

The Devil's Fire by Mariam El-Hafi Chapter 101 - 110

288 (Vouchers

"Her mother is fun to hang out with. I totally see where Althaial got her personality from." Rafaelle chuckled, sitting on the couch with his laptop.

"She's hot though." He commented with a grin.

"Did you come to flirt with her or did you do something useful?" I gave him a blank look.

"Ah, sorry. I actually forgot she's your mother-in-law." He laughed as if he had said the funniest thing. I rolled my neck in annoyance. I was not in the mood for his bullshit. Especially because I was leaving without Althaia.

"Rafaelle." I snapped at him to get to the point.

"Right. So, I have been working on how to crack the code to track those phone calls she has been getting. Whoever she's in contact with, is doing everything they can to make sure their cover is not blown. While you all disappeared and left me alone, I came up with an idea. And since none of you would have been able to do it, I came to do it myself." He smiled big, looking proud of himself.

"I don't need to hear your life story, get to the point." I said impatiently and he gave me a sour look.

"Someone's a bit cranky..." He muttered under his breath, making me glare at him.

"I worked my usual charm to get close to Jacinta because I needed her phone. I installed this software I developed on her phone, and the next time she gets a call, I will be able to trace it. Well, that's what I hope... I haven't exactly tried it out yet but I'm a genius! I'm sure it will work." He rubbed his hands together as he looked excitedly at his laptop.

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“Good. I want to get to the bottom of this as fast as possible. Antonio has been keeping track of her but she never met up with anyone, only going to the bank.” I frowned, wondering why she was using the shop for laundering money and for whom. It wasn’t for her own pleasure and there wasn’t any unusually large amount of money around in their house. Neither in the shop, making me wonder what we had missed.

“We need to check the banks she has visited. She probably has a safe with documents somewhere we don’t know about.” Lorenzo commented and I nodded in agreement.

“I will see what I can do. It can take some time, but it’s not impossible to get access to the banks’ database.” Rafaele started to work on his laptop just as the door opened, and Arianna entered.

“We’re ready to leave.”

“You will have to leave with Cara. We have something to take care of.” I told her and she let out an annoyed sigh.

“Why are you the only ones allowed to have fun? I want to kick someone’s ass too.” She scowled and crossed her arms.

“I need you to go back. We’re having issues with the shipments and I need you to deal with it. Dom could use your help.” I explained to her, knowing she wouldn’t leave if I didn’t assign something for her to do. It worked as she slowly let out a grin, excitement showing in her eyes.

“Wait, does that mean you’re cool with me and Dom now?” I smirked before turning to look at Lorenzo, who was frowning at her.

“What do you say, Lorenzo? Are we cool with it?”

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“I need to have one more talk with the fucker before I decide.” He said, still not happy about the fact one of our men had taken a liking to our baby sister.

“Lorenzo, no! Your ‘talk’ consists of anything but talking! It’s not fair that you can be with someone and I can’t.” She challenged Lorenzo. He walked up to her, looking at her but he didn’t say anything as they sent glares at each other.

“If he as much as hurts you or makes you cry, I will cut his throat open.” He promised her. Arianna let out a scoff.

“You don’t think I will get to him first if he does?” She raised her brow, making him let out a wicked smile.

“Good.” Without saying anything else, he kissed the top of her head as a form of acceptance.

“Great! We will leave then.” She smiled brightly and turned to leave but stopped when Rafaelle made a sound that caught out attention. He was looking concentrated and started to furiously tap on the keyboard.

“What’s going on?” I walked over to him and looked at the screen, only seeing pages scrolling fast with different letters and numbers.

“She got a call. It got disconnected after five seconds but that’s enough for me to make it work...” He was focused as he continued to type code after code at a fast pace, determined to finally trace the call while muttering words and numbers under his breath.

“...And... here... we... go!” He stopped typing and a map showed up, a red dot blinking at the location.

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“Mastermind Rafaelle did it again!” He punched the air and got to his feet as he kept praising himself.

“Get ready to move.” I said to them, getting a nod from Lorenzo. I looked back at the map, staring at a blinking red dot.

The location was on the other side of the town and we left as soon as Arianna and Cara made it safely to the airport. I carefully scanned our surroundings when we came to a stop. The sun had set and the location was in the middle of nowhere with a beat-down warehouse with trees surrounding the place.

Lorenzo had parked the car out of view in case someone were outside. Guns were drawn out as we moved forward, making sure we wouldn’t be spotted by whoever was in there.

We parted ways once coming closer to the warehouse, Lorenzo going around the other side to make sure the coast was clear on that side. But everything was quiet as we continued to move and around.

Too quiet.

I met with Lorenzo and Rafaele at the back of the warehouse where a door was. I looked at Lorenzo, giving him a nod and he pulled down the handle. The door was unlocked and I held my gun up in front of me as I walked in, looking around the dark place only to see empty shelves.

We walked further inside, almost nearing the middle when we stopped. My body tensed and my blood was boiling at the sight in front of me.

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Large pictures were hung on the wall on the opposite side of

But they weren't just any pictures.

There were pictures of all of us during our stay here. Pictures of me and Althaia together. Pictures of Luca and Giovanni, Lorenzo and Cara, Arianna and Rafaele. Even pictures of Antonio and Jacinta.

Someone has been keeping track of us all.

My jaw clenched in rage and I fisted my hands as I looked at one particular picture.

My breathing was coming out heavy in anger. A picture of Althaia and her mother, their faces crossed over with red paint spray. The words right under made me lose it.

REST IN PEACE

"It's a setup... It's a fucking trap!" I shouted. My body was shaking in anger as I turned to look at Rafaele and Lorenzo.

"We need to get to Althaia now!."

Before I could make even take a step towards the door, the sound of multiple cars appeared with headlights streaming into the warehouse through the windows.

“Get down!” I threw myself to the ground behind a shelf for cover just as gunshots were fired into the warehouse. We were surrounded and shots were fired from different directions and shattered the windows.

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Althaia

After taking a shower and getting dressed in my nightgown, I made my way downstairs where I saw my mother had already lit the fireplace for some coziness.

I couldn't help but feel a little empty now that Damiano wasn't here anymore. It was crazy how fast I had gotten used to him being around me to the point I would feel a little lonely whenever he wasn't here.

“I made some tea. It's decaf.” My mother smiled. She handed me a mug and sat next to me on the couch with another mug in her hands.

“Thank you.” I said gratefully. I loved having a cup of tea in the evening and it always made me feel relaxed.

We sat quietly together as we sipped our tea but it was a comfortable silence with the burning wood crackling. I turned to look at my mother when she let out a sigh and looked at

“I must say... They are a lot more different than I had

expected.” I raised my brows in surprise before a smile appeared on my lips.

“They are. Especially Arianna and Rafaelle.” I chuckled and she rolled her eyes at the mention of Rafaelle.

“That boy needs a good smacking or two with my wooden spoon. Shameless boy.” She scoffed, making me laugh.

“Ah, yes, Rafaelle truly has no shame. You have no idea how many times has teased me with his stupid comments.” I shook my head a little while smiling as I remembered his dumb jokes.

“One time, he made such an inappropriate comment about me Damiano punched him in the face.” I grimaced a little at the memory. I quickly realized I probably shouldn’t have shared that with her since she wasn’t fond of him. But to my surprise, she was actually smiling about it.

“Even though I hate to say it, it’s obvious he cares about you. They all do... And...” She took a deep breath and smiled while caressing my hair.

“I know I haven’t been supportive of your relationship with him... but I have just heard so much about them and I got scared for you. You are my priority. I want you to be safe and happy.” My mother gave me a soft smile as she spoke, and tears formed in my eyes.

“I can see you’re happy, and if it means you’re happy with him then there really isn’t much I can do about it. I don’t want to stand in your way of happiness.” A lump in my throat formed, feeling relieved that she had accepted our relationship and had seen a different side of him. I knew there was still some progress between them that had to be done but this was such a relief.

“And now, you’re going to have a baby... My God, when did you get so grown?” We chuckled a little, both with tears in our eyes as she pulled me into a hug.

“I know, I still can’t believe it.” I sniffed and wiped my eyes, smiling.

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“Also, there is something I need to talk to you about.” I felt the nerves build up as I had no idea how to break it down to her, or how she would react but it was better to just tell it as it was without beating around the bush.

“He wants me to live with him when I go back for Cara’s wedding.” I said quietly, watching her reaction. She let out a sigh and held my hand.

“I figured that much out...And so soon?” My mother looked at the fireplace.

“It only makes sense that you should live with him. But I need to talk to him before I let you go.”

“Talk to him about what?” She looked at me again, giving me a small smile.

“You don’t need to worry about it.”

“I hate that answer. He always gives me that answer.” I sighed but she just let out a small chuckle. I didn’t pressure her into telling me because I knew I wouldn’t be able to get it out of her. Maybe once she had the chance to talk to Damiano I would get to know about it too. I have a few ideas on how to persuade him into telling me.

“What does it feel like to give birth?” I decided to ask. I kept thinking about it since the stuff Cara had said to me.

“Cara said one’s buttohole explodes in the process.” My mother was sipping her tea but choked before letting out a laugh.

“That child talks too much. Don’t listen to her, your buttohole won’t explode.” She shook her head in amusement.

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“It feels like bad period cramps. Just a hundred times worse and then it just progresses into something far more painful...” She grimaced a little as if remembering the pain.

“That is not helpful at all, mom!” I looked at her in shock. Something worse than period cramps? My period cramps were already bad enough, forcing me to stay in bed because of the pain.

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“But don’t worry! You will get the epidural and you won’t feel a thing. As soon as I got it, I slept through most of it, feeling no pain at all.” She quickly reassured me, making me feel more relaxed about it.

“Thank God!” I put my hand up to my chest as I breathed out in relief. I did not know what to do if I had to go through that much pain and it was not like I had any choice but to endure it. Though, I was still not too excited about giving birth mainly because I had no idea how the pain would be.

I could only hope it wouldn’t be too painful.

We ended up chatting for a while about everything as we sipped our tea. It was late and I couldn't keep my eyes open for much longer.

"I will go to bed now. Goodnight, I love you." I placed a kiss on her cheek and she gave me a soft smile.

"I love you, too. Goodnight, honey."

Once reaching my room, I grabbed my phone only to get disappointed when I didn't see any text messages or calls from Damiano. Cara had texted earlier once they had arrived safely. They have been back for hours now, making me wonder if he got busy with work the minute he got back.

I got comfortable under the blanket and placed my phone next to me in case he decided to call, but tiredness quickly washed over me as soon as my head hit the pillow and I fell into a deep sleep.

A loud sound made me jolt up in bed. I looked around my

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dark room in confusion, but there wasn't anything out of the ordinary. Quick footsteps were making their way towards my room, making my heart beat like crazy in fear, having me staying frozen, not daring to move. The door opened and I saw it was my mother, her breathing coming out fast as she quickly got up to me.

"We need to leave, now!" She grabbed my hand, dragging me out of bed in a hurry. That was when I could see her.

With blood on her face and a gun in her hand.

"Mom, what's happening?" I said in a panic, words barely coming out with how much my voice started to shake. She put her hand to my mouth to quiet me and moved us away from the door when we heard another set of footsteps approaching.

I held onto my mother tightly and she was focused on the door, aiming and ready to fire.

She quietly pulled me behind her when someone stopped in front of my door. The door got slightly pushed, opening it a bit further than it already was. My

heart pounded like crazy when a pair of black gloves holding a gun entered our view.

My knees almost gave up on me when he stepped inside.

He was dressed up in all black and his head was covered, not allowing me to see what he looked like. He scanned the room, looking in the opposite direction from us. My mother wasted

no time and pulled the trigger, shooting him in the back of his head. I let out a strangled scream as I watched him drop dead in front of us.

She quickly grabbed my hand again as we ran out of my room

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while she scanned our surroundings before running downstairs.

My eyes went wide and a gasp escaped my lips as I saw two more dead bodies on the floor, one with a knife deep into his chest. My mind was going crazy, fear building up and taking over my body. If it wasn't for my mother dragging me behind her, I would have collapsed right on the floor.

We busted through the door, heading for the car immediately, and that was when I noticed that everything was absolutely dark. There were no lights in the house or the streets.

My mother pressed down on the gas once we got inside the car, a scream coming out from me when someone suddenly jumped on the hood of the moving car, aiming his gun at us.

"Hold on!" My mother yelled to me and I quickly reached for the grab handle to steady myself as she made a sharp turn, making the man fly off. It took me a few tries to put my seatbelt on with how hard I was pulling it, and at this point, I had trouble breathing and my entire body was shaking in fear and panic.

"That damned bastard took me by surprise! I should have known he would do this sooner rather than later." She said angrily to herself while driving so fast everything was a blur.

"W-what's going on? what's happening?!" I screamed as I looked at her. Then my eyes widened even more when I -remembered Luca.

“Where’s Luca? Did you kill Luca?” At this point, I was just screaming everything that came to my mind.

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“No! I haven’t seen him and I don’t know where he is.” This information should have given me relief. Instead, my

heartbeat was going even crazier, thinking he was dead somewhere.

I went to reach for my phone, only realizing I didn’t have it with me.

“I need a phone!” I yelled out in frustration. I had to make sure he was okay and he wasn’t dead.

“There’s a phone in the glove compartment.” I quickly opened it and grabbed the phone, my fingers hovering over the numbers, trying to recall his number but my mind suddenly went completely blank.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me.” My mother said when something caught her eye in the rearview mirror. I looked back and saw two cars had appeared, driving fast to catch up

to us.

“Althaia, get down!” She pushed me down in the seat just before the sound of gunshots could be heard. She tried to swerve to avoid them but it was difficult since we were on a long empty road with only trees surrounding us. I had my eyes squeezed shut, trying to calm down just a little so I would be able to remember someone’s phone number.

“They are aiming for the tires.” My mother continued to swerve sharply from side to side, making me snap out of it and quickly dial a number.

“Luca!” I yelled into the phone when it got picked up but no one said anything.

“Althaia! Are you okay?!” I let out a breath of relief when I

Dividing into pages now

heard his voice.

“Thank God you’re alive!” I almost sobbed into the phone.

“I don’t know what’s going on. People broke into the house and we’re now in the car, trying to get away but two cars are following, shooting after us.” I quickly tried to explain the situation to him, stumbling over the words in the process.

“We’re driving as fast as we can to get to you. We got ambushed! They came out of fucking nowhere and took us by surprise!” He said in pure anger. I swallowed hard, thinking about how they had managed to do this and why they were after us.

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“We can see the cars now. We will take care of them from here.” I heard the gunshots coming from his end through the phone. I looked in the side mirror, now seeing the cars behind us swerving from side to side to avoid the shots, but it still didn’t stop them from shooting at us.

Just as I opened my mouth to say something to Luca, my head was violently smashed into the car door, making me drop the phone as we lost control of the car. The rear tire was shot and my mother tried to control the car but it was of no use as it kept forcing us to the side of the road and into the

woods.

The car was violently shaking as it took us over the bumpy and uneven ground at a fast speed. Everything was happening so fast and my throat closed, not allowing me to make a sound before we violently crashed into a tree.

I groaned as I held my head in my hands, the feeling of something warm and wet touching my hands. My body felt heavy when I tried to look up and I slowly blinked to regain

focus in my sight. The door to my side opened and I saw my mother trying to talk to me but it sounded muffled. As if my head was underwater.

“Althaia, we need to run!” Her voice pierced through. The adrenaline rushed through my veins and made me quickly react, numbing the pain in my body as I hurriedly got out.

We ran fast deeper into the woods’ just as we heard the other cars stop, doors opening, and footsteps following us.

Gunshots were fired, making me scream, trying to cover my head with my arm as if it would help.

“Keep running!” Luca shouted to us and more shots were fired.

I was breathing heavily, already out of breath but somehow found the strength to run faster. Even though my lungs at this point were begging for me to stop and take a break. My mother held my hand tightly, her breathing coming out faster too, leading us through the woods, trying to get away as far as possible from whoever was after us.

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Damiano

They continued to fire into the warehouse. Bullets flew over our heads while we still were on the floor. I focused on listening to how many were currently firing, and based on the direction of the bullets coming through the windows, my guess was eight people. Two people on each side of the warehouse, surrounding the building.

Now, the question was how many were out with them, not firing at us.

The fire ceased and I looked over to Lorenzo and Rafaele, seeing they were fine. I signaled to them to spread out as I got up on my feet quietly. In such situations, it was always the smartest to pretend to be dead and work quietly as possible to take them down.

I looked around the warehouse and made my way to a dark corner where I would be able to take cover. It was completely dark outside now with the headlight turned off. But it was even darker inside with only some streams of moonlight providing a bit of light in a few spots.

I crouched down behind a shelf in the corner that hid me from being seen.

The door slowly opened but no one entered to make sure there wouldn't be any attacks from our side. At this point, I was fucking pissed, ready to get my hands on them as fast as possible so I could get to Althaia.

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Althaia.

The thought of her being in danger right now made me see red and my body was shaking in anger. But I had to force my body into a Cold Zero.

Void of any emotions.

I couldn't allow myself to feel anything right now and make any rash decisions. I wanted this to be clean and fast without any hassle. We were outnumbered but with how many, I still wasn't sure about that and I needed my head in the game.

The faster we were done with them, the faster I would be able to get to Althaia and make sure she was safe. Arianna's words about Althaia having great survival instincts echoed in my mind, and for once in my life, I prayed she and our baby would be okay.

They had to be.

Closing my eyes, I let out a long breath, shutting my body down from feeling anything. My focus was getting ready for those bastards who dared to make such a move on us.

And I was thirsty for blood.

I was going to make sure every single drop of theirs was going to be spilled, and find the motherfucker who wrote that shit on the walls with the pictures.

I snapped my eyes open when I heard movements. They were

slowly entering the warehouse. One by one, carefully

checking around for us to see if they could find our dead bodies on the ground.

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I almost wanted to scoff out loud if they thought it would be this easy to kill us. But I was about to show them how easy it was to kill them.

Just, as I had thought, eight of them walked in and split up. One came closer in my direction but I was out of his view. I was still crouched down, remaining still and silent as I waited for him to come closer.

I had been trained for this my entire life and I knew how to move without making a single sound. I was born to be a leader and raised to be a killer. And whoever was behind this, had apparently thought they could take me down by creating a trap and making a surprise attack. This wouldn't be the first time someone has tried something similar, making me almost laugh in amusement if they thought they would be any different from the others.

One thing they would all have in common was death.

And I was ready to drain theirs.

He was close to me now but hadn't spotted me yet as he looked around fast in a nervous manner. I observed him as he came closer to get a sense of what type of person I was dealing with. But the way he moved immediately let me know that this wasn't a person who was skilled enough, and he had absolutely no idea what he was doing.

And again, for the first time in my life, I fucking rolled my -eyes. They had hired worthless pieces of shit to get the job .done.

He quickly turned around to make sure no one had sneaked up on him. It was just too bad that he had his back to me now and was standing so close to me.

I got up fast and grabbed his head, covered his mouth with. my hand, and snapped his neck without making a sound. His body fell limp against mine and I quietly moved him into the dark corner and laid him down, taking his gun and tucking it into my waistband behind my back.

I moved along the wall, staying low and hidden in the shadows to get to the next one. I knew Lorenzo and Rafaele had taken care of some already as I only spotted four now. One of them started to whisper something to his

comrade. I frowned when I didn't recognize the language but I couldn't care less about it right now. I wanted this to end.

Now.

I picked up a piece of broken glass and threw it across the warehouse to distract them. They immediately reacted to the noise and split up in two. The others went in the direction of Rafaele and Lorenzo, leaving the ones closest to me completely unaware that I had now sneaked up behind them.

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I grabbed my knife and wasted no time and slit his throat open. I quickly moved to the next one when he turned around, giving him no chance to react as I stabbed my knife deep into his eye. I watched him drop dead to the ground at the same time I heard another body drop on the other end.

I moved quietly between the shelves, scanning my surroundings to make sure they were no more inside. I saw Rafaele and Lorenzo coming out of the shadows, signaling to me it was clear from their side.

Now, the question was how many we would be facing outside.

As we moved closer to the door, Lorenzo grabbed a dead body close to him and threw it out of the door. As soon as the body got into their view, gunshots were fired from outside, letting us know there were definitely more than five people. But none of them made an attempt to get closer to the door.

Looking over to Rafaele, I gestured to him to go to the window from his end while I went to the already shattered window at my end while Lorenzo kept close to the door.

Nodding at Rafaele, he stood up fast and fired multiple shots out of the window. He took cover once the others found him and started to shoot in his direction. While they were distracted, it allowed me to look out of the window and scan the situation outside.

Ten more people were outside, but it wasn't a problem as I moved fast and fired, taking three men down immediately. They scattered around and tried to hide behind the trees and out of my view but they just hadn't realized they would still be in Lorenzo's view as he shot from the door.

They continued to shoot recklessly at us in the hopes of

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hitting us. But it was useless as the warehouse was a lot sturdier than expected, giving us a great cover as we waited for the fire to cease.

A bunch of amateurs we were dealing with as they ran out of bullets at the same time. Just as I heard them trying to reload had me move faster than they could. I took out the extra gun I had as I moved along the long window and fired at them. I was getting impatient and this had already taken too long already.

“Cover me!” I yelled to Rafaele and Lorenzo as I jumped out of the window. I ran towards one of the cars, throwing myself down to the ground, seeking cover behind it to quickly reload my gun before I got to my feet again.

I ran between the trees, shooting to create a distraction for Rafaele and Lorenzo to get out of the warehouse. I shot the last person in my view and the whole area suddenly went silent as I tried to listen for more movements.

“To your right!” Rafaele shouted, and I looked only to see I had missed one person who had hidden behind a large tree.

A stinging sensation appeared on my upper arm as he moved faster than I could move out of his way, giving him the opportunity to slash me. Furious, I grabbed his arm, twisted it, and punched him repeatedly in the face. I pushed up against the tree, smashing the back of his head repeatedly against the trunk. I grabbed his knife and stabbed it in the throat with so much force it went all the way through and hit the trunk of the tree.

“Piece of shit.” I sneered out and took a look at my arm. He managed to slash me pretty deep as blood trickled down my

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arm. But I couldn't be bothered by it right now as we ran towards our car, getting in quickly as Lorenzo sped away.

I grabbed my phone and called Luca, only for it to go straight to voicemail.

“Rafaelle, track Althaia down, she’s wearing the earrings.” I said as I tried to call Antonio. My anger was only fuelling the more it rang, letting me know it was bad from their side.

Fuck!

“Antonio! Tell me what’s going on.” I ordered as soon as I heard it pick up. His breathing was coming out harshly, and I gritted my teeth as I knew I couldn’t expect anything good.

“Fuck, man. I have no idea what happened. We got ambushed. They broke into the house but they got out and drove away. We followed as soon as we could.” He said hurriedly but stopped talking as I heard more gunshots coming from his end.

“Althaia?” I growled out, feeling my heart beating faster as I waited for his answer.

“I... I don’t know. They fled into the woods. I tried to follow but more of these bastards kept coming!”

“Fuck!” I yelled out and punched the dashboard. I tightened my hold on the phone, feeling completely powerless in the car as I couldn’t do anything.

” got their location!” Rafaelle turned to Lorenzo, giving him directions as he drove as fast as he could.

“Hang on, we’re on our way.” I said before throwing the phone.

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to the floor in frustration. I grabbed my head in my hands as I started to feel all sorts of things now.

Althaia, baby, hang on. I’m on my way.

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Althaia

We kept running further into the dark woods. Running between the trees to try and lose the people who were after us and to try to avoid the bullets as much as we could. By now, I was running significantly slower as I was struggling to get even just a little bit of air, and my lungs were begging me to stop.

My legs were ready to collapse at any moment now.

But I had to keep going.

Despite what I told Damiano, I knew I still wasn't fully recovered. I could easily feel how weak my body was now compared to before. I was panting and my body was covered in sweat but I somehow still found the strength to keep going. If it wasn't for my mother dragging me, and pushing me to keep going, I would have already been caught and dead.

"Over here." My mother led us behind a large tree, able to hide both of us. We had managed to get away from the men and she had also managed to take down a few of them with her

gun.

I collapsed to the ground, gasping for air so much it hurt. My body was trembling, my heart was beating like crazy and I felt sick. I wanted to throw up so badly but I somehow kept it in and tried to focus on calming down my breathing. My mother sat down on the ground and rubbed back, trying to help me with my breathing as much as she could.

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I moved and rested my back against the tree, closing my eyes when I started to feel lightheaded.

"It looks like we lost them. For now." My mother whispered while looking around. I opened my eyes and looked at her, grabbing her hand in mine and holding it tightly. I tried to be as quiet as I could be but it was hard as I was desperate for air to fill my lungs. But it sounded like, we were alone for the moment.

The woods were silent and I couldn't hear any gunshots or movements, making me wonder how long we had been running because we were pretty deep into the woods.

"Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?" My mother turned to look at me, her eyes scanning me and I shook my head.

"I think I'm fine." I panted. I couldn't tell if I was hurt or not because right now I couldn't feel a thing. My body was still pumping with adrenaline, numbing any pain I should have.

"Are you okay?" I asked her and she nodded while she kept scanning our surroundings.

"Mom... What's going on?" I whispered to her, my voice coming out scared and tears welling up in my eyes. She looked at me, with a pained expression on her face as she swallowed hard.

"I'm so sorry..." She whispered back, her eyes glistening while holding my hand in hers.

"This was not supposed to happen. I just wanted to protect you... Everything I did was for your protection. But I failed." A tear escaped her eye and she pulled me into her, hugging me tightly into her body. I had already tears streaming down my cheeks as I sobbed into her shirt, wrapping my arms tightly

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around her waist. I was overwhelmed with feelings, everything coming at me at full force, each emotion trying to dominate the other.

I couldn't say anything. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. My throat was tight, giving me trouble to even swallowing my own saliva as I just continued to hold her tightly.

We sat there for a while and I had finally calmed down my breathing. We were sitting entirely in silence in the woods with only the leaves making noise with the light wind blowing.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know what else to do... He threatened to hurt you while you were there and I didn't know what else to do. I had to do what he said to protect you." She suddenly said, making me lean back to look at her.

"Wh-what's going on? Who are you talking about?" I frantically looked around her face as she looked at me with a sad expression.

"I should have told you the truth from the beginning.... Althaia, honey, listen to me." She looked at me with a determined look.

"Whatever happens to me, you stick with Damiano. He's the only one who can protect you from him."

"Don't say that! Mom, please, you're scaring me... Who are you talking about?" My breath halted as I waited for her answer. My body went cold the more I waited.

"Let him swear to always protect you. Do you promise me, Althaia?" She looked at me firmly, and I couldn't do anything but nod.

"I don't have time to go into detail but -" The sound of a twig

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Vouchers.

snapping interrupted her, making her quickly snap her head towards the sound. My body froze, not daring to move an inch or make a sound. Not even to breathe, afraid to give away our hiding.

Light movements could be heard, the crushing of the leaves indicated that we were not alone anymore but it sounded like there still was some distance between us.

Another set of footsteps appeared and light whispers could be heard. I tried listening in to what was being said and I immediately picked up they weren't speaking English but a different language. I focused to pick up on the words to see if I could recognize it.

It was Korean.

I frowned the more I tried to focus on their conversation but they were talking in hushed voices, only making me pick up very few words and making me wonder why these people were after us.

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We got up on our feet as quietly as we could, ready to face whatever was going to happen. My heart was once again pounding and my legs were slightly shaking but I had to force my body to calm down as this wasn't the time to be scared and weak.

I tried to listen to them, and it sounded like there were only two of them. I had to gather my strength to at least be able to fight back, suddenly remembering Arianna's instructions on always going after the vital points.

I was too focused on trying to hear their conversation when I was suddenly pushed hard to the side, making me land on the ground with a grunt. The sound of a gun firing made me quickly snap towards the sound, seeing my mother was aiming in the direction where I previously stood.

My eyes widened when I saw another person coming from behind my mother.

"Behind you!" I screamed just in time for her to turn around and pull the trigger.

But it was empty.

"Althaia, run!" She yelled just as he lunged after her, but she blocked his attack and used the gun to smash him in the head. I hurriedly tried to get up to help her, only to feel a strong kick coming out of nowhere, hitting me right in the ribs. It forced me on my back and air completely left my lungs.

I drew in a sharp breath and rolled to my side, violently coughing while gasping for air as pain spread out in my body. I screamed out in pain when a fistful of my hair got grabbed, forcing me onto my feet.

1/4

"Let her go!" My mother screamed at him, trying to get to me. But she was trying to fight off two people at the same time.

Something in me snapped.

I clenched my hand into a fist and aimed for his face. I barely made any contact with him as he leaned back, avoiding my punch. Instead, he grabbed my arm to twist it painfully behind my back.

“Fuck!” I screamed out. But I still tried to hurt him in some way, but he blocked me. I was violently pushed against a tree, his body completely pressed up against mine with his forearm against my throat, choking me.

I tried to get out of his hold, clawing his arm in the process but it was impossible. He was much stronger and bigger than me. His arm was crushing my windpipe, making me gag as I tried to gasp for air. I tried to push him away but my push was too weak as I looked at him. His eyes were the only thing visible to him, and he just looked back at me, tilting his head slightly to the side as he observed me.

My eyes were slowly drooping, black spots appearing in my sight when he suddenly removed his arm from my throat, and I immediately took a sharp breath.

The moment was short-lived when he grabbed me again.

My back was against his front as he held me in a headlock with my arms behind my back. I had a hard time focusing, feeling my body getting weaker by the second. I blinked slowly a couple of times, and I saw my mother being held by the two men with a knife against her throat, forcing her to stay still.

2/4

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“It’s me you want. She has nothing to do with anything. Let her go!” She glared furiously at him and tried to break free but the more she moved, the more the knife got dug into her, cutting her skin, and blood trickled down her throat.

“You should have thought about that. Now, she has to pay for your mistakes, too.” I could hear his sinister smile as he spoke. He sounded almost amused.

“It’s a pity, really... She’s almost too pretty to die.” He let out a laugh as if it was the funniest thing ever, making the other two chuckle along with him.

Gaining a few of my senses back, I trashed around in his hold with all the strength I had left in my body.

“Let us go!”

“She’s a feisty little one.” He tightened his hold on me, almost crushing me as he showed just how strong he was compared to me.

“Maybe I should enjoy you a little before snapping that pretty neck of yours.” He whispered in my ear, dragging his nose alongside my cheek.

“H-he’s going to kill you.” I choked out.

“And who’s going to kill me? Your boyfriend? I have some news for you; he’s dead.” My body stiffened as he chuckled. My heart felt like it was going to explode with how fast it was beating.

“You’re lying...” My voice was barely audible. I looked at my mother with tears in my eyes. She went quiet too at his words, her eyes were wide in shock.

Vouchers

“I have no reason to lie. And now, you’re both going to taste the same fate.” Just as he said that the man plunged the knife deep into my mother’s stomach. She let out a breathless gasp, her mouth slightly open as she looked at me, tears escaping her eyes.

MONG

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I stopped breathing as I looked at her with wide eyes, no sound escaping me. The little strength I had disappeared and my body went limp against his body with tears streaming down my face. My mother closed her eyes and she winced in pain as he pulled out the knife, only to plunge it right in again.

“Mama!” I screamed at the top of my lungs, watching her slowly slip out of consciousness when he stabbed her one. more time.

A hand clamped on my mouth to stop my screaming and I vigorously thrashed around, moving my entire body to get out of his hold while I cried for my mother.

I watched her fall to the ground, blood soaking her shirt fast. She slowly blinked, looking at me for a last time before closing her eyes entirely.

My throat tightened completely and I stopped moving, my body going numb as I looked at her. I blocked everything out, only seeing her and feeling my heart being ripped out as I stared at her numbly.

I didn't know if I was breathing. My mind was completely blank, stripped of all of its senses as I couldn't tear my eyes away.

The men said something but I couldn't hear what they were saying. All of sudden their voices sounded faint and at a great distance. Even though they were standing right here.

There were some movements but I couldn't be bothered to look around. I was in shock, waiting for my mother to get up on her feet. To show me she was okay and still alive. But slowly, my mind started to understand why mother was lying on the ground, unmoving.

I didn't realize I got laid down on the ground. I was still looking in the direction of my mother. That was when I felt hands going up on my legs and under the nightgown I was wearing, reaching for my underwear and sliding it down my legs.

My entire body was void of any emotions. As if they didn't exist within me.

I looked away from my mother and looked up at the night sky. Some of the branches were blocking my view from seeing the entire sky.

My legs got wrapped around him as he leaned over me, now blocking the entire view of the dark sky. I looked at him, my eyes cold and dead as they could be as I kept looking into his eyes. I saw just how wicked they were and full of lust as he settled between my legs.

"I'm going to kill you." I told him blankly. I felt his chest vibrate against mine as he let out a small chuckle. He moved around a little, ready to do what he wanted to do with me when I spoke again in the same tone.

"I don't think you understand... I said I'm going to kill you." I grabbed the big rock under my hand and smashed it into the side of his head with as much force as I could.

He yelled out in pain as he fell to the side, holding his head in his hands. I moved quickly, keeping him down by straddling his waist, and grabbed the rock with both hands. I lifted it high above my head before hitting his face with it.

And again.

And one more time.

I screamed at him, watching the blood flow out from his face, watching him become lifeless underneath me.

But I didn't stop.

I kept going as the rock came in contact with his face. Again and again until his brain mass splattered out.

"Let go of me!" I screamed when hands grabbed me from behind. I kept screaming, tears blurring my sight as I tried to get out of their grasp.

I wasn't done with him. Anger filled my body, and I wanted to continue to smash his face.

"Althaia, stop!" I stopped moving, my breathing coming out harshly as I glared at the body. Arms were wrapped around me from behind and keeping my arms down to my sides before I got turned around.

"Luca... Help me... My mom." I cried out to him desperately. I turned to look at her, only to see Antonio by her side.

I looked around, seeing the two other men on the ground, dead.

"Are you hurt?!" Luca asked. I was about to answer him when I let out a strangled breath and squeezed my eyes shut in pain. I held onto Luca tightly and my hand clutched onto my stomach. Painful cramps were all I felt, feeling like I was being stabbed over and over again.

"Althaia!" I opened my eyes, relieved when I saw his face as he

ran to me.

“Shit...” Luca whispered next to me and Damiano suddenly stopped running.

He was a few feet away from me and I looked at him in horror when I felt it. His expression mirrored mine. I looked down, seeing large streams of blood flowing down my shaking legs.

“No...” Damiano breathed out in a whisper. I looked at him, tears silently making their way down my face as he closed the distance between us. He pulled me tightly into his body and his arms around me as if he was trying to protect me.

My body went limp against his body. The little strength I had, vanished into thin air.

My eyes closed and darkness washed over me, taking me out of my misery.

4/4

Chapter 110

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Damiano

I watched her as she lay on the hospital bed. She had needles injected into her arms, her forehead was bandaged and the same with her legs and feet. She had been running in the woods bare feet and got them scratched up badly. The same with her legs.

Her entire body was bruised and slowly starting to show discoloration.

“When will she wake up?” I asked Ellie while she changed Althaia’s bandages. It had already been over twenty-four hours and she still hasn’t made any sign of waking up.

“It’s hard to tell... Her body shut down and is trying its best to recover after experiencing trauma. And with the blood loss too, I wouldn’t be surprised if she needed another day or two.” Ellie sighed and I gave a short nod.

I couldn't help myself but look down at Ellie's small baby bump and then look at Althaia's flat stomach.

My chest tightened at the sight.

I averted my eyes and looked out at the window, trying to shut down from feeling anything at the moment.

But fucking hell, it was hitting hard.

I was happy for Antonio and his wife. Still, the universe was laughing in my fucking face by doing this to me. I knew I was being punished for every fucking sin I had committed.

Punishing me for every single life I had killed and taken pleasure in doing so.

And the worst one of it all, I was being punished through the one I loved.

And the universe took away our baby.

How could this happen? How could I let this happen to her when I promised I would protect her?

I turned to look at the door when it opened, seeing Arianna stepping inside, carrying a bag with her and Giovanni followed right after. Giovanni's eyes immediately went to look at Althaia, his fist clenching as he looked around her face.

He had lost it when he landed and found out what happened. Luca, too, went furious when he saw the blood. It made me realize how close she had become with my men and the way they had come to care for her.

It was impossible not to.

She had that effect on people. She was lovable and caring to everyone, giving the need to protect her pure soul at all costs. Giovanni didn't want to leave her side and the furthest he would go was outside the door.

I had the entire area heavily guarded. I wasn't taking any chances now, and I couldn't risk another surprise attack while Althaia was trying to recover.

"I've brought you some clothes." Arianna said and placed the bag on the floor.

“Damiano, you need to get yourself cleaned up and get some

2/5

“I’m not leaving her.” I snapped. I was still in the same clothes and most of me was still covered in blood. But I couldn’t leave her..I felt like if I let her out of my sight for two seconds, she would die.

“She can’t see you like that when she wakes up, and you need to get some sleep. You won’t be much of a help if you pass out from sleep deprivation.” She talked softly to me and I knew she was right. I didn’t want her to wake up only to see me like this and make her panic. But that would mean I had to get out of the room and down the corridor to be able to take a shower.

“We’ll be here.” Giovanni assured me and after a while, I gave them a nod.

“Let me just have a look at your arm first.” Ellie said once she was done with Althaia. I got slashed pretty deep on my arm and had to get stitched up.

“Are you feeling better?”

“It’s fine.” I had a high pain tolerance and it didn’t bother me much. It was only giving me an annoying itching feeling.

“I meant are you still experiencing any symptoms of food poisoning?” She asked, making me look at her with a frown.

“I didn’t get food poisoning.” Ellie raised her brows a little in surprise.

“Oh, so you didn’t have the same food then?”

“We did, but only she got it. The doctor said she caught it

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easily because of... weakened immune system.” I spat out bitterly. I couldn’t get myself to say that it was because she was pregnant.

Past fucking tense.

Ellie frowned a little and started to tab around on her tablet.

“What is it?” I asked. She had something in mind with the way she was reacting.

“Are you sure you had the same food?” She asked once again.

“We had the same food for breakfast and we didn’t get sick either.” Arianna commented, making Ellie sigh with a frown as she continued to look at her tablet.

“... No that can’t be it.” She muttered to herself.

“Ellie.” I said impatiently, making her look up at me.

“When she got food poisoning, did you go to the hospital immediately?”

“Yes.”

“Then that can’t be it. Unless...” She kept on muttering under her breath, her brows furrowed in concentration.

“You think she got poisoned.” I said, coming to the point. Anger fumed inside of me at my own words.

“Yes, but if you all had the same food, you would have suffered too. And the blood test they took of her didn’t show anything either. Pregnancy does weaken the immune system but not to the point that she would be the only one to get food poisoning.” She explained. I had to move my neck from

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side to side to ease the tension in my body before I exploded.

“What do you think it is?” Giovanni asked, his hands still clenched into fists, trying to contain his anger, too. Ellie went quiet as she tried to think while still looking at the medical journal.

“She had cake.” I said, suddenly remembering she ate something I didn’t.

“She only had a small bite of it.”

“What kind?”

“Chocolate cake. Her favorite.” I furrowed my brows as I tried to remember back to it but there wasn’t anything unusual about it.

Could it really have been that small bite of the cake that had left her in such a condition?

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