

## Chapter 81 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Kent pushes his pants downward as he lays me down again on the blanket. I keep my eyes closed, but I can feel him moving his legs, kicking the pants off as he brings his body back to mine. Then, he lays the length of himself down on top of me and my eyes fly open as I feel the new sensation of his skin flush against mine.

As I feel feel...him. All of him, pressed against my hip.

I gasp a little, starting to tremble a bit at the newness of it all. He is...big. I can feel it. I mean, I never thought he'd be small – god damn it, I never thought about it at all – never really considered any of these sorts of things –

Oh my god, was I supposed to think about this? Was I ready -

“It’s all right, Fay,” Kent murmurs to me, running a slow hand down my side, across my ribs and my waist and my hip. I snap my eyes to his, wanting and needing his calm. Kent looks at me steadily, his face serious. “It’s all right.”

I nod, a little shaky, but trusting him. I am happy, for once, to let Kent take complete control here. And from that moment forward, he does.

We don’t move slowly, though, as I thought we might. Instead, Kent’s slow caresses of my body with his calloused hand, his mouth hot against my mouth, against my neck, my shoulders, my breast –

All of it makes me writhe beneath him, urging him onward with a fervor I didn’t know I had.

He doesn’t say a word, though, doesn’t acknowledge my racing pulse, my harsh breathing, my tugs against his body to bring him closer against me as he slides one of his broad hands between my legs and slowly, torturously, draws one finger down the length of me.

I moan, my body arching against him, twisting my head to the side as I gasp against the intensity of the sensation.

This, apparently, breaks his silence.

“God damn it, Fay,” Kent growls as he watches me, doing it again, more deliberate this time, allowing his fingers to explore the wet core of me. I’m soaking for him, I know, already, and I press my eyes even more tightly closed as I feel him slowly press a finger inside of me. I gasp at

the sudden rush of sensation, and then cry out as he moves his thumb upward at the same time, finding that precise spot on me that makes me shudder as he presses against it.

Kent lowers his face to my body as he slowly moves his hand, circling my clit gently with his thumb, pulsing his finger inside of me in a way that I find...maddening, and incredible, and rich. Then, just as I'm starting to understand it, to feel the rhythm of him, to feel my own hips pulse against his hand, I feel him shift and then, slowly, deliberately, he slides another finger in.

My moan is feral and guttural this time, my eyes pressing more tightly closed as my head arches back on my neck. I didn't know – I had no idea it felt like this – I shake and cry out again, unable to help myself as Kent's fingers explore me, softly curling inside of me and hitting –

God damn it, a point I hadn't even known was there –

I shiver against his hand, making small gasping, desperate noises I didn't know I had in me before –

Suddenly, I hear Kent curse and pull his hand away from me. I begin to sit up, surprised, disappointed, my eyelids heavy – wanting more –

But Kent presses me back against the blankets, laying his whole body on top of mine. I gasp a little at the feel of his skin against my own too-bare, too-raw flesh, every single one of my nerves brought to their edge by the feel of him – by what he was doing to me.

"I'm sorry, Fay," I hear him murmur as he settles himself between my legs. "I should – but I can't – fuck, Fay, I can't wait any more –"

I nod, wanting it, understanding – but also – suddenly – anxious again –

I feel him reach down between us, his knuckles grazing the skin of my stomach as he reaches for himself, and then my eyes fly wide open as I feel him press himself against me. I look up into his face, suddenly scared at the feeling of his cock at my entrance.

Kent holds my gaze steadily as he moves himself slowly against me, letting me feel the hard mass of him straining against my core, sliding the head of his dick across my wet silky center. He takes his time there, though I can see the restraint in his expression, the way he's holding back. Still, he lets me get used to it, lets me feel the warm mass of him, lets me work through the newness of it all until I want it.

Until I'm begging for it.

"Please," I whisper, suddenly wanting more – more of it – more of all of it. And I reach out a hand to take him by the hip and pull.

With a heavy groan, Kent releases his restraint just a little and gives me what I want. And slowly, clearly still holding back for my sake, Kent slides inch by inch inside of me.

I cry out, my eyes pressed shut, as he fills me, as I feel myself stretch for him, as I feel the incredible sensation of him hot and thick inside of me. I throw my head back and feel Kent tuck his face against the skin between my neck and shoulder, undone by the feel of me wrapping tight around him. It feels endless, that first entrance, as Kent slowly slides the whole length of himself into me for the first time.

He moves a hand down my body to hold my ass, pulling me tight against him as he sinks to the end of him. I feel him shudder, his whole self, and my own body gasps against him, my hips pulsing, wanting more, greedy.

Kent complies, shifting his hips to pull out just an inch and then slamming home again. My eyes fly open, seeing stars at the intensity of the feeling, and then he does it again. And again. My body responds without me telling it what to do, wrapping my legs around his waist, meeting Kent stroke for stroke as he pounds himself into me, each pulse longer, harder - his breath hot on my skin.

I feel something building in me then as I wrap my arms around his shoulders, as my whole body is swept away in Kent's rhythm, something twisting in my core and my stomach, building, slow. I lean my head back, letting Kent take over, do whatever he wants to me – carried along with it, seeing an incredible shift of colors passing across the inside of my closed eyelids –

I'm arching against him now, breathing fast, wanting – god I don't know what – when –

“God, Fay,” he gasps – “I can't –“

And then his thrusts are suddenly deep and slow as Kent's whole body clenches, as he comes to his end. My eyes fly open at the unique sensation of him spilling himself inside of me. Surprised, panting, I turn my face to his, but Kent's eyes are closed as his body collapses against me, as he tucks his head against my shoulder and pants heavy against my skin.

Breathing hard, I staring at the ceiling of the barn, trying to put myself back together. As I come back to myself, I find one of my hands gently resting against the swell of his bicep, another wrapping in the curl of his thick hair as we both find our breath. There are...tiny holes in the ceiling, I notice. Though which streams of light enter the darkness of the barn, this secret space that feels...

Totally different, from the rest of the world.

And suddenly, I don't want to move, not at all. Not an inch.

Because I know that for now, in this moment, everything is good and safe and warm.

But the moment we move – the moment we get up, and put on our clothes, and go downstairs...

Everything will be irrevocably changed.

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“What are you thinking about,” I whisper a few minutes later, when our breathing and our heartrates have returned almost to normal. Kent has shifted himself to lay at my side, though I’m still on my back, one of his warm arms wrapped around me and pulling me close to his body.

Kent doesn’t say anything for a second, and then he gives a warm little laugh. “Nothing, Fay. I’m thinking about nothing. That’s sort of the point.”

“Is it?” I ask, turning my head fast towards him. Because I – I am thinking about everything. My thoughts are going wild right now – does that mean I did it wrong?

Oh my god.

Did I do it wrong?

Kent slowly opens his eyes a little and looks at me, his arm tightening to bring me closer. “Yes, Fay,” he whispers. “It’s supposed to be relaxing. Peaceful.”

“Oh,” I say, slowly, my face confused.

He smiles at me, amused, and I bite my lip a little, unable to help my little smile in return. It’s so rare to see Kent smile – it pleases me to be the one to make him do it, I realize.

“What,” he asks. “You’re not feeling relaxed?”

“No,” I whisper, my smile broadening. “I feel...kind of crazy.”

“What?” he asks, surprised and a little worried. His eyes open fully now. “What –“

“I mean,” I say eagerly, turning my body towards him. “Was it any good? Did I do it right? Did you – did you like it? Was I supposed to –“

“Fay,” Kent groans, laughing again and closing his eyes, a wider smile on his face now. He takes a deep breath, collecting his thoughts, and then he opens his eyes again to look at me seriously. I note, however, that he still has a little curve at the corners of his lips. “It was good if you enjoyed it. It’s not really about what I experienced – or it shouldn’t be, for you. That’s not what I want.”

“But,” I say, hesitant. “I want you to enjoy it.” And as I say it, I realize it’s true. I want him to like it. I want him to want to do it again.

“Fay,” Kent says seriously, reaching out a hand to brush my cheek. “Trust me. I enjoyed it. A lot. You don’t have to worry about that.”

“Okay,” I say softly, smiling to myself as I press myself closer to him, tucking my head beneath his chin. Kent wraps his arms tightly around me, running a hand down my spine. I enjoy the little tingle that his touch brings to me as he traces his fingers up and down the length of my back.

We stay there, like that, for a long time. His body keeps me warm as I let my mind wander, as I enjoy the feeling of him holding me tight. I never thought, really, what it would be like to have someone’s whole body pressed to mine, skin-to-skin. I never knew I’d like it as much as I do.

But as I lay there, feeling and wondering, questions...crop up.

“Kent?” I ask again a few minutes later, hesitant.

He makes a soft noise of acknowledgement deep in his throat, inviting me to continue.

“Why is there a blanket here?”

He turns to me, confused.

“Like,” I say, smiling at him, a little roguish. “Like, did you plan this? Did you put this blanket here just in case –“

He laughs now, a true, real laugh, and I smile to see him do it. “No, Fay,” he says, his eyes peacefully closed again and his face turned up to the ceiling. “I’m smooth, but I’m not that smooth. It’s probably one of the stable hands – sometimes someone has to stay with the horses all night, and one of them probably comes up here for some peace and quiet.”

“Oh,” I say, looking around and considering the place anew. Actually, I can see and understand that now – it’s quite nice up here. Peaceful, like Kent said.

I look at him again, though, biting my lip and trying to work up the courage to ask the real question on my mind. How was I the same girl who stood up to him downstairs in the stall? Where was she now when I need her?

“Go ahead, Fay,” Kent says, his eyes still closed, startling me a little. “Ask your question.”

I stare at him, surprised. “How did you know I have another question?” I ask, suspicious.

He peeks at me through one half-opened eye. “I can just feel it. Sixth sense. Fay sense.”

I swat his arm, hating that he’s right, making him laugh as he closes his eye and waits patiently.

“Um,” I say, a little awkward now. “What are we going to do about...pregnancy?”

He laughs a little again, which makes me feel embarrassed and a little mad. “Well it’s a serious question –“ I huff. “We never talked about it before – and I don’t want you like, slipping birth control into my morning coffee without asking me –“

He laughs harder then, and I go still with shock.

“Wait –“ I start, pushing away from him and looking him dead in the face. “You aren’t already doing that, are you – because that is a violation –“

“No, Fay,” Kent says, laughing harder and shaking his head. He presses a gentle thumb to my mouth, stopping my tirade, the rest of his hand wrapping warmly around my face. “It’s all right,” he continues. “I had a vasectomy – years ago. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“Oh,” I say, my eyebrows going up in surprise. I had never thought – had never even begun to think... “So,” I say carefully, “you don’t want any more kids?”

“No, Fay,” he says, considering me gently. “Daniel is enough. Do you?”

I shrug, biting my lip. I honestly hadn’t thought about being a mom too much – I’ve been so focused on my career, and I hadn’t really had a mom for much of my life...

“I don’t know,” I murmur, looking at him seriously.

“That’s all right,” he responds, nodding, understanding. He drops it there and I find that I am grateful. I’m not sure I want to be pressed, right now, on this point. Though I admit, I am glad that I don’t have to worry about being knocked up.

“Is it always like this?” I whisper suddenly, curling up against him and asking the question before I even realized that it was growing in me.

Kent tilts his head to the side, studying me seriously, curious. “What do you mean?”

“Like this,” I breathe. I hesitate then – not really knowing...how to explain what I mean.

Slowly, Kent shakes his head side to side. “No, Fay,” he answers seriously. “This was...totally unique.”

Then, quite carefully, as if I were very delicate, or he risks breaking some spell, Kent leans forward to bring his face close to mine. And slowly, gently, he presses his lips to my mouth, carefully kissing me with a warmth and deliberation that...I’ve never felt before.

Not from him.

Not from anyone.

And when he pulls away, he’s smiling at me.

And I feel a fluttering in my stomach that lets me know that I am on quite dangerous ground.

Luckily, Kent spoils it.

“Next time,” he murmurs, moving his hand lower to grip my ass, using his leverage there to pull me tight against him, “we’re going to make sure that you finish too.”

“Wait,” I say, cocking my head at him, confused. “I didn’t?”

Kent laughs at me before kissing me soundly, firmly, with complete control. I let him, allowing the kiss to sweep through me, losing myself to it until I’m almost panting again. Then he releases me, smirking down into my face, the controlling Kent I know suddenly back.

“Oh Fay,” he teases, arrogant, as he squeezes my ass. “I am going to have a good time, showing you this new world.”

I narrow my eyes at him, half resenting his smugness, half excited to see what’s next. I snap my teeth playfully at him and he laughs, pulling me close for another kiss.

Chapter 83 – Shaken, not Stirred

## Chapter 83 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

A few hours later, I stand in the cool white space of my bathroom, staring at my freshly-showered reflection in the mirror. I’m wrapped in a towel, another one twisted around my hair, and I can’t stop...looking at myself.

Wondering if I’m...different somehow.

I drop my towel and pull the other from my head with a frustrated sigh, turning and trying to get a look at my naked body in the mirror from different angles, working to truly see...

But then I give up, glaring at myself in the mirror a little bit. Because I know that I don’t look different – not really, not at all. Because that’s impossible.

But I do know that, inside...I am different. Things have changed – I have changed. And I don’t know at all how I feel about it.

Everything just feels so...strange. And new. When I had left the house this morning, I was one person and now...am I someone else? My body keeps reminding me that things are different too, with a low ache between my legs a constant reminder of how I spent the afternoon. And my

thighs keep shaking a little, just tiny tremors, probably because I had my legs wrapped around Kent's waist all day, and I was using muscles I haven't had to use before...

I blush, thinking about it, and then I scowl at myself in the mirror for blushing and pull my robe off of its hook, tugging it over my arms and knotting it tight around my waist.

Honestly, I'm a mafia mistress now. A real one. Shouldn't I be beyond embarrassment?

A knock comes at my bedroom door and, eager for the distraction, I move to it quickly. I don't have plans for the evening – but did Kent...?

When I open the door, I'm surprised but not displeased to see Jerome standing there, looking bored. I give him a happy smile and he opens his mouth to say something, but then he freezes after he takes one look at me.

"What?" I say, taking a step back, my hands flying to anxiously twist the ends of my wet hair. "What's wrong?"

"Oh my god," Jerome whispers, leaning forward and grinning at me. "You actually did it, didn't you?"

I freeze – no way – there's no way he knows so fast –

"Oh my god, you totally did!" Jerome hisses, gleeful, "You actually boned Lippert! –"

"Jerome!" I gasp, looking out into the hallway, frantic. "What the – are you serious – how did you?!" Then, desperate, I tug him angrily into my room, slamming the door shut behind him.

"Fay, please, I'm dying," Jerome laughs as he stumbles across my floor, his voice half whisper and half glee. "Please, you have to tell me everything –"

"I'm not telling you anything!" I hiss, giving him a little shove so that he falls back against the bed. "Even if there were anything to tell – I'm not going to – I mean, I wouldn't –" I blush now, pursing my lips, realizing that...well, that it's no good.

Jerome sits perched on the end of my bed, leaning forward, grinning at me as if it's Christmas morning. "Come on, Fay, I won't tell anyone – I can keep a secret!"

"We're not girlfriends, Jerome!" I huff at him, "this isn't a slumber party – I'm not telling you my deepest darkest just because you ask!" I cross my arms but I can't help smiling a little. Honestly, I am dying to talk to someone about it, and I do like Jerome.

"Oh, it's not a slumber party?" Jerome asks, smirking and raising his brows. "Like the one you had last night with my boyfriend? Really, Fay, you do like to have Lippert men in your bed –"



“Ew!” I say, dashing forward to smack him on the arm. “You of all people should know that it’s not like that between me and Daniel and – wait –“ I freeze, my arm raised to smack him again. “Did you just – did you just call Daniel your boyfriend?”

Now it’s Jerome’s turn to blush. “No – I mean, it was a slip – we’re –“

“You’re what?” I breathe, dying to know, leaning towards him.

“Quid pro quo, Miss Alden,” Jerome snaps, quickly pulling himself back together and retaking control of the conversation. “I’ll tell you if you tell me.”

I stand up straight, folding my arms over my chest studying him. “Fine. You tell me first.”

“No way – you go –“

“No!” I interject, laughing. “You tell me, or I’ll make Kent fire you –“

“Unfair!” Jerome cries, jumping to his feet. “You can’t leverage your sugar daddy’s –“

“I can do as I please! I –“

We’re both silenced, suddenly, by a hard knock at the door, both of our heads spinning towards it. I’m faster than Jerome, though, using this to my advantage. “You know that’s Daniel, right?” I say, smirking as I reach for the handle. “Maybe we should just...let him in? See what he thinks?”

“No, Fay –“ Jerome says, his face worried. But I just grin at him and whip open the door, turning to face Daniel with a wicked grin.

That falls immediately from my face.

Kent is standing there, his arms folded, glaring at me. And then his eyes flicking dangerously to Jerome, standing behind.

“Sir,” says Jerome, putting his hands out where Kent can see them, like he’s being questioned by the police. “I’m sorry sir – I meant to get her for you, like you asked – but we got distracted –“

“Distracted by what?” Kent says, his voice slow, even. Perilous. I take a step away from Kent, freaked out by the violence on his face. “What distracted you, Jerome?” Kent asks again, taking a step into the room, his eyes flicking to me once as he prowls closer to his prey. “What distracted you so much that you came into Fay’s room? Alone? And shut the door? When she’s undressed?”

“Please,” Jerome begs, quailing a little under the force of Kent’s stare. “I promise – it was nothing – we’re – we’re friends –“

Kent doesn't acknowledge a word that Jerome says, just continues to stalk closer to him until their faces are inches apart. "Get the fuck out, Jerome."

Jerome immediately flinches away, nodding and dashing for the door, clearly scared – perhaps even for his life. He doesn't even look at me as he goes. I watch Jerome's form disappear out my door and down the steps, shocked and freaked out myself. Then I turn back to Kent, my eyes wide.

"What the hell is going on, Fay?" Kent asks, arms crossed, glaring at me.

"Nothing," I insist, staring at him, shocked. "Seriously, Kent, there's nothing going on between me and Jerome, there can't be, he's –"

And then I stop realizing...

Realizing that Kent actually doesn't know. That he wouldn't be this jealous, this enraged, if he knew that the bedroom that Jerome is actually secretly visiting is...Daniel's.

"Kent," I say, crossing the room to him and putting my hands flat on his chest, looking up into his face. "Seriously, you've got to believe me – there's nothing going on between me and Jerome. He's my friend – one of my only friends, in this house." I bite my lip at him, knowing – well, knowing that that's worked in the past. Hoping it works again. "Please – just trust me. It was an innocent visit."

I can tell by the stony nature of Kent's face that he doesn't quite believe me. I frown a little, confused. Why – if we just slept together hours ago – if he just took my virginity – why would he think I was sneaking Jerome up into my room for some kind of tryst?

"You'll have to forgive me for doubting your fidelity, Fay," Kent sneers. "Especially considering that your boyfriend is downstairs. Waiting for you. To take you on a trip."

I blink at Kent, totally confused.

Then I take a step away, anxious. Is this...is this some kind of trap?

"Kent," I whisper. "What are you talking about?"

Kent cocks his head to the side, studying me, but I look at him with honest confusion on my face. He assesses me for a moment and then nods toward the door. "Come and see for yourself," he says, stepping towards it. I follow, eager to understand, padding after him in my bare feet until we're both standing at the top of the steps. I'm still looking up at Kent, though, when he stops and gestures down to the first floor.

And then I look and my mouth falls open.

Because Ivan is standing there, smirking up at me.

“Are you ready, Fay?” he asks, all brash assurance. “Time to go.”

## Chapter 84 – Mini-Break

# Chapter 84 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Ivan,” I say, my voice hardly more than a whisper as I stare at him from the top of the steps. Then, realizing that I’m standing here basically naked in my tiny robe, I clutch the fabric closed at my throat and take a deep breath, trying to figure out what the hell to do next. What is he doing here!?

“I take it,” Ivan says, his smirk deepening, “by your state of dress that you are...not ready yet? Do you need a few more minutes?”

“A few more minutes?” I ask, baffled. And then, fully aware that Kent’s eyes are on me, I flit down the steps until I’m eye-level with Ivan. “What are you talking about, Ivan? Why are you – what are you –”

Seeing that I’m not playing coy and that I’m genuinely confused, Ivan frowns at me. “Didn’t you get my texts, Fay? Or your dad’s? This was...all set up.”

I slap a hand to my forehead, groaning. Texts. My phone. You know, communication with the outside world?

“Ivan,” I explain, shaking my head. “I haven’t checked my phone since like...yesterday afternoon. I’m sorry – I’ve been...distracted.”

Images flash through my mind, suddenly, of precisely how distracted I was. Images of Kent pinning me up against the wall of the stable – his mouth hard on mine while he carried me upstairs – the feel of his body against mine as he pressed into me –

Despite myself, I blush, which only makes Ivan grin. “Ah, that’s all right, Fay,” he says, giving me his patented cocky half-smile. “It’s a surprise then. Go get packed – I’m taking you away for the night. A little mini-break, just you and me. So we can, ah...get to know each other.” His eyes move, at his last words, to Kent standing at the top of the stairs. Ivan’s smile deepens, bringing out a dimple on his left cheek.

Slowly, I turn to follow Ivan’s gaze. Kent doesn’t look at Ivan, though – only at me. Then, he twists his head quickly to the side towards my room, his meaning perfectly clear.

“Give me a minute,” I murmur to Ivan as I run up the stairs, past Kent and towards my room. I can hear Kent’s heavy footsteps behind me as I fly into my room and spin to face him. He slams the door shut.

“Kent, I swear –“ I say, all in a rush. “I had no idea – I did not plan this –“

“Give me your phone,” Kent commands, interrupting me, apparently having no interest in what I’m saying. I nod quickly and rush to my desk, grabbing the phone he gave me off of it and handing it to him. Kent glances at it and then tosses it on the bed, glaring at me. “Your other phone, Fay,” he demands, his voice starting to get angry.

I purse my lips together, a little frustrated, and then nod. I kneel down and open the bottom door of my desk, pulling out the burner phone Janeen gave me. I glance at it, seeing that I have several unread messages. I start to open them but Kent grabs the phone out of my hand.

“Hey!” I protest, but he just flicks his eyes at me once, annoyed, and then ignores me, opening the messages and reading through them. I cross my arms over my chest as I stand up, angry at Kent for not letting me have privacy, but then also angry at myself for thinking he would. And then again for thinking that I was clever enough to have a second phone without him knowing about it.

“What the boy says checks out,” Kent says, tossing the phone onto the bed with the other one and then turning to glare at me. “You didn’t plan this?”

“I swear,” I say, pressing a hand to my chest. “I didn’t know anything about this – you didn’t either? Usually my dad would call you to like...ask permission or something.”

“My last phone call with your father didn’t go well,” Kent says, looking away from me and clenching his jaw. I blink in surprise, thinking that the last phone call was when...well, when my father called to tell Kent that I’m a spoiled, ungrateful whore. But Kent was calm and collected when I saw him later that afternoon – I had assumed...

“Are things...okay? Between you two? Between the families?”

“That’s not your concern,” Kent replies rigidly, turning to meet my eyes again, his expression harsh. I huff a little laugh, opening my mouth to say that it very much is my concern, considering I’m the one stuck between these two families, but he continues on.

“Well?” Kent asks. “Do you want to go?”

I freeze and stare at him, my eyes wide, wondering if this is some kind of trick question. “Do...I want to go?”

“That’s what I asked you, Fay,” Kent snaps. “Don’t play stupid now, we both know you’re not.”

I don't let his tone phase me, I'm used to it by now, and instead simply stare at Kent, trying to figure out what the hell I'm supposed to do now. Because part of me – a big part of me – just wants to go to bed right now, to curl up in the dark and give myself a minute to contemplate this insane day.

And another part of me – well, another part...likes Ivan. Likes the idea of him standing downstairs, all handsome and cocky, waiting to take me away. The dangerous part of me – which I am now starting to realize is more powerful than I thought it was – really wants to see what Ivan has in mind for the evening.

But still another part...

I look at Kent, then, and suddenly all I want him to do is to wrap his arms around me and tell me not to go. To pick me up, and carry me downstairs, and tell Ivan to fuck off, and then take me to his bed – wherever that is in the house – and lay me down in his sheets and –

“What do you want me to do?” I hear myself ask, my words tentative.

Then I hold my breath, wanting his answer. Needing it.

I see Kent's minds moving as he studies me. I see him take a deep breath in through his nose and then sigh, shaking his head a little.

“I need you to go, Fay,” he says, his voice a little...rueful? I don't know. I can't parse it. “I'm cut off from intel about your father right now, all my men are, and...things are getting complicated. It's bigger than me and Alden – there's a rift starting between all of the families...” Kent sighs and scrapes his hand over his face from top to bottom. “If you went, Fay, you could try to discern the sentiment. That would be helpful.”

I stare at Kent, shocked that he has such a business-like reply, that his motives for wanting me to go or stay have absolutely nothing to do with...us. With this afternoon. With whatever our personal relationship is.

And then I remember that we have two contracts. And that one of those contracts was to be a mistress, but the other – and frankly, the more lucrative one – was to be his spy. So quickly, I nod. I wonder if he can see the disappointment on my face before I replace it with a little smile. “Sure, Kent,” I say. “If that's what you want.”

He studies me for a moment and then steps closer, taking me by the hand and pulling me against him. “Remember that this is a business trip, Fay,” he growls, close enough that I feel his lips move against mine. “I absolutely forbid you to enjoy yourself.”

I feel a little laugh ripple through me as I tilt my head up, meeting his eyes. “Whatever you say, boss.”

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Twenty minutes later, Fay slips out of her room, dragging a little powder-blue wheeled suitcase behind her, dressed in a casual white tennis skirt and an oversized varsity sweater that Kent picked out for her before he left her room.

At the bottom of the stairs, both Ivan and Kent watch her descend. They've been there the whole time, waiting. They didn't say a word to each other.

"Bout time, gorgeous," Ivan says with a smile, coming forward and reaching out a hand to help Fay down the last few steps. She beams at him.

"Oh, come on," she replies, wrinkling her nose playfully. "I'm worth the wait."

Kent feels fury build in him as he forces himself to watch the exchange. He wants nothing more than to step forward and punch that satisfied smirk right off of Ivan's face as he looks Fay over from head to foot. But Kent does nothing, doesn't move at all, burying the desire deep inside. It's not worth it.

There's the creak of a door, then, and Ivan, Kent, and Fay all turn towards the kitchen as Daniel comes into the hall, taking a big bite of the sandwich in his hand, his mind clearly elsewhere. Daniel stops in his tracks when he sees them all staring at him and slowly swallows his bite. "What's...going on?" he asks, wary.

"Hey Daniel," Ivan calls, raising his chin to him, not letting go of Fay's hand. "Nice to see you again."

"Daniel, come here," Kent commands, not giving Daniel a chance to respond. "Come say goodbye to your fiancé. She's off for a little...trip."

Both Daniel and Fay raise their eyebrows at Kent's use of that word, Ivan looking between them, but Kent ignores them all. He has his own reasons. Daniel crosses to the unlikely group, his eyes on Fay.

"Where you going?" Daniel asks with a confused frown.

"Away for the night," she replies, attempting a little smile. "It's a...surprise?"

"With Ivan?" Daniel pushes, starting to get mad and moving to stand next to his father. Fay shrugs and nods a little. Daniel glares at them all. "Why!?" Daniel demands, his voice angry.

Kent expertly changes the direction of the conversation, though, snapping his fingers towards the open doors of his office. Two men come out, backpacks slung over their own shoulders. “These men are Fay’s body guards,” Kent explains, his words directed at Ivan. “I’m sure you can accommodate them.”

“Sure,” Ivan says, unphased. “We’ve got plenty of room. Hey guys.” He lifts his chin towards each of them in a friendly greeting. Kent notes the little smile that forms on Fay’s face as she watches Ivan, pleased, apparently, at his ability to meet Kent’s demands with a cool head.

Kent nudges Daniel hard in the arm. “Say goodbye to your girl, Daniel. I’m sure she’ll miss not having you so close by tonight.”

Daniel glares at his dad a little and then, sandwich still in hand, goes to wrap Fay in an awkward hug, his sandwich getting dangerously close to her hair. “Have fun, Fay,” he says blandly, clearly not meaning it and giving Ivan a bitter little glare over her shoulder.

“See ya, Daniel!” Fay says cheerfully, giving him a squeeze and then letting him go. Ivan smirks at both of them, not missing that there was no good-bye kiss. Kent grits his teeth at his son’s inability to read the room. As Ivan moves to open the front door, Kent moves to Fay’s side, partially wanting to cover for Daniel’s mistake and partially wanting...well.

“Have a nice time, Fay,” he half murmurs, half growls, placing a hand on her waist to pull her to his side. Then, he places a fatherly kiss on her forehead.

As Kent pulls away, Fay looks into his eyes, disbelief and irony written all over her face. She shakes her head at him while Ivan’s back turned. “Sure thing, daddy,” she whispers, taking the opportunity to fist a hand in his shirt and pull him hard against her. “Don’t miss me too much.”

She gives him a look, then, that twists Kent stomach and sends all his blood rushing for his cock. But before he can respond, she’s let him go and is moving through the door, not even looking over her shoulder as she leaves, the guards following after her. When Fay takes Ivan’s hand and smiles up at him as they walk down the front steps, Kent grits his teeth and slams the door behind her.

He takes a moment to collect himself, breathing hard, and then turns towards his office to see...

Daniel, standing there, his expression a little scandalized. “You okay, dad?” Daniel asks slowly.

Kent says nothing, just turns and storms into his office, slamming that door as well.

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“So, where are we off to?” I ask, eagerly smiling as I buckle my seatbelt in the front of his car. But while I was expecting words, Ivan’s response is to place a gentle hand on my cheek, turning my face to him.

“Hey, are you okay?” he asks, searching my face. “That was...intense in there. Weird.”

I melt a little, looking into his pretty grey eyes, and nod my head. “It’s...always weird in there. Casa Lippert is a strange place.”

“I’m starting to get that impression,” Ivan mutters, still staring at me. “It’s really good to see you Fay,” he continues quietly, sincerity all over his face.

I take a deep breath, suddenly relaxed, more relaxed maybe than I’ve been all day, which is weird considering...well. I push that thought from my mind and give Ivan a real smile. Not the fake ones I’ve been pasting onto my face since he came into Kent’s house. “It’s good to see you too,” I sigh, taking his hand. “Really good.”

“Good,” he says, grinning at the redundancy in our conversation. Then, he turns his attention to the road. “You want to go eat some seafood?”

“Always!” I reply, suddenly eager. “Are we going to the beach?”

“Mountains, actually,” he says as he pulls out of the driveway, Kent’s guards following behind us in a black SUV.

“Seafood in the mountains?” I ask, wrinkling at my nose. “When we live so close to the shore?”

Ivan just gives me a little wink. “Trust me,” he says. “You won’t regret it.”

Two hours later, we pull up to the most gorgeous mountain house I’ve ever seen. I’m gaping as I step out, taking in the amazing vista behind the house as well as the fantastic architecture of the home itself, which looks like it has about a dozen decks and balconies.

“Oh my god,” I whisper, staring up at it. “Is this...is this your place?” I ask, glancing at Ivan as he comes to stand next to me.

“Yours, actually,” he relies, slipping his hands into his pockets and staring at the house.

I frown at him. “What?”

“This is your dad’s place,” Ivan explains, turning to me with a smile. “He loaned it to me for the night. Told me to take you up here, enjoy ourselves.”

“Oh,” I say, shrinking away from him a little, surprised. “I thought that you...”

Ivan turns his head a little, waiting for me to continue.

“Well...” I hesitate, “my dad and I, the last time we met, we didn’t...end things on very good terms. And he was mad that I was seeing you. And I kind of thought that you brought me up here because you wanted to see me...”



“Fay,” Ivan says gently, taking my hand. “Nothing’s changed. I’m still on your side. Your dad loaned me the house because I flipped out on him – I heard what he said to you –”

My mouth drops open, wanting to ask how, but he just smirks at me and puts a hand up, asking me to let him finish.

“I have my sources, Fay,” he continues, “and I went to your dad’s house, demanding that he apologize to you. This,” Ivan says, shrugging and looking towards the house again, “is his apology. As well as his blessing, I guess. For us to see each other.” He turns to look me in the eye then. “Though none of that matters to me, though. I’d have come for you tonight whether he’d loaned me this house or not.”

“Oh really?” I ask, finding myself drawing closer to him unconsciously. “And without this house, where would you have taken me?”

“Cheap motel on the boardwalk,” he says, shrugging with a smirk. “I would have treated you to the finest fries that a five dollar bill could buy – taken you fishing on the pier with nothing but a piece of corn as bait–”

I find myself laughing, suddenly, charmed by him again. He wraps an arm around my waist, pulling me close, and I let him. “Seriously, Fay,” he says. “Forget your dad – he’s a jerk. I brought you here because I thought you’d want to know that he was sorry. But if you don’t like it – we can go right now.”

“No,” I murmur, smiling at him, our faces close. “Let’s stay. I want to check out my property, after all.”

Ivan nudges my nose with his, sending a little flutter through my stomach, and then pulls me towards the house.

Chapter 86 – Blondes Always Have More Fun

## Chapter 86 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

“Oh my god,” I mutter, my mouth full of crab cake, my eyes almost rolling back into my head with how delicious it is. “This is...seriously, how do they get such good seafood up in the mountains? This tastes like it was caught this morning!”

“I think it was,” Ivan replies, equally intent on a lobster tail. “I think they’ve got a guy whose whole job is to drive up from the shore in the mornings with the freshest catch. Then he goes back at night.”

“A lot of lonely hours on the road,” I murmur, nodding seriously, “but he’s doing God’s work.”

I take a final bite and then, groaning, lean on the backrest of the queen-sized lounge positioned on my father’s third-floor deck, looking out over the scenery. We’re eating al fresco tonight and the view is...amazing. Just treetops and mountain peaks as far as the eye can see.

As much as I resent my father – my cheek still carries the phantom sting of his slap – I have to admit...his taste in vacation property is flawless.

Ivan leans back next to me on the lounge, our shoulders brushing. He holds out a beer to me, fresh from the cooler at his side. Smiling, I take it, twisting off the top and taking a swig.

“So,” I say, leaning into Ivan and giving him a little nudge with my shoulder. “What do we do now?”

Ivan pauses and then turns his head slowly to me, his eyebrow suggestively raised, and I swat at him, cackling with laughter. “Seriously, a couple of crab cakes and you think you’re going to get me in bed!?”

“Crab cakes!” he insists, laughing with me, “and a multi-million-dollar property!”

“Which is more mine than yours!”

“Details,” Ivan mutters, flicking a hand to dismiss my point as he brings his beer bottle to his lips, “semantics. Not important.”

“It is pretty here, though,” I sigh, my laughter fading to a happy hum in my chest. “Thank you for bringing me.”

We sit there for a long time, chatting about nothing, as the sun fades over the horizon and stars take the sky. I smile when I see a few early fireflies flitting their way through the treetops, the swoop of bats and owls as they start their nighttime prowling. I shiver, a little, as the evening grows colder, and Ivan wraps a warm arm around me.

I lean into him and then feel a twist of discomfort in my stomach when I remember...well, that someone else was keeping me warm with their body heat just a couple of hours ago.

God, I wonder suddenly, am I a slut?

My mind starts to race, my body going tense as I consider the fact that I’m letting Ivan hold me on the deck of my father’s house when only a few hours ago, his enemy – my boss, and maybe... my boyfriend? – was...

God. Maybe I am a slut.

Is it a bad thing to be a slut? I wonder frantically. Should I be sitting here, slut-shaming myself, or should I – like Janeen says – just give in to the impulses of my body and not bother with puritanical questions of shame –

“Are you all right, Fay?” Ivan asks gently.

I blink back to myself and realize that I’m panicked a little bit – breathing harder than I should be when I’m just relaxing on a deck drinking a beer. My body is tense against Ivan’s. No wonder he noticed – how could he not?

“I’m okay,” I reply after a moment, deliberately making my muscles unwind. I give Ivan a wan little smile.

He studies me carefully, sweetly, frowning a little. “Can I hazard a guess?” he asks.

I tense again – can he know, like Jerome did? Can he tell that this morning –

“This world is getting to you a little bit, isn’t it?” Ivan speculates softly. “It’s not an easy place.”

My breath leaves me in one big relieved exhale. “Yes,” I say, relieved that Ivan is not as perceptive as Jerome. “Yeah it’s...it’s been a lot, lately.” I work to give him a smile and fail a bit. Ivan raises a hand to my face, his fingertips cool and a little damp from the condensation of his beer.

“Well then,” he says, smirking at me. “Forget about it. For a little bit. For just one night.”

“Forget about it?” I echo, disbelieving. “Fat chance there –“

“Seriously, though,” Ivan says, grinning at me. “We’ll just forget about our lives for a couple of hours. Be two totally different people. Leave it all behind. Hi, my name is Rodrigo,” he says, his smile growing as he holds out his hand to shake mine. “Pleasure to meet you.”

I laugh at his stupid little game, shaking my head, hesitating. He reaches out and takes my hand, though, lifting and lowering our clasped fingers in a forced shake.

“Come on,” he whispers. “Try it.”

“Nice to meet you Rodrigo,” I murmur, flicking my eyes up to him, smirking a little.

“I’m a lion tamer,” he says, pitching his voice lower as he takes on his role. “I spend my days taming wild beasts and my nights...taming wild women. And who are you?” he asks, holding my hand tight. “Come on, Fay,” he urges in a whisper, giving me a little nudge with his shoulder when I hesitate. “You can be anyone.”

I tilt my head back, giving into it, my hair falling back over my shoulders as I look up into the sky and consider my options. “I’m Sister Mary Alexander,” I say finally, smiling to myself as I

decide. “I’m a Benedictine nun. I make fancy marzipan and sell it on the streets of Austria to raise money for the orphans under my care.”

“Fay,” I hear Ivan whisper, snapping me out of my imaginary wanderings and drawing my gaze immediately back to him. I blink in surprise when I see a smile stretched across his face from cheek to cheek. “You’re so weird,” he says, shaking his head at me a little, a laugh starting in his chest.

“What!” I gasp, “you said I could be anyone I wanted –“

“That’s right,” he laughs, his grin growing, “you can pick anything in the world – any fantasy at all - and you pick a nun?”

“What!” I protest, leaning forward and laughing with him, joy running through me. “I liked The Sound of Music a lot when I was a kid –“

“Oh, so did I,” Ivan agrees eagerly, his words overlapping mine as he reaches out to grab me, pressing his hand against my lower back, “you actually hit the nail on the head, Sister Mary –“ he murmurs, pulling my body closer to him so that I’m laying flat on the lounge and he’s curved over me. “This is actually working for me –“

“What!?” I shout, aghast – laughing through my shock - I was going for the opposite of that – the least sexy thing I could think of –

“Oh yeah,” Ivan nods, smirking down at me, moving the hand on my back to graze the side of my ass and move briskly down my thigh, his fingers teasing at the edge of my skirt, “I went to Catholic school – I’ve been fantasizing about this for a long time –“

“What?!”

“Mmhmm,” he continues, “do you think you could say the rosary for a little bit, and like, look at me disapprovingly? Or, actually, could you get a ruler and slap me on the wrist – just a couple times –“

I’m laughing so hard now that I can feel tears pricking at my eyes. Ivan goes along with me, our bodies shaking against each other at the ridiculousness of it, and suddenly I find myself a little bit in love with his sense of humor, his ability to take anything and twist it and make it fun.

“Well, Rodrigo,” I murmur a moment later when my laughter fades a bit. I’m smiling up at him, not allowing myself to think too much about what I’m doing as I raise my hands to run them through his blonde hair, my eyes roving over the tattoos on his neck, suddenly wanting, very much, to see the extent of them printed on his arms and his chest. “What do a lion tamer and a chaste nun do next? I don’t have any animals for you to tame. And there are no wanton women here.”

“Aren’t there, though?” Ivan murmurs, dipping his head to press his lips softly against my clavicle.

“No,” I whisper, closing my eyes and letting my head fall back, clearing the path for him to kiss his way up my neck.

A shiver runs through me as he does it, as he runs his mouth over the length of my jaw. “Liar,” he whispers, the word just tender breath against my ear.

## Chapter 87 – Secret Warnings

# Chapter 87 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I can’t help myself, then, as I turn my face to Ivan, a tiny moan on my lips that he snatches away with his mouth on mine.

I kiss him without remembering to breathe, so hungry for him that I forget myself – hungry for his joy, his laughter, his ease and his jokes – the way he lets me escape the rest of my world and lose myself in him. Ivan’s mouth is hot against me as he wraps me in his arms, twisting his body and me with it so that I’m all tied up in him, his back now flat against the cushions and my chest pressed on top of his as I take control of the kiss.

His hands feel like they’re everywhere, all over my body, and I want them there – and I slip my own hand beneath his shirt, feeling the flat stretch of his stomach, the ridge of the v of his muscles as they disappear into the top of his pants –

But suddenly I gasp, pulling away – remembering another stomach – another stupid pair of pants –

I sit straight up, aghast, staring down at Ivan.

“Fay,” he says quietly, sitting up, looking at me with concern. “What’s wrong?”

I just stare at him, appalled at myself. How could I – Kent was –

“It’s all right,” Ivan whispers, putting out a tentative hand and brushing a curl of my hair behind my ear. “It’s okay. We don’t have to. Do you want to – go inside?”

“No,” I breathe, shaking my head, my body starting to calm down.

Because, of course, Ivan isn’t going to make me do anything I don’t want to. I realize that, as I stare at him.

The real problem is that I...I don't know what I want. And with everything that happened with Kent – the intensity that grew between us until it broke – until he broke – I hadn't realized...that maybe this, with Ivan...

Maybe this is what I want? Want more?

Or...is it just Ivan is the one in front of me right now...and after twenty-some years of celibacy something has broken in me and I just want to have sex with everyone -

I sigh and hang my head, shaking it, so terribly confused. "No," I say, closing my eyes and letting myself rest. "Can we just...can we just stay out here?"

"Of course," Ivan responds instantly, leaning back against the cushions and looking at me with concern. He takes my hand and tugs on it, inviting me to come close and relax. I move to sit next to him, putting my head on his shoulder, knowing that he'll let me take the lead. That he won't push.

We're quiet for a long minute, Ivan reaching for two more beers from the bucket and handing me one. I take it, giving him a little smile, truly grateful that he's...well, that he's being so nice to me.

"So, Rodrigo," I say with a little sigh. "Tell me how you grew up."

And he does. Ivan invents a long story for Rodrigo for me, of his childhood raised by panthers and his early years in the sands of the Sahara, including weird twists and heart-wrenching turns that have me laughing long into the night. A few hours later, my head still pillowed on Ivan's shoulder, I fall asleep listening to the sound of his voice.

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The next morning the dawn light wakes me, rudely peeking through my lashes and invading my sleep. I rub my eyes, the early-morning air cold and dewy against my skin, and look to Ivan slumped against my side, still asleep.

I smile as I look at him and raise a hand to softly brush his hair back from his handsome face. Ivan flinches a little at my touch and then I watch him blink awake. As he does I think about the intimacy of that – of watching someone wake up, of their body still pressed to yours.

"Hey," he says, his eyes falling on me.

"Hi," I whisper, unable to keep the smile off my lips. It comes, unbidden, whenever he looks at me like that.

"You're pretty," he mumbles sleepily, lifting a lazy hand to tug one of the rumpled strands of my hair.

I laugh a little, opening my mouth to deny it, but I'm interrupted by the sound of the sliding door opening to the deck. We both flinch a little, turning towards the man standing there, dressed in black. One of Kent's guys.

"It's time, miss," he says, his voice serious. "He wants you home. Now."

"Oh?" I ask, biting my lip with disappointment. "No breakfast?"

Slowly, the guard shakes his head. I turn my attention back to Ivan, but his eyes are on the guard.

"Can you give us a minute?" Ivan says to Kent's man, using a tone that reminds me that Ivan, too, is the head of a criminal organization. The guard hesitates but Ivan twists his head a little, his mouth tightening, letting the guard know that it wasn't really a question. Sighing, the guard goes back inside, closing the door behind him.

"Can I tell you something Fay? Before you go?" Ivan asks quietly, his voice more serious than I'm used to, and definitely too serious for dawn. "Just between us?"

I cock my head to the side, some instinct in me prodding me to pay attention, so I sit up and look him in the face. This is...different, than the carefree Ivan I know, who always acts like he can handle anything. Instead, now, there's real worry in his eyes.

"Okay," I breathe. "Sure."

"You need to be careful, Fay," Ivan urges, his voice tentative. "I wanted to tell you this last night – but we got distracted. And now time is short, so I'm sorry that this is abrupt, but...things are changing in the criminal sphere. Something big is coming – I don't want you to get caught up in it. But you're very close to some of the big players in this war. I'm worried that you could get swept away in it."

I feel myself go pale as I listen to him, fascinated. I knew that there was...discord between the families, but I never thought...

"Are you one of these players, Ivan?" I hear myself ask, my voice steadier than I thought it would be as my mind races to think of Kent – of Daniel –

"I am," Ivan says quietly, nodding slowly and raising a hand to cup my cheek. "I can protect you, if you...if you'll let me."

Slowly, I reach out and take his other hand, needing to know more. "Are you suggesting that...maybe Kent can't?"

"Fay," Ivan whispers, leaning closer to me. "I can't – I don't want to say anything that will make it worse, or get you into hot water at home. But..." he looks at me seriously, his eyes locked on mine. And then he swallows, like he's made a hard decision, and speaks all in a rush.

“Kent’s going down, Fay,” Ivan insists, moving his hand from my cheek to behind my neck, wrapping his fingers softly in the hair at the nape. “He’s on the wrong side of – of everything. You have to get out of that house while you can. If you come with me, I can protect you.”

I move away from Ivan suddenly, shocked – scared – glancing over my shoulder towards the door, my heart starting to race.

“No,” Ivan says, urgent, his hand slipping from my neck to my shoulder, pulling me back. “Not right now – there’s time – everything’s fine, I didn’t take you out of there last night to like, make a move while you were gone.” Ivan shakes his head and I watch him closely.

“Just think about it,” he concludes softly, his eye wide. And deep down, everything in me tells me that...this is not a play for power. Or if it is, that beneath that play is a real concern for me. A desire to keep me safe.

“Thank you, Ivan,” I say, biting my lip. “I will think about it.”

And then I lean forward, pressing a kiss to his mouth, letting myself linger for just a moment with my eyes closed, wondering if this...

But then I pull away and stand up. He watches my every move.

“I have to go,” I whisper, holding his gaze for – well, maybe for too long.

And then I turn, and leave, nodding to the guards in the house to let them know I’m ready. And as I walk out the door, I know Ivan is behind me, watching my every step.

Chapter 88 – Home Again

## Chapter 88 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

A hand on my shoulder shakes me awake and I jump, gasping a little bit as my head spins to see Kent’s guard sitting next to me in the back seat of the SUV.

“Sorry,” he says, tentative and pulling away. “I didn’t mean to scare you – we’re just...home.”

“Oh,” I say, surprised, turning to see that we are indeed pulling around to the front of Kent’s house. “Oh, wow,” I murmur, turning back to the guard. “I was really out of it, wasn’t it?”

He gives me a little smile and a shrug. “Only minor snoring. Minimal drool,” he quips, making me laugh.



I narrow my eyes at him a little, working to remember. “Marco...right?” I hazard, and am rewarded with a wide grin on his face.

“You got it, miss,” he says, giving me a nod as the car pulls to a stop out front.

“Well, thanks, Marco,” I say, giving him a little smile. “For spending the night keeping me safe, and also waking me up before Kent found me slumped and snoring in the back of his car.”

Marco laughs, shaking his head and leaning over me to pop my door open. “Any time, miss,” he replies warmly. As I climb out of the car I realize that I’m starting to learn the ways of Kent’s house more than I thought I was – I’m learning names, patterns. It feels...nice, I think, as the driver – Gianni – comes around the car and lifts my little suitcase out of the trunk. I smile at him as I accept it, pleased when he grins at me in return, and then I turn towards the front of the house.

I stop when I see him standing there, my breath stolen from me a little bit. First because...well, because he looks really good, standing there, clean-shaven in the morning light, already dressed in his finely tailored suit. But second because he looks mad.

I sigh, glancing between Gianni and Marco, who don’t meet my eyes under his gaze. What the hell did I do this time?

I reach down to grab the top handle of my suitcase, carrying it with me as I climb the steps towards Kent. He watches me come towards him, his arms folded, his face...unreadable. Stern. When I get to the top, close to him, I don’t know what to do. Should I...hug him?

I laugh a little bit, despite myself, at that impulse. Nothing about Kent right now – his size, his stance, the power radiating off of him, the severe look he’s giving me – none of that says “hug me,” not at all.

Surprisingly, though, his face softens when he hears my little laugh. “What?” he asks, dropping his hands to his waist and turning his head to the side, just a little bit. “What’s funny?”

“Nothing, Kent,” I say, shrugging. “It’s just...really early to get glared at that intensely. Can a girl get a cup of coffee first?”

Kent blinks at me then, his lips parting a little in surprise, and then he shakes his head, blinking as a little smirk pulls at his mouth. “Come on, Fay,” he sighs, reaching out a hand that he places between my shoulder blades, ushering me neatly towards the open door. “Come inside. Welcome home.”

Surprised, pleased, I do as he says, only turning back for the little suitcase. “Leave it,” he murmurs, continuing to urge me forward. “They should have taken it in for you anyway.”

“Oh,” I say, glancing backwards at it and then at Marco and Gianni, who seem to be realizing the same thing at the same time. Marco sighs and puts his head in his hands, but I give them both a smile. Kent’s back turned, Gianni risks giving me a little wave.

Smiling, bolstered by the fact that...well, that I think Kent’s guards like me, at least a little bit, I walk with Kent into the house and look up at him. “Did you have a nice night?” I ask, a little desperate to break the silence.

Kent looks down at me for a moment while he closes the door, but he doesn’t answer my question. “Did you have a nice night, Fay?”

“Um,” I say, my fingers reaching up to tangle in my hair, which I know is...unkempt, after a little – just a little - frisky business with Ivan and a night sleeping outside. Kent’s face goes dark as he sees me playing with my hair – something I only do when I’m anxious. Realizing that I’m giving away more than I want to, I drop my hands and fold them neatly behind my back.

“What happened?” Kent asks, taking a step closer to me, glowering down at me so I have to tilt my head back and look up at him. “Did he touch you?”

I frown at Kent then, a little defiance curling in my stomach as he glares at me. “Was he...not supposed to touch me?” I ask. “It was a date, Kent. You knew that when you sent me.”

I see anger grow in him then, visible in the flare of his nostrils, the tightening of his jaw, the way his shoulders flex back and his fingers curl towards fists. “I don’t want him touching you, Fay,” Kent glowers, his voice barely louder than a whisper and dangerous in its depths.

“Well, then what do you want, Kent,” I reply, not budging an inch and looking up into his face. “Do you want information? Or do you want me untouched? Because...I’m not sure you can have both.”

A rumble sounds deep in Kent’s chest and he draws closer to me, but then, to my surprise, he checks himself, backing off and sliding his hands smoothly into his pockets as he looks me over from head to foot. The anger is still there – and, well, the jealousy, if I’m going to put a name to it – but I can see that his curiosity is also peaked. “Upstairs,” he commands, nodding to the staircase. “Now.”

My mouth falls open a little. Is he...to the third –

“Your room, Fay,” Kent clarifies, smirking a little at my hesitation. “I want to know everything you learned, but you need to clean up. You look...rumped.”

I glare at Kent a little, holding his gaze and letting him wonder – for a second – just how I got this rumped, and then I nod, turning to climb up the stairs. Kent stays close behind me and follows me into my room, closing the door behind me.

And then I tell him everything.

Well, not...everything. Some of the details of Rodrigo's life, and Sister Mary's strong, visceral reaction to him, are...not precisely relevant. But the details about Ivan confronting my dad, about my dad apparently apologizing to him and offering the house, of Ivan's warnings this morning? I tell Kent every inch of that. It's my job, after all.

And Kent, to his credit and my surprise, is very businesslike about the whole thing. I move around my room performing my little routines and Kent is quite modest about it all, turning his back to me when I peel my skirt and sweater from my body. When I head for my shower, Kent comes along, leaning against the door frame and looking away as I scrub and continue to recount everything I learned. I watch him the entire time that I talk and honestly I'm a little disappointed that he treats me with such restraint.

A little bit of me had been hoping he'd be tempted. That he'd maybe...

But as I climb out of the shower, wrapping my towel around myself, Kent doesn't even look at me, staring out the window instead.

"That's it," I finish, a little lamely. "Um...do you have any questions?"

"I don't," Kent replies, finally turning to me once the towel is wrapped securely around my body. His eyes move over me almost impassively, my body apparently eliciting no reaction from him. "Thank you, Fay," he says, standing up straight and glancing at his watch. "You can take the rest of the day off. I'm sure you're tired after so much work last night."

"It wasn't so bad," I say, letting a little smile find my mouth. "Ivan's...a good time."

There's a little fire in Kent's eyes as he processes my words. But he merely nods and turns to leave the room. I follow Kent into my bedroom and watch him go. He doesn't say a word or look back at me as he opens my door, passes through it, and quietly closes it behind him.

I sink down onto my bed in a huff when he's gone.

What the hell was that?

Did I...did I do something wrong? Does he not like me anymore?

Chapter 89 – Confrontations

## Chapter 89 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Kent leans against the wall outside of Fay's room for a moment after he leaves, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath through his nose.

That girl...

She's going to be the death of me, that girl, Kent thinks as he clenches his jaw, grinding his teeth. It had been...so fucking difficult. So damn hard to turn away from her in there, as she pulled every piece of her clothing off and tossed them carelessly to her floor.

It had taken a level of self-restraint that, frankly – after yesterday, in the barn – he had thought he'd lost. But he'd done it. He'd refused to look at her as she had walked naked past him, as she climbed into her shower and let the water run all over her body, through her hair, telling him all about her ridiculous night with that boy.

But even as Kent thinks of it now, pushing himself up from the wall and opening his eyes so he can resume his day, he has to admit that Ivan is not ridiculous.

Kent knows that Ivan's romantic relationship with Fay is...inconvenient. He doesn't like, at all, that they seem to have a real affinity for each other. But Ivan, despite the fact that he might actually be drawn to Fay, has figured out that Fay is Kent's Achilles heel. That she is precisely where he needs to strike to get to Kent.

Kent sets his shoulders and walks quickly down the stairs towards his office. If he's going to survive this, he needs to convince everyone outside of this house – and perhaps many of the people within it – that Fay is...less important to him than they currently think she is.

As Kent enters his office, he considers that Ivan, despite his youth, has been playing his cards well. Even if Fay is ignorant of the fact, Kent is well aware that everything that Ivan said to Fay the previous night was designed to be repeated to Kent. It's obvious to Kent that Ivan uses Fay, deliberately and efficiently, to prod Kent, to attempt to get him to move in whatever way Ivan feels will best benefit his organization.

Kent is thus not surprised, as he closes his office door behind him and heads to the desk, that Ivan told Fay – in as genuine a way as he could – that he thinks Kent is on the wrong side of things, that he's going down. But what does surprise Kent is Ivan's offer – twice, apparently – to take Fay away. To protect her.

It is...uncommon - unheard of, really - for one boss to take a woman from another family under his protection without an official tie to her, like an engagement or a marriage. That sort of exchange usually unites those families, not further divides them. But Ivan is clearly continuing to mark Kent as his enemy – he wasn't offering to take Fay as a way to draw himself closer to the Lippert family, to which Fay is clearly showing her allegiance by still living in Kent's house despite the end of her engagement to Daniel. And if Ivan is on good enough terms with Alden that Alden is loaning him vacation properties...why offer to take Fay into his own care? Why not let her father do it?

And Ivan hadn't offered to marry her – Kent knows this, Fay would have told him. So, what the hell was Ivan playing at, offering to protect her but...not reaching out to those who were already doing that job?

Kent grits his teeth harder, staring down at the wood of his desk, trying to figure it out.

Either Ivan actually had feelings for the girl, and wanted to be with her without the ties to the Lippert family that Fay could offer, or...

Or Ivan really did know something that Kent didn't.

And Kent really was in danger of going down, in such a way that would put Fay in the crossfire.

The idea of it – of some kind of blindside attack that could hurt Fay, hurt Daniel – and he didn't even see it coming –

Kent's blood boils at the idea. He curls his hand into a fist and slams it against the desk, making the pens, paper and phone sitting there rattle. Then, he grabs his phone, pressing a few buttons and barking orders down the line. "Marco, Gianni, in my office. Now," he orders before crashing the phone back down.

He needed his spies out there, working. He needs more information, and he needs it now.

Kent looks up a few moments later, surprised to see that Marco and Gianni have arrived back at the office so quickly. But he realizes immediately that it's not his two most reliable guys standing in the door staring at him with rage on their faces.

It's Daniel.

"Is she home?" Daniel asks, looking upwards towards the bedrooms of the house, towards Fay's room.

"She is," Kent replies evenly, standing straight and squaring off against his son.

"What the hell are you doing," Daniel growls, still standing in the door, "sending her off with him like that? Letting her go?"

"I needed the intel," Kent replies.

"You're ruining my life!" Daniel shouts, taking a fierce step into the room and slamming the door shut behind him before stalking over to Kent's desk. Kent doesn't flinch, not an inch, instead taking a moment to study Daniel as he crosses the room. He hasn't seen Daniel since last night after Fay left and Daniel is wearing the same clothes he was yesterday. He has dark circles under his eyes and his hair, usually carefully styled, is mussed. If Kent had to bet on it, he'd say that Daniel also slept out last night – and that he had been on a bit of a bender.

But with who? Daniel had never been one to drink alone.

"Am I really ruining your life?" Kent asks, his voice mild. "Or are you doing that all on your own?"

“She’s mine, dad,” Daniel growls, “she’s going to be my wife.”

“No, she’s not, Daniel,” Kent sighs, looking down at his desk and straightening his papers – not because they need straightening, but because he knows it will piss Daniel off to be disregarded.

“She is!” Daniel cries, slamming his fist on the desk as Kent had done moments before, “she’s the only thing I’ve ever wanted! The only person I’ve ever liked! And you’re taking her away from me – and letting fucking Ivan mess with her, on top of whatever you’re doing -“

“Really?” Kent snaps, moving his gaze quickly to his son’s eyes again, allowing the anger within him to reignite. “Because if she was so important to you, Daniel, then where were you last night? Because you certainly weren’t here.” Kent takes a minute to look at his son’s clothing again, letting Daniel see him do it this time. “And wherever you were, it certainly doesn’t look like you were being faithful to Fay.”

When Kent moves his eyes back to Daniel’s face he’s surprised by the rage he sees there. He had expected shame, embarrassment, but this –

“You’re going to ruin her life, dad,” Daniel growls, leaning over the desk to bring his face closer to Kent’s so that he can see that his son means every word. “And if you do that, I’m going to ruin yours.”

Kent leans slowly across the desk, meeting Daniel’s fury with his own deliberately cool gaze. He opens his mouth, then, intending to say “try me,” but he’s honestly surprised when another set of words leave his lips.

“You lost her, Daniel,” Kent whispers, his eyes narrowing at his son. “And I’m not giving her back. Go find another beard to pretend to be your wife. Fay is mine.”

Daniel stands up stock straight at these words, paling a little, and Kent suddenly realizes what he said. The knowledge he just confessed to knowing, without...without meaning to do it -

Daniel backs away from the desk, staring at his dad, fear stark on his face. Kent merely straightens, watching him go, not letting Daniel see that he messed up. Inside, there’s an impulse to reach out a hand to his son – to apologize, to tell him that he’s doesn’t actually care –

But in reality, Kent knows that this was, in some ways, an act of war between him and Daniel. To be...different, in a family like this, was in some situations a death sentence. And Kent has no intention of punishing Daniel, or making him change, or ever letting anyone else hurt him for who he is –

But in a situation like this, revealing his knowledge as he just did as a way to intimidate and get him to back off? It was every inch a threat.

And Daniel knows it too. He backs towards the door, holding his father's gaze, shaking his head a little bit. Kent's stomach turns as he watches his son twist the knob, leaving the room and closing the door behind him without another word.

It will be fine, Kent tells himself. We've spent too long with that 'secret' between us anyway. It's better to have it out in the open, at least between us.

But a deeper part of him wonders if he's just crossed a line he can't uncross. If he's lost Daniel's trust for good, without meaning to do it. All in pursuit of Fay.

Kent raises a hand to his face, covering his eyes, repeating the words in his mind that he had thought when he left her room. This girl will be the death of me.

He didn't...he didn't fuck up like this before she had come around. He had been in complete control.

But there's no time to dwell on the thought. A knock comes immediately at the door before Kent can indulge in the question any further, or come up with a solution on how to approach Daniel next.

"Come in," Kent calls, dropping his hand, his voice returned to its steady timbre.

The door swings open and Marco and Gianni come in.

"Good," Kent says with a nod, gesturing towards the two chairs across from his desk. "We have work to do. We need more intel – much more."

Chapter 90 – The White Box

## Chapter 90 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I lay back on my bed for...way too long. Just laying there, frustrated, staring at the ceiling.

I am also exhausted – I know this by the fuzz that I feel in my brain, the lethargy taking control in my limbs, and my very slightly grumpy mood. It's been...one hell of a 48 hours, if I'm being honest with myself. From my very tense movie night with Daniel, to...everything yesterday, in the stables with Kent. And then last night, with Ivan?

I groan, my head spinning to think that that all happened in such quick succession. And frankly, I haven't gotten much sleep throughout all of it – at least not the deep, peaceful sleep, alone in my cozy bed that I know my body is craving.

So I sigh, turning over and slipping under the covers, not even caring that I'm naked, intent on just getting some rest –

But when I do put down my head, curling up on my side and pillowing my cheek against my hand...

Sleep eludes me. God damn it, but I just can't stop thinking.

My eyes fly open and I purse my lips together, frustrated.

I've just got way too many unanswered questions on my mind. Sighing, I flop onto my back and stare at my old friend the ceiling again.

What the hell am I going to do?

Or, beyond that, who do I even like?

It feels like a ridiculously sophomoric question – who do I like – when I'm trying to decide between the heads of two serious crime organizations. But it also feels incredibly important that I answer that question – right now – or I am going to be in one hell of a situation very soon.

Because I know myself – I know that I can't juggle both of them, at least not for long. I don't think it's in me to be...what, polyamorous? Non-monogamous? Whatever the right term is, I know that I can't handle it. Even though my whole life I've been a no-man kind of girl, I know in my heart that if I am romantically involved with someone, I want to be a one-man kind of girl. One person to whom I can really dedicate my affections and who makes me feel safe.

The question is: who is that? Kent? Or Ivan?

Or, frankly, someone else? The Prince Charming I've always wanted, but who I just haven't found yet?

And what about Daniel, who is offering me...well, not romance. But a solid, happy life with my best friend. Less tumultuous and confusing than what Kent and Ivan offered, for sure. Daniel is right – some people get together for passion and then are disappointed when it fades. Daniel and I could have a very happy life together. What was so wrong with that?

I groan, not wanting to make a choice, and certainly not wanting this many choices. But despite my recalcitrance, I find myself...thinking about these options, turning them all over again and again in my mind.

Kent, with his dark intensity and that anger deep within him that blows on some sort of coal within me, coaxing it to flame. Kent, who lifts me as easily as if I'm a kitten and pulls me hard against his body, making me feel safe and warm and wanted in his arms.

Or at least I thought he wanted me, until he wouldn't look at me today...



I dismiss that, though – I knowing, deep down, that Kent wants me, which is an assurance I don't really have with Ivan. I have the proof of Kent's desire - I've seen him struggle against it for weeks, seen him write up that ridiculous contract in order to build walls between us, walls designed to keep him safe, not me. And a very large part of me wants to break those walls down, to see what I find behind them all. A little thrill runs through me at the idea of Kent loosed from all of the restrictions he places on himself.

What would it be like to see him unbound. What would it be like to be with him, totally unleashed...

I blush, thinking of it, and then wonder – is that what I like about Kent? The challenge, more than Kent himself? I groan, feeling guilty, because frankly – it's the opposite with Ivan.

I like Ivan because – as far as I can tell – he gives me himself on a platter. There are no walls, no mystery – just his sincere, funny self. I smile when I think of him, which I don't do when I think of Kent – a smile that echoes the thousand times that Ivan has made me laugh so hard my face aches.

Isn't that, really, what one is looking for? That kind of connection?

And also, he's stupid hot...when I think about what we almost got to last night, about the way his skin felt under my hands, the fact that I could have, if I wanted to, pulled that shirt from his body and inspected the intricacies of those hidden tattoos, the forbidden parts of him...

I groan and turn over to bury my face in my pillow, muffling the sound. God, what was wrong with me? Because I really...really want to do that.

I sigh, my face still tucked away in the pillow, not knowing what to do, when suddenly...

It's as if a little Janeen-shaped devil lands on my shoulder, poking me angrily with her pitchfork. "Why the hell do you need to decide now?" she hisses angrily, putting her hands on her hips. "Neither of them have made you any promises! And you need more information to make this choice! Put yourself first!"

And I twist in my bed, away from my pillow, realizing that...she's right.

I don't need to decide now. I don't have all of the information. I don't even know what either of them are doing – both of them could have girls on the side. Or! I gasp to realize that I could be the girl on the side...

Both Ivan and Kent keep their secrets. I have no idea, really, what either of them are up to in the hours when we're not together.

Suddenly angry, I sit up straight, gathering my sheets to my chest in angry fists.

Imaginary Janeen is right. I need to put me first. I need to do what I want, explore my own feelings, and right now? That means investigating both of these connections more so that I can actually, really make a decision that works for me.

And Kent – if he wants to treat me like an employee, like what’s between us is just a job, like he did today? Then fine. It’s time for me to get to work.

And suddenly I know exactly what I want to do next.

I move quickly, blow drying my hair out into soft waves and putting on just a little bit of makeup. I’m in a hurry, after all. Once that’s finished, I reach for the white box that’s been sitting on my vanity since I threw it there yesterday morning, when it was delivered with Daniel in the room.

Slowly, I untie the ribbon and pull the top off, biting my lip when I see...

A pretty, seashell-pink set of lingerie, panties and bra made of flimsy silk and lace netting, covered all over with little seed pearls in delicate patterns. As I slip the underwear over my bottom and clasp the bra behind my back I feel...just as pretty, and delicate, and incredibly sexy as this set of lingerie is.

Precisely, I’m sure, the way Kent wanted me to feel.

And then, taking one last look at myself in the mirror, I grab the little fur-lined robe that Kent sent me off of its hook and slip it lightly over my arms, not bothering to tie it. It won’t stay tied long anyway, if my plan works the way I think it will. Then, clutching the robe closed, I hurry down the steps, forcing myself not to look around and check the hall to make sure nobody sees me.

If they see me, they see me. I’m not ashamed.

This new self-assurance is tested, a little, a moment later when I reach the landing of the stairs and Kent’s office door opens, Marco and Gianni coming out, their faces concerned. Marco glances at me and keeps going, pretending that he didn’t see me, but Gianni falters in his steps, a little bit shocked. I take a deep breath and look at him evenly for a moment, but then I move past him.

It’s not his job, after all, to judge me.

And I have a job to do.

Luckily, they left Kent’s office door open when they left. I walk to the entrance and lean myself against the door frame, peering into the room and watching Kent stand at his desk, looking at his papers.

He's so damn tall, and the way his shoulders fill out that suitcoat...god damn it, but I feel myself starting to ache for him already, deep in my core.

I lift my hand and knock gently at the door with one finger, just a light little rap.

Kent's head instantly spins to me, surprised.

And then I let my robe fall to the floor.

"Well?" I say, standing before him in nothing but the underwear he sent to my room, that he picked out just for me. "I'm ready for my shift to begin, whenever you are."