

The Devil's Fire by Mariam El-Hafi Chapter 271 - 280

"That would be nice." I smiled. She gave my hand a squeeze before I watched her retreating form.

My mother was nervous and probably needed a minute to herself before facing the man she hadn't seen in over twenty- five years. And who apparently also happened to be my biological father.

"We should get you to the clinic first." Damiano said when I neared him.

"I know but I think I need to do this first in case... I don't think I will be able to have this conversation after." I told him. For now, I could pretend everything was okay with me. But if I went to the clinic now just to get bad news, it would leave me shattered. There was only so much I could handle at the time, and I wanted to hear what my mother had to say before becoming a complete mess.

"Are you sure?" Damiano's eyes narrowed as he looked around my face in concern.

"I am, but maybe you should rest? You look tired." I said worriedly. It was too soon for him to be standing and moving around this much. I knew he was trying to keep his

movements minimal, but still, he should be in bed resting until he fully recovered.

"Are you saying I look like shit?" He raised a brow.

"Just a little." I bit back a smile when he clicked his tongue at

"I'm kidding." I chuckled, unable to keep it in.

"You've never been sexier. You should go to war some more. It

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does add some attractiveness." I joked. Damiano gave me a playful smile, leaning closer to me as he held my chin to look at him.

“I’ve told you before... If you want me to burn the world for you, I will. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you.” He sealed his promise with a kiss, having my heart flutter. And once again, he has proven he would go beyond and above for me.

And I would do the very same for him.

“When everything is over, I want to go to bed and sleep in your arms.” I whispered against his lips. That was all I needed. As long as he was by my side, I could get through everything.

“Whatever you wish, my love.” Damiano gave me a soft smile.

“I should get Alexei.” I said and he gave me a small nod. There was no reason for my mother to tell me the whole story, just for her to tell it again to him. I wanted to spare her as much emotional pain as possible because I knew she had to make difficult decisions in life. Just to protect me.

“I will get him, just stay here.” I told Damiano, Antonio, and Giovanni once we were out. I didn’t wait for a reply as I made my way to Alexei and Nestor. He was leaning against his car but straightened up when he saw me.

I stopped in front of him, feeling a little awkward talking to him after knowing who he truly was to me. I could barely handle his piercing blue eyes on me.

“Are you okay?” Alexei asked, surprising me with his soft tone.

“I – Well... I don’t know...” I answered truthfully. My mind was all over the place at the moment, and I was trying to push

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through it all. <

“... Turns out she is alive.” I decided to say with a forced-out chuckle. I had no idea how else I was supposed to tell him, but it seemed fitting since I had no idea she was alive to begin

with.

Alexei and Nestor didn’t say anything and just looked at my troubled expression.

“Follow me.” I told them and went back to the house with them close behind. This time, Antonio and Giovanni followed inside as well. I doubted Alexei and Nestor would try anything since this place was heavily guarded, and they were all watching the Russian Mob Boss like a hawk, waiting for him to make one mistake before they would empty their guns on.

him.

My mother was in the living room, her back facing us as she was looking out of the floor-length window. She turned around when she heard us enter, her eyes immediately resting on Alexei. They didn't say anything for a long while as he, too, was watching her.

Alexei was looking stunned at the sight of her. He probably gave up the idea of ever seeing her again a long time ago, and now, she was standing in front of him for the first time after

so many years.

Then his eyes turned ice cold with a glare.

“You damned woman!” And he pulled out his gun.

Well, shit.

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Althaia

As soon as Alexei drew out his gun, Damiano pulled me behind him and he and his men pulled out their guns as well, finger on the trigger and ready to fire. But then Nestor quickly pushed Alexei away when a knife flew right in between them, missing Alexei's head by a hair.

Surprised and confused, everyone turned to look in the direction where the knife came from. My mother had her brows pinched with her gaze locked on Alexei, ready with another knife in her hand.

“Did you forget how she loved to do that to you?” Nestor sighed at Alexei. But he was too focused on my mother with a furious gaze.

“Seems like her aim is off.” He sneered.

"It's not off, it was simply a warning. I got you once, and I can do it again." My mother spoke calmly but had a whole different demeanor to her. My jaw was on the floor as I looked at them back and forth in pure shock.

This whole damn thing had me completely dumbfounded. Wasn't Alexei the one who had demanded to see her, and almost started a war because of it? And now, he was the one trying to kill her. What had me even more confused was, my mother had all those letters and pictures from their time together, yet she was looking at him with a firm glare, ready to launch her knife at him one more time.

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"Okay, let us all just calm down for a minute..." I said and stepped around Damiano to face them. Damiano stopped me from getting between them but I told him I would be fine. I doubted they would do anything if I stood in between them.

"Let us try and be normal, civilized people for a moment and lower your weapons." I said carefully.

"Stay out of it. This is between me and your mother." Alexei hissed but his eyes never once left my mother.

"Don't talk to my daughter like that!" My mother snapped at him. But her words only made Alexei explode even more in rage,

"Your daughter? Apparently, she's my daughter too that you have hidden away from me for twenty-five fucking years you damned woman!" He shouted and everyone went silent. He was furious but he was also looking distressed about the fact he had a daughter he had no idea about.

My mother looked taken aback by his outburst. We all were as no one expected him to lose it like this. Not that it wasn't understandable...

My mother then looked at Damiano with a slight frown.

"You told him?"

"I did." Damiano replied with no care in the world.

“That was not your business to tell.” She hissed and Damiano’s eyes darkened with anger.

“Oh, but it was when I was trying to save your daughter from the man you let her think was her father, and he wouldn’t

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leave me the fuck alone.” His voice was going deadly low.

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“I found the small treasure chest in your room, and the note from Nestor, telling you to meet him at the Luxe Palace. So I went to meet him.” I said quickly to prevent them from going at each other.

“Alone?” She asked, color leaving her face and I nodded.

“Althaia!” My mother looked at me furiously.

“Yeah, no need to be mad at me about it. Damiano already went bat shit crazy on me for it...” I muttered with a scowl, not liking that memory of him.

“What I mean is, it wasn’t my first time meeting Alexei, and I told him about you. Then I guess at some point he went and dug up your casket.” I elaborated.

“Of course, he fucking did.” I raised my brows in surprise. My mother never cursed hence why we were never allowed to do it under her roof. She made that clear many times with her wooden spoon.

“Mamá... Is it really true that he’s...?” I trailed off. Even though I had heard it a few times already, I wanted it to be confirmed by my mother. Her gaze softened at me and held my hands in hers as she let out a sigh.

“It is true. He is your biological father.” I let out a breath and turned to look at Alexei. He, too, was looking at me as if I was unreal.

I could understand how no one would ever have been suspicious if he was my biological father and not Gaetano. We looked nothing alike.

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His eyes were blue, mine were green.

His skin was light, mine was tan.

I took completely after my mother in terms of looks, making me wonder if I even inherited anything from him.

But then I suddenly remembered something.

“Ew!” I erupted, and my expression turned into one of disgust before I could stop myself. Alexei looked completely

offended.

“What? Would you rather have that stupid Italian man as your father?” Alexei spoke with a heavy Russian accent as he

looked at me with a frown.

“It’s already bad enough you’re married to an Italian.” He continued, having Damiano and his men send him a death

stare.

“Watch your mouth, Vasiliev. You’re already on thin ice.” Damiano almost growled out, and Alexei dared to ignore him as he still looked at me offended. It almost made me want to laugh.

“I didn’t mean it like that. I just remembered you telling me how I looked like one of your old lovers. That’s pretty disturbing now. Especially now that I know it’s about my mother.”

“You said what?!” My mother and Damiano erupted in fury.

“How was I supposed to know she was my daughter? I was intrigued when I saw her, and not in a nasty way. She looks exactly like you did at her age, and it had me curious.” He

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shrugged. My mouth formed an 'o' as I wondered if that was where my curiosity came from.

“Other than the looks, you’re nothing alike. Althaia is pure- hearted, innocent, and bright. But you!” He pointed at my mother with a growl.

“You are one crazy woman who tried to kill me! But it’s okay. I can see the years didn’t do you well, you old woman.” Alexei let out a satisfied smile when my mother gave him a deathly glare.

“Who are you calling old, you dusty man?!” She erupted and I gasped when she threw a knife at him. Nestor once again had to push Alexei out of the way when he refused to move.

“Are you really going to let her get you again?” Nestor sighed and shook his head. Then Alexei started to speak fast in Russian. Whatever he was saying, my mother’s eyes narrowed.

Then she started to speak in Russian.

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I dropped my jaw as I looked at her, completely starstruck.

My mother and Alexei kept going off at each other in Russian, even Nestor interferred but it looked like he was trying to calm them down.

“This was not how I imagined things would be...” I said to Damiano, who also watched them. I looked at him, seeing he had a frown on his face before holding his gun in front of him.

“Damiano, wait –” But it fell on deaf ears as he fired. I looked at the others in horror, but let out a breath of relief when I saw he shot above their heads in a warning. It still had Alexei and Nestor quickly react and aimed at Damiano. But I wasn’t worried because I knew no one was going to shoot.

Still, a smile got on my lips when I noticed Alexei had grabbed my mother and pulled her behind him to protect her. He was in denial when it came to her, and I knew he erupted in so much anger because of this huge secret she had kept from him.

But she will always be his Solnishko, and he will always be her Lunnyy svet.

No matter how much they tried to deny it at the moment.

“Do you want to die?!” Alexei shouted at Damiano.

“Quiet.” Damiano spoke calmly in demand.

“You can all kill each other for all I care. But my wife is a

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priority and she needs answers. And she better gets those answers right now before I shoot your brains out.”

“Let me just rephrase that real quick.” I sighed and patted Damiano’s arm to calm him down.

“It looks like you have a lot of catching up to do, but before that, can we please get to the point where I’m involved first?” I asked, hoping this would stop them from killing each other for a bit.

“Of course, honey.” My mother smiled at me, but quickly frowned when she noticed Alexei’s arm around her.

“Let go of me. I don’t need your help.” She pushed his arm away.

“Ungrateful woman.” Alexei scoffed.

“Stop it! You’re acting like entitled teenagers, it’s embarrassing.” I snapped at them, having enough of their fighting already. Luckily, they listened and stopped their bickering.

My mother sat me down on the couch with her, holding my hands in hers as she thought of how to break it all down for

I knew there wasn't much I could be surprised by. I just needed to know how and why she decided to do things the way she did. Whatever it was, I knew she had a good reason for all the decisions she took.

"Okay..." My mother started, and I was finally going to hear the truth.

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An Old Flame(2)

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My mother came from an influential Greek family, and her father was in fact a Mob Boss back in the day. However, with the rise of Italians and Russians taking over territories faster than ever, the Cirillo Family struggled to maintain a name for themselves, and eventually, they were forgotten among the many Mafia organizations that were destroyed or simply couldn't keep up.

But my mother's father refused to let that happen to him. It was his honor and pride, and he would rather die than watch it all crumble like that.

That was when the Volante Family came into the picture.

My grandfather strongly believed in domestic patriarchy, and since my mother was an only child and female, there was no way he would allow her to take over and lead. My mother had silently watched everything and acquired the skills and knowledge to take over as a leader.

But still, even if it was her birthright, he refused.

When my mother was young, she was allowed to take an education, giving her the opportunity to travel and explore the world while she took her semesters abroad.

That was when she met and fell in love with

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“I’m twenty–
five, but okay.” I chuckled. Everyone had been quiet and listened to my mother’s story. It was a story I thought you would only read about, or watch in movies. In no way would I have expected my mother to have such a story.

“I have a question.” I turned to look at Alexei.

“You asked for my mother’s hand in marriage, wouldn’t you have been able to track her down if you knew the family she came from?”

“I would. If she ever bothered to give me her real name. I told you she went by many different names, and not once had she revealed her true name to me. Your mother legally changed her name every single time. When I approached your grandfather, I said ‘I want your daughter’s hand in marriage’. I wasn’t being specific and I didn’t even consider if he had more than one daughter. You can call it being young and dumb.” He shook his head with a slight smile.

“I did look for her, but the names never matched her description.”

“It’s Jacinta.” I clarified and he raised a brow at my mother.

“Is that your real name or something you made up?”

“Jacinta is my real name.”

“What kind of name is that? Your parents really fucking hated you, didn’t they?” He laughed as if it was the funniest thing ever. If my mother had another knife in her hands, she would have thrown it at him.

“But in the end, I stopped caring. She was too much of a headache for me anyway.” Alexei gave a dismissive wave,

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acting like he didn't care. Of course, I didn't buy it. They were both playing hard to get.

"What? Was I too opinionated for you? Did I challenge you too much? Did I hurt that stupid ego of yours? No surprise since I was this close to being able to kill you." My mother scoffed loudly at him.

"Close. You didn't succeed." Alexei fired back.

"Only because I changed my mind at the very last minute." His eyes narrowed, turning into two cold slits as he stared at my mother.

"You should get checked for psychotic disorders."

"Oh, go cry to your mama, you big baby. That old hag was the reason I went crazy!"

"Mom!" I gasped in shock she would say that about his mother.

"Careful, Solnishsko. That's my late mother you're talking about." He sneered and my mother got up on her feet in rage.

"The same mother that prevented me from ever telling you were going to have a child!" She shouted at him.

It went dead silent as they stared at each other.

"...What are you talking about?" Alexei frowned, and she let out a breath.

"I am not a heartless person. I was going to tell you the minute I found out. I knew she was yours because, at that time, Gaetano was away for more than four weeks. Two weeks after I saw you, I started to get symptoms. And Gaetano was still

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not back from his trip." She ran a hand through her hair.

"May she rest in peace, but your mother was doing the most to keep us apart. She never liked me, but in your eyes, she could never do wrong. I showed up to tell you and

to figure out what you wanted to do. But I ran into your mother first and she prevented me from seeing you. I explained to her it was urgent, and then had to tell her the real reason why. She tried to kill me on the spot.” My mother shook her head in disbelief.

“But she knew. She knew I was pregnant with your child but she didn’t tell you, and I went back to living my life with Gaetano. What else was I supposed to do? I couldn’t risk your mother going after me to terminate my pregnancy

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Althaia

My eyes welled as I could feel the pain, and my heart ached for them both. The fact that my mother was going to tell them, maybe even holding onto the hope that they could finally be together.

But no.

For her own protection, mine even, she had to accept that was how her life was going to be. And I couldn’t even imagine what Alexei must be feeling now. To know he was close to being told he was going to have a child with the woman he loved. But his own mother stood in his way and took the truth with her to the grave.

Nestor looked completely taken aback as he looked at my mother and followed Alexei once he came to his senses. I was sure Alexei needed some time to think it all through.

I didn’t say anything, giving my mother some time to gather herself. I looked at Damiano, he was leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, already looking at me. I couldn’t tell if he was truly interested in the story or not as he wore a straight face.

Then I knew he wasn’t interested when he tapped the watch on his wrist, letting me know how was getting impatient and wanted me to get to the clinic now. I knew I had to go soon but i couldn’t leave after this.

She literally dropped a bomb on us all.

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smile as she returned to sit next to me.

he, giving me a soft

“I know how it all sounds, but know you’re still the best thing that ever happened to me.” She whispered as she caressed my cheek. I smiled. I never doubted that for a second.

“The decisions I made are not something I am proud of... But, I had to keep you alive and safe for as long as I could. Fortunately, you look like me which made it easier. And I never wanted you to have the Volante name because you weren’t his, but I also couldn’t give you your real name. Instead, I came up with some excuse about protection and twisted the Cirillo name into Celano to make it sound Italian.” My mother continued to explain. Everything made so much more sense now. If Gaetano knew I wasn’t his daughter, he would have killed us both on the spot.

“I liked the name Celano better than Volante.” I admitted, making her chuckle.

“I just had to continue the lie for a bit longer until I could find a way out. Bit by bit, I saved enough for us to get away. But of course, nothing was easy. Life never is. You loved him as your father and it broke me because he was going to ruin it. But your well-being meant more to me, and if it meant you would hate me for taking you away, then that was fine with me. You just had to be safe.”

Guilt flooded me. I was so heartbroken when we left, and I did remember feeling a bit resentful toward my mother. But when I believed I was calling my father to talk to him, he never once picked up and even changed his number. I just accepted that was how it was going to be and lived life with my mother.

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“How did you do it?” I asked.

“Well, for once I felt like I had luck on my side. I found out Gaetano was cheating on me with Morella, and it gave me the perfect reason to go. I even made a scene to make it more believable that I was upset about it, and that was when we left.”

“You slapped him.” I said and my mother looked at me in surprise.

“How do you know?”

“Cara and I heard you fighting. We sneaked out of the room and we saw you slap the fuck – I mean, we saw you slap him.” I quickly corrected myself. Who knew if she had a wooden spoon here? But it actually made her smile. She looked proud of herself and she should be.

“My biggest regret will always be not fighting harder for Cara...” My mother looked frustrated with herself, and I

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I had completely forgotten about that episode. Now that she was telling me about it, I did remember how I was upset about

she wouldn't let

the whole situation, not understanding why was upset about

me go when it was my family we were talking about. I was just too happy I was finally going to see Cara after so long.

“What you didn't know was, I followed you to make sure you would be okay.”.

“Seriously?!” I gaped.

“I did. I never figured out why Gataeno let us go that easily. In case anything was going to happen, I would be there to get you away. I went under disguise and dressed up as one of the servers to stay close to you. But then things took a turn the minute Damiano grabbed you, thinking he knew the truth. It almost gave me a heart attack!” My mother exclaimed in exhaustion at the memory.

I leaned back on the couch, trying to process everything that was being thrown in my face. This was way, way deeper than I could have ever prepared for.

“So... You knew everything?” I asked, thinking back to the phone call about her flipping out because Cara was marrying a Bellavia.

“I did. I had to pretend I didn’t know a thing. But I genuinely didn’t know about you and Damiano until you told me. And I knew I could recognize that man and the other one, Luca | think his name was.” My mother pointed at Giovanni.

“You thought they were a couple at the restaurant.” I put a hand to my mouth to stop myself from laughing too hard as Giovanni gave me one displeased look.

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“I apologize. But you did look great together!” She said brightly to him, making it even funnier as his frown deepened.

“Luca’s engaged and Gio has a girlfriend, but he won’t admit it.” I let out a playful smile when he gave me a blank look.

“Shame. I really hoped they would be together.” She whispered to me, having me shake my head in amusement. My mother sighed before continuing with the story.

Everything turned into a mess faster than she could have time to figure out what to do. When Gaetano ordered Michael to take me to his office, which complicated things for my mother. She was trying not to attract any attention to herself because she had to pretend she was just a normal server. She was relieved when I got out of Gaetano’s office. It was with Michael but she had some faith in him that he wouldn’t do anything to me since she practically raised him as well.

“That was when I thought I would show up at your hotel and take you back home. But Gaetano caught me before I could get off there.” I let out a small gasp and my eyes widened.

“I have no idea how that bastard recognized me, but he did.” My mother frowned, still visibly angry about it.

“He revealed to me he knew the truth about you and I was positive he was going to get rid of me right at that moment and go after you next. Instead, he had me work for him under the radar and I was in no position to challenge him.” My brows raised in realization. Now it made so much more sense why he had reacted so angrily when he saw me at the engagement party.

It was because he knew I was the daughter of Alexei Vasiliev.

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“I got sent back to Florida and followed every single instruction he threw at me, and then I was laundering money for him. He needed to use a business no one would keep an eye on. I had to put in many hours of work for it to even make sense, and that piece of shit always reminded me how easily he could hurt you if I didn’t listen. He sent me a picture of you sleeping at his house. Gun to your head.” She clenched her jaw as she spoke, and a cold shiver ran down my spine. Gaetano was toying with my mother and had me thinking I was spending quality time with my father.

It had me feeling sick.

“And that was why you bought that property in Greece.” I stated. I didn’t need to hear anymore. I could connect to every single thing now.

My mother nodded.

“Yes. One big mistake when Gaetano took over, was he forced the elders to retire early as a way out. Most have passed away but there is still one I have always been close to, and he helped me out with the property. I call him Uncle Belen.” She smiled at the mention of him.

“He was one of the very few that actually agreed I should be the new leader. He’s the type of person that sees everything but stays hidden in the shadows. Ask him anything, and he would have an answer for it. That is how I knew about

Damiano’s late fiancée.” I glanced at Damiano at the mention of Sienna, knowing how he had reacted the last time my mother brought her up. But not a muscle in his face moved, having me raise a brow at him.

“You threw that at his face at the time. Why?” My tone let her

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know I was not pleased with it at all. I had no idea about their history at the time, but if my mother knew Sienna had passed and still brought it up the way she did, had me pissed on Damiano's behalf.

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The Truth(3)

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"I brought her up to see how he would react to it. If he didn't react to it that means he didn't care, and you had gotten yourself into some deep mess. So, not only was I trying to get Gaetano off our backs, but I would also

deal with Famiglia di Bellavia. Which is a hundred times worse than dealing with any other people." My mother let out a breath, and I could feel all the stress she had to go through. I could now understand more why she reacted so badly to my pregnancy back then.

Even though I wouldn't have been of any help back then, I still wished she would have told me everything. But I could understand why it was a necessity I had to be left in the dark for so long. They knew this dark world way better when I had only just seen a scratch of it at the time. And it made me feel a whole different kind of gratitude to my mother. So much she had done for me without me having any idea.

She would forever be my rock.

I wrapped my arms around her and embraced her tightly, taking her by surprise by the sudden action. My mother had done an amazing job of keeping me safe and living a normal life.

"I'm just happy you're okay." I whispered to her. The void that lingered in my heart after I thought she had passed, finally went away as she held her in my arms,

“Me too, honey. You have gone through more than I ever wanted you to, but you will always be okay. Do you know why? Because you have a good man by your side.” She said and I could feel the tension melt away in her body.

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“I know.” I smiled. It came slightly choked out when a lump formed in my throat. I was barely able to keep my tears at bay.

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I let out a breath and finally got to my feet. Only to wince in pain when my stomach cramped.

“Shit! I’m taking you to the clinic now.” Damiano stormed to me while my mother was holding onto me with concern.

“What’s happening? Did you get hurt?” Her voice was laced with concern. I took a deep breath and forced a smile on my lips.

“I just found out I’m pregnant... And I’m most likely

miscarrying right now.” My mother looked at me in pure horror

“What?!” Antonio and Giovanni erupted at the same time, rushing to my side as well.

“And you let me sit here and babble about this?!” My mother exclaimed.

“You need a doctor! I will go with you.” But I stopped her before she could hurry me out.

“I will be fine. Besides, you have things you need to sort out with Alexei.” I smiled. It was easier to say I was fine when in reality I had no idea if I would be. For now, I was okay with faking it until I knew for sure.

“No. He can wait.”

“I think he has waited long enough, mom. Don’t worry about me. I will come and see you after.” I promised before Damiano almost went to carry me to get going. Antonio and Giovanni practically ran out to get the car going to get us to the clinic.

“Fuck, I can’t believe I listened to you on this.” Damiano

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growled, angry with himself when I had to slightly lean into him for support.

“Damiano.” I stopped him and he looked at me with worry in his eyes.

“What’s wrong? Are you in a lot of pain? Let me carry you.”

“No, you can barely stand on your own feet.” I placed my hands on his cheeks, feeling his stubbly cheeks under the palms of my hands.

“Thank you. Thank you for keeping her alive.” I told him. I wish I could truly tell him how thankful I was.

“I don’t know what I would do without you. Thank you for everything, and for always coming back to me.” His eyes softened and I leaned in to kiss his lips, trying to show him my love and gratitude, even though I knew it wasn’t near enough for the things he did for me.

“No need to thank me, my love.” He whispered against my lips. Damiano placed a kiss on my forehead before taking my hand in his as we went to the car.

I halted before sliding inside when Alexei and Nestor showed up and made their way toward us. I looked at Alexei when he stopped in front of me.

“I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do. But I would like to get to know you. If you accept.” He had a small crease between his brows, and it almost seemed like he was nervous about his question.

“I would love that.” I gave him a small smile to which he returned. He looked at Damiano, his expression turning

serious.

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“We have something that needs to be discussed. About her birthright.”

“I know. I will set up a meeting.” Damiano replied and Alexei gave a firm nod before making his way inside the house.

“Nestor?” He looked at me.

“Make sure they don’t kill each other, please?” I asked with a small smile.

“It’s been my job ever since they met each other.” Nestor sighed but smiled as he promised me he would.

“Come. Let’s go.” Damiano said. I took another deep, trying to prepare myself for the worst as we went on our way to the clinic.

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Althaia

Ellie was already at the clinic, waiting for us when we arrived. The closer we got to the examination room, the more anxious I got. I was dreading it more than ever. To get that confirmation that it was another miscarriage.

That another life was lost in me.

I felt suffocated.

Damiano, Antonio, and Giovanni were just as worried. No one bothered to mask their emotions as they were concerned for my well-being and what was going to happen.

“So, what are we dealing with?” Ellie asked once she closed the door to give us some privacy while Antonio and Giovanni waited outside.

“I took a pregnancy test, it was positive but... I’m bleeding and cramping.” I swallowed hard as Ellie listened carefully to me. Damiano stayed close to me, holding me as if I would collapse at any moment. What I loved about Ellie was that even though she knew us, she was still being professional and not letting us see if she was concerned as she listened to me.

“Okay, we will do a blood test and do a transvaginal ultrasound for a more detailed view. Are you going to slap my hands if I come near you with a needle?” Ellie smiled and her teasing slightly lessened the tension in my body.

“I will try not to.” I returned her smile.

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I looked away, focusing on Damiano while she drew my blood. It wasn't too bad this time. Or maybe because my mind was going crazy, and having me feeling more dreadful than ever.

I don't want to go through this again...

“Please undress from the waist down and place your legs here.” Ellie instructed once she came back. My heart was beating faster and faster when I got on the hospital bed, bending my knees as she covered me to do the examination.

Damiano was next to me, holding my hand and caressing my head for comfort.

“Whatever happens, we'll get through it, okay?” He whispered softly to me. Words were stuck in my throat. I was unable to say anything and gave a nod instead. I held his hand tightly, feeling like hours were passing by and I was trying my best not to let out a sob.

“Oh...” Ellie suddenly said, having us immediately look at her. Her brows were slightly furrowed as she focused on the screen and I braced myself for her to confirm I was miscarrying.

“What is it, Ellie?” Damiano asked impatiently, and just as anxious as I was.

“Well – Actually, you should see for yourselves.” She turned the screen around to us. I let out a shocked gasp when she explained what we were seeing.

“So, everything is fine? But what about the bleeding and cramping.” I stumbled on my words, afraid to get my hopes up in case it was a false alarm.

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Let It Burn(1)

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“You have nothing to worry about. What you’re experiencing

is implantation bleeding, which is normal. The cramping is because of hormone change and your womb is preparing itself.” Ellie explained.

“Everything is okay then?” I already had tears in my eyes as I asked one more time just to be sure. She gave me a warm smile.

“Everything is absolutely fine. Congratulations, guys! You’re going to be parents.” Ellie beamed. I covered my face with my hands, lightly sobbing at the news.

When Ellie left to give us some privacy. I looked at Damiano, shocked, but he was still staring at the screen, not believing his eyes either. He let out a slow breath when he looked at me with a smile on his lips. He immediately cupped my face, pressing his lips to mine. A kiss that was so full of tenderness and relief. Even I let out a small laugh against his lips in pure happiness.

“I love you, baby. So, so much.” Damiano said in between kisses. His golden-brown eyes were bright with joy, having me sniff as tears were already making their way down my cheeks.

“I can’t believe this is actually happening.” I sat up, embracing him as tightly as I could without hurting him.

“I know.” Damiano let out a blissful sigh and kissed the top of my head. But then fear hit me full force and I clung to his arms, looking at him in panic.

“Damiano... What if it happens again? I don’t want to – I can’t handle it one more time.” I cried out to him in a form of desperation. His expression hardened and placed his hands on my cheeks.

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“It won’t happen again. It’s going to be different this time and not once are you going to leave my sight. No one’s ever going to hurt you again. Over my fucking dead body, do you understand?” Damiano spoke firmly to me.

“What if some of them got away and are waiting to finish the job?” I whispered. The fear of possibly going through the misery of losing another baby again was deeply engraved in me. So much I felt the panic attack creep in on me.

Damiano’s expression softened and he took a seat on the chair in front of me.

“Don’t worry about it, we’ve got everything under control. And... I wasn’t going to tell you this but I’m getting rid of every single one of them. Anyone who was involved, anyone who knew about it, friends, families... I’m going to scare them out of whatever shithole they’re hiding in, and then I’m going to rip them limb from limb. Nothing will stop me. I’m burning them all. For you.” Damiano held my hands and kissed them when I started to twiddle them around. It was one of my nervous traits.

“Tonight, everyone will understand that no one can or will fuck with Famiglia di Bellavia.” There was a fire in his gaze, burning like a sun. It was so intimidating, dangerous, and so beautiful at the same time as he promised me every single one was going to pay for what they have done. Getting rid of every single one and more to ensure my safety.

Our safety.

I smiled when his hand went to my stomach, caressing it with pride and admiration that there was life growing.

“promised I would destroy the world for you. And I am.

Anything to keep my fire.” Damiano whispered, still looking at my stomach, feeling enchanted by it before he looked at me with a beautiful smile on his lips.

He did promise me, and not once had he failed to keep his promise. After all, Damiano was a man of his word.

He was my villain, and...

“My Devil.” I whispered with a soft smile, and a mischievous look appeared on his face.

“And you, my love, are The Devil’s Fire.” And he sealed my lips with a kiss full of promise, protectiveness, and so much love it had me melt in his arms.

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? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

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Just when we opened the door to step out into the hallway, Antonio and Giovanni snapped their heads toward us. Giovanni had been pacing and quickly went to stop in front of me with Antonio.

“What took so long? What’s going on? Are you okay?”

Giovanni’s questions came out right after the others anxiously.

“Awh, look at you! And you say you don’t care about me.” I just had to tease him. He made it so easy for me right now.

“This is not the time, Althaia! Tell me!” Giovanni almost yelled in frustration. I glanced at Damiano before looking back at them.

“You’re going to be uncles.” I said with a big smile. I still barely could believe my own words.

But then something happened that left me completely shocked.

Giovanni embraced me.

I was stunned to the point my eyes went wide and my jaw dropped. I quickly snapped out of it and wrapped my arms around him too.

“You really do care about me.” I sniffed, my eyes tearing up, touched by his concern.

“Whatever. Just shut up about it.” He said but still hugged me tightly, feeling his body at ease. Giovanni stepped away and looked at Damiano, who was giving him a deadly glare but he had done a good job of not ripping him away from me.

1/4

“Sorry, Boss, I just had to. She’s our Donna.” Giovanni gave a few pats on his shoulder, looking relieved.

“I knew you would be all right. You’re one hell of a fighter, your baby will be nothing less than that.” Antonio pulled me into his arms and I felt his relief as he held me. It was Antonio’s turn to receive the deadly look from Damiano when Antonio kissed the top of my head. But this was one of the few moments Damiano was doing his best by keeping himself in check. It had us both laugh at Damiano’s reaction before I went to him to calm him down.

“Let’s get you home.” Damiano held my hand as we made our way out.

“Actually, there’s something I need to do before we go home.” I told them.

I walked down the underground tunnel with Damiano close next to me and the others following right behind us. I had been here before but this time it was different. It was heavily secured with armed men everywhere to ensure no outsiders would be able to get in or out. They were on guard and ready for anything. They gave us a nod in respect when we passed them before we reached the familiar door that had witnessed the unimaginable.

The Chamber of Torture.

Taking one small deep breath to prepare myself, Damiano opened the door and we stepped in.

Gaetano was chained to the wall, hanging from his wrists as he was slumped forward. Blood was dripping from his face

2/4

and onto the ground. He had been brutally beaten, and if it wasn’t because I was able to hear his breathing, I would have thought he was dead.

Damiano kept by the door, his arms crossed as he leaned against it. This was something I had to do. To have my closure. I dragged a chair and sat in front of Gaetano but made sure to keep enough distance even though his arms and legs were chained.

He lifted his head to look at me, and a wicked smile crept onto his lips, showing his blood-stained teeth before letting out a low laugh. I watched him, letting him laugh because he knew his life was over after this, and there was no escaping.

“So you win again, Althaia.” His voice was filled with venom as he spat out my name. But I wasn’t bothered by his tone as I stared at him with a straight face, void of any emotions. I wasn’t feeling anything toward him. He didn’t deserve any form of sympathy.

“I just want to know why.” I told him. I wanted to know why he didn’t kill me the minute he learned I wasn’t his daughter, and why he pretended to be a loving father that wanted to protect me. When it was him I needed to be protected from.

“You took someone in that wasn’t yours, and treated him like your own. But me? You didn’t even try with me. You were all I knew about and I loved you more than anything as my father.” Ever since I knew about him remarrying shortly after my mother and I left, and taking in a son and treating him like his own, hurt me deeply. More than I wanted to admit.

Gaetano stared at me, trying to move around to find a comfortable spot, but with the way he was hanging, I doubted

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he could.

“When I got the news I was going to be a father, I was

delighted. More than ever. So much I didn’t even care that it was going to be a girl.” He chuckled and I rolled my eyes. My mother was right. It was such a male-chauvinist world.

4/4

Chapter 280

Post Views: 8

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

288 IVouchers

“At some point during the pregnancy, I got an anonymous tip that she had been unfaithful. I dismissed it, knowing people play dirty games to tear you apart. She barely left the house, how was she supposed to? When you were born and I held you in my arms for the first time, something didn’t feel right,

but I dismissed it. They say you feel different when you get a newborn in your life.” He kept on chuckling as if remembering back to the good old days.

“As you got older, I still didn’t feel anything towards you. I tried but it still didn’t feel right. It felt like you weren’t mine... And I thought maybe that note played tricks on me. I even had a hard time calling you by your name.” Gaetano scoffed. It now dawned on me why he always insisted on calling me figlia, daughter, and barely said my name.

“I kept dismissing it until I got news from my doctor. I am incapable of having children.” Gaetano was looking me dead in the eye as he spoke.

“It wasn’t something that happened out of the blue. I was told about my problems when I was a young boy but I didn’t think more of it and it slipped my mind over the years until my doctor reminded me. That note kept lingering in the back of my mind, and that was when I finally decided to have a DNA test. Still, with the results in my hand, I couldn’t believe it. That was when I got another envelope sent, containing pictures of her with him!” He hissed out, rage swirling in his eyes.

I wasn’t bothered by his rage as I listened to everything. It made me wonder if it was Alexei’s mother who sent him those tips. Based on my mother’s explanation, she was the only one who knew and tried to get rid of her because of it.

“I was going to kill you both on the spot. But I couldn’t. A wife

1/3

Let It Burn(3)

288 Vouchers

is a man’s honor. She made a joke out of me, and I couldn’t risk word getting out that my wife was being a slut and spreading her legs for the Russians.” This time, it was me boiling with rage at him insulting my mother.

“Althaia, stand up for a second.” Damiano gently took my hand as I got to my feet. Then Damiano grabbed the chair and crushed it on Gaetano’s head. I watched the wooden chair splinter, letting me see just how much force he was using.

“Don’t strain yourself.” I said to Damiano, afraid he was getting himself hurt when he continued to bash him with the chair.

Gaetano groaned out in pain, his head dangling from side to side before he composed himself and let out a laugh.

“Why did you pretend to be my father when I came for the engagement?” I asked, getting straight to the point. Gaetano let out a snarl.

“You fucking almost ruined everything I had been working for!” He shouted in resentment.

“I had everything planned out, the fucking perfect plan! But people knew I had a daughter, so I faked your death as Althaia Volante because no one asks questions about the dead. And you ruined it by showing up! I had to pretend you were my daughter, and I was doing this to protect you to save my plan. I couldn’t risk anyone finding out you’re Russian, that would ruin everything for me if they thought I was working with them.” His breathing came out loud and harsh in fury.

“So, I tried to get rid of you before it was too late and the news got out. I always kept my eyes on you and hired people to do the job. I sent human traffickers, and I even cut that

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worthless piece of shit’s tongue to send a message that it was my doing.” He started to laugh hysterically. My heart dropped as I remembered those men following us at the amusement park, and that guy who attacked me after the auction. He almost succeeded in getting rid of me.

Gaetano faked caring for me to my face, but the minute I would turn around, he was trying to stab me over and over again in the back.

“Unfortunately for me, you already had protection. So, I focused on creating my army. I was becoming bigger and more powerful and I was about to show it to the world by succeeding in taking down the Russian scum. And then, I was going to find you and your mother and kill you.” Gaetano’s eyes went wide in joy at the thought of not just killing Alexei and my mother, but me as well.

“You ruined everything for me! But at least, I got rid of The Devil’s spawn that was growing in your stomach.” He laughed loudly. I moved faster than I had ever before, taking Damiano’ s gun before even he could react.

And I shot him.

Gaetano roared out in pain as I shot him in the shoulder. I wasn’t going to give him the pleasure of giving a quick death. No. I wanted him to suffer as much as I’ve suffered.

He tried to take everything from me, and he made me -miserable. The sympathy that usually clung to my heart was

gone. I didn’t feel anything but anger and resentment. I wanted them all to pay for hurting me and my loved ones.

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Post Views: 9