



Innocent Virgin Prisoner (Tarasov Bratva #8)

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Category: Urban

Description: He took my innocence and now I've developed a forbidden relation with my client.

A cruel Bratva boss, his power and anger make him untouchable – and sometimes uncontrollable too.

Our agreement was simple: therapy sessions, no attachment, no emotions.

But the night he stole my virginity, everything changed.

Now he's obsessed with me, and I can't escape his grip, no matter how hard I try.

I told myself I'd stay professional, keep my distance.

But the more he demands, the more I crave everything he offers—and it terrifies me.

This is a relationship that could destroy me, but I can't walk away.

His world is brutal, his heart even more so. But I'm helpless to resist its pull.

Every time I push back, he pulls me closer, his grip tightening like a vice.

I test the chains of his control, but he merely laughs in amusement at my misery.

He's a master of manipulation, and I'm just a pawn in his game of power.

Can I survive the wrath of the Bratva leader who owns me? or will I surrender everything to him?

Total Pages (Source): 27

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

I woke up to the alarm clock buzzing on the bedside table, my lips curling into a small smile. My heart gladdened, and my eyes widened ever so slightly as a spark of excitement coursed through my blood.

It was yet another day to be grateful for the gift of life, another day to be productive and chase my dreams. As a 22-year-old young woman who had a small, humble beginning in a quaint town, I was determined to make it big in the city of Los Angeles.

I wasn't born into wealth and didn't have a business tycoon for a father or a family business to run. What I had, however, was a single mom who did her best to raise me in the ways that she could. She taught me to be content with what I had and to always go for what I wanted regardless of the situation I found myself in.

The fact that I wasn't born with a silver spoon was the reason I worked tirelessly to change my life with one goal in mind: to be successful. I owed it to myself and to my mother, who battled with depression almost all the time.

Maybe watching her struggle with emotional stress over the years was what birthed my love for helping people overcome their pain. I developed a passion for psychology at a tender age, drawn by the concept of human behavior.

I wanted to understand the human mind—how it operated—and also have a deep knowledge of why people acted the way they did. The variations in people's reactions to the same action was rather intriguing to me, and I wanted to know more. If I could understand the psychology of human beings, then I would be able to help humanity in the little ways I could.

Driven by this ideology, psychology was my major in college, and that was the first step in becoming the strong and successful woman I'd always envisioned.

As a fresh graduate, I moved to LA for an internship at a prestigious private therapy clinic, Oakwood Wellness Center. The clinic was a serene oasis nestled in the heart of the bustling city, providing top-notch mental health services to a diverse clientele.

I worked as an intern at the clinic for six months before being promoted to a job position. I learned far more than I ever imagined within this time period. According to my superior, Dr. Kim Kurt, my dedication and zeal to work was the reason for my quick promotion.

She wasn't wrong, considering that my passion for the profession seemed to wax stronger with each passing day, with each patient I helped.

Working at Oakwood Wellness Center had filled a void in my heart and gave me a sense of fulfillment. I felt like I was at the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing for the right cause. There was no greater joy than this—at least for me, anyway.

This was why I always woke up happy every morning, eager to see what the day had in store for me. My colleagues at work nicknamed me “Sunshine Girl” because they claimed that I was always so bright and positive. Why wouldn't I be? I had everything I'd ever wanted, and my life was meaningful—simple but meaningful.

I stretched and swung the sheets to the other side; I sat on the edge of the bed, my legs dangling in the air for a moment. The floor was cool beneath my feet as I strolled to the floor-to-ceiling window and parted the curtains.

The sun's glow was warm on my skin, and my smile broadened as I drew a deep breath with closed eyes. My hair was a tangled web, with stray strands framing my

face, as I glided through the room, rolling my neck in a massaging motion.

“Hey, Siri, play ‘Better When I’m Dancin’ by Meghan Trainor,” I said, rubbing my eyes.

Siri’s smooth voice responded, “Playing ‘Better When I’m Dancin’ by Meghan Trainor.”

The upbeat melody filled the air, charging the atmosphere with positive vibes, and I couldn't help but move my body to the rhythm. The song’s infectious beat dropped, and I swayed my hips, allowing the music to take control. As Meghan’s powerful vocals rang out, I felt my energy lift, and I spun around, rhythmically snapping my fingers.

I danced my way to the bathroom, my feet moving and twirling to the beat while singing along. I shed my nightgown and stepped into the shower. There, I washed my face, brushed my teeth, and enjoyed a warm bath.

Once done, I headed out and strolled over to the wardrobe with a white towel wrapped around me. My eyes squinted as I stared at the clothes neatly arranged on the hangers, contemplating what outfit to wear today.

Not long after, I chose a navy blue pencil skirt and a crisp white blouse with a subtle sheen. The blouse featured a relaxed fit and soft V-neckline, adding a touch of elegance to the overall look.

I picked a pair of black stilettos from my collection of shoes to complement my outfit.

As I finished dressing, I stared at my reflection in the full-length mirror, admiring the gorgeous woman looking back at me. My hazelnut brown hair fell in effortless waves

over my shoulders, and thanks to my heels, I stood inches taller.

My light brown doe eyes sparkled with mirth, and my full lips, painted a shade of red, curled into my signature smile. I smoothed out the wrinkles on the skirt that accentuated my curvature, and my impeccably manicured fingers adjusted my blouse.

I exhaled sharply, beaming with confidence as I muttered the same words I told myself every morning. "It's gonna be a good day." A radiant smile flashed across my face, and I grabbed my handbag, heading out, ready to face the day.

The Uber driver pulled over by the sidewalk, the gravel crunching beneath the tires as the car came to a halt. I opened the door and stepped out, the morning sun enveloping me. As the vehicle drove away, I headed toward the clinic's magnificent building, its sleek glass facade reflecting the vibrant greenery of the surrounding park.

My heels clicked against the fine floor as I walked into the building. Inside, the clinic's modern design and calming color palette exuded warmth and welcome.

"Morning, Sunshine Girl," Olivia, the receptionist, greeted me, standing at her position behind the counter. Her long dark hair was pulled back in a ponytail, her blue eyes shining with admiration as she stared at me.

"Morning, Olivia," I replied, mirroring her sweet and endearing tone with a vibrant smile. "You look amazing today," I added, strolling past her.

Her brows arched, her grin widening as she trailed me with her eyes. "Funny, you took the words right out of my mouth." She chuckled.

I turned around and shrugged my shoulders while walking backward, my eyes pinned

on her. “Well, I guess what they say is true: Great minds do think alike.” I winked at her, wiggling my brows before swiveling to round a corner.

“Good morning, Sunshine Girl,” greeted a tall, bearded man with sharp dark eyes and black hair.

“Hey, Ronnie, how’s it going?” I asked without slowing down.

He caught up with me, matching my pace while scribbling on a notepad. “Bonnie broke up with me last night,” he said, his tone light and casual with no hint of pain whatsoever.

My brows furrowed, and I stopped in my tracks, facing him. “Oh, my God, are you okay?”

He tore his eyes off the notepad in his hands and held my gaze. “Yeah, I’m good,” he said with a smooth tone that masked his true feelings.

I eyed him and raised an eyebrow, my voice dry and laced with sarcasm. “Try saying that with a bit more enthusiasm, and I just might believe you.”

He hesitated for a moment, his jaw clenching ever so slightly. “I’ll be fine.” His lips curled into a plastic smile.

I’d definitely have a talk with him later, but right now, I had a patient to attend to. My hand snapped out to rest on his shoulder. “You will be.” I beamed an encouraging smile at him. “We’ll pick this up later.” I patted his shoulder and walked away.

My first session today was with a woman named Sarah, who was battling with anxiety and depression. She’d just recently lost her cat in a fire that almost claimed her own life. Sarah seemed more bothered about the death of her pet than the house

and property that the fire had consumed. She said that the cat was the closest thing to a family she had, and now she felt all alone in this “cruel world,” as she put it.

In this line of work, nothing was weird or strange; it was just another Tuesday for us. It didn’t matter how ridiculous our patients’ stories might seem; what we were more interested in was their emotional state. Our job was to listen and provide them with the help that they so desperately needed.

Clearly, Sarah and her cat shared a connection that I was unable to fathom. However, I listened to her, offering empathetic nods and supportive words. As the session progressed, I was able to skillfully use relaxation techniques and coping strategies.

Later during the day, after a series of sessions with other patients, my superior called for an impromptu meeting with his team.

We all sat at the large rectangular table that dominated the center of the room, murmuring amongst ourselves and wondering why we were called. My eyes scanned the modern conference room, admiring the crisp white walls and polished dark wood floor.

The air was filled with the soft hum of conversations and the sweet aroma of freshly brewed coffee from our mugs. A whiteboard on the wall across from me displayed the remnants of our last meeting, the marker’s vibrant colors still bold against the board’s sleek surface.

Ronnie sat relaxed in his chair, his eyes staring blankly into space. He had a hand under his chin as he sat there, lost in his own thoughts. The breakup had hurt him more than he cared to admit.

My gaze shifted to Emily sitting in a chair a few feet from Ronnie. She had her eyes fixed on him, her expression soft, and I could swear that she could feel his pain.

Emily had always loved Ronnie, but he'd been too blind to see it.

Personally, I never liked that Bonnie girl, and for someone as free-spirited as I was, that spoke volumes. Everyone who'd met her had told Ronnie that she was bad news. But the man was so in love with her that he failed to see the danger she posed to his sanity.

Maybe this was for the best. Maybe now, he'd finally see the one woman I was sure truly loved him: Emily.

Aside from that, what exactly was going on? Why the sudden meeting?

I glanced at my watch, and that was when the door opened, and Dr. Kim Kurt walked in. At her appearance, silence fell, and every staff member adjusted in their seats.

Dr. Kim's heels clicked against the floor as she walked to the head of the table, her perfume wafting through the air. Her short brunette hair framed her round face, and her green eyes sparkled behind her wire-rimmed glasses. She wore an impeccably tailored black suit with a crisp white undershirt, exuding an air of confidence and professionalism.

The woman inspired me in more ways than one. She was the perfect role model for me: beautiful, successful, and very good at what she did. Dr. Kim was in her late forties, but she looked twenty years younger, especially because of her petite frame and baby face. Sometimes, my male colleagues would talk about how she was so hot and sexy and fantasize about the crazy things they could do to her in bed. Idiots.

She halted at the head of the table and said, her voice calm and collected, "I'm sorry I'm late." Her gaze swept across the room. "Thank you for coming on such short notice," she began, her aura commanding attention. "I have an important announcement to make."

Glances were exchanged as she paused for a moment.

Dr. Kim continued. “We’ve been approached by a high-profile client, and usually, I should be the one to take the sessions with them. But unfortunately, I’m indisposed at the moment.” She paused, as if to let that sink in. “That being said, I’ll be assigning one of you to the case—someone that I’m positive is more than capable for the job.”

All eyes fell on Carol, and her lips curled into a self-satisfied smile, pride flickering in her gaze. She was the one who fit the description. Besides, when situations like this arose, she was always the first choice. The girl was good at her job, but she was an embodiment of pride and arrogance.

“Clarice,” Dr. Kim’s voice pierced through my thoughts, and her gaze fell on me. “You’re taking the case,” she blurted out.

“What?!” Carol snapped reflexively, her eyes wide with shock and disappointment.

The same exclamation escaped my own lips, but with a much lower tone. My heart skipped a beat, and for a fleeting moment, my brain abandoned me. I was just as shocked as everyone else at the table. Dr. Kim had caught me off guard with this appointment, and now I felt a surge of excitement and nerves at the same time.

I could feel my colleagues’ gazes and sense the skepticism some of them gave off. Honestly, I couldn’t blame them for being doubtful about the selection, considering that I was relatively new to the team.

“Dr. Kim, are you sure about this?” Carol questioned, her tone hinting at her judgment and disdain. “Clarissa is new to the job; she has no experience. She’s incapable of handling high-profile clients.” She rose to her feet, an instinctive move that highlighted her opposition to the plan.

Carol had never gotten my name right, and I hated that. However, what bothered me the most was her condescension. She'd always thought she was better than everyone else, but her arrogance would be her undoing.

“Carol, sit your ass down, and don’t you ever interrupt me again,” Dr. Kim spat, her voice calm but laced with venom.

Reluctantly, the sassy and arrogant girl sat back in her chair, glaring at me with a clenched jaw.

“Congratulations, Clarice,” Dr. Kim said, her eyes locked on me. “I believe you have the potential to excel in this field, and I’m eager to see how you’ll handle this challenging case.”

I was almost certain that Carol was just as eager. She was clearly anticipating my failure.

“Thank you, Dr. Kim.” I nodded, trying to appear more confident than I felt. “I promise I won’t let you down.”

“I know you won’t,” she said with conviction, her gaze still locked on mine. “I’m more interested in how you’re going to navigate the complexity of this case. It’s not gonna be easy. But I have faith in you.”

My lips parted into a faint grin, and I drew a deep breath, feeling a sense of determination wash over me. I was ready to prove myself, to show Dr. Kim that contrary to what Carol thought, she hadn’t made a mistake by choosing me.

I locked eyes with Carol, and I could see the fire burning within, the jealousy and the envy. But I wasn’t moved by any of that. I had a task to do, and I was going to give it my best.

“Alright. That’ll be all for now,” Dr. Kim said, her voice sharp and dismissive.

Her phone buzzed on the table, and she answered the call, strolling out of the conference room.

“Congrats, Clarice,” a female colleague, Fiona, whispered as she rose to her feet with the others.

“Thanks.” I looked up at her, paying attention to the murmurs around me.

Most of my colleagues seemed genuinely happy for me, but the likes of Carol, not so much. Carol’s heels clicked against the floor as she strolled over to me.

“You’ve landed your first high-profile client,” she said coldly. “Let’s see how long your victory lasts.”

My expression softened at her words, and I beamed a broad smile at her, unaffected by her negativity.

Her face contorted into a faint frown as though my grin had pierced her heart like a knife. Without another word, she walked away, her footsteps rapidly receding.

“How do you guys cope with her?” I leaned back in my chair, eyes fixed on Ronnie as he leaned against the edge of the table.

“We just ignore her and act like she doesn’t exist,” Emily chipped in, heading toward me with some files clasped to her chest.

“Works every time,” Ronnie said, chuckling, his fingers loosening his tie.

“How’re you holding up?” I asked him, looking into his eyes. I could see his pain

simmering beneath the surface.

He hesitated for a second. “I’ll live.”

“Yes, you will,” Emily said, her lips curling into a bright grin. She rested her hand on his.

For the next few seconds, there was an awkward silence as the two gazed at each other. Emily got a grip of herself and cleared her throat, pulling her hand away. She gripped the files to her chest tighter and looked in my direction. “Congratulations on landing the big case, Clarice. You’re going to knock it out of the park. I’m sure of that.”

My eyes crinkled at the corners. “Thanks, Em.”

She flashed a smile that barely masked her nervousness, and her eyes darted back to Ronnie before she left the room.

He watched her leave and didn’t shift his gaze off her until she was out the door. Ronnie looked back in my direction and caught me staring at him with a knowing smile on my lips. “I know what you’re thinking,” he said, cocking his head to the side, his tone flat. “It’s a bad idea.”

I threw my hands in the air with a defensive motion and demonstrated zipping my lips. Those two had chemistry, but Ronnie was still in denial.

However, that was the least of concerns at the moment. This case was a big deal to me, and my superior was already counting on me not to fail. As a newbie to the profession, I shouldn’t be handling such high-profile clients yet. But here I was, with that burden on my shoulders.

Dr. Kim could've given this case to anyone else, yet she chose me to handle it. As excited, thrilled, and intrigued as I was, I was also nervous, anxious, and maybe even afraid.

But was I going to let it control me and affect my performance? Hell, no. This was an opportunity to prove myself to everyone. It was a test, a test that I was determined to pass with flying colors.

Whoever the high-profile client was, surely, their case wouldn't be so terrible.

Right?

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They say anger is a short madness, but as I stood there, facing Damon Barlow, I felt like I was staring into the abyss of a lifelong rage. I could feel my blood boiling and my fury simmering beneath the surface.

I clenched my fingers into fists, and my brows knitted together, accentuating the scowl on my face. The bastard, Damon, knew that I was pissed by the words spewing from his mouth, yet, he wouldn't stop talking.

The more he spoke, the angrier I got and the tighter my fists balled. My expression darkened as I listened to his veiled threats and empty words. In my mind, I'd killed the son of a bitch multiple times already and in the most gruesome of ways. In reality, I was just a step away from sending him straight to hell.

The nightclub was alive with the DJ's hypnotic beats as vibrant lights cast momentary glimpses on the frenzied faces of the dancers. With loud cheers and hands in the air, they swayed their bodies to the pulsating music that had them enchanted.

However, all of that had suddenly become an indistinct noise that seemed to fade into the distance as my rage amplified. I had come out here to have some fun, blow off some steam, and just relax after the week's work. That was until I ran into Damon Barlow—the last person in the world I thought I'd cross paths with tonight.

Barlow was a man of unyielding ambition and an insatiable hunger for power. He was known for his brutal tactics and his ability to strike fear into the hearts of his enemies. Barlow had proven that he was a force to be reckoned with. He had built his reputation on fear—to the extent that the mere mention of his name sent shivers down people's spines.

The man was known for one thing: madness. Barlow had no rules, no creed, no code of honor—and that made him dangerous. He was a mindless animal, a beast with no humanity, nothing to keep him in control.

He was not respected by anyone, but he was certainly feared by many. His gang was responsible for some of the most heinous crimes in the city's history, from extortion and racketeering to murder and mayhem.

Most leaders of organizations—legal and illegal—were afraid of him. The man was believed to be untouchable, above the law because he owned half the city. Lies!

Barlow was powerful. True. But his influence and reputation were over-exaggerated because people were afraid of the mindless animal within him. They magnified him to the point where he became like a god in their heads, just so they'd have an excuse not to get involved with him. Cowards.

I'd encountered him a few times in the past, and he hated me instantly. This was because I didn't grovel at his feet or tremble like the others. He disliked my boldness, but I couldn't care less.

Word in the street was that Barlow thought of me as a disrespectful bastard with no iota of respect whatsoever. He couldn't be closer to the truth, but he wasn't entirely correct. He mistook my self-worth for disrespect.

I had the Tarasov blood coursing through my veins, and the one thing no man could do was intimidate me. Barlow might be all the horrible things they said he was, but I was no saint either.

There we were, face to face, as Barlow's words crawled under my skin, fueling my rage. He was older than me, but that didn't give him the right to refer to me as a kid—a kid without direction and guidance.

My lieutenant, Alex Solokov, placed a palm on my shoulder, signaling that I should hold in my rage. Alex knew me better than anybody else, and he knew that if Barlow kept talking, things would get messy real quick.

Growing up, I'd struggled with a single, overwhelming issue, a problem that had plagued me throughout my childhood: anger. It was an uncontrollable fury that would burst out of me when triggered, leaving destruction in its wake.

At this point, I was starting to feel triggered by Barlow's confrontation, and it wouldn't be long until I snapped. Alex knew exactly what was about to happen, which was why he had his palm on my shoulder. He knew what my fury was capable of once unleashed.

Barlow wasn't the only mindless animal in the club tonight. I, too, had a demon of my own, and the beast within me had almost broken free from the chains holding it bound.

"I heard the Bratva has been having some...difficulties lately," Barlow said, his voice calm but dripping with malice and mockery. He stepped forward, his lips curling into a smirk. "Rumor has it that your anger issues cost your organization a multi-million dollar contract." His tone fell to a hushed whisper, his breath ghosting against my ear.

My jaw tightened, and I felt that rage growing stronger by the second. This man was really testing the patience I didn't even have.

He pulled away, toiling with his cufflinks and eyes dropping to his wrists. "Well, I guess that's what happens when you put an incompetent in charge of something bigger than him."

"I'd watch my tongue if I were you, Barlow," I hissed, my voice low and deadly. "It would be a shame if you lost it."

His expression darkened slightly. “Don’t threaten me, Raz.” He met my gaze, venom evident in his tone. “I’ve killed people for far lesser crimes than that, boy.”

Rage jolted across my body like lightning, and I could feel my hands trembling as I stepped forward, my eyes never leaving his face. “Call me that again one more time. I dare you.”

His men drew out their guns, ready to protect their leader, and my foot soldiers did the same. The air was thick with tension, and his smirk only accentuated my anger.

Barlow mirrored my expression and began, his voice bold and challenging. “You, Raziel Tarasov, are nothing but a—”

The word hadn’t even left his lips when my fist connected with his jawbone, the impact knocking out his tooth. His head fell backward, blood spilling from his mouth. The blow was so powerful that it lifted him off his feet and sent him crashing into a wooden table that broke under his weight.

Before his men could open fire, my foot soldiers took the lead, shooting down the enemy in their sights.

Chaos erupted, the music stopped, and the sounds of gunshots filled the air. Guests screamed and lowered their heads, taking cover from flying bullets as the two teams clashed in a fierce battle.

Alex and my men didn’t shoot to kill, and in no time, they had the enemies subdued and at gunpoint.

I, on the other hand, couldn’t stop myself from unleashing my fury, my fists drilling into Barlow’s face. He was down on the floor, weak from the blow that had almost knocked him out completely, but I didn’t restrain myself. I couldn’t.

With his collar in my grip, I straddled Barlow's chest, my knees pinning his shoulders to the floor. My knuckles fell on his nose with powerful strikes that splattered his blood across the ground.

My dirty blond hair was a tangled mess as his head snapped back and forth underneath my heavy punches. My blows were unrelenting despite the amount of blood that covered his face.

Alex rushed over and grabbed my arms from the back, hauling me off Barlow's battered form. "Calm down—calm down!"

"Let go of me!" I snapped, my blood still boiling with rage.

Those of Barlow's men who could still walk ran over to help him up, their eyes blazing with fury, but at the time, there was nothing they could do about it.

My men surrounded me like a shield amidst the chaos in case the enemies tried anything stupid. Guests ran helter-skelter, confused as to what was going on. Others had their phones out, filming the whole thing, but I didn't give two shits. I was tempted to bounce back on Barlow and teach him a lesson he wasn't going to forget in a hurry.

Sirens wailed in the distance, signaling the cops' arrival. Someone must have tipped them off.

"We gotta get outta here," Alex said, his eyes scanning the surroundings.

He led the way out, and we followed, pushing through the crowded room until we emerged into the cool night air. The city lights twinkled like diamonds in the distance, the breeze blowing against my face.

My anger had yet to be quenched despite the blood dripping off my knuckles.

Alex fell into step beside me, his voice low and even. “That outburst was highly unnecessary. It was reckless, and you could’ve killed him.”

“He should’ve kept his mouth shut,” I said, my tone unapologetic as I wiped the blood on my knuckles with a white handkerchief.

“That’s beside the point,” he stressed with a whisper, his brows furrowing at my nonchalance. “Barlow is—”

“Barlow is a man, Alex!” I snorted, glaring at him, my rage swelling within me. “And as you know, I fear no man.”

He paused for a moment, pinching the bridge of his nose. “There will be consequences, sir,” he said softly, his concern evident.

It fueled my rage how much Alex glorified that son of a bitch. I didn’t give a damn what the consequences would be. The man had threatened me, and everyone knew I hated being threatened. I warned him, dared him to repeat himself, and he was stupid enough to fall for my trap.

He had it coming. Barlow got what he deserved, and that would teach him not to mess with me ever again.

Without another word, I walked away from Alex and the scene, seething in silence.

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The air was electric, and loud, pulsating music boomed from the speakers. A whirlwind of infectious energy enveloped us as we stepped into the club.

Laser beams sliced through the darkness, casting an otherworldly glow over the dancing masses. The floor was an ocean of writhing bodies with ecstatic smiles on frenzied faces. At the DJ's instruction, hands were thrown up in the air as his fingers expertly scratched the surface of his disc.

Nodding his head to the rhythm of the sound, the DJ pushed a few buttons, his fingers flying across his set-up, manipulating the hypnotic beats. "Who's ready to travel back in time?!" his deep, husky voice boomed through the speakers. "Put your hands up if you're to travel back to 2011!"

The crowd's hands flew into the air, anticipating his next move.

He turned a few knobs here and there, and immediately, the music changed the atmosphere to something more erotic.

The crowd cheered, screamed, and danced harder when LMFAO's "Sexy and I Know It" filled the air.

The music was so loud that it reverberated through every cell in my body, making it nearly impossible to think or communicate without shouting. Scarlett was speaking to me, and I could see her lips moving, but I couldn't hear a word she was saying.

"What?!" I literally screamed at the top of my voice, my brows arching reflexively. "I can't hear you!"

“I said—”

The rest of her words were drowned by the loud DJ’s noise.

A light scowl flashed across my face, and I wished at that moment that I had just stayed back home. I didn’t have anything better to do at my place, but at least I’d have my peace and quiet. This setting was too wild, and the noise was killing me, not to mention the unnecessary attention this stupid person was drawing to me.

Scarlett O’Sullivan, my tall redhead friend, wouldn’t take “no” for an answer when she proposed that we come out here to have some fun. This wasn’t my usual gathering, and I never would have agreed to tag along if Scarlett wasn’t so damn persistent. As fun and jovial as I was, I wasn’t the clubbing type of girl, and she knew that. But my friend thought that it was ideal to step out of my comfort zone every once in a while.

How the hell had she convinced me to wear a dress as short and shiny as this? Now, I’d lost count of the number of guys that had stared lustfully at me.

The black knee-length dress hugged me in the right places, accentuating my curves, and its hem highlighted my toned legs. Delicate seed pearls were sprinkled across the dark silk fabric, sparkling like diamonds. The gown, in general, seemed to shimmer and glow in the lights, drawing eyes from all directions.

Scarlett’s green dress complemented the color of her eyes, and her red hair fell loosely over her shoulders. She grabbed my hand, her eyes scanning the wind environment as if searching for something. “There!” She pointed at a lounge somewhere across the vast expanse. “Come on!” Scarlett led the way with my wrist in her firm grip.

As we pushed through the unwinding crowd, the pulsating beats and vibrant lights

gradually faded into the background. Scarlett found us a table away from the noise and the dancing masses.

It took a lot of courage for me to ignore the eyes on us as we approached the lounge. Those men, stinking of wealth and power, had their lustful gazes fixed on us, and that made me so uncomfortable. I wished that I could shrug off this feeling of being out of place and just blend in with the crowd—unbothered like Scarlett was. But I simply couldn't.

Surrounded by velvet curtains and soft, golden lighting, we slid into the plush, comfortable cushion seats.

“Finally, some peace and quiet—or at least something that looks like it,” I muttered the last sentence under my breath, my eyes roaming the lounge. “I don’t think I could have handled much more of that chaos.”

Scarlett chuckled, her eyes crinkling at the corners. “Would you stop being a buzzkill?” She slammed her palm against the table and leaned back on the cushion. “Come on! We’re here to have some fun!” she added, her voice dripping with enthusiasm.

“Yeah, that’s easy for you to say, considering you’re not the one being dragged to a nightclub against her will,” I said, raising an eyebrow.

Scarlett laughed, her eyes shining with mischief. “Oh, poor baby,” she teased, wearing a mocking expression. “Did your incredibly persistent best friend force you to do what you didn’t wanna do?” Her tone was laced with a glint of sarcasm.

“Haha. Very funny,” I shot back dryly, my expression flat.

“Lighten up, Clarice. There’s more to life than just your work and your little house,”

she said, her gaze locked on mine. “We’re here to celebrate your first real high-profile client, so stop being such a wuss.”

At this point, I could hardly find the words to shoot back at her, and that victorious smirk on her lips crippled my resistance.

“But was this dress necessary? Did I have to wear it?” I gestured at the fabric that cascaded down my physique.

Her brows rose. “What’s wrong with the dress?”

“Are you kidding me?” I edged closer, my hands on the table between us, as I lowered my voice. “It’s drawing unwanted attention,” I said through gritted teeth, my eyes discreetly roaming the surroundings.

“Would you relax?” She laughed. “The dress only reveals what you always hide...your curves and contours.” A slight pause came when her gaze darted across my body. “You should be thanking me instead of complaining, you know.” Her lips curled into a smirk.

I let out a light groan and rolled my eyes. “You’re impossible, Scarlett.”

“And that’s why you love me.” She winked and wiggled her brows. “Now, what do you wanna drink? I’m buying.” Scarlett flagged down a waitress.

I wasn’t used to stuff like this, so how would I possibly know what I wanted? Leaning back on the cushion, I tried to be more relaxed. “Surprise me,” I replied.

Scarlett beamed at me, her face lighting up with a radiant grin. “Figured you’d say that.” She raised her head and looked at the waitress towering over her. “We’ll have two of your best cosmopolitans, please,” she placed the order. “And can we also get

some of those amazing sliders I've heard so much about?"

"Coming right up." The waitress nodded, jotting down the order. She flashed a soft, courteous smile at us. "Enjoy your evening, ladies." She dematerialized, her high heels clicking against the floor as she retreated.

As the evening progressed, I started to feel a bit more relaxed. Maybe it was the drinks, but I didn't think so, considering that my good friend made sure we both drank responsibly.

I hadn't had so much fun in a while, and if I was being honest, a part of me was glad that she'd brought me out here tonight.

Scarlett dragged me to the dance floor after having our drinks.

As always, I was a bit skeptical at first. "Scarlett, you know I don't know how to dance," I objected as she pulled me by the wrist.

"You don't have to know how to dance. Just move your body to the rhythm of the beat." Her manicured fingers flew into her hair, combing through the strands as she withdrew from me and stepped onto the dance floor. "Just close your eyes and imagine you're in your room. I know how well you dance when you're alone!" she said, her voice crashing against the loud music

My lips curled into a smile as I watched her shake her body to the sound, her red hair whipping around her face.

"Don't just stand there, hop on!" She beckoned me, gesturing with her fingers.

"Ah, screw this." I exhaled sharply, damning it all as I joined her on the dance floor.

She laughed, reaching out to hold my hands. Together, we danced, our bodies writhing in sheer bliss. At that moment, nothing else mattered. I freed myself and decided to give in to the music. I let it take control, directing the movement of my body, and I could feel it coursing through my veins.

I threw my hands into my hair, my feet tapping to the rhythm of the DJ's hypnotic beats. A feeling of excitement washed over me, and it was like a whole new person had taken over, one who didn't give a shit about anything else.

The more I danced, the more I felt my worry, anxiety, and shyness dissipate until all that was left was happiness—pure and undiluted. This wasn't something I would do often, so why not utilize this opportunity?

A few boys approached me, and I found myself dancing with these strangers. One of them dared to hold my hips from behind, and I would've snapped his hand off, but he was gentle. His grip was light and respectful, his hand guiding the movement of my waist.

I shot my head back to meet his face—his amazing hazel-brown eyes crinkling at the corners. He was tall and handsome, maybe no older than twenty-three, and his smile was charming.

My lips curled into a smile, and I found myself melting into his arms, his hands traversing my body. I let him feel my skin and caress my curvature because I could sense his modesty. He could have used the opportunity to exploit my body and risk getting smacked across the face. But he didn't. Instead, he avoided my sensitive areas.

The boy clearly had some respect for a woman's body, and his touch was delicate yet electric. We danced together—face to face, our bodies moving in sync. I didn't realize how close we'd gotten to each other until I felt his boner against my thigh.

A spark ignited within me, and I felt a tingling sensation between my legs. My eyes widened ever so slightly, and my gaze dropped to his groin. The print of his erection over his jeans stirred up a flutter in my chest, and my heart paused for a minute.

I lifted my eyes and held his gaze, tempted to claim those enticing lips of his. What're you doing? Snap out of this madness! I cautioned myself. You're losing control.

As handsome and tempting that young man was, I couldn't let anything happen between us. He was a complete stranger, and I couldn't let myself be stupid. There was a part of me that wanted to just kiss him and taste his lips. But to what end? What would happen if the kiss got so heated up and we both decided to take it elsewhere, somewhere more private?

I hadn't been with a man before, and with the amount of ecstasy coursing through my veins at the moment, what was the guarantee that he wouldn't take advantage of my weakness? I was still a virgin by choice, and I didn't want to lose that yet.

My mother would always say, "Don't start a fire if you can't put it out."

This was a fire that would definitely consume me, and I would spend a long time wishing I never lost control. Losing my virginity to a stranger at a nightclub wasn't how my story would go. No.

Without saying a word, I stepped back from him, watching his shoulder slump in dismay. As I scanned the area for Scarlett, who had somehow vanished from my view, that was when it happened: the commotion.

The crowd gasped in fear and astonishment, their noises drawing my attention to where a man's fist was flying into another's jaw. The impact was so hard that I heard the victim's bone crack.

The powerful punch from the attacker lifted this man into the air, and his body crashed onto a wooden table. As the furniture broke under his weight, gunshots filled the air, the sudden sound forcing everyone to take cover.

I dropped to the floor immediately as the chaos erupted, and the guests ran wildly, seeking shelter from flying bullets. From the ground where I lay shuddering, I jerked my head to find the attacker straddling his victim's chest, his knees pinning the defenseless man's shoulders to the floor.

My heart ached as I witnessed the gruesome scene where this beast of a man relentlessly slammed his fist into his victim's face. His knuckles were dripping with blood, and the victim's head was snapping back and forth, but he wouldn't stop.

It was like watching a horror movie, and I couldn't seem to tear my gaze off the scene. The look in the attacker's eyes hinted that this wasn't his first rodeo; he'd done this and worse before. I thought I was looking at the devil himself unleashing his fury.

Another man rushed over there and pulled the attacker off his victim, and that was when I had a good look at him. He stood tall at 6'4" with a broad-shouldered frame that radiated strength and power.

His dirty-blond hair was slightly tousled, and his piercing, light eyes held an unsettling intensity that made my skin crawl. The man's sharp jawline and angular features gave him a look of both elegance and danger.

He was super handsome, insanely attractive for a devil, and I couldn't tear my gaze off him.

"Ohh, Clarice! Thank God you're okay!" Scarlett's voice snapped me back to the present, her heels rapidly clicking on the floor as she approached me.

By now, the shooting had stopped, and I would later come to find out that the incident was a clash between two mafia gangs.

Scarlett helped me to my feet, her concerned eyes roaming my body as if searching for any sign of bruises or injury.

“I’m fine,” I said, my lips curling into a smile.

“Are you sure?” she asked, her voice laced with worry and anxiety. “Were you hit?” Scarlett took a quick glance over my form again.

“I’m alright. Are you?” I asked, gently squeezing her fingers.

She let out a soft sigh of relief and nodded. “I’m good. I’m good.”

Scarlett was already beating herself, and I knew she wouldn’t be able to live with herself if anything had happened to me. She felt responsible for me tonight since it was her idea to come here. But luckily, no one was hurt—well, except for the man whose jaw was certainly broken.

The distant wailing of approaching sirens wafted through the air, and Scarlett grabbed my hand. “Come on, let’s get out of here.”

As we pushed through the crowd, I looked back in the direction of that destructive man, but he was no longer there. The man had some serious anger issues from the looks of things. He needed help, the kind of help that Oakwood Wellness Center provided.

However, I hoped I’d never be unfortunate enough to have someone like him as my patient.

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“It was high time someone taught that son of a gun a lesson.” Daniel laughed, seated in the visitor’s chair across my desk. His brown eyes simmered under the soft chandelier glow, his gaze fixed on me. “Funny how he couldn’t even throw a single punch.”

Daniel Tarasov—my younger brother, the easygoing one of the two of us—had stopped by my office this afternoon. He’d heard about the incident with Barlow—what transpired and the outcome. The videos of my outburst had gone viral on the internet, and there was hardly anyone who hadn’t seen or heard about it.

My brother was pleased by my reaction. He believed that I’d shown the world that Barlow wasn’t as untouchable as everyone thought.

“I’ve seen that video a thousand times, and I honestly still can’t get enough of it,” Daniel said, his body shaking subtly as he chuckled hard, his legs crossed. “That blow was precise, and I’m sure you fractured his jaw. That’ll teach him not to mess with the Tarasov bloodline.”

I sat back in my leather armchair, a cigar smoldering between my lips. A thin thread of smoke swirled around me as I took a drag, tasting its flavors on my tongue. “Barlow should have kept his mouth shut,” I said, my voice low and deep, a puff of smoke escaping my lips.

“If he had, he would have kept his face the way it was.” Daniel chortled, his fingers grasping the bottle of whiskey on my mahogany table. “Barlow’s been such a pain in my ass, and I’m glad you finally put him in his place.” He poured himself a glass and relaxed in his chair, taking a sip.

The door opened, and Alex, my most trusted lieutenant, walked into my office with a file in his hand. His expression was blank as usual, his shoes clicking softly on the marble floor as he approached my desk.

“Boss, we have a situation,” he said, halting in front of my table.

My eyes squinted ever so slightly, my brows knitting together to accentuate the puzzled look on my face.

“Your temper is making headlines again,” he said, his voice calm and collected.

“Yep, wouldn’t be the first time,” Daniel chipped in, sipping from his glass.

My brother was right. This uncontrollable temper of mine had landed me in so much trouble so many times, especially with law enforcement agencies. However, with my power and connections, I’d always come out unscathed. Los Angeles should get used to me by now.

“It’s different this time,” Alex said, wearing a somewhat serious expression on his face.

My brother and I exchanged glances before my gaze fell on Alex, my curiosity piqued. “How so?” I asked, wondering what had changed all of a sudden.

“As entertaining as the nightclub incident was, it’s landed you in trouble,” he said, his eyes fixed on me with an expression that screamed I told you so .

“What kind of trouble?” I questioned, wondering what was above my power and connection.

“Law enforcement is taking a closer look at us, and your...outburst didn’t exactly

help our case.” The pause came when he handed me the document in his hand. “We’ve received word that the DA is pushing for charges.”

My smirk faltered as I accepted the document, and my eyes scanned through the pages. I raised an eyebrow, and my face darkened the more I read. “Is this some kind of joke?” I jerked my head to face him, my voice dripping with disdain.

“I’m afraid not, sir,” came his flat response.

Daniel, confused, shifted his gaze between the two of us, completely in the dark. “What’s going on?” He leaned forward, curiosity getting the better of him.

I tossed the document on the table and let out a dismissive scoff. “The court has ordered me to attend a mandatory therapy session. Can you believe that?”

My brother burst out laughing at how ridiculous it sounded. “You? Therapy? I almost feel sorry for the doctor.”

“Alex, you can tell the DA’s office to kiss my ass because there’s no way I’m playing their game,” I said, cracking a smile at the absurdity of the so-called punishment. “Can you imagine me sitting and spilling out my feelings to some glorified shrink?” I laughed.

“Actually, I can,” he said, his statement striking me like lightning.

My laugh trailed off as I glared at him, a faint scowl flashing across my face.

“With all due respect, sir, you crossed a line,” he added with a calm voice, soft and smooth.

My jaw clenched, disappointed by his perspective on the situation. “You were there.

You saw what happened, and you know that Barlow started it,” I said, a pang of irritation swelling up within me.

“True,” he said without taking his eyes off me. “But you threw the first punch, sir. You beat the crap out of him in front of those witnesses.”

“He had it coming,” I said, sharp and defensive.

“Perhaps. But that’s beside the point,” he paused, then continued. “Things could have escalated more than that. Lives would have been lost—innocent lives—and the situation would have spiraled out of control.”

My hand balled into a fist, and my jaw tightened at the harsh truth that I wasn’t ready to face.

“Damon Barlow is well connected, and he has powerful friends in high places—”

“I’ve told you before: I’m not afraid of Damon Barlow,” I cut him off, my scowl deepening as a spark of rage jolted across my body.

“This isn’t about fear, sir,” he said, his tone cool but audacious. “It’s about self-control, a construct the world believes you lack.”

I felt my blood boil at the bitter taste of the truth, a truth that only fueled my rage.

“Considering the kind of man Barlow is and the condition you left his face in, we’re lucky a mandatory therapy session is all we get,” Alex concluded.

“Well, now that you put it like that, it kinda makes sense,” Daniel said, his gaze shifting from Alex to me. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but...he’s right.”

Of course, he was right. I knew that he was, and that was the reason I was so pissed. But as much as I hated the bitter truth, there was little or nothing that I could do about it.

Law enforcement was already looking into my case, and the last thing I needed was more trouble. Disobeying a direct court order would only escalate the matter. There was no need to make the situation any worse than it already was.

Despite my reservations, I knew deep down that I couldn't afford to ignore the court's verdict. In order to avoid more severe legal consequences, I would have to swallow my pride and attend the therapy sessions.

It was a ridiculous idea—yes. But I didn't have much choice. I couldn't risk jeopardizing everything I'd worked so hard to build over some little dispute with the court. No. It wasn't worth it.

Perhaps the therapy sessions might be good for me, even though I highly doubted the possibility. However, the sooner I got the stupid task done, the sooner everything would return to normal again.

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I heaved a heavy sigh, feeling a slight surge of unease as I smoothed out the wrinkles on my pencil skirt. My manicured fingers adjusted the wire-rimmed glasses perched on my face. I wasn't sure why I chose the nerdy look—maybe I thought the glasses would make me appear more professional.

My hair was pulled back into a neat bun, and my makeup was subtle yet polished. A faint flutter swelled up in my chest, betraying my nerves despite my composed exterior.

“You’ve got this,” I muttered to myself, nodding in affirmation.

My heels clicked against the fine wooden floor as I paced back and forth, breathing in and out in an attempt to summon some courage. I raised my head and glanced at the wall clock, my heart skipping a beat at the realization that my client could walk in at any time.

At the very last minute, my client had changed. It seemed that this new patient was even more high-profile than the case Dr. Kim had initially assigned me, but she claimed it was necessary for me to take this one on; she had the same faith in me. Thankfully, the original case was going to Emily, not Carol.

Dr. Kim had hinted at the man's volatile nature. She said, “He’s a bit of a handful with some serious anger issues.” It wasn't the words that had spooked me; rather, it was the stern expression on her face.

In order to distract myself from this unwanted fear that had me second-guessing myself, I glanced around my new office. A sense of reassurance washed over me as I

inhaled the sweet aroma of freshly brewed coffee wafting from the coffee maker in a corner.

The space was calm and serene, with soft gray walls and a plush area rug in a soothing blue hue. The center of the room was dominated by a sleek modern desk flanked by two comfortable armchairs.

Just then, I heard the door open, and as I turned toward the entrance, my eyes fell on an imposing man strolling in. Behind my glasses, my eyes widened ever so slightly, and my heart paused for a second.

It may have been a little dark that night at the club, but I had a good look at the fight starter, and I never forgot a face. It was him. He was all dressed up in an impeccably tailored black suit and with a much calmer demeanor, but it was him. I was certain. He looked charming, handsome, and dashing, but he was the same devil I saw that night.

No wonder this case took priority, I couldn't help but think as I observed him.

As he approached me, the scent of his cologne enveloped the air around me, and his sharp blue eyes never left my face. His dirty-blond hair was slightly tousled like the other night, and his blazer highlighted his broad-shouldered frame.

The blank expression he wore further accentuated his ruggedness, and his aura exuded confidence, power, and danger. He wasn't a man to be messed with, and I knew that for sure—I'd witnessed his rage firsthand.

A surge of anxiety surged through me, and there was a sudden dryness in my throat. His presence commanded attention, and I felt small before him, his imposing frame towering over me.

The man was gorgeous—I couldn’t deny that—and staring at him caused my legs to turn to jelly. How could someone as handsome as him be so cruel and heartless? But the most important question remained: How was I going to handle such a character? Was I even up to the challenge? Where did I start from?

I struggled to steady my breathing and appear as professional as possible—composed and in control. That was the aura I exuded, but deep within me, I was in dire need of help. This situation was way above my experience. And now, I couldn’t help but wonder what exactly it was about me that convinced Dr. Kim Kurt to assign me to the case—especially knowing it was more complicated than the initial high-profile client.

Oh, dear Lord, I don’t wanna mess this up, I prayed in my mind, my gaze locked on this man’s intimidating stare. Like a drum, my heart pounded in my chest as I struggled to maintain an air of confidence and composure.

My palms were sweaty, and it seemed like my legs could no longer carry my weight. However, I was the doctor here, and he was my client. This was my space, and that meant that I was in control. The DA’s office had granted me power over him. Regardless of who he was, within this space, I called the shots.

With a discreet move, I exhaled softly, a fraction of my fear and anxiety dissipating into the air.

He halted in front of me and introduced himself, his voice deep and husky. “Raziel Tarasov. I have an appointment with a therapist.”

Immediately, my professional mask slipped into place, and I extended a steady hand. “Welcome, Mr. Tarasov. I’m Clarice Evelyn, and I’ll be facilitating our sessions together.”

Raziel’s brows arched slightly, a glint of surprise flickering in his gaze. His eyes

dropped to my outstretched hand before darting back to my face as he shook my hand. His grip was delicate yet firm, and I felt a jolt of electricity course through my whole body. Despite the shock, I maintained my composure, pretending to be unfazed by his touch.

“Please, take a seat.” I withdrew my hand, masking my nervousness with a courteous smile.

His fingers expertly unfastened the buttons of his blazer as he sank into the plush armchair and crossed his legs, one over the other. His confidence was admirable yet intimidating, and I could only hope that I wouldn’t mess this up.

I settled into my chair with a pen and a notepad in my hand as his piercing gaze locked on my face. His intense stare was a clear indication that he was studying me for reasons best known to him. However, I had a pretty good idea of what might be running through his mind.

The man was almost twice my age and might even be old enough to father a girl like me. He must have found this situation weird, and indeed it was.

The air was thick with tension, and I could almost hear my own heart racing slightly faster. The intensity of his stare didn't make things easier either, and I couldn't let him intimidate me.

“Shall we begin?” I said, my voice low and professional. I crossed one leg over the other. “May I just confirm that you’re aware of the confidentiality and boundaries of our therapeutic relationship?”

His lips curled into a sly grin, and he asked, derailing completely off course, “How old are you, eighteen?” His gaze remained steady.

My brows furrowed at the condescension in his voice, and I felt a pang of irritation swell within me. “Excuse me?” The words fell from my mouth, mirroring my displeasure.

Raziel paused for a moment, a hand under his chin with a pesky little smirk dancing on his lips. “Carry on,” he said, his voice low and even, like he knew he’d crawled under my skin.

I subtly clenched my jaw and drew a deep breath, dispelling the negativity creeping into my heart. A warm, courteous smile spread across my face as I leaned forward, my pen poised over my notepad. “Let’s start with the basics,” I began, my tone laced with confidence and composure. “Mr. Tarasov, can you tell me a little about what brings you here?” I locked eyes with him.

“Don’t you already know that?” he questioned, his voice flat and dripping with disinterest.

I went silent, my expression stern yet welcoming—a subtle sign that I still awaited a response from him.

He heaved a sigh and answered, “I’m just following orders, Doc. The court thought it would be a good idea.”

“And what do you think? Do you share their opinion?” I asked, my eyes boring into his with a sudden confidence.

He cocked his head to the side, retaining his smirk. “Would you like me to lie or tell the truth?”

“We’re discussing your feelings, Mr. Tarasov. The truth would be appreciated,” came my response.

“Well, in that case, the truth is that I know this to be a complete waste of my precious time, and I cannot wait to be done with it,” he said, his voice laced with disdain and, unfortunately, sincerity.

That was his undiluted thought, and without knowing it, he'd just given me a head start. My eyes fell on my notepad as I scribbled my findings before raising my head again. “Why do you feel this is a waste of time, Mr. Tarasov? Do you think you cannot be helped?”

“Help is for people who have a problem,” he said, looking right at me.

“And you don’t?” I questioned, holding his gaze. I studied his body language and the slight changes in his flat expression.

Raziel paused for a while, absently stroking his jaw, unwilling to answer a question as simple as that. In my line of work, silence was also a reply, and I’d received my answer. Raziel was in denial, and beneath all that arrogance and pride was a man in need of help. He’d never admit it—his ego wouldn’t let him, but I was willing to do my job.

“Mr. Tarasov, can you describe your current living conditions for me? Do you live alone or with others?” My question broke the silence between us.

His eyes squinted, and his brows knitted together, highlighting the puzzled look on his face.

I went ahead to clarify my question further. “Your living situation can provide valuable insight into your support system and stress levels.” I paused, letting my explanation sink in for a moment. “Also, your response will help me understand your daily routines and potential triggers for anxiety and, well...anger.”

He adjusted in his chair and toiled with his cufflinks, his expression neutral. “I have a place. It’s...fine.”

That was a little more than vague, but I’d let it slide for now. I scribbled down my notepad and faced him again. “Can you tell me what you do for work?”

“I’m a businessman,” he replied, his tone keen and sharp.

My eyes narrowed, locking on him as I searched for any sign of emotion. But the man was good at keeping a straight face. His expression was stoic, blank, and almost unreadable. I analyzed his behavior these past few minutes and made a mental note to dig deeper into his background. There was more to this closed-off individual than he was letting on

I’d lingered on the basics long enough; it was time to get to the point.

I braced myself for the outcome.

I cleared my throat and adjusted my glasses. “Tell me, Mr. Tarasov, how do you feel about the club incident?”

His expression darkened slowly, and his eyes furrowed. “I don’t do feelings , Doc. A man crossed a line, and I punched him in the face,” he said with a low and unapologetic voice.

“I think you did a lot more than just punch him in the face,” I replied, holding his intimidating gaze.

“How would you know? You weren’t there,” came his flat response, his eyes never leaving my face.

Oh, but I was. Raziel just didn't know it—not yet, anyway. He had no idea that I saw him unleash the beast within. Maybe it would be better to keep it that way, at least for now.

“I saw the videos online, Mr. Tarasov,” I stated, observing his countenance and waiting for the slightest change in his mood.

Raziel remained calm and collected, unfazed by my words. “Like I said...he crossed a line.”

“Is that how you treat everyone who crosses one of your lines?” I questioned, eager to hear his response so I could know where to place his level of madness. In his silence, I continued, my tone measured but pointed. “Mr. Tarasov, do you agree with me that you have the tendency to let your anger dictate your actions?”

His expression darkened, and his jaw tightened, hinting that I'd struck a nerve. Raziel uncrossed his legs and leaned forward, his voice a low whisper. “You act like you know...but you don't.” The slight pause came when his eyes bore into mine.

“Maybe,” I responded, holding my ground, unfazed by his sharp words. “But I do know that you lack self-control.”

His brows furrowed, and his fingers clenched into fists, his eyes pinned on me like a hook to a fish. My heart skipped a beat as I wondered if I'd just lit a match too close to the fire.

“Let me guess,” he began, a glint of anger flashing across his rugged yet handsome face. “You're going to fix me—make me a little bit better with your fancy notebook and your patronizing smile.” He leaned back in his chair, watching me with a stern look.

The mockery in his tone couldn't be more obvious, and it triggered me. But I was the professional one here, and my reaction should differ from his.

“As ironic as it may sound, it's not far from the truth. But by all means, please do go on,” I said, wearing an equally stern expression. “I'm fascinated by your insightful analysis of the therapeutic process.” The words tumbled out of me, dripping with sarcasm.

He let out a scoff, his lips curling into a smirk. “You think you're clever, don't you?”

His question caused my heart to skip a beat in my chest, but I maintained my composure. I clenched my jaw in order to mask my nervousness as he leaned closer again.

He stared deeply into my eyes and said softly, his voice husky and laced with menace, “You have no idea what you're dealing with here, Doc.”

I swallowed, bracing myself. “You're right. I don't. But that's why we're here.” I held his gaze and softened my expression. “So, please, let me help you.”

For the next few seconds, it was silent between us, each staring into the other's eyes.

Raziel was as dangerous as he was broken, and deep within me, I was already wondering how I'd handle such a man. Was I up to the task?

Would this case make me or break me? Would I fix him, or would he ruin me? One thing was certain, though: This was going to be a lot tougher than I thought.

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I sat in my leather chair, gently swaying to and fro, with a glass of vodka cradled in my hand. The air was filled with the harsh scent of the drink and the smell of smoked tobacco.

On the mahogany table, a half-smoked Cuban cigar lay abandoned in a delicate china saucer, a thin tendril of smoke curling upward. A small grin perched on my face as I sipped from the glass in my hand.

I'd yet to understand why the young therapist still lingered on the fringes of my mind. She was all that I could think of, and for some inexplicable reason, I found her incredibly amusing.

Clarice Evelyn, the beautiful and spunky shrink who had stood her ground against me without so much as flinching. Her pretty face flashed in my head, keeping my mind occupied with thoughts of her and only her.

Strange.

This young girl, who was no older than 25, had somehow managed to live rent-free in my head. She had me distracted and unable to focus on anything else but her.

Alex was sitting across from me, already filling me in on the progress of our ongoing project.

I could see his lips moving, but unfortunately, I wasn't listening—my mind was elsewhere. Physically, I was present in the office with him, but mentally, I was reliving my therapy session with that amazing, fearless, and gorgeous young doctor.

She had the most angelic smile I'd seen in a long time, and her light brown doe eyes sparkled behind her wire-rimmed glasses. Her makeup was mild, and it matched the tone of her soft, smooth skin, while her hazelnut-brown hair was styled in a bun.

Her attire—a pencil skirt and a flowered blouse—was simple yet professional, but it was also sexy. It accentuated her curvature and highlighted her contours, adding a touch of sophistication to her overall look.

Under the soft chandelier lights, her skin glowed, and her eyes sparkled like sapphires. When she smiled, it was like her eyes smiled with her, and her full lips revealed a glimpse of her perfect whites.

But what really drew me to her was her guts—her spunk and fearlessness. Clarice seemed like a woman who knew her worth and wouldn't allow herself to be intimidated by anyone. I admired that about her.

The woman had been unaffected by my presence, unlike anyone I'd ever encountered. Usually, most people would cower in front of me, trembling at the intensity of my gaze. But not her. She was different.

Clarice hadn't only held her ground; she'd also, on multiple occasions, locked eyes with me. She was unfazed by the intensity of my stare, something a lot of folks found rather intimidating. Not to her, obviously.

I guessed she reminded me of how I carried myself around Damon Barlow—confident and strong. The way I wasn't afraid of the man despite his reputation was the same way she wasn't afraid of me.

Her fearlessness pulled me in like steel to a magnet, and for the first time in a long time, I felt something other than anger and disdain.

I may not have been paying rapt attention to Alex's words, but I was discerning enough to notice his sudden silence. I shifted my gaze toward him and caught him staring at me with a small smile playing on his lips.

"What?" I asked, curious by the way he looked at me with slightly squinted eyes.

"Nothing," he said, reclining into the visitor's chair, his gaze unwavering. "I just haven't seen you this...distracted in a while."

My brows knitted together, and I replied, trying to sound as convincing as I could, "I'm not distracted."

He raised an eyebrow at me and chuckled softly. "Anything you say, Boss."

I tried to push back the thoughts of Clarice that flooded my head, but the harder I tried, the harder she invaded my thoughts.

"I've been meaning to ask," he began, fixing his eyes on me with purposeful intent. "How'd it go with the shrink?"

A faint grin twitched at the corner of my lips, and I took a sip from my glass, reminiscing on the season with her.

"That good, eh?" he teased, noticing my smirk and the softness of my expression.

"It wasn't so bad," I admitted, emptying my glass before setting it down on the table.

"Care to elaborate on that?" A small smile flashed on his face, and his tone was tinged with a glint of curiosity.

I paused for a moment, locking eyes with him, reveling in the suspense brewing

within him. Alex must be wondering what kind of encounter I had at the therapy session, considering my current mood.

Alex wasn't the type to pry, but he'd noticed the slight change in my attitude since the last session. Catching a soft expression on my face was like catching lightning—almost impossible. Yet, here he was, witnessing a rare phenomenon. His curiosity was justified.

“She’s young,” I said finally, breaking the silence.

“She?” he asked, arching his brows.

“My shrink. Yes,” I continued, my voice low and even. “She’s smart for her age and good at her job, I must say.”

His eyes widened at my words. “You just gave a compliment,” he said, tilting his head to the side as amusement flickered in his gaze.

“Indeed,” I concurred, ignoring his surprise. “But that’s not what’s really fascinating about her.” I leaned forward, elbows on the table. “Alex, she wasn’t afraid of me,” I stated, my tone laced with intrigue. “She didn’t even flinch. She held her ground and acted like she was in control.”

“Perhaps she doesn’t really know who you are,” he suggested.

“Oh, she does. She knows, trust me.” I leaned back in my chair, my smile broadening. “Not everything, but enough to make her fear, yet she wasn't afraid.”

With a fascinated grin on his face, Alex stared at me in silence, anticipating my next move.

“She thinks she’s strong.” A soft, dark chuckle escaped my lips, and my eyes squinted ever so slightly. “Well, next time, I’ll be more...persuasive, and we’ll see just how much of me she can handle.”

He hesitated, then asked, “Do you think that's a good idea—testing her limits?”

“It’s a fantastic idea, Alex.” My lips curled into a smirk.

The thought of toiling with her excited me, but beneath all of that, there was something else. I couldn’t quite explain it yet, but whatever it was, it pulled in me even more. I was interested in this therapy now more than ever and couldn’t wait to see how it would all play out in the end.

At least she’d given me something to look forward to—an outcome to anticipate.

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I pulled into the driveway of my mother's cozy home and killed the car engine, a soft sigh escaping my lips. My fingers rubbed my eyeballs, and I reclined into the driver's seat for a minute.

My eyes lifted toward the rearview mirror, and I adjusted the frame, catching my reflection. I needed to be sure that I didn't look stressed out so Mom wouldn't have something to worry about.

The case with Mr. Tarasov bothered and spooked me on many levels, but I couldn't share it with anyone. Doctor-patient confidentiality. Mom, on the other hand, was nosy at times and could be persuasive when she wanted to be, especially if she sensed that something was off with me.

She was like a living, breathing stress detector, and the last thing I wanted was to have her concerned over nothing.

My mom, Diana Evelyn, had been in and out of jobs—all sorts of jobs—in order to feed me and my younger brother, Ethan. The woman was a hard-working single mother who was ready to go the extra mile to make sure that her children had a roof over their heads and food in their bellies.

Mom was the reason I worked so hard. She'd done everything in her power to see me through college and allow me to chase my dreams. I'd be an ungrateful child if I messed up and threw away her sacrifice. Mom never got to live her dream life; she never got the opportunity to chase her own goals and objectives. However, she made sure that I chased mine and reached the heights that she never could.

This woman inspired me in more ways than she could possibly imagine, and I would forever be grateful to her.

Every now and then, I would stop by the house and spend quality time with her and my brother. They were the only family that I had in the world anyway.

A broad smile spread across my face as I opened the door and stepped out of the car. My eyes glanced at the simple cookie-cutter building—at its brick-faced exterior and low-pitched roof, a familiar sight in this suburban neighborhood.

I hadn't taken a step further when I heard my phone ring, its constant buzzing forcing me to dig my hand in my pocket. I withdrew the device and answered. "Hey, Ronnie, how's it going?"

"Clary, I think I've made a mistake," his voice, laced with urgency, boomed through my phone's speakers.

The next words that flew out of his mouth sounded like gibberish to me because they tumbled out in a nervous rush. I could barely make out a thing he was saying.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Slow down there, mister," I cut him off, grasping the car's backdoor handle and yanking it open. "Let's try this again—a little calmer this time." My tone was gentle and smooth, but my curiosity was piqued. "What's going on?" I leaned forward and grabbed a few bags from the backseat.

Earlier, I'd stopped by the bakery to pick up a couple of my family's favorite treats: fresh-baked cookies for Ethan and a lemon pound cake for Mom. I also picked up a few loaves of crusty bread for dinner.

I grabbed the bags, and that was when Ronnie repeated himself. He said, "Emily and I kissed!"

I paused for a moment, my brows arching as I tried to process his words. It sounded a lot more like an exclamation than a statement, and it was obvious that he was freaking out.

“Well, it’s about time.” I chuckled, stepping away from the car. With a deft kick, I shut the back door, the sound echoing through the cool and quiet afternoon air.

“That’s all you have to say? ‘It’s about time.’ Really?”

“What do you want me to say, Ronnie?” I laughed lightly, turning to make my way to the house with the bags balanced precariously in my hands.

“I don’t know—that it was a bad idea?” he replied, anxiety palpable in his tone.

The phone tucked between my shoulder and ear was held in place by the gentle pressure of my bent neck. My flats were almost soundless against the pavement as I walked toward the entrance.

“Well, I’m sorry, I can’t tell you that, Ronnie,” I said, wiggling my brows and beaming a smile at a neighbor who’d waved at me from their patio.

“Why not?” he demanded.

“Because .” I let out a slight groan, frustrated by his level of ignorance. “Are you really that clueless? Emily’s been in love with you for, like, forever, Ronnie!” I blurted out.

“Oh, my God. This is bad. This is terrible!” he grumbled on the other line.

“You know what’s terrible?” I began, lashing out at him but with a mild and gentle tone. “The fact that you’ve ignored what’s been right in front of you this entire time.

Ronnie, I've watched you waste your love and affection on someone who never even valued you as a person," I said, referring to his ex-girlfriend, Bonnie, or whatever her name was.

"I'm confused right now, Clary. What should I do? I don't really know how I feel about Emily," he said.

"I can't tell you what to do, Ronnie. The ball is in your court now," I replied, halting in front of the entrance. "Whatever you choose to do with it is entirely up to you."

"This wasn't exactly the response I was hoping to get," he said, clearly disappointed.

I let out a sigh. "I'm sorry, Ronnie. I'm just not in the right frame of mind at the moment."

"You alright?" he asked, concerned.

"It's nothing I can't handle," came my reply. "Speaking of handling, my hands are full right now. Literally. Can we pick this up later?"

"Uhh, yeah—of course, sure," he answered, the skepticism in his voice hinting at the fact that he wasn't done with me yet. "Bye."

"Bye."

He ended the call.

I let out a light groan.

Setting the bags at the base of the door, I reached out and rang the bell.

A few moments later, Ethan answered the door, his eyes shining as he took his headphones off. “Hey, sis.” He extended his hand.

“Hey, buddy.” My lips curled into a smile, knowing what was coming. I reached out, and we shared a special handshake, one we’d perfected over the years. It started with a simple high-five followed by a quick fist bump and then finished with a gentle thumb-to-thumb touch.

Ethan would turn 18 in a few months, and although he was already taller than me, he still knew his place. We’d had our fair share of siblings fight over the years, but as we matured, we gradually dropped that habit. Ethan used to fight me all the time, and I would always fight back until I realized that he was the only brother that I had.

Mom would occasionally remind us that we were all we had in this world. She would always whisper to us that someday, she would leave this earth, and all we’d have was each other.

It took a while, but Ethan and I soon worked out our differences—the usual brother-sister banter that used to drive us both crazy. We used to fight over the most ridiculous things: who got to control the TV remote, whose turn it was to do the dishes, and who was the ultimate champion of Mario Kart—me, of course.

However, for the past few years, since I left for college, we’d hardly experienced a serious fight. This little handshake of ours symbolized our union and the connection we shared.

Ethan reached for the bags, and his brows furrowed slightly. “Whatcha got in there?” With the loaded bags in his hands, he headed back inside.

“Nothing much, just some stuff from the store.” I followed up behind him.

As I stepped into the living room, the soft golden lights of the table lamps enveloped me, casting a warm glow over the cozy space. The room was a comfortable mess of plush sofas, colorful throw pillows, and the familiar aroma of Mom's grilled chicken wafting from the kitchen.

"Please tell me you got Mom's lemon pound cake," he said, his voice dropping to a hushed tone. "All week, she wouldn't shut up about it."

I chuckled, pointing at the bags he set on the coffee table. "Well, luckily, it's all in there."

"Mom, Clary's here!" he called out.

"Did she bring my lemon pound cake?" Her voice came from the kitchen, more concerned about her treat than she was about me.

As hilarious as that was, it was classic Diana Evelyn, and I couldn't help but laugh.

"Yep. She's all yours." Ethan sank into the sofa with an exasperated sigh, his light blue eyes crinkling at the corners.

I strolled over to the kitchen, inhaling the tantalizing aroma of caramelized onions and roasted veggies that teased my senses. There, I spotted Mom from the entrance. The air was filled with the sound of sizzling meat and the clang of pots and pans as the sunlight filtered through the window.

Mom had her back to me, a large serving dish cradled in her arms. She was plus-sized, with long, dirty-blonde hair and amazing hazel-brown eyes. She was a beautiful woman, charming and free-spirited, the source of my jovial nature.

She turned around and faced me, her lips curling into a radiant grin. "Clary, darling!

You're just in time," she said, her voice laced with excitement. "Pass me that knife, would you?" She pointed at it on the countertop.

"Mom, I literally just got here," I teased, hinting that it was still early to send me on errands.

The sound of my brother's mocking laugh came from behind me.

"What did you think I meant when I said she was all yours?" Ethan strode in, chuckling with a wide grin. He picked up an apple from the fruit basket on the kitchen table and leaned against the refrigerator.

"Your brother has grown wings, Clary. He doesn't help out with the chores anymore," Mom grumbled, accepting the knife I handed her.

"Ethan?" I cast a questioning and judgmental glare in his direction.

He shrugged his shoulders, took a bite from his apple, and replied with his mouth full. "Come on, you know Mom exaggerates things sometimes."

"Excuse me, I exaggerate things?" Mom pulled her head back, her disbelieving eyes pinned on him. She shot a glance in my direction and added, "Ask him what he does all day. He's either playing video games, or he's FaceTiming that Janice girl."

Ethan's eyebrows arched in surprise. "What's wrong with Janice? I thought you said you liked Janice," he stated, spreading out his arms theatrically.

"I do like Janice, but you're spending way too much time with her," Mom replied, her gaze never leaving his face.

His fingers combed through his hair, a light chuckle escaping his lips. "That's

because we're in a relationship, Mom. Unlike some people." The last statement was spoken when he stole a glance at me.

At first, I didn't get the humor until I caught that mischievous grin twitching at the corners of his lips.

I planted my hands on my hips, casting a playful glare at my brother. "What's that supposed to mean? How'd I get dragged into this?" I laughed, shaking my head in amusement.

"Pay no attention to your brother," Mom said, her smile broadening. "I know the right man is out there for you."

"Yeah, I don't doubt that," Ethan muttered, his voice dripping with mild sarcasm.

"One more word from you, and I swear to God I'm gonna...." Mom grabbed the kitchen spatula in her hand and chased him around the kitchen island.

He laughed, holding up his hands in mock defense.

I lowered my head, pinching the bridge of my nose, but inside, my heart filled with gladness. It was always fun watching those two behave like children. Their banter never failed to leave me smiling, and I couldn't have wished for a better family.

We might not have the world, but at least we had each other. And for me, that was more than enough.

However, amidst my bliss and fun, images of my client's cold and calculating demeanor crept into my head.

At that moment, a pang of fear swelled within me, stopping my heart for a second.

His name rang eerily at the back of my mind like a soft, scary whisper: Raziel Tarasov.

Later that evening, I sat on my childhood bed, flipping through the pages of my notepad. Under the lamp's warm glow, I reviewed all I'd written down about him—Raziel. Somehow, the sound of his name in my head gave me the creeps.

I had barely scratched the surface, and I could already tell that he was going to be a tough nut to crack. The man had no known weaknesses—at least not yet, anyway. Raziel wasn't remorseful; he didn't seem too concerned about his anger management issues. Judging by what I saw during our last session, the man wasn't willing to get help.

He was proud and arrogant, not to mention condescending. But more than that, there was something in him—something dark and evil that I couldn't quite place. At the mere thought of this, I felt a cold shiver run down my spine, and my skin was covered with goosebumps.

If I was going to make it through these sessions unscathed and in one piece—emotionally and mentally—then I needed to be more careful. He was a wild one, an untamed beast with the tendency to go on a rampage when triggered. This was my client? Why did Dr. Kim Kurt believe that I could handle such a person?

Raziel had a temper, hot like hellfire, and he was clearly unpredictable and unstable. There was no telling what he could do at any given point in time, and that made him very dangerous.

The knock on my door startled me, and out of fear, I almost jumped out of my own skin.

Her muffled voice came from outside: “Clary, honey, it’s Mom.”

I let out a soft exhale, smiling faintly at the ridiculousness of my fear. “Come on in.”

The door creaked and opened, revealing her at the entrance. Mom’s gaze lingered on me, and her eyes squinted ever so slightly. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m alright.” I rubbed my eyeballs and put on a plastic grin.

“Work trouble?” She leaned against the door frame.

I hesitated for a moment before answering. “Something like that.”

Noting my skepticism, her lips curled into a sly smile. “Don’t worry; I’m not gonna pry this time. Doctor-patient confidentiality, I get it.” She strolled into the room, her smile unwavering. “I don’t know what challenges you’re facing, honey, but I do know this.” She sat on the edge of my bed, her gaze pinned on me. “You’re smart enough to solve it.” She extended her hand, touching my cheek. “And I am so proud of you.”

My heart melted at her words, a wave of emotion washing over me. “Thanks, Mom. It means the world to me,” I murmured.

Mom gazed into my misty eyes for a moment, pride sparkling in the depths of hers. “Alright,” she broke the silence shortly after I responded. “Dinner’s ready.” She stood up, beaming at me.

“I’ll be down in a minute,” I said, mirroring her smile.

As Mom headed out and shut the door behind her, I drew a heavy breath and scratched the back of my head. This case wasn’t going to be a piece of cake, and I could only hope that Mom was right about me being smart enough to solve it.

I took one last glance at my notes before closing them and heading down for dinner.

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It was a long day, and I was exhausted from the series of serious meetings that I had to attend. A cold shower and a nice meal would suffice at this point—perhaps a good massage, too. My mind was busier than a regular day in Los Angeles. It was a tangled web of thoughts, redundant and important.

I could feel my head throbbing as I drove back home in the comfort of my sleek black Lamborghini. The car's cabin was filled with the gentle hum of the engine and the fresh scent of premium leather and polished wood. The luxurious fragrance enveloped me in refinement and sophistication as soft classical music played in the background.

I rounded a corner, and my eyes squinted ever so slightly. My jaw clenched at the queue of cars stretching out before me like an endless river of steel and glass glinting in the sunlight. A pang of irritation swelled up within me, and my fingers tightened around the steering wheel.

“You gotta be kidding me,” I muttered, furrowing my brows as I joined the queue and brought the car to a stop.

With soft, jagged breaths, I lowered my head, fingers pinching the bridge of my nose in an attempt to remain composed. The idea that I was stuck in traffic despite my exhaustion infuriated me. I could feel the subtle trembling of my body, like the beast within me was snarling, threatening to come out.

All I wanted was some peace and quiet, but the busy streets of LA offered everything but that. The cacophony of blaring horns, the screeching of tires, and the revving of cars assaulted my ears, worsening my headache.

To my left, a group of pedestrians chatted loudly as they crossed the street, while to my right, a construction crew drilled into the pavement. A street artist leaned against a wall, an acoustic guitar in his arms as he strung the strings with expert precision.

A small crowd gathered around him, smiling and filming his performance—a soulful rendition of James Blunt's “You're Beautiful.” His voice was a little off-key; however, it still added a charming, laid-back quality to the song.

As he performed, strumming the chords of his guitar, people tossed coins into his guitar case as they went about their regular lives. Others, however, were mesmerized by his music, momentarily forgetting about the hustle and bustle of the city.

Whether I admitted it to myself or not, the man's music was a welcome distraction. Its soothing melody eased a fraction of my stress.

“...you're beautiful, it's true. I saw your face in a crowded place, and I don't know what to do...” he sang, his fingers performing magic on the guitar strings.

And that was when it happened. I saw her in a crowded place, just like it said in the lyrics. What an impeccable coincidence!

The music gradually faded into the background as I shifted my gaze to Clarice Evelyn. I tried to look away, but I couldn't. Something about this woman had me hooked, unable to tear my gaze off her.

I felt a flutter in my chest, and a reflexive grin played on my lips, a sense of calm washing over me. Now, this was a distraction worth my time, and I couldn't care less when the heavy traffic decided to ease.

Clarice stood outside a coffee shop, dressed up in a pair of tight blue jeans and a crisp white top. While cradling her coffee in a thermos, she seemed engrossed in a

conversation with a female friend in a patterned dress. The duo chatted with smiley faces, and Clarice's doe eyes sparkled like diamonds. Her skin shimmered in the sunlight, and her hazelnut-brown hair cascaded down her back.

She looked different—casual but sexy—without the wire-rimmed glasses she'd had on during our last session. Her posture was confident and graceful, her smile radiant and infectious.

Time seemed to pause as I stared at this beautiful woman, whose aura was so magnetic that it entranced me.

My eyes narrowed as I watched her, observing the way she laughed, the way the sun kissed her face, and the way the gentle breeze danced through her hair. Loose strands rustled in the wind, framing her face with soft curls.

Her jeans hugged her skin, accentuating her curves that seemed to draw attention. The sound of her playful laugh filled the air, and I couldn't help but wonder what her friend had said to prompt such joy and excitement.

Watching that unique smile play on her face melted my heart, and my expression softened slightly. She lifted the thermos to her enticing, full lips and took another sip, her tongue sticking out to lick the remnants smeared over her mouth.

I stroked my jaw, grinning at the illicit picture my dirty mind had painted—that tongue of hers licking my own lips.

Her smile faltered almost indistinctly, and her brows furrowed, forming faint creases between them. Her eyes, now sharp and alert, darted across the surroundings with a suspicious look etched on her face. It was almost like she could feel my gaze, like she was perceptive enough to sense that someone was watching her.

For a fleeting moment, she lowered her head and rubbed the back of her neck, her eyes darting in the direction of my car. Seconds later, she straightened and met her friend's gaze again.

Clarice wasn't just smart; she was also observant. She was certain that someone's eyes lingered on her. That knowing smile on her face betrayed her composure. She knew. I was sure of that.

But did she know it was me? Had she seen me in the car?

It didn't matter, anyway; she had me intrigued already—drawn to her like a fucking moth to a flame. But why? What was it about her that had me enchanted?

Clarice exuded confidence and warmth, and despite the amazing smile that made her approachable, she seemed unbothered and unafraid of anything or anyone. Impressive.

No woman had caught my attention the way that she did. And I had yet to understand why, especially because I was starting to feel a flicker of admiration for her.

She stole a quick glance in my direction and sipped her coffee, her posture relaxed and composed. Even out here, she still seemed totally in control, and I couldn't help but be intrigued by this innocent yet fiery young woman.

A soft scoff escaped my lips as I leaned back in my seat. My gaze never left her form, which was enveloped in the sun's warm glow.

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I recognized his car—that sleek black Lamborghini that stood out from the streak of vehicles all waiting for the lights to turn green. It was him; it was Raziel. I was certain.

The tantalizing aroma of my freshly brewed coffee wafted through the air, blending with the smell of hot asphalt and the distant tang of street food.

Scarlett and I had stopped by a café to unwind a little, and now we stood outside the building, chattering and laughing. At first, I was super engrossed in the conversation, contributing and sharing my own experience in every topic we talked about.

However, my attention wandered off about five minutes ago, leaving me distracted and completely lost in thought. I felt guilty for not reciprocating Scarlett's energy and enthusiasm. Honestly, it was like the more I tried to focus, the more this man stole my attention.

I couldn't explain how I was able to sense his presence, but for some reason, I felt someone's gaze lingering over me. I wasn't sure who it was at first until I looked around, discreetly peering at my surroundings.

The moment I spotted the car, halted in traffic, I was plagued with the same feeling I'd experienced the first time Raziel Tarasov walked into my office. That distinct darkness, that stench of evil peculiar to only him, somehow pulled me in.

Raziel's aura was scary, and even from across the street, his presence affected me more than I cared to admit. It was strange and intriguing at the same time how someone I'd only had an encounter with just once could crawl under my skin the way

that he did.

How did I easily detect his gaze without looking in his direction? How come I was able to feel his presence, to sense his vile energy?

Now that I knew he was watching me, my heart wouldn't stop racing in my chest. A sense of fear overwhelmed me, but that wasn't the only feeling his presence stirred up in me. There was also anxiety and a glint of excitement. I didn't yet understand the excitement because, at the time, the feeling was weird—out of place, maybe.

Did he know that I was on to him?

My eyes darted across the street, stealing glances in the direction of his car while my friend's voice droned on. Poor Scarlett was unaware of my distraction and wouldn't stop talking about her latest shopping spree.

With my gaze on her, I would sip my coffee, smile, and nod along even though I wasn't mentally present. I tried to pay more attention to her words, but Raziel's dark aura had me hooked.

Why was I drawn to a man as unstable as him? Why did my eyes keep darting toward his vehicle? He was a bad man, a very dangerous man whom I was tasked with helping. He shouldn't have this much effect on me.

Focus, Clary. Focus , I thought to myself, momentarily shutting my eyes in an attempt to push the thoughts of Raziel Tarasov to the back of my mind.

"I'm telling you, Clary, this new designer boutique on Rodeo Drive is to die for!" Scarlett exclaimed, her voice dripping with enthusiasm.

"Uh-huh," I said, nodding absentmindedly as I sipped from my thermos and shot

another quick look in Raziel's direction.

"I actually got myself the most adorable pair of Louboutins! You just have to see them." She cackled.

"Mmm-hmm," I murmured, lowering my head, trying to mask my distraction.

Scarlett's voice slowly trailed off, and I could feel her gaze lingering on me. Shit. She must have finally sensed the change in my energy—that couldn't be good.

"Mmm-hmm?" she repeated, her tone laced with suspicion.

I raised my head and met her gaze, which was locked on me, her arms folded across her chest. "What?" I mumbled, feigning ignorance. My free hand instinctively scratched the back of my head.

"Funny, I was about to ask you the same thing," she said, her gaze never leaving my face.

I broke eye contact, sipping my coffee and looking away as if nothing had happened.

"Okay, spill," she said, her voice firm but playful.

"Spill what?" I asked, my lips curling into a faint grin as I looked back in her direction but avoided her eyes.

"I don't know," she said, furrowing her brows as if studying me. "You seem a little...distant—distracted."

I scoffed, letting out a derisive snort. "What? No!" I waved my hand in dismissal. "I'm not."

She arched her brows, and her eyes widened ever so slightly. “Oh, yeah? What was the last thing I said?”

I paused, thinking for a fleeting moment. “When?”

“Just a second ago,” she replied keenly, her eyes fixed on my face.

My lips curved into a self-satisfied smirk as I answered. “You said ‘when’.”

She laughed dryly. “Ha, ha. Real classy, Clary.”

I chuckled, shrugging my shoulders as I drew away from her, ignorant of the embarrassment that I was walking into. Unbeknownst to me, I inadvertently stepped too close to a group of rambunctious children playing tag nearby.

It all happened so quickly, but one tiny, energetic body collided with another in a flash. The collision sent a juice box flying out of the child’s hand. Time seemed to slow down as the box soared through the air, its contents escaping in a majestic arc.

With eyes wide open, I gasped, steeling myself in horror as the crimson-red liquid splattered on my crisp white top. I felt a pang of anger and irritation swell up within, and I glanced down at the kid in front of me. He looked terrified, his eyes misting and shining with genuine remorse.

“I’m so sorry, ma’am,” the boy murmured. His breath hitched in his throat, his eyes widening slightly in terror.

The others stopped, watching me, their anticipation for my reaction growing by the second.

I wasn’t even sure what to do or how to respond to such an embarrassing situation,

especially with Raziel watching from across the street. I was close to losing my temper and lashing out at the kids, but what kind of a therapist would I be if I did that? Boy, how Raziel would taunt me with that if I gave in to this rage brewing within me.

In my head, I could see that pesky little smirk of his perched on his face. Raziel must be enjoying this, and it infuriated me all the more, but I had to play it cool. I clenched my jaw and glanced down at the affected area.

The red stain spread like a gruesome wound across the fabric of my blouse, making me seem like I'd just emerged from a crime scene.

Goddammit! I cursed in my mind.

Scarlett, who'd had her palm over her mouth, trying to hold her laughter back, couldn't control it anymore. So, she let it out, her laugh somehow easing the heavy tension that hovered around us.

My face contorted into a mock scowl, although I truly was pissed. However, her cute little laugh and teasing expression softened my temper. "It's not funny, Scarlett," I whined, my voice laced with desperation and a hint of embarrassment.

"It kinda is if you believe in instant karma," she replied, wiggling her brows.

"God! This can't be happening right now," I grumbled, waving a dismissive hand at the kids, and they scurried off.

Her eyes dropped into the stained area. "Stop whining. It's not that bad," she said, basking in my frustration.

Oh, I could strangle her to death right now.

“Easy for you to say—you’re not the one who’s stained,” I murmured, my face burning with embarrassment as I frantically brushed at the stain, only spreading it further.

“Yeah...you might just be making it worse,” Scarlett said, her gaze pinned on me.

“I can see that,” I retorted through gritted teeth.

My heart pounded in my chest as I heard the sound of an approaching vehicle. My breath lodged in my throat, and my body stiffened, hoping that it wasn’t Raziél’s car behind me.

The vehicle halted by the sidewalk, and judging by the smile on Scarlett’s face, the driver was facing my direction. I didn’t have to trace her gaze to know who was behind me. It was definitely Raziél Tarasov.

“I think he’s looking at you,” Scarlett said, her voice hushed as her eyes locked on mine.

“Nice blouse,” he commented, his cold tone dripping with sarcasm.

I shut my eyes momentarily at the sound of his baritone voice, and a shiver ran down my spine. Scarlett’s eyes shifted across the two of us, but she said nothing, her smile retained.

Reluctantly, I turned around to face him, and that was when my heart sank into my stomach. God! He was handsome. Raziél’s car window was wound down to reveal him perched in the driver’s seat, exuding an air of confidence, power, and control. His hand gripped the steering wheel with a stylish elegance as he looked in my direction.

That sexy smirk lined a corner of his lips, and his piercing light eyes locked to mine with fiery intensity. His dirty-blond hair was perfectly imperfect, with subtle layers that added depth and texture. A few strands fell loosely across his forehead, highlighting his chiseled face and strong jawline.

The intensity of his gaze was unnerving, and I could feel my pulse quickening. I was both annoyed and embarrassed that he saw me in this state.

“Great!” I mumbled, holding his gaze despite the overwhelming emotions. “How typical of you to show up when things go wrong.”

“Oh, trust me, things could have gotten a lot worse.” He snickered, his eyes never leaving mine.

“Well, luckily, they didn’t.” I rolled my eyes, my voice tinged with a glint of mock disdain.

His smirk deepened, and his eyes were on the stain. “You look like you just escaped a knife attack...barely.” He chuckled, his voice laced with mockery.

The tension in the air thickened with each word, and I could tell that he was toying with my emotions.

My brows furrowed, forming faint creases between them. “You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?” I questioned, squinting as a pang of vexation coursing through me.

“What can I say? It’s not every day you see your shrink in the streets of LA with a ruined top,” he said, his teasing words cutting through my heart like a knife.

My jaw tightened discreetly, and in my head, I’d already smacked him across the face seven times. He was totally basking in my frustration and wouldn’t even hide it. His

smirk was ridiculous, but despite my reservations, I couldn't deny how attractive it made him look.

"Get in," he said, his voice calm but laced with a glint of authority.

My brows arched instantly as his words caught me off guard. I didn't appreciate his tone or the air of finality that left no room for arguments.

My scowl deepened, and I said, looking into his eyes, "As you can see, I'm with a friend."

And that was when Scarlett sold me out.

"Nope, she's not," she said to him. "She's not with me."

"What?" I turned in her direction, shocked by her response, and I cast a stern glare at her.

"Don't look at me like that," she said through gritted teeth, her voice a low whisper. "I'm doing you a favor."

"How's this a favor?" I questioned with the same hushed tone, my blood boiling at her betrayal.

"Quit whining. You're embarrassing me in front of this gentleman," she said, stealing a glance at him.

I pushed my head back in surprise, and my eyebrows rose. "I'm embarrassing you?"

"Okay, you're embarrassing the both of us," she rephrased, unaffected by the intensity of my glare or the annoyance etched on my face.

I swear she's gonna be the death of me.

"Oh, my God, I can't believe you right now," I muttered under my breath, pinching the bridge of my nose.

"Has the jury reached its verdict yet?" Raziél's deep voice broke the moment of silence between us.

Scarlett turned to face him, beaming. "Matter of fact, we have. She's coming with you." She glanced back at me. "Aren't you, Clary?"

There was no way I was going to turn this down now. Scarlett had manipulated and orchestrated the perfect scheme to make me go with Raziél. She'd always been interested in my love life—or rather, the lack of it. This was a rare opportunity to match me with someone, and she wasted no time jumping on it. Classic Scarlett.

I turned to face Raziél and managed to squeeze out a plastic smile.

They say every cloud has a silver lining. I guess the silver lining here was that I'd get to know him better as my client.

I drew a deep breath and whispered to her, "You sold me out. Not cool." My lips pursed, suppressing a smile.

She leaned forward and said, her breath brushing against my ear, "You're welcome."

I shook my head and let out a scoff before heading toward the sleek black Lamborghini. Once again, Scarlett had her way; she'd won.

The front passenger door unlocked, and I grabbed the handle, swinging it open. I took one last look at my persistent friend and flashed the middle finger at her before

sliding into the car.

Scarlett just smiled and blew me a kiss, her eyes crinkling at the corners. As annoying as she could be sometimes, she always had my best interest at heart. Scarlett, despite not knowing who Raziel was, had only insisted that I went with him because she read the chemistry between us. She felt the tension and the energy and thought about doing what she did when she had the chance.

Enveloped by the warmth of his car, I closed the door, feeling a sense of comfort washing over me. As Raziel drove off, I had my eyes on Scarlett, watching her through the side mirror. She waved at me, and I responded with a smile, my fingers wiggling playfully.

“She’s a character...your friend.” Raziel’s baritone snapped me out of my thoughts.

“She is, indeed,” I replied, stealing a glance at him.

It was silent between us for the next few seconds, and I couldn’t help but appreciate the rich scent of expensive leather that filled the car’s cabin. The interior was the epitome of elegance and sophistication; everything was spot-on.

“Where do you live?” he asked, breaking the awkward silence.

I was skeptical at first, but then again, how would he know where to drop me off if I withheld my house address?

I told him where I stayed, and that suddenly seemed like a decision I might regret later on.

For the next few minutes, I struggled with the right words to say—to at least have and keep a conversation going. The only thing that popped into my head was to ask about

his anger issues and what exactly caused the fight the other night.

“Can you tell me what happened?” I finally summoned the courage to ask, my eyes fixed on him.

“What do you mean?” He shot a quick look in my direction, his focus still on the road.

“The night you battered that man’s face,” I said, watching him closely. “What happened? Why did you react that way?”

“Last time I checked, we don’t have a session today,” he said casually, his tone smooth and dismissive. “Save your questions for later.” His lips curled into a self-satisfied grin.

As annoying and embarrassing as it sounded, he had a point. However, his deflection only meant that I had a lot of work to do on this man, and it wasn’t going to be easy.

I heaved a sigh and looked away from him, my head resting on the glass. A sense of disappointment washed over me. He clearly had no respect for people's feelings, but I wasn't surprised.

God only knew how this would end because I had no idea whatsoever.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

I sat across from my incredibly hot and intelligent shrink, my legs crossed as I exuded my usual air of composure. My gaze was pinned on her, watching her adjust in her chair, getting ready for our session.

Her hair was piled up in a neat bun on top of her head, and her amazing, captivating eyes sparkled behind her glasses. She appeared professional, yet elegant, beautiful in every way.

Clarice's feminine perfume wafted through the air, seemingly drawing me in with its sexy scent. The jewelry around her glittered in the soft light, and her relaxed energy hinted at the control she commanded.

Fascinating.

This was the reason I returned for this next session despite my reservations and initial hesitation. This was a complete waste of my time, and I knew that to be a fact. But I was intrigued by her and anxious to see how this would end. Her bravery, spunk, and confidence were traits I admired and found rather interesting.

It was like she truly believed she could change me—like she could fix me and repair the broken parts. What could be more intriguing than such a delusion from a little girl?

My lips curled into a smirk as I watched her with an intense gaze. It was a bit softer than my usual stern look but enough to highlight my fascination. She seemed determined to prove herself. But to whom?

I furrowed my brows and squinted my eyes, wondering what exactly led her on this path.

Had she had a rough childhood? Had she experienced something so horrible as a kid that she decided to understand the reason people did what they did?

Something had led her to do this, and for absolutely no reason, I was suddenly interested in her backstory.

The room was as silent as a graveyard as she skimmed through her notes from our last session. Her perfectly manicured fingers flipped through the pages of her notepad, and her chest rose and fell with steady breaths.

She didn't seem nervous, didn't seem disoriented. The young woman had everything under control, and I couldn't wait to see what she had in store for me today.

"You're wasting my time," I said, breaking the silence with a challenging smile on my face. "Aren't you supposed to have done that before now?" I added, trying to get on her nerves.

She jerked her eyes and met my gaze, her fingers drumming against the surface of the notepad on her lap. Clarice stared at me with a blank expression and said, her voice calm and collected, "You just can't help crawling under my skin, can you?"

"You're even more naive than I thought if you think your skin is what I wanna crawl under," I replied, my eyes boring into hers. Meanwhile, a faint, self-satisfied smirk twitched at the corner of my lips.

She retained her blank expression as if unaffected by my perverted response. And for the first time in a long time, she made me feel weird—perhaps a little embarrassed, even. However, this small act of negligence from her only piqued my interest and

curiosity.

Clarice kept proving to me that she wasn't one of the regular LA girls I was used to having around. This challenged me to delve more into her, and I most certainly would.

She crossed her legs and adjusted her glasses, her fine, relaxed posture exuding power and control. "Mr. Tarasov," she began, her voice gentle and soothing. "The last time we met, I asked you a question which you so conveniently deflected—"

"I didn't deflect anything," I cut her off, my eyes never leaving hers. "I merely told you to save it for later."

Ignoring my rude interruption, she continued, "Why did you batter Mr. Barlow's face?"

"Because I could, and someone had to put that bastard in his place," I hissed, feeling a pang of vexation rising within me.

"Just because we can do something doesn't mean that we should, Mr. Tarasov," she said, looking into my eyes, unafraid of the glint of rage dancing in their depths.

"Sometimes, Clarice, violence is the only way to put people in their place," I said and clenched my jaw in an attempt to hold back my rage.

"Maybe." She shrugged her shoulders and continued, "But in your case, it seems to me that violence is always your first response."

"And what's wrong with that?" I demanded, my voice thickening under the weight of my anger.

“Everything,” she blurted out, holding my gaze. “Everything is wrong with that, Mr. Tarasov. You almost killed a man. Your actions that night could have resulted in a gunfight that would have claimed a lot of lives—innocent lives.” The words jumped out of her mouth, a calm and collected rush.

“You’re pulling up a lot of hypotheticals,” I countered, my tone low and even. “The fact is, none of these things actually happened.”

“But what if they did?” she insisted, her expression blank, unreadable. “You would have been responsible for the death of all those people just because you couldn’t control your anger.” She stared at me, her eyes squinting and her brow furrowing like she was studying me. “Even now, my words are starting to trigger you, aren’t they?”

My jaw tightened, and my face contorted into a light frown. I hated the fact that she could see right through me and read me like a fucking book. Apparently, she was good at her job, and despite my anger, I admired her.

Her eyes dropped to her notepad as she scribbled down whatever she’d noticed about me. Perhaps I’d given off more than I intended to without even realizing it.

“You misunderstand the situation with Barlow. I merely took care of a problem. That’s all,” I said, my expression turning cold.

Her eyebrows rose at my words, her voice laced with disbelief. “A problem that required hospitalizing someone? That’s quite a creative solution you have there, Mr. Tarasov.”

“It had to be done,” I said, stern and without remorse.

“Is that how you react to all the problems in your life, by throwing punches?” she asked, her brows furrowing ever so slightly.

My eyes narrowed, and I leaned forward, my voice dropping to a low growl. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, Doc.”

“Really? Enlighten me, then,” she said, a glint of sarcasm lacing her tone.

“This is business, not some petty squabble you can fix with a hug and a timeout,” I spat.

Her expression remained calm, but her words cut deep. “I’m not talking about business. I’m talking about the fact that you beat a man half to death with your bare hands and feel no remorse about it.”

My lips curled into a smirk, and I reclined in my chair. “It’s part of the business, love: Inflict the fear of God in the hearts of your enemies.” I held her gaze for a moment before continuing. “But then again, I don’t expect you to understand. You don’t know what it’s like to walk in my shoes. You don’t know what it takes to survive in my world.”

Her expression softened, and her eyes never left my face. “Maybe I don’t,” she said, her voice calm and soothing. “But I do know what it’s like to be human. And that’s what I’m trying to help you find again.” She paused for a moment, letting the words sink in.

A sense of awe washed over me, and I swiped a palm across my face, appreciating her ability to seamlessly toil with my emotions. Her level of control over the situation and her composure were proof that I may have underestimated her skills.

The next few questions were more accommodating and didn’t really upset me that much. It was almost like as the session progressed, a feeling of calmness overwhelmed me, keeping me relaxed and emotionally stable. I felt like I was in a safe space, and the more she spoke about how I needed to handle my rage, the more I

saw things from her own perspective.

I didn't think that I would ever feel the need to keep my anger in check. However, her choice of words and the way she painted my situation made me understand the error of my ways. Strange...weird—but fascinating.

How had she managed to reach a part of me that had been dead for ages? How had she conjured up a feeling that seemed a lot like guilt? Had she cast some sort of spell on me? How the hell had she pulled that off?

Clearly, I'd misjudged her. I underestimated her ability to thaw my stone-cold heart, and if I wasn't careful, she might just end up doing worse.

As the season came to an end, I couldn't help but be drawn to her so much that I felt my heart pause for a moment when our eyes met.

"That'll be all for today, Mr. Tarasov," she said, flashing a welcoming smile at me, her eyes crinkling at the corners. "I must commend your cooperation. It was way better than the last time."

My response was a soft smile as I rose to my feet, buttoning up my black blazer. She did the same, her movements graceful and majestic. I held her gaze, and we stared at each other for a fleeting moment, the air thick with tension.

I contemplated voicing my thoughts because a part of me was concerned that she'd turn me down. However, she was worth the shot. In a move that caught her off guard, I asked, "Would you like to go out with me sometime?"

Clarice's professional demeanor faltered, and her eyes widened ever so slightly, surprise flickering in her gaze. Her breath lodged in her throat, and her cheeks flushed as she struggled to regain her composure.

Her eyes dropped to the floor for a moment before she raised her head and faced me, clearing her throat. “I...uh...” she stuttered, her hand flying to discreetly scratch the back of her head. “This is a professional environment, Mr. Tarasov. I’m afraid I must maintain our...therapeutic relationship.”

Her words stung like a nasty bee, especially because no woman had turned me down before. Clarice just wouldn’t stop amusing me. Her rejection should hurt, and it did...a little. It pricked my ego, but it also stirred up something in me, something I’d yet to name.

I flashed her smirk and headed out without a word, even more obsessed now than before.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

“Did Ronnie tell you anything?” Emily’s voice, laced with a hint of embarrassment, came through my phone’s speakers.

She’d called me about two minutes ago, saying that she just wanted to check on me, especially since my client was a tough nut to crack. Emily was a nice young lady with a good heart and would, every once in a while, reach out to me just to check in.

However, the call this evening wasn’t for that purpose. No. I knew exactly where she was headed with the conversation and was waiting for her to spill the beans. I was already exhausted from my session with Raziel Tarasov, and I’d yet to recover from the emotions he’d managed to stir up within me.

The last thing I needed right now was more drama, but I couldn’t exactly turn her down. Emily was one of the few real friends I had at the clinic, and it would break her heart if I ignored her now that she needed me the most.

I slotted the key into the keyhole and turned it, unlocking the door. “You wanna know if he told me about the kiss?” I trailed off, pushing the front door open.

Shutting it behind me, I walked into the house with the phone clasped to my ear. With an effortless move, I tossed the bunch of keys onto the entryway table with a clatter.

“I’m sorry to drop this on you like this, Clary. I know you’re probably dealing with a lot right now,” she said, her voice soft and tinged with helplessness.

“No, no, it’s fine,” I replied, feigning modesty even though I just needed some time to myself—at least for now.

As I stepped further into the house, I shed my jacket and let it drape over the back of the couch in the living room. The soft glow of the table lamps cast a warm ambiance that illuminated the cozy yet comfortable space.

“Talk to me, Em,” I said, encouraging her to pour her heart out.

“It’s just so complicated now, Clary,” she said.

“But you’ve always loved Ronnie,” I said, pausing in my tracks to take off my heels, one after the other.

“Yes, that’s true, but the kiss changes everything now. I’m not even sure how he feels about me,” she stated, her pain and confusion evident.

The hardwood flooring was cool beneath my feet as I padded into the kitchen, the phone still pressed to my ear. “Have you two spoken about the incident yet?” I asked, opening the refrigerator door, the cool air brushing against my skin.

I lowered my head, my gaze sweeping across the neatly organized shelves. There, jars of homemade jam and crisp vegetables stood like soldiers alongside a few carefully wrapped leftovers.

“I’m so embarrassed to face him, Clary. I’m afraid to have a conversation about the kiss because I’m not sure what his response would be,” she said, her voice cracking under the weight of her despair. “I don’t know what to do.”

“You should talk with him. That’s what you should do,” I replied, withdrawing a gallon of milk from the fridge.

Shutting the door with the back of my leg, I walked over to the kitchen island and set the gallon on the countertop.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea,” she objected, fear creeping into her tone.

“You’re only delaying the inevitable, Em. It’s the only way.” I opened the cupboard and retrieved a glass cup, which I placed on the countertop. “What’s the worst thing that could happen, hmm?”

She drew a deep breath on the other line, falling silent for a moment while I poured myself some milk.

“You’re right,” she said. “I guess I’ll have to face my fears.”

“Em, you’re a beautiful woman. Strong, resilient, loving, and with a pure heart,” I began, my tone dripping with sincerity. “Trust me, Ronnie would be a fool to let you slip through his fingers. It’ll be his loss.”

“Okay, now you’re just trying to make me feel better.” She giggled on the other line, and I could almost envision her cheeks flushing.

“It’s the truth, Emily. You’re everything I said and more, so don’t let anyone make you feel any less of yourself. Not even Ronnie,” I concluded.

She let out a sharp exhale, her voice sounding much better than before. “Thank you, Clary. I knew I could count on you.”

Her appreciation prompted a smile on my tired face, and my fingers rubbed my eyes. “Anytime, Em. Anytime.”

“Alright. I’ll leave you alone now,” she said, a glint of enthusiasm creeping into her tone. “Bye.”

“Bye,” I replied, and she hung up the phone.

I released an exhausted sigh, feeling a little relieved now that I could help a colleague. However, the question remained: Who was going to help me in this current dilemma?

My fingers wrapped around the glass, and I lifted it to my lips, emptying the milk down my throat.

Thoughts of Raziel Tarasov flooded my mind like a hurricane. And the more I tried to think of something else, the more the invasion intensified, leaving my brain a tangled mess.

I cupped my face in my palms and shook my head, as if attempting to physically shake off the thoughts of him. Even now, at my place, the rich scent of his cologne still lingered, invading my senses, hence the reason I couldn't seem to get him out of my head.

His voice resounded in my head, echoing through the void in my mind: "Would you like to go out with me sometime? "

The audacity he had to ask me out, the courage he exuded, and that intense stare all had me intrigued. His offer was tempting, and for a second there, I almost lost my professionalism. Luckily, I hadn't—well, not yet, anyway.

Although he left my office without a word, I couldn't help but feel like that wasn't his last attempt. Men like Raziel weren't the kind to give up so easily. I was certain that he'd try again, and a part of me was anticipating his second attempt—I looked forward to it.

The pull between us was undeniable, and I was afraid that with this growing emotion inside me, things might sprawl out of control.

His signature smirk flashed in my head.

I wiped a palm across my face in an attempt to push it to the back of my mind. No matter how much I tried to lie to myself, the truth remained that I found him attractive— really attractive—and that was a problem.

Once done with the gallon of milk, I returned it to the fridge, shut the door, and headed upstairs. I needed a shower. Maybe the water would ease me of this mental stress.

I pushed my fingers into my temples, moving them in a massaging motion as I ascended the stairs. Raziel had occupied my mind long enough, and I desperately needed to get him out. This was all shades of wrong, and the more I entertained thoughts of him, the harder it became to think of anything other than him.

This whole situation screamed trouble, but I couldn't help myself. I was drawn to him. Why? I wasn't exactly sure yet. I shouldn't like the way I felt when thinking about him— somewhat...aroused. It was bad and unprofessional. Could it be helped, though? Not necessarily.

I strolled into my comfortable bedroom, the cozy interior illuminated by the golden glow of the evening sun filtering through the window. I shed my clothes, and naked, I stepped into the bathroom to freshen up.

Somehow, it helped. I felt a little better after bathing, and while I sat in the living room after sundown, my mind was occupied with the program playing on TV.

With my nightgown draped over me, I sat on my couch, my legs on the cushion. A half-eaten bowl of cereal sat beside me as the TV's screen lit up the room, illuminating my face.

Then, I heard the knock on my door.

I glanced at the wall clock. It was almost eight o'clock, and I wasn't expecting anyone. I rarely had visitors, let alone at night, so who could it possibly be?

I hadn't finished processing the first knock when I heard it again.

Alarmed, I grabbed the remote and turned the TV off, my eyes squinting ever so slightly as I looked in the direction of the front door. I rose from the couch and cautiously glided over to the entrance, my curiosity getting the best of me.

As I halted by the door, I heard footsteps retreating from the other side—not quickly, like in a hurry, but majestic. I grabbed the door handle and pulled it open, my gaze sweeping across the empty street.

That's weird, I thought to myself, as there was no one within my line of vision.

The street was cool and deserted, with lamps casting long shadows across the sidewalks. A neighbor's dog barked in the distance, its growl and howls puncturing through the night.

I turned to my left and right, but there was still no sign of anyone, and that had me spooked—kind of. I was in no mood for jokes tonight; besides, it wasn't even Halloween yet.

As I was about to get back inside and lock my door, my eyes dropped to the floor, and that was when I saw the gift box sitting there.

I jerked my head and, again, scanned the surroundings meticulously before picking up the box. My eyes narrowed as I read the hand-written message on the card attached to the package. "I hope the dress fits. Get ready by 9."

I hadn't seen the sender's name yet, but in my head, only one voice played while I read through the text. The tone was masculine and dripping with authority, an aura I was very familiar with.

I flipped the card over, and a small grin spread across my face as my eyes fell on the lone word written in italics—the name “Raziel.”

This gesture melted my heart in a way I never anticipated, and despite reservations, I couldn't help but blush. My fingers reflexively pushed some stray strands behind my ear.

One last time, I raised my head and scanned the surroundings before stepping back inside to lock my door. I pursed my lips, trying to suppress my smile as I headed back to the living room, holding the light gift box in my hands.

I knew that he wasn't going to give up so easily. I knew he'd try again, and that part of me that wanted this was glad. This commanding invitation didn't leave any room for rejection, and although it stung a little, I was able to convince myself not to be offended by it.

I set the package on the coffee table and sank into the sofa, my eyes pinned on the box, decorated with a red ribbon. With my fingers in my mouth, I delicately chewed on my nails, contemplating my next move.

This was wrong, not to mention dangerous, but I wanted it. Deep down, I wanted to hang out with him and damn the consequences. However, there were rules to this profession, and one of those rules was that patients were forbidden territory. Our relationship was supposed to be strictly therapeutic and nothing more.

Anxious, I tapped my foot against the floor, my heart racing with anticipation. My pulse quickened as I stared blankly at the box, feeling stuck between the devil and the

deep blue sea.

A huge part of me wanted to go out on this date with him, but the reasonable part of me was against it.

This is a bad idea, a faint voice whispered in my head.

My eyes darted toward the wall clock to calculate how much time I had to make a decision. Should I go with him or should I not?

After a moment of contemplation, I concluded that this was an opportunity to get to know him better beyond the four walls of my office. Going on this date was purely for the sake of helping him—it was for his own good. At least, that was what I told myself to help lessen the guilt for breaking the rules.

I heaved a sigh and rose to my feet, finally deciding to go out with him. It was wrong, and I might regret it later, but the magnetic pull between us was too strong to ignore, making it impossible to reject his invitation.

One date with him wouldn't hurt. Would it?

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

She was wrong to have thought that I was going to take no for an answer after asking her out to dinner. I always got what I wanted—one way or another. Although her rejection was admirable, it was the driving force that led me to press on. My curiosity wouldn't let me respect her decision.

I just couldn't ignore the fact that she'd been bold enough to turn me down. Her spunk, courage, and defiance had me hooked. She did what no girl or woman had ever done, and I couldn't think of anything more fascinating than that.

Usually, girls her age would do anything just to get my attention, anything at all. But not her. She was different, and that alone was why I was curious to find out more about her.

Perhaps her rejection had bruised my manly pride, but that wasn't the reason I insisted on going out with her. Yes, it pricked my ego, but it also piqued my interest more. I needed to know her beyond just the confines of her office. I had to.

Dressed in my impeccably tailored black suit, I stood in front of the full-length mirror, my fingers adjusting my tie. I glanced at my watch, hoping that she was actually going to be ready by nine. She was a stubborn woman and just might turn down my invitation. Again. However, a part of me believed that it was going to be different this time.

The sound of my phone vibrating on the bedside table punctured through my thoughts, snapping me back to reality. Taking one last look at my reflection in the mirror, I adjusted my cufflinks and strolled over to the buzzing phone.

The incoming call was from my lieutenant, Alex, and my brows knitted together for a minute before I lifted the device to my ear. “Yes?”

“Boss,” his deep voice came through the phone’s speaker. “I’ve got some news about Damon Barlow...and it’s not good.”

My eyes narrowed, and my jaw tightened ever so slightly at the mention of that bastard’s name. “What about him?” I asked, my voice low and laced with disdain.

“He’s been hospitalized, sir,” Alex’s sharp tone cut through the air. “It appears the injuries he sustained from your...altercation have worsened.”

Unmoved by the recent development, I stood in the silence of my room, the phone to my ear. Deep down, I knew this was trouble, and chaos was not too far behind, but I couldn’t care less.

Alex went ahead to further explain the gravity of the situation. “Damon’s had a heart attack, sir, and my sources tell me that the man’s in critical condition. It’s not looking good, sir.”

Unfazed by the news, I looked at the wall clock, more concerned about my date tonight than about Barlow’s well-being. He could kick the bucket for all I cared.

Alex, noticing my silence and nonchalance, asked, “Are you still there?”

“I am,” I replied, my voice cold and devoid of emotion. “Anything else?” My dismissive tone silenced him for a moment.

He knew that I didn’t give two shits, and although he wasn’t in support of my nonchalance, he knew better than to protest.

“No, sir. That’s all for now,” he said, low and even.

“Good,” came my reply, and the line went dead as I ended the call with an unchanging expression.

I had more important things to worry about, and Barlow’s health wasn’t one of them.

With a fluid motion, I tucked the phone in my pocket and glided out of the room.

While driving to Clarice’s house, my heart wouldn’t stop racing with anticipation. I hated the feeling, but at the same time, I couldn’t help it. Was I nervous? I couldn’t be, could I? How was she able to stir up such an emotion within me? I never second-guessed my charms, but now I was. I didn’t know for sure what would greet me at her place.

Would she honor my invitation or decline it?

I struggled with these thoughts all through the drive until I reached her place and pulled up by the sidewalk. My eyes darted toward her window, where the faint outline of her silhouette danced behind the closed curtains. The gentle movement was mesmerizing, a quiet intimacy that felt almost invasive.

Suddenly, the lights inside flickered out, plunging the room into darkness. My eyes narrowed, and I grabbed the door handle, opened it, and then stepped outside. The evening air was cool against my face as I shut the door shut, buttoning up my blazer.

My shoes, polished to a shine, clicked against the pavement as I walked to the other side of the sleek black SUV. I leaned against the surface, eyes fixed on her door, waiting.

I shot a quick glance at my watch; it was already a few minutes past nine o’clock.

Looking around discreetly, I peered at the surroundings in an attempt to keep my mind distracted. Beneath my calm and composed exterior, anticipation shimmered—a strange emotion that had me bewildered.

Her front door opened, and my eyes darted toward her—an epitome of elegance. My brows arched slightly, and I felt a flutter in my chest when our eyes met. My heart stopped for a minute as I drank in the beauty of this goddess approaching me.

She was dressed to perfection, with her hazelnut-brown hair styled in a neat bun on top of her head. The red gown I got her hugged her body like a second skin, accentuating her curves. Her makeup was light, blending seamlessly with her complexion, and her eyes sparkled like diamonds. She appeared taller tonight thanks to the black heels that raised her height by a couple of inches.

The daring slit on the side of the dress flashed glimpses of her alluring thighs as she moved gracefully. Her full lips were painted a shade of red, and when they curled into a faint smile, her eyes crinkled at the corners.

I felt my composure falter slightly as I watched her approach me.

Clarice exuded confidence and elegance, her skin simmering in the moon's ethereal glow. She was gorgeous in every way—simple but classy—and I couldn't help the smirk that played on my lips.

Tonight, Clarice was mine, whether she realized it or not.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

I drew a deep breath, standing in front of the mirror, my manicured fingers deftly moving on top of my head, styling my hair into a neat bun.

“This is a bad idea,” I muttered to myself, staring at my reflection.

My light brown eyes shimmered in the room’s soft glow.

I’d made up my mind to honor his invitation—turning him down again would only delay the inevitable. Raziel was never going to give up; he’d press on until I eventually yielded.

In essence, this was bound to happen anyway. It didn’t matter how much I resisted; his persistence would win in the end. Besides, this was a chance for me to get to know him more and find out the kind of man he was. This date was for his own good; it was a part of the drill, and it would be beneficial to both of us.

Yeah, keep telling yourself that, that tiny little voice in my head spoke again.

I’d deluded myself into believing that I was only doing this so I’d find better ways to help him. But deep down, I knew the truth, and I was avoiding it in any way that I could.

It was easier for me to believe the lie I’d cooked up than to face the harsh reality. Maybe living in my own delusion was cowardice, but at least that way, I wouldn’t have to beat myself up too much.

Once styling my hair into a bun, I lowered my hands and smoothed out the wrinkles

on my elegant red dress with my palms. Gently, I swayed left to right, my eyes checking out my figure, which was accentuated by the gown.

Raziel Tarasov might be a brute with anger management issues, but the man sure had good taste. The gown he'd gotten me fit my body perfectly, hugging me in the right places. It was a little too much, especially with the slit at the base of the dress that revealed a glimpse of my thighs. But overall, the outfit was beautiful.

To complement the dress, I chose my finest pair of heels—my favorite black pair—and they made me look inches taller.

For someone who claimed there was nothing attached to the date, I sure took my time to look good and smell even better. I made sure that I was dressed to perfection, and a part of me couldn't wait to see the look on his face when he saw the dress on me.

I leaned into the mirror, my eyes locked on my reflection, and with a quick, expert twist, I opened a lipstick. I smoothed the bold red shade across my lips with a deliberate stroke, the color blooming like a rose on my mouth.

With a subtle smack, my lips melded together, the movement almost imperceptible as I fine-tuned the lipstick's application.

Satisfied with my complete transformation, I straightened and heaved a sigh, my face radiating with a soft smile. Then, I heard it: the sound of a vehicle pulling up by the sidewalk outside my place.

It had to be him.

My eyes darted toward the wall clock, and I realized that it was a few minutes past nine o'clock. It was him. I was sure of it.

It was as if I lost my breath, and my heart stopped for a moment. I turned toward my window, but the curtains stood as obstacles, blocking my view. Although I couldn't see the car parked outside, I knew my date had arrived.

I took one last look at my reflection in the mirror before grabbing my purse from the table. My heels clicked against the fine wooden floor as I headed out of the room, turning the lights off before leaving.

The moonlit enveloped me, casting a silver glow over the quiet street as I stepped out of the house. The air was filled with the sweet scent of blooming flowers while the soft chirping of crickets seemed to provide a soothing background hum. A neighbor's dog was still barking incessantly in the distance as a gentle breeze blew across the street.

Feeling the air against my face, a sense of calm washed over me as I breathed in the serene atmosphere. However, this fleeting moment of peace was short-lived the second I set eyes on Raziel Tarasov.

My breath lodged in my throat, and my heart skipped a beat as I saw him leaning casually against his black SUV. The man was so smoking hot that he had me transfixed, caught in the snare of his charm and charisma.

His dirty-blond hair was slightly tousled, as if he'd run his fingers through it, and his impeccably tailored black suit highlighted his imposing and powerful physique.

I felt a flutter in my chest, and my heart raced like a galloping horse as I drank in the gorgeous sight of him. For a moment there, I forgot about how dangerous and cruel he was. In fact, I had yet to understand how someone as handsome as him could be capable of being so evil. It didn't make much sense to me.

Raziel Tarasov was way too handsome to be the devil that I knew he was. And the

way he effortlessly stirred up these emotions in me was alarming—scary as hell. I knew instantly that I was in trouble— big trouble—but I couldn't turn back.

The man exuded an air of charm and confidence that was both captivating and intimidating. The moon's ethereal glow danced across his features, highlighting his chiseled face and ruggedness.

Raziel's light eyes locked onto mine, his piercing gaze seeming to see right through me. I felt my pulse quicken, and a jolt of electricity surged through my body. He smirked, a low, seductive curve of his lips that melted my heart.

He was ridiculously attractive, and there was no denying that. Raziel Tarasov was hot, the kind of hot that made me want to fan myself and look away, but I couldn't. This man had my eyes glued to him.

His brows arched as I approached him, and the faint smirk on his lips prompted a small grin to spread across my face. His eyes roamed my body with a flirtatious glint flickering in their depths. "You look exquisite tonight, Clarice," he said, his voice low and husky, dripping with sincerity.

I couldn't help the smile on my face, couldn't stop it from broadening as I halted in front of him, my cheeks flushing. "You don't look so bad yourself," I replied, meeting his gaze with a composed exterior despite the turmoil within me.

He stared at me for a moment before adding, "You know, with the way this dress hugs your curves...it's a crime to cover up such beauty."

His smooth tone sent shivers down my spine, almost disrupting my composure. But no, I wouldn't let his remarks shake me enough to let him read my emotions like a book.

I felt my cheeks warm, and I held his gaze, my voice steady. “Are you trying to flatter me, Mr. Tarasov?”

“We’re not in your office tonight, Clarice. This isn’t one of your sessions, so Raziel will be just fine,” he said, his eyes never leaving mine.

He was essentially telling me to let go of the professional part of me and see him as just a regular person—not my client. If I did that, then my voice of reason would be right after all. This professional part of me was the only thing I used to console myself—to tell myself that this was still part of the job.

He moved away from the car and bridged the distance between us, his close proximity quickening my pulse and rendering me almost speechless. “What if flattering you is the goal?” he whispered, his eyes still locked on mine. “Would you say it’s working?”

I maintained my composure, pretending to be unfazed, unaffected by his wry smirk and handsomeness. “Don’t get ahead of yourself, Raz.” A smile twitched at the corners of my lips. “Not every girl is easily swayed by your charms.”

His eyes lit, burning with a sense of intrigue. “Well, the night has barely begun, so it’s still a little too early to jump to conclusions.” He flashed a faint grin and opened the front passenger door without breaking eye contact.

My brows furrowed slightly, and my lips pursed, suppressing another smile, but I said nothing.

“After you,” he muttered, gesturing toward the open door.

My eyes shifted from his face to the waiting car, and I hesitated for a moment. I knew that once I got in that car, things would no longer be the same between us. I could

delude myself all I wanted, but the truth remained that I was consciously looking for trouble. Would I be ready when it came knocking?

I exhaled softly and damned the consequences of my actions as I slid into the front passenger seat, and he slammed the door shut behind me. My heart was hammering in my chest as my eyes followed him through the car's windscreen.

Effortlessly, he glided over to the other side, opened the driver's door, and got inside. Raziel glanced at me before shutting the door and starting the car. The engine came alive, its revving sound filling the car's cabin.

The scent of rich leather wafted through the air, mixing with the manly smell of his cologne and the feminine aroma of my perfume.

As he drove away, he stole a quick glance in my direction and began softly, engaging me in a conversation to fill the awkward silence, "If I'm being honest, I didn't think you were going to accept my invitation after your cold rejection earlier."

The smile playing on his lips and the air of comfort he'd effortlessly created helped me relax; I appreciated this version of him. I didn't think he had in him to be somewhat playful. Maybe this date wouldn't be so bad after all.

"Well, you didn't exactly leave me with much of a choice, now did you?" I replied, suppressing my smile, but it still managed to reveal itself.

"So, persistence is the key," he teased, his eyes fixed on the road. "Got it."

My smile broadened, and a quiet giggle escaped my lips. "I must say," I began, staring in his direction. "You do have good taste in women's dresses." I smoothed my palms down the gown that highlighted my lap.

“Oh, solnyshko , you limit my good taste to just dresses?” he teased, his lips twitching at the corners.

I wasn't sure he called me, but I thought it was Russian. Maybe I'd ask him later, but not now.

Shit! I actually was starting to enjoy his company.

“Well, what other areas do you have good taste in—aside from cars, of course?” I indulged him, watching him drive carefully.

“Women,” he said, his tone soft and endearing. “Why do you think I invited you to dinner?” He looked at me for a moment, his smile widening.

Dang it! I hadn't seen that coming, and now his words had caught me off guard, almost throwing me off balance. However, I must retain my composure at all costs.

“Still on the business of trying to flatter me, I see,” came my reply, my lips pursed and my eyes crinkling at the corners.

“Is that the way you see it?” he asked, stealing another glance at me. “Because I'm just being honest.” His shoulders shrugged casually as he steered the vehicle down the streets of Los Angeles.

“Works on every girl, every time, doesn't it? Your ‘honesty’?” I asked, air-quoting the word. I knew I wasn't the first girl he'd used that trick on.

He looked at me for a second, his expression soft. “If I told you that you're different from the other girls, would you believe me?”

“Probably not,” I replied, yet I was unable to prevent my smile from revealing itself.

“Fair enough,” he muttered, unaffected by my response.

My eyes drifted out the window, gazing at the city’s vibrant nocturnal rhythm. The streets thrummed with energy, a dynamic fusion of music and laughter. Headlights seemed to cast a hypnotic glow over the pavements as the city whizzed by outside my window.

The nightlife was in full swing, a dazzling spectacle of twinkling lights and honking horns.

I returned my gaze to him and asked the question that I should have earlier. “Where’re you taking me anyway?”

He glanced in my direction and replied, “I would tell you it’s a special place, but you’re not gonna believe me.” His eyes crinkled at the corners.

“Special?” I raised my brows, my tone laced with skepticism.

“See?” He chuckled softly, pointing out the disbelief in my voice. “Not to worry, we’re going to one of my favorite spots in the city.”

Favorite spot, he said, and now I was interested in knowing what he had in store for me.

I could ask more questions, but I didn’t; I just returned my gaze outside the window, my head against the glass.

Not long after, we drove to an upscale restaurant in the city, and Raziel eased the car to a stop outside the sleek modern building. Its exterior—a glass and steel facade—glinted in the moon’s glow.

“We’re here,” he said, looking at me.

“Your favorite spot is a restaurant?” I asked, my surprise palpable

He flashed me his signature smirk. “The food will make you change your mind. Trust me.”

Raziel didn’t strike me as the type of man to be interested in his stomach. Therefore, there must be something about this place that drew him in. If he said the food was great, then indeed, the food must be great. It would take a good chef to make a man like him praise this place. Now, my curiosity was piqued.

We both got out of the car and headed to the majestic building. Soft golden lighting cast a warm glow over cream-colored walls adorned with lush greenery.

As we stepped inside, the cool environment enveloped me, and my eyes adjusted to the lights as I drank in the sophisticated clientele. The air was alive with the gentle hum of conversations, the clinking of fine china, and the muted strains of classical music.

Couples and small groups of impeccably dressed folks occupied the elegant tables, their faces aglow with candlelight. The sweet fragrance of fresh flowers and the aroma of exquisite cuisine wafted through the air, teasing my senses. The ambiance was elegant yet intimate, and I couldn’t help but feel out of place.

Raziel’s fingers grasped mine, and at his touch, I felt a flutter swell within me. He led me to our table nestled in a cozy alcove near the floor-to-ceiling window. The table was set with crisp white linens, fine crystal, and a delicate floral arrangement.

Raziel pulled out a chair and gestured for me to sit. I hesitated for a moment, but eventually, I took my seat. As we sat, the waiter, a poised and polished man with a

discreet smile, approached us.

“Ah, Mr. Tarasov, welcome back, sir,” he greeted him, halting in front of our table. His eyes flickered to me before returning to Raziel. “I see you brought company.” A sheepish smile played on his lips. “That’s a first.”

“Yeah, well, I thought it was time to break the tradition,” Raz replied with an enigmatic grin.

“Indeed.” The waiter’s gaze lingered on me for a moment, his expression neutral, but his smile remained. “Anyhoo, we’ll be sure to take good care of the two of you tonight.”

“Thank you, Jacob,” Raziel said to him.

“Shall I start you off with some wine and appetizers?” the waiter asked, his gaze shifting across the two of us.

Their voices trailed off as the two men deliberated on what to get us. I hadn’t thought it was possible to see this somewhat soft side of Raziel, and I couldn’t help but be intrigued by this version of him.

The waiter’s subtle remark didn’t go unnoticed. He’d claimed that I was the first woman Raziel had come here with, and somehow, that statement made me feel special. It was strange that I felt that way, but I couldn’t help it.

I lowered my head, trying to suppress the warmth spreading across my chest.

So far, everything was going fine, and as the night unfolded, I began to ease into it, relaxing and enjoying Raziel’s company.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

Under the chandelier's warm, golden glow, I sat in my expansive living room, cradling a glass of whiskey in my hand. The soft light draped over the room's dark wood accents and plush, cream-colored furnishings, adding a sense of warmth and sophistication to the space.

The scent of old leather and the faint hint of smoke from the modern fireplace wafted through the air. The crackling flames cast flickering shadows across the walls, adding to the room's ambiance. Towering floor-to-ceiling windows framed the glittering city skyline, the polished marble floor refracting their delicate silhouettes.

Seated on the plush couch with a hand over the headrest, a small smirk lined a corner of my lips. I stared blankly into space, the soothing silence of the living room punctuated by the occasional soft clink of ice in my glass.

I took a sip, my legs crossed. My mind was flooded with thoughts of my dear doctor and our little adventure the other night. I'd yet to get over her: her beauty, her smile, and the way her cheeks flushed at my remarks.

It was an incredible night—a night to remember—and I was certain that I'd reminisce about that date for a long time. Despite being on a date with me, she still hadn't let her guard down, the professional part of lingering. However, by the end of the night, I got to spend some time with Clarice Evelyn, not the shrink assigned to me by the DA's office.

I lifted the glass to my lips and took another sip, my mind drifting back to our conversation and the shocking truth it had revealed. Nothing could have prepared me for this revelation, and honestly, now I just wanted her even more.

My lips curled into a sly grin as I let myself recall the conversation.

“So, tell me, Clarice,” I began, leaning back in my chair, my eyes locked on hers. “What’s the most adventurous thing you’ve ever done?”

Her cheeks turned a pink hue, and she looked away for a fleeting moment, a smile playing on her cute, full lips. “In case you haven’t noticed, I’m not really the...adventurous type.” She let out a delicate chuckle, her eyes crinkling at the corners.

“Well, that’s a shame,” I teased, my grin retained. “You’re missing out on a whole lot of fun stuff.”

“Oh, trust me, your idea of fun and mine are not the same at all.” She laughed lightly, her perfect whites glittering in the lights.

“What’s your idea of fun?” I inquired, curiosity lacing my tone.

She exhaled sharply with that charming smile still playing on her lips. “I don’t know. Netflix and chill, maybe,” came her reply, her tone dripping with uncertainty.

My brows arched at her words. “With what, your cat?”

Clarice beamed, sipping from her flute. “I don’t have a cat. But thanks, I think I’ll consider that now.”

Her response cracked me up, and I didn’t realize when a light laugh escaped my lips. I hadn’t been this free and comfortable around a stranger before, and it sure felt really nice.

“In that case, I think you need to get a life—something other than your job,” I said,

never taking my eyes off her.

Her shoulders slumped downward in a rather playful manner. “Maybe I’ll do that, especially since everyone keeps telling me the same thing.” She paused for a moment, staring into my eyes before quickly breaking the silence between us. “Although, I do have a crazy idea in mind.” Her lips curled into a mischievous grin.

My eyes narrowed, and I leaned forward, intrigued. “Okay, I’m interested in hearing your ‘crazy’ idea,” I confessed, my voice tinged with a hint of curiosity.

“Of course you are,” she teased and cleared her throat. “Well, I’ve always been scared of heights, and to conquer that fear, I’d like to go skydiving someday.”

“Skydiving?” I raised an eyebrow in surprise, my smile broadening as I stared at her. “That’s impressive.” I leaned back in my chair. “I wouldn’t have pegged you as the daredevil type.”

“Oh, trust me, I am not.” She laughed, slightly raising her hands in the air as if in opposition. “Chances are, I might not make it down to the ground alive.”

“Cut yourself some slack,” I said, my gaze pinned on her. “Focus on the good part. That adventure will help you conquer your fear, and it’ll be fun, too.” I winked at her.

Clarice scoffed, her expression soft and her smile genuine. “Yeah, I can imagine.” She met my eyes, and for a moment, we just stared at each other again.

I could feel my heart throbbing in my chest, and the sensation jolting across my body was alien. I’d never felt this way before: relaxed, comfortable, and still somewhat nervous. Was I nervous? I hadn’t exactly found the right word for the way she made me feel, not yet, anyway.

The air was thick with tension, and the more we stared into each other's eyes, the more I felt my heart race like a galloping horse.

My gaze dropped to her enticing full lips, drinking in the perfect curve and the bold shade of red painted over it. Her charming smile had me enchanted, and there was something about her that pulled me in like a moth to a flame.

I dared to take my gaze a little lower and settled on her cleavage. The tantalizing glimpse of her voluptuous curves shrouded by the fabric of her dress seemed to draw my attention. However, as pleasing as it was to stare at her bare skin, I was quick to look away, my gaze darting back to her eyes.

“What other crazy ideas have you cooked up in your mind?” I dared to press on in that aspect, driven by the tension hovering over us.

She looked right at me, her chest rising and falling steadily. But beneath that calm demeanor, I sensed her fear and anxiety. The subtle trembling of her lips betrayed her slipping composure, yet she masked her nervousness.

“I’m not sure,” she began, her manicured fingers pushing some loose strands behind her ear. Her eyes dropped to the table, and her voice fell below a whisper. “I think there are some...experiences I've yet to explore.” She paused, her eyes flying back to meet mine, her expression soft and endearing.

My head discreetly tilted to the side, and my eyes squinted in an attempt to understand her words. I had a feeling that I knew where she was headed with this, but I didn't want to get my hopes up.

She continued, her tone a little husky and sensual. “I've always been fascinated by the concept of firsts.” Clarice held my gaze, her chest heaving slowly. “You know...the thrill, the excitement, the uncertainty that comes with experiencing something for the

first time.” The words were spoken one at a time, with a deliberate slowness that shifted the atmosphere to something more sensual.

My eyes narrowed, a small, knowing smile spreading across my face. She wasn’t talking about getting drunk for the first time or exceeding the speed limit while driving. No. She had just subtly told me that she was actually a virgin.

Back in my living room, I swiped a palm across my face, intrigued by the fact that she was still untouched. I sipped from my glass, my lips curling into a self-satisfied smirk. This revelation changed everything about my perception of her.

The thought of her innocence and the fact that she hadn’t been with a man before stirred up something primal within me. Now more than ever, I wanted her for myself. I wanted to claim her body, mind, and soul—to own her and make mine and mine alone.

This feeling brewing within me was an irresistible mix of fascination and possessiveness. It was a desperate need to own her, to claim her in ways that I’d yet to fully understand.

The attraction between us was subtle but undeniable. She wanted me as much as I wanted her, even though we both acted like we were in control of our feelings.

Why else would she reveal to me what seemed to be her secret? There was a magnetic pull between us, a force of attraction that we both couldn’t deny, but neither was willing to accept it yet.

However, after our dinner together, I concluded that denying what was clear as day was useless. The more I thought about her, the more my obsession for her grew. This feeling was mutual, and all it needed was just a spark to ignite the flames of passion burning within us.

Perhaps I'd start that fire and let it consume us both.

A mischievous grin tugged at the corners of my lips.

The sound of approaching footsteps interrupted my thoughts, snapping me back to the present. I sensed his presence even before he materialized in front of me, almost out of thin air.

Alex stood poised, his soft expression betraying his stoic gaze. "Sir, I have some news," he began, his voice low and even. "But I'm afraid it's not good."

My brows knitted together, and I shifted my gaze to his, a pang of vexation swelling inside me. "If this is about Damon Barlow, save it," I growled, my face contorting into a frown.

"It's not," he said, his eyes never leaving mine. "It's about Clarice."

My heart skipped a beat at the mention of her name, and I didn't realize that I'd leaned forward, anticipating his report. I'd had Alex instruct some of my men to keep an eye on her—to monitor her every move and report back to me if they saw anything worth my time.

"What about her?" I asked, my voice deep and hushed, though my heart was hammering in my chest.

He'd begun his report by saying that he came bearing bad news. Now that I knew Clarice was involved in this, I couldn't help the anxiety twisting my stomach into knots.

He hesitated for a moment. "She's been involved in an accident, sir."

My expression darkened immediately, and my jaw clenched as I tightened my grip around the glass until it shattered in my palms. The whiskey spilled over the floor, and pieces of the broken glass cut into my flesh, but I ignored the nasty stings.

Anger, frustration, and concern collided within me, prompting me to clench my fingers into fists. I rose to my feet, my blood boiling as I snatched my car keys from the side stool and stormed out.

“Let’s go,” I ordered Alex, my voice sharp and authoritative.

The mere thought of Clarice in harm’s way ignited a surge of protective anger within me, and I wasn’t going to rest until I knew she was fine.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

I knew going out with Raziel Tarasov was a bad idea. But did I regret it? Not entirely. The dinner wasn't as terrible as I'd thought, and I had such a great time, contrary to my initial assumptions. I saw a softer side to him that I hadn't seen before, and it sort of changed my perspective of him.

He wasn't the devil, the heartless brute I thought he was. No, he was more than that, and honestly, I hadn't been expecting to meet this version of him. The man was gentle that night and also polite to that young waiter.

Raziel Tarasov was a regular man, except more powerful and influential than most. His anger management issues seemed to be his biggest flaw, the one trait that labeled him as the devil people saw him as.

Despite how much I learned that he reveled in the fear his name inflicted in the hearts of his enemies, I saw a gentler part of him that only a few had access to.

Raziel wasn't all that bad. He was just a man who lacked self-control, a man in need of my help. After that night, I was certain that with a few tweaks here and there, he could be a better person.

Then there was the personal issue between us— the undeniable connection that had messed with my mind since that night. Raziel was my client, and I should have control over these emotions brewing within me, but for some inexplicable reason, I couldn't.

As fantastic and harmless as that night had seemed, I knew it was the beginning of my downfall. Our conversation then had birthed something, something more sensual,

and I knew I was in big trouble.

Why on earth had I hinted at the fact that I hadn't been with a man before? Why couldn't I control myself? Why had I let the tension coursing through me dictate my words? Now, he knew my little secret. How was I sure that he wasn't going to try and exploit that weakness I exposed to him?

Thoughts of Raziel Tarasov occupied my mind as I walked through the crowded sidewalk with both hands tucked in my coat pockets. The world around me seemed to fade into the background as I moved, deep in thought.

I was so busy analyzing the possible ways this situation might pan out between the two of us that I hadn't realized I'd stepped off the curb. While I crossed the street, Raziel's smile flashed in my head, as did his light laugh and soft expression. The way his charming eyes seemed to see right through me stirred up a flutter in my chest.

Distracted, I didn't notice the car approaching until it almost hit me. Its speed was slightly above the limit, and my eyes widened in terror just before the collision.

The sound of the car screeching to an abrupt halt escalated my heartbeat, leaving me frozen in state—shocked and afraid. The driver had slammed on the brakes, and the vehicle skidded to a stop, but only after the bumper clipped my hips. The collision sent me stumbling sideways, and despite my effort to regain my balance, my feet tangled, and I fell hard on top of the pavement.

Everything happened so fast, and the next thing I knew, I was lying on my back, squinting at the sun's rays. Loud gasps rose from the crowd around, and it seemed like the world was swirling. My heart was pounding in my chest, and my breath lodged itself in my throat.

I hadn't fully come to terms with what had just happened, and I wasn't even sure that

I was still alive. Adrenaline pumped through me, and my vision was still a little hazy, my mind disoriented.

A sharp pain shot through my leg, and a soft wince escaped my lips. With gritted teeth, I sat up, my eyes darting to my leg as I assessed the knee I'd scraped during the crash. My knee throbbed, and although it hurt, it wasn't so unbearable. I gingerly touched the scrape, my brows furrowing as I winced again, my fingers making contact with the tender skin.

I heard the car door open, and the driver leaped out of the vehicle, rushing over to me. As I jerked my head, I saw a harried-looking woman, her face pale and masked with worry.

Her heels clicked against the pavement as she rushed over to me. "Oh, my God, I am so sorry. Are you okay?" she asked, kneeling beside me. Her voice was laced with concern and guilt.

"I'm alright," I said, managing to squeeze out a smile.

I was pissed at her for almost running me over with her car, but her genuine apology melted my heart.

"You're bleeding," she said, her eyes dropping to my scraped knee as her fingers flew to assess the damage.

"It's just a scratch. I'll live," I said, struggling to stand back on my feet.

"We need to get you to a hospital," she said, ignoring my statement about how mild the injury was.

I grabbed her hand and leaned into her as she helped me up. "Seriously, I'm

fine—there's no need for that.”

“I insist,” she said, looking right at me, her voice warm and soothing. “It’ll help me feel better because I really need to be sure that my clumsiness didn’t do much damage to your leg.”

“It didn’t,” I replied, a small smile playing on my lips. My expression was softening by the minute.

“You don’t know that for sure,” she argued, her eyes locked on mine. “Please, let a doctor check you out. Bill’s on me.”

I sensed her resilience and heaved a sigh. “You’re not gonna take no for an answer, are you?”

Her lips curled into a smile as she shook her head.

A soft, quiet laugh escaped me, and I lowered my head and pinched the bridge of my nose.

“I’m Bella, by the way,” she introduced herself, her grin widening. She also extended her hand for a shake.

“Clarice.” I mirrored her gesture and took her hand.

“Alright, Clarice, let’s get you to a hospital.” She beamed, helping me to her car.

At the hospital, the emergency ward was a flurry of activity, the air thick with the scent of disinfectant and the subtle beeps of the medical equipment.

I sat on the edge of the narrow bed, thinking how unnecessary this trip was, considering there was absolutely nothing serious wrong with me.

Bella, whose insistence was the reason we were in the first place, turned out to be quite the loquacious one, and I couldn't help but enjoy her company. Her indulgence was reassuring, her lively chats occupying my mind and prompting smiles on my face.

She glanced behind me, her eyes darting toward the entrance. “Oh, the doctor’s here—finally,” she said, her voice tinged with relief.

I heard the door open and looked back, watching a nurse bustle in, followed by a doctor with a kind face and a clipboard. “Sorry to have kept you waiting,” he said, his voice calm and soothing as he halted in front of me.

“I thought it’s called an ‘Emergency Room’ because you guys give swift responses to emergency cases,” Bella said, her eyes fixed on the young doctor, and a faint, almost undetectable scowl flashed across her face.

“Apologies for the delay, ma’am,” he replied casually, a small smile dancing on his lips.

He looked at me, and then his eyes dropped to my injury. “Okay, let’s take a look at your knee, shall we?”

I locked eyes with Bella as she stood beside me, chewing on her nails, watching the kind doctor examine the knee with expert precision. His gloved fingers massaged the affected area, his touch gentle and soothing.

He glanced up at my face and asked, “Can you walk me through what happened?”

“Uh...I was crossing the street, and I didn’t see a car coming until it almost hit me,” I replied, wincing as the pain spread through my knee.

“Almost?” He raised a brow in question, his professional fingers still working their magic.

I shot a quick glance at Bella and then returned my gaze to him.

“Well, the driver wasn’t exactly reckless,” Bella chipped in, scratching the back of her head. “Luckily, they were able to slam on the brakes on time.” A glint of guilt and justification crept into her tone.

The doctor raised his head in her direction, and she looked away, avoiding his eyes. His smile was knowing, but he said nothing to her.

He continued his examination, prompting occasional wincing when he touched a tender spot. “It’s just a minor bruise,” he announced with a reassuring grin. “Nothing to worry about.” The doctor straightened and held my gaze. “I’ll fix you with a bandage, and you’ll be good as new.” He signaled the nurse, and she strolled over to a section of the ward.

“See? I told you,” I said to Bella, a smile spreading across my face. “Are you satisfied?” I asked, looking right at her.

“Not yet. He has to bandage it first.” Her eyes crinkled at the corners, her lips parting to reveal her beautiful smile.

I let out a disbelieving scoff and shook my head as the nurse returned with a small bandage.

The doctor accepted it, and with quick efficiency, he applied it to my knee. “All set,”

he said, retaining that smile he'd had on from the onset. "Just take it easy for the rest of the day, and you'll be fine."

"Thanks, Doc," I said, mirroring his grin.

He gave me a subtle nod and departed with the nurse, accepting a phone call on their way out.

"Phew! That's a relief," Bella said, her hand on her chest. She kept her eyes pinned on me.

"Happy now?" I cocked my head to the side, casting a somewhat serious look at her.

Her lips curved into a mischievous smile, signaling that she was about to retort in a way that might get me grumbling.

I squinted and narrowed my eyes.

"Well, not yet. I have to make sure that you get home safe first," she said, her tone laced with finality.

A soft laugh escaped my lips, and my brows shot up. "Are you kidding me?"

She shook her head. "No, ma'am, I'm not."

I let out a sigh, swiping a palm across my face. "Honestly, Bella, I'm okay. You heard the doctor. It's just a minor bruise."

"This isn't about the bruise anymore, Clary," she said and added almost immediately, "I can call you Clary, right?"

I chuckled, nodding my head, amused by this strange woman's effortless means of easing my stress. Within the past few minutes, we'd bonded in a way that was both intriguing and concerning.

"Look, you can call me selfish, fine—but I'm doing this for me," she continued, her soft expression complementing the smile on her lips. "Making sure that you get home safe and sound would make me feel a little bit less terrible of myself."

There was no ditching this one. No way. She was such a persistent person, and I couldn't get rid of her that easily. Maybe if I were in her shoes, I'd be just as concerned about the other person's safety as well.

I drew a deep breath, finally succumbing to her ridiculous insistence. "Fine, you win. I'll let you take me home."

She grabbed her purse from the table and flashed me a teasing grin. "You know, I like that you think you actually had a say in this."

I laughed, and she did, too, helping me carry my bag.

All through the drive, Bella and I chatted, and for some twisted reason, a part of me was glad that she almost ran me over. If she hadn't bumped into me with her car, I never would have met such a wonderful soul.

She pulled over by the pavement outside my house and then beamed at me. "Now, I'm satisfied."

My lips curled into a smile, and I turned to face her from the front passenger seat. "Thank you, Bella."

"Don't thank me. You would've done the same thing if you were in my shoes," she

replied, her tone laced with modesty.

True. I would've.

“It was nice meeting you, Bella,” I said, my voice soft and smooth.

“I wish it were under better circumstances,” she said, holding my gaze. “But I’m glad we crossed paths.” She flashed me a mysterious grin.

It was silent in the car’s cabin for a moment until I broke it. “Alright. I’ll see you around.” I opened the door and grabbed my small bag from the dashboard.

“Oh, you most certainly will.” She chuckled, watching me step out of the car.

I bade her goodbye, and her car drove away, leaving me by the sidewalk. I shook my head, amused by how her happiness had rubbed off on me. I hadn’t returned home the same way I left—confused and overthinking. Thanks to Bella, I came home in a better state of mind, even though the story would have turned out to be a tragedy if she hadn’t hit the brakes on time.

With a deep sigh, I headed toward my house, the keys jingling in my hand as I opened the door. It wasn’t until I was almost in my living room that it hit me, and I paused in my tracks.

Wait a minute, I thought I locked that? I thought to myself, glancing back at the entrance with squinted eyes.

“You really should change your locks,” a very familiar voice, deep and husky, spoke from my living room.

“Jesus Christ!” I flinched, almost jumping out of my skin—literally—my hand flying

to my chest in fear and shock. My eyes fell on the man sitting comfortably on my sofa with his legs crossed and hands on the armrest like a king on a throne.

It was him: the man who had occupied my mind all day long and the reason I was almost run over earlier today. Raziel Tarasov.

He sat there with a smirk on his lips, as if he enjoyed the way I'd just freaked out at the sound of his voice. He rose to his feet, his imposing figure commanding attention.

Like a bee to honey, my eyes were drawn to his torso, where the fabric of his V-neck black shirt clung to his skin, accentuating his muscles. Raziel stood in my living room, his hands casually tucked in his pockets, his sharp gaze pinned on me.

I felt a cold shiver run down my spine as I discreetly drank in the sight of his hot body. My fingertips tingled, and my heart sank into my stomach, leaving me almost breathless. Why was he here?

“Wh...what're you doing here, Raz?” I demanded, taking a cautious step further, my eyes darting across the room as if searching for someone else.

“I came to be sure that you're fine,” he said, his gaze dropping to my bandaged knee.

I halted in front of him, my eyes narrowing. I was a bit puzzled by his claims at first, and then the realization hit me. My face contorted into a frown, and my brows furrowed, forming faint creases between them.

“Have you been stalking me?” I questioned, my tone a bit more biting than usual as a pang of frustration brewed within me.

Raziel closed the distance between us in a single stride, his grip firm around my wrist, forcing me to flinch at his sudden move. “You don't get it, do you?” he

growled, his voice deep, low, and dangerous. His eyes bore into mine with a glint of possessiveness dancing in their depths. “I don’t trust the world with you,” he added, looking into my eyes.

I squirmed out of his grip, my head pulling back in surprise. “You don’t trust the world with me? What’s that supposed to mean?” I demanded, a faint scowl flashing across my face.

“It means that I don’t want you getting hurt,” he said, pulling me back to himself, his arm around my waist.

My body collided with his, my bosom against his broad chest as I jerked my head, looking into his eyes. The rich scent of his cologne enveloped me, and his tender grip on my wrist thawed my heart. His touch was dominating yet electrifying and, in that close proximity, quickened my heartbeat.

The air around us was thick with tension, and my breath lodged in my throat, my stare remaining glued to his face. His gentle pull on my hip connected my lap to his, and a jolt of electricity surged through my body. My breathing was jagged—slow but unsteady—my anxiety building by the second.

I’d been more afraid in my life, and I’d also never wanted anyone as badly as I wanted him. It was as though his grip and the feeling of my body on his ignited a fire within. Now, the flames were burning, and I couldn’t put them out. My heart was hammering, and my chest was heaving rapidly.

My lips trembled as his fingers took a handful of my hair and gently pulled, forcing my head to jerk upward.

“I can’t stand seeing you getting hurt,” he muttered, his low, husky voice sending shivers down my spine. His eyes fell to my heaving chest, settling momentarily on

my cleavage. “And I can’t seem to stay away from you, either,” he confessed, his breath warm against my skin.

“I...I...” came my stuttered response, my whole body shaking like a leaf. “This...this is wrong,” I whispered, trembling at the feeling of his hand caressing my face, his palm smooth over my skin. “This is very wrong, Raziel.”

“Yet you want it,” he said, pulling me closer so I could feel his erection.

My eyes widened slightly as the print of his shaft pressed against me. I bit my lower lip, my expression mirroring the ecstasy coursing through my blood. I could almost hear the sound of my heart pounding like a drum, and in that moment, I found myself melting into him.

I was vulnerable—weak and overwhelmed with passion and desire, their flames engulfing every cell in my body. It was useless resisting him because the more I tried to fight back this urge to let him into me, the weaker I became—physically and emotionally.

I craved to have him deep inside me, to let him take my innocence, and there was no denying that. This was a terrible, terrible mistake that I was about to make, but I couldn’t help myself.

A sudden heat spread across my body while I was simultaneously overwhelmed by cold, the kind that caused my core to tremble.

How was I cold and hot at the same time? Why was I unable to resist him? The problem here wasn’t that I couldn’t turn him down; it was that I didn’t want to.

I was already dripping wet, and I knew in my heart of hearts that this was the day I would lose my virginity.

Raziel Tarasov was toxic and dangerous, yet I was still drawn to him, pulled in by his darkness. This man was deadly, and his touch was like poison, slowly creeping into my system and weakening all of my defenses.

I should push him away. I should send him out of my place. But I wouldn't. I loved the way he touched me, the way his possessive hands wrapped around me like a protective shield.

He was right. I wanted this as much as he did, so why deny myself this pleasure? I would definitely regret this later, but for now, I'd give in to this temptation and satisfy this insatiable hunger that had sprawled out of control.

"Tell me to stop, and I will," he whispered, his fresh breath against my face.

His words fueled my desire, like adding coal to a flame, and I felt my body shudder. I couldn't bring myself to tear my gaze off him, and the more my eyes bore into his, the more aroused I became.

His grip around my waist tightened, and his hand dared to settle on my left breast. "Say it. Tell me to stop." His low, husky whisper challenged me to resist him.

His fingers grazed against my hard nipples over the fabric of my white top, and I didn't realize it when I let out a soft groan. Raziel's electric touch sparked something in me, something primal.

Driven by passion and the sensation that caused my thighs to brush against each other, I drew a deep breath, damning the consequences of my actions.

Fuck it, I thought to myself, and in an instant, our lips clashed in a fervent kiss.

With a swift motion, he helped shed my coat and tossed it on the floor, his tongue

sliding into my mouth. The sensation left me breathless, wanting more of him, and more of him he gave. Our heads came together in perfect sync, as if dancing to the rhythm of the passion coursing through us.

My fingers grasped the hem of his V-neck black shirt, and with an effortless pull, I stripped him from the waist upward. While our tongues danced in our mouths, my hands roamed his chiseled torso, his skin thick beneath my palms. I could feel the ridges of his abs and the few scars that mapped his torso, adding to his rugged masculinity.

With a practiced precision, I flicked my heels off, my feet settling on the fine wooden floor. His palms grabbed my ass, and in a second, he lifted up like a feather and locked my legs around his waist.

My hair cascaded down my face like a river as I lowered my head, my lips still locked to his. Raziel's kiss fueled my passion, and I couldn't wait to have him inside me. Without breaking the fervent kiss, he headed upstairs with me in his strong arms.

He located my room with ease, considering it was the only bedroom upstairs. Bursting in through the door, he walked over to the bed, where he gently lowered me on my back. Raziel's lips felt mine, and a quiet moan escaped my mouth. He kissed my neck through to my chest before yanking off my white shirt.

Raziel's eyes narrowed, and a faint self-satisfied smirk lined his lips the moment my breasts came into view. My pulse quickened, and my chest was heaving rapidly with slow breaths.

"Beautiful," he murmured, bending over to kiss them tenderly, one at a time.

"Oh, yes." The sweet moan fell out of my lips, and I released a soft sigh, my muscles relaxing at the sensation jolting across my body.

The feeling of his tongue licking and sucking on my nipples sent my hands flying into my hair, and my face contorted in pleasure. I didn't think that a woman could experience such an amazing feeling just by having her breasts sucked. It felt so good and relaxing at the same time.

His hands traveled across my body, possessing every part and parcel of me. At his expert touch, I trembled, gradually surrendering myself to him. Raziel was sucking, fondling, and squeezing my breasts like a man who knew how to pleasure a woman.

He was so good at it that I couldn't hold back my moans. I writhed beneath him, my fingers massaging my scalp with shut eyes. He was only touching my breasts, and I was already so excited. How would I feel when he finally traveled inside me?

My heart raced with anticipation, and my body stiffened as he left my breasts and kissed down to my belly button. His fingers grasped my waistband, and that was when I reopened my eyes and looked down between my legs. His gaze met with mine in a silent permission to take my pants off.

I swallowed hard, my heart pounding like a drum, and my eyes never leaving his face. Raziel tugged down my pants, taking them off me and exposing my black panties. In a fleeting moment of embarrassment, I felt my cheeks warm, and my heart paused for a second. I studied the expression on his face, searching for any sign of disappointment, but instead, I found a small grin.

"Has anyone ever tasted you before?" he asked, his gaze locking to mine as his fingers grazed over the fabric of my panties.

I rolled my eyes in ecstasy, biting my lower lip at the feeling of my wetness beneath his finger. My legs trembled as he caressed my thighs, kissing and licking my skin.

I rested on my elbows, my eyes fixed on him, watching this attractive man tease me,

making me crave him even more. Lost in a sea of passion and anticipation, I almost forgot about what he'd asked until he repeated himself, rephrasing the question.

"Are you familiar with the pleasure of oral intimacy?" His husky voice sent shivers down my spine.

I shook my head, my breath heavy and hard to catch.

A smirk twitched on his lips, his fingers still grazing over the fabric of my panties. My body shuddered, anticipating his next move, as it felt like my heart was either going to give out or explode in my chest.

"Would you like to experience that?" he asked, his sexy gaze draining me of what little strength I had left.

I nodded, struggling with my jagged breaths.

"Say it. Say you want me to go down on you," he said, his tone both endearing and commanding.

"I want you to go down on me," I replied, losing control of my body, mind, and soul.

He was in charge, and he let me know that. His dominating aura was clear as day, and I liked it; I liked being under his control. It felt strangely good.

Raziel buried his face between my legs and drew a long breath as if pleased with the scent of my arousal. His fingers grasped my panties, and with a single pull, he yanked them off. His eyes darted back to my face, his small grin retained as he inhaled my scent again.

"You smell good, and I bet you'll taste even better," he whispered, his smooth tone

dripping with certainty.

I honestly hoped so because I didn't want to disappoint him. This was the first time anyone would ever explore my sweetness, and for a moment there, I second-guessed whether or not he'd like it. This made me nervous, stealing my breath away.

My heart raced with anticipation as he broke eye contact and lowered his head. "Oh, my goodness," I moaned, my eyes rolling backward.

The feeling of his tongue on my entrance sent a jolt of electricity surging through my body. I fell on my back, fingers tugging against the sheets as I reveled in the feeling of ecstasy sprinting through me. My toes curled in rapture, and my mouth was shaped like an "O," with pleased gasps escaping my lips.

His tongue wiped my cunt, taking and licking my wetness as he sucked on my clit. The passion with which he ate me up hinted at the fact he delighted in my flavor. His tongue worked magic on my entrance, and I bucked my hips, seeking deeper contact.

I arched my back in passionate abandon, my grip tightening around the sheets. His hand caressed my thighs and then roamed my body, feeling the softness of my skin. The erotic thrill sent shivers down my spine, and the sweet sensations traveled to my brain.

To him, I surrendered myself completely, moaning with his name on my lips. My hand flew to cover my mouth so he wouldn't hear me calling out for him. It was embarrassing to have done that, and I could only hope that he hadn't heard me.

The moisture from his mouth mixed with my wetness, and this electric combination filled me with an intoxicating euphoria. Raziel licked my cunt like an expert, and his possessive hands were all over me, tracing my curves and contours.

My legs shuddered in the air, and he held me in place, his hands grabbing my thighs. I closed my eyes, feeling the sparks of electricity surging through my trembling body. My face contorted in sheer pleasure, and I writhed against the sheets, pressing my palm over my mouth.

Whatever Raziel was doing to me was so good that I almost screamed in orgasmic pleasure. My palm muffled my moans, but only for so long, as this unbridled joy got the better of me. I threw my hands into my hair and released a loud moan that was sweet music to my ears, fueling my desire. “Yessss...that feels so good...!” I grabbed my breasts and fondled them, tuning my own nipples.

The sensation, the supreme pleasure, was killing me softly, especially because the feeling blended with Raziel’s magical tongue. I felt like I was starting to lose my mind.

My face scrunched up in ecstasy, and my breath lodged in my throat. My eyes were closed, and my mouth was open but producing no sounds. In the end, what came forth from my lips was a loud gasp.

Raziel pulled his face backward, leaving my pussy to itself for a moment while my whole body jerked. Now, I wanted him even more than before.

I leaned forward, grabbed him by the belt, and pulled him to myself.

He wiped my juice off his mouth and reclaimed my lips, engaging me in a kiss so intense that it left us both breathless. While tongues danced and twirled in our mouths, I unbuckled his belt, unzipped his pants, and dipped my hand into his groin. My fingers wrapped around his hard, long shaft, and my heart skipped a beat.

I withdrew the veiny organ and stroked its length, satisfied by the size. I wasn’t an expert at dick sizes and couldn’t tell if he was above average or simply average. One

thing was certain, though: That weapon of his was not below average.

His palm cupped my breast, squeezed and fondled it, and his lips still locked to mine. I teased myself with his cock, grazing his cap over my slippery entrance. The feeling was ecstatic, but his lips on mine wouldn't let me express my moans.

I was wet for him, super excited, and my body was tense, quivering with erotic thrill. I broke free from his possessive lips and stared into his sexy eyes. "Take me," I pleaded, unaware of when the words fell off my mouth.

His lips curled into a smile, and his hand slid down to grab his cock, positioning it outside my entrance. "I know you haven't done this before, so I'll be gentle," he whispered, holding my gaze.

I looked deep into his eyes, mine widening as he slowly penetrated my cunt. My body stiffened in readiness to accept him, and my breath ceased in the process. A soft, long groan escaped my lips, and my face scrunched up in pain as I felt my flesh tearing, splitting to accommodate his cock.

He paused, taking note of my agony. With a gentler move, he pushed further in, my tight pussy ripping apart to swallow his cock. The more he drove into me, the more tightly I closed my eyes, feeling the pain jolting across my body.

"Is it all in?" I asked, my thighs shaking and my voice cracking under the weight of my pain.

"Almost," he said, his tone soft and tender as he drove deeper but carefully.

I pressed my lips together, my body stiffening as I squeezed tightly against the sheets. "Oh, my God, it's so deep," I moaned, reopening my eyes.

My muscles, which had constricted moments ago, now relaxed briefly as he pulled out with a slow, careful move. I let out a soft sigh, a wind of relief blowing across my face. Raziel inserted his shaft back inside me and repeated the process: in...out. The more he practiced that, the easier his penetration became.

Now, it was more pleasure, less pain, and it felt so good. My pussy was already so wet and slippery, my juice serving as a natural lubricant that eased the process.

Raziel's waist ground into mine, his cock slowly thrusting inside me. I moaned, unable to contain the sensual delight that brought tears to my eyes. My legs hung in the air, and my arms wrapped around him as our bodies collided in the heat of passion. His hands traversed my body, sending electric sparks through me.

I raked my fingers into his back, my nails digging into his tough skin, and my eyes widened as he plunged deeper into me. My moans grew louder as his pace quickened. He seized my hands and pinned them down on the bed, his waist grinding against mine. The feeling of being in bondage, unable to use my hands, was surprisingly erotic. I enjoyed being at his mercy with little or no control over my own body. It was ecstatic.

He slid both my hands over my head and pinned them down together under one of his. With the other, he mildly choked me, gripping my neck with a tender and cautious hold. I loved it. He exerted his dominance over me, and I surrendered to his authority, my pussy getting wetter and wetter.

He increased his pace, ramming me harder, faster, and deeper while holding me in place and choking my neck. My eyes misted with tears drawn from sheer pleasure as my breasts bounced back and forth to the rhythm of his rapid thrusts.

Raziel unleashed a primal growl, like a wounded beast. His legs trembled, and his face contorted in pleasure, yet he wouldn't stop or slow down. I wrapped my arms

around his back, moaning in his ear while he continued to plunge further into me. Raziel raised my leg, and with a single shot, he released his essence inside me.

His warmth spread into my pussy as he pushed deeper and deeper inside me, his thick grunt highlighting his pleasure.

I grabbed him tightly, accepting his load with wide-open eyes until his body collapsed on mine. By the end, we were both spent, exhausted, and gasping for breath.

Raziel slid off me, and we lay on our backs, facing the ceiling. I'd yet to come to terms with the fact that I just had sex with Raziel Tarasov—my client with extreme anger issues.

The sex was mind-blowing, and the feeling beat my expectations. This wasn't how I'd envisioned losing my virginity, but I couldn't deny what a wonderful time I had. Raziel made my first experience quite a memorable one, and now, despite the complexity of the situation, a part of me craved him even more.

The man knew how to pleasure a woman, and today, he made a woman out of me. He handled me so well that I couldn't stop smiling, and my cheeks wouldn't stop flushing. I turned sideways and looked at him, his eyes locked to mine. He smoothed his tousled hair backward, and his lips curled into a smile that seemed rather genuine.

How did he manage to get so close to me in such a short period of time? He hadn't only gotten close to me; he'd also gotten into my pants and made me feel so good. Raziel Tarasov did what no man had ever done to me, and I couldn't help but marvel at this.

Sleeping with him was my guilty pleasure. I knew it was wrong, but if I hadn't given in to this temptation, I would have missed out on such a wonderful experience. I

could feel my pussy tingling and my nipples hardening. It was clear that I wanted more of him—today, tomorrow, and even the day after that.

This was a terrible situation that I found myself in, and if I didn't tread with caution, it would land me in so much trouble.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

It had been an awfully long few days already since we had sex—a few days that felt like an eternity. Clarice had been living rent-free in my head, and I couldn't seem to get her out. I didn't want to anyway. The experience with her was nothing short of phenomenal, and it had awakened something in me, something I'd yet to name.

Since the incident, I hadn't been able to focus on anything other than Clarice Evelyn: the gorgeous therapist who had snaked her way into my stone-cold heart. I wasn't the type to enjoy a woman's company more than once, especially after sleeping with her. In most cases, I'd feel repulsed or irritated by them after satisfying my urge.

That was a jerk move for sure, but I never really gave a shit. I was always about my duty to the Bratva and the Tarasov family business; anything outside that was secondary.

However, things were different with this young, beautiful, and intelligent therapist. Clarice had defied everything that I stood for, and in this short period of time that I'd spent with her, I was starting to grow fond of her.

No woman had ever attempted to unlock this possessive part of me. In fact, I honestly didn't think I'd be so proprietary with any woman. This was because I never saw them as a priority—not until Clarice came into the picture.

At first, I underestimated her ability to influence me. Hell, I thought I'd be the one to influence her. And perhaps I did, considering that she willingly slept with me. But what that only proved was that it was a two-way street. We both influenced one another.

My shoes, polished to a shine, clicked against the fine marble floor as I headed toward her office. With a hand buried in my pocket, I glided through the hallway, adorned with intricate carvings and designs.

Today, my mood was a lot lighter than usual, thanks to the soothing memories that occupied my mind. I could still hear her sweet moans in my head, and the images of her face, contorted in pleasure, prompted a small smile on my lips.

My heart raced with anticipation as I drew nearer to her office, eager to set my eyes on her. Taking her innocence had a much stronger influence on me than I had thought. I didn't only reminisce on the good time we had; I was looking forward to it happening again.

I couldn't seem to get enough of her. I wanted more and more, even though the relationship between us was unprofessional. Professionalism be damned! Nothing would stand in my way. I'd tasted her, and now I wouldn't let anyone dare do the same. She was mine whether she realized it or not.

She'd surrendered herself to me and let me take her virginity, making me her very first. As satisfying and intriguing as that was, the feeling didn't end there. No. It stirred up a sense of possessiveness within me, and I had already branded her as mine.

No one else would have access to her body as long as I lived, and the mere thought of another man with her caused my blood to boil. A fleeting scowl flashed across my face, and my fingers clenched into fists. My jaw tightened momentarily as I sought solace in the pain I'd inflict on whichever man would be unfortunate enough to go after her.

I drew a deep breath and halted outside her office, my hand reaching for the doorknob. I let out a quiet exhale and switched to a softer expression before opening

the door.

Usually, I'd smell her perfume from the entrance, but something was off today. The scent that invaded my senses was a cologne, an unfamiliar fragrance that made me squint with suspicion.

I walked in, and my gaze fell on a middle-aged man seated in her chair. He wore a polite smile, his brown eyes pinned on me with a glint of fear and anxiety dancing in their depths.

The man's brown suit exuded professionalism and style; however, he seemed to lack something—confidence. I could tell by the way his forehead was dampened with cold sweat that he was nervous.

Behind his nerdy-looking glasses, his eyes blinked rapidly, indicating his struggle to hold my intimidating gaze.

He cleared his throat and adjusted the rim of his glasses. "Mr. Tarasov, good morning." He rose to his feet, offering to shake my hand. "I'm Dr. Harry Winfrey," he said, his voice dripping with a British accent. "I'll be handling your sessions from now on."

My jaw tightened, and my scowl deepened as I ignored his outstretched hand, my gaze never leaving his face. "Where is she?" I questioned, my voice laced with venom.

His throat wobbled, his fingers adjusting the rim of his glasses.

"I said , where...is...she?" I repeated, taking a menacing step forward, my blood boiling with rage.

“She, uh...she’s—she’s been assigned to another case,” he stuttered, his scared eyes blinking rapidly and his voice trembling despite the professionalism he tried to exude. “Your case was transferred to me, Mr. Tarasov.... You’re my client now.” He drew a deep breath, struggling to stand his ground.

My brows furrowed, my eyes blazing with fury as I clenched my jaw, feeling a surge of anger jolt across my body. She did this on purpose. This was her lame attempt at avoiding me. Clarice was trying to distance herself from me.

The thought of that fueled my rage, and without a word, I stormed out of the office. For someone trying to help douse my anger issues, she sure just made a big mistake. Leaving me now when I needed her the most was a bad move, and it pissed me off.

I slammed the door shut on my way out, and the bang was loud enough that it startled the few bystanders, but I didn’t care.

She wouldn’t get away with this.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

“I feel so guilty, you know,” he said, burying his face in his palms, his voice cracking under the weight of his self-reproach. He raised his head and met my gaze, his lips trembling as regret flickered in his eyes. “She was my best friend’s girlfriend, and I slept with her,” he added. “What kind of a friend does that make me? How can I ever stare at Liam’s face again, knowing what I did?”

His name was Bernard, a portly young man with fine facial hair and a pair of green eyes. Bernard was my patient for today. I’d asked to be assigned to anyone but Raziel Tarasov. Dr. Kim Kurt had asked why the sudden request was made, but I was a little bit vague on my reasons.

However, I was lucky that she granted my request and transferred Harry Winfrey to the case. Harry was one of the oldest staff members at the clinic, and he was good at what he did, making him the perfect candidate for the job.

I was certain that Dr. Kim would eventually seek better answers from me as to why I abandoned the case mid-way. How was I supposed to tell her the truth? How was I supposed to tell her that I broke the rule and slept with my client?

Just like Bernard, I, too, was battling with my own guilt, but unlike him, I didn’t have anyone that I could talk to. Here I was, seated in front of my patient, attempting to provide a solution to his problem while I was still wallowing in mine.

Listening to him was the hardest part of this process because although I was physically present, mentally, I wasn’t. My mind was busy drifting in and out of the conversation as I struggled to fight this intense guilt gnawing at me.

I knew for a fact that I'd feel guilty after having sex with Raziel Tarasov. But I didn't think I'd feel this much shame and regret. It was almost unbearable to the point that I had to run away like a coward, abandoning the case and the man in desperate need of my help, all so I wouldn't look at him.

Bernard's voice cut through my thoughts like a knife, snapping me back to reality. "Doc, I can't eat. I can't do anything because I'm crippled by this...this giant pit in my stomach," he explained, his tone laced with remorse, pain, and regret.

"Bernard, I understand how you feel," I said, looking into those misted eyes of his.

He shook his head. "No, Doc, I don't think you do," he said, doubt overshadowing his tone.

I drew a deep breath and leaned forward, my gaze pinned on him. "Trust me, Bernard, I know what it's like to feel guilty. I know how much pain comes with regret...I do." I paused for a moment, as if letting the words take a toll on him. "But we can't change the past— we can't undo what we've done. We can only learn from our mistakes."

He rose to his feet, his palms smoothing his hair backward, a glint of frustration creeping into his tone. "That's the problem, Doc...I can't learn from my mistake."

I jerked my head, squinting with a puzzled look on my face. "What do you mean?"

He hesitated for a second, rubbing the back of his neck. "I want more," he declared, meeting my gaze again. "I know it's wrong, but I can't get enough of her." Bernard paused, and a realizing scoff escaped his lips. "I think I'm obsessed, Doc. Fuck! I'm in deeper shit than I thought." He sank into the sofa, the leather crunching beneath his weight.

I swallowed hard, my heart pounding in my chest as I wondered the same thing. Was I also...? No. I couldn't be. Right? If I was obsessed, I wouldn't have abandoned the case. Right? Fuck!

It was almost like I was starting to lose my mind, and despite the countless questions echoing in my head, one thing was certain: I wanted more of him. I wanted more of Raziel Tarasov.

Bernard's and my situation had a lot in common, and I was just as confused and messed up as he was. I needed help, too. I needed clarity and a way out of this problem that I'd created by myself. I had tried to convince myself that I acted under the influence of a moment of weakness. I was weak and horny, and he took advantage of that.

But did he really?

Raziel had asked me to tell him to stop, that he would back off if I did. He gave me the chance to flee from that temptation, but I didn't. This was on me, and it was useless to try to play the victim. I knew the truth.

Now to the big question: How was I supposed to fix Bernard when the same thing that broke him had broken me? He and I were in the same boat: clueless, helpless, and desperate for intervention. How would I give what I didn't have?

"I'm losing my mind here, Doc," he said, his voice low and faint. "I don't know what to do."

As I shaped my mouth, ready to respond, the front door immediately swung open. The sudden, unauthorized entry startled me, and I raised my head toward the entrance. My heart stopped for a while, and my breath lodged in my throat the moment my eyes fell on the man by the door.

Raziel.

He stood there, his cold, piercing eyes boring into mine, his gaze intense and intimidating. His slightly tousled hair framed his chiseled face, and his scowl accentuated his ruggedness. With slow, menacing footsteps, he walked further into the room.

I clenched my jaw, tightly gripping my pen in an attempt to remain composed. The fury in his eyes sent shivers down my spine, and I could feel the heat spreading across my body. I was sweating in awkward places, and my heart wouldn't quiet; it wouldn't stop hammering in my slowly heaving chest.

My hands trembled, and absolute fear overwhelmed me, almost crippling me—literally.

“What the hell, man? You can't just barge in here!” Bernard snapped, rising to his feet.

I tried to stop him, knowing it was a shitty move and that he might end up losing at least a tooth, but I couldn't find my voice. Raziel's commanding presence had left me numb.

Bernard faced off against Raziel, and the moment he met Raz's cold and dangerous eyes, he froze. His throat wobbled, and his eyes widened slightly, like he was looking at the devil himself, transfixed and rooted to the floor.

Raziel balled both hands into fists, his intense glare pinned on the portly man who dared challenge him.

Bernard's hands trembled, fear flickering in his eyes as he withdrew slowly, taking backward steps away from Raz. Without saying anything, Raziel stepped forward, his

blazing eyes never leaving Bernard's. The intensity of his glare alone sent Bernard running like a scared little cat.

He zoomed out of the office, and the door clicked shut behind him, leaving just me and Raz alone to ourselves. Bad idea.

"What is the meaning of this?" I rose to my feet, my voice dripping with venom and disdain.

Transforming my fear into anger was the only way that I could survive his suffocating presence. Besides, I couldn't let him see how much of an effect he had on me.

"Have you no respect? I was in the middle of a session with a patient, for Christ's sake!" I snapped, my scowl deepening.

He grasped my hand, his firm grip tightening around my wrist as he pulled me closer to himself. "You think you can run away from me?" He leaned forward, his eyes boring into mine, his voice low and malicious. "You can't. I own you," he growled.

My heart sank into my chest at the weight of his words, and my knees quaked, my legs turning to jelly. The possessiveness in his tone inflicted me with an unsettling mix of fear and something I didn't want to name.

"You're delusional if you think you can just ditch me," he hissed, his eyes never leaving my face. "You're mine, Clarice. I owned you the day you let me take your innocence," he added, his voice deep and husky. "The sooner you understand that, the better."

I could almost hear the sound of my own heart pounding like a drum, threatening to jump out of my chest. I held his gaze, my lips shuddering subtly as I glared at him,

feigning defiance even though deep down, I was scared to death.

Raziel had put the fear of God in me, and now I couldn't even find my voice or squirm out of his hold.

The door opened, and a pair of heels clicked against the floor. "What's going on here?" Dr. Kim's voice cut through the tension hovering in the air.

Raziel let go of my hand before she walked over to us, her gaze shifting across our faces. "Is everything okay?" she asked, throwing the question at me.

"Everything's fine," I replied without taking my eyes off Raziel. "He was just leaving."

His intense gaze lingered on me a little longer before he turned around and walked away without saying a word.

I let out a soft sigh of relief, my jaw tightening to mask my nervousness. His words echoed in the back of my mind, leaving me breathless and shaken, scared to my bones. The reality I'd long dreaded had now come knocking on my door, reminding me that I was in trouble. Big trouble.

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A thin thread of smoke swirled around me as I leaned against the edge of my mahogany table, a cigar between my lips. I stared blankly into space, a faint grin twitching at the corners of my mouth.

My mind was occupied with thoughts of Clarice and her pesky little defiance—the stubbornness that seemed to draw me in like a fucking drug. Her ability to stand her ground and be brave in my presence was something that I would always find intriguing.

She hadn't given a shit about how upset I was, and her eyes blazed with fury, just like mine. Why? Why was she different, and why did her difference affect me so much?

Clarice wasn't the first woman I'd been with, but there was something about her that I'd yet to name. The mere fact that she had a subtle way of pulling me in was interesting and very much intriguing. I was curious to know her more, to be with her and her alone.

But why was she pushing me away?

My face contorted into a fleeting scowl as I released a puff of smoke, the cigar's flavors dancing on my tongue.

Usually, I was the one avoiding the women that I slept with, and that was why being on the other side of the table was new to me. It sucked, and I hated the feeling. It was as though the universe was using her to make me atone for my sins against all those women.

Somehow, her sudden avoidance, her cold attitude, and her demeanor made me feel used. It was almost like she had an itch, and I was the one available to scratch. The idea stirred up a funny feeling within me. I couldn't exactly explain it, considering that it was alien to me, but it sort of...hurt.

Beneath what felt like emotional pain was a glint of admiration. It didn't matter if she hurt me or not if her change in attitude and subtle avoidance infuriated me. One thing was certain: She had successfully unlocked a feeling in me, and I couldn't stay mad at her for long.

I drew another round of smoke, my gaze drifting off as my mind became more ensnared by thoughts of the mysterious woman. However, before I could delve deeper into my thoughts, something awakened within me—a survival instinct. It was as though a switch had been flipped on in my head, and fleeting seriousness flashed across my face.

Goosebumps crawled all over my skin, and my senses were on high alert. I was trained to perceive danger from a mile away, to sense a threat even when it seemed rather unlikely. My brows furrowed, and my heart stopped for a moment, my hand lowering the cigar from my lips.

Something was wrong; I could feel it, and it made me fucking restless. My sharp eyes gazed out the floor-to-ceiling window, and faint creases lined my forehead. I was exposed, out in the open, making me vulnerable to a sniper attack.

Suddenly, an ear-splitting clash of glass caught my attention as a bullet hurtled through the window, its trajectory deadly and precise.

Instincts kicked in, and in a flash, I ducked, my quick reflexes honed from years of living on the edge. With a practiced sideways twist, I avoided the bullet's path by mere inches. The projectile slammed into the wall behind me, the impact sending

splintered wood and shattered glass flying across the floor.

The door burst open, and Alex barged into the office space, his gun held up in front of him, ready to spring into action. The two others with him circled over me, their weapons drawn, eyes darting across the room and outside the window.

“Are you okay, Boss? Are you hit?” Alex asked me, glancing in my direction while still inspecting the surroundings.

“I’m alright,” I said, straightening. My voice was low and even, unshaken by the attempt on my life.

He lowered his gun, perceiving that I was out of danger—at least for now. Alex turned around in my direction and said, his tone dripping with conviction, “This wasn’t random.”

No, it wasn’t. I had a lot of enemies, and any one of those fuckers could have been responsible for this.

Alex’s brows knitted together, and his eyes squinted, suspicion creeping in. “Barlow,” he said, clenching his jaw. His tone was quiet yet venomous. “He’s behind this. It has to be his feeble attempt at a payback.”

“But he’s in a hospital,” one of the men with me cut in.

“He doesn’t have to get his hands dirty to get the job done,” Alex explained, his eyes flying back to the window.

Damon Barlow, like me, had men everywhere. He had spies and foot soldiers doing his bidding. Given that I was the reason he was in the hospital, it was safe to assume that this attack was linked to him.

But wait a minute.

My eyes narrowed ever so slightly as a realization hit me. If this were Barlow's doing, then that would mean that he was out to get me. Knowing the kind of man that he was before this attack today, he must have his men tailing me, secretly following me wherever I went. That was what I'd do if I were in his shoes.

If that were the case, then that bastard or his men must know about Clarice and how close I'd gotten to her. This only meant one thing: I'd just put a giant bullseye on her back, making her a potential target.

Shit.

"Alex, keep an eye on Clarice. Double the surveillance around her house and make sure she's safe at all times," I ordered him.

"Sir, the attempt was on your life, not hers," he said, bewildered.

"This was a warning shot, Alex," I said, my eyes boring into his. "And if Barlow or any of those fuckers who call themselves my enemies is behind this, then her life is in grave danger."

He nodded his head and signaled the other men, and they all stormed out of my office. Alone with my thoughts, my anger simmered beneath the surface at the thought of her being in harm's way.

My fingers clenched into fists, and a deep frown settled on my face. I tightened my jaw, finding comfort in the horrors I'd inflict on whoever would dare touch a hair on her head.

I'd send them to hell, and I'd do that with a fucking smile on my face. But for now,

I'd focus on keeping her safe; it was my primary assignment.

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The city was alive this afternoon, bustling with activities as pedestrians crowded the sidewalks, going about their daily lives. Towering skyscrapers stretched above like giant sentinels, their glass and steel facades glinting in the sunlight.

Impatient drivers blared their horns as cars, buses, and taxis rumbled through the streets. The atmosphere vibrated with the hum of engines, the wailing of distant sirens, and the chatter of pedestrians.

The laughter, the music, and the calls from street vendors and performers added to the city's loveliness, enticing passersby to stop and sample their wares. The air was filled with the sweet scent of freshly brewed coffee, exotic spices, and roasting nuts, all teasing my senses.

The city's rhythm enveloped me as I walked through the crowd, my mind occupied with one thing and one thing only: the man, Raziell.

His effect on me from the last time we met hadn't washed off yet. His intimidating glare and sense of possessiveness still lingered, and I couldn't shake it off. He clearly wasn't done with me and still wanted more of what had happened the other day.

One of my biggest fears was how he would perceive me after getting what he wanted. Would he take me seriously? Would he avoid me because he'd gone between my legs? Would I be just another name he'd cross off his list once he was done taking my innocence? All these questions had overlapped in my mind.

I was worried that he'd discard me like I was some used toy to be tossed in the trash.

However, the reverse now seemed to be the case. Raziel's reaction was the exact opposite of what I'd thought. Although a part of me was relieved that my fears hadn't become a reality, I couldn't help but feel like this clinginess was also another type of trouble.

Raziel's possessiveness of me was alarming. It was almost like he was...obsessed. His words still echoed in my head, inflicting me with fear and something that I was too afraid to name. "...I own you...you're mine..."

A cold shiver sprinted down my spine, and my heart skipped a beat at the sound of his voice resounding in my mind. I struggled to dispel the thoughts of him, especially because I'd almost been run over by a car the last time he was in my head.

Focus, Clary. Focus, I thought to myself, slapping my forehead while still in motion.

I honestly needed a distraction from these thoughts that wouldn't let me think straight. I had stepped outside to clear my head and rid my mind of this man. But it was like the more I tried, the more I failed—woefully.

I could still feel his touch on my skin. Despite the amount of time that had passed since we made out, the taste of his tongue lingered on mine. Images of this man grinding into my waist with expert moves flashed through my head, reminding me of how good the experience was.

If I continued like this, I'd lose my sanity. This distraction was starting to get out of hand, and I desperately needed to get Raziel Tarasov out of my head. He'd overstayed his welcome, and these illicit thoughts that flooded my mind would only land me in more trouble.

I had enough on my plate already, and it was all because of him. I missed the days when I used to be in charge of my own thoughts, the days when nothing controlled

me and when nothing crept into my mind without my permission.

Now, I felt helpless, unsure of how to get myself out of this mess I'd created. How could something so deadly feel so good?

As my mind wandered, in search of a way out— a solution to my problem—my eyes caught a small bookstore across the street. My brows narrowed slightly, knowing this was the perfect way to get Raziel out of my head, for now at least.

Reading was one of my many hobbies, something that helped keep me busy, and spotting that bookstore somehow gladdened my heart. On a whim, I stepped off the curb, looked both ways, and then crossed to the other side. My shoes clicked against the pavement as I strolled over to the shop.

I ducked into the small bookstore, its shelves packed tightly with volumes of several shapes and sizes. I walked through the tiny aisle, my eyes scanning the collection, thinking about which one to pick.

That was when I heard a very familiar voice from behind me. "Clarice?"

I recognized the voice, the sweet femininity of it, but I'd yet to place a face to it, until I turned around. My gaze met the speaker, her hair cascading down her shoulders, eyes sparkling with mirth. Our last encounter was brief, but there was no way I would forget her so easily.

My lips curled into a genuine smile, my eyes crinkling at the corners. "Bella?" I chuckled, stepping toward her. "What're you doing here?"

"Same thing as you, I suppose," she replied, mirroring my gesture as she slipped into my arms. "I did tell you that I'd see you around," she teased, letting go, her eyes locked on mine.

“Yeah, you weren’t kidding.” I chuckled, a sense of comfort and peace washing over me.

Her gaze dropped to my knee for a second before returning to my face. “How’s the leg?” she asked, her tone tinged with a hint of concern.

My smile broadened, and I rolled my eyes in mock exhaustion. “Come on, you know it’s just a scratch.”

“Just checking. Is that so bad?” She laughed, stepping toward the nearest shelf. “So, what brings you to this neck of woods anyway?”

“Nothing much, just browsing for some new reads,” came my reply, my eyes darting across the collection of books.

“Same here—I swear I’m starting to run out of shelf space at home,” she said, withdrawing a book, her fingers flipping through its pages.

The enthusiasm in her voice was a clear indication that she was a fellow book lover, and that softened my heart. My lips parted into a small grin as I drew nearer. “Interesting,” I began, halting in front of her. “What kind of books are you into?”

“Hmm. A little bit of everything, I guess,” she replied, her tone light and tinged with a glint of uncertainty. “Fiction, non-fiction, mystery, sci-fi....” Her shoulders shrugged casually. “I just love getting lost in a good story.”

“Me, too.” I laughed, intrigued by how much we shared in common. “Although I like to believe that I’m a total sucker for historical fiction. There’s just something about being transported to another time and space that just...captivates me, you know?” The slight pause came when I groped for the right adjective, my voice dripping with enthusiasm.

“Ah! I know exactly what you mean, Clary.” She chuckled, closing the book in her hand and slipping it back into the collection she withdrew it from. “Personally, I’ve always been fascinated by the Victorian era.”

“Shut the front door!” I raised my brows in surprise, my eyes shining with excitement.

“I’m serious.” She laughed, her eyes crinkling at the corners.

“Have you read any of the Brontë sisters?” I asked, my gaze pinned on her, eagerly awaiting her response.

“Are you kidding me? I adore Jane Eyre!” she replied, her voice shrouded by excitement.

I couldn’t help the broad smile spreading across my lips.

Bella was one of the very few individuals in my life who seemed to be drawn to the same genre of books as me. It felt good to find someone else who loved the things I loved finally.

As time went on, we continued to chat, laugh, and discuss books. Our conversation flowed easily and naturally, like we were old friends. Speaking with her helped ease my stress and reduced my anxiety.

We spent more time together at a nearby café, eating and drinking as we delved deeper into the mysterious world of books and novels. Our conversation revealed that she and I shared a lot in common, and I couldn’t help but wonder where she’d been all my life.

With Scarlett out of town, Bella was definitely going to be my new buddy. Her

energy matched mine, and her presence always helped me forget all about my situation.

Before we parted ways after long hours of chatting and laughing, she gave me a book she said was her favorite. Considering that we were both essentially identical in this aspect of life, I had no doubt that I was going to love the book.

We exchanged phone numbers, and then we both went our separate ways. I was glad I stepped out when I did and that I ran into her at the bookstore. Our time together made me feel a whole lot better, and I returned home in a better state than when I left.

I strolled into my house, locked the door behind me, and headed straight into my room, my fingers rubbing my tired eyes. From the entrance, I shed my jacket and tossed it onto the nearby hanger. I took off my shoes and walked over to the bed, the wooden floor cool beneath my bare feet.

Cupping my face in my palms, I sat on the edge of the bed, letting out a soft sigh. Now that Bella wasn't here to keep me company, my mind was once again starting to get flooded with thoughts of Raziel.

My eyes fell on the gift box he'd gotten me, and I instinctively rose to my feet, strolling over to the table. Raziel hadn't only gotten me a dress for the dinner date the other night. Inside the box was a mini portrait, a painting of a man radiating several emotions, depicted with colorful brush strokes. I lifted the decorative box and the portrait, perching them both on the shelf across my bed.

A small smile played on the corners of my lips as I admired the thoughtfulness behind the painting. My fingers brushed over the surface of this gift, my eyes pinned on the man in the painting. For some reason, I could see my present situation in it. It was almost like the intensity of the emotions swirling around the man was a somewhat graphical representation of my own life.

I was helpless against these overwhelming thoughts of Raziel, and the more the images of him flooded my mind, the hornier I got. The tingling sensation between my legs caused my thighs to brush against each other as a heat of passion slowly spread through my body.

I wanted him so badly, and now my body was starting to tremble. My fingertips were tingling, and my heartbeat escalated by the second, leaving me breathless. I stepped away from the shelf and sat on my bed, my eyes fixed on the gift box.

Raziel was wild, dangerous, and far beyond my ability to help. Yet, that untamed part of him stirred up something inside me.

As I sat on the edge of the bed, my thoughts spiraled, seemingly out of control. Despite my attempts to push him out of my head, Raziel's presence still lingered, consuming me from the inside and awakening feelings I struggled to suppress.

It was starting to feel hot in here, and my thighs wouldn't stop brushing against each other. A flame of passion ignited within me, and I didn't realize it when my hands darted to my chest. My fingers grazed my nipples, and I stared directly at the gift box, playing with my breasts over the fabric of my top.

I was so wet already just thinking about Raziel's possessiveness—his hands all over my body and his tongue in my mouth. Fuck. A spark jolted across my body, and I felt a shiver sprinting down my spine.

It was useless trying to control my appetite. I wanted him so badly, and since I couldn't have him at the moment, I'd rather just....

My fingers grasped the waistband of my pants, and I took them off, my body sprawling on my bed with my head tipped back. I slid my hand between my legs, and my eyes widened as I felt my wetness. A soft moan escaped my lips, and my other

hand darted to my chest, caressing my breasts.

I'd never done this before, but here I was, touching myself and thinking about a very dangerous man. I hated that he had so much of an effect on me, but I couldn't help it. He had me hooked.

Fuck you, Raziel.

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I lounged on the cream-colored leather couch in my VIP lounge as soft, golden lighting cast a warm glow over the room. The air was thick with the scent of whiskey and that of a half-smoked Cuban cigar.

In my hands, I held a slim state-of-the-art tablet, its screen glowing with soft, blue light. My eyes scanned the display, a faint smile twitching on the corners of my lips as I wore a thoughtful expression.

I reached for the bottle of whiskey towering on the low table in front of me and, with an expert move, poured myself a glass. Clutching the tumbler between my fingers, I raised it to my lips and took a sip, my eyes never leaving the glowing screen.

The decorative box I'd sent to her house days ago was adorned with something other than intricate carvings and fancy ribbons. It was a low blow to add such a minute yet privacy-invading chip to the gift box. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't help myself.

Besides, I did it to make sure that I had eyes on her at all times. That way, I'd know if anyone should try to come after her. At least, that was what I told myself to help ease the guilt.

Planting a hidden micro camera and a mic in the gift box I'd sent to her was a little extreme, even for me. But it was useless crying over spilled milk; the deed was done already. Whatever the box's camera caught was displayed on my screen, and right now, the mini microphone had picked up a movement in her room.

The door opened, and the camera caught her walking into the room, her fingers

rubbing her eyes. Clarice shed her jacket and draped it over the nearest hanger. She took her shoes off, and on bare feet, she strolled further in, her expression distant and her movements thoughtful.

I took another sip from my glass, my eyes fixed on the glowing screen. I watched her waltz over to the bed and sit on the edge, oblivious to my eyes on her. She cupped her face in her palms and let out a deep breath.

My eyes squinted as I continued to watch her. She seemed exhausted—bothered about something. Whatever was running through her mind appeared to have been weighing her down.

I stroked my chin absently, my gaze pinned on the beautiful woman on my screen. Clarice lifted her head and looked in the direction of the gift box. The camera captured her eyes, and for a moment there, I thought she met my gaze, except she had no idea that I was watching.

Or did she?

Clarice rose to her feet and strolled over to the box. Through the earbuds plugged in, I heard the faint rustle of her movement as she lifted the decorative box and just stared at it.

The room was silent, her voice absent, but her eyes held me captive. Clarice had no idea that she was gazing right into the camera and essentially right into my eyes. I couldn't read her expression at first until a small grin played on her lips.

I wondered what had prompted such an angelic smile that brightened her face, but her grin was somehow contagious. Again, I took another sip from my glass.

She carried the box and walked over to a shelf where she gently placed it, her smile

still retained. For a woman who was keen on avoiding me, she sure had a funny way of showing it when she was alone.

Her claims of wanting to stay away from me were nothing but an act to hide how she truly felt. Clarice wanted me as much as I wanted her, but the difference between us was that she was too afraid to act on her feelings—at least in public.

For some reason, I couldn't shake the thought that she was up to something funny—something that would be worth watching. My lips curled into a smile, my gaze fixed on the screen as I anticipated what she would do next.

However, before I could get too comfortable, the door opened, and Alex walked in with my brother Daniel, together with a handful of my men. Their subtle intrusion caused my face to contort into a faint scowl, my eyes leaving the screen to settle on them.

“Hello, brother,” Daniel greeted me, sliding onto the couch across from mine, his brown eyes pinned on my face.

The small smirk on his lips hinted that he was aware of the discomfort their presence had caused. But as usual, my easy-going younger brother didn't give a shit.

He picked up the bottle of whiskey, grabbed an empty tumbler on the table, and poured himself a drink. “Why the long face? Did we interrupt something?” he teased, his eyes darting to my tablet.

Alex took a seat beside Daniel, and the others secured the perimeter, their sharp eyes scanning the room.

“Heard you got shot at,” Daniel said, reclining on the couch, his legs crossed and the tumbler cradled in his hand. “How're you holding up?”

“The sniper missed my head. Wrong move,” I replied, my voice calm and collected as I took another sip from my glass.

“Well, I say we find that fucker and show them how to take a damn shot without missing,” he said, smoothing back his dark hair. “Don’t you think so, Alex?” Daniel glanced in his direction.

“Absolutely,” he answered, meeting my brother’s gaze. “We’re working on that.”

“My gut tells me this attack is tied to Damon Barlow—that sick fuck is clearly out for revenge.” Daniel chuckled, his tone mild but sinister. “If he doesn’t tread carefully, he’ll meet his maker a lot quicker than he’ll get out of that hospital.”

Of the two of us, Daniel was the easy-going one, the one with the sense of humor. But as charming and vibrant as he could be, he was just as dangerous. My brother’s cruelty was on another level—he’d torture his victims and drag them to hell while making a joke.

Unpopular opinion: Daniel was worse than I was. This was simply because, unlike me, the man could mask his fury with tricky laughter that always deceived his enemies. More often than not, they’d misunderstand his laughter and lower their guard, and when they’d least expect it, he’d strike.

It was almost impossible to tell when he was happy or furious, and that made him very dangerous.

Daniel might have laughed when he joked about sending Barlow to meet his maker. But I knew my brother; he was fucking serious.

As Daniel and Alex discussed ways to find out who was behind the shooting, I found myself drifting away from the conversation. My eyes would occasionally dart to my

tablet's glowing screen as I struggled with my divided attention.

However, as the conversation went on, a soft, unexpected sound filtered through my earbuds. It was a sharp intake of breath, and it stole my attention, forcing my eyes back to the screen. At first, I wasn't exactly sure what I heard until I saw her fondling her breast in front of the camera.

The conversation around me faded into the background as I heard the unmistakable sound of her soft purrs—a low, throaty moan that echoed in my head. My pulse quickened, and my eyes stayed fixed on her, watching her take off her top.

Without a word, I flipped the screen downward and rose to my feet, striding out of the lounge.

“Hey, where're you going?” Daniel called after me, his voice laced with surprise and a glint of curiosity.

I ignored him, left the lounge, and found solace in the privacy of a nearby room. Once inside, I shut the door and settled on a couch. By the time I returned my gaze to the screen, she was already naked, sprawled on her bed, her head tipped back. I watched Clarice's hands explore her body with reckless abandon, and my grip on the tablet tightened.

I couldn't tear my gaze off the screen, and I could feel my cock swelling in my pants. I froze, my chest heaving as I watched her slide her hand down between her legs. Her face contorted in pleasure, and she bit her lower lip while her free hand caressed her breasts.

A dark possessiveness swelled up within me, accentuating my desire. Clarice was mine whether she realized it or not. That body was mine. I owned her; she fucking belonged to me.

I set the tablet on a low table in front of me, unbuttoning my pants. With a quick move, I undid my zipper and withdrew my hard cock. Her sweet moans were music to my ears, and I found myself stroking my shaft as a wave of pleasure coursed through my veins.

She stared at the gift box while playing with herself, her body arching, her legs spread apart. I fixed my gaze on her, imagining that I was the one fingering her pussy. Clarice moaned, bucking her hips like she couldn't get enough. Her hand covered her mouth, and her palm rubbed rapidly over her clit. Her muffled moans still sounded so erotic and pleasing to my ears.

Clarice stimulated her clit so hard and fast that her fingers grasped the sheets, and a loud moan fell from her lips. She shut her eyes, basking in the pleasure coursing through her like jolts of electricity.

Then the unexpected happened—she said my name.

“Raz—oh, Raz...!” she moaned, her back arching higher.

My brows shot up in disbelief, and I paused for a moment to be sure that I heard her correctly. She called out to me again, this time with a much softer tone.

“Raz...yes...! Raz...Raz... Raz....” Her voice grew a little louder each time she said my name.

The sound of my name on her lips was so sexy, and the louder she moaned, the faster I stroked my cock. I watched her legs tremble, and her body stiffened for a moment. Her mouth was shaped like an “O,” but no sound came forth, and her eyes rolled backward. She was climaxing; I could tell.

“Yes, Clarice, yes!” I muttered, stroking my cock so hard that my body quivered. My

eyes never left the screen as I didn't want to miss anything—not even the slightest expression or movement.

She quickened her movement over her clit, and soon a long, dragged moan escaped her lips. “Fuuuuccckkkkk...Raz, yes...!” Her body shuddered, and her legs trembled as she writhed against the sheets.

She just had an orgasm with my name on her lips. What could be hotter than that?

I watched her back slump against the bed, and she lay there, spent, exhausted and gasping for breath. The room fell silent except for the faint sounds of her heavy breaths. Watching her relax, I smeared my pre-cum over my cock, unsatisfied, but I'd make do with this experience.

My lips curled into a broad grin as I realized now just how much she wanted me. Clarice's energy matched mine, and we clearly wanted to taste each other again.

My expression darkened ever so slightly, and I made up my mind that the next time we crossed paths, I wouldn't leave without possessing that body.

She was starving. I was starving. It was high time we stopped torturing each other and just satisfied our cravings.

One thing was certain: The next time I saw her, I'd devour her like a hungry lion, and I wouldn't hold back.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

My fingers massaged my forehead as I sat at my desk, my elbow on the mahogany table. I had my eyes fixed on the notebook staring at me, but my concentration was elsewhere.

I had one job this afternoon: to evaluate a patient's progress. But I seemed to be doing a terrible job at that, considering that my mind was everywhere but on the notebook.

With a soft exhale, I reclined into my chair, rubbing my tired eyes and feeling a slight pang at the back of my head. I barely slept these days, barely thought about anything other than Raziel Tarasov.

How could one man have so much of an effect on me? And why the hell couldn't I get him out of my mind?

Raziel occupied my head all day, every day, and no matter how hard I tried, it was almost impossible to get rid of him. My eyes drooped to the floor, and my heart paused and skipped a beat. I recalled the way I'd touched myself and called out his name two days ago. It was super embarrassing.

A wave of shame washed over me, and I honestly wanted to hate myself. But despite my reservations, I couldn't deny the fact that I loved it—the feeling of climaxing with his name on my lips.

Just thinking about it now made my nipples hard and erect, my cunt tingling between my legs. My thighs locked together, and my breathing suddenly became shallow.

Images of my night with Raziel slowly flooded my mind, reminding me of what a great lover he was. My heart raced in my chest as I reminisced on the way he touched me, kissed me, ate me up, and drove inside me.

Heat waves spread across my body, and at the same time, a cold shiver ran down my spine. My hands brushed against my nipples over the fabric of my top, and a flame ignited within me.

“No, no, no, not now...not again,” I muttered under my shallow breath, struggling with the temptation to touch myself in the solitude of my office.

My heart was hammering in my slowly heaving chest, and the illicit pictures playing in my head only worsened my situation. I hated Raziel for this—for ruining my life and making me want him more than ever.

This was torture, and I wasn't sure how long I'd be able to endure it.

My legs trembled, parting with a slow, cautious move as my manicured hands caressed my thighs. I tried to control myself, considering that I was at the office, but the more I tried, the more vulnerable I became.

I shook my head, massaging my temples as I struggled to shove the growing imagination back in my head. I raised my leg and placed it on the table, imagining being gone on by Raziel. I wanted so badly to feel his tongue parting my folds.

As I thought about how good it would feel if he was here, going down on me, my legs spread apart a little wider. My hand slid down to stimulate my clit, but I was quick to get a hold myself.

“No,” I whispered, my voice laced with a glint of determination as I withdrew my hand and lowered my leg.

I drew a deep breath, struggling to control my desire despite my shuddering body. This wasn't right; it didn't feel right, and I couldn't keep letting my emotions dictate my actions.

Did I still want Raziel Tarasov? Hell, yeah. However, touching myself would only escalate my lust and leave me hanging. It wasn't worth it.

That instant, my phone buzzed on the table, snapping me back to the present. My eyes darted to the lit screen, and I saw a text from my new buddy. Somehow, Bella was always there to distract me from the overwhelming thoughts of Raziel Tarasov.

The sight of her name alone prompted a small smile on my face until I read the content of the message. It read, “ Hey! My friend Sophie is hosting a yacht party this weekend. You should come—it'll be fun!”

A faint, almost undetectable frown flashed across my face at the idea of a social gathering. I wasn't the kind to roll well with a crowd. I loved my privacy and found comfort in my own company. However, considering the kinds of thoughts that occupied my mind these days, maybe being around other people wouldn't be such a bad idea after all.

The first step to getting Raziel out of my mind was mingling with others, and I couldn't do that by staying by myself all the time.

I ignored the message and pinched the bridge of my nose. The last time a friend dragged me out of my shell to a nightclub, I witnessed a monster's outburst. However, this was just a silly excuse to ghost the party.

Later that afternoon, I sat on a bench in the garden at the back of the clinic. The scent

of fresh flowers wafted through the cool air, blending seamlessly with the aroma of my coffee. I leaned against the backrest, my thermos perched beside me with my legs casually crossed.

One glance at me, and one would think that I exuded confidence and composure, whereas I was falling to pieces deep down inside. I needed to feel the natural air, the gentle breeze against my face, hoping it would help me think straight.

This whole thing with Raziel Tarasov was killing me, and the worst part was that I had no one to talk to. No one at all.

Ever since I asked to be taken off the case, I'd been avoiding my supervisor and colleagues—especially Carol. Dr. Kim had a lot of faith in me despite Carol's negativity, and now I felt so guilty for letting her down. Maybe Carol was right after all. Maybe I wasn't ready to take on something as taxing as that.

Luckily, Dr. Kim hadn't assigned Carol to the case after I asked to be taken off—she would have made my life a living hell here at the clinic. Carol would have taunted me with the case, and my current situation would've been worse. Thankfully, the original case Dr. Kim had assigned me to hadn't gone to Carol, either.

I was still deep in thought when someone conspicuously cleared their throat, their voice pulling me back to the present. I lifted my head, and there she was, Dr. Kim Kurt, her eyes shimmering behind her glasses.

“Doctor,” I called out, my voice laced with surprise and my eyes shining with shock. “Um...hi...” I stuttered, her presence taking me completely off guard.

“May I?” She gestured at the vacant space beside me.

I swallowed hard, hesitating for a second because I knew this was it—this was the

moment we'd speak about the elephant in the room.

God! I wasn't ready to have this conversation with her—not now.

I scratched the back of my head reflexively. “Yeah, sure.”

Her lips curled into a faint grin, and she sat beside me, her eyes fixed on the horizon.

I could almost hear the sound of my heart pounding like a drum in my chest, but I tried to the best of my ability to stay composed.

“Are you alright?” She turned to face me, her expression soft and welcoming.

My eyes squinted, a little puzzled by her inquisition. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

“‘I'm fine’ is a default reply people give when they don’t wanna share something that’s bothering them,” she said, her tone mild and gentle.

Her gaze and her words somehow softened my heart, creating a calm and more serene atmosphere fit for a confession.

I managed to squeeze out a smile and a light, forced chuckle. “This isn’t a default reply; I’m fine, really.”

Her small grin broadened, and she adjusted a little bit closer. “Clarice, I’ve been in this line of work long enough to know when someone’s lying...or when they’re hiding something.”

My heart sank into my stomach, and my breath lodged in my throat. I’d been caught. Maybe she knew about the incident, the mistake, and now I was in some serious trouble.

“You’ve been distant lately,” she continued, her eyes locked to mine. “You’re easily distracted, and you seem like you’re dealing with something heavy.” She looked me dead in the eyes and asked, “Is there something you wanna talk about?”

My heartbeat escalated, and my pulse quickened, my brain going blank for a moment. Was this a trick question? Was this an opportunity for me to come clean because she already knew the truth? What should I do now?

“You’re ashamed, aren’t you?” she asked, looking at me. “You’re ashamed that you couldn’t handle the client I assigned to you. Is that it?”

It was like a wind of relief had blown across my face when she asked this. Although she was on the right track, Dr. Kim was oblivious to the real deal, and it was best to keep it that way.

I let out a soft sigh, rubbing my eyes. “It’s embarrassing to chicken out the way I did, especially because you believed in me,” I said, scratching the surface of the truth without delving deep.

She exhaled sharply. “Maybe the fault is on me.”

My brows arched, and my eyes widened ever so slightly. “What? No!” came my objection.

“Maybe it is,” she insisted. “I convinced you to handle a case that I knew was way above your ability. I expected so much from you, and whatever that expectation resulted in is my fault.”

“Doctor—”

“Enough with the modesty, Clarice,” she cut me off, her voice smooth and easy.

“This wasn’t entirely your fault. I shouldn’t have assigned you to Raziel Tarasov, knowing the kind of man that he is.” She paused, staring right at me. “Did he hurt you?”

He fucked me—that’s what he did, I thought to myself.

However, with a steady voice, I replied, “No. No, he didn’t.”

She studied for a moment before saying, “Okay, that’s good.” Dr. Kim drew a deep breath and continued. “This job can be traumatizing at times, but I can guarantee you it gets better. Now, I’m not sure what your reason is for pulling away. But I’m certain that you never would’ve done so if you didn’t think it was necessary.”

I felt my eyes misting at her consoling words, and my heart melted.

She placed a hand on my shoulder and stared into my eyes. “For what it’s worth, you did a good job with Raziel Tarasov.”

My lips curled into a smile, and I wiped a lone tear from my cheek. “Thank you, Doc.”

Her smile widened, and she rose to her feet, taking her leave. Dr. Kim paused a few paces away from me and added, “Oh, and one more thing.” She turned around, her eyes locked on me. “You should go out more often. Staying by yourself all the time won’t do you any good.”

“Copy that.” I let out a soft chuckle.

She beamed at me and turned back around, her footsteps receding as she dematerialized, leaving me to my thoughts.

I smoothed my hair backward, exhaling sharply. “That went well,” I muttered under my breath. In fact, it went better than I had expected.

Dr. Kim was right; I needed to go out more often.

Without a second thought, I withdrew my phone from my pocket and replied to Bella’s text. As I typed in the words, my fingers darted rapidly across the lit screen. “Count me in.” I hit the send button and locked my phone’s screen.

After work that evening, I decided to browse the shops for something to wear. These weren’t my regular kinds of outings, and I had absolutely no idea how to prepare for it.

I found my way into a boutique, and while wandering through the racks of dresses, I couldn’t shake the feeling of being watched. As my fingers ran over soft silks and shimmering sequins, I felt a prickle at the back of my neck.

With a discreet move, I glanced out the floor-to-ceiling window and caught a man in a leather jacket standing across the street. He was leaning against a wall with a hat that concealed his face.

I’d seen the same guy earlier while moving between stores. He’d obviously been following me. At first, I wasn’t sure that was the case, but seeing him across the street from the shop I was in cleared away my doubts. Whoever he was, I was certain that he worked for Raziél.

A pang of annoyance swelled up within me, and my jaw tightened. Was he so obsessed that he had his men following me around? That was a low blow, even for him.

But I wasn't going to let his lingering presence bother me. If Raziel thought that this little game would intimidate me, then he had something else coming. I didn't give two shits if he watched my every move.

If watching me was what he wanted to do, then by all means, let him feast his eyes.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

Cradling a glass of whiskey in my hand, I stood on the deck of the luxurious yacht, my eyes sweeping across the horizon. The air was filled with the faint scent of saltwater and the distant cry of seagulls squealing overhead.

A gentle breeze rustled my hair, carrying the faint hint of coconut sunscreen and the distant thrum of the yacht's engines. Dressed in a crisp white linen shirt and a pair of dark gray pants, I stood with a couple of my business associates, all dressed in similar outfits.

Our conversation was hushed, with occasional laughs and light chuckles. I squinted my eyes at the warm sunlight that danced across my chiseled features, my gaze drinking in the surrounding environment.

I was here for one reason: Clarice Evelyn.

My sources informed me that she was going to be at this elaborate yacht party, and here I was, waiting. Perhaps my obsession with her had escalated since I watched her play with herself, calling out my name.

Until now, her breathy moans still echoed in my head, and I hadn't been able to stop replaying that scene over and over again. Clarice was mine, and I would do anything to make sure that she understood that as a fact. She had unlocked something in me, and now it was almost like my heart only beat for her and her alone.

My eyes roamed the yacht itself, a majestic sight with a sleek, white hull that sliced through the turquoise water with ease. A sparse scattering of lounge chairs and umbrellas perched on the deck, polished to a high shine. Impeccably dressed guests

found shelter and comfort under the umbrellas, drinking in the breathtaking views.

The deck resonated with the upbeat rhythm of a DJ's mix, enticing the guests to move to the beat. Waiters and waitresses glided through the crowd, trays of champagne and canapés expertly balanced in their hands.

Peals of laughter punctuated the air as a small cluster of girls reveled in the music.

I sipped my whisky, buried my hand in my pocket, and gazed out at the horizon. Before me, the ocean stretched like an endless expanse of blue silk, the waves rolling in gently, their crests blown off in a misty spray.

Up ahead, I sighted the faint outline of a distant island, its towering trees and lush greenery swaying in the wind.

I lifted the glass to my lips and took another sip, my mind occupied with thoughts of Clarice. She was here somewhere; it was only a matter of time before we crossed paths, and my heart wouldn't stop racing with anticipation.

"Hello, handsome," a familiar voice spoke from behind me.

I recognized that tone—its femininity—and my face contorted into a small frown. She was the last person I was expecting to run into, yet here we were. With a slightly clenched jaw, I turned around to face her, my expression blank.

"Joanna," I called softly, taking another sip.

"Why the long face, honey? Aren't you glad to see me?" She raised her brows, a teasing grin playing on her lips.

"Not exactly," came my blunt response.

Unfazed by my harshness, Joanna chuckled and slipped her hand around my neck, her green eyes locked on mine. “I see you haven’t changed one bit.” She beamed, flashing me a warm smile. “You should try it sometime. Might be good for you.” She wagged her eyebrows.

Joanna was a woman that I used to date—nothing serious, just two people having sex with no strings attached. She’d known my rules back then, and she stuck to them. No stopping by unannounced, no emotional involvement of any kind, just sex. Nothing else.

I broke things up with her when I got bored. It wasn’t her fault—she didn’t break any of my rules. I just grew tired of the whole thing and called it off. Joanna wasn’t mad. She was a little disappointed, but that was it.

“Like the new look?” She tilted her head sideways, showing off her red hair.

Joanna used to be a brunette, but I guessed she decided to try something new. It wasn’t at all bad, but I was uninterested. Her see-through dress revealed her matching bra and underpants, momentarily drawing my attention.

My eyes darted across her sexy body for a while before I returned my gaze to her face, blank.

“Do you like what you see?” she asked, her voice dropping to a low, husky whisper.

Without a word, I gently took her hands off my neck and lowered my head, my gaze dropping to my phone’s screen. Alex had sent me an update on Clarice, and before I could scan through it, I glanced up, only to spot her across the crowd.

Her beautiful smile melted my heart as I watched her skin shimmer in the sunlight. She was surrounded by a few folks—male and female—their conversations soft and

distant. Her hazelnut-brown hair cascaded in loose waves over her shoulders. Clarice wore a fitted emerald green dress with a daring slit that revealed glimpses of her alluring thighs as she moved.

So elegant. So graceful. So gorgeous.

I couldn't bring myself to tear my gaze off her, and soon, the flutter in my chest transformed into something more sinister. A scowl settled on my face, and my jaw clenched as I watched one of the boys around her whisper in her ear.

My blood boiled with anger at the fact that she was giggling at whatever the fuck he was saying to her. A fire ignited in me, and I balled a fist, my scowl deepening. It infuriated me how close she was to him and how his arm casually grazed against hers.

Why the fuck was she smiling at him? What was he telling her?

My eyes blazed with fury as I thought of the many different ways to end that bastard's wretched life. How dare he get so close to my Clarice? She was mine, and he'd pay for crossing a line with her.

In a heartbeat, while she looked around the deck, Clarice's eyes locked on mine across the space. I watched her smile gradually fade away, and a brief solemnity perched on her face. She glared at me for a moment before shifting her gaze to the woman beside me—Joanna. A glint of something that could be mistaken for jealousy flashed across her face, and she rolled her eyes, looking away.

A fleeting moment of comfort washed over me, and my lips curled into a faint, self-satisfied smirk. That was jealousy on her face. I was almost certain. However, Clarice did have her own plans to get back at me.

I could feel Joanna's gaze lingering, and when I looked at her, I caught a smile

spreading across her face. “What?” I growled.

“Nothing.” She threw up her hands in a defensive motion, her faint grin retained.

The background music shifted to a much slower rhythm, and the crowd of youngsters cheered, each grabbing a partner and moving to the dance floor. My gaze never left Clarice, watching her stand on her own until that godforsaken son of a gun strolled over to her.

She beamed at him, her eyes sparking with mirth as he took her hand and led her to the dance floor.

I stood there, seething in silence, my anger simmering beneath the surface. My eyes blazed with fury as I watched him place his hands on her waist, and she melted into him. I set my glass of whiskey on a nearby table and balled both hands into fists, my eyes meeting hers across the space.

Her lips curled into a mocking smirk, and she wrapped her arms around his neck, allowing his hands to roam her body. She raised her head upward as if basking in the feeling of his face being mere inches from her neck.

She was doing this on purpose to spite me. And although this was nothing but an attempt to get under my skin, it didn’t piss me off any less.

The young man’s hand slid down to her hips, guiding the movement of her waist to the rhythm of the music.

“That’s it. You’re done,” I hissed, my jaw tightening as I strode over to the dance floor.

With all that anger surging through my veins like electricity, I grabbed the young

man's hand from behind and pulled him back away from her. The force was so powerful that he stumbled backward and almost missed a step.

“What the hell, man?!” he snapped, arms spread apart as he glared at me. “What’s your problem?”

“Raz, stop,” Clarice said softly, her voice laced with warning.

I ignored her, my blazing eyes falling on the brave, young fellow, interested in finding out just how brave he was. Without a word, I took a few menacing steps forward, my imposing height towering over him. I watched his expression soften slightly, a glint of fear dancing in his eyes.

The music stopped, the party froze, and I could feel the gazes of the bystanders on me. Nonetheless, I didn’t give a shit.

“What’s the matter, young hero? Cat’s got your tongue?” I growled, the intensity of my glare causing him to cringe.

I enjoyed the fear flickering in his gaze, the way his initial arrogance was quickly replaced with humility and terror. I could send him straight to hell with just a single strike, and I believed he knew that to be a fact. Judging by the way he looked at me, he clearly realized that I wasn’t a man he wanted to mess with.

“Raziel, that’s enough!” Clarice swooped in and saved the fucker’s ass. She grabbed me by the wrist, her eyes darting across the faces in the crowd. “You’re embarrassing me,” she added under her breath, her grip tightening around my wrist.

I hesitated for a moment, my intimidating gaze never leaving the man’s face until I felt Clarice’s pull. Literally, she dragged me away from the dance floor, easing the crowd of the tension that hovered over the area.

As we retreated, the DJ's music played again, and the crowd cheered like nothing had happened—or almost happened.

I followed her below deck, my wrist in her hold as she led me away from the noise and prying eyes. Her footsteps were hasty, her heels clicking against the wooden floor while in motion. Soon, she reached a door, grabbed the handle, yanked it open, and pulled me inside.

Clarice shut the door behind her, the music and noise now distant and muffled. This was a secluded lounge with dim lighting adorned with some plush couches and sofas. The sweet scent of liquor wafted from the mini bar in the corner. Just by the entrance wall was a sleek wooden table with a bottle of wine and a tray of cookies perched on it.

Clarice turned to look at me, a scowl settling on her face. “What is wrong with you?” she demanded, her voice low and laced with venom.

“Don't try to turn this around. You were the one dancing with a stranger,” I said, my eyes pinned on her.

Her brows shot up in disbelief, and a scoff escaped her lips. “So fucking what? You don't own me!” she hissed, her tone dripped with defiance. “I'm free to dance and be with whoever I want.” She dared to step closer, her eyes never leaving mine. “You, Raziel Tarasov, need to understand that I am not one of your silly whores. I'm not bound to you. I can do whatever I want with whoever I want, and there's nothing you can do about it.” The words tumbled out of her with a deliberate slowness, each one sinking in and striking a nerve.

The air was thick with tension, her spunk and defiance both annoying and intriguing at the same time. I stood still, listening and watching her in silence. Beneath all that rage in her tone was something else—frustration—and I knew exactly what it was

about.

A self-satisfied grin played on my lips, and a sense of calm washed over me. I had her in my palms now; she didn't realize it, but I did.

Her breath was shallow, and her body shuddered subtly. Her eyes betrayed her composure because, despite the rage she showed off, something more sensual lurked within. I could see it—that raw, undeniable desire.

“You still think about it, don't you?” I asked, my voice tinged with a hint of conviction.

Her brows knitted together in confusion as her eyes squinted. “Excuse me?”

“That night,” I began, taking gentle steps forward, my gaze fixated on her face so I wouldn't miss even the slightest change in her expression. “The way I kissed you...held you...licked you.... You still think about that night, don't you?” With each pause, I drew closer to her, watching her chest rise and fall with slow breaths.

Clarice held my gaze, her eyes blinking and her lips quivering like she'd caught a cold. She withdrew from me, stumbling back a few steps.

I continued, reveling in her helplessness. “You say all these things about being with whoever you want, yet the real person you want...is me.” My words stole her breath, and I watched as her eyes widened slightly, like she realized she'd been caught.

Her backside met with the edge of the table, and the bottle towering on it lost its balance, shaking for a second.

“I made a woman out of you, and now, you can't stop thinking about me,” I added, my voice low and husky, my eyes boring into hers. “You can't get enough, and deep

down..." I extended my hand, brushing the back of it along her smooth arm, "...deep down, you know that none of those boys can make you feel the way I made you feel." My eyes dropped to her cleavage, the tantalizing glimpse of her voluptuous curves enticing me.

Clarice's body shook like a leaf. She stared back at me, speechless. Her eyes burned with undeniable desire, and she clenched her jaw, trying to mask it.

"No one else can spoil you the way that I can." I dared to slide my hand down, my fingertips teasing her thighs.

"You're...you're wrong," she muttered, her voice weak and barely above a whisper as she steeled herself at my touch.

"Am I?" I asked, leaning forward to whisper in her ear. "I know what you did the other day when you thought no one was watching."

Her breath caught in her throat, and a mix of shock and embarrassment flickered in her gaze.

My lips curled into a smile as I watched the unpleasant surprise on her face. I leaned toward the next ear and whispered softly, "It was interesting watching you orgasm with my name on your lips." Upon my revelation, my hand traveled up her thigh and settled on her soaked underpants.

An unplanned moan—soft and sweet—tumbled out of her mouth, and I pulled back to catch the expression on her face. Clarice was helpless against my charm, too weak to resist my touch. Her eyes simmered with passion, yet she couldn't tear her gaze from mine. Maybe she couldn't. Maybe she was glued, unable to move. Whatever the case, Clarice was at my mercy.

She stared into my eyes, gripping the edge of the table behind her with both hands. The tip of my fingers grazed the fabric of her underpants, teasing her entrance.

“You naughty little devil,” I whispered, enjoying the look on her face as she struggled to suppress her moans. “You’re wet already. You’re wet for Daddy.” I slipped one finger underneath her panties and slid it up her slippery cunt.

A soft, enticing gasp came forth, and she bit her lower lip, her body slightly arching towards me. “Raziel, please...” she begged with almost a whisper, her grip tightening on the edge of the table.

“Please, what?” I asked with the same tone, daring to slip that finger inside her wetness.

“Oh, fuck,” she mouthed, too weak to produce a sound.

“You want me, don’t you?” I asked, delicately fingering her pussy, watching as her face scrunched up in ecstasy.

“Raziel...” she called, moaning.

“Answer the question,” I said, a hint of authority creeping into my tone.

She moaned a little louder as I pushed the finger further inside her.

“Answer the question,” I repeated, sliding in another finger, and her super wet pussy swallowed them both.

“Fuck! Raziel, you’re torturing me,” she said amidst a soft purr.

I slid my other hand behind her and grabbed a handful of her hair, tugging it down so

her head jerked upward. “You wanted to get laid the minute you saw me,” I began, looking right into her eyes, my breath fanning against her skin while I fingered her pussy. “That’s why you tried to make me jealous. That’s why you brought us to this place, away from everyone else.”

She stared at me, breathing heavily with a heaving chest as her legs parted, allowing me better access to her cunt. This action was reflexive, a subconscious move made by her body in response to my touch.

“Deep down, you know you want me inside you again. Admit it,” I said, my voice husky and challenging.

She hesitated, her muscles relaxing, giving way to the passion coursing through her blood. “Yes,” she whispered.

“Yes, what?” I demanded, my gaze boring into hers.

She swallowed, shuddering with quivering lips. “Yes, I want you inside me again,” she finally admitted.

My lips curved into a smirk, and we stared at each other, our hearts racing with anticipation. Seconds later, we rushed at each other’s lips, devouring them with intense fervor.

As I lifted her onto the table, the force and the rapid movement of our bodies sent the bottle crashing to the floor. Engrossed in the heat of passion, we ignored the crash, and the contents spilled over the floor.

High on ecstasy, Clarice’s hand swept the tray of cookies off the table, her lips locked on mine. Tongues twirled in our mouths, and our heads tilted to the flow of the passion coursing through us like lightning.

Her hands roamed my body, and mine squeezed her breast while the other wrapped around her waist. I pulled her closer, and her legs spread apart, my groin against hers. With a swift yet delicate tug, I pulled aside the fabric that concealed her breasts, exposing her gentle swells.

My lips left hers, and I kissed down her neck to her chest. There, I sucked on her right breast while fondling the other. Her hands struggled with the buttons of my shirt, and the moment the top four were undone, she slid her hand inside. Her soft palms caressed my broad torso as she moaned quietly at the feeling of my tongue on her nipple.

She grabbed me by the belt, and I straightened, watching her adjust on the table as she unbuckled my belt. Clarice unzipped my pants, dipped her hand inside my boxers, and withdrew my shaft.

Her lips crashed against mine in a second while she stroked my length, positioning it outside her entrance. Lost in a sea of passion, she broke the kiss and stared deeply into my eyes. Clarice moved my cap up and down her cunt in a teasing gesture, her body writhing in ecstasy.

I pulled closer, and she spread out her legs, her pussy accepting and swallowing my cock. A sweet gasp escaped her lips, and I gave her breast a gentle squeeze as I pushed my dick inside her.

“Oh, fuck, yes,” she murmured like a starving woman, her arms around my back.

My waist ground against hers, my cock traveling deeper and deeper inside her. She raked her fingers against my back, her legs trembling in the air, as I slammed into her pussy like a wounded beast

Under her weight, the table creaked loudly, blending with the sounds of our thick

grunts. I thrust into her with relentless strokes, a testament to how badly I'd wanted her this entire time. The table's noise, coupled with our groans, was enough to indicate to anyone outside the door what was happening inside.

However, neither of us gave a shit. We'd both been starving for a while, and now that we finally gave in to our lust and desire, we didn't mind bringing the whole damn yacht down.

I quickened my pace, plunging faster and harder as I drove vigorously into her cunt.

"Yes! Yes!" she moaned, locking her feet around my waist.

Our bodies collided as this intense flame of ecstasy threatened to consume us both. With her breasts pressed against my chest and my hands grabbing her ass from the back, I penetrated her entrance with hard thrusts. She wrapped her arms around me, clinging to me as if seeking deeper contact.

I pulled my head back, and upon the slightest chance, Clarice rushed at my lips. She sealed my mouth with a kiss so hot, so fervent, that it had me growling like a beast.

She unlocked her feet around my waist and spread her legs. Her body jerked and trembled at the rhythm of my relentless strokes. My legs shuddered as a spark, a jolt of electricity, surged through my body, prompting a primal growl.

Her face, scrunched up in ecstasy, fueled my desire, fast-tracking my arrival by mere seconds. With a swift motion, I pulled out of her cunt, spraying my load on the floor.

Out of air, we gasped, staring at each other with slowly heaving chests. The room fell silent as tension between us eased by the second, replaced by something more relaxing.

My hand flew upward, fingers caressing the loose hair that framed her exhausted face, dotted with sweat. There was no way in hell that I was ever going to let Clarice be with someone else. She was mine, and that was a fact.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

I sat on my couch in the living room, both legs perched on the coffee table. In my hand was the mini portrait he'd sent me, fingers absently tracing the edges of the painting.

I still hadn't come to terms with the fact that we had sex again, and boy, was it good! I didn't realize how much I'd missed him until I gave in to the temptation that almost consumed me.

Why did he have this much of an effect on me? Why couldn't I resist him or stand my ground when he was around me? It was like he had me enchanted, as the more I tried to resist him, the weaker I got.

Raziel now knew my true desire; he knew that I was drawn to him, and that knowledge would be the end of me. I should have done a better job at masking my emotions; maybe that way, he wouldn't have seen right through my tough exterior.

But then again, Raziel was a psycho— a psycho that I couldn't bring myself to hate, no matter how hard I tried. He was obsessed with me, possessive, and that only made him more dangerous than he already was.

My face contorted into a faint frown, and I tossed the portrait aside, cupping my face in my palms. That wasn't a gift from a gentleman. No. It was nothing but a Trojan horse with the primary purpose of spying on me.

I'd found the tiny camera and microphone strategically hidden on the portrait after wondering how Raziel got to know about the masturbation. There was no way that he could have spied on me through my window; it was covered at the time it happened.

Curiosity led me to find the possible ways he might have watched me, and then it clicked: the chances of a hidden camera. I ransacked my place, looking for any sign of alien tech in my house. It didn't take long before it crossed my mind to examine the beautiful gift box he'd sent to me.

Luckily, I'd found the devices and smashed them, both embarrassed and mad that he had the audacity to invade my private life.

The thought of him watching me masturbate sent shivers down my spine. And the fact that I had called out his name while at it was super embarrassing. Raziel had a hold on me, and I hated it; I hated feeling trapped and suffocated. How could even his absence have so much of an effect on me? It was like Raziel didn't need to be physically present to control my actions.

I let out a frustrated groan, the couch crunching under my weight as I slid my head down to the left armrest. My mind was flooded with thoughts of Raziel and the way he fucked me on that yacht. His words still echoed in my head, and I couldn't seem to get him out.

"No one else can spoil you the way that can.... No one can make you feel the way that I made you feel.... You're mine."

As much as I tried to deny it, the truth remained that he was right. I was drawn to him alone, and no man could ever touch me or ignite the kind of fire in me that he had sparked. My heart burned for him, yearned for him, and as annoying as it was, it was the truth.

My pride was wounded, and I was both angry and intrigued by the way he made me beg.

Like that hadn't been enough, Raziel made me admit that I wanted to feel him inside

me again.

No matter how hard I tried to block him out of my head, I simply couldn't. It wasn't just the pull of his dangerous charm that I couldn't resist; it was everything about him. Without even trying, Raziel Tarasov seemed to control my life and consume my thoughts all day, every day.

Memories of the way he'd fucked me like a wild animal on the loose came rushing back into my mind. I recalled the sounds of my own moans and the feeling of having him buried deep inside me. Just thinking about it alone caused my core to tremble, and a cold shiver sprinted down my spine.

Just then, the doorbell rang, snapping me out of my spiraling thoughts. Finally, a distraction. I sat on the couch, my eyes darting toward the entrance as I wondered who it was. I wasn't expecting anyone—hold on a minute.

My breath lodged in my throat, and my heart stopped for a second.

Shit! Please, God, don't let it be Raziel Tarasov.

I wouldn't be able to maintain my cool if it turned out to be him.

The bell rang again, and I flinched at the sound, my heart pounding in my chest. I contemplated ignoring the bell until whoever was outside got tired and left. But then, on second thought, what if it wasn't Raz?

I drew a deep breath, summoning the courage to rise to my feet. It didn't make any sense that I lived my life in fear of this man. I'd given him too much control over me, and it was high I put an end to it.

So what if it was Raziel standing outside my door?

I strode over to the entrance and hesitated before grabbing the door handle. It gave a faint creak as I opened it, and my gaze fell on the unexpected visitor standing by my porch.

My brows arched, and my heart felt a bit lighter—a signature effect of the visitor’s presence.

“Surprise!” Bella exclaimed theatrically, her tone mild and soft as a warm smile spread across her face.

I mirrored her grin, my eyes sparkling with excitement. However, my brain was unable to connect with my mouth and produce a sentence. At first, I wondered how she knew where I lived; then I remembered her dropping me off after the hospital visit.

“Sorry to drop by unannounced,” she said, her gaze holding on to mine. “I was in the neighborhood and decided to say hello—oh! I come bearing gifts.” She revealed a bottle of wine after the last statement.

“Your timing is impeccable,” I said, admiring the bottle in her hand. “I could really use a drink right now.” I massaged my temples, my low voice hinting at my frustration.

She squinted her eyes, her head cocking to the side. “Are you okay?” she asked, her tone laced with concern.

I exhaled sharply, gesturing with my hand. “Come on in.”

I headed back into the house, and she followed behind me, her heels clicking against the floor.

“It's a cozy space you've got here,” she said, her eyes roaming around the living room. “Nice decor.”

“Thanks.” I beamed at her. “Please, make yourself comfortable.” I gestured at the nearest couch.

My place was small and simple, with a few plush sofas and couches, all within a budget. The walls were adorned with intricate carvings and portraits that added to the ambiance of the space. The room was illuminated by a chandelier's warm glow and the soft lighting of my table lamps.

Although the space was not exquisite, it somehow earned me praise from the very few visitors I had.

“What can I get you?” I asked, strolling over to the kitchen.

“I'm more interested in what's up with you. So, let's just start with the wine, shall we?” she replied, staring at me from the living room.

I paused, staring back at her. This was her first time at my place, and I felt the need to at least entertain her with something of mine.

“Don't look at me like that. Just grab two glasses and get over here,” she said, her tone smooth and teasing.

I chuckled, shaking my head as I withdrew two champagne flutes from the cabinet and returned to the living room. Bella was already seated on a couch with the bottle standing tall on the coffee table. Gently, I set the flutes beside it, raised the bottle, and popped it open with a deft twist.

“Now, that's more like it.” Bella laughed, her eyes crinkling at the corners.

The gentle glug-glug of wine flowing into the flutes as I poured released the fragrance of fermented grapes into the air. Once done, I set the bottle on the coffee table and sank into the couch inches from Bella.

The leather crunched beneath her weight as she adjusted and faced me, her left arm resting on the couch's backrest. "Alright. What's going on? Talk to me—it's a safe space." She beamed, her voice light and playful.

"Hold on," I said, reaching out to grab a flute. My fingers wrapped around its stem, and I lifted it to my lips, draining a significant amount from the glass.

"Uh...I'd take it easy if I were you," Bella said, her tone tinged with caution.

After swallowing a generous mouthful, I lowered the flute back on the table, a small amount of wine remaining.

"Is it that bad—what you're going through?" she asked, her eyes never leaving mine.

"Honestly..." I began, letting out a soft sigh. "I don't know, Bella." I held her gaze, my voice laced with a hint of helplessness.

"Lemme guess: There's a man in the picture," she teased, her lips curling into a faint but radiant smile.

I scoffed, eyes crinkling at the corners. "What're you, psychic?"

She shrugged her shoulders, her smile broadening as she moved closer to me. "Alright. What exactly is going on, Clary?" A glint of solemnity flashed across her face.

"I'm stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea," came my vague response, my

eyes pinned on her.

“Yeah, I can tell, so I’m gonna need you to be a little bit more specific than that,” she said.

I paused for a moment, hesitating before saying, “Bella, I think I’m falling in love with the devil.”

Her brows rose gradually, but her expression remained soft and welcoming. “Now, we’re getting somewhere.”

“It doesn’t matter how hard I try to stop thinking about him—I just can’t.” I lowered my head, buried my face in my palms, and exhaled sharply. “It’s like there’s something about him that keeps pulling me in. Argh!” I groaned in frustration, smoothing my hair backward.

“May I ask why you’re fighting this feeling you have for him?” Her eyes bore into mine.

“Because Bella, this man is the devil himself and—and whatever this is...it’s all shades of wrong.” The words tumbled out of me in a frantic rush. “The worst part is that I know he’s evil, and I know what we have is dangerous, but...” I paused, shaking my head, my voice trailing off. “...I can’t help it, Bella.”

She stared at me in silence, listening, her hand reaching out to touch mine.

I continued, my voice shaking as I expressed myself with trembling lips. “I feel so attached to him, and there’s this...this insatiable desire I have for him that burns beyond the physical.” As I spoke, I demonstrated with my hands, my voice dripping with frustration.

Bella gently squeezed against my fingers, her soft expression lingering on me.

“Do you know what annoys me the most?” I scoffed dismissively. “He’s obsessed with me.”

“Obsessed?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes,” I blurted out. “He keeps tabs on me, has his men following me around.” My fingertips rubbed my temples in a massage motion.

I felt a slight pang at the back of my head and reached out to pick up my glass of wine.

“Maybe it’s Raziel's twisted way of trying to keep you safe,” Bella said, her voice audible but flat.

I drained the remainder of the wine in my glass and squinted at her. “Keep me safe? What’s that supposed to mean?” I lowered the glass back on the table, suddenly feeling a little dizzy.

“Well, we live in a shady world, Clary, and you never know when trouble comes knocking on your door,” she said, her voice dropping to an eerie whisper. “You never know when you’re staring right in the face of danger.” Her voice trailed off, and her smile vanished.

There was something sinister about her response, something dark that I’d yet to process. And then it hit me; I hadn’t mentioned his name to Bella, so how did she know who I was talking about?

“Hold on. I never told you his name was Raziel,” I said, feeling the tension hovering around us.

As I tried to make sense of this sudden change in atmosphere, my vision started to blur, and my head grew heavy. I pressed my eyes tightly, my hand flying to massage my temple as the world around me began to swirl. My heart raced in my chest, a misty veil covering my eyes.

“What’s the matter, Clary, feeling a little light-headed?” Bella's voice echoed as if the entire room was empty.

My vision was hazy, and everything in my sight appeared to be double. The flute fell off my hand, splattering on the floor, and I tried to rise to my feet. Too weak and faint, I dropped to the ground, struggling to keep my eyes open.

It was the wine. Bella had spiked my drink. She drugged me. But why?

Bella rose off the couch and towered over me, her voice fading into the background as she said, “Nighty night, Clarice.”

The self-satisfied smirk on her face was the last thing I saw before my eyes shut, and I drifted unconscious, out like a light.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

For the hundredth time, I glanced at my phone's screen, expecting a notification that she'd at least responded to my texts. Over the last few hours, I'd left her a ton of messages and called her phone more than a couple of times. Yet there was no response whatsoever.

Did she hate me that much? Was I such a terrible person that she would so casually ignore all of my attempts to reach out to her?

She may be overwhelmed with guilt, given the outcome of our confrontation at the yacht party. But was that enough reason to ignore me? Or perhaps she was mad about the hidden camera I'd spied on her with.

This assumption was possible, especially because now, I couldn't access the camera feed anymore. Clarice had destroyed it earlier on, leaving me blind and clueless as to anything concerning her.

Had I crossed a line when I planted that bug on the gift box? Perhaps she was so embarrassed that I watched her in her most private moment. That was more than enough reason for her to want to cut me off for good.

"Shit!" I mumbled under my breath, fingers rubbing my eyes.

Maybe revealing what I did hadn't been such a great idea after all. I should have just kept my mouth shut.

"Damn it!" I cursed, a pang of vexation swelling up within me.

Reflexively, I rose off the couch in my living room and paced back and forth. I smoothed my hair backward with labored breaths as I struggled to control my rage.

The fact that I couldn't get through to her was starting to upset me, and I seethed in silence. My blood boiled with anger, and my jaw tightened. A part of me blamed myself for this predicament, but there was little or nothing that I could do about it. Being ignored by the one person in the world who I wanted to speak with right now wasn't in any way helping at all.

I lowered my head and typed in another text, my fingers rattling across the lit screen.

The least you can do is text back.

I hit the send button and tossed my phone on the couch.

While swiping a hand over my face, my heart paused for a minute, then sank into my stomach. "No," I whispered to myself, trying to dispel the creepy thought slithering into my head.

What if something was wrong? There had been an attack on my life barely a few days ago, and whoever was responsible for that must have done their homework. I'd ordered a double security around Clarice, so she should be fine.

However, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was awfully wrong. If she was fine, she would have at least texted back with an arrogant or sassy reply. But she didn't, and the silence was rather suspicious.

The more I tried to convince myself that she wasn't in any sort of trouble, the more this feeling gnawed at me. I glanced at the wall clock and realized that it was a little past midnight. Perhaps she was asleep. That was a possibility, and it would explain why she hadn't responded yet.

Still, the feeling lingered, and my instincts told me to take action. My instincts were never wrong, so it was in my best interest to obey. I grabbed my phone from the couch and dialed Alex's number.

It rang on the other line, my patience growing thinner by the second.

And then, he answered, his voice deep and husky, "Boss."

"Did you double the security at Clarice's house?" I asked, going straight to the point.

"I did," he said, sounding certain.

"Where is she now? Is she home?"

"She should be," he said, a hint of skepticism lacing his tone.

"I don't need assumptions right now, Alex. Where is she?" I demanded, my voice rising with anger.

"I'll check in with the men assigned to her place, Boss," he replied, his tone tinged with urgency.

As the call ended, I clenched my jaw, feeling the weight of this strange emotion overwhelming me. Was it fear? Was it a concern? Whatever the case, though, it wouldn't stop gnawing, and I couldn't sit idly by waiting for a response.

With quick paces, I snatched my car keys from the side stool and stormed out of the mansion. Once in my car, I shut the door, started the engine, and zoomed out of the compound.

While driving through the city in the dead of night, I would occasionally glance at my

phone, expecting a text or a call from Alex. None came in. Driven by fear for her safety, I slammed on the accelerator, the speedometer needle climbing up to three digits.

Recklessly, I wove the car through the streets, my fingers wrapped tightly around the steering wheel. All I could think about was getting to her house on time, and no fucking police vehicle better try to pull me over.

I exceeded the speed limit, driving through the night like fucking Vin Diesel. My face was a mask of concentration, my focus fixed on my destination. Up ahead, a small queue of cars halted, waiting for the lights to turn green. My jaw tightened, and instead of slowing down, I accelerated onward, my SUV speeding past them in a flash.

In no time, I swerved the car down her street, my eyes locked on her house up ahead. The sound of my tires screeching loudly pierced through the silence of the night as I brought the car to a halt outside her place.

I stepped out of the vehicle, and I rushed out, heading toward her front door with hasty steps. As I raised my hand to knock, I realized the door was slightly ajar.

Strange.

It didn't matter how exhausted or distracted she was; Clarice would never leave her door unlocked, especially at this time of night.

A mix of fear, anger, and worry washed over me, and I burst into the building, yelling her name. "Clarice! Clarice!"

I halted in the living room, my chest heaving rapidly as I peered at the space for anything out of place. Then, my eyes fell on the bottle of wine perched on the coffee

table. Beside was a half-filled glass, untouched. Instinctively, I rushed over there and discovered there were two glasses, but one was shattered on the floor.

There was no spilled wine around the shattered glass, meaning someone must have drunk it before it broke.

My sense of reasoning kicked in, and my brain started analyzing the situation. There was a bottle of wine on the table with two glasses, one empty and shattered, the other half-filled and definitely untouched. Clarice had a visitor, and whoever they were, they brought the wine. They drugged her.

My fingers clenched into fists, and my jaw tightened as my heart hammered in my chest. Confusion set in, and soon after, so did frustration. With a loud cry, I grabbed the bottle and hurled it at the wall, shattering the damn thing, its red liquid splattering across the floor.

“Fuccckkkk!” I bellowed, veins lining my forehead.

I threw my hands to my head, my mind running wild as my pulse spiked. Who could have done this?

I hadn’t thought deeply when my phone rang in my pocket. I reached for it and answered.

“Bad news, Boss,” Alex’s cold voice came through the phone’s speakers.

I already knew what bad news he had for me but that wasn’t the point at the moment.

“Who took her?” I asked through gritted teeth, anger simmering beneath the surface.
“Tell me you found out who took her.”

“We did, sir,” he said, his tone dripping with a glint of disdain. “Clarice had a visitor tonight. A woman. We ran facial recognition, and we found a match.” He paused for a moment as if letting the words sink in.

“Goddammit, Alex, who the fuck was it?” I snapped, my voice rising above normal.

“Her name is Bella, sir. Bella Barlow,” he replied. “She’s Damon Barlow’s sister.”

My blood boiled at this revelation, and my body shuddered with anger. This was retaliation for what I did to her brother. She was drawing me out, trying to get my attention. Well, now she had it. Now she had my full attention, and I hoped that she was ready because I was coming for her.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

I winced at the aches that plagued my body as my eyes flickered, struggling to lift before finally opening. Groggily, I took in the surroundings—a dimly lit room with figures dancing in the shadows. My vision was still hazy, and the world around me remained blurry, like a camera lens struggling to focus.

My head felt heavy, as if weighed down by an invisible anchor. A wave of dizziness washed over me as my foggy mind tried to remember where I was or how I got there.

I blinked repeatedly, trying to clear the fog from my vision. The sound of heels clicking against the floor echoed in my head as a figure approached me.

“Wakey wakey,” the familiar feminine voice, soft and smooth, snapped me out of my swirling thoughts.

In an instant, memories of how Bella had come to my place and drugged me all came rushing back all at once. My vision cleared at the sound of her voice, and I jerked in fear. The sudden movement made me realize that I was bound to a chair, my wrists zip-tied to the armrest.

“You...” I said, staring at her with a hint of shock and betrayal, my voice faint and weak.

“Yes...me,” Bella said, lowering her upper body, her hands on her knees. Her lips curled into a deadly scowl, and a menacing frown settled on her face. It was almost like the woman staring into my eyes wasn’t the same friend I’d come to know.

I shook my head, my eyes squinting in confusion. “I don’t understand,” I stuttered,

my pulse quickening. “What’s going on, Bella?” My lips trembled as I looked into those cold eyes of hers, devoid of remorse.

I honestly couldn’t recognize her, and the weight of her betrayal was starting to crush my soul. I hadn’t known her for long, but I’d really thought we bonded.

Bella’s hand reached out, and she caressed my hair, her evil smirk retained. “Oh, Clarice...poor, innocent, and naive Clarice Evelyn.” She clicked her tongue rapidly, her voice tinged with mockery. Bella wore a plastic sad face, a mocking gesture that broke my heart. “Did you really think that I was your friend? God! You’re even more naive than I thought.” She threw her hand up, staring at me with disgust in her gaze.

Her words pierced my heart like a knife, charging up my tear glands.

Bella straightened, her heels clicking on the concrete as she slowly circled me, her low, mocking laugh shattering my soul. “How’s my acting? Pretty impressive, eh?”

“Why?” The question jumped out of my mouth as tears streamed down my cheeks. “What did I ever do to you?”

“Oh, honey, trust me, this isn’t about you,” she replied, finally facing me once again. Bella looked right at me and said, “You’re just a means to an end, a pawn in this little game of mine.”

I’d never been more confused in my whole life, and it was as though my brain had completely shut down. I was unable to put two and two together, unable to think straight or figure out what she was driving at.

“I...I...I thought you were my friend. I trusted you, and this entire time, you’ve just been—what? Pretending?” The words burst out of me in a stutter, my voice tinged with hurt and pain.

“Trust is for the weak, Clarice,” she muttered, her tone low and unapologetic. “Don’t take it personally, but you’re just bait. The big fish will be here soon.”

I paused for a moment, trying to process her words. My eyes roamed the dimly lit room, taking in the sight of the heavily built men armed to the teeth. Those figures looked like Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator* —ruthless and dangerous.

If I were bait, as she said, it would only mean that whoever the big fish was had to be someone equally ruthless and dangerous. Why else would she have all these men here?

Using me as bait would insinuate that her target would care enough to want to come for me. However, her assumption was silly because there was no one in my life that fit that description.

Hold on a minute.

My eyebrows shot up in shock and surprise as one name popped into my head. “Wait a second. Are you talking about Raziel Tarasov?”

A faint grin twisted at the corners of her lips. “Atta girl. Now, you’re catching up.”

My heart stopped for a moment as a series of thoughts flooded my mind. A myriad of unanswered questions overlapped in my head, and a veil of bewilderment settled on my face.

Why would she think that he would come for me? Yes, we had sex a couple of times, but that didn’t mean that he cared enough to endanger his life. Or did it?

What the fuck had I gotten myself into?

“Bella,” I began, my voice calm and cautious. “I think you’ve made a big mistake.”

Her brows rose in astonishment. “Is that so?”

“Yes,” I replied, staring right into her eyes. “Look, I know you think kidnapping me would somehow lure Raziell here—but you’re wrong. It won’t. He doesn’t care about me that much.”

She bent over, her face mirroring mine as she looked into my eyes like she was searching for something. “Are you really that naïve, or are you just lying to yourself so you won’t have to live with the guilt of being associated with a psychopath?”

Good question.

“Honey, I orchestrated this whole thing from the beginning. Trust me when I say Raziell will come for you.” Bella straightened, her hand withdrawing a gun from the back of her pants. “And when he does... bang .” The slight pause came when she mimicked the sound of a gunshot with the barrel pointed at me.

I hesitated, contemplating whether to ask the question ringing in my mind.

“Go ahead.” She flashed me a smirk. “Ask away. I know you want to.”

My throat wobbled as I swallowed hard, my voice barely above a whisper. “What did he do to you? Why do I see so much hatred in your eyes?”

Her jaw tightened, and her scowl deepened. “You’re his shrink, aren't you?” she asked. Almost immediately, she added, “Before you fucked him and asked to be laid off, the case, of course.”

She knew too much, and that was treacherously alarming. This meant that she’d been

watching me, following me, and studying me like a book. Bella had indeed orchestrated this whole “friendship.” Nothing had happened by accident; it was all part of her grand scheme to get close to me.

The feeling of being used caused my expression to darken, a glint of anger swelling within me. “Who are you?” I demanded with a low, husky growl.

“My name is Bella. Bella Barlow,” she replied, watching me closely. “Does that name ring a bell?”

It did.

The DA’s office forced Raziel to attend therapy sessions after he unleashed his fury on a man named Damon Barlow. Judging by Bella's age bracket—late twenties or early thirties—she definitely wasn’t his daughter. Perhaps his sister.

“Your client-turned-lover battered my brother’s face and landed him in a fucking hospital,” she growled, her tone dripping with venom. “And what did the authorities do? They sent him to a therapist...to learn how to manage his anger issues. How do you call that a punishment?” She snickered, glaring at me.

“Maybe it isn’t,” I said, my voice calm and collected. “But this isn’t the right way to go about it either.”

“I know you’re pained because I pretended to be your friend, but this isn’t about you,” she said, taking a couple of steps closer. “I have it all planned out.” She paused, her eyes never leaving mine. “I know Raziel has anger issues, and that’s why I invited you to the yacht party and set you up with Greg.” Bella began encircling me again. “The plan was for Raziel to see you with another man and lose his temper. He was supposed to unleash his fury and beat Greg half to death in front of all those people.”

I listened to her, goosebumps crawling all over my skin as I wondered how she could be so cruel, coming up with such a plan.

“But then you had to intervene and drag Raziel away from the scene.” She stopped and placed a hand on my shoulder. “You know, thinking about it now, I realize this is actually your fault. If you had let things play out the way I planned them, Raziel would have been in deep trouble as we speak, and we wouldn’t be here right now.”

She was right. If Raziel had lost his temper that day and bounced on Greg the way he did to Damon Barlow, the court would’ve been left with no choice but to pick up a case against him. By interfering, I had unintentionally ruined her revenge plan.

“Because of you, Clarice, I had to switch to plan B,” she said, her expression softening ever so slightly. “And believe it or not, I didn’t want to come to this. You might be naïve, but you’re not all that bad.”

“You’re making a mistake, Bella,” I said, staring right into her eyes. “Raziel isn’t someone you wanna mess with.”

“Honey, I’m not afraid of him,” she said, her voice laced with arrogance.

“You should be,” I said, my tone sharp and stern, unapologetic.

“Excuse me?” Her face contorted into a deeper frown.

“Bella, do you know why Raziel landed your brother in a hospital?” I asked, relaxing in the chair that held me captive, my eyes pinned on her.

“Because he’s a psychopath,” she stated, disdain and venom creeping into her tone.

“He is,” I said, my posture exuding confidence and composure. “He is the psychopath

that beat a man almost twice his size half to death with his bare hands,” I explained, watching the glint of fear dancing in her eyes. “I was there that night, Bella. I witnessed the whole thing, and I saw the devil with my own two eyes. I watched him take down your brother with a single blow; I watched his demons find expression in his fury—the same fury that landed him in a hospital.”

She seethed in silence, her chest rising and falling with heavy breaths.

I continued, “That’s the psychopath that you’re messing with.” I held her gaze, feeling my fear dissipate into thin air. “Piece of advice as his shrink: Run, Bella. Run. Run as fast as your legs can carry you.” My words were spoken with a deliberate slowness that only fueled her fear.

She tightened her jaw, trying to mask her terror, but I could see right through her. She was afraid.

“If Raziel is half the man I think he is, and he cares about me as you say he does, then you don’t wanna be here when he comes for me. And trust me...he will come,” I added, a faint, self-satisfied grin twitching on my lips.

“Let him come. I’m counting on that,” she said, trying to sound brave and unfazed by my words.

“Are you?” I asked, my smirk broadening. “Raziel will kill every last one of your men. He will break you in ways you can’t possibly imagine.” I paused, my confidence growing by the second. “Last chance, Bella. Run.”

I was bluffing to save my own skin, unsure of anything I said. But the moment I realized that my words were starting to get to her, I decided to use them to my advantage. Bella’s fear was evident, even though she concealed it with a frown.

She looked at me and smiled. “Nice try, Clarice. You almost had me. But I know a bluff when I hear one.” Her voice dropped to a sinister growl on the last statement.

Refusing to break character, I replied, “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Suddenly, the dim lights flickered and died down, plunging the room into a shallow darkness. The moonlight filtered through the window behind me, its soft, ethereal glow draping over the room. At first, no one said anything, and the space was as silent as a graveyard.

I caught Bella’s eyes lingering on me, her grip tightening around her gun.

“What’s going on?” she asked one of the men, her attention shifting.

Before I could respond, muffled gunfire erupted from outside, striking terror into the hearts of my kidnapper. Bella fumbled for her flashlight, and her men readied their weapons, training them on the front door.

The gunfire continued, accompanied by the anguished sounds of wailing men.

“He’s here,” one of my captors muttered under his breath, his voice trembling slightly.

Raziel.

He’d come for me.

I felt my heart gladden at this realization, and a small smile played on my lips. A wave of confidence overshadowed me, prompting a light chuckle from my mouth. “Ah, you’re so fucked now.”

“Shut up,” Bella hissed, but her voice wobbled.

“You should’ve listened to me. You should’ve run when I asked you to,” I added, smirking, entertained by her sudden terror.

“I said shut the hell up !” she snapped, her voice rising in frustration.

The screams continued, and the sounds of rapid gunshots drew nearer by the second.

Raziel was coming, and nothing was going to stand in his way. They pissed off the devil; they kidnapped the woman he called his own. Now, he’d come to get her back, and he brought fucking hellfire with him.

Soon, all the sounds stopped—no shouts, no gunshots. Nothing but absolute silence.

Bella’s men exchanged nervous glances, their hands tightening around the weapons held up in front of them. Their fingers were ready to squeeze against the trigger at any given time as determination etched their faces.

Bella went behind me and placed the barrel of her gun against my temple, her hand shuddering subtly. She must have thought that having me at gunpoint was her one-way ticket out of there. But was it?

I should be scared. This woman had a loaded gun to my head, but my faith in Raziel’s ability to save me cast out all my fears. How was that even possible?

“Get ready. He’ll be here any minute,” Bella instructed her men, her tone hushed and stern. “Once that door opens, I want you to open fire, got it?”

They nodded in affirmation, guns aimed at the door. “Let’s kill this motherfucker,” one of them muttered, his voice dripping with venom.

The air was thick with tension as all our attention was directed toward the front door, anticipating an invasion. Outside the door, something approached, its slow and steady beat a harbinger of doom.

A sense of dread crept over the scene as approaching footsteps echoed through the silence outside. The figure's pace was a cold and calculated threat that prompted an unsettling stillness, as if the very atmosphere was holding its breath in anticipation.

The confident clicking of footsteps drew nearer, thickening the tension in the room before stopping right outside the door.

"He's here," one of the men whispered, his hand trembling.

"Well, what're you waiting for? Shoot him down!" Bella ordered.

My heart skipped in fear, and my eyes widened. "No!"

Bella's men opened fire, their large arms vibrating as bullets pelted toward the front door, boring holes into it. They didn't stop until their guns clicked empty.

I didn't realize it when a lone tear streamed down my cheek, my heart aching. There was no way he was going to survive that if he was truly outside that door.

The men looked at one another, slowly lowering their empty guns.

"You." Bella pointed at one of them. "Go check it out."

He nodded, and with his gun held up in front of him, he took cautious steps toward the door while the others watched.

My breath lodged in my throat, my chest rising and falling as I prayed for some sort

of miracle.

Dear God, please let him be alive.

I fixed my eyes at the entrance, and I heard the door creak as the man slowly pushed it open.

He flashed his torch across the hallway, but there was no one outside—not a single soul. “What the hell?” he mumbled, turning around to face the others, his back against the entrance. Where’d he go?”

My heart paused for a moment, and a faint, almost undetectable grin played on my lips as I spotted a figure rise behind him.

Before the men around could make any move, a knife slit the man’s throat from the back. His eyes widened, hands flying to his neck as blood gushed out, trickling through his fingers.

“Fuck!” one of the men cursed out loud, unsheathing a dagger.

Instantly, the figure, with inhuman speed, burst into the room with a blur of motion that left my captors stunned and reeled. He was so fast that they didn’t see who or what they were fighting against.

The atmosphere was filled with the sickening sounds of tearing flesh and cracking bones as these men screamed, their wails echoing through the room.

I watched in horror, my swirling mind struggling to comprehend the carnage unfolding right in front of me.

It was him. It was Raziel. I could smell his cologne.

With each passing second, limp bodies fell on the floor, torn and broken. Raziel's deadly precision was remarkable, fearsome, as he took down his enemies in a matter of seconds with his bare hands and a dagger.

As suddenly as it began, the chaos ceased, and the room fell silent except for the sound of Bella's jagged breaths.

I could smell her terror and feel her trembling body.

The lights came back on, revealing a black hooded figure looming in front of us. He held a dagger dripping with blood, his knuckles covered in the same.

Bella, who'd been standing behind me this entire time, wrapped her arm around my neck as if to choke me. "Stay back!" She pointed her pistol at the figure and then shifted her aim back to my temple. "I swear to God, I'll fucking shoot her brains out!" Bella yelled, her frustration and fear crystal clear.

The figure slowly took off their hoodie and raised their head. Raziel's gaze met mine, and I felt my heart melt. My lips curled into a smile, even in the face of danger.

Raziel's men burst into the room, armed to the teeth with their fiery looks cast on Bella.

"It's over, Bella Barlow," Raziel said, his voice thick and scary as hell. "Lower your weapon."

She hesitated, her hand around my neck trembling as did the gun against my temple. "No," Bella declared, her tone stern and firm. "I'm getting out of here, and she's my way out. I know you live by a code. You can't harm women, so you're not gonna shoot me." A hint of conviction crept into her tone.

Maybe she was right. Maybe Raziel and his men couldn't harm her, but who said that I couldn't?

Raziel looked at me while Bella blabbed about her immunity as a woman. He didn't say a word, but his silence spoke volumes; it was almost like we were in sync for a second. In a weird way, I felt like I knew exactly what he wanted me to do, and as he nodded at me, I swung into action.

Bella's face was directed behind me, and although my hands and feet were bound, it didn't stop me from using my head. I gathered momentum, and within seconds, I swung my head backward with a sudden and powerful move.

My hind head connected with her nose, and a painful gasp came forth. The impact was so strong it disoriented her for a moment, causing her to stumble backward.

One of Raziel's men bolted toward and snatched her weapon while two others rushed to hold her down.

Raziel sprinted up to me, and with a swift move, his dagger cut through the zip-ties that had me bound. Once free, I sprang to my feet and threw my arms around his neck, my heart swelling with emotions.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his voice low and husky, his palm smoothing my hair backward.

"I am now," I responded with the same tone.

"I thought I'd lost you," he whispered, his arms around me tightening.

I pulled my head back and stared into his eyes, my heartbeat steadying by the minute. "I didn't think you were gonna come for me. I didn't think you cared enough," I

muttered softly, placing a palm on his cheek.

“You were wrong,” he said with a sweet and smooth tone. “I do care.”

“Yeah. You proved it already.” I chuckled, staring into his eyes.

“And I’ll prove it over and over again,” he said, framing my face in his hands. “I meant it when I said that you’re mine, Clarice. It may sound possessive, but it’s true.” He paused, holding my gaze. “Perhaps I’m more obsessed with you than I thought.”

My lips curled into a smile, and I confessed my feelings as well. “I guess that makes the two of us because, honestly, I can’t stop thinking about you.”

He mirrored my expression and said gently, his breath warm against my skin, “I don’t want you to.”

My expression softened, and my eyes crinkled at the corners. “I don’t want to either.”

He wrapped his arms around my waist, pulled me closer, and planted a slow, passionate kiss on my lips.

With my arms around his neck, I kissed him back, my head tilting to the rhythm of his. Confessing each other’s feelings somehow lifted a burden off of me, and I felt as light as a feather.

I owed this to Bella. Regardless of her twisted game, she was the reason behind this happy union. I heard her cursing and making a noise as she was being dragged away, but none of that mattered to me at the moment. As Raz and I kissed, the world around us seemed to melt away, leaving just the two of us.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

It had been a year already, a year and a few months since Clarice and I decided to take things to the next level. In all honesty, I hadn't been this happy and fulfilled before in my whole life. I almost didn't realize what I'd been missing until it arrived.

Clarice, the sunshine girl, was the light in my darkness, the better half who completed me. This woman brought out the best in me and helped me view life and people through a different perspective.

Because of her, the change in my behavior, my interactions with people, and the way I handled situations was so palpable. I wasn't the same mindless animal that I used to be—the one who lacked self-control.

Slowly, Clarice had slithered her way into my stone-cold heart, thawing it without even trying. She taught me how to be a better version of myself, how to manage my anger and keep my fury in check.

It wasn't an easy ride, but over time, I surrendered to her teachings. I learned, I practiced, and eventually, I got the hang of it. These days, because of Clarice's intervention in my issues, I learned to listen more and act less.

Thoroughly analyzing a given situation before unleashing my fury became my top priority. Clarice believed that I didn't always have to physically exert my fury to inflict fear on people. And once again, she was right.

I used to be of the opinion that my uncontrollable rage was the reason people feared and accorded me the respect that I deserved. But Clarice showed me the flaw in my thinking and helped correct it.

In no time, word got out that Raziel Tarasov was a new man—a man in control of his demons as opposed to the old me. However, just because I had total control over my anger didn't mean that I wasn't still as dangerous as I used to be.

The incident with Damon and Bella Barlow had earned me a shit ton of respect from both friends and foes. The Barlow family had learned the hard way never to cross the Tarasovs again.

Considering the risky stunt she pulled—kidnapping my Clarice—Bella Barlow was lucky that I let her go unharmed. If it was her brother who'd pulled that stunt, he would have taken a bullet to the head. After Damon was discharged from the hospital, his pride and arrogance dropped significantly.

We'd crossed paths a few times within the last couple of months, and he'd been on his best behavior. Damon Barlow knew better than to start a fight with me or declare an all-out war on my family. It would be suicide because we'd wipe every last one of his men off the face of the Earth.

The name "Barlow" used to strike fear in people's hearts, but now, the name seemed to have lost its weight. I had no grudge or bad blood against the Barlow household and all that they stood for. They messed with the wrong person, and they paid the price. Life went on.

We win some; we lose some. And they lost this one.

It might take a while, but with steady hard work and dedication, they would eventually regain their respect. But for now, let them wallow in self-pity, shame, and disgrace, knowing that I, Raziel Tarasov, was responsible for their misfortune.

Perched on the edge of the bed, I glanced over my shoulder, drinking in the sight of the beautiful naked woman lying asleep under the sheets. She lay on her side, her

delicate features softening as she slept. I watched her sexy form rise and fall with each gentle breath, her eyelids fluttering slightly as she chased dreams.

The soft, golden light of the setting sun creeping into the room seemed to caress her, accentuating the gentle curves and contours of her sleeping form.

My lips parted into a genuine smile, and I reached out, pushing a loose strand behind her ear. She looked so beautiful—so innocent and at peace. Clarice's shoulders relaxed at my touch, and she released a soft sigh, a testament to her safety around me.

I stared at her face, admiring such an incredible work of art with nothing but gladness in my heart. She and I had come a long way, our love growing stronger by the day. Clarice tolerated my bullshit and was very patient with me; she didn't give up on me even when it seemed like I would never learn. And for that, I was grateful.

I was a better person today because of her, and I didn't need anyone telling me that it was time to do the right thing. Clarice Evelyn was the woman with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life.

I'd come to realize over time that she was my world and that my life revolved around her. Without Clarice, my world would be dark and empty—desolate, chaotic, and incomplete. I'd grown so attached to her, and there was no way that I could live a day without her. I couldn't even imagine it.

I let out a soft exhale and rose to my feet, stripped from the waist upward. The marble floor was cool beneath my feet as I strode over to the balcony of this secluded villa. There, I drew a deep breath, bathing in the vibrant hues of the setting sun.

The sky was ablaze with warm oranges, purples, and deep pinks, a breathtaking canvas stretching across the horizon. The air was filled with the scent of blooming beach flowers and the aroma of salt water as the sound of waves gently overlapped

against the shore.

I gazed out at the endless expanse of ocean, basking in the soothing melody, the ebb and flow of the tide. My hair, tousled by the sea breeze, framed my face as I leaned forward, both elbows on the polished handrail.

My eyes narrowed against the dying light, watching as the sun dipped below the horizon. My mind was flooded with thoughts of spending an eternity with Clarice Evelyn, and all I could do was hope that she felt the same way I did.

Not that I doubted her love; I just wasn't sure whether she was ready to commit herself to me for life. Clarice was everything that I ever wanted in a woman. She checked all the boxes. Losing her would be my loss, and I just might end up worse than I was.

I'd never been so nervous in my life—never been so afraid of being rejected. The feeling was awful, and my heart wouldn't stop pounding in my chest. It was wonderful how Clarice unlocked the parts of me that I hadn't even known existed.

People said that I was the devil, that I had no feelings whatsoever. But as true as that might be, around Clarice, I was more human than anyone could imagine. She made me feel so strong yet vulnerable at the same time.

When I was with her, I was a different person: nice, loving, and kind. Even in her absence, I would sometimes find myself showing some sort of compassion to people—strangers I believed were deserving of it.

Clarice had effortlessly transformed me into the man she believed I could become. Honestly, I loved this new me.

“Hey.” Her sweet, soft voice came from behind me.

My lips curled into a smile, and my heart warmed as I turned to face her.

Clarice emerged from the villa's bedroom, the white sheets wrapped loosely around her body. Like a ghostly bridal veil, the hem trailed behind her, sweeping the floor. Her skin shimmered in the lights, her hazel-brown eyes sparkling with mirth. Her hair, a tangled mess, only added to her allure, a few errant strands escaping to frame her face with soft, seductive curves.

Her bare feet were soundless against the marble floor as she glided toward me. Her manicured hand grasped the hem of the sheets, holding them securely over her chest.

My eyes roamed her alluring figure, and a faint, proud smile lined my lips.

Clarice glowed under the soft, colorful light of the setting sun, her signature scent mingling with that of the blooming flowers. As she moved with a graceful elegance, the sheets revealed a tantalizing glimpse of her enticing, fresh thighs.

I'd never seen a goddess before, but somehow, I was certain that she looked like one. Clarice was so devourable, and even though we'd had sex before she fell asleep, I knew for sure that I'd lose control if she lingered long enough.

"Wow," I said, my voice low and husky, tinged with a glint of admiration. "Now, that's a sight to behold." I raised my brows, my eyes drinking in her sexy body, shrouded by the sheets.

Her cheeks flushed, and her enticing lips curved into a radiant smile. "Are you trying to make me blush? 'Cause it's working." She halted in front of me.

"I'm just stating the obvious, ma'am," I teased, reaching out to hold her waist.

Clarice giggled, her expression soft and endearing. "Stop...." Her voice trailed off,

her amazing eyes crinkling at the corners.

“God! You’re so beautiful,” I remarked, my tone a hushed whisper that caused her smile to broaden.

“Okay...” she drawled lazily, her head jerking up toward my face. “What’s gotten into you today?”

“Nothing,” I said, my fingers caressing the strands that framed her face. “Just taking some time to appreciate what a wonderful woman you are.”

“Aww.” Her face softened, a warm, tender light illuminating her eyes. “That’s so sweet, coming from a man who’s hard as a rock.”

“Oh, I know something that's hard as a rock right now,” I said, my tone light and playful as I ground my waist against hers.

Clarice threw her head back and laughed, unbridled joy flickering in her gaze.

For the next few seconds, we were silent as we stared deeply into each other’s eyes. I caressed her cheek with the back of my fingers, my gaze never leaving hers. In her eyes, I saw pure, undiluted love, and I knew instantly that now was the time.

I dipped my hand into my pocket and withdrew a diamond ring. Her eyes widened, and her brows arched in disbelief. Her hand fluttered to her mouth as if to contain the emotions brewing within. A soft gasp escaped her lips, and her eyes grew misty.

Down on a knee, I held up the ring, positioning it inches from her outstretched hand as I looked at her face.

“Raz...” she whispered, her chest heaving slowly.

“Marry me, Clarice,” I said, my voice laced with a hint of anticipation. “I’ve come to realize that I cannot live without you, and I don’t want to. So, let’s make this official.”

She hesitated for a while as if struggling to find her voice. “Are...are you sure about this? Is this what you truly want?” she stuttered, looking right into my eyes.

“It’s what I desire,” I said without breaking eye contact. “What do you say?” My heart raced with anticipation, even though I knew what her response would be.

Her lips curved into a beautiful smile. “Yes. Yes, I’ll marry you.”

A wind of relief and gladness blew across my face, and I slipped the ring onto the appropriate finger. As I rose to my feet, she embraced me tightly, and my possessive hands wrapped around her like a protective shield.

She reached out and sealed my lips with a kiss so fervent that it left both of us breathless. I kissed back with the same energy, our heads tilting in perfect sync, directed by the flow of passion coursing through us.

My hand slipped down between her legs, and my fingers teased her entrance. Clarice broke the kiss and laughed. “Ooh, someone’s being naughty.” She wiggled her brows at me, her smile spreading across her face.

Clarice pulled away from me, her movements fluid and elegant. I watched her stride back into the bedroom and then turn around to face me with a seductive smile. Slowly, she let the sheets slide off her body, revealing her nakedness.

Clarice bit her lower lip and beckoned me with her index finger. “What’re you still there for? Come take what’s yours.”

A smirk twitched on my lips as I watched her sit on the bed, her legs slowly spread apart.

Now, that was more like it.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:53 pm

Am I dreaming? Is this real? I thought to myself, my eyes locked on the beautiful damsel staring back at me in the full-length mirror. White lace and silk clung to my body, hugging me in the right places and accentuating my curves.

My hair was styled into a neat bun on top of my head, and my eyes sparkled with mirth, my skin simmering under the soft light. The makeup artist had done a fantastic job on my face—nothing flashy or loud, just simple yet exquisite.

I drew a deep breath, glancing at Scarlett's reflection as she stood behind me, helping with the zipper of my wedding dress. Her eyes were focused on my back, her fingers deftly zipping up the gown with a cautious move.

A faint grin played on my full lips—painted a shade of red as I took a moment to appreciate my journey so far. My heart raced with anticipation as I stood there: a bride waiting for the right time to meet her groom.

Today was the day that I would commit myself to one for all eternity—the very same man who had made a woman of me. How interesting was that! I'd yet to comprehend how I moved from despising him to falling so deeply in love with him.

What started out as a fling— a mistake—ended up with a diamond ring on my finger. I guess I'd been in love with him from the moment we had sex, the moment he made me feel so alive and wanted—loved. I just wasn't ready to accept it yet because I thought it was wrong to harbor such feelings for my client.

I would always be grateful to Bella Barlow for opening my eyes and making me realize just how much Raziel and I meant to each other.

It had been over a year already, and our love seemed to grow stronger by the day. Saying yes to Raziel was the best decision I'd made this year, and I didn't regret it one bit.

My husband-to-be had changed drastically over the course of our relationship. He'd proven to me time and time again that he was willing to be a better man for my sake. He'd put in the work to deal with his anger issues, and with my professional help, he excelled at it. Why wouldn't he? I mean, I was pretty damn at my job.

Being married at 23 wasn't exactly a part of my plan, but life happened. I wanted to focus more on my career and help as many people as I could before settling down. However, that love had now put me on a different path, a better path, and it didn't mean that I still couldn't follow my dreams.

Raziel and I had a long talk after our engagement, and we decided that I was going to retain my job and do what I loved to do: therapize people.

Although we started out in a rather bizarre situationship, I honestly couldn't have asked for a better partner. This man, Raziel, completed me in ways that I never imagined. He made me feel safe and secure around him, and I was certain that he wouldn't only make a great husband but also a great father to our unborn children.

"And...done." Scarlett's words cut through my thoughts, snapping me back to the present.

Her green eyes met mine in the mirror before us, and her hands flew to my shoulders. Her manicured fingers dug into my flesh in a massaging motion as she beamed at my reflection.

I watched her expression soften, and her lips parted into a radiant, contagious smile. "What? Why are you looking at me like that?" I asked, mirroring her grin.

“Because I’m super proud of you, Clary,” she said, her voice low and dripping with sincerity.

My heart melted at her remark, and my hand fluttered to my chest.

She turned me around and looked into my eyes, her fingers gently squeezing against mine. “Despite the challenges, the things you survived...you still emerged triumphant.” She paused for a second, letting her words sink in. “Why wouldn’t I be proud of you? Why wouldn’t I be proud to be your maid of honor?” she added, her face lighting up with an even broader smile.

I felt my cheeks flush, and my eyes misted, a flutter swelling up within me. “If I cry and ruin my makeup, it’s on you,” I teased amidst chuckles.

“It’s your big day,” she said softly. “And I am genuinely happy for you, Clary.”

“Thank you,” I said, slipping into her warm embrace.

“You smell as good as you look,” she whispered in my ear, inhaling the scent of my perfume.

I laughed and withdrew from her, my eyes roaming her gorgeous body. The subtle sheen of her pink gown caught the lights, accentuating her toned physique. A delicate silver necklace peeked out from underneath the neckline of her dress, adding a touch of sophistication to her overall look.

“Says the girl who looks like a goddess,” I replied, wiggling my brows at her.

A sudden knock on the door shifted our attention toward the entrance, and soon, an impeccably dressed woman stepped inside. She spread out her arms and beamed at me. “Surprise!”

My eyes widened in shock, and my heart warmed. “Mom?”

Mom had given a flimsy excuse for why she’d miss my wedding. Although it had hurt me so much, I decided to understand, even though it didn’t make any sense to me.

“Did you really think that I was actually going to miss your wedding?” She strolled inside, looking so beautiful and radiant.

Mom tossed her bag on the nearest table and hugged me tightly, her sweet perfume invading my senses.

“You came,” I said, letting go, my eyes locked to hers.

“Sweetheart, nothing in the world could’ve stopped me from here—not even a freaking zombie apocalypse,” she said, her voice laced with conviction and enthusiasm.

I laughed, struggling to hold back the tears of joy that welled my eyes.

“Hi, Mrs. Evelyn,” Scarlett greeted her with a warm, courteous smile.

“Hi, Scarlett. You look amazing,” Mom replied, turning to face her.

Scarlett’s cheeks flushed, and her eyes darted to the floor. “As do you, Mrs. Evelyn,” she said. Almost immediately, she added, “I’ll, uh...I’ll leave you two alone now.” She beamed at us and then quietly exited the room.

As the door shut behind her, Mom drew closer to me with a soft expression. “My baby girl’s all grown up now.” She placed a palm on my cheek, her eyes boring into mine. “Look at you,” she added, pride lacing her tone.

I blinked repeatedly, trying not to shed tears, as her words and facial expression made me so emotional.

“I wish your father was alive to witness this day...to see what an amazing woman his little girl has grown up to become,” Mom’s voice cracked with sentiment as she spoke, her genuine words infused with a deep longing.

“Mom, I’m trying not to cry,” I said softly, my voice trailing off under the weight of the emotions surging through me like electricity.

“Me, too, honey,” she whispered, tears welling up in her eyes. “I’m just so proud of you, Clary.”

At this point, I lost the fight as tears trickled down my cheeks.

Mom’s voice was like a gentle breeze, soft and calming as she whispered, “No, no, no. Shh.” Her words were a lullaby of comfort. “You’re gonna ruin your makeup.” Her hand hovered over my face before wiping my tears away with a delicate touch.

I drew in a deep breath, blinking back my tears, my heart overwhelmed with emotion.

“Here,” she said, revealing a slender, ornate silver chain held by a tiny crystal-encrusted locket. “Turn around.”

Without hesitation, I did, facing the morrow with her behind me.

Mom reached around my neck with a tender touch, the cool of the silver chain gliding smoothly against my skin. Her fingers grazed the nape of my neck as she secured the chain with a soft click. “There.” She looked in the mirror, staring at the crystal-encrusted locket with intricate patterns that seemed to glow with an inner light.

I squinted my eyes, suddenly recognizing the necklace.

“I wore this piece of jewelry on my wedding day,” she began, holding my gaze in the mirror. “As did my mother...and her mother too,” she added, her voice low, highlighting the significance of this little piece.

My hand fluttered to my chest, fingers delicately tracing the intricate patterns carved on it. “I didn’t realize we had a family heirloom,” I said, catching the reflection of her eyes.

“We do,” she said, turning me around to face her. “And now, I’m counting on you to keep this safe and pass it on to your daughter on her wedding day.” She beamed at me, a glint of pride flickering in her eyes.

A mix of emotions overwhelmed me on the spot as I felt the weight of this transgenerational legacy settle upon me. The responsibility to carry on our family tradition and honor the long line of women who had worn this necklace before was a serious one. A part of me wished she had told me about this earlier—maybe I’d have been more prepared for it.

But in any case, it was an honor to be the next bearer of this precious jewel, and I would do my best to uphold this sacred trust.

“It looks good on you,” Mom said, her palms brushing against the fabric of my white silk and lace, as if smoothing an invisible wrinkle.

My lips curled into a smile, and a wind of relief blew across my face. Before I could respond, the door opened almost immediately after a knock.

“Hi, sorry to interrupt, but, uh...it’s time,” Scarlett said, her head poking from behind the door, her voice tinged with urgency.

My heart sank into my belly, and my palms suddenly became sweaty. My breath lodged in my throat, and I drew a deep, long breath.

“We’ll be out in a minute, sweetheart,” Mom said, looking in Scarlett’s direction before turning to face me again. “It’s okay to be nervous, honey. But don’t worry. I’m here for you.” She gently squeezed against my fingers.

Her words were relieving—soothing and reassuring. My throat wobbled as I swallowed, nodding my head.

“Come on. Let’s go meet your groom,” she said, her lips curling into a beautiful smile.

I felt my heart warm at the thought of being eternally Raziel’s. I hadn’t seen him all day, and I couldn’t wait to set my eyes on my handsome Prince Charming.

The giant church doors parted, and the majestic strains of the “Wedding March” filled the air, signaling the start of the procession. I exhaled sharply, feeling Mom’s fingers intertwined with mine as she walked me down the aisle. The soft rustle of our footsteps on the carpeted floor was the only sound that blended with the spell of the music.

I could feel the guests’ gazes on me as heads turned, eyes fixed on the radiant bride and her beaming mother. Amongst the seated crowd, I spotted my brother, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he discreetly waved at me.

A few more elegant steps down the aisle, I spotted my colleagues from the clinic, Ronnie and Emily, seated side by side. They had worked things out and been an item for over a year. Maybe their wedding would be next after mine. With their fingers intertwined, they beamed a collective smile at me, and I reciprocated the gesture.

Beside the couple was seated Dr. Kim and a few other of my colleagues, all dressed to impress. Their faces lit up with radiant smiles that warmed my heart and made me feel loved.

And then there was him. My favorite person in the world, the man who had stolen my heart and proved to me that even the cruelest of them all was capable of love.

Raziel Tarasov.

He stood poised, waiting for me at the altar, his impeccably tailored black tuxedo exuding confidence and composure.

My heart sank into my chest, and I felt my soul stir as his eyes, shining with adoration, met mine. The music, the faces, the fragrance of the flowers, and essentially everything around receded into the background. Time seemed to pause as I walked toward the man I'd be spending the rest of my life with.

I locked eyes with Raziel, and while drinking in the sight of his gorgeous body, my breath hitched in my throat. His slightly tousled hair framed his face, his broad shoulders were squared, and his jaw was set in a tender smile that melted my heart.

As I drew nearer, closing the distance between us, I felt a surge of love and excitement coursing through my blood. His lips curled into a smile that prompted the same gesture from me.

My heels clicked softly against the carpeted floor as I approached the altar. Mom and I halted before the groom, and I felt her hand slip out of mine. I stole a glance at her, flashing a faint grin. In my chest, my heart was pounding like a drum, and a wave of nervousness washed over me.

Raziel extended his hand, and I hesitated for a fraction of a second before taking it. He helped me up the few steps at the base of the altar, his smile warm and courteous.

Standing across from him, my eyes bore into his as the priest's voice filled the air. My heart was racing with anticipation, and I couldn't help the smile playing on my lips. Raziel looked so handsome, and his rare, soft expression accentuated his charms.

“Dearly beloved,” the priest began, his voice loud and audible. “We’re gathered here today before the Almighty God and all these witnesses to join Clarice Evelyn and Raziel Tarasov in holy matrimony.”

Raziel’s composure was admirable, and I wished I wasn’t so nervous. Without breaking eye contact, he discreetly reached for my hand and squeezed gently against it. Like magic, this little gesture helped ease my anxiety a bit, and I responded with a broad smile.

“Marriage is a sacred bond between two people, a union of hearts, minds, and souls.” The priest’s words were like the summer breeze, gentle and calm.

However, this suspense was killing me, and I wished that there was a way for him to skip the real deal.

As his words droned on, I fixed my eyes, my mind, and my attention on Raziel, watching the love and adoration flicker in his gaze. His genuine smile sent a cold shiver down my spine, and a flutter swelled up in my chest.

Fast forward to the exchange of vows, and the priest’s voice snapped me back to the present.

“Clarice, please repeat after me,” he said, his tone light and smooth.

I drew in a deep breath, as this was the moment I’d been waiting for—the moment of truth, the defining moment of our lives.

As the priest recited the vows, I repeated after him, my eyes never leaving Raziel’s face. “I, Clarice Evelyn, do take you, Raziel Tarasov, to be my lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward. For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do part.” As I spoke, my voice cracked slightly under the weight of the overwhelming emotions

jolting through my body.

My eyes misted, and it took almost everything in me to hold back my tears. I couldn't understand why I was so emotional, but I couldn't help it either.

"Raziel, please repeat after me," the priest said, looking at him.

Raziel adjusted on the spot, his eyes sparkling through his soft expression. As he said his vows, his gaze was pinned on me, his voice smooth and endearing. His confidence and composure were off the charts, his words dripping with genuine sincerity.

"...for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part," he concluded, winking at me.

This playful gesture, however minute and discreet, warmed my heart, and my cheeks flushed. My eyes momentarily dropped to the floor before meeting his again.

The priest went silent for a second, his gaze sweeping across the congregation. "If anyone here has a just cause why these two should not be joined in holy matrimony, let them speak now or forever remain silent."

Not a single word was spoken as our guests exchanged glances. Alex, Raziel's most trusted lieutenant, stepped forward from a corner beside the altar, his sharp eyes scanning the crowd. With a deliberate motion, he brushed open his blazer, revealing the glint of a gun nestled in its holster. This was a silent threat to put down anyone who'd dare speak up.

A quiet laugh rose from the crowd, and although it seemed like a joke, it really wasn't. These men had ice in their veins and wouldn't hesitate to do what was necessary when the time came.

However, as expected, there was no objection of any kind, and the silence seemed to vibrate with anticipation.

The priest shifted his gaze between the two of us, his eyes twinkling. “With the power bestowed upon me, I now pronounce you husband and wife,” he declared, his voice firm and smooth.

My heart leaped for joy, and my face lit up with a radiant smile.

“You may now kiss the bride,” he said, taking a step backward.

Raziel’s hand grabbed my waist and pulled me to himself, his lips meeting mine in a tender, sweet kiss that sealed our union forever. The crowd erupted into a heavy round of applause that almost brought the entire building down.

It was official. I was no longer Clarice Evelyn. Now, I was Clarice Tarasov. What could I say? The name did have a ring to it.

Now, to the big finish, the moment I had long been waiting for almost throughout the entire occasion. The wedding night.

My husband and I had decided to try something new—an approach we hadn’t taken before. The idea was fantastic, and it had been my deepest, darkest desire.

The mere thought of it alone had me wet on the inception of the idea. Now, the moment had come, and I was ready, or so I hoped. My heart was racing in anticipation as I’d never done this before.

Sure, I’d seen it in movies and read about it in novels, but I’d never actually experienced it before. With Raziel, I was free to be my authentic self, free to try out

new things and explore the concept of sex.

Butt-naked, he towered over me with a whip in his hand as I knelt down in front of him. With both of my hands bound behind my back with a rope, I gazed up at him, completely naked.

Deliberately, he encircled me, his footsteps soundless against the marble floor. “Bend over,” he said, his voice deep, husky, and sensual.

The hint of authority in his tone sent shivers down my spine, and I obeyed, lowering my face to the ground.

“Go lower,” he said, striking my ass with the whip.

I flinched at the sweet pain coursing through my body, my eyes widening at the sudden strike. It hurt, and I was almost certain that my ass had turned red. However, it also felt good.

“Yes, Daddy,” I moaned, doing as instructed, my ass rising in the process.

He spanked me again, this time on the second butt cheek, and again, I flinched, moaning.

As I braced myself for the next course of action, I felt his fingers digging into my ass, massaging my flesh. Raz went on his knees and slapped my ass, and before I could register the pain, his tongue on my exit caused my body to tremble.

“Fuccckkkk,” I muttered under my breath, the feeling sprinting to my brain.

My hands were bound together at the small of my back, hence why I was unable to move, unable to express this unbridled pleasure jolting through me.

My husband ate my salad like he was eating my pussy, his palm occasionally spanking my ass. I could feel his face buried between my butt cheeks, and the magic his tongue worked on my exit had me shaking like a leaf.

My hands twitched against the ropes, but they held me captive, fueling my desire. My legs shuddered in ecstasy, my eyes widening in shock as I moaned.

The floor was cool beneath my cheek as I surrendered to my master, completely at his mercy. Raziel ate me out, his tongue nastily licking my exit, the tip swirling over my tiny hole.

The feeling was ecstatic and electric, and my legs wouldn't stop shaking. He slipped his hand between my legs, his thumb gliding through my wet entrance as he ate my exit.

"Oh, my goodness, Raz!" I moaned, my voice barely above a whisper. "What're you doing to me?" I whimpered, reflexively struggling against the robes that held me bound.

He spanked my ass again before withdrawing his face and rising to his feet. "Turn around," he commanded, towering over me.

"Yes, Daddy," I said softly, doing as I was told.

"Look at me," he said, his face falling downward.

I raised my head and met his gaze, feeling naughty and so fucking aroused. His hand snapped out to caress my hair, fingers massaging my scalp. I bit my lower lip, watching his cock pointed out in front of me—so hard and veiny. Without breaking eye contact, I edged closer, sticking out my tongue to lick his cap.

Raz groaned, pushing my head further into his groin, his move fluid and delicate.

It was strange, but the feeling of being handicapped, unable to use my hands, somehow accentuated my lust. My head moved back and forth and around as I gave him a blowjob. I was careful not to use my teeth, and just listening to him groan in pleasure was satisfying.

His hands on my head guided my movement, and I could sense his caution. I pulled my head back and looked up at his face. “Don’t hold back. I want you to fuck my mouth.”

His lips curled into a sexy grin. “You naughty little devil.”

“That’s what I am...your naughty little devil,” I responded, my voice low and husky.

He gently pulled on my hair, his cock penetrating my mouth. I felt it deep in my throat, and my eyes teared up, my breath ceasing for a moment. He pushed my head deeper into his groin, and I gagged, drooling.

Raz, with a single move, pulled my head backward, and a loud gasp escaped me. I opened my eyes, struggling to catch my breath as a thick thread of saliva lingered from my mouth to his cap.

“Yeah...that’s it,” he said, his voice dripping with sheer pleasure.

I pushed my head back into his groin, his cock traveling into my mouth. With so much fervency, I sucked on his shaft, the gurgling sound filling the air and accentuating my desire.

His pleased gasps were a clear indication that I was doing a pretty good job. And the way he gently massaged my scalp helped ease my tension.

My eyes were misty, and drops of saliva dotted my chest, falling from my mouth. I felt so nasty and wanted to be treated as such.

Raz withdrew his shaft, and before I knew it, he whisked me into the air and positioned me on all fours on the bed. I giggled at the sudden action, and my eyes widened when his cock penetrated me from the back. “Ooh, fuck, yes,” I moaned, biting against the sheets.

My hands twitched against the ropes as he slammed into my pussy with relentless strokes. My legs shuddered, and my moans grew louder, yet he wouldn’t stop or slow down. “Yes, yes, yes, yes, please...give it to me,” I pleaded, tears rolling down my cheeks.

My entire body was overwhelmed with pleasure as his cock seemed to hit just the right spot. “Right there, right there! That’s it, baby. Yes, yes, yes...” I cried. Literally. “Don’t stop—don’t you fucking stop.” I groaned like a wounded animal, my face scrunched up in ecstasy.

Raziel respected my wish, my command. He rammed into me vigorously, his pace increasing by the second. He fucked me harder and faster, occasionally spanking my ass with his whip.

“Ohh, fuck me! That feels so good!” I purred softly.

“You like that shit?” he asked, maintaining an average speed, his voice shaking in ecstasy.

“I love it,” I said through gritted teeth as I bit the sheets. “I love it, baby.”

I felt a spark ignite within me, and an unfamiliar, sweet sensation traveled across my body. His cock was hitting the right spot, and although I’d never cum before, I didn’t need anyone telling me that this was it; this was the moment I would experience it. If only he would keep going a little longer.

“Oh, God, yes!” I cried out. “I think I’m gonna cum.”

His hand snapped out and grabbed a handful of my hair. As he pulled on it, my face jerked upward, my moans escalating by the second. My legs trembled, as did my bound hands, and I felt a cold shiver sprint through my body like lightning. “Don’t stop—please, don’t stop.”

He didn’t. He continued to plunge into me with relentless strokes.

“I’m almost there—almost there!” I groaned, my face contorted in pleasure as he rammed me faster and harder, his cock stimulating my G-spot. “Fuck! I’m cumming!” I announced, my eyes tightly shut and my voice shuddering.

“That’s it. Give it to me,” he groaned, quickening his pace, his groin slapping loudly against my ass.

My eyes rolled backward, my legs trembling as a burst of liquid squirted out of my pussy. Still, Raziel didn’t stop until I pulled out from his cock, my body dropping to the mattress. I shook, having the best orgasm of my life. “Fuck,” I whispered to myself, feeling charged up as opposed to feeling drained.

Raziel reached out and untied my hands with a fluid move. I rolled my hurting fists in a massaging motion, my eyes locked on him with a smile. He had just blown my mind and catapulted me to a whole new realm I’d never visited before.

I knelt on the bed, taking his hard cock in my free hands as I looked up at him. “That was amazing,” I said, my eyes shining with excitement as I stroked his cock. “Now, it’s my turn.”

I flipped Raz over, and as he lay on his back, I took my time to tie his wrists to the bedposts and his ankles. As he lay sprawled on the mattress, arms and feet firmly secured in place, I crawled onto the bed like a cat. On my knees, I took his cock, standing erect like the Eiffel Tower. My hands stroked his shaft, and I kept my eyes locked on his as I lowered my head and kissed his cap.

I teased him for a moment, my tongue twirling around the tip of his cock with a seductive smile on my lips. Soon, I swallowed his cock, and my hands glided over his length. He groaned, his toes curling in response.

My hair fell forward, framing my face, and I slid a few strands behind my ear. I gave him a handjob while simultaneously administering a blowjob. I loved the way his face contorted in pleasure, the way he groaned, enjoying my work. He pulled against the restraints that held him captive, and his body jerked in response to my delicate touch.

Once done to my satisfaction, I slowly straddled him, inserting his cock into my slippery pussy. I let out a soft sigh, balancing on my throne. My waist ground over his cock as my manicured hands caressed his broad torso. Reaching for his face, I claimed his lips, devouring them with a slow pace that soon switched to something more fervent.

He kissed me back, tongues dancing in our mouths, our heads tilting to the rhythm of our shared passion. In no time, I quickened my pace, my waist grinding hard and fast against his groin. His cock was deep inside me, and his hips bucked upward, driving into me with swift strokes.

My speed and energy matched his as our hips collided in perfect sync. I broke the kiss and straightened on his cock, my waist grinding back and forth. I moaned, my hands darting to my chest as I moved faster and faster. I squeezed my breasts, fingers tuning my hard nipples.

I heard his primal growl and knew what was coming. I wanted it.

Raz's body trembled in ecstasy, his waist slamming into mine from underneath. My hands dropped to his chest for support and an anchor, my hips twisting, twirling, and grinding against his cock.

“Fuck!” he groaned, pulling against his restraints, his face scrunched up in pleasure.

Still, I didn’t stop. My lips curled into a self-satisfied grin as I watched him shake, ready to empty his essence deep inside me.

“Ohh, yes, baby, give it to me. I want it. I want all of it,” I said softly, moaning deliciously.

Raz’s legs trembled as he released himself inside me, my pussy accepting every single drop. He let out a deep sigh, and I did the same, collapsing on his broad shoulders.

Exhausted, we both took a moment to catch our breaths, our chests rising and falling. My sweaty body brushed against his, my hands caressing his skin.

I jerked my head and looked at his spent face, a smile playing on my lips. “That was incredible,” I confessed, holding his gaze, my heart warm with love and affection.

“No, you were incredible,” he said, his breathing heavy as he mirrored my smile. “I love you, Clarice,” Raziel declared those three magic words.

My grin broadened, and I leaned closer, my breath against his skin. “And I love you, Raziel.”

He beamed at me just before our lips met in a tender, sweet kiss that sent a shiver running down my spine.

I was the luckiest and happiest woman in the world.

THE END