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The Moretti's - A Different Family Dynamic

Chapter 78

Monday Afternoon – 84th Street Townhouse, Manhattan – 24 February 2003

Mr. and Mrs. Gleason tried to keep the young Oriental woman from leaving the townhouse believing it was in her best interest to remain inside. Their knowledge of the Moretti family was learned from reading and doing for their mentor Mario Moretti. The townhouse was filled with art and antiques from around the world. Rooms were kept shuttered to insure against anything happening that would reduce the value of the art and antiques collection. The morning was uneventful except for the arrival of Viviano to take the twins to school. The rest of the morning was spent keep Ming as stress free as possible. For Mr. and Mrs. Gleason, relief arrived when the front door opened and Apollonia Moretti walked into the townhouse just after 1:15PM in the afternoon.

"Miss Moretti," said John Gleason as deferential as ever, "how nice to see you again. If I may, your beauty is a thing to behold. If I had a daughter, I would have wanted her to be just like you. May I take your coat?"

Amazed at his ability to disarm, Apollonia removed her coat, and handed to the smiling man while trying to stop from blushing. "May I inquire as to your and Mary's health on this cold February day?"

As he hung up the coat in the front hall closet, "We're a bit tired after yesterday. Two five year old boys are a bit of handful, Miss. Moretti. But, we survived and look forward to spending more time with them if that is at all possible."

She watched him turn to her after he closed the closet door and she could see the joy in his eyes when he spoke of Ming's two sons. Since taking over the family, she had to give Mario, her father, credit for finding these two amazing people. Smiling in return, "Yes, John, I think that is very possible and probable. Where..."

He gently interrupted, "Thank you. Mrs. Zheng is in the solarium on the..."

"Fifth floor," said Apollonia laughing as she played a gentle game of who interrupts who with John Gleason.

John Gleason watched Apollonia walk to the elevator and no sooner than the door closed behind her he returned to the business at hand. Every day except Sunday, John Gleason took a preselected set of closed rooms, opened them one-at-a-time, and dusted and cleaned each until the wood and metal shone as if it was just manufactured. He'd smile to himself knowing if it wasn't for Mario Moretti he'd probably be in a pauper's grave on City Island.

Exiting the elevator, Apollonia found Ming sitting on the love seat reading. As she approached, Ming stood up and allowed Apollonia to take her into her arms. They kissed, deep, long, and with emotion. When they came up for air Ming gently pried herself from Apollonia's arms and returned to sitting on the love seat. The look on her face was all Apollonia needed to see.

"You promised me, Apollonia," said Ming. No anger just concern in her voice.

Apollonia knew she was controlling her anger, but knew she was mad when she did not use the shortened form of her name. "Ok, what is wrong?"

"Look at the time, Apollonia!!! I'm scared... You promised me that you would take care of the detective thing... I haven't heard a word from you... Then you walk into the room like nothing is wrong..." Ming tossed the book she had been reading across the room. Luckily for Apollonia she didn't have to duck and the book did not hit and break anything of value.

The anger began to rise inside Apollonia and showed in her eyes, because that is where it always displays itself first. She cursed at herself for letting it happen. Ming was not the problem. Ming was not striking out at her emotionally, verbally, or physically. Ming was reacting to her stress and fear. Apollonia saw Ming's face change when the momentary flash of anger formed in her eyes and crossed her face. She stopped, frozen in her place. Apollonia Moretti fell to her knees, opened her arms, and with tears in her eyes begged forgiveness for showing any sign of anger towards Ming.

Apollonia did not move. She remained planted on the solarium floor, arms open wide as tears and streams of mascara ran down her face. No other person in the world had the effect that Ming Zheng did on her. Ming sat on the love seat for a moment longer before she stood, stepped over to Apollonia, and allowed herself to be taken into her lover's arms. Ming felt Apollonia's arms surround her body just above her hips and hold on for dear life. She heard her lover's plaintive wail, "Please, forgive me, Ming. Please, I don't, no can't ever lose you again. You have this tenacious hold on my soul. I've felt so empty for the past years. I'm so, so sorry. Please, forgive me."

She felt her lover's tears begin to soak the right side of her cotton shirt as Apollonia maintained her grip on Ming's hips. Breaking Apollonia's hold wasn't easy but she did. Ming took hold of the crying woman's biceps and shook hard enough to get her attention. Through tear blurred eyes Apollonia looked up and into the eyes of the Oriental woman she knew she loved. Ming spoke, gentle but with authority, "I saw the anger in your eyes, Appy. For one split second the darkness that pervades your soul showed itself to me. I will not forgive you for being who you are and I will not try to change who you are. I will not tolerate nor will I stay if you ever expose that side of your being to me. I will not tolerate being the brunt of that anger, ever, Appy. I am here and you have to let me help you. I watched as the darkness tried to take you over. When you realized who was sitting opposite you, you regained control."

Apollonia shifted her body so she could free an arm from Ming's hold. She retrieved a tissue from her pocketbook and began to dab her eyes. She didn't say anything in response to her lover. She just knelt in front of her waiting for Ming's rejection of their renewed relationship.

"You told me to be honest, but I cannot be honest if you are going to lose your equilibrium and strike out at me. What would you have done if you hurt me or even killed me Appy?" Ming waited, but saw she wasn't going to answer. "I love you Apollonia Moretti. The first time I kissed you in my dorm room I went against all cultural Chinese mores and morals. My family will disown me and I will never see my parents or brother again. I'm willing to do that for you, for us, but I will not accept or tolerate you exposing your dark side against me when you get angry. You have the physical skills to..."

Apollonia screamed, "NO!!! NEVER!!!" She quieted down and said, "I meant everything I said to you last night. I am asking you to be my rock and my spiritual guide. I'm coming to you because," Apollonia reached up and took Ming by her upper arms pulled her close, kissed her cheek, eased her back, "my heart aches when I'm not with you. I love you and I need you for the strength you give me and to help me conquer my demons. I will do for you what you will do for me. I will walk away from my family. If that is what needs to be done, so be it."

Ming offered Apollonia her hand which the red eyed woman took and used her help to stand up. The smile was infectious and Apollonia responded to her lover's beautiful face. Ming said, "We will cross that bridge when and if we come to it. What I need more than anything is you, our love, and the knowledge that you will never again allow the demon inside you to surface at or because of me."

Back on an even keel, Apollonia nodded. She turned to get her pocketbook for another tissue when her cell phone rang. She picked it up and didn't have to look at the number to know who was calling. She looked at Ming, mouthed the name of Howard Cohen., and crinkled her eyes in response to her lover's tightlipped smile.

"Hello... Yes, I've been waiting for your call... You took it upon yourself to call Detective Lawson, and... Really, the Chief of D's... He must be fuckin' pissed... No, I swear, I did not call... I alluded to it, but I know better... Ok, where... Your office at 4:00... How the fuck... Ok, Ok, Ok... 4:00 at your office. See ya there..."

Ming hearing only one side of the conversation didn't like the idea she had to be away from her boys, "Apollonia, 4:00PM isn't good. The boys will just becoming home and I want to be here. Please, anyway..."

Tight lipped, Apollonia looked at her lover and waited. She didn't respond until the look on Ming's face was one of total acceptance and resignation to her having to be away from the townhouse when her sons returned home. After she inhaled and exhaled a very deep breath, Apollonia spoke, "The time is perfect. Why? That is very simple. It is at the shift change and although the detective really doesn't have one the uniformed men do. The Detective's superiors will be watching the officers coming on and off duty. Men will be arriving and leaving the precinct where the Manhattan South Detectives office is located. When we meet at Mr. Cohen's office you are going to sign a statement that he, Detective Lawson, has corroborated your alibi for Saturday night. You will not have to be burdened with going to the precinct and treated like a common criminal. You will be officially released from any police investigation when it comes to the death of Sonny Zheng."

Ming's hand went to her heart, her eyes rolled back into her head, and she fainted onto the floor. With all her training, Apollonia Moretti was not prepared to see and react to her lover collapsing to the floor. She fell next to her and screamed for help several times. She cradled Ming's head in her arms and against her breasts. She moaned, cried, and screamed. She was totally flummoxed about what to do because of her emotional tie to Ming.

John Gleason ran into the solarium through the rear stairwell of the federal townhouse. He was only two floors below when he heard Apollonia's cry for help. Breathing hard he too knelt next to the prone Oriental woman and placed his fingers on her left carotid artery. He felt a weak pulse. He saw how flush she was and immediately put together that she had fainted. He wrestled the prone woman from Apollonia's grip, pushed her to a sitting position, and then lifted her to the love seat. Apollonia watched shaking inside hoping nothing had happened to the love of her life. John Gleason rolled her head forward and between her legs. He forced blood back into her head and brain.

Three minutes later the elevator door opened and Mary Gleason walked into the solarium. John looked at his wife and said, "Sorry, Mary, but you have to go down the kitchen and get some ice and a bottle of water. She just fainted." With a bit of urgency, "Go!!!"

After a few minutes, John pulled Ming's head up and leaned her back against the rear of the love seat. Her color slowly started to return and her eyes became focused. Apollonia sat on the other side, John removed his arm from her shoulders, and leaned the still frightened Oriental woman into her lover's embrace. Mary returned with an ice pack and a large 16 ounce glass of water. She looked at John who signaled to her to give them to Apollonia. John Gleason stood up, put his arm around his wife, and guided her to the elevator. Before entering he said to Apollonia, "Ice on the back of her head and neck. Let her drink some water and when she is up to it you both come to the kitchen so Mary can check her out." With a bit of emphasis, "No is not an acceptable answer."

Apollonia and Ming watched them enter the elevator knowing he was not going to wait for an answer. Ming took a few sips of the water, looked at her lover and then at the floor between her legs. With her eyes cast down, she whispered, "Thank you, Apollonia Moretti. Thank you."