

## Chapter 26

I wait for her to say something, but I now had Axton's mother's name. I'll give Marco one thing: he is good at covering up for people. There are hardly any articles remaining about Axton's family or his life before he moved to the city like they just vanished, and now everything is secondhand info or rumor.

It makes me wonder how much he covered up for Floyd, his foster brother. Axton barely told me anything about his mother that I didn't already know about her, and he was very reluctant to talk about her.

"Phaedra, I didn't know about her until Floyd agreed and allowed that asshole to buy her. What a shock that was to know he had a family I never knew about, especially given that he stole the opportunity from me to have kids, made me have a hysterectomy not long after we met, and said his way of life was too dangerous to raise children in.

"So, I didn't expect him to have any, and it almost broke me to find out he did. Though now I see it as a blessing, especially after what became of Phaedra. That was also around the time I met Mary and Petra," Sondra says, shaking her head and taking another mouthful of her rum.

"Who bought her?"

"Axton's father. Insufferable prick he was. I hated him from the moment I met him. You could tell he was a cruel bastard, and I thought Floyd had a sinister edge, but that man had no limits, no humanity. He claimed Phaedra was his mate."

"He was a terrible man, and Floyd knew that, making what he did worse. She didn't want to go with him, but he forced her, despite her not being able to recognize him as her mate. She was only fifteen, still a child. A year later, Phaedra had Axton when she was only sixteen." Bile rises in my throat that he would just sell her to a man because he claimed her as his mate, his own daughter.

"Floyd told her she was to settle her mother's debt to Ivan, Axton's father. Apparently, she ran a debt, and he was going to kill her and cut all business dealings

with Floyd until he met Phaedra. I didn't know who she was until her mother tried to stop him."

"He never told you he had a daughter. He never mentioned her once?" I question. Sondra shakes her head.

"No, turns out he had an entire life before he met me; I was Floyd's mate. Human mates are unheard of, and I wasn't familiar with your world. This was just before I found out about my real parents, so when he said I was his, I never questioned it. I just knew I couldn't seem to stay away from him, despite knowing I should, despite loving Marco still. So, I was shocked to learn about her and her mother, Mary. He left her when he found me, just abandoned her," she tells me.

"Wait, Mary was her mother? As in Petra's mother?"

"Yes, Petra was Phaedra's twin sister." She tells me, and the wheels start spinning in my head. This was so much to take in, and I was struggling to work out how all this information links to my father. Or is that another story?

"My husband was not a good man. That was the day I truly, truly realized that. I knew he was into something shady, knew about the drugs, the fight clubs he ran with Ivan, but trafficking, I didn't think he was capable of that." She says sadly.

"So, how does that link to the women here? I thought Petra escaped her abusive father and took the women with her?" I ask, looking out at them setting up for dinner.

"She escaped her abusive father, but it was never her father she was running from. It was the man she, too, was sold off to, her mate. Floyd didn't care for those girls. He saw an opportunity and if they wanted their mates, they would pay the price he wanted. He didn't care that they were his daughters, he cared what he could get for them." Sondra sucks in a sharp breath before shaking her head.

"I've done a lot of things I am ashamed of. One of them was not helping them sooner." She says with a faraway expression on her face.

"Sondra?" I call out to her, and she tilts her head, looking at me.

"For years, I watched Mary grieve for the daughters she lost. All this time, she lived only a town away; I asked Marco for her information. We became friends; I bought her that cafe. I stole the money from Floyd's safe, hoping to give her something to distract her from the loss of her girls. He was so mad, beat me up pretty good for it,

but after a while, he gave up trying to keep us apart, knowing I would take the beating just to sneak off to see her.” She tells me.

My stomach drops hearing that. It was like karma was out to get her, punished and punished again, and I now understood why she has such a hard exterior. But no matter the cold, unfriendly attitude, she still had a heart of gold beneath it all.

“It wasn’t until I heard about Phaedra’s death that I asked Marco to help me get Petra back,” she tells me.

“Marco helped you?” I ask in shock. Axton said Floyd and Marco were close, but I’m surprised he went against his brother considering he gave up his girlfriend for him. Sondra nods her head and smiles sadly.

“Axton said Marco raised Floyd?”

“He did, but that didn’t mean he agreed with the things his brother did. Marco was furious when he found out about the girls, yet he loved his brother. He was always trying to fix him and get him to see reason. He thought by letting me go, I would somehow fix him since I was his mate, but some people are just bad and always will be. Floyd was one of those people.”