

Chapter 201 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Gasping, I pull my face from Kent's and snap my gaze to the door where –

“JANEEN!” I shriek, scrambling suddenly to get out of Kent's lap –

Even though seconds ago I would have said that nothing could tear me away –

But my sister – here on the ship! Does it mean -

I clamber to my feet and hurl myself at her. Laughing, Janeen catches me in her arms. “Hey, baby,” she murmurs, giving me a tight hug.

Desperate, I pull away, searching her face. “Does this mean – did dad –“

“He's here,” she says, grinning and nodding to me. “I talked him into it – last minute. Apparently we got on the boat just moments before your boy here.” Janeen tilts her head towards Kent now and, beaming, I turn to see him still sitting on the floor, looking a little chagrined as he watches us, his arms looped casually around his bent knees.

“Hey Kent,” Janeen says, grinning at him like a devil. “Didn't think that the next time I saw you that you would be groping my sister in a shipping container with a horse in it,” she adds, her smile deepening. “But hey, life is full of surprises.”

“Nice to see you too, Janeen,” Kent replies, his voice dry. Then he sighs, getting to his feet and coming over to us. The moment he gets to my side, he puts an arm around my waist, like he can't not touch me.

“Um,” I say, looking between Kent and Janeen, suddenly torn. Because as much as I want, honestly more than anything, to spend several long hours alone with Kent – I can't just abandon my dad, who just gave up his whole life to join our band of criminal expatriates.

“Come on,” Janeen sighs, tugging at my hand. “They told us to come to dinner. You two can catch up after. All right?”

“Five minutes,” Kent says as Janeen drops my hand and steps away. She turns her head at him, curious. “We'll be up in five minutes, all right?” he clarifies.

Janeen grins at him again. “Is that all you need, Lippert?”

Kent just scowls at her, making her laugh as she starts again down the hall. “Five minutes!” she calls over her shoulder. “My timer’s started!”

As Janeen disappears down the long hall I turn my face up to Kent and can’t help the smile that breaks out on my face. His face is serious as he watches Janeen go and butterflies burst out in my stomach as I study the stern expression that I love so much.

When he looks down at me he can’t stop his smile either, though I see him fight it, which just makes me smile harder.

“Fay,” he murmurs, taking my chin in his hand, looking over my face and shaking his head at me a little bit, like he can’t believe he’s looking at me with his own eyes. I wrinkle my nose at him, which elicits a smirk. But then he sighs sharply and takes a step back, looking down at me, at my stomach.

I bite my lip, suddenly trying to guess the direction of his thoughts, and realizing that as thrilled as we are to see each other...this might be one aspect about which he’s not so happy.

“I’m so sorry, Fay,” Kent murmurs, still looking down at me. “For how I acted that day in your bathroom – for not instantly being on your side. I should have... damn it, the night before I promised you that you had my utter trust, and then at the first test of it –“

“It’s okay, Kent,” I say quietly, leaning closer to him and rubbing one hand softly over my stomach. “That’s so far in the past – honestly, I don’t even think about it anymore. So much has changed – and I know that I haven’t seen you since that moment but honestly...everything is different now.” And then I hesitate. “Isn’t it?”

He looks up into my eyes. “Yes,” he agrees, nodding sharply. “I mean – not everything – how I feel about you is the same but...yes. Nothing about what I thought or said in that moment even feels like me anymore.”

I grin suddenly, and he turns his head at me, silently asking what’s so funny. “Look at you, Kent,” I say, laughing a little, “talking about your feelings. Jail did you good.”

“Jail made me miss you,” he murmurs, wrapping a fierce arm around me and pulling me tight against him again, precisely where I want to be.

And I smile up into his face, tempted to let the moment pass, but then...

I can’t.

He sees my smile falter. “What is it, Fay?” Kent murmurs, lifting a hand to stroke his thumb across my cheek.

“Kent,” I whisper. “I...I really like the baby.”

“What?” he asks, confused.

“I mean – I’ve gotten to know it a little – and I think it’s probably going to turn out to be a really funny kid. I mean, I don’t know how I know it, but I already feel like the baby has a sense of humor –” And then I blush, looking up into his mystified face, realizing that I’m saying this all wrong. So I bite my lip, and take a deep breath, and start again.

“What I’m trying to say, Kent,” I begin slowly, “is that I...really want you to like this baby too. I – I think it’s going to be a good one.”

Understanding breaks on his face, which softens immediately with tenderness as well as a little guilt. “Fay, is this what you’ve been worrying about for two months?”

“Well, yeah,” I scoff, “amongst...other things.”

“Because I told you I didn’t want any more children?”

“Because you underwent elective surgery to prevent more children,” I clarify, rolling my eyes.

Kent murmurs something soft and exasperated in Italian before he drops the arm around my waist and turns fully to me, taking my face in his hands and looking carefully down into my eyes.

“Everything - everything is different now, Fay,” he says quietly, saying every word carefully so that I hear him. “I don’t know if you believe in god, or fate, or...anything like that. But I do, somehow – at least a little bit. We were given this child – meant to have it – and there’s nothing more I want in this world than raise this baby with you. All right?”

A tenuous little smile breaks out on my face. “You’re not just saying it?”

Slowly he shakes his head as he smiles at me. “I like this baby too, Fay,” he murmurs. “I promise.”

And my eyes fill with tears again, and he clicks his tongue to see it and strokes my hair comfortingly, murmuring some pleasant things about not crying so much, but I just laugh, and shake my head, and stand on my toes and turn my face up to him so that he’ll kiss me.

And he does, and it’s...perfect.

“FAY!”

Janeen’s shout comes ringing down the stairs, echoing off the metal walls around us, making Kent and I jump apart.

“Dinner! It’s been SIX minutes!”

“Um,” I say, smiling up at Kent. “I think we should go up.”

He sighs and closes the door to Heathcliff and Butterfly’s makeshift stable, wrapping an arm around my shoulders and leading me in the direction of my sister’s voice. “Who picked this vessel anyway,” he murmurs, looking around. “No one should have allowed Janeen on a boat that’s so...reverberant.”

“Daniel picked it,” I sigh, leaning against him as we walk.

“What?” he asks, shocked. “How did he do that? Who – who owns this ship?”

“Well,” I say, looking up at him wide-eyed. “It’s kind of...mine...”

“What!?” Kent stops dead in his tracks, shocked.

“FAY!” I wince and then laugh as Janeen’s voice shouts again.

“Coming!” I call out to her and then I tug Kent forward. “Come on,” I say with a grin. “It’s a really long story. We’ll catch you up at dinner.”

Chapter 202 – Family Dinner

Chapter 202 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I smirk when I feel Kent check his step just a little before entering the ship’s very tiny dining room. Honestly, I think it’s just a room that they put a table in where we could eat separately from the crew – this ship isn’t really accustomed to taking passengers; even the cabins we’re staying in are usually reserved for officers.

So, the tiny room that we enter is very, very full of people that Kent isn’t used to mingling together. But I don’t think anyone sees it except for me as Kent immediately regains his composure and ducks through the door, nodding around to my dad and Janeen, and then Daniel and Jerome, who are certainly standing closer than they ever have in Kent’s presence before.

I grin at them, knowing that the jig is up, and that they’re both uncomfortable with it. But I’m pleased to see them not pretending anymore.

“Dad!” I gasp, dashing away from Kent’s side to throw my arms around my pops, who hugs me tight.

“Hey, little girl,” he says, laughing. “Surprised to see me?”

“A little,” I say, beaming at him as I pull away. “But so, so glad you decided to come.”

“Well,” he says, running a warm hand over my shoulder and my arm, “someone’s gotta be a grandpa to this little baby.”

I grin at him, thrilled, and hug him again before turning – a little awkwardly – back towards Kent. Janeen watches it all with a huge smile on her face, dying to see this go down.

“Dad, you remember Kent, yes?”

But Papa Thompson, as always, declines to rise to the bait.

“Kent,” my dad says, coming forward and holding out a hand, smirking at the man who had him thrown in the trunk of a car the last time he saw him.

“Mr. Thompson,” Kent says evenly, his face not giving anything away about how he feels about re-meeting this man he treated so terribly, and after he’s knocked up his daughter to boot. Oh, and been the cause of some serious criminal mischief that made us all flee the country. I glance at Janeen and break into a huge grin too, enjoying it.

“Mr. Thompson is a bit formal, don’t you think? These four have been calling me Papa,” dad says, his smirk deepening as he sees Kent’s lips tighten with distaste. “But I suppose someone else deserves that title, these days.” Dad gives Kent a wink and Kent sighs as he takes his hand back.

Janeen and I burst out laughing and I turn away to say hello to Daniel and Jerome, knowing that Kent would probably die rather than call my dad papa, or let anyone call him by the name.

Except maybe the baby. We’ll have to see.

Things are easier after that, my dad having broken the tension. Daniel, Jerome and dad sit down at the table as a cook comes in with some tureens of food. As he places them on the table, Janeen moves closer to Kent, peering up at his face.

“Hey, did you guys even clean this?” she says, standing on her toes to get a better look at the cut on Kent’s head.

“It’s fine,” he murmurs, trying to lean away. “I’ll get to it after dinner.”

“No, let me,” she says, firm as she snatches a clean napkin and a glass of water off the table. I sit down at the table Daniel on Daniel’s left – he’s my husband, after all – and watch, a wide grin on my face.

“Janeen,” Kent says, pulling his head away from her as she dabs the napkin in the water and reaches for him.

“Kent!” she scoffs, and then she smacks him on his arm. “Would you just let me? I know what I’m doing.”

Kent purses his lips, his eyes going directly to me. “Is this where you got it from?” he asks, his voice tight.

“Got what, Kent?” I ask, my voice light and innocent. “Janeen is just trying to help.”

“Stubborn,” he murmurs as she hauls him over to the chair next to me and presses hard on his shoulders to get him to sit.

“Helpful,” I correct, patting him on the knee as Janeen leans close.

Kent hisses and flinches away as Janeen begins to dab at the cut on his forehead. “God, do you even know what you’re doing?”

“Of course, I do, I’m a stripper,” she murmurs. “All strippers know first aid.”

“What?” he breathes, looking up at her, baffled. “That is...not true.”

“Yeah well,” she says absently. “This one does. Stay still.”

And Kent, to his credit, lets her dab at the wound before heading to a first aid kit attached to the far wall. The cooks finish laying our meal out on the table while Janeen rifles through the kit and Kent looks around the table, I think conflicted about what to say or do.

The rest of us – my dad excepted, probably – are a little confused too. We’re all very, very used to Kent being in charge – but as I look around I see that Daniel and Jerome are – perhaps unconsciously – turned towards me.

Because I’m the one who’s taken the lead in these past few months, haven’t I?

How strange, I think. Because immediately, immediately when I saw Kent again I was ready to hand it all over – all the power, all the responsibility, all the decisions. But as I look around, I realize that...I’m perhaps the only one who wants that.

I turn to Kent, eager to see what he thinks, and am a little relieved to find that he’s not staring at me. Instead, he’s looking around at everyone else, watching them watch me.

But however he feels about it, Kent takes it in stride as Janeen comes back over with a little rubbing alcohol and a bit of gauze.

“So,” Kent says, looking around at everyone and then hissing as Janeen dabs at his head.

“Sorry,” she murmurs, still dabbing, but not interrupting.

Kent winces again but doesn't let it stop him. "Where, exactly, are we headed?"

Even though they know the answer to Kent's question, Jerome and Daniel turn to me, which makes me smirk. I lean forward and take a roll out of a little basket, as well as a wrapped pat of butter. "I think everyone should get something to eat before we get to the big stuff," I say quietly, assuming command and declining to answer Kent's question immediately, though I'm not really sure why. Maybe...because I can. Or to see what happens.

To my slight surprise, and certainly my pleasure, my family complies with me. Daniel and Jerome stand and start passing around plates, filling them with food as I quietly butter my roll. The entire time, I'm aware that Kent's eyes are on me.

When the roll is good and buttered, I turn to Kent as I take a bite, holding his gaze as I do, chewing quietly.

"Well look at you," he murmurs, the corner of his mouth turning up just a little.

"Look at me," I whisper back, holding his gaze. But then I give him a little wink. "Troops work better on full bellies," I say, looking up at Daniel and raising my voice so he can hear me. "Plus, your son brought you a present. Didn't you?"

"Oh yeah!" Daniel says, brightening. And then he moves swiftly to a little bag in the corner, pulling out a bottle of Macallan 15 Year whiskey – Kent's favorite bottle, which he always kept stocked in the house. Kent groans softly when he sees it and runs his palm over his face. I laugh a little, seeing him almost salivate. Daniel laughs too, giving us both a wink and then pointing around the table to see who wants a glass.

Everyone raises a hand but me. I just scowl, jealous, because even though I don't like the taste, I could certainly use a drink on a day like today.

And even as I smile around at my family, Kent at my side – the one thing I wanted, the one thing I gave up my entire life for...

The image of my father flashes before my eyes - his throat cut, his head lolling, his eyes wide and staring as the blood flows from his opened throat –

I wince, pressing my eyes shut and looking away.

Kent's hand is on my knee in an instant. I take a deep breath before turning to him and nodding. "I'm all right," I say, glancing around and pleased to see that no one else noticed.

"What was it?" he murmurs, glancing at my stomach.

"Nothing," I reply, giving him a soft smile. "I'll...can I tell you later?" And then I nod subtly towards everyone else, implying that I don't want to ruin our festive atmosphere. Kent looks at me seriously for a moment before he nods, his hand tightening on my knee.

“The moment you’re ready,” he says quietly. “We’ll go. All right?”

“Okay,” I say, smiling at him and then taking another bite of my buttered roll, the only thing that I feel like I can stomach at the moment. My usually voracious appetite has been dulled by the stresses of the day. I’m sure it will come back soon but...I take a deep breath, willing myself back into cheer.

Because it’s a happy day, it really is. I got what I wanted and it all went off without a hitch. And I planned it, after all – I knew the cost. I paid it gladly, even if I did take an emotional hit.

Daniel hands Kent his glass – one ice cube, as usual – and Kent takes a moment to take a long, lingering sniff of it.

“Oh god,” my dad says, across the table, coughing and sticking out his tongue as he stares down into his glass. “This is rough. Do they have any 7-Up in the kitchen?”

Kent laughs a little, shaking his head before taking a lingering sip. “I’m going to have to disagree with you there, Thompson,” Kent says, his eyes closed. “This is the good stuff.”

And as his hand tightens again on my knee, I know he doesn’t just mean the drink.

Chapter 203 – Intentions with My Daughter

Chapter 203 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Dinner goes smoothly after that, I think the liberal pouring of whiskey helps us find our rhythm. Kent is by no means an easy addition to any party – he’s too commanding a presence, and Daniel and Jerome fall too easily into their habitual fear of him. But Janeen and I work hard to cajole the boys, getting them back to the playful banter that we relied on so much to keep our spirits up at the beach house. And it works – it’s only a short while before I see the tension leave Daniel’s shoulders, before he leans unconsciously towards Jerome, before Jerome slides an arm around Daniel’s waist without even thinking about it. I glance at Kent when this happens, curious, but Kent gives no indication that he even notices – even though I’m sure he does. “So,” Janeen says, grinning around at everyone and refreshing some glasses after we’ve all eaten our fill of the surprisingly hearty meal - Swedish meatballs over egg noodles. “Why don’t we let Kent in on the secret of where we’re headed. And me too, for that matter, because I never reached the level of security clearance enough to be told.” “Yes, you did, Janeen,” I say, sending her a little glare over my little dish of vanilla ice cream. The cook noticed that I didn’t eat much and generously brought it out to me, hoping to tempt my stomach or my tongue. I raise a small spoonful to my mouth, taking a small bite. “We never kept it a secret from you.” “Well then why don’t I know?” she asks, saucy, leaning back in her chair and taking a liberal sip of her drink. “Because,” I say, looking peacefully down at my desert. “I don’t know where we’re going.” “What?” Kent bursts

out, baffled. I just shrug, looking at him first and then around the table. "I mean, the ship is headed to many ports in Europe. And I'd prefer to get off at one of the earlier ones for poor Heathcliff's sake –""You brought the horse?" dad asks, shocked. "He is family, dad," I reply, amazed that he thought I'd leave him behind. "We seriously have...no destination..." Kent interrupts, still staring at me in shock. "We figured we could make it a group decision," Daniel says, taking my side. "Fay finally decided to give up her death grip on her reign of terror. I, frankly, think that we should be grateful to her for giving us the opportunity to provide some input." "You're welcome, baby," I murmur, winking at him and pointing my spoon briefly in his direction before scooping up another bit of ice cream. "So, where do we think we should go?" Jerome asks, his cheeks flushed with excitement and I think quite a bit of whiskey. "France? Italy? Portugal, I hear, is gorgeous." "We seriously have...no plans?" Kent asks quietly, leaning towards me as Janeen starts to ask questions about these unfamiliar ports and the kind of men who live there. "We have plans," I answer with a shrug. "We can just...do them from multiple places. And we should settle down somewhere. I thought you'd want input on this, and I've never even been to Europe, and I couldn't rely on Daniel to decide," I say, gesturing towards him, "he's just going to pick wherever has the best coffee and bookshops –""Both of which go to Paris," Daniel says, nodding sagely. "So that's a vote for France from me." Kent ignores his son, staring directly at me, and I can see his emotions warring in him. Because half of him wants to lay into me, I know, for just...heading to sea without the next step planned. But another part of him – the bigger part, I'm betting – is pleased to have some say in our fate, to be able to take some semblance of control over what happens next. I watch him as he figures this out, as the smile comes back to his face. "You pick," I say, reaching out and brushing my knuckles across the skin of his cheek. Kent leans into my hand a little before he nods. "All right. Any deadline on when the decisions have to be made?" "About ten days to cross," I say quietly. "There's time." He turns his head then, pressing a kiss to my fingers and closing his eyes, promising me silently to make good use of that time. And I smile, my stomach turning over with joy and anticipation. Because, damn it, I have these ten days of peace. And I intend to enjoy myself. Neither Kent nor I realize that the table has gone quiet, with everyone watching us, until my dad clears his throat. I snap my attention back to the table but Kent sighs, hanging his head for a moment as he realizes that he has been...perhaps a little indiscreet in front of my dad. Kent takes a moment before he turns and looks at Papa Thompson. And though I and probably Daniel can read the apology on Kent's face as I drop my hand and grin at Janeen, my dad just looks at Kent sternly. "I think it's time," dad says, standing up from the table, "that you and I had a chat, Kent." He doesn't say it angrily, or with any intent to be intimidating. But he is firm as he nods towards the door, letting Kent know that this is happening now. I clench my teeth together, willing myself not to laugh as Janeen beams at me, loving the drama. Kent stands up and drops his napkin on the table. "All right," he says, nodding to my dad. "Lead the way." And then, both stoic and silent, dad and Kent head out of the little dining room together. The moment the door shuts behind them Janeen and I howl with laughter, unable to hold it back. Daniel and Jerome look at each other, delighted, and then they join in. "Oh my god," Daniel murmurs, taking a big sip of his whiskey before pouring a refill. "I don't think there is a conversation that Kent wants to have in the world right now than this one with your dad, Fay." "Well, what about my dad!" I say, laughing and leaning forward, eager. "He already got the son in law he always wanted – one who doesn't even touch me. Now he has to have a stern chat with my baby daddy, who has a reputation as the most ruthless mob boss and ladies' man that our city has ever seen?" "Call him your baby daddy to his face," Janeen eagerly pleads, "but do it when I'm around. I want to see it.

– do it for me – my birthday is coming up – “I laugh and shake my head. “Nooo, be nice to poor Kent, he’s been all cooped up in jail for months.” “Yeah,” Daniel says, smirking at me. “And then the first thing you do is load him onto a container ship?” “Oh,” I say, my eyes going wide. “I didn’t think of it that way...” “Don’t worry,” Janeen sighs, smirking at me. “I’m sure will find a way to make his stay pleasant. Unless Kent had some gentleman company in the jail,” she says, blinking innocently. “Ugh, you always take it too far, Janeen,” I sigh, but I can’t help laughing anyway. But as I sit back in my chair, relaxing, I feel a familiar twinge of nausea in my stomach and I moan a little. “Oh jeeze,” Janeen says, sighing for me with pity. “Baby acting up again?” “Yup,” I say, working to stand up. “Probably why I didn’t eat much. Can you help me down to my cabin?” I ask, reaching for her. “Sure,” she says, coming to my side and wrapping an arm around my waist. “You two stay here,” she says, pointing over at Daniel and Jerome. “We’re not done drinking. And dad will come back and give us all the details.” “Aye aye, Captain,” Daniel says, giving her a wink and blowing me a kiss. Jerome gives me a fond wave just as my face starts to turn green. “Come on, Captain,” I murmur to my sister. “We’ve got to hurry.”

Kent takes a deep breath as he follows David Thompson out into the fresh air on deck. It’s by no means a picturesque spot – just metal walls, ceiling, and floor on three sides and the sea beyond. But it’s a bright, crisp night with the moon shining out over the waves. Kent shrugs a little, thinking it’s not such a bad spot for a conversation he thought he was far, far too old to have. The parents of most of the women he’s dated recently have been dead or out of the picture. So, this? It’s...unique. Thompson leans against the rail of the ship, swirling the whiskey in the glass in his hand and nodding at the spot next to him. Kent obliges, leaning against the rail and looking evenly at the older man. But as Kent stares at Fay’s adoptive father he blinks, realizing that Thompson is...what, at most eighteen years older than him? God, less than the difference between himself and Fay. Kent grimaces inwardly, but he doesn’t let it show on his face. Instead, he waits for Thompson to begin. Thompson sighs, and looks out at the sea. “You’d better do right by her, Kent,” he murmurs quietly. “Because I know I’m supposed to be scared of you and everything, but I swear to god, if you don’t? I’ll kill you.” Kent finds himself taking a deep breath and smiling as he looks down at the floor, trying to hide it because he doesn’t want Thompson to think that he’s mocking him. Because honestly, he likes it. It’s precisely what he’d say, if he had a daughter. And Kent realizes quite suddenly that he really be in Thompson’s shoes in a little more than eighteen years if he and Fay have a daughter, which they very well might...Kent groans audibly then, putting a hand over his face. Thompson laughs and Kent peeks through his hand at him. “Just figured out the irony of our age difference, didn’t you?” he says, grinning. Slowly Kent nods, pulling his hand away from his face with a sigh. “Well?” Thompson asks, smiling more kindly at him now. “What are your intentions with my daughter, Kent? I need to know whether I have to throw you off this boat right now. Because I’m about mad enough to do it. She broke about thirty laws today – big ones – to make this happen. And I let her because I’m not sure I can tell her not to, and because I saw she couldn’t live without you. But if you don’t feel the same...” Thompson sticks out his thumb and flicks it over the side of the rail, giving a little whistle as he does so. Kent nods, getting the message. “I don’t think it’s a problem,” Kent says, standing up to his full height, because he figures he should be standing straight at a moment like this. “Because I intend to marry her at the first chapel we can find. If you’ll give me your blessing, of course.”

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Chapter 204 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Thompson smirks at Kent, not letting him off that easy. “How can you do that?” he asks. “She’s already married.”

A muscle flicks in Kent’s jaw. “They’ll get divorced. We’ll have the paperwork drawn up immediately.”

“I’m not sure any court in America is going to process their divorce right now,” Thompson says, laughing and looking out over the water. “Considering you three are probably America’s Most Wanted.”

Kent grits his teeth, realizing that this is probably correct.

“Besides,” Thompson says, sighing contemplatively. “I’m not sure that’s part of their plans.”

“It isn’t?” Kent asks, confused. Because, with him out, why would they...

“They got married for more than just fun,” Thompson says quietly, “and to make the baby legitimate. They made those nasty Italians come over, did a paternity test for them and everything.”

Kent’s eyebrows go up, but then he raises a hand to the back of his head, remembering the little patch of hair...

He frowns, confused and hating that he doesn’t know what the hell is going on here.

“So, I guess you’d better ask Fay,” Thompson continues, turning back to look Kent up and down. “She might have her own opinions about whether or not you two should get hitched, and I’m sure it has nothing to do with my blessing.”

“Still,” Kent pushes, wanting it. Because despite his line of work and the hundreds of laws he’s broken in his life, there are some traditions that matter to him. “I’d like to have it.”

Slowly, Thompson shakes his head, looking at Kent with a sternness that is unnatural on his kind face. But still, in the man’s eyes Kent reads a grief and protectiveness for his daughter that makes him...envious.

And suddenly, quite suddenly, Kent desperately hopes that the baby is a girl.

Thompson sighs, and with effort, Kent pulls his attention back to him, even as the hope takes firm root in his chest.

“I don’t want this life for her, Kent,” Thompson says quietly. “This was...she pushed through these months, planning this, putting it all in order, worrying about you, doing what she did but this? For the rest of her life?” he shakes his head. “I know my girl, Kent, and she is strong – but before long, this life of yours will break her.”

Guilt and grief sweeps through Kent in a wave. He locks his muscles against it, not willing to give in. “What did she do?” he whispers, shaking his head. “Everyone alludes to it, but no one will tell me.”

“Well,” Thompson says, giving a deep sigh and looking down at the ground. “I won’t either. That’s her story to tell.”

They’re quiet for a long moment, Thompson turning to look out over the sea, and Kent studying this man who loves Fay as much as he does.

“This ends,” Kent says quietly, and Thompson turns back to look him in the eye, “as soon as I can end it. I swear it. It will be done before the baby is born, and then we’ll have peace. For good.”

“You swear?” Thompson asks, his voice low and thick.

“On everything that matters,” Kent says, his own voice rough. “I swear.”

“Well then,” Thompson says, wiping discreetly at his eyes before lifting his hand between them. “I guess you’ve got my blessing then.”

Kent clasps Thompson’s hand and shakes it, nodding once.

But Thompson doesn’t let go, instead stepping closer and looking up into Kent’s face. “You’d better try a little bit harder to deserve her, Kent Lippert,” he says quietly. “Because you may have fooled her a bit with your money and your good looks – but we both know that you’ve got a ways to go.”

Rueful, Kent laughs and nods. “We agree on that. And I will – I promise I will.”

And then, to his surprise, Thompson closes the distance, wrapping him in a tight hug and patting him hard on the back twice before letting him go and turning back towards the door.

“Come on, boy,” he calls, laughing a little and pulling the door open as he nods inside. “I’m sure she’s waiting for you. Go on and find her.”

Kent moves swiftly through the door into the ship, not looking back. His eyes do flick, just once, down the hall towards the room where they ate dinner – where he knows his son is still sitting, enjoying his evening.

Part of him hesitates, knowing he needs more time with his boy –

But...

There's time for that – lots of it now. It's the gift that Fay gave him: plenty of time to make up for the years he lost not being a good enough father.

Still, there's precisely one thing he wants right now, and one person he wants to be with. And he has a feeling that she'll have taken the opportunity of his absence to make her way downstairs.

So Kent turns sharply away from the tiny dining room, heading instead for the stairs, going down one level and striding through the hall. Again, the numbers of the cabins flash by his eyes until he finds it: four.

He reaches out a hand, but suddenly the door opens.

And he scowls a little – he can't help it – to see Janeen standing in the doorway, looking up into his face.

She bursts into laughter as soon as she sees his expression.

“Oh come on, Kent,” she says, grinning, putting a hand on her hip. “We're going to be seeing a lot more of each other these days. You're going to have to pretend to like me just a little bit.”

“I don't dislike you, Janeen,” he returns, narrowing his eyes at her a little bit and slipping his hands into his pockets. “I just –”

“Wish someone else was opening the door?”

Kent sighs, but then he nods, confessing it.

Janeen gives him a softer smile and then steps out of the room, gesturing in towards it. “Go ahead, lover boy,” she says with a warm smile – warmer than he's seen before. “Though I'm not sure you're going to be as happy with what you find.”

Kent frowns, not understanding, but Janeen just pats him on the arm and turns away, heading down the hall towards the stairs. Kent steps inside, closing the door behind him, looking around the room for Fay but...

Again, again she's not here.

Sighing sharply through his nose, Kent grits his teeth – but then he turns towards the bathroom, hearing movement there.

“Fay?” he calls.

“Oh geeze,” he hears her murmur, dismayed, maybe a little embarrassed.

Kent crosses the room in a few steps, pushing the already-open bathroom door a little further ajar and peering inside.

She’s there, and his heart breaks to see her looking so miserable, sitting on the floor, her cheek pillowed on the back of her hand, which is in turn pressed against the toilet seat.

“Sorry, Kent,” she sighs, looking up at him with her shining blue eyes. “It’s not the reunion you expected, is it?”

He just smiles at her, shaking his head, and her expression changes from contrite to remorseful when he steps into the room, closing the door behind him.

“Kent, you don’t have to –“

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he murmurs, moving behind Fay and settling himself on the floor as well, stretching his long legs on either side of her and leaning against the tiny bathroom’s wall, starting to slowly rub her back. “Do you honestly think I’m just going to sit in the other room while you’re sick in here? Waiting for you to finish?”

“Maybe,” she sighs, and he shakes his head when he hears the misery in her voice. “I don’t know if I like the idea of you watching me barf, Kent. It’s not me at my cutest, is it?”

Kent laughs and is pleased when he sees her smile just a little bit. “Is it pregnancy?” he asks, moving on from the ridiculous notion that it would make him see her any differently. “Or sea sickness?”

“I don’t know,” she murmurs. “Both, I think. I haven’t really been on a boat before – not a big one like this, not for a long time.”

“Well, we’ll get you through it,” he murmurs, steady, still stroking her back.

“Okay,” she sighs and they’re quiet for a long, peaceful moment before her body goes rigid again.

“Are you all right?” he asks.

“Nope,” she says, taking a deep breath and pushing up to her knees. “Here we go again...”

And Kent sighs, desperately sorry for his sweet girl who – whether this is pregnancy or sea sickness – is only in this state because of him. Fay quickly rises to her knees and Kent leans forward, gathering back her hair and continuing to brush her back in long, slow strokes as she loses her supper.

Chapter 205 – Tough Conversations

Chapter 205 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

About forty-five minutes later, Kent helps me to my feet. My legs are still shaky, but Kent stands close by as I brush my teeth and gargle mouthwash.

“I don’t know about all this,” I murmurs, glancing up at him and feeling awkward as I dab at my mouth with a clean hand towel.

“What do you mean?” he asks, peering down at me.

“This new intimacy,” I say, wrinkling my nose a little as I look up at him. “Kent, our entire relationship – or whatever it is –”

“Relationship,” he says instantly, with a sharp nod.

“Fine,” I say, waving a hand and brushing it off. “You’ve kept me at arm’s length. The bodily realities of our lives have been mysteries – I’ve never even seen you shower. And now we’re living in close quarters, and you’re watching me barf? Standing over me as I brush my teeth?”

“What?” he asks, smirking a little. “Do you want me to move to the cabin next door? Give you your privacy?”

“No,” I say, growling a little and taking a step closer – hating, categorically, the idea of him going anywhere at all. “I just...” I shrug, and sigh, “you like me to be...perfect, to come waltzing down the stairs every day dressed in my cute little outfits, my hair all done. You’re going to be grossed out when you discover that I’m...real. And pregnant, which is a whole different level of real.”

Kent sighs, and dips his head to press a quick kiss to my mouth before hastily bending lower. Before I know it I gasp to find that he’s scooped me up into his arms. I laugh a little in my surprise.

“I’m a little ashamed of myself,” he murmurs, looking down into my face, “if you’ve taken my bullshit boundaries as anything about you. You’re perfect, every iteration of you, Fay – perfectly-dressed Fay, throwing up on a container ship Fay – they’re all very good.”

I laugh now, wrapping my arms around his neck, pleased to the core of me to hear him say it, though I admit...I still have my hesitations. "Well," I say quietly, "why did you put up so many boundaries? Why didn't you let me in?"

"I did," he says, raising his eyebrows at me. "More than you probably know. More than anyone else in...years."

"Daniel said something about that," I say quietly, looking up at him. "About...me being the only one of your girlfriends you let sleep in your bed every night."

Kent frowns a little, letting loose a sigh. "He noticed that, did he?" Then he looks up, glancing towards the door, through which – somewhere – Daniel exists.

"Daniel noticed a lot," I say quietly, peering up at him, curious about his emotions about his son.

"Well, he's not wrong," Kent replies, looking down at me and then starting back into the bedroom, sensing that I'm well enough now to leave the toilet's side, at least for now. "I've opened up to you, Fay, just...in my own way. I'm afraid you'll have to continue to be patient with me now – it's not going to be perfectly easy for me, after years of being shut off from everyone."

He carries me over to the bed, sitting down on its side and then twisting to place me, gently, on the mattress, my back against the two pillows up against the bed's plain wooden headboard.

"Why did you shut people out," I ask quietly, wrapping my arms around my knees after he pulls the blankets up, tucking me in a bit so that I'm warm, even though I'm still in the little black dress I put on at...

Wow, at two-thirty in the morning. Have I really been up that long? Why am I not more exhausted?

But as Kent stands and peels his shirt off and my eyes pass over his muscled body, his tanned skin...

I know precisely why I'm still up.

"I want to talk to you about that," he murmurs, turning to look down at me. "But...is that the conversation we should be having tonight?"

And I bite my lip as I look up at Kent's serious expression, as he glares at me a little – letting me know that he's well aware that there are things that happened today about which he has not been informed, and about which he wants to know.

Slowly, I shake my head. "We can save it," I say quietly, knowing that it's right. "For another time."

“We have plenty of time now,” he murmurs, stepping forward and taking my chin in his palm, staring down into my face as if he can’t get enough of looking at me. “Well...as long as you did your job well and we aren’t going to be stopped by international customs and sent back to the United States the moment we land in Europe.”

“Oh,” I say too-innocently, my eyes going wide. “Should I have planned for that?”

He narrows his eyes at me, just a little, unwilling to play. I just laugh and swat his hand away.

“Of course we planned for that,” I murmur, shaking my head at him. “Daniel’s in charge of those details, actually – he’s kind of amazing at shipping and boat stuff now – he learned a lot in the past two months, about both the legitimate trade and smuggling –“

“Daniel?” Kent asks, baffled.

“I made him get a job,” I say, grinning.

“Daniel got a job?” Kent’s mouth falls open, making me laugh even harder. And then he groans, turning away from me. “I think...” he says quietly, taking a moment to consider. “I think I need a shower, Fay,” he says, glancing over his shoulder at me. “And then you need to tell me everything. Are you all right with that?”

“Look at you, Lippert,” I say, leaning back into the pillows with a wide grin. “Asking me if I’m all right with the plan, instead of telling me what’s going to happen. I think I like this new situation.”

“Well,” he says, moving back towards the bathroom even as he keeps his eyes on me. “Don’t think I didn’t notice what happened at dinner. It’s very clear who is in charge of your little rag-tag crew.”

“Don’t be too jealous, Kent,” I say, sighing and resting my head on top of my knees. “I’ll let you borrow them sometime.”

He laughs, shaking his head and turning towards the bathroom, I think eager for his shower to wash off the months in jail, the crash, the hard ride, the surprises of the day. To be clean, to start anew.

But before he disappears, I call his name. He turns to me, curious, and I can see on his face that he’ll give me anything I ask for in this moment. Anything at all.

“Can you toss me that pack of saltines?” I ask quietly, pointing to the white sleeve of crackers on the dresser.

He laughs, surprised, and I smile to see his face so joyful. But then he does as I ask, grabbing the crackers and tossing them to me before he disappears into the bathroom.

“Don’t get crumbs in the bed,” he calls over his shoulder. I bite my lip as I rip open the sleeve, so incredibly happy, because as each moment passes he becomes more and more like the Kent I know again.

The Kent I love, and the man I fought to have at my side.

I bite into a cracker, happy and pleased, and look down at my stomach, where the baby has been quiet all day. “Your daddy’s back, baby,” I murmur, giving a content little sigh. “And we’re not letting him go anywhere, ever again. Are we?”

Baby doesn’t reply, but I don’t mind. Because we have time for that.

Chapter 206 - Pride

Chapter 206 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

When I hear the shower turn on in the little bathroom, I stand up and head to the little suitcases that I packed for Kent and I for this trip. A little thrill runs through me as I remember how anxious I was packing his – worrying if he’d like the clothes I picked out for him, if he’d ever get to wear them – if I, too, would get to wear mine, because there was one hell of a large chance that I was going to get arrested today as well –

But everything went over beautifully. And now...

I have other things to worry about.

Like what do you wear to bed when you’re four months pregnant and you haven’t seen your baby daddy in two months?

I groan a little, turning towards Kent’s bag first and pulling out a pair of underwear – black boxer briefs, the only thing I’ve ever seen him wear – and a pair of pajama pants. I move to the bathroom door and crack it open, falling back a little in surprise at the quantity of steam that puffs out of the door.

Well, I guess he didn’t get a lot of hot showers in jail.

“Clothes delivery,” I call, tossing the underwear and pajamas onto the closed lid of the toilet.

Kent laughs a little, and I know he’s appreciating the irony of tables again being turned. I just smile and pull the door shut, letting him have a minute to enjoy his shower in peace. Then, I move to my own little suit case, quickly swapping out my black dress for a mostly-shapeless black silk nightgown.

I peer at myself in the mirror once I've changed, running my fingers through my hair and then turning to the side, smoothing the fabric down over my little baby bump. I smile at it, thinking that it's kind of cute.

But will Kent think the same?

I mean, I know he just said that he thought all iterations of me were perfect but...

I sigh and turn away, hoping that it proves correct. Because Kent liked my body a lot when I wasn't pregnant – I just...will he still like it now that it's shaped differently?

I push the thought from my mind, though – something I've gotten used to in the past couple of months – and crawl back into bed, pulling the blankets up over my knees and picking up my book, reading through a few pages and not really processing what's going on in the story.

I grow tenser as I hear the shower water turn off, hear him moving around in the bathroom, brushing his own teeth, getting changed.

Because...

Frankly, I'm not looking forward to the conversation I know we're going to have next. I don't want, at all, to think about how he'll react when I tell him everything Daniel and I did to make this moment possible.

Because while he might be able to accept morning sickness Fay, and pregnant Fay...

God, will he still love me when he finds out that I'm a murderer?

I mean, he'd be an incredible hypocrite if he didn't but...

Was my innocence one of the things he loved about me? Did I take that away?

When Kent finally emerges from the bathroom – he ignored the pajama pants, as I thought he might – I'm looking up at him with wide and worried eyes, already shining with tears.

His face falls immediately as he crosses the room in an instant, sitting on the edge of the bed and leaning forward, cupping my cheek with his palm. "What?" he asks, quiet, insistent. "What is it?"

I shake my head, my lower lip trembling as I whisper my answer. "I'm really worried you're going to hate me now."

"Fay," he breathes, shaking his head like it's unbelievable. And then he sighs and takes the book from my hands, neatly marking the page with the flap of the book cover and placing it on the side table. Then, all business – all Kent – he shuts off the light, and climbs into bed, and takes charge.

Kent rearranges the pillows so that he can lean back against him, and then he pulls me into his lap and wraps his arms tight around me, pulling me warm against his chest. He tucks the blankets in around us so that we're in a comfortable little nest, and then he rests his head against mine.

We sit like that for a moment, listening to the still rush of the waves against the ship, the distant sound of the engines churning. And I take a deep breath, closing my eyes, relishing the feeling of ceding him control – of letting him handle it all.

After a few moments of peace, Kent speaks.

“Tell me,” he murmurs, his voice low, his chest rumbling with the words.

And without hesitation, I do.

Kent holds me tight for what feels like hours as I tell him everything. He's a better listener than I thought he'd be, only interrupting softly when he doesn't understand, or needs more details. I start at the beginning, telling him of my sleepless night and determination, of how hard it was not only to make myself think of a plan ridiculous enough to work, but to convince myself that it could be real, that it could actually work.

My voice lowers when I begin to speak of my father, and of Ivan, and the decision to take one out and let the other live. It remains soft as I describe sorting through what felt like a very un-motherly desire for vengeance and balancing it with a cool determination to remove the true threats to our continued lives together. I give Kent the full details of how I made Ivan trust me, made him think I loved him before ruthlessly using his conviction to get him to move half the cops in the state to a point hundreds of miles from Kent's crash.

I hesitate only when it comes time to tell him about today, about this morning. But Kent's arms tighten around me, encouraging, and so I begin. My voice begins to shake a little as I'm forced to relive it – trapping my father, poisoning him, being fully aware that Fiona was arranging for the murder of his closest allies while Daniel slipped poison into his glass of champagne and then cut his throat. All to solidify our control, or dominance.

To ensure that there was no one left to come after us when we walked away.

I'm crying by the time I finish, little tears slipping down my cheeks as I wonder at the woman I've become. Because I always wanted to be a psychologist, someone who helps people.

And what am I now?

When I go quiet, and he can tell that I'm finished, Kent finally shifts, turning slightly so that he can look into my face, moving a hand to my cheek and turning my eyes towards him. Slowly, gently, he brushes my tears away.

“I'm sorry, Fay,” he murmurs, and I shake my head, dismissing it –

But his hand stills. “No,” he says, firmer now, and I look up at him. “I want you to hear me say it. I’m sorry – you never should have been in that position to have to have made those choices. That’s my fault.”

I scoff, shaking my head. “It can’t be your fault, Kent – Ivan and my father did that to you –“

“I should have seen it coming,” he murmurs.

“You couldn’t –“

“I could have,” he says, insistent, and I go quiet, looking up at him, considering that if he was willing to listen to me then I should at least do the same for him. “I failed you, and Daniel, when I didn’t. If I had, you wouldn’t have had to go through all of this –“

“No,” I say, firm now myself, frowning and shaking my head at him as I lift my hand to his face, placing the tips of my fingers across his lips. He stops, staring at me, I think surprised. But I don’t let myself consider it. “I won’t let you take the guilt of this from my shoulders, Kent. It’s mine –“

“But even if I want to –“

“Stop,” I command, serious, needing him to hear me on this. He raises his eyebrows a little, surprised.

Chapter 207 – Whatever Souls are Made Of

Chapter 207 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

But he lets me continue.

“This is mine, Kent,” I say softly, dropping my hand. “If I let you take the blame...you also take from me my conviction that all of these were my choices, that these were things that I did. From the beginning, you told me I was a pawn in this game – and I know my father felt the same –“

I see guilt flash across Kent’s face as he remembers the way he explained my place in this world by demonstrating to me that I was a mere penny to be moved around the table by men more powerful than me.

“But none of this, Kent,” I say softly, “none of my actions these past two months have been the natural result of a bigger player’s move. It was me, choosing to step in, to play my own cards. If you try to take the guilt from me...”

He nods, understanding. “It would be me, in my way, claiming your moves as my own.”

“I...won’t let you do that, Kent,” I say quietly, shaking my head. “I think...I think I’m different now from who I was before. It means something to me, this knowledge that I can handle myself in this world. I won’t let you take it from me.”

Slowly, he lowers his face, pressing his forehead to mine. “Good,” he murmurs, his word a simple affirmation of everything I think and I feel. Because...I wouldn’t take it back, would I?

“Will you hate me for it?” I whisper.

“Hmm?” he asks, moving a way a little, frowning at me.

“For not letting you take this from me? For...for having blood on my hands? For being different than the sweet girl you...liked?”

“Fay,” Kent sighs, his frown deepening. “If you think that I haven’t been aware for many months now that you’re capable of great and terrible things and loved you because of it...”

“What?” I ask, leaning away a little, shocked.

He laughs lightly and dips his head again, lower now, to press a kiss gently to my neck. “Maybe not from the start,” he murmurs, his lips grazing my skin, making a shiver run through me. “But...very soon after, love – I realized precisely what you were, and I loved you for it.”

“And what I am I?” I ask, deeply curious.

“Well,” he says, lifting his head and looking me in the eye. “There may be a great deal about us that is dissimilar on the surface,” he murmurs. “I’m...hard, and you are soft, and sweet. And you’re small, and delicate –“

“And you’re gigantic,” I laugh, making him laugh too, pulling me tighter against him.

“Yes, that,” he continues. “And you’re the bright fire to my darkness, the song to my silence, but deep down? In our hearts, our true selves, where it matters?”

And suddenly, I realize that he’s right – and that this was perhaps the spark that rose between us. Kent and I - what we see echoed from the depths of each other is a reflection of ourselves. And if Kent can accept that he is capable of murder to defend the ones he loves...

...then he must accept, must have accepted for a long time, that I am as well.

“Whatever souls are made of,” I murmur, lifting my chin to look steadily into his eyes.

“Yours and mine are the same,” he finishes.

And I laugh, pleased even beyond myself –

“Do you remember,” I say suddenly, all in a rush, “the first time I said that –“

“Yes,” Kent growls, his voice harsh now, rumbling against me as he tightens his grip on my body, pulling me close, wrapping his fingers in my hair. “Except you said it about that damn horse instead of me – I’ve never been so jealous of a horse in my life, Fay –“

I’m laughing now, warmly, richly, joy thrumming through every inch of me. But my laugh is cut short, because Kent finally –

Finally –

He claims my mouth with his own, kissing me breathless.

Things move quickly now, as they should have before – but I realize that I was holding back because I didn’t understand, didn’t trust that he would see me for who I am and love me anyway.

But now that I realize that he’s seen it all along? And loved it all along?

God, the freedom I feel –

I let it all go then, in an instant. Any hesitations, any fears – gone.

And left in their wake is a pure, undiluted love for this man, who is my match in every way. A man who I very much want, right now.

And who very, very clearly wants me just as much.

Kent’s mouth is hot, insistent on mine as he turns me in the bed, lowering me to the mattress and leveraging his body above me so that I can feel the weight of him pressing me down. I moan, my mouth open to him, at the warm press of him on top of me, the feel of his tongue moving against mine, tasting me –

But at the sound of my moan, Kent hesitates, pulling his face away, looking down towards my belly. “Is it…” he asks, flashing his eyes back up to mine, “does it hurt, me on top of you like this? The baby?”

“No,” I breathe, wrapping my hand in his hair and pulling his face back to mine. “I’ll tell you if it does.”

With a little groan of his own, Kent presses his lips to mine, claiming me again. My sharpening breath tells him how much I want him, how much I’ve been waiting for this – for the feel of him again hard against me, for his mouth against my skin –

Kent has been patient before, in the past – taking his time with me, teasing me. But tonight is...not one of those times. Instead, his hands move with a steady determination, the callouses of his palms rough against my skin as he slips them beneath my flimsy nightgown, one dipping low to grab my ass, the other sliding upwards to claim my breast.

He groans again, louder now, as he presses me closer against him, turning to the side so that I lay with my belly pressed flush against his – or at least, as flush as it can go anymore – as he pulls at my leg, lifting it to hook my knee high over his waist.

I kiss him recklessly as I feel him shove at his boxer briefs, pushing them down. I moan a little into his mouth, shaking a little with anticipation as I feel him roll his body over mine again. I can feel the hard, swelling mass of his cock now positioned at the core of me, and I press my hips up, wanting him to press inside –

But Kent waits, taking a moment to slide one hand up my arm, lifting it above my head. I pause now, opening my eyes, curious –

And I see him looking down at me now, his eyes insistent as he pins that wrist above my head, asking me for my consent – to give it all to him, all of the control –

Control over my body tonight, yes, but also of our lives, our futures –

Kent is asking me, silently, to pass him that control. To let him take care of me, to trust him –

And I nod, slowly, as I lift my other hand as well and cross my arms at the wrist, letting him grasp both together.

Kent moans, then – dark, and heavy – as he lets his weight rest fully against me now, sliding his free hand down the length of my body as he pins my wrist above my head. I swear his moving hand leaves sparks in its wake. He wraps that hand around my hip, lifting me harder against him, and with one slow press Kent slides himself into me.

Chapter 208 – Connection

Chapter 208 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

The noise that tears from me as Kent presses inch by inch into me...

Well. In any other situation, I think I'd be embarrassed.

But tonight? I don't care.

Instead, I turn my head to the side, my stomach contracting with the deep groan that stumbles from my lips at the feel of Kent's hard cock filling me, at the way I stretch to accommodate the wide girth of him, at how it feels so good – so incredibly right – that, fuck, god, I'd commit thirty more felonies to have this moment again.

Kent tucks his head against my shoulder as he fills me to the end of him and then he stays there for a second, fully pressed into me, making me squirm beneath him with the intensity of feeling all of him inside me. My body reacts beyond me now, writhing, my hips pressing up hard, tighter, wanting more –

With a deep exhale Kent moves his hips all in one fluid motion, pulling himself out almost to the tip, and then with a shudder he slams his hips forward, sinking all the way into me, hard. My head tilts back as I gasp, a wordless noise ripping from my throat as he does it again – and again –

Kent releases my hands and I wrap my arms around his shoulders then, my nails digging into the skin of his back as Kent pounds himself into me precisely as he wants me in this moment – hard, and desperate, and not holding an ounce of himself back. Every molecule in me responds as he fucks me hard down into the mattress, wrapping his fingers in my hair, using his grip there to tilt my head back, to expose my throat, which he licks with the hot, thick expanse of his tongue.

His teeth are on my throat as his pace starts to increase, as I cede everything to him, letting him take all control. The feel of it – the sharpness of his canines on my neck – makes me shiver with content, with anticipation as he pounds violently into me.

Pleasure pools in my core as Kent pulls my head even further back, my end coming close. He brings his face close to mine now, and I feel the panting of his breath as he speaks the words against my skin. "Say it, Fay," he growls, panting - his words clipped. "You're mine. You belong to me."

"I'm yours," I moan, meaning it, wanting it – and then, as he growls with pleasure at my confirmation, I feel myself start to spill over, my entire body tensing as my inner walls clench around him, as joy and release pounding through me along with his rhythm, completely in his control.

Relief still chases through me as I come back to myself a little, as Kent continues his relentless pace, and I raise my hands to his face, turning it, making him look at me. "You say it," I demand, my lips still parted, my eyes fluttering at the intensity of it – of the aftershock, and the way he continues to fill me even as I feel my body melt back into the mattress. "Say it, Kent," I demand, holding his gaze. "You're mine too. You're mine."

A rough groan tears from Kent as his eyes fall away from mine, unable to help it as his end nears. "Fuck, Fay, yes, I'm yours," and then a louder, heavier moan accompanied by a hard slam of his hips as I feel him spill inside of me, the warm rushing feel of it sending a shiver through my entire being. "I'm yours," he murmurs again as he lowers his head again to my shoulder and then slowly rests his weight down onto me.

I sink my fingers into his hair, panting, pressing his head close. “You’d better be,” I mutter, and after the second it takes for him to understand what I’m saying he looses a light laugh.

Our breathing echoes in the silence of the room for a long few minutes as I savor the feel, the warmth of him again against me. I turn my head so that it rests against his, pressing a kiss to his hair, taking a deep sniff of him. Because even though he smells of clean soap and shampoo, he also smells definitively of Kent, his very own rich smell that threatens to curl my toes with the pleasure of it.

When he catches his breath Kent raises his head to look at me. I just stare at him, blinking, before he laughs and turns over, falling onto his back and pulling me tight against him on my side. I smile, biting my lip and placing my head right on that place it has longed to be for months now – in the soft space between his chest and his shoulder. And then I close my eyes, pleased, savoring it, because this is what I’ve been dreaming about – quite literally – for months.

Kent and I, laying in the dark. The sheer completion and peace I feel curled up against him, his arm wrapped around me.

“So,” I say softly, not bothering to raise my voice. I know he can hear me. “Rumor has it that you’re in love with me, Kent Lippert.”

His breathing halts for a moment and then comes all out in a frustrated rush that makes me laugh.

“Why do you never give me a chance to say this in my own time, Fay?” he murmurs, shaking his head.

“Excuse me!” I say, tilting my head up now to look at him, to watch the changing expressions of his face. “You have been on this boat for hours, you’ve had plenty of time!”

“When would you have had me say it,” he murmurs, glaring down at me a little. “When we were sitting in the straw next to your horse? At dinner, with your father and your sister and my son watching?”

“Don’t forget poor Jerome,” I say, pouting. “He was there too.”

Kent ignores me, dismissing the point.

“Or should I have interrupted your midnight confessions, and told you then?”

“My answer to all of this is yes,” I say, heaving a contented sigh. “All of these were appropriate moments. The only conclusion that I can thus come to is that your love for me is –“

He growls then, interrupting me and making me laugh as he scoots lower on the bed so that our faces are even now, even as he shakes his head at me. “Will you give me no peace?” he murmurs. “You know how I feel.”

“Nope,” I reply, lifting my chin and arching my back so that I press more fully against him now. “Not until you say it.”

“I love you, Fay,” he murmurs, and I bite my lip with pleasure, feeling it sweep through me all the way to my toes. “I love you...an insane amount. I think it makes me...little crazy, every time I realize how incredibly much I love you, and how much you mean to me, and what a treasure you are. So please – if anything, I don’t say it enough because it doesn’t encapsulate enough. The words are too small.”

A warmth curls in my stomach again, because I feel precisely the same.

“I know,” I sigh, happy, meaning it. “But you could say it more often, if you wanted to. I’ll know what you mean.”

“I’ll say it six times a day if it makes you happy.”

“Make it twelve,” I murmur, feeling mischievous. He chuckles and turns his head up towards the ceiling, a subtle smile on his lips.

“All right,” he murmurs, giving me a little nod. “But you keep count and let me know how many I owe at the end of every day. I can’t be bothered with that.”

I laugh, smacking him lightly on his stomach, which makes him wince but grin. “Well then you owe me eleven more,” I chide, my eyes on his gorgeous profile, which is lined in silver by faint moonlight filtering in from our little porthole.

Kent shakes his head, tightening his arm around my shoulder and pulling me closer. “It’s past midnight,” he murmurs. “I have all day to deliver the remaining words I owe.”

“Fine,” I say, smiling and tucking my head against him, closing my eyes. “But mark my words, Lippert. I’m coming for them tomorrow.”

“You’d better,” he sighs.

And then, exhausted, we both drift off to sleep.

Chapter 209 – Wake Up

Chapter 209 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I start awake at the knocking that comes at my door, sitting up straight in bed. For a moment, I’m completely confused and a little scared – where the hell am I?

But then I feel Kent's arm tighten around my waist. Immediately I smile, looking down at where he lays belly-down on the bed.

"Whoever it is," he murmurs, still exhausted, "...shoot them."

I laugh despite myself but then smack him lightly on the back as the knock comes again. "You know I didn't bring any guns on this boat, Kent – that's so dangerous –"

He lifts his head suddenly, looking at me with an appalled expression. "We don't have any guns?"

"Well Daniel and Jerome probably do," I say, shrugging and slipping out of the bed, reaching for my old bathrobe, which is folded neatly on the top of my suitcase. "But they wouldn't let me have one."

"Clever boys," he murmurs, putting his head back down on the pillow with a content sigh.

I grin at him and move to the door, pulling it open just a little bit and peeking out. My grin deepens when I see my sister standing there with a big tray of food in her hands.

"Hey sis," she says, wrinkling her nose at me. "Any idea what time it is?"

"Um," I say, glancing over my shoulder and looking for a clock but finding none. "No?"

"It's one o'clock," she says, laughing a little.

"What?" I gasp, my eyes going wide.

She laughs harder then and shakes her head at me. "You and lover boy state up late?"

I give a little shrug and lower my eyes, letting her make what she will of my non-answer. Janeen laughs again.

"Is that for me?" I ask, looking eagerly at the tray.

"It is," she says, holding it out for me. "A little breakfast, a little lunch." I reach out to take it and then blush horribly when I see, in the corner, about five condom packets bunched neatly together in a little white tea cup.

I flinch back and then glare at her and she bursts out laughing, pleased at the result of her joke.

"Janeen!" I scold, opening the door further now and taking the tray from her hands. "You're just trying to embarrass me."

"What!" she exclaims laughing. "Safe sex is important! And a lesson the two of you clearly have to learn!"

“Well, it’s not like they’re going to do any good now,” I murmur, glancing down at my stomach and sending her a second glare as I move back into the room.

“Condoms protect against more than just pregnancy!” she calls after me in a singsong voice.

“Bye Janeen!” I say, mimicking her, deliberately letting her know to go the hell away.

“You’re welcome, Fay!” she shouts as the door shuts behind me.

Scowling a little bit, I carry the tray over to the dresser where I neatly remove the offending item and drop it into my suitcase. Then I carry the tray over to the very tiny breakfast table with two chairs as Kent turns his head to me, sleepy and curious at once.

“Breakfast?” he asks, pleased.

“With a side of snide sister,” I murmur.

He laughs lightly and pulls himself to the edge of the bed, tugging on the underwear he discarded last night before giving me a kiss on the cheek and heading off to the bathroom. As he freshens up, I pour us two cups of dark coffee from the French press, leaning forward to savor the smell.

When Kent comes out of the bathroom a few minutes later, I’m sitting in the bed settled against the pillows, my cup is half drunk.

“You’d better get over here,” I murmur. “Or your cup will be gone too.”

“You’d deprive me of my first cup of proper coffee?” he asks, pretending to be appalled. “After two months in jail?”

“Kent,” I say, looking up at him with wide, innocent eyes. “I’m pregnant. The baby needs it.”

He laughs, taking his cup and climbing onto the bed. When he leans back against the pillows he reaches for me, wrapping an arm around my hips and pulling me into his lap, wanting me close. “The baby doesn’t need caffeine, Fay,” he murmurs, shaking his head and pressing a kiss to my hair. “Though knowing you, it’s been jittering around in there like a Mexican jumping bean for four months now.”

“Excuse you,” I say, looking him up and down. “I have been a very responsible mom for the past two months —“

“And the first two?” he asks, turning to smirk at me.

But I just narrow my eyes at him, smacking him with my free hand even though I know that he’s joking. “Well someone was feeding me coffee every morning. In bed and then at breakfast. And then...maybe some in the early afternoon.”

He laughs, shaking his head a little as he sips his coffee. “Kid’s screwed,” he murmurs. “But we’ll like it anyway.”

“Look on the bright side, Kent – maybe all the coffee stunted its grown and it will stay little,” I sigh, rubbing a hand fondly over my stomach. “Make my job a little easier, five months from now.”

“Daniel was a big baby,” Kent says absently, taking a sip of his coffee.

“Really?” I ask, genuinely curious.

“Mmhmm,” Kent hums, turning his eyes back to me. “Almost ten pounds.”

My eyes go wide and my mouth falls open, appalled.

“What?” he laughs.

“Kent!” I exclaim, still horrified, “that’s gigantic!”

He shrugs a little, brushing it off. “Maybe it came from Lenai’s side,” he offers.

I turn my head to the side and flick my eyes over all six-foot-something of him. “Yeah,” I say, my voice deeply sarcastic. “I’m totally going to buy that the giant baby gene came from your tiny first wife.”

He laughs now, shaking his head. “It will be fine,” he says, shrugging it off. “This baby? She’s got a strong mama, and we’ll get you all the good drugs.”

A smile grows on my face as I peer at him now, waiting for him to figure out what he just said.

“What?” he asks, looking at me, frowning at my confusion.

“You just called the baby she,” I say, laughing. “Are you team Princess Baby?”

“What?” he asks, his face scrunching a little in confusion.

I laugh again, rolling my eyes. “Janeen and Jerome think it’s going to be a girl. They’ll be thrilled to you have you on their side.”

“Oh,” he says, considering a little. “Well, I guess I am on their team, then.”

“You want a little girl!?” I squeal, grinning, looking at him, every part of my heart melting just a little bit.

He looks away from me, smirking and pretending he’s a cool and unemotional mob boss again, even though I now know he has more depths than that. “I don’t care if it’s a boy or a girl, Fay –“

“Yes, you do!” I laugh, reaching out to shove his shoulder lightly, teasing him. “You totally want a little girl, who is just like me! Another tiny Fay, so you can have two!”

His smirk deepens into a smile as he looks at me again and slowly shakes his head. “No, you’ve talked me out of it now – the two of you will destroy my life and drive me insane. I changed my mind – I want a boy –“

“No, you don’t,” I murmur, reaching behind me to put my cup down and pressing myself closer to him. Kent obliges by wrapping a warm arm around me. “You want a little baby girl, which is probably the sweetest thing you’ve ever said, Kent. And I’m going to tell everyone.”

He groans then, which makes me laugh harder. “Don’t,” he sighs, shaking his head. “Just keep it between us.”

“No,” I say softly, shaking my head as I rest it against him, completely charmed by this sweet little detail of Kent’s heart that he doesn’t want anyone to know about.

“Do you really not know anything about the baby’s sex?” he asks. “You’ve...been to the doctor and all, right?”

“Of course I have,” I sigh softly. “But I told them I don’t want to know. Daniel wanted to find out, but I wouldn’t let him.”

“Good,” Kent says, huffing a little. “It’s not his business.”

I smile a little to myself because...well, it kind of is Daniel’s business, isn’t it? On paper, this child is Daniel’s in every way it can be before it’s born.

But I don’t bring it up – not yet. Because there are some parts of our plan that I need to talk through with Daniel first, before we can bring Kent in.

As much as so much of this feels over, feels finished?

There’s still so much left to do.

Chapter 210 – Breakfast

Chapter 210 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Come on,” Kent says, finishing his cup of coffee and moving as if he wants to stand up. “We need to get some food into you – you’ve got to be starving –“

“Nooo,” I groan, leaning hard against him and making his job difficult.

“What,” he laughs, pausing for a second. “You’re not hungry?”

“Of course I’m hungry,” I murmur, closing my eyes and tucking my head deliberately beneath his chin. “I just don’t want to get out of bed. It’s so lovely here. Can’t we stay all day?”

“Trust me, Fay,” Kent murmurs, his voice low as he drops his lips to my hair and traces a hand down the length of my back. “There’s nothing I want more than to stay here with you all day. Preferably in the absence of this very ugly robe –“

“Hey!” I shout, snapping my head up to glare at him. “I’ve had this robe for years – Janeen brought it to me from our old house! It’s perfectly broken in!”

“I can tell, Fay,” he says, laughing a little and looking at it askance. “You don’t have to get nostalgic about your robe – we’ll get you a new one, a really nice one –“

“I don’t want a new one,” I scoff, “I like this one!”

“Okay,” Kent says, smiling and kissing my angry mouth. “You can wear it beneath the one I get you, so I don’t have to look at it.”

“You’re such snob,” I say, laughing as I lift myself from his lap and head a little eagerly for the table, where I sink happily into one of the chairs and begin reaching for some buttered toast. Kent takes a minute to rifle through the little suitcase I packed for him, selecting some soft pants and a sweatshirt that he pulls over his head.

“Does the clothing pass your standards test, sir?” I ask a little sarcastically as I watch him settle the clothes over his tanned and muscled stomach, regretting a little the fact that the sight of it has been hidden away. Two months in jail hasn’t done much to change Kent physically – he’s still very hot, if perhaps a touch thinner than he was when he went in.

“It will do,” Kent murmurs, sitting down across from me and smirking a little as he meets my eye. Because we both know that the clothing is all precisely what he’d want – I did my job well here, seeking out his favorite brands, trying them out on Daniel to ensure I got the size right. It all works.

I grin widely now, letting him know that I know that he likes it, and he laughs, shaking his head. “Thank you, Fay,” he sighs, leaning forward and beginning to make himself a little plate of fruit, and cheese, and a half a sandwich. Though the words aren’t much, I know that there’s a great deal of feeling behind him – as with most things Kent says.

“You’re welcome,” I reply simply, smiling and taking a big bite of my toast.

Things move easily then as Kent and I have our breakfast, chatting idly about the minor details of my months at the beach house, the little preparations I made for this trip. As we talk, I can see

him falling more and more into the leadership role he always assumes, his shoulders straightening, his face turning more serious. I smile to see it because this, of course, is the Kent I fell in love with.

But it's also nice to know that I now know something of the man beneath this hard surface, and that I can bring him out when I want to. When it's just us, and Kent feels safe.

I smile now, perfectly happy and shaking my head, considering that it's a wonder what the passage of the day can do. This time yesterday I was a mess of nerves, not even knowing if Kent and Jerome were going to make it to the boat, if cops were going to come screeching up to the port to arrest Daniel and I for what we did –

I blink suddenly, and my hand – holding a cup of orange juice - shakes a little bit, almost spilling my drink as it all again comes back in a flash –

My father, dead, his throat and his mouth open – shock still in his eyes, because he'd really thought the antidote was real, that I was going to give it to him –

Before even that light faded away. And he was just...dead.

"Fay?" Kent asks, leaning forward and peering at me across the table.

"Sorry," I say, clearing my throat and putting the orange juice down onto the table. "It's nothing."

"No, it's not," he insists, still looking at me. "Tell me."

I flick my eyes up to his, not wanting to. Because we're having such a nice morning –

"Tell me," he says again, an order this time.

I sigh, giving in. "It's not a big deal," I murmur. "I think it's – it's natural. I just remember, at odd moments, what we...did yesterday." I shrug, trying to downplay it – honestly because I think it needs to be downplayed. Wouldn't it be worse if I had no hard feelings about it? If I just moved blissfully on from killing my father?

Kent nods slowly, still looking at me without blinking. "Are you remembering it?" he asks.

"Yes," I say, holding his gaze. "In...strange little flashes. They come at the oddest moments –"

He nods more sharply now, sitting back, and I note that his hand grips the arm of the chair harder than it did before, as if he would break into my own mind and take the hard feelings away if he could. "That's happened to me before," he says softly. "It doesn't...end, but it gets fainter and fainter, more infrequent."

I turn my eyes downward as they start to fill with tears, not wanting him to see – but of course, how would he not notice?

I hear Kent click his tongue in concern and then he's moving, at my side in a second and scooping me out of the chair, pulling me up into his arms. He murmurs my name, a little sadly, before moving to the bed to sit me warmly in his lap again while he leans back against the pillows, a position I very much like.

But I don't have much time to appreciate the comfort and nearness of him right now, because I'm trying to hard to get my emotions under control, to reel everything back in. Where is the badass mafia donna now? I didn't even cry yesterday, when it happened –

So why now, when it's so embarrassing –

"I hate that it's turned out like this," Kent murmurs, his arms wrapped around me, holding me tight against him.

I squawk a little in protest, looking up at him in surprise, making him laugh.

"No," he sighs, shaking his head, "all of this," he says, nodding around to our room, to the ship, our entire escape, "is...more than I could have asked for. But the price you paid to give it to me, Fay," he shakes his head, and I can see the guilt in his eyes.