

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

Chapter 9

9 MILLIE

As the aunts left, my sister, Harper appeared by my side, her red hair contrasting beautifully with her mint dress. She opened a box to reveal a stunning necklace adorned with diamonds and pearls set in intricate white gold threads. "Gio sure knows how to spoil you. This necklace and headpiece probably cost more than most people's houses!"

From downstairs, we could hear the sounds of laughter and chatter from the guests in the garden, occasionally accompanied by a clunking sound "What's that noise?" I asked, trying to distract myself from the overwhelming thoughts.

Harper walked to the window and peered outside. "The men are stashing away their guns in plastic boxes."

"How many guns are they hiding?" I inquired.

Harper raised an eyebrow, “One each. Why do you ask? Just wondering why they feel the need to put on a show like that.”

I replied. “It's symbolic,” Feeling the weight of the whole situation. including this wedding, pressing on me.

Harper seemed puzzled, “But if they all want peace, why not attend unarmed? It's a wedding. after all.”

I hesitated before admitting, "There have been incidents before — red weddings, they call them. I've seen pictures of a wedding where the bride's dress was soaked in blood.”

Sienna shuddered, worried, “That won't happen today, right?”

Trying to reassure them, I said, “I don't think so. Chicago and New York need each other too much. They won't risk bloodshed while the Bratva and Taiwanese are still threats.”

Harper snorted, clearly unimpressed, "Well, that's somewhat comforting, I guess." "It is. At least for today, we know everyone will behave," I tried to sound more confident than I felt.

Harper embraced me from behind, her chin resting on my bare shoulder, "We could still run, you know. Sneak out while everyone's busy. Gio wouldn't notice."

Sienna agreed eagerly, getting up from the bed to support the idea.

However, I shook my head, "It's too late for that now.

"Nonsense! We can figure something out," Harper urged

"If I break the agreement, there will be bloodshed. They'll seek retribution," I explained, feeling the weight of the situation bearing down on me. Harper's frustration was evident, "They all have blood on their hands! Every fucking single one of them out there!"

"Don't curse." I reminded her out of habit.

Harper mocked our father, "Where did behaving like an obedient lady get you? Straight into the arms of one of the deadliest men in the country." Her words stung, and I looked away. She was right, my obedience had led me here.

"Sorry, I didn't mean it like that," Harper apologized, realizing her mistake.

Taking her hand in mine, I reassured her, "It's alright. You have a point. Many people in that garden deserve to face justice, but they're still family, and there are innocents too, like Karsen."

Harper's bitterness seeped through her words, "Karsen won't stay innocent for long. Soon, he'll become a killer."

I couldn't deny it, "You're right. His initiation starts at twelve. Gio killed his first man when he was just eleven."

"But he's still innocent now." I insisted. "And there are other children and women caught up in this."

Harper fixed her gaze on me through the mirror, her eyes searching for answers, "Do you truly believe any of us are innocent?"

Being born into our world meant being born with blood on your hands. With every breath we took, sin was engraved deeper into our skin. Born in blood. Sworn in blood like the motto of the New York Cosa Nostra

"No." I said firmly.

Harper flashed a grim smile, and Sienna walked over to the bed, picking up my veil attached to the headpiece. I bent my knees so she could fix it atop my head. She gently smoothed it out.

"I wish you were marrying for love. I wish we could giggle about your wedding night. I wish you didn't look so fucking sad," Harper said fiercely. The silence between us stretched. Sienna eventually nodded toward the bed. "Is this where you'll sleep tonight?"

My throat tightened. "No, Gio and I will spend the night in the master bedroom." I didn't think I'd get much, if any, sleep.

A knock sounded, and I squared my shoulders, putting on my outside face. Leila and Kayla stepped in, followed by mother.

"Wow, Millie, you are gorgeous. Your hair looks like spun gold," Kayla complimented. She was already wearing her bridesmaid dress, and the mint color looked gorgeous with her dark hair.

"Thank you, Kayla," I replied with a forced smile.

"Technically, only unmarried women are allowed to be bridesmaids," Leila chimed in, "but my Uncle insisted we make an exception for Kayla. He's really keen on finding her a new husband."

Leila wore a floor-length maroon dress with long sleeves, despite the summer heat. It was probably meant to hide how thin she'd gotten.

Mother took Sienna's arm. "Come on, Sienna, your cousins need to talk to your sister." She led Sienna out of the room, then looked back at Harper, who sat cross-legged on the sofa. "Harper?"

Harper ignored her. "I'm staying. I wan't leave Millie alone."

Mother knew better than to argue with my sister when she was in a mood, so she closed the door.

"What are you supposed to talk to me about?"

"Your wedding night," Kayla said with an apologetic smile. Leila made a face, showing her youthfulness. She was only twenty-two. "Oh, really?" I replied, smoothing my dress nervously.

Harper shook her head. "Who sent you anyway? Gio?"

"Your mother," Leila said. "She wants to make sure you know what's expected of you."

"Expected of her?" Harper hissed. "What about what Millie wants?"

"It's what it is," Leila said bitterly. "Tonight, Gio will expect to claim his rights. At least, he's good looking and young."

She was right. Gio was good looking. but that didn't change the fact that I was terrified of being intimate with him. He didn't strike me as a gentle man in bed. My stomach lurched again.

Kayla cleared her throat. "Gio will know what to do."

"You just lie on your back and give him what he wants," Leila added. "Don't try to fight him: that will only make it worse." We all stared at her, and she looked away.

Kayla touched my shoulder. "We're not doing a good job at consoling you. Sorry. I'm sure it'll be alright."

Harper snorted. "Maybe mother should have invited one of the women Gio's been with to the wedding. They could have told you what to expect."

"Alyssa is here," Leila said, then she turned red, and stammered. "I mean, that's only a rumor. I—" She looked toward Kayla for help.

"One of Gio's old girlfriends is here?" I whispered, feeling hurt and confused

Leila cringed. "I thought you knew. And she wasn't really his girlfriend, more like a plaything. Gio's been with many women." She snapped her mouth shut. I was fighting for control I couldn't let people see how weak I was. Why did I even care if Gio's past flings were at the wedding?

"Okay," Harper said getting up. "Who the heck is Alyssa, and why the heck is she invited to this wedding?" "Alyssa Black. She's the daughter of a New York senator who's on the payroll of the Mafia," Kayla explained. "They had to invite his family."

Tears blurred my vision, and Harper rushed toward me. "Oh, don't cry. Millie. It's not worth it. Gio's an asshole. You knew that. You can't let his actions get to you."

Kayla handed me a Kleenex. "You'll ruin your makeup."

I blinked a few times until I had a grip on my emotions. "I'm sorry. I'm just being emotional," I confessed.

"I think it's best if you leave now," Harper said sharply, not even looking at bella and Kayla. There was rusting, and then the door ~ opened-a d closed. Harper wrapped her atms around me. "If he hurts yous, I I kill him. I swear it. I'Mtake one ofthose guns and put a hele in his head."

"I appreciate the sentiment, Harper, but he had survived the Bratva and the Triad. and he's the most feared fighter in the New York familia. He'd kill you first," I said, leaning against her for support.

Harper shrugged. "I'd do it for you."

Pulling back slightly, I looked into her eyes. "You're still my little sister. I should protect you."

Harper whispered, "We will protect each other. Our band is stronger than their stupid oaths and the Omerta and their blood vows." "I don't want to leave you. I hate that I have to move to New York," I said, my voice trembling with emotion.

Harper swallowed hard. "I'll visit often. Father will be glad to be rid of me."

Just then, our mother walked in. "It's time." She scanned our faces but didn't comment. Harper took a step back, his eyes burning with determination, then she turned and walked out. Mother's gaze lingered on the white lace garter on my thigh. "Do you need help putting it on?"

I shook my head and slid it up until it rested on my upper thigh. "Later tonight, Gio would remove it with his mouth and throw it into the group of gathered bachelors," I thought. I smoothed down my wedding dress.

"Come," Mother said. "Everyone's waiting." She handed me my flower bouquet, a beautiful arrangement of white roses, mother of pearl roses, and pink ranunculas.