

## Chapter 281 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

A cry breaks from my throat too as my eyes fly open and I see Gio reaching lifting up the little baby, and Gio – he’s smiling – his face rich with joy as he holds the little baby up and turns him a little – all red and mad – so that I can see.

“Well done, Fay,” he murmurs as I stumble out a shaky little laugh and lean fully back against Kent, unable to tear my eyes away from the baby. “You did beautifully.”

“Give me my baby -” I say, my voice at once somehow breathy and demanding as I lean forward, reaching for it –

“A moment,” Kent whispers in my ear, wrapping an arm around me and holding me warm against him, “let them check him out for a second –“

“Him?” I gasp, looking up at Kent in sudden shock and surprise. “It’s a –“

“A boy,” Kent says, beaming down at me, and I laugh again. “A little boy, Fay –“

“Oh...” I sigh, completely undone by the knowledge of it – a little boy, I have a little boy now, a son...

“Oh lame,” Janeen says, and I laugh harder now, looking up to see her still holding the puppy tight in her arms as she scowls a little at the edge of the group of paramedics. “Princess Baby is a boy –“

“Don’t call my baby lame –“ I protest.

“I didn’t say the baby was lame,” she says, turning her head to me for a moment before staring down again at her beautiful new nephew, “I just said his gender was lame. Which is an undeniable fact, Fay, you can’t get mad at that. Plus, now I owe Daniel fifty bucks.”

The paramedics finish looking him over, cutting the umbilical cord and wrapping him up in one of the towels. I keep my eyes on my child as the doctors help me finish up the messy process of giving birth. And then, once it’s all finished?

They lay my baby finally into my arms, and I burst into tears.

I stare down into his face through my foggy eyes, trying to wipe the liquid away so I can see him better. But the tears just keep coming.

“You did so wonderfully, Fay,” Gio murmurs, leaning close and kissing me on the cheek. “It all went well – a textbook home birth. The paramedics and I don’t have any concerns, all right? So you just relax.”

I look up at him briefly and nod, barely hearing what he’s saying, and perhaps intuiting this he shifts his gaze to Kent and nods steadily to him. “We’ll be here, all right? To monitor. But we’ll give you two a few minutes alone with your son.”

“Thank you, Gio,” I whisper, looking back at my baby. I shake my head, still baffled as I stare at his perfect, tiny little face –

“They’re dragging me away,” I jump a little as I hear Janeen’s disappointed voice and I look up to see her kneeling by my side. She kisses me quickly on the cheek. “I’ll be back soon to hold that baby, all right? They can only keep me away so long.”

I smile at her and nod, but, inevitably, my gaze turns back to my son.

“Will you call dad?” I suddenly ask my sister as I feel her move away from my side. “He went to town – will you call him? Tell him to come back?”

“You got it, sis,” Janeen says quietly, and then she’s gone.

And abruptly it’s just me, and Kent, and our son. Sitting on the living room floor in our suddenly-quiet house.

“Kent,” I whisper, my whole body trembling a little with pain and exhaustion and shock as I turn in his arms a little so that he can see the baby too. I glance up at him. “Is this real?”

He laughs a little. “It’s real, love,” he murmurs, leaning forward to kiss my hair, and then my cheek, and then to peer at the little baby in my arms. Slowly, Kent raises his hand and brushes it against the baby’s cheek. The baby is quiet now, blinking his little eyes and wiggling a little. “He’s beautiful.”

“He’s mad,” I whisper, studying his face curiously. Kent bursts out laughing again.

And the baby – he really is mad. He has a tiny button nose, and perfect pink little lips turned down in an angry frown. And eyebrows – god, they’re already knit together, like he inherited the expression from his dad...

“He’s bound to be mad,” Kent murmurs, and I can hear the smile in his voice. “He was just born, it’s probably a very shocking experience.”

“Poor baby,” I murmur, leaning forward to press a kiss to his little head. And then I pull away, content to stare at him, to study him again. “I can’t believe you’re here,” I murmur, stroking his little cheek with my finger. He has a little fuzz of hair on his head already, but I grin when I see that it’s not Lippert black.

I mean, it's not red either – but it's light. Will it darken? What color will it be?

“I think he looks like me,” I say quietly after a moment of studying my kid, smug.

“No way,” Kent murmurs, his voice deep and content, rumbling in his chest. “He's got my looks. Lucky kid.”

“He'd better not,” I say, dry. “I am not having another Lippert clone wandering around this house – I won't be able to tell the three of you apart.” Kent laughs again, harder this time, before tucking a finger beneath my chin and lifting my face up to his.

“And how are you feeling?” he asks, worry returning to his voice now. Because, as much as the doctors have given me the okay, it's still been one hell of a day.

I stare up into Kent's gorgeous face for a long moment before returning my eyes to my beautiful baby. And as much as I'm thrilled to finally hold him in my arms...

I don't know. I feel...very conflicted. My body hurts – and my mind suddenly flashes to Ivan, and my mother with her arms tied behind her back –

And I sigh, and close my eyes, and lean heavily against Kent. “I feel tired,” I say, meaning it. A bone-deep, soul-deep kind of tired. Kent tightens his arms around me as he sighs, letting me rest my head against his chest.

“I know, sweetheart,” he murmurs. “You can sleep now. You can rest. I'll make sure of that.”

I nod, believing him for a moment.

But then I remember that I have a newborn.

“No, I can't,” I say, frustrated, sitting up a little.

“What?” Kent goes tense behind me.

“I have to feed him, Kent, and take care of him,” I murmur. “He's just a little baby –“

“Well, I'll help you.”

“Damn right you'll help me,” I say, turning to glare at him a little. This just makes his face burst into a grin and, impulsively, he leans forward and kisses me.

And I kiss him right back, leaning into it, wanting it, needing it. And I laugh a little as the kiss, and all of Kent's love behind it, brings me slowly back to myself.

“I love you, Kent,” I murmur as I pull back a little, feeling the baby squirm in my arms. “And I'm really happy. I am just...very tired.”

“I love you way more,” he replies, sighing. “And him too,” he says, nodding to the baby.

“Do you want to hold him?” I ask, sitting up straight and realizing suddenly that I’ve been selfish, hogging the baby.

“Of course I want to hold him,” Kent murmurs, “it’s my kid. I’m going to hold him so much he’ll be sick of it.” And then he gently unwraps his arms from their place around me and takes his son into his arms.

I realize how hard I’m smiling when my cheeks start to ache. But I can’t help it – it’s just such a wonderful sight, watching Kent rock our brand-new baby in his arms.

“Hey, little guy,” Kent murmurs, smiling down at our son, who fusses unhappily in his arms.

“He likes me better,” I say, leaning over to stroke a finger down the baby’s belly, still wrapped in his towel. “He’s not so fussy with me.”

Kent shoots me a little glare, but he ignores my words. Instead, he just leans forward and kisses his son’s soft head, murmuring to him softly in Italian. And I don’t know precisely what he says, but the gist is clear: that he loves him, and that he always will, and that no matter what happens in this world? He’ll always keep him safe.

And my eyes fill with tears, because I know that it’s very, very true.

That Kent – in so many ways he’s ruthless, and cold, and has a capacity for violence that in some ways goes unmatched.

But with me, with the baby, his family?

With us, he is unerringly kind and protective.

And most importantly, mine.

Or, at least, ours now. Because as I lean my head again against him and stare down at my baby in his arms, I feel the very true connection between all of us.

We are a family now. And Kent and I? We’ll fight to the death for that.

Chapter 282 – A New Lippert

## Chapter 282 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Gio gives us a good chunk of time alone with the baby, but when his friend the OBGYN arrives, things start to become a little more hectic. She's a really nice, very pretty young woman – Janeen scowls freely at her, I smile to see – and after a full check of the baby and I she gives us a clean bill of health.

“Home births are more common in Italy than the United States,” Gio murmurs, standing close behind his friend and translating for me. “So, it is not quite as shocking here. Though,” he flicks his eyes to me with a smirk, “most new mothers don't keep their labor secret from their families and partners.”

“Well,” I say, smugly tossing my wet hair back over my robed shoulder, “most new mothers don't have quite as busy a morning as I had the day their child is born.”

I had a quick shower while the doctor checked out the baby, and now that I'm all clean I'm cozied up in bed. Honestly, though, considering everything that needs to be done I'm not sure it was the best choice – I can feel my eyelids starting to close now that I'm comfortable and warm, even despite my determination to stay up.

“Shall we feed him?” the pretty OBGYN says in halting English, smiling at me, and I nod eagerly to her, starting to take my robe off so that I can give the baby his first little meal.

“I'll leave you to it,” Gio murmurs, turning away from me as Kent comes into the room, hanging up his phone.

“Oh please, Gio,” I say in flat tones, laughing a little. “I think the secrets of my naked body have been fully revealed to you today – who cares if you see a little breast –”

“I do,” Kent says as he strides over to the bed, his voice clipped. Then he snaps his fingers and points over his shoulder with his thumb. “Out, Gio. Give my wife her privacy.”

“Not your wife,” I sigh, but I smile anyway, liking the return of jealous, protective Kent. The OBGYN murmurs to me in Italian, and while I don't understand her words, her gestures and gentle touches are a very clear guide about how to feed the bay. And before I know it, I gasp – because he's latched! And I can feel him drinking.

I grin, looking at the doctor and then up at Kent. “This is so weird,” I say, amazed, “but also very cool.”

Kent nods to me, smiling, and runs a hand over my hair as the doctor says a little farewell in Italian, leaning forward to kiss me on the cheeks and, I think, wish me luck. I thank her in English, hoping she understands, and Kent smiles at her warmly, translating my thanks and giving his own in Italian as he walks her to the bedroom door.

After she goes, Kent sits on the edge of the bed. “Daniel and Jerome are nearly at Villa Bianci,” he says, his voice a little awkward – because, I mean, there's a third person in that car that Kent

isn't mentioning, isn't there? But I don't bring her up either. "They say they're thrilled for you, and jealous that they didn't get to be here, and that they can't wait to meet the new guy."

"New guy," I murmur to the baby, smiling at him. "That's you!" I laugh a little, shaking my head. "You're going to meet your big brother, my husband – and he's huge –"

Kent laughs, starting to say something, but then a knock comes at the door.

"Puppy delivery," Janeen says, smiling as she stands in the doorway, the puppy in her arms, his little scrabbling paws reaching for me as soon as he sets eyes on me. "Also, dad delivery," she adds, stepping aside to reveal my dad behind her.

I burst into tears again and try to stand up.

"Oh, baby," dad says, laughing and hurrying across the room to me, his hands out. "Don't get up \_"

"I can't be baby anymore dad," I say as Kent stands, making room for the new grandpa to sit next to me on the bed. "We've got a new one for that title."

"No, sweetheart," dad says, cupping my cheek in his broad, calloused palm. "You're always baby. Always my baby." And he leans forward and kisses me on the forehead, just the same way I kiss my son.

My tears start to flow harder now – I'm exhausted and happy and overwhelmed all at once.

Dad murmurs nice and comforting things to me as I pull myself back together. Then he kisses me again and stands up. "I'll come and see the little man later," he says quietly, "after you've both had a little rest." He looks up at Kent then. "You let her sleep now, you hear?"

Kent nods seriously to my father. "Yes, sir," he says, and I smile because I can tell that he means it.

Janeen comes forward then, plopping the dog on the bed.

"Janeen," Kent groans as the puppy climbs over the lumps and folds of the blankets, intent on getting to me. "Seriously, on the white duvet –"

Janeen just grins and ignores him, sitting down in the spot dad just vacated. "Seriously, sis," she says, her perky personality coming back to her now that all the drama has passed. "Can you like, move your boob? I want to see his little face..."

Kent groans a little and excuses himself, heading into the bathroom – I think probably for a quick little shower himself.

I laugh and swat at her. “No, Janeen,” I say, grinning at her. “He needs to eat – he’s probably starving, after all the excitement he crafted today.”

“Seriously,” she says, her eyebrows going up. “Kids either got horrible timing or a wicked sense of humor.”

“Let’s hope for the latter,” I sigh. The puppy gives a little yip of triumph as he finally settles by my side, and I wrap an arm around him, tucking him in close.

“Are you okay?” Janeen asks, her voice unusually serious, and I look up at her. “I mean, with the birth stuff, but also with...” she grimaces a little, and I know she means mom.

“I am okay,” I say quietly, a little guilty. “Are...you okay with the fact that I’m okay with it? Because, Janeen, you’re...allowed to hate me for it. If that’s how you feel.”

Janeen clicks her tongue and shakes her head, reaching forward to tuck my hair behind my ear. “She was always kind of a bitch,” Janeen murmurs, which makes a shaky little laugh fall from my mouth. She tilts her head to the side now. “And, I mean, I usually like that about a woman -”

I start to laugh harder at this and my sister grins at me. “But Gio filled me in a little. Abandoning you at five and then trying to ruin your life again by threatening your baby daddy if you didn’t snitch on the most powerful man in Italy? Which probably would have resulted in you getting killed?” She shakes her head. “That woman – she had whatever was coming to her. And you have nothing but my love and respect.”

I nod, grateful, but I glance towards the door. “Does dad...”

Janeen sighs and looks in the same direction. “If he knows, he hasn’t said it. And if he hasn’t said it...he doesn’t want to talk about it. I think he’s at peace with it, Fay, no matter what happened. Dad – he’s always been a look-to-the-future kind of guy anyway.”

“We owe him big time,” I murmur quietly. “Maybe we can get him like...a vespa...”

Janeen starts to laugh at this, and the two of us spends a few more minutes together. She helps me switch breasts halfway through the breast feeding – which the baby does not like – and she keeps me laughing when she comments that the baby looks like a very old, very grumpy, very tiny Italian man.

We’re still laughing and chatting five minutes later when Kent comes out of the closet dressed in gym clothes – soft pants and a black sweatshirt.

“Damnnn, Kent!” Janeen says, leaning back on her elbow and grinning as she looks him up and down. “I like you in leisurewear! God damn it, why do you wear those suits all the time when you look like this dressed down –”

“Out, Janeen,” Kent says, keeping his voice dry even as he smirks at her. “Fay needs to sleep.”

“Fay’s not gonna get any sleep when you look like that,” Janeen mumbles, winking at me as she pulls herself to her feet. “She’s gonna get started on that second baby –“

Kent goes very still at the sheer mention of it, which makes me burst into a wide grin.

“Out,” Janeen, he commands.

## Chapter 283 – Names

# Chapter 283 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Janeen just laughs, and when she stands up from the bed Kent gives her a playful little shove on the back that makes her grin over her shoulder at him.

“And take this puppy with you –“ Kent says, reaching for my little friend who is pressed so close to my side.

“Noooo,” I cry, wrapping a hand around the puppy’s little belly and pulling him closer to my side. “No, you can’t take the puppy, he’s had such a hard day!”

“The puppy has had a hard day, Fay?” Kent asks, disbelieving as Janeen calls her goodbyes and heads out the door, shutting it behind her. Kent sighs at me for a moment before he turns away and moves around the room, pulling the curtains shut against the afternoon light.

“Just because we also had a weird day doesn’t mean that the puppy can’t have had a stressful day too,” I say, smiling slyly because I’m very aware that Kent could have made Janeen take the puppy, and she’d have done it. But Kent let the dog stay because I want him near.

“I think you’re allowed to be the focus of the day, gorgeous,” Kent murmurs, finishing his work and slipping into the bed next to me. “It should be about what you need, not the dog or anyone else.”

My drowsiness comes back in full force now that the room is quiet, and shady, and the baby has finished eating and has fallen into his own doze in my arms.

“Not me,” I say quietly as Kent wraps a warm arm around me, moving the puppy so that he rests lightly on my lap instead of squished between us. “I think baby needs to be the focus today.”

“Baby,” Kent murmurs, smiling down at our sleeping son. A huge smile breaks out onto my face as I look at him too, though it’s instantly interrupted by a yawn. “He’s good looking,” Kent considers quietly. “Thank god.”



I laugh and whip my face up to Kent's. "You wouldn't have liked him if he was ugly?"

Kent just shrugs, his eyes still on our kid. "I would have. It just would have been harder."

I laugh and shake my head but snuggle up against Kent, because I know he doesn't mean it – he's just making me laugh. "Don't listen to your vain father, baby," I murmur to my new baby, all cozied up in my arms in his little newborn onesie. "Looks aren't everything."

We're quiet for a long moment as I rest my head against Kent's shoulder, my eyes drifting a little shut.

"So," Kent says quietly, his voice soft in the quiet afternoon peace of our room. "Are we just going to call him baby his whole life? Because, I mean, that's very cute. But he might get a little beat up for it."

"Anyone who beats up our baby is going to have to come through me," I say, grinning a little. But then I sigh and open my eyes. "But you're right." I sit up a little and look down at my cute baby's little scrunched face. "The child needs a name. What...hmm." I turn my head to the side a little, considering him. "What do you think suits him?"

Kent and I – we've talked about names casually, things we like and we don't, but we never decided on anything – never even came up with a top ten. I guess it just sort of got lost in all of the other insane things we had to plan during the tail end of my pregnancy.

"I don't know," Kent says, his words slow and considerate.

We're silent for a really long time, starting at the kid, when suddenly I start to laugh at the ridiculousness of it all. "Oh, come on," I sigh. "We're not stupid people – surely we can come up with a name."

"I think that's the problem," Kent murmurs. "We can easily come up with a name, we just both want a good one."

"What about, Daniel Redeux – try that one again, see if it comes out right this time. "

Kent laughs at this, but shakes his head. "Daniel will be too vain if he gets a namesake. Plus, confusing in the household on holidays. They'll fight over their presents"

I grin. "All right, well, what about Lil Kent – that one had some charm to it -"

Kent just growls at me this time, a low sound in his chest as the puppy lifts his head, quirking his ears at me. "We're not naming the dog that either, so try again."

"Well, the dog needs a name too!" I say, gesturing towards the sweet, patient little pup, who blinks his brown eyes at me.

“Call the dog ‘back to the farm,’” Kent murmurs, his voice dry even as he wraps his arms tighter around me, pulling me close and pressing his lips to my hair, “because that’s where he’s going –

“Oh, hush you,” I sigh, scowling and shooting Kent a little glare as I stroke a hand over the dog’s soft head.

“All right,” Kent says, his voice more serious now. “For the dog, what about…Titus.”

“Titus,” I say, sitting up a little, curious.

“Sure,” Kent says, “a figure of classic literature, a general returning to Rome, everyone wants him to be the emperor…it’s a noble name.”

“Kind of a…dark ending though…” I murmur, grimacing as I remember my Shakespeare.

“Well, we’ll just ignore that part. Give our little Titus a chance to rewrite it.”

“All right,” I say, grinning and leaning forward to pat the puppy’s head. “Titus Lil Kent Lippert. Perfect.”

Kent laughs at my addition of a middle name and I turn to see him grinning at me. I lean back against him, looking up into his face with a happy sigh.

“Well,” I say, a little cunning, “if you got to name the puppy…I get to name the baby. Only fair.”

“What!?”

“Well, you can’t do both names,” I protest, my jaw dropping open. “Plus, Janeen will never forgive me if I let a man name Princess Baby –“

“That is too sly, Fay, you can’t just wait for me to name the dog and then change the rules –“

“I can too! I did all the work today!”

Kent scowls and narrows his eyes at me, but I can see the little smile fighting to be on his lips. “Fine,” he growls, wrapping his arm around me and letting his hand slip down my back, using his leverage there to pull me closer. “But I have veto power if you pick something horrible. What do you have in mind?”

“Well…” I say quietly, biting my lip and looking down at the sleeping baby in my arms. “I was thinking…Dominic.”

Kent’s silent for a long moment – long enough that I look up at him curiously.

But he’s just staring intently at our son.

“Damn it,” he says softly, shaking his head a little. “It’s just too perfect. I can’t even make a joke about it.”

My face bursts into a smile. “You like it?”

“I really like it, Fay,” he says, leaning close and pressing a kiss to my mouth. “It’s...like it was always his name.”

I hum a little with pleasure, lifting a hand to stroke Kent’s cheek and then smiling down at my son. “Dominic Lippert,” I sigh, pleasure welling warm in my heart. “You’re very much loved already, little boy.”

“Domenico,” Kent murmurs softly, reaching out and stroking the baby’s head like it’s a blessing.

“What?” I ask, turning and frowning up at him.

“Domenico,” Kent repeats, turning to me. “The Italian version of his name –“

“Well, we’re not going to call him that –“

“Even if we don’t everyone else will – he’s a little Italian boy and Italian’s can’t say Dominic –“

“They can damn well learn!”

Kent laughs a little now, shaking his head at me. “It’s not like there’s not precedence. Daniel goes by Daniel and Daniele. Two names – one for each culture. Why can’t Dominic do the same?”

“Because Domenico isn’t as cute,” I sigh, a little bitter, even though...well, I do actually think it’s pretty cool that he’ll have a name for each culture.

“It’s very cute,” Kent sighs, disagreeing and pulling me close again. “But we’ll all just call him Dom for short anyway.”

“Right, Dom?” I say, giving into it and tapping my little boy on his tiny, perfect nose. He fusses a little at the tap, yawning and turning his face away just an inch, which makes me grin. “It’s perfect.”

“You’re perfect,” Kent murmurs, pressing another kiss to my hair as I yawn again.

“I may be perfect,” I mutter, “but I think I’m fading. Will you please not let me crush the baby if I fall asleep?”

“Give him here,” Kent says, reaching for him, “better safe than sorry.” And so I pass Dominic over to his father, who I have full confidence knows how to hold a baby better than I do. This is his second time around, after all.

“Wake me up when he cries,” I murmur, snuggling against Kent and leaning back against the pillows. “The book says,” I yawn so wide it feels like it’s going to crack my jaw, “maybe...two hours...”

“You got it,” Kent murmurs, one arm warm around me as the other cradles our infant son. “Just rest, Fay. I’ll take it from here.”

And I swear, it takes about eight seconds for me to fall completely asleep.

Chapter 284 – A Dad Again

## Chapter 284 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Kent gets two or three hours of sleep as well, after Fay drifts off. He takes a minute alone with his son, studying his face and his tiny form, but when he feels himself slipping off he lifts both Titus and Dominic from the bed, slipping Titus into his little crate, where the pup promptly curls up into a little sleepy ball of fur. Then Kent swaddles Dominic and place the baby in his little bassinet, wheeling it over to his side of the bed.

Because as much as Fay insists upon being woken up in two hours? Kent’s absolutely not letting that happen. Fay – she did too much today, and she hasn’t slept in more than thirty-six hours. He’s determined to let her rest, no matter what the consequences.

His eyes drift shut, but they immediately spring open again a few hours later at the first noise from the baby. Kent groggily blinks his eyes but forces his body into action, sitting up and reaching for the child. Before he can even begin to wail, Kent has Dominic up in his arms and is headed for the door to the room. When the baby really gets started, Kent’s already out in the hallway, gingerly pulling the door shut.

When Kent emerges out into the living area, he smiles to see eyes already turned towards him.

Gio and Janeen, he sees, are seated close together at the kitchen island, enjoying a little cup of coffee.

“I’ll take some of that,” Kent says, stifling a yawn and lifting a chin towards the coffee as the baby starts to fuss and cry. “If there’s any left.”

“Here, zio,” Gio says, holding out his own mug. “A fresh cup – I haven’t had a sip yet.”

Kent murmurs his thanks, reaching for the mug and downing it all in one go, willing his body to wake up.

“Little guy,” Janeen murmurs, getting to her feet and reaching for the baby. “Why so angry?”

“Hungry,” Kent murmurs, handing Dominic over to his aunt and moving to the cabinet and starting to rifle through it.

“Well,” Janeen says, hesitating, “why did you bring him out here? Dinner is in there, with Fay.”

“Fay’s too tired,” Kent says, yawning himself as he produces a small tin of formula. “I’m letting her sleep.”

“Ohhhh,” Janeen says, cuddling the baby in her arms and grinning down at him. “Mommy’s going to be mad, she wanted to breastfeed.”

“She still can,” Gio says, crossing his arms as Kent mixes up a bottle, coming close to Janeen to peer down at the unhappy little baby. “But I think Kent is right – Fay is absolutely exhausted right now, her body needs rest, and a little formula won’t hurt...” He hesitates now, looking up at Kent. “Does he have a name yet?”

“Dominic,” Kent says quietly, a little smile tugging at the corner of his lips as Gio nods and Janeen gives a little coo of happiness to hear her nephew’s name.

“Dominic,” Janeen murmurs, “little Dom. Very good.” When Kent comes back with the prepared bottle and reaches for the baby, she hesitates. “Can I feed him?” she asks, hopeful.

Kent just smiles and hands her the bottle. “Be my guest. Do you need any instructions?”

“Nah,” Janeen says, carrying the baby and the bottle away to the couch. “Lots of girls at the club bring their kids by. We’re all practiced babysitters alongside our other gig as alluring temptresses.”

Kent laughs, shaking his head as Janeen seats herself, talking quietly to Dom. Honestly, it’s actually kind of convenient. Because Kent? He needs to talk to Gio.

When Kent turns his eyes on his nephew, he finds Gio already looking at him seriously, waiting.

“Well?” Kent says, pitching his voice low as he turns to the coffee machine and starts to make two fresh cups of espresso.

Gio, knowing precisely what his uncle is asking, moves close. “I’m afraid it didn’t go as well as planned, Kent,” he murmurs, pulling his phone out of his pocket and placing it on the counter between them. “My grandfather...he is not pleased that the Monaco plan was hastily cancelled.”

Inwardly, Kent scowls, frustrated and angry at Bianci. But outwardly he doesn’t let any of it show. “Tell me,” he commands.

Gio complies. “Daniel and Jerome delivered the woman and explained the situation. How she disrupted the plan, her offer to Fay. They did their best to paint Fay in a generous light, but my grandfather...” Gio hesitates and shrugs. “You know him, Kent.”

“I do,” Kent says, watching the coffee splash into the waiting mugs. “He’s suspicious of betrayal, and beyond that he’ll take any failure as an opportunity to grasp for more. Shit.” Kent’s hand folds into a tight fist against the counter as his mind turns, trying to figure out Bianci’s next moves.

“He’s...keeping Daniele,” Gio says softly, and Kent whips his head to stare at his nephew.

“What?”

“Nonno,” Gio explains, anxious. “He is not letting Daniele or Jerome leave the house. Instead, he’s demanding that you come and explain yourself.”

“Shit,” Kent breathes, more vehement now. “So not only did he not accept Victoria as a stand-in for the Monaco job, but now he’s keeping my kid as his hostage?”

Gio tilts his head to the side and presses his lips together. “You knew that him happily accepting Victoria instead of Monaco was a long shot, zio,” he says, shaking his head. “Nonno, he says he wants you there – at the villa – now. Tonight.”

Kent goes still, staring at Gio. “And did you tell him that Fay just had a baby?”

“Of course I did,” Gio insists angrily, leaning forward. “He doesn’t care. He says he wants us all there, now, to speak for our choices. And if we don’t...”

“He won’t hurt Daniel,” Kent snaps, turning away, grabbing the coffee and handing a cup to Gio.

“But Jerome...”

Kent curses again, low under his breath. And then he leans back against the counter for a long time, his mind racing.

After a few minutes, his cup drained of coffee, Gio nudges Kent with his elbow. “Well?”

Slowly, Kent turns to look out the window and assess the lateness of the hour. “Call him,” he says, nodding. “Even if we get there tonight, it will be too late to talk. Tell him we’ll be there first thing in the morning. Before he wakes up.”

“All right,” Gio says, pushing himself up and giving Kent a warm pat on the shoulder. “I’ll do it. And in the morning, I’ll be ready.”

“Thank you, Gio,” Kent says, meeting his nephew’s eyes with a steady gaze. “For this, and for everything today. I am very grateful.”

“I was glad to be here,” Gio says, his eyebrows raising. “You have a good family, zio. I am...grateful to be a part of it.”

“You are part of it, Gio,” Kent says, hoping his nephew believes it. The young man smiles and nods, heading away to his room.

As he does, Janeen stands, bringing the baby and the mostly empty bottle back over.

“Well, he’s all yours now, daddy,” she says, handing Dominic over into Kent’s waiting hands. “I don’t do the burb-and-barf part. That’s all you.”

“No problem,” Kent says, smirking a little as he looks down at his little boy. “Thank you, Janeen.”

“What’s going on, Kent?” she asks, her voice serious as Kent drapes a cloth over his shoulder and holds the baby up against it, beginning to lightly pat Dominic’s back.

“What do you mean?” Kent asks.

Janeen lifts her chin after Gio, questioning. “Whatever you two were talking about. What’s going on? I’m part of this now – I want to know.”

Kent looks at her steadily for a moment, assessing, before he speaks. “Bianci is pissed that Monaco didn’t go down. He’s going to ignore our situation and use our apparent failure to squeeze us for all we’re worth.”

“Damn,” Janeen says, slipping her hands into her pockets and shaking her head. “He sounds like a dick.”

Kent smirks. “He is a dick. That’s how he got to be so rich and powerful.”

“Like some other people I know,” Janeen says dryly, making Kent laugh, though he keeps it low, not wanting to disturb the resting baby. “So?” Janeen continues, cocking her head like a bird. “What do we do?”

“We?” Kent asks, raising a questioning eyebrow.

“We,” she insists. “I’ve got a little nephew to defend now, as well as a baby sister. I’m in this, Kent. Whatever you need,” she shrugs, “you’ve got me.”

“Thanks,” he replies, meaning it genuinely. “But honestly, go get some rest – we’re going to need our energy tomorrow. Every ounce of it.”

“And will you rest?” she asks, already starting to drift towards the hall.

“Probably not,” Kent sighs, glancing at the baby perched against his shoulder. “But, new dad stuff. That’s to be expected.”

Janeen just shakes her head at him, smiling. “You’re a better man than I thought you were, Kent Lippert,” she says.

“Don’t give me too much credit, Janeen,” he murmurs, lowering Dominic from his shoulder to his arms. “Rest up.”

Janeen murmurs her own goodbyes, turning towards the hall, when suddenly Kent calls her name. Janeen turns, her brow raised, curious.

“When I say get some rest, I mean sleep,” Kent says, his voice dry. “No accidentally stumbling into Gio’s room tonight, all right? Save it.”

“No promises, Lippert,” Janeen says, giving him a wink. And then she turns and flounces down the hall.

## Chapter 285 – Rude Awakening

# Chapter 285 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Something soft caresses my cheek, but it takes me a long, long moment to come back to the waking world.

My eyes slowly blink open but I lay with my heavy head pressed into my pillow.

“Hey,” I hear Kent’s voice say, and I slowly turn towards it. “Time to get up, sweetheart.”

“What?” I ask, confused. I start to sit up then, leaning hard against the pillows and the headboard as I rub my eyes, trying to remember...

And then my eyes go wide as I realize, duh, that I have a baby. “Where’s Dominic?”

“Right here,” Kent says, and my eyes finally focus on him sitting on the bed a foot away from me, holding the fussy little baby in his arms. I reach for Dominic instantly, but Kent laughs, putting a hand on my shoulder. “Take a second, Fay. Wake up. He’s not going anywhere.”

I exhale then, leaning back against the pillows, kind of unable to take my eyes away from my beautiful son in Kent’s arms. I stretch my arms above my head, though, and then run my fingers through my hair. “How long was I asleep? Is there any coffee?”



“Always coffee,” Kent murmurs, nodding to the cup already on my bedstand. I grin when I see it, but, as logic comes back to me, I reach for the baby again.

“Let me feed him first –“

“He’s not hungry, Fay. Not right now.”

“What?” I ask, confused. I mean, judging by the way I feel, I know I’ve been asleep for more than six hours – the baby must be starving –

“I made him a bottle,” Kent says softly. “I wanted to let you sleep.”

“WHAT!?” Any sleep that was in my veins instantly fades from me as I glare at my child’s father, reaching suddenly for my little boy. “You gave my baby formula!?”

Kent does his best to keep from smiling as he opens his mouth to explain.

“I told you she’d be pissed,” Janeen says, interrupting and making me jump as she comes out of the closet with an overnight on her shoulder. As I stare at her with open surprise, Kent passes the baby over into my arms.

I instantly feel relief when I feel the weight and warmth of my little boy curled against my chest. But I’m too pissed at his dad and confused by my sister’s presence to pay my son the attention he deserves. “What – what the hell is going on here?”

“Fay,” Kent says, and I turn to him. “Things have gone a little sour. Bianci – he is...”

“He’s keeping Daniel and Jerome locked in his dungeons,” Janeen helpfully supplies, grinning at me as she flounces over to the door. “Meet you outside!”

“What!?” I stare after my sister and then at Kent, aghast.

He just shakes his head. “I should have waited until she was gone to explain.”

“What is happening!?” My voice is a little shrill, but I honestly at this point feel like it’s kind of justified.

“Bianci’s pissed,” Kent explains quietly, moving closer to me and putting a warm hand on my arm, rubbing it softly. “He...he wants us there. Now. He won’t let Daniel and Jerome leave until we go explain ourselves for Victoria, for letting the Monaco deal fall apart.”

My face goes slack as I put together the pieces and guilt sweeps through me. Because, I mean, some of this was beyond my control – I was the one kidnapped off the side of the road for heaven’s sake. But the plan to put off Monaco so that we could take down my mom? I mean, Kent agreed to it, but that was all me.

This? All of this?

It's on my shoulders.

"It's going to be fine, Fay," Kent murmurs in an attempt to be comforting as my infant son fusses in my arms.

"You don't know that," I breathe, shaking my head at him.

"I do," he insists, moving again so that he sits at my side, wrapping an arm around my shoulders, keeping me warm and safe. "We'll make it be all right. Bianci – he hasn't lost anything in Monaco deal just yet – and I'm too useful to him to actually piss me off by hurting Daniel or Jerome –"

"Kent," I snap, turning to stare up at his face. "Don't you fucking do this –"

He frowns at me, confused.

"You're talking," I say, my voice low and angry, "like you're going to let Bianci rope you back into this – that you're not walking away from this today with your freedom –"

He hesitates, looking down at the bed now.

"Kent!" I gasp, appalled.

"Well, we might have fucked that up a little bit, Fay," Kent returns, lifting his head to look at me seriously. "We made a deal with Bianci – Monaco, done, today. We set the timeline for that deal. We reneged on it. He has every reason to hold me to the fire for that failure."

"We gave him my mother," I seethe, shaking my head at him, appalled.

Kent just looks at me, his face quiet and calm. "It was a good move, Fay," he replies, steady. "But we never knew, truly, how he was going to respond. This was his reaction. And now we have to go."

"What?" I ask – again, honestly, I'm starting to get annoyed by all of this mystery. "Where!?"

"Villa Bianci," he sighs, tightening his arm around me. "Cars are all packed. You just have to get dressed."

"Kent!" I gasp, shoving him away a little bit as Dominic fusses even more in my arms, starting to cry – maybe sensing my agitation? I don't know – I'm new to this. "I just had a baby! Like, hours ago! I'm not going anywhere!"

"I'm sorry," Kent says, and I can see his genuine sorrow all over his face. "Fay, we need to go – my fucking other son..."

And I groan, and shut my eyes...

Because as much as the last thing I want to do on earth is leave this bed...I know that if we've been summoned? And we refuse? And Bianci has Daniel and Jerome?

Well. He might not hurt Daniel...

"Okay," I sigh, nodding, getting it. And then I look down at my baby boy. "Poor baby," I murmur, stroking his little face with my finger as he peers up at me. "I wanted a simpler start for you. With breastmilk." I turn to shoot another glare at Kent then.

"It was doctor's orders, Fay," a voice says from the doorway and I look up to see Gio standing there, fully dressed. "Your sleep was more important. Formula is a modern miracle – it won't hurt the baby –"

"Excuse me," I say sharply then, holding up a hand, "I am his mother. I will be in charge of how he is fed. Now if you would please," I say haughtily, turning to Kent now and starting to shift the baby, "take your son, I need to go get dressed."

Kent just nods, doing as I say and taking Dominic before offering a hand to help me up. I take it and get to my feet, groaning a little at the strange new aches all over my body.

And god – after so much sleep, you wouldn't think that I'd be this tired – but I am completely exhausted. I move to take a confident, self-composed step forward but I surprise myself by stumbling awkwardly to the side.

"Gio," Kent calls, holding me steady with one hand as his nephew comes forward. Kent offers Gio the baby and I frown to see my son handed off again – I just want him with me right now. "Can you help the baby into his carseat? I'm going to help Fay get dressed."

I sigh, accepting the help as Kent wraps an arm around my waist.

"Bring the coffee," I mutter as Gio turns towards the door and Kent starts to guide me to the closet. Kent nods, laughing, and reaches for the coffee on the bedside table. "And where's my dog?"

Kent just laughs then at that, handing me my cup and shaking his head at me. "So many demands all at once."

"Well, I wanted to stay home and be a new mom today," I say, glaring at him as we walk together into the closet and I find my balance again. "But someone is requiring me to play mafia instead. So, you reap what you sow, Kent."

"Yes, little donna," he murmurs, pressing a kiss to my head. "Come on. Your clothes are all laid out."

Thirty minutes later, I look around our packed silver SUV, kind of baffled by the strange crew we've amassed here.

"All right, baby?" dad asks from the other back seat, Dominic's little carrier strapped into the middle seat between us. Titus, in dad's lap, peers curiously into the newborn car seat, maybe wondering if he can fit in there too.

"Yeah," I say, glancing forward at Gio in the driver's seat and Kent in the passenger, and then backwards over our luggage through the back window to see Janeen in the front seat of her little Porsche. "Are you sure you want to come, dad?" I ask, hesitant. He has previously not really been interested in the business side of our family.

"Oh, I'm sure," he says, smiling happily at his grandson. "I'm not letting you all leave me all alone in that house – especially not when I got my new buddy here to hang out with."

I smile a little, looking down at Dominic in the little blue Yankees beanie that my dad mysteriously produced this morning, which of course made me instantly burst into tears.

"I'm glad you're here, dad," I say softly, and my dad reaches out a hand to stroke softly over my hair.

"Me too, Fay," he whispers. "I'll help you out, and the baby will be just fine. Especially when we've got Janeen's nice doctor in the front seat."

I grin at him then, catching the way dad called Gio Janeen's nice doctor. He winks at me, letting me know it was intentional.

I glance in the driver's seat and wonder if that's a blush on Gio's cheek? Or just the pink light of the rising sun.

"All good?" Kent asks, turning from the passenger seat to look at us, his eyes warm and worried at once. "Do you need anything?"

"Nope," I say, smiling at him and doing my best to keep my voice cheerful even though dread curls in me. "Let's hit the road."

Kent just looks at me for a long, fond moment, and then turns back to the front of the car. "Hit it, Gio." And then he leans his head back on the headrest of the car as Gio starts to drive. "Wake me up when we get there."

"Here we go, little baby," I whisper to Dominic, unable to keep the smile from my face as he turns his head towards me. "Baby's first road trip, followed by baby's first mafia negotiation! Big day for you!"

And I can't help but laugh, just a little, as Dominic yawns and closes his eyes, turning his head away as if that's just a little bit too boring for him.

I sigh, content, and then spend the next few hours in and out of a daze, half sleeping, half staring at my beautiful son and chatting with my dad, and all the time worried about what the hell is going to happen next.