
Chapter 1

Chloe

San Francisco

Eighteen months later

R.I.P.

George and Samantha Bourne.

Gone but never forgotten. Eternally missed.

Same date of death. A date that's etched into my mind.

The plane from Atlanta bounces along the tarmac of San Francisco International. My mind is still stuck on the image of the gray granite headstone. The wind makes the plane shudder even as we come to a stop by the gate. It was a rough ride.

I visit them every few months, year after year, putting fresh flowers in a vase, brushing off dried leaves, cursing my fucking asshats for brothers for leaving me alone with this.

When I come home, I do what I always do. I take a leaf that I saved from the grave and put it in an envelope. Then I do the same with a second leaf. I write two different addresses to correctional institutions, put on a stamp, and send them off. No sender. I love how it irks the wardens when they check the mail, but there's also a deeper meaning for my brothers who eventually receive them. It's a little hug from me to them, and a little reminder that they came from somewhere, that we had parents, and a life.

Preparing a cup of tea, I hesitate between calling Gayle to see what she's up to or starting up my computer. I have two deadlines for tomorrow, and two more for the day after. Handling the accounting for small businesses comes easy for me. I have a way with numbers. It's as if they speak to me. I see errors as if they were written in glaring red, a missing invoice calls for me to find it. It's like detective work. My friends call it boring, but I love it. I will always miss the light-hearted hours at the center, though. The kids. Working with Kerry was a blast, always funny, always kind, always compassionate. We were younger, more innocent. Those were good times.

On the other hand. Grave. Grumpy over my brothers. Tired and a long journey. Screw working. I call Gayle.

"What's up, girl?" She's panting hard.

I quickly swallow my mouthful of tea. "Heya. What's with you?"

"I've been out running."

I nearly sputter. "Running? You?"

"Gotta get in shape."

There's something in her voice that makes me narrow my eyes. "Why?"

"Just—So, are you home? Trip went all right?"

I sigh. "Yeah, meeting the family is always a hoot. Lots of food and talks." The lie comes easy as always. It's been ingrained in my being. "Wanna go out?"

“Sure. I need to shower.”

“Me too.”

We decide on a time and place and hang up.

My little two-bedroom apartment is foggy with steam when I’m done. I pick through the wardrobe and decide on a pair of antique-looking, brown leather pants and a white blouse with a lacy back. I pass on makeup and put my hair up in a messy bun. I just can’t be bothered. I’m not out to flirt. I want one glass of white wine with a friend and leave it at that.

LYING ALONE in bed that night, like every night, I feel the sting of sadness over life passing me by. Gayle has a new lover. I’m twenty-six and I have no one. I have yet to meet anyone who can fulfill my needs, my longing for heat, passion and a little dose of danger. Pulling up the dating site on my phone only enhances that feeling. I flip through one kinky ad after the other and nothing resonates with me. They all seem like little boys playing Doms. I want someone who can show me the ropes, so to speak. I have no experience, I only know that I need something more, something that can compensate for the lack of tension in my life, that can sate me. The only ones who seem to be for real are already in a relationship but are willing to take on more subs for training, and I’m not interested in that. I want someone who is for me, and me alone.

I want what everyone wants. I just want to be seen. There’s more to me than the tall, generic blonde. A lot more. But the secrets I carry will stay mine it seems, because no one has dug, no one has asked.

Luciano

They eat my food, drink my wine, and fuck my whores.

The men around the table laugh and joke and think they're in my good graces. They're wrong. Few around me are as safe as they think.

"Luci, what's your thoughts on the Crimson Corp takeover?" Eric leans half-way over Christian to catch my attention. Eric Reed. My second in command. I took him in when he was still in his late teens, some twenty years ago.

"We'll pay them what their clubs are worth," I say.

"And what is that?"

I laugh. "Not what they claim. More like thirty percent of that."

"I say we take 'em out," says Christian, joining the discussion. "They're a fucking mess. They still want to keep a share. They can go fuck themselves."

Two of my nephews attend dinner tonight. My sister Bianca's second youngest son, Matteo Russo on my left seems to be having a good time and is deeply engaged in a discussion with some girl across the table, gesturing vividly. The girl laughs and blushes. Matteo goes after anything pretty. Tonight, he'll tie her up in one of my guestrooms and probably give her the best fuck of her life. Tomorrow she'll be too sore to walk, and he'll find some other chick. We Salvatore/Russo men don't play nice.

Me, I don't know how to live any other kind of life, and I don't want to either. I'm perfect right where I am.

Christian Russo sits to my right. He barely speaks, consumes copious amounts of whisky, and has become my most ruthless man. His dark soul seems unsalvageable. Botching a mission, nearly dying, falling hard for his hit and then losing both the girl and their baby hasn't become him. I'm not surprised he scared her off, making her drop off the face of the Earth. I am as cruel as they come, but even I wouldn't want to get on his bad side

these days. He's very useful, though. I can pitch him against anyone and he pulls through, leaving no witnesses.

No witnesses. Except one, the one Eric unexpectedly chose as his woman. Anna.

For some reason Christian spared her. I even think he cares for the feisty little lady. Maybe he thinks he made up for his past mistake. Maybe he just respects Eric's wishes. They've worked closely together half their lives.

It's good. And bad. My men need to trust each other, but they also need to obey me without questioning my orders, and they've been fucking slacking in that department lately.

Next to Eric sits Ivan Sokolov. Him I can trust. He's been doing my dirtiest business for years. He barely speaks, but he listens. He's built like a house and looks like a brainless brute with his rough features and his broken nose, but there's intelligence in those eyes. Munching on a piece of steak and chugging it down with beer, he observes my men, taking stock. He'll alert me the moment something is off.

I narrow my eyes as I take in one of the men at the far end. Roberto. He's got a hooker on his lap and a hand inside her blouse, kneading her breast. He's been seen talking to the competition in a club in Las Vegas. My guess is he thought it was safe to meet up out of San Francisco, but he'll be aware before the dawn breaks that this is not the case. I've got eyes and ears everywhere. The Salvatore network is vast, and I haven't spent twenty years building it by being lenient.

"Antoine can be reasoned with," I say. "I've dealt with him before. With the gambling club on the west side."

Christian shrugs. "Yeah, but he's not the one making the ultimate decision."

I gesture to the girl who sits by my feet, a dark-skinned beauty Elena found me in the brothel. She's got a red lacy bra and matching thong. "Take off your bra." She shuffles closer, still on her knees. The tiled floor must be a bitch to sit on for a long

period of time, and I've had her sit there for forty minutes. Slowly she reaches behind her back and unclasps the thing, letting it drop next to her, keeping her deep brown eyes trained on me. I pinch one of her nipples, squeezing it between my thumb and index finger, not breaking eye contact with her. Eric clears his throat. "Go on," I say without looking up. "You think he'll budge?"

"Fuck, Boss. No, I don't think he'll budge to us. He's loyal to Andrew."

The girl's eyelids flutter as she fights the pain, fights to not flinch and pull back. She knows there'll be more hurt if she doesn't do what I tell her. They all know this.

"Good old Andy. He's been a pain in my ass ever since he came here, starting up his clubs." I glance up at Eric as I grab the girl's thick curly hair and push her toward my groin. "I'm tired of his antics."

"So let's just do a fucking takeover," growls Eric.

The girl pulls down my zipper and takes out my cock, wrapping her fingers around it as she puts her lush lips where they should have been a long time ago.

I snort. "You wanna kill off thirty men?"

"Andrew and some of his closest will do fine. I'm sure the others can be convinced."

"We won't be able to trust 'em for shit," says Christian.

"We don't need to trust them. I won't fucking employ them."

Eric throws up his hands. "Where will you find staff for five clubs?"

My cock is growing hard in the girl's skilled mouth. I clutch her hair even rougher and thrust her head toward me, burying myself to the hilt, a shudder running through me. She's fucking good. I gotta remember to thank Elena.

"That might be an issue." I have to fight to focus on the conversation because right now all I want to do is pull this girl by her hair over to my private wing of the house, tie her up and fuck

her until Tuesday. I pull out and tilt up her head. “Hey, wanna earn some extra cash? Work in a club?”

She widens her eyes. “Yes, sir,” she says breathlessly, “I would.”

I smirk and force her back to her duties for the night, then I look up at Christian and Eric. “We’ll solve it. Takeover it is.”

Ivan, who’s clearly been listening, throws one last glance at Roberto, then he puts down his beer and leans over toward our side of the table. “When are we doing this?”

I nod toward Eric. “You organize it and get back to me.”

He nods. Christian opens his mouth to speak. I interrupt him.

“Can you stay sober long enough?”

“What the fuck, man? I—”

“Language,” I snarl.

Christian glances over toward the other half of the table where a couple of men have taken an interest in our conversation, then back at me, his black eyes flashing. He oozes lethality. Just how I want him. His lips curl, then he stands.

“Sit,” I hiss.

He stares me down with a hint of a challenge in his eyes, then he sits back down. “You fucking know I’ll do my job.”

“Good,” I say with finality in my voice. “Tonight, we have work to do.” I nod to Ivan who knows what it’s about. I’m about to test just how unflinchingly loyal my guys are. They don’t know of Roberto’s affairs, only Ivan does, and in a moment he’ll relay my order to them to take out the weasel. Roberto’s been working with us for fifteen years. They know him well, they know his wife and kids, they’ve killed and partied with this guy. Now they’re gonna do him in.

I stand and pull the girl up by her nape until she’s on her feet. Tucking my cock back in my pants, I steer her toward the glass double doors. In the corner of my eye, I see Ivan stand and pull out his gun, striding over to Roberto, putting it to his head.

“Let’s walk,” he says.

The pleading begins. Matteo, Christian and Eric dart up, as does the rest of the crowd. I smirk as I push the girl before me, reveling in the sounds of chaos. My forte. Roberto is in for a world of hurt tonight and just thinking about it makes me rock hard. Ivan will inform me who hesitated and who didn’t.

Steering the girl into my bedroom, I slam the door closed and shove my hand between her legs, push her panties to the side and thrust my fingers up her cunt. She twitches from the rough intrusion and I haven’t even begun yet.

“Knees hurt?”

“No, sir, I’m good,” she gasps.

I glance down at the flattened skin over her kneecaps. Her dark hue doesn’t allow the redness to show. “Know what?” I pull out and tear her panties off her. “I hate liars. Bend over.”

Breathing erratically, she turns and obeys, presenting her mouthwatering round butt. I smack it. Hard. She stumbles forward.

“Don’t fucking move,” I growl. “Hands on the floor.” I take a step closer and smack her again, making her rock forward yet another step.

She whimpers. “I can’t keep my balance, sir.” She steadies herself, spreading her legs as she puts her palms to the floor.

Her cunt is hairless and too enticing not to explore further. I slide my fingers along her slit, back and forth, rubbing against her clit, then a little rougher in between her folds. Like a bitch in heat, she begins to rock against my hand, getting wetter by the second. I push my fingers inside her, thrusting, a thumb on her increasingly swollen nub. Then I pull out and slap her right across her pussy, making her scream and shoot forward.

I snap open my belt and pull down my zipper. “Bend over the edge of the bed.”

She darts around, her eyes huge and confused, a single tear trickling down her cheek. “Sir, I—”

“This is what I pay you to do. Get on the fucking bed. Now.”

I'm rock hard, stroking my cock in my hand. Her eyes dart between my face and my thick length, then her gaze turns distant, as if she gives up all hope. She turns slowly and walks up to the bed, spreading her legs as she falls forward clutching the comforter.

I don't like that she gives up already. I want to pull them to the edge of despair, I want them to plead and weep. But I want the first fucking part to last a little longer than this. Glancing over at the curtain that covers my rack of canes and whips, I already know how I'll pull her right back to the present.

Pulling off my belt, loop by loop, I then wrap it around my fist and whip it right over her beautiful ass. She'll plead. And when she does, I'll fuck her. Hard.

In my basement, at this very moment, someone else is pleading. This girl will leave the building, a hefty sum in her bank account, probably bleeding, definitely crying, but alive. Roberto won't be as lucky.