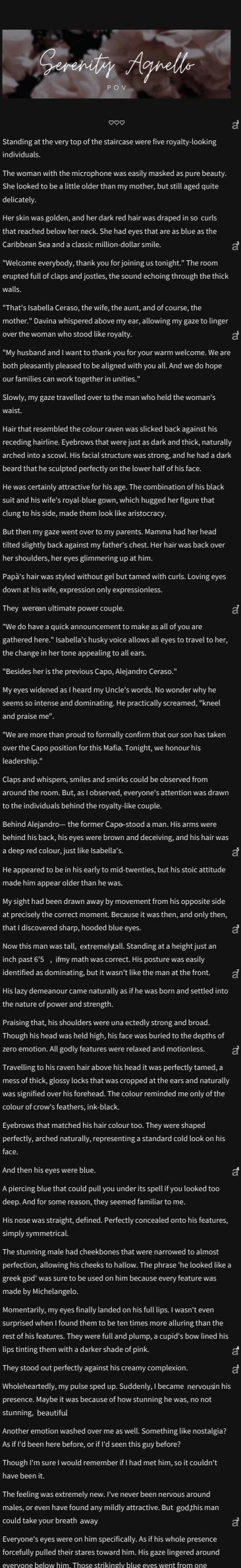
Chapter Two



everyone below him. Those strikingly blue eyes went from one individual to another, searching lazily across the room. My breath hitched when his gaze was near mine, and within only seconds, his eyes finally looked straight into my own. I gulped as he held our gaze longer than he held anyone else. His

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expression hadn't shi ed once, only o ering me a cold, boring look of nothing.	
As another second passed, his eyes le mine and I felt as if I could finally breathe.	
"What the fuckwas that" a My head snapped toward the deep, sarcastic voice. Turning around, I	
find my best friend and onlyfriend, Hayden Hart. a Born into the Mafia world, Hayden was equally as intimidating and	
tormenting as any other Mafia male. Although, the dierence between him and them was that he was completely gay.	
"Hi, Hades." I give him a small smile, flicking my hair over my shoulder.	
In his black suit, Hayden looked as sharp as ever. His golden curls were half spilling over his brow, and he was covered in jewellery, from	
his gold lip ring to the gleaming gold hoops in his ears. at	
my face, and draws his lips to my cheek, carelessly. "You look hot, darling." His British accent failsto make me swoon,	
and then he pulls those lips to my ear, whispering again, "Now, you better update me on why that fine piece of Mafia king was looking at you like how I look at my money."	D
I rolled my eyes and he catches it as he pulls away from my frame. "So dramatic, Hades." I watch as he pulls his tattooed hand in front of	
my face, stopping me from talking. "No, I'm not What just happened was very much notnormal."	
I ignored him completely, turning back to the floor full of familiar and unfamiliar faces.	
"You do have to admit how fineSilver is." Silver.	
My mind goes a little dizzy for a second. The name lingered in my mind, searching and searching for an answer as to why I felt like I	
knew who it was. Frowning, I turn my head to him in confusion. "Silver?"	
He hums deeply, his brown gaze falling over to the alleged 'Silver'. "Silver Cearso, the current top Mafia king in the world. Deadly and	
cold. He's choked multiple men to their deaths literallywith his bare hands." Hayden plays with his lip ring, scanning the said man I refuse	
to look at again lustfully. af "You have issues." I whisper to him and he flashes me a playful glare before continuing	
before continuing. "He's dangerous, Serene. He's careless with his actions, if you simply even blink at him the wrong way he'll have your head next to his	
even blink at him the wrong way he'll have your head next to his throne. Known for being emotionless, not having a care or rule in his mind.	
Known for being emotionless, not having a care or rule in his mind. Silver was purely the definition of what evil would be like in human form."	
م Hade's description of this blue-eyed man had my skin crawling. Yes, I lived with the Mafia and my father and mother's reputation was	
known as ruthless But the dierence between him and my parents was that my parents	
were protectors to me. Silver in this case could— as Hayden said- have my head next to his throne if I looked at him the wrong way.	
" Buţ" Hades continued with a slow, menace-like smirk. "His skills not with murdering but with that female body of yours is apparently beyond imaginable."	
Gulping, my eyes finally fluttered away from my devil of a best friend and toward the opposite side of the room. There stood the family of	
five, quietly discussing something with another family. It was a specific family of three. A father, a mother, and a daughter.	
Although the daughter I recognised. Her name was Sasha Tremblay. The daughter of the French Mafia. I see her at every social event, all	
Mafia balls, all business dinners, andrandom parties hosted around town when she's visiting New York.	
And let me tell you, I have never, evermet someone so stuck up and snobby in my entire life.	
Yet here she was, twirling her platinum blonde, straightened hair around like it was a piece of spaghetti.	
" God,is that the fucking witch from France or whatever," Hades twists his face in disgust, passing me a glass of what looked like to be cranberry juice.	
A Sni ing it, I shrug and take a small sip while humming in response to Hayden. He pins her with a distasteful look, his eyes scrutinising her	
precisely. "That dyed hair is bound to fall out any minute now, or maybe the extensions would accidentally slip out as she continues to	
twirl it." af	
a er—due to the juice down my throat. My face turns red as I realise my horrible choking scene had caused fewer eyes to look over.	
Sasha and her company were looking over already, the visible frown on her lips as she looks at me.	
Instantly looking away, I instead meet the eyes of Isabella Ceraso, the curious glance lingering over me and the man next to her, Alejandro Ceraso, staring bullets into my head.	
Oh, goodness.	
I gave them both a small smile, one of my shy, unconfident ones. Isabella had smiled back, returning to the family and as did her scary husband.	
Before I could catch the eyes of anyone else, a broad figure from behind them began moving and I caught the back of Silver Ceraso,	
striding confidently and lazily through the crowd of people. Blowing out a breath I hadn't known I was holding, Hades' warm	
hand touched my shoulder, pulling me away from my embarrassment.	
"You all good?" He looked at me with concern and amusement, I only nodded and handed the half glass back to him. "Think that's enough for me "	
for me," He chuckles and takes it, looking at me strangely. "There's nothing in this, Serene."	
I knew that, I just couldn't be trusted with anythingright now.	
My gaze fell back over to where the family was, only to discover them now having moved over, standing directly across and talking away with my own.	
with my own. d Mamma laughed at something Isabella had said, my father quiet but with a faint smirk on his lips.	
with a faint smirk on his lips. The distance apart did near to nothing to stop my father from noticing my gaze, which instantly brought his hand midair to make a	
simple signal to indicate my joining them. all for the signal to indicate a signal to indicate a signal to indicate my joining them.	
really hated thisl let my gaze switch around the room, somewhat trying to find the man that had captivated me for a second.	
But with no luck, he was nowhere in my sight. Moving through the individuals, they part for me as I make it across	
the sea of dangerous dwellers. Now and then my eyes would flitter from feet to feet across the floor,	
only until they stopped on one set. Slowly bringing my head up, I face my mother and her overly bright,	
drunksmile. " Isabella this is our daughter, Serenity." Mamma places her arm	
around my waist, and the other tall woman opposite us smiles kindly.	

"I'm not sure if you remember Isabella, Serene? You were only little when we first met them." I frown ever so slightly at my mother's words, I look at Isabella and

try to remember her face, eventually, I came up with nothing. "It's an honour to meet you again, Serenity." She places her hand in

front of my body and what do I do? I simply stare at it blandly. a That is until my mother pinches my side and thrusts her heel into my foot. "It's nice to meet you," I wince internally. I nod, finally taking her

hand in mine.

Isabella smiles and gestures toward the man beside her, the husband His dark gaze was accompanied by a hardened expression, leaving little to no breath between my lungs.

"Alejandro Ceraso," His voice was dark, thickly laced with an accent identical to my father's. But Alejandro's voice was huskier, whereas

my father's was more smooth. I took his hand too, my smaller palm greeting his huge one.

"And our nephew..." Isabella looked toward the redheaded boy standing a few feet away, he was talking to a blonde woman, one who had her hands naturally all over him.

Isabella rolls her eyes and looks back towards me, "I apologise, he gets distracted easily." I shrug lightheartedly and give her a small, awkward smile.

"Congratulations to your son on his new role." My mother says, stepping a little closer to my side and simply placing a hand on the small of my back, beginning to draw small circles on my skin.

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"Thank you, Arabella. I would introduce you to him but he's wandered o somewhere..." She seems to make eye contact with her husband, silent words forming between them.

a "You all should come for dinner sometime, we're interested in talking business with you both again." đ

My mother was now the one to look at Papà, the same silent look passing between them as Isabella made with Alejandro.

My father's cold eyes shi ed to my questioning ones for a brief moment, and I was certain I looked more terrified than curious.

He looks away, giving Alejandro a similar cold stare.

"The three of us are honoured, thank you for the invite." Mamma squeezes my waist comfortably and soothes my nerves.

Isabella smiles lightly and places her arm through Alejandro's, "Well, we will let you enjoy the rest of the celebration, we hope to hear from you soon, sí?"

Papà looks over at her, a single so nod in agreement. "Presto." His accent rolls with the words, Mamma smiling too and parting me away from the two.

Translation: "Soon."

"You okay, flower?" Mum whispers gently into my ear, I nod and give her a small smile. "All good, Mamma."

We saunter back into the crowd, my mother sipping clearly on more bitter champagne and my father beside her, his arm around her as he chats with Uncle Theo and Nico.

I quickly grow bored again. I can't help but return my gaze to the Cerasos. They appeared to be so out there, buzzing and adoring while yet so secretive. Not to mention, the most enticing son not being even present at his own ball. a

My eyes search around the room for Hayden, definitely in the mood to hear about all the gossip he would've caught from around the room. He was simply a Penelope Featherington when it came to events such as this. đ

When I finally found him far across the room, his eyes met mine before they widened with distress and crisis. I frowned and looked around him, dropping my gaze to the woman in front of him.

I had to cover my mouth from cackling again. It appeared Sasha Tremblay had no clue about Hayden's sexuality, which to be fair was no one's fault if you didn't knowHayden. He simply dressed and had the voice of a straight white boy.

But, oh, poor thing He was simply being attacked by Sasha's grubby french paws. Her hands gliding up his blazer, Hayden simply laughing awkwardly and making awkward eye contact with me every second. Excusing myself, the crowd parts for me as I make my way down the ballroom. As I start approaching Hayden he immediately moves out of the corner he was trapped in, gliding past Sasha and not failing to push her ever so slightly.

"Serenity!" He cheers, coming to my side and wrapping an arm around my waist, protecting himself almost. I watch the girl turn in annoyance, the familiar frown on her lips churning my gut.

"Serenity." Sasha's accent curls my name around her tongue with pure bitterness, not even an ounce of flattery portrayed.

I don't bother to smile, I'll never smile at someone who doesn't respect me. Nor would I ever fake to like someone, it's something I'd never tolerate, hence why Hades is my only friend. đ

"Do you need something, Sasha?" I calmly stated, so ly tilting my head up to reach her gaze. Sasha steps forward, trying to intimidate me. Her petite frame almost mocks my slightly short, curvaceous one, but I fail to amuse her.

"I want you to get out of my way, princess"

I scrunch my face up slightly. The nickname only made me cringe, the number of times I've been called 'princess' according to my position in the hierarchy has made the word somewhat sinful to my ears.

"Aren't you a 'princess' yourself, Tremblay?" I look up to Hades, watching him quirk an eyebrow at her. When I look back up at her, her red cheeks are visible and it seems that Hades had gotten under her skin.

"Do yourself a favour and walk away," I say with a sigh, obvious that I was over her crap. She sco s, looking between us both with empty distaste. a

I hear her mutter something incoherent while passing by and I grip her arm before she could o icially be out of sight. I lean up to her ear and whisper, "Just to let you know, helikes men" đ

The colour of beetroot fills her pale cheeks, a snicker of a smirk crawling on my lips as I watch her hu with frustration and yank her arm from my grip, striding o.

"Oh, you're evil," Hades chuckles in my ear grasping me out of the stu y state I was in. I turn in his arms and smile up at him. "And I love it." He grins, I smack his shoulder playfully and glide out of his arms. "Oh! I forgot to mention that I'm leaving early tonight. My mothers got me by the head, I have to complete training which somehow had

to be done at fucking midnight, can you believe it?" He sco s and runs a ringed hand through his curls, making them

bounce down his forehead. I pout and wrap my arm around his arm, "You're going to leave your only greatest, truest, and hottest friend?"

Hayden rolls his eyes at me, looking up at the ceiling with conflict.

"You know you could always come with— "No." I respond quickly. I knew what he was going to say since he asked all the time, but I was never interested. Never

"Where is Darla anyway?" I ask, referring to his mother.

Hades shrugs and looks over his shoulder. "Probably in some corner plotting to murder every male insight."

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Darla, Hayden's mother, was known as one of the best spies and absolute lethal trainers in the underworld world. She was a woman who had a distaste for men, holding only the power of a strong,

independent mother. Darla and my Mamma got along quite well, thus why Hades and I have always been as close as ever.

I let out a quiet giggle at his words and stifle it straight away as the urge to pee came over me rather abruptly.

"I have to pee," I say my thoughts aloud, already searching for the bathroom in the obnoxiously big room. a

"Might be up there," Hayden looked toward the staircase and I immediately shook my head, there wasn't a single chance I'll go up there.

Hayden sighs and searches the room for something, his eyes brightening as he finds what he was looking for.

"Come on." He takes my arm and drags me across the room as I hold in my pee.

It seems he led us to Isabella Ceraso, just my luck

She glanced over at us as we approach her, a kind smile forming on her lips.

"We apologise for disrupting," Hades looks over to Alejandro who holds nothing but a cold stare, "Serenity and I need to use the restroom."

Isabella instantly widens her eyes and pulls her hands together in

what looked to be remorse. đ

"Oh, yes, the bathroom is just around the corner there," She points to the corridor with dimmed lights but continues, placing a hand on my shoulder, "But there's a more private bathroom up the stairs to your

le ." She smiles gently at me, clearly meaning if I had my period or something I was guessing. Hopefully not referring to having a quickie

with Hayden up in the 'private' bathroom. Silently praying she didn't mean that...

"Thank you, Mrs Ceraso." I say so ly, my voice coming out quieter than it means to.

Still gleaming, she nods once and returns to her husband.

I took this as my chance to retrieve Hayden's hand and lead us up to the private bathroom. He stops suddenly and snatched his hand back with a reluctant stare.

"Nah-uh, she meant you."

Pursing my lips, I look up the staircase nervously before retracing my eyes to him.

"Could you just come up with me? I don't want to be alone."

Hades sighs and gives in, coming to his senses. Hayden has always been protective of me, not like my Uncles or father though somewhat near to it.

Only when it came to my safety, such as now. Being escorted to a bathroom was the smartest thing to do being in a room full of

criminals who probably all prey on women like me. "These stairs are so fucking long, it's going to be the literaldeath of

me, Serene." a

We make it up to the last step as he says that, I laugh lightly and tighten my hand on the forearm I was gripping.

"You are built like Hercules, how are you thatunfit." I mutter, walking in the direction Isabella had mentioned the bathroom was.

"Don't let looks deceive you, pooh bear"

I unlatch myself from him as we make it outside of the bathroom, a glare hitched on my face directed toward the smirking male.

"That nickname hasto go, Hayden."

Hayden chuckled and swung open the bathroom door for me, then continued to shoo me inside a er leaning casually against the wall. "Hurry in before you piss yourself." He mocks, leaving me partially

pissed o.

I enter the bathroom and thank the heavens for the gorgeous looking bathroom. While doing my business, I look around and notice how goldit was.

Everything looked expensive and made by deities. It was the ancient type of look, with a sink not of electrical use but with actual golden taps.

The mirror was shaped like an arch, painted in rose gold starting and ending in a swirling pattern.

There wasn't a shower nor a bath, though the bathroom was fairly big enough to fit two showers and tubs inside.

I flush the toilet and wash my hands with extra care, making sure to slip o my rings before doing so too.

A er that, I turn o the light and reopen the door only to find my very lovely best friend completely gone from sight. a

So much for protection.

Inhaling a deep breath, I step foot into the hallway about to turn back around, only until a breeze went by me and a glimmer of light down the other end of the hall caught my eye, stopping me. a I turn my body around completely, matching the response of curiosity however horror.

Down the corridor was a double-door room, a balcony further inside, the doors wide open. The white curtains were being puppeteered by the wind, leaving the ebony sky awake with the stars. a My body ached to turn around and return to the party, to my family. Yet, my heartached to leap forward and risk it. a And I did. a

Through the double doors was an openly wide resting room. The sofa is strewn across the room, with a rectangular co ee table on one side and a bookshelf brimming with novels.

It was fairly a comforting room, only if there were at least some light instead of the mere glow from outside contrasting inside. Pulling my attention there, aligned with the room was a terrace.

Sheer white curtains flew openly with the wind, allowing the view outside to adorn my sight.

I walked closer, curiosity piqued. The closer I walked, the more I could adjust my eyes to the large figure leaning over the railing.

By the looks of it, it seemed like a male. Broad shoulders, long legs, dark cropped hair. His figure looked familiar too. His elbows were slanted over the railing, his broad shoulders tensing under the black

fabric of his shirt as if feeling my presence.

My head tilts slightly to view him at an angle, but it didn't work. Walking closer, the side of his face comes into shot.

Instantly, my gaze widens with recognition. Impossibly, I was captivated once again.

A pale complexion, yet blemishless. So lips that had the perfect cupid's bow, both the top and bottom full and in between his parted lips was a lit up cigarette.

Inky black tresses fell down his forehead, only fewer strands

obscuring his dark brows. Because of the illumination of the night, I could only see one side of

his face, the other half was hidden plainly behind the darkness of the night.

I could tell that he was looking down at the cars that flew in and out of his home, his long lashes cast easily over his eyes, allowing no colour to be seen unless he glanced up.

And then he did.

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