



Virgin Bratva Prisoner

(Dubrov Bratva #9)

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Category: Urban

Description: I wanted to become a doctor. Instead, he makes me his forced Bratva bride.

He wants to coerce my family into submission by forcing me into marriage.

He's much older than me, but it's not like I have a choice.

My dreams are shattered, and my life and my innocence are his to do with as he pleases...

I graduated college with top marks and had my career all planned out.

But he decides to destroy it all and kidnaps me to his mansion.

I get out of the cuffs and run, but he catches me and wrestles me to the ground.

He carries me back to his house and says he'll lock me in.

He makes me walk to the altar, and I vow to hate him for the rest of my life.

But late at night in his bed, the fight leaves me.

I cannot protect my virginity when all my body wants is to give it to him.

I cannot protect my heart when all my soul wants is for him to crush it.

Am I falling for the ruthless Bratva?

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I storm into the warehouse. I had to come in early again. It's still quiet, as most of my workers will only start arriving in the next hour or so.

There is an issue I have to deal with. Another one. It seems like we have these endless petty issues lately and I know it is all related to that new family. The Kuznetsov brothers. Would rephrase this paragraph.

I walk into my office and drop my work bag next to my desk. Flipping open my laptop, I punch in my password and silently wish my assistant was here because I am dying for a cup of coffee, but don't have the time right now to make it myself.

This new family that moved into the area a month ago has been a none stop pain in my ass since the day they got here. And last night, because of their interference, another one of my shipments got delayed, I have another pissed off client and another mess to fix.

It's one thing if they want to mess up their own business, but they've been making weak, but very constant, attempts to steal clients from us and to steal our business ideas. Their meddling is now becoming a thorn in my side that I can't ignore anymore.

When we arrived in America, we worked our fingers to the bone to make a solid business foundation for ourselves. We didn't steal ideas or try and backpack off of someone else's hard work. Leon led the way—and then the rest of my family arrived after to all put in the effort needed to create this business for our family.

Not a fucking chance I am going to let another family come out of the mud and try to

mess with what we've created.

I run through my emails, looking for the schedule. I know it has Midia, the dockyard manager's contact details on it. I forgot to take them down last night when I saw him in person. There. Got it. Picking up my phone off the desk I punch in his number.

It rings a few times, I know it's early, but he should be at the docks already.

"Oleg, how are you, my brother?" He says cheerfully when he answers.

"Don't fucking call me your brother —what the fuck happened last night? Did one of your men give them access to the shipping yard?" I snarl angrily. I'm no good without coffee in the morning. It dictates my patience levels, and right now they are very low.

Beneath the desk, my leg is bouncing in agitation.

I have to stay calm. Self-control is what makes a man.

I want to climb through the phone and punch this idiot in the face, though. So much for self-control.

"Ah, come on, man, I told you last night I would fix this. I'm already trying to find out what happened—just give me some time," he pleaded.

"We don't have time. Are you going to fix the massive loss we've incurred because the shipment won't arrive on time to the client when we promised?"

He sighs, but at this point he knows better than to talk back.

"Midia, you better fucking find out who has been giving them access. I want to have

a personal conversation with the person. That—or it's your head that will roll for this one because you can't keep your team in control."

"Yes. I will. I promise." He says tightly.

When this situation is sorted out, I want him to review every member of his team. I need to know where our weak links are.

We pay our people very well. Our staff are treated like extended family. To have any of them doing underhanded bullshit like this is not acceptable and needs to be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

I hang up the phone and sigh heavily.

Someone on his work force has been taking handouts from this new family. A little money slid under the counter—a little access to our shipping yard. And a whole lot of trouble for me.

My brothers expect me to sort this shit out because I manage warehouse operations and I am good at what I do. The business side of things.

When it comes to dealing with mafia business—I am not interested in the politics of it. But my family is important to me and I know my role and my duty. I did not choose this Bratva life, and if it were up to me, I'd be living in a log cabin in the woods, not having to deal with any of this shit—but we don't always get to choose our path. I have to do the best I can in the role I have been given. For the sake of my family. My loyalty is with them. I will do anything for them.

I stand up, stretching my legs out. Last night was not a good night and I didn't sleep well. I got home late from the shipping yard and then the constant phone calls didn't stop. Stress and trying to deal with this shit has left me feeling drained and agitated.

The new family that moved into our city needs to learn their place. Who the hell do they think they are—arriving here—encroaching our territory—messing with our clients and trying to steal our business ideas. I don't understand how they thought they would get away with it. The Dubrov name holds a lot of power, they have surely been made aware of it, but they are still stupid enough to test us.

Just outside my office I hear my assistant arriving. Thank fuck.

“Lianna.” I snap, not meaning to sound like a total asshole. It's not her fault I'm dealing with this drama. She hurries into my office, standing in the doorway with a frown of worry on her face. Her mousy brown hair is in a single braid, over her shoulder. She pushes her wide round spectacles up her face, repositioning them on the bridge of her nose. “Yes, Oleg?” She asks nervously, starting to twist her fingers together.

“Please, will you make me one of those extra sweet, extra frothy coffees you are so good at,” I sigh, rubbing my temples as I stand next to my desk.

“Oh, of course I can. I'll be quick as lightening.” She replies with relief in her voice. She's a sweet girl. A little timid, a little meek over all. I have to be careful with the tone I use when I speak to her because she seems to shrink into herself when I speak too loudly. But she's good at what she does. She keeps my schedule, and my work life running smoothly. What she lacks in people skills, she makes up for with her brilliance in keeping my office and filing system organized.

She hurries off to make my coffee.

I look around my office, wondering if I should tell my brothers about last night's issues, or first try and find a solution. They are also getting impatient and a few days ago they were talking about paying this new family a visit. I know that means.

It means someone dies.

Dubrovs don't appreciate being tested or having their authority challenged.

I think I will try and find a solution to this mess before I update them.

The Kuznetsov family isn't going anywhere. So, I have to come up with a plan to put them in their place and show them who really runs this city.

If I don't, my brothers will, and that will involve guns, shooting, war and death.

Hopefully, I can come up with a more amicable way forward.

I should also go and check on the shipments leaving today. I don't want any more shit.

After a coffee, I'll head down to the docks.

I can smell the coffee before she walks into my office.

"You are a lifesaver. One day when I meet my wife, I hope she makes coffee as well as you do," I chuckle to myself and notice how Lianna's cheeks flush bright pink. Shit. I know she has a little crush on me. I shouldn't say things like that.

I smile tightly, feeling the awkward tension in the air between us.

"Thanks," I say, lifting the coffee. She nods, still blushing.

"Just call me if you want another one," she smiles, then quickly turns away to leave.

Sitting in the office chair, I sip my coffee and strum my fingers across the top of the

desk.

One day when I meet my wife— what a stupid thing to say.

But the thought ignites something.

I am the only one of my brothers who is not yet married.

My mind is suddenly racing with ideas and I hate all of them—but the unfortunate reality of this entire fuck up is—it's this or war .

Marriage has long been used in the mafia as a technique for forced alliance.

As far as I know the Kuznetsov family has unmarried sisters.

Fuck .

I clench my jaw. Feeling the idea solidifying in my mind.

I've been trying to figure out a solution for weeks. This one makes the most sense.

I wish it didn't but it's better than a killing spree, that's for certain. A kinder option to force the Kuznetsovs into submission.

Later that afternoon, sitting in my car outside a coffee shop in town I am secretly watching the two Kuznetsov sisters having lunch together.

From a distance, they look quite similar to each other. Close in age, both with curly blonde hair and delicate features. They are laughing and enjoying their meal. One of them appears more confident than the other. Perhaps she is older. She pulls my eye towards her more and more as I watch.

I am not sure which is which, but their names are Raisa and Ruslana.

One of them is going to become my wife.

I'm not going to bother with negotiations and conversations with her brothers. I know their parents are dead. If I wanted to approach the head of their family it would be their oldest brother, Rodion. It would be the diplomatic way to enter into a marriage agreement. But fuck him—he didn't act diplomatically when he arrived in this city and started stepping on toes right away. No. There will be nothing diplomatic about my solution.

This is going to be quick and dirty.

I'll kidnap one of the Kuznetsov sisters and force her family into submission by marrying her. Our names will be tied together and they will have no choice but to align themselves with us. And it will stop my brothers from being able to use violence to resolve this mess.

The sooner I can do this, the better.

I'll get my men to start tracking one of them. Then when the opportunity is right—I'll take her.

I watch for a long time until they step out of the coffee shop and hug each other goodbye on the sidewalk. They are both beautiful girls, but I have to admit, one of them is drawing my attention more than the other.

It shouldn't matter. It doesn't matter.

This is a marriage of convenience—nothing more.

My window is rolled down and I can hear their chatter now.

“Are you celebrating tonight?” The other one asks.

“Of course, I passed. I’m so freaking excited. We’re going to Monstera. That club at the waterfront.” Her sister giggles.

“Ugh. I wish I could come with you, Raisa.” Her sister looks upset.

So, she is Raisa. She can’t be more than twenty-two.

At thirty-three, I am much older than her. But it’s inconsequential. This is a marriage of purpose. Nothing more.

“Don’t sulk, Ruslana. We’ll go for some champagne this weekend. Just you and me. I don’t mind celebrating twice. But please, remember that you promised to keep this all a secret. I really don’t need any of our brothers finding out—please?”

“I pinky promised—it’s a sin to break a pinky promise—I know how it works. Your secret is safe with me, Raisa.”

Raisa laughs and wraps her arms around her sister, hugging her tightly.

Her smile is infectious, lighting up her eyes. Whatever she is celebrating obviously means a lot to her.

I know Monstera. It’s a very upmarket club. I’ll call them and have a VIP table booked for tonight. I guess I am going clubbing.

I guess the perfect opportunity presented itself much sooner than I thought. Raisa has just become my primary target and if all goes according to plan tonight, she will be

coming home with me.

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I wrap my arms around Ruslana's neck, hugging her so tight she squirms to get away. I feel happier than I have felt in a very long time.

I can't believe it's all coming together—my dreams finally feel like a real possibility and not just some distant fantasy.

Coming to America was a massive step for my family. I know my brothers all think that this place is the perfect city to build our family business. Boston is known for its high energy and fast-paced living. It's an ideal place for our family business to thrive.

But I don't care about any of that Bratva shit. I want out. I want to get away from it. And it just so happens that coming to America allows me the opportunity to do that.

Back home I completed my studies and graduated college just before we left. My brothers think that I'll be ready to start working in the family business now, but the truth is that the qualification I got was only the first step towards me reaching my dream of becoming a doctor.

Now, secretly, I have just passed the entrance exam and I have been accepted to a very prestigious university here in Boston.

I wish I could tell my brothers, but I know they will be disappointed. Besides—they have their hands full with setting up the new business here. Ruslana, my younger sister, is my best friend and biggest supporter.

She won't break her promise. I know my secret is safe with her.

Hopefully one day, when I'm doing well and I have my own practice, I'll save her from this mafia life as well.

I say goodbye to Ruslana and walk towards my car.

I was very specific about getting my own apartment when we arrived in America. I needed a space to study without worrying about them asking questions all the time. My brothers were worried about me staying on my own in a new city, but I love it.

We've only been here for a month and already I feel like I belong here.

The energy of this place makes me feel like the possibilities are endless.

Driving back to my apartment, I'm happily thinking about tonight. At the entrance exam I met a really cool girl, Jenna. We hit it off right away—and she also got accepted so we'll be studying together. She invited me to come out dancing tonight to celebrate. It's awesome to know I already have a friend and a study buddy. It's not going to be easy. Late nights, hours of discipline—and all while keeping it a secret from my brothers. But it will be worth it.

As I push open my apartment door, I walk inside and realize that I left my music playing the entire time I was out this morning. My grouchy neighbor in the apartment below me is going to be complaining about that for sure.

I pick up the remote and flick it off.

I pick up the welcome packet that the university delivered this morning.

I'm going to go through all of requirements for text books and whatever else I need. I'm so excited. I'm so proud of myself too. I graduated college top of my class. I'm not one of those people that can just read something once and remember it either, I

had to work hard for those results and I will keep working hard towards my dream.

All afternoon I sit with my feet curled up beneath me, making lists, checking where I can order the text books from—planning ahead.

By the time I stand up to stretch, I am shocked to see that the sun has already gone down and my apartment is quite dark. I was so focused on my laptop that I didn't realize.

Shit.

I'm going to be late for the party tonight if I don't move my ass.

I rush to the bathroom and flick the shower on. I don't have enough time to wash my hair, but luckily it still looks good. I sweep it up into a high bun and climb under the hot spray of water, soaping myself down in a hurry.

Then, wrapped in a towel, dripping water everywhere, I rush through to my bedroom and grab my little black dress from the hanger. It's the easiest choice without overthinking what to wear. I know it looks good on me and I don't have time to fuss over outfits right now.

I toss my dress onto the bed and dry off, leaving the towel in a crumpled pile on the floor of my bedroom.

I slip the dress on, pair it with some super high black stilettos, and decide that somehow—by sheer luck—the messy bun I did for the shower actually looks really cute, so I leave my hair exactly as it is, with a few long loose curls hanging around my face.

I brush on some makeup, grab my phone and my credit card and rush out of the door

to my car.

I should call an Uber, but I'm too late to wait for it and if I do end up drinking too much, I'll just get one to drive me home.

I'm not much of a drinker though. I enjoy a glass or two of champagne, and on the rare occasion, I'll have a pink gin, but mostly I hate the hangover and I don't like to be out of control so, I avoid it.

When I get to the club, I remember the other reason it would have been better to Uber. Parking is a nightmare. The club is busy, with a long line of people waiting outside and it takes me ages to find a parking space.

Now, I have to walk a mile in these shoes.

By the time I reach the club entrance from where I parked, my feet are aching. I should have just worn my Nike's. The uneven ground is not made for high heels, but at least inside the club, it'll be fine.

Sneakers could have looked pretty cute with this dress. I giggle to myself, looking at all the girls dressed to the nines standing in the line outside. I bet you every single one of them wishes they could have worn sneakers. Perhaps we should all start a revolution.

"Raisa." I turn to see who is calling my name. I mean it can only be one person, seeing as I don't know anyone in the city yet. Her bright red hair makes her easy to spot.

"Jenna," I say happily, as she grabs my arm and drags me into the line to stand next to her. "You made it just in time. If you were five minutes later, we would already be inside and you'd have to stand in line all by yourself. This is Blake and this is

Mathew. They are also going to be studying with us.”

Blake is beautiful. Her jaw length, blonde hair is dead straight and frames her sharp pixie-like features perfectly. Matthew’s crew cut and thick glasses tell me he’s a no-nonsense type of person. Someone I would probably enjoy studying with. They are both smiling—welcoming and friendly. I like them instantly.

“Hi. Hello. Nice to meet you.” I smile broadly at everyone. I guess these people are going to be my group. The thought makes me smile even wider. Could use a basic description of Blake and Mathew to help form a better picture.

It’s like the start of some big adventure. A big adventure leading to an even bigger adventure afterwards. The bouncer looks us over and lifts the rope to usher us into the club.

As soon as we walk inside, the music is like a wall that hits me. The bass vibrating through my chest, red and purple lights flashing above me.

“Drinks!” Jenna shouts, dragging me towards the bar, following the rest of the group.

She hands me a tequila. Shit. I don’t handle tequila very well.

“Don’t give me that look.” Jenna laughs. “We are celebrating and it’s probably the last party you are going to have for the next like two or three years because your entire life is about to be overtaken by textbooks.”

I laugh, it’s true. “Fine,” I lift the shot, shout cheers with everyone else and down it. Instantly pulling a really sour expression as the harsh burn hits my throat.

I suck in a sharp breath and Jenna laughs at me. “Don’t worry, I feel the same. Let’s go dance it off!”

“Wait for us!” Blake shouts. She grabs Matthew’s hand, and they follow behind.

“Are they dating?” I lean close to Jenna to ask.

“Ugh. It’s so complicated. They’ve been on and off for the entire year and I am honestly over all their drama. I’m so happy I met you because I was really starting to feel like their third wheel.”

I laugh, the joys of college romance.

“Have you got a boyfriend?” She shouts over the music.

“No, I’m too focused on studying. I don’t want to distract myself with that kind of stuff.”

“Me too. So, we can be single together and take over the world.” She laughs loudly.

The dance floor is packed. Bodies are pushed together like sardines in a can.

It’s still incredible, though. The energy is brilliant, everyone seems to be in the same vibe, and the night is going perfectly.

We stop every now and then to grab another shot of tequila. I figured since I started on tequila—I may as well stick with it.

My head is starting to feel light and warm as I left my arms into the air, letting my fingers play through the smoke the DJ has released from the smoke machine. All of the beautiful lights are hitting it and creating amazing patterns.

I feel free.

I feel like coming to America is the best thing that has ever happened to me and I can't wait to find out how this next year is going to open doors for me.

Jenna and I are having the best night ever. She is definitely going to be my closet friend. I can already tell.

Matthew and Blake signal that it's time for another round, so we all start pushing our way through the dancers to get back to the bar.

I lean against it, grinning and feeling alive.

Then I have this strange tingling feeling over the back of my neck—as though someone is watching me. It's oddly familiar and I realize it's the same feeling I had earlier when I was having lunch with Ruslana.

I turn around to look behind me, searching—and my heart comes to a complete stop.

My eyes narrow as I stare back at the tall stranger.

His dark eyes are locked onto me and I can feel the heat of his gaze from across the bar.

The corner of his mouth curls upward into a grin.

Holy fuck, he is hot.

His broad shoulders are pushing tight against his shirt and with the top few buttons undone I can see the hint of a small tattoo on his left collarbone.

His hair is thick and hanging in front of his eyes, a little wild, perhaps from dancing. The five o'clock shadow across his square jaw makes him even sexier.

And he's tall. Tall enough that I would have to crane my neck back to look at him if he were standing next to me.

I try to fight the girlish smile that spreads across my lips, but the tequila is winning—and now I am flirting with this tall dark stranger.

“Oh wow. He's sexy.” Jenna leans close to my ear to comment.

Her words interrupt the trance he seems to have put me in and I manage to pull my eyes off him.

“Sure. He's hot. Where's that tequila?”

It doesn't matter if he's hot.

I don't have time for that.

But as they slide the tequila in front of me, I find myself looking up and across the bar to see if he's still there.

He isn't.

My heart sinks in disappointment—but really—it's better.

He's way too good-looking for his own good. I know men like that. They are trouble.

I mean—I've never actually dated a guy before. I've kissed someone before, but nothing more.

I saw the issues my friends went through and I decided that I didn't want anything to do with any of that and I just stuck my head down and focused on my studies.

I throw back the tequila, promising myself that it is my last one for the night because I'm way too giggly and even though we are going to be here for a few more hours still—I want to dance off the tipsiness.

Suddenly, Jenna giggles next to me and steps away. “She’s all yours,” she says and I frown trying to figure out what she means.

I turn to look at her and instead of seeing her, I see him.

He's taller and even sexier than he looked from across the bar.

My pulse quickens and I swallow hard as I stare up at him.

“Hello. I wanted to ask if you and your friends would like to join me in VIP?” His voice is deep, like thunder rolling through a dark sky.

“Uh—I glance around, looking for support from one of my friends, hoping they’ll say no.

“We’d love to,” Jenna says loudly.

Shit.

The smile that spreads across his face causes electricity to shoot down my spine. He is trouble, but maybe, just for tonight, I want a little trouble.

We follow him up to the VIP area where Blake and Matthew immediately get comfortable on the wide sofa. Jenna starts dancing at the edge of the balcony overlooking the packed dance floor below. “Wow. It’s so much better up here, Raisa,” she laughs.

The stranger takes my hand and pulls me close to him.

“Raisa?” He asks. My name on his lips making me melt. Never mind the fact that I am suddenly in his arms, leaning against his really muscular chest.

“Yes.” I say breathlessly.

“I’m Oleg.” He holds me close as he starts dancing with me and I am really surprised by how good his moves are.

I can’t think about anything else except for the way he is moving against me.

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I hold back the growl of satisfaction that almost escapes me as her body presses against mine. The curve of her back just beneath my hand, my arm wrapped around her narrow waist. She fits against me like she belongs here in my arms.

I want to deny it, but I'm actually struggling with just how strong the attraction I feel towards her is. There is something electric between us that has charged the air with static. It feels dangerous and tempting at the same time.

She is an enigma pulling me in and I am trying to pretend that it is nothing but intrigue. A shallow curiosity, born of necessity.

It was easier to pretend this afternoon, when she was some distance away from me. When I was watching quietly from the sidelines, plotting and planning.

Now I am closer to her and feeling her presence more intimately. Watching her had me on the edge of my seat—touching her is a completely different game. I want to know everything about her. I have a possessive urgency to stare right into her soul and read her most intimate secrets.

With her in my arms as we dance to the heavy bass fueled music, my body is betraying me.

She is the flame and I am the moth.

She looks up at me and giggles. Her bright blue eyes are electric, enticing and teasing with one glance.

When the beat slows down, she steps away from me, pushing her hand against my chest, making me wonder what her touch would feel like against my naked skin. An image flashes through my mind of her sitting on my lap as I grab her hips and thrust up into her.

I clear my throat and clench my jaw, trying to pull myself together.

“I’m going to get some water,” she says, stepping towards the sofa and reaching for one of the bottles of sparkling water on the table.

Her two friends are making out rather intensely in the corner.

I chuckle.

Young love.

Any love.

They are all so naive. They don’t know what the real world is like. Sometimes I wish for that kind of ignorance—where I could just fall in love—and pretend like nothing else mattered in the world.

Raisa sits down, pulling the edges of her very short black dress down to cover her thighs. It barely helps and my eyes roam freely over her legs.

I take a seat next to her and she immediately shifts over to give me more room which I don’t like.

I resist the urge to pull her back up against me. I don’t want space between us. I want to feel the heat from her body.

“What do you do, Oleg? When you aren’t dancing your nights away?” she asks with a soft smile on her face. Her plump peach-colored lips perfectly outlined against her pale porcelain skin.

We start chatting about life and she mentions she came here to study medicine. She wants to be a doctor.

“That’s why we’re celebrating tonight. We all passed the entrance exam. So, we’ll be studying together.”

“That’s really impressive, Raisa.”

“Thanks.” A wide, genuine smile spreads across her lips.

This definitely means a lot to her. This must be what she was talking to her sister about earlier today.

She wants to start her own practice. But that doesn’t make sense—she came here with her family—to run a business. I know what type of business. Her being a doctor doesn’t really fit in with those plans.

“Your family must be proud of you,” I say, curious and wanting more information about how her brothers feel about her choice.

“Mm.” She shrugs. “Maybe, if I wasn’t hiding it from them, they might be proud, “ she giggles, touched by the tequila. A little more relaxed than normal, but she still appears completely in control of herself.

“Why would you want to hide something like that from them?”

“My family is— different . I guess that’s the best way to describe it. They want me to

be involved with the family business and it's just that I want something else for my life. Something more, "her words drift off and she licks her lips, looking around nervously as though she's shared too much.

I change the subject, to try and put her at ease again.

We talk for over an hour which shocks me because it flies by easily and our conversation flows freely. It's been such a long time since I have spoken to anyone about anything that isn't related to work.

She's sharp and keeps up with me while I discuss topics that I expect her to know nothing about.

My brothers will talk for hours about business plans and shipping schedules or how to get more power or territory for the family—I find it deathly boring. I feel like there must be something more meaningful.

But at the end of the day—nothing is more meaningful than doing your duty to your family.

I watch as Raisa talks about her new apartment and how she is loving this city. Her face is bright with excitement. She speaks enthusiastically and seems to glow with happiness.

Raisa is smart, sassy and confident. I find it incredibly attractive.

At the same time—she isn't falling all over me like I expect her to.

I've seduced many women before. It's easy. Too easy, actually.

I just suggest to them that they might be interested and they gush over me,

embarrassing themselves with their own desperation.

I've never had a woman act as cool and calm as Raisa is acting.

But it doesn't matter.

I don't even know why I am thinking about this.

Raisa is just a means to an end. Everything else is irrelevant. I need her to solve this issue I am having with her family. Nothing more. Nothing less.

I can't let myself get distracted like this.

She stands up, glancing at her wristwatch to check the time.

"I think we had better get going," she says, looking around to try and locate her friends.

Jenna has wandered off and is talking to some other people and the other two are still entangled in each other on the other sofa.

I stand up too. Obviously, I am not ready to let her leave.

While her cool disinterest fuels my personal attraction to her—I am not here for those reasons. I need her to show interests so that I can lure her to follow me, even if it is only for the purpose of my goals.

It annoys me that she has even suggested leaving. Why would she not want to spend more time with me?

I need her to be captivated by me—if I can seduce her, I can get her to come home

with me without risking a scene. But she seems to be ready to brush me off.

“Raisa, stay for another drink. I am really enjoying getting to know you. Your friends clearly aren’t ready to go yet,” I say, trying to entice a little more time out of her.

She looks up at me and bites her lower lip. Her eyes say she is interested. Her body language says she is—nervous perhaps.

A little shy maybe. She smiles and looks away again.

Her demure gestures are driving me crazy.

Without thinking about it, I wrap my hand around her jaw, lifting her face up towards mine and with my arm around her waist, I pull her right up against me.

I don’t give her a moment to react before I press my lips onto hers. The soft warmth of her mouth drags me away from reality for a moment.

I am completely lost in the kiss. Heat is running through my body. Intense electrical sparks like shards of lightning bolts up my spine.

I feel her hands running up my sides, her fingers brushing over my ribs and digging into me as the kiss becomes more passionate. My arm tightens around her and I can feel my cock beginning to respond. I should stop.

But I can’t.

A soft moan escapes her lips and it tips me over the edge.

My cock is rock hard.

I have never been this turned on by a kiss before. I wasn't expecting my body to react like this.

It's the most intense kiss I've ever felt and I don't want it to stop. I want to lift her off her feet and slam her against a wall right now. In front of everyone. I don't care.

I want to pull her dress up and thrust into her.

Raisa pulls away from me as she takes a deep breath. She looks as shocked as I am. Gently she reaches her hands up to her mouth and brushes her fingertips over her lips which are red and swollen from the kiss.

"I... " she murmurs. "I should go to the ladies to um... to freshen up."

She turns away from me and I grab her arm. I really don't want to watch her walk away. My entire body is alive with need for her.

It's too difficult to suddenly not have her next to me.

"Don't be long." I grin. Then let my hand drop away from her. I need to get control of myself. This is crazy. Whatever is happening to me is crazy.

Raisa pulls her mouth to the side at the same time she smiles and the quirky little grin makes me chuckle.

"I won't be long," she replies, as she disappears towards the bathrooms.

I stand against the balustrade around the balcony, looking out onto the dance floor below and hiding the evidence of what she did to me. Waiting for my body to calm down.

It feels as though it's taking forever, probably because I can't stop thinking about her.

What the hell just happened? No one has ever had that effect on me before—not like that—and definitely not just from one kiss.

For a second, I consider that someone might have spiked the drinks. But I haven't had anything that I didn't pour myself. No. That it's what happened.

It was just her. Something about her.

Something about her is so magnetic that even now, I don't like the distance between us.

But again, I shake my head. No. I'm getting distracted. I'm letting this little fox get to me. I have to be vigilant around her or she is going to get the upper hand and ruin my plans.

My family is the most important thing in this situation. We have a serious problem and I am going to fix it—Raisa is just the solution I need and nothing more to me.

I flex my shoulder back. Where is she?

She's been gone for ages.

Way too long. I was so lost in thought that I didn't even realize how long she'd been gone for.

I turn around and find her friends gone too.

What the fuck?

Fuck.

Dammit, I was distracted.

Angry with myself, I push away from the balustrade and march towards the bathrooms. I don't even care when I push the door to the women's bathrooms open and step inside.

Two girls scream and glare at me with horrified expressions on their faces.

"I'll call security if you don't get out of here," one of them snaps while the other one's gaze traces up and down my body. I chuckle, a dangerous sort of laugh that is more a warning than anything else.

"Go ahead, see what happens, " I growl back at her.

She takes a step away from me with wide eyes.

I look around, Raisa isn't here.

Stall by stall, I push the doors open, but they are all empty.

She's gone.

She managed to slip away from me while I was distracted and thinking about that fucking kiss.

Fuck .

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

I walk fast, needing to create distance between myself and the gorgeous stranger who I only just met and then kissed. Well, technically, he kissed me, and holy wow—that was incredible. So incredible that for the first time in my life, ever, I was having visions of letting him do whatever the hell he wanted to my body.

I was literally picturing losing my virginity to this guy— who I only just met. What in the world is wrong with me?

I shake my head as I hurry away from him. A quick glance over my shoulder and I see him leaning against the balcony railings. Dammit. He's so hot.

I almost completely lost control there. I didn't even remember that I was standing in a very public place. My body and my mind were both totally enthralled by him.

How does he have that effect on me?

I lean against the swing door of the ladies' bathrooms and I step into the room as the door swings shut behind me. There are three girls standing by the mirror touching up their makeup and giggling about something, tipsy and having fun.

Is that what's wrong with me? Maybe I just had too much to drink and that's why I sort of lost control for a moment. The odd thing is that the kiss feels like it completely sobered me up. I haven't even had a drink in a while and I don't feel drunk at all.

The kiss was more intoxicating than the drinks I had earlier.

I lean against the vanity and stare at my reflection in the tall mirror.

My cheeks are flushed.

“Girl, I saw that!—You kissing Mr. Tall Dark and Handsome. Jeepers. That looked intense.” Jenna walks towards me with a massive smile on her face.

“Gosh. I don’t know what to say.” I feel my cheeks flush even darker pink.

“What do you mean? I told you to have fun tonight. Don’t be embarrassed about it,” Jenna laughs. The bathroom door swings open and Blake walks in.

“Why wasn’t I invited to this secret meeting?” she says, walking towards us.

“We were just discussing Raisa’s new love affair,” Jenna laughs.

“Oh—with the most notorious single man in the city?” Blake smirks and glances at me before leaning towards the mirror to check her make up.

“What do you mean?” I ask curiously.

“You don’t know who that is?” Blake asks, sounding a little smug.

“No, I don’t.”

“Don’t forget she only just moved to Boston, dumbass.” Jenna rolls her eyes at Blake.

“It’s one of the Dubrov brothers. The last single one and all the girls want him,” Blake says with a wide smirk.

“Dubrov,” I mutter as shock bolts through my body. It can’t be.

“Yup. Dubrov. They basically run this city. Really rich businessmen. He and his

brothers own a number of businesses around the area and my word—when I say rich—like you couldn't even imagine. Anyways. You were just snogging the most sought-after bachelor in the city.”

Blake is talking, and I'm sort of listening. She doesn't have all of the information right. She seems to think that him and his brothers are legitimate businessmen. I mean—they are—but not really.

I know that name.

Dubrov.

In fact, it's the only name I knew since moving here. The one my brothers keep talking about over and over again.

Somehow, out of the thousands of people I could have met tonight, a Dubrov is the last one I wanted to meet.

My heart is sitting in the pit of my stomach.

I just kissed him.

Even worse—it felt incredible.

But he is basically an enemy to my family.

I bite my lower lip.

“Don't look so worried, girl. He's clearly into you too,” Blake says, pulling a face, wondering why I wouldn't want to be kissing the most eligible bachelor in the city. She doesn't know what they really do—that they are all part of the mafia. The

massive underworld that really runs this city.

The world that I want nothing to do with.

Of course, that would be my luck. Just when I meet a guy that seems capable of sweeping me off my feet—he is totally, one hundred percent, without any doubt whatsoever—off limits.

Dammit.

“Are you guys ready to go?” I ask, trying to sound casual.

I don’t really want to have to explain myself to my new friends. Partly because I will sound crazy and partly because I don’t want to reveal the truth about my own family too. I’d rather not have any of them knowing that my family is also mafia. I really want to escape that life completely.

That’s my dream for coming here to America and I can’t mess it up on my first proper night out.

Dubrov.

Dammit.

“We can go to a different club?” Jenna says. “Are you going to invite your new man to join us? Mr. Dubrov,” she giggles.

“Actually, I’m exhausted. I’m not used to all of this drinking and dancing,” I laugh, trying to ease the tension in my body. But the laughter comes out sounding forced. So, I sigh instead, brushing a strand of hair behind my ear. “I’m going to head home.” I need to get out of here and away from Oleg. It kind of stings to find out who he

really is. I feel a sort of betrayal that doesn't make sense because it's not like he knows who I am, either. It was just a very weird, very unfortunate coincidence.

"Ok, well we can walk you out and then decide where we want to go next. Did you park close?"

"I did. Thanks. Sorry to bail on you guys so early."

"No, don't be silly, it was a really fun night. And it's going to be an amazing year ahead." Jenna grins, pulling me into a hug. "Let's get going."

We all walk out of the club, pushing through the crowds on the lower floor, I glance up towards the VIP balcony area—my heart thundering in my chest—but I don't see him.

A wave of relief washes over me. I didn't want him to see me leaving. I feel like a total fool—running away from him without even saying goodbye—but I really don't want to see him again. I just need to get out of this club and forget any of this happened. I also need to hope like hell that not even one of my brothers finds out what happened tonight. Holy shit. If they somehow hear from one of their city spies, that I was making out with a Dubrov—I think they'll lock me in a room and throw away the key and never ever let me out again.

I chew at the inside of my cheek as we make our way down the passage that leads out of the club and into the fresh night air.

It hits my skin with a cold blast that helps to push my thoughts out of my head for a moment. I take in a long, slow breath, enjoying the crisp coolness of it. The club was so smokey from the dance floor I didn't actually realize how much I just needed a breath of fresh air.

“Oh, it’s cold,” Jenna complains, rubbing her hands over her arms.

“I rather like it,” I reply.

“Oh, you’re one of those weirdos who likes the winter more than the summer.”

I laugh. “No, I like them both. But the fresh cool air does wake you up nicely and clear your head.”

“Ok, well, I don’t want my head cleared. I want to dance more.” She laughs, “Where did you park?”

“It’s around that corner. You guys don’t have to walk me. I’ll be fine.”

“Don’t be silly. Our Uber is still going to be a while so we will definitely walk you.”

We all chat as we make our way towards my car. I really like all of them. They are great people and it makes me excited again for the year ahead. We’re going to have so many stories after we graduate.

I pull my car door open. “This is me guys. Thanks so much.”

“I’ll call you tomorrow. We can go for a coffee and chat about our schedules,” Jenna says, then pulls me close to hug me goodbye.

I say goodbye to Blake and Matthew as well, then climb into my car and pull the door closed behind me.

I watch as they all walk away, chatting and laughing together.

I’m really looking forward to a hot shower, and then climbing into bed.

I had so much fun tonight, but I'm more of a home girl than a party girl.

I'm happy to be less interested in partying so that I can focus fully on my doctorate.

I pull out into the road, yawning loudly.

Tomorrow, I will need to look at my budget and how I can pay for the next part of my studies without my brothers finding out. I've been using the money my parents left me when they died. Most of my inheritance is in the family trust though—and tied to the family business.

I'll have to come up with a good reason for Rodion to not question the money I request.

The streetlights flash past my window as I get closer to home. My apartment is in the city, nice and close to the university.

I pull off the main road and onto a side road. I'm almost home.

Behind me someone flicks their brights on, blinding me. It's so annoying when people are that inconsiderate.

I push my breaks, slowing down to let them pass, thinking that it must be what they want. But instead of overtaking me—the driver comes up alongside me and starts swerving towards me. The dark tinted windows make it impossible to see who it is.

I let out a sharp scream of surprise when their car connects with mine and I am pushed right off the road, my car sitting on a lamp post—sending me jolting forward against the steering wheel. The airbag explodes in my face as I fly forward.

It stings and I scream again, but this time it's cut short because the force of the airbag

slams all of the oxygen from my lungs.

I try to blink away the horrible dizzy feeling as nausea pushes into my stomach. Panic surges through me and I choke back a cry.

But then I force myself to take a sharp breath. My brothers taught me so many things. One of those things is how to fight back.

Unclipping my seat belt, I do my best to ignore the fear. Get out of the car. Run. That's what I need to do right now.

I kick at the door, which isn't moving. I think when they hit me, it must have bent it closed permanently.

Beginning to feel desperate, I shuffle my body over the gear stick, trying to get to the passenger door. But before I can reach it—someone yanks it open and reaches inside my car to grab my arm.

I scream so loud, my throat begins to hurt.

A hand locks over my mouth as I am dragged from the car and held up against a solid chest.

That familiar smell. The same cologne Oleg was wearing in the club tonight. What are the chances?

Zero.

I kick and fight as he shoves me in the boot of his car, pushing my face down against the rough carpet. I feel him lock handcuffs over my wrists then he rolls me onto my back. His dark eyes locking with mine for a second before he slams the boot closed.

My heart is hammering wildly as I scream. “Oleg what are you doing? Let me out of here.” But I know it’s useless.

It was no accident that we met in the club tonight. He knew I was going to be there—and he was watching me for a reason. He was planning this the entire time.

When I kissed him—he already knew he was going to kidnap me.

The nausea gets worse as I start to understand the truth of the situation I am in.

“Breathe, Raisa, breathe.” I whisper to myself, barely hearing my own words over the sound of the engine growling as he races to wherever he is taking me.

“Your brothers showed you how to get out of handcuffs,” I mutter as I begin to work at the latch using the charm on my silver bracelet.

I laughed at them when they gave me this thing. I never thought in a million years that I would need to use it.

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I pull up in the driveway of my private home. I am not taking Raisa to our family home as I haven't actually discussed this plan with anyone else. I want to arrange for us to be married first and I don't need anyone interfering in the meantime.

When I switch the engine off, Raisa is very quiet. She's been kicking against the car boot for most of the journey. I had to turn the music up really loud to drown out her noises—and the fact that there isn't even a single sound coming from the back of the car—I don't like it one bit.

I climb out and slam the door shut. My stomach is knotted and I'm annoyed that I had to do this. I wish I didn't have to take her by force. I really hate the fact that I like her. It was probably a bad idea to chat with her for such a long time at the club. It's messed with my head a bit.

I feel guilty.

But I know it doesn't matter how I feel.

I have a duty to my family and that is all that matters.

My hand is resting on the button at the back of the car which will release the boot and open it.

I take a deep breath, ready for her start shouting at me again.

Then I click the button and pull the boot open quickly.

But as soon as it unlocks, she is ready and one step ahead of me. She kicks hard against it, causing it to jump up and smack me in the jaw.

I stagger backwards, caught off guard.

She leaps out of the car and starts running.

I bolt after her realizing she doesn't even have the handcuffs on anymore.

Her brothers taught her well. They must have prepared her for things like this—knowing the life they live and the world they are operating in.

It doesn't take me long to catch up with her.

I launch myself towards her, grabbing her around the waist as I twist my body and roll onto the grass in front of my property. She rolls with me, still kicking, clawing at my face.

I grab both of her wrists in one hand and pin them above her head as I lay on top of her. She kicks again so I use my legs to spread hers open and then press all of my weight against her body.

She cries out, so I lock my other hand over her mouth.

“Don't make this harder than it is, Raisa,” I growl against her ear. Having her pinned beneath me like this with her legs spread wide and her dress riding high over her hips—it's making my cock fucking hard again and that's the last thing I need right now but her body feels too good underneath me.

She is so small in my hands that she doesn't stand a chance against me. I could do whatever I wanted to her right now.

Fuck.

Get a grip.

Stop this.

Get her inside and lock the fucking doors. You are not a monster. You are a man and you will treat her with respect even if you have been forced to kidnap her against her will.

I push myself off her, but drag her up with me at the same time so that she can't make another run for it. "Raisa," I warn her with one utterance of her name. "Walk with me or I will carry you in."

"I'm not going anywhere with you," she snaps.

I shake my head. "Fine. Don't say I didn't give you an option."

She shouts furiously as I lift her off the ground, throw her over my shoulder and carry her into the house.

Inside, I set her down and lock the front door. She immediately bolts away from me, trying to find a way out.

I sigh and run my fingers through my hair.

This is going to be a lot more work than I imagined it would be.

She's far feistier than I was prepared for.

I pick up my phone and dial Marcus, ignoring the sounds coming from upstairs. I

know there is nowhere for her to go. She's locked in. I made sure everything was secure before I left this evening.

"Marcus," I say, as he answers the phone.

"Oleg, how are you tonight? Did everything go according to plan? We did run a full sweep of the property after you left—just to double check everything."

"Yeah, no, that's great, but listen. I actually want to get a second team on the perimeter of the property. They can patrol inside the garden area. I want to be extra careful."

"No problem. I'll have a team put together in the next hour. I'll bring them over myself and give them the rundown."

"Perfect. No one is to come inside the house, though."

"Noted. Also, seeing as you are on track, do you want me to confirm for the priest?"

"Yes, definitely."

Marcus has been my righthand man for years. He knows the ins and outs of my life better than anyone. He has saved my life more times than I can count.

After my call with him I walk upstairs to find Raisa.

I hear a crashing sound coming from the guest bedroom, so I head in that direction.

Walking in, I lean against the door frame with my arms folded across my chest. I just watch her for a moment. She is picking things up off the dresser and throwing them against the sliding doors that lead out into the balcony.

“Why don’t you try the chair? It’s heavier.” I say, and she jumps around to face me with wide, terrified eyes.

“Just let me go,” she begs.

“I can’t do that,” I say with a sigh. “And listen—I am about to give you another choice. Pay attention because I will only say this once.”

She glares at me, that fiery stare burning into me.

“What?” she snarls. Fuck. She’s sexy when she’s angry.

My jaw clenches tightly. I’m doing the right thing. For my family. That’s all I need to keep reminding myself of.

“Ok, you have a choice. You can behave, stop breaking things, and have free access to the entire house—or—you can carry on behaving exactly as you are now and I will simply lock you in one room and you can create as much havoc as you want in that space. So, what will it be? The entire house or one room?”

“What about if you just—“

“Raisa. Make your choice,” I demand. I am not willing to discuss anything else at this point.

“Please don’t lock me in a room,” She says softly.

“Fine. There’s food in the kitchen. Ask if you need anything. I’ll be around. I have double security so honestly, don’t even bother trying to escape. You won’t make it far and all you’ll end up doing is pissing me off. You don’t want to piss me off.”

I stare at her, waiting for a response, but all she does is nod tightly.

I know she is going to try something else. There is no way she would give up that easily. But I'm not worried. She really has nowhere to go.

I turn away from her, giving her the space she needs to calm down and process the situation she is in. I get it. She's angry. She is obviously upset. But it is what it is. She will just have to accept it.

I head downstairs with far too many thoughts running through my mind.

Tomorrow afternoon, the priest will be here and we will be married. After that, everything changes. I'll inform my brothers of my solution to our problems and then we can make contact with her brothers and inform them that they have no choice but to ally and stop their shitstorm before they end up doing any real damage.

It's their own fault that it came to this. If they had approached us when they first arrived, we could have had a discussion—but they chose a different path—forcing me to choose this.

Downstairs, in the kitchen, the chef has left dinner in the oven for me. I pull the dish out. Lamb shanks on a bed of roasted butternut with creamed spinach. I hope Raisa isn't vegetarian or some shit like that because then she is going to hate living here.

I dish up two plates. One for myself and one for Raisa. It's late, I don't know if she had dinner before she went to the club—but at least if she does come looking for food in the night there will be some ready here for her.

I grab a pen from the kitchen draw and scribble a note on a serviette, leaving it on the glass food dome I place over her plate.

Raisa, this is for you. Otherwise—help yourself to anything in the kitchen.

Again, I feel a heavy pang of guilt. It doesn't feel right—holding her here against her will. I really like her. She doesn't deserve this and what's worse is that I feel a kinship towards her because she is trying so desperately to get out of the mafia world that she is studying behind her brothers' backs. She is fighting for her own life—not one that her family chose for her.

It really sucks that she got stuck with the raw end of this deal.

I eat my food downstairs in the dining room. Outside I see the new guards being shown the property by Marcus. Good. When I go to bed in a bit, I can rest easily knowing that there is no way for her to get out.

She can try.

I just hope she stops breaking things because then I will have to lock her up in the guest bedroom. I don't want to be forced to do that.

I already feel bad enough as it is.

When my food is finished, I carry my empty plate back through to the kitchen and leave it for the housekeeper to deal with tomorrow.

I head upstairs and check in on Raisa who has actually fallen asleep in the guest room. Thank fuck for that.

She is lying on top of the blankets, curled in a ball, with her short black dress drifting up over her ass.

I don't want to look, but it's impossible.

She is gorgeous. Her body is gorgeous and there is nothing about her that I don't find attractive.

Somehow—she is exactly my type.

I pull a spare blanket out from the closet and gently wrap it over her, trying not to wake her up. I can't have her sleeping uncomfortably. I don't know why she didn't just climb underneath the blankets on the bed. I guess she was reluctant to give in and accept that she is spending the night here—she doesn't realize yet that she will be here for much longer than one night.

She stirs slightly, rolling over on the pillow and I see evidence of tears on the silk pillow case.

My jaw clenches.

I brush my fingers over her soft, warm cheek.

"I'm sorry, little flower," I whisper.

Then I turn away, walking to my own bedroom.

I need sleep as well. It's been a long night and tomorrow is an important day. The day of my marriage.

There will be no fancy show of it, though. We are just going to say our vows and sign the papers. I don't care about the dresses and flowers and all of that shit.

This is a marriage of business. A necessity.

After a hot shower, I climb beneath the covers of my own bed and sigh as I stretch

my arm behind my head, staring up at the ceiling. It's dark and I can hardly see anything, but I'm agitated. I can't sleep because all I can do is think about the gorgeous girl sleeping in the room across the hall from me.

Oh, and that kiss.

Fuck me. That kiss was insane.

Just thinking about it, my cock is starting to get hard.

I can't. I have to rest. I need to go to sleep.

I roll over onto my stomach, burying my face against the pillow and letting out a frustrated sigh.

Closing my eyes, I try to force myself to sleep, but it takes ages and when I do finally drift into the darkness—I dream of her.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

“Ugh.” I feel myself waking up, and the headache pressing against my temple as I roll over in bed. Opening my eyes, I blink a few times, then bolt up in shock—remembering everything.

Sitting on the bed in his guest room my heart is beating heavily. Waking up instantly stressed out is a horrible feeling.

I look down at my legs and the blanket that has fallen off me, lying around my waist now.

I know I didn’t climb under the blankets last night. Oleg must have come in to check on me after I’d passed out.

I tried so hard to stay awake, but my eyes were so heavy. I was so exhausted.

I can’t believe I fell asleep.

That he put a blanket over me.

I bite my lower lip, pulling the blanket to the side and swinging my legs over the edge of the bed.

My head really is throbbing. I need a painkiller. Stress always gives me a headache and this is probably the most stressful situation I’ve been in.

At least—I think—he doesn’t want me dead or anything. He obviously has some plan to use me as a bargaining chip for something—something he needs or wants from my

brothers.

I sigh and rub my eyes.

Standing up, I pull my dress straight. I wish it wasn't so short.

I wander through to the ensuite bathroom linked to the guest bedroom. In it I find a fresh towel and a folded pile of clothing.

A pair of jeans, a crop top, a white hoodie and some sneakers—and fresh underwear. Lace . He's got a fucking cheek buying me lace underwear.

I sigh and flick the shower on.

Kidnapped or not—I need a hot shower. I still smell smokey from that club and I feel gross. I think I still have grass in my hair from my failed attempt at escaping last night.

Oh my word.

Last night.

Images flash through my mind of him lying on top of me—my legs spread around him and his hand over my mouth.

Fuck—it was so kinky—dammit—I hate the fact that I was so turned on by it then and just the thought of it now is making me feel all hot and bothered again.

A shower will clear my mind, wake me up and hopefully give me some fresh perspective on how to handle this situation.

The shampoo and conditioner in the shower are definitely a girls' brand. I can see the bottle is new so it makes sense that he bought this for me.

It's odd—to be kidnapped by someone who is thoughtful.

The hot water runs over my skin and I instantly feel better.

I stand under the running water, soaping myself, washing my hair, and letting it massage the tension from my muscles.

My guess is that Oleg will already have contacted my brothers and started negotiations. That means that my brothers will already be working to get me home.

All I want to do is get home.

It's all that matters to me right now.

I dry off, sweep my damp hair up into a bun on top of my head, and get dressed. Oleg has provided everything I need in the bathroom—so when I am done, I feel so much better. Which is a relief.

I peak out of the bedroom door. Looking up and down the passage I find no one there.

Maybe I can try to escape again. Last night it was dark and I was tired and panicked. This morning might be much easier.

I want to get to my brothers and warn them about what the Dubrovs are really like—what they are capable of. I know my brothers have been causing some trouble around the city—making some noise—but I don't think they fully understand who they are up against.

I remember there being a big sun room at the end of the passage upstairs here. I run as quietly as possible towards it.

There was a big balcony outside it, and maybe if I can get onto the balcony, I can make it down into the garden.

I push against the sunroom doors—but they are locked. Staring through them into the garden below, my heart sinks.

There are so many security guards walking around outside.

It's like he's prepared for the absolute worst-case scenario. Does he think the entire army is going to come and rescue me—because it looks like that's the kind of defense he's got set up here.

“Fuck,” I mutter angrily.

There is no way in hell that I am going to be able to get off the property without being stopped.

I have to wait this out.

My brothers will strike a bargain—they will do whatever it takes to get me home. My family looks after each other. I know I haven't been fair to them—keeping my secrets from them—but when it comes down to it, we would all do anything for each other.

They will negotiate a deal quickly to get me home as soon as possible. Maybe by this evening, I'll be safely back with them.

I bite at my lower lip as I walk downstairs towards the kitchen.

My stomach is growling. I'm so hungry and I really need a cup of coffee.

I walk into the kitchen and stop dead in my tracks.

Oleg turns around to face me.

"Good morning. Did you sleep ok?" he asks, as though I was a guest, and not here by force.

"What do you care if I slept ok or not?" I snap angrily.

He shrugs and takes a mug down from the cabinet above him. "Can I make you a coffee?"

"I don't want your coffee," I say, knowing it's not true. I really want coffee. But I don't want him to make it for me and then somehow think I owe him something.

"Don't be ridiculous, Raisa. How do you like your coffee? Or are you a tea person?"

I sigh.

"One sugar. With milk."

I stand as far away from him as I can. The kitchen is massive, so it's easy to keep the distance between us.

Despite my intense anger towards him I still find myself checking him out as he stands with his back towards me.

I can see the muscles of his back beneath the thin white t-shirt he is wearing.

Dammit.

He's sexy.

I wish I wasn't so intensely attracted to him.

I wish I could stop thinking about that damn kiss—and how it felt when he pinned me down last night.

Oleg turns towards me, a cup of coffee in his hand.

He places it on the counter next to me.

“Thanks,” I mutter, not wanting to speak to him at all.

“Pleasure,” he replies casually.

Looking up at him and taking a deep breath, I dare to ask, “When can I go home?”

His dark eyes pierce into me as his eyes narrow. My breathing gets faster, heavier. My eyes drift to his lips. He doesn't say a word. His gaze seems to cut straight through me.

“Do you prefer eggs for breakfast or a fruit salad and some oats?” He asks, turning away again—completely ignoring my question.

“Coffee is fine,” I sigh, then walk out of the kitchen because I can't handle being so close to him and thinking inappropriate thoughts that won't get out of my head.

The sooner I get home, the better. The less time I spend near him, the better.

I don't like the effect he has on me.

I don't like the fact that I want to throw myself into his arms so that I can experience that kiss again.

It makes me really angry that I'm even thinking about that.

I decide that the best thing for me to do is to hide away in the guest bedroom as much as possible until my brothers come to get me.

When I do get too hungry, I sneak downstairs and find leftovers in the fridge. I heat them up, then carry them back up to the room where I can eat in private and not have to face Oleg.

The morning drifts by painfully slow because I am so impatient to get home and I have absolutely nothing to do to try and make the time go by faster. By late afternoon, I am ready to tear my hair out I'm so agitated.

I hate waiting. It's such a waste of time.

Downstairs, I hear someone arriving.

The front door closes and voices drift up towards my room.

Is that my brothers? Are they here? Am I going home?

I push off the bed, feeling hopeful and excited.

Rushing towards the door, I run straight into one of Oleg's guards.

Crashing into his chest, he grabs my arm and says, "Hey, slow down."

“What’s going on downstairs?”

“Come on, I was sent to fetch you. I’m sure you will find out soon enough.”

My heart is beating fast and I feel a smile of relief spread across my face. My brothers must be here. I’m going home. Thank goodness.

The guard leads me downstairs, but not towards the front door. Instead, he turns towards the back of the house and guides me into what looks like an office.

“What the hell is going on?” I stammer, seeing a priest standing in the room.

The guard pushes me towards Oleg.

Oleg takes my arm and pulls me up against his side.

“What is going on?” I say more forcefully.

“We are getting married,” Oleg answers, curt and short. To the point.

“No, we are fucking not,” I snap back in shock.

“Yes, Raisa. We are. Now do as you are told.”

His fingers grip around my arm as I try to turn away from him. He yanks me back to his side.

“I’m not marrying you,” I cry out in desperation.

“Marry me, or your family will suffer.”

His threat is simple, but the possibilities of what he might do to the people I love are endless.

My jaw drops open as I stare at him in disbelief.

“Why?” I beg to know.

“Do as you are told, Raisa,” he says again.

The priest starts reciting the usual ceremonious rantings and before long he turns to me and says, “do you, Raisa Kuznetsov take Oleg Dubrov to be your lawfully wedded husband?”

I stammer, stuttering no reply at all. Oleg’s fingers dig into my arm.

As soon as I get out of here, I will divorce him. Whatever he has planned—it won’t work. “I do,” I mutter.

“I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss your bride,” the priest says and my heart beats in a wild flutter of confusion.

Oleg steps right up against me, wraps his hand around the back of my neck and presses his lips against mine.

I am so angry it feels as though that anger is going to rip through my chest. But the worst part—the absolutely worst part of this—is that the kiss feels so fucking amazing.

Oleg steps away and looks down at me with a dark streak in his gaze. Something behind his stare tells me he felt the same way about the kiss.

I want to go home.

This isn't right.

I don't want any of this.

I want to become a doctor and escape this horrible mafia life.

The priest slides a piece of paper across the desk towards us. "Please sign over here."

I pick up the pen on autopilot, not even thinking anymore but feeling sick to my stomach as I scribble my signature onto the marriage certificate. Surely this can't be legal. This can't be happening.

But there it is. A marriage certificate with my name, right next to my husband's name. Oleg Dubrov.

"Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Dubrov," the priest says with a smile.

"Mrs. Dubrov?" I blurt out in absolute horror.

"Thank you for your time," Oleg says to the priest. Ignoring my emotional turmoil. I don't believe what just happened. I can't even seem to process it in my own thoughts. Am I really married to him now?

I stare between them. I can't process any of this.

The priest leaves and Oleg nods to his security guard. "Please take her to my room. I think her and I need to talk," he says. The guard takes my arm, which I immediately pull back. "Don't touch me," I snap angrily. He takes my arm again and pulls me out into the hallway, then pushes me ahead of him—leading me to Oleg's bedroom.

Oh, we are going to talk alright. I am going to tell him exactly what I think. He's going to—

“Raisa.”

His voice makes me jump and I spin to face him. My guard is up, my fists are clenched at my sides and my jaw is biting down so tightly it's starting to make my neck muscles ache.

“What the fuck just happened?” I blurt out, loud and aggressive.

“Raisa,” he speaks gently, not matching my energy. “It had to be done. I'm sorry, that you were put into this position, but this is for the best.”

I shake my head, no, this is bullshit.

“The best for who? You? Your family? Do you care about other people?” “I hate you, Oleg. I will hate you till the day I die,” I whisper, the words spilling from my lips like a curse.

He smiles sadly.

He is standing too close and it's making my skin tingle and my stomach flutter as though a hundred butterflies have escaped and are now flapping around inside me.

I bite my lower lip and squeeze my eyes closed to try and ignore how freaking sexy he looks.

Get a grip, Raisa. I repeat to myself.

“Raisa, you don't deserve this. But somehow—maybe it is—maybe this is what was

meant to happen,“ his hand brushes over my cheek. I want to turn my face away from him, but I seem to losing control of myself. I’m so angry, so full of rage, with blood pulsing through my veins so fast it’s making me dizzy.

His touch is warm and it sends shivers down my spine. What is happening to me?

“You are the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen. You are smart, strong and passionate about everything,” he whispers, his voice is deep and it rumbles through me.

When I do open my eyes to look at him his eyes are dark chocolate pools of warmth—and desire.

My heart begins to beat faster, harder. The rhythmic thunder of my blood pulsing in my veins is making me lean towards him. I should not be leaning towards him. This was not my plan. I was going to—

What was I going to do?

“I don’t want you to be upset about any of this, Raisa. I promise you I will take care of you. I will protect you through all of this. You are my wife now.”

His reassuring tone and gentle touch is confusing me. My mind is screaming no—telling me to be angry and push him away—but my body is doing the complete opposite.

I can’t help it, the way I am tilting my head back, lifting my lips towards his. I can’t help the way my skin is alive and begging for him to touch me, I can’t stop myself.—

He leans down and his lips are against mine. Electricity bolts through me as his hands slip beneath my top, running over my naked skin.

I'm so nervous, but everything feels right.

I gasp against his kiss and he lifts me in his arms. I wrap my legs around his waist and the kiss becomes more passionate, deeper, harder.

Warnings fire in the back of my mind. Stop. You shouldn't do this. This isn't what you want.

But right now, it's all I want—so I shove those thoughts aside.

A deep moan rumbles through his chest as he walks to the side of the bed, and stands me on the mattress.

My hands are shaking.

I am taller than him now as I look down at him. He slides both hands over my waist as he pushes my top up and over my head. His lips play over my exposed nipples and I moan softly, running my fingers through his hair and hoping that he can't notice how nervous I am.

“You are a goddess,” he growls, grabbing the buttons of my jeans and tugging them open, sliding them off my legs.

I kick them away. Heat is building in my body it feels as though it is vibrating between my legs. A sensation I've felt before, but never this intense. Never with this much desire and urgency.

I grab his shirt and without unbuttoning it, I pull it over his head.

I take in the sight of him, shirtless, sculpted perfection. The tattoo across his collarbone is much bigger than I expected it to be. I reach up and touch it, sliding my

fingers over the black in, etched in abstract patterns that curve to the shape of his body, complimenting the muscles and tendons that ripple beneath it.

He pulls his pants open and my eyes lock onto his cock.

It's massive. Thick veins running up the shaft.

Suddenly, I'm shaking even more. The nervous thread tugging at my thoughts has grown tighter.

I want this.

But I've never done it before.

I've never even seen a fully naked man—so—ready.

He pushes me backwards onto the bed and I want to tell him. I want to say something so that he knows. But I'm embarrassed.

What will he think when he finds out I'm a virgin?

He lies down over me, his body pinning me down and his hand caressing my face.

His cock is rock hard and throbbing between my legs. He rocks against me and his cock rubs over my pussy. Oh my word. It feels so good. My body is begging me to just let him take me. To let him do whatever he wants with me.

Fuck. I want this so badly.

But—I have to tell him.

It feels wrong not to.

He pushes his hips forward and I tense up.

This scene feels rushed.

“Wait—“ I gasp, just as he is about to thrust into me.

“Mm,” he growls, trying to control himself, leaning up to look at me.

“It’s—I’ve—“ I stammer, trying to find the right words.

“What is it, Raisa?” His deep voice vibrates against my breasts.

“I’ve never done this before—“ I whisper, my cheeks flushing bright pink and burning with embarrassment.

“You’re a virgin?” He growls, and I can’t tell if he is angry or not. He sounds upset. The way he pulls his mouth into a snarl makes my stomach twist with shame.

He pushes off me, shaking his head and grabbing his pants, quickly pulling them back on without looking in my direction.

He doesn’t want me anymore. My heart sinks as I grab at the blankets and tug them over my very exposed body. I’m dying inside.

“You should have told me sooner, Raisa,” he says softly, with his back to me. The muscles ripple as he moves.

Oleg takes a deep breath and lets it out heavily. His shoulders are tense. The way he’s standing—I think he’s definitely angry.

Then he walks out of the room, leaving me lying on the bed, confused, aroused, heated, angry—trying to hide myself beneath the blankets.

I'm more embarrassed than I have ever felt in my entire life.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

It's been two days since our marriage. Raisa has been avoiding me, quietly roaming the house with a look of anger etched into her face. She glares at me whenever we cross paths.

I've been doing my best to give her space. She needs time to adjust to all of this.

But the guilt I feel is immense.

Especially after finding out that she is a virgin.

I sigh heavily, pushing away from my desk, the chair sliding backwards. I stand up and run my hands over my face, rubbing my temples to try and massage away the headache that seems to be building behind my eyes.

Fuck.

I feel so bad about what I did to her. She doesn't deserve this.

But I still know that I made the right choice—overall—for the greater good of everything.

She just needs time to see it the same way that I do.

That for both of our families, this is the best.

Rather this than having them go to war with each other.

I was hoping to tell her brothers—and mine—in the next week. But I just wanted to give her some time to adjust first.

It can't be easy for her.

I walk out of my home office and downstairs to the kitchen. Raisa is in there, heating up some leftover Chinese food from last night.

She sees me, glares at me, and storms out of the kitchen without saying a single word.

I grab her arm as she walks past me.

“Get your food, Raisa. I'll come back later,” I gently push her back into the kitchen, then turn to walk away.

I hear the front gate bell, ringing softly through the house.

“Who could that be?” I mutter to myself.

Glancing back over my shoulder at Raisa, who is standing with her back to me, waiting for her food again, I nod. Good. Let me see who this is and get rid of them as quickly as I can. I don't need the drama of guests now while my new wife is trying to adjust to things.

Walking toward the front door I pull my phone out to check the security cameras from the front gate.

Shit.

Yefim and Alexei.

I am definitely not ready to see my brothers now. I wanted to tell them all at the same time in a meeting I called—and prepared for.

I pull the front door open and watch them climb out of the car.

“Oleg, brother, it’s good to see you in one piece,” Alexei says, smirking as he walks towards me.

“What do you mean one piece ?”

Alexi shrugs. “Yefim here was convinced something bad was happening—“

I step aside as my brothers walk into the house. I gesture towards the living room.

“What the hell are you talking about?” I say, a little abrupt because I am starting to lose patience.

Yefim walks slightly ahead of us, into the living room.

“You practically doubled your reinforcements at the house. The security office told me about it this morning. Why would you do that if there wasn’t something you were worried about?”

Yefim sits down, folding one leg over the other, leaning back in the sofa. His eyes are locked onto me as Alexei and I take a seat as well.

Shit.

“It’s nothing serious. Just something I am working on—regarding this new problem we have lurking in the city. I am busy with a solution—“

While I am talking Yefim is staring at me with those intense eyes of his. I sigh heavily.

“You aren’t really telling me anything, Oleg. You’re just talking in circles. Why don’t you tell me what is actually going on? What solution?”

I lean back in the sofa too. Damn this headache is just getting worse. I should have taken painkillers earlier. Oh yes, that’s what I want into the kitchen to get, but then Raisa was there—

“Oleg?” Alexei says, pulling me back into the moment.

“Guys, I just need you to trust me ok. I will come by and see all of you at the office—at the end of the week. I just need few more days to get everything in order and then I can explain it all to you.”

Yefim doesn’t look impressed with me.

“If something is going on that requires additional security—I think it is best that you talk to us about it right now. I don’t want shit to hit the fan after we leave and then I find out it is something I could have helped you with.” His stern tone is a warning.

But I am losing my patience. I lean forward in the sofa, resting my elbows on my knees. “Yefim—you need to trust me. I am not a reckless person.” I can’t help glancing at Alexei when I say this.

“Hey,” he mutters defensively when our eyes meet. I smirk.

“Look—guys—I need you to go now. I will come and see you at the end of the week. For now, I just need time—“

“Oh,” Raisa stammers from behind me.

Yefim and Alexei are both staring at her in horror.

I turn in my seat, my heart sinking to the pit of my stomach.

She is standing wide-eyed just behind the seating area. Her plate of food in her hand and a wild look on her face.

“Oleg—“ Yefim says darkly. His eyes are locked onto her. “That is Raisa Kuznetsov.”

I sigh.

Fuck.

I guess there is no getting out of the explanation at this point.

“Yes. It is.”

“Start talking,” Alexei demands.

“I wanted to tell everyone at the same time—“

“Start. Talking,” Yefim says, his voice clipped and tight.

“Raisa, would you like to join us?” I ask, because she is still frozen in place.

Saying her name seems to snap her from the daze she is in. She spins away from us and hurries out of the room without saying a word.

I sigh again. I need more time so I can get through to her. Having my brothers here right now is not part of the plan.

I turn back towards my brothers. Leaning back into the sofa again I close my eyes for a second, then I start explaining my plan to them.

“I took her a few days ago and Raisa and I are now married. She is no longer a Kuznetsov. She is a Dubrov.”

“What the fuck?” Alexei blurts out in shock. “What the fuck made you think that was a good idea?”

Suddenly, I am filled with intense anger. “What the fuck do you mean what the fuck? You can’t talk. You of all people should at least understand a little bit. You make the most reckless choices of us all!—How the fuck did you meet your wife, Alexei?” I don’t want to feel angry, and I don’t want to raise my voice, but Alexei is the last fucking person on the planet who should be judging me.

Maybe I’m just being defensive. Maybe I’m feeling guilty for what I have done to Raisa. I take a breath, trying to calm my thoughts.

Yefim reaches out and touches Alexei’s arms when he tries to stand up. “Wait, Alexei, calm down.” He says, his voice even. “Oleg, explain to me—what the fuck you were thinking.” There is no judgment in his tone, but I can hear the disappointment.

“We are at the beginning stages of war with her brothers. By marrying her, we form an automatic alliance with them and they have to stand down— without bloodshed. Let’s be honest. It was either this or you guys all storming in there with your guns and explosives. This is the better option.”

“This is the thing that is going to start the war,” Alexei hisses. “You kidnapped their sister.”

“For the greater good,” I snap back at him.

Yefim shakes his head. “This is a terrible plan, Oleg. You should have spoken to us first.”

“No, this is the right way to handle this situation. I thought about it for a long time. I know I made the right choice,” I say back with force.

I know I made the right choice.

This is far better than the method my brothers would have chosen.

Yefim’s jaw is clenched. The muscles are feathering along it as he tries to hold back his anger. “When Leon finds out—“

“He doesn’t need to know yet. And you two are not the ones who should tell him. I will tell him,” I demand.

“Damn straight you are going to tell him. I don’t even want to be in the room when he finds out what you did,” Alexei snarls.

I shake my head. “You two need to leave and don’t breathe a word of this to anyone. I will call that meeting at the end of the week.” I stand up, gesturing for them to do the same. This conversation is going nowhere and it’s only serving to make matters worse.

I wanted more time.

I still need that time.

Yefim and Alexei stand up, both looking angry with me. “I wish you had spoken to us first,” Yefim says.

“Well, it’s too late for that now. So, move on,” I snap back, agitation growing.

Yefim shakes his head and takes a deep breath. “Alright, brother. We will give you the time you need. But only until the end of this week. Then I will tell Leon myself.”

I don’t say a word as I watch them both leave.

I’d rather not speak in anger or frustration and make this situation worse.

Once they are in their car and heading off the property, I breathe a sigh of relief.

At least I bought myself a little time. Time I desperately need to make things better between Raisa and myself.

I need her on board with my idea before we talk to her brothers.

I want to make her feel relaxed. I don’t want her to be angry with me.

I still can’t help this crazy pull I feel towards her.

Heading upstairs to her bedroom to try and talk to her, I can feel the knot in my stomach. My brothers rocking up here was not a good thing. I wasn’t ready for that at all.

Standing in the doorway, I watch her for a moment. She is sitting on the frame of the window, staring out into the garden. She has the most beautiful profile, delicate and

elegant. Her one leg is popped up on the window ledge, her arm resting on her knee and her head resting against the wall.

Long soft blonde curls are falling over her shoulder and down her back.

“Raisa, can we talk?” I say gently.

She jumps at the sound of my voice and quickly turns to face me. The peace is gone from her body. She looks rigid and tense now.

I wish I didn’t have that effect on her.

“What do you want?” she snaps.

“I want to talk. I want to find out what you need—to feel more at home here.”

“What I need? Home? Are you serious?” She stands up and marches towards me, standing just in front of me she glares up at me with hatred and anger. “If you want me to feel at home—then let me go home, Oleg.”

She is as stubborn as me and it’s going to get us nowhere.

“I can’t do that,” I say gently. I want to reach out and touch her. It takes everything in me not to pull her up against me.

I notice how her eyes trace over my lips, down my body, then back up again. She looks frustrated with herself.

Then heat builds behind her gaze again and she aims it at me. Clenching her fists at her side she pushes her shoulders back and glares more intensely.

“Let me go home. I heard your brothers. They aren’t happy with you either. Whatever it is that you have planned—it won’t work. Just let me go now and this can all be over. I won’t even tell my brothers what happened. I’ll just go back to my life and pretend—“

“We both know that isn’t true, Raisa. We both know you will tell them everything. Besides. Letting you go will not solve anything. It won’t fix the bigger problem. I’m sorry—but I can’t do that.”

Her chest is rising and falling quickly. Her breath is heavy and fast.

She bites her lower lip and my heart begins to pound faster.

Fuck.

I want her.

This talk is not going how I planned.

I need to get out of here before I do something I will regret.

“Raisa, just know that I don’t want anything bad for you,” I say with a heavy heart.

“Then let me go,” she begs.

“No.”

I turn out of her room and walk away from her because if I don’t, I am going to kiss her again—and I won’t be able to stop anything that happens after that.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

I have been pacing around this house for days and I'm going crazy with boredom. It's one thing to be a prisoner in Oleg's home, that's a whole emotional wreckage I will have to process at some point—but to be this bored, on top of all of that is just driving me insane. Nothing is happening. No one is talking to anyone about what Oleg did. I feel as though everything is stagnant and all I want is to be able to talk to my brothers and find a way to get back home.

I stomp down the stairs loudly, letting out my frustration on each step. I march all the way to the kitchen in a huff.

I've been in a bitter mood all week and it only seems to be getting worse as each day passes. I hate this place. I hate that I am being held here against my will. None of this is fair.

When I get to the kitchen, I sigh in annoyance. Oleg is there.

“Oh, good I wanted to talk to you, Raisa,” he says sounding friendly and calm. I hate the fact that he is still being sweet to me the whole time. I hate the fact that he is still so fucking good-looking. Why does he have to be so sexy? It doesn't seem fair somehow. My kidnapper—I want to hate him.

I do hate him.

But I also want him—I roll my eyes.

And it doesn't help at all that he's currently shirtless and in a pair of sweatpants.

“What do you want?” I snap, annoyed at myself as much as I am annoyed at him. I need to get my body under control.

“Tonight, we are going out.”

“Where?” Every cell in my body is suddenly alert. This might be my chance to escape. “What are we doing?”

“You will have a chance to see your brothers. We are leaving at seven o' clock. I have sent a dress up to your room and you will wear that.”

“A dress—what—how—“

“Just wear the dress. Don't argue with me on this. If you want to see your brothers, just do as you're told for a change.” He sighs, looking exhausted by my constant resistance to his requests.

He has been trying to be friendly. He's always asking me if I need anything and he offers me tea and food and anything I might want. He's done his best to make sure I am comfortable—but it doesn't make up for the fact that he kidnapped me and forced me to marry him.

I hate doing what he tells me to do.

But if he wants me to wear a damn dress and that gets me time with my brothers—that's all I need. I can see them. I can tell them what is going on—and maybe by the end of the night, I will be on my way back to my real home.

In fact, I will make sure I am on my way home.

When we leave the house, we will leave all of these damn guards behind. I can

definitely find a way to escape.

My heart flips with excitement and a smile spreads across my face.

I quickly push it away.

I don't need Oleg seeing my smile. He will guess something is up because it is such a sharp contrast to the bitter expression I have been wearing every time he sees me.

"Fine. I'll wear the dress," I snap.

He turns to look at me. His eyes narrowed. "Thank you," he says gently. There is relief in his voice. A pang of guilt washes through me. But why should I feel guilty? I didn't do anything wrong.

Somehow, though, I don't want to upset him.

I don't want to make this harder than it needs to be.

I just want to go home. Can't he see how badly I want to go home?

I stare at him for a moment. My mind drifting.

If Oleg and I had met under different circumstances—

No. Don't even think about that. It isn't going to help anything.

Just focus on how you can escape tonight.

You can go home.

At seven o' clock, I am wearing the dress Oleg gave me. Along with a diamond necklace that hangs just above my cleavage. The necklace compliments the beautiful and very obvious wedding ring wrapped around my finger. It still feels foreign against my skin. It feels heavy and I keep fidgeting with it because it doesn't belong there. I'm not supposed to be married. I didn't choose this.

Staring down at my left hand for a moment, I am lost in thought as I watch it glitter in the soft light.

When I stand in front of the long mirror and look at myself my heart does a tiny summersault. I can't deny it. I look freaking incredible. This dress is gorgeous. I don't know if Oleg actually chose it or not—but if he did, he has incredible taste.

The soft emerald fabric hugs my body tightly, over my hips and the curve of my ass, then it flows out around my legs. A long slit up the side accentuates my body and makes my legs look even longer.

I feel absolutely gorgeous.

I pin my hair up on top of my head in a pretty bun.

I'm ready.

I'm ready to escape and go home and I get to look incredible while I am doing it.

I wonder where we are going that requires a dress this extravagant. It seems so over the top.

I walk downstairs towards where Oleg is waiting at the bottom near the front door. His eyes are on me the entire way, each step I take, I can feel the heat of his gaze as it burns into me. His stare turns me on. I can feel his desire from here and it makes me

picture things I should not be picturing.

“Raisa—“ he stammers as I step towards him. “You look—wow. The most beautiful creature I have ever seen. I knew the dress would look amazing on you—but at this point I think no matter what you wear you’d look amazing.”

I don’t say a word as I walk past him, out of the front door towards where the limousine is waiting for us.

I slide into the back seat and turn my face towards the window. I don’t have to be nice. Even though I love that he compliments me. I love that he thinks I’m beautiful.

But I can’t let him know that.

I feel him climbing in next to me, the heat of his leg against mine. I try my best to ignore the way it pulses through my body, luring me in, enticing me.

I will escape tonight.

That is what I need to focus on. Nothing else.

After we have been driving for fifteen or so minutes, I turn to Oleg.

“Why do we need a limousine and all of this flashy nonsense just to meet my brothers? It doesn’t make any sense.”

“We are meeting them at a party. One where a lot of my allies will be attending. Of course, I want to introduce my new wife to the Bratva world—looking as beautiful as ever. But you could have arrived in sweatpants and a hoodie and they would have still seen your beauty—“

“A party?” I stammer in shock. “You didn’t say we were going to a party.”

“Why else would you be wearing something like this?” He chuckles and it flares my annoyance.

“You want me to walk around amongst a bunch of Mafia idiots and you want me to what? Be polite? Be the happy wife? Are you completely out of your mind? I am going to tell every single one of them that you kidnapped me and forced me into this marriage!—” Anger is making me hiss my words at him. I’m struggling to stay calm.

He shifts slightly, turning his body towards me as he glares down at me. “Raisa. Listen very carefully. I will only say this once and you should not dare to doubt it. If you don’t make your brothers believe that you are happily married to me—they will become upset—and when they get upset, they will start fighting against me. When that happens—Leon and all of my brothers will open fire on them. People will die. Your brothers will die.”

My mouth drops open in horror. “You wouldn’t,” I stammer.

“I wouldn’t, but my brothers would and you know your brothers would too. So, trust me when I say that it is in your best interest to play along with this marriage tonight. If everything goes smoothly and your brothers believe that you are happy with me—we avoid bloodshed. No violence is necessary. I wanted you to do this willingly. I had hoped that we would have more time together to work through our differences before tonight arrived—but it is what it is and this is happening tonight—so now it is your choice about whether or not you want to start a war.”

I turn my face away from him.

Taking slow breaths to try and soothe my racing heart.

For a long moment I just stare out of the window—fighting the tears that are burning at the back of my eyes. I want to scream. I want to cry and tell him I hate him. But I will not put my family at risk. I have to find another way to escape. I have to figure out some other option for getting back at him.

I quickly brush my hand across my cheek, wiping away the single tear that managed to escape. I won't let Oleg see me cry.

I won't let him see any weakness from me. I've managed to hold myself together since he forced me into this marriage and I won't stop now.

I will find a way, though—to escape this. Maybe not tonight. But soon.

We arrive at the party and I feel horribly tense as I climb out of the limousine and walk towards the massive doors of someone's home. I have no idea where we are. I assume it is one of Oleg's brother's mansions. I was so looking forward to just seeing my brothers this evening—and now I have to face a bunch of Bratva mafia families and keep a smile on my face the entire time when all I want to do is curl up and cry my eyes out because I feel trapped into a corner.

This entire situation could not be more opposite from what I want for my life.

Oleg steps alongside me, taking my hand in his.

His skin is warm, and I clench my jaw as I realize how reassuring his hand is over mine.

Dammit.

We walk into the party which is already in full swing. So many eyes are on us, so many people I don't know.

Oleg greets them all and introduces me as we walk through the crowds. They all know him and they all seem to have a lot of respect for him as they treat him almost like royalty. A Dubrov.

Somehow, I am now playing the role of a Dubrov wife. I better do a good job of it. There are so many people watching.

As we move through the party my eyes are peeled, constantly searching for my brothers. They aren't here yet.

I sip my champagne and stand against Oleg's side—his arm wrapped around my waist—I smile and talk happily. Outwardly we are the perfect, happy couple. Newlyweds, basking in the excitement of it all.

Inside, I am in a knot of frustration and anxiety.

I feel the tension building inside me—the longer my brothers take to get here the worse it is getting. Where are they? Why aren't they here already? I just want to see a familiar face. I want someone to tell me that everything is going to be ok.

I need my brothers. I need them to be here for me now.

I smile tightly, leaning against Oleg. Waiting.

Trying to be patient.

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I can see and sense how nervous Raisa is as we walk into the party, but she doesn't pull away when I take her hand and she smiles as we are surrounded by all of the guests as they smother us in congratulations and well wishes for our future.

She is playing the role perfectly and while I can read her small gestures well enough to see her discomfort, no one else notices anything.

As we stand outside talking to a group of people, she leans into me, so I wrap my arm around her waist and hold her tighter.

I wish this was real. I wish I was really introducing her as my wife— willingly—because she is the most radiant and beautiful woman here. She is the most radiant woman I have ever met. I would have chosen her in a heartbeat if I had had the chance to get to know her before all of this chaos.

I stare down at her, tracing my eyes over her petite and sharp profile. Her perfect little nose and those plump pink lips.

She sighs softly, troubled by her own thoughts.

I clear my throat, realizing that I have been staring at her for too long. She is looking back up at me, those bright blue eyes of hers seem to have hypnotized me.

“Would you like another drink?” I ask, just because I need something to say and something else to think about. She holds up her champagne glass which is still half full. I nod. She doesn't need a drink yet and that means that I have nothing to do to distract myself.

I hate these parties. I hate all of this fake niceness I have to maintain while I am in the presence of all of our Bratva allies.

I prefer to be home, in peace, and leave this social side of things to my brothers. They seem to enjoy it and they are definitely better at it than I am. I find myself to be perhaps a little too abrupt with the idiots, not tolerating stupidity all that well. It doesn't help that I know none of these people are genuinely my friends and realistically. they know nothing about me.

Beside me, I feel Raisa's entire body tense and I look at her, then follow her gaze to see what she has spotted.

Her brother. Rodion Kuznetsov.

I guess her family has arrived.

“Remember what I told you,” I whisper against her ear. I don't think I need to remind her, she has been doing very well so far, but I really don't want any trouble and I definitely don't want a shootout.

The whole reasoning behind me taking and marrying Raisa was to avoid violence.

Rodion walks straight towards us, his eyes locked onto his sister and a deep-furrowed frown on his forehead. He looks angry and intimidating. I can see why people mutter about him—saying he is dangerous. Of course, I don't give a fuck what people say. Appearance is not everything, but I can say for sure that Rodion is a man who is confident and sure of himself. He is not a man who easily rolls over if he doesn't agree with you.

He glances at me, then snarls at his sister, “where the fuck have you been and what the fuck is this I hear about you getting married?”

Raisa becomes even more tense at my side. She smiles, a tight smile that hardly reaches her eyes.

“Rodion, this is Oleg, my husband.” She tilts her head towards me.

I hold out my hand. “It is good to finally meet you face to face, Rodion.”

He glares at me, ignoring my outstretched hand.

I lower it again, pushing my shoulders back. He better not fuck this up for us. Raisa shifts her weight from one foot to the other. She is horribly uncomfortable.

Rodion looks furious.

He better play nice or he is going to pay the price for it.

“You fucking married my sister?” he hisses at me.

“We married each other, yes,” I say calmly.

“What the fuck is it with you Dubrovs? Do you think you own everything and everyone? You can’t just go around doing whatever the hell you please—“

“I was hoping our first meeting would go better than this,” I reply, still remaining calm despite my blood beginning to boil in my veins.

“Better than what, Dubrov? Us being pissed off about this secretive bull shit?”

“Look, we are family now. We should be discussing a better way forward for both sides. We shouldn’t be fighting each other.”

“You have no idea who you are dealing with,” he snarls.

On either side of him two other men appear. Raisa interrupts Rodion’s outburst by introducing me to another two of her brothers. I can see she is trying to defuse the situation, but it doesn’t seem to be working.

“This is Rad and this is Roman. Guys, this is my husband, Oleg Dubrov.”

Both of the new comers have shocked looks on their faces. They stare at their sister in disbelief, waiting for her to tell them that this is some kind of joke. Raisa senses the tension increasing and wraps her arm around my side, leaning her head against me. She is trying her best to appear happy and relay that message to her brothers. I appreciate her efforts. It seems to be failing though.

She smiles. “I’m sorry to spring this on you guys like this—it’s just—“

“We met and it was an instant connection,” I say.

Rad ignores my comment and shakes his head at his sister.

“It’s just that you can never do what you’re told—you went out alone and made your own choices. You know full well that we would never have allowed this. How could you pull a stunt like this—were you even thinking about the effect your choices would have on your family? How selfish are you, Raisa?” He is speaking directly to her, as though I am not even here. His tone is cold and nasty. His harsh words are cutting into her like a blade. I can see the way her eyes begin to glitter. He is upsetting my wife.

I take a slight step forward, moving myself in front of his gaze and pushing Raisa a little behind me in a protective gesture.

“Watch your tone, Rad. That is my wife you are speaking to. I don’t give a fuck who you are—when you talk to her you will do so with respect. Nothing else.” I glare at him with darkness and threat in my eyes. He better watch his fucking back or I will be the one starting the violence that I am so desperate to try and avoid.

His lips lift into a snarl of anger.

“That is my sister and if you think you can just walk into my family and start demanding respect based on what—your name ?—you have another thing coming.”

Roman steps closer to me, making his presence known. A clear threat in the way he moves. Raisa steps out from behind me and stares at everyone in horror. “Please, stop this , this isn’t how I wanted this to go,” she says sounding worried.

She knows that Leon could react at any moment if he doesn’t like what he sees.

“Raisa, keep your mouth shut. We will deal with you later,” Rad snarls at his sister again.

I grab him around the collar of his shirt and pull him right up against me. I keep my voice low when I spell the situation out to him.

“Look around you, Kuznetsov. Perhaps you are ignorant, perhaps it is just your ego acting up, but the Dubrovs own this city and you shouldn’t forget that. It is not just my name that demands respect for the sake of the way it sounds. My name demands respect because of the power behind it. Even now, you are outnumbered to the point where you wouldn’t even have time to blink if I signaled for them to take you down. All I want is for you to show your sister some respect. Is that so hard?”

I push him back and he staggers against his brother who catches him with hatred in his eyes—directed at me with ferocity.

Rad pulls his shirt straight, his pride is hurt, but nothing more. He forces his shoulders to relax and I see his posture changing as his eyes roam the crowd around him. He knows I'm right. He knows he and his brothers would drop like flies if it came down to a fight. They are surrounded and are not on territory that they are familiar with. They basically don't stand a chance and all that is holding them together at this point is arrogance.

The fact that any of them walked in here and even tried to challenge me is something I will never understand. I'll put it down to shock at the news of their sister's marriage. They need time to process and come to terms with the information. The next meeting better fucking be calmer than this.

Rad pushes his shoulders back, standing taller and Rodion's lips curl into a smug smile as the other brothers arrive. They feel stronger now. I can see it in the way they stand. The way they hold themselves. They expect me to back down just because there are more of them.

I look at each of them in turn. Making eye contact and letting them know I won't back down.

I know each of them because I have studied their photographs, made sure I did my homework. Rigor, Renat and Ruvim stand with Rodion, Rad and Roman.

The tension becomes thicker, but none of them makes a move. None of them has anything else to say. They all seem to be glancing towards Rodion—willing to do whatever he says—waiting for his move.

Finally, Rodion clears his throat loudly.

“This isn't over, Oleg Dubrov,” he says sternly.

“You’re right. This is far from over. I will be in contact so that we can arrange another meeting. Preferably one where you remember who you are dealing with next time. In the meantime, I suggest you all watch your backs and the choices you make.”

When I look around, I realize that everyone at the party is watching us. The tension has spilled over and captured everyone’s attention. This is not how I wanted this to go. It’s time to leave. Our marriage announcement has been made and Raisa has played her part perfectly—but before I do punch one of her brothers in the face—we need to leave.

Besides, they pissed me off even more with how they spoke to her. I don’t understand it. Who the fuck do they think they are?

I take Raisa’s hand in mine and turn away from her brothers, pulling her in front of me protectively, ushering her away from them. I want to kill every single one of them. I can’t believe they spoke to her that way, their own sister. Have they no respect for their own family?

Glancing around, I lock eyes with a few of our guests and they quickly look away. I hate the politics and the drama. I want to get out of here right now.

I don’t even bother trying to find any of my brothers. They will either have seen what happened or will find out soon enough.

Right now, it's time to leave.

Raisa doesn’t say a word as I lead her out of the party and into the front area of the house, towards our waiting limo.

She stands quietly as I pull the door open and usher her inside the car.

When I look at her face, I can see how upset she is.

I don't know if it is what I did or how her brothers treated her that has caused her to look so miserable, but all I want to do is it make her feel better.

I assume she is angry with her brothers.

Even though her and I know that this marriage was forced—they didn't know that and she did a very good job of making it appear genuine. Yet they insulted and questioned her instead of being happy for her.

From that perspective—I imagine it hurt her.

They didn't even wish her congratulations. Not that I should be surprised by that. But worse than that they tore her decisions apart and spoke to her like shit just because she went out without their permission. Is she their prisoner? Their slave? What right do they have to control her life?

No wonder she wants nothing to do with this life. No wonder she was doing whatever she can to try and escape her brothers and make a different path for herself. She deserves more than that. She deserves better.

I suddenly want to be the one who gives her something better. To show her that not everyone caught up in the Bratva world is like that.

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I don't say a word as Oleg leads me out of the party. My heart feels heavy because I was so excited to see my brothers. I thought there was no way in hell they would fall for my pretend happiness at being this man's wife, but they not only fell for it, they were very open about blaming everything on me too.

Is that really how they see me? As some silly girl who makes silly choices and puts the family at risk?

Do they really think I would go behind their backs and actually get married?

I can't believe it. I hate the fact that they were so mean to me in front of everyone watching.

I feel embarrassed and hurt.

I don't think they were fair at all with the way they treated me.

I sigh as I stare out of the window.

The driver starts the limo and I bite at my lower lip, lost in thought about how badly that all went.

I can't believe that they all think I got myself into this mess. They didn't even pause to think for a second that just maybe something else was going on. Not even Rad—who I get on the best with out of all the boys. He is more patient than the others, a little gentler with his words—but not tonight. Tonight, he was just angry.

“Are you ok?” Oleg asks, reaching out and brushing his hand over my leg.

I turn to glare at him, angry and hurt.

“No, I’m not ok and it’s your fault. You should never have done any of this. It hasn’t helped anything. Didn’t you see in there—how angry they all were? What did you hope to achieve by forcing me to marry you and then parading me in front of my brothers?” I snap loudly.

“Are you kidding me? I wasn’t the one who disrespected you in there. Your brothers treated you like shit. They have no respect for you at all. Why in the world did you let them talk to you like that? Why didn’t you tell them to go to hell?”

“My brothers are not the problem, Oleg. You are!” I shout back at him.

All of the calm that I have managed to maintain over the past week is suddenly exploding out of me. I can’t hold it back anymore. I’m too angry now. I’ve been put through too much. All of this for what? What was the goal? I don’t understand his thinking at all.

His brothers were angry at him the other day and my brothers are angry at me now. What good is coming of this?

“If my brothers spoke to me like that, I would have punched them in the face,” Oleg mutters.

“Oh, yes? You would have? What would that have solved? My brothers are just trying to take care of me. They have always protected me. My whole life they have been there for me.”

“It didn’t look like it tonight. All they did was treat you badly.”

“What do you know? You know nothing about me and nothing about my family. You have your comfortable life here in this city. You have whatever you want. We had a hard life growing up. My parents died when I was too young to even get to know them. Rodion has been a father figure to all of us, and each of us takes care of the other. My brothers might be overprotective and overbearing—but I know they love me and all they want is for me to be safe.”

It looks like my words have cut a nerve in him. His eyes are narrowed towards me and I can see he is biting back his own words. I feel bad, I don't like to hurt people, but I didn't say anything that wasn't true. I didn't say anything unfair.

He kidnapped me and then he turned my own brothers against me.

I have a right to be angry with him.

I wish I could speak to Ruslana. She would understand my frustration.

Finally, Oleg shakes his head.

“You don't get it, Raisa. You don't understand,” he says softly. He's frustrated.

“You're right. I don't understand and with all of your talking, you haven't bothered to actually explain it to me.”

He rubs his hands up and down his pants, trying to get rid of the tension building inside his body. I know, because I feel the same tension building inside mine. I am struggling not to explode in a louder rage, to lash out, to say things I will regret.

“I did this to form an alliance between our families,” he presses.

“But, Oleg, don't you see how many alliances you are going to trigger as well? Not

everyone agrees with what you did. People are going to leave alliances because of your actions. “

“Bullshit,” he snaps. “Just because people were staring at the party tonight doesn’t mean they don’t agree with me. People love drama. They love the politics. It’s all a load of shit if you ask me. They need to mind their own business—but I promise you something, my allies are strong.”

“Your allies might be strong, but what position have you put my brothers in? They haven’t had a chance to establish themselves like you have in this city. They have enemies here, enemies who might see this as a weakness and come pushing harder at their door.”

“Your brothers need to learn who to negotiate with and who to fight with. So far, they are fighting with the wrong people and causing shit with the wrong families. They came here with too much arrogance and it’s going to backfire,” he snaps at me. I clench my fists in my lap, trying not to react. I close my eyes and shake my head. He is making me so angry. How dare he speak about my family like that? He wants them to show respect, but he doesn’t seem to respect anyone.

“You are so busy standing up for me against my brothers—but what about you? Why do you get to treat me however you want to? Who is going to tell you that you need to have respect?”

“You think I don’t respect you?” He glares at me. “Are you blind? Have I not given you everything you need? Have I not done my best to make sure that you are comfortable in your new home?”

“Your home. Not mine. I didn’t choose any of this. After you kidnapped me and forced me into a life I was trying to get away from.”

Oleg grabs my jaw in his hand. I can see an intense darkness in his eyes. One that terrifies me and, to my horror, turns me on like a fire screaming through my blood and igniting my skin.

“You don’t think I’ve treated you well, Raisa?” He says my name as though it was a threat on his lips.

“I—I—“ I stammer. All I can do is stare into his eyes, full of menacing threat. My mind is so focused on how his hand feels on my skin, and the way my body is alight with sudden and intense need for him.

His eyes drop to my lips and the way his mouth opens slightly makes me shudder. I gasp softly as he leans towards me—and then all of my self-control leaves me.

I throw myself against him, my lips pressed into his as I climb onto his lap.

I seem to take him as much by surprise as I take myself.

But I can’t stop.

The first time we kissed—and every day since then—I have not been able to stop thinking about what he would really feel like. How it would be to have him properly.

He grabs my hips and pulls me harder against him, thrusting his hips upwards and pressing his cock between my legs.

My dress is riding up over my thighs and his hands are hot on my skin.

His touch drifts beneath my skirt, up over my hips as he pushes me down harder against his cock.

Our lips are locked together, my hands around his neck as I kiss him harder, fierce and angry. It's as though all my frustration is coming out of me in the most passionate way possible.

He grabs a handful of my hair and tilts my head backwards. His lips brush across my neck, sending shivers down my spine. I shudder with pleasure as he trails kisses along my skin.

My nails dig into him, my pussy throbbing as I rock my hips back and forth on top of him.

I'm nervous—to have sex for the first time—but I am more than ready.

I am desperate for him.

I've never felt like this for any other man—and I don't want to stop what is about to happen.

He pushes me slightly back and tugs his belt open. I bite my lower lip as I stare into his eyes.

Sudden loud snaps of sound shockwave through the air and I let out a sharp scream as something slams into the window of the car.

Oleg lifts me, throwing me onto the seat next to us and covering my body with his.

The driver rolls down the privacy window and shouts back to us, "We're taking fire!" The security guard next to him is busy cocking his gun, preparing to fire back.

I scream again as more thunderous sounds burst into the air around us and thud against the window.

“It’s bulletproof, Raisa. We’ll be ok,” Oleg says against my ear, cradling me in his arms.

“Get us out of here now!” he shouts to the driver.

The limo swerves and skids over the road as we turn corners at a speed I don’t even want to guess. I keep my face buried against Oleg’s chest and my eyes squeezed tightly closed. My heart is beating so fast all I can hear is the drum of it in my ears.

I want to cry and scream at the same time, I am so terrified.

Oleg doesn’t let me go, not even for a moment.

The car chase continues for far too long and we take a few more bullets, which slam against the side of the car but never break through.

In the front, the driver and his security guy are both shooting back.

The limo skids around another corner and I hear a loud crash as something happens to the other car.

“He’s rolled!” the driver shouts. We accelerate forward and all I can hear now is the growl of the engine as we race away.

Oleg holds me for a few minutes longer, then pulls me back to look at my face. Embarrassingly, my cheeks are stained with tears.

“Raisa, are you ok?” he asks. But all I can do is stare at him.

“Raisa,” he says more sharply, shaking me slightly.

I stammer, “I’m—I’m ok.”

“Good.” He looks up towards the driver as he pulls me onto his lap. “Take us to the safe house.”

He cradles me on his lap and I curl up in his arms, not caring about anything other than how safe he is making me feel right now. My heart won’t stop going crazy and tears are still streaming down my cheeks.

I have never been more scared in my life.

I’ve never felt like I was about to die—that was too much.

My entire body is shaking and my breathing is sharp and heavy.

Oleg keeps stroking his hand over my hair and whispering to me. “It’s ok, Raisa. It’s going to be ok.”

We drive for ages, out of the city center and towards the outskirts, to a place I don’t know.

We pull up into a driveway and the driver presses a button to open a security gate.

He parks inside the garage.

The security officer turns around to speak to us.

“I’ll guard the perimeter. You two get inside. Do you want me to call for backup?”

“There is no need. This place is secure enough. You two can bunk in the security hideout tonight. We won’t be staying here long. Just get some rest. We can deal with

the car and this shit show tomorrow morning.”

Oleg opens the car door and lifts me out, still holding me in his arms.

His security officer unlocks the entrance and lets us into the house, then they disappear to the other side of the house and Oleg carries me into the bedroom upstairs. He gently puts me on the bed.

I still can't stop shaking.

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She is like a little bird in my hands, delicate and terrified. She feels small and I have this overwhelming urge to protect her. I wrap my arms around her, cradling her.

I carry her upstairs to the main bedroom in the safe house. Her scent washes over me, sweet and warm like wild orchids and magnolias. Perhaps a hint of honey. She smells incredible. It draws me closer to her as the scent sinks into me.

The remnants of the kiss we shared in the car, and how quickly it escalated, are still flowing through my body. Burning like a fire waiting to devour everything in its path.

She can tell me as much as she wants to that she hates me, that she is angry with me, but she can't hide the way her body reacts to mine. It's obvious she is attracted to me despite our disagreements. We clearly share some kind of physical connection and even though we have issues with communication, the chemistry is undeniable.

Gently, I place her onto the bed, but when I step back, I can see how badly she is still shaking. My heart pulls towards her. I need to make her feel safe. I need her to know that nothing can happen to her here. She is safe now.

I lift the blanket off the bottom of the bed and wrap it around her body, dragging her back onto my lap as I sit on the bed, resting my back against the headboard. She snuggles against me, barely making a sound.

She just needs a moment to realize that we are no longer in danger.

I think she might be in shock.

“Raisa, I promise you, we are safe here,” I assure her softly.

She has her face buried against my chest and her trust in me floods me with warmth. I wish she could be this receptive to me all the time. Things would be so much easier between us.

She doesn’t understand, and perhaps I am only starting to understand now, but I want her to be happy. I want what is best for her and I want her to want to be around me.

There is something about her that captivates me and I am starting to just give in to those feelings.

I want her.

I want her safe.

I want to protect her from everything and everyone.

She snuggles against me and lets out a slow breath, as though she is finally starting to calm down. Her body is no longer shaking so badly.

I brush my hand across her cheek. Her hair has come loose and is wild around her face and over her shoulders. Using my fingers, I do my best to smooth it out while I talk quietly to her.

“Are you feeling a little better? Do you need anything at all?”

She shakes her head. “I think I’m ok now,” she says softly. But she doesn’t move away from me.

“I think I should make you something to eat. We didn’t even stay long enough at the

party to have any of the food. You probably need a little sugar after—after what happened now.”

“Maybe.” She shrugs. I don’t think she is ready to make any kind of choices, even ones as simple as whether or not food would help her feel better.

So, I decide for her, and just lift her up and carry her downstairs, the blanket still wrapped around her.

I set her down on the kitchen counter, her legs hanging over the edge.

“We have—“ I pull open the cupboards, looking at what they stocked the safe house with. “Spaghetti and—“ I pull the packet of spaghetti out, find a can of mushrooms and some packet of cheese sauce. In the freezer, I find bacon and toss it into a sink of hot water to defrost it quickly.

I hold up the food options, showing her what we have.

“It’s not going to be the best spaghetti you’ve ever had, but it should do the job,” I chuckle, seeing her eyes locked onto me. She is watching my every move. She looks focused, sharp with heightened awareness—like a small animal, ready to run at any moment.

But I notice that a small smile touches her lips when I joke around in a relaxed way.

Good. That’s what I want to see.

While I cook, I chat about other things, helping her to relax more and understand that this is a safe place. She hasn’t spoken at all, but her eyes are softer and calmer.

She seems to be doing a lot better by the time the food is ready.

She lets the blanket drop off her shoulders when I hand her a hot bowl of creamy spaghetti with mushrooms and bacon. “This smells really good,” She says, taking it from me.

I lean against the counter and eat, standing next to her. She swings her legs while she eats, innocent and sweet.

She really is gorgeous.

There is something so special about her. She has a unique beauty that glows through her.

“Are you feeling ok now, Raisa?” I ask, finally thinking she is ready to talk about what happened in the car.

“Yes, I was just—it was terrifying. I have never been in a situation like that before,” she sighs.

“Ever? I thought your family was involved in a lot of mafia situations. “

“I told you earlier, I have always tried to stay out of the Bratva life. I never wanted anything to do with any of this stuff. It’s not the life I wanted for myself.”

Guilt stings into me. So she has never seen what it can really be like. No wonder she was so scared. No one has ever shot at her before. No one has tried to take her out.

I am the reason she now knows what it feels like to be shot at.

I sigh.

But then I realize that it is very unlikely that it was me they were after.

“Raisa, have your brothers been the target of any attacks or threats since you arrived in this city?”

She sighs, putting her empty bowl down on the counter next to herself. “It’s been constant. It really stresses me out, but when I bring it up with them, they brush it off and tell me it’s just part of what has to happen for them to establish themselves. I don’t think that’s true. I want it to stop before something terrible happens and I lose one of them.”

I shake my head, wondering who is targeting them. One of the other families definitely has it in for them and is determined to try and chase them out if they are being constantly attacked like that.

“You’re right. It’s not normal. They obviously have a strong enemy hell-bent on getting rid of them. I know they’ve been pissing a lot of people off since they got here, so it’s no surprise, really.”

“Ok, but what can they do about it? How can they stay safe when people come after them like that—I mean—is that why we got shot at tonight?”

I nod. “I think that they were targeting you . It was a warning to your brothers. There are very, very few people who would come after me that way.”

She bites at her lower lip. I love it when she does that.

She looks lost in thought.

I step close to her, resting my hands on her legs, then I reach up and lift her face up towards mine with my hand below her chin.

“Raisa, let’s make a deal.”

She tilts her head, her eyes narrowing towards me. The bright blue of them seems to intensify. “What kind of a deal?” She says, skeptical, nervous to make deals with the man who kidnapped her I assume. She is smart to be cautious. I can’t fault her on that.

“The kind of deal that will keep your brothers safe.”

I brush my hand over her cheek, her skin is warm and soft. My thumb brushes across her lips and my body sparks with need.

I push it down, doing my best to deny the way she makes me feel.

Now is not the time to explore our physical attraction. She’s been through too much tonight already.

“Alright—what do you want in return?” Her eyes pierce into me.

“If you cooperate with me—and if you can convince your brothers to cooperate as well—I need them to work with me on this—then I promise to keep your family safe. No harm will come to them. They will have the full protection of the Dubrov clan.”

“Will your brothers agree to this as well?” she asks with doubt in her tone. “None of them sounded happy when they found out we were married.”

“You let me handle and worry about my brothers. All I need to know from you is that you can handle your own brothers.”

“I will do my best,” she says, nodding. “I accept your deal. As long as you keep my family safe, I will cooperate with you.”

I feel relief wash through me. Finally, I seem to be getting somewhere with her—and

with my plan to resolve the issues without violence.

It's crazy—I never imagined it would be so difficult to get people to want to avoid war. Now that she has agreed to the deal, tomorrow we can head back home and she will start properly convincing her family that this is what she wants—and that it is for the best. I will have to speak to mine.

We will need to put a protective detail on her brothers. I can't have someone taking them out after I just made a promise like that.

My brothers aren't going to be happy about it, but I think if we have a proper sit down, they might hear me out and understand my line of thinking.

After dinner, we both head upstairs to the bedroom. There is only one bed and we have to sleep next to each other. This sends a thrill racing through my body. Again, I push it aside.

Raisa keeps throwing nervous glances towards me as she gets ready for bed. In the closet, she finds an oversized t-shirt—well—it's oversized on her. When I wear it it's tight. She turns her back to me and I turn my face away when she lets the dress drop down her body onto the floor and slips the t-shirt over her head.

I clench my jaw.

Now is not the time.

Raisa walks to the side of the bed and sits down. Then she pulls the blankets up and slips beneath them. She snuggles down against the pillow with her back turned towards me and her legs curled up as she lies on her side.

I lie on my back with my one arm behind my head. Waiting for sleep to claim me, but

she is too close to me and it's distracting.

My eyes trace the delicate curve of her neck and the shape of her spine.

Raisa seems to fall asleep easily, her soft, deep breathing letting me know that she is resting. I am relieved that she is feeling safe enough to sleep.

As I am just about to fall asleep, relieved that she is ok, she rolls over and shifts up close to me in her sleep and snuggles against my chest.

I grit my teeth.

My body burning with need for her.

I close my eyes and do my best to ignore it, but it is impossible, and it's very late when I finally drift off to sleep.

But even in my dreams—all I can think about is how close she is to me.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

I sleep more peacefully than I have in a really long time.

I thought sleeping next to him would be difficult, something I struggled with, but as soon as my head hit the pillow, I was so comfortable and so peaceful that I just fell right asleep.

I dream about him all night, though.

Just the scent of him was intoxicating enough to filter into my dreams and all night I dreamed that he made love to me in the most beautiful ways.

In the morning, as the sun filters through the open curtains and into my pillow, pulling me awake with its warmth, I get a little fright—realizing that I am lying on his chest, my hand resting on him.

I don't want to move too suddenly and wake him up because I am embarrassed that I ended up in that position.

Slowly, I roll away from him, onto my side, but he mumbles something in his sleep and rolls with me, wrapping his arm around me and pulling my back up against his chest.

That's when I feel his cock.

Rock hard, pressing into me.

I swallow hard.

My body begins to tingle and heat builds between my legs. I fight the urge to arch my back and push my ass into him.

He's asleep and there is no knowing what he is dreaming about. He might be as embarrassed to wake up and be in this position as I was to wake up sleeping on him.

I close my eyes, too nervous to move, and try desperately to go back to sleep.

I can't, but luckily by the time he wakes up, his cock is calmer and I pretend to still be asleep to not make any of this awkward.

He rolls onto his back and stretches, groaning softly.

I roll onto my back and look over at him.

He grins at me, making my heart flutter wildly.

"Did you sleep well?" He asks.

I nod.

"I'll make us a coffee," he says, sitting up, throwing the blanket off himself and swinging his legs off the side of the bed. He isn't wearing a top and his muscles are flexing as he stretches his arms over his head. I struggle to tear my eyes off him.

I've never woken up in the same bed as a man before. I guess I've never spent the night in the same bed as a man before either.

I almost don't want him to stop cuddling me. But that's ridiculous. I need to pull myself together. I can't allow these kinds of thoughts.

When he is out of the bedroom and downstairs in the kitchen, I quickly get up and pull my dress on from last night. All I slept in was an oversized t-shirt from the closet. There really weren't that many other options.

Dressed, as best as I can be, I walk into the kitchen.

Oleg hands me a creamy cup of coffee. It tastes delicious.

"Thank you, this is perfect."

"I did pay attention. I know how you like your coffee now." He says with a smirk.

I look down to hide my grin.

"Are we headed back today? To your house?"

"To our house," Oleg corrects me. "Yes, we are headed home as soon as we've had our coffee."

I don't think I can think of it that way. It's not my home. Not by choice. I still believe that once this is all over, I can somehow end the marriage and carry on chasing my own dreams.

Am I being naive thinking that?

Are those dreams over now that I have married him?

My stomach knots and I take a deep breath to stop the sadness that threatens to overwhelm me. I am not ready to give up my dreams of being a doctor.

Those are my dreams. I never wanted to be a wife.

I deserve to chase my dreams.

When we arrive home, I do feel at least some sense of relief for the familiar environment. I have clothes here—and my own space.

After a shower and changing into some fresh jeans and a white jersey, I walk downstairs to find Oleg talking to a woman. She looks close to my age, very pretty with her long dark hair and she's full of smiles and laughter.

“Yes, but how can you do that behind my back?” She says with a note of tease on her voice.

“It wasn't something I discussed with anyone.”

“Well—Oleg—I definitely shouldn't be the last one to find out. I didn't even find out from you. I heard from my friend's brother just because he happened to be at that party. Oh, my word— is this her ? “

The woman sees me walking into the living room and turns to face me.

She has the most gorgeous smile.

Oleg practically rolls his eyes at her. “Raisa, this is Anya, my sister.”

Oh.

Is that really his sister?

“Are you ok?” she asks, stepping towards me. I realize I am just staring at her, not saying a word.

“Oh—yes. sorry. I was—I wasn’t expecting—“

Fumbling over my words, I feel like a complete idiot. But I really wasn’t expecting someone like her. After everything I’ve heard about the Dubrovs, I was picturing his sister to be a bratty, spoilt bitch of a woman with overdone makeup and a sour expression on her face.

“It’s really nice to meet you.” She ignores my weirdness and drags me into a hug, which I receive with awkward stiffness.

“You too,” I finally reply, pulling myself together.

“I can’t believe Oleg didn’t even tell me I had a new sister-in-law. I would have been around to say hello already.”

I chuckle. It’s not the most normal of situations. That’s for sure.

Anya declares that we have to have cocktails by the pool, sitting in the sunshine. I glance nervously at Oleg, expecting him to tell me we have to work on the agreement we made last night —that I need to start talking to my brothers right away. But he doesn’t.

“Alright, you girls go get comfortable outside and I’ll make something pink for you.” He laughs shaking his head as he walks towards the kitchen.

“Your brother knows how to make cocktails?” I ask, surprised.

Anya nods. “Oh yes, I made sure all of them learned it’s the best way to impress girls.” She gestures for me to head out onto the patio.

The sun is warm so I pull my jersey off, feeling a little exposed in my crop top, but

the sunshine feels amazing on my skin.

Anya flops down onto the poolside lounge and stretches her feet out in front of her. I do the same, still confused about why she is nothing like the rumors led me to believe she would be.

“Do you help your brothers—I mean with the business?”

“Oh gosh, no. I’m not really interested in that at all. I just recently started my own little side business. I’m really excited about it. It’s a perfume company. I get to have scents made from scratch and it’s so much fun. Next time I come visit, I’ll bring you a bunch of samples.”

“That does sound fun. You can always smell exactly how you want to smell.” I grin.

“What do you do?” she asks, rolling onto her side to look at me.

“I am studying—um—I was studying to be a doctor. I got accepted into the university here in the city and the lessons start in two months.”

“Wow. Are you kidding me? A doctor? That’s so impressive. So, you must be pretty smart then.”

“I guess. I don’t even know if I can still study with everything that’s happened. It’s a real dream of mine. One I really don’t want to lose.”

Oleg arrives with two long glasses, filled with bright pink icy liquid and strawberries. I’m really impressed.

“Gin and vodka,” he says, handing them to us.

“It’s really pretty,” I say, admiring his presentation.

“And they taste amazing,” Anya nods, releasing the straw.

“Listen, girls, I need to do some work. Are you two ok down here?” He is looking at me even though he’s talking to both of us. I nod. “I’m fine down here.”

“Me too,” Anya says. “As long as you left all the stuff out so we can make another one of these later.”

“It’s all there,” Oleg says, grinning as he walks off.

Anya turns and waits, watching until he is out of sight. Then she spins towards me. “I could not believe it when they told me he was married. I was so shocked.”

“Why?” I ask, curious as ever.

“Because Oleg is so responsible . He’s the most level-headed man I’ve ever met. He’s the dependable one of all my brothers.”

“Really?” I guess I never really saw him that way.

“Yes, for sure. He never gets into any trouble, and always takes care of the rest of us. He also hates violence—so I guess that’s one of the reasons he avoids trouble. He’s the complete opposite of my other brother, Alexei. Alex was born in trouble!—“she laughs loudly.

It’s so strange sitting here chatting to Anya. I am learning more about Oleg from her than I do from him. But it makes me think, and I realize that I never really bothered to even try and get to know Oleg.

It has been a really weird situation and I was really angry.

I still am, I mean, it's not like I chose to be here, married to him. But seeing as I am here, maybe I should at least try to find out more about him.

The way Anya speaks about him—she really loves her brother. She looks up to him and they have a good relationship.

Anya is also very similar to me. She isn't interested in the Bratva lifestyle at all. It sounds like she has been very sheltered from it by her brothers. She has an innocence about her that suggests she really doesn't know much about it at all.

I know enough to know that I don't want to know.

All afternoon, Anya and I sit together talking by the pool.

We have three pink cocktails—the second one we make ourselves and the third one Oleg comes downstairs from his office to make for us although, I think he just wanted to check up on us.

He seems nervous to leave me alone with his sister for some reason.

Maybe he's worried she will spill his secrets.

When we are alone again, I ask Anya, “why wasn't Oleg married? Aren't all of your other brothers married?”

“Yes, they are. Oleg didn't even really date. He just wasn't interested in women. I think he was too focused on the business and making sure the family was ok. I think that's the only reason he is so good at what he does, he does it for his family. I guess he never gave himself the time to meet someone or to fall in love. I thought he was

never going to get married.”

I smile, staring out across the garden.

But here he is. Married to a girl he kidnapped.

“I guess he changed his mind about marriage when it became about business, too,” I shrug, sipping my cocktail.

Anya laughs, shaking her head vigorously.

“Sure, it might have started as a marriage of convenience, but I’ve seen the way he looks at you. My brother doesn’t look at people like that. You’ve definitely caught his attention.”

Anya stays until it’s almost dinner time. Oleg invites her to join us for dinner, but she says she already had plans with a friend.

When she is gone, I am still feeling a little giggly and happy from my afternoon in the sun having girl time.

I’ve been really missing my own sister, so it was lovely that I got to spend the day with Anya.

“You got on well together,” Oleg says, his eyes narrowed towards me as though it is a question rather than a comment.

“I love her. She’s great.”

He smirks, nodding as he pulls the chair out for me at the dinner table. “Well, that’s good to know. Do you want another drink with dinner?” He is standing right behind

me as I sit down and he leans over me to ask the question. A wave of his cologne washes over me and my body tenses, eager to reach out and touch him. I really shouldn't drink anymore. I might do or say something embarrassing.

“Oh, no. I'm not much of a drinker. I'll wake up with a headache tomorrow.”

“I'll get you a glass of water then.”

He gently places his hand on my shoulder before he leaves. His fingers warm against me. His touch is welcome and when he walks away, my skin feels cold.

Oleg sits down next to me for dinner. His leg brushes against mine beneath the table and is a constant distraction.

“I think she liked you too.” He smiles as he dishes up for us.

“Are you close with your family?” I ask boldly, with the bravery of someone who had a few drinks.

“I am. We are all close, but—“

He falls silent for a moment and I find myself staring at him. Tracing my eyes over his profile. I want to trace my fingers over that sculpted jawline, down his neck and over his collarbone where his tattoo starts.

“But what?” I ask, once I get impatient.

“But I am different from them. This lifestyle—it's not what I would have chosen for myself. I love them, and I would do anything for them. But I wanted something different for my life.”

He looks lost in thought when he speaks, even a little distant, so I decide to change the subject.

“I had a fun day today.” I grin.

He narrows his eyes towards me curiously.

“Is that so?” he grins.

I love that cheeky smile of his. I bite my lip when my mind begins to race over how gorgeous his body is and how badly I want it pressed against me again.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

Raisa has been pacing around the house looking very frustrated these last few days. We are still deciding what the best way will be for her to approach the discussion with her brothers. But in the meantime, she seems to be impatient and agitated, acting like a caged animal.

It started the day after she saw Anya. But I guess, in reality, it started the day I kidnapped her and forced her to marry me.

Her and Anya got on so well and I wonder if Anya might be able to give me some insight into Raisa's thoughts and how I can make things better for her at home. I want her to be happy here.

She doesn't speak to me enough for me to know how to help her with that. Apart from the obvious—letting her go—which I can't do.

I pick my phone up off the desk and lean back in my home office chair.

Dialing Anya's number, I press the phone against my ear and wait for her to answer.

"Hey, big bother. What's going on with you?" she sings into the phone in her usually happy manner.

"He,y kiddo. I wanted to ask for some advice from you—or insight. Whatever you want to call it."

"You need advice from me? Oh, this should be good. How's Raisa by the way? She's so awesome."

“Raisa is the reason I’m calling.”

“Oh? Is everything ok?” She sounds worried.

“Yeah, everything is fine. But Raisa seems down and I was wondering if you maybe spoke to her about something when you were here—something that is bothering her—or something that she needs or wants that I can get for her to make her happier?”

I clench my jaw, feeling like this is a long shot.

“Mm. Actually. Definitely, yes.”

“Oh. Are you serious?” I say really excited to know.

“She seemed a bit upset because she got accepted into some big university here, to study medicine, and now she can’t go because of everything that happened. I think it’s a dream of hers and I’d be pretty miserable if I had my dreams taken from me.”

“She wants to study. Ok. I didn’t even think about that but I remember her telling me it’s one of the reasons she was so excited to come to the city.”

Anya and I chat a little longer, mostly about Raisa and how things are going between us—then I say goodbye and make another phone call.

I have some contacts that will be very useful right now.

My good friend runs a private university and I know they offer online courses. I want to find out if he will accept Raisa.

After giving him her details, he does a search and finds out she has an incredible

academic record and he would love to have her studying through his university. He will send me all of the study material she needs to get started this afternoon.

This is excellent news.

I decide to hold off telling Raisa until the study books arrive.

I have to admit I am really excited to see her reaction.

I hope Anya was right and that this will help Raisa.

That afternoon, a courier arrives with a box of books. I carry it inside and put it on the dining room table. Raisa and I have been having dinner together every night and I really enjoy that time. So, I have decided to give her the surprise then.

At six, the chef confirms that the food is ready and I go upstairs to call Raisa. She is curled up in the sunroom, reading a book on the sofa.

“Dinner is ready,” I say, smiling at how comfortable she looks.

“I’ll be right down. I just want to finish this page.”

By the time she walks into the dining room, I am ready and waiting.

I can’t help the stupid grin on my face. I just want to make her smile.

“What’s this?” she asks, pulling her chair out and sitting opposite me.

“This is something for you.”

“For me?” She reaches out to touch the box, curiosity traced over her face.

“You can open it now if you want to.”

She stands up and drags the box towards her side of the dinner table. “Oh, it’s really heavy.” Now she’s confused. This is actually fun.

She lifts the lid off the box and stares down into it and the neatly packed text books. Tilting her head and frowning deeply she looks up at me. “I don’t understand.”

“Read the letter.”

Opening the crisp white envelope, she unfolds the page and reads out loud.

“Dear Raisa, you have been accepted to study at our online university. You will find all the first semester study material delivered along with this letter, and should you have any questions at all—contact your assigned tutor.”

She looks up at me again with her jaw open, her perfectly shaped lips catching my gaze.

“I can study?” she asks, completely shocked. “You arranged it so that I can still attend university?”

“Yes, I wanted to make sure you could still follow your dream. This year would be online and after that we can look at how things have changed and you can continue online or attend university. For now, at least you are moving forward.”

Tears spill from her eyes, flowing freely down her face. She runs around the table and throws her arms around my neck. I sit in complete shock. I figured she would be happy about this but her reaction takes me by surprise.

“Thank you so much! Oh, my word. You have no idea what this means to me.”

I grin, wrapping my arms around her waist and pulling her close to me to return the hug. “It’s my pleasure, Raisa. And in the future, if you want something or you need something, just ask me.”

“I will,” she says happily, then lets me go and returns to her seat.

Her entire mood seems lifted as she talks excitedly about starting her studies the very next day.

And she does.

She dedicates herself to those text books during the day and in the evenings, we sit together and have dinner, chatting, getting to know each other and having a laugh.

We have somehow developed a little routine that works for both of us with the evenings at dinner at being my favorite part.

Tonight, it’s Friday, and Raisa has completed her first assignment, which got submitted this afternoon. She is excited to see how well she did, and we have opened a bottle of champagne to celebrate the start of her studies.

Raisa is on her third glass and her cheeks are glowing bright pink. She is giggling and looks relaxed.

“Anya told me that your brother Alexei is the naughtiest of the lot, and she said that you are the one who stays out of trouble.” She grins at me.

“And—do you think she’s right?”

Raisa nods with a little giggle. “I believe her. You do seem like someone people can depend on. It’s nice to feel that way about someone. My brothers are all pretty

different, too. I mean—growing up, they would get into a lot of trouble—oh—this one time, we were all allowed to go to a carnival and we were supposed to stick together. But my sister and I snuck off because the boys only wanted to play the shooting games and we wanted to win teddy bears. Ruslana and I got distracted along the way and we went into a mirror maze. Oh. My word. We got stuck in there. Everywhere you turn, you can't find your way out because everything that looks like a way out turns out to be a mirror. Ruslana started crying. Do you know what my brother Rodion did? He smashes down three walls of mirrors to get us out of there.”

Raisa is laughing at the memory. “It was such a mess but Ruslana was so relieved. They wanted to keep my brother there, but we all made a run for it and escaped the security guards. We could never go back to that carnival again even though it came through our little town every year.”

“You were very close to your family growing up?” I ask.

“Yes, we were close then and we are still close now. Even though I am not interested in the Bratva life—my family still means the world to me. I would do anything for them.”

“I’m the same. I’m also not interested in this Bratva life. I would have chosen something else for myself, but I do it because my family needs me,” I sigh.

She looks up at me, her bright blue eyes are so beautiful tonight. They seem to be glowing, perhaps it's the champagne, perhaps it's the way she is smiling.

“You don’t seem like you fit the lifestyle. I mean, you have to kind of be an asshole to be good at running a mafia family.”

“I can be when I have to be, but I will go out of my way to find a solution that doesn’t involve violence.”

She nods. “I agree. People need to learn to negotiate more before things get that far. I want to be a doctor so I can help people. It’s hard to know some of the things my brothers do because of our Bratva bloodline.”

“When did your parents pass away?” I ask, wondering if it’s too sensitive a topic.

“I was too young to know them. Rodion has always been like a father to me. He’s pretty scary when he’s angry.” She giggles and ends up snorting a little.

I start chuckling at how red her cheeks go.

Then, we both end up laughing loudly.

Raisa has another glass of champagne during dinner, and when the plates are cleared away, I can see she is a little unsteady on her feet.

I walk around the table to wrap my arm around her waist. “Come on, little flower, let me get you to bed. I don’t want you to have a hangover tomorrow and blame me.” I laugh.

She giggles and leans into me.

“I want to go dancing,” she says excitedly.

“That is not happening. I bet the moment you lie down, you’ll want to sleep.”

“Pfft.” She grins.

In the bedroom, she clumsily pulls her top off over her head and stands in her lace pink bra, looking for the oversized t-shirt she likes to sleep in.

I can't help staring at her. She is gorgeous.

My body responds to the sight of her and I try to push the thoughts away.

She turns towards me and I quickly drag my eyes up to meet hers.

She bites her lower lip, her eyes filled with mischief. I can see that she no longer cares about finding her t-shirt. She wants the same thing I do.

Raisa steps up close and presses against me, her hands brushing over my chest, onto my shoulders, and around the back of my neck. Everywhere she touches me, it sends bolts of electricity racing through me.

"Hi," she whispers, her eyes glistening.

"Hi, you," I reply, knowing that this is wrong.

I shouldn't even be thinking about doing something with her when she is in this state. It wouldn't be fair of me. That's not who I am.

But she's leaning against me, and she clearly wants this.

I close my eyes and tilt my head as I growl escapes my chest.

You need to stop this, Oleg.

She stands up on her tiptoes as my hands run over the naked skin of her back. "Raisa," I say with warning. "I don't think—," she presses her lips against mine and kisses me.

It's a fierce kiss, filled with heat and need. It sends my blood racing and fire pulsing

through me.

I wrap my hand over the back of her head and deepen the kiss. My mouth locked over hers.

Fuck.

I want her so badly.

But I can't let this happen.

This is not how it should be.

I pull away from her, still holding her steady.

“Raisa, this can't happen tonight. Not after so much champagne.”

“Why?” She pouts her bottom lip out and I shake my head, grinning at her.

“Because you need to sleep. I told you—I won't be blamed for your hangover tomorrow.” I lift her in my arms and put her on the bed. She wiggles up to the top and tugs her pants off, throwing them over the side of the bed. I hand her the t-shirt, continuously telling myself to keep my eyes to myself.

She slips the t-shirt on and I pull the blankets over her.

“Get some rest, beautiful girl. I'll bring you some water,” I whisper, staring down at her as she closes her eyes with her face snuggled into her pillow.

I brush the hair away from her face, admiring her beauty.

Then, with a tight sigh, I walk away, even though all I really want to do is slip beneath the blankets and hold her naked body against mine.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

Oleg set up a desk for me in the sunroom. I have all of my study books, my colorful pens, bright notebooks, and a brand-new laptop spread across the desk.

My internet is limited. I think he is worried I will try and contact my brothers, but I'm not even upset about that. I am just really grateful to be starting this course because it's all I wanted from the moment I arrived here in this city.

I flick through the pages of my textbook until I find the one I was busy summarizing this morning.

I've just had a half-hour break, a cup of coffee, and a sandwich, and now I am back at it.

I love this.

I feel like the pages of these text books are my stepping stones. Each one carrying me closer to where I want to be. I'm so happy to not be wasting time anymore. I'm making good use of my days now and it feels amazing.

"Do you want a coffee?" Oleg asks, standing in the doorway of the sunroom.

"I just had one, thanks so much." I say, spinning my chair to face him.

"Alright. I'll see you at dinner then." He smiles, setting my heart alight with that gorgeous face of his, then he disappears down the passage, back to his own office.

As he walks away, I hear him talking to the housekeeper.

“You look pale, Melissa, what’s wrong?”

“My grandson—he’s sick. It’s a very bad flu and my daughter is worried because of his asthma.”

“Has he been to the doctor yet?”

“The doctor just sent him home with cough syrup. I told my daughter—he’s not a good doctor. But she doesn’t have money for the—“

“I’ll book an appointment at a specialist for you. Go home to your grandson. and help your daughter look after him. The driver will come and collect you to take you to the specialist later this afternoon.”

I have snuck away from my desk to peek down the passage and watch them. I have a warm smile on my face. My heart glowing because he is such a gentle man.

“Oleg, you are always so kind, I can’t thank you enough.”

“There is no need to thank me, Melissa. I just want your family to be healthy. I know how important family is. Also, you should have come to talk to me already about this. I’m always here to help when you need it, ok? No matter what it is, just talk to me.”

Melissa’s voice sounds tight with tears when she says thank you again, then she wraps her arms around his waist and hugs him while he stands awkwardly, patting her gently on the back.

I grin, then sneak back to my desk. He has the biggest heart.

I’ve been paying attention to him over the past week or so, watching how he handles things, and how he speaks to the staff.

I especially admire how he treats his employees.

The more I watch him, the more I notice how gentle he is.

It's strange because he comes across as this dominant man who always gets his way—and somehow, he is that—but people don't do things for him out of fear. They do things for him because they admire him.

They admire him because of how he treats them.

Despite my best efforts not to, and my best efforts to stay guarded against him, I am starting to admire him too.

I turn my attention back to my textbooks. I can't be so easily distracted if I want to reach my goals.

After a few more hours of study, I stand up to stretch. Lifting my arms above my head I yawn and lean back, flexing my shoulders. I didn't realize how long I had been focused for. But that was a good session.

It's still a while before dinner time, but I want to go and see what Oleg is up to.

I leave my books open, placing my pen in the curve of the page.

Wandering down the passage, I listen to see if I can hear anything.

His voice travels down the passage from his office.

He is laughing.

I quietly step close to the wall and inch closer, wanting to know what he's talking

about—and who he is talking to.

Lucky for me, his phone is on speaker.

But my heart tightens in my chest when I hear a female voice coming through the line on the other side.

“Oleg, you always make me laugh. That’s why I love doing business with you. Now tell me, when are you going to ask me out to dinner?”

“Tanya, we had our business dinner last month. Was there another meeting you wanted to schedule?” he asks, and I shake my head, even I know that wasn’t what she meant.

“No, silly. I meant we should see each other outside of business. Perhaps something more personal. I would love to find out who you are beneath all of those tailored business suits.”

Oleg clears his throat.

She is being so freaking blatant about her flirting that you can’t possibly tell me he didn’t understand this time.

But will he flirt back? Why is she flirting with him if he’s married? Did he not tell her he was married? Is he keeping it a secret from certain people because he wants to explore other options—like with her?

My heart starts beating too fast and I feel myself getting more and more upset.

“Tanya, you know my rules. I don’t mix business and pleasure. Besides, I doubt my wife would be too happy with me,” he laughs, but it’s a polite laugh—not his genuine

laugh. I know the difference. It eases my mind a little, but I'm still really annoyed that she tried to flirt with him.

Why would I be so jealous? It's ridiculous. It's not like I have some claim over him. Technically—sure—we are married. But it's not like I want some claim over him.

But then why am I so freaking jealous?

Outside his office door I stand hesitating. I want to march in there and tell him he's not allowed to do business with that woman anymore.

Then I also want to laugh at myself for this silly reaction I'm having.

I sigh, too loudly, then freeze—listening for any indication that he heard me.

When I think I'm safe, I turn away from his door to leave.

“Raisa.” His voice makes me jump.

I spin around to face him, my cheeks already turning red and making it horribly obvious I was up to something.

“Were you eavesdropping?” He sounds slightly amused.

“Why would I do that?” I stammer.

“I don't know why you would do that?” he chuckles. “Is something wrong? You look upset.”

“Why would I be upset? Why are you asking me that?” I feel like he can see straight through me.

“If you want to ask me something, go ahead and ask me.”

He folds his arms across his broad chest and my eyes graze over his thick, muscular forearms.

“Um—“

“Don’t be shy Raisa.” Why is he grinning like that? Ugh. It’s so annoying.

“Who is Tanya? Did you go out with her? Were you guys dating? Is something happening between you two?”

The words explode out of my mouth before I really have time to think them, though, and the minute I’m done talking, I’m dying from embarrassment.

Oleg takes a step towards me. I don’t move. I feel the need to hold my ground at this point.

“You are worried about Tanya?” he asks, his chest pressed up against me.

“No—um—“

“Are you jealous, little flower?” He chuckles and the mischievous grin that spreads across his face creates perfect dimples in his cheeks.

“Why would I be? “ I mutter, trying to look away from him, but he wraps his long fingers over my jaw and lifts my face up towards his.

“It sounds very much like my wife is jealous of another woman.”

I pull my mouth tight; my lips are sealed. The more I say the more stupid I feel, so

it's best if I just don't say anything now.

Oleg maneuvers me so that my back is against the wall and he has me trapped there. His hand runs up my thigh, pushing my dress higher.

My heart begins to pound heavily in my chest, beating fast.

My lips part as I take a sharp breath when he leans closer.

His mouth is only inches from mine and when he speaks, I can feel the warmth of his breath.

"I think I like it when you get jealous," he whispers darkly.

His lips are so close to mine—I just—I want—

I stand on my tiptoes and kiss him. I can't wait. I need to feel his mouth over mine.

He runs his hands over my lower back and pulls my hips up against his hard cock. I gasp against his mouth and feel the low rumble of a growl that runs through his chest.

"What are you doing to me, little flower?" he whispers.

I press my hips forward, rocking against him.

I want him so badly. I don't want to wait anymore.

He's teased me too many times and I'm ready.

Oleg lifts me, up against the wall, I squeal in fright because he lifts me all the way up—wrapping my legs over his shoulders.

His hand against my chest to hold me in place.

With his other hand, he pulls my underwear aside.

His hot tongue runs over my pussy and I moan loudly, knotting my fingers in his hair.

With his thumb hooked in my panties, he pushes my thighs wider apart.

His tongue pushes into me and I shudder with pleasure.

He begins to move his tongue in and out of my pussy, fucking me with his mouth, my back pressed against the wall and my head feeling dizzy.

I am terrified one of the house staff will walk past and see us—but I'm also lost in the pleasure of how this feels so I find it hard to care.

He rubs his thumb over my clit, moving in slow circles as he licks inside me.

The low moan he makes vibrates against my pussy and heightens the pleasure.

Soon I can feel myself losing control.

My legs are shaking over his shoulders, he is moving his tongue faster as he takes control of me.

I know my nails are digging into his shoulders, I'm trying not to make too much noise, but I'm struggling as I cry out with pleasure.

Then an orgasm slams into me, wave after wave it pulses through me. I feel like I am about to fall off the edge of the world, but his hands are holding me tightly.

I am still gasping from the pleasure of it when Oleg lowers me to the ground.

My legs are shaking, and even though I've just had the most intense orgasm—I want more. I want him.

I want to feel his cock inside me.

I grab his belt and look up at him. His pupils are dilated as he stares down at me.

“I want to feel you inside me,” I whisper nervously excited and filled with anticipation.

I see how his jaw clenches. He closes his eyes for a second. Fighting against something.

“No, Raisa,” he says calmly, taking my wrist in his hand and pinning it behind my back.

He places his finger beneath my chin and leans down to kiss me. A very gentle kiss. I taste myself on his lips.

It turns me on even more and the desperation inside me grows.

“Why not?” I stammer, not understanding why he wouldn't want this as well.

He shakes his head.

“Not now, Raisa.” His voice is tight when he turns away from me and walks back into his office.

My heart sinks.

Why doesn't he want me?

Every cell in my body is screaming to feel him. I have never felt such an intense need before. I want him so badly.

I bite at my lower lip, the frustration growing deeper, wilder, angrier.

Then I spin around and march back to the sunroom.

I need something to take my mind off him. Studying is probably my best option.

But sitting at my desk, I just strum my pen against the open pages of my text book. I'm upset. Or annoyed. I can't really tell.

I can't stop thinking about him.

Why didn't he want to?

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The last few days Raisa has been very frustrated.

She is moody, short tempered and looking agitated with everything, including me.

I know it's because of her studies. She has been working so hard. Sitting for hours with her mind focused on the same thing—she must be exhausted.

Tonight, I want to do something nice for her so that she can get out of the house for a bit. She really needs a break, otherwise she will burn out.

I need to help her get rid of some of that building frustration so I'll plan something fun.

But before that happens, I have a very important meeting set up for this afternoon.

I am sitting down with her oldest brother, the leader of the family, Rodion Kuznetsov.

I need to be fully focused during that meeting, so my plans with Raisa need to wait. From what I have heard—her brother is not an easy man to deal with. I don't know how I am going to get him to come to some kind of agreement with me to stop messing with my clients and my business.

I don't know what to offer him until I've had a chance to talk to him a bit. I am hoping that I'll be able to read him. I'm usually pretty good at getting a decent read on people when I see them face to face.

Close to lunchtime, I pop my head into the sunroom. Raisa's little study space is near

the big window where she can enjoy some sun and a nice view while she focuses.
“I’m heading out for a bit.”

She turns to face me, her eyes are brighter blue than usual today. Absolutely gorgeous.

“Where are you going?” she asks.

I clench my jaw. I don’t want to lie to her, but I wasn’t planning on telling her I had a meeting with her brother until after I knew the outcome of that meeting.

I sigh.

There is no real reason to keep it from her, though. She knows I want to negotiate peace with them.

“I’m meeting your oldest brother to try and come to some kind of agreement.”

“You’re meeting Rodion?” she asks, sounding shocked.

“Yes.” I wait for her to respond in some way. Maybe she is going to be angry, or upset that I didn’t tell her earlier.

She chuckles. “Good luck,” she says with a grin. “He’s as stubborn as they come.”

I smile. I’m happy she’s ok with it. “Thanks. I think I’ll need that luck then. I won’t be back late—and then I have something planned for us for this evening. I thought it would be nice for you to get out of the house a bit after all of your studies?”

“Definitely. I am feeling frustrated.” She rolls her eyes then turns back to her books. I guess that’s my cue to leave her in peace.

I walk out to my car, thinking about her brother and what kind of man he is.

I think his main motivation is keeping his family safe and I'm walking into this meeting at a slight disadvantage because I've pissed him off by marrying his sister. However, he is under the impression that she chose to be with me, so that's at least a good thing.

Driving into the city, I run through options and scenarios in my head. I hate being unprepared. I hate not knowing how things will turn out—but it is all part of the lifestyle I am living.

Parking outside the coffee shop where he chose to meet, on neutral territory where neither of us would feel uncomfortable, I switch my car off and take a deep breath.

Well, it's time, I think to myself, climbing out of the car and crossing the quiet street to walk into the coffee shop.

The rich aroma of freshly roasted beans is in the air. It's a warm scent, a welcoming one.

I walk over to where Rodion is sitting. He stands up as I approach and I hold my hand out to shake his. He glares at my hand for a moment. Not accepting it.

“Shall we get straight to it?” he says gruffly.

“Sure,” I reply, pulling my hand back and taking a seat.

I stare at Rodion, trying to read his expression.

His body language is cold and tense. His shoulders are pushed back, his jaw is tight. His eyes are narrowed and focused intently onto me.

“What do you want, Dubrov?” he practically snarls at me.

I sigh. This is not going to be an easy meeting. I can already tell he’s got his mind set on not coming to an agreement.

“I want to resolve whatever issues we have between our families and I want to come to some kind of peaceful agreement. If we can’t come to an agreement, well then, I hope to at least have a better understanding of what you want.”

“I want you to go back in time and not marry my sister,” he snaps bitterly.

“Your sister is quite happy where she is, with me, and I want to discuss business matters instead of that.”

He huffs loudly.

We start a tense back and forth which seems to be getting us absolutely nowhere. He is determined not to work with me in resolving this and I can feel my patience begin to wear down.

“Rodion, we need to figure this out. If we can’t, you know how this ends. Neither of us wants to go to war over this shit.”

He snorts angrily.

“My only goal is to keep my family safe and build a business that allows me the chance to take care of them the way they deserve to be taken care of. I will do whatever it takes to achieve that.”

“We both have a great deal of responsibility to keep our families safe, Rodion,” I sigh heavily. “Look—how about this—we are in the same line of business, but I know the

main product you deal with is a secondary product for us. Additionally, our main product is a secondary product for you. Right?”

“Correct,” he says coldly.

“So, if we agree to no longer trade in your primary product, and you agree to no longer trade in our main product, that leaves the entire market for that specific clientele open to you. We no longer have to fight over clients or cause issues between ourselves. If I do have a client looking for the product you sell, I will simply refer them to you and vice versa.”

He leans back in the chair and folds his thick arms across his chest. He looks like a hunter, watching his prey. His eyes are locked onto me as his mind races with the offer I have made.

“How do I know you will honor this deal and not sell the product behind our backs?”

“That would defeat the entire point of this meeting. Besides, I am going to have to trust you as much as you are going to have to trust me.”

He nods slowly.

“Fine. I accept the deal.”

“Great—“ Rodion is already standing while I’m talking. He glares at me one last time, tosses some money onto the table to cover the bill, then walks out of the coffee shop without even one more word.

I stare at the notes he’s left on the table and shake my head.

Fuck. He’s an asshole.

His entire demeanor is making me doubt whether he will actually stick to the deal we've made.

I feel like I've made two steps forward and one step back. Like I've almost resolved this.

I don't want to take any chances.

Pulling out my phone, I dial Marcus.

"Oleg, how did the meeting go?"

"I want a tail on him. He's come to an agreement with me, but I've got a bad feeling about him. There is just something about him that I don't trust."

"Alright, you want him followed then. I'll get one of the more experienced guys to do it. We don't want to mess up on this one and make matters worse."

"Yes, good thinking."

With that out of the way, I push my own chair back and take a deep slow breath. I've done what I can for now, but I am not going to assume it's over.

I'll keep my eye on it and take it one day at a time.

Raisa will still need to work on making her brothers believe that she wants to be with me—and I still need to figure out which of their enemies it is that is so hell bent on taking them out.

For now, though, I can focus on my plans for tonight.

Trying to decide what Raisa would enjoy most, I call a very popular restaurant in the city. It's a sought-after venue and one that it is not easy to get a table at but of course, I know the owners, and they are happy to help.

It's a really over the top place and people there all seem pretty fake to me—but I think Raisa will enjoy dressing up in something pretty and the food is incredible.

Back at home, we still have a few hours before the evening plans.

I find Raisa sitting downstairs in the living room, flicking through some series on the television.

"You can't find something to watch?" I ask, sitting down on the sofa with her.

"I'm just trying to find something to relax my brain, but these shows are all so boring. I'm not much of a movie watcher, but I thought I'd try. How was the meeting with Rodion?" She tosses the remote onto the sofa next to her, giving up on the shows.

"It went well—I think. We have sort of come to an agreement."

"Sort of?"

"I think he's still very nervous about trusting me, and I won't lie, I'm not fully on board with trusting him either. But I feel like we did make some headway and I hope for improvement in the future."

"That's good. It does take Rodion, all my brothers actually, a long time to trust people. We've all been through a lot."

"I wanted to ask, would you like to have a phone call with your siblings this afternoon before we go out?"

Her face lights up. “Really? I’d love to.”

“I had them install a program on your laptop that will allow for a group call. But Raisa, please understand that the calls are being monitored by my security team. I can’t take any chances with negotiations only just opening up now. I really want to find a way for our families to work together and if you—“

“I understand, Oleg,” she interrupts me. “I get why you want to monitor the call.”

I feel bad, blatantly telling her that I can’t fully trust her, but the risk is too great.

“Well, then you can call them whenever you are ready. As for this evening’s fun, be ready at five. There is a dress on your bed.”

“You bought me a dress for tonight?”

I nod, smiling. She looks excited maybe it’s the phone call, maybe it’s for this evening’s plans.

Either way, I am happy to see her smiling.

Raisa is on the phone call with her brothers—four of them were able to join the call—the others were busy—she is chatting away happily. She asks them how they’ve been and if they are all safe. I know she has been worried about them, especially after someone took a shot at us not too long ago. But I promised to keep them safe and I have kept that promise.

Raisa chats for half an hour, all the while she comes across as someone who is relaxed, settled and enjoying her life. Not once does she give the impression that I kidnapped her and forced her to marry me.

I don't know if she is damned good at acting or if she is starting to enjoy being in my home.

I know I've been enjoying having her around.

At five, Raisa walks into the living room, looking like a goddess.

The red dress I chose for her fits perfectly, and compliments every inch of her body.

I feel my blood rushing quicker as I stare at her.

Shit.

Maybe I should have chosen something less sexy. I am going to struggle to pay attention tonight because she is so distracting.

"Oleg, this dress is gorgeous, but isn't it a little over the top for a restaurant?"

She brushes her hand over the soft fabric clinging to her body.

"No, it's perfect for the place we are going to."

I usher her out to my car, opening the door for her. She climbs inside, her eyes on me as I walk around to the driver's side.

She doesn't know yet, but the place I have booked is not actually in this city.

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Oleg drives us out of the city and my confusion really kicks in when we arrive at the airport. He parks the car on the runway right next to a plane, then climbs out and opens my door for me. He tosses the keys to a man who comes to greet us.

“Park it in the hanger. Thanks, man,” Oleg says.

“What’s happening?” I ask.

“We are taking a short flight,” He grins, leading me towards the jet.

“You rented a jet for us?”

“No, little flower, this is my jet.”

I hold back from letting my jaw hit the floor.

We walk onto the plane and the hostess hands us each a glass of champagne. “Mr. and Mrs. Dubrov. Welcome,” she says, ushering us toward the back where there are very comfortable looking sofa style chairs, all cream leather and looking over the top extravagant.

I sit down next to Oleg, glancing out of the window.

“You didn’t have to go to this extreme, Oleg. Could we have gone to dinner somewhere in this city?”

“No, I thought you needed something special to relax a little. Let your hair down and

enjoy the night, Raisa.”

My stomach flips as the plane takes off, I grip the edge of the seat tightly. I have never been that fond of flying. Not that I’ve flown much in my life. The longest flight I ever took was the one to come to this city.

Oleg reaches out and takes my hand during takeoff. It’s so strange how such a simple gesture can distract me from my anxiety.

“You don’t like flying?” he asks.

“I’m not really used to it. It is kind of crazy to be sitting in a metal tube hurtling through the air as though you weigh nothing.”

He laughs. “I guess you could look at it that way. I’ve flown so many times I don’t even notice how it makes me feel anymore.”

“You don’t even get excited?”

“All of my flights are for business. This is probably the first time I’ve used this plane for something personal.”

“Well, we had better make tonight extra fun then.” I grin, enjoying the chat and no longer worrying about the flight.

We climb into the car waiting for us, Oleg driving. That is when I find out he has a hanger here as well and keeps one of his cars here.

I can’t even comprehend how much money his family has. They must be doing so well at business. My brothers would be smart to make allies of them.

We drive through the city and I watch out the window, enjoying the new scenery, taking in the late afternoon as people walk along the pavements, talking, enjoying the last bit of sun before it sets.

Oleg stops outside a tall building right in front of a wide marble staircase.

A doorman opens my door for me and holds his hand out for me to take.

I climb out of the car and squint towards the overly lavish-looking venue.

People are arriving around us, all over-dressed in the same manner I am.

The women are giggling and gushing as their dates lead them through the ornate glass doors.

I glance towards Oleg. He looks stiff, but he holds his hand out to me and wraps his fingers through mine as we walk inside.

“Mr. Dubrov, your table is ready for you sir.” The hostess greets him straight away and he nods in polite response.

She leads us to a table near the window overlooking the waterfront and some very expensive-looking yachts.

Oleg still looks stiff. Sitting up too straight with his mouth tight as he looks around the room.

“Are you looking for someone in particular?” I tease him.

“No, I just know too many people here. It’s hard to go out in any city and not feel watched and judged because of who I am.”

“Is that why you look so uncomfortable?” I scrunch my nose. What is the point of going somewhere when you can’t relax and enjoy the evening? “Why did you pick this place?”

“Because, I thought you would enjoy the experience and the food is great. All of the mafia families come here.”

I shake my head. Mafia families. Did he not hear me when I said I was into the Bratva lifestyle? Also, I could swear I remember him saying the same thing.

“Oleg, you look like someone stuck an iron rod into your spine. You are so stiff. This place is beautiful, but it’s really over the top. Like it’s just about people showing off how much money they have or their status.”

“Well—I guess that is exactly what it’s about—I thought—“

“No.” I stand up and hold my hand out to him. “I want you to show me who you really are, not who everyone else thinks you are . You would never come here by choice. I can see it all over your face.”

He stands up as well but looks hesitant. “You don’t want to eat here?”

“I want to eat somewhere where you can relax. Where is your favorite place in this city? If you wanted to take yourself out somewhere—to clear your mind—where would you go?”

“Are you sure?” he asks, tilting his head to the side and eyeing me seriously.

“I’m one hundred percent sure. I already know you aren’t a big fan of this lifestyle and I want to get to know the real you.”

Oleg chuckles at me, shaking his head. “Alright. Follow me then.”

He leads me through the restaurant, crowded and noisy, with a jazz band playing on the stage near the edge of the room. We walk around the dance floor, towards the big doors to leave.

We head back out to the car and climb inside. The hostess comes running after us, looking very worried. “Sir, was something not to your liking, I can have your table changed, we can—“

Oleg shakes his head and holds up his hand. “No, Sarah, thank you. Everything is perfectly fine. We just had a change of heart and decided we would prefer to do something else tonight.”

“Oh, um—“ she looks shocked. As though no one has ever walked away from a booking at this place. I wonder what it even took to get a table here. It’s so popular I bet it’s booked months in advance.

The engine revs to life and Oleg pulls away from the over-the-top restaurant and the crowds of mafia-connected families.

I am so curious about where he is going to take me, but I don’t ask—I want it to be a surprise. It’s more fun that way. All I know is that I would rather see his favorite place than some fancy overpriced restaurant full of snobs.

“When last were you in this city?” I ask instead.

“About two months ago. We host some of the bigger meetings here. When all the families need to connect and discuss important business. It’s always a bit chaotic. There is somewhere I go to get a break from the meetings.”

“That’s where you are taking me now?”

“Exactly.”

He reaches out and brushes his hand over my thigh. My heart stutters, my breathing gets a little faster. Then he pulls his hand back, leaving me wanting more.

We don’t drive far before Oleg pulls the car over in a parking space near the beach.

“Is your favorite restaurant here somewhere?” I ask, no longer able to contain my curiosity.

“Not quite,” he grins, enjoying the mystery he is creating.

When we are out of the car, he holds out his hand and I place my hand in his, smiling as I thread my fingers between his.

We walk along the promenade in the cool evening breeze until we reach a food truck. An old man leans out of the window. “Oleg, it’s been a while my friend.” He grins down at Oleg, his wild grey hair thinning and his smile creating deep cracks on his face.

“It has, I’ve brought my wife along—she wanted to know my favorite place in this city—so here we are.”

“Wow, your wife? That is a surprise. It’s lovely to meet you.” He smiles at me and nods his head then turns his attention back to Oleg. “So, two of the usual?” He chuckles.

“Two of the usual.”

The old man disappears from the window and Oleg pulls me against his side as he looks towards the ocean. The sounds of the waves are already relaxing me.

I look at him and ask, “what did you order?”

“You’ll find out soon enough.” His entire posture has changed, being here instead of that restaurant. There is a smile on his face, a light shining in his eyes. He has taken off his jacket and slung it over his shoulder, the sleeves of his shirt are rolled halfway up his forearm.

He looks really good like this.

It’s not long to wait before the food truck owner hands Oleg two take away boxes. “Did you put extra salt and vinegar on?” Oleg asks. “Of course,” the gray-haired man replies as though the answer should be obvious and he’s even offended Oleg asked in the first place.

After saying thanks and good-bye, Oleg leads me down to the beach where the rock pools start. The wind is a little stronger here, but the air is still warm. He drapes his jacket over my shoulders. Then, he takes a seat on a large smooth rock at the edge of the smooth white sand. He taps the rock next to himself to invite me to sit as well.

When we are comfortable, he hands me one of the take away boxes. I lift the lid and laugh.

“Fish and chips,” I say with a wide grin.

“The chips are nice and soft too, with extra salt and vinegar all over them. The best way.”

I pick up a chip and pop it into my mouth. I can’t even remember when last I had fish

and chips and damn, these are so good.

Looking out over the crashing ocean waves, the sun is busy setting over the ocean, creating orange and silver streaks across the water. I can see exactly why Oleg likes this place the most.

I look over at him.

He looks genuinely happy.

“This place is amazing, Oleg. Thank you for bringing me here.”

“I guess I should have just brought you here in the first place. I just thought you would want to see the fancier side of the city. Feel spoiled.”

“Being spoiled isn’t about being fancy, you know. It’s not about going to the most expensive place or even buying the most expensive gifts. It’s about doing something thoughtful for someone, even if it costs nothing at all. It’s about the thought that goes into it.”

Oleg stares at me for a long time, his dark brown eyes locked into mine.

I can’t look away, even when a soft smile traces his lips. I can’t drag my eyes off him.

“I think I haven’t heard more truthful words in a really long time, little flower.” He reaches out and tucks a stray curl behind my hair and I lean my cheek into the palm of his hand.

He stays like that for a moment, holding my face in his hand. His touch is warm and my heart feels happy to share this moment with him.

I kick off my shoes and wiggle my toes in the sand. Even though the stars are beginning to shine above us, the sand is still warm from soaking up the sunshine all day.

Oleg takes off his shoes as well and we eat our fish and chips with our hands, completely at ease while we chat about our lives.

There is no doubt that this experience is ten times better than the night we would have had if we'd stayed in that posh restaurant.

Seeing Oleg smile like this is priceless.

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The sun has set completely by the time we finish eating. Raisa licks the salt and vinegar off her fingers and I watch the way her lips wrap around her finger—wondering what her lips would feel like wrapped over my cock.

I clear my throat and look away.

“Did you enjoy that?” I ask, trying to think about something else.

“It was the best meal I’ve had in ages. I think the view has a lot to do with it—and um—the company isn’t so bad either.” She giggles and throws me a naughty look.

“Mm. The company isn’t too bad,” I agree, smiling at her.

Raisa closes the lid of her empty box after throwing the last few chips from her takeaway towards the late-night seagulls waiting for some scraps.

Unfortunately, she didn’t factor in that twenty other sea gulls were also waiting just out of view and as soon as the chips hit the rocks they flock down like a storm of birds.

She screams, laughing loudly, and covers her head.

I pull her close to me and wrap my arm around her as the birds fight and squabble over the chips.

She is giggling, ducked against my chest. Her laughter is a beautiful sound and I can’t help the massive smile it puts on my face.

The seagulls calm down a little, but now they are all standing on the sand around us, staring us down in hopes of something else.

“I thought there was just one or two,” Raisa says, peaking out at them.

“With seagulls—there’s never one or two.”

“They’ve got us surrounded!” she pretends to be horrified.

I chuckle. “Alright, I am going to throw the last of my chips and then while they are distracted, we can make a run towards the promenade.”

Raisa grins at me. “If I’m not fast enough—go on without me. Save yourself.”

I pack up, laughing. I love her sense of humor.

We gather our shoes and I count to three, then throw the last of my chips onto the rocks. We both bolt towards the promenade and arrive there laughing and leaning on each other as we glance back at the mayhem of birds fighting for those chips.

We watch them for a while, then I pull her face up towards mine with my hand around her jaw. For a moment, I am lost in her eyes.

Then she smiles and I shake my head, pulling myself back into reality.

“Do you want a coffee?” I ask, sliding my arm around her waist. I’m not ready to end the night yet.

“I’d love one.”

I take her hand and lead her towards the row of food trucks, selecting the one I know

makes a great cappuccino. We carry the hot takeaway coffees and find a bench where we can watch the night sky and the people walking around.

Raisa leans into me, resting her head on my shoulder.

It feels comfortable. It's easy with her. There is no pressure and no need to be anything other than who I am.

This evening has really shown me a lot about who she is and how she brings out a part of me that most people never get to see.

“Why did you guys come here? What made your family choose to move?”

“One of my brothers, Leon, he lost his mind a little after my parents were killed. He was obsessed with getting revenge on the man who did it. He spent years just focused on that and nothing else. It forced him to build up the business so that he could afford to carry out his plans. It's crazy, but that is what motivated him to become really wealthy and really powerful.”

“What happened? Things like that can consume a person.”

“Yeah, it changed him. It wasn't good. But because the businesses were doing so well, he asked my brothers to move down here and help with it all. We came thinking he was still going to be that angry man hell-bent on revenge. But things changed for him here. He got married. He has kids. He's a completely different person now.”

“So, things turned out alright.” She smiles warmly. “And your family got a chance to move and have a better life.”

“Yeah, exactly that. I like living here. I just wish I didn't have to deal with Mafia politics.” I chuckle.

“Well, be grateful that your brother did what he did. It obviously wasn’t nice for him to suffer through that, but it created amazing opportunities for your family.”

“Yes, we are grateful to him and I have a lot of respect for him. I know what he is capable of—honestly, he still scares me sometimes.” I laugh, but remembering how cold and cruel Leon was at one stage—it’s the truth. I know how he can turn. My brothers and I lost him for a long time.

“I’m really happy that everything worked out,” she says softly, resting her cheek against my shoulder again.

“Everything will work out for you too Raisa. Anything you set your mind to—you will achieve it. I can see you are that kind of person someone willing to work for what they want and sacrifice and dedicate themselves to things that aren’t always easy.” I stare down at her.

She has impressed me so many times since I met her.

I didn’t expect my forced marriage to end up like this. Where I have someone I can actually talk to and share parts of my life with.

Someone I can be myself around.

She keeps surprising me, and I’m rather enjoying it.

Raisa shivers slightly and I wrap my jacket tighter around her shoulders.

Our coffee is finished and we had a wonderful dinner on the beach. I think it is time to maybe think about heading back home.

“Are you ready to go home?” I lean close to her and kiss the top of her head.

“I’m ready. This was the most magical evening. Thank you so much for showing me this place.”

“We can come here again. It can be our spot from now on.” I smile, feeling my heart flipping nervously. I want to have hope that her and I are growing closer and building something, but I live in the real world.

I have to be careful about what I let my heart fall for.

Raisa stands up, a soft and beautiful smile on her face. In the moonlight she looks ethereal. Her skin is glowing and her eyes are shards of light, glittering like the stars.

She takes a step towards me, looking up at me with that captivating stare.

“Oleg,” she says my name softly, as though it was just a breath of air on the warm breeze.

I look down at her, waiting for her to say something else, but she doesn’t. Instead, she stands up on her tiptoes and kisses me.

Our lips press together and I slide my arm around her waist, feeling the curve of her lower back. My heart begins to race and my body feels more alive than ever.

We kiss for a long time, not caring about anything else, just feeling connected and safe with each other.

When she steps away from me, she is smiling.

“Thank you. Tonight was beautiful,” she says.

I take her hand as we walk back to where we parked. I like being close to her. I like

holding her. I want to do so many more things with her.

Every time I kiss her, it gets harder to stop myself.

She is perfect.

The way she moves, the way she speaks, her smile, the curve of her body against mine. Everything about her is perfect.

In the car, we drive through the city towards the airport. Street lamps flash past my window, the bright lights from shops and restaurants spill onto the sidewalks and people roam around the city enjoying the night.

I reach out and place my hand on her thigh, leaving it there, letting the warmth of her skin soak into me. In the darkness, I see the silhouette of her face, and the way her smile widens at my touch.

We arrive at the airport and get back onto my private jet. Raisa sits closer to me than on the way here. She presses her body up against mine.

She is nervous during the take off, but not as badly as before. I talk to her all the way through to distract her.

Once we are in the air, she turns her body to face mine.

She looks me straight in the eyes, her stare is intense when she asks. “Oleg, why won’t you sleep with me?” Her bluntness takes me by surprise. “Every time I think you are going to—you stop—why?”

I take a slow breath. “Raisa, that’s something really special. You’ve never done that before and I don’t want to force you into anything you aren’t ready for. When you

choose to do that, I want it to be entirely your choice, and not something you will regret afterwards.”

She smiles, then climbs onto my lap, causing my body to stir like flames sparking to life. If she behaves in this way, I won’t be able to stop myself from taking her. I wrap my hands around her waist to lift her off me, but she stops me, brushing her hand over mine.

“I am ready.” She says, looking into my eyes.

“Raisa—,” I stammer, clenching my jaw.

“I am ready. I want this. I’m telling you I’m ready,” she whispers, leaning close with her lips hovering inches from mine.

She leans down and kisses me, her hands wrapping around the back of my neck as she pulls herself against me. Her innocence is so beautiful to me. A rare treasure that has belonged to no one before me and now she is telling me it’s mine to take.

Her boldness surprises me, the way she sits with her legs spread over my lap. She pulls herself even closer until her breasts are against my chest.

Her hips rocking over my cock.

I growl as my cock hardens, throbbing against her.

“Are you sure?” I ask, struggling to control myself.

“I’m sure,” she replies quickly, without hesitation or doubt.

Holding her face in my hands, I stare right into her eyes because she can’t hide the

truth from me. Her words might say she's ready, but her eyes will tell me what I really want to know.

All I see is desire. Beautiful, deep blue pools glittering like diamonds. She is confident and sure of herself in this moment. She's ready.

My heart constricts tightly. Flooded with passion, eager to have her, but I force myself to move slowly, controlled and gentle. It is her first time and I don't want to hurt her.

I push my hands slowly up her thighs and my lips against hers. Her mouth tastes like honey. Sweet and golden. Her lips are soft and warm on mine and the sensation of her kiss sends bolts of lightning through my body.

She moans into my mouth, a sound so beautiful it makes my cock pulse.

I force her dress up over her hips, my fingers digging into her hip bones as I grip her tightly and rub her over my cock. I want to savor this moment. The moment she gives herself to me. The first man to taste her sweetness and possess her fully.

But Raisa has other ideas. She's been waiting too long and she's fiercely trying to take control.

She grabs the edges of her dress and pulls it up over her head. Her breasts look divine, creamy and smooth. They are so full and soft that when I caress my hands over them there is too much to hold. She is perfect.

And she is mine.

I take one of her nipples into my mouth and twist my tongue over it, teasing her, feeling it harden against my lips. She giggles nervously and when I look up at her she

is biting her lip with a devilish glint in her eyes.

I watch her expression change as I cup her breast in my hands again.

Rubbing her pert nipple between my fingertips, she shudders with delight and digs her nails into my shoulder.

Leaning close to her, I trace kisses over the curve of her neck, down to her perfectly sculpted collarbone, licking my tongue over her pale skin. As smooth as silk and as white as cream.

Her hands drift down over my chest. Her fingers trace the dips and curves of my muscles.

She unbuttons my shirt and pulls it open, running her hands over my naked skin, tracing her fingers over my tattoo. An intimate gesture that turns me on even more.

Her hands drift down my stomach, to my belt, causing my heart to beat faster with anticipation.

Leaning back, she tugs the belt buckle open, sliding it from the loops and flicking it away.

Her delicate fingers pull at the button of my pants and I growl.

I've let her take the lead for too long. She is mine to take. Mine to control.

Now that I know she wants this as much as I do, I feel no restraint.

I stand, lifting her into my arms and place her gently onto the sofa. Looking down at her, I shrug my shirt off and toss it aside, then pull my pants open and let them drop

to the floor. I kick them aside, standing naked in front of her.

She lies on her back, spreading her legs open wide for me.

I am going crazy at the sight of her. Her perfect shape. The flower of her pussy, as pink as the most beautiful rose I have ever seen.

My cock throbs and aches to feel her as I lower myself over her. I want to be inside her, claiming her in the most intimate ways.

Her eyes are hungrily devouring me, traveling up and down my body as though I am everything she desires.

Unable to wait another second I drop down onto the sofa.

Lowering myself over her, my hand pressed into the sofa above her head, her legs spread wide with my hips pressing against them.

I look into her eyes, trying to read her, as I take my cock in my hand and press it against her pussy.

Her pupils dilate and she parts her lips, letting out a soft sigh.

I slide it back and forth over her and she moans a seductive sound that shudders down my spine.

I want to tell her it's ok if she's changed her mind or if she's feeling nervous but I don't trust myself to be able to stop if she wants me to. My cock is so hard it feels like a rock in my hand. I am so desperate to be inside her—I've waited so long for this that I am almost in pain with the need I have for her.

She stares up at me with those gorgeous ocean-blue eyes. Pulling me in. teasing me.

Her lips curl into a nervous smile before she nods, biting her lower lip, telling me she's ready.

With a rush of excitement, I push my cock into her, slowly, moving inch by inch and letting her adjust and be comfortable before I push further in.

When I am about halfway inside her, she gasps and I pause, worried that I've hurt her.

"Are you ok?"

"Yes," she moans, tilting her hips up towards me. "Don't stop."

I push my cock all the way inside her pussy. My cock is buried right to the base. Our bodies locked together as close as we can possible be. Her fingers are digging into me. Her hands tight around my waist.

She is completely mine now that I'm inside her, feeling how her pussy twitches and pulses around me.

A deep growl rumbles from my chest as I pull out and thrust into her again.

She moans softly, wrapping her arms around me and digging her fingers into my back.

Raisa begins to move with me—her body ready to feel more. The initial nervousness and pain have turned to pure pleasure and she is tugging at me, begging for it.

I start rocking back and forth, faster, pushing harder into her.

Her moans grow louder and she tilts her head back against the sofa pillows.

I wrap my arm around her waist and arch her back up towards me.

She locks her legs around my waist, crying out with pleasure each time I thrust my cock into her.

I'm still nervous to hurt her, so I do my best to move gently, as hard as it is.

Raisa's legs start to shake and I reach between her legs and rub my thumb in slow, steady circles over her clit. She can barely hold herself together. She lifts her arms above her head and grabs the fabric of the sofa, clawing at it and crying out until her orgasm slams into her, making her body shudder in throws of passion and bliss.

Watching her come pushes me completely over the edge and I explode inside her. Pushing myself deep into her. Growling like an animal who has just caught its prey.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

Sunshine begins to heat my pillow and pulls me awake. Oleg's arm is wrapped around my waist, holding me against him. I roll over, snuggling against his chest. After we got home last night, I came to sleep in Oleg's bed, not my own.

I grin, sleepy but remembering how we made love on the flight home the night before.

And again at home before we fell asleep.

He finally gave me what I've been waiting for—what I've been wanting.

And it was better than I could ever have imagined.

It hurt a little in the beginning, it felt like he was too big for me, but when I relaxed and stopped feeling nervous, the pain quickly became pleasure and then I wanted all of him.

“What are you smiling about?” he asks in his morning voice, which is even deeper than his normal voice and vibrates up against my chest where I am laying on him.

“Um.” I didn't know he was awake or that I was still grinning. “I was just thinking about last night,” I confess, and instantly my cheeks flush pink.

“Well, then I am very happy to see you smiling,” he chuckles, pulling me right onto his chest and pressing his lips against mine.

I love how Oleg makes me laugh all the time. Even when we aren't doing anything,

when we are just being together. I smile constantly and the happiness just bubbles out of me in the most natural way.

“Coffee?” he asks, stroking his hand over my hair.

Mm... I can think of something else I want, but I think I might be a little tender from last night. So, coffee it is.

“Yes, please.” He playfully throws me off his body and I get tangled in the blanket. He is up and out of bed before I can unwrap it from my legs.

Oleg pulls on a pair of sweatpants and I look around for my t-shirt. He tosses it to me and winks, then walks out of the bedroom.

I throw on the t-shirt, it's his and fits me like a dress.

I run downstairs to join him for that coffee.

When I get to the kitchen, Oleg is on his phone. He has it wedged between his shoulder and his ear as he makes the coffee. Almost dropping it he gets annoyed and puts the speaker on, placing it on the counter.

“So, it'll start around three this afternoon. We'll have a barbecue for lunch. The kids have all been wanting to see their cousins and swim and all that shit.”

“Sounds great, man. We'll be there.”

“We?”

“Yes, Raisa and I will be there.”

“Right. Yes. Alright. See you later.”

The person on the other side hangs up before Oleg has a chance to say anything more and Oleg rolls his eyes, shaking his head.

“Who was that?” I ask, and he jumps a little, thinking he was alone.

“Jeez. I thought you were still upstairs. That was Leon. We have a family lunch today.”

“Oh,” I say, feeling my stomach tighten with nerves. “He seemed confused when you said ‘we’.” In all honesty, it sounded like he wasn’t happy at all that Oleg is bringing me.

“Leon just got back from a business trip. He only recently spoke to me about us being married. It’s still kind of new to him, so I think he’s still processing, but he’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure he wants me there?” I lift myself onto the kitchen counter, sitting on the edge, waiting for my coffee.

Oleg turns towards me and steps between my legs, he wraps his hands over my hips and kisses me. “Don’t worry about what Leon wants. I want you there.”

I smile, feeling warm and happy inside.

It’s difficult to admit, but even more difficult to pretend it isn’t happening. I am falling for Oleg.

He is such a gentle, beautiful man. He shows strength when it is needed, but he has the softest heart and is so protective and caring towards those around him. It’s

impossible not to be falling for him.

Not to mention how fucking incredible he makes my body feel.

Oleg hands me a cup of coffee and the scent washes over me.

Alright.

I can do this.

I can go to his family barbeque and meet all of his brothers.

As long as he stays near me, I think I'll be ok.

All morning my nerves seem to get worse instead of better. I thought that maybe by the time I got there I would have calmed myself but the opposite happened and while I was getting ready , I even had a little panic moment. I'm scared to see all of his brothers in one place.

But, taking a few deep breaths and talking to myself for a bit, I managed to calm down.

Now, we are about to walk into Leon's home.

Oleg seems unaware of my tension as he takes my hand and leads me through the double doors of Leon's mansion.

"Oleg!" One of his brothers shouts from the living room when he sees us.

I turn to see Alexei grinning at Oleg—Yefim standing nearby. "Hi Raisa," Alexei says, and to my relief, he seems friendly. I smile tightly. "Hello," I say back, looking

around and trying to take everything in all at once.

I feel overwhelmed and it causes me to step close to Oleg, seeking reassurance. He wraps his arm around my back.

“Where’s Leon?” Oleg asks after greeting everyone in the room.

“Out in the garden with the kids.” Yefim nods towards the patio doors.

Oleg looks down at me. “Let’s go say hello to Leon, then we can get a drink.” I nod, smiling, my stomach churning. This is the part I was most nervous about.

Out in the garden there are kids running around everywhere. They are screaming, laughing, jumping in the pool, and kicking balls around and it looks like they are having the best time in the world. It’s so strange to see because I was not expecting a proper family vibe—I mean, with kids and chaos like this. I don’t know I was expecting it to be more posh somehow. Or serious.

Leon walks towards us with a scowl on his face. So far, he is the only one who I’ve seen here who isn’t smiling.

“Oleg—this must be Raisa.” He glares at me.

“Hello, Leon. It’s nice to meet you.” I hold out my hand to shake his and he moves stiffly, shaking mine in greeting as he continues to glare down at me.

“This event is for my family ,” Leon says darkly. “I don’t want any outsiders causing shit for me. I hope you hear that loud and clear, Raisa Kuznetsov,” he speaks directly to me.

No matter how nervous I feel on the inside, I don’t appreciate his tone or his attempt

at intimidating me. A veiled threat, no matter how it is delivered, does not sit well with me.

“Thank you for your warm welcome, Leon. It’s lovely to be here,” I snap back at him and stare directly into his eyes, not breaking away until he does.

Oleg clears his throat loudly, pulling me tighter against his side interrupting the weird power play introduction Leon chose.

“Leon, this is Raisa, my wife. Raisa was looking forward to meeting everyone.”

“I’m sure she was,” Leon mutters.

“You know what, Oleg, I think I will go and get us a drink. Your brother looks like he needs a moment,” I say calmly, turning my back on Leon and facing Oleg.

“Alright, the girls will help you find everything.”

I walk away from them, but still overhear Leon’s comment. “Are you sure you should leave her alone to walk around the property?”

I shake my head in annoyance and let out a heavy sigh.

Leon is not friendly—at all—in fact, he’s a total asshole.

Anya spots me and comes rushing over. She hugs me tightly. “Hi. Oh my word, I was looking forward to seeing you again. The girls are in the kitchen, we are just about to start making cocktails so you have perfect timing.”

She grabs my hand and pulls me into the kitchen where I am introduced to all of his brothers' wives, Clara, Sasha and Tia.

“Girls, this is Raisa,” Anya yes happily.

Sasha hands me a knife and a bowl of strawberries. “You can cut these.” She grins, immediately making me part of the cocktail making team.

We all chat and laugh as we work together.

They are all so lovely.

I’ve been around so many girls before, all having fun and relaxing. They seem so close to each other and it makes me miss Ruslana. Ruslana would have fit in here, too.

Even though I was worried about Oleg leaving me alone at the family event—it turns out that everyone here is so friendly and welcoming—everyone except Leon—that I actually feel completely at ease with them all.

Oleg does keep coming to check up on me and make sure I’m ok though, which I do appreciate. At dinner he pulls my chair right next to his so that we eat with our legs touching beneath the table.

After dinner, they don’t leave the chaos for the housekeeper to deal with, everyone gets involved, clearing the table and stacking things nicely in the kitchen.

I admire his family for this. I know it impressed me when I saw how well Oleg treated his employees, and now I see that his whole family is like that.

I am just finishing up, carrying a dish through to the kitchen, when I walk past the passageway and hear Oleg’s voice.

I pause, listening, because he sounds tense.

Leon is lecturing him.

“There were other, better ways to resolve this issue. I don’t know why you thought forcing a marriage was the best or only option.” He sounds angry, as usual.

“It is a good option and it’s working. I don’t regret my choice,” Oleg says calmly.

“Honestly Oleg, the Kuznetsovs weren’t such a big problem. Now you are stuck in a marriage with one of them.”

“The marriage prevented this situation from becoming worse, Leon.” Oleg sighs in frustration.

“Are you sure you weren’t just coveting Raisa and looking for an excuse to marry her?” Leon asks.

“Coveting her? No, don’t be ridiculous. Raisa is just a tool. She is an important piece of the puzzle for negotiating with her brothers. That’s all. Don’t overthink this.”

I feel my heart constrict, causing pain to shoot through my chest.

His words cut deep into me.

I can’t listen to another second of this, especially seeing as it feels as though I am about to burst into tears.

I put the bowl I was carrying on a side table and hurry to the bathroom for some privacy. I can’t have anyone in his family seeing me crying. That would be too embarrassing and right now I am embarrassed enough that I actually thought something was happening between Oleg and me. I can’t believe it—I thought that he had feelings for me.

It honestly felt that way.

But clearly, I've misunderstood the entire situation.

As I close the bathroom door, the tears stream down my cheeks and pain clenches tightly in my chest.

It was stupid of me—of course it was.

He kidnapped me and forced me to marry him.

He didn't even want it.

It was all just for his business—for his brothers.

I stand alone in the bathroom for a while, staring at my reflection and splashing cold water on my face to try and wipe away the redness on my cheeks.

I dry my face and take a few deep breaths.

At least I heard the truth—I just wish it had been sooner, before I started falling for him, because I could have saved myself a lot of pain.

But from now on I will be a lot more careful around him.

I am just a tool to him.

It's better if I just stay away from him as much as possible. At least I have my studies to keep me busy.

That is my goal, anyway. It always was. I wasn't ever meant to fall for some random

guy. My dreams are just to become a doctor and to make a home for myself in this city. I don't need Oleg. I don't need some asshole guy who just wants to use me as a tool.

I can take care of myself.

I nod at my reflection in the mirror.

Then, with one last deep breath, I step back out into the family party.

My heart closed off, colder, more protected than before.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

I have been struggling the last few days with Raisa.

It seems that no matter what I try, she hardly even wants to speak to me.

She goes into the sunroom, closes the door, and doesn't come out except to eat a little and then go to bed.

I knew her studies would be difficult, a definite challenge, but I feel like she is drifting away from me.

I can't figure out exactly what is wrong or how I can help her.

Walking up the stairs carrying two cups of coffee, I want to try and talk to her again. I've tried before and she was extremely cold towards me, but I am going to keep trying until I get through to her.

The truth is that I miss her.

Even between her studies, she was usually smiling and relaxed, but things are different now.

I knock once on the sunroom door, then push it open with my foot, carrying the coffee inside.

Raisa has her head bent over her textbooks, a pen in her hand as she takes notes.

I put the coffee on her desk and wait for her acknowledge me in some way.

She doesn't. It's like I'm not there at all.

"Raisa," I say gently.

"What?" she snaps back without looking up.

"Can we talk?"

She drops her pen, clearly agitated. "Why?" she says, spinning her chair to glare at me with the same fierceness that has been in her eyes for the past few days.

"I wanted to check in with you—to see how you are doing?"

"I'm perfectly fine. Thank you. Was that all?" she says abruptly.

"Are you sure, though? You seem—"

"Oleg, is this going to take long? I have a lot to do here." She gestures over her textbooks.

"No, sorry for interrupting," I say, disappointed that I still have not managed to get through to her. "Enjoy your coffee," I say, turning away, wishing she would call me back or say something more. But she doesn't.

I think her studies are stressing her out. I paged through her textbooks the other night and what she is learning is really intense.

It must be exhausting. I don't really blame her for being so stressed out.

I just need to show her that I am here for her and will support her through this.

I ask one of the guards to keep an eye on Raisa while I head into town.

She is joining me for dinner tonight at home and I think I should get her a little gift; to show her I'm thinking of her. I saw a gorgeous pendant the other day that immediately made me think of her, I just haven't had the time to get there and get it for her.

A rose for Raisa, her namesake.

Standing at the jewelry store, I hold the ruby rose pendant in my hand.

"It's perfect," I say, admiring the glistening red stone.

"This and the bracelet please." I gesture towards the matching bracelet, made up of a row of roses, all shining in beautiful rich reds.

I carry the gift back out to the car, then drive to the local flower market to select the freshest red roses for her.

This is sure to bring a smile to her face.

I feel myself getting excited for dinner tonight, because I am sure I will get my Raisa back. My little flower.

I really have been missing her laughter.

Because Raisa agreed to join me for dinner this evening, I have asked the chef to make his version of fish and chips. He has chosen to make salmon and roast potatoes—which I think is perfect. It's just the gesture and thought behind it that I was aiming for.

I am already seated in the dining room when Raisa walks in, looking tired and a little miserable. She glances at the red roses on the table, but the only reaction I note is that she bites her lower lip and knots her brows together, looking away from the flowers as though they have upset her.

“Hi gorgeous, did you get your studies done that you wanted to finish today?” I ask, trying not to be hurt by her reaction.

She pulls out her chair and sits down opposite me. “I did.”

“Would you like a little champagne with dinner?” I ask, standing up to reach for the bottle.

“Sure,” she says, sounds uninterested in everything.

I walk around the table and stand behind her to pour a glass.

She doesn’t move or reach out to me at all.

I am disappointed, but it’s ok, because I’m sure she will smile when she sees the beautiful gift I got for her.

Leaning over her, I place the velvet gift box in front of her, then run my hand over her neck. “I saw this and thought of you right away. It’s as though it was always meant to be yours.” I smile, letting my hand stay on her back, feeling her warmth beneath my touch.

She seems to tense slightly, reaching towards the box.

“You shouldn’t have,” she mutters.

“Go ahead and open it.”

She sighs softly, then flips the lid open. I sit down next to her, wanting to see her smile—but my heart sinks when I see her expression.

Her eyes are shining as though she wants to cry.

I stand up again, unsure wof hat could be wrong.

I take the necklace out of the box. “Hold your hair up, let me put it on you.”

She lifts her hair, keeping her eyes averted from me.

I clip the necklace onto her, then the bracelet.

“Do you like it?” I ask, wondering why she seems uncomfortable with the gift.

“It is very beautiful.” She clears her throat and quickly wipes the back of her hand across her cheek. Then she smiles tightly and says, “What’s for dinner? I’m really tired. I want to get to bed early.”

I sigh, walking back to my own seat.

“It’s Smith’s version of fish and chips. I thought you’d enjoy the reference,” I say, feeling lost inside, no closer to understanding what is going on with her than I was this morning.

Raisa shakes her head, her mouth pulling tight as she tugs at the necklace in agitation.

Then she looks up at me with such anger in her eyes that I actually lean back slightly in my chair.

“Why in the world would you do this? Why would you give me gifts and make references to that night we had together? What kind of game are you playing with me?” She practically snarls she is so angry with me. Her fist is clenched around the rose pendant on her neck.

“What—I don’t—Raisa, what is going on?” I say, exasperated. “I’ve been trying for days to help you ease your study stress—but I’m starting to think it’s more than that. What is going on? Talk to me?”

“I just want to know why you are faking being nice to me. Why bother? Why taunt me like that?” She snaps.

“Fake?” I stammer in confusion.

“Yes, Oleg—fake.”

“Why would you think my gestures are fake?”

“Because I am nothing but a tool to you,” she spits the word with anger. Deep anger. The type that hides hurt.

“Raisa—“ my heart is beating fast, realizing the conversation she must have overheard.

“Don’t even bother.” She stands up, pushing her chair back, getting ready to leave. “You don’t have to explain anything, actually. It doesn’t even matter. I heard what you said to Leon the other night. I know I am nothing more than a method of reaching my brothers.” She turns to leave the room, but I am up and out of my seat too quickly. I grab her arm and spin her towards me.

“You were never meant to hear that, Raisa,” I say, holding her against me so that she

can't leave.

“Well, I did hear it—so you don't have to pretend anymore.” Tears are falling silently down her cheeks.

What I said to Leon really hurt her—badly—and I didn't mean it. Not at all.

“Raisa, I promise you, I only said that for Leon's benefit. It isn't how I feel.”

“Why would you say it if it wasn't true?” She mutters quietly.

Fuck. I can see the pain in her eyes.

No wonder she has been so cold towards me for the last few days. No wonder she hasn't wanted to talk to me or interact with me. She's been completely avoiding me and now it all makes sense.

“I said it only to keep Leon from interfering with our relationship and the entire situation. If Leon thought something was going on, he wouldn't leave this alone.”

“I don't believe you,” she whispers. Her eyes turned away from me.

“Raisa, please—“

She steps away from me, pushing against my chest and forcing me to accept that I have to let go of her.

Shaking her head, she takes a tight breath in.

“I'm not really hungry,” she says.

“No, stay and eat something. I’ll go if you want me to—“

She shakes her head again, then reaches up behind her head and unclips the necklace. She puts it on the dinner table, along with the bracelet, then turns away from me and walks out of the dining room.

My heart has sunk to the pit of my stomach.

I feel horrible.

I feel like a piece of me has been torn away—something I didn’t even realize was there—but now that it’s gone, I feel immense pain.

“Fuck,” I say loudly, cursing myself.

I really fucked up badly with this.

I wish I could take back the words I said to Leon.

I wish she hadn’t heard them.

How do I fix this?

How can I make this right?

I stand at the edge of the dinner table, staring at the ruby rose pendant.

Gently picking it up, I place it back in the box next to the bracelet. I will leave it in her bedroom.

But I can see now that it will take a lot more than a simple gift to win back her trust

and affection.

I don't know what needs to be done, but I will find a way.

I don't even want to go to bed with this distance between us—maybe—

I pick up the velvet box and jog upstairs towards her bedroom.

Knocking lightly at the door, I step inside. Raisa is sitting on her bed. She quickly wipes at her face, brushing away tears that I wasn't supposed to see.

“Raisa—I didn't want to just leave it like that,” I sigh, heavy with guilt. “I understand why you are upset with me. I would be too if I was in your situation. I just need you to know that it is not how I feel. What I said to Leon—it's not the truth. I am so sorry I said that. I don't know how, but I will make it up to you. I'm really sorry, Raisa.” I speak gently, and she listens quietly.

She doesn't look up at me and she doesn't move from the bed.

I step over to the dresser and put the velvet box on it. The Raisa pendant is hers. Whether or not she speaks to me again—that is her choice too.

I stand in the doorway looking at her for a moment, wishing she would say something—or even just look at me.

But she doesn't. So, finally, I accept it and turn to walk away. Feeling the heaviness on my shoulders.

I need to give her time. And I need to find a way to make this right.

Lying in bed at night alone, my heart feels heavier than it ever has.

I feel like I've lost something that I didn't know I had and it's breaking my heart.

I want Raisa to be in bed next to me. Instead, she is across the hallway—so close—but so far away.

I roll over and stare at the empty pillow where she should be sleeping.

Sighing, I close my eyes as my hand drifts to her side of the bed.

It feels as though there is a cord tied between us, tugging, softly, constantly pulling because we are supposed to be together. Not apart like this.

It takes a long time for sleep to claim me and when I wake up in the morning, I still feel heavy with guilt.

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I don't know how I am supposed to feel after Oleg told me that he didn't mean what he said.

I so desperately want to believe him—but I am too scared. I am scared of how much it hurt before—and what if he's just manipulating me? Then I let my guard down and when I find out again that it's not real, I will be even more hurt.

Sighing, I stare down at my study notes. I have been sitting at the desk for an hour and I haven't even managed to start today's sessions.

I wish I had my study friends. People like Jenna, Matthew and Blake. It's so hard doing this alone. I never planned to do it this way.

And now it's not only the stress of studying—it's Oleg, too.

My mind is a frayed mess. My heart is all knotted and twisted and fearful.

Maybe I need to take a break today and just spend some time outside in the garden. Get some fresh air—clear my head and hopefully figure out what to do about all of this.

I push my notebook away, along with my textbook and my pen.

Heading downstairs, I go to sit in the garden for a little when I walk straight into Oleg as he comes out of his bedroom.

“Oh,” I say, embarrassed. I wasn't ready to see him yet. I still have so much I need to

think about.

“Raisa,” he says, reaching out and grabbing my shoulders as we collide.

“Sorry,” I mutter, stepping away.

He sighs softly. I steal a glance at his face and notice how tired he looks. My heart aches to see him like this. But—it shouldn’t—he is the one who hurt me.

He shifts his weight and runs his hand through his hair. “Listen, I was headed out to the warehouses this morning. Do you want to join me?”

My first instinct is to decline the invite—but then I pause and realize that apart from the fact that I wanted to get out of the house for a bit and clear my mind—the idea of him inviting me to see his warehouse is pretty big. It shows trust. I will be able to see a lot of what he does and how he operates.

Things he probably wouldn’t really want my brothers knowing—but he is willing to risk showing me.

“Sure. I’ll come along for the ride,” I say.

“Super. We can leave now if you are ready?”

I nod.

The drive to the warehouse is tense. Being this close in an enclosed space with Oleg is difficult. I don’t know what to say. I am not the type of person who can have a fake conversation when there is something massive going on between us.

So, I stare out of the window and watch the world go by. It’s a lot better than sitting

at my desk staring blankly at the small textbook font, anyway.

Oleg must sense my tension because he doesn't try to speak to me either.

We just drive in silence while I sit here, wishing that we had never drifted apart in the first place.

Outside the warehouse, Oleg opens my door for me. I climb out and admire the size of the building. It's double the standard size, taking up a massive stretch of land.

"This is one of several that I manage," he says, placing his hand on my lower back and leading me towards the entrance.

His touch sends shivers down my spine, but I do my best to ignore it.

"This place is massive," I say, more to myself than Oleg.

"It is a really impressive space. Over here is where we have the products arriving, and on the far side there is where they get packaged for distribution. We specialize in this specific product. We are the only people on this continent who sell this product at this quality. So, when people come in and start offering the same product at a lower price but also a lower quality—the buyers assume it is our product and that effects our relationships with customers."

"But can't people just sell the same product at the same quality?"

"No. We have the best chemist on the planet. No one can match our formula. Your brothers tried and they tried to sell it to our clients, too. We had a number of very pissed-off people blaming us—" he sighs.

"My brothers did that?" I ask, feeling guilty for what they tried and how they messed

with clients that didn't belong to them.

“Your brothers did that and more. The problem is that if our clients come after us for something we didn't do—it gets ugly really quickly. It's one of the reasons I hate this mafia bullshit. People shoot first and ask questions later.”

I bite at my lower lip, frowning as I follow him through the warehouse.

“So, are my brothers still messing with your clients?”

“No. Thankfully, because of our marriage, your brother was forced to come to an agreement with me. He will not sell our primary product, and I have promised not to sell his primary product. It was a small distribution product that we were testing out, but if handing it over to your brothers means we can avoid a shoot-out, I am more than happy to do that.”

“So, you gave up a portion of your business to my brothers even though they are new in this city?”

“It's better than war, Raisa,” he says as he picks up a clipboard, checking some information on it and setting it down again.

“Before you kidnapped me, did you try to speak to my brothers?”

“Numerous times. It was at the point where I had to make a choice before my brothers took control of the situation. People would have lost their lives if we had gone ahead with their solution.”

I can't believe I am only now coming to understand exactly why Oleg kidnapped me and forced me to marry him.

The other option was his brothers storming my family home and killing my brothers—which would have been an easy fix for them. I would have lost my family.

And even if Oleg's brothers didn't want to go that route, one of the angry clients would have. In this world it seems everyone really is ready to shoot first and ask questions after. Oleg went against the knee-jerk reaction by trying to force their hand into an alliance.

“Has it worked?” I ask, wondering if his plan was successful or if my brothers are still causing shit.

“It did as far as I can tell. Rodion has stuck to his agreement and has not been selling or speaking to our clients.”

Oleg is still talking as he shows me around the rest of the warehouse. He tells me all about how things work and how he likes things organized. All of his staff are happy to see him and I can tell that even here in the bigger business sections—Oleg is still a very gentle soul beneath all of the dark and mysterious exterior he has to present to the world because of what he does.

I walk around, following Oleg, thinking about his reasoning for marrying me. He did make the right choice. My brothers would never have worked with him without being forced to do so. They would never have allowed someone to dictate their actions—even if it was for the better—Rodion might not have known that.

By marrying me, he saved their lives and he saved his brother's lives too. It could have become a bloody mess.

Oleg comes to a stop outside an office door on the upstairs platform of the warehouse. “This is where I work when I'm not at home.”

He pushes the door open and ushers me inside.

It is a modern, simple and clean office. Minimalistic in black, grey and white.

He closes the door behind us.

“Can I make you a coffee? I had them put the machine in here because while I’m working, I drink quite a bit of it.”

“Sure. Um, Oleg, I understand a lot more now, why you did what you did.”

I lean against his desk, facing him while I talk.

“Can you see why I didn’t have any other choice? I am sorry, Raisa. I am sorry you got dragged into it—but it seemed so much kinder than—“

“—death.”

“Yes.”

“You used me as a tool,” I sigh.

“I did, but I never saw you as that. Right from the beginning you captivated me. You are such an incredible person, Raisa. You deserve so much more than what happened to you. I mean the marriage—“ he looks down at the coffee mug in his hands, his voice is tight.

“The marriage isn’t that bad,” I giggle, starting to relax around him again after he opened up to me like this.

I guess I just needed to understand it all. I needed to see where he was coming from

and why he did what he did. I had a small idea—but having him explain it to me and show me all of this—it means a lot to me.

At the sound of my laugh, Oleg turns quickly to look at me.

He has a small smile on his face, not wide enough to dimple his cheeks, but still gorgeous.

“I haven’t heard you laugh in days,” he says, forgetting about the coffee and walking over to me.

“I haven’t felt like laughing for days.” I shrug.

“I know. I really am sorry, Raisa.” He steps between my legs, wrapping his arms around my shoulders as I wrap mine around his waist.

He pulls me close to his body and holds me for a long time.

I press my head against his chest and listen to his heart beating—the rhythmic sound syncs with my own heart beat and I feel like I am safe, at home in his embrace.

After a while, he leans back and with his finger beneath my chin, he lifts my face towards his.

Leaning down, he presses his lips against mine and kisses me.

My heart begins to beat faster, my blood rushing and my skin tingling.

I hear his breathing become more intense as our kiss deepens.

He pushes my legs wider apart, holding me closer to him.

I moan softly against his lips.

Oleg lifts me off the desk so that I am standing against him. His cock is bulging against his pants, threatening to tear the seams open.

I tug at his belt, not caring that we are in his warehouse. The office seems private enough and I want him right now.

A low growl rumbles through him as I free his cock and wrap my hands around it.

Suddenly, he spins me around and from behind, he pulls my jeans open, yanking them down over my ass. He pushes me forward, bending me over the desk. I moan loudly when he strokes his cock over my pussy from behind me.

“You’re going to have to be a good girl for me, little flower. You have to stay quiet,” his deep voice warns me and sends a shiver down my spine.

I arch my back and thrust my ass towards him.

“I’ll be quiet,” I whisper.

He grabs my hips and slowly pushes his cock into my pussy.

My mouth opens and I have to hold back the cry of pleasure. Instead, I take in a sharp breath as he buries himself inside me.

Holding onto my hips, he begins to thrust, moving slowly at first, then building up speed and pushing in harder and harder.

My legs start to shake and I have to hold onto the desk to steady myself.

Oleg is moaning quietly behind me and the sounds are sending me over the edge.

I cry out, too loud, not able to stop myself. His hand clamps around my mouth as he pulls my back against him, pushing up into me with a hard thrust. I moan again—against his hand the sound is muffled.

I can feel him growing harder and my pussy is clamping down over his cock as I get closer and closer to orgasm.

“Are you going to come on my cock, little flower?” He whispers in my ear, his cock spreading me open every time he thrusts into me.

I moan a muffled response, but his hand is over my mouth still. It’s better this way because I know I can’t stay quiet.

I am digging my fingers into his arm, holding onto him as my legs weaken even more and my entire body begins to shudder.

The orgasm slams into me and rolls through me—over and over again—until I can barely breathe.

He goes rigid inside me and thrusts into me one last time before I feel him relax against me.

He drops his hand from my mouth and I am already grinning.

I will never get over how incredible he feels inside me.

It’s as though he was made perfectly for me.

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Raisa walks into my home office. It's late morning and she's been tucked away in her study corner up until now.

She walks straight to my chair, spins me to face her and then climbs onto my lap. I chuckle and wrap my arms around her as she snuggles against me.

"I had an idea," she says, looking up at me.

"Oh, you did—did you—what idea was that?"

"I think it's time for another date," she grins.

"Do you want me to book us a restaurant?" I ask, threading my fingers through her hair.

She rolls her eyes. "Oleg, what happened the last time you booked us a fancy restaurant?"

I laugh. "Right. Of course. I ended up having the best date I've ever had in my entire life."

"So, I heard that there is a fair in town here at the end of every month. Which means that there is one today and I want to go."

"I haven't had cotton candy in years. Do you think they'll have any?" I reply.

"There is only one way to find out."

She scoots off my lap and rushes out of the room to get ready before I can say anything else. I guess it is a Saturday anyway, and I've done plenty of work for a weekend. Besides that—to have Raisa back—her accepting me again—it is everything I could have asked for and I want to spend every minute I can with her.

I close the file I'm working on, saving it to finish later.

When I step out of my office into the hallway, Raisa runs out of her bedroom, dressed and ready to go.

She has her pink high-top sneakers on and faded light washed jeans with a white hoodie. A small blue back pack is slung over one of her shoulders.

She looks too cute for words with her high messy bun and glossed lips.

Raisa leans forward to retie her shoe lace and I notice the ruby red rose bracelet on her wrist. Immediately, my heart swells with happiness.

When she stands up, I pretend to adjust her hoodie, and see she is wearing the necklace as well.

She has properly forgiven me, and I couldn't be happier.

I glance down at my faded black jeans. I don't often leave the house in anything but a suite. But a fair is not the place to wear a suit—and Raisa wants to see the real me—not the business me.

I head into my room and grab a black t-shirt and a black hoodie.

I feel comfortable.

It's nice to feel comfortable and be headed out on a date with someone special. No pretenses, no charades. Just us, enjoying each other's company.

Raisa practically races me to the car she is so excited.

I can't stop smiling as we climb in and she grabs my phone to find out what the address is.

"Oh, sorry," she says, handing my phone back to me, realizing she was getting ahead of herself because I have a pin code.

"Seven Seven Four Zero," I say, not taking the phone away from her.

"What?"

"My code."

She types it in, the most beautiful smile spreading across her face—one that she couldn't even try to hide if she wanted to.

A few moments later she has the address and I punch it into the car's GPS.

She puts my phone into the center console, still grinning, looking really pleased with herself.

I reach out and run my hand over her leg.

Today is perfect already.

I have never been to the monthly fair in the city. In fact, I didn't even know about it. I've been so focused on work and my family that I never bothered to explore other

things.

Raisa is showing me that I can still run the business and enjoy time away from it. I never knew I wanted this so much.

The fair is hosted in the massive park area near the city center. The green grass and surrounding trees make us feel like we are somewhere far from the busy hustle and bustle of city life.

Raisa is captivated by everything. There are hand-made crafts, home cooked treats, hot dogs, popcorn and candy floss.

She excitedly pulls me from stall to stall. Admiring people's art and touching everything.

We spend the day roaming around, admiring everything, laughing at other people, tasting all the foods that catch our eye and buying more to take home with us.

Raisa finds some natural skin care products which she loves and I get her the entire set. She tries on a long cotton coat that looks amazing on her and I get her that as well. I actually try to buy her a lot more things but she stops me.

"I really appreciate the gifts, Oleg—but it's not necessary. You are already spoiling me by being here with me."

Before I can reply and tell her I want to buy her gifts, that it makes me happy, she spots bumper cars and shouts with excitement. "We have to go on those."

We stand in line and she is giddy, jumping up and down until we reach the front. I pick the black car and she picks the yellow one. We race around the ring, just for fun, crashing into each other, screaming with laughter.

We stay at the carnival all day, and when the sun begins to set over the tree line, we get a coffee and find a quiet bench to sit on so that we can carry on watching all the people come and go. Raisa leans into me, and I think of our beach date. It also ended with a coffee on a beach while we people-watched.

This date was even more fun than that one. I think we have grown a lot closer since then—over coming some difficulties and getting to know each other a little better.

I wrap my arm around her, holding her close.

My heart pulls tightly when I think of her and what she means to me.

This is the first time that I have realized that Raisa has completely captured my heart.

I have real feelings for this girl.

She has become more than special to me.

I think I am falling in love with her.

Everything about her makes me happy and I can't actually imagine my life without her in it.

I smile, staring at her for a little too long.

“What?” She asks, when she notices.

“Nothing,” I reply, because how can I tell her?

How can I explain that I think she is the most perfect and beautiful person I have ever met in my life?

The long lazy sunbeams stretch over the trees onto us and we sit quietly soaking them up, without a care in the world, just being together.

I have never felt more at peace with someone before.

I need to find a way to tell her how I feel. I just don't want to scare her away or freak her out.

For all I know, she is planning on completing her studies and only staying with me until the alliance between her brothers and me is settled. I don't know what her thoughts are for the future. I stole her from the life she had planned and threw her into mine.

Maybe I should just keep my feelings to myself and let things carry on the way they are now.

It is better than risking pushing her away from me.

Raisa grumbles loudly, then giggles.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"I think I had too many sweet things and my sugar rush is wearing off because all I want to do is curl up on your lap and fall asleep."

I chuckle. "Well then, maybe I should get you home, because I wouldn't mind curling up in bed with you and cuddling all night."

"That sounds perfect," she says, jumping up from the bench and grabbing my hand to pull me up, too.

She is so animated, full of life and love and laughter.

We walk to the car, my arm around her and her leaning into me.

It really was a perfect day.

At home, while Raisa is singing in the shower, my phone rings. I glance at the screen to see who it is.

It's Marcus, my head of security.

Sliding the button across the screen, I answer the call and press it to my ear.

"Oleg, how are you?"

"Good, is everything alright?"

"I just wanted to update you on the situation with the guy we have following the brother Rodion."

I glance at the bathroom. Raisa is still singing in the shower, but I walk out of the bedroom to take the call in a more private setting. I don't know if she would be upset with me if she heard I have someone following her brother around to keep tabs on him.

"Yeah, what can you tell me?" I ask when I am downstairs.

"Pretty much nothing going on with him. He has been sticking to the deal. What he did do, though, was he put men on each of your brothers and your sister. Following them. He seems to be keeping tabs on your family."

“That’s to be expected, I guess. He wants to know if we are holding up our end of the deal, too. Buy why would he have someone following Anya? She isn’t even involved in the business?”

“He follows Anya himself. Not often, but often enough for my guys to notice.”

An angry growl spills from my mouth. “That motherfucker better not go near my sister,” I say with threat.

“You did take his,” Marcus says, and I snap back angrily. “For good reason.”

“I know, I know, I’m just giving you shit.”

Taking a deep breath, I calm myself again. “Ok, well, thanks for the update. At least we know it’s all good for now. If he starts anything weird with Anya, please tell me immediately. I don’t want that asshole touching her.”

“Will do. Have a good night, Oleg.”

“You too, Marcus.”

I head back to the bedroom and Raisa is fresh out of the shower. I walk in just in time to see her pulling the oversized t-shirt over her naked body.

“Oh, I missed the best part,” I tease her, grabbing her around the waist and pulling her towards me to kiss her.

She melts into my arms, kissing me with intensity that takes my breath away.

“What did you say about cuddling?” she asks, a coy look in her eyes and a sly grin on her face.

“I am going to hop into the shower now—and when I get out you can find out what I mean about cuddling.”

She grins and jumps into the bed, snuggling herself against the pillow as she pulls the duvet up over her body.

I’m so happy to have her sharing my bed again. She hasn’t officially moved into my bedroom yet—but I want her to.

There is no reason for her to be in the other room.

I head towards the shower, stripping down as I walk, then climbing under the hot spray and leaning my arm against the shower wall as I drop my head under the flow of water.

Things are going really well—at work—with the Kuznetsovs and with Raisa.

I never expected any of this when I took her.

But it has turned out far better than I could have imagined.

I scrub down and rinse off, then climb out of the shower, wrapping a towel around my waist.

I walk through to the bedroom, eager to climb into bed next to Raisa.

When I glance down at her, I see that she is fast asleep, almost drooling on the pillow.

A quiet chuckle escapes me.

She was far more tired than she said she was.

She's out cold. So deep in dreamland I wouldn't dare wake her up.

I drop the towel and throw my side of the blankets back, climbing beneath them. I won't wake her, but I am definitely going to hold her against me.

My heart belongs to her, and I don't even know how to tell her that.

I'll figure it all out eventually.

For now, I am just going to enjoy each moment I have with her.

Including this one, where she is sleeping so peacefully next to me and I get to hold her against me all night.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

I stretch my feet out and wiggle my toes as I wake up. I slept perfectly. Gosh, I didn't even know how tired I was until I set my head down on Oleg's pillow. It smelled like him and the bed was so comfortable. I meant to wait for him to get out of the shower last night, but I guess I passed out before that happened.

I woke up a few times in the night and Oleg was holding me. It felt so amazing. I just snuggled close and fell asleep again quickly. Feeling safe and warm.

Still drifting in between sleep and waking up fully, I roll over in his bed, not feeling his arm around me and wondering where he is. I reach out beneath the covers and find nothing, so I open my eyes and realize that the bed is empty. Stretching my hand out to his side, I can feel it is still a little warm so he didn't get up too long ago. I can't believe I slept through it. I'm not usually such a deep sleeper, but I guess I had so much fun yesterday I wore myself out. All of that amazing food, the laughter, the conversations—it was the perfect day.

I'm so happy we managed to sort out the issues between us and I came to understand who he really is. It helped me so much to go to his warehouse and have him share that part of his life with me as well.

I am still nervous about falling too deeply for him, but I don't think I am actually in control of that. My heart is on its own mission but I am still being as cautious as I can be.

I throw the cozy blankets off my body and swing my legs over the edge of the bed. The carpet is soft beneath my feet.

I stand up and stretch like a lazy cat then get dressed in my crop top and black tights. I have to study today so I may as well be comfortable. I'll go for a run just before lunch if Oleg will let me, or send someone with me.

I wander down to the kitchen to make coffee and find Oleg, but he isn't there.

I peak into the living room and see that the patio doors are open. He must be outside. Walking out into the bright morning sunshine, I have to squint my eyes against the glare.

But I find the garden empty.

I walk over the pool and stand next to it, trying to decide if I feel like swimming. The water looks really fresh and I'm definitely tempted right now but that is when I see him in the glass house on the other side of the garden.

His home gym.

Oleg is lifting weights and each time he pulls the weight up, his arm flexes tightly, making the muscles over his shoulders and back bulge out.

I can't stop staring. I should look away. I'm basically spying on the guy, but I can't stop watching him. Dammit, he is so freaking sexy.

It's so crazy that I am actually married to him.

Without realizing it, I find myself walking closer to the glass house, hoping to get a better view.

I am practically drooling against the glass when he looks up and sees me.

I freeze, knowing how this must look.

He tilts his head to the side, a sly grin on his face, then he gestures for me to come inside.

I walk around the glass house to the entrance and walk in, trying to look innocent and casual. But I think my cheeks are glowing pink with embarrassment.

“Were you perving?” he asks straight away.

“What? Of course not.” I say defensively.

“Are you sure, because there is still a little drool—“

I quickly reach up and touch my hand against my lips, instantly realizing that it makes me look even more guilty.

He backs up, laughing.

I grin and shake my head. “So, is it a problem if I want to admire something I like looking at? “

“Mm. Why don’t you come and admire the view from close up instead?”

An idea strikes me. It’s been a long time since I attended my self-defense classes with my brothers—but what better time to practice than now. So, I walk closer to him and try my best to look innocent. But the naughty thoughts are making me grin a little bit.

He sets the weights down and walks towards me as well. I sidestep onto the gym mats just as he reaches out to wrap his arm around me.

Without any warning at all, I grab his arm, twist my body and kick my leg out backwards, knocking him off his feet. He lands with a loud huff as the air is knocked out of him.

Then I drop my weight down onto him, pinning him down, while I crack up laughing in triumph.

He looks shocked to his core, completely taken by surprise. His brows are raised and his eyes are wide as he stares at me.

It takes him a few seconds to realize what has happened—and when he does, he can't stop laughing.

“Jeez, woman. Where did that come from?” he asks, lifting me off him.

“I wanted to admire the view—from really close.” I grin.

“It looks to me like you want to play?” his voice darkens with mischief.

I nod.

He stands up, holding his hand out to pull me to my feet—then he steps further onto the mat and gestures for me to follow him. “Alright. Try again.” He dares me.

I walk a full circle around him, deciding on my approach, then I come at him from behind and put him in a head lock.

I do really well for a while, but this time he was definitely ready for me and he ends up throwing me over his shoulder onto my back on the mat.

I squeal with fright.

He plays as rough as my brothers.

I guess I can play rough, too, then.

As he reaches down to offer me a hand up, I grab his wrist, wrap both of my legs around his arm and tug him down into a kneeling position. Once he is there, I move quickly, wrapping my thighs around his neck and twisting him onto his back as I kneel over him, locking him in place with his head between my legs.

Again, he looks surprised that I got the upper hand, but then another mischievous grin steals its way onto his face as he runs his hands up my thighs.

“ This —I could definitely get used to. This doesn’t seem like a bad place to be at all.” He chuckles, grabbing my ass and squeezing it.

I feel my cheeks flushing pink and quickly roll off him, getting to my feet as fast I can, ready for the next round.

For over an hour we are on the gym mats, tackling, trying to take each other down, and having a good laugh about it. He teaches me some moves I didn’t know and I show him most of the moves my brothers taught me.

I am surprised that despite his obvious advantage in size, there are one or two moves where I really manage to lock him down—even if only for a little while.

At least it shows me that everything my brothers taught me in the self-defense classes wasn’t a waste of time. Besides that—it is an incredibly good workout. We are both sitting on the mat, leaning back on our arms and breathing heavily.

“Damn. I’m hungry now,” he says, wiping his hand across his brow. We’ve worked up a good sweat.

He pushes himself onto his knees, then stands up and stretches his shoulders back. I watch as the muscles ripple across his biceps, my eyes taking him in.

“I’m hungry and feeling hot and sweaty,” I complain, trying to think about something other than how fucking sexy he is.

I roll onto my side, then push myself up to stand as well. My stomach growls in protest. I didn’t even have coffee yet.

“Where did you learn all of those moves? I have to admit, I am really impressed.”

“I do have six brothers. I think it’s kind of obvious where I learned the moves,” I laugh.

Oleg chuckles. “I guess it is.”

“I think they were worried about me—I mean, with the lifestyle they live. Even if I avoided becoming a part of it—there was always a chance things could go wrong and they wanted me to be able to protect myself.”

“You mean in the event of some tall, good-looking guy kidnapping you and forcing you to marry him?” Oleg smirks at me with mischief in his eyes.

“Yes— exactly that.” I tilt my head to the side and narrow my eyes at him with a sly grin across my face.

Then I turn towards the big glass wall looking out into the garden.

“That pool is still looking very inviting,” I say to myself, staring at the bright blue water.

“It is, isn’t it,” Oleg agrees, standing close to me. My body shudders at the sound of his voice. Just being this close to him for so long has been a constant tease.

The last hour of contact with him has left me feeling hot and bothered in more than one way. I need to jump into that pool to cool my mind off as much as my body otherwise, I won’t get any studying done.

“Are you going to—“ I am about to ask him to join me for a swim, but from behind he lifts me up, throws me over his shoulder and marches out into the garden while I scream and laugh loudly.

He walks straight to the edge of the pool and tosses me in without any hesitation whatsoever.

My body hits the cold water with a splash and I gasp at how icy it is. I did not expect that. It’s such a beautifully sunny day I thought the water would be warmed by the sun.

I swim to the surface. Ready to give Oleg a piece of my mind, but as I come up and gasp a breath of air—he is diving into the water next to me.

He swims towards me and pulls me into his arms as he surfaces.

His hair is slick against his head, dark and glistening.

Water drops fall from his thick lashes as he eyes me and grins. “Sorry, I couldn’t resist,” he says with amusement.

“I’m sure you just couldn’t control those urges.” I roll my eyes.

“There are actually a number of urges I struggle to control when I am around you.”

“Is that so? What are you going to do about it?” I wrap my legs around his waist beneath the water and pull myself up against him. My arms draped around his thick muscular neck. Every cell in my body screaming to feel him.

His hands explore my back, roaming down over my ass.

“This—“ he growls against my ear as he slips his hand inside my pants and presses his fingers into my pussy.

I gasp softly, digging my fingers into his skin.

He leans forward and locks his lips against mine, kissing me deeply, as we hurriedly tug at each other’s clothes beneath the water.

The gym session was an hour-long foreplay and both of us are clearly feeling the heated urgency of the moment. Water is splashing around us as he tugs my pants down and then pulls me back towards him, wrapping my legs around his waist again.

I feel his cock, hard and pressing against me.

With his hands gripped tightly around my hips, he pushes himself inside me. His cock stretching my pussy open and filling me up.

I gasp as he slides into me, turning me so that my back is against the side of the pool. Pleasure shoots through me.

A deep moan escapes his lips as he buries himself all the way into me.

He closes his eyes for a moment and I stare at how gorgeous his face is. When he opens his eyes, they are locked with mine and he begins to thrust in and out of me, pushing me hard against the edge of the pool. I tilt my head back and moan and he

thrusts faster. Fucking me while he stares at me as though I am the most beautiful girl in the world. That is how he makes me feel when he looks at me that way.

It sends shivers down my spine and causes my heart to race. My mind full of thoughts that worry me. Because as pleasure surges through my body I finally have to admit to myself—

—that I am in love with this man.

I've completely fallen for him and even though I've been trying to deny it—I finally have to accept the truth.

“Oleg—“ I whisper breathlessly.

His dark eyes pierce into me, waiting for me to say more—but I don't dare.

His cock slam into me and I cry out as my legs begin to shake, still locked around his waist.

He wraps his hand around the back of my neck and presses his lips against mine,—kissing me passionately and fucking me until the pleasure becomes all I can feel or think about, my orgasm slamming through me like a bolt of lightning.

I feel Oleg stiffen as his cock pulses inside me, groaning with pleasure as he finds his release.

We get dressed beneath the water. Grinning at each other as we pull our clothes back on before climbing out and running back towards the gym to find some towels.

Oleg wraps the towel around me before taking another for himself.

I watch him as he dries off, stripping his shorts off beneath his towel.

I do the same, stripping down and leaving my wet clothes outside.

“Come shower with me,” he says, holding his hand out. I wrap my fingers through his and follow him into the house.

My heart is thundering a thousand warnings.

But it's too late.

I am in love.

There is no going back now.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

Raisa is sitting at the vanity, struggling to get her hair the way she wants it.

We are leaving for our date soon and she looks incredible, dressed in that pale blue long summer dress that floats around her body like water. But she is starting to grumble because her hair won't pin up properly.

I step behind her, watching her in the mirror.

"Let me braid it," I chuckle. For some reason, her frustration is just cute to me.

"You can braid?" She stares at me through the mirror.

"My sister taught me how to. She refused to wear any other style for about a year of her life, so I got really good at it. Hand me the brush."

I pull her hair loose from the style she tries to put it in, then brush long strokes down her back, smoothing out the curls.

Raisa watches me intently in the mirror as I work from the top, braiding a French plait all the way down her back. She touches her hair carefully, feeling the neat twists.

Picking up the hand-held mirror, I show her what I've done. "Is that ok?"

"Oleg, this is amazing. I might be going through a year of only wanting braids too now. You really are good at that."

She stands up, finally looking pleased with her hair. "I'm ready," she says, smiling and happy.

"Let's get going. "

We walk out to the car together and she looks absolutely gorgeous this afternoon.

We are going to a little Turkish restaurant at the edge of town. It's a quaint venue and the owners are an old married couple who have been running the place for what seems like their entire lives. I think his parents owned it before he took over with his wife. It's a lovely, warm and inviting place and I know Raisa will enjoy it.

I hold the door open for Raisa as she lifts her dress and climbs into the car.

I climb into the driver's side and we head out onto the road. The sun is already starting to set and the sky is bright with streaks of pink and orange.

Raisa reaches out and takes one of my hands off the steering wheel. She places it on her leg and smiles as she stares out of the window.

My heart thunders wildly in my chest. She has been so affectionate these last few days. I really love this side of her, the side that actually asks for me to touch her.

My phone rings loudly in my pocket and I shift to the side to pull it out, staring down at the screen. It's my warehouse manager.

I slide the green button to answer the call and it connects to the car system.

"Damon. How are you this afternoon?" I ask.

"Sir, there was an accident on site—Luke has been injured."

“Is it bad? What happened?”

“Just a stupid mistake, really—where are you?”

I glance at Raisa. “I’m actually just around the corner from the warehouse. I’ll be two minutes.”

I hang up and glance at Raisa. “Sorry, I want to go and make sure he is ok.”

“Of course, there is no need to apologize.”

Parking outside the warehouse, we both hurry out of the car and run in through the massive doors.

The manager is there to meet us.

“Sir, we called the ambulance, but they are taking forever to get here and he’s losing a lot of blood.”

Damon hurries us over to where Luke is lying on the warehouse floor, looking like he is in a lot of pain.

A pool of blood has formed around his leg where something sliced through his work pants.

I am about to ask Damon for more information when Raisa kneels down next to Luke. “Shit,” she mutters. Then turns to me. “I need the first aid kit and your belt.”

“Get the kit,” I say to Damon, not asking any questions, just pulling my belt loose.

She wraps my belt around his upper thigh and pulls it tight, buckling it closed. The

bleeding slows as Damon arrives with the first aid kit and hands it to her. He looks worried.

“Does she know what she’s doing?” he whispers to me, too soft for Raisa to hear. Luke’s eyes roll back in his head and his body goes limp as he loses consciousness.

I nod, but I’ve never seen her at work before. I hope, for Luke’s sake, that she does know what she’s doing.

“You—press down here,” she says to the man kneeling on Luke’s other side, holding his hand. He does as he’s told while she digs around in the first aid kit, looking for something. Finally, she pulls out a pair of scissors and what looks like weird long-nose pliers, but steel and shining.

She works quickly to cut away his pants, pulling the material away from the wound. “Hold him down,” she says sternly.

Then, she pours a clear liquid over the wound.

“Hold him,” she warns.

“He’s unconscious.”

“I don’t care. Hold him.”

She pushes the pliers into the wound, clamping them down over something and suddenly, the blood stops flowing completely.

She breathes a sigh of relief. Not letting go of the pliers she leans back slightly. “That was close,” she mutters.

“What happened? What did you do?” Damon asks nervously, staring at the still-unconscious Luke.

“He’s going to be ok, but he needs to get to the hospital quickly,” she says.

Behind us, medics flow into the building. Damon waves them towards us.

“What’s going on?” the medic asks, eyeing Raisa and her grip on the pliers.

“He cut his femoral artery, lost consciousness about two minutes go.”

The medic leans over, examining Raisa’s fix.

“You managed to get the artery. That’s incredible. Are you a doctor?” the medic asks.

“I’m learning,” she says.

“Well, you just saved this man’s life. If he was already losing consciousness, he didn’t have much time left before he bled out.”

Raisa smiles tightly as medics work together to get Luke onto a stretcher. One of the medics takes over Raisa’s grip on the pliers.

Then they rush out, carrying Luke towards the ambulance.

Raisa stands up, the front of her summer dress is sticky with blood.

She wipes her hands down the soft fabric, trying to clean them off a little.

“You save his life,” Damon says, excitedly, then grabs her into a tight hug, ignoring the mess. “Thank you. Thank you so much.” Then he turns to run towards the

ambulance to drive with Luke.

“Luke is his son,” I say to Raisa as she stares after him. “You just stopped a father from having to see his son die. What you did was incredible. You didn’t even hesitate.”

I stare at her in awe and admiration.

“I did ok, didn’t I?” She smiles—proud of herself.

“You did better than ok, little flower.”

“I guess we need to go home and shower,” she sighs, frowning at her ruined dress.

“There are showers in the back of the warehouse. I am going to shoot into town and by the time you get out, I’ll be back with a new dress.”

“Are you sure? That seems like a lot of trouble—“

I reach out and run my hand over her cheek. “Nothing is too much trouble for you, Raisa.”

She grins up at me, tilting her face into my hand.

“Tony here will show you where the showers are.” I gesture towards the man standing nearby. “There are towels in the locker room. I won’t be long. I promise.”

Rushing out to the car, I can’t help but feel overwhelmed with gratitude. She just saved a man’s life. Not only would we have lost Luke, but also Damon for a while. He would have struggled with the pain of losing his child—our entire workforce would have been affected.

She did such an incredible job.

In town, I stop at a late-night boutique and choose another long flowing dress for Raisa. This one is gold, with a sparkle to the fabric. It looks beautiful and I know it is going to look even better on her.

I drive back to the warehouse, constantly thinking about her.

She keeps surprising me.

Back at the warehouse, I find Raisa waiting in the bathroom, a big towel wrapped around her.

“I’m coming in,” I call from the doorway, in case there are any other women in there.

“I’m alone,” Raisa calls back to me.

I sit down on the locker room bench next to her and take her face in my hands, pulling her into a kiss.

She melts against me, wrapping her hands around my neck. I keep my lips locked with hers for as long as I can before I have to pull away.

Smiling, I tuck a stray curl behind her ear. “Raisa, what you did this evening—you know—I know grown men, hardcore, strong-willed men who would have panicked seeing that amount of blood. But you just knelt down next to him, took one look at it and knew exactly what to do. Honestly, you blow me away. And not just with this—with everything you do. You are an incredible woman. You have determination—your confidence—the fact that you don’t let anyone stand in the way of your dreams—Raisa. You are incredible. I am so grateful to have you in my life—“ I take a slow breath. “I just want you to know how much I appreciate you.”

Raisa's cheeks are bright pink when the shy smile spreads across her face.

"Oleg—I was just doing what I was taught to do—" she stammers.

"No, you weren't taught to stay calm like that—and I'm not only talking about this—I'm talking about everything."

She bites her lower lip, her eyes shining.

I tilt her face up with my hand beneath her chin. I stare into her bright blue eyes as I say it again, "you are an incredible woman and I am so grateful to have you in my life."

She leans forward and kisses me, and it is the perfect answer.

I pull the gold dress out of the boutique bag and hold it up for her. "I hope you like it."

"It's perfect," she says, letting the towel drop to her feet.

I help her slide the dress over her head and tie it at the back. She spins around, letting the heavy gold fabric flow out around her.

"You look incredible."

"Wow. I love it." She says, feeling the fabric between her fingertips.

"Come on, I told the restaurant we would be a little late. But let's get going. I think we both need a drink."

"I feel bad that I'm still hungry after all of that." She raises her brows at me, looking

guilty.

I crack up laughing, “well, we should be celebrating life with a good meal.”

Once we are in the car my phone buzzes. I pull it out to check the message from Damon.

Damon: Luke had stitches, they closed up the wound and fixed the damage. Tell that girl of yours that she literally saved his life. The doctor explained to me what she did and she is an angel. Thank you. Please tell her I said that.

Me: I’ll make sure to pass the message on. Let me know if you or Luke need anything. I’ll have some fresh clothes and food sent to the hospital for you.

Damon: Thank you Oleg, you are always so good to us. Luke is coming out of recovery now. They will let me see him soon.

“Raisa, Luke is perfectly great. You literally saved his life and Damon just messaged to let you know how grateful he is.”

I reach the message out to her and she is grinning from ear to ear.

I run my hand over her leg. “It looks like you were always meant to be a doctor. You definitely chose the right goals for yourself. I’ll help you reach your dreams, whatever you need.”

Raisa and I have a really lovely evening at the Turkish restaurant. The food is incredible and the quiet, intimate venue is exactly our style.

Watching her chatting away happily my thoughts are drifting, wondering how I got so lucky to find her—in these strange circumstances—and that even after I did

everything to her, she is still so good to me.

I don't know what I did in life to deserve someone so amazing.

All know is that I will do anything to keep her close to me.

I never want to lose her.

I have to make sure she is happy and that she has everything she could ever want or need.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

My life is feeling less and less controlled lately. Oleg has been generously letting me leave the property as long as I take one of the security guards with me. He let me go for a run the other night and today he has agreed to let Anya take me out shopping once I am finished with the few chapters I want to study this morning.

Things have been so perfect between Oleg and myself and I have finally given up trying to fight the way I feel for him. Of course, I haven't exactly told him how I feel either—for now I am just enjoying it—maybe even starting to feel hopeful for our future together.

But I don't want to talk to him about it yet because I don't want to have to face the reality of him possibly telling me he doesn't feel the same way. It would be heartbreaking—and I need to prepare for something like that.

I scribble a few notes down in my notebook about the muscles of the heart and then drop my pen down onto the paper. I need to go shower. Anya will be here soon.

On my study desk, my laptop chimes loudly.

An incoming video call from Ruslana. My little sister calls me a few times a week and keeps me up to date with what is happening at home. She isn't involved in any of the business stuff, but she tells me who is bickering with who and any funny stories and basically just all the things I need to stay up to date with my brothers and their shenanigans.

I love talking to her and I'm excited because Oleg said I can buy her some gifts when I told him I was missing her. So, today when I go shopping, I'll be choosing things

for her too.

I flick the answer button on my keyboard and her face fills my screen.

“Ruslana,” I say happily.

“Raisa—wow—you look really pretty today.”

I reach up and touch my hair. “What do you mean?” I ask, knowing I haven’t even showered yet.

“I don’t know. You’re just glowing. Like you got a new tan or something. Have you been in the sun?”

“Not really.” I laugh.

Talking to her is easy. It’s always a free-flowing conversation, easily moving from one topic to the next.

We chat for about thirty minutes before she has to go. Renat just got back from the shops with some food and they are shouting for her to come and make lunch. She rolls her eyes in annoyance and leans backward to shout out of her bedroom door. “I’m coming now. Stop being so impatient.”

I laugh. “Gosh. They still aren’t cooking for themselves?”

“Well, they take pretty good care of me—so I guess it’s the least I can do to take care of them.” She grins. “But don’t tell them I don’t mind doing it. It’s more fun that they think they are annoying me.”

We say goodbye just as Anya messages me to say she’s on her way.

Shit. I have to shower and get ready. I hate feeling rushed because then I panic and forget things.

I rush around the bedroom after my shower. Tossing my clothes all over the place while I search for my jeans. Finally, finding them, I pull them on and through the bedroom door from down stairs I hear Anya saying a loud and friendly hello to Oleg.

I hope he can delay her for five minutes.

I pull a little white t-shirt on and brush my hair, pinning it in a high bun. I grab my sneakers and run down stairs carrying them and my socks.

“I won’t be long,” I call out, sitting on one of the middle steps. Anya peeks around the corner to look at me. “Hey girl, there is no rush,” she grins.

But I’m excited, and eager to get going. I can’t even remember the last time I had a day out with a friend—and shopping is relaxing and fun. I’ve been looking forward to this ever since she mentioned it.

The mall isn’t too busy because it’s the middle of the week. We roam around from shop to shop with the two bodyguards following us, looking bored out of their minds.

At one point, we try to convince them to go have a coffee and give us some space—but they glare at us, reminding us that Oleg will have their heads if they take their eyes off us for even a minute.

But we really want to go to the lingerie shop and two men tagging along doesn’t seem right. I am not that comfortable with them so I want to browse lace and suspenders while they watch.

Anya leans close to me and whispers, “the shop opposite us—the dressing room has

two exits. If we have them waiting outside the one—we can slip out the other.”

I feel my heart race a little. I know Oleg gave us both a very serious lecture before we left the house, insisting that at no point do we go too far from the bodyguards—but the thrill of misbehaving a little has my blood pumping. All I’ve been doing lately is studying and being good. It’s definitely time for a little bit of innocent fun.

We walk into the shop and both of us grab some random items and walk towards the change rooms. The body guards take a seat on the sofa outside the left side entrance, prepared to wait for however long it takes.

Anya and I walk straight through the changing rooms, dropping off the clothes at the right-side exit. We peak across the store to where the body guards are sitting—oblivious to what we have done.

Anya grabs my hand and pulls me towards the shop doors in a hurry.

We make it out into the mall, both laughing, running away from the shop and the bodyguards.

“It gets a bit much,” Anya sighs, slowing down to a normal speed. “Having them around all the time.”

“It does. And I really don’t want them watching me choosing lacy undies.”

She giggles and we walk towards the lingerie shop, which is just the other side of the food court.

We are laughing and joking and so caught up in the moment that I get the fright of my life when I walk straight into Rad. My heart is pounding heavily when I look up at him in shock.

He chuckles, grabbing my shoulders as our eyes lock. My heart sinks when I see who is with him.

Rad and Rodion. What are the chances that two of my brothers would be here at the mall today?

“Raisa,” Rodion says in surprise. “I definitely didn’t expect to see you here.”

But he isn’t even looking at me. His eyes are locking onto Anya.

“Um. Anya, this is Rodion. And this is Rad. My brothers.”

Anya nods. “I know who they are,” she says with distaste, glaring back at Rodion as hard as he is glaring at her.

What the hell is wrong with him? He’s being so weird.

I’ve never seen Rodion look at someone that way.

I feel an urgent need to distract him.

“Rodion—how are you?” I say, feeling worry creeping into my bones because he doesn’t stop watching her.

My biggest concern is that my brothers want revenge against Oleg and his family for taking me and that Rodion might be planning to take Anya now that the opportunity has presented itself.

I wouldn’t put it past him. I know what he is capable of and I know he’s still pissed off with Oleg for forcing me into a marriage—even though I have been very insistent that I chose it.

Rodion doesn't even seem to realize that I asked him a question. So I punch him in the shoulder. "Hey. I asked how you are."

"Fine." He growls, his eyes piercing into Anya.

Fuck. This is bad.

Ok.

I need to do something to defuse this situation—and I need to do it fast.

Otherwise, before I know it my brothers will have Anya and I in the back of their car and I'll be headed back home with them instead of to Oleg—where I actually want to be. Strange how that has changed. Not too long ago I would have been over the moon for this opportunity to escape.

I turn towards Anya.

"Dammit, Anya, I think I left my wallet on the counter at the other shop," I say to her, trying to give her the signal with my eyes.

"Oh. I mean—it should still be there. We can go grab it if we are quick. I'm sure the shop assistant noticed and is keeping it safe."

I turn towards my brothers again to say goodbye.

"It was good to see you—" I say to Rodion and Rad. But Rodion shakes his head. "We'll walk with you. We were headed that way anyway." Not that I have even told them which way we were going. I sigh heavily.

But if my plan works then they will follow us right back to where the security guards

are waiting and then Anya will be safe. That's all I am worried about right now.

A heavy feeling churns in my stomach as we walk back the way we came from. I am trying to act calm and casual, but anxiety is building.

Anya walks close to my side, not out of fear, but because she seems to be trying to move away from Rodion, who is walking so close to her, he is practically on top of her. What the hell, Rodion? I glare at him, but he isn't paying any attention to me at all.

Even if he wants to kidnap her for revenge—he doesn't need to make it so creepy and obvious. I roll my eyes. Brothers are so annoying .

We are getting closer to the store where we lost the security guards when we see both of them marching towards us, looking pretty angry about us getting the upper hand.

I grin, knocking Anya with my elbow. Playing along with our original goal of losing them—but I think she wanted to find them again just as much as I did.

She giggles and Rodion's eyes flare towards her.

“Dammit, I thought we lost them for good,” she laughs.

“Me too. We did such a good maneuver.” Both of us are trying to make light of the situation. Even though we both know we just dodged something.

The security guards step up to us, standing close when they see my brothers following.

“Ladies, are you enjoying yourselves—is everything alright here?” One of the guards asks, eyeing my brothers.

“Everything’s great. We just bumped into my family.” I smile, friendly and relaxed.

Rodion’s fists are clenching at his side. His jaw is clamped so tight I can see the muscles feathering along it. Rad has been quiet this whole time. He also seems pretty focused on Rodion. Perhaps waiting for a signal. Perhaps wondering why he is acting so weird.

Anya turns towards my brother, glaring at him, looking right up at him as though he wasn’t almost twice her size. She looks fierce.

“Nice to see you. Hope you enjoy the rest of your day,” she says, not too friendly—definitely more of a warning for him to step back.

“It was nice to see you too Anya,” Rodion says her name, letting it roll from his lips as though he was tasting it. I sigh with annoyance. He can stop being weird now. His plan is ruined. The security guards are with us.

I pull him into a quick hug. Then Rad, too.

“Bye, guys,” I say, grabbing Anya’s arm and dragging her away because now she’s glaring at Rodion and things feel like they are heating up instead of calming down.

The bodyguards stand firm, their eyes on my brothers while we build distance between us. Then they turn to follow, neither of them keen to let their guard down.

Once we are safely inside the car, I breathe a sigh of relief. That was so fucking intense. I don’t know if I read too much into it—because that was the first time I’ve really seen my brothers in ages—but it was too tense.

I was genuinely scared of what they wanted to do to Anya.

“Jeez. Your oldest brother is a little crazy,” Anya sighs loudly, leaning back against the car seat.

“Sorry about that. I think he’s still a bit upset about everything.”

“He’s got one hell of a stare.”

“I know. He can be really intimidating. I’m glad nothing happened, though.”

“Me too. Sheesh.”

We drive back home to Oleg’s house, and Anya strides inside, announcing that we need to make cocktails because our shopping trip was cut short.

Oleg is out at the warehouse, so Anya and I take over the kitchen and start putting together some pretty watermelon cocktails splashed with lemon.

She seems to have completely forgotten about the awkward incident with my brothers by the time Oleg gets home—and for that I am very grateful because I am not sure how to explain everything to him. Especially seeing as it all happened when we snuck away from the guards.

Anya stays for dinner. She is a little tipsy and we are having fun, but the entire time I am waiting for her to mention that my brothers were at the mall—and I want to avoid that. So, for the entire dinner I struggle to really relax properly.

When Anya leaves, Oleg pulls me close.

“What’s wrong?” he asks, holding me against him.

“I’m just tired. It was a long day.” I smile up at him.

“Well, let’s go to bed then. I can help you relax and fall asleep easily.”

He scoops me into his arms and carries me upstairs.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

“Are you sure?” I ask him again, feeling my blood begin to boil.

“Yes, sir. Rodion was definitely up to something. The way he was looking at Anya was just—it was intense. It was obvious he had some kind of plan. Something was going on.”

I sigh heavily. “Thanks. You can go. I will deal with this.” I dismiss the security guard that went with the girls to the mall yesterday. He came to me this morning to let me know his concerns—and everything that happened when the girls went shopping.

Raisa didn’t even mention this to me. She didn’t even tell me that she had bumped into her brothers there. Why would she keep it from me?

I guess it’s because she knew I would be pissed off. I was so clear with her and my sister that they needed to stay near the security guards. Both of them know how pissed off I’d be to hear that they managed to ditch the guards and put themselves at risk like that. I guess that’s why Anya didn’t mention it either.

I clench and unclench my fists.

“Raisa!” I shout loudly, waiting to hear her response from somewhere in the house. Anger is building by the second.

“I’m here,” her voice drifts downstairs from the sun room. She’s studying. I shouldn’t interrupt her, but I’m too upset about this to let it go. I need to confront her right now. I need to know what the hell she was thinking.

I storm upstairs.

She is sitting at her desk, turning the chair towards me as I walk into the sunroom.

“You saw your brothers?” I snarl, standing over her.

Her entire body goes rigid.

Yes, she knew I would be angry.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I demand.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t want to upset you over nothing. We just bumped into them. That’s all.” She says, sounding casual but looking nervous.

“Raisa. The security guards told me that you slipped away from them. They told me that Rodion was very intense towards Anya.”

She laughs nervously. “He definitely had his eye on Anya.” She waves her hand in the air, trying to make it seem trivial.

“Raisa, this is not a joke. Was he planning to take Anya? The guards told me that you were acting as though you thought that was a possibility. That you looked nervous.”

She sighs. “No, Oleg, I think I just got nervous because I haven’t seen them for so long. I didn’t know how to act. I am sure he wasn’t going to do anything.”

Her hands are in her lap and she is fidgeting a lot.

“Raisa—“ I say with a deep warning in my voice. “You have to be honest with me.”

“I am being honest with you. I was nervous—but I really think that I was just overreacting. I just assumed things. My brother isn’t like that.” She sighs.

“If it was so innocent then why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I didn’t want you to react like this over nothing.” She gestures her hand towards me.

I sigh. I guess I have been keeping certain things from her that would help her understand why I am so worried about this.

Pulling up a chair I place it on the floor opposite from hers and sit down—taking her hands in mine.

“Your brother, Rodion, has been following Anya around for a while now. Anya doesn’t know. I put extra security on her to keep her safe, but that’s why I am worried about this. Your brother has already made it clear that he has some kind of interest in Anya. Yesterday, when he saw you two without the guards, he obviously thought he had an opportunity and was about to break the deal.”

Raisa looks worried. She shifts in her seat and bites at her lower lip.

“What are you going to do?” she asks, her voice thick with concern. This tells me that she knows her brother is actually capable of something like that.

“I need to pull us all together again somehow. I have to remind him of why he agreed to work with me instead of against me. I can’t have him breaking our deal. For everyone’s sake. Your family and mine. It will be a hell storm if he does. My brothers will not be controlled if he is going to mess with Anya.”

Raisa nods. “I’ll do whatever I can to help,” she promises.

“Thank you.” I stand up, kissing her forehead. Then I hurry out of the room. I have to figure out how to fix this. I have to plan something.

The best solution I could come up with to bring the two families together again was an event, hosted at my brother’s home. I thought it would give me a chance to speak to Rodion—in a secure environment with both families around.

Yefim agreed to host it because it was better than having her brothers scouting around my home, where Raisa lives. I want to keep them away from her as much as possible and inviting them into that space is a risk.

The party started a few hours ago and the music is playing and we are all hanging out in the back garden, having a drink. It should be a relaxed evening—but it’s not.

It is incredibly tense. Despite my best efforts to be polite and civil—I am so angry with Rodion for causing tension that I am struggling to hold a conversation with him. And to make matters worse—he hasn’t taken his eyes off Anya this whole afternoon.

He keeps watching her, looking at her as though she is prey and he is the hunter. I want to smash my fist into his face.

Whenever I try to hold a conversation with him or ask him any questions to try ease the situation his replies are short and rude and things are getting very quickly out of hand because I am losing my patience with him.

When Raisa leaves to go get another drink I take the opportunity to confront him with what is really on my mind.

“Look, Rodion, I know you want to break our agreement. I want to know why. We need to resolve our issues and you need to back off.”

“Bullshit. You don’t know a fucking thing about me.” He glares at me. Finally, dragging his eyes off Anya.

“I know you have some weird fucking interest in my sister,” I snap angrily.

His eyes darken. “Oh—are our sisters off-limit? Interesting you should say that—“

“Oh, for fucks sake. Raisa is happily married to me,” I sigh.

“The fuck she is,” he growls. “I can see straight through this game you are playing. I don’t know what you have over Raisa—but she would never marry a man like you.”

I feel my fists clenching at my side. I want to punch this asshole's face in. I want to show him what is going to happen if he doesn’t work with me and continues to fight me every step of the way. Is he so fucking stupid that he can’t see I’m trying to do something good for both families?

Rodion looks me up and down, his brows knotted.

“What are you going to do, asshole?” he snarls, stepping closer to me, seeing my body language has become aggressive because I don’t give a fuck about hiding it anymore.

“I’m done trying to force you to use your logic. Clearly, your neanderthal brain only understands violence,” I hiss.

He swings at me angrily and I duck just in time, feeling the brush of his fist as I narrowly escape the punch.

The commotion that breaks out around us grabs a lot of attention and suddenly, both of our families are rushing towards us.

Rodion runs at me, slamming his shoulder into my stomach. The air is knocked right out of me as I fall backwards. But Yefim catches me as two of Rodion's brothers grab him and drag him back.

He's yelling angrily as they push him away.

"Walk it off, man," Rad says, gesturing for him to walk away and cool down.

I sigh, clenching my jaw and look around for Raisa.

When our eyes meet, she looks disappointed and it breaks my heart to see that look on her face.

I walk over to her.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't want it to get that far. Your brother is not an easy man to deal with."

"I know. But the last thing I want to see is you two fighting," she says quietly, sounding miserable. I pull her into my arms, wanting to comfort her.

"Where's Anya?" Leon shouts from somewhere behind me.

I turn around in a panic.

"Where is she?" Yefim yells as well.

Someone shouts, "find her!" And suddenly, everyone starts running in different directions.

I scan the crowd, searching for my sister and Rodion—who has also disappeared. My

heart sinks. That fucking asshole took her.

He planned it the entire time. He couldn't take his eyes off her for a second—and now he's disappeared and she's gone too.

It was him.

I storm in the direction he walked off in, hell-bent on making him give her back to us. But as I walk towards the house, he walks out of it and into the garden, still looking pissed off.

“Where is she?” he asks me with a dangerous edge to his voice.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I shout. “You tell me. You are the one who took her. Don't play your games, Rodion. We aren't as stupid as you seem to think we are.”

Rodion shakes his head. He looks beyond annoyed. But he isn't even half as angry as I feel. I will tear him apart to get my sister back.

“You are wasting time,” he hisses. “The longer we stand here fighting—the worse it is for Anya. We need to get out there and find her.”

I step forward and grab his collar, shaking him and pulling him close as I snarl. “Don't fuck with me, Rodion, you conveniently disappeared right when she did.”

But Rodion's entire body has relaxed. He isn't fighting back.

He lifts his hands in the air in a defensive gesture.

“Oleg, I swear, I don't have her. I didn't take her,” he says calmly.

He isn't defensive or angry or aggressive. I let go of his shirt and step back, confused.

"But you've been following her. I know you have."

He doesn't even try to deny it.

"Yes. I followed her—I followed your brothers too. I kept my eye on all of the Dubrovs to make sure you were honoring your agreement. That's all."

He shrugs, but he looks worried. "I don't have Anya."

Staring into his eyes, I finally accept that he might be telling the truth.

His whole demeanor has changed. He is calm and stressed. No longer fighting against me.

Leon and Alexei run back into the garden. "We've looked everywhere. She's gone. Someone has taken her."

My entire body is tense with anxiety.

I shake my head. "If it wasn't you—it has to be the family who was trying to take you out. They saw that we were aligned with you and now we are their enemy, too."

"But why take Anya?" Rodion says. "Why not one of us?"

"She is a much easier target."

Rodion turns to his brothers. "Get your men together. Whatever we need to do—we have to help find Anya."

He turns back to me. “It must have been my enemy. They have been causing shit for us for a while now. I didn’t think Anya was in danger, though. I guess they were waiting for the right moment and we created enough of a distraction for them to make their move.”

I sigh, running my hand through my hair. “Yeah. Fighting between ourselves really doesn’t help anything.”

Leon steps close to us. “What is going on?”

“Someone has been watching us. They saw the ongoing tension between the two families and used it as the distraction they needed to take Anya.”

“Fuck sakes.” Leon snarls. “Get the men together. We’ll all go after them. Does anyone know who they are? Where are they located?”

Rodion nods. “It’s the Sidorov family. Three brothers. They have been threatening us for months. They made a few weak attempts to take us out—but they are small—annoying and useless.”

“I know the family. I know where their base is.” Leon nods at me.

“Alright, lead the way,” I say.

Then I turn to Raisa.

“Raisa, stay here.”

“Not a chance. I am coming with you,” she snaps, heated and not backing down.

“Raisa, I need you safe.”

“Oleg, I don’t care what you need. I am coming with you.”

I sigh, annoyed, but I don’t have time to argue with her.

“You are staying in the car,” I insist as we all jog out to the driveway, everyone piling into the cars, ready to follow Leon.

I check my gun beneath my seat, making sure it is loaded and ready.

Raisa eyes it nervously.

“It’s not too late to stay here. I will come back and—“

“Drive. We don’t have time to waste,” she says, pulling her safety belt across her chest and clipping it in.

I tried. But she’s right. We don’t have time.

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Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

My stomach is in a tight knot as we follow the convoy behind Leon.

I honestly thought Rodion had been the one who took Anya. When we all realized that it wasn't him, my heart sank because at least if it was my own brother, I could have spoken to him. Unfortunately, she is with a stranger now someone scary, dangerous, and unknown.

I sit quietly next to Oleg. He looks tense and worried as well.

I don't blame him.

I know he is very close to Anya.

All of her brothers love her.

We drive through the city towards the harbor, where Leon pulls off to the side of the road. We all do the same.

He climbs out of the car, and in no time we are all standing with him. Oleg is furious that I got out as well. But I will not just sit there and wait. I want to help and I want to do whatever I can.

"We'll head in the back. You guys can take the front entrance. It's not a big warehouse, so this should be quick and easy. The goal is to get Anya, I don't care what happens to the people who took her," Leon says to everyone. As soon as he is done speaking, Rodion bolts towards the front of the warehouse. He is determined to clear his name and help get her back. Otherwise, why is he still acting so weird about

her?

Oleg turns towards me. “Please, Raisa, go back to the car.” I glare at him and he shakes his head. “Stay behind me and you will do exactly as I say when we are in that warehouse. Do you hear me?”

“Yes.” That I can agree to.

He pulls a second gun from his ankle and hands it to me. “Do you know how to use this?”

I nod.

He grabs my jaw and pulls me towards him. Pressing his lips against mine, he kisses me. It's brief but intense. Then he turns to run after his brothers.

I follow everyone into the warehouse.

Before I even step through the doors, gunfire has already erupted inside. I flinch at the sound. No matter how many times you shoot a gun at the target range, or out in the field near the forests back home—no matter how many times you hear that loud snap—you never really get used to it.

Although, glancing around me, I notice that all of the men look like they don't even notice the sound.

Oleg runs deeper into the space, kneeling low and taking two shots. I see a man drop to the floor ahead of us and my stomach churns.

I hate this.

All of this death.

I follow close, the small gun Oleg has given me feels heavy in my hands. I won't use it unless I have to.

Somewhere in the warehouse I hear a loud scream. It sounds like a girl, but I turn towards it, expecting to see Anya and I see a young man. Leon has him by the collar of his jacket.

He tugs the jacket to the side, revealing a waiter's uniform.

"This is the uniform they were wearing at the party this evening," he snarls, glaring at the man.

"I—I—" he stammers.

"Where the fuck is my sister?" Leon growls and the man looks like he is about to pee in his pants.

"We didn't—we didn't take your sister. We wouldn't touch the Dubrov sister."

Leon snorts. "Right—so you were at my party—and my sister is missing—but you want to try and deny it. "

"We took his sister, a girl called Raisa, please—it wasn't me, though. They made me do it." The guy points towards Rad.

They think they have me.

They took the wrong girl.

I am the reason Anya got taken.

I'm about to step forward when an explosion rattles behind us and we all drop to the floor. Oleg pulls me close, his arm wrapped around my head.

I hear screaming from behind me, the person is in agony. I turn with worry, fearing that I recognize my brother's voice.

Writhing on the floor, Renat is clutching side. A large chunk of metal is protruding from it.

Everyone else is already taking aim towards the explosion as men rush through the hole in the warehouse wall towards us.

They fire at us, but there aren't enough of them and between my brothers and the Dubrovs, the enemy drops like flies.

Bodies fall to the floor around me as I keep low and make my way to Renat.

The gunfire stops and I hear someone shout Anya's name.

Glancing around, I see Rodion carrying her into the main area of the warehouse. Holding her tightly cradled against his body.

When he sees it's safe, he sets her down and she huffs, stepping away from him.

Anya is safe. Thank goodness.

I turn my attention back to Renat.

He groans, rolling over.

I grab his body and stop him.

“Don’t move,” I say harshly.

Rodion is leaning over me now. “Pick him up. We have to get him to the hospital.”

“Don’t you dare move him,” I snarl at Rodion and push his hand away.

“What the fuck?” he snaps at me.

I lift the torn shirt away from the wound, assessing the damage.

Turning to Rodion, I demand. “Give me your shirt.”

“What?”

“Now! Stop being difficult and just give it to me.”

Rodion, looking confused, unbuttons his shirt and pulls it off, handing it to me. He’s wearing a t-shirt beneath it. I don’t get why he had to be so difficult.

I take a deep breath. “I’m going to pull this out. It isn’t in deep, but the angle it’s in means it will pierce his kidney if we move him now. That will be very bad. I’m going to pull it out, then press this against the wound. Then we can get him into the car, ok?”

No one answers me.

“Ok?” I say again, louder.

Oleg pushes past my brothers and kneels down next to me. “Tell me what to do,” he

says.

“Push here. And Renat—try not to move.”

Renat nods, his face pulled tight in agony.

Slowly, I remove the shard of metal, blood spits from the gash, but I cover it quickly. It's not deep. He will be fine.

Renat groans but sounds relieved to have the metal out of his side. “Fuck, that fucking hurt,” he mutters. “Thanks,” with a sigh of relief.

Oleg slides his arm around Renat's waist and helps him up. Ruvim and Rad step forward to take him and help him to the car.

Rodion is glaring at me with narrowed eyes.

“How did you know what to do?” he asks abruptly.

“Now isn't the time,” I say.

He grabs my arm. “Now is a perfectly good time.”

I sigh.

“I've been studying medicine for years.”

Saying it out loud is actually a relief. I never wanted to keep that secret. I've always wanted to tell them and I've wanted them to be proud of me for it.

Rodion looks shocked. “What do you mean?”

“I graduated top of my class back home, then I started studying again when I got here. Oleg helped me sign up at a very prestigious university and I’m writing my exams soon.”

“Oleg helped you—are you studying to become a doctor—is that how you knew how to help Renat?”

I nod. “Yes.”

Rodion glares at Oleg, who steps close to me and wraps his arm around my waist. “You did an amazing job,” he whispers against my ear. I smile, because I just saved my brother a world of pain. If they had moved him, that shard would have done far worse damage.

Oleg and I turn to walk out of the warehouse, away from the carnage.

“Is Anya ok?” I ask as we step outside.

“She’s good. Leon has taken her home. Rodion was actually the one who got to her first. I need to thank him.”

Oleg stands next to his car but waits before getting in.

“Rodion—“ he calls my brother, who turns to look at him. His eyes are glazed, as though he is lost in thought.

“Mm?” he says, looking between Oleg and me.

“Thank you—for what you did for Anya. For getting to her so quickly. I appreciate it.”

“Sure,” Rodion says, then pauses. “Oleg, did you really enroll Raisa in university?”

“She wants to be a doctor, man. I will do anything she needs me to do to help her achieve her dreams.”

Rodion nods slowly, then pulls his car door open.

“Have a good night,” Oleg calls out.

“You too,” Rodion replies, then climbs inside and drives away.

“What’s gotten into him?” Oleg shrugs, pulling his door closed. He turns towards me, running his hand over my leg. “Let’s get home. Tonight has been absolute chaos.”

He pushes the car into gear and pulls out into the road, heading away from the warehouse, towards our home.

“Do you think he’s angry with me?” I ask after a while, worrying about how serious Rodion looked. “Or maybe disappointed? Because I never told them I was studying.” I twist my fingers nervously in my lap.

“Just give him some time, little flower. A lot happened tonight. But one thing is for sure, he saw what you did for Renat. He can’t deny that you helped him.”

I nod, still feeling tense with worry.

By the time we get home, Oleg has talked me out of some of my stress. He even has me laughing a little. I love how he can do that. How he can take away my concerns and put me at ease.

“No matter what, it’s your life Raisa, your brothers don’t get to choose your dreams.

And I will support you—through everything.”

I still haven’t told him I love him.

I want to.

I’ve almost done it so many times—but I haven’t seemed to get the right moment.

Oleg pulls the car door open for me. I climb out just as his phone starts ringing. He flicks it to answer.

“Rodion? What did—oh—ok.”

He holds the phone away from his ear. He presses a button on the screen and switches the call to loudspeaker as we climb the stairs into the house.

He pushes the front door open and leads me to the living room.

“Ok, we are both listening.” Oleg finally says.

“Raissa? Can you hear me?”

“I’m here. I can hear you,” I say, narrowing my eyes in confusion.

“Listen, I was shocked when I heard you were already so far along into your studies. I guess I hated the fact that you felt you needed to hide it from us. That you thought we wouldn’t support you. Raissa, I am your brother and I will support whatever you want to do. If you have a dream of being a doctor, then I am not going to tell you that you can’t do it. Chase your dreams with fierce passion—“ He pauses, I don’t say anything because I feel emotionally overwhelmed by his words. “And Oleg,” Rodion continues, “I think I was wrong about you. Seeing how you were there in a second to

help my sister with Renat's injury, how you trusted her, and knowing that you have been supporting her and helping her achieve everything, man, I'm sorry. Ok. I was wrong about you. Definitely. Thank you for being the man my sister needed and felt safe enough to share her secrets with."

I can't help the tears that are flowing down my cheeks. But these are happy tears, I am so excited that my brother not only knows the truth but has finally accepted that I want to be with Oleg, he isn't going to keep fighting this.

"Thank you, Rodion. This means so much to me," I manage to say between tight sobs.

"Don't cry, Raisa. I'm happy for you. I'm happy you found someone who sees you and supports you. Oleg—you better look after her. I'm happy—but I'll be there in a second if you hurt her in any way."

Oleg chuckles, wrapping his arm around me and holding me in a tight hug. "Thanks, Rodion. I appreciate that."

We end the call with my brother and I can't stop grinning.

Oleg is smiling down at me. "Well, that was an unexpected call—he chuckles.

"That was the best call ever. My brother is happy for us. This is the best news ever. They won't fight you or your family anymore and all of this horrible tension can be over."

I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him.

Tonight isn't the right time to tell him that I love him.

Too much has happened already.

But at least Anya is safe and Rodion isn't going to be a pain in the ass anymore.

Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 5:13 pm

The shootout at the Sidorov warehouse caused issues amongst the families, so now I am being forced to explain why one of our allies got taken out by us without any discussion amongst the others.

Of course, it isn't difficult to explain that they kidnapped Anya and that alone would be explanation enough, but I need to do better than that.

I need to find a way to explain that the Kuznetsov brothers helped to get Anya back and that my allies should now also accept them as their allies.

But this won't work if Rodion isn't serious about working with me.

So, before I can meet with the families, I have to meet with Rodion.

Leon wants to come along and he is currently standing in my office, glaring at me.

"I promise you I will handle this. I caused this shit show, so I will sort it out. Leon, this would be a waste of your time. I will sort it out." I say, for the third time.

"Are you sure? Because you told me marrying that girl would solve everything, but our sister still ended up getting kidnapped, " his eyes are piercing into me. I know he's pissed off about what happened to Anya and so am I, but me marrying Raisa had nothing to do with that.

"Leon, if this isn't resolved by tonight, then I will come to you and ask for your help. But I promise you, it will be sorted out by then."

He pulls his mouth tight. “Call me later. I want confirmation.”

I nod, feeling frustrated and exhausted by his constant worry. But again, I remind myself, he is just upset about what happened to Anya.

When Leon leaves, I breathe a sigh of relief.

Rodion is on his way here and I didn’t want to have to deal with both of them in my office at the same time. They both have such intense personalities and I just don’t see that situation going well.

Luckily, Leon is long gone when Rodion walks in.

“Oleg,” he says stiffly.

“Rodion, I’m glad you offered your help.” I nod.

I hold out my hand to shake his and he takes my hand tightly in his grip shaking once, hard. Then he lets go. It seems that he is showing a little more respect these days. Thank fuck. I am so over this drama.

“I had to help. The Sidorov family was after me, not you. It was my enemy. It’s the least I can do.”

“We need to arrange a clean-up around that warehouse before the cops catch wind of what went down. Can you handle that?”

“Yes, I have already put the team together. I just wanted to check with you first. We have the truck ready and waiting for disposal.”

“You can send them in. You and I also need to come to an understanding about our

business relationship moving forward.”

Rodion sighs tightly. He wants to say something. I wait, not interrupting him as he gathers his thoughts.

Finally, he steps towards my desk and rests his knuckles against the surface as he leans slightly towards me.

“Oleg, I want my family to be officially allied with you, but not only that, I want to be your equal.”

I smile. He is asking a lot. To be an equal to the Dubrovs is a big request. He is going to have to prove himself first.

I fold my arms across my chest, staring in Rodion’s eyes. He is dead serious. He doesn’t break away.

“Alright. But you don’t just get to be equal to the Dubrovs overnight. This is something you will have to work towards. You are going to have to earn that kind of status. However, I will give you every opportunity you and your brothers should need in order to earn it. Is that to your satisfaction?”

Rodion steps back, folding his arms across his chest, mimicking my gesture.

“It is. That makes sense and I appreciate that you are willing to do that for us.”

“So, we’re good?”

“We’re good,” he chuckles and I realize it is the first time I have ever heard him laugh.

I shake my head. “You are not an easy man to work with, Rodion.”

“I’m sure my sister has told you all about it,” he laughs again.

“Alright, you can join me at a meeting I am having with my allies. You will need to get to know all of them because they will be your allies, too, by default. I’ll catch you up on all the information on the drive there.”

Later that evening, I walk into my home feeling exhausted but pleased that everything has gone so well.

Before I can really relax with Raisa though, I need to call Leon.

I pull my phone out of my pocket and dial his number, leaning against the back of the sofa, waiting for him to answer.

“Oleg, give me good news.”

“We are allied with the Kuznetsovs, and Rodion attended the family meeting with me. Everyone is on board. Things are sorted. We won’t be getting any more trouble from them. The remainder of the Sidorov family fled the city after realizing they had kidnapped the wrong sister. If they return, we can decide what we want to do there—but otherwise—everything is good.”

“I’m happy to hear that. Good job.”

Leon says goodnight and I hang up the phone.

Turning towards the door, I see Raisa standing there.

“How much did you hear?” I ask.

“Not enough to understand what is going on. Did you meet with Rodion—what happened?”

My stomach tightens. I am not sure she will be happy with the offer I made for her brothers. I don't know if she will think it is fair enough, seeing as her and I are married.

“Raisa, your brother asked if your family and my family could be allied. I agreed to that. It is what I wanted from the start.”

“Ok, but then why do you look so tense?”

I sigh, running my hand through my hair. “Because he asked to be my equal. And I didn't agree in the way he wanted.”

“Does that mean you agreed in a different way?”

“Yes, I told him he could earn it. That I would help him achieve that—but that it isn't something I can just hand to him.”

Raisa smiles. “Are you serious? You will really help them out like that?” She sounds so happy. I thought she was going to be angry that I didn't make it easier for them.

“Yes, you aren't upset?” I ask, checking to make sure.

“Why would I be upset? That is so amazing and I'm so happy.” She runs towards me, straight into my arms, hugging me tightly.

My heart is bursting with happiness.

All I have ever wanted was to make her happy and now that all of the mayhem and

chaos is over, I finally seem to be achieving that.

But now that it is over—is she going to want to leave?

My jaw clenches and my entire body stiffens. She senses the change in me and steps away to look up at me.

“Oleg, what’s wrong?”

“We need to talk.”

I take her hand and lead her to the sofa. Sitting her down next to me.

“Raisa, everything is over. Technically you don’t have to stay married to me if you—“ my throat tightens and I can’t seem to get the words out. I don’t even want to suggest that she leaves. I don’t know how I will manage to get through that.

She glares at me with her eyes wide and her mouth dropped open.

“Is that what you want?” she asks, her voice small and tight.

“No, it’s the last thing that I want. If I had my way, you would never leave my side—“

“Oleg, I love you,” she blurts out—then stares at me with fear in her eyes.

She doesn’t even blink, just watches, waiting for my response.

I stare back in disbelief. Did I hear her right?

“You love me?”

She nods slowly, biting her lower lip.

A massive smile spreads across my face as I lean forward to grab her into my arms.

“Raisa, I love you. I have been in love with you for so long—but I didn’t know how to tell you—“

“Me too,” she laughs against me, relief flooding through both of us.

When I pull her away from me to look at her face, her eyes are bright with tears.

“I love you,” she giggles, looking up at me with those bright blue eyes sparkling wildly.

I shake my head.

Then I slide off the sofa, dropping onto one knee in front of her.

“Will you marry me, Raisa?” I ask, holding her hand.

She smiles so beautifully that my heart wants to explode.

“I will marry you,” she answers, then slides off the sofa onto my lap, causing me to fall backwards onto the floor. She lies over my chest, laughing and kissing me. When she stops, she stares at me with a serious expression. I pause, waiting to hear what she has to say.

“This time, I am wearing a dress though. A proper wedding dress.” Her frown is so intense I can’t help but laugh at her.

“We will plan the wedding of your dreams, little flower. Everything you want.

Anywhere in the world you want to go. You can have a thousand guests—or no guests at all—“

“I want a small wedding, with our brothers and sisters, no one else.”

Her eyes are warm and full of love when they stare into mine.

“That sounds perfect,” I say softly, then pull her towards me, rolling over so that I am on top of her, I press my lips against hers and kiss her.

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It has been six months since I married Oleg for the second time—or if you ask me—for the first time. The time that really counted.

Our wedding was absolutely perfect. I had the most beautiful dress. We got married at their family holiday resort in Hawaii. All of my siblings were there and no one caused any drama.

Since then, things have only been getting better.

The last six months have been the happiest time of my entire life.

Oleg is the most perfect man. He smothers me in love and kindness. His gentle heart is my safe place and every time I fall asleep in his arms, I fall deeper in love with him.

He is my entire world and I can't imagine my life without him.

I officially moved in with him.

I found an amazing tenant for my apartment in the city and I think it might even be the start of my property investment portfolio.

My studies are going really well. I passed my first set of exams top of my class and I am pushing to do the same again for the next set. It's exhausting but so rewarding and lucky for me, I have the most incredible man who is continuously showing me his support.

On some evenings, I get together with my new study group, and Jenna is part of it, which is really amazing. We help each other through the complicated parts and provide loads of moral support when things seem overwhelming. It's nice to have a group of people who are going through the same challenge that you are—trying to become a doctor.

I sit at my desk in the sunroom, tapping my pencil on the pages of the textbook like I usually do when I start to lose focus because I'm trying to push too hard. The words are beginning to blur into each other because my eyes are so tired. I rub my eyes, trying to force them to be more awake.

I hear Oleg come into the room and turn to see him carrying a cup of coffee towards me. Oh, my word, I just love him. He seems to know what I need before I even know what I need. He sets it down on the table and leans down to kiss my forehead. I pick up the coffee and sip it with a happy heart.

“Little flower, I think you need a break. You've been at it for hours.”

“Ugh. I was trying to get through this last chapter, but I can't focus anymore. I think this coffee will be my saving grace, though. I can just push—”

“You aren't pushing anymore—you're done.” He says sternly.

He pulls me out of my chair and my legs ache from sitting down for too long. He wraps his arms around me and I melt against him, breathing in his scent.

“We still have the dinner tonight at my brother's place. Are you up for it? I can cancel if you like. We can snuggle up on the sofa, wrapped in a blanket, watching horror movies all night, “ he grins, looking hopeful. I know he hates all of this socializing.

“We are going,” I laugh. “Don't use me as an excuse to get out of it.”

He chuckles, hugging me tighter. “Fine. Then you definitely have to stop studying now. It’s almost time to start getting ready.”

“It can’t be that late,” I say in shock, glancing down at my watch.

But it is—I can’t believe the entire day has just disappeared.

I groan loudly, leaning more into Oleg.

He laughs, picking me up in his arms. “I’ll help you with the shower.” He grins as he carries me towards the bedroom.

I squeal and wiggle away from him. “If you help me with the shower, we will never get out of the shower,” I laugh, escaping his grip.

“That was my plan.”

I gently push his chest and throw him a naughty smile.

“You have to wait until we get home. If you’re good you’re nice to everyone at the dinner, then I will reward you with something extra special,” I laugh.

“Hey, I’m always nice—but fine—I accept your deal.” He slaps my butt cheek as I walk away from him to go and get ready.

Later that night we arrive at Leon’s house just as the last light is fading from the sky.

I can see my brothers are already here. Their cars are all parked in the driveway, scattered between Oleg’s brothers' cars.

Oleg and I walk into the dinner party and I grin when I see Anya and Ruslana sitting together, laughing over a cocktail. Those two get on far too well. They are trouble—I

can just see it.

I walk right over to them and hug them both tightly.

“Are you two causing trouble?”

“Who us? Never,” Anya laughs, winking at Ruslana.

“Well, I’m just happy that both of my sisters are getting along,” I say, sitting down to join them. Oleg comes to hand me a drink, smiles at me, leans over to kiss me and then disappears to talk to the brothers.

“Is everyone getting along?” I ask Anya, who has been here the longest and can update me on things.

“Actually, yes. Alexei and Rad seem to get on like a house on fire. I don’t know if that’s good or not. Overall, all of our brothers are tensely getting on. Like there is awkwardness—but it’s not bad. Definitely an improvement every time we have a dinner,” she laughs.

“And you?” I raise my brows towards her.

She rolls her eyes. “Don’t even get me started. I am not ready to get on with your brothers yet. I’m happy just being friends with your sister.”

Ruslana smiles and lifts her glass towards Anya. “Cheers to that. Who needs boys anyway?”

I roll my eyes at both of them.

“You two might need boys if you don’t want to be single for the rest of your lives,” I laugh, standing up to go and find my husband.

“I’ll get married when a man comes along who deserves me,” Anya calls after me. I shake my head and wave my hand to dismiss her silliness.

I do hope she finds someone amazing one day. She deserves it.

I find Oleg outside in the cool night air. The brothers are all standing around, smoking cigars and drinking whisky.

I snuggle up against my husband’s side and he wraps his arm around me.

“You look tired, little flower.”

“I am tired. Exhausted actually. I think your idea of staying home and snuggling was actually the right one.”

“Oh no, we can’t leave now. You have to witness me being nice to everyone,” he chuckles and I playfully punch his side.

He turns to face me and lifts me in his arms. “Come on. I know exactly what you need.”

“Oleg—“ I whisper, laughing as he carries me into the house, past everyone, to the downstairs guest bedroom. “What are you doing?” I ask softly, afraid someone will hear us.

“No one saw us—don’t worry—they are all too busy discussing business.”

He moves slowly when he closes the bedroom door though, pushing it softly until it clicks into place, then he turns towards me with a mischievous grin.

He winks and walks right over to me, grabbing my top and pulling it up over my head. I laugh a little too loud and clasp my hand over my mouth, but he takes my

wrists and moves it away. “Make as much noise as you want.”

“They would definitely hear us if I did that.” I giggle.

Oleg cups his hands over my face and leans close to kiss me. The warmth of his mouth locked over mine is so seductive and sensual that I forget where I am for a moment. I grab his shirt in my hands and tug him closer to me.

He runs his hands over my body, then kisses me even deeper, sending shivers running through my spine. He makes my heart race and my skin burn with need. I don’t think I will ever get enough of this man. He is the most perfectly gorgeous thing I have ever laid my eyes on.

Oleg slips his fingers under the waistband of my pants and I feel my cheeks flushing pink. “Are we really doing this here?” I giggle again.

“Try and stop me, little flower.” He growls.

I gasp when he yanks my pants off and pushes me onto the bed as he stands looking down at me.

He smirks, then with a dark tint to his voice he commands, “Touch yourself. I want to watch.”

His eyes dance over me while he unbuttons his shirt, moving as though we have all the time in the world. The thrill of it makes me grin and I slowly brush my hand over my stomach, between my legs, rubbing my fingers over my pussy.

My fingers slide between my pussy lips, brushing over my clit and sending delightful waves of pleasure through me. I gasp softly as I slip my finger inside myself, feeling my pussy tighten and then shudder with anticipation and desire to have his cock thrusting into me.

“I love it when you bite your lip like that,” Oleg says, stepping out of his pants and climbing onto the bed. He pushes my legs apart. His eyes locked onto my pussy.

“Don’t stop. Keep touching yourself. You have no idea how beautiful it is to watch,” he says, kneeling between my legs.

I rub my fingers in small circles over my clit as Oleg pushes his rock-hard cock against my pussy. The lust that surges in me at that moment is so intense I almost come just from the idea of him filling me up with that monster cock of his.

I gasp as he slides into me, slowly, pushing deeper as I arch my hips up towards him. My body is out of my control. I am entire his to do with as he pleases.

I don’t even care where we are anymore. And I don’t care about any sounds I’m making. I just want him. I want him deeper and harder and fucking me like I am the only thing he ever needs.

He grabs my ass in his hands, lifting me up and pushing all the way inside me. His cock is stretching my pussy open, making me shudder with delight.

He licks his thumb and reaches behind to press it against my ass.

I feel my body tense in fear.

“Relax, little flower,” his deep voice vibrates through me. “I won’t hurt you.”

I take a deep breath and do as he asks, trusting him and giving in to his commands.

He gently rubs my ass while I rub my clit and he fucks me with his cock.

My sanity is slipping quickly over the edge.

The sensations come at me from every angle and soon I am moaning loudly, rocking my body against him, wanting to feel more and more.

Oleg slips his thumb inside me, not deep, just enough to tease me and push the boundaries of what my body can handle.

I feel him go harder inside me. He is enjoying this as much as I am. Playing with me is teasing him.

He starts to fuck me harder, his cock thrusting deep into me, my fingers are moving faster over my clit as my pussy swells around him. The dark smile on his lips tell me that he can feel how close I am to the edge.

My body is tired from a long day of study and all of these sensations at once are making me lose control. My skin is hot, burning and tingling with pleasure.

I want more.

More.

His cock slams into me and I let out a sharp cry. He clamps his hand over my mouth.

My legs begin to shake and I cry out again, muffled against his hand.. I stare at him, still moaning, unable to hold back the sounds of my desire.

The smile on his face is so fucking sexy. He loves this.

And seeing him so turned on is making it even more intense for me.

I can feel his cock growing harder inside me as he thrusts in and out of my pussy.

He pushes in deep and I can't take anymore.

My eyes flutter and roll back as a wall of pleasure slams into me, over and over again my body shakes wildly as the orgasm steals me away.

I feel Oleg stiffen and explode inside me.

He lies down next to me, pulling me up against him.

We both grin as we catch our breath.

“So, do you want to go home and watch movies on the sofa, all snuggled up under a blanket?” he whispers against my ear.

“Only if we can do that all again when we get there,” I grin.

“Oh, little flower, I was counting on it.”

Oleg and I don’t even say goodbye—we just sneak out the house, to the car and drive straight home.

Everyone is getting on fine and they can survive the night without us. For now—all I want to do is cuddle up against the man who has completely stolen my heart.

I want to wrap myself in him and close my eyes and enjoy every moment of him.

Sitting together on the sofa, my head resting on his chest, his fingers brushing through my hair, Oleg leans close and whispers, “I will fall more in love with you every day until my time on this earth is over. That much, I promise you. You are my entire world, little Raisa flower. You are everything to me.”

THE END