



# Kidnapped Bratva Twins (Tarasov Bratva #6)

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**Category:** Urban

**Description:** This Bratva Monster found me. He stole me. And now he says I'm his.

A night of weakness led to his bed. I thought I could run, hide his twins, and erase his memory.

But Lev Tarasov, Bratva's most ruthless enforcer, doesn't forget.

Now, I'm locked in his mansion, his dark eyes claiming me with every glance.

He's twice my age, a monster forged in blood and brutality.

I hate his dominance, but my body betrays me with every touch.

He says I'm his to protect—but I know the cost of his protection.

One wrong move, and his enemies will tear us apart.

His hands are stained with sin, his world built on violence.

I should run from the man who stole my freedom.

But his presence consumes me, his touch igniting a fire I can't put out.

And when our twins call him "Papa," I see a side of him no one else can.

Can the man who destroyed my life also be the one to save it?

**Total Pages (Source):** 25

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I had to run.

Lev Tarasov's mansion was no place to raise my children. That ruthless killer didn't have what it took to be a father. He'd only pass on his legacy of cruelty and teach them the way of the Bratva.

He was a man whose loyalty lay with his family business—one of the most feared criminal organizations in the whole of Chicago.

His life was a web of trouble, crime, and violence. The man had enemies here and there, enemies that were just as ruthless and would do anything to take him down.

It wasn't safe for me and, mostly, the kids.

At least, this was my justification for running away when I learned that I was pregnant. Hiding was only delaying the inevitable.

Lev would soon find me. He'd come for me, and when he did, it would be a cold day in hell. But as fierce as he thought I was, I wasn't ready for that day—I dreaded it because it would essentially mark the end of life as I knew it.

It didn't matter how much my body craved his touch or how much I longed for him; I wouldn't give in to the illicit thoughts running through my mind. I knew better. I'd learned the hard way to stay the hell away from that twisted devil, that monster forged in blood and brutality.

His hands were stained with sin, his heart cold like the Arctic water. Lev had ice in

his veins. He was a man as disciplined with his chiseled physique as he was with his code of honor—a code he wouldn't break for anyone or anything.

Bloodshed was just another Tuesday for him, and he was the kind of man who was powerful enough to take whatever he wanted. Unfortunately for me, I was the one he wanted.

However, I'd fled from that monster years ago, and now I was hiding in the quiet coastal town of Evergreen Bay, under a new identity.

Although it seemed like I was far from reach, I couldn't shake the feeling that I wasn't. The only way to escape that devil's grasp was to leave this world—to die. As cruel as it seemed, death was the one thing that could truly keep me away from him. So long as I walked the Earth, it was only a matter of time before he found me.

I was safe from him for now, but how long was I going to keep running? How long would it take me to elude him? How long until he came bursting through the front door?

A flash of lightning streaked the clouds outside, accompanied by rolls of thunder as the downpour began. The wind howled, whistling, rain splattering on the closed windows.

I sat on the side of Elara's bed, my fingers clutching the hem of her blanket as I spread it over her body, shielding her from the cold.

Across from her was her twin brother Nikolai, snuggled under the sheets, his eyes hollow and cold like those of his father's lingering over us.

Nikolai was a spitting image of Lev Tarasov, same dark hair, same eyes, and the same sharp, angular features. Each time I looked at him, I saw the man from whom I

was on the run. Nikolai was a constant reminder that I would always carry a piece of Lev with me wherever I went.

However, he was a sweet little boy, reserved, and didn't talk much, unlike his sister, Elara.

Elara, on the other hand, was more like me in more ways than one. She had my blue eyes, my golden blonde hair, and a lot of my confidence—although these days, I didn't have much of that left in me anymore.

These kids were all that I had. They meant the world to me. Elara and Nikolai were my everything, and I'd do anything in my power, go to any length, to keep them away from that life of violence that their father lived.

I deluded myself into thinking I'd given them Russian names because I loved the choices. However, the truth that I was too scared to admit was that I actually did that to honor their father—kind of. A part of me still felt guilty for running with his kids and for denying him the opportunity to know of their existence.

Perhaps this was my way of soothing my conscience, even though I wouldn't change my actions.

“Mom?” Nikolai's calm voice invaded my thoughts, drawing my attention.

“Yes, honey?” I replied, my eyes locking on his in a fleeting moment.

“Where's Dad?” he questioned, his gaze never leaving mine.

My heart sank into my stomach, a sudden heat burning me up on the inside. His question caused my breath to lodge in my throat as a wave of anxiety washed over me.

“Other kids talk about their dads, but we don't,” Elara added, her voice laced with emotion.

I shot a quick glance at her, my heart skipping a beat at the glint of emptiness in her blue eyes.

As a mother, I'd tried to the best of my abilities these past three years to make them happy. I played the role of both Mom and Dad, but clearly, that wasn't enough. There still remained a void that I couldn't fill no matter how hard I tried.

I'd always known that, someday, one of them would address this topic, but I just didn't think it would happen so soon.

What was I supposed to say? They were too young to understand anything. What should I do?

“Who is our Dad?” Nik asked, desperation creeping into his tone, his hollow eyes simmering with a glint of sleepiness.

I swallowed, my heart racing with anticipation, but I maintained a soft expression, managing to squeeze out a smile. “Do you know what ‘complicated’ means?” I began, my eyes darting across the both of them.

“Not really,” Elara said, her gaze fixed on me.

“Well.” I let out a sigh, trying to mask my discomfort with a slightly broadening grin. “It means that there are some things you can't understand until you're older.”

“Things about Dad?” Nik asked, a hint of disappointment flashing on his face.

“Sadly, yes,” I said, my tone mild and calm, hoping my response would douse their

curiosity.

“Well, if it's...” Elara said and paused, her eyes rolling as if searching for the right word. “complicated,” she continued, “then at least tell us how you met him.” A small smile played on her lips, curiosity flickering in her eyes.

I stole a glance at her brother, and he had the same expression. They both looked intrigued, hoping to hear a story about their father.

As dark as that place in my head was, I had to revisit that memory for children's sake. I couldn't deny them this request even though it would end up breaking my heart all over again.

I could almost hear the DJ's hypnotic beats echoing in my head as I took a rough trip down memory lane.

The events of that night would forever linger on the fringes of my mind. It was on that night that I met the devil who changed the course of my life.

Images of his face flashed in my head as I recalled the happenings that led to this day.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

Someone once said, “If betrayal was forgivable, the devil would still be sitting next to God.”

I couldn't agree more with this statement, considering my resentment for such acts. Loyalty was key in my line of work; it was the one thing that was non-negotiable.

The Bratva mafia was infamous for many things, one of them being our ruthlessness toward those who dared break the rules of our organization.

Every member of the Tarasov Bratva knew the codes we ran by; they understood the consequences of breaking these codes. The punishment attached to this was always severe. Yet, some of our men still had the audacity to go against the same organization they'd sworn an oath to stand by.

Greed was the principal factor driving them to abandon the Bratva. No matter how many of them were caught and punished publicly, there would still be idiots who thought they could outsmart the organization.

Greedy bastards!

I, for one, never took it lightly with those sick fucks. Anyone who dared snitch on the Bratva would pay the ultimate price eventually.

Tonight, I was on the hunt for one of those Judases amongst us: a man called Arseni.

Arseni used to be one of the Bratva's most loyal foot soldiers, ruthless and a little cunning. His tricky nature was a useful resource that often came in handy for our

organization. The man was a master of deceit and could so easily fool just about anyone. He was that good.

With him on our side, we'd infiltrated a number of rival organizations and obtained useful information that gave us an edge over our enemies. He was a tool that made our work look easy.

However, things began to change when pride found its way into Arseni's heart. He thought so highly of himself and believed that he was irreplaceable; hence, he deserved a seat in the inner circle.

There were rules to these things—rules to how we climbed up the ranks—but Arseni believed he'd earned a place at the high table. Of course, I turned him down. He was too ambitious, too proud for his level, and these were the traits, the pointers, that indicated that he wasn't ready to go up the ranks.

He was lucky I entertained his foolish and overzealous proposal instead of putting a fucking bullet in his skull. Arseni had been working for me for donkey years; he'd proven to be loyal and quite resourceful. Therefore, wasting such a tool wouldn't have been a good idea.

However, I turned him down and told him he wasn't ready. And he wasn't.

Arseni wasn't so pleased with being rejected, even though he wasn't stupid enough to have acted out before me. He'd kept his anger and disappointment to himself lest he crossed a line and faced a terrible fate.

Little did I know that my rejection would set that prick down a path of rebellion.

After he left my office that day, Arseni was no longer the man I could rely on. Although his change in attitude was never obvious, I could discern the negativity



oozing from him.

It wasn't long after that the organization's finances started to dwindle; our enemies turned out to be a few steps ahead of us every single time. It was as though they knew our plans before we executed them and would always find a way to counterattack.

It went on over and over and this became a serious concern to the organization.

We were losing high-profile clients to rival organizations, investors were withdrawing from us, and our finances were seriously at stake.

It was clear that we had a mole in our midst, and even now, I cursed myself for not suspecting Arseni. I didn't think that he'd be stupid enough to turn against us, but then again, I didn't realize how highly he'd already exalted himself.

My trusted lieutenant, Andrey, did his homework, dug a little deeper, and eventually discovered that Arseni had been the mole all along. This news fueled my rage and made my blood boil.

I was so mad at myself for letting him trick me all this time. Despite his over-ambition, he still had my trust, but the bastard decided to break it. He chose to make an enemy out of me. Wrong decision.

He'd fled the moment he realized that we were on to him.

According to Andrey's findings, Arseni had been selling sensitive Bratva information to our enemies—he'd been selling them our secrets. No wonder they were always two steps ahead of us.

I could only hope that the money he received was enough compensation for his treason. He betrayed the Bratva, betrayed me , all for what? Money, power,

influence?

My fingers balled into fists, a spark of rage surging through me as I stood amongst the crowd, eyes scanning the room with calculated intensity.

Waiters and waitresses, dressed in their signature attire, glided through the throng, balancing silver trays laden with champagne flutes and canapés. The fragrance of exotic flowers mingled with the scent of caviar and truffles.

The rhythmic throb of music filled the atmosphere in the penthouse apartment, and the air was charged with anticipation. Guests—the creme de la creme of society, all dressed to impress with their designer attire and dazzling jewels—sprawled across the luxurious space.

Crystal chandeliers reflected rainbow hues on the polished marble floor, casting soft lights that cast warm glows over the guests. A live jazz band performed on a raised platform, entranced the crowd with their soulful melodies.

The music weaved a spell that drew people to the dance floor, but this wasn't my concern. I wasn't here to have fun; I was here to find the one who betrayed my trust, and I wasn't going to leave until I found him.

I shot a quick glance at the diamond-encrusted watch glinting on my wrist, my patience wearing thin. In my mind, I'd cooked up thousands of ways to make that bastard suffer before sending him to hell.

This was personal.

Arseni had not only betrayed the Bratva but also tricked me into thinking he was not a threat. I loathed him for this and couldn't wait to have him in my basement, where no one would hear his screams.

“Here's here somewhere,” Andrey said, hovering at my elbow, his eyes fixed on the guest list in his hands. “It's only a matter of time until we find him.” He raised his head and looked at me.

My teeth gritted in a mix of anger and disappointment. I was displeased with the fact that I'd have to wait a little longer before catching that son of a bitch. But regardless of my impatience, I retained my calm, finding comfort in the horrible things I'd do to Arseni once I caught him.

“Tell the men to stay on high alert,” I said, adjusting my tie, a hand slipping into my pants pocket. My tailored black suit complemented the color of my hair, which was slightly unkempt. “If he's here, he mustn't slip through our fingers.” My expression remained impassive, but a hint of tension rippled beneath the surface.

“He won't,” Andrey said, his voice laced with conviction, eyes flashing with a glint of fury. “We'll find that bastard, Boss—he's not escaping tonight.” His tone dripped with disdain and venom.

Andrey shared in my anger and was just as determined to see that greedy asshole brought to his knees.

As my gaze swept across the room, a peal of laughter caught my attention, and I turned toward the sound. In a moment, my eyes fell on a woman who shone like a jewel amidst the sea of faces. Her blonde hair fell loosely over her shoulders like a river of gold, her sapphire gown highlighting her curvature and hugging her in the right places.

She stood balanced on a pair of black stilettos that accentuated her radiance, a champagne flute clutched between her fingers. She glowed, her skin simmering in the chandelier's soft lights.

This vision of loveliness seemed engrossed in her conversation with a group of other women dressed in elegant gowns.

My brows arched as I stared at this beautiful stranger, and for a moment there, I forgot about Arseni. This woman had captured my attention, and now I couldn't seem to tear my gaze off her. My eyes lingered on her as I drank in the sight of her gorgeous body, wondering who she was.

“That's Rayvn Jenson,” Andrey said as though he'd read my mind, his eyes tracing my gaze. He shot a glance at me before returning his eyes to her and continuing. “Daughter of James Jenson, an American tycoon—one of the most successful businessmen in the city of Chicago.”

A faint smirk lined a corner of my lips as I watched her, enjoying the quiet sound of her laughter. There was something about her that I couldn't wrap my head around, something that had me drawn to her. Was it her amazing body or her sweet voice? I wasn't entirely sure, but her presence was a distraction from the task at hand.

I should be focused, but I wasn't because she'd stolen my attention. What a smooth criminal!

In a fleeting moment, she looked in my direction, her dazzling smile illuminating the room. Her blue eyes held my gaze for what seemed like an eternity, and I was captivated by her beauty.

There was a subtle flutter in my chest, my stone-cold heart momentarily warmed by her infectious grin.

Our eyes met, and the room fell silent, the world around us melting away. As her blue eyes locked on mine, I felt the weight of her gaze like a gentle touch.

Usually, most people couldn't look me in the eyes, let alone hold my gaze for so long. Yet, this beautiful young woman didn't look away; instead, her stare burned with an inner fire.

Her confidence was admirable, and as we stared into each other's eyes, the air was thick with an unspoken connection. In that moment, everything else faded into the background. Even the room itself seemed to shrink, leaving only the two of us suspended in an ocean of silence.

## Page 3

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My manicured fingers wrapped around the slender tube of lipstick, my thumb rotating the base with a soft click. With my lips parted slightly, I leaned in, applying a final precise stroke of color—a faint shade of red.

I jerked my eyes, catching the reflection of myself in the mirror, my sapphire dress glittering in the soft lights. The fabrics hugged me in the right places, accentuating my figure as I stood inches taller on a pair of black stilettos.

The young woman looking back at me shone bright like the morning star with blue eyes sparkling like diamonds.

I heaved a sigh, admiring my reflection in the mirror, my body swaying left and right, eyes drinking in the sight of my curves. I was a twenty-one-year-old plus-sized girl blessed with an amazing body in which I always found pride.

My golden blonde hair cascaded down my shoulders like a waterfall. My light makeup complemented my fair skin with a natural pink undertone that blended so seamlessly.

This was me, Ravyn Jensen, the perfect daughter that James and Harley Jensen expected me to be.

Tonight, I was all dressed up, ready to endure yet another one of those boring, tedious events my parents insisted I attend. Of course, I couldn't object; I didn't exactly have a say in that or anything else, if I'm being honest.

This was all just an act to impress them and present the perfect image befitting the

family name and status. It was exhausting most of the time—doing what was expected of me rather than what I truly wanted and pretending to be okay with it.

I wasn't the timid type, was never afraid to speak my mind and express myself. But when it came down to family matters, I would often just listen to Mom and Dad because deep down, I cared about the image and status they'd built over the years.

I wanted to forge my own path, to be free from my father's world of power, wealth, and influence. However, I wasn't going to be rebellious about it. I'd figure something out sooner or later.

But for now, their roof, their rules.

My lips curled into a plastic smile that looked as genuine as they came, a skill I'd honed over the years from attending galas and social events like the one for tonight. These gatherings were nothing but a performance—a meticulously choreographed dance of fake smiles, forced conversations, and a desperate need for escape.

Oh, what another joyful night of playing dress up and pretending to be interested in people I didn't know and might never run into again.

I grabbed my purse from the bed and strode out of the room, my heels clicking against the floor.

“Oh, my God, she's gonna be the death of me,” Dad grumbled, glancing at his gold-plated watch as he paced the living room.

“Would you relax? She's getting ready,” Mom said, sitting on a sofa with her legs crossed. A hint of amusement crept into her tone.

“We're late, Harley,” he replied, stopping in his tracks, his voice dripping with

urgency.

“I'm ready,” I announced from the head of the steps where I'd been standing for the past few seconds.

“Oh, finally! Thank God,” Dad said, relief lacing his tone as he jerked his head toward my direction.

Dad's gaze lingered on me, his brows rising as his expression softened. It was as though his little annoyance at my slight delay had dissipated the moment he saw me. He buried his hands in his pocket, his white tux complementing his hair and beard.

His name should have been “White,” considering his love for the color, as virtually everything about him was always white. Most of his clothes were white, and his cars were also white, as was the living room and his master bedroom.

Mom rose to her feet, her gaze fixed on me and lips curving into a smile. Her blonde hair was styled into a bun and piled on top of her head. Her black gown shimmered in the lights, the tiny pearls that adorned it glittering like diamonds.

“You look amazing, sweetheart,” she complimented, her blue eyes crinkling at the corners.

“Thanks, Mom,” I replied, my cheeks flushing at her remark as I descended the stairs.

Dad adjusted his wire-rimmed glasses, a finger tugging at the bridge. “You look lovely,” he said, and without leaving any room for my response, he added. “Now, can we get going?” He led the way, heading toward the front door.

Mom and I exchanged glances, giggling softly as we followed up behind him.



The drive was about thirty minutes long, but eventually, we got to the penthouse. I had no idea what or who was being celebrated; all I knew was that I was here to mingle with the society elites.

Mom and Dad had deluded themselves into believing that the reason they always insisted I tag along for occasions like this was to provide networking opportunities. But that wasn't the truth. It was a masquerade to hide the real reason: They were using my presence as a symbol of the family's perfection.

They had a reputation to protect, and I was the immaculate and refined tool they could flaunt. It was a real piece of work, living up to their standards, playing the role of the exquisite and ideal daughter. Spotless.

The opulent space was already filled with the who's who of high society, the wealthy and influential. A good number of these people were nothing but crooks and criminals, masquerading as humanitarians and philanthropists.

Foes and allies alike mingled, chattering with plastic smiles as though they wouldn't turn around and stab one another in the back once they got the chance. This hypocrisy was one of the many reasons I loathed events like this; it was really just a gathering of wolves in sheep's clothing. Nothing more, nothing less.

This was the part where I would join in the hypocrisy, smiling and waving at folks that I didn't give two shits about.

Cool jazz music wafted through the air, performed by a live band on a raised platform. The sweet aroma of champagne blended with the scents of different colognes and perfumes, adding to the sophistication of the space.

Warm glows from hanging chandeliers illuminated the guests, whose elegant dresses and tuxes simmered in the lights. Soft murmurs of conversations weaved in and out

of the jazz rhythms, creating a serene and intimate atmosphere.

“Ah, Mr. Jensen, what a pleasant surprise,” a deep, hoarse voice caught my attention.

I turned toward the speaker, watching the black-suited man approaching us. He was nearly as old as my Dad, with a bald head and facial hair. He was a portly man with a mean face and a scar that resembled a cut over his left eye.

“Mr. Fisher,” Dad greeted with a smile as he halted in front of us. “How long has it been since we last saw each other?”

Fisher laughed, throwing his head back. “So long, my friend.” He extended a hand, and Dad shook it. “You look well.”

“As do you,” Dad replied.

“Mrs. Jensen, still as radiant as always,” Fisher said, kissing Mom's hand with a sketched bow.

Mom's response was a bright smile, her lips parting in elegance. I steeled myself, ready for an introduction, considering that this man's face was unfamiliar. Not like I'd remember him after tonight, anyway.

“Mr. Fisher, you remember our daughter, right?” Dad's voice cut through my thoughts, returning me to the present.

My gaze met with his, and in the depths of those piercing green eyes was a glint of infatuation, a really disturbing one. With a discreet move, he checked me out, his eyes roaming my body as he reached to take my hand.

I grimaced inwardly, struggling not to show my disgust, but my expression faltered,

my face twisted in distaste.

“My, my, my,” Fisher said, his voice dropping to a low whisper as he took my hand, his lips pressed against the back of my fingers.

I felt a pang of irritation within me, my lips curling into a subtle snarl.

“The last time I saw you, you were just a child,” he continued, clicking his tongue, amusement flickering in those eyes that wandered around my body. “Now, look at you...ripe in all the right places.”

A faint scowl flashed across my face, mirroring my displeasure, repulsed by his touch.

“Okay, Mr. Fisher.” Mom laughed lightly, stepping forward to take my hand off his lips, her action deliberate yet respectful. “I think we're done here,” she said, her gaze fixed on him with a wide plastic smile on her face.

His lips twitched at the corner, and his eyes shifted across Mom and Dad's faces in a brief moment of awkward silence. I was grateful that she came to my rescue in the nick of time, but I still couldn't understand why.

This wasn't the first time a man decades older than me had been overly nice to her daughter. However, something about Mr. Fisher seemed to have awakened her protective side.

Even Dad didn't look so pleased, but he retained his grin.

“Well,” Fisher sighed, breaking the silence. “I'll see you folks around then. Ladies.” He looked at Mom and me before tapping Dad's shoulder and walking away to mingle with the other guests.

“Thanks for the save, Mom,” I said, a smile spreading across my face. “But what was that about?”

She blew a raspberry, waving a dismissive hand. “Don't worry yourself, sweetheart. It's nothing.” She beamed at me.

I knew there was more to the story, but I wasn't going to pursue it further. Perhaps they knew something dark about Mr. Fisher, and they didn't want me to get involved with him. Not to worry, though—not even in my next life would I get involved with that pervert.

Dad was attending to some of his business partners and associates, some of whom I recognized, and others I didn't. Mom was on her phone, scrolling through social media, giggling at whatever she was watching.

I let out a sigh, the inevitable boredom slowly creeping in. A waiter was strolling past me with a silver tray of champagne and canapés, and I helped myself to a flute.

As I took a sip, my gaze swept across the room and settled on a familiar face that caused my eyes to squint. I peered closer, and my brows arched in surprise as I recognized the young girl by the bar. “Tessa?” I whispered and turned to Mom. “I'll be right back.”

She was so engrossed in her phone that I wasn't sure she even heard me.

With graceful steps, I glided over to the bar where she was standing with two other girls. “Tessa O'Brian,” I called, my smile broadening.

She turned in my direction, her movement swift and fluid as though my voice had rung a bell in her head. Her dark doe eyes widened in surprise, jaw dropping in shock. “O...M...G,” she muttered the words with a deliberate slowness. “Ravyn

Jensen?" She chuckled, spreading her arms.

"In the flesh." I laughed, delighted to have bumped into her.

Tessa slipped into my embrace, our hands wrapped around each other. "Oh, my God! Look at you!" Her eyes traversed my body.

"Look at me? Look at you!" I rephrased, drinking in the sight of her gorgeous body. "You look amazing, Tess!"

"Says the girl who's glowing in elegance." She laughed, gladness dancing in her eyes.

Tessa wasn't as tall as me, but she was just as beautiful. Her silky black hair fell loosely on her shoulder. Her full lips were a deep, rich pink, curved into a perpetual smile. Her pale skin glowed with a soft, ethereal light, and her incredible black-as-coal eyes seemed to hold a world of emotion.

"It's really good to see you again, Tess," I said, admiring the lovely cream-colored gown that hugged her like a second skin. "How are you enjoying the party?"

"You call this a party?" Her brows yanked up in disbelief, her voice laced with sarcasm. "Please." She rolled her eyes dramatically.

I chuckled, feeling a wind of relief wash over me. At least I wasn't the only one who thought this party was a snooze-fest. "I take it you're not having the time of your life."

Tess snorted. "Are you kidding me? It's a nightmare." She plucked a flute of champagne from a nearby waitress's tray and raised it in a toast. "Cheers to boredom."

“Cheers.” I laughed lightly, clinking my glass against hers.

We sipped from our flutes, and as we caught up on old times, my eyes wandered the opulent space until I spotted him. He stood across the hall, his dark, sleepy eyes scanning the room with a chilling intensity.

His imposing height commanded my attention, his rigid frame bulging out from his impeccably black tailored suit. His dark hair was attractively unkempt, giving off a sexy appearance. He exuded confidence and a sinister aura that made my skin crawl. Something was off about him, something dark and threatening. Yet, I felt drawn to this strange man.

Next thing I knew, his cold eyes met mine, magnetically attracting me to him. I felt a shiver run down my spine, and my breath hitched in my throat. Tearing my gaze away seemed impossible, and my heart was pounding in my chest. This staring contest had me glued, inflicting me with desire and fear. He was easy on the eyes, but at the same time, he looked cold and dead. What kind of man was that, and why did I find him ridiculously attractive?

I could feel the world around us melt away as he held my gaze, his expression unreadable. The longer we stared at each other, the faster my heart beat.

“Oh, no, dear. Don't even think about it.” Tessa's voice cut through my thoughts.

Then, and only then, was I able to tear my gaze from his unsettling gaze. I glanced in her direction and realized her eyes were on the same man I was looking at.

“That's Lev Tarasov, and trust me....” She faced me, her voice dropping to a deadly warning. “He's bad news. Best to stay away.”

Why did her words have the exact opposite effect on me? Now, I found him even

more irresistible.

“Word in the street is that he's the devil's advocate—a demon with ice in his veins,” she continued, her tone dripping with a mix of dread and disdain. “It is believed that he has no soul, no emotions, no conscience...just pure evil.”

I scoffed dismissively, unwilling to entertain the possibility of her claims. “Come on, Tess, don't tell you actually believe all that nonsense because it sounds like you just described Dracula,” I said, glancing back at him.

“It's not nonsense, Ravyn,” she said, looking at me. “His family has a connection to the Russian mafia.”

“Mafia?” My brows arched, mirroring my disbelief. “Do they still exist?” I returned my eyes to this irresistibly hot man who had succeeded in stealing my attention.

Tessa was further explaining herself, but I wasn't really interested in the allegations against this man, Lev Tarasov. I could sense something sinister about him, yet I couldn't stop myself from being attracted.

### Chapter 3 – Lev

The soft jazz music played on, the cool melody wafting through the air as a few couples waltzed on the dance floor.

Andrey had dematerialized, following up a possible lead to help catch that son of a bitch, Arseni, leaving by myself.

A waiter glided past me, and I plucked a glass of champagne from his silver tray, eyes darting across the space. There were a lot of folks here tonight, allies and foes alike, and at least one of them would know about Arseni's whereabouts.

The bastard had eluded us for quite some time now. He'd proven to be a difficult man to find, using all the tricks he learned from us to stay hidden. However, tonight would be the night that I finally got hold of him. I was done playing hide and seek with that asshole and couldn't wait to see the look in his eyes when I caught him.

It would be fun watching him fidget, begging for mercy, but he'd get none. Arseni had bitten off more than he could chew, and now it was high time he choked.

However, despite my determination to get a hold of him, there was a little problem—the blonde girl across the room. Ravyn Jensen. I had sensed from the onset that she was going to be a distraction, and as it turned out, I wasn't wrong.

It didn't matter how many times I tried to stay focused on the mission; my mind wouldn't stop thinking about her. I'd lost count of the number of times I'd stolen glances at her, reveling in her amazing smile even though I wasn't the one she was smiling at.

I took a sip from my champagne flute, the flavors exploding on my taste buds as I dared to look in her direction again. This time, I caught her staring, and she quickly tore her gaze away as though embarrassed.

A smirk lined a corner of my lips, my gaze never leaving her form as she conversed with her friend.

Was she as drawn to me as I was to her? Was that the reason she was staring when she thought I wasn't looking?

I dug a hand into my pocket, my eyes roaming her body, drinking in the mesmerizing sight of her curves. I was starting to get seriously sidetracked by her irresistible beauty, but I couldn't help it. There was just something about her that had my eyes glued and my heart racing in my chest.



This was a strange, unfamiliar feeling, hence why I was so intrigued by it. I was curious to find out how she'd managed to catch my attention and why I felt this weird sensation in my stomach just by looking at her.

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As the night wore on, my multi-tasking plan went on just fine, and on several occasions, I locked eyes with Ravyn Jensen. I didn't realize it until now, but I had subconsciously followed her.

She moved gracefully through the crowd like she knew her way around, her demeanor exuding confidence and composure. Intermittently, she smiled and waved at onlookers as she wove through the guests like a pageant queen.

I didn't mean to follow her, but that seemed exactly what I was doing. Wherever she went, I'd find myself around that area, at least at a reasonable distance from her.

Maybe she noticed me, maybe she didn't, but I knew deep down that it was only a matter of time before our paths crossed.

She'd parted ways with her friend and was now standing by the refreshment table, eyes roaming the room with a small smile on her face. It looked like she was

observing the crowd, uninterested in the events unfolding before her.

Perhaps behind the polished exterior was a girl bored out of her mind.

I should approach her and at least start a conversation rather than standing here and watching her from a distance like some creep. I could do that so easily, but a part of me wasn't done admiring her from afar. Maybe I'd approach her when I felt the time was right. But for now, I'd keep watching—unless, of course, the universe orchestrated a situation that would require me to step in.

“Oh, my God!” a deep, masculine voice exclaimed, snapping me back to the present.

Soft murmurs rose from the crowd, and my attention fell on a scene that caused my brows to arch in disbelief and shock. Was it just me, or did the universe hear my thoughts?

A young man had tripped over and accidentally spilled champagne on Ravyn's dress, hence the reason for his previous exclamation.

Ravyn's body stiffened, and she stood frozen, eyes shut, hands hanging in the air as if hoping that this hadn't just happened. Her chest heaved slowly, fingers clenching into fists as she opened her eyes, her gaze dropping to the region around her cleavage.

“I am so sorry, ma'am,” the man apologized, his tone dripping with remorse as he looked around, searching for the means to clean up his mess.

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“Sorry.” He pulled away, fear etched on his face as he watched her scowl deepen. “I was just trying to....”

“Hey,” I called his attention from behind.

He turned, and the moment he saw me, his breath hitched in his throat, amplifying his fear. His throat wobbled as he swallowed hard, cold sweat dampening his forehead. Clearly, he knew who I was, and the terror of my identity had him frozen in place.

“Mr....Mr. Tarasov—I...I didn't know that...” he stuttered, hands slightly trembling. “I swear to God, I didn't mean to—”

“Beat it,” I cut him off, my voice a menacing whisper.

Without a word or a moment of hesitation, he literally ran in the opposite direction, his disappearance bringing her into view. She stood a few paces away, her eyes fixed on me, her expression softening as I approached her.

I halted in front of her, a faint grin twitching at the corner of my lips. “Are you okay?” I asked, my tone laced with a hint of concern.

“My ego's a little bruised, but I'll be fine.” She exhaled sharply, glancing down at her gown. “My dress, though...not so much.”

“Here,” I said, handing her a napkin, keeping my other hand buried in my pocket.

She hesitated for a while before accepting it without breaking eye contact. “Thanks, but I’m not sure this can fix my dress. It’s...it’s completely ruined,” she said, frustration creeping into her tone, her fingers massaging her temple.

Ravyn’s perfume invaded my senses, and her beauty was even more pronounced up close. She was so upset, and with good reason, but somehow, she managed to remain in control of her emotions. Others would have lashed out at the young man, but she didn’t. Instead, she kept her fury in check, refusing to let her anger get the better of her. Impressive.

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She couldn’t walk around the party with her gown ruined, and I had a plan to help. But would she accept my proposal? Would I come off as creepy if I suggested what I had in mind?

It was harmless; however, I wasn’t sure how she was going to take it. The last thing I wanted was to scare her away, but it was the only thing I could think of at the moment.

Deep down in my heart, I knew that if she accepted my proposal, tonight would take an unexpected turn. Would it be for the best or the worst?

There was only one way to find out.

“I can’t fix your dress,” I admitted, watching her swipe the napkin over the dampened region of her gown. “But I can get you out of here if you’d rather not deal with...all of this.” I twirled a finger in the air, encompassing the entire awkward scene.

She raised her head, her brows arched, caught aback by my proposal. Ravyn held my

gaze for a moment as if considering it, and I kept an open mind, willing to respect whatever she decided.

She looked around the room, her eyes dropping ever so slightly as she noticed the unwanted attention and the awkward stares. Ravyn went silent for a few seconds, obviously weighing her options. She could either come with me—a complete stranger—or deal with the mockery of having her dress ruined.

No pressure. No rush. I waited for her response; whatever she decided would be okay with me.

Ravyn rubbed her eyes, her shoulders slumping as she raised her head. “Where would you take me?” she asked, her tone laced with defeat, though a glimmer of defiance crept into her voice.

I was tempted to curl my lips into a smirk, but I couldn't risk coming off as a pervert. “Somewhere a little more...quiet,” I replied, my expression softening for a moment. I kept my tone mild and inviting.

She squinted, brows narrowing. Faint creases formed between them as she pinned her gaze on me like a hook to a fish. Ravyn stared at me as though she was studying my personality and/or motive. Unfortunately for her, I was a master at masking my true intentions, so she'd just have to trust me. I wasn't going to hurt her anyway.

Her eyes dropped to the floor, a million thoughts probably running through that mind of hers. Could I be trusted? Could I not be? Would I hurt her or attack her once we were out of here? Should she go with me, or should she just stay back and endure the embarrassment until the party was over?

All these were possible questions that she could be asking herself right now. I was a complete stranger, a man she'd never met or crossed paths with before. I understood

her skepticism and would understand if she decided it was a bad idea to go with me.

“Fine,” she blurted out as if to prevent herself from changing her mind.

A small smile played on my lips, not enough to spook her but just enough to prove that I didn't have any ill intentions.

And just like that, the night took an unexpected turn. However, the million-dollar question remained: What would happen when we got to my place?

## Page 4

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### Chapter 2 – Ravyn

My manicured fingers wrapped around the slender tube of lipstick, my thumb rotating the base with a soft click. With my lips parted slightly, I leaned in, applying a final precise stroke of color—a faint shade of red.

I jerked my eyes, catching the reflection of myself in the mirror, my sapphire dress glittering in the soft lights. The fabrics hugged me in the right places, accentuating my figure as I stood inches taller on a pair of black stilettos.

The young woman looking back at me shone bright like the morning star with blue eyes sparkling like diamonds.

I heaved a sigh, admiring my reflection in the mirror, my body swaying left and right, eyes drinking in the sight of my curves. I was a twenty-one-year-old plus-sized girl blessed with an amazing body in which I always found pride.

My golden blonde hair cascaded down my shoulders like a waterfall. My light makeup complemented my fair skin with a natural pink undertone that blended so seamlessly.

This was me, Ravyn Jensen, the perfect daughter that James and Harley Jensen expected me to be.

Tonight, I was all dressed up, ready to endure yet another one of those boring, tedious events my parents insisted I attend. Of course, I couldn't object; I didn't exactly have a say in that or anything else, if I'm being honest.

This was all just an act to impress them and present the perfect image befitting the family name and status. It was exhausting most of the time—doing what was expected of me rather than what I truly wanted and pretending to be okay with it.

I wasn't the timid type, was never afraid to speak my mind and express myself. But when it came down to family matters, I would often just listen to Mom and Dad because deep down, I cared about the image and status they'd built over the years.

I wanted to forge my own path, to be free from my father's world of power, wealth, and influence. However, I wasn't going to be rebellious about it. I'd figure something out sooner or later.

But for now, their roof, their rules.

My lips curled into a plastic smile that looked as genuine as they came, a skill I'd honed over the years from attending galas and social events like the one for tonight. These gatherings were nothing but a performance—a meticulously choreographed dance of fake smiles, forced conversations, and a desperate need for escape.

Oh, what another joyful night of playing dress up and pretending to be interested in people I didn't know and might never run into again.

I grabbed my purse from the bed and strode out of the room, my heels clicking against the floor.

“Oh, my God, she's gonna be the death of me,” Dad grumbled, glancing at his gold-plated watch as he paced the living room.

“Would you relax? She's getting ready,” Mom said, sitting on a sofa with her legs crossed. A hint of amusement crept into her tone.



“We’re late, Harley,” he replied, stopping in his tracks, his voice dripping with urgency.

“I’m ready,” I announced from the head of the steps where I’d been standing for the past few seconds.

“Oh, finally! Thank God,” Dad said, relief lacing his tone as he jerked his head toward my direction.

Dad's gaze lingered on me, his brows rising as his expression softened. It was as though his little annoyance at my slight delay had dissipated the moment he saw me. He buried his hands in his pocket, his white tux complementing his hair and beard.

His name should have been “White,” considering his love for the color, as virtually everything about him was always white. Most of his clothes were white, and his cars were also white, as was the living room and his master bedroom.

Mom rose to her feet, her gaze fixed on me and lips curving into a smile. Her blonde hair was styled into a bun and piled on top of her head. Her black gown simmered in the lights, the tiny pearls that adorned it glittering like diamonds.

“You look amazing, sweetheart,” she complimented, her blue eyes crinkling at the corners.

“Thanks, Mom,” I replied, my cheeks flushing at her remark as I descended the stairs.

Dad adjusted his wire-rimmed glasses, a finger tugging at the bridge. “You look lovely,” he said, and without leaving any room for my response, he added. “Now, can we get going?” He led the way, heading toward the front door.

Mom and I exchanged glances, giggling softly as we followed up behind him.

The drive was about thirty minutes long, but eventually, we got to the penthouse. I had no idea what or who was being celebrated; all I knew was that I was here to mingle with the society elites.

Mom and Dad had deluded themselves into believing that the reason they always insisted I tag along for occasions like this was to provide networking opportunities. But that wasn't the truth. It was a masquerade to hide the real reason: They were using my presence as a symbol of the family's perfection.

They had a reputation to protect, and I was the immaculate and refined tool they could flaunt. It was a real piece of work, living up to their standards, playing the role of the exquisite and ideal daughter. Spotless.

The opulent space was already filled with the who's who of high society, the wealthy and influential. A good number of these people were nothing but crooks and criminals, masquerading as humanitarians and philanthropists.

Foes and allies alike mingled, chattering with plastic smiles as though they wouldn't turn around and stab one another in the back once they got the chance. This hypocrisy was one of the many reasons I loathed events like this; it was really just a gathering of wolves in sheep's clothing. Nothing more, nothing less.

This was the part where I would join in the hypocrisy, smiling and waving at folks that I didn't give two shits about.

Cool jazz music wafted through the air, performed by a live band on a raised platform. The sweet aroma of champagne blended with the scents of different colognes and perfumes, adding to the sophistication of the space.

Warm glows from hanging chandeliers illuminated the guests, whose elegant dresses and tuxes simmered in the lights. Soft murmurs of conversations weaved in and out

of the jazz rhythms, creating a serene and intimate atmosphere.

“Ah, Mr. Jensen, what a pleasant surprise,” a deep, hoarse voice caught my attention.

I turned toward the speaker, watching the black-suited man approaching us. He was nearly as old as my Dad, with a bald head and facial hair. He was a portly man with a mean face and a scar that resembled a cut over his left eye.

“Mr. Fisher,” Dad greeted with a smile as he halted in front of us. “How long has it been since we last saw each other?”

Fisher laughed, throwing his head back. “So long, my friend.” He extended a hand, and Dad shook it. “You look well.”

“As do you,” Dad replied.

“Mrs. Jensen, still as radiant as always,” Fisher said, kissing Mom's hand with a sketched bow.

Mom's response was a bright smile, her lips parting in elegance. I steeled myself, ready for an introduction, considering that this man's face was unfamiliar. Not like I'd remember him after tonight, anyway.

“Mr. Fisher, you remember our daughter, right?” Dad's voice cut through my thoughts, returning me to the present.

My gaze met with his, and in the depths of those piercing green eyes was a glint of infatuation, a really disturbing one. With a discreet move, he checked me out, his eyes roaming my body as he reached to take my hand.

I grimaced inwardly, struggling not to show my disgust, but my expression faltered,

my face twisted in distaste.

“My, my, my,” Fisher said, his voice dropping to a low whisper as he took my hand, his lips pressed against the back of my fingers.

I felt a pang of irritation within me, my lips curling into a subtle snarl.

“The last time I saw you, you were just a child,” he continued, clicking his tongue, amusement flickering in those eyes that wandered around my body. “Now, look at you...ripe in all the right places.”

A faint scowl flashed across my face, mirroring my displeasure, repulsed by his touch.

“Okay, Mr. Fisher.” Mom laughed lightly, stepping forward to take my hand off his lips, her action deliberate yet respectful. “I think we're done here,” she said, her gaze fixed on him with a wide plastic smile on her face.

His lips twitched at the corner, and his eyes shifted across Mom and Dad's faces in a brief moment of awkward silence. I was grateful that she came to my rescue in the nick of time, but I still couldn't understand why.

This wasn't the first time a man decades older than me had been overly nice to her daughter. However, something about Mr. Fisher seemed to have awakened her protective side.

Even Dad didn't look so pleased, but he retained his grin.

“Well,” Fisher sighed, breaking the silence. “I'll see you folks around then. Ladies.” He looked at Mom and me before tapping Dad's shoulder and walking away to mingle with the other guests.

“Thanks for the save, Mom,” I said, a smile spreading across my face. “But what was that about?”

She blew a raspberry, waving a dismissive hand. “Don't worry yourself, sweetheart. It's nothing.” She beamed at me.

I knew there was more to the story, but I wasn't going to pursue it further. Perhaps they knew something dark about Mr. Fisher, and they didn't want me to get involved with him. Not to worry, though—not even in my next life would I get involved with that pervert.

Dad was attending to some of his business partners and associates, some of whom I recognized, and others I didn't. Mom was on her phone, scrolling through social media, giggling at whatever she was watching.

I let out a sigh, the inevitable boredom slowly creeping in. A waiter was strolling past me with a silver tray of champagne and canapés, and I helped myself to a flute.

As I took a sip, my gaze swept across the room and settled on a familiar face that caused my eyes to squint. I peered closer, and my brows arched in surprise as I recognized the young girl by the bar. “Tessa?” I whispered and turned to Mom. “I'll be right back.”

She was so engrossed in her phone that I wasn't sure she even heard me.

With graceful steps, I glided over to the bar where she was standing with two other girls. “Tessa O'Brian,” I called, my smile broadening.

She turned in my direction, her movement swift and fluid as though my voice had rung a bell in her head. Her dark doe eyes widened in surprise, jaw dropping in shock. “O...M...G,” she muttered the words with a deliberate slowness. “Ravyn

Jensen?" She chuckled, spreading her arms.

"In the flesh." I laughed, delighted to have bumped into her.

Tessa slipped into my embrace, our hands wrapped around each other. "Oh, my God! Look at you!" Her eyes traversed my body.

"Look at me? Look at you!" I rephrased, drinking in the sight of her gorgeous body. "You look amazing, Tess!"

"Says the girl who's glowing in elegance." She laughed, gladness dancing in her eyes.

Tessa wasn't as tall as me, but she was just as beautiful. Her silky black hair fell loosely on her shoulder. Her full lips were a deep, rich pink, curved into a perpetual smile. Her pale skin glowed with a soft, ethereal light, and her incredible black-as-coal eyes seemed to hold a world of emotion.

"It's really good to see you again, Tess," I said, admiring the lovely cream-colored gown that hugged her like a second skin. "How are you enjoying the party?"

"You call this a party?" Her brows yanked up in disbelief, her voice laced with sarcasm. "Please." She rolled her eyes dramatically.

I chuckled, feeling a wind of relief wash over me. At least I wasn't the only one who thought this party was a snooze-fest. "I take it you're not having the time of your life."

Tess snorted. "Are you kidding me? It's a nightmare." She plucked a flute of champagne from a nearby waitress's tray and raised it in a toast. "Cheers to boredom."

“Cheers.” I laughed lightly, clinking my glass against hers.

We sipped from our flutes, and as we caught up on old times, my eyes wandered the opulent space until I spotted him. He stood across the hall, his dark, sleepy eyes scanning the room with a chilling intensity.

His imposing height commanded my attention, his rigid frame bulging out from his impeccably black tailored suit. His dark hair was attractively unkempt, giving off a sexy appearance. He exuded confidence and a sinister aura that made my skin crawl. Something was off about him, something dark and threatening. Yet, I felt drawn to this strange man.

Next thing I knew, his cold eyes met mine, magnetically attracting me to him. I felt a shiver run down my spine, and my breath hitched in my throat. Tearing my gaze away seemed impossible, and my heart was pounding in my chest. This staring contest had me glued, inflicting me with desire and fear. He was easy on the eyes, but at the same time, he looked cold and dead. What kind of man was that, and why did I find him ridiculously attractive?

I could feel the world around us melt away as he held my gaze, his expression unreadable. The longer we stared at each other, the faster my heart beat.

“Oh, no, dear. Don't even think about it.” Tessa's voice cut through my thoughts.

Then, and only then, was I able to tear my gaze from his unsettling gaze. I glanced in her direction and realized her eyes were on the same man I was looking at.

“That's Lev Tarasov, and trust me....” She faced me, her voice dropping to a deadly warning. “He's bad news. Best to stay away.”

Why did her words have the exact opposite effect on me? Now, I found him even

more irresistible.

“Word in the street is that he's the devil's advocate—a demon with ice in his veins,” she continued, her tone dripping with a mix of dread and disdain. “It is believed that he has no soul, no emotions, no conscience...just pure evil.”

I scoffed dismissively, unwilling to entertain the possibility of her claims. “Come on, Tess, don't tell you actually believe all that nonsense because it sounds like you just described Dracula,” I said, glancing back at him.

“It's not nonsense, Ravyn,” she said, looking at me. “His family has a connection to the Russian mafia.”

“Mafia?” My brows arched, mirroring my disbelief. “Do they still exist?” I returned my eyes to this irresistibly hot man who had succeeded in stealing my attention.

Tessa was further explaining herself, but I wasn't really interested in the allegations against this man, Lev Tarasov. I could sense something sinister about him, yet I couldn't stop myself from being attracted.

The soft jazz music played on, the cool melody wafting through the air as a few couples waltzed on the dance floor.

Andrey had dematerialized, following up a possible lead to help catch that son of a bitch, Arseni, leaving by myself.

A waiter glided past me, and I plucked a glass of champagne from his silver tray, eyes darting across the space. There were a lot of folks here tonight, allies and foes alike, and at least one of them would know about Arseni's whereabouts.

The bastard had eluded us for quite some time now. He'd proven to be a difficult man



to find, using all the tricks he learned from us to stay hidden. However, tonight would be the night that I finally got hold of him. I was done playing hide and seek with that asshole and couldn't wait to see the look in his eyes when I caught him.

It would be fun watching him fidget, begging for mercy, but he'd get none. Arseni had bitten off more than he could chew, and now it was high time he choked.

However, despite my determination to get a hold of him, there was a little problem—the blonde girl across the room. Ravyn Jensen. I had sensed from the onset that she was going to be a distraction, and as it turned out, I wasn't wrong.

It didn't matter how many times I tried to stay focused on the mission; my mind wouldn't stop thinking about her. I'd lost count of the number of times I'd stolen glances at her, reveling in her amazing smile even though I wasn't the one she was smiling at.

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Ravyn rubbed her eyes, her shoulders slumping as she raised her head. “Where would you take me?” she asked, her tone laced with defeat, though a glimmer of defiance crept into her voice.

I was tempted to curl my lips into a smirk, but I couldn't risk coming off as a pervert. “Somewhere a little more...quiet,” I replied, my expression softening for a moment. I kept my tone mild and inviting.

She squinted, brows narrowing. Faint creases formed between them as she pinned her gaze on me like a hook to a fish. Ravyn stared at me as though she was studying my personality and/or motive. Unfortunately for her, I was a master at masking my true intentions, so she'd just have to trust me. I wasn't going to hurt her anyway.

Her eyes dropped to the floor, a million thoughts probably running through that mind of hers. Could I be trusted? Could I not be? Would I hurt her or attack her once we were out of here? Should she go with me, or should she just stay back and endure the embarrassment until the party was over?

All these were possible questions that she could be asking herself right now. I was a complete stranger, a man she'd never met or crossed paths with before. I understood

her skepticism and would understand if she decided it was a bad idea to go with me.

“Fine,” she blurted out as if to prevent herself from changing her mind.

A small smile played on my lips, not enough to spook her but just enough to prove that I didn't have any ill intentions.

And just like that, the night took an unexpected turn. However, the million-dollar question remained: What would happen when we got to my place?

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The soft hum of the engine filled the car's cabin, puncturing the silence between us as I sat in the front passenger seat, looking out the window. He was nestled behind the wheel, his sharp eyes fixed on the road ahead.

This was a huge risk, and I only realized it when I stepped into his black Ferrari. I had never met this man before, and if he was anything like what Tessa had described, then it was a bad idea.

However, a part of me didn't share her opinion. She might be right about him, but she also might not be. For all I knew, those allegations against him could just be a ploy to ruin his name. Whatever the case, I didn't change the fact that I was super fascinated by him.

I could sense the negative energy oozing from him, but I couldn't help but be drawn to him like a moth to a flame.

Usually, I wouldn't have accepted his proposal to take me somewhere quiet, away from those people—all those eyes and witnesses. But I simply couldn't turn him down.

A couple of reasons drove me to accept to leave with him regardless of the part of me that had objected.

To begin with, my dress was completely ruined, as was my mood, and I couldn't walk around the party reeking of champagne. The stares of the onlookers alone had embarrassed me to death, and there was no way in hell that I was going to spend another minute at that party.



Also, I was already bored out of my mind and needed an escape from this snooze-fest. Not to mention, the proposal to leave had come from the one person who had stolen my attention.

Maybe he felt drawn to me, too, considering that he'd been following me around back at the party. It wasn't creepy or anything, and I didn't get any bad feelings about it. The whole situation with him was just a pull of attraction that neither of us could resist.

I enjoyed the awareness that he was watching me, maybe even drooling over me, which made my fingertips tingle. Not once, not twice, had I caught him staring, and although his expression was blank, those hollow eyes betrayed emotions.

He was mysterious in more ways than one, and that mystery was one of the reasons I was fascinated by him. Of all the men at the party, he was the only one who had me enthralled, and I wasn't the kind to be easily drawn by men.

I needed to understand the reason for this strange spark that he had ignited in me. I'd never been so attracted to someone to the point where I lost my sense of reasoning before.

Over the years, I'd learned to control my emotions and not let them get the better of me. However, tonight was different. With him, it was like I'd thrown away all of my training, standards, and rationality.

I knew he had a bad aura—I could sense it, and something about him exuded evil, trouble, and danger. Yet, despite all of this, I was willing to risk it to find closure on why I felt the way I did.

This man was twice my age, maybe even as old as my dad, and seemed to be a lot worse than that perv, Fisher. He had a sinister look in his cold eyes that could scare

the living daylight out of anyone.

I saw it happen firsthand with the guy who spilled that drink on me. The way he fidgeted when he saw him was a clear indication that this man was deadly.

Yet I couldn't stay away.

It was as though setting eyes on him had awakened the wild part of me that craved the freedom to do as I pleased. I wasn't Mother Theresa; I was far from being a saint, but prior to tonight, I'd always been able to keep my feelings in check. The fact that this time, I couldn't was rather intriguing, and I needed to know why.

A million questions were tugging at my mind at the same time, threatening to rip it apart. However, the prominent one was: Why wasn't I afraid of him? He could be what Tessa believed he was, yet I wasn't terrified for some reason. Instead, I felt peaceful, relaxed, and safe. Why was that?

As he drove, he'd steal glances at me, and a few times, our eyes met in a fleeting moment, my heart skipping every time. He made me feel a certain way that I couldn't explain, but all I knew was that I loved the feeling.

“My place is up ahead,” he said, his husky voice sending jolts of electricity surging through my body.

I looked in his direction, catching a glimpse of those eyes—dark and hollow. My lips parted into a smile.

After a short drive, we approached the outskirts of town, the cityscape giving way to rolling hills and towering trees. My breath logged in my throat for a moment, and my eyes widened as a glimmer of fear crept in. However, it was just my natural instinct kicking in.

We took a turn, the car slowing down as we neared an imposing structure—automated gates adorned with intricate ironwork. Through the giant bars, I could see glimpses of the vast expanse on the other side. The gates swung open with a soft creak, welcoming us into what seemed like a secret realm set apart from the outside world.

He navigated the car through the gates, and we glided along a snake-like driveway flanked by towering trees and meticulously trimmed lawns. This place was massive, exuding wealth and power. The landscape unfolded like a canvas of emerald green, a beauty to behold.

We snaked through the compound, ascending a gentle slope, and soon, the mansion came into view. Its magnificent and imposing facade was a perfect blend of classical and modern architecture, simply breathtaking.

He steered the car around a circular fountain, bringing it to a smooth halt at the building's grand entrance. He killed the engine and turned to face me, his expression softening ever so slightly. “We're here,” he announced, his voice a gentle whisper. “Let's get you inside.”

As he stepped out of the vehicle, I opened the door and did the same. The soothing sound of water from the fountain—dancing and splashing in perfect harmony—filled the air, blending with fresh flowers' sweet fragrance.

The night was cold, and the gentle breeze brushed against my face, whipping my hair into a frenzy. I squinted, walking over to the entrance, where a pair of huge stone gargoyles stood sentinel, their eyes seeming to watch with quiet intensity.

A little creepy, but okay.

Above, a starry expanse adorned the celestial canvas, the full moon casting an

ethereal glow over the compound. The mansion loomed ahead of me, its turrets and gargoyles reaching toward the sky like skeletal fingers.

This looked so much like a scene from a Gothic horror novel, the kind where a young, naive girl ventured into an old, creepy mansion and never came out.

I half-expected to see a ghostly figure lurking in the shadows, yet for some reason, I was so calm and unafraid.

He opened the door and ushered me in, the grand foyer's high ceilings enveloping us. Chandelier lights brightened up the space, the warm glow reflecting on the polished marble floor as he led me through the opulent space, our footsteps echoing off the high ceilings.

As we entered the living room, I was struck by the perfect balance of modern style and luxurious comfort. Low-slung plush sofas and armchairs in rich cream leather were strategically arranged around a gleaming glass coffee table beside a crackling fireplace.

In a few easy strides, he waltzed over to a minibar with a fluid motion, his long steps eating up the distance. He shot a quick glance at me, eyes crinkling at the corners. "Need a drink?"

"Yes, please," I replied, standing by the fireplace, my gaze sweeping across the opulent setting.

He carefully selected a bottle and two delicate glasses from the minibar. With practiced precision, he opened the bottle and generously poured a portion into each glass before returning to me.

"Here you go," he said, his voice deep as he handed me a glass.

“Thanks,” I muttered, accepting it with a faint grin.

“We haven't been properly introduced,” he began, his eyes fixed on me. “Lev Tarasov.” His hand stretched out.

I felt a flutter in my chest, my breath ceased for a moment, and I almost forgot my name. “Ravyn Jensen,” I said, delicately clasping my palm in his firm yet gentle grip.

An awkward silence fell between us, a strange tension rising as we stared at each other. At some point, I couldn't remember the reason I was here—it suddenly didn't matter. What did was the unspoken words, the chemistry that crackled in the air.

“So...Lev....” I finally broke the silence, my heart pounding in my chest as some illicit thoughts ran through my mind. However, I struggled to maintain my composure, fighting the sensual images in my head. “Are you always this nice to strangers, or is it just the pretty ones?” My lips twitched at the corners, my eyes jerking to meet his.

“I've been called many things, but nice isn't one of them,” he said, holding my gaze with an intense stare that had me hooked. His expression softened slightly, and a small smile played on his enticing lips. “However, I did see a pretty girl in need of help, and I decided to step in.”

“So, what? You offered to help because I'm pretty?” I asked, my eyes squinting. I watched his reaction as if seeking clarity, whereas I was only teasing him.

Lev took a sip from his glass. “Perhaps,” he said, his voice barely above a whisper. “Or perhaps because my reason transcended your beauty.”

“How so?” I asked, my heart racing as I took gentle steps forward, my gaze locked on his.

His eyes roamed my body, head to toe, before settling on mine, with those lips quirking into a smirk. “Let's just say you're...attractive...irresistible,” he admitted, sipping from his glass, his gaze unapologetic.

I halted in front of him, barely inches away, a rush of adrenaline coursing through my body, and my breath was hard to catch. Neither of us would break eye contact, and the excitement that came with this staring contest was overwhelming.

The temptation to give in to this jolt of lust surging through me grew stronger by the minute. All I wanted to do was claim those lips and devour them, and I'd done so already in my head. I just needed the courage to make the move.

He seemed to be in control of his emotions, but his eyes betrayed him. He wanted me as much as I wanted him, but Lev was choosing to take things slow. If he rushed this, it would make him look like a pervert, and I admired his strength to stay in control and composed.

I took his glass out of his hands and bent over with a slow, seductive pose, setting both glasses—mine and his—on the coffee table. “Well, here we are....” I straightened, eyes locking on him with an intimate stare, my tone a sweet whisper. “Alone, away from prying eyes.” My manicured hands brushed over the fabrics of his black suit. “What are you gonna do about that...attraction?” The slight pause came when I bit my lower lip, eyes boring deeper into his.

“What do you propose?” he asked, his husky voice deepening, lips curling up into a seductive grin.

My eyes traversed his form, and my heart pounded loudly in my chest. I battered my eyelashes at him, leaning forward to close the distance between us. I shoved my voice of reasoning to the back of my head. Right here and now, there was no reason for me to pretend, none whatsoever. This was my chance to do whatever I wanted without

caring about holding up a perfect image.

My emotions were all over the place, driving me to go wild like a loose cannon. Don't think. Just do it. Go for it, I thought in my mind. He reached out, and feeling his hand on my arm, my body trembled, yearning for him.

In his eyes was a glint of desire dancing in their depths, and despite his composure, the subtle print of his cock exposed his longing for me.

Like a drum, my heart continued to pound, anxiety washing over me, threatening to steal my breath completely.

I'd never wanted anyone so badly before, and a mix of fear and lust surged through me. I was afraid of the outcome should I give in to this temptation. Yet, I wanted to satisfy my craving. I wanted to feel his touch and eventually have him buried deep inside me.

I wanted this, and I wanted it so bad that just the mere thought of it had me wet in my pants. Screw it!

With an intense rush, I dared to claim his lips, damning the consequences of my action. This was a mistake, and I might regret it, but I'd worry about that later. For now, I just wanted to get laid by him.

He kissed me back, slipping his tongue into my mouth, and I did the same, feeling his breath against my face. I could taste the wine on his lips and tongue, which fueled my passion.

His strong arms wrapped around my waist, fingers pressing my ass as our kiss intensified. Our heads tilted to the rhythm of the passion growing between us.

I was so horny that my whole body shuddered at the sudden chill that ran down my spine. I cupped his face in my palms, my lips devouring his with a fervent intensity that left us both breathless.

Consumed with the flames of passion and desire, I pushed against his chest, and he stepped backward, deliberately falling onto the couch behind him. I wasn't strong enough to move such a man whose feet were rooted to the ground. However, the power of a horny woman couldn't be overemphasized.

He lay on the couch, leaning against the backrest, a smirk lining the corners of his lips.

My chest heaved rapidly as I burned with desire, my nipples hardening at the realization of what was already happening. I tried to stop myself, but I was too far gone, drowning in a sea of ecstasy. The lioness in me had been set loose, and there was no going back.

I straddled him, grinding over the print of his cock as I shed his coat and tossed it aside. My hands roamed his body, fingers struggling with the buttons of his crisp white shirt.

He edged closer, reclaiming my lips, a hand massaging the back of my neck. Like the fireplace, the flame in me burned so bright I felt consumed by it. Lev devoured my lips, tongues twirling in our mouths.

Unapologetically, I ripped the buttons off his shirt because I wasn't patient enough to undo them. Maybe I'd be embarrassed about that later, but now was not the time to get distracted.

A glint of shock flickered in his eyes at my sudden action, but I ignored it, surrendering completely to the feeling that was driving me nuts. I kissed from the



nape of his neck to his broad chest and chiseled abs. My hands caressed his torso, fingers tuning his hard nipples.

Fuck! He was so masculine—strong and sexy.

A shiver coursed through me as his fingers trailed down the zipper of my gown, the soft rasp of the teeth sending tremors down my core. His hands caressed my back, his strong palms brushing against my soft skin, amplifying my lust.

I straightened my posture, sitting astride him as I slid down the fabric of my gown, revealing the delicate curves of my breasts. I felt a rush of excitement as I exposed myself to him, my heart racing with anticipation.

His hand flew to my chest, fondling the lacy black bra that cradled my gentle swells. His touch prompted a moan out of me as I ground against his groin, basking in the erotic feeling of his cock beneath me.

Both his hands went around me, and with a fluid motion, he unhooked my bra and slid it down my shoulders, my breasts exposed. He took a moment to appreciate my moderately sized mounds, his lips curling into a faint smirk.

I edged closer, my waist twirling over his groin as he took my breast in his mouth, sucking on each of them, one after the other, with expert precision. His hands squeezed my voluptuous curves, switching between my peaks, sucking and fondling.

I burned with desire, a shiver sprinting through my body as my heart swelled with pleasure. His teeth deliciously grazed my nipples when sucking my breasts, fingers tuning them when fondling soft curves.

His touch was killing me, awakening every sexual flame I'd ever felt.

Sliding off him, I settled on my knees at the base of the couch, fingers unbuckling his belt while holding his gaze. I tugged his pants by the waistband, yanking it off him to reveal his nice pair of boxers.

I straightened on my knees, digging my hand to withdraw his cock, and the moment I did, my heart skipped at the sight. It was heavy to begin with, long and veiny.

Lev's shaft loomed before me like the Eiffel Tower, his bald balls inviting me. I lowered my head, taking his length in my mouth, my tongue twirling around his cap.

His muscles relaxed, a deep groan escaping him as I stroked his cock while going down on him. His hands flew into my hair, fingers massaging my scalp as the couch crunched beneath him.

I bent over and took his balls in my mouth, sucking delicately while my hand stroked his length, smearing drool over it.

The thick sound of his groan hinted at his pleasure, and that was encouraging.

Once done, I rose to my feet, taking off my panties, my eyes locked on his face as I straddled him. I took his cock in my hand, positioning it at my entrance. With deliberate slowness, I sat on his groin, his length traveling deep inside me. The drool smeared over it served as lube, easing his thrust.

I let out a soft purr, feeling a rush of excitement, my core trembling as he penetrated me. "Oh, my God," I muttered under my breath, biting my lower lip as my eyes shut in ecstasy.

His hands grabbed my waist, directing my movement, my hips swaying back and forth. I wrapped my arms around his neck and arched my back, my breasts sticking out in his face.

I felt so alive with him buried deep inside me, his long cock hitting my G-spot. I writhed against him, twisting and twirling my hips, seeking a deeper connection.

He grabbed my ass, fingers digging into my flesh while I ground on his shaft. My body shuddered at his touch—his hands traversing my body, tracing my curves and contours.

I threw my head back, basking in the feeling of ecstasy coursing through me. My hands shot up into my hair, my body writhing on the long shaft inside me. Overwhelmed with pleasure, I moaned softly, feeling his hands on me, his mouth on my breasts. The chill of his tongue licking my erect nipples sent shivers down my spine.

As our bodies collided in the heat of passion, the tension between us intensified, and gradually, I began to quicken my pace. From underneath me, he did the same, his thrusts growing more and more powerful with each stroke.

My breasts bounced up and down as I rode him hard and fast, my heart threatening to explode from all that ecstasy jolting across my body. His urgent plunges hit the right places, causing my eyes to roll back in sheer pleasure.

I was losing my mind, his touch and kisses taking me to places I had never dreamed of. My heart raced in my chest, my pulse quickening at his powerful drives.

Lev's fierce strokes intensified with each passing moment, his relentless thrusts digging deeper inside me. I held on tightly, steeling myself at the sound of his primal growl. My body stiffened, feeling his length extend further into my cunt. His groin slapped against mine, and his groans deepened, his intense plunges accentuating his urgency.

My moans grew louder, a thrill of climax rushing through me. He drove deeper and

faster with vigorous strokes that made me crave his load.

I wanted to feel him inside me—it was all shades of wrong, but I didn't care. I wanted his cum, and I wanted it deep inside my pussy. Why did I feel so naughty with him? Why did I completely lose control?

He growled like a beast, pushing his hips upward, eyes glued to mine as he released himself inside me. His legs trembled, his load filling up my cunt.

My lips curled into a self-satisfied smile, my palms circling his head, feeling the warmth of his essence. My pussy tingled, accepting his load, and a soft sigh escaped my mouth.

It felt so good—his cum in me, his hands around me, and my sweaty body resting against his. I was at peace in his strong arms, exhausted and drained but more than willing to go multiple more rounds with him.

This was an opportunity that I planned to utilize, as I wasn't sure what would happen after.

No one had ever made me feel this way before, and I'd never lost control in front of any man prior to tonight. It was amazing to be myself, to express and act on my deepest, darkest desires without having to pretend to be who I wasn't.

I'd just met this man and had absolutely no idea who he was except for the scary tales Tessa had told me about him. She'd be disappointed if she realized that I not only went against her warning but actually followed him home and had sex with him.

Fuck, I had sex with this stranger!

Ironically, it was the most mind-blowing sex I'd ever had. Never had I ever ridden

any man the way I rode him. It was different with him; I didn't know why or how, but it was.

As I pulled back my head to look at his face, his lips curled into a faint smile, his fingers combing through my hair. I could tell this wasn't just some random sex. No. It was beyond that, and something told me that this was the start of something new.

The question was, would it be good or bad?

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

These past few days had been blissful, a contrast to my regular life. Ever since our last night together, it was as though something had awakened in me, like a part of me had been unlocked. She'd ignited a flame I didn't know I had, and now, it wouldn't stop burning.

It wasn't just the incredible sex anymore. No. It was more than that. This was a connection much deeper than sex, and as fascinating as this unusual feeling was, it was also concerning. I felt like I was sailing into uncharted territory, something I was unfamiliar with. And although it felt great, I couldn't ignore the pit in my stomach.

Why? I wasn't sure.

Maybe because Ravyn and I had been spending a lot of time together since that incredible night. For regular folks, getting attached to a woman after a night with her might be considered normal. However, that wasn't the case with me.

I wasn't the kind easily drawn to women, let alone the same woman. I'd always been so focused on the Bratva business and how to expand our territories that women were hardly ever on my mind. Every once in a while, I could get myself a woman to pass the time. The moment she served her purpose, and I was satisfied, I'd move on like it never happened.

Serious relationships were never my thing. They were a distraction that I wasn't ready for. Being committed to a woman would essentially affect my commitment to the Bratva, and I didn't want that. That used to be my opinion, anyway.

However, that opinion was gradually becoming obsolete in my mind. Why? Because

Ravyn had slithered her way into my heart.

It was both intriguing and concerning at the same time. These days, she was all that I could think of. This woman occupied my mind all day long, and I found myself always wanting to be around her. It had never happened to me before, and regardless of my reservations, I couldn't stop myself.

Over the last few days, I'd hung out with her more than I had with any other woman. It was like I simply couldn't stay away from her no matter how hard I tried. There was something that always drew me to her like a moth to a flame, something rather beguiling.

What did she do to me that night that had me spellbound to her? Well, if I'm being honest, no woman had ever ridden me the way that she did the last time. It wasn't necessarily the ride itself but the emotional connection we shared during the process.

“Emotional.” That was the key word.

Feelings were alien to me, and to a lot of folks who knew the type of man that I was, I was emotionally dead. Some even thought that I was incapable of feeling anything other than hatred and anger. Were they wrong? No.

But for some inexplicable reason, this young woman had stirred up something in me. She had managed to flip the switch of my humanity, lighting up the emotional part of me. How she was able to do that after one night was still a marvel to me—I couldn't explain it even if I tried.

Since our first night together, we'd gone on a few evening drives across the city and had dinner at a fancy restaurant more than once. The more we hung out, the more I grew attached to her. I'd grown deeply fond of her, and I was starting to cherish every moment with her.

Ravyn wasn't just a beauty blessed with amazing curvature; she was more than that. The young woman was also intellectual and seemed like the kind who would help with meaningful insights on any matter. Her ability to think outside the box was intriguing, and that made me realize just how much value she had.

For a girl her age, she sure was a lot smarter than some of her peers, more mature and thought-provoking. Each time we talked, she had me transfixed by her sense of reasoning, and sometimes, I would even forget that I was talking to a twenty-one-year-old.

She was intelligent, beautiful, and sexy—the complete package. Could that be the reason I was so attracted to her—so drawn to her? She had everything I wanted in a woman and was into me as much as I was into her. Why else would she honor all of my invites to hang out?

The way she looked at me, her radiant smile and sparkling eyes, always prompted a flutter in my chest. Ravyn had me hooked to her, and from the way I saw it, she'd crept deeper into my heart than I knew.

Tonight, we were together, having dinner on a rooftop lounge, the cityscape unfolding before us like a canvas of lights. The view beneath was a breathtaking backdrop for our evening tryst.

The sweet scent of Chateau Lafite Rothschild 1787 and the rich aroma of the refined meals set on the table between us wafted through the air. I sat across from her, relaxed in my chair, eyes fixed on her face, illuminated by the lounge's warm glow. Her eyes sparkled like diamonds against the inky night sky, and her enticing lips, painted a shade of red, curved into a bright smile.

Her fingers cradled the delicate glass of wine, her hand moving in a slow, sensual rhythm as she twirled it, eyes locked on mine. We'd been staring at each other for the



past minute, and neither of us had said a word.

It was comforting, sitting in this peaceful silence, watching her, looking through the window to her soul.

The night's cool air brushed against our skins as the stars twinkled above, the moon's light casting its ethereal glow. It was as though time had stood still so we'd savor the moment and appreciate the deep connection we shared.

It was almost impossible to tear my gaze off her, and I didn't want to. Why would I? It was peaceful and comforting as opposed to my regular life. Ironically, she had no idea the kind of man I was or the despicable things I'd done. Would she still have that endearing look in her eyes when she found out the truth about who I was?

As much as I pretended like it wouldn't affect me if anything should change between us, I knew deep down that was a lie. I'd grown so attached to her in such a short period of time, and now that might be a problem.

My eyes left hers for a moment, hovering over her body as I drank in her beauty. Her golden blonde hair was styled into a bun and packed atop her head, two strands falling out to frame her face. She had light, natural makeup on, which blended with her skin tone, accentuating her radiance.

Her spaghetti-strapped blue gown hugged her in the right places, highlighting her curves and contours. Her gentle swells were perfectly nestled behind the fabrics of her dress, revealing a tantalizing glimpse of her cleavage.

She caught me staring at her voluptuous curves and teased with a soft tone, her eyes crinkling at the corners, "My eyes are up here." Her fingers—index and middle—gestured toward her face.

I lifted my gaze and met hers, a smirk playing on my lips.

She set the glass on the white cloth spread over the table and leaned in, her blue eyes boring into mine. “So, Lev...” she began, her soft tone hinting at an impending question.

I kept an open mind even though a part of me could almost tell that her question might strike a nerve.

“What is it you do for a living?” she asked, her gaze never leaving mine.

My heart skipped a beat like I wasn't prepared for this moment. She was bound to ask me this sooner or later, and I thought that I was ready, but clearly, I wasn't. Hearing those words from her hit me differently.

However, I maintained a stoic expression, my fingers cradling the stem of my glass as I sipped my wine.

Beneath the curiosity that laced her voice was an edge of caution, as if she could sense the shadow of truth. She held my gaze, her eyes boring deeper into mine like she was studying me—or at least attempting to do so.

“We've been hanging out for some time now, and I still don't know much about you,” she added, her tone calm and smooth. “So pardon my curiosity.”

Curiosity is not a sin. But it kills the cat, I thought to myself. Some things were better left unsaid, and not everyone could handle the truth about me. Despite her wisdom and intelligence, I wasn't entirely sure that she was ready for the answer to her question.

I set down the glass and dabbed my mouth with a napkin. “Business,” came my reply,

simple and casual but laced with finality.

There was no need to elaborate, and besides, my response wasn't entirely false. The Bratva organization was a business, a sector of which I ran. She didn't have to know more than that for now. If Ravyn wanted to know the whole truth, she'd have to earn it, but at this point, she would have to make do with my reply.

She squinted, her brows narrowing ever so slightly. It was clear that she was not satisfied with my response, and with the way her sharp blue eyes stared deeply into mine, I could tell that she was searching for more.

For the next few seconds, a deafening silence fell between us, her gaze hooked to my face. It was obvious that Ravyn had more to say and maybe even more questions to ask. But despite my welcoming demeanor, a subtle reserve lingered, and she was smart enough to detect the boundaries I had established.

She leaned back in her chair, picking up her glass. Ravyn took a sip, her tongue sensually sticking out to lick the wine on her lips. She cast a seductive look at me, hinting at the fire ignited within her.

The sudden switch from a tense and awkward atmosphere to a sensual and flirtatious one was a clear indication that she had decided not to pry. Ravyn's decision to respect my boundaries and let it slide, at least for now, proved her remarkable level of maturity and sensitivity.

Her lips curled into a sexy grin, her blue eyes sparkling with mirth as she stared at me. Underneath the table, I could feel her foot traveling up my leg, toiling with my emotions.

A teasing sensation jolted through my body, prompting a faint smirk as I watched her slowly encircle her finger around the rim of her glass.

I held her gaze, basking in the sexual energy she exuded. In her eyes was a glint of an unspoken challenge, one that I was willing to accept.

My erection was growing harder by the second, the heat of passion getting hotter and hotter.

Ravyn effortlessly stirred up something in me—something vulnerable but dangerous.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I lay in bed, my heart racing with anticipation as I thought about how the drastic turn my life had just taken. Was I ready for this? Would I be able to face the consequences of my actions? I'd made my choice, and now I had to grab the bull by the horns even though it could crush me in the process.

Snuggled up in the sheets, I thought deeply about my actions and how they would affect me—sooner or later. This situation with Lev had become even more complicated, and there was nothing much that I could do about it.

My heart beat for him, and my body craved his touch, all day, every day. It was like I wasn't the one in control of my feelings anymore. Tessa's warning about that man still lingered on the fringes of my mind, but I would always ignore it.

There may have been some exaggerations about the type of man that Lev Tarasov was, but beneath all of that, it was also possible that there existed some atom of truth. A quick Google search would help me confirm the allegations against him, but I was afraid of what I'd find.

What if it turned out that Lev was everything Tessa said he was? What if he was even worse? Would I be able to live with that? The look in his eyes when I'd asked what he did for a living the last time we met was alarming.

Although he appeared receptive, the unspoken limits he set was a silent warning to proceed with caution. My instincts picked up on the signal, so I decided to let it go. He was holding back on the truth, and his response about being a businessman was nothing but a shadow of the real stuff he was into.

As curious as I was that night, I knew it was a bad idea to push further. Lev Tarasov had a kind of darkness in him that was both frightening and attractive at the same time. There was something about him that never really added up, something evil.

The problem was, I never had been able to look beyond his attractiveness. I knew that he reeked of trouble; I could sense that he was dangerous, yet I was still drawn to the man.

I thought that if I gave in to my craving and had sex with him, things would go back to the way they were before I met him.

I was wrong.

Sleeping with him only awakened the wild part of me. It ignited a fire that I couldn't put out. Having sex with him did change something. It changed the way that I felt toward him but in the way that I had expected because now I couldn't seem to get him out of my mind.

I grew so attached to him since that night, and the more we hung out, the more difficult it was to control my emotions. No man had ever made me feel this way, emotionally or sexually.

It was as if Lev had me entranced. I felt like I was spellbound to him, like I was freaking addicted to the man. I could swear that he felt the same about me, too, because why else would he reach out to me several times since that night? And why wasn't I able to decline any of his invites to hang out with me?

The feeling of attraction was mutual, and everything was just happening so fast. The situation had now sprawled out of control, and neither I nor him had power over what was happening.

I was watching my life take a dangerous turn, and it was as though there was little or nothing that I could do about it.

How long would I keep this hushed? How long until the truth got out?

Lev was the least of my problems right now; I had a more pressing concern: my family. Knowing how powerful and influential my dad was, it was only a matter of time until he found out about me and Lev.

My fear about Dad finding out the truth about us was nothing compared to how I dreaded him finding out the truth about what I recently discovered.

This was a huge mess, and there was no scenario in my head where it ended well—at least not without a fight, if I got lucky.

My mind was flooded with a myriad of thoughts as I tried to figure a way out of this. But no matter how much thought I put into it, I couldn't seem to find a solution that wouldn't end up in a scandal.

I'd done the math. I'd run the numbers and predicted the possible outcomes of this dire situation. None was in my favor. In every possibility, I'd end up getting hurt really badly.

There was no escaping this impending scandal, and the thought of having to face it sooner or later made my heart sink into my stomach.

Laying on my back, I pressed a pillow against my face, groaning in frustration. I slammed against the mattress, my hand bouncing off the foam. In my head, all I wished for was that the ground would just open up and swallow me.

If I had only listened to my voice of reason and stayed away from Lev, I wouldn't be

in this mess. However, I wasn't exactly in control of my emotions at the time. Even now, I still wasn't. My body still wanted and craved him despite my reservations and the life-changing discovery that I'd made.

I snapped out of my thoughts at the sound of my door bursting open. My eyes widened, a momentary anger flashing across my face at the intrusion. As I sat on my bed, Dad stormed into my room, his face a mask of fury.

His eyes blazed with anger, and his lips pursed into a thin line. Deep creases formed between his brows as he glared at me.

My breath lodged in my throat, my heart pounding like a drum in my chest as I looked at him. As he drew closer, the pit in my belly widened, swallowing up all of my emotions and leaving me with nothing but fear.

Dad halted in front of me, his face contorted in fury, his jaw clenched.

He knew.

I was certain that he had found out, considering his reaction. Dad always had his ears on the ground when it came to matters that would jeopardize his “good name” and his pristine reputation.

“I'm gonna ask you a question, Ravyn,” he stated, his voice flat. “And you better think twice before you answer.”

I knew this conversation was inevitable, but I just didn't think that we'd be having it now. I looked up at his face, red with anger, and swallowed hard against the sudden dryness in my throat.

“Is it true?” he asked, narrowing his eyes, arms folded across his chest.



“Is what true?” I managed to ask, my voice barely above a whisper. I could hear the sound of my own heart beating, my chest heaving as I blinked rapidly in an attempt to remain composed.

“Don't play games with me, girl,” he warned, his tone urgent and menacing. “Have you been hanging out with Lev Tarasov?” Dad demanded, his voice laced with disdain.

His question stole my breath away, amplifying my fear and concern. I stared at him, lips quivering as I struggled to find my voice.

The scowl on his face deepened as though my silence only infuriated him the more. “Do you have any idea who that man is?” he raged, his chest rising and falling, disappointment etched on his face. “He’s part of the Russian crime syndicate—a fucking Bratva member!” he blurted out, eyes burning with anger.

I'd known from day one that Lev was trouble, but hearing Dad reveal his identity with so much hatred, disappointment, and disdain twisted my stomach.

“I don't know what you have going on with him, and it ends now!” he commanded, his voice laced with finality.

“What?” I snarled in objection, my brows furrowing to accentuate my displeasure at his tone.

He ignored me and continued, “I cannot—I will not—have you bring shame and disgrace to this family!”

“I'm not a child anymore!” I snapped, my voice rising higher than his as I sprang to my feet.

He was silent for a moment, squinting. His head tilted slightly to the side, shock flickering in his gaze. He obviously wasn't expecting my reaction, but I was done pretending to be a nice, perfect daughter.

“That's all you're ever worried about, isn't it?” I scoffed, tightening my jaw. “The family name, the reputation you've built—you want me to be this ‘perfect’ daughter that you flaunt around without actually considering my own feelings.” The words tumbled out of me in a frantic rush, my voice breaking as I expressed my anger and disappointment. “You don't see me as an adult who's capable of making her own decisions, and that's why you treat me like a child.”

He paused for a moment, watching me seethe in silence. “If you want to be treated like an adult, start acting like one,” he said through gritted teeth, drawing closer to me. “You will end whatever madness is going on between you and that monster before you tarnish the family's image.”

My chest heaved slowly as I cast a glare at him, my blood boiling with rage at the coldness and finality of his tone. Dad left no room for arguments, his eyes blazing as if daring me to go against his orders.

I clenched my jaw, lips quivering in response to the pang of irritation swelling within me.

He leaned forward, his breath against my face. “Don't test my patience, girl,” he said, his tone a chilly whisper. “Do as you're told.” Dad eyed me and walked away, his footsteps retreating.

He left my room and slammed the door shut behind him. I let out a frustrated groan, anger coursing through my body as I paced back and forth, seething silently.

I pressed my fingers into my temples in a massaging motion as I strolled into the

bathroom. Maybe if I washed my face, this feeling of anger would dissipate quicker.

I had a bigger problem than this, and I needed to be clear-headed in order to address it. As I turned on the tap and rinsed my face in the sink, my eyes darted to the pregnancy test strip on the countertop.

Those two glaring lines had changed everything. The double marking on the strip indicated that I was with child, and that was the reason for my frustration all morning.

I'd been feeling a little funny since the last time Lev and I had sex, but I had thought it was nothing serious until I missed my period. It was then that I recalled we hadn't used protection that night, and I wasn't on any birth control pills at the time.

In order to be sure that I was truly pregnant, I decided to buy the strip last night. Very early this morning, I'd tested my urine, and those two lines appeared, striking me with fear and confusion.

I straightened, watching my reflection in the mirror as I dabbed my face with a white towel. Dad already hated the idea that I was seeing Lev Tarasov. He thought it would ruin the family image, but he had no clue how bad things were about to get.

My heart pounded hard, threatening to jump out of my chest. It was difficult to breathe, and I felt like I was suffocating. I was done with all this pretense; it was killing me, and I needed a way out of my predicament.

I was plagued with confusion, unsure of what to do with this sudden pregnancy. The situation was a delicate one, and if I was going to scale through unscathed, then I needed to be smart in my thinking.

First things first, I needed to see Lev. We had so much to discuss, and he had a lot of explaining to do. I needed to know who the man who got me pregnant truly was.

I heaved a sigh, making up my mind to pay him a surprise visit.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I'd been so occupied with my new hobby, thinking about and hanging out with Ravyn Jensen, that I almost never had the time to bother about that bastard, Arseni.

It had been a few weeks since he was outed as the mole who'd been selling sensitive Bratva information to our enemies. He'd been on the run ever since, using all the tricks he learned from us to elude capture.

I hadn't given his situation much thought, owing to the fact that Ravyn was all that mattered to me these past few weeks. I'd been distracted by her. Yes, I wasn't proud of it, but it was like I didn't have much control over my own thoughts and emotions.

Today, I was seated in my home office, reclining in my chair, my thoughts jogging between Ravyn and Arseni. I hadn't heard from her in a few days, and although this little break was intentional, I still missed her company deep down.

Staying away for some time was a mechanism to help me refocus my attention on the most important aspect of my life: the Bratva. Besides, it was also a way to delay her inquisition about me. I didn't want her asking too many questions and getting too close to the truth.

She would eventually find out someday, but at the moment, I wanted her to remain in the dark. Ignorance, they say, is bliss. Everything would change the day she would find out the truth about what I did for a living. This was a reality that I wasn't ready for.

I never used to care about what people thought of me; to hell with them and their opinions. I'd always taken pride in my position in the Bratva and never felt the need

to hide my identity from anyone. But with this young woman, things were different.

Strange. But these days, I found myself increasingly invested in her perception of me. It was as though a part of me that I hadn't fully understood yet cared about what she thought of me.

Such things had never bothered me before, yet here I was, constantly concerned with the impression I made on her. Was I becoming someone else? Was I losing myself over this woman?

I massaged my temples in an attempt to soothe the headache that plagued me. This distraction was affecting my focus, and I hated it. I was losing concentration, but the more I struggled to stay focused, the more I found my thoughts drifting back to her.

She was running through my mind, living rent-free in my head, and as good as it felt, I needed an escape, something else to occupy my mind.

The rhythmic knock on the door pierced through my thoughts, bringing me back to the present. It was Andrey's signature knock, and before I could wonder what was so important that he had to interrupt me, my eyes narrowed at the man he walked in with.

A faint smirk played on the corners of my lips, and a sinister anger infused with a malevolent glee overtook me. A fierce satisfaction overwhelmed me at the thought of finally being in the same room with that traitor.

I got out of my chair, my steps menacing and calculating as I walked to the front of my desk. With my eyes fixed on the man whose hands were bound by a rope, I folded my arms across my chest.

Andrey pushed him with a powerful shove that sent him tumbling to the ground at my

feet. Arseni's body shuddered as he strained to raise his head. His face was a canvas of bruises, battered and disfigured, with a thick thread of blood hanging off his torn lips. Swollen eyes, blackened and blue, struggled to stay open, staring out from underneath a tangle of cuts and scrapes.

Arseni's features were distorted almost beyond recognition, a testament to the severity of the beating he'd taken. His shirt was ripped, hanging in tatters, revealing a torso mapped with deep cuts and gashes.

“Found him at the airport,” Andrey said, his thick voice dripping with venom. “He was trying to flee the country.”

With a clenched jaw, I squatted in front of him, casting a disdainful look at his pathetic features. “Did you really think that you could betray me and run away?” I asked, my tone malicious.

He swallowed hard, his throat wobbling in fear as he held my gaze, his torn lips quivering.

I seized his jaw, my fingers pressing into his flesh while glaring at him, feeling the weight of his treachery. “Do you have any idea what you've done, what you've cost me?” I questioned, my voice dropping to a menacing whisper.

His eyes widened, highlighting the terror in their depths as he groaned at the pain of my hold against his jaw. I tightened my grip, digging my fingers into his jawbone, reveling in his agony.

Arseni's betrayal had cut deeper than I cared to admit. Maybe this was because I had such high hopes for him. He was a promising young man, loyal and so dedicated to the course of the Bratva that I didn't think that he would even in a million years turn against me.

In spite of his arrogant proposal to join the inner circle, I thought he was just misguided and didn't see him as a threat. The man had my trust even after that silly stunt he pulled. But he broke that trust.

I let go of his jaw, and his head slumped downward, his breathing heavier by the second.

Arseni spat blood and whispered with a strained voice, "Villains are not born; they're made." He jerked his head to look right into my eyes, a mix of fear and bravery flickering in his gaze. "You made me, Boss."

My teeth gritted at his words, a pang of vexation swelling within me, and my scowl deepened.

"I spent decades of my life serving you, obeying your every command without question," he began, his voice rising with each sentence, the fear in his eyes transforming into anger. "I never asked you for anything, but the one request I made, you turned it down without even considering it."

My lips curled into a smirk as I rose to my feet, burying a hand in my pocket. He thought that he could talk to my conscience after deluding himself into thinking that he was a victim of circumstances. How convenient.

"Your words are empty, Arseni," I began, my tone icy and full of disdain. "You've proven yourself to be a liar and a selfish bastard." With deliberate slowness, I circled him, my shoes clicking against the floor. "You're not a victim, Arseni, no." I halted in front of him, feeling the jolt of fury sprinting through me. "You're a traitor, one who broke the vows he swore to our brotherhood."

In an instant, his anger dissolved, replaced by the terror he tried so hard to mask. Arseni's lips trembled as he watched my countenance turn colder than before. The



weight of his betrayal fueled my rage, and my fingers curled up into fists.

“Think...think about everything that I've done for the Bratva,” he stuttered, his survival instincts kicking in, eyes shining with desperation. “Surely, there has to be more than one thing that can melt your heart and make you spare my life.” The words tumbled out of him in a rush as he settled on his knees, his pleading gaze locked on me.

Pathetic.

I had admired his fleeting moment of bravery. At least he would have died like a courageous man, not this coward he'd transformed into.

“Remember the multiple ways I've been helpful to the Bratva—the deals I've secured, the enemies I've put down.” His voice trembled, desperation and pleading creeping into his tone. “Come on, Boss, that has to count for something,” he added, as if hoping to persuade me through sheer volumes.

The more he spoke, the more I felt disgusted by him. How dare he ask for leniency after what he'd done?

In the heat of the moment, none of his accomplishments mattered. None whatsoever. All I could think about were the losses and the deep shit his betrayal had dragged the entire organization into.

“Grant me my life, and I swear you'll never see me again—or better still, I can work for you under strict supervision,” he proposed, clasping both hands in a pleading gesture. “I can...I can fix my mess and get the organization back on track. I can help you raise twice the money you've lost.” He held my gaze, his chest heaving, as a glint of pride flickered in his tone.

I stuck a stick of cigarette between my lips and lit it, taking a long drag. The flavors danced on my tongue as I released a puff of smoke. It was rather entertaining how he overestimated his own importance. The idiot seemed to genuinely believe that his presence was indispensable.

“You need me, Boss—you know you do,” he said, his voice dripping with urgency.

His arrogance and the way he thought the Bratva would crumble without him only fueled my rage.

My brows furrowed, forming deep creases between them, and in one swift motion, I drew my gun from the back of my pants. “I don't need you, and you're not indispensable.”

He raised his hands in front of him, eyes wide with fear, and before his quivering lips could produce any words, I pulled the trigger.

The deafening sound echoed through the room, Arseni's head shooting backward at the impact, a hole drilled in it.

A loud gasp caught my attention as my victim's lifeless body thudded to the floor. I jerked my eyes toward the entrance, and my heart paused for a moment at the individual standing by the door.

Ravyn was frozen in shock, her hand covering her mouth as her eyes shifted across me and the man I'd just killed in cold blood. Her chest was heaving rapidly, terror flickering in her gaze. She looked at me with an unmistakable horror, like I was some kind of monster.

I gritted my teeth, feeling a pang of vexation at the fact that she saw me taking a life. Why was she here at this time, unannounced?

I took gentle steps toward her, but she withdrew in silence, tears streaming down her eyes. Ravyn turned around and bolted without looking back.

“Shit,” I muttered, cursing under my breath.

This would change everything, and now she left me with no choice.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

What did I just witness, a fucking murder?

My heart raced faster than a galloping horse, my chest rising and falling as I sprinted down the stairs, footsteps pounding against the steps.

I wiped my tears, the sound of the gunshot echoing in my head. All I wanted was to get as far away from this monster as my legs could carry me. At the entrance, I grabbed the door handle and yanked the damn thing open.

With lightning speed, I bolted out of the building, the giant stone gargoyle's eyes watching me as I descended the long steps at the entrance. These heels were killing me, slowing me down, and I almost tripped over after missing a step. However, I was quick to get a hold of myself.

I pushed the unlock button on my car key holder, and the vehicle chimed, its dashboard navigators flashing momentarily under the moon's ethereal glow.

My heels clicked against the pavement as I ran toward the car parked by the circular fountain. I could hear his cold voice behind me, calling out my name, but I wasn't going to slow down. Once I got to the car, I opened the door and slid behind the wheel with a sense of urgency.

With shaky hands, I jammed the key into the ignition and twisted. The engine coughed, spluttered, but refused to roar to life. "What the hell?" I muttered, my heart sinking in my chest as I turned the key again.

The same thing happened.

“You gotta be kidding me!” I slammed against the steering wheel, cold sweat dampening my forehead. “Come on, please,” I pleaded with the car, turning the key over and over with nervous glances out the window.

Lev stepped out of the building, his imposing frame shrouded in the shadows cast by stone gargoyles. His hollow eyes seemed to glow in the dark, or was it just my imagination?

Whatever the case, I couldn't let him get a hold of me. I'd just witnessed him kill a man in cold blood, and with the little I knew about the mafia, I was certain that this wasn't good for me at all. Those men never left loose ends; they eliminated eyewitnesses without second thoughts.

There was no telling what Lev was capable of doing to me in this state, and the fury in his cold, dark eyes was a clear indication that he was dangerous.

The best thing was to get the hell away from here as soon as possible. But for some inexplicable reason, my stupid car wouldn't start, and Lev was already closing in.

“Come on!” I turned the key one last time, and the engine roared to life. A wind of relief blew across my face in a fleeting moment as I hit the gas and slammed the door shut in the process.

My car's tires screeched loudly as I peeled out of the parking spot just before he could grab the door handle. I glanced at the rearview mirror, my heart pounding in my heaving chest as I traveled through the serpentine driveway at high speed.

There he was, standing in the moonlight by the fountain, his eyes fixed on my speeding vehicle. This was a narrow escape, and I considered myself lucky to have made it out of that dark mansion alive.

Dad had confirmed that he was a member of a Russian crime syndicate, which gave me an idea of the type of man he was. But watching him in action was entirely different; nothing would have prepared me for this.

He'd shot that guy in cold blood and didn't even flinch. The man I saw back in the mansion was not the man that I'd been hanging out with. Or maybe he was, but I was so busy cooking up excuses that I knew would keep me away from the truth.

I'd created a version of him in my head simply because I was attracted and didn't want to ruin whatever thing we had going on.

Tessa was right, and I should have listened to her. I should have just stayed the hell away from him that night, as she had warned. Now, I'd gotten myself into a mess that I couldn't get out of.

Maybe it would have been easier if I wasn't carrying his child or if Dad didn't hate him so much. But that wasn't the case—I was pregnant, and Dad loathed his guts.

“What have I done?” I muttered, wiping my tears as I accelerated onward, the headlights shining in the dark as I drove on.

Towering trees lined both sides of the road as I traveled at top speed. I was still in his territory, on the outskirts of the city, and so I didn't have the luxury of relaxation, at least not until I knew that I was safe.

Thousands of thoughts overlapped in my mind, and I felt like I was starting to lose my sanity. I couldn't fathom the extent of my troubles because I couldn't control myself in a moment of weakness.

What was I going to do now? Where would I even begin? Dad would kill me if he found out that I was with Lev's child. Lev may or may not let me go if I got caught. It

was like I was stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea.

I'd worry about that later. For now, I just had to survive the night.

The sound of screeching car tires rounding a corner behind me pierced through my thoughts. Through the rearview mirror, I caught the reflection of a sleek back Ferrari tailing me at a high speed.

My breath ceased for a moment, and my eyes widened in shock. It was him—Lev Tarasov—and he was catching up really fast.

With a jolt of adrenaline, I floored it, slamming my foot on the accelerator. My back was glued to the seat as I felt the car surge forward, the speedometer needle climbing up to triple digits.

The road snaked through the woods, our cars' engines roaring as we traveled at high speed. The fear of getting caught fueled my determination, and at the moment, nothing else mattered other than escaping that monster.

His Ferrari was gaining on me, its sleek nose inches from my bumper. His horn blared, signaling me to pull over, but I wouldn't give in.

Again, I floored it, the car treacherously speeding down the rolling hills, the cabin filled with the noise of its loud hum. His Ferrari's nose slammed against my bumper, the impact jerking me forward, but the seatbelt held me in place. I glanced at the side mirror and swerved the car down a bustling road, the loud honk of a truck fading as it sped past me.

That was a reckless move, and that truck would have crushed me if my car had landed on the road a second earlier. However, I got lucky; that's all that mattered.

With my heart pounding in my chest, I weaved through traffic, fingers wrapped tightly around the steering wheel. I dodged cars with mere inches to spare, a skill I never knew I had until now. Ignoring the curses of vexed drivers, I streaked through the line of vehicles with dangerous precision.

My moves were surprising to me, but I guess that was the adrenaline coursing through my veins. However, Lev was a master driver as well, and he wasn't giving up. The good thing was, I knew these streets like the back of my hand.

Lev was just as determined to catch me as I was to escape, which made my journey frustrating. His Ferrari matched my every turn, closing the gap between us with unnerving precision.

I took an abrupt swerve down an empty street, hoping to ditch him through that path, but he followed behind me.

A thread of cold sweat trickled down my temple when I realized I couldn't shake this man off. He was relentless. His car was now driving side by side with mine, and our eyes locked in a fleeting moment.

I felt my pulse quicken, and my breath lodged in my throat as he overtook my vehicle. His tires squeaked to a sideways halt in the middle of the road.

I slammed on the brakes, bringing the car to a stop, inches from his Ferrari. The sound of my own heart beating like a drum filled the car's cabin, and I felt a sudden dryness in my throat.

He stepped out of his vehicle and slammed his door shut as he approached me, eyes blazing with fury.

My hands trembled around the wheel, misted eyes watching him wrench my car door



with an alarming strength.

“Get out,” he growled, his voice dripping with authority.

I stared at him, my chest heaving slowly in an attempt to mask my fear, a glint of defiance flashing in my eyes.

“I said...get out,” he repeated, holding my gaze, his jaw clenched.

Going against this simple instruction could get me in deeper trouble, so I deliberately slowed down and did as I was told without breaking eye contact with him.

“I didn't see anything,” I said quietly, wearing the closest thing to a stoic expression I could muster.

He leaned closer, his voice dropping to a deadline whisper, “Then why did you run?”

I swallowed hard, gritting my teeth, trying to appear composed as I resisted the urge to shed tears.

His hand snapped out to hold my neck, his grip firm but not cruel. My heart raced in my chest, and I flinched at his quick move, wondering what he was up to. I stood frozen in place by the scary look in his eyes that nearly caused me to pee my pants.

He edged closer, his breath warm against my skin. “You’re a witness to a crime I committed,” he began, his voice calm but menacing. “Which means that I could end you right now and do away with your body.”

My legs could no longer support my weight, and my heart had sunk into my stomach. At this time of night, we were on an empty street, and nothing was stopping him from doing what he said.

His eyes roamed my body, his expression unreadable no matter how hard I tried to read him. “Let's get something straight,” he added, whispering in my ear. “Whether you live or die is entirely up to me. Meaning that from now on, you belong to me.”

His venomous words sent shivers down my spine, and my throat wobbled as I swallowed hard. Tears stung my eyes, but I wouldn't let them flow—I couldn't let him see my fear. So, I clenched my jaw, blinking rapidly as I fought back the tears that welled my eyes.

His grip around my neck loosened, and my body shuddered as his fingers traveled down my chest. In a heartbeat, he claimed my lips, locking them to his with a kiss so harsh and bittersweet that I couldn't resist.

Our tongues danced in our mouths for a fleeting moment of breathlessness until he pulled away, leaving me to the flame his touch had ignited with me.

I should've hated him and been super afraid, but his hold over me was too powerful, and his kiss made my mind go blank.

This was more messed up than I thought.

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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

It had been five days since the incident, and she'd been silent, too afraid to make any funny moves. She could've gone to the police to report what she witnessed, but my stern warning must still linger on the fringes of her mind.

She hadn't reached out to me, and I hadn't done so either. No phone calls, no texts, nothing. I figured she needed some time to process the whole situation, and I didn't want to overwhelm her more than she already was.

Ravyn was in so much shock that she hadn't left the apartment she rented barely a day after the incident. I couldn't understand why she didn't just run back home to her parents instead of renting a place for herself in the city.

Perhaps she did that to avoid the temptation of spilling the beans. Whatever the case, it was a wise decision because now I could watch her every move. I had hidden cameras planted outside her new apartment to keep me updated on her activities.

Naturally, she shouldn't be alive after what she saw. One of the rules of the game was that there should be no eyewitnesses. Whoever saw us being the gruesome men that we were should be eliminated on the spot; that was the law.

However, regardless of how ruthless I was, I never killed women and children. These two categories were off-limits. If a man had stumbled on me carrying out such activity, he would never have left the mansion alive.

Andrey would have shot him in the leg to cripple him until I decided on what to do with him. No loose ends! That was how we operated.

Ravyn should've called me first rather than popping up unannounced. That was a dumb move, and I hated that she was silly enough to pull a stunt like that. She was a smart woman, and she should have known better. Now, look at the mess she'd created.

My fingers drummed a slow rhythm on the armrest as I sat in the silence of my office, a faint veil of smoke swirling around my chiseled features. Lost in thought, I dragged on the stick of a Cuban cigar smoldered between my lips, the soft crackle filling the air.

In the dimly lit office space, I leaned back in my chair, gently rocking sideways, shrouded in smoke. I pondered what to do next. I hadn't considered how to best handle the situation, and it was gnawing at me.

I installed those cameras outside her new residence to ensure that she wouldn't do anything stupid. It didn't matter who she was or how I felt about her; in the end, people would always do what was best for them.

I'd put the fear of God in her, but at the same time, I wasn't going to just sit back and expect her to do as she was instructed. The fact that she was afraid was the reason she still needed to be watched. People could do the unthinkable when they were afraid, and that was why, in this situation, I couldn't trust that her fear would keep her in check.

Underestimating what she was capable of would be folly on my part, and I wasn't going to do that. Ravyn had proven to be an intelligent woman, and right now, I had no idea what was running through her mind.

My inability to understand her thoughts was a clear indication that I was in the dark about her plans. She might have been silent, but knowing her, she was definitely cooking something up.

However, to play it safe, I spent most of my time watching the live feed from her apartment. She hadn't had any visitors since she moved in, hadn't left the house for one day, and all she ate was pizza.

The delivery man often came around the house twice daily, by 11 AM and 6 PM.

Dressed in his uniform—a red polo shirt, a pair of blue jeans, and a red hat on his head—he would always knock three times on her door. On the third knock, Ravyn would step out onto the porch and accept the delivery.

The exchange of cash and goods never exceeded a few seconds before she'd get back in the house and shut the door behind her.

This was the pattern, day after day, repeating the same routine over and over. For this entire time, she'd been surviving on pizza, and a part of me felt sorry for her. This version of Ravyn was a stark contrast to the fiery woman I grew fond of.

She was reserved, silent, and maybe subdued by the fear I'd inflicted in her. It seemed like it was better that way, like she was finally starting to understand her place. But why did her silent compliance feel wrong?

I didn't know her too well, but she didn't strike me as one who would so easily accept defeat. Her silence may or may not mean that she'd chosen to comply. What if she had something up her sleeve? It was strange that she hadn't gone anywhere, hadn't been visited by anyone except for the delivery man.

Why did she choose to eat only pizza? Why only twice a day?

My eyes narrowed as I absently rubbed my jaw, a number of thoughts tugging at my mind. I watched the live footage of her apartment on the screen flickering on my mahogany table.

The same delivery man arrived at her doorstep at exactly 6 PM. He knocked three times, and she answered on the third knock. Ravyn paid him in cash, accepted the box, and receded into the house.

I squinted, leaning toward my laptop, suspicion creeping into my gaze. Something was off; I could feel it. My brows furrowed, faint creases forming between them as I peered closely at the screen.

With fingers rattling across the keyboard, the keys clanked rapidly as I rewound the tape. The images blurred together in a mad rush, replaying the events in fast motion. A sharp, high-pitched whine emitted from the speakers, filling the air as the footage reversed.

I paused the tape, eyes narrowing as I studied the images, comparing them to those from the previous days.

Wait a minute. That's not right, I thought, scrutinizing the feed playing on my screen.

The more I flipped through multiple days' recordings, the more the pattern solidified, momentarily stealing my breath. From my observation, the feed had been the same since the second day she moved into the apartment.

Everything was identical, down to the most minute details. The time it took the delivery man to reach her porch was always the same—not a second longer or shorter. The brief exchange between him and Ravyn was also the same for each day's footage. Same body language, same movements, same timeframe.

A faint scowl settled on my face as I realized she'd been messing with me this whole time. She knew that I was watching her, so she decided to play smart. I wasn't sure how she did it, but somehow, she had managed to set up the camera to play the same recording every day.

“Clever girl,” I muttered under my breath, raising an eyebrow to mirror my astonishment.

I knew her silence, her so-called compliance, wasn't to be trusted. She was up to no good, and as impressed as I was by her ability to fool me, I couldn't risk her doing something stupid.

Without a moment of hesitation, I picked up my phone off the table and dialed Maxim's number.

“Boss,” he answered.

Maxim was the man I had put in charge of watching Ravyn's apartment. He and a few other men were tasked with reporting to me should she try anything funny.

“Check the apartment. Now,” I ordered, my voice dripping with urgency as I got out of my chair, heading toward the door.

I left the office at a fast pace, my mind filled with thoughts of what Ravyn was up to. Deep down, I knew what had happened, but I was yet to believe it until I saw it with my own eyes.

The drive to her place didn't take so long, considering how busy my head was. I pulled over outside her apartment and headed inside to find my men standing in the cozy living room.

They bowed slightly in reverence as I stepped forward, my sharp eyes scanning the room.

“Boss.” Maxim's deep voice drew my attention to the stairs where he stood. “You might wanna come see this.”

My jaw clenched, knowing exactly what I was going to find as he led me upstairs to her room. We stepped inside, and my fingers balled into fists the moment my eyes settled on the cleared-out wardrobe and the empty hangers. All her clothes were gone.

The floor was a little dusty, a testament to the fact that no one had been here in a while. My jaw tightened, the scowl on my face deepening as I strolled to the open window on the east side of the building. This was a blind spot that the camera would never have captured. She must have known that, hence the reason she used it as an escape route rather than the front door.

This was premeditated.

She'd been planning it for a while—that was the only logical explanation for how she pulled it off so effortlessly. Ravyn had been gone for at least two days, and I'd had no idea because I hadn't realized the feed had been tampered with.

My blood boiled, anger simmering beneath the surface as I stared out the window, my chest heaving slowly. In silence, I seethed, tightening my fists until my hands trembled.

She'd slipped through my fingers!

She'd outsmarted me!

Rage surged through my whole body, a lone vein straining along my forehead as I struggled to keep my anger in check. However, I lost that fight and gave in to the fury that had overwhelmed me.

Like a ravaging beast, I let out a savage growl, slamming my fist into the wall with a deafening thud. A spiderweb of cracks radiated outward from the impact site, the sound of splintering plaster echoing through the air.



Ravyn had just made an enemy out of me, and now she'd forced me to see her as one. Since the plan was to run away from me, tracking her father's house would be useless because that was the last place she'd go. She must have relocated to a place she knew that I wasn't going to be able to reach her.

Running away from me was one thing; staying hidden for so long was an entirely different thing altogether.

Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but I would eventually find her, and when I did, she would regret her actions.

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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

Five years. That was how long it had been since I ran away for my safety and the babies'. At the time, I didn't even know that I was carrying a set of twins in my womb; I just wanted to get as far away from that cold-blooded killer as possible.

He wasn't the kind of man I wanted to father my children. No. How could I, in good conscience, let the devil raise my own kids? What example would he set for them? Lev Tarasov was nothing but evil, and that was the legacy he would leave behind: evil.

There was no way in hell that I was going to subject my kids to a life of crime and disorder. They deserved better, and I wasn't going to be the reason they would feel trapped in a world of violence. Their father, sadly, was a dictator, an egocentric and manipulative bastard with a stone for a heart and ice in his veins.

He lacked the capacity to raise a child, let alone two. That embodiment of evil would only ruin their lives and corrupt their minds, especially Nik's. He would consider the boy as his legacy, heir to his precious empire, which, ironically, was built on bloodshed, lies, deceit, manipulation, corruption, and all manner of everything illegal.

I couldn't bear the thought of being under the control of such a man. He had made it crystal clear that I belonged to him, and his condescending tone had made my stomach turn. He spoke to me that night like I was some piece of property that he owned, and that just accentuated my anger.

Right there and then, I had made up my mind to escape that control freak. I knew how good he was at reading me like a book, so I decided to mask my emotions and hide my plans.

The sound of their blissful giggles and laughs punctured the silence of the kitchen, snapping me out of my thoughts. I could hear them running upstairs, their footsteps pounding against the floorboards.

One of these days, those two would bring down this house.

A flutter swelled up in my chest, a warm smile spreading across my face as I listened to their playful banter.

Gentle rays from the rising sun filtered through the window, filling the kitchen with a warm yellow glow. I cracked eggs into a bowl, whisking them with a flourish before pouring the mixture into a sizzling skillet.

As I made breakfast, the sweet aroma of crispy bacon, scrambled eggs, and freshly brewed coffee wafted through the atmosphere, filling the cozy kitchen with an inviting scent.

Before now, I hadn't cooked a day in my life; I never had to, considering that I was born into wealth. Everything I ever needed was provided for. All I had to do was be the perfect daughter for the Jensen family.

However, now I was on my own, raising two children all by myself without help from anyone. Circumstances had forced me to learn things that I normally wouldn't have bothered to learn at all. I didn't have a choice; it was the only way to provide for myself and the kids in my care.

Moving to the small coastal town of Evergreen Bay wasn't easy for me. This was because I knew no one here and was starting life from scratch. I had a little money saved up, and with that, I got myself a small place to stay.

To the kind folks of Evergreen Bay, I was Claire Finch, a single mother with two

adorable kids that everyone seemed to love.

For five years, I'd lived in this sanctuary under a different identity. And although it had been a bittersweet experience, I was proud of the woman I'd become. I didn't have much, but I had everything I needed to be fulfilled. The little I owned, I earned from hard work—fair and square.

My life was simple; it was nothing compared to the glitz and glamor I'd left behind, but at least here I called the shots—I made my own rules. Yes, I was pretending to be someone else, but this time, I wasn't doing so just to please anyone. Everything I did, I did for myself and the safety of my children.

“Nik! Elara!” I called, heading out of the kitchen with a tray of scrambled eggs, freshly brewed coffee, and crispy bacon. “Breakfast is ready!”

Their laughs filled the air as they raced down the stairs, footsteps echoing off the walls. Taking the lead, Elara taunted, “You can't catch me!” She laughed, her ponytail bouncing behind her. “I'm faster than you!”

“You wish,” Nik responded, a playful scowl perched on his face.

Every time I looked at Nikolai, I saw his father, and the older he got, the more striking the resemblance became. My boy was a constant reminder that I could only get away from Lev for so long. Nik and Elara were proof that I would never truly escape the man responsible for the outcome of my life.

They ran around the dining table, my daughter's eyes sparkling with her mirth. Her brother chased her about, pretending to be outraged, and I just stood there with an uncontrollable smile on my face.

These two lovelies were my world, and I would do anything to keep them safe.

Becoming a mom taught me that there was nothing that a mother wouldn't do for her children. Nothing at all.

There was no greater feeling than seeing my kids happy and blissful, ignorant of the harsh reality of life. I'd give up anything in the world just to make sure they wouldn't suffer the fate I spent half a decade of my life protecting them from.

“Alright, you two speed demons.” I chuckled, my heart filled with love and gratitude. “It's time to eat. You're already running late for school.”

As their laughter died down, they settled into their chairs, ready to dig into their favorite meal of the day.

I watched them eat, my gaze shifting across the two of them, lips curled up into a bright smile. It was as though my love for these two adorable cuties grew stronger every day, and so did the bond I shared with the both of them.

After breakfast, we all headed outside, where I loaded their backpacks and lunchboxes into the car. Once done, I tucked them into the backseat and fastened their seatbelts. I slid behind the wheel of my Honda Civic and started the engine.

It wasn't a Porsche or a Ferrari or any of the exotic cars that I was used to driving, but it was practical, not to mention reliable. Plus, I bought it myself with the money I raised from working twice as hard as most people in the town.

I felt a sense of contentment wash over me as I listened to the kids chatter at the back, their elated voices filling the car's cabin. A broad grin played on my lips as I pulled out of the driveway and headed to their preschool.

Those two four-year-olds were the light of my world; without them, my life would be so empty. I considered myself lucky to have been blessed with the best of both

worlds, and the best part was that they always got along.

They'd fight each other every once in a while, but most of the time, they'd spend quality hours bonding. I knew of kids—siblings—who rarely got along with one another, kids who'd rather be nice to strangers than their own blood.

Every day, I was grateful that my Nik and Elara were different. Maybe it was the way I'd raised them to always love and have each other's backs. Or maybe it was just how they were built. Whatever the case, they made me a super proud mom.

We arrived at the school, and I walked them to the barred gate, watching as they eagerly joined the other kids on the playground. I'd grown so confident in Nik's ability to keep them both safe.

On several occasions, my four-year-old boy had put some bullies in their place for daring to attack him or his sister. The Tarasov blood coursed through his veins, and sometimes, he manifested that brave and scary part of him.

From what I heard, all the boys at school feared him, even those a little older than him. Nik was playful only when surrounded by family. At school, though, he was usually something else—cold, calculated, and somewhat sinister. He was a lot like his father in that area, and his signature scowl, coupled with his hollow, dark eyes, often scared the shit out of his peers.

Elara, on the other hand, was a spitting image of me in every way, hence her jovial nature. She was the fun one, the sunshine girl with a pair of amazing blue eyes that sparkled like diamonds when she smiled.

“Bye, Mom!” Elara's tiny voice cut my thoughts as she waved from afar.

“Bye, guys. Have a great day!” I called out, blowing them a kiss.

As Elara darted off to play, Nik flashed a small smile at me before following up behind her like a human shield.

When my son looked at me the way he did, my heart stopped for a moment. It was as though I was looking at Lev Tarasov, and he was looking right back at me.

As I lingered by the gate, eyes fixed on the two of them, a voice drew my attention, prompting me to turn to the speaker.

“I admire the way you love your kids,” Ms. Jenkins said, her lips curling into a genuine smile.

She was a teacher in the school, and soon, Nik and Elara would graduate from the class she taught.

Ms. Jenkins was a young woman, maybe in her mid-twenties, like me. And although we didn't talk all the time, on several occasions, I'd caught her staring at me. It was never in a creepy way, no. Her stares were always accompanied by a lovely smile and a wave whenever our eyes met.

“Thank you,” I replied to her remark, my lips curving into a grin.

“They're lucky to have you as a mother, you know,” she added, her eyes crinkling at the corners. “You work really hard to provide for them, and you do that all by yourself.” Her smile broadened, admiration flickering in her gaze.

“That obvious, huh?” My cheeks flushed, and my eyes dropped to the floor, hiding my embarrassment.

“Yeah...” She chuckled, her laugh contagious. “I don't know if anyone else has told you this, but uh...you're a super mom.”

Her words melted my heart, misting my eyes, and I blinked back the tears welling in their depths. No one had said that to me—ever. And I was so grateful that someone had genuinely appreciated all the hard work I'd put in all these years. It meant a whole lot to me, and I felt a sense of satisfaction wash over me.

“Thank you, Ms. Jenkins,” I said, my voice dropping to a whisper, barely containing the emotions within me. “You've made my day.”

She beamed a bright smile, revealing a glimpse of her perfect whites as she nodded her head and left.

I took one last look at my kids having fun on the playground, and I felt a flutter in my chest. The joy in my heart knew no bounds. Ms. Jenkins had said that they were lucky to have me as their mother. However, in real life, I was the lucky one to have been blessed with those two angels.

I headed back to my vehicle and drove to the small boutique I owned downtown. Investing in the clothing business in this part of town had turned out to be a good idea, considering how lucrative it'd been.

It wasn't my dream job or the ideal career path for a woman from a rich background. But it was enough to pay the bills, put food on my table, send my children to school, and cater to all my needs. What more could I ask for?

My friend Lorena used to say that simplicity was underrated and that the peace that came with it was always satisfactory. I hadn't understood what she meant by that; now, I did.

Later that afternoon, after a long day of attending to customers bustling in and out of my boutique, I decided to take a break. Over the years, I'd picked up a new skill: sketching designs for my clothing business.



As I sat at my small desk in a corner of the boutique, sketching a new design, my mind drifted off to the night I gave my old life away.

Running away had taken a lot of planning and critical thinking. Lev was a smart son of a bitch, and I knew that if I stood any chance at escaping him, I would need to be just as smart.

That night, after he'd cornered me in that empty street and threatened that my life was in his hands, I decided to flee.

Moving into that apartment had been the first stage of my plan. I couldn't go home to my parents, knowing the situation that I had gotten myself into. I knew a guy back in college—a hacker who owed me a favor for using my family's influence to help him out of trouble.

I'd contacted him when I moved to that apartment. After explaining to him the basic things that he needed to know about my situation, we both came up with a plan to help me escape without a trace.

He'd started off by first hacking the surveillance cameras outside my place. I'd rented that apartment because I knew that Lev would want to keep an eye on me after what I'd witnessed.

To do so, I anticipated that he'd have a few of his men around my place, watching my every move. And for the first time, I predicted him accurately. He had his men set up CCTVs outside my place in the most covert of ways possible, almost undetected. But I was intuitive.

Damon, my hacker friend, had disguised himself as a pizza delivery guy and arrived at my place twice in one day: in the morning and in the evening. Instead of a pizza, the contents of the boxes were the items I needed for my escape: forged papers, fake

passports, and so on.

He'd hacked the CCTV and tampered with the footage, making it so that the same feed would play every day. I knew this trick wasn't going to fool Lev for long, but it would at least buy me some time to escape.

Tampering with the footage was one thing; ditching the watchmen hovering over my place was another problem altogether. I had to study them and figure out their patterns. It helped that they were ignorant of the fact that I knew of their presence; therefore, I had the element of surprise. Sort of.

Anyway, the moment I'd found the pattern and discovered an opening, a slight lapse in their security, I used it to my advantage. I wasn't sure an opportunity like that would present itself again, so I jumped on it and bolted through the east window.

I'd left without turning back, without even letting my parents know that I was skipping town. For years, I'd told myself that it was for the best and that I had no choice. But recently, I felt a giant pit in my stomach called guilt.

It began not long after I had my own children and understood the concept of parenting. I put myself in my parents' shoes and asked myself how I'd feel if, one day, either of my babies left the city without a heads-up. How would I feel?

I'd be terrified for their safety. I'd be heartbroken.

This was the feeling I'd subjected my own parents to for five years. They had no idea where I was or if I was even alive. Mom must have been worried sick, and Dad must have used all of his resources, influence, and power to try and find me.

But I did what I had to do, and it was for the best. Right? Then why did I feel so guilty?

More than a few times, I'd come so close to reaching out to them to at least let them know that I was okay. But at the last minute, I'd always chicken out. I was afraid of how they'd react.

At 26, I wasn't exactly living the life they had envisioned for me. I was a single mom of two with no husband, living a simple life in a small house. This wasn't how they expected my life to turn out. Knowing my parents, they'd be disappointed, and Dad would say that I'd brought shame to the family name.

They wouldn't want anything to do with such a "failure," so why bother reaching out to them? It was best if I stayed away and let them mourn the death of their perfect daughter because, indeed, that version of me was dead.

My life might not be moving on the same track that they had planned for me, but at least I got to live it on my own terms.

Later that evening, I sat by the window, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee filling the air around me. As I sipped from my cup, I watched the kids play in the yard with a couple of our neighbor's children.

They seemed happy, oblivious to the dark world of crime and violence they hailed from. It was an established fact that I'd do anything, go any length, to keep them safe and away from that world. However, deep inside me, I couldn't shake the feeling that trouble was around the corner.

How long would I stay hidden?

As long as it takes, I thought to myself.

What if this feeling of unease growing inside was nothing but my own fear getting a hold of me?

The thought of losing this peaceful life I'd worked so hard to build sent shivers down my spine. With a reflexive move, I closed the curtains, my heart racing in my chest.

As much as I wanted to delude myself into thinking that this feeling was nothing serious, deep down, I knew better.

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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

A lot had happened in the last five years; a lot of significant changes and advancements had occurred in my life and business. For starters, I was half a decade older now, and with that came a shitload of pressure and marital concerns.

My advisers stated the obvious: that I wasn't getting any younger and that it was time to settle down and have my own family. Of course, I knew that. I just hadn't found the right person yet.

The woman that could have been the right one decided to flee from me like I was some kind of monster. Until today, I still thought about her, even though most times, I tried not to. She'd crept deep into my heart and occupied a vast majority of my mind, making it almost impossible to forget her.

However, she had made her choice. She'd run away from me. But how did she manage to pull that off in such a short period of time?

I knew she was smart, but I had never thought she was that smart. And to think she'd actually stayed hidden for five fucking years. Damn! I shouldn't have underestimated her. No one had ever pulled a stunt like that with me, yet she did it effortlessly, and she succeeded.

How? How did she do that?

This question had lingered on the fringes of my mind since that fateful night, and sadly, I hadn't been able to find the answer to that. Maybe she was in league with someone else, someone really good at making people disappear. That would make sense. It was the only logical explanation, anyway.

I was almost certain that as smart as she was, there was no way in hell that she would've escaped the house by herself. She had help from someone. Perhaps the delivery guy.

After she left the house, I had the best of my men searching for her, scouring the city day and night. However, she was nowhere to be found. It was as though she had just vanished without a trace.

I instructed Andrey to keep an eye on her family and find out what they knew. But it turned out that they, too, had no clue where their daughter was. Her mother had nearly lost her mind at the thought of her daughter going missing.

She left everything behind just to get away from me, including her family. Why? Why did she do that? What did I ever do to her to make her fear me so much?

It didn't make sense that she'd abandon her life and parents simply because she witnessed me taking a life. Was that enough reason for her to vanish without a trace?

For five years, the answers I was searching for had slipped through my fingers, and I loathed being in the dark. She disappeared and left me with a ton of questions that no one could provide the answers to. That was wicked.

Two things bothered me the most about this situation. One, how she was able to outsmart me from within the confines of her apartment. And two, the reason she left everything and everyone she ever cared about just to get away from me.

I was interested in her motive, in what drove her to take such a drastic decision. Ravyn fucking abandoned everything! Why? The driving force behind this course of action was beyond the fear for her own life. There was something more. But what was it?

As time went by, the zeal to search for her dwindled with each passing day. She clearly didn't want to be found, and I couldn't help but be impressed by her ability to stay hidden for so long. She had proven by her action that she was smarter than me, and that pricked my pride.

She'd broken the record by becoming the first person on the fucking planet that I couldn't find. However, as remarkable as that achievement was, it only fueled my rage.

It was useless putting so many resources into finding someone who did all that they could to elude me. So, instead of wasting my time on such an insignificant act, I decided to move on and take the Bratva more seriously than before.

The thing with that fucking traitor, Arseni, had cost the organization a lot in losses. But with my head back in the game, I was able to draw strategic plans to get us back in business.

Over the last two or three years, our organization regained all we'd lost—double-fold. I occupied my mind with productive thoughts, which proved quite helpful over time.

The Tarasov Bratva grew stronger than it had ever been. We carved our name deeper in the heart of the criminal underworld, intensifying the fear and respect our organization commanded.

Our numbers grew by the day as everyone wanted to be a part of something great. Our previous competitors were now insignificant, for we had climbed high up the ladder of success, power, wealth, and influence. In simple terms, we were way beyond their reach.

However, in this line of work, the more successful one got, the more enemies one made. New threats emerged every time we hit another threshold. But unfortunately

for them, the Tarasov Bratva was next to invincible. Whatever posed a threat to us, we'd neutralize with immediate effect.

The Bratva had always been a force to be reckoned with. But recently, as we took a different approach in business our reputation had evolved. The fear that once commanded respect now inspired outright terror. Our name was whispered in dread, and our influence had tripled in strength.

All of these achievements were possible because I decided to think of something more productive than the woman who left me.

In readiness to settle down and start my own family, I got engaged to a woman. I could no longer endure the pressure from my advisers and family members, so I did what they wanted.

She wasn't Ravyn, but at least this union would strengthen both our families. This marriage would be nothing but a business strategy from which the two sides involved would benefit.

I sat in my chair at the head of the long, polished mahogany table, my piercing gaze sweeping across the serious-faced men before me. This was the fifth deal this week that the Bratva was closing with yet another powerful organization.

The grand conference room with high ceilings and walls was adorned with rich, dark wood paneling and plush carpet. The men, dressed in impeccably tailored suits, sat in their chairs, exuding an air of confidence as they discussed the content of the deal.

I reclined in my chair, eyes narrowing as I listened to the Irish mob's deliberations. These men were trying to be cunning, attempting to trick us into accepting their terms and conditions. Their leader, Seamus, seemed hell-bent on negotiating a better deal, but I could see the desperation behind those tricky green eyes of his.



As smart as that might appear to be, it was folly, considering that this partnership would benefit them more.

Fingers absently drumming against the armrest, I let him speak, knowing the upper hand was mine.

“...and we're willing to offer a 20% stake in our operations,” Seamus said, a hint of a brogue in his voice as he leaned back in his chair, anticipating my response.

“20%, you say?” My brows arched, my gaze piercing.

A glint of concern flashed in his eyes, and his brows subtly knitted together. “That's a fair deal, no?”

I scoffed, my lips curling up into a faint smirk. “You're trying to be clever, Seamus.” My eyes bore into his, my expression unreadable as I leaned forward, elbows on the table. “Let me make one thing clear,” I began, my voice deepening, dripping with seriousness. “This partnership will go exactly as the contract says. No renegotiations. No hidden clauses.”

His jaw tightened ever so slightly, faint creases lining his forehead, accentuating the displeasure etched on his face. But I couldn't care less.

“You'll get the benefits we've outlined, and we'll get the cooperation we need. Take it or leave it,” I concluded, my voice laced with finality, leaving no room for debate.

He went silent for a moment, a cautioned murmur rising amongst his entourage as they exchanged glances. Seamus hesitated, his gaze shifting across his associates before returning to me.

We locked eyes for a while, and for a second there, I thought he was going to walk

away, but then his shoulder sagged slightly. “Alright. We'll take it.”

An almost undetectable smirk played on my lips as a sense of triumph waved over me. “Excellent,” I said. “I'll have our lawyers draw up the final documents.”

Seamus rose to his feet, and so did his associates. His shoes clicked on the polished marble floor as he walked over to me, his expression stoic.

I pushed back and got out of my chair, accepting his extended hand. “Let's get the partnership started.”

We shook on it, and he said, a fiery glint flickering in his eyes, “I can't wait to see how this goes.”

I'd played this game long enough to know a threat when I heard one, no matter how subtle it may sound.

I flashed a glaring smirk, my firm grip tightening against his. “Likewise.”

Our gazes bore into one another, the air thick with tension and anticipation. I could sense his unease despite his feeble attempt at masking it. After I let go of his hand, he nodded and signaled his associates to leave with him.

Seamus wasn't pleased with the outcome of this meeting. He and his men knew they were getting the raw end of this deal, but they also knew that refusing my offer would mean missing out on a lucrative opportunity.

Soon, they left the conference room with my own associates following behind them. Andrey, seeing that we were alone, approached me with something that resembled a smile on his face. “Boss, there's something you should know—”

“Lev, darling!” Sophia interrupted, gliding into the room, her heels echoing off the high walls.

“Oh, God!” I grumbled under my breath, pinching the bridge of my nose as she drew closer.

With a gentle nod, Andrey withdrew and saw himself out, granting me the unwanted privacy that my fiancée's arrival had brought.

Sophia was an elegant woman from one of the most influential families in the city. She was practically every man's dream: beautiful, smoking hot, and fucking rich, not to mention obedient.

Her family's connection and power made her the perfect woman to wife up. At least, that was what my advisers believed. I, on the other hand, was just moving with the flow, willing to do anything so long as it benefitted the Bratva.

Sophia was blessed with a model's shape, tall and skinny but in a sexy way. She had an amazing smile, and her hazel-brown eyes sparkled like diamonds. Her wavy dark hair always fell loosely over her shoulders, adding a touch of elegance to her appearance.

Today, she wore a crisp white crop top that exposed her flat tummy over a pair of tight blue jeans. Black stilettos complemented her overall look, and her porcelain skin simmered in the lights.

As hot as she was, I'd never found her attractive, and this was a huge problem, considering she was the woman I'd tie the knot with.

Sophia halted in front of me, her arms wrapped around my neck as she kissed my lips. I couldn't kiss back; I hadn't been able to bring myself to do so yet. Her touch

had always repulsed me, igniting a flicker of irritation within me. But as always, I'd manage to squeeze out a smile.

“You look tired,” she said, resting her forehead against mine, her breath brushing over my skin.

“Yeah...I had a long day,” I replied, my voice faint and my body subtly pulling away from this uncomfortable position she'd trapped me in.

“You should get some rest.” She kissed my cheek and took a step back, her gaze locked on me.

I nodded, rubbing my forehead.

Surely, Sophia could read between the lines. She could tell that I wasn't that into her, yet she wouldn't stop coming at me. Underneath that good girl vibe she had going on was a version of herself she hadn't shown me yet.

Sophia's energy seemed so unreal, almost like she was faking it so I'd take an interest in her.

She glanced at her watch. “Oh, shoot!” came the soft exclamation, as though she had just realized she was running late for an appointment. “I gotta run, honey.” She picked up her bag from the table and kissed me again before heading out. “Don't forget the gala tonight!” she added, her voice dripping with sweet obligation.

I let out a sigh, fingers massaging my eyeballs as she walked out of the conference room, shutting the door behind her.

I should like Sophia, regardless of whether she was fake or not. She had everything needed to entice me, but for some reason, I couldn't stop comparing her to Ravyn.

The sooner I understood that those were two completely different women, the better it would be for me. I should learn to appreciate Sophia's efforts instead of being cold toward her.

As much as I wished she was more like Ravyn, she simply was not. But at least she was here with me. Ravyn wasn't.

Later, in the cool evening, I stood by the window in my office, sipping from a glass of vodka. I stared out, the city skyline spreading before me like a canvas of twinkling lights, but my attention was drawn inward.

Thoughts of Ravyn wouldn't let me be. Images of her face flashed in my head; her laughter, her enchanting smile, and that one night we shared together wouldn't stop replaying in my mind.

As I sipped from my glass, my thoughts began to unravel, memories of Ravyn flooding my consciousness. The more I tried to push back the images of her face, the more they wove together into a tapestry of moments we shared.

“Boss.” Andrey's voice snapped me out of my thoughts.

I took another sip and turned to face him, his lips twitching at the corners. His eyes had the same look as back in the conference room. Andrey seemed a little bit thrilled about something, and he would've told me what it was before if Sophia hadn't interrupted.

Now, I was curious, my brows furrowing slightly. “Don't just stand there. Spill,” I instructed, my anticipation growing by the second.

“We've got a lead,” he declared, looking into my eyes.

My heart stopped for a moment because even as vague as his words were, a part of me knew what he was talking about. I felt a cold shiver run down my spine, my chest heaving slowly.

“One of our men spotted a woman matching Ravyn's exact description,” he said, his eyes never leaving mine.

Hearing her name on his lips, and the possibility that I would finally have the answers to the questions that plagued me for years, stole my breath away.

He continued, “She's living a simple life in a small coastal town, and uh...” He paused, breaking eye contact with me. Andrey cleared his throat, as if bracing himself for my reaction. “It appears she has a...family.”

His words echoed in my head, striking a nerve as a jolt of anger surged through me. I tightened my jaw, my chest constricting from all that fury swelling within.

Family? I thought, a scowl settling on my face. The idea that she belonged to someone else fueled my rage, prompting my brows to furrow with deep creases between them.

Another's hands had touched her skin. She had sex with someone else and even had a family with them. My teeth gritted at this thought, eyes blazing with fury.

I tightened my hand around the glass until it cracked. My body trembled at this revelation, and I set the glass on the table before I ended up shattering it.

This whole time, she'd been with another man, building a family with him?

I jerked my head. “Confirm that it's her,” I ordered, my voice barely above a whisper.

He nodded, and as he was about to leave, I added, “Andrey.”

He stopped in his tracks.

“Get the jet ready,” I instructed, turning to look out the window. “I want to see for myself,” I muttered under my breath.

If, indeed, the woman they spotted was Ravyn, then she had a lot of explaining to do.

At last, I'd found her after all this time.

Ravyn had no idea what was about to hit her, and I found comfort in that. In my head, I pictured the look on her face when we'd finally meet again. Oh, how satisfying it would be to gaze upon the terror in her eyes.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

What a wonderful day!

It had been busy all morning with customers bustling in and out of my boutique. Elegance and Whimsy, the name I'd chosen for my business, had, within this short period of time, spread across the town. Some believed it was a haven of style and sophistication.

Personally, I thought that may have been an exaggeration. Although my boutique was small compared to the other establishments in the neighborhood, the size didn't matter much, considering the amount of effort I put into growing my brand.

When I'd first moved here, I wasn't sure what business to venture into, and it took me a while before I figured it out. I studied the town, its people, and what they lacked. As much as I wanted to get on my feet and cater to my unborn kids, I was also interested in solving a problem.

I realized that if I could solve one problem, then I'd be killing two birds with one stone. It didn't take long before it dawned on me that the one thing this part of town lacked was a standard boutique. Or at least something that looked like a standard boutique.

There wasn't any functional business in this area that sold what I had in mind, and I thought to myself, "This is it." Dad used to say, "Sometimes, people don't know what they need until you give it to them."

The folks around these parts would often travel to neighboring communities to access a boutique. It was just a stone's throw away, so a lot of them didn't see it as a



problem. However, I didn't share that opinion, and I was willing to give them what they usually went outside to look for.

So, I took the bold step to establish my brand, Elegance and Whimsy.

Dad was right. These people didn't know that they needed such an establishment next door until I brought it to their doorstep. There's a popular saying, "You don't know what you've been missing until it arrives."

This was the case with me and the town's people. My establishment was like an eye-opener to how convenient it was to easily access a standard boutique without having to go far.

It wasn't all rosy at first, but with time, everything started to fall into place. My business had grown exponentially since its establishment five years ago. I didn't think my brand would grow this big in such a short period of time. Every day, I was grateful that I was bold enough to have started it when I did.

Now, I'd killed two birds with one stone; I'd solved a problem, and it was profitable.

I realized that subconsciously, I'd picked up a thing or two from Dad, and those things I learned, I put into practice. Perhaps I was business-minded like he was. I just hadn't known it yet.

Today, the store was alive with the hum of conversations, the soft chime of laughter, and the occasional rustling of fabrics as customers browsed the racks. The walls were adorned with an expertly curated selection of designer gowns, some of which I sketched out myself.

Resplendent in a sleek black dress with my hair styled in loose waves, I glided across the crowded store. My smile was unwavering as I greeted my esteemed customers,

offered styling advice, and rang up purchases with practiced ease.

The sparkle in my eyes and the wide grin perched on my face belied the nerves that sometimes fluttered beneath my polished exterior. My business was expanding, and sooner or later, I'd have to start considering hiring workers because there was only so much I could do by myself.

The concept of having employees due to the rapid growth and expansion of my brand warmed my heart. It had always been my dream to own an establishment, and now, here I was, running one effectively.

Five years ago, I hadn't thought I'd climb this high up the ladder of success on my own. It was incredible how lucrative my first attempt at running my own business was. Was it a dream because it was too good to be true?

I felt so free and alive.

Running away from my old life might have been a selfish and maybe even silly idea, but I was glad that I did. If only Mom and Dad could see the woman I'd become now. They might not be proud, considering my achievement was nothing compared to the plans they'd had for me.

As I arranged a display of crystal earrings, an elegant woman approached me, her heels clicking against the floor. I raised my head and beamed at her as she halted in front of me. I'd seen her around a couple of times, but we'd never really spoken before. This was because she often stopped by with a friend who always was the one to purchase a thing or two, and then they'd leave.

“Hi, welcome to Elegance the celestial canvas was a starry expanse with the crescent moon hanging somewhere behind a pillar of cloud. As the cool air blew across the town, whipping my hair into a frenzy, I headed toward my car, my keys jingling and

heels clicking against the pavement.

Something seemed off tonight. I wasn't sure what it was but I couldn't shake the feeling that trouble lurked in the darkness. My heart was pounding in my chest for no definite reason, and I felt a sudden dryness in my throat.

The streets were deserted, a little quieter than usual, with the lamps casting long shadows along the sidewalks.

I paused in my tracks, taking a look around the familiar surroundings that seemed awkwardly different tonight. My eyes furrowed, creating faint creases between my brows as I wondered why this unsettling feeling plagued me.

As I neared my car, the screeching sound of an approaching vehicle caught my attention, its bright headlights enveloping me. My hands reflexively rose to shield my face from the harsh beams that blinded me for a moment.

Everything happened so fast.

I heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming at me, and before I could even think about what was happening, a needle pricked my neck. Whatever I was injected with must have been so powerful, considering the little time it took to knock me out.

Light as a feather and with blurry vision, I fell weightlessly, a pair of strong arms whisking me into the air. The world around me swirled, the muffled masculine voices of my abductors echoing in my head.

I heard one of them say, "We got her. Drive."

As the vehicle they had me in drove away, my eyes shut, and all that existed was utter darkness.

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My head was throbbing hard when I awoke, blinking with heavy eyes as I finally came to. I winced at my aches, my fingers massaging my temples. As my vision cleared, my eyes caught the ceiling fan spinning, but I had yet to understand what was going on.

I recognized the scent of my living room, but how did I get here? Then, I immediately recalled the needle piercing my flesh, and my hand flew to the affected spot on my neck.

Wait a minute. I recognized the cologne filling the air around me. My eyes widened, and my heart sank into my stomach. My breath lodged in my dry throat.

I jumped off the couch, panting with cold sweat dampening my forehead. My legs turned to jelly, and breathing became impossible as I saw him sitting there in silence.

The table lamp cast an eerie glow on his chiseled face, which was devoid of emotion as he sat on a sofa, legs casually crossed. His men stood sentinel by his side, their imposing presence filling the room.

My chest heaved rapidly, eyes fixed on the devil sitting in my living room. I'd always known this day would come, but nothing would have prepared me for it.

“Lev,” I whispered under my breath, tightening my jaw as I struggled to stay calm.

He rose to his feet and approached me with slow, menacing footsteps. I'd almost forgotten how tall he was and how scary his cold stare could be. As he towered over me, my brain went blank, abandoning me for a moment.

“Ravyn Jensen,” he called softly, his voice dripping with a hint of venom, his

expression stoic.

I drew a deep breath and summoned all the scrambled pieces of courage I could muster. “What—what're you here?” I asked, my lips quivering, regardless of the defiance in my tone.

He held my gaze, his deep voice and sinister reply shattering my soul. “I've come to collect what's mine.”

My throat wobbled as I swallowed hard, my heart pounding like a drum in my heaving chest.

It's over. I'm doomed.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I couldn't believe my eyes when my men brought her back to this cozy place she called home. It was beneath the standard of the woman I once knew, small and simple. Maybe a little too simple, considering her family's status.

She left everything just to build a life with a common man. Was that how much she loathed me?

As I stood in front of her tonight, watching her lips quiver and her chest rise and fall, I realized how much I'd missed her. She was still as gorgeous as I remembered, perhaps even more gorgeous. She'd gained a little weight, but only in the right places, and her curvy frame constantly drew my attention.

Despite this incredible growth, my anger still simmered beneath the surface. She was someone else's, and the thought of his hands all over her body quickened my pulse. Those lips that should have been mine were not someone else's to kiss.

Jealousy washed over me, and my jaw tightened, my fingers balling into fists as I stared into her blue eyes. I could see the fear dancing in their depths, even though a defiant scowl settled on her face. Her attempt to mask her terror was feeble, and her eyes betrayed her supposed composure.

However, beneath my anger was a sense of relief. She was okay, alive and well. At last, I had the chance to get all the answers to the pesky little questions she'd left me with. I could do whatever I wanted, and there was little or nothing that she could do about it.

She was aware of this fact, which was the reason for her fear.

As I approached, she slowly pulled away, holding my gaze. Her breathing became increasingly jagged as I closed the distance between us. Her signature perfume lingered in the air, invading my senses and reminding me of the intimate moment we once shared.

Ravyn stopped in her backward tracks, her scowl deepening. “You shouldn't be here,” she said through gritted teeth, eyes flashing with disdain. “I don't want you around. You're not welcome here, so leave.” She gestured toward the door as though her empty words were enough to get me moving.

My lips twitched at a corner, eyes roaming her body, subtly drinking in the sight of her curves. Her defiance was admirable, but it wouldn't help her at all.

“Lev, you shouldn't be here,” she said, her tone laced with a hint of caution as she blinked her eyes with controlled breaths. “You need to leave. Now .” Her voice was firm, dripping with authority.

It was almost like she was trying to prevent me from finding out something she was hiding. Too late. I already knew about the bastard in her life.

My brows arched at her effrontery and audacity, a soft, disbelieving chuckle escaping my lips. “It appears you've forgotten your place or who you're talking to,” I growled, my brows knitting together. “Perhaps these last five years have dulled your memory.”

Her throat wobbled as she swallowed, her chest heaving with a slow motion. “I don't want any trouble, Lev.”

“Then why did you run?” I asked, my voice dangerously low, eyes pinned on her like a hook to a fish.

She held my gaze, her lips trembling, her face pale, and I could see the tension in her

body. Her muscles seemed coiled, ready to spring into action like she was bracing herself for the worst.

For a moment, I thought I saw a glimmer of tears simmering in her eyes, but she quickly blinked them back. I could sense the effort she was making to keep her voice steady and her fear at bay.

“For five years, you stayed hidden,” I began, eyes narrowing as I took a few steps forward. “Did you really think that you could run away from me and I wouldn't find you?”

“It's a free country, Lev,” she replied, withdrawing until her back met the wall behind her. “Besides, I'm a grown woman, and I can do whatever I want.” The courage and defiance in her tone were glaringly forced. “I left because I wanted to, and there's nothing binding you and me.”

For a fleeting moment there, I thought I saw something flicker in the depths of her eyes—a flash of uncertainty. On her last statement, a glimmer of doubt seemed to undermine the bravado in her tone. As her words hung in the air, I saw a shadow of fear, perhaps even desperation, dancing across her face.

Her eyes kept momentarily flying around like she was expecting someone. Maybe the bastard she started a family with.

Her statement, “There's nothing binding you and me,” sounded a little bit off, like she was trying to convince herself as much as me. The faintest whisper of insecurity had escaped that statement, and now my curiosity was piqued. My mind was racing with the implications, and a number of questions droned on in my head.

Nevertheless, I'd start with the obvious.



“Who is he?” I demanded, eyes narrowing to form creases between my brows.

She squinted, a puzzled look flashing on her face. “Who's who?”

My jaw tightened, and my hand snapped out to grab her wrist with a firm grip, my furious eyes boring into hers. She winced in pain, struggling to squirm out of my hold.

“Don't play games with me,” I warned, pulling her close and watching her body tremble, her fear slightly amplified.

“You're hurting me,” she said, her voice dropping to a whisper, a hint of anger flickering in her eyes. “Let go of me!”

Her resistance and defiance pushed me to frustration, my rage exploding as I tugged on her hair from the back. Her head jerked at the sudden pull that forced her to look at me.

“Answer me!” I snarled in her face, her eyes squinting, fear etched on her countenance.

As she shaped her mouth, ready to respond, the sound of a car pulling over by the driveway interrupted the moment. That instant, I watched the color drain out of her face, her breath lodged in her throat.

The car's headlights died down, and the sound of doors opening and closing was heard. Two tiny voices—one higher than the other—caught my attention with their laughs.

I returned my gaze to Ravyn's pale face, her heart pounding heavily in her chest. She wasn't just married to another man; they had kids, too. My jaw tightened, and I let go

of her, a jolt of rage traveling across my body. I could pull out my gun and shoot the bastard as soon as he walked in through that door.

I could feel her unease. Her eyes misted, and her body trembled in ways I hadn't seen before. Ravyn was restless, her fingers scratching the back of her head as her feet tapped against the wooden floor.

“Lev, listen...we can, uh...” she began, her voice shaking.

“Shut up,” I ordered, my eyes fixed on the door, eager to see the bastard who walked into the room.

As the handle turned, her chest heaved quicker, her eyes wide open, breathless. Her unease and fear amplified my curiosity.

The door opened, and two adorable kids, neither above the age of four, ran into the room. At the sight of the strange men in their living room, both children stopped in their tracks, their gazes shifting across each of us.

Their laughs faded gradually, as if they could sense the tension in the air. Behind them, a woman around the same age as Ravyn stood, just as shocked as the kids. I assumed she was the driver, considering she was holding a set of car keys.

If this woman drove them home, where was the husband, the father of the kids?

Hold on a minute.

My eyes settled on the boy holding onto his sister's hand. He was looking right at me with a clenched jaw and hollow eyes that seemed to flicker with bravery and a hint of anger. He stared directly into my eyes without fear, a glimmer of warning dancing on his face.

The little boy was sending a subtle message not to mess with his family. I knew that look. I used to have it in my eyes when I was his age each time I was faced with a threat.

“Uh...Claire, is everything alright?” the woman asked, fear creeping into her tone.

Ravyn cleared her throat, a plastic smile playing on her lips. “Yes, Ms. Jenkins. Everything's fine. Thanks for bringing the kids home.” She flashed a dismissive grin at her as she walked toward the children.

Ms. Jenkins didn't seem convinced, but she was either too afraid to push further, or she just decided to trust Rayvn's claims.

She squeezed out a smile and turned to leave. “Have a good night.” Her gaze swept across me and my men before she dematerialized.

Ravyn lowered herself to the kids' level, retaining her plastic smile. “Go to your room, okay?” she whispered, placing a gentle hand on their shoulders. Her voice cracked under the weight of fear.

“Mom, are these men bothering you?” the brave little one asked, his piercing gaze fixed on me.

“What?” She let out a dry laugh. “No, sweetheart.” She ruffled his hair. “Now take your sister upstairs, and don't come down until I come to get you.”

He hesitated for a moment, his eyes darting across our faces before leading his sister up the stairs. The way he held on to her hand was a clear indication that he would do anything to protect his sister.

Both kids were the same age, a little above four. So, if they were hers—and they

were—that would mean that she must have been pregnant when she left five years ago. The timing was perfect.

The boy was a spitting image of me in more ways than one, and it was like looking in a mirror. Andrey glanced at me with a raised brow the moment he saw the kid. Despite the silence, we both shared the same thought.

The kid had my eyes, my deadly stare. The resemblance was uncanny and undeniable, and I didn't need a paternity test to know who the father was.

On the other hand, the girl was a carbon copy of her mother; she had the same blonde hair, blue eyes, and smile.

It all made sense now. This was why she ran away. She found out that she was carrying my children in her womb and decided to ditch town. How selfish and wicked.

I turned to her, her eyes dropping to the floor, unable to look at me. “They're mine...aren't they?”

She managed to raise her head, tears simmering in her eyes, her shoulders slumped in dismay.

This was what she was trying so hard to hide a few minutes ago. She never wanted me to find out. Things just got more complicated now that two children I never knew of were involved.

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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The cat was out of the bag now.

My heart was racing in my chest, and my breath lodged in my throat as I sat across from him. The rage in his eyes was glaring, and his tightened jaw accentuated the deep scowl on his face.

The kids were upstairs, and his men had stepped outside, leaving just the two of us. I could barely stomach the tension that hovered in the air, threatening to squeeze the life out of me. His intimidating glare made it difficult to hold his gaze.

For the past three minutes, it had been awkwardly silent between us, and he wouldn't tear his blazing eyes off me. There was no telling what he would do next. The fury in his gaze couldn't be more obvious, yet it was next to impossible to predict his next move.

I'd always known that this day would come, the day that my past would catch up with me. But despite how long it took for him to find me, I still wasn't prepared—I wasn't ready to face him.

Running away from him after witnessing what he did was one thing. Keeping his kids away from him was an entirely different ball game altogether. His anger after finding out about the children had escalated, and now I was in even deeper shit than before.

I tried to muster all the courage that I could, but it seemed impossible to put up a brave face at the moment. I was unable to look him in the eye, too afraid to catch a glimpse of the evil dancing in their depths. I'd never seen a man so furious like this before, and that terrified me.

I felt like I was seated with the devil, having no idea what he would choose to do to me. Lev could pull out his gun and squeeze the trigger in a split second. And then puff! Just like that, my life would be over in jiffy.

Everything I'd worked so hard to build would go down the drain in the blink of an eye. At this point, my life was in his hands—one wrong move from me, one bad word, and it would all be over.

Over the past few minutes, I'd attempted to plead with his conscience, but I hadn't been able to find my voice or the right words. It was as if my brain had abandoned me, leaving me blank and helpless.

I could feel the heat rising within me, making me sweat in awkward places. My pulse had quickened more than it ever had, and I could hear the sound of my own heart pounding heavily in my chest.

His intimidating glare and silent seething made my core tremble as I sat quietly, fidgeting with my hands on my lap.

I drew a deep breath and summoned the courage to raise my head and meet his gaze, my chest heaving slowly. “Lev, I...I can explain.” The words fell out of my mouth, low and barely above a whisper.

“It's pretty obvious, isn't it?” he asked, his tone eerie and cold. “You decided on your own that I had no right to know about my kids, to be a part of their lives.” His jaw clenched, and his words were spoken through gritted teeth.

I could see the rage flashing in his blazing eyes. His fingers balled into fists as he stared into my soul. I'd never been so terrified in my whole life, and no matter how hard I tried to remain composed, I couldn't.

My heart wouldn't stop pounding like a freaking drum, and for some reason, I was unable to stop blinking. Maybe it was a mechanism to mask my nervousness

He continued, his voice calm but dripping with venom, “How dare you?”

His tone sent shivers down my core and a sudden dryness in my throat. It was as though I could feel my life leaving my body, my soul crushing at the sound of his voice.

I had no idea what he was going to do to me, no clue what his reaction would be like, and that uncertainty was killing me slowly.

“Lev, please,” I muttered, my lips quivering, a lone tear trickling down my cheek.

“You robbed me of my kids, Ravyn!” The words tumbled out in a hushed, angry tone that cut through the air like a knife.

I flinched at his growl. My skin prickled, my breath hitched in my dry throat, and I swallowed hard.

His gaze seethed with anger. His face twisted into a snarl, eyes blazing red. “For five years, you denied me of fatherhood. You ran away with my kids without telling me—what was the plan, to keep them away from me for life?” His voice rose with each sentence as he spoke, his intimidating glare intensifying by the second.

“I'm sorry,” I said, my eyes dropping to the floor.

“No. You're not,” he replied swiftly, leaning forward without looking away. “You did this on purpose. You planned to flee, to keep my kids from me, and I wanna know why.”

His demand left room for my response, but I was so caught up in my own fear that I didn't realize I was toiling with his patience.

“Answer me!” he thundered, his palms slamming against his lap.

Startled, I almost jumped out of my skin, my heart stopping for a moment. His reaction had stolen my breath and also my voice, and now my mouth was open, but no sound was produced.

Where was my brain now that I needed it?

“Why did you do it?” he repeated, annoyance simmering beneath the surface. “Why did you decide that I wasn't worthy enough to know of their existence?”

I managed to raise my head and look at him, my heart sinking into my stomach. “Because I was afraid,” I responded at last, my voice a little rusty from disuse coupled with the nervousness that consumed me.

His expression softened ever so slightly, almost undetected. His eyes squinted, and a subtle glint of intrigue and curiosity etched on his face.

“I was afraid, okay?” I began, sniffing as I wiped my tears. “You know the kind of life you live; it's a dangerous one filled with chaos, death, and destruction.” As I spoke, I felt my confidence gradually seeping back, my voice rising with each sentence. “Lev, you have enemies everywhere—enemies that wouldn't mind going the extra mile just to hurt you.”

He leaned back in his chair, his eyes betraying the stoic expression on his rigid face.

I continued, his silence boosting morale. “I didn't want my kids growing up in such a world of violence. I'd be putting a giant bullseye on them for enemies to target.”



He stared at me, clenching his jaw, although I could sense his anger dissolving at my reason. Any reasonable human being would understand my fear, and so could he, but it still didn't change the fact that he was mad at me.

“Also, I didn't trust your ability to be a father,” I spat, looking into those hollow eyes of his.

He squinted, his scowl deepening, mirroring his displeasure at my tone and assumption.

“I watched you kill a man in cold blood, Lev. Pardon my skepticism about your credibility as a father,” I added, holding his gaze even though my whole body was tensing, quivering with fear.

He hesitated for a moment. “You think I'm a monster.” His lips curled into a faint, self-satisfying smirk. “You're not wrong. I am.”

Something about the way he unapologetically owned up to his monstrosity made my skin prickle.

He edged closer, his voice dropping to a menacing whisper. “I am a horrible man, Ravyn. I've done many horrible things, and I will do more horrible things.”

Cold sweat dampened my forehead, and a shiver sprinted through my spine, amplifying the terror I tried so hard to mask.

“Make no mistake,” he continued without breaking eye contact, “I am as evil as they come. But as devilish as I can be, I would never let anyone so much as touch a hair on my children's head. Without hesitation, I will wipe half the planet in order to keep them safe if it ever comes to that.”

Somehow, I didn't doubt that one bit. It was both scary and refreshing at the same time. Indeed, he seemed like the type of man who would end whoever would be stupid enough to harm his family.

He might be able to keep them safe, but for how long? How long until someone figured out how to hurt them or worse?

Even if he could protect them from his enemies, who was going to protect them from him? I didn't want them to be a part of his life of crime and violence. I didn't want my son, Nikolai, to turn into a man like his father, cold and dangerous.

However, at this point, there really wasn't much that I could do.

He rose to his feet, fingers fastening the buttons of his double-breasted coat. "Get the kids ready. You're all coming back with me to Chicago," he declared, his voice firm and authoritative.

My brows arched instantly. "What?" I mumbled, rising to my feet, my heart racing like I didn't expect this from him.

"You made your choice five years ago," he said, meeting my gaze. "Now, I'm making mine." The finality in his voice left no room for arguments.

A million thoughts were tugging at my mind as I stood there, frozen in shock as he approached me.

Lev halted in front of me and leaned to whisper a chilling threat that sent shivers down my spine. "Try to play clever again, and I assure you you'll end up dead...just like the world already thinks you are." His breath grazed against my ear, his tone devoid of emotion.

The deadly intent behind his words made my heart skip a beat. My palms were sweaty, and my breath was heavy as he pulled back and stared at me, an evil smirk playing on the corner of his lips.

He wasn't bluffing. I knew that for sure.

Lev withdrew from me, his shoes clicking against the wooden floor as he headed out of the house. I blinked rapidly, my heart aching as I tried to fight the tears in my eyes.

The sofa crunched beneath my weight the moment I sank back into it, thinking about my new reality. I was doomed now that Lev was back in my life. In just a few hours, I'd lost everything I worked so hard to build in the last five years.

Lev's arrival had robbed me of my peace, happiness, and fulfillment. He left me with no choice but to abandon everything and follow him. Defying his orders would be stupid; I'd be putting myself in harm's way. What good would that do for anyone?

If I decided to be stubborn and something bad were to happen to me, he'd claim my kids. Lev would remold them in his own image, and in a few years, they'd forget all about me. I'd be nothing but a ghost, a memory that would, in time, fade from their minds.

I couldn't have that. I would succumb to his demand and do as he wanted, so long as I'd get to keep my life and be around my kids.

Leaving all of this behind was a huge sacrifice, but I was willing to do whatever it took to be on the safe side.

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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

I stood by the door, eyes fixed on the two children drinking in the sight of my mansion—their new home. A mix of awe and uncertainty etched their faces as they wondered what was happening.

My son, the heir to all that I had built, was silent, his expression nearly unreadable; he had a Tarasov signature. I could tell that he had a lot on that small mind of his, but he hadn't said a word. The kid was observing his environment, his eyes roaming the living room. Underneath the subtle glint of amusement was a hint of caution.

He was smart enough to see me, a stranger, as a threat. My boy had trust issues, and I'd have to do a lot of work in order to convince him that I wasn't a threat to him or two women in his life. For now, though, I couldn't be prouder of this little man.

My blood coursed through his veins, and watching him scrutinize his new environment prompted a smirk on my face. The warrior in him, the defender of his own, had awakened. If he was a little older, he would have had a word with me without being afraid of who I was.

The boy lacked fear—it was a concept that he seemed unfamiliar with. One of the qualities of a Tarasov was bravery, and my son had more than one of those qualities.

My daughter, on the other hand, had a smile on her face as her eyes darted across the opulent setting. She seemed impressed by what she saw, and her joy, however contained, was palpable.

For a long time, they'd lived an ordinary life, oblivious to the luxury that was rightfully theirs. All thanks to their “I know best” mother. The idea that my children

lived a simple life in a small town as opposed to the life of glitz and glamor that Ravyn denied them made my skin crawl.

She had done a pretty good job at raising them on her own anyway. The children didn't look malnourished, and they were in perfect condition. Ravyn might not have given them the world, but she did give them something unique: love.

I'd noticed the unbreakable bond between those two, and I had to admit, I was impressed. She taught them to love each other, to look out for one another and that seemed to be exactly what they were doing.

My son, Nik, would always hold his sister's hand whenever he had the chance, as if protecting her from danger. It was clear that his mother had taught him to always defend her, and the boy seemed to take his job very seriously.

For a boy his age without a father figure in his life, Nik sure turned out great.

A sense of unease washed over me as I watched them closely. These kids weren't just an extension of my legacy or symbols of the power of my family. No. They were my blood. My responsibility. They were mine to provide, cater for, and protect.

Ravyn was right about one thing: I did have a lot of enemies who'd want to harm them just to get back at me. The thought of anyone daring to go after my kids made my blood boil, and my fingers physically clenched into fists.

I'd burn the world before I let any harm befall those kids. I would start a fucking war over them, and there was nothing that I wouldn't do in order to keep them safe. They were my responsibility, and I wasn't going to let them down.

Ravyn believed that I'd make a terrible father, considering the type of life I lived. I should have been mad at her, but I realized that I had missed her outspokenness.

However, I was going to prove her wrong because right now, nothing mattered to me in the world more than those two kids.

For four years, I'd been absent from their lives. For four years, they'd lived without a father figure, but all of that was about to change. As great as they turned out, there was a void that Ravyn couldn't fill, a void only I could fill. She'd done her best alone. It was time I stepped in.

There was a lot to catch up on, and it could take the kids some time to get used to their new reality—to get used to me. But I was willing to try. I was willing to wait until they came around.

My daughter's eyes locked on mine, and she glided over to me, a small smile on her face. Her blonde hair fell loosely over her shoulders, and her blue eyes sparkled like her mother's.

She halted in front of me, and I couldn't help but smile, a genuine smile that hadn't played on my lips for a long time.

“Hi,” she said, her eyes crinkling at the corners, a glimmer of caution flickering in their depths. “Is this your house?”

Her tiny, adorable voice broadened my grin, and I stooped down to her level, my heart racing with anticipation. “Yes, it is. Do you like it?”

She looked up at her mother standing by her side and then returned her gaze to me, nodding her head. “It’s really big. A lot bigger than ours.”

Her voice melted my heart, and a weird feeling I couldn't describe surged through me. I felt a type of joy that I hadn't felt before, but underneath that joy was fear. Fear of screwing things up, of not being good enough.

This little angel had me enthralled, and there wasn't anything in this world that I wouldn't give to her. For the first time in my life, I actually cared about someone else's opinion of me. My daughter had the same effect her mother had on me when we first met, but on a much larger scale.

“I'm Elara,” she introduced herself, her cute smile spreading across her face. “What's your name?”

I swallowed, taking a moment to digest the fact that she didn't see me as a monster. I could sense her reservation, but she definitely wasn't afraid of me.

“Lev,” I replied, my lips curling into a bright grin.

“What does it mean?” she asked, squinting her eyes, curiosity lacing her tone.

“It means 'lion,’” I answered, amused by her inquisition.

Elara giggled, her whites flashing as her lips curved into a smile. She jerked her head, met Ravyn's soft gaze, and returned her eyes to face me. “Are you a friend of Mom's?”

I hesitated, stealing a glance at Ravyn before refocusing my attention on the cute little one. “I am.”

“Cool,” she said, her eyes shining with mirth.

“You know what's even cooler?” I asked, a mischievous grin twitching at the corners of my lips.

She stared at me with anticipation flickering in her gaze, her cute smile gradually broadening.

I leaned forward and palmed the side of my mouth as I whispered in her ear. “I’m your father.”

She lifted her head, her eyes widening in shock. Elara squinted like she was studying me, unsure of what to make of this revelation. A puzzled expression settled on her face, and her head tilted to the side. The girl was just four years old, and only God knew what story her mom had told them about their father.

Elara went silent, her expression blank and almost unreadable. I hated that I couldn't read her at that moment, and I realized just how frustrating it was for people who couldn't read me.

So that's how it feels , I thought.

A faint, nearly imperceptible smile flashed across her face, and her hand gripped her mother's. The smile wasn't a symbol of her acceptance of me as her father—at least not yet. However, it was something I could work with.

There was an awkward silence between us, and I could almost hear Ravyn's heart beating in her chest. She was uneasy for reasons best known to her, but I thought it had something to do with me telling the girl that I was her father.

I caught my son's eyes, his expression stoic as he stood by his mother's side. The air was thick with tension, and the awkward silence was growing deafening by the second.

Andrey materialized by the stairs and conspicuously cleared his throat. “Boss,” he began, his deep voice cutting through the silence. “Should I get the maids to prepare the rooms?”

Without taking my eyes off my little girl, I replied. “Yes. Make sure my kids have



everything they need.” I rose to my feet, adjusting my blazer.

It sounded weird saying that out loud, but with time, I'd get used to it. This was my reality now—being responsible for two children. As thrilling as that was, a part of me was afraid of parenting, especially because this was a new territory for me.

But if Ravyn could do it on her own for four years, I would have to give it my all.

“Come on,” Andrey said to the kids, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he mustered a faint smile. “I'll show you to your rooms.”

They looked at their mother as though seeking her permission before going with this strange man with a terrifying look.

She nodded, forcing a smile good enough to have them let their guard down.

Deep down, I was just as jealous as I was intrigued by the way she raised these kids. I could only hope that one day, they would look at me the same way they looked at her, with respect and reverence.

As they followed Andrey up the stairs, Nik held on to his sister's hand like a guardian keeping her safe. I watched them in silence, and the sight tugged at something deep within me—something I wasn't quite ready to name yet.

This wasn't a parenting competition. But if it were, I'd have to work twice as hard just to have half the effect Ravyn had on these kids. She'd taken her time to mold them the right way, and despite my reservations, I couldn't help the pride simmering underneath.

She'd given me two beautiful souls—the best of both worlds—and now it was up to me to keep them. I had no idea where to start, and I had no clue what to do, but I was

going to figure something out.

I felt her gaze lingering, and when I turned to face her, she crossed her arms over her chest. In her eyes was a glint of defiance, vulnerability, and mockery, as if daring me to figure out the concept of fatherhood on my own.

This was more than enough reason for me to think fast and act even faster. I couldn't have her gloating over my failure, so I mustn't fail.

As tedious as this journey might be, I was willing to see it through to the end. Those kids were mine, and even though, at the moment, I had no idea what it meant to be a father, let alone a father of two, I would definitely figure it out.

One thing was certain, though: Those kids would never lack anything. And as long as I still had breath in my lungs, no harm would ever come their way. Not while I was still alive.

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By the cool of the evening, the house was quiet, ironically peaceful. Everything here reminded me of the time in my life that I'd buried for so long. The memories tugged at my mind as if trying to rip it to shreds.

Everywhere I turned, Lev was there. His cologne, his signature scent, lingered in the very air I breathed, a reminder that there was no escaping him this time. This place felt haunted by the memories of my past, my guilty pleasure.

Yet, despite the negativity oozing off the walls and high ceilings, the mansion still felt peaceful tonight. I couldn't explain this strange peace and quiet, but that's what I felt. The kids felt it, too. I was sure of that.

Nik and Elara, as jovial as they were, had this superpower of sensing and rejecting bad energy. I'd seen them push people away or give off cold and unwelcoming reactions to folks they didn't resonate well with.

However, as evil as Lev was, Elara seemed to be quite joyful around him. Strange. Considering her natural aversion to negative energy, she sure had enjoyed her conversation with him even before she found out that he was her father.

On the other hand, he had tried to be more accommodating than I'd anticipated. And the smile he wore when talking to his daughter...that was priceless. That grin had almost melted my heart, especially because I'd never seen such a genuine smile on his face before.

Was this a sign that I was wrong about him? Could it be that these children would bring out a side of him that I hadn't seen before? I'd heard cases like this where a

man's kids were able to effortlessly transform his life for good.

But Lev was no ordinary man. He was incapable of love, even though his actions earlier had suggested otherwise. I couldn't let my guard down and trust his parenting ability just because of one day of playing nice.

Kids could be overbearing sometimes. Did he have the patience to deal with that? I knew the amount of restraint it took me not to yell at them when they acted out. Nik and Elara were mature for their age, but nonetheless, they were still kids, and every now and then, they would lash out, break a rule, or be defiant.

Lev was a man of principles who loved giving orders and took pride in people obeying said orders. Our son, Nik, on the other hand, didn't like to be bossed around. He was like his father in a way, proud and arrogant.

How would Lev react if he ordered the boy and he defied? What would he do? How would he handle the situation?

Maybe I was thinking too much; perhaps I was so worried about the future that I was losing sight of the present.

The reality was my kids seemed happy being here. They were a little uptight at first, but as the day progressed, I watched them loosen up and crawl out of their shells.

They had never seen such an enormous building before, and nearly everything about the house intrigued them.

Elara had insisted that Lev took them on a tour around the house, and to my surprise, he didn't object. Elara held his hand all through the tour, her smile unwavering. Nik and I followed behind in silence, his fingers clasped between mine.

I watched Lev bond with the kids in a way I didn't think was possible. He wasn't doing much, but his enthusiasm while conversing with them was admirable. It was like I was looking at an entirely different person.

The kids were sleeping now after a pretty long day. They should have gone to bed at least an hour ago, but they were too intrigued by the flashy things Lev had shown them. If I hadn't stepped in, they would have still been awake by now.

They had separate rooms, but for now, they decided to share one as they always did. At least this way, I'd easily attend to both of them at once rather than individually.

Tucking them in seemed more daunting than ever tonight. They each had a lot of questions, and neither would shut their mouth. At some point, I thought my brain was about to explode, and it took a lot of work to not lose my cool.

They were confused, happy, worried, and curious at the same time. I was just as puzzled as they were, maybe even more puzzled. The truth was, I was in dire need of cosmic assistance because I had no idea what I was doing or what the outcome of this union would be.

My kids just wanted answers.

“Is it true that he's our daddy?”

“Does this mean we have a lot of money now?”

“Where has he been all this time? ”

Their questions echoed in my head as I walked through the hallway, my fingers rubbing my eyes.

It wasn't easy convincing them that I'd explain everything tomorrow. They were so eager to get answers tonight, but I was not in the right frame of mind to go down that lane. Mentally, physically, and emotionally, I was drained.

In the end, though, I managed to sing them to sleep as compensation for not answering their questions. After a little while, my voice worked its magic, and I tucked them in, turned off the lights, and stepped out.

I stretched, yawning, as I descended the stairs toward the kitchen. A glass of water would help my current state of mind. My bare feet were soundless against the polished marble floor, and the gentle chill was seeping into my skin.

Striding across the expansive kitchen, I made a beeline to the humming refrigerator, its stainless steel surface gleaming in the soft light. I grasped the handle, swung the door open, and retrieved a chilled bottle of water.

With a gentle thud, I closed the fridge door. As I turned around, my body jerked in shock, and my eyes widened as an abrupt yelp escaped my lips. I almost dropped the bottle in my hand at the unexpected sight of him looming in the doorway.

His sudden appearance made my heart skip a beat. It was as though he'd materialized out of thin air.

“Jesus Christ,” I whispered under my breath, my hand flying to my chest as if to prevent my heart from jumping out.

His lips curled into a self-satisfying smirk as he leaned against the wall, arms folded across his chest.

He'd scared the living daylight out of me, and he seemed unapologetic about it. In fact, I could swear that he did that on purpose just to see the fear in my eyes. It was

like he reveled in my terror. What a terrorist!

I raised a finger in the air, and my face contorted in a mix of mock anger and sheer embarrassment. The idea was to warn him not to ever do that again, but at the last second, I could barely find my voice or the right words.

So, I clenched my fingers into a fist and lowered it, defeated. I hated how powerless I felt around him.

My fear dissipated, replaced by a flutter in my chest as I drank in the breathtaking sight of this ridiculously attractive man. He was stripped from the waist upward, and my gaze roamed over his chiseled physique. His toned abs seemed to ripple beneath his skin like waves on a summer lake.

I could feel my pulse quickening, my heart racing with anticipation as I recalled the night I claimed that body as mine. I'd almost forgotten how helpless I was around him, how his presence turned me on so effortlessly.

No, no, no, I can't let him see me this vulnerable. No, I can't. I won't, I thought to myself, struggling with my breath to stay composed. My fingertips tingled, as did my mound, but I wouldn't let my weakness show.

The more I tried to get a grip of myself, the more I felt a cold shiver jolting across my body, breaking my defenses. My eyes fell on his broad torso that narrowed to a lean waist, accentuating the V of his hips.

His loose ash-colored jogger pants hung low on his waist as he strolled into the kitchen, a hand buried in his pocket. He picked up an apple from a fruit basket set on the kitchen granite counter, his hollow, dark eyes fixed on me.

Deep inside me, I was praying that he didn't and wouldn't sense my sexual anxiety. I

tried to pull myself together, but I couldn't help being drawn to him. It was as though every molecule in my body wanted him.

Gosh! This tension was killing me, and his faint smirk wasn't helping at all. His lips were enticing, like they were calling out to me, and at the moment, I was battling with the images of the time I devoured those lips so fervently.

Why did I crave him so much? I knew better, but I still couldn't stop myself. Why?

“Can't sleep?” he asked, his deep voice sending tremors down my core.

For a second there, my brain abandoned me again, leaving me blank and speechless. “Uh...” I cleared my throat, fingers pushing my hair to the back of my ear. “Yeah. Sort of.” My response was a low whisper, the flutter in my chest growing by the second.

His signature smirk twitched at the corner of his lips, his gaze dipping to my shoulder where the strap of my nightgown had slipped. I caught him drinking in the tantalizing glimpse of my left breast as exposed by the slipped strap.

He took a bite of the apple in his hand and munched on it while his eyes roamed my body. “What's the plan? To seduce me?” he teased, his voice laced with a hint of amusement.

My brows arched, and a soft scoff escaped my lips. “That's ironic coming from a man who's standing shirtless in front of me.”

His smirk broadened ever so slightly as he stepped forward, closing the distance between us. The scent of his cologne enveloped me, invading my senses while I jerked my head to face him, my heart racing with anticipation.



The nearer he drew, the more difficult it was to breathe. My chest heaved slowly as I struggled to calm myself lest he saw right through me. It would be rather embarrassing if he found out how much I wanted to feel his touch despite my reservations.

I was so wet, and I hated it. I hated myself for feeling so vulnerable around him. He hadn't touched me yet, and I could feel myself already melting away.

He halted before me, his head lowered to examine my face. "You talk like you're affected by the fact that I'm shirtless," he said, holding my gaze as if searching the depths of my eyes for answers.

His smooth, husky voice sent tremors down my core, increasing my body temperature. He seemed colder than before, sharper, yet his hold on me was still strong as ever. His presence felt like a magnet, drawing me in like a moth to a flame despite the warning bells ringing in my head.

The fact that his assumption was a clear indication that he was onto me caused my throat to tighten. The last thing I wanted was for him to realize how his presence affected me.

But why couldn't I defend myself? Why couldn't I pull away since words seemed to have failed me one more time?

Then, it hit, the perfect response to mask my nervousness and vulnerability.

"Shirtless?" I raised an eyebrow, a faint smirk playing on my lips. "What makes you think I even noticed?" I asked, trying to sound as convincing as I could.

My heart stopped for a minute as he leaned in, mirroring my expression, his voice dropping to a husky whisper. "The eyes don't lie, Ravyn."

I tried to tear my gaze off him, but the man had me glued to the spot, unable to move or look away. He took another bite from his apple and straightened, eyes lingering over me as he munched on it.

An annoying smirk played on his lips as he walked away, leaving me in the kitchen, alone with my thoughts. I could almost hear the sound of my heart pounding in my chest, and both my legs had turned to jelly.

I reached out to hold on to the edge of the counter for support, and my head lowered as I struggled to catch my breath. The fear of what would have happened if he had attempted to touch or kiss me was so overwhelming it had me crippled.

There was a good chance that I wouldn't have been able to resist him, considering how wet I already was.

I still craved him so badly—my desire for him still burned as bright as before. But despite how much I wanted him, I wasn't going to give in to the temptation. I wouldn't let him know how much of an effect he had on me.

No, I wouldn't.

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“You can't be serious,” Sophia said, her voice laced with a mix of anger and disappointment. Her eyes were blazing crimson, fingers tightening around the white tablecloth.

Her fury was suppressed yet apparent, and I completely understood her plight. She clenched her jaw, her piercing gaze locked on mine as she awaited my response, even though she already knew what I'd say.

I wasn't the type to joke around, let alone with such a delicate matter. She knew I wasn't bluffing, but she still demanded that I respond. Perhaps she needed clarity—a justification that she wasn't hearing things.

I didn't stutter when I said I was calling off the engagement, nor did I smile to hint that I was teasing her. However, I would grant her the clarity she needed by repeating myself so my response would stick to her skull.

“I haven't been more serious, Sophia. The wedding's off,” I said, sitting across from her, unfazed by her rising rage.

Her face contorted in anger, her chest heaving slowly as she released her grip around her innocent tablecloth. She drew a deep breath and let it out through the small opening her lips had formed.

Sophia reached for the wine bottle, which stood tall among the dishes on the table. Her manicured fingers wrapped around its slender neck. For a fleeting moment, her eyes darted to me, and then she returned to the table.

With a smooth, practiced motion, she tilted the bottle, allowing the rich crimson liquid to flow into the waiting glass. The gentle gurgle of the wine filled the air, blending with its sweet aroma.

I watched her take her time to pour herself a drink, my eyes squinting ever so slightly as I wondered why.

Once filled to her desired level, Sophia lifted the glass with an elegant move, the delicate rim grazing her lips. She breathed in the wine's heady aroma and then jerked her eyes without raising her head. "Is she prettier?" she asked, taking a sip.

Unnecessary drama was the last thing I needed at the moment, but given the way things were going, it seemed inevitable.

"Yes," I replied bluntly, my expression stoic, gaze fixed on her.

Her eyes narrowed, forming faint creases between them as she set the glass back on the table. She tried to mask her anger with a blank face, but I knew my answer had pierced her heart like a dagger.

Perhaps I shouldn't have been too honest or too blunt. I should have considered her feelings; besides, she was human, after all. But in my defense, she asked a question and answered.

"This isn't about beauty," I added, not to make her feel better but because it was indeed beyond Ravyn's appealing looks.

"So, her family's more connected, then?" she asked, her eyes boring into mine. Her voice was calm and smooth, as if unaffected by my behavior.

Now, I was starting to get offended. I owed this woman no explanation—I owed no

one, not even her family or mine, any explanation. It was my life, my decision, and no one else had any say in it whatsoever.

Damn the benefits that would come from our union—Sophia and me. I wasn't going to ruin my life and those of my kids just to please people. I didn't care that plans had already been made for our wedding. I wasn't going to go through with this.

To begin with, I never liked Sophia. My advisers had pushed me into taking her as a wife. She was never my choice. Now that I'd found my choice and returned her home with me, everything had changed.

I had two kids with the only woman who had ever tickled my fancy. Why marry someone I didn't love and would never love when I could build a life with my kids and their mother?

Things would only get more complicated if I went ahead and wed Sophia. It was better to end it now than spend the rest of my life trying to repair a broken marriage.

This decision was beyond my own selfish interest. My kids would always come first from now on, and I didn't mind whose heart I'd break if it came down to it. Marrying Sophia was a terrible idea; I'd known that from the start, but at the time, I didn't have another choice.

Now, I did.

Ravyn wasn't just easy on the eyes; she was intelligent, as well—if not the most intelligent woman I'd ever met. This was the same woman who not only outsmarted me but also managed to stay hidden for half a decade.

She'd pulled a stunt no one else ever had. My advisers would love her once they knew the whole story.

Sophia was great. She was an amazing woman, respectful and obedient. But she wasn't Ravyn.

Ironic how my respect for the mother of my kids had doubled ever since she returned. There were so many forces influencing my decision to call off the wedding with Sophia, and all of them made perfect sense.

As for the benefits that would come from marrying her, I was sure the Bratva would thrive with or without her family's help. We'd been doing more than fine long before this arrangement, and nothing would change.

If my advisers were to raise the issue of influence and power, they'd realize soon enough that Ravyn hailed from such a family.

“Sophia, this isn't gonna work,” I said, looking right into her eyes. “It's best we end it now.”

She let out a soft, dismissive scoff, her lips curving into a faint smirk. “I understand,” she said, leaning closer, elbows on the table. “Just answer me this: Do you love her?”

First things first, I never told her that there was another woman. I simply said that I was calling off the engagement; she was the one who assumed that there was someone else, and she was right.

However, this question hit me like a fucking bullet to the heart. If I didn't love her, I should know the answer immediately and not feel this much unease. But the reverse was the case.

And why the hell was my heart racing so fast?

It was a simple yes or no, yet it was so complicated. I wasn't quite sure how to answer

it, and at that moment, images of Ravyn's smiley face from five years ago had come flooding back into my mind.

I realized that I'd actually missed seeing her smile. Ever since her arrival at my place, I hadn't seen that genuine grin on her lips.

However, the question still lingered, and I sat there in silence, speechless.

Her eyes narrowed, a scowl settling on her face as her jaw clenched. She must have gotten the answer she needed, and I would appreciate it if she had told me because I was confused. I was yet to figure it out.

Or maybe I just wasn't ready to accept the truth.

I watched her frown deepen, her chest rising and falling with controlled breaths. She'd lost her composure, allowing her anger to resurface.

She didn't like this at all; the woman was upset, and with good reason. But I couldn't care less. Now, I had another thing to worry about: the simple question she'd asked.

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*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

It had been a few days already since we arrived at the mansion, and I still couldn't fill this giant pit in my stomach. There was a lot I needed to get off my chest, and in order to do that, I needed his audience.

However, I hadn't been courageous enough to meet him and lay out my demands. I was nervous and afraid, unsure of what would happen if I met up with him.

The last time we were alone in a closed space, I almost lost my cool and gave in to temptation. But beyond my fear of once again falling and giving in to lust, I was in desperate need to talk to him about the present situation of things.

I felt so suffocated, unproductive, and useless. All I did all day was stay home and take care of the kids. For five years, I worked by a set of principles I'd designed, principles that created a balance between my work life and family. And until now, those principles had been working out just fine.

Lev had stepped back into my life like a thief in the night and was destroying everything I'd worked so hard to build. He'd turned me into a housewife, and I hated that. I was a grown woman who knew how to take care of herself and her kids. But it was as though he thought I was incapable of doing my job as a mother and still pursuing my dreams.

I was doing just fine for five years until he showed up out of nowhere and literally kidnapped me. My life and my business were suffering because he decided that I should sit idly in his house all day, every day.

Well, I'd been idle long enough, and I wasn't going to just sit back, cross my fingers,



and watch him ruin my life. No. I was done taking his bullshit. I was done being afraid and nervous. What's the worst thing that would happen if I spoke? I didn't care. I was going to confront him regardless.

In the hallway, I drew a deep breath, rubbing my sweaty palms over each other as I steadied my resolve. "You've got this," I whispered to myself, my heart hammering in my chest. "He's a man. Not a god. He can be spoken to." I let out a sharp exhale and headed toward his room.

It was almost midnight, and maybe I should wait until tomorrow to do this, but I couldn't keep in any longer. It was now or never. He might be asleep, but that wouldn't stop me; he'd wake the hell up, and he'd listen to what I had to say.

I halted outside his room, taking a moment to rethink my decision, but my mind was already made up. All I needed was more courage. I smoothed my hands down my nightgown, my heart skipping a beat. A warm, golden glow seeped from the narrow opening between the door and its frame, a clear indication that he was awake and stirring.

Good. At least we'd have this conversation while he was clear-headed and not sleepy. Without knocking, I pushed the door open and barged in like I owned the place, driven by a wind of confidence.

Seated by the window with a glass of whiskey in his hand, he turned in my direction, a brow raised in surprise. "Something happened to your knuckles?" he asked, his voice laced with sarcasm.

"We need to talk," I said, my tone stern and unapologetic, my expression stoic. "Now," I added, leaving no room for debate, arms folded across my chest.

His second eyebrow rose to the height of the other, astonishment flickering in his

gaze. He obviously found my courage amusing, considering the faint smirk playing on his lips.

It took a lot of effort not to drink in the sight of his masculine physique—his chiseled abs, broad shoulders, and hard nipples. My eyes were locked on his despite the way his gaze unnerved me.

I swallowed, maintaining eye contact, my willingness to see this through amplifying by the second. He could see the seriousness in my eyes, and he knew that I wasn't leaving here until I said what was on my mind.

Lev sipped his whiskey, then set the glass on the side stool and leaned back in his chair. “In case you haven't noticed, it's almost midnight,” he said, his voice smooth and husky.

“I'm aware, but this can't wait,” I replied, retaining my blank expression despite the chills his voice had sent down my spine.

He crossed his legs effortlessly, one over the other, as he adjusted in the chair. His movements were graceful, economical, and precise, exuding an aura of confidence and calm self-assurance. “Humor me,” he said, pinning his gaze on me.

For a second there, I almost lost my cool, but I was quick to get a grip of myself. “I'm tired of sitting home all day doing nothing; it's daunting and frustrating. It feels like I'm not living up to my full potential, and it sucks,” I explained, my hands flying around as I spoke, my voice dripping with fatigue and a hint of pain.

He watched me in silence as if wondering where I was going with this, his eyes never leaving my face.

I paused, summoning the courage to spit out the real reason I was here. He stared at

me, anticipation coloring his eyes like he was waiting to hear what I had in mind.

“I wanna resume my business,” I blurted out, holding his gaze, regardless of how intimidating it was. “I wanna move my boutique to the city.”

He raised his eyebrows, creases forming on his forehead as his eyes bore into mine. Lev hesitated for a moment before giving a blunt response that shook my nerves. “No,” he said.

“No?” I leaned forward, eyes widened in disbelief, a pang of irritation swelling up within me.

“Yes. No,” he replied, unapologetic, reaching for his glass.

I didn't think it would be easy, anyway; I expected some resistance, considering the kind of man he was. But I wasn't going to back down, at least not without a fight.

I scoffed, swiping a palm across my face, struggling to suppress my rage. “Why? Why can't I resume work?”

He looked me dead in the eyes and replied, his tone calm but authoritative, “Because I said so.”

My eyes narrowed at the condescension and dominance in his voice. I clenched my jaw, daring to take a step forward. “Because you said so?” I demanded, brows furrowing with a glare, as if challenging him to repeat the words.

He sipped his whisky, a wry smirk playing on his lips. Clearly, he enjoyed seeing me frustrated and annoyed. Perhaps it gave him some sort of dark comfort.

“You seem to forget that I'm a grown-ass woman, capable of making her own

decisions!” I sparked, my voice rising a little higher than normal.

Maintaining his composure, he said, cradling his glass in his hand. “And you seem to forget your place... ‘grown-ass woman.’” The sarcasm in his last statement couldn't be any more glaring.

“You can't decide what I should or should not do with my life, Lev,” I insisted, ignoring his subtle warning.

“You mean like you decided five years ago to run away with my kids and keep them from me?” His brows arched, his words striking my heart like lightning. “Ironic, isn't it?”

I see what you're doing there, I thought, unable to argue, given the point he was driving at.

He uncrossed his legs, set the glass back on the side stool, and rose to his feet. “Tell me,” he began, taking slow steps toward me. “What makes it right for you to make a decision you knew would affect me in more ways than one?” Lev stopped in front of me, his imposing height making me look little in my own eyes. “And what makes it wrong for me to do the same? Hmm?”

He had me in a tight spot, bringing my hypocrisy to my notice. There was hardly anything that I could say because, apparently, I started this, and he was only tearing a page out of my own book.

I opened my mouth like I was about to give a response, but I found no words. I was speechless. Not just because he had proven what a hypocrite I was but also because he was too close, and I could feel his breath on my skin.

His presence was awakening feelings I'd buried for a long time, causing my breath to

lodge in my throat. I jerked my head; my eyes locked to his as I fought back the illicit thoughts seeping into my mind.

I could smell his cologne and the scent of the whiskey lingering on his tongue. Alcohol wasn't my thing, but at the moment, a part of me longed to taste that whiskey—to lick it off his lips.

Goddamn it, Ravyn, focus! I cautioned myself, slightly trembling at the sight of his broad torso in my face. This was a very important moment; I shouldn't be swayed by his magnificent physique.

“You don't need a boutique,” he said, his husky voice cutting through my thoughts like a knife.

I was so distracted by the feelings his smooth, deep voice and shirtless body were stirring up in me that it was almost impossible to stay focused on the task at hand.

“The only reason I haven't punished you yet is because the kids need you,” he added, his expression flat and nearly unreadable. “I brought you back to raise them under my supervision...to be their mother.”

My stomach knotted at his words, my tear glands charging up. “You're essentially asking me to play house?” I asked, my voice dropping to a low whisper.

His dark eyes roamed my body, lips subtly twitching at the corners. “Consider it mercy,” he said, holding my gaze. “People have died for far lesser crimes than what you did.”

I hardened my heart, clenching my jaw as I remembered that the plan was to stay until I had my way. “I'm sorry, but I can't do what you're asking,” I said, my tone laced with defiance.

His eyes narrowed, boring into mine, but I wasn't going to be intimidated by him.

“That boutique is life, Lev,” I began, my voice firm and audacious. “I built it from scratch, brick by brick—me.” I beat my chest, a glimmer of pride seeping into my tone as I spoke up. “I can't throw away everything I worked so hard to build over the years just because you want me to. No. I can't.”

His expression darkened, mirroring his displeasure at my defiance and maybe the arrogance in my tone. “You live under my roof, so you'll obey my rules.”

I folded my arms across my chest. “Well, mister, your rules don't sit well with me. You're caging me like I'm some kind of pet you own. But newsflash, I'm not. I'm a human being just like you, and I've got rights.” The words tumbled out of me in a rush.

My lips quivered, my heart racing with anticipation as I felt the urge to let out just how frustrated I was. “You're just like my parents: controlling, demanding, and exasperatingly difficult to handle,” I began, feeling the nasty sting of tears in my eyes. “You only care about yourself and don't give a shit about how I feel, as long as you have your way...everything else be damned, right?”

He was quiet, watching me rant, his expression softening ever so slightly.

I shook my head, wiping the tears streaming down my eyes. “You don't take me seriously. My parents never did, and ironically, the best part of my life was when I was away from all of you.” My voice broke, my lips trembling as I let myself feel the pain I'd bottled up for so long. “And—and just when I thought my life was going well, just when I started to figure myself out, you showed up and whisked me away.”

He tilted his head, squinting as though he was studying me.

“I can be a mother to our kids and still run my business. Why can you not see that?” I continued, sniffing, fighting back my tears. “I've done that for four years, being a mom and working at the same time. This isn't uncharted waters for me. But you're hell-bent on having things done your way.” My chest heaved slowly, eyes locked on him.

A chunk of that pain dissolved as my bottled-up feelings finally found an expression. I felt a little lighter, like a burden had been lifted off me.

His jaw clenched, eyes narrowing as he closed the small distance between us. My breath lodged in my throat for a moment, thinking I'd struck a nerve and he'd say or do something violent. So, I steeled myself, expecting the worst the minute he raised his hand.

But what did Lev do? He gently pushed a loose strand of my hair behind my ear. This gesture was so unexpected, smooth, and tender, leaving me both shocked and skeptical.

I raised my eyes to meet him, brows furrowing a little as I studied his sudden change in countenance. The feeling of his thumb brushing against my skin as he wiped a stream of tears rolling down my cheek caused my body to tremble.

It had been ages since I'd been touched this way, since a man had looked so deeply into my eyes. I'd closed myself off from feeling anything for any man after the incident years ago. However, his intimate gaze and softened expression melted my reserves.

I'd wanted him so badly since I arrived, and now it was almost impossible to fight back my desire to get laid. Here we were, alone, under an intense atmosphere that had shifted from bad banter to something more sensational.

He wiped the tears streaming down my other cheek with his second thumb, his eyes never leaving mine. There was something in their depths that reminded me of the good times we used to have—the moments we once shared.

The silence between us grew more and more deafening by the second, my heart racing, my lips and body quivering at his touch. Despite his dark aura, I craved to have him buried deep inside me.

“You haven't changed,” he said, his finger traveling down the nape of my neck. “You're still stubborn and defiant.”

I jerked at the electric spark jolting across me, my thighs brushing against themselves in reaction to the tingling sensation between my legs.

“And you're still dominating. Still controlling,” I said with a tone as low as a whisper. My voice faltered, gradually trailing off at the effect of his touch.

A faint grin flashed across his face, his hand daring to travel down my chest. I could literally hear the sound of my own heart beating like a loud drum, my breath difficult to catch.

He locked my gaze, watching me struggle to mask my nervousness. Yet, I never pulled away, nor did I ask him to stop. Why would I do that? He obviously wanted me as bad as I wanted him.

His eyes dropped to my lips, desire shining in their depths.

The sexual charge between us was off the charts, and as the tension continued to hover, the ignited flame within me sought to find expression.

Like two unlike poles pulled by a magnetic force, we both rushed at each other's lips,



claiming and devouring them in a fervent kiss. His arms possessively wrapped my waist like a man aware that he owned his woman. Deep down, I loved it.

My hands flew to his face, cupping it as the kiss deepened, tongues twirling in our mouths. I could taste the whiskey lingering on his lips and tongue, and that fueled my desire. Our heads tilted together in desperate harmony, driven by pure, undulated passion.

I felt so alive with his hands roaming my body, caressing my curves and contours. Was this how much I missed him? Damn!

He moved his hand to my chest and fondled my breasts, delicately squeezing them one at a time. His other hand was still around my waist, pulling me closer as if seeking a deeper connection.

The heat was growing, the flame burning so intensely that it threatened to consume us both. We devoured each other's lips like hungry beasts, and boy, was I starving!

It was as though every dead cell in my body had jerked back to life; every molecule, every fiber of my being, longed for him. I couldn't get enough. I wanted more. I wanted sex!

He whisked me into the air without breaking our kiss, and I locked my feet around his waist. Being inches higher, I lowered my face, sliding my tongue into his mouth, his palms supporting my ass, fingers digging into my skin.

I pushed the loose strands of my hair behind my ear as he headed toward his king-sized bed. Lev lowered me on the mattress, his hands squeezing my breasts, fingers pinching my nipples over the fabric of my nightie.

He broke the kiss, leaving me breathless, unsatisfied, and in need of more. He

mirrored my face, watching my chest heave slowly while I lay beneath him. I could feel his erection, hard as a rock, brushing against my thigh.

My body quivered at the electricity surging through my veins. With his thumb, he traced the curve of my mouth with a deliberate slowness that made my lips tremble.

The desperation and longing in my gaze couldn't be any more glaring. He knew I wanted him; he could see it in my eyes, but he was toiling with me, teasing me with his hard boner. Every touch, every kiss, awakened the sleeping lioness inside me.

“Has anyone else...?” he whispered, looking into my eyes, voice trailing off as he chose not to complete his question.

He wanted to know if another's hands had touched me. I wasn't surprised, considering that he was the jealous type.

I shook my head, too numb to speak, thanks to the insatiable desire coursing through me. A glint of pride flickered in my gaze for no reason, and I wondered why I was glad that I hadn't been with someone else despite our history.

Maybe I should ask the same question since we were being honest, but I wouldn't. He was a man who could get whatever and whoever he wanted. It was possible that he'd been with multiple women over the past few years. Five years was a long time, and I wasn't expecting any form of loyalty from such a man.

However, I wouldn't entirely rule out the possibility that he might not have been with another woman. It would explain why he asked me. Lev might be the devil, but he was a devil with a code of honor—he wouldn't have asked if he was fooling around.

His lips curled into a self-satisfied grin as he kissed my neck through to my chest and then eventually between my legs. He raised the hem of my dress and positioned

himself to go down on me.

Lev sniffed my mound with a deep, long breath and an enjoyable look on his face, a testament that he loved the scent of my arousal.

My body trembled as I steeled myself, waiting to feel the chill of his tongue on my pussy. His hands grasped my thighs, caressing them and sending jolts of electricity through me. His gentle tease was killing me, and my heart wouldn't stop hammering as if it was about to jump out of my chest.

He pulled my panties off, jerked his eyes to meet mine, and said, his voice soft and tender, "Tell me to stop, and I will."

Nothing in the world would make me tell me that right now. I hadn't felt this way in ages, and I wasn't going to give it up for anything at all. Nothing mattered in this moment; all that existed was two horny adults, sex-starved for half a decade.

I grasped his head and pushed it down between my legs, his tongue settling on my entrance. "Oh, my God!" The words fell off my lips. I didn't plan to moan out, but it felt so good that I couldn't hold it back in.

My fingertips grabbed the sheets and squeezed against them, releasing a series of soft purrs. This was the first time he was going down on me, and he was killing it. The time we'd had sex, the flame burning between us left no room for such luxury. However, tonight, we had all the time in the world, and Lev was utilizing it well, exploring the depths of my pussy in ways I hadn't known was possible.

I arched my back, bucking my hips, longing for a deeper connection. My eyes widened when I felt his finger slip in through my wetness. That instant, my hand flew to my mouth, muffling the pleased cries escaping my lips.

He licked my clit, sucked on it while simultaneously fingering my pussy. I thought I was losing my mind—he was so good at this, and I could feel my anxiety dissipating, my muscles relaxing.

He did this thing with his finger inside me that triggered my orgasm—a come-hither gesture.

“Oh, God, yes!” I moaned, writhing beneath his mouth. “Right there. Don't stop,” I whispered, a hint of plea seeping into my tone.

He continued the technique, his lips relentless on my clit. My legs shuddered in the air, and my grip tightened around the sheets, my moans growing louder by the second. Yet, he wouldn't stop or slow down. I liked it. I loved the sensation it gave me.

My back arched higher, face contorted in pleasure as the feeling overwhelmed me, and that was when I felt the orgasm. “I think I'm gonna cum,” I announced, pressing against his head.

I bucked my hip, both hands darting up to smooth my hair backward. The sensation was too much to bear, and I felt like something was about to explode from me. “Fuck, I'm cumming!”

He pulled me closer, his mouth eating up my wet entrance like he was anticipating my release.

With a sweet moan, my body trembled, my essence squirting out like water from a fountain. My back dropped to the bed, chest heaving rapidly as I covered my face with palms, embarrassed and amused at the same time. I'd never cum just from oral before, so this was a big win, and I'd yet to process what had just happened.

I looked down, and there he was, smirking, wiping my juice off his mouth. My lips curved into a smile, fascinated by his skills. Lev leaned forward and kissed me, my hands traversing his torso as he yanked down the straps of my nightgown, one at a time.

The strap fell off my shoulder, revealing a tantalizing glimpse of my cleavage. Lev's eyes crinkled at the corners as he tugged down the fabric to expose my breasts. His lips claimed my nipple while tuning the other, his waist grinding between my legs.

I let out a soft moan, hands reaching down to grasp the waistband of his pants. Without hesitation, I pulled it down, and his hard cock sprung out, his creamy tip grazing my entrance. I wrapped my manicured fingers around that long, veiny cock and positioned it outside my mound.

With a single stroke, he penetrated me effortlessly, a testament to how wet and slippery I was. My eyes widened as my pussy accepted him, swallowing him whole. I hadn't realized what I'd been missing out until now. I hadn't realized how much I'd been dying to have him deep inside me until he penetrated me.

It was like I was a woman again, my cells and molecules leaping for joy. Our heads moved together in perfect sync as he devoured my lips with an intense fervency that left us both breathless.

He drove into me with relentless thrusts, his strokes hitting the right spot as I moaned in his mouth. His hands fondled my breasts, fingers deliciously pinching my hard nipples. I felt transported to a different realm—a realm of bliss and sheer pleasure.

My legs hung in the air, and his hand traveled my body, skin against skin. His touch was tender and smooth, and his kiss passionate, as if he'd missed me as much as I'd missed him.

I raked my fingers into his back, driven by ecstasy, my body writhing beneath him. “Go deeper,” I whispered in his ear, yearning to connect on a different level.

It was as though I wasn't myself anymore, and a part of me didn't care. I just craved to be fucked the way I wanted: deep, hard, and fast.

Lev did as I instructed, his cock traveling to the most remote places inside me. It felt so good. So right.

I locked my legs around his waist, my hands rubbing his back, pressing his ass downward. I couldn't get enough. I wanted more and more.

More and more was what he gave, just the way I wanted it, the way I liked it. At some point, it started to feel like we were making love and not just fucking.

This was officially the best sex ever!

As Lev's speed quickened with stronger, harder thrusts and a primal growl, I knew he was climaxing. He deserved it, anyway; he'd done more than enough on me for one round.

I wrapped my arms around him, my legs still locked behind his waist as I anticipated his release. I wanted to feel his warmth. It had been a long time since I felt it, and everything inside me wanted it. “Do it. Cum in me,” I whispered in his ear.

Maybe I'd regret it later; maybe not. But it didn't matter to me at the moment. I just longed for his creampie.

With a deep groan, his body jerked as he pushed deeper inside me, releasing his load. A satisfactory smile spread across my face, my pussy accepting his essence. He filled me up with himself, warm and soothing.

Once he was done shooting every drop, he let out an exhausted sigh and collapsed on me. We were both spent, each panting from the incredible marathon we'd just had. He slid off me and lay on his back, facing the ceiling, his jagged breaths harmonizing with mine.

I turned to meet his soft gaze, my heartbeat steadying as we locked eyes in a passionate silence. Overwhelmed with gratitude and satisfaction, I leaned forward and rested my head on his chest. Ironic how I felt so peaceful and safe when his arms wrapped around me.

However, beneath this bliss, something else lingered—a burden in my spirit to do what was expected of me.

“Are you okay?” His voice, laced with a glint of concern, sliced through my thoughts.

How did he...? Could he hear thoughts or something? Perhaps he sensed my energy.

I raised my head and replied, a hint of anxiety seeping its way into my mind. “It's my parents,” I said, looking into his eyes as searching for support. “I need to reach out to them.”

His brows narrowed ever so slightly, but even though he hadn't said anything yet, I could tell he thought it was a good idea.

## Page 20

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The scent of vodka and the faint thread of smoke from my Cuban cigar wafted through the air as I sat back in my chair, unable to focus on work.

My mind was flooded with thoughts of Ravyn and our time together last night. How could one woman make me feel so alive and fulfilled? The best part was that she hadn't been with another man since she left years ago.

She could have been lying so that I wouldn't think ill of her. But I could swear that she wasn't. Five years was a long time for a woman her age to keep herself. She was a young and gorgeous woman, hard-working and intelligent. Surely, men of all kinds must have approached her. Yet, she didn't fall for temptation.

I was impressed, very impressed, in fact, and also filled with pride. Despite how much she feared and hated me at the same time, she still valued me deep down. In her subconscious, she understood that her body was mine and mine alone. However, if she wanted to fool around with other men, she would have done so. But she didn't.

Regardless of how much she claimed to despise me, all of that was a lie to mask her true feelings. Why else would she give both her kids Russian names if, indeed, she loathed me?

Images of her face, contorted in pleasure, kept flashing in my head, occupying my mind. I could hear the sound of her moans, could feel her touch against my skin, and just like that, my cock swelled up in my pants.

I rubbed my eyes, letting out a deep sigh, recalling the scent of her arousal and the way she tasted so good. I'd had more than a few women in my life but none of them



had triggered me like she did.

It was almost as if I was starting to get attached to her, which was strange, alarming, and intriguing at the same time. Attachment to anyone or anything other than the Bratva course was alien to me, yet it felt right with her.

Last night, Ravyn and I didn't just have sex like two horny adults; well, it may have begun in that direction. But as our passion blossomed, the affection between us transcended to something more sensual.

Each touch, each deep kiss, ignited a flame within us that fueled our passion. I hadn't enjoyed sex in this manner before, and that seemed to be the reason I couldn't stop thinking about it. Everything about Ravyn was pleasing to me. Every inch of her body seemed to call out to me, hinting at her longing for me.

I combed my fingers through my hair, a sexual heat overwhelming me where I sat, wishing she was around. The taste of her cum still lingered on my tongue, and the more I tried to push these illicit thoughts to the back of my mind, the more they kept tugging at me.

Why couldn't I resist her? Why couldn't I stay angry at her for so long? She'd pushed me to the wall, outsmarted me, ran away with my kids, and deprived me of knowing them. Yet, it was like my heart still beat for her.

She stirred up feelings within me that I didn't think I had, feelings I couldn't quite understand. Ravyn's stubbornness, guts, spunk, and defiance had a way of pulling me in like a moth to a flame.

Her presence awakened emotions that I'd suppressed my entire life, igniting a flame of passion that burned so bright. Ravyn was unlike any woman I'd ever known: strong, resilient, and a goal-getter.

She had raised my kids on her own for four years and somehow managed to balance motherhood and her work life. As much as I tried to mask it, I was impressed by her ability to effortlessly multitask.

Perhaps she was right about being capable of being both a mother and an entrepreneur at the same time. Her only request since she returned with me was that I let her continue with her business here in the city. It was an opportunity for her to expand, and with my money and resources, she'd be climbing up the ladder of success a lot quicker than she could imagine.

Ravyn might not know this yet, but she had my respect. Yes, she got on my nerves at times, especially when proving stubborn. But regardless of how annoying she could be, I admired her, maybe even adored her.

Her type was rare, and I'd be a fool if I let her slip through my fingers again.

I wouldn't be the man to stand in the way of her success. No. She worked so hard to build her life without my help or her parents'; it would be unfair to make her give it all up. She was a woman with dreams, goals, and ambition, and if I wouldn't support her, I would at least not be the obstacle in her way.

Moving her boutique to the city was a great idea; it would put a smile on her face, and I'd like that. Seeing her happy had suddenly become my priority.

The sound of my phone buzzing on the mahogany table interrupted my thoughts, my eyes darting to the lit screen. It was an incoming call from Andrey.

I picked up the phone and answered, the device clasped to my ear.

“Boss.” Andrey's deep voice came through the speakers. “We're almost there, just a few blocks away.”

“Good,” I replied, reclining into my chair. “Keep me updated on everything.”

“Got it,” he replied.

“Andrey,” I called before he hung up the phone. “Protect them with your life,” I added, my voice stern and solemn.

“Yes, Boss.” He hung up the phone.

Ravyn and I had discussed her reunion with her parents and came to the conclusion that she should meet with them today. I could tell that she was nervous about meeting them, considering how time had passed and the circumstances behind her leaving.

I should have been the one driving her and the kids to her parents’ place, but I had an important meeting to attend. Honestly, it was up to me, I'd have said she should wait and we'd go together tomorrow. But she seemed eager to get it over and done with, and I had to trust and respect her decision.

Exerting my authority as a man was what the old me would have done, but this version of myself was learning to be more open-minded. She'd given me more than enough reason to trust her—for one, she'd survived without me for five years.

Ravyn could take care of herself. No arguments there. However, I couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't right. Perhaps I was only being paranoid since my family was out there without me to protect them.

Whatever the case, they'd be fine—Andrey was with them. With or without being told, he'd keep them safe at all costs.

## Page 21

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

“Mom, where are we going?” Elara asked, raising her head to look at my face, curiosity flickering in her eyes.

I turned to her, a small smile playing on my lips as I tried to mask my own nervousness. “We're going to see some really important people, honey,” came my reply, fingers smoothing her blonde hair down.

She mirrored my grin, her gaze darting toward her brother as he sat by her side. Both of them were perfectly tucked in—seatbelts strapped in the backseat with me.

Nik held her hand in silence, his sharp eyes fixed outside the window. All dressed up in a black tux that fitted his small features, my boy looked exactly like his father. It was almost as if he was a mini version of Lev Tarasov. He had the man's blood coursing through him anyway.

Staring at Elara was like looking in a mirror. The resemblance was striking, uncanny, and with one look at her, anyone would know she was mine. Today, I'd dressed her up in a flowered knee-length flair gown, just like mine. Her blonde hair was pulled back in a ponytail, the same as mine.

Although Nik looked a lot like his dad, he still had a few of my features: the same shape of my nose and the flicker of my face beneath the surface. Mom and Dad wouldn't need any formal introduction to know the kids were mine.

Andrey, Lev's most trusted lieutenant, was at the wheel, his gaze fixed on the road, sharp eyes occasionally scanning the streets as he drove. Deep down within me, I wished Lev was here; somehow, I thought his presence would soften the situation a

bit.

I'd have felt better if he was with me and the kids—safer and more secure. Andrey must be great at his job because if he weren't, Lev would never have entrusted us to him.

There was an important meeting that needed his attention, hence the reason he couldn't tag along. I saw it in his eyes that he wanted to come with us, but he couldn't ditch the meeting. Lev had always been loyal to the Bratva, and I understood that. I respected that.

His willingness to tag along and the fact that he even considered choosing to go with us over going for the meeting was a testament of how much he valued us.

If I had waited until tomorrow, I would've been on the road with him. But I was too anxious and worried to wait a minute longer. This reunion had lingered long enough, and it was high time I set eyes on my parents.

They might have unintentionally made my life a living hell, a prison, but in the end, they were still my parents.

However, the million-dollar question remained: How would they react to seeing me after these many years that had gone by?

I had left without saying goodbye. No heads-up whatsoever. And for more than half a decade, I never actually reached out to at least let them know that I was okay. Wasn't I just as terrible as they were? Maybe even worse.

As exasperatingly difficult as my parents were, they never abandoned me, but I did that. I chose my freedom and happiness over them without even giving them a chance to right their wrongs.

Would they understand me? Would they forgive me for the pain and hurt that I put them through?

The closer we drove to the mansion, the more cold sweat dampened my forehead. My heart was hammering in my chest, my whole body overwhelmed with tension. This anxiety was killing me; my throat was dry, and my breath had become quite difficult to catch.

“Are you okay, Mom?” Nik's voice snapped me out of my thoughts.

“Hmm?” I looked in his direction, my brain going blank for a moment.

“Are you okay?” he repeated, his eyes glued to mine, boring deeply into their depths as if searching for answers.

I blinked a few times, clearing my throat in an attempt to mask my feelings. “Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay.”

“You don't look okay,” Elara's tiny voice chipped in, a hint of sadness and concern flickering in her gaze.

“What? That's not true,” I lied, trying to sound convincing, denial creeping into my tone. A nervous laugh escaped my lips, and I blew a raspberry. “I'm fine. I truly am.” My lips curled into a plastic smile, my gaze shifting across the two of them.

The last thing I needed was to get them all worked up. My kids were super perceptive and could sense even the slightest change in my mood. I had to do a better job of masking my emotions.

“Are you sure?” Nik asked, unconvinced but willing to buy my response. He stared at me, his eyes narrowing, forming tiny creases on his forehead.

“Positive,” I replied, my smile broadening as I struggled to compose myself.

In the rearview mirror, I caught Andrey stealing a glance at me, and our eyes locked in a fleeting moment. He could tell I was lying, and I knew he could see right through my mask of confidence. However, he didn't interfere; he just fixed his eyes back on the road.

These men's ability to conceal and hide their emotions should be studied. They were so good at pretending not to care, even when, deep down, they did. Showing emotions was a sign of weakness; at least, that's what they were taught all their lives.

“Are we there yet?” Elara asked, her voice dripping with anticipation.

I turned my attention to her and crinkled my eyes at the corners. “Trust me, sweetheart, when we get there, you'll know.”

She squinted, her head slightly tilted, mirroring her puzzled expression. When she looked at her brother, he smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

Dad's mansion was just as enormous as Lev's, and I was certain the view would take their breaths away.

After a few more minutes, we arrived at the compound, the magnificent vista unfolding before us. The car ascended the meandering driveway lined with towering trees and manicured lawns. Ahead was the majestic mansion with its sleek modern lines, gleaming surfaces, and expansive windows.

“Whoa!” the twins chorused, their eyes wide with astonishment, their gazes fixed on the unwinding landscape, vibrant gardens, and towering trees outside.

As we drove further into the expansive compound, the sound of songbirds filled the

air, blending with the sweet fragrance of blooming flowers.

Eventually, the driveway led us to the mansion's entrance, where a magnificent fountain danced and splashed. Its misty veil rose as if to greet us as Andrey pulled over and brought the car to a halt.

"Now, we're here," I said, my lips curling into a smile, eyes darting across the kids.

Speechless, they just stared at me with bright smiles on their faces. They hadn't been exposed to buildings and compounds like this, given that I raised them in a small town where nothing much ever really happened.

Therefore, their amusement was excusable.

Andrey killed the engine and caught my eyes in the rearview mirror. "Would you like me to accompany you inside, ma'am?"

"Thanks, but that wouldn't be necessary," I replied, returning my attention to the kids. "Hey."

They fixed their gazes on me, eyes shining with excitement.

"Could you give Mommy a minute?" I beamed at them, my expression soft and warm. "I need to put a couple of things in order first, and then I'll come get you. Is that okay?"

"Will you be long?" Elara asked, a hint of impatience gleaming in her eyes.

"No, honey, I won't," I replied, smoothing her hair backward. "I'll be back in a jiffy." My smile broadened.



“Okay,” she replied, her voice almost a whisper.

“Stay with Andrey, okay? I’ll be right back.” I grabbed the door handle and pushed it open, my heel resting on the pavement.

I got out of the car, blew my kids a kiss, and shut the door behind me. As I walked past the front passenger seat, I paused, taking a quick look at Andrey. “Keep them safe, will you?”

He nodded, and I headed toward the entrance, my heart racing with anticipation as I neared the front door. It felt like forever since I was last here, but everything still remained the same.

I climbed up the few long steps at the entrance and halted by the door, taking a deep breath. “You can do this,” I whispered under my breath, lifting my hand to ring the bell.

As I waited for someone to answer the door, my knees felt like they could no longer carry my weight, and my throat was dry all of a sudden.

Not long after, the door creaked and opened, revealing Rosa, the maid, standing on the other side. She locked eyes with me, squinting with furrowing brows as I stood there in silence.

Her eyes widened slowly, and her brows arched in shock and surprise. At last, she recognized me. “Ravie?”

“Hi, Rosa,” I replied, wiggling my fingers at her, my lips curling up into a smile.

“Oh, my God!” She dashed out of the house, embracing me tightly. Her eyes misted as she pulled away, watching me in astonishment. “Please, come on in,” she said, her

voice breaking as she wiped the tears streaming down her chubby cheeks. “Your parents are about to lose their minds.” A chuckle escaped her mouth.

I took one last look at my kids in the car before following Rosa into the mansion. A wave of nostalgia hit me as I stepped into the building, the foyer's light enveloping me.

Memories of my childhood and adulthood in this house came rushing back all at once, amplifying my heartbeat. Rosa's happy voice droned on and on, but I was so distracted by my anticipation of what was to come that I couldn't pay attention to her.

Rosa had worked for my parents for as long as I could remember. She was like a second mother to me, and I realized now just how much I'd missed her. The tears in her eyes, the joy on her face, and the excitement in her voice were testaments to how much damage my absence had done.

Would Mom and Dad feel the same way as Rosa when they saw me? Would Dad cast me out of his sight? What would they think about my kids? How would Dad react after knowing who the father was? He had clearly warned me to stay away from Lev Tarasov. How would he feel knowing Lev was the father of my children?

The moment we got to the living room, my breath lodged in my throat as I saw both Mom and Dad sitting on a sofa, watching the news.

Rosa cleared her throat, halting beside them. “Sir, ma'am, there's someone here to see you,” she announced, her smile broadening.

“Who is it?” Dad asked, turning around to face the door where I stood coldly.

I locked eyes with my father, and in that moment, it was as if time itself stood still. I could hear the sound of my heart pounding in my chest while I struggled to maintain

my composure.

Mom turned to face her husband, who looked like he'd seen a ghost. "James, what is...." Her voice trailed off as she traced his gaze and set eyes on me.

"It's her," Rosa said to them, wiping her tears. "It's our Ravie baby."

Mom rose to her feet, her misted eyes never leaving mine. One step at a time, she approached me, shock flickering in her gaze. She stretched out her hands and blinked back the tears that welled her eyes as she halted in front of me, hoping she wasn't seeing things.

"Please tell me this is real," she said, her voice cracking, lips trembling.

I was too numb to speak, my tear glands charging up, and all I could do was nod my head, my heart constricting. A familiar feeling of comfort washed over me as she cupped my face in her palms.

"Oh, God, you're real!" She stared into my teary eyes, shocked that she could actually feel my skin against hers.

"I'm real," I replied, sobbing.

Mom pulled me into her warm embrace, her arms wrapped tightly around me, her tears dropping on my back.

"Ravyn, honey." Dad's soft voice was laced with excitement, shock, and relief.

I slipped out of Mom's hold and watched my father walk toward me, a lone tear trickling down his cheek.

“Dad, I...” Words failed me, and luckily, he didn't seem ready to entertain any explanations yet.

My eyes widened in surprise when he hugged me, his strong arms holding on to me like he was never going to let me out of his sight again.

“You're home,” he said, his voice strained from the struggle to keep his sobs back in. “You're really home.”

This wasn't exactly the reaction I was expecting. Who were these people, and what did they do with my parents?

“I've missed you so much,” he confessed, letting go of me, his thumb wiping my tears.

My face contorted in anguish, lips trembling in a desperate bid to contain the emotional turmoil brewing inside. “I've you both as well.” I wept, giving in to all that pain and hurt, my eyes shifting across my parents' faces. “I'm sorry that I left. I'm sorry that I didn't call or...”

“We're sorry, too, sweetheart,” Mom chipped in, her fingers interlocking with mine.

“Wait. What?” I paused, pushing my head back a bit, shocked by her response.

I had risked ruining this moment by telling the truth. Initially, I was of the notion that they thought something bad had happened to me. So, confessing that I had run on purpose was supposed to come as a shock to them.

However, it was obvious from the looks of things that they weren't surprised or shocked by it at all. Instead, I was the one who was surprised and shocked.

“After you left,” Dad began, his tone mild and sorrowful, “we thought that something bad might have happened to you, but as time went by, we realized that our actions were the driving force that led you to run away.”

Was this really happening, or was I dreaming because this was too good to be true?

As Dad spoke, I felt my tension, my anxiety, all those pent-up emotions dissipating gradually.

“You’re an intelligent woman, Ravie,” he added. “The fact that, with all my resources, we couldn’t find you only meant one thing: You didn’t wanna be found.” A mix of pride and guilt seeped into his tone.

“And that’s how we knew you ran away on purpose,” Mom chipped in, delicately squeezing against my fingers. “We were so hard on you, so selfish that we didn’t realize how suffocated you felt.”

“We spent the last five years praying and hoping that you find your way back to us...that you find it in your heart to forgive our ignorance and nonchalance,” Dad said, his voice dripping with remorse.

Is this for real? I wondered, my expression softening, a wind of relief brushing against my face. Mom and Dad had said everything I wanted to say to them. And the best part was that they understood their faults and were genuinely apologetic.

“I’m sorry I took so long to come around,” I said, sniffling, my heart lighter than it had ever been.

“What’s important is that you’re here, safe and sound.” Dad’s eyes crinkled at the corners.

One more thing remained, and I just had to summon the courage to spill the beans.

“I didn't come alone,” I said, my breath hitched in my throat as I looked across the two of them.

They exchanged glances, then returned their focus to me.

“Mom, Dad,” I began, drawing a deep breath in preparation for their reaction. “I have two kids,” I blurted out, shoulders slightly shrugged.

Their brows arched, eyes widening in shock. “Oh.” The word fell out of Mom's lips. “That's...that's unexpected,” she added, stuttering, a little nervous.

“I'm a granddad?” Dad asked, his lips curling into a smile.

“Yes,” I replied, mirroring his grin.

“Harley, can you believe it?” He turned to her, his eyes sparkling with mirth. “We're grandparents!”

Mom's smile was a bit weary, hinting that she was still in shock, her eyes wide with surprise. “Where are the kids?” she questioned, her tone laced with desperation.

“They're in the car,” I replied, my smile broadening as I gestured toward the door.

“Well, what're we waiting for? Let's go say hello!” Dad led the way, his pace hasty.

Rosa and I followed up behind my parents, excitement filling the air. We rushed outside, only to be met by a huge shock.

Wait a minute, what's going on here? I thought, unable to process what my eyes were

looking at. My heart sank into my stomach, and a sudden heat overwhelmed me, prompting cold sweat to dampen my forehead.

The car was gone, and Andrey lay on the pavement, bleeding at the back of his head. I wasn't sure whether or not he was still alive, and the voices around me faded away as I stood frozen in place.

My legs turned to jelly, unable to carry my weight as I fixed my eyes on the spot where I'd left the car and my kids.

“Wh...what's going on here?” Dad's stuttering voice caught my attention, bringing me back to the present. “Who is this man on the floor?” Fear and concern flickering in his tone.

“Is he dead?” Rosa whispered, tension thick in the air.

That wasn't particularly my problem right now. I had a bigger issue that I'd yet to process, and my brain was functioning well at the moment.

“Where are the kids?” Dad asked, daring to step toward Andrey.

He hadn't gone further when Andrey's groan stopped him in his tracks. Dad paused and withdrew, unsure of who Andrey was or what his presence here was for.

Andrey wasn't dead, after all, and he had some explaining to do.

With his hand over his bleeding skull, he managed to stand, his gaze meeting mine. Andrey's eyes were blazing with fury, a deep scowl settling on his face as he approached me, limping.

Beneath his annoyance was a glint of guilt flashing in his eyes.

“Andrey,” I called him, my voice barely audible, my heart pounding like a drum in my heaving chest. “Where are my children?” I asked, my eyes misting, lips quivering, overwhelmed with the fear of his response.

He swallowed hard, clenching his jaw, his face red with anger and guilt. His silence weakened my feet, my eyes widening at the realization that they'd been taken.

Tears streamed down my cheeks as a wave of terror washed over me, my legs barely able to carry my weight. I stumbled backward, but Dad was quick to catch me.

My parents' concerned voice droned on, but as the seconds ticked by, I drifted off into my own thoughts, their voices fading into the distance.

My worst fear had come to pass, and nothing could have prepared me for this.

This must be some kind of joke. I must be dreaming; maybe I'd wake up soon. No matter how much I tried to deny it, the truth remained that my kids had been kidnapped.



*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

She sat on a sofa back at the mansion, her foot tapping against the floor, fingers in her mouth, chewing on her nails. Her eyes were red from crying, swollen.

Fear etched on her face, cold sweat dampened her forehead, and her chest heaved rapidly. “I should've listened to you,” she said without raising her head, her voice breaking as she spoke. “I should've listened and just waited until tomorrow.” She jerked her head, tears streaming down her cheeks. “This is all my fault. If I hadn't been so anxious and—”

“Hey,” I cut her off, taking a few steps in her direction, my heart racing with fear of what would happen to those kids. However, I couldn't let her see how much this was affecting me. “It's useless blaming yourself. You had no idea this was going to happen.” I squatted in front of her and took her hand. “This isn't your fault, Ravyn.”

She sniffled, tears pouring like raindrops from the sky. “If anything happens to them—”

“Nothing will happen to them,” I interrupted, my voice confident even though, deep down, I was scared half to death. “We'll find our kids and bring them home, I promise.”

She heaved a sigh as I wiped her tears with my thumb. In my head, I found comfort in the different ways I'd make the perpetrators of this act suffer. Those bastards had messed with the wrong family—they messed with the wrong man.

For the past few hours, I'd been battling with my own guilt. I never should have chosen that damn meeting over my family. I should have been there, but I wasn't. The

fact that I let my kids down when they needed me the most was killing me.

At this point, I'd do anything to reverse the hands of time and relive the day. I'd do things differently—I'd put my family first before business. I couldn't stomach the thought of anything bad happening to those children because I ignored my instincts. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if their abductors had their way.

Andrey was beating himself up at a corner. He'd apologized countless times for losing the kids, but it wasn't his fault either. Our enemies had ambushed him, and the only reason they won was because they outnumbered him.

The goal was to find my children and save them from the clutches of whoever had taken them.

That's why my younger brother, Erik Tarasov, was here. Erik, a tall, dark-haired high-ranking Bratva boss, was a genius, a fierce leader, and also a badass hacker. If anyone could find my kids, it'd be him.

He'd been seated in front of his laptop for the past hour, his sharp green eyes glued to his laptop's flickering screen. "I've found something," he announced, raising his head to glance at me.

Ravyn sprang to her feet, her eyes widening in anticipation. Together, she and I rushed over to Erik at the dining table. Andrey did the same as well.

Erik cracked his knuckle, fingers resuming their rattling across the keyboard. "Okay, so I managed to hack into the Jensen residence's CCTVs, but it so happens that the kidnapers unfortunately wiped the footage."

My expression darkened, and he cleared the air with immediate effect.

He raised a finger in the air as if asking me to chill. “Not to worry; they were smart but not smart enough.” A sly smirk played on his lips.

“What do you mean?” Andrey asked, his brows furrowing as a puzzled look crossed his face.

“Well, let's just say that I found a way to beat them at their own game,” Erik replied, his fingers pressing the keys with rapid precision. “I was able to recover some fragments of the footage using a combination of video enhancement software and machine learning algorithms.” He pointed at the screen where a grainy video feed flickered to life, showing a van leaving the compound.

My eyes narrowed, and I leaned forward for a closer look.

“This is the vehicle that was used to abduct the kids,” Andrey confirmed, his voice dripping with certainty and fury.

Ravyn and I exchanged glances, her chest rising and falling as fear and anxiety overwhelmed her. But the good thing was, we were getting closer to finding our kids.

Erik typed some more, his gaze shifting across the keyboard and screen. Then, he zoomed in on the vehicle's license plate, the numbers becoming clearer.

“You can track that, right?” I asked, hoping for a positive response.

“It's not as easy as Hollywood makes it look,” he said, flashing a faint grin at me. “But I'm way ahead of you, brother.” He pushed some more keys, eyes scanning his screen. “Using optical character recognition software—OCR, for shorts—I was able to enhance the license plate, which I then scanned with a custom-built API that taps into the DMV database.” The words tumbled out of him in a nerdy rush.

I glanced at Andrey, who seemed to be as confused as I was. I didn't understand a word he just said, and I was pretty sure no one else in the room did.

“Maybe just speak English next time,” I said to him, my expression blank.

“Can we please skip to the part where you tell us what you found?” Ravyn asked, a hint of frustration creeping into her tone.

“Yes. Of course. Apologies.” Erik cleared his throat and continued, “I tracked the vehicle to a spot in the city, and that's when I found something fishy.” He looked at me, the light in his eyes going dim for a moment. “Check this out.” He pointed at the screen.

We watched a sleek black car—one that looked very familiar to me—pull up alongside the kidnappers' vehicle. A woman clad in a furry overcoat and a pair of dark glasses stepped out, her face obscured by shadows.

My eyes narrowed, my heart racing with anticipation as Erik zoomed in on the woman's face, revealing her identity. My jaw tightened, and a pang of rage swelled within me. “Sophia,” I whispered, my fingers clenching into fists.

Ravyn jerked her head, squinting as her gaze lingered on me. “Who the hell is Sophia, and what has she got to do with my kids?” The fury in her voice couldn't be more obvious.

“That's not all.” Erik pointed at a man who stepped out of the kidnappers' vehicle and was talking with Sophia.

“I'll be damned,” Andrey said softly, meeting my gaze. “That's Ilya...Arseni's brother.”

Ravyn scoffed, demonstrating with her hands. “Okay, I’m confused—who’s Ilya? Who’s Arseni? What’s going on here?” she demanded, her eyes pinned on me like a hook to a fish.

I seethed in silence because Rayvn’s biggest fear was playing out as she spoke. This was the reason she ran away with the kids in the first place: to keep them safe from the life of violence I lived.

“It makes sense that these two would join forces, considering that they both have an ax to grind with you,” Andrey said, rage seeping into his voice. “Ilya is out for vengeance since you killed his brother five years ago. Sophia, on the other hand, is mad because you called off the engagement with her.”

“Engagement?” Ravyn’s brows arched in surprise.

I took a step back, rubbing my eyes, anger simmering beneath the surface. Ilya’s reason was understandable; Sophia’s wasn’t. How dare they go after my kids? They could have attacked me directly, but they went after my children.

They’d bitten off more than they could chew, and now, they were about to choke on it. Both of them.

“Lev, what’s going on?” Ravyn asked, her eyes narrowing.

“I’ll explain everything later,” I replied, my expression darkening. “But for now, I need to go get our kids.” My attention drifted to my brother. “Do we know where they’re holding the children?”

“We do,” he answered, pointing at the red dot blinking on the screen.

“Good,” I said, clenching my jaw. “Get the men ready. We’re going to war,” I

instructed Andrey, my voice dropping to a deadly whisper.

Ravyn took a step forward and looked right into my eyes, rage flickering in hers. “Do me a favor; bring our kids home.” She drew closer, her gaze turning sinister within a second. “And make those bastards suffer.”

That, I would gladly do. Messing with my kids was a mistake—an unforgivable one—and they would pay for crossing the line.

My lips curled into a deadly smirk, and I stepped away, ready to rain hell on those who chose to be my enemies.

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Ilya had no idea we were coming; he had no idea that I was on to him, which meant that we had the element of surprise. My men and I infiltrated his hideout, an abandoned building on the outskirts of the city.

Like ninjas, we moved stealthily in the dark, taking out his guards, one at a time, with silent yet deadly attacks. Espionage and assassination were just another Tuesday for us, and the bastard, Ilya, was clueless about the danger lurking in the shadows around him.

Necks snapped like twigs as we quietly eliminated the enemies in their own territory. Ilya's defenses were weak, as were his men, and in no time, all his guards were eliminated.

I found my way inside, Andrey and a few of my enforcers by my side while Erik and Ravyn waited in the car. I needed my brother out there for reconnaissance and tech support.

As we stepped into the building, my blood boiled at the sight of my kids being held at gunpoint. The coward had the effrontery to point a gun at two four-year-olds. Where was the honor in that?

Elara's eyes met with mine in a fleeting moment, fear flickering in the poor girl's gaze, her body trembling. Nik showed no sign of fear. Instead, he fumed in silence, jaw clenched, eyes blazing with fury.

“You're like your father in many ways,” Ilya said to Nik, pointing the gun at him. “Sadly, you won't grow up to take on his legacy.” Ilya cocked the gun. “I can promise you that.”

“It's unwise to make promises you cannot keep,” I said to him, my voice calm but menacing.

His body jerked immediately, and he turned around to face me, shocked by my sudden appearance. He grabbed the kids and set them in front of him, fear etched in his eyes. “Don't move, or I swear to God, I'll shoot!” he threatened, trying to sound confident.

The remainder of his men rushed out and pointed their guns at us. We were outnumbered, but I had a plan.

Ilya laughed, thinking he had the upper hand here. What an idiot!

“The idea was to kill someone you cared about just like you killed someone that I cared about.” He chuckled, his fingers massaging my boy's shoulder with the barrel of the gun pressed against his skin.

My eyes narrowed, fists balling in both hands, but as angry as I was, I knew I had to tread carefully. Ilya was a madman, it was obvious, and to beat him, patience and

timing were the key elements to guarantee my victory.

“Luck has shone on me, Lev,” he added. “I don't get to just kill your offspring; I get to kill you, too.”

“I'm ready.” Erik's voice came through the bud in my ear, his fingers rattling across his keyboard.

“Do it,” I whispered, discreetly targeting Ilya's left eye as my hand reached for the dagger sheathed to my waist.

“Lights out in three...two...one.” Erik hacked into the building's power grid and shut the damned thing off.

My men and I were one with the dark, trained to fight even with our eyes closed. As the power went out, everyone in the room became a blind man. The only difference was that my men and I were deadly blind men.

I hurled the dagger in Ilya's direction, and seconds later, the sound of his wails filled the air. “My eye!”

His men, confused in the dark, opened fire, shooting in our direction, each flash revealing a glimpse of their horrified faces. Bones cracked, flesh tore, and necks snapped as we took the enemies out, swift and effortless.

Once done, Erik turned the lights back on, and the only people standing were the Tarasovs. My son was seen covering his sister like a human shield, and I couldn't be more proud of his selflessness and bravery.

A few paces away, Ilya lay on the floor, drowning in the pool of his own blood with my dagger buried in his left eye.



“Dad!” Elara exclaimed, her voice laced with joy and relief as she rushed toward me.

My lips curled into a smile as I bent over and picked her up, her tiny arms around my neck. “It's okay, you're safe now.” I smoothed her hair backward, heading toward my little hero. “Hey, buddy.” I lowered myself to his level, pride sparkling in my eyes. “You did good tonight.” I ruffled his hair.

“Thanks, Dad,” he said, a smile spreading across his face as he slipped into my arms.

I picked him up, too; my heart filled with relief and gladness. Andrey locked eyes with me and nodded as I left the building, leaving him in charge of cleaning up the mess.

Ravyn was pacing back and forth outside, waiting for our arrival.

“Mommy!” Elara called out, her adorable voice cutting through the silence of the night.

Ravyn turned in our direction, tears of joy streaming down her cheeks. She spread out her arms, welcoming them into her bosom. Both kids hopped off my body and ran into their mother's embrace.

I stood by the building's entrance, watching her shower them with kisses, sobbing and chuckling at the same time.

Tonight, we came so close to losing them, but it was a good thing that we arrived when we did. I was grateful to have been able to save them, and I promised myself at that moment that I wouldn't let this repeat itself ever again. Never.

Ravyn gathered them both into her arms and raised her eyes to look at me, mouthing, “Thank you.”

As we stared at each other, an unspoken understanding brewed between us. We were in this together, whether we like it or not.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

My heart swelled with joy, and I'd never been more relieved. I thought this was the end of the road; I thought I was going to lose my kids because those maniacs had an ax to grind with Lev.

This was what I was afraid of five years ago—it was a part of the reason I fled after finding out I was pregnant for him. Today, my biggest fear had played out right in front of me, threatening to steal my only source of happiness.

The feeling was terrible. I couldn't think. I couldn't eat. I couldn't do anything at all but cry. My eyes were swollen with bags beneath them, and my heart ached more than it ever had in my whole life.

Breathing was a problem, as was standing on my feet, considering how weak my legs were. I wanted to blame Lev because if he hadn't dragged us back here—a city filled with his enemies—none of this would have happened in the first place.

I lived half a decade without having a problem with anyone, no scandal whatsoever. All those years, the only thing that kept me up late at night was the thought of him finding me. I dreaded ever running into him because I knew he was trouble and that nothing good would come from him being back in my life.

Today was proof that I was right. It wasn't paranoia; it wasn't any form of delusion. It was a fact. However, today also proved something to me, something a lot deeper.

When he'd found out that the kids were kidnapped, Lev didn't rest for a second. He made phone calls every minute, making sure all of his resources were put to work. Lev was hell-bent on finding them and bringing them home safe and sound.

But beyond his determination was something else—fear. I didn't think he had it in him to ever be afraid of anything. He was also in control of everything around him: people, property, and even his emotions.

While working on fixing this mess, he masked his feelings with anger and rage. But beneath the surface, I saw a man enveloped by his own guilt. Fear danced in the depths of his eyes, betraying the stoic expression he had on.

He wasn't heartless after all.

If this scandal proved anything to me, it was that Lev would do anything for his kids. He'd go as far as burning the world down if he had to. I realized he wasn't the devil I thought he was, at least not when it came to family.

He was human, just like me, and regardless of his ruthlessness, there was a part of him that still cared.

I sat on the sofa, watching my parents play with the kids, each one carrying a grandchild on their lap. Nik and Elara needed all the attention that they could get at the moment. They had been through hell and back, and I could only imagine the fear they must've suffered watching their lives flash before their eyes.

My eyes darted to Lev as he sat beside my dad, the two men talking and smiling with Nik on Dad's lap. The sight was a beautiful one to behold, and I still couldn't believe my eyes. This was the same man who had warned to stay the hell away from Lev Tarasov, that he was bad news.

Today, the two men were seated in the same room, discussing life, politics, and business. This was my parents' first time visiting the mansion, and honestly, I was a little shocked when they called and said they were coming around.

They couldn't wait to set eyes on their grandchildren, especially after this traumatic experience. Initially, I thought Dad would have been upset when he realized that Lev was the father of my two children and that he was sort of the reason they got kidnapped in the first place. But Dad wasn't. It was almost like none of that mattered to him. His interest was more in the kids and making them happy.

“You look just like your mommy. Has anyone told you that?” Mom said, braiding Elara's blonde hair.

The little girl, comfortably seated on Mom's lap, jerked her head, her eyes shining with mirth. “Mommy looks just like you. Has anyone told you that?” A wide grin spread across her face.

Mom laughed lightly, her lips curling into a radiant smile. She met my eyes for a fleeting moment, and I mirrored her gestures, my heart light as a feather.

“Grandma, my dad's a hero,” Elara said, her adorable voice filling the room.

Voices fell silent at her announcement, heads turning in her direction. Lev and I exchanged glances, and his expression softened as Mom indulged the little girl.

“He is, isn't he?” she asked, lowering her head to look the girl in the eyes.

Elara nodded her small head in affirmation, her smile broadening, eyes crinkling at the corners. “Yes. He saved us from a bad man.”

Mom's gaze snapped toward me, then back away. “Your dad sounds like Superman.” She flashed her whites, a grin twitching at the corner of her lips.

“No,” Elara objected, her voice tiny and cute, her small fingers reaching to toil with Mom's hair. “He's more like Batman because he likes the dark.”

Lev threw a quick look my way, a glint of vulnerability flickering in his eyes. Elara turned in his direction and smiled, her tiny hands waving at him.

Lev couldn't hold back his emotions, so he expressed them with a genuine grin that made his eyes sparkle. His gaze shifted to Nik, and the boy flashed his father's signature smirk.

I may have been right about his enemies going after his kids. But he was also right about doing whatever it took to keep them safe. He'd proven today that he was capable of protecting them at any cost. Lev proved something else, too—the fact that he was capable of love.

Only a man who understood the concept of love would willingly risk everything and endanger his own life. He showed me a version of him I didn't think existed. Lev proved that he was selfless and would always put his family first.

We locked eyes once again, and this time, I felt my heart dissolve into a puddle of emotions, like sugar in hot coffee. A smile spread across my face, and a soft sigh of relief escaped my lips.

Later that evening, my parents bade us goodbye, and although the kids didn't want them to leave, they promised to come pick them up next time.

My parents' presence had really lightened up the kids' mood, and it was almost as though they'd forgotten all about the near-death experience. Nik and Elara were hyperactive tonight, and it was next to impossible to get them to sleep.

Lev thought it was best to let them blow off some steam. He said happiness was the natural antidote to the traumatic experience they had. It was way past their bedtime, but I guess he was right about letting them have some fun. They deserved it.

Nothing else mattered to Lev tonight, and it was as though he'd chosen to devote his time to the kids. We all lay on the couch in the living room after everyone had left. Elara's voice, dripping with enthusiasm, filled the air as she described the incident and how her dad saved them from that bad man.

She talked, and we listened, smiling and laughing as the night went by in a flash. Sleep crept into their systems at almost midnight, causing them to doze off.

Lev picked Elara in his arms, and I did the same with Nik. We carried them upstairs to their room, tucking them each in their beds. It was weird watching him sit on the side of Elara's bed, his fingers brushing her hair to the back of her ear.

If I didn't know better, I'd think he was growing soft. But he wasn't; he was just overwhelmed by the love and affection he felt for his children.

I set Nik on the bed, my knight in shining armor, my brave little soldier. With a warm smile on my face, I pulled up the blanket over his body and kissed his forehead. His lips curled into an infectious grin as he relaxed on the mattress, head resting on a comfy pillow.

“Dad,” Nik called his attention, his gaze darting across to him.

Lev lifted his head, eyes pinned on the boy. “Yeah, buddy?”

“Why did that bad man take us?” he asked, his voice calm and laced with a glint of curiosity.

My heart skipped a beat, shocked by his question, although I knew how inquisitive the kids could be at times. Lev shot a quick glance at me and rose to his feet, circling over to Nik's bed.

He lowered himself on one knee, holding the boy's gaze. "Sometimes, Nik, people do bad things because they're hurting," he answered, his tone mild and low. "But that doesn't make it right, and bad people are usually punished." He held his hand and added, his voice laced with conviction, "You're safe now—we all are—and I'm gonna make sure it always stays that way."

Nik heaved a sigh, his lips curling into a smile.

"Now, go to sleep." He ruffled his hair, his grin broadening.

I was impressed by the way he answered the boy's question. His response was perfect—it helped Nik easily process the incident without scaring him.

That was wisdom at play, and I couldn't be more proud. He tucked the boy in bed and rose to his feet. "Goodnight, buddy."

"Goodnight, Dad," Nik replied.

I kissed his forehead and beamed at him. "Night, sweetheart."

He mirrored my gesture and closed his eyes, exhaling sharply.

Lev and I took turns kissing Elara's forehead, careful not to disturb her sleep. She looked so peaceful and adorable, and I was filled with gratitude that I hadn't lost any of them today.

We headed out, turned off the lights, and shut the door behind us. Lev and I headed back downstairs and settled on a couch, each of us exhausted from the day's stress.

For a few minutes, there was radio silence between us, hidden glances passing across the two of us. I could feel his gaze lingering, but for some reason, it was like I was



too shy to look at him all of a sudden.

At last, I summoned the courage to say what I had on my mind, my head turning to face him. His gaze was pinned on me, a faint smirk playing on his lips. My heart skipped a beat as we locked eyes, the world around us melting away.

“Thank you,” I said, staring at him, my voice dripping with sincerity.

“For what?” he asked, his eyes never leaving mine.

“For being true to your word,” I replied, my unease dissolving by the second. “You promised to find and return them safe and sound. And that's exactly what you did. So, thank you.” I extended my hand, my palm resting on his. “If I'm being honest, you surprised me today.” I chuckled, my eyes dropping to the floor for a fleeting moment. “I didn't think that you'd make a great dad, but now I'm starting to reconsider.”

He watched and listened to me in silence, his faint grin retained, admiration flickering in his eyes.

“You've changed over the past few days, and I gotta admit...I'm loving this version of you.” The slight pause came when I held his gaze, my eyes boring into his.

He arched his brows, his lips twitching at the corners. “You're ‘loving’ this version of me?” He air-quoted the word.

I chuckled, my cheeks flushing as I broke eye contact. “Don't get too cocky.”

He beamed at me, a bright, genuine smile that melted my heart.

Lev edged closer, closing the distance between us, his body barely inches from mine. “You and the kids are my responsibility,” he began, his gaze unwavering. “Today, I

got sloppy, and that almost turned out to be a costly mistake. But I learned.” His hand extended to mess with a loose lock of my hair. “This will never happen again—not on my watch. I promise you that.”

Yes, I believed him. I believed every word that came out of his mouth. He'd given me a reason to trust his ability to do as he said, and I found comfort in that fact.

A sense of peace washed over me, and in the silence of the moment, the atmosphere drifted to something more sensual. My heart was swelling with emotions, racing with anticipation. I stared deeply into his eyes, watching his expression soften, his head slightly leaning toward me.

Driven by passion and the emotions surging through me, I reached out and claimed his lips, my palm resting on his cheek. At first, the kiss started slowly, tongues sliding into our mouths, but as the flames burned brighter, the kiss deepened.

Breathless, we devoured each other's lips with an intense passion, his body brushing against mine. As our heads tilted in perfect sync and his hands traversed my body, I felt the connection between us deepen.

His kiss left me smitten, craving him and yearning for more. I could feel the fire ignite within me, burning with an intense fervency that threatened to consume me.

This feeling was beyond sexual; our connection ran deeper than that. And that was how I knew I was starting to fall in love with Lev Tarasov.

## Page 24

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 4:58 pm*

The air, filled with the sweet fragrance of blooming wildflowers, teased out loose strands that framed her face as her lips curled into a vibrant smile.

Her dress, a floral print with delicate spaghetti straps, danced in the gentle breeze, its lightweight fabrics fluttering around her knees. Ravyn's gaze was fixed across the horizon as we both stood on a hill cloaked with a verdant carpet of grass and wildflowers.

Songbirds sang, their songs blending with the sound of waves lapping against the shore beneath. Seagulls squealed overhead, the wind whispering through the grass as we watched the horizon, the sun slowly descending.

Above, the sky transformed into an array of warm hues as the setting sun dipped below the horizon, casting a soft golden glow across the landscape.

“It's beautiful,” Ravyn said, admiration flickering in her tone, eyes sparkling, and lips curling into a vibrant smile.

I stood by her side, my gaze sweeping across the breathtaking panorama of the surroundings. “I thought you'd like it,” I said, my voice smooth and charming, drifting toward her direction.

“Well, you weren't wrong,” she replied, squinting at the gentle breeze, her expression soft and warm.

Ravyn shut her eyes and drew a deep breath, letting it out slowly, her smile unwavering.

“I come here sometimes whenever I need to clear my head,” I began, walking past her and heading toward the edge, a hand in my pocket.

Her eyes widened ever so slightly, a hint of concern creeping into her gaze. I could tell that her heart had skipped a beat when I came dangerously close to the edge.

She stood transfixed, rooted on the spot, her voice laced with a hint of fear and caution. “Uh...you might wanna, you know...take a step back...away from...over there.” Her hand gestured toward the rocky outcropping, her body language clearly indicating how uncomfortable she was.

A smirk twitched at the corner of my lips as I turned to face her, amused by the mask of fear she had on.

“Over here is where the fun is,” I teased, my expression softening. “You'll get a better view, I promise. Come on.” I beckoned her.

She shook her head, a nervous chuckle escaping her lips, her index finger wagging in the air. “Hm. Mmm. No, sir, I'm a mother of two, and my life is still very much precious to me. Thank you very much.”

I lowered my head, chuckling as I rubbed my eyes, my heart swelling with emotions.

She folded her arms across her chest. “Go ahead, laugh all you want, but I'm not going over there.”

I looked at her, my eyes boring into hers, a fleeting seriousness flashing across my face. “It's safe. I promise.” My hand extended, my soft and confident expression seducing her to change her mind. “Trust me.”

I watched her face relax, shoulders slumping as she let out a slow exhale. “You better

not let me fall,” she warned, her voice dripping with playful solemnity, a teasing scowl etched on her face.

“I won't,” I assured, my smile broadening.

She overcame her fear and stepped toward it, her chest heaving with slow breaths and her body subtly trembling.

“Look at me,” I said, noticing that the height was getting to her, infusing back the fear she'd dispelled. “Keep your eyes on me. Nothing else.”

She heaved a sigh and held my gaze, swallowing as she approached the bluff with slow, calculated steps. The moment her hand touched mine, I pulled her to myself, a soft yelp escaping her mouth.

“That wasn't so hard, wasn't it?” I asked, my arms around her waist.

She beamed a bright smile, tucking a loose strand behind her ear. Her eyes, wide with wonder, dropped below the hill where a river snaked through the valley. “You weren't kidding. It is a better view,” she confessed, looking into my eyes, her breath fanning against my skin.

For the next few seconds, it was silent between us, the gentle wind rustling our hair, our intimate stare deepening. This woman meant the world to me, and there was no denying it now.

After everything that happened, everything we'd been through these past few days, I'd come to the conclusion that my life was better with her in it.

Ravyn's presence at the house made me understand what I'd been missing this entire time. She and the kids seemed to effortlessly light up my mood every single day.

It's true what they say: You don't know what you've been missing until it arrives.

That was the case with me. I hadn't realized how much comfort and joy this woman could bring into my life. And now that I had tasted what having a family with her would like, I didn't want to let go.

Ravyn cleared her throat, her eyes still locked to mine. "So, what's gonna happen with your ex-fiancée?" she questioned, a fleeting seriousness flickering in her eyes.

"Sophia will get what she deserves," I said, my tone flat. "You just wait and see." A mischievous grin twitched at the corners of my lips.

She squinted, a faint grin spreading across her face, her head tilting to the side. "What did you do?" Curiosity laced her tone as she anticipated my response.

"What I always do to those who attack me first. Retaliate," I answered, a sense of comfort washing over me. "But we're not here to talk about irrelevant things," I added, changing the subject.

Intrigued, her smile broadened, and she asked, "Okay, then, what're we here to talk about?"

"Us," I said, my voice stern and firm like a man who knew exactly what he wanted and was going for it.

"Us?" Her brows arched, and her breath lodged in her throat.

I took a step forward and watched the setting sun for a moment before turning back in her direction. Expressing my emotions was uncharted territory for me, but for her, I was willing to give it a shot.

She looked so beautiful, standing there, her hair dancing in the breeze, squinted eyes fixed on me with anticipation flickering in their depths.

“For so long, I've locked myself up to feeling anything for anyone,” I began, my voice laced with sincerity, gaze pinned on her. “But with you, things are different. You've managed to do what no woman has ever done.” I took a pause, letting my words sink in for a while.

She blinked a few times, her expression getting softer and softer by the minute. My confession had taken her unaware, and the look of surprise in her eyes was priceless.

I continued, “First, you outsmarted me, then you eluded me for five years, and now...you've unlocked something in me, something emotional.” The slight pause came when I closed the distance between us, my eyes locked on hers. “You, Ravyn Jensen, have proven to be the light in my dark. And this little time I've spent with the kids has opened my eyes to the reality that I'm actually capable of...love.”

She blinked rapidly, as if fighting back her tears. Her cheeks flushed, a small smile playing on her enticing lips. “Love is a pretty strong word, Lev, one you shouldn't use unless you mean it,” she said, holding my gaze, her eyes looking deeply into mine like she was searching for a hint of insincerity.

“I don't throw words around, and you know it,” I said, reaching out to hold her hand and intertwine our fingers.

Her breathing grew heavier by the second as she stood frozen in shock, her gaze locked on my face. “Lev...” she whispered, her voice breaking.

I knew what she was going to say; I knew what she was thinking. Ravyn was afraid to hope; she felt the same way that I did, but she needed to be sure that I wasn't messing with her.

“Shh.” I placed my index finger over her lips, sealing whatever words were about to spill from her mouth. My hand slipped to the back of her neck, fingers massaging it with a subtle and expert motion.

Her muscles relaxed, and a faint, almost undetectable moan came forth, mirroring the pleasurable effect of my touch on her. She grasped my hand, leaning her cheek against my palm.

The air around us crackled with tension, eyes boring into each other's depths, our heads barely an inch apart. She shut her eyes, leaning in to accept my lips and locking them with hers.

I broke the light kiss, cupping her face in my palms as she reopened her eyes. “I never thought that I'd say this, but...” My fingers caressed her skin, my thumb tracing the curve of her mouth. “I love you, Ravyn.”

Her face lit up with a smile so bright it made her eyes sparkle like a thousand sapphires. Ravyn rushed at my lips, devouring them with a passionate fervency. The kiss deepened for a moment, her tongue sliding into my mouth and hers in mine. Seconds later, she broke it, her fresh breath brushing my skin. “And I love you.” Her eyes crinkled at the corners, lips parting to reveal her perfect whites.

I felt my heart melt at her words, a flame of passion igniting within me. As I stared at her, my desire burned, fueled by the erotic look etched in her gaze.

She edged closer, and with my arms around her waist, she reclaimed my lips, our heads tilting in perfect harmony.

As we stood on the ridge, the world around us melted away, leaving only the softness of her lips and the warmth of her body pressed against mine. The hummingbirds and the sound of the waves crashing against the shore faded into the distance. Nothing



else mattered but the two of us basking in the sea of passion.

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A slow, sensual song played in the background as our naked bodies writhed against each other's, the music adding to the ambiance of the atmosphere. I devoured those cherry lips, taking her tongue in my mouth while my hand traced her curves.

The hotel room was dimly lit, the moon's ethereal glow filtering through the window, the curtains dancing to the rhythm of the wind. Her manicured hands traversed my broad torso and my back as we exchanged slow, deep breaths.

I let her lips rest, bending to kiss the nape of her neck, her breast in my palm, my fingers fondling them. Her soft moans amplified my yearning for her, my teeth grazing her skin with delicious bites.

A breathless murmur came forth, her fingers rubbing over my back as I lay on her, my body covering hers. Her smooth skin brushed against mine, the friction making me harder than I already was.

Her body trembled beneath me as I slid out of her slippery entrance, her wetness draping over my length. I took her luscious peaks in my mouth, my hands pressing both lumps together as I grazed my teeth against her hard nipples.

She arched her back, her moans fueling my passion while I deliciously bit her nipples. I could feel the sensation coursing through us, her body quivering at my touch, hands rubbing my head.

I stuck out my tongue, licking her chest through to her belly button as I descended her torso. Her legs shuddered against my gentle grasp, fingers digging into her skin, massaging her thighs.

My face jerked back to hers, and our eyes locked in a fleeting moment. Her lips curled into a seductive smile as she watched me position my head in front of her pussy, dripping wet.

Her chest was rising and falling, anticipation etched on her gaze, her fingers grasping the sheets.

I drew a deep breath, inhaling the sweet scent of her arousal, my nose grazing her clit. She smelled so good, and I bet she'd taste even better. My thumb brushed over her entrance, teasing her a little, her juice slippery beneath my skin. I pulled my hand inches away, and a thread of her wetness linked my thumb to her cunt. What a wonderful sight.

Her pussy lips seemed to be calling out to me, her flower inviting me to have a taste of her juice. But I wasn't done teasing her yet. I enjoyed the look of desire and suspense that colored her eyes. I enjoyed the way her body was surrendered, waiting to be taken over.

I dipped my middle finger, pushing it in with a deliberate slowness that prompted a soft sigh out of her. She held my gaze, biting her lower lip as her body quivered, a testament to the desire coursing through her veins.

I swiped my thumb over her entrance and kissed her clit. "I wanna taste you," I said, my voice barely above a whisper, eyes locked on hers.

She swallowed, her throat wobbling, as she nodded in affirmation. I broke our eye contact and faced the beautiful flower inches from my mouth. I stuck my tongue out and licked her entrance upward.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned, her hands on my head, her fingers in my hair. "That's so good," she purred.

I slid back my middle finger while simultaneously kissing her pussy's lips. The taste of her juice fueled my hunger, and I ate her up relentlessly. I heard the sound of her head dropping to the pillow beneath her, her hands grasping the sheets.

I held on to her thighs, pulling her closer as if seeking a deeper connection. Ravyn bucked her hips, granting me access to her depths as she twisted and twirled, releasing a series of soft moans. My lips smack against her pussy, her juice draped over my mouth, my finger relentlessly sliding deeper and deeper inside her.

The more I ate her up, the louder and sweeter her moans grew. She arched her back upward, fingers squeezing and tugging against the sheets.

She was lost in a sea of ecstasy and pushed me to eat her even more. She tasted so good that I couldn't seem to stop myself from devouring that cunt. The moisture from my mouth mixed with her wetness, making the oral session sloppy and nasty.

“What're you doing to me?” she whispered amidst sweet moans, her waist pushing upward like she couldn't get enough.

Her reaction was satisfactory, boosting my ego as I worked on her pussy. She lowered her back on the bed, breathing heavily as I raised my head to look at her frenzied face. Sheer pleasure flickered in her eyes as she held my gaze, her lips curling up into a smile of astonishment. “Tell me what you did to me,” she said, her voice low and breathless.

I flashed a smirk and leaned upward to kiss her lips. With my hand still between her legs, I pushed my finger back inside her, in...out...in...out.

Her palm rested on my cheek, tongue traveling into my mouth as the heat of passion grew hotter by the minute. Her eyes widened, jaw dropping as I quickened my pace, fingering her more intently. She moaned in my mouth, and I possessed her lips,

sealing her purrs.

She broke the kiss, and her face contorted in passion as her eyes dropped downward to watch my fingers work their magic. Her breasts wiggled with the movement of her body, and her eyes fluttered shut for a moment.

With an incredible amount of strength, she pushed me over to the bed, positioned on my back. Ravyn's lips curled into a mischievous grin, and she went down on her knees, her fingers pushing her hair back.

She gazed at my cock, standing tall, her hands stroking it with an expert motion. I groaned, feeling my muscles contrasting with her action. A jolt of electricity surged through my body as I shut my eyes, surrendering to the passion she offered.

A thrilling sensation sprinted to my brain, and my legs trembled, hinting at the incredible effect of her handjob. Up and down, she slid her palms over my shaft, smearing my pre-cum over it.

My body jerked subtly when the warmth of her mouth enveloped my cock. She pushed her face deeper into my groin, my cock traveling into her throat. I heard her choke and gag before pulling her head away. Her teary eyes locked to my face as a nasty thread of saliva lingered from her mouth, linking my cap to her lips.

That's so hot , I thought, a wave of pleasure washing over me.

She rolled her tongue around my cap, her fingers caressing my balls as her eyes jerked up to look at me. She clearly loved the ecstatic look on my face and was perhaps even basking in it.

She was just as good with her hands as she was with her tongue, and I struggled to keep my growl back in. However, her actions were sending shock waves through my

body—waves too powerful to ignore and keep inside.

She licked my shaft upward, reclaimed my cap, and then licked it downward until her tongue rested on my sack. The feeling was shocking and tingling at the same time. Her mouth delicately swallowed my well-shaved balls, sucking on them as her hand stroked my length—or height, in this case.

I felt so alive, my heart swelling with desire as I surrendered myself to her to do as she pleased.

Once done, she stroked my cock a few more times before straddling me, her hand holding up my shaft outside her entrance. Slowly, she slid down, our minds, bodies, and souls connecting in a heartbeat.

She moaned, settling on my groin, my shaft deep inside her. Ravyn's hands traveled across my broad torso, her hips gently swaying over my cock. She reached down and claimed my lips, and I hers.

Our heads danced in sync with the rhythm of the passion that burned between us. Her hair cascaded down her face like a river of gold, her lips devouring mine so intently.

With her palms, she cupped my face, our breaths exchanging in the heat of the moment. My hands rubbed the back of her thighs, traveling up to her ass. She winced in pleasure without breaking our kiss as I spanked her butt, her skin smooth against my palm.

I massaged her ass, fingers digging into her flesh, before traveling to her chest and delicately squeezing her breasts. Her hips ground back and forth in a slow, sensual motion that sent sparks of electricity surging through us both.

As the cool music played on, heating up the atmosphere with sexual tension, she

moved her hips to the slow rhythm of the beat. My hands grabbed her waist, taking control of the flow, tempo, and direction of her moves.

She whipped her hair backward, raising to position herself upright on my cock. I tilted her grinding waist, directing her sensual moves, her soft moans amplifying my lust.

Her hands flew to her chest, squeezing against her breasts, fingers pinching her nipples. She twisted and twirled, her body writhing in ecstasy. My cock traveled deeper and deeper inside her as I bucked my hips, pushing inside in sync with her moves.

She bit her lip, her face contorted in pleasure as I reached to help squeeze those luscious peaks bouncing up and down. I grabbed her tender globes and fondled them, feeling their softness beneath my palms.

Leaning forward, she stretched out her hands, placing them against the bed's headrest while still grinding on my cock.

I firmly held her ass and rose to position myself on my knees. She wrapped her hands around my neck and her legs around my waist as I thrust into her.

Her body pressed against mine, her gentle swells pushing against my chest as she moved up and down my cock. I settled on my heels, my head raised to look at her face, inches higher. She was biting her lip, her eyes rolling backward as she purred.

My palms pressed against her ass, holding her in position as I drove into her pussy. Her arms around my neck tightened, burying my face between her breasts. Her signature scent, mixed with her sweat, invaded my senses, and I moved to take her breast in my mouth.

She pulled back a little, her body merely inches away, with her grind becoming more vigorous by the second. She supported herself with one hand around my neck, and with the other, she pushed her fingers through her hair.

I dropped her back on the bed, and a smile spread across her face as she flipped over on all fours. I spanked her ass and bent over to eat her salad. From her reaction, she obviously wasn't expecting my tongue to rest on her exit, but that's where it landed.

“Oh, my God!” she exclaimed softly, her face falling to the mattress.

Her legs trembled as I licked her tiny hole, my thumb simultaneously brushing over her entrance.

“Fuccck!” she murmured, the pillow muffling her pleasure-filled shrill.

With deliberate slowness, I gently pushed my thumb inside her hole, her moan deepening at this penetration.

She was tight, so tight that I concluded she'd never had anything go through her exit before. Her muscles relaxed, her tension eased, and her legs shuddered subtly as I pulled my thumb out.

I grabbed my cock and brushed it against her entrance, teasing her first, making her yearn to have me inside her.

“Just stick it inside already,” she said softly, her moans dripping with desperation.

Not yet.

I loved the way her body trembled with anticipation, the way my cap teased her entrance.

“This is torture,” she murmured. “You're torturing me.”

A long, satisfied gasp came forth as I pushed my cock inside her from the back. I grabbed a handful of her hair, and while pulling in it, I drove into her pussy with relentless strokes.

“Oh, my goodness, fuck,” she moaned, fingers grasping and tugging against the sheets.

Her butt cheeks slapped against my groin as I penetrated her entrance, pulling on her hair. Her breasts bounced back and forth, her nipples brushing against the sheets.

I quickened my pace, my strokes driving faster.

“Yes, please, yes,” she cried, her body vibrating from all that pleasure sprinting through her. “Harder, harder. Fuck me harder,” she requested, groaning deeply.

I released her hair, and her face dropped back into the pillow. With energetic moves, I rammed into her with vigorous thrusts that forced her to say my name.

“Oh, Lev, give it to me,” she purred, her sweet voice breaking at the force of my tireless strokes.

She slipped her hand underneath, her palm rubbing over her clit with a rapid motion that matched my pace. “Fuck, that feels so good!” She let out a high-pitched cry, groaning, her palm unrelenting.

I pushed deeper inside her, a spark jolting through my body, and a primal gasp came forth, hinting that I was climaxing.

“No, no, please don't cum yet!” she pleaded, her voice filled with desperation. “I'm



almost there.” She increased her pace, rubbing her clit a lot faster than my strokes.

This wasn't about me. It was about her. I couldn't satisfy myself at her expense; it would have been selfish of me. Although I was on the brink of cumming, I had to hold it back for her sake. It would give me so much pleasure to see her satisfied because tonight, the goal was to please her in any way that I could.

With a deep growl, I held my essence back in, refusing to release my load no matter how tempting it was.

“Don't stop! Please, don't stop,” she begged me, her cries fueling my urge to release.

It was almost impossible not to fill her up, considering the sweetness of her voice and pussy.

Anything for you, I thought to myself, struggling to control myself while still hitting her hard.

“Oh, my God, I'm cumming!” she announced, her voice and legs trembling.

Her warmth enveloped me, and as I pulled out of her entrance, a gush of liquid poured out like water from a fountain. “Fuccckkkk!” She dragged the word amidst moans, her body dropping to the mattress.

Ravyn's body convulsed, her legs shuddering as she bit on the sheets, her fingers wrapped around them. I leaned down, my hands traveling around her curves and contours, feeling the vibration of her body.

My lips curled into a faint grin as I basked in the sight of her struggling to get a hold of herself. She rolled over on her back, her eyes wide with astonishment. “Wow!” she giggled, covering her face with her palm. “You're amazing,” she confessed, a glint of

amusement and respect creeping into her tone.

“And you're incredible,” I replied, reaching down to kiss her neck as she panted subtly in an attempt to catch her breath.

Her hands roamed my body, fingers raking my skin. “Now, let's make you cum, shall we?” she whispered in my ear, her hand reaching down to grab my cock.

She rubbed my cap up and down her entrance, her body twirling beneath me. She moaned softly, using my cock like a dildo to tease herself.

Perhaps I'd get her a vibrator to help spice things up a bit.

She took control of my shaft, deciding how deep inside her it traveled and how far out of her it went. Her hands flew into my chest, caressing and pinching my hard nipples.

Her body jerked as I pushed inside her with a powerful force. Her eyes crinkled at the corners, teeth grazing against her lower lip. She loved it. The feeling of her hands roaming my back sent shivers down my spine.

“Go deeper,” she whispered, moaning, fingers digging into my flesh as her legs spread apart.

My weight pressed her into the mattress, lips reclaiming hers like I couldn't get enough. As I plunged deeper at her request, she bucked her hips, deepening the connection between us.

My hand brushed and caressed beneath her thigh, her leg raised in sheer pleasure as she surrendered to me. With a slow, deliberate rhythm, I pushed inside her, her wetness aiding my thrusts.

“You're so beautiful,” I whispered in her ear, watching her cheeks flush, her eyes sparkling with mirth.

“And you're so manly,” she replied with the same tone, her hands traveling around my body. “So hard and veiny, just like I like it.” She reached down to hold my cock sliding in and out of her. “It's so big,” she moaned in my ear, stroking it while it worked its magic.

The deeper I plunged into her, the more sparks of electricity I felt surging through me. The scent of her perfume and the smell of her arousal invaded my senses, leaving me wanting more of her. I couldn't get enough, nor could she, and as our bodies collided, our connection deepened.

“Lev! Oh, Lev, you're killing me,” came her whispered cry, her feet locking around my waist.

I continued to drive into her, my shaft traveling to her depths as she writhed beneath me. Her fingers grasped and squeezed the white sheets, her back arching as soft purrs escaped her lips.

“You like that, don't you?” I asked, a self-satisfied grin flashing across my face.

She bit her lower lip, her eyes shining with passion as she nodded in affirmation.

“Say it,” I demanded, my voice husky and laced with authority.

“I like it,” she moaned, sticking out her tongue, her breasts bouncing back and forth to the rhythm of my thrusts.

I took her tongue in my mouth, my hands pinning hers to the mattress, keeping her in place, unable to move. My waist ground effortlessly against hers, her entrance wet

and slippery, swallowing me whole.

“Harder,” she whispered, her eyes rolling back into their sockets, her tone laced with intense pleasure. “Please, go harder.”

My hips moved in a rapid yet sensual circle, my body undulating above hers. She moaned out loud, my name on her lips, begging me not to stop. “Yes, right there! Please, don't stop.”

Her legs parted, hanging in the air as I pulled her closer with each stroke. My movement became more frenzied, my hips pounding into hers with a relentless pace.

“Yes, yes, yes,” she moaned, locking her eyes with me, her face contorted in a mix of pleasure and ecstasy.

Her hips arched upward, meeting my thrusts with a matching rhythm, her body moving in sync with mine. As she gazed into my soul, her features relaxed into a serene, euphoric expression.

Again, I quickened my strokes, my body moving with a more urgent, primal intensity. Her pupils dilated with pleasure before fluttering shut for a fleeting moment. She slid her arms around my neck, pulling me closer, her body trembling with ecstasy.

A deep growl hinted at my arrival, and my legs shuddered, a sweet sensation jolting across my body like lightning. Her legs wrapped around my waist, as did her arms around my neck, an indication that she didn't want me to pull out.

“You can come now. Give it to me,” she whispered, her voice dripping with desperation, her soft purrs sending shivers down my spine. “I want it. I want every drop.”

I couldn't turn down her request—didn't want to anyway. With her body pressed against mine, her tender breasts against my chest, I let out an intense growl, filling her up with my load.

“Yessss!” she exclaimed softly, tightening her grip around me.

I released myself inside her, pushing deeper, my face contorted in pleasure, my groan deep and primal. I filled her up with my essence, her pussy warm and more slippery than before. I transferred a piece of myself to her tonight, and I had never felt so connected or in sync with a woman before.

The feeling was incredible, and I couldn't seem to tear my gaze off her. Beneath me, her lips curled into a satisfied grin, her sweaty skin against mine.

Ravyn was the woman for me, perfect in every way, and I wasn't going to let her slip through my fingers again. No. Not again.

And so, in that moment of intimacy, I made up my mind to be joined to her forever. I'd make her mine and start a family with her and the kids. It was high time, anyway.

I'd marry Ravyn Jensen, and nothing would stand in my way.

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I cannot believe this is happening. I'm getting married to Lev Tarasov, I thought, standing next to him on the altar, a radiant smile perched on my lips.

The warm sunlight that filtered through the tree caught the flowing white silk lace that draped my slender figure. My hair was styled into a bun and pinned on top of my head, a pair of stilettos complimenting my outfit and raising me inches taller.

My heart was racing with anticipation, the cool breeze brushing against my skin, teasing the loose strands that framed my face.

The same hill that birthed the confession of Lev's love for me was now a monument upon which we were to be joined in holy matrimony. How poetic!

Lev stood across from me, his impeccably tailored black suit simmering in the soft sunlight as he locked eyes with me, his lips curled into a proud smile. There was an intensity in his eyes that seemed to hold the very fabric of our love, a subtle promise to always have my back.

The priest's voice droned on, blending with the gentle rustling of leaves in the cool breeze, but I could barely hear him. My attention was fixed on the incredibly handsome man in front of me.

I gazed into those eyes that didn't seem as dark and hollow as before, a flutter rising in my slowly heaving chest. The chirping birds and the soft murmurs of our guests—close friends and family members—all faded into the background. It was like no one else and nothing else existed in that moment but the two of us.

I was so enamored by him that I almost forgot myself, a broad smile spreading across my face. It was nearly impossible not to appreciate the irony of how my life had turned out in the end.

Who would have thought that I'd get happily ever after, considering all that happened between us? Five years ago, today would have been nothing but a dream, but here we were, living the dream.

This marriage wasn't some mistake that I'd regret later in the future. I'd thought it through, I'd weighed my options, and I'd agreed to marry him because I wanted to. Why wouldn't I want to?

Lev was everything that I ever wanted in a man: loyal, strong, and a great dad. Not to mention powerful and influential. He was still cold and calculating, still ruthless when it came down to business, but he was the one my heart craved for.

He made me feel complete, safe, and loved. Lev wasn't an emotional man; it just wasn't in his personality. But his words—however few—and his actions were proof of how much he loved and respected me.

He was more than capable of protecting and providing for me and the kids. Plus, with his support and influence, my boutique business was starting to gain ground in the city.

One of the major reasons I accepted to be his wife was for the sake of the kids. It would benefit them immeasurably when we were one big happy family. For almost half a decade, they'd lived with an emptiness that I couldn't fill, no matter how hard I tried.

It was impossible to take the place of their father, and now that they had met him, the bond between them had solidified beyond my expectations. Nik and Elara had accepted him and his mansion—and not only that. These days, they were inseparable.

Even if I hadn't fallen so deeply in love with Lev, I would have sacrificed it all for those two wonderful kids. I would have married him anyway, just so they wouldn't be heartbroken.

But that was a worst-case scenario. This, what was happening today, was the best-case scenario, and I was glad it worked out for the better.

“Ravyn.” Lev's soft voice cut through my thoughts, bringing me back to the present.

I blinked, restoring my composure, my eyes crinkling at the corners as I listened to his vows, my heart melting like ice cream.

“I promise to stand by you,” he continued, his voice low and husky, “through thick and thin, through every storm, every trial, and every triumph.” His hands grasped mine, squeezing gently against my fingers. “You...are my home, my comfort, and my better half. As long as I live, no evil will befall you.” His tone dripped with sincerity, his expression soft and confident.

My tear glands charged up, misting my eyes, and for a moment there, I almost forgot my own vows. His words were simple, but the weight they carried was so heavy. Lev's promise had come from a place of solemnity and belief; he trusted in every word that came out of his mouth.

I drew a deep breath, my voice trembling as I began, fingers locking into his, “I promise to love you, to support you, and to never leave your side, even when the darkness closes in.” I paused, a mischievous grin twitching at the corners of my lips. “Not that you're afraid of the dark anyway.”

A low, scattered chuckle rippled through the small crowd, and Lev's face broke into a genuine smile, a testament that his sense of humor wasn't so bad.

Mirroring his grin, I continued, holding his gaze, a shiver running down my spine.



“You are my rock, my shield, my shelter, and I will love you forever.”

There was a brief moment of silence as our words sank into our hearts like a seed planted into a fertile ground. My smile broadened as I saw the sparkle in his eyes, the glint of mirth dancing in their depths.

“With the power bestowed on me, I now pronounce you husband and wife,” the priest's voice broke the silence, his instructions clear and concise. “You may now kiss the bride.”

Lev's arms wrapped around my waist, and he pulled me closer, leaning in to claim my lips in a hot, passion-filled kiss.

A heavy round of applause erupted from the crowd as they rose feet, their eyes fixed on the newlyweds.

I threw my hands around my husband's neck, my head, tilting, dancing to the rhythm of his. As though the heavens were in support of our union, the sun broke through the trees, casting a warm light over the scene.

We broke the kiss and stared into each other's eyes for a moment before my gaze swept across the guests. Mom and Dad looked at me, pride flickering in their eyes, their lips curling into a bright smile.

Beside them were my little ones, Nik and Elara, both dressed to impress. They waved at me, eyes sparkling with excitement as I waved back, mirroring their gesture.

Although the wedding wasn't as extravagant as it should have been considering our social status, it was still the best day of my life. We didn't need much of a crowd; just a few friends and family members were enough to make the day memorable.

Even with all Lev and I had been through, all the time spent apart, all the pain and

heartaches, we knew at this moment that we were in this together, forever.

That soul-lifting, fervent kiss had just sealed our commitment to each other, binding us together for all eternity. It was scary, but nothing had ever felt so right.

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The day wasn't over until Lev said it was. I didn't realize just how romantic he could be until he led me to a private garden later that night.

Under the ethereal glow of the full moon, we wove through towering trees, my hand in his, wondering where he was taking me. I knew he had something up his sleeve, and the smile on his face indicated that I'd love whatever he had cooked up. But what was it?

The question lingered; however, I kept an open mind, my anticipation growing as he led me down an unwinding path lined with smooth white stones. Soft, golden lights spilled from lanterns scattered amongst the lush greenery, casting warm glows that lit up the path.

Soon, we reached a clearing where a beautiful antique four-poster bed stood, adorned with intricate carvings. Flowing transparent white curtains cascaded down the posts like a waterfall, the lightweight fabrics dancing in the cool night's air.

The sweet fragrance of jasmine, roses, and lavender invaded my senses, their delicate petals rustling the breeze.

“Wow!” I exclaimed softly, eyes wide with surprise as I drank in the romantic setting.

On the bedside table was a woven basket overflowing with an assortment of fresh, juicy fruits—plump strawberries, orange slices, crisp grapes, and so on. Beside the basket was a bottle of rich wine and two slender crystal glasses.

“This is beautiful,” I said, my voice laced with admiration as I turned to face him.

He stood in front of me, dashing in his white shirt and pants that matched my radiant, knee-length dress. Lev tucked a hand in his pocket, his eyes never leaving mine. “I thought we should have some time alone, just you and me,” he said, his voice smooth and easy.

“Well, aren't you romantic?” I teased, my tone light and playful as I drew him closer, my arms flying around his neck.

His response was a lazy smirk, his hand holding my waist with the knowledge that I was his for life.

“This place is incredible,” I whispered, my eyes darting around the surroundings. “Thank you.”

Without a word, he whisked me into the air, his strong arms sweeping me off my feet. The action was so sudden it prompted a yelp out of me. I giggled, my heart filled with joy and happiness as he carried me to the antique bed.

On the crisp, white linens that adorned the mattress, he gently lowered me, my head resting on the comfy pillow beneath. His lips brushed against my skin, teasing me before locking to mine.

Lev kissed me deeply with a deliberate slowness that sent tremors down my core. He pulled his head back, his eyes boring into mine, a glint of passion dancing in their depths.

He reached out and picked a plump strawberry from the woven basket and fed it into my mouth. His movement was smooth and fluid, his eyes pinned on me.

Tonight wasn't necessarily about romance or intimacy. It was beyond that. Tonight

was just another opportunity to bond and connect on different levels. No distractions, just us.

In the peace and quiet that this private garden, a serene oasis, provided, we both knew that come what may, we had each other, and nothing else mattered.

My life was perfect, and those who sought my downfall had all faced the punishment they deserved.

Ilya, the bastard who had kidnapped my kids because he had an ax to grind with my husband, was dead now. The knife Lev had hurled at his left eye had apparently claimed his life.

The bitch that conspired with Ilya, Sophia, who happened to be Lev's ex-fiancée, was rotting in jail. She was stupid to have gone after Lev, knowing the type of man that he was.

My husband had dug into her life and found her dirty secret. It turned out that she was involved in the business of human trafficking and was also responsible for the death of her ex-boyfriend.

According to my husband, his right-hand man, Andrey, had gathered more than enough evidence to put her away for good.

But Lev hadn't stopped there, no. He went after her family, as well, ensuring he exposed her father's dirty secret, fraud, money laundering, embezzlement, and other criminal acts.

We, the Tarasovs, were guilty of the same crimes or worse, and exposing Sophia's family seemed like a hypocritical thing to do. But they messed with us first, forgetting that the Tarasovs always struck back. And when we did, we wouldn't shoot to miss.

Her family had faced a multi-million dollar lawsuit that wrecked their accounts, leaving them disgraced and bankrupt. The humiliation of her family was public, and even though a part of me felt sorry for her, I knew she deserved it. She had it coming.

Our children were off-limits. Anyone who dared lay a finger on a single hair on their heads would face the Tarasov wrath; chances were, they wouldn't make it out alive.

I didn't think I'd ever be so proud to bear that last name. But here I was, glad to be a part of the Tarasov family.

My parents, once against this union, were now my biggest supporters, so much so that Dad had walked me down the aisle on my wedding day. They'd come to terms with the fact that I had made my choice and that I was happy with the woman that I'd become.

Yes, I was married to the devil, and I would support his business like he supported mine. We were one now, in spirit, soul, and body. Inseparable.

Behind every great man, they say, there's always a woman. However, behind this great devil...there was me.

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THE END