

Chapter 31 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

When we finally reach the black sedan, Kent and Daniel climb into the back seat on either side of me, sandwiching me in the middle. Pressed between them, I fold my hands between my knees and try my best to breathe evenly.

“Go,” Kent says firmly to Carlos, who obediently peels out. Kent continues to look out the window, surveying the landscape for any more threats which he didn’t catch the first time.

Daniel, instead, turns to me. He takes my face in my hands and carefully looks me over. When he ascertains that I’m not scratched or bruised, he moves on to the rest of my body, putting a hand on my knee and taking me in.

“How are you, Fay?” he asks quietly. “Are you hurt?”

“I’m f-f-fine,” I say, shivering a little. I don’t know whether it’s shock still, or perhaps the cold –

Suddenly, I remember my beautiful mink stole – still in the coat check at the country club. I turn backwards to look out the rear window with a little “oh,” regretting the loss of it.

“What,” Kent says, worried, following my gaze. I instantly feel guilty – here he is, looking for assassins wielding guns or blades and here I am, sorry to have lost my coat.

“N-nothing,” I say, looking up at him. I notice that he’s still clutching his arm and that blood is still seeping from behind his hand.

I lean across him to look at it. “Are y-you all right?”

“I’m fine,” he says, pulling away from me with gritted teeth. “Just a graze – nothing the guys at home can’t patch up –“

I look up into his face, then, my eyes wide, finally putting the pieces together – god, what the hell took me so long – “do you mean you were shot!?”

Kent looks at me, then, frustrated and like he doesn’t know what to say – because of course he was shot.

The knowledge, though – after all that we’ve been through tonight – sends me. I lean back into the leather of the seat, my whole body shaking, pressing my teeth together so that they won’t clatter.

“Oh my god, Fay,” Daniel says, pulling off his coat and wrapping it around me. He looks towards his father, who looks straight forward in the car. “What should I do for her??”

“Nothing,” his father says. “She’ll get through it. Just keep her warm. Everyone’s first time is rough.”

Daniel wraps his arms around me as the tears start to leak from my eyes, sliding down my cheeks in a silent torrent. All of a sudden, I’m so fed up with all of this –

So fed up with this world, with this life – how people think it’s just normal to have a first shootout, as if there will be more and I’ll just get used to them –

I saw people die tonight – people with families – people who were coming after me, maybe, trying to take me because I’m a powerful pawn in whatever fucking game they’re playing – Kent and Alden and Daniel –

I hate them all then – hate everything they stand for.

Daniel tries to be kind to me, tries to shush me and stroke my hair softly.

“I hate this,” I whisper between my clattering teeth. “I hate this, I hate this life, I hate everything it represents –” I turn to Daniel then, hurt and damage all over my face. “I wish I’d never met you – I was right to dump you the first time, when –”

But I snap my mouth shut. I don’t mean all of it, not really – I don’t hate him. If I did, I’d tell his dad his secret to punish him for wrapping me all up in this – for not letting me go, for being complicit in keeping me here, trapped in this life, when all I want to do is leave.

“I’m sorry, Fay,” Daniel says softly, and I can tell by the guilt in his face that he means it.

“Then let me go,” I plead, desperate.

Slowly, though, he shakes his head.

Deep down, I know the choice isn’t his. But I weep bitter tears anyway.

Next to me, I feel Kent slump in his seat. I turn to look at him then and see him looking out the window then, more pensive than I had expected. I stare at him, at his stark profile against the light of the window. He doesn’t move or say anything, so I suppose he lets me look my fill

He hangs his head, then, letting out a sigh. And, shocked, I note that the lines of his face match Daniel’s. He feels guilt as well.

The next morning, I just laid in my bed and stare at the ceiling for a long, long time. I skip breakfast and no one comes up to get me, which has never happened before. I guess they’re giving me my space. I’m grateful, I suppose, but overall...I just don’t really care.

Things moved quickly last night after we got home. The three of us spent the rest of the ride in silence, but when we arrived at the house everyone was expecting us.

Fiona had made a beeline right for me – not even asking how Kent was doing. Instead, she had wrapped her arms around me and hustled me upstairs as Kent got himself patched up and Daniel – well, I didn't really know what Daniel did. Or care.

She had rushed me right to my room and run a bath for me, stripping me of my clothes while I continued shaking. Then she helped me to step into the hot water and sit down.

"That's all right, baby Fay," she murmured to me, using a cup to pour water over my head like a little kid. "Shh, baby," she continued. "You'll be all right."

I had noticed, passively, that the water turned a little pink from the blood washing off of me. Not my blood, of course. Kent's. I couldn't help staring at it.

After a long time, when the water was growing cool, Fiona helped me out, bundled me into warm flannel pajamas – too warm for the spring, but so, so comfortable against my skin – and then tucked me into bed. Before she left, she opened a cabinet in the corner that holds a television and put on some mindless reality show at extremely low volume.

"So you don't have to sit in silence," she whispered to me, kissing me on the head. Then, intuiting that I wanted to be alone, she left.

I fell asleep, gratefully, almost immediately. A few times in the night I got the sense that I woke up a little to someone peeking through my door, probably checking on me, but no one bothered me.

It's almost noon before someone does. I sit up when I hear the door creak open. I rub my eyes, expecting to see Daniel or Fiona there, or the housekeeper, or the chef – and get the shock of my life when I see Kent Lippert standing in my door.

He's dressed casually in a fine camel-colored sweater and black slacks. I've never seen him wear anything but a suit, I don't think. "Come on, Fay," he says, stern but not unkind. "That's enough."

I sink back into my pillows a little, resenting his command, giving him a little glare.

To my surprise – again – he laughs at me. "Don't pout at me, girl," he says, leaning against my door frame. "It won't work."

He nods to someone behind him in the hallway – the housekeeper, apparently, who brings in a tray of food and a stack of clothing. As she brings the tray closer, I sniff the air greedily at the scent of blueberry muffins. I'm shocked to find that I'm ravenous.

“Good,” Kent says, watching me pick a muffin off the tray and bite into it eagerly. He nods to the clothes. “I’ll see you downstairs in twenty minutes. Wear your boots.”

I stare at him for a second, considering, and then I nod.

Boots. Boots means horses. I look towards the pile of clothing at the edge of my bed as the housekeeper leaves silently. Riding gear.

Well, he’s certainly found my weak spot. There’s nothing, really, that could get me out of bed today except for Heathcliff.

Chapter 32 – The Good Stuff

Chapter 32 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

The closer they get to the stable, the more Fay seems to cheer up, as if she’s leaving the memories of last night behind. Kent can’t help the smile from his face when he sees it. He was worried for her last night – truly worried that some real damage had been done.

Fay was delicate. He knew it intimately – it was one of the things he liked best about her. She was a sensitive girl, feeling things keenly, more acutely than others. But beneath that, she has a solidity to her core, a well of strength that he’s not sure she’s even aware of.

She’s going to need that strength, he knows, if she’s going to make it in this world. And he’s quite determined to see that she does. Because if she doesn’t...

He shakes away the thought, not letting it enter his mind. He will see that she does, and he’ll do everything he can to foster that strength in her. It won’t be easy, but Kent intends to see it through.

Fay sits up very straight in the seat when they pull into the driveway of the stable, the gate swinging open for them. Kent can tell that she’s reining in his excitement for his sake, trying to play it cool, but she’s out of the car before he can throw it in park.

Kent finds her in Heathcliff’s stall a few minutes later, cooing to her horse, running her hands over his silky ears and talking to him softly. He watches her for a few minutes, letting her greet her friend, who nuzzles her warmly.

“Have you ever ridden before, Fay?” Kent asks quietly after a few minutes. She turns to him and smiles, biting her lip a little in embarrassment. He smirks, knowing her answer before she says it.

“Yes?” she says, a question rather than a statement. “I’ve...ridden. Before.”

His smile deepens. “By which you mean, you’ve sat on a couple of ponies at the county fair.”

Fay bites her lip again before smiling and blushing a little. “Okay, yes. But the man who owned the ponies said I have a natural seat!”

Kent laughs at her then and bends down to pick up a basket of brushes and combs by the door, placing it inside the stall before shutting it and bolting them in. “I’ll let you two get acquainted,” he says, “perhaps you could brush him. He’ll like that.”

Fay eagerly coming forward to select a brush.

“I’ll be back in a little bit,” he says. “We’ll get you saddled up and then we’ll see if that seat is any good.” Kent turns away then, heading to the front of the barn.

He’s surprised, a moment later, to hear her call after him.

“Thank you,” she says softly, her head peeking out over the stall door.

Kent simply nods to her and turns, tucking his hands in his pockets and continuing on his way.

Kent and Fay spend the rest of the day at the stables. He leaves her alone, mostly, going around to visit the other horses under his care, checking in with the grooms and the manager to ensure that everything is running smoothly.

When the trainer arrives, Kent points him in Fay’s direction and is pleased, about half an hour later, to see Fay leading her saddled horse out to the riding arena.

Kent leans against the door of the barn, watching at a distance as the trainer runs her through the basics of riding, showing her the horse’s gaits on a long lead while Fay is still on the ground. It’s a special thrill, though, when he sees Fay put on her little velvet helmet and lead her horse over to the mounting block.

The joy on her face when she sits astride Heathcliff’s back for the first time – a little chill runs down his spine. He can’t help feeling just...purely happy.

Last night, in the car, seeing Fay shake like that – the shock, the trauma in every muscle – it was one of the worst feelings of his life. He frowns, thinking of it now, of his extreme reaction to Fay’s physical danger.

He’s a mafia boss, for heaven’s sake, Kent tells himself. It’s not like he hasn’t lost people to this business before, hasn’t put his loved ones on the line on an almost-daily basis. So what was it about this girl that made him absolutely horrified at the thought of her in danger?

Kent grits his teeth, uncomfortable with the potential answers to this question. He knows that he wants her on a physical level – god, every day he’s confronted with that horrible fact. But this other feeling, this...protectiveness. He shakes his head, unwilling to delve into it just yet.

Instead, Kent stands up straight from his spot at the stall door and walks towards the riding rink.

The lesson is coming to a close, the instructor talking eagerly to Fay, who smiles down at him from her place on the gelding's back. When Kent comes to lean against the rink's fence, the trainer gives him a warm smile.

"She's a natural!" the trainer says, resting a comfortable hand on Fay's knee. Kent glares at the touch and the trainer, grimacing a little, quickly removes his hand. Fay doesn't notice.

"See!" she says to Kent, laughing. "I told you I had a natural seat!"

"I didn't doubt you for a minute," he says simply, giving the trainer a stern look. Knowing his boss, the trainer says a gracious goodbye to Fay, promising to see her again next time, and then heads back to the barn.

"He's really nice," Fay says, nudging her horse so that he walks over to Kent.

"You just like anyone who gives you compliments," Kent jokes, reaching out a hand to stroke Heathcliff's neck.

Fay's eyebrows raise, almost disappearing beneath her helmet. "A joke!" she laughs. "Kent Lippert made a joke!"

He laughs with her, perhaps a little surprised himself. "Don't get used to it," he says quietly. "It's not a common occurrence."

"No kidding," she says in response, smiling indulgently at him.

"You enjoyed it?" Kent asks, nodding towards the ring and indicating the lesson as a whole.

"Yes," she says, definite and happy. "Can I come back tomorrow?"

Kent nods, pleased at the big smile she gives him. "Come down now," he says, gesturing towards her. "Heathcliff has earned his rest."

"Um," she says, biting her lip, suddenly concerned. "He didn't...teach me...how to get down."

Kent laughs and ducks under the rail of the fence, coming close to Fay's left side. "Feet out of the stirrups," he says, and she obeys. He puts up his hands towards her. "Now just swing your right leg over the back of the horse and slip down to the ground."

"What!" she says, appalled. "You just want me to jump down!?"

Kent laughs at her, entertained. "Well, you can always stay up there forever if you want."

Fay gives him a dirty look.

“I’ll catch you,” Kent says, enjoying himself. “Come on, let’s go.”

Fay narrows her eyes at him a little and then takes a deep breath, swinging her leg back over the horse.

Kent is as good as his word, catching Fay by the waist, letting her fall back against him instead of sliding her body down against the saddle. As he lowers her slowly to the ground, Fay puts her hands on top of his for balance, her back running down the length of his chest and stomach before her booted feet hit the ground.

A little thrill echoes in his stomach at the feel of her against him. Kent clenches his jaw, trying to keep himself under control.

Chapter 33 – Family Ties

Chapter 33 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

They stand like that for a moment, his hands on her waist, she leaning back against him – just an instant, really, before she pushes away and loops her horse’s reins over his head, using them as a lead.

Fay smiles innocently at Kent, silently thanking him for the lift, and the two head back towards the stables.

“Last night,” Kent says quietly after a moment, his hands again in his pockets.
“Before...everything...”

Fay looks up at him, a little wary. Clearly, she doesn’t want to talk about it. Still, he presses on.
“Did you enjoy it? Meeting your family?”

“Oh,” she says, surprised. Then she laughs a little. “Honestly, I kind of forgot about that part of the night. Well, yeah,” she says, looking forward again. “It’s surprising, really. I never knew I had such a big family.”

Kent nods as they enter the barn. “It’s pretty standard for us,” he says. “We, in this world, we tend to come from large families. I don’t know what a family gathering looks like with less than eighty people.”

“Wow,” she says. “So do you have lots of siblings?”

“No,” he says, shaking his head. “I’m a rare lonely child – my mother could only have me.”
When she frowns up at him, he adds, delicately, “complications at my birth.”

“Oh,” she says, frowning as she leads Heathcliff into his stall. Kent follows her. “I’m sorry to hear that,” Fay adds softly.

“It’s all right,” he says shrugging. “My parents were each one of six. I grew up with lots of cousins who felt like siblings.”

Fay laughs at that. “Yes, apparently, I have lots of those too. I met a few last night – second cousins, even.”

“Yes,” Kent says, leaning against the post by the stall door and watching her. “You’ll have so many of those that you’ll lose track of them. Until they need something,” he adds, a little ruefully.

“Oh!” Fay says, remembering something as she loosens Heathcliff’s girth and slides the saddle from his back.

. “I heard something funny last night,” she continues, carrying the saddle over to hang it over the stall door. “I was talking to my second cousins over at the bar, they called me ‘baby Fay,’ just like Fiona does, and they said that they have a sister named Fiona. Is that for real? Has she been my cousin all along, and you just never told me?”

Kent blinks at her for a moment, standing perfectly still. Then his mouth falls open slightly as his brain begins to whirl, processing – thinking through –

His face falls, then, into a dark expression. “Leave the horse,” he says, grabbing Fay by the arm. She drops the reins in shock, her face going pale.

“Wait, what happened?” she asks, confused as he pulls her out of the stall. “I can’t leave Heathcliff like this - ”

“The grooms will handle it,” Kent growls, pulling her towards the front of the stables, snapping at a groom as they pass and pointing back towards Heathcliff’s stall. The groom instantly understands, heading towards the back.

“Kent!” Fay says, still shocked. “What’s happening?!”

But he doesn’t answer as he hauls her to the car, dropping her arm and climbing into the driver’s seat, slamming the door behind him.

Kent doesn’t say a word to me the entire ride home.

I twist my hands in my lap, looking over at him a few times, noting that his face is growing increasingly angry with every passing mile. I shrink back in my seat, wondering what the hell I said – what I could have done wrong –

I trace his anger back – when had it started? I guess when I mentioned my cousins, the conversation about Fiona –

But that's just a coincidence – it has to be – there's absolutely no way that Kent wouldn't have thoroughly background checked every person he lets into his life –

If he didn't know...

I worry about it the whole way home, but I'm too scared to say anything. What would it do, anyway?

After we pull into the garage, Kent quickly climbs out of the car and slams his door, not saying a word to me as he storms into the house, past one of the guards that came to the door to greet us and report. The guard – Jerome, I see – stares after Kent in shock and then turns to me with a curious expression.

I just shrug and shake my head as I climb out of the door, letting him know that I have no idea.

I see that Kent has left chaos in his wake on the way to his office, people standing in the hallway staring after him with worried expressions. As I walk slowly into the house, I see Daniel come down the stairs. He catches my eye.

“What happened?” he whispers, looking concerned, but before I can answer Kent comes out of his office again, fury in his every line.

“You two,” he demands. “Upstairs.”

“Dad,” Daniel says, taking another step down, putting out a hand to offer to help –

“I said upstairs!” Kent yells, and Daniel and I both jump. I scurry to where Daniel is standing on the stairs, grabbing his arm and pulling him up with me.

“Seriously, what's going on?” Daniel whispers to me as he follows.

“I don't know,” I whisper back, pulling him towards my room. He comes in with me and I shut the door behind us. But even the door can't block out Kent's next bellow.

“Fiona! Get down here! Now!”

Daniel stays in my room with me for a while. He won't admit it as readily as I do, but we're both scared to leave. We watch old movies, surviving on bottled water and some gummy bears that Daniel had stored away in his room.

Eventually, though, he has to go to his night class. He apologizes as he goes, looking back at sorrowfully as he leaves. I think he knows that I'd pay anything to be go with him right now.

I wait for a little bit, my eyes on the door to see if Fiona will come. Hardly a night passes when she doesn't stop by my room to say goodnight, at the very least.

But there's no sign of her.

A couple of hours pass with no word from anyone and my stomach starts to growl so hard I can't stand it. I haven't eaten anything real since my blueberry muffin that morning, and I'm starving.

Hesitant, I peek out my door. The whole house is silent, no guards or servants anywhere. Curious, I step out into the hall further, looking around. Still, no one.

I creep down the stairs, walking as softly as I can, but still, I encounter no one. Anxious, I hurry towards the kitchen, hoping there's something easy to grab.

When I push open the door, though, the kitchen too is empty. I step into the room, marveling, never having seen it quite so silent. My stomach growls loudly then, prompting me forward.

I scurry over to the giant industrial fridge, pulling it open. Seeing that it's well stocked with food, I grab a clean plate from the dish rack and start to fill it up. French bread, cheese, some prosciutto and fruit – I smile at my haul, excited.

As I close the fridge, though, I hear a noise.

It's a groan – thick with misery, but so quiet that I'd never have heard it if the house itself hadn't been as silent as the grave. I go very still, my eyes darting immediately to the small white door that leads down into the basement, waiting to see if it comes again.

I almost leap out of my slippers at the next sound, though – a heady shriek that turns into a horrible, horrible scream.

Reacting on instinct, I run for the door to the kitchen, almost dropping my plate of food as I push through it and dash down the hall. I press the food against my chest as I run up the steps, not caring if I stain my sweater, heading right for my room.

I'm panting as I slam my door shut, pressing my back against it.

What the hell was that?

Or more importantly, who?

Chapter 34 – Midnight visits

Chapter 34 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I picked at my dinner that night, the food not tasting quite as good once I realized what was going on in the basement.

This world is so confusing to me. On one hand, there's so much beauty to it – the two days spent at the stables were some of the happiest moments of my life. But everything that happened last night – and now, knowing what happened downstairs – what still might be going on...

I'm so uncomfortable, knowing that I'm living in a world where the happy parts are bought with violence and pain.

I drift into an uncomfortable sleep later. I had hoped that Daniel might come by, talk to me, maybe put my mind at ease. But he never showed up. I'm restless all night, waking up at every perceived noise.

I must have fallen into some sort of deep slumber, though, because when someone shakes my shoulder I'm suddenly awake, gasping, shocked –

How the hell did they get into my room without me waking up –

I spin in my sheets, terrified, my eyes adjusting to see a dark figure crouched there –

I cringe back, but stop when I hear a soft, familiar shushing sound.

"Shh, shh, baby Fay, it's all right," Fiona says, putting her hands on my shoulders.

"Fiona!" I cry, sitting straight up in bed, instantly awake.

She turns her head towards the door at my noise, worried, and puts a finger to her lips, shushing me. As her face is turned, the light from the window falls on her face, revealing a deep bruise starting along her cheekbone, under her eye. Her lip is swollen too, a little cut down its left side.

"Fiona," I say more softly, reaching out towards her face.

She flinches away from me but then works to put on a smile. I can see that it takes effort.

"What happened to you," I ask, concerned – but in the pit of my stomach, I think I know.

"Don't worry about it, baby," she says, giving me a truer smile now. "How are you, are you okay?"

"Me," I say, aghast. "Fiona, you –"

"Fay," she says seriously, cutting me off, "we don't have a lot of time. Tell me – are you all right?"

Surprised by the question, I nod. “Sure, Fiona,” I say. “I’m fine.”

“Okay, sweetheart,” she says, putting a hand on my cheek. “I’m going to go away for a while,” she continues, glancing back at the door over her shoulder. “But I couldn’t leave without saying goodbye to you.”

Worry collects in my stomach and my chest as I study her face. “Where are you going? Why –“

“I just gotta get out of here,” she says, working again to keep the fear off of her face, but I can tell by her quickening words that her time is growing short.

“Fiona, did he –“

“Don’t worry about it, Fay,” she says, smiling at me again. “Just stay on his good side, okay? He won’t do anything to you if you do what he says. Lie if you have to – just...” she hesitates now, “do what you need to do to survive. But at every turn, let him think he has the upper hand.”

Tears start in my eyes now. I open my mouth to speak but she interrupts me again.

“Don’t do that, little cousin,” she says, giving me a broad smile, wincing when it pulls at the cut on her lip. “I’m all right – just like I said – I’m getting out of here.”

“So that’s real?” I ask, wiping the tears from beneath my eyes. “You’re really my cousin?”

“Sure,” she says, putting a hand on my cheek. “I knew you the instant I saw you in that kitchen downstairs – knew you were our little baby Fay.”

I bite my lip against my emotions then, struggling to keep from crying. My cousin here, all this time, taking care of me – and I didn’t know.

“But he...he didn’t know?” I ask.

She shakes her head at me.

“Were you – were you spy-“

“Don’t ask questions, Fay,” she says seriously. “That you don’t want to know the answer to.”

I snap my mouth shut, not really knowing, now, whether or not I want to know. I think I do but –

“Listen, baby,” she says, reaching into the pocket of her jeans. “I need you to do something for me. As family.”

She produces a little note, pushing it into my hand. I stare down at it.

“I need you to get this to your dad,” she says quietly.

“To – to Alden?” I ask, looking up at her again, surprised.

“No, Fay,” she says, pursing her lips sarcastically. “I want you to take it to David, your other dad.” My eyes search her face as she hits me, jokingly, upside the head. “Don’t be stupid. Of course to Alden.”

“Fiona...” I say, my eyes widening. “I don’t know if I can – that’s so dangerous. If Kent -”

“Please, baby,” she says, true pleading in her eyes. “I know what I’m asking you to do, and I wouldn’t ask it if it wasn’t so important. I promise you, I promise – no one you love will be hurt by you doing this. Okay?”

I bite my lip, considering it. Fiona backs away from me, leaving the note in my hand.

“I’m going to leave it with you,” she says. “And if you want to flush the note down the toilet, Fay, I understand. I’ll be disappointed,” she gives me a stern, sisterly look then, “but I will understand. Please.”

She puts her hands together like she’s praying and backs towards the door.

“Fiona,” I whisper, “please, stay – just tell me what’s going on –“

“I have to go baby,” she whispers, her hand on the knob now. “He – he doesn’t know I got out. They’re going to come looking for me.”

My eyes go wide at that – I hadn’t considered that she’d be a prisoner –

My god, what did she do?

And what did he do to her for her transgressions?

“I love you, Fay,” Fiona says, pressing her hand to her heart and looking at me with real affection in her eyes. “I’ll see you again sometime – I promise. But now I have to go.”

She blows me a kiss and slips out the door, closing it behind her.

I’m speechless as I stare at the dark space where she was just a minute ago. Then I blink, wondering if maybe I dreamt it all – it happened so fast –

But when I look down into my hand, the note is still there.

Shit. Shit. What the hell was I going to do with this?

It’s a little bomb, really – I know that. If Kent finds me with this note, I am done for, relationship with Daniel or no.

But to whom, really, do I owe my allegiance? Should I give this note to Alden, my father, who I know loves me?

Should I give it to Kent, out of allegiance to Daniel? Or to Kent himself, out of allegiance to him? After all, he protected me last night – kept me alive –

But what, really, happened last night? Was it just coincidence that my father and his family weren't in the room when the attack happened?

Kent said it was a kidnapping attempt, maybe for me, but was it? Was I ever really in danger? Did my father perhaps arrange it as a way to get me away from Kent, to get him out from his clutches?

I groan, leaning back against the pillows, feeling far too inadequate to answer these kinds of questions. The fact was, I had absolutely no idea what was really happening, and here was this stupid note, this test of my loyalty.

Everything depended on my actions next - who I gave it to, whether or not I flushed it down the toilet like Fiona said. But even if I did that, and my dad or Kent ever found out that I had this piece of evidence and didn't give it to them –

God damnit, I'm screwed either way.

Swiftly, I peel open the note, hoping that its contents give me any hint about what I should do next. But it's just two lines of cryptic poetry.

The little wren sleeps, warm in its nest,

The mink at its door doth it detest.

What? I wrinkle my nose at the verse, written in Fiona's hand. What the hell was this?

It doesn't even make any sense – nests don't have doors -

I grit my teeth and fold it up, trying to decide what to do.

My eyes fall on my desk then, and I make a decision, then.

Well, I make a decision that allows me to defer the real decision. I hurry out of my bed and over to the desk, grabbing some scotch tape out of the top drawer and crawling underneath to tape the note to the back of the slim central drawer.

There, I think, crawling out and dusting my hands off. Now that it's safely hidden, I can decide later what it is that I want to do.

I get back into bed and lay my head back on my pillow, wondering and worried. Damn it, things have so grown so very complicated.

What was going to happen when Kent discovered that Fiona was gone?

I purse my lips and stare at the ceiling, knowing that I won't get a lick of sleep. I'll be too busy staying up all night worried about what my next move should be.

Chapter 35 – Visitors

Chapter 35 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Breakfast the next morning is...awkward.

Kent serves Daniel and I eggs and sausage, sliding the plates onto the table next to our cups of coffee without a word of acknowledgement.

Daniel and I dig in silently, both intuiting that it's better to stay off Kent's radar.

When Kent's back in the galley, Daniel looks at me curiously, nodding to his dad and shrugging in question, asking me with his gestures whether or not I have any idea what's going on.

I shrug back, doing my very best to pretend that I don't. God, I hope he believes me.

Daniel sighs and we continue eating quietly for a few minutes.

I open my mouth to ask Daniel his plans for the day when a guard comes into the room, rushing towards Kent. Distracted, I shut my mouth and we both watch the action instead.

"Sir," the guard says. "There's a...visitor at the door." Oddly, he glances at me then. "He came without warning – do you want to see him?"

Kent glares at me as well – what the hell did I do? – as he wipes his hands and takes off his apron, following the guard out of the room. Daniel and I gape curiously after him, but he's back a few moments later, pointing at me and snapping his fingers before disappearing from the room again.

"Um," Daniel says uncomfortably. "I think you're being...summoned."

"Okay," I say, a little breathless with worry. I give Daniel a little smile and then head out of the room, walking down the hall to Kent's study.

He's standing at his desk then, staring at me with a hard expression as I come in.

"Um?" I say, my hands tangling anxiously in my hair. "Did you...want me?"

Kent pauses, looking me over, before answering. "Your father is here," he says. "He wants a word with you."

My eyes widen at this and I just stare at Kent, not knowing what to say.

"Well?" Kent says, a little anger or frustration in his voice now – I can't tell which. "Do you want to see him?"

"Um?" I say again, my eyes darting around. "Do you...want me to see him?"

Kent crosses his arms over his chest, studying my every move. We stand in silence so long I can't stand it.

"Seriously, Kent," I burst out, almost frantic with my anxiety now. "I have no idea what's going on. Do you want me to see him? Do you think I shouldn't? After what happened at the party – I don't know –"

"It's fine, Fay," Kent says, interrupting me and giving me a little nod. "It's not a test," he continues, though something in me tells me that maybe it was. "Your father has come to the house and asked to see you. He's alone. If you'd like to see him, you may."

"Oh," I say again – I'm genuinely unsure of what I want. "I guess? I'll see him? If you're okay with it?"

Kent nods to me and then to a guard I didn't realize was standing behind me.

As the guard heads off, Kent gestures to me to come closer, so I do. I stand by his side and we both watch the door silently, waiting for Alden to show up.

Alden appears a few minutes later, his face worried.

"Fay," he says, crossing the room to me and wrapping me in a hug I wasn't expecting. "I'm so glad to see you're all right."

He nods to Kent next. "Thank you, Kent, so much. For taking care of my girl."

I look between them. "You didn't know? That I was all right?"

Alden shakes his head, glaring at Kent a little. "I just got word this morning. Apparently this house was on lockdown all day yesterday."

“Sorry to have kept you waiting,” Kent says, his arms crossed. “It was in the best interests of my security. Do you have any word on what happened two nights ago? Who is responsible for the attack?”

Alden shakes his head, apparently unsure. “My men are out there, listening to the word on the street. Our best guess is that it was Ivan.” Alden says, spreading his hands. “He’s had it out for you, Lippert, ever since you went to the Warden.”

I look between them. Ivan? The Warden? What the hell was going on?

Kent nods slowly at Alden, his face giving nothing away.

“I think he was trying to take us both out,” Alden says, shaking his head with regret. “I should have known – shouldn’t have had such a big party –“

Kent says nothing and I frown a little. This was Kent’s very theory – why isn’t he confirming it? The room grows awkwardly quiet.

“Would you mind,” Alden says, breaking the silence and gesturing towards me. “If I had a private moment with my daughter? I still haven’t had a moment alone with her. To reconnect.”

Kent studies me for a moment and then nods slowly. He says nothing as he heads out of the room.

I look at my father then, feeling strange and awkward. My hands go immediately to my hair, starting to braid it.

“Fay,” he says, quite tenderly. “Are you all right? You weren’t hurt?”

“No,” I say to him, genuinely. “Really, I’m fine – Kent got us out unscathed. Are – are you okay? Tristin, the kids?”

“We’re all fine,” he says, relieved, wiping his sweaty hands down the length of his suitcoat. “We got lucky, with the baby needing attention in that moment. We were out of the room and able to get to the car without much fuss.”

“Good,” I say, for lack of any better response.

Alden glances towards the door. “And you’re...happy here?” he asks. “Lippert is good to you?”

“Oh,” I say, following his gaze, surprised by the direction of the conversation. “Yeah, sure, everyone’s really nice.”

“Because you know,” my father says softly. “If you wanted to come home, you are always welcome.”

Home. The word doesn't sit easy with me, not really. Because his home hasn't been my home in years.

"That's okay," I say, giving him a little smile. "I think I want to stay here, with Daniel. My fiancé."

It's not a lie, not really. Of course, I'd rather go home to my real family, but if that's not an option then I'd certainly rather stay here with Daniel, who at least is my friend, before going to live with Tristin.

"Ah, your fiancé," Alden says, giving me a fatherly grin. "And how are things going with the two of you?"

"Really well," I say, raising my eyebrows and lying with ease. It's not too hard, I guess, when your fake fiancé really is your best friend. I grow awkwardly silent again, though, not really knowing what else to say.

"Do you love him?" He asks.

I blink. "Yes, of course I do."

"And have you two..."

I blink again, wondering - and then I blush, realizing what he's asking. I look down at the floor, embarrassed. He just chuckles.

"My Fay," he says, "such a good girl. I'm sorry - I'm pushing you too far. I just ask because you know," he says, leaning down to speak conspiratorially with me. "You're still quite young - perhaps too young to get married. If you ever wanted to explore your options, I could introduce you to quite a few eligible young gentlemen."

My mouth falls open a little in surprise. What? I thought I had been engaged to Daniel since I was a baby - was it not as much of a done deal as I thought it had been?

I blink and then force myself to laugh a little. "Thank you for the offer," I say, "but Daniel and I are very happy."

"Okay," he says, putting a warm hand on my shoulder. "You let me know if you change your mind."

Alden glances towards the door again. "I'm going to head out, now that I know that you're safe. Unless..." he gives me a significant look here. "You have anything to give to me...?"

I blink at him, confused, and then suddenly realize -

Oh my god, does he mean Fiona's note?

“No,” I say, stepping back a little, my answer coming perhaps a little too fast. I wrap my fingers further in my hair. “Um, no. I don’t have anything to give you. Not...right now. At least.”

“All right, my dear,” he says, leaning forward to give me a kiss on the forehead. Then, with a pat on my cheek, he strides out of the room.

I stand there, perfectly still, watching him go. What the hell was that?

A few minutes later, when Kent comes into the room, I’m still standing there, stricken, thinking deeply about this snarled world. Kent closes the door behind him and closes the distance between us, sitting down at his desk and folding his hands in his lap.

“So, Fay” Kent says, looking at me evenl

Chapter 36 – Interrogation

Chapter 36 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I frown a little at Kent, blinking. What?

He folds his hands and waits patiently.

“What,” I say, hesitating. “What do you want to know?”

“Everything,” he says, raising his eyebrows. “I want you to tell me everything he said to you, and everything you said in response.”

I frown at him further. “Are my conversations with my father not private?”

Kent leans forward a little, the corners of his mouth pulling up. “If you want to have private conversations with your father,” he says slowly, “you can have them off my property. But in this house? I’m entitled to know everything. Including the words exchanged between my ward,” he looks pointedly at me, “and my potential enemy.”

I cock my head to the side. “I thought you and my father were allies,” I say, crossing my arms.

“Do allies leave each other to be shot at parties they threw? Do they conveniently leave the room moments before an attack?” Kent shakes his head slightly. “Our alliance is on shaky grounds, Fay, before this wedding happens. Right now, Alden and I are tenuous at best.”

He stares at me then, silent. Waiting patiently for me to talk.

I clear my throat, looking away and trying to think. What did we just say to one another?

“I’m waiting,” he reminds me.

“I know,” I say, a little sharply. “I just...I’m trying to remember precisely.”

I throw my mind back, thinking hard. I don’t usually catalog my conversations so precisely. But I guess, in a Mafia household, you have different instincts when it comes to these sorts of things.

“He asked me if I was okay, after the party,” I say, closing my eyes so I can concentrate. “And I told him I was fine, that you got us out.”

Kent stays silent, allowing me to continue.

“Then, he asked if I’m happy here.”

“And your answer?” Kent says quietly.

I look at him then. “That I am. Happy here, I mean. But he told me that if I wanted to come home and live with him instead, that I’d be welcome to do that. I told him I’d rather stay here, though. With Daniel, because he’s my fiancé.”

“And thennnn,” Kent says, moving his hand slowly throw the air, inviting me to proceed. I can tell he’s growing impatient by my hesitations.

“And then,” I said, putting a hand on my hip, “he asked me if I’m happy with Daniel. And if I love him. And whether or not we’ve been...intimate.”

Kent raises an eyebrow at this, smiling a little. “And what, Fay,” he says slowly. “Was your answer to that.”

I narrow my eyes at him and move on. “I told him that I’m very happy with Daniel, and that of course we’re in love. To which he replied that I’m still very young, and that if I wanted him to introduce me to some new options, that he’d be happy to do that.”

Kent nods slowly at this, still watching my face carefully, clearly processing the implications.

“I told him no,” I say, turning towards the door. “That was it.”

“Was that all, Fay?” he asks me, and I turn back to him.

“What?” I ask, confused.

“Are you sure? Take a moment. Try to remember if there was anything else.”

I swallow then and realize – shit.

I had left something out. Not intentionally, not really – none of my conversation with my father was important enough to warrant keeping a secret from Kent. Instead, I'd rather be open. But somehow, I did forget the most suspicious bit.

I hurry my next words out, eager to have this finished. "He asked me if I had anything to give to him."

"What did he mean by that?" Kent asks, frowning.

I shrug. "I have no idea. I told him I didn't. I don't. Then he left."

Kent nods, waving a hand at me in a dismissal, so I walk out of the office and head towards the back garden.

I'm slightly shaken by the experience, to be honest – first talking to my father, and then reporting the conversation to Kent. I know that I'm a pawn in their game, but I hadn't realized that I'd be expected to report, on either side, what the other had said.

How do I manage this? I hadn't lied to Kent – had told him everything. But was that, really, my best choice? Where did my allegiances lie?

I sigh, pushing through the kitchen door and then heading out to the back garden. I need some fresh air.

When I pass through the back door, I'm pleased to see Daniel there, buttering a scone at the little table, reading.

"Oh hey, Fay," he says, smiling at me. "Do you want some tea?"

"Sure," I say, sitting down and feeling better already. "Actually, tea sounds great."

Kent waits for the door to his office to click shut before reaching towards the top drawer, which he unlocks with a key from his pocket. Then he pulls it open and removes the tape recorder that's sitting inside, still running.

Deftly, he presses the stop button and then the rewind, waiting a few moments before pressing stop again. Then he presses play and listens, carefully, to the entire conversation between Alden and Fay.

Kent smiles a little as the conversation passes, as he realizes that Fay told him precisely what was said in precisely the same order. Not only does she have a good memory, but she didn't leave anything out. Good. This means his trust in her can remain, at least from now.

Kent smile deepens a bit as she hesitates when Alden asks if she and Daniel have been intimate. Alden was pleased by her silence, suggesting a negation, and Kent can't help feeling the same.

The smug happiness inside him is checked, though, by the sudden wonder of why Daniel and Fay haven't been intimate. Of course, selfishly, because he knows he wants her, Kent doesn't want Daniel to touch her.

But they're young people who claim to be in love, their bedrooms basically next door to each other. If Kent had been in Daniel's place in his early 20s, he'd be sneaking over to his girlfriend's room every night.

So why wasn't Daniel?

Kent sighs, putting the consideration away for another day, and moves to press stop on the tape recorder just as the conversation is ending. He pauses, though, when he hears Fay hesitate.

"Um no. I don't have anything to give you." Fay had said, but her voice is oddly strained here. Kent takes his hand off the stop button, listening closely. "Not...right now. At least."

Kent frowns deeply at this, listening with only half an ear as the tape continues to roll, turning mostly to footsteps and silence.

Not right now? What the hell did that mean? Did Fay expect to have something to give Alden in the near future?

Narrowing his eyes, Kent gets to his feet.

Perhaps little Fay was starting to play the game. And not on his side.

Without hesitation, Kent steps out of his room, snapping his fingers at the guard who is standing there. "Get two more guys," he says. "We're going upstairs."

The guard nods, heading off to collect who he can, and Kent heads up the stairs.

He opens the door to Fay's room, looking around carefully. She keeps her space neat, but not obsessively so. The bed is nicely made, but there are books and writing tools placed casually around the room as if she left them there unthinkingly, distracted.

When his guys pull up behind him, Kent gives his command without looking at them.

"Toss it," he says. "The whole place. Anything strange, I want to see it. I don't want a single corner untouched."

The guys nod, moving into the room and starting to tear it apart.

Chapter 37 – Freedom

Chapter 37 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

I smile down into my cup of tea, enjoying the fresh herbal scent. My belly is full of scone, and I'm listening passively as Daniel explains the ins and outs of some new philosophical theory that he's learning about for his class.

I don't really care about it, but it's nice to hear him think through something about which he's passionate. It's really a gorgeous day – the sun is shining in little pieces through the grape leaves that wrap around the pergola, and I lean my face back to enjoy the warmth on the soft skin on my cheeks.

Next to me, I hear Daniel laugh a little. "Are you even listening to me anymore?" he says.

"No," I reply, smiling. "But that's okay, it's good to hear you talk."

He laughs again, a soft thing, and then takes my hand.

"It's nice, Fay," he says, and I open my eyes to look at him, seeing him smile at me. "That you enjoy listening to me, even when you're not hearing my words."

I squeeze his hand and return his smile, considering him.

It's funny – I was so in love with him for the few months that we were dating. Or, at least, I thought I was. Maybe "obsessed" was a more appropriate term, but either way, I couldn't stop thinking about how handsome he was or how much I wanted to kiss him. Just to kiss him, small, chaste things. But I had wanted so badly for him to treat me gently, love me, be kind to me. To treat me like his treasure.

But now? After everything I've learned about his life – our life? It's all just... gone. All of those feelings have disappeared.

Instead, I view him now completely as my best friend, my ally in this crazy world. I want the absolute best for him and know that he feels the same about me, but the romance has been totally wiped away.

It's a bit sad, really – the end of a love. I wonder, passively, when the next time I'll have a crush again, feel that delicious buzzing of emotion in my stomach.

I push back against the first thought that comes to my mind, ignoring it. Ridiculous.

Luckily, Daniel helps to disrupt my thoughts.

"Are you all right, Fay?" he asks.

"Daniel," I say, running my thumb lightly over his fingers, thinking about what my father said to me earlier. "Are you happy here?"

He frowns at me, slightly curious. "What prompted this?"

I shrug a little. "Curiosity, mostly, I guess. You just seem... such a mismatch for this world, most of the time. I guess I wonder why you've never left. Never just... bailed on it."

He shrugs, a little uncomfortable. "It's my home, Fay. My family, my world. I guess I don't really have anywhere to go."

"But you've got all the resources in the world," I say, leaning forward. "Honestly, aren't you ever tempted to just steal, like, one of his cars, sell it on the black market for whatever you can get, and take the money and just run?"

His mouth falls open at the idea.

"Or," I continue quickly, "you offered me millions to keep my mouth shut the day we broke up – if you have access to that kind of cash, why not just take it for yourself? We could go! We could run away to the French Riviera, change our names, spend the rest of our days just drinking wine and writing books! About whatever we want!"

He laughs softly and gives my hand a squeeze before pulling his back to reach for his teacup.

"It's a beautiful dream, Fay," he says softly. "But it's impossible."

"I think we could do it," I say, my face eager. "I think we could go."

He looks at me seriously then. "You mean that, don't you?"

"Daniel," I say, pleading. "We could do it."

His face is still hesitant, but I can tell that he wants to say yes.

"Daniel, if we don't do this," I say quietly. "We'll end up like Fiona."

His eyes go wide as he looks at me then. "You – you know about Fiona?"

I nod quietly, not explaining any further. He wonders how I knew – what I knew – but he doesn't ask me now. I can tell him more when we're lying on a beach in San Tropez.

His eyes dart around the patio, as if he's looking for someone who is listening.

"If I agreed to even think about this," he says, "what would the plan look like?"

I bite my lip eagerly. "We could keep it simple, start small. Figure out how to get our passports, or get convincing passports made. Then, the next thing we need is cash. I have nothing," I say, but then my eyes catch on the million-dollar diamond I'm wearing on my hand. "Or, well, I have some of this jewelry his dad gave me."

He frowns at the ring on my finger, remembering – of course – that it was his mother's. I quickly put my hand over it.

"Not this one," I say gently. "This one, we keep. But there are sapphires, other jewels. Just like... sitting in my room."

He pauses for a moment, looking at me seriously, and then he whispers his answer.

"Okay, Fay," he says, very, very quietly. "I'm not saying let's go. I'm just saying... let's look and see. We'll look into how hard it is to get the documents. Then, once we know more... we'll talk again."

I can't help but give a little squeal of joy, and he smiles at my excitement.

"Okay!" I exclaim. "Um, I don't even have a passport though – do you think we can get one?"

He considers it for a moment, opening his mouth to answer, when suddenly the door to the patio flies open, banging hard against the stone wall of the house. I gasp, turning sharply to look at Kent, standing there, seething, his hands clenched in fists at his side.

Both Daniel and I go silent, frozen in our seats. This is bad.

"What the hell," Kent says, striding forward and putting out his open hand between us. "Is this?"

I instantly recognize it.

Shit. Shit.

In Kent's hand is the folded note that Fiona had given me for Alden, that cryptic poem inside. It's been opened – clearly, Kent has read it – but it still has the tape on it, the same I used to stick it to the back of the desk.

Suddenly seized with fear, I raise my eyes from Kent's hand to his face. I don't say a word.

In response, Kent just grabs my arm, pulling me up out of my chair and along with him back into the house. He's angry, of course, but his grip doesn't hurt me. He's still firmly in control.

"Dad!" Daniel calls after him, coming into the house as well. "Stop! What's happening! What did she –"

"No," Kent says, turning to look firmly at his son. "You stay here."

Daniel stops in his tracks, seeing the look on his father's face. Still, he tries once more.

"Dad, let her go – don't do this –"

"You stay here. If you kept your woman in line," Kent says, his voice dangerous, "then I wouldn't have to do this."

With that, he again storms forward, dragging me behind him across the kitchen. Towards that small white door in the corner.

My blood goes cold when I see where we're heading.

"No," I say, finding my voice, throwing my weight back, digging my heels into the tiled floor. "Please, no!"

He ignores me, continuing to move forward, tugging me once so that I lose my balance and have to stumble after him –

Then, we're through the door – heading down the stairs –

Down the little dim hallway, towards...

I cry out again when I realize where he's taking me. Kent only checks his stride to throw open the metal door to that room.

That room. The same one where I had looked through the door – seen Kent, his belt in his hands –

Those two men, chained to his chair –

"Please," I beg, my voice frantic, terror snaking through every limb in my body. "Kent, please – I promise, I didn't do anything –"

"It's time," Kent says, pulling me into the room and tossing me so that I stumble the last few steps and stop myself against a metal table across the far wall. "Time for you to learn your place, Fay."

I lean back against the table, horrified, as Kent strides forward and closes the distance between us.

Chapter 38 – Allegiances

Chapter 38 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Kent comes to my side, grabbing my right arm and pulling it forward as he moves to the other side of the table. He still holds my arm firmly in his grip as he goes, making me bend over the table to move with him –

Which, I suddenly realize, is precisely what Kent wanted.

When I'm bent at the waist, my torso stretched across the table, Kent produces a set of handcuffs attached by their chain to a metal loop on the table's edge. While I watch, he snaps the handcuffs tight around my right wrist, attaching me firmly to the metal table.

Then, he looks at me. "Your other wrist," he demands, holding out his hand for it across the table.

"No!" I shout, scared but also suddenly furious. I'm not going to be complicit in my own torture.

"Fay," he says, his voice threatening. "This will be much easier on you if you're obedient."

In response I tighten my lips and stand up as straight as I can, curling my other arm behind my back. "No."

Inside of my head, a very quiet voice is screaming at me to just do as he says – he won't be cruel to you if you do what he says! – Just tell him what he wants to know and you'll be fine! –

But I've been here long enough to know that Kent Lippert is going to be cruel no matter what he does – it's in his blood, or some other intrinsic part of him.

And god damnit, I'm sick of being the good little girl who does as she's told in this world. It hasn't gotten me anywhere yet, and it's not going to start now, just because he's got me chained to a metal table in his basement.

"Fay Alden," Kent says, lowering himself to look me in the eye. "Give me your arm. Now."

"No," I throw back at him, matching his tone and his glare.

I shock myself here, again. Moments ago, I was trembling as he pulled me down the stairs. What the hell snapped in me to make me so suddenly defiant?

As Kent's mouth pulls back in a frustrated snarl and he storms around the table, grabbing my left arm and pulling it back with him as he returns to the other side of the table, I realize that it's this –

This –

As I watch the anger on Kent's face, I realize that I've riled him. Kent Lippert – always so calm, so in control, so even-keeled in the face of danger, opposition, hell even gunfire –

Kent Lippert reacts when I stand up to him. It pisses him off.

And part of me really, really likes pissing him off.

Bullies, I think, snarling myself, they hate it when someone finds a chink in their armor. And I'm the chink in his.

This, I could use to my advantage.

Still, there's not much I can do as Kent pulls my left arm around to the other side of the table, clicking the other half of the handcuffs around my wrist. Then, he stands back, studying his handywork.

I pull back on the chain once, testing it, and seeing how firmly it holds. The handcuffs bite sharply into my wrists, making me wince, so I lean forward again, resting my elbows on the table and looking up into Kent's face. Casually, I clasp my hands together.

I see him open his mouth to speak, but before he can his eye falls on the engagement ring on my left hand. Quickly, he moves to unlink my hands and pull it off my ring finger, slipping it into his pocket.

Without thinking, I feel a retort coming to my lips.

"What, Kent," I say, my voice soft. "Can't beat me with your wife's ring on my hand? Something feel wrong about that?"

Even I'm shocked at the words that just came out of my mouth. Jesus Christ, who am I?

I see him flinch – just barely – but then he raises his eyes to mine, his face perfectly calm. "That's enough, Fay," he says. "I'll be asking the questions."

He folds his arms and I hold his gaze, not moving an inch.

"What was that note," he asks, his words quick.

"I don't know," I say, matching his pace.

"Then why," he pushes, his voice harder, "was it in your room?"

"Because Fiona gave it to me."

He presses his hands to the table. "Then you do know what it is."

I narrow my eye at him. “I know what it is as far as I know that it’s a piece of paper with bad poetry written on it, sure,” I say. Again, I surprise myself with my attitude and confidence – it by no means matches what I feel inside. “But as for what it means, or what it’s for, I don’t know.”

“What,” he says, bringing his face closer to mine, “did she tell you to do with it?”

I lower my voice almost to a whisper, forcing him to lean closer. “She told me to give it to Alden.”

I see Kent’s lips curl back from his teeth at that. But before he can ask another question, I continue.

“But obviously, since it was still in my room,” I whisper, lowering my eyes to his lips as I speak. “I didn’t.”

I hear a low rumble of dissatisfaction in Kent’s chest as he pushes away from the table, turning his back to me, clearly thinking this through.

I stay where I am, leaning my weight onto my elbows and forearms, watching him, my hair spilling around my face. I shake my head, trying to push it back, but it doesn’t work.

“Why,” Kent says, over his shoulder. “Why didn’t you give it to Alden.”

“Because,” I say, my voice deadpan. “I don’t know which of you to trust. I’m still deciding.”

He whirls on me then. “After all I’ve done for you, Fay – everything I’ve given you –“

“Oh!” I say, laughing up into his face now, shaking my manacled hands. “Yes, thanks so much, Kent – you’ve been a real angel to me these past few weeks – I just feel so cared for when I’m being chained to a table in your basement –“

This sets him off.

I can’t help myself from smiling, a little, as he storms to the right, coming around the table. I try to turn, to watch him, but he’s too fast –

Kent grabs me by the back of my neck, pushing me down so that my chest is flat on the table, my cheek likewise touching the cold surface. Again, he’s controlled enough to ensure that I don’t slam my head on the metal surface, but I can hear his breath coming fast now, his chest heaving –

“God damnit, Fay,” he says, “I could make this so much worse for you – you’re treated like a damn princess in this house –“

“Don’t you get it, Kent?” I say in response. “I know that you only treat me well because if it got back to Alden that you weren’t, that he’d move to take me from you. And you like having me here in this house. Like having me as your little pawn, to hold as a threat against him.”

Kent pauses for a moment, and then I gasp and wince as he pushes on my neck harder, my face pressing hard against the metal.

But then, to my surprise, he releases me.

I take a deep breath as I feel the pressure lessen on my neck, feel him take his hand away. I hear him move back a few steps, starting to pace behind me.

“This, Kent,” I say, panting a little, stretching my neck to soothe the ache there. “This is why I kept the note, taped it behind my desk, instead of giving it to you straight away. I kept it because I know that this lurks around every corner – you treating me like an animal.”

“Maybe,” I continue, my voice cold, “if you gave me the respect I deserve to begin with, I would have given you my allegiance from the start – given you the note, instead of keeping it as leverage in case I needed it.”

I hear silence behind me as Kent stops pacing. For a minute, all I can hear is the sound of my breathing.

Then, I hear three slow steps as Kent comes up behind me.

I feel him there, the warmth of him behind me, as he slides one hand over my ribs and the other over my shoulder and collar bone to wrap around my throat, pulling me upwards as far as I can go, until my arms go taught against my chains.

“And I told you, darling Fay,” he says, his quiet voice itself a threat, “that respect in this house is earned, not given. So, let’s see if we can teach you a little lesson.”

He lowers himself so that I can feel his taught stomach against my lower back, his voice close to my ear now. “A little lesson,” he whispers, “about respect.”

Chapter 39 – Obedience

Chapter 39 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

Kent moves around the table, and to my surprise, he takes a key out of his pocket and slides it under the metal table. A mechanism snaps, and I feel a sudden give to my handcuffs as they are released from the table.

Before I can pull away, Kent grabs the chain between the cuffs, taking control of my actions. He says nothing as he starts moving towards the center of the room, pulling me roughly along with him. When we reach a spot where a short chain is bolted to the floor, with an open padlock at the end, Kent stops.

He slowly brings my manacled hands close to his face, my body pulled close to his. "On your knees, Fay," he says, firm..

My mouth hangs open in disbelief. Why? I try to speak, to question his demand.

"I said," he says, his brows knitting cruelly together. "On your knees."

Slowly, my earlier courage abandons me, and I begin to sink to my knees as Kent lowers his hand to allow me to do so. I find myself resting there, my knees on the cold cement floor, my arms stretched above my head, looking up at him with wide eyes.

Kent lowers one knee to the ground, maintaining eye contact with me. Then, slowly, he raises the chain from the ground, wrapping it around the links of my handcuffs and sliding the padlock closed, creating a perfect circle. I look down, realizing that I am once again contained, trapped, and at his mercy.

I gaze up at him as he stands tall.

"In this world, Fay," Kent says, his voice even and low, "you don't survive if you let people walk all over you. My father tried that - tried to maintain this family's power by being kind, and fair, and logical."

Kent slides his hands into his pockets, his most controlled position, and bends at the waist, bringing his face close to mine. "He was dead by the time I was eight."

My mouth falls open slightly, and I watch as his hands clench into fists in his pockets. "So when you tell me," he continues, slowly circling me, "to trust you, to treat you as someone I trust, without having earned it..."

I turn my head to watch him, but my movement is limited, my neck reaching its breaking point.

"You're asking me, then, Fay," he says, taking another step, "to act like a fool."

I try to turn further, but the handcuffs won't let me. I stare forward, my heartbeat and breath quickening. I can't see him, don't know where he is. I listen intently, needing to know. Startled, I jump when I hear his voice very close to my ear.

"Do you think I'm a fool, Fay?" his voice is a whisper, sending a shiver down my spine as his breath brushes against my earlobe.

"No," I whisper, closing my eyes. In this moment, I feel completely different than I did just minutes ago at the table. Then, I had the power, the information he wanted, the ability to provoke him with my words, actions, and body. But now, everything has changed.

Kent is back in control, and he's going to make me pay for every bit of power I took from him at the table. Pay it back tenfold.

"Good girl," he murmurs. Then, he starts walking again, continuing his circle. My eyes fly open, waiting for him to come into my line of sight once more.

"Do you want me to trust you, Fay?" he asks, now at my right shoulder. I turn my head towards him.

"Y-yes," I say, unsure if that's truly what I want, but knowing it's the answer he expects.

"Well," he says, leaning down and towering over me, "you were wrong to doubt my vengeance, to think that I wouldn't uncover your secrets."

My chest rises quickly now, and I sink closer to the ground, my knees splayed apart, forming a W-shape, my rump resting on the floor. "I'm sorry," I breathe. "I won't do it again."

"Too late for that," he says, a small smile forming on his lips. "It's time for you to take your punishment. And if you want me to trust you, then you'll have to take it without complaint and show me just how obedient you can be."

Slowly, I nod. Internally, the surprise of being dragged to the center of the room wears off. The anger and defiance I felt earlier at the table start to resurface, waiting on the tip of my tongue to be thrown in his face.

Go ahead, Kent, I want to say. Hurt me. Let's see what it does.

But for some reason, I don't. Instead, I gaze up at him, my eyes wide, my mouth slightly open.

Slowly, I nod. "I'll be good for you, Kent," I hear myself whisper.

And suddenly, I realize it. I realize that I want this. That, goddamn it, some part of me likes this, likes being chained to Kent's fucking basement floor and telling him I'll be obedient for him.

My breath quickens, my brows knit together as I think, what the fuck?

But Kent laughs lightly and my attention shifts back to him. "Good girl," he murmurs, looking down at me. "I like it when you do as I say."

He reaches out a hand, curling his index finger under my chin, slowly dragging his thumb across my lower lip. "Get back on your knees, Fay," Kent whispers to me.

I blink at him and, for some reason, I don't comply. It's not that I don't understand him; I just... don't.

Kent laughs lightly, and I remain perfectly still as he returns his thumb to the dimple at the center of my full bottom lip. Then, leisurely, he slides his thumb into my mouth.

I feel it slip down the soft wetness of my tongue, caressing it. I close my mouth slightly, just enough for my teeth to press lightly against his flesh.

"I said," Kent's voice is rough as he suddenly tightening his grip on my chin, causing me to gasp, "to get on your knees, Fay."

Quickly, I obey, pulling myself back up to my knees with difficulty.

"Good girl," he murmurs, loosening his grip on me and taking his thumb out of my mouth.

I leave my mouth hanging open as Kent stands up, walking slowly around me until he again disappears from my sight. For a few moments, I keep my eyes closed, straining my ears to hear beyond the sound of my own panting breath, trying to decipher what he's doing.

He's at the back of the room now, opening something on a hinge, moving things around. Damn it, I want to see. I have to know. Shivers run all over my skin in anticipation and fear.

I hear his steps approaching me again, and I press my eyes closed.

"Lean forward, Fay," he commands. Without protest, I do as he says, moving my shoulders forward so that my chest is angled towards the ground. "Further, Fay," he says impatiently. "Put your arms on the ground."

I whimper lightly, but the sound fails to express the complexity of my emotions as I press my forearms to the ground in front of me, lifting my hips and ass into the air.

Chapter 40 – Release

Chapter 40 - Fall For My Ex's Mafia Dad

A sound cracks through the air and I flinch, realizing –

Shit, was that a whip?

I gasp and whimper when I hear it again – snap, snap –

“I didn’t want to do this, Fay,” Kent says, his voice low and – my stomach twists at the realization – pleased. “But you made me. If you’d only been obedient, I could have spared you this.”

There is silence now, and my breath comes quick and ragged, my arms trembling as I wait –
SNAP.

I let out a piercing shriek as I feel the leather whip smack against my ass. I fall forward so that my face presses against my clasped hands. I pant, my eyes flying open in shock –

The right cheek of my ass smarts and stings –

Holy fuck – did Kent seriously just –

“Get up,” he commands, but I don’t. Instead, I stay precisely where I am, staring at the floor in shock.

“I said,” I hear him grind the words out from between his teeth, to “to get up, Fay.”

Trembling, I pull my body back up so that my weight is resting on my forearms and knees.

“Ask me for another,” he demands.

My eyes fly even wider at this.

“Do it,” he says, his voice quick and thick. I hear him panting now, too, and realize –

Realize that he’s losing control –

Slowly, I begin to smile. And I don’t say a word.

“Do it, Fay!” Kent shouts behind me, snapping the whip in the air again.

“No.” I say, narrowing my eyes as I stare at the floor, my voice firm.

I hear the whip clatter to the ground, hear the anger in him as he throws himself in front of me, falling to one knee, grabbing my face and forcing me to look at him.

“You will do it,” he growls, his face dark with his need. “Ask me. Beg me.”

When I do nothing, he loses it, his face turning red with fury. He brings his face close to mine and shouts directly at me.

“DO IT FAY.”

I wait a moment, and then surprise even myself when I open my mouth to laugh – just a tiny little thing, but enough to wipe his expression clean. The blood drains from his face, leaving him pale.

“Do it, Kent,” I say, my voice totally even.

I don’t beg at all. I demand.

“Hit me,” I say, raising my chin as I look him in the eye. “Hit me again. And again.”

A horrible snarl slides from Kent’s lips and then suddenly –

I blink, shocked, as I see that Kent’s face is no longer inches from my own –

I turn, looking towards the door just in time to see Kent move through it, slamming it behind him.

Wha-

I blink again, sitting up on my knees and resting my butt on my heels as I look around at the empty room. What the hell just happened?

Upstairs, Kent storms through the kitchen, then out the door into the hallway, where Daniel is waiting, his face angry.

“Dad,” he says, falling into stride with him. “You’ve crossed a line here – taking Fay into the basement – she is my –“

“Go and get her, if she’s yours,” Kent snarls, throwing the handcuff keys onto the hallway floor at Daniel’s feet and storming beyond him into his office. Then, before anyone can follow him, Kent slams the door shut and deftly twists the lock.

Then, safely inside, he lets out the bellow of rage that he’s been holding in – his hands in fists at his sides, his face turned up at the ceiling.

God damnit – he thinks, finishing his yell, turning and hurling himself towards his desk and into his chair. God damnit that fucking girl –

The images run through his head –

His thumb in her mouth, sliding over her tongue –

The delicious, shocked expression on her face and then, the way her eyelids had fallen half shut, as she had let him push it in deeper –

God. Damnit.

Kent pounds his fist once on his desk, the sound echoing throughout the room as he grits his teeth and closing his eyes.

But no matter how hard he tries, he can't stop the memories –

The sight of her kneeling for him on the ground, panting, waiting –

The sweet yelp that she made, her whole body tensing as he just flicked her ass with the whip –

God, he'd been instantly hard when he heard that noise – had felt, finally, like he could control her again –

But then.

Fucking then. When she had said no.

He had just lost it. Lost complete control – gone to his knees in front of her – and she had laughed at him.

Kent pictures her face in that moment – her beautiful face, with her red curls spilling around her cheeks, as she had smirked at him and not begged, but demanded that he hit her again.

God damnit. He had almost truly lost it then – almost...

Instead, he'd gotten out of the room.

But now, in the privacy of his office, pissed at himself for losing control, horrified that it was at her hands – this girl – this nothing –

He lets him think about what he would have done – what he almost did - if he'd stayed just two more seconds down there.

Grabbed her by that red hair, pulled her to him, crushed her face to his own, panted into her mouth as he ripped the shirt from her body, grasped her small, firm breast in his palm, pulled her on top of him –

Made her moan, made her beg –

Fuck, Kent thinks, grinding his teeth against his desire, but he can't help it. Instead, he gives in, swiftly unbuckling his belt, the top button of his pants, thrusting his hand inside.

“Fay?”

Her head swivels towards the door as it pushes open slightly, a dark head peeking from behind it.

“Hi, Daniel,” she says with a little smile. She’s sitting cross-legged on the ground now, her hands still locked to the floor with the chain and padlock.

Daniel frowns at her, stepping inside. “You seem...shockingly okay,” he says.

She gives him a little shrug. She’s been down here alone for about ten minutes now. Actually, she’d been getting kind of bored. “No real harm done,” she says.

Daniel comes over to her, kneeling on the ground in front of her and producing a key from his pocket. She wonders, passively, where he got it, but then shrugs, realizing that it doesn’t matter.

“It’s just,” Daniel says as he works. “I’ve seen people after my Dad...teaches them a lesson. And you’re just sitting here, kind of...peaceful? When he is flying around upstairs all pissed off?”

Daniel pauses for a moment and studies her. “What did you do to him?”

Fay shrugs, giving nothing away. Daniel just sighs and finishes unlocking the cuffs, setting her free. Fay stands, rubbing her wrists – which really are sore – and looking around.

“What did he do to you?” Daniel asks, slipping his hands into his pockets and standing as well.

Fay shrugs again, glancing at the whip on the floor.

Daniel’s eyes widen as he sees the direction of her gaze. “Wait, did he whip you?”

She meets his eyes and gives him a little smile. “Not hard,” she says, truthfully. She barely feels it now. “I think he was just trying to scare me a little.”

Daniel looks at her, aghast, but Fay’s smile just widens. “Do you want to go upstairs?” she asks.

Daniel just nods slowly and gestures towards the door. Fay accepts the invitation, walking out of the room and down the hallway ahead of him.

“Actually,” she says over her shoulder. “Do you want to get something to eat and bring it up to my room? I could use a snack.”

Daniel says nothing, just stares at her as he follows her up the stairs.