

CHAPTER 6

CAMILLO

My fist tightens around my glass of water as I glower at Marco. “What the fuck was that?”

Alessio gives us each a glance before looking back down at his plate. Smart guy.

“What was what?” he snaps with his trademark impatience.

“That.” I point to the kitchen where Rosa no longer stands. She’d quietly mumbled an excuse and moved into the hallway. “It’s her first fucking day!”

“Why should I pretend to be nice now when I won’t be later?” he clips. “There’s no point in sugarcoating shit.”

Walking in on Marco hovering over Rosa like that sent red across my vision. I only stopped myself because Rosa was almost in front of me, and there was no way in hell I was knocking her aside just to pummel Marco.

What the hell has gotten into me?

She’s the maid. She works here, and I warned her what they were like. It’s not my problem how Marco and Alessio talk to her. But it sure as shit feels like I need to stand between them and Rosa. She’d gone pale, and her eyes glistened with tears—but she’d nodded mutely, just taking it.

“You,” I start, leaning forward in my seat, “told me to find a fucking maid. I found one.”

“She needs to learn, Millo,” Alessio says in a serious tone, swallowing a bite of his salad with a grimace.

I eyeball Marco. “You don’t have to be so pissed off with her, Marco,” I say as I eyeball him.

“I’m always pissed off in case you haven’t noticed.”

“Look, I know you’re missing Juliana and the kids, but don’t take it out on Rosa.”

“Why do you care? And did she tell you that she can cook?”

“Yeah, she said that she could kind of cook,” I say slowly. “Why?”

“Judging by the look and taste of this food, it’s obvious she was lying just to get the job. And there’s no way you, AKA Mr. Greedy Guts, is going to put up with a maid who can’t cook. I should just give her the flick now. It looks like she’s gonna be a crier as well, and you goddamn know that I can’t fucking stand that.”

“Look, Marco,” I begin, but my words come to a halt as Rosa tiptoes back into the kitchen, her face a beautiful cold mask as she looks past us and stands by the stove. Her hand trembles as she starts to clear up.

“You,” Alessio clips at Rosa, “and I need to talk.”

Rosa lifts her head before dropping her eyes, and as I watch my brother glare at her, every muscle in my body constricts.

“You messed up my closet. I have a system for a reason,” he growls as his knuckles whiten around his fork.

“Everything is sorted into color-coded order,” Alessio continues. “If you can’t do it right, don’t goddamn do it.”

“For God’s sake, Alessio,” I say. “Just about every item of clothing you own is black, so how can it have an order?”

“Even black has different shades, numbnuts, and my black clothes are all organized into a graduated order.”

“Cry me a fucking river,” I snap, taking another long gulp of my water. “Give her half a chance, and she’ll learn your anally retentive ways.” Why the hell am I defending her?

Rosa just nods and turns back to the sink, and we get on with the meal. And although it smells okay, the food is far from good—and I can tell that my brothers are thinking exactly the same thing. The steak is overcooked and dry, the fries are still raw and hard in the middle, and the salad dressing is too sharp with way too much vinegar. Thank God Marco doesn’t point this all out to her—it would probably finish her off.

Conversation between my brothers fills the room, but I don't join in unless addressed. I spend most of dinner watching her.

From the outside, the woman is a skittish, meek, little kitten who a big bad wolf like me could play with and ruin until nothing's left. But there's something else there as well.

Secrets.

And secrets are a dangerous thing.

Because the more I watch her, busying herself with meaningless crumbs and specks of dust none of us would have ever even noticed, the more I sense there's something else which she's not telling us.

I'm not like Alessio who considers every angle before the attack. And I'm not like Marco who's like a finely honed knife. I'm blunt and to the fucking point. A bludgeon we use against anyone we deem unworthy. It's my job to tear down anyone and everything in order to protect our family and the Fratellanza. And as much as I'd like to think Rosa isn't a threat, she's a puzzle I can't figure out. And that's worse.

I need to figure it out. Then maybe I can explain this feeling in my chest and the way she draws my attention unlike anyone else has ever done. Because once I know what makes her tick, I can protect my family if things go sideways...

"Let's get ready to head back out." Alessio's words interrupt my thoughts.

"What?" I blurt out

He raises a brow. "The casino. We have things to do, Millo." His eyes lift toward Rosa, making sure that she's not paying too much attention to what he's saying. "We had a meeting about it, remember?"

"Right," I say after a moment's hesitation, pushing back my chair and standing.

And we waste no more words as we move from the table and down toward the front door. Like my brothers in front of me, I tuck the gun into the back of my belt. We pile into the SUV and clear out all thoughts except for what we need to do next.

"Alright, let's get this shit over with," I murmur.

I drag a hand down my face as I sag against the seat of the SUV. It's dark outside, and inside the vehicle, it feels like a lifetime since we had dinner.

I rub my jaw as I jump down from the SUV. Exhaustion pumps through me as I jog up the steps to the front door. On instinct, my gaze darts around the property, watching and waiting.

The electric perimeter around us is fully functional, and there are guards strategically placed in all key locations, but that doesn't stop me from checking every time I enter or exit the property. It's a habit. The thought of something happening to my family bothers me more than they'll ever know.

Alessio pushes me forward. "Move. I'm tired. I need to shower and sleep."

"Knock it off," I growl as I move into the foyer, shaking my head. The estate itself is quiet, and I strain to listen to anything out of place. Nothing.

The first thing I notice is that the place is clean—a spotless kind of clean. The kind it hasn't been since the day the women and kids hightailed it to Italy and the maid quit.

The second thing is the smell. The smell of something sweet takes its place. It's distracting and aggravating all at once. It smells good, but it also reminds me of Rosa sitting in the SUV. Goddammit. I shouldn't be entertaining thoughts of her at all.

Alessio brushes past me with a rough shoulder check before stomping up the stairs, leaving me at the bottom. Marco jerks his chin to the corner of the office where a drinks cabinet stands. God, yes, please.

Pouring two tumblers of whiskey, he hands one to me with a scowl.

I know what he's going to say, so I try to preempt it. "Marco, there wasn't anyone else."

But he continues to glower at me.

"You know, we've got a terrible reputation with the agencies..."

He narrows his dark eyes at me. "Quit making excuses for your shit choice of maid, Camillo."

"Aw, Marco, you don't know what I had to go through. One woman at an agency actually laughed at me."

The scowl on his face eases a little, replaced by a murderous intent that's directed at the old bat who had the audacity to laugh. I wouldn't like to be in her shoes tomorrow.

We walk side by side into the lounge, but he comes to an abrupt halt in front of me just as he crosses the threshold.

“What?” I murmur.

Marco stalks forward, and I file in after him, my muscles tensed and my fists bunched, ready to defend us all if need be.

“For fuck's sake. What are you doing in here?” he roars at someone I can't see until I take another few hasty steps forward.

Rosa seems to have been sleeping on the couch. She leaps up and jumps out of her skin, nearly tripping over her feet. She blinks once, twice. “I-I'm sorry. I was...” Her gaze darts around the room with a wide-eyed look of alarm as if the walls might hold the answer.

Marco's arms cross over his chest. “I asked you a fucking question.”

Jesus, the smell in here is even better than in the foyer—it smells sweet and delicious.

“I know, sir.” Her gaze drops. “I was just finishing the dusting, sir. I just closed my eyes for only a second, I promise...”

I try to school my face into a neutral expression, but I can't help my brows from shooting up. We've been gone around four hours, and it's midnight now—has she been working that whole entire time?

Marco's glare at her doesn't change. In fact, it seems to only worsen. “That's not what I meant.” His face is contorted into an expression I know only too well.

Rosa blinks, sucking her trembling lip between her teeth. Her brow crinkles. “I'm sorry, I don't understand,” she whispers.

He walks forward, and I stride to slip in between them, giving my brother my shoulder as I turn to Rosa. “What he means is why are you still up?”

Again, her face morphs into confusion. “I'm, um, working.”

“That eager to lose your job?” he snarls.

“Marco,” I say in a warning tone as I turn to face him. I can see the flicker in his eyes before he settles them back on Rosa. The expression he wears used to make me flinch, but that was before I learned to read between the lines. Rosa doesn’t have that experience.

“I’m not fucking paying you to work late hours and through the night,” Marco growls.

“I understand, of course, sir.” Her hands twist in front of her. “I don’t expect you to pay me extra...”

She thinks he’s concerned about how many hours she’s doing because of what it will cost us? “I don’t think he’s worried about you charging us more,” I say dryly. “He just doesn’t understand why you’re still up and doing more work after you’ve already spent the whole day working.”

Her brow furrows in puzzlement. But before I can try to explain it any further, she mumbles out another apology and dashes down the hall into her tiny bedroom.

I shake my head. Why the hell did she think just now that she had to apologize? It’s us who are taking advantage of her if she thinks we expect her to work fourteen-hour days.

Marco storms his way to the kitchen, downing his drink, and heading straight to the whiskey kept in there for a second shot of liquor.

“You could be a little nicer to her.”

“Should I? You think you get to tell me how to treat my employees now because you what? Hired her?”

“No. I just—” I pause and look around the kitchen. “She’s been here less than a day and already cleaned most of the place. The kitchen is fucking spotless.” I gesture to the sink, no longer filled with dishes, gleaming under the glow of the lights. There’s even a stand of cupcakes that look heavenly. That’s what the delicious smell is.

I make a beeline for them. I take a sniff—lemon sponge with buttercream. My mouth waters. Sign me the fuck up for this. I’m starving now. I unwrap the cake from its paper cup and take a bite, holding back a moan of pleasure as the flavors explode on my tongue.

“I’m just saying, you weren’t this harsh with the others on their first fucking day.” I swipe a stray crumb from my lips as I talk around another bite of moist cake. “You told me to fix the problem, and she’s the fix. You need to lay off a little.”

Marco raises a brow, impatience flickering across his face. “Don’t talk with your mouth full,” he grits out. Now he wants to talk about fucking table manners? Sometimes, he still acts like the parent that he had to be to me and our youngest siblings when our parents died—it’s like he can’t ever shake that role off entirely.

I swallow, trying not to roll my eyes. He crosses his arms and studies me for a second as I polish off the last bit of cupcake before grabbing another. I’ll work it off in the gym tomorrow. “I’m just saying that you snapping at her like that is the reason it was so fucking hard in the first place to find someone.”

“You finished?”

“Yeah, maybe.”

“Why do you care, anyway?” Alessio’s voice sounds from the doorway where he leans with his arms crossed. He’s freshly showered and has come back down to get some water.

“I don’t care,” I say over another mouthful of cupcake. God, if she bakes like this all the time, I’ll have to up my gym reps. “She’s already as scared as a baby kitten. Marco’s just going to make it worse. That’s all I’m saying. Look, not a fucking single agency wants to give us a maid. We’re too terrifying. So, if she leaves or you fire her, then we’re back at fucking square one.”

But even as I say this, Alessio’s words keep echoing in my mind. Do I care? And why...?