

SINFUL INTENT

by

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Prologue

Since leaving the army a month ago, I'd been lost. For the last eight years, I did everything on *their* schedule. Without someone yelling in my ear, I didn't know what the hell to do.

Being a soldier for most of my adult life had an impact on me. It changed who I was and made me the man I am today. To say I was controlling would be false. I needed control, but over myself and no one else. The one thing I knew was that I needed a purpose. I had the drive, but had lost the direction in which it pulled me.

When the invitation to my cousin's wedding arrived in the mail, I threw it in the pile of junk mail that sat unopened, not giving it another thought.

My mother called a week before the wedding and asked if I'd RSVP'd. She'd been up in my shit since the day I came back. I loved the hell out of the woman, but she could be a major pain in my ass.

Even though I told her there was no way in hell I wanted to be around family, she told me I had to go. Just like the military, saying no to her was unacceptable. She'd walk into my house and drag me out by the ear, even at my age.

"All right, Ma." I rolled my eyes as I dug through the pile of unopened mail on my kitchen counter.

"You need to see your family. It'll do you good to be around the Gallo side."

"Why?" I asked, even though I already knew the answer. They were her side and, therefore, superior.

"They have their lives together. Sal knew how to raise boys."

"Are you saying I'm not a good man, Ma?"

"Morgan, you know that's not what I meant. You need to get out of this city for a little while and clear your head. Plus," she added, drawing out the S, "I need you to accompany me on the trip. You know I hate traveling alone. The suitcase is always too heavy for me to lift, and I get lost easily."

I blew out a shaky breath and closed my eyes. She knew I wouldn't say no to her. "Fine, Ma. I'll take you to Izzy's wedding. But I won't be happy about it."

"Thank you, baby. I'll call and let your aunt Maria know to expect us. I want to get there a couple days early. I'll book the airfare. You just show up sober enough to be allowed on the plane, Morgan. Understand?"

"Yep, loud and clear."

"I love you," she said as she disconnected the call.

I had a couple of days to get my shit together to see her side of the family. I hadn't seen the Gallos since I was fresh out of high school and on my way to basic.

Izzy was just a gawky teenager with a sharp tongue, and the boys... They were Gallo through and through.

I wouldn't say I was very different from them, but I had some DeLuca blood in me. I knew if I didn't enlist in the military, I'd easily fall into a life of crime and violence, unlike the Gallos. They were the better branch of the family tree.

The only upside I could see would be spending a couple of days in sunny Florida instead of freezing my balls off in frozen Chicago. I'd have to spend most of the trip listening to my mother drone on about life and how it was time I found a good woman to settle down with—it was the same conversation I'd had almost every day for the last month.

Before I could even get up from the table, my phone rang again.

“What now, Ma?” I barked as I pushed the chair back.

“I spoke to your aunt and everything is set up. You're going to stay with your cousin Joe while we're there, and I'll stay with Mar and Sal.”

“Do I get a choice in this?” I squeezed my hand into a tight fist, trying to channel my annoyance.

“Nope. Everyone else is full. Joey will be happy to have you.”

“I'm going to get a hotel.” I hated staying with people, especially when I hadn't seen that person in ten years. I knew them as well as I knew my father. He'd walked out of our lives the day I graduated from high school.

“No, you’re not. That would be such a slap in the face. You’ll stay with Joe and Suzy; she’s such a sweetheart.”

“We’ll talk about it later. I have stuff to do.”

“Start packing, Morgan. I booked our tickets for the day after tomorrow.” *Click.* The phone went silent. It’s hard to argue when there’s no one there to argue with. Ma was the queen of hanging up before I could say anything more.

As I stared out the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Lake Michigan, I rolled my neck and counted to ten. I could handle a few days with the family. Maybe they’d help get my mind off all the fucked-up shit I’d seen. My faith in humanity had evaporated while I was in combat, but the silence and calm of being a civilian had me climbing the walls.

I needed to get out of here. Old friends, the kind who only knew trouble, had been lighting up my phone since I returned. They were the last type of people I needed to be hanging out with. As a kid, I found myself in trouble more times than I like to remember—small crimes, petty theft, and other bullshit things kids do. The last straw came when we stole a car and were quickly popped for the crime.

Instead of spending time in jail, I was given an option—enter the service and turn my life around or head to the slammer and do a small stretch. The army seemed like the better choice. At least I’d have my freedom and could see the world. That’s the line they use to sell it, at least. The only part of the world I saw was more like hell than an actual foreign country.

It did straighten me out and made me the man I am today. The last thing I needed was to hook up with my buddies who never left the life. I knew they were still pulling jobs that could land them in prison for much of their natural life. I'd just been given my freedom, and there was no way in hell I'd give it up to make quick money.

Spending quality time with my quiet family should help me relax. Right?

Who was I kidding?

The Gallos had never been quiet a day in their lives. They were loud and obnoxious, but they were everything I had grown up with in life. It was time to get my shit in order to head down to the Florida sunshine and get the fuck away from the Windy City.

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