

VALENTINA RUSK

THE COST OF DEVOTION READER DOSSIER

A spoiler-light companion to Empire of Embers

THE COST OF DEVOTION SERIES

How to Use This Dossier

This companion file is spoiler-light. It is designed for readers who want the world of The Cost of Devotion Series in one place before, during, or after reading Empire of Embers. It explains the houses, the pressure points, and the quiet logic behind the rooms where every smile is also a calculation.

Reader note: This file enhances the story, but the book stands alone. No ending, major reveal, or essential resolution is hidden here.

The Series in One Breath

A winter witness becomes impossible to erase. An arranged marriage becomes a partnership under fire. Then a fragile peace is threatened from the inside, and the woman trained to be neutral becomes the one person capable of seeing where the structure is breaking.

Book Three Field Brief

Title	Empire of Embers
Core promise	A mafia romance of alliance, betrayal, slow-burn trust, and a woman who stops being decorative.
Primary setting	Villa Mondragone, an opulent Italian house where peace is performed under chandeliers and candlelight.
Heroine	Serafina Ferrante, neutral daughter, social architect, and the person everyone underestimates.
Hero	Dante DeLuca, containment specialist, structural watcher, and the man trained to distrust desire.
Central question	Can two professional observers expose a betrayal without becoming the fracture they are trying to prevent?

The Houses at a Glance

House	Public Face	What They Protect	What They Misread
Ferrante	Neutral hosts, diplomats, social facilitators.	Survival through usefulness and careful nonalignment.	Serafina is not the table. She is the architect.
DeLuca	Old power, protocol, enforcement, security.	Structure, territory, and the authority of the family machine.	Control is not the same as safety.
Caldero	Order, financial discipline, strategic consolidation.	The peace architecture created through marriage and shared interests.	A treaty can look stable while its channels are compromised.
Volkov	Cold survival, political memory, calculation.	Face, leverage, and the old obligation to survive whatever comes next.	Silence can mean loyalty, fear, or shared guilt.

Principal Dossiers

Serafina Ferrante

Ferrante neutral daughter. Her weapon is attention. Her rebellion begins when she chooses to use what she sees.

Dante DeLuca

DeLuca operator. Reads rooms as systems, threats as pressure, and desire as a risk he cannot afford.

Don DeLuca

Patriarch. Speaks softly, watches everything, and preserves structure even when the structure may be compromised.

Luca Sarris

Financial intermediary. Easy to overlook, which is exactly why his movements matter.

Viktor Marczek

Financial liaison. His position inside the shared commercial channel makes him more important than his title suggests.

Katya Orlov

Volkov-side presence. Prepared, polished, and more financially informed than a diplomatic deputy should be.

Tommaso Ferro

Trusted DeLuca chief of staff. Access point, institutional memory, and the person whose proximity to the seam cannot be ignored.

Roman and Anya Caldero

The public monument of the new peace. Their partnership makes the alliance look possible.

Nico and Noelle DeLuca

The earlier fracture. His choice and her survival changed what devotion could do inside the DeLuca system.

Timeline of Pressure

Stage	What the world sees	What is actually changing
Book One	A dangerous man protects the wrong witness.	Nico chooses Noelle, and protocol loses its absolute authority.
Book Two	A ceasefire is sealed through marriage.	Roman and Anya turn a transaction into a shared structure.
Book Three opening	The families gather to show unity.	Serafina sees that the peace is holding only because people are refusing to lift it.
The first seam	A medical incident behind closed doors.	One glass, one seating change, and one corridor begin to expose a larger design.

Villa Mondragone: What to Watch

The villa is not only a setting. It is the book's first system. Every chandelier, corridor, place card, and glass participates in the performance of peace.

Serafina understands that rooms tell the truth before people do.

- The warmest position in a room often belongs to the person claiming quiet authority.
- A seating chart is never only hospitality. It can become a political instrument.
- Avoidance can be louder than conversation. Track who does not look at whom.
- The wrong object in the wrong place can reveal more than a confession.
- A neutral person becomes dangerous the moment she starts choosing what to do with what she sees.

Serafina's Rules for Reading a Room

Rule	Meaning
Begin with exits.	Exits show who expects trouble and who believes they are protected from it.
Track hands.	Hands betray nerves, ownership, impatience, and fear before faces do.
Listen to timing.	A late invitation, a delayed glance, or a premature toast can be more revealing than words.
Respect silence.	Silence is not absence. It is often where the real information waits.
Never confuse being overlooked with being powerless.	Invisibility is useful until the moment you choose to become visible.

Series Reading Order

1. Holiday Hostage - the witness inside the winter estate.
2. Vows Under Fire - the marriage that turns a ceasefire into structure.
3. Empire of Embers - the peace that begins to reveal its hidden fault lines.
4. Crown of Silence - the next door that opens after the fire.

Want the private files? Join the Secret Dossier Series to receive Serafina's notes, Dante's containment file, the Villa Mondragone seating chart, a safehouse bonus scene, and the next first look.

MORE FROM VALENTINA RUSK

The Secret Dossier

Six more files, released over ten days. Private notes, a containment file, a seating chart that changed everything, and a bonus scene that is not in any of the books.

Serafina's Room - Reading Notes

Her private notes, in her own voice.

Dante DeLuca's Containment File

The file the family keeps on the man they cannot control.

The Villa Mondragone Seating Chart

Who sat where, the night everything changed.

Bonus Scene - First Fire at the Safehouse

Not in any of the books.

The Cost of Devotion Power Map

Every alliance and every debt on one page.

Book 4 First Look - Crown of Silence

The next door is opening.

OPEN THE SECRET DOSSIER

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