I decided to go to the bathroom first so that I didn't look like the Demogorgon from Stranger Things A er peeing, brushing my teeth, and splashing hot water onto my face, I tie my knotty hair up into an e ortless bun and leave my room o icially. I rush down the stairs, my feet struck by the icy tiles that were minus zero degrees in the mornings. As I was passing the living room unquestioningly while I noticed all the commotion coming from there. I retrace my steps, entering the living room and drawing everyone's attention to myself and the slowest smile braces my lips. Nana Layla, Pops, Uncle Dre and Uncle Nico were all gathered around the sofas. "Morning!" I grin chirpily and walk into the room further, wrapping my arms around my grandfather once I've reached them all. He hugs me back just as tightly, patting my back so ly before kissing my cheek. As I lean away, he tilts his head to the side with a similar smile to my own. "How's my granddaughter, hm?" meeting my grandmother.

Chapter Nine

Waking up to the sound of immediate chatter and laughter surely

Today's classes didn't start until 10:30, so I planned on sleeping in a little, but my early ass couldn't help but check out what was going on

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forced my impermeable body out and ready of my bed.

downstairs.

I laugh at his attempt to determine whether I was having issues or not —he wasn't someone who had emotion plastered all over him all the time, though he apparently has improved significantly since first Shrugging in response, he rolls his eyes and pats my waist once to dismiss me. Next was my beautiful grandmother, Layla. She and my grandfather looked as if they hadn't aged a day since their 40s, though they weren't old either, It was still so bizarre to me. Nana hugs me as soon as I went to lean down and hug her. She quickly kisses both of my cheeks before running the pad of her thumb along my cheekbone. " Bella she's getting more and more beautiful each day." Nana turns to face my mother, who is sitting on the love seat with my father. "Tell me about it," Papà mutters under his breath, even though the whole family could hear it. Uncle Dre chuckles just as I hug him next, he kisses my forehead and looks at my father from over my shoulder. "Better watch out for those frat boys, Agnello." I catch my father rolling his eyes, and the sound of Nana smacking Andre on the shoulder came next.

"Don't play with him Andre, he looks just about ready to murder half of them anyway." Nana mumbles, glaring at Andre subtly. It was my turn to roll my eyes now. Moving over lastly to Uncle Nico, who stayed silent the entire time of the he y conversation—he replaces his blank face with a smirk as I tackle him in a hug. "Hi, Uncle." I peck his cheek, or more correctly, his annoying scru, before hopping o of him. I take a seat between my grandparents on the long sofa where everyone is seated. Nana takes my hand in her lap and so ly strokes her hand on top of mine, relaxing me.

"How's it going in college so far, Serene?" Uncle Andre asks and I give him a half-smile, "Good, I guess. I'm enjoying my classes." "Any boys we should know about yet?" Uncle Nico then peeps his head to the side, looking at me with a curious yet deceitful gleam. In the corner of my eye, I could see dad's head turn the slightest only knowing the scowl that would be set on his face. They're all so protective of me that I don't even think they were like this with my Mamma. Maybe it's because I'm their only grandchild/niece, or because I don't kill people for a living like them — or because they know you're a weak link who will cry about anything. "No, there aren't any boys," I confirm, releasing some of the tension. Uncle Dre physically sighs in relief, dramatically relaxing back in his seat with his hand over his forehead. "Leave her alone, boys. If she wants to have fun, let her." Mamma argued, leaning into my father's side. They all sco, and Uncle Nico glares at my mother. "We're men first of all. Secondly, no" Nana lets out a laugh and I can see my grandfather presumably roll his eyes at his son. Though Uncle Dre nods his head with agreement, all the while Dad and Pops stay silent in their casual non-smiling

"Okay, can we talk about something else now?" I whisper, shi ing in my seat whilst bringing my knees to my chin. Everyone nods and proceeds to make conversation—and thatwas exactly when Mamma decides to mention their little deal with the Ceraso's. "You've partnered up with the Ceraso's" Uncle Nico raises his brow, his eyes shining with curiosity. I watch my grandfather shi in his seat, sitting up a little more as he points a stern look at my father. "Roman." His voice held authority, possessing the entire room to become silent. My father lands his gaze on Pops, nodding once while they both keep a straight, emotionless face. "Can you trust them?" The question lingers in the air. For some reason, I never even thought Potential Mafia associates were di icult to find—allies, no, but allowing those people into your home, your family, the home of the people who hold the most powerful empire—you need direct trust, even if collaborating is only temporary.

Assuming that the Ceraso's were friends of my parents, my father knew them well and as did my mother, they could trust them.

Mamma nods her head with a small smile, "Don't worry, Dad. They're

Couldn't they?

good people, we can trust them."

My grandfather narrows his gaze, suspicious almost—but he hardly trusts anyone, besides family, of course. So, this new arrangement will take a long while for him to get used to— to trust. "So, what is their use going to be exactly?" Uncle Nico folds his arms over his chest, looking between my father and mother. Mamma smiles gently and plays with a strand of her hair, "Training recruits, adding trusted recruits—" "Meetings with allies and shipping arrangements." My Papà finished for my mother, tiredly leaning his head back and closing his eyes. He looked exhausted, probably overworking himself again. Concern rises through me for my father. Looking at him closely, his hair was slightly longer at the tips, indicating that he hadn't had a haircut in a while, and his eyes were a shade darker than the usual light caramel colour. My father took good care of himself, always appearing well kept and always carrying the power he exceeded—right now, he looked as if he'd fall asleep any minute, all the while wearing baggy sweatpants and a shirt that remained a size larger than his actual fitting. "Papà? Are you all right?" The question fell from my mouth immediately as I realised. Everyone's attention fell on my father, silence occurring. My mother smiled sadly at me, rubbing at Papà's arm assuringly, "Rough week, flower." He replies, giving me a small, assuring smile. 🏻 🝠 Frowning still, Mamma gave me a look that said she'd tell me later—

to which I nodded. "The son of the Ceraso's, Silver I think? He goes to the same college as Serenity." Mamma looks at me from across the room, sending me a smile before looking at the others. "The son?" Uncle Nico mocks, leaning forward to stare at me. I shrug halfheartedly, acting as if I wasn't just with him last night and wouldn't be with him again tonight. Tonight was the supposed fight he had invited me to—his fight. An hour a er he dropped me home, he had sent the address and nothing else. And I reply with anything either. I had a feeling he was a dry texter, which resulted in me never texting him—whereas when it came to texting, I was the polar opposite, going all out. I messaged Hayden telling him to join me because there was absolutely no way I'd be going to that fight by myself. "Yes, Silver. We're friends, I guess." I reply casually, and everyone's heads turn toward me. Here we go "You gues?" Andre says, amused. "Yeah, we take English together. He asked to be friends and I agreed." I fiddle with my fingers, sinking deeper into the couch as I become uncomfortable with the stares at me. "That's sus-"So cute!" Nana gushes, cutting o Uncle Nico. I blush a little and say

nothing, watching as my mother agrees and everyone else sort of

"Huh?" I stare at my mother, confusion swirling around me like a

"Well, he is the current Don. Business is made with him specifically,

"Does that bother you, Serenity?" My father asks, his stern voice intimidating me. It bothered me, but not in the way he thought why.

"Guys, it's good she's friends with him. It makes it less awkward when

contemplates.

whirlpool.

Great.

his father following a er."

he's around and about in the house."

I didn't want the more reason to be around Silver, he was slowly crawling into my brain and developing into a cru-Don't even say the word, Serene. "Nope, doesn't bother me at all." I confirm with a small smile, "I was just confused as to why he was going to be lurking around our house." I mumbled under my breath, making sure nobody could hear me—all except my grandfather who sco ed in response. Everyone was too caught up in their conversations to see Pops leaning down to my ear, whispering only so I could hear, "Don't worry, he won't be lurking around anywhere. I'll make sure of it." I look up at him, giving him the 'are you for real?' look, to which he only smirked and winked away the unsaid question. Resting my head back against the couch, I stare up at the ceiling and block out everyone else in the room, dwelling in the deep depths of my thoughts. The sun was down completely, the day nearly at its end. Deciding on an outfit for a simple underground fightwas harder than you would think. Simplicity wouldn't do, but wearing too much wouldn't do either. I chose a pair of slim, leather pants and a corset top that ended in a V shape above my belly button. I matched my outfit with a pair of ankle boots that were narrowed to a point and had a slight heel. Also decided on a single necklace and a few gold and silver rings on my fingers.

My hair was pulled back into a high ponytail, with my curls dangling down my back. A er applying lipgloss, mascara, eyeliner, and a few dips and dots under my eyes of concealer, I was all ready to go.

Hayden blows up my phone, telling me he was outside already.

Today was a simple day—classes were normal, and Silver was absent from English Lit, so I didn't get to see him today. Except, of course,

I informed my parents that I wouldn't be home for dinner; they asked

Our relationship was good; they let me go out whenever I wanted as long as I told them the truth about whom I was going with and where

what I was doing, and I told them just as it was.

I was going. Dad was quick to add bodyguards to my whereabouts but I assured him that I would be with Hayden all night, he was basically my personal bodyguard along with being my best friend. My father trusted Hayden, even thought of him as a son almost. Therefore, bodyguards wouldn't be a problem for me tonight. A er saying a brief goodbye to my parents, which essentially amounted to me screaming that I was leaving prior to exiting through the door. Hayden had music blasting in his car, and I imagined him scrolling through his phone at the time, looking for the perfect song. I entered and thrust my fist against his bicep to bring his attention away from his phone. "You look pretty," He scanned my body and gave me a wink, leaving me to laugh at him. "And you look sexy, new belt?" I pat his toned stomach and he swats my hand away, shaking his head with an eye "Switch is going to be there," He mentions and starts to round the driveway, exiting through the gates. "Ah," I sang, "Explains the belt." I giggle and he throws the middle finger at me casually while he turns a sharp corner. A er humming along to a few Taylor songs and ending it on Sex, Drugs, Etc by Beach Weather, we arrived at the venue. It appeared to

be an abandoned parking garage with multiple levels. Lights impacted the middle level, and shadows of numerous figures loom around the edges of the barricade, revealing to me that this arena was just inside there. We were lucky to find a spot hidden just between two Ferraris weirdly, most of the cars around us were worth nearly millions. I exit the car, grab my purse, and sling it over my shoulder before kicking the door shut with my foot. Next to Hayden, I wrap my arm through his and we make our way out of the parking lot, which is devoid of life but su ocating with lack of We pass through the mayhem of cars and end up inside a li , which takes us to the middle floor, where the fight is taking place. "Are you nervous?" Hayden murmured close to my ear. I let out a silent breath, watching the elevator doors open to reveal the sight of nearly hundreds of people. Backs faced us as we stepped out and I held onto Hayden tighter, hating the way this place was su ocated with some many people. "Not really," I breathed out through the racket of noise. Speakers echoed pop songs, blasting the place into an uproar. The he y smell of weed and cigarettes contributed to the loud music, especially the chatter amongst everyone too. The arena was filled with men and women—of all ages. Lots being close to our age, some being near my parents'. I took note of the seats packed with empty spots, being only further down the middle where the boxing ring was.

With no shame, I pull us toward the second row, managing to squeeze past bodies that smelt of all types of odour as well as

"Is that Serenity Agnello?" I heard a female voice say aloud, making

ignoring the eyes that lingered across us.

my back sti en but I never faltered my steps. We stop at the two middle seats, I plop down as soon as we land there and Hayden follows me too. "You okay, Pooh Bear?" A low hum escapes my lips, my eyes shi ing to the arena promptly. I felt uneasy with the eyes on me, I could feel them glare holes in my back— no wonder Papà wanted guards The high pitched sound of a microphone being adjusted brought my eyes and the others away— thankfully A tall male who looked to be in his late 30s stood inside the pit, a bright smile planted on his face, widening the thick moustache under his nose. "Welcome audience!" He greets, earning multiple howls and claps from the said audience. The man with the microphone starts to talk about the fight, the prize, and the supposed bets on who was to win tonight, while my gaze focused on something else. Or rather someone. Right behind the ring was the face of Silver and what looked to be like Switch as well. From between the lines of wire, I could make out Silver's shirtless bodice. Glimpses of his abs, which were as defined as an eight pack from heaven, tattoos scattered in various shapes and sizes, though they weren't completely taking over his skin. Still allowing his smooth ivory skin to vail my mind speechless. His inky hair drooped down in strands as he bowed his head, watching himself protect his hands with the hand wraps. My mouth became dry as I watched him, how e ortlessly gorgeous he seemed to be at everything.

And don't even get me started on those massive biceps, yes, also tattooed—one specifically caught my gaze, it was an entire tattoo of

Snapping my sight away, Switch ended up blocking my vision of him

Curious to see if Hayden had seen me watching him, I look up to only

"You like him." I giggle under my breath, watching him snap his eyes

"Shut up Serenity, you shouldn't talk." He mumbles back, rubbing his

Shaking my head, I look back up at the ring only to see Silver and

what was the infamous Medusa.

and I looked away immediately.

find Hayden taking in the sight of Switch.

down at me, glaring straight through my soul.

Hot or what, Serenity?

jaw in annoyance.

Switch gone from their previous spots and the man with the microphone now stepping aside. Right on cue, a man the size of hulk walks upfront. He was a giant lengthwise, his head bald and his face reminding me of a severely enraged man. His face screamed 'brutal murderer', his lengthy body and muscley arms looked as if he could squish Silver with only his hands. But boy was I wrong. As soon as Silver stepped up onto the ring, the crowd— along with my heart—went wild. Silver was tall, very tall. And he was muscular, not to the point of looking like a bodybuilder, but to the point where it showed that he worked out every day and that he could beat you and your friends up in an instant. His lower half was dressed in silky black shorts that reached just above his knees. They hung low on his hips, revealing his welldefined V-line, which was tattooed from his ribs down his pelvis and, I assume, ending mid-thigh. It was one large, single tattoo of something, but I wasn't close enough to make out what it was. Silver's name is being chanted, allowing his lowered head and cold gaze to catch a glimpse of the audience. Slowly falling on everyone, those blue eyes skimmed from person to person until they finally landed on my row, making successful and immediate eye contact with me.

I find no emotion behind his stare; he holds our gaze for what seemed like minutes but was only a few seconds right before putting the

"Fuck, you guys did it again." Hayden chuckles, and I swat him with my hand, taking a deep breath as I prepare myself for the ultimate

I hated this crap, but still, I find myself watching an old and yet new

The chant for the fight to start in 10 seconds begins, Hayden shouts the last three seconds and I lowly whisper them under my breath.

While Silver looked calm and unbothered—still the glare set in his gaze fired right through the beefy man, he, himself, looking rigid.

He was the opposite of Silver. Allowing anger to confide in him,

Mr Giant takes a large swing at Silver, but Silver doges it quickly and

This became the routine for about a minute straight, only when Silver

allowing it to be his weakness rather than a strength.

focus on his opponent.

violent fight I was to witness.

begins to circle him again.

di icult to read.

finalising the finish.

Silver Ceraso won.

And I had no idea why.

ways.

grin on his lips.

eat—failing muchly.

the boy in front of me consumed me.

friend about to beat up a guy twice his size.

The bell rang and now the two circle each other.

had finally made his first strike. Cheers erupted from the audience, echoing throughout the arena along with the powerful smack Silver's fist made to beefy's jaw. He stumbles back from the powerful impact, Silver continues to circle him like a predator readying to attack its prey. My eyes stay locked on Silver, memorizing the way he moves, the way his eyes are strained on the opponent with a look of only darkness. The beefy man seems angry, therefore he acts on that anger and entirely swings himself forward trying to hit Silver. And skillfully, Silver misses every hit and went for his own. Back and forth I watch Silver hit him, Beefy tries to hit Silver and it all comes to a halt when Silver manages to get him lying face-first on the ground. Everyone, including myself, stands to their feet as Silver turns the man over and starts hitting him ruthlessly. I even look away at some point due to all the blood. Though the opponent is still alive and breathing, he attempts to hit Silver a few times, which works only once. A powerful hit to his lip le Silver pulling away for a moment, the crowd goes silent, a few screams here and there for Silver to beat him up again. Both opponents have taken a stand and are now fully engaged in combat. Beefy hits Silver again, but Silver retaliates by hitting him harder, more powerfully than the previous times—more as though he was using all of his strength since he knocked the man of steel to the The man barely makes an e ort to stand, and Silver simply looks down at him, his hair dangling from his head, making his expression

Placing his foot on his stomach, Beefy stays down and the bell rings,

The audience cheers and my body nearly rattles from all the claps

Aside from that, a smile crept up to my lips, and a sense of pride for

As soon as he was announced the winner, everyone's chatter never dyed down as both opponents head o the ring going their separate

A lot of people began to head o while I decided to stay, hopeful to get a chance to congratulate him. Even if his presence made me want

to melt into a puddle, utterly hating my body for that reason.

"Right," I agree, looking down at his phone between his hands.

"That was fucking cool," Hayden says from beside me, a mischievous

"Switch said to meet them outside in the parking lot." He shoves the screen in my face, causing me to wince and flick my wrist in his face. "Let's go then." I grab both his hands and attempt to li him from his

Eventually, Hades stands and he's the one leading us through the village of people. My body squirmed and squished through many tall bodies, and some women as short as me struggled just as much as I did. And just as we got outside, my hand was forcibly removed from Hayden's, fulfilling my worst nightmare.

His head of golden curls was whisked away with the many others and I now couldn't find him. I took a deep breath in and tried scurrying past people, thankfully everyone started to separate leaving me less claustrophobic but still Next time I'm bringing a leash. Suddenly the side of my body was yanked to the side, my feet stumbled over another as I tried to regain my balance but fail when the yanking didn't stop. "What the fu-" I catch someone's greedy hands tugging on my purse and snap my head up, a man in his mid-40s, short and grubby, try to take my purse from my shoulder. "Hey, let go," I mumble, swinging my body away from him which made his hands drop but only irked him, he steps forward and tried to grab meinstead of my bag this time. Just before his grubby hands could attack me or my purse again, he grunts to a stop when a towering, shirtless male steps in front of me. a "Who the fuck are you?" Silver seethes, only imagining his enraged

Out of curiosity, I poke my head around the corner of Silver's body, "Take another look at her, even a step and I will kill you." His words He still hadn't spoken, grunting when it was needed but not a word. My grip on Silver's arm tightens further when the man starts to take "Money." He says, jabbing a finger in my direction—getting the sense Without care, Silver takes out a silver pistol from his pocket, leaving Silver carelessly deactivates the safety with a thunderous click, and

A breath of relief soaks right out of me—immediately recognising who had come to save me. stare detonating bullets through the man. I hid behind Silver like the wimp I was, my bag was in my arms being cradled like a baby because it is my baby and the male's eyes catch mine just as he tries to grab me again—I squeal and grab Silver's arm for safety, although he was quick to block the man from touching me. still scaring me shitless. him step away from Silver. more steps away. forward in front of the man, leaving him to cower away again.

This was embarrassing and somewhat hilarious in a way, but it was were rottenly sincere and I think the threat got to the man, sensing that he didn't speak English very well. I furrow my brows and Silver rolls his precious eyes, "Leave." Silver almost growls out, stepping Still tense, I felt better-ish, but as Silver turns his body to face me, I become nervous all over again.

"Are you okay?" His Italian accent pours through his teeth, comforting me oddly enough. I shake my head a little, slowly letting go of my grip on his arm. "Thank you, D'argento" I pop him a small smile, avoiding his intense eyes, though looking at his bare chest filled with tattoos, still glistening in sweat, looking into his eyes wasn't so much a bad idea. What if I licked— Oh my god. I could feel my face go as red as anything and I snapped my gaze up at his, holding nothing but a hint of curiosity in them. "Congratulations," I cough, "on the win..." I explain, looking at his lips, brows, and then eyes. A tug of a smirk comes to his lips, his tongue clicks and he shrugs casually—cockily "Thanks, Fiore Did you enjoy it?" He takes a step forward in front of me, unfortunately, my feet were glued to the ground right now, and not an inch of my soul moving.

my eyes as wide as the man. finally, the man stumbles back, shaking his head repeatedly, and murmuring apologies before slipping away into the darkness.

"Sure..." I look down at my hands nervously, all my confidence

vanished from the amount of anxiety I have produced within 5 minutes, I utterly had no energy to step away and be a smartass back to him. Silence occurs but his cool, slender fingers fall under my chin, gently li ing my head to meet his. It felt as if my breath was stuck in my throat, disabling any words to form. especially with the darkness consuming around us they looked all than a firecracker cracking I watch those captivating eyes scan down my body, only quickly side, allowing his fingers to slide down under my jaw, having everywhere he touched linger with sparks.

Those icy blue eyes held me captive, they were as light as the moon, too magical—enabling my silly little heart to speed and thump faster before landing on my lips, "Why so nervous?" he tilts his head to the "I'm not, just cold," I mumbled helplessly, feeling as if my words were gibberish—though I know they didn't because of how he reacted, that

small smile he pulled on every so o en curled upon those luscious lips, suddenly placed to my ear while his hand moved to my lower back, pulling mine into his body. I flush red as his cool breath fans the side of my neck, his lips grazing my skin too. "The little top you're wearing isn't doing much to help, is it amore miα" He whispers darkly against my skin, raising all hairs on my body. Translation: "My love?" I gulp, somewhat rising with a snarky comment. "No, but looking at you still shirtless is making me even colder." I raise my brows and he chuckles, narrowing his head down as he shook it with amusement.

He abruptly takes one of my hands into his, feeling how cold they were, he shakes his head again and begins to step back. "I'm taking you home." He states nonchalantly, turning around and pulling me along with him. The change in tone and attitude has my head doing flips. "But I came here with a friend..." I mumble out again, looking around for Hayden and with no doubt, he had either gotten distracted by Switch or is frantically searching for me around this parking lot. "And...?" He rumbles out in a bored tone, switching hands while tossing out his car keys from his pocket. "Come with a friend and

leave with a friend, what's the di erence?" He raises a brow as he and step in. "Can we at least get some food, per favor €" I give him the 'I'm lower lip into his mouth.

Translation: "Please?" Rolling my eyes, I do as he says onlyfor safety reasons, and "Where to?" He asked monotonously.

casually opens my side of the door, and all I do was reluctantly sigh "Wendy's." He hums, speeding right out of the parking lot.

desperate' eyes, which seemed to work a er he nods and sucks his "Put your belt on." He demands and shuts the door closed strongly. shamelessly watch his shirtless body slide inside the car to my le . "Wendy's?" I suggested and he nods, the engine of the car revving on.