

Chapter 231 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Daniel slowly shakes his head, putting a hand on Alessi's shoulder. "We don't know where dad is," Daniel says, his voice filled with grief. He glances at me and I move to his side, impressed again at how good an actor Daniel can be. I slip what I hope looks like a comforting arm around my husband's waist.

"What?" Alessi says, shocked, looking between us.

"We left," Daniel says with a sad shrug, "because we knew, when my father escaped, that they would lock us down – maybe even arrest us, even though we weren't involved. So we fled, wanting to get here as soon as we could. To be with family in these hard times."

Alessi clicks his tongue and shakes his head, murmuring something mournful in Italian. "I had really hoped," he says, putting his hands into the pockets of his linen pants, "that he would be with you. My old friend."

"I know," Daniel murmurs, shaking his head again and staring at the ground, looking like he carries a great deal of guilt on his shoulders.

Alessi, seeing his nephew sad, springs immediately to action. "Come in, come in!" he says, wrapping an arm around Daniel's shoulders and leading us both forward. "It is good you are here early – we will cook you breakfast, eh? And then we will have a good long talk – get you set up here, in your home."

"Who is here?" Daniel asks, and his face brightens as we enter the house and begin to walk through rooms that I know carry a great deal of nostalgia for him. I watch his face as much as I look at the incredible house around us. It's wide and expansive, the most impressive house I've ever seen, with sweeping staircases and marble floors.

"Everyone is here!" Alessi responds as he leads us quickly through the main part of the house, which is empty, and through to what is clearly an older part of the home. We are soon in a small, slightly cramped, but remarkably cozy and cheerful kitchen that I am surprised and pleased to see is filled with people.

A series of gasps goes through the room and then shouts of "Daniele!" Metal clatters as at least six women of varying ages drop their cooking utensils and dash across the room to throw their arms around their much-missed nephew or cousin or whatever he is to them. I laugh as Daniel is immediately engulfed in a hug that's at least three people deep, shouting out his greetings to his loved ones.

But as I smile at my husband and his family, waiting patiently to be introduced, movement at the far corner of the kitchen catches my eye.

And as I turn to look, I feel my heart steel as I meet the gaze of the one person who I know is not likely to be thrilled to see me today.

Natalia stands with an eyebrow raised, the knife in her hand paused in the process of slicing onions. Her eyes swiftly move to my stomach, as if checking to see if the baby's still there, and then dart back up to mine before she gives me a cold smile.

And I lift my chin, feeling my lips turn up just at the corners.

Because even if she's excited about the baby, I still know precisely how she feels about me. And considering that we showed up without Kent, the love of her life? Well. Perhaps I can intuit why she's looking at me so coldly.

But what Natalia doesn't know is that I've come to this battleground today with the entire Alden arsenal at my fingertips.

And I have absolutely no problem taking her out if she gets in my way.

"Daniele," an old woman says with such emotion that my gaze snaps away from Natalia, turning to see Daniel bend down to hug the white-haired woman who is probably half his size. Tears drop from her eyes as she murmurs something to him in Italian, holding him close for a long moment before stepping away to hold his face in her hands.

"Nonna," Daniel says, beaming at her and laughing as he places his hands softly on her shoulders. "Mi sei mancata, nonna."

She cries again and wraps him in her arms and I turn my head to the side, a little baffled and confused. The women begin to notice me then, as well as my confused face, and several move over to me.

"Are you the bride!?" One gasps, about Kent's age, and she reaches for me immediately, pulling me into a hug. "Daniel, is this her!?"

Daniel, his arm still around the old woman, turns and smiles. "Yes, Valentina – this is Fay, my wife."

Valentina beams and then says something loudly in Italian – I think interpreting Daniel's words – and a cheer goes up in the kitchen as the women of Daniel's family swarm towards me, all reaching to give me hugs and kisses. I laugh as I return them, completely overwhelmed and touched by how they immediately accept me as one of their own.

The old woman comes forward last, her withered hands reaching first for my face to study me and then dropping to my pregnant belly, which she brushes with her fingertips. She looks up at me with such hope in her eyes –

And guilt just rolls in me – because I think this is Daniel’s grandmother, and she thinks that this is her first great-grandchild –

She asks me a soft question in Italian that makes the women laugh softly. I just shake my head, looking towards Daniel for help.

He slips his hands into his pockets, looking at me with a great deal of pleasure. “She wants to know if you’re pregnant, or you just ate a lot of linguine.”

I laugh now too and turn back to the woman, eagerly. “Pregnant!” I say, my hands going to my stomach, a little blush coming to my cheeks.

“Sei incinta?” she asks, wanting to be sure.

I look to Daniel, and he nods at me, and I turn to her and nod again eagerly. She throws up her hands and cheers, as does everyone else, and the kitchen is full of happy noise and cries. Then, to my surprise, someone opens a bottle of something – I don’t know what – and begins to fill tiny glasses, handing them around to everyone in the room.

Even I am handed one as Daniel comes to my side. “It’s limoncello,” he murmurs in my ear. “Just take a little sip to please them.”

And I nod as glasses are raised, and words are shouted around – a blessing, I assume, for Daniel, and the child, and me, I guess – before everyone drinks their little glass of yellow liquor. I sip at mine, surprised a little by how much I like it. Lemon is not always my favorite, but this is surprisingly sweet.

Everyone gives a cheer when the glasses are emptied and then the kitchen is again loud and busy, with many of the women moving back to their kitchen tasks, though Daniel’s grandmother and the women he called Valentina stay close. My eyes move to Natalia in the corner, who never left her spot, though she participated in the toast.

I find her watching me, curious. But when she sees me looking, she returns to her work.

I smirk a little, knowing that she’ll find me at some point, even if she’s playing it cool now. Still, it’s interesting to see her not take control of the room – to defer to these other two women, letting them take their turn with Daniel and I first.

“Come,” Valentina says, wrapping a warm arm around my shoulders. “We’ll go out back – have a little chat, yes?”

I nod and Valentina leads me away, though I can feel Natalia's hard gaze on me the entire time we walk to the back door.

Chapter 232 – Big Italian Family

Chapter 232 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Valentina calling some instructions to Alessi over her shoulder as we go and I glance to see him give a confirming wave, moving to a large brass coffee machine. Daniel takes his grandmother's hand and the four of us move through a back door onto a gorgeous little patio that actually reminds me a great deal of the patio at Kent's house.

I smile when I realize that this must have been his inspiration, and a warmth runs through me. Even though he's not here, it's so lovely to finally be getting these insights to Kent's life, his personality, his past.

"I am Valentina," the woman says to me, leading me to a little wooden chair at a cozy patio set and grabbing a pillow. I smile up at her as she solicitously tucks the pillow behind my back, ensuring my comfort. "I am Alessi's wife – we are so glad to have you here, Fay. I heard so much about you from my husband and from Natalia."

"Oh!" I say, smiling at her, feeling a bit stupid for not putting it together before. Because of course I knew Alessi was married, and I've heard his wife's name before, but – well, I guess I was just overwhelmed, meeting Daniel's big Italian family all at once.

Daniel takes a moment to settle his grandmother in a chair next to me before moving to a chair on her other side. Daniel introduces her to me, telling me that her name is Rosa but to call her Nonna like everyone else.

"Nonna," she says in confirmation as she reaches over to take my hands. "Me Nonna."

I laugh and repeat the word affectionately, and then point to my chest and say "Fay."

"Fay," she repeats, nodding deeply as Alessi comes out of the kitchen, bearing a tray of espresso that I sit up straight to see.

Alessi laughs when he sees it. "Fay, I did not forget your affection for espresso," he says, setting down the tray and handing around the little cups, mixing milk into mine before he hands it over.

"You're too good to me, Alessi," I say with a sigh, leaning back and taking a sip. "Thank you all so much for welcoming me into your home. I feel stupid now for not taking more time to learn Italian."

Valentina clicks her tongue and dismisses the point. “We most of us – besides Nonna – we speak enough English to make it work, and you will learn, yes? You will stay here?” She looks between Daniel and I expectantly now.

“No, no,” Daniel says, and I smile to see him using his hands and adopting a little bit more of an Italian accent than he has with us. He’s already falling into the rhythms of this house which must be like a second home to him. “We have rented a place – we wanted our own space for when the baby comes.”

Valentina sits up straight and glares at him a little. “You will need help when the baby comes – there is no better place than here, your home – you will move in immediately –“

I grin, a little, to see the fire and vehemence in this woman, but Alessi just laughs lightly and puts a hand on her knee. “Let them do as they please, Valentina. I’m sure you will see the child enough.”

“I love children,” she says to me, placing a hand on her heart. “You should live here, I will raise the baby for you –“

We all laugh and Valentina rolls her eyes and tosses up her hands, muttering something about nobody taking her seriously. Alessi puts an arm around her shoulders, tugging her close and giving her an affectionate kiss on the cheek, murmuring kindly to her. I smile at them, pleased to see the warmth between them – they are clearly very dedicated to each other, which I suppose is important in a family like this.

Cheerful conversation carries for a while as we drink our espresso, Daniel filling in his family on the story that we’ve practiced about wanting to quietly flee the country after Kent’s escape. As time passes I begin to grow a little impatient, because while this it’s very nice meeting Daniel’s family...

Well? We’re not precisely here for a social call, are we?

I sit back quietly in my seat for a moment, letting the family take over the conversation, trying to think of a way to prompt Daniel to request an audience with his grandfather, Don Bianci. But...how do I do that, while still playing the blushing bride?

After a moment of quiet contemplation, I notice that Nonna has gone quiet too, and I look up to see her studying me with a little smile on her face. I sit up straight, worried that she’s seen through me, or that I’ve let my mask drop too much –

But she clicks her tongue and places a soft hand on my arm, leaning in to whisper something in Italian.

Daniel turns to us, curious and I cock my head at him. But he just smirks and shakes his head at me slightly, letting me know – in his own Daniel way – not to worry about it just now. So I just

smile at him, and then at Nonna, and do my best to be engaged in the conversation as Alessi updates Daniel on things that he's missed in Italy since they last spoke.

But I admit, I'm getting antsy. How the hell do I turn this conversation?

Before I have a chance to consider the problem much further, there's sudden movement at the door as a young man comes skittering out of it. He gasps a breath as his head whips towards us. "Daniele!" he shouts, and Daniel leaps to his own feet, sending his chair across the flagstones behind him and making me jump.

"Gio!" Daniel shouts, and suddenly Daniel is tripping over the patio furniture as the young man dashes across the patio. The two collide, wrapping their arms around each other as my eyes widen.

"My eldest," Valentina says, leaning closest to me. "My Giovanni – Daniel's cousin, and his best friend."

"Oh," I say, my eyes going wider. Because, honestly, Daniel never mentioned him. And considering that Daniel is my best friend...

Well. You'd think that's someone I'd have heard about, right? I mean, I knew Alessi had children, but Daniel never once mentioned to me that he was close with any of them.

Daniel and Gio chatter excitedly to each other in Italian as I look the young man over, impressed despite myself with how handsome he is. He's not dark like Daniel is, nor is he as tall or as broad, but he has a very distinct Italian charm with his lighter brown hair and his close-cut beard that does nothing to hide the deep dimples on his cheeks.

Daniel turns to me then, and I hear my name mixed in with the Italian words, knowing that I'm being introduced.

Gio moves eagerly to me, reaching for my hand. "Fay," he says, his voice light and charming, "it is so nice to meet you, finally – my father has told me so much –"

"And you as well, Gio," I say, grinning at him but flicking my eyes to Daniel, who gives me a chagrined little shrug.

I'm absolutely going to have some questions for him on the way home. But, right now? I suppose that's not the point. Gio wraps me in a warm hug and then dips to kiss his mother and his grandmother on the cheek before turning to his dad.

"Well?" Alessi says, looking Gio over from head to foot, and I'm shocked to hear what sounds like disapproval in his voice. I take a minute to study Gio a little closer and blink when I realize that he, unlike the rest of his family, is not dressed in luxurious leisurewear. Instead, he's wearing a pair of hospital scrubs.

“He sent me down,” Gio says, his voice more serious now as his gaze passes quickly over me to fasten on Daniel. “He says that...he’s ready to see you now. So, um. You should go up.”

The table grows quiet then, and I realize quite suddenly that while I thought that we’d have to request an audience...

Well. It seems that the Don is already aware that we’re here.

And that he’s waiting for us.

And I scowl at myself, inwardly, for being a bit stupid. Because of course he knows – this is his house, after all. And he didn’t become the most powerful boss in Sicily by letting people come into his home without his knowledge. All of this – Alessi escorting us to the kitchen first, letting us be greeted and pampered by the women – all of it was a diversion so that Don Bianci could be informed and make his own plans.

Come on, Fay, I growl at myself inwardly, though I keep my face placid as Daniel moves to my side. Pull yourself together.

“All right,” Daniel says, nodding to his cousin. “Lead the way.”

And Gio’s face breaks into a grin almost as if he can’t help it before he nods his head back towards the house. “Follow me.”

So, we do. Valentina grabs my hand on the way, giving it a supportive little squeeze that I return. And I wave to Nonna on my way out, pleased when she blows me a little kiss. Because the women, at least – it looks like I have them on my side.

I take Daniel’s hand then as Gio leads us into the house. We step away from the kitchen, heading up a dark set of stairs that branches off the kitchen. The cousins chat eagerly to each other, catching up, but I ignore them, inwardly working to steel myself.

Because now?

Now I meet the boss.

And I’ve got one chance to get this precisely right.

Chapter 233 – The Don

Chapter 233 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Daniel and Gio continue to chatter as we make our way up to the third floor, but Daniel turns to me as our pace slows and we approach a set of brown arched doors. Gio likewise grows quiet, his whole demeanor changing in an instant from an eager young man greeting a favorite cousin to the eldest son of a mafia family.

Gio looks us over as Daniel takes my hand, though I note that his focus is almost entirely on Daniel now, as if Daniel is in charge and I'm just tagging along as a formality. I smirk a little, but I don't do anything to change this perception. At least, not for now.

"Are you ready?" Gio asks, switching to English.

And Daniel and I nod as one, turning towards the doors as Gio swings them open.

I do my best not to gaze around the beautiful lounge before us like a simpleton, though I have to admit that the temptation is strong. It's a beautiful room, with all dark wood and plush, expensive furniture. The curtains are looped heavily over the windows, blocking out the majority of the bright Italian sun, and as Gio waves us forward to a sitting area I note that there is a small fire burning cheerfully in the hearth, even though it is not a cold day.

Seated before the fire in a tall wing-backed chair is an old man, his sharp eyes already on us as we cross the room towards him.

Though my natural temptation to blush and look down at my feet rises in me, another eagerness overtakes it – and I realize that though this is perhaps the most intimidating man I'll ever meet, I'm excited to face him. I've been planning this for a long time.

So, I keep my eyes on him and I don't flinch or blink.

And though his eyes go to Daniel first, carefully looking his grandson over from head to foot, when his gaze moves to me? His eyebrows raise a little in surprise.

And then the corners of his mouth turn up into a very small smile.

Gio moves to stand in the corner of the room behind his grandfather's chair as Daniel and I cross the room. But I admit that I forget all about Gio as Daniel and I move closer to Don Bianci, because I'm blinking with surprise when Daniel actually goes to one knee before the older man, taking his grandfather's hand and pressing his lips to the Don's knuckles. Don Bianci only lets the kiss last a moment before he pulls his hand away and runs it fondly over Daniel's hair, murmuring something affectionate in Italian.

Daniel raises his head and smiles at his grandfather then, getting to his feet and leaning forward to kiss the old man on both cheeks, murmuring his own reply that I don't understand.

Don Bianci laughs a little at whatever Daniel says, just a short huffing sound, and then pats Daniel on the cheek before he stands straight.

Daniel moves back to my side as Don Bianci holds a hand out to me, palm up. For a second I panic a little, wondering if I'm supposed to go to one knee –

But no. Somehow, it just...wouldn't feel right. So instead, I simply take a step forward and slip my hand into his. The Don looks me over then, his smile deepening a little bit.

“So,” he says, his English lightly accented. “You are my grandson’s bride. It is a pleasure to meet you, Fay Alden.”

“And you, Don Bianci,” I say, lowering my head a little in a kind of bow. But somehow, with this man? It doesn't feel foolish. He tightens his fingers, inviting me further forward, and I bend over, kissing him once on either cheek. When I straighten, he lets my fingers go and I step back to Daniel's side.

The Don settles back into his chair, looking between us, letting silence reign in the room, clearly letting us be uncomfortable if that's what we're feeling. Because this is his room, and we're on his time now. This man – he wears his power comfortably, letting it settle over his shoulders, completely undisturbed by it.

And I take a deep breath feeling contentment settle within me, because honestly? That's exactly how Kent wears his. This man might not know it, but he doesn't scare me. My months at Kent's side have prepared me to deal with men just like this. Daniel – he grew up fearing men like Don Bianci, like Kent, like my father.

But me?

I've found my way to loving one and murdering another.

And as I realize that, any fear and tension that linger in me drop away. Don Bianci's eyes watch me as I take a deep breath and settle my shoulders. And then he smiles, and laughs a little, and his words are directed only at me as he speaks.

“So,” he says, folding his hands neatly in his lap. “What is it that you have come to ask me for today?” “Nonno,” Daniel says, stepping forward and trying – I think – to draw the Don's eyes back to him. “We have only come to –“

But Don Bianci silences him simply by raising his hand, smirking as he keeps his eyes on me, his every action saying I wasn't speaking to you, grandson.

And a little smile lifts my own lips now, because I see that he sees right through any façade that fooled Daniel's family in the kitchen, any suggestion that Daniel's the one in charge and I'm just his shy little wife.

The Don settles his hands back in his lap and he raises his eyebrow at me, inviting me to speak. I open my mouth, ready to begin, but suddenly the door opens again.

Daniel and I turn and I my brows raise in surprise to see Natalia come into the room.

Don Bianci peers around us, and when I look back at him I'm a little pleased to see a frown on his face. "What are you doing here?" he asks Natalia, speaking in English so I can understand.

Natalia's face is simpering as she hurries to his side. "I thought that I could help," she says, dropping a kiss to the Don's cheek as she arrives at his side. Then she straightens next to him. "As Alessi's second, and as someone who knows these two...very well," she says, a slow smile on her face, "I thought that I would be an asset at this meeting."

I press my lips to a thin line, but I don't say anything as Daniel murmurs his greetings to Natalia. Before he can finish, though, Don Bianci takes a deep breath and interrupts.

"This is all very nice," Bianci says, his eyes again returning to me, though they occasionally flash to Daniel, wanting to see his reaction as well. "The reunions, and the meeting of family. But I have reason to believe," he says slowly, "that this meeting has a great deal more to do with business than my family below would understand."

"What makes you say that, nonno?" Daniel says coolly, sliding his hands into his pockets. I keep my face impassive.

"I am not a fool, Daniele," Bianci says, his voice razor sharp. "It is not a coincidence that my connection to the Alden family goes dark, and then two weeks later you show up at my doorstep with an Alden bride."

Daniel frowns. "We were married months before —"

"Enough," Bianci snaps, not willing to be lied to or diverted. "Tell me the truth. Now. Everything."

"We'd be happy to," I say quietly, not letting myself flinch as all the eyes in the room move to me. And then, my eyes ice, I shift them to glare at Natalia. "But not with her here."

There's silence for a moment as Natalia's eyes flash at the challenge. Don Bianci chuckles a little and I shift my gaze back to him.

"She is an important member of my staff, Fay Alden," the Don says softly, a smile playing on his lips, though it doesn't pass my attention that he doesn't call me by my married name. "Why should I send her away?"

I don't say anything for a long moment, simply returning my gaze to Natalia and letting the silence hang between us. I let a taunting smile find my own lips.

And Natalia, as I knew she would, rises to my bait.

“You little - ,” she growls, leaning forward towards me, “what reason could you possibly have to request that I -“

“Because,” I snap, my voice loud and sharp in the room, like a flash of lightening. Natalia’s eyes fly a little wide at the force of me as I lean incrementally towards her, baring my teeth. I say my next words with perfect clarity and calm. “It does not please me to have you here, Natalia. Which is enough.”

And with one final glare, I shift my gaze back to Don Bianci, dismissing her.

Slowly, Don Bianci smiles, deeply satisfied.

He raises one hand, waving it casually. “Go, Natalia,” he murmurs, dismissing her as well, his eyes on mine.

Natalia looks down at him in shock, sputtering something in Italian.

The Don’s face falls in a second as he snaps a single word and she goes pale as she steps away from him. Natalia’s lips peel back from her teeth as she glares one final time at me, but I barely see it as she storms towards the door and leaves the room, because I keep my eyes on the one man who matters.

Don Bianci. Who has, I’m happy to see, realized that I’m the one in charge on this side of the table.

Not Natalia. Not his grandson. Me.

“All right, Fay Alden,” Bianci says, smiling at me again. “Where do we begin?”

Chapter 234 – Negotiate

Chapter 234 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I give the head of the Bianci family a slow, leisurely smile. “Wherever you wish to begin, sir,” I say quietly, passing the gambit back to him. I want to know more about what he wants before I tell him what I want. “We are simply grateful to be guests in your home.”

Don Bianci smirks at me, obviously aware that we’re not here for a pleasant chat with family. “All right, little donna,” he murmurs. “I wish to know why your family has suddenly stopped communicating with me, even though we have a set of deals in place.”

“My father is dead,” I say simply, keeping my face impassive.

“I am aware,” Bianci murmurs, raising his eyebrows. “A great scandal. I am sorry for your loss, but the newspapers report that you were lucky enough to have breakfast with him that morning. Such a blessing, to have those final moments with your father.”

“We weren’t close,” I reply, holding his gaze, feeling Daniel looking at me now. “I don’t know how much you know of my history –“

“I know everything about your history, Fay Alden,” the Don cuts in smoothly, again looking me up and down.

I smirk a bit. Because he certainly doesn’t know everything. I tuck my hands behind my back now, consciously avoiding touching my stomach. “Then there’s no need to tell you that my mother raised me away from my father and I knew nothing of my connection to the Alden until earlier this year.”

“And this mother,” Bianci snaps. “Where is she?”

I narrow my eyes a little as he rests an elbow on the arm of his chair, tilting his head and propping it – just lightly – on his fingertips.

“My mother is dead,” I reply quietly. But...why is he asking that? If he knows all of my history, certainly he already knows this. Still, I pushed forward. “I haven’t had a mother since I was a child.”

Slowly, Bianci nods before turning his eyes to his grandson.

“Daniele,” he says, his words still directed at me, “I hear is newly adept in the shipping industry. This must be convenient for you, considering your recent inheritance.”

“A convenient turn of fate,” I say, allowing a smile to play at my lips. “He’s good at it, though I’m not sure he enjoys the work.”

Bianci raises an eyebrow at Daniel, inviting him to speak.

“I wouldn’t count on my continuing in the industry, nonno,” Daniel replies, his voice casual and a little disinterested. “I’m not sure that it speaks to my passions.”

“And what are your passions, Daniele,” the Don asks, his voice harder now.

Daniel just shrugs and looks away, I think a little frustrated. “I’m still figuring that out.”

The Don scoffs a little, raising his head and flicking his fingers towards Daniel dismissively. “You and Gio,” he murmurs, shaking his head and glancing towards his other grandson. “Not understanding what’s actually important in life...”

I shift my eyes to Gio in time to see him rolling his eyes briefly skyward. And honestly, I have to admit myself confused – because he’s not dressed in medical scrubs for fashion, right? Is his grandfather honestly disappointed in him for being a doctor or a nurse?

I mean Daniel I get – Daniel’s a professional student at this point, which I don’t mind, but I see how in a traditional Italian family this might be non-preferred. But a son in the medical field?

My brows knit together just a tiny bit.

“And you, Fay,” Bianci says, turning my attention back to him. “You have a degree in...psychology, yes?”

I nod in confirmation, a little impressed. I mean, it’s not like that would be difficult to discover, but this man clearly has done his homework.

Silence hangs steady in the room as the old man studies me, waiting for me to break under his gaze. But I just wait, patient. And then, quietly, darkly – he begins to laugh.

“All right, little donna,” he murmurs, repeating the nickname. “Stop playing coy. Tell me what it is you did.”

“All right,” I say with a nod, pleased to see him stop dancing around the niceties. But still – I’m not going to confess my crimes that easily. I still want to make him to tell me what he knows. “Where do you want me to begin?”

“My son,” Bianci says coldly. “Where is he?”

I raise my brows a bit because...Alessi is downstairs, is he not?

But Daniel picks up on it faster than I do. “We don’t know where dad is,” he says quietly, sticking to our story, which I’m sure Bianci sees right through. “We fled America when we figured that the police would lock down our –“

Bianci flicks his hand again at Daniel, silencing him, returning his eyes to me. And I watch him, curious at his decision to call Kent his son. Because does he actually feel that way about him, this child he raised, to whom he gave his daughter?

Or is it some kind of verbal ploy to make us think he cares more about Kent than he really does?

I truly don’t know. I can’t tell.

“Kent is safe,” I say quietly, but then I press my mouth shut, letting it end there.

Bianci smirks a little, letting me keep my secrets on this issue, probably because he already knows more than he’s letting on.

“If you have not come to return my boy to me,” the Don murmurs, leaning forward to look at me now, his tone letting me know that he’s coming to the end of his patience with my game. “Then what is it that you have to offer?”

“A great deal,” I reply, raising my chin a bit, knowing that it’s time to show my cards. “Not the least of which is a Bianci great-grandchild. Your first, if I’m not mistaken.” I unlink my hands from behind my back and let one drift to my baby bump.

“A blessing,” he says with a nod, his words serious. “But not enough to account for the loss of the Alden connection, if it is truly gone.”

“I am the Alden connection now,” I say, allowing my voice to sharpen a bit.

“Are you?” he asks, a smirk again on his lips.

“And the Lippert,” I say, assured. “When my father had Kent arrested he stole his industries, both legitimate and illegitimate. And then, with my father’s untimely death, they all passed to me.”

The Don’s smirk deepens as he takes me in. And though I’m sure he knew all of this to begin with, I can tell that he likes hearing me say it. “So,” he murmurs, “you are suddenly a very powerful young woman, Fay Alden. Quite by chance.”

“No,” I reply, my voice low. “Not by chance.”

He raises his eyebrows, inviting me to continue.

“I took it all,” I say.

“So, you killed him?”

I don’t answer, just hold his gaze. I know better to admit my crimes so blandly; but still, I want him to know.

The Don’s smile deepens even further. “And why are you telling me all of this, Alden?” he says, and I don’t miss that he drops my first name, addressing me as he would the head of any other family. “Why come all the way to Italy, to my home, to lay it out so plainly? Are you seeking to renew the connection between our families, though your power now rivals my own?”

“No, Don Bianci,” I say quietly, leaning forward and looking him in the eye. And then I pause, just to make sure that he’s listening.

When I see the corners of his eyes crinkle with interest, I say what I came here to say.

“I came here today to give it all to you.”

Chapter 235 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

The Don sits back in his chair, his white eyebrows almost at his hairline. And then he laughs, surprised and pleased.

I straighten up and take a deep breath, knowing that we're in the thick of the game now. And I've just gained quite a bit of credit, I think. Don Bianci isn't someone who is used to being surprised.

"And why, donna," he murmurs, settling back into his chair, his eyes now greedy, wanting what it is that I have laid on the table for him. "Is the price of all of this?"

"Nothing material," I murmur, giving a little shrug of my shoulder and looking up at Daniel, who nods at me, encouraging me to continue. "Just...a little matter between family."

"And the connections," Bianci pushes, speaking more quickly now, wanting the details. "If you're here, playing the little mother in Italy, who is in America running your family? Your father and all of his capos are dead."

"My cousin," I say, my answer immediate. "Fiona D'Agostino. She's an Alden on her father's side."

The Don raises an eyebrow at me. "Quite a coterie of women you're building here," he murmurs.

"Is that a problem for you?" I ask, raising the same eyebrow, mirroring him.

"It is not," he murmurs, his eyes flashing to my stomach. "As long as you are not hysterical."

"Don't worry," I say, snapping a little, my voice low. "The money will flow."

"And will it flow to me?" he asks, his question instant, his voice sharp. "Kent did a great deal of work these past months convincing Natalia and Alessi to reinvest with Alden, largely for your benefit, girl. To keep an engagement between his son and Alden's daughter – an apparent love match. But I am not such a romantic that I did it for you – I want what I was promised."

"Fiona is loyal to me," I say quietly. "She will be happy to work with you if I ask her to. But my hope is that after I hand my industries to you that she will transfer her loyalties as well – become your girl in America, not mine."

The Don tilts his head at me now, curious again. “So, is that your price? Freedom from this, from all of it? To simply be...the little mother, instead of the donna of the Alden and the Lippert families?”

“It is,” I say quietly, “though not the price in full.”

He nods to me, pleased to get to the meat of it now. And I take a deep breath, because this is the moment when it all comes together or falls apart.

“Freedom,” I say, holding his gaze again. “For Daniel, for me, for our child...and for Kent.”

A slow smile spreads across the Don’s face here, because the first three...well, we’re easy, aren’t we? He’s well aware that while I currently hold the Alden and Lippert organization in name, that I’m in no way capable of actually running a criminal organization – I don’t have the experience.

But Kent?

Kent’s been Bianci’s golden goose for twenty years now, making him millions in America while he reigns here in his Italian villa.

Kent’s freedom – forgiving the life debt he owes to the Bianci family. That is the real ask here.

And I’d give anything, anything to get it.

And so that’s what I’ve come here today to offer: absolutely everything I have, everything I’ve stolen and killed for, in exchange for Kent.

“You should take the deal, nonno,” Daniel says softly. “It will make you the most powerful man on two continents.”

“I’m aware of the stakes, Daniele,” Bianci growls, glaring a little at his grandchild, clearly not seeking his advice.

Still, he leans back in the chair and studies us, clearly considering it. He lets us hang for a long time, so long that Daniel shifts his weight beside me. But I stay perfectly still, waiting, knowing that I’ve played my not-insubstantial cards to the best of my ability.

And also aware – very aware – that it is a good offer. And that Don Bianci wants it very much.

But he didn’t get to be as powerful as he already is by being a calm, grateful man.

No, greed is in his bones. And if there’s a chance he can get more, if he can have all of this and keep Kent too?

He’ll try for it.

“I’ll think about it,” the Don says with a gentle shrug before reaching a hand to his side. Gio is there in a moment, offering his own hand to help his grandfather stand from the chair.

Then, as the Don drops his grandson’s hands and moves towards us, his face shifts completely, becoming the familial patriarch instead of the calculating criminal King. Bianci moves to Daniel first, taking his face between his hands and smiling at him before leaning forward – I’m surprised, a little, to see that Daniel is actually taller – and kissing Daniel on both cheeks.

“Daniele,” he murmurs, “it is good to have you home. You should stay, yes? We will find you a role in the family, help you raise this child.”

Daniel frowns a little bit but nods, not accepting the invitation but acknowledging the generous offer it includes.

Then the Don turns to me, coming close and slipping a finger under my chin to turn my face up to him, studying me. “It was a pleasure, Fay,” he murmurs, his voice genuinely pleased, “and a curiosity to met you. I must say, I did not expect our Daniele to marry so well.”

I blink rapidly at what is surely high praise, and then smile a little as the Don leans forward and gently kisses both of my cheeks as well.

“You will stay for dinner?” he asks, taking a step away and looking between us.

“Not tonight,” Daniel says with a sigh, running his hand through his hair. “We have...plans.”

We don’t have plans, unless you count getting yelled at by Kent. But, well. We do have to go do that, and it will indeed take most of the day.

“Then you will come back soon,” the Don says, turning away and stepping towards the fire. “My wife will want to feed you, and you should spend time with family. And I’m sure we will need to have more...chats.” His words are less an invitation than an order. He waves a hand and Gio steps towards us, gesturing towards the door, clearly understanding our dismissal.

Daniel calls some words of farewell over his shoulder, assuring his grandfather that we’ll be back soon, but I don’t say anything, my mind racing over everything that happened as we step out the door.

Because – well, it went well, didn’t it?

Or did it?

I mean – he didn’t give us an answer, didn’t agree to my terms...

But he didn’t say no?

Should I have gone in a different way – should I have gone in asking for more, so that when Bianci counters I can ask for less but still keep the one thing that really matters to me, Kent’s freedom, on the table?

Should I –

But I’m so distracted in my thoughts that I trip, stumbling a little down the formal staircase that I suddenly realize we’re walking down.

Luckily, Gio grabs my arm before I can actually pitch forward.

“Fay!” Daniel gasps, and then he glares at me, scolding me a bit. “Would you pay attention!?”

I wrinkle my nose at him a little, frowning. “I was thinking.”

“Can you concentrate on walking first? God, you have to be careful - ”

I open my mouth to retort but Gio cuts in smoothly with a laugh.

“Don’t be too hard on her, Daniele,” he murmurs, holding my arm steady as I find my feet and smile up at him. “She just went to battle with nonno – she’s bound to be a little distracted.”

“Thank you, Gio,” I say perkily as we start again down the stairs.

“What do you think?” Daniel murmurs to his cousin, who laughs a little again.

“I think you were right to let her talk,” Gio says, keeping his voice low so we’re not overheard. “She did better than most. And nonno –” Gio shrugs here, a little apologetic, “he thinks you are a little lazy.”

I frown at Gio now, defensive. “Daniel is not lazy –”

Gio grins at me as we reach the ground floor, clearly pleased. “A loyal wife,” he says, looking me over. “I admit, I am impressed. I underestimated you. Though I think, perhaps...” he shrugs again, a very Italian gesture, “that you want people underestimate you. Yes?”

Chapter 236 – Drive-Time Confessions

Chapter 236 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I shrug, a little coy, and look Gio over from head to toe. Because as much as he presents himself as outside of his family – someone who does not dress like them, who is clearly in a trade, and

who has garnered both his father's and his grandfather's disappointment – Gio has learned some tricks, hasn't he? He's quite adept at reading people.

Which is something I'll have to keep an eye on in our future interactions. I don't trust him, even if he is close with Daniel. Not until I know what it is he wants.

So, I simply smile and neither confirm nor deny what Gio has said, making Daniel laugh and wrap an arm around my shoulders, looking towards the door.

"Must you really go?" Gio asks Daniel, frowning, his face genuinely sad, even pleading. "I wanted to catch up."

"We do have to go," Daniel replies with an apologetic twist of his mouth. "But we're not disappearing. We'll be back – there will be time to catch up."

"Yes," Gio says, giving us both a little smirk. "I have a feeling there will be."

And then Daniel pulls open the door and Gio gives us both kisses on our cheeks – I keep forgetting to turn my head for the second, and make a mental note to start getting used to that – before waving to us as we head for the car.

As I climb inside, I give Daniel's favorite cousin one last smile, taking him in as he leans against the entryway to the gigantic, beautiful house.

"Why didn't you tell me about him?" I ask quietly as Daniel buckles in and starts the car.

"Didn't I?" Daniel asks, turning to me with a frown.

I turn to stare at him, a little surprised. "Daniel, not once did you mention that you had a cousin you were particularly close with. Cousins, you talked about all the time. But a best friend?" I turn my head to the side, curious and with a little bit of accusation in my words.

"Yeah, well," Daniel murmurs on a sigh, starting to pull the car out of the driveway and onto the road. "It's kind of a long story."

"Well," I say, reaching out a hand to pat him on the shoulder. "Luckily we've got a long ride."

"A long ride with a very angry mob boss at the end," Daniel mutters, smirking a bit. "You sure you're ready for this?"

"Oh, it'll be fine," I say, running my fingers through my hair and piling it on top of my head. "You just leave Kent to me."

Daniel laughs and nods. "Trust me, Fay," he says. "I have every intention of doing just that."

Daniel and I drive for about half an hour in quiet, both of us processing the events of the morning in our own way. I, for one, go over every moment of the meeting with Don Bianci again and again, trying to see it from his perspective, or to discover places where I slipped and said too much, or too little.

But eventually I sigh, because...well, I'm trying to get into his head, aren't I? And I'll never know what he thinks or thought – not really.

So, I'm better off not trying.

“Don't stress about it, Fay,” Daniel says, giving me a smiling glance. “You did well in there.”

“Yeah well, if I'd done really well he'd have leapt from his seat and said ‘of course! What a great idea! I'm thrilled at this prospect – I immediately accept!’”

Daniel laughs and shakes his head. “Don't wish for the moon, Fay, you'll only be disappointed.”

We talk for a long time then, me spelling out all of my thoughts about our meeting and the all of the different possibilities. Daniel listens carefully and gives me his perspective, but we're both aware that he's just letting me process my own thoughts aloud.

And I am, again, grateful for my sweet husband bestie.

But once I feel better about it all, I turn my attention to him. Because, I mean, while I had my own thoughts and emotions about the day – it must have been very different for Daniel, seeing his grandfather again, and on such different terms.

“Did it bother you at all?” I ask, turning to him a little and resting my head against my seat as I gaze at my husband. “The way that he...well, that he suggested he was disappointed in you?”

“Nah,” Daniel says, giving a casual shrug. “I think I got used to disappointing these Italian fathers a long time ago. It's inevitable, unless you're willing to structure your life exactly like theirs.”

“Is that how Gio feels too?” I ask quietly, considering.

“Yeah,” Daniel says, his eyes on the road. “We were the closest in age, growing up, but our affinities run deeper than that. Neither of us really want to do what our dads do. And Kent – he let me slip more than Alessi did Gio.”

“Really?” I say, raising my eyebrows. “Is this the first and only time when Kent gets off the hook for being an easy dad?”

Daniel laughs and glances at me. “Only comparatively. I mean, he still arranged a mob marriage for me and held me to it –“

“To your distinct advantage,” I murmur, teasing, making him laugh.

“Yes, undoubtedly,” he says with a nod, “but Kent never made me go into the family business, not really. He let me to go to school for whatever I wanted and actively kept me from learning the illegal stuff, to keep me out of harm’s way.”

I nod, considering it, liking this side of Kent – the protective dad.

“And Gio?” I ask, wanting more details.

Daniel laughs a little. “You know, he actually had to run away from home to go to college to be a nurse?”

“Really?” I ask, kind of tickled by the idea of someone’s great rebellion being enrolling in medical school.

“Yeah,” Daniel says, shaking his head and laughing. “But even after he got it and continues to work in the field,” Daniel shrugs, “his entire family pressures him to give it up. They want him to inherit after Alessi.”

“But doesn’t Alessi have other kids?” I ask, confused.

“Yeah, five others,” Daniel says, raising his eyebrows at me. “And Tonio – he’s second-eldest, after Gio – would be more than happy to take the spot. But,” Daniel shrugs, “family is very important to the Bianci’s, and the job goes to the eldest.”

I hum a little in understanding, considering this. Honestly, I see what Daniel means. Kent comes off as the comparatively easy father here.

We’re quiet for a few moments before I speak again.

“Daniel,” I say quietly. “Why didn’t you tell me about Gio?”

He heaves a long sigh before glancing over at me, pressing his lips together, his face clearly reading are you really going to make me go into this?

And I give him a big grin and reach out to shove him lightly on the arm with just the tips of my fingers. “Tell me!” I demand, laughing. “I’m your wife! I’m supposed to know all of your deep dark secrets.”

“I wasn’t trying to keep it a secret. I just don’t talk about it a lot because...” Daniel sighs again and I roll my eyes a little at how dramatic he can be. “Gio and I...we didn’t leave things very well the last time that I was here.”

“Why not?” I ask, sad for him and a deeply curious.

“Because,” he says again, hesitating and glancing at me. “I kind of...stole his girlfriend.”

“WHAT!?” I burst out, sitting up straight and then bursting into laughter. “Daniel, are you serious!?”

He hunches over in his seat, laughing along with me and shaking his head, blushing a little. “It was like five years ago!”

“What happened!?”

“It was stupid,” he murmurs, rolling his eyes. “I was...jealous.”

“Of what?” I gasp.

“You don’t get it, Fay,” he says, glancing over at me. “Gio and I? We were inseparable as kids growing up. And then when we started getting older and he was interested in girls? I mean – very interested in girls, all he wanted to do was go out with girls, and talk about girls, and meet new girls. Suddenly I didn’t have Gio to myself anymore and I was so jealous – it felt like I lost my best friend. And he was really into this girl Violetta, and my reaction was...”

He grimaces here and I laugh again, able to interpret.

“So you and Violetta?” I say, raising my eyebrows at him. “Was she the great love of your life before Jerome?”

Chapter 237 - Pissed

Chapter 237 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Obviously,” Daniel says, rolling his eyes. “No, we were a dumpster fire. I couldn’t bring myself to do more than kiss her.”

“Hmm,” I say, blinking at him innocently. “I wonder what that’s like...”

Daniel shoots a glare at me, half apology half chagrin, and moves on with the story. “As soon as I got her I didn’t want anything to do with her and I was...not nice. But Gio wouldn’t take her back, and then I dumped her and Gio wouldn’t talk to me – so I went back to America and we didn’t talk for a long time. Unfortunately, her family is...connected to ours. So it caused a big stir.” He sighs and shakes his head. “I regret it, obviously.”

“Well, it seems like Gio is over it now,” I say, hoping it’s true. “He was really excited to see you.”

“I know,” Daniel says, his eyebrows going up. “I mean, I was really glad to see him. I hope he does forgive me, but we probably need to talk.”

“So,” I say quietly. “Gio doesn’t know that you like guys?”

He sighs again, noncommittal, and I perk up again. “What is this side of the story?” I gasp, again intrigued.

“He caught me, once,” Daniel murmurs. “But he never said anything –“

“Oh my god,” I say, leaning forward. “Tell me everything.”

“Well, I would,” Daniel says, slowing down the car. “But...we might have other things on our mind just now.”

I spin in my seat to look through the windshield as Daniel presses the button on the top of the car to open the gate to our villa.

“Oh god,” I murmur, my fingers pressing lightly against my lips as the gate swings open and we start down the drive. “I didn’t realize that we were home already.”

“Yup,” Daniel says, a little humor in his voice. “And as predicted, look who’s here waiting for us.”

And even though Daniel’s right, that we were completely prepared for this and knew what was waiting for us here...

The sight of Kent, standing in front of the house with his arms crossed tensely over his chest, glaring daggers at us as we make our way up the drive?

My stomach plummets all the way down and I don’t even blink - I can’t keep my eyes off of him.

Because I don’t think I’ve ever seen Kent this pissed off.

“All right, little wife,” Daniel murmurs, his voice genuinely worried as he pulls the car to the front of the house and parks it. “This is all you.”

“I take it back,” I murmur, looking away from Kent as he glares at us, livid and unmoving from his place in front of the house. “You do it. I’m not used to scary Kent. You grew up with this! You have more experience!”

“Nope,” Daniel says, smirking at me as he unbuckles his seatbelt. “This was the deal.” Daniel puts his hand on the door handle, ready to pull. “You ready?”

I unbuckle my own belt and sigh as I give Daniel one last look. “Ready as I’ll ever be. Let’s go.”

And then, together, we step out of the car and I steel myself to face my second mafia don of the day.

“Where the hell did you two go?” Kent growls, not moving from his spot, though his words are full of enough rage that I have to work not to flinch away from him.

I mean, I’m not scared of Kent anymore, but I’m certainly reminded of why I used to be.

Still, I know how to handle this. So I turn to him with a soft smile and brush my hair behind my ears. “Hey, Kent,” I say, starting towards his side.

Kent puts a hand out, his palm flat towards me. “Cut the shit, Fay,” he growls, glaring at me. “Talk. Now. Where the hell did you go?”

I stop in my tracks, knowing not to push him. Daniel comes to my side and slips his hands into his pockets. “We went to go see nonno, dad,” he says, with a little sigh and a shrug, knowing exactly what the reaction is going to be to this.

Kent’s face goes pale and his expression drops along with his hand. “You...you what!?”

“Come on inside,” Daniel says, starting towards the door, “we’ll explain –“

But Kent’s there in a flash, grabbing Daniel by the front of his shirt and giving him a rough shake. “What the fuck were you thinking, Daniel!?” he shouts, his voice half terrified and half livid. “You went – you went to –“

Kent drops Daniel’s shirt suddenly and steps away with a groan, sinking his hands into his hair and turning away from us, muttering mournful words and shaking his head.

My eyes go a little wide, because I had expected him to be angry, but I hadn’t expected this.

“Dad,” Daniel says, taking a step towards him.

“You’re a fucking idiot, Daniel,” Kent snarls, spinning to glare at his son, his expression again furious. “You have no idea what and who you’re messing with here – you are completely out of your league –“

“It was my idea, Kent,” I say quietly, stepping between them. “I did this, not Daniel.”

“Well then he’s even more of a fucking idiot, Fay,” Kent growls, leaning down a little to look me in the eye. “Because he let you have the confidence to think that you could handle Bianci, and you absolutely cannot.”

I look squarely at Kent now, doing my best to pat down the anger that’s rising in me now in response to his words. Because I didn’t do this lightly and without thought. This plan? It’s been in the works for months now.

But I can't throw that in Kent's face right now, not like this.

Nope.

Both of us need to cool down.

Or, perhaps more precisely, heat up.

So, I take a second to stare at him for a moment before I step closer and put a hand on his arm. "Come on, Kent," I say quietly, looking up into his gorgeous, furious face. "Let's talk about this inside."

"I am not finished –"

But I just give him a little glare and turn towards the house, letting him know that I'm going in with or without him.

Daniel turns to walk with me and Kent gives an audible snarl as he storms in after us.

When we get in, I see Jerome standing as still as a deer in the kitchen, not knowing where to go. Dad has made himself scarce but Janeen is stretched out languidly on the couch, grinning, looking between us all.

"Hey, sis!" she calls. "Thanks so much for leaving me to deal with all of this tension today! Really fun!"

I send a glance in Janeen's direction but ignore her, knowing that it's not the time. Instead, I start towards my room.

Daniel steps towards the kitchen, towards Jerome.

"I am not finished with you," Kent growls, taking a step after Daniel, wanting to keep us together.

"Come on, Kent," I snap, keeping my voice a little bored, though everyone can tell that I'm certainly frustrated.

The room goes completely silent, except for Janeen's little squeak of delight at what must be Kent's appalled face. But I don't look over my shoulder as I head down the short hall to our room. There's really only one way this is going right now – and it's my way.

If Kent wants answers, he's coming with me.

And perhaps realizing that – but likewise pissed that I've taken control like this – Kent storms after me.

I leave the door to the room open as I casually pass through, and Kent slams it closed behind him.

“Fay!” he snaps, but I don’t turn around. Instead, I lift my hands to the back of my neck and start to tug at the zipper there.

“Get over here!” Kent shouts. “We are not finished with this conversation!”

“We didn’t even start it,” I reply, kicking off my shoes and still not looking at him as I get my dress’s zipper all the way down. I hear him following me as I make my way into the bathroom. Halfway across the bathroom I tug the dress over my head and toss it to the floor. Then I walk into the huge walk-in shower in the corner of the room and turn the water on, setting the temperature to very hot before turning to Kent.

“What the fuck are you doing,” he growls from the doorway. Something in me quails a little bit when I see that he’s actually angrier now than he was when we got home – but still, I know that it’s not going to be any better for either of us if I just collapse to him now.

I’m going to tell him what happened, and he’s going to cool down so he can think logically about this. We can kill two birds with one stone.

“I’m taking a shower, Kent,” I say with a sigh, reaching behind my back and unclasping my bra, letting it fall casually to the floor.

Chapter 238 - Shower

Chapter 238 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Kent’s eyes go to the floor with the bra, and then his gaze slowly travels up my body as I shimmy out of my panties and then kick them away when they hit the tiles.

“This isn’t going to work, Fay,” Kent says, his voice low with warning. “You’re not going to seduce me out of answering your questions or being pissed at you –“

“I’m not trying to, Kent,” I say, my voice calm as I turn away and walk into the water. “I’m just taking a shower. I’ll answer whatever questions you have.”

For a second I close my eyes and gasp a little as the water hits my skin. This shower is a marvel of engineering, with water shooting from at least six points strategically positioned on the walls and the ceiling. Most of the water falls directly from above, mimicking a rain storm. I take a moment to tilt my head back, letting it wash over me, and I’m drenched in seconds.

But after I've gotten used to it, I turn back to Kent, unsurprised to see him glaring at me, fully dressed, from the edge of the tiles where the shower begins.

"What do you want to know?" I say, reaching for the sea sponge and the soap. "Tell me everything," he demands, leaning against the wall, looking determinedly at my face and not letting his eyes stray.

And I do.

As I later up the sponge and drag it over my neck, and then down my chest, and then over my stomach and around to my back, I tell Kent everything. I tell him about how months ago we arranged for the DNA test so that the baby would be a Bianci, so that we could offer them an heir and solidify my connection to Daniel, making this a deal between family, not rivals. And then I tell him about how Daniel and I decided to leave Kent behind because we knew he'd never let us go and make our offer to the Don.

Halfway through the telling, Kent covers his face with his hand, his shoulders shaking just a little with frustration. But I press on, standing in the steady stream of water, telling him about meeting his family, and being escorted upstairs to see the Don. And then about the offer I made – of everything I own, everything I've stolen and killed for, in exchange for Kent's freedom. Our freedom.

When Kent raises his head, his face holds a great deal of grief.

"Fay," he says, his voice cracking a little as he scrapes a hand down the length of his face. "It's – it's too much – and he'll never –"

"He will," I say, my eyebrows going up as I reach out a hand towards him. "It's a move that plays to his greed for power and his familial pride, Kent," I sigh. "It makes sense."

Kent shakes his head at me. "He doesn't do things just because they make sense, Fay," he murmurs. "It's not that simple."

"Then come explain it to me," I say quietly, allowing myself to beg just a little bit. And then I take a step closer to Kent, my hand still outstretched.

No part of me is surprised when Kent sighs and starts to pull his shirt over his head. I know my man well.

I take a few steps closer now, intending to help, but Kent's glare stops me in my tracks. Because he is still pissed, and does not want my assistance right now. So I step back into the stream of water, reaching for the shampoo and starting to wash my hair as my eyes follow Kent's every move as he strips down.

Because, I mean...where else would I look?

Kent's angry enough to be dangerous right now, but he's still hot as hell.

My eyes are still on him as he stands up straight and steps into the shower with me, immediately coming close enough that his stomach presses against mine as he glares down at me. Kent raises his hands to my head, sinking his fingers into my hair and running through the long strands, rinsing the suds of the shampoo out.

"Do you know what I'm going to say next, Fay?" Kent murmurs, his voice still tense. "Since you know everything?"

I close my eyes, my hands finding a spot on either side of his waist as I tilt my head back, luxuriating in the feel of his fingers against my scalp. "You're going to say that we should have told you our plan," I say quietly. "And let you talk us out of it."

"And you're going to tell me it was a good plan, and I wouldn't have let you, so I forced your hand."

I open my eyes then, bringing my head back up and nodding to him. "And would I be wrong?"

"Is that the most important thing to you?" he asks quietly, his hands stroking over my hair possessively. "To be right?"

"No, Kent," I say, pulling him tighter against me. "The most important thing is for you to be free of all of this. So we can do what you said you wanted – what we wanted. Remember? No more criminal bullshit. The vineyard...the baby. A simpler, safer life."

He growls, surprising me by spinning me around. I stand facing the wall for a second, not understanding – but then I hear Kent grab another bottle from the little shelf and hear him squeeze something in his hand. And then I smile, biting my lip a little, as I feel Kent begin to apply conditioner to my hair before starting to speak again.

"The route to freedom, Fay," he murmurs, working the conditioner through my hair firmly but gently, "was not to go to Bianci."

"Explain that to me, Kent," I say on a sigh, tilting my head back a little and taking a step closer to him, unable to stop myself from reaching behind me and wrapping my hands around his hips. "If you still 'owe' him, and couldn't leave the criminal element behind because he wouldn't let you, then what else is there to do but offer him something worth letting you go?"

"Because he has no intention of ever letting me go," Kent murmurs, using his fingers to work the conditioner completely through my hair. "And now, with this baby, and this deal, you've given him everything he needs to wrap you and Daniel up in it too."

I shake my head, not believing it. "We won't let that happen, Kent," I say, assured.

He turns me again, and I open my eyes to look at him as he again tilts my head back, rinsing my hair clean. “You already have, Fay,” he says, shaking his head. “I think that...”

He sighs and wraps his arms around me, truly holding me for the first time today as he looks down into my face. Steam puffs in the shower all around us as I look up into his eyes, and very suddenly it feels like the only things that exist in this world right now are Kent and me. That everything outside of this room is...illusory.

And as he studies me, his eyes roving over the details of my face as he presses me tightly to him, I think...well, I think he must feel precisely the same.

“The only way out of this, Fay,” he whispers. “Was to run. To avoid him at all costs.”

“Then why did we come to Sicily, Kent?” I ask, my voice as soft as his.

And he shakes his head at me, as if I’ve caught him there. Or as if he really doesn’t know.

I raise my hands to his cheeks then, hoping he hears me. Because as mad as he is, and as good as his points are, I don’t regret a single thing I did today.

“Kent,” I whisper, “there was no running. He was going to find us. The right move was going to him first.”

“Fine,” Kent growls, baring his teeth at me just a little bit. “But then you should have let me be the one to go.”

“I had more to offer than you,” I counter, shaking my head.

“You offered too much,” he says, getting mad again. “And you gave him too much information, making the offer for me -”

“What?” I ask, confused.

“Don’t you see it?” he asks, his face close to mine now, the water dripping down his cheeks and off his nose. And damn it, I can’t help it, but my hands raise, my fingers sinking into his hair.

“No,” I whisper, as I stroke his hair back from where it has fallen into his face. “Please,” I ask, my face close to his now as heat begins to pulse in my core. “I don’t understand – what did I miss?”

“That Daniel and I have always been at odds,” Kent murmurs, his head dipping just a little now as he begins to give in. “That Daniel – my freedom would never be enough for him to ask you to give up everything. Not for me.”

“Oh,” I say, blinking a little as I realize what he’s saying. I start to fall back a step, but he doesn’t let me. “You mean,” I continue, speaking the words as I think them, “it wouldn’t make sense for me to give it all up for you...if I am already safe with Daniel and the child.”

Kent hums a little in confirmation when I finally get it, but I just curse and cover my face with my hands.

“Shit,” I whisper, realizing that he’s right – that I...I gave too much.

And Bianci – he’s too clever to have missed it.

So, what on earth will his counter-move be?

Chapter 239 - Steam

Chapter 239 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Kent clicks his tongue in sympathy and I look up at him, my eyes wide with regret. He just shakes his head at me. “It wasn’t a bad plan, Fay,” he murmurs, holding me tight. “You’re just...playing chess with the grand masters now. You’re kind of bound to be outmatched.”

I frown at him a little bit. “Are you suggesting that what I did in the months while you were in jail was easy?”

He shakes his head, his face perfectly serious. “Don’t accuse me of things I don’t mean just to get the upper hand, Fay,” he murmurs, and I sigh, realizing that...well, maybe I was doing that a little bit. “But your dad was...never a top tier player, even if he lucked into some of the right moves with Ivan’s help –“

“Took you out,” I mutter, a little bitter.

Kent gives a short laugh and shakes his head. “And you don’t have the element of surprise anymore, Fay, which you have to admit was a big part of your plan to get me free and escape the country. They know your name now – Bianci, he has a reason to see you coming.”

I sigh again, resting my head against his chest, frustrated. “So, what was the right move?”

“The right move,” he says, tightening his arms around my me and resting his head against mine as the water pours around us, “was coming to me with this idea and working together to figure it out.”

I pull away a bit and frown up at him. “And you’d have let me do that? You’d...work with me? Let me be part of the planning?”

Kent stares down into my face and lifts a hand to my cheek, stroking it with his thumb. “You’ve proven yourself capable, Fay,” he answers. “More than capable – a talented strategic mind. I’d be stupid to turn you away – what, because you’re young? A woman? Pregnant?” he shakes his head at me. “Give me more credit than that.”

I narrow my eyes at him, not quite believing it. Not yet. “You always shut the door on me before.”

“Yeah,” he sighs, his hand slipping down my back now. “That was before you put together a fairly brilliant plan to get me out of jail that went off without a hitch. That was frankly dull with its perfection – honestly, not a single shot fired, Fay –“

And I laugh now, shaking my head up at him, my heart raising a little bit.

“So did I totally fuck it up?” I whisper, anxious.

“You did not,” he murmurs, his hand slipping lower now to take a firm grip of my ass. “We’ll work it out, Fay. It’s not what I’d have chosen, and you acted sooner than I’d have chosen to act but...you’re not wrong that we’d have had to face him eventually. And your first move was not a bad one.”

I start to smile a little but hesitate when he frowns, narrowing his eyes at me, his hand tightening its grip and pulling me closer against him.

“But that’s not what we really need to talk about right now,” he murmurs, his voice deepening, darkening.

“It’s – it’s not?” I ask, my eyes going wide with anticipation and a little bit of anxiety. Because what...

But suddenly I give a little gasp as Kent uses his grip on my ass to pull me hard against him and then lifts, sliding my wet body up along his until I’m lifted up firmly against him. He glares at me again before striding three steps forward until my back presses against the cool tiles of the shower wall.

“We have to talk,” he growls, “about you lying to me, and sneaking out of the house, with Daniel of all people –“

And I smirk a little – I can’t help it – because this? This fight is more familiar territory. This I can handle.

But Kent just shakes his head at me, narrowing his eyes until the smirk falls from my face.

“I’m serious, Fay,” he says, pressing me back against the wall. “We’re not going to do it like this, with you doing whatever the hell you want and just swanning back into the house and taking your clothes off until I’m not mad anymore. I admit – it worked this time. But that’s the end of it.”

And I hesitate, not really wanting to agree to this because...

I mean. This worked out pretty great for me.

And so I loop my arms around his neck and move myself closer, letting the wet skin of my breasts press against his chest. “Well then what will we do instead?” I murmur, lifting my mouth to his.

But, to my surprise, he just shakes his head at me again. “No,” he snaps. “I’m serious, Fay, this is the end of it. That is the last lie you tell me, and the last time you do something behind my back. We agree – I won’t do it to you, and you won’t do it to me. Or else this is done.”

I pull back a little in shock, blinking up at him, trying to judge if he’s serious. But when I take in the clenched line of his jaw, this drawn brows...I realize that he is.

“All right,” I say, my eyes going wide with sudden fear. “Never again, Kent. I promise – that’s the end of it. The end of it all. Okay?”

He nods tersely, but doesn’t stop glaring at me, doesn’t let me down from my place pressed against the wall.

“So,” I say, anxiety coiling in my chest now. “Kent, are we...are we okay? Are we good?”

“Not yet,” he snaps, his grip on me tightening once more.

My frown deepens, confused. “What –“

But before I can get my question out Kent’s mouth is hard on mine. I moan almost instantly as he parts my lips with his, as his tongue slides into my mouth. One hand wraps around my waist, pinning me firmly to him as his other hand leaves my ass and slides between us.

My moan deepens as he slides his fingers against me and I tear my head to the side, pressing my eyes shut at the intensity of the feeling of Kent’s hands sliding against me. God – Kent’s hands – all thoughts of this afternoon, of mafia drama – it all disappears, because the only thing I can focus on now is the way he’s slipping his thumb right to that point at the crest of me.

“I’m going to show you, Fay,” Kent growls, his voice low, “that good things come when you listen to me, and do as I say.”

My back arches, pressing me closer to him as I moan my agreement, my consent, anything that will keep him going. Then angry hum in his chest deepens as he continues to stroke me with his

thumb, sending shivers through my entire body. Then, when a moan slips from my lips at every stroke, Kent's fingers slip lower, two pressing into me, slow and thick. I groan and shudder at the feel of him starting to fill me – his fingers curling right at that spot –

My breath comes in hard pants already, because I want him – I mean, I always want him, but now, especially – I want to be as close to him as I can. My eyes flutter open as Kent's hand begins to pulse and water drips down my face, dragging over my lips as I stare into his gorgeous face –

Kent shifts his hand, going deeper, and my head falls back a little, my eyelids fluttering because it's perfect – god, fuck, how does he know precisely –

He lowers his mouth to my bared neck, and I swear I light on fire at the press of his lips against my pulse. My hips buck against him, wanting more, needing it – pleasure builds in me already to the breaking point, coaxed there in an instant by Kent's expert hands. I lift my head, my hands going to his face, wanting his mouth on mine again as I start to spill over –

“No,” he snaps and I whimper a little as he pulls his hand away –

I blink, my breathing rough in the hot foggy air of the shower, and stare at him, confused –

Why –

“On your feet, Fay,” he orders, his grip on my waist loosening.

Chapter 240 – Unexpected

Chapter 240 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“What –“

Kent just gives me a look that silences me and I groan a little, my mouth trembling – I was so close – but I do as I'm told, unlocking my legs from their place around his waist and placing them on the ground.

Before I can even think, Kent grabs me by the waist and spins me, and pressing a hand between my shoulder blades, leaning me forward so that my hands and chest are pressed against the wall. His free hand goes to my hips, pulling them backward against him so that I can feel the full, hard press of his cock. My nipples instantly go hard up against the cool tile that I rest my cheek against.

“Who is in charge here, Fay,” Kent growls, pressing the hard mass of that thick dick up against my slick folds, pulling hard on my hips so that he grinds against me.

I moan a little, heat pulsing suddenly through me as I relish the coolness of the wall against my flushed cheek, closing my eyes, wanting him. “You are, Kent,” I whisper, my voice thick with my need.

“And you’re going to do exactly what I tell you to?” he asks, leaning over my back and teasing me, pressing the tip of his cock just at the edge of my entrance. I press my hips backwards, wanting him, but lightening fast he whips the hand from my shoulders and smacks me hard in the ass.

“No,” he growls. “Say it.”

“Whatever you want,” I pant, my eyes pressed shut. “Whatever you say.” The words are basically a gibberish moan – I don’t even know if he understands them – but the deep, contented hum of Kent’s breath in his chest lets me know he takes my meaning.

I brace myself against the wall as Kent starts to press into me, and then he drives himself forward, filling me with a single stroke. The sound that rips from my throat is wordless, feral - because I love – I love this –

I fucking love the way my body feels when it clenches around him – love the feel of him pounding that thick cock so deep inside me that I feel him everywhere – love the sound of his quickening breath as he loses grip on the control that’s so precious to him.

I love the way that pleasure spools out in me, building again to that peak, to that crest I was previously denied –

“No,” he growls again, his pace quickening. My eyes blink open and I try to look back but he slams his hips forward, making me moan and shut my eyes again, unable to help it. “You’ll cum when I tell you to, Fay.”

“What?” I gasp, confused – my mind fuzzy with pleasure –

“Don’t you dare,” he growls, pounding faster now, shifting his angle lower in a way that makes me groan, makes my legs feel a little weak, “finish until I tell you to.”

“Kent,” I gasp, his name hot on my tongue as I feel myself start to go, “I don’t think I can –“

“Don’t, Fay!” he snaps, raising his hand again and smacking me sharp on the ass, a move that just makes me clench tighter against him. “Do as I say,” he commands.

And I hesitate – because I want to, but I’m not sure that I can – I’m not in control – but then he slows his pace and fucks me with long, deep, thorough strokes and it feels like my mind goes

blank. Fuck, but all I can do is gasp, and nod, and agree to do whatever the fuck he wants me to do whenever he wants me to do it –

Because this? God, yes, this is everything I want – I could stay the rest of my life in this shower –

“Good girl,” Kent murmurs, bending down over me and continuing to fuck me with those thick, hard, deep strokes as I do everything, everything I can to hold myself together, my legs shaking with the effort. The pleasure, it builds in me now, past the point where I thought it could go, and I struggle and writhe against Kent, my hips bucking hard against him, whimpering with want and need.

I feel Kent’s hot breath on my back as the water streams around us, as Kent begins to set a brutal, steady pace, pounding so deep into me that the pleasure coils tighter and tighter like a spring, wanting to loosen. But I don’t let it.

Still – it’s so hard – I can’t hold it back much longer –

I groan, my back arching, and I whimper as I turn my face to him over my shoulder. “Kent,” I pant, “I can’t – I can’t hold it back anymore – “

“Beg me for it,” he growls, a hand sliding across my stomach to grasp my breast, his fingers twisting against my nipple –

“Please,” I plead, the word breathless and desperate.

“Go,” he commands, shifting again, the new angle at which he fucks me hitting some point that makes my head fall back as I cry out, as everything spills forward – all the coiled up pleasure, all the delayed gratification –

I shout and moan as it courses through me, my whole body shaking, and Kent quickly pulls me back so that my back is flush against his chest, holding me through it as I feel him shudder and moan himself, and then the quick rush of his cum filling me inside, hot and thick and luxurious after the brutal pounding I just took.

I have absolutely no control of my body for a few moments as the pleasure streaks through me, Kent holding me tight against him as his own body shakes and shudders, stroking into me a few more times as the feelings subside.

When it’s done, when my breath comes back to me in heavy pants, I hang my head forward, my eyes pressed shut.

“Are you all right?” he murmurs, cupping my cheek and starting to turn my face towards him.

When I don’t answer he goes tense, and then spins me, and cups my face in his palms. “Fay!” he snaps, forcing me to blink my eyes open as I look up at him.

“I’m fine, Kent!” I say, swatting at him without force and giving him a little frown as I stumble back a step. “Would you give a girl a minute to come down?”

He laughs, a relieved little sound, and before I can do anything he dips down and wraps his hands again around the back of my thighs, lifting me up again and wrapping my legs again around his waist. I groan at the movement, just wanting to stay still, but I tuck my head against his neck and wrap my arms around him, letting him carry me as he turns off the water and steps out of the shower.

My body goes tense at the sudden cold now that we’re out of what was basically a sauna, and Kent murmurs something sweet to me before grabbing a fluffy towel and wrapping it around my shoulders. Then he heads for the door.

“Noo,” I moan, lifting my head a little, coming back to myself more and more as each moment passes. “It’s going to be freezing out there –“

“Well get you to bed,” he promises, holding me tight and pulling the door open. I give a little squeak and press myself closer to Kent when the air from the bedroom comes in and is, as I suspected, significantly cooler than the bathroom. “I’m not finished with you, anyway.”

“What?” I ask, shocked and a little intimidated as I lift my head and stare at him. “Kent, I don’t think my legs work anymore – how can you not be finished with me?”

“Because,” he growls, striding for the bed and narrowing his eyes at me. “I want to be absolutely sure you’ve learned your lesson.”

I moan a little again, thinking that I need at least a minute to get back to normal before anything else happens, but then he smirks at me, and lowers his mouth to my jaw, pressing his tongue languidly to that soft place just below it that he knows always makes me moan –

And my traitor body betrays me as my eyes again flutter shut, and I press myself closer to him, somehow wanting more –

But just as Kent leans down to lay me on the bed –

The doorbell rings.