

The bass from the speaker in the corner of the living room reverberates throughout Kyle's tiny, cluttered apartment, and I'm surprised the neighbours haven't called the cops by now. We're not being particularly quiet, and it wouldn't be the first time the middle-aged woman across the hall has complained, even though it's barely past ten o'clock on a Friday night.

"Hey, Mac!" Elena shouts from the kitchen. "Do you want another drink?"

I look over at the slim Russian enforcer and shake my head, holding up my half-full cup. "All good! Thanks!"

She shrugs and pours more vodka into her own cup. It's her night off, and unlike the rest of Valentina Santoro's inner circle, Elena doesn't act like she's too good to hang out with those of us who do Val's grunt work. That, and the majority of Val's other lackeys tend to stay away from booze, unlike Elena, who seems to consume as much vodka as most people drink coffee.

She returns to the couch, plopping down beside me and flipping her long, blond hair over her shoulder. At first glance, Elena appears more suited for a runway, with a tall, lithe frame and a face of sharp angles and piercing blue eyes to match, than making sure Silver Springs' most prominent gang leader stays in power. But the same traits that make her seem innocent and unassuming make her one of Val's most lethal enforcers. Elena is capable of infiltrating the uppermost levels of the city's wealthy elite and taking out Val's enemies in seconds without even breaking a sweat. She's absolutely terrifying, but no one would guess by how she twirls her hair around a manicured finger and flirts unabashedly with the guy sitting next to her on the arm of the couch.

Kyle leans back against the cushions on my other side, casually draping an arm over the backrest as I take another sip from the horrendous drink Elena made me half an hour ago. I'm pretty sure it's just straight liquor, which I happily accepted after the text I got from Valentina earlier today, but I also know she needs me up early, so I've been taking my time with it.

Kyle breaks away from the conversation he's having and flashes me a charismatic grin. He's wearing dark jeans with an open button-down shirt over a graphic tee tonight, and his dark brown hair is swept to one side. Normally, his easy, dimpled smile and playful attitude are enough to pull me out of a sour mood, but not when I know Valentina needs me to oversee a transaction. In another life, I might actually be attracted to him, but I need to stay focused on staying under the radar and surviving long enough to make my way out of here. His whole flirty and carefree thing would only be a distraction that I can't afford.

"Hey gorgeous," he says casually, leaning into my space so he doesn't have to shout over the music. "Got any big plans this weekend?"

The dimples and charm make it impossible not to smile back at him, but it doesn't quite reach my eyes. "Nothing too wild," I reply with a small shrug. "Just the usual routine."

He laughs. "I think most people would find our usual routine a little wild."