

Wrong Marriage. Right Bride (Wrong Vows Book 1) - Chapter 9[2,682 words]

Chapter 9

ELENA

The twin super bikes snarled to a halt in front of the glass monolith that rose from the Lombardy hillside like a black dagger carved into the night itself.

For a moment, everything seemed to hold its breath.

Behind us, seven matte-black supercars slid into formation with military precision, engines purring instead of roaring now.

Three Lamborghinis.

Two Ferraris.

A McLaren.

And a custom Aston Martin that looked less like a vehicle and more like something engineered for war.

Doors opened in perfect synchronization.

Twenty-eight men of the Third Battalion stepped out into the night.

Black Veil's elite.

Their presence was immediate—heavy, oppressive, disciplined.

Each of them wore tactical black: slim combat pants reinforced at the knees, compression shirts beneath lightweight ballistic vests, plate carriers strapped tight and loaded with spare magazines.

Suppressed rifles hung low across their chests, cradled like extensions of their bodies rather than weapons.

Balaclavas covered everything below their eyes.

Night-vision goggles rested on their foreheads like dark crowns, ready to descend.

They moved like machines.

Deadly.

No chatter.

No laughter.

No noise beyond the soft crunch of boots against gravel.

Just silence—and the kind of readiness that meant one wrong move could turn this meeting into a massacre.

I swung my leg off the bike and removed my helmet, pulling it free in one smooth motion.

Cool night air rushed against my face.

Sharp.

Clean.

I sucked in a breath, grounding myself.

My thighs ached from the last forty-five minutes—locked tight against the bike as we tore through winding roads at a speed that flirted with recklessness and death.

My pulse still thundered in my ears, adrenaline humming beneath my skin like a second heartbeat.

Renzo killed his ignition.

The Ducati fell silent with a mechanical sigh.

He set his helmet onto the clip behind the seat and dismounted in one fluid motion, like gravity itself had agreed to accommodate him.

We stood side by side now.

Black on black.

Control on control.

I wore fitted tactical leggings and a long-sleeve compression top beneath a cropped leather jacket.

Inside those pockets—carefully balanced—sat my Glock, extra magazines, and the quiet weight of preparedness.

Low-profile combat boots anchored me to the ground.

Ready to run.

Ready to fight.

Renzo looked the part too.

Dark tactical pants.

A black Henley stretched across his compact, muscular frame, the sleeves hugging his forearms.

A lightweight armored vest sat unzipped just enough to reveal the gold chain resting at his throat—casual defiance against the violence he carried.

We didn't look like guests.

We didn't look like negotiators.

We looked like what we were.

Bikers who doubled as killers.

Royalty riding machines that cost more than most people's lives.

I rolled my shoulders, trying to shake off the lingering tension in my body.

Renzo headed for the entrance of the building—a glass monolith.

I followed without hesitation.

This had to be where the meeting with the Sicilians was taking place.

The Third Battalion moved with us.

Twenty-eight shadows falling into formation behind our steps.

Every man spacing himself with calculated precision, forming a silent perimeter that stretched across the gravel like a living weapon.

It was impossible to tell whether we were walking into a negotiation...

or the opening act of a war.

The glass doors ahead reflected us back in fractured fragments—dark silhouettes approaching something that looked too polished, too clean to survive what we carried with us.

I kept my expression neutral.

But inside—every instinct I had was awake.

Alert.

Ready.

My phone vibrated against my side.

A sharp, insistent buzz that cut through the quiet like a warning.

I didn't react immediately.

Just slowed my step slightly.

Then slipped my hand into the inner pocket of my jacket.

Pulled the phone out just enough to see the screen.

Vincenzo.

Seven missed calls.

My chest tightened with something that sat somewhere between anger and something I refused to name.

His contact name sat there on the screen, stark and simple.

The only one in my phone when I'd set it up three days after the wedding.

The day he'd handed me a black Amex card and told me to buy whatever the hell I wanted.

I stared at the screen a second longer than I should have.

Then—

I let the screen go dark and shoved the phone back into my pocket.

He had left me on my knees — lips parted, heart pounding, ready to take his cock into my mouth like the obedient little slut he wanted me to be.

Then he simply walked away.

Without a word. Without hesitation.

Abandoning me there in the most humiliating position imaginable, all so he could run to Violet over some minor accident.

How fucking laughable.

It was the clearest proof yet: I meant nothing to him.

Absolutely nothing.

Had he finally come home and noticed I wasn't there?

Was that why his phone calls kept coming, one after another?

Let him call.

Let him keep calling until his thumb bleeds.

I wasn't going to answer.

Not now. Not ever.

Renzo paused at the heavy glass doors, one hand resting against the frame, and glanced back at me.

"Elena, this isn't the time to play with your fucking phone," he barked. "This is serious business. I don't want to see you touching that thing until the meeting is over. That's an order."

I met his glare, a slow, sarcastic smile curving my lips.

"Yes, boss," I replied sweetly, the word dripping with mock obedience.

The soldiers had already spread out.

Half swept the perimeter in silent, calculated arcs—checking blind spots, watching reflections in the glass, tracking movement that didn't exist yet.

The other half formed a loose wedge behind us, creating a clear path to the entrance while still maintaining coverage.

Their rifle muzzles tracked every shadow.

Every flicker of light.

Every possible threat.

Renzo and I stepped through the heavy glass doors, our boots echoing sharply against the polished marble floor.

Inside, the building exuded brutal elegance — sleek lines, dark marble, and cold steel that made the entire space feel deliberately intimidating.

Twenty-foot ceilings stretched above us.

Black marble floors, veined with silver, reflected our movements in fractured shards.

Everything here was designed to impress.

And intimidate.

We moved through a wide corridor lined with abstract steel sculptures—twisted, sharp, and deliberately unsettling.

Some looked like they could be weapons themselves, angled and forged in a way that made my fingers itch.

Two escalators rose to a mezzanine above us.

At the top, Sicilian guards were already in position, their presence quiet but unmistakable.

Grey suits.

Earpieces.

Hands resting on slung MP5s.

They watched us pass without expression.

Without reaction.

Just observation. Just calculation.

At the end of the wide corridor, a pair of tall double doors stood open like a waiting mouth.

Renzo pushed one side fully open and we stepped inside together, our boots echoing in the sudden hush.

Inside the room, a long ebony table dominated the space.

Polished. Expensive.

Intentionally set to command authority.

On the far side sat the Sicilians.

Two figures.

Waiting.

Their side of the table was already occupied.

Ours had been left empty.

Intentional.

Behind them stood twelve men in charcoal suits, spaced evenly like statues.

Comms wires ran from their ears, and their hands rested near their weapons.

The air in the room shifted the moment we stepped in.

Tension thickened.

Renzo stepped in first, pulling out the chair directly across from the woman.

Then he turned slightly—waiting.

He didn't sit until I did.

A small gesture. But deliberate.

I took the seat.

Only then did he sit beside me, angling his body so he faced the man across from us.

The Sicilian man was mid-forties.

Lean. Sharp.

Silver threaded through his dark hair in a way that looked intentional rather than aged.

His suit—charcoal, tailored—probably cost more than most people in the room combined.

Beside him sat the woman.

Late thirties.

Severe.

Her black hair was pulled into a tight chignon, every strand controlled.

Sharp cheekbones. Blood-red lipstick.

She radiated quiet authority.

Danger without noise.

Renzo inclined his head.

“Donatello. Bianca.”

A pause.

“Pleasure, as always.”

Donatello returned the nod, his expression unreadable.

“Renzo.”

Then his gaze shifted to me.

“And...?”

I didn’t look away. “Elena.”

My voice was even. Unshaken. “Vincenzo’s wife.”

Bianca’s eyes sharpened—just slightly—before smoothing back into composure.

“We were not expecting company,” she said, her voice measured.

“Vincenzo insisted his wife be present,” Renzo said, unbothered. “I’m sure you can appreciate that.”

A lie.

But not one worth challenging.

The room settled into its rhythm.

No one spoke for a second longer than necessary.

The conversation began without preamble—because in rooms like this, politeness was just another form of weakness.

They were discussing the northern shipping routes.

Specifically—the new container terminal at Genoa.

A facility capable of moving three times the volume of narcotics without triggering customs detection systems.

The Sicilians wanted a larger cut.

More control.

More leverage over the flow.

Black Veil wanted exclusive rights to the encryption software that masked the cargo.

Ownership. Control. Power.

Numbers were thrown out.

Percentages. Timelines.

Threats were layered under diplomacy.

Warnings disguised as suggestions.

I listened.

Quietly. Carefully.

My phone buzzed again.

Another call.

I didn't even look at it this time. Just silenced it.

And kept listening.

Then—

Renzo's phone rang.

The sound cut through the room like a gunshot.

Everyone noticed.

No one reacted.

But the shift was immediate.

Renzo reached into his pocket slowly.

Pulled out his phone.

He glanced at the screen, his jaw tightening almost imperceptibly.

Not enough for most people to notice.

But I did.

"Excuse me," he muttered, already turning slightly away from the table.

Renzo lifted the phone to his ear.

"Yeah."

The word was flat.

A pause followed—brief, but heavy.

I didn't need to hear the voice on the other end to know who it was.

Vincenzo.

Even through the distance, even through the low hum of the room, I could almost feel his anger crackling through the line like live wire.

Renzo didn't react.

Not outwardly.

His posture stayed relaxed, his shoulders loose, his expression unreadable as he listened.

"She came with me," he said evenly. "Yes, sir."

A beat.

“Yes... she insisted.”

Another pause.

His eyes flickered briefly toward me—quick, sharp, assessing—but he didn’t linger.

“No, the meeting’s civil so far.”

Another pause.

His jaw tightened again.

Then—

“Understood.”

Click.

The line went dead.

Hung up.

Just like that.

Renzo lowered the phone and slipped it back into his pocket, returning to the conversation as if nothing had happened.

The Sicilians didn’t comment.

The conversation continued, steady and deliberate, as if the interruption had never occurred.

Numbers were finalized.

Terms adjusted.

Compromises made where necessary, concessions calculated down to the last percentage point.

It didn’t take long after that.

Ten minutes.

Maybe less.

Everything was settled in the same quiet, dangerous language the entire meeting had been conducted in.

No raised voices.

No threats spoken aloud.

Just mutual understanding—backed by the unspoken agreement that if anything went wrong, everyone in this room would die trying to fix it.

Handshakes followed.

Firm. Brief.

Donatello stood first, smoothing his jacket with deliberate precision.

“Extend our regards to Vincenzo Orsini,” he said, his voice calm but carrying weight. “Tell him the Sicilians remember old alliances.”

Renzo inclined his head once.

“Will do.”

Bianca followed, her expression unreadable, her red lips pressing into a thin, controlled line as she stepped back into her role—silent, observant, lethal in her own right.

Then their men moved.

Twelve shadows filing out in a tight formation, their footsteps echoing softly against the polished floor before disappearing into the corridor.

Gone.

Just like that.

I let out a slow breath as the doors closed behind them.

The tension in the room shifted.

“Still alive,” I murmured, pushing myself up from the chair. “Well. That went... smooth.”

Renzo didn’t look at me.

He checked his watch instead.

“The Sicilians and we share the same roots,” he said evenly.

“We’re not like the Spanish—constantly at war. We know how to conduct business, even in hostility, without turning it into bloodshed.”

A pause.

“Doesn’t mean we trust each other.”

His gaze lifted, sharp and cold.

“That’s why we bring armies to every handshake.”

That—was the truth of this world.

I didn’t argue.

Just turned and followed him as he headed for the exit.

The Third Battalion fell into formation again without a word, moving like a single organism as we retraced our steps through the corridor.

Back through the sculptures.

Back past the silent guards.

Back toward the glass doors that separated us from the night.

Only when we stepped outside—when the cool air hit my face and the tension in my chest loosened by a fraction—did I speak.

“Vincenzo called.”

Renzo didn’t slow. “What did he say?”

He walked straight to his bike, boots crunching against the gravel with deliberate steps.

I frowned.

“Renzo.”

He stopped.

And for a moment—just a moment—something felt... off.

Renzo’s entire body went rigid.

Then—

I followed his gaze.

And my stomach dropped.

Every single one of the seven cars the third battalion had brought sat useless, tires flat.

The supercars sat in place like lifeless husks, their weight resting unevenly on punctured rubber, the sidewalls sagging as though something had drained the life from them.

Twenty-eight tires.

All slashed.

At once.

A cold chill crawled up my spine.

Renzo moved fast, Glock already steady in his right hand, his arm locked, barrel tracking the treeline with precise, deliberate movements.

His hand shot out, clamping around my upper arm, and in one fluid motion he yanked me backward—dragging me behind the nearest supercar.

The black Lamborghini's frame blocked us from immediate view as we dropped into cover.

The Third Battalion reacted instantly.

Rifles came up.

Bodies dropped low.

They spread out in practiced formations, using the vehicles and scattered concrete barriers as cover, their movements precise, synchronized, lethal.

This wasn't their first ambush.

And it wouldn't be their last.

"What the fuck is going on?" I hissed, already pulling my Glock from its holster.

The weight of it settled into my grip.

I flicked the safety off with my thumb.

Renzo's voice came low beside me.

“This is a red signal. We might be under attack.”

My breath hitched, then slowed as I forced myself to stay calm.

Every instinct screamed danger, but I couldn’t let panic take the wheel.

Renzo’s eyes scanned the lot, sharp and calculating.

I followed his gaze toward the treeline beyond the lot.

One soldier broke from formation, sprinting straight toward the cover where Renzo and I crouched—Rossi, his name patch announcing him clearly.

His breathing was controlled, his stance still alert despite the urgency.

“Backup’s en route, boss,” he reported, voice tight but steady.

“ETA three minutes. Armored Suburban and two technicals. They’re rolling hot.”

Renzo gave a curt nod, eyes never leaving the treeline.

“Good,” he said, low and controlled. “Hold positions. No one relaxes until we have eyes on the threat.”

Rossi nodded once and fell back into position without another word.

I slipped out from behind the Lamborghini and approached Renzo’s Ducati.

The tire was completely flattened.

My eyes scanned the cut again.

Too precise.

This wasn’t chaos. This was a message.

“Elena—step the fuck away from that bike.”

Renzo’s voice cracked across the lot like a whip.

Commanding.

“This is still a hot zone. We stay in cover until backup arrives. You hear me?”

I didn’t respond.

Didn't even look at him.

Instead, I shifted my attention to the cars the third battalion had arrived in.

I wasn't going to stay in cover like a coward without figuring out what this was—an ambush, a trap, or a message.

The doors were unlocked. That alone was wrong.

I moved toward one of the cars—a custom Aston Martin—and eased the door open carefully.

Eyes sweeping the interior in a practiced scan—leather seats, carbon-fiber trim, no visible threats.

Nothing obvious.

I moved to the next car.

Ferrari SF90.

Same story.

Clean.

The third car—the McLaren—sat slightly angled, its rear door cracked open just enough to notice something off.

My instincts tightened.

I stepped closer. Opened the door fully.

And there—on the backseat—my entire world narrowed.

A compact black cylinder sat nestled against the Alcantara upholstery like it belonged there.

Matte finish.

No seams. No markings.

Just a single red LED blinking once every second.

And beneath it—a thin wire connected to a small detonator cap taped to the side.

My pulse spiked.

Recognition hit instantly.

This wasn't just a bomb—it was a military-grade shaped charge.

Designed to direct the blast outward—Precise destruction rather than chaotic dispersion.

C4 or Semtex.

Enough to shred the interior. Enough to turn the car into a fireball.

Enough to kill everyone within a twenty-foot radius.

My eyes locked onto the LED.

00:05.

My blood turned to ice.

“It's a bomb!” The words tore out of me.

I didn't hesitate.

I grabbed it—lighter than expected—and spun on my heel, breaking into a run.

Without slowing, I threw it.

The cylinder flew from my hand, arcing across the asphalt, skidding hard before rolling to a stop fifteen meters away.

“Three seconds!” I shouted.

The lot erupted in movement.

But there was no time to react.

The device red LED blinked—

00:01.

One of the soldiers—Marco, young, barely twenty-five—broke cover.

“Marco—NO!” someone shouted.

But he didn't stop.

He sprinted straight toward it.

And then—he dropped, throwing his body over the cylinder, shielding it, sacrificing himself to absorb the blast that would have torn through all of us.

“Flee!” I screamed, already turning.

“Everyone fucking flee—NOW!”

Renzo’s hand clamped around my bicep with brutal force.

Hard enough to bruise.

He yanked me backward, dragging me toward the far side of the lot as my boots scraped against the gravel.

I stumbled.

Fighting to keep my balance.

The world compressed.

Too late.

The blast came.

A concussive crack—followed by a violent pressure wave that slammed into us like a physical wall.

Heat surged over me in an instant.

My feet left the ground, air ripped from my lungs as the force hurled me sideways.

Everything around me splintered into light, a blinding white that consumed my vision as death passed too close.

Then it vanished.

Darkness closed in, swallowing everything whole.

Wrong Marriage. Right Bride (Wrong Vows Book 1) - Chapter 10[4,795 words]

Chapter 10

ELENA

Pain woke me first.

Not the sharp kind that fades quickly, but something deeper, spreading through every joint like my bones had been shattered and forced back together wrong.

My ears rang with a high, metallic whine, the kind that swallowed every other sound and left only a hollow echo inside my skull.

For a moment, I couldn't tell where my body ended and the pain began.

My back felt like it had been dragged across asphalt and then run over for good measure.

Every inhale hurt.

Every exhale hurt more.

I forced my eyes open.

Not dead.

That was the first thought.

Not heaven.

Not hell.

Just—a room.

I lay on a narrow cot, the thin, unforgiving surface pressing into my back.

My wrists weren't bound.

But moving still felt like punishment.

Every shift sent a fresh wave of pain rippling through my body, setting fire to the bruises that had already begun to bloom beneath my skin.

I tested my fingers.

They worked.

My breathing steadied—barely.

Then—the door exploded inward.

Vincenzo stormed in.

His presence filled the room instantly—suffocating, sharp enough to cut through the haze of pain clouding my mind.

His face was controlled.

Eyes dark—black with something deeper than anger.

He crossed the room in three long strides, stopping directly in front of me.

Towering. Overwhelming.

“Why on earth did you follow Renzo to that meeting?”

“You’ve been in the academy less than a month.”

A step closer.

“You think you’re ready to ride with the Third Battalion?”

“You think this is some CIA field exercise?”

I forced myself to sit straighter.

Pain lanced through my spine immediately, sharp enough to steal my breath for a second.

I didn’t let it show.

“Take it easy, Vincenzo. Your men might be trained, but I can do everything they can,” I said, trying to mask the ache still rippling through me.

“And it’s not like surviving a bomb explosion is exactly a first for me.”

His eyes narrowed, a faint smirk tugging at his lips. “I see you mistake my silence for gentility.”

Before I could retort, his hand shot out, closing around my upper arm like iron.

The pressure was brutal.

Pain exploded instantly, sharp and immediate, radiating through my shoulder and into my ribs.

I bit back the sound that tried to escape.

Barely.

He hauled me to my feet.

Fast. Rough.

My balance faltered, and I stumbled, fighting to stay upright as my body protested every movement.

Fresh pain flared along my ribs.

The burn on my arm.

The aching, growing bruise where the explosion had kissed my skin too close.

My legs wobbled. My breath came in shallow gasps.

He didn't care.

He dragged me out of the room.

Down a short corridor.

My bare feet scraped against the cold concrete, each step jarring the bruises that were already blooming across my back and legs.

The explosion had thrown me hard.

I could feel the dull pressure behind my eyes—warning me of a possible concussion.

The sharp sting along my ribs.

For a moment—memory and reality blurred.

We moved through another door.

And into a larger space.

A garage bay.

Dimly lit.

Concrete floors stained with oil and time.

Renzo knelt in the center of the room.

His wrists were bound behind his back with heavy zip-ties.

His posture was still.

His head was slightly bowed—but not in defeat.

His head had been shaved clean.

Dark stubble already beginning to prick through his scalp.

He didn't look up.

Ciro stood a few paces away.

Tall. Still. Composed.

A Glock 19 rested in his hands, held in a perfect two-handed grip—low, ready.

Vincenzo shoved me forward.

Hard.

I stumbled, barely catching myself as pain shot through my elbow and up my shoulder.

“You think our world is a joke?”

His voice echoed off the concrete walls.

“You think you can just tag along on a high-risk sit-down because you're bored?”

A step closer.

“Because you're angry I left to check on Violet?”

I opened my mouth, ready to answer.

“On your knees.”

Vincenzo's command sliced through the air like a blade, cutting off every word before it could leave my lips.

I froze.

For a split second—everything stilled.

Then—

Ciro moved.

Fast.

His boot drove into the back of my right knee with brutal precision.

Cartilage cracked.

My leg gave out instantly.

I dropped hard to the ground, knees slamming into concrete with a sharp, sickening impact.

A raw cry tore from my throat before I could stop it.

Pain exploded through my leg.

My vision blurred for a second—but I forced it back.

I forced myself to stay conscious.

“I forced him.”

The words tore out of my throat—strained, barely holding together.

“I pressured Renzo to take me. He didn't want to. Leave him out of this.”

For a fraction of a second, there was only silence.

Then—impact.

Pain exploded across my back as something heavy slammed into me with brutal precision.

A baton.

Not meant to maim. Just to break you down.

Air was driven from my lungs in a violent gasp as my body arched forward, muscles locking in reflex.

White spots burst across my vision, bright and disorienting, swallowing the edges of the room.

The explosion's aftershocks had already left me raw—every nerve exposed, every breath a negotiation with pain.

This—this was another layer.

Hot. Deep.

The force of the strike radiated across my shoulder blades and down my spine, settling into a burning ache that refused to fade.

I sucked in a shaky breath, biting down on a groan.

Barely holding it together.

Ciro's voice cut through the haze.

Cold. Flat.

"Do not speak unless spoken to."

I swallowed hard.

Tasted iron.

Blood—where I'd bitten my tongue without realizing.

I forced my head up slightly.

Vincenzo's fists were clenched at his sides.

But his gaze—his gaze flicked away from me the moment the baton had landed.

Just for a second.

Like he couldn't bear to watch.

Then he turned.

And started pacing.

Fast and restless.

Boots striking concrete in sharp, controlled echoes that filled the room with a rhythm of contained fury.

“Renzo cannot be forced to do anything,” he said, voice deliberate, each word measured like a strike.

“He knows the modules, the operandi of this family. He took you on a mission that could have ended your life—a woman who had no clue how our world operates.”

“He hated you so much he wanted you gone. He knew the risks of meeting with other families, yet he did it anyway, all because of that foolish promise he made to Violet’s sister on her deathbed.”

“So no, Renzo knew exactly what he was doing. And you... you ignored my calls. Not once. Not twice. Again. And again. Such defiance isn’t courage. It’s ignorance. It means you underestimated me. And you will learn—quickly—what that costs.”

He stopped suddenly. Right in front of me.

Close enough that I had to tilt my head up to meet his eyes.

I forced my gaze down to the floor instead, focusing on the dull, stained concrete beneath my knees.

The weight of every decision I had made pressed down on me.

I could face whatever punishment was coming, accept it fully—but I could only hope that Renzo would be spared.

I knew Renzo hated me, yet I didn’t believe he truly wanted me dead.

The way he had yanked me away from the blast’s direct path... if he hadn’t steered me toward that particular side, I would have been reduced to ashes.

Vincenzo exhaled slowly through his nose, then straightened.

“The Sicilians didn’t come tonight to kill anyone. Flattening the tires? That was deliberate—to avoid human casualties.”

“The directional explosives... they weren’t meant for our men. They were meant to destroy the vehicles, nothing more.”

He let the words settle.

Then his gaze sharpened, and he crouched, bringing his face level with mine.

Close. Dangerous.

“If they wanted all of you dead, they wouldn’t have wasted time with tires. The blast would have hit while you were driving home.”

A pause.

“The Sicilians have already taken responsibility for the attack. We’ll deal with them—on our terms. At the right moment.”

He leaned slightly closer, voice dropping to a lethal cadence.

“Matteo Alvarez and the Sicilians are secret partners. The Sicilians planted those bombs in the vehicles parked outside to send a message—proof that Matteo is watching you.”

“If you had stayed away from that meeting, nothing would have gone wrong. But you didn’t. And your reckless move—taking that bomb from the car—cost me the entire third battalion. Somehow, only you and Renzo survived. That’s... surprising.”

The room went still again.

I stayed on my knees.

Breathing slow.

Pain still pulsing through my body—but now, something else had taken root beneath it.

Understanding.

And something more dangerous than the pain.

I lifted my eyes.

Just slightly.

Not enough to challenge. But enough to be seen.

“You left me—”

“I left to make sure Violet didn’t die in a ditch because her driver clipped a guardrail.”

Vincenzo’s voice cut in—low, but edged with something sharp enough to slice clean through my defiance.

Because her driver clipped a guardrail?

That's what nearly got her killed?

The absurdity of it cut through the tension like a knife.

He straightened to his full height, posture rigid, the anger still there but buried deeper now.

His gaze shifted.

First to Renzo. Still kneeling.

Then back to me.

"You've only seen the restrained version of me. The one who kisses you at the altar instead of snapping your neck. The one who walks away instead of finishing what he started in your bedroom."

"Ask Ciro. Ask Renzo."

"The other side of me—the one you haven't met—has no humanity left. No mercy. No second thoughts. You don't want to see it."

A pause.

"Get up."

The command was simple.

But my body refused to cooperate.

I tried.

The moment I shifted my weight, my knee buckled again, sending a sharp, searing pain straight up my leg.

My breath hitched as my body collapsed slightly to the side, the floor rushing closer before I caught myself with trembling arms.

White-hot pain bloomed across my leg.

I clenched my jaw, fighting it.

"I'm too weak..."

“Do not speak unless spoken to.” Ciro stepped forward immediately, baton raised, ready to strike again.

Before it could land, Vincenzo’s voice cut through the air, his eyes locked on Ciro.

“Enough.”

Ciro froze, every muscle tensing, then relaxed only at Vincenzo’s command.

Vincenzo stepped forward instead.

He bent slightly, and before I could protest, he hooked an arm under mine and lifted me himself.

The movement surprised me.

Not because of the strength—but because of the control.

He didn’t yank. Didn’t drag.

He adjusted my weight carefully, steadying me just enough to keep me upright.

Still—his grip burned.

Every touch seemed to press into the bruises already forming beneath my skin, igniting fresh waves of pain that forced me to bite down hard on the inside of my cheek.

“You don’t go anywhere without my explicit permission. Not a meeting. Not a walk. Not a single breath of fresh air unless I know exactly where you are.”

He leaned in slightly, his voice dropping to a low, dangerous whisper meant for me alone.

“Next time you pull something like this... I won’t let Ciro stop at one strike. I’ll chain you to this villa myself.”

The words sank deep, leaving no room for doubt.

His eyes flicked to Ciro.

“I know how we discipline soldiers who step out of line. But this... this is my wife.”

“I know the rules. But you will not treat her like one of your recruits. Not now. Not ever. Do not—ever—strike her again.”

Ciro simply nodded.

Without a word, he lowered his weapon and stepped back three measured paces, creating distance between us.

I froze, caught somewhere between disbelief and confusion.

Vincenzo was giving orders to his second in command—never to touch me again, never to treat me like one of his recruits.

I didn't know what to feel. Relief? Confusion? Awe? All of it at once.

Renzo remained on his knees where he was, head bowed, shoulders still.

He hadn't spoken since Vincenzo dragged me in. Not once.

And now I understood why.

He wasn't silent out of fear alone.

He knew the rules—words were not to be spoken unless expressly permitted.

Vincenzo turned back to me, his gaze unflinching, carrying the weight of authority and intent.

"Lock Renzo in the dark cell for seven days," he said without looking away from me.

"Seven days?" Ciro confirmed.

"Seven days. No light. No distinction between day and night."

A pause.

"No food."

Ciro nodded once.

"Let his stomach remind him," Vincenzo continued, "what happens when he lets personal feelings override orders on a mission."

"Understood."

Ciro moved.

Without hesitation, he stepped forward and hauled Renzo to his feet by the elbow with firm, controlled force.

Renzo didn't resist.

Didn't struggle.

Didn't even lift his head.

And—he didn't look at me.

Not once.

As they passed, as he was dragged toward the door, he remained silent.

Composed.

The door closed behind them with a heavy, echoing clang that seemed to settle into the bones of the room.

The silence that followed was suffocating.

And then—guilt hit.

Hard.

It crashed over me like a wave, stealing what little air I had left.

I'd begged to go.

Insisted. Pushed. Pressed.

And now—

Renzo was being punished.

Not just punished—isolated.

Starved.

Locked away in darkness for seven days because I couldn't stand being left behind.

My chest tightened painfully.

Vincenzo stepped closer again.

I tensed instantly when his hand lifted toward me.

Instinct screamed.

Bracing for pain.

But instead—his fingers slid gently behind my neck.

Careful.

He pressed lightly against the fresh welt at the base of my skull, and I couldn't stop the sharp hiss that escaped me at the contact.

His touch stilled.

For a second.

Then softened.

“Sit on the chair,” he ordered.

Quieter now. But still firm.

I forced myself to move.

Every muscle protested.

Every step sent sharp, biting pain through my back and ribs.

My knee wobbled, threatening to give out again, and I had to grip the edge of the chair to steady myself before lowering down.

I sank into it slowly.

Then folded in on myself.

Knees drawn to my chest.

Arms wrapped tightly around my body as if I could physically hold the pieces together.

“Stay here,” Vincenzo said.

Then his footsteps retreated, fading into the distance.

The room fell into total silence, heavy and absolute.

Barely two minutes later, footsteps returned.

I didn't need to look up to know who it was.

Vincenzo approached with a first aid kit, every step measured.

He crouched in front of my chair and opened it with quiet precision, the soft click of the latches breaking the tense stillness.

I tensed, disbelief coiling in my chest.

There was no way—the cold, ruthless Vincenzo, the man who hated me with a passion that could burn cities—was here to patch up my wounds?

No.

That wouldn't even happen in hell.

He reached for my legs.

His hands were warm as they settled around my shins, gently guiding my legs outward from where I had curled them in tight.

The contact sent an unexpected jolt through me—not pain this time, but something almost unfamiliar.

Something that didn't hurt.

He moved with precision, unfolding me slowly, one leg at a time, adjusting my position so I was no longer twisted into a tight, protective curl.

He lifted a clean handkerchief from the kit and pressed it to my cheek.

The cloth came away almost immediately damp with tears I hadn't even realized were falling—tears born of Renzo's condemnation to that dark cell, of the searing pain from the bomb explosion, of Ciro's baton striking my upper back with such force I could feel the bone beneath protest.

I couldn't tell which agony had drawn them out, only that they were mine, unexpected and unstoppable.

Vincenzo didn't react.

Just a quiet, measured pause before he set it aside, reached for another handkerchief, and continued with slow, deliberate care.

His hand moved with precision across my face—temples first, then under my eyes, tracing along my jaw.

Each motion was almost clinical, but the gentleness beneath it was impossible to miss.

Careful. Attentive.

Like he was handling something fragile—something that might break if he pressed too hard.

My breathing hitched once.

Then again.

But slowly, under the rhythm of his touch, the sobs began to ease.

Not because the pain was gone—it wasn't.

But because something in the way he moved quieted it.

Calmed it.

By the time he finished, my face felt clean, the coolness of the cloth lingering against my skin, my breathing uneven but no longer spiraling.

“Lie down on the floor,” he said softly.

A pause.

“On your stomach.”

I hesitated. Just for a second.

Then obeyed.

Slowly lowering myself from the chair to the cold concrete, every movement sending a sharp protest through my ribs.

I bit back a wince, but it still slipped out as a quiet hiss when my weight shifted.

The floor was hard.

But stable.

Vincenzo moved beside me, kneeling with quiet efficiency.

His presence felt different now—less like a threat, more like a controlled force operating within boundaries only he understood.

His fingers reached for the hem of my torn top.

“Lift your arms if you can.”

I did.

Carefully.

He peeled the fabric up and over my head with infinite care, as though the smallest mistake might cause pain I wasn't ready to endure.

The cool air brushed across my skin immediately.

Exposed. Sensitive.

And then—the full damage was revealed.

A thick, angry welts ran across my back—deep, purpling bruises where the baton had struck.

The skin around them was already swollen, darkening into colors that promised worse pain tomorrow.

Vincenzo inhaled sharply under his breath.

Antiseptic wipes came first.

The moment the disinfectant touched my skin, I flinched—muscles tightening instinctively as the sting cut through the raw welts.

He didn't press harder.

He just adjusted his pace—slow, careful.

Then—the arnica gel.

Cool at first, then soothing as it spread beneath his fingertips.

He applied it with light, circular motions—barely touching, yet somehow reaching deeper than the antiseptic ever could.

The burn softened under his touch, not gone, but less sharp.

When the gel absorbed, his hands shifted.

This time—massage.

Slow. Deep.

His thumbs worked along the edges of my shoulder blades, carefully navigating around the welts, never pressing directly on the bruised areas, but easing the surrounding tension.

Muscles that had been locked tight began to loosen under his touch.

Heat spread through my back.

Not the burning kind.

Something else.

Warm.

Almost... grounding.

My breath caught again.

This wasn't punishment.

This was care.

From the same man who had ordered me to kneel just moments ago—who had allowed his enforcer to strike me when I hesitated, when I broke one of their codes.

He shouldn't be tending to me.

He should be punishing me for going to that meeting with Renzo.

Renzo and I should face the same measure of retribution.

So why was he caring?

I couldn't wrap my head around it.

The contradiction settled in my chest, heavy and disorienting.

I felt like I was caught in something I didn't fully understand.

Or deserve.

When he finished, he slid one hand under my elbow and another beneath my arm, guiding me carefully back into a sitting position.

I followed, moving slowly, my body still tender, still aching—but no longer overwhelmed.

He reached into the kit and pulled out a blister pack.

Shook two white tablets into his palm.

“These will help,” he said quietly.

He held out a bottle of water.

I hesitated for just a second before taking both.

The pills.

Then the water.

I swallowed them with a small sip, careful not to look at him.

Careful not to let myself linger on this version of him.

Because it didn’t make sense.

None of it did.

I had caused irreparable damage.

The third battalion. His most loyal, his best-trained soldiers. Men who had lived and breathed for his command, who would have followed him into any fire, any war, without hesitation. All of them—gone.

I could only imagine the weight that pressed on him now.

The void left in his ranks, the roles that would go unfilled, the strategies undone, the lives he now had to compensate for.

Every loss a testament to my recklessness.

I should be in the dark cell beside Renzo.

Not here.

Not being treated like something worth saving.

Like something... valued.

Vincenzo rose to his full height.

He didn’t step back. Didn’t turn away immediately.

He just stood there.

Watching me.

His gaze was intense—sharp enough to feel like it pressed against my skin, yet something beneath it felt different.

He was seeing me.

Not as a liability. But as something else entirely.

Something he couldn't quite name.

His chest rose and fell a fraction faster than normal.

The painkillers were finally beginning to take hold.

Not enough to erase the pain—but enough to dull its edges.

My body felt heavy.

My hands rested loosely in my lap.

My bare feet pressed against the cold, scuffed concrete.

I couldn't make myself look up.

Couldn't bring myself to meet his eyes.

Not after the gentleness.

Not after the care.

Not after the way his hands had moved over my skin like I was something fragile—something worth protecting—instead of the problem he kept insisting I was.

I kept my head lowered.

Watching the faint lines in the floor.

For him to leave.

For the door to open.

For the silence to return.

But the sound I expected never came.

Instead—I heard movement.

Vincenzo walked across the room—not toward the door—but to the wall-mounted phone.

An old landline.

Hardwired.

Used only when discretion mattered more than traceability.

He lifted the receiver, pressed a short extension, and waited.

A few seconds of silence stretched between the clicks of the line.

Then his voice came, flat and controlled.

“Congratulations.”

He hung up before a response could even come through.

The receiver clicked back into place.

And then—he walked back toward me.

I tensed slightly without meaning to.

He moved past me—and sat.

Directly opposite.

In a leather armchair positioned with intention.

Facing me.

He leaned back slightly, legs spread, elbows resting on the armrests, fingers steepled beneath his chin.

Watching.

The silence stretched.

And stretched.

Until it wasn't just quiet anymore—

it was pressure.

Heavy.

Like something physical pressing down on my chest, making it harder to breathe.

Then—

“Violet is pregnant.”

The words detonated. Like a shaped charge.

Everything inside me shifted at once.

My spine stiffened.

My balance—already fragile—tilted slightly even though I was sitting still.

My throat tightened instantly.

Saliva disappeared.

I tried to swallow. There was nothing there. Just dry air.

My heart slammed hard against my ribs—so forcefully I thought something might crack again.

For a moment—I couldn’t process the words.

Couldn’t attach meaning to them.

Then—slowly—they settled.

Violet.

Pregnant.

With his child.

The room felt smaller.

I lifted my head slightly.

Just enough.

“May I... speak?” My voice wavered, cautious.

Every instinct reminded me of the unspoken rule—no words unless spoken to—lest Ciro's baton find its mark again.

He studied me for a long moment.

Then—a single nod.

My breath trembled slightly as I spoke.

“What about the promise you made—the vows of this marriage?” I asked, my voice trembling despite my effort to stay steady.

“I understand that you hate me, want me isolated, want me never to be loved by anyone... but is it part of your punishment to betray me? To let another woman carry a child?”

Vincenzo leaned forward, elbows resting on his knees, his dark gaze fixed on me.

His voice was low, measured, and chillingly calm.

“First,” he said, each word deliberate, “I did not cheat on you. The child in Violet is not mine.”

“I have never—ever—touched her in that way. Not then, not now. The thought of it has always repelled me.”

I scoffed, the sound slicing through the thick silence.

“And you expect me to believe that?” I said, disbelief and anger threading my voice.

“You’ve spent your life loving her, protecting her, dropping everything the moment she needed you. If that child is anyone’s, it’s yours. And even if it isn’t... does that mean she’s been unfaithful? You wouldn’t allow that, would you? So just say it, Vincenzo. Speak the truth. Not like I could do a damn thing to stop you anyway.”

Vincenzo didn’t flinch.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Vincenzo said coldly, “I’m not explaining myself to you. Who the fuck are you again?”

A bitter, mocking laugh escaped him.

“Oh, right. You’re the daughter of the man who violated me repeatedly and stole my innocence.”

His eyes burned with pure hatred as he stared at me.

“Believe me or don’t. It’s your problem, not mine. And just so we’re clear — that same father of yours was one of my father’s favorite clients. He paid good money to violate my sister too.”

His jaw clenched so tightly I could see the muscle jump.

“You will be hated for the rest of your life.”

He leaned in slightly, voice dropping into something lethal.

“And when Violet has her child... you will raise it as your own.”

The air was ripped from my lungs.

It felt like a fist had punched straight through my chest, collapsing everything inward.

My ribs constricted around nothing, desperately trying to hold together something that had already shattered.

The room tilted violently.

For a few terrifying seconds, I couldn’t focus on anything except the roaring in my ears.

Vincenzo had a sister.

And my father — the man whose blood ran in my veins — had not only brutalized Vincenzo... he had violated his sister too.

The realization sliced through me like broken glass dragged across raw skin.

My heart felt torn open.

There was a sharp, physical pain behind my sternum that had nothing to do with the injuries already on my body.

Guilt surged immediately after.

I hadn’t known.

Couldn’t have known.

But that didn’t change the truth of it.

We shared the same blood.

The same name.

And Vincenzo—he had carried that pain for years.

Decades.

While I had lived with a name that, to him, meant nothing but destruction.

He shifted in his chair, crossing one leg over the other with a calm, controlled ease that made the threat behind his words hit harder.

“As you know, Violet has a heart condition that makes her fragile. Now that she is pregnant, the risks are even higher—she is more delicate than you realize.”

“For the time being, I will not deny her request to visit me as often as she wishes. That means you may see her here more than you’d like.”

“During her visits, you will not confront her, you will not raise your voice, and you will not stress her or the child she carries.”

“I warn you, Elena: do not behave like those unstable wives who lash out in jealousy. There is no love in this marriage, and there will never be any. Jealousy has no place here.”

“Do I make myself clear?”

My breath hitched, but no words would come.

He watched me for a moment longer—then rose.

Slow.

Predatory in the way he unfolded from the chair, like every movement was calculated to remind me exactly who he was.

“And starting tonight,” he said, voice flat, “you sleep in my room.”

My stomach dropped.

“It’s about time you start fulfilling your... wife duties,” he added, each word measured.

Wife duties?

We’d shared separate rooms since the first day of our marriage—and part of me had preferred it that way.

Before I even realized, my head shook, a small, reflexive motion.

“No—”

The word came out sharper than intended.

“I’m not letting you have sex with me.”

“Not like this.”

My voice trembled, but I forced the words out anyway.

“Not while you keep treating me like—”

“You will be in my room before 10:00 p.m. every night,” he cut in.

The interruption was immediate.

“You will not leave until after 6:00 a.m.”

Each word landed like a command carved into stone.

“That’s a command. Not a request.”

He lifted his wrist slightly, glancing at the heavy steel watch there.

“It’s 9:45.”

Another beat.

“I suggest you eat something substantial. You’ll need strength—not just for tonight, but for every night that follows.”

The implication settled between us.

“And if I were you,” he added, his voice dropping to something quieter. “I wouldn’t be late.”

“Not even a second.”

He turned and walked away.

Leaving me there.

Sitting. Breathing.

Trying to process everything he had just said.

My gaze drifted unwillingly to the wall clock.

9:47.

The second hand ticked forward with mechanical indifference.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Each movement sounded louder than the last, as if time itself had slowed just to make sure I heard every passing second.

Thirteen minutes.

That was what I had left.

Thirteen minutes before I was expected to walk into his room.

Before whatever “wife duties” meant in his world became my reality.

My stomach tightened at the thought.

Eat, he had said.

Gain strength.

Strength for what?

My mind refused to fill in the blanks, but my body did anyway.

A low, cold dread settled in my gut, spreading slowly, wrapping around my ribs like something tightening its grip.

My gaze shifted slowly toward the staircase.

The one that led upward into the villa.

Toward the private wing. Toward his space.

His control. His bedroom.

I would never let Vincenzo be my first.

Never.

No matter what twisted thing he was implying, I refused to let him have that part of me.

A man like him could easily force it— I knew that.

I had dreaded it from the moment I understood what kind of monster I was married to.

But I swore to myself, right then and there, that I would never allow it to happen.

I could run.

The thought came suddenly.

I could stand up right now—move fast, slip through the halls, find a side exit, and disappear into the night.

Disappear before the clock struck ten.

Before he came looking.

Before he decided to enforce his command in a way I couldn't escape.

But even as the thought formed—it unraveled just as quickly.

Because this place—this villa—was not like the others.

It wasn't just a house. It was a fortress.

Even if I somehow managed to escape this fortress, then what?

My chest tightened at the thought.

Ruslan Baranov's men were still hunting me across the globe.

And now I had made a new enemy in the Spanish rebels—if they caught me, I'd be as good as dead.

Running wasn't an option.

Vincenzo's fortress wasn't safety—it was just another, far more controlled hell.

I checked the time—9:55 PM.

No time to eat.

I braced myself for whatever awaited, forcing my legs to move.

Step by step, I walked straight into the place I feared most: his bedroom.

Every movement pulled at muscles still sore from the explosion, still bruised from Ciro's baton.

My body protested with every step, knees weak, ribs throbbing, shoulders tight.

Pain lanced through me, a dull, constant reminder that I had survived, but barely.

I climbed the stairs.

Each step felt heavier than the last, my footfalls echoing too loudly in the silence of the house.

One step.

Then another.

Then another.

My hand brushed the railing—not for support, but to steady the trembling I refused to acknowledge.

My pulse thundered in my ears, loud enough that I was sure he could hear it.

At the top, the double doors of his bedroom loomed.

My chest tightened.

My throat felt raw.

My stomach churned. And yet, I forced myself forward.

I lifted my hand and knocked, slow and deliberate.

"Come in," his voice answered—calm, measured, like he had been waiting.

I swallowed, my legs quivering beneath the ache, and pushed the doors open.