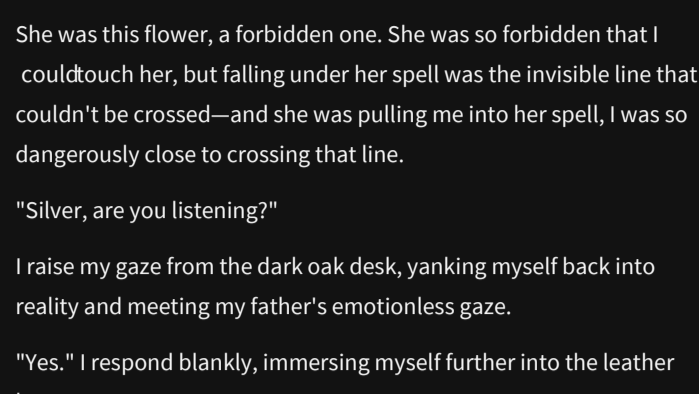


Chapter Thirteen



♡♡♡

Serenity, Serenity, Serenity. ⤴

The hypnotic beat of her name repeats in my mind over and over, contrasting a rhythm in my head each day that slowly corrupts me from the inside.

Walls that had been built for years were slowly crumbling all because of a woman with the silkiest of hair, the colour of a raven—and grey eyes that were a shade darker or lighter depending on her mood—whenever she was around me, they always seemed to lighten.

Her voice is a luscious melody of Italian but so so and sweet—reminding me only of honey. ⤴

And her skin—as well as her lips, just as so as she was—so vulnerable, so innocent, and yet so breakable.

She was this flower, a forbidden one. She was so forbidden that I couldn't touch her, but falling under her spell was the invisible line that couldn't be crossed—and she was pulling me into her spell, I was so dangerously close to crossing that line. ⤴

"Silver, are you listening?" ⤴

I raise my gaze from the dark oak desk, yanking myself back into reality and meeting my father's emotionless gaze.

"Yes." I respond blankly, immersing myself further into the leather lounge.

The longing stare he gave me revealed the depth of his hatred for me at the time, while the other gruesome stares of men in the room who were nowhere near the power I conceived held a set of discouragement for the lack of attention I paid them.

I'm sure their wives receive the same amount of attention I'm giving them at this moment. ⤴

"How much debt are they in?" I glance between the three men, all emotion now swapped for an edgy look—obvious that my current involvement with the conversation a-ected them.

"Uh, well, one of the Biker gangs owes us half a million—"

"And they've used all of it, still haven't come up with enough money for the due date." One of the other men continued on, explaining everything that I expected.

Of course they haven't. You've put your trust in a gang full of Bikers that know nothing but their ego. ⤴

I glance over at my father, his same blank facade matching my own as I lean further back, tilting my gaze up to the ceiling.

"Where are they now?"

All three men glance at each other, the one in the middle looking back at me sternly. "Downtown, Triphon Avenue, inside the Pub."

Tipping the rest of my water down my throat, I pass the glass back onto the tray and face the man head-on.

"I want your crew down there by tonight. Find them, jump them, and get all of my money back."

I stood to my full height, glancing at my watch for a second before turning on my heel to leave the suocating room of cigars and powerless men.

"We'll need some help, what if there's no money—"

"If there's no money, kill every one of them."

My order was stated clearly, and I made it clear that if any of my orders were completed incorrectly, they would also be dead before sunrise.

As I leave the room, I close the door behind me and follow the path down the corridors to the elevators, but not before hearing someone else's footsteps right behind me.

Already knowing who it was, I made no motion to talk to them and so, I kept going.

"Silver." She calls out sternly, making my jaw bunch up in anger.

"What?" I grumbled, pushing the elevator button once and impatiently waiting for it to come down.

Her presence is beside me, I could feel the burning gaze of my mother from anywhere.

One too many things were wrong with both of my parents, title mattered more than life and power well power mattered more than both. And like parents like son, they've passed that gene on to me. ⤴

Though I've earned the title I have, power was one of many things bestowed upon me in life. People fear when they see me, their widened eyes and whispers, it's all because of my name, but they know what I'm capable of.

"Where are you going?" I could see her arms folding from the corner of my eyes, her question deliberately stated what she wanted to hear. ⤴

Digging into my pocket, I pick out a cigarette from the box and easily slip it into my mouth.

"Picking up Serenity." That was all I said before releasing the first cloud of smoke.

Her distaste for cigarettes could still be hanging on the edge of her tongue, ready to tell me how they'll ruin your body, how unflattering it was. But it calms me from her, why should I matter?

"Oh." She sighs, her voice drastically changing based on my plans for the night, "Good." ⤴

I could feel the smile on her lips as I walked forward to enter the elevator, not having pushed the above button enough she stops the doors from closing with the tip of her foot. ⤴

Finally, I snap my eyes up from the ground, releasing yet another heap of smoke and managing to not blow it straight into her face. ⤴

An egotistical smile layered on her lips, her eyes blazing with mischief. ⤴

"Be careful, Si?" Her brow rises and I continue to glare straight into her eyes, not making a move to respond.

"Move." I push the elevator button again, and this time she does move, allowing the doors to shut as her back now faces me. ⤴

Eventually, the doors closed and my tense statue relaxed just an inch. Leaning back against the wall, I look directly up into the ceiling meeting my reflection in the mirrors above.

Ash fell from the cigarette between my lips, but I couldn't care less.

The doors opened and I disabled myself from the elevator, heading directly out of the building.

The almost-darkened sky drew my attention; I was probably late to pick up Serenity because of my longing encounter with my mother, and I checked my watch to prove it.

As soon as my foot hit the gas, I was out of the estate within a second, my cigarette went beneath the dirt.

Speeding through peak time traffic wasn't ever an issue, I started driving when I was fourteen—illegally—though it was how I was nearly a professional in it. Having taught myself, it was all I knew. ⤴

I made it to the cafe within five minutes, missing every red light and passing several slowing cars, the usual twenty-five-minute drive was easier than accustomed to.

My eyes effortlessly caught sight of the small woman sitting on a bench outside of the cafe. Serenity's raven hair was tossed up into a messy bun, little bits framing her so features that expressed nothing but a blank facade while staring at her phone.

I parked immediately, then headed out of the car slowly catching her sole attention, just as I wanted in the first place.

Serenity's grey eyes peer through my own, a sense of relief washing over her visibly. She stays sitting, each one of her lusciously tanned legs crossed over another.

"I thought you were showing me up for a second." She jokes, her upturned eyes staring up as she gives me a little smile.

It was refreshing when she smiles, she rarely did it but when her plump lips curled it mesmerised me to the point where it would be tattooed into my mind. ⤴

"I'm not that ruel, Serenity." My sarcasm came out nothing like it was opposed to be, my tone was flat and with nothing of emotion—just as it was trained to be.

Somehow my body had ended up right in front of hers, our height difference already being a big difference and now, her head barely even reached my stomach. ⤴

"Mhm, we'll see, Silver."

Cato's name on her tongue was nearly one of the best sounds I've heard in a lifetime. Her matching sarcasm with my own only fought against my inner demons, clawing out to reach her and keep her for myself. ⤴

But I know that can't happen. ⤴

"Ready to go?" I say, holding out my hand for her. Willingly, she grasps it and stands to her feet, revealing her entire goddess of a figure.

Apparent in a pair of light blue sweatpants hanging low on her waist, revealing her stomach and the belly button piercing there too. ⤴

I felt my jaw tighten when the upper half of her body was covered in a short, all-black top cropped just below her full breasts. ⤴

"You stare at every woman like that?" She teases, bringing my attention back to her fiery gaze.

Biting the inside of my cheek, I try to restrain from grabbing her by the neck and pushing her warm, so lips against my own again. ⤴

Her eyes flicker down to my lips then continue to scan my face with a small smirk.

"You know that I don't," I state, my lips forming a straight line as I hollow my cheeks and grip her hand to move us toward the car.

Fewer eyes linger over us, nothing I wasn't used to.

She says nothing as I open her side of the door, she flickers her gaze twice to me before smiling to herself and sliding in.

"Thank you." Her quiet voice whispers while gazing up at me, increasing my muscle restraint. I simply nod and close her door.

I take a deep breath while walking over to my side, preparing myself for the night ahead with one of the prettiest girls I've laid eyes on. ⤴

My younger self would be jumping with joy. ⤴

Entering the car, I caught a whiff of her enticing aroma, her scent immediately engulfing me.

"So, where are you taking us?"

Her voice echoes into my mind, demolishing every thought and sense.

I relax back in my seat, already racing the car out of the secluded parking lot.

"My personal tattoo parlour," I roll my neck, rubbing my hand at the back of it to ease the stiffened muscle.

"I'm guessing you own the shop?" She assumes, her voice laced with sarcasm.

Smiling, I attempt to keep in my smile and swerve around the cars humming in traffic. Serenity seems to relax in the seat beside me.

"I do own it," I corrected, slowly easing the car in front of the red light.

"Can you tattoo?" Her eyes burn the side of my face, I glance at her once but somehow my eyes can't look away.

Our eyes locked and her head tilted to the side, exactly what she did when she's either curious, asking a question, or if she's simply trying to grab someone's attention.

I've mocked her about it silently ever since we first met. ⤴

Without answering verbally, I give her a nod and look away but not before catching her eyes lighting up at my skill.

"Well, can you do mine? I'd trust you to do it more than someone else." ⤴

Something inside me jerks alive at her request. Or more her words.

She trusts me? ⤴

Isn't that what you wanted? ⤴

Tonight I had the whole parlour to myself, one of my workers was there to initiate our tattoos, although it seems I'll be the one doing the job.

It was good, I wanted to gain her trust tonight—one way or another. ⤴

"If that's what you want, Serenity." I raise an eyebrow up at her, assuring that she knew what she wanted before proceeding. But as far as I knew, Serenity was someone who took care of her decisions, knowing well enough what she was doing or getting into.

"It is," She brushes a lone hair behind her ear, my eyes flickering to the multiple piercings covering her ears, "Only if you're okay with it. If you aren't confident enough—"

I start chuckling based on the choice of words she used. Confidence came too easily for me, if I wasn't sure how to do something, I'd dedicate every second of my life to making sure I was way past my confidence in it.

"Don't worry, I won't fuck up your skin, Sweetheart; know what I'm doing." My tone dulls as more words flow from my mouth, and I realise I've been using my voice more with her than with anyone else in my life. ⤴

I notice her cheeks turning pink, which only adds to my confidence. I take in the comfortable silence between us both as the car becomes quiet again.

The darkness of the evening had now turned completely black, and my thoughts were calm and collected. As we move deeper into downtown, shadows appear on every street corner. These areas of town were notorious for criminal activity—me in other words.

Serenity's soft hum fills the car again, realising it or not, her fingers tap along to the rhythm of the song up against her covered, thick thigh that I also so desperately wanted my hand against. ⤴

"Wanting Serenity" was what I called my infatuation with her. Her body's curves and delicacy, as well as the calming aroma she carried on her, completely shielded her from other people's negative aromas. Her soft, accented voice was as calm as she was, always in a whisper with those she wasn't close to, but as loud as anything with those she was comfortable with.

Day by day I grow closer and closer to figuring her out, and yet, I feel as if I've gotten nowhere when I learn new things about her each day. Shaking my head, I run my hand through my unruly hair, allowing it to fall in front of my face as I park the car just outside the parlour on the roadside.

Serenity seems to realise we had arrived, now sitting silent and roaming her gaze outside of my window to take a better look at the shop.

"Looks cute," She mumbles, unfastening her seatbelt and rubbing her hands down her thighs as impatience riles her up. ⤴

She'd do that when she was nervous or impatient—spreading her hands and rubbing at her skin.

"Come on," I grumble, hopping out of my side and immediately making it to hers before she'd have the chance to walk out herself.

Opening her door, she slides right out, looking down at her pure white sneakers and then glancing up quickly at me.

"Nervous?" I tilt my head to one side, observing her fidgeting figure—innocent and captivating.

"A little." She whispers under her breath, breaking eye contact from the road behind me and glancing into my eyes.

"Don't be, I'll be with you the whole time." I shrug lightly, attempting to comfort her with my words but end up holding out my hand for her to grasp.

I clench my jaw when her skin connects with mine, a small rise of a smile on her lips.

There we go. ⤴

Moving us onto the road, we step onto the footpath and I reach my arm out pulling the store door wide open. Holding it open, I allow Serenity to enter, receiving a thankful nod before her gaze gets caught up in sightseeing.

The door closes behind me, Serenity has moved further in, but she still holds my hand and stays close.

"Wait here for me?" I asked, turning slightly to face her. Serenity nods, letting go of my hand and standing to the side.

Moving around the tables and chairs, I pass several stations filled with different designs and artworks—upon moving, one of my workers exited.

"Silver, good to see you." He comes in front of me, clasping my hand with his before moving away.

"What can I do for you two tonight?" He asked while glancing behind my back, over at Serenity. I noticed his eyes linger for a long three seconds, noticeably making my hands twitch.

Stronzo won't be touching an inch of her skin tonight.

"Nothing, you can go home, I'll take over." ⤴

Raising his eyebrows in surprise, he placed his hands up in surrender and started chuckling.

"Damn, doing my job for me." He continues to laugh by himself, ever so quickly rising my impatience.

"Alright, I'll head out, give me a call if you need anything."

Grabbing his bag, he slings it over his shoulder and heads out but not before smiling down at Serenity, leaving her to send him a small, fake smile back.

As soon as the door close shut, Serenity bounced onto her feet and started gazing around while I set everything up.

"You know what you want?" I call out to her, setting everything into place and lowering the chair for her to lie on.

"Yep, I sketched it out for you."

A pull of a smirk grows onto my lips, finding it cute that she sketched everything out herself. ⤴

"Is it going to be hard for you to do all this?" Her voice was closer now, as was her presence behind me. Standing up straight, I shake my head slowly and look down at her.

"Sit." I demanded, not pulling my gaze away from her. ⤴

Frowning slightly, she obeys and swings her legs from the chair, lying her body down against the long seat and resting her arms up on the rests.

"Show me what you want." I asked her a little softer, allowing her to relax a fair bit more. I wasn't used to being so close, I could tell she was on edge but still determined to get the tattoo—nervous at most.

Her smaller hands reach inside the pocket of her sweats, pulling out a folded piece of paper. She hands it to me gently—as if she were to be too harsh with it, the paper would disintegrate in front of her eyes.

Nodding toward the paper, I took it slowly out of her hands and began unfolding it, revealing the detailed design of her tattoo.

It was a heart, a bleeding heart.

The size was smaller than I anticipated she would prefer. A full heart, she had drawn raindrops of blood dripping from the inside, passing the meeting point at the heart's end and allowing the beginning of a crack to form from the tip.

Curiosity along with questions started to swarm my mind with her particular design.

"I'll tell you the meaning one day." She shrugs lightly as if reading into my thoughts. ⤴

My eyes scan her a little longer, absorbing her reign of serenity

She was much calmer now; she wasn't fidgeting, her hands were resting on her thighs, and her gaze was fixed calmly around the room, the stormy grey a sense of delight.

Shaking out of my thoughts, I begin to set aside the needles and ink to prepare for the outline of the tattoo.

"Lie back for me," I lick my lips and watch her settle back against the chair. ⤴

"You still want it here," I point to the place below my collarbone, and she nods silently. Her shirt was low enough for me to assess, so there wasn't anything else she needed to do.

Sitting onto the small chair, I lower her chair further via the pedal and she jolts a bit in surprise—revealing that she was still nervous.

"What do you plan on doing after college, now that you're not taking over the business, hm?"

I attempted to take her mind off of the situation, conversation always worked to distract another.

"I'm not sure yet... I'm thinking of becoming an art teacher." She said coolly, watching my every movement on her skin.

Black gloves covered my fingers and I started to outline her tattoo design.

"Why a teacher?" I continue, genuinely curious.

She heaved a tired sigh and relaxed a little more into the seat. Our faces were closer now and the more concentrated I became on her soft skin, the more aware I was of how entirely close we were.

"I guess I want to help younger kids grow confident in art, that's if they're willing to."

Humming along to her answer, I say nothing more and continue to draw the pattern.

"How about you? Your future is obviously already in hand, would you rather anything else than that lifestyle, Silver?"

God knows how much I loved to hear my name on her tongue, the way it curls and sweetens. ⤴

"There's nothing I want more than what I have now, Serenity." I speak some truth, looking straight into her enlightening gaze. ⤴

She holds eye contact with me, her breath hitching for a moment when noticing how close our mouths were to each other.

Flickering her gaze down to my lips, I made sure to look away before I lost control and had only half of her tattoo outline.

"You're distracting me." I state coldly, continuing the almost finished outline.

She scoots and moves her hands on the top of her stomach.

"And you're a hypocrite, D'argento"

Smirking slowly, I could feel her eyes on me—burning through me like a flame getting closer and closer to my skin. If it was anybody else saying such things they'd be 6 under or deeper by now.

"Nearly done," I mumble and she nods so ly.

"So, you really just consume this lifestyle? There's never been a time where you wished to be a normal human being?"

Her question threw me on guard for a second, I stopped my movements and looked up into her eyes seeing where all of the curiosity lay.

"When I was younger maybe? But not now." I replied blankly, moving my hand away from her skin and looking back down at the outline.

Before she could ask anything else, I rolled back on the stool and stood up, hovering over her frame.

"You ready?" I asked her, lining up the tattoo gun.

Serenity's eyes widen an inch, her hand begins to clench into a ball and her luscious lips part with terror.

"I'll be with you the whole time, it's not too late to back out." I placed my hand on the side of her face, running my finger up and down her cheekbone.

Visibly relaxing, she shakes her head slowly and begins to relax again with a defeated sigh.

"Fuck it, let's do this." ⤴

♡♡♡

AUTHORS NOTE

I watched Volume 2 of ST as soon as it came out and finished it within a 4 hour span... ⤴

Let's just say Lei has never cried more in her lifetime (although ST3 Hoppers Note scene is debatable) ⤴

Thank you all for reading! I apologize for the delayed update I've had a busy week and wasn't as motivated to write.

I'll see you all next Sunday! ⤴