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The Moretti's - A Different Family Dynamic

Chapter 149

Wednesday Night – Columbus Place – 12 March 2003

Nathan heard the knocking on the window that divided the front from the back of the Town Car. He did not question why Miss Moretti did not use the intercom. Nathan was not a person to berate his employer but for some internal reason he did not turn his head to look into the rear passenger part of the vehicle. He looked into the rearview mirror, saw Apollonia trying to get his attention, and lowered the glass.

"Nathan," commanded Apollonia, "back up, head towards Broadway. Make your first right onto Maiden Lane and follow it about two tenths of a mile. You'll come to a narrow unmarked dirt road. Make the right and follow the path until you see a cut out on your left. Pull in there, cut the lights, and turn off the motor."

Nathan Childress did as she asked. He wasn't scared, but he wished he had a weapon underneath his left arm. The fact that the main gate was not fully closed, the guardhouse door was wide open, and the building was empty was enough of a clue to signal that something was definitely wrong within the compound. He found the narrow dirt road, made the turn, and followed the rutted road to the cut out. The huge sedan was jostled as he drove so he maintained a speed that would not rip the undercarriage out from underneath the vehicle. He saw the cut out, pulled in, shut the headlights, turned off the motor, and said, "We're here."

"Good," said Apollonia as she exited the vehicle. "Viv come with me. Ming, you and Nathan, stay here. We'll be back momentarily. Do not do anything stupid. This is a private road and it is not patrolled by the police. Trust me and wait until Viv and I return."

Apollonia with Viv following crossed the rutted road and entered the thick stand of trees and bushes along the opposite side. Both knew where they were headed. Viviano let Apollonia take the lead. She made her way towards the rear fence of the Moretti compound. Although the land they were on was not fenced, it still was part of the acreage owned by the family. It took a bit longer than she expected to find the hidden rear gate because of the overgrown brush and weeds. Apollonia looked at Viv and pointed to her right. He nodded and followed. Apollonia used the fence as a guide. She moved about two hundred fifty yards along the fence and almost missed what she was looking for.

The small brick building was not bigger than a medium sized walk in closet. Apollonia fumbled for her keys, found them, and with a practiced hand, slid the key into the lock, and opened the door. The low wattage interior light

immediately came on. Inside was a cache of weapons, ammunition, and clothing. Mario Moretti had the foresight to place the small armory outside the perimeter fence so if they ever needed to get to it because, hindsight being twenty/twenty, he knew having the cache of weapons on the property could only lead to problems. The small armory was on the Moretti property, but not situated within the confines of the fenced residential property. She stepped down and in while Viviano stood in the entrance. The light was dim and directed so it would not leak through the small open door to the outside. The density of the brush and trees even in the dead of winter was thick enough to keep the light from reaching the dirt road and the sky.

"What do you think?" asked Apollonia as she eyed the weapons cache.

"More important," said Viviano, "what are we walking into? Whoever was here made a major mistake by leaving the gate open and the guardhouse empty. At a minimum, the duty guard, Mario, Raffaella, Antonio, Carmen, Alessa, Shen and Lian are within the compound. We need to be careful, yet we need to have enough firepower to take as many intruders as we come upon. We need to get the jump on them."

"You forgot Alessandro. He decided to stay until we returned from our trip. As far as who was dumb enough to forcibly enter the compound, your guess is as good as mine. We need to go in armed to the teeth," replied Apollonia.

She looked at the wall of handguns and chose the four Sig Sauer P229s chambered in 40 S&W with extended threaded barrels for silencers. Below them in a large drawer were the silencers and magazines loaded with Federal .40 S&W 180 grain hi shock hollow point bullets. She took four silencers, twelve magazines and handed them to Viv. He screwed the silencers onto the barrels, put a magazine into each of the semiautomatics, and racked a round into the chamber. Against the wall opposite were illegal automatic assault rifles and twelve gauge shotguns. Apollonia thought for a moment before she decided to take three tactical pump action Remington shotguns with extended ammunition tubes. She handed the shotguns to Viv. He knew to load them with double ought buck, put additional shells on the two exterior ammunition bandoliers, chamber a round, and set the safety. The next weapon she picked was illegal for civilian ownership in the United States. It was a M60E3 light machine gun designed by and built for the Navy SEALs. It fired 7.62x51 caliber NATO ammunition and could push 550 rounds a minute down the barrel. Below it in a drawer were belts of two hundred rounds each. She took seven belts - one to load and six in reserve.

"You're not serious," stated Viv. "We get caught with that we're fucked, Appy."

"I'll take the heat," she replied as she searched for and found two pairs of heavy socks and two pairs of military style jungle boots. She stepped out and leaned the weapon against the front of the small building, closed, and locked the door. She looked up at Viv and said, "I'm not carrying it. Nathan is."

"You trust that big man," said Apollonia.

"With my life and the life of my family," she replied. She added, "He is a trained marksman and if you haven't figured it out already, he's a black ops assassin."

Apollonia and Viv slung the shotguns over their shoulders. Each had a Sig in the waistband of their pants. Apollonia tucked the third Sig in the small of her back as did Viv with the fourth. Viv carried the M60E3 and four belts of ammo. Apollonia took the rest. The carefully made their way back along the fence to the gate, turned left, and exited the brush and trees where they had entered. Nathan saw the weapons, stepped across the small road, and helped carry the armor to the trunk of the Town Car. He pressed the key on the fob to open the trunk. The lock released and the trunk rose. He did not hesitate to break the light in the trunk to maintain the darkness.

"We'll only need that to get ready," said Apollonia. She opened the back door of the car, sat, and changed out of her heels into the light military style boots. She gave Ming the second pair of boots and socks. She went to the other side to change out of her heels. When Apollonia was finished she stood and said, "Nathan, take a Sig and two additional magazines. Each magazine holds twelve. The weapon is loaded with one in the chamber and eleven in the magazine. Have you handled a M60E3 light machine gun?"

"I've shot the 60," he replied not giving her the truth about how he really came to know the weapon. "Not a problem. Just have to be careful as the barrel overheats easily."

Apollonia pointed to the weapon and the extra belts. Nathan did not take his black suit jacket off because his shirt was bright white. He wrapped in a crisscross fashion across his chest four of the belts. He opened the breech, laid the first round of the fifth belt into the slot, closed the breech, and racked a round into the chamber. He checked the safety, nodded, and leaned against the car waiting. The two remaining belts were grabbed by Ming. She wrapped them around her upper torso as Nathan had. Nathan was not going to say anything about the weaponry, but he knew that the four were going to enter the compound, evaluate the situation, and if need be take out the intruders.

"Close and lock the vehicle. Hide the keys," said Apollonia. "We're going to enter the compound through the rear gate. We'll make our way around the periphery keeping in the shadows to the back of Ming's house. We'll work our way from her house around the cul de sac to Viv's house. As we approach, we need to see and hear what we can to ascertain the status of the other family members and don't forget about the security guard. I want to capture the officer-in-charge. Otherwise, shoot and ask questions later. Knee wounds are preferable, but if there is no other choice, shoot to kill. Also, this is totally by the seat of our pants, so if we need to modify the plan midstream we will."

Apollonia looked to her lover and said, "Are you ok with this? I don't know what we're walking into and I don't know about the boys."

Ming maintained a stoic attitude, but her body language said it all. She hid her training behind her cool, calm, demeanor, "Beware to those that harm my children. I'm good Appy."

"Miss Moretti," said Nathan, "I suggest we keep at least six feet between us. I wouldn't approach the house in single file. We should spread across the rear yard as we make our way to the objective house. Also, I would do it in a crouch or on our bellies."

"Good thinking Nathan," agreed Apollonia. "Let's get a move on."

The four made their way through the brush and trees to the gate. Apollonia had the key ready, opened the lock, and then slowly opened the gate. She feared the hinges would squeak due to lack of use and buildup of rust. The noise was minimal and she was confident that if anyone was patrolling the grounds, they would not have heard the noise. Viv went first followed by Ming and Nathan. Apollonia went in last and closed and locked the gate behind her. Her thought process was there should be no reason the four of them would have to beat feet back to the gate to escape. If everything went as she hoped it would, someone could drive Nathan to the Town Car after they cleaned up what she figured was going to be a bloody mess. The woods inside the fence around the periphery of the property were not as thick, but it did provide a decent amount of cover.

Apollonia decided that Nathan should take the lead. He knew just by watching him prepare and make his way to the fence, he knew what he was doing. "Nathan, take the lead, I'll be behind you to direct you. Ming behind me, Viv take the rear and keep an eye behind us."

"Yes Miss Moretti," said Nathan. "We have a minor problem with the ambient moonlight, but if we're careful we should not be seen. He pointed to lights ahead and slightly to the left, which house?"

"That should be the main house at the top of the cul de sac," she replied. "To our left just at the edge of the periphery is the family cemetery. It is surrounded by a low iron fence. If we head to our right, we will pass my house and Ming's house. If we head directly to the lights, we'll run into the pool and the patio. Each house has a separate garage which from our perspective will be on the right as we head towards the gatehouse. Each house has a fairly large size patio surrounded by a three foot stone wall. The only pool is behind the main house."

"Understood," said Nathan. "You, Ming, and Mr. Rossi. . ."

"Viv," said Viviano, "call me Viv. You'll know when to address me as Mr. Rossi."

"Yes sir," said Nathan out of respect and training. "Take a moment to look around and you will see that even in the dark the trees are casting slight shadows. This means we can be detected by people trained as I am. We are not dressed properly and we'll have to make the best of a bad situation. We have the firepower. Per Miss Moretti, use it judiciously. Whisper when we have to talk and use hand signals at all times. Let's get a move on."

Nathan did not stay in the brush because it would have made moving difficult and the noise of breaking branches would make a minor racket. Instead, he walked just inside it on the grass. He crouched as he made his way slowly towards Ming's backyard. The idea crossed his mind to check out Apollonia's house first but he saw the insanity of the idea because it was the first house on that side of Columbus Place next to the main house. Start at the furthest point and work your way back to your objective. He also realized they would have to double back to go around to get to Viviano's house. It took twenty-one minutes of slow painstaking crouching and crawling to get to the middle of Ming's back yard.

The house was completely dark. Ming always left on the light above the kitchen sink. There was a lamp on a small table outside her bedroom. When she left with or without her children, she lit the lamp. The only other light that was on was the light over the backdoor. Apollonia knew immediately that something was wrong. If Raffaella had Shen and Lian at her house, she would have never turned off the interior lights. Apollonia made her way to Nathan.

She whispered, "We have a problem. The lights that are always on – aren't. The boys are too young to be alone in the house especially in the dark. They're either dead, tied up and gagged, or not inside. As with all the inhabited houses on the compound, the backdoor is always unlocked. I say we make for the driveway and check. If it is locked, then someone who does not know the family methods locked the door and we know we have intruders."

"We can't break in," said Nathan. "If they're inside, they'll hear and alert the others."

Apollonia smiled, "What they don't know is all the exterior doors within the compound are keyed the same. All the doors on all the houses use the same lockset and key. We just need to check for booby-traps before we open the door. They may slam shut if you allow them to, but if we're careful we can open the door and gain entrance without anyone hearing."

"Ok," said Nathan. "I'll cover. Viviano, you go first. Get to the garage and provide cover. Then Miss Moretti, Ming, and then me."

Viviano checked to his left and right. He eyed the back of Ming's house. He saw no movement. He nodded his head and made a mad dash for the end of the driveway by the garage. From watching movies, he pressed his body against the side of the garage, checked the area, and when he knew it was clear, waved for Apollonia and Ming to make the run across the backyard. Both women made their way as if they were trained military personnel. Nathan watched and was amazed. Ten seconds after they made it across the backyard, Nathan made his way across.

The waited a moment for everyone to catch their breath. When their breathing was somewhat normal, Apollonia made her way to the backdoor and checked to see if it was locked. It was. She took the key which she had separated from her keychain and unlocked the door. She pushed it open and before she could enter Nathan took her by the shoulder to stop her.

"Me first Miss Moretti," he whispered.

Apollonia did not argue. Nathan placed the M60E3 against the side of the house and unwrapped the four belts of ammunition from his torso. He took a deep breath to calm his nerves and entered the house with his gun just below eye level using a two handed grip. His training taught him to keep his finger off the trigger, but he decided to go against training. He did not know how much pressure he would need to pull the trigger and that could pose a problem. If the pull was very light and he bumped his right arm, he could discharge the weapon. He moved slowly through the mudroom, when he got to the door into the hall he paused. He stepped to the side, peered into the darkened hallway checking left and right. He saw nothing and stepped into the hall. He checked to his left and then his right as he peered towards the entrance to the kitchen. He saw nothing ahead of him. He stepped back to the doorway to the mudroom and waved Apollonia into the house. He made his way down the hall to the entrance of the kitchen. He stopped and held up his hand. He bent his elbows moving the well balanced Sig closer to his chest while maintaining

his grip, moved his head just enough to see around the doorjamb, and saw two shadows standing at the entrance to the family room and the great room. To his amazement, the men were quiet relaxed considering their part of the operation was to stop anyone that made entrance into the house. He stepped back towards the mudroom.

Apollonia, Ming, and Viviano were right behind him. He turned, held up two fingers, and mouthed, "Two men inside." He pointed towards the mudroom. Viviano and Apollonia moved back a few steps. He whispered, "This is a simple take down even if there are three. I can see two and they're quite relaxed for the situation. Let me do what I'm trained to do. You wait for my signal to enter the kitchen. I want to take one alive so we can question him."

"Agreed," whispered Apollonia.

Nathan Childress nodded, took a deep cleansing breath, exhaled, and made his way back to the entrance of the kitchen. He stopped, looked around the doorjamb, and saw the silhouettes of the two men. They were relaxed. Too relaxed for what they were supposed to be doing. Nathan calculated his odds and decided to come in low, put two into the side of the man standing in entrance to the family room. When the other moved back and turned to shoot, he would put one in each of his knees. One dead and one wounded. He would have enough time to disarm the wounded man before he could do any damage.

The takedown of the two men took less than fifteen seconds. The first man never knew what hit him. The spit of the silencer did not warn them. Nathan put two bullets center mass effectually killing him before he hit the floor. The second man turned, raised his weapon, and before he could squeeze the trigger, a .40 caliber bullet aimed at each knee tore apart the patella and the joint behind. The man groaned, grabbed for his knees, and fell to the floor. Nathan immediately knew the man was a trained black ops person. He did not scream when he was shot. He tried to keep his cool and return fire, but losing both his knees and his ability to stand kept him from responding to his attacker.

Nathan placed his size fourteen shoe on the man's neck and pressed. "Drop the gun, now. Or, I'll fuckin' crush your throat."

The trained black ops interloper complied. Nathan kicked the gun under the breakfast table. He looked up to see Apollonia, Ming, and Viviano enter the room. Nathan removed his foot, stepped back, and made it plainly obvious that he would shoot the man between-the-eyes if he tried anything stupid.

Viviano went through the man's pockets and found nothing to identify him. He checked the inside of his suit jacket for labels. None were found. He looked at Apollonia and shrugged his shoulders.

"Shoot him if he tries anything stupid," said Apollonia.

She made her way into the U-shape of the kitchen and found a medium sized serrated knife. She returned to the interloper, knelt, and said, "You have a choice. Answer my questions and live or be a tough guy and die a very painful death. There are no other options."

The black ops interloper said nothing. He gritted his teeth against the pain. His eyes betrayed that there was someone else in the house.

"Viv," whispered Apollonia, "Make a tour of the house. Be careful, but do not hesitate to shoot."

Ming interject, "I'm going."

Apollonia knew better than to argue. She knew Ming was going to check for Shen and Lian.

Viviano looked at Nathan who gave him the thumbs up sign which instilled confidence in his mind. He nodded, turned, and made his way down the hall to the great room. He was smart enough to stay against the wall to keep his silhouette small. Ming did the same.

Apollonia took the medium serrated knife and jammed it into the bullet hole in the man's right knee. She twisted and as she pressed it down into the wound. The man could not keep from screaming. She pulled it out, rubbed it on his cheek, and said, "Talk to me or I'll cut your cock and balls off."

His eyes flew open as she began to open his belt. He stared with amazement as his pants were opened and pulled down to reveal his genitals. He was not restrained but he understood if he moved, he would be dead. He shivered when Apollonia picked up his scrotum and placed the knife behind the sack.

"Who do you work for?" she asked.

"FUCK YOU BITCH!!!" he spat.

Nathan moved to keep a line of sight on the man's forehead. Apollonia understood why he moved. She raised her eyebrows and without saying a word forced the knife through the man's scrotum effectively separating his testicles from his body. He could not stifle another more terrifying scream. It wasn't the pain, but the loss of his testicles.

"Next is your cock," said Apollonia. She found the rather small appendage, lifted it, and placed the blood soaked knife at its base. "If you don't want to lose your cock, answer my question. Who do you work for?"

The fear on his face was real. His training never took into account the severing of his genitals. A bit of torture, but not complete emasculation. He knew he was going to die. Nothing could save him. Maybe the team leader on the second floor would come to his aid, but he knew the guy was a dick head and a chicken-shit. He felt the pressure of the knife. Then he thought he heard the spit of a silencer. He turned his head to the hallway leading to the front of the house. He knew the entire team was carrying weapons without silencers. Maybe, his associate got some balls, disarmed either one or both, and shot them at close range.

Apollonia and Nathan heard the report of the suppressed gunshot. Apollonia did not reduce the pressure on the knife, but she did wait to see who came down the hall. A minute later she was relieved to see Viviano followed by Ming walk heads up down the middle of the hallway. She smiled and pressed a bit harder against the root of the interloper's cock.

"So, now you're all alone," she said. "We figured three in each house. If you want to join your brethren, then don't answer my question. But I will tell you that just by the way we found you situated in the house we know how you've set up security. A totally dark house means three men. Two on the first floor and one on the second. Doesn't take a rocket scientist to know you're trained in black operations. Answer my questions and you'll live. You may be crippled and have to pee sitting down, but you'll be alive. Keep on trying to be strong and a hero and you'll die a very slow painful death. Even if we leave to take care of the rest of your crew, I will come back and I will shove my hand up your ass and rip your insides out. Who do you work for?"

"FUCK YOU BITCH!!!" Against his operational commands to only speak English, he failed when he spat, "Fottere tu!!!"

"Il Concilio Vaticano II ha inviato. Baciare il vostro pungere bye-bye," she said in perfect Italian as she separated the man's cock from his body. Blood spurted and oozed from the amputations. Apollonia could care less about killing him slowly. She knew where these assholes came from and why they were there. She stood, pressed the barrel of the silencer between the man's eyes, and just before she pulled the trigger, she said, "Io mentito."

Nathan, Ming, or Viviano flinched when she shot the man. Apollonia stood, looked from Ming to Viviano to Nathan, and said, "We're going to have a major clean up if we have to kill them all." She paused not to calm her nerves, but to prepare for the night's activities. "I expect that we will."

"What did you say just before you pulled the trigger?" asked Nathan.

"I said to him I lied," replied Apollonia. "He knew what I meant. Any ideas about how to proceed?"

Nathan spoke up, "If the house is dark, then the only people inside are the black ops men. If the house has lights on, then I think it would be safe to assume that is where they are holding the hostages. Can we see the other houses from here? Also, we need to know how many cars are on the street or in driveways."

"I'll go to the third floor," said Viviano. "There is a small doorway to the roof. If I'm careful, I should be able to see the other houses and the street." Viviano did not wait for an answer as he made his way upstairs.

Something bothered Ming, "What if they're here just to tell us that the hostages are not on the property or they're all dead?"

Before Apollonia could respond, Nathan said, "You have to keep those thoughts out of your mind. Right now, Shen and Lian are alive. Do not think otherwise. We have a job to do and we need you on point to make our objective. Can you handle the situation? Because if you can't Ming, please stay here."

"Thank you for your concern," said Ming. "I'm no pansy ass. They're my children and they are my soul. You have to understand that no matter how much I want to push the possibility of their death out of my mind, it still surfaces. Believe me when I say this, if I have to pull the trigger, I will without a second thought. I have my friends back as I know you have mine." She paused before saying, "I'm headed to my room to make a quick change into more comfortable dark clothing. Don't worry I can do it without turning on the lights."

It took longer than he expected, but Viviano made his way onto the roof. He noted that Apollonia's and his house were dark. Mario's house had lights on in the great room and in the master bedroom. The third floor was dark. He could not see the back of the house. In the driveway were two cars with a third and fourth on the street in front. He double checked the dark houses and recounted the vehicles before he made his way back to the kitchen.

"Four cars. Two in Mario's driveway and two parked on the street. Apollonia's house and my house are completely dark," he paused and although it was dark in the house they could all see his consternation at his thought. "Did anyone check for radios? Cell phones? Walkie Talkies? In ear communication buds?"

Ming moved to the dead men and checked their right ears. She retrieved two small communications buds and put them on the breakfast table. Without a word, she departed for the man that lay dead on the balcony outside her room. She returned with a third communications bud and a cell phone.

"Cell phone guy was the team leader," said Nathan. "I would suspect the phones are burners and all communications are done in Italian. I'm not fluent in Italian. I imagine two of you are, but the problem is we have only one male besides me. We need to make a decision about answering and having verbal communications, because if we do and they don't recognize the voice, we're fucked and possibly the hostages are fucked as well. Text messages should not pose a problem."

"Ok," said Apollonia. "We just have to move quickly. My house next. Then backtrack down to the gatehouse, cross the street, and up the back yards to Raffaella's house. We cannot navigate around the back of the main house without the possibility of being seen. We'll take down the six remaining via the entry we used at Ming's house. Then we will decide how we are going to make ourselves known to the remaining three. Agreed?"

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Apollonia's house proved to be a bit more difficult because the men were not stationed in the same place when Nathan made entry into the kitchen. Both men were standing the U-shape of the kitchen. It forced Nathan to put down the M60E4 so he could step into the room, spin to his left, and get two center mass body shots into the men before they realized what happened and could react. Neither man had any form of identification on them, but they did have ear bud communication devices. The takedown of the third man on the second floor was accomplished by Viviano. Ming stayed with Nathan and Apollonia. As it was in Ming's house, the second floor man had the cell phone and was the team leader.

After the house was secure, Apollonia made a quick tour to check that nothing was disturbed. When she got to her atelier, she knew immediately that something bad had happened in the room. Two of her work tables were overturned. The only inference that could be made was either Colina or Alessandro or both got into fisticuffs with the black ops intruders. Apollonia froze for a minute. Her body shook at the thought that one of those pricks hit Colina in the face. God help the assholes that remained alive if Colina was injured. Upon her return to the kitchen, she told everyone that something happened in her atelier. She offered her opinion that it looked like a fight had occurred because two of her work tables were overturned.

Before they left for the guardhouse, Apollonia changed out of her business suit into black clothing. She offered a change of shirt to Nathan, but everyone knew Colin's old black hoodie would not make it over Nathan's head. They all chuckled which relieved some of the tension. It was a momentary break and they all knew the next hour or two was going to be quite difficult.

Nathan took the lead as they made their way down to the guardhouse. The door to the small building was still open. The gate remained partially opened. Apollonia decided to manually close the gate and secure the guardhouse. She looked around the inside of the small building and was thankful there was no blood. Maybe the duty guard was surprised and did not have a chance to pull his weapon. It never entered her mind that he could be working with the intruders. The gatehouse video recorder was smashed to smithereens apparently in an attempt to protect the intruders' identities. What the interlopers did not know about Columbus Place security could fill a thimble. They broke the video recorder, but had no knowledge of the systems that recorded movement on the street and around each house. Not that it mattered, because the only person of the black ops group that would remain living was the group leader.

Again following Nathan, the group made their way behind the empty houses on the side of Raffaella's house. Apollonia calculated that they did not enter those houses because the backdoors were not broken down. Only houses that had Moretti family living in them kept their backdoors unlocked. It took twenty-five minutes for the four friends to get positioned behind Raffaella's house. Like the rest it was totally dark. Viviano allowed Nathan to take the lead. He understood completely why his sister-in-law hired him to be her driver. He would bet his life that he was also acting as her bodyguard.

Nathan made entry and checked the position of the two first floor intruders. This time one sat at the breakfast table while the other stood in front of the kitchen sink. Nathan knew he would have to take out the man in front of the sink first. He calculated that he would have to enter the kitchen firing his weapon. Enter the room, turn left, fire two shots, spin, and wait for the man sitting at the table to stand. Once he did, he would put two into his chest. His entry plan went exactly as he hoped. He spun to his left before the black ops interloper could raise his weapon. He fired twice and as the man fell face forward onto the floor. His partner fell backwards onto the floor from the impact of the two .40 caliber bullets. Nine seconds to take out two men. Nathan Childress was feeling pretty good about his effectiveness. He was also proud that he hadn't lost his touch.

Viviano and Ming made their way to the second floor. Standing next to the door to the master bedroom was the leader of this squad. Before he could raise his Sig, Ming fired two shots. The first hit the man directly between the eyes, The second shot was placed square in the middle of his sternum. Viv was impressed at Ming's expertise with a semiautomatic. Her ability to cold heartedly assassinate another human being scared him.

For the third time, all four gathered together the men's communications buds and the leader's cell phone. They put them in a plastic bag and hid them in the downstairs toilet. They used what they could to wrap the bodies to try and stem the flow of blood. Once their work was done, they stood in the kitchen deciding how they were going to approach the main house.

"We need to collect some intel," said Nathan. "Somehow we need to get close to the main house and peer inside. We need to try and ascertain what we're up against."

"I have a pair of binoculars," said Viviano. "They're not night vision goggles, but they should allow one of us to see into the great room, family room, and kitchen. Of course, that is if one of us can get close enough."

Ming spoke, "I'm the smallest. Give me the binoculars. I'll make my way around to the back of the main house and see what I can see. I can check out the great room from the garage side closest to the house. All I need is my semi and my magazines. I have no intention of getting caught or seen."

The remaining three saw the determination on Ming's face. They did not argue that one of them should go instead of her. Viviano offered Nathan a sweatshirt. It was definitely too big for Viv, but would definitely fit the big man. Before Ming left Nathan offered, "Mr. Rossi, if you have any black shoe polish, it would be a good thing."

Viv nodded, "It's in my room and while I'm there, I'm going to make a quick change. Sorry Nathan, I don't have any pants or jeans that will fit you." He left without waiting for an answer. Viv returned wearing all black. In his right hand was a tin of Kiwi black shoe polish and a baby diaper. He handed them to Nathan.

"It's easy people," said Nathan. "Just put it on your face, but don't wipe it on. Use streaks so it will break up the outline of your face. Sorry ladies, but if you're going to take part, you're going to look the part."

Apollonia and Ming laughed. Neither woman cared about their appearance. What they both wanted did not have to be enunciated. When the tin of shoe polish and diaper were handed to Apollonia she had the paste on her face quicker than a man with premature ejaculation could spend his seed.

Ming covered her face last. When she was comfortable she nodded and made her way out of Viviano's house. She made her way towards the main house. She went behind the garage and stayed next to the wall so she was covered by the landscaping. When she reached the corner, she moved a small branch of the pine tree that was placed on the corner of the building. Her line of sight to the front porch and two of the windows into the great room was perfect. She lifted the binoculars and scanned as much of the room as she could. She moved further to the left and saw something she did not expect. Standing just outside the front doors were two additional men. They were armed with long guns that appeared to be semiautomatic assault weapons. She noted that each weapon had two thirty round magazines taped together to make changing them easier. These men were military trained and experienced operatives.

She backed into the landscaping and made her way halfway down the back of the garage where she exited. She checked the moonlight and made her decision. She knelt and then went to her belly. She slid across the grass towards the back of Viviano and Raffaella's house. If she went at least three quarters of the way to the periphery of the property, she knew she would be able to work her way around to the back of the main house. Then she would crawl forward to point where she could use the binoculars to peer into the back of the house. Again, if everything went as planned, she should be back inside with the others in no more than fifteen to twenty minutes.

The back of the main house was lit primarily from the French doors and windows in the breakfast area and kitchen. Ming could not get as close as she wanted. She peered into the house and counted five men. That made a total of four additional interlopers. Her heart pounded and she used her training to calm her nerves because she had not seen her children or any of the others she had become so very close to. She moved the binoculars up and tried to peer into the second floor windows to no avail. Just before she turned to crawl back to Viviano's house she saw a sliver of light coming from the basement. *'Where else would they keep their hostages,'* she thought as she made her way around and away from the main house.

The whole intelligence gathering trip took just under twenty-seven minutes. Ming quietly entered Viviano's house and made her way to the kitchen with due speed. "We have a problem," she said. "We miscalculated the number of men. Four cars carry sixteen to twenty men not twelve. There are two stationed on the front porch next to the doors. Inside there are two additional men. I believe the hostages are in the basement. If I am correct, at least two of the men have to be going downstairs to check on them. If not two, at least one must be checking. When I looked into the back of the house all of them were in the kitchen, breakfast room, and family room. Last but not least, the two men on the front porch are carrying assault weapons."

"What I wouldn't do with a sniper rifle right now," said Nathan. "Could take the two down before they even knew what hit them without letting those inside know their front guards were dead."

"Guess I blew it," said Apollonia. "On the wall of the hut are several sniper rifles - .308's, 5.56s, and one suppressed Barrett .50. Didn't even cross my mind to bring a sniper rifle."

"How could you know," stated Nathan trying to relieve his employer's anxiety over a simple mistake. "I'd say you made a simple tactical error. If we had spent time watching to prepare for an assault, we'd have the proper equipment and armor. Instead, we're here by the seat of our pants with no working intelligence. We know what we know so I'll take out the two on the porch. I know I can get to them before they alert the rest of their team. That will take away that firepower. Question is how do we make ingress into the house?"

"How do we know that one of them won't descend into the basement and kill all the hostages?" asked Viviano.

"We don't," said Nathan, "but, the hostages are their only chip in the game. Kill them and they lose their hole card. They want them alive so they can threaten Miss Moretti with their demise to get what they want."

"Why don't we go in from two directions?" asked Apollonia. "Two through the backdoor and two through the front doors. I can unlock the front doors, but I'll guess they're not locked."

"No," stated Nathan emphatically. "We cannot make entrance through the front doors. If any of the men are on the balcony, we're walking into a shooting gallery. We have to do as he have when entering the other three houses. What will make it difficult is the lack of darkness. . ."

"Not a problem," said Viviano. He turned to Apollonia, "We could cut the main inside the garage. They wouldn't know what hit them. Nathan, Ming, and Apollonia enter as we have before. We agree on a delay. I go into the garage and when delay time has passed, I throw the breaker to turn off the power."

Nathan thought a moment before he said, "Are all of the houses on the compound exactly alike?"

"Yes," replied Apollonia. "The only difference is the size of the main house. It is bigger, but the room layout is exactly like the others. The six others were built after the main house. The only difference being their smaller size."

"Damn," growled Nathan. "It is a great idea, but we'll all be blind. Our eyes will not adjust fast enough. We need to cut the power and wait before entering the house or just go in with the lights on and take our chances."

"We need to take the two on the porch first," said Ming. "If we cut the power before we do them, what are the chances that they will make their way towards the garage to see what happened to the power? That will take a few seconds to a few minutes. We'll be in the dark so our night vision will not be affected by the light in the house. You know that once the lights go out, some of the ops guys are going to come out the backdoor. They'll enter our ambush, except their teammates will not hear the sound of gunfire. Remember we're suppressed. It should be like shooting ducks in a barrel."

"What if they go back into the house through the front doors?" asked Apollonia. "There is that scenario to think about. Maybe they've planned to rally in the kitchen if the lights go out. I'm just suggesting. . ."

"We need to make a decision," said Nathan. I think we go with cutting the power, but instead of waiting for the two on the front porch to move inside or come to the garage side, I make my way to them and when the lights go out, I take them out. I make my way to the backdoor and wait just a moment to see how many of the assholes are going to come running outside and unknowingly into our ambush. Once we clear them, we enter the house. We know that at least one will be on the second floor. The rest have to be on the first and at least one in the basement."

"I agree," said Apollonia. "Let's do it!!!"

Apollonia and Viviano followed Ming as she made her way around the back of the main house to the rear of the garage. They stayed close to the periphery before turning towards the rear of the main house's garage. Viv took off his hoodie, wrapped it around his hand, and with close to no sound broke the side window closest to Apollonia's

house. He reached in, undid the lock, and raised the window. He made his way to the electric box and the main switch, looked back at Apollonia, who was watching the time, and waited for her signal. Meanwhile, Nathan made his way across the front lawn staying close to the landscaping to the steps leading up to the porch. He checked his watch as saw he had ten seconds before the lights went out.

Apollonia counted down in her head, five, four, three, two, and one. She saw Viv and nodded. He threw the switch sending the house into total darkness. Viv made it to the window and followed Ming and Apollonia to the corner of the garage nearest the backdoor. Apollonia saw an opportunity and took it. She made her way across the driveway and pressed her body against the side of the house. Collectively, Apollonia, Ming, and Viviano held their breath. Just as they thought, two men came flying out of the backdoor. Ming shot the first one in the chest. Apollonia shot the second one in the temple. Both men fell dead. Viviano made it across the driveway to the backdoor. He waited for Nathan per the plan.

Nathan stood the moment the lights went out, fired four shots. The first two hit the man closest to him. He fell like an anchor into the sea. The second man got off two rounds of his own. The first missed Nathan by a mile, but the second grazed his left shoulder. The bullet did not enter his body, but it did cause a rather deep crease in his deltoid muscle. The pain caught him for a second, but his training and his ability to block the pain kicked in. He held his gun pointed at the second man, but he did not need to pull the trigger. The second set of bullets hit the man directly in the center of his chest. Nathan made his way up the stairs and across the porch to the stairs by the backdoor. His arm was bleeding but he did not care. He wanted to get into the house. He saw the two dead black ops men as he made his way to where Viviano stood.

"Follow me," stated Nathan as he pressed the magazine eject button. He reloaded without having to look at what he was doing. He left the empty magazine lying on the porch.

He opened the door and stepped into the mudroom. Thankful for his twenty-twenty vision, he caught the glimpse of a shadow just inside the hallway leading to the kitchen. He froze, gun held ready, and he waited for the other man to make a move. Nothing happened which made Nathan decide to take the bull by the horns. He stepped up to the door, stepped through as he turned right, and with the action of an automaton put two bullets in each of the two men standing halfway down the hallway to the kitchen entrance. He moved forward two steps and stopped just as a fusillade of bullets tore into the wall opposite the kitchen entrance. He pressed his body against the wall that was the other side of the kitchen wall and made his way forward. He was amazed that the men were just shooting haphazardly in an attempt to stop the onslaught of one trained military man and three civilians.

The bullets stopped long enough for Nathan and Ming to make entrance into the kitchen. Two of the remaining three were standing, guns raised, and waiting. Nathan did not need to think about what he had to do. He squeezed the DAC trigger twice. The man on the right did not get off another round. His head exploded because Nathan decided to take the more difficult head shot. Before Ming could expend any rounds, Nathan moved his aim and squeezed off two more. The bullets hit the man in each eye.

Apollonia and Viviano came in behind Nathan and Ming. They saw Nathan holding up one finger. They understood that only one man remained alive and he was on the balcony that surrounded the great room. He was the group leader. He turned to them and pointed up. No one moved. Six of the seven men were dead. Nathan wanted more than anything to bring down the seventh alive. Apollonia began to move and he stopped her, "He's mine. I promise I will take him alive."

Apollonia did not argue. She watched her driver make his way down the hallway to the great room. Everyone held their breath even though they wanted to make a beeline to the basement to check if that is where the others were being held. Nathan stopped before he entered the large room. He scanned the expanse for any movement and saw none. He knew the asshole was on the second floor balcony, but where. He had a decision. Take the stairs closest to the master bedroom or slide to his left and take the stairs on the same side, but further from the room. He decided on the latter. He made his way to the stairs and with ease of a man one-third his size and a lightness of step made his way up. He tried his damndest to blend into the staircase and only through his training did he succeed. Lying on the steps supporting his weight with his balls of his feet he moved up enough to look down the floor for the other asshole's feet.

Nathan sighed the sigh of relief because standing in front of the bedroom door was the group leader. His firearm was not at the ready, but by his side. The best approach was no approach. Nathan pressed his knees onto the step they were resting in front of and lifted his upper torso. He raised his Sig, aimed, and put two bullets into the knees of the group leader. He fell like a stone never seeing the man who shot him. Nathan stood and made his way down the balcony to the prone group leader. He was surprised to see a bandage on his nose, but that did not deter him from his duty. He kicked the gun away, bent over, picked the man up, and tossed him over his shoulder. There was no fight left in the crippled operative. To add insult to injury, Nathan unceremoniously dropped him on the floor when he entered the breakfast area.

"Mr. Rossi, you can turn on the lights," said Nathan totally forgetting that he was instructed to use Mr. Rossi's first name.

Ten seconds later the lights came on. Apollonia did not look at the man Nathan brought into the breakfast room; she was more interested in going down into the basement. She did not have to say a word to Ming. They made their way to the basement door, opened it, and descended their Sigs at the ready. Tied up and gagged against the wall opposite the wrecked wine cellar were Mario, Raffaella, Colina, and an injured Alessandro Bruno. Ming's head spun as if it were on a swivel. Nowhere to be found were the children. She fell to her knees and screamed. Apollonia screamed upstairs for Viviano to come down and help. The security guard was nowhere to be found either.

Mario, Raffaella, and Colina were not physically hurt, but they were definitely emotionally injured. Alessandro sustained a beating but thankfully nothing was broken. Well, his pride, but no bones. Viviano helped Alessandro climb the steps to the kitchen and breakfast area. Raffaella and Colina were dazed. Alessandro wanted to go after the bastards, but his body would not allow it. He had no knowledge that all but one of the intruders was dead. Mario was calm and not at all angry at the intrusion into his house. He took the stairs and showed no reaction to the mayhem that occurred inside his house. He did not overtly show his anger or amazement at the dead men that littered his kitchen floor. The next place he went was his chair at the head of the breakfast room table. He sat and showed absolutely no emotion.

The hardwood floors of the hallway, kitchen, and breakfast area were slick with blood. It took a moment for Nathan to realize that they had miscalculated the number of men by two. There were nine and not seven. He stared hard at the one living operations man. He saw the adults come up from the basement, but there were no children. 'Where were the children?' he thought. He stepped over to the man he had shot in the knees, leaned down, and said, "You do not want my employer to interrogate you about the whereabouts of the five children. I suggest you tell me where they are or as God is my witness I will skin you alive."

The injured operative ignored the big black man that had shot his legs out from under him. He just stared into his eyes and sneered as he vainly tried to suppress the pain coursing throughout his body.

Viviano took off to search the second and third floors.

Apollonia made her way over to the operative lying on the floor and broke out laughing. Everyone froze wondering why she was laughing her head off when the children were still missing. She saw the look of fear and wonderment on everyone's face. Cackling like an elementary school child, she said as she pointed to the prone man, "I would like to introduce Father Mangini of the Vatican's Protection Division to you all. He, Father O'Connor, and Cardinal DeTomaso paid an unannounced and uninvited visit to me yesterday morning. They were here to speak to Mario not knowing that he no longer controlled the Moretti family. Um, the reason he has that bandage on his nose is a ninety pound woman kicked his fuckin' ass."

Apollonia turned back to the obviously frightened cleric, leaned down, and asked, "Where is the security guard? More importantly, where are the children, Father Mangini? I'm not going to let Nathan skin you alive, I'm going to do to you what the Medieval priests of the Spanish Inquisition did to those they believed to be nonbelievers. Then I'm going to visit the insanity of Dr. Josef Mengele on you. If you're still alive and not answering the one question I have for you to answer, the sadistic cannibal serial killer Jeffery Dahmer comes to mind. Do you know of Jeffrey Dahmer?" She saw no immediate response from the cleric. "The last indignity may just be the first I use on your sorry ass. Think about it, because I'm not telling you."

Father Mangini shook his head in the negative. His eyes pleaded for his life and some medical attention. "I beseech you to please get me medical attention. In the name of all that is holy!!! Please!!!"

Apollonia ignored him. She turned to Nathan, "Watch over him and make sure he does not bleed out. But, do not give him aid and comfort."

Viviano returned to the breakfast room. His eyes wide, his lips curled with anger, and his hands balled into fists. "They're not in the house!!!" cried Viviano. He turned to the man on the floor and kicked him in his kidney. Father Mangini screamed as he had lost any level of pain control.

Nathan let him do it just once. The second kick never happened. To the disbelief of everyone in, Nathan reached for Viviano, took him by his underarms, and lifted him off the floor. "Enough Mr. Rossi," said Nathan. "I promise you we will find the children."

"Alive???" he cried as he came to the realization that the big black him had lifted him off his feet as easily as he would lift a fifty pound crate.

Nathan's response was simple, "Yes." Then he gently placed Viviano back down.

Apollonia took charge of the situation now that all of the Vatican's operatives were dead or captured.

"Colina you're going to have the most to do. Put on you executive's hat and do not stray from completing the assignments. Call Uncle Gino. We need to dispose of the bodies tonight. I want them cremated after he decapitates them. Tell him to bring twenty-four ice chests. I want heads on ice and kept here. I have a plan. Call our security company and have them wake up a minimum of twelve men. I want them here as soon as possible. Also, find out the name of tonight's guard. Call the worldwide family heads and advise them that we are closing down the church. No access to anything. We enter the Vatican and take back our land. We do the same to any land we own worldwide that we allowed them to build a facility or church. Tell them to close the Vatican Bank and freeze all of their assets. Shut down their computer networks. Deny them access to each other and the Internet. Also, make sure you cancel all deliveries including food. You have permission to do and or say what you need to effectively put the church out of business. When you're done with those phone calls rustle up some food for us. It is going to be a long night and day."

"Viv wake up whomever you have to and get a crew or crews here to clean up the blood, fix the walls, fix the floors, and paint or stain as needed. Go the houses and pick up the ear buds and cell phones from the toilets. We're going to need them. Last, go through the cars for anything you can find. I suspect we're going to need one or two of them."

"Raffaella call the family doctor and have him come here to check out Alessandro. If he balks, tell him we'll shut down his practice. Then get in the kitchen and rustle up some food as we're expecting a lot of people. Colina will help you when he is finished with his duties."

She walked over to Mario, took him by the arm, and led him into the family room. She pushed him down into a chair. "I have one question. Do you know where they took the children? Do you know who took them? By name."

"I don't know Appy," moaned her hated father faking his fear at the loss of the children. "I swear I had nothing to do with this. This is all your doing!!!"

Apollonia pulled him to his feet. She stared up and into his eyes. "If I find out that you were behind this, I am going to feed you your genitals. If one hair on any of this family's children is out of place, I will feed you your genitals. You will help us find them. You don't and I will feed you your genitals. I want you to go into the breakfast area, pick up the phone, and call whomever you have to; to find our children. If you need to kneel and suck the cock of every fuckin' pedophile priest to find out where they are, I expect you see you swallowing boatloads of cum. Failure to help us will result in me feeding you your genitals."

"I am not responsible," emphatically stated Mario. "I will give you what you want, but do not hold this fiasco over my head. I did not break our compact with the church."

The slap was borne of her frustration. Mario did not flinch or respond. He did not rub his face. He allowed his youngest daughter to guide him back to the breakfast area. Mario took his seat, moved it by the phone, and began to make calls as his hated daughter commanded. What she did not know was his calls were to non-functional numbers.

"Nathan," called Apollonia, "can we move that asshole?"

"Sure," replied Nathan. "Where to?"

"I'd love to take him to the city, but that is not going to work," she said. "Let's just . . ." she paused, looked at Ming, and said, "Fuck it. The floor is already covered in blood. We'll question him here. By the way, two in the knees?"

"Based upon where I found him," said Nathan, "and where I was; it was an easier shot to take out his knees. I really didn't want to shoot him in the shoulder. They heal. His knees are gone forever. He'll never walk again."

"Can he kneel?" she asked.

Nathan frowned, but answered, "Yes, he'll be able to kneel when his knees heal if he gets the proper medical attention."

"Can he kneel now?" she asked. "I mean right now?"

"It will be painful, but I think we can get him on his knees," responded Nathan.

"Good," said Apollonia. "Ever been blown by a priest?"

Nathan rolled his eyes in exasperation, "No, but I guess there is always a first time."

"Fuckin' A," responded Apollonia. "Move him so we can begin the interrogation."

Very quietly Ming approach and asked, "And me?"

Apollonia tucked her chin, frowned, and said lovingly, "Like you have to ask. . ."

The interrogation of Father Mangini could only be compared to the interrogation of Al Qaeda terrorists by the CIA. The rendition would have been the movement of the injured black ops priest to the townhouse in the city. As much as she wanted to move him there, time was against her. The children had to be found before they were taken outside of the United States. Apollonia knew it would be a bit more difficult to find them and it would take longer than she preferred, but find them they would. If she could get the information from the priest without resorting to torture, she would let the cocksucker live.

"Nathan, remove his clothing," ordered Apollonia.

Nathan knew why she was removing his clothing. Nudity would make him feel ashamed, dirty, and immoral. With a shit eating grin, Nathan used his StratoFighter™ Stiletto tactical folding knife to cut off the injured black ops

priest's clothing. By the looks of his knee injuries, the longer they were not treated, the more difficult it would be for him to at least move them. The damage done to the bones of the knee joint would make it impossible to surgically implant a bionic knee. The lack of trauma medical care will force the orthopedic surgeon to either fuse his knees or amputate just above the ball of the femur.

Ming seethed as she watched Nathan cut off the priest's clothing. She hated that she went to her lover to ask if she was going to be involved with the interrogation. Ming knew that her lover looked upon her children as her own. She looked at the clock on the microwave oven and saw that only two minutes had passed since she looked before. Time was of the essence. This bastard had better give up where they took the children or she'd personally pull every nail out of his fingers. If he still refused to talk, she'd start with his thumb and remove a bit of each finger at the knuckle.

"Tie him to the chair," said Apollonia. "Damn, I wish we were at the townhouse. This interrogation would be so easy there. Nathan, carry the chair outside. Ming, go upstairs and find a couple of bath towels. I'll be right back."

Apollonia returned from the garage with a five gallon plastic bucket. She pointed to the center of the patio equidistant between the French doors and the pool. Nathan moved the chair with Father Mangini to where she pointed. Ming returned with two standard sized bath towels. Apollonia went to the right side of the French doors where she found the coil of green garden hose. She knew she did not have to roll out a few feet before she turned on the water. The hose came easily as it was being charged with water.

She stopped next to the priest. She pulled the empty bucket close to where she stood. She turned on the water and filled the bucket a bit more than halfway. Apollonia dropped the hose and said, "Do you know what is going to happen to you Father?"

Father Mangini was partially in shock, but not deep enough to not know what was being asked of him. He wiggled in the chair in a vain attempt to free an arm or his useless legs. He turned his head and tried to spit, but failed miserably. He did get two words out of his mouth, "FUCK YOU. . ."

Angry, Apollonia spat, "Nathan roll the chair backwards. Lift the legs so his ass is higher than his face."

Nathan did as she commanded. He knew what she was going to do to the priest. He rolled the chair backwards and used the front legs to raise the back legs off of the slate of the patio.

"Ming, put a towel over his face and hold it there," said Apollonia.

Ming complied.

Apollonia picked up the half full bucket of water and poured a quarter of it over the priest's face. The reaction was immediate. His breathing became labored as the water was drawn into his sinuses. He tried to breathe through his mouth which exacerbated his inability to breathe and increased his feeling he was drowning. There was no way he could hold his breath against the onslaught of water.

"WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN???" screamed Apollonia.

Father Mangini strained against the rope that held him in the chair. He couldn't speak because his mouth was full of water which was drawn into his lungs as he tried to breathe.

Apollonia gave him less than two seconds before she poured another portion of the water over his face. His reaction was the same. He tried to flail his arms to stop the waterboarding. His body strained against the ropes. His legs did not hurt because his brain had overridden the pain to deal with the possibility of drowning.

"WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN???" cried Apollonia directly into his right ear. "YOU WANT THIS TO SHOP?? THEN TELL ME WHERE THEY WERE TAKEN!!!"

Apollonia nodded to Ming and she removed the towel from the priest's face. The three waited for the man to regain a semblance of control. They saw his fear and reveled in it knowing he would have killed everyone if he could all in the name of the church. Apollonia nodded again. Nathan picked up the front legs and started to roll the chair backwards a second time. Ming stood ready with the soaking wet towel. Father Mangini sneered. Nathan finished the movement needed to allow the waterboarding. Ming dropped the soaking wet towel and held it tight against the priest's face.

Apollonia poured the remaining water over the priest's face making sure the liquid hit him directly on his face. The third pouring of water broke the priest. Apollonia, Ming, and Nathan saw it and were surprised. Father Mangini coughed, spat, and choked on the water as his torture continued until the bucket was empty. Apollonia dropped the bucket, put her face over his, and yelled, "THIS WILL STOP. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TELL ME WHERE THE CHILDREN WERE TAKEN. IF YOU DON'T GIVE UP THEIR LOCATION, I WILL STOP THIS TORTURE MOMENTARILY AS I PREPARE THE RACK FOR YOU. I WILL TIE YOU BETWEEN TWO CARS AND SLOWLY DRIVE ONE IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION FROM THE OTHER. I WILL PULL YOUR ARMS AND LEGS FROM YOUR FUCKIN' PEDOPHILE BODY. THEN I'LL FUCKIN' WATERBOARD YOU AGIN!!! WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN???"

Everyone saw him nod his head. Ming removed the towel, but did not remove it from his vision. Nathan placed the chair back on its four legs. Father Mangini's head hung to his chest. His breathing was labored. Death would not visit him quickly and his God would have to forgive him for what he did in his name. His mind reeled with the pain of the bullet wounds and waterboarding. He weighed his options and decided to give the crazy bitch what she needed in the hope she would not kill him on the spot. It took him a shorter time than he expected to regain his ability to speak.

"Please in the name of God, stop," cried Father Mangini. "No more!!! I'll tell you where they were taken. I'll tell you everything. Just stop!!!"

Quietly and calmly, Apollonia added, "By who and how many."

"Yes," he moaned, "but, please dry my face."

"Sure," interjected Ming. "When hell freezes over. Now tell us or I swear I will make you suffer even worse than feeling you're drowning. I'll start by pulling out your nails. If you don't give up where the children are, I will cut each finger off at each knuckle. Very painful way to lose your fingers."

"Where are they?" asked Apollonia.

"Untie me at least. . ." groaned the priest.

Apollonia made a fist and crashed it down on Father Mangini's right knee. The pain was immediate and excruciating. Father Mangini, after all his bravado, involuntarily pissed on himself, the chair, and the patio.

"Last time before we put you back and force feed you some more water, asshole. Where are the children?" demanded Apollonia.

Father Mangini wanted in the worst way to make the sign of the cross. He did it in his mind. After all of his training, he knew he was broken physically and mentally. The worst part of it all to him was it was done by a woman that weighed no more than ninety pounds and stood just five feet five inches tall. He shook his head trying to throw at least some of the water off his face. He saw the bitch nod to the huge black man and he screamed as his body began to shake uncontrollably fearing another round of waterboarding.

"Wait," said Apollonia. "I think he's had enough. Well???"

"There are six men not including the security guard," breathed Father Mangini knowing he had just succumbed to what every black operative in the world tried to never do. "The security guard was released after we

faked his interrogation. I do not know where he went. Cardinal DeTomaso and five others took the children to a warehouse in Brooklyn. They are waiting for word from us that you have been subdued. Our operational orders were to take you and Mario Moretti alive. We were ordered to kill everyone else. Mr. Moretti was to be taken to the Vatican. You and the children were headed to a private. . . ”

“Compound in the Italian Alps,” finished Apollonia. “I need verbal confirmation that Mario Moretti instigated this fiasco to try and regain his power and return to the church the backing of the Moretti family. Then give me the address of the warehouse father and I promise to get you medical help. I will let you live out your meaningless life sucking and fucking Aids infected Nigger cock in Africa.”

“Your father made contact with the Vatican Offices in New York. I was in the office when Cardinal DeTomaso spoke with him about fixing the problem. They discussed and agreed upon tonight’s activities.” Father Mangini coughed, spit up some water mixed with blood, and continued, “They were taken to the old Austin, Nichols and Company warehouse in Red Hook, Brooklyn,” whimpered the priest. “They on the second floor in the rear closest to the water. Tomorrow you and the children were to be incapacitated, transferred to a freighter, and taken to Italy.”

Apollonia patted his face and said, “Good boy. Now, one question and one last thing for you to do then I’ll let you rest.”

“What???” Father Mangini asked.

“First, the men with the Cardinal,” said Apollonia. “What weapons are they carrying? Are they part of the same clandestine service as you?”

“I’m not going to rat. . . ” was all that Father Mangini got to say before his tormentor slammed the butt end of her Sig onto his injured right knee several times. The suffering and the pain was enough for Father Mangini. He screamed, “STOP!!! ENOUGH!!! They are, but better trained. The men are considered to be like your Navy Seals. They’ll die before they get captured.”

“Good, now the last thing you need to do. Call Cardinal DeTomaso. Tell his eminence that you’re completed the operation and you’re on the way with Mario and me,” said Apollonia. “If he asks, everyone else is dead. Fuck it up and I promise your death will take a very long time.”

“I agree,” sputtered the priest.

“Take him inside. Untie him, hold the M60E3 to his head, and watch as he calls the Cardinal,” said Apollonia. “He tries anything stupid, don’t shoot him. Just rip his balls off and shove them down his pedophile throat.”

Apollonia went to where her hated father sat at his place at the head of the table. She stood next to him and quietly said, “Fuck you Mario Moretti. We know where they were taken. You sold your own fuckin’ grandchildren and a child borne of your relationship with a cousin’s wife to save your own useless life.” Apollonia put the working end of her Sig between his eyes. She held it there as she spat, “No need to fake or make your calls. The good Father Mangini gave you up. He didn’t last too long and Jesus did not come to his aid. When I return with your grandchildren, your illicit love child, and my lover’s children, I am going to savoir watching you eat your genitals. Then and only then will I decide what I am going to do with you. Killing you quickly will be too easy and quite unsatisfactory.” She pulled the weapon, turned to Viviano and, calmly said, “Take this piece-of-dog-shit into the basement. Bind his arms and legs. Gag him. Then hang him from one of the exposed ceiling beams upside down. Make sure he cannot escape and make sure my sister does not go near him. Never mind I will talk to her now.”

Apollonia looked around for her sister and did not see her in the kitchen breakfast area. She was about to call out when Raffaella approached her as she entered from the family room. Their eyes met and Apollonia saw something in her sister’s eyes that she’d never seen before. Before she could say anything to Raffaella, her sister put her arms around her shoulders and said, “Apollonia, I heard it all. I heard what the priest said. I know he isn’t lying to save his life. I’m on your side. Do not worry about me. I’ve seen the light. I suspected he was involved when those

assholes treated him with kid gloves." She leaned in, kissed her sister on each cheek, bowed her head, and said, "My allegiance it to you Apollonia Moretti. I give my life and fealty to you unconditionally. Ask and I shall comply."

Upon hearing his oldest daughter give her allegiance to her sister, Mario Moretti made the sign of the cross, put his head onto the oak breakfast table, and silently prayed as he cried. He knew his last gambit to regain his control of the Moretti family had failed.