

## Chapter 71 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

The room is...well, it's incredibly chic, as far as sex dungeons go.

My mouth falls open as I slowly scan the room, taking in everything and trying to figure out the function of...well, all of it.

I blush horribly as I step into the room, feeling every bit the naïve virgin that I am. I know, immediately, that I am out of my league with this. Here I was thinking that all you needed for sex as a nice comfortable bed and...

Well, actually, that's here too.

I wander towards the huge four-poster bed at the center of the room. It's made of sturdy black wood and dressed with onyx satin sheets. I run my hand over the blankets, marveling at the softness of the material before my eyes catch on the series of rings built into the headboard. I look up at the posts next, and then at the square of wood that connects each of the posts above my head. Those all have rings too.

What the hell are those for?

I snatch my hand away from the bed, bringing my fingers delicately to my mouth and turning to look around more. It's actually...not at all like the dungeons I've seen on television and the internet, the few times I've been curious enough to look. Those are filled with devices and chains and...strange obscene chairs that make me blush harder when I remember them. This room, while it's clearly built for sex - and for a very certain kind of sex - is...simpler, I suppose?

It suits Kent, I think as I look around, to have a BDSM sex room where most of the toys are neatly hidden away in tasteful, matching cabinets that line the walls. Even in here, he keeps his secrets close to his chest, locking away everything until he's ready to reveal it.

I'm standing, knock-kneed and wide-eyed, still staring around the room, when I hear someone clear their throat behind me.

I gasp, spinning, and see him there – his muscular shoulders filling out the frame of the door. My eyes go even wider, if that's possible. Slowly, I let my hand drop from my mouth as he takes a step into the room and closes the door behind him.

“Hello, Fay,” he says, slipping his hands into his pockets and staring at me evenly, his voice perfectly controlled. “How was your date with Ivan?”

I laugh, suddenly – a little huff of disbelief, really – at the ridiculous simplicity of the question. “Um, it was nice?” I hear myself say. “We had...tacos.”

Kent frowns a little, quickly putting together that we didn’t go to the restaurant he arranged for us. But he doesn’t say anything. He just walks further into the room, stopping when he’s a few feet from me, close enough for me to see the rough late-night stubble that has grown onto his usually clean-shaven face throughout the day. Close enough for me to look up into his hard green eyes.

“I don’t show this place to everyone,” he informs me, his voice soft. “And I would be...displeased. If others were to learn about its existence. I like to keep my personal life private. Is that understood?”

I nod slowly, even though the first thing that pops into my head is that I am definitely going to tell Janeen, who was going to lose her mind.

“You’ve signed a nondisclosure,” Kent continues, looking at me closely. “If you break it, you’ll lose...everything we agreed to.”

I nod again, still speechless.

I mean, I’m still going to tell Janeen. But he doesn’t have to know that.

“Good,” he says, taking another step forward and reaching out to take me by the waist, pulling me a stuttering step closer. “Are you ready to begin?”

I blink suddenly, my eyelids moving rapidly. “B – begin?” I ask, my heartrate ratcheting up.

Oh my god. Was this for real?

Was this – was this actually happening to me?

I begin to panic, just a little bit, as I stare up at him.

I think that a big part of me never thought that this was going to be real – that this was, instead, some gigantic game of chicken, with him pushing me as far as he thought I would go until I told him to say stop –

But here I am, dressed in a corset and panties, in Kent’s secret sex room, with him asking me if I’m ready to begin?

My mouth goes dry, hanging open slightly, and I have absolutely no answer.

Because honestly...I don’t know what I want –

But then.

I see Kent's mouth curve up, ever so slightly, as he sees the panic plain on my face. As he thinks that he's won.

And god damn it, but it lights that fire in me. I snap my mouth shut and square my shoulders, pleased when I see that smile drop from his lips.

"Sure, Kent," I say, giving a casual little shrug, feeling a new confidence flood me that I certainly hadn't had ten minutes ago – hell, thirty seconds ago. "I'm ready when you are."

Kent's eyes narrow at me and he takes a deep breath in through his nose. I watch him closely, my breath and heart rate still raised as I sweep my eyes over him, noticing the swell of his muscles beneath his shirt, the trim line of his body as it traces down to his hips, the –

The heaviness there, at the front of his pants.

The panic and the thrill pulse through me anew at the sight of it, of what I've raised in him, and I feel a new perverse curiosity as well. I want, suddenly, to unbuckle his belt, to let his pants fall to the floor. To see it for myself.

Which is something totally new for me. I've never done this before – not really. Never been in a room alone with a man who was hard for me, who wants to see me naked like this, who wants to...to touch me. And who, I'm realizing, I want to touch.

I raise my eyes to his, then, and let him see me wanting it.

Kent clenches his jaw fiercely, a predator holding itself back from launching itself at its prey. I take a careful step closer, but he shakes his head and shifts his gaze.

"There," he commands, pointing over at a wall where I look to see a series of D-shaped metal anchors in a row about a foot higher than my head. "Over there, Fay."

I glance at Kent's face again but then do as he says, walking slowly over to the wall and looking up at the metal loops while Kent moves swiftly to a cabinet a few feet away. "What are these for?" I ask, staring up at them.

"I'm going to show you," Kent murmurs, coming up close behind me, so close that I can feel the heat of him radiating against me. I resist the shocking new urge I feel to lean back, to press my ass against him –

"Hands up," he orders. "Above your head."

I comply, lifting my arms up, waiting, staring straight at the wall.

"Good girl," he murmurs, grasping my left wrist first and wrapping a wide leather cuff tightly around it. I shoot my eyes up to watch, shocked to see that the cuff has a little chain attached to it that leads to the matching cuff still in Kent's hand. I watch breathless as Kent passes the other

cuff through one of the d-rings above me, and then lowers it to wrap it around my other wrist, fastening it shut.

And then...

Then I start to really freak out.

Because this doesn't feel like a game of chicken anymore.

It feels like Kent Lippert just changed me to a wall in his secret sex chamber, and I had no way of getting out if he doesn't let me. And now I can feel him behind me, closing the distance between us.

Fuck. Fuck.

"I've wanted you like this, Fay," Kent murmurs, putting his hands on my waist and sliding them down, feeling the enhanced curves of my body that the corset gives me. "For a very, very long time. And I've never waited this patiently for a woman in my life."

Chapter 72 - Cornered

## Chapter 72 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I'm shocked and confused by the emotions that run through my body in this moment. Because one part of me – a huge part – wants me to cry out, to beg him to stop – to tell him that I'm scared, and this is too new, and too fast –

But the other part – maybe the larger part?

God damn it, but it wants him.

I am absolutely, completely freaked out by all of this but...

I am also soaking wet.

I grimace as I realize it, embarrassed and a little ashamed and totally confused. What is wrong with me, that I'd let someone chain me to their wall as part of some kind of sex contract, and that I'd like it –

"Spread your feet," Kent commands, his voice soft and ridiculously close to my ear. I jump a little, but I do as he says, moving my feet a few inches apart.

“Wider,” he commands, impatient. I comply, spreading my feet until they’re at shoulder width. “Good girl,” he purrs, and then puts a hand between my shoulder blades, obliging me to lean forward just a little bit, until the chains holding my wrists above my head go taut.

I’m panting, now, as I feel him move his hand back to my hips, pulling me backwards just a little until –

Until I feel my ass pressed against him, against the whole hard length of him, stiff and ready.

“See what you do to me, Fay?” Kent whispers, his voice rough. “Did you know that you make me this hard?”

Slowly, desperately, I shake my head.

He moves one hand lower then, around the curve of my ass and then shifting his hips so that there’s space for him to move his hand downward, between my thighs. My panting grows rougher as I realize that he’s heading, inexorably, towards...

“I’ll stop,” Kent murmurs, bending his body over my back, his fingers just inches from my panty line, “whenever you ask me to, Fay.”

My eyes fly suddenly open at this as I realize, through my haze of desire, that it is still a game. That he’s pushing me, trying to get me to balk.

But god damnit, if he thinks I’m going to be the one to...

“More,” I breathe, closing my eyes, feeling my body start to tremble in fear and anticipation and need. “More, Kent,” I demand.

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Kent grits his teeth at her words. God damn it.

Because he doesn’t want her like this.

He wants her – fuck, but he wants her, he wants to bury his cock so deep in this girl that it makes her whole body shake, he wants to hear her groan with the feeling of him pounding himself inside of her.

But not. Like. This.

He wants Fay in clean sheets, downstairs, in his bed. He wants Fay laid out before him so he can lick every inch of her body, so he can take his time making sure she’s ready for him, that her pussy is so wet and aching for him that she cums the moment he presses himself inside her.

Not strapped to the wall of his chamber, this place he only takes people when...

But Kent dismisses the thought, looking down at the gorgeous girl bent over in front of him, unable to keep his eyes from roving over the curves of her ass, the way her hair spills over her shoulders.

This beautiful, innocent, sweet girl – bent over for him like this –

His cock twitches at the sight, the thought – the animal nature in him urging him to rip those panties off her body and sink himself deep into her right fucking now.

But this...this isn't it.

“More,” she gasps again, beginning to look over her shoulder, perhaps wondering what was delaying him. His body reacts instantly when she begins to peek at him and he smacks her sharply on the ass, eliciting a little sharp yelp that makes his stomach clench with want.

God damn it, she is so fucking sexy – every fucking thing that she does makes him absolutely insane –

“You want this, Fay?” Kent growls, moving backwards and pulling his shirt over his head before moving to his belt. He's pushing her now, he knows it. He's deliberately trying to scare her, trying to get her to ask him to stop.

Because he only brought her here to push her to her limits, to get her to submit. To admit that she wouldn't – couldn't – meet his will at every turn and turn her nose up at it. Kent wants, more than anything in this moment –

More than he wants to fuck her which is...significant –

Kent wants to break her.

He wants to tame her to his will like the wild filly she is. And to do that, he has to get her to beg him to stop. He has to push her to her limit and get her to admit that she had one.

Because this girl? She had far too much power over him, and he needs to take it back. Needs it, more than he needs to be inside her right fucking now.

Fay starts to tremble harder, flinching as she hears his pants hit the floor. He steps out of them, his face grim, kicking the garment to the side and standing behind her again, one hand on her hip, the other slowly pumping his cock through the thin fabric of his boxer briefs.

“Do you want it?” he asks again, desperately hoping...god damn it, he doesn't know what he hopes at this point.

“Yes,” she gasps, her whole body tensing as if she's about to receive a blow.

Kent flinches back when he sees this, sees her frightened.

Stop, an inner voice says inside of him. It's not how this should be –

But he silences it, pushing himself forward. He moves his hand from Fay's hip back to her inner thigh, this time moving more swiftly, running his fingers across the soaked crotch of her panties. Kent grits his teeth and presses his eyes shut against the almost unbearable sound of the moan she makes, his own body starting to tremble now against the restraint he's practicing.

Kent repeats the movement, dragging his finger across her, and then – unable to stop himself – he slips that finger behind the fabric of her panties and traces the slick, agonizingly soft folds of her. She gasps, giving a little cry of pleasure and shock and fear, and slowly, his eyes closed, his breath coming short, Kent begins to press two fingers inside of her.

“Stop,” she breathes, and Kent freezes, his eyes flying open.

As her word brings him back to himself, Kent is overwhelmed, quite suddenly, with guilt. He pulls his hand away from her and steps away, instantly obeying her command.

“Please,” she says, her voice tormentingly soft and delicate as she stands up straighter, looking over her shoulder at him with tears –

His heart and stomach wrench as he sees the tears in her eyes.

“Please,” she says again, shaking her head, so vulnerable before him. “I’m...I’m a virgin, Kent,” she reminds him. “I can’t...like this...”

And then her lip begins to tremble and it's a knife in his gut. God, he could just hurl himself from a window right now – maybe should, for what he pushed this girl to – this perfect angel of a girl –

But Kent doesn't let Fay see any of this. Instead, he just nods once and moves instantly forward, reaching up to release her wrist from the leather cuff. As he does, the weight of her other arm pulls the cuff through the ring so that she's free of the restraint. Kent steps away from Fay and watches her shakily unbuckle the clasp on her other wrist.

When she's free, she lets the cuffs and their attaching chain fall to the ground. Then she looks up at him with her beautiful doe eyes, her hair spilling around her like silk, her knees knocked together in awkward shame.

“I’m – I’m sorry –“ she starts.

“No,” he interrupts, his voice loud and harsh, making her jump. Inwardly, he cringes at this as well. God, what the fuck was wrong with him? He presses his eyes shut tightly for just a moment, working hard to control himself, and then looks at her evenly.

“You’ve done nothing wrong, Fay,” he says. “Just go to your room.”

She hesitates, but he glares at her, hard.

So she just gives a little nod and strides quickly away, passing through the door and shutting it behind her in an blink.

The moment she's gone, Kent lets himself sink to the floor, a sudden, familiar ache building in his chest, his body going weak as the pain transforms him.

He knows what it is, this old friend of a feeling. Guilt, pain, horror, anxiety – they all mix together, the perfect cocktail to kindle the panic attack that grips his body now.

And he holds on to the pain, letting it race through him, hoping, a little, that it takes him out completely for what he just did to that girl. What he forced her to, all for the sake of his pride.

He knows he deserves every bit of this, and so he welcomes the pain, submitting to it entirely.

## Chapter 73 – Crisis of Confidence

# Chapter 73 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I dash from the room, pounding down the stairs that lead to the second floor, my mind set on nothing but the safety of my room, my bed, my closed door –

But as I turn onto the second-floor landing, I slam into someone coming up the steps from the house's first level.

“Whoa! –“ the person says, gasping in surprise and perhaps a little pain. “What –“

Frantic, I work to push beyond them, feeling and seeing nothing beyond the tears in my eyes that stream down my cheeks. I'm a bit feral now, like a rabbit doing anything it can to get back to my warren – I've just got to get inside, where I can be alone –

“Fay,” the voice says, worried and stern. He grasps me by my shoulders and I gasp, looking up, shocked to see Kent's face –

But no, a face like Kent's, but softer, younger – Daniel.

“Fay, are you alright?” he whispers, urgent. “What's – why are you wearing that?”

I look up at Daniel, my mouth hanging open, not knowing what to say. My eyes flick to the door to my bedroom – there's no part of me that wants to have this conversation now. I just – I can't.



“I have to go,” I mumble, pushing past him. I hear him call after me but I ignore it. There’s a little guilt in me at this – I know that I haven’t been fair to Daniel in all of this – but the guilt isn’t strong enough to fight my panic, my fear, my desire to just be alone.

I look once over my shoulder at Daniel as I push open my door, see him looking towards the stairs up to the third floor, putting things together. Does he even know what his dad has up there?

Before I can see what Daniel does next, though, I press my door shut, leaning against it and closing my eyes, panting a little. The dark of my room washes over me like cool water and I feel my shaking body start to ease, my pounding heart lighten.

I stand there for a long time, my forehead pressed against the door, my breath huffing hot against the white paint, my mind absolutely reeling. But as the minutes pass, and as I lean into the safety of my room, I’m able to start to put words to my emotions.

God damn it. God damn it. What the hell just happened?

I push myself up and away from the door, starting to put the pieces together. Flashes of it come back to me as I move to my bed, unlacing the corset and letting it drop to the floor. Kent standing in the doorway, looking at me like a wolf at his supper. Kent wrapping a leather cuff around my wrist. Kent pressing his hand between my shoulder blades and pulling my hips back against him –

Kent moving his hand, his fingers, down the slick center of me –

I push my panties to the floor now, stepping out of them and standing naked in my room, my own hand drifting downward towards the place where Kent touched me only a few minutes ago –

Minutes, really? Was it that short?

Nobody had ever touched me like that. And as much as it terrified me, and as much as I wasn’t ready for it to happen like that – chained to the wall, his to command –

There was certainly a part of me that...liked it? Maybe. I sigh, confused.

Even as I push myself to figure out how I feel, the strain and confusion of the situation washes over me. I sigh, heading for my wardrobe, wanting the comforting feel of cotton pajamas against my skin – not all of this silk and boning and laced-up restraint.

As I pull on a t-shirt and a pair of pajama shorts, I consider that at the heart of it, of the whole evening, the central fact was that it was terrifying for me.

And perhaps it’s just me being a baby – being so naïve, and romantic, and sheltered. But as much as it sometimes gives me pleasure and a thrill to defy Kent, and to push him, and to drive him beyond his point of control – I am not sure I want to have sex like that.

At least not the first time. Because there was something about the feeling of giving up control to him that, at some moments, felt...good?

But it went too far. I don't want to have sex that scares me, that makes me cry. I just want...well, I suppose I want to be held. And comforted. Because losing your virginity is scary enough – I'm not sure chains need to be added to the equation.

I'm staring passively into the wardrobe, lost in my thoughts, when my eyes fall on it. I pull Ivan's jacket from its place balled up in the back corner, where I'd tucked it maybe an hour ago. God, an hour, is that how it really took for my world to turn upside down like that?

I pull the jacket on, wanting its comfort and the memories of the parts of tonight that were so good. I tuck my nose against the jacket's collar and take a deep sniff of Ivan's warm and spicy scent. It's strange, that two men who are so similar on paper can make me feel so completely different on the same night.

And considering my two "dates" this evening, I definitely know which one I preferred.

I climb groaning into bed, pulling my covers up over me, still shaken from my experiences but starting to feel better. Just before I drift off to sleep, I grab my phone –

Not the Kent phone, the burner. The one Janeen gave me.

And I type in Ivan's number, and send him a quick text to say goodnight.

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Half an hour has passed since Fay left the room, and Kent is still laying on the floor, crippled with pain and anxiety. He presses his eyes closed against it, wanting – quite desperately – to be anywhere else, to be anyone else.

God damn it, but he hates himself right now. Hates every choice he's ever made that has led him here, to this – to laying in his underwear on the floor of his secret room, feeling like the absolute worst person on earth.

Because he knows he's made a mistake – that none of this is what he wanted, or how he wanted it, with Fay. But for the life of him, he doesn't know how to not do precisely this.

As he considers that idea, Kent scolds himself, because – obviously – he knows how to not do this. He's had sex with women in much simpler ways – normal sex, good sex, in a bed without ropes and chains. Not every woman he's ever brought home has been locked up in this room, restrained for him. He doesn't need the kink to have sex – sometimes it's just an extra, a bonus that allows him to explore his obsession with control.

Because that's what it's all about, after all, Kent thinks ruefully. Control. Everything is about control – controlling his life, his world, the underworld, his business ventures, the threats to his

power and everything he and his family have built. He has to keep a tight fist around all of it – absolutely all of it – or it will fall apart.

And Fay –

Somehow, fucking Fay –

This wisp of a girl, this tiny, naïve, coltish thing who knows absolutely nothing about this world –

Somehow, she is the thing that threatened to undo it all. Because she makes him absolutely lose control. With her, he has no idea what he will do next.

And the intensity of how he feels towards her – how much he wants her... Yes, on one level it's a physical desire – but Kent is forced to admit, now, laying on the floor staring at his ceiling that it goes beyond that. That the magnitude of what he feels is not just a desire for a woman he seeks to control, but...

God damn it.

It's a real, true pull towards her that he hasn't felt since he first met his wife. And the pull – it's inexorable. Heavy, like the chain of an anchor wrapped around his feet. Like gravity, with Fay at the center of the earth.

And this, all of this? The scaring her, the need to break her, to make her submit – it was all a fight against the power of that pull.

But deep down, he knows, it's like the ocean fighting the moon's sway over the tides. He can crash all he wants, but Fay is the force that calls the still waters within him to her. Makes them rise so high he thinks he might drown.

Give in, the voice inside himself whispers. Just swim down.

But god damn it, he can't. He can't.

Because if Kent gives in to just this one thing, the rest will fall – like dominoes, or a loose string on a sweater. It will all fall apart.

And so Kent lays for hours on that floor, trapped, stuck like a bug pinned to a board, torn between opposing forces. The first desire, the stronger one, is to let it all collapse as he takes her in his arms. That desire's insidious twin, however, still whispers into his ear that if he just pushes a little harder...he can break her. Make her fall in line. That he can have her in his world, just as he likes her – that he can make her fit.

Kent agonizes over it, truly torn over the question of which path to take, because he knows that these are the only two paths in his life. Because any option that keeps Fay out of his life...

Well. It's just not an option. Not anymore.

Kent has to come up with a plan. But all the while that he agonizes over his two options, a voice murmurs in the back of his mind that neither of these options really considers the true threat of the situation:

The very real possibility that Fay will break him first.

And take it all for herself.

## Chapter 74 – A New Mission

# Chapter 74 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

In the early hours of the morning Kent comes through the door to the third floor dressed in his wrinkled clothes from the night before. He exhales a deep breath through his nose as he pulls the door shut behind him and starts downward, his eyes on his feet.

“What were you doing with her in there, dad?”

Kent jumps at the voice, his eyes fastening suddenly on Daniel, who sits at the foot of the third-floor staircase, his back pressed against the wall. Waiting for him.

Kent says nothing to Daniel, just stands frozen, staring at his son. Daniel looks exhausted as he slowly shakes his head. Has he been sitting there all night?

“I saw her when she came out last night, crying. You can't bullshit your way past this one, dad.”

Kent's eyes narrow at his son. What, after years of having no qualms or questions about his choices in women, suddenly he wants to be involved? Suddenly he wants to play the morality police?

“Go to bed, Daniel,” Kent commands, starting down the stairs again. “Don't you have a test or some other bullshit to concentrate on today?”

“Dad –” Daniel protests, getting to his feet.

Kent whirls on his son when Daniel puts a hand on his arm to stop him. “Stay out of things you don't understand, Daniel,” Kent orders, taking a step towards his son to glower over him.

“She's better than this,” Daniel hisses through clenched teeth, holding his ground. “She doesn't deserve to be treated like trash – like you treat all of the women who –”

“Shut your mouth, Daniel,” Kent snaps, his voice low with warning, moving so close to his son that Daniel takes an involuntary step back. “You don’t get to say a god damn thing to me about this. She’s mine now.” Kent pauses, giving Daniel a second to process that fact. “Find yourself someone else to defend, and someone else to fuck. Not that you weren’t doing that already.”

Daniel’s mouth falls open as Kent turns away and continues calmly down the steps. Daniel knew, of course, that his dad found out about Jerome’s secret visit to his room. Whether or not Kent knew it was Jerome was another question. But this was the first time, ever, that his father had ever come even close to acknowledging his secret love life.

And Daniel realizes that Kent probably knows more about Daniel and Jerome than he was letting on. And that Kent is very willing to use it as a weapon if that information carves a path to getting what he wants.

And what he wants, apparently is Fay.

Daniel clenches his fists as he watches his father’s form disappearing into his office. Because Fay is his, not his dad’s – she is the only good thing in this stupid world, the only thing that made Daniel feel at home. And even if he could never be a true husband to her, he still wanted her at his side as his wife. He knew he could make her happy, in the end.

And so, he was going to fight to get her back.

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I groan when I hear a knock at my door.

I glance on the clock on my phone and see that it’s not even six o’clock. Who the hell could want my company now? I swing my feet off of my bed, heading to the door thinking that it’s even too early for my clothes to be delivered.

I pull open the door, yawning, and immediately freeze.

It’s Kent standing there, in perfectly pressed suit pants and a crisp white shirt.

Kent, who never comes to my bedroom in the morning – who always waits to speak to me until I come down to the kitchen for breakfast.

I stare at him, shocked and a little afraid, as his eyes flick over me, quickly assessing my rumpled hair and my bare legs and – oh my god –

Ivan’s jacket.

Indeed, his eyes pause for a moment on the fine wool of the suitcoat, its long sleeves rolled up to my elbows. It’s way too big for me, and Kent would certainly recognize one from his own collection or from Daniel’s, so he certainly will figure out...

I see him put the pieces together as he clenches his jaw and moves his eyes back to mine. “Good morning, Fay,” he says, his calm belying the anger I can see roiling behind his eyes.

“Good morning, Kent,” I whisper, leaning against the doorframe, wanting the support.

Kent opens his mouth to say something but then snaps it shut, looking down again at the suit jacket and then turning his head to look down the hall. Or, at least that’s the direction of his gaze. I can tell from his unfocused eyes that he’s not looking at anything – just staring into space as he puts together his thoughts.

“I have new instructions for you,” he says after a moment, still not looking at me. I watch him, curious, my anxiety increasing. If he just has instructions, why didn’t he wait to give them to me at breakfast, like he always does?

“All right,” I say quietly, waiting for him to continue.

But he doesn’t. Instead, he just nods abruptly and turns away, heading back down stairs. I watch him go, baffled, but noting that he doesn’t look at me again. Not once.

Almost as if he can’t.

A little smirk pulls at my lips as I slowly shut my bedroom door and look down at Ivan’s suitcoat. Well. That hadn’t been my intention, when I put it on....But it certainly yielded results, didn’t it?

I take careful note, and then head to my bathroom to start getting dressed for my day. When I return from my shower, I see that my clothes delivery has arrived and that it contains a crisp little blazer in just my size. I smile and tuck Ivan’s jacket away behind the headboard of my bed, hoping that the household staff won’t find it there. I’m not ready to say goodbye to it, not just yet, and I know that if I leave it in my wardrobe today that, by this evening, it will have mysteriously disappeared.

Twenty minute later I head downstairs for breakfast, dressed in the suitcoat and chic grey slacks that Kent chose for me. It’s a more formal and restrained look than I’m used to, and I’m curious about what he has planned for me. I’m certainly not going to the stables, after all – not dressed like this.

When I push through the door to the kitchen, though, the first person I see is Daniel. My stomach drops and I hesitate when he looks up to meet my gaze. He does not look happy.

Instead, for the first time since I’ve known him, Daniel refuses to smile at me. He just looks at me, grim. A little angry. Then, his eyes flick to the empty chair across from him, a demand as much as an invitation.

I hesitate a little longer, glancing around the room to better assess the situation. My gaze falls, on Jerome, who is likewise looking at me. Jerome gives me an exaggerated wide-eyed grimace,

drawing a finger across his throat and nodding towards Daniel. His meaning could not be more clear: I'm dead meat.

Nodding towards Jerome, who gives me a sympathetic shrug, I make my way over to our little breakfast table and sit down across from Daniel.

“Good morning, Fay,” he says, his voice even. I raise my eyes to glare at him a little, wondering if he realizes just how much he sounds like his dad in this moment. Who the hell was he anyway, to make me feel bad about anything, when he's sleeping with Jerome?

“Good morning, Daniel.” I murmur, mocking his tone a bit. I probably shouldn't, but I can't help myself.

“And just how long,” he bites out, glaring at me, “have you been fucking my dad?”

## Chapter 75 – Family Breakfast

# Chapter 75 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Oh my god, Daniel,” I spit, blushing beet red and leaning forward across the table. “Are you serious? Before coffee?”

He leans back in his chair and glares at me. “What, do you think coffee is going to make this any better?”

“Yah,” I say, snatching his own tiny espresso cup from its place in front of him and quickly draining it. Screw him, I need this way more than he does.

Daniel's mouth falls open a little when he sees what I've done. “Fay!” he complains, “that's mine!”

I slam the cup back onto the table and glare at him in return. “Oops,” I say, cocking my head to the side and crossing my arms over my chest as I lean back.

“You're being such a brat, Fay,” Daniel hisses, leaning over the table. “I can't believe you're acting like this, after what you did to me –“

“What I did to you, Daniel?!” I exclaim, huffing in disbelief. “You're the one making crude accusations before I've barely had a chance to sit down – and what business is it of yours anyway!”

“You’re my fiancé! Of course it’s my business!” He retorts, his voice growing louder as he gets angrier.

“Am I?” I ask, sarcastic, unfolding my arms and putting my hands flat on the table so that I can better accuse him in return. “As far as I know, you never asked me to marry you. Your dad told us we were engaged. And so, when it comes to dissolving the engagement, it seems like that was his prerogative. And besides, where were you these past few days? If we were so engaged, and so close, and so dedicated to each other, why weren’t you around, begging me to come back? You were probably out somewhere, paying attention to your actual boyf-“

“Watch it,” Daniel growls, silencing me and looking around anxiously to make sure nobody heard.

I sit back in my chair, feeling cowed and guilty. Because, of course, I don’t want to ruin his life just because he’s being a jerk to me. “I’m sorry,” I say, a little bitter. “I didn’t mean that. That last part. But everything else I did mean!”

“Fay,” Daniel grumbles, waving a hand to dismiss it all. “I saw you come down from the third floor – I saw what you were wearing, and I know what he keeps up there.”

“Do you?” I ask, my eyes going wide.

“Fay,” Daniel pleads, exasperated, “can you please, for once, focus on what is actually important here?”

“Okay,” I say quickly, nodding. “Sorry. It’s just nuts what’s up there – have you gotten to see it all? Do you know what’s in all of those cabinets?”

Daniel just gives me a withering, exhausted stare and I bite my lip, realizing that I’ve done it again. “Sorry,” I murmur, and then I look down at my hands and sigh. “Daniel, I haven’t slept with your dad.”

From the edges of my vision I can see him sit back in his chair in relief.

“But that doesn’t mean that I won’t,” I continue, raising my eyes slowly to his.

Daniel’s mouth falls open in disbelief as he stares at me. I blink, surprised, and realize that he was actually hoping that there had been some mistake – that there was some kind of reasonable explanation for why I was running around the third floor in my underwear.

And that actually, I may have just confirmed one of his worst fears. That he was losing his one ally in his house to his dad. I shake my head slowly, opening my mouth to tell him that I’m sorry, but suddenly a plate of food lands in front of me.

I look up, my mouth still open, to see Kent standing there, sliding a plate in front of Daniel as well. I look him over, noting the chef’s apron tied tight around his slim waist, his clean-shaven



cheeks below eyes with dark circles beneath them. Apparently, he got less sleep than I did last night.

I cock my head, curious about that.

“Daniel,” Kent says, his voice even but unfriendly. “Don’t you have class to attend?”

Daniel just crosses his arms, glaring at his dad and not responding. But Kent doesn’t rise to the bait. Instead, he turns to me.

“Fay, I’d like you to go to lunch today at your father’s house.”

“Really?” I ask, my eyebrows raising.

Kent nods. “Yes, I need you to feel out the situation. Word has gotten out about the end to your engagement to Daniel,” he continues, looking briefly at Daniel to include him in the conversation, “and that you’ve been spending time with Ivan. I’d like you to see how your father feels about this change. And report it back to me.”

I nod, agreeing but hesitant.

“What,” Kent demands, his words clipped. “You don’t want to do it?”

“Oh,” I say, surprised. “Um, no, I’ll do it...it’s just...one of the less pleasant tasks that I’ve been assigned.”

Kent does an almost double take at these words, looking suddenly into my eyes with surprise on his face. I cock my head to see it – I’m not sure I’ve ever seen Kent truly surprised before. But then I consider the meaning of my last words and realize that, of course, our encounter on the third floor last night was an assignment of sorts. And that I’ve just implied that lunch with my dad will be worse...

I blush, and curse myself again for my stupid tendency to do that all the time. Not only do I look like an idiot, blushing all the time, I also wear my emotions right on my sleeve.

“No,” I blurt out, shaking my head and looking down at my breakfast, “I mean, it’s fine. I’ll do it. It won’t be so bad.”

“Not every assignment is going to be a date with a sexy tattooed blonde, Fay,” Kent insists and I look back up at him in shock. Was he...did he just tease me? Did he just...

“Did you just...call Ivan? Your enemy? A sexy tattooed blonde?”

Kent just smirks at me and laughs a little, turning away. “Your car will be ready at eleven, Fay. Jerome will drive you. Don’t make me regret assigning him to you this time.”

I say nothing as Kent walks away, just staring after him, wondering how he does this. Balances it all, lives a life of such extremes with such complete control. Hell, I get one knot in my plans and go to pieces, but Kent...

“Wait,” Daniel says, leaning forward and interrupting my train of thought. “Did you go out on another date with Ivan? When?”

“Um,” I say lightly, picking up my fork and poking at my eggs. “Last night?”

“What!?”

I sigh, looking evenly at Daniel. “Seriously, Daniel, if you want to be a part of this then you should pay more attention. You’re like, the last person in this house to be aware of that.” Frustrated, I start to shovel food into my mouth. Seriously, if he’s so into being my fake fiancé, you’d think he’d start to pay a bit more attention to me.

I glance at Daniel as I eat and see him carefully studying me from his chair. I realize suddenly that he’s coming to precisely the same conclusion as me, at exactly the same time.

“So,” Daniel says, leaning forward and giving me a big smile. “Let’s hang out tonight, then. Watch some movies, like we used to do.”

“Okay,” I say, hesitating. Because honestly, I don’t know if I want to make plans if...

...if there’s another box of lingerie waiting at my door tonight.

If Kent has another assignment in mind.

## Chapter 76 – Family Drama

# Chapter 76 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

At eleven, I walk through the door to the garages, a sigh on my lips. I see Jerome immediately, waiting by one of the black cars. He gives me a big smile, which I return unenthusiastically. It’s not him – I just...really don’t want to go to lunch at my father’s house.

Jerome gives me an understanding little grimace as he opens the back door for me and I climb in.

“You doing all right?” he calls over his shoulder as opens the driver’s door and sits down in the front seat, genuinely curious.

“Just ready for this to be over,” I say back to him, leaning my head back and closing my eyes. Jerome makes a little grunt of understanding and begins to pull out of the garage and down the driveway.

When we’re on the road, I pull out my burner phone to send some long-delayed texts. I feel safe using it in my room, but not really anywhere else in the house. Not that my room is really safe anyway – Kent is very likely to have it checked daily, after the note from Fiona.

Still, better safe than sorry.

I’m pleased when I see that a text from Ivan is waiting.

Ivan: Good morning, beautiful. I hope you slept well. Any chance I get to see you tonight?

I sigh, really wanting to say yes, but knowing it’s impossible.

Fay: Sorry, already have plans. Send me a pic so I know how desperately sad this news makes you.

I laugh, a few seconds later, when Ivan sends me a picture of him with an exaggerated frown, tracing a finger down his cheek like a tear. Jerome looks curiously at me in the rearview mirror so I do my best to wipe my face clean, not wanting him to know what I’m up to. Then, I reply to Ivan.

Fay: You’re pretty even when you’re sad. Check in with me later.

Then, I’m pleased to see a text from Janeen pop onto the screen. I’m eager to see it – she never texts first unless she has a good reason for it.

Janeen: Lawyer came by this morning – gave us the deed to the house! Dad was so thrilled he cried. Wish you were here to see it. Lawyer also gave us a list of potential beach properties – insane!

A picture of a gigantic white and blue beach house pops up next, along with her assessment.

Janeen: This one is my fav, though I’m really looking for one with a hot tub.

I stifle my laugh by biting my lip, but I can’t help the smile that bursts out on my face. A bad lunch with my dad is definitely worth it, if I can make my sister and my dad this happy. Quickly, I type a reply.

Fay: Pick whichever one you want. But the biggest bedroom is for me. Don’t forget who got you that beach house.

Janeen’s reply is prompt.

Janeen: Or how you got it! Proud of you sis. Make that \$\$\$

She ends the text with the emojis of a cat with heart eyes, a peach, and an eggplant that, in combination, make me blush. I tuck my phone away, newly bolstered for the afternoon ahead of me.

We pull up to my father's house not long after and I see my stepmother Tristin waiting by the door, her arms crossed. Little Romulus stands next to her, waving enthusiastically. I smile at him, grateful that at least someone is happy to see me.

When I step out of the car, Romulus dashes to me, wrapping his arms around my leg in greeting.

"Hey kid!" I say, laughing and ruffling his hair.

"Hi, sister!" he exclaims, grinning up at me. "I missed you! Why did you stay away?"

"Oh," I say, frowning and feeling guilty all of a sudden. "I didn't mean to – I'm sorry –"

"Romulus," Tristin calls, and I look up at her, still standing stern by the door. Romulus lets go of me and runs to her. I follow closely behind.

Tristin gives me a steady stare as I climb the steps to her house, her expression unchanging when I attempt an awkward smile. "He's mad at you," she informs me, stern, as I approach her. I don't have to think very hard to figure out that "he" means my father, not little Romey here. "You watch what you say – or you'll make hell for all of us, even when you leave."

"Oh," I say, red creeping into my cheeks. "I'm sorry – I never meant –"

"No," she responds, narrowing her eyes a little at me before turning to open her door. "I don't suppose you do think about how any of your antics affect us. Not at all."

I open my mouth to protest but then shut it as I follow Tristin into the house. Because it's right – I haven't thought about it. Not at all. But then again, it's not really my fault that my father treats her poorly. I sigh, feeling a headache start at the back of my head as I follow Tristin and Romulus into the sitting room. This is a level of family drama I never signed up for.

My father starts in on me the moment I step into the room.

"What the hell do you think you're toying with, girl," he demands, glaring at me as Tristin and Romulus make their way to the couch. Romulus goes a little pale as he looks at his dad and then back at me with wide eyes.

I sigh and look down at my feet. "Can you please tell me what you mean?"

“You know precisely what I mean,” he snaps. “Ending the engagement that I negotiated for you at birth? Messing around with that boy – Ivan – behind my back?” Alden slams his hand on the arm of his chair, making me jump as my eyes snap up to his.

“Isn’t that what you wanted?” I ask, a little scared as I spread my hands wide. “I mean – you introduced me to Ivan – you wanted me to end the engagement –”

“No, you foolish child,” my father counters, angry. “I wanted to end that engagement for you, on my terms. I wanted to negotiate a relationship with Ivan, or use it to leverage other connections. Instead, you’re out there making ridiculous decisions – waving your cat all over town –”

“Waving my –” I blink as I interrupt, shocked. “Waving my what?”

“A slut!” he shouts, his face growing red as he spits the words at me. “A slut! My daughter, all over town, drinking with that boy – sitting in his lap on a picnic table – kissing him – I have pictures of it! Everyone does!”

I’m shocked as well as horrified as I listen to this. I had honestly thought Ivan and I were safe at the little taco truck – I had no idea my father’s intel was so good. I grit my teeth, realizing that my privacy has been violated again – that a moment that I thought was precious, private, and mine was infiltrated and documented. And now, apparently, used against me.

“You will fall in line, girl,” my father growls, pointing a finger at me. “To begin, you will move in here – it is ridiculous that you are still in the Lippert house even after your engagement has ended – people will think he’s taken you as his mistress –”

I laugh, my body bending over almost in half as I hear this – hear my father accusing me of precisely the truth as if it’s the worst thing I could possibly do in the entire world. As I begin to straighten up, I see that this bodily reaction may have been...a mistake.

My father is shooting out of his chair, Tristin going pale across the room and gathering Romulus close to her side. My father strides towards me, his face livid with rage, a shade of red I haven’t seen before on a human face. I back away quickly, bumping hard into the doorway as I go but eager to get away from this rhino charging right for me.

“You will fall in line!” he commands, grabbing for my arm. “You are my daughter – you will do as I demand –”

“I will not!” I shout, ripping my arm from his grasp and angry enough to find my feet and face him as we stumble out into the hall. “You have no right to make demands on who I marry – let alone belittle me by calling me a slut when I’ve done nothing to –”

He silences me, then, with a sharp slap across my face.

I gasp, stumbling back, my hand instantly going to my smarting cheek.

I look back up at my father, aghast. My real dad has never – ever in my life – hit me. The rage it engenders surprises me as I clench my teeth and growl, fighting the desire to claw his damn eyes out.

But, instead, I remember precisely who I am, and I stand straight, dropping my hand and giving him a withering glare.

“Kent will have something to say about that,” I say softly, looking him straight in the eyes. “And so, I think, will Ivan.”

Then, my eyes shift to Romulus. “If you ever need to get out of here, kid?” I say quickly, before anyone can interrupt. “You call me.” Then I return my eyes to my father. “Because my mother was right to run. And anyone who stays is a damn fool.”

My father lets out a bellow of rage and throws himself towards me, but I’m already out the door, running down the steps. Jerome is leaning casually against the waiting car but he jumps up when he sees me coming, pulling the back door open and running for the driver’s door. Jerome starts the car even as he sits down and slams it into drive the moment I hurl myself into the back seat.

“Go!” I shout, pulling the door behind me and looking over my shoulder to see my seething father stumble into the drive. Jerome does as he’s asked and peels off of his property and onto the road.

“Do you ever not cause trouble, Fay?” he mumbles, glancing at me worriedly in the rearview mirror.

I pause and then levelly meet his gaze, still shaken. “Look who’s talking, Jerome,” I mumble, sarcastic.

Jerome gives me a little laugh that warms my heart. He drives swiftly down the road for a few moments before speaking again. “Come on, kid,” he says kindly. “Let’s get you a milkshake. You look like you need it.”

“Is that...allowed?” I ask, curious.

Jerome just cocks his head and glances at me over his shoulder. “Lippert told me to take you to lunch, right? Who am I to take you home hungry. Besides,” he says, hesitant, “you’re the boss’ girl now. I’m yours to command.”

I settle back into the leather of the seats, a bit pleased at this, my heart certainly lighter to have Jerome be so nice to me after such a nightmare of a visit. I know, suddenly, precisely why Daniel likes him so much.

“Well then,” I say softly. “Milkshakes and cheeseburgers it is. Lead the way, Jerome.”

## Chapter 77 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Jerome and I come back a few hours later after an afternoon of light chat. We kept it easy, neither of us wanting to address the elephant between us. Instead, we talk mostly about horses. When we enter the house we're too busy laughing, the dregs of our milkshakes still in our hands, to notice Kent standing in the hallway staring at us.

Jerome notices first, stopping in his tracks and clearing his throat, the smile dropping from his face. Kent says nothing, just slowly puts his hands in his pockets and shifts his weight to his back foot, giving us both a long stare.

Something about it – I don't know what, maybe the arrogance in his stance, or the way that he stopped us both in our tracks just by standing there – makes me roll my eyes. Despite everything – all of the trauma of the afternoon, and the crazy intimidation I felt on the third floor last night – Kent's macho bullshit still makes me want to push back.

"My dad wasn't in the mood to feed me," I report calmly, "so Jerome took me to get cheeseburgers and milkshakes. You want some?" Innocently, I hold my milkshake out to him, straw first.

Kent's eyes flick to the milkshake and then back up to my face. "No, Fay," he responds, his voice low. Then he nods to Jerome, dismissing him. Jerome is gone before I can even see him move.

"Your father called me," Kent says, prowling close enough to touch. I refuse to move an inch. "He says you were...disrespectful." Slowly, he raises a hand to my face, his thumb brushing over the red mark that lingered after my father slapped me. I flinch. Kent drops his hand.

"Why do I get the feeling that you're giving me the PG version of what he actually said?" I reply, my voice low.

"Because," Kent replies, still standing close to me. "I didn't think you'd like it very much if I told you that he called you a conceited, spoiled, ungrateful whore."

I can't help the smile that tugs at my lips as I look up into Kent's face. But I am surprised to see Kent give me one in return. My stomach turns over at the sight of this, at the discovery that I've...pleased him. And that I quite liked doing it.

Suddenly, I want to please him again.

But then, just as suddenly, I am hit with flashes of the memories of last night – of how frightened I was when he moved his hand low on my body, touching places no one has touched before. And I flinch away, knowing – deep down – that I’m...I’m just not ready for it. Not now.

“Fay,” Kent says, his voice oddly choked as I take a step back from him, looking at the floor.

“Um,” I say, buying time as I step to the side and work to move past him. “I’m just going to go upstairs –“

“Fay,” Kent says again, insistent, placing a hand on my waist in a plea to stop. I hesitate at his gentle hand and look up at him. “Please,” he says, his eyes uncharacteristically wide. “Let me make it up to you...”

“Um,” I reply, hesitating again because I don’t really know what he means. Make what up to me? The horrible lunch he forced me to go to? The embarrassment of Daniel finding out?

But in my heart, I know precisely what he wants to make up for.

I’m just not sure I’m ready to hear it.

So, I push past him, a little surprised when he lets me go, his hand dragging lightly across my stomach as I pull away and move towards the stairs.

“Fay,” Kent calls after me when I’m halfway up the steps, his voice scolding. I look down at him to see the Kent I know has returned, his hands in his pockets, his gaze perfectly controlled.

“Don’t forget that we have a contract. And I intend to collect.”

I surprise myself with my wicked grin, then, as I look down at him. Because this, at least – this cat and mouse game? It’s familiar ground. And really, I do know, after last night, that Kent isn’t going to enforce that contract if I don’t want him to. He wants me to want it.

And, if I’m honest? After a day to think about it, and looking at him right now, staring up at me with his muscular arms crossed, his diamond-cut jaw clenched, all power, and all at my command?

I still do.

I want it.

Just...on my terms, like Janeen said.

“We have a contract, Kent,” I say, my smile growing as I lean over the banister to get a better look at him. “But that contract had no specific timeline. So, I guess...” I shrug. “We’ll just have to see.”

Then, without a look back, I jog the rest of the way up the stairs.



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At around eight o'clock, a knock comes at my door, making my stomach plummet almost to my feet. I hesitate, knowing it could be one of only a few things. I'd pushed Kent this afternoon – so it could be him, ready to push me back – but...

I take a deep breath in through my nose and steel myself, moving towards the door. It's better to know, I think, than to sit on my bed for fifteen minutes speculating about it. Which is something I know I am perfectly capable of doing. But...I've got to be brave.

So, I pull my door open and hear a little plop as something falls flat at my feet.

Surprised, I look down to see a box there, tied with a white ribbon tonight. I lean down and scoop it up into my arms, closing my door behind me as I hurry to the bed. Eagerly, I untie the bow and shake the box open.

I'm absolutely stunned by what I see.

Slowly, I unpack the box, marveling at the incredible softness of the little silk pajama shorts and matching camisole, each embroidered with the most delicate lily details along their edges. Then, I gasp when beneath it I find the most luxurious robe I've ever seen – cut short, but trimmed at the neck and the cuffs with soft white fur.

I glance back at the box then and marvel again at the last gift – a pair of the most delicate white moccasins I've seen with fur lining the inside and the most incredible beadwork on the top. I line these treasures up on the bed and take a moment to stare at them, a finger curled on my chin, curious.

This was...well, it was still lingerie, I supposed. But it was not anything like the lace teddy he sent me the first night, or the corset he made me wear yesterday, which were each designed to intimidate me. This collection, alternately...

Well, it seems like Kent really wants me to be comfortable. I feel a little twinge inside me at the...well, the sweetness of that sentiment. I have to admit myself shocked and surprised.

I turn this all over as I carry my new clothes into the bathroom, tying my hair into a knot so that I can take a quick shower without getting my hair wet. What did it all mean? Was he...not going to ask me to go to the third floor with him tonight? Did he want something...different?

As I step out of the shower and towel myself off, I wonder what new challenge Kent is setting up for me. How are we supposed to play cat and mouse when the cat is...being really cute? And perhaps even trying to romance the mouse?

I admit I feel some anxiety at this change as I slip the silky pajamas onto my body and pull the chillingly-soft robe over my arms. I'm still marveling at the luxurious comfort when a knock comes at the door.

I pull the moccasins onto my feet and move slowly towards the sound, not really knowing how to feel about it all. The cruel, controlled Kent I know how to handle. But this Kent...

I pull the door open, curious to face him, but then blink in surprise when I see Daniel standing there.

"Oh," I say, my eyes wide as I look up at him. "Daniel."

He smirks, leaning against my doorframe with a basket full of supplies in his arms. "What. Expecting someone else?"

I laugh a little and look down at the basket, filled with popcorn and movie supplies. "What are you doing here?"

"Movie night," he reminds me, perhaps a little too cheerfully. Then he looks beyond me, expectant. "Can I come in?"

I bite my lip, not really knowing how to say "no, thank you, please go away, your dad I think wants to take my virginity tonight and be quite nice about it." But Daniel doesn't wait for my reply anyway, pushing past me.

"I was thinking some 90's classics tonight," he says, looking at me with a grin as he settles onto my bed. "Start with Clueless?"

"Sure," I say, giving him a smile and leaning on the wall as I watch him pull his laptop from the basket and open it so that we can watch the movie in here. After a few moments, Daniel notices me watching him from the open doorway, and pauses his action.

"I'm trying, Fay," he says quietly, looking at me gently. "I still want this."

"Why?" I breathe, shaking my head, not understanding him. "Daniel, you don't even like me – and what about Jerome, shouldn't you be on this date with him?"

Daniel purses his lip and looks at the door, as if Jerome will show up in the hallway at any moment. "I have to marry someone, Fay. And in this world, it can't be a man." He shifts his gaze to mine. "I want it to be you – I care about you in my own way. Won't you please let me try to convince you that this could be good?"

"Daniel," I sigh, looking down at the floor. "I just don't know..."

"Please, Fay," he begs, and I look up at him when I hear his voice catch. God damn it, but I can't let my friend cry. "Just...can we please just do this? Can you please let me try?"

"Okay," I whisper, pushing the door shut and coming over to the bed. I climb in next to my friend, leaning against the pillows and putting my head on his shoulder. "But you have to rank each of the guys on screen on a scale from 1 to 10, and you have to be honest about it."

“Paul Rudd is the only ten,” Daniel murmurs, pressing play on the computer and then grabbing a bag of popcorn from the basket, offering it to me. I laugh as I accept it, and then, comfortable, begin to watch the film.

About an hour in, a knock comes at the door. I go still when I hear it, cursing myself for – stupidly – letting Daniel’s drama make me forget that, duh, Kent sent all of these clothes for a reason.

“I’ll get it,” Daniel says, hopping out of bed before I can even move. As if he was...waiting for it.

“Daniel, no –“ I call, trying to grab the edge of his shirt as he moves towards the door. But he’s too fast for me.

Daniel pulls the door open and leans casually against the wall when he sees his dad standing there. “Hey dad,” Daniel says, arrogant. “What’s up.”

I groan and put my hand over my face. As if he didn’t know.

“Well,” Kent says. “Isn’t this a surprise.”

Chapter 78 – Heathcliff

## Chapter 78 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I drag my hand down my face and force myself to look at Kent. He’s looking right at me, of course, from his place outside the room. Looking at me as I sit in the clothes he sent, having a movie night with his son.

“Is it a surprise?” Daniel asks, working hard to pull Kent’s attention back to him. It doesn’t work. Kent keeps his eyes fixed on me. “I’m just having a nice evening in with my fiancé, after all,” Daniel continues. “What’s so surprising about that.”

Kent ignores his son. I shift uncomfortably under his gaze, looking down at the popcorn in my lap. I look up when I hear Kent speak again.

“Well,” he says, his voice conclusive. “I wouldn’t want to interrupt. You two have fun.” He pauses, looking me straight in the eye for a good ten seconds before turning slowly and striding away, perfectly in control. Daniel rudely slams the door after him.

“Daniel,” I sigh. “Do you have to be such a dick?”

“He’s being a dick, Fay!” Daniel explodes, throwing his hands in the air. “What he’s doing to you – how he’s treating you! I’m saving you from that!”

“Daniel,” I hesitate, looking at him with sorrow on my face. “Did you ever think that maybe…”

He goes still, staring at me with his mouth open. I trace the design on my duvet, awkward.

“Seriously?” Daniel breathes. “He got to you too?”

I look up at him, a little rueful. He did.

“Can we just…enjoy the night?” I sigh, gesturing towards the empty side of the bed. “You scared him away – isn’t that what you wanted?”

Daniel sighs too, putting his forehead in his hand and closing his eyes to think it through.

“Just come watch the movie with me” I plead softly. It breaks my heart to see my friend so upset, even though…well, even though I know that this isn’t going to end well for us. That if I start sleeping with his dad, things are forever going to be changed between Daniel and me.

And suddenly I decide that what I actually want – really – is one last real night with my best friend. While he’s my best friend.

Daniel nods then, perhaps coming to the same conclusion, and climbs back into the bed with me. I rest my head on his shoulder and he gives me a chaste little kiss on the forehead, both of us apparently deciding not to talk about it. Perhaps, in this case, silence is best.

We finish Clueless, and a couple more movies, before I eventually drift off to sleep with my head still on my friend’s shoulder.

But I swear, my last waking thought is to wonder what the hell would have happened, really, if I made Daniel go away. And called Kent back.

And let him peel this little fur robe from my shoulders and drop it to the floor.

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I wake up the next morning to the sound of a knock on the door at six AM. I groan, blinking awake, and look sideways to see Daniel doing the same in the bed next to me.

“Mornin’,” he murmurs to me, rubbing his eyes. When I get up, Daniel turns over onto this stomach, burrowing back into the pillows.

“Lazy,” I chide, smiling at him and heading for the door. “What, you don’t get up to receive your own clothes deliveries in the morning?”

“Clothes deliveries?” Daniel asks, peering at me. “Your clothes are delivered?”

I open the door and give the housekeeper standing there a smile, accepting the folded clothes and the white box beneath. My eyes raise at that – the white box in the morning is new. Then, I turn back to Daniel, frowning a little. “You don’t get clothes delivered?”

“No, Fay,” Daniel says, sitting up and staring at me. I see him put it all together in his sleepy mind as I walk back to the bed. “Oh, gross, seriously? He picks out your clothes every day?”

“I kind of like it,” I say, shrugging and laying out the clothes I’ve been sent this morning, tossing the white box on my vanity and hoping Daniel doesn’t ask about it. “Takes a lot of pressure off of me. And he has good taste.”

“It’s so creepy, Fay,” Daniel whispers, scrunching his nose.

“He’s been doing it since I moved in,” I reply, nonchalant as I admire the pretty blue and white dress with scalloped cap sleeves that Kent sent today. “I thought it was Fiona, at first, but she told me it’s him.”

“That’s so weird,” Daniel whispers, all in a rush, and then collapses back onto the bed.

I smile at Daniel, laughing a little, but then my laughter fades as I look carefully at the dress in my hands and wonder...well, wonder if I maybe got too used to this. Maybe I haven’t thought enough about how weird this actually might be.

As I study the dress I consider that Kent controls pretty much every aspect of my life now. He decides what I wear, what I do all day, where I go, where my money comes from, where my sister and my father live. And while I’ve accepted a lot of that as part of living under a mafia boss’s roof and enjoying the luxury of my situation...is this really what I want for my life?

I sigh, tossing the dress onto the bed, looking at it. It’s a delicate, pretty thing – where was Kent imagining me going in that dress?

Did I want to go there?

I shake my head.

“Okay, Daniel,” I say, clapping my hands and making him groan at the noise. I laugh and move to the side of the bed, shaking his shoulders and making him wake up. “Go away! You’ve outstayed your welcome! Leave me alone so I can get changed!”

“No!” He shouts into the pillows, laughing too. “I want to sleep! Leave me be! You just get changed – I won’t look.”

“Get up!” I shout, laughing and grabbing a pillow, which I start hitting him with. “I’ll see you in twenty minutes at breakfast, lazy.”

Daniel grumbles his assent and climbs out of bed, stretching and yawning. I see him eye the white box as he heads for the door, and then he brings his eyes to mine, curious. I just shake my head. "You don't want to know, Daniel."

"You're right," he murmurs with a sigh. Then, he blows me a little kiss, heading next door to his own room to get ready. He pulls my bedroom door shut behind him.

As soon as he closes it, I move to my wardrobe, my mind made up.

Even though I just said that I'd meet Daniel at breakfast, I actually have no intention of doing that. I pull some of my riding clothes out of the back of my wardrobe, as well as my shiny black boots. Then, I hastily get ready for my day, eager to get to breakfast before anyone else does.

Or, more accurately, past breakfast, and to the garage.

Because today, I have no real desire to hear what Kent has planned for me in that blue and white dress. Today, I want to do precisely what it is that I want to do. And today, I want to see my horse.

Forty minutes later, after successfully evading everyone but Jerome, who I made give me keys to the car, I pull up to the stables just as the sun is coming up. I park the Lexus in the spot closest to the barn doors – the one usually left open for Kent. But today, I decide, it's for me.

I give some of the workers a happy smile as I rush down the aisle to Heathcliff's stall, pulling open the latch to the door as I beam at my pretty boy.

"Hey, handsome," I murmur to Heathcliff, who gives me a happy little whinny and huffs at my hand, looking for a snack. I oblige him, pulling a sugar cube from my pocket that I snatched from the espresso bar when I snuck into the kitchen for just one sip of coffee before I ran for the garage.

"Did you miss me?" I softly ask my horse, scratching his forehead and then working my way down his neck. "I missed you."

And then I take the little box of grooming tools off the shelf at the top of the stall and get to work, brushing Heathcliff's coat until it shines and braiding his mane. I take my time with it, relishing the feeling of having all day to do this, to do precisely as I please.

But also, a little thrilled at the anticipation that...Kent isn't going to like this.

That I've defied him, again. Avoided him, again.

And that I have every expectation of seeing him later, all pissed off at me. Worked up into a fury.

Just how I like him.

## Chapter 79 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

A few hours later, I'm leading Heathcliff back into the stables from our ride. We didn't go in the ring today, but instead spent most of the early afternoon trotting around the property, admiring the scenery. It's a beautiful landscape with beautiful vistas and as I rose I resented, a little, that I hadn't been allowed to ride freely out here before.

But then again, I'm not as interested in what I'm allowed to do as I used to be.

The day is growing hot, and both Heathcliff and I have a light sheen of sweat on us as we walk into the stables. I wipe it from my forehead with the back of my arm, looking forward to wetting Heathcliff down with the hose and taking a nice long drink from it myself, when I see him.

Just standing there, in the middle of the aisle that runs between the line of stable stalls. His arms crossed, his feet spread wide apart.

Glaring at me.

Heathcliff surprises me by checking his step a bit, apparently intimidated by the raw animal fury that we can both sense coming off of the predator standing there. But I click my tongue at the horse, tugging his lead rope and asking him to come a long with me. I don't check my stride at all, barely glancing at Kent as I make for Heathcliff's stall.

After a moment, Heathcliff follows.

If Kent wants to talk to me, he can damn well wait until I've taken care of my horse.

I take a minute to settle Heathcliff in his stall, tying his rope to a metal ring on the wall and reaching for his hoof pick when suddenly one of the stable hands shows up at the stall door.

"Um," he says, awkward, glancing over his shoulder. "I'll do that for you, ma'am..."

"What?" I ask, standing up straight. "Why?"

He hesitates again, even more awkward, glancing again at Kent, who I'm sure gave him the order. I just give him a little laugh and wave my hand.

"Thanks," I say, dismissal strong in my voice as I turn away and lean down to pick up one of Heathcliff's feet so I can clean it. "But I can take care of my own horse."

“Your horse, Fay?” I hear Kent ask. I drop Heathcliff’s hoof and straighten up again, turning to see Kent standing at the stall door now, furious at having been ignored several times this morning. “Last time I checked, I paid for that horse, and its care.”

“Really, Kent?” I ask, folding my arms over my chest and glaring at him. “You’re going to take your present back, just because you’re mad at me?”

Kent narrows his eyes. “I can take back more than the horse, Fay,” he warns, his body seeming to fill the entire doorway.

“Is that what you want, Kent?” I ask, turning fully to him now, feeling my defiance slip a bit as I think about what he’s saying. Because, as much as I like to defy him, in this moment I just...need to know. “Is that all I am to you? A contract? I defy you, and you take things away from me? I do as you say, and I get rewards?”

I see Kent tense at this change in direction. I think that he, too, was expecting a fight. Maybe looking forward to it. “Do you have a problem with that, Fay?” he asks, his voice low and resonant. “That seems to have been our deal, all along.”

“So that’s it, then,” I push, taking a step closer and looking up into his face. “I really am just...your little doll. That you dress up and move around your play house, sending me where you want me to go, doing what you want me to do.”

I take another step towards him, looking up into his face, truly curious to see how he reacts. Kent works hard to hold my gaze, to keep his emotions tucked away and not let me see anything at all besides that which he wants me to see.

“This is a job, Fay,” Kent tells me, his voice stern. “You understood that. Services in exchange for pay, for...privileges. And if you don’t perform those services...well, like any other job...”

“But this isn’t my job, Kent,” I reply, feeling my lower lip start to shake a little with unhappiness. Unhappiness I’m not sure I’ve fully acknowledged in a while. Because I’ve been...excited? About some of the changes in my life, and in my relationship? But if I really consider what they actually mean...I’m not sure anything has changed at all.

“I’m a therapist, Kent,” I continue. “Or at least, I was training to be. That was my job, until you made me quit and locked me up in your house. Until you made it clear that the only way for me to gain any control over my life was to marry your son or sign your contract. You forced me into this.”

“I forced you to nothing!” Kent hisses, closing the distance between us, his anger alive in him now. “You signed that contract of your own free will, Fay! You —“

“I am more than this!” I shout, surprising myself – and him, and the horse – with the loudness of my voice, my vehemence.



Kent takes a step back, blinking in surprise. “Fay –“

“No,” I say, stepping forward into the space where Kent fell back, clenching my jaw and staring up at him. “No, Kent – you don’t get to talk me out of it. All of this is bullshit – that contract is bullshit. It’s just ink on paper – none of it means anything, or reflects any part of what’s actually happening between us. All your contracts and your rules and your regulations? It’s all designed to make me feel weak, and to make you feel strong and in charge.”

“It’s designed to privilege me, yes,” Kent snarls down at me, not giving another inch, “because I am the one who has something you need, Fay. And your position is to serve me in exchange for it. With gratitude.” His lip curls, now, with anger, maybe disgust.

“Really, Kent?” I whisper, feeling a sudden burst of courage as I realize the actual truth of the situation. I close the distance between us completely so that my chest is pressed up against his. I allow the line of my body to arrange itself close against him, my stomach curved against his torso, our hips suddenly aligned.

I look up at him, my eyes wide and clear. “Because I think that the situation is actually reversed, Kent,” I murmur, my voice thick with the knowledge of my power. “I think that, actually, I have what you need.”

Kent stares down at me, his breath coming hard now, and then suddenly there’s a shift in him – fast, lightning-quick. Just a simple click behind his green eyes, and one final moment of perfect stillness -

And then Kent breaks.

A moan rips from him as he grabs me, one arm hard around my waist, crushing me against him as he brings his mouth to mine and claims me. I’m lost in him, instantly, my arms around his body fast, my hands pressing against the hard muscles of his back, wanting him closer – wanting him against me, solid, now.

Kent moans again, desperate, his eyes closed as he reaches the hand around my waist lower, dipping below my ass – not to grab it, but instead to lift me, bodily, up against him. I cry out against his mouth, shocked and a little frightened at the sudden force of him, but I wrap my legs around his waist, consenting to it, letting him carry me.

He falls forward a little, his footing unsure, almost drunk on the moment, lost in me, and then I feel the wood of the stall’s barrier hit hard against my back, forcing a little gasp from me as the air rushes from my lungs at the impact. Kent pulls back for a moment, checking to see that I’m okay, but I nod to him, fervent, and he brings his face back to mine.

Chapter 80 – Upstairs

## Chapter 80 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

My mouth is open to Kent's as he kisses me, his tongue warm and desperate against my own. I feel a hard shudder pass through me as he pulls his mouth away, the hard stubble of his cheeks a contrast to the softness of his lips as he tears his mouth across my jaw, down my neck, every movement frantic, rash – none of it designed to seduce, all of it feeling as if he can't not touch every inch of me with his mouth.

Now. Immediately.

“Fuck you, Fay,” he growls against my shoulder, the edges of his teeth pressing harsh against the soft and tender skin of my neck. “God damn it, fuck you.”

I know he's furious, angry at me for pushing him this far – for making him the one to break –

But god damn it, I love it. A warm thrill is running through me, from my head to my toes. And despite what I know it will raise in him, how dangerous he can be, I laugh.

I tilt my head back and laugh, reckless, welcoming it.

Because it was all leading to this – contracts or not, since the moment he laid eyes on me at the jail. It was all coming to this, no matter how much he pretended. He was never in control.

Kent rips his face up to mine, livid, at the sound of my laugh, his eyes alight with violence, a snarl on his lips. But I can't wipe the smug smile from my face.

“Well, Kent?” I say, panting, my eyelids low with my want and my self-satisfied joy. “Are you going to fuck me or not?”

And then, with a snarl, he rips me away from the wall and carries me out of the stall.

I don't know where he takes me, don't really know how he navigates, because I've pulled his face back to mine and I'm kissing him recklessly now, my eyes pressed shut, my own tongue eagerly exploring the contours of his mouth. I press my hips harder against his stomach as he grips my ass in one hand, his other steadily spread across my back as I feel him navigate us up a tight set of curving stairs.

When the light behind my eyes changes, from day-bright to a moody dark, I pull away from Kent, looking around. He's still moving us briskly forward, the sound of wooden planks echoing under his feet.

“A hay loft?!” I gasp, looking around in wonder. Then a ridiculous laugh bursts from me. “Seriously, a hay loft? Is this some kind of tawdry romance novel –“

“Shut up,” he growls, falling to his knees and bringing me with him.

I comply, bringing my mouth back to his, slower and more deliberate this time as I find myself suddenly in Kent’s lap, my legs still around his waist, in the cool, private dark of this secret space. Kent matches my mouth’s pace, kissing me deeply now, with less frenzy, but no less intent or force.

I feel my breath coming fast now as Kent smooths his hands over the contours of my body, tugging the edges of my shirt so that they come untucked from my tight riding pants. I lean back a little, allowing Kent to pull the shirt up over my head and cast it aside in the hay. As he does, I feel the heft of him hard beneath me, rubbing against my ass. Wanting me.

I bite my lip suddenly, some of my bravado gone.

Kent looks down at my mostly-naked torso and then back up at my face. His expression changes, then, from one of anger and raw need to...something more complicated. I don’t know. I can’t read it.

“Fay,” he says quietly, his voice rough as he brings a hand up to my face. “If you don’t –“

“No,” I murmur, shaking my head and sitting up straighter, bringing my face close to his. “I want to, Kent,” I whisper, my words breath against his lips. I twist one hand behind my back and undo the clasp of my bra, taking a moment to toss it on top of my shirt. I see Kent go still at the sight of me, his hands twitching against the desire to touch my bare flesh, against the restraint he’s practicing.

“I want it,” I say again. “I just...can you show me how? Slowly?”

Kent exhales a long breath then, but not one of exhaustion – of long-denied desire finally fulfilled. “Yes, Fay,” he says, his lips brushing mine, and then he seals his mouth against me. I moan into him as he brings one steady hand up to cup my breast, his thumb moving delicately over my nipple. I feel him shudder, then, his cock twitching beneath me.

He shifts, using one hand pressed against my back to balance me as he leans forward, laying me flat out on my back against –

I blink, looking to the side, surprised to see a blanket there. I open my mouth to ask but Kent takes his hand from my breast to place a finger softly against my cheek and turn my face back to him. Quickly, he shakes his head and kisses me again.

His message is clear. Questions later. Now, we do this.

Eagerly, I show him that I agree, kissing him hard and tugging his own shirt off of his body and adding it to the growing pile of clothes next to us.

What grows between us, in these moments, is a steady intent. As Kent peels my tight pants from my legs, tugging them off at the ankle, his eyes and face are serious. Mine are as well as I lift my hips, letting him slip my underwear over my bottom and then down over my knees and ankles. When I'm naked before him, he surveys me with cool but...almost solemn eyes.

Like someone looking at a beautiful painting, or...something they've lost. Something they never thought they'd see ever again. I'm unnerved by it – it's not something I understand.

“Kent,” I whisper, not able to stand the intensity of that gaze. So I sit up, bringing my face close to his, putting one hand on his chest. But I don't really know what to say next. So I just stare at him, looking into his eyes, feeling...the magnitude of this thing, building between us.

He stares back at me, at my face, his breathing coming quick now. “You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, Fay,” he whispers to me. My mouth falls open at the raw honesty I hear in his voice.

And I...I can't bear it.

I close my eyes against his words, not wanting – or willing – to acknowledge the feelings they raise in me. And so I do the only thing I can think that will bring us back to fair ground, to the old place I know that we're comfortable.

I slide the hand resting on his chest downward, brushing over the waistline of his pants, lower, until I'm holding his thick cock in my hand. Trembling a little, frightened at the new experience, I move my hand over the fabric, feeling him.

Kent shudders hard, his whole body giving one hard convulsion at my touch.

“Kent,” I whisper, my eyes still closed. “Please. I want you now.”

And then he leans forward, bringing his mouth back to mine as he begins to unbuckle his pants.