

Chapter 251 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Really, Fay,” Kent says, pretending to ignore Bianci and putting a solicitous hand on my shoulder, though I know that both of our attention is firmly on the Don. “Let’s get you home –“

“One moment,” Bianci says, holding up a single finger as we turn to the door. “I have one offer which we have not considered.”

Kent looks at me, all concern, and I sigh before giving a hesitant shrug, suggesting that I guess I can make it just one more moment. I see a muscle flick in Kent’s jaw as he hides his smirk before turning back to his family.

“All right,” Kent says, all business.

“One final job, Kent.” Bianci says, finally saying the thing he’s been waiting to offer all evening. “And then, once complete, I will relieve you of your debt to our family. Though you, of course, will always be welcome as our son.”

Kent’s posture changes now as the power passes to him. He slips his hands smoothly into his pockets as he holds Bianci’s gaze.

“How long is the job?” he asks, his voice clipped.

“Eight months,” Bianci replies.

“Make it four,” Kent replies and Bianci spreads his hands out, tacitly agreeing. Inwardly I smile, because I know Kent changed the timeline for me. He wants it done before the baby is born.

“And the job?” Kent asks, pressing now.

“Within your wheelhouse,” Bianci replies, cagey. “Though not without its challenges.”

“All right,” Kent says, nodding a little now. “But I want one thing.”

Surprised at this counter, Bianci raises his eyebrows, inviting Kent to ask.

“Gio,” Kent says, nodding to his nephew, who raises his brows. Alessi goes rigid in his chair. “For the timeline of the job. I want him on my crew.”

“Why?” Alessi asks, genuinely baffled.

“Daniel trusts him,” Kent says, looking over at Gio now, pretending to look the young man up and down as if he himself has some doubts. “Plus, I’ll want a direct line to you at all times. This is the offer I’ll accept. One job, four months, and Gio comes with me.”

My eyebrows raise as I realize that it’s not that Kent wants Gio’s help, or that he’s trying to help Gio.

Instead, it’s that...Gio’s kind of a hostage, isn’t he? If Bianci pulls anything...we’ve got his heir.

Excitement builds in me and I fight a smile as I realize the cleverness of Kent’s final move, which he has perhaps been waiting to make all night.

Bianci takes a moment, staring between us, his fingers tight around his drink.

Kent stares right back at him, unmoving, for a long tense moment.

Finally, Bianci speaks.

“Done,” he snaps, giving a single nod and I clench my teeth to keep from breaking out into a smile. “When do we iron out the details?”

Kent glances at me, looking me up and down. “We can come back in the —“

“Oh, that’s all right,” I say, smoothly interrupting and reaching out to put a sweet hand on his forearm. “Why don’t you stay now, Kent? Get everything figured out.”

I turn slowly, smiling at Gio. “My new cousin can help me downstairs, can’t he? Help me find Daniel? I’m sure my husband can take good care of me.”

Slowly, Gio gets to his feet.

Kent’s arm tenses under my fingers and I turn my gaze back to him, looking up into his face. A smile finally breaks onto my face as I see him smiling back at me. “That’s a good plan, Fay,” he murmurs, leaning forward and pressing a quick, fatherly kiss to my forehead.

I almost laugh at the ridiculousness of it, knowing that it’s the mere shadow of the kiss he’s going to give me later, when he’s going to be acting as anything but a father to me. But, well, I tuck that all away now as Gio comes to my side.

“Come, Fay,” Gio says, his face all solicitousness. “Let’s get you to Daniel.”

“Thank you,” I say, but I ignore his offered arm and move to Bianci instead, slipping my hands into the Don’s and offering him two kisses on his cheeks.

“Thank you, nonno,” I murmur, giving him a real smile. “This is a gift. I’m so pleased we can do business together.”

“I am as well, little donna,” he murmurs, smirking at me. “You are a clever girl.”

I shrug and murmur that I’m no such thing, moving to Alessi to give him his own set of kisses before moving back to Gio and taking his arm.

“See you downstairs, Kent!” I call over my shoulder as Gio and I move towards the door. “Try not to stay too late.”

And then, with a final wave, I leave the bosses to their business and step out the door.

When the door snaps shut behind us, Gio’s face breaks into a wide grin and he wraps an arm around my shoulder, hurrying me down the hall and away from the door. When we get halfway down the stairs, he bursts into laughter and shakes his head at me, thrilled.

I can’t help laughing along with him – his joy is infectious.

“That was brilliant, Fay,” Gio says, shaking his head at me as we together hurry downstairs. His face falls suddenly as he hesitates, “I mean, unless you are actually sick? Are you – are you okay?”

“I’m fine, Gio,” I say, grinning and patting him on the shoulder. He smiles again and we restart our quick journey down the stairs.

“Seriously, though,” he gushes, grinning, “I’ve never seen someone turn the tables on nonno like that – he and dad were playing their usual game, and you just cut through it like – uh, what is the phrase? Like a hot knife with the butter?”

I laugh, shaking my head a little and flicking my hand to dismiss it. “You’re overstating it, Gio,” I murmur. “It wasn’t impressive – any pregnant person could have made the same claim.”

“Yes,” Gio says, nodding as we reach the empty great room on the first floor and leading me across it, heading I think for the kitchens. “But that is what is so clever – nonno, he never negotiates with women for a reason – because you can pull cards like this. If you were a man, nonno could have called you rude for wanting to leave early. But a pregnant woman?” He laughs with delight.

“And!” Gio continues as we pass through the mostly empty kitchen, “the fact that you knew it, and played your role with such confidence?” He pats me on the back as we head for the door to the back patio where he instinctually knows the rest of the party must be gathered. “It was very good, Fay. Kent and papa – they were impressed too.”

“And nonno?” I ask, curious as we walk out onto the back patio to a great cheer from the remaining party guests – about twenty of what looks like the closest family, I’m guessing.

“Don’t worry about nonno,” Gio says, shaking his head. “He didn’t like it, but you didn’t force him to offer anything he wouldn’t have given in the end.”

I smile at Gio, pleased and considering that I'm glad we're going to have him on our side now, genuinely hoping that we can help him get out too, if this isn't the life he wants.

Gio smiles back at me, I think likewise pleased to be on our team.

"Well," Daniel says, coming over to us and handing Gio a drink before slipping an arm around my shoulders. When he moves to my side, I see that Janeen and Jerome have come over with him. "How did it go?"

"It went pretty good," I say with a little shrug, grinning up at my husband. "And the best part is that we have a new cousin to take home with us for four months!"

I wave a hand at Gio, grinning, my eyes going directly to Janeen.

"What!" Daniel exclaims, his face bursting with joy as he laughs and throws his arms around Gio. "Really!? You're coming with us?"

"I am!" Gio says. "Your dad asked for me, and so I will come!"

"Oh, good job, Fay," Janeen murmurs, her little cat's grin again finding her lips. "Christmas has come early for me this year."

"Disaster," Jerome sighs, covering his face with his hand as he slumps against Janeen's shoulder. "Is this the end of us, my love? Over as soon as it began?"

"We'll always have that one night, my love," she murmurs, dramatically cupping his cheek in her palm, "when you kicked me in your sleep, and I almost stabbed you for it."

"Memories," he says, nodding to her and struggling to keep a straight face. "That will last a lifetime."

"What on earth are you two talking about?" Gio asks, looking between Janeen and Jerome in complete confusion.

We all burst out laughing at this, and Gio smiles, wanting to join in but still not getting it.

"We'll tell you when we get home," Daniel says with a sigh, his arm warm around his cousin's shoulders.

And I nod, agreeing to it because...

Well, if Gio's going to be living with us for four months?

I'm certainly not going to be sneaking out the window every night. So, we'll have to let him in on our little set of secrets – and then, truly, we'll know whose side he's on.

Chapter 252 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

We stay quite late at the Bianci house that night, waiting for Kent to wrap up the deal. I admit that I'm fading a bit towards the end, my head on Daniel's shoulder and my eyes drifting shut, wondering if I'm going to have to crash on a couch or something –

But the Italians?

Man, can they party.

Even though I'm out of steam and I can tell Janeen and Jerome are flagging as well, the Bianci family keeps pouring drink after drink, shouting around the table cheerfully in a language I don't understand. I don't mind, though – the atmosphere is so warm and cheerful, and it's good to see Daniel be the center of attention.

Eventually, though, another cheer goes up when Kent and Alessi emerge from the back door, more drinks poured to welcome them. Kent greets his family warmly, but I note that his eyes move to me as soon as he has a chance. He frowns at what he sees and sets his glass down, hardly having tasted his drink.

“No, Kent!” Natalia says, moving close to him as she clicks her tongue and gesturing at the abandoned glass, protesting in Italian.

“I'm sorry, Natalia,” Kent says, switching to English so those of us who don't speak the native tongue can understand. “But my pregnant daughter-in-law needs her sleep.”

Natalia waves her hand, dismissing the point. “We can have beds made up here – it is no trouble! It has been so long since we have had our Kent here, in his home. Please, stay!” She wraps her arm around his and looks up at him with wide eyes as the rest of the family shouts their protests at the idea that he would leave

My eyebrows raise at the way Natalia presses herself tight against Kent's tall form, clearly inviting him to enjoy more than just his family's company tonight.

A smile pulls at his lips, but Kent looks away from his ex. “Sorry, Natalia,” he sighs, looking towards where our little party of Americans is gathered with Gio standing behind us. “We're homebound tonight. Ready?”

I stand, giving Natalia an exaggerated little pout that makes her narrow her eyes at me – because we're both well aware that Kent is leaving for me, even if we think that it's for different reasons.

It's a big long goodbye then as we work our way to the front of the house, Natalia especially staying close to Kent's side and murmuring to him that he could stay –

I sigh and roll my eyes at Daniel a little because I can't help being a tiny bit jealous. I don't like her hands on him. Daniel just laughs with me and presses a comforting hand to the small of my back. "She doesn't know, Fay," he whispers, grinning at me. "It means you've done a good job. Let her shoot her shot – who cares."

I just shake my head as we head for the car out front, Gio coming to walk by our side as Kent hangs back, saying his final goodbyes to nonna.

"Don't you have anything to bring?" I ask Gio, frowning a little at his empty hands.

"What, Daniele cannot loan me some pajamas?" Gio says, grinning at me. "My mother will send my clothes along – I am just eager to get out of here."

"Eager to get out?" I ask, tilting my head at him. "Or eager to begin spying?"

"Spying, Fay?" Gio says, twirling his car keys too-casually around his fingers, a big grin crossing his face. "What, do you have any secrets worth discovering?"

I narrow my eyes at him, winding my arms around Daniel's waist, but there's no time to answer as Kent comes forward.

"Come on," he says, unlocking the car and nodding towards it.

"Daniele," Gio says, catching Daniel's arm. "Come with me in my car."

Daniel hesitates, looking at me.

"I'll go in Gio's car!" Janeen says instantly, her eagerness making me laugh.

"Come on, Janeen," I say, snagging her arm as she starts towards Gio's pretty car. "Those two need to patch some things up." I send a wink over my shoulder to Daniel and pull Janeen along with me.

"You were never such a cock block, Fay," Janeen grumbles, even though she allows me to pull her along, "before you got all mafia."

"You're throwing yourself at him, Janeen," I counter, opening the back door for her as Jerome climbs in the other side, giving his boyfriend the space he needs to talk things through with Gio on the ride home.

"Yah," Janeen says, rolling her eyes at me. "I'm the slutty sister, it's kind of my method."

“Go to sleep,” I say, laughing and ignoring her as I push her into the back seat. Then, eager, I climb into the front seat.

“You just wanted Daniel gone so you can ride shotgun,” Kent murmurs, smirking at me as he starts the car.

“Yup,” I say, reclining my seat back despite Janeen’s squeak of protest from the back seat when I invade her space. “More room for napping.”

“Not going to keep me company?” Kent murmurs, starting to pull out of the drive.

“Not a chance,” I reply, exhausted by the stress of the day as well as my pregnancy. “Talk to Jerome.”

“Nope,” Jerome says from the back seat, laying down so that his head is in Janeen’s lap. “Your crazy Italian family got me too drunk. You’re on your own, Kent.”

“Pathetic,” Kent murmurs, “the lot of you.” But I just smile, because I know he doesn’t mean it, and I’m asleep before we hit the highway.

I sleep the entire way home and am shocked, really, by how refreshed I feel when Kent’s hand brushes against my arm, waking me once we’ve pulled into the driveway of our little villa.

“Are we home already?” I ask, stretching my arms above my head and smiling at him. “Is Daniel home too?”

“They’re pulling in now,” Kent says, nodding towards the headlights pulling down the drive. As I glance into the back seat, I see that Janeen and Jerome have already gotten out of the car. I raise my eyebrows, surprised at how soundly I slept. Then I turn my eyes back to Kent.

“What’s the plan?” I ask, thinking of how Gio’s going to be incorporated into our home.

“What do you want it to be?” he asks quietly.

Slowly, I shake my head. “I don’t want to live with secrets anymore, Kent,” I answer, my voice almost a whisper. “That was the whole point. If there’s any way we can trust Gio…”

“All right,” he murmurs, leaning forward to kiss my cheek. “Then let’s get him inside and ask some questions.”

“You’re not too tired?” I ask, my eyes shifting to see Daniel and Gio climbing out of his car after it parks.

“Too tired for an interrogation?” Kent asks, grinning at me and cocking his head to the side. “Come on, Fay. That’s the only part of being a mafia don that’s actually fun.”

I burst out laughing and climb out of the car, heading into the house with Kent at my side. When we come inside I see that Janeen and Jerome have sobered up a little and are waiting, a little too casually, in the living room for us. Gio, walking in at Daniel's side, raises his eyebrows when he sees us all waiting in the main area of the house, not heading off to our separate rooms.

"What?" he says, looking around at us with curiosity. "It is nearly two in the morning. We are not going to bed?"

"Nope," Kent says, curling a finger at Gio and beckoning him into the kitchen, where he pours two glasses of whiskey. "You. Come here. Now."

Gio goes still at Kent's tone, I think for the first time realizing that he's speaking to Don Lippert, not his friendly uncle Kent.

And then, a little tentative, he starts to make his way to the kitchen.

Chapter 253 - Interrogation

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Daniel snags a bottle of wine and some wine glasses out of the kitchen before going to sit with Janeen and Jerome in the living room – close enough to be on hand if Kent needs to inform them of anything, but far enough to give Kent and Gio privacy.

I step towards the kitchen, my eyes catching on a little note on the counter as Kent and Gio lean against the granite, beginning to speak in low tones.

Gone to bed, love you – Papa

I smile, giving the note a little pat with my fingers and then moving to stand next to Kent.

Kent and Gio immediately go silent, turning to me.

"What?" I ask, crossing my arms across my chest, looking between them.

"Fay," Kent says, glaring at me a little, his meaning immediately clear even though he doesn't explain himself with words. His expression clearly reads that this is a private chat.

"Oh, whatever," I say, rolling my eyes and huffing a little laugh. "We bought your freedom with my money, Kent. I'm staying for this."

"Fay!" Kent growls, his glare deepening – because I am obviously messing with his plan.

“If you want me gone you’re going to have to carry me away,” I say, raising my eyebrows at him. His growl deepens, letting me know that he has no problem with that. “And lock me up,” I add, pointing a finger into his face. “Because I’m just going to come right back from wherever you put me.”

Kent exhales slowly and then turns his face away from me, talking only to Gio and pretending I’m not there. I smile and set my shoulders, pleased to have won.

Gio looks between us for just a second, a little smile on his lips, but he pays attention to Kent when he starts to talk.

“What are you here for, Gio?” Kent asks, dead serious. “Tell me now – the truth. Because if you’re here as your grandfather’s spy it will go better for you if you tell me now, rather than me finding out later.”

“I promise, Zio,” Gio says, his face suddenly serious. “I am here for what we talked about yesterday. I want out. I want to help you with your plan, and in exchange I want you to get me out as well.”

“So, it’s that simple? Your allegiance passes from your grandfather to me? I don’t buy it.” Kent leans in, creating tension between himself and his nephew. I watch curiously, wondering how I could replicate that kind of pressure even though I don’t have Kent’s physical dominance.

“Think about what’s in it for me,” Gio says, his voice almost pleading now. “The life I want – my grandfather refuses to let me live it. Unless you think I went to medical school, and continue to work part-time in a hospital, as some kind of elaborate ploy?”

I turn my head in consideration of that – it would be unnecessarily elaborate.

I, for one, buy Gio’s story.

But I’m notoriously more soft-hearted than Kent.

The interrogation goes on for about forty-five more minutes with Kent liberally refilling Gio’s glass, loosening his tongue. I watch it all silently, fascinated, even though I see Janeen fall asleep on the couch. Jerome likewise slackens, though Daniel keeps patiently awake, flicking through his phone.

But Gio’s story doesn’t change, nor does he break. In the end, I see Kent nod, not precisely satisfied but at least willing to make his next move. I perk up when he stands up straight from the counter, reaching into his back pocket.

“No matter what your plans,” Kent says, producing his phone and placing it face-up on the counter, the recording app open and ready to play. “I have this as collateral. And I won’t hesitate to play it for your father and your grandfather.” He presses the screen then, letting Gio in on the fact that he recorded their conversation this morning.

“Good,” Gio says, raising his eyebrows. “I’m glad you have collateral, Kent. I’ll give you more if you want it.”

“I don’t need more,” Kent says, holding his nephew’s gaze with his own dark glare – a look so menacing even I blink at it in surprise. “You need to know, Gio, that you’re my man now. And if you betray us, in any way, I won’t hesitate to kill you. This recording is nothing. What I will actually do to you is much, much worse.”

“Good,” Gio says, nodding steadily at Kent. “I understand. I welcome it. I’m not fucking with you, zio. I’m your man.”

My mouth drops open a little in shock with the casual way that Gio accepts Kent’s words. “Wait, seriously?” I say, stepping forward and peering into Gio’s face. “He – your own uncle – the man who taught you how to kick a soccer ball - threatens to kill you and you’re just like ‘sure yeah, what else is new?’”

Gio grins at me suddenly. “You’re slipping, Fay,” he says, leaning back on the countertop. “You forgot that I grew up in this world – I know how to play my cards.”

“What?” I ask, stepping back a little. “How did I slip?”

“Fay,” Kent sighs, running a hand down his face.

“How did you know,” Gio says, looking at me slyly, “that Kent taught me to kick a futbol?” he asks.

I curse inwardly, suddenly realizing that Kent must have said that this morning...when I was hiding in the closet. When I wasn’t supposed to have heard it.

I narrow my eyes at Gio now, though I can’t help the little smile that pulls at my lips. “What, is that not a common uncle nephew activity in Italy?” I ask, raising an eyebrow and giving a little shrug.

“Just as common,” Gio murmurs, his grin deepening so that his dimples show, “as uncles who sleep alone in beds, but leave indents on two pillows by the headboard.”

“Enough,” Kent growls even as I gasp a little, my smile growing at Gio’s cleverness.

Damn. And I really did think that I’d away gotten with that one.

“Before this conversation goes any further, I need to know that you understand what you’re signing up for. And what awaits you at the end of this road if you even think about betraying me. Or her. Or Daniel, or anyone else in this house.”

Slowly, Kent sticks out his hand.

“I understand,” Gio says, his smile fading a little as he nods seriously to Kent and slips his hand into his. “I accept it. I’m your man, Kent, I swear it.”

“Fine,” Kent growls, giving one final shake of Gio’s hand before dropping it with a sigh. Then he quickly lifts his glass of whiskey to his lips and drains it in one swift motion before setting it back on the counter with a heavy clink and reaching for me.

I barely have a chance to gasp before I’m up in Kent’s arms, and then I burst out laughing as he carries me away towards our bedroom.

“Wow,” Daniel says, watching as Kent strides past the living room and I give a little wave. “Guess there’s no more secrets in this house.”

“Nope!” I call over my shoulder. “Night everyone! Leave us alone until noon!”

Kent doesn’t look back, but I do, noting Gio’s satisfied smile as he watches us disappear around the corner, just as Daniel slings an arm around Jerome’s shoulders, tugging him close as he raises his glass of wine in Gio’s direction.

“Welcome to the family, Gio,” Daniel says as Kent pushes through our door. “You’ve met my boyfriend, Jerome.”

I gasp a little, wanting to see what happens next, but Kent just kicks the door shut.

Chapter 254 – Plans Between Two

Chapter 254 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Nooo,” I whine, reaching back for the door. “I want to see! Gio’s going to find out that Janeen is single –“

“As if he doesn’t already know,” Kent murmurs, carrying me directly to bed. “Besides, your sister’s love life isn’t a telenovela –“

“Um, isn’t it?” I ask, pulling back and staring up at him like he’s crazy. Kent just looks down at me and laughs, coming to the side of our bed.

“Seriously?” he asks, raising his eyebrows at me. “Because I’ll take you back out there if you want – but I am going to bed. And if I’m alone in here, I’m going to sleep.”

“Fine,” I grumble, snuggling myself closer to him with a little contented sigh. “Take me to bed, Lippert. I’ll get my updates in the morning.”

“As you wish,” he murmurs, sinking down onto the bed and taking me with him, tucking his face between my neck and my shoulder and pressing a lingering kiss there.

I sigh, running my fingers through his hair, finally fully content. “Are you happy, Kent?” I ask quietly. “Did it all go the way you wanted it to?”

“It did,” he murmurs, raising his face to look at me, cupping my cheek in his palm and stroking his thumb over my cheekbone. “It went well, Fay. You did your job and I did mine. Now we just have one last thing to do before we can start our life.”

“Hate to break it to you, Kent,” I whisper, my lips turning up in a smile. “But our life already started.”

“Our peaceful life,” he murmurs, nudging my nose with his. “Free from crime.”

“Maybe a little bit of crime,” I whisper back, holding up my fingers so he can see my thumb and forefinger pinched together. “Just to keep things spicy.”

This makes him laugh, rolling back on the bed and pulling me with him. I give a little shriek that I don’t really mean and snuggle closer to Kent when I find us in our favorite position for our quiet talks – face to face, my leg hooked behind the back of his, my pregnant stomach pressed tight against him.

Kent strokes my hair and looks at me a little sleepily, contentment in every line of his face.

“Do you think Gio’s really on our side?” I ask, playing with the buttons on the front of his shirt.

“I’m as sure as I can be,” Kent answers quietly. “You can never really be sure. But I meant what I said, Fay – and he knows that I mean it.”

“That you’ll kill him?” I ask quietly, flicking my eyes up to his.

“I’ll kill anyone who puts you at risk – puts us at risk. Our family.”

I nod, understanding.

“Are you okay with that?” he asks, looking at me seriously.

I nod again, letting him see that I am. Because honestly, I feel precisely the same way. And while Janeen earlier this week pointed out the ways that Kent and I are opposites, I am well aware that this is the part of our personality that fits together neatly as a match.

Both Kent and I have no problem extinguishing completely the threats to those we love. On this, we’re united.

He smiles at me, bringing his face closer. "I like it when you're vicious, Fay," he growls. "Perhaps a little more than I should."

"Well, this bodes well for me, Kent," I murmur, wrapping my fingers in his shirt and using my leverage there to yank him closer to me. "Because I intend to be very cruel to you tonight."

"Oh really," he murmurs, turning suddenly so that his body is leveraged over mine in a way that steals my breath. His hand travels down my side, bunching the skirt of my dress as it goes until his fingers find the skin of my thigh, slowly traveling up it. "And what, precisely, did you have planned."

"The worst thing you can imagine," I whisper, my voice throaty and low as I look up at him from beneath my lashes, letting him see every inch of how much I want him.

"Enlighten me," he murmurs, his hand taking a full grasp of my ass as he lowers his lips to my neck.

I moan a little, burying my fingers in his hair. "I'm going to start," I reply, my words breathy, "by telling you everything I think Janeen is saying to Gio right now, and every reason why I think it's going poorly –"

"What!?" Kent snaps, pulling back suddenly to glare at me.

I burst into laughter, unable to help myself. Kent growls in displeasure, which only make me laugh harder. "What!" I say, propping myself up on my elbows when he pulls away. "I said I was going to be cruel to you, Kent! This is the best way I know how! This will be torture for you."

Glaring at me, Kent undoes the buttons on his shirt and starts to yank it off. I bite my lip a little, heat starting to pool in my core. I press my legs together against the need growing there at the sight of him angry at me.

God, I love it when he's all riled up.

"If you need me to teach you a lesson about the right time for jokes, Fay," Kent snaps, lowering himself over me again, glaring at me with a violent heat in his eyes. "I am more than happy to oblige."

"Go ahead and teach me, Kent," I say, drawing a finger down his chest with a dirty little smirk. "I have a feeling I have a lot to learn tonight."

Fast, Kent's hand goes to the back of my neck, gripping me there as he lowers his body, his weight pressing me deliciously down. My lips are already parted in a moan when he brings his mouth to mine.

I wake up before Kent the next morning, which is my favorite. I smile a little, all tangled up in him, and take a minute to admire his sleeping face. No one else gets to see him like this, in repose, which is really a shame for everyone else.

Because he is absolutely gorgeous.

My eyes drift over the contours of his face, his full lips, the stubble growing dark on his chin and cheeks. His lashes – longer than is fair, on a man – cast delicate shadows on the skin beneath his eyes. God, even the furrows of his brow are sexy, because I know precisely how they knit together when he glares at me, or at anyone, which is perhaps Kent at his hottest.

Quietly, I wonder if Kent commands so much control because he's scary? Or if he's just so gorgeous that everyone – men and women – do what he wants.

I sigh, a little jealous.

“What?” he mutters, his eyes still shut, making me jump and then laugh.

He cracks an eye open, looking at me a little blearily. “Is something wrong?” he murmurs. “Because if it is...go fix it. And let me sleep.”

“Nothing's wrong,” I sigh, snuggling myself closer to him and tucking my head beneath his chin, pressing a quick kiss to his clavicle. “You're just really pretty.”

He hums discontentedly in his chest, muttering something about how I didn't have to wake him up for that because he already knows, making me laugh again and smack him a little.

“Don't be conceited,” I murmur. “It doesn't look good on a dad.”

“Everything looks good on me,” he sighs, his arms tightening around me in a sweet hug that makes happiness flood me from head to toe.

God, this man. I love him so much, even if he is full of himself.

“How'd you sleep?” Kent asks, pulling away a little and peering down at me. I turn my face up to his, smiling.

“Good,” I report. “It is very nice to wake up unstressed. I like it when my plans are all done and I can finally pass everything on to you.” I stretch my arms above my head, relishing the feeling.

“Don't get too ahead of yourself there,” Kent sighs, pulling me close again. “I'm going to need your help on this little task Bianci has given me.”

“Really?” I ask, surprised. Honestly, I figured it was going to be something that spoke much more to Kent's skills than my own. I pillow my head on Kent's arm, newly curious about what Bianci wants Kent to do – wants us to do.

“Really,” Kent murmurs, stroking my face. “I’m not marrying you just for your pretty face, Fay. I need your mind in this line of work.”

“Oh really?” I ask, my face bursting into a grin. “We’re getting married now?”

“Aren’t we?” he asks, raising an eyebrow at me like it’s a settled question.

I burst into laughter. “I’ve said it before, Kent,” I sigh, sitting up so I can look down at him, my hair spilling over my shoulders, “but I’m already married. And I love my husband very much.”

“I’ve heard,” Kent replies, turning on his back and pulling me forward a little so that I lean over him, “that your husband is merely a pale imitation of me.” He plays idly with the ends of my hair.

“I will not take such slander of my beloved,” I snap, pretending an offense I don’t feel and pulling away quickly, hopping out of bed.

Kent snatches after me but misses, letting out an angry growl.

“We’re getting married, Fay!” he calls after me as I walk stark naked into the bathroom, ready for my day.

“We’ll see, Kent!” I call back, laughing. “Maybe you should ask me first!”

But I don’t wait for a reply, closing the bathroom door behind me as my hand drifts idly over my baby bump, my mind distracted with by the more pressing thought of breakfast pancakes.

Chapter 255 – Not So Mysterious

Chapter 255 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

About half an hour later, freshly showered and more appropriately dressed in pajamas and a robe, I push open my bedroom door and give a little squeak of joy to see most of my family already awake gathered in the kitchen and living room. Dad and Kent are the only ones absent – but Kent’s just a minute or two behind, since he got to the shower second.

Janeen sees me and smiles, opening an arm for me, and I quickly scurry to her side, wrapping my arms around her waist. I blow kisses to Daniel and Jerome, waving to Gio before standing on my tiptoes to whisper in Janeen’s ear.

“Where’s dad?” I ask.

“Out for a walk,” she replies. “Said something very boring about nature and the countryside.”

I nod eagerly, moving on to the real question on my mind. “So?” I hiss. “Did anything happen with Gio after he found out about Janiel!?”

Janeen pulls away, grinning at me with glee. “What is Janiel!?”

I cock my head and study her, smiling. “What, is Derome better?” I ask, blinking innocently, which makes her tilt her head back and laugh.

“Tell me!” I insist, tugging on her robe, dying with anticipation.

Janeen heaves a long, sad sigh. “Hate to break it to you, sissy,” she says, smiling at me. “But the man is impervious to my charms. I threw everything I had at him last night and he just went to bed!”

“Did you offer to take him with you?” I ask, my eyebrows raised.

“I practically laid rose petals on the ground to show the way,” she grumbles, rolling her eyes. “Honestly, Fay, I’m very depressed – I don’t want to talk about it anymore.”

“Poor sister,” I murmur, patting her cheek consolingly. She sighs and nods, accepting all of my pity. “We have to get you to town, find you a nice local guy to take care of you.”

“Or six,” she corrects, but otherwise she nods at my sage assessment of the situation.

I laugh and kiss her on the cheek as I move to the coffee machine while Kent comes out of our room. The series of hello’s go around to him as well as I start to push the buttons on the machine, trying to figure it out.

“Let me,” Kent says, his voice a little scornful as he knocks my hand aside. “You’ll break it.”

“Hey!” I say, frowning up at him. “The coffee I’m supposed to be able to do! It’s not my fault that you got this machine that makes no sense.”

“Go,” he says, flicking a hand at me, though he’s unable to keep the smile from his lips. “Spare the poor machine your insults. I’ll bring you your cup.”

I sigh and walk away, my arms crossed, joining Gio at the end of the counter.

“I take it that you are not particularly domestic, Fay?” he asks, sipping at his own cup of coffee that I look at with envy. Seeing the direction of my gaze, Gio slowly slides the cup out of my reach, which makes me laugh.

“I am plenty domestic,” I say, giving him a playful little glare as I prop my chin in my hands, leaning forward on the counter. “They’re all just fancy snobs.”

“There’s nothing wrong with appreciating the finer things in life,” Gio murmurs and I groan as I look him up and down.

“Oh no,” I moan. “You’re one of them too. I should have known.”

Gio laughs again, shaking his head at me and I smile and stand up straight as Daniel comes to my side, dropping a kiss to my cheek.

“Hello, my horrible, unfaithful little wife,” he murmurs, slipping a hand around my waist and pulling me close to his side.

“Hello, gorgeous cheating husband,” I say, beaming up at him.

We both laugh and then together turn to Gio, who looks between us in confusion.

“Wait,” Gio says, frowning. “So, you two are...actually married?”

“Mhmm,” I say, wrapping my arms around Daniel and resting my head against his chest. “It was a hasty wedding aimed at legitimizing my child so we could trick your grandfather into agreeing to our terms to release Kent from his familial obligations,” I say, giving a little shrug as if it’s the oldest story in the book.

“You speak...very quickly,” Gio says, smirking at me as he sips his coffee. “Even without your caffeine.”

“Which makes me doubt giving you this,” Kent says, coming over to the three of us and sliding my cup of coffee over to me, which I drop Daniel eagerly to grab. I take a sip as I move to Kent, giving a little hum of happiness as I lean my back against his chest as he wraps his arms loosely around my waist.

“This is a very strange little family,” Gio says, narrowing his eyes at us and making me laugh. But Gio smiles too, letting me know he doesn’t mind it.

“You get used to it,” Jerome says, coming over and hopping up to sit on the counter. “So,” he says, leaning forward eagerly to Gio. “When did you figure it all out?”

“Figure what out?” Gio asks, taking another casual sip of his coffee.

“All of the deep dark secrets of this strange little family,” Janeen says, joining the group and sipping her own cup of coffee that matches mine, which I grin to realize that Kent made her without her having to ask.

“Oh, almost immediately,” Gio says with a smirk.

“Lies,” Daniel says, grinning at him. “You’re not that clever.”

Gio laughs and puts his coffee down. “All right, not immediately,” he says, looking around. “Though Fay was the most obvious piece that didn’t fit.”

My jaw drops open and I give a squawk of protest. “Excuse me!” I say, holding up a finger, “I am not the weak link in this family!”

“No, you played your role very well,” Gio says, leaning his weight back into his hind foot as he crosses his arms – a move so like Kent and Daniel that it makes me smile. “But the baby,” Gio says, gesturing towards my belly, “with Daniel as the father?” Gio clicks his tongue, shaking his head. “That, I knew, was impossible.”

“It’s not impossible,” Daniel scowls, narrowing his eyes at his cousin. “Your dad bought it.”

“Dad does not know you like I know you,” Gio says, smirking at Daniel. “Do I need to go into detail about the midnight meetings with the boys from town you thought were so secret? Or should we...”

“Yup.” Daniel says, nodding sharply, a quick blush rising to his cheeks. “Moving right on from that.”

“So, the question of who was the father of Fay’s child,” Gio says with a shrug, “was pretty easily answered.”

“It could have been any random guy,” Kent protests, a little tense behind me. I give another squawk, protesting his language as I turn my head to glare up at him. Kent ignores me.

“It could have,” Gio says, smirking at him. “Until you passed her the salt at dinner, Kent, before she asked for it.”

“What?” Kent breathes, a little shocked.

I give a little wiggle of triumph. “The Lipperts were the weak links this time!” I say, unable to stop my broad grin, “not the Thompsons!”

“You’re a Lippert now, Fay,” Daniel reminds me with a little glare.

“What does a little salt have to do with it?” Kent asks, his eyes still on Gio.

“You watch her, Kent,” Gio says quietly, holding his uncle’s stern gaze. “Without even realizing it. More than I’ve seen you watch other women – even those who were your...uh girlfriends? Paramours?” He shrugs. “I don’t know the word.”

I wiggle again, a little smug, but Kent just laughs. I look up to see him shaking his head.

“You’re good, Gio,” Kent says, smiling at his nephew. “I’m impressed.”

“All right, but what about me?” Jerome says, smirking at Gio. “When did you figure out me and Daniel?”

“That one was almost instant,” Gio says, his face bursting into a grin. “You are – ah – what is the phrase in America? That you are his type.”

We all burst out laughing at this and Daniel covers his face with his hands to hide the blush that reddens his entire face.

“New subject!” Daniel insists, the words blurred by his hands as Gio pats him on the back.

“So, the only one of you with any mystery left at all,” Gio says calmly, looking around at all of us until his eyes fall on Janeen, “is this one.”

“Who, me?” she says, perking up a little and pressing a demure hand to her chest. “I don’t have a secret in the world.”

“We’ll see,” Gio says, turning his head and looking her over, assessing. “That’s just what you want everyone to think.”

“Damn, Gio,” I say after Janeen drops her hand, looking at our newest familial addition in surprise. “Are you sure you shouldn’t have gone into psychology? Or like, fortune telling? You read us all like a book.”

“Maybe it’s what I’ll do next,” Gio says, giving a little sigh. “Once this next job is done.”

“Speaking of which,” Kent says, heaving a little sigh as he steps away from me, gesturing towards the dinner table. “I think it’s time that we all sat down and had a chat about this. Because there’s one last job Bianci has asked me to do, and I’d like to ask each of you for your help.”

He pauses a moment, looking around at each of our faces. “And I’ll tell each of you precisely what I’m asking of you so that you can decide whether or not you want to do it.”

“Kent,” I say, stepping closer to him and pressing a hand to his chest. “Of course we’ll do whatever you need – you know that –“

“No,” he says, interrupting me even as he puts a hand over mine, pressing it tight. “This is different, Fay – that last plan? They did that to help you. This one?” He shifts his eyes from mine now, looking around in the room. “I’m asking you to do it for me, and I’m well aware that that’s different. I will understand if you want to say no.”

“Okay, Kent,” Janeen says, more serious than she usually is. I turn to look at her in surprise. “Let’s hear what you’ve got.”

Kent nods and as one we all move to the table.

I leave my coffee behind, my heart beating fast enough now that I don't think I'll need it.

Chapter 256 – A Job for Everyone

Chapter 256 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I grab Janeen's arm on the way to the table, pulling her back just a little. "You're going to do whatever he asks you to, Janeen!" I hiss, glaring at my sister.

"I'm going to hear him out, Fay!" Janeen says, gesturing towards the table.

"What!?" I gasp, appalled at her lack of instant assurance.

"He's right!" Janeen says, stopping to argue with me in whispers while the men begin to settle themselves at the table, leaving a space for me at Kent's right-hand side. "I mean, I'm probably going to say yes, Fay, but Kent does not get the same blank check that you do! I want to hear what he's asking first!"

"He'd never ask anything of you that –"

"He would," Janeen says, raising her eyebrows at me. "You think I didn't read every article I could on this guy during those months he wouldn't let us talk to you, Fay? I know you're in love with him, and I'm certainly becoming aware that there's more to him than just the ruthless mafia boss, but if you think he's not capable of throwing people under the bus to get what he wants then you're being naïve."

"Not people he loves," I growl, glaring up at her. "Not people I love."

Janeen's mouth tightens as she looks down at me. "I said I'd hear him out," she says. "But I did not sign up to join the mafia, Fay. I'm here for you," she says, pointing in my face, "and this baby," she moves her finger to point at my stomach now. "Not for him."

"It's one in the same," I snap, baring my teeth a little at my sister.

We stare at each other, each locked in our stubborn glare, but I flinch out of our standoff when I hear someone clear their throat.

Together, Janeen and I turn to see the entire table of men looking at us.

"It's fair, Fay," Kent says, looking at me evenly. "She has a choice."

I glare at my sister again before stalking to Kent's side and sitting down there, making my own loyalties perfectly clear. Janeen keeps her face even, sitting down quietly at the far end of the table next to Jerome.

As soon as Janeen is seated, Kent begins.

"It's a heist," Kent says, looking calmly around at all of us. "Casino de Monte Carlo."

I blink at him in what feels like slow motion. "W-what?"

He turns to look at me, a little line forming between his eyebrows. "I said seven words, and you already have questions?"

My mouth falls open a little bit. "You say those seven words and expect me to believe that you're describing what we're going to be doing for the next four months and not the plot of the next James Bond film?"

"They already kind of did that one, actually," Jerome says with a little grimace, and I gesture towards him as proof of my claim.

"Regardless," Kent says, crossing his arms and looking around at us. "That's the deal."

"Bianci said this was in your wheelhouse, Kent," I say, peering at him closely. "Have you...done this sort of thing before?"

"My first job," he says, flicking his eyes to me. "First solo, at least. I was...young. It went well, but there was suspicion regarding who was behind it. One of the reasons I went to America – to wait for the dust to settle a bit."

"We just fled one continent," I mutter, suddenly anxious. "Where do we go after this one? Asia? Africa?"

"What does he want us to take?" Daniel asks, moving on without me.

Kent describes a particular high-roller who visits the casino on a pretty regular basis – one of Bianci's enemies who owes him a great deal of money and won't pay up. The job is relatively simple and more crime-y than I'm used to. We broke Kent out for love and family – but this? This is all revenge. And money.

As he speaks, Kent lays it out as simply as he can. Our job is to take out the guy while he's there having a good night, seizing not only his winnings but also as many of his high-roller possessions as he can – cash, jewels, bank cards so that we can drain what funds we can. We have to leave the area clean, but with some kind of particular signature that lets Bianci's enemies know that they need to pay their debts or they'll meet the same fate.

We're all quiet for a long moment when Kent finishes speaking, processing this insane plan.

“Why does he want you to do it, Kent?” Gio asks, his voice soft. “It seems...the sort of job any of his regulars could do.”

“Because they don’t know I’m here,” Kent replies, shifting his eyes to his nephew. “And I’ve been away long enough that I wouldn’t be immediately recognized as a connection to the Bianci family.”

“Though I would,” Gio says, tilting his head a little.

“Which is why you’re staying in the hotel room,” Kent says. “Base operations.”

“And me?” Janeen asks, perking up. I move my eyes away from Kent for the first time, surprised by my sister’s tone. My eyebrows arch when I see her so enthused. She catches my eye and shrugs at me. “This one sounds more fun than yours, Fay. Do I get to play a role? Can I be a femme fatale?”

“You do get to play a role, Janeen,” Kent says, crossing his arms over his chest. “Though I need you to take it seriously. This is not for fun.”

“It can be both,” Janeen says, but the way she nods at him lets us all know that she understands.

“Janeen and Jerome are the most unrecognizable, if he’s willing to participate,” Kent explains, his eyes moving to Daniel’s boyfriend. Jerome quickly nods his head, confirming that he’s in. “They’ll be on the floor – gamblers or staff, I haven’t decided yet. We have to see what we need. Daniel and I will do the job itself.”

My heart sinks when I hear this. Not that I want Janeen doing any of the actual job – the thieving and the murdering – but hearing that it’s going to be my baby daddy and my husband on the line?

Well. I’m not happy about that at all.

“What about me?” I ask when Kent silently surveys our little troops.

“You’ll help me plan it,” Kent says, turning to me.

“No, I mean day-of,” I say, peering at him. “Am I going to be on the casino floor too?”

“You’re going to be here, Fay,” Kent says, looking at me like I’m a little crazy. “With your dad, and whatever guards I can get Bianci to loan me for the weekend.”

“What!?” I gasp, appalled.

“You’ll be more than eight months pregnant!” Kent explains, his confusion only deepening. “Fay, you’ll barely be able to move, let alone travel to Monaco, let alone be an effective member of a heist team –“

“That is such bullshit!”

“It’s true!” Kent says, looking around the table for support. Everyone stays stone-faced and silent, not getting in the middle of this. “Fay, are you – are you serious? Did you honestly think that I was going to risk my pregnant wife in a dangerous heist at the end of her third trimester?”

My mouth falls open in shock, but I almost immediately snap it shut in rage. “We are not married,” I growl at him, getting to my feet as I point my finger into his face. “And if you think I’m not going to fight with you about this every minute for four months, you’re dead wrong.”

With that I storm out of the dining room, and through the kitchen. I hear Kent call my name but I don’t turn around as I head out of the house, absolutely livid. I keep walking, my feet slapping against the cold stone terrace, and then the cement around the pool, and then grass, and then a little bit of gravel as I come to the edge of the house’s property so that all that stretches out before me is a field and then the sea beyond.

Chapter 257 – Planning and Action

Chapter 257 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I take a deep breath, confused about whether I want to indulge my rage or quell it.

Because that really, really pissed me off. How dare he use my pregnancy as a reason to keep me out of this? As if I’m some kind of time bomb that’s going to go off in the middle of his heist and ruin all his plans. Pregnant or not, I’m perfectly capable of deciding what it is that I can and cannot do – who the hell is he to make this choice for me!?

And also! If it’s safety that’s at risk, why does he get to put his life and his freedom on the line when I can’t? We’re both going to be parents at the end of this road – but I’ve got to keep myself safe?!

Even as these thoughts run through my head I’m aware of the flaws in them. But I don’t let myself address those, not yet. Instead, I just stew in my anger, staring out at the sea for a long, long while.

I don’t know how much time passes before a figure comes up on my right, slipping a blanket around my shoulders. I pull it around myself, surprised into awareness of how cold I was simply because it’s so warm around me, but then as I look up to see who gave it to me I narrow my eyes and wish I’d pushed it away.

Because it’s not Daniel, who I expected. It’s Kent.

“Still mad?” he asks, slipping his hands into his pockets.

“If I wasn’t freezing I’d throw this blanket into the ocean just to spite you.”

“Don’t do that,” he sighs. “It’s merino wool. It would be a shame to lose it to the sea.”

“Why are you doing this to me?” I snap, spinning to glare at him. “Kent! I want to help! I can’t believe you’re cutting me out of what is essentially my deal – I’m the one who got this on the table!”

“I’m not cutting you out,” he replies, glaring at me just a little, and I can tell he’s holding back for the sake of mending fences. “I’m just letting you know, upfront, that there’s no way I’m letting you on the front lines of this heist when you’re days away from having a baby!”

“Pregnant people can do plenty of things,” I counter, losing my temper and opening my mouth to list them. But Kent cuts me off.

“You can’t even get on a plane at that point,” he growls. “How would you even get to Monaco?”

“Oh please,” I reply, narrowing my eyes at him. “Like you’d fly commercial for this.”

Kent shrugs, conceding the point that whatever our entrance and exit to Monaco would be, we’ll certainly be chartering private transport for the sake of discretion.

“I need you, Fay,” Kent says, stepping forward and reaching for my face, though I flinch back. He sighs and lets his hand drop. “I need you in every step of planning this. The way you got me out of prison and then out of America – it was brilliant. You’ve demonstrated that you’re a master strategist with an incredible capacity to put your plans in motion. I need that.”

I shake my head at him, not buying it. “All this flattery,” I say softly, staring at him with suspicion. “And yet, I hear a ‘but’ coming.”

“But,” he says, tilting his head and conceding the point. “One, you are not good on the spot,” he says, holding up one finger.

My mouth falls open in protest and I step forward, ready to defend myself, but he just continues.

“And two,” he glares at me, “you will be more pregnant than you think you will be at nearly nine months pregnant, Fay. You’ll draw eyes wherever you go, and you will be miserable on your feet. This is not me underestimating you, this is me assessing the reality of the situation. We will have to move fast, and change plans on the dime, and maybe even have to run. You will not be able to do that.”

I sigh sharply through my nose, considering that at least the second point might be right.

“Why do you say that I’m bad on the spot?” I ask, my feelings a little hurt alongside my confusion.

“Fay,” he sighs, stepping closer, and I let him this time. Kent wraps an arm around me and puts a finger under my chin, tilting my face up to his. “You are good at so many things, but you were very wise to send Jerome out to get me while you waited on that boat.”

“I didn’t just wait on that boat,” I growl. “I had a very full morning, if you’ll remember.”

“A perfectly orchestrated morning,” Kent replies, raising his eyebrows at me. “Every moment, practically every bite was planned. You had Fiona out doing all the unpredictable work while you and Daniel walked in and out of that house in half an hour.”

I shake my head, defensive – because it was so much more complicated than that –

“I’m not insulting you,” he says softly. “It was brilliant, and maybe without recognizing it, Fay, you played to your strengths. You are good at putting together the complicated plan, but you didn’t put yourself on the front line for a reason. You don’t want to have to make snap decisions, you don’t want to be the one pulling triggers.”

“Even if you say it’s not, this sounds like an insult, Kent,” I say, hating him a little bit for just this moment. “These all sound like very admirable traits that you have.”

He shakes his head slowly. “Any idiot can be on the front lines muscling their way through,” he says quietly. “A very rare few stay in the background and pull the strings. That’s what Bianci does. That’s what you do.”

“And you?” I ask, raising a single eyebrow at him. “Sounds like you flatter yourself as both.”

He shakes his head at me. “You’re better at this than me, Fay,” he says quietly. “I just have more experience.”

“Flattery,” I say, rolling my eyes.

“It’s not,” he insists, tightening his fingers on my chin and making me look at him. “I built industries in America and ran a gang for a long time, but it landed me in jail. I got outwitted by Alden and Ivan of all people. Bianci would have seen that from miles away. You would have seen that from miles away.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t see it –“

“Because I didn’t let you,” he snaps before sighing and dropping his hand now, looking out at the sea and looking, of all things, ashamed of himself. “I treated you like a pet and a mistress for months, even when I knew what you were. And you told me – over and over again – that Ivan was telling you that something was going down. And I didn’t listen. If I had treated you like an

equal, explained things, let you turn your mind to it?" He shakes his head. "It would have all turned out different."

"Well, then why won't you do that now?"

"I am letting you do that now," he says, turning to look at me again. "Fay, if you weren't pregnant when this is slated to go down, I'd have you in Monaco by my side. But that's not our reality right now."

"Convenient," I say, my tone dry. "Considering that you picked the timeline."

"You want to move it back?" he asks, looking at me with genuine interest. "Because Bianci said eight months – if you want to do this when we have a four-month-old at home –"

"No," I sigh, shaking my head and pulling my blanket tighter around myself, gritting my teeth. "You're right. I want it done before the baby comes. Can we make it even sooner?"

"We can try," he says, reaching out a hand for me. "If there's a way to get it done sooner...we can think about that. But planning something like this takes time, Fay," he shakes his head. "You know that. We have a lot to learn."

"I'm aware," I say, my voice dry as I slip a hand into his. I pull Kent closer to me and he willingly moves to my side as I look up at him. "I'm not agreeing to this, Kent. I'm still going to fight you on it – if there's a way for me to be helpful there and not a hindrance, I'm going."

"Okay," he says quietly, nodding to me, though I see him fighting a smile. Because he knows he's won.

"Stupid baby," I sigh, looking down at my stomach and running a hand over it. "Getting in the way of all my plans."

"Don't call the baby stupid, love," Kent murmurs, wrapping an arm around my shoulder and pressing a kiss to my head. "Remember, we like the baby."

"Well, this baby had better be cute," I mutter, frustrated.

"We'll like this baby even if it's really ugly," Kent sighs, his voice happy. "Because then it will develop a great personality to compensate."

"What would you know about that," I snap, turning my face up to glare at him. "You've been gorgeous your whole life."

"I know," he says with a grin, tugging me back towards the house. "It's great. I'm boring as hell, and people still want to hang out with me."

“You can hang out with me, baby,” I whisper falsely towards my stomach. “Not with this boring, arrogant idiot who calls himself your dad –“

Kent bursts into laughter and I can’t help smiling a little myself, even if I am still disappointed.

Because, well, even if being pregnant does get in the way?

I’ve still got a heist to plan with Kent at my side this time. And I’m going to enjoy the hell out of that. Quietly I take his hand and squeeze it, and he squeezes it right back. Because this time, finally, we’re in it together.

Chapter 258 – The Long Game

Chapter 258 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

The next few months pass more quickly than I thought they would.

Kent and I spend pretty much every minute together, which I thought would get on my nerves but...

Well. We get along really well, especially when we’re working on a project together like this. I wake up every morning flooded with ideas, telling Kent all about them over coffee and breakfast while our family moves in and out of the room. Every day we spend some time outside – going for a long walk or to see the horses – before we move to the second guest room shortly after that, which we’ve commandeered as our planning space. I grin as I look around it now, half pleased and half disturbed by how closely it matches the plans of a serial killer.

But, well. At least it means we’re thorough.

“Did you hear from Janeen?” Kent asks, leaning over a printed set of the travel plans to ensure that the plane tickets match up with the false ID’s he’s acquired. “Did she settle in at the casino?”

“She didn’t text me back,” I say a little absently, groaning as I run a hand over my thirty-eight-week-pregnant belly, where the baby has just given my rib a sharp kick. “I’ll text her and tell her to get out of whoever’s bed she’s in.”

“You all right?” Kent asks, and I look up to see him looking me up and down, worried.

“I’m fine,” I reply, laughing a little concern and pressing a hand to my lower back. “Baby’s just feeling violent today. Wants to go to Monaco and kick ass with daddy.”

Kent smirks and shakes his head, looking back at the paperwork. “No babies in Monaco,” he sighs.

“Unless Janeen’s conceiving one right now,” I mutter. And then I sigh, because I feel a little bad for her. Over the past couple of months she’s fallen hard for Gio, but he has been freezing her out completely. He’s been a good friend to her – to all of us - but anything romantic she tries? He shuts it down in a second in the a very cool, very casual, very Italian way he has.

So when we sent her to Monaco a few days ago to start undercover as a cocktail waitress in the casino? Let’s just say that she’s been treating it half as work, half as spring break, working out her Gio frustrations with as many Monegasques as she can.

And I, for one, am glad she’s enjoying herself, even if it’s stressing Kent out that she doesn’t reply to our texts until 3 pm.

Gio, for his part, has been spending most of his time with me and Kent in this room planning, which has kept him away from Janeen’s pining. Sometimes I watch him, though, and wonder if he knows how much she likes him – but he gives no hints. Janeen aside, though, it’s been very useful having a criminal mastermind who doubles as a doctor who can talk Kent down when he gets all worked up about me being in my third trimester.

Which he does...way too often. Kent and I both look up when hear a tap on the door and I smile when I see Daniel standing there. “Everything coming together?” he asks, strolling casually into the room and looking over our paperwork.

Daniel’s been amazing these past couple months, responding with alacrity whenever Kent or I ask him to do anything but mostly letting us take the reins. Honestly, I think that’s how he prefers it. He and Jerome spend the majority of their time keeping the house cozy for all of us while Kent and I devote our singular attention to the heist.

About two months ago, they threw us the most amazing Christmas I’ve ever seen, and they managed to keep it all a surprise, only bringing in the tree and the presents and the decorations at the last minute. I basically cried my eyes out the whole time I was so touched, which made Daniel roll his eyes at me a lot, but...well, what did he expect? He knows how sentimental I can be.

It’s been difficult, being so consumed by this plan and not being able to concentrate on the things I’d otherwise concentrate on – like seeing Italy, or enjoying being pregnant. But...well, if this gets Kent out of his obligations to the Bianci’s? I guess I’ve got my whole life to do those things.

Except the pregnancy bit. That’s ending soon, thank god. I have not enjoyed my third trimester, and these past two weeks have been incredibly uncomfortable. The sooner this baby comes, the better.

Well. As long as it waits until after Kent and my family get safely back from Monaco. But they’re leaving in two days, and they’ll be back two days after that, so I think I’ll hold out.

Or at least, I hope I will.

“It’s all coming together on paper,” Kent says, sighing as he stands up straight and looks evenly at his son. “Which is all well and good until it all goes to shit day-of.”

“Stop cursing it, Kent,” I sigh, glaring at him a little. “It’s going to go beautifully. Don’t get your negative vibes all over the pretty plans,” I say, lovingly touching the papers so artfully pinned to the walls.

He mutters something but Daniel grins at me and I wrinkle my nose at him.

“What’s up, Dan,” Kent asks, turning to look at something else, having no real time or patience for anything extraneous this close to the launch date.

“Jerome and I are going to town for groceries,” Daniel says with a little shrug. “We wanted to see if Fay wanted to come.”

“Ohhh!” I gasp, clasping my hands under my chin. “Yes yes yes! Let me just get my bag –“

I dash for the door but Kent puts out a hand, touching me lightly on the arm. “Fay,” he says, his eyes worried as he glances over me. “Are you sure –“

“Kent!” I almost shout, frustrated. “You’re so worried that I’ll go into labor that you won’t let me go to town, but you’re not so worried that you’ll go to Monaco for four days?” I roll my eyes at his hypocrisy.

Kent’s lips tighten and he shakes his head at me. “I just think you’re safer here,” he says, slipping his hands into his pockets. “Why risk it? Why risk anything?”

“Because it’s not a risk,” I say, my shoulders slumping. “Kent, I haven’t been off the property in a week – I am dying to see something besides this incredibly beautiful house and your incredibly beautiful face. Please?” I ask, stepping close and pressing my hands to his chest as I look up at him. “Don’t be mad at me if I leave for one hour?”

He narrows his eyes. “One. Hour,” he growls. Then he raises his eyes to glare at Daniel next. “One hour.”

I give a little squeal and step on my tiptoes to kiss Kent on the cheek before scurrying out of the room after Daniel. I move quickly, dropping a little kiss on my dad’s cheek as he watches American sports on the big-screen TV we had installed for him. He waves me off fondly, his eyes fixed on the screen. Then I slip on a pair of flat loafers by the door and sling my little purse over my shoulder, practically jumping with excitement.

“Geeze, Fay,” Jerome says, laughing as he comes to give me a kiss on the cheek. “Don’t be too excited – it’s just groceries.”

“It’s not just groceries,” Daniel says, laughing and grabbing the keys to our silver BMW. “It’s breaking her house arrest.”

“Oh, Kent’s just overprotective because I’m about to pop,” I say, rolling my eyes and pulling the door open, stepping happily into the sunshine and turning my face up towards it.

“You’d better hope that’s true,” Jerome laughs, slinging an arm around my shoulder as we walk to the car. “What if this is just...who he is now? Your overprotective Mafia don boyfriend, keeping you barefoot and pregnant, locked in the house for the rest of your life?”

“One, he’s still buying me shoes, so I don’t think the barefoot thing is going to happen,” I say, climbing into the back seat. “And two, he’s getting a second vasectomy the same day I give birth, because we are not doing surprise baby ever again.”

Daniel laughs as he climbs into the driver’s seat and starts the car, Jerome buckling his seatbelt on the passenger side. “The first vasectomy one didn’t take, what makes you think the second one will? Lippert sperm is just...very virile, Fay.”

“Oh, really?” I ask, sarcastic. “The all-powerful Lippert sperm is to blame here? Well then, Jerome, when are you due?”

Jerome bursts out laughing as Daniel grins, shaking his head as he pulls down the drive towards our gate.

I relish every minute that we’re outside of the house. It’s not that I don’t enjoy our gorgeous home, or all the time that I get to spend with Kent working on an elaborate high-stakes puzzle –

But, well, it’s Sicily. And it’s gorgeous, and charming, and I’ve spent very little time taking in the sights and actually enjoying myself here. And it’s all so, so close – honestly, just a few more days, and Kent will be free!

And soon we’ll have the little baby, and we’ll just live...a really happy little life.

At least, that’s the plan – and I, unlike Kent, prefer not to consider any unhappy alternatives that could get in the way.

Kent really did pick a pretty little town for us to live near, too. Daniel, Jerome, Janeen, and Gio go in frequently at night to the few little bars that scatter the streets – and of course I’m always invited. But, well, I’m in mafia mode, and mommy mode too – usually I’m busy planning, or exhausted from planning, and the idea of sitting around jealousy watching my friends have fun getting drunk doesn’t appeal. So instead I just stay curled up with Kent, reading or watching something mindless on TV, passively turning over the details of our heist in my head so that I can get everything...just perfect.

I'm very much looking forward to the day when I can toss this baby at my dad, who loves little kids, and drag Kent out with me to these bars with my sister and my friends – but until then? There is something nice about quiet nights at home.

But as we drive down the cobblestone streets of our little town and I look at all the charming brightly colored buildings, my smile and my anticipation grows. Because soon I'll be able to go out here, and also take my little baby on strolls.

Soon – it's all going to happen so soon!

Chapter 259 – Roadside Puppy

Chapter 259 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Unfortunately, our little errand today is a short one. I look longingly at the little coffee shop down the street, considering making Daniel and Jerome go for a quick espresso with me, but...

Well, Kent was serious about one hour, and if I'm not back he will get worried and come looking for me. I roll my eyes at how annoying he's being as Daniel parks the car and we all climb out, starting start into the charming little grocery store at the edge of town.

I breathe deeply as I grab a basket and start to wander the aisles, staring at all the products labeled in Italian that contain...I have no idea what. I smile to myself, making a mental note to start learning Italian more diligently soon, because I think it looks like we're going to settle here and I want to be able to shop in the market by myself and not just buy a bunch of mystery items.

Daniel and Jerome move more purposefully through the store, gathering what we need for dinner tonight as well as what I'll need to stock the house with while they're all gone for a few days. They don't give me a list of any items to put in my basket, though, instead allowing me to just enjoy myself.

I pout a little as I wander down the aisle with row after row of wine, and then I feel a sharp twinge low in my stomach that makes me huff out a breath, my hand pressing low there until it passes.

"Oh, little baby," I sigh, rubbing my belly and shaking my head down at my tiny friend, big as a mini watermelon now. "Go easy on mom."

A contrary little kick comes next, making me laugh. "You telling me something, baby?" I ask, and then I look up and grin as I look at the wine. "You want a nice bottle of wine, baby?"

The baby kicks again, almost in confirmation, making me laugh harder. But I just shrug and think...why not? And so I start to fill my empty basket with whatever I want.

All the things I've been denied my whole pregnancy go into it – a couple of dusty bottles of red wine, and that bottle of fancy champagne that Kent promised me, and then I move to the cheese aisle and start stocking up on all of the unpasteurized soft cheese, and the delicious cured meats, and a bunch of crackers and bread to go along with it. I toss a can of tunafish on top, even though I don't really like it.

I just want it because I can't have it.

Daniel laughs at me as I carry my heavy haul to the counter, where the cashier is checking out our fairly massive amount of groceries. "What's all this?" he asks, and then he laughs and shakes his head at me. "Fay! You can't eat any of this!"

"So what? Kent's paying for it, and I want it." I'm stubborn now, as well as gleeful. Also, I'm rich for the next couple days until I turn my companies over to Bianci in addition to the proceeds of the heist. Why shouldn't I get what I want?

I plop the whole basket on the counter, determined. "Do you think they have Aperol?" I ask, looking around. "I want a spritz –"

"Fay," Jerome says, looking over at my selection. "Half of this is going to go bad by the time you have the baby."

But I just shrug, not caring, and...

Well. "Wait," Daniel says, reading me openly. "Wait, Fay, do you...do you know something?"

"I don't know anything," I say cagily, looking away so he won't see the smile on his face.

"Seriously, Fay," Daniel says, spinning me so that I look at him, his words worried and sounding a lot like his dad now. "Do you – is something happening? Are you going to –"

"Oh, nothing's happening," I say, knocking his hands off my shoulders and cupping my hands beneath my belly to support it. "I'm just having some...pains. But Gio says they're Braxton hicks – fake contractions! It's just getting me excited," I say, giving a little shrug. "Just let me have the cheese, okay? If I don't have the baby by the time the cheese goes bad I'll make dad eat it!"

"Fay," Daniel sighs, looking me over worriedly and lecturing me on safety, but suddenly the woman behind the counter laughs and waves her hands at me, smiling and shaking her head at him.

"What did she say?" I ask, grinning at Daniel.

He laughs too, heaving the sigh. “She said to let you have the cheese if you want the cheese – that we shouldn’t say no to you when you’re so pregnant. Fine, fine! Whatever pregnant Fay wants.”

“Damn straight,” I say, smiling as I stand on my toes to kiss him on the cheek. I do the same to Jerome before giving my benefactress behind the counter a happy smile. She nods to me warmly and continues to ring up the groceries, putting them in the canvas bags that Daniel brought with us.

I sigh, content, and move to the window to look out at what I can see of the little town. But as I peer, the most wonderful sight catches my eyes.

“Oh!” I say, clutching my hands to my chest in delight. “Daniel, Jerome! There’s a farmer across the street, and he brought his puppies to sell at the little road-side stand!”

“Noooo,” Daniel groans, freezing and looking at me. “No, Fay! Do not go look at those puppies – we are not –“

“Puppies!?” Jerome gasps, darting immediately to my side, ignoring Daniel as much as I am.

“We are not getting a puppy!” Daniel calls to us.

“Looooook,” I coo, pointing at them and trying to get a better look. “What kind are they? Can you see?”

“I think they’re German Shepherds,” Jerome says, his face as happy as mine. “Oh man, and they’re so little –“

“We are not getting a puppy!” Daniel insists again, snapping at us now. The woman behind the counter starts to laugh at him again.

“We’re not!” I say, turning to him with a big smile. “We’re just admiring them Daniel, come on. Enjoy the beauty of life for a moment.”

“You’ve have enough beauty of life today, Fay,” Daniel grumbles, “you got your cheese. Dad was right – we shouldn’t have taken you out of the house –“

“I’m going to go look,” I say, skipping for the door.

“No!” Daniel protests.

Jerome moves with me.

“Jerome!” Daniel barks, and his boyfriend turns with a sigh. “Seriously, Jerome,” Daniel says, his voice incredulous, “you’re going to leave me with all of these bags? Get back here.”

“I’ll come over when the bags are in the car,” Jerome whispers to me. “Pick a good one.”

“Do not pick anything, Fay!” Daniel shouts.

“I won’t!” I call over my shoulder as I press the door open and start to dart across the road, looking both ways before I cross so I don’t get hit by a car in my excitement. See? I can be careful.

I really have no intention of getting a puppy – I know that I have a baby coming soon and that a baby and a puppy at once will be a disaster.

Plus, Kent will kill me. So, no puppy today.

At least...unless one is really, really cute...

I hurry right to the farmer, who gives me a big smile as I come up to his stand, greeting me warmly in Italian. I press my hands to my chest and shake my head apologetically, saying the phrase that Kent taught me – “Mi dispiace, non parlo Italiano” – as sadly as I can. The farmer nods understandingly, still smiling, and when I eagerly point to the puppies he nods, giving me permission to explore.

“Ohhhh,” I say, leaning over their little pen and gasping with delight when they press their little dark snouts against my hand, yipping and jumping excitedly, trying to get to me. “Oh, they are so cute!”

I laugh as I pet as many of them as possible, smiling over at the gorgeous German Shepherd that sits elegantly in the pen with them. She must be their mother.

“Bellissima,” I say, smiling at the farmer and pointing to the mommy dog. He laughs and nods, saying the word back to me and watching with pleasure as I admire his puppies.

One sits alone at the back of the pen, watching curiously and peering at me around its siblings, but a little too shy to come forward. Obviously, my heart instantly breaks.

“Hey, little guy!” I coo, moving to the back of the pen to pet his precious little head. He peers up at me with big dark eyes, turning his head a little at the sound of my voice. “Ohhh, you’re trouble,” I laugh, scratching him a little.

The farmer comes close, lifting the tiny puppy up and placing him in my arms. My heart instantly melts as I cuddle him close, pressing my face to his soft puppy fur.

My mind is absolutely made up the moment he sticks out his little puppy tongue and gently, tentatively licks my cheek.

“Put the dog down, Fay!” Daniel yells from across the street, his voice frustrated and entertained at once as he and Jerome load up the groceries into the trunk of our car. He shakes his head like he knew this was going to happen.

“But look at him!” I laugh, carrying him around to the front of the pen. “How can I leave him here all alone!?”

“He has eight siblings Fay – he’s not alone!” Daniel puts his hands on his hips as he turns to me, shaking his head.

“But he loves me!” I call back, laughing as the puppy licks me again, more eagerly this time. “I can’t –“

But I don’t get to say any more because a white van on the road drives between us. Smiling, I close my mouth, waiting for it to pass.

But it doesn’t. My face falls as the van screeches to a stop three feet from me and, lightning fast, the side door rolls open.

My eyes go wide as I gasp because, too fast for me to think, hands are reaching out and grabbing me – pulling me hard forward. I shout – and then scream before a hand slaps over my mouth as I try to turn. My kidnapper hauls me backwards into the van, the puppy still clutched in my arms.

My arms tighten around the poor animal who lets out a whine of fear or pain – but it’s too late – I kick, and bite, and scream against the hand pressed to my mouth –

But I’m yanked sharply backwards across the floor of the van.

And the door rolls shut in front of me before the van lurches forward, flying down the road.

“God damn it, Fay! Stop fucking biting me!” A voice says behind me.

I instantly go still.

Because I know that voice – know it well.

I turn, shocked, to look right into Ivan’s face.

Chapter 260 – An Old Friend

Chapter 260 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I bite Ivan one last time for good measure and he snaps a curse, whipping his hand from my mouth. Instantly I scurry away from him, rocking a little in the unbalance van that's flying down the road – going even faster than Italians usually drive, which is saying something.

“What the fuck, Ivan!?” I gasp, staring at him in appalled shock.

What even –

How –

I just stare at him, shaking my head, struggling to comprehend the sight of him here – in front of me – in Italy – in a van into which he just pulled me – kidnapping me –

“Surprised to see me, Fay?” he asks, rubbing at his hand and glaring at me from his spot sitting on the floor of the empty delivery van.

“You jackass,” I growl, suddenly getting very pissed and scooting forward – the puppy still in my arms – and delivering a sharp kick to his thigh.

“Ow!” he shouts.

I kick him again, harder.

“Fay! Fucking stop!”

“No!” I shout, leaning forward and starting to smack him. “You kidnapped me! And I’m pregnant – like very pregnant! You could have hurt the baby!”

Ivan covers his head as I rain blows on him. “Ow! Fuck, Fay! Stop it!”

“Let me out!”

Ivan gets over his pain and surprise and grabs my wrist, twisting it a little so that I gasp and do as he says, stopping.

“I’m not letting you out,” he growls. “You’re coming with me. We have business to attend to.”

I just shake my head at him, knowing that even if he lets my wrist go I’m completely at his mercy. God damn it, Kent should have taught me how to use a gun. Or a knife. Or something. But instead all I’ve got is this puppy –

Suddenly I gasp, looking down at it.

“Oh my god,” I say, looking into the dog’s big brown eyes. “Oh, poor thing! You made me steal him away from his family!”

“You could have dropped it,” Ivan grumbles.

“In the street!?” I glare at him, again appalled, and yank my wrist out of his hand, using my feet to push myself backwards away from him until my back is pressed up against the wall of the van. I wrap my arms around the puppy who gives an anxious little whine. His feet scramble a little in his very reasonable fear and so I do my best to comfort him, stroking his little head while I glare daggers at my ex.

He glares right back at me, clearly not feeling any guilt at all.

Except, his face changes after a long moment, and his eyes drift down to my stomach.

“Seriously, though, are you all right? I didn’t hurt –“

“You did,” I snap. “I’m dying. Pull over the van, let me out.”

He raises his eyes and glares at me again, any sympathy gone.

“I’m having the baby right now,” I say dryly. “You have to take me back.”

“Stop fucking around,” he growls, shaking his head at me. “You need to take this seriously, Fay _“

“How can I take this seriously!?” I break in, leaning forward to glare at him. “My jealous ex just came and snatched me off the side of the road – it’s like something out of a Mexican soap opera _“

“I’m not your ex!” he shouts, sitting up straight, looking horrified at the notion.

“Oh whatever,” I say, leaning my shoulders back against the van wall and shaking my head at him. “You wish you were.”

“Enough,” he says, slicing a hand through the air, clearly pissed that I’m not trembling and begging him for my freedom, or however he expected me to act.

“No!” I shout, not even knowing what I’m objecting to anymore – just wanting to be contrary.

“Fay!” Ivan yells back, leaning forward, clearly pissed at me. “I’m taking you –”

“You’re not taking me anywhere!” I cut in. After everything I’ve been through these past months, absolutely no part of me is scared of him anymore. He may have pulled some fast ones on us before, but I have been learning these past few months and Kent’s initial assessment of Ivan? It was right.

Ivan’s young, and he’s bitter, and he’s out for vengeance, all of which cloud his judgment. He’s clever, but he’s green.

“I’m in charge here,” Ivan growls at me, pointing to his chest, and I smirk a little. Because anyone who is actually in charge? They don’t have to remind the people they’re trying to control. “And you have no recourse, and you’re not getting out of this van except where I want you to, and when I want you to.”

My scowl deepens now because on that he’s right. Bodily, he does have me under his control. So, I’ve got to play his game for a while.

But...I can’t help getting one last dig in first.

“Fine,” I say, raising an eyebrow and shrugging. “But wherever you take me, Kent’s going to find you, Ivan. And he’s going to rip you to shreds.”

“We’ll see about that,” Ivan says, leaning back against the wall perpendicular to mine and resting his arms on his knees, glaring over at me.

We’re both silent for a long moment as I look down at my puppy and pet his sad little head. Poor thing, I think my heart wrenching for him. Because this is not a very good first day away from his mom, is it? I fold my legs and settle him into my lap, trying to make him as comfortable as possible.

“I can’t believe you’re worried about the puppy,” Ivan murmurs, and when I look up at him he’s shaking his head at me.

“Some of us have hearts, Ivan,” I murmur.

“Really, Fay?” he says, his voice dry as he raises his eyebrows at me. “After what you did to your father? After what you did to me? You can seriously still claim to have a heart?”

“One, I have no idea what you’re talking about. And two, you both,” I say, pointing an accusing finger right at his face, “betrayed me first. So, get your shit straight there, Ivan. It’s not my fault you underestimated my capacity for vengeance.”

“And what did you think?” he asks, tilting his head at me. “I was just going to roll over and let you get away with it?”

“If you were smart you would have,” I counter. “What does it even matter, Ivan? It’s an eye for an eye – you betrayed me, I betrayed you. We’re even. Why can’t you just let me run away and hide, live my life in peace?”

“Because,” he growls. “You stole my vengeance from under my nose, Fay. Lippert was the thing I wanted, and you took him.”

“You don’t have any proof of that,” I sigh, blinking lightly at him. “I just got lucky – was wandering the streets of Sicily and then poof! There he was.” I let a sarcastic little smile find my lips. “Like magic.”

“Bullshit,” he growls. I just shrug. He’s not getting any confessions out of me – asshole is probably wearing a wire anyway. I’m not stupid enough to say anything real.

We ride for a long moment in silence, kind of at a stalemate.

“So, what do we do, Fay Lippert?” he asks on a sharp little sigh.

“I don’t know, Ivan Kaminski,” I reply, my voice cold. “It’s your kidnapping. What do you have planned?”

“I’ll tell you,” he says, “but first you have to agree to be compliant. This isn’t going to work if you keep being such a bitch.”

“Oh, spare me the insults, Ivan,” I sigh, rolling my eyes at him. “Why would I do anything you want me to do?”

“Because,” he says, leaning forward and looking at me evenly. “I have every intention of taking you back to your stupid little villa tonight. But for that to happen, you have to do what I say.”

I study him, doing my best to discern if he’s lying. I curse inwardly, wishing I’d mined Gio for more tips and tricks on this – he’s way better at reading people than I am. But then slowly I nod, because what’s the alternative? Just rolling around in this van all day, yelling at each other?

“Fine,” I snap, lifting my chin like the mafia donna I am. “Where are you taking me?”

“To see someone very important,” Ivan replies. “Who has quite an offer to lay at your feet.”

I raise my eyebrows, intrigued.