



# Capture (Primal #3)

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** I knew this day would come.

I knew for all my sins that the day would come when theyd see through my disguise.

Now, Im locked in a room, captured by the Kaisers

and awaiting my punishment.

**Total Pages (Source):** 34

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

I had no concept of time without a phone or a watch, but it felt like I had been locked in this room for two hours, maybe more, before I heard footsteps and voices, a sign of life.

Fresh air streamed in from the air conditioning, keeping the temperature low, and I drank water from the faucet in the bathroom.

Still, if I stayed in here for much longer, claustrophobia would claim me, triggering a panic attack.

I sat cross-legged on my bed, expecting the voices and footsteps to come closer and my door to unlock, but instead, the voices became muffled, and I assumed they had stepped into another room.

I lay back on the bed, feeling desperate as I replayed the last few months in my mind.

What could I have done differently? Was I so blind that I couldn't see what Bitchtective was plotting?

If it weren't for her, I would've quit my job at the club as soon as I found out who I was working for.

If it weren't for her, I wouldn't be here in the first place.

If it weren't for her, I'd be living an everyday life as a college student, making friends, dating...

oh, but wait, it was never normal , but at least I could pretend.

Flirtatious laughter rang out in the room next door, and I left the bed and walked into the bathroom between our rooms to listen in. Apprehension stirred in my stomach when I heard a deep male voice, and I wondered if it was Gunner or Ronan. In a room. With a girl.

A bitter taste in my mouth urged me to switch the faucet on and slurp several mouthfuls of water. I had no right to claim their affection and loyalty when betraying them. But this was a jagged pill to swallow—listening to that, basically shoving their exploit in my face.

More flirtatious laughter from the woman, followed by groaning from the man. I couldn't hear the words spoken, but the tone told me everything I needed to know. Then sex noises. Sighing. Groaning. Grunting, Gasping.

Tears burned my eyes as it hit me hard how much I liked Gunner and Ronan—maybe even loved them—if I knew what it felt like to be in love. I missed Gunner when he wasn't around, but enjoyed his presence from afar when he'd watch me from behind a mask. Those days were over.

A noise from the flirting couple pulled me out of my morose thoughts, urging me to press my ear to the wall for clarity—repetitive grunting, heavy breathing, short, sharp, exasperated sighing. The couple was having sex.

I screwed my face up and stepped away from the wall, horrified.

Of all places to have sex, Gunner or Ronan or whoever it was chose the room next to me, to rub it into my face.

In hurt and disgust, I stormed out of the room and slammed the door behind me.

Just as the door to my room opened, Gunner was holding a black plastic trash bag.

His narrowed, suspicious eyes flicked to the door I just slammed, assessing the scene, before focusing back on me.

“You’re there,” I stated stupidly, pointing my finger at his scarred face that I adored and always will.

Ignoring my comment, he walked in and placed that bag on the bed as I looked past him at the open door, wondering if it was a good move to run for it, but Ronan emerged in the hallway, arms folded across his chest, not a hair out of place.

“I emptied your drawers,” Gunner told me coldly. “We’ll bring you dinner in about twenty minutes.”

“Wait. How long will you keep me here?” A sharp sound like furniture scraping across the wooden floor reminded me that people were there. “What’s going on next door?”

Ronan frowned, annoyed, glancing down the hall. “We specifically told them not to use that room,” he mumbled scornfully.

“For what?” I brushed that question aside because it wasn’t important. “How long are you going to keep me here?”

“For as long as it takes,” Ronan replied, sternly.

Gunner pulled something out from the back of his jeans, and I lurched backwards at the sight of the handgun, holding my hands in the air in fear. “What plans did you have for this?” he asked accusingly.

Oh, it was my gun. The gun I had forgotten was in my chest of drawers, which I had bought for protection in moments like this. “Protection,” I replied honestly.

“From who?” he insisted.

“You. Them,” I pointed my thumb behind me, indicating Bitchtective.

He gripped the barrel of the gun in his hand as his head tilted to the side to look at me from a different angle. “The cops? Was it the cops who asked you to plant a bug in Mr. Kaiser’s office?”

I was about to nod a yes when I realized he was a hypocrite. “You planted a bug in my room, didn’t you?” I hit confidently. I wasn’t entirely sure if it was him or Bitchtective, but there was only one way to find out. “So, you’re just as bad.” I stomped my foot angrily.

He didn’t deny it, which told me everything I needed to know. I wasn’t surprised, since he’d been stalking me, among other things, and in a way, I didn’t care. Not now anyway.

“I’m not the cops,” he argued smoothly as his eyes turned black. “What was the prize?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, closely watching his hand clutching my gun. “That gun is loaded.”

“Not anymore,” he asserted. “And we want to know what prize was dangled in front of your face for you to come into this club and be a mole for the fucking cops.”

I swallowed over a lump in my throat as more furniture screeched across the wooden floor in the room next door. Jeez, haven’t they finished yet? “What was your prize for

planting a hidden camera in my room?”

I refused to answer him because I didn't want to travel down that road and expose my family.

After all, it would only reveal who I was.

I wasn't sure if they had yet figured out I was Annika.

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell them because this burden had grown too heavy for me to bear, but I held back.

Gunner bit his bottom lip as he raked his eyes over me, as the couple in the room next kept moaning, grunting, her sighing becoming higher in pitch.

She had to be faking it. No woman was ever that loud when it's a natural orgasm.

Surely. Gosh, was I that loud when the boys had sex with me?

My cheeks burned with secondhand embarrassment as I tried to compose myself under the serenading erotic noises.

“Seeing you,” he replied with a glimmer in his eye. “Watching you.”

“Naked. Changing. At my most vulnerable, doing things that a girl only does when alone?” I challenged him to see how he'd react.

“Whatever beats your drum,” he answered indifferently, shrugging those impressive shoulders that had greatly supported me in a time of weakness, but I won't tell him that.

“So, you admit you did it then. Great. I’m glad we’re on the same page.

So you have no right to accuse me of doing something that you did yourself,” I fumed as Ronan’s nostrils flared, and a tight smirk appeared on his beautiful face, only for him to turn away from me as soon as I noticed his smile.

Gunner had lost his patience and yelled, “For the last fucking time, Riley, were you asked by cops to plant that camera?”

“Yes,” I answered, then immediately regretted it.

Ronan’s hand rested on Gunner’s shoulder to calm him down, then he stepped before him to take the lead. “Who are they? What interest do they have in us?”

I swallowed over the lump in my throat as the blood seemed to drain from my hot, burning cheek, turning me cold. I hugged my body and glanced at the black plastic trash bag holding everything I owned, except, “Where’s my laptop?”

“I have it,” Gunner answered. “And answer the fucking question.”

“I want my laptop,” I argued. “It has all my assignments, and one is due next week...” I studied their faces, wondering if they’d ever let me go, and my dreams dissipated before my eyes.

“I’m checking it,” Gunner told me. “For evidence.”

“There’s only assignments on there,” my voice broke under the strain. “Please don’t delete my assignments.”

“I won’t touch your assignments,” he promised me. “I have no interest in your assignments. I’ll be looking at your emails and any files that might reveal who you

really are and who you work for.”

“Who I am?” The couple next door fell quiet. Their erotic high plunged into nothingness, the moroseness that claims the mind after the physical stimulation. “I am Riley, Riley Laws.”

My reply only made Gunner even more pent up and annoyed because he doesn’t believe me. “You keep avoiding answering the question,” his voice was sullen. “So, I’m going to assume the answer is yes. That you’re working for the Larsson police and they asked you to plant that camera in Mikky’s office.”

“Mikky?” A shiver ran down my spine. I hadn’t heard that name uttered in three years, and memories flicked about in my mind of phone calls and meetings where my father fondly referred to Mikael as Mikky.

These memories triggered something in me, and I had to compose myself to keep my emotions in check.

“Mikael, your boss,” Ronan clarified.

A dull ache formed behind my eyes, and my stomach was both empty and crying out for food, but also nauseous as if I might vomit if food were provided. “I’m feeling unwell,” I patted my forehead with the back of my hand. “I need some food and hydration.”

“Sure,” Ronan exhaled, tapping Gunner on the shoulder to retreat. “We’ll come back later.”

“Wait. What?” Gunner protested. “Don’t you see what she’s doing? She’s creating a diversion, stretching it out, giving the police time to figure out what happened to her.”



“I see exactly what she’s doing,” Ronan snarled at him, “but she needs to eat, so I’m going to the kitchen to grab a plate, okay?” Ronan stood back in the hallway. “Let’s go,” he ordered Gunner, who reluctantly broke his glare and pulled away from me.

As the distance between us lengthened, I exhaled, realizing I’d been holding my breath.

Then, as the door was shut and locked behind them, I crumbled onto the bed.

I was coming to the end of my tether with the way the police were pressuring me, and I doubted I could keep up the charade for much longer.

I hunted through my bag for a warm sweater as footsteps pounded the wooden floorboards, coming nearer as my breath hitched again. I expected my door to fling open again, but I heard voices that seemed right outside my door.

When it became apparent that neither voice was any of the Kaisers, I started banging on the door and screamed for help. The voices fell quiet, and I couldn’t tell where they went, but I continued to bang my fist against the wood, grasping the doorknob, and shaking hard, hoping the wood would break.

My feet stumbled backward at the sound of heavy, angry footsteps coming closer, and I retreated to the bed, pretending that I hadn’t moved in the first place.

The door unlocked and flew open, and I was greeted with Ronan’s face, fuming, nostrils flaring.

I always wondered if Ronan had a switch to activate his temper, given that he was so levelheaded and calm, with a smooth expression on his face that rarely creased into irritation or sadness.

He shut the door behind him and stormed up to me, so our faces were only an inch apart.

Heat was peeling off him, and his eyes were empty and soulless.

Yet his stare penetrated my skull as the muscles in his jaw pulsed.

This was a different side to Ronan, a cruelty I had only ever seen in the forest pool when he seduced me.

“Don’t fucken mess with me,” he snarled in a low voice that was more frightening than being yelled at. “Do that again, and I will punish you. Do. You. Understand?”

My mouth was suddenly desert dry, and my heart pounded violently against my ribcage. I parted my lips to speak, but my words were trapped in my throat, so I nodded instead.

He pulled his penetrating gaze away and stormed to the door. “There is always someone watching you, Riley,” he hissed at me before slamming the door, then locking it.

As I listened to his footsteps grow distant, I scanned the surfaces, searching for a hidden camera. Since I knew exactly what they looked like, I dropped to my knees to look for them under the bed .

I couldn’t find anything, but as the minutes rolled by, his warning words, "There is always someone watching you , Riley ," kept circling in my mind, keeping me broken and forcing me to be obedient.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

Did she spill?" I asked Ronan when he glided into my office.

"No," he replied, heavyheartedly. "It was on the tip of her tongue, but..." he shook his head. "The longer she's here, the more she will be a problem for us. Anyway, I'm going to the kitchen to grab a plate for her."

I drained my glass of whiskey and took a strong pull of my cigar as I pondered our situation and what he had just said. "Let me do that," I told him, and he flinched.

"Are you sure?" he pressed, frowning. "You're not going to do anything to her, are you?"

I took another pull on my cigar and blew out the smoke to cloud his concerned face. "I'll decide what I do to her."

"We need her alive, Mikky," he insisted.

"Do we?" I was playing with him, then I pointed my cigar finger at him. "You and Gunner want her kept alive, so you can keep fucking her. I..." pointing to my chest, "on the other hand, don't care. She's our prisoner. Held hostage for treason."

"Treason?" he questioned. "We're not a sovereign country."

"I'm the king, and she committed treason," I clarified. "Against the Kaisers. We're American royalty."

"C'mon, Mikky, don't hurt her," he groaned as fear flashed behind his eyes.

He had feelings for the girl, and for some reason, it irritated the living shit out of me.

Gunner and Ronan fell for her charms because they were weak, unable to refrain from touching the one girl they should've stayed away from.

That defines a weak man. In a way, I could forgive them for their youthful indiscretions, but their youth should never supersede my authority.

I stubbed out my cigar, placed it on the ashtray, and then pushed back my chair. "I'll get the tray from the kitchen."

"Okay," he said, succumbing to my orders and retreating to his office. It wasn't my problem that he fell for a girl who betrayed us, and perhaps this would be a great learning lesson for him and Gunner. "Do you want me to go with you?"

I frowned. "No. I can carry a plate of food on my own, Ronan. Go and check on the liquor stocks in the bar downstairs." I wanted to get rid of him because he seems to believe he's responsible for the little liar.

"I already did that earlier," he informed me. "Anyway, have you seen Gunner? I need him to guard her door because she's acting stupid and drawing attention to herself. So we might have to move her to a more private location."

I shrugged nonchalantly. "We can keep an eye on her if we keep her here, and what do you mean she's drawing attention to herself?"

"Banging on the door and screaming," he replied.

Those rooms were deliberately designed so you could faintly hear the fucking noises in the next room to get clients in the mood; however, the two bondage rooms are completely soundproof, but they are always booked in advance.

I didn't want to waste one of those rooms to imprison her, but it might come to that.

"For now, we'll just leave her where she is, and if she causes a problem, we'll become her problem. You and Gunner can do shifts to watch over her." I nodded toward the wall. "I think Gunner is in the viewing room."

He slipped his hands into his pants pockets and backed away, and I found myself smiling at his difficulty in dealing with this situation.

The guy had run this place for the last three years while I was in prison, under my orders, yet this was the hill he wanted to die on.

A plain, lying girl who worked for the fucking police.

I was both disappointed and a little entertained.

The first broken heart was always the worst, but the pain numbed over time.

Of course, I wasn't speaking of experience, since I had never allowed myself to fall in love because it was always inconvenient and messy. And as soon as the grip of impatience tightened in my chest, I'd distance myself from the girl, preferring the company of prostitutes.

I rolled my shirt sleeves up to the elbows and was taken aback when I automatically checked my hair in the mirror.

For her. What the fuck? As I left the office, I internally scolded myself for caring about how I looked to her.

The liar. The traitor. Allegedly, Lars' foster daughter and Gunner's sister.

Jeezus, she's not even overly attractive.

I mean...she's pleasant on the eyes, curves in all the right places, smells great, a little dimple on her cheek, worry lines on her forehead showing her strain with being in my presence.

I liked that I made her fumble and twitch, but it seemed that she was playing me all along, and perhaps her nervousness was because she was screwing me over.

My ego needed some therapy, like a good whore and a strong drink.

Drinking and fucking work well together, as long as the drinking wasn't a priority over the fucking.

My fingers twitched toward my phone to contact Freddie to hook up another high-class prostitute, but my hunger to see the little liar locked in that room alone got me almost hard. Almost.

I poked my head into the viewing room to find Gunner and Ronan having a conversation. Gunner's black scowl was a cover for the hurt in his eyes, while Ronan, hands in pockets, was trying to convince him to guard the girl's room.

"If she's being obnoxious, then one of you gets down there ASAP to shut her up," I ordered them, ignoring their distressed expressions.

"I'll go," Gunner offered. He pulled his hood over his head, and as he walked past me, I pulled it back off his dark head again to remind him of the standards.

"Go down the back corridor, so our members don't see you," I told him, shaking my head. How many times did I have to remind him to wear formal clothes, but no, he turns up in a fucking black hooded sweatshirt.

I followed Gunner down the stairs, while he turned a sharp left when we landed on the club floor, and I opened the doors to head down the hallway toward the kitchen.

Pupils dilated at the sight of the boss, in no mood for a friendly chat, and as soon as I saw Betty's deadly straight hair and scarlet lipstick, I beckoned her to come closer.

"I need a spare plate of food," I told her. "Now."

"Oh," she scanned the kitchen, frowning in confusion. "Your meals should be brought up soon." She caught the attention of one of the kitchen staff members. "Where is Riley?"

"She doesn't work here anymore," I sternly informed her. "I'll take my meal now."

She hesitated as if she was about to ask what happened, but she wisely changed her mind and focused on arranging a plate of food for me.

Crumbed chicken breast and roast baby vegetables.

Fine. Whatever. I was sure she'd eat whatever I served her if the little liar was hungry enough.

Best food in the city, yet she deserved canned cold spaghetti.

It took about five minutes before a silver tray with a covered plate was handed to me, and while I waited, I carefully watched the interactions with the kitchen staff.

We still had to flush out the traitors amongst us, and the liar upstairs, professing to overhear a conversation, rattled about in my mind.

With the tray in my grasp, I briskly walked back where I came and then turned down

the back corridor, leading to the lounge rooms on the ground floor. An elderly gentleman was waiting in one of the rooms, resting his wooden cane against the chair, and I forced a smile on my face to greet him.

He was waiting for a girl or business associates to join him. Many business deals were done in these private rooms before heading out to the bar or upstairs to see their favorite girl.

Balancing the tray with one hand, I found the secret switch, and the bookcase slid open. Greeted by floral perfume and cleaning products, I walked up the stairs to find Gunner sitting on the floor, scrolling on his phone, looking glum.

“Is she behaving?” I asked him.

“She’s quiet,” he told me. “Do you want me to go in with you?”

“No,” I said as flirtatious giggles flooded the empty spaces. “Someone in there?” I pointed at the room where the giggles seemed to be coming from.

He nodded. “They’ve already climaxed, so they’ll probably be coming out in a few minutes,” he said flatly, pointing to his ear. “Loud.”

I suppressed my smile as I unlocked the little liar’s door, swung it open with a squeak, and was greeted with a piercing squeal. “Don’t you know how to knock?” she fumed at me.

It seemed I caught her changing. She was wearing nothing but a bra and panties, and scrambled to put clothes on.

My cock twitched, and I took a deep breath to calm my shit.



Fuck I needed to bang a whore. Like, immediately.

Any whore would do, even a cheap, ugly one, because I can't see an ugly face in the dark.

"Turn around," she screamed as if she'd forgotten who I was.

"You're our captive," I reminded her, as I reluctantly turned my back on her, annoyed that Gunner and Ronan had seen her naked, yet she didn't want me to see her in her underwear.

Dimples covered the back of her thighs, and her panties were rising her ample butt cheeks that my hands longed to squeeze.

As I stared at the wall while the sound of brushing fabric filled the air, all I could think about was sinking my teeth into those wiggling butt cheeks.

"What is that supposed to mean? I'm your captive, so that means you can walk in anytime without my consent," she railed angrily.

"Yes, it does mean that. And you lost your consent when you decided to fuck us over. Consent requires respect." I educated her, realizing I was obeying her wishes by turning my back, so I was hardly enforcing my authority.

"It isn't hard to respect someone's privacy," she hissed, and my mouth stretched into a smile. The little liar is a fiery minx. I could have fun with her.

"You think I haven't seen a girl in her underwear before," I snarled at her, suppressing my utter joy at stumbling in on her half-naked.

## Page 3

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“I’m sure you have,” she snapped. “I’m sure you have many girls on demand, but I’m not one of them, am I?” There was an exhausted exhale before she announced. “You can turn around now.”

“Lucky me,” I mumbled, turning back to look at her, and to my disappointment, she was wearing baggy sweatpants and a pink hooded sweatshirt, just as baggy, so it was impossible to trace her curves.

“Your dinner,” I told her, then placed the tray on the edge of the bed.

She flicked me a peculiar look as she raised her chin proudly into the air. “You try it first,” she insisted.

“The food? You want me to try the food?” I asked, a little confused.

“Yes.” She folded her arms defiantly across her chest. “I want it checked so you haven’t poisoned me.”

“You want me ,” I pointed to my chest, “to be your cupbearer?”

“Yes,” she said, flaring her nostrils. “I’m not eating it until you do, which means I will starve to death imprisoned in this shithole.”

“And? You think I care if you starve?” I stressed, flinched slightly when guilt fluttered in my chest. What was it about her that got me so riled up? “The police planted you to spy on us. You’re about as much worth as a slug.”

Hurt clouded her eyes momentarily before the fire emerged. “A garden slug or a sea slug? They’re quite different, you know.”

I frowned. “I don’t care to know the difference between a sea slug and a garden slug and...just eat your food.”

“Not until you taste it first,” she challenged again.

“Look, I don’t care if you eat it or not, but I do want you to tell me again about the alleged conversation you overheard in the locker room,” I ordered her, leaning against the wall to let her know that I wasn’t in a hurry to go anywhere.

She swallowed. “I thought you didn’t believe me,” she said softly.

“I don’t entirely, but,” I pointed my thumb in the direction of where Gunner sat, probably looking at car porn. “He does.”

Her pretty eyes flicked to the wall. “Who’s there?”

“Gunner,” I replied without emotion.

A warm smile graced her face, and I could tell she had feelings for him. However, my lips parted at the sight of how beautiful she was when her smile was genuine, unlike the forced, empty ones. “I hurt him, didn’t I?”

I sighed, running out of patience. Discussing feelings was not my forte, nor did they have a place in my world. “Yes, you did. And Ronan. But I partly blame them for choosing you in the first place.”

“Choosing me?” she questioned.

“Well, any idiot can see that you’re going to cause problems,” I replied, giving little away. I won't mention that Gunner had convinced himself that she was Annika, whereas I believe her connection to the Larsson police was because she was their mole—nothing more, nothing less.

“What does that mean?” she frowned, chewing her bottom lip, and my cock lurched again, causing a conflict that I wished I didn’t have right now. Cock versus commonsense.

“Forget it. Just tell me what you overheard,” I demanded as the door across the hall opened and closed, and I cringed at them seeing sad-sack Gunner sitting there. We needed to find a more effective way to do this.

“Taste the food first,” she hit back.

My eyebrows shot up in surprise at her gall as I wavered for a few seconds, staring at that face, waiting for it to crack. “Smart girl,” I finally succumbed and stepped to her bed. She won that battle, but I will win the war.

I removed the cover from the plate and glanced at her face to find that those eyes were hungry and dilated as she licked her bottom lip.

Slowly, I picked up the knife and fork, taking my time, drawing out her desire to eat something.

I sliced off a piece of the chicken and placed it in my mouth, chewed, savoring the flavor and tenderness.

She was almost drooling, lips parted, eyes craving the chicken.

That look on a woman’s face weakened even the greatest of men. If she looked at me

the way she was looking at the chicken, I'd find it hard to restrain myself.

Just for fun, I started coughing, wrapping my hand around my throat, pretending I was joking as fear flashed in her eyes. I couldn't keep up the pretense for too long because she'd refuse everything we offered her.

"I'm kidding," I laughed, swallowing the chicken, but I wasn't convincing her, so I sliced another bit of chicken, chewed, and swallowed. "See, all good." I pushed the tray toward her. "Now, your turn."

She still didn't seem so sure, so I wiped the fork clean on my shirt and sliced another piece of chicken, then offered it to her.

Those full lips trembled slightly before she opened her mouth, and I fed her the chicken.

Covering her mouth with her fingers in a dainty fashion, she chewed and hummed at the flavor.

Once she swallowed, I sliced another piece of chicken and offered it to her, then flinched when I realized what I was doing. Not only did I enjoy feeding her, but I was getting off on it. This was a strange concept for me.

I handed her the fork handle and stepped back to disassociate myself with the tender behavior. "Now, tell me about the conversation you overheard."

"Um," she chewed, swallowed, and my cock hardened as those plump lips moved. "I was in the locker room and heard two people talking, but I didn't see them. But one sounded like Betty, although I couldn't be sure."

"Betty?" I questioned.

She frowned. “Didn’t I say that. Oh, no, that’s right. I left that out because I wasn’t sure if it was her, so I didn’t want to get her in trouble.” Her head tilted to the side. “I guess I have nothing to lose now.”

“Betty,” I repeated, not sure I’d believe it. Sounding like Betty was not the same as being Betty. However, she had a recognizable voice, so who else sounded like her?

“I might be wrong,” she repeated. “Anyway, they talked about the rats and mentioned the name Vladimir.” She paused, waiting for me to react, but I set my expression in stone.

She sighed before adding, “The person said they called the press about the rats. They seemed to be behind it all or were ordered to do it by someone higher up in the hierarchy, which I assume was the Vlad person.”

I deliberated on what she said for a few moments before explaining, “Here’s the thing...

” I started as her eyes widened behind those glasses.

You have a friend who has been identified as a close family member of an enemy of ours, you are working for the Larsson police, and you then come out with this story.

That’s three strikes against you, so telling us the truth will be a good idea, or you might never leave here. ”

I challenged her to gauge her reaction; her brow creased into worry lines, and I almost felt sorry for her. For some reason, this particular girl triggered unwanted emotions in me, and I couldn’t understand why for the life of me.

“That is the truth, I swear,” she argued as her voice cracked under the strain of

emotion. Then she seemed to have captured a thought. “Wait. What friend are you referring to? The only friend I have is...”

She gasped as her eyes flicked about as if the pieces were finally falling into place. This reaction seemed genuine, so either she was a great actor or had no idea why her friend showed so much interest in her.

“I’ll leave you to think about your future,” I told her sternly.

I was done with this conversation for now, but I will return because I doubt I could keep away from her for too long.

## Page 4

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While the high-pitched screeches of women faking orgasms and the grunt of men finishing off floated along the hallways, not a single sound came from Riley's room.

My ass was turning numb from sitting on the hard wooden floor, so I stood to stretch my limbs, then pressed my ear against her door to search for sound.

When I heard no sound, I unlocked the door and opened it a crack.

Mikky wanted me to stay out of her room, but I had a good excuse.

Her dark head looked up from the pillow, cheeks stained with tears, body in the fetal position.

She reached for her glasses resting on the second pillow, and my heart exploded.

I was supposed to hate her. I was supposed to plot her death for betraying us, but as she chewed her bottom lip, as hopelessness lurked behind her eyes, my resentment vanished, and my attraction to her rose.

"Is there any point?" I stated coldly. "Is there any point in putting those glasses on?"

She frowned in confusion as I approached her and reached for her face. She gasped desperately as I snatched her glasses from her. Then, as I had done before, I held them up to peer through the lenses, only to discover that they were just glass.

"These are fake?" I pointed out, then tossed them onto the bed. "Drop the bullshit, Riley. Or should I call you by your real name?"



Her eyes filled with tears, but they were the wrong-colored eyes. “What do you want from me?” she protested.

“Tell me your real name,” I insisted.

She fell quiet for a few beats as if considering what to say, then, in a croaky voice, “I already have.”

“Don’t lie. I have fake glasses, fake eye color, fake hair color, fake everything.” I started pacing to work off the energy burning through my body, stirring my anger and sadness as memories of my father and Annika stormed about in my mind.

“Gunner,” she sighed, anguished. “I’m sorry that I betrayed you.”

“I’m not interested in your crocodile tears, Riley, or should I call you by your real name?” I exclaimed, even though it was making her more distressed and tearful. “Now...what is your name? It’s on the edge of my tongue.”

“Just do it,” she shouted as Annika’s fiery temperament took over, replacing the tears. It’s beneath the fake surface, lingering for a fleeting moment when she dropped her guard and forgot to fake everything.

“Do what?” I enquired.

“Slit my throat. Kill me. Do it,” she challenged. “I don’t care anymore.”

“Dramatic,” I scoffed, surprised at her surrender because Annika wouldn’t give up so quickly. “Killing you had crossed my mind, but for now, we need to keep you alive.”

I folded my arms across my chest and stared her down, wrestling with my conscience. The girl I adored was crumbling before me, and I hated it. This was her own doing,

and she had no one to blame but herself.

“You could’ve come to me,” I stated softly. “I would’ve helped you.”

“There was nothing you could do, Gunner,” she stressed, tormented and confused.

“And I was blindsided, too.” She dropped her face into her hands as her body trembled, and I clenched my fists to stop myself from comforting her.

When her hands fell away, her face was glistening with tears.

“I intended to come to Gotland to pursue my dream of studying marine biology, graduate, and find a job, but they had different plans.”

“They? The cops,” I questioned. She was opening up, which was good, but I needed her to say her true name. I needed those plump rose lips to say the name Annika.

“Yes,” she breathed.

“The Larsson Police Department?” I assumed that the officer who was in her room was a member of the Larsson Police force.

“Not entirely,” she claimed, sitting up and brushing her hair from her eyes.

She took her ponytail out, and her hair was wavy, curling around her pretty face. But all I could see was Annika with colored hair. Annika filled my brain and stimulated my cock, and it was harder than ever to see Riley in this girl peering at me from those wet eyes.

“What does that mean?” I enquired, standing over her. “What do you mean, not entirely? Are the police part of the Larsson Police force or not?”

“They are, but not really. I mean...” she sighed, struggling to find the words, or maybe she was about to lie again. “They are part of the Larsson Police Department, but on the edge of it. Like they seem to have their own rules.”

“Dirty cops?” I questioned, unsurprised.

She nodded. “I think so. They...she...actually, I’m unsure how many people are involved in this...whatever it is, but I see only two faces.”

“The blond cop,” I replied bluntly, and she flinched at the tone of my voice. “We know who she is, but how do you know her? How did you become recruited into their little schemes?”

“She bribed me,” Riley replied, picking up her glasses, playing with them between her fingers, then swinging them around mindlessly.

“With what?” I was on a roll, so I might as well keep persisting with my line of questioning.

“To take my brother away from his family,” she replied, voice cracking again, and I could tell she wasn’t faking it. This was genuine emotional stress.

“You have a brother?” I exclaimed curiously.

“I don’t remember you mentioning a brother.

” Yet I knew Annika had a brother who was about six or seven years old and was living a happy life with his adopted family.

But Riley hadn’t mentioned a brother, so had she tripped herself up, or was she going to come up with another tale off the top of her head?

She swallowed again, hesitating. “Yes. A younger brother. They threatened to hurt him.”

“Where is he?” I was losing patience with her storytelling, but I’ll give her the benefit of the doubt, as perhaps she’ll lead me to the truth.

“Um, I don’t know,” she sighed, rubbing her eyes.

“Look, I don’t know if you plan to tell us the truth or not, or string us along, but we already know about your brother. And we already know where he is. The Kaiser trust protects him. Nothing is going to happen to him,” I explained.

“How do you know my brother?” she screwed her face up.

Fuck, she’s still playing along, and I exhaled to relieve the tension building in my chest. “Drop the bullshit, Riley. Or should I call you by your real name? We know who you are. I just want you to say it. Say your name. Say it.”

Fear crawled across her face as her pupils widened and her mouth parted. “I don’t know what you mean? You’re confusing me with someone else.”

“C’mon, Riley. Stop bullshitting me. This,” I drew a circle in the air, “is fake. Everything about you is fake. Now is the time to drop the facade and reveal who you are.”

She shook her head. “I don’t know what you mean,” she sobbed, and I groaned as guilt and doubt stormed my conscience.

Was I wrong about this? Or was she so stubborn and afraid that she found it difficult to relinquish her disguise? Perhaps she had been playing the role of Riley Laws for so long that she had forgotten how to be Annika.

“How do you know about my brother when I haven’t told you about him?” she asked, and again I questioned whether I was right about her.

My eyes found a spot on the ceiling as I tried to cool my jets and decided to go along with her bullshit.

“We know everything about you. I’m your stalker, remember, I did my research.

Your brother is protected and always has been, so the Larsson cops were lying to you to force you to be their mole. ”

She clammed up, lay back down, and turned on her side away from me. The room fell silent, and I considered leaving, but my feet were glued to the floor. The curve of her body lured me in like an addiction that I couldn’t beat.

I slipped my shoes off, took the empty food tray off the bed, placed it on the floor by the door, and knelt on the bed.

Her cheeks were wet with tears, and I leaned over her, wiping those streaks away with my thumb.

Then I lay beside her, nestled into her curves, her butt cheeks pressed against my crotch.

She didn’t move or try to push me away. Instead, she relaxed into me as I stroked her hair.

“I’m sorry it has come to this,” I whispered against her soft skin.

She exhaled as her body trembled, not because it was cold in here, but because she was grieving. A breathy sigh escaped her lips before she softly spoke, “I’m sorry I

did this to you. You don't deserve it. None of you deserves it."

Pain surged through my chest, and my muscles tensed at her admission, yet I still needed her to say her name. "What does that cop want?"

"Evidence to put Mr. Kaiser back in prison again," she replied, and I squinted because once again, she was admitting who she was, without actually saying it.

"Just say it, Riley. Say your name," I was almost begging. I needed to hear that name drop from her lips. The name of my foster sister, the girl who lit up my world when she smiled. The girl that my parents saved from a life of hell. "Say it. Say your real name."

My fist found her cool cheek, and I brushed over the tears that continued to stream as my heart turned to jelly. I wore a shell of black as armor to protect my soft heart from the cruelty of the world. Yet, this girl, who squeezed against me, could destroy me with one word: Say it.

A sigh escaped her lips as her fingers clasped my wrist and she pressed her lips against my palm. "I'm so sorry," she said in a hushed tone.

My lips found the curve of her neck as she turned her face to meet my lips. "Say it," I demand in a whisper, drilling into her green eyes that were blue underneath those contact lenses.

She raised her head, so our lips met, and that's all it took.

One touch from this girl and I was under her spell.

Claimed. Annika could control me with one look, one smile, one flirtatious twirling of her golden hair around her finger.

Every day as a growing man and brother, I fought against my deepening feelings for her, and now she has finally returned to me, and she won't say her name.

I peppered kisses along her bare skin as she sighed, and tears dropped onto the bed sheets. My hand rubbed along her arm, then down to her thigh.

The echoes of doors opening and closing down the hallway, frisky, sexy voices to relax and lure the client, high heels tapping on wooden floorboards, laughter, followed by silence.

Riley's finger went to her left eyeball as she removed the green lens on the pad of her finger and placed it on the pillow. She then proceeded to do the same with her right eye.

"I have blond hair," she told me quietly, brushing her hand along the part in her chocolate-colored hair. "I need to color it every four or five weeks."

"To keep up the charade," I added as my voice sounded harsher than I intended, but I couldn't get past the pain pulsating in my chest.

She nodded as she licked her bottom lip. "I wore a mask like you did," she sighed. "We are no different."

I wanted to hiss back at her and say that she was wrong.

We were not the same. I wanted to tell her that I would never betray the family that saved me.

We were worlds apart. I would never put an innocent man in prison.

But I kept my mouth shut as I didn't want to interrupt the flow of Riley

metamorphosing into Annika.

The scent of hair was intoxicating, mingling with our body heat. My animalistic instincts urged me to slide my hand between her thighs to turn her on, because I had an overwhelming urge to fuck her until the bed broke, but my senses knew that was a bad idea.

Apprehensively, I waited for her to say the name. Say it. She was almost there. Dangerously close to revealing to me who she was.

She turned away from me to stare at the wallpaper, and my heart sank. I lost her. I lost the moment of the butterfly's emergence. I was about to leave in a huff to smoke a joint and drink some alcohol to cure my ills because this shit was doing my head in, but her hand tightly grabbed my forearm.

Her finger traced nauseating circles on my skin as I could feel her body tense and tremble, tension building as if a levee was about to break.

“Tell me your name,” I whispered into her ear, but she ignored me as her finger moved in circles on my skin. I took a deep breath to cool my shit, because my patience was running out.

“Say it,” I insisted, still keeping my voice low and flat so I didn’t scare her. “Say your name. Say it, Riley. Say it.”

Her finger continued to burn my skin in hypnotizing circles, and a brick of frustration burdened my chest. There was only so much I could take of her messing me around.

Her finger stopped moving in circles, and an invisible line was drawn on the white of my forearm. Then, another invisible line was drawn from the top of the first line, followed by a third line, a horizontal bar between the first two lines.



My heart slammed against my ribcage. I might've been mistaken, but I swore that was an A. Then her finger drew an invisible N, then a second N, and then an I.

“Say it,” I whispered again. “Say the name.”

She exhaled as her body seemed to shrink in the cocoon on my body.

“Annika,” she mouthed so softly as if she didn't want to hear it herself. But I heard the name loud and clear, like a bloodcurdling scream in my ear.

Annika.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

I texted Gunner that I was coming to take over my shift of guarding Riley, but after twenty minutes, he hadn't replied, so I assumed he was asleep.

I found Mikky on the floor, sitting at a table with two silver-haired men smoking expensive cigars, sipping top-shelf whiskey, relaxing back, talking trade and business.

I signaled to him that I was going upstairs, and he cocked his eyebrows, beckoning me to come over for a chat. "Tell Gunner to go home and get some sleep, as I don't want him moping around here. He can go to my apartment and sleep in the spare bedroom, if he wants."

"Alright, no problem," I replied as I scanned the area to ensure everything was functioning. The burlesque girls enthusiastically danced the cancan while the bar was busy with members waiting to be served by the impeccably dressed wait staff in bleached white shirts and hair tied severely back.

"Ronan," Mikky grabbed my attention to return to him. "Don't touch her." His eye narrowed in severe slits. "You hear me. Don't touch her."

"I promise, boss," I answered with sincerity. But leaving Gunner up there alone with Riley was taking a risk. Yet Mikky had higher standards of me than his nephew, not just because I was his paid right-hand man, but because Gunner was broken and unreliable.

The scent of perfume infiltrated my senses when I ran up the back stairs into the Velvet rooms. Weirdly, I'd frequented this area more in the past week than in the last

three years. I'd never been interested in what occurred in these rooms or the women who worked here.

All doors were closed with 'Do not disturb' signs on the doors as I was serenaded by wailing sex noises that were making me hot, unfortunately. The last thing I needed was to get horny as I descended on the girl I was attracted to, who sat alone in her room.

My shoes froze on the wooden floorboards when I realized someone was missing from the interior—Gunner. Where the fuck had Gunner gone? He had the key to her room, so how would I check on her?

Feeling annoyed, I messaged Gunner to get his ass back here ASAP, so I could check on the girl. Moments after I sent it, I heard the distinctive beeps from Riley's room, and my shoulders tensed in frustration.

My hand clenched into a fist, but I decided to go down to Freddie's office to grab the spare key to surprise him and catch him in the act.

Jealousy and frustration stirred in my chest as I ran back down the stairs.

The jealousy came from the fact that Gunner had no problem ignoring orders from Mikky, yet, idiot me, the annoyingly loyal lackey, would use my self-control to obey Mikky's orders.

I wouldn't hesitate to put my unwavering loyalties toward Mikky and the Kaiser empire above my desires, and sometimes, it pisses me off how grotesquely dependable I was. But I'd be reluctant to explore the consequences of disobeying Mikky.

Under the choir of female staff greeting me with "Good evening, Mr. Bryne,"

eyelashes fluttering, pretty smiles on their faces. Everyone knew the strict rules that staff were not permitted to date, and if they did, they were to keep it discreet within the club.

Freddie shared an office space with Betty, whose shift usually finished when the kitchen closed. Her second-in-command took over managerial duties governing the bar staff, whereas Freddie oversaw the casino, the dance girls, and the Velvet rooms.

The door was shut, but I walked in, and it was empty, so I knew the spare keys were in one of Freddie's drawers in his desk. I found them in the bottom drawer on a key ring, slammed the drawer shut, and paused when my attention went to Betty's desk.

Riley claimed she overheard someone who sounded like Betty talking about the rat drop and calling the press, but also mentioned the formidable Vladimir. Vladimir was not the person's name, but rather a reference to someone of great power and authority who was their dictator or boss.

Through my contacts, I learned that Mr. Ivanov, at the height of his power, was fondly referred to as Vlad by his subordinates and staff.

But it all came crashing down, and we ran them out of town.

But only a fool would've assumed that they'd never return.

Gothenburg was their territory, so we expected them to go underground to muster up finances and resources and return to fight the next battle in this war.

We knew it was not over when the Kaisers bought the Savile club for a killing.

No, it was merely a ceasefire, a pause in the combat.

Usually, this part of the club was quietened down when the kitchen closed for the evening, apart from the front reception.

I glanced down the hallway to ensure no one was around before casting my eye over the paperwork on her desk, which included the paper copy of the roster.

Then, I opened the top drawer and found a phone sitting there.

I doubted this was her usual phone, which was typically attached to her hip, but a four-digit passcode blocked it so that I couldn't access it. I shut that drawer, looked inside the next drawer, found nothing of interest, and then tried the third drawer, which was locked.

Voices echoed down the hallway, so I left the office with the locked drawer lingering in my imagination.

After I've dealt with Gunner, I'll find a tool in the kitchen to pry open that drawer.

I won't rest until I do. Under this roof, everyone was presumed guilty until proven otherwise, including one of our most valued staff members.

I strolled out of Freddie's and Betty's office like I owned the place, showing my authority, avoiding eyes as I passed staff before stepping out into the open casino where the place was pumping.

I ducked into the private lounges and backed up to the Velvet rooms, then walked quietly to the room at the end of the hall.

I slid the key into the lock, opened the door, and stalled at the sight before me. Riley and Gunner were spooning, fully clothed, deeply asleep. They didn't move at the sound of the lock turning.

“Interesting way to treat the captive,” I spoke aloud to break their sleep, and Gunner propels out of the bed in horror that I caught him in the act.

He approached me with his head down, fingers combing through this raven messy hair. “Annika,” he mumbled.

“Huh? Are we still going to pretend-”

“She’s Annika,” he spoke aloud as Annika sat up and leaned against the bed frame. “She confessed it.”

I glanced over his shoulder at her, chewing her bottom lip, avoiding my eye. “You’re Annika?” I questioned.

Lashes beat over blue dazzlers, and I almost lost my breath at how beautiful she looked. The fake lenses were removed to reveal stunningly beautiful eyes. “Yes,” she resigned.

“Well, Mikky is going to be...” I didn’t bother finishing the sentence because I couldn’t find the right words to fit the moment, and the grand reveal took me aback.

“I told you, Ronan. I told you from the start, Ronan, that she was Annika. ” He sounded proud that he stuck to his guns, yet where did this leave us? Now that it’s revealed who she was, it gives us more power because she has the answer to our problems.

I stood over her as she pressed her back against the wall, hugging her knees, listening to us talk about her while remaining silent.

My gaze continued to slide over her eyes because this revelation only made her look more feral and beautiful, like the smooth-skinned selkie diving through the frothing

water.

“So, here we have it,” I breathed. “You were here the entire time, right under our noses. You outfooled us-

“Not me,” Gunner asserted. “She didn’t have me beat.”

“Yeah, well, you knew her better than us and knew the details of her character,” I rationalized, trying to hold back the urge to touch her face to make sure she was real.

All our Christmases had come at once, yet this felt like a heavy loss, not a win. I composed myself and turned to Gunner, “I’m taking over the shift. Mikky wants you to head back to his apartment and get some sleep.”

“I’ve been sleeping,” he argued as panic flashed behind his dark eyes. “I don’t need to sleep. I can stay, Ronan. It’s okay. I can stay and carry on the shift.”

“That’s an order, Gunner,” I snarled, annoyed by his petulance, and pointed to the door.

“Ronan,” he pulled over to the far side of the room and lowered his voice. “Don’t...” he exhaled as if finding it difficult to express what he wanted to say. “Don’t hurt her, Ronan. Please, I’m begging you, don’t hurt her.”

That’s the problem, though. My loyalties to the Mikky and Kaiser empire supersede my attachment to the Selkie, and if Mikky asked me to hold a gun to her head and pull the trigger, I’d do it. Gunner knew this, which made me the most dangerous person in the room.

“I won’t, Gunner,” I replied honestly. “I won’t touch her, I swear, but I might need to ask her a few things now that we know she betrayed Mikky.”

“Yeah, I get it,” he replied in anguish, wrestling with his love for the girl versus Mikky. And it was apparent: he had loved her since they were kids, and he had always loved her.

“Go,” I pointed to the door, and he dragged his feet, looked back one more time at the girl on the bed, and closed the door behind him.

I find my phone in my pocket, swipe Mikky’s number as those blue eyes watch me closely, dropping away when my gaze meets hers.

“Yup,” Mikky answered cheerfully as the sounds of the club echoed in the background.

“She’s confessed,” I told him. “Thanks to Gunner.”

“Confessed? Confessed to what?” he asked as it occurred to me that there could be a thousand different things that she could confess to, but only one that mattered.

“She’s the girl we’ve been looking for. Annika, the adopted daughter of your uncle.

It’s her. She’s here.” I narrowed my eyes as I stood over her, as her fingers trembled in fear.

“Riley Laws confessed that she is Annika.” My gaze met hers again, and this time, she allowed her stare to remain bravely fixed on my face, where her fate was laid before her. “What do you want me to do with her?”

“You’re kidding?” he chuckled, sounding chilled out by expensive alcohol. “Gunner was right all along?”

“He was,” I hit as she hugged her knees tighter as if to shield her from her impending



punishment. “Gunner was right.”

“What do you want me to do with her?” I asked again, then added to scare her, “I can start torturing her to siphon information. To see how far I can go before she breaks.”

The traitor’s mouth parted in fear as those bright, blue eyes flicked about the room as if searching for an escape.

I had no intention of torturing her, not yet anyway, but if Mikky asked me to hasten the process, I’d do it.

That’s me, Ronan Byrne, Mikael Kaiser’s number one man, butcher, whatever he wanted, I’d do it on command.

“Make my life easy for me and ask her some questions to warm her up,” he directed. “If she doesn’t squeal, then put some pressure on.”

“Done,” I replied, swiping off as my eyes rake over her soft, pale cheeks that I had the urge to sink my teeth into.

Of all the girls I discovered in the forest that day, it’s a pity it happened to be the girl who had a target on her back with Mikky’s name on it.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

What do I have to do to live?" I asked him as soon as he swiped off the phone, walked to the door, checked that it was locked, and leaned against it.

Ronan's likable, laidback demeanor had vanished, replaced with a stranger.

Someone I had not met before, nor would I want to meet, was locked in this room with me.

"Wrong question," he replied swiftly. "How much is your life worth?"

"Nothing," I sighed, feeling numb, hunting for a spark of fire within me to fight against him.

Now that I had removed my mask, freeing Annika, she refused to stand up and be seen.

"I don't care anymore. You have me. I'm your prisoner.

Do what you want to me for your pleasure. I don't care anymore."

I held up my wrists, "Handcuff me," I added as the fight in me seeped away into the abyss. "Bound me. Kill me. I do not care."

He rolled his eyes as if he thought I was trying to tug on his heartstrings. "Drop your hands," he snapped gruffly, then folded his arms across his broad chest as his arm muscles bulged under his white shirt. "I'm going to ask you some questions, and you're going to answer them honestly. Got it?"

“I have nothing left to lose,” I answered nonchalantly.

“Spare me the fake emotion,” he snarled, then exhaled out his frustration, although I was unsure if it was me feeding his frustration or something else. “Question one. Are you Annika Kaiser?”

I was taken aback by Ronan's use of the surname Kaiser. I suspected it was a deliberate attempt to rub salt into the wound. “Yes.”

“What was Annika’s mother’s name?” he proposed, obviously needing proof.

“Luanne,” I replied, swallowing over a lump in my throat. “Are you sure my brother will be okay?”

“Yes. He was always fine. The family who adopted him is in regular contact and receives supplements from the Kaiser trust until your brother is eighteen,” he explained. “If you were honest with us from the beginning, we could’ve helped you.”

“They threatened to kill me,” I argued. “They said what happened to Mr. Kaiser will happen to me, too.”

“Who?” he asked.

“The Larsson police,” I replied as all the secrets I’d been holding on to emptied into this room. “Specifically, Judith-”

“We know about her,” he told me. “But what I want you to start from the beginning. Do you know who killed Mr. Kaiser?”

“No,” I replied. “And that’s the truth.”

“Did you know it was going to happen?” he questioned, narrowing his eyes as his fist found his jaw, and he rubbed the chiseled line.

“No,” I breathed, then backtracked. “Yes. I mean...they insinuated that something would happen without actually saying what it was. But they needed me to be home on that day.”

“The day Lars Kaiser was shot?” Ronan clarified.

“Yes.”

He exhaled as I watched his broad chest and shoulders hitch, then relaxed. “How did they approach you? How did they manage to communicate with you without anyone knowing?”

“I think they were watching the house because they would turn up in an unmarked car after encouraging me to climb inside after school or other times when I was isolated, then Judith would speak gently to me, and it started like that.”

“Did they try to brainwash you into believing that Mr. Kaiser was a bad man?” he interrogated.

“Well...it wasn’t too hard considering that the police would often turn up and he was arrested on numerous occasions, also imprisoned for several months, so it was an easy message to emphasize. And it was done slowly and over time, and they acted like my friends and protectors.”

“They slowly planted poison in your mind that the bad guy in the scenario was the man who adopted you, fed and clothed you, and saved you from a life of ruin?” he rationalized.

“Yes,” I replied honestly as guilt scoured my stomach. I had nothing to hide now.

“Were you shocked when Mr. Kaiser was shot?” he pressed.

“Yes. I was upset for Gunner,” I breathed as the weight of the burden lightened, replaced with numbness.

“It occurred to me that this was what they had been leading up to, and I knew everything would change from that point forward. Everything fell into place as to why they wanted me to be home on that day, and then Judith approached me and...” I exhaled as a spiral of pain circled in my stomach, “threatened all sorts of things, including arresting my mom, and that was also when I found out that I had a brother.”

His head nodded slowly as his narrowed eyes, a penetrating stare that stripped me bare.

“Look, I understand you were only a kid, fifteen or sixteen, when the police started brainwashing you, but I ask again...why didn’t you go to Mr. Kaiser or Sylvie about what was going on?

Or at least speak quietly to Gunner, who, as I understand, you were close to back then. More than just siblings, I suspect.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I came to believe they were my enemy, and I was living under the roof of people whom I should not trust. Bad people.”

He screwed his face up as if he wasn’t quite convinced, but a girl like me struggled to trust anyone. My mother was a drug addict who would put her addiction above her children. The coming and going of strange men, the use of needles left on the floor, and threats from the landlord to throw us out.

Then the Kaisers showed up and took me away from the mess and placed my mother in rehab, which raised a question that had always bothered me. A missing piece of the puzzle. Of all the struggling solo mothers in Larsson, and there were many, why my mom?

“How did they find out about us?” I knew he was the wrong person to ask, as he was only a child then, probably hadn’t even met the Kaisers at that point.

“Who?” he seemed confused.

“My mom. Why her of all people? Why me, of all kids born to addicts?” I clarified. “Why did Mr. Kaiser and Sylvie choose us to save?”

“I don’t know the full story, but he discovered your mother unconscious in an Ivanov-owned club after he raided it and discovered she had a kid at home alone,” he explained.

I swallowed over a lump in my throat as a river of pain surged through my body. “She left me alone? She left a small child alone in a shitty apartment? How long for?”

“Yeah, I don’t know how long you were there for.

” his tone softened as he seemed uncomfortable by me hurting.

The less I knew about the way my mother treated me, the better, and hearing the samples of the reality of my situation turned my stomach and made my betrayal of the family that took me in even worse.

“But, ah, apparently, Lars booted the door down and found you in soiled diapers in the bed, staring at a homemade mobile hanging from the ceiling.” He cleared his throat, looking even more uncomfortable.

“Quiet as a mouse. You didn’t cry, even when strangers picked you up and took you away, you didn’t cry.

” He paused for a few beats and shrugged his shoulders.

“That’s what Lars, I mean, Mr. Kaiser, told me. ”

Emotions pounded in my body: anger, sadness, grief, abandonment, as I struggled to hold back the tears. “She left me alone...?” I hugged my trembling body as I blinked back the tears, as I didn’t want to show vulnerability in front of a man who viewed me as his enemy.

He stepped toward me, then stepped back, showing signs that he was uncomfortable and conflicted with this moment. An intense silence fell over us as if he was struggling to know what to say next, or maybe he was waiting for me to add to his comment.

“I’d better go...” he mumbled and pointed his thumb behind him as if to indicate that he was going to wait outside as the guard on his shift.

I nodded, pleased that he was leaving because my lungs were closing in on me, and my breath caught in my throat.

I slapped my hand over my mouth to stop the sound of a sob escaping, but instead, an impending panic attack arose, claiming the air that I was desperately trying to get into my lungs as pressure weighed down on my chest.

In my peripheral vision, Ronan stalled as he was about to leave and looked back as I struggled to catch my breath. In only a couple of strides, he was there, standing over me, warm hand placed on my cheek. “Are you okay, Ri, I mean, Annika?” he said in that soothing voice.

I nodded, struggling to take in air as my throat seemed to constrict as a load of bricks weighed upon my chest. I tried to suck in breath, but the pressure on my chest made it difficult.

The mattress sank as he sat down next to me, and a warm hand found my back and started rubbing. “Are you having a panic attack, Annika?” he asked softly.

“I...thin...” Words refused to leave my mouth, so I resigned to nodding again.

His strong, muscular arms wrapped around my trembling body and began to rock me while rubbing my back. The warm caress from his embrace was like a warm spa on a cold day, and the circus of anxiety began to ease.

“I’m not sure if I’m doing the right thing here,” he confessed quietly as his warm breath tickled my eyelashes.

It took me a couple of minutes before answering as I didn’t want to use up invaluable breath, but once the tidal wave of anxiety died away, I answered, “Which part are you unsure about? The treating my anxiety part or the keeping me here against my will part?”

He paused for a couple of seconds before reluctantly pulling away and rising to his feet, standing over me.

Perhaps I imagined it, but I could feel the guilt peel off him—the stubborn loyalist. The hardworking right-hand man to Mikael was struggling with his morality—the girl he wanted vs. the man he protected.

Or maybe he didn’t want me anymore. Perhaps I crossed a line that he could never forgive me for.



As he walked to the door, done with me, unable to tolerate being in the same room as a woman who betrayed him. “I’ll be just outside the door if you need me,” he told me, avoiding my eye.

“Okay,” I cleared my throat. “You don’t want to stay in here where it’s warm?”

He exhaled as his head nodded slightly, then answered assertively, “No.” My heart panged in my chest at his rejection, but it was probably for the better. “Oh, and,” he exhaled again as if struggling to deal with the problem, which was me. “Do you need anything? Food, water...”

“My phone? Can I have my phone?” I was pushing it as I knew what the answer would be, but if you don’t ask, then you’ll never know.

His eyes narrowed, and his shoulders tensed a little, showing his impatience with my question. “I think you know the answer, but good try. You have everything you need. A bed, bathroom, and food will be brought in soon. As I said, I’ll be right outside if you need anything.”

“Your turn to take a shift, is it?” I didn’t want him to leave because I felt lonely in this windowless room, and if they were going to kill me, then please don’t let me die alone.

“Yes,” he replied, putting up that wall when he was back to business, and of course, I was nothing but business for them.

“Thank you for helping me with the panic attack,” I called after him just before he closed the door on me and left alone in the room once again.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

Can I have a word?" I asked the head bartender, who gave us the tip on the drug-taking dance girls, and who was selling them the drugs.

I took this to mean that she was loyal to us, but one had to be careful regardless.

And it's she who had to be cautious of us, not the other way around.

Whoever betrayed us must be siphoned out and eliminated.

The color ran from her cheeks as confusion washed behind her eyes as if she thought she was in trouble, but didn't know what for. She will be in trouble if she lies to me, though, so she had better think before she speaks.

I wiggled my finger to lure her close to me, and she leaned over the bar, swallowing nervously as her eyes were the size of saucers. "Is everything okay?"

I cast my eye around the empty showroom and bar to see if anyone was watching us. A cleaner had her head down vacuuming, and a younger bartender was shining glasses with a cloth. Betty, who Annika believed was the one speaking about the rats dumped in the club, even though she wasn't entirely sure.

She had her dark blond hair pulled back into a ponytail with tidy bangs, clean makeup, and a starched, perfectly ironed uniform. She set a good standard and work ethic for newer and younger staff.

"What I'm about to say to you must be kept between you and me," I stated sternly.

“Sure,” she nodded nervously, then swallowed as her eyes darted about the ample empty space. “Has something happened?”

“Well, you’d be aware of the rat dump, an attack by an enemy, to have this place shut down by Health Inspectors.”

“Dumped? It was deliberate?” she asked warily, and I paused to consider whether I should continue pursuing my line of questioning.

Maybe she doesn’t know anything. She was the type of staffer who turned up early, put her head down, and worked diligently without complaint.

She added, “I heard about the rats, but I wasn’t aware that it was a deliberate hit. By who? Our competitors?”

“Ah. So you don’t know anything,” I groaned as my heart sank.

Confusion washed across her face, then a glint of something in her eyes. “There were rumors. I didn’t take them seriously,” she shrugged her shoulders.

“Like what?” I pressed firmly.

She bowed her head and glanced under her eyelashes over my shoulder as if seeking out someone in particular.

I slowly turned my head around, so it didn’t seem obvious what I was doing.

It was Betty that I saw, striding toward us, impeccably dressed, scarlet lipstick, long black ponytail swinging behind her.

I glanced back at the bartender, who dropped her eyes.

“Her?” I pointed my thumb behind me. “Betty?”

“Like I said, it was a rumor that I didn’t pay much attention,” she whispered, then recoiled and slunk away as Betty approached.

“You’re here early?” Betty stated breathlessly with that blood red smile as the bartender moved further away from us. Betty’s eyes flicked between the bartender and me, then forcefully relaxed my stance, cracked open a couple of pistachios, and then threw them back into my mouth.

“Just checking up on the place,” I replied, forcing the warmth in my tone, which wasn’t easy, since I’d never been a great actor.

“Ronan’s busy with school.” I knew Ronan was guarding the traitor’s room and might need to catch up on sleep once he was done.

But I wasn’t going to tell Betty that because right now, she’s got a target on her back.

“Okay, great. Is there anything I can help you with?” She cocked her head to the side as if she was picking up on my restrained energy.

“Yeah, no sign of rats?” I asked her, straight to see how she’d react.

She barely flinched. “No sign of any pest, including insects. You know we have a very high standard here at Savile, Mr. Kaiser.”

Her answer seemed rehearsed and out of character, but it was an answer that she knew I would want to show that she had it all under control, and for me not to worry about a single thing. Sure.

“Good,” I replied. “And the health inspector?”

She shrugged those shoulders and glanced at the bartender again, who crouched down behind the bar to check something. “I haven’t heard a peep since you paid him off,” she replied flatly.

“And the media?” I pressed, looking at her directly in the eyes, expecting a flicker of guilt, but seeing nothing. If she was collaborating with the Russians, then she had a clear conscience. Not a fleck of culpability in her face.

“Again, I haven’t heard a peep from them,” she asserted in that level tone that she had perfected. “You’ll be the first to know if I did.” She checked her phone as if a message had just come in, then tapped her long fingernail on the bar. “I’d better get back to the front desk.”

“Sure,” I nodded in understanding, and I waited until she was a few feet away before adding, “Didn’t you used to work in the theatre?”

She froze, looking back in confusion. “The theatre?”

“Yeah, acting on stage,” I clarified. “Weren’t you a theatre kid?”

“Yes,” she replied suspiciously. “Not just theatre, but I had small roles in movies and television series.”

“So, you didn’t quite get your break in Hollywood?” I postured, suppressing a smirk because she didn’t like that question. I touched on a sore point and found Betty’s weakness, an unresolved career.

“No,” she answered brusquely, controlling her tone so she didn’t snap at me.

“So, is running a Gentleman’s club Plan B, or maybe Plan C for you? I mean...it must be a comedown after pursuing an acting career,” I pushed further to see if she’d

crack and show me who she was.

She sighed, frustrated and confused by my line of questioning. If she were colluding with the Ivanovs, she might tell them that I'm on to her, or she might assume I'm in a foul mood because everything had been crap lately. Well, she wouldn't be wrong there, and she might be responsible for it.

"I better go," she stated evenly, then left.

As she started walking away, I swiped for our private investigator's number, Danny, and as soon as he answered, "Beatrice Hewitt. Can you do some digging on her?"

He hesitated two beats. "Betty, your manager?"

"Yes. I assume a security check was done on her when my aunt and uncle hired her many years ago, but I'm starting to have some doubts," I explained as my gaze latched onto the door that led upstairs to the little liar's room.

"I'll get onto it, Mr. Kaiser," he replied. "Can I ask for specifics on why you think Ms. Hewitt might be a problem?"

Fair question. "A trusted staff member overheard a conversation that was cause for concern," I told him, thinking of her.

She wasn't trusted at all, but I sounded more convincing by saying that she was. But right now, she's up in that room alone, feeling sorry for herself. My cock twitched. Huh. Interesting.

"Okay. I had already spoken to her, but it was mostly asking about her staff, not about her, since you held her highly," he explained as if using that as an excuse.

“Well...I’m having second thoughts about that now,” I told him as I waved my hand at the bartender to grab her attention, then pointed to the glass bottles of spring water in the fridge, and she opened the door and took one out and was about to open it, when I held my hand up to stop her.

“Let me do some digging, but just to clarify, would you like me to update you or Mr. Brynes if I discover some sensitive information?” I’m glad he asked this question and understood the project's confidentiality.

“I prefer you come straight to me and make sure no one else knows what you’re doing, but if I’m unavailable, then Ronan is next in line,” I asserted as I pointed to a packet of salted potato chips behind the bar, and the bartender grabbed a bag.

Still, I raised two fingers and as if reading my mind, she grabbed a sour cream and onion to go with the salted packets.

It was hardly nutritious, but it was a good snack food to eat between meals.

I didn’t want her to go hungry, even though she was our prisoner and I hated her.

“Let me see what I come up with,” he said evenly, and I assumed he was going to end the call, but he added, “It’s obvious that the latest ruses are coming from the inside-out, so it makes sense that it might be her.

Remember the witness saw the laundry delivery van drop off something in the early hours of the morning, and there was someone in your building that had a key to unlock the delivery door so they could collect, what one can assume was a box of rats. ”

“Yeah, we were aware and had been putting our ear to the ground, but as you know...keep your friends close but your enemies closer,” I stated bluntly, and he

agreed.

I swiped off, noticing the bartender had already restocked the packet of chips that I'd taken.

With Betty out of the way, I was tempted to pressure the bartender with more questions about the rats and the traitor in our midst, but my abdomen was pointing me in another direction, toward the door that led to her room.

A strange tingle traveled down the back of my neck as I strode to the Red Velvet lounge rooms as if my body was instinctively warning me against it. An inner dialogue played out as the scent of plush leather hit my senses, between the good, sensible me and the reckless, instinctive side.

What? I had no intention of touching her.

She's my enemy. I'd be mad to lay a hand on the girl who got me sent to prison.

Yet, it's been a while since I slid my cock into the warm, wet core of a woman and since she spread for the boys, then maybe...

no. She's my enemy. I hate her. She means as much to me as the bug on the wall or the sludge in a swamp or the fungi in the damp garden.

Damp. Fuck, my mind is back between her legs again.

As I ran up the stairs, I was getting hotter, and even when I saw Ronan's surly, bored face at the end of the hall, it didn't cool my heat.

"Is she alright?" I asked him as I approached her door.



“Yeah, well, no, she had a panic attack, so I think all those stories she told and lies she spun had come back to haunt her in one giant heap,” he explained, sounding grim.

“A panic attack? Huh,” I swallowed back the guilt rising in my stomach. She’s young and easily influenced, and I should be more forgiving, but she chose to side with the police instead of the family that loved her. “Was it real? It wasn’t a little Hollywood, so you’d feel sorry for her?”

He hesitated as an annoyed expression washed behind his eyes. This was always my concern with these two lads, that the sweet perfume of a pretty girl would dull their senses while she crawled under their skin to plant a lie. Dipshits.

“Yes, it was real,” he stated, grinding his jaw, holding back his irritation at me.

Perhaps it was time to set him straight. “Ronan, if you and Gunner are turning soft over this girl, maybe I can’t trust you anymore.”

He flinched as he rose to his feet to look me in the eye, then mumbled something. He wasn’t usually a mumblor, unlike Gunner, so whatever he said was difficult for him to express, in case he bore the wrath of my anger.

I placed my hand by my ear, “What?”

He shrugged as the color seemed to run from his face. “I don’t think she deserves this,” pointing toward her door.

A strange sensation of loneliness came over me.

Am I alone in this? Have the men I rely on the most abandoned me?

I can’t rely on Betty anymore, and these two chumps were siding with the traitor,

which left only Freddie.

That didn't fill me with confidence, as my world seemed to be crumbling before my eyes because of her .

All of this heartache and division was because of her .

“No, you're right,” I replied, and I could see his shoulders relaxing as a flicker of hope expressed in his eyes.

Only for me to demolish his hope by adding, “This room is too good for her. We should've kept her in a cold, stone dungeon, chained to the wall, fed only bread and water.

Luckily for you, there are no dungeons around these parts. ”

“C'mon, Mikky, she's told us everything. What more do you want from her?” he pressed as his stare noticed the chips and spring water in my hands, which kinda contradicted what I just said.

I cut him a black scowl. “I'm disappointed in you, Ronan. I thought I could rely on you, but maybe I'm wrong,” I warned him.

“You can rely on me,” he asserted. “But...she was a kid, man. She was na?ve and scared and fell into a fucking rabbit hole of cops emotionally blackmailing her.” He exhaled. “She was a kid. Sixteen, Mikky, a fucking kid.”

I agreed with him. She was a kid. I get it. But I wasn't about to give the little liar her freedom because the first people she'd run to were the fucking cops. Ronan should know this. “If she betrayed us once, she'd betray us again, Ronan.”

“Mik-”

“Leave,” I demanded, interrupting another guilt trip. “Go and get some sleep, Ronan. That’s an order.”

“I honestly don’t think she’d be that dumb, Mikky,” he groaned, peeling his back away from the wall.

I scoffed, shaking my head in disappointment as I unlocked her door. “She’s not going to get a chance to find that out, is she?”

He stalled and I shot him another black scowl, before he continued on his way down the stairs, head low, looking like a wet guppy fished out from a pond.

At this rate, there’d be no one left on my side. Maybe I should destroy everyone, burn this fucking down, and start again from scratch with new people by my side. Maybe.

Then I swung the door open and my gaze latched onto her small body bundled up in the corner of the bed, hugging her bent knees, messy dark hair, fear flashed behind her eyes, and my heart lurched in my chest.

Damn.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

He looms over me like a monster eyeing his prey, completely without warmth and sympathy. But I shouldn't be surprised. He was the one who bore the brunt of my lies. Three years of his life were taken from him simply because I chose to believe the Larsson police over the family that fostered me.

"Food," he pointed out as he placed two packets of chips and a glass bottle of water, one of those fancy brands in a wine bottle, on the side table.

"You know that feeding me will keep me alive. I thought you'd rather I waste away as punishment." As I spoke, I refused to look up at him because that face was remarkably handsome for such an evil man. But I guess no one is perfect.

"Don't confuse me bringing you food with kindness," he said, then leaned against the wall in the same place as Ronan had not long ago. Far enough away so he couldn't touch me, but close enough so he could intimidate me, then examine my expressions and movements in reaction.

"So, why do you bring me food, then?" I sighed, glancing at the chips and having a sudden desire to binge on fatty starch until I popped.

"Because rotten carcasses stink and I wouldn't want to upset the guests in the other rooms," he replied with a glimmer in his eyes, showing a dark sense of humor that I could appreciate.

The classic Kaiser satire that Gunner and my foster father shared, although Lars Kaiser lost his humor in the later years after he was released from prison, and cops were always on his back, constantly putting pressure on him.

I distinctly remember us walking on eggshells in the house whenever Lars Kaiser was in one of those black moods.

The moods deepened as time went on until his death.

It was almost as if he could see his death coming.

“You sure know how to make a girl feel special,” I mocked. I wouldn’t have dared to speak to him like that only a week ago, but I had nothing to lose now.

“There’s not a single thing about you that is special,” he replied bluntly, and my body flinched at the tone of his voice. Not because he was being mean, but because he seemed to be forcing a lie, as if he was making himself dislike me and treat me cruelly.

Whatever. I didn’t care. Let the Kaiser monster do his work, killing me slowly, driving me crazy due to the isolation. Death by carbohydrates and sex noises didn’t seem too bad after all.

“Do you find that funny?” he asked, bemused, and I realized that I was smiling at my stupid joke about carbohydrates.

“No,” I sighed. “Actually, it is funny. You’re keeping me locked up in a brothel serenaded by heavy grunting and sighing. It’s basically water torture without the water, as you know, it will eventually drive me nuts.”

“I thought you already were nuts,” he swiftly replied, and I realized he was cracking a joke, but he didn’t smile, so maybe it wasn’t a joke. It was so hard to tell.

I faltered for a few seconds to compose myself so I didn’t laugh some more. I glanced up under my eyelashes at him, and his gaze staggered me as my heart slammed

against my ribcage at the intensity of those eyes, and I wondered what thoughts were dancing in that perfectly dark head.

“You remind me of Mr. Kaiser,” I managed to say without stuttering.

“Well...we’re related,” he exhaled and clenched his jaw.

“You’re like a younger, angrier version with curlier hair, and I think you’re a little taller too,” I explained as his eyes narrowed with every word, as his lips tightened, suppressing a smile.

Or at least I think he was suppressing a smile, maybe it was a grimace or a fuming hiss. Oh well. I might as well have fun poking the bear before I die.

“It sounds like you look at me a lot,” he stated firmly, and this time he allowed that smile to show, but only for two seconds before it disappeared again.

“Not really,” I shrugged. “Why would I look at you for? You’re not all that, you know.”

He cocked his head to the side in confusion. “What? You sound like my ex-cellmates,” he pointed out about my slang. “How old are you? The same age as Gunner, aren’t you?”

I nodded as grief invaded my chest, weighing me down. “Twenty. I have two birthdays. One for Annika that I celebrate quietly, and one for Riley that I also celebrate quietly because no one knows me here.”

“And what about the other pseudonym you have?” he asked, frowning as if amused, although it was hard to tell.

“Oh yeah, Petra Black. I forgot about her,” I smirked, then covered my mouth with my hand so that he couldn’t see it. Once I managed to drop my smirk, I added, “See, you should really hire me to work for you because I’m an expert on disguises and spying.”

He snorted and that smile stretched across his chiseled dial, eyes twinkling, expression warming and I was taken aback by my heart soaring as a quiver traveled down my spine. I made the devil smile and liked it.

“I could be just as bad as you,” I added, straightening my shoulders to seem confident.

“Bad? You think I’m bad?” he pressed. “I’m innocent. My criminal record was wiped, Annika. Because a lying little b...” he refused to say the word aloud, “Sided with the police and threw an entire family under the bus.”

“You’re never going to get over that, are you?” I hit, finding the courage to challenge him because, as I kept reminding myself, I had nothing left. “I mean...it’s been three years. It’s probably time you got over it.”

He screwed his face up in indignation as if no one had ever spoken to him like that before. “Did you just lose your head?” he spat heatedly.

I struck his trigger point, so it might be safer if I changed the subject.

“You could use me as a spy down on the floor to find out who let the rats in, even though I’m pretty sure Betty had something to do with it.

” The words fell from my lips hastily and with little effort.

As if a spell had come over me, forcing me to say whatever was on my mind,

regardless of the consequence.

“I don’t know if I could trust you,” he asserted. “Once we let you out of here, the first thing you’d do is go running back to the blond cop from Larsson.”

“What have you got to lose, though? Send me down there as your mole, Mikael,” I tested him again, and he shot me a dark scowl.

“You refer to me as Mr. Kaiser,” he corrected me in a sinister tone. “We’re not friends or family, so we’re not on a first-name basis, Annika. And we have everything to lose. There’s no way in hell I’m going back to prison.”

“If you’re innocent, then you have nothing to worry about,” I argued.

The rage was all over his face, yet he kept his cool, a man in control, no matter how many buttons I pushed. “I was inn-o-cent,” he seethed, clenching his jaw.

“Oh yeah, but you’re still not the most innocent type of person, are you, I mean...” I trailed off as his frightening frame was now standing right over me. In two strides, he was here before me, thunder radiating from every pore.

He leaned down, so our faces were only an inch apart as his warm breath tickled my nose, and I saw the pattern of his iris. “Annika,” his voice was low and gritty, provoking a shiver to run across my forearms.

Without touching me, he caged me under his powerful enchantment, frozen to the spot, muscles stiffened, jaw locked, breath hitched. I couldn’t move, even if I tried.

His hand came out of nowhere and claimed my mouth, fingers and thumb pressing into my cheeks, while his palm seemed to burn my lips.



I swallowed nervously, and it occurred to me that maybe I did want to live.

Only moments ago, I didn't care if he pulled a gun and shot me, but at this moment, every part of my body screamed at me to survive whatever he was about to do.

"I was innocent ," his lips barely moved as he spoke, as his dark eyes drilled into my skull.

I swallowed and wrapped my hand around his wrist, touching his skin for the first time and finding him warm, not the damp, cold aura he normally exuded—the Smoldering Fall.

"O-kay," I breathed, barely able to move my mouth due to his grip on my face.

He lifted my face upwards, forcing my gaze to meet his as my nerves coiled about in my stomach. The heat of anger and desire flashed behind those eyes as his intense stare traveled down to my lips, and his demeanor changed.

He narrowed the small space between us and pressed his lips against mine as my hand clung tighter to his wrist, holding on for life.

He loosened his grasp on my face, lowering his hand as his other hand found the back of my neck, pushing me toward him as he possessed my mouth, slipping his tongue inside as I gasped for breath.

The entire room spun about me as I tried to digest what was going on here.

I thought he hated me. A man didn't kiss a woman like that if he hated her, unless I was mistaken.

Maybe he rose above his abhorrence of me to find out what I tasted like.

Confusion spun in dizzying circles within me as my body trembled in both terror and horniness. My panties quickly became sodden as my clit throbbed in a desperate need for those fingers to touch me down there.

His tongue continued to torture my mouth in a dangerous dance with my tongue, forcing further into my mouth as if he wanted to fuck my throat. My body melted under a heady mix of his cologne, intense body heat, and his blistering touch.

The man who had a seething hatred toward me was kissing me like I was special, wanted, and desired. It was challenging to keep my head above water as thoughts darted about in my mind, questioning and analyzing what was happening to me.

He broke the kiss, and I gasped, desperate to get air into my lungs. As he pulled away, my instant reaction was to increase my grip on his forearms to keep him here. My heart raced as sighs escaped my lips, hungry for more, but he didn't seem to want to give me more.

That incredible body walked back to this spot against the wall in those black pants as he licked his lips where my mouth had been only a moment ago.

Silence fell.

A strange anger came over him as he seemed to be annoyed about what he had just done.

I cleared my throat, and he glanced up at me under those dark eyelashes. "I don't have germs, I swear," I told him, and he said nothing. "Um, that was unexpected."

"It was a mistake," he replied sternly. "A stupid mistake."

"We all make mistakes," I tried to console him while my insides were doing

somersaults, so I had to hug my stomach.

“Do you still hate me? I mean...that kiss wasn’t-”

“I’ll leave you alone,” he interrupted and turned his back to open the door. Obviously, he didn’t want to discuss the kiss and preferred to pretend that it hadn’t happened. That’s how much he was disgusted by me.

“Thanks for the chips and spring water,” I called after him as he shut the door on me, and silence and loneliness followed. The silence will remain until the workers with their clients arrive to pleasure them in the rooms, and my ears would be assaulted by their sexual noises.

I leaned over to the side table and grabbed the fancy bottle of spring water, twisting the lid as the bubbles rose to the top of the water. My mouth had become dry from that kiss and needed to be hydrated and relaxed.

A dark figure loomed over me that I hadn’t noticed was in the room. He’d returned silently, or when I was distracted by the bubbling spring water, with nothing but desire and repulsion on his handsome, chiseled face.

“Oh,” I jolted, taking fright. “I didn’t realize you had returned.”

He refused to speak because words would make this real, but instead he claimed my mouth again, kissing me with more voracity than before, and I sighed into his mouth.

Then my body was forced onto the bed, and I wrapped my legs around his solid frame, while the space between my legs was wet and eager for penetration.

I pulled the sweater up over my head as the weight of his body enthralled me. Warm hands were everywhere, his mouth traveled from my mouth down to my neck, where

I lurched in eagerness when the sensation of his coarse chin and soft tongue grazed along my skin.

His hands found my breasts and squeezed as I sighed, “I bet it’s been a while…” only to be promptly shushed into silence.

He didn’t want me to speak, and that’s okay.

I could handle the silence, but it bothered me that he hated me so much.

Was he imagining someone else beneath him because he was so repulsed by what I did to him?

Maybe his mind was on one of the girls who worked in these rooms, or perhaps a staff member, or possibly a sweetheart he dated in high school?

I was only a body to be used for pleasure and lust, while the mind was with someone else.

My bra was aggressively pulled down, revealing my breasts, and he lunged at them, placing his mouth over my nipple and sucking hard, drawing out a high-pitched sigh from me.

While he sucked the life out of me, my hands were squeezing his delicious butt cheeks, hoping that he’d take them off and show me what he was made of.

He pulled away, leaving me breathless and holding out my arms for him to come back to me. As he turned his back and stepped away, I dropped my arms over my naked breasts, suddenly feeling ashamed and used.

“Surrender,” I whispered to him as he was about to leave me alone again.

His feet froze. “Huh?” he exclaimed, without turning back to look at me because he was so grossed out.

“Surrender,” I repeated. He remained still for two beats before opening the door, and I added, “To me.”

The door slammed behind him, and this time, I knew he wasn’t going to return for a while.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

What have you done with her?” a familiar voice laced with venom spat at me, and for a second, I thought it was Annika.

But, to my disappointment, it was the weird Russian with the geeky glasses.

Of course, it was Annika because she was in the Red Velvet room, held hostage by us, so that was a momentary lapse of sanity.

Unless she escaped. No. There was no way she could escape, as there were no windows, and if she did escape, she wouldn’t come to me.

She’d run to the police, like Mikky said, or escape out of the state.

Honestly, if I were her, I’d buy a plane ticket and leave the country, because no matter where she was, we’d find her.

But, like I stated, she couldn’t escape the room anyway without the help of someone else.

To be honest, I liked the idea of her waiting in that room alone with moist lips at the mercy of us.

“I said, what have you done with her?” she repeated in that accusing tone, making it clear that she hated me. Not that I cared.

“I heard you the first time,” I growled at her as she trotted alongside me while I strode hastily to my next class.

I didn't want to be here. I wanted to be at the club with Annika, to keep her company and to make sure that Mikky didn't hurt her, but orders were given by the boss, giving me little choice.

"Well..." She stopped walking as we approached a road with a car driving by, and assumed I would stop for the vehicle, too. No. I walked ahead, and the car stopped so I could go past without complaint. Obviously, they picked up on my mood and the annoying little flea I was trying to rid myself of.

Tap, tap, tapping of her footsteps came running up behind me, puffing and panting, and I suppressed a smile. "Are you still here?" I snapped at her, without looking.

"You haven't answered my question, and you almost got yourself killed back there," she scolded me as if I were a misbehaving kid.

"I knew they'd stop," I argued as I spotted Ronan, further up, munching on a protein bar, while staring at his phone. I didn't need to see his face to know that he was in a grim mood because he wasn't near Annika, leaving Mikael alone with her—dangerous times, for her at least.

"Well...they probably didn't want to dent their car," she stated, and I wonder if that was a geek joke, but she didn't laugh at her remark, so maybe it wasn't a joke. "Anyway, where is Riley? I haven't seen her in days, and she's not answering my messages."

"Maybe she doesn't want you as a friend anymore," I hit back. "You're not exactly fun to be around."

"We...what? We were never fun friends," she told me abruptly.

"Figures," I stifled a smirk because 'fun friends' was actually funny, but I didn't

think she saw the funny side to it. “Two geeks were hardly a party.”

“You didn’t seem to mind her, though, did you? And are you going to tell me where she is? Don’t lie to me either because I know you’ve been following her and watching her from afar for weeks, basically the moment she arrived in Gotland,” she rattled off, fuming.

“Oh, I see, you’ve been watching me watching An-,” I stopped myself before saying her correct name because this little flea here wouldn’t know who she was. “Riley.”

I faltered for a second and wondered if the geek knew who Riley really was, hence why she was so interested in her.

“Just tell me if she’s okay.” Her tone grew sullen, and I looked down at her to see if she was being genuine.

“Why do you care?” I asked as she continued to trot next to me to keep up with my strides.

“Well, you know she’s my roommate,” the geek pushed her glasses back on the bridge of her nose, reminding me of Riley, not Annika, even though they’re the same person. I wondered if Annika studied geek behavior to know how to perform the little twitches and quirks.

“Oh...kay,” I stated in a lowered tone, coming to the end of my patience. “Let’s drop the BS, shall we?”

“What do you mean?” she hissed angrily as we walked past a group of students standing by a basketball court, watching as guys dropped hoops. It had been raining, and the cement was wet and shiny, causing them to slip around on their sneakers.



“I know who you are,” I exhaled as fatigue hit from the lack of sleep last night, curled up with Annika, then sent home as if I did something wrong. I didn’t touch her. I swore I didn’t touch her in that way, anyway.

“I’ve never made it a secret,” she snapped, then added, “Did Riley tell you my name?”

“No. We found out because you were sniffing around too much, raising our prickles,” I confessed to her.

“You’re what? Prickles? What’s a pricker?” she panted, still trying to align with my strides. “Oh, god, don’t tell me. It’s probably something gross.”

“I think you’re confused with peckers,” I mumbled. “Anyway, you’re an Ivanov, aren’t ya?”

“Yes, I am,” she said, straightening her back and lifting her chin proudly. “I never hid who my family is. And what’s your problem with my family?”

“Is that a joke? Seriously, are you joking? You’re our enemy, and you sided with An, fuck, Riley deliberately,” I snarled. “Why?”

She bit her bottom lip as we walked around the bend and into the block, where I opened the door for her to go through first, and it seemed to make her blush. I bet this geek had never had a boyfriend or been kissed or had her tit squeezed.

I’d offer to help her out if I weren’t obsessed with Annika, my fucking foster sister. Fuck, I need therapy.

“Do I look dangerous to you?” was the argument she came back with. She was a bolshie little thing, just like Annika, and had no intention of backing down from this

argument, regardless of what territory we ventured into.

“Depends what you’re running back to your family with,” I hit back, then lowered my voice to say, “I mean, I could slit your throat right now if I felt like it.” I patted my sweatpants pocket to make it seem like I had a knife hidden in there.

I didn’t. I left it under the seat of my car.

After I used it to cut Riley’s jeans and fuck her in the gardens in the dark.

I enjoyed that. I’d like to do that again.

Soon. She’s a sitting duck, an easy shot, lying in that locked room on that bed with nothing to do.

“They’d know it was you,” she hissed back at me, utterly unafraid of my threat, which was honorable.

I suspected she was a little autistic or something because she was extraordinarily good at hiding her emotions, or maybe she didn’t have any feelings. She was an Ivanov after all. I shouldn’t expect too much out of her.

“Really?” I suppressed a flinch because that comment sent a little shiver down my spine. “Are they watching us now?”

She bit her bottom lip again as those eyes darted about weirdly behind glasses again, reminding me of Riley the fake ass.

When I compare this chick’s movements and quirks with Riley the Fake, it’s obvious now that Riley was forcing the geek girl thing.

I knew all along. She was never a shy geek girl.

She was always bright like sunshine, with a dimpled smile, fun and flirty, and loud, infectious laughter.

I was aware at the time, when we were fifteen or sixteen, that there were older boys who had their eyes on her, but they had to get through me first. They failed. But those same older boys would have no interest in Riley the geek or this chick here.

“Katerina Ivanov,” I stated in a warning tone when she refused to answer. “Are your family or lackeys watching us right now?”

“More than likely,” she replied, raising her chin in pride, but her eyes flicked about as if searching for something as her head remained bowed.

“More than likely? It sounds like you’re unsure, Kat. Can I call you Kat?” I asked her as we walked down the hallway lined with students watching us closely.

“No, you cannot,” she spat.

“Great. I’ll call you Kat,” I defied her as we came to the bottom of the stairs, and I ran up to the landing, noticing that she wasn’t following.

“You still haven’t answered my question,” she called after me, yet she still couldn’t look me in the face; instead, her gaze stopped at my shins. “Where is she?”

I shook my head. “I have no idea,” I grinned, then ran up the next flight of stairs, and once up on the landing, I looked down at her standing in the same spot.

“I know you’re lying,” she snarled as her weird voice bounced against the walls.

I leaned over the railing and called down to her, “How do you know I’m lying, Kat?”

“Because...” she muttered something I didn’t catch, and I was about to give up on her and leave, but something about her twitching expression urged me to press her.

“What? What did you say, Kat?” I yelled down to her as the pounding, echoing footsteps of three students hiking the stairs smothered her voice.

She waited until they were gone before repeating, “Because you’re like a barnacle.”

I scoffed, not seeing the connection. “A barnacle? Because I attach myself to Riley to get a free ride.” I almost repeated the name Annika, but caught myself before it left my mouth.

“Pretty much,” she replied breathlessly. “Well...it’s like she’s your lifeline.” Her words danced about my ears as she spoke, as truth bombs fell, destroying my protective shell. “You can’t survive without her. Your food. Your breath. Your everything.”

She glanced up at me as I was staring down at the floor, not looking at her but a million miles away, in the past, in Larsson with Annika. My heart thudded in my aching chest as my mouth dried up from those brutally honest words spoken by our Russian enemy.

I finally found her after three years. I finally found her, and it’s like I had been holding my breath for so long that I got used to it. Finally, I could breathe again. Food tasted sweeter, the colors in the world seemed brighter, and I was happier because my purpose had returned to me.

I nodded in agreement as I came back down to earth, but she was gone. The Russian geek had vanished without me knowing, leaving me yearning to see Annika, lying on

that bed alone.

I turn around and come face to face with Frankenstein in a suit, and he wasn't alone. There were three of them built like linebackers, smug expressions on their faces as if I'd been sprung. The thief who hadn't stolen anything was about to get nicked.

"Can I help you?" I asked them casually, pretending that I didn't know what was going on and who they were. Russian or cops? I was betting they were the Russians, the lackeys of Ivanov, and oh fuck, the geek girl just outwitted me.

"Gunner Kaiser?" Frankenstein asked in a tone like he already knew because they'd been following us for some time.

"No," I replied casually, inching my way to the stairs to make a run for it. "I think you've got the wrong person." I tried to create doubt in their minds to distract them for half a second so that I could flee.

But Frankenstein's reaction was to grin from his big square head, and even as I turned to run down the stairs, they didn't follow.

There was no panicking or rushing to chase me.

Something didn't seem right, and I patted my pocket searching for my knife, then remembered again that I left it in my car. Damn.

It wasn't until I came to the landing and smacked hard into another suited brick that I realized that they had me surrounded.

I was outnumbered and outclassed, and our strategy to expose the Ivanovs and flush them out into the open was working precisely as planned.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

My phone buzzed on the desk as I sat in class, and the smiling, flirty girls who liked to sit near me immediately raised their heads in curiosity to see if it was from an admirer. There was only a handful of people who had this number, so I knew it was probably the boss.

I was wrong.

It was from Gunner, who should be in class if he were doing what Mikky told him. His mother would be very disappointed if he failed this year, and I suspected he was behind in his studies. He was intelligent but lacked commitment, often grew bored, and was easily distracted.

I opened his message, but it was blank, and immediately, alarm bells went off in my head. A blank text indicated that he was in trouble. This had been common knowledge between us for years, started by Lars Kaiser. Yet, this was the first time Gunner needed to use it.

Instantly, I excused myself from class and slipped out into the hallway. Once there, I swiped for Mikky's number and waited for him to pick up. After several dial tones, it switched over to voicemail.

"Mikky, they've got him," I swiped to end the call, then switched the tracker on my phone to see where they've taken him.

We knew they'd take his phone off him, so we stitched the tracker into the hem of his underwear. They're likely to pat him down, searching for a weapon, but they'd have to strip search him to find the tracker. I hoped they didn't do that because that might

be the end of him.

Katerina Ivanov had been hanging around like a bad smell since the beginning of the term.

We knew she created a fake ID for Annika, and we also knew that was a setup.

What we hadn't quite joined the dots with was whether Ivanov knew who Riley was or was using her as a mule in some way, since Gunner had taken so much interest in her.

It was like dropping a trail of breadcrumbs to our Russian enemies so that we could entice them into our trap.

My only concern was that they don't hurt him.

We predicted that they'd use him as bait, so we'd come running to rescue him, and then they'd bamboozle us in some way.

Or they might want a trade. Gunner in exchange for money or territory.

These guys were so predictable that we knew they'd send their little geek to follow Gunner, and we also suspected that campus would be where they'd kidnap him because he was more likely to be alone and easy to corner.

Mikky: Have you got a trace on him?

I breathed a sigh of relief when Mikky finally replied, as I couldn't possibly pursue and achieve our objective without his help.

Me: It's working, but it's not giving me a location yet. I'm on my way to my car right

now.

Mikky: Keep me posted.

My feet started pounding the cement, heading quickly toward the parking lot, yet my instincts were telling me that they hadn't left campus yet. The college landscape was huge, so discreetly moving their luggage in daylight without raising suspicions would be possible but difficult.

I could see the top of the roof of my vehicle parked in the third row, then checked the map on the tracker to find that it was highlighting a location. My hunch was correct. They're still on campus.

Me: They're still here. Near the headquarters, in the basement under the science library.

Mikky: Are you armed?

Me: Yes.

Mikky: I'm on my way. Don't do anything until I get there.

Keeping that promise might be difficult.

Mikael didn't usually do the dirty work, but maybe prison changed him.

We had men we called upon, faceless and nameless, dangerous men who slit throats and fired bullets, then retreated to the shadows again.

Like the guy I hired to wipe out the drug dealer who was grooming and selling his shit to our girls.



These men were paid extremely well to be loyal to a fault and to keep their mouths shut.

It could be the guy in a suit you walk past in the fruit aisle in the grocery store, or it could be the guy who fixed your vehicle at the garage.

Their contact numbers were on my secret phone that I kept in the back of my locked desk drawer.

Mikky knew this, and I left it up to him whether or not to call them, as I knew, after the recent incidents and suspicions surrounding Betty, that he might have lost confidence in whom to trust.

I unlocked my vehicle and grabbed my Glock from under the seat, checked that it was loaded, and slotted it into my belt. Then, I slipped on a black jacket to conceal it.

Checking the vicinity to see if anyone was watching, I walked quickly to the top of the parking lot, still checking the area to make sure I wasn't being followed.

They watch my apartment, so they'd watch me here too.

And you get used to it. It's always on your mind to be careful about what you say and do in public because they'd be taking notes to use against you.

The tracker showed that they were still in the basement under the science library.

That was a problem for me. There was only one way into the basement, but two ways to access the hallway that led to the basement – the library served as the main entrance, and the fire exit at the end of the hall was the other way in or out.

So, it was impossible to slip into the basement unnoticed.

There was a chill in the air caused by low cloud that made it feel later than it was, and an icy shiver graced the back of my neck.

As I walked around the corner of an admin building, I glanced behind to see if anyone was following.

It looked clear, so I kept my pace walking directly toward the science library.

It's busy. Students were everywhere, getting in my way. Fuck, they don't even look before they step out onto the path because their heads are down, staring at their phone. Easy kills exposing the back of their necks. Brainwashed fuckwits.

I tried to stay off the main paths, but sometimes it was impossible. Every time I heard footsteps behind me, I scrutinized who it was. If I were being followed, it wasn't obvious.

The science library was in sight, and I patted my gun under my jacket for assurance before entering the library and scanning the area, searching for anyone who looked suspicious.

It seemed pretty normal in there, but the staff must've seen Gunner being dragged through the place to the 'staff only' exit and then down the stairs to the basement.

I was tempted to ask one librarian who was at the information desk, as most of the staff there knew who we were and why we had entered the 'staff only' area.

As I approached the desk, she looked up, and then as soon as she clocked who I was, that smile disappeared.

"Has anyone gone down there?" I pointed to the door behind her.

She swallowed nervously, then nodded.

“How many people saw them go through here?” I asked curiously, glancing at three students climbing the stairs leading to the first floor.

Then my gaze drifted to a guy leaning over the railing, looking down at us, having a conversation.

He wasn't there a few seconds ago. A wry smirk was on his ugly face as he shot a casual salute as if to say, 'we gotcha.'

We'll see. I wouldn't bet on that.

“Not sure,” the librarian shrugged as she glanced up at that man, as fear flashed in her eyes.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, and I found it was a message from Mikky.

Mikky: Received intel. They want to make a deal. Where are you at?

Me: Standing right outside where they're keeping him.

As soon as I sent the message, I checked the tracker to find that they were on the move again. I hovered by the door and swiped for Mikky's number, and as soon as he answered, I could tell by the background sounds that he was driving.

“They're on the move,” I told him. “What do you want me to do?”

“Pull back and watch from undercover,” he asserted. Don't let them see you.”

“Ah, too late,” I informed him as I glanced up at the guy at the top of the stairs, who

had his phone against his ear. Reading his expression, I saw that he was being informed that they were leaving.

“Have they seen you?” he asked unconcerned.

“Yeah, I’ve been spotted by one of them. He’s watching me now,” I stated, turning my back to head toward the main exit.

“They won’t do anything to you until a deal is made,” he reported. “And they won’t dare touch a hair on Gunner’s head, unless I don’t agree to their demands.”

“And what are they demanding?” I asked him as I opened the glass swing door and stepped outside.

“Don’t know yet,” he mumbled, again unconcerned.

“I’m betting on territory,” I proposed. “Maybe they want the club back.”

He scoffed. “Well, they’re not getting it.”

“Maybe you could trade Betty for Gunner,” I suggested.

“They can have Betty for free, considering that I’m about eighty percent sure she’s working for them,” he stated confidently. “Got Danny to dig up some dirt on her.”

“Only eighty?” I questioned.

“Yeah, I have more questions than answers, and I’m open to Danny proving me right or wrong,” he exhaled as I could see the indicator on his SUV.

“Alright,” I leaned against the wall of a building in good view of the main entrance

and the emergency exit, outside the library, waiting to see if they're coming out," I informed him.

"What about the little liar? Maybe we should hand her over to the Russians in exchange for Gunner," he proposed, and a sensation as if an icy cold hand clasped the back of my neck struck me as he spoke.

I hated my selkie being the cause of Mikky's and Gunner's grief, yet I couldn't deny how I felt about her. No matter how much I fought against it, I was in deep over her.

"I'm kidding, Ronan," Mikky's voice down the line responded to my silence.

"What would the Russians do with her?" I argued. "She's no use to them."

He sighed. "I agree. She's more use to us ."

My chest tightened at his words. Something had changed, yet I hadn't put my finger on what exactly. What did he mean that Annika was more used to us? Use her as bait to extract more information from the staff, or utilize her for something else?

"As I said before," Mikky's voice was stern. "You and Gunner need to get over her. Move on. Find someone more suitable."

I exhaled to relax the brick in my chest. "I don't know if I can do that," I told him honestly.

I expected him to give me one of his little talks about loyalty or a warning about how important my job was, but instead, he grunted as if resigning to losing the battle of the hearts. Or maybe it wasn't the time for another lecture, but something had changed in him.

“I’ve spotted them,” I alerted him as men in suits standing out like giraffes in a monkey enclosure around strode out from the emergency exit at the side of the library.

In the middle of them was Gunner, black hood over his head, hands tucked into his black jeans, flanked by four men. There was no chance he could make a run for it.

He glanced up under the hood, and I knew he was searching for me, hoping that I had received his alert text.

“They’ve got our boy for sure,” I told Mikky just as Gunner caught me, then immediately dropped his head so it didn’t seem obvious.

“Alright. Don’t let your eye leave the tracker, so we can see where they take him,” Mikky directed. “Go to class and let the dust settle.”

“What? Are you serious?” I replied, astonished. I thought he’d want me to go back to the club.

“Yeah. If you’re being watched, then make sure you act normal, as you’re not bothered by them having Gunner. Nothing will piss off the Russians more than us being just a little too chilled out about this little dilemma they’ve caused,” I nodded in agreement as he spoke.

The Russian lackey who was leaning over the railing in the library walked past and again shot me a casual salute as if he believed he had us bent over a barrel.

Sure, dude.

I swiped off, slipped my phone into my pocket, and swiftly checked the tracker to see that they’re taking Gunner to the parking lot, unsurprisingly. Then I pulled away from

the wall and walked in the opposite direction toward my class, as the lackey glanced back at me in surprise at my inaction.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

I pressed my ear against the wood as I listened to his footsteps on the floorboards grow distant, followed by the distinct sounds of him treading the stairs. Mikael was guarding my door for over an hour before his phone went off with notifications.

I waited until I couldn't hear his footsteps anymore, then waited another few minutes trying to pick up on sound before I tested the doorknob. It was locked, of course, because they're not idiots, but I aggressively shook the door, hoping something would snap.

Failing that, I slipped my shoes on and tried to kick it down, but unfortunately, I came off worse than the door.

Dropping to my knees, I peered underneath and could see nothing through the keyhole.

It won't be long before the brothel workers and their clients start flooding the halls and rooms, so I'll call out for help then.

Dejected and frustrated, I returned to the bed and tried to concentrate on an assignment that is due next week.

My captors removed the Wi-Fi, so I couldn't even email my assignment to my tutors or ask for an extension.

After playing the role of the nerd for years under the mask of Riley, I'd gotten used to working studiously for good marks, handing my assignments on time, and rarely missing a class.



They covered all their bases, except for one major flaw, which was their decision to imprison me. I expected them to shift me to a more secure and secluded location that didn't have a constant flow of customer traffic after 3 PM, right outside my door.

Honestly, they didn't think this through properly, and they would do better if they had me on their staff.

I could bring a lot to the club, a new perspective, and a fresh look at how they run the business.

Firstly, I would change the position of the kitchen.

I mean, whose idea was it to have the kitchen on the other side of the club from the dining room and bar?

Seriously, if they didn't cover the food with a silver plate cover, the meal would be cold by the time the waitress walked through the casino to the dining room to place it on the member's table.

Dumb. I'd modernize the décor because, honestly, that red and black boudoir wallpaper was getting old fast. I mean... that's like so last century.

Perhaps I'd missed my calling. I should've studied interior design and management instead of marine biology. Oh well. I guess none of that matters now. I wonder what plans they had for me? They can't leave me in here forever. Either they kill me and bury my body somewhere, or they let me go.

It was pointless trying to concentrate on the ecology assignment as my head couldn't get into it. So I lay back onto my bed and stared at the stark white ceiling, and noticed several fly poops that I had the urge to clean it off.

Yeah, they needed to hire me. I'd put a lick of paint on the walls, a warmer, lighter hue, and cover up the fly shit. Damn, that fly shit was getting on my nerves.

I sat up and propelled to my feet on the bed, pulled my sleeve over my hand, and then reached up high to rub the spots, but still couldn't reach. Frustrated, I sat back down, but the fly shit was going to haunt me into the night and prey on my mind until I wiped it off.

Focus on the assignment. But the fly shit is still there.

Asssssignment. But flyyyyyy poop.

The distant sounds of high heels hitting the floorboards cut through my circling thoughts, and I bolted upright to watch the door. It seemed to be only one set of footsteps, and I wonder if it was one of the brothel girls who came to check the rooms.

My heart hammered in my chest as I raced to the door and pressed my ear against it, as nerves curled about in my stomach. I could hear whispers under her breath, her inner dialogue coming to the surface during the assumed solitude.

Except I was there.

I listened to those confident footsteps stop nearby, then shuffle, followed by the squeak of a door, more whispering, and then another door opened.

My assumption must be correct. She was checking the rooms before to ensure that they were clean with fresh linen on the beds, and please, I beg you, check the ceilings for fly poop.

This was an opportunity that I couldn't miss. Even though it might backfire because

the woman might be loyal to Kaisers, she might, just might, sympathize with me—a girl locked in a room.

“Hello,” I whispered-shouted, fearful of the consequences, but it was immediately apparent that I wasn’t loud enough. “Hellooo? Is there anyone out there?” I whispered-shouted louder.

The confident footsteps pounded the floorboards toward my door, and I slammed my hand against the wood so she could find the right door.

“Hello? Is someone out there?” I breathed close to tears because my freedom was only a single slab of wood away.

Unless...it was the wrong person on the other side of the door.

“Who is this?” Her voice stunned me, like a sharp sting to my chest. It was Betty, I think. Maybe I was wrong. My head spun in dizzy circles as I tried to decipher whether I should continue this conversation.

“Um,” I hesitated, but she was the only hope I had. “Help me. I’m being held captive.” It sounded ridiculous as I said it, but it was true.

“Who...” she started as the door handle turned and the door rattled as she tried to open it. “Why are you locked in there?”

The more she spoke in that assertive, husky voice, the more I was sure it was Betty. As far as I was aware, she didn’t know that I snitched on her concerning the rats. Gosh, I could be wrong about that, too, because I didn’t see her; I only heard her talking in the staff locker room.

“Betty? Is that you?” I resorted to asking as my heart caused my breath to hitch.

“Yes. Wait. Is that you, Petra?” her muffled voice asked through the wood.

Hot tears filled my eyes due to the nauseating conflict going on inside of me. “Yes. Please. Betty. Get me out. Please.”

“Why are you in there? I thought...Ronan told me you had quit,” she argued, sounding confused. “I was surprised about that because you seemed to love the job and needed the money.”

“I did. I do, but please, Betty, do you have a spare key to unlock me out? I’m terrified that Mr. Kaiser will come back. Please, Betty, please help me,” my voice cracked under the pressure as the hot tears dribbled down my cheeks.

“Oh god, are you okay? Why on earth would they trap you in here? What did you do?” she pressed, annoying me.

“Yes.” Why was she still here? Why didn’t she do something? “Is there a spare key?” I asked again in case she didn’t hear me the first time.

“Is there anything you need?” she enquired, and again I was baffled by her relaxed nature, as one of her staff was locked in a room for days.

“Yes, to get out of here. Please, Betty. He could come back at any time,” I stated firmly, so she’d get the message that she had to hurry.

“Who? Do you mean Mr. Kaiser?” she questioned, and I found myself wanting to bang my head against the wall because I was certain I had already said that.

“Yes. Please, Betty, help me,” I sobbed as I slapped my palm against the wood of the door.

“Okay. I’ll go look for a spare key,” she said. Then I heard her confident footsteps, high heels pounding the floorboards, growing distant, then trotting down the stairs.

Everything felt wrong about her behavior.

She was usually a bold, assertive woman, wielding authority that the Kaisers respected.

But she seemed indecisive, dithering, and unconcerned about my situation, and wasted time asking questions instead of taking action.

Perhaps it was my projection, as I was so desperate for her to take action and get me out before my enemies returned.

Silence fell again.

My heartbeat pounded in my head as my jaw ached from clenching so much due to stress and panic. I felt that I had done the wrong thing by asking Betty for help. I should’ve kept my mouth shut.

I retreated to my bed and started packing my bag, giving Betty the benefit of the doubt.

There was no way the Kaisers would have told her that I suspected she was the one who organized the rats.

Or maybe they did. Perhaps I had that wrong.

The worst scenarios kept playing in my mind as time dragged on, and the silence was torture.

What if the Kaisers were working with Betty?

What if this whole thing, including the rats, was a setup to expose me and the Larsson police?

I didn't see a rat, and the kitchen staff never mentioned them.

The club was closed for a night, and we were asked to stay home, but what if that was part of the plan to distract me?

Time was dragging on. I imagined in my mind, Betty striding down the stairs, through the private lounges, out onto the club floor, across the bar and dining area, weaving through the casino tables, then into the hallway passing the kitchen to her offices.

If she walked quickly, it would take ten minutes each way, so twenty minutes all up.

But what if a staff member stopped her? What if she couldn't find a spare key?

What if she called the police instead, or worse, called the people she worked for, and I wasn't meaning the Kaisers.

The other people. The man she referred to as Vladimir, the boss or leader, was the one I heard speaking in the locker room.

I sat on the edge of the bed with my bag over my shoulder, ready to leave. With every slight sound, I leapt up and pressed my ear against the wood, hoping help was on its way, only to be disappointed when it wasn't.

An hour or so passed, and my mind invented more scenarios on what happened to Betty. Alien abduction? Fell over on her heels, sprained her ankle, and was taken to

the ER. Broken faucet in the kitchen, causing a flood, and I was put to the back of her mind?

The distant sounds of high heels ascending the stairs, and I propelled to my feet, but the heels didn't sound the same as Betty's, so I wondered if she sent someone to let me out. Then I picked up on another set of footsteps that followed the high heels, heavy and slow, probably a man's.

Their footsteps quietened, and a door was shut, and I knew they had gone inside one of the rooms. Not Betty, then. I retreated to the bed and sat on the edge, waiting for more footsteps, hoping the couple down the hall would be quiet. Tortured by sex noises was the last thing I needed right now.

Without a clock in here, I had no sense of time, but it felt like thirty minutes, but it might be less, before the couple down the hall left their room.

I wondered how much she charged for thirty minutes.

They were quiet, didn't hear a peep out of them, so I wonder if he got a refund if he couldn't get it up. It seemed quick.

I propelled to my feet, tempted to bang on the door to grab their attention, but halted when I heard another set of footsteps. This time they were slow and heavy, and I stepped back from the door as they came closer. Then stopped right outside my door.

Again, I raised my hand to bang on the wood to grab their attention, but lowered my hand when a key slid into the keyhole and the lock clicked.

My feet shuffled backward as my breath hitched in my chest, heart slammed against my ribcage, as the doorknob turned and the door flew open. Sharp, severe eyes glared at me, ruthless and lethal, and I stepped back again, slamming against the bed and

falling backward onto the mattress.

He shut the door behind him as those cruel eyes raked over my body, Adam's apple bobbed in his throat, top lip curled slightly as his cologne draped over me, killing me softly.

His hands fall to his belt as he begins to slowly unbuckle it, pull it from his pants, and let it fall to the floor. Then those fingers unbuttoned his pants and pulled down the zipper.

"Take off your jeans," he demanded, flicking his finger at me. There was no asking or suggesting; it was an order.

"What?" Heated desires flooded my body, triggering my nerves and confusion. His smothering intensity burned all over me, and my body fell backward onto the bed without him even touching me.

"Now," he asserted, nostrils flared, lips moistened as my hands gravitated to the fly of my jeans.



## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

I couldn't get her off my mind. A seed was planted in my brain that rapidly grew into a twisting, encompassing vine that invaded every space inside my head.

Everywhere I looked, I saw her. Her scent infiltrated my senses, and it didn't matter where I went or what I did; I could smell her perfume.

A sweet residue was left on my shirt, pants, hair, and skin, poisoning my mind and weakening my self-control.

She was plaguing my mind as I drove to Gotland. I heard her name spoken on the breeze and saw her face on the screen of my phone as a call came in from the Russians to inform me that they had Gunner and wanted to make a deal for his freedom.

My head was on the game while the Russian spoke to me, yet as soon as the call ended, I hungered to return to her. The plan was working. They had Gunner and were unlikely to hurt him if they knew what was good for them. But we had the upper hand.

The first stage was complete, and all I had to do was return to the club to wait for Ronan to provide the coordinates of where they were hiding Gunner, which was likely also to be their headquarters. Hopefully.

I put my foot to the floor to get back to her because, for some fucking reason, that little liar had gotten my skin.

Maybe it was because I hadn't had sex in years, stuck in that fucking prison, or

perhaps it was something else about her, something that was difficult to put into words.

That same indescribable thing that captivated Gunner's feckless ass and toppled Ronan's commonsense.

It was mid-afternoon by the time I arrived back, and the Red Velvet rooms were open for business as well as the bar and dining room, but not the casino.

The usual reliable staff were there, which reminded me that I needed to give some of them a raise.

I spotted Betty's jet-black ponytail swinging as she vanished into her office, pretending she didn't see me.

That's fine. I'll deal with her later, once Danny digs up some incriminating evidence on her.

It was wise not to act until I had plenty of dirt to use against her.

My crotch was leading me, and even if I closed my eyes, my half-hard cock would take me to her room. I was a man with a purpose, a freight train bulldozing through obstacles to get to her, and I knew she would respond to my touch like she did last time.

I arrived at the door into the private lounge and pushed it open, descending on her as she lay there alone, wet and eager for my cock. The look in her eyes when I kissed her soft, sweet lips, and the way her body latched onto me, hungry for more.

I ran up the stairs as my heart pounded and my cock pressed against my zip. The key to her room was burning in my pocket, and as I reached for it, I heard her shuffling

inside, which only added to my horniness.

The door swung open, and I ignored the disappointment that washed across her face as if she were someone else. Gunner and Ronan were not going to be coming in here for a while, little miss. Get them out of your head. That initial reaction only fueled my passion to fuck her into next week.

“Take off your jeans,” I told her as I started unzipping my throbbing cock that was already dripping pre-cum because I was so fucking eager to get between her legs.

She was stunned. Lips parted, eyes staring with wide eyes, no need to wear glasses anymore because the mask was ripped from her pretty face, and all that was left was Annika laid bare.

“Now,” I asserted in a stern voice, and her trembling hands immediately moved to her pussy as she unbuttoned her jeans and pulled down the zipper.

By the quickness of her movements pushing her jeans down her thighs, she wanted this too, but my patience was running thin.

I gripped her jeans by the crotch and dragged them off her as she squealed, her terrified eyes flicking to the door.

Again, it was as if she was expecting someone else to be there, and that enraged me.

“They’re not coming,” I snarled at her.

She swallowed, then fixed her frightened gaze on my face again. “You know?”

That was an odd question to ask, and I wasn’t in the mood to answer it. I leaned forward, placing my hands on the bed on either side of her, and her lips parted as if

she was expecting me to kiss her. Now I had her full attention.

My teeth clenched, causing a sting of pain in my jaw.

Instead of kissing her, which was what she expected and wanted, I held my angry face two inches away from hers and fixed my gaze onto those eyes.

Her fear was the gas that stoked my machine.

“Your mind, body, and soul are mine until I’m done with you. Do you understand?”

A sweet little sigh escaped her lips, and she lifted her mouth for me to claim her. Still with that look of disappointment raw in my mind, I seized her face in my hands and glared at her.

“Do you understand?” I proposed again.

She nodded her dark head.

“You are mine until I’m done with you, so get the other two out of your head,” I demanded, but was a little perplexed by the confusion in her eyes.

She swallowed, then nodded again.

“Good girl,” I hissed as I ran the back of my fist along her soft cheek. It had been far too long since I felt anything so smooth and beautiful.

As I let go of her face, still locked in a gaze, something warm softly grabbed my hard bulge as fear vanished from her blue eyes, replaced with mischievousness.

“Your eyes weren’t blue before?” I suddenly realized, probably because I didn’t look

at her that much. But now, I saw it—the light in those pretty eyes.

“I wore colored contacts,” she informed me.

“Ah, the terrible disguise,” I grunted as her hand climbed inside my briefs and clasped my hard as a fucking rock cock.

“Seemed to work with you,” she argued as her hand worked me faster.

“Only because I didn’t remember you back then when you...” I stopped talking because finishing that sentence seemed wrong.

Her eyebrows cocked. “When I was a kid. Was that what you intended to say? You don’t remember me from when I was a kid? I was sixteen.”

She seemed surprised, but what did she expect? She was Lars' foster kid. Why would I take any notice of her? Kids were more of an annoyance that got in the way of our objectives.

“Sixteen is still a kid,” I murmured.

I was fixated on those plump lips moving as she spoke, as I imagined them wrapped around my cock. As her hand rubbed faster over my length, I claimed her mouth and kissed her hard, before pulling away and standing over her again.

She knew exactly what to do. Like a good girl, she took my cock in her mouth as I twirled a clump of her dark hair around my hand like rope, pushing her head into me.

My head fell backwards as I let out an elated gasp while my hips rolled, loving her soft, warm mouth moving up and down, rose lips clamped down.

Three years. Three fucking years since I had a woman suck me off.

It seemed fitting that the first girl I chose to take my cock in every hole when I got out of prison was the girl who put me in there.

Weirdly, that seemed like the perfect equation and the ultimate discipline for her to be my slave. “Slave,” I whispered. “My fucking slave. You owe me. You fucking owe me.”

My cock was filling every space in her mouth, so she was unable to respond, and I didn’t care what she had to say anyway.

“I’m going to keep you in here as my fucking pet,” I growled, closing my eyes and sinking into the zone. “My fucking pet slave. You’ll find your freedom only when I’m done with you, then I’ll toss you out.”

I tightened my grip on her hair, pushing my cock deeper and holding it there, and when the choking noises came, I went a little further before pulling out altogether.

Her eyes widened in shock as her hand went to her throat, and she coughed a little. A slice of sympathy coiled in my stomach, but I quickly ignored it when I remembered the smell in the prison cell when an inmate vomited or pissed in the corner, or some other revolting act.

My cock was dripping in her saliva and my pre-cum, a hard rod glistening and hungry.

“Turn over onto your stomach,” I demanded, eager to finish inside of her.

She hesitated as the fear returned to her sky-blue eyes, and I knew she didn’t trust me with her back turned. Even though I didn’t blame her for hesitating, I wasn’t in the

mood to have a conversation about her feelings. The feelings and emotions of a liar were irrelevant to me.

“Don’t hurt me,” she breathed as her words were caught in her throat.

“Hurt you? I’m gonna fuck you hard. Whether my cock hurts you is your problem,” I snarled. “Now roll over onto your stomach.”

“Where are you going to put it?” she asked, still unmoving, infuriating me.

Then I realized she was concerned that I was going to slide into her tight hole.

That thought had crossed my mind, but I wanted her warm, wet pussy because it’d been three years since my cock had been in one.

And it was her pussy that I wanted. Not a high-class prostitute, or a random from Tinder, but this blue-eyed liar before me.

“In your pussy,” I told her sternly, raising my voice as a door slammed down the hall. Paying clients received the best treatment possible, while I had my slave imprisoned under their noses.

She exhaled, brushed her hair back, then did as I ordered, turning over onto her stomach. “I haven’t had anyone in my anus,” she told me.

“I need special lube for that,” I educated her, surprised that Gunner hadn’t gone there. “I want my enemy’s pussy.”

“Your enemy?” she questioned, speaking into her pillow.

“We’re not friends, are we?” I hissed at her, but her cute ass cheeks looking up at me

chilled my anger—a perfect little mound of flawless flesh.

To tease her, I leaned over and slid my cock between her butt cheeks as she cried out, “I thought you weren’t going to do that.”

“I’m not. Hush. No talking. I don’t want to hear the little liar’s voice when I’m fucking her,” I stated as I rolled my hips, moving faster between her butt cheeks as the tip of my cock was shiny with my pre-cum.

I slipped my hands under her hips to tug her bottom half off the bed, and she naturally bent her knees, which was what I wanted. That sweet ass was beckoning, and I pushed my length into her sodden pussy in one go, extracting a gasp from her mouth buried into her pillow.

Her pussy clamped down around my cock, urging me to thrust in deep, then pull out in long, slow movements.

Her butt pushed against my balls as cute sighs and moans sailed into the air, as the knuckles on her hands turned white as she gripped her pillow.

Cheek pressed into her pillow, mouth parted, body jolted with every powerful thrust.

Pulling out almost all the way again, then slowly slamming my cock hard into her soaking core. Then again. Pulling out most of the way before drilling back into her body.

It felt like fucking heaven. She felt like fucking heaven.

After a few more times at this agonizingly slow pace of long strokes and forceful plunges where moans and soft sighs exuded the room, I increased my pace.



Reaching for her hair and twisting it around my hand, my hips fell into short, quick thrusts, pummeling that ass: slap, slap, slap.

“I’m coming,” she announced, and I was taken aback. I had no interest in my enemy’s pleasure because all I cared about was me getting off and finishing.

I was about to growl, ‘I don’t care,’ but the words refused to leave my throat.

Something changed in me as her sighs increased in lustful mouthfuls and her butt kept pressing against me, wanting more, desiring more.

As my pace increased even more, her hands gripped the pillow tighter, and screams became louder, stimulating my horniness.

“Oh my god, I’m coming,” she squealed, and I kept slapping my cock in her, driving me down deeper to reach for a greater impact when she came.

But I thought I didn’t care if she came.

Just as she climaxed, I pulled her head back gently by her dark hair, and a delicious shudder rippled through her taut body, striking my cock as she clamped down hard, and I let out a loud, elongated grunt.

I emptied inside her as she released.

She exhaled and lay still as I pulled out of her, suddenly feeling strange that I enjoyed pleasuring her. I enjoyed the little liar's orgasm over my cock, and her pleasure became my priority in the end.

As she lay there, naked from the waist down, I tucked my half-limp cock away, ignoring the guilt stirring my stomach.

In silence, I zipped up, adjusted my clothing, and turned my back on her. When I looked back, about to leave, she was still lying there, spent.

I liked doing that to her. I liked that I fucked her into exhaustion and she peeked, hitting the ceiling, then landed with a thud.

My fingers combed through my hair, conflicted as I opened the door with my other hand. I wanted to leave her like that, damaged and in recovery, but I couldn't leave her like that.

"Are you alright?" I finally asked her as a couple next door were fucking, and the bed head was banging against the wall. Note to self to get that sorted.

Her dark head nodded as she slowly rolled over onto her back. Before I knew it, I was at the edge of the bed, covering her half-naked body with the blankets.

"Thanks," she mumbled into the pillow without glancing up at me.

I left and locked the door as an odd cocktail of unwanted emotions thundered through my body. Guilt and satisfaction. I owed her nothing. Why did I have to be guilty of? The satisfaction and surprise were how much I enjoyed pleasuring her, even though that wasn't my objective.

The guilt shredding my insides into tiny pieces, I'll deal with it another time. But the gratification and the pleasure will lure me back to her room.

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*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

I didn't bother wrestling or struggling with the Russians, as soon as I saw Ronan standing by, watching me being escorted, he received my message and knew exactly what to do.

We planned this. It was either him or me that they'd target, but since the geek girl Ivanov lingered around me like a bad smell, I suspected it would be me they'd target.

Predictable. I had to stifle an eye roll when they cornered me outside my class.

Walked me through the campus on display without a single person challenging us, even if they did, the Ivanovs would lie.

This was our plan. I had a tracker sewn into my briefs, so Ronan and Mikky could trace where their hideout was.

A balaclava was placed over my head back to front, so the eyeholes were at the back of my head, but I still had blurred vision through the black fabric. My wrists were tied behind my back with plastic cable ties, and they bundled me inside a van, slammed the door hard, making the van rock.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked.

Silence.

"C'mon, man, I can hear you breathing and I can smell your fucking rank body odor," I mocked him.

“Shut the fuck up,” he spat. His enormous frame shifted, and I caught sight of what looked like a gun. No surprises there.

I chuckled at how easy it was to provoke the fucker. “You got a wife?”

Silence, but I could sense his irritation.

I continued to mock him in an attempt to provoke a reaction. “Is she blind? I bet she is to date a giant motherfucker like you.”

Silence.

The van slowed and remained at a leisurely pace, stopping and starting at traffic lights, I assumed, so I knew we’d arrived at the inner city.

My wrists were tied behind my back, but I managed to tuck my thumb into the band of my jeans and rub along my lower back to find the small disc in my briefs.

It’s still there, but I hoped like hell that it’s still sending off a GPS signal to Ronan’s phone.

I tried to avoid thinking that way, but my life depended on the signal working, and if it didn’t, then I was screwed.

The beast in front of me shuffled in his seat, then stood, banged solidly on the divider to alert the drivers in the cab. I jumped in fright because I couldn’t see what he was doing properly through the black stitching of the ski mask.

“We’re being followed,” he informed them, then his thick skull turned behind him to the back windows.

I tried to see what he was referring to, but the windows were darkened, so all I could see were glimmers of light as it struck metal and flashes of light when vehicles momentarily blocked out the view or turned in another direction.

It wouldn't be Ronan who was following us because he didn't need to unless the GPS tracker wasn't working.

But then he wouldn't make it obvious, and they'd recognize his vehicle since they'd been watching us for weeks.

So, it could be one of our contractors that we hire to do the dirty work, yet that didn't make sense either.

These men were professional at covering their tracks, or else we wouldn't hire them to knock people off.

The van seemed to go around the block, one right turn after another, and it honestly felt like we were going around in circles, coming back to where we began. The beast opposite me kept his head turned toward the window, watching whoever was following us.

Then a muffled voice coming from the cab snarled a word in Russian that the beast repeated. I recognized the phrase instantly as the Russian word for pigs.

"You got the cops on your back?" I mocked him again. "Stand out like a fucking sore thumb, you do. Maybe a student called them when they saw you at Gotland. Probably thought he looked too dumb to be coming to college. Big fucker in a suit." I was ranting mindlessly, trying to stir the shit.

I detected movement before a solid thump struck the side of my head, so I didn't have time to move out of the way. "That's no way to treat your guest," I blurted, speaking

over the ringing in my ears.

“You shut that mouth or I’ll shut it for you,” he threatened, forcing his tone to remain calm. I knew I was getting to him, like an annoying flea that no amount of pesticide managed to kill.

“You missed my mouth, bro. That was my ear,” I pointed out in that smartass tone that used to piss my father off.

Even at twenty, I still managed to find my inner sixteen-year-old to stretch the patience of fuckers like the beast. Men like him were not used to someone talking back to them.

We kept driving around the block in giddy circles, one right turn after another, to rid ourselves of the cops.

It had to be Gothenburg cops since we were convinced that the blond cop from Larsson was working with them.

Well, it seemed like it anyway. Honestly, we were the good guys for once, and everyone against us was the ones acting illegally, trying to sabotage or blackmail us.

Whether it was the blond cop or these fuckers.

“Are you working with the Larsson cops?” I asked him, knowing he wouldn’t give me an honest answer, but I was curious to see how he’d react.

“Shut up,” he belted out. This time, there was a tone of anger, showing that he was losing his cool.

Refusing to obey, I pressed, “Have you got a problem with your steering? Why are

we going around and around in fucking circles? Is the steering locked? Can you fuckers not drive properly?"

Silence.

"Stop the car and I'll take a look at the steering for ya," I offered out of the goodness of my heart. "I'm a fucking wizz, bro, a wizz. Basically mechanic. I fixed my car. I gotta classic, old school, Stang, bro."

The beast exhaled, his patience wearing thin due to my constant chatter, which was getting on his nerves. I felt I was winning this battle of might or wits. I opened my mouth to persist with the verbal diarrhea, but

Mikky's voice echoed in my head, telling me to stop with the cocky shit or else they'll make my life harder.

Alright. I'll calm my shit and fall silent, watching the beast through the black haze, stitching as his head was turned, watching out the window.

The beast banged on the divider again, making me jump. Jeez, I wish he'd warn me before doing that shit. "Lost 'em," he informed the driver, sounding relieved, then mumbled the Russian word for pigs again in great disgust.

The van's direction changed from driving around in circles to turning left instead. There was more stopping and starting at traffic lights, and then the van increased its speed along strips of road, and I assumed we were leaving the city center again and entering the suburbs.

So, the Ivanovs were taking me to a nice suburb with a white picket fence? Their headquarters, located down the street where kids play on the road on their bicycles, was the perfect cover.

“Am I going to meet your boss?” I asked the beast.

Silence.

“Is he pretty?” I went on because I couldn’t help myself. “I bet he’s pretty. Does he bend you over the des-”

“Shut up,” he snapped, and I cracked up laughing.

“So, will you introduce me to your boss? The messiah. The rat king. Vladimir? Is Vladimir, the king, going to be there?” I pushed to see how far I could take it.

“You are a stupid fucking...,” he snarled, then was interrupted by the van turning around a corner, then slowly driving down a smooth road, until it stopped with the engine running.

I heard voices in the driver’s cab before a sharp clanging sound, like a gate opening, then the van lurched forward.

The van kept to a slow speed on the smooth road, again, as imagined images tossed about in my head.

Birds were chirping overhead as leaves rustled in the trees, then dogs began barking.

I couldn’t hear traffic, so we must be far away from the high-population area.

Nerves coiled throughout my body as my mouth grew desert dry, and I had the urgent need for water. The persistent stress was whether or not the GPS was sending signals to Ronan because it felt as though I was a world away from them.

The van pulled up, the engine cut out, the driver’s doors slammed, and then the back



of the van was opened as a gush of wind swept over me carrying the scent of gas and dried grass or hay. Maybe they had taken me to a hideout in the country.

The beast roughly grabbed my arm and pushed me forward as two men waited outside the back doors. My natural reaction was to wrestle against him to make his life harder, but I wanted to avoid injuries, so I remained calm.

I climbed out and sensed a building towering over us, blocking out the sun, with a peaked roof and front porch, which seemed like a typical house. Instead of going into the house, they led me down the side of the building in the shadows, making it difficult for me to see.

The surface beneath my feet changed from cement to soft grass as the scent of hay grew stronger.

We stalled as one of the men bent down and pulled up something that creaked loudly, and it wasn't until I was forced to feel stairs under my feet that I realized they were leading down into an underground tornado shelter.

A dank stench infiltrated the ski mask, then a light was switched on, but it didn't make much difference. I was forced down onto a hard surface, and then I felt the plastic ties cut. Then, footsteps retreating as I rubbed my wrists and immediately reached to take the ski mask off.

The door slammed, followed by the sounds of bolts sliding into place. As I freed my face from the ski mask, I found myself exactly where I imagined - in a dank tornado shelter with only one way out.

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

The GPS cut out,” I told Mikky on the phone. He must be in the bar because I could hear tinkling glasses and chatter in the background. “But we can check out the location before it dies, hoping he might not be too far away.”

“Yep,” he grunted quietly, keeping his reply short because he didn’t trust who was in his earshot. “We’ll sort something. Where are you now?”

“Just finished class and heading back to the club,” I told him as I walked back to my car.

“Good. Wait,” he asserted as he seemed to be walking somewhere, and I assume he wanted me to wait on the line until he found somewhere private and secure to talk.

A door closed, and the background noise vanished.

“I was contacted by someone who wants to talk to me, and I think it would be wise if you were in the room.”

“To tell you their demands?” I assumed he was referring to the Ivanovs wanting a deal in exchange for Gunner.

“No. He’s not one of them, although it doesn’t seem that way on the surface,” he explained, still keeping his tone steady. “That’s why I want a second pair of eyes and ears. The Russians haven’t made contact yet. I assume that’s because they’ve been on the move with Gunner.”

“No problem. I’ll be there in an hour,” I glanced behind me and noticed a shady

character nearby. “I think I’m being followed.”

“Chill out,” he suggested. “Don’t act as if you’re alarmed by them. We don’t want them to think they’re winning.”

“How’s Annika?” I had to ask, since no one was guarding her room, which allowed her to bang on the door and grab attention.

He hesitated before answering, “She’s fine,” his tone softened, which was surprising, considering that his jaw tensed every time her name was mentioned.

“It’s after four, Mikky, so that the girls will be up in the rooms,” I pointed out, trying not to sound bossy.

“I have both keys for that door, so they couldn’t let her out even if she were dumb enough to make a fuss. Besides, the girls and their clients would be wise to keep their mouths shut if they knew what was good for them,” he explained, and I nodded in agreement.

The girls were good at keeping quiet about the married men, the paid members, who came to see them every week, so they’re more likely to keep their noses out of the business going on in the end room down the hall.

“Alright. I’ll check on her when I get to work,” I offered, mostly because I was looking forward to seeing her.

I tried to downplay my feelings for her in front of Mikky, but it was almost impossible to suppress my eagerness to see her again.

I was torn about Annika being locked in that room.

On one hand, I knew where she was at every moment of the day and night.

However, on the other hand, I caught and trapped my selkie, and no wildling should be caged. Vivacious and beautiful creature swimming in that forest pool that tantalized my curiosity, but now that fight and spirit were dying.

Once behind the wheel of my car, I searched for the guy following me, then spotted a familiar car cruising by slowly.

It was the blond cop from Larsson, and the man who followed me was driving.

So, we had to deal with the Ivanovs and the police, but these two were outside the jurisdiction so that they couldn't arrest me without permission from the Gothenburg Police.

I drove at a moderate speed from campus back to the inner city while the cop car followed.

What were they expecting? My life consisted of attending classes, working on assignments, working at the club, and sleeping.

There was little deviation from that schedule, so were they hoping I would... Then a thought crossed my mind.

I wondered if Mikky was right and the Ivanovs were working with the Larsson police.

They were watching me to see if I'd search for Gunner, then what?

Should I be arrested for looking for my friend?

Nah, something stinks. Gunner's kidnapping might be a setup, so they pin it on Mikky again.

Their number one goal was to get him back in prison.

Crooked cops were the fucking lowest of the low.

I parked in the staff parking lot under the building and took the elevator up to the club. Then, I stopped to peer out the front reception windows, spotting the police parked down the road. I rolled my eyes, then, when I turned around, Betty was standing there wearing a wide scarlet smile.

"Can I help you, Mr. Bryne?" she asked, forcing a cheery tone.

"No, I'm fine," I answered as a shiver traveled down my spine. "And since when did you call me Mr. Bryne? What happened to first-name basis?"

"Sorry. Have a good day, won't you, Ronan?" she insisted, and something stirred in my stomach. She was guilty as fucking sin, yet we still needed evidence before we took action. We were surrounded by snakes and rats in human form, waiting eagerly for one of us to screw up.

I messaged Mikky to ask where he was located, so I could grab the key to Annika's room to check on her. He answered that he was up in the viewing lounge, so I ran up the stairs and found him sitting there with a tumbler of whiskey in his hand and a cigar lying in an ashtray.

"It's early, Mikky," I stated the obvious and assumed something stressful occurred.

He cocked his eyebrows and took a sip of his whiskey before saying nonchalantly, staring out the window onto the empty casino floor, "I was tempted."

“I understand. We’re in interesting times,” I agreed as I sat down in the leather chair next to him. “The cops followed me all the way here as if I would go-”

“I wasn’t talking about that,” he cut in, then leaned forward to seize his cigar and took a deep inhale, before blowing out the sweet smoke.

I was a little confused as he seemed distant and deeply unhappy. Something was plaguing his mind, and it wasn’t Gunner. “What are you talking about?”

He wavered for a few seconds, watching the cleaner sweep the vacuum across the carpet. Then nodded in the direction of the bar. “Her.”

“Betty?” I inquired, wishing he’d spit out what was bothering him because maybe I could fix it. “I saw her earlier, wearing a venomous smile. Fake as fuck.”

“Not her,” he cringed in disgust. “Her . The little liar.”

“Annika? Do you have a key for her room? I want to check on her,” I explained, curious to know why she was getting on her nerves so much, but I was too eager to see her.

He grunted in frustration, combing his fingers through his black, curly hair, hesitating as if he didn’t want me to see her. But Mikky succumbed, reached into his pocket, and handed me one of the keys. “Be back in thirty minutes for the meeting,” he stressed flatly.

“No problem,” I stated. “You can always rely on me.”

“Yeah, I know,” he mumbled as I walked away, but then froze and turned back. “What’s up, Mikky? Has something happened?”

He nodded slightly, took another sip of his whiskey, and swallowed. “She happened,” he answered, and I instantly knew what was bothering him.

Annika. She’d crawled under his skin and lit a fire, and he’ll keep returning until the fire is extinguished. She was like that—an addiction. There was something about her that lured the strongest of men to her side.

I didn’t blame him for succumbing to his temptations, and in a way, it worked for us, as maybe he’d be less inclined to hurt her.

“She’s nice, aren’t she?” I said and cocked my eyebrows again.

Then straightened his back to get back to business. “We’ll hire a vehicle to search for where they’re keeping Gunner,” he suggested, “so they don’t recognize us.”

“Might have to be at night, though, because the location is in the country, surrounded by empty fields,” I informed him. “I looked on Google Maps where the GPS signal dropped off, and there’s only farmland with the odd farmhouse nearby.”

“So,” he shrugged. “He had to be in one of those farm houses.”

“Not necessarily. They might’ve driven out of the city, Mikky. It just so happened to be in that location when the signal stopped,” I explained.

“Worth checking out anyway,” he proposed flatly. “Then we’ll go from there. Fuck. If Lars were still alive, he’d be seething if we lost his son.”

“Yeah,” I agreed, feeling bad because it was my idea. But the Ivanovs can’t make a deal with Mikky without proof that they had Gunner alive and well anyway.

The Red Velvet rooms were full and in action with fucking sounds filling the hall.

It was early in the day, and yet the married men were getting their rocks off while their loyal wives ran the kids about.

It was not my scene, and it never will be, but I understood that it was an essential part of the club.

I unlocked the door and pushed it open, and an easy smile stretched across her face. “Are you letting me out?” she asked with more spirit in her than last time I was in this room.

“No,” I told her straight. “You wanted to die last time I was in here. What changed?”

“Um, I don’t know,” she seemed shifty and looked away, and I knew it had something to do with Mikky.

He got between her legs and wet his cock, probably for the first time since he was in prison. Fuck, three years without sex. It must’ve felt like a fucking dream to slide inside a girl like Annika.

“You look chipper,” I pointed out. “Color in your cheeks.”

“I’ve been feasting on carbs,” she said, brushing chip crumbs off her stomach as I noticed a half-eaten bag of chips was on the side table.

“Who bought you those?” as if I didn’t already know. If it wasn’t Gunner, it’ll be Mikky. Worming his way into her bed with bags of fatty starch.

“Your boss,” she replied with a twinkle in her eye, as she made space on the bed for me to sit next to her. “Where’s Gunner? Is he okay? I haven’t seen him for a while.”

“Ah, yes,” I said, checking the time on my phone because I didn’t want to miss the



mysterious meeting with Mikky. I didn't want to let him down. "Gunner. He's ah..." I should've spoken to Mikky about how much I could tell her, but she was concerned about him. "He's busy."

"Oh," she sounded disappointed. "Too busy to visit me?"

I chuckled. "You're our prisoner, Annika. Not an enclosure at the zoo. He's not obligated to visit you."

"I know," she seemed hurt, and I realized I said the wrong thing. "Seems out of character, that's all."

She's right. The guy was obsessed with her, and if Mikky allowed it, he'd move all his stuff into her room so he could be with her twenty-four-seven.

"Well, he has some important errands to run and is out of town," I mumbled, making it up as I went along.

"I think you're hiding something from me," she spotted the lie easily, unsurprisingly. "But the feelings of a prisoner are irrelevant."

Guilt stirred in my gut. I guess it wouldn't hurt if I told her the truth, as there's not much she could do about it anyway. "Yeah, I suppose. Okay, you're right," I caved to my guilt. "He's been kidnapped."

She gasped and slapped her hand over her gaping mouth. "By whom? Oh my god. Have the police got him? No. Wait. Kidnapped. Police don't tend to kidnap, unless," she made a face, "Her."

"Her?" I pressed to see if she'd open up.

“Judith the Bitchtective,” she replied. “She’s a bad cop. She is capable of kidnapping people.”

“Well, it wasn’t her, although she might be involved,” I stated honestly as her hand found mine and she began massaging the back, and her touch traveled immediately to my crotch. Fuck. That’s all it took.

“So, who?” she kept asking with a furrowed brow and bit her bottom lip.

“The Ivanovs,” I answered, and her eyes glazed over as if she wasn’t aware of who they were.

But the confusion lasted only a few seconds before her mouth parted and a gasp of shock escaped her lips. “Ivanov? Like...”

“Your friend, Katerina Ivanov, set him up. Sort of. They’re our enemy,” I held back from giving her the whole story because her hand was now on my leg, close to my cock. One track mind.

“What a little bitch. I thought she was on my side. Wait. What am I saying? Gunner’s not on my side. None of you is on my side. I can’t trust anyone. And what do you mean by ‘sort of?’” Annika babbled because she was getting annoyed, or maybe she was high on carbs.

“I think she was on your side,” I corrected her. “She was trying to protect you, but also was using you to get closer to Gunner or me. But it was a double banger, and it was predictable. We used Gunner as bait to locate where they’re hiding.”

“So, you were setting her up as she was setting you up?” she clarified. “Huh. Funny.”

“Yep,” I nodded, locking my gaze onto her pretty face. As soon as her eyes met mine,

she graced me with another of those gorgeous smiles, and I took the opportunity to kiss her.

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:22 pm*

He tasted like mint and coffee, soft lips, warm hands, the man who spied on me while I swam naked. The man who fucked me in the water. My Simmering Summer felt so good as my body melted under his touch.

“I feel guilty doing this while Gunner...” I breathed into his mouth, pausing my tongue.

“Do you want me to stop?” he kindly offered like the gentleman he was.

“No,” I replied honestly because my clit was throbbing and I was so wet between my legs. Thighs like rubber, toes curling, insatiable hunger.

“We’re not supposed to touch you,” he whispered into the curve of my neck, tickling my skin.

“Says the boss?” I asked in a flirtatious tone.

I could still feel Mikael inside of me. The way he brutally seduced me, callously fucked me, almost made a hole in the mattress from his tormented thrusts. Three dangerous men have fucked me and I loved it all.

Mikael stimulated my horniness, and I wanted Ronan to make me go over the line again. I was becoming useless and weak, addicted to these men, who treat me cruelly. Shameful, but I couldn’t stop.

Ronan seized my mouth again as I ran my fingers through his tidy, brown hair, giving him the message that I wanted it. I wanted it badly. I wanted them badly.

“Yeah,” he breathed as his hands climbed under my sweater, rubbing my bare back, along the spine, down to my butt crack, slipping a finger along my crack.

“I wouldn’t worry about him,” I assured my Simmering Summer. “He succumbed to his temptations.”

He grunted, unsurprised as a little smile appeared on his face. “Figures.”

“You seem proud of that?” I questioned, flabbergasted that he wasn’t concerned that I was fucking all three of them. You’d think dangerous men such as the Kaisers would be more possessive. Or maybe they would be if it were a man outside of their circle.

He shrugged. “He’s a good man and ah...it’s kinda weird, but also cool, that it was you.”

I chuckled, “A good man that keeps me locked in here.”

He snorted, seeing my point. “Well, he’s a good man to people who don’t betray us.”

“Do you...” I began eager to ask a question that’s been on my mind for years. “Do you think he’ll ever forgive me? Will all of you forgive me?”

He peppered kisses all over my neck before coming up for air as if he was killing time to think it over. “Gunner has forgiven you already,” he stated, “although he’s still suspicious of your true motivations.”

“And Mikael?” I pressed. “Do you think he has it in his heart to forgive me?”

His intelligent eyes fixed onto the wall behind me, then narrowed his eyes a little, thinking over. “I think so,” he replied slowly, sounding slightly unconvinced. “If you want him to forgive you, you might have to work for it. It won’t come for free.”

“I know I hurt him badly,” I sighed, taking the hint that if I let Mikael have his way with me more, then his heart might be open to forgiving me. “But I could be extra nice to him.”

“You do that,” he grinned, agreeing with my strategy.

“And what about you, Ronan?” I asked him, taking his gorgeous face in my hands, to look him squarely in the eyes. “Do you forgive me, yet?”

“I’m getting there,” he stated honestly.

“Maybe I could help you along too,” I offered flirtatiously, biting my bottom lip while beating my eyelashes.

There was no time like the present, so I climbed over his legs, straddling him and took his gorgeous face in my hands, kissing him, while I rocked over his hardening crotch. His hand quickly unbuttoned his black dress pants as I helped his cock spring free.

My desperate need to ride him hard to quench my thirst and hunger surprised me. Animalistically, together we stripped my jeans and fresh panties down my legs, tossing them on the floor. I’d just changed my panties after Mikael made me sodden, and I had a pile of dirty clothes in the corner.

I kneeled over his cock, teasing him by gently touching his head with the lips of my pussy, then pulling away again, shooting him a mischievous smile as I did it. His hand slapped my bare butt cheeks to force me to obey.

“I don’t have much time,” he growled as his hand grabbed my butt cheek to lure me down over his wet cock.

“Oh,” I bit my bottom lip again, teasing. I bet Mikael had no idea where he was and what he was doing. “Are you expected elsewhere?”

“Yes,” he chuckled, loving me doing this to him. I doubted that Mikael would like this treatment, but Ronan had a more moderate personality.

I succumbed to his charms and slid down over his cock and gasped as he filled me up.

My body is so subtle as he claimed my mouth and kissed me passionately and deeply, drawing out a sigh as I began to move over his cock.

His hands clenching my butt cheeks guided me over him, moving my hips in slow circles as his firm organ rubbed against my inner soft skin, stimulating my body.

My knees pressed into the mattress as his hands lifted me, before slamming back down again, forcing the tip of his cock to prod me deeply. God, it felt good. I was still a little raw from Mikael, but that quickly dissipated the more relaxed I became.

Again, he guided me upwards over his cock, before slamming back down, as he pushed himself upwards inside me, drawing out another gasp of erotic pleasure.

I leaned forward to balance myself, before a flurry of small, short thrusts to stimulate my clit more as he grunted, whispering, “Fuck, you’re killing me. That’s so fucking good, selkie. My little selkie.”

Slamming my body back down, so his cock prods the back of my canal, crying out as the impending orgasm traveled up and down my inner thighs. I was so close. So close.

Then Ronan’s dripping, hungry gaze changed. He spotted something over my shoulder and stopped moving. I twisted my neck behind us to find an imposing dark

figure standing there watching. Arms folded across his broad chest, severity all over his face. He didn't look pleased.

"Mikky?" Ronan panted a little embarrassed.

"We've got a meeting," he reminded him sternly.

"Okay," he stated as he encouraged me to climb off him. "I thought I had time."

"No," Mikky spat bluntly. "Finish."

"Huh?" Ronan seemed confused, yet I knew exactly what Mikael wanted. That look on his face told me everything I needed to know.

"Keep going until you're finished," Mikael demanded, then relaxed back against the closed door, expecting us to follow through.

I had no problem fucking Ronan in front of Mikael, especially since my back was to him, but Ronan might feel a little embarrassed, after all, he was his boss. It might seem weird.

I placed my hands on Ronan's shoulders and hammered my body several times over his cock, wanting to please both men in different ways.

Even though I couldn't see him, I felt his stare rake over my butt cheeks, which was the only part of my body that was naked.

To fix that, I pulled my sweater off, unhooked my bra, and continued to ride Ronan into the sunset.

My breasts wiggled as I bounced up and down, and just before I was about to cum, I



turned to look him in the eye. He stood motionless, narrowed eyes filled with both bitterness and lust. Ronan was right. It might take more of this for Mikael to forgive me, but I'll do whatever it takes.

Something had changed in me. I wanted to live and wanted these three men to be the leading actors in my life, if they wanted it too. If only they could find it in themselves to forgive me. Forgiveness was a choice; therefore, they could choose it if they wanted it.

I came full circle back into the cocoon of the Kaisers, and this was where I wanted to be. But it was the man staring at me with heat in his eyes that had the key to their hearts. It was he whom I had to convince of my self-worth and genuine desire to stay with them.

The orgasm struck me hard, and I tipped my head back as my body was dripping in luscious desire, so turned on by this situation, but curious as to why he preferred to watch rather than join in. Maybe he will next time.

A loud, gut-wrenching moan escaped my lips as the orgasm rippled through my body, leaving no muscle untouched. I kept riding him until I was done and felt his warm cum empty into me.

When I turned back, searching for that handsome, sinister face, he was gone.

I didn't hear him go, and a sense of disappointment invaded me because I wanted to see the satisfaction in his face.

I wanted to see the corners of his mouth turn upwards and the bulge at the front of his black pants grow at the sight of me being pleased.

I wanted to ask him if he liked watching me naked, unabashed, begin fucked by

Ronan, his righthand man.

“I better go,” Ronan stated hastily as if he was in trouble, and lifted me off him.

Dribbles of cum and sex juice traveled down my legs as I reached for my panties, discovering that they’re wet and I couldn’t bear to put them on.

“How long are you going to keep me here?” I hissed at Ronan as he quickly put his cock away and zipped up.

“We’ve had this conversation before, Annika,” he told me as he watched me dress.

“I’ve got dirty clothes that need washing,” I pointed to the pile in the corner. “And maybe you could bring a TV in here, so I can watch Netflix, because it’s getting damn boring. And I need some exercise to stretch my limbs.”

“Try yoga. You don’t need to go outside for that. And I’ll sort out your washing,” he informed me, bundling up the pile of dirty clothes from the floor.

“And a TV?” I pressed.

“I’ll do my best,” he grinned, then stepped to the bed, leaned down and kissed my lips, once, twice, three times as if he was reluctant to leave.

“I hope you don’t get in trouble,” I said as he left.

He scoffed. “Nah, it’ll be fine.”

He hustled out of my room in a hurry for the meeting, carrying my dirty underwear.

The door shut behind him, and silence fell.

I immediately wondered what had happened to Betty and the key, as it's been a while since she discovered me.

Because maybe I'd changed my mind about leaving.

Perhaps I want to stay so I can maintain my relationship with Gunner and Mikael.

Besides, there was no safer place that I could be than where I was locked in the room of the Kaiser's club.

It was a curiosity, though, because even if Betty were unable to find the spare key, she'd still return to tell me, if she cared.

Or call the police or fire department to have me rescued.

I wondered then if she returned while Mikael was fucking me, and she decided that maybe I was that keen to leave.

Or perhaps she was disgusted by what she heard and decided to let me suffer in silence.

Except, I wasn't suffering at all. I mean...Yes, I wanted my freedom, but that came at a price. Escape and have the Kaisers on my back, hunting me down to make me pay twice over, or stay and face them head-on, where we can bravely work on our relationships.

I chose to stay.

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There was nothing I liked more than watching the little liar getting fucked, but I had to brush those tantalizing thoughts aside to focus on business.

“A Mr. Dalgety is here to see you,” Betty informed me on the phone, and I told her to send him up.

“Dalgety?” Ronan screwed his face up. “Doesn’t sound familiar. Is he a cop?”

I shrugged, noticing a pale piece of fabric poking out from his pant pocket. “No idea. You’re coming out.”

“Huh?” he frowned in his confusion, following my finger pointing at the front of his pants.

“Your pocket,” I clarified, since he was looking in the wrong place.

“Oh,” he seemed bashful. “Annika’s washing. I dumped her dirty clothes on my desk, but found a pair of her panties on the floor that I must’ve dropped on the way up here. I’ll put them through the laundry at home.”

I wiggled my finger at him, and he pulled the pair out and threw them onto the desk. “Full brief soft pink,” I said, holding them up.

“I think that’s more like bikini briefs, but you know...she doesn’t seem to like G-strings,” he educated me. “Or at least I haven’t seen her wear them, and there’s none in her laundry. It’s either bikini bottom or naked.”

“Naked?” That caught my attention.

“Naked swimming. Skinny dipping. That’s how I first saw her, naked, swimming. So, it’s kinda hard to turn my brain into hating her, because I had seen her at her finest, before I knew who she was,” he seemed to be making an argument to save her. “She was exquisite.”

Betty knocked at the door, and I yelled, “Enter,” and a plump man with a receding hairline who on first glance looked like a cop, but I could be wrong.

“Mr. Dalgety?” I pushed my chair back and offered him my hand as Ronan grabbed a chair and sat to the side of us.

He shook my hand, then sat in the chair, and then looked behind him to ensure the door was closed and Betty had gone. “I must apologize, Mr. Kaiser, I deliberately used a pseudonym. My name is not Dalgety, it’s George Tindale, Sergeant George Tindale from Gothenburg PD.”

My heart sank, and I wondered if he was collaborating with Betty, and my hand that was resting on the desk formed into a fist out of fury. Yet it was Freddie who approached me, urging that I have a meeting with the guy, so I was starting to think that I couldn’t trust Freddie either.

I glanced at Ronan because the name Tindale didn’t ring a bell, and reading the expression on Ronan’s face, he hadn’t heard of him either.

“Sergeant, how can I help you?” I asked, playing dumb, suppressing the anger and punishment I was planning to inflict on Freddie. It seemed as if the entire fucking place was rife with enemies trying to take us down.

“We are currently investigating these two people,” he stated, swiping his phone and

bringing up two photos.

I glanced at Ronan, who leaned over the desk to take a look, yet we kept our expressions blank. We knew who they were, alright, but I had no intention of letting the sergeant know that.

“Do you recognize them?” he asked.

“What is this about, Sergeant?” I avoided answering his question in case he incriminated me for a crime I didn’t commit again.

“Let me explain,” he said flatly, even though the guy likely had enough experience as a cop to spot a liar or at least someone trying to evade telling the truth.

The guy probably had his mind made up about me before he walked in here.

“Understandably, there are some pieces of information I am not privy to share, but I was alerted by their behavior when a student by the name of Riley Laws, correct name Annika.”

He shot me a side glance, but I remained quiet, waiting for him to finish.

He continued, “Obviously, you would know Annika, since she was fostered by your uncle several years ago.”

“Ah, that Annika,” I still played dumb, unsure of where I should go in this conversation, so I glanced again at Ronan, whose complexion was draining of color.

“Her pseudonym was Riley Laws, and she was under the witness protection program after she testified to...” he stalled as if he wasn’t keen to finish the sentence off.

“Put me in prison. Yes, I’m very familiar with what happened there, and she lied,” I finished off the sentence for him, clenching my jaw as I spoke because it still pisses me off, even as my feelings toward the little liar had changed.

Every time I was reminded of what happened three years ago, it reopened the fresh wound.

Tindale nodded, watching me closely. “I am aware,” he agreed, and I refused to relax, because he might be trying to grease me up so I dropped my guard, and then he’d pin some fake shit on me and I’d be back in prison again. Fuck that.

“You’re aware that she lied under oath?” Ronan spoke for the first time. “You’re not part of the Larsson police force, so how do you know?”

“I’m aware that the girl was coerced,” he told me straight.

“Which is why I’m here. And to answer your question, I was part of the witness protection program under the Gothenburg Police dept that helped Annika relocate here.

” He stalled for a moment to swipe his phone for the pics of the blond cop and her sidekick from Larsson.

“I’m not sure if you’re aware that it wasn’t her choice to bring her to this location.

It was hers,” he pointed to the blond cop, Judith.

“Did she know we were here?” I asked him carefully.

If he had been following her for a while, then he’d have noticed that she had gone missing for a while. He’d notice that she hadn’t turned up to class, and if he’s in

contact with the blond cop, then he might also know that the last time she saw Annika was here at the club when we grabbed her.

“Yes, that was why she convinced Annika to study here to use her as bait to lure you out.” He shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly, then a strain washed across his face.

“It was confusing to me at first because Annika was in disguise and had nothing to do with you until she started working here. I was perplexed because of all places, it was here in your club that she chose to work. I assumed Judith played a part in her finding work here, so I did a little digging and discovered there was a second player in the scheme.”

“Who?” Ronan asked, expectedly.

“The Russian family that was driven out of this area when your family came along. They went underground to strengthen their resources and returned wanting to take back what you took from them,” he explained breathlessly with a slight wheeze, indicating that he was an asthmatic or a smoker.

“We know,” I told him. “We’re fully aware of what the Ivanovs are trying to do.”

“If I were brutally honest with you, we’re not keen to have them back.

They kept the streets dirty with drug dealing and forcing girls out onto the streets, coercion, among other crimes, and since your family arrived the streets had been cleaner, crime had dropped,” as he spoke, I felt proud of Ronan since it was him that had been working hard to do that while I was in prison.

We had contacts whom we called upon to remove street scum that was causing us problems. Even though we rarely saw their faces, we knew we could rely on them and had been calling upon them since my uncle was alive and running the family



business in Larsson.

He handed those highly secretive contacts down to me and Ronan.

Cleaning up the streets was done illegally, and I wondered if Tindale and his police colleagues were aware of that. Maybe they were and turned a blind eye. We were good at covering our tracks, and we even had hidden bank accounts under fake names specifically to pay them.

Tindale flicked his hand. “I’m digressing. Katerina Ivanov, strategically planted in the same hall to befriend Annika and then sold her a fake ID with an older date of birth so she could start working here,” he stated flatly.

“We knew she was using a fake ID and sacked her. She doesn’t work here anymore,” I informed him, stretching the truth a little. She was sacked because she was betraying us, but we were aware of the fake ID for some time.

It was revealing to us how vital Katerina’s role was in the scheme of things.

“So, are you sure that the Ivanov family and the Larsson police department are working together?” I pressed, because this was our suspicion as well, but I felt there was a missing link.

Why would they join forces at the risk of corrupting the Larsson PD? That part didn’t make sense to me. Many things didn’t make sense to me. The eagerness to have me imprisoned in the first place and the eagerness to have me arrested and placed back in prison were oddly contrived.

“Yes. What alerted me was when Annika was being manipulated and emotionally blackmailed by Judith from the Larsson PD. So, I did some digging on her to discover that she was married to the nephew of one of the top-dogs in the Ivanov

family and was mysteriously killed in a car crash a few miles out of the edge of Larsson city nineteen years ago,” he flicked me a sharp knowing look, like he suspected I had something to with it.

“The Ivanovs had no territory and no power in Larsson,” I educated him. “They were happy here in Gothenburg until they made some stupid financial decisions that destroyed their empire.”

“But they were trying to squeeze their way in, weren’t they?” he said it like it was common knowledge. “At the time, they were spreading their territories, not just into Larsson, but into other cities as well. We were aware of that and kept track of them.”

“What was the nephew’s name?” Ronan asked, keeping his tone even.

“Serg Popov or Poppa,” he answered, and I rubbed my jaw with the back of my fist.

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“I was only a kid back then, so I’m unfamiliar with anyone called Poppa, although I am aware of the Popovs within the Ivanov family,” I explained as an eerie sensation traveled over the skin on my forearms. There was something about that incident that stirred inside of me.

Nineteen years ago, I would have been only nine years old, but I knew someone older and probably knew more about the situation: Gunner’s mom, and my Aunt Sylvie.

“Judith changed her surname and first name, went on to enroll in the police force, worked her way up the ranks, and made it her mission to destroy the Kaiser empire, whom she held personally responsible for killing her husband.”

“Wow,” Ronan said under his breath. “That’s an incredible revenge plan. Did she have proof?”

“If she had proof, I haven’t found it. But she was coaxed by the Ivanovs to have someone working on the inside in the police to turn a blind eye to certain crimes, while coming down hard on your family, including the arrest and imprisonment several years ago of Lars Kaiser and then your conviction,” he described, clearing his voice a couple of times.

“False conviction,” I corrected him, then pointed to the canister of chilled water, so Ronan could pour a glass and offer it to the sergeant.

“Yes,” he sighed, then gulped the water on as three dribbles flicked onto his olive-green shirt.

“So, she’s crooked as a dog’s hindleg, and you’ve known about that for a while?” I stated, trying not to sound as if I were accusing him of withholding information.

“I became suspicious when I had a phone conversation with Annika and she seemed scared, and I knew that Judith had gotten to her, so I, with support from the Gothenburg PD, began following them,” Tindale relayed to us.

Ronan filled his glass with more water, because it seemed like he had more to offload.

“I have to admit that apart from the shifty blond cop, we’re not surprised about anything you’ve told us,” I stated honestly.

“Well, I have two questions for you...ah...one is, do you know where Annika or Riley Laws is currently located, because she seemed to have dropped off the face of the earth?” he pressed, and my stomach turned.

Ronan shuffled on his feet, conflicted. On one hand, we want to trust this guy, but on the other hand, I didn’t want her to leave the confines of that room. Not yet.

“She’s safe and well,” I told him sternly. “In hiding from,” I nodded my head toward his phone, “the crooked cop.”

“I may need to speak to her,” he said, tensing up a little as if he believed I might have harmed her.

“That’s fine. That can be arranged with notice,” I stated.

“We could organize a phone call,” Ronan added. “Why do you need to speak to her?”

“Ah, well,” he hesitated, “Just to make sure she’s safe and well and being used as a

pawn in your or their games. I guess I still have echoes in my mind of the last conversation I had with her, where she was shaken, so I would feel better if I spoke to her to know that she is taken care of.”

“She is,” I assured him. “What is your second question?”

“Gunner Kaiser,” he stated, tilting his head to the side to look at me differently. “Do you have any idea where he is?”

Ronan puffed his cheeks out and then blew air from his mouth as if deliberating whether it was wise to bring this man we’ve only just met into the little game of two families.

He observed our hesitation, then added more information, “We followed a van owned by Ivanov with Gunner in the back, so we know they have him. I’m just curious to know if they have contacted you to make a deal or exchange?”

“They haven’t given the specifics of their demands yet,” I replied slowly.

“And what are your plans? I assume you have plans?” he queried sharply.

I wavered again and glanced at Ronan, who shrugged his shoulders.

Tindale filled our silence by saying, “I doubt you’d sit back and do nothing,” he pointed out correctly.

I opened my mouth to give him a vague answer, but he spoke over me.

“Kidnapping is a grave criminal offense, Mr. Kaiser,” he began in a warning tone that I didn’t like, and my jaw clenched. If he were trying to threaten me with arrest because we kidnapped Annika, I would take the Glock out of the bottom drawer right

now.

Instead, he surprised me and took a different direction.

“You see, as I previously stated, we don’t want the Ivanov family and their type of business back in town.

And I’m prepared to do anything to make sure that doesn’t happen.

So, if we were to arrest those men for conspiring and then the abduction of Gunner Kaiser, then we can at least put them behind bars where I can keep a close eye on them. ”

He relaxed back in his chair and tapped his phone, where the pictures of the dirty-blond Larsson cop were.

“She’s not the only one with a need to avenge the bad guys,” he stated bluntly, looking me in the eye.

I glanced at Ronan, who gave me nothing.

“Let me think about it,” I told him. “Give your contact details to Ronan and one of us will get back to you when we’ve decided what we’re going to do.”

“No problem,” he said cheerfully, pushing his chair back to stand, then offered me his hand. “Pleasure doing business with you, Mr. Kaiser.”

Ronan walked him to the elevator as I thought it over. When Ronan returned, he shut the door behind him and passed me Tindale’s business card. “What do you think?”

“I don’t know,” I replied, taking the card from his hand and looking it over, searching

for something amiss with his details and finding nothing. “Makes sense to tell him what we know about Gunner’s location to arrest the fuckers, but I needed to think about it.”

“Fair enough,” Ronan replied, slightly glum.

“In the meantime,” I exhaled, preparing myself for battle, “I’ll swallow my pride and call Sylvie to see if Serg Popov rings a bell.” I tapped my finger on the desk irritably. There’s something about the car crash nineteen years ago that stirred my instincts that I needed to get to the bottom of.

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N aturally, I tried the door to see if it would be easy to kick down, but as soon as I turned the handle, a solid bang came from the other side to let me know that the door was guarded.

Were they going to guard it all night? Maybe in the small hours of the morning, the guy guarding the door might fall asleep, then I could try to escape.

So far, that was the only plan I had if Ronan and Mikky lost the signal. But it's essential to remain positive. They'll find me. They had to find me.

There's a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling that dimly lit the room, but would flicker periodically, making my vision go weird. A figure standing in the corner was only the shape in the wood; demons could invade a vulnerable mind if someone stayed too long down here.

I had no concept of time, but I climbed the rickety wooden stairs to peer through the cracks in the door, which was the only access to the outside, to sense if night had fallen.

It was the perfect place to hide me. Underground, where GPS and wi-fi signals were less reliable, and in the middle of nowhere.

There was an old armchair placed in the middle of the room, covered in stains on the pale, ripped fabric, and it wasn't until I sat down in it that I realized that the splatter stains looked like faded blood.

Faded stains on the floorboards as well that had seeped into the wood, which also



looked like blood, although it might be my imagination.

My sinister imagination traveled to the darkest of places where enemies of the Russians were brought down here to be tortured and tormented until they squealed.

But then I didn't think the Russians had been back in Gothenburg for long, so the blood stains weren't from someone they tortured.

Or maybe they weren't blood stains. Perhaps they were mud splatters from the dirt ceiling.

Fuck, is this room waterproof when it rains?

I traced the wooden stairs and imagined rainwater flowing down them, the shelter filling up like a fish tank.

I should have taken those swimming lessons that my dad wanted me to take more seriously.

I needed to control my mind and think more positively, repeating affirmations to calm it, and hope for the best.

Folding my arms across my chest, I tucked my hands under my armpits to keep them warm as my body temperature started to drop; the less I moved around, the colder I felt.

That's an easy problem to solve, so I propelled myself to my feet and started air punching as I darted about on the floor pretending to be in a boxing ring.

There were no blankets or extra clothing in here, so I had to look after myself. If I freeze, it's over. If I become complacent, then it's over.

My breath increased as my body temperature warmed, but it also meant that I inhaled more of the cesspit stench that lingered in here.

My feet froze dead when bolts slid across the door and flew open.

For a second, I thought with their haste that it was someone who had come to rescue me, but no, to my disappointment, it was one of Ivanov's men. Fuckwits.

They placed a bottle of water and two McDonald's burgers on the top step before slamming and locking the door behind them.

"Hey," I bellowed, running up the stairs, then banging on the door. "I need a blanket. It's fucking cold in here."

"What?" an angered voice hissed at me through the door. "Eat the food."

"I need a blanket," I yelled again, "More clothes."

The bolts clanged and the door flew open again as the guy lurched forward and before I had a chance to react, pushed me hard. My foot stepped down onto the next level, but I lost my footing and fell backward, rolling down to the floor.

I lay there for a few seconds before the guy asked, "Are you alive?"

"Yes, I'm alive, you fucker," I groaned under my breath as I sat up, but felt the pinch of a sciatic nerve.

"Good," he said and slammed the door on me.

"What about a blanket?" I shouted angrily, but I doubted he heard. Fuck.

What I absorbed in that short space of time and under dimmed light was that he was armed and seemed to be on his own. I could tackle one armed man, but two would be difficult. But it was wiser to wait until Mikky and Ronan came to rescue me.

Pulling myself up onto my feet, the pain was superficial; I might end up with a large bruise on my butt and thigh, but besides that, I think I will survive.

I climbed back up the stairs, grabbed the burgers and bottle of water, and ran back down, landing in the chair. The burgers were cold, probably bought earlier in the day when they planned my abduction.

Even though I was hungry, I took small bites, assessing the flavor in my mouth to detect bitter poison. It seemed okay, apart from the gherkin, which I flicked out onto the floor, then finished it, leaving the second burger for later because I didn't know when my next meal would be.

I cracked open the bottle of water, relieved that it was sealed, so it hadn't been tampered with, and then began quenching my dry mouth. Bored with nothing to do, I imagined seeing Annika's pretty face in every surface and every stain, and her natural perfume seemed to stifle the damp stench.

Annika lay alone in the bed, perhaps Ronan had gone to comfort her.

Would he tell her that the enemy stole me?

Would she care? I think she would. That twinkle in her eye and the way her face lit up whenever she saw me told me that she would care.

She, after all, was my best friend since we were kids, so of course she'd care.

But I wanted her to mourn for me, yearn for my touch, and lose sleep hoping that I

don't get hurt.

She used to fuss over me whenever I got into a schoolyard fight and was landed with a bloodied nose or a bruised ego. I enjoyed that.

The warm, fuzziness accompanied by thoughts of her peeled away as a chill prickled across the back of my neck. I pulled my black hood over my head and hugged my body as I sank into memories of her.

Happiness stirred in my belly as I drifted into a slumber, traveling to her room in the hall, climbing into her bed, wrapping my arms around her warm, soft body.

Then I travel back in time to when I first spotted her arriving on campus, and I knew immediately that it was Annika, my long-lost foster sister.

The girl I fell for as we grew, matured, and developed. I didn't tell her that, of course, because that would be weird, but I kissed her more than once, our unspoken secret.

Her room in our house was where I found myself at times of trouble, and I'd climb under her soft pink sheet and we'd talk all night about stupid stuff. Then, play the game and see who did it better. Batman or Superman. Nirvana or David Bowie. Cats or dogs.

When I awoke again, I didn't know where I was at first and panicked. It was pitch dark, and the dank smell was nauseating and unfamiliar; it was also depressingly cold.

Reality struck that I was in the tornado shelter, underground somewhere in Gothenburg.

We hadn't driven long enough to be too far out of the town center.

It was so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of my face, so I blindly felt in the dark for the hanging string attached to the light, and once I found it, I pulled and jumped in fright when it flicked on.

But who flicked it off? I didn't hear anyone come in. The thought of someone creeping about while I was asleep was one concern, but the other was why I slept so profoundly that I didn't wake.

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I think you need to move me to a new location,” I told Mikael when he arrived with my dinner, avoiding his eye because I was still a little embarrassed about him watching me having sex with Ronan.

“Several hours of sex noises are starting to get on my nerves, especially when I’m alone.

” A bashful chuckle exuded from my mouth, and I pressed my fingers over my lips to shut me up.

Gosh, I acted like such a loser when I was in his presence.

That’s what he did to me. His boss's man energy and killer stare rendered me weak and useless.

“Do you like seafood?” he asked, as the sweetness in his tone made me flinch because he was usually so severe.

And there was no sign in his eyes that he was reflecting on the last time he saw me.

Or more accurately, the last time he saw my bare ass getting shagged by his loyal right-hand man.

Jeez, what did I look like from that angle?

Bouncy dimples ass. I bet he's seen the most beautiful women in the world naked, then lowered himself to looking at my ass.

"Um," I pulled my focus back to the covered plate. I wasn't overly hungry because I stuffed my face with potato chips and haven't used up the excess energy. I think the excess calories were still sitting in my stomach. "What sort of seafood? And any word on Gunner?"

"Crab cakes. And no. We're conducting a plan," he kept his answers short.

"Oh, I haven't had crab cakes before," I suppressed a cringe. The only crab cakes I've seen were the cheap frozen ones from the grocery store that didn't look too appetizing.

"First time for everything," he exhaled as if the world was on his shoulders, then retreated to the door, where I thought he was going to leave me.

"So," I desperately wanted him to stay, just for the company. Riley enjoyed her own company, but Annika wasn't that good at it, so she pretended. But there was a difference between being alone by choice and being alone by force.

But he stepped out, brought in a cane basket, and placed it in the corner. "Laundry. Clean and folded."

"Wow," I gasped. "That's impressive. It was only..." He walked away as I spoke to him, reminding me of Gunner's lack of manners. It ran in the family because Lars was like that too, and it used to infuriate Sylvie at times. "Okay, bye."

The door shut behind him as I shook my head disapprovingly, not that he'd care if I disapproved of his behavior or not.

But my mind was still on Sylvie, causing a physical reaction of nausea and skin crawls.

That was why I worked hard to forget her the most, because she would be the most difficult to convince that I was worthy of forgiveness.

She was my foster mom and saved me from a life of ruin.

How could I possibly face her after what I did?

It occurred to me that Mikael didn't lock the door after he left, or at least I didn't hear him lock the door.

It wouldn't hurt to try the handle, I mean...

I already decided I wanted to stay with them, maybe not as their prisoner as part of their empire, so I wasn't going to run away.

However, it wouldn't hurt to test the handle to see if he, the big boss, screwed up.

Flinging the door open, I froze at the sight of narrowed eyes, looking down at me, not filled with fury like I'd expect, but amusement.

"You forgot to lock the door," I pointed out.

"I'm aware," he stated smoothly, gaze unflinching.

"Okay, so were you expecting me to escape, or...I mean, it's a bit irresponsible for the actual boss to leave the door unlocked."

"I answer to no one," he asserted, shooting me a dark look.



“What about Sylvie? Do you answer to her?” I pressed, curious about his reaction.

There was a tiny flinch in his face. It was only for a second, but it told me that Sylvie held some weight in his life.

She was his auntie and probably had little to do with her, since they lived in different cities, but I could tell that he also wouldn’t want to piss her off.

And who would be dumb enough to piss the Kaiser Queen?

Well...me. I was dumb enough to piss off the entire clan.

I pointed my finger at him after seeing the ever-so-slight recoil, and he was a little too cocky. “Ha! I knew it. Sylvie scares you.”

“No. She doesn’t,” he told me flatly.

“But you’re pleased you don’t live in the same city and work in the same club, though, aren’t you?” I challenged him.

He refused to reply, but his gaze shifted from warm fondness to icy cold suspicion, back to warm fondness again. Simmering Fall. I hate to think what thoughts were circling in that dark, beautiful head as his vibe turned icy cold.

I swallowed over a lump in my throat, suddenly thirsty for a cool drink.

“Why are you out there anyway?” It was a fair question, as he was lingering out here in the hall, but when a door opened and his gaze shifted to the woman who had just left the room, fear stormed through my body.

“Waiting,” he replied, levelly.

“Waiting for who?” My hands trembled as I started to think the worst.

In seconds, I’d convinced myself that he was waiting for a girl, maybe his favorite girl, to appear so he could follow her into one of these rooms so that he could fuck her. I was not enough for him.

“Do they give you special discounts?” I asked him.

He frowned, confused as his head cocked to the side. “Who?”

I nodded down the hall, so he understood what I meant without having to spell it out, but he still seemed perplexed. Or maybe he was faking it.

“About time,” he stated, gazing down the hall, sounding relieved, and I hesitated to look that way because I didn’t want to see the girl that he chose over me.

“It was awkward,” a calm, warm voice answered. Ronan was carrying a large box and had to turn to the side and shuffle so that the corners wouldn’t graze along the fancy, outdated wallpaper.

“What’s that?” I asked as he seemed to be bringing the box our way.

“A TV,” Mikael replied as if he should already know.

“As per order,” Ronan added as he shuffled into my room.

“Oh, was that why you were waiting out here?” I clarified with Mikael.

“Yes,” he answered slowly, always frowning just like Gunner. “I was waiting for Ronan to lug it up here, so we could install it for you.”

“Wow, thank you, but wait, why am I thanking you when you’re keeping me prisoner?” I argued, and he hushed me, ushering me back inside my room, then closed the door behind us.

“You asked for it, so...here we are,” he stated as a small smile appeared on his face as if he was proud to do a good thing for me.

When I matched his smile with my own, his smile vanished, and a flash of that cold severity appeared behind his eyes.

It must be hard for him to be in my presence when I remind him so much of all the bad stuff and what I did to him.

Ronan began pulling the television out of the box, and all the packaging came out with it as Mikael turned his attention to my dinner. “Have you tried a crab cake yet?”

“No,” I replied. “I’ve been distracted.”

“It’ll go cold if you don’t eat it. And I’m not taking it all the way down to the kitchen to warm it back up for you,” he said scornfully.

I swallowed nervously and sat on the edge of the bed next to the bedside table where he had left the covered plate. I was reluctant to try crab cakes in front of him, fearing I might hate them. I’ve never been fussy about food, but I did know what I liked and disliked.

“Are you planning to keep me here long-term?” I asked to distract him from my meal that I hadn’t touched.

“You keep asking me that, and I keep giving you the same answer. I haven’t decided what I’m going to do with you yet, so it’s better to have you where we can keep an

eye on you,” his voice growled as he spoke that even Ronan glanced up to read his expression, “rather than out there where you can go running to the Larsson cops.”

“I swear I’ll never go back to them. I have no loyalties to them,” I tried to convince him, but he shrugged nonchalantly as if it didn’t matter what I said; he wouldn’t believe me.

Ronan’s phone rang just as he was unraveling the electric cord, and he checked the name flashing up on the screen before excusing himself from the room. I noticed that he shot Mikael a sharp look as he left, as if the caller was someone important.

Mikael followed him out, and I then focused on the covered plate. He’d be disappointed in me if I didn’t try it. If I didn’t like the taste, maybe I could hide it under the bed.

I removed the silver cover from the plate and was pleasantly surprised by the meal before me. I had imagined a soft, mayonnaise-smeared slab of crab meat, but instead, it was fried and crispy, and it looked and smelled delicious.

“It looks like you were right about Betty,” Mikael’s voice shuddered down my spine. I didn’t notice him walk back in, and it looked as though Ronan had left.

“You’ve got evidence?” I asked, looking up at that chiseled face as he stood over me. He liked standing over me, imposing his authority because he could see the way he made me nervous, and he liked it.

His nostrils flared. “Let’s just say, we found who she was,” he said, picking up a silver fork and using the side to cut a small piece of the crabcake.

“Who was she? Are you saying she’s not a cop?” I enquired, hoping he’d give me more information than little hints dropped every so often. “Have you heard from

Gunner yet?”

“So many questions and none of it is your concern,” he told me as he dug the prongs of the fork into the piece of crab cake. I assumed he was going to swallow it, but instead, he held the fork an inch from my mouth, prompting me to eat it.

“Why did you bring it up then, if you weren’t going to tell me more. Was she a cop? No. Wait. She must’ve been,” I rationalized outwardly, before taking the piece of crab cake in my mouth and chewing it. “Hmm, yum, that’s good.”

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“Ronan is talking to our contact now, who will give us more information,” he said as he cut another piece using the side of the fork while a cloud of his cologne infiltrated me.

I let a sigh and immediately regretted it when cruel mischievousness danced behind his eyes. “It tastes so good,” I affirmed, so he realized that the sigh was for the taste of the crab cake and not anything to do with him, even though that’s a lie.

I parted my lips and took the second piece of crab cake as my gaze refused to move from his smug face.

“Good,” he said quietly.

“Is this a secret fetish?” I enquired as I chewed on the crispy as those dark eyes watched my lips move. “Feeding your prisoner off the fork.”

“I wouldn’t call it a fetish,” he said without flinching at my accusation. Nothing penetrated that confident armor.

“You don’t have a secret horde of hungry women in the basement that you go down and hand-feed every evening?” I pressed. “Like some little ritual thing.”

A smile stretched across his face that I took as a win. When I made Gunner and Mikael smile, it was because they genuinely found me funny. It was one of the best gifts, men who rarely smiled to light their faces up in a smile, even if it lasted two seconds before it disappeared again.

“That would be more trouble than it’s worth,” he said brutally honestly. “Besides, one prisoner was enough work, let alone several.”

I snorted, and his eyebrows cocked, and that deep scowl smoothed out as his gaze softened as it ran over my lips and eyes. “Am I more trouble than I’m worth?” I pressed to see how he’d react.

“Definitely,” he replied without hesitation, and then sliced another piece of crab cake for me to take off the fork.

“You’d make a great father,” I told him, and that scowl returned, and maybe I’d inadvertently discovered Mikael Kaiser’s trigger spot, so naturally, the smartest thing to do was to push it more. “Have you thought about marriage? Ever fallen in love?”

“I spent the last years in prison,” he reminded me. Why did he have to ruin the moment by bringing that up?

“So...you didn’t meet anyone that was marriage material in the penitentiary then?” I kept mocking him to see how far I could take it, curious to find his snapping point.

He rolled his eyes as that scowl turned into a mix of entertainment and annoyance. “I should be angrier at you,” he seethed as he chopped a larger piece of crab cake, and I knew by the aggression behind his movements that he had plans.

“Why aren’t you angrier? Why haven’t you knocked me off and buried my body under the club?” I asked him straight as he held that larger piece on the fork in front of my lips.

“Under the club? You don’t bury bodies under the club as that would incriminate us, wouldn’t it? Dumb move,” he said with a twinkle in his eye. “It’s wiser to cut off the hands and feet and remove the teeth, then bury the body outside the city, a place we

never go.”

“Wow, was that satire or dark humor or-” He brushed the piece of crab cake against my lips, and I refused to take it into my mouth, so he pressed it slightly harder against my lips, and a small piece dropped off and fell into my lap.

“Are you being defiant?” he snarled as the heat peeled off him, blistering my cheeks. I bet my face was as red as a raspberry, and he likely viewed my rise in anxiety as a win.

“Yes,” I replied bravely, shooting poisonous darts from my eyes at him. “I can feed myself.”

“I’m aware. Open your mouth,” he demanded coldly as his patience seemed to be running thin.

Again, I refused to open my mouth, and he crushed the crab cake against my skin. I stared at his face as he did so, as waves of annoyance mixed with bemusement that I dared disobey.

“After you’ve sacked Betty, or whatever you’re going to do with her...you should hire me instead,” I stated bluntly, pulling a smile out of that face again.

“Ah, really? You think you can do her job?” he questioned.

I began, “I think this place needs a refresher, update the décor and-”

“Update the décor? That won’t bring more members into the club, Annika. Updating the décor won’t make the members spend more money,” he explained in a condescending tone, like I was a child, and that pissed me off.



“I’ve had time to think about how you can improve this place with my help,” I explained hopefully. “Updating the décor was just one idea. Another idea is changing the location of the kitchen, so it’s closer to the dining area.”

His penetrating gaze locked onto my eyes, and I refused to look away, challenging him on his intimidating stance. His hand found my mouth, and he smeared the piece of crab cake over my mouth, as I licked it off. Then he slipped two fingers inside my hungry mouth, and I began to suck hard.

He bit his bottom lip as a dangerous ravenousness colored his stare, and as he pulled wet fingers out of my mouth, I kept my lips parted, eager for him to claim my mouth with his. But instead, he placed the fork back down on the plate and started walking to the door.

“I’m part of the family,” I called after him. “You could let me into the family business. I swear I’ll work hard. C’mon, Mikael. Please. I’ll be great for the business.”

The door shut behind him, leaving me reeling for more. More of their touch. More of their time and company. Breath escaped my mouth as I grabbed a whole crab cake from my plate and bit the crispy edge, chewed as my mind cluttered with thoughts.

Damn. I didn’t succeed in convincing him, yet, but I’ll keep trying. I always liked a good challenge.

As I pointed out to him, I am part of the family. I might not be blood-related, but I am family —a Kaiser through and through, whether they were willing to admit it or not.

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Mikky appeared from behind the bookshelf, the secret door that led up to the Red Velvet rooms, as I sat on the leather couch, staring at the floor after my conversation with Danny.

My head was spinning as to what to do with this latest piece of information, and what was the best way to manage Betty.

“Why didn’t he phone me?” Mikky asked as he took his phone from his pocket, then realized that the battery was dead. “I made you the second contact on the list.”

“And? What did Danny dig up on Betty?” he inquired. “Going by the glum expression on your face, our suspicions have been proven correct.”

“I just feel bad, man,” I exhaled in an attempt to relieve the burden weighing down on my chest. “Didn’t Lars do a background check on Betty before hiring her?”

“We poached her from the Larsson club, stealing Sylvie’s most valuable staffer, so we already knew she was loyal,” Mikky answered abruptly. “She’s been working for the family businesses for twenty years or more. There was no need to do a background check on her to hire her to manage this place.”

“What about when Sylvie and Lars hired her in the first place?” I pressed because none of this made sense to me. “Was there a background check done on her then?”

Mikky shrugged his shoulders. “I was only a kid back then. What have you got on her?”

“She was born here in Gothenburg,” he started.

“Seriously? I thought she was a Larsson native, well, I assumed she was a Larsson native because her grandmother was living with her, until she died.” Mikky narrowed his eyes as he spoke, as if hunting for memories in his mind. “I thought she was solid.”

“Did Lars poach her, or did Betty offer to move here?” I asked him because it mattered whether it was his idea or not.

“I wasn’t part of the conversation, but I remembered Lars saying before we purchased this place for a bargain price that we should steal Betty from the Larsson club.

And I remember scoffing, assuming he was joking, as Sylvie would hit the fucking roof, because they were so tight.

I mean...Sylvie and Betty were good friends...

” he trailed off again as he found a spot on the wall and stared at it as if he were a million miles away.

“Close friends. Sylvie practically viewed Betty as part of the family, a sister, even, because she grew up in the club and became an integral part of the business.”

“Danny went through the footage from our security camera at the back entrance, down the alleyway, but the footage had been erased like the CCTV at the front entrance,” I explained to him.

“But he discovered there was CCTV on the bus stop that Annika would use after her shift. He had it checked and discovered that Judith and Betty had met in the shadows on three occasions in the past month. He’ll send us the footage if we want to view it.

”

“No,” he shook his head as fury rose in him, still staring at that spot on the wall. “No need.” He wavered for a few seconds, deliberating, before stating, “Get Betty in my office. ASAP.”

“Right on,” I replied, leaping to my feet. “You’re going to confront her?”

“I’ll ask her some questions and watch her slowly as he tries to answer them,” he answered, stepping out of the lounge, walking like a man on a mission, and everyone should get the fuck out of the way of that train.

I followed behind him until he ran up the stairs to his office, while I continued onwards to the kitchen area. She wasn’t in the kitchen, which was unsurprising, so I poked my head into the office, and it was empty as it was busy in the club, and all hands were on deck.

Perhaps I walked past her when I stormed through the casino, but I did glance about searching for that deadly straight ponytail.

When I turned the corner from the hallway into the grand entrance area, a girl was alone behind the desk, attending to members as they arrived.

I stepped in behind the desk to assist with signing in and out, hanging coats, and storing valuables that guests didn’t want to take into the club in our safe.

When I had a spare moment, I quietly asked her if she’d seen Betty.

“She said she had to head home to pick up something,” she whispered, but that was some time ago, and I haven’t seen her return.

Panic shivered down my spine. Damn it. We wanted to play down our suspicions of her until we knew for sure, so she didn't flee. Once the line of members was cleared, I stepped away from the front desk and walked quickly, without raising an alarm, into the casino to search for her properly.

When I couldn't see her, I raced into the bar and dining area and spotted Freddie chatting to a table of members who were in a cloud of cigar smoke. I caught his attention, and he cruised over to me with a wary expression on his face.

"Have you seen Betty?" I asked quietly.

"Not for a couple of hours," he replied. "Did you speak with Mr. Dalgety?"

"Who?" It took me a few seconds to grasp who he was talking about. Not Mr. Dalgety, his real name was Sergeant Tindale, but Freddie wouldn't know that. "Oh, yes, him. It was fine. Did Betty tell you that she had to go home to pick something up?"

He shook his head. "No, but it's a full house, and I've been busy schmoozing the guests. Why? What's happened?"

"Ah, we may have lost Betty," I mumbled under my breath, giving little away.

He hesitated and shuffled nervously on his feet. "Listen, I've been wanting to talk to you and Mikeal about-

"Do me a favor," I interrupted. "Call Betty to find out where she is. Just make something up that the staff were looking for her."

"Sure," he replied, as jazz music played softly in the background and I scanned the bar and diners to ensure that nothing was out of place.

“Betty,” Freddie spoke into the phone. “Are you in the club somewhere, as the kitchen staff are looking for you?” Then he swiped off. “I left a message. And ah about Betty...”

I started walking away from him toward the stairs to inform Mikky that we might have a problem with Betty’s whereabouts. “Yeah, don’t worry about her. We’ll get it sorted.”

“I’ve been concerned about her for a while, Ronan,” he said, walking quickly beside me. “And wasn’t sure how to tell you since you’re so close with her.”

“Really?” I stalled and turned to face him so I could read his expression, just as a waitress moved past us, and I realized we were in a bad place to have a quiet conversation. “Come up to Mikky’s office.”

“Sure,” he hesitated, because he shouldn’t leave the floor.

“We’ll be quick,” I promised him, and we spoke in the viewing lounge so that you could oversee the floor.

“Alright,” he answered, but he seemed nervous.

“Let me ask you something,” I began, eager to ask him a question that’s been bothering me. “Dalgety?”

“Yeah,” he answered, saying little.

“You know we don’t like people visiting Mikael without clearance unless Mikael organized it himself, so why did you arrange for Dalgety to see him?” I rationalized as we dashed up the stairs, but I then stopped halfway to scan the floor searching for Betty, while waiting for Freddie to answer.

“You think she’s gone, don’t you. Done a runner?” he questioned as we turned to climb the rest of the stairs.

“It doesn’t look good,” I stated as I opened the door and turned down the hallway toward Mikky’s office.

“Dalgety,” I prompted him to answer the question that he seemed to be avoiding.

“He came in the front entrance and told the receptionist that he insisted on seeing Mikael Kaiser. As you know, we train the girls to take their details, and we may or may not pass the message on. When he showed his badge stating that he was from the Gothenburg PD, she came and got Betty, but she wasn’t at her desk.

“However, I was at mine, so she asked me what to do. It was pure luck, because if Betty were there instead of me, then I don’t know what would’ve happened, although he was persistent so that he wouldn’t have gone away that easily.”

“Anyway,” he continued as I knocked on Mikky’s door and heard his voice calling me from the viewing lounge.

“He said he wanted to speak to Mr. Kaiser about the whereabouts of Gunner Kaiser and Riley Laws, so I freaked out. I wasn’t sure who Riley Laws was, but I assumed she was a girlfriend, and maybe they had run away together or worse... Is Gunner missing?”

“Yes,” I replied, “but we have it all under control.” We walked into the smoke-filled viewing lounge, where Mikael looked distant and glum, cringing when he saw Freddie there.

“What’s happened?” he knew. He just knew something wasn’t right.

“We can’t get hold of Betty and can’t find her on the floor,” I told him. “And Freddie is here to talk to us about a few things that have been concerning him.”

“About Betty?” Mikky pressed.

“Yeah,” encouraging me to take a seat in the leather armchair, while I stood guard at the door, staring out the window across the casino and bar, still searching for that black ponytail, even though my mind was with Annika as it always was these days.

I left the television half unpacked in her room, which was a great excuse to return and see her.

“Is Gunner okay?” Freddie asked, panicked.

“We think so,” I answered, although I honestly didn’t know what his physical state was like.

“It’ll be over very soon anyway,” Mikael added confidently and flicked me a look as if he had decided on how we’re going to get him back. He’d tell me later.

“Anyway,” I encouraged Freddie, “Dalgety first.”

“I made the appointment for him to see you, but decided to use a fake name, so Betty wouldn’t know he was a cop because I didn’t trust her, and she’s had a slight grudge for you guys for a while,” he explained evenly.

“So, we changed his name, and I arranged the appointment. I was worried whether I did the right thing or not.” He hesitated, then added, “Did I do the right thing?”

“Yes,” I affirmed hastily. “Now, tell us about Betty having a grudge for us.”



“I might be exaggerating, but I’ll let you decide, but it started when Mikael came back; before then, she was practically running the place along with Ronan.

“I thought at first that she was bitter having to take a backseat in decision-making again, but that didn’t make sense either.

She’d disappear, then reappear, have secret meetings, and change her schedule.

It was out of character for her as she was so reliable without a fault.

I had a suspicion that she was behind the rat problem, as CCTV cameras were removed and replaced with duds or footage wiped from the working cameras.

It was several small things that, when you add them up, were significant and unfortunately led back to her. ”

I nodded, listening intently as I kept watching the club floor to spot that jet black ponytail, but I knew instinctively that she was gone. Long gone.

“Is that it?” Mikky seemed unimpressed, as if it wasn’t much to worry about.

“There was one more issue that occurred a few months ago, before you returned from...” he refused to utter the word prison as if it were shameful. “There was money going missing from the petty cash and the bar till.”

I grunted in surprise. “You didn’t tell me about that?”

“It was resolved quickly once I was informed and the money was replaced,” he assured me.

“Who would be dumb enough to steal from the Kaisers?” I growled, annoyed that the

power that I wielded while Mikky was in prison didn't scare them enough.

They were aware that I had business meetings with Mikky every week, so they knew he was the one who made the call if someone needed to be dealt with.

"Who replaced the money?" Mikky asked, frowning, possibly hoping that it wasn't money moved from another club account. "And how much was it?"

Fred's complexion reddened. "A few thousand," he answered, shrugging, trying not to turn it into a big deal.

"And where did the money come from?" I repeated the first question because it was evident that he was avoiding answering it.

Freddie swallowed and wriggled uncomfortably in his seat.

"Was it your money?" Mikky asked accusingly. "Did you replace it with your own money?"

His complexion reddened even more as tiny beads of sweat coated his top lip. His Adam's apple bobbed in his throat as he swallowed.

Mikky looked up at me from the armchair, "Organize a transfer to repay Freddie. Today."

"No problem," I replied, noting it in my phone to remind me.

"There's no need," Freddie stated, holding his hand, looking embarrassed.

"Too late. It's done," Mikky ordered. "Now, who stole the money in the first place?"

“He’s gone,” he pointed out. “I pushed him out quietly.”

“Wait,” I halted the conversation. “Was that the senior bartender who left unexpectedly, leaving us short-staffed several months ago?”

“Yes,” he sighed.

“You covering him?” I pressed, slightly annoyed, but I understood where he was coming from.

“I dealt with the problem. No hassle. You didn’t even know, so...” he argued, holding his own.

Fair enough. That’s why we hired Freddie and Betty to make problems go away, until one of them became a problem. “What’s that got to do with Betty?”

“Betty was romantically involved with him,” he told us. “They were very discreet, and it was impossible to tell at work, so I turned a blind eye to it. Besides, she was a manager, like I am, so I didn’t have seniority over her.”

“So, she broke that rule as well,” Mikky stated scathingly. “Why would junior staff behave and follow the rules if senior staff don’t?”

“But she said she was very embarrassed about his thieving and broke off their relationship, but I think she was lying, so I’d drop it. And I did. It was never mentioned again,” he said sternly.

Silence fell as I reflected on this new information and a previously unknown aspect of one of our most valuable staff members. Mikky grew distant as Freddie rose to his feet, eager to get back on the floor.

“Anyway,” he said as he stepped toward me, and I moved out of the way so he could leave.

“Even though she is very good at keeping her private life private and never bringing her grievances to work, I have a hunch that he is still in the picture and...” he paused to gather his thoughts, but I could predict what he was about to say.

“I think he and she conspired in the rat dump, working with an outside group.”

“Yeah, we know who that is,” I mumbled under my breath as I patted him on his shoulder as he moved past. “Thanks for that, Freddie. I’ll sort out the money transfer later.”

“Sure. Thanks,” he said proudly.

## Page 22

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

“Where are you going?” I asked Ronan as he wandered down the hall to the elevator, bypassing his office, “To finish setting up the television in Annika’s room.”

Huh, that’s where his mind was at. “I’ll do it,” I offered, and a smirk slid across his face.

“Are you sure? You do hate her, remember,” he mocked, and I shot him a sharp look to hide my smile. “I’m distracting myself.”

“From what?” he pushed with a wry look on his face.

“Calling Sylvie,” I replied, and he snorted in laughter as he disappeared into his office.

“Have you decided what action you’re going to take with Gunner?” he called after me.

A heavy sigh left me, trying to shift the brick of stress on my shoulders. “Yep,” I answered.

I was prepared to let Betty go for now, but Gunner and the impending overreach from the Larsson cop and her collusion with the Ivanov family won’t stop until they’re destroyed.

So, my decision was based on the best outcome for us, and eliminating all our enemies to govern our fought-for and won territories was the objective.

The Velvet rooms were in full swing as the girls politely greeted me as I walked into their lair, hoping I might dabble in their game. But no, my attention and desires were elsewhere, to the girl at the end of the hall.

Why her?

There were thousands of other options, more attractive and classier than her, so why do I keep returning to the girl who screwed me over? The little liar.

Trepidation flooded my body as I loomed closer to her room, my cock pressed against the front of my pants, so I paused to calm my shit. It surprised and disappointed me that my body reacted this way to the thought of touching her.

Sylvie was right, maybe I needed therapy after my prison term because this behavior was out of character for me.

Why pursue her when my usual taste was an expensive whore with shiny, smooth legs that went on forever and an empty smile?

When I was done with a whore, I felt no guilt or responsibility toward her, but for some reason, my feelings toward Annika were different.

After taking a few seconds to compose myself, I unlocked her door and stepped inside to find it empty. I scanned the room as panic rose and noticed the empty TV box in the corner, while the TV was erected and plugged into the wall, ready for use.

The sound of flowing water pulled me to the bathroom door, relieved that she was in there bathing and hadn't escaped.

It surprised me how my body reacted to the possibility of her escaping from us and disappearing again.

I was beginning to forgive her for what she did because she was only a kid, but if she did it again, I wouldn't be so charitable.

There was only one slab of wood between me and that naked body, and my rising heat prompted me to try the handle. It was unlocked, so I pushed the door open to step into the steam-filled space, which was infused with the floral scent of her shampoo.

There was standing there in the shower, completely naked, skin glistening wet, eyes squinting from the water flowing into them, dark hair saturated and glued to her skin.

With my gaze raking over her body, I removed my shoes, then my socks, unbuckled my belt, and waited for her to notice that Lars Kaiser had arrived.

As I began to untuck my white shirt, that's when she glanced up and screamed, "Oh my god, you scared me." Her instinctive reaction was to cover her breasts and pussy with her hands. I silently step in, fully clothed, seize her wrists, and hold them above her head.

"You should've knocked," he hissed angrily. "I'm entitled to some privacy."

"You should've locked the bathroom door," I argued calmly.

"The lock doesn't work," she snarled back at me, wrestling with my grip.

"I'll get it fixed later," I informed her, even though I might conveniently forget because I enjoyed walking in on her when she least expected it. She was, after all, my prisoner, not a guest at a hotel. "If I remember."

I lowered my mouth to claim hers, and she defiantly turned her head away. "Your clothes are getting wet," she states angrily.

“Wrong. They are already wet, and turn your face around. I want to look at you,” I insisted.

But she kept her head turned, wearing a tiny smirk as if she believed she was winning. No, girl, you don't win when I'm your competitor.

I pushed my hard crotch into her, so she was caged entirely by my body, and she gasped, still refusing to look at me. My hands were busy, holding her wrists above her head, so all I had left was my mouth, so I nibbled at her neck, making her shiver, writhe beneath my hold.

“Can you feel how hard I am?” I whispered into her ear, then seized her earlobe between my teeth and bit down, drawing another exhilarated gasp from her succulent mouth.

“No,” she snapped ruthlessly and pressed her abdomen into my crotch as she tried to get away from me, but she was a contradiction. Her face and body were melting in desire and enjoyment, but her words spat venomously. The body spoke the truth, while her mouth lied.

My hips rolled as I gyrated into her shimmering body while continuing to nibble the curve of her neck. Her right leg lifted and curled around the back of my thighs as I pressed harder into her as she wriggled and sighed beneath me.

“I hate you,” she whined as if in pain, which made me gleeful and hornier

“Good,” I spoke into her skin, dripping in warm water.

I quickly released my grip on her wrists, and before she had a chance to do anything, I flipped around, so her breasts were pressed against the shower wall and her perky was available and all mine.



“Oh, you’re a butt man,” she breathed as I unbuttoned and unzipped my fly, unleashed my hungry cock, standing up like a rod.

Seizing her wrists again, I held them above her head, and she wriggled her butt cheeks as if desperate for me to fill her up. Shower water dribbled down my face as my white shirt stuck to my skin, practically transparent.

My cock wanted to penetrate her tight hole, but I didn’t have lube, and even though I usually wouldn’t care, with her, something inside of me didn’t want to hurt her. Pushing boundaries was fun, until I inflicted pain where the light vanished from her eyes. I didn’t want that for her.

Even though I created seething hatred in my mind of the girl who betrayed the Kaiser family and would lie on my thin prison mattress, imagining hunting her down and destroying her.

One thing that kept me going night after night was the thought of one day, wrapping my hands around her throat and squeezing the lifeblood from her deceitful body.

But that was before I met her in the flesh and listened to the sweet tone of her voice, inhaled the scent of her hair, and grazed my hand across her cheek.

Back then, I viewed the little liar as subhuman, a thing that must be destroyed.

Now, I see life behind her eyes that I’d find impossible to extinguish.

Clamping my forearm over her wrists, I could free one hand so that I could run my fingers along her butt crack. Sighs and moans filled the air under the sound of falling water, as I whispered, “little liar, you fucking little liar,” into her ear.

“I’m sorry,” she cried.

“How sorry?” I asked, as I reached the front of her, found her clit, and massaged it.

“Very sorry, Mr. Kaiser.” Her tone was naughty, and I loved it as I could feel her body weakening under my touch.

“How sorry?” I tormented her. She couldn’t see my face, but it was impossible to wipe this smirk off my face. The little liar had no idea what she did to me.

“So sorry. What can I do to make it up to you?” she breathed heavily as her cheek was squashed against the shower wall, slightly stifling her voice.

“This,” I slipped my cock inside her wet pussy and began pounding hard, showing no mercy. “This...” pump, pump, pump, “this is how you make it up to me. Understand?”

“Yes,” she replied, pushing her butt against me.

“Will...you...obey...me?” I asked in between thrusts, then began pummeling her faster.

She hesitated as she was too busy gasping with each thrust. “No,” she finally replied.

My hand immediately found her butt cheek, and I squeezed, digging my fingers as my hips kept up the pace.

My finger then wormed into her tight hole, warming it up for another time, where I will claim it with my cock.

I moved my finger in and out before aggressively shaking it within the firm anal walls, then pulled it out as her sighs and gasps began to become higher-pitched and more frantic as she propelled toward climaxing.

“No?” I questioned, even though I could tell she was teasing me. No one said no to Mikael Kaiser. No one.

I pressed both hands against the shower wall, still caging the little liar in, not that she was in a hurry to leave, since we were attached and bound. Adjusted my position slightly as she poked her butt out a little to align with my cock.

Then I finished her off by whacking her hard, hammering as she tipped her head back and wailed, joining in with the surrounding sex noises in the other rooms.

I came inside her as her body clamped down on my cock and then kept moving as her climax died down. My body pressed against her, arms wrapped around her vulnerable, wet frame, then pulled away when I realized what I was doing.

“I didn’t think being affectionate was your thing,” she teased as I pulled out of her and stepped out of the shower.

“I wasn’t being affectionate,” I argued, turning away so she couldn’t see the smug look on my face. “I tripped and you cushioned my fall.”

She snorted in laughter. “Tripped? What did you trip over? Your big penis.”

I swallowed back laughter and picked up her towel, unfolding it. “Hurry up and get out.”

“I haven’t finished washing my hair,” she told me, but I didn’t believe her. I suspect she was trying to be defiant again.

“Fine,” I replied bluntly, dropping the towel on the floor and stepping to the door.

“Your clothes are soaking wet,” she yelled after me, stating the obvious as each step

left a footprint on the carpet.

“I’m aware,” I mumbled to myself.

“You left your shoes behind,” she shouted, half laughing, as I caught myself in the mirror in the bedroom. Black hair, messy and soaking wet, white shirt so wet that I could see through it, and worst of all, a broad smile on my face.

It took me by surprise. I hadn’t seen myself look that happy for...well, since, actually, I couldn’t remember when I looked that happy before. I returned to the bathroom under swathes of her bubbly laughter that uplifted me as I left again, walking on air.

“Don’t trip over your cock again,” she yelled as I left her room, not giving a fuck that I looked like a saturated chump as I walked through the bar and restaurant, then the casino, up the stairs to my office.

Life was too damn good to care, until I landed in my chair in my office, and the reality of life’s burdens - Gunner, the Ivanovs, the Larsson cops came thundering back down again.

“Why are you wet?” Ronan asked, giving me a side-eye as if he could tell that I’d been up to mischief.

“Don’t ask,” I snapped, as I grabbed my car key to head back home to my apartment to change.

## Page 23

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

I knew I hadn't been in here long, but it felt long because I had nothing to do but think.

Naturally, the worst scenarios came to mind.

The GPS signal dropping out or the club getting hit by the Ivanov family and Annika, Ronan, and Mikael getting shot, or the cops screwing over us again and arresting everyone, leaving me to die here.

With Annika locked in her room, the cops or the Ivanov family might not find her, so she could be our only hope if she could get out.

Wait. I was making up stories from thin air, and I needed to stop it, but it was so cold in here that I had to do something to take my mind off my shivering body.

I forced myself to rise from the chair and feel my way in the dark because I didn't want to waste the lightbulb.

So, I started pacing again to keep warm, jogging a few strides before turning around and jogging a few steps back again.

When warmth infiltrated my body, I sat back down until I was cold again, then repeated the exercise. Star jumps, squats, and push-ups were great at invigorating my body and raising my temperature. Then I'd sit back again.

Annika was on my mind at every moment, with every step and every inhale of dank air.

It's always the Riley version of Annika that I see, wearing glasses, dark hair, furrowed brow, nerdy bookhugger.

It was Annika, disguised as Riley, that I fell for.

I mean...I had already had a crush on Annika before she vanished, but this new version, even though it was fake, I found attractive.

So, the girl in glasses was always alone, unless she was with that Ivanov geek. It was her I was obsessed with, and it's her I wanted to get to.

I closed my eyes and folded my arms across my chest, listening out for sound.

Then I snapped them open again when I heard scratching and assumed, at first, that a rat had found its way in here.

But spotted a flash of light under the crack in the door, and I felt my way in the dark up the steps to peer underneath.

I could hear footsteps crunching in the grass outside the door, then the light flashed underneath again, and the door rattled as someone tried the handle.

It was probably security personnel checking the land with a flashlight, and they soon disappeared. So, I felt my way down the stairs and landed in the chair, and spent the next few moments staring at nothing in the darkness.

My eyes dropped closed, and my head fell back onto the back of the armchair.

My mind traveled to Annika, spooning in her bed, warm bodies pressed together, and a cozy, warm feeling came over me.

Half of me was aware that it wasn't happening for real, but I sank into the illusion in my mind and bathed in her heavenly scent and touch and let the dream world consume me.

My hand gently stroked her bare forearm as she slept, unmoving as gentle sighs floated into the air, and I felt so close to her, yet she was so far away. My body sinks further into this paradise, becoming detached from the smells and sounds in my environment.

A wicked hand brushes along the front of my pants, cupping my bulge and rubbing. Her hand crept into my pants, and I pulled my sweats down so that she could go hard. The rubbing increased as the pressure began to build.

Engulfed by Annika's naked tits, ass, and wet hole as her hand whacked me faster as the pressure built some more. I was so hungry for her warm, wet mouth over cock, sucking me until I creamed into her mouth, then I'd hold her until we fell asleep.

When I pounced on her as she was walking through the park in the dark, I cut a hole in her jeans and fucked her.

She loved it. Even though she was wary of my unpredictable behavior, she succumbed to my heat and let me do what I wanted.

She came. She always climaxed and shuddered over my erection, dripping her juice.

Her hand stroked some more, but I wanted to fuck her and reached out to pull her close to me. But she escaped my grasp. I let her go once, and I refused to let her go again. Even if she fled, I'd hunt her down and convince her to stay with me...with us.

We had everything she needed. Not just money and a home, but love...the love from family and the love from me and Ronan. We'd give her the world, so why would she

leave us? We could give her everything.

Okay, so maybe she might be annoyed that we kidnapped her and held her hostage...but she'd forgive us.

Her hand kept stroking me as the pressure built at the base of my scrotum; it felt so fucking good. I grunted with each touch as her fingers played with the tip of cock and then squeezed my balls as I let out a groan.

I was in her room, not the room in the hall, but now in her bed in the room at the club. The room that we kept her captive in. Sinking into her mattress, legs wrapped around my waist, shagging, creaking bed, sighs, and moans. Plenty of light and warmth in a room with no windows.

She lifted her leg and straddled it onto my shoulder, as I altered my position to drive downward. Long, slow strokes. In and out. Out and in. The pressure in my scrotum builds some more, then a little more, until a cannon is fired and magnificent release into her soaking pussy.

I jolt awake, slightly disoriented.

“Annika?” I called in the dark.

Dripping water nearby, the smell of damp dirt, the air stale and dense. I wasn't where I should be.

“Annika?”

I stood up and felt something warm and wet on my lap and realized my cock was in my hand. Confused and downhearted, I tucked it away and scrutinized the room I was in.



Then it dawned on me where I was, and the sex I just had wasn't with Annika, but it was just me jacking off., and my cock alone in this depressing shelter.

I sat back down, hugged my body as the cold started to set in, and closed my eyes again, hoping to arrive back in bed with Annika, where it's nice and warm.

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

Gunner,” I mouthed with my eyes closed as a warm body next to me wriggled.

I bolted upright when I thought someone was in my room. I patted for Gunner to wake him, but his side of the bed was cold. And it occurred to me that I was in the room at the club, and Gunner was somewhere else.

I stared at the ceiling in the twilight, barely making out the grooves in the plasterboard and the floral wallpaper as I listened for the slightest of sounds.

Sometimes, underneath the sex noises and footsteps along the floorboards, I’d hear jazz music playing, like the music they played in the bar when girls danced.

Upbeat, fun music that made the members smile and buy more liquor, and they let their guard down, they’d spin the roulette wheel and spend or lose more money than they intended.

“Where are you, Gunner?” I whispered into the night.

No reply. “I hope you’re okay and not hurt.

Someone will come for you soon. Mikael and Ronan won’t let you down.

Of course, they won’t because you’re family.

They’d never abandon you, and even if it took months, they’d move oceans and destroy to find you.

” I swallowed. “That’s why I want to stay, Gunner.

I want to stay with you three and work my butt off to build your trust in me.

I promise, Gunner, I’ll never let you down, ever.

Not anymore, Gunner. I will never let any of you down, including Mikael, who...

well, is a bit intense, isn’t he. He needs to take a chill pill, and then maybe we could get along; he could even hire me to work here.

The four of us together can make it the best club in the country.

That’s my objective now. To make Savile, the best club in the entire country. ”

Silence.

“But where are you, Gunner?” I hissed. “Do Mikael and Ronan know where you are? I know it sounds insane, but if you can hear me, whisper my name in the dark?”

Silence.

“Okay, maybe that’s harder to do, and maybe you’re sleeping and can’t hear me talking to you telepathically. Yes, I know I could be going insane, Gunner, because I’m talking to myself, but thinking of you, hoping you can hear me. Let’s try something else. If you hear me, tap on the wall.”

Silence.

“Go on, Gunner.” I cupped my mouth and whispered-shouted, “Tap on the wall.”

Silence.

I closed my eyes again, sinking back into the mattress to sleep, only to snap my eyes back open when I heard a tap on the wall opposite. My body bolted upright and peered into the dark to see if someone was there.

“Oh my god, I am losing my mind,” I whispered out loud. I so desperately wanted Gunner to contact me that I imagined him tapping on the wall.

Was this the first sign of madness? Or maybe the room was creaking. Yes, that’s it. It is an old building made of wood, so naturally, the natural materials move and creak with changes in temperature and moisture.

The tapping repeated, and I sat up again and stared at the wall as if Gunner was going to appear like a ghost and take me in his arms. No movement, so I climbed out of bed and tiptoed to the wall and pressed my ear against the wallpaper. Then tapped to see if he’d return my fake Morse code.

When he did, I propelled backwards in fright, slamming into the edge of the bed and falling onto the mattress.

“Gunner?” I whispered as I rolled off the bed, then stepped toward the wall again. I pressed my ear against the wall, wondering if he was trapped inside, creating an entire scenario in my head that he had been hiding in the foundations of the club the whole time.

“What are you doing, Gunner?” I raised my voice because there was unlikely to be anyone here to hear me talking to myself, even though I wasn’t talking to myself, if Gunner were here.

“No,” a muffled male voice replied. “Gunner is not here.”

“Ronan?” I exclaimed as my heart fluttered, knowing that he was only a wall away, but disappointed that Gunner wasn’t here.

The lock clicked, and the door opened as his impressive figure moved in the dark, bringing with him a cloud of cologne and body heat. “How long have you been out there?”

“I’ve come and gone and maybe been here for a couple of hours, guarding the room,” his smooth voice filled the room and cocooned my body.

“It must be uncomfortable out there, so why don’t you come in when you have to guard me instead of sitting out there in the hallway?” I suggested.

I caught the movement of his shoulders shrugging as a warm hand took my hand in his, and I crumbled under his touch.

There were moments like this where I felt guilty for being so weak to their touches, but that’s what the Kaisers and Ronan did to me.

Ronan and I were outsiders, not blood-related, so we had a connection, if only I could convince him that I was worth keeping.

“I guess, I interpret standing guard to mean outside the prison cell,” he replied as I wrapped my arms around his solid body, breathing in his scent. “We’re not going to forget Gunner,” he promised.

“I know you’d never do that in a million years, but he was part of my life too...oh heck, have you told Sylvie yet?” I panicked, imagining how she’d react to her only son being stolen by the enemy or cops.

He scoffed. “No way, she’d kill us.” He hesitated for a few seconds as his hand ran

along my spine in a soothing, comforting way, rather than sexual. “Mikky has to call her about something else, so he’ll have to lie when she asks how her son is.”

I swallowed over a lump in my throat as the guilt for what I had done to this family may never leave me.

First, her husband was murdered in cold blood, then her nephew was wrongly arrested for his murder.

Yeah, I definitely fucked up, and the only way they’d forgive me was to blame my young, stupid age and being strong-armed by Bitchtective.

“Does she ever ask about me?” I rationalized, unsure if I wanted to hear his reply. “Sylvie, I mean, does she ever ask about me?”

He made a strange hissing noise, like a balloon letting out air, possibly debilitating as to how to answer my question.

“We haven’t told her that you’re with us.

She doesn’t know that we know of your whereabouts and that you’ve been under our noses the entire time.

We haven’t told her anything. Not even that you were under the witness protection program with a new persona. Yeah, we haven’t told her anything.”

“Did Mikael order you not to say anything?” I asked him as he broke our embrace, and cool air brushed over my cheeks.

“Go back to bed,” he ordered, gently grasping my wrist and leading me to the bedside.

“Will you stay for a while? Please?” I pleaded quietly.

“If you want me to,” he stated. “And yes, it was Mikky who told us to keep you a secret.”

“Why?” I kneeled on the mattress and crawled to the far side of the bed so that he could slip in beside me.

“Because the wrath of Sylvie was far worse than Lars and Mikky combined?” he said it lightheartedly in a joking sort of way, but I knew it wasn’t really a joke; otherwise, they would’ve told her.

“What do you think she’d do to me if she found out I was working in the club?” I asked as I snuggled down under the blankets.

He snorted in amusement, then swore under his breath. “I wouldn’t want to think about it.”

“Do you mean she might have me knocked off?” I kept pushing to see what he’d say. I was fully aware that they’re a crime family and that she’d have access to the same hitmen as Lars would.

“No comment,” he stated abruptly, and I cracked up laughing as his arms wrapped around my body and he nestled his chin into the curve of my neck. It was a grave matter, and I shouldn’t laugh, but with all the heavy drama that has been going on lately, it’s nice to see the funny side.

He didn’t seem in the mood for sex, which was good, because I was a little depleted from bonking his boss in the shower. Instead, he held me, and in the safety and warmth of his embrace, my eyes closed. As I listened to his breathing, he seemed to fall into a slumber.

Several moments passed where I lay still, pretending to be asleep, but my head was too busy with thoughts of Gunner, schooling that I was missing, Lars, the cops, and everything else.

“Why did you think I was Gunner?” Ronan questioned, which made me jump because I thought he was asleep. I bit my lip trying to come up with an explanation so I didn’t seem mad and delusional.

He continued as I lay still, “I heard you talking to Gunner. Perhaps you were half-asleep, sleepwalking, or something else. I heard what you said about how you are sorry and you’d do whatever it takes to make it up to us.”

Ronan exhaled and continued in a slur as if he was groggy and half-asleep, barely knowing what he was saying, “Annika? You’re asleep?”

No, I was wide awake, curious to hear what he was going to say next. He mumbled some more, moved his arm to scratch his face, feet grazed against mine, then fell still, followed by another exhale.

I thought he was done chatting, and I expected a light snore to fill the air, indicating that he was asleep. Then, he startled, which made me jump, but my racing heart was quickly soothed by a hand stroking my hair.

“I believe you,” he said, and I wondered what he was talking about.

“I believe you, Annika. When you said that you’d do anything to earn our trust, I believed you.

When you said you were sorry, I believed you.

” He paused and wriggled in the sheets. “When you said that you want to be part of



the business and part of the Kaiser family, I believed you.”

Something wet struck my cheek, and I realized that I was crying.

Pent-up emotions and the weight of guilt that I carried over the last three years started pouring down my face.

This was only the beginning, as I was well aware that I had a lot of work to do to convince Mikael, especially, not to mention Sylvie.

I’d work my butt off, work overtime for free, I’d let them check my phone so they knew I wasn’t secretly messaging the police. Whatever they asked of me, I’d do.

However, this was a significant first step because, despite everything else, Ronan believed in me.

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*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

Sylvie replied to the message I sent her last night with a time for us to have a conversation about some delicate matters. I wanted her to be alone and in private so no one could overhear the conversation, and I meant to organize schedules to align, so we were both free.

Naturally, she was curious to know what the problem was and called me immediately, but I was driving home, so I couldn't talk properly. Her tone was strained as if she was worried that I had bad news for her, then she asked if Gunner was okay.

She didn't need to worry about Gunner because he was being looked after better by Ronan and me than if he still lived in Larsson.

We treated him like a man, whereas she'd have him tied to her apron strings, turning him into a pussy.

I understood her concern, as after losing her husband, her grip on her son was tighter, but the boy needed space to grow into a man.

And now he's a good man, and we're going to keep it that way.

It was just after 11.30 AM as I sat in my leather armchair in my apartment, looking out across the city while I waited for her call.

I preferred speaking to her in the privacy of my home, rather than at work, because it could take a while.

We've left Freddie in charge of the midday dinner shift as Ronan had classes.

If there were any problems, then he needed to sort them out himself until I arrived.

Ronan informed me that Annika had been served her cooked breakfast, orange juice, and fresh coffee, like Rapunzel locked in the tower—only the best for our princess. When I arrive at the club, I'll serve her lunch, and maybe...?

My entire body lit up thinking of her in the shower, walking away sodden wet like I'd fallen in a pool, but I didn't care. I'd never felt so alive and happy in so long. The flurry of giggles that flooded the room as she called me back to grab the shoes I'd forgotten.

She'd make a great wife.

"What? Where did that come from?" I mumbled to myself, alone in my apartment.

"Now, I was thinking about marrying her? No. Don't get ahead of yourself, Mik.

Jeezus, don't get ahead of yourself. Besides, when I said she'd make a great wife, I wasn't meaning me.

She'd make a great wife for Gunner or Ronan, is what I meant. "

The phone started ringing, and Sylvie's name appeared on the screen. Thank fuck. Saved by the bell, so I didn't have to think about the wife slip-up.

"Good morning, Mikael," she said as soon as I swiped to receive the call. "Don't keep me in suspense as to why we're having this clandestine conversation."

A little shudder traveled down my spine at the icy tone drilled down the line.

She was expecting the worst, but had no intention of informing her about Gunner because we had a plan in place.

And she would hit the roof if I told her that we used her precious son as bait for the Ivanov scum to bite.

It worked, and we knew it would. The Ivanov family was predictable as fuck.

“Good morning, Sylvie,” I replied, trying to disguise the slight resentment in my tone for the fact that she terrified the bejeezus out of me. At the end of the day, she was Lars’s wife and still held considerable power in our family business. “How is everything in Larsson?”

“It was nice seeing my son when he briefly visited last month as part of the investigation. I notice that was the only time he visited,” she carried on with her rant, but I stopped listening.

I understood that she was a mother missing her only child, but Gunner was an adult and was capable of making his own decisions about where he wanted to spend his time.

But I knew that the real reason he didn’t visit her was because being there in Larsson and at the club reminded him of his father’s unsolved murder and the girl who screwed him over.

“Let’s cut to the chase,” I interrupted her rant about Gunner and the lack of communication and transparency between the two clubs. “There are two issues I want to discuss with you.”

“Go ahead,” she inserted in a slight, sarcastic tone, reminding me that I was beneath her in the family hierarchy. I ignored it, even though it annoyed me. “It sounds

serious.”

“Betty,” I started. “Do you remember doing a security check on her before hiring her in the Larsson club?”

“Of course,” she replied, baffled. “What has she done?”

“Vanished. We can’t find her. Tried calling her on her cell and sent someone around to her apartment, but no one was answering the door.”

“Is she unwell? Or under stress?” Naturally, Sylvie assumed there was a perfectly good reason for this odd behavior because Betty was flawlessly reliable. In fact, I couldn’t remember her calling in sick in the years she worked for my family.

“No. She is collaborating with the Ivanov family,” I told her bluntly, and a sarcastic scoff traveled down the line.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she hissed, sneering. “Betty? Our Betty? The Betty Lars stole from me. Impossible.”

“We have proof,” I asserted. “CCTV footage of Betty communicating not only with Larsson cops but with the Ivanov family, and when confronted about it, she vanished.” Silence fell down the line.

I wanted to analyze Sylvie’s reaction to see if she had anything to do with it, but she seemed genuinely shocked.

It would have been better if I had spoken to her in person, but I didn’t want to leave the city. “Hello. Sylvie? Are you there?”

“Yes,” she replied breathlessly. “I’m here. Oh. I’m just stunned. The Ivanov family

got to her.”

“Yes. We suspect she was lured by money and was still romantically involved with the bartender who was sacked for stealing a few months ago,” I explained dryly. “So, she hasn’t contacted you lately?”

“Months,” she answered, then paused a few moments as if she was struggling to digest it.

“I haven’t spoken to her for quite some time.

I missed her because we were friends as well as colleagues, but over time, communication grew less frequent, which was only natural since we weren’t working together anymore. ”

“I agree that it seems out of character for Betty, but we can only go by the evidence,” I told her.

“And the evidence leads us to the Ivanov family and the Larsson cops, who were behind.” I took a deep breath because I wasn’t sure if I should mention Annika, but she was deep in the middle of it, not by choice.

“Who was behind Annika’s protection program? ”

“Oh,” she made a sound as if clearing her throat. “I thought I’d never hear that name spoken ever again. I suppose she was working for both the Ivanov family and the police. The little brat.”

A brick of annoyance landed in my chest. “It wasn’t her fault,” I spoke quietly, not quite believing what I just uttered. I was sticking up for the girl who sent me to prison, but it wasn’t her fault. It was clear that she was frightened into it. “She was a

kid.”

The line fell dead again, but with a different vibe as if she was surprised that I succumbed to that view. “You’ve obviously had time to reflect while in prison.”

Wrong. I was burning with revenge every single day I was in that place.

It was her that I saw, even though I didn’t know her that well and couldn’t remember the features in her face or the movement in her walk, or the way she played with her hair.

I never paid any attention to the foster daughter of my uncle for good reasons.

She was a kid, and she was under the governance of Lars.

Ignoring her comment, I decided not to share what we know about Annika. I’d keep that piece of information for another day, as I knew she would find it difficult to understand. Keeping her out of the loop was convenient for now.

“Onto the next topic that I want to talk to you about,” I started, and she scoffed again, and I ignored it. I knew it annoyed her that I didn’t bite back over the prison comment.

The only way to move on is to allow myself to forgive and heal, and part of that healing involves spending time with Annika. Another part of the healing process was to find out who murdered Lars. At times, it felt like we were so close.

“Does the name Serg Popov mean anything to you?” I asked sternly, and again the line went dead. “Hello? Sylvie?”

“Yes, I’m here,” she said, sounding frustrated.

“Serg Popov, does that name sound familiar?” I pressed, then listened carefully to background noises, but it was quiet.

“Well, the Popov family has been around for a while here in Larsson, although they’re under the radar, but we know they collaborate with the Ivanov family,” she answered impatiently. “What is this about, Mikael?”

“What about Serg Popov, specifically? Do you remember him?” I kept pushing because she was vague, which could mean she was hiding something.

“I...ah...don’t remember-” she stalled as if trying to create a story to offload.

“Let me remind you,” I started. “Serg Popov died in a car crash nineteen years ago.”

“Oh?” Her surprise sounded fake.

“He was married to the cop that was heading the case that got me arrested and falsely accused of organizing Lars’ death,” I told her, leaving out Judith’s name because I didn’t think it was relevant. “She was so bereaved that she took out her revenge on our family.”

“What does our family have to do with it?” she asked so innocently.

“She believed that the Kaisers killed her husband, although there doesn’t seem to be proof.

It’s only her hunch, I assume. After losing her husband, I guess she wanted to even the score.

However, I feel like there's a missing link, which is why I’m calling you.



Do you know anything about this?" I explained, hopefully.

"Nineteen years," she parroted distantly, as if her mind was going back that far, but there was something there in her tone. Something she wasn't telling me that I might do a better job at siphoning out of her, if we were in the same room and I could look her in the eye.

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“Yes, nineteen,” I encouraged her to continue whatever thought path she was on.

“I was hoping it would never come to this, but it’s all about the girl,” she sighed, saying something that I least expected.

“What girl?” I asked, mystified.

“The girl Lars found in the dingy apartment alone, with soiled diapers. She never cried, you know, and we thought she was brain damaged from the lack of nutrients and affection, but no, she just wasn’t a crier,” she explained.

The story was all too familiar, and a chill slid down my spine, causing the hair on my forearms to stand up on end. “Girl? Are we talking about Annika?”

She sighed again. “Yes. We discovered her as a baby and took her away, fed her, and changed her diapers. We had her at the house for two days, until the mother came crawling back. Well, it wasn’t the mother; it was the father. Her father, Poppa, Serg Popov.”

I didn’t see this coming. Every other piece of information that we’ve been given by our hired PI or what Sergeant Tindale told us has been astonishing. Maybe that’s the Kaiser in me. I was raised to consider all solutions and scenarios before acting on them—this scenario I hadn’t imagined.

“Ha,” she grunted half-heartedly. “Now you’re the quiet one. It seems I have stunned you, this time.”

I took a moment to digest the information, trying to make sense of it.

Everything seemed to be linked. “I knew Lars,” I started slowly as my head spun.

“He discovered her as a baby, abandoned in her cot, but then you gave the baby back, until she was a few years old, which was when you fostered her? Is that correct?”

“Yes, we put the mother into better accommodation, paid for by us, bought clothes, and baby formula. Whatever she needed, we didn’t hesitate to provide for them. But her habit had a stronghold on her, and there were people who she considered friends or allies who wanted her back in the game.”

She trailed off, and I could hear tapping like she was tapping her finger on a table, irritably. Stepping back into the past did that to the best of people.

She cleared her throat and continued, “We organized a drug rehab twice, and she would come out clean and then go back to the people who treated her poorly. I genuinely believe she tried to turn her life around, but as I said, the chokehold that drugs and the drug pushers had on her seemed impenetrable. We even considered moving her out of the state, but then we’d have less control over her.”

“So, was Popov one of the ones who was pushing her back onto the game?” The pieces of the puzzle were falling into place, and I knew the answer before she said it.

“Yes.”

“So, you organized his death?”

“Yes. For not giving a damn about his daughter, for pushing drugs onto a vulnerable mother, and for being just a vile human being in general. He then used the girl to bribe for money.” She made a sound as if disgusted.

“A heinous, filthy human, and she, his wife, had no idea what he was really like. No damn idea whatsoever. I doubt she even knew that Annika was her husband’s child.

They didn’t have children of their own, you know. ”

My stomach turned as it seemed far too coincidental that Judith would coax Annika to risk her by coming to work at our club, under our noses, when she knew we’d hurt her if we found out.

“I’m going to bet that Judith the cop found out somewhere down the line that Annika had her husband’s blood running through her veins. It may not have been initially, but I reckon she found out eventually,” I argued.

We both fell quiet again, thinking it over, as my heart went out to the girl I had locked in the room in the club.

How could I possibly hold a grudge against her after everything she had been through?

It was no surprise that she had systemic trust issues with adults, since the adults who were supposed to care for her abandoned her many times in favor of a vice.

“Do you think it was her?” she suggested, speaking in a cryptic language.

“What do you mean?” I questioned, unsure if “her” meant Annika, Judith, or Queen of Sheba.

“That ordered a hit on Lars. Do you think it was this Judith woman?” she clarified.

“She had a motive,” I rationalized. Then I thought of something our most trusted bartender said once about Lars receiving a distressing phone call, and I suspected

someone was trying to threaten or blackmail him.

“Unfortunately, she is the only one who could fill in the gaps since Lars’ phone was allegedly broken in police custody. ”

“ Allegedly . Sure it is,” she grunted sarcastically.

“Sylvie, there’s something else I need to tell you, but I don’t want you to freak out and overreact,” I began, deciding that it was appropriate to be upfront and honest about one secret.

“There’s more. Jee, you have been busy. Okay, let me have it. What else are you going to surprise me with?” she mocked, sounding in better spirits after our heavy conversation.

“Annika,” I exhaled to consider an easy way to let her down.

“Yes? Oh, don’t tell me. You know where she is?” Sylvie predicted.

“Yes. I know exactly where she is.” Heat warmed my cheeks as I thought of her. “We’ve been keeping her in hiding until all of this had blown over.”

She made a slight choking noise, then quickly composed herself. “You’re protecting her? Gosh, prison has changed you.”

I wanted to say that it wasn’t prison that changed me. It was Annika, and being back at the club, where I enjoyed the thrill of the business.

“How is Gunner managing having his foster sister, who broke his heart, nearby?” Of course, the mother had to put her son's feelings above those of anyone else.

I chuckled. “He’s doing fine. In fact, he’s enjoying having his friend back.” I was about to say, ‘girlfriend’, but caught myself before it came out. “Friend. They went to the same college together. They’ve become good friends again.”

“Huh,” she wavered again, and I assumed that it stung to be told this in one foul sweep.

“She had a tough early start to life, and even though I try not to think about it, it was horrifying what that baby was put through. After watching her mother struggle for years, we took little Annika into our hearts. It might take some time for me to forgive her after what she did to you and Gunner.”

I was about to add that I was well on the way to forgiving her, and I was pretty confident Gunner and Ronan had too, but Sylvie took the words out of my mouth.

“So, I only hope that she learned from her mistakes. That’s all we can ask, considering that she was likely coming from a place of pain and abandonment,” she said as her voice cracked under the weight of emotion.

“Well, well, well, you’ve made a turnaround. At the beginning of this conversation, you were willing to have her hunted down and-”

She cut in, “This conversation brought back the horrifying memories of the girl abandoned in the cot, and perhaps I shouldn’t be so angry when perhaps she didn’t know better.

But you see... one of the reasons I was angry was that I thought we had failed her.

That all the love we'd instilled in her, her parents’ genes were too strong, and she’d fall onto the same path as her mother.

But you say she is at college? What is she studying? ”

“Marine Biology,” I replied.

“Is she happy and healthy and smart?” she stuttered as she spoke as if struggling to ask for fear of the answer.

“Yes, she’s real smart and gets mostly A’s, looks healthy and seems happy...” I swallowed as my entire body was singing, thinking of her. “She’s also beautiful, a beautiful person. Just so you know, Sylvie, you did well. With her, I mean, you raised her well.”

Her voice broke down the line, and I knew she was crying, but trying to disguise it. “Good,” she sniffed. “Oh gosh, I must have allergies.”

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A ll went well,” Mikky poked his head into my room, and he seemed in good spirits, which surprised me. “I told her about Annika, too.”

I grimaced and clenched my jaw. “How did that go?”

His black eyebrows cocked. “Better than I imagined. I warmed her up to it, and she kinda got emotional thinking about what she went through as a baby.” he lowered his gaze as he spoke, and I knew Annika captured him like Gunner and me.

His anger toward her was waning, and I felt a sense of relief. It wasn’t her fault. None of this was her fault. She was caught up in an adult world of mass manipulation and blackmail.

“Do you think Sylvie might come around and maybe even accept Annika back into the family?” I asked to see how he’d react, while reflecting on what Annika said when she didn’t realize I was listening.

She thought she was talking to Gunner, or the ghost of Gunner, if she was going mad or half asleep.

Maybe she could see him there, but then tapped on the wall as if she genuinely thought he was there.

It was evident she was deeply concerned about where he was and hoped he wasn’t hurt. She’s a nice girl.

He chuckled and shrugged. “You never know. It’s hard to tell with Sylvie.



Besides, it was a phone call, so I couldn't see her facial expressions as we spoke.

Anyway," I sensed a quick subject change coming, even though I wanted to put an idea past him that maybe Annika could be given a share of the business and be employed here in an administration position.

There were more pressing issues to discuss, but I won't forget what I heard her say last night when she thought she was alone.

"Poppa," he started flatly, unemotional, "Serg Popov. The man who died in a car crash nineteen years ago."

"Organized by Lars?" I assumed, since it wasn't uncommon for the Kaisers to squash a bug when it was getting on their nerves.

"Of course, but ah..." he waved his hand dismissively, "sounded like he was a problem."

"He had a kid?" I pressed, wondering why Mikky brought it up.

"Yeah. Guess who?" he quipped.

"Annika," I resigned as everything fell into place. Now it was making sense. "He was a shit father and a shit husband to the crazy cop, so the perfect man to have an accident."

"Basically," he sighed, checking the time on his phone.

"Kept forcing Annika's mom back on the game.

Every time she got clean, he was on her back again, wanting her to hit the streets.

So after several months, Lars solved Annika's mother's problem by organizing a fatal accident.

But it wasn't enough and, in the end, Annika's mother asked Lars and Sylvie to take her away for money. ”

“She sold her kid?” My voice rose higher than I intended because I hadn't heard that part of the story.

“Desperate people do desperate things. And I guess she was smart enough to notice that Lars and Sylvie would give Annika everything she needed and more,” he stated, standing up from his chair as I noticed a change in his demeanor. “I'll head to the kitchen and grab a plate for Annika.”

“Are you sure you don't want me to do that?” I teased as a smirk appeared on his typically severe face. Yep, he was falling down the Annika rabbit hole hook, line, and sinker. Captured.

“No, it's fine. I'm more than capable of serving the girl,” he stated, glancing at me from under his eyelashes, smugly eager to get down to see her.

“Fine,” I laughed, leaving the room as his phone went off, and I heard him answer it as he walked down the hallway to the elevator. But stalled and caught my attention by clicking his fingers, and then pointed to the phone pressed against his ear.

It was an Ivanov representative relaying their demands to Mikky, asking if we would ever see Gunner again.

“Where is he?” Mikky asked sternly, showing no fear. “Give me a location.”

The conversation lasted two minutes, and the caller did the majority of the talking.

When Mikky swiped off, he seemed calm and in control.

“And? What do they want in exchange for Gunner?” I asked, keen to get Gunner back. It hadn’t been gone long, but it felt much longer, and we didn’t know what state he was being held in.

“As we suspected, they want the club back,” he replied flatly, then added, “For free.”

“Fuck off,” I snorted. “They can get stuffed. You bought fair and square. It’s their problem if they’re shit with money.”

“They also want \$30 million clean cash,” he said nonchalantly as if it didn’t bother him because we had outsmarted them anyway.

I laughed. “Good try, bros. But they might have better luck pursuing a different career than being crime lords.”

“They’d have better luck being street cleaners,” he joked. “Juvenile.”

“So, have you decided what the plan of attack is to get Gunner back?” He’d been coy as to what he had decided: either go pick Gunner up, or allow Tindale to do it.

There were pros and cons to both, so it took careful consideration.

We had a location until the GPS signal cut out, and Google Maps showed it to be open farmland with a handful of houses scattered across the land.

If the van kept going that way, they’d end up at the river, but I had a sneaky suspicion that he was hidden in one of those houses.

It made no sense to hide him too far away from the city center and from where we

reside.

Mikky seemed in good spirits as he left to serve our girl, and I retreated to the office to find a message on my phone from Freddie.

Freddie: We need help downstairs. With Betty gone, we need someone to manage the staff. Any suggestions?

Me: I'm coming down to help.

The first person in mind was Annika, whom I could potentially train for the role, since she was family, but I needed to discuss this with Mikky later.

I ran downstairs instead of using the elevator and poked my head into the kitchen to ensure that everything was okay.

It was the lunch shift, so it was flat out, and Mikky was there, plating up for Annika, although the staff would assume it was for him.

Retreating from the frantic kitchen, I went down to the office area and found Freddie at his desk, working on the computer. "Oh, good. Here is this week's order from the green grocer and butcher. You have to call it through by three PM so it's here first thing tomorrow morning."

"No problem. I'm happy to help," and sat at Betty's desk, noticing that her stuff hadn't been cleared. I guess she had to flee on the fly.

I called the butcher, the green grocer, and the organic food store and placed our large order, which was already written out. Then, I went through Betty's drawers, looking for her black diary, which she used for note-taking and staff meetings.

“So, we have a chef who failed to show,” he informed me.

“Failed to show. Didn’t even call in sick?” I was always annoyed when staff didn’t adhere to the standards we set. However, there could be a perfectly reasonable explanation, but that didn’t help us.

“Nope. I’ve called around, but no one is available, so I told the wait staff to tell the guests that there is a slightly longer wait before food is served,” he explained as my stress levels rose slightly, but this was hospitality.

“Offer the members drinks on the house to sweeten them up. I’m not much help in the kitchen, but I’ll help where I can,” I informed him, opening Betty’s desk drawers. “Where does Betty normally keep her diary and laptop?”

He shrugged, “I don’t know. The diary is either on the desk or in her hand, as it was too important to lose,” he replied, standing up. “I have to go back to the bar.”

The bar area was his territory, and he rarely spent much work time over this side of the club, so I wasn’t offended when he had to go back to work. Someone appeared in my peripheral vision, and it was one of the reception girls at the front.

“Where’s Betty?” she asked with flushed cheeks. “I can’t get the card machine to work.”

“Betty isn’t here and won’t be returning,” I told her flatly, as I stood up to follow her to the front desk. “From this point onwards, come to me if you have any problems.”

“Okay, does it have something to do with her disappearing that day?” she innocently asked, and I realized that she was the girl who told me that Betty had gone home to get something and never came back.

“Yes and no,” I said, then concentrated on fixing the card machine that had paper caught in it. Betty said we needed to upgrade the system. Well, I could understand what she meant.

I apologized to the member who was waiting for us to process his card, then, after he left, I asked her, “Do you know where Betty’s diary is?”

“Um, she usually carried it with her,” she replied as another member and his wife walked in, who had a table booked for lunch.

I allowed her to serve the members as I scanned the reception area for the extensive black diary, and then wondered if it might be somewhere in the casino area. It crossed my mind that there was possibly another traitor in our midst.

I crouched down and opened every drawer and cupboard, but couldn’t find it. I assumed she took it with her, but it was the club’s property.

“Does it have to do with Mr. Yarmouth?” the reception girl asked after the guests departed and was about to head down the hallway again.

“Mr. Yarmouth? The toymaker? Does he still come in?” We hadn’t heard from him in a while after we made a deal with his lawyer after he was found handcuffed to the wall in one of the bondage rooms and was left there for hours.

I assumed that he was happy with the deal and was too ashamed to come back.

“Yeah,” she stated, “The toymaker. She organized to have him humiliated, so he’d sue the club.”

“How do you know this?” I snarled.

Her cheeks burned red again as if she had regretted saying anything, but luckily, she chose wisely. “I heard them talking about it.”

“Them? Who was the second person?” I pressed sternly, and she looked as if she was about to vomit. “Don’t hold back, now. Tell me who the second person was.”

She swallowed, took a deep breath, and then said quietly just as another couple came in for lunch. “She was a chef.”

“Name,” I pressed her even more firmly.

“Carrienne,” she finally replied as the members came up to the reception desk and she turned her back.

I stormed out of the reception and down the hall to find Freddie had gone from his desk. Then I thundered across the empty casino floor and saw his dark head at the bar, checking the stocks of liquor.

“Freddie,” I called as I approached the bar.

“Yeah,” he startled and turned around.

“The chef who hadn’t turned up today was named Carrienne?” I pressed.

Confusion washed across his face. “Yeah. Why?”

I turned my back and walked as an elation came over me. It was a great feeling to rid the club of all the filth that had contaminated it. “Hire a new chef. She won’t be back,” I ordered him.

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Why do you like to hand-feed me?" I asked as he placed a French fry against my lips, and I bit down on it.

"I like watching your mouth move," he answered with a devious look on his handsome face. "I'm imagining your lips wrapped around my cock."

I narrowed my eyes, feigning fury. "You filthy man."

"I am now," he replied.

"You should offer me a job," I reminded him.

"You had a job here," he argued.

"Offer me back my job as Annika," I pleaded.

"You're not twenty-one yet," he stressed.

"I won't go near the alcohol or casino, or," pointed to the door, "these rooms. I'll do the dishes. Give me a chance."

"What makes you think that I'll let you out ever? I might keep you here as my slave. Tie you to the bed. With your legs spread," he threatened, tapping another French fry against my lips.

"Don't threaten me with a good time. Besides, you'll grow bored with that and so will I," I told him. "I'm not a hole, or three holes. I'm a living, breathing human that



deserves respect. Even if I had to earn that respect from you.”

He resigned, nodding slightly in agreement. “I do see you as a human,” he said slowly as if he was choosing his words carefully.

“Then give me a chance in the club. Please,” I begged, pressing my palms together in a prayer.

He sighed and stabbed me with a little sharp scowl, yet his mouth was smiling. Not a big smile, like Ronan’s, but a Kaiser smile, rare and fleeting, but it felt rewarding when they decided it was you they chose to smile at.

“I’ll think about it.” he was simmering in his smugness, being in this position where I was begging, and it took only a flick of a finger for him to grant me my wish. It must’ve felt good to have such immense power and my life in his hands.

“You still believe that I will escape and you’ll never see me again, aren’t you?” I rationalized, reading his mind.

“Naturally,” he replied flatly. Then he stumbled, and I saw a flint of something behind his eyes. Then he surprised me by asking, “Where would you go? If I let you go now, where would you go?”

I swallowed, thinking it over for a few seconds. “If I had my freedom, I would go back to the hall and back to my class, as Annika, not Riley Laws.”

“So, you would flee the state?” He cut a piece of cheeseburger and held it near my mouth and bit into it, humming at the taste.

“No. That’s good,” I said, dabbing my mouth with the ivory-colored fabric napkin.

“You’d go back to Gotland?” he said, surprised.

“Yes. I have nowhere to go,” I stressed. “And I love marine biology, but I still think you could use me here. As I said, I have a good eye for color harmony.”

“Color harmony? That’s a new one,” he chuckled as he glanced at the wallpaper and frowned, perhaps noticing that it was dated and fading.

I pointed my finger skyward. “Fly poop.”

He looked up and cringed in embarrassment. “This is Freddie’s and Ronan’s domain. They should’ve checked the rooms more thoroughly.”

“See, this is why you need me, because I notice fly shit and creases in the wallpaper and scratch marks on the floorboards,” I argued proudly. “Beauty is in the details, Mikael.”

“Mikael?” he snarled as if I wasn’t permitted to use his first name.

“I beg my pardon, I mean, Mr. Kaiser ,” I corrected, snidely. “You’ve stuck your cock in me more than once, and I’ve sucked you off, and you watched me getting fucked by Ronan, yet I can’t call you by your first name? Seems a little unfair to me.”

He opened his mouth to answer, but I interrupted with a snarky comment, “Oh, my apologies, I forgot. You see me as three holes, like a sex doll, Mr. Kaaaaaiser.”

“I’m starting to think that maybe I want you to leave now,” he growled, bemused with a twinkle in his eye, licking his bottom lip.

“Maybe I see you as nothing but a table with an erect rod attached.” I made a motion with my hand like I was rubbing a cock while pressing my tongue against the inside

of my mouth.

“A table?” he seemed baffled, but amused.

“Yeah, like a solid table with a sex toy sticking out of it. That’s all you are.

A giant sex toy that also happened to be my ex-boss.

” He tilted his head to the side, looking at me slightly differently as if I were a weird animal in the zoo.

“You’re moving up in the world. That must be a self-promotion going from prison to walking sex toy. ”

Before I could say any more, he’d claimed my mouth, hands cupping my cheeks, and a shiver ran down my thighs, directly into the space between my legs.

His tongue worked my mouth like a dream, running over my teeth, pushing down harder, and I naturally fell away from his overpowering touch.

He pulled me back again, so we were plastered together, held together by his firm embrace.

“This is the only way to shut you up,” he breathed into my mouth, then bit down on my bottom lip, and I recoiled when I felt a sting.

He broke out in a kiss as those eyes raked over my face, then ran his thumb over my lower lip, showing me a smudge of blood, and then licked it off.

“See,” I whispered breathlessly, “I’m more than just three holes.”

“I’m aware,” he stated evenly, as he grasped my sweater, and I raised my arms as he pulled it up over my body, leaving me with nothing but a bra.

“What am I to you?” I shirked off his touch and held up my hand to stop him from coming close. “What am I to you?”

He faltered as those eyes plowed into me with great intensity, making me shudder, and I leaned back to dodge a missile that might fly out of his eyes. “Are you playing games?” he warned.

“No. I want an answer,” I boldly demanded. “What am I to you? Just three holes or...”

He sighed and glanced to the side, and I sensed he was finding this uncomfortable. “A girl,” he replied.

“Oh, great. I’m pleased you noticed.” I dropped the sarcasm because it wasn’t helping the situation and cooled my tone. “You find it difficult speaking about your feelings, don’t you?”

“Lie back,” he ordered.

I was about to do what he demanded for fear of retribution, knowing that he was a Kaiser and one didn’t want to piss off a Kaiser. Again. Let’s not forget that I had already gotten on the wrong side of the Kaisers. I tried one more time. “Tell me what you think of me?”

His nostril flared as he looked down at me under those gorgeous, black eyelashes. So damn sexy, yet so damn dangerous.

“You’re a girl who is slowly getting under my skin,” he spoke in a steely tone that

both terrified and excited me.

His glare was stern to meet, but I bravely raised my head, met his gaze with mine, and said, “Good. Because once I settle under your skin, I’ll never leave.”

Amusement washed across his chiseled features. “What? Like scabies?”

I tipped my head back and snorted in laughter. “Yes, like a seven-year itch.” I raised my finger. “This is year one.”

In a rush, he had me flattened against the mattress, body on body, hands held above my head.

Those dark eyes rolled over my lips and eyes, then down to my bra, claimed my left breast with his mouth, and began sucking.

I arched my back under his delicious touch and wrapped my thighs around his solid, muscular body.

Those lips travel down my stomach, slow, torturous brushes across my skin, barely touching, yet it blisters and shivers. My entire world was his. It was useless. I couldn’t fight him off anymore, nor did I want to.

His mouth worked its way between my legs, and he pressed his mouth along the jeans’ crotch, sucking and licking, making my pussy panties and jeans even wetter than they already were.

There was a flash of guilt that we were doing this as Gunner was somewhere alone and held hostage by bad people, but I let that go and sank into the mattress under Mikael’s devouring touch.

He then flipped me over onto my stomach, and I squealed at the ferociousness of his strength and quickness. His hands gripped the band on my jeans, then gave them a massive tug, pulling them aggressively down, snapping the dome of them off the fabric.

Teeth sank into my flesh, sucking and biting, tightrope walking the line between pleasure and pain, and it felt wonderful. A finger wormed into my tight hole and wiggled about, before peeling my jeans off completely, and I heard the distinctive sound of them being dropped to the floor.

Then he paused for a few seconds as I sensed we weren't alone.

I looked behind me to find Ronan had slipped into the room, eyes with desire, and I reached out to him.

He glanced at Mikael as if seeking his approval, and as soon as Mikael nodded, Ronan was standing over me.

I tugged at his pants, and he unfastened the button.

I grasped his erect cock, rubbing it a few times, before sliding it into my mouth.

The mattress sank under the weight of Mikael coming behind me, claiming my rear end, fingers pressed into my butt, and mouth biting. The sound of brushing fabric followed before he filled me up from behind into my hungry, wet pussy. Then began pummeling me, short, sharp strokes.

It took us several moments to find our pace. Short, quick movements over Ronan's cock, in synch with Mikeal moving inside me. Ronan's hand placed gently on my head, then moved to the back of my neck, where he took a bunch of my hair in his hand to use as a rein to guide my movements.

This was the first time I'd been desired by two men at once, and it was both scary and tantalizing.

The emotions traveling up and down my body, all with the eroticism that had claimed me, were overwhelming, and I was close to breaking the cord between us.

But my stubbornness kept going to see how it felt when I hit heights and climaxed.

I trusted Ronan more than Mikael, whom I couldn't see and could only feel.

Mikael then pulled out and seemed to signal to Ronan to do the same, as a gush of air flooded down my throat from being free from his cock filling me up.

"Are you hungry?" Mikael asked Ronan.

There was another silent exchange between them before Mikael ordered me to roll over onto my back and take my bra off.

"What are you going to do?" I asked, frightened that they were conducting something that might hurt me.

"You'll see," was all he said as I precariously took my bra off and lay on my back, naked and vulnerable.

He then took a handful of French fries and sprinkled them across my body, then seized what was left of the cheeseburger and tore each piece, also dropping each piece along my body. He then tipped the last of the fries off the plate onto me, so I was covered in food.

They stood back to admire their masterpiece lying there like a kitchen table, before Mikael turned to Ronan and said, "Dig in. No hands."

I gulped air as immense desire and anticipation trembled across my body. Together they climbed into the bed, on their hands and knees, and began eating off me like grazing bulls with erect cocks on display, glistening wet from my juice.

My skin prickled and riveted in luscious desire as tongues licked along my skin before claiming a mouthful of food. My nipples were protruding and throbbing as I was writhing from a rising orgasm just before they pulled out of me.

Ronan's mouth engulfed a piece of burger patty and sucked on my breast as he devoured the meat, while Mikael was licking up fries like a vacuum cleaner.

Mikael took some fries in his mouth, then changed his position, so his head was between my legs, and spread my legs as he inserted fries inside me with his tongue.

My back arched, toes curled, thighs rippling in desire as I began to climax again. Warm tongue smashing fries inside my wet pussy while a warm tongue ate burger off my breasts.

"Oh my god," I cried out, wrangling with the enormity of the impending orgasm encompassing my entire body. "I'm gonna cum."

Mikael kept eating me downstairs as Ronan started rubbing his cock. When I reached out to help him, he brushed my hand away. "Let us pleasure you," he demanded.

Mikael's tongue pushed fries further into my pussy, then slipped his tongue further in to eat them, before running his tongue over my throbbing, sensitive clit.

I lurched as the climax rippled through my body and screamed as Ronan's cream spat from his cock all over the remaining food on my body. Mikael kept eating me until I was done, panting and depleted.



But he wasn't done with me. He hadn't come yet, so he pushed himself inside me and proceeded to serve me short, quick strokes, smacking his balls against my skin, while munching on fries.

Then he suddenly pulled out and, like Ronan, he emptied his cum all over the food on my body.

Under their penetrable gazes, I took a piece of burger bun covered in their cream and slowly bit into it, chewed, then swallowed.

I took a leaf of lettuce between my fingers and as I gazed up at these two beautiful men, I shoved the leaf, sodden with their cum, into my mouth. Chewed, then swallowed.

A gorgeous smirk stretched across Mikael's face. "Good girl," he said proudly. "Maybe you will be a good fit for our business."

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

After Ronan left to get back down on the floor, since Betty had vanished, I was about to leave Annika, but decided to stay. An internal battle to be the man I used to be, who hired high-class whores, then bolted out the door, satisfied, harboring no obligation to be nice or book them in again.

The pre-prison Mikael walked to the door to leave her there on the bed covered in food, because that's her problem. But the post-prison Mikael stopped and turned back.

"I have work to do," I impatiently said as she sat up, picking bits of food off her, as she put a fry in her mouth, most of it sticking out like a cigarette, and her plump lips pursed. She looked fucking hot. Even after fucking her, messing her up, she still looked fucking hot.

She shrugged indifferently. "Okay. I'm not keeping you here."

I stepped back toward the door, then turned back again to wrap a blanket around her shoulders. "Is the TV working?" Okay, now I was trying to make small talk, which was something I wasn't good at because I didn't usually need it. Unless you're a paying member in the club, I could pull on the charm.

She frowned, "Yes," and answered as if she thought I was weird.

"What?" I asked, helping brush off the food from her gorgeous, dimpled body.

"You're terrible at this," she snapped, exhaustedly.

“At what?” I don’t know why I cared, but I did, and it both annoyed and enlightened me at the same time.

“Talking to a girl like a normal person,” she ranted in a tone that she wouldn’t get away with if she were still on staff.

I chuckled because I was enjoying this, and I could still feel her on my cock and a saltiness in my mouth from the fries that was a perfect complement to the taste of her skin and pussy that still lingered.

Her clothes were where I had left them, on the floor, and I picked them up, brushed off the crumbs, and handed them back to her.

“Thanks,” she replied a little coldly.

“I do see you as a girl,” I stated, then realized it sounded stupid. “I mean, I see you more than just three holes.”

She was in the process of pulling her panties up her thighs when I said this and stalled, leaned, and started giggling. I wasn’t sure if she was laughing at me, but her bubbly, contagious giggles lit up her entire body.

“I feel so special,” she said sarcastically under those giggles.

“Good,” I shrugged, bending down to pick up a piece of burger meat and placing it back on the plate. “Because you are special. To us, anyway.”

The giggles stopped abruptly, and I glanced at her pretty face to see why, and she was staring at me with tear-filled eyes, her mouth parted in awe. I swallowed over a lump in my throat, unsure of what she was going to do next.

“Are you okay?” She seemed stunned, stuck in one place; even her mouth seemed frozen open. She’ll get a dry mouth if she keeps it open like that.

Her head dropped down into her hands, and her entire body shook as little whimpers exuded into the air.

What do I do? How do I fix this?

This was a situation I was uncomfortable in, and I had no experience dealing with crying women, especially those I cared about.

I placed my hand on her shoulder to comfort her and felt the shivering of her skin, which prompted me to crouch down and scrutinize her pretty face, seeing that she was genuinely upset.

“Did we hurt you?” I rationalized as I knew some women were emotional after sex, and we took her body to new levels that she hadn’t experienced before, so I knew she was probably quite depleted.

“No. I enjoyed it,” she sniffed, wiping her tear-stained cheeks with the foot of her palm.

“Why are you crying?” I needed to be educated on this matter, as it was so foreign to me at the time.

She sniffed and sobbed a little more before she said, “It was a nice thing you said.”

“Oh? You’re crying because I said something nice to you?” I clarified to clear up my confusion.

She nodded as I searched the room for something she could blow her nose on that

wasn't covered in food stains, and the only thing I could think of was toilet paper, so I went into the bathroom, inhaled the scent of her shampoo and soap, pulled a length of paper, and returned offering it to her.

I'd rather provide her with a lace handkerchief or a clean serviette than a wad of toilet paper, but at least the toilet paper was the luxury, soft, and strong brand.

"Thanks," she sobbed, taking the toilet paper and blowing her snotty nose on it.

"So, ah, every time I say something nice, you're going to cry?" I carefully questioned.

"No," she snapped, and I flinched at her reaction.

"Okay," I was walking on eggshells and wanted to escape out the door, but my feet refused to move.

Her body was shivering, so I helped her get dressed.

Once she was completely covered, she hugged herself as if she were still cold.

The temperature in the room was warm, so I couldn't understand why she was shivering.

Maybe she was coming down with the flu. I couldn't leave her like this, and the only thing I could think of to help was to wrap my arms around her in an attempt to warm her up.

Immediately, she melted into my embrace as her soft hair brushed across my cheek, and her small hands latched onto my forearms. At first, my body tensed because it seemed so unnatural to waste time hugging someone, but when she sighed, closed her

eyes, and breathing slowed, a growing fondness overcame me.

We were attached in this cocoon as I rocked her body until she fell into a deep sleep. I then gently released her grip on me, pulled back the sheets, and laid her inside. As she slept, I tidied the food mess, all the while my gaze kept traveling upwards at the fly shit on the ceiling.

She was right. This place needed an upgrade.

After picking up every piece of food and returning it to the plate, I removed it to take it back to the kitchen. I then checked her laundry basket to see if any clothes needed to be washed, scanned the room to see if there was anything I could help her with, and finally left the room.

As I turned to lock the door, something inside stopped me. My hand gripped the handle as I patted the key in my pocket with the other hand. It was time to free the sparrow from her cage.

With a heavy heart, I left it open a few inches to show her that I had given back her freedom and she could go wherever she wanted.

I didn't want to do that as I was fearful that I'd never see her again, but it was cruel to leave her in there. We become used to her always being there, but it wasn't by choice. We imprisoned her.

I wanted, no, needed her to decide for herself. How much did she really want to work here and be part of the Kaiser family again, or was it a fake story to convince us to trust her and, in the end, let her go?

I guess, there's only one way to find out.

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

With no concept of time, I could only determine if it was day or night by the light streaming through the cracks of the door. Sometimes the light was brighter as the sun seemed to shine directly onto the door, and I'd press my hand against the wood to feel the warmth against my skin.

I maintained the exercise routine to keep the blood pumping, which helped improve my mental health to a certain degree. After several star jumps, sit-ups, and running on the spot, fresh positivity would surge through me, where I'd be certain that everything would be okay.

But as time drifted and I stared at the stains on the walls, the ol' black dog would return, and as soon as I succumbed to dying alone in here, I'd force myself to exercise some more.

I was in the middle of doing a hundred press-ups when I heard footsteps outside growing louder, followed by the sound of the door unlocking.

Without a word, the masked man swung the door open, showing me they were armed to warn me to keep clear, then dumped more fast food down the steps.

I'd eaten enough cold McDonald's cheeseburgers to last me a lifetime, but I was hungry and needed to keep my strength up because I had no idea how long I'd be here.

Even though every time they dropped food, it was in my nature to attempt to disarm him, that might ruin the plan of Mikael and Ronan ransacking the place once they find me.

Fuck, it's been long enough. Maybe it felt long because I was alone with nothing to do, and it was cold all the fucking time. I bit into a cold, tasteless cheeseburger and swallowed it down, thinking of Annika, which warmed my spirits a little.

Footsteps padded on the dirt outside my door, and I paused mid-eating, curious to know why they returned. The door swung open a crack, and a balaclava-covered face peered down at me.

"They don't give a shit about you," he snarled mockingly. "And don't want you back, so we're digging a hole to dispose of your body."

"Sure, bro," I cocked my eyebrows to mock him back, because I knew Mikael and Ronan would come through for me. We had a plan.

"They tried to negotiate the very generous offer we put on the table, but ah, unfortunately for you, we don't negotiate," he laughed.

"What?" My voice was croaky from not speaking and breathing in dank, cold air, so I cleared it and asked, "What was the generous offer?"

He hesitated, and I assumed he was a lackey who wasn't permitted to share important information, but he caved anyway: "The club and several million in cash."

"Predictable," I chuckled, "There's always more than one way to travel to Timbuktu."

"What?" he snorted.

"Nothing," I smiled.

He lingered for a few seconds, trying to figure out why I wasn't upset that my family



had dumped on me. But this was the plan. We knew they'd make a lame offer of blackmail, but if Ronan received the GPS location, then all should go down as planned.

If Ronan received my GPS location. What if he didn't receive it? It was a persistent, haunting thought. But then, why were they negotiating? Maybe the GPS wasn't working.

The masked man was still watching me as the lifeblood seemed to drain from my face, and that's when he started laughing. "Ha ha, your own family places a higher value on that club than you. Haha. Your own family hates you."

He slammed the door on my sad face as I finished off the burger. No matter what paranoia claimed my mind, I had to keep returning to the fact that Mikael would never abandon me. Annika would be on his back if she knew about it. Ronan would never allow me to be currency for the club. Never.

Yeah, Mikael would come through for me. He had to.

My mind traveled back in time to when we were kids, my happy place. Annika and I were swimming in the pool, playing Xbox, stealing whiskey from the liquor cabinet, and pretending to get drunk, even when we hated the taste of it.

A shiver traveled down my spine when I somehow came to a scene in the past where I walked past my father's office and could hear him talking on the phone.

He was infuriated with whoever was on the line, and I could hear his footsteps, like he did when he had serious thoughts on his mind. Mikky and I were the same.

But something was different with his tone. He was always good at making big problems go away, but for some reason, the issue of disgust wasn't easy to solve.

I remember his snarling voice, barely able to contain his rage, “What the fuck do you want? Yeah, I’m not giving you that. She’s not for sale.”

My eyes snapped open. Who’s not for sale? Who was he talking about?

Initially, when I overheard this conversation, I assumed he was talking about Mom or one of the staff at the club in Larsson.

And I wouldn’t have remembered the conversation at all if it weren’t for the seething anger.

A man who was so utterly in control of his environment, who hired men to do his dirty work, never needed to raise his voice like that at anyone.

I mean, he yelled at Mom and us kids sometimes, but it wasn’t like that.

After that phone call, he stormed out to use the bathroom, and I crept in to check the number on his phone. It was unmarked, and when I called it, a woman answered.

“Changed your mind?” she snarled sharply.

I immediately ended the call and hoped like heck he wasn’t having an affair, but when I checked the messages in contacts, they weren’t friendly or sexual; she wanted money from him, and the entire discussion was over a woman, even though I couldn’t find a name.

It was not long before he was murdered.

My head spun going over what I could remember about the days leading up to his death. Annika grew distant. Dad was often in a sullen mood and spent most of his time at the club, and the atmosphere was intense. Something had changed, but I

couldn't figure out what.

Then my heart slammed against my ribcage when a memory came sailing back. Annika was outside the school gates, speaking to someone—a woman with blond hair. As I approached, I heard her voice, and it was the same as the woman on the phone.

I had already succumbed to accepting that the police groomed Annika into lying under oath over Mikael's arrest. But this was before my father's death.

When they saw me there, the woman distanced herself and retreated to her car, which was a marked police vehicle.

"Who is that?" I asked Annika.

She sighed and started walking away from me. "No one. Just a lady who thought she knew my father."

"Really? Who is your father?" I asked as her pace sped up as if she was avoiding the subject. I overheard Mom saying he wasn't a nice man, but they say who he was.

"I have no idea," she replied, sounding annoyed. "She wouldn't tell me unless I went for a drive with her."

I cringed and made a squelching sound with my mouth that usually made her laugh, but on that occasion, she was a million miles away and was oblivious to it.

I wrote that woman off as a cop making up stories to reel Annika in, possibly to extract some information from her about my father. It was a regular occurrence to have cops hanging around and hassling us, and this was no different.

Except, looking back, it was different. Joining the dots together led to finding out who killed Dad.

I propelled forward, almost choking on my burger.

“I know who killed him.” The words left my mouth as the floor beneath my feet seemed to ripple like waves under this new revelation. “I know how my dad was killed.”

A gunshot cut through my thoughts, and my attention was diverted to what was happening outside.

Shouting followed by more gunshots grew nearer—thudding footsteps right over the top of the shelter. There seemed to be many footsteps, meaning many men, but the shooting was more controlled, as opposed to a gang shootout.

Something didn't feel right. It's too orderly and controlled, so I propelled off my chair and hid under the stairs, so I could see them before they saw me.

My breathing hitched as I could sense them right outside the door, with someone giving orders. It was all over for me in here, but who was outside that door might make my life worse than it already was.

I jumped when the door smashed open, followed by a voice yelling, “Gunner Kaiser? Come out where we can see you. And raise your hands into the air.”

## Page 31

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

I woke with a start as footsteps pounding the floorboards seemed louder than usual, and the scent of perfume infiltrated my senses.

I climbed out of bed to use the bathroom, and my body was tingling from Mikael and Ronan's touch.

As I sat down on the toilet, a slight pinch to my insides and a dull ache in my lower back reminded me of the delectable sex I had earlier.

My body was titillated and pleased, yet I felt bruised and a little deflated.

I suppose I was still uncertain where I stood with them, as they had every right to be cautious with me.

But they didn't hold back when it came to fucking, though.

They didn't seem to care if they trusted me or not when it came to stripping me down naked and turning me into a smorgasbord.

Regardless, I loved it. I loved their touch, scent, and attention; yet, the only downside was that I wished Gunner were there too. I wish Gunner were with me now.

It baffled me that Mikael and Ronan didn't seem to care that he had been kidnapped and was hidden somewhere. They were barely showing stress over it. You'd think they'd be out there searching for him instead of fucking me in my prison room.

Weird.

After flushing, I turned the faucet on and washed my hands as my mouth was bone dry, and when I peered at my reflection in the mirror, I noticed my lips were cracked, with a smear of dried blood on my bottom lip from when Mikael bit it.

My tongue brushed across the blood, then I ran my finger over it, licking it off my skin, like Mikael did. My hair was a mess, but my skin was glowing like I'd never seen, and my blue eyes were sparkling like a teenager in love.

A strip of golden blond was growing along the part in my hair, and I sighed in relief that I didn't have to apply hair color or book in at a hair salon.

Upkeeping a disguise was stressful. Hair color, eye color, remembering my fake name, fake family, and fake place of birth, and fake documents at all times.

I was so pleased I didn't have to pretend anymore.

It was a massive weight off my shoulders to be Annika again, but with it came the pain of my past.

The way my mother treated me. The story of her leaving me in my cot with soiled diapers while she was out buying drugs. She was a damaged soul in a world eager to exploit her. And I was the lucky one. Even though I was held hostage in this room, I was still the lucky one.

With a heavy heart, I walked back out into the bedroom and was startled when I heard the door creak. The door had been left open. I swallowed over a lump in my throat as my skin prickled along the back of my neck.

Mikael neglected to check the door after he pulled it closed. No. Wait. I'd been asleep for a while, so maybe someone came in while I was sleeping and accidentally left it open.

A rush of panic flooded my chest as my breath hitched, and nerves swelled in my stomach.

It had to be a trap. A voice in my head was screaming at me not to touch the door because it might be a trick.

There's probably someone on the other side waiting for me to leave, so they could grab me or...

no, that didn't make sense either, because they could grab me while in here.

There was often one of the men guarding my door, so Mikael or Ronan might be there watching my movements. But curiosity pulled me toward the door anyway, step by light step.

Once at the door, I placed my hand gently on the door and peered through the crack, but couldn't see much without pushing it further.

My heart thudded against my chest, and my hands trembled as if I were doing something wrong. I took a deep breath, then pushed the door open further, startled when it made a loud squeal, and I jumped backward for fear that someone would hear.

I sat back on the edge of the bed expecting angry footsteps to descend on me, but I met with silence. The door creaked again, as if there was an open window somewhere. I paused and waited a few seconds longer for human sounds before starting to step back to the door again.

"Hello?" I quietly called out, then pushed the door open a little further to see down the hallway. "Hello?"

I swallowed again over that steadily growing lump in my throat. My mouth was so dry that I turned back to sip some water from my water bottle while my gaze never left the door, expecting someone to turn up as if they had just popped out only moments ago.

After quenching my thirst, I started the arduous journey to the open door again, and once there, I called out, “Is anyone there? Ronan? Ronan, are you there?”

Silence.

I pushed the door some more, recoiling from the loud creaking, then peered down an empty hallway. Usually, when Gunner or Ronan guarded my door, they’d sit on the floor against the wall right outside my door.

It was empty.

Bravely, I stepped out into the hallway and scanned the area, expecting to see someone’s head pop out from one of the rooms. But nothing happened. I seemed to be completely alone.

It was such a strange feeling to be completely alone with the door open. My freedom was granted to me by human error.

My socked feet slowly tread the floorboards, pausing whenever I thought I heard something. My heart was pounding too loudly in my head that I worried I wouldn’t hear someone creep up.

Halfway down the hall, a door slammed shut, and I startled and inadvertently gasped in fright, then slapped my hand over my mouth for fear that someone heard me. I swung back expecting to see someone standing there, but it was empty, and it was my door that slammed shut.



Now my mind was playing tricks as I began to imagine that someone had crept into my room, where all of my possessions were lying in wait for my return. If they wanted to punish me, then this was how to do it. Set me up by giving me my freedom, only to laugh as I've been in their web again.

I was stuck between moving forward to the stairs or going back and checking my room. So, I resigned to turning back, opened my door carefully as my heart thudded, and peered in, "Is anyone there?" I asked quietly.

No reply.

I pushed the door open a little further, and my room was empty, so I turned back, walked a little faster to the end of the hall, gazed down, saw and heard no one, and then turned back again to retreat to my room.

The fear was overwhelming. I'd been trapped in this room for days, and finally I could leave, and I was too afraid to.

I threw on a sweater and comfortable sweatpants and started packing my bags as my head spun. With my laptop under my arm and my bag over my shoulder, I stepped out of the room once again and walked carefully down the hall to the stairs, then held my breath as I padded down to the bottom.

Still, seeing no one and hearing no single sound.

*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

Even though I was busy filling Betty's role over the dinner shift, I kept looking out for Mikael to signal to me that the job had been done.

I noticed he kept checking his phone, like I did, but he also kept looking in the direction of the private lounges that led up to Annika's room.

I didn't know why he kept looking in that direction, so I assumed she was on his mind.

Annika did that to the best of men. Turned a crush into an obsession, but it seemed all three of us wanted her, so all three of us would have to learn to share.

As I perused each table, checking that each member was pleased with their meals, I knew I had to have a conversation with Mikky about hiring someone to preplace Betty, because I couldn't fill in for her as well as perform my duties and study at the same time.

Then I'd suggest giving Annika a chance, perhaps in a junior role, until she finishes her studies.

I was busy serving drinks to a table of four when I heard my name being called and spotted Mikky standing by the dividing wall with his phone pressed against his ear. He flicked his hand at me to go over, and my heart raced in anticipation.

This was the phone call we had been waiting for.

"They've got him," he stated, and I relaxed. "Outside."

“Any arrests?” I asked. Mikky decided to let Tindale take over the retrieval of Gunner as it made more sense and kept our name clean. It was a case of two birds with one stone.

Mikky nodded. “Searched the house and found unregistered firearms, drugs, and a ton of cash. Gunner is fine. They’ll be dropping him off soon.”

“Great,” I sighed as my spirits rose.

As I walked away, I glanced back at Mikky, expecting him to be pleased; instead, he seemed distant, his eyes flicking to the private lounges, and I knew something was troubling his mind, involving Annika.

I didn’t say anything and threw myself back into serving and checking on meals.

Then, I retreated to the kitchen to check on the staff, and finally, I checked on the girls at the front desk in reception.

Betty left a large hole, and it needed someone special to fill it.

Maybe if the Kaisers hadn’t taken her for granted, we wouldn’t be in this position today.

It was while I was fixing the card machine after it had chewed the receipt again that Tindale came in. “Can we bring him in?” he mouthed, unsure if the front entrance was appropriate.

I gave him the thumbs up, and a few minutes later, Gunner showed up, looking rough, unshaven, a little dirty, and in need of a long shower and some soap.

I hugged the man and patted him on the shoulder, then shook Tindale’s hand,

thanking him. He didn't seem to want to stay, as he had more pressing issues to deal with, such as the many Ivanovs who had been arrested. As soon as he was gone, Gunner asked, "Is Annika okay?"

"Yeah, she's fine." It was amusing that he cared more about her than himself at that point. "She's in the same place she was before you left, but we do have catching up to do about some discoveries we made while you were gone."

"Hell," he combed his fingers through his messy, greasy black hair, "I thought about her a lot while I was in that place. She's what kept me going. I also thought about the past and what happened to Dad. It kept haunting my mind, Ronan."

We slipped into Betty and Freddie's empty office so that he could talk. "Yeah, it's alright," I spoke calmly, patting him on the shoulder because he seemed distressed. "Everything is fine."

"You don't understand," he protested, agitated, scratching his skin. "I need to see Annika." He turned and stormed for the door as I followed. "I thought you hadn't received the GPS signal and couldn't find me."

"We came through for you. We'd never let you down, Gunner, never," I explained as I kept up with his pace as we stormed to the casino floor. He seemed disoriented, stunned by the light and sounds coming from the kitchen, and I was starting to worry for him.

We spotted Mikael, and a smile stretched across his face. He opened up to hug him. "Whoa, dude, you need a shower," he cringed.

"I need to talk to you," Gunner wasn't in the mood for cracking up about bad smells as he usually would. "All of us together. Including Annika. Let me see Annika."

Mikael hesitated and stood in his way, which surprised me. “Yeah, I don’t know.”

“What do you mean?” Gunner pressed, moving past him toward the private lounge.

“You can’t go on the floor looking and smelling like that,” Mikael demanded.

“Look, it’s important,” Gunner stressed, and Mikael and I exchanged glances.

“Stop,” Mikael placed his hand on his chest. “Go up to my office, Gunner, put on some deodorant and a nice shirt, then come back down, and we’ll visit Annika together.”

“Fine,” he replied as Mikael stepped in front of him, herding him to move in the opposite direction toward the stairs that led up to our offices.

As soon as he was gone, I turned to Mikky, “What’s going on?” I suspected something was up.

“I’m not sure if she’s there,” he said flatly.

“Annika?” I needed clarification because where else would she be?

“Yeah, I left the door open,” he said, sounding depressed, as if he regretted the decision.

“Intentionally?” I rationalized as my heart sank.

“Yeah,” he sighed. “I gave her freedom back. I couldn’t keep her locked up in there anymore. It was wrong, and she didn’t deserve it. So...I gave her the choice.” Mikky swallowed and folded his arms across his chest. “She probably won’t be there when Gunner goes up to see her.”

“Have you seen her come down?” I asked, glancing up the stairs as Gunner was trotting down wearing a black blazer over a white button shirt, hair combed back, and looking a lot more presentable.

Mikky shook his head. “But I thought if she wanted to stay,” he took a moment where he seemed emotional, which wasn’t like him, but quickly composed himself, “she’d come to my office and boss me around, begging for a job, like she’d been doing for the last few days.

” Again, he took a second to sort his shit out, so Gunner couldn’t see his disappointment. “When maybe she was playing us again.”

I nodded as Gunner approached. “I guess there is only one way to find out.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

I kept my cool around Gunner as the three of us walked through the private lounges, opened the secret door, and then climbed the stairs. I didn't know what we would find when we arrived, and despite being disappointed that she had left, I knew I had done the right thing.

Set her free. If she comes back, then she's yours. If she doesn't, she never was.

Gunner was at the front of us, eager to see her, and going by the cloud of cologne trailing behind him, he slathered quite a bit on.

I avoided Ronan's stabbing glare when we approached her door to find that it was closed.

Gunner will have to learn to move on without her.

We all will have to learn to move on without her.

Maybe she'll turn up again in a year to say hello, but I doubt Gunner would be open to allowing her back into his heart again.

"Have you got a key?" Gunner asked, and I patted my pocket, finding the key, then handed it to him.

"Try the handle first," I told him.

Confusion washed across his face as he looked at me, then to Ronan, and knew something was awry. Without a word, he turned the handle, finding it was unlocked.

He paused and asked, “Why is it unlocked?”

I had no words to give that would make him better, so I turned away as he pushed the door open and stepped inside.

“About bloody time,” a scolding voice came from the room, and a smile stretched across Ronan’s face as I dropped my head down into my hands, almost in tears.

I had convinced myself that she must’ve gone. I convinced myself that was the only explanation. We could give her everything, but only if she wanted it.

The three of us piled inside to find our girl sitting on the bed, knees bent, arms wrapped around her knees, bag packed on the floor, as she was ready to go somewhere. Looking glorious.

She lunged at Gunner and flung her arms around his neck as the two of them jumped up and down together in happiness, then she fussed over him as he lapped it up like a puppy dog.

“Bro, are you falling for her?” Ronan asked me quietly, while Annika giggled in glee at having Gunner back.

“No,” I snapped.

He snorted, rolling his eyes. “Sure, you ain’t. Big hard man.”

“I was so worried something happened to you,” Annika crowed, running her hands through his hair.

Then a shadow cast over his face as he stepped back from her and looked to Ronan and me. “I know who killed Dad,” he said, and the room fell silent, seeming to be



swept up into another dimension.

Before I sliced through the silence, I asked, “Who?”

He turned to Annika, “Do you remember that cop who approached you that day. She said she knew your father. Do you remember her?”

Annika frowned, baffled. “Yes, but she was Judith, Gunner.”

“I know,” he replied. “It was she who was blackmailing my dad. I overheard him on the phone one day, so I called the number, and it was the same voice. It was the same person.”

“That’s impossible,” Annika said, shaking her head.

“She was a police officer. Why would she blackmail him? She was watching our family,” she paused to clear her throat, as her cheeks reddened after saying the word ‘family’.

It’s as if she didn’t believe she deserved to have that title anymore.

And if it were a month ago, I would’ve agreed with her, but not now.

She continued, “I realized later, after Mr. Kaiser died, that she was the same person who approached me that day. She was all nice and friendly, but when I wouldn’t cave to her demands, she began to threaten to hurt my brother until it got so bad that I started to believe her.

Annika paused to sip her water, “She mentioned knowing who my father was only once, and when I brought it up again, she said I imagined it. But I knew I didn’t because I told Gunner. So, what did she have on Mr. Kaiser to blackmail him with?”

Gunner opened his mouth, then shut because he didn't have the answer, so I stepped in, "Because she did know who your father was." I glanced at Gunner again.

"She knew him very well." I paused to take a breath.

"She was married to him. And he died in a car crash, and she, Judith, believed it was Lars and Sylvie who organized his death."

Gunner and Annika's mouths had dropped open as were their eyes, taking it all in. Perplexed and in awe.

"That was what she blackmailed my dad with?" Gunner exclaimed in surprise. "Did she have evidence?"

"Well, obviously not because he didn't succumb to her demands," I explained.

"She wanted to expose how her husband died, committed to spending her career destroying the Kaiser empire, was behind Lars' first arrest many years ago, behind his second arrest two years after, and was behind my arrest three years ago.

I suspect we're going to find out that she was also responsible for Lars' death. "

"I knew it," Gunner stamped his foot down.

Ronan's phone beeped. "I have to get down onto the floor. We're short in staff," he said to me, shooting me a sharp look.

"Short in staff?" Annika crowed. "I can help. Please let me help."

"You're not old enough to work on the floor," I reminded her.

She ignored me and opened her bag, dragging out the white polo shirt uniform top. “I hadn’t handed it in to Betty so that I could help in the kitchen.”

“Betty doesn’t work for us anymore,” I told her sternly.

“Ha,” she bit. “Good job. Now, Gunner, you go home and shower because,” she pinched her nose, “you need soap. Then come back, and we can get this functioning at a higher standard.”

“Excuse me?” I was a little put out, but I enjoyed her enthusiasm and bossiness.

Against my wishes, she pulled her top off in front of us, slid on her Savile club polo shirt, then flapped her hands at us to get to work. “Get back to work, you lot. You don’t make money by standing around, watching me get dressed.”

Ronan grinned from ear to ear as it was evident that there was nothing we could do to stop her, even if we wanted to. I let Ronan and Gunner leave the room first, then gently grabbed Annika’s forearm to pull her back.

“I was surprised to see you here,” I whispered.

A breathy chuckle exuded from her delectable mouth, and her eyes sparkled like stars. She bit her bottom lip, shooting me a mischievous look. “So, you left it open deliberately? I wondered that. You don’t seem like someone who would make a major error such as leaving your prisoner’s door open.”

She sighed as grief washed over her face, and she lowered her head, looking at me under her eyelashes.

“Why would I leave? This is my home.” Her voice cracked, and then she swallowed, turning away to hide the emotions behind her eyes. “You three are my family...” She

paused again as if it was difficult for her to open up like this. “Aren’t you? Aren’t you my family?”

I nodded and released her arm and let her go to catch up with the other two, as I grabbed her bags to take them back to my apartment, where she was welcome to stay for as long as she liked.

As I stepped toward the door, I paused to reflect on the last few days with Annika locked in this room: the fun we’ve had and my growing fondness for her. I’ll miss Annika not being in here anymore, my pet locked in the room ripe for the picking. She’s happier now.

Her sweet figure appeared at the door after she had gone, and I had a moment to myself. Her smile is vast and beautiful as she leaped toward me, wrapping her arms around my neck, her feet lifting off the ground as she peppered kisses over my cheeks.

“Thank you,” she whispered into my ear, then let go too soon.

As she walked away, that little ass wiggled as she moved. I asked, “For what? What are you thanking me for?”

She glanced back with a tear in her eye, “For believing in me.” Before I had a chance to reply, she vanished from view, and I stood in her room for a few moments to dwell on what she said. It was a cliché, but she became the light to my dark and the joy to my bitterness.

Still with my hands occupied with her bags, I wandered to the viewing room to watch her go by.

Ronan appeared first. The responsible, loyal one, not blood-related, but he was

family, and I wouldn't be here without him.

Gunner was next with Annika beside him, arm looped in his, chatting away as she scanned the floor as if scrutinizing and planning in her mind what she would change.

She stalled on the empty casino floor as Gunner kept walking forward and glanced up at me, as if she knew I'd be there watching. A gorgeous smile across that face as she flicked me a naughty little, discreet wave, then skipped to catch up with Gunner.

That's what happiness looked like, and I hoped it only got better for all of us. No one could replace Lars, yet our family seemed complete with Annika returning to us.

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*Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 4:23 pm*

I found them sitting in the viewing room at the end of the hall, smoking cigars and drinking whiskey.

That sweet cocktail scent, I'd become used to, and knew my men were relaxed and feeling satisfied with life.

Good. That's how I wanted it. If they're happy, then I'm so glad, and vice versa.

It was a game of four where there were no individual winners or losers, but we always fought for and with one another as a team, a family.

I waved the smoke away from my face as three pairs of eyes dragged their gaze away from the window to greet me.

"Which one?" I asked, showing them four samples of wallpaper for the Velvet rooms. I chose material that was easy to clean and looked expensive, even though they were on sale.

"The red," Ronan was the first to reply, then glanced at Mikky, who had a pained expression on his face.

"I don't remember giving you my approval to action this, Annika," he said in his business tone.

"Yes, you did. I was saying the other day in bed that the rooms need to be updated, and you said, 'Fine.' That's what you said, 'Fine.' That's you giving me approval," I explained.

“I meant 'fine' as in stop going on about it,” he reasoned, sternly.

“I only asked ten thousand times and you finally said, ‘fine,’” I argued back, ignoring his argument.

Gunner smacked his lips, chuckling under his breath. “She’s a bossy broad, aren’t she?”

“Yes,” Mikky groaned.

“So, which one?” I asked them again. “Which wallpaper do you like?”

“I like the dark blue,” Gunner pointed out. Typical of Gunner to choose the dark, moody one, but an entire room dressed in this wallpaper would look super classy.

“Mikky?” I urged, even though he was being difficult. “Which one?”

He forced himself to look at the samples, acting all grouchy and stubborn as per usual, which didn’t work on me anymore. Despite my simmering Fall’s icy exterior, he was on the inside a cuddly teddy bear, as long as you didn’t piss him off by hurting one of his family.

“Have you finished your marine biology assignment?” he pressed in that tone of authority.

“Of course,” I replied, enthusiastically. “I handed it in earlier today.”

I had only one more year to go before I graduate, and then I could work full-time at the club, now that I was over twenty-one.

By then, I would’ve had enough experience to perform Betty’s old role.

Ronan had stated several times that he would be glad to hand it over, as he had been filling in until it was time for me to take over.

That was the deal I made with the guys. If I completed my marine biology degree and worked part-time in the club in junior roles, I would be eligible for promotion.

“The gold one,” Mikky finally gave me an answer.

I snarled exhaustedly. “Three different answers, three different colors.”

“Use different wallpapers for different rooms,” Mikky suggested, which was exactly what I was hoping he’d say.

“What a fabulous idea,” I gasped, slightly exaggerated to encourage him. I’d never forget Sylvie saying to me a year ago, when we came together in peace at the olive branch meeting, ‘The best way to get your way is to convince them that your idea was theirs all along.’

She was right. She also said if you want them to do something for you, butter them up with praise. She was right about that, too.

We’ve become distant allies, women in business who want the best outcomes for all of us.

If I were to be honest, I doubt that we’d be as friendly if we lived in the same city and worked in the same club.

One thing Sylvie and I had in common is that we’re fiercely territorial, not just over land but our men.

“Oh my gosh, I could design themed rooms,” I suggested, excitedly, and I could see him baffled by my enthusiasm. Then his expression changed when he realized he’d



been duped. Even Gunner and Ronan knew I was blindsiding him, but they sat there with broad smiles.

Good one, Sylvie.

“Decision done,” I announced as I walked away.

“What did I just agree to?” I heard Mikky asking the guys.

I managed to get only halfway down the hallway before an arm curled around my waist to pull me into Ronan’s office.

The wallpaper samples fell from my hands, splayed across the floor.

It was their thing. Stealing a chance, surprising me with flowers or dinner, or spontaneously whisking me away to their office.

Their impulsiveness kept me on my toes and gave them something to occupy their curious minds.

It was Mikael this time, caging me against Ronan’s office wall, arms wrenched above my head, mouth claiming my neck as my panties quickly became sodden.

I couldn’t help myself. They were like my weaknesses and my strengths, and a single touch from any one of them would have me ruined for the day.

Over his shoulder, I sensed another figure descending on us. Ronan wanted to be part of our play. Well, it was his office after all.

Mikky’s mouth traveled to my subtle breasts as Ronan snuck his hand over my crotch as a third figure arrived – Gunner. I suppose he was feeling left out, sitting in the viewing room by himself.

I was roughly pulled from the wall and bent over the desk with their enormous strength as I delighted in dropping my pants, so they could penetrate me, which was what I hungered for day in and day out: to be erotically seduced by one or two or three of my men.

Mikky inserted his cock into me with the usual forceful push, while Gunner unzipped his pants and flipped out his erect cock so that I could suck him off. While Ronan knelt to suck my clit.

It was astonishingly glorious, elevating me into new heights of pleasure. My clothes ripped from my body, completely naked, a slave to their touch.

My inner thighs were like rubber, as nerves shot up and down, firing into my clit that Ronan was eating. When he sucked my clit, I cried out over Gunner's cock while Mikky pummeled me from behind.

My body jolted and gyrated with every stroke from Mikky while Gunner guided my head over his length.

"My turn after you, Mikky," Ronan spoke over my clit, and his voice vibrated my wet skin, adding to my lust.

We kept the pace up in rhythm because we'd done this so many times before. Mikky was the boss and always had first dibs on where he wanted to go, leaving Gunner and Ronan to fight over the other parts of me.

My fingers gripped Gunner's butt cheeks and squeezed, like a watermelon, as he grunted in pleasure and rolled his hips, pushing his length in a little further before moving out a short way.

Mikky pulled out of me, "Swap," and Ronan stood behind, taking his turn to fuck me, while Mikky came to the front of me, and I opened my mouth to take him as always.

“Good girl,” he said calmly, stroking my hair. “You fucking drive me crazy, Annika.”

I couldn’t answer because my mouth was stuffed with his cock, but I knew that I loved it. I loved his taste, touch, sound of his voice, scent, everything. My feelings for Gunner and Ronan were the same, but Mikky was the last man to warm to me. The last man to forgive me. The last man to love me.

Ronan’s cock was a little slimmer, but longer than Mikky’s, so he adjusted his position a little so he could drive downward, as I cried out when it pinched a little. Gunner continued where Ronan started to eat my clit, sucking and licking, giving different strokes to Ronan.

The sound of the elevator pinging in the background, followed by the dinner trolley rattling as it was pushed over the door rails. That was my job once, and I enjoyed it, but someone else does it—a newbie by the name of Katerina Ivanov.

Even we, the Kaisers, had a big enough heart to offer her a job when her family was arrested and imprisoned for the abduction of Gunner, holding illegal firearms, drugs, extortion, tax evasion...the list went on.

But it wasn’t Kat’s fault. She was born into that family and, like me, was manipulated by influential people to do dirty deeds. I had compassion for her situation, and we’ve become friends. Besides, as I quickly learned, it was better to have the people whom you don’t trust where you can see them.

Katerina will always be loyal to her Ivanov bloodline family, regardless of what she says, just like I will always be loyal to a fault to my Kaiser family.

Ronan slammed the door, so Kat couldn’t see what we were indulging in, although it’s not the first time she’s walked in while I was being fucked by one of the Kaisers.

I tried to keep my voice down so Kat couldn’t hear, but it was impossible, as my

body crumbled and succumbed to the orgasm that claimed my body.

My body contracted for a few seconds as my breath stalled; my heart seemed to stop beating, and my nervous system froze, just for a moment, before the release. I moaned over Mikky's cock as Ronan kept pumping until he released into my pussy.

After we were done, they helped me dress, and we retrieved our meals that had been left outside the doors and sat at the desk, eating together as a family.

When I took the lid off the plate cover, I laughed in delight to find crab cakes.

"Special order," Mikky said with a wink, then lowered his head to kiss me on the lips as Gunner and Ronan watched, smiling proudly that Mikky was happy again.

We dug in, devouring the crab cakes, while discussing the business as per usual. We had no competition anymore, and the police weren't on our backs like they were, and even though that was our objective, it made it a little boring.

I suspect it won't be long before another family from another territory might wage war on us, but for now, we'll enjoy the peace.

"So, um," I cleared my throat. "What about paint colors to go with the wallpaper..."

The guys groaned as if I was forcing them to watch paint dry or count blades of grass. But as Sylvie said, make it look like it was their idea.

I continued in my sweetest tone, "So, I was thinking that the floorboards need sanding and polishing, and we need to discuss the possibility of moving the kitchen..."

The End