

Chapter 263 An Untimely Vacation

Ella

The mornings had always been my time of clarity, my beacon of hope. But not today. Two weeks had slipped by since my dismissal. Two weeks of job searching, late nights spent revising my resume, late mornings sleeping in and being awoken by the sound of my neighbors arguing or playing loud music.

I felt like a failure. A failure with convictions, maybe, but a failure. Today, I woke up tangled in a mess of bed sheets, my mind muddled with thoughts I couldn't shake off. Groaning, I groggily crawled out of bed and shuffled over to the bathroom, where I flicked on the light and jumped out of fear of my own reflection.

My hair was a mess. I had dark circles under my eyes. I was starting to look a little gaunt, too, from not being able to afford halfway decent meals since Mr. Henderson fired me. The weight of Logan's influence and the web of the Mafia in the city felt inescapable.

Even though I tried to reintegrate into another law firm, word had traveled fast, and every door seemed shut. Every conversation turned cold the moment my name came up. It was as if I were marked, and in this city, it wasn't in a good way.

My stomach growled-a reminder that I had responsibilities beyond just my pride and ambitions. Ema felt weak, too. It was a bit concerning, to say the least. My father always said that a weak wolf was just asking to be attacked or overpowered. Underfeeding myself was a dangerous game.

My ever-loving parents had generously offered financial help when I had first moved here, but my stubborn heart had refused. They had given me so much already. Asking for money now would be like admitting that I couldn't stand on my own two feet. That my dream of independence was just that-a fleeting dream.

I had always lived frugally, but my rookie lawyer salary barely covered my expenses. And now, with the stream of income gone, I found myself calculating how long I could survive on my meager savings.

My parents didn't even know that I was out of a job. Whenever they called me, I skirted the subject, claiming that I was just really busy or that I was working on stuff that I wasn't allowed to talk about.

Naturally, there would soon come a point when they realized that I was full of shit. Would I give in at that point and move back home, where it was safe and comfortable and there was no shortage of money? Maybe.

But I wasn't willing to let it get to that point just yet. I still held out hope that there was a shred of good left in this city. There had to be at least one law firm, however tiny, that still held onto its beliefs and wasn't secretly backed by the looming shadow of the mafia.

If that didn't work, then surely there was a coffee shop that would let me make drinks and keep my head down until people forgot my name. Then I could try again.

Minutes ticked into hours, and the clock's ticks only served to add to the weight on my shoulders. I glanced outside, watching as the sun made its way higher and higher into the sky. It was officially lunchtime, and I hadn't even had breakfast.

Finally, I decided to grab my laptop and make my way downstairs to the coffee shop across the street. There was free wi-fi there, central heating, and cheap croissants. I scrounged up some cash that I had lying around

the apartment and made my way over, shivering against the chill of the autumn air.

“That’ll be six dollars and fifty cents,” the barista, a young man who looked a few years my junior, said from behind the counter.

“Six... Six dollars?” I exclaimed, my eyes wide. “It’s just a black coffee and a single croissant!”

The barista shrugged. “Inflation.”

Grumbling under my breath, I dug into my pocket, where I managed to find a few more quarters. But I was one quarter short. “I only have \$6.25,” I murmured.

The barista snatched the money from my hands and rolled his eyes. “Whatever. You’re holding up the line.”

“Thanks,” I said, shuffling over to a table. A few minutes later, I had a cardboard cup of bitter black coffee and a stale croissant in my hand. It tasted like shit, but it was sustenance.

Maybe going home wasn’t such a bad idea. I could tell everyone it was a vacation—a brief respite. I was just taking time off of work. Yes, I was taking time off of my very busy work schedule. I was even getting vacation time!

Opening my laptop, I began to search for flights, settling for the cheapest ticket I could find. The flight was scheduled for this evening, giving me just enough time to pack and leave.

As I zipped up my suitcase, a knock at my door startled me. Peering through the peephole, my blood ran cold. Several men, their eyes void of emotion, stood outside. All of them wore chilling, stiff smiles, making the hair on the back of my neck stand on end.

“Danger,” Ema said, her voice weak and far away. “Be careful.”

“I know.”

I took a deep breath and tried in vain to summon any shred of bravery I had left. There was none there, but I knew that the men wouldn't be going away anytime soon. I opened the door just a crack, then peered out and eyed the men suspiciously.

"Can I help you?" I asked. One of the men stepped forward, his grin unwavering. "Miss Morgan, our boss has been waiting for a chance to chat with you for a while. It seems he got wind of your travel plans."

Fear clawed at me. How did they know about my flight? "I don't know what you're talking about," I said, trying to feign innocence. "Oh, come on now," another man chuckled, his voice dripping with malice. "You're not exactly subtle, sweetheart."

I frowned. "You have the wrong girl," I said, going to shut my door. But the man in front stuck his steel-toed boot out, stopping the door from shutting all the way. My face blanched.

Before I could react, the man in front muscled the door open. Two of them grabbed my arms, easily overpowering my weakened state from hunger and anxiety. Their grip was iron-clad, and any attempts to wriggle free only made them hold tighter.

"Let go of me!" I shouted, fear and anger giving my voice a tremulous edge. I felt my wolf try to take control, but it was no use. She was too weak, thanks to my poor diet. We were helpless, both of us.

"I said, let me go!"

The men didn't respond. Instead, they effortlessly hauled me down the hallway, kicking and screaming.

"Help!" I cried. "Murder! Fire!" Of course, no one came out of their apartments. They wouldn't. They knew what this was. I had quickly learned that everyone in this godforsaken city knew about the mafia. To them, I was just a ticking time bomb. Why get involved?

Panic surged within me, threatening to drown my senses. Memories of all the Mafia stories, filled with torture and revenge, played out in my mind. Had my act of defiance led me to this dark end?

The men dragged me out of the building against my will, and unceremoniously threw me into an unmarked van.

As the van sped away, I caught a fleeting glimpse of my apartment building, the place I had once viewed as a symbol of my newfound independence in the city. A tear rolled down my cheek, not out of fear for what awaited me, but for the dreams that had been brutally shattered.

And then, a burlap sack was shoved over my head, and I couldn't see anything anymore. All I could hope for now was a chance to see my loved ones one more time. But in this city, where the Mafia's tentacles seemed to stretch into every corner, even that might be too much to ask.

Chapter 264 New Beginnings

Ella

The suffocating darkness of the burlap sack seemed to amplify every sound and sensation. The rough fabric chafed against my skin, and the acrid smell of stale sweat filled my nostrils. I could feel the car's movements, every twist and turn of the winding roads, and the muted voices of the men accompanying me.

They were taking me far away from home. I could feel it. And if I knew anything about the Mafia... I knew that I wouldn't be coming back.

Using every ounce of Ema's strength and courage that was left, I tried to break free. My legs kicked wildly, and my muffled shouts resonated through the tight confines of the vehicle, but the men around me seemed unperturbed.

"Please!" I called out, struggling against the absurdly tight restraints around my wrists. "Please, just let me go! I'll disappear! You'll never hear from me again!"

No one responded to my pleas, no hands attempted to calm me or even restrain me further. It was as if they had done this countless times before, grown immune to the sounds of their victims' distress.

After what felt like an eternity, I felt a change. The car's rumbling transitioned from the smooth asphalt to the gravelly crunch of a driveway.

I braced myself, hoping for an opportunity to escape or, at the very least, to see where they were taking me.

Suddenly, the car came to a halt, and strong arms yanked me out. The shock and disorientation of the sudden movement made my stomach lurch. I was hoisted over someone's shoulder, the weight of my own body pressing down on his shoulder, making it even harder for me to breathe. Despite the fear and confusion, I continued my struggle, kicking my legs and yelling into the fabric.

"Let me go!" I screeched, wriggling beneath the man's iron grip. "Let me go, you fucker!" The journey on foot was short but intense. Every step the man took jarred me, but the feeling of plush carpeting beneath me as I was placed down gave me a brief moment of relief. My heart raced in anticipation of what would come next.

As the burlap sack was yanked off, a rush of cool air met my face. Blinking against the sudden onslaught of light, I tried to orient myself, taking in my new surroundings, all the while on high alert for the next unexpected turn of events.

Instead of the cold wind of a remote area, I was met with the scent of polished wood and leather. I wasn't in some dilapidated warehouse or a barren field. It was an opulent mansion, with intricate chandeliers and plush carpets.

And there, standing before me in his imposing stature, was Logan. A flood of emotions hit me, a mix of relief, anger, and confusion.

"I'm truly sorry, Ella," Logan said immediately, his deep blue eyes betraying a hint of genuine concern. He crouched down beside me, and his hands worked quickly to release me from my bindings.

As soon as my hands were free I scrambled to my feet, my legs wobbly but determined. My instincts took over, and I revealed my fangs, poised to attack. But Logan, with unexpected humility, exposed his neck to me.

“You can rip me apart if you’d like,” he said. “But I assure you, this was just a misunderstanding.” I was taken aback by the vulnerability in his stance, a stark contrast to the usual cold, calculated man I had come to know so far.

“You!” Logan barked, turning his attention to the men who had abducted me. “I told you to approach her with kindness. Why the aggression?”

One of the men stepped forward, his face etched with fear. “We did as you instructed, sir. We smiled and asked her to come with us. But she resisted. She tried to flee.”

“Your idea of a smile is downright creepy!” I snapped, my anger flaring once again. “I thought you were going to kill me!”

“Well then...” Logan licked his lips, his eyes flashing with anger. The men, each enormous and hulking mountains in their own rights, almost seemed to shrink beneath him. “Fight, then.”

“Sir?” one of the men asked, his voice quavering slightly. “You heard me,” Logan repeated. “Fight. You may only stop beating the living daylights out of each other when she-” He nodded his head toward me.”-decides that you’re finished.”

The command left Logan’s lips with a cold finality, and his men hesitated for just a split second before they squared off against each other. My heart raced, my eyes darting between the two burly men, incredulous that they would obey such a chilling order.

The air grew thick with tension. The silent mansion hallways echoed back the sounds of heavy breathing and the shuffling of feet. With a quick nod of mutual agreement, they lunged at each other, fists raised. The first punch landed with a sickening thud, jolting my senses.

I watched in abject horror as powerful blows were dealt with surgical precision, each strike designed to incapacitate and harm. One man’s nose

burst open, splattering blood onto the plush carpet below, while the other sported a rapidly swelling eye.

The elegant hall, once a testament to Logan's apparent wealth and refined tastes, was now the scene of a brutal and senseless showdown. Crimson stains marred the ivory carpet, the once regal ambiance replaced by the metallic scent of blood.

Logan, however, appeared completely unfazed. He perched casually on the edge of his mahogany desk, watching the chaos unfold with a detached expression. There was no hint of remorse or concern on his face. Instead, he looked on with an almost clinical interest, as if observing an experiment.

My heart constricted as the fight intensified.. One man managed to get the upper hand, pinning his opponent to the ground and wrapping his thick fingers around his throat. Gasps for air filled the space, accompanied by desperate pleas for mercy.

The choking man's eyes bulged, and his face began turning an alarming shade of purple. I couldn't bear it any longer.

"Stop!" I finally called out, my voice shaking as it echoed through the mansion. "Enough! Stop this madness!" The men halted instantly, their chests heaving with exertion, eyes darting between Logan and me.

Logan gave them a withering look and nodded, giving them silent permission to climb to their feet and limp away. Once we were alone, Logan turned back to me, his demeanor changing. "Ella, please understand. I never intended any harm. I only wanted to discuss something with you."

"And for that, you kidnap me?" I shot back, my arms crossed defensively. "Kidnapping was never part of the plan," he said. "But here me out: I can offer you double your previous salary. It's a generous offer," Logan proposed, his voice coaxing.

I scoffed. “This isn’t about money, Logan,” I retorted with irony dripping from each word. “My family has more than enough. It’s about doing the right thing in this godforsaken city.”

He leaned in closer, the intensity of his gaze locked onto mine. “My plans are more than just monetary gains, Ella. I think you know that.”

Exasperated, I replied, “Then get to the point, Logan. Why am I here?” Before he could answer, he reached out, his fingers grazing my hair. “You seem tired, Ella,” he observed, his voice soft and almost....caring? “It’s been a while since we last saw each other.”

I recoiled, but not entirely from Logan’s touch. Deep down, my wolf stirred, recognizing its mate. It was an unnerving sensation, feeling a connection to the man who was partly responsible for my recent hardships.

Logan’s eyes searched mine, noting the conflict within. “You haven’t been eating well, have you?” he asked gently.

“I’m not here for small talk,” I said, my voice firm. “I want to know-” But my stomach, with its impeccable timing, chose that moment to grumble audibly. The irony of the situation was not lost on me, and Logan’s face cracked into a grin. The rich sound of his laughter filled the room, much to my dismay.

“Come,” he said, his mirth still evident. “Let’s eat first, and then we can discuss everything.”

Although my pride protested, my hunger won the argument. With a reluctant nod, I followed him deeper into the mansion, my wolf restless, and my thoughts a jumbled mess.

Chapter 265 Sleeping with the Flanco

Ella

As we exited the mansion, the gravel crunched underfoot, the sound reverberating in the otherwise silent evening. Logan led the way, his long strides confident and unhurried.

We approached a sleek black car with tinted windows. Its polished surface mirrored the moon's glow, casting eerie reflections of our figures.

"Get in," he instructed, not a command so much as a casual suggestion. But his clear blue eyes told a different story. They were always watching, assessing. I hesitated, eyeing the vehicle and then him.

"Where are we going?" My voice carried a hint of defiance, a touch of the suspicion I felt. Logan had an unpredictable streak that made him intriguing, but also undeniably dangerous.

"To eat," he replied nonchalantly, as though it was the most obvious thing in the world. "I know a good place." The guarded expression didn't leave my eyes. "And why should I trust you? If you try any tricks, Logan, I swear, I'll kill you."

His response was swift and unexpected. With an amused smile playing on his lips, he tilted his head, fully exposing the vulnerable column of his neck. "Like I said before, you're welcome to rip me apart, Ella. I'd consider it an honor to be murdered by someone as captivating as you."

I scowled, taken aback by his audacity. “You’re full of shit.” Logan chuckled, a rich sound that held genuine mirth. “Perhaps. But aren’t you a bit curious?”

With a reluctant sigh, I relented, opening the passenger door and sliding in. As he took the driver’s seat, the scent of leather and a hint of his cologne filled the space, a strangely comforting aroma that lulled my heightened senses.

The engine purred to life and we began to move, weaving through the less-frequented roads. I realized we weren’t as isolated as I’d thought. The towering buildings of the city loomed in the distance, illuminated by a myriad of lights, a stunning backdrop to our journey.

It was beautiful, watching the city skyline from this perspective, a shimmering mirage against the dark tapestry of the night.

The drive was shorter than I expected. Before I knew it, Logan was pulling into a parking space outside a quaint burger joint by the water. The neon sign buzzed softly, casting its warm light over the exterior, and through the windows, I could see the lively hustle and bustle of patrons..

“Here we are,” Logan declared, a hint of pride in his voice. “Told you I knew a good place.”

I was surprised. This didn’t seem like the sort of place that someone like Logan would go to eat. It seemed like nothing more than a simple waterside burger joint. But then again, I supposed that this mobster had more to him than meets the eye.

“I still can’t fathom it,” I murmured to myself as I stepped out of the luxurious car. “Why am I always dining with this mobster?”

Logan chuckled from beside me, flashing a boyish grin. “For someone who claims to be such an independent spirit, you sure do seem to have a penchant for my company.”

My throat clenched. Dammit, I thought to myself. That was meant for Ema. “Sorry,” I said, clenching my jaw tightly. “That wasn’t meant to be said out loud.”

Logan just threw back his head and laughed, the sound echoing across the still night air. It was strangely infectious, and despite the absurdity of our situation, I found myself stifling a grin.

The waterfront’s cool breeze brushed past us as we approached the burger joint, its neon sign glowing invitingly.

The restaurant was an unassuming gem, strategically perched on the edge of the waterfront, almost kissing the harbor’s embrace. Picnic tables, filled to the brim with happy families and flirting couples, littered the front patio.

Inside the little restaurant, there was hardly even enough space to stand. Logan elbowed his way through the crowd, held up two fingers and said something to the cashier that I couldn’t quite make out. A few moments later, I was being ushered over to the end of the counter. It wasn’t long before two burgers, wrapped in paper, and a paper bag filled with greasy french fries were shoved into our hands.

“This way,” Logan mouthed, his voice lost in the din as he nodded his head toward a back entrance. I followed him hesitantly, but upon bursting back out into the cool night, I found myself breathless.

What really set this eatery apart was its breathtaking view. We were mere feet away from the ocean, its dark, velvety waters shimmering under the moonlight. Every so often, the gentle lap of waves against the shore would create ripples, making the water dance in a symphony of silver and blue.

Overlooking this serene spectacle was the city’s skyline, a beautiful juxtaposition of nature and urbanity. Skyscrapers, their glass facades illuminated in a myriad of colors, pierced the night sky, standing tall and

proud. They cast their reflections on the water, creating a mesmerizing mosaic of light and shadow.

“I’ve seen way too many gangster movies, you know?” I said, glancing at the glistening water. “There’s always that ominous line about ‘sleeping with the fishes’. I’m not too keen on becoming part of that cinematic trope.”

Logan leaned in, amusement dancing in his eyes. “Before any watery farewells, I promise, at least you’ll have a delicious final meal.” He winked. I stifled a laugh. “How very generous of you.”

Logan led me over to a small ledge with a metal railing. I watched in awe as he casually sat down on the edge, sticking his feet out through the wide spaces between the rails. He patted the spot next to him, and before I even sat, he was unwrapping his burger and taking a large bite, immediately followed by a mouthful of French fries.

I sat beside him. The aroma of the burgers and fries was enough to make me temporarily forget about my fears.

“You know, Ella,” he began, his mouth full, “I always thought you were just here playing the rebellious heiress, out to have a wild city adventure. But now, I see there’s so much more to you.”

I took a deliberate bite of my burger, avoiding his gaze. “What do you mean?” His fingers tapped rhythmically against the railing, creating metallic vibrations that ran down the length of it. “Your dream, Ella. Your ambition to change the city. It’s intriguing. And it got me thinking.”

“I’m listening,” I responded warily. “If you go back to your firm, start with that small case I mentioned, and prove yourself, maybe then...” He trailed off, leaning in closer. “Maybe then, I can help you with a case that’ll give you a real fight against the mafia.”

I almost choked on my drink. “You? Help me take down the mafia? Aren’t you a part of it?” He smirked, revealing a hint of mischief. “Not my mafia,

darling. Another one.” I frowned, processing his words. “A factional war? What do you get out of it?”

Logan’s gaze intensified, and he leaned even closer, so close I could feel the warmth of his breath. “What if it’s a step towards your ultimate goal? Would you consider my offer then?”

My heart hammered against my ribcage. “What do you want from me?”

His voice dropped to a whisper, laden with sincerity and an emotion I couldn’t quite place. “Pretend to be my girlfriend.”

I choked on my burger, my eyes widening in disbelief. Coughing, I managed to sputter, “What?!”

Chapter 266

Ella

The night was awash with ambivalence and intrigue as Logan and I sat side by side, the city lights playing a serenade of reflections on the dark waters. The weight of his proposal hung between us, making the air palpable with tension.

“I don’t understand,” I began, hesitatingly. “Your ‘fake girlfriend’? Why? What does that have to do with... literally anything?” Inside, Ema was raging.

“Fake girlfriend?” she hissed. “First, he just wants you as a mistress. Then he wanted to trick you into being his girlfriend because you are Ella Morgan. Now that he knows you’re not going to follow his mind, he wants to use you as a fake girlfriend? Not even an official one anymore?!!”

“It’s not like I’d want it to be official anyway,” I replied. “But I don’t want this, either. Let’s hear him out, though.” Logan took a deep breath, as if preparing himself for a confession.

“You see, my brother recently got engaged to an Alpha from a prestigious family. Her father’s wealth is vast, and it could very well be the key to accelerating my brother’s ascendancy.”

I scowled. “It had nothing to do with me. My father is strictly legitimate. He doesn’t dabble in any of your... Mafia nonsense.”

Logan smirked, that familiar cocky grin that both annoyed and intrigued me. “I know, Ella. Your father’s empire spans three major companies, right? Real estate, chip technology, and connections with W coins-his cryptocurrency. Moreover, he’s involved in some business developments that I’m particularly interested in.”

A sudden realization hit me, and I frowned deeper. “So, you were not only finding me for my wealth. I’m your ticket to getting closer to those ventures?” I hissed.

He sighed, seemingly exasperated. “Look, Ella, how long would you need to play this role? A year. Give me that, and I promise, once that’s done, you’d have become an impeccable lawyer, one to reckon with, and I...” He paused, glancing away. “I will get what I want sooner.”

“Okay,” I said, rubbing the bridge of my nose. “Just theoretically, let’s say that I agreed to this ridiculous proposal. You would seriously let me go once it would be all over? Once you have what you need?” I questioned, eyeing him intently, searching for any hint of deception.

He leaned in close, so close that I could see the specks of gold in his deep blue eyes. His voice dropped to a husky whisper. “Do you really think, by then, you’d want to?”

The electricity between us was palpable. My heart raced, responding to the attraction that flowed like a current between us. But I snapped back, setting my face in a determined frown.

“My feelings for the Mafia are of disdain, not interest,” I growled. “If I took you up on this proposal... Regardless of feelings, I would be out after one year. No questions about it.”

Logan sat back, raising his hands in mock surrender. “Your choice. If you want to leave, I won’t stop you. I’ll play the gentleman.” I pressed further, curiosity gnawing at me. “Why are you so keen on taking down other Mafia members?” I asked. “What’s in it for you?”

He looked away, the playful glint replaced by a steely resolve. “There are things I can’t share with you yet, Ella. I need to trust you completely first.”

The thought of teaming up with Logan to fight against the Mafia felt wrong, but it also felt oddly right, even with the personal sacrifice it entailed. This was our deal, but it was my decision. I wasn’t going to rely on anyone but myself.

“I don’t know,” I said, crumpling up the empty burger wrapper in my hands. “I don’t know.”

Logan simply shrugged. “Take some time to think about it,” he replied. There was almost a sense of contemplative benevolence behind his voice. Maybe my presupposed view of the Mafia wasn’t entirely accurate. Or maybe he was just... different. I was intrigued to know why he wanted to take down the Mafia, considering that he was a part of it.

But for all I knew, it was all just a ploy to get me closer to him... To gain my trust, get a mate of high status, and get close to my father.

That was what all of the guys in my life ever wanted, at least. Every boyfriend I had ever had wound up trying to get something out of me.... money, fame, power.

After the last guy, who dated me for almost two years and convinced me to fall in love with him, only for me to find out that he was trying to steal money from me, I promised myself that I wouldn’t let it happen again.

The rest of our meal was consumed in reflective silence, each lost in our thoughts, intermittently breaking it to admire the scenic night view.

“Maybe we should get to know more about him,” my wolf’s voice echoed in my mind. “Maybe it wouldn’t hurt, you know?”

I stifled a laugh. Even after all this time, I still couldn’t control my wolf’s innate feelings. “Don’t fall for him so easily,” I replied. “He’s still no good. I won’t fall for all of these platitudes he keeps spilling out.”

Ema didn't respond, but I could feel her reaction. She was respecting my decision, and retreating into herself. I knew that it hurt for her to have to push away our mate, but we had no choice.

By the time Logan started the car to head back, I felt as though a whirlwind had swept through my mind, leaving me with countless fragments of thought.

Once we arrived back at my apartment, I barely waited for the car to stop before I jumped out, eager to escape the stifling tension.

"Thanks for the food and the ride," I muttered, not meeting his eyes. I turned to walk into the building but paused mid-step, biting my lip. Turning, I met Logan's gaze through the car window, those piercing blue eyes filled with determination and...hope?

His voice reached out, soft yet persuasive. "Believe in your dreams, Ella. That fierce determination to achieve them? We share that."

I stood rooted to the spot, my gaze fixed on Logan. The world around us seemed to blur, my focus solely on the man before me. There was something in his eyes, a depth that I hadn't noticed before. It was as if, beneath the facade of power and cunning there lay an almost kindred spirit.

There was an unspoken understanding that hung in the air, making the distance between us feel almost negligible. I could sense a mutual respect, a shared journey of dreams and ambitions. Two souls, seemingly so different on the surface, but intrinsically bound by similar paths and desires....

And fate. Then, breaking the spell, Logan put his car in drive. The engine revved, and with one last look cast in my direction, his lips curling into a half-smile, he sped away.

For a few moments I watched, breath held, as he drove away until the taillights became specks in the distance. The night's cool breeze ruffled

my hair, but I was lost in my thoughts, my eyes fixed on those two yellow beams glaring back at me.

‘corner It wasn’t until he turned a corner and was out of sight that I finally raced up to my room, my mind a cacophony of thoughts and emotions.

I didn’t sleep that night. I couldn’t. Back and forth I went across my room, the night’s events playing and replaying in my head. If I agreed to something like this... What would it truly entail? I couldn’t deny the pull of the mate bond, but... Maybe there was some hope there. Hope that this could be clean, that we could get what we wanted and go our separate ways. I could take down the Mafia in this city, regain my title as a lawyer, and fulfill my dreams. Logan could get the business connections that he wanted.

Eventually, dawn began to creep in, casting a soft glow into the room. I hadn’t realized how much time had passed, but by now, I knew what to do. After what felt like an eternity, I picked up my phone and dialed Logan’s number.

“I’ll be your lawyer,” I finally conceded, the weight on my chest lifting slightly. A triumphant laugh echoed from the other side. “That’s my girl!” Logan’s exuberant voice made my cheeks flush and my heart race.

This was going to be one hell of a year.

Chapter 267 A Lonely Place

Logan

The chilly wind that night was relentless, and as I stepped out of the car, I felt a pang of emptiness as I looked up at my dark mansion. The ever-present guards flanked my home, silent statues in their tailored suits.

Their stillness was deceiving, because beneath the calm exterior, they were ready to leap into action at any moment. All it would take was one order from me. The fight that ensued earlier when they stupidly kidnapped Ella was proof of that.

However, even with their presence, I couldn't help but feel isolated. My home was a testament to my tastes: large, opulent, and overlooking the vast expanse of the sea. But tonight, it felt different.

The house that had been a silent refuge now echoed the solitude of my thoughts. Why was it that just a short meeting with Ella made everything seem so... incomplete?

As I walked through the spacious rooms, I noted the intentional lack of decor. A deliberate choice. The walls held memories, some that I preferred to forget. To fill them with decorations would be to acknowledge those very memories that I was trying to bury.

Before I could drown further into the mire of my thoughts, my phone rang, its shrill tone shattering the stillness. It was Harry, my brother.

“Logan,” he began, his voice dripping with that familiar arrogance, “I’m hosting a little soirée to introduce everyone to my fiancée. Remember her? The Alpha’s daughter?”

I smirked, feeling a hint of sarcasm in my voice. “How could I forget? With her father’s questionable legal dealings, you must be thrilled.”

There was a brief silence. I could almost picture him, his face contorted in that infuriating smile. I always hated it. I hated most things about that bastard, but sometimes it felt as though I hated his smile the most.

“Actually, I am thrilled,” he said after a moment of hesitation. “Her family will be beneficial for our expansion.”

That word ‘our’. It always felt misplaced when Harry said it. Our objectives were far apart. He craved power, money, dominance. I... I wanted out. Out of this life that had stolen my childhood, torn apart my family. Every day, I dreamt of the day the word ‘Mafia’ would no longer define me.

“You should come,” Harry continued, his nasally voice breaking through my reverie. Then he chuckled, that maddening laugh that always set me on edge. “Although, it might be awkward for you to show up alone. No need to bother if it would upset you.”

The comment stung more than I cared to admit. I retorted with a brief, “Goodnight, Harry,” and hung up, my grip on the phone a bit tighter than necessary.

Harry and I had never gotten along. He was my older brother, only older by a year, but you would have thought that he had decades on me by the way that he looked down on me. He was always our dad’s favorite, if only because he always did what our dad wanted.

If you needed someone to run the family business while dad was away on vacation, Harry was the type to do it perfectly. In fact, he would make

more money during those days. when he was in charge. If you needed someone to take care of... dirty business? Drown a traitor? Intimidate an ingrate? Harry was your guy.

My dad loved that about him. My entire life was nothing but one giant pissing contest with Harry. At least I had one hold over him: I was more handsome. Taller. Better with the ladies. He only ever had wives because he wasn't afraid to shell out cash to keep gold diggers around.

I was almost entirely certain that this newest wife would disappear once she got a few luxury cars and a mansion out of him.

Sometimes, though, I wondered if I would have been better off if I had done what he did with women. With my looks and money, I knew I could have any woman I wanted. But I never used those things, and thus I was alone.

Alone in the shadowed expanse of my room, the weight of loneliness bore down on me. My wolf stirred within, urging me to claim Ella, to bring her into my world. But that wasn't fair to her. If she accepted my offer, I would try my best, but there were no guarantees in this life.

The moonlight filtering through my window cast a silvery glow on everything it touched. I had always dismissed tales of the Moon Goddess, but tonight, in my vulnerable state, I found myself wishing. Hoping that Ella would see beyond the shadows of my past and stand with me in my quest for a better future.

I fell into a light sleep that night, made restless by my tossing and turning. Ella plagued my mind. Her fiery attitude, her round lips, her long honey-golden hair, her piercing gray eyes... God, how could I be sent the perfect mate, only for her to hate me right off the bat because of my past?

I awoke the next morning and laid there for a few minutes, running my hand repeatedly through my hair. But before I could sink deeper into my introspection, the familiar ringtone sounded again. Ella.

Her voice, though hesitant, held an edge of determination. "I'll be your lawyer," she declared. The weight on my chest lifted.

"That's my girl!" I laughed, genuine happiness resonating in my voice. She was silent for a moment. I pictured her on the other end of the phone, her face beet red. She didn't seem to want to notice, but I noticed how quickly she blushed around me. It was cute.

"Prepare for work on Monday," she added, all business. Before I could respond, she hung up. Classic Ella, I thought to myself, shaking my head.

I called her old boss after that. One benefit of my position in life was my ability to make people bend to my whim... And her boss, Mr. Henderson, was the perfect person for that. "Remember how I bought you that nice Rolex?" I asked, after the necessary pleasantries were exchanged.

"Erm... Yes, of course," he replied. "I'm wearing it right now."

"Good." I smirked, imagining him beginning to sweat behind his silly little desk. He was probably tugging on his overly tight shirt collar right now. "If you want to keep it and the wrist that it's attached to, you'll want to allow my girlfriend back to your firm."

"Sorry?" Mr. Henderson asked, his voice wavering. "Your... Girlfriend?"

I couldn't help but grin. "Yes," I replied. "My girlfriend. Ella Morgan." After ensuring Ella's comfortable return to the law firm, I decided to indulge in a little mischief.

Dialing Harry's number, I feigned innocence. "Sorry about last night," I said, grinning. "I was tired last night. Long day." Harry was silent for a

moment. “Do you need something, Logan?” he asked, feigning indifference.

My grin widened. “Yes, actually, I do,” I replied. “See, you were mistaken last night. I won’t be coming to your party alone. In fact, I’d like to announce my plus-one. I can’t wait to introduce her to the family.”

Silence. The satisfaction was sweet. “Who?” he finally managed.

“You’ll find out,” I replied, smirking, before hanging up.