

Chapter 151 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I laugh harder at Daniel's suggestion, playfully shoving his shoulder. "No, he's not! Ridiculous," I sigh, turning towards my vanity.

"I'm serious, Fay," Daniel continues, still grinning wickedly at me. "I mean, I guess you don't see it the way I do because you've only experienced obsessed Kent. But do you seriously think he's ever, ever apologized to anyone like he did to you last night? Climbed through a secret passage to go see them just because he couldn't stand the thought of them being mad at him anymore?"

"Ohhh," I say, tsking and dismissing the idea with a wave. "Don't be ridiculous, Daniel, it's not that big of a deal. It happened once! We were in a fight, he wanted it settled!"

"Fine," Daniel says, giving a little one-shouldered shrug. "But what about you sleeping in his room every night?"

"What?" I ask, turning to him now, confused. "Fiona would –"

"No," he says, raising his eyebrows. "Fiona was by far dad's favorite girlfriend, and certainly his longest lasting. And she was the only one who got a room – the one that's two down from mine – where Natalia is sleeping now."

"Well," I say, still frowning, "I have my own room too –"

"Yeah," he says, nodding slowly. "A room with a direct passage to his."

"But Fiona," my frown deepens now as I start to realize...

"Fiona slept in her room every night. If she stayed over in dad's room it was always a special occasion – twice, maybe three times a year," Daniel says softly, smirking at me. "Even nights when she had clearly...spent time with him. He always slept alone."

I blink at Daniel, shocked. What did that...

"But you, Baby Fay," he says, smirking and using Fiona's pet name for me. "You sleep over every night. And he can't stand to let you go to sleep angry after your big fight. He's obsessed with you."

My mouth falls open a bit as I struggle to come up with a reply, which just makes Daniel laugh harder at me as he stands up. His laughter just makes me narrow my eyes at him.

“Enough of you, and your theories,” I say dismissively, though I’m still a little shocked at what I’ve heard. Kent, obsessed with me? More than Fiona? “Give me my breakfast sandwich,” I demand, extending one hand while I use the other to rustle through my makeup drawer, searching for my mascara.

“That’s another thing,” Daniel says, moving to the breakfast tray and then reaching out to hand me the little breakfast sandwich. “Before you came to live here? Dad never brought me breakfast. He only started bringing me breakfast because he couldn’t just bring you a plate, like he probably wanted.”

“What?” I ask, turning to Daniel with shock and confusion on my face as I take my breakfast from him. “So...what did you eat?”

“Whatever I got out of the fridge,” he laughs, taking a bite out of his own sandwich. “Not that I’m complaining, though. I eat better with dad’s obsession by my side.”

“Oh, stop,” I say, glaring at him again with a sigh and shaking my head at my sandwich.

“What!” he says, coming to stand next to me at my vanity. “Why are you so glum about it? I thought you’d be glad to hear you’ve got dad wrapped all around your finger.”

“Because,” I say, looking up at him, suddenly struck by the sadness that has been haunting me a bit since I went through Lenai’s photo album downstairs. “Daniel,” I bite my lip, hesitating, wondering if Daniel is the right person to say this to. But he nudges me with his elbow, inviting me to speak.

“Daniel,” I repeat, looking up at him, “even if he likes me a lot, he’ll never...he’ll never love me. Not the way...he loved your mom.” I finish my sentence in a rush, looking down in shame. But when Daniel doesn’t speak after a long moment, I look back up at him, a little disturbed to see Daniel looking down at me in confusion.

“Fay,” he says quietly. “What do you think you know about how my dad loved my mom?”

“I think she was his first and only love,” I say promptly, straightening my shoulders and staring at his face, wanting to see his reaction.

But Daniel just glances back down at his sandwich and takes another bite, as cryptic as his dad.

“What?” I ask, suddenly desperate to know. “Is that – is that not true?”

Daniel just shrugs, looking at me evenly. “I think...you should ask Kent,” he says. “I don’t think it’s my story to tell.”

And as I sit in silence, working through my feelings at this weird non-news, Daniel nods towards the clothes bag. "Should we put those on?" he asks, easily changing the subject as he so frequently does. "Or should we hang out in our pajamas, since we're not allowed to go down until noon?"

"Well," I say, stretching my arms languidly above my head. "considering that my pajamas are on the floor, and that I'm naked under this robe," I say, nodding to where my warm flannel PJ's are laying in a heap where Kent tossed them, "I think I'm going to get changed..."

"Oh, gross, Fay!" Daniel groans, spinning away from the sight of the pajamas and striding towards the bathroom. "I'm going in here for five minutes! And when I come out, I want all evidence of your evening cleaned up, and I never want to speak of it again!"

And then he slams the bathroom door shut and I laugh, standing up and working to straighten up the room to better protect Daniel's delicate sensibilities.

Kent hears Fay and Daniel come down the stairs just after noon and smiles a little, moving to the door, wanting to intercept them before they can go into the kitchen.

He leans against the doorframe and watches the two of them as they come down the stairs, lightly holding hands. Kent smirks at this, thinking that he's happy as hell that his son is gay, because if anyone else held her hand like that...

Well. Thoughts for another day. Today is a celebration.

"Hey, dad," Daniel says with a smile, seeing Kent first. Fay looks up in surprise and then beams too when she sees him standing there, sending a little thrill through Kent's stomach that he doesn't let show on his face.

"Hello," Kent replies, standing up and nodding towards his office. "Would you two come in here?"

"Why?" Daniel asks, frowning as he stops at the bottom of the stairs.

"Do you need an explanation?" Kent asks, raising an eyebrow at his son that makes Fay laugh a little. "Or can a father not request that his son join him in his study?"

Daniel holds a hand up in a semi-sarcastic apology and the two of them follow Kent into the room. Kent leads them over to his desk, where a little tray is waiting with three chilled glasses of champagne.

"What's this?" Fay asks, looking at him curiously.

“A celebration,” Kent answers, handing each of them a flute and picking the last one up himself. Then, he raises his glass and holds it out so that Fay and Daniel can clink theirs against it. They oblige him, but still look curiously at him, which Kent enjoys a little too much.

“And,” Daniel says, after taking a sip. “What are we celebrating?”

“The fact,” Kent replies, looking between them, “that we’re alone.”

“What?” Fay asks, tilting her head to the side like a little bird, listening to the sounds of the house, which still hums with people.

“What are you talking about, Dad?” Daniel asks, looking around. “Everyone’s...here.”

“No,” Kent says, giving a little sigh of relief before taking another sip of his champagne. “Not everyone, because the Biancis are gone.”

Chapter 152 – Celebrations

Chapter 152 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Fay gives a gasp and then a loud whoop of joy that makes Kent laugh, pleased to see her reaction. Daniel gasps “no!” and then drains his glass of champagne, likewise laughing before wrapping his dad in a hug that makes Kent stumble back a step.

And then Daniel lets Kent free and Fay takes his place, wrapping her arms around Kent’s waist and giving him a squeeze before dancing away from him, laughing and spinning as she holds her glass of champagne above her head, threatening to spill it everywhere. But for once, Kent doesn’t care.

It’s enough to see her happy.

“What happened, dad?!” Daniel asks, beaming at Kent excitedly.

Kent just shrugs. “They had business in Italy,” he says. “I convinced them that they were needed there immediately and got them a flight.” Fay catches his eye then, laughing a little, because she knows what that business is, but Kent only lets a little smile come to his lips.

Daniel looks between them, rolling his eyes when he realizes that Fay knows something he doesn’t. But he lets it pass. “Business in Italy? And they’re...not coming back?”

“Well,” Kent says with a little sigh, running a hand through his hair. “They probably will come back. But for a few weeks, at least,” he says, smiling at the two of them, “we’ve got the house back to ourselves.”

“We have to celebrate!” Fay declares, holding her glass up and spinning again with joy. “We need to have a party! And get sloppy, delicious take out for dinner! Nothing Italian – Chinese! We need to get lots of Chinese food!”

“If that’s what you want,” Kent says as he leans back against his desk, “you order it. As much as you want.” And then he smiles as he watches her dance around the room, singing a little victory song about Italians going back to Europe, or hell, whichever they can get to faster.

Daniel moves to Kent’s side as Fay continues to sing and dance, crossing his arms over his chest and watching Kent as Kent watches Fay.

“She loves you too, you know,” Daniel says quietly to his father, who turns to him in surprise.

“What are you talking about?”

“You know what I’m talking about, dad,” Daniel says with a smirk, nodding towards Fay.

“No, I don’t,” Kent murmurs, though he smiles a little.

“You forget that we have the same face,” Daniel continues, gesturing towards his own features which Kent knows are very nearly an exact replica of his own. “I know its expressions. I know what you feel when you look at her. I can read you, even if no one else can.”

Kent looks thoughtfully at his son for a moment. “You know,” he says, “you suggesting that you can see love on my face means that you’ve seen it on your own.”

Daniel blushes at this, looking down at his empty champagne glass and saying nothing as Fay, across the room, pulls the curtains open and takes a long swig of her champagne. “Let’s get some sun in here!” she shouts. “Get all the bad Natalia energy out!”

Daniel, grateful for the interruption, looks back at Kent curiously. “So?” he asks, and Kent turns his face back to his son. “Do you love her?”

And Kent’s lips curl into a wry little half-smile as he turns to look at Fay. “Do you even need to ask?” he answers.

Before Daniel can reply Fay crosses the room back to them, wrapping her arms around Kent’s waist again. “Do we get Chinese now?” she asks, smiling up at him as Kent runs his palm down the length of her hair, unable to tear his eyes away from her beautiful, perfect face. “Or do we wait till tonight?”

“Tonight,” Kent murmurs, dipping his head to place a simple kiss on Fay’s lips. Neither he nor Fay notice, but Daniel blinks in shock at the sight of it. It’s the first time he’s seen them do it. Well, he’s known for a long time that they are...together. But this?

Daniel’s almost bowled over by it, the simplicity of them - by how much it very suddenly makes sense.

“Why?” Fay asks, pouting.

“Because,” Kent says, standing straight with a sigh and unwrapping her arms from around him. “I’ve got some things to finish up today. But tonight I’ll clear my books. We’ll celebrate then,” he says, smiling between them. “Just the three of us.”

“Or...four?” Fay says excitedly, smiling at Daniel with an eager expression.

Daniel gapes at Fay, his eyes darting between her and his father.

“Oh, he knows you have a boyfriend,” Fay says, rolling her eyes. “You should bring him!”

Daniel goes a little pale then, realizing that this post-Natalia era was one in which all of their secrets were apparently going to be laid bare.

“You should,” Kent says evenly, looking seriously at his son. “If there’s someone who is...important to you, who you’d like to introduce to me...you should bring them.”

Wary, Daniel takes a deep breath, not sure how he feels about this. “All right,” he says slowly. “I’ll...think about it.”

“And I’ll go to the barn!” Fay declares, grinning and standing on her tiptoes to give Kent another kiss before heading for the door. “Jerome will take me. See you tonight!”

Daniel makes some excuse, heading out on Fay’s heels, but Kent barely hears his son as he watches Fay go. Because he is very, very excited for this new era.

Good things, he knows, are just around the corner for all of them.

I chatter almost unceasingly to Jerome in the car, telling him all about the absence of the Italians and begging him to consider coming to the little family party tonight. He refuses immediately, letting me know that Kent is going to cut his head off when he finds out that its him – a low-level Mafia lackey – dating Daniel, and not some Ivy-league rich boy like Daniel should be dating.

As we move into the stable and the riding ring I protest, arguing that it’s not going to be like that – that Kent was, after all, very accepting of Daniel being gay despite all of the ideas everyone

has long had about what happens to gay men in Mafia families. So why would he care at all who Daniel is dating?

The debate continues in snatched conversation as I put Heathcliff through his paces and Jerome rides behind me on his own borrowed steed, a pretty white mare named Butterfly. But after about an hour of it, when the horses are happily exercised and Jerome and I still haven't come to an agreement, we both laugh and decide to move on from it all.

"I hope you'll come," I murmur to Jerome, knocking my shoulder playfully against his arm as we lead the horses back into the stables. "I like you. I like you and Daniel. Kent will like you too."

"Kent does like me," he sighs, "as the guy who reliably chases down the people who owe him money and as his girlfriend's chauffer. As the guy sneaking into his son's bedroom?" Jerome just shakes his head at me, still not convinced.

I laugh again, opening my mouth to object, but I turn away when I hear a banging from a stall at the other side of the stable. Butterfly lifts her head then and nickers loudly towards it.

"What's that?" I ask as I turn Heathcliff into his stall.

"No big deal," Jerome replies as he starts to move away. "Our sweet Butterfly is in heat," he tells me over his shoulder as he leads her to her own stall across the aisle. "The stallion at the end of the row is...unsettled by it."

"Oh," I say curiously as I tie Heathcliff's lead rope to the little ring on the wall and start to unhook his saddle. Then, as I put the saddle on the door and start to brush my horse, I let my mind start to wander. How often do mares even go into heat? And I didn't notice any physical sign of it from Butterfly – do horses just...not get their periods?

And quite suddenly, as I think it, I realize something.

And I go absolutely perfectly still as my mind races.

Quickly, desperately, I flick through my mental calendar, trying to remember when the last time I...

And then my hands begin to shake, just a little bit, as I look down at my stomach in horror.

Because as far as I can remember?

It's been about...six weeks since I last had my own period.

Chapter 153 – The Birds, the Bees, and the Horses

Chapter 153 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I stand very still for a very long time, my breath getting increasingly faster as I stare into space, trying to figure this out.

What was – what’s wrong with me?

How the hell did I miss this?!

My period has, since I first got it when I was thirteen, been very regular. And unlike Janeen, who sometimes needs to take the day off and lay in bed for the whole day when her period starts, I have never really had too much trouble with it. So, generally, it’s not something I think or worry about too much –

But this?! To go six weeks without noticing that it just never showed up?!

Have I – have I seriously been stuck in such a sex haze that I just didn’t notice?

But wait – how did I not notice this!?

But beyond that - how did Kent, who is so precise with literally every other aspect of my life, just not notice that I’ve been sleeping with him every night for six weeks without interruption? How did neither of us –

I groan a little, tilting my head back, my brain quickly running through the possibilities.

Because – what does this mean?

My mind obviously turns to the clearest possibility: that I’m pregnant.

But how!? Because Kent had a vasectomy –

But...did it not work? Or is it something worse –

Am I – am I sick? I press my hands low on my stomach and look down at myself, trying to feel if...I mean, did something in me...break?

But I feel totally normal – no pain.

But not all illnesses present as pain at the start...

I'm almost panting with anxiety now, because I know that either way – either way, this cannot be good. Either I'm sick...or I'm...I'm somehow, impossibly, fucking pregnant...

Or is it something else? What am I not thinking of -

“Fay?”

I spin, almost jumping out of my boots in shocked surprise as I look up at Jerome.

“Are you okay?” he asks, looking at me warily. “I’ve been...talking to you for like two minutes. You haven’t responded.”

“We need to go,” I snap, my hands starting to shake a little. I step away from Heathcliff, heading towards the stall door –

“What? Why –“ I push past Jerome and he glances back into the stall towards my horse. “Fay, you haven’t even stored his tack or cleaned his feet –“

“Let’s go, Jerome!” I shout over my shoulder, storming towards the front of the stables. Because I need answers – now. And the easiest option thing to rule out as a possibility is pregnancy.

So, I need to get to a pharmacy. Now. Right fucking now.

Jerome, intuiting that something is seriously wrong, curses behind me and closes Heathcliff’s stall door. I’m practically out of the stable and heading for the car when I hear him calling some instructions to the stable workers and then running after me.

“Fay!” he gasps, grabbing my arm before we can get to the car. “What the hell is going on? What happened?”

“We just need to go, Jerome,” I snap, looking towards the car and not up into his face as I usually would.

“What changed?”

I work to pull my arm out of his hand but he holds tight, refusing to let me go. “Fay!” he shouts. “Tell me! Now!”

“No!” I yell, spinning my head to look viciously up at him. “This is my business, Jerome! So, get in the car and drive, all right!?”

Shocked, clearly worried by my sudden change in mood – change in entire personality, really - Jerome drops my arm and takes a step back, looking me over from head to toe. But I just shake my head once and stalk towards the passenger side of the car.

I hear Jerome sigh behind me as he moves to the driver’s side, apparently deciding to play along.

We drive in silence. My anxiety takes full control of me and I sit with my arms wrapped around my legs, my chin on my knees, my dirty boots flat against the leather of the seat as I stare blankly out the windshield.

From the corner of my eye I can see Jerome glancing at me anxiously every few minutes, but I don't look at him. I don't do anything on the surface, but inside my mind is screaming.

What the – what the fuck am I going to do?

If I'm...

"There," I say, my voice monotone as I fling a finger out to point at the chain pharmacy I've been waiting for, the one we pass every day on the way home. "Stop here, Jerome," I order.

"What?" He asks, glancing at me again. "Fay, why? What do you need? Are you – are you sick?"

I don't answer but he slows the car, pulling into the parking lot anyway. When the car rolls to a stop I unbuckle my belt, but before I can step out of the car Jerome grabs my wrist. I pull hard, trying to tug away, but again he won't let me.

"Stop," he commands, and I look angrily up into his face. "Tell me what's going on," he insists, his hand tightening around my wrist. "You were happy all day, and then I find you in the stall basically catatonic, staring at the wall, panting like you've run a marathon? And then you tell me to stop at a pharmacy? What's going on, Fay?"

"Back off, Jerome," I snap, glaring at him. "This is my business. Not yours."

And then I push the car door open and climb out. Jerome groans and lets me go, but when I glance over my shoulder as I slam the Lexus door shut behind me, I just see him staring at me out the windshield, totally baffled.

Good, I think. Because it's going to be really complicated to keep this quiet if he's watching me pick out a pregnancy test.

I stalk into the pharmacy, following the signs and quickly finding the family planning aisle. There, I crouch down and stare at my options, looking through the neatly packaged pregnancy tests with their pink and purple labels, trying to find...

I don't know...the right one?

And as I start to panic again, wondering...shit, do I just buy one? Or some kind of...multipack? And which one... Do I need the early result one? Fat chance on that, considering my period has been gone for six weeks –

So...the one that tells you in words? Or one with a blue stripe? Or...this one is...pocket sized...

But who the hell would need a pocket sized pregnancy test?

And as I crouch there, staring frantically at all the options, the words on the packages start to blur as my eyes fill with tears. And then my lip starts to shake, and I hang my head, and fall back on my ass and begin to sob in the middle of the pharmacy, tucking my face against my hands.

Fuck. Fuck. What the hell is going on with me?

“Fuck,” I hear someone whisper, echoing the words in my mind.

I flinch as I look up to see Jerome standing over me, his eyes wide, looking slowly between me and the products neatly arranged before me. Then he crouches down next to me, staring at me unblinking as I sniff and try to pull myself together. “Are you...are you serious, Fay? Are you...”

I shake my head vehemently. “I don’t know,” I murmur, looking back towards the pregnancy tests.

“Fay,” he snaps, suddenly grabbing my arm and yanking me towards him, making me gasp as I look at him. “Who the fuck is the father?!”

Chapter 154 – Just a Quick Trip to the Pharmacy

Chapter 154 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“What!” I gasp, shocked, but then I get very angry very fast, ripping my arm out of Jerome’s hand for the third time in about an hour. “I don’t even know if there is a father, Jerome!”

“Of course there’s a father –“ he shouts, his voice cracking because apparently he’s as freaked out as I am.

“I don’t even know if there’s a baby!” I yell in response, gesturing fervently at the pregnancy tests.

“Ohhh my god,” he groans, sinking back on his own ass and putting his head in his hands. I glance around briefly at the other customers who studiously avoid our aisle but don’t hesitate to glance down it, their eyes wide and curious. I bury my instinct to snarl at them all to go fuck themselves and turn my attention back to Jerome.

“Seriously, Fay,” he says, raising his eyes to look at me with sorrow and worry all over his face. “Who is the father? Is it Ivan? Because –“

“Oh my god, Jerome,” I snap, leaning forward to smack him hard on the arm. “Of course it’s not Ivan – you know that I’ve only been sleeping with Kent!”

“I don’t know that, Fay,” Jerome growls between his teeth, saying my name like it’s a curse. “You’ve had plenty of time alone with Ivan to get knocked up! It’s the only thing that makes sense, considering Kent’s vasectomy!”

I stare at him, my mouth dropping open a little. “How do you know about that?”

“Everyone knows about that!” Jerome shouts, throwing his hands wide. “Do you seriously think Kent has kept it a secret? All the women he’s brought around – you think he hasn’t made it clear to all of them, to everyone, that trying to trap him into childcare payments for the next eighteen years isn’t going to work?”

“Well, I don’t know then!” I cry, throwing my hands in the air, starting to freak out more that Jerome is starting to freak out. “It’s a miracle then! Or maybe it’s the second coming of Jesus! Or maybe I’m sick! All I know is that I have only ever slept with Kent, and now I haven’t gotten my period in six weeks – and that’s literally all I –“

“Are you SERIOUS Fay!?” Jerome shouts. “Six WEEKS!? What the hell have you been doing!?”

My temper breaks and I snap my mouth shut, leaning forward fast to shove him, hard, knocking him back flat on the ground.

“Fuck off, Jerome,” I growl. “You don’t get to say a god damn thing to me about this.”

And then I push myself to the feet, grabbing the keys from the ground where they’ve spilled out of his hand and grabbing a pregnancy test – any pregnancy test – off the shelf and storming towards the front of the store as Jerome just lays there, staring at the ceiling, apparently having his own stress-induced mental breakdown.

But I come up short a few seconds later and have to slowly turn and wait as the tears again start to roll down my face. It takes three whole minutes for Jerome to walk out of the aisle, his shoulders slumped and his head hanging. He stops in surprise when he sees me.

“What?” he asks, glaring at me a little. “Why are you still here? I thought you’d take the car and be gone.”

I heave a heavy sigh and shrug, my mouth starting to tremble again as I look helplessly at him, the keys in one hand, the pregnancy test in the other.

“I don’t have any money,” I admit, my words squeaky and trembling as they fall from my lips.

Jerome tilts his head back and stares at the ceiling for a second, taking a deep breath. “Rich girls,” I hear him murmur. “Why do rich girls...never have any money.”

But then he brings his head back down and looks at me, and I start to cry harder when I see the sympathy in his eyes. And my friend walks forward and wraps an arm around my shoulders as he reaches into his back pocket and pulls out his wallet.

“Come on, Fay,” he sighs, leading me forward to the scandalized teller. “I’ve never bought you a drink, so I guess a pregnancy test will have to do instead.”

A little laugh sputters from me as I place the test on the counter and Jerome gives me a little squeeze.

“It’ll be all right, kid,” he whispers to me. “We’ll get it all worked out.”

Jerome wanted me to take the pregnancy test there in the pharmacy bathroom, but my shocked “ew” had him rolling his eyes and escorting me to the car. He tried to talk me into probably a hundred other places to take it, but I shook my head to each one.

I understand his point – that we need to figure this out privately before we decide what to do – but quite frankly I’m shaking so hard right now that I can’t imagine being anywhere but home. I want the calm privacy of my own little white bathroom. I don’t think...well, I don’t think I’ll be able to go anywhere else.

Jerome is obviously tense as we pull through the gate and into the garage. He turns to me as he shuts the car’s engine off. “We need to get upstairs fast but inconspicuously,” he says, thinking aloud as I clutch the little paper bag that holds my fate. “Don’t act like anything’s wrong,” he advises, “but we’re going to move fast and talk to as few people as possible. Okay?”

“Okay,” I say, nodding fast, my breath shaking a little.

Then he nods to me and we both get out of the car, heading swiftly for the door to the house.

Luck is on our side – at least in this, if nothing else. We see a few of the usual people as we pass through the hallway, past the closed door to Kent’s office. But as we hurry up the stairs, no one takes any particular notice of us.

Jerome strides into my room first and I scurry after him, breathing out a big breath of relief as I press the door shut and quickly flick the lock. I turn and head towards the bedroom but stop when I hear a buzzing noise.

“What?” I ask, going still and staring at Jerome as he pulls his phone out of his pocket and glances at it.

“Nothing,” he murmurs, starting to type something and then briefly flicking his chin towards my bathroom door. “Go,” he says before looking back down at his phone. “It’s just Daniel – it’s seriously nothing.”

Hesitating, because everything in my life right now feels like a bomb about to go off, I hurry into the bathroom and close the door behind me. Then, my hands shaking like they've never done before, I quickly pull the pregnancy test out, rip open the box, and start to read through the instructions.

Because obviously I've never done this before, and I want to get it right.

Once I think I understand how to do this, I quickly move to the toilet, holding the little test shakily in my hand as I work at the button at the top of my tight riding pants.

What happens if I like...drop the stick in the toilet?

Or if I...don't aim right? And miss the stick entirely? How will we get another one before –

But I groan at myself, sick of my stupid brain and all of my anxieties. Frustrated, I yank my pants down before sitting down on the toilet. Because honestly, it can't be that hard, and if I can't do this...

But I almost do drop the test in the water after I've finished, because a sudden knock comes at the outer door of my room. I go still with sudden fear.

Because whoever is at my door now – they're going to know something's wrong. My door is never locked in the middle of the day, especially not with Jerome trapped in here with me.

Desperate to know, I anxiously place the pregnancy test on the counter by the sink, refasten my pants and pull open the door to my bathroom.

To my shock, I see Jerome already at the crack to my bedroom door, arguing vehemently with someone in hushed tones.

Chapter 155 – Just a Quick Test

Chapter 155 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Go away,” Jerome hisses. “You can see her later!”

“What the fuck, Jerome!” I hear Daniel snap and I gasp, going very still. Because Daniel – Daniel can't know.

“She needs a minute –” Jerome protests as Daniel – taller and broader than him – starts to push at the door.

“What’s wrong with her?” Daniel asks, suddenly frantic. “Is she all right?”

“She’s fine!”

“Then why won’t you let me in!?” The final word a shout, Daniel gives a hard shove at the door and Jerome stumbles back. Jerome spins towards me, shaking his head as I stare at Daniel, who almost falls into the room.

Daniel takes a moment to stare at me, to look between Jerome and I, taking in our ashen faces and shocked expressions.

“What the hell is going on, Fay?” he asks, angry now.

“Nothing,” I gulp, taking a step back towards the bathroom and cursing myself – absolutely cursing myself for not tucking the pregnancy test and its box away somewhere safe –

Daniel notices my step back and his eyes flash to the bathroom.

“What’s in there?” he asks, pressing the bedroom door shut behind him.

“Shit,” Jerome breathes, hanging his head in his hands again.

“Nothing!” I insist, taking another step backwards. But Daniel’s already on to me, and as he starts to take long strides to the bathroom – desperate to know what we’re hiding – I spin and dash in, reaching for the test still sitting peacefully at its spot by the sink.

My fingers almost touch it, but Daniel is too fast. His hand suddenly comes into my sight, reaching out for it – snatching it up off the sink before I can grab it.

“Daniel!” I protest, whirling on him, grabbing for the test, trying to get it back. “It’s mine!”

“Well fucking obviously, Fay!” he shouts, his voice somewhere between rage and horror and worry all at once. “What the – what the fuck is this!?”

But I fold my arms, glaring at him as he holds it high up above my head.

“I peed on that, you know,” I snap, hoping it will make him drop it.

But it doesn’t work, he just glares at me and then looks up at it before snapping his face back to me.

“Are you...are you pregnant?” he asks, breathless.

“Well, I don’t know, Daniel,” I snarl. “That’s what we were trying to figure out!” And I gesture vehemently towards the test, still held out of my reach.

And slowly, clearly trying to piece the world back together as Jerome comes to the bathroom door and stares between us, Daniel brings the test back down and stares at the result.

As Daniel stares at the stick I find that I can't breathe and my hand goes to my throat as I stare at him, waiting for him to tell me if...

...if my life is completely over.

Slowly, too slowly, he looks up at me. "It doesn't say anything," he says, his face twisting in confusion. "What's it supposed to – did you do it right?"

"Oh my god," I snap, taking a stumbling step forward and grabbing the test out of his hand. "Daniel! It's probably not done yet! And you're supposed to let it lay flat!"

Daniel puts his hands up innocently as I place the test back on the counter.

"How long are you supposed to wait?" he asks, a little breathless, staring at it.

"Three minutes," I say, crossing my arms and staring at the little stick as Jerome comes to stand between us. We're all silent for a long second, together staring at the little piece of plastic, before I groan and flip it over so that we can't see the result.

Then I turn away, burying my face in my hands and beginning to pace anxiously. "We'll flip it over when three minutes are done," I say, decided. "I can't...stare at it and just guess."

"Fay," Daniel says, and I hear him take a step closer to me, touching my shoulder. "Who – who is the dad?"

And I spin, yanking my hands away from my face and glaring up at him. "Seriously?" I cry. "You too!?"

"Well –"

"I am not sleeping with anyone except your dad, Daniel!" I shout, exasperated. Seriously, I lose my virginity two months ago and everyone already thinks I've got multiple partners? I mean, I guess Janeen would be proud, but –

"He can't have any more kids, Fay," Daniel explains, looking at me like I'm stupid.

"Do you two," I say, looking wide-eyed between them and folding my arms angrily over my chest, "do you seriously keep saying that to me because you think I'm an idiot? That I don't obviously know this?"

"Well then how –"

“I don’t know, Daniel!” I shout, throwing my hands up, at the end of my rope. “I have no explanations! I am not keeping any secrets! I know what you know! And by the way, we don’t even know if I’m...”

But my words cut off as I realize that I can’t say the word. And my vision flicks back to the little plastic stick, sitting so innocently on the counter. Holding my entire fate.

“How much longer?” Daniel asks after a moment, and I glance up at him to see him clenching his jaw the same way his dad does when he’s stressed.

“About thirty seconds,” Jerome replies, staring hard at the sink like he can see to the other side of the test through sheer will alone.

“Swear it,” Daniel snaps suddenly, grabbing me by the arm and pulling me a step closer to him so that I’m staring up into his too-serious face. He shakes me a little before saying it again. “Swear it, Fay. That you’ve only slept with him.”

“I swear, Daniel,” I whisper, looking honestly up into his face, hoping he can see it there. “No one else. If this...if there’s a baby...it’s his.”

Daniel looks at me for a long moment before wrapping his other arm around me and hugging me close. “All right,” he says, and I can feel his head nod above me.

“What are we going to do,” I whisper, pressing my face against Daniel’s chest and letting myself shake a little against him.

“We’ll...talk to him,” Daniel says, chagrined. “He’ll want a paternity test – or, I don’t know, something. But he’s going to be pissed,” he sighs. “It’s – it won’t be easy. But we’ll...we’ll figure it out, okay? We’ll take care of you.”

And I press my eyes shut and will myself to believe him, even though I know...

That this is not okay. Nothing about it is okay. My entire world just completely exploded in front of me, and even if I’m not pregnant – then what is happening with my body?

My stomach twists then and I go rigid in Daniel’s arms, trying to figure out what’s happening – is this like morning sickness? Or just anxiety? Or did Natalia seriously poison me last night -

Before I can let my mind race in the thousand new directions it wants to go, though, I feel Daniel turn slightly towards Jerome. “How much time is left?”

“Time’s up,” Jerome replies and I pull away from Daniel a little, my breath catching in my throat.

“Seriously?” I ask. How did three minutes go so fast?

Jerome confirms with a terse nod, still staring at the stick.

And then Daniel reaches for it, but I move fast and swat his hand away.

“No,” I say, stepping forward. “This is...this is mine.”

And my best friend hesitates, but he lets me walk to the sink alone, where I pick the little test up.

And flip it over in my hands.

Chapter 156 – Knock Out

Chapter 156 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

There are two lines on the pregnancy test.

A quick glance at the little key to the side of the screen confirms what I already know.

Pregnant.

I'm pregnant.

I feel everything drain from me in this moment – like all color, all life, all breath and joy floods from me as I stare at the little stick in my hands.

“Shit,” I hear Jerome say, watching my response.

“Fuuuuuuck,” Daniel hisses, turning away for a split second, his shoulders tense. I raise my eyes to watch him, to look between him and Jerome, desperate for...

For any solution.

For anything at all, now that my world has turned upside down.

Jerome's eyes are on me. “It's okay, Fay,” he says, coming forward to me slowly with his hands out, like he's approaching a startled horse. And as I see the sympathy and the worry in his face, I feel myself start to tremble, feel my eyes start to fill with tears as my hands clutch around the test.

Pregnant!

I gasp in a sudden breath, all of my emotions and thoughts and panic snapping back into place as my mind starts to whirl, frantic for a plan, for a solution –

“Oh my god,” I murmur, leaning back against the sink and staring down again at the test. “What are we going to d-“

But I don’t get a chance to finish my sentence.

Because we all go silent and perfectly still as we turn as one towards the bedroom door.

Which Daniel didn’t lock behind him.

And which now, quite slowly, is pressing open.

“Shit shit shit,” Jerome starts to say, his whole body going rigid.

Because we all know precisely who it is.

Only one person left in this house would come boldly into this room uninvited.

“Give it to me,” Daniel hisses in a panic, hurrying forward, grabbing at my hands. But I’m frozen – absolutely frozen – as I watch Kent walk into the bedroom, watch him look around, and then watch him frown a little as he sees movement in the bathroom.

“Fuck, Fay!” Daniel whispers, clawing at my hand.

Late – probably too late – I open my hand and let him take the test from me, which he quickly whips behind his back. I stay where I am, my lower back pressed against the sink, as Kent crosses the room and comes to stand in the bathroom doorway and looks between the three of us.

“What’s going on here,” Kent asks, stern, all business. He knows already that something is off – he’s too practiced at interrogation for us to hide anything from him now, especially since we’re all so clearly worked up. His eyes fix especially on Jerome, which makes sense – Daniel and I have a reason to be here.

But Jerome?

“What are you talking about, dad?” Daniel asks, too innocent. His voice is just barely higher than it usually would be, but it’s enough.

“I heard shouting,” Kent replies evenly, slipping his hands into his pockets as he prepares himself to question us. He’s impossibly cool, as I imagine he always is at these moments. I can feel my body betraying me though, starting to shake again. I press my jaw shut, wondering how the hell we’re going to get out of this.

“It was nothing,” Daniel says with a shrug. But Kent ignores him.

“Why are you here,” he asks, lifting his chin towards Jerome, ignoring me for the moment, though his eyes flick to me once, taking in my rigid form, my trembling muscles.

“I –“ Jerome says, coming up with nothing. And I don’t blame him, under the Mafia King’s heavy gaze. “I’m just...”

“You’re just what,” Kent asks, taking a step forward towards him.

“Um,” Jerome says, not looking at Kent, his eyes moving fast around the room as if looking for some sort of explanation. And then they land on something on the floor that makes him go pale.

My eyes follow his only a second before Kent’s do. And my blood freezes again when I realize that it’s...it’s the box that the pregnancy test came in. Frowning, Kent steps forward, trying to get a better look, but Daniel takes a frantic step in his way.

“Stop,” Daniel says, putting one hand on Kent’s chest.

Kent swipes the hand away and keeps moving, but Daniel shouts this time, telling his dad to stop, putting his palm again flat on Kent’s chest and shoving him back, keeping his other hand with the pregnancy test twisted behind his back.

Kent snarls at his son, glaring at the deliberate opposition, but then he notices that Daniel is only using one hand to stop him. His eyes move swiftly to Daniel’s elbow, to where his arm disappears behind him.

“What are you hiding,” Kent snaps, grabbing Daniel’s arm and attempting to spin him. But Daniel struggles, working to keep his arm behind him.

I moan a little, knowing that it’s done, and stressed almost to my breaking point as I watch Daniel and Kent struggle in my bathroom, Kent pulling hard at Daniel’s arm and Daniel working hard to twist away from him. Jerome takes a step away, coming to my side, likewise staring in shock as it starts to get rough – as Kent yanks hard at Daniel’s arm and the test falls from his hand -

The test goes spinning across the floor and we all go still as we stare at it.

Kent’s the only one who moves.

He takes two steps over to where the pregnancy test come to rest. Then he stares down at the test’s face, at the two lines which stand stark against the white plastic of the test, against the white marble of my floor.

Kent doesn’t touch it, though I watch him freeze as he stares down at it, as he understands.

After all, he’s seen a pregnancy test before.

He stands still for far...far too long.

And I can't help it. I start to pant in anxiety, in fear, desperate to know what he's thinking –

Because of course – of course his first thought is the same one that Jerome and Daniel had – that this baby can't be his.

And my breath comes faster and faster, the harsh rasp of it echoing in the still room, as I think frantically that it can't not be his – that I haven't slept with anyone else –

Ridiculously, my mind flicks through my memories as I stare at Kent, who stares at the ground – because am I – did I forget something? Did I sleep with someone else – was I drunk!? But then I shake my head at the ridiculousness of it – obviously I would remember -

But how? How did this happen?

Slowly, Kent turns his face upwards to meet mine. My heart starts to pound harder when I see the insane range of emotions cross over his face – rage, and betrayal, and fear, and confusion, and hurt –

“Is this yours?” he asks, his voice too low, too even.

Hesitating, but not coming up with anything I can say to hide it – obviously, I am the only one here who could produce a positive pregnancy test – I nod.

He straightens his shoulders and prowls towards me, the predator in him taking over. Kent comes to stand close, close enough to grab me, and I feel the trembling in my muscles intensify until my whole body is shaking.

Kent stares down at me, studying me, his teeth clenched, his eyes full of rage even though his voice stays quiet. “Who have you been fucking, Fay?” he asks.

I gasp a little breath as I look up at him, undone by the harshness of his words.

But then I snap my mouth shut and lift my chin a little, because I know that I haven't done anything wrong. That no matter what he throws at me right now – no matter what Daniel or Jerome think either – I know the truth.

That I'm pregnant with Kent's baby. No one else's.

Before I can open my mouth to tell him precisely that, Kent snaps a hand up and grabs the fabric of my shirt in his fist, yanking me forward so that I stumble against him, gasping in surprise and fear.

“WHO,” he roars, shaking me a little, “have you been FUCKING, Fay!?”

“Hey!” Daniel shouts, and I feel a pulse go through Kent’s body as Daniel hits him, hard, across the shoulder. “Get your hands off of her!”

“She’s –” Jerome starts, stepping forward, but Kent drops me so that I fall back against the sink, his eyes on Jerome in a flash.

“It was you, wasn’t it?” Kent snarls, bearing down on Jerome now, who stumbles backwards.

“What!?” Jerome gasps, “No! I –”

But Kent advances on him, cutting him off. “I’ve seen you,” Kent seethes, moving forward until Jerome has his back up against the wall, “holding her hand, laughing with her, all your little touches in the car in your secret moments – is that what you’ve been doing? Taking her to the stables every day and fucking her –”

“No!” Jerome protests, putting up his hands, a very literal fear for his life passing across his eyes. “I swear, I –”

But Kent, faster than I can see, whips his arm up and cracks his fist across Jerome’s face.

Chapter 157 – Flip Out

Chapter 157 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Jerome makes a horrible noise, half cry and half groan, as he falls to the floor.

Daniel shouts and I hear a scream – I realize passively that the scream comes from me - before Kent reaches down and grabs Jerome by the shirt, lifting him again so that he can punch him another time, his fist flashing across his jaw –

But Daniel’s on him now, grabbing his father by his arms and ripping him away from Jerome, who moans on the floor, his face turned down towards the cold marble.

My hands are pressed to my mouth in horror as I see blood all over Jerome’s face, all over the floor –

Daniel stumbles backwards with Kent’s arms wrapped in his own, pulling Kent away. “Get off of him!” Daniel cries, his eyes looking frantically towards his boyfriend.

Kent lets out another feral roar, pulling hard at Daniel, trying to get back at Jerome – to, to kill him, I realize –

“Stop!” I scream, putting my whole heart into the word, into the noise that rips from my lips. “It’s not him! It’s not Jerome!”

Kent and Daniel go still, turning towards me, and suddenly the only sound in the room is Jerome’s injured moans.

I keep my eyes fastened on Kent’s, willing him to look at me, to pay attention to me, to let his rage fall away...

And something about it works. Kent and Daniel stay still for a moment before Kent shakes himself, hard, and growls at Daniel to let him go. Daniel hesitates but does as his dad says. When Kent doesn’t move for Jerome again, Daniel falls to his knees at Jerome’s side and urges him to turn over, to let him look.

But I don’t have time for it. Instead, I stare at Kent as he collects himself, as he leashes the animal within him and straightens his shoulders before walking over to me. As he comes close he puts his hands in his pockets again, though I can see them tightened into fists, as if he has to put them away to avoid grabbing me again.

My lower lip shakes a little as Kent stares down at me, but I raise my chin once more, reminding myself again and again that I didn’t do anything wrong.

“Who is it, Fay?” Kent growls, clearly working hard to not flip out again. I see his shoulders twitch with the effort. “Who is the father?”

“You are,” I reply, as steadily as I can.

Kent just stares at me, not bothering to do what Daniel and Jerome did and inform me, needlessly, that that’s impossible because he’s had a vasectomy - that he can’t be the father. Kent knows that I know.

And I watch his face twist with disbelief. “Liar,” he snarls, glaring down at me.

Slowly, I just shake my head, denying it. Categorically.

I am not lying. If I’m pregnant, he’s the only one who can be the father. I know it logically, but I also know it in my bones. As I stare up into his face, I let him see the truth there.

To my shock, Kent lets out one more twisted snarl before whipping away from me, stalking across my bedroom and out the door, gone before I can even blink.

I feel myself collapse a little in his absence, catching myself against the sink on my palms as my knees go weak. And then, thinking what’s the point, I just let myself slip to the floor, still staring into the bedroom and at my door, which is standing wide open.

“Where —” I hear Daniel ask, and I turn to him, my mouth open with shock. “Where did he go?”

“I have no idea,” I murmur, shaking my head a little.

Daniel heaves a big sigh and then helps Jerome sit up. Jerome, I’m glad to see, is conscious, if not in a great deal of pain. And, deciding that Jerome needs him now more than I do – which is probably true – Daniel turns his attention to him, feeling at Jerome’s face for a broken nose or jaw, trying to assess the damage.

I do nothing. I just sit in silence, watching, my brain...empty.

Because for perhaps the first time in my life...I’ve just got nothing.

I mean, what am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to think? I’m sitting here, in a gorgeous marble bathroom, knocked up by a supposedly infertile Mafia King who thinks I’ve been unfaithful to him, watching my fiancé – my baby’s brother – try to assess whether or not my lover broke his lover’s jaw?

Like...what the fuck am I supposed to think?

So I just don’t. I just sit there, silently, for a long...long time.

Kent storms down the stairs, his face dead to the emotions that pound through his body. When he reaches the ground floor he continues steadily, walking swiftly to the door at the back of the kitchen that leads out to an area behind the house that his guards use for their smoke breaks. When he gets there, Kent hurls the door open and glares out at the men, who go silent and still at his sudden arrival.

“Marco,” Kent commands, snapping his fingers. Then he turns, knowing Marco will follow. Kent moves now towards the garage, slamming the door open, his focus only on his next steps. He moves to the passenger side of the escalade as Marco grabs the keys and moves to the driver’s seat. Then, to Marco’s shock, Kent opens the door to the back seat and climbs in.

Marco only hesitates a moment before opening the driver’s door and sliding in, buckling his belt and turning on the car.

“Where to, boss?” Marco asks, trying to keep his voice even though he intuits that something is very, very wrong.

Kent sits motionless in the back seat, his head hanging. Then he mumbles an address that Marco taps into the car’s GPS before starting to back out of the garage.

As they begin to pull out of the garage and move down the driveway, Marco glances into the back seat. His jaw drops when he sees Kent laying himself down across the three seats that make up the back row, his eyes pressed shut.

Marcos driving slows a little as he wonders what the fuck is going on – the boss, he never shows weakness like this -

“Go!” Kent snarls, noticing the change in the car’s speed. Shaken, Marco does as he’s told, refocusing on the road.

In the back, Kent presses the heels of his palms against his eyes, trying to control his breathing. But it does no good. He feels the panic rising in him, taking control of his limbs, his mind –

Panic that he hasn’t felt in months, because she’s been there – there in his bed, warm and sweet, in his room, making him laugh. Fay – this incredible young woman, who he had trusted – who was...was fixing things for him, making him better, making his life better –

But now she had fucking betrayed him. And is trying to lie about it, even though it’s impossible...

Kent grits his teeth, shaking his head, remembering the way she looked just a few minutes ago when she stared up at him with such clarity and assurance in her eyes and told him that he’s the father of her child.

Is it – is it even possible that Fay has become that good of a liar in the past few months? Is she even capable of it? But Kent knows that he’s underestimated her before. He could be doing it again.

As the panic takes over, as the pain rises in his chest and he groans with it, Kent keeps tight at the center of himself the tiny kernel of hope that...

That something went wrong. With him. With the minor surgery he had years ago.

And as his mind goes dark with the pain of his panic attack, as his body curls tight against the seats, he repeats a single refrain over to himself.

The doctor will know. The doctor will tell us. A simple test. A simple test...a simple test...

And he’d know soon. Because that’s where they are headed now.

Directly to the urologist’s home office.

Chapter 158 – A Simple Check-Up

Chapter 158 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

The panic begins to subside.

Kent pulls himself together as Marco pulls up to the urologist's house, a property that also serves as his home office. Kent takes a deep breath in through his nose, glaring at the house. Because he chose this doctor partially because of the privacy that the home office provided, but also because he was supposed to be the best.

Rage coils in him at the thought that this doctor may have fucked up his vasectomy, or performed it in such a way that it...healed itself or something.

But even as the rage builds, an equally powerful part of Kents wants the doctor to have fucked up. Not because he wanted to get Fay pregnant – god, fuck, the idea of another baby twenty-two years after his first...

Kent shakes his head, pushing the thought away. Because if something did go wrong with the vasectomy, the important thing is that it means Fay didn't betray him.

Or at least...that it was possible that she didn't.

Kent scowls, throwing open the door to the back seat as Marco puts the car in park. These secondary questions – he could think of them of it later. This was step one.

The sky is growing dark now in the early evening as Kent strides up the doctor's walk to the front door. He doesn't hesitate to pound, hard, on the red wood, ignoring the knocker and the doorbell. He needs something to hit with his fist anyway.

Jerome's face didn't quite take all the anger out of him, did it?

That kid is up to something, Kent thinks to himself, pleased to have a distraction from his other pressing thoughts. How did he get involved with this? Why was he in Fay's bathroom? Daniel made sense but...Jerome? There was more to it, and he was going to get to the bottom of that as well.

Impatient, Kent raises his fist to pound on the door again as Marco comes up the walk to stand behind him. But before Kent can knock the door swings open and a woman stares up at him, surprised.

"Where's the doctor," Kent bites out, but then his eyes shift as he sees the old man come into view in the hall behind the woman.

The doctor's eyes go wide as he sees, and recognizes, precisely who this is.

"Sir," the doctor says, taking a step back, almost as if he'll run.

Like hell you will, Kent says, storming into the house and past the woman, not caring that she stumbles out of his way. "To the office," Kent snaps to the man, grabbing his arm. "Now."

The doctor walks at Kent's side, his arm clasped tight in the Mafia King's hand as they move into the office. Kent shoots Marco a quick glance and Marco nods, understanding that he's to stay outside. Then Kent shoves the doctor into the room and slams the door shut before hastily explains his dilemma.

"Oh," the doctor says, looking up in fear at the dangerous man whom he may have failed in a very crucial aspect of his life. "So your...lady friend is pregnant. And you'd like to know..."

"If it's possible," Kent growls, his teeth clenched, "for me to be the father."

"Well," the doctor says, nodding and moving to a metal cabinet on the far side of the room, removing a plastic cup and a special overnight mailing box that contains ice packs to keep it cool. "In that case we will need...a sample."

Kent nods and snatches the cup out of the doctor's hand, looking down at it for a moment before looking back up at him. "How long will it take?" he asks. "For results?"

"I'll get the results tomorrow," the doctor answers, blinking up at him. "The morning, if we rush the order and request overnight processing."

"Good," Kent snaps, "yes, order the overnight. Faster, if you can, I'll pay whatever they want. I'll be staying here," Kent adds, glaring at the doctor, "until I get the results. If that's any incentive to move faster."

Then Kent looks at the door to the right which he knows is a private space. Knows it intimately. After all, he's been here before.

"You know the drill, Mr. Lippert," the doctor says, leaning back against his desk. "I hope that you get...whatever result it is you're looking for."

Kent nods quickly. "Me too," he murmurs in reply. Then he heads into the little room.

Daniel wipes the blood from Jerome's face and says something faint to Jerome about ice. He glances at me as he heads out the door, hurrying down the stairs. But I don't stop him or try to say anything. What is there to say? Instead, I look over at Jerome, my eyes sorry. I can tell that he's in a lot of pain.

Seeing the sympathy in my expression, Jerome just shrugs, letting me know it's not my fault. "I've been punched before," he murmurs, pressing a hand to his sore jaw. "I'll get punched again. Don't worry about it."

But I sigh, watching the bruise bloom purple across his jaw and under his eye. "This is a bad one though, Jerome."

“You’ve got it worse, Fay,” he mumbles in response, looking down at the floor. And I look down at myself, placing my hands on either side of my stomach, finally really realizing that...

...that I’m fucking pregnant.

Shit.

Shit.

What the hell am I going to do now?

“Are you lying to us, Fay?” Jerome asks, his voice cold, and I snap my head up to look at him in surprise.

“What?”

“You heard me,” he snaps, his pain pushing him beyond his usual patience.

I take a moment to stare at him and then sharply shake my head. “I know I have no proof,” I say, my voice steadier than I thought it would be. “But I’ll take any test you want, and they’ll all come back the same. It is only possible for one person to be the father of this...” I look down at myself again. What’s the right word here? Child? Baby? Fetus? And tears fill my eyes as I start to panic again.

And I think it’s the tears that sell Jerome on the fact that I’m telling the truth, because his voice is softer now when he replies.

“Okay, Fay,” Jerome sighs, and I watch him lean his head back against the wall and shut his eyes as he waits for Daniel. “I believe you. I’ll help you in whatever way I can. And so will Daniel. You know that, right?”

“I do,” I whisper, believing it and staring down at myself again.

Daniel comes back after a minute and moves to Jerome, having a short conference with him as he brings him some ice wrapped in a rag as well as some pain killers. But as they speak to each other, I pull myself to my feet and walk into my bedroom, laying myself down in my bed and pulling my covers up all the way to my chin, ignoring the fact that I’m still wearing my dirty riding boots.

What does it matter now anyway.

Then I close my eyes and try not to think at all. Because I know that as soon as I start – it’s going to be unbearable, trying to decide what to do next, and how to do it, and what my life is going to look like.

Because everything is different now; everything has changed. I will never, ever be the same person I was – and I feel a great deal of grief about that fact.

A long time later I hear footsteps behind me coming out of the bathroom.

“Fay?” Daniel asks. “Are you...all right?”

Silent, I shake my head no.

“What can we do?” Jerome asks.

“Nothing,” I murmur. And then I pause, considering it – considering if there’s anything I want. But I just come up blank. “Can you just leave me alone?”

The boys are silent for a moment and I sigh, wishing they’d just go.

“Are you sure?” Daniel asks, hesitant. I can hear in his words that he desperately doesn’t want to leave me along right now, that he wants to be here for me. But...I just can’t. Not right now.

“Please,” I say, hunching my shoulders and wrapping my blankets tighter around me.

“Okay,” Daniel whispers, and a moment later I feel his lips press against my hair as he gives me a gentle kiss. “We’ll be right next door, okay? You call us when you want us?”

“Okay,” I reply, nodding and squeezing my eyes shut.

And then I hear their footsteps as they leave the room, the slight creaking of the door as they pull it closed behind us, though they don’t close it all the way so that they can hear me if I call.

I lay very still for a very long time. I lose track of it, eventually, working hard on clearing my mind and pushing all my thoughts away. Instead, I listen to my breathing, feel my heart beating, and seek – deep within me – some kind of...difference. Can I feel the baby growing in there? Is it...is it even a baby?

Do I want it to be?

Some time later I sit up in bed, groaning a little as my muscles unlock and bend after far too long in one position. I raise my hands to my temples, rubbing them in an attempt to clear the headache that pounds there.

Then, a little bleary, I turn towards my desk, noticing that the day has grown dark outside my window, already turning towards night. As I stand I wonder at it – how much time did I lay there, denying my reality? But then I sigh and move towards my desk, pulling open the little drawer and reaching for my burner phone.

Because even though I know Daniel and Jerome are next door, and even though I'm grateful for it, I really just want my sister right now.

I pull up her contact information and quickly press her number, hoping she picks up. The phone rings, and rings. She doesn't answer.

Sighing, I press the call button again, but she doesn't pick up. I call again – which I never do – hoping that she understands that it's an emergency. But nothing.

Frustrated, breathing out heavily through my nose, I open my messages and quickly send her a text letting her know that I need to talk, that she has to call me as soon as she gets this.

To my shock, a text comes through immediately.

My blood goes cold when I read it:

Fay, I can't talk – I'll see you soon – just do what they say –

...what?

She'll see me soon? Why does she think –

Do what who says? Who is she –

But then I jump, my eyes flashing towards the door as I hear the loud cracking noise echo through the house. And then it comes again, and again.

And I recognize it, immediately, from the noises I heard months ago at the country club, when I went running through the greens with Kent and Daniel, trying to get away from people trying to kill us.

Those are gunshots.

And they're inside the house.

Chapter 159 – The Raid

Chapter 159 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I'm still standing wide eyed, my mouth dropped open in shock, my little phone falling from my hands when Daniel and Jerome burst into my room. Jerome slams and locks the door behind him.

“Get down!” Daniel shouts, dashing directly for my wardrobe.

“What?” I gasp, a little stupidly – but I’m just so shocked –

“Down!” Jerome barks, running to my side and pressing on my shoulders, forcing me to my knees. He puts a hand protectively over my head, looking all around. The gunshots continue downstairs, as well as screams and yells – everything growing louder and more frequent -

“What the hell is going on!” I scream, frantic now with panic.

“I don’t know!” Daniel snaps back, bending over into the wardrobe and pulling up a piece of wood from the bottom, reaching down below it and coming out with –

“Oh my god,” I exclaim, my eyes going – if possible – wider when I see Daniel emerge from the wardrobe with a silver gun in his hand. “Did you put that there!?”

“No,” he snaps, quickly snapping the pieces of the gun apart and back together in a way I don’t understand, checking the bullets or something. “Dad did. But obviously he didn’t tell you about it, because you’d probably kill yourself dropping it or something.”

“Jerk,” I breathe, glaring at him before spinning towards Jerome, completely freaked out now and totally confused about what the hell is going on.

“It’s a raid,” Jerome says, looking over towards the door. “I don’t know who is behind it – a rival family?”

“Not the Russians,” Daniel says, moving over to us and glancing out the window, the gun held expertly at his side. “Maybe...Alden? But he wouldn’t – not with Fay in the house -”

I blink as I stare at Daniel, shocked – my mild-mannered bestie, who likes books and philosophy, looking like a god damn secret agent with a gun cocked and ready by his side. He actually looks, for once, like the son of a mafia don.

What – what was happening to my life?

Was this even real?

I jump and shriek as more gunfire echoes from below, as if in answer to my question – that yes, this is indeed real.

“What’s our next step,” Jerome asks, looking up at Daniel from his spot crouched down on the floor next to me. Daniel moves away from the window now, turning towards the door.

“We wait,” he growls, positioning himself in front of us and raising the gun to point it at the door, ready to shoot whoever comes through it next.

“Should we,” I start, thinking frantically and glancing to the wardrobe, “should we go through the wardrobe? Downstairs? Try to find your dad?”

“No,” he says, shaking his head. “Dad says that if you’re in a place of safety and you don’t have a clear way out – if you don’t know precisely how you’re going to get away – you stay put and defend that space until you know what’s going on. We don’t know who is down there or what is happening. We don’t know how to get to a car. So, we entrench.”

I start to shake now with the fear and the adrenaline coursing through my body. Jerome puts an arm around my shoulders, I think for his comfort as much as his. “Okay,” Jerome says, nodding and agreeing to Daniel’s plan, letting him take lead on it.

And then we all...sit there. For way too long.

“Will your dad come up?” Jerome whispers, glancing again at the wardrobe.

“I don’t know,” Daniel murmurs, glancing at him and then at me. And then down at my stomach. And I groan a little, almost able to read his mind on this: that Kent, if he can, will come up here. Because I’m here. And I’m pregnant. And his base instinct, in all of this, is going to be to protect his son and this new maybe-baby, even if he is pissed at me for getting knocked up.

Even if he doesn’t know yet, for sure, that it’s his baby? If Kent can get here. He will.

So I too stare between the door and the wardrobe, looking for him. Waiting.

Where is he?

The silence in the room grows, as the three of us wait.

And I thought that it would be better – that I’d get used to it, would calm down – but listening to the horrible noises below – gunfire, screaming, shouted commands to move here or go there –

All that noise winds me tighter and tighter until I think I might pop.

And throughout all of it – I know that I’m listening for him. For the sound of Kent’s voice, the echo of his own commands –

But I don’t hear it anywhere.

And I go cold as I realize that that might mean...

Oh my god.

I slap a hand over my mouth, shaking my head in horror.

Is he already dead?

Daniel stands steady, staring at the door, his hands tight around his gun as my mind absolutely whirls in panic.

Did the father of my child fucking die hours after I found out I was pregnant?

What on earth was I going to –

But before I can get any further in my thoughts, the sound of something hard banging against glass makes us all spin towards the windows.

We all go rigid with fright and Daniel shouts something wordless as he raises the gun towards my windows, towards the darkness outside that makes it impossible to see anything –

But suddenly, of all things, a voice echoes from the darkness outside.

“Don’t you fucking shoot me, Lippert!”

Daniel hesitates now, dropping the muzzle of the gun just a little in confusion. Because we – we know that voice –

I know that voice –

I jump to my feet, heading impetuously for the window, acting on pure instinct rather than logical thought.

“Fay!” Daniel shouts. “Don’t open that –“

But it’s too late. My hands are already at the top of the window, flicking the lock, and then my palms are flat against the pane pushing up so that I can see...

Ivan.

Crouched there, on the little roof outside of my bedroom window, glaring in at me, a gun in his hands pointing in at us.

And then a horrified gasp escapes my mouth and I slap my palm over my lips, staring at him and shaking my head.

But not at his gun.

“Oh, Ivan,” I breathe between my fingers, lifting my eyes up to meet his. “What did you do?”

“What I had to, Fay,” he growls, flicking his eyes to me even as he points his gun at Daniel, who has his own gun aimed at him. “Drop the gun, Daniel!” he shouts. “That’s the only way you’re getting out of this alive! This is your last warning! Drop it!”

Daniel hesitates but Jerome croaks out his name and, glancing at his boyfriend, Daniel curses and tosses the gun aside so that it lands on the bed.

But I barely see any of this, my eyes trained on Ivan who finally looks back at me.

“All right, Fay,” he says, his voice grim. “It’s all over. Let’s end this.”

But I have no response. I can’t say anything. Instead, my eyes just drift lower on Ivan’s body to take in the blue shirt that covers all of his beautiful tattoos.

And over it, the bulletproof vest.

That reads, in four bright yellow block letters:

NYPD.

Chapter 160 – Through the Window

Chapter 160 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Ivan,” I breathe, shaking my head, my whole body trembling again.

“Back up, Fay,” he says, lifting his chin towards me. “Let me in.”

I do as he says, backing up until I’m almost at the bed. His gun still trained on Daniel and Jerome, still kneeling at Daniel’s feet, Ivan climbs through the window, standing up straight.

Daniel takes a moment to look Ivan over and then he groans, putting his head in his hand and turning away in disbelief. “A cop?! You’re a fucking cop, Ivan?!”

“Damn straight,” Ivan murmurs, though his face remains serious. “Born and bred. I want you back against that wall, Lippert,” Ivan commands, nodding to the far wall behind Jerome, where Ivan can keep the gun on both of them at once. “Hands up where I can see them.”

Daniel obeys, his face set in an unhappy frown as he glares at Ivan and shakes his head, but he obeys nonetheless. “Fay,” Ivan continues, once Daniel is in place. He doesn’t look at me, his eyes still trained on the boys. “I also want you in my line of sight, pressed there against the other wall.” He nods next to him, to an empty space next to my desk. Slowly, I move to it so that he can see me while he concentrates on Daniel and Jerome.

“Good,” Ivan says. Then, he turns his attention to Jerome. “Hands behind your head,” he commands. Jerome lifts his hands, scowling at Ivan with real hate in his eyes. Slowly, I raise my hands as well. “Not you, Fay,” Ivan growls, rolling his eyes a little bit.

“What?” I ask.

“You’re not under arrest,” he tells me, glancing a little in my direction.

“What!?” I ask again, my voice an octave higher this time, completely confused. Ivan huffs a sigh of frustration.

“Just...stand there,” he mutters as Jerome lifts his own hands behind his head.

That done, Ivan shifts his gaze to Daniel. “Are you going to do something stupid?” he asks, his face hard. There’s no lightness in it – none of the carefree, charming guy I got to know, for whom I had thought I had real feelings. “Or are you going to let me cuff your boyfriend without any trouble?”

“Am I being arrested?” Daniel asks, cautious.

“No,” Ivan says, rueful. “Though that was not my choice.” He takes a step forward, his muscles going tense as he raises the gun towards Daniel’s face. “Are you going to do something stupid, Lippert? Because if you do, I’ll shoot you now and get it over with.”

“I’m not,” Daniel spits out at him, glaring hard, his hands still up above his head.

“Good,” Ivan murmurs, and then he moves – fast. In an instant Ivan is tucking his gun back into its holster as he moves to Jerome’s side, twisting Jerome’s arm behind his back and grabbing handcuffs from his belt. As Ivan slaps one cuff around Jerome’s wrist, I see Daniel eye the gun in Ivan’s holster, and then glance at the bed, where his gun is sitting –

“Daniel,” I breathe, shaking my head vehemently at him. He scowls at me and looks away, but we both know that he was being desperate thinking he could grab one of them before Ivan noticed. We both know that this is done – that any chance we had to fight our way out of this – if we ever had it to begin with – is gone.

As soon as Ivan is done cuffing Jerome he kicks him, hard, so that Jerome falls on the floor.

“Ivan!” I gasp, glaring at him, but he just shoots me a dirty look before unholstering his gun again and stepping back so that he has a direct line of sight at the three of us. Then he grabs the radio on his shoulder.

“Hey,” he says into his radio. “I’ve got Daniel Lippert, Fay Alden, and Jerome Rosello up here in the corner bedroom.” A voice buzzes in response, but I can’t make it out. “Yeah, secure. We’re good up here for now. I’ll hold them while you finish the sweep.” Then he glances at me, his eyes fastened on mine as he asks his next question. “Lippert?”

His face goes cold as he listens to the answer. And for the first time, Ivan gets distracted, looking away. “What?” He hisses into his radio. “Are you fucking serious, Jones?”

I glance at Daniel, frantic. Daniel looks back at me with the same expression, his face whiter than I’ve ever seen it. I whip my attention back to Ivan.

“What,” I ask, my voice shaking. “What’s – what’s happening.”

He just waves the gun at me, continuing to listen to something on his radio. Then, he murmurs “affirmative” into the handset and spins on the both of us. “Where the fuck is he?”

“What are you talking about?” Daniel growls, still holding his hands up by his head.

“Kent!” Ivan shouts, his face going red with anger now. “Kent Lippert! Where the FUCK is he in this house!?”

My jaw drops in shock and a second later relief floods through me, my knees going literally weak for the second time today as I lean back against the wall. If –

If they haven’t found him yet –

He’s probably not dead –

“We don’t know, Ivan,” Daniel growls, keeping his eyes on him.

Ivan, losing his cool more than I’ve ever seen him before, lifts his gun and points it straight at Daniel’s face, and I go cold. Because – as much as I understand that this is a tense situation – I’m pretty sure cops aren’t supposed to use their guns to threaten guys who aren’t being arrested, and who are standing against the wall with their hands up.

“Fucking tell me now, Lippert!” Ivan yells. “Where the fuck is Kent!”

“Don’t hurt him!” I scream, my hands balled into anxious fists at my side. And I honestly don’t now who I’m talking about – Daniel, or Kent, or –

“You’re going to fucking tell me, Daniel,” Ivan shouts, striding over Jerome and coming close enough to point his gun directly in Daniel’s face, but not close enough for Daniel to grab it. “Or I swear to god, I’ll shoot you right now!”

I moan at the sight of Daniel at gunpoint, closing my eyes, my whole body threatening to give out under the stress of this moment -

“I. Don’t. Know.” Daniel growls through his teeth.

“I’ll tell you!” I shout, the words out of my mouth before I can think about whether it’s smart.

I open my eyes to see again the horrible sight of Ivan's gun still pointed at Daniel's face. "What do you know, Fay," Ivan barks, his eyes still fastened on Daniel.

"Promise me," I cry. "Promise you won't kill Kent! Or Daniel! Or...anyone!"

Ivan growls but then he takes a step back from Daniel, appeasing me. Though he's still looking towards Daniel, his next words are addressed to me. "This is a capture mission, Fay," Ivan says, a touch calmer now. "We're authorized to use lethal force if anyone resists," and here he takes another menacing step towards Daniel, "But we won't kill him unless he retaliates," Ivan continues, his voice low, as if he'd like nothing better than to take them all out.

"Then why is there all that shooting downstairs!" I gasp, my voice panicked.

"Because they're probably retaliating, Fay!" Ivan shouts, spinning his head to glare at me. I look towards Daniel, whose hands twitch, obviously itching to take Ivan's gun or tackle him or something. But I shake my head no.

Realizing his mistake, Ivan snaps his view back to Daniel. "Tell me!" He commands. "Where is Kent!"

"There's another floor," I say, all in a rush. "Through the wardrobe," I say, nodding towards it, though Ivan can't see me. "It um – it connects to Kent's bedroom? And there's...all sorts of rooms in the corridor below it? But yeah – he probably went back to his bedroom before you guys came in, after he found out..."

And then, ridiculously, I blush – because in my panic I am saying way more than needs to be said right now.

"After what?" Ivan presses, taking another step back towards the bed so he can keep Daniel under gunpoint and look at me at the same time.

I snap my mouth shut, not saying anything. Daniel does too.

"After what," Ivan insists, his voice breaking under the strain.

But it's Jerome that breaks our silence, his words bitter.

"After he found out Fay's pregnant, you asshole."