

## CHAPTER 41

### CAMILLO

I return to the mansion after dealing with a debtor. It didn't need to be done today—but I needed it. I needed the feel of warm blood on my knuckles. I needed a distraction after the funeral and Rosa's text that she's staying at her mom's house.

I walk through the mansion's front door. I'm home.

The house is quiet now, an unfamiliar stillness that feels like a heavy weight on my chest. I can still hear the echoes of Rosa's soft voice and Ethan's small footsteps. But they're just memories now, hanging in the air like smoke that suffocates me. They're gone. I know that. But I still can't believe it. And I don't know if it'll ever sink in.

As I look around myself, everything feels surreal. And the only thing that runs through my mind is the first day I drove Rosa here. And then I think about the first time I saw her smile, the first time I heard her laugh...and the first time I realized I was in love with her.

The house is so empty without her and Ethan. Ethan. Just the thought of his name makes my heart ache with such an intensity that I think it might burst. I scrunch my eyes shut, remembering the first time he wore his Marchiano baseball jersey, the first time he hugged me, and the first time he gave me that beautiful, unconditional love of his.

No, this isn't home anymore. It can't be my home without them here. I'm left just a shell of a man without them. I feel homeless, loveless...worthless.

I pause in the doorway of our bedroom, and it's like I'm frozen there. Reminders of her are everywhere—the smell of her perfume on the sheets, her hairbrush forgotten on the side, a book she was reading on the nightstand. But so much also feels different so that it no longer feels like the cozy nest we had together.

Rosa asked in her text if I could send over some more of their clothes and things. My brothers and Lorenzo are in the living room, sorting through the toys, but I can't move. I can't step out of this room and leave it all behind. My brothers are trying to help, but their presence only underscores how much I need them—because I'm barely

holding it together. They move around the house, carefully collecting items that belong to Rosa and Ethan, placing them in boxes with a tenderness that I can't bring myself to emulate.

The thought of packing up Rosa and Ethan's things, of folding away the life we had, it's unbearable. By doing that, it's like I'm erasing us, piece by piece, until there's nothing left but a skeleton of a man who doesn't know where to go from here. I hear Marco call my name, his voice firm and reassuring. He's always been the one who holds it all together. And I know he's just trying to do that for me right now, but I can't help feeling like I'm slipping through his fingers.

I walk into the living room, and it's a mess with toys everywhere—the majority belong to Marco's and Alessio's kids, but alongside those are a small pile of the ones belonging to Ethan. Alessio is taping up a box, his jaw tight. He looks up at me as I walk into the room, and for a moment, he just stares at me. I can see the sadness in his eyes and the concern.

For a moment, I watch the way his hands move, careful and precise. He's always been like that, methodical, focused. It's comforting in a way to see him so steady when everything else feels like it's falling apart. But it also makes me realize how lost I am, like I'm drifting away while they stay anchored.

Lorenzo hands me another box, and I take it without a word. I lift the flap, and taking a glance inside, I see more of Ethan's toys, small and colorful, but they feel heavy in my hands. I can't help remembering the way his face would light up when he played with them, the sound of his childish chuckles filling the room. I rush to close the box, not quite trusting myself to keep it together if I look any longer.

Marco picks up from under a chair a small toy model of a red Ferrari. The toy car is one of Ethan's favorites, the one he used to roll across the floor with that sweet, determined look on his face. I reckon Ethan is going to grow up to love cars as much as I do. I hold it in my hand and let the cool metal press into my palm, and for just a moment, I'm transported back to the day when I bought it for him, his delighted giggles filling this very room while Rosa gently scolded me for spoiling him. Closing my eyes, I try to hold onto those sounds, but they slip through my fingers like fine grains of sand. "Do you want to keep this one?" Marco asks in a quiet voice.

I just shake my head, forcing myself to open my eyes and look at him. "No. It belongs to Ethan," I say, my voice barely above a whisper. "He should have it."

He nods and places it carefully in the box I'm clutching. As I watch him do it, I feel a strange mix of emotions. One part of me desperately wants to cling to these things, to

keep them here in the hope that it will somehow make them return. But the other part of me knows that holding onto these objects won't bring the people I love back.

I slump down on the couch. The house feels foreign now, like it's not really mine anymore. I run a hand through my hair, trying to steady myself. The grief is too big, too overwhelming.

Marco sits down beside me, not saying anything, just there. Just his presence next to me is comforting, but it also makes the emptiness inside me feel even bigger. I don't even know what to say to him, how to explain the hollow ache in my chest. So, I don't. I just sit there, the two of us side by side in silence.

Lorenzo carries down the two bags with Rosa and Ethan's clothes that Juliana and Cate packed for them. "This is the last of it," he says, his voice strained. For once, he isn't the terse, authoritative mafia boss that the world always sees; Lorenzo went through a lot when his kids' mom died, and I can tell he feels an empathy for my situation—he understands what it feels like to lose everything.

I nod, not trusting myself to speak.

"I'll put them in the car," Lorenzo says.

"No, wait!" I grit out. Leaping to my feet, I stride into the laundry room and collect something for Ethan. His Marchiano baseball shirt. Even though he won't be needing it at the Davis residence, I want him to have it. I need him to have it. I want him to remember that he was, and still is, a part of our family. He's one of us—forever.

Folding it carefully, I trace my fingers over the threaded embroidery of his name on the back. Then I place it in the bag and zip it up, trying hard but failing to keep the sting from the back of my eyes.

Lorenzo, Marco, and Alessio load the boxes and bags into the car, and I stand there watching as a soldier drives it away, taking pieces of my life with him. The house feels empty now, as does my heart. And I don't know how to fill that emptiness, how to be whole again when the best parts of me are gone.

So, I just stand in the middle of our living room, letting myself stare at the remnants of a life that feels like it's been ripped apart. My mind starts spiraling into the worst possibilities. What if they don't come back? What if this is it? The thought terrifies me. I can't imagine a life without them even though over the last hour, I've been packing away their things like this is the end. I struggle to breathe as my chest tightens, but I can't let myself break down. Not yet. Not in front of my brothers.

“They’ll come back,” Marco says, coming up behind me and gripping his hand around my shoulder. He’s trying to offer some reassurance, but there’s an uncertainty in his voice that mirrors my own.

I don’t respond. I can’t, because I don’t know if he’s right. God, I want to believe him, but the truth is, I just don’t know what to do next and how to make things right.

I stride off, saying that I need some time to myself. And walking to the gym, I close the door shut softly behind me.

A few months ago, I would have said that nothing could make me feel like this.

Nothing could make me feel this sad.

But standing here alone, I can’t do anything.

Except fall to my knees.

And let the tears leak from my eyes and scatter onto the ground until I’m sobbing.

As my heart breaks into a million pieces.