

## Chapter 283 Unsaid Words

Ella

As we pulled up to the lookout point, the dazzling city lights sprawled out beneath us like a twinkling tapestry.

The vastness of the view was breathtaking, and I felt a small shiver run down my spine, not from the cold, but from the sheer beauty of it all. Logan parked the car and turned off the ignition. The silence of the night was only punctuated by the faint hum of the city below.

“Come on,” he whispered, gesturing for me to follow. We clambered onto the hood of the car, the cool metal pressing into my legs, and sat side by side, staring out at the shimmering skyline.

The vast city lights stretched out before us, flickering in a rhythmic dance of night. It felt as if we were suspended between two worlds-the serenity of the elevated viewpoint and the bustling city below.

“It looks so small from up here,” I murmured, my fingers absentmindedly tracing patterns on the cool metal of the car hood beneath us. “But when I’m in it, it feels endless.”

Logan chuckled softly, his eyes crinkling with amusement. “Big cities have that effect. What was your home city like?”

I sighed, leaning back on my hands and letting the cool night air wash over me. “I was lucky, I guess, I began, my mind drifting back to earlier days. “I grew up in a penthouse in a beautiful part of the city. I had my own room, with this big bay window that overlooked a park.”

“You had a park right next to your penthouse?” Logan asked. I nodded, smiling at the memory. “Yes, right across the street. We went there all of the time. Many afternoons were spent there, with Moana. and my little sister. We’d have picnics beneath the willow trees, chase butterflies, and just... be. Those were simpler times.”

As I spoke, I remembered one particularly fond memory from my childhood, before Daisy was born and before Moana and my dad got together. It was back when Moana was still my nanny. She took me across the street to a little farmer’s market, and bought me a yellow stuffed duck.

I still had that duck. It was sitting on my bedside table back at my apartment. Logan seemed to absorb my words, looking out at the distant horizon. After a moment, he turned to me, his gaze searching. “Ella, is it true what they said at that party about Moana?”

I knew what he was referring to. Taking a deep breath, I nodded. “Yeah, she isn’t my biological mom. And, yes, she was originally my nanny.

My little sister was the product of a one night stand.” He waited, giving me the space to continue or not. I appreciated that.

“But,” I started, my voice growing soft, “I don’t really care about biology. Moana has been more of a mother to me than my biological mother ever was. She’s filled our home with love, warmth, and laughter. I’m so grateful she came into my and my father’s lives.”

A smile played on Logan’s lips. “She must be someone special.”

“She is,” I replied, my heart full of gratitude. “We love each other dearly. She’s the reason I believe in unconditional love. She’s my dad’s fated mate, you know.”

Logan was quiet for a moment, then his voice broke through the night, softer than I’d ever heard it. “You’re very pretty when you talk about the past like that. When you’re genuinely happy.”

I could feel the warmth creep up my cheeks, making me thankful for the dim lighting. “Thank you,” I whispered, suddenly feeling shy.

Desperate for a change in topic, I turned my attention to the sleek machine we were perched on. “This is a really nice car,” I remarked, trailing my fingers along its smooth red surface. “Have you always had a thing for cars?”

The serenity of the moment was palpable, yet it also held an underlying tension, like an unsaid secret just waiting to be revealed.

“I guess you could say that,” Logan began, his voice contemplative. “As soon as I was old enough, I began saving up for my first car-this car. And as soon as I was able to drive, I bought it and never looked back. I’ve always loved cars, ever since I was a kid. They’ve been... an escape for me.”

I turned to look at him, intrigued. “An escape from what?”

He hesitated, his jaw clenching slightly. “From my home life,” he murmured, sounding somewhat apprehensive. I frowned, unsure if I should pry, but curiosity got the better of me. “Was it that bad? Your home life, I mean?”

For a moment, Logan looked lost, his eyes distant. When he finally spoke, his voice was low, as if he was sharing a heavy secret. “It wasn’t a good way to grow up,” he admitted. “And you know what’s funny? I sometimes resent people like you, just a little bit.”

I was taken aback. “What do you mean?”

He glanced at me, his blue eyes intense. “You grew up with both-money and a loving family. I always thought you get one or the other. But never both. I got the money part, sure, but the loving family? Not so much.”

There was so much pain in his voice, so much vulnerability. “Sometimes I think I would have preferred growing up poor, but with two parents who

genuinely loved me,” he confessed, and there was an undeniable wistfulness in his voice.

I felt a pang in my heart. For all the teasing and the banter, I realized how little I truly knew about Logan. I reached out instinctively, placing a comforting hand on his arm. “Are you in touch with your mother?” I asked gently. “I haven’t heard anything about her.”

His whole demeanor changed. There was a shadow in his eyes, a hardness that hadn’t been there a moment ago. “Ella,” he said, his voice cold, “it’s getting late. I think it’s time I drive you home.”

I blinked, taken aback. “Did I say something wrong?”

He didn’t answer, instead sliding off the car and walking around to the driver’s side. “Let’s just stick to our new contract. You don’t need to be ‘trapped’ with someone like me,” he said, his voice somewhat bitter. The word ‘mafia’ hung unsaid in the air between us.

Silently, I followed him and got into the passenger seat. We drove in silence, the tension between us thick and palpable. The city lights that had seemed so beautiful just moments ago now felt cold and distant.

My mind raced, trying to process what had just transpired. Had I crossed a line by mentioning his mother? I wanted to apologize, to clarify, but the stern set of his jaw told me that now wasn’t the right time.

We pulled up outside my apartment, and before I could say a word, Logan said, “Goodnight, Ella,” his voice devoid of its usual warmth.

“Logan,” I began, desperate to clear the air, but he just shook his head.

“Just... take care of yourself, Ella.”

I watched him drive away, a mix of emotions swirling inside me—confusion, guilt, and a deep sense of regret. I had so many questions, but for now, they would remain unanswered.

## Chapter 284

Ella

The large wooden conference table felt cool and smooth beneath my fingertips as I arranged the files in neat stacks. I could feel my palms getting sweaty with anticipation. This was one of the first significant cases I'd handled solo at the firm, and I wanted everything to be perfect.

To add a touch of hospitality, I carefully set out a tray of assorted pastries fresh from a popular bakery downtown.

There was a soft knock at the door, and Logan sauntered in. His demeanor was relaxed, in stark contrast to my tight bundle of nerves. "Good morning, Ella," he greeted, raising an eyebrow at my meticulous setup.

"Morning," I replied with a half-smile, adjusting a paper clip that was slightly out of place. "Thank you for coming."

Before Logan could respond, the door opened again, and in walked the tenant accompanied by his lawyer.

I recognized the lawyer from previous interactions around the firm. He was known to be a tough negotiator, a thought which only fueled my anxiety. They settled into the seats opposite Logan and me.

The tenant, a portly man with a sharp nose, didn't waste any time: "We've come with an offer," he declared, pulling out a thick envelope from his

briefcase. I raised an eyebrow, taken aback. I hadn't expected things to move so quickly. "Go on."

As the thick envelope hit the table, its presence drew an undeniable tension. The tenant's lawyer, a tall, lean man with salt-and-pepper hair and glasses, shifted in his seat, nonchalantly pushing the tray of pastries out of the way as though they were a hindrance..

"Let's get straight to the point," he began, locking eyes with Logan, a move that made me feel oddly left out of the conversation. "My client is willing to pay the outstanding rent in cash, upfront. A hassle-free transaction that will save both parties time and resources."

I opened my mouth to interject, to assert my position in the negotiations, but Logan, his gaze unyielding, beat me to it. "How much are we talking about?"

The tenant cleared his throat. "Full settlement of the missed rent. Every single cent." He tapped the envelope with a hint of smugness.

Logan's lips curved into a slight smirk, his interest evidently piqued. "That's a generous offer," he said. "What's the catch?"

"There's no catch," the lawyer assured. "But we do need assurance that the tenancy continues uninterrupted."

I watched the exchange, a sense of unease settling over me. The quick pace at which this was transpiring left me spinning. This wasn't the usual pace of negotiations I was familiar with, where each term was parsed, evaluated, and haggled over.

No, this was far different. This felt like a high-stakes poker game, and I was barely a spectator.

I finally spoke up. "Logan, may I remind you that the terms of the lease clearly stipulate that any unlawful activities on the premises are grounds for eviction?"

The lawyer turned to her, a patient smile on his face. “Miss, with all due respect, there haven’t been any proven unlawful activities. Allegations are just that allegations.”

“That’s not entirely true,” I countered. “There have been numerous complaints-”

Logan’s hand on mine beneath the table stopped me mid-sentence. The touch was gentle, but the message was clear: let him handle it. It was a move that stung, a reminder of the imbalance of power in the room.

The tenant and his lawyer were clearly steering the conversation, and Logan seemed willing to play their game. I felt more like a bystander than a key player in these negotiations.

Logan, his gaze never leaving the lawyer’s, inquired, “Assuming I accept this offer, what guarantees do we have that this will be the end of our issues?”

The tenant interjected, his tone almost pleading.

“Logan, this place is essential to my operations. If I’m settling this huge amount in cash, you have to understand how much it means to me. There won’t be any more issues. You have my word.”

Logan tilted his head slightly, studying the man for a few moments. “You know, words are wind. How can I trust you won’t default again?”

The lawyer smoothly intervened. “How about an advance on the next three months as a show of good faith?”

Logan raised an eyebrow, clearly impressed by the offer. “That’s an enticing proposal.”

My patience was wearing thin. “And what about the other terms of the lease? Are we just going to ignore them?” I chimed in.

The tenant's lawyer, wearing a thin veneer of patience, replied, "Miss, we're addressing the most immediate concern here. My client is showing willingness to cooperate, to ensure things move smoothly."

I felt my temper beginning to flare. The way that the lawyer addressed me, looking at me as though I was a vapid trophy wife and not a lawyer, made me sick.

"Cooperate?" I asked. "By simply throwing money at a problem? That doesn't resolve the underlying issues."

The room grew tense. The tenant looked between me and Logan, uncertainty flickering in his eyes. "Logan, all I'm asking is for a chance. You know how the game works."

I was taken aback by the tenant's words. "The game?" My wolf asked inside my mind. I felt my heart race. What were they referring to? And why was Logan so easily influenced by their offer?

The lawyer leaned back in his chair, adopting a conciliatory tone. "Look, all we're asking for is a fair deal. No one wants lengthy legal battles, right? Let's find a middle ground."

I took a deep breath, trying to marshal my thoughts. But before I could articulate my concerns, Logan gave a small nod, sealing the agreement. With a satisfied expression on his face, Logan smiled and leaned across the table, extending his hand to shake the tenant's. "I'll take the deal."

My mouth fell open, my well-prepared arguments forgotten. I felt sidelined, my concerns unheard. I couldn't help but question Logan's motivations. Why was he so eager to settle? What was really going on behind the scenes? And where did that leave me in the grand scheme of things?

"Um... If I may." I interrupted before they could shake hands, finally making my place known in this deal, "I'd like to speak to my client in private."



“Certainly.” The other lawyer nodded curtly, adjusting his cuff links. As soon as I had pulled Logan into a private room, I rounded on him, my voice low and fierce.

“Do you realize what you’ve just agreed to?” I hissed. “That tenant is involved in some shady business on your property, and you’re just... taking the first deal?”

Logan met my gaze squarely, his blue eyes unflinching. “I don’t particularly care what he does as long as he pays rent on time and doesn’t interfere with my other dealings.”

I shook my head, frustration bubbling up. “This isn’t just about the rent, Logan. It’s about ethics, about principles. I thought you wanted to move away from all these under-the-table dealings?”

He exhaled slowly, running a hand through his dark hair. “Look, Ella, it’s not that black and white. The world I come from? Sometimes, you have to pick the battles you fight. And right now, with everything else going on, this isn’t the hill I want to die on.”

“But-”

He held up a hand, silencing me. “This doesn’t change our professional relationship. Handle the paperwork, make sure it’s all legally sound. That’s what we’re here for.”

I felt a pang of disappointment, a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. It wasn’t just about the case or the decision he had made. It was about trust.

I had genuinely believed that Logan was trying to turn over a new leaf, trying to distance himself from the shady world of underground dealings. But his actions today made me question it all.

## Chapter 285 Sound Counsel

Ella

The door to the conference room had clicked shut behind us, muffling the sounds of hushed discussions from inside. The empty stairwell that we found ourselves in was silent, save for the faint hum of the air conditioning.

Logan's blue eyes met mine, his expression unreadable. But I could feel the simmering tension in the air, thick enough to cut with a knife.

"Why are you acting like this?" I demanded, my voice shaking with anger and disbelief. He blinked in surprise. "Acting like what?"

"Like some...some greedy, opportunistic landlord! Just grabbing the first offer they throw at you because it's in cash, without a thought to the illegal dealings behind it. That's not the Logan you said you wanted to be."

He exhaled deeply, rubbing his temples. "Ella, I'm going to handle the illegal side of things," he said matter-of-factly. "But not by doing the most blatantly stupid thing-rejecting rent from a tenant who's willing to pay. That's just bad. business."

I stepped closer, poking a finger into his chest. "This goes against everything you've told me. You said you wanted to step away from the underworld dealings, to start fresh. This...this isn't it."

Logan's eyes darkened, his patience evidently wearing thin.

"You think I'm being two-faced? Ella, you're being naive. You might be an excellent lawyer, but you know nothing about the dynamics of being a mafia head here."

I scoffed. "I'm not asking you to teach me Mafia 101. I'm asking you to stick to your word, to have some integrity. I thought we had a deal. Or have you forgotten our contract already?"

We glared at each other, a storm brewing between us. Every part of me wanted to storm out, but this was too important. I needed to understand why he was acting this way.

The silence stretched, and just when it felt like the atmosphere would combust, Logan's demeanor shifted. His features softened, and he looked away. "Look, I want to take this deal, sort out the issues, and move onto the next case."

"Next case?" My voice cracked. "When did we get another case?"

He smirked, a glimpse of the old, cocky Logan I was already becoming all-too-familiar with. "I've got a bunch of them lined up. And believe me, if you just...just listen to what I want, we'll win them all. Your career will skyrocket. But for that, Ella, you need to trust me."

"Trust?" I echoed, my voice rising with incredulity. "How am I supposed to trust you when you just blatantly lied to my face?"

The weighty silence that had settled after those words spilled out of my mouth was palpable. Logan's steely gaze was fixed on the window as he readjusted his collar, attempting to regain his signature composed demeanor.

"There are much bigger fish to fry, Ella," he murmured, finally breaking the silence. "Accept the deal, and I'll sign whatever papers you have for me."

I wanted to argue, to scream at him for disregarding the principles he had supposedly -once held. But practicality won over. My own rent was due, and I needed the income from this case to cover it. Still, resentment simmered beneath the surface.

“Fine,” I spat, maybe a little sharper than I intended. “But not for your sake. For mine.” His eyebrows knitted together, a silent question forming, but he said nothing. Instead, he followed me back to the conference room.

“Well?” the other lawyer asked, giving both of us a quizzical look as we returned. “Have you made your decision?”

“Logan...” I cleared my throat, pushing down my anger. “My client... Will take the deal.”

“Very good.” The tenant stood, extending his hand. This time, Logan shook it, and I didn’t stop him. All I could do was watch in a state of numbness as Logan took the offered pen and scrawled his signature on the dotted line.

Once the meeting was over, the rhythmic tapping of my heels against the marble floor echoed in my ears as I strode from the room, heading straight to my office. My wolf paced restlessly inside, feeling Logan’s lingering anger

“The mention of his mother seemed to have hit a nerve,” she said. “That’s why he’s in such a mood. It has to be. But why? Why was he so sensitive about her? Why did he shut down last night when she was mentioned?”

“I don’t know why you care, Ema,” I replied. “He’s clearly a lying, no-good idiot. He’s a... a criminal. Why should we care if he’s mad about his mommy?”

“Well...Ella,” Ema hissed. “I don’t like it either, but remember that he’s our mate-”

“He is not our mate.”

My words came out of my mouth out loud, echoing in the space of my small office. I sighed, passing a hand over my face. "I'm sorry, Ema," I continued. "It's just."

"I know. You don't have to say it."

As I took a deep breath, attempting to calm the raging emotions inside me, the image of Logan from that first night surfaced the arrogant, dismissive man who was supposed to be my fated mate.

Had I been wrong in thinking he was actually planning on changing? Was he just taking advantage of me to get what he wanted after all?

Sitting behind my desk, I began to sort through the paperwork, the mechanics of my job. serving as a distraction from the chaos of my emotions.

But every now and then, a memory would creep up-a soft touch, a stolen glance, a whispered word. It reminded me of the Logan I had come to know so far, or at least, the man who I thought I had come to know. The one who was complex, layered, and far from the brutish man I had first encountered.

But now, I wondered if all of that was just a facade. A way to gain my trust, to twist things in his favor. A wealthy Alpha daughter of a billionaire, a good lawyer, and his fated mate? It was the perfect way to one-up his scheming brother, wasn't it? Maybe the two of them weren't so different after all.

A gentle knock pulled me from my musings. It was Clara, the secretary. She carried a bouquet of white roses. "These just came in for you," she said with a knowing smile. Taking the flowers, I found a card nestled within. "I'm sorry," it read in Logan's rushed handwriting.

Of course, he was. I sighed, placing the bouquet on my desk, imagining that he probably sprinted to the nearest flower shop to pick out the first bouquet he could find in order to win my favor again.

Did he really think I was that stupid? The roses were beautiful, and the gesture was sweet, but it couldn't erase the doubts clouding my mind.

For the rest of the day, I tried to focus on work, but it was a challenge. Logan's conflicted demeanor, the unresolved tension between us, and the looming questions about his past kept intruding on my thoughts.

When the workday finally drew to a close, I gathered my things, mentally preparing myself for the confrontation that awaited me at home. Logan didn't seem like the type to let things fester. He would likely want to talk, to clarify, to explain. But was I ready to listen?

As I stepped out of the building, the cool evening air brushed against my face, offering momentary relief. I began the walk to my apartment, lost in thought.

## Chapter 286 Lone Wolf

Ella

The streets had settled into that dusky, purplish hue that heralded the onset of evening when I recognized the low purr of an engine behind me. The sleek black car pulled up to the curb, and from it emerged Logan, his tall frame poised with that unmistakable confident swagger. “You’ve gotta be kidding me,” I whispered to myself, whipping around and picking up my pace.

“Ella!” Logan called, followed by the sound of his footsteps pounding on the pavement as he jogged after me. Without so much as giving him a glance, I quickened my steps, hoping to put distance. between us.

But, with each step I took, I heard the rhythmic footfalls of Logan’s shoes against the pavement growing louder. He jogged after me, his long-legged strides easily bridging the gap I had worked so hard to put between us.

“Did you get my flowers?” he asked. I had to resist the urge to growl. “Yes,” I replied, not looking at him, “and I threw them away.” “Threw them away? I thought you would like them, or are you not a ‘rose’ girl?”

“I’m not a ‘taking bribes from my client to feel better about his shady dealings kind of girl.” I hissed.

Logan stopped for a moment, but I kept going. I heard him chuckling behind me, followed by the sound of him jogging after me again. “What, are you playing hard to get, Ella?” Logan called out playfully, maneuvering in front of me with a smirk.

I stopped abruptly, facing him with a fiery glare. “Hard to get? Logan, I’ve never been ‘easy’ to get, and you?” I scoffed. “You’ll never ‘get’ me, especially if you’re just a double-dealing criminal.” He chuckled, though there was a hint of exasperation in his eyes. “You always have a way with words.”

I rolled my eyes and attempted to walk past him, but he shifted, walking alongside me. His tall form towered over me, his scent assaulting my senses like a half-enticing, half-sickening love potion that took all of my energy to resist.

“Go away, Logan,” I growled, ignoring my wolf’s urges to be closer to him. “Come on, don’t be like this,” he implored. “I’m sorry about earlier, okay? It had to be done.”

His voice, that velvety tone that once was endearing, was now grating on my nerves. “So, you’re trying to make up for it by taking me out? That’s your grand plan?”

Logan, looking a bit put off, shook his head. “I’m not trying to do anything shady here, Ella,” he said. “I just want to talk a bit. And yeah, maybe I do want to make it up to you, at least a little. My bar-it’s cozy, low-key. Great drinks. Really, it’s perfect for you.”

A strange cocktail of emotions swirled within me. There was anger, of course, but also curiosity and an inexplicable pull towards him. I hated to admit it, but for a split second, I almost considered it.

But the moment passed, and I set my jaw hard with conviction. “No. We’re working together, that’s it. Nothing more.”

He ran a hand through his hair, visibly frustrated. “Ella, we completed our first case together. I thought, you know, maybe we could celebrate that.”

“Celebrate?” I echoed. “Logan, there’s nothing to celebrate. You might have conveniently forgotten, but you broke your word. Not much of a



cause for champagne, don't you think? Besides, you handled the whole case without me today."

Logan cocked his head to the side. "What do you mean?"

I huffed angrily, appalled by his stupidity. "What do you mean? If I hadn't practically forced you to talk to me earlier, you would have taken the Ideal in an instant. What was I even there for? To look pretty while you handle everything? I'm not that type of woman, Logan."

At my words, Logan's face blanched. "I didn't mean to make you feel that way." He sighed, looking both defeated and hopeful at the same time. "Look, I'm sorry. Let's just have a fresh start tonight. You, me, a drink."

In the recesses of my mind, I pondered over the stark change in Logan's demeanor. Just last night, his fury over a mere question about his mother had been palpable. Yet now, he seemed almost desperate for my company.

The inconsistency troubled me, though I chose to hold my tongue on the subject for the time being. Finally, I softened a touch. "Logan, we're colleagues. And for the remainder of our arrangement, that's where I want to draw the line. I can't mix business with whatever this is."

The two of us paused, standing face-to-face in the middle of the sidewalk. The distant hum of the city surrounded us. As I turned to leave, Logan's voice, more earnest than ever, rang out.

"Just one drink?" he pleaded.

"Just screw off, Logan!" I snapped without turning to face him.

Yet, he trailed behind, ever persistent. "Can't you at least let me explain?" he asked, still walking behind me. "Come on. I'll buy you a drink, even dinner if you want. And we can talk."

"No." I frowned deeply, knitting my brows together. "Leave me alone, Logan."

Behind me, I heard Logan stop along with a heavy sigh escaping his lips. “Why do you hate me so much?” he asked.

Stopping, I whirled on him. “You were not only immature today but blatantly stupid! If you want to continue dipping your toes in illegal dealings, you shouldn’t have paraded around claiming otherwise.”

“It’s not my illegal business. It’s my tenant’s,” he defended. “Don’t play games with me, Logan. All of that could easily be pinned on you. Why would you willingly tangle yourself with someone like that? You had every power to sever ties with that tenant.”

Logan exhaled heavily, raking his fingers through his hair. “Ella, it’s not as simple as you make it out to be. This isn’t about one guy, one tenant. There’s a web, a hierarchy. This tenant might be small, but he’s linked to bigger sharks. If I cut him off, I’d antagonize people who can make life very unpleasant for me.”

“So what?!” My voice rose, echoing off the surrounding buildings. “You just turn the other cheek, become a puppet?”

“It’s about keeping the peace, Ella,” he murmured, almost pleadingly. I laughed bitterly. “You mean being a coward.”

Logan’s jaw tightened. “Was I a coward when I jumped in front of that falling billboard for you?” He lifted his shirt sleeve slightly, exposing the still raw, healing scar, marked with stitches. “This hasn’t healed, Ella.”

I took a step closer, anger flaring in me. “Thank you for that, truly. But one heroic act doesn’t make up for a pattern of cowardice. Your bravery then doesn’t grant you a free pass to bow to every thug with a threat.”

His eyes widened, a mixture of hurt and disbelief. “You think I enjoy this? Living in this limbo? It’s not just about me. There are other people involved, people I care about.”

“And what about me, Logan?” My voice trembled with emotion. “Where do I fit in this grand scheme of yours? Or am I still just a trophy to you, a way to one-up your brute of a brother?”

For a moment, he was silent, gazing at me with those deep, conflicted eyes. “Ella, I-”

“Save it.” With a final, scathing look, I turned on my heel, leaving him standing there, a lone figure against the backdrop of the dimming city.

## Chapter 287 A Delicate Dance

Ella

The brisk evening air sent shivers down my spine as I approached the entrance to my apartment building. The echo of my heels on the pavement seemed louder in the silence, a rhythmic pulse of my own agitated heartbeat.

“You were rather tough on him just now,” a deep voice murmured within my mind. My wolf. Her presence was a gentle hum in the background, a second consciousness that had always been a part of me.

Ever since I could remember, she had been there. We were flip sides of the same coin, often bickering, but always there for each other.

“He had it coming.” I shot back, pushing open the main door. The lobby was dimly lit, casting soft amber glows across the polished marble floor.

“Look, I’m still wary, too. But he was trying to make amends, Ella. It was evident in his actions, in the very way he looked at you.”

I rolled my eyes. “I don’t need a lecture from you. It’s not just about today. It’s the principle of it all. He said he wanted to move away from illegal dealings, and then he just jumps at the first offer.”

The elevator doors slid open, and I stepped in, pressing the button for my floor. The ride up was brief, but it gave me time to reflect.

“Ella,” my wolf whispered with a tenderness | hadn’t expected, “sometimes people just don’t always act consistently, but I think it’s worth noting that he is trying, even if you don’t think he’s trying hard enough. You might be holding him to an impossibly high standard. Remember, he’s supposed to be our...”

“Fated mate?” I finished the sentence with a snort. “That doesn’t mean I should compromise on my values. A mate should be someone who understands, respects, and shares them.” The elevator dinged its arrival, pulling me out of the mental conversation. My apartment welcomed me with its familiar scent and warmth. It was my sanctuary, the place where I felt the most like myself.

Moving to my room, I began to change out of my work attire a sleek pair of pants and a – form-fitting white blouse. I slipped on a soft, oversized off-the-shoulder sweater that draped comfortably down one arm.

The fabric was cozy against my skin, a gentle lavender hue that always seemed to calm me. I paired it with a set of lounge shorts, the material cool and breathable. Freeing my blonde hair from its tight bun, I relished the sensation of long, wavy locks cascading down my back. My fingers worked through the almost-white strands, undoing any tangles and knots.

I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. The transformation from the poised, professional lawyer to a relaxed, at-home Ella was always something to behold. My gray eyes stared back, a swirl of emotions evident-confusion, frustration, and perhaps a touch of regret.

Shaking off the reflective moment, I moved to the kitchen. My hand hesitated over the cabinet door.

A moment later, I was pulling out a bottle of wine-a rich Merlot, its dark depths promising solace. I retrieved a wine glass, the crystal gleaming under the kitchen lights. With practiced ease, I uncorked the bottle, pouring the velvety liquid into the glass.

The aroma wafted up, notes of plum and cherry mingling with subtle hints of chocolate and spice. Holding the glass, I stepped out onto the balcony. The city spread out before me, a mesh of twinkling lights and distant sounds. I sipped the wine, the flavors dancing on my palate, soothing the disquiet in my soul.

“Maybe... maybe I was a bit too harsh on him,” I admitted softly, more to myself than to my wolf. The weight of the day’s events pressed down on me—the arguments, the passionate defenses, and the regrettable words.

My wolf hummed in agreement, her presence a gentle embrace. “Everyone has their battles, Ella. Perhaps Logan’s struggles are more complex than you realize. Remember, he’s navigating this world just like you, even if his path is different than yours.”

I leaned against the railing, gazing out at the horizon. The night held both mysteries and answers, and as the wine warmed me from the inside, I hoped to find a little bit of both.

The softly shimmering hues of the twilight painted the sky as I reclined on my little balcony, cradling a glass of wine. The music from my playlist flowed gently, carrying the weight of my thoughts into the breeze. It was one of those nights during which the stillness held a conversation with the heart.

Suddenly, the dreamlike trance was interrupted by the shrill buzzing of the doorbell. Annoyed, I contemplated ignoring it, but curiosity had other plans. Glancing at the security monitor, I saw a familiar figure. Logan.

With a reluctant sigh, I buzzed him in. What now? I thought. When the door creaked open, Logan stood there, an almost apologetic look on his face. In his hand, he clutched a bottle of wine—presumably pricier than the one I had opened.

His gaze momentarily darted to my nearly empty glass. “Looks like I’m late to the party,” he remarked with a hint of playfulness in his voice.

“One glass doesn’t make it a party,” I replied, arching an eyebrow. “And if you’re here to talk business, you’re outside of office hours.” I couldn’t help the bite in my tone.

He held up the wine, the label catching the dim light. “No business, just...a peace offering. Thought we could use it after today.”

I looked at him skeptically. “And why would I want to share wine with you after what transpired today? Didn’t I make it clear that I didn’t want to see you tonight?”

He stepped inside without an invitation, running a hand through his dark hair. “Because I was wrong. I’ve been pondering over our last conversation. And while I hate to admit it, you had a point. I acted on impulse.”

The honesty in his voice surprised me. Taking a deep breath, I responded, “It’s not just about acting on impulse. Once contracts are signed, it’s not easy to revert decisions, Logan. Legal battles can be draining.”

He looked genuinely remorseful. “I should’ve listened, Ella. I see that now.” Hesitating, I gestured for him to sit. There was something disarming about Logan when he let his guard down. I found another glass and filled it with the wine he had brought.

“To better decisions,” I proposed, lifting my glass. “And to not being a stubborn ass,” he added, clinking his glass against mine. His rueful smile was contagious.

As we sipped, we talked about everything other than work. I learned more about him in that hour than I had in the entire time I’d known him so far. From his childhood tales to his dreams, from his favorite music to the places he had traveled. Everything except his mother. I was beginning to see the layers beneath the mafia facade.

As the night deepened and our glasses refilled, the ambiance changed. I played an old jazz number, the soulful melody floating in the air. I noticed

Logan's foot tapping in rhythm. When I turned to grab some snacks, he had moved closer. There was an intensity in his gaze that made my heart skip a beat.

"I've always loved this song," he murmured, his voice almost a whisper. "It's timeless." I nodded in agreement, getting lost in the soft saxophone notes that filled my apartment.

He cleared his throat, a hint of hesitation evident.

"Ella...do you dance?"