

Chapter 2

The Ferraro's hospital, known to normal citizens as St. Camillus Hospital, served as the perfect emblem for the mob family. It was old as dirt, efficient, and beyond flaws. Nobody, not cop nor criminal, dared whisper anything bad about the Ferraros or their pet project.

It's why Elena even applied to St. Camillus, despite its seedy connections. It wasn't her first choice, but Elena wanted nothing more than to escape her family and start over somewhere new. And the only way to do that was by earning money.

As far as swallowing morals went, St. Camillus wasn't a bad option. Many businesses in the city had mob ties. But most of them were small fries who'd bow down to Capo Vitale or Don Morello in a heartbeat.

The Ferraros were a different story. They'd been on indifferent terms with the Morellos and other crime families, content to let them have their own slice of the city.

But if things ever got dicey? Everybody knew how it would shake out.

The Ferraros set the rules that all other crime families followed—no child prostitution or underage drug deals had occurred for two decades because of the Ferraro's laws. The Ferraros were also the reason contract breeches were punished by death. If anyone crossed them, they'd get wiped out like dust.

The city lived or died at the Ferraros' whims.

So Elena accepted the job offer.

Elena's first week as a doctor at St. Camillus was pretty much what she expected. The work was fulfilling but grueling. She tried not to pay too much attention to who was in her hospital beds—her patients extended the same courtesy.

Her coworkers were more complicated. Elena wasn't turning heads as the Vitale Girl but as the only female doctor in the entire hospital. It took the full week, but the other doctors realized she was more than a pretty face.

Elena was so busy she had barely noticed she'd yet to meet her mystery husband. That was just fine by her. She felt a little bad for Mr. Fabio, but, considering what her former life was like, Elena couldn't feel bad about how things were.

And so a whole nine days passed since Elena's marriage and the start of her new life.

On the tenth day, Elena discovered a new mystery. Massimo Ferraro, the current don of the Ferraro family, was visiting the hospital. According to the gossiping doctors, he was going to pick one doctor to be his family's personal physician.

"Best of luck," Elena told her colleagues.

"You're not interviewing?"

Elena shrugged. Things were going well already—why ruin it by having her life devoted to a mafia don?

On the streets, Massimo Ferraro was called the Boss of Blood and Ice. He was said to personally destroy any mafia member who broke the Ferraro's rules. Apparently, he wiped out every trace of the Lombardi family ten years ago—save through names on headstones.

Not a man she'd want to get entangled with.

"You must be set for life already for a salary of 900k to be below you."

"Nine hundred thousand dollars?!" she shouted, suddenly glad she had already finished her coffee. Otherwise, she'd be spitting it out in shock. "Neurosurgeons don't even make that much!"

With that kind of money, her student loans would be gone. She could pay for an apartment—no, a house—on the other side of the globe, and still have money left over for a new life.

"Where did you say you had to sign up for an interview?"

Elena got the last appointment of the day. She tried to lose herself to her work but couldn't stop wondering how Massimo Ferraro compared to the rumors.

Finally, it was time to find out.

A man she'd never seen before introduced himself as Ferraro's personal assistant and led her to an unused office in the hospital. That, too, she'd never seen, but the family name on the wall made it clear why: this office was left empty for the mafia don.

The assistant knocked twice. He turned to Elena. "Don Ferraro will see you now."

It wasn't lost on Elena that he was now using mafia titles. While he called his boss "Mr. Ferraro" out in the public wing of the hospital, that had been playing at normal. Here, in private, he could admit all that the Ferraro family was, and, by extension, all their physician might deal with.

Elena had grown up keeping her mouth shut and staying out of mafia business. She could handle ignoring how the Ferraros got injured and focus on treating them.

She opened the door.

The office was pristine and modern. Elena recognized the desk—an abstract, chic thing—from a catalog her father followed: it cost seven thousand dollars. The bookcase Massimo Ferraro was browsing likely was worth triple.

Massimo looked up and stared at Elena.

Massimo was clean shaven with a handsome jawline. His black curled hair was swept into a low, short ponytail. His eyes were like emeralds that danced under starlight.

He also looked a lot younger than Elena expected. He couldn't be more than a decade older than herself, could he?

Elena met his gaze.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Elena—"

"You can go."

He spoke with no emotion. That, as much as what he said, threw off Elena.

Massimo walked slowly to his desk, scowling the whole time. He reminded Elena of an injured cat, snappish but content in his disagreeable nature.

Elena took a steady breath.

"I'm here to interview for the personal physician opening. Your assistant confirmed that this is my appointment."

Massimo typed on his computer, thoroughly engrossed in the screen. "You're a woman."

He didn't ask it like a question, but Elena nodded. "Yes, I am."

"Then you don't belong here."

"You've got a bad limp," Elena said evenly. "You must've injured it... maybe two weeks ago at most, probably closer to one judging by how much you wince. Your former doctor either told you it'd take too long to heal, or he botched the job entirely."

Massimo stopped typing. He looked at her.

"Go on," he said.

"Like I was saying, I'm Elena Vitale. As you probably know, my father is a capo to Don Morello, but I share nothing with my family aside from my name. I have no contact with them, so you can be sure where my loyalties lie."

Massimo raised an eyebrow, but he didn't interrupt.

"I graduated top of my class. In one week, I've shown every male chauvinist you've employed here how indisputably capable I am. If you give me the opportunity, you will find I'm the best family doctor you could ask for."

It was quiet in the study for a long moment. Then Massimo lifted his left leg onto his desk.

"Tell me how you would treat my limp then."

Elena hesitantly rolled up the pant leg to get a better look at the injury.

"Well," Elena started, "I'm guessing this is a bullet wound of some kind. Your old doctor might've fished out the bullet, but, judging from the sloppy stitch work, he didn't clean the site. Might've not even fished out all the shrapnel."

"If you're so confident you could do better than me, hop to it."

"YOU did this?"

Oh, Elena was screwed. But she didn't have a choice. She took Massimo to his own hospital room and did as he ordered.

While she had pride in her work, it was hard to keep her cool. Massimo stared at his leg as if seeing it for the first time.

"You're hired," he said slowly. "Provided you pass the probation period."

His assistant entered the room with paperwork for Elena and a new suit for the don.

"You're on call at all hours. If Don Massimo needs you, you're expected to be there in a flash," the assistant explained.

Elena nodded. "Is there any chance I could get an advance on my salary? I have some student loans I need to make sure don't default."

The assistant looked at Massimo, who gave a disinterested wave of his hand.

"If you provide the correct information before the end of the day," the assistant replied.

Elena nodded and excused herself.

She hadn't expected them to agree to that. Granted, this job wasn't going to be easy or have any long-term security. She should take whatever she can get.

Elena also hadn't expected them to start talking as soon as she closed the door.

"Luca, I need you to pick up some gifts for my wife."

"Anything in particular, sir? A Windsor watch, Newman cigars, or Magnanni loafers perhaps?"

"All of them."

Elena had to clamp her hand to her mouth to keep from laughing. The don's poor wife must've not had a good gift from her husband in ages. Elena felt her energy renewed by this revelation—she should get back to work.

"Are you going to see her tonight, sir? It's already been ten days since you were married."

"I'm not sure..."

His voice got quiet as Elena walked away.

"What a weird coincidence," Elena thought to herself. "He got married on the same day as I did."

Elena considered herself lucky that she just had an absentee husband, not one that was a mafia don.