

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

Chapter 10

10 MILLIE

As we walked through the empty house, my heels clacking on the marble floors, my heart pounded in my chest. We stepped onto the veranda overlooking the backyard and the beach. The front of the garden was occupied by the huge white pavilion where the wedding ceremony would be held. But behind the pavilion, dozens of tables had been set up for the following feast. Voices carried over from inside the pavilion where the guests were waiting for my arrival. A path of red rose petals led from the veranda toward the entrance of the pavilion. I followed mother into the small room between the outside and the main part of the pavilion. Father was waiting and straightened when we entered. Mother gave him the briefest nod before slipping into the makeshift chapel.

"You look beautiful," he said quietly, offering me his arm

I blushed and replied, "Thanks, Father."

"Gio won't know what hit him." he grinned.

Feeling a mix of nervousness and excitement, I ducked my head. "I hope so."

"Be a good wife, Millie. Gio is powerful, and once he takes his father's place, his word will be law. Make me proud, make the Outfit proud," he said solemnly.

I nodded, my throat too tight for words. The music started to play: a string quartet and a piano. Father lowered my veil, providing an extra layer of protection, no matter how thin. Maybe it would hide my expression from afar.

Father led me toward the entrance, and the fabric was pulled apart, revealing the long aisle and the many hundred guests to either side of it. My eyes were drawn to the end of the aisle where Gio stood, tall and imposing in his charcoal suit and vest with the silver tie and the white shirt. His groomsmen were dressed in a vest and dress pants of a lighter grey, and wore no jacket and a bowtie instead of a tie. Karsen was one of them, much shorter than the men.

My father tugged me along, and my legs seemed to carry me on their own accord as my body shook with nerves. I tried not to look at Gio and instead watched Harper and Sienna from the corner of my eye. They were the first two bridesmaids, and seeing them gave me the strength to hold my head high and not bolt for the outside.

"Kind of symbolic in itself," I mumbled, trying to hide my nerves.

Gio extended his hand, palm upwards. My father lifted the veil, and I reluctantly took Gio's hand. His gray eyes seemed to burn with an emotion I couldn't decipher. Was he sensing my anxiety? I avoided meeting his gaze.

The priest in his white frock greeted us and the guests before beginning his opening prayer. I tried not to faint, holding onto Gio's grip for support. Stay strong, Millie. As the priest approached the marriage rites, my legs trembled uncontrollably. He announced the crucial questions.

"Gio and Millie," the priest addressed us. "Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage? Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?"

"Yes," Gio replied with his deep voice, and after a moment's hesitation, I managed to answer firmly, "Yes."

"Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and his Church." Gio clasped my hands, his warmth contrasting with my cold skin. We faced each other, and I finally glanced into his eyes. Gio began his vows, and I listened, knowing that sweet lies were about to spill from his lips.

"I, Gioseffo Merante, take you, Amelie Pearce, to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life." The words sounded so tender, yet they were nothing but a fagade

I followed suit, reciting the expected words, and the priest blessed our rings. Gio picked up my ring from the red cushion. "Here, let me help you," he said, extending his hand toward mine. My fingers shook like leaves in the breeze as I raised them, my heart pounding like a hummingbird's wings.

"Steady now," Gio's voice reassured me as his strong hand steadied mine. I struggled to put the ring on his finger. It was white gold with twenty small diamonds, a symbol of love and devotion for most couples, but for me, it felt like a golden cage, a reminder of my entrapment.

I enter alive and I will leave dead,' those words echoed in my mind, the chilling oath that tied me to this world of organized crime.

"Now it's your turn," I said to Gio, my voice trembling. Sebastian noticed and shot me a sharp gaze, seemingly piercing through my fears. He and Gio were close, and I knew he wouldn't let this go easily.

Escape had been an option once,

SS but not anymore. As hundreds of faces from the Chicago and New York families stared back at us, I realized that flight was no longer possible. Divorce? That wasn't even on the table. Death was the only way out in this world, and breaching the agreement would lead to war.

"I feel like a puppet in this grand scheme," I confided in Gio, feeling the weight of my emotions. "A pawn in a game of power and wealth." He looked into my eyes, understanding my turmoil. "I know it's not easy, but we have to do what's necessary for our families."

"Duty and honor." I said bitterly, repeating their words. "They claim it's an honor, but it feels like a prison."

"You may kiss the bride," the priest finally announced, pulling us back to the present moment.

I raised my head, facing the sea of scrutinizing eyes in the pavilion. My heart raced, but I knew I had to keep a strong facade. Father would be livid if I showed any weakness, and Gio's Familia would exploit it without hesitation

Gio leaned in to kiss me, and I forced my lips to cooperate, concealing my desire to escape. But it seemed futile with Gio; he could see through me like no one else.

"Smile, you're the happy bride," he whispered into my ear, his lips brushing against it. I managed a smile, knowing we were being closely watched by our guests.

As we greeted well-wishers, Leila approached us. She pulled me close and whispered, "Make him be good to you. Make him love you if you can. It's the only way to get through this."

I was taken aback but didn't have time to respond before they moved on. Gio noticed my unease and inquired, "What did she say?"

"Nothing important." I replied hastily.

Throughout the evening, I continued to nod and smile. Leila's words echoing in my mind. Could I make Gio do anything he didn't want to? Could I make him love me? Was he even capable of love?

I glanced up at him, watching as he mingled with guests, effortlessly putting on a charming facade. But when our eyes met, I saw the darkness and possessiveness that sent shivers down my spine. I doubted love and gentleness had a place in his black heart.

"Congrats, Gio," a high-pitched voice interrupted our moment. Gio and I turned towards it, and I sensed a subtle shift in his demeanor.

"Alyssa," Gio acknowledged with a nod.

My eyes were fixated on the woman standing nearby, even as her father, Senator Black, tried to engage me in conversation. She had an artificial beauty-with perfectly shaped features that seemed too perfect to be natural, I couldn't help but feel a tinge of jealousy, but I quickly brushed it aside. Content it belongs to

She leaned over to whisper something to Gio, and I saw his face remain impassive. Finally, she turned to me and unexpectedly pulled me into a hug I tried not to stiffen up, attempting to be polite.

"I should warn you." she whispered, her voice filled with malice. "Gio's a beast in the bedroom, and he's hung like one too. It's going to hurt when he takes you, and he won't care about your feelings. He'll treat you like an animal and leave you bloody."

Gio noticed my discomfort and reached for my hand, but I couldn't face him after what that woman had just said. My face drained of color, and I flinched, trying to hold it together as we greeted the remaining guests.

As we settled into our seats, the guests began chanting, "Bacio, Bacio." signaling that we were expected to kiss. Gio pulled me close, and I struggled to maintain composure while we obliged the tradition. Once the chanting stopped. I finally sat down.

Harper, who was seated beside me, leaned over and whispered in my ear, 'I'm glad he didn't go overboard with the kiss*I wouldn't have been ~ able to eat if he did.'" I nodded, x gratefyybfor the small mercy. io Sebastian, seated beside Gio; 'made a lewd joke that had them both laughing, and I chose to

ignore it. Our table was filled with family members and acquaintances, but my nerves made it impossible to enjoy the meal.