

## CHAPTER 39

### CAMILLO

“Where the fuck have you been?”

I drop my bag on the floor. Two days ago, I left the gym, but I was no calmer than when I entered it, so I found another outlet for my anger.

“You didn’t fucking answer your phone,” Marco carries on. “And you didn’t show up at the casino last night.” He’s looming in front of me, eyes narrowed.

“I needed to blow off some steam.”

“And you couldn’t be bothered to let anyone fucking know? We thought...”

My brow scrunches. The look on Marco’s face is foreign. His brow is etched with lines, and he looks like he hasn’t slept in a few days given the bags under his eyes. He’s worried. The expression knocks some of the frothing rage from me. “What happened, Marco?”

“Someone hit the warehouse. We thought—”

“What the hell is wrong with you!” Alessio storms into the lounge, murder in his gaze as he heads toward me. Behind him, Cate and Juliana and the kids follow, worry etched into their faces.

My heart clenches. Shit.

“Office. Now.” Marco’s expression is fierce.

I follow wordlessly. It’s been two days. And I haven’t been able to stop myself from seeking out trouble. Needing to feel in control of my life. Needing to be ruthless and physical—just like the way the world sees me. Like she sees me.

With demons clawing at my skin, I’d visited a list of people who needed a reminder of what the Marchiano name meant, what the Fratellanza meant. I’d left without a word to my family. I’d thought it’d be a distraction. Something to stem the bleeding of my

heart as it poured out. All it'd done was give me more time to think—about Rosa and Ethan. About losing her. And losing him. About how ill-suited I am for her.

From the moment I laid eyes on her, I always knew she'd never be mine. I'm not a good man. And yet I've deluded myself into thinking I could have her—have them both. I've done nothing in my past to deserve someone like her by my side.

The thought of sleeping in my bed, surrounded by the scent of her, was enough to make me ill. I'd turned off the side of the road and lost what little was in my stomach before I decided it wasn't worth it to continue down that line of thinking. Instead, I lost myself in the feel of flesh beneath my fists, the coppery smell of blood, and the high of an illegal boxing fight to drown my sorrows.

“Sit.”

I drop into the chair. “Marco, I—”

“I talk. You fucking listen.” This isn't my capo talking now. It's my brother. And somehow that makes this worse. At least with him taking on the role of capo, I could pretend and explain away my absence as being due to work demands. But I can't do that with him as my brother. He'll ask questions. Poke his nose into my business.

“What the fuck is going on? You don't just go out and act like that without telling us! We thought—”

“I wasn't thinking. I'm sorry.”

“You're sorry?”

“What do you want me to say?”

“I want a fucking explanation. Where the fuck were you? And why have you come home smelling like a damn bar? I want to know what the fuck made you think going dark on us was a good choice. Fuck, Camillo...”

He sags into the chair, staring up at the ceiling. The soft mutter under his breath makes me feel bad. It's not so much an admonishment as it is the worry easing out of his tightly wound body. The man sitting before me looks older, his nerves frayed. The lump in my throat is hard to swallow.

“Well? I'm waiting.”

I don't have the right words to tell him what's going on. Whatever storm is still raging inside my chest hasn't calmed at all in the last two days. There's no cure that'll soothe the darkness which is eating up my self-control. "She's not coming back."

His brow scrunches. "Rosa?"

I nod.

"She actually said that?"

I heave a sigh. "She told me she doesn't need the job here anymore. Her father left her some money, so she's got options now. She can leave Chicago for good."

"Uh huh."

"What?" I exhale, dragging my battered hand down my face.

"I swear to God, Millo, if you weren't my brother—"

"Comforting as I know that your threat's gonna be, let me stop you there. Look, I'm sorry I worried you, all of you. I just needed a distraction."

"You've got a phone for a fucking reason."

"Yeah. Yeah, I got it. Are we done?"

"Not by a fucking longshot." I sink further into my chair, buckling up for the longest lecture of my life. You'd think I was fifteen again, having started yet another fight in school, and not a fucking grown man with the way Marco rips me a new one. Eventually, once he's said his piece, he sits back, his face no longer reddened with anger. He looks tired. "So, that's it? You're just going to let her leave without a fight?"

"What?"

"You said she wasn't coming back. And you're letting her leave?"

"It's her choice. Plus...she doesn't want someone like me."

"Someone like you? What the fuck does that mean?"

I purse my lips, waiting for him to catch up with what I've spent the last two days coming to terms with. I can't keep her. Keeping her means hurting her, and that

thought makes my stomach roil. She deserves the chance to be free and happy. To start afresh away from Chicago and that piece-of-shit husband of hers.

I'd only ruin her. Trap her here in a world that would tear her apart. The judgmental looks and whispers would only grow. She deserves better.

After all, that's what devils do, isn't it? Corrupt the pure things in life just for the hell of it.

I've always known deep down that whatever beast I am, I'm not made for a happy ending.

"She deserves the chance to be free." I'm not looking at Marco as I say the words. My gaze is on the dark view outside the window. The barest hint of Chicago's skyline skims the horizon as the deep darkness of the night starts to chase away the dusky tones of sunset. The inevitable change settles something in my gut. An acceptance of some kind.

"And if she wants to stay?"

"She won't. There's no reason she'll stay with us." I want to add with me, but I don't. "We're not the right kind of people for that."

"Bullshit."

A bitter laugh bubbles in my throat, and I lift my gaze back to Marco. He doesn't get it. As much as they tried to protect me, it wasn't enough. "It doesn't matter. It's how the world works, Marco. After the funeral, she'll be back to collect her things and get away."

"Are you going?"

"Going?"

"The funeral, dumbass."

"I... No."

"You should."

"I really shouldn't."

“Not looking like you just stumbled out of a fucking dive bar and smelling like one, no. But you should go.”

“Why? I’ve made enough problems for her just by showing up at her family’s home. She doesn’t want me there.”

“Did she say that?”

“No. But she didn’t say the opposite either.”

“Millo,” Marco huffs, “go take a damn shower, change, and go to the funeral. If anything, do it to just show your respects to Rosa. I think you owe her that much.”

The look Marco levels with me isn’t one I see on his face often. In fact, I’m not really sure what to make of it. But it’s clear that if I’m not going to go because of Rosa, he’s going to make me.

I sigh. “Fine.”

“Good. Now if you fucking ever do that shit again, being my little brother isn’t going to save you from getting your ass kicked.”

My mouth twitches. “You’d throw your back out, old man.”

“Go.”

I let the door close behind me. Alessio, Cate, and Juliana are all huddled together when I emerge. It’s clear they’re waiting for details, for some explanation to ease the worry they felt as sharply as Marco had. But unable to talk anymore for now, I decide I’ll have to fill them in later.

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This is a terrible fucking idea.

I should have fought harder against this when Marco strongarmed me into coming.

St. Hyacinth’s Basilica is packed. But unlike the last time I was here, the church isn’t decorated in delicate pink and white. Instead, people in black and dark gray line the pews, their soft murmurs punctuated by a few stray sniffles, while floral arrangements fill the space with their sickly scent.

My eyes sweep the area, noting the security. From the messages I've received from Rosa and Ethan, I know they haven't had any unexpected visitors or contact.

"Uncle Millo!"

Ethan's little shout echoes through the somber atmosphere. And I feel the laser stare of eyes on me. Weaving through the line of mourners, Ethan's small body rushes toward me. My heart hammers in my chest.

As self-conscious as I feel, I can't ignore him. I can't turn him away. I don't want to.

I squat down as his arms fling around my neck. That hollow feeling in my stomach grows, and yet something in my chest clicks into place. Acid burns my eyes and throat at the contradiction.

"Hey, buddy."

"Momma said you weren't coming."

"I..."

"I told her you would. Then we'll go home, right?"

I avert my eyes, not wanting to crush the kid's spirits. Rosa's watery gaze levels on me, and a small tentative smile pulls at her lips. She's beautiful. The days away haven't changed that. Bathed with the soft light from the stained glass haloing her perfect body, she's mouthwatering. Despite the modest black dress that seems to hide her curves, she's easily the prettiest here.

"This was supposed to be a closed ceremony." The loud comment snarled from Rosa's mother hits my ears as I rise back to my full height, Ethan gathered in my arms like he belongs there. The tutting response from Reagan seems to fill the room like a wave.

"C'mon, buddy, let's get you back to your mom."

"You'll sit with us, right, Uncle Millo?"

I shake my head, "Not this time. You should sit with your family."

"Oh." Ethan's gaze drops, and my heart seizes in my chest. Fuck. "Unless your mom says it's okay," I add quickly. Anything to rid that sharp pang I feel and the look on his face.

“Cyndie,” I say to Rosa’s mother, giving her a small nod. “The Fratellanza extends its condolences for your loss.” I grit out the words with reluctance—because that man deserves nothing of mine or my family’s sympathies. But I’m not doing this for them. I’m doing it for Rosa.

Cyndie’s tight lips twist, and I watch Rosa’s sister straighten up a little more.

I look at Rosa’s face, pink from the scene my arrival caused. “You came,” she says softly.

“Yeah.”

“Can he sit with us, Momma?”

“No, that wouldn’t be appropriate,” Cyndie snaps before Rosa can respond.

“It’s okay. I’ll find you later,” I jump in, not wanting to cause a scene, and I set Ethan down next to Rosa.

Her breath hitches when my fingers trail along her arm in passing. “Okay,” she says softly as she shoots me an apologetic look.

I step away, letting out a deep breath.

“What the hell was that? I can’t believe you, Rosa.” Reagan’s hiss circles around me as I settle into an empty pew in the back.

The service is more than Conor Davis deserves. A choked up Cyndie stumbles through her eulogy of Conor and their life together. Even Reagan puts on a show for all the church to see. It doesn’t escape my attention that Rosa isn’t included in this. My hand fists at my side.

Soon, it’s time for the burial. But the chilly air does nothing to chase the feelings in my stomach away. The soft patter of rain that drizzles the area only seems to heighten the dark feeling inside me—the feeling that I don’t belong here.

Conor’s black lacquered coffin is lowered into the family plot, and Reagan’s exaggerated sob hits my ears. It lingers and festers as the murmurs continue to make their rounds. Brute and thug are mentioned more times than I care to count.

But my attention is zeroed in on Rosa. Curled inward under the umbrella she holds, her fingers twist together, and she doesn’t hold anyone’s gaze longer than needed.

Fire licks my veins at the image. Rosa deserves to grieve however she wants, but something tells me this isn't her choice. It's theirs.

Back at the house, people mill about in conversation, reminiscing about Conor, Cyndie, and Reagan's life as some happy family, of all Conor's accomplishments in his life. My elbows brace against the bar, my back resting against its ledge as I watch the crowd.

"Who'd have thought she'd open her legs for that brute?"

The words snap my head in that direction, my hand tightening on the tumbler in my hand.

"From what Grayden's said, she's a bad lay. She must be good at other services, if you know what I mean."

"I doubt it. Have you seen her? She's a fat bitch. She'd put off any man with a body like that..."

Their boisterous laughter has me seeing red. The sound of cracking glass echoes around me as I slam the drink on the bar top. "What did you say?" My voice comes out as a growl.

Their grins fall from their faces in unison as I tower over them.

"You don't s-scare us."

I arch a brow at the stuttered declaration. I most certainly do.

"You can't do shit to us," the other slurs, pressing his pudgy finger into my chest. "Touch us, and I'll get my lawyer to sue you for everything you're worth."

My eyes drop to the digit pressing into my Italian suit, then back up at the man.

Hastily removing his finger, he lifts his drink with a feeble smile. "Plus, we're just having a laugh. Anyway, once you get tired of the mousy bitch, we'll gladly take her off your hands."

I squeeze my fist tighter at my side. My self-control is slowly slipping out of my hands. "Keep Rosa's name out of your fucking filthy mouth."

The man laughs like I've said the funniest joke. It's a bad mistake on his part. And he knows it the moment he feels and hears the crunch of his nose beneath my fist.



Chaos erupts around me as our bodies crash into the ground.

Each ragged breath seems to bring more rage than clarity to me.

I lunge at him again as my hands tighten their grip.

The slippery, viscous liquid of blood coats my knuckles as the haze of red turns even more intense.

Rough hands try to grab me.

But I rip myself free, my hands circling the throat before me until his cough and gasps are all I hear.