

## Chapter 258 Intentions

Ella

“...Miss Morgan. Good evening.” As the words left the familiar man’s mouth, I felt a pang of unease. The empty top floor of the restaurant was eerily silent, amplifying my growing discomfort.

The smoky scent of the warm charcoal fire, the soft crackling of the wood, the distant clinking of silverware, everything seemed to halt as he muttered my name.

“Ella Morgan,” he repeated, his eyes flickering with uncertainty and something akin to regret. “You’re Ella Morgan?”

“Yes,” I answered slowly, my heart pounding. “You’re Mr. Barrett?” The man’s face almost seemed to blanch a little more. “Yes. Logan Barrett. There... is no other Ella Morgan around here, is there?”

I couldn’t help but give him a strange look. “No,” I replied, furrowing my brow. “I mean... I don’t think so, at least,”

I watched as he spun around, frustration etched on his face. He muttered something under his breath, the harsh undertone a stark contrast to the serene ambiance. My mind raced with a myriad of thoughts. “It’s him,” Ema said, bristling with excitement. “It’s our mate!”

“You think i don’t see that?” I responded,, resisting the urge to run right then and there. “Don’t get too excited, Ema. We’re not staying.”

I heard Ema's distinctive growl inside of me. "I'm not excited," she murmured. "Our last encounter left a bad taste in my mouth, too. He may be our mate, but I don't trust him."

"You called my boss specifically for me," I said, taking a slow and tentative step forward. "Is there something wrong?"

"No. Of course not." Logan straightened himself and turned back to face me, his expression guarded and polite. "Will you sit with me? I'd like to discuss the case."

I was reluctant to work with this man. He seemed like a jerk in the car the other night, and of course there was the issue of the fact that we were fated mates.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Barrett, but this might not be appropriate," I said, adjusting the strap of my purse on my shoulder. "There are plenty of excellent lawyers at my firm that I could recommend instead-"

"Please," Logan interrupted, holding his hand out to stop me. There was almost something frantic behind his eyes then. "Let's just have dinner. I apologize for my behavior the other night, but I can assure you that I'll be nothing but pleasant to work with."

I hesitated for a moment. Every muscle in my body was screaming for me to run, but I felt obligated by duty to go through with the dinner.

"It's just dinner," Ema said. "You can tell him you're not doing the case later."

"I could feel that you were getting restless inside. You still want to spend time with him, right?" "Yeah...I'll let you decide then..." I felt her growl a bit, then retreat.

But She was right, it was just dinner. I knew nothing about the case, and maybe it would be appealing after all. Maybe it would be a quick and easy case, and then I could move on and not see him anymore.

Hopefully.

“Alright,” I said, letting out an almost inaudible sigh. “I’ll stay for dinner.” Logan’s face flashed with an undeniably handsome grin. “Thank you,” he murmured, pulling out my chair.

I felt myself stiffen as I brushed past him and sat down, holding my breath against the assault of his overwhelming scent. When he sat across from me, I found myself staring awkwardly down at the tablecloth, just wishing that this could all be over.

As we sat across from each other, the air around us grew tense. Our connection as fated mates pulsed between us, a constant reminder of our entwined destiny. His scent teased my senses, and I had to force myself to focus on the task at hand.

“So, the case-“I began, but was quickly cut off.

“Let’s at least order dinner first,” Logan said, handing me a menu. “Dinner is on me. Order whatever you like.”

I blanched a little, but took the menu. It seemed as though this man was intent on having dinner with me before bringing up the case, and I decided to go along with it.

The restaurant’s flickering candlelight cast long shadows across the table as I poured over the menu. Logan, who’d been quiet since our tense confrontation, finally broke the silence.

“Are you a seafood lover, Ella?” His question hung in the air, a thin attempt to shift the evening into safer territory. “This restaurant has some really decadent dishes.”

“I... usually prefer more simple dishes,” I responded, pointedly glancing at the gourmet options on the menu: lobster, caviar, fresh oysters. All of the dishes had exorbitantly high prices, something that Moana would have griped about.

Finally, I tapped my finger on the one appealing thing on the menu. “Steak and potatoes,” I said, feeling my mouth water. “That’s more up my alley.”

Logan’s brows knitted together in slight confusion. “Ah, I thought perhaps you would prefer something more... exotic.”

“Why?” I asked, cocking my head.

Logan shrugged. “Well... no particular reason.

You look like..”

“It seems that I’m no longer the “peasant” in your eyes just because I changed my outfit,” I narrowed my eyes. “Don’t judge people’s taste buds by its cover, Mr. Barrett.”

He froze for a second, but soon his lips twitched into a half-smile. He seemed almost amused by my words. “Well, in that case, let’s get two steaks. Medium-rare?”

I nodded, admittedly feeling the hunger pangs set in. Maybe dinner wouldn’t be so bad after all. As we ate, Logan seemed much more polite than the man who I had met the other night. I began to wonder if he was intoxicated when I met him, or in a bad mood.

He seemed much different now. Our conversation flowed a bit more freely, although it continued to teeter between comfortable and painfully awkward given our.... history. No matter how many times I tried to bring up the case, he never seemed to want to hear it.

Finally, with the main course over and the dessert plates cleared away, I decided it was time to discuss the case once and for all. I felt the restlessness of my wolf, her impatience mirroring my own.

“Well, Mr. Barrett-”

“Call me Logan.”

“Right. Logan... I think it’s time we discuss the case.” Logan nodded slowly, leaning back in his chair with an air of practiced comfort. “It’s a matter of land, really,” he began. “My tenant. His name is Hector. He’s a business owner-an old friend. Maybe I’ve been too lenient.”

‘How so?’ I asked, leaning forward, elbows on the table. “I own the building where Hector runs his business,” Logan explained. “He’s been falling behind on his rent for a while now. I let it slide, out of respect for our friendship. But I’ve come to learn that he’s been using my building to conduct some... unsavory deals.”

I frowned at this revelation, my brows knitting together. “You mean he’s engaging in illegal activities?”

“Exactly,” Logan said, nodding. “And I want no part of it. I’ve asked him to vacate the premises, but he refuses.”

“What has he said exactly?” I asked, considering the legal implications.

“He claims he’s still within his lease agreement, says he’s been there for years and has the right to stay despite the fact that he’s months behind on his rent. The man is so delusional, in fact, that he even claims that he’s not behind on rent at all. He’s been uncooperative to say the least, and I think he’s just trying to stall.”

I pondered the situation. “A lease agreement, you say? Do you have a copy of it?” “I do,” Logan affirmed. “I can have it sent to your office first thing tomorrow.”

I nodded, scribbling a few notes on a napkin. “Good. That will help. You’re confident he hasn’t paid you the rent he claims to have paid?”

“I have every receipt,” Logan said. “He’s months behind.”

“Then this should be a straightforward case,” I said, glancing up at Logan. “Given what you’ve told me, he has no legal standing to stay if he’s

conducting illegal business and failing to pay rent. I can forward your case to one of our excellent lawyers-”

Logan leaned forward in his chair, his eyes flashing with surprise. “Ella, I don’t want another lawyer. I want you. Wasn’t that clear?”

I frowned. “Why me?”

“Because...” Logan continued, “You don’t have to know why. You just need to know that I want to work with you, and I will always provide more cases like this one for you in the future.” There it was, the deal sweetener. He had more cases for me-more “easy wins”.

As I looked at him, it finally hit me. The reason he wanted me to handle this case. The reason behind this ostentatious dinner.

His words from our initial meeting replayed in my mind, his casual mention of a woman he could “always have if he wanted.”

It was me he was referring to. Me, Ella Morgan, whom he wanted for my status and wealth.

“You knew who my father was, didn’t you?” I asked.

Logan’s expression changed instantly. “You weren’t looking for a lawyer, but a girlfriend from the Morgan family.”

## Chapter 259 Not Goodbye

Ella

Logan said nothing. The ambiance of the room was thick with tension, so much so that it felt almost palpable. I understood now what this man's true intentions were. With my heart pounding wildly against my chest, I stood, grabbing my purse.

"Well, like I said, I'll be forwarding your case to one of the other lawyers in the firm," I said, taking a step back. "Dinner was a pleasure, but I don't believe it's appropriate for this to continue."

I turned to leave, but immediately stopped in my tracks. Before, there had been one man standing by the elevator, and now there were four. And I could tell that they weren't going to let me leave.

The dim lighting, the bodyguards blocking my exit, and Logan's intense gaze felt intimidating and suffocating.

There was silence. The room felt palpable with tension. All at once, I wanted to both rush forward and kiss him again as his scent overwhelmed me and I wanted to leap out of the window to get away from him.

"Let me out," I said, my voice shaky but defiant.

"What do you mean?" Logan asked, a hint of amusement in his voice.

I looked from Logan to the men in black suits and back again. Why were they with him all of the time? And why did he feel the need to have so many bodyguards for just a dinner with me?

Logan sighed, gesturing to his men, who reluctantly stepped aside.

“Fine,” he said, his voice dripping with annoyance. “I won’t hold a lady here against her will,” I huffed and turned back to the elevator, which was now free, and began insistently pressing the button to go down. Logan’s voice suddenly came from behind me again, this time closer.

“Ella, are you really going to pass up an opportunity?” he asked, his intoxicating scent wafting toward me from across the room. “I couldn’t force anyone to be my girlfriend, but I could provide you with easy cases. I can help you build a reputation in this city.”

I whipped back around while the elevator took its sweet time to come back to the top and glared at Logan.

“You should decide whether you really want to be with me after you spent enough time with me.” Logan continued.

“First of all, I’m not interested in ‘easy’ cases handed to me out of pity,” I retorted, my voice quivering with a mix of anger and uncertainty. “I came here to make a difference, not to be handed charity.”

His lips curled into a smirk. “What if I said I could help you take on the most challenging cases this city has to offer?”

“You don’t get it,” I snapped. “It’s not about the cases, Logan. It’s about your behavior, your attitude. No matter if it was marriage or work, I don’t want to be associated with someone who sees women as commodities. Someone who throws money at random women, hoping they’ll be his mistress. I have self-respect.”

His expression softened for a brief moment, the playboy facade slipping. “I can see that,” he said. “I gathered that last night, trust me. But I can guarantee that my attitude is the least of what you should hate about me.”



I could feel my frustration growing, mirrored by the simmering anger within my wolf. I didn't understand him, didn't know what game he was playing.

Just then, the elevator finally dinged, and the doors slid open. I rushed inside, clutching my purse tightly beneath the cold gazes of Logan and his stoic bodyguards.

"This is the last time we'll meet like this," I said, trying to sound resolute. "We'll see about that," he replied cryptically. "Join me for dinner tomorrow. A place I truly cherish."

"Goodbye, Logan."

"Not goodbye, Miss Morgan. Just... see you soon." His words sent shivers down my spine. With that, the elevator doors shut in front of me, blocking my view of the arrogant bastard.

I exited the building with as much dignity as I could muster, but my insides were churning with confusion and anger.

"How could our mate be such a... a..."

Ema's voice echoed in my mind, full of anger. "A bastard?" I asked.

"Something like that." That night, sleep eluded me. Logan's piercing eyes, the ominous atmosphere, the hidden meanings behind his words-they all haunted my thoughts.

My alarm startled me out of a restless doze. With a groan, I got ready for work, hoping the office routine would serve as a distraction. Yet as soon as I walked in, I noticed a change in my colleagues' behavior.

They approached me cautiously, with a newfound respect, asking politely if I had the time for a few tasks. Bemused, I accepted some, eager to bury myself in work.

The hours ticked by slowly, each passing moment weighed down by my earlier encounter with Logan and the looming decision about taking on his case.

How could I explain to my boss, Mr. Henderson, my reluctance to accept a case from this man? He would never accept an excuse in regard to Logan being my fated mate. He would laugh me out of the room if I tried to tell him that.

My thoughts were interrupted by Sarah's sharp voice. "Mr. Henderson wants to see you in his office. Now."

"Um... did he say why?" I asked, pushing my chair back. Sarah simply shrugged and folded her arms across her chest, pursing her lips. "I'm not your messenger," she growled.

Trepidation coiled in my stomach as I approached Mr. Henderson's office. A million possibilities floated through my mind, with one at the forefront: Logan, in all of his nastiness and abhorrent nature, told Mr. Henderson about my reaction yesterday and I was now going to be fired for embarrassing the entire firm.

I could picture it now: within a week, I would be groveling at my parents' doorstep, bags in hand. They would, of course, welcome me back with open arms.

"Now that you've had your adventure, come shadow me at WereCorp," my dad would say. "Don't worry, Princess. You want privacy and freedom? Here, here's a giant check to buy whichever fancy penthouse or mansion you want. No, you don't need to pay me back. I'm your daddy, and you're my Princess. It's my job to take good care of you."

The thought of it made me sick. I loved my dad, but I wanted to pave my own way. However, as I reached the door, the sound of laughter caught my attention. I furrowed my brow, pausing for a moment. I heard two voices. My breath caught in my throat.

As the door swung open, the sound of laughter ceased. “Ah! There she is!” Mr. Henderson said, standing from his chair with a jovial expression on his face.

My eyes widened. The last person I wanted to see was lounging on the couch, looking every bit the confident CEO.

He wore a tailored black suit, with his jet black hair slicked to one side and his clear blue eyes gazing out at me from beneath two stern eyebrows. He sat confidently, his arm draped across the back of the sofa while his legs were crossed in a wide, powerful position.

“Miss Morgan,” Logan drawled, a smirk playing on his lips. “Good to see you again.”

## Chapter 260 Least of Worries

Ella

The frosted glass door to Mr. Henderson's office opened, revealing the man himself. Upon seeing Logan, I felt Ema's restlessness inside of me. His scent overwhelmed the both of us, instinct urging us to overreact and move closer to him. But I felt her suppress it. She was just as displeased with him as I was.

Mr. Henderson looked jovial and appeared to be in the midst of a spirited discussion with Logan. However, as I stood in the doorway and looked back and forth between the two men, I could sense a shift in the dynamic. Behind Mr. Henderson's pleasant exterior, his eyebrows were knit tightly together and his eyes flashed with anxiety.

"Ella," he began, his voice tight. "Can I have a word?" Logan reclined comfortably on the plush couch, looking surprisingly unperturbed by the tension in the room. "Should I leave?" he asked.

"No, no, you stay here," Mr. Henderson replied, flashing a bright smile.

Mr. Henderson ushered me into a smaller adjacent conference room, closing the door behind us. The thick glass muffled Logan's voice as he chatted on the phone. It was a stark contrast to the high-pitched tone that Mr. Henderson now adopted, now that we were alone. "Ella," he whispered frantically. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

I was a bit taken aback. “Pardon, sir?” I murmured, raising my eyebrows. Mr. Henderson shot me an angry glare. “Don’t play coy with me, Ella,” he hissed. “I’ve been kinder to you than I should be, all because of who your father is. You have to take this case, which, might I add, just fell into your ungrateful little lap. Do you understand the gravity of this situation?” “And if I don’t take it?” I asked, choosing to ignore Mr. Henderson’s angry remarks.

“If you don’t, you can find another firm to work for. You’re embarrassing not just yourself, but all of us. My partners are already foaming at the mouth over this client being handed to you on a silver platter. I’ll be on the platter next, served up like a fat pig with an apple in my mouth, if you don’t take it.”

My pulse quickened, still taken aback by my boss’s change in attitude. He had never been this cruel to me before. “I didn’t know that choosing not to work on this case would lead to an ultimatum, sir.”

His face turned an alarming shade of red. “It’s not about Logan. It’s about the influence he and his... associates hold. If you don’t cooperate, I really will have to ask you to leave the company.”

I felt like I had been punched in the gut. “Are you threatening to fire me?”

He pinched the bridge of his nose, inhaling deeply. “I wish it didn’t have to come to this,” he murmured, his face overtaken now by sympathy. “But he’s too important, Ella. And frankly, I’m out of options.”

Before I could respond, Mr. Henderson placed his hand on the doorknob. “It’s your choice,” he hissed, narrowing his eyes. “Your choice and your consequences.”

As Mr. Henderson opened the door, Logan’s firm gaze instantly met mine. There was a new depth to his eyes, one that I hadn’t noticed before – a mix of understanding and something more profound, darker.

“Mr. Henderson,” he interjected smoothly, rising from his seat. “I really need Ella’s expertise. Trust me, you want her on this case.”

“I’m well aware, Mr. Barrett,” Mr. Henderson replied, putting on another jovial smile. “We’re very lucky to have your business at all. But, alas, youngsters...”

Logan chuckled. “I know,” he said. “Ella is full of fire, I’ll give her that. That’s why I really need her on my team.”

I took a deep breath and tried to quell the fury that was beginning to bubble up inside of me. These two men were talking about me as though I wasn’t even standing right there in front of them, like I was a prize horse at auction.

In my eyes, Logan was nothing but an arrogant bastard who saw women as transactions, and nothing more. He was a jerk, a chauvinist, an elitist... The list could have gone on and on.

But my dream job was slipping through my fingers. I had come to the city to make a name for myself, without my family’s influence. Losing this position would set me back significantly. I didn’t want to go crawling back to my parents. I didn’t want to become the next CEO of WereCorp.

“Well, I’ll leave you two to discuss your options,” Mr. Henderson said, checking his watch. It was then that I noticed that his watch was new, a Rolex. He never wore stuff like that. I glanced over to the floor near his desk, and felt my heart sink upon seeing the little bag with tissue paper sticking out of it. Was Logan bribing him? For me?

Mr. Henderson left. The room was silent, filled by a heavy tension that hung in the air.

“Well?” Logan asked, standing to his full height, towering over me. The room suddenly felt all too cramped. “What do you say, Miss Morgan?”

After what felt like an eternity, I managed a response.

“Fine,” I whispered, letting out an exasperated sigh. “I’ll take your case. But once this is over, you and I, Mr. Barrett, are done professionally.” Logan nodded, the corner of his mouth lifting slightly, hinting at a smirk. “Understood.”

With that settled, we moved on to sign a confidentiality agreement. Every clause and term weighed heavily on my heart, but I put pen to paper, locking myself into this strange, high-stakes alliance with a man who I had only met a few days ago but already despised with every fiber of my being.

Hours later, my phone vibrated, breaking me out of a trance. Logan’s number flashed on the screen. “Ella, join me for dinner? There’s a small place I want to show you.”

I hesitated before typing back, “Why should I?”

A moment later, he replied, “Because it’s not like last night. Trust me. Besides, I want to get started on my case. Let’s discuss.”

Still skeptical, I arrived at the venue he had mentioned a little while later. The restaurant was inconspicuous, nestled between two bigger establishments. The exterior was humble, but the aroma wafting out hinted at delicious possibilities inside.

It was, indeed, much different from the restaurant from last night. This one seemed family-owned.

When I walked in, I was immediately hit with a wall of garlic and rosemary. It smelled delectable. Huge pizzas on wooden boards were carried out to waiting families. Soft Italian music played in the background, their notes punctuated by the sweet sound of trilling voices and mandolins. I could hear what sounded like two people arguing in the kitchen in thick accents.

Logan sat at a red leather booth in the corner, waiting. There were two glasses of red wine in front of him, one for him and one for me. “You made it,” he commented with a hint of surprise as I walked up to him.

I raised an eyebrow and slid into the seat across from him. “I want to get this case over with just as much as you do,” I said, glancing around. “This place seems nice. Nicer than yesterday.”

He chuckled. “I haven’t brought anyone here before. Not even family.” I scoffed. “Let me guess, you usually prefer those showy, overpriced places that offer style over substance?”

Logan shook his head, looking almost vulnerable. “I never learned to share. Not my secrets, not my vulnerabilities. Not even places like this.”

I tilted my head, considering him. “Why?”

He looked down at me, his blue eyes piercing into mine. “Remember when I said there’s something worse than my infidelity you should be worried about?”

A cold shiver ran down my spine. “Yes... and?”

He took a deep breath, his face serious.

“I’m the son of the city’s most influential mafia boss.”



## Chapter 261 Giving Up On Dream

Ella

“I’m the son of the city’s most influential mafia boss.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I had stepped into this city with a single purpose-to fight against the malignant tumor that was the mafia. Not with them And now, here I was, face to face with the son of the most influential mob boss in the area. And he was my client.

“Well?” he asked, his lips curling up into a smirk at the corners. “We have client-lawyer confidentiality. You know the truth now. I told you that there was more to worry about than my infidelity.”

“Oh god,” Ema said, sounding surprised. “A mafia boss? Can it get any worse?”

“At this point, I wouldn’t be surprised if it does somehow get worse,” I replied. I swallowed. My mind raced. I knew how the mafia worked, at least to a certain extent. I knew, at the very least, that it was dangerous to go against them. That was why Mr. Henderson was so insistent on me taking Logan on as a client. He was afraid.

Logan did bribe my boss with that nice Rolex watch, but he also intimidated him. And now I was trapped in the middle of it all. I had a choice to make: risk my life and my job and pull out of the case, or risk those things anyway and stay working at Logan’s lawyer.

“I won’t do it, Logan,” I said firmly, drawing upon every ounce of resolve I had. “I won’t work for the mafia. I came here, to this city, because it

needs good lawyers... not crooked ones. I can't let myself be caught in your webs of deceit."

He just leaned back, a hint of a smirk touching his lips, making the room's ambient lighting seem a tad dimmer.

"This case, Ella," he said slowly, "is completely legal. I'm branching out-finance, real estate, technology. My attempts to legitimize some parts of our family business."

That explained why he had so many seemingly unrelated businesses. Money laundering, likely. I didn't believe for a second that he wanted to 'legitimize' anything.

I raised a skeptical eyebrow. "And I'm supposed to believe you've turned over a new leaf? I'm sure you have a plethora of other illegal businesses as well."

With a swiftness that came from years of refined instinct, I discreetly activated the recording app on my phone. If Logan gave me anything incriminating, I wanted to catch every word of it.

Logan simply smirked again, his blue eyes flickering with a new fire within them.

"Do you mean illegal activities like drugs, murder, human trafficking, loansharking, protection rackets, and sex trafficking?" he questioned openly, his voice eerily calm.

My heart raced. This was not what I expected. He was laying everything out in the open? No euphemisms, no skirting around the topic? Just blatant admittance?

But before I could react, he reached across the table, swift as a striking snake, and snatched my phone, turning off the recording.

"There are illegal operations, yes," he admitted. with an air of nonchalance, tossing my phone back down on the table between us. "But

mostly, it's my father and brother who are managing them these days. I'm like you, in a sense."

I sneered, keeping my phone in my peripheral vision. "You're nothing like me, you slimy weasel," I hissed.

Logan simply laughed. "But you're wrong," he said. "I, like you, am trying to pave my own way. I could easily fall into my family's safety net. I could turn to the illegal side of things. But I want to be different."

I grabbed back my phone, frustration boiling over. "You think you're being clever?" I spat, barely keeping my voice level.

Logan fixed me with a cold stare. "Don't try to outsmart me, Ella. Right now, I'm just your client. As long as we're still in business, you'll answer to me. And it won't be just once."

He paused, the intensity of his gaze softening slightly. "Look, I just want to be upfront with you. I still hold hope for us, you know? The Moon Goddess wouldn't have paired us otherwise." I shot up from my seat, nearly knocking over the untouched glass of wine that sat in front of me.

"Don't bring the Moon Goddess into this!" I growled, feeling my fangs begin to bare themselves. "It wasn't her help-it was her misjudgment. My goal in this city was to stand against the likes of you. I refuse to be your puppet. And I reject you as my mate."

The air between us was electric, the tension palpable. Logan, too, stood up, his tall frame casting a shadow over me.

"Dreams? You came to this city for your dreams? For justice? So, what now? You're leaving just because things aren't going the way you planned?"

With a sense of finality, I snatched our contract from the table, tearing it up into shreds and letting them fall onto his plate. A few shreds fluttered into his wine glass, staining them red. Red like blood.

“I won’t compromise with the mafia, Logan. Even if it means giving up my dreams. Even if it means leaving.”

His voice was menacingly low. “Tearing that contract isn’t the end, Ella. There’s a penalty-a hefty one. And trust me, battling the mafia here? We have ties deeper than you can fathom-with the police, the courts, even your precious law firms. You can’t fight here. The war has already been won, and my side was victorious.”

I took a deep breath, steadying myself.

“I’ll pay your penalty. And if it comes to it, I’ll leave this city.”

He watched as I made my way to the exit, a mixture of amusement and admiration in his eyes. But as the door swung closed behind me, I could feel my hands trembling. What had I just done?

Emerging from the restaurant, the cold night air hit my face, a stark contrast from the now- stifling atmosphere that I had just escaped. The streets were emptier now, a haunting silence save for the distant echo of footsteps and voices.

I was already paranoid. As I walked, I kept glancing over my shoulder, as though Logan. would have already sent goons after me to do his bidding. I had disobeyed a son of a mafia boss, and I had seen plenty of movies and heard plenty of stories about what happens to people who dared to do that.

“I’m worried,” Ema said. “He’s not trustworthy. Men like him...”

“I know,” I answered, shaking my head. “I’ve heard the stories.”

However, no one ever came. Not yet, at least. As I walked, a weight in my chest and a whirlwind of thoughts in my head. A few blocks away, I slipped into a small alley and leaned back against the brick wall, staring up at the crescent moon in the sky as my racing heart began to settle.

It was like a smile, a jeer from the Moon Goddess. I wanted to shake my fist at it and yell for being given the fate of such a horrible mate.

A bitter laugh escaped my lips. “Why, Moon Goddess?” I murmured, shaking my head. “Of all the people in this vast, overpopulated world... why him? Is this a cruel joke? A test of some sort?”

The night remained silent, the moon offering no answers and no comfort. The uncertain dawn of tomorrow loomed ahead. But for now, I took solace in the one thing I was sure of: my unwavering resolve.

## Chapter 262 Crime & Punishment

Ella

The next day, I went to work with conviction set in my heart. I wouldn't let this run-in with the mafia hold me back. If anything, it would only serve to fuel me.

But the moment my office door swung open, I knew something was wrong. Mr. Henderson's face was an unnerving shade of red, and his eyes shot daggers at me. It seemed the walls had ears, and the news of my recent altercation with Logan had already reached him.

"Ella," he started, his voice dripping with restrained fury, "did you really tear up a contract with one of the most influential clients this firm has ever had?" I squared my shoulders and met his gaze directly. "Yes, Mr. Henderson, I did."

Mr. Henderson drew in a long, sharp breath that sounded like a hiss. "And why, pray tell, did you do that?"

"Because Logan Barrett is a member of the mafia, sir."

Just then, Mr. Henderson leaned forward, his palms flat on the desk. "Do you have any idea of the penalty for breaching that contract? We can't afford such an astronomical amount, especially not for a rookie like you!"

My chin lifted defiantly. "I'll pay the penalty. Whatever it is."

His eyebrows shot up in surprise. “That penalty, Miss Morgan, is substantial. Far beyond what I think you can afford. Although, I suppose you expect your daddy to take care of it for you.”

I took a deep breath, even as my insides churned with anxiety. “I’ll figure it out on my own. But I couldn’t-I wouldn’t-be part of that contract.”

Mr. Henderson’s eyes searched mine. “Why did you do it, Ella? Why risk everything?”

“I didn’t come here to work for the Mafia,” I responded, my voice unwavering. “I came to fight against them. I can’t-and I won’t-be their puppet.”

He sighed, taking his glasses off and passing a hand over his weary face. “You’re a halfway decent rookie lawyer, Ella, but maybe your family has shielded you too much. You have these... naive ideas of challenging the Mafia’s grasp in this city.”

I frowned, struggling to understand what Mr. Henderson was getting at. “What do you mean?”

He hesitated for a moment, and then his voice dropped lower. “Our firm, Ella... We pay a tribute to Logan’s group every year. It ensures the smooth operation of our business within the city.”

I felt as if the wind had been knocked out of me. “What? Why would you-”

“Do you think we have a choice?!” he snapped, his earlier restraint melting away. “It’s the cost of doing business here. You were hoping to take on the Mafia, but the reality is they’re everywhere. Even here, in this very room.”

It was like a punch to my gut. The realization that the very system I had hoped to cleanse was willingly in bed with the enemy left me feeling sick. I was battling a leviathan, and I had just seen its true size.

He sighed again, softer this time. “I’m sorry, Ella. We can’t keep you here. As much as I believe in what you’re trying to do, it’s too dangerous. Not just for you, but for all of us.”

Tears stung my eyes, not from sadness but from a fiery rage. I was angry at the system, at the mafia, and at myself for thinking I could make a difference.

I gathered my belongings, not a single colleague daring to meet my eyes or offer words of consolation. The murmur of whispers and hushed conversations in the office hinted that they knew of my so-called ‘indiscretion’.

Stepping out onto the streets, a torrent of emotions engulfed me. Panic, anger, frustration -all at once. The city I had come to hoping to make a difference in seemed like a giant puzzle with pieces that didn’t fit.

My phone buzzed, pulling me from my thoughts. The screen showed Moana calling, her name accompanied by a picture of her, Edrick, and my sister, Daisy. Swiping to answer, their caring voices immediately filled the void.

“Hey, love. How was your day?” Moana asked cheerfully, clearly unaware of the storm brewing inside me.

I could hear the sounds of plates and silverware clinking, water running, and various voices. I recognized the voices of our maids, Lily and Amy, and our elderly housekeeper, Selina-more of a live-in grandmother at this point, as she was getting too old these days to do as much as she used to-in the background. They were in the kitchen, probably preparing dinner.

“It was-It was-” I began, but my voice faltered. A sob choked in my throat, and tears rolled down my cheeks, each drop carrying a piece of my shattered dream.

“Ella?” Moana’s voice turned worried. “Are you okay?”



I tried to respond, but words eluded me. Just then, my dad's deeper tone replaced Moana's. "Ella, talk to us. What happened?" Mustering as much strength as I could, I responded. "I'm okay, dad. Just... It was a rough day, that's all."

There was a pause. I could hear my dad's voice: "I knew that goddamn dump of a city would crush her spirit."

"Edrick, calm down," Moana replied. Then, my dad spoke into the phone again. "Look, Ella, you really should come home. Our city has some great law firms. One of my Alpha friends even has his own. Maybe you could-"

"I'm not coming back," I interrupted, even as doubts clouded my mind. "At least not now. I need to figure out my path here."

Just then, I heard a familiar voice. "Is that Ella?" It was Daisy. I recognized her small voice immediately. She was fifteen now, but in my eyes, she was still a baby. "Yes, sweetie," Moana said, her voice muffled, no doubt by her hand covering the receiver. "But she's not"

"Put her on," I murmured, wiping my tears away. "I want to talk to her."

A few moments later, my little sister's voice was echoing through the phone. The sounds of the kitchen faded, and I could tell that she was walking away from our parents-probably to their dismay.

"Hey, Ella," she said, sounding as if she was smiling. "Remember that boy I told you about?"

"Yeah," I replied, smiling myself. "Erik? The one you had a crush on?"

"Mhm." She paused, then lowered her voice. "He asked me to the dance."

I couldn't help but grin. "That's great, little sis!" I exclaimed, my eyes filling now with tears of happiness rather than sadness. "Be careful, though. Okay?"

Daisy didn't respond for a moment. She was silent.

“Daisy?” I called out. Finally, she cleared her throat. “Mom and dad keep worrying about you,” she said quietly. “But I’m not worried. I keep reminding them about that one time that you beat up that bully when we were in school. Remember?”

I had to laugh. “Yeah. She kept tripping you. You got a black eye from falling in the hallway. Man, it felt good to deck that little snot in the face.”

Daisy laughed, too. “You got in soooo much trouble. Mom and dad grounded you for at month.”

Our voices dissolved into laughter. Soon, I had almost entirely forgotten about my pain. We finally hung up with a promise from each of us to stay safe and keep our heads up.

But my voice lacked the conviction it once had. Could I really fight this battle alone? Would the weight of the city’s corruption crush me? Or, in this darkness, would I find a way to shine? Only time would tell.