

SURRENDER TO THE DON'S EMBRACE (GIO AND MILLIE)

Chapter 1

1 MILLIE

I was lying comfortably on the long couch in our library, reading, when I heard a knock on the door. My sister Sienna's head was resting on my lap, and she didn't wake up when our mother came in. Mom looked worried, with her blond hair tied up in a bun at the back of her head

"Is there something wrong?" I asked. She forced a smile and said, "Your father wants to talk to you in his office."

Carefully, I moved Sienna's head and put her down on the couch. She curled up, being a small eleven-year-old, while I, at five feet four inches, wasn't very tall either. Nobody in our family was particularly tall. As I walked towards Mom, she avoided eye contact.

"Am I in trouble?" I wasn't sure what I could have done wrong. Usually, Sienna and I were the well-behaved ones, and our sister Harper was the rule-breaker who got into trouble.

"Hurry up, don't keep your father waiting," Mom said simply. My stomach churned nervously as I stood in front of Father's office. After taking a moment to calm my nerves, I knocked on the door. "Come in."

I entered, trying to keep a poker face. Dad was sitting behind his mahogany desk in a big black leather armchair. The mahogany shelves behind him were filled with books he had never read, but they concealed a secret entrance to the basement and a corridor leading off the premises.

He glanced up from a stack of papers, his grey hair slicked back. "Have a seat."

I sat down in one of the chairs across from his desk and folded my hands in my lap, trying not to bite my lower lip, as Dad disliked that. I waited for him to speak. He had an odd expression on his face as he looked at me. "The Bratva and the Triad are trying to take over our territories. Their boldness is increasing day by day. We are luckier than the Las Vegas familia, who also have to deal with the Mexicans, but we can't ignore the threat from the Russians and the Taiwanese any longer."

I was confused. Dad never talked to us about his business. Girls weren't supposed to know the details of the mob business. I knew better than to interrupt him

"We need to resolve our feud with the New York Familia and join forces if we want to stand up against the Bratva and the Triad." Peace with the Familia? Dad and everyone else in the Chicago Outfit hated the Familia. They had been fighting each other for decades and only recently decided to ignore each other in order to target members of other crime organizations, like the Bratva and the Triad. "There is no stronger bond than blood. At least the Familia got that right."

I furrowed my brow. "Born in blood. Sworn in blood. That's their motto." I nodded, but my confusion only grew.

"I met with Agatone Merante yesterday," my father said. Agatone Merante was the head of the New York mob. A meeting between New York and Chicago hadn't happened in ten years, and last time it didn't end well. They called it Bloody Thursday. My father wasn't even the boss; he was just an adviser to Vernon Ruberti, who ruled over the crime in the Midwest.

"We agreed that for peace to be possible, we had to become family," my father continued, looking at me intensely. I didn't want to hear the rest.

"Ruberti and I agreed that you would marry the oldest son of the Merante, Gio, who will be the future head of the Familia."

I felt like I was falling. "Why me?"

"Merante and Ruberti have been talking on the phone, and Merante wanted the most beautiful girl for his son. They couldn't give him the daughter of one of their soldiers, and since Vernon doesn't have daughters, they chose you as the most beautiful available," my father explained.

"But there are so many beautiful girls," I choked. I couldn't believe this was happening.

"There aren't many Italian girls with hair like yours. Vernon described it as golden," my father laughed. "You'll be our way into the New York Familia."
"But, Father, I'm only fifteen. I can't get married." I pleaded.

My father waved it off. "If I agree, you can. We don't care about laws."

I gripped the armrests tightly, feeling numb

"But I told Agatone we'd wait until you're eighteen and done with school. Your mother insisted on it, and Vernon gave in to her begging."

So the Boss had decided to wait, but my father would have forced the marriage if he could. Gio Merante, - my future husband, was known for crushing a man's throat with his bare hands. I didn't even know how old she was. My cousin had to marry someone much older. I hoped Gio wasn't that old. Was he cruel?

"He'll be the head of the New York mob," I whispered. "Please, Father, don't make me marry him."

My father's face tightened. "You will marry Gio Merante. I shook hands on it with his father. You'll be a good wife and behave obediently at the engagement celebrations."

"Engagement party?" I asked, my voice sounding distant.

"Yes, it's a way to connect our families and let Gio see what he's getting." my father replied "When is it?"

"September. We haven't set a date yet."

I nodded numbly. My dreams of a loving wedding were shattered. I asked if I could continue attending school, but deep down, I knew it wouldn't matter. My future was decided for me. Everything was already over before it even began

I couldn't stop crying. Harper was comforting me by stroking my hair while my head rested on her lap. She was only thirteen, just eighteen months younger than me. However, those eighteen months made all the difference between being free and being trapped in an unloving situation. I tried hard not to blame her for it because it wasn't her fault.

"You should talk to father again." Harper suggested once I reached her bedroom. I only shrugged and lowered my head. Knowing our father, there's nothing that could change his decision once decided. She ran next to me, grabbing me by the arm. "Maybe mother could help." She whispered.

"Come on. Father never let a woman influence his decision." I responded. Shutting her ideas. The same time taking off all the hope that my heart might entertain

I wiped my tears away and looked at Harper, feeling miserable. She had the same blue eyes as me, but her hair was red, unlike mine, which was light blond. Father sometimes called her a witch, but it was not an endearing term.

"He made a deal with Gio's father," I told her.

Harper was surprised and asked if they had met. I wondered the same thing. Why did Father find time to meet with the head of the New York Familia, but not to discuss his plans to sell me off like a commodity?

I dismissed the frustration and despair welling up inside me, telling Harper that there was nothing we could do.

Harper tried to cheer me up, saying that Gio could be ugly, fat, and old. But I knew my worries went far beyond his appearance.

We decided to search for information about Gio online. He seemed to be a sought-after New Orleans bachelor with cold gray eyes and a muscular build. The articles called him the heir of businessman ~ Agatone Merante, but we knew what he truly represented: death and violence.

Seeing the pictures of him with different girls in every photo made me bitter. Society girls were attracted to his charm and wealth, not knowing the darkness that lay beneath his facade.

I felt the need to talk to Enrique, our loyal bodyguard, who knew everything about everyone, including Gio.