

*Excerpt from Hate Like Honey (Corsican Crime Lord, Book 2)*

*Angelo*

Sweeping Sabella into my arms, I hurry with her to the shelter of the cave. The engine of the boat sounds when I reach the rock enclosure, but I don't bother to look back. I sit, pulling her onto my lap.

"Get away from me," she says, trying to break out of the cage of my arms.

I rub her biceps through my jacket. "You need to get warm."

"What I need is for you to stop touching me," she screams, finally managing to scurry off my lap.

She lands on all fours, my jacket slipping off her shoulders. I reach for her ankle, but she claws her way like a crab through the sand to the other side of the cave and pushes her back against the wall. There, she sits shivering, watching me with a terrified expression.

"I'm not going to hurt you." I raise my hands in a placating gesture. "I already told you that."

She spits the word at me. "But?"

I make to move. "But you need to get warm."

She flattens herself against the rock. "Stay away from me."

"Sabella." Frustration rides on my words. "I want to help."

"Help?" She utters an ugly laugh. "Like you helped my dad?"

A sob racks her shoulders.

Using my most reasonable voice, I say, "You know why it had to be done." I don't want to mention my mother or my sister. I don't want those memories to cloud my judgment with anger. Not now. Not now that she needs me.

Her accusation bounces off the roof of the cave. "I can't even go to the police. You must be fucking ecstatic about that."

"I'm not ecstatic about anything."

I try to advance again, but she shakes her head so vehemently that wet tendrils of her hair stick to her cheeks.

My patience is running out. I make myself stern. "Be reasonable, Sabella."

“Reasonable?” She laughs again. “Why? Because you’re so reasonable, you heartless, deceitful, murdering son of a bitch?”

I grit my teeth at the insults, but I let them slide. After all, I earned every name she called me. “You’ll catch pneumonia.”

Her upper lip curls. “Like you care.”

“You know I do.”

Her tone is biting. “Is that why you came to the hospital?” Then sarcastic as her volume rises again. “Because you cared? No, wait. It was only to shave me. You’re a sick pervert.”

“I wanted to see my mark.” As if the thought alone is a magnet, my gaze is drawn to her lower body. “It healed nicely. Very pretty.” And like the pervert she accused me of being, that thought makes me hard.

She picks up a handful of sand and throws it at my face. “Go fuck yourself.”

My reflexes are good. I duck in time. “We’ve been through that, haven’t we?”

“Are you getting off on this?” she asks, sparks shooting from her eyes. “Is that why you’re tormenting me?”

“Tormenting you has never entered the equation.” I add with warning, “Not yet, but if you keep this up, it may.”

“Just—” She spears her fingers through her hair and cups her head. “Just stay away.”

“I can never stay away from you.”

She drops her hands and curls her fingers like claws into the sand. “What the hell else do you want from me? You’ve taken all my firsts. Everything. What else can you possibly want?”

The answer is simple. “You.”

“Why?” she cries out. “What have I ever done to you?”

“Wanting you isn’t a punishment, Sabella. We were always meant to be together.”

Hatred darkens her eyes. “Here’s a newsflash. We’re enemies. I may not be able to give the police the names of my father’s murderers because I just found out that he was a murderer too, but we will never be together.” She emphasizes the last part, using the rock for support to straighten as she throws those words at my feet.

Now isn’t the time to convince her of anything. It’s an even worse time to inform her of her fate. What worries me the most, is, “Did you go that deep into the sea on purpose?” The question constricts my throat and twists my mind. “Did you plan on coming back?”

Her eyes flare. Her chuckle is mocking. “Do you think I’ll drown myself over the likes of you?”

I watch her narrowly, noticing how cold she is, inside and out, how full of bitterness and hatred. “What would’ve happened if Roch weren’t there?”

She shrugs, mocking me. “Who knows?”

I don’t like it. I don’t like her gambling attitude toward life. “Why did you do it? Why did you go so far?” I add in a quieter tone, “It wasn’t the first time.”

She clenches her hands at her sides. “I’m not a fucking quitter.”

“No?” I tilt my head. “Then explain it to me.”

“I don’t owe you any explanations,” she bites out.

That’s it. I’ve had it. I lunge, grabbing her arm before she can escape. “Don’t forget, *cara*, your life belongs to me. I have every right to demand an explanation.”

Angry tears simmer in her eyes. “I regret the day I laid eyes on you.”

“You don’t have to,” I say, rubbing my thumb in a soothing gesture over the soft skin of her wrist. “There was a time you liked me. With a little effort, we can go back to that.”

“I never liked you,” she utters with a sneer. “How could I? I didn’t even know you. The person you pretended to be wasn’t real.”

“One day, you’ll understand.” Now isn’t the moment to come clean about her father’s broken promise.

“Oh, I understand.” She yanks on my hold. “Perfectly.”

“I can be that man for you again.” I drag her closer, making our bodies collide. “All you have to do is ask me.”

Her brown eyes narrow, and her lips thin. Contempt shows in every line of her features. “Hell will freeze over before I ask you for anything.” She lifts her chin, holding my gaze with false bravado as she commands in a calm, controlled voice, “Now let me go.”

I don’t miss the effort it takes her to force that control or to pretend not to be scared. Her whole body is shaking with the effort. Uncertainty flickers behind the anger shimmering in her eyes. I take notice of other things too, of how her body fits against mine and how hard her nipples are from the cold.

Pushing her backward, I follow her down and catch her body to break her fall before she hits the sand. I'm on top of her in a wink, spreading out over the length of her, and nothing has ever felt so right. Finally, I can warm her. What I really want to do is possess her.

She fights me, slamming her fists into my ribs and clamping her teeth onto my shoulder. I don't stop her. I let her use me as the punching bag she needs to get this poison out of her system. I'm not restraining her. If she wants to, she can flip us over and punch me in the face, but she doesn't. Not that she's holding back. No, she tries to inflict damage to the best of her ability.

I let her carry on until she tires. When she sags onto the sand with a defeated sob, I catch her wrists and pin them above her head. The look in her eyes changes. It turns from uncontrolled fury to uncontrolled carnality. I can't tear my gaze away from the way she watches me like a female praying mantis about to mate a male before making a meal out of him.

What passes between us is simple physics. Energy can't be destroyed. It can only be transformed. All that anger fueling her now doesn't vanish. It simply changes into a different sentiment. I can take away her fury as little as I can change the law of energy. I can, however, offer her an escape, if only for a short while. She was my first, and she'll be my last. What we are isn't pretty, but we're meant to be together.