

SUPERNOVA

**BOOK III OF THE ALESSANDRA LEGACY TRILOGY
CHAPTER ONE**

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For The Fans ;)

CHAPTER ONE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21

12:17 P.M.

ROME

For the first time in more than two decades, snow was falling in the capital city of Italy.

They were probably alive the last time this happened, the man in black mused, watching the fat, pristine flakes flurry to the ground as if they were as late as the frustrated populace they fell upon. Chaos clogged the streets in a gridlocked crush of blaring horns and hurled insults, and he stalked faster down the sidewalk, taking sullen pleasure in his ability to outpace the cars idling alongside him.

Wise choice, leaving the Maserati back at the office, he noted, and his annoyance began to temper. Walking had just seemed fitting for this pilgrimage, but now that the whole goddamn city was a parking lot, he was especially grateful for that decision. At last, he reached his destination, and he strode through the rusting iron gates with purpose, more than ready to leave the *melée* behind him.

The thickening blanket of snow obscured the gravel path, but where so many had walked this hallowed ground before him, the footworn trail still made itself manifest. He forged his way through the whitecapped stones and towering hemlocks, their branches drooping with the weight of their icy burden. Every soldiering step brought him deeper within the boundaries of this sacred space, and soon the showering snow muffled out the noise of the maddening crowd beyond the ancient rock walls.

He found the site without issue, following the caretaker's directions to the hilled clearing in the thick trees. Approaching the spot with the hesitant steps one reserves for visiting the dead, he read the two names etched side-by-side in the single granite stone before stopping at their feet.

The wind picked up, seeming to acknowledge his presence. He held his ground against the face-numbing cold, unable to shake the feeling it was appraising him, the newcomer dressed head-to-toe in black Fioravanti, a dark silent shadow in a field of whirling white.

When the gust died down, he knew he'd passed muster, and despite the heavy wet snow falling in a constant hiss around him, he removed his fedora to make a proper introduction.

"My name," he began with formal ceremony, "is Raine Sinagra Mathison. I am the only son of Cailean Mathison of Scotland and Natalia Sinagra of Sicily. As the chosen successor to Nobile Loiacono, I am the boss of New York City, and I am your daughter's husband."

Even though we haven't spoken in weeks, Raine frowned as he bent to lay his offering at the base of the Alessandras' headstone, and the two red roses burst like bloodstains on the stark white snow.

He cleared his throat. Today marked the twenty-first anniversary of Solana's parents' deaths, and he'd come here to pay his respects to them, to thank them for giving their lives to protect their only child. Now that he was here, however, it seemed there was no way to express that sentiment without it sounding self-serving and arrogant. They hadn't done it for his benefit, of course. They'd done it for hers, to save her from sharing this same plot of earth right along with them.

While that remains your theory, he reminded himself, *your wife certainly thinks there's much more to it than that.*

"Solana's convinced it was your intention to keep her out of this life you and I both know so well," Raine found himself saying out loud. "If indeed that's the case, then I humbly ask your forgiveness.

"But I'd be willing to wager you understand the situation in which she put both of us that day in July," he said. "After those three days we spent together, I made her the only offer I could. While our arrangement has worked out remarkably well for all parties involved, she's become much more to me than I ever dreamed and I hope you're as proud of her as I am."

Raine's expression darkened.

No. Not for all parties involved. Not by a long shot.

"But where our partnership seems to be the work of divine providence, our marriage is the devil's playground," he grumbled, and the mere utterance of the words ignited something in his chest. It just felt good to get it out there, and another rush of cold wind - gentler this time - seemed to encourage him to continue.

"She's still not speaking to me, after what I said to her in November," he explained. "And yes, I realize I fucked up. But I don't get this. I don't get why she's so bullshit.

“We’re talking about someone who flat-out refused to come stay here with me in Rome, even though she’s the same girl who cried in my arms while we were making love on my desk. I’ve added her name to every asset I own out of love just as much as necessity, but she’s expressed no interest whatsoever in putting hers into the trust with mine. I asked her to move in with me in New York, even offering up Sheridan East as a place where she could raise her beloved horses, and she practically went cataleptic on me. I don’t want children; I never have. I want *our* children - there’s a difference - but she made it very clear she’s not having that conversation with me anytime soon.

“So what did she expect me to say, then, when she asked me who she is to me? Christ, it’s always one step forward, two steps back with this woman. I called Cavi, my second, and we thought it best to give her a week to cool down before I try to open the airwaves with her again. While that made sense to me at the time, I wonder if it made matters worse because something... *happened* that week.”

Raine’s sudden shudder had nothing to do with the bone-chilling blast of wind that came roaring over the graveyard. “I still can’t explain it, but I’ve accepted the fact that I can *feel* her. Thousands of miles across the goddamn globe and I can sense her emotions when they’re at their strongest. It’s only happened three times, but this last one, a week to the day after I left her to come back here... ”

He’d never forget that hideous feeling of emptiness as long as he lived.

“I must have called her thirty times that Sunday and left just as many voicemails over the course of the following week. Nothing. Cavi suffered the brunt of my frustration; although he assured me time and again she was fine,

I finally threatened to lay him out and escort her to Rome personally if she wasn't on the line with me inside of an hour."

Raine sighed. "She called. At the *fifty-ninth minute*, of course, but she called. And she sounded so tired. So tired. And still so goddamn angry I was lucky to get a sentence longer than five words out of her.

"I asked her what was wrong, what the hell I'd felt from her this time, and she told me she's having nightmares. About you. How the two of you died. Because of me and my plans to uncover any potential threats to her that may still linger here.

"So I told her I'd call it off, then, if it was causing her such emotional trauma. But I made it clear that if I did, she'd never be able to come here on any kind of permanent basis.

"That didn't seem to phase her in the slightest."

Raine felt the words tear through him like lead shot and he ran a frustrated hand through his snow-covered hair. "What that means is she has no interest in running Imbrialis Italia as my right hand. What that means is she has no intention of coming to stay here, however long this UniBanca deal may take to close out. What this means, ultimately, is she doesn't want a real marriage with me, and while I prepared myself as much as possible for this contingency, I can't fucking believe how much it fucking hurts."

He hadn't realized he'd lowered his head until he felt the icy chill of snowflakes melting on the back of his neck, and the frigid droplets sliding down his collar made him even angrier.

"I just don't get how it came to this," he fumed. "Our weekend together was goddamn perfect up until the last

thirty seconds of it, and with the exception of that three-minute phone call, we haven't spoken since. I – ”

A whiff of cigarette smoke floated on the winter wind, and Raine whirled around to see who'd joined him in the secluded grove of trees ringing the Alessandras' plot.

Not a soul in sight.

But still the scent grew stronger, wreathing itself around him –

And his hair stood on end when he detected a fresh, pleasant perfume beneath the earthy tang of tobacco.

My mother, Solana had told him on St. John. I remember the sweet scent of her lavender... we literally bathed in it nightly during our bedtime bath. As for my father... to this day I find the smell of cigarette smoke in the ice cold of winter comforting.

“Jesus Christ,” he whispered.

Raine closed his eyes as the wind strengthened, and the scents intensified until he swore they must be standing right in front of him. The words... he never heard them. He just felt them, felt them appear in a place inside him where nothing had been before.

Three things for you, Raine Sinagra Mathison, boss of New York City, husband to our only daughter.

Tell her your heart.

Bring her home.

And keep her safe, as best you can.

The gust dropped, taking the haunting fragrances along with it, and when Raine opened his eyes again, the red roses lay at the tips of his black Ferragamos.

Words he hadn't uttered since he was a child escaped his lips.

“Santa Maria, Madre di Dio, prega per noi peccatori, adesso e nell'ora della nostra morte, Amen.”

Recovering, he snapped back into action, bending to return the flowers to their place before the headstone.

“Thank you,” Raine murmured as he replaced his small offering to them. He stood to take his last look, but when he donned his fedora to leave, an idea came to him.

He reached into his pocket for his iPhone, and even though it took a few tries, he managed to get his unsteady fingers to take a decent picture of Damian and Isadora’s grave.

“Thank you,” he repeated with a reverent bow, then left them to their rest in the swirling snow.