

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE POLICE



The detectives hitched themselves shoulder to shoulder at the end of my bed. I could feel them studying the bruises that were pooling under my eyes.

'Miss Gracewell, can you tell us how you sustained your injuries?'

I side-glanced at my mother, making my most subtle *oh-crap* face. What was I supposed to say? Point into the hallway in the direction of the Falcones and shout, 'The murderers are thatta way!'

Gently she laid a hand on my shoulder. The game was *omertà* and the objective was not to get killed for snitching. The word flashed in my head like a neon sign: *omertà, omertà, omertà*. The vow of silence, and we were all bound up in it. *Don't die, don't die, don't die.*

'A fall,' I lied. 'Unfortunate, really.'

'A fall,' repeated the first cop, Detective Comisky. His moustache was twitching like a big grey caterpillar. His partner, Medina, had dark beady eyes. They were bulging, hoping. I could almost taste it – their need to prove themselves, to catch a Mafia assassin – or two, or ten. They were close, in a way. Between the endless fleet of mafiosi milling freely in the hospital corridors, Jack's dead henchmen at the warehouse, and my admission into hospital alongside the bullet-wounded Falcone underboss, things were already pretty suspect.

'Are you certain about that?' Comisky pressed.

I clamped my mouth shut and nodded, trying to ignore the distant well of panic inside me. Maybe speaking to the police would have been the right thing to do, but we knew that having Nic watching over me in my hospital bed was not enough to keep the others at bay if we tried to compromise their freedom. Sure, I had saved Luca, but Valentino could hardly let it pass if I broke the sacred rule of *omertà*.

'Very well, Miss Gracewell,' said Comisky, his tone decidedly icier. 'Can you, instead, tell us how you came to be brought into this hospital with Gianluca Falcone?'

I feigned a frown. 'Was I?'

His frown was much more convincing. 'Miss Gracewell, do you have any information about the warehouse shoot-out in Old Hegewisch two nights ago?'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Miss Gracewell, can you explain your relationship with the Falcone family?'

'The who?'

'Miss Gracewell, can you tell us what you know about your father's relationship with the Falcone family?'

'Excuse me?' That one got me right in the throat. My words went all wobbly and I struggled for the right level of nonchalance. Beside me, my mother bristled. Why would they bring that up? They were trying to rattle me, and it was working.

'Detectives, if you could leave Sophie's father out of this, I'd appreciate it,' she interjected, buying me some time to compose my thoughts. For a moment, she seemed completely unruffled. Sometimes I forget she has dealt with the police before. She had watched them take her husband away.

Unpleasantness twanged in my chest. I wished my father were with us. I wished we weren't so marooned without him. He had left us to face everything alone, and it had almost killed us. Still, I was determined not to let the detectives see how much it bothered me. I was determined not to let them know my weakness.

The cops flicked their attention briefly to my mother, and then ploughed on, undaunted by her request. 'Miss Gracewell, did your father have something to do with this?'

I didn't miss a beat that time. 'My father's in jail, detectives.'

A patronizing smile lifted the caterpillar moustache from Comisky's face. 'That's not what I asked.'

I felt very cold all of a sudden, and my mother, so unwavering just moments ago, had gone deathly quiet. If I looked at her too long, I could see the ashen skin beneath her sparing make-up. Her fingernails were chewed so close to her skin they were bleeding. Secrets. Lies. They had nearly

destroyed us. I lifted my chin and levelled the detectives with my gaze. 'Well, that's your answer.'

Detective Comisky puffed up his chest and released a deep grating sound. Medina stifled a yawn. He was obviously the smarter of the two, since he looked like he wanted to go home and take a nap rather than continuing to beat a dead horse. Already I was finding their visit exhausting. Talking is difficult enough when injured, but lying is infinitely harder. Maybe it was the tail end of a morphine crest, but my mind was wandering and I was starting to think Detective Comisky looked disconcertingly like Maurice from *Beauty and the Beast*.

He withdrew a small black notepad from his shirt pocket and flicked it open. He pulled a pencil from behind his ear and tapped it against the paper. 'Why don't we try the truth this time, Miss Gracewell?' he said, looking up at me again. 'Perhaps I should explain exactly why your cooperation with the law will be in your best interests . . .'

I kept my expression steady. *I saw nothing. I know nothing. They will discover nothing.* As it turns out, I needn't have worried about how they were planning to persuade me because they were interrupted, ceremoniously, before they could try.

The door to my hospital room was flung open and a figure breezed in with such misplaced casualness it felt almost like we were expecting him. His attire was impeccable as usual: a bright grey suit that shimmered underneath the fluorescent lights, and patent shoes that click-clacked as he walked. He had slicked his silver hair behind his ears. I almost gagged as the smell of honey wafted into the room, clinging to my skin, my hair, my brain.

I hadn't seen him since the warehouse, and I had been hoping I would never have to see him again. But unfortunately for me and my pulse, we were bound up in this investigation together, and as the Falcone *consigliere*, Felice was not about to let it go on unsupervised by him any longer.

'*Buongiorno*, detectives,' he offered, sweeping around them in an arc and coming to stand mid-way down my bed. The air was thick with that dreadful cloying sweetness, and I wondered if I would ever again smell honey without experiencing the accompanying sense of certain death.

Felice laid a hand on the side of my bed, his fingers curling around the bordering bars. I felt myself stiffen at his closeness. It brought back unwelcome memories of being tied up in his huge bee-infested mansion right before Calvino, his brother, beat the crap out of me. I shifted away from him. On the other side of my bed my mother squeezed my shoulder.

'It's OK, sweetheart,' she whispered, but there wasn't an ounce of conviction in her voice. The last time she had seen Felice Falcone, he was pointing a gun at her head. If she thought I couldn't feel her hand shaking on my shoulder, she was wrong.

'Mr Falcone,' croaked Detective Comisky, his cheeks rouging. 'I'll have to ask you to leave. We're conducting a private interview with Miss Gracewell.'

'Whatever for, Detective Comisky?' Felice's smile, while fake, was a lot more practised than that of his adversaries.

'Well, we—' Detective Comisky faltered. He shut his notebook and shoved it back into his shirt pocket, but kept the pencil clamped in his hand. 'I don't recall telling you my name, Mr Falcone.'

Felice raised his almost invisible brows. 'But you know *my* name, detective. Is it that strange that I should know yours?'

Detective Comisky blanched. Felice seized his surprise, stepping closer to him. 'Walter Comisky,' he mused. '342 Sycamore Drive, I believe. Beautiful residential neighbourhood. Those quaint brick houses, and then there's that fabulous park on the end of your street. I expect your girls adore it.'

Detective Comisky rolled his shoulders back and made himself stand a little straighter. He was a half-head shorter than Felice but he jutted his chin to account for the difference. 'They do, Mr Falcone. Now if you could just—'

'And your wife must *love* that backyard. So much open space for her gardening. All those beautiful hydrangeas, and I've always adored long-stemmed daisies. It's Alma, isn't it?' He flashed another thirty-two-tooth grin.

'No,' said Detective Comisky, with obvious relief. He hiked his belt up, returning a small, not-so-practised smile that flickered underneath his moustache. 'It's not.'

Behind him, Detective Medina's expression had crumpled.

'No, no, no.' Felice rubbed his temples as though his mind had betrayed him. 'That's not your wife, Walter, that's Detective *Medina's* wife . . . isn't it, Doug?' He peered around Comisky, making a show of his sudden interest in Detective Medina.

It took several long seconds before Detective Medina responded. 'I don't see why that m-m-matters in a p-p-professional investigation, Mr Falcone.'

My mother squeezed my shoulder a little harder, and beneath the sheets I squeezed my leg to stop it from shaking. Felice was a master of intimidation and it was hard not to feel

the horror in the detectives' faces as they realized exactly what was going on. Here was a cat sharpening its claws in front of two quivering mice.

'It matters,' clarified Felice, without taking his eyes off his prey, 'because maybe I have a gift for her. Both of your wives, in fact. Alma and . . .' He made a show of tapping his chin thoughtfully, but there wasn't a person in that room who didn't believe he already knew the name of Detective Comisky's wife. 'Rose!' he whooped, feigning excitement in his fake *Aha!* moment. 'How could I forget? Rose. Beautiful, like a flower. Beautiful like her garden. They fit together seamlessly.'

Detective Medina raised his hand to his chest, rubbing at it with casual slowness, but there was a real possibility he was having a heart attack. I pictured Felice stepping over his body, being careful not to scuff his shoes. *Ugh.*

When Felice spoke again his voice was low. 'Perhaps your wives might like a jar of my home-made honey? I could have it delivered to them, it wouldn't be a problem . . .' He trailed off, letting the sentence, and everything that went unsaid in it, hang in the air.

The pencil snapped inside Detective Comisky's fist.

Felice smirked.

I sank deeper into my sheets. I remembered the jar of honey Felice had sent to Jack, and exactly where it had led us all. By the looks on the detectives' faces it was clear they knew exactly what that black-ribboned jar meant. In the underworld, he was 'The Sting', and his honey brought death.

'That's all right, Mr Falcone,' said Detective Comisky, shifting to the side so he was no longer standing between Felice

and the doorway. He gestured at the door. 'We don't want anything from you. We want to proceed with this private interview. If you would please leave now.'

Felice threw his hands in the air, clapping them together once. 'Of course,' he said with blithe indifference. 'I have to be with my nephew anyway. I heard all your questions this morning tired him out, and I would hope you don't plan on doing the same thing to this poor girl. I'm quite sure she needs her rest, and even more sure that this investigation is an utter waste of your precious time, which could be spent more productively elsewhere.' He left the room without so much as a backward glance.

My mother released her grip on my shoulder and exhaled in a choked puff. My palms were slick with sweat even though Felice hadn't looked at us once when he was in the room.

'Well, then,' said Detective Comisky. 'We'll resume.'

The interview was concluded a couple of minutes later. That was on Day Two. Two days since my life had flipped upside down and changed everything I thought I knew. There were so many things that haunted me, questions woven inside the nightmares. And there were people, too. People I never wanted to see again, people I never wanted to meet, and people who still owed me answers. And though I didn't know it at the time, there was someone just like me, trapped on the other side of that world, trying to get out.