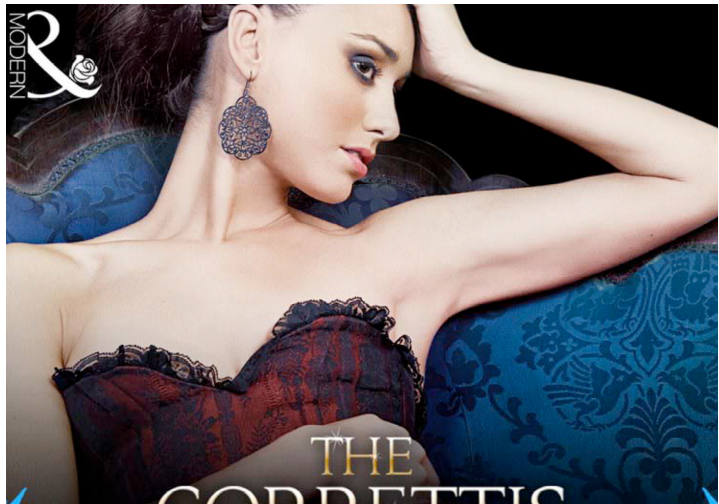
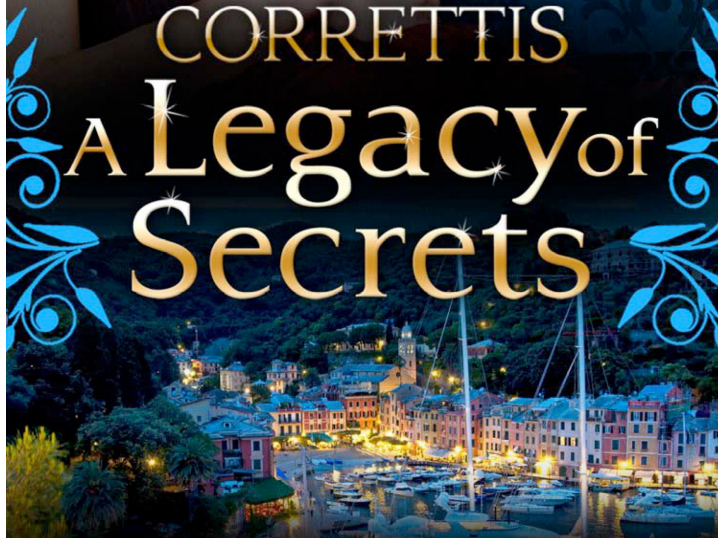


MODERN
& 



THE
CORRETTIS
A Legacy of
Secrets



CAROL MARINELLI

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A Legacy of Secrets

Аннотация

As Santo Corretti's Personal Assistant, Ella is run ragged fielding the playboy's heartbroken exes. She refuses to succumb to his charms in the hope that one day he will let her on his film set. Losing herself in films was how she escaped her harsh upbringing. Santo is a closed book, but it's no secret that there is a lot riding on his latest film. When the director quits, he reluctantly lets Ella step in, and soon finds her passion intoxicating. He can't offer her more than a fling but it could make their time working together all the more pleasurable...!

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‘Do you have to leave?’

‘Santo, please...I have to think about my career. Can we...’

‘I meant, do you have to leave the room?’

‘You didn’t mean that.’ Usually she rebuffed any flirting easily;

it was just a little harder to do this morning and not just because they were on a bed in a very dark room, more because she felt as if she had glimpsed today the real Santo, the one behind the very expensive but very shallow façade.

‘Remember how you told me you would never get involved with someone you work with...’

‘I do.’

Her second day at work, they had gone for dinner, had sat side by side and pored over his diary, Ella trying to be efficient but terribly aware of his beauty, trying to ignore it, trying to work when his hand had reached for her face.

‘If you try anything like that again, you’ll have my notice with immediate effect.’

How she rued those words now.

‘We have a problem.’ Santo said and she looked at him and, though it was terribly hard to think of Santo and morals at the same time, Ella realised he did actually have some; for apart from a few stunning suggestions, apart from the odd gentle flirt, not once since that day had he put so much as a finger wrong.

She just wanted him to put that finger wrong now.

And he did. Just one finger dusted her forearm and Santo waited for her hand to halt his, gave her every opportunity to stand, to change her mind. She’d been very clear as to her boundaries, but his breath stilled as he felt them tumble down.

About the Author

CAROL MARINELLI finds writing a bio rather like writing her New Year's Resolutions. Oh, she'd love to say that since she wrote the last one, she now goes to the gym regularly and doesn't stop for coffee and cake and a gossip afterwards; that she's incredibly organised and writes for a few productive hours a day after tidying her immaculate house and a brisk walk with the dog.

The reality is, Carol spends an inordinate amount of time daydreaming about dark, brooding men and exotic places (research), which doesn't leave too much time for the gym, housework or anything that comes in between. Her most productive writing hours happen to be in the middle of the night, which leaves her in a constant state of bewildered exhaustion.

Originally from England, Carol now lives in Melbourne, Australia. She adores going back to the UK for a visit—actually, she adores going anywhere for a visit—and constantly (expensively) strives to overcome her fear of flying. She has three gorgeous children who are growing up so fast (too fast—they've just worked out that she lies about her age!) and keep her busy with a never-ending round of homework, sport and friends coming over.

A nurse and a writer, Carol writes for the Mills & Boon[®]

Modern™ and Medical Romance™ lines and is passionate about both. She loves the fast-paced, busy setting of a modern hospital, but every now and then admits it's bliss to escape to the glamorous, alluring world of her Modern heroes and heroines. A bit like her real life, actually!

A Legacy of Secrets

Carol Marinelli



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PROLOGUE

‘PLEASE.’

Ella wasn't sure how many times that word had been said to her in the past, but she knew that she would forever recall this time.

‘Please, Ella, don't go.’

She stood at the departure terminal of the busy Sydney International Airport, passport and boarding pass in hand, and looked into her mother's pleading eyes—the same amber eyes as her own—and she almost relented. How could she possibly leave her to deal with her father alone?

But, given all that had happened, how could she stay?

‘You have a beautiful home....’

‘No!’ Ella would not be swayed. ‘I have a flat that I bought in the hope that you would move in with me. I thought that you'd finally decide to leave him, and yet you won't.’

‘I can't.’

‘You can.’ Ella stood firm. ‘I have done everything to help you leave and yet you still refuse.’

‘He's my husband.’

‘And I'm your daughter.’ Ella's eyes flashed with suppressed anger. ‘He beat me, Mum!’

‘Because you upset him. Because you try to get me to leave...’ Her mother had been in Australia for more than thirty years, was

married to an Australian, and yet her English was still poor. Ella knew that she could stand here and argue her point some more, but there wasn't time for that. Instead she said the words she had planned to say and gave her mother one final chance to leave. 'Come with me.'

Then Ella handed her mother the ticket she had secretly purchased.

'How?'

'I've brought your passport with me.' Ella pulled it out of her bag and handed it to her mother to show that she was serious and that she really had thought this through. 'You can walk away now, Mum. You can go back to Sicily and be with your sisters. You can have a life....' She saw her mother wrestle with the decision. She missed her country so much, spoke about her sisters all the time, and if she would just have the courage to walk away then Ella would help her in any way that she could.

'I can't.'

There was simply no point, but Ella did her best to persuade her mum. Right up to check-in, right up to the departure gate, Ella tried to convince her mother to leave, but she had decided now that the subject was closed.

'Have a nice trip, Ella.'

'I'm not going for a holiday, Mum,' Ella said. She wanted her mother to realise how serious this was, that she wasn't just going to be away for a few weeks. 'I'm going there to look for work.'

'But you said you will visit Sicily.'

‘I might.’ Ella honestly didn’t know. ‘I don’t know if I can, Mum. I’d hoped to go there with you. I think I’ll stay in Rome.’

‘Well, if you do get to Sicily, give my love to your aunts. Tell them...’ Gabriella faltered for a moment.

‘*Don’t* tell them, you mean.’ Ella looked at her mum, who would be in trouble for even coming to the airport, and couldn’t believe she was expecting Ella to tell her aunts how fantastic her life was in Australia, to keep up the pretence. ‘Are you asking me to lie?’

‘Why you do this to me?’ Gabriella demanded, as she did whenever Ella didn’t conform or questioned things. Possibly Ella was more Sicilian than she gave herself credit for, because as her mother used the very familiar line, Ella was tempted to use it herself. *Why you do this to me? Why did you stand and scream as you watched your daughter being beaten? Why didn’t you have the guts to get up and leave?* Of course she didn’t say that. Ella hadn’t shared her feelings with anyone, not even her mum, since that day.

‘I have to go, Mum.’ Ella looked up at the board—she really did have to, customs would take forever—but at the last moment her voice cracked. ‘Mum, please...’

‘Ella, go.’

Gabriella wept as she said goodbye but Ella didn’t—she hadn’t since that terrible day two months ago. Instead she hugged her mum and headed through customs and then sat dry-eyed on the plane with an empty seat beside her, nursing her guilt for leaving

her mother behind, but knowing deep down there was nothing more she could do.

She was twenty-seven years old, and had spent enough of her life trying to get her mother away from her father. Even her job had been chosen with money, rather than passion, in mind.

Ella had worked as a junior assistant for a couple of CEOs, then moved through the ranks, eventually becoming a PA to a politician. She'd spent the past two years in Canberra, dreading what she might come home to in Sydney.

Unable to live like that, she had swapped a very good job for a not-so-good one, and bought a home nearer her parents. Now, after all those years of trying to help her mum, Ella knew she just had to get away.

She had references in her bag and could speak Italian.

It was time to get a life.

Her life.

It never entered her head that she might need some time off to heal from all she had endured—instead Ella's focus was on finding work.

Except it was just rather more intimidating than she'd first thought.

It was January, and she had left the hot Australian summer for a cold Italian winter. Rome was busier than anywhere Ella had ever been. The Gypsies seemed to make a beeline for her every time she ventured from the hotel, but she took in the sites, stood in awe in the Vatican and threw a coin in the Trevi Fountain,

as her mother had told her to do. But what was the point, Ella thought, for her mother would never be back.

She took a train to Ostia Antica, visited the ruins and froze as she walked along the beach, wondering when the healing would start, when the revelation that she had done the right thing by leaving would strike.

It didn't.

So instead of sitting around waiting, Ella set about looking for work.

'You have a lot of experience for someone your age, but...'
It was the same wherever she went—yes, her résumé was impressive, but even though they were conversing in Italian, Claudia explained at her interview, as the others had yesterday, Ella's Italian simply wasn't good enough for the agency to put her forward to any of the employers on their books.

'You understand it better than you speak it,' Claudia said. She really had been nice, so Ella chose not to be offended. 'Is there any other type of work you are interested in?'

Ella was about to say no, to shake her head, but with nothing to lose she was honest. 'The film industry.'

'We don't handle actors.'

'No, no...'
Ella shook her head. 'I'm interested in directing.'
It was all she had ever wanted to do, but saving up enough money to give her mother the option to move had been her priority. Instead of trying to break into the industry as a poorly paid junior, Ella had gone for better-paid jobs. But this morning, sitting in

a boutique Rome employment agency, Ella realised she could perhaps focus on herself.

‘Sorry.’ Claudia gave a helpless shrug and as Ella went to thank her, she halted her. ‘One moment. We have a client, Corretti Media—they are in Sicily—Palermo. Have you heard of them?’

‘A bit.’ Ella was obsessed with the industry. ‘They’ve done well with a few blockbusters recently.’

‘Alessandro is the CEO, and there is Santo—he’s a film producer.’

‘I have heard of him.’ Ella said, though chose not to add that it wasn’t his producing skills he was famous for—more his scandalous ways. Still, Claudia seemed quite happy to discuss them.

‘He goes through a lot of PAs!’ Claudia rolled her eyes as she pulled up the file. ‘Yes, it is Santo who is looking for someone—you would go with him when he is on location. You would need an open mind though—he is always getting into trouble and he has quite a reputation with women.’

Ella didn’t care about his reputation, just the thought of being on location. Maybe she could get some experience—at least it would be a start. ‘Perhaps he would be more forgiving of your Italian if I tell him that you are familiar with the industry.’

‘My Italian is improving,’ Ella said.

‘And you’d need to seriously smarten up.’

This time Ella was offended. She was sitting in a very expensive grey suit—one that had been suitable for Parliament,

she wanted to point out—but then again, it was three years old and politicians weren't exactly known for their stand-out fashion.

‘Santo Corretti expects immaculate.’

Ella forced a smile. ‘Then he'll get immaculate.’

‘One moment.’

Ella sat as Claudia made the call, trying to quell the excitement that was mounting. Because for the first time she actually wanted a job, wanted it in a way she never had before, though her cheeks did burn a bit when Claudia looked her over and said that yes, she was good-looking. Was honey blonde hair really a prerequisite for this job? Ella wondered as she heard her hair being described.

As it turned out it didn't matter.

‘Sorry...’ Claudia shook her head. ‘That was his current PA, and though she is very keen to leave, she says there is no point even putting you forward. He is very particular.’

‘Well, thank you for trying.’

Leaving the agency Ella stopped for coffee. Gazing out the window at a busy Rome morning, she told herself it was ridiculous to be so disappointed about a job she hadn't even been interviewed for.

And even if she had...Ella looked out at the women. There was just an effortless elegance to them and if Santo Corretti went for immaculate then the bar was raised very high here in Italy. He would have taken one look at Ella in her rather boring interview suit and the answer would have been the same.

Anyway, Ella asked herself, did she really want to work in

Sicily, did she really want to go and revisit her mother's past?

Yes.

Ella's heart started a frantic thump, because she simply wasn't ready. Except she was walking out of the café and instead of tackling the next agency on her list, she found herself peering into the beautifully dressed windows, wondering what a PA for Santo Corretti might wear. And a few moments later she was asking a shop assistant the same.

Well, she didn't say his name, just said that she had a very important job interview. A little while later Ella sat and had her long curly hair trimmed and tamed and then loosely tied at the nape and her make-up and nails done too.

By early afternoon she checked out of her hotel, and took the short flight to Sicily. She looked out at the land she had seen in endless faded photos that had been described to her over and over by her mother. Despite the beauty of the snowcapped mountains, the glistening azure sea and the juts of buildings vying for space on the coastline, Ella wasn't quite sure that she was ready for this. But she was here to work, she reminded herself.

While the bravest thing she had ever done might have been to leave Australia, Ella thought as she checked her luggage into storage and stepped out into the winter sun, this felt pretty brave too.

Or foolish.

She'd find out soon enough.

Ella climbed into a white taxi. 'Corretti Media.'

Ella held her breath, worried he might ask for an address, or say he had no idea where she meant, but the driver just nodded and Ella pulled out her mirror from her handbag, smoothed down her hair and touched up her make-up. Her newly capped gleaming white smile felt unfamiliar. No one would ever guess the price she had paid to get it—and not in money.

Snapping the mirror closed, Ella refused to dwell on it, just pushed all thoughts of her father aside. As the taxi pulled up outside the Corretti Media tower it was a very determined woman who paid the driver and then stepped into the sleek air-conditioned building and told the receptionist that she was here about the PA vacancy.

Un attimo, prego. The receptionist reached for her phone and a few moments later Ella stepped out of an elevator and was somewhat stunned by the response she received.

Buona fortuna! An exceptionally pretty and very tearful woman thrust a black leather-bound diary and a set of car keys at Ella as she wished her good luck dealing with Santo and then shouted over her shoulder an old Italian proverb that Ella had heard a few times from her mother. ‘If a man deceives me once, shame on him. If he deceives me twice, shame on me.’

‘I take it that’s a no, then?’

A deep, rich voice had Ella turn and, as he walked out of his office, she could, for a dizzying second, understand his PA’s willingness to have given this man a second chance. She clearly wasn’t giving him a third for, with a sob, she ran for the door,

leaving Ella alone with him.

Green eyes met hers and there was a hint of an unrepentant smile on a very beautiful mouth and, on his left cheek, a livid red hand print.

‘Are you here for an interview?’ he asked Ella in Italian and when she nodded and introduced herself, he gestured to his office and she followed him in.

He needed no introduction.

CHAPTER ONE

SANTO JERKED AWAKE, his heart racing, and reached out for familiar comfort, but rather than in bed with a lover beside him, he was asleep alone on a couch.

What happened last night?

His mind was a cruel trickster.

It did not tell him what had happened—it showed him little clues.

There was an empty whisky bottle on the floor, which Santo stepped over to get to the bathroom, and when he looked down he saw that he was still wearing the wedding suit, but his tie was off and the shirt torn and undone.

He checked the inside pocket of his jacket, remembered Ella double-and triple-checking that he had them before she left and he went off to be best man at his brother's wedding.

The rings were still there.

He splashed his face with water; his face and chest were a mass of bruises.

Santo looked at his neck and grimaced, but a few love bites were the least of his concerns as yesterday's events started to come back to him.

Alessandro!

Santo picked up the phone to arrange a driver, but he got the night receptionist who, perhaps unaware that she should not

ask such questions, enquired where he wanted to go and Santo promptly hung up.

Looking out of the window, from his luxurious vantage point, Santo could see the press waiting. Rarely for Santo, he couldn't stomach facing them, or his brother, alone.

'Can you pick me up?'

Despite the hour, Ella answered the phone with her eyes closed. After four months working for Santo Corretti she was more than used to being called out of hours, though he sounded particularly terrible this morning. His deep, low voice, thick with Italian accent, was still beautiful, if a touch hoarse.

Yes, beautiful and terrible just about summed Santo up.

Peeling her eyes open, she looked at the figures on her bedside clock. 'It's 6:00 a.m.,' Ella said. 'On a Sunday.' Which should have been enough reason to end the call and go back to sleep. Yet, all night, Ella had been half expecting him to ring, so much so she had sat with her giant heated rollers in last night and had already laid her clothes out. Like the rest of Sicily, Ella had watched the drama unfold on television yesterday afternoon and had seen updates on the news all night. Even her mother in Australia, watching the Italian news, would know that the much-anticipated wedding of Santo's brother, Alessandro Corretti, to Alessia Battaglia had been called off at the last minute.

Literally, at the last minute.

The bride had fled midway down the aisle and the world was waiting to see how two of Sicily's most notorious families would

deal with the fallout.

Yes, Ella had had a feeling that her services might be required before Monday.

‘Look, this is my day off.’ She did her best to hold firm. ‘I worked yesterday...’ Of course, as just his PA, Ella hadn’t been invited to the wedding. Instead her job had been to ensure that Santo arrived sober, on time and looking divine as he always did.

The divine part had been easy—Santo made a beautiful best man. It was the other two requisites that had taken up rather a lot more of her people skills.

‘I need to pick up Alessandro from the police station,’ Santo said. ‘He was arrested last night.’

Ella lay there silently, refusing to ask for details, while privately wondering just what else had happened yesterday.

She had raised a glass to the screen as she had seen Santo arrive at the church, talking and joking with Alessandro, privately thinking that the gene pool had surely been fizzing with expensive champagne when these two were conceived.

They could, at first glance, almost be twins—both were tall and broad shouldered, both wore their jetblack hair short, both had come-to-bed dark green eyes—but there were differences. Alessandro was the eldest, and the two years that divided the brothers were significant.

As firstborn son to the late Carlo Corretti, Alessandro was rather more ruthless, whereas Santo was a touch lighter in personality, more fun and extremely flirty—but he could still be

completely arrogant at times.

‘Come and pick me up now,’ Santo said, as if to prove her point. Ella let out a long breath, telling herself that in a few weeks, if she got the job she had applied for, then all the scandal and drama of the Correttis would be a thing of the past. Working for Santo was nothing like she’d imagined it would be. ‘The press are everywhere,’ he warned, which was Santo’s shorthand to remind her to look smart—even in a crisis he insisted on appearances. ‘Take a taxi and then pick up my car and drive it around to the hotel entrance. Text me when you’re there.’

‘I hate driving your car,’ Ella started, but was met again with silence. Having given his orders, Santo would assume she was jumping to the snap of his manicured fingers, and had already hung up.

‘Bastard,’ Ella hissed and then she heard his voice.

‘You love me, really.’

Ella was too annoyed to be embarrassed. ‘I love lying in on a Sunday morning.’

‘Tough.’

This time he did hang up.

In a few weeks you’ll be out of it, Ella told herself as she rang for a taxi. The woman on the other end of the phone sounded half asleep as well and told Ella it would be a good fifteen minutes to half an hour, which suited her fine. She climbed out of bed and headed straight for the shower and then to the mirror, but Santo could forget it if he thought she was going to arrive in full

make-up. She changed her mind, because like it or not, Santo was her boss and Ella took her work very seriously. So, instead of a slick of mascara and lipgloss—which were usual weekend fare, if she wore any make-up at all—Ella set to work with the make-up brushes and then smoothed out her hair a touch and tied it into a low ponytail. She pulled on a dark grey skirt and sheer cream blouse and added low heels.

One good thing about working for Santo was her clothing allowance.

Actually, it was the only good thing.

And Ella wasn't even particularly interested in clothes!

Hearing the taxi toot outside her small rented flat, Ella checked her appearance one more time and then grabbed her 'Santo Bag' as she called it, making sure that she had his spare set of car keys, before heading outside. She squinted at the morning sun and took in the vivid colours of a gorgeous Palermo in May. The ocean was glistening and the city still seemed to be sleeping. No doubt the whole of Sicily had had a late night, waiting for updates in the news.

'Buongiorno.' Ella gave the taxi driver the address of the smart hotel where Santo was staying and then sat back and listened to the morning news on the radio.

Of course the jilted Corretti groom was being talked about long after the headlines had been read.

And, of course, the taxi driver was more than delighted with the news. 'Trouble!' he told her. 'As if a wedding would ever unite

the Corretti and Battaglia families...' and happily he chatted some more, unaware he was driving her to meet with Santo. Ella chose not to enlighten him. Santo didn't exactly keep her informed about the goings-on in his family. If anything, his Italian picked up pace if he ever had to speak with one of them, just enough to make it almost impossible for her to work out what was being said.

'They have always fought?' Ella checked.

'Always,' the driver told her and then added that even the death of Salvatore Corretti a few weeks ago would not bring peace between the two families. 'The Correttis even war with themselves.'

That much Ella knew. Even though Santo didn't reveal much about his family, Ella was forever having to deal with the feuding Corretti cousins. The family was incredibly divided and they were all constantly trying to outdo the other, under the guise of the family empire. They were all trying to outmanoeuvre one another in the bid to become top dog, not just at work, but with cars, with women, with horses. Ella was sick of it. She was tired of the dark secrets and mind games they all played.

She'd have put up with it for a while longer though, if Santo would just give her a small step onto the ladder she wanted to climb. Over and over she had asked him if she could work on just one of his films as a junior assistant director.

'*Presto*,' Santo would say and then, as he did all too often when he spoke to her in Italian, he would annoyingly translate for her.

‘Soon.’

Well, soon, she'd be gone.

Ella asked the driver to stop while she bought some coffee and then climbed back in.

As they approached the hotel Ella told the driver that she wished to be dropped off in the underground car park. As they approached she saw that Santo was right—there were a lot of press around and security was tight. Ella was more than happy to show her ID before paying the taxi driver and telling the concerned valet that she wanted to personally take the car up to collect her boss.

Ella slipped into the front seat and smelt not the leather, but the familiar, expensive scent of Santo. Before she started the engine she texted him, letting him know she was in the basement and on her way to collect him.

The engine growled at the merest touch of her foot and she jerked her way through the car park, doing her best to ignore the flash of cameras as the paparazzi stirred at the new activity taking place.

Come on, Santo, she muttered as she sat with the engine idling, glad of the effort she'd made as cameras clicked away, worried, too, that he might have fallen back to sleep after he had called her. But then, still wearing last night's suit, she saw him, walking just a little unsteadily towards the car. Ella's lips pressed together when she saw the state he was in. The press were going to have a field day. His suit was torn and dirty and he was wearing

several fresh bruises too. His deathly pale skin only accentuated the fact that he hadn't shaved.

'Buongiorno!' Ella said loudly and brightly as he climbed in.
'Good morning, Ella.'

It was a small game that they played, one that they had partaken in since her interview. Ella, determined to show him how wonderful her Italian was, attempting to prove that just because she was Australian it didn't mean that she wasn't up for the job, had introduced herself in her very best Italian.

Santo had promptly responded in English—pulling rank and basically saying that his English was better than her Italian, which was of course right. Though, as it turned out, Ella did speak enough Italian to land the job. But when it was just the two of them, they conversed mainly in English, except for this one mutual game.

'I thought you wanted us looking smart.'

He just frowned.

'You said there were press everywhere.'

'There are,' Santo said. 'I was just warning you.'

'Here.' She handed him his coffee.

'You need to get one for Alessandro,' Santo said.

'I already did.'

'Let's go then.'

They jerked out of the forecourt. 'Why do you have to have gears?' Ella moaned, because she always drove an automatic, though of course Santo didn't consider that real driving. Still,

he didn't answer, just sat, unusually quiet, as the car moved out into the bright sunlight. Glancing over she watched him wince and, taking mild pity, Ella put her hand in her Santo Bag and handed him a pair of sunglasses. But even they didn't fully cover the purple bruise on his eye.

As the press surged, Ella inched gingerly forward, aware that one slip of her foot on Santo's accelerator could flatten the lot of them.

'Just go!' Santo cursed as they gathered for their shots and then he cursed again as Ella blasted the horn a few times and finally dispersed them.

His mood didn't improve as they drove through town. 'I hate driving in this country,' Ella muttered as she was forced to swerve and narrowly missed a Vespa. In Australia they drove on the left-hand side of the road and occasionally they even managed to follow the road rules.

Though it wasn't the traffic that was getting to Ella, nor the 6:00 a.m. wake-up call from her boss, whatever fight he had been in last night didn't account for the purple marks on his neck.

Bloody hell, she thought darkly, even in the middle of a family scandal, even as the Battaglia and Corretti families exploded, trust Santo to still be at it.

With who though?

No, Ella was not going to ask for details.

She really didn't want to know if he'd run true to form and gotten off with Taylor Carmichael, the stunning American

actress who was playing the leading role in the latest film Santo was producing.

Shooting started on Monday and Santo had made it his personal mission to keep Taylor out of trouble. He had insisted that she attend yesterday's wedding to both ensure that Taylor behaved and to garner some publicity for the film. But with both their reputations, it was perhaps a forgone conclusion as to what had taken place.

It really was time to move on. If she didn't get the new job, then maybe she could head to London, or France perhaps.

Or even go home?

He asked her to stop so that he could draw out some cash to hopefully expedite getting his brother out of the lock-up and Ella closed her eyes and leant her head back on the headrest. The thought of home brought no comfort at all. It was her mother's birthday in a few days and Ella would be expected to call. She was gripped with sudden panic at the thought and opened her eyes and took a couple of deep breaths as she realised that no, she was nowhere near ready to go home.

She watched as Santo had a few attempts at the machine and then, with an irritated sigh, Ella climbed out of the car and walked over to him, tapping his number in.

'What would I do without you?' There was no endearment in his question. He turned his head for a moment and Ella felt heat rise on her cheeks, but then told herself that there was no challenge behind his words. There was no way Santo could know

what she had been up to in recent days.

And, Ella consoled herself, who in her position wouldn't be looking for another job? She was tired of bailing him out, tired because now she'd had to get up at some ridiculous hour on her one day off to bail his brother out. Tired, too, of running Santo's not-so-little black book—sending flowers and jewellery to his girlfriends, booking intimate tables in fantastic restaurants, organising romantic weekends and then having to calm ruffled feathers when invariably, inevitably, Santo upset them in his oh-so-usual way.

'How was Taylor?' She simply couldn't stop herself from asking, because it was imperative for the film publicity that Taylor had behaved herself last night.

'Niente dichiarazione,' Santo responded, smiling at her pursed lips. 'I am practising "no comment" for the press today. Perhaps you could practise too.'

He was so good at deflecting questions, not just about women, about everything. Always managing to shrug off things that should matter but simply didn't to Santo.

As they pulled up at the police station, Ella was relieved that there were no press waiting; at least word hadn't got out yet that Alessandro was here.

'How do you think he'll be?'

'Hungover.' Santo yawned. 'And far better off without her.'

He went to climb out and Ella, who'd assumed that she'd be sitting for half an hour, or however long it took to bail someone

out, was surprised when Santo turned around and asked if she would come in with him.

‘Me?’ Ella checked.

‘You might sweeten up the *polizia*.’

‘I find that really offensive, Santo.’

‘Ah, but you find so many things really offensive, Ella,’ he drawled.

Ella collected Allesandro’s coffee and walked towards the police station with Santo. She knew exactly what that little dig had been about—Ella was the first PA he hadn’t slept with. She had made it clear, to his obvious surprise, that this was business only. To his credit he had backed off completely, but now and then there was a little dig, a tiny reference to the fact she was resistant to his charms.

Not completely, of course.

No woman could be. He was stunning to look at and incredibly sexy, but completely incorrigible. Yes, a night with the boss might be tempting at times, especially when he smiled, especially when he looked as impossibly beautiful as he did today. But it was the thought of the morning after that, for Ella, was enough to ensure she resisted.

They stepped into the station and there was a lot of talking, a lot of hand waving and the handing over of an awful lot of cash, but, surprisingly quickly, a very dishevelled Alessandro appeared. He had his share of bruises too and there were grazes over his knuckles and that oh-so-immaculate bridegroom suit

was covered in dust and torn.

‘Here.’ Ella handed him his coffee, which was no doubt cold by now, but Alessandro drained it in one go as they walked back out of the police station. He winced at the far-too-bright morning sunlight that seemed to be magnified by the ocean, and Ella handed him a pair of sunglasses too—she always carried spares.

Ella wasn’t Santo’s PA for nothing!

‘Thank you,’ Alessandro said. Putting them on he looked at his brother, taking in the bruises and thick lip and the nasty graze on Santo’s cheek. ‘What happened to your face?’

Ella held her breath.

She was dying to know, but the answer served only to surprise and further confuse her.

‘You did,’ came Santo’s wry response.

CHAPTER TWO

‘YOU DON’T REMEMBER?’ Santo asked, once they were in the car and Alessandro had asked Ella to drive him to his home.

‘I am trying not to.’

They were speaking in Italian, but Ella could pretty much make out all that was being said.

‘I spent the whole night trying to contact you,’ Santo said.

‘Clearly, not the whole night,’ came Alessandro’s terse response. ‘Who the hell did you let loose on your neck?’

Santo just laughed and offered no explanation. ‘I must have rung you fifty times.’

‘And forty-nine times I chose not to answer.’ Alessandro withdrew into silence and Ella didn’t blame him. Santo, it would seem, had not a care in the world. He just scrolled through the endless ream of texts on his phone as they talked, ignoring the constant buzzes to alert him to a call.

Ella drove them to the Corretti Media tower, where Alessandro had a luxurious penthouse, but the paparazzi were still clamouring for their shot of the jilted groom.

‘Lie down in the back if you want,’ Ella suggested. ‘I brought a coat for you. I’ll try to get in the back way.’ But Alessandro refused her suggestion to lie down, told her to just drop him at the front and sat there stony faced as the cameras flashed and reporters shouted their questions.

'I'll come in with you,' Santo said.

'I don't need a handhold,' came Alessandro's terse response, but Santo ignored him and when she stopped the car both the brothers got out.

The gathered press went into a frenzy. Both were, Ella knew, more than used to dealing with them. There were always questions and scandal where this family was concerned. But though there were questions that would certainly need to be answered, interviews that would have to be given and the press to be faced, clearly, for Alessandro, it was all just a little too soon. Ella watched as a rather personal question was asked and Alessandro's shoulders stiffened, his hands balling into two fists. Perhaps Santo realised that his brother was very close to losing his temper again, because for once, Santo made a very sensible choice and turned his brother back towards the vehicle. Ella reached out and opened the door and Santo shoved his fuming brother into the back of the car before climbing into the front.

'Drive on,' Santo said. 'Get around the corner, and then I will drive.' He was clearly impatient by Ella's rather tentative speed and once around the corner Santo reminded her that he had asked her to pull over.

'Fine, but if you're driving I'm getting out. I can smell the whisky from here.'

For once he didn't offer a smart retort, just gestured for her to carry on, and turning the car around at the first opportunity, she drove the trio back into town.

‘We can go to the hotel you are staying at,’ Ella suggested to Santo. ‘We can enter via the basement.’

‘No,’ Alessandro said. ‘I’m not going to be holed up somewhere by the press. I just want away from them.’

‘We could go to mine.’ Ella tried to think how best to give Alessandro privacy for a few days, though she could hardly imagine him staying at her cheap rental place. ‘It’s just a small villa, but it’s pretty tucked away, so I’m sure that they’d never think to look for you there.’

Ella glanced in the mirror as she awaited his response, but instead of answering her, Alessandro spoke briefly to his brother, who argued with him for a moment.

But then Santo spoke. ‘Take him to the harbour at Cala Marina.’ Santo gave her directions. ‘Alessandro wants to go to his yacht.’

Ella did as she was told, heading to the harbour where Alessandro’s yacht was docked. But despite her resolve to refuse to ask for details and despite reminding herself that it was none of her business as the car ate up the miles, on this, Ella couldn’t stay silent. ‘Do you really think that’s such a good idea?’ She turned worried eyes to Santo. Ella really didn’t like the idea of Alessandro alone on a yacht, given all that had happened.

‘I have just been reminded that I am the younger brother.’ Santo scratched at his neck and then pulled at his unbuttoned collar as if it was a little too tight. ‘He insists that we take him or he shall arrange his own transport there.’

Which gave them no choice—they were hardly going to let Alessandro out on the street to make his own way. So they drove, pretty much in silence, till they neared the pretty harbour. Ella almost willed one of the brothers to start talking so she could find out just a little of what had taken place last night, but perhaps because she was there, neither spoke about family matters.

'Dove Alessia?' For the first time Alessandro initiated conversation, asking where his ex-fiancée was, and Ella held her breath as they pulled into the harbour.

'Puttana,' came Santo's crude and dismissive response, but Alessandro was insistent.

'Where is she?'

And Ella was still holding her breath when Santo answered his brother, telling him the truth in a very dismissive voice—that it would seem that Alessia and their cousin Matteo had run off together.

The expletive that came from Alessandro was perhaps merited, and unlike Santo, he was nice enough to give a brief apology to Ella for his language before leaving the car and staggering off towards his yacht.

Santo sat for a moment and watched his brother and then climbed out of the car, trying, Ella presumed, to persuade Alessandro to come back with them.

She watched them argue for a moment but the bond between the two brothers was clear. It mattered not that Alessandro had thrown a few punches at Santo last night. It didn't change

anything between them. Not for the first time Ella wondered what it would be like to have a sibling, how it might feel to have someone in your corner—for how it hurt to deal with her parents alone.

But whatever Santo said to his brother, it didn't work. Alessandro shrugged him off and she watched as Santo stood for a moment, then turned around. But instead of a roll of the eyes and the slightly cocky smile Santo often wore, his face was grey as he walked back towards the car and climbed in.

They sat for a moment and watched Alessandro board his yacht.

'Do you think he'll be all right?' Ella was loath to leave.

'Of course,' Santo said. 'He's tough.'

He'd need to be tough—being jilted at the altar with the world's cameras aimed on him, Ella thought. 'Santo, I don't know that it's right to leave him.'

'Just drive.' Again Santo dismissed her worries. 'He'll be fine.'

She couldn't believe his lack of concern, but that was Santo. He dealt with stuff as it cropped up and then moved easily on to the next thing, never worrying about the chaos he was leaving behind.

Ella rang ahead and asked housekeeping to sort out his suite and run a bath and asked for some breakfast and a lot of coffee to be sent up.

'Assuming that your company won't mind,' Ella checked, telling herself that she wasn't fishing for answers.

‘She’s gone.’

‘Just the one?’ Ella glanced over, thinking she’d get a glimpse of a smile, but Santo was just staring out of his window.

The press were still waiting but Santo didn’t duck. He just sat there as they got their shots. As Ella went to indicate, to enter the hotel via the more secure route of the basement, Santo stopped her.

‘The foyer will be fine—I don’t need the basement.’ In fact, he took off his dark glasses and pocketed them before he got out, hurling a filthy look straight in the direction of the cameras before stalking into the hotel with his head held high. Ella threw the car keys to the valet and caught up with him at the lift. As the doors closed behind them, Santo slumped against the wall for a moment, his eyes closed, and Ella was no longer just worried about Alessandro—no, she was more than a little concerned for Santo too. He was incredibly pale. Assuming that it was Alessandro who had hit him last night, then it was one very angry fist Santo would have found himself at the end of—maybe he’d been knocked out?

‘Are you hurt anywhere else?’

He didn’t open his eyes, just shook his head.

‘Were you knocked out?’ Ella checked.

‘Unfortunately, no.’ Green eyes opened and he gave a thin smile and she found herself staring back to a different Santo. It was as if all the arrogance had left him, as if, for once, she was seeing the man he really was and it was mesmerising. She simply

could not stop staring—even as the lift doors opened—and for a moment the two of them just stood.

‘What happened?’ She had sworn not to ask, yet she did.

‘Why?’

‘I just...’ She flailed for words. ‘I’m concerned.’

‘Sure you are!’ There was an edge to his words that told her he considered her a liar. For a moment she was confused, but now wasn’t the time to dwell on it. Instead they walked to his suite. Of course, he couldn’t find his swipe card but, of course, she carried a spare.

As they stepped into the suite it was scandal rather than breakfast that awaited. Santo thumbed through the papers and Ella gave in and picked up one. Perhaps, she consoled herself, it was better that Alessandro was on a boat and escaping all this, for the photos and write-ups were brutal.

‘Oh!’ Ella let out a small crow of shock at one particular photo. There was Taylor Carmichael, the woman Santo should have been policing yesterday, the actress who he was relying on to behave, running true to form despite promises that she had changed.

‘Is it any surprise?’ Santo shrugged.

Probably not, Ella conceded. In fact, her only surprise was that the man in the image wasn’t Santo. But did he care about nothing? Filming started tomorrow and there had been a lot of fireworks about the casting of the leading female role. Taylor’s comeback after a spectacular unravelling was risky at best—a

disaster for the film at worst.

And this looked like it was turning into a complete disaster.

Still, problems with the film would have to wait till tomorrow. Right now Ella had more pressing things to sort out—like six-foot-three of beaten-up, hungover male. ‘Go and have a bath,’ Ella said. ‘I’ll chase breakfast.’

‘I don’t want breakfast’ was his inevitable response. ‘I’m just going to go to bed. Thanks for all your help.’

‘You have to eat something,’ Ella started, and then shut up. After all, she wasn’t his mother. Not that his own mother would be worrying too much—Carmela Corretti’s only concerns were fashion and manicures.

‘Just have a bath.’ Ella settled for, ‘I don’t care whether or not you eat. I for one happen to be starving, so I’m chasing them.’

‘Sure.’

He headed to the bathroom and after a few minutes there was a knock at the door and Ella stood as the maid set up the table.

‘Thank you,’ Ella said, pouring herself a coffee and trying not to overthink who he’d been with last night. It was none of her business what Santo got up to.

She flicked through the papers, reading some of the more salacious details that had come out. They were the most complicated of families and for a while she was lost in the gossip. But later, glancing at the bedside clock, Ella realised he’d been in there ages. She thought maybe he had fallen asleep and she tried to ignore the knot of worry in her stomach, but after a moment

or two she knocked.

‘Breakfast is here.’

Ella stood at the door and all she could hear was silence.

‘Santo...’ She knocked again. ‘Answer me.’

Nothing.

‘Santo!’ Ella tried to keep the note of panic from her voice as she thought of head injuries and hangovers and the fact that the newspaper headlines could be far worse tomorrow than they were now. She was actually terrified for him.

‘Santo!’ She rapped loudly. ‘If you don’t answer then I’m going to have to come in.’

Still nothing.

Ella tried the handle, but of course it was locked.

Heart in her mouth she ran to her bag, rummaging through it and then through her purse to find a coin. With shaking fingers, she fitted it into the slot and turned the lock.

‘Santo!’ she shouted and when still there was no response, Ella knew she had no choice but to go in.

CHAPTER THREE

‘SANTO...’ AS SOON as she opened the door, Ella regretted it.

There were some things she simply shouldn’t see and immediately Ella knew why he hadn’t answered her.

Santo’s modesty was covered by bubbles, his head resting on the edge of the bath. His eyes were screwed closed, and his lips were pressed together. For once Ella wasn’t catching her boss doing something inappropriate—that she could deal with. What she couldn’t immediately deal with was the fact that Santo Corretti, a man who charmed his way through life, who always had a smart answer for everything, who, she was sure, cared about nothing other than movies and getting laid, was lying in a bath and trying and failing not to cry.

Santo never cried.

He could not remember a single time that he had. It was an entirely new experience to him.

Not when his father, Carlo, had died alongside his uncle. Nor had there been a hint of a tear at his grandfather’s death. Not even as a little boy—it was as if he’d been born knowing that tears would never work with his mother, Carmela, and any sign of weakness would only have infuriated Carlo. So instead Santo had relied solely on looks, wit and charm.

He’d just run out them today.

‘Go...’ He put his hand up, the word barely making it out of his lips, his shoulders shaking with the effort of holding it in. Both wished they were embarrassed for a rather more salacious reason.

‘I can’t just go.’ And no, this wasn’t in her job description, but Ella wasn’t just going to leave him, so she sat on the edge of the bath and pondered the man. He was unshaven, there were bruises on his chest too and he looked battered but not just physically—he looked broken.

She had at times wondered if there were any feelings to be had in that beautiful head, but now he lay clearly shattered and she watched as he blew out a breath and then finally spoke.

‘Do you really think he’ll be okay?’

‘It’s Alessandro!’ Ella said firmly. ‘Which means yes—of course he’ll be fine. He just needs some time.’

After a moment Santo nodded and then opened his eyes. Ella didn’t want him to be so beautiful, but seeing this side of him just served to confuse her more. ‘I really do think that he’ll be fine.’

‘It’s not just Alessandro...’ he admitted. ‘It’s the whole lot of them. You should have heard the stuff that came out last night,’ Santo started, but didn’t continue.

‘You can tell me.’

‘Because you care?’ There was a strange surliness to his words and Ella frowned, but then he shrugged. ‘It is family stuff—it is not for me to say.’

Ella chose not to push. She knew all about family secrets,

knew there were certain things you just didn't speak about. She had lived her life keeping quiet after all.

She looked around the bathroom and wondered how someone could make so much mess in so little time. His clothes were strewn all over the floor, the tap was still running where Santo had brushed his teeth and no, she noted he didn't replace the cap.

'It's a mess,' Santo said, only she guessed that he wasn't talking about the bathroom.

'Families often are.'

She looked at him then, met his eyes. Usually she pulled hers away, usually she could not stand to have anyone examine her soul. But she saw the green and the bloodshot and the pain in his and for a second she thought she might cry too, which she hadn't since that terrible day. As Ella sat looking at Santo she was a breath away from telling him that she knew the pain the people who should love you the most could cause, but she held on to it, just as she always had.

He did not ask.

She did not tell.

It was safer that way.

'Come on,' Ella finally said. She knew that he would hate to have been seen like this, knew that neither would mention it again.

She put her hand in the water and met his ankle, but she brushed past that and pulled out the plug. Then standing she turned off the sink tap. But as she went to go, Santo just lay there,

the water rather rapidly disappearing, and before she saw far too much of her boss Ella grabbed a towel.

‘I’ll avert my gaze,’ Ella said, holding the towel up while trying to make a joke, but there was simply no room for jokes this morning and no room for modesty either. In the end, Santo took her hand and sort of hauled himself out of the bath as Ella did her best not to look. He tucked the towel around his hips and walked out to the suite, bypassing the breakfast that had been laid out and heading straight to bed.

‘Sorry about this.’

‘Oh, you will be...’ Ella started and then stopped. Now really wasn’t a time for their regular teasing. ‘Let’s just forget about it.’ He gave her a slightly suspicious look, but Ella meant it. Yes, they might tease each other at times, but she wasn’t going to use this. ‘It never happened, Santo.’

‘Thanks.’ He gave a brief nod and then went back to telling her what to do. ‘Can you get my phone?’

He sat on the edge of the bed as Ella went off and he could hear her loading up plates and pouring drinks. Santo really did not know what was happening to him—it was as if everything had suddenly caught up, everything he had pushed down and ignored or suppressed was now strewn out before him and refused to go back into its neat box. Family secrets spewing out last night had made Santo feel physically sick. For the first time he hadn’t even been able to screw his way out of it—last night he had removed his mouth from hers, felt her lips on his neck and looked down at

another nameless blonde and couldn't be fagged to head to bed. Instead he had sent her on her way and spent the night with a bottle of whisky, trying to get hold of Alessandro.

Santo sat there searching for one good area of his life, but even the film was in trouble now thanks to Taylor's behaviour yesterday.

One good thing.

He looked up as Ella walked in, his very professional, somewhat aloof PA, and very annoyed suddenly, Santo climbed into bed and tossed the towel to the floor in a very surly gesture because, apart from the drama of his family, he'd found another thing out yesterday.

'You're leaving?'

Ella felt a blush spread over her cheeks, and it wasn't because he was clearly naked beneath the sheets. There was the awful part when looking for another job where you naturally didn't let your employer know. She had felt such horrible guilt as she'd lied about her whereabouts and, to make matters worse, Santo had been really nice about her trip to Rome to supposedly visit a doctor. He'd paid for her flight and even put her up in a luxurious hotel overnight. Ella understood now a couple of the barbs that had come her way this morning. She'd offered him the chance to speak about his family when he'd known that she was already planning to leave.

Ella walked over and actually sat on the edge of the bed and looked at his scowling face. 'I don't know for sure if I'm leaving

yet,' she said.

'That trip to Rome wasn't for the doctors...' She blushed darker as he said it. 'The film industry is a tight one, Ella—people talk.'

'I don't even know if I've got the job.'

'Well, it sounds like you have. Luigi rang yesterday for your references,' Santo said. 'You'll forgive me if I don't offer my congratulations.'

And she wanted more details but, given the situation, it would be unfair to ask for them. She daren't get her hopes up either, not till Luigi contacted her. Maybe all it would be was an invite for a second interview. 'Can we talk about this later?'

'We'll talk about it now.' Santo glared at her. 'I understand you want to be a director—I get that you want some involvement—but the director I have hired for this movie comes with his own team.' He took a breath, realised that he did not want to lose her. 'When I hire for the next movie, I will make it a priority to see if whomever I hire—'

'I wanted in on this movie, Santo.' Ella looked at him. 'I love the script so much, you know that.'

'And you know how important this film is to me, Ella, even more so now.'

'Now?'

'I am not going into that, other than to say I am not taking any risks with it.'

'Unless it's a risk called Taylor Carmichael,' Ella snapped.

‘And look how that risk has paid off? But I will consider you for the next one.’

‘It’s not just that.’ Ella closed her eyes. When you were Santo’s PA there was plenty of other stuff to complain about. ‘I don’t get a moment...’ She looked at him. ‘You’re way more than a full-time job, Santo.’

‘This was an exception. I do not ring you usually on a Sunday.’

‘Santo, Sunday starts at midnight on a Saturday night, so actually, quite often, you do.’

This was her job, Santo consoled himself as he sat there, but he knew he had been pushing things this weekend. Though he would never admit it out loud, he did concede that he had been nervous about the wedding, at the two families in the same church and the reception afterwards. Spending yesterday morning with Ella had been somewhat soothing.

Today, facing his brother, he had wanted her alongside.

‘You’ve become indispensable.’

‘No,’ Ella said, refusing to give in to him. Santo had a way with words and was very good at saying the right thing when he wanted his own way. ‘No one is.’

‘Perhaps,’ Santo said, and then thought for a moment. ‘We get on.’

‘Not all of the time.’

‘I thought we did—we have had some laughs.’

She looked at his depraved face, at a man who so easily made her laugh and had no idea what a feat that was—no idea how

tender and bruised her soul had been when she had first met him. That the smile she had worn for her interview had been false on so many levels. Of course she could share that with no one and so Ella looked down, took a croissant from the plate and peeled a piece off and then popped it in her mouth, aware that he was closely watching.

‘I thought you were about to feed me.’

She was glad to see the slight return to his humour.

‘Not a chance.’ She gave him a weak smile as he checked his phone. ‘Any messages?’

‘Nothing.’

She could see the worry in the set of his lips. ‘I didn’t realise you and Alessandro were so close.’

‘We’re brothers,’ Santo said, as if that explained everything. ‘Do you have a brother or sister?’

‘Nope—just me.’ He noticed the slight strain to her voice, and he should have left it, really, except he did not.

‘You hardly ever speak of your family.’

‘Because we hardly ever speak.’

‘How come?’ Santo asked, but Ella shook her head. She just wasn’t going to go there with him. It was time she left the room now and so once he’d eaten a croissant and drained his coffee she took the tray and stood.

‘Is there anything else I can do for you?’

‘You know there is.’

Yes, his humour was back!

‘Get some sleep,’ Ella said and turned off the hotel phone by his bedside. Then she headed over and drew the drapes, more than a little aware that Santo was watching her. She was just too aware of him too much of the time. As she glanced down she could see the press outside the hotel, still hovering, and she knew that this wasn’t going to go away any time soon.

‘Okay.’ She walked back over to the bed. ‘I’ll leave you till about two.’

‘You’re staying?’

‘I’ll do some work in the lounge.’

‘Come in and check my pulse.’

‘No, but I will answer your phone. Is there any comment you want me to give?’

‘I’ll deal with all of that.’

As she went to take his phone from the bedside he stopped her, his hand closing over hers. ‘No.’

‘I’ll deal with the calls,’ Ella said. ‘Santo, that’s what you pay me for. If it’s Alessandro I’ll bring the phone straight through to you.’ She was terribly aware of his hand over hers, and more so when still it remained. She should simply have lifted her hand and walked out the room, as she would have on any other day, except she didn’t and neither did she resist when he pulled her back to sit on the bed. With the curtains drawn it was unlike before—dark and more intimate and too much for her racing heart.

‘Do you have to leave?’

‘Santo, please...’ Ella really didn’t want to talk about it now.

'I have to think about my career. Can we...?'

'I meant, do you have to leave the room?'

'You didn't mean that.' Ella blushed as he smiled. Usually she rebuffed any flirting easily. It was just a little harder to do this morning and not just because they were on a bed in a very dark room, more because she felt as if she had glimpsed today the real Santo, the one behind the very expensive but very shallow facade.

'I would miss you.'

'For a little while.' Ella smiled.

'There could be advantages though....' As he spoke, Ella's heart thumped in her chest, knew what he was leading up to. 'Remember how you told me you would never get involved with someone you work with?'

'I do.'

Her second day at work, they had gone for dinner after, had sat side by side and pored through his diary, Ella taking notes, trying to be efficient but terribly aware of his beauty and trying to ignore it, just trying to work, when his hand had reached for her face.

She'd tried to emulate the hairdresser, had done everything they had said, except her curls hadn't been quite so glossy and kept escaping the hair tie. She'd felt his hand move to her cheek, his fingers capturing a lock of her hair.

'Don't.'

Refreshingly he hadn't made an excuse and neither had he apologised as he dropped contact. Instead he'd asked a question.

‘Why?’ His eyes had frowned a little, a curious smile on his lips at her response. No doubt it was one he wasn’t used to.

‘I don’t have to give an answer to that.’ Ella had more than met his eyes. ‘But if you try anything like that again, you’ll have my notice with immediate effect.’

How she rued those words now.

‘We have a problem,’ Santo said and she looked at him. Though it was terribly hard to think of Santo and morals at the same time, Ella realised, he did actually have some. For apart from a few stunning suggestions, apart from the odd gentle flirt, not once since that day had he put so much as a finger wrong.

She just wanted him to put that finger wrong now.

And he did.

Just one finger dusted her forearm and Santo waited for her hand to halt his, gave her every opportunity to stand, to change her mind. She’d been very clear as to her boundaries, but his breath stilled as he felt them tumble down.

Hell had been the night, and the morning pure misery, but now...He felt the tiny hairs on her arm rise beneath the pads of his fingers and the constant shiver between them deepen as her silence let him go on.

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