

EPILOGUE

ROSA

I clutch my stomach as tears gather in the corners of my eyes. Cate and Juliana's laughter joins mine as we lounge in the backyard watching the kids go wild, trying and failing to climb onto the floaties in the pool.

Danio and Debi are both back from Italy and have joined us out here, as has Alessio. Alessio is currently trying to tame the beast, but much like the kids, having no luck. So far, the floatie has remained the champion.

"Where's my phone when I need it?" Juliana snickers, searching her lounge. "Marco needs to see this."

"You'd think they'd try a different tactic," Cate says before sipping on her lemonade.

"You'd think a grown man would do better." Debi laughs as she watches Alessio, clutching her stomach.

Juliana eyes me. "So..."

"So?" I parrot the tone, knowing exactly what they'll ask me.

Despite the unease I felt with them to start, they've been nothing but welcoming, going so far as to even welcome Kori and Kristopher to a few play dates. The utter joy that swells every time I think about having a family like this is surreal.

And that's what they want to know about now. They're asking about a certain tattooed man who's swept me off my feet.

Things with Camillo and I are...perfect. Better than I ever thought I'd have in life. It's not the sort of life I'd imagined, but it's exactly what I need—and what Ethan needs.

"Do you know what Camillo's up to?" I ask. We came out here with our drinks when he kicked us out of the kitchen.

"No." Juliana shakes her head. "Just that it's a surprise and not to come in until he says so." She shares a look with Cate and Debi.

“Do you all know something?”

“What?” Debi says with an air of innocence.

“No,” Juliana adds with too much emphasis as she goes back to watching Alessio and Danio playing with the kids in the pool.

“You totally do know something...”

But they busy themselves with their drinks and phones. I take a long sip of my iced tea before pursing my lips.

“Rosa?” Over an hour later, some time after the kids and guys have left the pool and started a game of baseball, I hear my name called. Turning to see Camillo, I bite my lip to keep from laughing. Camillo’s black T-shirt is covered in white powder, and a streak of it is marring his hair and cheek. The apron around his waist is also covered with splotches of colors.

Juliana and Cate are not so polite. Their laughter fills the yard, and Camillo ducks his head a little, scowling as his cheeks stain with color.

“What happened to your shirt?” I ask.

“What?” His head snaps up. “Oh this? Um, nothing. Will you, uh, come to the kitchen?”

I slide from the lounge, adjusting my cover up as I go. While I might have made big strides in conquering the damage done with my eating habits, there’s still a lot of work to do—it’s an ongoing journey and one which Camillo is helping me with every step of the way.

Camillo’s gaze eats me up, and I catch his tongue swipe over his bottom lip. I flush, knowing exactly where his mind is going. Like most mornings, Camillo started the day with what he calls his favorite meal. The wicked things this man can do with this tongue never cease to amaze me. And the fact that he demands it be done with me on top of him sends my body shivering.

Lacing my fingers with his, he guides me toward the kitchen. The smell of freshly baked lemon cake wafts around me, making my mouth water.

The ugly voices in the back of my head tell me I shouldn't want it, but I push them away. One cupcake isn't going to kill me. Anyway, Camillo will certainly make me work off any negative effects later.

I smile at him, squeezing his hand.

Then, as we turn the corner into the kitchen, my jaw drops.

And I stop in my tracks as I take in the sight before me.

The door to the fridge is wide open. The counters are covered in white powder—flour, or sugar, or both. Batter drips from the edge of the island onto the floor. Bowls, whisks, and God knows what else are piled high in the sink. It looks like a bomb went off.

“Jesus...” I mutter. “What happened in here?”

Camillo tugs my hand again and guides me further into the kitchen. I don't miss the red on the edges of his ears as he does so.

He inhales deeply, shifting from foot to foot before turning to face me. “I can see now that this, uh, probably wasn't the best idea. I'll clean it up, Rosa. I promise.”

I can only nod, too shocked to do anything more.

He steps to the side, revealing cupcakes arranged on a tray. The frosting is a bit messy and sliding off some places, but they smell heavenly.

“You made me cupcakes?”

“They're your favorite.”

I step closer, reaching out to take one.

My hand freezes midair as I catch the writing over the top of them.

My brain forgets to work.

My lungs forget they need oxygen.

And my whole world tilts on its axis and almost topples right over.

Because there are twenty-seven cupcakes.

And twenty-six of them have a letter iced on them.

While the very last cupcake is iced with a question mark...

And they spell out the most beautiful sentence I've ever seen.

They say: I love you, Rosa. Will you marry me?

"W-what?" Surely, I read that wrong. It can't be...?

Tears blur my vision as I turn back toward Camillo when he doesn't say anything.

But the space where he stood is empty.

Instead, he's kneeling on the ground, a ring in his hands.

I gasp, covering my mouth.

His eyes spear me with a look that warms my entire body. It's the same look he gives me when he doesn't think I'm looking. One full of raw emotion and love. Like I'm the only thing he'll ever want in life. Like I'm his saving grace.

When in reality, he's mine.

"You're serious?" I choke out.

He nods. "Like a fucking heart attack, baby." Another deep inhale from him. "And I could have done a million more romantic things, but none of them felt more like me and you. You've done more for me than you'll ever know. And I might not be perfect, but I'll die trying before ever letting you go. So, will you do it, Rosa? Will you marry me?"

I can't speak for a few moments.

Is this really happening?

"Oh my God. Yes, yes, yes," I say with a watery laugh. "But only if you promise not to bake ever again without supervision."

His deep chuckle fills the room. "Deal." His hand trembles just slightly as he stands and slides the ring onto my finger. He leans closer, his lips brushing the shell of my ear.

I look down, my gaze wide at the glossy platinum band and the glittering pear-shaped diamond which is positioned between several smaller round diamonds. It's utterly breathtaking. I swallow back a sob. No one has ever gone to such lengths for me.

"I'm so happy," I murmur. Words I never thought I'd say to a man like Camillo. For his hardened ways and brutish exterior, he's the only man who's ever looked at me the way he does. Who's shown me kindness and love. I thought I was way too broken to give love to a man. But he's a man I can see myself falling in love with again and again for eternity.

His lips press to my forehead. "There's more."

"More?"

He nods, smiling like a kid on Christmas Day. It's a smile that takes my breath away.

His chin jerks behind me, and as I spin around, I nearly lose my footing, but his arms keep me steady and upright. "Careful, baby, there's flour all over the floor."

My gaze lands on a second tray of cupcakes. My brow puckers as I come closer.

And I can't say a single word for several long seconds. "You're...serious?"

"Yes. If I'm going to have you, I want all of you and all of your life. And I want it to be official." His arms wrap around my body, pulling me into his flour-covered clothes. "But only if you approve?"

I nod, giving him a grin. "But does this mean that the second oven is as much of a mess as the top oven?" I giggle as tears shine in my eyes.

A movement behind Camillo catches my eye, and I see Cate and Juliana peering inside, followed by a flash of Debi's head.

"Probably." Camillo laughs as he gives an apologetic shrug. And then, he calls out to the girls. "You can come in now!"

Squeals fill the room as Juliana, Cate, and Debi file in.

"Let me see!" Debi gasps as she rushes toward the cupcakes.

Juliana claps her hands together with glee. "I can't believe it actually worked."

Cate holds up her phone. "I filmed the whole thing so we can play it at the wedding!"

“Welcome to the family!” Juliana cries.

“Thank you,” I giggle.

“You’re all so nosy,” Camillo mutters, rolling his eyes at the girls and grinning at the same time.

The girls pull me into their embrace, hugging me and lifting my hand for their inspection, each giving an approving look or a sigh of appreciation. Their warmth and clear joy for me make me melt.

“Alright, alright, enough. Out, out.” Camillo shoos them away with a snap of the towel on his shoulder. “I’d like some alone time with her now. You can pester her later.”

“What about dinner?” Debi asks.

“Debi, you might be my sister, but if you don’t fucking leave, I’m not responsible for the therapy you’re going to demand.”

The deep timbre of Camillo’s voice sends a thrill racing down my spine. I give Debi an apologetic smile before I’m tugged into Camillo’s arms once more, and I don’t even take a breath before his lips crash into mine.

He holds me to him and kisses me like he’s a dying man and I’m his last meal. Butterflies erupt in my stomach, and my legs turn to jelly.

“You’re mine,” he whispers against my lips. “For fucking ever, and then some, Rosa.”

“Yours.” I nod in agreement, still a little drunk on his kiss. “But you’re mine too.”

“Only yours, baby.” His lips trace over mine, parting them with expert ease.

My fingers fist his shirt, and I tug him closer.

“How long do you think we have until the kids want to come in and demand dinner?” he rumbles.

“Probably twenty minutes?”

“Perfect.” Without warning, he lifts me up over his shoulder. It never ceases to surprise me how effortlessly he carries me. A sharp slap to my ass makes me gasp, and I can’t help the soft, needy sound that leaves me.

“Wait,” I laugh. “What about Ethan?”

I swear I hear him making a pros and cons list in his mind before he drops me back to the ground. “After?”

“After, we’re cleaning the kitchen,” I remind him.

The hungry look in his eyes makes me shiver. His pupils are blown wide, his eyes nearly black. A wicked, dangerous smile tugs at his lips. He stalks forward until I’m backing into the edge of the counter. “You’re torturing me, baby.”

“I think you can manage.”

He presses in further, his nose skimming along my throat, making my eyes roll back in my head.

I squeeze my thighs together. Every single one of my nerves is on fire for him—and he knows it.

He sucks at my sensitive skin. And I can’t help the soft sound that leaves my lips.

His fingers play with the sash of my cover up. “I think you want this just as badly as I do, baby...”

I nod, tilting my head back to give him more access.

He pulls back to gently lift me onto the counter. And he exposes my bathing suit to him.

“Fuck me, Rosa.” He breathes against my skin as his forehead rests on my shoulder. “When did you buy this?”

“Last week...”

“And you’ve had it this whole time?”

I nod. It’s the right balance between sexy and classy. High-waisted bottoms that cut high on my hips and a halter top that cups my breasts while showing just the right amount of cleavage.

It’s not something I’d usually buy, but after a lot of persuading, Kori, Juliana, Cate, and Debi managed to convince me. Of course, I’d spent all this afternoon with it covered up—I’m a work in progress—but I’m glad that Camillo is seeing it now.

“Damn. We never would have left the bedroom if I knew you were going to be wearing this today.” His hot breath sends a shiver down my spine, straight to my core. “Fuck, baby, how am I supposed to resist you when you’re dressed like this and look so damn delicious?”

“There’s always dessert after dinner,” I tease, but I’m just as wound up as he is. Fingers roaming over the hard planes of his shoulder and back, they slip under the fabric to feel his heated skin.

“Fuck that.” His finger drags down the center of me and between my legs, my hips rolling in response.

“Hope everyone is decent!”

Camillo groans. “I swear to fucking God someone better be dying,” he mutters in reply to Marco’s voice.

I giggle, earning a low rumble from him as I brush my body against his, stretching my way down to the ground once more. “Be nice. He’s your brother.”

“Brother? I don’t have a brother. That man is dead to me if he keeps on cock-blocking me.”

“Someone wants a drink!” he announces from the mudroom before I hear the soft click of the door and Marco lets Ethan into the kitchen.

Camillo grumbles once more—something about payback. I swat at his chest, laughing as I spot the top of Ethan’s head.

“Wow... Momma is gonna be mad.”

Camillo gives me a sideways glance. “Is she now?”

Ethan’s eyes are as wide as saucers. “Uncle Millo, you made a mess. A really big mess.”

“I did, yeah.” Camillo rubs the back of his neck before moving to hoist Ethan into his arms. His small, squealing giggle fills the air, and I melt even more for this man.

“You’re thirsty?”

Ethan nods. Seeing Camillo with my son, seeing them interact, never ceases to amaze me. I don’t know what I did to deserve this man before me.

I never thought I'd ever end up being surrounded by people I care about but who also care about me. I've never felt like this in my life.

Wanted. Cared for. Loved.

Camillo hands Ethan a juice box from the fridge. "Alrighty, Ethan. I also have a surprise for you, okay?"

"Me, Uncle Millo?"

Camillo carries him toward the second tray of cupcakes which are red velvet—Ethan's favorite flavor.

I watch as Ethan's brows furrow. He tries to sound out a few words before he declares his name loudly.

Then, Camillo softly reads out the writing he iced on the second tray of his cupcakes.

There are thirty-four cupcakes this time.

And they also end with a question mark.

And they say: I love you, Ethan. Will you let me be your dad?

Ethan's face bunches again. "R-really?"

"Really, buddy. But only if you want that, of course. You and your mom, you're my family now."

I try to keep the tears from blurring my vision as Ethan nuzzles his head into Camillo's neck and nods. I'm not sure he understands the full extent of what being adopted will mean. But he will one day. And what I do know is that my son loves this man as wholly and unconditionally as he loves me.

His arms clinging for dear life around Camillo's neck squeezes my heart like the best hug ever. "Does that mean I can...call you Dad now?"

"You can call me whatever you want—Dad, Uncle Millo, or even Santa Claus. I don't care what you call me as long as you and your mom are here with me."

I can't hear Ethan's exact response, but I can tell the gist of it from the look of sheer elation on Camillo's face.

This. Right here. This is what I've always wanted.