

Jonathan and Emma

By Kate Simon

Jonathan Gallo closed the file on his last case. It had been a successful conclusion for the homeless veteran who'd been on trial. George Percy had shoplifted a bag of dry dog food from a convenience store. Jonathan convinced the owner not to press charges and he'd found John a small apartment that accepted dogs. He'd also found a veterinarian who would get the dog's shots for free. Jonathan had gotten George into a program that would help him with his PTSD and hopefully into a work program. He'd elicited a promise from George to stick with it for his dog, Buddy's sake. Jonathan and his assistant, Carolyn would keep an eye on him.

He walked out to Carolyn's office and handed her the file. "Let's keep an eye on George for at least six months, until he's back on his feet."

"Will do, boss." She took the file and set it on her pile of folders. "Should I put your name in the 'keep an eye on' file?"

"I'm fine. You worry too much."

"No I don't and no you aren't. You haven't been the same since you got back from Italy. Are you going to tell me what happened or do I have to call your mother?"

"You wouldn't."

"Obviously we've never met," she smiled as she extended her hand. "Carolyn Armstrong. Retired Army staff sergeant and full fledged pain in the ass. Now tell me what happened."

Jonathan smiled and sat down on the edge of her desk. There was no point in evading her. She was almost as relentless as his mother. "Well, I've already told you that my parents and I had a great time. We found at least two dozen direct relatives and a lot more spouses and friends." He paused and smiled. "It was a trip I'll always remember."

"What's her name?"

"What?"

"Oh please. Like you can hide anything from me. You look like a love sick puppy."

He smiled and shook his head. Of course he should know better. "Emma Moretti."

“Have you spoken with her since you’ve been back?”

“We’ve emailed.”

“Pfft,” she made a derisive wave of her hand. “Email. How romantic is an email? I assume you have her number.”

“It’s a nine hour time difference. That’s why the emails.”

“So email her now and ask when you can call her, or better yet, FaceTime.”

“You’re not going to let me get away without doing it, are you?”

“Not a chance. Now go.”

Jonathan smiled as he closed his office door. It was just after one p.m. in LA which made it about ten p.m. in Genoa. He opened up the chat function of his email and started typing.

“Hello, Emma. Are you on?” His heart sped up as he waited for a reply. He smiled when he heard a beep.

“Hello Jonathan. Aren’t you at work?”

“I’m at my office. The upside to being my own boss is I can talk to a beautiful woman as long as I wish.”

“Hah! I’ve had a long day at work and I’m a mess. Hardly beautiful.”

“I bet you look as beautiful as you did that day in the church square. Can you pull up FaceTime?”

“Oh no, Jonathan. I really am a mess. I’ve no makeup and I’m in my pajamas. I’m about to go to bed.”

“I’m ringing you. Please answer, Emma.” The FaceTime app rang her computer several times. Finally a screen popped open as there she was. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a messy ponytail, she wore no makeup and she was wearing a pink pajama set.

“See, I told you,” she smiled.

“My God, you’re beautiful,” he whispered.

“You must have terrible reception in Los Angeles.”

“No I don’t,” he smiled. “I see you very clearly.”

“Oh, Jonathan,” she whispered.

“I miss you, Emma.”

“It’s only been a few weeks.”

“It’s been eight weeks. I want you to come to LA.”

“Jonathan, we’ve talked about this.”

“Two weeks. The EU gives you four weeks. Please, Emma.”

“How do you know about our vacations?”

“I have Google. Please Emma. I miss you.”

“Jonathan...”

“Are you concerned about sleeping arrangements?”

“We barely know each other.”

“You can stay with my parents. They live about a half mile from my house.”

“They might not like a stranger in their home. It could get awkward, crowded.”

“Sweetheart, my parents could host the entire Asaro and Russo families.”

“Excuse me? My English is not that good.”

“Your English is perfect. It means my parents have a very big home. Or, you could stay at my house alone and I’ll stay with my parents. What ever makes you comfortable.”

“Maybe a hotel would be better?”

“Our homes are much nicer than hotels. Does this mean you’ll come?”

“I miss you too, Jonathan. Yes. I’ll come.”

“Woo hoo!” he jumped up from his desk and clapped his hands. “When? Soon!”

Emma laughed. “It will take some time to arrange.”

“You’ll call as soon as it’s arranged?”

“Of course.”

He sat back down and smiled. “Emma, I’m so glad you said yes. All I want is to give us a chance.”

“I think we need to do that, so we can see what this is between us. I should go now. I’ll need to work hard so my boss will let me go for two weeks.”

“It will be worth it.”

Emma touched the screen with her fingertips. Jonathan returned the gesture. “Good night, tesoro.”

“Good night, sweetheart.” Jonathan sat back in his chair and grinned. He heard a knock at door. “Come in, Carolyn.” She stood in the doorway with a big smile.

“I assume from the ‘Woo hoo’ everything went well.”

He grinned and put up one finger. “You’re allowed one “I told you so.”

Jonathan pulled into his parents driveway and punched in the gate code. He lived only half a mile up the beach but he didn't have nearly the security his parents did. The security wasn't because of their expensive ocean front home. It wasn't because of their status as Homeland security agents. It was because of their art collection, started by his mother's family, it had last been appraised at over one hundred million dollars.

"Mom, Dad, I'm here." Kate came out of the kitchen.

"Hey sweetheart. Perfect timing. Lunch is ready."

"Can I talk to you first? Where's Dad?"

"He's doing laps."

Jonathan walked out of the kitchen and on to the deck. "Hey, Dad."

"Hey. Lunchtime already? I'll be right there." Cabe walked up the steps of the pool. Jonathan admired the way his father kept in shape. He may have been past sixty but he was in better shape than most of the men on his basketball team who were half his age.

"Can I talk to you and Mom?"

"Sure, son. Is there a problem?"

"No, but I need to talk to you both."

"Okay, let me dry off and I'll be right there. "

Jonathan went back inside, sat down at the kitchen table and set his laptop on the counter.

"You know the rules. No work at mealtime," said Kate.

Cabe joined them in the kitchen, sufficiently dried and wearing a Marine Corp t shirt. "You know better than to break your mother's rules," he smiled.

"This isn't work, I swear. First, I need to talk to you about something. Remember, Emma Moretti?"

"Of course I remember. She was lovely," said Kate.

He tried not to smile too broadly. "She's agreed to come for a visit."

"That's great, son," said Cabe.

"The thing is her parents are a bit worried about her traveling all the way to California to visit a man she barely knows."

Cabe smiled. "She knows who you are, otherwise she wouldn't be coming here."

"Her parents are still concerned, and honestly, so is Emma. We didn't have that much time together in Italy. She talked about staying at a hotel."

"God no. You'll spend all your time in traffic."

"Exactly. Ahh...I hope you won't be mad but when I invited her I said she could stay at my house and I would stay here, or...."

"Or what?" asked his mother.

"Or she could stay here. I thought she'd be more comfortable here because there's more room. Also you're both fluent in Italian, I'm not nearly that good."

"You need more practice. You promised Zia Angelica," said Cabe in fluent Italian.

"I know. Emma says Carlo keeps asking how my lessons are going because Zia keeps asking. But I think you just made my point." He opened the laptop. "I'd like to call Emma so her parents can meet you."

"And so you can show her our home," said Kate.

He blushed, knowing he'd been found out. "Yeah. That too."

Cabe smiled and put a hand on his shoulder. "I take it she's expecting your call."

Jonathan nodded. "I told her that I wanted her parents to meet you. I didn't mention anything about the house."

"Well, go on," said his mom.

He smiled and hit the button. After two rings Emma's face appeared on the screen. "Hello Emma."

“Buona notte, Jonathan.”

“My parents are here.” He turned the computer so she could see them at the table.

“Buona notte, Mr. and Mrs. Gallo. It’s good to see you.”

“It’s lovely to see you again, Emma,” Kate said in her perfect Italian. Jonathan cringed. He really did need to practice more. “I understand you’re coming to visit. Cabe and I are looking forward to seeing you again.”

“As am I.”

“Jonathan mentioned your parents are a little nervous about your coming here,” said Kate. “Perhaps they might feel better if they met us?”

“That would be very nice.” She picked up her laptop and carried into a living room. “Mama, Papa, Jonathan’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Gallo, would like to say hello.” They looked up at the screen and nodded.

“Buona notte,” said Mr. Moretti. Mrs. Moretti hung back. She would be the tough sell.

“It’s very nice to meet you,” said Cabe in fluent Italian. “We enjoyed meeting Emma when we were in Genoa.”

“Your Italian is good, for an American,” he said.

Cabe brushed off what was meant to be an insult. “My grandfather, Alfonso Asaro, was born in Genoa as was my grandmother, Sarafina Russo. They raised my mother speaking Italian. We both grew up in an Italian neighborhood in New York, Bensonhurst.”

“We know the Asaros and the Russos. They are good people.”

“Thank you. I think so too.”

Mrs. Moretti leaned into the screen. “You’re wife, she doesn’t look Italian.”

Kate smiled and answered in Italian. “I’m of Irish descent but I learned so I could understand what my husband was saying.” She looked at Cabe and smiled. “I don’t like being in the dark.”

Mrs. Moretti's eyes narrowed and then she laughed. "Oh, I like you, Mrs. Gallo."

"Please, I'm Kate and my husband is Cabe."

"I'm Anna and my husband is Stefano."

"Anna, let's talk mother to mother. I can understand why you'd be hesitant about your daughter coming over here and spending time with people you don't know. I can assure you your daughter will be safe as a guest in our home. My husband and I are Homeland Security agents." She looked over at her son. "Get our badges. They're on sideboard." Jonathan handed the badges to his parents and smiled. They flipped open the badges and held them up to the screen.

"You're police?"

"Federal agents. I mostly work with computers." She stood up and signaled to Jonathan to follow her with the laptop. "Let me show you our home." Cabe and Jonathan followed her into the living room. "This has been my family home since I was a child."

They spotted Stefano looking closely at the screen. "Is that a Monet?"

Kate smiled. "Yes, it is. My mother was a collector." She had Jonathan point the screen at a far wall. "These are my favorite artists." She pointed at a portrait Cabe had done of her. "This was done by my husband." Then she pointed to the portrait Jonathan had done of the two of them on the chaise during those first tumultuous days. "This was done by Jonathan."

"They are gifted," said Stefano.

"I couldn't agree more." She smiled at her men. "I know Emma was saying something about staying in a hotel."

"Yes, it's more appropriate," said Anna.

"Anna, Stefano, have you heard about the traffic in Los Angeles?"

"They say it's bad."

“Take bad and multiply that by ten. Even if she stayed in the closest hotel, she’d spend a lot of her vacation in traffic. My home would be very comfortable for her and, as you can tell, my husband and I are fluent. She’d be happy here.”

“I don’t want to impose, Mrs. Gallo,” said Emma.

Cabe smiled. “Emma, we have seven bedrooms. You won’t be imposing. We’d love to have you here. Stefano, you’re daughter will be safe with us.” He smiled at his son. “We also have a great view.” Jonathan angled the camera toward the ocean view. He made sure to get a good view of the pool.

“Mother of God, how much do they pay police?” asked Stefano.

“I can explain that,” said Kate. “My father founded a computer company, Rimark.”

“Oh my,” said Anna. “I know that name.”

“Anna, you won’t have to worry about Emma. We will take very good care of her,” said Cabe.

“Well, you seem to be good people,” said Stefano. “And you’re Italian.”

“Excellent! Let us know about Emma’s arrival time.” Cabe turned and put his hand on Jonathan’s shoulder. “Go talk to your girl.”

Jonathan took the laptop out to the deck and sat down. “You see. Your parents approved. You can stay here, if that’s okay.”

Emma smiled. “Yes, Jonathan. That’s okay.”

“Yes! When?”

“I will call you soon with the details.”

“I can’t wait to see you, Emma.”

“I can’t wait to see you too. Goodnight, Jonathan.”

“Buonanotte, tesoro.”

Emma smiled. “Your accent still needs work.”

Jonathan roared with laughter.

Cabe and Kate went into the kitchen and started to serve lunch. "Well, that was interesting," said Cabe.

"It was. She's the one isn't she?" asked Kate.

"I think so."

"Oh boy."

"Katie girl, take it easy. Don't plan the wedding yet."

"Don't worry, boyo. I'll take it easy."

"No, don't," said Jonathan.

Cabe and Kate turned around and saw their son in the doorway. "I want every stop you can think of pulled out. I want to convince her to stay permanently."

"What are you thinking of, son?" asked Cabe.

"Emma is an independent woman. I want to show her the opportunities for her in Los Angeles. I was thinking about arranging a meeting between Emma and Michaela Turner. Apparently Mike is a well known in the world of jewelry design."

"Maybe a party at the Nashes?" said Kate. "Have Marina invite her famous sister in law."

"Yeah, that'd be great!"

"And meeting Marina Sokolov, one of the world's most famous movie stars wouldn't hurt."

Jonathan put his hands up in surrender and smiled. "Whatever works."

Jonathan stood at the entrance to the international concourse with a rose and the biggest bundle of nerves he'd ever had. He would have just two weeks to convince Emma to stay. He couldn't explain why he knew Emma was the one, not to his parents, not even to himself. Then he saw her coming up the walkway. The sunshine highlighted her blonde hair. She got closer and he could see the sparkle in her green eyes. She stood in front of him and smiled.

"Benvenuto in America." He handed her the rose and gave her a light kiss.

"Thank you," she smiled and returned the kiss. He took her carry on from her and they started walk toward baggage claim. "You've been practicing," she smiled.

"I have my parents speaking to me only in Italian and I reply in Italian. I still wouldn't past muster with Zia Angelica but I'm trying."

"You're doing well."

"Thank you, sweetheart." They picked up her luggage and headed to the front door. He pulled out of his phone and hit a speed dial. "We're at the door."

"Who are you calling?"

"My parents. They'll drive us home." Their large black SUV with government plates pulled up and parked. His parents got out of the van and each gave Emma a hug.

"It's so good to see you again," said Kate.

"It's wonderful to see you both. Thank you for having me in your home."

"We are happy to have you," said Cabe. "Son, get her luggage in the back and we'll get going." Cabe knew the locals wouldn't hassle a car with government plates but he didn't like taking advantage.

Emma tried to make pleasant conversation with Jonathan and his parents but she couldn't help looking out the window. The palm trees, the people and the traffic, it was overwhelming. "My God, there are so many people!"

"It can take some getting used to," said Jonathan. "My mother was born here but my father is from New York and I was from suburban Washington, D.C. Los Angeles is nothing like anything we'd experienced."

It took about an thirty minutes to reach what Emma thought was a long quiet strip of an ocean road until they pulled up to a gate. Jonathan's father punch a code on a keypad and a wrought iron gate opened. They went down a long driveway and a magnificent home rose in front of her. "Oh my God," she whispered.

Jonathan leaned in and whispered, "That was my reaction the first time I saw it."

"This is a palace," she said quietly.

"Once you get past the appearance of the place you'll see it's a warm home. My parents make it that way."

She smiled and took his hand. "You love them very much."

He looked toward his parents in the front seat. "More than I could ever say."

Emma knew some of Jonathan's history. His birth mother had never told his father about him. When he'd been kidnapped by a drug lord his mother was about to prosecute she went to Cabe for help. Cabe and his wife had used their resources as government agents to find and rescue him. Only then did Jonathan discover Cabe was his father. Emma wasn't real clear on what happened next but apparently his birth mother tried to take revenge on Cabe and Jonathan for their close relationship. Cabe and Jonathan nearly died and his birth mother was in prison.

Jonathan told her that Kate was the mother he'd never had. He talked about his first ever birthday party and his mother's homemade cakes. Most of all he talked about the unconditional love his parents had shown him since he'd met them. He never mentioned all the money his mother must have. When she met his parents in Genoa they

seemed like her parents, just American. All of this splendor would take some getting used to.

They walked into the home and the first thing Emma saw were the floor to ceiling windows the led to a deck with a large pool. Past that was a spectacular view of the ocean. “My God,” she said and then blushed. “I’m sorry. I’m not used to this. I saw it on the computer but this is...I don’t have words for this.”

“My words were usually ‘Holy Crap’ said Jonathan. He put his arm around her. “I understand, it’s difficult to take it all in at once.”

She turned and rested her head on his chest. “Thank you for understanding. This make take me some time.” She glanced up and gasped. “Is that a Renoir?”

“Mom, is lunch ready?” he asked as he pulled her toward the kitchen.

“Oh my God, it is, isn’t it?”

“Mom?!”

“Yes, come sit. After that long flight I thought a lighter meal would be better” Kate set out a chicken salad dish for each of them. “How was your flight, dear? It’s such a long one.”

“It was lovely considering you sent flew me first class.”

Cabe smiled. “Jonathan likes to spoil those he cares about. He bought all of us first class tickets for our trip to Genoa.”

“As much as you barked, Dad, you have to admit, being able to sleep stretched out is much better than trying to sleep sitting up.”

“Wait, you paid for the ticket?” asked Emma. “I thought your parents...”

“Jonathan! You never told her?! What did you talk about in Genoa?” asked Kate.

“We were too busy talking about Italy and art and our work.”

“Jonathan! What is going on?” Emma demanded.

“My birth mother’s family came from money. They didn’t like her so they left everything to me.”

“So you’re...rich?”

Jonathan shrugged and smiled. “Not nearly as much as my parents.”

“Son, this is not a contest. You should know better,” said Cabe.

“Sorry, Dad.”

Emma looked at the Gallos, back and forth between Jonathan and his parents. Her head was swimming. They seemed so normal, like her family, but they weren’t. “Excuse me.” She set her napkin down and went into the living room. She looked around and saw art that in anyone else’s home would have been prints. Emma had spent enough time in museums to know what she was looking at was real. She felt Jonathan’s hands on her shoulders.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. I didn’t mean to hide anything from you it’s just not the first thing I think about.” He motioned to the couch. “Please?” She sat down and gasped.

“Oh my God, that’s a Monet.”

“Emma, please, listen to me. My mother’s mother was an art collector. Most of the art are pieces she collected fifty years ago. She had excellent taste.”

She pointed to the portrait he’d done of his parents. “I saw that one on the last FaceTime. Your Mama said she preferred your work and your father’s.” She pointed to another painting. “This is his work, yes?” Jonathan smiled and nodded. “You are both very gifted. Both of your works could hang in any museum.”

“My father had a show at the Pennington. It’s a very well regarded gallery in Los Angeles. He raised a lot of money for my sister Amanda’s pediatric center.”

“You never said you had a sister.”

“I never knew her. She died when she was six from cancer.”

Emma’s hand flew to her lips. “Oh my. Your poor father.”

“He does great work in her name but sometimes I can tell when he’s thinking about her. He tries not to let me see him cry.”

“Jonathan my head is swimming. There is so much I don’t know about you and your family.”

“That’s what this time is for. Whatever questions you have I’ll be happy to answer. I promise no more surprises.”

Emma smiled and took his hand. “Good. We should get back to lunch...”

“Well, there is one thing I didn’t mention.” She dropped his hand. “You know how I mentioned I wanted you to bring some photos and sketches of your work so I could see them?”

“Yes,” she said warily.

“I do want to see them. So do my parents. In fact their very excited to...”

“You’re stalling.”

“There’s a party this weekend and Michaela Turner will be there. She wants to see your work too.”

“What!? You’re having a party and you’ve invited one of the world’s best designer’s to meet me?”

“Ah...that’s not all of it.”

“Speak now before I get back on that plane.”

“Her sister in law is having the party. She’s my mother’s best friend.”

“So, she’s friend’s with Ms. Turner’s sister in law.”

“Her sister in law, my mother’s best friend is Marina.”

“Marina who...?” she asked with a brewing anger.

“Marina Sokolov. The movie star.”

Kate and Cabe nibbled at their salads while they waited for Jonathan and Emma to return.

“How do you think he's doing?” asked Cabe.

“He's a good lawyer, used to talking out issues. I think he can handle it.”

“I can feel for Emma. This is a lot to take in. I know it threw me at first.”

“That's for sure.” They heard a sudden spate of Italian curses.

“Ah. He told her about the party,” said Cabe as he and Kate snickered.

They finished their lunch and Emma helped with the dishes. Cabe saw Emma yawn and knew her jet lag must be catching up to her. “Emma, why don’t I show you your room? You can take a nap.”

“That is probably best. I am a bit woozy.”

“Understandable. Come with me and I’ll show you your room.” Jonathan looked at him and Cabe shook his head. “Jonathan, help your mother finish up in here.” He led Emma to a room at the far end of the main hall. It had floor to ceiling windows and a door to the wrap around porch with a magnificent view of the ocean. It also had a beautiful McClaren painting over the bed. “This should give you some privacy.”

“Oh my,” she whispered.

“The one thing I should let you know. At night we turn on the alarms. If you brush up against a painting when the alarm on it’s loud. Jonathan found that out the hard way the first night he was with us. Emma, if there is anything you need, anything at all, please let us know.”

“Mr. Gallo, this is all...so much.”

“Please, call me Cabe. I know exactly how you feel. Kate and Jonathan grew up with this kind of life. I grew up in a small home in Bensonhurst. When I first met Kate this was all so overwhelming. I’ll tell you how I adjusted to it. I realized that Kate appreciated what she had but it wasn’t the driving force in her life. Her impulse was to serve the public good. That’s why she joined the FBI when she was twenty two and Homeland when she was forty two. All she ever wanted was to use her skill to protect people and serve her country. And she did. She was one of the most famous agents in the history of either agency. It’s why Homeland fought so hard to keep her when she wanted to retire. Emma, Jonathan is the same way. He grew up with people who flaunted their wealth. Instead of following their footsteps, he enlisted in the Marines.”

Emma smiled, “Just like you.”

Cabe smiled and blushed a bit. “We were surprised we had so much in common.”

“Like art. You’re both very gifted.”

“Thank you. Instead of encouraging Jonathan’s natural gift, his birth mother and her family tried to make him into copies of themselves. That wasn’t who he was. When he came back from his tours he finished law school but his work didn’t satisfy him. He opened his own practice, mostly servicing fellow veterans in need of his help. My son is a good man, Emma. We are so proud of him.”

“I can tell.”

“What I’m saying is, as hard as it is, try not to be overwhelmed by all of this. Take your time to get to know my son. You won’t be disappointed.”

“Thank you Mr...Thank you, Cabe.”

“You’re welcome.” He pointed to a notepad on the nightstand. “If you want to call your parents I’ve written the Wi-Fi codes down for you. FaceTime will be easier than an international call.” He walked to the door and paused. “Take as long as you want to rest. We’ll be here when you wake up.”

Cabe walked back into the kitchen to find his son waiting for him. “Dad, what the hell?”

“Son, Emma is feeling overwhelmed by the house, the art, the money. I know how she feels. You have to give her some time to adjust to this.”

“Okay, Dad. It’s just...”

“I know. You want to pick up right where you left off in Genoa.”

“I have an idea,” said Kate. “Why don’t you go home and set up a nice dinner.”

“Cook?”

“You have the skills. Make that ziti dish I taught you. I’ll write out a list of what you need. Go to the market and don’t forget a nice bottle of wine.”

“Your house is a lot less intimidating than this place,” said Cabe. “When she wakes I’ll walk her down the beach.”

“Okay. I guess it will keep me busy until then.”

Emma opened her eyes and looked toward the window. It took a moment for her to remember she wasn't home in Genoa. She saw the sun setting through a wall of windows. Los Angeles, the Gallos, Jonathan. She sat up and saw herself in the mirror. She needed a shower and wanted to change into some fresh clothes. She got out of the very comfortable bed and noticed her bags had been left in her room. The small door next to the dresser led to a beautiful private bathroom. She tried to remind herself what Cabe had told her. Don't let the house and the art overwhelm her. She slipped out of her clothes and turned on the shower. The multiple heads loosened her stiff muscles and woke her up. She changed into a light sun dress she'd bought for the trip. She thought it was pretty when she bought it, but now she had her doubts.

She found his parents in the living room. His mother seemed to be absorbed in a tablet while his father was reading a book.

"Oh, hello Emma. You look lovely," said his mother. "Did you have a good rest?"

"I did, thank you, Mrs. Gallo."

"Kate, please."

"Thank you, Kate." She looked around. "Where's Jonathan?"

"He's at his house. He's expecting you for dinner," said Cabe. "I'll walk you down there. Kate, give him a heads up we're on our way."

"Walk?"

"He lives a short walk down the beach." He kicked off his shoes and walked to the sliding door. "You might want to carry your shoes." Emma pulled off her sandals and walked toward Cabe. She followed him past the pool and down the smooth wood stairs to the beach. "It's not very far."

"It's nice that he lives so close. You and your wife must enjoy that."

"We do. I didn't know about him until a little over a year ago." Cabe chuckled. "Kate says she's supposed to have eighteen years to get used to her baby not living with her."

Emma smiled. "She likes being a mother."

“It’s easy to do when you have such a wonderful man for a son.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

“It’s been my experience that people who are so attached to their son would not be as welcoming to me. You only met me for a short time in Genoa.”

Cabe stopped and smiled. “We trust our son’s judgement.” He glanced up at house with a short stairway. “That’s Jonathan’s house.” He walked up the stairs and Emma followed. They walked across the pool deck to the sliding glass door. “Jonathan, we’re here.” Jonathan came to the door and slid it open.

“Hi, welcome.”

“I’ll see you when you get home, Emma.”

“I’ll walk her back, Dad.”

“Of course you will.” Cabe said with a stern look. They watched as Cabe walked back down the stairs.

“Can I ask you something?” said Emma.

“Anything.”

“Your father, sometimes he talks to you like...”

“Like I’m a kid?”

“Yes. Does it bother you?”

“No, not really. My parents never had the chance to raise me.” Jonathan smiled. “So once in a while I feel like I’m a teenager. It’s okay.”

“It’s okay?”

“For the first time in my life people care enough about me to be pissed if I don’t behave properly.” He took her hand. “I never had that.”

“Surely your birth mother cared how you grew up.”

“My birth mother only cared that my behavior didn’t reflect badly on her or her parents.”

“Oh, Jonathan.”

“I don’t want to talk about her.” He smiled and gave her a soft kiss. “Welcome to my home.”

“Thank you. It’s very beautiful.”

“I didn’t want to move to far from them. I’d only just found them.” He stopped himself and looked at her. “I’m trying hard not to look like a Mama’s boy and failing.”

“Mama’s boy?”

“A grown man who’s too attached to his mother, or in my case, my parents.”

“I don’t think that, Jonathan. I like your parents very much. From what you told me of your childhood, I can understand why you’d want to stay near your parents.”

He sighed and smiled. “Thank you. Now come, I’ve made dinner.” He led her into the dining room and held a chair for her. It was a small but tasteful room where the focus was the view of the ocean.

“Jonathan, it’s so beautiful.”

“Thank you. I love it here. It’s about half the size of my parent’s home but it has the most important requirement in a Gallo home.”

“What’s that?”

“A pool and deck big enough for the family. We like to have pool parties.”

“Doesn’t your family live in Italy.”

“Oh, I mean our LA family, Scorpion.”

Emma gasped. “Scorpions?”

Jonathan smiled as he handed her a glass of wine. "Scorpion is the name of the team of computer geniuses my parents work with. They're good people, a little odd, but good. It takes normals a while to get used to them."

"Normals?"

"People with normal IQs like you and me. And my Dad too. My mother is a genius, like them." He smiled. "Sweetheart, for tonight, lets not talk about anyone else. There will be plenty of time to get caught up on that. I would like to propose a toast. To a new beginning." He held his glass out and she tapped it with hers.

"To a new beginning."

He set his glass down and stared at her.

"What?"

"I'm so happy you're here."

Jonathan took the salad dishes away and took a breath. What was he thinking, serving pasta to an Italian girl? He set the plate of ziti in front of Emma. She smiled. He tried to calm himself. He sat down and tried not to watch her eat.

"Oh my, this is delicious. You made this yourself?"

"I did," he smiled. "It's my mother's recipe."

"Well, I will not tell my mother that my American boyfriend's Irish mother's recipe is better than hers." She smiled and took another bite and rolled her eyes. "I'm quite serious. This is amazing."

"I'm so glad you like it," he said quietly.

"What is it?"

"Nothing."

“Jonathan, it’s something. You’re blushing.” She reached for his hand. “Please, Jonathan, talk to me.”

“It’s the first time you referred to me as your boyfriend. It took me by surprise, a very pleasant surprise.”

She laughed. “Do you think I’d fly six thousand miles for just anyone?”

“I’ve wanted to make a good impression but I...”

Emma squeezed his hand. “Jonathan, no one has ever gone to this much trouble for me. As for being emotional, you’re Italian. We’re an emotional people. In Genoa, you’d be considered positively stoic.”

Jonathan whispered, “Thank you,” knowing he’d lost what little doubt he had. Emma was the woman for him.

Jonathan poured Emma another glass of wine and sat next to her on the deck couch. The pool lights and the sound of the ocean made for the perfect atmosphere.

“It’s so beautiful here, like a resort,” she said.

“Emma, my father and I had a talk. He was trying to get me to understand what this is like for you. This is not a lifestyle most people experience. I admit I’m trying to impress you, but I don’t want to overwhelm you.”

She smiled. “Why are you trying to impress me? If I wasn’t already impressed I wouldn’t have come all this way to see you.”

“Because I want to give you a reason to stay.”

“Is that why you want me to meet Michaela Turner?”

He took a breath. Complete honesty was tough as hell. “Yes.”

“Jonathan, I work in a small shop in my home town. Michaela Turner is one the most renowned designers in the world. Everyone in the business knows her work.”

“You mean like, Tiffany or Cartier?”

“Exactly. What makes you think my work could even come close to hers?”

“Wow. I knew she was good, I didn’t know she was that good. To me she’s Mike.”

“Mike?! You call Michaela Turner Mike?”

“Everyone does. Everyone except her husband, Jake Sokolov. He says she’s too pretty to be called by a boy’s name.” He took her hand in his. “When I talked to Mike about you she said she’d love to see her work. She said she wants to see what’s trending with new designers.”

“Jonathan, I don’t know.”

“Emma, when are you ever going to get a chance to get your work viewed by someone like her, someone you obviously respect? And before you panic, Mike said she would be honest with you but she’s also a very nice person. She’s not someone who’d be cruel.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“Let’s not talk about that now. Tell me how are things in Genoa? How are your parents?”

“They’re well. They were nervous about me coming here but meeting your parents did the trick, especially your mother. My mother kept asking if I was sure she wasn’t Italian”

“She’ll love that,” he laughed. “How’s work? Did your boss give you a hard time about your vacation?”

“No, but he had me working late for a few weeks. Oh, that reminds me. I brought a necklace for your mother. I made her one like the one I she admired.”

“That’s so nice. She’ll love it.” He touched her shoulder and ran his finger down the strap of her sundress. “You look so beautiful tonight.” He took the wine from her hand and set it on the table. He leaned in and gave her a soft kiss. She ran her hand up his chest and pulled him close. The soft kiss quickly turned heated. His hands began to wander down her back and caressed her side. Her hands twined tight around him. He knew he was losing himself in her. He forced himself to push away. “Emma, if I have any chance of being a gentleman I need to stop.”

Emma pulled away. “Oh, I’m sorry.”

He threaded his hands through hers. “You have nothing to apologize for. Sweetheart, I’ve wanted you from the moment I saw you in Genoa. I’ve promised your parents you’d be safe with me. I can’t go back on my word.” He stood and took her hand. “I should probably walk you back to my parents house.”

She smiled and took his hand. “You know, I made no such promise to your parents.”

Jonathan groaned.

Emma laughed

Jonathan knocked on his parents patio door before walking in. “Mom, Dad, were here.” He found his parents curled up on the den couch watching a western. “Did Dad win the toss?”

“No. He sat through several episodes of ‘Firefly’ so I owe him.”

“Captain Mal?” asked Emma.

“Yes!” said Kate. “Are you a Browncoat?!”

“I am! I love Kaylee. She’s so clever.”

Cabe rolled his eyes and laughed. “Another one.”

“Did you have a nice dinner?” asked Kate.

“He told me it’s your recipe. It was delicious.”

“Have you forgiven him about the party this weekend?”

“I have. He’s promised no more surprises.”

“Except you have one,” said Jonathan.

“Oh yes. I brought a little something for each of you.”

Jonathan looked surprised. “You said you had something for Mom.”

“Of course I brought something for everyone. I’ll be right back.” Emma left the room for a moment and Kate took the opportunity to quiz her son.

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“How’s it going? She seems to be having a good time.”

“At least she’s not swearing at you anymore,” said Cabe with a smile. “She has quite the colorful vocabulary.”

Emma came back into the room with a small bag. She pulled out a small box and handed it to Cabe. “This one’s for you.”

“How nice of you.” He opened the box and smiled. “This is amazing. You made this?” Emma smiled and nodded.

“Show us!” said Kate. He handed her the box that contained a gold tie bar with a small disc, painted black and red with a gold globe, anchor and eagle. “This is amazing. The detail work is perfect.”

Cabe stood and gave Emma a hug. “Thank you, dear. It’s beautiful,” he said quietly.

“You’re very welcome.” Emma hand Kate a larger flat box. She opened the box and gasped.

“Oh my God! This is magnificent.”

“You liked my necklace so I made a version of it for you.”

Kate wiped her cheek. “It’s breathtaking.” Cabe and Jonathan looked over Kate’s shoulder. There was a delicate wired necklace that feathered out into an open collar. On the end of each wire was mounted a small dark jade ball. In the center of the necklace was a matching pair of jade earrings. Kate stood and pulled her into a hug. “I love it. Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome.”

Jonathan took Emma’s hand. “You’re a brilliant designer.”

“Thank you.” She reached into the bag and handed Jonathan a small box. “I didn’t forget you.” She gave him a small smile. “I hope you like it.”

He opened the box and looked back at Emma. “Sweetheart, this is wonderful.”

“When I saw you father’s I thought you might like one.”

Jonathan took a gold ring out of the box and slipped it on his right hand. It had been cast with a Marine emblem. He put his hand to her cheek and gave her a soft kiss. “I love it.”

Emma looked out at the sunrise over the ocean. She loved her home in Genoa, but this was the most beautiful place she'd ever been. Jonathan's parents really were a great deal like her parents. They were kind and made her feel very much at home, even though they lived in a palace. She dressed in light slacks and top. Jonathan said to be sure and wear comfortable shoes. When he asked what she wanted to see first she said Rodeo drive. She wanted to see what was the latest in jewelry design. After lunch they planned on going to the Pennington.

She walked into the kitchen and found Jonathan's parents dressed for work. She was very pleased to see Cabe was wearing his new tie clip. She wasn't surprised to see him wearing a gun but she was shocked to see Kate with a shoulder holster and a very imposing weapon. "Kate, I thought you work with computers."

"I do but as an agent I carry a weapon."

She heard a quick knock on the glass followed by the sliding of the patio door. Jonathan walked into the kitchen and smiled. He was dressed in light khakis and a short sleeve button down shirt. "Good morning." He leaned down and gave Emma a kiss. "Good morning."

"Good morning."

"Hey, what's with the heavy armor, guys? You're not on another undercover. I've had enough of waiting for Stacey Hawkins to pull bullets out of you both."

"No. We have a meeting at headquarters and then back to Scorpion," said Kate. "No one's shooting anyone today."

"Shooting? You've been shot?" asked Emma.

"Jonathan, you're frightening Emma," said Kate.

"Sorry. Is the coffee ready?"

"Coffee?!" asked Emma, followed by several colorful invectives. "Who's been shot?"

Jonathan took a seat next to her. "Actually, sweetheart, we all have."

“What?! They said America was a lawless place, everyone shooting everyone, but I never believed it.”

He took her hand and held it tight. “My father was shot when he was a Marine. There was also an incident last year. He was protecting an African prince and there was an assassination attempt. My father jumped between the prince and the shooter.”

“I heard about that. Prince Umbuto. That was you?” Cabe nodded and topped off his travel mug.

“What happened to you, Kate?”

“Actually it wasn’t on the job. My estate administrator was stealing from me. We found out and he was ruined. He took it out on me.”

“Oh my God, Kate.”

“Emma, my mother is a hero. The gunman had the young child of one of the Scorpion team held hostage. Mom was shot protecting him.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“It’s okay, Emma,” said Kate. “We are doing much less work, what’s called in the field. There is much less chance for us to be hurt.” Kate smiled. “We’re getting a little old for that sort of thing.”

“Speak for yourself, witch,” said Cabe as he gave her a quick kiss.

Emma looked at Jonathan. “Did he just call her a...”

“Witch,” he smiled. “He calls her his Irish Witch.”

“I’m confused.”

Cabe put his hands on Kate’s shoulders. “It’s because from the moment I met her, she cast a spell on me.” He kissed the top of her head. “Come on, Witch. We’re going to be late.”

Emma said goodbye to Jonathan's parents and sipped her coffee. "You didn't tell me how you were shot. Was it when you were in the Marines?"

He sat down next to her and started to speak. He got a faraway look in his eyes. "No, it wasn't then. It was my birth mother, Kathleen."

"What?"

"I told you she's in prison now. She arranged with some bad guys she knew to kidnap me and my father. It was right after a charity car race. I tried to fight them off but one of them shot me in the leg."

She took his hand in hers. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"No, it's okay. You should know everything. They cornered us at the racetrack. They took us to a garage and locked us in an oil pit. I lost consciousness but thanks to my father I survived."

"How did you get out?"

Jonathan managed a smile. "Mom. Mom and the Scorpion team. Scorpion figured out where Kathleen and her thugs were but they wouldn't say where they were holding us, so Mom convinced her to tell."

"How?"

He grinned but bit his lip. "Mom shot her."

"What?"

"In the shoulder. It wasn't bad, but it was enough to convince her to tell where we were. Mom knew one of us was badly hurt and needed help fast." He looked Emma in eyes. "It was the second time the team and my mother saved my life."

"My God. Here I was thinking you all had such an easy life because of the money."

"Sometimes money can make you a target, like it did with Mom. That's why we take precautions. We have excellent security. Mom and Dad are excellent agents. They know what they're doing."

“Jonathan, do you think the Pennington could wait for another day?”

“Of course. Why?”

“I’d like to meet these Scorpion people.”

Jonathan parked his car in the lot and walked Emma down the famous Rodeo Drive. It's not a place he went frequented but it was a favorite for tourists. He was all for anything he could do to take Emma's mind off their painful conversation this morning. She was smiling as she walked past the windows of Givenchy and Prada. "Do you want to go in?"

"Oh no. I don't know how to say this without sounding...I don't know the English word...pretenzioso."

"Pretentious?"

"Yes, pretentious. We have all these stores in Genoa. I'm more interested in American jewelry trends."

Jonathan spotted a jewelry store up the block. It wasn't a name he recognized so it was probably an independent jeweler. "How about there?"

"Oh yes," she smiled. They looked into the window displays. Jonathan watched as Emma poured over each piece.

"Shall we?" he smiled.

Emma started examining each display case when they were approached by a well dressed woman in her forties with an affected French accent. "Welcome to Bijoux. I am Claudine."

"Thank you. Some of your designs are quite unique." The woman looked properly offended. Emma looked at her like she was sizing up an opponent. She pointed to some elaborate earrings in the case. "What is the quality of those diamonds?"

Claudine pulled them out and set them on a pad. "These are very high quality stones. Flawless."

Emma picked up an earring and looked closely. "They are far from flawless. They are at best F color and I've seen less carbon in pencils."

"Well, I will find you something else." She pulled the earrings back and set them back in the case. "Damn tourists think they know everything," she muttered in French.

Emma smiled and replied in French, "This tourist does." It was everything Jonathan could do not to laugh. They did hear a snicker coming from another, much younger sales girl. Emma looked at her and smiled. "You, come over. I'd like your opinion." Emma smiled and looked at Claudine. "You can go now." Claudine look mortally offended and huffed.

"Fine. I will leave you in Angela's hands."

Angela joined them, still hiding her snicker. She extended her hand and smiled. "It's very nice to meet you." She leaned over the counter and whispered to Emma, "That was awesome. She deserved it." She looked over her shoulder to see the woman had gone into the back room. "Her real name is Betty and she from San Dimas."

"Angela, what would you recommend for me?"

The girl looked Emma up and down for a moment, then pulled some delicate diamond studs from the case. Each quarter carat stone was set in a small flower setting. "I think you'll like these."

Emma examined them and smiled. "Very nice. D color, internally flawless, perfectly matched, lovely setting. I'm curious. Why would you choose these for me?"

"From what I can see you are a woman of elegant taste. You prefer quality over quantity. There is nothing bougie about you."

"Bougie? I'm sorry. I don't always understand American idioms."

Jonathan laughed. "She's right, sweetheart. Bougie means flashy and full of themselves."

Emma smiled. "Pretenzioso." She looked at the girl and smiled. "Thank you. That's very nice of you." She handed the earrings back to the girl. "I am a jewelry designer from Italy. I wanted to see what Americans like."

"There are so many different kinds of Americans. Many people in this town are new to wealth and they like to show off. Those are the kind of customers who never last. Customers who aren't out to prove anything to anyone but themselves are the best kind

of customers. They like quality. When they find someone who will provide that, they will stick with them.”

“That’s very interesting, Angela. Thank you so much for your time.” Emma extended her hand.

“It was very nice meeting you…”

“Emma. Emma Moretti.”

Jonathan smiled. “We’ll take the earrings.”

“What? You didn’t ask how much.” said Angela.

“Jonathan, they will be very expensive. The stones are exquisite.”

He pulled out his wallet. “I think Angela is right. They would look perfect on you.”

Angela leaned over the counter towards him and quietly said. “Sir, they’re five thousand dollars.”

He passed his black American Express card to the girl. “That’s fine.”

Emma reached over the counter to the girl. “One question, will you get the commission?”

Angela grinned. “Oh yes! Don’t worry about Becky. She’s just a sales girl like me.”

Emma smiled. “I think you’re much more than just a sales girl.”

She brought back the sales slip for Jonathan to sign as Emma looked into the mirror to put in her new earrings. “Oh my,” she whispered. “They’re perfect.”

Jonathan slipped his arms around her waist. “They’re almost as pretty as you are.”

Emma snickered. “Did you really just say that?”

“Not my smoothest move, but I’ll work on it,” he laughed.

“Honestly, Jonathan, I’d never expect you to buy me something so grand.”

“All I care about is do you like them?”

“Of course, I love them.”

Emma couldn't help but look at herself in the mirrored wall. Her new earrings flashed in the light, like good stones should. She suddenly realized Jonathan was speaking. “I'm sorry, what were you saying?”

“I was saying I've been here before and I've always enjoyed it.”

“I'm sure I will too. I'm sorry I was distracted by my beautiful new earrings.”

He reached for her hand. “I'm glad you like them.”

Emma smiled. “So tell me, how have you managed to take time off from your practice. From what you've told me, there are so many who need your services.”

“I've managed to get a few firms to give me some juniors for pro bono work.”

“I don't understand.”

“Juniors are young attorneys new to the practice. Pro bono is when an attorney does work at no cost. This lets the firms complete their civic duties without having to look for the cases. My paralegal, Carolyn, runs the office and keeps track of the cases. She may call me if there's an emergency.”

“I would expect that. What you do is very important.” Emma decided Jonathan was adorable when he blushed. They ordered a light lunch and sipped their iced tea. “Are your parents alright with us coming by to meet the team?”

“Yes they said it would be fine. I think they'll probably tell them to be on their best behavior.”

“Why is that?”

“They're all geniuses. Paige, their project manager, is a normal. She interprets the world for them. They don't always understand how normals behave.”

“You said your mother is one of them but she's lovely. I feel very comfortable with her.”

“I think a lot of that comes from her undercover work. They called her “The Ghost”. She would blend in with her environment and no one would ever notice her.”

“How could no one notice her? She so pretty and all that red hair?”

“I know! That’s what I said.” Jonathan smiled. “It’s really impossible to describe the rest of them. You need to meet them.”

Emma smiled and tasted her Mediterranean pita sandwich. “This is delicious.”

“I’m glad you like it.” He took a taste of his cashew chicken salad. “How are your parents?”

“They’re well. Now that they’ve retired I think they’re looking for something more to do. I’m hoping to get them involved in the Church activities so they can leave me be.”

“Leave you be?”

“They didn’t have me until late, in their mid thirties.”

“That’s not late.”

“It is in Italy. Now that I’m near thirty they are afraid that my career has prevented me from finding someone. They want grandchildren.”

“Oh,” he said, fiddling with his lettuce.

“What?”

“Are they concerned that the American will take you away from them?”

She reached for his hand. “No. I think they’re worried you’ll break my heart.”

“Emma, I don’t know what will happen in the next two weeks but I can promise you this. I want this to work for us. I knew it the first moment I saw you.” He smiled. “I also know if I ever crossed any lines with you that you would very promptly put me in my place.”

“Thank you. You’ve never pressured me for anything. I came here because I wanted to. You don’t seem to mind that I’m not getting well...” She felt herself blush. “I don’t know how to say this properly.”

“Maybe I do. You’re staying with my parents not just to please your parents. You’re doing this for yourself, you’re keeping a physical distance between us.”

She nodded to embarrassed to speak.

“I think I understand.” He leaned closer so no one could overhear. “As much as I want to be with you, and dear God in heaven I do, I don’t want us to rush. I want us to get to know each other. You’re important to me, Emma. I want us both to be sure.”

Emma giggled. “Who are you, Jonathan Gallo? I thought all American men were inveterate, what do you say, corndogs?”

He laughed out loud. “Horndogs. Yes, we are but you’re worth the wait.” He took a sip of his iced tea and smiled. “You knew horndog, didn’t you?”

She smiled and nodded. Maybe Jonathan Gallo wasn’t too good to be true.

Jonathan pulled into the Scorpion parking lot and hoped the team would be on their best behavior. These people had become his brothers and sisters.

“It really is a garage,” said Emma.

“They’ve been in this space since before they worked with Dad.” He opened the door and spotted his father at the coffee machine. “Hey, Dad. We’re here.”

“Hi. Did you have a nice lunch?”

“Very nice.” He looked up and saw his mother coming down from the loft. “Hi, Mom.”

“Hi, sweetheart.” She glanced at Emma’s new earrings. “Oh my. I didn’t notice those this morning. They’re stunning.”

“That’s your son being wildly generous again. I was looking in a jewelry store and he insisted on getting them.”

Kate looked at him and smiled. “Well done.”

Cabe let out a whistle. “Hey you lot, come say hello. This is Emma Moretti.”

The team approached and Jonathan took her hand. He knew he was more nervous than Emma. Walter came first and extended his hand.

“Hello, I’m Walter O’Brien. I’m the head of this team.”

“It’s very nice to meet you.”

Jonathan snickered, knowing full well Walter would make sure let Emma know his status.

“Hello Emma, I’m Paige Dineen. This is my son, Ralph.”

Emma shook both their hands. “Jonathan has told me a lot about you.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Emma. Nonno and Nonna have been looking forward to your visit.”

She looked at Cabe. “Nonno and Nonna?”

Ralph smiled and replied in a not half bad Italian. “Nonno and Nonna look after us like we are family.”

Kate gave his head a pat and a quick kiss. “You are family.”

Jonathan introduced Sylvester, who was typically nervous. “It’s very nice to meet you.” Sly looked at him and smiled. “She’s as pretty as you said.” Sly realized what he’d said out loud and blushed.

Toby was typical snarky. “Hello I’m Dr. Tobias Curtis and you could have done much better than Marine boy.”

“Stuff it, skinny. I’ll still beat you anytime, anywhere.”

“Jonathan?” asked Emma. Apparently snark didn’t translate well.

“He’s always challenging me in a footrace. He never wins.”

“If I can interrupt this testosterone festival, I’m Happy Quinn.” She pointed at Toby. “I married to the guy in the hat.”

“It’s very nice to meet you, Happy.”

Jonathan pointed to her work bench. “Happy’s our engineer. She builds the most amazing things.”

“Do you do metal work?”

“Yeah.”

“So do I. Could you show me? I’d be very interested in seeing what you do.”

Happy shrugged. “Yeah, sure. Come on.”

Jonathan watched as they walked to her workbench. Emma was smiling as Happy showed her what she was working on. “They look like they’re having fun.”

Cabe leaned closer. “You’re nervous as a cat. What’s going on?”

“I don’t know.”

Toby took a sip of his coffee. “I do.”

“Excuse me?”

“I know why you’re such a wreck.”

“Enlighten me, oh great and powerful Oz.”

Kate put her hand on his shoulder. “Easy, honey. He’s trying to help.”

“Okay, sorry.”

Toby smiled. “It’s okay, Marine boy. You’re trying to compress a normal courtship into two weeks. You’re afraid you’ll screw it up.”

“So what do I do?”

“Nothing.”

“What?”

“Jonathan, you’re a good guy. We all know it. Emma does too or she wouldn’t be here. Try to relax and be yourself. Enjoy your time together.”

Jonathan smiled and nodded at Toby. “Thanks, brother.”

“Anytime.”

Toby smiled when Kate gave him a kiss on the cheek and whispered, “You’re a good man, Toby.”

He blushed and smiled. “Thanks, Mom.”

Jonathan sat back and watch Emma as she put on Happy’s welder’s helmet. She fired up a torch and was working on a piece of metal. Toby was right. He would make the most of what time they had and hope that would be enough.

Emma had a great time with Happy. They both used their imaginations to create works in metal. Happy had let her have fun with some scraps on her bench. She took a flat piece of steel, a flat edge clamp and some resistors and attached them together. She

pulled off the welding mask and handed her design to Happy. She smiled and played with the clasp.

“Is this...?”

Emma took it back and clipped it into Happy’s hair. “The perfect barrette for an engineer.”

Happy looked at herself in the a mirror and smiled. “Awesome.” She walked over to Toby and Jonathan. “Check out what Emma made for me.”

Toby nodded. “Nice.”

“Are those resistors?” asked Jonathan.

“I thought they were pretty colors.”

“Very clever,” he smiled. He was about to give her a quick kiss when his phone rang. Carolyn knew how important this time was so she wouldn’t call unless it was an emergency. “Hello.”

“Boss, I’m so sorry for calling but I knew you’d want me to. Tommy Rollins case got pushed up on the docket. You know his situation . If I hand this off to a junior he’ll freak.”

“No, of course. You’re right. Call Tommy and tell him not to worry. Tell him I’ll be there. Text me the details. Thanks, Carolyn.” He hung up and looked at Emma. “I’m sorry.”

“What’s wrong,” asked Emma.

“I’m afraid the Pennington is going to have to wait. I have to go into court tomorrow. One of my client’s court date’s been pushed up and I can’t let a junior handle his case. I’m really sorry, sweetheart.”

Emma rested her hand on his shoulder. “There’s no need to apologize. I understand. We’ll have time for the gallery another day.”

Cabe joined them. “Is something wrong?”

“Not at all,” Emma smiled.

“I need to be in court tomorrow so we have to alter our plans.”

“Emma, Kate and I have to work tomorrow but you are free to use one of our cars.”

“Tomorrow might be a good day to relax and do nothing.”

“In the meantime, why don’t we have dinner at our house,” said Cabe.

Kate joined them and smiled. “Emma, Happy showed me the barrette. It’s adorable and very clever.”

“Thank you.”

“Kate, dinner at our place tonight?”

“It’s too warm to cook. How about we pick up take out and eat on the deck?”

Jonathan sat poolside with a glass of wine and watched the water. He liked swimming at night. After dinner, Mom and Dad had turned on the pool lights and then made themselves scarce. He knew they wanted to give them some privacy. He'd changed into his suit and was waiting for Emma. He'd just taken another sip of wine when Emma came through the patio door. She was wearing a long bathrobe his parents kept in the guest bathrooms.

"Where are your parents?"

"They said they wanted to give us some privacy but the truth is my parents enjoy their...alone time more than most." Instead of being embarrassed, Emma laughed.

"Oh, that's lovely."

"I tell them they're like a couple of horny teenagers. I'm always careful not to walk in the house unannounced." He handed her a glass of wine and she took a sip.

"It's so beautiful here."

"Shall we go for a swim?" He stood and started to pull off his t shirt when he froze. Emma dropped her robe and revealed a midnight blue one piece halter suit. He saw more revealing outfits on the streets of LA but he'd never seen anything sexier. It fit her body like a glove.

"Jonathan? Are you alright?"

"Wow," he whispered. He walked toward her and slipped his hands around his waist. "You're so beautiful."

"Thank you," Emma smiled and gave him a kiss. "Now unless you plan on swimming in your t shirt you should take this off." She backed up as he pulled off his shirt. She looked at him and gasped. "Oh my." She ran her fingers along his Marine tattoo. "You never mentioned you had a tattoo."

"Do you like tattoos?"

She looked at him with a glint in her eye. "I like this one." She smiled and pushed back on him. "Come on then." She dashed to the deep end and dove in. Jonathan dove

in after her and was surprised it took quite a few strokes to catch up with her. He caught her by the waist and laughed.

“You’re quite the swimmer.”

“They used to call me sirena”

“Siren?”

“Yes. I think the closer English word is mermaid. I love being in the water. I used to swim all the time when I was a child.”

“Don’t you swim now?”

“I work so much I don’t get to the beach often.” She put her arms around his neck and floated in the water. “When did you get your tattoo?”

“My first year in the service. We were on leave in San Francisco.”

“Was it a drunken episode?”

“No. I tried to avoid that. It was more of a group event. We’d had a great training event and we decided to get tattoos together.”

She slipped her hands behind his head and gave him a kiss. “It’s very sexy.”

He grinned from ear to ear. “I’ll have to make sure my father keeps his shirt on.”

“Excuse me?”

“He has a lot of tattoos.”

Emma raised her eyebrow. “Oh really?”

He laughed and pulled her close. “Oh no you don’t. He has his own girl. He can’t have mine. And his girl has her own tattoo and a big gun.”

She smiled and whispered. “You have nothing to worry about and gave him a deep kiss.”

Emma sat in the kitchen with Kate and Cabe. As beautiful as their home was, their lifestyle was casual. Most meals were at a small table in the kitchen. They sipped coffee as Emma helped get breakfast ready. She was putting orange juice on the table when she heard a knock at the front door.

“There he is,” said Kate. Jonathan walked in the kitchen and Emma’s heart skipped. She’d never seen him in a suit and he looked wonderful.

“Good morning,” he smiled. He walked over to Emma and gave her a soft kiss. He leaned and whispered, “Good morning, beautiful.”

“You look very handsome,” she smiled.

“Sit,” said Cabe. “Your mother made omelets.”

“Great. I’ll need the fuel.” He sat down next to Emma and sipped his juice.

“What’s the case today?” asked Kate.

“It’s a veteran I’ve been working with for awhile. I’ve just gotten him into treatment but I was hoping to have more time before his court case. It took me some time to get him to trust me and I have to be there for him.”

Emma smiled and covered his hand with hers. “Of course you do. Would I be able to come with you? Could I sit in the courtroom?”

“If you want to, sure.”

“I would.” She looked down at her simple shift dress. “Am I dressed okay?”

“You look perfect,” he smiled. “The dress is nice too.”

Emma giggled and then noticed his parents were smiling. “Is your son always so debonairre?”

Kate smiled. “Well, he’s always a gentleman but how he is with ladies, we wouldn’t know.”

“What? Why?”

“Because he’s never brought anyone home,” said Cabe.

“Really?” She looked at Jonathan and his blush told her it was true. She leaned in and kissed his cheek.

Emma had seen American courtrooms on television. They were like most buildings in America, new. The courthouse in Genoa was fairly new but a number of public buildings were almost as old as the city itself. Jonathan was speaking with an older woman and a man who looked as though he’d never worn a tie. He shaggy hair had been slicked back and his suit coat looked two sizes too big. The man noticed her watching and spoke to Jonathan, who smiled and waved her over.

“This is Emma Moretti. Emma, this is my assistant Carolyn Armstrong and this is my client, Tom Flannery.”

She shook Carolyn’s hand and smiled. “It’s a pleasure. Jonathan has told me a great deal about you.” She extended her hand to Tommy. “It’s very nice to meet you, Tom.”

“Are you his girlfriend?”

She looked at Jonathan and smiled. “Yes, I am.”

“Are you Italian, you sound Italian.”

“Yes, I’m from Genoa.”

“You remind me of my grandmother.”

“Excuse me?” asked Jonathan.

“She was Italian too, a pretty blonde.”

“Thank you, Tom. Many northern Italians are blonde like me.”

“She was always nice to me.”

A bailiff approached Jonathan. “Court will be in session in ten minutes, Mr. Gallo.”

“Thank you, Mark.”

Tom started rocking back and forth. “No, no, no. They’re going to put me away. I can’t get locked up. No, no, no.”

“Tom, try and calm down. You know I’m going to do everything I can.”

The man looked at Emma with tears in his eyes. “No, no, you can’t help me. No one can.”

She didn’t know what possessed her but she took the man’s hand and sat him down on a bench. “You know Jonathan. He’s never lied to you, has he?” Tom shook his head. “He’s an excellent attorney. He will do everything he can for you.”

“I’m not worth it. No one cares.”

She looked him in the eyes. “I care.”

“Why?”

His simple question just about broke her heart. “Because you’re a brave veteran. You’ve served and deserve my respect. You’re my fellow human and worthy of respect.”

“Will you be in court?”

“Yes, I’ve come to see Jonathan work.”

“Can you sit next to me?”

She looked up at Jonathan who smiled and nodded. “I will sit next to you.”

“Okay,” he said quietly.

Jonathan opened the door for Carolyn, who led Tom to his seat at the defendant’s table. He leaned in to Emma and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. “Well done, sweetheart.”

She tried to hide her blush as she sat at the end of the table next to Tom. She looked back at Carolyn who’d taken up a place behind them. “Are you sure this is alright?” she whispered. Carolyn nodded and smiled.

The bailiff announced the judge and everyone stood. When they took their seats she could feel Tom's legs twitching under the table. She reached for his hand and held it. "We're here for you," she whispered. Tom looked at her with a sad smile.

"Let's get started. First case is the state versus Thomas Flannery. Mr. Flannery has been charged with breaking and entering and theft. How do you plead?"

Jonathan stood. "Not guilty."

A man sitting behind the prosecutor stood and started yelling. "Not guilty?! Not guilty?! He broke into my store, he stole merchandise. Do you know how many times I've had these homeless bums break into my store?"

The judge banged his gavel. "Sir, you will sit down and be quiet or I will have you removed. Now, Mr. Gallo, I am quite sure you have an opening statement. You always do."

"Yes, your honor. Tom Flannery was a homeless man." He looked over at the store owner. "A homeless Marine veteran. Tom has a number of health issues including PTSD. Tom saw things in battle none of us could ever imagine. He won the Bronze Star for his bravery and service to our country. He pawned it for food." Jonathan walked toward the jury box. "When Tom was arrested he was homeless, desperate and hungry. He has since been given a place at the VA where he will get the assistance he so desperately needs. Putting him in jail will serve no purpose. It will cause a drain on the county resources and Mr. Markham will not recoup any of his losses. I have a proposal."

"Of course you do," murmured the prosecutor.

The judge banged his gavel. "That's enough from you, Mr. Price. Go on, Mr. Gallo."

"Thank you, your honor. Mr. Markham has listed a total of five hundred and sixty dollars in damages to his store. I suggest Mr. Flannery work for Mr. Markham so he may recoup his losses."

"What? You want me to give a thief a job?!"

"Enough!" the judge slammed his gavel.

“Your honor, I’d like to call Mr. Markham to the stand.”

“Very well.”

The man was called and sat down in the chair. Emma noticed the man looked angry but the prosecutor seemed resigned. “Mr. Markham, how many times has your store been robbed in the last year?”

“Six! Six times by bums like him,” he shouted as he pointed at Tom. Emma squeezed his hand.

“Don’t listen to him. You’re no bum.”

“Yes, I am,” he whispered as a tear fell.

“What was taken from your store this last time, when Mr. Flannery was arrested?”

“A bunch of protein bars, bottles of juice.”

“That’s all, no money?”

“He broke the lock on my back door. That cost me five hundred bucks to fix.”

“Mr. Markham, what do you think Mr. Flannery would have done with what was taken. Did he take cases of bars and juice.”

“No,” he admitted.

“Would you say the amount that was taken would be an amount that would feed one person?”

“Yes,” he sighed.

“Mr. Markham, how old are you?”

“What? What does that have to do with anything?”

“Please sir, answer the question.”

“I’m seventy.”

“You are still very fit and work every day.”

“I sure do.”

“People make assumptions about you, don’t they, because your old.”

“Watch who you’re calling old. I can still take care of myself.”

“I have no doubt, sir. But people still assume because you’re seventy, you can’t care for yourself.”

“Yes.”

Jonathan leaned closer. “I bet that pisses you off.”

“Hell yeah it does!”

“Tom Flannery was homeless. People assumed it was because he was lazy, didn’t have a job. Nobody looked at him and saw someone who served his country. Nobody saw someone who’d seen things in war that most couldn’t imagine in their worst nightmares. People looked at him and assumed, just like they do with you. Now, if you had someone like Tom in your store, someone who’s big, and tall and a good deal younger than you what do you think they’d assume?”

“I don’t know,” he muttered.

“Maybe they’d assume you had someone who could protect you. Someone who could look out for you.”

The old man looked at Tom. “Maybe.”

“Here is what I’m suggesting. Tom could come work in your store, help you clean up, lift things, repair broken locks. If you paid him a minimum wage, at first, you’d recoup your losses and the neighborhood would know that you had a strong young man keeping watch over your store.”

Mr. Markham looked at Tom. “We’re you really a Marine?”

Tom nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“You’ll need to speak up if you’re going to work for me. The rest of me if fine but my hearing is shot.”

“Yes sir, I was a Marine.”

“Huh. A jarhead. I was Army. Infantry.”

Tom smiled. “Infantry leads the way.”

“Damn straight they do!” Markham looked at Jonathan. “Okay. It’s a deal. But if he screws up I won’t be so nice next time.”

“Thank you, Mr. Markham. I have no further questions.”

The judge looked at Jonathan and shook his head. “You couldn’t have done this with a few phone calls?”

Jonathan smiled and looked at the young prosecutor. “He wouldn’t take my calls.”

The judge looked at the now mortified prosecutor. “Price, next time Gallo calls, answer. He usually has a plan that will save us all a lot of time and money.” The judge looked at Tom. “Will the defendant please rise?” Tom stood on shaky legs. Emma stood next to him and supported his arm. The judge looked at Emma. “Who are you?”

Emma smiled. “Just a friend, sir.”

The judge looked at Jonathan and raised an eyebrow. Jonathan blushed and the judge snickered. “Okay, Mr. Flannery, you are being given a chance here. Everything is in place to help you succeed. You’ve got some good people in your corner. Lean on them. If you feel yourself backsliding, reach out. I don’t want to see you here again.”

Tom managed a very shaky, “Yes sir.”

“Very well, case dismissed.” The judge banged his gavel and Tom sat back down in his chair.

“Is that it? I’m not going to jail?”

Jonathan smiled. “No you’re not going to jail. My office will arrange for a schedule for you at Mr. Markham’s store. Stick to it. You can do this. You have housing and medical assistance. If you need anything you call my office. You’re moving forward now.”

“Why are you doing this for me?”

Jonathan showed him his new ring. "Semper Fi, brother."

Tom wiped a tear from his cheek and whispered, "Semper Fi."

Carolyn touched Jonathan's arm. "I have what you asked for." She reached into her briefcase and pulled out a box. Jonathan took it and gave it to Tom.

"This is yours."

Tom's hands shook as he opened it. It was his Bronze Star. "How did you get this?"

"It wasn't hard to find once we knew what area you'd been in. Take it to your new apartment and keep it safe. Let it remind you that when things were at it's worst you did what you had to." Tom nodded as he wiped tears from his eyes. "Carolyn will take you home."

Tom stood and gave Jonathan a tight hug. "Thank you, brother."

"You're very welcome."

Tom left with Carolyn as Jonathan gathered up his papers. "Are you ready to go, sweetheart?" Emma couldn't stop staring at him. She was overwhelmed by the emotions swirling inside her. She wiped a tear from her cheek and gave him a soft kiss. Then, as naturally as breathing, she whispered. "I love you."

Jonathan sat in his car and looked for the words. She loved him. It was everything he wanted. Now what? He looked at Emma and caressed her cheek. "What happened in there, what you did for Tom. You were wonderful." He leaned in and gave her a soft kiss.

Emma kissed him but looked concerned. "You're not saying anything about what I told you."

"Hearing you say you love me is a dream come true. I'm afraid I'll wake up and it won't be real."

She held his hand to her heart. "This is very real, Jonathan. I love you."

"Emma, I love you too, so much. I wanted you here to see if I could win your heart." He blushed and looked out the windshield. "Good God, I sound like an old romance novel."

She turned his face toward her and smiled. "You have won my heart. The question is now, what are you going to do with it?"

"Keep it safe and close, always." He pulled her into a passionate kiss.

They walked into Jonathan's house and he set down his things. "Can I get you something? An ice tea or..." Emma silenced him with a passionate kiss.

She looked at him and whispered, "The only thing I want now is you."

"Are you sure?" She smiled and took his hand and led the way to his bedroom. "Emma, sweetheart, I..." She quieted him again with another kiss. Then she walked behind him and pull his jacket down over his shoulders.

"Jonathan, do you think I'm a woman who knows her own mind?"

"Yes," he whispered.

She smiled as she loosened his tie. "Do you think I'm easily influenced?"

"No," he gasped as she unbuttoned his shirt.

“I think there’s just one more question,” she smiled as unzipped her dress and let it drop. “Do you want me?”

“God, yes,” he gasped as he pulled her into his arms. She smiled and sat down on his bed. He stripped off his slacks and sat down next to her. He kissed her softly. “My beautiful girl,” he whispered.

Jonathan opened the door to his parents house for Emma. He'd would have rather spent the rest of the evening and night with her, but they'd promised to have dinner with them. His mother was in the kitchen start

"Hi, Mom. Where's Dad?"

"Getting changed. Did you have a good day?"

"Yes, we did." He could feel his blush.

Emma touched his arm. "It's been a busy day. I'm going to take a quick shower and change." She smiled and gave him quick kiss as she left the kitchen.

He turned back towards his mother who was grinning from ear to ear. "What?" he asked.

"Come on, tell me. You know you will sooner or later."

His father walked into the kitchen wearing jeans and a Marine sweatshirt. "Tell you what?"

"Something's changed. Something big," Kate smiled.

"Okay, but you have to promise not to make a big deal." He took a breath and smiled. "She told me she loves me."

"Oh, Jonathan!" Kate squealed.

"Mom! She'll hear you."

"I passed her upstairs in the hall. She's in her room," said Cabe. He walked up and put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder. "She told you she loves you. What did you say?"

"I told her I love her too. The truth is I think I have since that first day in the church square."

"Now what?" asked Cabe.

"I want to figure out how to convince her not to go back to Italy. But I'm trying to be patient. Emma needs to decide what she wants. I want her, need her to be sure. If she

were to change her mind,” he looked at his parents and tried to keep himself in control. “If she changed her mind I don’t think I could take it.”

Cabe gave him a hug. “I understand, son. I felt the same way about your mother.”

He smiled at his father. “Thanks, Dad.” He stood back and gave himself a bit of a shake. “Alright, enough of that. Let’s just have dinner.”

Jonathan had just finished setting the table when Emma returned wearing jeans and light sweater. “How can I help?” she asked.

“We’re all set,” said Kate. “Have a seat.” She set plates of her oven fried chicken in front of them and took her seat.

“This looks delicious, Kate,” said Emma.

“It’s one of my favorites,” said Cabe he smiled as he took a bite. “So tell me, what did you think of court?”

Emma smiled at Jonathan. “It was a revelation. Jonathan gave his client his life back. I understand why you’re so proud of him.”

“Yes we are,” said Kate.

“I wouldn’t have been able to help him without Emma. He started freaking out and she calmed him down. She sat next to him during the hearing and held his hand.”

She blushed. “He said I reminded him of his grandmother.”

“Excuse me?” asked Cabe.

“Apparently she was Northern Italian too.”

“Well, it sounds like you both had an interesting day,” said Kate as she smiled at Cabe. Jonathan knew his mother well enough to know what she was thinking. She was thinking about weddings and grandchildren. He just hoped Mom was right.

“Emma, calm down. Mike is great. You don’t have to worry about her,” said Jonathan. He was watching as she rearranged sketches in her small portfolio. She’d stayed up late putting finishing touches on a couple of new designs. He wanted Emma to have a wonderful experience meeting someone she admired. Instead, she was a frantic mess.

“Calm down! Calm down! Would you calm down if you were going to speak before the Corte Suprema?”

“Supreme Court?”

“Si, Supreme Court.” She looked at her portfolio. “What am I thinking? I shouldn’t bring this.”

Jonathan took her by the shoulders and made her look at him. “Sweetheart, stop. She is not going to pass judgement. She’s a friend of the family.”

“You arranged this for her to see my work! Of course she will judge.”

He knew he was losing her to her panic. “Sweetheart, listen to me. Leave your sketches in the car. This is just a barbeque with friends. There will be a lot of people there, good people. Have fun. Then decide whether you show Mike your work. I’ll respect whatever decision you make.”

“This is why you brought me here. This is what you want!”

“Emma, have I ever lied to you?”

She stopped and took a breath. “No.”

“Do I want you to stay here in California with me? Of course I do. I’ve made no secret about that. But this has to be right for you. If you said yes to staying only because of me and then changed your mind...” he took a pause and tried to calm himself. “I couldn’t take that,” he said quietly. “I love you, Emma. I love you with all my heart. But I would never want you to stay if it wasn’t right for you.”

She looked at him and nodded. “Okay. It’s just a party with friends. If I don’t show Ms. Turner my work you won’t be angry.”

“I promise,” he said with every ounce of conviction he could managed.

Jonathan pulled up to the Nashes and parked behind his parents car. Emma looked around at the house and the neighborhood. “This is so...”

“Normal?” he said.

“Yes. Marina Sokolov is famous. I would have expected something more like where your parents live.”

“This was Frank’s house before he met Marina. It was big then. Now, with the four kids it’s crowded. They have seven year old twins, a six year old and the baby is six months old.” Cabe and Kate walked up to their car and waited for Jonathan and Emma to exit his car. “Are you ready?” he asked. She nodded and smiled. He could tell she was nervous and he didn’t blame her. She was about to meet one of the most famous actresses in the world and her career hero. But he knew only a few minutes with the Nash and Sokolov families and everyone felt like they were any other normal family.

They walked into the typical Nash craziness, laughter, children running and a Mama yelling in Russian. Marina came to the door to greet them. The most famous movie star in the world was wearing jeans, a t shirt and not a stitch of makeup. She was carrying her youngest, six month old Riley Jane. She looked at the cake box Kate was carrying. “Death by Chocolate?” she asked.

“Like I would bring you anything else.”

“This is why we’re best friends.” She handed Riley to Kate while she relieved her of the cake. She gave everyone a quick kiss and extended her hand to Emma. “You must be Emma. Marina Nash.”

“It’s a pleasure,” Emma smiled.

“Cabe!” A man as tall as Cabe walked toward them wearing jeans and a well fitting t shirt. He pulled Cabe into a hug.

“When are we going on a ride?” asked Cabe.

“Soon, brother. As soon as we get the baby on a better sleep schedule.”

“Oh for God’s sake, Frank. You just don’t want to leave your baby girl,” said Marina. “Cabe, please, for the sake of both our sanities, get him on a bike and the hell out of the house.”

“You’ve got it,” Cabe laughed.

Frank extended his hand to Emma. “You must be Emma. I’m Frank Nash.” He glanced around at the children and assorted Russian speaking adults. “Welcome to the madness.” Marina shot him a withering look. “Divine madness, darling,” he quickly added.

Emma looked back and forth between Frank and Cabe. “Cabe, I thought Jonathan was your only American family. Are you cousins?”

Cabe laughed. “We get that a lot but we aren’t related.”

“Are you sure?” she smiled.

A beautiful, tall woman with white hair joined them speaking quickly in Russian. Marina rolled her eyes and handed Frank the cake. She started yelling in Russian as she went out the patio door to the backyard. Frank smiled. “Apparently our daughter is climbing the tree in the back yard.”

“And that’s a problem?” asked Emma.

“It is because she’s only just recovered from a broken leg from climbing the same tree.” He introduced the older woman. “Emma, this is my mother in law, Anna Sokolov Davenport.”

She smiled and shook Emma’s hand. “Ah, yes. You’re Jonathan’s girlfriend.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

A little boy ran up and pulled on the woman’s skirt. He spoke to the woman in Russian and she smiled. “Excuse me. Apparently I’m needed.”

Frank laughed. “Like I said, divine madness. Come on outside. You can meet the rest of the family.”

Jonathan took Emma's hand as they walked to the backyard. He could feel her tense up as she spotted Mike talking to Jonas Sokolov. "Let me introduce you," said Frank. "Everyone, this is Emma Moretti, Jonathan's girlfriend."

"Uncle Jonathan," a young girl with long dark hair came running toward him.

"Hi princess," he smiled as he picked her up. She had long dark hair tied up in a ponytail. She looked like a miniature version of her mother. "Emma, this is Anna."

"Hello Anna."

"Hi. Do you speak Russian?"

"No, sorry. Just Italian, French and English."

The little girl shrugged. "Too bad."

"Princess, I need to introduce Emma to everyone."

"But I haven't seen you in ages," she whined.

"Anna Marina." said her father, in a very fatherly tone.

"We'll have the rest of the party to catch up," said Jonathan as he set her down.

"Okay," she said with a pout.

Frank took Jonathan and Emma around to the guests. They walked toward a man with silver temples sitting next to a very stylish woman with long dark hair. "This is Marina's brother Vasily Sokolov, Val, and his wife Katherine."

"It's very nice to meet you."

"We've heard a lot about you."

Emma looked at Jonathan. "Not from me," he said. "Probably Mom talking to Marina."

A man a few years younger approached. There was no mistaking the family resemblance. "Yo, Val. You're on burger duty."

"Jake," said Frank. "This is Emma Moretti."

“Hello, Emma. I’m Jake Sokolov. We’ve heard a lot about you.”

Emma gave Jonathan a withering glare. “I swear, it wasn’t me,” he laughed. Frank introduced her to Anna’s twin brother Jonas who shook her hand like a proper gentleman. The twin’s six year old brother Jacob was ready with a bright smile.

“Anna told me you don’t speak Russian. I can help if you don’t understand.”

Emma smiled and reached for his hand. “Thank you, Jacob. I would greatly appreciate the help. If Jonathan or his parents slip into Italian, I will be happy to translate.”

“That’s okay. Uncle Cabe taught me. I’m pretty good. I have to go help with the table. That’s my job.” The little boy smiled and left.

Frank looked at his son and shook his head. “ We speak Russian at home because that’s how Marina and her brother’s were raised. Marina’s brother, Jake, taught me when we were in the Marines, so Russian is not a problem. The problem is the little bugger is just about fluent in Italian. He has a head for languages. If he doesn’t want me to understand he speaks in Italian. The bigger problem is now he’s teaching his siblings. I’m already outmatched here. I may have to take a class to catch up.”

“How could you be outmatched by your children? You’re their Papa. You’re know more.”

“You’d think so, wouldn’t you. Both the boys have tested with extremely high IQ’s. Anna is more like me. She’s a gearhead too.”

Emma looked at Jonathan. “Gearhead?”

“Very into cars and motorcycles.”

“Oh, I understand.”

Frank introduced her to Marina’s stepfather, George Davenport, a handsome, silver haired man. “George met Anna when Val and Katherine got married. He’s Katherine’s father.”

“That was a lucky day for me and my daughter.” They looked to the sound of a baby laughing and Emma gasped at the sight of Michaela Turner.

Jonathan leaned close and whispered, "It's okay, sweetheart. I promise."

"Come on. I'll introduce you," said Frank.

"Okay," she whispered.

"Hey, Mike. Can I take her off your hands?"

"You're not fooling me, Frank. You want Riley Jane to yourself," she smiled.

She looked at Jonathan and smiled. "Hi, Jonathan," she said as she kissed his cheek. "It's been too long." The baby put her arms out to her father as he scooped her up. He made a raspberry sound on her neck and she giggled.

"This is Miss Riley Jane Nash." He smiled at Emma. "and this is Michaela Turner."

"Hello. I'm so pleased to meet Ms. Turner. I'm a great admirer of your work."

"Thank you so much, Emma. And around here I'm just Mike Sokolov."

Jonas ran up to the them. "Aunt Mike, come see the stones I found. I think you'd like them for your jewelry."

Mike looked at them and smiled. "See what I mean." Jonas grabbed Mike's hand and pulled. "We'll talk in a bit."

Emma looked at Jonathan and smiled. "Michaela Turner," she said. "I can't believe I've met Michaela Turner."

Frank smiled as he gave his daughter another kiss. "I have to admit, Emma, I'm a little confused. Mike is great but well...she's Mike."

Jonathan looked at the awestruck expression on Emma's face as she glanced over at Mike examining the stones Jonas had gathered. "Let me explain. Apparently Michaela Turner is the Michael Jordan of jewelry."

"What? Really?"

Emma nodded. "If that means she's the greatest designer since Tiffany, then yes."

“Wow?” Riley Jane let out a squeal, apparently displeased she was no longer the center of attention. He made another raspberry sound on her neck and she giggled.

“Riley? Wasn’t that your mother’s name?”

“Yes,” said Jonathan. “Marina and Mom have been best friends for years.”

“And Jane was my grandmother,” said Frank. “My mother told me she was very girly. It fits her.”

“Frank!” Marina called. “Round up the children. We’re ready to eat.”

He looked over at Marina. “I’ve got the baby.”

“I’ll take her,” said Emma.

“Here you go.” Frank handed her the baby and Riley Jane busied herself with Emma’s earrings.

“Oh, you like those do you?” She smiled at Jonathan. “She likes jewelry. A girl after my own heart.”

Jonathan couldn’t agree more.

Emma sat at one of the large tables next to Jonathan. His parents were talking to Frank and Marina. Little Anna had insisted on sitting next to Jonathan and was busily making cow eyes at him. If Anna had been a decade older she would have taken issue with her. Emma was holding Riley on her lap who'd decided she liked Emma's jewelry. It was all she could do to keep the baby from pulling on her earrings.

"Oh no, little one. You can look but don't touch," she said in Italian. Riley stopped and looked at her.

"No!" she said. "Sono carini." All the adults stopped talking and looked at the baby.

"Did she just say they're pretty...in Italian?" asked Jonathan.

"Sono carini," Riley repeated as she made another grab for Emma's earrings.

Marina put a plate of hamburgers in front of Emma and smiled. "I'll take her now." She looked at her youngest son. "Jacob, I take it you've been teaching your sister."

"Babies learn fast," he said with a smile.

Marina shook her head and looked at the adults. "Okay, here's a sentence I'd never thought I'd say. Jacob Nash do not teach your sister a language your Mama and Papa don't know."

"Oh, Mama, but she's good at it. She learns fast."

"Then help her with her English and her Russian. Leave the Italian until she's old enough to translate it for me."

"Okay," he said as he reached for a burger.

Jonathan reached for a burger and gave it to Anna. "Thanks, Uncle Jonathan."

Emma watched as Jonathan took care of Anna and her meal. It seemed like such a natural behavior for him, despite having grown up as an only child. He caught her staring. "What?"

"You seem so comfortable with the children for being an only child."

“I’ve been around them for a while. They’re good kids. You do pretty well with kids and you’re an only child.”

She made a dismissive noise. “In a town like Genoa, friends like the Russos and Asaros, there are always children around. There’s always a baby who needs picking up.” She glance at him as he pushed food around his plate. “What is it?”

He looked around to see who was listening and then leaned in and spoke quietly, “You said your parents wanted grandchildren. You never said if it was what you wanted.”

Emma looked at the gleam in eye. She knew what he was thinking. He wanted children but he wouldn’t press her. He wanted to know what she wanted. She smiled and whispered, “I want children.”

Jonathan couldn’t help but grin as he nodded and said, “Okay.”

She kept snatching glances at Jonathan as she tried to eat her meal. He’d been honest with her from the beginning. He wanted her to stay. Now she had to decide if she could leave her parents and everything she’d ever known for entire life.

Emma saw Michaela Turner looking at Kate's jewelry. It was then she realized Kate was wearing the jewelry she'd made for her. Kate was smiling as she waved her over to them. She tried to calm her nerves as she pasted on a fake smile.

"Emma, Mike was admiring your work."

"This is beautiful. Your metal work is flawless. Jade is a lot harder to work with than most people think."

Her heart pounded. Michaela Turner said her metal work is flawless. "Thank you, Ms. Tur..." Michaela looked at her and smiled.

"Mike, please."

"Thank you, Mike. Your opinion means a great deal to me."

"You have pictures, sketches. Show me."

"Oh, I..."

"Let's skip the false modesty, Emma. You know you're good. I bet the owner of a store claims your designs as their own."

"How did you know?"

"Because I've been there. Show me your pictures."

"Where's your portfolio?" asked Kate.

"In the car."

"Jonathan!"

He came left his conversation with the rest of the men and walked toward them. "Yeah Mom?"

"Go get Emma's portfolio." He smiled and ran out of the backyard.

Mike sat down at on a chaise and indicated Emma should sit chair next to her. Jonathan came back quickly with her portfolio. Mike took it from his hand. "Now take your Mom to go visit with the others. We don't need any help."

Emma's hands were shaking as she unzipped her portfolio. She'd arranged some of her favorite designs with photos of the finished pieces. She watched as Mike examined each design and photo. She was nodding and smiling. She looked at Emma and smiled. "You're gifted. Truly."

"Thank you, Mike."

"Your work with colored stones reminds me of my own work. We are of like minds."

Emma gasped and tried to hold back her tears. She couldn't believe this was happening. "Thank you."

She pointed to the last few designs that had no pictures. "What about these? You haven't made these yet?"

"These are new designs. I've done them since I've been here in the States."

Mike got a big smile. "Perfect. They could be your first designs for me."

"What?"

"No one but my husband knows this. I'm opening a store in Los Angeles in three months. My husband and I live in Carmel which is four hours north of here and I plan on staying there. I've been looking for someone who shares my sensibilities, someone who can represent the kind of work I do."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm looking for someone who can run my LA location."

"Are you offering me a job?" she gasped.

"We will need to talk more, but from meeting you and looking at your work, I think you'd be perfect."

"I don't know what to say."

"Don't say anything. Think about it."

“I’m here on a tourist visa.”

“I don’t think that’ll be a problem. Half the family are government agents and the other half are lawyers.”

“I’m not family.”

Mike chuckled as she looked at Jonathan with his parents, trying not to look at them. “That’s just a technicality for now.” She pulled some stones out of a zipped pocket on her purse and put them on the table between them. “Speaking of family, my nephew has been collecting these for me. What do you think?”

Emma looked at the various colored stones. Her brain went into automatic as she examined each stone. She picked up a large piece of pink marbled quartz. “This one is beautiful. I wouldn’t alter the shape. I’d put it in a small gold mounting, a few discreet prongs, nothing to take away from the color.”

Mike smiled and picked up the stones. “Perfect.” She put them back in pocket and took Emma’s hand. “I know you have a lot to think about and if you’re interested we’ll need to talk about business, managing the store, percentages.”

“Percentages?”

“I would never lay claim to your designs. You should be paid properly for your work.” She could see Emma was tongue tied. “I know I’ve thrown a lot at you. My husband and I will be staying at the St. Regis for a few days.” She looked around at the large crowd and smiled. “I love my family but the truth is,” she glanced at her Jake who shot her a wink. “The truth is I love having some quiet time with my husband.” She pulled out a business card out of her bag and handed it to her. “You can reach me at this number.”

“Thank you,” Emma said. “Can I ask you, why would you bring me on? You’ve always been independent.”

“I’ve had my small shop in Carmel for years. I had done very well. Then I married the brother of Marina Sokolov and my business exploded. I can’t keep up with the demand. I’m flying down here several times a month to meet clients. Opening a store here is the only logical choice but I’m not leaving Carmel. My husband and I love it there.

I can hire managers and sales people, but to find someone who sees jewelry as I do, who could understand my vision, that's near impossible. That was until I met you. Just think about it and call me."

With that Michaela Turner left Emma standing in the middle of a noisy family party and unable to hear a word. All she could think of was her professional hero not only like her work, she wanted to work with her. She needed to get away. She darted past Jonathan and ignored him when he called after her. She walked into the kitchen and saw a stairway. She went downstairs and found herself in the middle of a home gym. What was she going to do? This was too much. It was too good. Maybe it was too good to be true.

Jonathan followed Emma into the house. He saw her disappear down a stairway and followed her. He found her pacing back and forth in a workout room. "Sweetheart, what's wrong?"

She turned and pointed at him. "Did you do this?"

"Do what?"

"Michaela Turner offer me a job! Not just a job, running her new Los Angeles store."

"That's great, sweetheart. She must really like your work."

"Did you put her up to it? Are you financing this?"

"What? No!"

"This is what you want. You want me to stay. It would mean I'd have to stay in Los Angeles."

"Emma, I'm telling you I had nothing to do with a job offer. I wanted you to meet her because you were both in jewelry. I knew she was popular in LA but I had no idea Mike was that famous. If she offered you a job it's because you're talented."

"How can I believe you?!"

Jonathan felt like he'd been gut punched. "How can you not? I've never lied to you. If you still don't trust me, then what are we doing?" He started leave but stopped when he heard her crying. He gathered her into his arms and was relieved when she didn't fight him. "Emma, for God's sake, talk to me. What's wrong?"

She sobbed and everything came spilling out. "I've spent my whole life hoping for the tiniest part of what I've had since I've met you. I've worked so hard to get where I was in Genoa. I apprenticed with jewelers until I got a position with a good place. I put everything else in my life aside. No man, no children, nothing but focus on work. Then I meet you and I'm in California staying in a palace and I meet my idol." She looked at him totally confused. "The most famous actress in the world served me hamburgers!" He tried not to snicker, and failed. "Are you laughing at me?!"

“God, sweetheart, no! It’s just I’ve known all these people since I first met my parents. They’re my family. All I see when I look at Marina is a fierce Russian mama.” He took a breath. “That’s not all, is it?”

“No. It’s you.”

His heart pounded. “Me? What did I do? Please, baby, let me make it right.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong, that’s the problem.”

“Okay, now I’m confused.”

“You have done everything right. You’ve never pressured me into anything. I knew that first day in the church yard, I shouldn’t get attached but I couldn’t help it.” She gave him a sad smile. “You are so damn handsome.” He tried not to snicker, and again, failed. “After you went home with your parents I was miserable for weeks.”

“You were? You never said anything.”

“I never said anything to anyone. I didn’t want my parents to say I told you so. I thought it wouldn’t hurt me to keep in touch. I couldn’t wait for your emails and when we could FaceTime. I missed you so much.” She buried her head in his chest. “Then I came here and I realized just how much I love you.”

He held her close. “I love you too, sweetheart. So much.”

“Now what? She looked up him and his heart nearly broke. How could she not understand him?”

“Emma, sweetheart, when I tell you I love you I don’t mean just for now. I’ve never told a woman I love you.”

“You haven’t?”

“No. Only you. I don’t want us for just today. I want forever.”

“What?” Her voice quivered.

He smiled and cupped her cheek. “Forever, the church, the big party, our families celebrating,” he paused and gave her a light kiss. “Maybe a couple of kids. But what I

want more than anything is you. So if that means we live here or we go back to Italy, I don't care. All I know is I will do whatever it takes to make this work for both of us."

"You mean that, don't you? You'd follow me back to Genoa."

"Absolutely."

"It would be a hell of a commute to Los Angeles," she gave him a mischievous grin.

"What?" he asked almost afraid of the answer.

"Michaela Turner, the best jewelry designer in the world, just asked me to manage her new store. I'd be crazy to turn that down."

He pulled her into a deep kiss. "Oh Emma, sweetheart. I love you."

"I love you too." She wiped a tear from her cheek. "All my dreams have come true all at once. Now what do I do?"

Jonathan grinned. "Get married?"

Emma was nervous as Jonathan drove her to the address Mike had given them. Jonathan offered her the car if she wanted to go alone but she said no. She was nervous enough without facing LA traffic. He pulled up in front of a building that had a marble front and a large show window. Over the door an elegant gold sign read 'Michaela Turner'

"Do you want me to wait in the car?" he asked.

"No, it's okay." They got out of the car and knocked on the front door. Mike came to the door in jeans and a dusty t shirt.

"Hi, come on in."

"Mike, I know you two have a lot to talk about. I'll stay out of the way. I'm just playing chauffeur today."

"Good, go be scare. There's a break room in the back. It's finished so you can make calls or watch TV."

"Cool." He smiled at Emma. "Come find me when you're finished." Emma smiled and nodded, too nervous to speak.

"Let me take you on the tour. The front of the store will be for walk ins. I have a line that I have manufactured so I can keep things at a reasonable price point." Emma check the cases that ran parallel to the wall.

"You have only these cases and the window? There is space in the center of the room."

"There is but I will use that shelves for less expensive items. I don't want anything in the center of the room that would be a security risk. Behind the aisle of cases are panic buttons."

"Panic?"

"Silent alarms in case of robbery. And while we're talking about that, there is nothing in here worth fighting a thief. The only rule in that instance is to get any employees and yourself to safety."

Emma smiled. "Understood."

Mike led her passed an elegant curtain to a private interview room. The furniture was exquisite mahogany and their were magnificent oil paintings on the wall. She leaned close to a seascape, thinking she recognized the artist.

“Is this?” she asked looking for a signature. “It is. It’s Cabe’s work. He’s so gifted.”

Mike smiled. “Yes he is. Do you recognize this artist?”

She looked at another ocean scene. This included a beach and a long stairway. The location looked familiar. She saw the name ‘Gallo’ in the corner but it wasn’t Cabe’s work. “Jonathan?”

“Yes. If he ever gave up the law he could be a successful artist. They both could.”

“I agree.”

“Okay, this room will be for consultations. Anyone who wants an original piece is going to expect to be treated well. We will have a bar stocked and stock appetizers when you’re expecting clients.”

Emma laughed. “You talk as though I already have the job.”

“You do.” She pulled a file out of the desk. “Here’s my offer. I’ll be here in LA when we first open but once we’re up and running I plan to be hands off.”

Emma couldn’t believe what she was being offered. The salary was substantial, even by LA standards. She was also being offered seventy five percent of the profit from sales of her own designs. “Oh, Mike. I don’t know what to say. You’re giving me an amazing opportunity.”

“Emma, I’m not giving you anything. You’ve worked hard to get where you are. You were blessed with an artistic ability, yes, but you’ve worked to master it. I’ve seen your metal work. That’s genuine skill. When you take this job, you’ll work hard. You’ll earn every penny I’m offering you.”

“Thank you, Mike.” Emma smiled and held out her shaking hand. “I accept your offer.”

Mike clapped her hands together. “Hot Damn! The only thing we need now is a sales staff.”

“Actually, I met someone at the store where Jonathan bought my earrings. Her name is Angela. I was very impressed with her.”

“Excellent! Offer her a job.” She opened the drawer and pulled out a box. She opened it and pulled out a business card. Emma gasped when she saw it.

Michaela Turner

Fine Jewelry

Emma Moretti, manager

“I was optimistic you’d say yes. I also had this made. It will go in the window.” Mike handed her brass plaque with black lettering.

Designs by Emma Moretti

For Michaela Turner

It was more than she could absorb and she began to cry. “I, I can’t believe this is happening.” Mike gave her a tight hug.

“It’s happening. The late nights, the fingers burned from hot metal, all of it. It’s going to be a hell of a lot of work.”

Emma grinned from ear to ear. “Yeah! It’s going to be great!”

“It sure is. Let me show you our back room. You can tell me if there are any tools you’ll want me to get.”

Emma held tight to her plaque as she walked into the work area. All the brand new equipment was the best in the industry. She looked at what would be her work bench. She ran her hand over the work table and picked up the small welding torch. “It’s perfect.” She looked at Mike’s big smile. “I can’t wait to get started.”

“Good, because those pieces you designed, I want those ready for the opening. I’ll get you in touch with my gem dealer. Order what ever you need to make them perfect. We’ll have a grand opening the first week. Marina’s attendance always means a big crowd.”

“I’ll start right away, but first,” she held up her plaque. “I want to show Jonathan.”

“Go,” she smiled.

She ran to the break room and found him on the phone. He gave her a broad smile. “Carolyn, I’ll call you back.” He discontinued the call and set it down. “Well?”

Emma held up her plaque and squealed. “Look!”

“Wow! That’s fantastic.” She set the plaque down on the table and he pulled her into a hug. “I take it that means you accepted the job.”

“Jonathan you won’t believe everything she’s doing. She wants me to design pieces for the opening in three months. This is everything I’ve ever hoped for. “

“I’m so proud of you.”

“Come on, I want to see how it will look in the window.”

“We should take a picture for your parents.”

Emma’s eyes lit up and headed toward the front of the store. “Are you coming?”

“In a sec.”

Jonathan hung back and found Mike. “Did you bring it?”

“Right here.” She opened the desk and handed him a ring box. He opened it and smiled. It was perfect. The large oval emerald was dark and clear. It was set in yellow gold and surrounded by small yellow diamonds.

“You’re sure she’ll like these stones?”

“Jonathan. She’s a jeweler. She’ll freak,” she laughed. “To find that many matched yellow diamonds is very difficult and an emerald that dark and clear, well I’d tell you it’s more valuable than a diamond of that size but you know that already. You paid for it.”

“It’s a gorgeous as you said it would be.”

“Are you giving it to her today?”

“No. This is her day. I don’t want to take away from it.”

Mike smiled and kissed his cheek. “You’re a good man, Jonathan Gallo.”

“Thanks, Mike.” He’d just gotten the ring box into his pocket when Emma burst back in.

“Come on! You have to see this!” She led him outside and she pointed to the plaque in the window. “I can hardly believe it.”

He gave her a soft kiss. “I’m so proud of you.” He pulled out his phone and lined up a shot of Emma and her plaque. Then he backed up and took a picture of her under the large ‘Michaela Turner’ sign. He knew she wanted to send these to her parents. He hoped they would share her joy.

They sat at the table at his parent's house while Emma recounted her day with Mike. "Hey, we need champagne. Dad?"

"There's some in the cabinet. I'll get the bottle you get the glasses."

Jonathan pulled champagne flutes from the cabinet and set them out for his father to pour. After a satisfying pop and some applause Cobe filled the glasses and passed them around. Jonathan held up his glass. "A toast. To Emma and her exciting new adventure."

"To Emma."

"Thank you, all of you. I still can't believe this is happening."

"I've known Mike for years," said Kate. "She is a sweet, wonderful woman but she's also a smart business woman. She wouldn't have made you this offer if she didn't think you were right for the job."

"Thank you, Kate. I appreciate you saying that." Emma smiled and took a sip of the excellent champagne. She set down her glass and looked Jonathan in the eye. "Now, are you going to tell me what you got from Mike?"

Jonathan gasped. He hadn't planned on doing this now. He'd planned on candlelight and just the two of them. He tried to cover by sipping his wine. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Emma laughed and looked at his parents. "I will always know when he's hiding something. His ears turn red."

Kate laughed. "So does his father's"

"They do not!" said Jonathan and Cobe together.

Emma and Kate both laughed. "I bet it's another extravagant gift, like my earrings."

He sighed and looked at his father, who shrugged.

"They have us pegged, son. Might as well give up."

Jonathan smiled and stood next to her. "I wasn't going to do this today. This is your day and I'm so proud of you." He pulled her to her feet and gave her a soft kiss. "I'm also in love with you, Emma Moretti." He reached into his pocket and pulled out the ring box. Emma and his mother both gasped when he went down on one knee. He opened the box to reveal the ring. "Emma Moretti, will you please marry me?"

"Oh my God, it's so beautiful. Wait! Have you been walking around with something this valuable in your pocket?"

"Ah, that's not an answer to my question and I can't stand up until you do."

"Of course I'll marry you, you crazy man!"

He stood, slipped the ring on her finger, and kissed her. It took a few moments for him to be aware that his parents were applauding. "I love you, angel," he whispered.

"I love you too," she whispered. "Crazy man."

Emma was trying not to show how nervous she was to call her parents. She'd told them she'd met Michaela Turner but she'd never mentioned a job offer. She also hadn't told them she and Jonathan had talked about getting married. Now she had the job and the man of her dreams. She could only hope her parents would be happy for her. She sat down at the kitchen table and opened the laptop.

"Do you want me to sit with you?" asked Jonathan.

"No. I need to tell them myself."

"Okay, I'll be in the living room. He kissed her forehead. "I love you."

"I love you too." She hit the FaceTime icon and waited for her parents to pick up. "Hi, Mama, Papa."

"Hello sweetheart. Are you having a good time?"

"Yes, Mama. Jonathan is wonderful and his parents have been very kind."

"I'm glad you're having a good time," said her Papa. "When are you coming home?"

"Papa, Mama, I need to tell you something." She could see the look on their faces. This was going to be rough. "Remember when I told you I met Michaela Turner? She's asked me to run her new LA store. She's even going to feature my designs."

"What?" her Mama gasped.

"You're not coming home?" asked her Papa.

"No, Papa. I'm going to stay in California."

"With the American?"

"Jonathan. His name is Jonathan. Papa, I've been offered the job of my dreams. Can't you be happy for me?"

"How can we be happy? You're leaving us," said Mama.

"Where will you live? With the American?"

“Papa, his name is Jonathan,” she wiped a tear from her cheek. “He asked me to marry him.”

“What?” asked Mama.

She held up her hand. “He gave me a beautiful ring.”

“This is too much. You should come home,” said Papa.

“Why can’t you trust me?” she wept. When she looked up she saw Jonathan standing in the doorway.

“Can I?” he asked. She nodded. She didn’t know what else to do.

He sat down next to her and patted her leg under the table. “Hello Mr. and Mrs. Moretti. I love your daughter very much. I understand why you might be unsure, everything has happened quickly. Please come to visit and you can see what Emma’s life will be like.”

“California?”

“I will send you tickets. You come when ever you like. You can stay at my home. Stay as long as you like. You need to see what she’s going to be doing. She’s going to be running and designing for the best jewelry designer in the country. She’s trained for this her whole life. She deserves to have a chance.”

“And you? You want to keep her from her parents?”

“Mama!”

“No, Mrs. Moretti. I told her I’d live in Genoa if that’s what she wanted. All I want is Emma’s happiness.” He looked at her and smiled. “I love her. How could I not?”

“Mama, Papa, please come to visit. You can see for yourself.”

Her parents looked at each other. “We need to talk. We will talk later.”

“Yes, Papa,” she said quietly. “I love you.”

“We love you too.”

Emma had tried to focus on her new job and not think about her parents. They'd talked briefly since that night but they hadn't agreed to come visit. She hadn't heard from them in days and it was killing her. Right now she was on the deck helping Jonathan get ready for a pool party with his Scorpion family. She loved how they were all so close. It made her feel like she was back home. Even though she was an only child, the neighborhoods she grew up in were always filled with lots of people. Everyone knew everyone. She hadn't been in California that long but she knew that wasn't always the case. Jonathan came out on the deck with a messenger envelope in his hands. "Work?"

"No, this is for you." He opened the envelope and pulled out a small card. "It's your work permit and the paperwork we need to get married."

"I don't know how you got this done so fast."

He gave her a quick kiss. "You have a smart lawyer."

"Yes I do," she smiled. She took the paperwork and secured it in their bedroom. She looked around and smiled. Once they'd become engaged she'd moved her things to Jonathan's. He'd gone back to work but he'd gotten her a car so she could get around the city. She'd also bought enough clothes to get by for a while. She wanted to plan their wedding but she just couldn't, not without her parents. She was working hard at the store, getting everything ready for the opening. She'd hired Angela away from her previous employer and she was proving Emma right. She was tough, smart and knew how to sell.

Emma had finished the designs for the opening but she wanted something different, something that would set them apart. She was considering her frustration when she walked back to the deck and got the shock of her life.

"Mama? Papa?" She threw herself into her parent's arms. "I've missed you so much." She shot Jonathan a glare. "Why didn't you tell me they were coming?!"

He put up his hands and smiled. "It wasn't me." He indicated his parents, who were standing behind them.

"You did this?"

“Jonathan’s mama called. She was, how did she put it, displeased that you and her son were unhappy and that we were the cause. She told us, didn’t ask us mind you, told us we were coming to visit and straighten this out.” Anna Moretti looked over her shoulder at Kate. “Are you sure you’re not Italian?”

“They sent tickets and a limousine to make sure we got to the airport and then another at the airport to bring us here,” said Stefano. He leaned closer to his daughter. “It was very nice.”

“I’m so happy to see you,” she cried.

Jonathan extended his hand. “It’s good to see you again, Mr. Moretti.” Stefano shook his hand and held on a moment for intimidation. To Jonathan’s credit, he didn’t flinch. “Hello, Mrs. Moretti.”

Anna looked at him and gave him a slight smile. “Since you will soon be family you should call me Mama.”

“Thank you, Mama. Come, let me show you around.”

Emma held her mother’s hand as Jonathan showed them what was now their home. Maybe she could have everything she wanted after all.

It had been a hectic six months for Jonathan and Emma. His law practice had gotten so busy he'd taken on one of the junior associates who'd worked on his pro bono cases. Emma's designs for the store had taken off. She'd taken the design she'd made for Happy's barrette and made it into a series industrial style of jewelry. It had become so popular that they could barely keep it in stock.

All of the work madness was compounded by the chaos of planning a wedding. Emma's parents had turned down Jonathan's offer of buying them a California home. They promised to visit often but they preferred Genoa. For now they were staying at his parents home. Because today, he and Emma were getting married.

"Yo, Dad! Can you help me with this?!" His father came into his bedroom and chuckled.

"Having trouble mastering the bowtie?" Jonathan handed him the bowtie. Cabe held the tie and looked at him.

"Are you ready for this?"

"Yeah, I'm more than ready although I can't believe Emma made me stay here last night."

"Son, you're marrying an Italian girl from a traditional family. You're lucky this and pre canna were all you have to do."

"We definitely want children and since I wasn't raised as anything in particular, having my kids be Roman Catholic is fine."

"Plus your in-laws are pleased."

"Anything I can do to win them over," he smiled.

"Just like you did for Emma."

"Yeah," he smiled.

"That's why I know you're going to be okay."

"What do you mean?"

“You’ll do whatever it takes to make her happy.”

“Just like you do for Mom.” He saw his father’s eyes tear and he fought to keep his composure. “Dad?”

“I was determined not to be a weepy old woman today.”

Jonathan laughed. “Emma said in Italy we’d be considered stoic.”

Cabe chuckled. “I do like your girl.”

“So do I.”

“Do you?”

“What do you mean? Of course I do. I love her.”

“No, that’s two different things. You can love someone without liking them very much. Do you like her?”

Jonathan thought for a moment about what his father said. “Yes, I do. She has this way about catching me off guard and putting me in my place. She’s so focused. She’s so creative. She know what she wants and goes for it. She’s kind.” He looked at Cabe and smiled. “I really like who she is.”

Cabe smiled. “That’s good, son. In the end, that’s what will keep the two of you together.” He cleared his throat and reached into his pocket. “I have something for you.” He pulled out a large gold cross. “This was my father’s. He always wore it. I’d like you to have it.”

“Dad,” he whispered as he held the cross in his hands. “Thank you.” Cabe helped him put on the cross before he tied his bow tie.

“You look great, kid.”

“Thanks, Dad. What’s say we go get me married.”

An hour later he stood at the altar with his father by his side. There could have only been one choice for his best man. It was a little unconventional to select the father of the groom but in all his life Jonathan had never known a better man than Cabe Gallo.

The wedding march started and the church doors opened. Emma walked down the aisle on her father's arm and everything else disappeared. He couldn't see the designer gown and the crowded church. All he saw was the beautiful girl from the church yard.

She whispered to him in Italian, "You look very handsome."

"I don't speak enough Italian to understand."

"Ah, American," she said.

Jonathan smiled because she understood. She was in the church yard too. "Yes. I'm visiting with my parents. So, were you speaking to me?"

"I was asking you why you were sketching me."

"Because you're so beautiful." Then he told her what he knew that first day. "Because I love you."