

MAFIA ROMANCE

Chapter 1:

Serena:

I'm still damp from the rain, the water soaked into every layer of my clothes but I still feel hot. My blood is running fast, my head in a constant panic, and I hardly feel the cold air conditioning blasting from the front vents of the black Mercedes. I bury my face into my hands, gently rocking to keep moving, to keep myself from being stagnant, while the realization sets in from what just happened.

"Please, let me go. I won't tell anyone... please," I beg, whimpering like a petulant hostage, although I had anticipated being tied up and gagged, maybe even blindfolded, but they have done no such thing. Instead, I've been shoved into the backseat, just minutes after walking into work this morning and seeing my boss dead on the floor. "Please, I won't tell—"

"Relax," the man driving says.

He pulls the car to a stop, parking just off of the backroad we've been traveling on and into a gravel quarry that seems too complicated to play a deadly game of hide-and-seek inside. I try my luck anyways even though history has told me I'm not fit for gambling.

I pull the door handle towards me, the lock clicking out of place and the door flying open. I sprint into the rain, hearing heavy steps hit the gravel behind me as I do. I saw the bullet wound on Dr. Greco's shoulder; clearly these men have guns. Thankfully they don't use them now, chasing me through the rain.

Tires screech against the gravel, throwing dust into the wet weather and spitting white rocks through the air, until the culprit is sitting right in front of me. I skid to a stop, almost running straight into the sleek luxury car that has no business being out in this quarry, let alone anywhere not a showroom.

The door is kicked open, Alessandro Vitale stepping out into the downpour.

I shudder at his height, clearly a foot and a half taller than myself with eyes like dark, raw honey and a sweet smile that goes with them. He crosses his arms over his broad, taut chest, offering a dismissive look to the men behind me.

“I think I can handle it from here,” he says, his voice like thunder rolling off the clouds above, “seeing as you’ve done everything except for following my instructions.”

“Instructions?” I repeat, muttering under my panting breath. “They’re with you?”

“Ciao, men,” he says, his tone stiff. I don’t take my eyes off of him, his dark hair brushed perfectly back on top, even when soaking wet. He reaches for me, his hand hot as it wraps around my bicep, tugging me to the other side of his neon green car. “Come on, kitten. You just can’t help but find trouble, can you?”

I manage to slide my arm free of his grasp, the rain helpful in one way. He only switches to maneuvering his arm around my hips, putting me into the passenger seat of his car. I inhale sharp, the vents blowing warm air and a towel draped over the console between us, his hand tossing it onto my knee before he speeds us out of this query as fast as he had arrived.

“Am I in trouble?” I ask, shivering from more than just the rain.

He levels a grin, something that I admire but that also looks foreign on his typically stoic face. “Have you done anything worthy of being in trouble?”

I replay the scene in my head again, Dr. Greco’s body flashing through memory. I subdue a harsh flinch. “I don’t think I’m the one in charge of determining that.”

“You’re right.” He pulls the car down a private drive, toward a small lake house at the furthest reach of a cul-de-sac full of similar homes. He parks in the garage, the door shutting us inside before the locks on the doors pop up. “Come on, kitten. Let’s get you in the house.”

In my haste I blurt, “are you going to kill me?”

He checks his gold watch, lined with clear crystal stones before he even pretends to hear my question. “I just drove you away from an abandoned rock quarry in the middle of an unnamed road. If you think I’ve decided to kill you in my personal lake house instead of out there then your judgement is seriously flawed.”

I watch as he exits the car and heads into the house, the garage door button in one hand, his other pushing the door to stay open, awaiting my entrance. Even though my heart is still beating out of control, I get out of the car and follow him inside.

The house is immaculate with polished wood walls and red leather furniture. It overlooks the nearby lake, overflowing slightly with this storm that never seems to want to stop. From what I’ve seen of Alessandro already, I’d never peg him as the outdoorsy type.

“Would you care for a drink?” he asks, working at a pushcart bar that sits beside his couch. I take a seat nearby, eyeing the variety of dark liquors. “I recall at the club you preferred whiskey straight but you were with your friends and such. People act different in crowds—something about peer pressure, I suppose.”

The club was my first night out in years and it ended up with a stranger, who I thought would have stayed a stranger, taking me home and tucking me into bed. Alessandro was a

gentleman that night, and since then we've run into each other too many times to just be coincidence.

"Are we here to talk about my liquor preferences or are you going to tell me what is going on?" I cling to the towel from the car, using it to swipe under the back of my dark crimped hair. "Did you have anything to do with Dr. Greco's death?"

"I don't kill people, kitten. I thought you knew me better than that."

"I don't know you at all," I retort, "but I know your family and I know their reputation."

He hardly seems afflicted by my words, taking a seat directly beside me with a scotch so strong it makes my nose twitch. "My family certainly does have a reputation, you're correct. But if we are known for anything, it's about how discreet we really are."

"Discreet about what?"

"General affairs," he says between sips. "Let's skip the tough topics for now, kitten. There's a bedroom down that hall, the third door on the right," he adds with a pointing finger. "There's a beautiful shower in there, all the amenities you'd need. Go get some warm water on your body before you catch a cold in those wet clothes."

I stagger to move, still struck with fear.

"Need some assistance?"

My lips part but the words are done coming out now. Instead, Alessandro sets his glass aside and pulls me to follow him toward the bedroom he described. My shoes squeak with every step, my work clothes clinging to my petite frame as he ushers me to the side, reaching into the glass shower and flipping on the warm water faucet.

I shiver as the steam fills the room.

He returns to my side, his fingertips carefully moving for the hem of my shirt, the feeling distantly welcomed. Course, I don't stop him. I only stand perfectly still, his hands moving slowly up my midriff until my shirt is finally pulled over my head. I cover my abdomen of all things while he undoes the top button of my pants, then the zipper.

"Relax, I'm not here to hurt you, kitten. You're trembling."

I stand before this handsome man, a man I've met too many times in unnatural ways, while I am stuck only in a set of black lace underwear. My bra is too tight, the rain water forcing it to imprint across my back and under my breast, but I don't mind. Especially right now.

"You going to make me take the rest of it off too, or are you going to help?"

I can't help but look into his captivating amber eyes. "You're engaged, aren't you?"

"Name-only engagement, kitten. She has her life and I have mine." He cocks his head, his hands hooked on the lace panties that sit on my hips.

“Then why are you here with me?”

“I told you at the club that night, and at the coffee shop, and even at the post office; I’m here because something I want is also here. Why are you here?”

My eyes flicker up and down his masculine, brawny physic. He’s beautiful, that’s obvious, but he is also an enigma. Every time I’ve crossed paths with him, he has had subtle undertones of flirtatious energy but right now seems to have exceeded the line previously drawn in the sand. It’s so excessive in fact that I welcome it.

I *crave* it.

“Promise me you’re not a bad guy,” I say, more so plead. “Everything I’ve seen about your family, about you, Alessandro, it’s not good news.”

He smiles, the notion flawless and engaging. “Call me Alex. Don’t worry, either. I’m harmless, Serena. Perfectly harmless. Unless—”

“Unless what?”

“Unless otherwise provoked,” he breathes.

I don’t have time to reply, to even process his words, instead I feel his body pressuring into my own, his hands brushing up my hips and sides, clinging to me before he hikes my backside up onto the countertop. From here, we’re closer in height which makes it easier for his next move to play out.

His lips push into mine, their movements subtle at first, kissing me slowly and gently on the surface before they move in for something more salacious. I can’t help but melt into his arms, feeling them wrap tightly around my sides, his hands toying with the clasp of my bra like a threat or even a promise.

Either way, I want it.

His lips pull for mine more, his tongue dragging slowly down the inside of mouth. I gasp for air while he steals mine, his fingertips gently dragging under the fabric of my bra until his thumbs flip it loose. I manage the rest of the way out of it now, letting it hit the floor.

“Please—” I pant, unsure what I’m begging for right now, or what I wouldn’t beg for in this moment. “Alex—”

He wastes no time pulling me from the counter, my legs instinctively curling around his pelvis to bring me to his chest, his clothes still wet but it doesn’t matter. He turns, moving effortlessly with me pinned to his chest, his lips still exploring my own as he leads us both into the shower and under the warm water.

My back presses to the wall. His lips dance with mine.

This day hasn’t been easy and the last few weeks have been tentatively abnormal, but Alex has been the only thing on my mind since we met weeks ago in that dirty, dingy club

downtown. Since then, I've passed off our random encounters elsewhere as accidents but the reality is clear now.

I know what he wants and as it stands, I want it too.

I'm just scared to have it.

I press my hand into his chest, a signal to stop, and considering how strong he is, he could easily ignore my plea. He doesn't though, abiding long enough to pull his lips off of mine.

"I need to know," I huff breathlessly after he's taken all my air. "What do you want from me, Alex? What happens if we do *this*? What happens next?"

He sets me onto my feet but continues standing over me, his eyes diverting from my bare chest and instead undoing his cufflinks and his blazer buttons, the sight of his suit pooling on the shower floor making my heart pitter to a stop. He's exposed now, slightly more than me, and I can't help but gawk. He's well built in all areas; even the ones I didn't know I wanted so bad.

"We don't have to do anything, kitten." He runs a hand through his hair, the warm shower water rustling his gel locks. "I am content with just admiring the view." His eyes shift to my bare skin, everywhere except for the black lace panties I have on. Other than that, he is free to gawk at everything else. "It's a fantastic view, at that."

"I never said I wanted to stop."

His brows knit. "You didn't seem too keen on continuing."

"I'm worried." I shake my head, stepping closer to his dauntingly tall physic, something about his aura so intoxicating to me. "What happens if we go through with this and it goes wrong?"

"What do you mean, *wrong*?"

I shake my head, wishing the words would form easily in my mouth like they do in my mind. I just want to explain the racing thoughts that flood me all at once, holding me down and daring to drown me. I need to say it, to fully express myself, but I've never been good at such tasks. I'm no better at it now, it would seem.

He swivels toward me at once, my back slowly pressing against the shower wall once again. I hold my hands to his muscular abdomen, unsure if I want to pull him back in or push him further away.

"You're afraid you might like me, kitten. Isn't that right?"

I choke on a sharp inhale. "I've only slept with one man in my life," I admit, blushing. "He was someone I loved at the time, or I thought I loved, and if I do this now, I am afraid I'll be just as vulnerable as I was back then."

"Are you afraid of that? Of being vulnerable to me?"

He leans down, his lips pressing against the side of my throat, working their way up to my jaw and then traveling back down the plain of my shoulder. I shiver, chills working down my spine, my hands sliding up his warm chest and clinging to his collar.

“I—I—”

Of course I’m petrified of being vulnerable to him.

But I’m more afraid of not having what he is so willing to give to me right now.

“You’re sexy,” he mutters into my skin, pecking all around my neck until he runs out of space, moving south toward my breasts, “intelligent, ambitious, flirtatious, and intoxicating, kitten. If anyone should be afraid of liking anyone here,” he adds, his knees hitting the shower floor and his lips working down the plain of my stomach, “it’s me.”

I gasp alive, seeing stars when his mouth begins to make out with my core. It almost sends me to the ground in shock. His hands are prepared, pulling at my panties before being torn off of my body in a quick swipe, no longer hindering his tongue as it slides forward suddenly.

My fists curl into his hair, pleading for more, needing more, until I think I may scream.

I feel his teeth now, gently nibbling on my sex, the shock of pain and pleasure swirling through my blood like lightning has struck my veins directly. I hold back from giving in, from succumbing to his playful tongue so quickly, and it may be my downfall. Spots blossom over my eyes. I shudder so fall that my knees finally collapse.

“Whoa, kitten, easy now,” he chuckles, letting me slide to the floor carefully, my legs splayed out around either side of his knees. It’s too tempting now, especially with his bulging, throbbing erection just inches from my parted legs. “You have no idea how delicious you taste. Just as scrumptious as I imagined.”

“How long have you been imagining it?”

He smiles modestly. “Since I saw you at that club, wearing that tight, pink dress that came to your thighs and those stick heels with crystals up the sides. You smelled like honeysuckle and roses. You still do of course but mixed in with my scent now.”

I cower under his glare and those charming eyes of his. “At the risk of us both being vulnerable, I have to ask you something, kitten.”

“What, Alex?”

“Do you really think I killed that dentist?”

I look discant, the imagine of Dr. Greco back in my thoughts. “I don’t know who did it, or why they would, only that your guys showed up seconds later and threw me into the backseat of a car waiting in the alley behind the office.”

“And you saw the body, for sure?”

I only nod.

“So you understand that whoever did that crime was supposed to cover it up, probably with an arson incident; make it look like an accident he was inside the building when it caught fire mysteriously.” He tucks my wet hair behind my ears, his fingertips grazing my cheeks cautiously. “That means you saw something not meant to be seen by anymore.”

“I understand that, but what’s your point?”

“My point is that when people see things that aren’t supposed to be there, those people usually end up missing, kitten.” He brushes his thumb off my lower lip, as though replaying the moment we kissed. “It happens all the time.”

I pull my knees to my chest, the water still warm as it pours over us both. “Does this mean I’m going to—to be killed—killed too?”

“No, Serena. I’m not going to let anyone kill you. I’m just letting you know that up until today, I’ve been *wanting* to see you every day. Now it might be a necessity.”

I choke back from crying. “I have a job, Alex. I have a life. As do you.”

“I have a lot of power, too. While under my care, kitten, I’ll have every possible connection I got working on finding out who did that to Greco. You can stay here until it’s sorted out.”

“Then what?” I breathe, my eyes subconsciously flickering to his ring finger, still bare even though the world knows Alessandro Vitale is engaged to a beautiful woman, Bella Luca. I almost feel bad even knowing her name after what we just did. “We part ways like nothing ever happened?”

His eyes follow mine, his hand flexing and unflexing methodically. “Things are complicated, kitten. I never claimed that they weren’t. It’s a matter of business, my engagement. It’s not as if you’re some paramour in my pocket. You mean something real in my life. Something I want to keep around any way I can.”

“What if I say *no*?”

“No?”

“Yeah, what if I decline your help? What if I go to the police and I tell them what I saw and I let you live out your life in the spotlight, with your fiancé?” My hands tremble in my lap and it isn’t due to the water cooling down in temperature slowly. “What if we stop meeting in unconventional ways and you stop getting what you want?”

His eyes narrow. I enjoy those eyes too much to stop seeing them now. I wanted them on me the night at the club, the day at the coffee shop and in passing at the post office. With everything going on, I feel safe under these eyes and leaving them will put me in danger in more than one sense. But something things are worth finding out.

He drops his head in defeat. "I don't want to stop running into you, kitten. But there are responsibilities I still owe my family and one of those is the business deal my marriage will seal. Now, I can make this easy and ask you to stay, or I can go beyond my means to ensure you can't leave. Hate me or love me, kitten, I have to make sure you're safe."

I swallow hard.

I was brought here and it seems now I won't be leaving.

Not even if I want to.