

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

Chapter 8

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Inside the bedroom, my mother and Harper were having a heated debate over what Harper should wear. I couldn't help but worry that my mother had ulterior motives for letting Harper stay. She had just turned seventeen and was getting closer to the age when our family might arrange her marriage as well. I pushed the thought aside as a knock echoed at the door. It was early; the guests weren't expected for another ten minutes.

Opening the door, I found my cousin Kayla, with her husband Enrique standing behind her. "I know I'm early," Kayla said, her warm smile putting me at ease.

"That's okay, come on in," I replied, stepping aside to let her in while Enrique remained outside.

Kayla and I settled on the sofa, catching up while we waited for the other guests. "Your husband sent his own bodyguard?" she remarked, curious about the presence of Dario.

I nodded. "Yes, he's quite protective."

"He's not your husband yet." she emphasized with a knowing look.

Her observation hit home, and I couldn't help but feel a twinge of sadness. "You're right." I admitted, feeling vulnerable. Kayla leaned closer, her expression understanding. "You look troubled. What's bothering you?"

"It's just that...well, my father and Gio have very different ideas of what's best for me," I confided.

She gently twisted her wedding band as she listened. "I understand how that feels. My father wants me to remarry already," Kayla revealed, her voice tinged with sadness.

"So soon after losing your husband?" I asked, shocked. "Not immediately, but he's already talking to potential suitors," she sighed. I couldn't fathom the idea of moving on so quickly. "Can't you say no? You were already married."

She shook her head sadly. "It was a childless marriage, and my father believes I'm too young to be alone. He insists I move back in with the family for protection."

We both understood the unspoken expectations society placed on us as women of marriageable age. "I'm sorry you have to go through this." I said, feeling a sense of solidarity with Kayla

"It is what it is," she replied, resigned to her fate. Laughing bitterly, I added, "Yeah, that's the sad reality."

Before we could delve deeper into our conversation, my mother and Harper emerged from the bedroom, signaling the arrival of more guests. The room filled with laughter and chatter, temporarily pushing aside our worries as we celebrated the upcoming wedding

The gift exchange was a lively affair, with everything from jewelry to spa certificates being unwrapped. Among the presents, I found myself holding a particularly awkward gift from Gio's stepmother, Clivia — a barely-there white

nightgown that left little to the imagination. Trying not to show my discomfort, I managed a tight smile and glanced at Harper, who gave me a knowing look.

"For your wedding night," Olivia said with a calculating glint in her eyes. "Gio will love unwrapping you. We must please our husbands, you know. Gio. will undoubtedly expect something this daring."

"Thank you." I replied, unsure of how to react.

As the conversation turned to wedding night stories, Nessa, Gio's cousin, shared a peculiar Sicilian tradition known as the 'presentation of the sheets'. My curiosity piqued, I inquired about it.

Olivia, ever the patronizing presence, explained, her eyes fixed on me, "After the wedding night. the women of the groom's family collect the sheets the couple spent the night on. These sheets are then presented to the fathers of the bride and groom, as well as anyone else who wants proof that the marriage has been consummated and that the bride was pure."

Nessa chimed in, "They call it the tradition of the bloody sheets sometimes."

The revelation left me frozen with disbelief, and Harper was quick to denounce the tradition as barbaric. However, Mother remained silent, her cheeks flushing red

"We won't abandon our traditions," Olivia insisted, looking directly at me. "And don't worry, from what I know, you've been well protected from male attention, so there's nothing to fear. The sheets will prove your honor."

Harper's expression showed her disdain for the tradition, but my mind was preoccupied with the realization that this tradition meant I was expected to sleep with Gio.

The afternoon before the wedding day, my family left the Mandarin Oriental and headed for the Merante mansion in the Hamptons. Harper and I were amazed by the grandeur of the place as we stepped inside.

"Wow, this mansion is like something out of a movie," Harper said, her eyes wide.

"I know, right? It's like we're in a fairytale." I replied, taking in the coffered ceilings and the view of the bay through the panorama windows. Gio's father and stepmother led us to our bedrooms on the second floor of the left wing.

"We should share a room," Harper suggested, and I nodded in agreement.

"Definitely. I need you by my side."

From our window, we could see the workers setting up the pavilion that would serve as the church for the wedding

It's all happening so fast," I said, feeling a mix of excitement and nerves.

The next morning, as the day of the wedding arrived, my mother tried to sound cheerful, but it was evident she was just putting on a facade. "Today's the big day!" she said, attempting to hide her worries.

I groaned, not quite ready to get out of bed yet. Harper, still half-asleep, mumbled something about it being too early.

"You two are like little kids, sharing a room," my mother commented with a mix of amusement and concern.

Harper peeked out from under the blankets. "Someone had to make sure Gio didn't sneak in here."

Mother raised an eyebrow. "Enrique was patrolling the corridor."

Harper snorted. "As if he could stop Gio from seeing Millie."

Mother shook her head, dismissing the idea. "Millie doesn't need protection from her husband."

Harper smirked, obviously disagreeing. "Yeah, right."

Ignoring the banter, Mother ushered me into the bathroom, clearly on a mission to get me ready for the big day.

"Quick shower, dear. The Beautician will be here any minute," she said, a sense of urgency in her voice.

As the water cascaded down on me, I couldn't help but feel a rush of adrenaline. Today was the day I'd > become Gio's wife, and the thought filled me with both excitement and dread. ~ -

When I emerged from the shower, Harper handed me a cup of coffee and a bowl of fruit salad.

"Eat something, even if it's just a little. You can't go through the whole day on an empty stomach," she said, concern etched on her face.

I took a sip of the coffee and shook my head at the food. "I'm too nervous to eat."

Harper rolled her eyes playfully. "Well, I'd love to see Gio's face if you fainted at the altar."

I chuckled weakly, taking a few bites of the fruit salad to appease her.

"The beautician is here, and they're ready for us," Harper said, gesturing towards the bedroom.

I took a deep breath, feeling the weight of the day settling on my shoulders.

"Let's face them then."

In the bedroom, the beautician and her team got to work, making us look our best for the wedding. As they waxed and prepped us, the beautician brought up a sensitive topic.

"Bikini zone? Do you know what your husband prefers?" she asked with a blush.

My face turned beet red, and I looked to my mother for help. Harper, always one to make a joke, had her own suggestion.

"We could call one of his whores and ask," she said, causing Mother to gasp in shock.

Blushing even harder. I quickly responded to the beautician, "Just a small triangle, please."

As the hours passed, the preparations continued, and when the moment finally arrived, my aunts brought in our wedding dresses.

"I can't believe it's almost time." I whispered, a mix of excitement and nervousness coursing through me.

Staring at my-reflection in the mirror, I couldn't help but admire the stunning dress. The chapel train fanned I out behind me, and the S plati nam embroidery sparkled i in the sunlight, the empire waist ro emphasized by a white satin ribbon.

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"Wow, that sweetheart neckline looks amazing on you! It really accentuates your figure," Aunt Josefa said excitedly, she was Kayla's mother. Aunt Roxie added, "Gio will be blown away when he sees you in this dress."

Feeling the nerves building up, I managed a smile as my mother stepped in. "Alright, let's give the girls some space now."