

Chapter 7

Dennis had been both unhelpful and surprisingly helpful. Rocky still felt the strange sense that Antonio needed him but just didn't know how. Or why.

Rocky thanked the bartender and stepped back outside.

The cold seemed sharper now. Rocky pulled his collar close against his neck, as much as a puffy coat would allow.

West Philadelphia stretched around him.

Drexel.

Penn.

Powelton Village.

Students.

Apartments.

Restaurants.

Bars.

Thousands of people.

One idiot.

And somehow Rocky was expected to find him.

Again.

Dana's apartment was small.

Comfortable.

Lived in.

The sort of place that reflected a person accurately.

Books.

Plants.

Television.

A chair that looked expensive.

A couch that looked stolen. Mid-century modern meets curbside finds.

Antonio approved.

Dana disappeared briefly into the kitchen.

"Go ahead and make a drink?" she called out. "Actually, make two".

"Then what will you have?" Antonio responded.

There was silence.

Then a laugh. He wasn't joking.

"That was terrible, Antonio but it's working."

Antonio smiled.

Vinnie would've appreciated it.

Antonio poured two glasses of bourbon. Neat. Dana emerged, she seemed more comfortable now. More demure.

The conversation continued.

The drinks continued.

The evening continued.

Far better than Antonio had expected.

Which, in hindsight, should have worried him.

At some point Dana disappeared into the bedroom.

A moment later she poked her head back out.

"Just so you know," she said, "I like my bourbon the way I like my men."

Antonio thought about it taking much longer than the moment allotted for.

"Cheap?"

Dana stared at him.

"No." she paused. "Stiff."

This was turning into a very good night.

Antonio quickly followed her into the bedroom. They embraced. Instinctively he started removing his clothes as he guided her down to the bed. He was remarkably fast at removing his clothes.

Then came the sound.

Metal against metal.

A key in a lock.

Dana froze.

Antonio froze.

Their eyes met.

"Oh shit," Dana said.

The apartment door began opening.

Antonio's mind immediately supplied several terrible possibilities.

"Oh shit?" he repeated. "As in, 'my bi-sexual, polyamorous girlfriend is home?'"

Dana pointed to the sliding glass door. "You have to leave!"

"Now."

"Who is it?"

"Now."

Antonio did not ask another question.

Experience had taught him that when a woman says "now" in that tone, additional information is a luxury.

He grabbed what he could. A shirt, his pants, and possibly a sock.

The only available exit turned out to be a balcony.

Antonio stared at it.

Then at Dana.

Then back at the balcony.

Twenty years of making fun of Rocky suddenly flashed through his mind.

"No."

Dana pointed again.

"Now."

Antonio stepped onto the balcony.

The cold hit him immediately.

Somewhere in the distance a siren wailed.

Below him stretched a narrow alley.

Above him stretched the Philadelphia sky.

A statue of William Penn was probably pointing and laughing.

"If I survive this, Rocky is never going to let me live this down."

A few blocks away, Rocky continued searching.

Something was definitely wrong.

He could feel it.

The sensation grew stronger with every step.

He scanned down every street, behind every dumpster, inside every hole in the wall bar he came across.

Two lovers were making out on a park bench. Rocky shamed himself by trying to interfere.

"Not Antonio." He said as he casually backed away.

Rocky was starting to panic. He hated to feel panicked. His breathing sped up and his heart raced. This was not good. He stepped toward a brick wall to try and regain his balance, his head was dizzy, his lungs were emptying.

Suddenly down the alley something caught his eye.

A figure.

A silhouette in the night three stories high, standing on the edge of a balcony.

Stepping forward. Falling.

Rocky's heart nearly stopped.

The man dropped from a mid-rise apartment balcony into the alley below.

Without thinking, Rocky sprinted.

His arms outstretched desperately trying to catch the falling object.

The bodies collided right before hitting the ground. Rocky used his own self to try and lessen the fall. Fortunately, his puffy coat absorbed the impact as the two fell to the ground.

Feathers floated majestically in the air as Rocky's jacket had completely popped and deflated as they lay in the alleyway.

The man rolled over.

They lay motionless in the night.

Rocky froze.

Antonio froze.

There was a very long and uncomfortable silence.

"Ew," Rocky finally said.

Antonio looked down.

"Ew," he agreed.

Another silence.

Then Rocky sighed.

"Antonio."

Antonio closed his eyes.

"I know."

"You're naked."

"I am aware."

Rocky looked up toward the balcony.

Then back at Antonio.

Then back toward the balcony.

And then Rocky started laughing.

The laugh of a man who had been finally included on an inside joke. The laugh of a man who could not believe the circumstances he found himself in. The laugh of a man who as finally free from something that tormented him for decades.