

## The Devil's Fire by Mariam El-Hafi Chapter 261 - 270

"We will both die if you keep moving!"

"That's the point, bitch!" Carlos had the audacity to laugh. I could feel my fingers slip and I squeezed my eyes shut.

Life isn't fucking fair at all.

It wasn't fair for Damiano to find me dead on the ground like that. The story of Sienna flashed in my mind, and I wanted to cry for Damiano. It wasn't fair that this was going to happen to him again. To have his happiness completely stripped away once again.

Thad no idea what would happen to him once he finds me, but I knew he wouldn't try to seek that happiness again.

Sienna.

Our baby.

Me.

There was only so much a human being could go through. No matter how strong they appeared to be. Damiano has already endured so much pain in his life, and only at the mere age of thirty. I know his upbringing taught him to be cold and

heartless in order to be a leader, but I knew the end for me would shatter him into pieces.

I prayed for him.

I prayed he would be okay no matter what the outcome would be.

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Goodbye(3)

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I prayed for everyone I had come to love and care for, hoping they would be okay.

“...Fuck!” I snapped my eyes open and looked down at Carlos, seeing him struggling to hold on.

I took a deep breath and tried my best to wiggle one foot out of his grip. My fingers were slowly slipping, and I would be able to hang on for a bit longer without him clinging onto me.

“Let go already!” I hissed out, trying to kick him off me but the son of a bitch had the nerve to laugh.

“I’m taking you with me to hell!” Carlos twisted his body, shaking us and making my fingers slip even more.

“Go suck Satan’s cock for ice cream. You will be needing it.” And with one hard kick on his hands, he let go.

“You fucking bit -” He never got to finish his sentence as he hit the ground. I let out a gasp at the brutal sight. I had failed to see the metal poles sticking out of the ground. And Carlos landed right on top, impaled. The metal pole was sticking out from his stomach, and I could see bits of chunks of his insides on it. His mouth and eyes were wide open, staring right at me.

I felt sick.

I pushed my nausea aside and focused on hauling myself up. It was only a matter of seconds before I would taste the same fate as Carlos.

“Oh, God... Oh, God...!” I gasped as one hand slipped. My body was swaying too much for me to hold on, and I tried with all my might to get my grip back on. But my arm was too heavy and too much in pain for me to raise it.

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I watched my fingers slowly slip from the edge, and there was nothing I could do. I squeezed my eyes shut, not wanting to witness the final moments of my life.

And I fell.

I felt the rush in my entire body, almost the same feeling when you were going on a fast roller coaster. Except this was the feeling before plunging to my death.

But it only lasted for a split second.

A hand clasped around my wrist, and my eyes shot open.

I couldn't talk.

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I couldn't even make a sound as everything got choked up in my throat.

"I got you!" Damiano grunted, almost out of breath. He was sweating, frowning, and groaning as half of his body was out while he held onto my arm tightly. Damiano gritted his teeth, struggling to pull me up as my body kept swaying in the air.

"I'm slipping!" I choked out, my heart almost stopping when I slipped down an inch.

"You're not leaving me!" He growled. He used the safety railing with his legs for support before grabbing me with the other arm. Damiano was panting and sweat dripped from his face as he heaved me up to him.

When half of my body was on the platform, he wrapped his arms tightly around me and pulled me in. Damiano was on his back with me on top of him as I, too, was holding him with an iron grip. We were both breathing hard and my entire body

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was shaking. Shaking because I was about to have the same brutal fate as Carlos.

"Are you okay?" Damiano's voice was strained, and he was breathing hard as he spoke but still held me to him, afraid to let me go.

"J-just hold me, please." I was crying and buried my face into his neck, trying to calm down and catch my breath.

I couldn't figure out what I was feeling as every single emotion wanted to surface. But still, I also felt numb in a way. I was crying and I had no idea if it was because of fear. Fear that I had almost died, or relief. Relieved that Damiano somehow had managed to climb the stairs with inhuman speed and grabbed me.

Damiano's arms slowly loosened their hold on me and slid down. I raised my head to look at him. His eyes were closed and he was looking unusually pale.

"Damiano?" Panic filled my body when he didn't respond.

"Damiano?" I hovered over him, tapping his cheek a few times as I called his name.

But he didn't.

He didn't wake up.

"Damiano!"

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No data found.

## **The Devil's Fire by Mariam El-Hafi Chapter 262 -**

Althaia

"No, no, no, please wake up!" My tears fell down his face, and no matter how much I called out his name, he was still

unresponsive.

"Y-you can't leave me... We-we haven't had enough time... Please, come back to me." But there was still nothing and his eyes remained shut. I sobbed as I cradled his head into my

arms.

This can't be the end.

“Come back to me, my love...” I whispered, refusing to accept I was holding my dead husband. I then frantically looked around his body to figure out what was happening to him.

His gunshot wound!

I quickly ripped his shirt up and unstrapped his vest, but nothing prepared me for the sight.

Bad wouldn't come close to describing what I was seeing.

His wound was open and blood flowed out too fast. I immediately tried to stop the bleeding with my hands, watching the blood seep out between my fingers and covering my hands. I rapidly blinked away my tears to clear my sight but they continued to stream down my face as I tried to think how to help him.

I shakily grabbed his shirt again, tearing a large enough piece of cloth to wrap around him. I tied it as tightly as I could while

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Come Back To M

still adding pressure. Damiano was still unmoving. He wasn't even making a sound. I moved up to him again, checking his pulse on the side of his neck, holding my breath as I did. I let out the biggest breath of relief when I felt his heartbeat. It was faint and slow, but it was still there.

He's going to be fine.

“Althaia!” I looked over my shoulder, seeing Lorenzo with Cara unconscious in his arms.

“Please, go save Cara!” Lorenzo looked at me, and then at Damiano. I could see he was hesitating to leave.

“Is he okay?”

“I got him, Lorenzo. Just help Cara.” I practically ordered. He gave one small firm nod before running to the exit with Cara. K let out a small breath, relieved that Cara was in good hands now and would get help.

“Damiano, wake up.” I whispered, caressing his cheek, hoping for some kind of response. I kept calling his name, touching him; and hoping, praying, he could hear me and come back to

I let out a choked-up sob, and a small smile formed on my lips— when I saw movements behind his closed eyelids. He let out a breath as he started to say something, but I couldn’t make out what it was.

“What are you saying?” I leaned down, my ear close to his mouth.

“... Beautiful angel...” He muttered, and my smile got wiped away.

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Beautiful angel?

Who was he talking about? Never once has he ever called me an angel. I looked at him with a frown, jealousy bubbling in

“Who are you calling beautiful angel? I don’t care if you’re on the verge of dying, you better not dream about another woman! Wake the fuck up!” With that, I slapped him.

Damiano’s eyes snapped open as his head got whipped to the side.

“Fuck, woman! How the fuck are you this tiny yet so fucking strong.” He suddenly erupted, groaning.

“Who were you calling beautiful angel, huh?” I scowled, furiously. Damiano let out a lazy grin as he looked at me.

“You’re my beautiful angel. So fiery, my love.” I clamped my mouth shut, feeling heat rush to my cheeks and my jealousy dying as he cupped my chin. It didn’t go unnoticed how his movements were slow. Even when he blinked it was slow.

“I thought you left me...” My voice cracked and my lip started to tremble as I sniffed.

“No, no.. I was just... resting my eyes.” He started to close his eyes again and he was looking paler by the second. I had to get him out of here fast to get help.

The explosives!

“We have to hurry and get out of here. Are you in a lot of pain? Can you move?” I was afraid to even try and move him in case I worsened his condition.

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“It hurts like a bitch.” Damiano grunted and clenched his jaw. That meant it was really bad. He was the type of person who could endure a lot of pain, and this meant it was critical.

I helped him to get on his feet when the sound of footsteps running toward us made me look up.

“Thank God it’s you.” I breathed out when I saw it was Giovanni. There was no time to be fighting off Gaetano’s men in here when the whole thing was about to blow up. I would rather not have our bodies blown up into pieces and splattered all over the place.

“Shit, are you okay?” Giovanni looked at us, assessing our injuries.

“We’re okay. Gio, Michael is still down there. He got shot and needs help.” I told him. Giovanni was also injured, and bleeding from the side of his head, but he was still well enough to be able to help.

“No, you need help.” Giovanni frowned when he saw Damiano’s condition.

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“Giovanni, we don’t have time! Go help Michael, now!” I shouted, ordering him to get going but he still didn’t listen and stepped towards us.

“I will pull the rank card if you don’t go.” I gave him one hell of a look and Giovanni gave me one disapproving scowl but he finally got going.

“That’s my Donna.” Damiano half chuckled as I helped him to his feet. He wrapped an arm around my shoulders, leaning on me for support and I had to use my entire strength to keep us both upright.

“Have I ever told you how hot you look when you’re angry?”

“Damiano, this really isn’t the time nor the place to be saying such things.” I was already breathing hard, struggling to keep his weight on me as we made our way to the exit.

“Sure is.”

“Did you hit your head or something? Because you’re not thinking straight.”

“I’m thinking about my wife’s pussy like I always do. I would say my head is just fine.”

“My God... Is the pain making you high? Nevermind. Stop talking and keep walking, you’re heavy!” If I wasn’t busy dragging him with me, I would have been embarrassed by how he talked.

“All muscles, baby.” He lightly chuckled. I shook my head and focused on getting out.

I was panting, my body aching and sweating when we finally

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got out of the building with Giovanni and Michael close behind. Outside was even more chaotic. Shouting, gunshots, cars on fire, and dead bodies on the ground.

It was a literal warzone we had stepped out to.

I looked around, seeing Damiano’s men had the upper hand and it appeared to be under control. There were so many armed men present, some I recognized and some I didn’t.

My eyes landed on a group of men, standing in a semi-circle, guarding someone. My eyes went down, seeing Cara’s father on the ground, beaten and tied up.

“Did you catch Gaetano too?” I asked Damiano, feeling hopeful that this nightmare was ending.

“No. The bastard is hiding like the coward he is, and let his brother out in the open.” Damiano groaned. I looked at him, seeing his condition has worsened.



“Sixty seconds! Get away from here!” Renzo shouted out, and everyone started to move.

“Shit... Althaia, you have to go, now.” I felt him trying to move away from me, but I held him tightly, almost wanting to slap him again.

“You really need to get that head checked if you think I’m leaving my husband behind. Shut up, and keep walking!” Right now, I didn’t care if I caused him more pain as I held him tightly, and walked as fast as I could. He would be okay as long as I got him far enough away from here.

“Antonio!” I shouted after him when I saw him. Antonio

spotted us, shouting orders out in Italian, and ran to us with a

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bunch of men once they noticed us. As soon as they grabbed Damiano, I collapsed to the ground in exhaustion. It was physically impossible for me to get up and keep going.

“Forgive me for touching you, Donna.” I recognized him as Niccolò. I let out a small gasp in surprise when he picked me up in his arms and ran. I held onto him tightly when I started to hear low explosions. I looked behind him, my eyes widening in horror when I saw the end of the building erupting in flames. It kept going, one explosion after the other, like a domino effect, and colored the night sky with orange flames.

“Cover your face!” Niccolò shouted to me. I quickly covered my face with my arms just the second when a massive blasting sound erupted. The blastwave was immense. So much it sent us flying forward. Niccolò broke most of the fall for me as we rolled around on the ground.

I got on my hands and knees, coughing and squinting my eyes as I shielded my face from the heat.

“Are you okay?” I asked him, and get gave me a thumbs up.

“All good.” He reassured me. I nodded, waving away the smoke that was quickly filling up the area. I looked around for Damiano, stumbling up to my feet when I saw him lying on the ground.

“You need to take him to the hospital, and get him treated right away.” I told them as they helped me get Damiano up on -his feet.

“Do you think everyone got out?” I asked Antonio as I looked around, luckily seeing many of Damiano’s men present.

“From our side, yes.” He said and I nodded.

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“Okay, that’s good. Did anyone find Gaetano yet?” Antonio shook his head, and I sighed.

“I guess he was still in the building then...” It was the only explanation since the outside was heavily guarded. There was no way he could have slipped out without any of them noticing.

“We will do rounds to check for any survivors.”

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“Please, anyone who is severely injured, send them to get medical attention immediately. To the men who are well enough, let them search the area for Gaetano. He can’t have gotten far away.” I told Antonio, and the men nearby stood and listened to me as if I was their commander.

“Understood, Donna.” I was a little taken aback by how Antonio addressed me. It did feel weird when it came from him, considering he was Damiano’s right-hand man and I saw him as someone superior.

“I need to get Damiano treated, but update me on what’s happening. If you need anything, let me know, and I will have someone be on their way.” Antonio gave a firm nod before ordering the men to get going.

“Look at you, ordering them around like a true Donna. They don’t even need me anymore.” I looked at Damiano and he gave me a half-smirk.

“Of course, they need you. And I need you, too.” I gave a small smile, putting his arm around my shoulders again as we got led to a car.

It all felt weird. I wanted to be relieved that it was over, but I couldn’t until Gaetano was found. I hope they would find him. If they not, who knew what next Gaetano would plan and this could happen all over again.

I blinked a few times when something caught my attention. I Hooked ahead, focusing on the ground. The ground was softer there, and it looked like a piece of the ground was moving upwards. I stopped walking and kept focusing on that spot.

“What’s wrong? Are you in pain?” Damiano asked, and I shook my head.

“Something is not right over there...” I trailed off, wondering if my eyes were playing tricks on me because of exhaustion.

But they weren’t.

It suddenly flew up and someone sprinted away.

“It’s Gaetano!” I shouted and pointed in his direction. My body reacted on its own, ready to run after him, but stilled when I remembered I was supporting Damiano.

“Capture him! Alive!” Damiano shouted and his men went after him.

“He’s getting away!” I was frustrated and desperate to end this shit nightmare once and for all. But it was obvious to see his men were exhausted but were pushing through to catch him.

The sound of a gunshot rang out loudly in the air, having everyone stop in their tracks. I saw just in time for Gaetano to fall to the ground. I let out a breath when I heard him scream out, holding his leg. He didn’t deserve a quick death for everything he had done.

“Wait, what’s happening.” I frowned, seeing familiar faces coming from the other side.

Alexei and Nestor.

Alexei slowly walked up to Gaetano, looking at him with a despised look before turning his attention to Damiano. His men followed behind him, aiming their guns at us.

I felt Damiano's body tense, cursing under his breath as he pulled me behind his back to cover me. My heart started to frantically beat as I looked around, assessing the situation. We

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were in no condition for another war, especially against Alexei.

"Now, you're going to tell me where she is." Alexei said through gritted teeth. He was enraged.

"Where the fuck is she!" He roared, and the sound of rifles being racked rang loudly. I stepped out from behind Damiano.

"Althaia, get back!" I ignored Damiano and stood in front of him and his men with my arms wide open, trying to cover and/ protect them in some way.

"Alexei..." I stepped closer to him with my heart in my throat when one of his men turned his attention to me, ready to fire. Alexei noticed and smashed the back of his rifle into his face.

"Don't fucking aim at her!" Alexei shouted, and Nestor

shouted something in Russian to them, and their aim was removed from me.

"I'm not sure what's happening here, but I already told you. My mother is gone." My eyes flickered back and forth between him and Nestor, confused why he was demanding where she was.

"If you want to know where she is buried, I can -"

"I will stop you right there. I went to the cemetery and dug up her casket." He said, and I gaped at him in pure shock.

"You ruined my mother's grave?!" I yelled at him, fury boiling within me.

"No. Your mother was not in it." Alexei looked at me with his stormful, piercing blue eyes.

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“What? What do you mean?” I breathed out, scared and dreading that someone had taken my mother.

Alexei didn't answer me and looked at Damiano. I turned around, seeing him looking at Alexei with a firm look.

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“Damiano, what is he talking about?” He continued to look at Alexei before finally looking at me.

“Your mother is alive.’

I stopped breathing, and my legs gave up under me.

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Damiano

Althaia was shocked.

Shocked to the point her body gave up under her and

collapsed to the ground. I grabbed her and pulled her into me, gritting my teeth as I ignored my own pain when I saw the state she was in. I didn't give two shits about Alexei at this moment, only worrying about her. She looked numb, lost, as she tried to comprehend what I just said. For once, Alexei kept quiet and had his men stand by as he looked at Althaia.

His daughter.

He hadn't expressed what he thought of the situation. About him having a daughter. But he was pissed at her mother for keeping away and not telling him. Twenty-five years had he lived on with his life without knowing he had a child out in the world. And to make it worse for him, his daughter thought Gaetano was her father.

An Italian man who married his woman

“Come on, breathe, Althaia... There you go... Breathe.” She gasped for air and I felt how her entire body was shaking against mine. I held her tightly, even though I was struggling to stand on my own because of the pain. I knew it wasn't long before I would lose consciousness again.

“Oh, fuck. Go get her a doctor and go fix yourself. You're useless to me if you're fucking dead.” Alexei sighed, even rolling his fucking eyes.

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“If you pull some dumb shit, Vasiliev, you know what the consequences will be.” I told him. I didn't need to clarify what I meant as he knew.

“You are in no position to make any threats to me.”

“Does it look like I care? Fuck up, and the blood is on your hands.” It was my final words to him before we rushed to the

car.

I was slipping in and out of consciousness in the car. My heart was beating faster than I have ever experienced, and I could feel the blood that kept dripping down from my stomach. Althaia was next to me, trying to keep me awake by talking to me and tapping my cheek. But half of the ride to the hospital, I couldn't hear what she was saying as if she was far away. That was how faint her voice sounded to me.

“...Surgery immediately!” I opened my eyes, seeing everything blurring past me.

“No surgery...” I said, trying to stop them but my body was too heavy to move and my eyes closed again of fatigue. I just needed to be stitched up and rest for a bit, and I would be fine.

“Don't listen to him and help him, please.” Althaia's voice sounded out, having me frown when I heard her cry.

Don't cry, my love. Your tears are precious.

I felt her lips on mine. So soft, light, and feathery, having my heart somehow beat even faster, and spreading warmth inside of me.

Like fire, and keeping me alive.

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“I love you.” She whispered, but I heard it loud and clearly.

And I love you.

Then darkness took over.

I was resting in the recovery room with IV bags attached to me, relieving my pain while I listened to Antonio as he reported everything back to me. The surgeons had to work fast on me since I had pushed my body beyond its limit.

And it almost cost me my life.

“...Everything is clear and people are getting treated.” Antonio reported and I nodded. We had faced a bigger army than expected and many of my men were injured. We had

casualties as well, but it was minimal compared to how many Gaetano lost.

“We have him and his brother locked up, separately, and got the place heavily secured.”

“And Vasiliev?”

“He’s still around but keeping his distance.”

“Of course he is.” I shook my head.

“I want eyes on him at all times.” I turned my attention to the door when it opened.

“You good?” Lorenzo asked as he stepped inside.

“Still breathing.”

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“You look like shit.”

“And yet I’m still better looking than you.” I shot back, and he cracked a smile.

“How’s Cara?”

“She’ll make it.” Lorenzo rubbed his jaw, frowning. I knew that feeling too well. The feeling of helplessness as there was nothing he could do but wait, and pray for the best.

“Althaia is with her now.” He said, and I sighed. It’s been more than twenty-four hours and not once did she leave my side until I woke up, making sure I would be okay. Then she became restless, pacing back and forth before she decided to check on everyone else.

“How is she handling the news?” Antonio asked.

“I’m not sure. She hasn’t mentioned it yet.”

“Denial.” Lorenzo commented, and I nodded. We all turned to look at the door when it opened.

“Oh... Am I disturbing you?” Althaia asked as she looked at us.

“No. Come here.” I held my hand out to her when she stepped inside.

“We’ll leave you be.” Antonio and Lorenzo gave a small nod to Althaia in respect when they passed her. She placed her hand in mine and sat on the chair next to the bed. Her eyes

flickered around, looking conflicted before she finally looked at me.

“How do you feel? Are you in a lot of pain?” She looked at my bandaged torso.

Vouchers

“I’m fine.” I reassured her, and her shoulders sagged in relief. We sat in silence and I watched her play with my fingers while avoiding looking at me.

“Althaia –

”



“Cara is going to make it.” She suddenly said, still not looking at me.

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“Michael too. Gio and Luca are getting fixed up as well, and

Arianna was awake. But she’s sleeping now, so…” She continued to update me on everyone’s well-being. I already knew what the status was but I let her continue, wanting her to talk instead of being silent, and drowning in her thoughts.

“And you? What’s the status on you?” A small smile appeared on her lips at my question.

“Well, I did get shot so I had to get my arm stitched. And my nose is not broken, so I will say I got pretty lucky.” Althaia let out a small breath before finally looking at me. Her arm was bandaged and her face was bruised from taking a hit.

I looked at her for a while and she started to squirm around in her seat. It was obvious she was battling something inside her head.

“What’s on your mind?”

“Everything.” She forced out a chuckle before biting down on her lip.

“Tell me.” I spoke to her softly, and her eyes started to glisten.

“Why would you say something like that to me?” I held her hand tightly in mine. It sent a jolt in my heart at the sight of her innocent green eyes filled with tears. She looked vulnerable, conflicted, and broken. It all showed in her eyes like a raging storm.

“That night... I saw her with my own eyes, so why would you say that to me?” I cupped her face with my hand, wiping her tears away with my thumb.

“You’re right. I shouldn’t have said that to you. I should have

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shown you instead.”

“Damiano, please, stop... It’s messing with my head.” She whispered. I never hated myself as much as I did right this moment with the way she was looking at me. So fragile. I wanted to cradle her in my arms, comfort and protect her. To tell her everything would be okay.

But will it be?

I had no idea what would happen after this.

“What are you doing? No, no, you can’t do that!” I ignored her as I pulled out the needles attached to me.

“Can you get me a shirt from the bag?” I asked her while I moved to get up from the hospital bed.

“No! You can’t just do as you please when you just had surgery. Stop moving!” Althaia tried to stop me but didn’t know how as she was afraid of hurting me. She placed her hands on my chest and I grabbed her wrists, pulling her close

to me.

“I-I almost lost you, please stop...”

“Look at me.” I had to talk to her firmly before she would listen.

“I’m fine. I’m alive, and I’m not leaving you anytime soon.” Her innocent eyes looked at me with tears threatening to spill.

“Do you promise?” I gave her a soft smile.

Shit, she is too cute for her own good.

“I promise.”

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Althaia looked around anxiously, barely able to sit still in the car. She thought I had gotten hit on the head too many times, and suffered partial memory loss. I

didn't try to convince her otherwise and just let her see with her own two eyes.

We stepped out of the car at the safe house. She looked around and her hand tightened around mine when she noticed how much security there was. She gulped as her breathing changed but managed to take a deep breath.

I took a quick glance at the car that followed us. It was Vasiliev because he loved to be a pain in my ass, and wouldn't let me get anything done in peace. I gave him a warning glare, reminding him to wait outside until Althaia got the time she needed.

"Shoot him if he tries anything." I told Antonio and Giovanni, having them keep an eye on him.

"Don't need to tell me twice." Giovanni kept his gaze on Vasiliev with his gun ready. Vasiliev was leaning against the car with his arms crossed as if he had no care in the world. Althaia was too lost in her thoughts to realize what was going

I lead her inside the house, noticing the slight tremble in her body as she walked. I looked at her when we stopped right in front of the double doors. I wanted to say something to her. To somehow prepare her. But how could I prepare her when she was about to see her dead mother alive?

Instead, I kissed her head in a lousy attempt to comfort her.

I opened the doors, my eyes landing on Jacinta sitting on the

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couch with her usual mug in her hands. She got on her feet when she saw it was me.

"I have a visitor for you." Jacinta's eyes slightly narrowed in confusion. I stepped aside and she let out a gasp when she saw Althaia.

Althaia didn't say anything, her eyes wide. She was frozen in place as she looked at her mother.

"... Mamá?" She whispered with tears.

“Althaja, my baby.” Jacinta cried out, coming closer. She

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stopped when Althaia took a step away. I frowned, noticing how her chest rose and fell too fast.

She was having a panic attack.

“Althaia.” I reached out for her but she flinched away from my touch.

“Don’t touch me!” She stumbled back, hitting the door before she turned around and ran.

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Damiano

“No. Stay here.” I stopped Jacinta when she tried to go after Althaia. I knew she would be shocked and in denial but I wasn’t prepared for this kind of reaction and run away.

I gritted my teeth, walking as fast as I could in the direction she ran off. This fucking gunshot wound was limiting me too much.

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I stepped outside to the garden, watching her leaning against a tree to catch her breath.

“Althaia.” I frowned, looking at the state she was in.

“Stop! Just.. please stop. Don’t come any closer.” She closed her eyes, trying her best to control her breathing. I clenched my fists in frustration. Frustrated with me that I was the cause of this. I stood still, watching her cry and gasp for air. And I would rather get shot a hundred times more than see her like this.

“How... How could you do this to me?!” Althaia shouted at me with so much anger than I had ever seen from her. Her innocent, green eyes turned into ones with a rage-filled storm.

And betrayal.

“I did what I believed was the best at the time.” I spoke to her calmly, even though my heart was about to race out of my chest, realizing this could be what drove her away from me. Althaia laughed. But not her usual sweet, joyful laughter that I loved so much, the one that always made me feel like the

luckiest man alive.

No.

This one was void of any emotions while looking so torn apart.

“Do you realize how fucked up that is? How fucking sick that is? I was broken to pieces! Mourning her death to the point I had to get away from people. Even away from you. You saw me... How could you watch me go through so much pain, and have me believe I had lost my mother forever?” She sobbed to me, her voice cracking in the process. I clenched my fists.

“I know. It killed me to see you like that. But it was something that had to be done. To protect your mother. She was in a coma for weeks. It was uncertain if she would make it. It would have made her an easier target for Gaetano to finish the job if she was known to be alive.” I talked to her softly and eyed her reaction. I didn’t want to send her into another panic, attack.

Althaia’s brows pinched together.

“You knew about Gaetano?!” She shouted in disbelief.

“I had my suspicions about it. I wanted a DNA test taken to be completely sure.”

“Oh, my God...” Althaia breathed out and grabbed her head when I explained everything to her. That I’ve been digging deeper into the whole mess ever since she showed me the old photo of her mother and Alexei Vasiliev.

Telling her how I was almost a hundred percent sure that Alexei Vasiliev was her biological father.

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m

and the planted

microphone in it.

Telling her how I connected everything back to Gaetano from the first attack to the last.

Telling her the original plan of taking down Gaetano before she became part of my life.

Telling her the plan at the wedding to try and take him down as quietly as possible.

I wanted to come clean and let everything out in the open.

I didn't want anymore more secrets.

D

But now, I had no idea what the fuck would happen to us.

"... I didn't think you would understand if I told you." I finished. There were many times I wanted to tell her. To put an end to her pain. To let her know that I was faking her mother's death and that everything would be okay.

But I couldn't in fear of losing her. Because I was one selfish bastard and I didn't want to live one day without her.

She was the one who mattered to me.

She was my world.

My fire.

"See, that's where you fucked up, Damiano. You always think along those lines, that I wouldn't understand and keep all these secrets from me. But you don't even make an effort to explain for me to understand." Althaia spat out, fury still storming in her eyes.

“I didn’t want to involve you.”

“You can’t just pick and choose what you want to involve me in! This is my life too!”

“Althaia...” I stepped closer to her but she held her hand up to stop me.

“I want to understand your reasons. Part of me probably understands what you had to do, but right now... I’m just so... upset with you. I’m overwhelmed and confused. I just need... space. Some time to think and process everything.” Althaia leaned against the tree, wiping her tears away while she looked completely lost.

I had seen her like this before. The day when I nearly went completely insane because she had to get away from me.

“Are you leaving me?” The question came out before I could crumple it up and shove it away into a deep, dark corner, and just live with the fact she was deciding to leave me.

Althaia looked at me, surprised that I had asked that. But I couldn’t blame her if she wanted to. I couldn’t even be mad at her like I had been the last time she went away. I had once again proven just how fucked up I was and what a fucked up world I was living in.

Her expression softened and I watched her eyes get filled up with fresh tears. I even had to let out a breath, bracing myself for the answer that was about to come.

At least I would spare her from more pain.

“No... I’m not leaving you, Damiano.” She slowly walked up to me, and it was incredible how my heart didn’t explode by how

4/5

fast it was pounding. She placed her hands on my cheeks, and I wrapped my arms around her, not wanting her to put

distance between us.

I needed to hold her. To have her close to me.

“My love, you’re stuck with me for life. I just need a minute or two to process things... I’m not exactly used to things being handled Mafia style.” She gave me a soft smile and I rested my head against hers. Relief couldn’t describe what I was feeling at the moment.

We are going to be okay.

I didn’t say anything and just pulled her into me, burying my face into her neck, and inhaling her scent.

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“Damiano, you have to let go.” She mumbled against my shoulder.

“Let me just hold you for now.” I said, not ready to let her out of my arms yet.

“No, I’m about to throw up on you if you don’t move now.” I stepped away just in time for her to throw up behind the tree. I held her hair as she continued to throw up.

“Let’s get you inside.” I led her inside again once she was done. She was exhausted and she needed to rest.

I led her to one of the bedrooms on the other side of the house to make sure she wouldn’t bump into her mother for now. This safe-house was much bigger than the one she had stayed in, making it possible to create some distance between them.

Althaia slumped tiredly on the bed, closing her eyes, and took deep breaths to keep the sickness down. I went back downstairs to grab a few things and a bottle of water and electrolytes to keep her hydrated.

I briefly closed my eyes, clenching my jaw when the pain was starting to appear. I popped a few painkillers, even though they wouldn’t do much to ease the pain later. I went back to the staircase when Jacinta showed up, looking around for Althaia.

“How is she?” Her eyes darted upstairs, contemplating if she should go up.



1/4

“She will be okay. She just needs some time to process before seeing you again.” I told her. I could tell she was worried but I couldn’t let her see Althaia now.

Jacinta nodded as she let out a sigh. I went on my way upstairs but stopped at her words.

“She lost the baby that night, didn’t she?” I didn’t turn around to face her. The mention of the baby still gave me a tight feeling in my chest.

“Yes.” I glanced at her over my shoulder, seeing the somber look on her face.

O

“You have another visitor outside. Alexei Vasiliev.” Jacinta looked shocked but her expression quickly turned into a frown with a cold stare.

“What is he doing here?” | scoffed.

“You have a lot of shit to explain. You lied and deceived people, what the fuck did you expect?” I said curtly and made my way to Althaia.

I shut the door behind me, hearing her throw up once again in the bathroom. She came out after she had washed up. I sat her on the bed and gave her the bottle of water.

“Take this one too.” Althaia stared at the pregnancy test in my hand before looking at me.

“I heard you get sick at the hospital too. Just take it so we can be sure.” I told her softly.

“Okay.” She finally agreed. I’ve been wanting her to take one for a while now, but she had insisted it was too early to tell

considering it wasn’t that long ago we decided to try for a baby. I had a weird feeling about it, and even if it turned out negative, at least I would know she was sick because of exhaustion and being overwhelmed.

Althaia drank the water and we waited until she had to go. And the minute she went inside the bathroom, I couldn't stand still. I paced the floor to keep busy in a way and waited, wondering what was taking long, only checking my watch to see she had only been in there for a minute.

The door opened and I immediately went to her, waiting for her to tell me anything.

"It says to wait three to five minutes." She wrapped her arms around herself while I checked the watch on my wrist.

"Okay." My patience couldn't stand it but I still tried to keep it cool. I sat with her on the bed, her head resting on my shoulder as I rubbed her back in silence.

The three minutes felt like hours as I continued to keep an eye on the time. I was getting too impatient, wanting to see the result already.

"It's time." I told Althaia, and she bit down on her lip, looking unsure.

"Can you check?"

"Are you sure you don't want to?" I asked and she nodded. I went to the bedroom, seeing the test on the counter. Strange feelings filled my body and I took a small, deep breath as I picked it up. I looked at it and turned around to face Althaia.

"Pregnant." I smiled, unable to keep it in. Excitement flooded

3/4

me and I had to look at the pregnancy test again to be sure.

**Pregnant**

Written in fat, black bold letters.

I could barely believe it as a smile kept lingering on my lips.

Fucking hell.. She is pregnant!

I looked back at Althaia, my smile slowly faded when I saw her looking broken.

“Do you not want it? Did you change your mind?” I asked, not understanding why she was looking so devastated by the

news.

“... I’m bleeding.” She whispered.

Time stopped and I felt the whole world crash.

T

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Althaia

I didn’t think it was possible to feel more miserable than this. But I kept being dragged down into an endless, dark hole while drowning in fear and pure devastation.

I was exhausted.

Exhausted from everything that happened and exhausted from every single piece of information thrown at me. I still haven’t even processed the fact that Gaetano wasn’t my father. And then everything else followed as if trying to give me a heart attack by exposing the brutal truth to me.

That my entire life has been a fucking lie.

Twenty-five years old and I was suddenly having an identity crisis that appeared out of the blue. For so many years where it has just been me and my mother, living life together. But it turned out I didn’t even know who she truly was.

My mother, who I thought I witnessed die, was somewhere in this safe-house.

Well, and alive.

I thought I was hallucinating when I saw her. Or maybe I was seeing a ghost. Or maybe I ended up in hell and this was my punishment. To be tormented by my mother for failing to protect her, and letting her die.... I couldn't understand it, but she was right there in front of me. It freaked me out so much that I just had to get away.

1/3

And now, I was going through the same thing that had left me absolutely shattered.

I was physically and mentally exhausted. My body was feeling heavy and all I wanted to do was to curl up in bed and just

sleep, and hopefully wake up to something normal. To

something that wouldn't make me feel so fucking miserable and heartbroken again.

Damiano stood still, looking at me like his entire world just crashed. Tears silently went down my face.

"I'm sorry..." I whispered to him, feeling my chest tighten as the pain only got worse. I had failed once again.

Damiano's eyes narrowed, almost looking furious with me when he closed the distance between us. He cupped my face, looking at me firmly.

"It's not your fault, you hear me? Don't ever blame yourself when this is entirely out of your control."

"How can I not?" I sniffed, feeling defeat overwhelming me.

"You told me before to take a test, and I didn't because I didn't want to get disappointed. And now... Now, it's gone before we have even -" I couldn't take it anymore as my voice cracked. Damiano pulled me into his chest, letting me cry out my pain while he comforted me, whispering soothing words to ease my suffering.

"Baby, there was nothing we could have done... Even if we knew. I'm sorry you have to go through this again..." He sighed. I looked at him, choking on

my sob when I saw sadness in his eyes. It was also hitting him hard because he didn't care to hide his feelings like he usually did.

"How bad is it? Are you bleeding a lot?" His brows narrowed in worry. I wiped away my tears and shook my head.

"It's not like last time. It's more spotting and I'm cramping a little. I thought I was getting my period, but then you said the test was positive..." I sat down on the bed with Damiano, feeling like my head was about to explode with the banging headache I had gotten.

Right now, I just wanted to lie down and not wake up before this nightmare was over.

"Let's get you to the clinic." Damiano said quietly and I gave a short nod but didn't make any move to get up. I rested my head on his shoulder as he wrapped his arms around me and placed a kiss on top of my head. I closed my eyes, mustering the courage to face what was going to happen to me again.

"Can I have Ellie? She makes me feel comfortable." I asked. Ellie has fixed me up a few times already, and I would rather have a familiar face to give me the bad news instead of a stranger. I could already feel the lump in my throat just thinking of it.

"I'll give her a call and let her know to meet us there." Damiano said, and I held his hand to give him some comfort too.

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Chapter 270

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I wasn't sure how long we sat in silence until Damiano said we should go. I sighed and we slowly made our way downstairs, mostly because I didn't want him to move too much when he had surgery in less than seventy-two hours. He shouldn't be moving at all but he was one stubborn man.

I stopped in the middle of the staircase, feeling my heart slowly start beating faster.

It was my mother right at the doorway to the living room.

I swallowed hard, feeling my lips tremble. I walked down the rest of the stairs, closing the distance between us, but stopped a few steps away from her. My mother stood still, watching me, waiting for me to make the first move.

I observed her closely. Watching the color on her cheeks, the brightness of her green eyes, seeing how her chest rose and fell as she breathed. She looked just how I remembered her before I thought I had lost her.

She truly is alive.

“Mamá.” I cried out and reached for her.

“My baby, Althaia.” My mother wrapped her arms around me tightly, holding me as close to her body as she could. I let out a shaky breath when I heard her cry, feeling her arms around me and feeling how her heart was thumping behind her chest.

It was like all my pain, and all my worry vanished when she held me. How I had longed for her touch for so long, and it tore my heart apart knowing I was never going to see her again. But here she was, holding me in her arms again.

“My sweet Althaia...” She whispered, looking at me with her

1/3

teary eyes as she placed her hands on my cheeks.

“I thought I had lost you.” My voice was barely a whisper as I sniffed, trying to control my crying. My mother gave me a sad smile.

“Your boyfriend took good care of me. It killed me that I

couldn't see you, but I knew it had to be done this way. For your safety too. He promised me I would see you again, and I've been waiting ever since.” She explained. I wiped away my tears, and let out a small smile.

“Husband, mom. He's my husband.” My mother took a sharp intake of breath, looking at me in surprise.

“You got married?” I nodded, and she looked behind me at Damiano.

“Even though she’s -” She stopped talking, looking back at

“Yes. Even though I don’t have a drop of Italian in me.” I said, letting her know that I knew about Gaetano not being my biological father.

“As if that would have stopped me from marrying her.” Damiano said, having me turn around to face him. He had his arms crossed, staring blankly at my mother. I couldn’t help but smile. It reminded me of when he came to visit me back home, and how they wanted to kill each other.

Damiano was still not quite fond of my mother.

It had me let out a slight chuckle, making Damiano look at me. His gaze softened and a small smile appeared on his lips.

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“I know what I want when I see it.” He winked. Even when I was a complete mess, he still managed to make me blush. I looked at my mother, seeing her with a warm smile. I embraced her once again, just to make sure she truly was here with me.

“Cara... How’s my Cara?” My mother’s smile faded when she saw my expression.

“She’ll be okay.” I told her as I let out a small sigh.

“I will tell you everything, but...” I trailed off, unsure how to say there was something I needed to know first.

D

“Of course, honey. I’m the one who owes you an explanation about everything.” She caressed my cheek and I gave a small nod. I didn’t want to be kept in the dark anymore, and it was time for me to know the whole truth, and how we ended up like this.

“And also, he’s outside... He deserves to hear it too.” I didn’t need to elaborate on who I was referring to because her expression already told me she knew.

My mother didn't say anything and caressed my hair before tucking a strand behind my ear. She let out a small smile but I knew it was forced.

“Do you want me to make you a cup of tea?”

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