



The Doctor and The Assassin

Lietha Wards

The Doctor and The Assassin

Lietha Wards

Free Evaluation Edition from obooko.com

© Copyright 2010 Lietha Wards

Published by the author. Distributed worldwide by obooko

This edition is available free of charge exclusively to obooko members for evaluation purposes only. It may be amended and updated at any time by the author so please visit www.obooko.com to ensure you have the latest edition.

This book must not be copied or printed unless the author has given written permission for personal printing. It must not be sold in digital or printed form nor offered free or for sale on any website other than www.obooko.com.

For more free ebooks and to list your fiction or non-fiction book for free publication, please visit www.obooko.com

Prologue

Jimmy thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He'd nearly missed spotting her because he was helping a customer when she walked passed the window outside the florist shop he worked at. The elderly woman he was helping peered at him over her spectacles when he was distracted by the woman outside the window. She was rambling on about her grandchildren and how they liked carnations. He could care less. Old people disgusted him. They were all wrinkly and worn out and they either smelled like Ben gay or cats, so he thought. The more she talked, the more he thought about shoving her under a bus. The image actually brought a smile to his face. Unfortunately she thought it was her stories that pleased him and she continued to fervently talk until she finally noticed that she didn't have his attention.

"Young man?" she stated with obvious displeasure in her voice.

He directed his gaze back to her, "I'm sorry ma'am, I'm on a break." It gave him pleasure to see how put out she was. *Old coot*, he thought as he turned away from her to tell his supervisor that he was taking a break. Like she really cared. She looked like something out of a Goth magazine, dyed black hair, piled on makeup and at least a dozen piercings hanging out of her face, not to mention the tattoos. She was rather repulsive to him. Nothing compared to that gorgeous piece he saw a minute ago. The woman shrugged telling him that was fine. Obviously she didn't notice the customer he'd left over in the corner of the shop with a scowl on her face. He quickly rushed out the door hoping he could catch up to the auburn haired woman. Scanning the crowd on the sidewalk, his eyes settled on the hair and because of it, she was easy to spot. He weaved through the crowd trailing after her, removing his apron and folding it in his left

hand as he walked. It was the auburn curls that attracted him. An unusual but gorgeous color the likes of which he'd never seen and they cascaded halfway down her back. Then he got a glimpse of the rest of her at a distance and knew she was meant for him.

Then the crowd parted momentarily and there was her walk, the self-assured natural feminine sway to her hips as she was unaware of how alluring it was to the man behind her. He did his best to try and stay within twenty feet of her but every cell in his body wanted to approach and accidentally brush against that delicious body.

Suddenly she stopped and looked in a shop window, brushing a tendril of hair behind her ear while examining a dress through the glass. If she knew how desirable and enthralling that simple gesture was to the men who stopped to stare at her, she probably wouldn't have done it. He smirked, she even didn't notice that they looked at her. She was completely unaware of her own beauty. *How perfect.* It was the ideal opportunity to study her lovely profile and exquisite body and he did. His eyes slowly soaked up every living inch of her and he was captivated.

He watched her smile a little probably imagining what the dress would look like on her. At least that was how he interpreted it and he couldn't help but smile too. Then, to his surprise, she turned directly toward him instead of continuing on her way. What happened next made him nearly fall over, she actually saw him. He was usually more cautious, but *God* she was distracting.

Maybe it was because he was still wearing the smile when she looked at him that caused her to smile back when she walked by. He felt his stomach leap at the gesture. He was a complete stranger and she acknowledged him. It was only for a second, but it was what had made up his mind. He had to have her.

He would do what he did with Anna May Wagner, but he would take his time and woo her first. He thought Anna May was perfect too, until he found out that she cheated on him with

another man. He felt his rage rise at the memory. But he had taken care of her so she could never do it again. Snapping himself back to the present, he noticed that auburn hair had almost disappeared from his view so he quickly caught up to her again but still kept his distance. He would follow her and see where she lived and he would keep following her so he could figure out her pattern.

Chapter one: Nick

NICK STEPPED OVER the large lifeless body carefully avoiding the blood spatter after he wiped the gun clean and placed it in the dead man's hand. He then walked to the door, took one final look over his shoulder at the scene, and was satisfied. Even to him it looked like a suicide. He skilfully injected the man with a paralytic when he foolishly opened the door for him. Of course he had to use a larger dose than usual because the man was excessively obese. The stupid look on the man's ruddy face all but amused him. Although in the man's defence, he really wasn't aware that Nick was sent to kill him. The drug wasn't to knock him unconscious, just render him helpless so Nick could question him. Despite the man's size, he eased him down to the floor with a fluid grace like he'd done this a hundred times before. Terry obviously let his health slide from years of sitting behind a desk. It helped that Nick was built for the job. He was six foot three, had a hard earned body, and was well trained.

"Where are the books, Terry?" Nick crouched his tall form down next to him while dispassionately recapping and pocketing the syringe. He spoke casually just as if he ordered a cup of coffee. Terry ran numbers as a bookie for his boss, but couldn't help skimming a little for himself and gambling it away. Soon he

was in deep to Frank Castile and the only way out was to turn evidence and guarantee a witness protection program. However, Nick had some people on the inside and received a heads up on Terry's recent confession to the feds. As far as Terry knew, their boss was unaware that he snitched. Nick passed the information on to Frank. That's when Frank sent in Nick. Everyone in the organization knew that when Nick showed up at your door, someone would die.

Terry was only able to let out a rush of air, and his words were very slurred.

Hmm, maybe I overdid it, He thought. Regardless, Nick stared down at him unfazed. "Your eyes still work. Look in the direction of your safe. Now, before you try and delay, know this. The drug doesn't dull pain Terry, don't make me prove it to you."

Terry's normally ruddy cheeks paled in fear as he guided his eyes towards a distasteful picture of 'Dogs Playing Poker'. Nick walked over to it and lifted it off the wall examining it for a moment as if he had all the time in the world. People don't realize that these paintings were done to advertise cigars. He smirked at the setting of dogs around a table play cards. They were meant to symbolize the working class man in the early part of the twentieth century. He never much liked this series of paintings from Coolidge. He thought them to be rather tacky. He set it on the floor. Sure enough behind the painting there was the safe. He went back over to Terry and crouched down beside him again, "I'm going to start saying numbers. You blink when I hit the combination. Blink once that you understand." When Terry didn't respond Nick gave him a sharp slap on the cheek, "Don't waste my time Terry. I can take all night to kill you." Nick started counting by tens. When Terry blinked he started on the second digit of the number until he had the combination.

Although he wasn't able to move, it didn't block out the terror that flooded through him. He knew that if his boss sent

Nick, he would die. No broken knees, fingers or teeth, only the certainty of death. Terry also knew that Nick would take his time as he promised if he didn't do what he said. His reputation was well known among the organization and as he crouched over him with such eerie calmness and an unemotional icy look in his dark eyes, he knew the stories were true. Tears leaked from the corner of his eyes.

Nick retrieved the books and took his time looking through them with no concern to the man lying on the floor, helpless and terrified, a short distance away. When he was satisfied that they were the originals, he tucked them inside his coat, closed the safe and replaced the repulsive painting. Then as promised, he placed the gun in the man's hand with the barrel against his temple and fired. Gunpowder residue will be on his hand if there is a question of who pulled the trigger. Nick doubted they would find the needle prick in his neck. They never do. Carefully avoiding the blood splatter and brain matter, he stepped around the body and left, shutting the door quietly behind him. It wasn't personal for him and he never got involved. He was trained by the best to remain detached and be skilled at a job.

He made his way out of the building and casually down to the walk in front of the apartment complex. Then he paused for a moment to pull up his coat collar to block out the fall New York chill. There was a slight breeze and he could smell winter in the air. Sounds of sirens in the distance reached his ears. Someone may have alerted the police over hearing the gunshot. He didn't use a silencer for that purpose. He knew he wasn't seen leaving that particular apartment. He was very careful. He always was. He turned and walked in the direction of his stolen Mercedes a few blocks down.

Normally he would have Mario pick him up, but he didn't want to involve the kid so closely in a murder. He was still young after all and eager, he smiled, *yes he was very eager*. Nick on

the other hand was seasoned at this. Emotionally, he was indifferent and it reflected on his face--Calm and emotionless. It was his job. He never got involved in a kill. First of all, it would be a sign of weakness, something never displayed. Secondly, he considered himself one of the best at what he did and concern for his targets would interfere, maybe even cause him to hesitate. He was trained to kill with assertion and confidence, not to doubt his marks or wonder why he was told to eliminate them. According to his superiors, that's what made him perfect.

He got in the car, flipped open his cell phone and called a familiar number. The blue light from the screen reflected off his muscular jaw. When the man on the other end answered, he said, "It's done. Send Mario for a pick up." He then hung up and drove toward the dock.

Nick wiped the wheel and door handle clean before he got out of the car. Mario arrived in a Black Hummer and was able to help him push the car off the pier. He then got in the passenger side of vehicle while Mario assumed his regular seat as the driver.

Mario got in the driver's seat. "How did it go?"

Nick spared him an indifferent glance, "Fine."

Mario inwardly groaned, he'd been driving for Nick for two years now and he still rarely speaks to him. He'd tried his best to get acquainted with him, but Nick was still a mystery. He knew about as much about him today as the first day he started driving for him. Even though Mario usually talked non-stop around him, you'd think he'd have something to say, like maybe "shut up". Although he wasn't rude, he only gave the simplest responses when asked a question and his facial expressions were always indecipherable. Mario always thought the silence was disturbing and that is probably why he talked so much, just to avoid the tension. Originally, he thought he could gain the man's trust and he would confide, or even speak to him a little more.

That never happened. After all, he wasn't the type of person to invite you out for a drink after work. If he did, you'd be sure not to go, because there would be something else planned besides a drink at a bar. It would probably turn into a drive through Jersey where your body wouldn't be found for months if at all. Although he felt apprehension around Nick, he really didn't have any reason to be afraid and despite his nervousness he actually admired his steel composure and rare talents.

Initially he was hired by Frank Castile, who gave him the job driving for Nick. He used to drive taxi until one day he met Frank. Dispatch called him to pick a fair one night a La Grenouille a famous French restaurant. A well dressed, distinguished, handsome man with salt and pepper hair got in the back seat with two beautiful women that could've have been right out of Playboy magazine; a voluptuous blonde and the other a sexy brunette. Frank told him to head to a popular nightclub on the Upper East Side. He'd only been in that job a few months, but you learn how to drive really well on the streets of New York in such a short time. Although Frank had been drinking, which he could tell from the odour of strong whiskey that radiated from the back seat through the perforated Plexiglas divider, his eyes and voice were steady when he spoke to Mario.

"Mario Puzzo?" Frank read the driver's identification posted in the back seat.

Mario glanced at him in the rear-view mirror at the sound of his name to find him staring steadily back at him, "Yes sir."

"You are Italian." The man's eyes didn't waver from his in the mirror.

Mario smiled, "One hundred percent."

"How old are you?"

"I'll be twenty this fall."

"You are young. You should be ambitious and be in college." He moved his arm in an explanatory gesture, "Not

driving cab.”

Mario stared at him for a moment through the mirror wondering if he was just making small talk or if he was really interested in his life, “You have to finish high school. My father died when I was young, I had to help out my mother. I quit school at sixteen.” Mario had told the story many times, when he was asked that same question about his age. So it didn’t bother him to repeat it. He actually liked to talk to his fares. His mother told him time and time again that he was credited with the gift of gab, and that he could charm just about anyone with his boyish good looks.

“You don’t say. A boy who loves his mama,” Frank chuckled, “is *ammirevole*.” Admirable

“*Grazi*.” Mario replied, thanking him.

Frank was surprised, “And you speak Italian!”

“A bit, my mother insisted.” Mario pulled up to the curb in front of Frank’s destination. The club was just starting to form a crowd. Two big Bouncers stood at the entrance picking the privileged guests from the crowd that were allowed to enter.

Frank told the women to go ahead and they got out of the car. He then turned back to Mario and leaned forward in the seat, “Listen kid, how much money you make a night?”

Pushing a lock of his thick ebony hair out of his face, Mario turned around in his seat to look at his fair. He studied him for a moment wondering if he should tell him. He was a handsome man richly dressed in an Armani black cashmere overcoat and grey slacks and appeared to be in his mid forties. It was obvious that the man was wealthy. He was surprised that a man of his privilege was interested in his life. It was the first time anyone of that calibre inquired about him. So he thought, *what difference would it make?* He shrugged, “sixty or seventy bucks.”

Frank tsked, “Not much of an income. What is that?”

About twenty grand a year?”

“Around there.”

Frank paused for a moment before speaking, “I have a proposition for you.”

Mario’s eyebrows went up, “A proposition?”

“I’ll pay your shift wages for today, to just accompany me for the rest of the night.” Frank was impressed more than he thought he would be with this kid. He knew he could use him and in turn the boy would be loyal because every question he asked him he received an honest answer. He even knew exactly where he could employ him.

Mario studied the man’s expression. He seemed genuine. However, this was New York, so anything was possible. “Why?”

“I might have a job for you that would pay three times what you make now.”

This statement made Mario’s eyes narrow in suspicion.

Frank laughed gregariously at the boy’s obvious distrust, and held up his hands in defence. “Nothing kinky. I promise.”

Mario smiled almost embarrassed that he was thinking it, “I’m sorry sir,” He said sheepishly, “this is New York.”

Frank nodded toward the two beautiful women waiting patiently through the car window without taking his eyes off of Mario, “As you can see, I don’t play that way. “ Normally he would take offense at someone thinking that way about him, but he was moving fast on this kid and he could understand where he got the idea.

Mario grinned while looking at the women before he returned his dark gaze back on his fare tilting his head questioningly, “...And you’ll pay my wages for today?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“You’re a good kid. You work hard, you’re Italian and you love your mother. For me that’s all I need in an employee.” He

smiled, "I have a job in mind for you. You only have to drive and maybe run a few errands. Nothing else. However, I like to get to know a new employee before I decide if the job suits them. Also I'm not the only one that needs to be impressed. So, you come with me for the rest of the night, and I'll let you know before the night is over whether I want you to work for me or not."

Mario's mother always told him, if it was too good to be true, it probably was. However, something deep within him told him to trust this man. He went with his instincts, "Alright."

"*Eccellente*." He pushed a small roll of bills through the slot in the divider, "My name is Frank Castile."

Mario took the money and looked back up at him, "this is too much."

Frank laughed, not the least bit surprised by his honesty, "It's okay kid, I can afford it. Buy something nice for your mother. Now come, I have two beautiful women waiting."

Mario looked at the busy club entrance, "Mr. Castile, I'm only twenty."

Frank got out of the car and opened the door for Mario, "It's alright. There won't be a problem."

Mario got out of the car, "How do you know?"

"I own the club." He shut the door behind him.

That was two years ago. Now Mario drove for Nick, Frank's most trusted. Mario knew Nick was good at what he did. Not just because of the rumours he had heard, but he believed some of them because he had seen the man in action.

The gossip among Frank's men were like he was in Special Forces, and then recruited for the CIA or some shit like that. He believed the gossip somewhat, the guy was built like a brick shit house. He was lean yet muscular and it wasn't the kind of body you got from steroids, it was definitely naturally developed. The kind of body you would see on a triathlon competitor. He'd seen

Nick change his shirt one day when he accidentally got some blood on his suit after he did an errand for his boss. One of those errands Mario wasn't allowed to accompany him to whatever Frank had asked Nick to do.

Although he always was there to pick him up after, Nick preferred to work certain jobs alone. So, during this moment in Nick's room, he couldn't mistake the two hundred and forty pounds give or take, six foot four athletic build. He could guess the height easily because Mario was six feet exactly and Nick was slightly taller than him. Mario was also more slender and weighed about one hundred and Ninety pounds. He knew that Nick had at least fifty pounds more of muscle on him. Mario would have loved to try and achieve that build, but between this job and his mother, he didn't have any spare time. On top of that Nick's body was adorned with several tattoos that just set off his beautiful physique. One was a tattoo of barbwire wrapped around his neck across his left shoulder, down around his muscled bicep and to mid forearm. The words '*All warfare is based on deception*' were tattooed on the barbwire on his upper bicep so it followed the contours of the wire. His expensive suits hid the tattoos completely. On his right bicep was a traditional tattoo of the Navy Seals consisting of the name, an eagle in the middle holding a trident in front of an anchor surrounded by a circle, which kind of looked like a life preserver. He'd put on his shirt before Mario could look at any more of them. Mario had to bite his tongue not to ask him about them, especially the script. For some reason he knew this wasn't the time. He sighed and decided to remain envious while remembering that Frank Castile wanted to see Nick, "Boss wants to see you."

"Fine."

Fine? That's all you have to say? Mario thought to himself. He remembered clearly as if was yesterday upon seeing Nick for the first time.

It was the same night he met Frank Castile. Although the nightclub that Frank owned was packed, Nick stood out. Not just because of his height, his expensive suit or his immaculate good looks, but because he was the only one in the place that didn't seem to be having a good time. He looked sharp in a pressed dark gray pinstriped suit, white shirt with a high mandarin collar which told Mario this guy was as wealthy as his new companion. Although he was strikingly handsome, and carried himself with radiating self-assurance, his eyes and expression were void of emotion. Mario almost shuddered when he focused his dark eyes on him for the first time.

However, when the Frank and Nick embraced in greeting Mario saw a flicker of emotion making him think he couldn't be all that frightening as he previously thought. He watched Frank point to the mirrored windows overlooking the club. Nick nodded and led the way and Mario followed both of them when Frank waved for him to come along. Once inside, Frank closed the door behind the two causing the loud music to turn to a moderate muffle. At least they could talk without yelling. In the lit office, Mario could see how handsome this man really was. He actually looked a lot like his new potential employer only a younger version. Mario figured he was also Italian, not just because of his dark looks, but from the conversation in his taxi, he figured out that Frank liked to hire Italian men. He watched Nick lean against the walnut desk crossing his long legs at the ankles and resting the palms of his hands on the top of the glossy surface while curling his fingers over the ledge, looking completely relaxed. His curious eyes focused on Mario who turned his gaze away unable to hold the stare.

“Nick, meet your new driver, Mario Puzzo.”

This brought his head back to the man named Nick. Mario felt a chill go through him as the sharply dressed man allowed his dark gaze scan over him. Mario chose to remain

silent. One of the few times anyone could say that about him. The man frightened him because in the light of the office Mario could tell the man was not just cold, but dangerous. When he spoke it was calm and controlled just like everything else about him.

“What makes you think I need a driver?” He raised his eyebrows at Frank.

“Because I said you do. He knows the streets really well. You need that.” Frank answered with unmasked authority.

“Mr. Castile, “ Mario interrupted, “I never said I’d take the job.” He saw Nick smirk out of the corner of his eye. Again, he found himself thinking that the man couldn’t be as cold as he originally thought.

Frank turned to Mario, his expression held the same amused look as Nick’s, “No?”

Mario shook his head with some hesitation, “I have to talk to my mother.”

Frank laughed at that statement, “I see. Well tell your mother you now have a new job that pays two hundred and fifty a night.”

Mario’s jaw dropped.

“Frank.” Nick warned, “The kid doesn’t know what I do and not only that, there’s nothing holding him loyal to you.”

“He’s Italian. What more do you need?” Frank defended. “Anyway, you’re untouchable. What are you worried about?” Of course he knew what Nick meant, but he had great pride in his own talent for reading people. It had served him well in the past. The kid never had a father figure and had struggled to help his mother. Therefore, he was honourable. He knew he could give this kid what he needed and in exchange the kid would be loyal to them. There was no doubt in his mind.

Nick shook his head at Frank’s jest, “It’s not that simple. You know that. It’s not me I’m worried about.”

“Sir?” Mario interjected missing the concern in Nick’s voice, “For two fifty a night, I’ll be as loyal as a lap dog. Just tell me what you need and it’ll get done.” Regardless of the man’s icy stare he saw a bit of a smile pull at the corner of his mouth. There was no doubt Mario needed the money. He could really help out his mother now. As a result, he was willing to deal with the Nick’s cool nature. Besides how dangerous could the man be?

“You’re sure you want to know what I do?” One of Nick’s eyebrows went up in question as he stared at the young man.

“Doesn’t matter.” Mario said trying not to let his cold stare affect him. *How bad could it be?*

“I run errands for Frank that might cause you to double check your morals, kid.”

Mario didn’t care, he needed the money. Besides, he grew up in the Bronx, there’s nothing he was sure he hadn’t seen before. Even though the man’s stare unnerved him, and he really didn’t like to be called *kid*, he was sure he could grow accustomed to it.

Nicked eyed him for a bit longer before he shrugged his shoulders and turned to Frank, “Okay, fine, “ he nodded, “If it’s what you want.”

“It is.” Frank said grinning as he knew he would get his way. Not another could say that of Nick, but he could and Nick never complained, but he had some guilt at how much he worked him. He thought Nick could use some help with the small things such as dry cleaning, meals, and driving. He used him to clean up his organization’s messes which included being on call twenty-four hours a day. Nick hardly slept anyway, but if Frank could alleviate the workload a bit, it would lift some of the guilt he felt.

Nick shook his head in defeat, “All right Frank, you’re the boss.” Then he focused his dark eyes back on Mario, “Cut off the ponytail kid, this isn’t high school.”

Absently Mario reached behind him and fingered his hair.

Although he wanted to argue, he knew there was no way in hell the man called Nick would bend. Everything about him was finite. "Sure." He mumbled.

Mario realized at that moment that the cold stare Nick was able to give off so easily never reflected on Frank Castile. It wasn't too long after when he found out why.

Now, two years later, he was seasoned in Nick's needs and had a good idea what Nick did for Frank. He had never seen him kill anyone, but he had seen him protect Frank against patrons of his own club when they got out of hand. He grinned at the memory because it really impressed him.

Six months after he started working for Nick, Frank had three beautiful women beside him in his booth, which he soon discovered that Frank usually was accompanied by at least two or more woman at all times when he was out clubbing. During that one time, two big and muscular men who had had a little too much to drink decided that just because Frank was important didn't mean he could hog all of the beautiful women in the club. Obviously they didn't know that he actually owned the club. Frank said something belligerent that Mario couldn't remember causing one of the men to lunge at him.

From out of nowhere Nick fluidly stepped in front of Frank, grabbed the man's arm and spun him around ramming him face down on the floor beside the booth with his arm bent at an unnatural angle before Mario could blink. Several of the woman screamed as blood spurted across the floor just missing Mario's shoes while Nick crouched over the man like a predatory wildcat still holding onto his broken arm. Mario just stood there, frozen in disbelief at the whole scene as he watched Nick bend down and say something in the man's ear to which he nodded quickly despite his screams. Nick then got off him and nodded to the other man to help his friend. Like Mario he just stood still, in shock as the scene unfolded in a flash. He seemed to suddenly

snap out of it and quickly bent down and helped his friend to his feet without taking his eyes off of Nick. Judging by the other man's expression, Mario figured that Nick was giving him that cold stare that he'd seen many times. They quickly left the club with the injured man holding his broken arm and bleeding like a stuck pig from his nose. Mario turned around and noticed that Frank hadn't even moved. It amazed him that Frank knew and trusted that Nick had his back. He watched Nick shake his head at Frank as if to say, *why do you do that?* Frank held up his hands like he didn't do anything wrong while a sly smile played across his face. Regardless of how calm things were now, he couldn't shake that scene. He stood there with a stunned expression on his face.

It was a thing of beauty.

Nick moved with such speed and skill so contrary to his outward appearance, that it totally threw him off guard. Up to that point, Nick always seemed so calm and reserved, without a worry, self-assured and always moving at a confident casual pace. Until then, he wasn't quite sure what he did for his boss. Now he knew. Quite Frankly, he was fascinated.

It was that moment that Mario realized that everything about Nick was deceiving for a purpose. The expensive suits and cool composure were used to throw off expectations of Nick's hidden skills. He now knew the whole time Nick was observing, assessing, planning and anticipating everything around them. That incident just proved it. Despite their size and number, those men were blindsided. Now he knew for sure, Nick *was* a dangerous man.

Quite frankly, he was so impressed that he didn't care what Nick did for Frank, as long as he could learn something, anything from him.

He focused on the present when Nick flicked open his cell illuminating the inside of the vehicle with a bluish glow and read

a text message. Frank's lifeline to Nick was his cell phone. Without it, he was sure Frank would be lost, because he relied on him a lot. Mario started the vehicle and drove towards his employer's townhouse on the other side of the city, which was of the many houses that Frank owned. As far as he knew Nick only had one residence, a modest penthouse in the Upper East Side that must have cost a bloody fortune. Well, it would be compared to his one bedroom apartment in Queens that cost fifteen hundred a month.

Mario was in Nick's bedroom once and watched him open hidden wall in his walk-in closet that housed some of the most fascinating weapons that Mario had ever seen. Not that he knew about weapons, but he was sure Nick knew how to use every single one of them or he wouldn't have them. Obviously he wasn't too concerned about Mario standing there and being aware of his hidden armoury. In fact he acted as if he wasn't even there as he put his guns away and let the mahogany panel slide shut. However, Mario knew not to take that for granted because Nick was always aware of everything around him, even how many feet to the inch that he stood behind him. *Well, he thought to himself, maybe I do know more than I thought about him after all.*

The hummer pulled up to a modest townhouse on Commerce Street in Greenwich Village. It was an 1830's townhouse that his boss gloriously restored with all the modern amenities. Bruno Tucci answered the door. He was one of his boss's personal bodyguards. Bruno was a very broad and tall man in his late fifties with a gray receding hairline. Although he may look clumsy and slow, he knew that it would be easier to fight a semi truck than Bruno. He was seasoned and strong. His fists were covered with scars which he could only assume came from the beatings he laid out in his time. The man probably had no feeling left there by the look of the scar tissue built up on his

knuckles. At one time, Mario was sure that Bruno had a neck, but now he was thick all over. His neck just seemed to have disappeared into his broad shoulders and big head. He'd been with Frank, his boss, a very long time. Mario heard he'd served Frank's father too and understood why Frank trusted him as much as he did Nick. He stood aside and allowed them to enter. He knew respect had to be earned from this family and although Bruno was involved with the organization longer than Nick was, there was no mistake of high regard in the older man's eyes when he looked at him. As he watched the two men greet each other, Mario had hoped that some day people would look at him with half the respect as Bruno gave Nick.

"Good evening Nick," said Bruno when he saw them. The big man shook his hand and grinned. He then turned to Mario, "Kid." He said politely while greeting Mario.

"Bruno." Nick said in a polite exchange of greetings.

"Mr. Tucci," Said Mario, wishing everyone would quit calling him *kid*. He also secretly wished Bruno wouldn't smile, he had too many teeth missing and looked more menacing than happy. He knew that it was only Bruno out of all of Frank's men that called Nick by his first name. Everyone else addressed him by his last. It just showed Mario how much respect Bruno had earned from Nick. Mario still addressed him by his last name or just called him *Boss* and he was the closest person to Nick for two years. He couldn't begin to imagine what Bruno had done for him to be given such a privilege.

"He's in his study." He nodded in the direction of the room, "can I take your coat?"

Nick nodded and removed his coat and gloves handing them to Bruno before he walked down the hall to the large den that served as Frank's main office.

Mario walked several feet behind Nick. He was glad too. If he walked in front of him he felt it would be like turning his

back on an open lion cage with Nick's arctic stare frosting his back.

The double doors to Frank's office were guarded by two more men. They opened the doors to allow them entry when they saw who it was. It was times like this that Mario was glad to be Nick's driver. His boss's men respected Nick, so they also gave him some measure of it. He'd heard mumblings from them in the past about why Nick had Mario, when there were more seasoned men around him eager to show their loyalty. This made Mario feel special, or favoured in a sense by Frank Castile. It must have all originated from that first day in the taxi when he'd met him. It had to have been something he said or did, that convinced Frank that he was perfect for what Nick needed. Needless to say, Mario never took advantage of his sought after position. He worked very hard for Nick and Frank to prove he deserved what he was given. In fact he couldn't ever recall either one of them complaining to him about the tasks he did, and for this family, no complaint was a good sign.

There were two more men inside the room on either side of the door. Mario knew Frank genuinely needed a lot of protection. He'd made quite a few enemies in his expanding empire. Although if Nick was available to accompany him, that's the only person he took with him. It gave Mario the understanding of how good at his job he really was.

Frank stood up when the men entered. A genuine smile spread across his handsome face. He approached Nick and gave him a respectful hug. Frank was as tall as Nick but not as muscular. He was ten years Nick's senior and when his Frank Senior died he took over the family business. The business consisted of prostitution, drugs and money laundering among other endeavours. He was able to turn his father's business into a multi-million dollar industry and brought it into the twenty-first century. He also ran quite a few legitimate businesses,

mostly to serve as a front for his money laundering. Real estate was Frank's most recognizable and prominent business and he was known as a real estate mogul, not a drug lord because he had a brilliant head for business and was able to conceal that dark side of his life. He contributed to major charities around the city and fattened the pockets of many elected officials. He was also a close personal friend of the mayor and contributed heavily to his last campaign. When Nick returned from Iraq almost three years ago, Frank gave him a large piece in the business. However unlike Frank who was a gregarious socialite, Nick stayed in the shadows. It was what he preferred. Nick may have been better looking, but Frank was the forefront, the businessman. Mario was amazed at how much they actually looked alike but their demeanour set them totally apart.

Mario gave Frank a respectful hug. He then stood back from the two.

"I need you to wait outside kid." Frank said to Mario.

"Yes sir." Mario turned and left the room without hesitation. He knew that this would be one of those conversations that involved Nick's hidden talents. So he did what he was told without explanation.

Frank poured Nick glass of whiskey and handed it to him after Mario shut the door behind him. "I need your help." He took a drink from his own glass, set his eyes on Nick and continued, "There's a charity event at the Mayor's this Saturday evening. I need you to be there with me. There's some land we own down in New Windsor that we need transferred to residential. I want to build Condos there. It's a nice piece of land. It would bring a huge profit. I have my guys do the construction. The building inspector is in to me for about thirty large, so passing code isn't a problem."

"And why me?" Nick spoke as one of his eyebrows raised in question.

“Well for one, you’re my brother. You need to be seen more, this is a family business.”

Nick took a swallow from his glass. He didn’t say anything but his expression said plenty as he eyed him over the rim of his glass, there was more to this.

“Alright, alright,” Frank grinned knowing that familiar look, “I need building permits pushed through and in exchange the mayor has problem and his daughter happens to be married to it...”

“No.”

“Hear me out. Her husband has taken to abusing her regularly. He’s into gambling at the tracks, and when he does win, it goes up his nose.”

“Tell her to leave him. This sounds like a family thing, Frank.”

“She told her father that he’d kill her, the Mayor believes him. He’s bailed the bastard out of debt over and over again for the sake of his daughter and he still takes to abusing her.”

“Hire a bodyguard.” Nick drank the contents of the glass and set it on Frank’s desk keeping his eyes on his brother.

“Or a hit man...” Frank finished.

Nick stopped, and raised his eyebrows. His expression remained serene, “You’re sure about this?”

“Yes.”

“Frank, you know this is really close to your legitimate businesses. If I do this for you, it could come back on us. Killing someone involved in a family of one of your high-profile business partners is very different from the other dirt bags we deal with.” Nick explained.

“He’s still a scumbag, just a different class of scumbag. Would your other employers have a problem with this? Is that it?” Frank didn’t know much about his other life. Nick never talked about it and Frank didn’t press him. If Nick wanted Frank

to know anything he would have told him about it. It certainly wasn't hard to figure out, especially when he would get mysterious phone calls or text messages, then disappear shortly afterward for several days or weeks. Of course he would tell Frank when to expect him back, but knowing what Nick did for Frank pretty much gave him all the information he needed. Not only that, Nick had changed. There was something cold and terrifying about him that hadn't been there before he went away and joined the Navy, and he was able to do things to people that Frank didn't even have the stomach for. Frank smiled inwardly; it was actually quite magnificent to watch him work.

Nick managed a wry smile, "Not likely." He walked up to Frank and placed a concerned hand on his shoulder so he could face him directly and get his point across. "You know this isn't about *me*."

"Well, then I'm sure you will find a way to make this untraceable to us. You are the best, are you not?" Frank gave him a smile of indefinite pride.

Nick sighed his disapproval and dropped his arm, "Alright Frank if you wish."

Frank nodded, knowing Nick would do this for him because he never denied him anything. "He wants to meet you before it's done."

"That's unusual."

Frank shrugged, "He wants to let you know why he needs this done. Ted's a good man; this isn't something that he'd just do because he doesn't like the guy his daughter is married to. Maybe he thinks it will justify the man's death."

"I couldn't care less if he feels justified. I'm not a fucking priest. Tell him to go to confession if he wants his sins purged." Nick bit out. "Murder is murder. Justification does not change that. Does your friend understand that?"

"I know this is unusual..." Frank said, not even fazed by

Nick's harsh response.

"I already said I would do it Frank. It doesn't affect me either way. You on the other hand are not being practical." He warned slicing a hand through the air.

Frank nodded, "Like I said, you will find a way to keep this away from me. I'm asking you as your brother."

"No, you're asking me to do a favour for you, and a man who in turn will *owe* you a favour and *because* you're my brother, you know I'll do it." He frowned.

He knew his brother preferred to stay unknown, but Frank wanted him by his side instead of in the shadows like he preferred. "Basically....Yes." Frank smiled.

"If you need those building permits, I could pull some strings." Stated Nick.

"It's not just that Nick. There are a few more things I need the mayor to do for me, so I thought about it being a package deal. I don't need you to do anything else over this."

Nick reluctantly nodded, "Alright then, whatever you wish. The daughter—does she have children?"

"No, she has had several miscarriages because of his physical abuse. No kids."

Nick nodded again, "Okay then. Give me a few days."

"It has to look like an accident."

"Understood."

Frank slapped him on the arm, "Good. Now you'd better dust off your Tux." He paused for a moment before adding another request, "Oh, and bring the kid to the party, this might be good for him to see."

Two days later Nick stared at his reflection in the mirror and smoothed the satin lapels and adjusted the bow tie on his tuxedo. As usual, his expression was unreadable. He didn't care for social events, but this was for Frank. In fact, he didn't care much for

anything, except Frank. They grew up in an abusive household. Their mother was defenceless against their father's wicked Italian temper. Many times she put herself in front of Frank and Nick. She died when he was eight from cancer of all things. Fortunately, the abuse stopped when Frank went and worked for their father. Neither one of them knew why and didn't care as long as it didn't start again. It wasn't easy for his brother. Just because Frank was his son, he made him start from the bottom and work twice as hard as the rest of his men. First as a strong arm, for those who owed his father money. His size could be very intimidating. Then he worked his way up, earning their father's respect. Frank took over the business about five years ago after his father's death. There was no love lost there with the brothers and their father. They both thought he was a ruthless bastard. Nick knew the only reason his brother went to work for him was for survival. Frank Senior used to tell them endlessly how useless they both were because their mother had softened them. When his father was still alive and Nick turned eighteen he made sure he was long gone. Until then, he was left alone with housekeepers and the family cook to raise him. Truthfully, he felt more for the cook, Helen, than he did for his own father. In fact, she still cooked for Frank. When he left home, he decided to join the Navy and discovered he'd have several hidden talents. One was his ability to master weapons such as guns, knives, even his own hands in less than half the time as the rest of his corpsmen. Another was his ability to memorize surroundings, people, documents and anything else they threw at him. Nick figured it had something to do with his lack of emotional sensitivity to cloud his judgment which meant he didn't hesitate. Also, the physical requirements were less stressful than fending off his father's blows. Three years later he applied for the Navy Seals and served for another three years, where someone took notice of his talents and soon after he'd disappeared from the

grid for five years. He even missed his own father's funeral, not that he cared. He turned up about three years ago when his organization gave him a break from assignments during the war in the Middle East and Frank took him in with open arms. He decided he needed time with his brother, his only family that he had left, and took a semi-leave from the organization. He was too valuable to let go permanently so they paid him a retainer which allowed him to live in the luxury that he lived in. Not that he needed it. He also contracted himself out in the past and made enough money as not to worry about his future in that regard. He enlisted himself as Frank's personal bodyguard after he'd discovered the small empire he'd built for them. Frank had made many enemies and besides Bruno, Nick didn't trust anyone else with his brother's life. All those years he was gone, Frank had no idea where Nick was, and never asked him. He knew Frank could see the change in him and had an idea what he was into when he'd lost track of him after he joined the Navy Seals. Frank told him once, that he knew he'd come home after some time. He just wasn't sure when he would show up. Regardless of there being a decade of difference in their ages they were close when they were kids, and that hadn't changed even after several lifetimes of experience between them.

He donned platinum accented cufflinks before reaching over and picking up his FN-FNP-45s, tucking them in his holsters under his jacket on either side of his rib cage with a practised smoothness. He also tucked a tactical knife in the sheath attached to the lower inner left leg.

A knock at his penthouse door let him know that Mario was here with the limousine. He opened the door and let him in.

"Ready?" Mario smiled at him. Of course Nick looked impressive, he always did. However Mario wasn't feeling too shabby in the Ralph Lauren three button tuxedo that Nick stopped and bought him on the way home the other day. He

couldn't deny his excitement at being allowed to go with the brothers. He didn't know what brought this on from Frank and it took every bit of will in his body not to show his elation over the information. Maybe he was learning a few things from Nick after all. He also couldn't believe that Nick didn't even hesitate or protest when Frank suggested he go. He actually felt like he belonged for once and even when Frank told him he wasn't driving for the first time, Mario couldn't get over the initial shock. In fact, he almost got in the driver's door until Carlo, one of Frank's men, stopped him with an amused smile and told him to get in the back with Frank.

What's more, Mario and Nick just walked into Rothman's on Fifth Avenue without an appointment the day before. Nick asked for the tailor and this specific tux that he wore tonight. The store's employees practically fell over him to comply with his wishes. Mario knew they took one look at him and knew he was important. Maybe it had something to do with the seventy five hundred dollar tailor made Fioravanti suit Nick wore. Or maybe his undeniable air of distinction and self assurance that alerted them. He should have known better, Nick always knew what was going on around him. Whatever the reason, Mario didn't care as long as this moment didn't end. In fact, when the tailor was fitting Mario, Nick interceded and straightened his lapels and stood back and scanned him with his dark eyes for a moment. Then he turned and instructed the tailor how he wanted it to fit. If Mario didn't feel important before, he really did now. It was the first time in two years that Nick had ever shown any kind of interest toward him. Halfway through the fitting, Nick answered his phone and Mario thought he'd lost interest in him just when he glanced over and told the tailor to correct a line on the lapel. All along Mario realized that he was multitasking, and still had his eyes on him. He should've known better. Nick's voice brought him back to the present.

“Let’s go.”

Mario nodded following Nick out of his penthouse and closed the door behind them.

Chapter Two: Jordan

Several men were at the entrance of the large English manor style house frisking people as they went in. Nick turned to Mario when they got out of the limousine. He straightened the collar on his overcoat, before Mario could say anything and tugged it straight.

“Pull your shoulder’s back, and straighten your spine. It works the lines nicely on the suit. Act like you belong.” His cool dark eyes guided over his young assistant.

“Okay,” Mario did as he was told. He knew any advice from Nick shouldn’t be taken lightly because he did not give it often. In fact, he was sure that was the first time in the two years he worked for him that he actually did give it.

Nick’s eyes gave a rare glint of approval at Mario’s efforts and that alone could have made him swell with confidence.

“That’s it kid, now you could almost pass as one of us,” Frank teased, “Who knew you’d clean up so well.” He slapped him on the back.

After he tried not to fall over from the force of Frank’s so-called affectionate pat. Nick may have been the muscle, but Frank certainly was no pushover. Mario blushed at the statement and seen Nick smile at Frank’s jest. He almost thought he saw a flash of pride in his eyes, but as quickly as it appeared, it vanished.

When Frank and Nick walked up the stairs side by side, one of the men stepped forward to check them for weapons, the other man stopped him by putting his arm across his midriff, “No, not these two.” He stood aside and let them pass, “Good

evening Mr. Castile, and Mr. Castile.”

Frank nodded to them as they walked past into the house, “Kid’s with us.” Frank indicated with his thumb over his shoulder at Mario who was at their heels. Nick didn’t even look at either of them.

“yessir.” The same man said.

Once inside, Mario took both their coats as someone else came to retrieve them, he gave them to her before he turned and followed the brothers through the crowd. He couldn’t help but notice that the two of them standing side by side, were extraordinarily striking. Maybe it was the Italian dark skin and ebony hair that matched perfectly with their tailor made tuxedos or the air of casual elegance they both carried themselves with. There was no doubt that many eyes, especially women, had turned toward them as they stood there scanning the crowd like lions surveying a pride. Mario followed behind them as they strode down the steps radiating confident poise.

Frank tapped Nick on the arm and led him toward a balding man in his mid sixties.

The man spotted them immediately,” Frank!” he called and excused himself from the small group he was speaking too, came over and shook both their hands as Frank introduced Nick., “We should go into my study for privacy.”

Frank turned to Mario, “Why don’t you go and get us something to drink. We won’t be long.”

Translation; *this meeting does not involve you.* “Yes sir.” Mario answered and turned to go search for the bar. He tried not to look disappointed but when Frank winked at him, he knew he’d noticed. That gesture seemed reassuring though and he was in a better mood when he ordered their drinks.

Nick and Frank followed Ted Calloway through a door off the main room.

Ted shut the door behind them and turned to Nick, “I’m

sure your brother has briefed you on my dilemma?”

“Some.” Nick eyed the man for a moment sizing him up, “I’m sure my brother has briefed you on *my* situation”

Ted managed a pleasant smile, “I assure you Mr. Castile, on my dead wife’s grave, that I would never reveal what I know. I may be many things, but I always keep my promises.”

Nick’s cool brown eyes searched out Ted’s, “Now its my turn to explain something to you. I have nothing to worry about Mr. Calloway. The people I work for don’t care what kind of extra curricular activities I do as long as I don’t interfere with their political agendas. Just so you understand, I can take care of my own messes and the people I work for make sure the dustpan and broom are spotless *if* I miss something, which never has happened. My brother Frank doesn’t have such privileges, so I’m very protective of him.”

“Nick...” Frank interrupted, and stopped when Nick held up his hand. Of course Nick was right, this was his department, and just because Frank was friends with Ted didn’t mean that Nick had to be. Frank knew that Nick’s only priority was his safety. So he let Nick continue.

“...So, do you understand me Mr. Calloway? No one fucks with my family.” Nick continued. “Because even the pope himself couldn’t hide from me if anything happened to Frank.”

Ted’s smile faltered a little and he pursed his lips as he pondered Nick’s words while studying the man’s hard expression. Even though they were brothers, Nick was different from Frank. There was a coolness about him that was actually frightening. Ted had met many people in his time as a businessman and mayor, including cutthroat politicians but Nick was by far the most fearsome. He didn’t mistake the deadly look in his eyes and the hint of threat in his calm steady voice if something were to go wrong. It didn’t help that he knew what the man specialized in from what little Frank told him. Right then he

knew Nick wouldn't hesitate to kill all those Ted knew including himself, if his brother was harmed or implicated in some way. Although, it wouldn't make sense to those who didn't value family as much as Ted did, so he understood perfectly. He met Nick's steely gaze, "I do."

"As long as were clear." His eyes remained steadily on Ted's.

"Let me show you," Ted stared back at him seriously as he walked over to his desk and took out a large brown envelope. Inside were several eight by ten glossy photos that he spread around on his desk, "I have three daughters Mr. Castile, that I raised by myself. My wife died in childbirth. They are very precious to me." He pushed the pictures across the desk toward Nick and Frank, "This one has endured being tortured, raped, and beaten by her husband to the point where I've lost two future grandchildren. I meant it Nick, when I said I understand."

Nick and Frank walked over and looked at the pictures.

Frank thought they were in a sense, graphic. Several photos showed her face bruised, bloody and swollen with multiple cuts, scrapes and gashes on her half naked body. One photo showed what looked like cigarette burns on her arms. Another was as if someone used her face for batting practice and both of her eyes were swollen shut. *Jesus*, he thought. He handed the photos to his brother who managed to hide the disgust on his face, but swallowed hard to suppress it. Even though the brothers had dished out their share of violence, they would never lift a hand to a woman. If it wasn't for the violence their mother endured, maybe things would have been different and although the brother's had dissimilar experiences after they separated, they both agreed that abusing women was cowardly.

"Nick..." Images flashed in Frank's memory of his father beating his mother along with the hatred and rage he felt toward him. That could just as well be her face in the pictures.

“I know...” Nick answered without looking at him.

“Do you see what I mean? If this was your daughter...” Ted stated sincerely.

“...Yes Ted, we get it,” Frank cut him off gently and flashed him a sympathetic gaze. He reached over and picked up one photo in particular that caught his attention. She had been holding a hospital gown across her chest and her delicate arms were riddled with bruises, but he’d left her face alone that time. She was beautiful. Shoulder length dark auburn wavy hair and green eyes that complimented a heart shaped face. A face filled with an expression of unspeakable sadness. Unfortunately it looked like her delicate nose had been broken once or twice.

Ted tapped the corner of the photo that Frank held. “That’s the most recent photo I have. It’s around four weeks old. Her sister Sara persuaded her take all of these for evidence, but she never pressed charges and has begged Sara not to pursue it. She has never come to me, she only confides in her sisters. I know she’s ashamed and embarrassed over her situation. Once, she went to a divorce lawyer and he found out. He threatened to kill her. Along with that and the physical abuse she has irreversible damage. Now she can’t have children. As you can see, I have no choice.” He paused for a moment trying to get a handle on his emotions and continued, “It’s not easy when you see your child in a situation like this and are powerless to prevent it.”

Nick set down the photo he was looking at and stared at the Mayor, “Does she know what you plan to do?”

“No, and she can’t find out. She met him in University, fell deeply in love. I think part of her still thinks she can save him. In fact, she doesn’t even know that her sister gave me these photographs and told me of the events that I’ve told you. She thought maybe I could talk some sense into her as her father. As you can see, I’m beyond that. I took one look at these photos and

decided another route. He's a monster."

"And you're other daughters...?"

"One just made detective, first class four months ago." He beamed. "She has tried to put a stop to this several times. Arrested him once, and he retaliated against Jean. She told her sister to back off. You understand that it's not good publicity when your gambling, drug-addicted Son-in-law is hauled in for questioning by your daughter. I would like to prevent further episodes like that. I was able to prevent the media getting involved last time, but it's only a matter of time before they find out. The other is in her third year of residency at Staten University Hospital."

"Do you think they will be to accept this...accident?"

"They won't know that it's anything but an accident. I am asking you to make sure of that. After speaking to your brother, I don't think that will be a problem with you. Besides, the only one that would be slightly curious is Sarah, the detective in the family, and she hates the man. If she wasn't so respectful of the law and her sister, she'd have shot him herself by now." Ted gathered up the photos and tucked them back in the envelope returning them to his desk drawer. The door opened to the study at the moment that he shut the drawer and a feminine voice diverted their attention.

"Daddy, they are all waiting...oh, excuse me. I was sure my father was hiding." She smiled, "I didn't realize you were hiding with friends."

Frank recognized her as the woman from the photos. However, the nose was different. It was petite straight and perfect. No sign that it had been broken. Also her incredible green eyes held no hint of sadness. In all, He was taken back. The pictures didn't do justice for her beauty.

The Mayor walked up to her and placed a kiss on her forehead, "These are good friends of mine. Jordan, this is Frank

Castile and his brother Nick. I'm sure you've heard me mention Frank's name before."

Twins! Frank suddenly realized.

She flashed her father a look that said *many times*," Of course, Hello Mr. Castile," she shook Nick's hand, "And Mr. Castile." She gave them both a radiant smile. Although Frank was incredibly handsome, he didn't hold a candle to Nick. His thick black hair was combed back off his forehead, and neatly trimmed around his ears which gave expression to his strong square jaw dusted with a slight hint of stubble that was quite enigmatic. His eyes were the yummiest shade of dark brown and framed with thick black lashes inset under inquisitive black brows. His skin was darker than his brother's. It was almost like he'd spent more time in the sun. However, she could tell from the even tone that it was his natural color. Frank was taller than him also, but she still put Nick at over six feet making him practically tower over her five foot four height. She still didn't miss the fact that he also carried himself with an air of arrogant confidence. However, she found that extremely appealing because when he spoke, a slight smile of approval lit his face while he studied hers.

"Nick." He offered.

"Of course." Her eyes lingered on him longer than she'd meant to. Who could blame her? "Nick." She repeated almost caressing the word with her tongue on her upper palate.

At that, Frank brought his head up looked at the two of them for a moment not missing the exchange, but didn't say anything. It was obvious from the way Nick looked back at her, that there was some interest. No one else would notice, but Frank did, because he knew how to pick out the subtle hints in Nick's expression. The woman's reaction he expected, but not his brother. Women were constantly throwing themselves at Nick because of his looks, the way he held himself, and most of

all, the mystery he gave off. It didn't help that he was filthy rich either. However, Nick never took them up on their offers or their affections. He was polite, always polite, but there was something different this time. It was definitely interest.

Ted didn't seem to notice at all and politely obeyed his daughter and led the men back out to the crowd.

Mario managed to locate the bar and get Frank and Nick each a glass of champagne. Frank took his glass and walked with Ted through the crowd while Nick removed himself as far from the throng as possible. Nick stood in an obscure corner of the large room leaning with one shoulder against the wall, one hand thrust in his pocket while sipping champagne. *He looked like something out of a James Bond movie*, Mario thought as he stood beside him feeling just a little inadequate. Mario knew that social events were not Nick's forte and he'd preferred not to have come. However, Nick didn't seem to be restless to leave, but instead was fixed on something in the crowd. Mario followed Nick's gaze and he could have sworn his heart stopped for a moment as his eyes locked on her.

She must've been the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen and she held the grace of a swan as she moved about the crowd socializing like a pro. Her delectable laugh reached his ears many times and he found it alluring through the monotonous murmurs of the socialite mob. Not to mention that the emerald satin gown she wore clung ever so nicely to her shapely form. Mario couldn't help but wonder if her milky skin was as soft as it looked. How easy the spaghetti straps could slide off her shoulders and material would flow like unbroken water down her form and pool on the floor. He saw her divert her gaze to Nick several times while conversing with someone else and hold her eyes steadily with his and Mario had to give his head a mental shake for imagining the woman naked. It wasn't like him, but she was so hypnotic. He'd felt immediately guilty for even

thinking in such a way, when it was obvious that she had eyes for Nick. What a surprise. Strangely enough, Mario was sure the feeling was mutual because Nick would have normally grown impatient waiting for his brother to wrap up business, but he never indicated wanting to leave. In fact, when ever he glanced up at the man his eyes were undeniably locked on her. Maybe being able to watch her somehow made the evening tolerable. It was like looking at fine art such as a Monet. Mario knew a bit about art because Nick had dragged him to several art exhibits. Nick liked art and because of him, Mario was developing a taste for it. Just when you think you've seen all the beauty in the blur and swirls of paint, something new and alluring catches your eyes, something you missed, just to make you sit and stare longer. She disappeared from their view for a moment behind an elderly couple and Nick straightened himself away from the wall, turned and without a word walked out the double French doors to stone balcony overlooking the dimly lit garden in the back of the house. Mario wondered if he actually felt uneasy with the attraction the woman had displayed toward him and it was time for a change of scenery. No, he doubted it, the man never had an uneasy moment in his life.

Although, Nick always had beautiful women try and drape themselves all over him and he would politely turn them down, this was different. He actually paid attention to this one. He tore his eyes away from her and turned to follow Nick.

There were a few more guests outside admiring the well manicured garden that surrounded a three tier fountain. It had inset lights that cast a rainbow glow to the cascading water. Nick was leaning on the granite rail that surrounded the balcony taking a drink from his glass. Mario kept close to the stone wall of the house in the shadows. He knew when Nick didn't want to be bothered, and this was one of those times. Even though it seemed as though Nick wasn't thinking of anything, he knew

better. Everything Nick did was purposeful in one way or another and empty thoughts or just pondering scenery wasn't in Nick's character. He was always aware of everything around him. When he leaned down on the rail, Mario swore he could've been posing for a fashion magazine. No matter what Nick did, it radiated his masculine confidence. If he could just have half of what Nick displayed in a setting such as this he would be clearly satisfied.

Just then a remarkable feminine shape passed in front of him and made its way to Nick's side. It took him a few seconds to realize that it was the woman he had imagined naked only moments ago. Mario noticed that Nick actually recognized her and politely stood straight to face her. Seeing her up close made him realize that a glimpse through the crowd did not do justice for her beauty. He was literally awestruck. She carried herself with complete class and elegance like she was born to belong. Now he could see the full length satin gown she wore and how it clung exquisitely to her every curve. It opened down the back and was held in place by strings of glass beads. The front of the gown left little to wonder at her flawless neckline and perfect breasts which the sheer fabric laid so perfectly against, then narrowing down to her tiny waist and voluptuous hips. Even in the dim light, Mario could not mistake how faultless she was.

"Miss Calloway." Nick said in polite greeting.

"Call me Jordan, please." She felt a small lurch in the pit of her stomach as he focused his dark eyes on her again. She admitted to herself that she could really get used to his scrutinizing stare.

He managed a smile, "All right, Jordan."

Damn he was sexy. "Aren't you supposed to be in that conversation?" she moved her wine glass in the direction of his brother and her father through the open double doors, who gathered with a few more city council men. She knew he watched

her over the past hour. Every time she looked in his direction his gaze was fixed on her. She might have found it unnerving if it was someone else. However, from such a handsome man, she found it very flattering. She couldn't take it anymore, she had to get to know him. She saw him leave through the doors to the back of the house and decided to follow him. Now that he smiled it just made him all the more mouth-watering.

"No." He glanced sparingly at her before turning his attention back to the group, "It's not my department."

"Oh?" She eyed his handsome features for a moment, "And what is your department, Mr. Castile, if not such a social butterfly like your brother?" Her green eyes probed his. As if his handsome looks weren't attractive enough. She found his self assurance irresistible.

"Not real estate, I just share the name."

Like fine art, Mario thought to himself again as he studied her beauty from the shadows. The light from the garden cast a soft glow on her face making her look angelic and every time she smiled dimples would grace the corners of her full lips. There's no way in hell that Nick could possibly ignore that. The man had the emotional expression of a marble statue, but Jordan Calloway could possibly melt ice with her beauty which may just affect marble the same way.

"Well, you must do something to earn your keep? We all do something." She searched his expression for some indication that he was interested in her. Although she couldn't see anything concrete, there was something, if even for an instant, in his dark eyes that she was sure she didn't mistake.

He smiled down at her, "Like a doctor?" he twisted the conversation back on her with such expertise she didn't even register it.

"Oh, you heard." She blushed and averted her gaze.

"Proud Papa." He nodded towards the social gathering.

“Sorry Dad can be that way. It kind of makes it tough to do anything on your own when people know who you are and who you’re related to.” She gave him a delectable smile, “Anyway, we were talking about you.”

“No, *you* were talking about me.” He replied giving her a subtle smile in return. *Touché*.

Jordan laughed, “Well, it’s not like you’re occupied with something else.” She saw the smile pull at the corners of his masculine lips and thought of how damn sexy he looked at that moment.

“True.”

She couldn’t take it anymore. He wasn’t trying in the least to even flirt with her and she knew she wasn’t ugly. Maybe he was married? Glancing down at his hands, she didn’t see a ring on his finger, but then again, men didn’t always wear their wedding rings. Unfortunately, she knew nothing about him because she didn’t even know Frank had a brother until tonight. She studied his expression for a moment before she boldly stated, “So Nick, how *does* one get to know you better?”

Nick cleared his throat, caught off guard at her forwardness.

She laughed again, “I see. You obviously aren’t used to a woman asking you out”

Damn! Thought Mario. That must have been the first time he seen Nick remotely uncomfortable. Although when he spoke he gave no indication.

“I can’t say that I am.” He flicked a glance over her head toward the patio doors where his brother was.

She gave him another irresistible smile, “How about dinner tomorrow night?” she watched him turn away for a moment as he considered it before he returned her gaze.

“I can’t. Sorry.”

She didn’t miss where his gaze lit when he turned away from

her. It was his brother. “hmmm. Let me guess.” She motioned her glass in the direction of his brother and her father, “I have the feeling your brother keeps you very occupied. Maybe I should go ask his permission” she teased.

Mario was amazed that she had picked that up so quickly.

“I wouldn’t recommend it. He may want you for himself.”

She felt a thrill go through her. Was that interest? She gave him a stunning smile. She actually thought he was teasing. “Well then what would you recommend, Nick?” She turned around leaned back on the banister in front of him sipping from her glass. Her eyes watched him over the rim, “I’m open to suggestion.”

“Quite frankly, I don’t have a clue.” He answered softly running his eyes down her form.

Although Mario kept to the shadow of the side of the house, it still surprised him that he knew he was there all along. Especially when Nick looked past her to him with a familiar look laced with unspoken instructions. He took Nick’s cue and approached the couple at that time pretending to look at his watch and clearing his throat indicating that they must go. Actually, he’d almost missed the hint because he couldn’t take his eyes off of Jordan long enough to pay attention.

“And unfortunately, I have to leave.” Nick nodded toward Mario.

She certainly didn’t miss that look of interest moments ago or did she imagine it? Now she wasn’t so sure from the way he made to leave. ‘So soon?’ She turned to see a good-looking young man approached that must’ve been around her age. After he looked at his watch, he gave her a generous grin and nodded a greeting at her. In fact he looked like a younger version of Nick Castile.

Mario’s grin near froze on his face as Nick introduced him to Jordan. He couldn’t recall any other time that Nick had ever

done that.

“Jordan Calloway, this is my assistant, Mario Puzzo.”

She smiled politely and said, “Hello.” Before turning to Nick again with her green eyes registering disappointment, “will I see you again?” She knew she was being a little aggressive, but she really didn’t want to let him go. He was so different from her father’s stuffy high society friends and their spoiled offspring. Also, she couldn’t deny that she was incredibly attracted to him.

“It probably wouldn’t be a good idea.”

Although the statement itself sounded rude, he’d said it was gently to make her think that it was nothing personal. She considered it for a moment, no, he wasn’t rude, he was just not explaining himself and why did he need to? He had every right to turn her down, but something in his eyes glinted every now and then telling her that he was interested in her, although it was short lived. Regardless, she did wonder if it was something she said that put him off. “Why? Are you married?” She almost scolded herself for being so forward, but she knew her time was limited in convincing him to see her again. She had already noticed that his ring finger was empty.

“No.” he smiled

“Engaged?” It was too late to stop now.

“No.”

“Seeing someone?”

“No.” His smile grew wider.

God he was gorgeous. “Gay?”

This time he actually laughed, “No, definitely not.”

Even his deep throaty laugh was sexy, “I’m running out of options Nick.” She teased lightly

“You certainly don’t hold back.”

“I’m grasping at straws here. Tell me you don’t like pushy.” A beautiful challenging smile spread across her face.

He chuckled again, “True and no.” He turned to leave.

“Liar.” She said softly baiting him with a sly sensuous smile. It worked if even for a moment.

He stopped and slowly turned back to her and tilted his head in amusement.

Mouth-watering! She thought again, at the image he gave with that subtle pose, “I didn’t get to where I was on my father’s shirt tails. I can read people Nick.” She reached into her handbag and pulled out her card, “Just in case you change your mind.”

Mario watched as he actually took it, stared at it for a moment, and tucked it in his breast pocket. He then turned his attention back to her. Her arms were stubbornly folded under her breasts and her green eyes sparkled as an eloquent smile lit her beautiful face. Simply put, she was stunning. There was no way Nick could resist her, but to Mario’s complete shock, he did.

He nodded to her, “It’s my work schedule. I have absolutely no social life right now, just so you know.”

She laughed, “Thank you for making it seem like it wasn’t me. My ego was deflating rapidly.” Now she understood why he kept glancing at his brother. She was sure he set Nick’s schedule.

“It *definitely* isn’t. Good evening, Miss Calloway, it has been a pleasure.” he said politely, then turned and left with Mario on his heels.

Jordan watched him go and let out a sigh of disappointment. Jesus, he was being difficult. She *knew* he liked her, she was sure of it. Why avoid her? She watched his broad back and shoulders as he walked away. He was so enigmatic and mysterious, not to mention simply gorgeous and there was no mistaking the intelligence in his dark brown eyes. She liked every one of those characteristics in a man.

“Wow.” Mario stated as they walked back through the crowd. He turned and looked over his shoulder to see if she still watched Nick and she did, “I can’t believe you actually walked

away from her! Jesus, she's beautiful. I really think she likes you." Nick turned and looked down at him with a cutting expression that said, *You think?* He then turned away and headed to the front doors.

"Sorry." He mumbled stopping and retrieving Nick's overcoat while he waited patiently. He then followed Nick out of the Mansion. Obviously his boss didn't miss a thing when it came to Jordan Calloway. Why he felt the need to probe into Nick's personal life, he'll never know, but he felt like a complete idiot now. He ran ahead and opened the door for Nick and suddenly Frank appeared behind him.

"Get in kid." Frank said.

Mario did as he was told but took his seat opposite Nick who didn't spare him a glance. He still felt like an idiot. Again he opened his big mouth and it got him in trouble. He just couldn't understand how Nick could walk away from such a gorgeous woman. Frank settled next to him, putting himself opposite of Nick. Mario now knew to keep his mouth shut, but that didn't mean that Frank had to and in a moment he understood why Nick had turned her down.

"She's not hard to look at. Is she Nick?" Frank said with a knowing look. He'd seen Nick heading for the door with Mario on his heels and knew he'd had enough of the gala. It was longer than he'd hope for, and was thankful to him for staying that long and he knew it was Jordan Calloway he owed for that. However, he couldn't shake the image of the look Nick and Jordan shared while in her father's study. It was obvious that Nick was interested in her. Any normal man wouldn't think anything of it, but he knew that Nick just didn't look at her, he *looked* at her. Nick doesn't unmask his guard for anyone, let alone a woman he just met. That's how Frank knew he was more than intrigued with Jordan Calloway than he let on. Although Nick had natural charm and charisma that would entice just about anyone, truth

of it was, he was a stone cold killer. For Nick to be interested in a woman wasn't an option for either of them. Not that he cared if Nick released some of his pent up frustration with a sexual relationship of any sort, but Jordan wasn't meant for that type of relationship. She was pure class. Anything less would be insulting. Even he knew that. Also, the mayor definitely wouldn't approve of his baby girl dating a hitman. It was obvious to both of them that Ted adored his daughters.

Nick gave him a look that said he didn't know what he was talking about.

Frank stared at him sternly, "Don't try it Nick. It was damn obvious to me! Besides you'd have to be half dead not to notice that Aphrodite."

Nick just shook his head and looked out the window but Mario didn't miss the subtle smile. He wasn't sure if Frank did. If he did, it wasn't mentioned. Frank's word 'Aphrodite' was appropriate for that woman, he thought. Aphrodite was the Greek Goddess of love and beauty...it was a fitting term. Obviously Nick thought the same from the smile he hid from his brother.

"Whatever you're thinking, you'd better quit. She's not even...."

"I hear you." Nick said calmly, turning his attention back to his brother with his expression unreadable again.

He was going to say, *an option considering what you do*. Frank studied his expression for a moment to see if he was serious before speaking, "Alright then. Look, if you need to have a little fun. I have some girls that..."

Nick actually chuckled and held up his hands, "No thanks." *I certainly don't need to be lathered up and raped*, he thought with amusement. He liked a good lustful roll in his bed with a real woman, not one that would give you a blow job if you just tell her to. Used women weren't particularly a choice for

him. He liked intelligent sophisticated women and he really didn't have a problem picking up those in the past, but that sweet red headed Calloway woman with her pouting lips, twin dimples and sparkling green eyes, occupied his mind now.

"Whatever you need Nick. I'll make it happen, you know that." Frank said seriously, "But I'm sorry, Jordan Calloway is not on the menu."

"I know." He said as if he wasn't interested anyway.

Frank was satisfied with Nick's answer and settled back into the seat eyeing his brother with admiration, "I'm glad you came, Nick. I have to admit, it gives me a sense of pride to have you with me. Just like old times, you and me in the neighbourhood."

Nick smiled, "Yes, it seems so, doesn't it?"

"Except now we're a lot wealthier and use more sophisticated means of extortion. No more beating up Johnny in an ally for his wallet."

"No, now we kill him." Nick added seriously.

Frank stared back at him, "Yes, we do."

It had never occurred to Mario that Jordan actually did affect Nick and that's why he was so irritable with him because he'd pretty much rubbed it in his face. Now he felt like a real idiot. Damn it though. If the man showed some emotion every now and then he would be able to read him better. Nick obviously knew that Frank wouldn't approve and that's why he walked away. Still, he didn't know how he managed.

Frank's phone rang just then and he answered it. He looked up at Nick, "Now...Yeah Bruno, tell Luigi we're on our way."

"We'll take Mario home." Nick said abruptly without looking at him.

Mario knew it was something important if he was being dropped off, but didn't protest. He still felt like an idiot and wanted out of the car.

The car pulled up in front of Mario's apartment and he got out of the car, "Good night Mr. Castile," he turned to Nick, "Mr. Castile." Who nodded in response. Mario couldn't tell if he was still annoyed with him but he really didn't seem to be.

"Later kid." Frank said as he shut the door. He then turned to Nick, "Why are you pissed at him?"

Nick looked at him and as usual his face remained expressionless, "Don't worry about it. I'm not."

Frank scoffed obviously not believing him, "Okay Nick."

Mario watched the Limousine pull away before he turned and went through the doors of his apartment. He didn't have a doorman and his apartment was by no means modest. It was more decent than what he was use to growing up in the Bronx. His mother still lived there, she didn't want any part of Mario's money although her health was not as good as it used to be and he worried about her a lot. It was obvious that she didn't approve of him working for Frank Castile but she never said anything. She would just say that she didn't want to leave her church, because she'd been there since she was a little girl she didn't want to go to another. She tried to get him to at least save money and go to college and finish high school, but he always thought it was pointless. He loved reading though. Maybe that's why his mother pushed him so hard. He would read anything he could get his hands on, but still didn't have a desire to go to school. Maybe it was because he could learn at his own pace. Or better yet he liked the excitement of the job he had. Any scholarly job would drive him nuts out of sheer boredom. He had a good job, a job he really liked and he made good money. So to please both his mother and his employers, he made sure he got an apartment halfway between his mother and Nick for convenience sake. That way he didn't find himself driving extensive distances.

He took off his new tuxedo and hung it in his closet and

stared at it a moment. He could no doubt get used to that life. To see the brothers together like tonight made him yearn for that kind of kinship. He didn't have anyone besides his mother. He never knew his father, so Frank was the closest thing he had to it, and Nick to a brother. They were both so proud and all attention was on them when they entered a room, any room. It was charismatic.

When Mario and Nick walked into Frank's office the next day Frank was in a bad temper. Mario had gone and picked Nick up like he usually did early in the morning, but Nick didn't register any of the mood that Frank displayed even though it obviously stemmed from the meeting they had last night.

Frank looked up at his brother when he walked in the room, "If you find that little bastard shaking down our businesses, deal with him."

"Frank, there are other ways." Nick stated calmly. "Set up another meeting with Luigi and we'll discuss it again. Only you don't get up and walk out this time."

"That fat slob wouldn't listen." Frank spat.

"He will. We'll give him an ultimatum and use his relationship with our father as leverage. Emilio is a captain, so he's important to them, just ballsy. If you put a hit on one of Luigi's captains, you are asking for a war. Your reputation won't hold up in your legitimate circles, especially when men associated with you start turning up dead. And if you expect me to start picking them off one by one you are not being realistic. We need the Gaetani family because we've been at peace with them since our father made peace. You destroy that trust or the family and you're asking for war or another family in its place that won't follow tradition. I'll follow him for a few days and get some surveillance. Luigi will listen"

Frank took a long breath to calm himself down, "Fine Nick,

you set this up, and give him your ideas. Where the hell were you when the old man died, I could've used your head then."

Nick chuckled, "You never think right when you're pissed off. Some things just don't change." He looked over at Bruno who was reading a paper and as if he felt Nick's eyes on him he looked up, "Set it up Bruno."

"No problem, boss" Bruno stood up

"Not tonight though," Frank added, "We already have plans."

Bruno nodded and left the room.

"What plans?" Nick asked

"We are having dinner with Ted Calloway, my engineer, and the building commissioner. Regardless of the mayor appointing him, he's a good man, and might need some swaying to pass my permits."

"You don't need me Frank." Nick protested.

"You're wrong. I already told you I want you with me. I need you as my *capo bastone*." He grinned at the jest.

Mario knew that word, it meant 'underboss' as opposed to *Capo Famiglia*, meaning 'boss'. From conversations over the past two years, he's come to recognize Frank is basically a mobster. However, he's much more civilized than the movies make mob bosses out to be. Although he has heard stories and Frank has a volatile temper, he has always been good to him and Nick could usually calm him down with a few words. Like now, you would never guess he was ready to put someone out of their misery only a few moments ago. Mario had never witness a 'hit' or anything near what you would expect from a mob syndicate, but he suspected it had been done. Nick would disappear for several days or weeks, and Frank would just tell him not to worry when he asked about him. Then there was the fresh smell of gun powder or blood on his clothes when he picked him up in the early morning or late at night. However, from the look of Nick's

steely expression, you'd think nothing happened. As for the other family, they shared the five boroughs with Frank's family. By the sounds of it, this Emilio had been overstepping his territory and hitting up business in Frank's district. Mario almost felt sorry for him, because by the sound of it, Nick was going to make him pay.

"Fine Frank. Whatever you want." Nick reluctantly agreed.

Chapter Three

THAT NIGHT, Nick accompanied his brother to Abboccato's, one of the best Italian restaurants in the city. They frequented there often and regardless of the one month wait for a reservation Frank always just walked in. He insisted that Nick come with him for a business meeting and as Frank said there was Mayor Calloway, he swore under his breath as his eyes settled on the rest of the guests. The mayor's gorgeous daughter sat with her father and another two men that Nick didn't know. *Jesus Christ*, he thought to himself. He was sure he'd seen the last of her at her father's house the prior evening. He honestly took Frank's advice regardless of her image resurfacing into his thoughts. When he stood out on the balcony with her the night before, every cell in his body screamed for him to leave her be, but he couldn't draw herself away from her. Yet standing there staring at her now made him realize that she seemed to have grown more dazzling since he'd seen her barely twenty-four hours before. He wasn't sure if he could resist the dimpled stunning smile, or her irresistible beauty as he did the night before. He'd actually spent time thinking about her endlessly when he'd left the mayor's house, and resolved to put her out of his thoughts from then on.

He cursed under his breath, as his eyes lit on Jordan and his expression became serious, "Fuck me, Frank. You should've

brought Bruno.”

“Calm yourself Nick, it’s important. I told you I wanted you to get more involved with business, besides have you seen how he eats.” Frank joked and placed his hand on Nick’s shoulder urging him forward, but he knew exactly what bothered Nick, and no wonder why. She was more stunning than the previous night, if that was possible. He didn’t know she would be there or he *would* have brought Bruno, especially after witnessing the brief exchange between Nick and her the previous night. It was the last thing he wanted for Nick was to get involved with her. It was too risky for both of them.

“Frank, Nick, over here.” The mayor stood up when they entered. He thought they hadn’t seen them yet because they were turned toward one another talking.

Jordan stood up to greet the brothers and Frank knew Nick could also see as well as he could, the tight material of her red strapless cocktail dress stretch perfectly over her the curve of her wonderful breasts, leaving a beautiful sight of cleavage. Her glorious auburn curls were pulled up off her shoulders and pinned on top of her head allowing just a few to caress the soft pale flesh at her neck.

Frank shook hands with the men at the table and then kissed Jordan’s hand telling her she was beautiful, before he sat down.

“Nick,” she politely stated, “Nice to see you again.” Her green eyes sparkled with excitement.

“Jordan.” He leaned down and kissed the soft creamy skin of her cheek, “you too. You look beautiful.”

She near blushed at the gesture, but managed to resist and took her seat. She was ecstatic that he had taken the free seat next to her and his brother took the empty one next to her father. Although he was being polite in his greeting she resisted the temptation of reaching up and touching that part of her cheek

that he kissed.

When they all sat down and the mayor, his two business associates and Frank didn't waste time talking about business.

Nick had been seated beside Jordan and if it were any other person he would have turned on the charm immediately, but with her sitting next to him, so sensuously irresistible, made him pretend to be listening to the surrounding conversation. He might have been a little rude by ignoring her, but she didn't seem fazed in the least. She was headstrong. He had figured this out already, and confident. Two more attributes he liked in women, besides beauty and Jordon Calloway certainly had that going for her. It meant that she would not be needy. Unlike Frank, he couldn't stand needy, clingy women. *Oh yes*, he thought to himself, *she was desirable*. Not to mention she had a body that was so hot she could melt butter.

Although Frank was involved in conversation with the rest of the men, he darted his eyes over to his brother and the striking woman that sat beside him. Every time he did that he noticed Jordan's eyes were on Nick. Even in the dim light of the restaurant her beauty was a force to be reckoned with. When she briefly excused herself to go to the ladies room, you could practically hear a pin drop in the place as every male eye was on her. He had to hand it to Nick; there was no way he would keep his hands to himself if he sat next to her. However thanks to Nick's well trained disposition, he managed. Then his faith in his brother faltered when dinner was over and the waiter was clearing the table. Frank felt a sickening lump in his gut when he saw Nick's features finally soften and turned to her after she had spent over an hour staring at his brother trying to talk to him and only receiving a bare response each time. He had to give it to her though, she didn't give up or even seem displeased.

Jordan eyed him intently as he made conversation with the other men at the table. His strong jaw clenched several times

under her scrutiny. She knew he could feel her eyes on him. Even through dinner, he had kept his answers to her questions curt and short. It made her grin, she definitely affected him. He was trying way too hard to ignore her. This empowered her toward him. Although he wasn't rude when he answered her questions, in fact he was every bit polite and gentlemanly. She was asking him things about the weather, his food, whether he enjoyed it or not, and did he come here often? She almost giggled at that one, it was so cheesy. Finally she saw that steely expression soften after about an hour and a half he finally spoke to her since the first sentence of the night when he told her she was beautiful, which she already knew was just a socially acceptable greeting.

"Is there anything else?" He said in a low voice and a hint of warmth in his mocha eyes, "You've tried everything but spill your dinner on my lap."

She gave him a dazzling smile showing her twin dimples and making her green eyes sparkle again, but she didn't miss the glint in his eyes, "I'm bothering you?" She knew she was, but Jesus he was so attractive. It actually began to amuse her; this game they played. She had been sitting there forever in sheer boredom listening to her father and his friends talk about real estate. Yesterday, she almost cringed when her father said he wanted her with him. He said it was to help Frank, and her beauty and female charm could be quite convincing. Also, he added that she made a wonderful conversationalist. She smiled and politely made small talk but when Nick and his brother came through the doors of the restaurant she had to withhold a gasp. She almost completely forgot how handsome he was. Although the other men at the table wore just as expensive suits as he did, he was the only one that actually looked as though he wore the suit and that it didn't wear him. It was a dark grey double breasted jacket with a burgundy shirt and black tie. *Damn, he looked good enough to*

eat, she thought. She watched his dark gaze set on her then pause. His brother said something to him and urged him forward. She smiled knowingly; he didn't want to be here. It was that moment that she knew that she affected him and led her to teasing him constantly during dinner. "I might have spilled my dinner on your lap, but it was absolutely delicious and it would have been a waste of a four thousand dollar suit." She paused letting her eyes rove over him, "well, then again, I guess I would owe you for the dry cleaning and you'd have to see me again to collect." She finished with a teasing tone.

"You weren't kidding about pushy." He answered with a bit of sarcasm trying one last time to deter her, but it didn't work.

She flashed him another smile, and kept her voice low because she didn't want to draw attention to them talking. "You forget, Nick, I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth, so I'm used to getting what I want..."

At the mention of her mouth, his eyes guided to her full pouting lips and he began to think of other things he'd like to use her mouth for besides a silver spoon. His groin tightened in response.

"...Also," she continued, not seeming to notice the change in his gaze, "think about my career choice. I'm use to dealing with bureaucrats and hospital administration." His eyes carefully studied her face and it was all she could do not to turn away, but she forced herself to stare back at him because she liked the way he looked at her. He seemed so reserved and remote until he actually looked or spoke to her. "You're a cakewalk next to that." She added, and watched his guarded demeanour softened a little more as he chuckled.

You have no idea, "At least you're honest." He mused as he quietly adjusted his slacks under the table to accommodate his growing erection. No woman had ever affected him so quickly. It had been awhile since he had had a woman, but still, his

reaction to her surprised him.

Something in the back of her mind told her that this was the moment. If she wanted to get his attention she had to act out of character. Normally, she wasn't as forward with men, but Nick was different. Besides being everything sinfully masculine and gorgeous, he was dripping sexual appeal like a rainstorm. Those mocha brown eyes of his were seriously melting her internal organs. The rising heat in her pelvis, the increase in her breathing and pulse rate, couldn't be ignored. It was undeniably exciting how she reacted to him without even laying a finger on her. She had never wanted to get to know a man as much as she did in all of her life as she did at that moment. So she broke with tradition and was bluntly candid. Lowering her voice so no one could hear but him, she locked her eyes on his, wiped the smile off her face, and confessed, "Honest? Nick, I'm completely fascinated."

Fuck me, he thought staring down at her through hooded eyes, *I am totally screwed*. Her beautiful upturned face, confession and sparkling green eyes was wreaking havoc on him and in his groin. Would she be shocked if he leaned down and told her to excuse herself and meet him in a bathroom stall? For some reason he didn't think she would because of the sexual pull between them at that moment. However, this wasn't the type of women you plant against the wall and take cheaply and he wasn't the type of man to disrespect a woman in such a manner. Jordan was beautiful, intelligent and sophisticated. The kind of woman you take your time with. Especially from seeing all that unshed desire that she just revealed in her emerald gaze. A quick screw wasn't an option with her. Christ, though, he was actually hard for her and she did absolutely nothing to cause it except for small flirtations. *Enough was enough*, he thought, she planted the invitation and he took complete advantage of it and slid his hand onto her thigh.

The heat of his hand and his bold touch surprised her. She did her best to not gasp out loud, but she couldn't keep the expression off her face. Instantly her hand covered his as it boldly moved upward, stopping him. Her quick movement was followed by one of the most sexy grins she'd ever seen from a man. She deserved it and she knew she did by enticing him, but honestly she didn't expect him to be so audacious or find it so damn exciting that he presumed she'd welcome it. "Stop." She whispered covering her mouth with her napkin feigning a cough while tilting her head down to tablecloth so no one could see her expression.

"*Make me.*" He dared softly causing her to abruptly bring her eyes back to his.

Mocha eyes darkened under thick black lashes and flashed her a muted challenge, causing her to flush. *God help her*, she was absolutely done for. There was no way he could miss the excitement registering on her face now and she was right. His hand inched upward under the hem of her dress. "Not fair," she breathed quietly while she tried to slow his ascent with a slight pressure.

"I never claimed to play fair and you started it." he said with tone meant to play on her sexual awareness and it worked. He watched her lips part and her emerald gaze darken with desire. All kinds of images went through his head as he lowered his eyes to her lush rose petal lips and what he could make them do to him.

"Very...very not fair." She whispered watching his hot gaze drift to her mouth. This wasn't normal. The feelings that he was eliciting with a single touch coupled with his stunningly heated gaze. In fact she had unknowingly lifted her hand off of his as his long fingers curled around her inner thigh. Sexual heat passed between them like charged static and she started to lean toward him.

Frank interrupted their conversation and directed a question at Nick. It bothered him to watch the two exchange words. Nick wasn't the least bit social, but when he did turn on the charm it was devastating to the opposite sex. He was tall, dark and one hundred percent Sicilian and although Frank wasn't ugly by any means, Nick had an air about him that attracted women like bees to honey even if he didn't say anything. Even his composure made his four thousand dollar suits look like they cost twice that. He carried himself with such self-assurance that any woman would have difficulty refusing him. Now, there he was chatting it up with the Calloway girl and Frank knew this was different, because Nick is surrounded by beautiful woman all the time but never softens like he did with Jordan. Not only that, Jordan was captivated. Frank had no idea about Nick's personal life, because he never mixed business with pleasure, and Nick never touched any of Frank's women although they had been offered to him many times. His brother had different tastes than he did and as he watched his Nick lean down toward Jordan and say something he couldn't hear, he finally realized what type of woman he liked. She responded by ducking her head and blushing. Well, at least he could say this for certain, Nick knew how to pick them. She was absolutely beautiful.

Nick looked up at Frank who directed the conversation at him. Instantly he removed his hand and turned his attention to his brother. What the hell was he doing? For some reason he completely forgot about everything around him. It had never happened to him before. Abruptly, he retreated back into his familiar protective unemotional cocoon. Unfortunately, he knew he'd upset her, but this wasn't the time or place. *Later*, he thought, *I'll deal with this later*.

Jordan was disappointed when she saw the warmth in his eyes darken to indifference and removed his hand as if he was

burned when he turned to answer his brother. Now she was sure he was attracted to her, but for some reason, a few words from Nick's brother flattened the exchange they were sharing. It wasn't even in reference to them, but somehow she was sure Nick read something in the words that Frank gave him and Jordan didn't miss it. What she couldn't figure out was why. Regardless, the rest of the evening was horrible because he didn't engage with her like that again. It was torture sitting so close to him that she would accidentally brush his arm or his leg when she crossed hers and not have him acknowledge her. She tried several times to get him to talk to her and he would answer her politely but apathetically. Later, outside the restaurant, she stood beside her father on the curb so he could say goodbye. She watched Nick get in the limo with his brother, hoping that he'd spare her one last glance because then she would be sure. She could feel her heart thud in her chest with anticipation as Nick opened the door for Frank. *Please*, she thought, *just a glance*. Then it seemed as if time slowed down when he turned and looked at her before he followed his brother in the car.

Her heart skipped a beat, now she was convinced. She smiled to herself, this wasn't over yet.

Frank sat across from his brother. He wasn't going to say anything, he already told him how he felt about the match, now it was up to Nick. One thing was certain, he had an uneasy feeling in his gut about this whole thing. If he'd known that the Mayor was going to bring his tempting daughter along he would have left Nick at home.

IT WAS MONDAY evening and Nick tossed his black suit jacket on the back of a nearby sofa chair. He then removed his gun holster placing it on the counter. He rotated his shoulders to loosen them up a bit and was loosening his tie when there was a

knock at the door. He stilled for a moment. He wasn't expecting anyone. He slid his guns out of their holsters, cocked them and approached the door quietly. Looking through the peep hole, he saw a familiar face and let out a breath of air half in frustration, and half in relief. He disengaged the guns and tucked them and his holster in a nearby closet and opened the door, "After hours work Doctor Calloway?"

Jordan stood on the other side of the door with two Styrofoam cups of coffee from the bistro down the street from his building and a striking smile on her face, "No. I just thought you could use a wind down from the day. I got off shift not too long ago and thought you might like a Coffee." She gave him a dazzling smile. She watched him look down at his feet trying to suppress one of his own. He then stepped aside and gestured her in with his free arm. She couldn't help but grin at her victory.

She entered the penthouse without hesitating and gave him a cup which he accepted politely, "I didn't think you'd really ever call me. So I thought I'd make the first move." She smiled up at him.

She was right. He probably wouldn't have called her. He didn't lie to her when he said he hadn't any spare time in his life. "Have you been waiting out there long?"

"No." Her expression said otherwise.

He made a face when took a sip of the coffee. It was ice cold.

"Okay, maybe a few minutes, " she laughed genuinely.

"How did you know where I lived?" he said slanting her an amused look.

She flashed him a devious grin, "My sister is a detective with NYC. I made a phone call when I couldn't find you in the phone book."

"Isn't that a misuse of city services?" Of course he was only teasing, but he wasn't impressed that she was there, in his

apartment. As it was, he had trouble resisting her in a crowd, how the hell was he going to when there were alone.

She shrugged her lovely shoulders, still smiling and not the least bit deterred by her behaviour. "Not if you don't tell."

He looked her up and down for a moment as if thinking, then he finally gave in, smiled back at her and set the cup down, "Come, I'll make you a real hot cup of coffee." He couldn't deny that he was impressed by her hunting him down and being honest on how she found him. It was probably what tipped the scale for him when he let her in his penthouse. He liked independent, self assured women. Fact is, she intrigued him, and he was hopelessly bewitched by her. He could still hear Frank's warning and his own instincts for that matter, but for some reason he chose to ignore them. Something he'd never done in the past.

"I thought you'd never ask." She removed her coat and laid it on a stool at the breakfast counter. Sitting on it, she watched him intently as he walked around the counter to the coffee maker. She couldn't help but noticed that his white dress shirt fell just right on his upper torso. Now that he'd had his jacket off, she could really see that his broad shoulders, thick chest and arms were actually his, not padding in the jacket as most men counted on. She looked around his penthouse suite and admired the masculine touches. He kept it simple and maybe way too organized and clean. The cherry wood cabinets in the kitchen were crowned with black polished granite and stainless steel appliances. His living room had taupe suede-like couch and chairs surrounding a simple glass and cast iron coffee table. The table didn't hold magazines like you would normally see, just a laptop. The walls had framed pictures of modern art that kept the masculine touches. There was no television in the room, just an expensive stereo. His penthouse suite actually described him immensely. There wasn't one crooked painting on

the wall. One thing she did notice was there were no photographs, not one. Regardless, it was very stylish, neat, elegant and perfect, just like she thought he was.

Before long, they began to share a bottle of red wine. Jordan mostly talked about her family and her experiences as a Doctor. He nodded politely in acknowledgment to her stories and actually chuckled at a few of them.

She watched him as he poured her another glass of wine, “You don’t say much do you?”

He shook his dark head and looked at her with intelligent eyes, “I speak when it’s important.”

What an odd thing to say? She studied him for a moment, “I’ve told you all about myself and yet, you’ve said nothing. I am beginning to feel like a chatterbox,” She smiled.

“That doesn’t bother me.” He set the bottle on the counter while keeping his eyes on hers. “Contrary to popular belief, I like to hear a woman talk about her life, especially when it’s interesting, and the company is...enchanting.”

Her cheeks pinked up a little from his compliment. It was the first time he indicated that he found her attractive, “Really? I thought that’s what put you off me the other night. It was that or my career choice. Some men don’t like it to think of a situation of me having a job where I make more money than them. Not only that but it’s mostly a masculine profession. You have to be tough mentally to deal with it.” She stated truthfully.

Her words made him smile devilishly. “There’s nothing masculine about you Jordan and I’m sure you don’t make more money than me.” *Men who are intimidated by such things are not men*, he thought.

God, he was positively gorgeous when he smiled, she thought as her breath caught in her throat. Her eyes darted to his masculine lips. Then she took a large drink of her wine glass while her green eyes gazed at him intently over the rim, “You

really don't think so do you? I mean about my profession." It was obvious that he was wealthy. The penthouse alone must've cost a fortune, not to mention the suits she had noticed him wear. Not one of them cost less than two thousand dollars. Not that it mattered to her. She couldn't care less of how much money he made, but for some reason it was important to a man.

"Not even a little bit." He confessed, "Remember I've seen you in a dress." He allowed a smile to tug at his lips recalling the other night, "And I know how you *feel*. You are definitely all woman."

She stilled at those words and blushed further. He *did* notice her the other night at her father's house and remembered the heated exchange at the restaurant. Regardless of his insistence to put her off, she was right, he was interested. "So, you did notice?" She managed to look at him regardless of her embarrassment over his flattery. He set down his glass and leaned on the counter towards her. She could see the change in his eyes again. His dark gaze was no longer cool, but heated and fixed on her.

"Yes." He said softly, "I did." His hand came up and brushed a curl off her face to tenderly tuck it behind her ear. "You'd have to be dead not to." He continued.

She near trembled at his gentle touch, but then watched the glint of warmth in his eyes suddenly steeled over as if some unseen thought crossed through them, and he withdrew his hand. Although it seemed too soon because they hadn't known each other too long, she didn't want to lose that warmth he'd displayed. Not only that, he actually *accepted* her choice in careers. Not many men do. It used to make her not tell her dates what she did, because it scared them away. One thing was certain, she didn't want him to close up again. Her voice was barely a whisper, "So Nick, why do you seem to be interested, but not want to explore that attraction?"

He smiled subtly while he erected himself, keeping his eyes steady on hers. "How old are you?"

"Is that the problem?" She wasn't sure if she wanted to tell him, because she knew there was a big age difference.

"Depends."

"I'm twenty three." Her eyes showed unmistakeable amusement, "And you are..."

"Thirty four."

"So you think the age difference is too much?" She sighed, "Nick, please don't take this the wrong way, but I don't interact well with men my own age. I finished high school at fifteen, premed by seventeen and was the youngest in my class at med school at a mere eighteen years of age finishing in the top three percentile. I find men my age very immature and they really do not appeal to me." She wasn't bragging even though it sounded like it. She was desperately trying to tell him why she was attracted to him, age wise, but it came out wrong, "Damn, that just didn't sound right."

He chuckled.

"Why is it funny?" She tilted her head at him.

"Your age or intelligence does not intimidate me Jordan. There's no need to explain it to me. I was indicating that my age might bother you."

She blushed and lowered her gaze, "I...I just thought because of the age gap you'd want to know why I prefer someone more your age. I just wanted to get it out of the way. I never even considered your age a problem. I figured that's how old you were. Well, I was thinking a few years younger." Now she was babbling and felt like a complete idiot. Whatever self confidence she usually possessed just flew out the window. The man seemed so composed and she was a bundle of nerves. What was wrong with her? She didn't get like this around anyone.

"Makes sense."

“I’m sorry. I misread your apprehension.” He seemed so put together and confident. Is that why she kept making a fool out of herself? Did his overwhelming self assurance make her feel insignificant?

“No need to apologize. I understand.” He said softly.

She could feel the heat rising in her cheeks as another blush rushed in, “Thanks for that.” She felt like a moron bursting the explanation like that, but she wanted to make it clear why she preferred men of Nick’s age, and more importantly, Nick. Her babbling made her feel like a silly smitten female, so she quickly changed the subject. “I’m getting tired of sticking my foot in my mouth. So what is it that you do for Frank?”

“I look after him. Keep him out of trouble.” He said, he began to walk slowly around the counter while not taking his eyes from her. Then he let himself grin knowing he affected her as he neared her by the apprehension clearly displayed on her face.

“Like a bodyguard?” her gaze followed him trying not to let that devastating grin make her fall off the stool and she absently reached out and held onto the counter.

He came to a stop in front of her. “Somewhat.” His grin faded and his expression became heated again as he reached up and brushed the hair off her cheek again, “I handle his security.” This time his hand remained where it was.

“...Do you carry a gun...?” she breathed. *Oh my God*, his touch was so gentle and the tingly sensation of it near stole her breath. Truthfully, she didn’t know for the life of her how she was still able to speak.

“Maybe...” He bent his head and his lips gently brushed her cheek,

“...Y-You aren’t really Frank’s brother are you?”. She tilted her face up to him. She’d never seen nor heard of him before that night, and Frank had been at their father’s house

many times, that's why he was such a mystery to her. She felt exhilarated at his touch. His confidence in himself to take such liberty with her was undeniably exciting. Obviously he knew that she was interested in him, but really, how could he not? She practically stalked him.

"..Not true...I am," he stated softly and kissed the corner of her lips while his hand slid around to the back of her neck, "—one hundred percent. Jesus, you're *beautiful*." He said thickly. In a smooth gesture, his other hand removed the wine glass from hers and set it on the counter so he could have her complete attention. "The things I can do to you..."

"S-So, You...oh *Christ*," His warm lips on her skin and masculine whispers in her ears were too much to bear, not to mention that deeply voiced confession. She turned her head and kissed him fully on the lips. Her hands ran up the length of his abdomen over his chest feeling the solid contours of muscles underneath. He pressed her back against the counter, separated her knees, stepped in between her thighs, and brought his body up against her pinning her back against the counter slanting his lips over hers completely. She moaned against his warm lips as tingling desire ran through her every limb. *God! The man can kiss!* She could feel his hardness press against her as his hands roamed to the buttons on her blouse brushing her flesh ever so softly with his fingertips as he undid each one. When she thought about it later, it was all done purposely. The man was a master at seduction, not that she cared, all she knew is she wanted him so badly she could taste it. Never in her life had a man affected her so quickly or at all and at that moment she knew none ever would, except Nick. He had taken complete control of the situation and that confidence alone fired her desire for him. With an urgency she could never recall having before in her life, her hands slid down his flat hard abdomen undid his belt and were working on the clasp to his slacks when a cell phone rang.

He immediately stopped, "Shit." He said softly. His forehead rested on hers for a moment while he breathed deeply. It rang again.

"Don't answer it." She whispered breathlessly.

He lifted his head and stared down at her, "I have to." He reached into his pocket while staring at her apologetically, "I'm sorry." He flipped the phone open and turned away from her.

"Nick?" she said in disbelief as he answered the voice on the other end.

"Is it urgent?" He turned his dark eyes back on her, still holding a hint of desire while he spoke into his cell phone.

What the hell? She let out a breath of frustration. She actually didn't realize she was holding her breath until he looked at her.

"Yes, I understand." He hung up and stared at her seriously, "I have to go."

"You're kidding!" She stared at him, abashed.

"I'm not." He walked back to her while doing up his belt, "My driver is already here."

"Now? Right now? This very moment?" She stared at him in disbelief

"Yes."

She stood up, "I don't *believe* this." She quickly did up the buttons on her blouse, suddenly aware of her exposed chest, all the while flushing bright red. "I was sure you were attracted to me."

"I am." He confessed.

She stopped and looked at him incredulous, "You have a funny way of showing it."

"It's important. I didn't lie when I said I don't have a social life right now."

"Is it more important than this?" She gestured her hands down her body, "Contrary to this evening, I'm not easy."

“I never thought that.” He stated seriously.

“I went out on a limb here. There was something very intriguing, and deliciously attractive about you. I really wanted to get to know you.” She stared at him and ran her hand through her hair trying to hide her rising blush, “God, is just embarrassing!”

He sighed and thrust his hands in his pockets as he approached her, “Jordan, I can’t apologize enough for your embarrassment and I’m sure anything I can say, won’t help, but this can’t happen between us. I really don’t have time in my life for what you want.” He was beginning to think the phone call from Frank was a blessing. He nearly made love to her, and he could not risk a relationship which he knew she wanted. Not only that Frank had already told him to stay away from her and out of respect he really wanted to listen. Even his own instincts were screaming at him to get away from this woman, not because of her, but because of who he was and what he did. That isn’t to say that he didn’t feel terrible for leaving her in such a way. It was highly disrespectful. He may have been a stone-cold killer, but disrespecting a beautiful woman was definitely unforgivable in his books.

She took a deep breath and looked up at him. Although his expression was sincere, she was still defensive at his words, “you have no idea what I want, Nick. Don’t presume anything from this.” The whole thing had caught her off guard too. She never expected the heated moment they just shared and for him to think that she wanted a relationship from it when there was no mention of it, was more embarrassing. Not that he was wrong, but the fact that he seemed to know her more than she knew him was unsettling.

His expression became unreadable.

She stared at him in disbelief not missing the change in his face, “Well, that’s just fine.” She picked up her coat and went

to the door opening it. She *knew* he found her desirable, so what in the hell brought on the protected demeanour that he suddenly displayed? When he apologized, he meant it. It was unmistakable. When he kissed her, it was laced with passion. Not only that, she felt his arousal. He did want her. It took a moment before it hit her. *It was the phone call.* She was sure it was the same person that interrupted them at dinner the other night, his brother. It had to be. What the hell did his brother have against her? She stopped and looked at him choosing her words carefully, and calming her voice somewhat. It was obvious he didn't have much of a choice where his brother was concerned, "You still have my card. Maybe when your brother lets you off the leash you'll let me know." She shut the door behind her. She knew it was harsh, but she was hurt and even though she had said it, it did not ease her feelings or her guilt at saying it.

"*Fuck.*" He said to the empty room. She certainly wasn't stupid. When Frank phoned it jarred him back to reality. He had near taken her to his bed and would have if it hadn't been for the interruption. Just being alone with her was enough to crumble his defences. He never thought she was easy like she suggested, it was not hard to see that she struggled with self-confidence around him no matter how she tried to mask it. However, she was assertive, which he admired. When she saw something she liked she went after it. He swore again, he really shouldn't have kissed her.

Mario thought the woman looked familiar when she stormed by him as he was walking through the doors to Nick's building.

"Your boss is a prick." She said not even looking at him or pausing as she walked by.

"You're telling me." He said under his breath while watching her leave.

Once inside Nick's penthouse Mario mentioned that he'd seen Jordan in the Lobby and what she said.

Nick was putting on his holster and sheathing his firearms, "We will keep that to ourselves." Nick stared directly at Mario to solidify his warning.

Mario got his meaning, "Yes, Mr. Castile. You know, she was really pissed off." Mario remembered what Frank had told Nick about staying away from her, and he assumed that Nick had turned her down and that is why she was angry. Nick always obeyed his brother.

"You don't say." He stated a-matter-of-factly, "Let's go." No one needed to tell him that Jordan was angry. He'd humiliated her and it bothered him enough.

Chapter Four

AT LEAST THIRTY minutes had gone by while he hid below waiting for the craft to get far enough away from the dock. While waiting, he'd donned his dry suit as the boat motor hummed through the craft, knowing the man wouldn't hear him. The motor finally shut down to an idol telling him they were stopping. Nick crept up from below and silently around the side of the boat with his dry suit hood and mask in his left hand and the familiar syringe in his right. Lionel, Jean's husband was just making his way down from the wheelhouse and it looked like he was already enjoying his solitude by the bottle of half empty vodka he carried in his hand. Nick set his hood and mask on the deck and crept closer.

Lionel reached up and turned on the stereo to a popular rock station before grabbing his half drank bottle and making his way down from the wheelhouse to the deck. He was feeling proud of himself. He won a substantial amount of money at the track

today and celebrated by getting a blow job by a hooker. His fucking wife hardly gave him the time of day anymore unless he forced himself on her. That was only fun some of the time. Other times he needed to have someone else take the initiative. *Bitch*, he thought to himself and took another long drink. Regardless of the cold he wanted to sit on the comfortable cushions aft of the boat. He was thankful he put on his thick felt coat before he left the wheelhouse. He turned and headed to the cushions when a strong arm snaked around his neck and he felt a sharp stab in his neck. He tried hard to fight the grasp but the arm was as solid as a rock and within seconds he felt all his limbs go slack.

The man never heard him coming until he grabbed him from behind and injected the tranquilizer into his neck. He struggled and grunted for a moment but Nick held him tight as he succumbed to the drug. He seriously thought about making the bastard suffer for ruining his night, but thought against it. Not only was he under a time limit, but he had to be careful not to draw suspicion if they find enough pieces to do an autopsy. So instead, he laid the helpless body on deck and went below to rig the propane stove. He returned and stood over him while the man stared back at him unable to move with a look of pure shock and question in his eyes.

Nick just shook his head and without saying a word, then retrieved dry suit hood and mask, put them on, and jumped into the murky frigid water of the Hudson. Within fifteen minutes the blast lit up the water in a flash of mock daylight.

When Nick finally made his way over the rocky shoreline, he removed his phone from a waterproof pocket and called for a ride.

It took Mario about twenty minutes to find him and an access point to pick him up even while driving along the flow of the river for the last hour waiting for the phone call. He pulled

over when Nick stepped out into the headlights. Like a well rehearsed routine, Mario quickly got out grabbed the dry pressed grey Kiton suit hanging behind him and followed Nick who opened the back door.

Nick peeled off his dry suit, threw his equipment and damp clothing in the back of the hummer.

Mario removed the suit from the wispy plastic dry cleaning cover and without an exchange of words, gave it to Nick. Again he was amazed that in the fall air Nick didn't even shiver as he stripped off his clothes to change.

Nick dressed quickly, smoothed his tie in the side mirror, and then got in the passenger side as Mario got in the driver's seat. He pulled out his phone and called his brother, "It's done." He hung up and turned to Mario, "Take me home."

Mario pulled in front of Nick's building. He was working himself up all day to speak to Nick about his desire to learn from him. Maybe it was the fact that they took him to that gala at the Mayor's the other night that gave him the small burst of encouragement. Whatever it was, he knew that he'd lose his nerve if he didn't act on it soon. Swallowing heavily, and not looking at him in case he lost his nerve, he spoke. "Look, Mr. Castile. I know you don't trust me. I know you really don't trust anyone except for your brother. " Taking a deep breath and gathering the rest of his courage, he turned to look at Nick to discover he was actually listening to him, although his expression still seemed impassive, he really didn't seem surprised either. "I've been your driver for two years now. I'd like to learn more from you."

Nick stared at him.

Mario kept talking to avoid the growing discomfort, "I was never really good in school, but I'm a good listener, and I can learn quickly. I can help with all the things your brother asks you to do and I can keep secrets. I've never said anything to anyone

about what you do for him. I'll prove my loyalty in anyway you want."

"You think you can do what I do?" One of Nick's eyebrows went up.

"Well, not right away. I certainly can't strip down naked when there's snow on the ground and act like I'm in the Bahamas..."

Nick smiled.

"... but I'm willing to take as long as you think it will take. I want you to trust me." The silence was excruciating as Nick just stared at him. Then he was filled with apprehension as the time stretched. Did he overstep his bounds? Was Nick going to fire him?

"Do you have any idea what I do?" he finally said with a sober tone.

Mario cleared his throat, "I—I've heard rumours."

"Rumours? Mario, rumours are what people start when they have too much time on their hands and rarely any of it has an ounce of truth in it."

"I know that. It's just—well you are so secretive."

Nick straightened himself and looked at the younger man, "Some of the things I do, will turn your stomach. Not only that, I'm protected by our government. You aren't." he said pointedly. "If something were to happen to you, I would feel responsible."

"Mr. Castile," Mario said, knowing that he might be pushing things, "My mother isn't well. I know you know this because you seem to know everything, but after she's gone, I'll have no one. You and your brother are the closest thing I have to family." He paused feeling himself falter a little, "I would do anything for your family. Let me prove it to you."

"Mario, my job isn't easy, no matter how I come across—"

"I know." He interrupted, "But if you give me a chance, I can show you that I can handle it too." The older man studied him

for a moment obviously considering his request.

He finally spoke, "I'll think about it." He got out of the vehicle, and turned to look at him with another slight smile, "I'm surprised Mario, that it took you two years to say that. Next time something like that is on your mind, say it." He shut the door and went into his building without a backward glance.

He knew? Mario thought. He should've known when Nick didn't question anything that he confessed to him about not telling anyone the things he knew. Mario felt as though he could walk on air when he pulled away from the building. He was glad he said something. He'd made more headway with his boss than he'd had in the past two years, and all he had to do was ask. At least now he knew where he stood with Nick. He actually had the distinct impression that he liked him.

Nick undressed and got into bed. He looked at his clock, two a.m. He chastised himself for what he was about to do as he picked up his cell phone and fingered the card Jordan gave him for a moment before he dialled the number. He had thought long and hard about her after she had left his penthouse. Regardless of his extensive experience with women, he couldn't just walk away from this one. *So much for self-control*, he thought putting the phone to his ear.

The voice on the other end of the phone was groggy, "Hello."

"You were sleeping."

"Nick?" She paused for a moment to look at her alarm clock, "Jesus, its two o'clock in the morning, *normal* people are sleeping."

"I figured you'd be up prying into someone's life."

She rolled over in bed onto her back and smiled into the phone, "You have an amazing way of making someone feel better. I'm surprised you're single." She added teasingly, then paused,

“Did you just get home?”

“Yes.”

“Wow, it must have been important.” She said in apparent certainty feeling a little guilty about how she reacted and relieved that it was the truth.

“I tried telling you that my social life is kaput.” He reminded her, then remembering her embarrassment, he added, “You sound incredibly sexy on the phone.”

She laughed, “Mr. Castile, are you trying to seduce me again? Phoning someone at two a.m. probably isn’t quite the right way to go about it. If anything it’s an aversion. I should hang up on you right now.”

“Point taken. Are you still angry?”

“No.” she didn’t lie. She wasn’t as angry as she was humiliated. “Are you still avoiding a close personal relationship?” She replied, “I’m afraid once bitten twice shy. Next time we meet, I might expect some courtship. So, my question is, are you game?”

He didn’t answer that one. There was nothing he would like more than to *play* games with her.

“Hmm, that’s what I thought.” She said with amusement.

“I have to ask you something?”

“Fire away...”

“Do you have the slightest idea of how beautiful you are?”

The words were said slowly and deeply with conviction and Jordan felt her stomach leap. *What the hell did he just say?*

“So, who’s rendered speechless now?”

How could she possibly turn that one around?

“By your extended silence, I’d say no one has every really told you that before. I however, have absolutely no qualms about declaring it.”

She tried to dispel the twinge in her belly, but every time he spoke it would pulse again, “No. no one has.”

“I see. Well, you have led a sheltered life haven’t you?”

How could he possibly turn this back on her, when he was the one that kicked her out of his apartment half-naked, “Not necessarily...I...”

“So I just find it surprising that you are not snatched up.”

“Nick, you are really embarrassing me.” She said softly, the blush evident in her voice.

“What a surprise.” He said thickly.

“I’m going to hang up now, before this blush stays permanent. Goodnight Nick.” She hung up, although she couldn’t wipe the smile from her face. He actually called her. Not only that, he was talking to her without her coaxing him. She didn’t think he would after what he’d said only a few hours ago. He was so calm and collected when he said it that she didn’t think he was interested, regardless of his slight interest during their introduction at her father’s house, and the passionate incident in his Penthouse that abruptly came to an end. She was sure he’d changed his mind. Obviously she said or did something right to make him think about her. But Jesus, talk about mixed signals. Just who was this guy?

He laid his cell phone on the bedside table and picked up her card to look at it again before he set it beside his phone and turned the light out.

Nick was up and dressed for the day when his phone rang. It was Jordan.

“Nick, can we try this again?”

There was a pause before he answered, “All right.” So much for his screaming instincts, but it was his fault, he phoned her first.

“Meet me at Chez Louie at eight o’clock.”

“All right.” He didn’t even hesitate.

“Do you know where it is?”

“Yes.”

“And Nick...”

“Yes....”

“...Don’t stand me up.” She hung up.

He smiled at the silence and closed his phone. *Maybe he was for a game after all*, he thought.

Jordan stood waiting impatiently outside the restaurant for him. She was wearing a black low-cut three quarter length empress style dress that hung loosely around the thighs but snug on the bosom. She chose to pile her auburn hair on top of her head but several curls escaped and tickled her neck, but she was too preoccupied to notice. *He isn’t going to show*, she thought to herself as the minutes ticked by. She glanced at her watch, seven fifty-five. Ten minutes had passed since she’d arrived but it seemed like an hour. She pulled her wrap more onto her shoulders to block out the fall air and silently scolded herself for fidgeting with her handbag and pacing in anticipation as those minutes passed. She had never been so impatient before in her life, but this man just made her all out of sorts and whatever self assuredness she had seemed to demolish into dust when he was around.

Just when she thought she couldn’t handle the suspense any longer, a taxi pulled up to the curb and her heart skipped a beat as he got out of the car with his eyes on her. She watched with anticipation as smile of approval spread on his handsome face as his eyes glided over her form. Her jaw near dropped at the sight of him in his charcoal two button suit, black turtleneck and overcoat. He was positively stylish and considerably gorgeous.

He gave her a fetching smile and leaned down to kiss her lightly on the cheek in greeting, “You are very beautiful.”

Always charming, she thought with a smile. “I was

beginning to wonder if you changed your mind.” She said trying not to blush.

“And be labelled a prick again. I wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Oh, yeah, I forgot about that. Sorry.” She blushed.

“No need to apologize, I was a prick.” He offered with a warm glint in his eyes showing her that he wasn’t the least bit offended.

She laughed, “Yes, you really were.”

He placed a hand on the small of her back and opened door for her.

After the appetizers, Nick called for the waiter, “due frutti di mare speciali per favore.” Two of the seafood specials.

The waiter nodded and left.

“Italian? I’m impressed, Nick. Although, you really didn’t have to impress me because I confess I’ve been impressed since I first met you.” She smiled

Nick returned her smile, “I wasn’t trying to impress you. These waiters barely speak English, I didn’t want our order screwed up.”

She laughed, “Really? I thought this was a French restaurant?”

“It’s a French restaurant owned by an Italian and It’s true. They probably would have brought us snails and humus. I hope you like seafood.”

She laughed at his joke, “I love it.” She took a drink of her wine, set it down, and looked up at him.

“Jordan about the other night...”

She held her hand up to stop him, “It’s okay, you already said sorry.” She was still very embarrassed about the incident, “I can see you are quite devoted to your brother. I feel the same way about my sisters, I just need to know if there’s any room for me in there somewhere because I’m not looking for a one night stand.” She watched him stare at her for a moment while his eyes

flickered something akin to desire while he pondered her words. Then she knew she affected him a little more the other night than she originally thought.'

"That's fair enough." He stated.

"I apologize for being so forward Nick, but I really don't have much of a social life either, and I really want to get to know you." She felt the need to explain why she was being so blunt, but it honestly didn't even seem to faze him. In fact, if she didn't know better from the interested look in his eyes, he actually liked the way she presented herself. It gave her the encouragement to be even more bold, "I can't deny the attraction I felt for you when I first met you last Friday. I was honestly hoping that you felt it too."

She watched him for a moment, when he didn't offer anymore insight about the other night she started to feel her confidence slipping. Then to cover her rising nervousness, she continued, "What made you change your mind about me?" when he didn't say anything she did. "Nick?" the silence was almost unbearable while she waited for her answer. When it finally did come she felt a thrill shoot through her at his confession.

"I'm thinking how to word this right Jordan." He sighed, looking at her "I never thought of this as a one night stand. Let's be clear. We're not juveniles here and this...attraction... was unexpected for both of us. I just have...other obligations and my free time is very limited."

It was then that she realized that Nick always considered his words carefully. It would explain why he was a man of so little words and why everything he did say seemed to be the right thing at that exact moment, excluding the incident in his penthouse where they were both caught off guard by the passion they shared in that short time. "Your brother?" She offered.

His silence gave her the answer.

She reached across the table and covered his hand with

hers, "I'm not asking for marriage Nick, just a man and a woman enjoying each other's company for awhile and if it carries on, so what?"

He took her hand and kissed it tenderly settling his dark eyes on hers, "It's a little more...complicated." God she was so innocent despite her assertiveness. He could see her confidence wavering slightly with her confession, but he needed to make sure he approached the whole subject gently as not to indicate on why his social life was lacking. He couldn't very well spit out *'I'm a government trained assassin that has been occupied for the last three years protecting my drug dealing brother that virtually takes up twenty-four hours of my day.'* No he couldn't say that. He knew some day he would, but not today.

When he first laid eyes on her since the disaster at his penthouse, he knew he lost the inner conflict. He really wanted to just tell her that he was off limits because of his job, but she was radiant and he finally admitted, he wanted her. She had absolutely no idea the affect she had on him or other men for that matter. The waiter that served their table near tripped over his own feet twice because he couldn't take his eyes off of her.

She gave him a stunning smile at his touch, "How so?"

"Well, for one, I'm pretty much on call twenty-four hours a day, as you found out." He said causing a bit of pink to enter her cheeks as she remembered the evening before, "I also work for another company that expects pretty much the same."

Her eyebrows went up, "Really?"

"I do security for them also," He couldn't tell her more couldn't then that.

"You are a workaholic." she teased

"Yes. My phone is usually active non-stop. I don't think I need to explain how that could interrupt us."

It was hard to forget. "It hasn't gone off yet tonight, though, Nick."

“Mario, my assistant that you met the other night is filtering my calls at this point. If there’s anything urgent that can’t wait until later, he will call me.”

“Oh.” She studied his features for a second, thinking that he took some measure to apologize to her which made her actually feel quite delighted, “Thank you for that.”

“I figured I owed you.”

She blushed, “Maybe I shouldn’t have burst in on you like that and expected you to drop everything for me. It was selfish of me. I’m sorry.”

He squeezed her hand, “Jordan, you would have to think a man would be blind and dumb not to see what was in front of him that night, but it was very urgent and I had to go.” *And stick a needle in your brother in law’s neck, then blow him to bits*, he thought to himself without the least bit amount of regret. What he really did regret was leaving a delectable morsel like her to do it.

She blushed more, “Thank you.”

He shook his head, “don’t thank me, there could be more interruptions like that one. If you’re willing to put up with it, we could possibly give this a try. If not then, let’s just enjoy tonight.” *What the fuck am I doing?*

Are you kidding? She wanted to say, *look at you*. Of course she would give this a try! Not only was the man the epitome of masculinity, being tall, strong, and disgustingly handsome, he had basically accepted everything about her that all of the other men she dated disliked. Not only that, just his touch alone elicited such raging desire in her. She did her best to keep the excitement out of her voice that he accepted her terms, and if she couldn’t he didn’t indicate that he noticed. “I would like to try. I can’t deny how attracted to you I am, but do you think you’re brother would approve? Frank gives me the impression that he doesn’t like to share.”

He laughed at her choice of words, "It's a little more complicated than that and he doesn't need to know right away. I think your father wouldn't approve either." Looking at her undeniable beauty, two words *Screw Frank*, came to mind.

"What would make you think that? He seemed to genuinely admire you from what I've heard."

"That was before you and I, I think he would feel differently now. Especially you being his baby."

Unable to stop the grin that lit her face, "Baby? I'm a twin. That would make us both his babies." Then her jaw dropped with his next confession.

"No, *you* are his baby." He repeated, "You are too damn sweet. I know he'd be protective of you. Hell, I've only known you a few days, and I want to strangle the waiter for drooling over you." He confessed. Ted Calloway was protective of both daughters, it was true, but he positively adored Jordan.

"That's possibly the nicest thing anyone has ever said." She admitted with unconcealed wonder causing him to burst into laughter then shake his head. Even though she didn't notice any waiter drooling over her, he obviously thought it and now she knew that there was some attraction and maybe even possessiveness that he held for her. It actually made her feel good.

"That is a response I wasn't expecting." He admitted with a grin.

Their food came just then and they left the seriousness of the conversation for small talk.

The cab pulled up in front of her brownstone on the Upper East Side.

"Did you want to come in for a glass of wine?" Her eyes searched out his. *Not sex, just wine* she thought to herself. She found it difficult to keep her hands to herself when he was

around, it wasn't like her at all. Most of the men she had dated in the past accused her of being frigid because she didn't put out. However, he had managed to get farther with her in his penthouse last night than any other in the past four years even after a month long relationship.

Nick looked at the building, considering it for a moment, before looking back at her, "I can't, I'm back on the clock at eleven."

One of her eyebrows went up, "Really?"

He nodded.

"Wow, you must really think I'm something if you gave me at least that much time." She stated as the realization hit her.

"Maybe I do." He said seriously before he turned away and got out of the cab. He walked around the car and opened the door for her. He held out his hand and she accepted and slow smile spread across her face as his words sank in while getting out of the cab.

He walked her up to her front door.

"You're sure about not staying for a glass of wine? I promise to keep my hands to myself." She allowed a slow smile to spread across her face.

He gave her a sensual grin, "I wish you wouldn't keep your hands to yourself and I'm positive I can't stay." He stared down at her for a moment, "Although the reasons for me to do so are sorely tempting." His answer was pinkening of her cheeks.

"You are a gentleman." She said softly.

"Not so," he countered, looking at his watch, then back at her with a sensual smile on his lips, "I find that forty-five minutes isn't near enough time to ravish you the way I want. When I do have time, I promise, I'm going to take all night, and make sure you know exactly how desirable you are to me. So don't accuse me of being a gentleman quite yet." Before she could respond, he tilted her chin up, leaned down and kissed her

without waiting for an invitation to do so.

Even if she wanted to resist, she couldn't. His words left her speechless and slightly stunned. In fact, her mouth had parted in a silent gasp, making it easy for him to capture her mouth aggressively and slant his lips over hers, delving his tongue into her mouth. His hand stroked the soft flesh of her cheek, then toyed with the fine hairs at her nape, and she closed her eyes against the gentle touch, finally overcoming her surprise to respond to him. He didn't even ask to kiss her, just like he did in his penthouse the other night. His words still burned into her and only added to her eager reaction to him. He tightened his grip around her waist and threaded his fingers into her hair when she finally did respond, making her take what he was dishing out with a passionate enthusiasm. It was ballsy to say the least, to assume that she would willingly jump in his bed, but it was the way he said it, with such an air of self-assurance that she knew she probably would. She decided that she found his aggressiveness toward her, very very irresistible. The man definitely knew how attractive he was, how attracted she was to him, and was using it.

He lifted his head and stared down at her, silently cursing himself for taking it that far. Every beautiful detail of her face was softly lit under the light over her door. Then she fluttered her long lashes and opened her eyes to look at him. The desire was unmistakable in her eyes. It was already hard to leave her, but now it was downright next to impossible. Although he still managed it. "I'll try to call you sometime this week." His finger trailed a path along her jaw.

"Promise?" She gave him a tempting smile and closed her eyes against the caress trying not to sound as breathless as she felt.

"I can't do that Jordan. I can only try." He explained truthfully near groaning at the reaction he got from touching her.

Her smile faded and she opened her eyes disappointment registering in their depths, "I guess you can't. At least you're honest."

"Sorry."

"No, it's alright. I'll understand...for now." She opened the door to her brownstone and stepped inside. She turned to look at him, "For now Nick." She smiled a little and shut the door.

Chapter Five

FRANK STOOD UP behind the desk while two men pointed their guns at him and Nick. Nick stood off to the side and Mario was on the floor unconscious, bleeding from a gash in his head. Nick had shown up barely a half an hour ago, and at that moment he was thankful, because he knew he couldn't handle the situation but Nick could.

"Are you sure this is what you want Al?" Frank calmly said although inside he was full of unease.

"You bastard! I know you've been holding out on me. I see all the money you rake in every week. You told me ten percent was my cut." Al spat on the floor in front of him.

They managed to sneak by the two stationed downstairs, knock on the door and smash Mario over the head with the butt of a gun when he answered it. One of the men searched Nick and removed both of his handguns. He then stood back and pointed his gun at Nick. Nick just stared at him with an unreadable expression.

"Ten percent of the last import was your cut. Not ten percent of every import. You were only capable of giving transportation once. Not only that, half the shipment went into the sea because your men thought that coastguard cutter was after them. I gave you ten percent of what those idiots didn't give

to the sharks. By rights, you're lucky I don't make you pay for my loss."

"That doesn't even cover my expenses."

"Then you should spend a little more and hire more intelligent men." Frank grinned

Good idea, piss off the man with the gun Frank, Nick thought sardonically though his expression remained impassive. Several times his eyes flicked to Mario out of concern. The younger man hadn't moved and if these men killed him, he would make them pay—slowly.

"I want the rest of my money, you prick." Al jerked the gun in his direction, "Your safe. Open your safe!"

Frank sighed and looked at Nick. His expression remained emotionless and if Frank didn't know better he looked totally relaxed. His brother never ceased to amaze him. Nick nodded indicating Frank was to do what the man asked. Frank stood, walked to the wall and tapped it twice with a balled up fist. The hidden panel popped open revealing the locked steel door.

Nick watched Al turn his attention to Frank as he opened the safe. He returned his gaze to the man holding a gun on him, studying him, looking for an opening. It finally came when the man turned his head at the click of the opening safe door. Nick quickly moved with fluid swift silence. The man didn't know what had hit him. He shoved the gun arm aside, elbowed him in the face knocking him to the ground screaming, seized the gun out of his hand before he fell to the floor and fired at Al with the intent to wound him.

Al jerked around at the noise and Nick shot him in the arm. He screamed and dropped the gun. He went to reach for it.

"Uh-uh," Said Nick calmly, and motioned with the gun he took from the other man, "Stand up."

Al stilled, held up his hands, and slowly straightened up with a terrified look in his eyes, "How the fuck did you do *that*?"

Nick said nothing. His outstretched arm aimed the gun to the center of his forehead, unwavering. The man on the floor reached out and grabbed Nick's leg. Without even blinking, Nick shot him in the chest killing him instantly cutting off his screams before aiming the gun back at Al.

Al turned white as fear vibrated through every cell in his body. Not only did Nick not even hesitate to kill the man, he gave no indication in his expression that it bothered him in the least. It was then that he realized the man was devoid of a conscience. It wasn't what was in his expression, it was just the opposite. His expression was so calm that he felt as if the man was looking right through him at the wall because there was nothing significant to indicate that he even existed except for the fact that the gun was trained on a spot between his eyes. His eyes darted to the other brother when he realized that Nick wasn't the one to reason with. "Come on Frank. Tell your brother to put the gun down." He pleaded.

Frank shut the door to his safe and closed the hidden panel. He then casually walked over and took a seat behind his desk, "If you came in here man to man, I might stop Nick from killing you."

Al studied Nick to see if he was serious. His hand clutching the bleeding wound on his upper arm. Nick stared back at him unblinking. There was nothing in his expression, his cold dark eyes, or his body language that indicated he wasn't going to go through with shooting him. The man looked as inhuman as a machine. Al turned to Frank, "You've got to be kidding me!" He tried reasoning as dread crept through him like ice water in his veins, "How can I make a profit from what you paid me. I'm sorry about the lost dope, but a man has to make a living. Who are you going to get to run your dope?"

"You should have thought about that before you came in my business with the intent to rob me!" Frank's voice rose in

anger, "You injured one of my men. You insult me and my brother. I've been known to be fair. As for the dope, it's replaceable and so are you."

"Frank...!" Al pleaded.

"Enough talk....Nick, kill him." Frank tilted his head toward the man while looking at his brother.

Nick didn't hesitate and pulled the trigger. The bullet found its mark penetrating flesh and bone instantly right between the eyes causing the man's head to jerk back. Al was dead before he crumpled to the floor.

Frank immediately picked up the phone, "Get Seto and Paul up here to clean up a mess in my office" He barked, "Where the fuck were those two ten minutes ago when we were about to be shot. Jesus Christ!" he slammed down the receiver, "These two must have snuck in the back while the boys were taking a piss break!"

Nick walked quickly over to Mario and knelt down beside him and felt his carotid artery for a strong pulse, "It's my *brother and I*, by the way." He said to Frank without taking his eyes off of Mario's unconscious form.

"What?" then it dawned on Frank and he threw back his head and laughed, "You're such a bastard." He looked down at Mario, who moaned and started to stir, "Is he going to live?" The concern was evident in his voice.

Nick looked at his brother, "Yes. We should get him to the hospital though. He'll need stitches."

"I'll get the boys to take him." Frank stood and walked over to them.

"I'll take him." Nick interjected.

"Fine. Those two need to clean my hardwood anyway."

Seto and Paul entered and Frank blasted them for 'dicking' off while his life was being threatened, "Get rid of these two before they ruin my fucking floor. First carry Mario to the

car.”

“Sorry boss. Yes boss.” They said in unison while nervously glancing at Nick. They knew what the man was capable of, and if Frank was angry enough he would unleash his brother on them for their incompetence.

Nick took Mario to Staten Island Hospital, the closest hospital to the club. He really didn’t want to, but Mario was still bleeding enough that he didn’t want to head elsewhere. . The only problem with taking Mario there was Jordan was working tonight and that was her Hospital.

Fortunately Mario had come to on the way there. He pulled into a parking spot got out of the Hummer and helped Mario out of the passenger side.

He was thankful that Jordan wasn’t around when the nurse put him in a bed and closed the curtain. She went to work in cleaning the wound while another nurse asked Nick for Mario’s information. Mario’s hand remained over the wound on his temple. It didn’t seem to be bleeding as much as before. He almost breathed a sigh of relief when an Asian Doctor stepped in around the curtain and not Jordan. It was then he got a glimpse of Jordan’s back at the nurses’ station.

Mario lay on the stretcher while the Doctor stitched up his head. He looked over at Nick, “I fucked up.”

“Lay still.” Said the Doctor not even fazed by Mario’s choice of words. He had been working Emergency for fifteen years and had heard much worse. However, the tall man’s eyes unnerved him a bit. It wasn’t anything in particular that alerted him, but through all the characters he’d met over the years, it didn’t escape him that this man was dangerous. However his concern for the young man he was sewing up was evident and it actually threw him a bit because what he had seen in the man’s eyes was chilling to say the least. It actually made him a little nervous stitching the gash in his head because if he had slipped

up somehow he was certain the man would make him aware of his displeasure.

“We’ll talk about this later.” Nick assured him quietly. With Jordan only a few feet away he didn’t want to alert her to the sound of his voice.

“Okay.” Nick closed his eyes while the doctor continued to stitch him up. When he was done Mario sat up unsteadily. He had a raging headache and it made him slightly dizzy. Nick made sure he was okay before he followed the doctor out of the curtained cubicle.

“He’ll have a migraine for a bit, but he’ll survive. He does have a mild concussion though. So make sure he stays awake for a few hours.”

“All right, Thanks.”

“What exactly happened to him?”

Nick looked at him seriously, “He tripped.”

The Doctor gave him an expression that said he didn’t believe him, but he’d heard it many times before and didn’t even dwell on it, “I see. Just make sure he doesn’t *trip* in the next fourteen days as not to reopen that wound okay. I’m giving him a prescription for a mild pain killer. He should take it for the next week to ease the throbbing.” He ripped the prescription off his pad and handed it to Nick.

Nick smiled and took the prescription, “Sure.” He turned and went back to Mario.

“I swear God can’t make them any better looking than that man.” Sighed a petite blonde nurse named Lana.

“You’re lucky you got to him first.” Claimed another slightly chubbier Nurse named Ashley.

“It was all I could do not to drool on the forms when he was signing them.” She giggled. “Six nurses, three doctors, a slow night in emergency and I got lucky.”

Jordan was standing to the side of the counter documenting in a chart while the nurses chatted and she suppressed a grin, "I'm glad it's a slow enough night that you two have time to gossip." She teased mildly.

Lana looked up at her, "Seriously Doctor Calloway, did you not see him?"

"I was busy with the stomach ache in bed three," she looked up at her from her writing, "Some people do work around here."

Lana smiled at her. She knew Doctor Calloway well over the past year and knew she wasn't the least bit stern as she tried to sound, "Well, if work was like this all the time I would have no problem hauling my ass out of bed for nightshift."

"Amen to that." Said Ashley.

She stopped writing and looked back and forth at the two nurses, "*That* good-looking?"

Both the nurses nodded in unison with healthy grins on their faces.

"Behind the curtain in bed six." Lana offered with a smile, "If you wish to take a peek."

"Hmmm." Jordan turned her head toward the curtain in the far corner actually considering it. She thought for a moment and shook her head turning back to her chart, "You two are silly."

"Doctor Calloway did you get your flowers?" Lonnie Banks, the orderly piped up. He like the others, found the night slow and thought he would stop in and flirt with the ER nurses.

"No." She smiled as Lonnie picked up the large bouquet and put them on the counter next to her. It was a beautiful bouquet of several dozen Purple roses.

"Wow, purple. How nice." She smiled.

"Any idea who sends them yet?" said Lana.

Jordan shrugged and smelled one of them, "Nope. It's probably just a patient I saved the life of, because I get them once

a week.”

“I would love a secret admirer.” Piped Lana.

Ashley spoke up, “What does the card say?”

Jordan opened the envelope and pulled out the card. It was blank, “Nothing, just like the last ones.” She flipped it over, “Wait...” there was a happy face drawn on the back of the card. It made her smile. She held it up for everyone there to see.

“Well, maybe by next month, he’ll give you a name.” Lana giggled.

“Well whoever it is, it’s obvious he’s just appreciative, because he doesn’t want me to know his identity.” She smiled at the three.

“It depends.” Lonnie said.

“On What?”

“Well, what do purple roses mean?”

“Oh, I never thought about that.” She looked at the three, “does anyone know?”

“Lust.” Said Lana which made them all laugh.

“I don’t think so.” Jordan made a disbelieving face at her.

“I’ll find out.” Ashley said as she pulled her chair over to the computer, pulled up a search engine.

While she was searching Lonnie questioned her more, “Was this the first purple bouquet?”

“No...come to think of it, they all were.”

“No writing or happy faces on any of the other cards.”

“No, they were all blank, just my name on the envelope.”

“Okay, I got it.” Stated Ashley, “Purple means love at first sight!” she blurted out quickly.

“hmm.” Said Lonnie.

“Hmmm what?”

“Doctor Calloway, you have a stalker.” He chuckled.

Unknown to the group at the Nurses station, Nick had

overheard every word and wasn't as amused as Lonnie. Overall, it made him uneasy. Jordan was receiving flowers from someone that she didn't remember and they would mysteriously appear every week. That wasn't normal. Especially when there wasn't a note. He knew what weird was, because he had seen all kinds. That man probably hit the nail on the head, Jordan probably did have a stalker. Whatever it was, he didn't like it. He'd found himself growing possessive over her since he met her. Typically it was unlike him, but the more he thought about it, it made sense. The woman was a rare treat and anyone in their right mind would be feeling the same way.

Nick waited until Jordan had left again to deal with another patient before he helped Mario to his feet and walked him out the emergency doors to the Hummer. His mind was still on Jordan's admirer. With a sexy woman like Jordan, it's more than likely that young man wasn't too far off, and Nick wasn't taking this lightly. Something inside him felt a rare ripple of anger. He always fathomed the worse of a situation before he started eliminating doubts and his instincts have always served him well. If this so called admirer thought he had designs on Jordan, he would definitely discourage him.

Mario let out a groan as Nick helped him to stand. Almost instantly after that noise, a young blonde nurse in pink scrubs appeared and offered to help. Nick wasn't a stranger to feminine wiles and knew damn well it had nothing to do with Mario. She told Nick her name was Lana. She offered the wheelchair which Mario refused muttering that it was for old women causing Nick to smile, so she helped by supporting the other side of him. After he was belted in the passenger side of the hummer, she tried unsuccessfully to give him her number.

"Thanks for your help Lana, but I'm seeing someone." He said politely.

She frowned, *figures, stupid of me to think this gorgeous*

man was single. “But if you change your mind, you know where I work.” She flashed him her best flirtatious smile.

“Yes, I do.” He said politely.

A flash of hope made her smile again, “Well, take care of your friend.” She said as she walked away waving at him with the tips of her fingers.

“I will.” He turned and walked around to the driver’s side letting out sigh as he got in the vehicle. “Definitely not my type”.

“I wouldn’t mind her number.” Mario mumbled from the passenger seat while he leaned back against the headrest with his eyes closed

Nick Laughed.

A short while later, Nick pulled up in front of Mario’s apartment building after he stopped at an all night pharmacy and filled Mario’s prescription, “Do you need help getting up stairs.” He handed him the bag with the pills.

Mario looked at him frowning, and took the bag, “No, I think I’ll be fine. I’m not a baby.”

Nick smiled undeterred by his defensiveness, “I think you better learn some self-defence.”

Mario let out a huff of frustration, “Gee, you think?” His fingers played with the stitches on his forehead. “It’s that or I’ll just learn to keep beating people with my skull.” He hissed though clenched teeth as a throbbing pain hit him again.

“I think next week, if you’re feeling better. I’ll start teaching you some judo.”

“Really?” His spirits brightened.

“Yeah. What I saw earlier doesn’t have merit.”

Mario chuckled and winced as another throb hit his head, “Thanks for the vote of confidence. Now you know why I just drive.” Mario couldn’t deny his elation at Nick’s offer. He’d waited for two years for lessons from the man. It lifted his dark mood despite the throbbing in his skull.

Nick chuckled this time, "Point taken. Get some sleep. I'll pick you up in the morning."

"Alright," he hopped out of the hummer, "Thanks Nick, for all your help."

Nick nodded and drove away after Mario shut the door.

Sara's Calloway's partner, Ben Strasky, handed her the burned painted panel that the diver gave him. The *Jolly Molly*, Her brother-in-law's boat. She sighed, cursed softly to herself and looked past him to the river at the activity before she spoke, "Did they find the body?"

Ben said, "Yeah, they're bringing him out now—or what's left of it. It's pretty torn up from the blast. They suspect the gas stove on the boat sparked and blew. They actually found the valve in the murky waters of the Hudson, it was open. Was he a smoker?"

"Yeah, and a drunk, and a drug addict." *And a wife beater and baby killer*, she thought to herself and gave him the wooden panel back, "He was a real bastard." She breathed in deeply, "Now I have to tell my sister that her husband's dead. I'm pretty sure she would feel as relieved as I am. Call me when they identify the body." She said coolly before she turned and walked away without waiting for a response. Her thoughts weighed on her mind heavily. She was not looking forward to telling Jean.

"Sure." He watched her swaying backside.

He was sceptical when the captain paired him up with her, the mayor's daughter of all people. At first he thought she'd use that to get what she wanted, but she never did. She never even mentioned him. Later, the Captain informed him that he was not to treat her any different than any other partner. Those were direct words from the Mayor himself. Ben sighed, how the hell was he supposed to do that? She was beautiful, intelligent and headstrong. He thought he might actually fall for her, but then

he met her sister, Jordan. Sara paled next to her. He wanted to ask her out so many times, but he had to work with Sara. He knew it wouldn't make for a good working environment if it didn't work out. Sara had been hinting at a relationship, but never outright said anything. She managed to invite him to all her father's social events and every time he accepted just to see Jordan again. If they went out for a drink after work Sara would invite Jordan because they were close so Ben jumped at the opportunity when Sara invited him too. Over the past four months Ben had thought he'd won her friendship, but his plans were much more selfish especially when he used Sara's affection for him to get to Jordan. No matter how Ben studied her mentally and physically, he couldn't seem to locate a flaw anywhere with her. Time and time again, he had to remind himself that she was barely in her twenties, because she'd acted much older than that. Unfortunately he had a reputation at the station as a womanizer, which was probably well founded. He was forty five and never been married and never even came close to a proposal. However, if he could have a woman like Jordan in his bed for the rest of his life, he was sure he could adjust.

Chapter Six

JORDAN HADN'T HEARD from Nick for several weeks, but she was busy with the death of her sister's husband. There were many times she opened her cell phone and dialled the number he gave her, but never hit the send button. She just couldn't help but think that if he really wanted to see her again he would've called by now. She openly sighed as she shoved her phone back in her pocket for the third time that day and turned her thoughts back to her sister's grief.

After the body of her brother-in-law was identified and the incident ruled accidental Sara told Jordan first before she

had to go break the news to her sister. Sara thought it would help their sister if both of them were there. As expected, his blood alcohol level was through the roof. She was sure her father had a hand in squashing further investigation on what else was in his system even though, he never admitted it. Although, the guy was a bastard, their sister still mourned for him. It just proved what a kind person her sister was. Her father encouraged Jean to stay with him for several weeks after the funeral which Sara and Jordan thought was a good idea. Especially since Christmas was fast approaching, they didn't want Jean to be alone. Her father decided to throw a Christmas charity event in hopes to spark Jean's holiday cheer and keep her busy by letting her plan the event.

Jordan knew her father was relieved over the loss of his son-in-law, because so was she and Sara, but they did their best to hide this from Jean. However Jean still was genuinely devastated. Jordan felt so bad for her twin sister, that she took several weeks off of work so she could stay with her at the house while her father was at work in the city. Being twins, it was odd that they were so opposite of one another. Jordan knew Sara would have probably shot Lionel the first time he laid a hand on her, but Jean would insist there was still good in him.

The nights were the hardest for her sister. The first night she stayed in the big house, she heard Jean crying through the door of her room. Jordan went in and crawled in next to her wiping her tears as she cried. Death wasn't easy for either of them, especially when it robbed them of their mother's precious affections. However, seeing her sister in such a state, made Jordan wish that her husband was alive just so she could somehow punish him, for making Jean mourn for his useless ass.

The next week proved to be good for Jean. Her father knew her well, and Jean did busy herself with the up and coming charity event and managed to focus on something else besides

her husband's death.

Jordan made herself available to help but let Jean take the lead. Through all of it, there was no denying where her thoughts kept roaming. She hadn't heard from Nick in almost three weeks. She knew he didn't promise her anything, but a phone call wasn't that hard, was it? She had to admit that she was frustrated and disappointed, especially after the wonderful evening they had last time they were together. She began to worry that she was too pushy. Maybe he was just being his charming self and didn't want to put her off. However, she couldn't deny his words on the phone that night he called her at two in the morning. *Do you have the slightest idea of how beautiful you are?* She silently chastised herself. They only had one official date and she couldn't stop thinking about him. It was the kiss that he gave her that night, it had to be. It was so unnerving, sensual, and passionate and oh my *God* why can't she stop thinking about him?

"Jordan," Jean walked up to her to show her the guest list and startled her.

"Yes?" she stated trying to look composed, but Jean wasn't fooled.

Her sister gave her a curious look, "Now, what are you thinking about?"

She smiled, "Nothing."

"Liar, but you're just lucky I have other things on my mind or I'd really grill you." She grinned, "Now, you're usually here for daddy's socials. I don't know half of these people, and he's invited over two hundred. I don't know where to seat half of them."

Jordan laughed glad her sister appeared to take her mind off of Nick, "Of course. I'll help you." Her heart near skipped a beat when she saw the Castile name.

"Okay, enough is enough. What is it?" Jean saw the instant,

although brief, change in her sister's expression.

"Oh...Nothing."

"Liar...." She grabbed the list back, "Who's name were you ogling." She scanned the list quickly to no avail, then looked back up at her, "fess up Jordan. Remember...we have twin tuition."

She put her hand to her forehead, there was no use lying to her, after all she was right, they are twins. "Nick Castile."

"I thought you didn't like daddy's stuffy friends?"

"He's different. And *definitely* not stuffy."

Jean's brows went up, and for the first time in weeks she looked interested in something, "You don't say.....you have to tell me everything!"

"Jean, there's not much to tell. Besides I haven't heard from him since our first, well second date."

"Well, is he handsome?"

She allowed a smile to reach her expression, "That's an understatement...he's very...interesting."

"Interesting?" Jean frowned at her sister's choice of words. "You like this guy and all you can say is, he's interesting?"

Jordan smiled sheepishly, "Well, he seems very reserved, but he's gentle, very charming, and quite intriguing."

"It sounds like you're describing a suit." She said flatly. "Give me something exciting....like thigh twitching exciting!"

Jordan winced and laughed at the same time, "Well, I really don't know what to say."

"How about...how does he make you feel? Is he a good kisser...better yet, is he good in bed?"

Jordan blushed, "I don't know!"

"You haven't slept with him?"

"I've just met him. Jesus Jean, give me a break."

"So you've kiss him?" Her silence was her answer and Jean grinned, "So? Come on Jordan, you were never really big on telling secrets, but something tells me this guy has you starry

eyed. Let me in on something okay?"

Jordan blushed, "Well...when he touches me, it puts shivers through me. Is that good?"

Jean laughed, "Still boring...how about, does his kissing make you wet?"

"Oh-my-God."

"Oh puh-leese." She said in the same manner rolling her eyes, "I never said where...I mean, your mouth could water right? Get your head out of the gutter, I never said that you soak your underwear." She added.

"I can see that I'm the good twin, and you are the evil twin. I refuse to answer your crass questions." She tried to sound insulted but she couldn't keep the amusement out of her voice, "Besides a lady never kisses and tells. So quit asking."

"Fine, I'll just let my imagination think the worst, that the man has an orgasmic tongue."

"Enough already," She took a deep breath. Although she might not be too far off with that.

"Well then, tell me something completely boring about him then." Jean resigned.

"Okay, It's so interesting because when he's with his brother, he reserved and detached, like he doesn't want anyone to know that he's interested in me, but when we're alone, he's so attentive."

"Maybe he just wants to get you in the sack, Jordan. Men can be like that."

Jordan ignored her choice of words, "Well, he's had opportunity but hasn't taken it, so that just proves that's not his motive." Of course she didn't tell her sister about him mentioning ravishing her all night. Just thinking about his promise made her knees weaken.

Both of Jean's brows went up, "You have got to be kidding me! You have offered yourself and he didn't take it? Is he

blind?"

"We've only known each other for several weeks and like I said two dates....one was official. The other one, I showed up at his place."

"Like I said...is he blind, or disturbed."

"He works a lot and doesn't want to just get up and leave when he's called. You'd have to know him Jean, he would consider that rude."

Jean's jaw dropped, "doesn't want to get interrupted? Is he an artist? How long does it take? I really have to meet this guy."

Jordan flinched at Jean's choice of words. She was always a little more brash and outspoken, despite being married to Lionel. That's why the match never made sense to her because of Lionel's abusiveness, "You will, if he comes to your event and I'm ignoring the other questions." In fact she wasn't sure if he was still interested in her despite the way he treated her when they were together. Even though he said he'd call, a lot of time had passed and she'd heard nothing. Her disappointment must've shown in her expression because her sister noticed.

"You haven't heard from him, have you?" Jean said genuinely concerned.

Jordan shrugged, "He said he'd call. He must be busy because I haven't heard for several weeks."

Jean wondered if her sister was being blown off. If she was, the guy was a complete moron because Jordan was stunning. They may be twins, but Jordan had the talent, brains and beauty. Her beauty was entirely different than surface looks too. She had a sweetness about her that Jean didn't possess and when people got to know her, they liked her even more because of it. She knew she was kind, but she was always the wilder of the two and lacked that giving innocent part that Jordan had.

"This guy must be something." Jean raised her brows.

"What makes you say that?"

“Well, the Jordan I know would have phoned him by now.”

“It’s not that simple.”

“Then, my dear sister, simplify it.”

“That’s easy for you to say....” Jordan felt her phone vibrate at that moment and pulled it out. She couldn’t help but grin. It was Nick.

Jean laughed, “Well there’s no mistake who that is from the look on your face.”

She nodded with the grin still on her face and answered her phone, “Hi stranger.”

“I think I owe you another apology.” Came his deep sexy voice on the other end.

“Well, you did warn me that you were busy.” The butterflies in her belly started fluttering at the sound of his masculine voice and she absently placed her hand against it. “But I do think I deserve it.”

“Turns out it was very busy and I’m sorry Jordan.” He said sincerely.

“Hmm, I hardly noticed.” She swore her knees just weakened. Also, just the sound of his deep voice made heat rise to her cheeks. Unreal, how the man could affect her even over the phone.

He chuckled, “Sure you did and in turn of a sufficient apology I think I owe you a glorious night on the town.”

She felt her stomach twinge again. “Well, I certainly won’t argue.” Jordan was fanning her hand toward her sister who was mouthing lewd comments. She mouthed for her to go away and then turned away from her still trying to listen to Nick without being distracted. “However, I should refuse to go out with you after being ignored.” Out of the corner of her eye she saw Jean put her hands on her hips and shake her head in disapproval.

“Rightly noted. I suppose I may need to get down on my knees to beg you for forgiveness.”

Oh my. She bit her bottom lip, “I think I should hear what you have in lieu of an apology before I ask you to do that.”

“Fair enough.” He chuckled, “Do you like opera?”

She felt like a giddy school girl who discovered her first crush. She desperately tried to keep her eagerness out of her voice, “Most definitely.” She absolutely loved opera.

“I have two tickets for *La Damnation de Faust* tonight.”

She turned and looked at Jean who was trying her best to listen in, “Tonight?” She repeated looking at her sister as her smile got wider.

Jean mouthed the words, ‘Go, Go’

Jordan narrowed her gaze and put a finger to her lips.

“I’ll pick you up at six.”

She looked at her watch, two p.m., “Okay, I’m at my father’s house in Jersey, I’ll head home in about an hour to change.”

“It’s a black tie event.”

“That’s good to know.”

“I’m sure you have something appropriate. See you at six.”

“Bye.” She hung up the phone but couldn’t wipe the excited smile off her face as she looked at her sister.

“Wow. You’re radiant Jordan. This guy must be something.”

“I hope so.” Then her face took on a horrified expression, “Oh no, he wants to take me to Faust. It’s a formal event and I have no time to shop. What the heck am I going to wear?”

It was Jean’s turn to grin. “I have something for you.” She grabbed her sister’s hand and led her upstairs to her room, “I got it for the charity event that dad left me in charge of, but I can always get another one before then, I have lots of time.”

“Are you sure?”

“Very.” She pulled her into her room and into her walk in closet. “It’s a good thing I had it sent here and not my house. It’s almost fate.” She laughed as she pulled out a red strapless taffeta

evening gown.

“Oh Jean. It’s beautiful.” She felt the material.

“It’s an Amsale. I have the stole too. So you’re set!” She handed the dress to Jordan, “Although, we have to do something with your hair.” She pulled it up off her neck as Jordan looked at herself in the mirror. “I think I can manage your rat’s nest.”

Jordan rolled her eyes.

“Jordan, be serious, you really like this man, so let’s give him something he can’t resist.”

Jordan couldn’t help but blush, “Okay.” She agreed.

It actually took more than an hour for Jean to do Jordan’s hair and get dressed. She stood back and admired her handiwork. Jordan’s hair was longer than hers, so it was easier to work with. Unlike Jordan, Jean kept hers cut to her shoulders because she really didn’t like the curls. Jordan kept hers growing halfway down her back. She didn’t realize how long her hair was until she worked with it, because Jordan usually kept it pinned up. Now she was envious. The curls actually formed soft perfect ringlets making her sister look quite angelic. She pulled the curls to the back of her head and pinned them in place with her mother’s diamond encrusted combs allowing the rest of the locks to pour down over her left shoulder.

“You are beautiful.” Jean stated seriously. The gown was almost the perfect shade of Jordan’s hair and carried the color all the way down her body. “I don’t think I could look as good as you.”

“We’re twins, nitwit and thanks for your help Jean.”

Jean shook her head, and ran a finger down her slightly crooked nose, “Not like we used to be.”

Jordan felt horribly sad for Jean in that moment, “I’m sorry Jean. I didn’t mean...”

“Shh...!” she set a false smile on her face, “Don’t even think of it! You are going to have the time of your life.”

That evening, Nick spotted Jordan in the window of her brownstone and grinned. He started up the steps to Jordan when he noticed the card. It leaned against the step in front of the door. He bent over and picked it up. It had her name on it. He flipped it over and then back again. He turned and looked around his surroundings. He was no stranger to the feeling. He was being watched. When he heard Jordan unlocking the door he stuffed the envelope in the inside of his jacket pocket. This wasn't good. Her admirer knew where she lived and his unease over it increased. Maybe the card was left for him to find. That couldn't be though, because they'd only been together in public once. Unless Nick wasn't giving this guy enough credit. The more he thought about it, the more he thought it probably was left for her, but now the man watched Nick and Nick knew that he was aware of the competition.

Jordan still felt terrible for her comment to Jean while waiting at her house for Nick to arrive. She looked at her watch. He was late, which was unusual. She went to the window that overlooked the street and saw the stretched Limousine just pull up. The driver got out of the car and opened the back door. She instantly forgave his tardiness when she saw him. He was riveting. There was just something about a man in an expensive tuxedo. He adjusted the collar on his overcoat and scarf to block out the November chill. *God he was so devastatingly handsome!* She watched him say something to the driver and it was then she noticed that it was Mario, his assistant. Just about that time he looked up and spotted her looking down on him from her window. A handsome smile lit on his features and she felt that familiar twinge in her belly again. Absently she put her hand on her abdomen and took a deep breath of elation and smiled wildly. He waved at her and walked across the sidewalk toward

her house. Jordan grabbed her stole and rushed down the stairs to meet him at the door. "Hi."

His face masked over as he slowly perused down her form, "I think you've outdone yourself Jordan." He stepped in the house and took her hands, "That gown does you justice," he kissed her forehead. "Turn around."

She did as he asked and her him tsk.

"Well, I know where all eyes will be tonight."

She blushed, "Stop it Nick."

He reached over and pulled her to him, "Not a chance."

"You'll...wrinkle my gown." She took a deep breath at the feel of his body against hers.

"I don't care." He said huskily, "I've missed you."

A wave of elation went through her at his confession.

"It's too bad we have to go." He lowered his head and placed his cheek against hers, "Because I could stay here all night with you and I only have a few hours."

She pulled her head back and looked up at him, "Again?" She tried but couldn't keep the disappointment out of her voice. She saw that his eyes registered his apology.

He smiled, "It's all I could get for you. So I'm willing to pack in the most fabulous time in a few hours."

She nodded reluctantly, "I understand."

"Of course you do, because that's who you are Jordan." He said softly, "I wish it could be different, but I have a meeting at midnight."

"Who meets at midnight?"

"People who work nonstop." He explained. "We'd better get going. We have a plane to catch." He took her hand.

She stopped, "A what?"

He turned back to her, "Well, Faust isn't playing in New York Jordan, it's in Chicago."

"You're kidding?"

“No.” his eyes glittered.

Her eyes searched his for some indication that he was joking. She found none. “You’re *not* kidding.”

He smiled as his hand came up and caressed her cheek, “You don’t think I had you spend hours in front of a mirror to hang out around town do you? Besides I said I owed you an apology.”

“I don’t know what to say.” She said in awe.

“How about ‘let’s go’ because the plane is waiting.” He said with a sloppy grin.

“Waiting? Frank owns a plane?”

“No. I have use of a plane from another company I work for.”

“Oh God Nick, this is really flattering.” She reddened again.

“You deserve it.” He kissed her lightly and took her hand before turning and opening the door. “I hope you don’t get airsick.” He said over his shoulder as he led her to the car.

Jordan saw Mario holding the limo door open for her, “Hello Mario.”

“Miss Calloway.” It was hard for him to say because he near bit his tongue at the sight of her. Jesus Nick was lucky. Jordan represented the most classiest of women he’d ever seen. The type he was used to were what Frank had kept around him which were mostly prostitutes, strippers, and those that frequented his club, but the only difference between the women that Frank employed and the ones that fought for his attention in his club was money. Now Mario realized why Nick never had anything to do with them after seeing Jordan. Although his mother raised him to respect women, he couldn’t help but noticed the sharp difference between them now.

After he helped Jordan in the car, he pulled the envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Mario. “Keep this for me until I get back. Try not to touch it too much.” He said quietly so she wouldn’t hear.

Mario saw the envelope and nodded, stuffing it in his pocket without saying a word.

Once in the car, Nick settled beside her, and she shivered. She didn't realize it would be so chilly. All she had was the wrap that Jean gave her.

"You're cold."

"I'll be all right."

He shook his head and removed his overcoat and wrapped it around her shoulders. "I don't think I would be a very good date if you ended up with a cold."

"Thank you. But aren't you cold?"

"I think I have more clothing on than you." Fact is he had barely noticed the chill. He pulled the coat snug at the front of her brushing her neck with his fingers. "You look like a dwarf in it."

She shivered again, but it wasn't from the cold. "Well, when you do a size comparison, I do look like a dwarf next to you."

He took her shivering as still being cold and pulled her next to him by wrapping his arm around her waist. "No. You look like an angel next to me. Quite frankly I like the way you look on my arm."

She gave him a dazzling smile before resting her against his shoulder.

About a half an hour later the limousine pulled up to a Gulfstream IV that already had the engines running at the Teterboro Airport in New Jersey. Mario opened the door and Nick got out and held out his hand to help Jordan. She still was staring in awe at the plane while Nick spoke to Mario. A stewardess was waiting at the foot of the stairs.

"We should be back around eleven tonight. Frank knows I'm out of town tonight so I don't want any calls at all." He took Jordan's arm and led her toward the jet.

"Yes sir." Mario answered before Nick turned away.

Nick had looped her arm over his as he walked her over to the smiling stewardess.

“Good evening Mr. Castile.” She nodded in Jordan’s direction with the same well taught smile, “Good evening Miss Calloway.”

Nick led her up the stairs into the plane to two of the large leather upholstered reclining seats.

The stewardess shut the door blocking out most of the jet engine noise and approached them as Jordan was settling into her seat against the window.

“May I take your coat Sir?”

Nick looked over at Jordan, a slight smile pulled at his lips over how adorable she was in his coat, “Not quite yet.”

“Very well then....Something to drink?”

“Yes, two glasses of white wine.”

Jordan nodded at his suggestion.

“Very well sir.” Said the stewardess and she left.

Nick settled in beside her, lifted up the arm that separated the two seats, took her hand and kissed it while watching her, “You still cold?”

“A little,” she inhaled the scent on his coat. “Besides I like the way you smell”

“Really? I smell?” He said lifting a mocking brow.

“Nice, you smell nice.” She explained. Maybe she shouldn’t have admitted that, but what he did next changed her mind.

“hmmm. So do you.” To make his point he lowered his face to her neck and inhaled.

She visibly shivered, “You really shouldn’t do that.” The feel of his stubble against her neck was almost erotic.

He pulled back and gave her an arrogant grin, “No?”

She shook her head, “you are driving me crazy, I swear.”

He laughed this time, “I’m glad.” Then to change the subject, “so what have you been up to these past few weeks?”

Truth is, he felt guilty for not being able to call her in the past few weeks, but Frank hadn't given him any time to spare and he knew that if he called her, he'd want to see her. After seeing her now, he knew damn well, he was right.

She told him of her brother in law's accident and how she'd taken a few months off of work and staying with her sister at her father's house.

"Are you all right?" Despite what he had done, when he said it, he'd meant it. In no way had he meant to hurt her.

She nodded, "I never liked him Nick, he was terrible to her, but she had a really hard time dealing with his death. She seems better though these past few days. That was the hardest part, seeing your sister in pain. Did I tell you she's my twin?"

He already knew that, but didn't let on, "There are two of you? I like that idea." He teased.

She elbowed him, "Don't even think it. We're nothing alike. She's...well, a little wilder, until she got hooked up with Lionel. Then she really became withdrawn and private. We hardly saw her anymore." She didn't know why she was babbling about her personal life but she didn't stop. "My sister Sara and I are closer even though she's seven years older than me." She eyed him, "so about my twin, don't even think it. I hardly have any time with you, like I'm going to share."

"If you ask me I got the better of the two anyway."

"How could you possibly know that? Everyone always chased Jean in high school, college, and University, not me"

"I find that hard to believe." He cupped her face with his hands and his eyes search out hers, "I mean, *look* at you. Maybe people didn't chase you because they *revered* you. Men knew that you were absolutely out of their league and well when your twin was more let's say...acceptable, they went after her. You may not realize this Jordan, but there are a lot of men out there that find intelligent woman very intimidating."

She blushed, "You are really embarrassing me again and Jean's not a tramp."

"I never said that." He said softly as his fingers traced a heated path down her neck and after flicking his coat out of the way, continued along her bare shoulder while his eyes locked hers. His voice was dangerously seductive. "I merely said you were untouchable."

"You don't seem to be having a problem." She breathed.

He smiled and spoke with distinct fearlessness as his eyes darkened, "I'm the kid in high school who took all the dares. So, I'm not afraid to touch the untouchable." His hand continued tracing across her shoulder and around the soft flesh of her neck, "And thank God I'm not because what a delicacy."

She was way too enamoured with him to be embarrassed at his words now, and didn't protest when he lowered his head to capture her lips. She didn't hesitate and kissed him back. Every time she was around him she had trouble keeping her hands to herself. The things he said to her and the feelings he managed to evoke from those words was powerfully compelling. He always seemed to make her feel like she was the only woman on earth that deserved his attention. He deepened the kiss and caressed the tip of her tongue with his. She was sure her insides just melted into a liquid mass. She felt his arms reach around her waist and pull her closer to his body. Her arm slid over his chest to his shoulder and she moaned against his lips. Nick suddenly lifted his head and stared down at her. "The stewardess." He said simply just as she came out from behind a curtain with their drinks.

She could barely get the words out, "How did you know?"

"I was listening."

"I wasn't aware of anything else but you. I don't know how you did that." She said breathlessly.

He leaned down and spoke softly in her ear so only she could

hear, "Don't think for a minute I wasn't involved as much as you." He kissed her cheek and turned in time to take the wine from the stewardess.

Jordan took a sip from her glass after she thanked her not meeting her eyes. She was afraid that her face and eyes held evidence of her desire. It was hard to squash the feelings that he evoked in her. She did look at Nick and he'd acted as if nothing had just happened when he also thanked her for the drinks.

How long is the flight?" She piped up feeling ridiculous despite his earlier words telling her he was affected as much as she was.

"Around an hour and twenty minutes....not long." He said in that same reserved voice in front of the stewardess as she leaned down and placed napkins on the table in front of them.

Jordan did not miss the look that the stewardess gave him. It was inviting to say the least, and suddenly she was angry. The gall of that woman! She was sitting right next to him! Obviously her thoughts were displayed in her expression, because he noticed.

"What's wrong?" He said when the stewardess left.

The nerve of that woman! "Nothing." But he chuckled again and she knew then that he didn't miss the look either. She decided not to push it. She had never felt the urge to scratch another woman's eyes out before in her life. The surge of jealousy caught her by surprise and completely unsettled her. It shouldn't have because he was clearly attentive to her and not the other woman, but then again she hadn't seen him in weeks.

Nick was right about the length of the trip; it was almost exactly an hour and twenty minutes. They then took a Limousine that Nick had prearranged to the Civic opera house which took about thirty minutes just in time for the first act. They were directed to a private booth in the Mezzanine by an usher.

As the opera played out in front of them Jordan was overwhelmed with the lavishness that Nick had doted on her. No one had ever done such things for her before. He treated her like royalty, made her feel beautiful and desirable. He was perfectly aware of her needs during every moment she was with him. He knew exactly what to say and when to touch her in reassurance. Although he was very standoffish around his brother, she didn't care at that moment, because he always seemed to make it up to her. It could have been two months for him not to call and she would have forgiven him after this night.

Something new she discovered about him, was that he spoke fluent French. She turned to ask him a question about the opera and he translated.

"You speak French."

"Yes." It was all he would say

"And Italian?"

"Yes." He admitted.

"How many languages do you speak Nick?"

"A few...watch the show." His eyes glinted.

She tilted her head at him in amazement before doing as he said.

When the opera was over a lot of the guests gathered in the foyer to discuss the event and try and beat the crowd out of the front entrance. Nick had excused himself from Jordan leaving her alone for a moment while he went to retrieve his coat. It was so crowded that she remained where she was so Nick wouldn't have trouble finding her. There must have been close to three thousand people in the audience so she knew she would get lost if she moved. A man with a ridiculous rainbow scarf bumped into her and didn't even apologize. He actually looked at her like it was her fault even though she hadn't moved and inch from where Nick had left her.

It was almost ten minutes before he returned with his coat

and scarf. He once again wrapped his coat around her to lead her toward the entrance.

When they got in the car and he slid next to him she noticed something on his cuff.

“Nick. What is that?”

He looked down at his exposed cuff, “Oh I had a bit of a nosebleed, that’s what took me so long to get back to you after I got my coat. I had to go to the men’s room and wash up.” He leaned over to the bar and grabbed a napkin and some soda water.

“Are you alright?” she looked at his nose. Which she thought was still perfect.

“Fine, it just happens with altitude change. That’s all. It never lasts.” He dabbed the spot until it was almost invisible, “There. Gone.” He smiled down at her while showing her the cuff.

“Well, you’d make a fine housekeeper some day.” She teased.

He chuckled and looked at her, “Did you enjoy the opera?”

“Did I?” she said not being able to keep the excitement out of her voice, “Nick it was amazing. It was even better with you translating things for me. How many languages do you speak anyway? You never answered my question.”

He shrugged like it was nothing, “A few.”

“French, English and Italian may be a few, but you speak more than that don’t you.”

“Maybe.”

“Hmm...I have a feeling you’re not going to tell me.”

His face took on a serious expression, and although the words were said gently his eyes took on that steely look that she’d seen before. “There are just some things about me Jordan that you don’t need to know.”

“You’re serious.” She was taken back. Why would her knowing how many languages he spoke bother him?

“Yes, I am.”

She tried to hide the twinge of hurt and looked away, but he obviously caught it.

“It’s nothing personal.” He tilted her chin up so she would look at him, “I don’t mean to hurt your feelings, but there are just some things about me that I don’t wish to discuss.”

She nodded slowly although still hurt and by the change in his expression she knew he’d felt bad. However, he was right; she didn’t need to know absolutely everything about him. They really didn’t know each other that long and she was prying. “I’m sorry Nick.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry for. Leave it to you to apologize.” He smiled while shaking his head.

The car pulled up alongside the jet and Nick helped her out of the car.

When they settled into the familiar luxurious seats she wrapped her arms around his, folded her legs under her bottom and leaned on his shoulder. He kissed the top of her head.

“Would you like another glass of wine?”

“No thanks I’m getting quite sleepy.”

“It’s the altitude change...jet lag. It affects you more than me because you’re not used to it. We may have to remedy that.” His thoughts roamed to the double bed behind the closed door at the back of the plane.

“You think so?” She answered him without looking up. “Do you think you’ll get another nose bleed?”

“No.”

“If you do, I know a good doctor.” She smiled.

He chuckled, “Good to hear.” He turned his face into her hair again taking a deep breath, and she knew he inhaled her scent, but his warm breath on the top of her head made her feel absolutely adored. Again the familiar twinge of butterflies pulsed in her stomach. She pretended not to notice. He was going to

drop her off at her house in less than two hours and there was no way that she could explore her desire for him here or at her house. She was thankful at that moment that his phone rang.

"I thought you told Mario to hold your calls."

"It's not from Mario," he said quietly as he checked the caller identification and flipped open the phone while offering no explanation. "Yes."

Jordan closed her eyes while Nick talked on the phone.

"Yes, it was a good opera, the critics were correct." Nick closed his phone.

What an odd conversation she thought to herself. For some reason she didn't ask him about the call. She'd figured if he wanted to tell her he could. That's one thing she discovered about him tonight. He didn't like to give information on himself. Part of her could understand that because he did a lot of security and by the looks of the corporate privileges, he was important. So obviously there were just some things that she really didn't need to know. Hopefully, she could stick to that, because she really wanted to know everything about him. Her eyes drifted closed and before she knew it he was waking her up at the airport. She even slept through the landing.

She watched from her door as the car pulled away and sighed, what an amazing night. He kissed her ever so gently before he left. Not like the crushing passion he had before, but either way still made her turn to jelly. She really wanted him to stay, but it was still too soon and he had already told her he couldn't. She walked into the kitchen and checked her messages. There were several from the hospital wanting to know if she'd come back early, one from her father just to say 'hello', and over a half dozen from her sister Jean wanting to know about her evening and 'where are you?', 'did you sleep with him?' and of course, 'if you did, was he orgasmic?' Jordan rolled her eyes, laughed and dialled her sister's number.

About forty-five minutes later, after Mario and Nick dropped off Jordan they walked through the door of his Penthouse. He went into his room and changed out of his tuxedo, replacing it with a charcoal Armani suit. He strapped on his holster and was inserting his firearms while walking out into the kitchen where Mario waited. He handed back the envelope that Nick gave him earlier.

“What is it?” Ever since Nick had given to him earlier he wanted to open it and see why Nick was so serious about him keeping it and not letting Jordan know, but he didn’t. Mario was honest and he wanted Nick to trust him.

“I’m not sure yet.” He went over to a drawer and pulled out a pair of latex gloves, and put them on. Then he took the envelope and opened it. There was nothing on the card, no print, no writing...nothing. He flipped it open and there was a hand drawn happy face.

“A happy face?”

Nick grinned while staring at it.

“What does it mean?”

“It means that my girlfriend has a stalker.” He explained in a grim tone.

“You can tell that from a card?”

“It’s the signature itself Mario. He left it on her step for me or her to find. I’m not sure yet who it was intended for. But he was there watching me when I picked it up. He’s getting bolder, letting her or I know that he’s aware where she lives. I know this isn’t the first one she’s gotten.” He went over to another drawer and pulled out a ziploc bag and put the envelope in it. “My employers might be able to find something on this.” He then removed the gloves and wrote an address on a piece of paper. “In the morning send this envelope to this address.” He handed it back to Mario.

“Yes Boss.” Despite the situation, Mario was beside himself with glee. He took the bag and tucked it in his coat pocket. Nick was actually discussing this with him. Something he had never done before. He felt a sense of pride that Nick confided in him. “How did you know he watched you?”

Nick gave him a cocky stare.

His pride was immediately squashed and was replaced by a blush. He felt stupid, *of course he knew if someone was watching him.* He quickly moved on trying to get rid of his embarrassment, “And the face?”

“I’m guessing that the next one won’t be so happy, because now he knows I’m involved with her.”

“So what are we going to do?”

His eyebrows rose, “Do you want to know?”

Mario nodded eagerly.

Nick gave him a faint look of approval, “First of all, you have to look at the situation. This guy has done this before because he’s patient and tactical in the way he makes his affections known. He also knows her routines so he’s watched her probably for several weeks or months.” Nick stopped because that part made him very angry. Having someone watch Jordan without her knowledge and knowing that she belonged to him was enough to make him kill the bastard.

“Mr. Castile?” Mario was fascinated with the information that Nick was able to get from the card alone and didn’t miss the flash of anger in his eyes. He knew it was because he worried about Jordan and Mario felt himself getting angry right along with him.

Nick nodded and continued, “He has a misconception that Jordan returns the affection because of the roses...”

“Roses?”

“He’s been sending her roses at work.”

“Oh, and now that she’s off for a bit...he’s been dropping

reminders on her doorstep.”

“Right. So Mario, if you take what I’ve told you into consideration, this guy is obsessive. He won’t stop until he thinks he’s won her over or lost her. Hell, he probably thinks they’re already engaged.”

“But Jordan’s dating you.”

“Yes. Now what would an obsessive, stalking, nutcase do to someone that he thinks has betrayed him.”

Mario’s jaw dropped, “You think he’ll hurt her.”

“I know he’ll *try* and hurt her.” Nick corrected.

“So you mean to stop him.” Mario understood now. Nick would do anything to protect Jordan from a creep, even if it meant killing him. Well one thing was for sure, Jordan couldn’t have a more competent boyfriend. It almost seemed like fate.

“Any way I can.” Nick started adjusting his suit jacket over his shoulders which brought Mario back to the meeting the brothers were having with another family.

“Can I come?” Mario asked.

Nick looked up at him while smoothing out his jacket. Mario was eager to learn and Nick already silently promised to start teaching him, but he wouldn’t learn anything from tonight. “You won’t be allowed in the meeting room Mario if you want to come. You’ll have to wait outside with the rest of the men.”

“I don’t care.”

Nick smiled at him, “It’s as boring as hell, and you won’t learn anything.”

“You don’t think so?”

Nick shook his head, “All the action happens in the meeting room. It’s kept private for a reason. There will only be five of us; Frank, me, Luigi and his second in command and a mediator. You will be waiting out side with half a dozen of Luigi’s thugs.” He retrieved his overcoat from the hall closet and Mario followed him.

“Is Bruno going?”

“No. Just me. Carlo is driving us.” He slid his arms into his overcoat while his dark eyes focused on Mario, “Take some time and go spend it with your mother. Take the rest of the night off.”

Mario looked at him and reluctantly nodded, “Okay.”

The next morning, Jordan sat across from Jean at the breakfast table sipping coffee while Jean read the paper. Her sister had tried endlessly to pry information out of her about her new beau, but Jordan would just grin and shake her head only giving her the bare minimum. Finally her sister resigned her attempt with mock anger and started reading the paper.

Jean gave the paper a shake so she could turn the page and something familiar caught Jordan’s eyes.

“Oh... my... God.” She leaned over and took it out of her sister’s hand without saying another word.

“Excuse me?” Jean stared at her in astonishment.

“I know that guy.” She pointed to the picture in the side column that said, ‘*Governor hopeful dead at fifty-four*’

“Who?”

“Him!” Jordan lay the paper flat on the table, “I saw him last night at the opera.”

“The opera in Chicago?”

“Yes. He was rude. He bumped into me, nearly knocking me over and looked at me like it was my fault. He wore a ridiculous rainbow scarf.”

“How did he die?” Jean was suddenly very interested.

“It doesn’t say. It’s pending an autopsy.”

“Hmm I wonder what Nick would say?” Jean’s face lit up, “Maybe your new boyfriend offed him because he was rude to you.” She giggled

“Not funny Jean.”

“Well, you said he deals with security.”

“He wasn’t even there at the time. He was in the men’s room and I didn’t mention anything.”

“Oh well,” she smirked, “I tried. Look at it this way, if he can treat a beautiful woman with such ignorance, maybe it was a good thing that he never made Governor. Can you imagine how he treated everyone else?”

“Still not funny. The guy is dead.” That statement still didn’t wipe the smirk off of Jean’s face.

Chapter Seven

THE MUFFLED MUSIC reverberated into Frank’s office, where he and Nick were sharing a drink along with half a dozen of Frank’s men and twice as many women. It was Frank’s idea to purchase the club, one of the busiest discos in Manhattan. No matter how much you sound proof a room the noise manages to get in. He was thankful for that when he killed two men in it, although it wasn’t open at the time, the extra soundproofing was still handy.

He looked over at his brother who sat in the middle of a leather couch surrounded by beautiful women. Nick knew that Frank liked the attention from the women who frequented the club. They were mostly rich daughters of the high society folk, and Nick knew Frank loved fucking them. He could have access to anyone of his own high priced call girls but sometimes he would prefer unadulterated sex from spoiled rich women. Nick himself stood near the door with his back against the wall. Mario had taken a chair next to him. Even though he didn’t complain, Nick knew that Mario still had the headaches from that skull bashing he took almost a month ago. Nick’s phone rang just then. He pulled it out of his breast pocket and noticed the caller was Jordan, and he swore out loud and hesitated not to answer

it. Damn, he should have called her sooner, but Frank had been keeping him busy all week and although he'd thought of her endlessly, he didn't have a moment alone to talk to her.

Frank who had a beautiful woman on each arm focused his attention on his brother when he heard him swear.

Nick handed his glass to Mario, "Hold this for a second." He flipped open his phone, "Yes."

"Are you busy?"

"Actually, yes." He wasn't impatient with her, he was aggravated from not seeing her. Every day he was away from her irritated him. The woman was addictive and he was having withdrawal.

Jordan could hear the music and the numerous voices in the background. Many of the voices belonged to women, "where are you?"

"My brother's club in Manhattan."

She sighed in frustration, because it was hard to hear through the noise on his end. By the sound of the background noise, at least he was telling the truth. "My father wants you and your brother to come to a charity event next week. The invitations are going out today. They should have gone out sooner, but my sister Jean seemed to have forgotten to mail them. She's been dealing with a lot."

"I'll let Frank know."

There was a pause on her end, "...are we still okay, Nick?"

He spared a glance at Frank, who was very curious even though he couldn't hear the conversation across the room through the noise, "of course." He felt guilty. He hadn't so much as called her, but then again, Frank hadn't given him more than a few hours just to catch some sleep. Between negotiations with the Gaetani family, the current condo project, and Frank's ongoing night life, he hadn't any time.

"You can't talk can you?" she finally realized.

“No.” he admitted.

“Do you have some time? I want to see you.”

“One moment,” He turned his head looked at Frank.

Frank stared at him for a few seconds and finally understood his meaning. He then nodded and waved his hand for him to go.

“Yes, I do now.”

“I’ll pick you up.”

“No, I’ll meet you.”

“Fine, I’ll see you at your place in an hour.” She was annoyed at his evasiveness. Was he hiding something? What about all of those women’s voices? He couldn’t possibly be there with one of them could he?

She was already waiting outside the door when he arrived. He inserted his key card into the lock and let her in, “Did you wait long?”

She shook her head.

Her silence alerted him. He paused and studied her features for a moment, “You look worried.” He said as he opened the door and allowed her in before him.

She turned to him when he shut the door behind them, “You don’t want Frank to know were are together, but you have no problem being with a multitude of different women in the presence of your brother.”

One of his eyebrows went up, “You’re jealous?”

“Ridiculous.” She stated.

Nick shook his head, as a smile pulled at the corner of his mouth, “You don’t need to be.”

She inwardly breathed a sigh of relief at the honesty in his tone, “No?”

“No.” He reached for her coat collar, “Let me take your coat.”

She turned allowing him to pull it off her shoulders as he

leaned down and inhaled her perfume rubbing his stubbly cheek against hers, "I'm really not the jealous type. But you are able to turn off and on so effectively, I just don't know what you're thinking. Then I don't see you for two weeks at a time. And then all those female voices..." She said softly. His closeness made her stomach twinge.

"I know." He kissed the back of her neck, then left his lips hovering above her skin as he spoke, causing his warm breath to brush her skin, "I told you I was my brother's bodyguard. I need to be with him."

She leaned into him, "You hadn't called."

"I've been busy," he kissed her nape again, "and my brother likes the attention of many women."

She turned to face him, "Really? So you're saying all those voices were your brother's girlfriends? I find that hard to believe."

"Really. I'm more of a one woman man. And you don't know Frank." He added with a sly smile.

She eyed him cautiously, "I hope so." She couldn't deny the butterflies that started fluttering around in her stomach again.

"You smell *amazing*." He didn't give her a chance to respond, quickly covering her mouth with his.

Her arms slipped under his suit jacket. Surprised at what she felt, she stopped and looked up at him, "you're carrying a gun?" To her, he didn't seem concerned that she noticed.

"You asked me if I carried a gun." He removed his it and set it on the granite counter, "Now you know for sure." He then reached over and removed his other gun. This brought her eyebrows up.

"Twins? I'm impressed."

He smiled down at her, "Really? I seem to have an affliction for them."

“Not funny.” Then she gave him a ravishing smile, “that’s kind of sexy Nick.” She stated looking at the firearms, “but don’t you need to have a permit for those.” She knew from her sister that New York State had very tough gun laws.

“Will you have me arrested?”

“I might just get Sara to do that. Then I can take your phone away, lock you in a cell and visit you all I want.”

He laughed, and leaned down to kiss her again.

She pulled back for a moment to look at him, “Nick, I know the other night...well...when we were here; I seemed quite forward, but...”

“...I remember.” He said deeply while staring down at her.

“Well now that I’m here with you... alone, I’m a little nervous. You just seem like such an enigma to me.”

He smiled, “An enigma? I don’t think anyone’s ever referred to me like that, but I’ll take it.” He kissed her soft cheek, then the other one.

She breathed, “I need to tell you that I haven’t had much experience, regardless how I came across...”

“I don’t care...” He whispered cutting her off.

“...But...” She wanted to tell him that she wasn’t as aggressive as she made out to be, but he really didn’t seem to care. He gently pushed her back against the wall and his hand caressed her neck while his thumb rested on her jaw and tilted her face up to his.

“It doesn’t matter Jordan.” He said convincingly, “I really *don’t* care. If you’re thinking about backing out of tonight that’s not an option. I’ve finally got you alone and have some time to spend with you. I intend to use every minute because I don’t know when we’ll get this opportunity again. I hope you don’t have any intention of sleeping, because I want you so bad, I can taste it.”

“But...” She repeated feeling her knees weaken and the

butterflies in her gut turned into a rollercoaster ride as a thrill shot through her at his deeply voiced confession.

He cut her off by slamming his mouth against hers with scorching intensity.

She shoved his jacket off his shoulders hardly mindful of it because of the way his mouth seduced hers. She realized now that she only got a taste of what he was capable of in his penthouse a few weeks ago. His lips coaxed hers repeatedly until she succumbed to his experienced urging and parted hers. Then he captured her lips and delved his tongue into her mouth with experienced control, enticing and urging her responses. He got it.

She was hardly aware that her hands had snaked around his neck and up to his hair where they managed to knot themselves in to pull her mouth closer to his, if that was possible. Only when she felt his hand on her thigh did she realize that she had worn a skirt and it was now hiked above her waist while his hand gripped her bottom and lifted her off her feet like she weighed nothing. She didn't want to let go of him even for a second and he must've thought the same thing because he held her to him when he turned and walked into his bedroom. He kneeled on his bed and leaned over to lay her down before covering her small frame with his.

He lifted himself to the side, slipped his hand around her lower back, unbuttoned and unzipped her skirt, then with gentle tugging, managed to get it and her underwear down her thighs. She helped by kicking her legs and flinging them off into the room somewhere. Her blouse had already been unbuttoned and if she had her wits about her she would realize that he already had her bra undone and it hung loose on her.

He lifted his head, "Jesus Jordan, we have to slow down."

She shook her head and reached for him.

He chuckled, "Just a minute, I need to get my clothes off."

He stood and quickly removed the rest of his clothing.

She was fumbling with the rest of hers when he moved to the bedside table and pulled something out of the drawer. She had barely gotten her bra off when he reached over, grabbed her feet, and turned her effortlessly so she was facing him crosswise on the bed before she could say or do anything, he was between her thighs taking her in his mouth. She cried out fisting her hands in the satin sheets as he continued doing unheard of things with his tongue. His hands reached up and caress her breasts and pulled himself closer to her. She was writhing and begging him for release when he covered her naked form with his. Then she remembered something important.

When she spoke she didn't realize she was panting, "Nick...do you have...?"

"Already done." He whispered thickly as his mouth closed over one of her nipples as he worked his way slowly back up her body.

She completely forgot what she was even going to ask him and gasped out loud as his tongue circled her breast erotically.

"*Damn* Jordan, is everything about you beautiful?" He rasped against her skin.

She moaned at his gentle caresses, but when he reached down between her thighs and his fingers entered her warmth she cried out his name.

He cut it short by kissing her hard and fierce eliminating all of her conscious thought. She started moaning uncontrollably at his touch and began telling him things that she would never repeat in public. His breathing changed with her words and he became hurried. He lifted her hips and entered her none too gently causing her to cry out again.

God she was so wet, hot and tight. He knew she was inexperienced but wow, she was practically untouched. He still worried that he had hurt her, but she gripped his shoulders and

lifted her hips toward him urgently causing him to withdraw and plunge into her hard again and again. They had practically moved halfway across his king sized bed when she screamed her release and bit down on his shoulder shuddering beneath him. Soon after Nick groaned his own orgasm and collapsed on top of her.

It was a full minute before either of them spoke. It was Jordan. "That was ...hot" she breathed, "Was that normal?"

"No." He lifted his head and smiled at her, "Definitely not." He kissed her thoroughly and passionately before he rolled off her and went to his bathroom.

She lifted her head and looked around at the bed. It was destroyed. She grinned. The bedspread and top sheet were on the floor and the bottom sheet had literally been pulled off the corners of the mattress. Then the mattress itself was moved about a foot off the box spring. She didn't even remember when that happened. Jumping up she quickly remade the bed and adjusted the mattress before he returned and then hopped in under the sheets. Suddenly she was embarrassed at her nakedness and pulled the covers up high.

He returned just then and got in next to her. He rolled toward her and pulled her next to him. She rolled to face him and he kissed her forehead before resting his chin on the top of her head.

"Did you mean it?" She asked sheepishly.

"What?"

"It wasn't normal."

"Yes." He grinned, "If you don't know, then you are inexperienced. Although no one could tell. That was definitely wild and like you said, damn *hot*." He pulled back and looked down at her his eyes were smouldering and a roguish grin laced his face, "Who knew that a sweet-mouthed little thing like you could talk so *fucking* dirty?"

She was shocked, "I did not!" Then the words she used came flooding back into her mind along with the blood rushing into her cheeks, "Oh! I did!"

He laughed, "*Oh* did you ever. I wouldn't have pounded into you like bloody jackhammer if you didn't."

"I am so embarrassed." The blush was even evident in her voice; she really didn't have to tell him. *It was his entire fault*, she thought, if he didn't get her all hot and bothered, she wouldn't have behaved like that.

"You shouldn't be. That's a talent. I think I'll phone you more often, just to encourage a little phone sex. It would make being away from you much more manageable."

"You are not helping." She flushed more and buried her face in his thick chest.

"Well, honey, don't change...please and if you're thinking about going to sleep tonight, you're out of your mind."

Chapter Eight

AFTERWARD, SHE LAY asleep on top of him. Her head lay on his bare chest. He felt the pressure of her weight with every slow breath he took. There was no denying that he liked the feel of her body and her warm flesh against his. More than he liked to admit. Her wavy hair cascaded onto the satin sheets. Her legs lay on either side of one of his. His other was bent at the knee with his foot flat on the cool satin sheet. Nick lay awake staring at the ceiling. He never was much of a sleeper. His hand caressed her bare back and shoulder. She was a handful for sure. However, she was worth every minute he could spend with her. He'd never been so intrigued by a woman like her before in his life. She was sophisticated, intelligent, independent and beautiful. He actually never let women interfere with his thoughts on a job. But thoughts of Jordan would seep into his

mind no matter what he did to try and ignore them. He knew this wasn't going to be easy, keeping this secret. Besides Mario, his brother already suspected something; he just hadn't brought it up yet. One thing was for sure, she looked really good on him. Not only that, her passion was unequalled and the sex was out of this world. She was amazing to make love to. Who knew that the reserved little beauty had such a wild side? He grinned, not that he complained. In fact he had nudged her awake again around two and made love to her again. Although she was groggy, she quickly overcame it and was more than eager. Even when he pulled her on top of him and made her take control. Seeing her body arching above him like a wanton Goddess made him hard as granite. Her beautiful breasts and their perk rosy nipples bouncing fluidly above him caused him to come sooner than he wanted to. It didn't help that he had images of things racing through his mind on what he wanted to do to her and told her every detail while she rode him causing her to increase her movements. Obviously, he grinned, she loved dirty talk too. How fucking perfect could she be? Everything about her was so exquisite. She tasted, felt and even made love flawlessly.

She moaned softly and shifted on him.

He stilled his caresses for a moment to see if she was waking. He didn't want her awake yet, she needed some rest before he took her again. And he was going to.

Satisfied she wasn't he continued caressing her milky skin. She just didn't understand the type of people that he dealt with or even had a clue about his brother's illegitimate businesses. That was a problem. A big problem. There would be no way that she would walk away from something like that if she found out. She was too righteous. Although, his brother masked the crimes he did well, his legitimate businesses that he used as fronts wouldn't last forever. Someone would figure him out sooner or later. Not to mention the crimes he himself has

committed for his brother. Just then his phone vibrated noisily on the bedside table. He reached over and picked it up to read the display. *Speak of the devil.*

Jordan shifted as she awoke and raised her head to look at him.

He put his finger to his lips while looking at her and answered the phone, "Yes?"

She tilted her lovely head at him in question but didn't say anything. She could hear the indistinguishable male voice on the phone talking to Nick.

"Yes I understand...Tomorrow, first thing." He flipped it closed

"Frank?" She asked.

"Yes."

"Doesn't he sleep?" she looked at the time. Four in the morning. She guessed Nick wasn't kidding when he said he didn't have a social life. He'd really meant it.

He chuckled, "Yes, more than me."

Her brows furrowed. "This is about me, isn't it?"

"Perhaps."

Jordan rested her head on her hands that were stacked on his chest, "I still don't understand what the issue is with me, Nick?"

He ran his fingers through her hair and cupped her chin, "This isn't your concern Jordan, don't worry."

"Are you sure?" she looked sceptical.

He pulled her up on top of him so she was facing him directly, "Positive." He threaded his fingers in her hair at the back of her head, "Now let's hear that lovely vocabulary again." He said as he pulled her down so he could kiss her.

She didn't hesitate and responded fully as he rolled her over onto her back.

Morning came too soon. He reluctantly got out of bed, showered and got dressed, chuckling at his ability as an accomplished lover. Jordan didn't even stir when he walked from his bathroom with just a towel around his waist to his walk-in closet, then back to the bedroom, adjusting his suit and tie. He was watching her while walking back and forth wearing a subtle smile seeing her naked and tangled in the satin sheets like she had been seriously ravished, making him feel arrogant in his lovemaking at the sensual scene. What a hot night and what an equally scorching woman. There wasn't a moment in his life he thought he could defy Frank and not feel guilty, until now. There was no way he would feel guilty over taking something like her for himself despite Frank's protests. He stopped by the bed and stared down at her for a moment knowing that her breathing had changed. She was awake now.

Her eyes cracked open a little, "Quit it....I know you're undressing me with your eyes."

He sat down on the bed beside her and caressed her cheek, "We have to talk."

She opened her eyes fully and looked at him. It was the seriousness in his voice that caught her attention.

"Nick, don't end this, I've barely just got to know...."

"...I'm not." He interrupted, "After our discussion over dinner a few weeks ago, I've been thinking." He looked sincerely at her.

"About what?"

"No one should know about us, just for now. Not just Frank, but your family as well."

She looked surprised, "What? Why? Are you embarrassed...?"

He smiled and immediately shook his head, "No, definitely not. That's insane."

"Then why?"

He explained, "My brother has enemies Jordan, and I protect him. One of the ways they can really get to him is through me. I don't want to risk your safety."

"I'm a big girl, Nick, I can handle it." She grinned at him while her hand rested on his thigh for reassurance.

"Unlike you, some of these people don't believe in following the law and there are certain things that you aren't used to in this type of world." He continued covering her hand with his.

Curiosity made her ask the question, "...And you?"

He paused for a moment, "I have a set of rules I must follow."

"...But not the law?" she saw that familiar cool look wash over his expression.

"I'm not answering that."

"You just did." She sat up, "I think there's more going on here than you are telling me."

"I can't tell you anything else." His eyes studied her expression as his hand came up and brushed an auburn curl out of her face tucking it behind her ear tenderly. "I told you before there are some things you just don't need to know about me."

"I find this one sided relationship isn't really fair." She gave him a disappointed look. She watched him look down at the bed for a moment considering her words before he returned his attention back to her. His dark eyes radiated sincerity and the coolness was gone.

"I know it isn't. Not for you. However, it's the best course for now if we wish to see each other. I'm not protecting myself Jordan. I don't need it." He paused so she could absorb his words, "You thought maybe it was your age, your profession, your father or whatever else that turned me off of you. I assure you absolutely nothing turned me off of you, it's quite the opposite or you wouldn't be here right now, in my bed. I tried

my best to forget about you, but Jesus, once you get in a man's sights, they're defenceless. I always prided myself on my self control; I can't possibly imagine what you do to those who don't have such mechanisms."

She blushed outright and was sure all her uncovered skin turned the same color, "That's not true." She whispered under her breath and turned her head away.

He cupped her chin and made her face him. His voice was laced with conviction, "Yes it is. You just carry yourself with such humility, that you don't see what affect you have on the male species. In a sense it's one of the things that make you vulnerable and even more appealing." He lowered his face to her hair and inhaled her scent deeply, "And now that I've had you, there's no way in hell I'm letting you go." He kissed the top of her head affectionately before meeting her eyes again.

His eyes darkened in that promise and she felt her chest tighten with affection toward him. He had meant what he said. She wasn't used to this at all. "Oh my god Nick, please stop" She felt the heat rising in her face again, "You make me sound so...so..."

He grinned, "...precious. You are, and I'm going to keep telling you that until you finally believe it."

"After last night I should be complimenting you." She stated not being able to meet his eyes after that confession. Her stomach leapt at the recent memory of his strong hands caressing her body, knowing exactly how to make her elicit such desire.

He chuckled at her statement, "Regardless of how we feel about each other, I need you to listen carefully so you understand," His voice became serious, "The kinds of things I do for a living and for Frank can be dangerous. Frank understands that. That is why he doesn't want me in a relationship. It's nothing personal."

“So you’re saying this secretiveness is all to protect me?”

“Yes. Look at it this way. You’re father has several bodyguards that follow him around when he’s out and about in public because not everyone thinks he does the right things all of the time and some are quite willing to hurt him, and well... some people are just plain crazy. How many times has someone tried to harm him?”

“Quite a few actually...” She admitted.

“Exactly. Frank on the other hand, deals in real-estate, construction and quite literally has screwed some people out of a lot of money, because he’s quicker on the draw than they are. With wealth comes prestige and power and sometimes there is an element of danger. At times these people are less than legitimate and wouldn’t mind a piece of him. That’s where I come in. Jordan, Frank isn’t as wealthy as he is because he was a nice businessman. This also means he’s not going to be impressed because I might be...distracted.” He smiled, “So easing him into this would be a better option for me. He will find out, because he’s definitely not stupid, but just for now we need to keep this quiet.” Of course he didn’t mention that his brother was a drug dealer, pimp and a gangster.

“I can understand your concerns Nick, but this is all one sided, I don’t know if I can play the way you want me too. Besides my sister already knows a bit about you and if you come to the charity event next week, she will know for sure who you are.”

Nick placed his hands either side of her face tilting her face up to look at him, “Then we will deal with this next week, but for now Jordan, that’s all I can offer. How far do you want to take this?”

She studied his handsome looks and gave in. “That’s not reasonable, you know you’re so irresistible to me,” she managed a weak smile, “I’m totally defenceless here. I’m crazy about you.

I don't have a choice."

"Thank you." He bent down kissed her fully after her confession before he lifted his head and studied her gaze, "I've got to get going. You can stay as long as you like."

"Okay." She smiled weakly at him, still unsure of this whole situation, but his compliments rang loudly in her mind.

He got up and left the room.

Jordan climbed out of bed, found his shirt for the night before and put it on then went to the kitchen and watched as he retrieved one of his guns from the counter, popped out the magazine with a metallic click, checked the rounds, returned it and slid his gun back in the holster under his jacket. He repeated the same action with the other. She took note that his gesture was so automatic and quick that she doubted that he was hardly aware that he even did it. However, for some reason, she knew that he would know if something were out of the ordinary. She approached him, "Why did you do that?"

"What?" he stated without turning around.

Jordan realized that he knew she was there the whole time even though she thought she was silent because he didn't startle in the least. "Check your gun clip."

"Habit." Is all he said.

"Really?" She really wanted to know what would get him into such a habit. She knew her sister never did such a thing when she holstered her gun.

He turned while doing up the buttons on his suit jacket. His hands stilled when he caught sight of her in his shirt, and then slowly and methodically his eyes raked down her form.

She didn't miss the change flash in his eyes, and his expression suddenly grew smouldering. She felt a twinge of excitement as he walked toward her. His handsome face registering naked desire.

"You shouldn't have done that." He stated thickly

She was confused, "What?"

He stopped directly in front of her and reached down to slide his hand up her thigh under his shirt, while his other hand slid around her waist. "Worn my shirt." He whispered against her neck, "Hmm, and no underwear." The light from his bedroom filtered in through the windows behind her and made every gorgeous curve visible through the material.

"It was the only thing within range." She gasped when his hand cupped her bottom and he pushed her back against the wall, as his lips caressed her neck. Her thigh slid up his leg and rested on his hip, "Jesus Nick...how the hell do you get me hot so quick?" A seductive grin spread across his handsome face as her fingers twined in his hair at the back of his head and she moaned.

"Me?" he said deeply grabbing her hand and putting it on his arousal while capturing her mouth with his in a crushing assault. "Baby, I'm so hard, I could crack granite."

His phone rang just then and he swore under his breath as he pulled back from her.

"Nick..."

His finger touched her lips to silence her and answered the phone while his eyes never left her face. "Yes." A slow sensual smile slid across his face as his gaze ran down her form again.

Once more she could hear a man's voice on Nick's cell phone but couldn't make out what he said. She kissed Nick's finger causing him to turn his smile into that sexy seductive grin she'd come to know.

"Yes, Frank, give me...an hour." He paused listening to Frank while his eyes warmed with desire while Jordan took his finger in her mouth sucking on it tantalizingly, "Make that an hour and a half. There's something I've got to do." His voice almost cracked.

Jordan gave him a ravishing smile as realization dawned on her that he just put off his brother for her. She reached out

and grabbed his tie pulling him back towards her.

He flipped the phone closed and threw it on the couch while his gaze remained fixed on her, "Oh hell, maybe two hours..."

He pushed Jordan quickly up against the wall, his lips caressing the nape of her neck.

She gasped against the sudden movement and Nick's continuous ardent assault. She brought her bare leg up to his hip and he ran his hand up her warm thigh and over her derrière grasping the perfect mound with a strong warm hand. His lips covered hers, kissing her unrestrained. Abruptly, he wrapped an arm around her waist and the other under her bottom pulling her away from the wall like she weighed nothing, unwilling to separate from her. He was so sexually aggressive, that it was igniting an undiscovered passion within her.

Jordan shoved him onto his sofa and knelt down in front of him undoing his belt. Her eyes locked on his. Nick went to grab for her again, and she backed off not letting him. A slow sensual smile spread across her face. He set his hands down on the sofa getting her meaning. She continued to undo the zipper on his slacks. He groaned when she took him in her warm mouth. Her hands massaged the length of his muscle thighs as she moved her lips and tongue over his member, knowing exactly where to apply pressure.

For a man, having a woman go down on him could seem cheap sometimes, but not with Jordan. This wasn't a cheap at all. She varied and changed her technique according to his responses. She was a tight package of passion and everything she did was done for both of their pleasure. His thoughts were confirmed when she moaned as she sucked him to the back of her throat. Burying his hands in her glorious auburn curls he helped show her what he liked. She teased the tip and stroked him long and hard periodically grazing her teeth over his flesh.

“Christ!” he bellowed, as she continued. Then feeling him tense she drew him deeply in her mouth and paid special attention with her tongue on the underside of his member until he felt he was about to explode when she lifted her head and climbed onto his lap taking him in her. Their lips met in heated passion as she rose up and down on his lap. He managed to pull up his shirt that she wore, slip it off over her head and capture one of her perfect breasts in his mouth. His arms circled around her waist and up her back. She gasped and arched into him. They screamed their release together and she collapsed on him.

A few minutes passed before either one of them spoke. It was Jordan.

“Holy shit.” She whispered against his chest, while trying to catch her breath, “That just isn’t natural.”

Nick took a slow deep breath and released it in a gush, “I agree.”

“You still have your clothes on.”

“So it seems.” He adjusted her on his lap and laid down the length of the couch taking her naked form with him.

She stretched out on top of him listening to the rapid beating of his heart.

“Are you cold?”

She giggled, “Hell no.”

“You are so damn hot.” He caressed her bare shoulder, “I should have known better to ask.”

She lifted her head and rested it on her hands, “You think so?” She smiled.

He reached up and moved her hair off her face, His dark eyes locked on hers, “Definitely.”

“You’re no cool cucumber either, you know.”

It was his turn to smile, “I know.”

She laughed, “Charming and conceited.” She adjusted herself on top of him, something was poking her in the side. She

reached across him under her chest and removed the gun from his holster that was making her uncomfortable, "Could've shot ourselves with this." She placed it on the floor beside the couch.

"I wouldn't have noticed." He said with a grin.

She laughed again. Then she suddenly became serious, "Are you going to tell me a little more about yourself?"

"Don't ruin this Jordan." He stated dropping his grin while still caressing her shoulder.

She sighed, "Its not fair Nick."

"I know."

She picked up his gun, and admired the stainless steel, "This is pretty fancy. How many rounds does it hold?"

"fourteen"

"What is this?" She pointed at a feature on the gun.

"Night sight."

"Seriously?"

"Yes."

"Don't you need a special permit for this?"

"Perhaps."

"Is this military issue?"

"Jordan. Stop it." he said gently but firmly.

She stared at him, he green eyes full of challenge, "Sooner or later. I will find out more about you."

"Let's make it later."

She sighed heavily in defeat and set the gun down again, "Fine. I just wish you would trust me."

"Jordan look at me,"

She did,

"It's not a matter of trust. You may not like what you find. I warn you, do not probe into my past or my present situation. It will serve you nothing. Let's just enjoy what we have."

She stared at him intently weighing his words. How

could she possibly ignore his secrets? She wanted to know everything about him including what he was hiding. How could anything be so terrible? Unknown to him, she learned plenty. Her sister Sara had shown her how to use a gun and there were certain things she knew about them and the state laws. She knew that he wouldn't be carrying a firearm around her unless he had a permit. It was also a custom made handgun which took a specialized permit specifically from the government. She also memorized the serial number on the bottom of the handle and would probe it further. She couldn't let this go. She had to know. She smiled at him, "Okay." She laid her head back down on his chest.

Chapter Nine

MARIO SHOULD HAVE suspected something when Frank called him in his study and told the other men to leave.

"Who is this woman that Nick is seeing?"

"I have no idea sir." Mario usually couldn't lie worth a shit, but he promised himself that he would today.

One of Frank's brows went up, "Really? You haven't noticed anything different with him? I find that hard to believe Mario. You are with him every waking moment when he's not with me and I've noticed it."

Mario stood still while Frank's dark eyes scrutinized his expression, but refused to give in. Nick's stare was much more terrifying. Frank's didn't even touch what Nick's could do to him. "I've noticed nothing different." He repeated. However, Frank must've known something was wrong with what he said because he just kept staring at him, making him very uncomfortable. He was suddenly thankful that Bruno opened the door distracting both of them and Nick entered.

He stopped when he saw Mario then his eyes went to

Frank then back to Mario.

Mario did not mistake the anger in them. He automatically assumed it was for him. Mario filled with guilt when Nick's gaze halted on him and seemed to penetrate his very being, even though he knew he didn't do anything wrong. Maybe that was Franks' angle. To get Mario in there and make it look like he said something so Nick would confess.

Nick then turned his attention back to Frank. "What's the problem Frank?"

"Mario, wait outside."

Mario nodded and walked by Nick as his cold eyes settled on him again. Mario shook his head subtly when he met his gaze and walked out the door. Bruno shut it behind him.

Frank waited until the door was closed before he turned to his brother, "Mario says you've met a woman."

"Nice try, Frank." Nick stared at him with an unreadable expression, "You could never lie worth a shit."

Frank stared at him for a moment and then laughed, "Jesus I should know better."

"Yes, you should." Nick also knew that Mario would rather take his own life than say anything about him. The kid was that loyal.

"Fine then," Frank walked up to him and put his arm around his brother's shoulder, "Let me rephrase this. This woman you've been seeing..."

Nick just looked at him.

"Bring her out to the house in Long Beach on Saturday for dinner. I want to meet her."

"Leave this be Frank." Nick warned him. "Don't interfere."

"I will expect you at around eight pm." Frank ignored his brother's request, "I'm having a gathering to celebrate the recent condo project. There will be many people all legit. Don't worry,

it'll just look like a regular date for you." Frank ignored the warning expression on Nick's face, "I will meet her Nick. You are my responsibility also, so don't give me that shit about it not being my business."

Nick swore under his breath. He was angry with Frank for putting Mario in that position, besides delving into his personal life. He did expect it, but not so soon. Mario looked like he was going to jump out of the window when he saw him enter. He knew that Frank did that purposely and it angered him.

"I forget how much you go on about your personal life," Frank laughed hearing Nick's curse, "but this is my business. You are my business! I have every right to meet her."

"Fine. Now, about Mario..." Nick interjected, "Don't involve him in this shit again."

"Yeah, sorry about that. I just had to see for myself."

"See what?"

"He lied for you, you know?"

Nick finally smirked, "Really? That's impressive."

"Well, I'm glad to see you're pleased with yourself. He's quite taken with you. That means a lot to me."

"Well, Frank whatever makes you happy." He said sarcastically still a little angry.

Frank smiled at Nick's wisecrack, "How's his mother?" Mario's mother was diagnosed with cancer about six months ago and is slowly dying. Mario never talked of it, but Frank had his sources. Also he didn't miss the bags under the kid's eyes lately.

"Health is still failing, but she's surviving."

"We should see if we can get her in a home to care for her needs, instead of her being in that apartment."

Nick's brow went up, "She won't agree to it if the money that pays for the home is mob money, she's quite religious. Mario tells her that he is just a driver for us."

“How the hell do you know that?”

Nick smirked, “I listen. I’ve heard him on the phone to her and your men gossip like school girls among themselves. It seems like you’re not the only one with a soft spot for him.”

Frank shook his head, “Well, maybe we can get the mayor to reroute some funding for her and make it look like it’s from a charity.”

Nick’s expression became sceptical, “What are you up to?”

Frank shrugged, “She’s going to die soon and he’ll have no one.”

“The kid’s already loyal Frank.”

“I know. That’s not it. It’s just that we’d be the only family he’s ever known besides his mother and maybe after her death we can look at assigning more responsibilities because when she dies, so will his ties to being responsible and accountable to her. We can mould this kid, I’m sure of it.”

“He’s already asked me.”

Frank laughed, “You don’t say? What a brave little bastard. Maybe his mother doesn’t have such a strong hold on his conscious that I thought.”

Nick chuckled, “He feels he’s up to more.”

“Even after a skull thumping? He is brave. What do you think of him? Do you think he can handle it?”

“I think he can, yes. With the proper training, he could be really good. He’s quicker than he knows, has a good build and he’s smart.”

Frank’s brows went up, “You don’t say?”

“So, what are you not telling me?” Nick’s brow furrowed.

Frank stared at him for a moment, “It’s nothing. I’m just concerned about his future.”

Nick waved his hand, “Alright Frank, just don’t pull the kid in here like that again. It looked like he’d rather jump off a

bridge than betray me. It's not fair to him."

"Agreed."

Jordan was exhausted after a busy day at the hospital. Actually it was more like five busy days. She said her goodbyes to the staff and was thankful that she had several days off before her next shift. *Maybe Nick would get some time off too* she hoped. She hadn't seen or heard from him after their steamy night together. It bothered her because not hearing from him allowed her insecurities to seep in. She began to wonder if she would see him again. She shouldn't think like that. Desperately she recalled the wonderful things he had said to her and held onto the hope that he had meant them. Her stomach filled with butterflies at the images of his voracious love-making which actually caused her to smile. She grabbed her packsack from her office and headed out the front entrance praying that she wasn't paged overhead during her walk out the front doors. She was wondering if she should stop by the gym and workout for a few hours, but decided against it. She probably made up for it with Nick the weekend before. She shivered at the images that came flooding back to her. She'd only been with two men before Nick and they didn't even touch half of what he could do to her to make her insane with desire. She swore he knew her body better than she did. Unfortunately, seeing him once a week, or every two weeks was becoming more difficult. She ached to see him more often, and with both of their busy schedules, it wasn't easy. She shook her head, every time she started thinking about something else, she ended up thinking about them naked...together. She sighed and scolded herself, because she just did it again.

Just then the sound of a horn honking caught her attention. She looked up to see Nick standing by a silver Mercedes. He had reached through the open window and

honked the horn to catch her attention. She wasn't prepared for how drop dead gorgeous he was. If she could take a picture of that, she would have. Immaculately dressed in an Italian made dove grey suit, black shirt and striped tie, and black overcoat, he definitely belonged in a fashion magazine. Her breath nearly caught and she couldn't contain the eager smile that spread across her lips as she quickly walked over to him. She could see that he was grinning also.

"Hi." She looked at the sleek car and back to him, "Yours?"

He pulled her into his embrace and kissed her without saying a word. It seemed like a full minute passed before he pulled back from her, although he didn't release her, "Hi." He mimicked with a sly smile, "And yes it is my car."

She felt breathless, "Wow. I *really* missed you." She actually forgot she said 'Hi' to him.

One of his brows rose, "You don't say?"

"A lot." She whispered and laid her head against his chest.

He held her for a moment, "Well, there's nothing better a man likes to hear than those words from a beautiful woman." He kissed the top of her head and grimaced.

She looked up at him, "Now, what do I owe this nice surprise and *what's wrong?*"

"You smell like hospital." He chuckled while releasing her to bend down to pick up her pack.

The man had her totally spellbound. She dropped it without realizing it.

"We have a dinner invitation to my brother's tonight."

She was surprised, "Your brother....but I thought..."

He gave her a reassuring smile, "looks like he figured us out sooner than later."

She suddenly became nervous, "Oh, Nick, I don't know."

"It's all right, he already likes you. He just doesn't know

it's *you* I've been seeing."

"He'll be mad about this, I'm sure. I mean, I met Frank and there's a look about him that makes me think like he has a temper."

He shook his head with an amused smile, "It won't be you he'll be angry at and besides all of the other reasons I told you why he doesn't want me seeing you, Frank also worries about me." He walked her around the passenger side and opened the door for her. He put her packsack in the backseat. "Do you have something to wear for dinner, or do we need to do a quick stop and shop."

"I think I can manage." She was still unable to take the smile off her face. She was ecstatic that he picked her up from work. It wasn't often that she got to see him in the daylight, and maybe that was a good thing. She could see that his features were masculine perfection in broad daylight. His dark brown eyes actually took on a warm hue in the sunlight and were more visible under his thick black lashes. He was a sight to behold. She was even more happy that he treated her with such adoration, because it just somehow made her feel beautiful when a man as heart-stopping as him took the time to make sure she was looked after.

He walked around the car and got in the driver's seat. Picking up her hand and kissing it he set his eyes on her, "Don't be nervous Jordan. Remember I told you this isn't about you, it's between Frank and me."

She appreciated that he was sensitive to her feelings of nervousness over meeting Frank again under these circumstances, "You always seem to know how to make me feel better." She smiled, "Thank you."

Nick drove to her brownstone and waited patiently downstairs while she got changed. If he'd gone upstairs and waited they wouldn't have made dinner. It was just as well, Frank

phoned.

“Yes.”

“I need you to swing by Commerce and pick up my contracts for the Windsor project. Carlo that idiot forgot them.”

Nick chuckled, “No problem.”

When she came down the stairs he’d just hung up the phone and she watched a slow smile of approval spread across his face as his eyes looked down her figure.

“Nice choice.” He said thickly.

She reddened, “You have to quit doing that.”

He took her hand and helped her down that last few steps, “Not a chance.” He took her faux fur wrap from her and draped it around her shoulders. “At least Frank won’t know what hit him when he sees you.”

She bowed her head because she knew she was blushing again. She knew arguing with him would be futile. She was sure he liked to make her blush.

Again he opened the door for her, helped her in the car and walked around to the driver’s side and got in. “I have to stop by my brother’s house and pick up something for him.”

“okay.”

He shifted into drive and pulled away from the curb, “Do you feel any better?”

She looked at him, “Than earlier? No. Worse.”

He took his eyes of the road to glance at her, “It’ll be fine Jordan, trust me.”

She smiled, “I do trust you.” She was sure she didn’t mistake the look of apprehension that quickly crossed his features at her words as he watched the road in front of them.

About twenty minutes later Nick pulled up in front of a beautiful townhouse on Commerce street.

“I’ll be back in a moment.” He patted her thigh.

“Okay.”

He got out of the car.

She watched him walk up to the front doors which actually opened before he even knocked. Obviously they were waiting for him. A man answered that looked like he was big enough to be a professional wrestler and shook hands with Nick. He then shut the door obscuring her view.

"That your girl?" Bruno asked as he handed Nick the briefcase.

"Yes." Bruno may have looked like an empty headed retired wrestler, but he was a lot more cunning than people gave him credit for. He was certain Frank never told Bruno about Nick's girlfriend, but the man knew anyway. Nick didn't elaborate, but then again, he never did.

"She's quite a looker Nick." Bruno smiled.

Nick chuckled, "You can see that from here?"

"I may be old, but I know gorgeous when I see it." He placed his hand on Nick's shoulder as he opened the door, "Have a good night, sir."

"You too."

Snowflakes started to fall on the windshield, melting from the heat within the car. Then it occurred to her, today was December first and with it came the first signs of winter. She smiled to herself. The holidays always brought fond memories. Although she never knew her mother, her father made sure that the three of them always had his attention regardless of his busy schedule.

The door opened at that moment and Nick got in. He turned and put a briefcase in the backseat while smiling at her, "Miss me?"

She laughed, "Always."

"We better get going, we have at least a forty-five minute drive ahead of us." He looked out the windshield, "It's starting to snow, so traffic will be insane." He shifted the car into drive and

pulled away from the house. It didn't take him long to see the dark sedan that followed him through frequent lane changes in his rear view mirror. He almost smiled, *this must be Jordan's admirer. Obviously he doesn't know who he's fucking with.* However, this was another complication that would probably enrage Frank.

Nick was right, traffic was insane. Also the snow made visibility a little difficult, but he drove like he didn't even see it. She wasn't sure if it was him that drove so beautifully or the car. Regardless, before she knew it they pulled down a drive into view of a gorgeous slate blue colonial style mansion in Long Beach. The front of the house was lit beautifully with amber garden lights which gave the house an incredible classic appeal. With the snowfall, the place seemed almost magical.

"Wow, how many houses does your brother own?" She stared in awe at the house. It was a two story house with white trim and by the looks of it, was built in the late nineteen thirties.

"Quite a few actually." He answered, "I guess it's a perk for a real estate mogul."

"I guess." Was all she could say.

As he pulled up to the front doors a man came out of the house as if waiting for them and opened the door to help Jordan out. Nick had already got out of the car and took her hand from the other man casting him a possessive look.

"Thanks Carlo, but I'll take it from here. Frank's papers are in the back seat."

The other man smiled, "Of course Mr. Castile I'll put your car in the garage." He then got in Nick's car and drove it away.

The snow really started to come down now, and she glanced at the house again, "This is really beautiful."

"Yes, it is. That's probably why my brother insisted we come here for dinner instead. He can be a bit of a show off." He smiled.

“You don’t say.” She laughed then stopped before he opened the door. He obviously felt her stiffen because his next words were very reassuring.

“Jordan, remember this isn’t about you. It’s between me and Frank. You’ll knock his socks off when he sees you.” He turned her to face him, “If anything he’ll forgive me the moment he sets his eyes on you.”

“I said you have to quit doing that.” She stated in barely a whisper.

He kissed her lightly and opened the door.

Chapter Ten

WHEN FRANK SET eyes on her he swore under his breath. *A fucking Calloway!* Jesus, no wonder Nick was so secretive, well, more than usual. His eyes slowly raked down her glorious figure as Nick was removing her wrap, and it was obvious why Nick continued to see her despite his request for him not to, there was no doubt that she was stunning. She wore a low cut satin mauve evening gown that left no curve undiscovered. Doctor or not, tonight she was all woman. He walked up to the two, not letting his emotions show in his expression, “Well, Nick has finally decided to bring you into the public, Jordan, you look stunning.” He leaned down and kissed her cheek.

“Thank you Mr Castile.” She blushed.

“Frank.”

“Thank you Frank.” She beamed at him.

He gave his brother a hug, “I want to talk to you.” He sternly whispered in his ear.

I knew that was coming, Nick thought to himself and nodded that he acknowledged him.

Dinner was wonderful. Jordan was relieved to see some familiar faces. Councilman Robert Ross and his wife Joan, that Jordan knew as an acquaintance through her father, along with a couple of others that she couldn't remember the names of. Altogether there were about a dozen people there, not including Nick and herself. One thing was for sure, Nick was right. Frank treated her with the utmost respect and if anything, went out of his way to make sure that she was having a good time. He introduced her and Nick to everyone showing an enormous amount of courtesy. For the first time she noticed that Frank actually didn't have a date. Every time he came to one of her father's events or any event that she'd been at with her father, Frank had a beautiful woman on his arm, and now that she'd discovered more about him in the past few weeks she thought it was odd. He loved women, loved being surrounded by them, and yet he was the only single one here. Why was that?

After dinner, they all made their way to a tastefully decorated sitting room for drink and four of the men, including Frank disappeared to sign some contracts that Nick had brought. Shortly after, most of the other company left excluding Robert and Joan. The guests made their way to their waiting cars through the increasing snowfall.

Jordan had to admit, she was having a wonderful time. The décor in the house was very warm and welcoming. Frank was an excellent host, and Joan Ross was a genuinely nice person. They chatted constantly throughout the evening. Although her eyes would frequently glance in Nick's direction to just see that his warm stare was already centered on her even though he easily maintained conversation with the other two men. She was terrible at multitasking like that. Whenever her eyes darted to him she completely lost track of what Joan was telling her, or what she was telling Joan. She felt like an

inconsiderate idiot. She was thankful that Joan didn't take offense when she asked her to repeat herself several times. The woman just gave her an understanding smile after darting her gaze to Nick. "Don't worry Jordan, I can tell you two are a new couple, and he hasn't been able to take his eyes off of you all night. He's just as captivated."

Jordan blushed.

Later, Jordan glanced up to one of the many huge windows that the mansion had and noticed the snowflakes had become so dense that there was no seeing beyond the white blanket to the trees that were clearly visible just a few short hours ago on the front of the property. She made her way over to one of the windows to stare at the weather. Nick joined her shortly.

She hugged her shoulders subconsciously while watching the snowstorm brew outside.

"Cold?"

His concerned voice brought her head around to stare at his warm brown eyes, "No, I think I'm just a little apprehensive of the trip home."

"I wouldn't worry about that." He volunteered.

She stared at him for a moment. "Why?"

He nodded at the snow outside, "We're staying the night."

Her eyes widened, "What did you say?"

He smiled down at her, "I have a room here, Jordan."

"But..."

"I may be a good driver, and my car does have all wheel drive, but all the roads closed about an hour ago."

Her mouth hung open, "...I don't have any clothes."

He gave her a knowing grin and pulled her back into his chest, "I'm sure we can make do." His hand slid around her waist and his hand spanned over her flat stomach as he leaned down to whisper huskily in her ear, "Besides, what I have in mind to do to

you doesn't involve clothing."

Feeling the rising blush she chose not to say anything to that fearing her voice would crack. Instead she slid her hand over his trying to ignore the heat erupting within her at his deep sexy promise. To top it all off, it was the first time he'd shown any sort of affection in public and in front of his brother, besides the courtesy that a gentleman would show a lady. Not that she complained, because he made up for it behind closed doors by giving her his most devoted and tender attention, but this was different. Maybe it was to relax her anxieties about staying in Frank's house with him. Regardless, the display of affection won her over. Just the opportunity to spend another uninterrupted night with him made her heart skip a beat especially with the memories of their last night together so vivid in her mind. "You don't play fair." She said under her breath as she leaned back into him.

His widening grin told her that she was right, "Well, the reward for cheating is worth it." He leaned down and gave her an affectionate kiss on the cheek.

Rob and Joan retired to their room for the night and Nick walked her to his. Of course it was enormous. It had a king size four poster bed with an incredible ensuite and one large walk-in closet with an expensive wardrobe for Nick.

"Wow"

He chuckled, "Make yourself at home." He went into the closet and re-emerged with one of his undershirts. "I know it's a little unladylike, but I'm sure you'll manage and still look like a beauty queen."

She smiled, "I'm sure." She took the shirt and had an image of it sliding over his muscular form fitting him perfectly.

"I'll be back, Frank wants to talk to me."

"Hmmm, I wonder what about?"

He shook his head slightly and leaned down to kiss her

gently on the lips, "I know you're exhausted, don't wait up, okay?"

He purposely didn't respond to her question. Obviously it was about her. One thing was for sure, he was right about her being exhausted. She had been working since six o'clock this morning, and now it was well past midnight. It was such a busy day, she didn't have time to stop and think about how tired she really was. Not only that, she got to spend time with Nick and pushed her fatigue aside just for that purpose, but now that he brought it up, she suddenly felt very tired.

Nick left and she went to the bathroom to wash up before bed. She sighed looking at the toiletries that were brand new and laying out for her. Frank was very considerate. She opened the wrapper of the toothbrush and brushed her teeth. She pulled the pins out of her hair letting the auburn curls fall and tickle her shoulders and back. Slipping the gown off she picked up Nick's shirt and smelled it. She would look silly if anyone saw her, but she couldn't help herself. She loved the way he smelled. Then she slipped the shirt over her head and it fell loosely past her hips. Looking at herself one final time in the mirror she turned and left the bathroom and crawled into the large bed. It was surprisingly soft and inviting. Just what she needed because it was huge and she felt so small in it, but she didn't care. She had his shirt on and was in his bed. She easily drifted off to sleep.

After Nick left Jordan he made his way to Frank's study. Frank had wanted to speak with him...what a surprise. Although he had to give it to his brother, he was no less than a gentleman with Jordan even though he knew the man was going to explode on him when he got him alone. He was right. He didn't even have the door shut after entering the room when Frank's voice boomed in his ears.

"Do you know what you're doing?" Frank paced the floor

in front of Nick, "She's the sister to a cop Nick and the Mayor's daughter."

"Yes, I know." Nick's expression was unreadable, "I told you to leave this be."

"Why didn't you just tell me?" Frank faced him, "Jesus, you have access to a hundred women. How long has this been going on?"

"Because I wanted to avoid causing you stress. It's not about that Frank, and about six weeks." Nick stated answering all three questions.

Frank searched his expression for something and found nothing. He knew his brother better than anyone, yet the man can look like cold steel even when under immense pressure. The only reason he knew this woman was important to Nick was because he *knew* him, "I hope you know what you're doing."

"You wanted to know." Nick said in a matter-of-factly tone.

"You should have damn well told me!" Frank pointed an accusing finger at him, "Nick, I told you to stay away from her."

"I couldn't." Nick calmly turned away from him and walked over to the bar, retrieved a glass and poured himself a whiskey, "Look at her Frank." He spoke without turning around.

"Damn rights! I did bloody look at her! How the hell do you think I knew you wanted her? Jesus Christ!" He took a breath to calm himself and walked up beside Nick and took the bottle to pour himself a drink. He swallowed the contents of the glass and refilled it while eyeing his brother. "I'm having a really hard time with this. You are not like this Nick. Me, well that's a different story, but I still wouldn't get mixed up with someone who could compromise everything for us."

"Yes, I know, but it still happened...and well, my resolve broke." He confessed as he turned to face him with a wry smile on his face.

Frank stared at him for a moment incredulous, "Your *resolve* broke?"

"Simply put. Yes."

Frank cursed again, "unbelievable." What a nightmare. He leaned back against the bar and stared at the ceiling for a moment deep in thought. He then let out a huff of breath in frustration and faced his brother again, "Is this serious?"

Nick shrugged, and answered honestly, "It very well could be."

"Alright, alright, there's nothing says you can't enjoy yourself and maybe this will lead nowhere, but here are some major risks here. Does she know anything?"

As Nick took another swallow from his glass he was thinking how unlikely this was to blow over. Jordan was his and that's all there was to it. Frank didn't understand that about him. He always thought woman were expendable pieces of pleasure, and maybe at some point he thought the same thing, but not about this one. He'd never felt like this about any other woman in his life. His eyes focused on his brother, "Nothing."

"So she hasn't asked you anything about your life? I find that hard to believe. She's very taken with you."

"She has." Nick said truthfully, "I told her I was your bodyguard."

Frank paused for a moment thinking about that, "It might do. Do you actually think she'll leave this alone?"

"No." Nick said truthfully, "She knows it's more complicated, but she's willing to accept that for now."

Frank swore and paced again, "What the hell are you thinking? She's not a stupid woman, she'll find out something."

"Maybe."

"*Maybe?*" Frank stared at him astonished.

"I'll deal with it when it happens."

"You're kidding right? Are you *trying* to give me a heart

attack? Let me remind you again that she's the sister of a detective and the daughter of one of my business partners, *and* you murdered her sister's husband. Don't you find that messed up?"

Nick actually chuckled.

Frank stopped and looked at him as Nick calmly took another drink from his glass. In all of this twisted mess, he could see why Nick found this amusing. His features softened, "Man, I hope you know what you're doing."

"I do. I won't let it touch you. I promise."

Frank thought for a moment, "Okay, Nick. That's all I need to hear because I trust you."

"Thank you."

"Have you ever thought what your other employers are going to think of this?"

"Yes. Thanks to you, they probably know now. I was trying to avoid being seen with her in public for awhile." Nick set his empty glass down and poured himself another.

"Well, if you were up front with me, I wouldn't have pried."

"Yes you would have." Nick took another swallow.

"Probably." Frank agreed, and his features soften a little more "did she settle in okay?"

"Yes, she's tired."

"She's alright with staying the night?"

"You intimidate her. However, I appreciate the fact that you did go out of your way to make her comfortable."

Frank sighed, "First of all, it's not her I'm pissed at. Secondly, you'd have to be a monster not to treat her right. She is beautiful and as sweet as hell." He shook his head and let his expression show his surprise. "I just can't believe *your* resolve broke."

Nick smiled at his words then his expression registered

something akin to guilt, "I know I owe you some sort of explanation Frank, but I can't really understand it myself. I really tried to ignore her, but no matter what, she kept appearing in my life. It was like dangling a carrot in front of a horse."

Frank stared at him, and then slowly nodded. He did understand this, regardless of how pissed he was with Nick. A carrot though? What an understatement. "Fine, it won't come up again. However, you start bringing her with you when you're out with us. Move her in with you if you have to."

"What the hell for?" he looked at him.

"Because, I don't need her ass all shot up, cut up, or found in a ditch somewhere and have the Mayor launching some fucking investigation that points to you, then me. He's aware of some of the shit I do, but when it comes to his daughter, it won't matter if you killed his son-in-law or how rich I made him. He'll find a way to screw us. Don't think that his ass isn't already covered."

"I see."

Frank shook his head.

Nick smiled, "There's something else you should know." If Frank didn't look worried before, he certainly did now.

"This is going to get more complicated isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Fine." Frank sighed wearily, "Tell me."

"Jordan has a stalker."

Frank's brows rose, "You're kidding?"

Nick shook his head, "I need one of your guys to start watching her. I can't be with her twenty four hours a day and watch you to."

Frank let out a string of epithets. When he was done he plopped in defeat in a large wing backed chair. His head leaned back against the cushion and he let out a defeated sigh, "This isn't good."

The outburst didn't even bother Nick, in fact he had expected worse. "No. But Frank, even if I did leave her alone like you wanted, I wouldn't leave her prey to this creep."

He nodded and looked at his brother, "You're sure about this?"

"Yeah, I got a bad feeling."

Frank leaned forward with his arms resting on his legs while staring at the carpet in thought. "Alright Nick, I'll put Sieto on her."

"He has to stay out of sight, I'm thinking this creep won't take long to surface."

"What makes you say that?"

"He followed us here and he's been watching her, so he knows her routines, where she works and now my involvement."

Frank couldn't help but grin. This stalker of Jordan's couldn't pick a worse adversary. "This guy won't know what hit him."

"Entirely."

"What was he driving?"

"Black sedan. It wouldn't make a difference Frank, it was probably a rental and he's long gone. This guy isn't stupid."

He nodded in agreement, "Is Jordan aware?"

"No, she thinks it's an old patient just showing his appreciation." Nick related everything he knew about the flowers including the card he found on Jordan's front step. "I don't want her to know yet because she wears her heart in her expression. If she knew what I know she'll be paranoid at work, home, walking downtown and anywhere else."

"But you want him to know that you know?"

"I want him to know that I'm a dangerous man to piss off."

Frank grinned, "That you are."

"Maybe he'll focus more on me as a worthy opponent

than Jordan's vulnerability. Now the creep knows he has competition."

"Like I said Nick, you're the smart one. I would have never thought of that."

"We'll see. This might not work and he might get aggressive or dangerous toward Jordan, which is why I need her watched."

"I like her Nick, you know that. I will help out the best I can. Anyone who preys on a woman like her deserves to be put down."

Nick finished his drink and conversation with his brother, then went to his room, used the washroom, undressed and crawled into bed next to Jordan. She didn't even stir when he curled up to her and pulled her back toward him. He knew she was exhausted and as much as he ached to wake her, decided against it. Now it was past two a.m. and she really needed to sleep. However, her body was so warm against his. Then she began to slowly respond to his body. She moaned his name at his touch and without waking rolled toward him burying her face in his chest. He rested his chin on the top of her head enjoying the feeling of her warm breath on his skin. He really could get used to this, he thought to himself.

When Jordan awoke the next morning, Nick wasn't with her. She raised her head and looked at both sides of the bed. Empty. She sat up. The snowstorm was still going full tilt outside and the first light of the day started to appear. She glanced at the clock on her bedside table, six thirty.

Jesus doesn't that man sleep? She thought. She knew he came to bed because she'd woken briefly in the night and felt his strong arms around her. It was enough to give her physically exhausted body to be satisfied and drift off again. Although now she wished she had taken advantage of him being beside her all

night, because now he wasn't here. She got out of bed and went to the bathroom. The shower looked very inviting. So she stripped off Nick's shirt and her underwear and stepped under the hot water. It was heavenly. She was well rested, mostly because she'd slept with Nick. For some reason she sleeps well with him. She turned her face up to the falling water enjoying the spray on her face. She ran her hands over her hair to squeeze off the water after she shampooed her hair. When she opened her eyes, there was Nick. His eyes were smouldering and he was in the process of undressing. She near gasped at his sudden appearance but was overcome with complete desire at his intention.

He stepped into the shower and without a word covered her mouth with his as he pushed her against the cool tile wall and brought his hard body against hers. He could've thrown her in the snow naked for all she cared at that moment because she wouldn't have felt the ice against her skin. His body was magnificent, hard, warm, and muscular. She was too focused on the excitement of his flesh touching hers.

Somehow they managed to end up in bed. Her wet hair splayed over her back and onto his shoulders as she lay on top of him.

"So, that was very nice."

He laughed.

"You know..." She gave him a seductive smile, "...if you keep this up I'm going to be like a little lost puppy following you around."

One of his eyebrows went up, "You think so?"

"Definitely." She admitted, as her cheeks flushed, "The things you manage to make me feel...wow."

"Well seeing you in that shower...was absolutely...*delicious*." He confessed huskily. "A vision of beauty Jordan, with your body all slicked up and soapy." He groaned.

She blushed again, "Quit it."

He chuckled again, "You *really* have no idea how beautiful you are, do you?"

She shrugged and furrowed her brow, "I know I'm not ugly...maybe cute but..."

"Beautiful." He cut her off, "...*all over*."

"Okay Nick, please stop." She felt like her cheeks were going to melt they were getting so hot, "So where did you go?"

"Change the subject, nice tactic." He laughed, but answered her question. "I went to drill you up some clothes. Luckily Frank likes skinny little maids. His housemaid is a little bigger than you but the jeans and shirt should fit for now."

"You're always so considerate." She smiled, "Thank you."

"You're welcome," he added.

"Was Frank pretty mad at you over me?"

He shook his head, "I already told you Jordan that I could handle Frank."

She raised her brow, "Hmmm evasive."

He returned her smile, "No. he wasn't too angry, just concerned. And like I said, he wasn't the least bit angry with you."

"What exactly did he say?"

Nick sighed, "Nothing important."

"I think I should know. Again Nick, your secretiveness isn't fair to me sometimes."

He looked at her for a moment, "Alright then. He said he thought you were beautiful..."

"...Nick!" She protested. She'd just gone over this with him.

"You insisted so I'm going to tell you." He gave her an accusing look and continued, "He understood why I liked you, he told me of his concerns because of his business, then he said I should take you with us more so I didn't have to worry about you

too.”

She searched his eyes for some indication that he was pulling her leg, but couldn't find any, “You're telling the truth.”

“I am.”

“Are you *trying* to make me fall in love with you?” she saw his expression change, ‘Oh God! It's too soon isn't it? I shouldn't have said anything.”

Slowly he shook his head, “Jordan, your honesty is refreshing and if it were any other woman, I may have just gotten dressed and left, but you're not any other woman, and I may be a little taken back, but I'm flattered.”

She looked away from him while she spoke, “You are very attentive, courteous...protective and you are very patient where my inexperience lies.” She reddened, “But not only that you manage to make me feel like I'm the only woman in the room no matter where we are.”

He smiled and caressed her shoulder, “to me, you *are*.”

She laid her head down on his chest, “I think I could get used to that.” She sighed, “so how come Frank didn't bring a date.” She could feel Nick shrug.

“He never brings women here.”

She lifted her head to look at him, “Really? Why?”

Nick gave her a lazy smile, “have you not met the women Frank dates?”

“I've met a few and I've heard stories through others.” She added with a little discomfort, “I'm not all for gossip, but I heard he likes models, women with great bodies and...”

“Vain.” Nick added to end her discomfort, “Shallow.”

“That's not nice.” She said trying not to smile. That's exactly what she had heard.

“but true.” He nudged her chin with his forefinger, “And you were thinking it, you were just too nice to say it.”

“You have a lot of faith in yourself to know what I'm

thinking.” She interjected.

“But I’m right.” He said with confidence.

She shook her head and suppressed a smile, “what on earth am I going to do with you?” He raised an eyebrow, “You are too darn arrogant Nick, presuming to know what I’m thinking all of the time.”

“Ah, but I do.”

“What am I thinking right now then?”

He feigned an expression of concentration, then realization as some thought struck him, “That you want to feel my body pressed firmly against yours until I take you to the edge of ecstasy...oh, and how much you like that thing I do with my tongue on your....”

She slapped a hand over his mouth, “Is there no end to your arrogance?” She laughed when he shook his head. “Anyway, we were talking about Frank...”

“You were. I was talking about something much more... appealing.” He said with a rakish grin.

“Alright, I was. So, besides the quality of women Frank dates, how come he doesn’t bring any here?”

“Frank is not one to let a woman get close to him Jordan. Now enough talk of my brother. We could talk about your tongue on my...” she placed her hand over his mouth again.

There was that serious tone that she was getting used to hearing. “Okay Nick I recognize that tone.”

“What tone?”

“That ask-no-more-questions tone that you take on at the drop of a hat when I get to close to your personal life.” She answered.

“Jordan.” He warned.

“I know, I know.” She leaned up on her elbow and stared down at him, “I just wish you would trust me.”

“I thought you understood. It has nothing to do with

trust.” Her beautiful emerald green eyes were so full of vulnerability that he near confessed everything he knew to her. That was what Jordan was about. She was trusting, vulnerable and as far as he could see, there wasn’t an ounce of deceit in her. That’s why he cared for her so much and needed her with him, because she actually made him feel human for the first time since he could remember. He quickly gave his head a mental shake, “You may not like what you find out about me.”

“Why?” She doubted that.

“Because of what I’ve become, and the things I’ve done and seen Jordan. I’m far from sainthood.”

She touched his jaw with her fingertips as her eyes followed the movement, “You are the most wonderful man, I have ever met. Nothing can take that away from me.” She saw the warmth in his eyes before they clouded over as he tried to conceal it. She took it further not wanting to lose it, “So Nick, no matter what you’ve done, I know how you treat me and I know you could never hurt me.”

“I never would.” He confirmed with a stern promise in his voice.

She gave him a warm smile, “And you admitted that you would protect me.”

“I protect what belongs to me...yes.”

“Belong?”

“As far as I’m concerned, you’re mine.”

This time she gave him a ravishing grin, “You think you own me?”

“Yes.” He said without hesitation.

“hmmm, there’s that arrogant streak again.” She teased not the least bit put off by his confession. He had just admitted that he would never hurt her or let harm come to her. She actually liked this possessive side of him. If it were any other she would’ve found it aversive. “Fine then, I guess that means your

mine too.”

He smiled again, “All right.”

“That seriously doesn’t bother you?”

“Not in the least. Stake your claim Jordan.” He smiled at her.

She laughed and slid on top of him, “As you wish.”

One thing he doubted he could ever get used to was the way she went down on him. She was virtually untried but was willing to experiment in just about any way possible. It was a rare and exciting combination to find in a woman. As sweet as she was, the wild passionate side she possessed was rare. His hands reached up and gripped the headboard as she worked her magic on him. Her auburn head was moving sensually between his thighs, while her mouth moved over him, and he told her exactly what he would like her to do afterwards in a voice hoarse with restraint. He wasn’t sure she heard him until she finally lifted her head, turned around and mounted him with her back to him.

“Oh God Nick!” she groaned as she slid down on him.

“It’s deep penetration.” He offered in a similar moan.

“I’m too scared to move.” She confessed, “It feels...oh God...” She tilted her head back causing her glorious curls to tumble down her back onto his abdomen.

“amazing...” he offered, releasing the headboard and grabbing her hips to help her start.

She did her best, but was too caught up in keeping him deep within her.

With a curse of impatience he shoved her forward on her knees and rammed into her until she was sobbing her climax. With a final harsh thrust he arched up and finished his with a shout. Bringing his chest to her back he reached up and began to tease her beautiful breasts.

“I can’t move.” She sighed.

“then don’t.” he answered, teasing her nipples into peaks, “I’m not done yet.”

“Again...?”

“hell yes.” He said huskily as he began to move in her again.

“Oh God....I’m dying...”

“Not yet honey.” He straightened himself up so he was on his knees behind her and knotted his fingers in her hair pulling her head back, “Not tonight anyway. God, your ass looks like heaven against me and I’m hard again already.” He began increasing his movements causing her to groan. “grab the foot board Jordan.” She did, “Now move back against me.”

“I...can’t think...I...”

“Do it.” He commanded and she began to move against him in his rhythm.

She released a cry of pleasure.

His hand tightened in her hair almost painfully as the pleasure built within him.

“this is too much!” she cried tightening her grip, throwing back her head, and moving against him as hard as she could.

“Tell me to stop then.’ He rasped out while his other hand sought out the sensitive spot between her legs.

“No!” she shouted, “Don’t....stop!” She managed to breathe out.

“Right!” he said and grabbed her hips to move forcibly within her. Her cries rose with the force of his movements and soon she was telling him what to do to her all over again. Every time he thrust deeply into her she released an incredible sensual cry that heightened his own pleasure. Soon their voices were mixing and rising together with each continuous meeting of flesh. This time it seemed like forever before they both collapsed in a bundle of limbs and sweat. It might have had something to do with the fact that they’d already made love twice.

Jordan couldn't believe how she felt. Every muscle of her body was trembling with overuse. Nick wasn't just a good lover...he was the ultimate lover. He knew exactly how to draw everything out of her. She never knew that any of what they just did existed within her. What they just....oh God...she didn't think that was even humanly possible.

"Jordan." Came his deep satiated voice, cutting into her thoughts.

"Hmmm."

He chuckled.

"I did die, didn't I?"

"Christ I hope not."

It was her turn to laugh, but it came out more of a moan.

"I'm not done with you yet."

Her eyes flew open to meet his brown smouldering gaze, "How...God, are you even human?"

He gave her a handsome grin.

"I can't move."

"No need."

She managed a smile, "That's what you said last time...Jordan grab the footboard...move against me."

He laughed, "Well, you found it within yourself didn't you?" he raised himself over her.

"you are a machine. It's no wonder you got a great body. Especially if you have so much stamina."

"Maybe," he lowered himself and murmured against the skin of her abdomen. "I can't help myself. You are so fucking gorgeous."

She gasped and arched toward him as he moved his mouth lower over her and his tongue found her bud of pleasure. It was her turn to grip the headboard. She trembled all over. Her thighs shook uncontrollably, but he didn't stop. She didn't think she had anything left in her until the words started pouring

from her. Then right before she reached her peak he raised up and impaled himself in her. She was so wild by then she came with the first thrust. Not Nick, he spent several more minutes reaching his.

Later she tried to get up to go to the bathroom and ended up sliding onto the floor like a puddle of water.

“What are you doing?” Nick leaned over and looked down at her naked body sprawled on the thick white carpet like a wanton goddess.

“I can’t bloody well walk.” She returned, “I tried standing up and my knees are like jelly.”

He threw his head back and howled with laughter.

“Thanks for the help.” She tried to unsuccessfully keep the humour out of her voice while she scrambled over on her hands and knees and finally managed to make it to her feet although very unsteadily. Walking to the bathroom she shot over her shoulder, “If I fall and crack my skull. It’s your fault.”

More laughter floated from the bed.

Chapter Eleven

BEN LET OUT a cat whistle when Sara came back to her desk wearing a black three-quarter length strapless cocktail dress, “Where are we going?” He teased.

“I’m supposed to be having a night with my sister.” She stuffed her work clothes into a bag, “Usually she keeps me waiting but I’m late. How do I look?” She tried her best not to fall for Ben, but she did. She knew his reputation too, but it didn’t help how she felt about him. Only, she knew he was crazy for Jordan. It was obvious now. In fact it’d taken her some time to see it, because he hid it well, but then the subtle clues became evident. Sara thought that he was interested in her because he’d

accompany her out for a casual drink afterwards, but then when Jordan couldn't make it, he'd have some excuse not to go. She really didn't want Ben around her sister. She was younger and more naïve and Ben was an experienced bachelor. She couldn't blame him, Jordan was beautiful, but why couldn't she get the man for a change.

"Great.", he thought to himself. He grazed his blue eyes over her perfect lush, round breasts, curvaceous figure, long elegant flawless legs and black high heels.

"Good. I didn't really have time to do my hair." She fumbled with the curls not seeming to notice his stare.

"Leave it down, it looks better." He volunteered

She paused for a moment and looked at him, "Okay."

Sara arrived at the bar she frequented with Jordan who had arrived before her, and she couldn't help but notice that her sister looked radiant. Well, more radiant than usual.

"Okay sis. Out with it."

Jordan gave her sister a look of confusion, "Out with what?"

The bartender interrupted and asked her what she wanted. Sara told him the same as what her sister was drinking before she turned her attention back to Jordan.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Give me a break. You may be Jean's twin, but you're my best friend besides my sister, and I know you have a man."

Jordan blushed, "I have met someone."

"Tell me."

Jordan remembered what Nick had asked and she shook her head, "I don't want to curse my happiness right now okay."

Sara's brows rose, "This is serious?"

Jordan shrugged and took a drink from her glass, "I think it is."

"Who is it?"

“Just so you know, he’s been invited to daddy’s Christmas party, so you’ll meet him then okay. Don’t push it.” She gave her an amused look.

Sara straightened herself, “This is serious? Wow, I can’t wait to meet him then.”

“Be nice to him.”

She gave Jordan a look of mock surprise, “Who me?”

“Remember my college boyfriend? You threatened to shoot him when I found out he cheated on me.”

“Bastard.” She grinned.

“Still, he threatened to press charges.” Jordan said exasperated. “Then you tell him you have friends that could take care of him, even if you were in jail.”

Sara laughed, “I remember that he turned white when I said that.”

Jordan rolled her eyes. “You could have lost your job.”

“But I didn’t, and he’s history.”

“You can wait until Daddy’s party to meet Nick.”

“Nick who?”

“Nice try.” She said shooting her a sideways glance.

They spent the rest of the evening catching up and talking about how Jean was doing. Sara was more level headed than Jean, and not so much a pushover. She always called things like she saw them and she hoped to God that she liked Nick. It would be a nightmare if she didn’t, because her they were close. However, Nick had an amazing charm about him that there shouldn’t be a problem, but she still couldn’t help but worry.

The next night maître d’ led Jordan and Nick through a busy restaurant to the best seat in the house where Frank and a few other men were waiting. Jordan got the call when she was out with her sister Sara the night before that she and Nick had been invited out to dinner with Frank. Her sister asked her

outright, who was the man on the phone, but she didn't want to jinx things. Obviously it was as plain as the day on her expression on how she felt about him when she spoke to him over the phone. Although Sara and she were close and Jean knew a little, she wasn't one to talk about her personal life. She had fallen in love with Nick Castile and never being in love before, made her realize that she was frightened. If he decided he didn't have enough affection for her, what was she to do? Although she knew he cared, it was still undiscovered territory for her and she didn't know what she'd do if she lost him.

Frank stood up as did the rest of them and gave her a respectful kiss on the cheek and his brother a hug, "Glad you could join us." He turned to the other two men and introduced them, "Jordan Calloway, this is Andre Rossi, he owns about half a dozen dry cleaning businesses across the city, and this is Paul Moretti head of my construction company."

"Thank you." She gave him a genuine smile and Nick held her chair as she sat down. He sat beside her, "Pleased to meet you."

"Any relation to the Mayor?" Paul said.

"My father." She didn't like letting people know that because she didn't want to be treated any differently.

"I see." Paul sat down as did the rest of them, "I met him several times. A good man."

"Thank you." She stated politely. *What else was he supposed to say?* She thought.

"The women all went to the restroom." Frank chuckled, "Our talk was trivial to them."

"Really, "she raised her brows, "A lovely night out, and men talk about business, in the company of beautiful women. I don't understand what's wrong with them."

Frank laughed, "Point taken." He raised his arm to flag down a waiter who immediately came over to their table.

“Maitre d’, bring us a bottle of Tenuta dell’Ornellaia and a bottle of your finest whiskey.”

“Yes Mr. Castile.” The Maitre d’ bowed and left just as the three women returned.

When the women returned Frank introduced Paul’s wife Linda, Andre’s wife Rosalyn, and Frank’s date Angeline, who looked around Jordan’s age, but strikingly beautiful in a yellow sequined dress the same color as her hair, that came barely to mid-thigh.

Jordan was thankful that Rosalyn sat beside her, she was very pleasant and boisterous woman that was slightly overweight but didn’t seem to care what people thought of her. Also, as Jordan found out, she liked to talk—a lot. Despite that, she made Jordan feel very welcome. The men were engrossed in conversation when Rosalyn turned to Jordan and spoke quietly.

“So tell me Jordan. How did you manage to snag the evasive Nick?”

Jordan smiled and shrugged. Fact is she didn’t know herself.

“You know,” Rosalyn continued, “I just don’t know how you managed to get him. In fact, I don’t think I’ve ever seen him with a woman. That’s not to say they haven’t tried, but I guess he never took the bait.” She chuckled.

“Really?” Jordan found that hard to believe.

“Yes, I have known Nick for three years when he came back from Iraq, but my husband’s father was a good friend of Nick and Frank’s so Andre has known them much longer.”

Jordan was taken back, “Nick was in Iraq?”

“You didn’t know?”

“Well, we just started seeing each other a few weeks ago.” She was a little embarrassed that Rosalyn knew more than she did about him. “There’s a lot I’m sure we don’t know about each other.”

“Well then,” she stated eagerly, “Let me fill you in what I know.”

Jordan laughed, she was elated that Rosalyn was a gossip. There were things that Nick wouldn’t tell her about himself that she wanted really to know.

“Now, this is all heard through rumours Jordan, so I’m not sure how much of it is true, but I heard from Andre that Nick was in Special Forces or something like that. His brother lost contact with him for many years and he just came home one day about three years ago like I said. Andre said that there was a coldness about him that wasn’t there before, but you never know what kind of terrors they see over there.”

“No of course not,” She couldn’t even imagine the sights that Nick had to deal with, but it sure explained a lot in relation to his ability to cloud his emotions so quickly.

“So tell me, Jordan, what is your secret?” she nodded toward the handsome man next to her that was engaged in conversation with Paul.

“Maybe I’m just using him for sex.” Jordan spoke quietly so that only Roslyn could hear.

Roslyn near choked on her glass of wine, “Now I know I like you.” She laughed again.

Frank ordered for all of them. He ordered items that weren’t even on the menu and the Maitre d’ didn’t even bat an eye when he did that. Later while they were eating the executive Chef came out to see how they were enjoying their meal and shook hands with the Castile brothers.

Jordan may have been the daughter of the Mayor, but she never got such regal treatment when she went out to dinner with him. She always prided herself as being a simple woman with simple needs, but she couldn’t deny that she really liked being treated like this.

She turned to Nick, “My father comes here all the time,

but doesn't get half the attention your brother gets, and I always thought they made him feel privileged."

Nick smiled, "Frank knows the owner. He's a distant relative of ours. I'm sure your father would get the same service if he was related too. Something you need to understand about Italians, Jordan, regardless of the six degrees of separation we all consider each other family."

"I'm beginning to see this."

"Ninety-nine percent of the people my brother does business with are Italian."

"My father is Scottish-Irish and they have a partnership." She stated.

"He's an exception. It's been a tradition in my family to remain within our culture, but your father had very good ideas that my brother couldn't resist." He explained.

They said goodbye outside the restaurant to Paul and Linda, but Andre, Rosalyn, Frank and Angeline decided to go clubbing.

"What do you think Jordan, you in?" Frank may have been speaking to her but he was looking at Nick.

"Clubbing?"

Rosalyn leaned down and spoke quiet enough that only she could hear, "Come Jordan, I really enjoy another intelligent woman to talk too." Of course she was talking about Angeline who remained giggly throughout the entire evening and was unable to hold any part of discussion with the others. "Not only that but I know you'll enjoy yourself. You are young, you have the best looking man here, and Frank will make sure you have the time of your life." She added with a glint in her eyes.

She turned and looked at Nick, she really didn't want to go. She already drank too much wine and was feeling a little tipsy. She noticed that Nick hadn't touched alcohol all night, so he was still sober, unlike the rest of the group.

Nick looked down at her then at his brother, he knew she wanted to call it a night, but his brother's expression told him this wasn't an option, "For a bit Frank." He knew Jordan was giving him a disappointed look. He also was aware that Frank kept her glass of wine filled all evening.

"Great," He cupped Jordan's face in his hands and kissed her playfully on the mouth making her eyes go wide in surprise. He then threw his arm around Nick as the Limo pulled up, "I know just where to go."

Nick leaned over and spoke in his brother's ear so no one could hear, "Rein it in Frank. You are going to frighten her."

Frank nodded that he heard him.

Nick pulled Jordan close as they got in the car. She crossed her legs exposing one of her glorious thighs. Nick placed his hand on it possessively. She wrapped her arms around his arm leaning in close to him.

Frank didn't miss the Nick's gesture. He knew it was purposeful for him not to overstep his bounds. Jordan was Nick's, there was no doubt. Although Jesus, she was stunning. Frank couldn't help himself sometimes. Especially when there was a beautiful woman involved. However, out of respect he promised himself he would try and behave and insisted that they all share another bottle of wine on the way to his club. Nick was the only one that didn't listen to his brother's coaxing and refused to drink.

"What's wrong?" Jordan noticed his full glass.

"Nothing." He patted his hand affectionately on her crossed legs, and leaned down so she could hear him over the noise of the other occupants, and when Frank turned on the stereo it helped even more, "I just don't feel like drinking."

"I think I've drank enough for the both of us," She confessed, "I actually feel a little tipsy."

He grinned, "It's my brother's way of getting you to

relax.”

“Wow...am I noticeably that uptight?” She stared

“Maybe a little.” He teased.

She glanced at Angeline who was pouring herself over Frank like fine wine, “I see what you meant about Frank’s women. But she seems nice.”

“She’s an airhead.”

“Nick.” Jordan scolded.

“She is. He only uses them for sex.”

“That poor girl.”

“That poor girl has a daddy that is a Supreme Court judge. She’s very spoiled.” What he didn’t tell her was that Frank had her father in his back pocket besides screwing the man’s only daughter.

The music in the club was loud, but Jordan was actually feeling it with several glasses of wine in her. Nick didn’t say much, he never did. She was aware that he was watching her intently and kept her close to him.

Frank leaned down and whispered something in Angeline’s ear. She nodded and gave him a ravishing smile.

Before Jordan could protest, Angeline grabbed her hand, “Come Jordan let’s dance.” She didn’t even wait for an answer as she hauled her into the crowd.

Nick went to stop her and Frank stopped him, “Leave them be,” he shouted above the music, “She needs this.” Frank was right. He knew women well. When Nick nodded and relaxed he knew his words sunk in. He put his arm on his brother’s shoulder as they led Rosalyn and Andre to his reserved booth, “You see that Nick, she needed to loosen up.” Frank shouted over at him as they passed the two women. He knew Nick could see what he saw and she was starting to really enjoy herself. *God she was beautiful!* He was sure she didn’t know the

effect she had on men. Especially when she moved the way she did.

When they reached Frank's booth, Seido and Paul were already waiting. Nick circled around and stood behind Frank like he always did.

"Dammit Nick, sit down!" Frank looked over his shoulder, "try and relax."

Nick spared him a glance that said he wasn't going to, before returning his attention to the two women.

Andre leaned towards Frank and started to talk, so Frank's attention was drawn away from Nick for the time being even though Frank knew Nick was watching the women.

Jordan was glad that Angeline pulled her to the floor. She felt unrestricted for the first time in her life. '*Clubbing*' as Frank called it wasn't as bad as she thought it would be. In all honestly she had never clubbed before in her life. She usually went to a bar several blocks from the police station where her sister worked for a drink with her and Ben, but that was the extent of her nights out. When the song ended and another began, Angeline suddenly grabbed her hand and led her through the crowd to Frank's booth. She was probably right to stop her, she suddenly felt exhausted. Maybe it was the excitement or the excessive amount of liquor that she drank tonight. However, one thing was sure. She was having the time of her life.

Angeline sat down beside Frank, "How was that baby?" She cooed.

He patted her bare thigh, while keeping his eyes on his brother," Very well done."

Angeline had her leg over Frank's thigh and nuzzling his neck with her lips.

Nick allowed Jordan to slide along side of Frank and he sat on the outside of the booth

The other guests sat on the other side engrossed in

conversation with each other but were visibly enjoying themselves.

Frank put his arm around Jordan affectionately. She shot Nick a worried look who didn't seem concerned with his brother's gesture. Frank already knew Nick's thoughts on the subject. He wasn't to intimidate Jordan at all. The affectionate display was just normal with Frank. He wouldn't overstep his bounds. Frank then relinquished his grip on her and just kept his hand across the back of the booth behind her. He waved his hand for another round of drinks.

"Does he ever stop?" Jordan spoke loudly over the music in Nick's ear.

Nick shook his head and grinned, "Never."

"You are going to have me addicted to sex, and your brother is going to have me addicted to liquor. I never had any sins before I met you two."

Nick laughed at her unusual candour, "Obviously you have had too much to drink."

"Frank, I can't." Jordan turned to him as another drink was set in front of her, "I've had too much already."

"Nonsense." He ignored her and handed her a shot of tequila, clicked her glass and drank it as did everyone else but Nick. She followed suit with hesitation. He ordered another round.

When the waitress brought the second round, Nick took her drink out of her hand and downed it himself. He then looked over at Frank and gave him a look that said, *enough*.

Frank smiled acknowledging his request and cheered him with his shot before he tipped back his head and finished it in one swallow.

Just then another man came up behind the booth, leaned down, and told Frank he had a phone call. When Frank got up to leave, Jordan stated that she had to use the ladies room. Frank

turned to Angeline, and said something in her ear. Angeline got up and took Jordan's hand.

"Come on Jordan I'll show you." The younger girl offered.

Nick stood and let the ladies out of the booth. He watched Angeline lead Jordan through the crowd while also trying to steady her. It was obvious that Angeline was used to liquor a little more than Jordan, for her step didn't falter like Jordan's and she drank about the same amount.

Jordan splashed some water on her face trying to sober up a bit. Although she didn't feel drunk, she was very tipsy. She hadn't drunk so much since she was a teenager. Angeline stood beside her, "You alright Jordan."

"Fine. I'm just not used to so much booze."

Angeline laughed, "Frank likes a good time that's for sure."

"Obviously," She managed to smile at Angeline in the mirror as she dried her face with a paper towel. Noise bounced into the ladies bathroom, but with less intensity as it did in the club. Most likely due to the double sets of doors that you had to walk through.

"Are you going to be sick?" She said with concern.

Jordan laughed, "Not there yet, just feeling a little bit dizzy."

"If you don't mind me saying, Nick's pretty hot. I mean, I might have went for him myself if Frank wasn't so great in bed." She was looking at her reflection and playing with her hair before she reached down and adjusted her breasts through the dress.

Must run in the family, Jordan laughed again, *too much information*, "You don't say?" She actually didn't mind Angeline. She was her age and completely immature, but she was honest, and really seemed quite sweet.

Angeline leaned on the counter and stared back at her in the mirror, "And how is Nick Jordan?"

Jordan coughed at the question. She was never one to kiss and tell, but booze does funny things to people. All she could do was try and suppress a smile, without success.

"I knew it!" Angeline blurted. She tapped the counter with her fist smiling, "You know, you are better looking than me anyway, it's no wonder."

Jordan tilted her head at her, "What are you talking about? You are beautiful!"

Angeline blushed, "Thanks." She looked away, "We'd better get back, Frank and Nick will think we ran away together."

Jordan laughed and let Angeline take her hand again. Music assaulted her ears as they went through the last set of doors. Angeline turned and grinned at her as she guided her through the crowd. Unfortunately not watching where she was going and ended up bumping into a group of men.

"Well, hello." Said one, "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

Angeline stopped as two of them stepped in front of her.

"And where have you been all my life?"

She would say that the four of them looked like they were off a varsity football team, but she could tell they've had too much to drink, and were on the prowl.

"I'm heading back to my date." Angeline stated, "Please get out of my way."

The man reached up and caressed her soft skin, "come on beautiful, my friends just want a little company."

"Then I suggest you keep looking." Angeline shot back, not the least bit flattered. And why would she be, she had the richest man in the club. Just then Jordan bumped into the back of her. She had followed her through the crowd and stumbled mainly due to her recent intoxication.

"Wow, two of you. Even better." Said one of the men.

Angeline turned to look at Jordan who was totally

clueless about the men, and turned back to the one talking to her, "Well, at least let me go get my purse." She batted her thick lashes and gave him a ravishing smile. She thought if she could fake them out she could make it back to Frank and let his men take care of the four. She knew there was no way she could deal with all of them and was sure of the thoughts going through their heads at that very moment. She dealt with a lot of men such as that and it was how you played the game that let you get away unscathed.

One of the men boldly circled his arm around Jordan's waist and she tried pulling away from him, "Well, maybe your friend can stay and wait with us then."

"Hey," Said Angeline, "Back off buddy." She pushed the guy's hand off Jordan, who was weakly struggling against him.

"Come on sweetheart, just give us a few minutes." He grabbed her from behind.

Even though the club was packed, Frank's booth gave them an advantage of overseeing the crowd. He turned to tell Nick that the women needed help but Nick was already on his way and with a wave of his fingers had Siedo and Paul on his heels heading through the mob. He leaned back and smiled.

"Come on," said Angeline, "My boyfriend owns the club." She slapped his hands away again, but the one holding on to Jordan had a twisted look in his eyes and gave no indication that he was just teasing like the one she was dealing with.

"Sure he does." Stated the one holding onto Jordan.

"She's right." Nick came up to the scene. "Let her go." Paul and Siedo circled around behind them with four more bouncers they snagged along the way.

"Just trying to have some fun." The one teasing Angeline held up his hands as if in surrender.

"Nothing against fun," Said Nick with a forced calm, "But that's my girlfriend your buddy has a hold of, and my brother's

girl you have a hold of. Let them go.”

Angeline, turned around and pushed him, “Jerk!” She walked away through the crowd.

“Now, your friend.” Nick pointed at the other man who had a hold of Jordan.

“Let her go Sean.” It was obvious he didn’t want any trouble.

The man called Sean ignored his friend and reached down and grabbed Jordan’s rear end.

Nick stifled his urge to pull his gun and shoot him, but Jordan did her best and slapped him. He released her then. Nick pulled her behind him.

“What are you gonna do man? There are four of us.”

Nick’s eyes glinted, “Only four?”

Sean stuck his finger in Nick’s chest, “Like I said...” His choking stopped his own words dead.

With an expert slice of his hand, Nick had hit him in the throat, grabbed his arm and bent it back forcing the man to his knees in front of him while the bouncers restrained the rest of them.

Jordan screamed, “Jesus Nick, let him go!” she placed a hand on his shoulder. He turned his head toward her but didn’t look at her and as suddenly as he attacked him, he released him and stood straight. She swore he moved faster than she could blink. That wasn’t normal...not at all. No one moves like that.

Siedo and Paul dragged the coughing man from the club following the other three.

Jordan stared at him accusingly, before turning and walking through the crowd to the outside of the club. Nick followed her. She got a short distance away from the crowd still gathered at the entrance hoping for a chance to get in before she leaned against the wall closing her eyes.

“Are you all right?”

She felt a hand on her waist and opened her eyes, to find Nick staring down at her with concern registering on his features. He had followed her, "You hurt that man." She accused

"Not much." He confessed.

"Nick, that could've been handled better."

"You think so? Did you not see the look in that man's eyes? He wasn't playing like his friends. In this world people like that don't live by rules. He was lucky all I did was sprain his arm and make him struggle with air for a few moments."

Her eyes widened slightly in disbelief, "You are not serious?" Angry, she turned away and he instantly put his hand on the wall to stop her, she turned back, and stared at him with a look of astonishment, "let me go Nick."

His hand reached up and caressed her jaw, "No, I won't let you go, I didn't like the way he manhandled you. First of all, he didn't have your permission. Secondly, if he'd gotten you out of the club and away from me, things would have gotten a lot worse and the only one that should be putting their hands on you from now on is me!" the last few words were said harshly, which he regretted. He never raised his voice, ever. However, seeing someone touch her, touch something that he rightfully believed was his, angered him.

Even though he practically shouted the last few words, his gentle caress made it known to her that it wasn't toward her. "Now I know you're kidding." But the seriousness of the look he gave her told her just the opposite. Those words rang in her mind, *the only one that should be putting their hands on you from now on is me*. Rosalyn said she'd never heard or seen him dating another woman in all the years she and her husband had known the Castiles. Yet, his confession, the fact that he pursued her out of the club, and stopped her from leaving suddenly became a reality. He really did care about her. "You're not, are you?"

“Jordan...” he looked away for a moment gathering the right words before he locked gazes with her again, “This relationship between you and me isn’t easy for me either, but I am what I am. I informed you what I did for Frank.”

Her face softened, “Yes, but...”

“...Let me finish. Now the reality of it is you are a doctor and are used to helping people, whereas I will intentionally hurt people to protect those I care about. I’m sorry you had to see that, but it’s my job and all I can say is they were lucky you were there.”

Her eyes widened, “Nick there were four of them!”

“Only three were a threat.”

“Three?” she said in an awed voice, “You think you could take all three?”

He didn’t want her to think he was superman, but those three would have been easy to take down, “I had several of the club’s muscle right behind them. If things got out of hand, they would’ve handled it.”

She paused on rest of his words for a moment before her green eyes met his again. Her expression no longer held anger or shock, and her voice was barely a whisper, “Are you saying you care about me?”

“I’m not good with those words Jordan.” He reached up and caressed her cheek again while his eyes followed his hand to avoid meeting hers, “but yes and I am very possessive about those I care about.”

This time all of her anger faded and she managed a weak smile, “I don’t know what to say to that.”

“Well,” he said sincerely, “you could forgive me for upsetting you. It’s the last thing I wanted to do.”

Even though she was in heels she still had to stretch up on her toes to reach his lips. He accommodated by bending his head to hers and kissed her back. His arms wrapped around her

waist and hers in his hair as his mouth moved over hers expertly drawing pangs of pleasure in the pit of her stomach. She could feel that her feet were no longer touching the ground as he stood straight taking her with him.

He pulled away first, "Well, I'd say that was an acceptance."

She laughed, "How could anyone remain angry with you? But Nick, no more fighting."

"All right, I'll agree to that if no one else places their hands on you." He stared down at her seriously. "Although I must say, I shouldn't really blame the bastard, you are stunning tonight."

She studied his expression while the blush crept into her cheeks, "I'm not sure if I like this possessiveness in you Nick." Truth is, no one had ever defended her before. Yes, he was right, she was a doctor, but maybe that man deserved what Nick did to him if he was right about his intentions. Actually she didn't want to admit it, but it thrilled her that he protected her. He must have known because of what he said next.

"No?" He placed his hands on the wall on either side of her head, studying her expression, "I think you do, because you know now that you mean something to me..."

"Maybe..." she confesses trying to suppress a smile and keep her expression stern.

He shook his head while his eyes focused on hers. A small smile formed, and his voice was low and steady, "I thought so. Jordan, I'll confess to you that I've gone against everything I've been trained to believe in to stay from you, and I'll be damned if I let some scumbag hurt you and take you away from me."

She did smile this time, "Okay, you have me convinced." She reached up and touched his face, "I'll say not more about it."

He turned his head and kissed her fingers, "Agreed." He

took her hand. “Frank will send out a hunting party if we don’t return soon.”

She allowed him to lead her back inside feeling lighter in her step at his confession.

Jordan lasted another hour before she let exhaustion really set in. Nick called Mario to come escort her home after speaking with Jordan. She knew that Frank didn’t want Nick to leave by the expression on his face, and she didn’t want to create any more problems between the two even though he reassured her it wouldn’t happen.

When Mario arrived, Nick walked her out to the limousine.

“I’ll call you tomorrow.” He said sincerely and kissed her lightly.

“I’ll hold you to that.” She stated before climbing in the car.

He watched the car pull out of sight before he went back into the club.

Nick, Angeline and Frank were the last to leave the club around four in the morning. Mario showed up to give them a ride home. He locked the doors behind them and that’s when the group confronted them. Angeline screamed as the three that Nick had evicted from the club stood in front of them, the one named Sean held a knife.

“How tough do you feel now?” He said.

Nick let a wry smile cross his features, and opened his jacket to reveal his gun.

The other two on either side of Sean stepped back.

Then he opened the other side and showed his other firearm, “Tougher than you.”

The sight of the gun made him apprehensive. He might have made a mistake challenging this guy. He turned to his two

friends, who had backed off then back to Nick, "So you're afraid to fight me huh?" it was bold, but he didn't want to look like a pussy in front of his friends.

Nick took off his coat and handed it to Mario. He then took off his holster and guns and did the same, "How's your arm." He ribbed him as he calmly rolled up the sleeves of his dress shirt barely paying the three any attention.

"Frank, do something." Angeline begged, "there's three of them!"

Frank whispered, not the least bit bothered by it. "Yeah, I feel sorry for them."

Angeline just stared back and forth at the two of them in stunned silence. Were these brothers crazy? "Are you going to help him?"

"If he needs it honey, but he won't." Frank said.

Sean turned and handed his knife to one of his friends so no one would see him, "Stick that fucker if I lose," he whispered to him. Then he turned back to Nick, seeing him hand off his firearms. "That's more like it. I warn you, I am a black belt in Karate." He displayed an act of kicking and a couple of right hooks in Nick's direction. His buddies smirked.

Nick stood completely composed.

Mario thought it might have been Nick's personal best in time to get the man's face on the cement when he lunged for him. *Another broken nose*, he thought by the look of blood on the sidewalk. Mario had learned a long time ago to sidestep quickly when the faces hit solid ground in front of him and he did just that almost as naturally as stepping off a curb. That's when the other man attacked with the knife. Nick moved aside swiftly with the agility of a ballet dancer so unlike his size, as the knife barely skimmed material of his shirt across his chest. He then grabbed the man's wrist and twisted suddenly and brutally causing him to scream and drop it. Nick then elbowed him in the face with such

force he fell over backwards.

“You broke my fucking nose!” Sean screamed from the ground.

Nick ignored him and casually bent down and picked up the knife. He tossed it expertly in his hand, flipping it over and over while looking at the third man.

“Jesus Christ!” He said backing up a few steps, before turning and running down the street.

The man that lay on the street that Nick smashed his elbow into, got up and ran after his friend holding a bleeding gash just below his eye.

Frank walked up to Sean who still lay on the sideway and kicked him hard in the side, he grunted and curled up in a fetal position, “Next time you come to my club and threaten my brother, you’d better be fucking prepared to take us all on, now that you’ve had a taste.” He leaned over him, “Or, you show some respect, because next time I won’t let Nick hold back. I’ll let him remove your fingers one by one and shove them up your ass, and then maybe something else you hold dear. You hear me?”

Sean moaned and nodded holding his gut and his nose at the same time.

Frank stepped over Sean and grabbed Angeline’s hand who looked at him with reverence after he threatened the man on the sidewalk.

“Wow, Frank, you’re such a turn on.”

He grinned at her, “you liked that did you?” he looked over her at Nick.

Nick just shook his head after the look in his brother’s eyes. It was no wonder Frank chose such women, they were so easy to impress for all of his wealth and tough guy stigmata besides his looks. Although Nick had the special training, Frank was by no means a pushover and more than likely could’ve taken the three himself.

Mario returned Nick's guns, holster and jacket. While Nick put them back on he went and got the limousine.

"Frank, I'm going to walk home, you guys go ahead." He was thankful Jordan did go home early and wasn't witness to this.

"You're sure? That's got to be like forty blocks."

"Yeah, I'm sure."

"Alright, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Sure." He watched Angeline and Frank get in the car. Frank waved before he shut the door.

Mario watched Nick in the side mirror as the car pulled away. He was disappointed that he wasn't coming. Again he was amazed at how he moved; swift and assured, every move calculated to his opponent. He could've easily killed all three of those men but chose not to. Instead he left them with unforgettable memories and made Frank look like the authority behind it all. It was brilliant. He knew their bond was strong, but now it was apparent. Those two brothers communicated so well without speaking that Mario was almost jealous of the affection they had for one another.

Chapter Twelve

JEAN EYED HER sister closely as the guests started to arrive. There were twenty other men and woman seated at their table so she wasn't sure who Jordan had eyes for. She still needed to put a face to Nick Castile. Never in her life could she remember her sister being so tight-lipped about a man. Soon she found out why.

Two tall, dark, handsome men entered the banquet room and there was no doubt who the mystery man was as Jordan herself went over to greet them. She watched as the older man

affectionately kissed her on the cheek while his other arm circled around her back and leaned down to say something in her ear. She laughed in response. At first she thought it might be him, she was wrong. There was no mistake of who the object of her affection was when the younger man stepped forward to greet her. She had to hand it to her sister, he oozed charisma and when he smiled he was God damn gorgeous. His dark looks were simply downright jaw dropping. *God he was tall!* And by the span of his shoulders he probably had a juicy body under that expensive tuxedo. She watched him lift his hand and brush her cheek with the back two fingers causing her sister to give him a sensual smile. Jean shook her head over the caress. Obviously, her sister had slept with him. It was the gesture and her reaction that gave it away. She didn't know if she was angrier at Jordan for not telling her, or if she was mad at herself for being jealous of the affection they shared. Jean sighed and did her best to squash the negative feelings knowing that her sister deserved to be happy. She needed to know who these two were and made her way over to the group.

Jordan saw her sister approach them and instantly introduced them to the Castile brothers. Of course Frank being his usual self commented on her beauty and kissed her hand in greeting.

Jean blushed in response.

"And a modest sister you have Jordan." Frank grinned seeing her cheeks flushing.

"Play nice Frank," Jordan teased knowing his prowess.

He boldly looped a surprised Jean's arm in his, "Whatever you wish Mrs. Calloway," He turned to Jean, "now would you kindly show us to our seats sweetheart."

Jean blushed again but allowed him to lead her off. Jesus, he was just as handsome as his younger brother, but perhaps a little more daring. She didn't mind in the least. By the

time they reached their seats he had told her three more times how beautiful he thought she was. Somehow through it all, he had expertly slipped his hand around her waist and every time he spoke huskily in her ear about something he would give her a gentle squeeze causing brief twinges of excitement to affect her body. It had been ages since Jean enjoyed the company of a flattering handsome man, and quite frankly, she didn't want it to end. He had her attention from the get-go.

Jordan went to protest, but Nick managed to discourage her by shaking his head as she led his brother off.

"Nick, she just lost her husband a few weeks ago, she's vulnerable and Frank's...." Her voice trailed off, she didn't know how to put it without sounding offending.

Nick smiled assuring, "Don't worry, he'll be a gentleman with her. I'll make sure of it."

She stared at him a moment, not wanting to trust anyone with her sister, then with a sigh gave in, "All right."

Ted Calloway was taken by surprise at the affection of his daughter with Frank. If he didn't know better, there was something going on between them. It gave him a horrible feeling in the pit of his stomach. Even though Jean just lost her husband barely three weeks ago, she was beginning to discover her freedom. He watched them circulate throughout the hall together and although there wasn't anything concrete that gave them away, it was more of the way Jean looked at him. Frank was just being his normal self with Jean and treated her like she was the only woman in the world, but his daughter wasn't used to such flattery. His focus was mainly on them for the rest of the night, causing him to miss key cues between Jordan and Nick

To Jordan, it was apparent that Frank had his sights set on her sister. He went out of his way to charm her repeatedly. Jordan knew that Jean wasn't used to such treatment and was completely overwhelmed and vulnerable. Although she was

totally captured by his charm she really didn't like the effect he had on her. Nick squeezed her hand under the table at dinner to bring her attention to him. He mouthed the words *leave them alone*. Her eyes showed protest but she nodded. He was right. Her sister was actually enjoying herself for the first time in years.

Frank liked vulnerable women. It gave him a sense of empowerment and if they were treated right, he could get undying loyalty out of them. He would never lay a hand on a woman himself regardless of their behaviour. All his call girls and other female employees respected this about him and if they stepped out of bounds they were let go. He never had a problem recruiting because he took very good care of all of them. He couldn't help it, he loved women. Although Jean held the same beauty as her sister, she was vulnerable, which was very attractive for him. She wasn't confident like Jordan, which his brother admired, and there was no doubt that she was damaged goods. It was odd that both women were so opposite of one another and they were twins. His brother Nick was like him in a lot of ways with the exception of their social tendencies. Frank had to force him to be seen in the social circles, which he very much enjoyed, but their thought processes about business and how woman should be treated were the same.

"Jordan?"

She looked up to see her sister Sara and Ben, her sister's partner coming through the crowd. She immediately left Nick's side to greet them. She was elated because according to Jean she wasn't going to be able to make it tonight and since she started dating Nick and with the death of their sister's husband she'd hardly seen any of her in the passed few weeks. Sara's smile told her she'd missed her too. Regardless of Jean being her twin they'd grown apart when she got married five years ago and she and Sara had grown quite close. She gave her a hug. "I'm so glad you changed your mind and came!"

“Me too.” Sara’s eyes landed on Nick who came up to stand behind her sister. *Hello, who is this?*

Jordan turned around, “Oh, Sara, Ben, this is my friend Nick Castile.”

Sara shook his hand, “So Jordan, is this your secret?” She couldn’t help but stare at him. He was magnificent. “It’s no wonder Jordan was so preoccupied these past few weeks.”

Nick gave her one of his rare genuine grins as he shook her hand, “can you blame me.”

Jordan blushed and Sara nearly did too. His grin was heart-stopping.

What the hell is this? Ben said to himself as he looked over his competition. Nick had both women practically swooning at his feet and they hardly even noticed him. He obviously was wealthy from the tuxedo he wore, but not only that but self confidence and arrogance that radiated off of him. All Ben had was a rental and it looked like crap on him compared to Nick’s suit. Ben took an instant dislike to him. Maybe it was the way he was looking at Jordan, or the fact that he had many advantages over him. Ben shook Nick’s hand, but he was not happy that his other hand circled around Jordan’s waist. He cleared his throat to get Jordan’s attention.

Jordan turned to him from Sara, “I’m glad you came too,” She grinned.

He bent down and kissed her cheek, “You look incredible.”

“Thank you.” She felt Nick’s hold tighten on her waist but chose to ignore it. He had confessed his possessiveness of her, and it may have been a subtle reminder, but Ben was her friend and was in no way a threat to Nick. Her sister grabbed her hand just then when she spotted Jean and pulled her through the crowd leaving Nick and Ben alone.

“Any relation to Frank Castile.” Ben asked him when the

ladies were out of earshot.

“My brother.”

“I’ve heard a lot about him. He still a womanizer?”

Nick stared at him for a moment with his distaste evident by the belittling smirk he gave him, “yes.”

“Well, Mr. Castile. I see that Jordan is very interested in you let me give you some advice. If you hurt her in any way, you’ll have to answer to me.” Ben didn’t give a shit who this guy was. All he knew was Jordan looked at Nick, like he wished she’d look at him and quite frankly it pissed him off.

Nick let out a laugh that held no amusement, “Does this tough guy Detective routine work on anyone?”

“You don’t want to find out.”

“I see.” Nick gave the man an amused once over look, “You couldn’t get her in bed. It makes sense.”

Ben’s face instantly raged, “You son of a...”

“Nick,” Jordan came up at that time, “Frank asked me to come find you.”

Nick leaned down and brushed his lips against her cheek, “I’ll be right back.” His cold eyes were on Ben’s during the affectionate gesture, sending him a message that Jordan was his. He turned and walked away.

Ben was seething. The bastard deliberately displayed possessiveness just to let him know who has the upper hand. “So is this serious?” Ben asked when Nick was out of earshot. He set a false smile on his face to try and hide his jealousy.

Jordan looked at Nick’s receding back, before turning her attention back to Ben. There was no doubt from the look on her face that it was for her, “I guess.”

“His brother has a reputation with woman, Jordan.”

“I know Ben, it’s obvious.” She was a little embarrassed, because at this moment he was showing his attention on Jean, who seemed defenceless, “Nick’s not like him.”

“Oh.” *Bullshit*, he wanted to say, “I don’t mean to pry.”

She laid her hand on his forearm, “It’s alright Ben, I know you’re just looking out for me. But I know what I’m doing. It’s okay.” She reassured.

He wanted to cover his hand with hers badly but resisted against it.

Halfway through the night when the guests had all eaten, music was playing and some were mingling or dancing on the floor. Jordan had her arm looped through Nick’s as she introduced him around to the guests. She had difficulty concentrating because she always had a watchful eye on her sister. Frank also knew most of the people there and she could hear his boisterous laugh every now and then drawing her attention to him. Jean stood beside him and in fact barely left his side most of the evening. Jordan knew that she was captivated by him regardless of her warnings because of the adoring way she stared at him. She breathed a sigh of relief when Frank’s phone rang. He flipped it open and answered it momentarily drawing attention from her sister. She watched him hang up and look at Nick who nodded.

He turned to her, “We’ve got to go.”

Although she was disappointed she was relieved for Jean, “Alright, thanks for staying as long as you did.” She gave him a dazzling smile.

She walked with Nick, Frank and Jean to retrieve their coats. He leaned down and spoke in her ear, “I’ll call you tomorrow.” He used the opportunity to kiss her affectionately on the cheek.

“Promise.” She hoped.

“I’ll do my best, but don’t wait up.”

“Of course.” She tried to force a smile.

He squeezed her hand and leaned down to brush his lips lightly to hers before following his brother out the door.

Jean stood beside Jordan to watch the men leave. She saw Nick turn and look at Jordan before he exited through the door and gave her a warm smile, "I see why you've been secretive about him, *wow*."

Jordan turned to Jean, "I'm not going to disagree."

"you should have told me you were sleeping with him." She said without looking at her and waving to the two men.

Jordan looked at her.

Jean shrugged and faced her, "Come on. That man is perfect. Even you couldn't keep your hands off of him."

"I don't like to talk about my sex life."

"What sex life? Until him, yours was dormant...and don't tell me about that one relationship in college."

"It was a year long."

"A fling." Jean shrugged. "but wow, I bet that man could write the book on pleasuring a woman." Jordan blushed, "Yeah, I thought so." She flung her arm in her sister's, "Now, I want to hear every juicy detail."

"Not happening."

Jean laughed, "Okay then tell me about that older brother of his. He's just as juicy."

"No....stay away from him."

"what do they do?"

"Jean...let it go." She said exasperated.

Sighing Jean led her sister against the far wall, out of hearing of the others, "I have gone through hell these last few years. Let me have something okay?"

Jean was right. What could a little information hurt, "Real-estate mostly." She admitted because that's really all she knew.

"Frank was very charming." Jean stared at the door the men just left through.

Jordan's expression became serious, "Don't get involved

Jean. He's got many women on his arm."

She shrugged, "maybe I need to just have fun for a change. I've been kept in the dark for so long I..."

"Not with Frank."

"Why?"

"I just don't want to see you hurt again." Jordan confessed.

Jean shook her head, "It won't happen. Not like before. I'm not going to *ever* get involved like that again."

Chapter Thirteen

THE CASTILE LIMOUSINE pulled up in front of one of the many warehouses that Frank owned.

"How's the detective sister? Is she going to be a problem?"

"Probably not, she seems to trust her sister's attraction to me. The partner is another story."

Frank's brow went up, "Really?"

Nick smirked, "It seems he has his sights set on Jordan."

"Really?" Frank repeated

"He's a prick."

Frank laughed, "You would say that."

"He had the balls to threaten me."

Frank laughed louder, "Not just a prick, Nick, a dumb prick."

Nick shrugged, "If he gets in my way, I'll deal with it Frank." He looked out the tinted window at the warehouse, "Let's get to work." He thought that maybe Ben was the stalker and then let it go. Ben didn't have that type of intelligence in him.

"Stay here," Frank said to Mario through the divider.

"No, he comes." Protested Nick.

Mario startled and looked at the two of them. Did he just say *he comes*?

Frank stared at him for a moment, "You're sure?"

Nick nodded.

Mario tried his best to conceal his delight.

"Alright Nick, suit yourself." Frank answered. "I'll stay here then."

Mario got out of the car almost too quickly showing his eagerness at finally being invited and trotted up to Nick while he was putting on his gloves

Nick hid his amusement at Mario's eagerness and spoke seriously to him, "You tell me right now Mario, if you don't think you can handle this. This may be graphic." He settled his dark gaze on him.

Mario spoke without hesitation, "I can handle it Mr. Castile. I swear I can."

He stared seriously at him, "Mario, there's no turning back after this. Just so you understand. Today, you will find out exactly what I do for Frank. For you there will be no more speculation, gossip, or clues on a ruined suit of mine."

Mario knew Nick was giving him a chance to change his mind. However, there was no way in hell he would. He wanted in. He wanted to be like Nick.

"I don't care."

"After this, there is no turning back. This is your initiation to the family. You got that?"

"I do."

Nick studied him for a moment while suppressing a smile. "Alright kid, let's go." Nick opened the door, and entered with Mario in tow.

Although he had images in his mind of what he would see, he still wasn't prepared for the man suspended by the rafters by a rope tied around his ankles and blindfolded. He was

surrounded by six of Frank's men. A small pool of blood was on the cement floor below his head like they had been using him as a punching bag.

After looking at the scene for a moment, it was obvious the man had been worked over. He was beginning to wonder if the man was dead, but then he turned his head at the sound of Nick and him approaching. He was exhilarated and frightened at the sight before him, but tried his best not to let it reach his expression.

Nick turned to Mario, "This is Emilio Lafratta, he is captain in a rival crime family within the city. The Gaetani family. He has repeatedly been encroaching on our family's business for some time now, which his family themselves has denied. Then he got caught. Now his family must pay our losses, plus compensation, which they feel is too high for the likes of him, and are willing to make a sacrifice in the process to make peace."

Mario remembered his name from before with Nick and Frank, but he was confused, "Why would he take money from your family?"

Nick explained, "Because Emilio here has an excessive gambling problem and hasn't been making his quotas...."

"That's not true!" A vehement response came from the blindfolded man, who obviously didn't have the fight totally beaten out of him.

Nick walked over and casually peeled off the blindfold, to which the man gasped,

"Jesus Christ! Nick Castile!"

"Cut him down and tie him to the chair." Nick stated evenly barely sparing the man a glance.

The men took several minutes to do as Nick asked, because Emilio still had some struggle left in him. All the time begging for Nick to release him. Mario didn't miss the terror in

Emilio's eyes when they set on Nick. His reputation was obviously known. Even though six men had worked him over prior to Nick showing up, it was apparent that he feared Nick the most.

The pleas fell on deaf ears as Nick ignored him and continued to explain the situation to Mario. The other family was forewarned about the issue, and several meetings were held between Frank and Luigi, who was the head of the Gaetani family. Luigi understood Frank's dilemma and told him he'd discussed this with Emilio who flatly denied the events. Luigi, unbeknownst to Emilio stated that if he could be caught red handed, that he wouldn't interfere, but not to kill him, just teach him a lesson. Frank agreed as long as the Gaetani Family covered their losses the lesson would manage the compensation for stealing. Luigi thought it was a decent trade, because they'd been on good terms since the death of Frank senior, Nick's father. Apparently Emilio was greedy and did get caught.

"So what are you're options?"

Nick gave him a look that said *many* while he unbuttoned his overcoat. "An eye for an eye Mario. There's no better justice." Nick removed his coat and his suit Jacket and gave them to Mario to hold. He then began to roll up the sleeves of his shirt, exposing the barbed wire tattoo that Mario remembered. "If you feel nauseated, turn away. Okay?"

He didn't miss the concern in Nick's voice and it just gave him the strength to prove to him that he could handle whatever Nick showed him. Mario nodded and watched as Nick walked over to the now chair bound Emilio. There was no mistaking the look of fear in the man's eyes, who was started spouting apologies and promises.

Again when Nick spoke to Emilio his voice was laced with a powerful undertone of authority and it was cool as ice. At that moment he shuddered to think what it would be like to be on the

receiving end of it. Nick was clearly able to instil such terror in people without doing anything. Emilio was clearly shaking while begging for his life.

“I know you think you are important Emilio. However, it seems like your family thinks that you need to be punished for stealing from my family.”

“I’ll pay it back!” He blurted, followed by bloody spittle.

“Well, I’m sure you don’t have an excess of five million stashed somewhere....”

“...That’s bullshit Mr. Castile, I didn’t take that much!” He protested desperately.

“Sure, after several months of hitting up our businesses on the east side, it came to probably half that much, but with interest...”

“...You’ve got to be fucking kidding me!”

“I’m going to let you know right now, I’m not going to kill you...”

Mario saw the man breathe a sigh of relief.

“...but I am going to take something from you, just so you understand that you don’t return to our territory, and your family will cover the rest, and take it out of your hide. ” Nick held up his hand and one of the men placed a pair of sharp edged pliers in it.

Mario wanted to cover his ears to block out the man’s blood curdling screams while realization coursed through him at the horrific scene unfolding before him. Regardless, he stood strong trying to resist any sign of weakness in Nick’s presence. Even though the man was tied in the chair, it took three more men to hold him still while Nick removed the top two phalanges off of all the fingers from his right hand. He felt nauseous as one by one, the appendages hit the floor with a tap. Despite the urge to cover his ears and to retch, Mario was still struck in awe at how calm Nick remained while he removed the appendages leaving a bloody stump on each finger. His face remained as

impassive as if he was looking out a window of a coffee shop watching traffic. Mario noticed there was slight wincing from the rest of the men, but they stood strong around Nick while he worked. Obviously they had seen him do something like this before.

When Nick was done he stood up and turned to one of the men, "Cauterize those, so he doesn't bleed to death before I'm done."

Carlo lit a propane torch, which just started Emilio screaming again.

Nick put his hand on Mario's shoulder and led him a distance away, while the screaming continued.

"How are you feeling?" He knew this was quite graphic for Mario to see for his first experience, but there wasn't a gentle way to ease him into it.

"I'm fine, sir." Mario couldn't admit the screaming bothered him.

"It's hard to get use to the first time." Nick stated almost as if he read his mind.

"What?"

"The screaming." Nick smirked as Mario gave him a shocked look.

"Can I ask a question?" something made him curious regardless of how graphic it was to him.

"Yes."

"Why the top sections of his fingers and not the whole finger?" He was surprised that Nick chuckled after what he had just done, like it was meaningless that he had taken the man's fingers. Regardless it did not change his image of him. He still wanted to do what he did and learn everything he could from him.

"He needs to have something to pick shit up with Mario, and I'm not a bastard. Now go sit in the car. You've seen enough.

Give Bruno my coat. I'm not done here yet." He turned and walked back to Emilio.

Mario left the warehouse and walked around the limo over to the dock and stared at the passing boats and reflected on what he'd just seen Nick do. He was sure Frank was sitting in the car just watching him for any hint of weakness, but he wouldn't show it. He never wanted anything more at that moment than to be like Nick. He couldn't get past the control he repeatedly exhibited. He admitted to himself that it was difficult, but he was sure with further training from his mentor he could get past it. Most of all he couldn't shake the look of terror that crossed Emilio's face when he saw Nick. There must've been a half dozen men in there, but Nick is the one that terrified him the most. Again it had him in awe of his boss. He didn't know of Nick's reputation but he did know some of the others in that room and if he were more fearful of Nick, then his reputation must be something else. He just had to keep reminding himself that these were scumbags, and the Castile family was his family as far as he was concerned. The electric hum of the car window interrupted his thoughts and he turned to it.

"Come here kid." Frank called.

Mario obeyed and walked toward the car.

Frank opened the door and told him to get in.

Mario did as he was told and settled in the seat across from him.

"Here," Frank handed him a glass of whiskey, "Drink this."

"I don't drink Mr. Castile."

Frank smiled, "It wasn't a request, kid. Drink up. You'll feel better."

Mario downed the contents before he had second thoughts and coughed loudly when he was done.

Frank laughed, "It's alright kid, to feel the way you do."

That's why I'm out here. I've seen and done a lot of shit in my life, but Nick can do the unthinkable. I certainly didn't feel like losing the five hundred dollar a plate meal that we just ate. So take it from me, you did fine."

Mario wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his shirt and coughed once more.

"You've seriously never had a drink before in your life?"

Mario shook his head.

His brows rose and an amused smile played on his face, "Jesus Kid, you never cease to surprise me."

"Mr. Castile?"

"Yeah."

"What made your brother that way?" He wasn't sure if his question would be answered but he thought he might try asking.

Frank stared at him for a moment, "I guess you deserve some kind of answer after today." He leaned forward on his seat, "To sum it all up, our father was a prick and didn't give a shit if he broke an arm, ribs, or cracked our skulls. I tried my best to protect Nick, but it sometimes just made Frank senior meaner. I guess Nick learned to control his emotions around him more than I could. He was the more intelligent of us too, so he learned quicker and used the discipline to refine himself. Nothing affects him, kid. I can beat someone stupid, or even shoot them, but Nick, he's got a way about him that the devil's afraid of. I swear he's got a dark room in his head where he keeps things that might come close to affect him, but all in all, nothing does."

"He cares about you." *And Jordan*, he wanted to say, but kept that to himself. Mario didn't mean to put it so bluntly, but the statement brought a sense of pride to Frank's expression.

"Yes, he does." He smiled, "Lucky for me." *And you too*, he nearly added but thought against it.

The door opened then and Nick got in and sat beside

Mario. He was adjusting the cuffs of his tuxedo back down around his wrists.

Mario moved to get out and Nick put his hand on his shoulder, "You can sit this out Mario, we got other drivers."

Just then the motor started.

"I'm not a weakling." Mario protested, "I can do my job."

Frank laughed again and Nick gave him an amused smile.

"We know," Frank said, "But I think you have earned the right to sit with us right now. Is that okay?"

Mario looked back and forth at the two of them, before he finally realized that they were showing him a measure of importance. He couldn't suppress a grin even though he tried. He eased himself back against the leather cushioned seat as the car pulled away.

Chapter Fourteen

IT WAS UNEXPECTED for Frank and Nick when Ted showed up at Frank's house at Commerce Street during the next day.

Bruno let Ted into Frank's study. His two bodyguards waited outside the door.

Ted looked around and saw Nick sitting on a nearby leather couch with his ankle of one leg propped on the knee of the other, reading a paper. He stood and shook Ted's hand, "Mr. Calloway."

Frank did the same, "What could we possibly owe this pleasure?"

Ted's expression took on a serious air. He swallowed before he spoke, "My daughter."

Frank stared at him abashed, "your daughter?" He spared Nick a look to find that he was looking back at him. *Jordan*.

"I saw how you looked at Jean, Frank. I need you to stay

away from her.”

Frank nearly laughed, *Jean?* He sent Nick another look with amusement in his eyes that didn't reflect on his expression before answering Ted, “Well, Ted, she's beautiful.” This wasn't about Nick and Jordan at all.

Ted shook his head, “As my friend. I need you to stay away from her.” He waved his hands in a circle, “this whole thing sickens me. The three of us plotted and murdered her husband and now you set your sights on her while she's still grieving. She's precious to me.”

Frank nodded, “I understand that Ted. I will do my best not to destroy our friendship.”

Ted looked instantly relieved, “thanks Frank.” He shook his hand again before he nodded his goodbye to Nick and left.

When the door closed Nick spoke, “You're not going to stay away from her.” It wasn't a question.

“Not a chance in hell.”

About an hour later, Jean answered the door to a grossly large bouquet of lavender

roses. She let the delivery man come in and set them on a circular marble table in the foyer. She thought maybe they were for Jordan but the card was for her. She opened it and it stated, *For a beautiful woman and a wonderful evening ~Frank~*

“Who are those for?”

Jean didn't hear Jordan approach and quickly hid the card behind her back.

Jordan stopped and stared at her, “You're kidding right?” She held out her hand.

Jean sighed, “Well, I guess you'll find out sooner or later,” she handed her sister the card.

Jordan read it and looked up at her, “I warned you about him. You've got to hide these before daddy sees them. He won't

be happy.”

Jean shrugged her shoulders, “Alright, but I’m not getting rid of them. I’ll hide them in my room if I have to.”

Jordan felt bad for downplaying her moment, “I’m sorry Jean, I don’t mean to ruin this for you.”

Jean nodded while picking up the bouquet, which was heavier than she thought, “It’s okay Jordan. I did hear what you said about Frank. I’ll keep it in mind okay?”

Nick adjusted Jordan’s body so she lay on her side facing him, “Something’s bothering you.” He brushed her hair off her face so he could see her. He’d called her just after eleven in the evening. Frank had decided to call it an early night. She arrived in a taxi about a half an hour later. They didn’t waste anytime showing each other how much they missed one another.

She managed a smile, “My sister.”

“Oh?”

“Frank sent her flowers today.”

His brow furrowed slightly, “I’ll speak to him Jordan.”

“I would appreciate that.” She gave him a warm smile. “Why would he do that?”

“She’s beautiful. Frank likes beautiful. Not only that she’s vulnerable. He gets protective around vulnerable women.”

“The only threat to her died three weeks ago. I was hoping she’d have time to mend. Not only that but Frank’s....” she stopped not knowing how to put it.

He smiled and tilted her chin up to look at him, “I’ll speak to him Jordan. It’ll stop. You’re father came over yesterday and demanded that he stop seeing Jean. Frank just doesn’t like people telling him what to do regardless if they’re friends or not.”

“Dad did that?” Her jaw dropped.

“Yes.”

“He didn’t say anything about us?”

“I think he was so focused on Jean he didn’t really notice. Frank and Jean seemed to have the spotlight that night.”

“Wow, he must’ve been worried about her.”

Nick chuckled and touched her forehead with his and kissed her nose, “Obviously. He’s just being protective Jordan.”

“I know, but it’s still embarrassing. We’re not teenagers anymore.”

His hand roamed down her back and he pulled her against him, “No, but I know how he feels. If anything happened to you...I would be very...angry.” He added slowly.

“Shhh...” she kissed him, “Nothing will happen.” She smiled, “I have my own personal bodyguard.”

“hmmm...well, you will have to let him know soon, I suppose.”

“Really?”

“Cat’s out of the bag. Frank knows, my employers know, and your sisters know. Nothing much left.”

“What about Frank’s enemies.”

“They already know too I’m sure. I’ve been seen with you a few times in public. People in our circles know my reputation. It’s not often I’m seen with the same woman.”

She lifted her head to look at him. Her expression was serious, “About that Nick...the circles I mean...are you going to let me know *exactly* what it is you do for Frank and this other company?” before he said anything she recognized the coolness that crept into his brown eyes.

“No. It’s better this way.”

“I would like to think that you could trust me.” She could see him open his mouth to protest, but she kept talking, “However, I’ll drop it for now, because I really care about you and don’t like to see that look in your eyes.” She saw some warmth return to his eyes.

“Can you at least tell me about your childhood?”

“It was terrible.”

She sighed, not believing him because of his evasiveness. “How?”

“My mother died when I was eight, My father was a bastard who used to kick the shit out of us on a daily basis. That’s all there is to say.” He said blandly, obviously not wanting to say anything more.

“My God. I’m sorry.” She felt terrible for asking. “Rosalyn mentioned you were in the Navy. I just thought that if she knew something then I should...”

“...Rosalyn has a big mouth.” He glowered interrupting her.

She actually giggled at his scowl, not the least bit intimidated by it. “I’m not arguing with that. In her defence she was talking highly of you.”

Nick shrugged, “She doesn’t know me from a hole in the ground. She just likes to think she does.”

“Well, how about me.”

“What about you?” he arched an ebony brow.

“I would like to know you from a hole in the ground.” She grinned.

He chuckled, “You know more than most people do Jordan, don’t kid yourself.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Frank knows you better than anyone.”

He smiled, “Yes, but Frank hasn’t seen me naked for over twenty years, you have.”

It was her turn to frown, “That’s not funny Nick. And it doesn’t count.”

“No?” He still smiled

“Definitely not.”

“All right then, I *was* in the Navy. Do you feel better?” he

stated with a bit of an edge in his voice.

“Not really. You have a Navy Seals Tattoo on your shoulder, so it’s kind of obvious. She said you also did a tour in Iraq?” She said, not letting his mood discourage her.

“Several.” He answered his smile faltered.

“Hmm, now I feel I’m getting somewhere. You can get rid of that scowl Nick. I should at least know something.” She pulled herself back up onto his chest so she could stare down at him.

Her hair fell around her face and he reached up and swept it off to one side while staring at her adoringly. “A few more questions then Jordan, and I don’t have to answer all of them. Also you have to accept that and never revisit them. Agreed?”

She gave him a ravishing smile thinking that she at least got him to agree to something, “Agreed!” She thought for a moment while wrinkling her brow, “Alright...let me see....If I’m only allowed to ask a few questions then I have to make sure they are crucial.”

He chuckled again.

“Shhh, I’m thinking...” she teased. “Okay, how many girlfriends have you had?”

“None.”

“You’re kidding?”

“No. I’ve never had the time.” He stated truthfully.

“Nick? How is that possible...I mean your so...” she blushed, “...experienced.”

He chuckled at her compliment, “I have had lots of lovers, no girlfriends. There is a tremendous difference.”

“Oh, I never even thought of that....wait, how many do you consider a lot?” She stared down at him and her eyes narrowed slightly.

“I lost count after the first hundred.” He teased.

“Really Nick, I’m not amused.”

“I can see that. I think I like this green eyed monster you portray. You are very sexy when you’re angry.”

“Stop it,” she nudged his chest with her fist causing him to grin. “So, would you consider me a girlfriend?”

“Now that’s a silly question.” He stated dropping his grin.

She frowned. Did he not consider her more than a lover?
“Why?”

“What do you think?”

“Well, I know that I practically had to stalk you to get you to go out with me.” He laughed at that and she frowned more, “So I’d like to think I earned that right...to be your girlfriend.” She added sheepishly.

When he stopped laughing he lifted his head and kissed her, “Jordan, you do not give yourself any credit. I consider you more than my lover, yes. If you were to put a word to it, I would admit that you are my girlfriend, but the word sounds cheap compared to what you mean to me.”

She beamed at his confession, “Are you always so sure of yourself?”

“Yes.” He answered without hesitation.

She shook her head, “Conceit is actually very flattering with you.” Then she smiled, “You know...I should be flattered that I’m your first steady girlfriend.”

He laughed, “Don’t be, you may not like me when you get to know more about me.”

She shook her head, “That’s where you’re wrong, because I’m already crazy about you.”

“Now it’s my turn to be flattered.”

“If you say so,” she said doubtfully, “So how come you accepted me then. I mean you have all of those women, gorgeous woman I might add, that are always available in Frank’s club.”

He made a face of distaste, "That's where Frank and I differ. I like sophisticated intelligent women, and well...Frank...he just likes women."

She laughed, "I noticed." She paused, "So tell me Nick, what made you change your mind and end up with me."

He grinned, "Well, you are beautiful." He purposely lifted the blanket, lifted his head and scanned down her backside. "*Everywhere.*" He smirked. "And hot as hell in bed."

She grabbed the blanket, "Nick!"

He stopped smiling, "Seriously though, you really are. I really wish you would accept my compliments Jordan." His hand caressed her cheek tenderly.

She lowered her gaze, "Thank you."

He lifted her chin to look at him, "Every time you talked, walked, or even moved, you grew more attractive to me. Then, when I stupidly kissed you, I was hooked."

She stared at him with raw emotion in her eyes. Her voice was barely a whisper, "You are serious."

"Most definitely. You also have this air of innocence that is entirely intoxicating and at the same time, you are mature beyond your years. So, I'd say you are utterly irresistible."

"That's the most wonderful thing anyone has ever said to me." She admitted while trying not to cry.

"It's the truth. Why do you think I get so possessive?"

"Well, you are Italian and..."

He laughed cutting her off, "...and you're Irish. You'd think we'd make a hot tempered pair, but no I'm not like this about women at all."

She leaned down and kissed him before lifting her head to look at him, "I think I've asked enough questions, because if we keep going at this rate, I'm going to be in love with you before the night is over."

"Well the night is still young, " He pulled her down to him

so she could kiss her again. "Let's invite your father out to dinner tomorrow night. We need to tell him before he finds out from someone else."

"Now I'm scared. I mean after Jean's disastrous relationship, my dad is very protective. Especially after you told me he went after Frank for a little attention and they're good friends."

"Then we'll meet in a public place, so he won't shoot me."

"How can you joke about my concerns?" she stared at him.

"All right honey, I'm sorry. Don't worry. I'll smooth things over with your father. Did you want me to talk to him alone?"

Her head fell in her hands, "Oh God...I just don't know."

"Don't get so worked up. I'll speak to him myself first. You don't need to be there."

"Daddy can be very convincing Nick."

Nick almost laughed. Ted Calloway was about as threatening as a puppy compared to what he was used to, "I'm not too concerned. I'll deal with it Jordan. Don't worry. I sure as hell am not giving you up no matter what daddy says. All right?"

She nodded.

"Now.." he said huskily as he gripped her hair in his hands, bringing her gaze level with his "what can you do for me to make me happy?" A slow sensual grin spread across her face.

"You really like that, don't you?"

"Only when you do it."

"Then," she said softly and teasingly as she lowered herself down, "Let me oblige you."

But she didn't, not right away. She teased him everywhere else until he finally couldn't take it anymore and arranged her according to his needs, not giving her any choice but to take him in her mouth.

Jordan loved the power it gave her, she also loved his forcefulness. She had purposely avoided what he wanted to push him and it worked. His aggression was such a turn on. He'd thrust her on the floor on her knees beside the bed while he sat on the edge of it taking her hair in his fists to force her mouth over him. When she began to slide over him, he didn't release his tight grasp on her hair but he didn't direct her either. She knew what he liked. He was forceful and aggressive, but not enough to hurt her. Deep rumbling groans were coming from his chest causing her to moan herself. . She could feel his orgasm rising, and continued working her mouth on him through his shouts of release until he fell backwards across the bed with a satiated groan.

She got to her feet and slid up over his muscular form, "Now...have I worn out the machine?"

"Give me a minute." He said softly. His eyes were closed.

She smiled down at him, "No." then she reached down and started caressing him.

"Oh hell..." he said instantly hardening again. No man could possibly have it this good! He sat up and gripped her hips, lifted her up and sat her on his lap thrusting into her hard until she screamed her release and he followed quickly.

The next day Jordan left for work, but not without getting a passionate kiss and a mouthed 'thank you' for the night before. He had Mario pick her up and drop her off at work. Half the day went by and she couldn't get him out of her mind. Poor Lonnie had tried to talk to her several times and she never heard him until he told her.

"I'm sorry, my mind is elsewhere." She added with a grin.

"You have a man don't you Dr. Calloway?" he offered while smiling

She shrugged and took a chart Lana handed her.

“name?”

She shook her head, “I don’t kiss and tell.” Folding the chart she set it down and looked at Lonnie while giving him a ravishing smile, “Not even a name.” she turned and walked off. Lonnie’s eyes followed her and narrowed.

Frank was at his desk when Bruno came in, “Frank, there’s a miss Calloway here to see you.”

“Jordan?”

“No...the other one.”

Frank raised a brow and inclined his head toward the other two inside his study. They immediately left, “Show her in.”

Bruno nodded and returned a few minutes later opening the door for Jean. She was gorgeous in a red sundress almost identical to the highlights in her hair.

Frank stood up, “What do I owe the pleasure.” He spared a glance at Bruno who caught his meaning and shut the door leaving them alone. He had enough experienced with woman to recognize one on the prowl.

Jean tossed her purse on the nearby couch and reached behind her to unzip her dress.

About the same time, Nick was being escorted into Ted’s study in his Jersey home. Nick could tell the man was nervous even when he stood up to shake hands with him. It wasn’t anything in his outward appearance, but he knew people.

“It’s a surprise to see you here Nick.”

“I know. I’ve come to talk to you about your daughter.”

“I thought Frank was going to leave Jean alone.” He said with some apprehension.

“It’s not Jean I’m here about, it’s Jordan.” The man paled several shades, “She and I have been seeing each other for several months and it’s pretty serious.” There was no beating around the bush with this subject and Nick wasn’t a procrastinator.

“Jesus...” he reached out and felt for the arm of a nearby chair, parking himself in it.

Nick took the liberty of pulling another chair up to face him. “I usually don’t explain myself Ted, but for her I will. I did try to stay away from her, but circumstances kept placing us in the same vicinity. I’m serious about her.”

“You killed Lionel.”

“yeah, I killed a few people since I met her.” He said without hesitation.

Now Ted felt like throwing up, “does she know...”

“Not yet,” he tilted his head at him, “I will be the one to tell her, not you. Is that understood?”

“Nick, she’s my daughter.”

“I know. I’ve come here out of respect because of it. If it were anyone else, I would just take what’s mine and screw the repercussions. I think you know that about me.”

He slowly nodded.

“When she finds out what I am, she’ll run from me. Sooner or later I’ll get her back. I don’t want you to interfere.”

Ted couldn’t handle looking at those cold eyes he turned his head away, “I’ll protect her from you Nick, she’s my daughter.”

“You can’t protect her from me. Don’t you get that? She does love me.” Nick sat straight, “I’m not doing this to hurt you Ted. Like I said, we had no control over this. Think about it in this fashion. Could you possibly worry less about her with anyone else? I can protect her. No one can hurt her while I’m with her least of all, me. I swear to you on my mother’s grave, I will never lay a hand on her.”

Ted brought his gaze to Nick’s, “Do you mean that?” He remembered how affected both brother’s were at the photos of Jean. He didn’t doubt that Nick was telling the truth.

“Absolutely. I’ll kill anyone that will.”

“I can’t believe I didn’t see it.”

“You were too preoccupied with protecting Jean.” Nick paused, “If it’s any consolation, Jordan and I didn’t see it coming either.”

“Jordan was fine until you came along. Don’t hurt her Nick.” Ted said with dead seriousness, “I don’t care who you are or who you work for. I’ll find someone better and hunt you down.”

Nick remained unmoved, “Fair enough. Now there’s something else you need to know before I leave.” Nick told him about Jordan’s stalker including everything he knew about him so far.

“You’re sure?”

“Positive. I’ll keep you involved as much as I can. Jordan has twenty-four hour protection right now that’s she’s completely unaware of.” He stood to leave, “I’ll protect her Ted. This guy went after the wrong woman.”

“Does Jordan even have an idea of what a ruthless bastard you can be?”

Nick managed a smirk, “No.”

“When she does, you’ll be sorry.” Jordan was a fixer, she loved people and loved being a doctor. When she finally fell in love, he knew it would be hard, all out, unrequited love and he was right. The man standing before her, couldn’t possibly return Jordan’s affections. From the first moment Ted Met him, he thought he was soulless. Even now when he talked about what he did it was in that ice cool voice that frightened him. Yet, Jordan did bring a warmth to his eyes, but nothing compared to what she felt for him. He was sure of it.

Nick watched the emotions play over his face and knew what he was thinking, “Don’t presume you know me Ted. No one does. Frank’s probably the most informed, but he doesn’t really know me either and we grew up together. I’ll give you a quick

idea. I can move in and out of a heavily armed encampment, slice the throat of the general like I wasn't even there. I'm a chameleon and that's why they send me in to get the job done. I can be anybody..."

"And Jordan."

"knows a side of me that I don't share easily. The real me." He confessed, "That's all I'm saying." He turned to leave when Ted called him back. Nick turned to face him.

"Thanks for that." He cleared his throat, "The explanation about you and Jordan. I appreciate it more than you know."

Nick nodded, "We should have dinner tonight...together. It'll ease Jordan's fears over you and I. It might help you too Ted, if you saw us together."

Actually it wasn't a bad idea. "Okay."

Nick gave him the name of the restaurant several blocks from his penthouse and named a time. Ted said he'd be there.

"Does your sweet daddy know you're here?" Frank asked while caressing Jean's naked back.

She released a snort, "I haven't told Daddy anything bad I've done in years." She rolled off him and began to get dressed. Suddenly she paused and looked down the length of his naked form, "you really are gorgeous all over."

"yeah, so are you."

She quirked a shoulder and turned away to pull on her dress.

Frank rolled to his side and watched her, totally unabashed of his own nakedness. "so, is this a one time deal?"

She finished zipping up her dress and started to put her shoes on. "Whatever."

He laughed at her casual attitude, "Honey...that shit don't work on me. I've seen it all. I know women."

"I've heard that." She finished buckling the other shoe.

"Jean, come over here for a second and drop the act." He

moved back and patted the bed.

Jean released a sigh and looked at him. Then nodding, she sat down.

“do you want to see me again?”

“I’d like to—I think. Jordan won’t be happy with me. She told me you weren’t good for me.”

“you’re sister is one hundred percent right. But if you didn’t show up today, I would have left you alone. The move was entirely yours. I’ll be honest. I play the field a lot. Sometimes I’m in bed with more than one woman. So if you don’t mind sharing.”

“I’m not looking for a relationship.” She cut in truthfully.

“Good. Me either.”

“I don’t like sharing a man in bed either. I tried that in college...there was no thrill in it for me.”

He chuckled, “Fair enough. After what we just did, I think I can only handle one of you at a time.”

This time she laughed, “thanks, I really needed that.”

“You’re very pretty when you smile too.” This time she blushed.

“Now before we start seeing each other...in the physical sense. There’s a few things I need to know.”

“Okay.”

“Your father mentioned that Lionel spent all of your money. Is that true.”

“That’s a little personal Frank.”

“I have a point to it.”

“Alright, yes, I’m financially broke. The debtors took everything after Lionel died to pay his debts. My dad covered the rest.”

“So you’re father holds your purse strings?”

She shrugged.

“My point is, if we are going to see each other, he’s going

to find a way to control that—move aside.” She did and he got and walked into another room. “I’ll be right back.” He shot over his shoulder. When he returned five minutes later he’d managed to pull on a pair of briefs that hugged his muscular thighs. Jean couldn’t help but stare. He was on the phone and shot her a smouldering look shaking his head while he spoke.

“One bedroom or would you prefer two.” He covered the mouthpiece of the phone.

“What?”

“an apartment Jean.” He said casually.

“Two.” She beamed.

He returned the smile and relayed the information. Then he hung up and handed her something.

It was a credit card.

“Wait a minute...”

“Take it honey. I don’t mind paying for something like you in the least.”

It was the way he said it that made it sound like a compliment instead of an insult. She took the card.

He sat back down beside her, “Now there’s a two bedroom apartment available in one of my buildings on the upper east side. It won’t be ready until Friday. When you move in, I’ll have a cell phone ready and waiting there for you.”

“I have a phone.”

“get rid of it. Now, use the credit card I gave you to furnish your apartment and get yourself a new wardrobe. No jewellery though. That’s my department.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I want you at my beckon call without interference. You are a sophisticated woman and none of the women I usually date can be taken to some of the places I go. And quite truthfully, I liked screwing you.”

This made her smile.

“See, I can’t even offend you. Fuck. I love it. A sophisticated woman who’s downright nasty.”

“There’s more than me you know.” She looked away, “Women who will jump at a chance for this arrangement.”

“not as hot as you I’m sure.” He tilted her face up to his, “Now for the rules.”

“Rules?”

“yes. This isn’t a two-way street Jean. I sleep with whom I want wherever I want. You however will not. I’m not paying you to run around with other men. You got that?”

“Yes.”

“When I phone, you drop everything and meet me where ever I want.”

She nodded.

“Most importantly, I have a temper. I can be quite violent, but never in my life have I hit a woman. I know what you went through, so when you see me in a rage, don’t fear me. Is that clear?”

“I guess.”

“Any questions?”

“yes..well, how often would you need me...? I mean, I have needs and...”

He threw back his head and laughed, “You are a catch.” He looked at his watch, “I wouldn’t mind a blow job before you left. I have to be somewhere in forty five minutes. Her answer to his blunt request was a naughty grin. And Frank thought he hit the mother load. When she reached over flipped down the waist band of his beifs and took him in her mouth. After she went down on him, he returned the favour and ended up a half an hour late for his meeting.

Chapter Fifteen

THAT EVENING JORDAN, Nick and Ted were in a restaurant several blocks from his penthouse. For the life of her Jordan couldn't fathom what Nick had said to her father to get him to come. Not only that, he seemed very at ease over the match. Jordan felt all the angst over this ebb out of her. Nick handled it like he said he would. She revelled in the fact that he was openly affectionate with her in front of her father too by putting his arm around her after the meal was over and at one point when her father went to the restroom, he leaned over and nibbled on her ear causing her to blush.

Jordan excused herself to the ladies room when Ted returned and Ted took the opportunity to talk to Nick, "You were right. I feel better. You really do care about her don't you?"

Nick nodded and took a drink of wine.

"She does seem happy."

"She is."

"I still don't think I can't interfere when she finds out about you."

Nick shrugged, "You'll make that choice when it happens. For now, you realize that I'm the best choice for her."

"I won't admit that."

"I am."

"Even if I thought you were, to admit a cold blooded killer is a good match for my baby girl, wouldn't be the decision of a good father."

"Fair enough."

Jordan came back at that time. "What were you two talking about while I was gone?"

"The weather."

"Sports."

Ted and Nick looked at each other and despite the

previous conversation, laughed.

“Fine.” She smiled, “Don’t let me in on it.” Not that she cared; she was busy being too happy that the two most important men in her life got along so well.

Twenty minutes later Ted got in his Limo and Nick flung his arm over Jordan’s shoulders as he walked her back to his apartment. “That went well.”

“I’m so curious to know what you said to him.”

“That is a conversation between us Jordan. I promised you I’d talk to him and I did.”

“You must be the most persuasive man on the planet then.”

“I do have my ways.”

Jordan started talking about other things after that, but Nick’s attention was on the guy that was following them. It couldn’t have been Jordan’s stalker, that guy would be more careful and not seen. He glanced sideways in a store window as they carried on down the street. The man wasn’t very tall and he wore a dark pullover with the hood up. This is all he needed. It was just a two bit thug. When another man stepped out of the alley with a gun, Jordan screamed.

“that way.” The man said roughly with an abrupt motion of the gun.

“Oh God,” she clutched Nick’s arm

Nick casually followed the guy’s motion with Jordan hanging off him terrified, when the man who was following them joined his companion.

“It’s all right Honey.” He said to her in a soothing voice, not wanting to say her name in front of the two.

“Yeah hunny.” Said one, “Hand over your purse.”

She did.

“And you rich guy...the wallet.”

Nick looked down at her, “Instead of letting me take care

of these two, you're going to make me hand over my wallet aren't you?"

"Nick...do it!" what the hell was he thinking? The man had a gun.

He sighed and reached into his inside pocket and dropped it on the ground, "Oops."

The man with the gun cocked it and aimed it at Nick's chest, "You did that purposely. Hurry up Charlie, get the wallet." He quickly shifted his gaze back and forth. The calm guy was making him nervous. "Get your hands up!"

Nick lifted his hands slightly.

The mocking smile that spread across his lips told Jimmy that it wouldn't have made a difference how high he lifted them. Only he didn't know why the man thought that.

"What about the lady?" said the guy named Charlie.

Nick's eyes narrowed on the man with the gun, "The lady stays untouched. You have our money."

"The watch too!" he shot, ignoring Nick's statement. The guy was starting to scare him.

Nick didn't take his eyes off the man with the gun as he undid his gold Rolex and tossed it on the ground repeating his 'oops'

"The girl...what about the girl."

"You really want her huh, Charlie?" Jimmy stood straight eyeing the guy as the gorgeous brunette clutched him desperately.

"I told you, no." said Nick.

"I don't think you have a say mister. I'm the one with the gun."

"Jordan?" Nick said without taking his eyes off of the two men.

She knew what he was asking and she was terrified for him because of it. He would be killed. There was no doubt. Yet

to save him she would be raped.

“no.” she managed.

Charlie made a grab for her and in that instant Nick made his move. He lunged for jimmy and shoved his gun arm directly at Charlie. The gun went off and shot the other man in the shoulder. Jordan screamed and fell with him as Nick made mince meat out of his partner.

Jordan was sitting in the back of the ambulance while Nick gave his statement to the police. Turns out Jimmy and Charlie would be put away for a long time for previous robberies and rapes. Nick shook the officer’s hand and gave him his card if he needed to get a hold of him. Then he made his way to Jordan.

“Are you all right?”

“Better.” She choked out. Her red-rimmed eyes guided to him.

“Are you the husband?” said the paramedic.

“Boyfriend.” Nick corrected thinking ‘husband’ didn’t sound so bad. The thought took him by surprise and he quickly suppressed it.

“Well, we want her to go and get checked out at the hospital, but she won’t go.”

“of course she won’t, she’s a doctor and she’s stubborn.”

The paramedic flashed her a surprised look, “Christ...I thought she was a supermodel.”

Nick smiled, “She’ll be fine. She’s just in shock. I’ll take her home. I live several blocks down.”

“She was lucky to be with you. The cops say those guys got a dozen rapes under them.”

“Good thing then.” He said as held his hand out to Jordan who’s eyes widened at the information, “Come on. We’ll go home.”

She nodded and took his hand stepping out of the

ambulance. He embraced her for a moment before guiding his arm around her waist and leading her down the walk toward his building. After a short distance she spoke. "You could have been killed." She remembered the scene after Nick had beaten the other man unconscious. He turned and hauled the other guy away from her while he continued to roll around screaming about his shoulder. Then after he pulled her to her feet, he calmly retrieved his watch, putting it back on, then his wallet and her purse before embracing her. Then she started to sob and he held her telling that everything was okay now. She didn't even protest over the violence he displayed with any sort of outward reaction. Mostly because she wanted to see those to hurt and that thought in itself filled her with anguish that she could wish that on another human being.

"You could have been raped. You didn't' honestly think I was going to stand by and let someone do that to you."

"But you would have lived."

"I could handle them." He could feel her shiver under his arm. "I told you before, no one puts their hands on you but me."

"God Nick, you could have been hurt."

"But I'm not and neither are you and two scumbags will be behind bars for a long time." He stopped to look at her and cupped her face in his large hands, "I've told you I'd protect you, and I did. Those two were no match for my skills. Jordan...never think that you aren't worth that." He could see her eyes tear up, but she slowly nodded.

He wrapped his arm around his waist and soon they were at his building. He took her upstairs and made her some tea. After she'd finished, he had tucked her into bed and rubbed her back until she fell asleep. Then he got up and went into the other room to make some calls.

"How was your weekend?" Ben asked when Jordan took a

seat across from him waiting for her sister who just went to the bathroom. "I heard you were involved in a mugging."

"I was, but I'm fine." She admitted. If it hadn't been for Nick things would have been disastrous. Then the gentle way he had taken care of her afterwards stayed with her. She had examined quite a few rape victims and it gave her a new perspective being close to being a victim herself. Without Nick, she would be feeling the trauma they went through.

"Sara said your boyfriend actually saved you." He kept the irritation out of his voice. It wasn't that he wanted harm to come to her, it was just the man was more than just a handsome face. He was capable of protecting Jordan. Now the woman looked like she was head over heels for this guy. As soon as he mentioned the word 'Boyfriend' her whole face lit up. *Mr. Perfect*, he inwardly scoffed to himself, *there's no way one man could be so damn flawless*. However from the look on Jordan's face, it was obvious that she thought he was.

After last night, Jordan wanted to be around her family so she made room in her schedule to go out for a drink with her. Nick was busy and so was Jean for some strange reason, but Sara wasn't. She didn't want to go home alone after what had happened to her the previous night. Not only that, she couldn't take the secrecy over Nick anymore and decided to do something about it. Nick had phoned her twice that day once at work and once after work, to see how she was doing. The calls were brief letting her know he was busy, but she was very happy he did call. Regardless, she needed to know more. Originally she was going to ask her sister, but Ben wouldn't press her for more information if she asked him for a favour. He could keep it to himself too. Sara might want to know why she's checking up on her new boyfriend and how could she possibly explain herself.

"Despite my near mugging last night, my weekend was fantastic, thanks for the concern." Her last weekend *was*

fantastic. Images of Nick making love to her flashed in her mind and created that familiar warmth in her pelvis. She tried to resist the smile that spread across her beautiful face but couldn't.

He hid his disappointment, "Really?"

"That's all I'm saying, Ben." Her eyes glinted, "So don't ask."

"Fair enough," he chuckled trying to hide his hate of Nick Castile.

She looked past him to the department doors seeing her sister stop and talk to someone, she knew she had to ask him now for that favour, "Say, do you still have a buddy in the FBI?"

Ben looked at her, "Maybe...why?"

She handed him a piece of paper, "It's a serial number to a gun." The one she lifted off of Nick's gun a while ago in his apartment.

"Who's gun?"

She shrugged, "Can you just do this for me and not tell anyone." She looked at her sister again, "Especially Sara."

"Hand it over, I might be able to help." Ben already had an idea who the gun belonged to.

She gave him the piece of paper, "Really?"

"I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks, I appreciate it."

Next morning Ben showed up at the hospital. He found Jordan in the staff room making coffee.

"Hi." She said with a cheerful smile, "What a nice surprise." It took her a moment to realize that he didn't look to happy and her own smile faltered. "What's wrong?"

"Jordan, where did you get that number from?" Ben said glancing around to see if they were alone.

She poured herself a cup of coffee, not noticing the gesture, "Just some one that works for a friend."

He handed the paper back to her, "You'd better not ask anyone else about this."

She stilled and stared at him, "Why not?"

"My buddy in the FBI called me at home last night wanting to know where the fuck I got this number."

"Are you kidding?" She set the carafe down and gaped at him.

"He tried to access his records and within three minutes his Unit Chief was in his office. Said he got a call from someone important wondering why he was trying to access classified records."

"Jesus. You're not kidding." Her face fell in surprise.

"No, I'm not." He lowered his voice as someone walked by, "Next thing he knew, three men in suits showed up several hours later and hauled his chief in his office. Then came into his office and confiscated his laptop. There was nothing he could do to stop them. They flashed some NSA badges. Jordan, where the fuck did you get this really?" His eyes probed hers.

"I can't say." She stated seriously.

He sighed, "Fine, don't tell me, but you'd better leave it alone. These guys were serious, and you do not want to end up on their shit list." He turned and walked away.

NSA? What the hell? Nick what the hell are you into?

Nick was at home when his cell phone beeped for a text message, '*call home*' it said, "Shit." Nick dialed the unlisted and untraceable number.

A familiar voice answered the phone, "Are you in trouble?"

"No." Nick answered.

"Cover you're tracks Nick, someone at the twenty-first precinct is checking up on you."

Jordan.

“Thanks.” He hung up.

Jordan shut the door and set the alarm. Her mind kept drifting to the strange conversation she had with Ben this morning. Was Nick wanted by the NSA? Was he a criminal? She made her way upstairs mentally and physically exhausted. It was a busy day and her mind was full of questions. She kicked off her shoes in her room and removed her blazer throwing it and her bag on her bed.

“Jordan.”

She released a screech and turned to the sound. Nick sat in a chair in the corner.

“What the hell Nick? You scared the hell out of me! How the hell did you get in here...my alarm was on?”

He waved a hand, “The alarm is so simple an eight year old child could crack it. Why couldn’t you just leave it alone?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” She stated innocently.

He stood up and walked toward her causing her to back up a couple of steps. His expression unreadable.

“Nick you’re scaring me.” She said looking at his posture and expression. This was a side of him she had never seen, and it frightened her. It was like he was a completely different person.

At her confession he stopped. He hadn’t meant to frighten her but he was angry, “the serial number on my gun.” He pulled it out and tapped the number with his finger before putting it away.

She froze, “How did you know about that?” How could he find out about that as quick as he did? She just found out herself that morning that someone or something in Washington didn’t want anyone probing into Nick Castile’s life.

“I told you to leave my past alone. Why couldn’t you?” he accused.

There was that cool look again. The one she remembered the first night they met. The same one she fought hard to have removed. "Because, I have a right to know who this man is that I'm involved with."

He took a deep breath and shook his head, "Sit down." He gestured to her bed.

"Nick—" She started to protest when he cut her off.

"Jordan, sit down!" He pointed at the bed.

Taken back by the rise in his voice she stumbled a little as she felt for her bed with her eyes not leaving him.

He took a deep breath to calm himself. He knew the harshness in his words frightened her, but he was angry that she tried checking him out despite his warnings. It put her life in danger and him in a tough situation with his superiors. "You want to know about me so badly, you should hear it from me. What you do with this information is up to you." He towered above her.

"Nick...I..." She wanted to tell him she was sorry, embarrassed, or ashamed for what she did but he'd cut her off.

He held up his hand for her to be quiet, "Don't interrupt me Jordan, I'm only going to say this once. Frank doesn't even know the whole story, so listen carefully because I won't repeat it. Is that understood?"

Wide-eyed, she nodded.

"I've done many things in my life, very few of them I regret. Many of them I should regret, but I don't. That is why I am ideal for what I do. That is why they chose me. When I was eighteen I joined the Navy. After three years I enlisted in the Navy Seals. There it was discovered that I had several talents. I learned quickly. Learning foreign languages and memorizing was easy for me among other things that I don't want to get into. Unknown to me, I was being watched. I was recruited by special ops where my talents were developed and used..."

“What are you trying to say...?”

He ignored her and continued, “Again I was approached, this time by men in suits. I ended up working for a sub agency of the U.S government that supposedly didn’t exist. They fine-tuned my skills. Gave me anything I needed for impossible missions, or areas of critical concern overseas, Europe, the Middle East, North Korea, etc, that no one else could do. I worked alone, in and out, undiscovered.”

Her mouth fell open, “What are you trying to tell me?”

He paused, “You are a smart woman, Jordan. I don’t think I need to spell it out for you.”

Her hand covered her mouth, “Please tell me that’s not true. You’re telling me you’re a trained killer?”

“I prefer assassin. You probing into my life has caused some curiosity in Washington. You could have unknowingly put your life and those you love in danger.”

She shook her head, “I didn’t know.”

“I *told* you it was to protect you, not me!” he said angrily, “Yet you continued to go behind my back.”

“I didn’t know!” she hollered, “You wouldn’t tell me anything!”

“Now you know why.” He said reigning in his anger.

“You’ve *killed* people?” She looked away from him.

“Yes.” He stated calmly.

“Nick, how could you take a life without precedent or cause?”

“It’s what I am. What I’ve been trained to do and I’m good at it.” He stated.

“You’re *good* at it?” She buried her face in her hands in disbelief, “I can’t believe I’m hearing this.”

“You opened this door Jordan. If you doubt my talents, you must know that your own father asked me to remove Lionel from your sister’s life.” He watched all color drain from her face

when she lifted her head to gape at him over his confession, but he continued, "I am telling you this because I can't be touched, but others that we care about can, your father, and my brother."

"Jesus Christ!" she stood up, "I think I'm going to be sick." Her arms covered her abdomen. "There are processes, Nick, the law..."

"...Is useless in the face of people like him. I recall you're father telling me your sister had him arrested and he took it out on Jean. It was only a matter of time."

"I can't believe my father asked you to do that!" Now she really felt she was going to be sick

"How do you think I knew about him? I'm good, but not that good. That first night we met, was when he asked me."

"You shouldn't have told me this." That night she flirted openly with her brother in laws killer.

"You wanted to know. You should have left it alone, for both of us. If you come after me, you'll have to turn your father in." Nick turned and walked out of the room.

Tears rolled down her cheeks and she swore she felt her heart break as the sound of the front door being slammed reached her ears.

Chapter Sixteen

JORDAN THREW HERSELF into her job over the next few weeks trying to drown out thoughts of Nick. She was afflicted with a gut ache over the conflict she was dealing with and there wasn't a soul she could talk to about it. The only one she could, was the problem. Despite her anguish, she couldn't deny that she missed him. It was tormenting her beyond anything she ever had to deal with. She was in love with him but to even imagine what he told her seemed unfathomable because of the way he treated her.

This is crazy, she thought while walking in the door of her house. She couldn't do this. She couldn't stay away from him. What the hell was wrong with her? Her very soul ached with missing him. Was she insane?

She tossed her bag on a chair and went upstairs to shower. It was there when the tears started to fall. There was no one to talk to about this and she couldn't deal with it on her own. It was horrible not having seen him over the past few weeks. Not even a phone call. She knew he left the ball in her court, but what if he found another woman and lost interest in her?

After her shower, she got dressed and knew who she had to talk to about this. The days had passed and she wasn't feeling any better about not having him in her life, and she needed to find out exactly what he felt about her.

Nick was sitting with his brother at a booth in the corner of the club. Several topless women sat with them. He seemed not to notice. It had been two weeks since he'd seen or heard from Jordan. He hadn't been arrested yet, so he knew she didn't say anything. He knew it would have come to this, but he wouldn't take back the time he'd spent with her, remembering the feel of her body against his and the nights they spent together. He looked over at Frank. He knew Frank knew something was up, but Nick knew Frank would leave it alone. If Nick needed to say anything he would have said it by now.

Frank saw Jordan first when she walked in. Her long auburn hair was unbound and its glorious curls bounced with every step she took. Jean may have been beautiful, but Jordan had that raw sensuality about her that made her more radiant. She wore a sleeveless khaki tank top and a brown above the knee skirt that had a slit in the leg so one of her splendid thighs would repetitively appear when she walked. He looked back up to her face and noticed that she was focused directly on Nick and also

looked very pissed off. Her green eyes narrowed on him while he happened to be politely removing one of the girl's hands from his lap. Frank nudged him.

Nick looked at his brother who nodded toward the entrance of the club.

"I don't think this is a social visit."

Nick just nodded, not taking his eyes off of Jordan.

"I wonder how she found us."

"It doesn't matter." Nick said

Jordan felt jealousy wave through her like a wild fire. Something she never had to deal with before. Not only were the women beautiful, but they were half naked and one of them was all over Nick. She had stopped by Frank's house on Commerce street and some beefy man told her where to find them. It surprised her that he would give it up so easily especially since it was a strip club. Probably another establishment owned by Frank. Then to find that one of the strippers had her hands on Nick was almost too much to bear. These last two weeks had been hell on her after he told her what he did. Not only that Jean had moved out of her father's house without an explanation and wasn't answering her or her Dad's questions. She even changed her phone but at least she got a forwarding number. When she finally did get a hold of her, she was too busy to talk, or her answers were blunt. Jordan's father was clearly upset and it didn't make any of this easier. Everything seemed to be crumbling at once, however, her heart was still breaking over missing him. It had taken some time but she had to see him and talk to him about how she felt. What she did to him wasn't fair, but he had some explaining of his own to do. It had taken some time to realize that she needed him. She loved him.

"Take a hike," she said to the woman with her hand on Nick's lap.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" she said.

Jordan gave her an emotionless grin, "I said take a hike before I get my detective sister to plant some cocaine in your ass cheeks and haul you in for possession."

The women looked at Frank who couldn't help but smile at Jordan's threat, "Go on ladies. I think she needs a word with my brother in private."

She called her several names as they removed themselves reluctantly from the table.

"I leave you alone for few days, and you consol yourself in strippers?" She turned to Nick.

"Actually they're more like call girls." Nick offered honestly. There was no reason in hiding anything now.

Frank chuckled.

Jordan focused her narrowed gaze on him, "Would you excuse us?" She was trying her best to squelch her rage.

"Yes Ma'am." He flashed an amused look at Nick and left.

"If you are thinking of having me arrested Jordan, I promise I won't last longer than an hour in jail, before I'm on the streets again." He said.

"I should." She snapped. Then turned her attention to the women draping themselves over Frank at the bar, "Do you sleep with women like that?"

"No." He said truthfully.

"Really?" She said sceptically softening her voice slightly in relief.

"I have never lied to you Jordan." He placed his hand on the seat next to him, "Sit down."

She took a deep breath while weighing his words and sat down beside him, "All right. But what the hell do you expect me to do with the information you told me?"

"Absolutely nothing." God he wanted to touch her. His hand lingered on the back of the seat and he wanted nothing more than to put it around her and pull her to him. She was

occupied with staring at her hands that were wringing each other on her lap while she spoke.

“Do you have any idea the conflict within me? You implicated my own father. I spent two weeks trying to figure out what to do. I just kept coming back to the fact of how much I missed you, how you made me feel, and what was the right way to deal with this.” Her facial features softened and she looked utterly lost.

“...and?” His eyebrows went up. She was so beautiful at that moment of vulnerability it was all he could do not to reach for her. Yet his expression and body language remained impassive.

She stared at him, “I need to know how you feel about me. I know you’re not the expressive type. I don’t expect that from you. However, I do need something from you that lets me know you feel the same way.”

“All right.” He finally smiled and his hand came up to brush her cheek, and then circled around to the back of her head to pull her close so he could kiss her.

She didn’t realize how tense she was until he kissed her, she felt herself instantly relax against him. All her turmoil flooded out of her and she was lost. This just felt so right. Then he delved his tongue into her mouth and took her completely, bending her back over his arm, not caring that his brother watched and he knew he did. She pulled back from him needing to catch her breath, and her wits. God the man could kiss! Her green eyes searched his, “I can’t believe I’m saying this but here it goes—Do you think it would work...I mean, between us?”

“Who knows?” His fingers stroked her hair, “The ball is in your court Jordan. I can’t possibly change who I am, or what I do. I’m in for life.”

She searched his eyes for some clue that he was lying and didn’t find it, “For life? God Nick, you’re making this so hard.”

“I regret that.” His sincerity was evident in his voice. His knuckles gently brushed her cheek as he stared down into her emerald gaze, “I will tell you that I would do anything within my power to protect you. I could never say that about another woman. I meant it when I said I was possessive.”

“You call it possessiveness, Nick, I am utterly in love with you.” Her words caused him to smile.

“Good.”

“That doesn’t frighten you?”

“Why would it? I already told you how much you mean to me.” He leaned over to speak in her ear, “I’ve shown you what you mean to me. Isn’t that enough?”

“Yes...no. I want to know if you love me too.”

He lifted his head and stared at her vulnerable expression, “I don’t know what love is Jordan. I can tell you some things that you may see it as, but with me, and the feelings I have for you are a first. I can’t say if it is or isn’t. I can tell you that I’d kill another man without blinking if he touched you. I’d travel to the ends of the earth to find you if you were lost. I can not bear thinking of another man being intimate with you without wanting to tear his arms off and maybe his...”

“Oh God, Nick, stop talking.” She breathed, “You don’t have to be so candid.”

“There are no more secrets between us now. You know what...or who I am and what I do.” He said honestly, “It’s who I really am.”

“I don’t believe that. There’s a side to you that I fell in love with.”

Smiling again he brushed his lips across her mouth, “Again that is a side of me I didn’t even know existed until you came along. As for my career, I can’t change it.”

“Why would you agree to life? Isn’t there some sort of time limit?”

“I had nothing else at the time, except Frank, and he was involved with our father’s life and wishes. There was no room for me. Also...I told you that I was good at it.” He eyed her seriously.

Her mouth gaped and she quickly closed it trying to regain her sanity, “I don’t know how to deal with this now I know about you, and my father.”

“I can’t tell you what to do Jordan.”

“Yes, I know.” She studied his face for a moment, “I’ve never been so torn before in my life. I love you, but because of what you do and who I am it makes things so difficult.”

“It really doesn’t have to be. You need to step back and look at everything. What we have together is not common. Is it worth fighting for? I believe so.”

“You do?” she said with surprise

He grinned, “Definitely.”

She nodded and allowed him to pull her into his embrace, “I’m in so much trouble.” She murmured against the skin at his neck causing him to chuckle.

“Sweetheart, you are not alone.” He nuzzled her shoulder.

Pulling back she looked at him with awe, “You too?”

He caressed the softness of her cheek with the back of his hand as he stared down at her, “Of course.”

“—but you never—”

“Jordan, I’m trained to keep my emotions off my expression. Sometimes it’s a second nature to me. I expressed how I felt. I never have done that with a woman before in my life. Short of falling at your feet...and I’ve actually thought about it...I can’t give you more than that.”

Her eyes studied his as all kinds of emotions coursed through her at his confession, “My god, you really mean that.”

“I do.” His thumb wiped a tear that fell from one of her eyes.

“I want you back.” She said softly. “It feels like someone

tore my heart out when I'm away from you."

"Honey, you never lost me." he leaned down and brushed his lips across the streak the tear made.

She nodded and buried her face into the crook of his neck again while he ran his hands over her back. "Promise me, that you'll never keep anything from me again, when I ask."

"I won't." he answered

"No matter how horrible it is."

"If you wish."

She nodded and lifted herself away from him, "Thank you."

He studied her expression, "Do you think you can handle this Jordan?"

She didn't miss the concern in his eyes even though it didn't reach his expression, "I have to." She gave a weak smile, "If I want you, I have to."

Nick framed her face in his hands and kissed her again.

He always left her so breathless, and when he treated her with such adoring tenderness, she couldn't fathom the acts he claimed he was capable of. Sighing heavily she could feel the turmoil ebb out of her and it was at that moment she realized that she had made the right decision. "Will I see you later?" She asked him.

"Wild horses couldn't keep me away." He confessed with a sexy grin.

Regardless of the past few weeks, that look started the flip-flopping in her belly. God, she *was* in trouble. Then, she remembered Jean and her sudden withdraw from the family.

"what's wrong?"

It always surprised her that he was so in tune with her feelings. She took a deep breath, "There's something else I need your help with."

"name it." He said without hesitation.

"It's Jean. She moved out of dad's house a few weeks ago and he's devastated. No one knows what's going on."

"Is she missing?"

"No. She answers her phone...which she got a new one and dad says he's not paying for anything of hers anymore. But she won't meet with me for coffee or anything."

Nick flicked a gaze to Frank while Jordan cast a worried look down at her hands, "does she sound happy?"

"Well, yes actually."

"maybe she's got herself a man." He knew exactly which one.

"She'd tell me. I told you what she was like."

"I'll look into it for you." Her face lit up.

"Thank you so much." Got up from the booth, "I have to go. I've got to go to work." She turned to go.

He stood up also, took her arm and pulled her back to him kissing her once more, deeply. He finally pulled away from her, "Something to help you remember."

She smiled, "I love you." She turned and left.

Frank came up to him after she'd gone, "What was up with that?"

Nick looked at him, "Nothing."

"She looked upset Nick, you two have a fight?"

"No. No fight." He was right. There wasn't a fight.

"I guess it didn't help that you were surrounded by half naked women when she walked in." Frank laughed, "Wow, though. She is damn sexy when she's mad."

Nick set a warning gaze on his brother, his eyebrows raised in an expression of caution.

"Well, she is." Frank defended, "Hey, you can't say I'm not honest. You'd have to be dead not to notice that."

Nick shook his head in defeat. *Tell me about it*, he thought to himself. "Speaking of sexy women...where's Jean?"

Frank shrugged.

Nick just stared at him.

Frank stared back, then he nodded in defeat, "One of my apartment buildings in the upper East side. Don't give me that look. You are guiltier than I am. I told you to stay away from Jordan." He reminded him. "Look at the can of worms we have to contend with because of that."

Nick ignored that statement and gave him a questioning look, "She—does know what you're like, right? That you aren't monogamous."

"Everything." He admitted with a shrug, "In fact she seems quite happy that I don't want anything from her."

It was Nick's turn to shrug, "Well then, get her to call her sister."

"Yeah, all right."

"You're all right with this?" Frank asked

Waving a hand he easily dismissed Frank's concern, "There's only one Calloway girl I'm interested in."

Frank grinned, "Well, at least I know why you wouldn't let go of Jordan now. What a fucking lay."

Nick shook his head not replying to that comment but he did let a smile pull at his masculine lips.

Frank didn't wait for him to respond probably because he knew he wouldn't. "Let's get out of here, I need something to eat."

Nick and Frank went to a little café that served the best sandwiches in New York according to Frank. The crowd usually would agree and today was no different. However, the owner always reserved a seat for Frank on certain days he knew he frequented. Nick preferred the one in the corner where he could face the rest of the patrons. It was just as well he did that day because of what happened next.

When the man entered the café Nick's trained eyes didn't

miss the look on the stranger's face. Although the man tried to mask it by not looking at Frank or him, Nick had seen it many times.

It was the look of a man who wanted to kill.

The stranger reached into his coat pretending to be casual, like maybe reaching for a cigarette. Nick turned and looked at Frank who was oblivious reading his paper. He moved quick and jumped up from his seat grabbing the edge of the table and flipping it in Frank's direction making him fall backward off his chair just as the stranger pulled out his gun and fired. The bullet embedded itself in the table that was now guarding Frank's body. Nick went for his own gun when the man turned on him. Bullets whizzed by his head as Frank scrambled behind the overturned table. People were screaming and trying to jump out of the line of fire. One unfortunate woman was shot in the side as she got up to get out of the way, putting herself in the direct path of a bullet that might have hit him. The man fired again. Either he was a piss poor shot, or all the commotion in the café was distracting enough making him miss killing Nick. Nevertheless, the last bullet the man got off finally hit him in the right shoulder causing instant burning pain. Nick grunted and stepped back at the impact, but his expert aim held steady. He squeezed the trigger, hitting the man dead center in the chest dropping him instantly. People were trying their best to get out of the café. Screams followed them out into the street. The few patrons that stayed hid under the booth tables and lowered their screams to whimpers.

Nick swore under his breath and sat in a nearby booth.

"Nick!" Frank yelled, clamouring to his feet, "Jesus Nick, you've been shot!" He turned to the man who peeked up from behind the counter, "Call an ambulance!" Everything had happened so fast, it was like a dream. One minute he was sitting and reading a paper, and the next Nick had tossed him on the

floor behind the table. The man behind the counter dialled the phone while Frank put pressure on Nick's wound. Blood was pouring from his brother's shoulder.

Chapter Seventeen

SARA AND BEN were the first detectives on the scene to respond to the homicide. They entered the café, to find Nick being told by a Paramedic that he had to go to the hospital. Two policemen stood behind him. Other Police were interviewing the witnesses and combing through the debris. Blood had covered the front Nick's white shirt. Sara felt horrible dread seeing him like that.

"Oh my God! Nick, what the hell happened?" she looked at his wound.

"I got careless." He managed a half smile.

She stood straight, "Good God, you joke about this?"

"I'm fine, the bullet came out the back. It was a clean in and out."

"Bullshit! You're going to the hospital. Jordan's going to be frantic!" She didn't keep the emotional concern out of her voice.

"I'll be fine. Trust me. Nothing's broken. I would know. I've been shot before." He allowed the paramedic who suddenly looked surprised, to remove his shirt and start to bandage the wound.

She looked at the Paramedic questioningly, "What do you think?"

He nodded, "I think he's right. I'm no Doctor though. He should still go to the hospital to get it checked out. The bleeding has slowed somewhat."

Ben was interviewing Frank, but still kept glancing over

at Nick and Sara wondering what was being said between them, “Your brother carries a gun?”

“He’s my bodyguard.” Frank admitted looking at the other man. He didn’t forget what Nick had told him about Ben Strasky, “And a damn good one.”

Ben stopped writing and looked at him incredulous, “Your *own* brother is your bodyguard?”

Frank smiled, “Could you possibly trust anyone more than your own blood to save your life?”

“Does he have a permit for the gun?”

“Ask him.” Frank shrugged.

“I intend to do just that.” He said with mild sarcasm.

Frank narrowed his gaze on him, “Careful Ben Strasky.”

The use of his full name brought Ben’s gaze up off his notepad to the man’s warning stare. He had never met the man before in his life, and Frank was pointing out that he knew exactly who he was. That meant he was discussed before. If he wasn’t such an arrogant bastard himself maybe a warning sound would go off in his mind. Instead he felt challenged. “Do I detect some cynicism in your voice?”

“No more than usual.” Frank stated unmoved. “That man, my brother, just saved my life. He’s deserving hero worship, not a suspect’s interrogation. So I expect you to respect that. If you don’t, all I have to do is make a phone call to demoralize you. Don’t test me on my honesty or influence.”

Ben was speechless.

“Jesus Nick, what were you thinking?” Sara stressed, “Thank God you’re alright.” How would her other sister take the news if Nick had been killed?

The paramedic still himself and looked at the exchange, obviously these two knew each other.

“I told you I’m fine.” He reassured, “Don’t worry Jordan.

She will find out later. I'll tell her."

"Sara." It was Ben. The concern that Sara had for Nick was making him resentful, "Frank Castile says, the dead man on the floor over there came in with guns blazing as do the witnesses. Nick was the one that took him down saving their lives." He wanted to add, *and the man's just as much of an arrogant prick too*. After Frank threatened him, he tried not to let it bother him, but it only made him angry. What the hell did a real estate mogul have to threaten one of New York's finest with? Nothing.

"Who is he?"

"Some petty drug dealer, has a sheet a mile long, Richard Calhoon...heard of him?" Ben directed the question at Nick, not Sara.

Nick convincingly shook his head. "No never heard of him."

"You'd better have a permit for those concealed weapons Nick."

"I do." With his good arm Nick removed his wallet from his jacket, opened it and pulled out a piece of paper handing it to Ben.

Ben took the permit and scanned it while still talking to Nick, "Witnesses say he was after Frank and when he couldn't shoot him, he then turned his sights on you after you protected him. They say you only fired one shot." His eyes settled on the signature of the Police Commissioner and he tried not to show the surprise on his face as he handed the permit back to Nick.

"That's correct." Nick returned the permit to his wallet.

Ben stared at him in disbelief, "You did a kill shot among all the commotion that went on in here with people running and screaming, missing them all. Whereas, this dead man here fired at least six..."

"...eight." Nick corrected

Arrogant bastard. Ben thought to himself but continued, trying to keep the anger out of his voice, “Anyway, he only hit you once?” He pointed at the tarp covered body that the coroner was now rolling into a body bag and onto a stretcher.

“Apparently.” Nick stared up at Ben unmoved by the questioning. He didn’t miss the edge in Ben’s voice.

To Ben he seemed almost amused by his questioning. Frankly, it pissed him off, “Can you give us a minute?” he said to the Paramedic.

“I’m done. Don’t move that arm too much friend.” He turned and left after Nick thanked him for his help.

When the paramedic moved out of the way, Ben wasn’t prepared for the site of Nick’s muscular body. This guy was built and the tattoos. Ben suddenly got a view of a whole new side of Nick Castile. Those tats would not be present on someone who was raised in the high society he lived in. Not only that, he recognized the Navy Seals tattoo on his shoulder. Who the hell was this guy? And no wonder Jordan was so attracted to him. Ben didn’t think there was an ounce of fat on him. He watched Sara help him to put his shirt back on and got a really good view of the six pack on his abdomen and the muscular chest and his biceps bulged when he threaded his arms through his sleeves, “Can you come down to the station tonight?” He suddenly became very envious and it just exacerbated his anger.

“Ben?” Sara looked at him, “This is a clear cut case of self-defence and he’s been shot. He can come and give his statement tomorrow.”

“You think so?” He looked at her then back at Nick, “No one can shoot like that.”

Nick stared at him, “Apparently at least one person can.”

Sarah looked at him incredulous, “Nick, shut up.” She turned her attention back to Ben, “He’s not coming down tonight, and he’s been shot.” She looked at the two police officers

standing behind him, "You can go. We'll take care of this."

They nodded and left.

"Are you speaking as a detective or a friend?" His eyebrows shot up.

Sara's eyes narrowed, "Both!" She called over her shoulder, "Frank, come get your brother." She locked gazes with Ben daring him to protest, "And take him home. He can come give a statement tomorrow. You just make sure he gets that shoulder checked out."

Ben bowed his head, conceding, "Fine Sara. You're responsible if he runs."

"He won't."

Frank came over to help Nick. He held his hand up to stop him and stood on his own looking directly at Ben, "I'll be down to the station tomorrow to give my statement and to pick up my gun after ballistics is done with it," he walked out of the café without a backward glance.

It was all Ben could do not to hit him. *Egotistical son of a bitch!*

She waited until she and Ben were out of earshot of everyone, "What the hell was that? That was a low blow Ben."

Ben spoke in a harsh whisper, "Are you sure you're thinking straight? That guy is as cocky as hell and he just killed someone! Anyone else would be showing at least some sort of remorse."

"Screw you. I would have done that for anyone in a clear cut case of self-defence. And look at the guy! Those are Special Forces tattoos if you didn't notice. This isn't the first time he's killed someone which explains the ease on which he did it. I'm not so stupid! I do know that he's probably well trained in the field and that's why he works security for his brother. You and I both know that he was defending Frank, every one of the witnesses say so. If you go after him, you'll lose and you know

it.”

“Jesus, Sara...the guy took down a man in cold blood while in a packed café. People were running everywhere and he managed to shoot the man in the heart from across the room? Who does that? One of the witnesses said he barely flinched when he was shot. Most people would drop and try and hide. He just stood there calmly taking aim.”

“So put it in your report that *the subject calmly took aim while saving countless lives.*” she stated sarcastically.

“Come on Sara” Ben searched her expression for some clue that she felt as he did. He saw nothing, “Can’t you see there is something odd about this guy? No one does that. Even if he is his brother’s bodyguard.”

Sara placed her hands on her hips, “Maybe the issue lies with you. What is your problem with Nick really? If this was anyone else, the statement could wait until tomorrow after medical attention. This has to do with Jordan, but you won’t admit it.”

Ben didn’t say anything.

“Fine. Be a Jerk about it all.” She turned and walked away.

“No way.” Nick said as Frank pulled up to the emergency entrance of Staten Hospital.

“Tough luck. You have to tell her. I promised Sara I’d get that shoulder looked at. You could have something in there, it could get infected. Then what kind of use would you be to me, on antibiotics, maybe losing the use of your arm....”

“...Jesus Frank, enough already.” He glared, “It was a clean shot. Through and through. Don’t try and worry me, it won’t work. I’ve had worse.”

“I don’t doubt it, but you’re going in. If Jordan finds out from someone else, I don’t want her to blame me. Remember I’ve seen her when she’s angry.”

“Fine. Let’s just hope that Al doesn’t have anymore brothers.” Nick stated

Frank chuckled. “No kidding.” He recalled Nick putting a bullet between the man’s eyes about a month ago. Of course they both told the detectives they never heard of Richard, when in all honesty they didn’t, but they did kill his brother.

When Jordan looked up from her chart she wasn’t prepared for the sight before her. Frank was helping Nick down the hall and his shirt was literally soaked with blood. Several Nurses were already beside him asking questions and he was waving them off stating he was ‘fine’. Jordan couldn’t get to him quick enough and helped Frank put him on a bed closest to the nurses station, but he refused to lay down. She turned and called orders to Lana who looked like she was about to cry of all things.

“Lana. Wake up!”

“Oh! Sorry Doctor Calloway. Right away.” She rushed off.

“I’m fine,” Stated Nick.

Frank rolled his eyes at Jordan over Nick’s statement who didn’t find humour in any of this. “You go tell the other nurse what happened and give them Nick’s information.”

He held up his hands in surrender not missing the look that blamed him for Nick’s condition, but did as Jordan told him to do and left.

“No one with a gunshot wound is fine.” She said seriously in a voice laced with worry while she peeled off his shirt to look at the bandage that was now soaked through. “Christ Nick, you need stitches.”

“Yeah, I’m beginning to think so.” He looked at his shoulder that was oozing again.

She just stared at him, “Doesn’t that hurt?” The man acted like it wasn’t even there. Even she knew that gunshot wounds were excruciating, she had treated enough of them.

“A bit.” He grinned, “Not as much as you think it does obviously by the look on your face.”

“You never cease to amaze me.” She shook her head, but the concern still remained.

Lana returned just then with an intravenous pole, fluids and proceeded to swab his arm to insert the needle. Regardless of him being injured she couldn't take her eyes off his body until Nick spoke to Jordan jarring her back to her duty. She didn't think she'd ever seen such a beautiful muscular frame except on television or in the movies. The guy was absolutely perfect. Also it seemed as if Doctor Calloway knew him. Now if she knew him Lana didn't have a chance in hell, because Jordan's beauty was pretty much unsurpassable.

“Jordan I don't need this.” He protested, “If anything just x-ray me to see if there's any stray pieces of bullet left in there or if it hit anything solid on its way through.”

Her jaw dropped at the same time Lana looked up from inserting the needle. She looked at the both of them. They did *know* each other.

Jordan quickly regained her currant shock at his suggestion and spoke with a calm authority, “Nick, this isn't Iraq, or wherever the hell else you've been. I'm going to do my job, and do it right regardless of your infantile protests.”

Lana started the fluids infusing into his arm just as Nick reached for Jordan. She watched his left arm circle around Jordan's waist and quickly pull her between his muscular thighs so she was up against him.

“I'm fine I told you. I feel just fine.” He said gently lowering his face into the soft curve of her neck. “Now even better.”

“God, Nick. Don't you feel any pain?” she stated trying her best to squelch the feelings his affection and husky voice caused.

Pulling back his dark eyes searched her expression, then slowly he smiled, "No."

Maybe it was something in his tone, but Jordan relaxed in his familiar embrace, completely forgetting about Lana standing there agape, "...Never in a million years did I expect you to come through those doors." She lowered her head into the crook of his neck, "Are you sure you're okay?"

She was the woman he was involved with? Lana thought to herself as realization hit her.

"Yes, sweetheart, I'll live." His eyes went to Lana as he spoke to Jordan, "You can take that bloody thing out of my arm now."

She nodded and stated with authority, "but you are getting an x-ray and some stitches."

He gave her another reassuring smile, "All right. Whatever you want."

"...And you are going to take some antibiotics so you don't get an infection."

He chuckled, "Okay."

Then Jordan suddenly became aware Lana standing there witnessing the exchange and she reddened quicker than any of Nick's compliments had done. *Well, so much for her professionalism.* She was so embarrassed she tried to leave but Nick held her arm.

"Stay" he said to Jordan before speaking quietly to the nurse, "Doctor Calloway doesn't need her reputation tarnished for the likes of me Lana."

It took Lana a couple of seconds before she realized that he was talking to her. She closed her jaw, nodded slowly, and then looked at Jordan who was definitely close to tears at her embarrassment. It was the first time she'd ever seen her close to losing control since she started her residency here. She immediately felt for her, "I won't say anything. I promise. You're

the only resident here that treats us with respect.”

“Thank you.” She said sincerely as Nick pulled her back into his embrace.

Lana left the two alone. She was still awestruck over that fact that Doctor Calloway was dating that gorgeous man. She’d heard rumours from the other staff that she was not interested in a relationship. Although she perfectly understood how this man had been able to attract her attention. Hell, who could blame her? She certainly wouldn’t be able to keep her hands to herself if she was able to touch that body for more than just medical purposes. She would keep to her promise for the both of them and not say a word to the rest of the staff. It would be hard though, she was a terrible gossip.

“Who was that man really?” Jordan knew he knew more about this than he was letting on, “and why was he trying to kill Frank?” She was knocking on his door just before midnight after her shift had ended. She actually let Frank take him home after the x-rays came back fine and she stitched the hole in his shoulder. It was obvious he knew she’d show up so he waited.

He let her in and leaned down to kiss her affectionately on the mouth.

“I told you, I don’t know.” He winced as he sat down on the couch.

“Yes. I don’t believe you.” She saw a pained look cross his face as he sat down, “Jesus, take it easy Nick.” She sat beside him.

“All right I didn’t know who he was until Ben told me the man’s name.” he admitted.

“So how do you know him?”

“Shhh, my head hurts.” He laid his head back and closed his eyes.

She sighed. She was nagging him. She lay her head on his left shoulder, “Okay, I get it. I will talk with you about this

later. I'm not forgetting." She wished that he would take the painkillers that she prescribed him. He had refused of course, even with her constant bantering.

"Thank you." He mumbled.

She let out a frustrated breath over the next subject, "Jean phoned me."

"Yeah?" he said slanting a look at her.

"She still won't tell me where she is, but she's agreed to meet me for coffee." She paused, "Where is she Nick?"

"Honey that's between you and your sister." He answered.

"you know though, don't you?" she said quietly.

"I do." He adjusted his head to look at her, "And you do to. Now, I found her for you, but don't ask me to get more involved. This is something you need to sort out with her."

"I know." She sighed, "I'm worried."

"You shouldn't be."

"I just can't believe this is what she wants." She said in disbelief. "I warned her what Frank was like."

"Frank will treat her well Jordan. Maybe she needs to feel like a queen sometimes and she can walk away at anytime."

Chapter Eighteen

"BOB, I KNOW I'm phoning you at home. I found have the gun I asked you to trace."

"Dammit Ben, are you crazy? I told you let it go."

"I just need a question answered. Did you get a name to it before they shut you down."

There was silence on the other end of the phone.

"Bob, I need your help. I just need the name."

"Why Ben, you can't touch him. These guys were dead serious. He's important to them. I was suspended for Christ's sake!"

“A name Bob...”

“Jesus Christ, they could be tapping my fucking phone Ben.”

“You owe me.”

Silence again for about ten seconds, “We’re even after this. It was Nick something or other....”

“Castile?”

“I think so. Goodbye Ben.” He hung up.

Ben picked up the evidence bag with the gun in it. It was custom designed. It was a damn nice handgun too. Ballistics didn’t find any matches to the bullet in the system. This guy was clean so far, even though Ben knew he was dirty somehow. Anyone with this man’s money and connections could easily replace handguns after he murdered someone.

Nick’s phone beeped. He pulled it out of his pocket, opened his eyes, flipped it open and read the text ‘*call home*’, “Damn.”

Jordan lifted her head up, “What is it?”

He put his finger to his lips to silence her as he dialled a number.

“We have a problem.” Said a familiar male voice.

“Do we?” his eyes darted to Jordan.

“Ben Strasky.”

“Fine.”

“The one on our end is taken care of.”

Nick hung up and turned his head to look at Jordan, “Ben’s been prying.”

She was stunned, “Prying?”

“I’ve been asked to deal with him.” He confessed.

“Nick you can’t...” She sat up straight.

“He shouldn’t have probed into my life.”

“I said you can’t!”

Nick sighed and laid his head back against the cushioned couch closing his eyes.

“Nick are you listening?”

“I am” he said without opening his eyes. “You did ask me to be honest with you.”

She did. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know yet Jordan.”

“You do this, I’m gone.”

He opened his eyes and looked at her, “Don’t use threats on me.” He stated seriously. “And you aren’t going anywhere.”

“Ben is a good man. Don’t you dare touch him.” She stated, unmoved.

“I know he is.” He knew Ben was after Jordan. Jesus, first a stalker, now a detective. Jordan was just too damn sweet and pretty for her own good.

“I’ll talk to him.”

“No, you won’t. You will stay out of this.” Nick raised his voice at her, causing her to sit up straight, astonished.

“You can’t expect me not to do something.” She defended.

“That is exactly what you will do. Do you want the people I work for to think you are a threat?”

“Jesus, Nick, don’t ask me to do this.” She reasoned.

His voice was calm again when he spoke to her. “Jordan, you are really making my head hurt. Be quiet while I think a way out of this for both of us.”

Jordan’s features softened, “You’re not going to kill him?”

“You just assumed.” He laid his head back on the couch again, “So stay out of it.” He closed his eyes. “Just because I’ve been asked to deal with something doesn’t mean I run around shooting people.” He opened his eyes and looked at her, “I only kill bad people.” He smirked.

“Thank you.” She leaned over and kissed him.

Ben was working late by himself when the call came from the front desk that he had a visitor, "Send him up."

Nick walked into the office while his keenly trained eyes surveyed the surroundings, he spied the janitor over in the corner emptying the garbage, well out of earshot.

Ben gestured to a nearby chair, "Here to confess." It didn't escape him the ease of which Nick walked and the air of arrogance that surrounded him like he owned the world and everything in it. And Jordan. Could he possibly be that untouchable?

Nick smiled without emotion and took the seat, "No. I would like my gun back. I called your captain. Seems I'm cleared of any charges."

"Yeah, what a hero." He said sarcastically as he opened his desk drawer and pulled out the plastic bag containing his gun and tossed it on the desk in front of Nick. "You must have some major pull somewhere. You didn't even give an official statement."

"So, how long have you been in love with her?" Nick changed the subject while he opened the bag, pulled out the gun and popped out the magazine, checking the rounds before he reinserted and holstered them.

Ben refused to respond to that question, "How long have you been a murderer?"

Nick smirked, "Hmm, about that..."

"You wish to confess? Should I call my captain?" Ben sat up in mocking display.

"Won't do any good, Ben. You can't touch me. Contrary to popular belief where the U.S. Government is involved, I'm not expendable."

"No wonder you're so damn smug." He snorted.

"You can call it that if you want. Regardless of your feelings for Jordan or me, you have to let this go."

“Why should I?” that sarcasm brought the arrogant man’s icy stare on him and though Ben would never admit it, it unnerved him. This man was a cold well made machine. So what the hell did Jordan see in him?

“Because of you, I got a phone call from Washington last night. It seems I may not be expendable, but they think you are.”

Ben stilled, “So now you are going to kill me.”

“No. I’m saying just back off and I won’t have to.” He stated bluntly as he got up, “If you don’t think I’m serious, check with whomever you got your information from. It’ll serve as a warning.”

“You bastard. Do you think Jordan will stand for this?”

Nick lifted his eyebrows, “Why do you think you’re still alive?” He turned and walked away.

After Nick had gone, Ben picked up the phone and called Bob. Shear dread filled him when he got a message that the number had been disconnected.

An hour later, Ben made his way through the pouring rain across the street from where he parked his car to Jordan’s brownstone. He rapped on the door and Jordan opened the door wearing a grey tank top and black yoga pants. She was apparently working out from the small beads of perspiration on her forehead. Her long auburn hair was pulled back in a ponytail, “can I come in?”

She stepped aside, “Be my guest.” He looked pathetic in rain soaked clothes and she suddenly felt guilty about the other night, “Here, give me your coat.”

He took off his saturated coat, and handed it to her. “I just walked across the street. It’s really coming down.”

“I can see that. Sit down, and I’ll make you some coffee. I’ll be right back.” She turned and left.

Ben wandered into the living room. Her tastes were very

elegant. He guessed they would be, her family was quite wealthy and she was raised with finest education in high society.

"There, " She came back in the room, "I tossed it in the dryer. It shouldn't be too long."

Ben was just looking at the photographs on the wall, "You didn't tell me you took ballet lessons." Smiling he turned and looked at her, but not after the photo of the two identical red heads in tutus were burned into his mind. They must've been about four in that picture, and it was very adorable. "Is that you and Jean?" he thrust his thumb over his shoulder at the photo.

"Yes, it is. Ben why are you here?" She had a suspicion that Nick had recently talked to him and that's what led him to seeking her out.

He didn't know how to say it, so he just did, "I had a visit from Nick Castile the other night," The look on her face let him know that she suspected as much, "You knew?"

She shrugged her shoulders, "He doesn't tell me everything, Ben. I'm not his mother."

"but you knew he was coming to see me?"

She sat on the couch and folded her hands on her lap, trying to look casual "Maybe I did."

"Did you know what he came to see me about?"

She just stared at him not giving anything away.

Regardless, he knew. "Jesus, Jordan....you did?" incredulous, he ran his hand through his damp hair, "I can't believe it."

"Ben, " She stood up, "I think we can let the coffee brew, you need a drink." She went into the kitchen and came back with two glasses of clear liquid.

Ben hardly tasted it as he downed the contents, "Do you want to enlighten me about this guy?"

"Just a minute, "she went to the kitchen this time and got the bottle, pouring him another

He drank that too and she refilled his glass.

"You have to sit down Ben." She herself took a large swallow of her glass.

He sat on the sofa that she'd just occupied.

Jordan sat down beside him and placed the bottle on the coffee table. She took a deep breath and looked up at him, "I can't tell you anything Ben. Only to just stay away from him...and me."

Incredulous he just stared at her. Did she honestly know what he was like? Maybe she thought he was referring to a jealous boyfriend, not a trained killer, so he thought he would enlighten her, "Fine. I'll tell you what I know and you tell me if you know these things to. This guy as commendations coming out of the ying-yang. He enlisted in the Navy when he was eighteen, Navy seals for three, then disappeared for five years. I know this guy carries a pair of concealed customized firearms that are virtually untraceable. He can take a bullet and still make a near impossible shot across a crowded room and hit a target. A man who has filed no tax return for over ten years, wears suits that cost thousands of dollars, and lives in a penthouse that neither he or his brother pay for. I know, I checked. Also, I know that whenever someone inquires about him, they get shut up, beat up or turn up dead." He paused for a moment letting that sink in.

Jordan did her best not to look upset, but she knew it was pointless.

"I *had* a friend in the FBI that I can't locate anymore. The Bureau won't give me any information, and his phone is disconnected. Frankly, I'm concerned that he's dead over something I asked him to do."

"He wouldn't do that." She defended.

"I don't think you know him as well as you think you do." That brought her head up with an angry set of her chin.

“You don’t know how wrong you are.” She said defensively, “I knew everything you just told me. I also know that he wouldn’t have anything to do with the disappearance of your friend.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I do.” She said confidently. Nick told her he didn’t harm good people and she sure hoped he wasn’t lying to her. The knowledge of him hurting people alone hurt her gut, but then she kept reflecting on how he protected her that night and even then, he didn’t kill those two men, even though she now knew he could have. Then there was Lionel, who was beating her sister regularly. She could no longer have children because of the abuse and their hands were tied on helping her. Not one day went by from the day he confessed to dealing with Lionel that she didn’t think about it. Was that justice so bad when there were no other outs? Her first thought was no, that wasn’t justice, but then she would see her sister and the damage he had caused and her righteousness faltered.

“Jesus Jordan. I didn’t expect this from you.”

She looked down at her lap, “I’m really sorry Ben.”

“Are you?”

She looked up at him, “Of course I am.” She said sincerely.

“I know my friend’s disappearance has to do with your friend Nick.”

“You can’t prove that.”

“I can try.”

A look of fear crossed her features, “Ben, please just leave this alone.”

“Then tell me what you know.”

She stood up, “You’d better leave.”

He stood up also, and cupped her lovely face in his hands while searching her eyes, “You know something Jordan. I know

you do.”

“All I can say is...”

He doesn’t know what got into him, he kissed her. For a moment he thought she actually responded until he felt her hands on his chest pushing.

She pushed back from him a look of astonishment and shame crossed her face. She said nothing. She couldn’t. She just didn’t know what to say.

He reluctantly released her. His eyes gave way to the emotion that he felt for her, “I’m sorry Jordan.”

She stared at him for a moment reading the raw emotion on his face, “Why didn’t you tell me?” She stared back at him.

He gave her a surrendered smile, “I couldn’t. I work with your sister. Then you started dating Nick Castile. By the time I built up the courage. You were already involved with him. Only then did I really realize I was crazy about you.”

“Oh no, Ben this can’t be.” She shook her head slowly. Of course she cared deeply for him, but not like that. It might have been different if she didn’t meet Nick, but she had. He had given her everything she needed to feel whole.

“I should’ve acted sooner,” He stepped toward her, “I can’t ignore this.” His hand reached up and caressed her soft cheek.

She didn’t move away, still stunned by his confession.

“Tell me you don’t love him and that you’ll give us a chance. I can promise you that there will be no secrets between us. I’ll treat you the way you deserve.”

She shook her head, “I-I can’t.”

His expression darkened, “There’s something sinister about that man Jordan. That time in the café, that wasn’t the first time he killed someone. There was not regret or remorse in him over it. Do you want to end up like Jean?”

She slapped him, “I think you’d better leave.”

He stood back, "Fine. I'm not letting this go."

She turned and left to retrieve his coat. When she returned she looked apprehensive, "You have to leave this alone Ben. You'll only get hurt." She handed him his coat, "I'm sorry I hit you."

He rubbed his cheek, "I probably deserved it for comparing you to your sister. I'm just worried, " he went to the door.

She followed him and opened it for him.

He turned back and kissed her lightly on the cheek, then stood back and looked at her seriously, "Please tell me you'll talk to me if things get hard to handle."

She smiled and nodded and shut the door.

Ben ran across the street to his car, got in and drove away.

A black Lincoln, parked behind him started up also. The occupant had observed the whole scene through the bay window on the front of the house. He picked up his phone and dialled.

Chapter Nineteen

FRANK ASKED THE other bodyguards in his study to leave while he talked with Nick after his brother strode into his office. He looked at Mario, "You too."

"Yes boss." Mario shut the door tight behind him.

Nick just stared at his brother. He knew this was serious.

"How serious are you with this girl Nick?"

Nick's eyebrows went up, however he never said anything. Something was up.

Frank continued, "I have built quite the Empire over the past few years for us. Certain issues arise that I myself must contend with, " He pulled a brown envelope out of his desk drawer, "I know you Nick. I know you really like this woman.

She is special, I'll give her that. However, she's intelligent and her sister is a detective. So I'm concerned that our secrets aren't safe anymore."

"I promised you."

"Yes I know you did. Maybe I have to protect you sometimes. You have skills that I could never imagine possessing. I have always been proud of that with you. Even when you were little and would follow me around the neighbourhood, I recognized your talents then. Nothing ever fazed you. Maybe it was the high hand of our father, maybe not. Some of those things couldn't be learned; you had to have been born with that high I.Q. you have. I have a good head, but you're brilliant. I could never memorize the things you do, or strategically plan so far in advance that you anticipate everything, except maybe when women are concerned. Now that's my area." He added with a bit of humor trying to break the rising tension.

"What's in the envelope Frank?" Nick knew he found something out about Jordan. Something he wouldn't like.

Frank shoved it across his desk and Nick picked it up and pulled out the pictures of her in an embrace with Ben. They were clearly kissing. There was no mistake about it.

"Sorry. I had to be sure," Frank said sincerely.

He flipped through the pictures with his expression revealing nothing, "Do you think this is sincere?"

"Yes. According to Siedo."

"When were these taken?"

"Two days ago."

Nick's expression remained emotionless as he put the pictures back in the envelope and tucked it into his inside breast pocket, "At least you didn't deal with this." Nick's eyes focused on his brother. "Thanks."

"Not my call, Nick. She's your girlfriend. I couldn't do

that to you without you knowing. I love you too much to do that to you anyway.”

“I understand.”

“You will deal with this, right?”

“I will.” Inside he was raging.

Jordan showed up at Nick’s Penthouse later that evening after work. He let her in when she arrived. She tried to kiss him and he stepped back and turned away from her.

“What’s wrong?”

“Sit down, Jordan, I need your help with something.” He indicated to one of the stools at his breakfast counter. The same stool that she sat on when they shared that first kiss.

His coolness sent a shiver of fear down her spine. She reluctantly took a seat at the counter which had photographs spread over its glossy surface. She gasped when she saw the content, and quickly stood up, “Nick, that’s not what it looks like!”

“It looks pretty clear cut to me.” He stared coldly at her.

“You got to be kidding. After everything you and I have gone through. Do you honestly think that I would cheat on you with Ben?” She rifled through the photos, “Obviously whoever you had follow me, didn’t get the picture where I slapped him!” She stared back up at him.

His expression remained unmoved.

She stared at him, “So, you’re going to believe these photos over me? He was only at my place for less than a half hour. What the hell could I do in a half an hour? It was him kissing me. I pushed him away, he confessed his love for me, and insulted you and I slapped him!”

“Then you should have said something.”

“Why? So you’d have an excuse to kill him? I’m not stupid Nick. You may seem detached, but I knew this would

make you angry. You'd have to be dead not to let it affect you. You yourself told me you would kill a man if he touched me. I can't believe you didn't trust me. You're the one with the women draped all over you all of the time. I take your word for it. When you tell me nothing is going on."

"This is different."

"Bullshit!"

"I have to protect Frank, Jordan. I need to make sure this isn't about him."

A tear rolled down her cheek, she could feel her heart breaking, "It was never about Frank, Nick. It was always about you and me. If I implicate Frank, my father goes down too. I could never do that. You have no idea the internal struggle I deal with. I'm in love with a hit man, who works for the mob and I'm constantly rewriting my morals over it. Several days ago I found out that Ben is in love with me and going to pursue his missing FBI friend and you, because of his feelings for me."

His eyebrows shot up at the last statement, "What did you say?"

She regretted saying it the minute it left her lips, "Oh Jesus!"

His cool demeanour broke with that statement. He approached her and gathered her into his arms, "Alright Jordan, enough. I believe you." Who wouldn't after that confession? She basically just signed Ben's death warrant by confessing that to him. She had to know that Nick wouldn't let it be.

She cried into his chest.

"Now I know why you didn't tell me." He kissed the top of her head, "I'm sorry."

She just nodded unable to say anything.

"I know this isn't easy for you. I never thought it was. You know I'm possessive. I have made that clear to you. My mind raced when I saw those photos."

She stepped back and looked up at him. Her eyes slightly swollen, "I'm sure it's not easy for you either."

He smiled, leaned down and kissed one of her tear stained cheeks, "I can handle Frank. I've told you that." He pulled her hair back off her face.

"Can you?" As far as she could tell, it was Frank giving the orders, not Nick whenever they were all together,

"More than you know." He kissed her other cheek.

"What about Ben?" She was terrified to answer the question.

He sighed, "I may have to try something different with him."

"Please Nick." She begged in barely a whisper.

"Don't worry, Jordan, he'll live. I already promised you that. Like you said, he's a good man. If I didn't, I would have killed him for trying to kiss you even before I spoke to you." His eyes darkened. The man had no right to touch her. Inside he was furious and had already planned on how to deal with this. This was going to be something that Ben never forgot.

She nodded, "Thank you."

Frank had just hung up the phone when Bruno came into his office.

"Miss Calloway is outside here that says you need to see her."

"Bruno, which one?" he said.

"Jordan Calloway."

So much for Nick dealing with her, "Let her in."

Bruno nodded and held open the door.

As usual, Frank thought she was stunning. Apparently she didn't look bad in anything. He looked her over. She had on a pair of beige slacks, a white blouse and a brown blazer. She strode up to his desk with that same determined edge that made

her so irresistible to men.

She threw a package of papers on his desk including the photographs he gave Nick.

Frank stood up, "Miss Calloway." He said in greeting.

She focused her fiery gaze on him, "Don't bother with the pleasantries Frank."

"If you wish," He turned his attention to the papers.

"That's a copy of my confession of how I was involved with the murder of my brother in law, along with my father."

His eyebrows rose, "Really?"

"I want you to see if there's anything I missed," she said sarcastically, "... I advise you keep that safe and hidden. So you can use it against me in the future."

Frank was taken back, as he picked up the papers and scanned through them briefly. She wasn't lying, "Why are you doing this?" He looked at her.

"Contrary to your belief, I love your brother, and if you ever interfere like that again, I'll shoot you myself, you son-of-bitch!" She turned around and walked away.

Frank suppressed a grin and called after her, "How did you know it was me that had you followed?"

She stopped, and spoke without turning around, "I wasn't sure until now." She opened and slammed the door behind her when she left.

Bruno let out a whistle.

Frank looked up at him a smile formed on his face, "Yeah, she's sexy as hell when she's pissed off. No wonder Nick likes her."

Bruno chuckled.

He looked at the photos, "Bruno, get that dolt Seto in here. I need to know a few things about these photographs." Nick had asked him to keep an eye on her, but it was his idea to spy on her. There was a difference.

Bruno nodded and left.

Obviously by some miracle, Jordan had been able to convince Nick of her loyalty regardless of this proof. He knew Nick needed indefinite evidence to contradict these pictures. He must have gotten it, or she wouldn't be still alive. There's no way in hell, no matter how infatuated he was with Jordan, that he could ignore this unless she gave him just cause. Hell, Frank himself was disturbed over her betrayal after seeing the pictures. He really liked this woman, now more than ever.

Chapter Twenty

When Nick entered her she gasped his name. He quickly covered her mouth with his and pinned her arms over her head as she wrapped her legs around his hips. He thrust into her none too gently in his need to possess her and she didn't protest. His hand caressed the length of her thigh and slid across her back as she arched toward him. He couldn't get enough of her. She was so perfect to him in everyway. She accommodated his every move when they made love. She knew exactly what he needed and became accustomed to his cues. Her body was his for the taking. Every perfect soft supple curve and crevasse belonged to him.

She caressed the muscles down his back with her hands. She couldn't ever expect to have someone know her body so well. He always took his time and made her feel so beautiful before he erupted into an aggressive lover. She was always long lost in his caresses when he thrust into her. She didn't think it could get any better until she felt him within her. The euphoric feeling of him moving and teasing her near pushed her over the edge every time. Then he would kiss her, deeply, probing her and teasing her with his tongue. She would scream every time she climaxed.

Nick rolled over on his back taking her with him. She

adjusted herself, so she came up face to face with him. She kissed him, and he kissed her back. His strong arms wrapped around her. She lifted her head and looked at him seriously.

“Wow,” he teased, “What was that for?”

“Everything. You make me feel so beautiful.” Her eyes searched out his.

“*Make* you feel, you are beautiful. I’m doing my best to convince you.” He said seriously.

His phone rang then. He kissed her, then reached for it and flipped it open.

She watched him intently.

“Yes.” Nick said speaking into his phone. He paused for a moment listing, “Yes, I understand. I’m on my way.” He hung up and looked down at her, “I’ve got to go.”

“So I hear.” She smiled up at him.

“I can’t stay here with you forever,” he kissed her again, “Although it is tempting.”

She giggled, “It’s alright; I get it, your brother beckons.”

Without a word, he kissed the tip of her nose, got out of bed and headed for the shower.

She curled up in his sheets and watched his powerful naked form head out the door. Was that his brother? He never indicated that it was. Turning her head sideways she looked at his cell phone. Behind her she could hear the shower running and knew that she could easily reach over and look at the number. Absently she reached for it and leaning herself up on an elbow she cradled it in her palm. Never in her life had she been dishonest and this was wrong, very wrong. Sighing she placed the phone back on the bedside table and laid back down.

A satisfied smile played across Nick’s handsome face as he watched the whole scene unfold. If there was any doubt that he couldn’t trust her it was just eliminated. That had to have been one of the hardest things for her to do. She wanted to know

more about him, but wasn't willing to betray his trust to get it. Silently he turned and went back down the short hall to the bathroom.

An hour later, Nick walked ahead of Mario into the empty warehouse. The click of his hand made Italian shoes on the pavement echoed off of the walls. He walked over to a door, opened it and went in. There were six men standing around a man tied to a chair. He removed his gloves and handed them to Mario. He then walked around the front of the man. He was blindfolded. Seto handed him the man's gun. Nick nodded to Bruno and he removed the blindfold.

"Hello Ben."

It took a minute for Ben's eyes to adjust to the light. His eyes searched the men until they lit on and recognized Nick, "Are you crazy! I'm a cop!"

"Do I look like I give a shit?" Nick responded in his calm tone.

"Do you think you can get away with this?" Ben accused, "They'll find out what happened."

Nick nodded to Bruno, who caught his meaning and punched Ben in the jaw.

Ben grunted as the pain hit him. Blood trickled from his mouth. *Jesus, it would have felt better to have his face rammed into a brick wall*, he thought.

Nick grabbed a chair and sat in front of him, "Now you know I'm serious. So shutup."

Ben looked up at him with hate in his eyes.

"You just couldn't leave it alone. Could you? I told you to back off. Jordan told you to back off. So I thought at least you would listen to one of us, especially after your buddy in the FBI disappeared."

Realization dawned on Ben's face, "Fuck you!" He said, "Why don't you just kill me?"

“Because I promised Jordan I wouldn’t.”

Ben looked surprised, “You promised?”

“Apparently she still cares for you regardless of you taking advantage of her the other night.”

“She told you?”

“Yes, but she didn’t want to.” Nick leaned over and put his elbows on his knees, “It took some coercion.”

“You son of a bitch! If you laid a hand on her...”

“You’ll what? Spit on me.” He looked up at the other men, “Everybody out. Mario, you stay.”

“Yes Sir....” Mario said unable to suppress a smile as the other men left the room.

He returned his attention back to the bleeding, tied up man in front of him, “I see that you do love her.”

Ben tore his gaze away confirming Nick’s statement.

“I would hate to see you take your own life with your gun when you got so depressed that she turned you down.” He lifted up the gun Seto gave him and cocked it.

The sound brought Ben’s gaze back to him, “You think she wouldn’t know? She’s smarter than you think.”

Nick smiled, “I know she’s smart, Ben. Give me credit.” He paused, “Although I should shoot you for touching her. That alone merits some form of punishment.”

“You’re not serious.”

“I don’t joke about things like this.” He added flatly, while emptying the chamber on the gun with a metallic snap, plopping the unfired bullet on the cement floor with a tinny noise, “Just heed my warning. You certainly don’t want Washington to think you are a liability. I’ve killed people more important than you Ben. Don’t think I won’t hesitate next time. If I were going to kill you, I wouldn’t even have wasted my breath on you.” He stood up, “Stay away from Jordan. Stay away from me and my family or I won’t just come after you. I’ll go after your sister in Rhode

Island, your brother, the lawyer in Greenwich and their families. Remember, I don't miss what I aim at."

Ben just stared at him and paled as fear registered across his face.

He started to leave, then stopped and turned back to him, "And one more thing." He leaned down so that his face was mere inches from Ben's, "If you ever lay a finger on my girl again, I will kill you. It won't be quick either. I'll take my sweet ass time and make you suffer enough to beg for the fires of hell to save you." He slowly stood up keeping his eyes on the man's face. His words were effective, he finally frightened him. "I'm going to let the boys have a little fun with you before they let you go, just so you get my meaning." He turned and walked away saying something to Mario that Ben couldn't hear. Mario opened the door for him and handed him his gloves back.

Mario turned to the other men, "Mr. Castile doesn't want his face marked up. He has to work on Monday."

Bruno nodded and went back in the room followed by the other men.

When Nick returned to Frank's house, and walked into his office with Mario, he was just hanging up the phone.

"Luigi wants a meet."

"Why?"

"It seems one of his captains is missing, he thinks you're responsible."

Nick shook his head, "How ridiculous."

"I told him that, but he wants to hear it from you just to make sure."

"Why does he think I'm responsible?"

"It's our friend Emilio. The one who lost his fingers to you."

Nick gave a grim smile, "Little bastard probably ripped someone else off and they killed him. Luigi should've taken

redemption out on him months ago.”

“I agree, but apparently he’s some nephew of a brother-in-law or some crap like that, so he had leniency on him.”

“Makes sense. When does he want to meet.”

“Tonight.”

“Alright. I have to let Jordan know I can’t see her tonight.”

“You should just marry that girl.” Frank said seriously

“What the hell brought that on?” Nick stared at him.

“She’s crazy about you.”

“I’ll be signing her death sentence Frank.” Nick shook his head, “Impossible.”

Nick walked over to Jordan who was fast asleep curled up with his pillow. He reached down and pulled the covers up over her shoulder.

She moaned, “Hi.” But kept her eyes closed.

“I’ll come to bed in a minute.”

“Uh-hmm,” she mumbled and managed to reach out and touch his thigh.

He turned and went into his walk-in closet, turned on the light and removed his suit jacket, holster and guns, and dress shirt. He kept on his undershirt and slacks on and went out to the living room to make a phone call.

“I took care of the problem. He’ll behave now.”

“Alright Nick. What about the girl?”

“Leave her alone.”

“Nick...”

“I’ve never asked for anything Johnson, I said leave her alone.”

There was silence on the other end.

“Let me rephrase that. If I find she meets with an accident, or even so much as stubs her toe, I’ll come after you

and everyone around you. If you don't think I know anything about you Johnson, you're wrong. I do my homework. I know something about all of you. You trained me remember? You made me the magnificent killer that I am. Let me help you understand. For instance, I know your name's not Johnson, it's Shale. I know your son is starting his first year at Dartmouth and your daughter is finishing her last year of high school. I also know your wife attends a book club at seven every Wednesday and the make and models of every one of their vehicles."

"Oh..Jesus..."

"If you think you can touch my girl, think again, because if you touch her, you'll have to touch me, and I don't take kindly to being touched."

Another long pause, then a voice with distinct shakiness answered him. "Alright Nick, point taken, you just control her. Also, keep in mind we're not the only ones who have interest in you." There was a short pause, "Be careful Nick. People with your skills aren't easy to come by."

"I know. Thanks Johnson I owe you." Nick hung up. When he turned around Jordan was

standing there in a crimson satin sheer that came to mid thigh. She was a picture of perfect splendour. Her long hair tossed to one side as she leaned against the door frame to his room. Her expression, however, was filled with fear.

"That was about me."

"Yes." He was hoping she didn't hear the first part of the conversation.

"Your employers, do they want to harm me?"

He shook his head and gave her a reassuring smile, "That's not going to happen," he went up to her and caressed her bare arms, "Not as long as I'm alive."

She nodded, "I trust you." She circled her arms around his waist.

“That’s what I need to hear.” he said and lowered his head on the top of hers and inhaled her sent deeply. He loved the way she smelled. He then lifted his head, “You need to start coming with me.”

She looked up at him, bewildered, “Why?”

“First, because my brother insists I start bringing you with me. Second, I need you with me from now on.”

“What is it you’re not telling me?”

“That I want you with me more.”

“Liar.” She sighed, searching his eyes, “But I’m learning. I know you’ll tell me when I need to know.”

He smiled, “Good. Now lets go to bed, it’s four o’clock in the morning,” he looked at his watch. “I’m actually tired.”

“Wow.”

“Well, maybe not that tired,” he confessed grabbing her from behind making her squeal.

Chapter Twenty One

The next day when Nick walked into Frank’s office on Commerce Street his brother asked him to take a seat because there was something he needed to talk to him about. Something serious.

“I told you Jordan was not your problem.”

Frank actually smiled, “This isn’t about your girl Nick. Anyway, I like her. So quit worrying that I’m going to protest it. If anything, she’s done amazing things for that wonderful personality you had.” That got him a bit of a smile. It was true. Nick never smiled and laughed as much as he did with Jordan, and Frank had known him his whole life. He wouldn’t trade anything in the world for that. “Now for the real reason I need to see you. I need to tell you something about Mario.”

“I’m all ears.”

“I had Mayor Calloway do us a favour several weeks ago. I had his DNA tested just to be sure.” He handed Nick an envelope. “Go ahead. Look.”

How did you get his DNA?” he said without looking up as he opened the envelope.

“When he bled all over my hardwood floor after that crack on the skull several months ago.”

The look on Nick’s face told Frank he already knew what he would find when he pulled the papers out of the envelope and scanned them.

“Does he know?” Nick read the results and looked up at Frank.

“No. I thought maybe you would want to tell him.”

Nick nodded, replaced the papers and gave the envelope back. “How did you even suspect this?”

“When our father stopped pounding on us and I figured he had someone else after our mother died to take his anger out on. It wasn’t because I went to work for him like we both thought, it was because he found someone else. Maybe he thought we were too big and would finally fight back....who knows. So, I followed him one day...you were already enlisted in the Marines...and I found a mistress with a baby. She was quite beautiful in her youth, you know? His temper never changed, even with her, but he was never allowed over at her apartment after Mario was born. I know now that she told him that his father died when he was too young to remember, when he actually didn’t die until several years later. She was quite poor, so our father paid for the apartment as long as she gave him what he wanted. It’s obvious she did a good job on protecting Mario because he has none of the signs that he’d been abused. I’m relieved that she stayed strong against our father that way. If he wanted her, he wasn’t allowed contact with his son. Of course, he already had two so he really didn’t care. Ruthless bastard. I’ve

been keeping an eye on them for twenty years. When Mario started driving Taxi, I decided it was about time the kid needed to be with his family. I phoned the dispatch office and asked for him personally, and the rest is history. He needs us. Especially now that his mother is dying he'll have no family, except ours. I wanted him to work for you so you'd become accustomed to him. He's very impressionable and I want you to teach him everything you know Nick. He is our brother. I'm too damn old to learn the things you know, but he's not."

"True." Said Nick

"He needs to be part of our business."

"Agreed."

"Are you alright with this Nick?"

Nick managed a smile, "I don't have a problem. I like the kid."

Frank grinned, "You really do don't you?" just then Nick's phone rang. Frank watched him answer it and say Jordan's name, then in complete surprise his face actually fell in horror.

"We're on our way." He hung up and gave his brother a look of utter despair. "Mario's in surgery at Jordan's hospital. He was brought in about twenty minutes ago with a bullet in his chest."

Frank couldn't speak. He was actually at a loss for words.

"Jordan says the surgeon doesn't know if he'll make it."

"Who..." he struggled to regain his self-control as much as he was sure his brother was doing. They had both just found out they had a brother and now he was hanging on to life by a thread. It was a horrible torrent of emotions. Mario wasn't like them. He always had such a positive outlook over everything, even the grim things that Nick did. He actually brought some life back into their lives. The kid was an innocent in their world. Though neither one of the would admit it, they both cared deeply for him.

Now, to find out he was family just pushed those emotions further. When Nick spoke Frank could see that he'd regained most of his composure, but he knew his brother and the rage was evident in his eyes.

"I have my suspicions that its our missing captain."

Frank on the other hand, had no issues about displaying his anger, "You find that son of a bitch and kill him." Waving a finger toward Nick, he started walking toward the doors of his study, "Bruno get the car!" He bellowed. A muffled 'yes boss' came from the other side of the door.

"I will."

"fuck him up to." He barked, beginning to pace.

"Frank, this doesn't help..."

"Hell..." He stopped and ran a hand through his hair, "Not this kid Nick."

"Yeah, I know." He walked past him and opened the door, "Let's go. He'll need someone there when he wakes up." If he wakes up.

"Mario!"

The voice was familiar, but he couldn't quite place it as he turned to the source. Then a loud sound followed by immense pain and the man's face was the last thing he saw before he blacked out.

Jordan was waiting for Nick and Frank when they came bursting through the emergency doors. She rushed up to the both of them, "He's in surgery. I'll show you a place you can wait until we know more."

"thanks." Said Frank his expression was contorted with worry.

She led them down the hall to a separate room, "It's private and I'll come and get you when I hear more or—" she

glanced at Nick, “—I can stay if—“

“No honey.” Nick smiled down at her, “go back to work. We’ll be fine.”

“All right, but if you need me just ask anyone okay?”

“In a heartbeat.” He bent down and kissed her before she left.

Frank took a seat and put his head in his hands, “This has got to be the worst thing someone has to deal with.”

“yeah.” Said Nick.

He lifted his head and leaned back in the seat and sighed, “Poor bastard.”

“He’ll pull through Frank. He’s tough after all he is a Castile.”

Frank smiled slightly, “That’s true.”

They waited for what seemed days, but it was only a few hours before Jordan led the surgeon through the door into the room. It was a relief to see both of them smiling.

Frank and Nick quickly stood.

“Are you relatives?” said the surgeon.

“We’re his brothers.” Said Frank.

“What?” Said Jordan.

“We just found out.” Said Nick, “I’ll tell you about it later.”

“Well, your brother will live. The bullet missed his heart by inches but punctured his right lung. He’ll have a chest tube in for about a week and then he has some recuperating, but he should recover one hundred percent.”

Frank and Nick shook his hand, “thanks Doc.” Said Frank, “Can we see him?”

“He’s not quite with it yet, but you may.” He gestured with his arm.

Mario thought he heard Frank’s voice through the haze.

Then as he opened his eyes to a blurry image of him, he knew it was Frank.

“hey kid. Good to see you’re alive.”

Mario moaned, “w—what happened?”

“Hey, don’t talk. The doctor said that you will be laid up for a few days.” He paused, “You have enough tubes hanging out of you to make you be mistaken for a bloody octopus.”

That actually made him smile and he winced, “Ow, man, I hurt.”

“Where?”

“Every bloody place God gave me.” He muttered, “even my teeth hurt.”

“I’ll get the nurse.” He turned and left.

Mario’s eyes focused on Nick who must’ve been standing behind Frank, “Hey boss.”

“Frank said shut up kid.” He smiled.

“You know that’s hard for me.”

“even on death’s door apparently.”

“Was I?”

“It was close. You lost a lot of blood.” He leaned down, “Did you see the man Mario?”

He thought for a bit, “Yeah, I remember that man you cut the fingers off—”

“I thought so.” He patted his arm, “I’ll take care of it.”

“Nick—” he said as the older man turned to leave.

“yes.” He turned back

“I want to be there.”

Nick grinned. “Sure thing.”

Just then the nurse came in with a syringe and Frank behind her. He walked over and told Mario that she had something to help him with the pain.

“Your brother is pushy.” She winked at Mario as she injected the drug into his intravenous site.

The Doctor and the Assassin

“Brother?” his eyes guided to Frank in complete astonishment.

“yeah kid. Learn something new every day don’t you?”

He wanted him to explain what that meant but his face went blurry again and he slipped into darkness.

“hey, what happened?”

The nurse adjusted the blankets, “The drug kicks in quick when we give it through the vein like that. He’s fine Mr. Castile.” She smiled up at him.

Frank looked over the pretty young thing with ebony hair and dark eyes, “Do you give me your word that he’s all right?”

She nodded, “I promise.” She crossed her heart with her finger.

Nick sought out Jordan who just so happened to be signing off a chart with full intentions to go and see how Mario was doing. She set the chart down just as Nick approached her. “Hi.”

“Hi darling.” He leaned down and kissed her cheek.

“How’s our newest shooting victim?”

He grinned, “Snowed by now I’m sure.”

“Good. It’s going to take him awhile to recover.”

“Doctor Calloway? You need to introduce us.” Said Ashley.

Jordan laughed, “they’ve been quizzing me for months.” She turned and indicated to the various health care staff. Then she introduced Nick, who was as usually a perfect gentleman and as usual the women present practically swooned over him because he was so charming.

“so this is the man you’ve been so secretive about.” Said Lonnie coming up from behind the couple.

“cat’s out of the bag.” Said Jordan.

Nick turned to see the orderly just parking the stretcher

against the wall before he turned to them. Then the man gave Jordan a pleasant smile that said a lot to Nick before he flashed a glance in his direction. It was subtle but Nick caught the anger in the man's gaze. He was no stranger to behavioural analysis and everything about the man's posturing and brief glances gave him a warning. He never stared long enough at him to let Nick read his gaze, and that gave him plenty of information. However, he had no problem staring at Jordan. Nick had just found Jordan's stalker.

"Doctor Calloway," said the nurse named Ashley, "You need to sign this."

Jordan excused herself and went back to the nurses' station about fifteen feet away leaving Lonnie and Nick alone. Nick never removed his eyes off the other man who still wouldn't meet his gaze. He was younger than him by about ten years, not as good looking as he thought he was, and fidgety. Finally after about thirty seconds of Nick just staring at him, he finally, slowly raised his eyes to his. This time he didn't conceal anything. Nothing was said between them but Nick saw the hatred in his eyes and Lonnie finally let him see it.

"You're smarter than I thought." Lonnie finally said breaking the silence.

"You're not." Said Nick with a deadly calm.

"Don't think you can hang on to her." Lonnie said flicking an uneasy glance in her direction.

"Don't think I'll let you live, you little squirt. You don't know me." Nick added in a dark whisper.

"You're no different than the others." He said without fear.

Nick gave him a calculating smile. "I'm glad you think so." Nick had been accused of being a sociopath by the various string of psychiatrists that his superiors made him see over the past decade and he always knew he wasn't because unlike the man

standing before him, he did have a conscience even though it wasn't as profound as it was with normal people, but he seemed to have rediscovered it with Jordan. In fact there were many things inside him that seemed to have woken up around that woman.

Just then Jordan returned, "We should go see Mario."

"I agree." He said then he addressed the orderly again, "Nice meeting you—Lonnie, isn't it?" Nick said with an intentional look.

Lonnie only nodded.

Chapter Twenty Two

A WEEK LATER, Mario was released into the capable hands of Jordan and Nick and to the confines of Nick's penthouse. Jordan frequently checked on him during the hours she wasn't working, but over the next few days Mario began to get irritable and at one point she came in to find him sitting at the counter in his bathrobe, with his hair messed up and a depressed look on his face as he leaned his head on his arm.

"It's not that bad." She chuckled.

"try it."

She set her purse on the counter beside him, "Are you in—Mario quit sulking and look at me please." She grinned.

He sighed heavily and sat straight while facing her.

"Now, as I was saying. Are you in any pain?" she tried to be empathetic, but he was a pathetic patient. Feeling completely sorry for himself.

"No." he said heavily.

"Open your shirt and let me check the dressing."

He did as she asked with complete disinterest.

She checked the old chest tube insertion site, "You may think that you aren't like Nick at all Mario but you guys are more

alike than you know.” She said and saw him brighten for a moment and smiled, “I have good news though. You should be able to return to his side in a week.”

“Best news I’ve heard since I woke up still alive.” He admitted.

“And shave or shower, because you’re taking this self-pity too far.”

That got her one of the famous Castile grins, “If you promise I’ll be back to work within the week.”

“I’ll give you a strong maybe.” She smiled at his impatience.

“Close enough.” He hopped off the stool and went to his room.

When he returned a half an hour later showered and shaved, he actually was smiling.

“feel better?”

“I do actually.” He saw her pick up her purse, “Are you leaving?” He said with obvious disappointment.

“I need to cover a shift for a friend this evening, but I’ll be back around midnight—”

“Come on Jordan.” Mario begged, “Nick doesn’t even have a television, I have nothing to do.”

She laughed, “I’ll speak to him about the television. You stay here and out of trouble. It’s a short shift. I’ll be back before your brother.”

Mario assumed the same position at the counter as she first found him in. Her laughter floated to him as she shut the door behind her.

But she wasn’t.

An hour later Nick got a phone call.

“Mr. Castile?” stated a soft female voice.

Nick recognized it but couldn’t place it.. “Yes?”

“Um...it’s Lana Brown...from Staten Hospital.”

“I remember.”

“I got your number from Jor...Doctor Calloway’s day planner in her locker. I feel silly calling you, but she hasn’t shown up for work today and it’s not like her, I was...”

“...What did you say?”

She paused at the surprise in his voice, “I’m sorry, I thought maybe she was with you....oh no....now I’m really worried. There was this guy in the other day asking for her. I thought he was just a former patient of hers, but he frightened me.”

“what did you tell him?”

“I...nothing Mr. Castile, then he got mad and there was this scary look in his eyes. He wanted to know when she would be back....I lied, and told him next weeks schedule wasn’t up yet and she had the rest of the week off, which she didn’t.” She was almost weeping.

“Lana...I need you to call her sister Sara, she works at the twenty first precinct and tell her what you’ve told me.”

“Okay.” She said, “Now I’m worried.”

“Me too.” He hung up

A half an hour later, Nick had bypassed Jordan’s alarm and entered her brownstone. Dread coursed through him as he saw the signs of a struggle. An overturned lamp, a smashed photograph, and a speckled trail of blood spatter on the wall. This was because of him, he was sure of it, but who would have the balls? He studied the blood for a moment, it wasn’t enough to conclude that she was seriously bleeding. It looked like someone sneezed with a bloody nose. He shoved the dark thoughts down deep. He had to remain focused. He flipped open his phone and dialed a familiar number.

“Nick?” Came the familiar male voice on the other end.

“Johnson, have you sanctioned anything in New York, or know of anything sanctioned here.”

“No.”

“Jordan Calloway is missing.”

“Your girl?”

“Yes.”

“Nick, I’m not that stupid.” He paused for a moment, “I’ll check around and phone you back, but I know nothing.”

“Alright.” Nick hung up. He took one last look around before he reactivated the alarm and left Jordan’s house. It was only a matter of time before Sara showed up with half the police force.

He was driving to his brother’s house on Commerce street when his phone rang.

“Nick.”

“Johnson.”

“It’s not us, or anyone affiliated with us. Our Intel has nothing on your overseas enemies either.”

“Okay. Thanks for checking.”

“Chances are this is local”

“Yeah, I’m getting that.”

When Jordan awoke she was blindfolded with her hands and legs tied together, she was disorientated. She lay on a cold damp floor, obviously cement. Her jaw and nose throbbed from the punches she’d received at her house. Slowly she became aware of her surroundings and was trying desperately to maintain her sanity. She’d never seen the man before when she opened the door, he just hit her. She fell down knocking a photograph off the wall and hearing it smash. She was able to roll over onto her knees and crawl into the living room dazed as he followed her in the house. She screamed as he grabbed her legs and spun her over on her back. Her arm swatted the floor

lamp and knocked it over. That's when he punched her again and blackness came. She wasn't sure how long she was out, but as she tried to peek under the blindfold it was obvious that wherever she was it was a dark windowless room. The only thing she could hear at that moment was her panicked breathing as she struggled against the knots around her wrists and ankles. At that time she was thankful she wasn't gagged, because she felt like she would vomit. She stilled her struggles to squelch the nausea and try and get her breathing under control. *Who was that man and where the hell was she?* Tears started to well up in her eyes, but the blindfold soaked them up so she swallowed hard and tried to suppress them holding on to the hope that Nick would find her.

Just then she heard grating of metal and the sound of rusty hinges creaking. The sound was deafening. She heard a click and through the blindfold she noticed a dim light was turned on.

"Look who's awake." Said a male voice.

"You hit her hard, she's been out for hours."

"Tough luck." Said the first man.

She felt two sets of hands suddenly grab her arms and legs, she fought against them.

"Bit of a wildcat." Chuckled the second man.

"Put her in the chair."

They sat her none too gently in it crushing her wrists behind her back making her gasp.

The first man laughed, "Deal with it missy."

She then heard a grating sound of another chair being pulled up in front of her.

"Take off her blindfold." Said the first man.

She blinked several times after the cloth was removed, just to see the face of her kidnapper. He had a thick head with ruddy cheeks and a thinning hairline. He attempted to comb his hair over on the bald spot of his head which just made it look

worse. Although he wasn't terribly overweight she could see by the bulge in his leather coat that he had a pot belly. The most horrific thing she saw was that he had no fingers.

"Oh yeah," he said, "You can thank your boyfriend for that."

"W-w-what did you say?"

"You heard me!" he spat.

She flinched at his words

Then he grinned, "Sorry, as you can see I have some unresolved anger over the issue."

She didn't say anything, she just stared at him terrified and a tear leaked from the corner of her eye.

"Aww, sorry baby, I didn't mean to make you cry." He reached out and wiped it off her cheek with his knuckles, and she flinched from his touch. Causing him to fume again, "I'm sorry I repulse you, but like I said you can thank Nick for these!" He held up both hands showing what was left of his ten digits. "But I have to hand it to him, you are gorgeous."

"What do you want?" she was barely able to get the words out.

"Besides Nick Castile's head on a platter?" He watched her face take on a horrified expression, as he reached over and caressed her thigh, "I'm sure I can think of a few things."

"Please don't..." She began crying again.

He laughed, "Well, you are quite frightened aren't you?" He stood up, "Good!" He began pacing, "He took everything from me besides my fingers. Because of him, my family took my home and emptied my bank accounts to pay him back." He stopped in front of her, "As if taking my damn fingers wasn't enough!"

"I don't understand." Tears slipped down her cheeks. She could tell that this guy was on the verge of losing his mind.

He bent down to come face to face with her, "Your

boyfriend took everything from me, my fingers, my money, and the respect that I earned from the Gaetani family.” His stubs for fingers rubbed up the outside of her thigh and she squealed while struggling to get away from him.

The man who stood behind her which she completely forgot about held her down by pressing his hands down on her shoulders.

“I wonder how Nick would feel if I took you as payment?” He knotted his stubby hand in her hair and pulled her head back making her gasp in pain. “What do you think gorgeous?”

Her breath quickened as she felt panic rising in her chest. Suddenly it dawned on her, that he liked that. He liked to frighten her. Then something within her caused her to get angry, “Do what you want, but I hope he does find you.” She said steadily trying to keep her voice from shaking, “because then I can watch him kill you.”

He suddenly released her. His expression was confused for a moment before he masked it then he grew angry but he didn’t touch her again.

“And if you hurt me anymore, he will take his time. If he took your fingers for stealing from him, what do you think he’ll do if you rape me?” She said through clenched teeth. Although she clamping them together to keep them from shaking it was effective, because she saw something akin to fear flash in his eyes.

“The little woman is a wildcat.” Said the man holding her down.

“shut up Eddie.” He looked over her head at him.

In that instant everything was a blur to Jordan. The door flew open against the stone wall with a clamour and the man in front of her dropped to the floor screaming as the one behind her released his grip followed by a sickening thud of body on

concrete. She turned her tear stained face toward the door and saw Nick standing there with a gun in his hand and sheer rage on his face. Then she saw the man on the floor in front of her. Rolling around on the floor with his hands on his leg screaming. Blood was oozing out between his fingers. She screamed at the sight and about six others rushed in the room picking up the injured man.

Nick holstered his gun and kneeled in front of her, "Don't look at him baby, look at me."

She fell silent and turned her wide terrified gaze on him. She could feel his fingers working the ropes at her wrists.

"Are you alright?"

She sobbed and shook her head.

"Shhh..." He said, "Just keep looking at me." When he finished untying her she jumped forward into his arms. He picked her up and carried her from the room. A bloody meat locker is where that bastard had her. He should have tortured him first but his men would keep him alive until he came back to finish him.

Mario was waiting outside with the Hummer. He quickly opened the back door and Nick got in while still holding Jordan. She sobbed into his shoulder. He spoke quietly to her, trying to soothe her.

Mario got in the driver's seat and started to pull away.

"Did he hurt you?" Nick swallowed, "I mean did he *touch* you Jordan?"

She shook her head and he held her tighter, "Thank God." He kissed her forehead. "I am never letting you out of my sight again."

She nodded against him still crying.

"shhhh...darling, you are safe now." He felt her shudder against him. "It's over now, no one will ever hurt you again."

She had quit crying and it took a moment for Nick to

realize that she had passed out. He directed his attention to Mario, "take us to my brother's house on Commerce...well go in the back so no one will see us."

"Yes boss." Mario agreed.

Nick had found her by having men follow Lonnie. In turn Lonnie followed the men who took her. Seido had knocked the little man over the skull and knocked him out and tossed him in the trunk of his car. Nick would deal with him later. As for Emilio, he made a promise to Mario to keep him alive for him to deal with. First they had to get permission from the Gaetani family.

Jordan awoke some time later with a start and a silent scream lodged in her throat. Then she felt the pain of her broken nose and bruised cheek. Nick was beside her in an instant. She was unaware of where she was until she heard his voice.

"It alright Jordan, you are safe now."

She directed her attention to him and he pulled her into his embrace. She clung to him.

"I'm sorry Jordan. I never wished for this to happen." He lowered his face on top of her head, "I wish I could take away your pain."

She just nodded into his chest.

"I was in hell with anguish over losing you."

She raised her face to his. "I knew you would come for me."

"Nothing could keep me from you." He kissed the tears that rolled down her cheeks. "But you need to stay with me for a bit."

She was willing to do anything to not go through that again.

"I phoned your sister Jordan. I told her you were attacked and became delusional, but managed to call me when

you woke several hours later.”

“I wasn’t raped. I told you...”

“Yes I know, but tell her what you need to just to get her to back off. I’m taking care of the man who was responsible.”

Jordan didn’t want to know what Nick was going to do to the man, but she just remembered the evidence of the man’s missing fingers, “Nick...”

“Yes.”

“That man said you cut off his fingers. Is that true?” She heard him swear. “It is true isn’t it? Is that why he came after me?”

“Probably.” Was all he would say, “I told you there were risks Jordan.”

She nodded, “Why did you take his fingers?” Was that her voice soft and calm speaking in such a way? She was in shock, she decided, because the horror at the man’s accusations hadn’t quite affected her yet.

“He had done something he should have. Please don’t ask me anymore about it. He was lucky I didn’t kill him then.”

“Are you going to?”

“What?”

“Kill him?” He didn’t answer her for awhile and Jordan didn’t think he would until she heard him.

“He shouldn’t have touched you. I have told you before how I felt about others putting their hands on you.”

“Nick, that’s no reason to kill someone.” She turned her head away.

“I think it is.” He cupped her chin and made her look at him, “He wanted to hurt you.”

“Nick I want you to let him go.”

“You want?”

She raised herself up to stare at him, “I’m asking you to release him.”

“I already shot him Jordan. He may not survive that and you want me to release a man that was going to rape you and god knows what else just to spite me.”

“You don’t know that.” She defended.

“Yes I do. I know that man.” He answered assuring.

Her mouth fell open, “But that doesn’t justify...”

“Yes...it does.” He cut her short. She tried to speak again and he stopped her, “ I have told you before that I will protect what belongs to me and who I care about. Jordan I have told you this. You have made your decision to be with me even though you know what I’m capable of. Do you want others to think that I let people play with my woman that way?”

“No.” She answered honestly.

“Then stay out of it.” He said sternly. “You do not know these types of people, I do. If I release him, he’ll come after you again.”

“I can’t believe you are saying this.”

“You know what I do.”

Tears started to fall again, “Is there anything I can say to stop you.”

“What exactly do you think I’m going to do?”

“My God Nick, you kill people.”

“Jordan, I’m not just a trained assassin, I have other talents. Why do you always assume I’m eager to kill someone. You don’t know me as well as you think you do.”

“And why the hell do you think that is?” she snapped, “You won’t tell me anything about yourself. I thought I could be satisfied with what you have told me and how gentle and caring you are with me that makes me forget what you do, but I don’t think I can Nick.”

“You love me.”

Her jaw fell. Then she snapped it shut, “You also have an advantage over me there too. You know I love you, yes, its true. I

do, but what..."

"I love you too Jordan." He confessed.

She was stunned, and speechless.

"Now will you quit assuming I run around with guns blazing." He smiled, "If I wanted the man dead, I would have shot him between the eyes when I found him leaning over you and all kinds of thoughts raced through my mind." He didn't tell her that he'd killed the guy standing behind her, "I'm handing Emilio back over to his employer. It's up to him what happens to the man." And if they let Mario have him, he may die yet.

She surprised him by throwing her arms around him and speaking as if she didn't even hear his last statement, "Oh Nick, do you mean it?"

He wrapped his arms around her, "I never say something I don't mean. Of course I meant it sweetheart." He nuzzled her neck with his face.

She pulled away from him and met his gaze, "Then no more half-truths and secretiveness. I need to know everything..."

"Jordan..."

She cut off his protest, "No Nick, I think it's about time I know everything about you if we are to stay together."

He looked over her head for a moment contemplating her words before he returned his attention back to her, "Alright, but no matter what I tell you Jordan, I will never let you go. You have to know that."

"I don't want you to."

"You may change your mind after you hear what I'm about to tell you."

When he started talking, he was right, she began to have misgivings. She constantly reminded herself that she loved this man and he was capable of such affection and gentleness that most of what he was telling her was someone else's life. Deep down she knew that was a lie.

“You already know of my childhood and my stint in the military so I’m not going to retell it. However, you may not realize that I still work for our government.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes. All the time I was in Iraq it was for them.”

“So who exactly are them?”

“NSA...CIA or whoever they loan me out to.” He said mildly

“My God...” she choked, “Our own government sanctions what you do.”

“Yes.”

“But when you...” she had trouble saying the words kill, “well, with Lionel..”

“Lionel was a scumbag Jordan.”

“I know that.”

“And we’ve already been over that. Sooner or later he would have killed your sister. The man was a waste of skin.” He said vehemently remembering the pictures that Ted had shown him.

“I know that too.” She said quietly, “I just think there could have been something else we could’ve done.”

“You mean more than you already have, no, there as nothing else. It was the only possible choice your father had. I have seen the pictures of what he did to her.”

“Have there been others besides Lionel and the man in the diner since we’ve been involved?”

“I’m not answering that question”

“How many?” she asked again.

“Telling you won’t make you know more about me Jordan, it’ll only upset you. Besides that part of my work is not open for discussion.” He stated sternly.

She stared at him

He stared back at her, then sighed and relented, “Very

well, there have been four.” He didn’t include Frank’s bookie, because technically he didn’t meet her yet. He also didn’t mention the fact that he was going to kill her stalker either.

“You’ve killed six people in the two months we’ve been together!” she hollered, “How the hell could that possibly...what...oh my God!”

“Jordan calm down, they were all scumbags.”

“Scumbags do not give you the right...”

“Yeah well, I beg to differ. Now quit your hollering, you wanted to know. If you’re going to keep screaming at me when you ask a question, I won’t answer anymore. Now sit down.” He said firmly.

She hadn’t even realized that she jumped off the bed. It surprised her, because after her ordeal she honestly didn’t think she had the strength to stand. He was right though, she was freaking out every time he answered her questions. She took a deep breath and sat back down on the bed beside him. “Okay Nick...I’m sorry I got upset. I’ll try to make it through this.”

Nick swung his legs up on the bed and leaned against the headboard, “Jordan, come here.” He held his arms out to her, “You need to take a minute and calm yourself.”

She stared at him then his arms. Through everything he had told her so far, she couldn’t get passed how much she loved him and how much she loved the feel of him against her. She nodded and slowly made her way to his arms, not wanting to let him know that she was eager for his affections but wanted them just the same. He rested his chin on top of her head when she laid it against his hard chest.

“What if I want children?” She didn’t know where that came from. He had never made any sort of commitment toward her, but just the same, she had to ask the question.

“I love children.” He answered without hesitation.

“Really?”

“Just because I sound like a monster doesn’t mean I am. I love kids. I have never harmed a child or a woman in my line of work. It’s one of my stipulations and my employers know better than to ask.”

“Boy or a girl.”

“What?”

“Would you want a boy or a girl?”

He chuckled, “A girl. As long as she looked like her mother.”

She lifted her head, “You never cease to amaze me.”

He brushed his lips gently across hers, “because I want children?”

She closed her eyes against the sweet caress, “It’s the gentleness in you. I just can’t see that other side that you are describing.”

“Then we have no need to continue.” He added.

She shook her head, “No, I need to know these things. How many languages do you speak Nick?” She revisited the question she asked him on the way to Chicago.

“Seven.”

“Seven!”

“No yelling Jordan.” He calmly reminded her.

“Sorry...I meant seven?”

“yes.”

“What are they?”

“The ones you know are English, Italian and French, but I also speak Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and German.” She looked astonished at his admission.

“How do you learn all of that?”

“I don’t know. I remember things. Learning languages for me is like you remembering a patient’s treatment. I get taught something and it stays.”

“Nick, do you have any idea how difficult that is for other

people?”

He shrugged, “I suppose that’s why I get handpicked for a lot of assignments overseas.”

His nonchalant attitude over his own intelligence floored her. She knew he was intelligent, but now she began to see how much. “You know, with your brain power you could do just about anything.”

“I never learned anything else.”

“What about being a lawyer. I could see you being brutal in the courtroom.”

“And if I lose a case do I get to shoot them?” he said with humour.

“Nick!”

He tightened his hold and laughed, “I’m only kidding.” He thought for a moment, “I may like the challenge of a courtroom though, it kind of appeals to me.”

“Really?”

He shrugged again, “I’m not the one that needs to be convinced. I have an obligation to my employers.”

“You can’t just walk away?”

He sighed, “Honestly Jordan, since I’ve met you I have found myself thinking about it.” It was something he never thought he would possibly consider. Being with her made him feel like he could have a normal life, get married, and have children. “I don’t know if I could just walk away. They’ve placed a lot of time and money on my training.”

“Could you survive financially if you left?”

He cast her a sly look, “Finances aren’t an issue. I could retire tomorrow and live extravagantly.”

“Then you think they won’t let you go?”

“I know they won’t.” He stated with certainty.

She reached up and touched his face, “Nick, you are highly intelligent. I have faith that you could do this if you really

wanted to.”

He smiled at her, “Of course you do.” He kissed her forehead, “I’ll tell you what. I’ll look into it.”

“You would do that for me?” she said softly.

“I would do anything for you love. I thought you knew that by now.”

Epilogue

LONNIE WAS DRAGGED unceremoniously up several flights of stairs. He had no idea where he was going, because he was blindfolded, but his head hurt like hell. The last thing he remembered was trailing the thugs that took Jordan with full intentions of taking her back. He had already made arrangements. His aunt had left him a house in the Poconos when she died and that’s where he took the last girl. Whoever had a hold of him on either side were strong because they didn’t even slow down.

Finally he felt the ties of his feet and wrists being released so he could stand, but the men who held either side of him didn’t release their grip and his hands were still bound.

Then the blindfold came off and after his eyes adjusted to the evening light, to his utter amazement there was Jordan’s boyfriend in a dove grey Italian made suit with a triumphant grin on his face. “you!” He shot a look to the two men that held him. Then he quickly surveyed his surroundings. He was on a roof top.

“I told you not to underestimate me.” He said calmly as he approached the shorter man, “Now you’ll understand why.” He grabbed Lonnie by the collar and shoved him back against the ledge of the roof. The other two men released him.

Lonnie screamed, “What are you doing!”

Nick tilted his head slightly, “Why, I’m killing you

Lonnie.”

“No—wait! I’ll leave her alone I swear!” he said in panic. Although he trailed this man over the last month, he never suspected that he was capable of this. He just summed his arrogance up to his wealth. It had been a mistake, this man was deadly. All along he’d been focused on claiming Jordan for his own and missed the look in the man’s eyes that he possessed now.

Nick gave him an emotionless smile, “So you can kill another woman. I don’t think so.”

“How—“

“It takes one to know one. Although I don’t murder helpless women, I know a killer when I see one.”

“Oh *Jesus!*”

“Good bye Lonnie. I’ll give Jordan your best.” With a final shove, he pushed the man off the roof, turned, and walked away with the two men flanking him before the man’s body hit the cement twenty stories below.

Three days later Emilio’s body was found in the Hudson but it took another six weeks to identify him because both of his hands and feet were removed. Cause of death was exsanguination. It turned out that the Gaetani family let Mario have Emilio after all becoming tired of his disrespect.

Nick and Jordan were married in a Catholic ceremony at St Patrick’s Cathedral six months later and he’d eventually convinced his superiors that he was retiring. Lonnie was the last man he had taken care of.

It turned out, he had a lot of information on his superiors. It also got him into Harvard for a future in law. Although he really didn’t have the education, their government was capable of anything. Also he knew he was smart enough to pass the entrance exams and he did. He smirked looking over at his

sleeping wife. What a contradiction to his life. He was switching sides. The things he did for her and the things he gave up for her were all worth it. With Nick's teaching, Mario was good enough to take care of Frank and he and Jordan would look at starting a family. Frank was on his way out of syndicate crime anyway, but Nick no longer wanted Jordan exposed to it. She was that precious to him.

Looking back over the last year, he would never believe he could fall so hard for a woman, but then again Jordan wasn't ordinary. They still had a lot of things to work out, but he loved her more than his own life, and it was worth it. Although she wanted the truth from him that day he rescued her, she had since told him not to volunteer information unless he asked for it from now on. He smiled at the memory. She would ask, she was too darn smart for her own good. Keeping secrets wasn't an option in this relationship and he didn't want to lose her again.

Finally Nick shut his eyes knowing he was the happiest man on earth and drifted off to sleep.