

Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

#Chapter 4 - Free Yourself

“I’m just saying,” Janeen says, shrugging as she slides an omelet out onto a plate. “It’s a red flag when a guy doesn’t want to meet her friends and family. I mean, who even *is* this Daniel guy, anyway?”

I stop dead on the stairs hearing these words, just three steps away from the kitchen. I stay still, hoping to hear what Janeen and dad really think.

“*I’m* just saying,” dad says, shrugging in his chair at the table. “I think you should trust Fay a little more. She’s a clever girl.” He turns and looks directly at me. “Aren’t you, kid?”

I scowl, embarrassed to be caught eavesdropping. I take the final steps down into the kitchen and give dad a kiss on the cheek, sitting down in the chair next to him. “I’m smart, but I’m not a *kid* anymore. Time to update the nickname.”

“Never,” he says, smiling at me. “You’re my kiddo forever.”

Janeen brings me a plate of eggs, patting me on the head. Even though we’re not related by blood, she treats me just as any condescending big sister would. I came to live with David and Janeen when David married my mom.

Even after mom died in her car accident only two years after the wedding, David never gave me any reason to think of him as anything besides my dad. I love him just as much as any blood relation. I have no memories of my biological dad and no idea where he is.

“So, what is it about this guy,” Janeen says, settling in her chair across from me. She’s always excited to talk about boys. “There must be something about him, especially because you’ve never called anyone your *boyfriend* before.”

I blush. She’s right but...well, they don’t know yet that my first relationship has already ended in disaster. I’ll make something up in a week or two.

“Well, he’s really sweet to me,” I say, picking up my fork and digging into my eggs. “He’s not like the other boys I met. They’re always so loud and annoying. Daniel is...different. A gentleman,” I say with a small smile.

And as gay as the day is long, I can’t help but adding internally. The smile falls from my face. But really, they don’t need to know that yet. I eat my eggs quickly, eager to get away from the conversation.

“He’s...gentle?” Janeen asks, raising an eyebrow, her voice skeptical. I look up at her, confused, and nod. She laughs. “Oh, poor Fay!”

I put my fork down and sit up straight. “What? What’s wrong with that?”

“What, he only touches you very delicately? Squires you around town?” Her voice is sarcastic here, saying it as if these are bad things. “Talks to you about *books*?”

“Yes?” I say, drawing my brows together, getting a little angry. “What’s wrong with that!?”

“Fay!” she says, leaning forward and laughing. “Come on, don’t you want a guy who gets your *blood* running a little bit? Not someone who gives you a little peck on the cheek, but who throws you down, makes you want to climb all over him like —“

“Ooooookay,” dad says slowly, interrupting her and holding out his hands between us. There’s a smile on his face, though, good natured. “That’s a little more than a dad needs to hear.”

Janeen laughs at this, popping another bite of eggs into her mouth. “Okay, touché, dad, but still. Fay, baby,” she looks at me imploringly. “Are you sure this guy isn’t gay?”

My face floods red at this, a deep blush as I look down at my plate. How the hell did she know?!

“Oh my god,” she says, leaning forward, all eagerness. “Is he!?”

“No!” I protest, stabbing at my eggs with my fork. “He’s —“

But whatever I was going to say is drowned out by Janeen’s roar of laughter.

“Come on, Janeen,” dad says, sternly, after a few moments of this. “I’m sure this Daniel is a great guy.” He looks at me, then, a little pity in his eyes. “Like she says, he’s just a gentleman.”

“Okay, okay,” Janeen says, wiping away tears of mirth. “I just want more for our Fay baby! You deserve passion in your relationship, as well as respect and...book talk, or whatever you do.” She shrugs.

“I’m very happy,” I murmur, finishing my eggs as quick as I can.

“Come down to the club with me,” Janeen says, reaching out and taking my hand. I can tell that she’s trying to make amends. “I’m not working tonight, and we can go have some fun! We’ll get free drinks and you can meet the girls!”

I look up at her, hesitating. I love Janeen, but we live in totally different worlds. While I’ve spent my life at school and coffee shops, Janeen has been a night owl, working at various clubs as a stripper. Not cheap sleazy places, either, but really high-end ones where they respect her work as a kind of art. She’s very talented, and she makes a *ton* of money.

“Come onnnn” she whines. “We’ll get you more in touch with your body, get your blood flowing.” She dances in her chair, showing us some of her moves, ending with a sexy flick of her long purple hair.

I laugh. Janeen has such an effervescent personality, it’s hard not to want to go wherever she’s going. “I’ll think about it,” I say, finishing my plate. “I’ve got some work to do –“

“Work work,” she says, rolling her eyes and scooping up her plate and mine. “You work way too much. Have some *fun*, baby!”

I roll my eyes at her and pat dad on the shoulder as I head into the living room. He picks up his paper, eyes already on the sports section.

When Janeen first got started in her profession, I wondered if it bothered dad. But he just said that there’s no stopping Janeen from doing precisely what she wants, so why not go along with it? “Besides,” he had said. “As long as she respects herself, why should I care if she dances in a thong or a tutu? Let her be happy.”

I smile at the memory, grateful, again, for such a good dad.

In the living room, I open my laptop and open a search engine. My mind drifts to Janeen's idea that I should get more in touch with my body and my instincts. My cheeks grow red and I find myself – bizarrely – typing *Kent Lippert* into the search bar.

I'm surprised by the results. The news channel that dad watches every night calls Lippert the Mafia King, always detailing his dirty deeds, but the sites I'm looking show him standing in front of a tech company in Silicon Valley, calling him the CEO.

Another site lists positive reviews of his many businesses, with employees suggesting that he's a great boss. Still another...god, is that *Brad Pitt* he's shaking hands with in that photo?

I gather my hair in my hands, passively starting to braid it as I look through these results, trying to match it with that ruthless man I met in the prison the other day –

"Whatcha looking at?" Janeen says, flopping onto the couch and grabbing the laptop out of my hands.

"Hey!" I say, snatching at it. "Janeen, give it back!"

"Oooohhhh," she says, scrolling through the photos of Kent on the page.

"Now *this* is a hottie who could light a little fire under *me*, for sure," she says, nodding appreciatively. "Who is this guy?"

"Kent Lippert," I say, hugging my knees to my chest. "I had to interview him at the prison the other day. He was...unnerving."

Janeen flicks her eyes to me, considering. "Did he scare you?"

I shrug. "A little."

She narrows her eyes a bit, snapping the laptop shut. "Okay, that's it. You're coming out with me tonight, baby Fay," she says, coming across the couch to give me a big hug. "You've had a *hard week* with your gay boyfriend and scary Mafia King. You've got to have some fun!"

I laugh, letting her wrap me up. "Okay, okay! Geeze, I'll come."

Little did I know how much these separate aspects of my life would collide in just a few hours.