

## Chapter 61 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Come on,” I say, pulling on Daniel’s sleeve and tugging him towards the back garden. “Let’s talk somewhere quiet.”

Daniel anxiously follows me out the back door, looking behind us to see if anyone’s followed before pulling the door shut. I sit down at the little table and wait for him to join me, my mind spinning as I try to decide what to say and how to say it.

“So?” Daniel asks, sitting tense in the chair beside me.

“Um,” I say, looking down into my coffee. “Your dad knows that someone was in your room with you last night. That you had a ‘midnight visitor.’ And you...well, that you weren’t playing scrabble with them.”

Daniel’s face is grave now and I see him curse under his breath as he looks away from me, his eyes going unfocused as he quickly sorts through the consequences of this development. “But he doesn’t know who?” Daniel asks quietly after a long pause.

“No,” I murmur, watching him closely.

Slowly, Daniel turns his head and looks back at me. “But you do.”

I bite my lip and raise my hands to play with my hair. Before I can touch the end of my red ponytail, though, I realize what I’m doing and carefully fold my hands back in my lap. I just give Daniel one slow nod.

“Damn it,” Daniel curses, breathing out a big breath and looking up at the sky.

I watch the variety of emotions cross his face – worry, fear, frustration, exhaustion - as he figures out what he wants to do next. When he turns his face back to mine, I’m surprised to see that anger has won out.

“You know you can’t tell anyone, right, Fay?” he demands. “That you will ruin my life if you do?”

My mouth falls open a little, shocked at the accusation behind his words. But then I snap my mouth shut, realizing that I did consider doing just that a few minutes ago. But he doesn’t know that – and the fact that he immediately distrusts me pisses me off.

“Daniel,” I snap, leaning forward in my chair. “I would never tell anyone a secret like that – one that could get you and him in big trouble. I can’t believe that you would even think that I would!” I point my hand to my chest now for emphasis. “I’m the one who dragged your father out of the hall last night before he could look through your keyhole, before he could figure out who the hell you were in there with –“

“Is that what you were doing, Fay?” Daniel hisses, leaning forward, suddenly furious with me but eager to keep his voice low. “You were looking through my keyhole? Spying on me?”

I blink in surprise and my mouth falls open again. “Seriously, Daniel? That’s what you want to harp on in this situation? Not the fact that I saved you from your dad figuring out your secret, one that I am continuing to keep, but that I was spying on you? Yeah, I heard noises from your room – I wanted to check and make sure you were okay –“

“Oh, okay, Fay,” Daniel taunts, sarcastic, leaning back in his chair. “You just wanted to check on me, so you leaned down and looked through the keyhole on my door. And do you think, maybe, that the reason my dad was so curious about what was going on in my room was not because of noises he wouldn’t have checked in on, but because he saw you out in the hallway at one in the morning, peeping through my door?”

I snap my mouth shut, glaring at him, realizing that of course he’s right. But still – Daniel has gotten sloppy in these past few months. Why is it my job to keep cleaning up after him, keeping his secret safe?

“Fine,” I snap. “You win, Daniel. I’m sorry for spying on my fiancé when I hear him messing around with his lover in the next room. You’re right. I’m so out of bounds on this one.” I roll my eyes at him.

“What,” Daniel huffs, laughing at my apparent gall. “Are you seriously going to come at me for bringing my boyfriend into my bedroom after you were out all day on a date with Ivan, our family’s enemy? Are we going to get into accusations of cheating here, Fay? Because I’m not sure you stand on solid ground –“

“Oh my god,” I breathe, my eyes going wide as I lean forward in my chair, interrupting his harangue. “He’s your boyfriend?”

Daniel freezes, his own mouth wide as he stares at me, realizing his mistake.

“Really?!” I squeak, my eyes as wide as saucers as his silence answers my question. “Daniel! That’s –“

But I don’t get a chance to tell Daniel what I think about his relationship because the door to the kitchen bangs open. And there, filling the doorway with his muscular frame, is Daniel’s dad. Silent, we both turn towards him, taking in the irritation on his face.

“Finally,” Kent breathes, crossing his arms over his chest. “I’ve been looking all over for you two. Come on.” He nods his head towards the house behind him, indicating that he wants us to follow. He waits for us to both stand up from our chairs before turning away, leaving the door open behind him.

Daniel starts towards it but I grab his hand, stopping him before he can go into the house.

“Daniel,” I whisper, my eyes darting anxiously towards the door. “Whatever happens in there – just remember that I’m on your side, okay?”

“Fay,” he murmurs, frowning, turning back to me. “Why are you telling me this? What am I missing?”

I bite my lip, still glancing between him and the door. I can’t read Kent right now – have no idea, really, what he’s going to do – or reveal – when the three of us are alone in his office. And despite the fact that I caught Daniel with his lover last night, and the two of us aren’t exactly faithful to each other as far as fiancés go, I think it will kill him if he finds out that his dad kissed me last night.

And that...well, that I kind of let him do it.

“Just...” I hesitate, looking up into his green eyes. “Let’s just be on each other’s team, okay Daniel?” I plead, still hanging on to his hand.

In response, he gives my hand a squeeze. “Okay, Fay,” he says, smiling a little and pulling me towards the house. “You’re right. I’m on your side.”

I smile too, relieved, and follow him into the house, still holding his hand. Kent isn’t in the kitchen when we look around.

But Jerome is.

He locks eyes with Daniel, and then glances to me, and then to our joined hands. I can’t help the little laugh that bursts from me at this, even though Daniel gives me a dirty look for it. It’s just all gotten so ridiculously complicated, it’s absurd. I never thought I’d be in a situation where I run into my gay fiancé’s lover in the kitchen on the way to have a tough conversation with his dad, the mafia boss I made out with last night.

Jerome just points at the door at the other end of the kitchen, towards the hallway and Kent’s office. Daniel nods, pulling me in that direction, rolling his eyes at me as I work to suppress my giggles.

Honestly, can it get any weirder than this? I think, giving Daniel’s hand a squeeze and following him through the kitchen door.

If only I had known then just how foolish I was to think that it couldn’t.

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The door to Kent's office is wide open when Daniel and I arrive, so we step in, still holding hands. Daniel pushes it closed behind us and I spend a little longer than necessary looking at the dark wood of the closed door, remembering what had happened there only a few hours ago.

When I turn to look at Kent, I anxiously take a step closer to Daniel's side. Is Kent seriously going to tell Daniel what happened last night? I hope, fervently, that he won't. Daniel would feel so betrayed, and I can't hurt him like that.

But Kent gives nothing away, standing there behind his desk, his arms characteristically crossed over the hard muscles of his chest. My eyes flit over his body and I despite myself I can't help remembering the hard contours of his form pressed against mine – the feel of him hard and ready for me –

I gulp, dragging my eyes back up to his stern face, refusing to let my mind go there.

"Come," Kent demands, glancing towards the two chairs set in front of his desk. "Sit."

Daniel and I do as we are ordered, walking quickly across the room and settling ourselves in the chairs. He gives my palm a little pulse with his fingers before dropping my hand, silently letting me know that our agreement still stands, that we're on each other's side.

God, I hope that by the end of this meeting that's still true. Anxious, I fold my hands in my lap.

"We have decisions to make," Kent says sternly, looking first at Daniel, and then at me. "After Fay's embarrassing display yesterday," he continues, fixing his eyes on me, "I frankly don't see any point in going forward with this charade of an engagement."

My mouth drops open in shock and I hear Daniel give a little cry of protest.

Kent holds up a hand, though, silencing him and continuing. "It's not as if you, Daniel," Kent says, "have done very much to ensure her fidelity. I'm aware that the two of you don't have much of a romantic connection, and I've never cared about that, but you've certainly taken no pains to ensure that your bride is content enough to keep in line."

I glance over at Daniel and see that he's blushing at this, chagrined.

“We can be better,” I hear myself blurt, speaking without thinking. “Daniel and I will spend more time together – we’ll make sure that we’re seen in public, having fun, being...being romantic...”

I bite my lip, wondering, really, how much it will take to wipe the memory of my date with Ivan from people’s minds. But then, at the thought of Ivan, my stomach turns over a bit. Despite his betrayal, his public display of what I thought was a secret date, I have to admit that I am attracted to him.

Is this really what I want? To be tied to Daniel in a loveless relationship, when someone like Ivan...

My eyes travel to Kent, then, too. Tied to Daniel when someone like Kent...

“No,” Kent answers, interrupting my train of thought, his voice low and flat. “Too much damage has been done. Your relationship is a laughing stock now. It’s dead.” He flicks his eyes to Daniel then. “I’ll find you a new bride, soon. One a little more manageable than this one.”

I blush at this, looking down at my hands, feeling terribly guilty. I had thought it was just a date with Ivan – a little freedom. I hadn’t realized how much I was ruining.

“Dad,” Daniel says, leaning forward in his chair, “this can’t be the end of it – I like Fay – she’s precisely the girl I want to marry –“

“It’s done, Daniel,” Kent intones, dismissive, looking down at a thin document on his desk. “Forget it. Move on. I’ll arrange for your first date with an appropriate girl sometime this week.” Daniel apparently forgotten, Kent shoves the document in my direction, looking directly at me.

“You’re still an important person in this world, Fay,” he says coolly, and I feel myself surprised to hear him admit what I’ve long suspected. That my relationship with the family means something to him. “I’d still like to have you formally tied to the Lippert family, to be known and understood as one of mine. Here is the offer I’d like to make you, in exchange for your allegiance.”

I hesitate, glancing at Daniel before reaching forward and taking the document off the desk. I page through it, not understanding most of the legal wording there, until I get to the third page which details...

“Oh my god,” I stammer, my eyes going wide as I look up at Kent in disbelief. “Is this – is this for real?”

Slowly, Kent nods, studying me. “Yes, Fay. One million dollars a year, and the purchase of your childhood home with the deed immediately signed over to your adoptive father. Plus, the purchase and gift of a beach house, in your name, so you can spend your spare time there with your dad, your sister. Anyone you choose. I don’t care which house – you can pick it.”

My jaw drops open to hear him confirm what I saw on the paper. I take a moment to digest this in silence, my eyes fixed on Kent, his on me.

“What – what do you want from me?” I ask quietly. “What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to turn on your father,” he answers. “Quietly, discreetly, so that I can wipe out his power in this world and take it for myself. I’ll direct your every move, don’t worry. But in particular, I want you to continue your relationship with Ivan, to convince him to leave Alden and ally with me instead.”

I blink in shock, staring up at his audacity. But, frankly, it’s – it’s brilliant...

“Fay,” Daniel protests, worried. “Don’t do it – don’t get involved in this, it’s too dangerous - I can give you more, keep you safe –“

“Do you have a pen?” I interrupt, my eyes on Kent. Kent pulls a pen from a cup on his desk and slides it across the desk to me. Daniel tries to grab it first, but I swat his hand away, snagging the pen and hastily signing my name to the bottom of the fourth page.

“Fay,” Daniel moans, putting his head in his hands. “What did you just do –“

“It’s everything I’ve ever wanted, Daniel,” I explain, turning apologetic eyes to him. “A way to help my family, to stand on my own two feet, to mark my allegiance with this family. And you and I – we can still be – but we can...” I hesitate, not knowing how to say it all just now.

But I shake my head, dismissing it, instead turning my eyes to Kent now, grateful for this gift. “Thank you, Kent,” I say, meaning every word. “I’ll do everything I can. Thank you.”

He nods, his face stern, but I swear I see something flicker behind his eyes. A softness I don’t usually see there.

Daniel pushes his chair back hard as he gets to his feet, storming towards the door. “I’ll never forgive you for this, Dad,” he asserts, staring hard at his father as he yanks the door open. “She was mine, the only one I had on my side, and you took her from me.”

I feel guilt roil in my stomach as I realize, suddenly, that he’s right. We entered this room promising each other that we’d be a team, and at the first hint of money and freedom...I abandoned him.

I lower my eyes in shame as Daniel slams the door shut behind him.

“Don’t,” Kent says, his voice soft.

I look up at him, confused.

“Don’t let him make you feel bad for doing what’s right for you,” he insists, his voice steady. “You made the right choice, Fay. And I’ll take care of you. I won’t let you get hurt.”

I nod, agreeing, but still...Daniel was the only friend I had in this house, really. Was I totally alone now?

“Besides,” Kent continues, producing a second document from the top drawer of the desk. “We’re not finished with our business today.”

I frown, leaning forward and picking up the document. What else could there possibly be? I glance over it, frowning, not understanding the meaning. It looked like a basic non-disclosure agreement, but...

“What’s it for?” I ask, looking up at him.

“It’s a contract, Fay.” Kent explains slowly. “For an additional service I’d like you to perform. One that will be...quite lucrative.”

I return my eyes to the contract, blinking in shock at the astronomical number I see printed on the second page. “What – what for?” I ask, meeting his eyes again. “What do you want me to do?”

Kent places his hands evenly on his desk, his muscular shoulders rolling as he leans across it to bring his face closer to mine. His green eyes flash with hunger as he stares into my eyes.

“I want you to be my mistress, Fay.”

I go stock still when I hear the words, completely unable to move, to react. His eyes hold mine for a moment and then rove lower, to my mouth, my chest, my legs crossed neatly in the chair before dragging slowly back to my face. “And I’m willing to pay handsomely for the privilege.”

/Chapter 63 – Insults

## Chapter 63 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Kent can’t help enjoying the way his stomach twists when he sees Fay like that, frozen in the chair before him, her mouth slightly agape, her sapphire eyes wide with shock. A curl of her unruly red hair has fallen loose of its messy ponytail and into her face. He presses his hands harder against the desk, avoiding the ridiculous urge to reach forward and brush it behind her ear.

He knew she’d react like this, of course – he’d arranged it so she would. Yes, he made all of his previous girlfriends sign NDA’s, and he’d treated their relationships in many ways as business

relationships. However, he'd never started the relationship that way. The fact was that he'd lost control too many times with this girl – that disaster of an interrogation in the basement, punching that kid at the stables –

Even kissing her last night – it had had the desired effect of showing her that he was in control, but damn it, had he even meant for it to go that far? He had wanted to keep kissing her, had had to tear himself away.

No, he had to get control back. Now. And he had learned that shock and embarrassment was one way to knock Fay off her game. He won either way in this situation – if she refused him, he'd have put her in her place. But, on the rare chance that she agreed to it...

Well. Two birds with one stone.

Fay was still staring at him, completely blindsided, as he leaned further forward across the desk. "It's a good deal Fay," he assured her, holding her gaze. "Almost as good as the one I gave Fiona. You should take it."

His words wake her up then, a little pulse passing through her as she blinks and focuses on him. Suddenly, rage lights her face and she crumples the contract in her hands. Kent can't help the smirk that quirks the corners of his lips. Frankly, he likes her all riled up.

"You pig," she snarls, pushing her chair away from her as she jumps to her feet. "I would never be your whore – never –"

"Not a whore, Fay," Kent interrupts, standing up and crossing his arms, looking at her levelly. "It's a position with respect – just with some legal ties attached, and some financial incentives for you. I've done this many times and the women with whom I've had previous contracts will tell you that it was a generous arrangement -"

"Oh?" she bites back. "Would Fiona say that? Fiona, who showed up in my room at midnight with a black eye? Would she call you generous?"

Kent lowers his brows at her, letting her know she's on dangerous ground "Fiona betrayed me, Fay. I would not suggest you follow her path."

"Oh, I don't think you have to worry about that," she snaps, her eyes narrowed in rage. "I would never be your girlfriend. Not in a million years."

He smiles at her magnanimously, leaning forward and speaking in kind tones, like you would to a child. "You're upset, Fay. Why don't you take some time to think it over? Really consider the offer."

She says nothing, just glares at him like she'd like to rip his heart out before spinning and stalking from the room.



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I could kill him, I think, my teeth clenched, my lips pressed to a thin line. Absolutely murder him. My eyes flick to the kitchen door as I storm towards the garage. For a second I think about all the sharp knives in that kitchen that would help me do the job, but then I push the thought out of my mind. Kent deserves a far worse death than that. Something medieval. Boiled alive in a vat of tar, or –

I slam into someone's chest as I push through the door to the garage, someone trying to come into the house just as I'm leaving it. I give a little shriek, pulled from my murderous thoughts and whipping my head up to see –

My frown deepens when I see who is standing before me.

Jerome.

"Fay!" he gasps, reaching out his hands to steady me after almost knocking me over. "Are you okay? What are you –"

"You're an asshole too!" I shout, pushing his hands off my shoulders and impulsively shoving him in the chest. He stumbles a few steps back, his face shocked.

"Wha – what?" he asks, his brows drawn together. "What did I –"

"You know what you did," I snap, advancing on him and pointing an accusing finger in his face. "You pretended to like me – you flirted with me, and this whole time you were sleeping with –"

"Fay!" Jerome hisses, looking around wildly and lunging forward to grab my arm. "Would you shut up?"

I press my lips shut, feeling suddenly guilty as I realize that in my rage I almost betrayed Daniel for the second time today. Jerome is right – in this house, you never know who is listening. Still, it doesn't make him any less of a dick.

"Get off of me," I demand, my teeth clenched as I shake his hand free. "And get me keys to one of the cars!"

"What?" He asks, baffled.

"Do it!" I shout, completely losing my cool and feeling tears prick at the corners of my eyes, which I slam shut. I have to get out of here – I have to leave this horrible place, where I'm constantly tricked, and lied to, and insulted, and offered obscene amounts of money to – to -

"Fay," Jerome's voice is gentle after a moment of hesitation and I open my eyes to look at him. Concern is written all over his face. "I'm so sorry, Fay – please –"

I can't help the tears that slide down my face then, and I feel all of the strength go out of me. "Please, Jerome," I beg, shaking my head. "Just get me the keys – I need to get out of here –"

He hesitates, glancing towards the door, but then he nods. "All right, Fay," he agrees, perhaps feeling bad for wrapping me up in his lies. "Just – don't run away forever. He'll find you. Just - take the Prius, and go somewhere and cool down."

"Fine," I mutter, brushing my hands across my cheeks to clear my tears. Jerome nods and goes over to the metal case where the keys to all the cars are kept, unlocking it and handing me a set. "The purple one, in the corner," he says gently. "Can you...can you drive?"

"Yes of course I can drive," I mumble, glaring at him again. God, why does everyone in this house treat me like I'm so stupid? I walk away from him without a backwards glance, climbing into the car at the end of the row and opening the garage door with the little button on the roof.

When I get to the gates at the front of Kent's estate, they instantly begin to roll open for me. I grit my teeth as I watch them open the path to my escape angry because I know Kent is letting me go. It wouldn't be hard for him to lock these gates, to prevent me from leaving. But instead he's sending me a subtle message.

He's fine with it if I steal his car and leave without another word.

He knows I'll be back.

## Chapter 64 – Sisterly advice

# Chapter 64 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Half an hour later, I'm pounding up the front steps to my childhood home and throwing open the screen door. I twist the doorknob and push on the wooden door behind it, expecting it to fall open with its familiar creak, but I bump against it when it fails to open. Tears start to slide down my cheeks again as I suddenly realize that it's locked. Of course it is - we always lock the door in this neighborhood – and I don't have my keys because they're sitting in my old purse, which is back at Kent's house.

I lean against the door with a heavy sigh, closing my eyes and letting myself cry more. It's all just too much –

Suddenly, I fall inwards as the door opens.

"Who..." Janeen says, and then gives a little gasp as I stumble into the house. "Fay!" she cries, her hands immediately on my arms, steadying me. "Are you all right? What's –" But as soon as I

turn my tear-stained face up to hers, she wraps me in a hug and holds me close. “Oh, baby,” she coddles, “baby, don’t cry! It’s okay! What’s wrong?”

I don’t say anything for a little while, just letting my sister hold me tight while I cry my heart out. She obliges me, shushing me softly and making comfortable noises until I’m finished. When my tears start to lessen, she gently peels me off her, crouching down to look in my face. “Fay,” she whispers, shaking her head at me in wonder. “What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

I sniff, wiping at my nose and looking around the house. “Is dad home?”

She shakes her head. “No, he went out with his buddies. He won’t be back for a while.”

“Good,” I say, nodding. “I don’t want him to know.”

“Know what?” Janeen begs, her eyes going wider with wonder. I can tell she’s as intrigued as she is worried.

“Come on,” I say, taking her hand and nodding towards the couch. “I’ll tell you everything –“

“Nooo,” she says, digging in her feet and not letting me pull her into the living room. “With tears like that, we’re having this talk over vodka.” She gives me a wide-eyed look like I’m crazy for wanting to do this sober and I can’t help the little laugh that bubbles out of me.

“Okay,” I nod, heading into the living room while she goes to the freezer and pulls out a bottle, starting to mix our drinks. Janeen takes her vodka simply, with a twist of lemon, but she adds a little orange juice to mine, knowing I need something sweet to cut the bite. As she works I sink into one corner of our old couch, taking a deep breath and looking down at the crumpled contract still clutched in my hand.

Janeen places our glasses on the coffee table next to us before taking her familiar spot on the other side of the couch, her back against the arm, our feet mingling in the space between us. “Well?” she asks. I don’t say anything, just toss the crumpled paper at her so that it lands in her lap. “What’s this?” she murmurs, unfolding it and frowning.

“My engagement to Daniel is over,” I inform her, my voice dead and expressionless. She looks up at me in sudden shock. “I made a deal with Kent to...work for him. Turn Ivan against my dad and towards him. In exchange, you’re getting this house. And a beach house.”

“We’re getting a beach house!?” Her eyes go eagerly wide. But I just purse my lips and glare at her, reminding her that I’m distraught.

“Oh, yeah,” she murmurs, rolling her eyes a little. “So sorry that your fake engagement to your gay ex ended, Fay, I was really rooting for you two –“

“Janeen!” I whine, kicking her a little. “Can you take this seriously! I’m upset!”

“Okay,” she sighs, and I see real apology on her face. “I’m sorry, Fay – you’re right. It just seems like maybe this is kind of a sweet deal. I mean, I know you weren’t pumped about that engagement, not really, so what’s the downside? Is it really dangerous?”

“That’s not the bad part,” I say, covering my eyes with my hand. “I was fine with all of that – I signed that contract eagerly.”

I hear my sister flick through the contract to the end. “Well,” she mutters, “this one isn’t signed...”

“Because that’s Kent’s second offer,” I say plainly, trying to keep my voice even as I peek through my fingers at her. Janeen quirks her head to the side, looking at me. “That’s the NDA he wants me to sign. When he pays me an insane amount of money to become his mistress.”

Janeen’s mouth slowly drops open into an exaggerated O as she stares at me for a moment. And then I almost leap out of my seat when she lets out a convulsive shriek of victory. “Yes! I knew it!” she shouts, pumping her hands in the air, the contract flapping as she waves it around. “I knew he was into you – I knew he wasn’t buying you fucking horses for nothing –“

“Janeen!” I gasp, shocked at her and a little appalled. “He has not been into me this whole time –“

“Oh come on, Fay,” she says, cackling with laughter and giving me a look that plainly says you naïve little baby. “He has been into you since the moment he met you – you don’t get carried out of strip clubs on someone’s shoulder just because they think you’re a poor stray kitten who needs some help.”

I frown at her, crossing my arms defensively across my stomach. But...damn it. My eyes flick to the side as I realize I have no defense here – I have been aware of...something...between Kent and I. And it’s been brewing for –

“Seeee,” she teases, leaning forward and pointing her finger at me. “You know it too!” She grabs her drink off the table and takes a swig, falling back laughing. “Oh, this is the best! I fucking love being right.”

Frustrated, I inhale deeply through my nose as I glare at her and grab my own drink off the table, taking a sip. “Well?” I bite out. “Just because he’s...into me...” I flick my hand, skipping over the details, “doesn’t solve this problem for me. What the hell am I supposed to do?”

Janeen’s laughter fades a little bit and she considers me for a moment, taking another slow sip of her drink. I wait patiently, watching her, wondering what’s going on in her mind.

“Well, Fay?” she asks quietly, leaning forward a little. “What do you want to do?”

“What do you mean?” I ask, hesitating and shrinking away from her a little, not liking the clever gleam in her eyes.

“I meannnn,” she says, smirking and drawing out the word. “Do you want to fuck him too?”

My mouth falls open and I blush terribly, making her dissolve into laughter again.

“You totally do!” she shouts, holding her drink up in triumph. “I knew it – I fucking knew it Fay –“

“Janeen!” I cry, kicking her sharply this time, but she just kicks me back. “Would you take this seriously?” I beg, and she calms down when she sees the very real worry on my face. She takes a deep breath, clearly working hard to contain her glee and look at me seriously, letting me continue.

“Janeen,” I mutter, looking down into my glass and feeling just as overwhelmed and upset and ashamed as I felt in Kent’s office. “I can’t – I can’t be his whore – I would never –“

“Whoa, whoa,” Janeen says, leaning forward and putting a hand on top of mine. “Who said whore, Fay? Did he call you a whore?”

I shake my head no, still looking down into my drink. “No, he said mistress – or girlfriend with financial incentives – but isn’t it the same –“

“Baby,” Janeen murmurs kindly, interrupting me and coming close to slide an arm around my shoulders. I stop talking and look at her, desperately wanting her advice. She looks fondly at me and taps her near-empty glass against my full one. “Come on, put that down the hatch,” she says, nodding towards my drink. “Then I’ll pour you another and talk you through this.”

I nod and she watches fondly as I drain my glass, smirking at the little shudder that passes through me. “Good girl,” she murmurs, giving me a squeeze. “Come on – you came to the right place. Big sis will fix everything.”

Chapter 65 – Getting Precisely What You Want

## Chapter 65 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Janeen seats me at the kitchen table while she fixes us both another drink. When she slides into the seat across from me, her face is gentler and more considerate than it was before. I sigh, grateful for it – Janeen has always teased me, and I don’t really care about that, but this is the big sister I came to see. The one who I know has my back through anything.

“Fay,” she starts gently. “Does this contract make you feel like a whore?”

“Um,” I hesitate, awkward, but really considering her question. “I guess...that was my knee jerk reaction? That he was asking me to be his whore, to pay me for sex?”

“And would that be a...bad thing?” she asks carefully, her hands wrapped around her drink. “To be paid for sex?”

I blush as I look away from my sister, realizing that I might have done something very wrong here. I mean, my sister doesn't get paid to have sex with people – at least, I don't think she does – but she's certainly in an industry that has no shame about taking men's money in exchange for turning them on.

“It's okay, Fay,” Janeen encourages me softly. “You can tell me what you think, you won't hurt my feelings.”

“Well,” I reply, turning back to her. “I guess – no, I don't think it's a bad thing. I don't have any problem with sex work, as long as women are respected when they do it and aren't exploited. I'm just not sure that it's something I've ever imagined myself doing.” I look down at my drink, feeling a little ashamed and not quite knowing why.

“To begin,” Janeen declares, her voice soft, “I don't think that this is sex work. I don't think Kent is asking you to be a hooker. That's a much more defined arrangement – sex exclusively in exchange for money. This contract,” she says, pointing at it, “actually doesn't say anything about sex.”

“It doesn't?” I sit up and look towards it suddenly, curious. I mean, I hadn't read it closely, but...

“No, Fay,” Janeen says quietly. “What he seems to be asking you for here is discretion. It sounds like he wants to be involved with you, romantically and sexually, but he wants to control the terms and he'd like you not to blab to the press or his enemies about it. And in exchange for your discretion, he'd like to give you, well,” she laughs a little here, running a hand through her hair as she stares at the number on the page, “a ridiculous amount of money. Like seriously, Fay, if you turn this down ask him if he's interested in me because I would take half of this amount to –”

“Janeen,” I scold, frowning at her and snatching the contract away.

“See?” she quips, smirking at me and lifting her drink to her mouth. “You like him. You don't like me putting his name in my mouth.”

“Amongst other things,” I murmur, glaring at her, and she laughs, taking a swig and returning her glass to the table.

“Fay,” she continues as I take a sip of my own drink, looking over the contract. “What it all comes down to is what you want. Because it sounds like you're already deep within this world, and I think,” she gives me a careful look here, inviting me to tell her she's wrong, “that you like

it there. That you want to stay in it. Because if you don't, we can pawn that gigantic engagement ring right now and get you on the next plane to Belize."

I blink at her, wondering what she's talking about, and then look down at my hand to realize that I'm still wearing Daniel's engagement ring. I stare at it, shocked, and realize that she's right – right about all of it. That I could run, if I wanted to, but ...

Damn it, but I don't want to. A huge part of me knows that it would be the smart thing to do, but the other part of me...

I look my sister in the eye. "You're right," I say, a little grim. "I don't know what it is about this world, Janeen. But I'm not ready to leave it yet."

She shrugs. "I get it. I'm a stripper. Everything logical tells me that this is not a career path that's viable forever, that's not going to get me a white picket fence and the American dream. But honestly, that's not what I want anyway. Baby, you have to figure out what you want."

I bite my lip, looking up at my sister through my lashes, a little ashamed of myself as I finally admit to myself what I want. What I've wanted for weeks now.

Janeen steadily holds my gaze. "You want him."

Slowly, I nod.

Her face falls a little with sadness and worry. "It's not...the easy path, Fay," she says, reaching a hand across the table and taking mine. "But I get it." She wrinkles her nose at me. "He's really hot."

I burst out laughing at this, squeezing my sister's hand and pressing my other to my face, covering my eyes. "Oh my god, Janeen," I laugh. "You have to stop saying stuff like that."

"What!" she cries, laughing harder. "If he were really ugly I would tell you to go, but come on Fay, at least he looks like someone who is going to rip your panties off and –"

"Janeen!" I gasp, ripping my hand from my face and glaring at her.

"Oh Fay," she says, letting my hand go and sitting back in her chair. "What do you think you two are going to do, play checkers?" She rolls her eyes again.

I sigh, ignoring her and sitting back in my chair, staring at the table.

"It's a good deal, Fay," she says, gentle again. "I mean, the way this is headed, it sounds like you were going to fuck him anyway. May as well get something from it."

"But how do I do it?" I sigh, slumping in my chair and feeling defeated. "I mean, if I did decide to do this – Janeen, I'm not as brave or savvy as you," I shake my head. "I have no idea how to

play this, how to make this world give me what I want. I'm afraid – I'm afraid it's going to eat me alive."

I cover my eyes with my hand again, overwhelmed.

"I don't know, Fay," Janeen replies, and I can hear the smirk in her voice. "It sounds to me like you made the mafia king want to bone you so badly that he called off your engagement to his son and offered you a horse, a beach house, and millions of dollars just to get in your pants." I snap my gaze up at her, again shocked.

She just cocks her head to the side and smiles at me. "Whatever you're doing," she says, raising her glass. "Maybe keep doing it."

"Yeah," I say, laughing a little and wrapping my hand around my own drink. "Maybe I can get a private jet next."

We both grin at each other as our eyes meet, though I roll mine. She doesn't, and instead holds her glass out to me in invitation. After a second of hesitation, I clink mine against it.

"Whatever you decide, Fay," she says happily. "I support you. But whatever you do, don't forget that you're doing this for you. Not for him. When it stops serving you? Get out."

I nod to her seriously, grateful for her wise advice.

And then I drain my glass, leaning forward across the table to ask my sister to help me plan my next steps.

Chapter 66 – A Queen's Gambit

## Chapter 66 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

It's almost dark that evening when I pull up to the gates to Kent's estate. I spent the day with Janeen, planning my next steps, letting the sound of her laughter and warm advice wash over me like a healing balm. I also let her curl my hair into sexy waves and exchange my slouchy sweater and leggings for a pair of tight jeans and a turtleneck, all black. She spent some time doing my makeup too, transforming me into the smokey-eyed femme fatale I felt I needed to be to take this next step.

The gates slide open without hesitation and I pull the car through. Instead of heading around the back of the house to the garages, though, I curve around the driveway and park directly before the front door. I take a moment to steel myself and then step out, looking towards the guard I know will be standing by the door at the top of the steps.



I don't let my surprise register when I see that it's Jerome standing there. Instead, I keep my face blank as I walk slowly up to the door and calmly hand him the keys to the Prius I borrowed that morning.

"Next time," I say softly, holding his eye. "I'm taking the Lexus."

He blinks at me, shock and confusion on his face, but I brush past, opening the door myself and leaving it ajar as I walk calmly into the house.

I head directly for Kent's office, knowing he'll be there. I don't bother to knock before I open the door.

He turns his head, glaring, opening his mouth to admonish whoever is interrupting him, but he goes silent when he sees me standing there, my arms crossed over my chest, a set of papers folded in my hand.

I don't say anything as I cross the room to him. Kent just closes his mouth, watching me as I walk. I hold his gaze as I stop before him, my expression blank. Then, slowly, I lean forward and place the signed contract on the desk in front of him.

"I'm ready when you are," I purr, looking him directly in the eye.

Then, without another word, I turn and leave him alone in his shocked silence.

As soon as I leave Kent's office, I head right for the kitchen, hurrying my steps. Janeen and I had planned every moment of that – parking at the front of the house, demanding a better car from the guard, delivering the contract to Kent and what I would say as I did it. But now that that's all done I don't have a script anymore and I feel my nerves coming back.

What I know I want is a big glass of wine to take upstairs with me, because I have a feeling Kent isn't going to let this rest tonight and I definitely want something to calm me down before –

I stop in my tracks as soon as I enter the kitchen. Daniel's sitting right there, at our breakfast table, reading a book.

Shit. Daniel.

Honestly, I'd forgotten all about him.

He looks up at me and instantly closes his book, coming over to me. "Fay!" he breathes, relief all over his face as he takes my hand. "Are you all right? Where have you been all day?"

"Um," I say, my eyes darting away from him. "I went to see my sister –"

"Good," he says, nodding. "I'm glad you got some time away. Are you all right?"

I look up at him, biting my lip and nodding shallowly.

“Good!” he insists, looking at me eagerly. “Fay, there’s no reason we can’t turn this around – we don’t have to listen to him, we can tear up that contract you signed this morning and start our engagement again, on our own terms.”

“Um,” I hesitate, pulling my hand from his. “Daniel?”

He stops, looking at me curiously. “What is it, Fay?”

But I lose courage, folding my arms awkwardly over my chest. “Nothing,” I murmur. “Actually, I’m not feeling well. I think I’m just gonna...”

Daniel takes a slow step away from me, putting his hands in his pockets. “Of course, Fay,” he murmurs, his voice worried. “Whatever you need.”

I give him a little half smile and then head to the fridge, taking out a bottle of wine and grabbing a glass from the counter. I don’t look at him again as I scurry out the door, though I can feel his eyes on me.

“Coward,” I hiss, cursing myself as I hurry up the stairs. Damn it, at the first trial of this new, powerful me I totally collapsed. I dart into my room, pressing the door closed and taking a deep breath, closing my eyes as I steel myself.

I know that I owe Daniel more than that. But damn it, Janeen and I didn’t plan what I was going to say to him, and he caught me by surprise. But I could do it – I figure out the best way to break it to him that I was leaving him for his dad –

“Oh my god,” I mutter, flying open. God damn it, but this was so ridiculous.

I move across the room then, opening the bottle of wine and pouring myself a big glass. This was Janeen’s advice too – a drink for courage, but not so much that I get sloppy. There was, apparently, a fine balance. But I drink the glass of wine quickly, my hands shaking a little as I glance towards the door.

I don’t know if I’m going to be able to find that balance tonight.

I pull a new phone out of my back pocket – one that Janeen gave me this afternoon, one of her “burners,” she called it, that she usually uses to text her married clients from the club who want a little more anonymity.

Kent took away my phone when I first got here, but things are different now. I’m not his son’s fiancé who needs protection anymore. I work for him now – not just as his girlfriend, but as his spy. And as such, I’m entitled to certain freedoms. Like texting my sister whenever I want.

I send her a quick text now, hoping she can give me a little courage. My stomach is all tied in knots.

Fay: Here now – part one of the plan went just as we want it to! Now, just sitting in my room waiting for him to respond??

A few seconds later, her reply beeps through.

Janeen: You've got this, little sis! Remember – it's about what you want. Don't let him pressure you into moving faster than you want to. Make him wait.

I nod to myself, bolstered by her words. That's right. It's about me now. And I may have agreed to be his – his mistress –

God, I've got to stop getting nauseous when I think that word -

But he does not have any right to make me feel –

I jump as a knock sounds on the door and freeze, my eyes going wide. Oh my god. Was that him? Does he want to...

I hesitate, waiting, but another knock doesn't come. I put my wine glass down and slowly walk to the door.

"Hello?" I whisper, sounding more anxious than I want to. But no reply comes.

I lean down to peak through the keyhole in my door, but I don't see anyone standing there. Curious, I twist the knob and slowly pull it open.

Outside my door sits a white box tied with a red satin ribbon. I look up and down the hallway but there's no one there. I quickly snatch the box, pulling it to my chest as I slam the door closed and lean back against it, my breath coming quickly.

Then, my curiosity getting the better of me, I hurry to my bed, quickly untying the ribbon and pulling the top off the box.

I go still when I see that inside there is nothing but a confection of black lace. My blood turns to ice as I run my fingers over it, realizing what it means. As I lift it out of the box, trying to figure out precisely what kind of lingerie it is, a little card falls from one of the folds.

Dropping the fabric, I grab at the tiny piece of cardstock, unfolding it.

The message is very simple.

Put this on with your black Prada pumps. I'll be there in fifteen minutes.

I cover my mouth in shock, shaking my head back and forth as I read it again and again.

Fifteen minutes?

And then what?

Chapter 67 – Fifteen Minutes Later

## Chapter 67 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

About fourteen minutes later, I study myself in the mirror, my stomach a mess of butterflies.

I'm better than I was about twelve minutes ago, though, when I'd been sitting on the floor drinking directly from the bottle of wine, hissing desperately into the phone to my sister while she tried talk me down. Luckily, the combination of alcohol and sister logic eventually pulled me together.

"Get your ass up," Janeen had ordered me, "put on that little outfit, and take charge. You're the boss, Fay, not him."

"Right," I had gritted through my teeth. "Except he's a literal mob boss. And I'm just –"

"Nope," she had interrupted. "Not today. Today you're Fay, mob mistress, who gets precisely what she wants. Right?"

"Right," I had growled, briskly hanging up the phone and grabbing the scrab of lace before heading for the bathroom.

Honestly? It looks really good on me, I think, turning to admire the way the cheeky little bottom of the lace teddy curves around my ass. I look – well, way sexier than I thought I would.

Suddenly, a light knock comes at the door and my eyes go wide.

Shit. My fifteen minutes are up.

"Just a second!" I call, diving for the bed and grabbing the requested Prada shoes from their place on the duvet. Then, pulling them on, I kick the empty lingerie box under my bed and turn towards the door.

I take a moment to close my eyes and take a deep breath.

You're the boss, Fay, I tell myself, my heart pounding in my ribcage. You're in charge. Not him.

The knock comes again.

I open my eyes.

“Come in,” I call. My voice shocks me by coming out calmer, deeper than I expected.

Slowly, the door opens and I see his figure standing there, silhouetted against the bright light of the hall. That’s when I realize that I’m standing in complete darkness – apparently the sun had gone down completely while I’ve been in here. My eyes had just adjusted to the dark.

Kent pauses, looking into the dark room, and then flicks a light switch by the door, turning on two dim sconces that hang on either side of my bed. The room is suddenly suffused with a pale orange light. My eyes go wide in it, seeing him standing there, one hand tucked neatly in his pocket.

We just stare at each other for a moment, neither saying anything, and then Kent steps into the room and quietly closes the door.

My stomach turns over and I do my best to control my breathing, to not let Kent see the anxiety roiling beneath my skin. He slowly crosses the room to stand before me, a jungle cat prowling towards some curiosity it finds in the forest.

“Good evening, Fay,” he murmurs, looking down into my face, reaching out a hand to brush a curl back from my shoulder. “You look lovely tonight.”

Something about the possession in his gaze riles me, and I’m glad of it. I’d rather be pissed off than terrified. I raise my chin and look boldly up at him.

“Do you like the outfit you’ve chosen for me? Does it meet your standards?”

He takes a minute to consider me before he replies. “No more or less than everything else I choose for you to wear.”

“Really,” I hear myself ask, raising an eyebrow. “This outfit...pleases you? The same amount as everything else I wear?”

He cocks his head to the side, looking down at my body, his eyes lingering on my breasts that are delicately cradled by the underwire of my bustier.

“You look beautiful in everything you wear, Fay,” he replies, taking a step back from me. He snaps his eyes up to meet mine, though, almost making me jump. “And the answer is yes, if what you’re really asking is if I want to fuck you no matter what you’re wearing.”

My breath catching in shock at this blunt admission of his desire. But he ignores me, returning to his study of my body, my clothes. Despite his words, he looks at me like a connoisseur, not a lover.

“Would you turn around for me?” he asks calmly. “I’d like to see the full effect.”

I oblige him, slowly turning around for him to see me from all sides. When I turn to face him again, his eye are locked on mine.

“Beautiful,” he says. “Stunning, Fay. Thank you.”

I don’t know what to say, so I don’t say anything. I just standing before him, trying not to let my knees shake.

The threat of that only increases when he takes two steps towards me, placing one hand on my waist, his other tilting my chin up towards him.

“Are you sure about this, Fay?” Kent whispers, his voice a caress. “Because if this is just an attempt to call my bluff – I promise you. There is no bluff.”

I’m sure he can feel me trembling now that his hands are on me, but I will myself to stare clearly into his eyes. “No bluff, Kent,” I say, keeping my voice steady. “I signed the papers. I’ll stand by them. But we’re going to do this on my terms –“

He laughs at me suddenly, taking his hand from my waist and using it to give me a sharp slap on the ass.

I gasp, stumbling back from him, shocked.

He gives me a wolfish smile, returning his hands to his pockets. “No, Fay,” he says, shaking his head. “My terms. Only my terms. Is that understood?”

I open my mouth to protest, but he ignores me, looking away towards the window as if my objections don’t matter.

“I want you to contact Ivan tonight,” he demands, his voice all business. “Tell him you want to go to dinner with him tomorrow.”

I had opened my mouth to protest his terms and I don’t bother to shut it when I hear his order. It just would have fallen open again anyway at this turn. What was – I thought that he –

“What, Fay,” Kent pushes, smirking at me and reading my mind. “Did you think I was going to come in here and ravish you tonight?” He slowly shakes his head. “No. With you, I want to take my time.”

He turns then and slowly heads towards the door, looking at me when he reaches it. “You’ll go to dinner with Ivan tomorrow night, don’t take no for an answer. And then, when you’re on the date, don’t say anything about our plans to have him come to our side yet. Just...be friendly.” He smirks at me, letting me interpret that any way I want.

I take a minute to process his command and then nod, letting him know I understand, gathering together my pride. This was my role now, after all. Agent and mistress of the mafia king. I had expected the latter title to come into play tonight but...well, I could roll with these changes. Honestly, I was a little relieved.

“And then,” he continues, snapping my attention back to him. “When you come home,” he puts an emphasis on the last word, ensuring that I understand that he expects me home tomorrow night, and not at Ivan’s house, “there will be another box like this one in your room. I’d like you to wear it. And then wait for me to come to you.”

I don’t say anything. I just stare at him. Was it going to be tomorrow night, then? When he...

“Do you understand, Fay?” Kent asks, raising an eyebrow at me, clearly pleased with how this went.

I raise my chin towards him. “Yes,” I tell him, my voice steady.

“Good,” he purrs, his eyes devouring me one last time before he pulls the door open. “I’ll look forward to it, Fay. Every minute of it.”

Kent pulls the door closed behind him and I fall to my knees, finally giving my legs permission to collapse and tremble all they want. My hands are shaking too as I grab my new phone from the bottom drawer of my desk and call my sister.

“Wait, seriously?” she exclaims, starting in without a greeting. “Is he seriously done? Jeeze, I thought Kent Lippert of all people had more staying power than that –“

“Janeen,” I groan, closing my eyes and flopping onto my back on my rug. “Stop getting ahead of yourself. We didn’t have sex.”

“Really?” she asks, intrigued. “Then what did you do?”

“Nothing,” I insist. “Well...he gave me a task to do tomorrow. But I need you. Help me figure out what to do next.”

My sister laughs and I can imagine her now, stretching out languorously on her bed. “Sure sis,” she says, her voice a little devious. “What do you need?”

So, I tell her everything.

And together, we come up with a plan.

Chapter 68 - Ivan

## Chapter 68 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

The next morning, I reach over and grab my cell phone off of the nightstand the moment I wake up, dying to see if Ivan texted me back. It's not my burner phone, or my old cell phone which Kent took, but instead my Kent-approved cellphone, which I'm sure he monitors. But whatever – let him look. This is all part of his big plan, anyway.

I bite my lip, trying not to smile when I see that I have a message waiting. Eagerly, I click on it.

Ivan: So, has he finally let you out of your cage, Fay? Of course I want to see you. Pick you up at 8.

My smile drops a little as I read this and I sit back on my pillows, wondering why I feel...well, a little disappointed. I stare at Ivan's text, reading it two and then three more times, sorting through my emotions.

And I realize that I'm disappointed because there's a third person in this text, quite present if unnamed. Kent. It's not just me and Ivan's secret liaison anymore.

I drop my phone into my lap as I lean against my pillows to think. I mean, it's never really been just me and Ivan, not ever – Kent and my dad were always involved, and Daniel too. But that afternoon at the bar, during that gap in space and time with only the two of us in it, it was...well, it was really nice.

And, quite frankly, I don't like the idea that this is suddenly a triangle. Kent and Ivan, with me in the middle.

I sigh as I realize, quite suddenly, that I'm being kind of a brat. I'm trying to have my cake and eat it too – to have both Ivan and Kent in my life, but to keep them in completely separate spaces when the reality is that I'm the pawn in their games, not the other way around.

Well.

At least for now.

I smirk to myself just a little and remind myself that I have Janeen in my back pocket, and that she's had loads of experience playing men against each other to get what she wants. And she told me precisely how to handle something like this. If Ivan's going to bring Kent into it, then I'm going to double down.

Eagerly, I pick up my phone again and send off a quick reply.



Fay: No worries, I'll come meet you wherever we're going. Can you send the address to Kent so he can arrange the car?

---

When I come back from the stables that afternoon, the house is relatively quiet. I frown as I walk down the hall and up the stairs, wondering where everyone is. But I shrug it off as I reach the landing, focusing on my evening and everything that I have to do to prep for it. Shower, then drying my hair, then...

As I turn to my door, though, I stop in my tracks. A little white box is sitting on the ground, propped against it, a black bow wrapped around it this time. My stomach drops when I see it. I glance furtively around, wondering who else has seen it – god, did Daniel see it? Embarrassed, I rush forward, grabbing the box as I press through my door, shutting it briskly behind me.

Then, I turn to the bed and carry my gift to it, placing it gently down on the duvet gently, as if there might be a bomb inside, ready to explode.

As I open the box, I see that there's no bomb in it but...my breath ratchets up anyway as I lay my eyes on something equally dangerous.

There are two garments inside the box, and one note. I reach for the note slowly unfolding it.

For your date, and then for after.

Be home by midnight. I'll come and find you.

"Crap," I murmur, dropping the note, my knees going to jelly. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, trying to lean back on Janeen's teachings. After all, I knew this was coming – I signed up for it. So why do I want to skitter away like some scared little rabbit?

I steel myself, clenching my teeth. "Come on, Fay," I murmur to myself, trying to say what Janeen would say. "Be tough."

I exhale sharply through my nose and get back to business. Because it was business, after all – I did sign a contract.

I open my eyes and lift the first garment out of the box. Despite my tough talk just moments ago, my eyes go wide and my breath catches. It's a little smoky-grey dress that...well, it's so skimpy it wouldn't be out of place in the opening scenes of *Pretty Woman*.

"Oh my god," I murmur, looking at the cutouts on the side, the absolute bare scrap of fabric that's supposed to cover my ass. Then I glance back down at the box and realize...

Oh my god, this isn't even the lingerie.

I look back and forth between the black satin corset and lace panties that are still in the box and the slinky grey dress in my hands, realizing with horror that Kent wants me to wear this out on my date with Ivan –

My cheeks rush with heat as I figure out that Kent is sending me out to Ivan basically naked – dressed in something Janeen would wear on the main stage –

My embarrassment turns quite quickly to anger and to steely determination, though – faster than it has before. I narrow my eyes at the dress, realizing, suddenly, what Kent is doing.

“Fine,” I snap, tossing the dress on the bed and stalking into the bathroom. “You want me to go on this date looking like your hooker? No problem, Kent.”

I’d just make him pay through the teeth for it later.

Or at least, that’s what I say to myself as I turn on my shower and peel off my riding clothes. Because the reality of standing up to Kent...

Well, it never goes quite as I plan in my head, does it?

---

I only saw Jerome as I left the house. He was at the foot of the stairs as I tottered down them in the six-inch heels Kent sent me to pair with my outfit. Jerome had opened his mouth to say something, but I gave him a withering glare as I made my way slowly down the stairs and he just shrugged, holding out a hand to help me balance.

I didn’t ask where Kent or Daniel were as we walked to the garage and he helped me into the car. We’re silent now as we drive, our relationship newly awkward. I glance at him, wondering if he knows that I know about him and Daniel, or if this new stiffness is about me leaving him stranded in the road when I left with Ivan the first time.

No answers come to my questions, though, making me sigh. When we pull up to the restaurant – I do a double-take, surprised to see that it’s actually the same restaurant that Daniel took me to a few weeks ago – Jerome grabs my hand as I open the passenger-side door.

Surprised, I look back him.

“Fay,” he says, worry on his face, and – I think – some real affection as well. “Just be careful tonight, okay?”

“Okay,” I say, giving him a little smile. “Thanks, Jerome.” A little warmth spreads through my stomach as he nods back to me. Maybe our friendship isn’t totally screwed after all.

Still. I’ve got business to take care of.

I step out of the car, closing the door behind me, and look around for Ivan.

My eyes go to him immediately and my stomach turns over, instantly filled with flutters. His six-foot, leanly-muscled frame is wrapped, for the first time since I've known him, in a chic black suit, his tattoos peaking over the crisp white collar of his dress shirt. Despite his ease at the valet stand, Ivan is clearly a man of significant power. It seems like everyone's eyes are drawn to him, inevitably, as they pass through the doors of the restaurant.

But Ivan carries his power easily, like a jaguar moving through the jungle, totally confident in his status as predator, not prey. His eyes meet mine and flick over my body and he stands up straight to greet me. A small smile curls at the corner of his mouth.

"Hey, Fay," he says quietly as I cross the short distance to us. "You look...nice."

His words check the final few steps I take towards him, making me hesitate and look down at myself. "What?" I ask, looking back up at Ivan with a frown. "You don't like my dress?"

He just shakes his head slowly, still smiling but pausing before he replies. "He's just really got his hooks into you, hasn't he, Fay?"

My cheeks burn in embarrassment and defiance at his words, the regret in his voice.

But as I look back down at myself, in this ridiculous dress and these crazy heels...

Damn it, but I know he's right. I'm Kent's little barbie doll, and he sent me out dressed like this to let Ivan know it.

Chapter 69 – Taco Tuesday

## Chapter 69 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Ivan laughs a little and shakes his head, coming forward to take me by the arm. "I'm sorry, Fay," he says, and I look up to see real apology on his face. "I shouldn't have said that – you look beautiful."

I'm still blushing, though. I never should have worn this dress.

"Come on," Ivan says, wrapping an arm around my shoulders and nodding his head towards the restaurant. "Let's go get something to eat."

I stop in my tracks, though, realizing – quite suddenly – that I don't want to go in there. I don't want to go to another mafia hotspot, the place Daniel took me because his daddy has connections here, where Ivan was able to get a last-minute reservation because he, too, has connections.

Kent sent me on this date, but I get to decide what happens from here on out. In the end, I'm in control.

Ivan looks down at me, curious about my pause, but I flash him a big smile.

“Actually,” I say, eager. “Do you want to go somewhere else?”

He cocks his head, curious. “I thought you wanted to come here.”

“Did Kent tell you that?” I ask.

“I told him to send the car to a restaurant I picked, and he said he was sending you here. Because it's your favorite.” A slow, dangerous little smile starts to form on Ivan's face.

“Yeah well,” I say, wrinkling my nose at him. “Kent doesn't know me as well as he thinks he does.”

Ivan simply nods, his smile growing, and raises a hand to signal the valet to bring his car back.

---

Thirty minutes later, Ivan and I are sitting on top of a picnic table in my old neighborhood, our feet resting on the bench and an enormous spread of tacos set out between us. I directed Ivan to drive here, knowing that my favorite food truck sets itself up on the edge of this little park on Tuesday nights. It's dark out, but the owners have strung up some cheerful lights and are playing some traditional music. It's not a busy night, either, so Ivan and I have the place mostly to ourselves.

It is, overall, kind of perfect.

“This is amazing,” Ivan murmurs, taking another bite of a carne asada taco. “How did I not know that this place was here?”

I give him a little wink. “Neighborhood secret,” I say, lifting my beer to my mouth and taking a sip. “We don't usually let outsiders in but,” I give him a surveying glance from head to foot, “for you, we'll make an exception.”

Ivan smirks at me. “Gracious of you,” he says, and then takes another bite, finishing his taco and reaching for another.

I smile, pleased that he approves, and nestle a little further into the warmth of Ivan's suit jacket. He spread over my shoulders when we got here, intuiting that I might get cold sitting outside. I

watch Ivan as he eats, observing the tattoos on his forearms that are revealed by his rolled-up shirtsleeves.

“What’s this one for?” I ask, pointing to an image of the Virgin Mary on the outside of his left arm. Ivan looks to where I’m pointing and then takes a moment to swallow before answering.

“My dad,” he says, looking seriously into my face. “He died, about five years ago.”

“I’m sorry,” I say, frowning and wondering, suddenly, what his life is actually like. All I know is that he’s the ambitious young prodigy of the underworld, and that he’s smart and powerful. But I have no idea, really, where he comes from or who he loves.

“It’s all right,” Ivan replies, shrugging it off. “We all have our trauma. He was a good guy.” He gives me a little smirk as he looks me in the eye. “He’d have liked you, though, for sure. He loved redheads.”

“Yes, well, we’re quite irresistible,” I murmur, flipping my hair back over my shoulder and pretending a haughtiness I don’t really feel. I’m rewarded with a laugh and I grin back at Ivan.

“Irresistible for sure,” he says, always the flirt as he looks down at the table and reaches for another taco. “But also, apparently, a woman of mercurial affections.”

My breath hitches a little at this – what does he mean by that? Suddenly, I’m terrified that he knows, somehow, about me and Kent – about the plans I have for later – commands, really – to meet him after midnight.

“What do you mean?” I ask, anxious but trying to keep my voice nonchalant.

Ivan glances up at me as he brings a plate of shrimp tacos into his lap, totally at ease. Then, he raises his left hand and wiggles his fingers at me. “No ring,” he says, and I glance down at my own hand to realize that he’s right – I’m actually not wearing Daniel’s ring tonight. “Everything all right with you two?”

I hesitate, wondering how to play this. I actually hadn’t left the ring at home on purpose – I just...hadn’t remembered to put it on after my shower. But could I use this to my advantage? Do I want Ivan to know that I’m free? I hesitate inwardly, wondering what Janeen would do.

“Sorry,” Ivan says, and I look up into his face to see that he really means it. “I didn’t mean to touch a sore subject.”

“No, it’s okay,” I respond breezily, giving him a little smile. “It’s just...Daniel is having a little...trouble. Being faithful.”

I mean, it wasn’t a lie. And Janeen said to stick to the truth as much as I can.

“Oh,” Ivan says, his eyebrows going up in genuine surprise. Then he puts his plate of tacos back down and pushes all of the food to the back of the table so that he can scootch closer to me. “His loss,” he murmurs, his eyes drifting down to my mouth.

Suddenly anxious, I turn my head away from him and lift my beer to my lips, taking a sip. Ivan takes the note and leans back a little. “I actually don’t know a lot about Daniel,” he says casually. “I know he’s in school, but he keeps a low profile as far as mob heirs go. He doesn’t seem as...involved, as other sons might be.”

“Yeah, well,” I reply with a little bitter smile. “Apparently he’s got other things on his mind besides Kent’s work and marrying me.”

“Oh?” Ivan pushes. “And what’s his style there? Does he have lots of girls who he sees for a short time, or just one serious side piece?”

I blink at Ivan in surprise, realizing that he’s pressing me for information. Simultaneously, I grasp that I actually do have information on Kent’s heir – dangerous information that very few people have. And Ivan’s looking for it.

And quite suddenly, I don’t want to give it. Daniel is still my friend; his secrets are safe with me.

“Can we talk about something else?” I ask hesitantly, giving Ivan a sad little smile that I hope suggests my reluctance stems from a sore subject, not because Ivan is coming dangerously close to some serious dirt.

“Of course,” he nods, again apologetic. “I’m sorry, Fay. I haven’t been the most tactful tonight, have I? I didn’t mean to pry...I’m just,” he shrugs a little. “Genuinely curious about your life.”

I bite my lip, deciding to push this a little bit. “Are you, though?” I ask, my voice barely above a whisper.

Ivan goes still, staring at me, waiting for me to continue.

“I mean,” I start awkwardly, looking down at my beer. “I know that the dive bar that you took me to was filled with people from all of the underworld families. That was embarrassing for me and it caused a real rift between me and Daniel when he heard, from multiple sources, that I was out flirting with you. And whatever Daniel and I are to each other, I do care about him.”

I look up into Ivan’s face with real hurt in my eyes and see guilt pass through his own. He’s either a crazy good actor or...maybe he actually feels bad, actually cares, at least a little, about how I feel.

“I like you, Ivan,” I whisper, the truth spilling out despite myself. “I like you...maybe a lot? But I don’t know if I can trust you, or if any of this is real, or if you’re just using me to get a leg up on Kent.”

Ivan nods, breathing out of his nose and looking down at his feet. He gives a sharp shake of his head. “You’re right, Fay,” he sighs. “I shouldn’t have done that. It was...a little bit of a coup for me, to be able to shove it in Kent’s face like that.” Ivan looks up at me again, giving me a little smirk. “And I know you enjoyed that part a little bit too.”

I blush, looking down at my beer as I remember what resulted from me shoving that day in Kent’s face like that. I remember Kent pushing me up against the door, his lips hot on mine – I remember moaning into his mouth and pulling him tight against me, wanting more. Ivan probably doesn’t know precisely how much I enjoyed it.

“But I’m sorry,” he continues, using one finger under my chin to turn my face gently back to his. “If it means that I lost your trust, then I wish I hadn’t done it. Because, whatever’s here, Fay...” he shakes his head lightly, and I know that that little shake contains a wealth of emotion, “it’s real for me. And I hope it is for you too.”

I bite my lip, not wanting him to know that...well, that it’s real for me too, despite myself.

“Damn it, Fay,” he whispers, his eyes on my mouth again, where my teeth press into my lower lip. “You make it hard for a guy to be chivalrous when you do that.”

Slowly, I let my lip drag out from beneath my teeth, my mouth open just a tiny bit. I swear a very tiny shudder passes through him.

“Whatever you want, Fay,” he murmurs, bringing his eyes back to mine with an effort. “It’s on your terms now. I promise, anything that happens between us is just for us.” He takes a moment and then repeats his vow. “I promise. It’s whatever you want.”

And suddenly, I know precisely what I want.

I raise my hand and place it, gently, on the side of his neck, my skin humming at the touch of his own against my palm. And then I pull his mouth to mine.

## Chapter 70 – The Third Floor

# Chapter 70 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Ivan drops me off almost precisely at midnight.

In the car, he leans over to give me one last kiss goodnight, but I put a hand out to stop him.

“Please,” I say, my eyes sad. He pulls back, surprised, but then his eyes flick up to the house, maybe thinking about Daniel – my apparent fiancé – waiting inside.

“All right,” he whispers, giving me a warm little smile. Then he takes my hand in his and raises it to his lips, pressing a lingering kiss against my knuckles, just as he did that time at the bar. “I want to see you again, Fay. Soon.”

I nod, giving him a half smile, but I don’t say anything as I step out of the car, my mood strange and taciturn. I wave as Ivan pulls away but I don’t turn and head into the house immediately. Because frankly, I’m not sure I want to be here, and I know what’s waiting for me inside.

Because tonight, with Ivan?

Tonight was just...amazing.

Ivan and I spent the entire night outside the taco truck, not needing anything more than some good food and cheap beers to fuel an entire night of conversation. Or at least, we spent a lot of it talking.

We also spent a great deal of the time making out. And it was great.

It’s just – I didn’t realize how much I wanted a night like tonight with a guy like Ivan, and how much I had missed it, even though I’ve never really had it before except in my imagination. Ivan never, ever would have fit my image of Prince Charming – his tattoos, his dangerous job, and crazy lifestyle definitely would have put him out of the running. But in other ways? He...kind of fits the bill.

I mean, tonight? We laughed, and we kissed, and I could tell that he wanted more but he never, ever pushed me to go further than I wanted to. Instead, he let me explore the contours of him at my own pace, and I liked it.

I liked pulling his face down to mine, opening my mouth to him. I liked the feel of him exploring me with his tongue and his hands. I liked the way he pulled me closer to him, letting me know that there’s more here to for the taking if I want it, but only if I want it and at my own pace. By the end of the night he’d had me feeling so comfortable that I’d somehow found myself sitting in his lap, running my fingertips through his bleach-blond hair, his broad hand slipping down the outside of my thigh and getting dangerously close to my ass as he made me laugh so hard my face hurt.

And the whole time, I never felt on the edge of anything – never felt scared, or pushed. Just felt...well, amazing.

And as I turn to stare up at the door to this house I realize...that it’s nothing like the way Kent makes me feel. At all, ever.

And I have no idea if that’s good or bad.

Or, frankly, which one I like more.



I steel myself as a shiver runs through me. Realizing that I'm starting to get cold standing out here pondering life, love, and relationships, I start up the steps and pull the jacket more tightly around my shoulders –

And then gasp. Oh my god.

I'm still wearing Ivan's jacket.

I groan and quickly shrug it off – I can't walk into Kent's house, for our...our appointment –

Wearing some other guy's jacket –

I look around, desperate. Should I just like, shove it behind a bush or something? But no – the gardeners will find it there, and word will get back to Kent somehow -

I quickly ball the fabric up and stick it under my arm, realizing that my only choice now is to take it with me. Silently, I pray that nobody's in the foyer when I step into the house.

I get lucky – no one's around as I run up the stairs, my stupid heels clacking loudly as I go. I hurry into my room, pressing the door closed before I dash to the wardrobe and shove Ivan's jacket into the back corner. I mean, it's by no means a secret there but...whatever. It's all I can do right now.

I take a deep breath as I sit on my bed, reaching down to unbuckle the clasp of my shoe and eyeing the lingerie still sitting on blankets. How the hell am I supposed to even get a corset on with no one to lace it –

“Welcome home, Fay.”

I shriek and leap up from my bed, spinning around looking for the source of the voice, which has a slight mechanical tone – but there's no one here –

“Please get changed,” the voice says again, and I recognize it as Kent's voice as I narrow in on the source – the intercom on the wall, by the door. God, I hadn't even known that it worked.

“When you're ready, go upstairs to the third floor. I'll meet you there in fifteen minutes.”

I go perfectly still, my eyes wide as I stare at the intercom and start to comprehend his words.

The...the third floor? With the locked door?

What the hell is up there?

There's a long pause and then the voice comes again.

“Are you there, Fay? Do you understand?”

I stumble into action, crossing the room and hesitating as I push the red button on the intercom, hoping it's the right one. "Um," I say awkwardly. "Okay? Sure?"

"Good," he replies immediately, pleased. There's a long pause before he continues. "I'm looking forward to it."

My hands are shaking as I step back from the speaker. Hell, my whole body is shaking now.

Because as great as my night with Ivan was, it was always leading to...this.

Kent.

And our contract.

Our deal.

And I had to meet him on the third floor in fifteen minutes.

"Shit," I whisper to myself.

What the hell had I gotten myself into?

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Ten minutes later, I've swapped my grey dress for the corset and panties that Kent left for me, and I'm standing frozen at the door which blocks the third floor off from the rest of the house.

The corset pinches me uncomfortably at the waist but...damn, when I had looked at myself in the mirror, I understood why Victorian women sacrificed the structure of their inner organs for this. The boning inside the black satin gives me curves like I've never seen. I look almost indecently sexy, which is a new experience for me.

And which, I suppose, is what Kent wants.

My breath comes short as I stare at the knob on the door. The last time I tried this, the door was locked. And considering how many people Kent has in this house every day who basically have free run of the place, if it's locked, it means Kent really wants to keep it private.

I gather up my courage and reach out to twist the knob, shocked when it turns easily in my hand.

As I push open the door, a little thrill of terror runs through me. And honestly? I can't tell whether I like the feeling of it pulsing through my veins or not.

But I swear to god my heart stops completely when the door fully opens and I finally see what is inside.

