillo’s room an extra special

tidy, even though I know none of the new arrivals will be going in there; although, to be fair, Camillo has been making a big effort lately to be tidier—putting clean clothing away instead of flinging it onto the floor, throwing away his car magazines once he's read them, not leaving empty drink cartons in the room. As I originally suspected, he's actually a pretty clean person—it's just clutter that's his downfall.

That evening, around dinner, I listen to everyone as they catch up on all the news of the women and children. And after helping to tidy up, I opt for some one-on-one time with Ethan, leaving the family to catch up with one another.

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Both Juliana and Cate have welcomed me with open arms and appear eager to get to know me. Ethan is nearly always whisked off to do something with the other kids, with a quick glance at me to make sure it's okay. It eases some of the tightness in my chest and gives me a weird feeling of warmth inside me to see him tentatively making friends.

The conversation is pleasant and loud with excitement, like it always is each morning now. Today, like the last few days since their return, there's not much for me to do. Cate insists on handling mealtimes while Juliana is happy to take care of most of the cleaning. I help where I can by tidying the rooms, but I've taken a step back, careful not to step on their toes.

My eyes lift and land on Juliana. Marco's beautiful wife has stunning blue eyes and swishy black hair. Both she and Cate are kind and warm, and the women ask questions about Ethan and me to get to know us every chance they get.

And then there are the conspiratorial looks we share at dinner as the men talk gruffly about business problems and the clubs and casinos. I've never had friends outside my immediate family, let alone women who actually seem to want me around. My heart squeezes at the effort they're making with me.

I push back my chair. "I should get started on my work." There's not much for me to do, but I need to do something. I need to feel like I'm contributing.

As I pass with my small caddy of cleaning supplies, I watch Ethan quietly coloring beside a few of the younger kids. It warms my heart to see it, but the small flinches every time one of the older children yells breaks my heart. It's better than it was when they first arrived back from Italy. And slowly, he's breaking from his shell. He smiles often now, and when he and Camillo are alone, the energy he has triples.

After cleaning Camillo's bedroom and bathroom, I turn down the hall to one of the guest bathrooms. But the guest bathroom is spotless. Someone's already cleaned it this morning.

Turning on my heel, I grip the caddy tightly, and numbness spreads through me as I reach and take in the now vacant and spotless kitchen. Not a speck of dirt or dish to be cleaned.

Heaving out a sigh, I replace the caddy and catch sight of a small piece of paper on the counter. It's a note from Juliana inviting me to join them all tonight for a BBQ outside, plus an additional note at the end to say that they've already taken care of the grocery shopping for the meal.

Every responsibility I have has been taken and handled. Braced against the counter, I will myself to push past the worry that's worming through me. And racing alongside it is gratitude for including me. I don't understand what's wrong with me. This jumble of emotions billow in and out like a ship's sail as anxiety swirls within me. Numbly, I move through the kitchen, wiping a spotless glass as my mind spins around the stark facts staring me in the face. I move from room to room, straightening the already neat and tidy areas again and again on autopilot.

Because without something to show how valuable I am, there's no reason to keep someone like me around.

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In the evening, I sit in the backyard with everyone. The men see to the BBQ while the women chat and the children play.

The buzz of nature and laughter fills the balmy Chicago air. I should be enjoying it. I should soak it up for all it's worth. But I can't. My fingers fidget in my lap as conversation surrounds me. I nod and smile at the right moments.

Even the warmth of Camillo's fingers playing with the loose hair at my shoulder absentmindedly does nothing to soothe whatever crack has fractured open inside me.

Time ticks by, minute by minute, as the sun drops low behind the tree line that surrounds the property, an easy conversation bouncing between the others. With a feigned yawn, I excuse myself.

Camillo's room—my room—is bathed in the fleeing golden rays. My skin itches as the tears I managed to keep away tonight threaten to spill past my eyes.

“Rosa?”

I stumble to my feet at his voice through the door. Trembling, I fiddle with the bed covers as if I’m getting ready for bed.

The door clicks shut. I can feel the heat of him before anything else. It’s comforting, and yet it scares the hell out of me.

“Rosa?”

“Hmm?”

“What’s wrong?” Camillo’s soft whisper strangles me further.

“Nothing...” I gnaw my lip, hoping he won’t pick up on why I can’t meet his eyes. He’ll know I’m lying if I look at him. But this isn’t a problem he can fix. “I’m just tired.”

“Rosa, look at me.”

Reluctantly, I turn around and muster one of those practiced smiles. One that crinkles around my eyes to make it appear genuine despite it being anything but.

“What happened?”

“What do you mean? Everything’s fine. I enjoyed the BBQ. You should go back and join the others.”

“Not before you tell me what’s going on.” The arch of his brow is all I need to see to know that he’s not buying my acting. Another thing to add to the list of things I fail spectacularly at. “Tell me,” he whispers firmly, tilting my chin toward him. Those deep brown eyes of his searching my own for some hidden answer.

The words lodge in my throat. My gaze darts to the side. I don’t want to cry. Furious, frustrated tears gather regardless.

“Rosa.” His voice caresses over my face as he leans toward me, forehead pressing against mine.

I squeeze my eyes shut, banishing the sting.

“Please, baby?”

Those two words crumble what little resolve I cling to. “I’m not needed here anymore,” I choke out.

“What?”

“You don’t really need me anymore now that everyone’s back.”

Camillo jolts like I’ve slapped him. Something flickers across his face. A feeling bubbles into my gut as rejection fizzles to life in his eyes, hardening the warm chocolate of his irises into steel. “You want to leave?”

I’m unable to look at him. “You hired me to do a job. With everyone here, there’s no point. I don’t want to overstay my welcome.”

“Rosa,” he breathes into my hair, before pulling back. “You don’t have to leave just because there’s nothing to clean or cook. You can’t possibly overstay your welcome here. Because you belong here.”

Those eyes, now warm once more, search mine as he towers over me. They sparkle with some emotion that makes my stomach flutter.

“You have a place here.” His thumb swipes over my bottom lip before cupping my chin. “Ethan has a place here. So, you’re staying. Even if you’re not needed to clean or cook as often.”

“Okay,” I exhale with a smile.

And Camillo’s lips tilt up into a knee-weakening grin before he claims my mouth. “Good. Do you want to go back down?”

“I’d rather stay here, if that’s okay?”

“Even better.”

And I can’t help the soft smile as he pushes me back onto the mattress.

Camillo’s lips along the column of my throat banish the thoughts, leaving a welcome blankness.

I lie back on the bed, trembling with desire. He crawls over me like a predator, drawn to me with an intensity that makes my emotions spin out of control.

I watch him as he peels off my clothes and then his. His hands spread my legs, his lips kissing all the way up from my calves to my inner thighs.

I'm consumed by the intoxicating scent of him and the sight of his hard desire for me.

I feel his hands gripping my ass and hauling me closer to his mouth.

And then he holds my thighs wide open as his hungry tongue devours my pussy, sending shivers down my spine.

I try to pull away as the tension builds. But he won't let me, intensifying his teasing and sucking on my clit until I can't even control my moans.

Every lick along my seam brings me closer to the edge...

And when I finally reach it, I scream out in pleasure, my whole body shaking under his tongue.

His guttural sounds vibrate against my core, his tongue swirling over my clit before pushing into my entrance and making me arch my hips up into him.

I feel myself succumbing to the pleasure again, my mind hazy, yet my body responding eagerly to every touch.

His fingers tease my tits and tug at my long nipples, pulling more moans from my lips.

I push my breasts into his touch, unable to resist the pleasure coursing through my body. "Camillo..." I whisper, my voice husky, feeling utterly desired and wanted by him.

"Get on your hands and knees—show me your pussy," he commands, pulling me up onto all fours and positioning himself behind me, entering me with an intensity that leaves me breathless.

I let go completely. I'm his in this moment—physically and emotionally.

"I want to possess you, claim you, make you mine in every way possible," he rumbles into my neck.

With every thrust into me, I push back against him, needing him deeper inside me.

Every inch of him is pounding against my walls, driving pleasure to every single nerve ending, his balls slapping against my pussy with every thrust.

And when we reach our climax together, it's even more intense than ever before. "That's it, baby," he growls. "Come for me..."

Afterward, we lie panting, and he scoops me into his embrace, stroking my hair back from my forehead as he presses a deep kiss to my lips.

I feel content and fulfilled. He's captured not only my body but also my heart and soul.

For a few long minutes, we lie there in a blissful state. And as his hands caress me, any doubts fizzle into a blissful state of mind fog. I sink into it, welcoming the distraction, wanting it to stay and drag me under so I don't have to face the reality looming in the distance.