

BITTER LOVE SERIES: BOOK ONE

kingdom of sinners

WHO WILL WIN?
THE KING?
THE QUEEN?
OR THE GODDESS?

SHANJIDA
NUSRATH ALI

KINGDOM OF SINNERS



OceanofPDF.com

SHANJIDA NUSRATH ALI

OceanofPDF.com

CONTENTS

[Playlist](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

Coming soon

Acknowledgement

More By The Author

OceanofPDF.com

Copyright © 2021 by Shanjida Nusrath Ali

Kindle Edition

This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This book may not be resold or given away to other people. If you want to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your only use, then please return to Amazon.com and purchase your own copy. Please do not participate or encourage the piracy of copyrighted materials. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, business, events and incidents are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Warning: The book contains intense sex scenes, explicit language, religious references and violence.

OceanofPDF.com

PLAYLIST

LISTEN NOW ON SPOTIFY

Horns- Bryce Fox

Trust- Boy Epic

Fever- Youthxx

Money- Cardi B

Play With Fire- Sam Tinnesz ft. Yacht Money

Drugs- UPSAHL ft. Two Feet

Wolves- Sam Tinnesz

Undiscovered- Laura Welsh

I Ran So Far Away- Hidden Citizens

Needed Me- Rihanna

The Way You Look Tonight- Frank Sinatra

I Feel Like I'm Drowning- Two Feet

Toxic- 2WEI (Britney Spears Cover)

People Are Strangers- Zella Day

Secrets and Lies- Ruelle

Shadow Preachers- Zella Day

[OceanofPDF.com](https://www.oceanofpdf.com)

*To my readers because my books exist because of you. Thank you for your
love and support.*

*To my favorite mafia/dark romance authors. Thank you for inspiring me
and making me fall in love with the world of dark romance.*

OceanofPDF.com

PROLOGUE



POURING RAIN OUTSIDE, SYNCs WITH THE FALSETTO VOICE OF THE UNKNOWN woman, playing on the gramophone. I remain still as a statue while my foster mother, Mrs. Jones, paints my face like a doll with makeup. I've never liked makeup; it always makes my skin itchy. And whenever I can't control my urge and scratch my skin for relief, mother takes out her cane and strikes it hard against my hand.

I still have the fresh marks on my olive skin but she covers them with makeup. However, the pain and agony are still there... something that even the foundation can't hide. Holding my chin between her index finger and thumb, Mrs. Jones tilts my head back, putting the blush on my cheeks, making them look rosy as if I'm blushing.

"There. All done," she mutters with an approving nod, followed by a prideful smile before putting the brush back on the dressing table. She cups my shoulder, facing me towards the mirror. But I can't look at my reflection...I just can't.

This is a sight that I dreaded. This is a moment that I wished no one would ever experience.

"Look how pretty you look," she whispers close to my ear, making me shiver. My head casts down but she isn't going to have any of this. I feel her tight grip on my jaw making me hiss with sudden surprise as she makes me

look at myself. The candles are the only beacon of light in the room, highlighting my features more than I want them to be.

“Give them a great show tonight, understood?” she speaks in a sweet like honey voice but the threat she holds behind that tone is only evident to me.

I nod with a shaky smile as she pats my shoulder in encouragement and guides me out of the room. The narrow hallway is filled with family pictures and different landscapes of London. The velvet carpet tickles the sole of my feet as I walk barefoot towards the room. My hands clutch my white cotton nightdress that ends at my shin. My nerves start to rush faster and faster with every step we take closer to the door. By the time she unlocks the door, my heart starts pounding hard against my chest. I can feel sweat running through my body.

The room is absolutely dark. There is no light. No sign of life. I’m standing at the door at the doorway breathing heavily, feeling my throat getting clogged with anxiety. Mrs. Jones pushes me further inside the room before closing the door. The smell of cigar and cheap whiskey fills my nostrils, nearly making me sick to my stomach.

I hear a click behind me and a light turns on, my eyes blink rapidly to adjust to the sudden brightness.

“Stand under the light,” a gruff, deep voice orders, making me jump. It’s my foster father, Mr. Jones.

I gulp and start to walk towards the center before turning and facing the dark room. For any other person it’d be just a dark room but for me it is my living nightmare.

I can feel the eyes of the uncountable audience inside. I can feel their gazes at me from top to bottom. I can feel their dark motives behind their presence. They are all here for one purpose only.

They are here for the show.

“Go to her,” Mr. Jones orders again but this time it isn’t directed to me. I am well aware who it is meant for because the person walks towards me with timid steps and their head casts down.

My sister’s little hands wrangle against her belly, making it crystal clear how nervous and fearful she feels. But we have no other choice. She also has makeup on with her hair braided into two. Her nightdress is white like mine but it’s much longer. When she stands in front of me, she follows my lead and faces the dark room as well and immediately grips my hand.

Her hands are shaking, her palms are already sweaty.

“Come on, start the show. People are waiting,” Mrs. Jones orders.

My sister and I turn around and face each other. Her eyes are scrunched close as she stands still. My hands start trembling but I give it my all to keep myself calm because if we ruin anything then we will be punished, beaten until we can barely move.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

I can hear my heart racing in my ears. I reach for the buttons of her dress and start to undo them slowly, gradually revealing her naked olive skin. I immediately look up and see my sister’s black eyes fighting back the tears.

Somewhere at the corner of the dark room I hear a faint groan.

Disgust and shame start to crawl their way up within my soul. By the time I reach the final button dread makes me nearly fall on my knees. Keeping my eyes locked on her, I push her dress down.

There, my sister stands with her trembling hands, clenched by her sides.

Naked. Vulnerable. Helpless.

The pain lurch at my heart, sending agony throughout my nerves. I give her a timid nod, urging her to make her move now. The more we wait, the more torturous it is for both of us. I watch her slender throat work down a swallow as she raises her hands and repeats the same action that I inflict upon her. When she pushes down the dress, instantly my skin prickles with

goose bumps from the cold air coming through the small window gap. My body starts to shiver but it definitely isn't because of the low temperature in the room.

These perverts...these sinners sitting in their thrones while watching a sin being committed, is what makes me shiver to my very core. I let out a shaky breath before leaning closer to my sister and cupping her shoulder, skating my fingertips lower and lower until they reach her breasts. The sharp intake of someone's breath makes my sister's eyes widen with fear and shame.

Please, bear it. Please. Just for tonight.

I silently speak to her, never leaving her gaze which starts to glisten with tears. I cup her breasts, hating myself with every fiber of my body. But this is our life.

There is no escape from this torment, nothing can be done but to bear it while letting our souls get tainted with sins we are bound to commit just for the pleasure of these perverts.

"Turn her towards us," Mrs. Jones orders. I close my eyes in disgust even though it will serve no purpose to save either of us. Her glistening eyes beg me not to do it.

I'm so sorry.

Holding her waist, I turn her towards the audience. My sister keeps her head lowered down, she doesn't have it in her to look at those perverts into their lustful, wicked eyes. Even my own tears are threatening to streak down but I hold them back, knowing well it would give them more pleasure seeing us break.

And we can't break no matter what.

"Fuck," a faint grunt at the center makes both of our bodies jerk suddenly. Mortification is eating both of us alive bit by bit.

I move my hands and caress her back, a hidden sign of reassurance... telling her that I'm here for her.

Be strong, my sister. Please, be strong.

My other hand leans in front of her with my fingertips skimming around her navel. But when I notice my sister's head moving up, my heart stops right there and then as I already know what is coming.

She meets the eyes of one of the perverts and in seconds she bursts into tears. Her knees buckle as she falls on her knees and starts sobbing with her body trembling without control.

"I-I can't, please. I c-can't do this. I can't do this," she keeps chanting those words again and again, rocking back and forth on the ground with her little, slender hands hugging herself, covering as much as possible.

I instantly kneel down, my heart shattering into pieces as I watch my sister breaking. It's all my fault.

Sorrow peaks out from the dungeon of my heart and starts to ink my soul with a gut-wrenching guilt. I hear whispers and a disapproval of the audience already but I don't give a single fuck about offering them a second of my time.

My arms immediately wrap around my sister, caging her against me as I take her hand and guide her out of the room without a second thought. We both rush upstairs to our room before I sit her down on the bed. Her sobbing continues with fresh tears running down from her now bloodshot eyes. I quickly retrieve two dresses and rush towards her, helping her put it on. I also get dressed and make sure the door is locked.

We will deal with the consequences later. Immense suffering would knock at the door soon, but till then I will be with my sister. She needs me more than ever.

I take her in my arms again, letting her cry against my neck while she clutches onto my dress.

"I-I'm so sorry," she stutters.

I caress her hair, trying my best to soothe her. "Hush. It's not your fault. Nothing is your fault." I kiss her temple.

Her hold tightens around me, her tears soaking my dress but it doesn't bother me. What truly does, are my sister's tears which I'm held responsible for.

I hear the faint echoes of people from downstairs, demanding for their money back. It is clear they are very frustrated and furious from our sudden intrusion. I can already feel the piece of hell that our foster parents are going to imprint on us.

Will we ever have a family who will truly love us?

I still remember the day our mother left us at a nearby McDonald's, saying she will be back in a few minutes. Few minutes turned into several minutes which soon turned into hours. Neither I, nor my sister left the spot as we waited for our mother, holding each other's hand. The only sweaters that we owned weren't enough to keep us warm in the dark winter night of December. By the time night dawned in, we both were shivering from head to toe. The owner luckily took pity on us and let us in. Midnight struck but our mother still didn't return.

We were alone, hungry and cold. The owner called the police and after questioning us, we were taken to our studio apartment. But what greeted us, made our blood run cold like ice water.

It was our mother's lifeless body lying on the wooden ground. But her pale skin and dark circles under her eyes didn't look like our mother's. She looked so happy, so alive when she was with us. This was a sight neither of us had ever witnessed before. A sight that will haunt us for many nights... maybe forever.

One of the policemen guided us slowly towards our mother's limp body and that's when we saw an injection loosely laid on her hand. Her fingers and lips were blue like they got frostbites. Foam was coming out of her mouth, pooling on the ground. Something within us broke that night.

Innocence. Care. Love.

Losing our mother was tough for us and as we had no other family members, we were shifted to a foster house. The day we got here everything felt perfect. Mr. and Mrs. Jones welcomed us with open arms and a pleasant smile. They gave us food and gifted us the best clothes and toys. But little did we both know that just like those dolls they gifted us, they were trying to turn us into one to please perverts like tonight.

The first time we denied their order, Mrs. Jones beat us up with a whip until our backs were oozing with blood. For several days my sister and I could barely lie down in bed or sit on a chair without wincing. We couldn't just run away as we had nowhere else to go.

"They will hurt us even more, won't they?" my sister whispers with her broken voice.

I don't answer her because we both know what's coming. She continues to cry, pouring her sorrow out while my arms never leave her.

Suddenly the door bursts open, making both of us jump back.

"You little bitch!" Mr. Jones hisses through his clenched teeth. His face flushes with anger, veins popping on his forehead.

My sister immediately hides behind me and I stand in front of her as her protector.

I blink through my tears, staring at him. He stares right back, like he is waiting for a response.

"It wasn't her fault," I mutter.

"Not her fault." His eyes narrow before he walks in and closes the door behind him. He unbuckles his brown leather belt and wraps it around his hand.

"Whose fault was it then? Answer me."

I swallow the lump in my throat, trying my best to be brave for my sister who is shaking like a leaf behind me.

"Tell. Me." He is looking right into my eyes with his dark, vicious ones.

“I-I...it was my fault. Okay?” My voice breaks. “It was just one time. This hasn’t happened before. Mistakes can happen.”

“Your fucking mistake cost me a lot of money!” he barks and grabs my arm, snatching me up to stand and pushes me against the wall.

“No! Stop!” my sister screams as Mr. Jones fists my hair tightly and slams me hard against the wall with my back facing his front.

He looks at my sister with a death glare which makes her take a step back. I raise my arms behind me to grab his hand but it’s a futile attempt when he rips open the back of my dress.

“Get off me!” I scream but he doesn’t listen. His grip on my hair hurts me to my roots, making my face scrunch in pain.

“Because of your fault my customers didn’t left a single penny tonight.”
CRACK. CRACK. CRACK.

I feel the sharp viper hits of his belt on my skin before I hear it. The pain is excruciating that my knees falter, making me fall on the ground.

“You have any idea how humiliated I felt?”

CRACK.

The hit stings so bad my skin feels like it's on fire, that my tears shed and I cry out. “You two had one job! One. Fucking. Job,” he grumbles, landing another hit on my back. I cry out louder as he leans my head back, using my hair for rein.

I hate him.

I really, really hate him with every being in my soul.

“You know what? Let’s give you a different lesson tonight,” he sneers. When I hear the sound of his zipper being undone my brows furrow.

“W-what are you doing?” I ask as I try to get up from the floor but he keeps me down with his feet on my burning back. He doesn’t respond and pushes his pants down before he forces my hips up and grabs both of my hands, placing them against my back.

“Get off me! Stop!” I yell, but it gets muffled as he pushes my head against the floor. He reaches between us, when I feel his finger tracing between my thighs, I panic. Adrenaline flows through my body, and I put every bit of my strength to hit his face with the back of my head. He lets out a strangled roar and in the blink of an eye he turns me around, his hand sails down across my face. The punch is jarring. Pain flares on my cheek, nearly blurring my vision.

I’m facing my sister who is looking at me with a horrid expression. The same expression she carried the day she saw our mother’s body.

The very sight makes me snap out of it and claw his face away from me.

“Fucking bitch!”

This time his hit is much worse, and the minute his knuckles contact with my face, I feel my skin split. Black dots float before my eyes, dazing me and making everything blurry. A cry of pain rips through my chest, and I fall onto my side.

Mr. Jones touches his cheek with his thumb and when he sees the blood, rage fires up in his eyes.

“You are going to die for sure, you little bitch,” he hisses, raising his arm to punch me again. I prepare myself to fight back but everything happens so fast that I am left clueless.

BANG! BANG!

Two, back to back, gunshots erupt in the room.

Mr. Jones suddenly gets still with his eyes wide. When my gaze drifts down his face, I see the blood staining his white shirt.

BANG!

Another gunshot sounds and this time it pierces right through his eyes making him fall on top of me. I shriek and get away from his limp body. My dress and hands are stained with his blood.

But when I get up and see my sister holding a revolver with her shaky hands, my heart skips a beat. I can’t speak or think for several passing

seconds. My throat feels dry, my lungs begging for air.

“What have you done?” I rasp.

Her wide, fear-filled eyes meet mine as she immediately drops the revolver that I stole from Mr. Jones wardrobe for safety. I had it all planned out tonight.

I saved some money, packed clothes and extra food and hid the revolver under my pillow. I had it all sorted out for our escape tonight after midnight. But cruel fate had something else in store for us.

I quickly snatch the gun from her hand before rushing and changing my bloody clothes. My sister just stands there and looks down at Mr. Jones’ dead body with fright, as if she feels he will come back alive and kill her anytime.

I grab our bags and the wallet that has all the money as I rush towards her. Holding her shoulders, I turn her to face me.

“Look at me,” I order her but her eyes are fixated on the pool of blood coating the wooden floor. I shake her by her shoulder and she jumps suddenly, as if she realized I’m here. Her eyes and nose are red from crying, her lips are pale and dry from fear.

“You did nothing wrong. You saved me, you saved your sister,” I mutter, offering her a shaky smile. She swallows hard and let out continuous shaky breaths.

“We will get out of London. Tonight. Right now,” I caress her hair and cup her face, “We will start a new life of our own. Just the two of us. Always together, remember?”

She nods, her lips parted as she releases a deep sigh.

“Always together,” she whispers.

Gifting her a sad, shaky smile I take my bag and pass hers. With one last look at one of the brutes who introduced us to hell, we both leave the room. With a heartbeat thudding loud in my ears, a terror nearly paralyzing my heart, I took my sister’s hand and crept down the hallway.

The house is quiet except for the pitter patter of the rain droplets against the roof and window. I hold my breath and listen to Mrs. Jones. Usually at this time she leaves for her poker game but making assumptions tonight is not a wise move. I unlock the front door when a footstep creaks against the floorboard of the hallway behind us. We should run right away, but we both still and turn to see if the sound is an imagination or reality.

Down the hallway is Mrs. Jones, short but lean, her amber hair tied into a messy bun. And in her slender fingers is a shotgun, a silencer over the barrel. With narrowed eyes and clenched jaw, she holds the promise of retribution.

Paralyzed, we both stand still, holding each other's hand tightly.

There is a torturous pregnant silence for several moments, a battle of silent hostility between the three of us.

She raises the gun and pulls the safety switch off. "You two piece of shits killed my husband and now you are running away with my money, too."

Her middle and index fingers curled around the trigger.

My heart pounds faster than ever as I feel all the air evaporating from my lungs.

"Nowhere to run now."

But we do anyway. Dropping the bags with a thud, we sprint out when the gunshot rings out and pierces through the door. I never leave my sister's hand as we dash through the pouring rain and darkness.

"Wait! Mom's photo—"

"We can't go back! Run! Come on!" I grab her hand and pull her down the sidewalk. More gunshots ring into the night as I feel them aimed at us. We both are heaving with exertion, running away from the hell we have been in for the past eight months. With a revolver and saved money, we escape. We escape without any survival experience in this harsh world. We never stop running until our feet can't take another step from the exhaustion.

We are at the highway now; the road is empty and dark with the rain getting stronger. My sister coughs and heaves for air while we both kneel down on the grass. I look up at the vacant, dark sky to let out a breath of relief.

Suddenly I find my own shadow highlighting on the road. I look over my shoulder and find a car driving closer.

My sister gets up immediately and waves her hand.

“Hey! Stop!” she yells, raising both her hands. I get up and follow her suit. We need to leave as soon as possible before Mrs. Jones hunts us down.

The car thankfully slows down and a man in black jacket pulls down the car window. His brows furrow in confusion as he takes in our sight. Two fifteen-year-old girls, hurt and alone in the dark highway getting cold from the rapid pouring rain.

“Are you two lost? Where are your parents?” he asks with a worrisome look.

“We are orphans and we have no place to go,” I lean down and hold onto the window, “Please help us.”

His eyes narrow further and I realize he notices my cut on my cheek. On instinct I touch it before trying to cover my face with my hair.

The man looks back and forth between me to my sister as if thinking what to do exactly. But luckily when he leans his hand back and opens the back door for us, calmness washes over me along with relief. Both of us rush inside and shut the door before the man takes off and continues to drive to our unknown destination.

My sister rests her head on my shoulder with her hands wrapped around mine. I look down at her with a smile which she returns back sweetly.

We escaped. We survived.

This is our new beginning.

CHAPTER 1



MAXWELL

PAST

I HUDDLE IN THE DARKNESS, feeling my wrists getting numb with every passing hour. My muscles aching from being bound from the ceiling for the entire day. I'm half naked, with no shirt covering my bleeding chest, and worn-out pants. My eyes had altered with the darkness days ago where I'm being kept. The nighttime is the toughest, but I'm glad to be left alone in my solace.

Day after day, a piece of me is being stripped away, arising dark demons within me. I'm only a fourteen-year-old boy who lost his innocence before grasping it in his palms. Instead, something worse was introduced to me.

Fear. Vulnerability. Cruelty.

My skin starts to prickle from the cold wind being blown inside the cellar, through the only small window. It's the only source of light and time for me. My head hangs low, feeling every ounce of energy drifting away from me.

My throat is dry like sand, and I can't remember the last time I took a shower. The stench of vomit, sweat and blood wafts from my body. My stomach keeps growling with hunger, but surviving without food for God knows how many days made me immune to feel hunger. The distant sound of a passing train is my companion in these silent times. And at the end of the day the sound of the church bell shows me the reality that God may not exist.

Sounds of footsteps start to get closer. Instant fear grips me by my throat. But when I pay closer attention, I realize the footsteps aren't heavy and loud like they usually are. They are soft and timid, as if someone is trying to sneak in. Is someone coming to help me? Did my father finally arrive to rescue me?

A ray of hope starts to settle in my heart, but it soon vanishes when the door opens. There's no man, no gun or violence. The light streaks in, nearly blurring my vision as a short figure stands at the doorway. The figure looks around as if it's trying to avoid any chance for trouble.

When everything seems clear, the figure comes closer and closer, taking slow and steady steps. Getting a clear image of the chaos that I am, I hear a gasp.

That's when I see it. Her.

I see her.

It's a girl. She is in her pajamas, with her raven black hair braided. Her olive skin blends well with her fabric color. A silver cross chain of God shines on her chest even in this darkness. There's another chain too, but the pendant is hiding underneath her dress. When I look into her deep blue eyes, I feel something shift. After battling with so much violence and pain, just from one look at her, I feel all the pain fading away. She is a siren that lures me into the light I can feel just from seeing her.

Her beauty is so mesmerizing that even the angels wouldn't dare to match up to her.

Her brows are furrowed with worry reflecting on her face. As if I am a threat, she takes a tentative step towards me, raising her small hand and touching the left side of my chest. There's a huge knife cut, but behind that injury is my pounding heart, which now feels warm from her touch.

Who is she? I want to ask, but I can't find my voice.

"Are you still in pain?" she asks me in a soft, heart whelming voice. Her voice sounds angelic, just like her.

I nod my response.

I hear her snifle, and when I notice her eyes glistening as if she is on the verge of crying, I feel the ache in my heart.

She looks around, biting her lip like she is thinking of something-looking for some sort of guidance.

"Don't make a sound. Shhh," she whispers with her finger against her lip before she leaves the cellar.

I shake my head, contemplating if what I saw was real or hallucination. Could she be real?

Few moments later, she comes back with a bowl of water and a first aid kit in her hands.. Setting them on the ground she looks at me and huffs as if carrying those and coming here was hard work for her. A few loose strands of hair come across her forehead, and I wish I could just touch them.

She is shorter than me as she reaches up-to my chest only. When she realizes she can't release me from the cuffs, she gets a stool from the corner and stands on it, coming face to face with me.

Being so close, she looks even more beautiful. I had been drowned in darkness so much that seeing her brings back the warmth I have been craving for such a long time.

Taking a small cloth, she squishes it into a ball and brings it to my mouth. Instantly, I move my face away from her.

No. Not the gag.

The fear creeps back in when I think she is going to gag me, and torture me further perhaps. Why should I trust her?

The moment I came here, I suffered through pain and torture only. Why would she be any different?

"I won't hurt you. It's for you to be quiet or else he will hear you," she whispers.

But I stay true to my roots and instinct. Suddenly, I feel her soft palms cupping my bloody face and moving it towards her.

"I won't hurt you. I promise."

I don't know if it's the tenderness in her voice or the emotions flooding in her eyes, but I believe her. For once, living in this hell, I believe someone who is already a part of it.

I part my lips, letting her put the cloth in my mouth as I clamp on it. She looks over her shoulder before retrieving the first aid kit, taking out the necessary things. And she's right. When the first dab of the wet cotton ball touches my scar, my screams of agony are muffled by the cloth as I groan from the burn. The girl tries to be as gentle as possible to treat my wounds. The entire time I groan and grunt against the cloth, but whenever my eyes take in her sight, the pain doesn't matter much to me.

After a few dabs and gentle blows, she puts everything back in the box and takes the water. Removing the cloth, she places the bowl against my lips, nodding at me to drink.

I welcome the cool liquid and take large gulps. My throat is a dry desert, craving for even one drop of water, and here I am getting an entire bowl. In seconds, it's empty and I sigh in relief.

Tucking a black strand behind her ear, she looks up at me with her innocent eyes. Right there, I feel it again. That pull... that electricity.

It feels like she is pulling my strings, urging me closer to her.

I witness her cheeks flushing as if my intense gaze is getting too much to bear. Oh, how badly I want to touch her. I want to feel how soft her skin is. I

want to comb my fingers through her dark hair, my eyes never leaving hers.

She looks away from me and places the stool back in its place, taking the box and bowl with her as she strides towards the door. She stands there for a moment, while looking at me over her shoulder. Her brows furrow with guilt? Pity? Sorrow?

I don't know.

With one last look, she slowly closes the door, leaving me in darkness again.

But unlike other times, tonight felt different.

Will she be back again? Is this meeting just a one-time thing?

What if it was and I never get to see her again?

I sigh and close my eyes, playing this short and only memory of her in my mind like a movie on a loop. I instantly know that this will be a moment I will never forget about till I take my last breath.

I JOLT FROM MY DREAM, welcomed by the darkness in my vast room. I feel the sweat beads running down from the nape of my neck. I wasn't wrong then, and I'm not wrong now. Her memory still lives in my mind.

She breathes in my mind.

But I do wish that she disappears from my mind for good. Once I used to relish her memory to find myself. To find the light of my life, but now the memory brings pain and guilt. A glance at my alarm shows it's three in the morning. Exhaling a heavy breath, I pull back the cover and stalk towards the balcony. Finding the golden cigar box, I pop it open and light up a cigar before putting it between my lips. I take deep breath, inhaling the smoke and letting it burn my throat and lungs. The burn is just what I needed. My eyes take in the lights glimmering the city of Moscow. The dark starry night, illuminates the beauty of the city furthermore as I bend slightly against the railing in just my sweatpants. I've killed thousands of

men and women for my power and their respect, but none of those have ever brought a single ounce of guilt in my soulless heart.

I take in another drag and blow out the heavy smoke, watching it diffuse into thin air.

I rule over Russia. I am the king of my bloody kingdom. But ever since that night, she is the goddess of my heart. The burn of the tobacco feels soothing, I've always craved for more and more pain. And like a little slave, fate did fulfill my wishes.

The only problem is the value. Day after day, the more I kill, the less pain I feel. I've never had any remorse for any of my sins, knowing well this is the dark world I was born in, and this is the life I will always live. No one can ever change it. The vibrating sound pulls me back from my thoughts, making me look over my shoulder and find my phone lighting up from a text on the nightstand.

I pick it up and slide it open, seeing the message from my father:

Be ready at 9 a.m.

They are going to make the announcement.

My jaw tightens. My hands gripping the phone so tightly that I the sides are already cracking. I know who *they* are and what the announcement is going to be. But I'm not going to let someone take away what I worked my ass off for. Not even my own family. I have been betrayed several times by my so-called family, and they all paid the price with their own useless life.

Everyone in Russia and the underworld knows about my dark tales. My first kill was evidence enough for the underworld to know how ruthless I am. Each and every one is aware of how vicious I can be if anyone tries to cross me. And tomorrow will be one of those vicious moments. When it comes to my kingdom, I want it all to myself. Only I have the right to my destiny. I own the bitch.

CHAPTER 2



MAXWELL

PRESENT

THE DRIVER OPENS the door for me as I hop inside my Range Rover.

“To the Court House,” I order the driver with my cold tone as he nods his answer and drives off, with my guards following behind. I busy myself. Answering a few emails when an unexpected call rings. Seeing the caller ID brings a slight smile on my lips.

I answer, placing the phone against my ear.

“Is it announced yet?” Lucifer snaps from the other side. “And a very good morning to you, too. Long time no see, my friend,” I mutter with a calm tone, knowing well it’ll piss him off.

“You said that the position will be yours. And now that is going to be snatched away in a few fucking hours—”

“Did I stutter when I said the position will be mine?” I sneer.

“You never stutter your promises. But think about it, Maxwell, your position affects my business, too. Half of—”

“Drugs and weapon supplies are shipped from my country. And only I know it because if others know about Russia working with Italy, then there

will be problems.”

“How could you be so relaxed about this?” he snarls, his voice seething with rage. I roll my eyes in frustration. Lucifer has been my closest friend since we were teenagers. Our friendship sparked up when we both shared the same hunger for power and ruling over the mafia world. We helped each other, building our own empires with supplies of drugs, weapons and whores. Our supplies will double if I get what I want, but hearing the hint of doubt in his voice makes the fury boil in my blood.

“Because if I have to move heaven and earth to get this, then I will do it without hesitation.”

There was a meaningful pause from the other line before he whispers the plan for today. “You are going to kill him, aren’t you?”

“Exactly. So, trust me when I say that I will keep my promise.”

“Alright. Are you going to do it on your own?”

I let out a dark chuckle. “When have I ever needed someone’s help to do my dirty work? You know, how much I love seeing my hands getting bloody,” I murmur, getting a raspy chuckle from Lucifer.

“Fucking asshole, as always. Should we discuss the new roots in a few weeks?”

“Sounds reasonable.”

With that I hung up the call, when the car halts with the sea of traffic in front of us. Letting out a heavy sigh, I nod at the driver. He gets my message and leaves the car as he rushes to the end of the traffic to get the cars moving. My name would be more than for him to get rid of the traffic in two seconds.

I look at the world around me through the black tinted windows, watching the drivers honking, few men working on the road construction, the so-called regular people going on with their lives. I used to wish that I could have a normal life, but when realization took place that being normal

means being weak, I dropped the thought in the gutter right away. I wasn't born to be weak, I was born to be a king.

Few handicapped boys, standing in front of the gates of the library catch my sight. A woman, who seems to be in her forties, stands beside them looking around with a worrisome look. I frown, trying to figure out what's happening. One of the boys points at the library with a disappointed look, while the woman says something to him as she pats his shoulder.

They want to get inside.

Aren't they allowed?

That's when I notice the gap being dug by the road constructors. The only bridge leading inside the library is a wooden plank, but with the weight of the wheelchair it will easily break. Thinking about helping them, I get out of my car with my guards following me. I make my way to the kids. Raising my hand at them, I order them to stay back.

But suddenly a girl beats me to it as she walks to the woman, asking her what's wrong.

"The boys wanted to visit the library. But the roads are under construction," she mutters with worry toning in her voice.

"And wooden plank won't be able to handle their weight."

The girl's back is facing me. Her red hair is curled in waves. Her olive skin is being revealed from the purple cami top and black skirt she's wearing. I don't know what it was, but something made me stay in my place and watch her as she tries to figure out a way.

"Just a second." Her voice sounds so calm and soft. It's oozing with tenderness.

She walks ahead and brings the black, bar gate closer to its very end. She walks to the kid with blond hair and helps him stand, taking him to the gate and placing both his feet on the bottom rail.

"Hold onto the bar tightly," she murmurs and the boy does what he is told. Using the same way on another kid, she folds their wheelchairs and

brings them on the other side.

“Ma’am, please unfold the wheelchairs,” she speaks to the woman who gets on her given task. On the other hand, the girl holds the gate and pushes it forward with the kids holding onto the bars tightly, leading them inside.

I stand there amused and spell-bounded by her spirit that I genuinely smile at the sight. So much innocence, so much purity was a rare sight for me. I barely remember the last time I saw such beauty. I crane my neck, to get even a slight peek of the unknown that is in front of me, but her long hair is veiling around her face. To be honest, I do remember but it isn’t the time and place to dig up old memories. The girl then helps the kids sit back in their wheelchairs and wheels them inside the library.

Does she work here?

Someone clears their throat; I look over to find my guards and the driver waiting for me.

Looking upon the sign board, I memorize the name of the library.

Moscow Public Library.

Straightening my posture, I get back to my car as we continue the journey.

Twenty minutes later, we reach the Court House where every Brigadier, Sovietnik and Captain is waiting. I enter the building which looks like an old castle, and it is. Call it old-fashioned, but the place is very well known and reputed among the underworld. It has been a part of our tradition to come here to make the biggest decisions. Every type of underworld meeting takes place here, and every member of my world is bound to be here, day or night. Father is standing in the middle of the stairs and beckons me forward. Every eye in the room follows me as I head towards him. I hold my head high like a prominent man. I’m taller than most of them and with the pride and power I carry everywhere, make them feel intimidated. I stop right in front of my father.

“Are there more men in the room?”

He shakes his head and walks to the conference room with me following him. My father only cared about the Bratva. Since I was a kid, he's been teaching me how to be a king. He taught me that no matter what sacrifice you have to make for power, you do it without hesitation.

Father retired as the Kaznachey of Moscow when I turned eighteen. He never loved me, that's for sure, because in this world, fathers are meant to be the symbolism of violence in your life. I both respect and loathe him. Respect for his cunning mind, and loathe for the monster he was towards my mother.

As expected, the Pakhan of Russia is sitting at the head of the chair. He is nearly eighty years old, but with the cancer eating him alive day after day, he looks more and more pale and wrinkly. A full glass of scotch is on the table, remaining untouched. He wears a similar gray suit to mine, but with a different shade of tie. His eyes shift to me while my father locks the door behind him.

"Maxwell. You are ten minutes earlier," he states in his neutral voice. Striding towards him, I pull back a chair beside him and sit back with a relaxed posture. My hands resting on my lap with my left foot against my opposite knee.

"What can I say? Time is valuable"

"That I can see, but you should consider discipline too because barging in is never a good sign."

Acknowledging his words with a nod, I lean forward. "When it comes to protecting our people, some rules are meant to be broken."

He frowns in confusion. "What are you talking about?"

"Everyone knows you will be making the announcement today. But what *you* don't know is that your life is in danger," I speak calmly like it is the most ordinary conversation. I see a mist of fear in his gray eyes, but he composes himself.

“I’m old and on the verge of dying, so, if someone wants to kill me, then let them.”

He sounds absolutely unaffected by my warning. My father walks towards him with his hands inside his black suit pocket.

“Nicholai,” my father puts his hand on his shoulder, giving it a friendly squeeze, “You have been the Pakhan of Russia since you were seventeen. Don’t you want this legacy to be passed to someone who is worthy.”

He let out a heavy sigh as he took the amber glass, taking a few sips of the scotch.

“Lomov, I didn’t need your lecture then and I don’t need your lecture now. My decision is final.”

Father snickers under his breath as I sit back in the chair, watching the show go on.

“What’s so fucking funny?” Nicholai snaps.

“You should sometimes take my advice. You see, I was going to tell you that your scotch was poisoned but like you said, you don’t want my advice.”

Nicholai’s eyes widen with horror as his hand immediately goes to cup his throat. The fear is now evident in his eyes, which he is trying so hard to contain. His body starts to shiver with the fear of death knocking at him.

“Y-you...” he stutters, his gaze shifting to my relaxed posture as he builds up the conclusion that this must have been my plan. I’ve wanted to be the Pakhan of Russia for a long time, and I am not going to let the title slip away so easily.

“It w-was you,” he accuses me, still gripping his throat.

My father laughs an evil laugh as if it was his greatest victory. By now, I’m getting bored of the whole scenario and think of cutting this short as quickly as possible.

“Do you really think he has that much brain for such a plan? Maxwell just arrived here. It was me who put the poison,” father confesses, grinning

like the fucking sinner he is.

I stand up, buttoning my suit before walking behind my father.

“Russia will soon belong to me and my son—”

My father’s words are left incomplete as in a flash, I slit his throat with the knife I have inside my suit. He chokes vigorously, as his blood spurts everywhere, with few drops staining Nicholai’s suit. Holding onto his throat, he falls to his knees like the weakling he is with his body shaking aggressively. His blood pooling around him in a puddle.

Seeing the sight, Nicholai is even more taken aback.

“Don’t worry. Your scotch has no poison,” I assure him while my father’s movements start to slow down as the last breath of air leaves his lungs with his eyes turning dark. I stand there watching my father die.

No pain. No guilt. No remorse.

“Why did you do it?” Nicholai asks, looking composed with relief.

“You and I both knew, my father always wanted to be the Pakhan, but you were the thorn in his path. But making your gay son the Pakhan of Russia?” I tsk, shaking my head, “Terrible move.”

He gulps with anxiety and worries about the secret being exposed to the underworld. His skin turns pale instantly. He will be a laughing stock for eternity.

“This position is a legacy rather than just having control all over Russia. And only I am worthy of earning this. I showed my loyalty by killing my own father. So, when it comes to protecting this legacy, I won’t ever hesitate to pluck the thorn from the path.”

Taking a tissue from the box on the table, I wipe my seal knife with it until it’s spotless clean. Towering over him, I offer him my ruthless stare. He gulps with nervousness.

“I earn what I want, and if I don’t get it then I seize it away with everything I have,” I warn him, my hands resting on either side of his head against the chair.

“Choice is yours. But be aware, give me the wrong answer and I will ruin your reputation like that,” I snap my fingers at him.

There us a long silence as he contemplates his decision, when there is a sudden knock at the door.

“Sir, should I call for the others?” A muffled male voice calls from the other side of the door.

“Yes, just a minute and call for two guards,” he orders before he looks up at me again, this time there is defeat settling in his eyes.

“Okay.” He nods.

“You will be the next Pakhan of Russia. Come to the underground tomorrow to take your oath.”

This time, I grin, gaining the greatest victory among all. Finally, I have everything.

Russia is now in my power. The Bratva is mine. I’m the king of this kingdom.

CHAPTER 3



MAXWELL

The next night, I arrive at the underground. The guards nod at me before opening the gates, with one of them leading me to the hall where everyone is waiting for me to take my oath.

Nicholai welcomes me and ushers with his arm over my shoulder, a fake gesture in front of everyone to show his support. Everyone is present.

Some of them give me an appreciative look, like they are trying to be in my good graces, and some directly glaring at me like I am an antelope they want to hunt and kill, just to hang my head on the wall to boost their confidence. They can read about it all they want, because in reality I'm the king of the jungle now.

Fierce. Strong. Invincible.

"You are now the new Pakhan of the Bratva. The enemies will think twice before uttering your name in fear, son. Be the true leader and think about your people, your kingdom."

He withdraws the knife which I have never seen before. Since my childhood, I have attended many events, but this one is a *once in a lifetime* opportunity. Only people who earn the place are allowed to have it. Pride swells in my chest as I take it. A sharp, shiny steel blade, with a skull at the end of the handle – so beautiful, and yet so dangerous.

I hold out my hand, knowing what is coming. Taking my hand, he draws the knife down my skin as he cuts my palm. I don't flinch. I've had worse.

"I would burn my flesh before I even think about betraying my people," I say firmly, forming my hand into a fist with the blood dripping down on the floor.

"I swear on my blood to be loyal and worthy of my people. My duty will always be my first priority."

"You are the Pakhan of Russia, Maxwell. You will rule with blood and power."

He takes out the ring with a diamond skull on it. A ring that has been passed from generation to generation. The skull ring that I've always wanted since the day I first laid my eyes on it.

He slips it through my finger and I feel the weight of power in my hands, relishing this prideful moment.

I extend my blood hand and shake Nicholai's, firm and confident.

"I won't fail," I swear to him, my people and to myself.

* * *

LATER THAT NIGHT, I make my way through the underground cage fight arena I own. The roaring of the men watching the fight booms around the room, nearly making the music playing through the speakers inaudible. Men hitting the wired cage, creating loud thudding sounds is what I live for. It shows their excitement for witnessing the blood fight. The people in the arena keep more distance from me, knowing what power I hold now. Some even nod or bow in acknowledgement. The fear, the respect... that's what I've always wanted. And now having it in my grasp, indeed feels like I finally won. Every death, every betrayal, every pain and every sacrifice is worth all this. The blood now stains my hand, the wound is starting to swell

a little, before I make my way to the bar and take the nearest bottle of Bourbon as I pour the golden umber onto my wound.

“Hey! What are you doing?” a girl from the other side of the bar table shrieks, snatching the bottle from me.

What the fuck?

When I look up, I find a woman. Nothing seems girly about her.

Starting from her red hair, her deep black eyes to her olive skin, she is a natural beauty. No makeup and no extra touches, and yet she looks like a goddess with that fierceness oozing in her eyes.

“Do you even know how expensive that is?” she asks with a glare, putting the bottle back on the shelf. Turning to me, she places her hands on her curvy waist. The top button of her white shirt is opened, and how I wish I could get a peek of her cleavage.

“You want a drink, so simply say it,” her eyes land on my wounded hand, making her glare more, “—and FYI this is a bar not the ER. I don’t want you to be the reason for losing my job, you asshole.”

God, that mouth. I can’t remember the last time a woman ever spewed on me like this. Samuel, the head bartender, notices the whole scenario, his eyes wide open with horror. He immediately goes to reprimand her but I shake my head to stop him. He gulps, begging me with his eyes for forgiveness.

“I apologize, sir,” he whispers with his head bowed slightly, while the woman, who captivated my attention, busies herself with serving the other customers with a polite smile. It would be difficult to figure out with that innocent smile that a few moments ago she was spitting fire with those same lips.

“It’s alright, Samuel,” I mutter, waving him off as I make my way to her. Watching my arrival, the men start to leave their seats, taking their drinks in a rush.

I take a seat with my eyes never leaving her figure. She avoids eye contact, ignoring me on purpose, while she's making drinks. The more I look at her, the more I feel a strange pull towards her. A sudden suspicion clogs my soul, as I try to recall if I have ever seen her before. She turns to get glasses from the shelf with her back facing me, then it suddenly hits me.

The girl from the library.

I frown as confusion consumes me. What is an innocent woman like her doing here? Working among the wolves and criminals?

She has the character of a chameleon. She changes her colors when she needs to.

Then she returns back to my side, filling the glasses with beer and setting them on the tray for the waiter to take. She is pretty neat in her work.

Has she been a bartender before?

Not once does she acknowledge me, making me more and more curious about her. The last time I let curiosity get the best of me was when I found my wife cheating on me. She made me believe with her innocence that she can love a monster like me, germinating the seed of her fake ass love in my heart. That's why when I witnessed her betrayal, it didn't take me one second to shoot her right between her eyes.

I thought that killing her would bring guilt, but that feeling came nowhere near, making me realize that love is not meant for me.

Who am I even kidding?

Satan, like me, is never meant for love.

"What's your name?" I ask, resting both my hands on the table.

She huffs, rolling her eyes. She's got an attitude, too. I like it.

"My name?" she offers a polite smile, and I nearly fall for how genuine it is.

"I'm sure I didn't stutter when I asked the question," I use my dominating voice that makes everyone cower away, but it seems to have

zero effect on her.

“My name is fuck off,” she grits the words out before whirling around and leaving the bar to go to the support area.

A chuckle emerges from my lips, watching that bravery in her. Women in my life have always been like a tool I use just for my pleasure. One snap of my finger and they would cast their eyes down in fear, willing to do whatever the fuck I tell them to do.

But her?

She is the first woman to every stand up to me. It could be that she doesn't know me, and is treating me differently, but what if she knows who I am and still gives me her attitude?

Someone who clears his throat gets my attention, turning around I find my cousin and partner, Igor. He grins before taking a seat beside me.

“Congratulations on your success,” he mutters, with genuine pride in his tone. Igor is the only man I can trust in my family. We have always been close like brothers, and have been there for each other in the worse times of need. When I opened the arena, I knew I wanted him to be my partner, knowing well he will take the responsibility seriously.

“Thank you,” I nod, raising two fingers at a male bartender as he gets busy making drinks for both of us.

In a few seconds, the bartender places two glasses of Beluga vodka in front of us. Clinking the glasses together, we toast to my victory.

“To your kingdom,” Igor toasts.

“And to the new Kaznachey of Novosibirsk,” I mutter, watching him frown in confusion.

Because of his asshole father, Igor always remained the Brigadier of Tomsk. He has the potential, strength and mind to be more than just Brigadier. I need him by my side as my brother, and Brigadier of the country I'm ruling now.

He smiles, realizing what the toast means and drinks it.

I finish my drink too, ordering another round.

Just then, *she* walks out of the back room with glasses and a bottle of scotch in her hand, making her way to the shelf. My eyes strain on her and her movements.

“Who is she?” Igor asks, looking over his shoulder, following my gaze with a corked-up brow.

I shrug. “Don’t know.”

He snickers. “Bullshit. If you didn’t know her, then you wouldn’t look at her like at your next prey.”

Good point. Anybody who doesn’t matter to me, I don’t waste my single second on them. But she has caught my attention.

Igor snaps his fingers at her, making my blood boil with anger. I glare at him, while his smug smile is plastered on his face. She saunters towards us.

“Yes?”

“Get us two glasses of Balkan 167°, sweetheart,” he orders, turning to face me with a wink. Igor does enjoy pushing my buttons most of the time.

She crosses her arms, pushing her tits up, making her look bolder and fucking sexy.

“Ana?” she calls for the blond bartender in the corner who comes to her side at once.

“Please, serve these two gentlemen,” she looks right into Igor’s eyes with the same fire sparking in her gaze, “—because I’m no one’s sweetheart.”

She flips her hair before returning back to the storage room. *Damn.*

I laugh at the epic moment I witnessed.

My, my. This woman is indeed something else.

“That bitch,” Igor snarls, but can’t help the laughter coming out of his lips.

“No wonder, you got your eyes on her. I would love to fuck that insolence out of her.”

I glare at him with my eyes narrowed, watching a grin spread on his lips, turning him into the wicked bastard he is.

He raises his hands up in surrender. “Okay. Okay. She is yours. Message received.”

I don’t know what it is but the thought of Igor being anywhere near her makes my nerves shake with fury. Not just Igor, any guy attempting to even make a move on her makes my spine crawl with adrenaline. The urge of murdering someone just because they even had the nerve to be anywhere near her, feels too strong. The woman is a goddamn Aphrodite, she deserves to be worshipped by her king, not the useless pawns.

“Have you got any plans for Demyan?” Igor asks, turning into his business mode.

I shake my head. “Not yet. He hasn’t fired back so there is nothing to worry about now.”

“And you are going to just wait for him to attack? He may have been deported from Russia, and God knows where the fuck he lives now, but you and I both know he was after power you have now. We have to be prepared.”

Demyan was once the Kaznachey of our community. Everyone feared and respected him for his power and wit. But when Nicholai discovered him being involved with the ICR, he was on the hit list of every assassin and mafia. But somehow, he managed to escape and since then he’s never returned. But surprisingly, he still attacked several districts and nearly killed Nicholai. In one of those attacks, Nicholai shot him, but missed his heart and he took off.

It’s been a few years. By now, he must know that I’m the new Pakhan of Bratva and will be waiting for his opportunity to strike.

“We will be. When the time comes, we will fight and end every last bit of his bloodline. But for now, we have to wait.”

The rest of the night passes by while I stay and talk to Igor about our new branches, members and supplies, but my eyes shift to her every now and then whenever she passes by. The arena starts to get vacant and less audible as the audience starts to leave. By the time the underground gets empty, it's nearly three in the morning. Igor left thirty minutes ago, while I stayed back for her.

To do what? For the first time ever, I have no clue.

Finishing my last drink, I get up and button my suit as I walk around the bar area to look for her. But after a full circle I realize she isn't here anymore. I find the blond girl, who immediately cowers away.

"Stop fucking shivering," I order, ending up with her trembling with fear. I roll my eyes, feeling frustrated already.

"Where is that red haired bartender?" I ask.

"S-she left, sir. Her shift w-was over an h-hour ago," she stutters, recoiling in the corner more and more, even though there is no space left.

Feeling bored, I turn and walk away.

She must have left through the back entrance. I leave the arena, get in my car and drive back home.

That night, when I get in bed, sleep is nowhere to be found. All I can think about is the woman inked in my mind after just one meeting.

Who is she?

Who are you, beautiful? What secrets have you got buried behind that fire within you?

But most of all, why do you feel so familiar?

CHAPTER 4



MAXWELL

PAST

I AM HALLUCINATING FOR SURE. Or is this real? I have no clue. My body or my mind is no longer in sync with me. They are gaining control over me as the days pass by, and, like a coward, I am letting them do it. The dark, dirty walls move as if they are getting closer, suffocating me.

“No... stay... away,” I barely whisper.

But the walls keep closing in. They turn into the monsters’ shadows, haunting me day and night. They are making me weak.

I have no other option but to cower.

This time I lay on the cold concrete floor, with the frosty wind howling inside the dark basement. I have no blanket and no clothes to protect myself. They ripped it away from me, making me suffer even more. The clattering of my teeth, my shallow breathing, hissing through my lips, are the only sounds echoing around the empty room. Even the distant sound of the church bell feels painful to my ears. My own arms cocooned around myself as I feel my body trembling from the cold. I am being consumed by

the cold. I feel the ground swallowing me alive before darkness creeps in, putting my consciousness into a deep slumber.

Unaware of how much time has passed, my eyes flutter open. The mist of light coming through the window gave a sign of dawn approaching. Licking my dry lips, I try to move but I feel a weight upon me. Blinking my eyes, I look down to find a warm fuzzy blanket covering me, along with someone's head resting against my gut.

It's her.

No. No. No. She can't be here.

They will hurt her if they figure out, she has been helping me.

Grunting in pain, I try to ignore it, as I look down at her. Her hair cascading over half of her face, while she's sleeping peacefully. As if it's the perfect spot for her. She looks even more beautiful asleep. I just want to stay there and keep looking at her, never wanting to wake her up.

So angelic.

But she must leave before they arrive.

Touching her shoulder, I lightly shake her. A mewling of protest coming from her lips, makes my heart clench.

"Hey," I whisper, leaning closer to her.

"Wake up..."

"No. Five more minutes," she protests in that innocent, little tone, making me smile slightly. She is so adorable.

"You have to go." My own voice sounds groggy to me. Adrenaline causes the sweat on my forehead, trickling down to my chin.

I shake her again and finally she opens her eyes with a yawn as she rubs the sleep from her eyes. God, the sight itself is so perfect.

Realizing where she is, the girl immediately sits back and looks at me with that worrisome gaze. "Are you alright now? Do you need more blankets?"

She brought me blankets? When?

Reckoning that I might have passed out, must have been the time she got here and found me the state I was in.

She touches my forehead and cheek - such soft hands, I wish they would touch me daily - as if I might have caught fever.

Holding her wrist gently, I push away her hands and shake my head. "I'm alright. You need to leave."

She frowns with a sudden determination set in her eyes. "Not yet."

Fear of her getting in trouble grips me as I stand up on my wobbling feet.

"Leave now," I order with a cold tone, even though it pings my heart, watching her frown from my sudden change of personality.

She breathes heavily with her lips parted, keeping her gaze fixed on me. Biting her lip, I can witness the tears shimmering in her eyes.

She shakes her head, her fists clench together. "I'm not going."

Fuck. No.

I won't let them hurt her.

Kneeling in front of her, I grasp both her shoulder, shaking some sense into her. Why isn't she getting it that I'm not worth risking her own life for? What the fuck is wrong with her?

"I said fucking leave!" I snap at her face, seeing her lips wobble and the tears streaming down her cheeks. Fuck.

Bear with it, Maxwell. Bear with it. She will at least live rather than being half dead from inside like you.

"Are you deaf?" I increase the pressure of my hands on her shoulder up a notch. "Fucking leave!" I scream with my hoarse voice, mentally cursing myself.

Finally, she gets the message and gets up before she dashes out of the room, making sure the door is locked. I sit there, kneeling on the dirty ground with my head bowed. The blanket is still over my thighs, keeping me warm.

Bringing it closer to the ray of light, I see the outline of the blanket clearly. It's a woolen fabric with red and golden roses imprinted on it. She is just like it.

Delicate. Soft. Warm.

And, being the reason for making her cry, makes me want to punish myself. She didn't deserve it but she also doesn't deserve to be involved in this hell I'm in now. Since the night she treated my wounds, the girl has been coming to the basement almost every night. In my darkness she is the only lantern of light I seek while suffering through the torture. Some nights she stays for a few hours and the other times she stays till dawn. I would have let her stay, but I heard those men talking about my healed wounds. They were getting suspicious. And no matter what, I won't let them hurt her.

I still haven't asked her name and neither did she tell me. But I call her my angel because that's what she is for me in these dark times. My an'gel.

The cranking of the door lock makes my heart jolt. Finding the empty cardboard box at the corner, I hide her blanket in it. This will be my souvenir. Only mine.

I won't let them take this away from me.

By the time, I take the spot I was previously in, the door unlocks as the monsters of my living nightmare enter the basement with wicked grins plastered on their faces.

A sight I will never forget till I take my last breath.

Even in hell, these memories will haunt me.

** * **

PRESENT

I WALK around the second floor, looking at all the men and women playing poker and blackjack. The girls are dancing on the poles, keeping the audience entertained as usual. From downstairs, people start to gather more and more for tonight's fight, with the gambling booths already filling up. *No Question* by *Rich The Kid*, is playing overhead. My surroundings are covered with the familiar scent of smoke and weed. Standing by the railing, I place both my hands on it, watching over my own little heaven, created from my own blood and money. I'm wearing one of my best suits, watching and ruling like a king. The casino guards are in their usual place with loaded and ready to be fired guns. My eyes go to the bar, or more precisely the woman who has captured my attention the last time just the same. With that white cami top and black skirt, and her hair braided, she is looking fucking gorgeous. The light makeup suits her. She is busy serving the customers, while engaging and laughing at every word. My eyes narrow when a guy drags out a thousand rouble bundle, waving it at her face while leaning close to her, my hands tighten around the railing as I nearly head downstairs to put a bullet through the fucker's skull.

But what happens next, does take me back by surprise.

She literally throws his drink on his face, stuffing the money in his mouth and pushing him away. The fucker definitely doesn't want to take the insult and makes a move to throw a punch. But one of the nearest guards comes in and stops the brawling before it raises up a notch. No one else is aware of the situation since it happens every now and then, and the guards are always there for such situations. But watching that fucker even thinking about touching her urges me to take the matters in my own hands.

However, my little spitfire took care of her own problems. Unlike the women I have met in my life, she is indeed something else.

Igor comes to my side, dressed in a navy-blue suit and matching tie. "We have a problem."

I look over my shoulder to meet his gaze. "Now what?"

“Victor has been stealing millions of roubles from the drug money and hiding them in his account.”

Victor is the new accountant we hired. Not even a year has passed and he already starts to steal. Immediate anger boils my blood as I grip the railing tightly.

“Should we kill him or put him in the ring match?”

Killing him would be too easy, and putting him in the cage would be no fun. He is in his sixties and has a mechanized left leg. But most of all, if he dies without the fear of death in his eyes then what would be the difference between me and any sane man?

I shake my head. “No. Bring him to me.”

“I’ll wait for you in the office—”

“I said bring him to me. Here. Right now.”

Igor nods before he leaves. Few moments later, Igor guides Victor to my side. He already seems nervous as I can see the sweat trickling down his forehead. I put my arm around him, with my hand gripping on his shoulder tightly. He flinches slightly but tries to maintain his composure. But from his body tensing up, it is clear how on edge he is.

“You wanted to see me, sir?” he barely whispers his words, anxiety oozing from his tone.

I smile, masking an angry face. “Yes, Victor. I just wanted to know something.”

“About what, sir?”

I feign a gasp, turning him to face me. “What’s wrong? Why do you seem so nervous?” I ask.

He frantically shakes his head. “Nothing, sir. I’m alright.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes... of course, sir.”

If he ever played poker, then I’m pretty sure he must have lost several times for his uneasy expression because, at this moment, it’s crystal clear

that he indeed stole from me. And there is only one punishment for him. Death.

“Let’s get you some fresh air, alright?” I tap on his wrinkly cheek.

He nods, turning to head for the windows, but he never reaches there.

In seconds I haul him back by the collar and push him over the railing, but let him dangle between life and death by holding onto his right hand. He screams and yells in fear.

Just what I wanted.

“Sir! Please, sir—”

“Shhh. Not a fucking word until you are told to speak,” I warn him with a glare, as he clamps his lips together. Everything around me just stops. The music, the roaring, the shouting, the gambling and the dancing. Each and every person’s eyes are now strained on the man, with his screams for help being the only sound echoing in the building.

“One question and one answer. Delay it and you fall.”

He nods while he heaves for air.

“Did you steal my money?”

He gulps, delaying his answer. And just like I promised, I start to loosen my grip on his hand.

“Yes! Yes, sir.” His whole face flushes with pure guilt as he looks everywhere except for my eyes, knowing well the fire I hold in my gaze could burn him right there and then.

“Were you told by someone to steal my money?”

“Yes.” His voice trembles along with his entire body.

“Who?”

“I-I don’t know, sir...”

Rolling my eyes, I loosen my hold further but he does everything to cling on to my hand like it is the last rope to save his own life.

“S-sir, I swear on my own life, I don’t know. I just had a random call and was bribed to steal your money. I’m so sorry, sir. Please... I’m sorry.”

Such a fucking moron.

“I promise you, sir, I will never do this again.”

As it is a random call and he is telling the truth for the first time, the information seems nearly useless to track down who did this.

“You are right, you won’t do this again.”

He smiles slightly, blowing out a breath of relief.

“Time to let you go.” Before he can contemplate my words, I let go, watching him fall down to the ground and landing with a loud thud. I look down, watching the blood pooling around his head but I don’t miss the twitching of his body.

“Get him up again,” I order as the guards waste no time dragging his limp body upstairs.

I grab him by his neck with his blood staining my hands.

Holding him by the collar, I throw him down again, this time with full force as I hear that ear soothing thud again followed by the gasps of a few females in the arena. This time I don’t need to check if he is twitching or not, because I am sure his soul left his body.

There is still silence in the entire room as everyone’s fear-filled eyes are strained on me. Presenting a wicked smile, I clean my bloody hands with a napkin.

“What’s with the silence? The fight begins in ten minutes. Let’s enjoy!”

In seconds everyone scrambles back to work, setting everything back in motion. Heading downstairs to get myself a drink, I present my calm face to everyone, even though they are aware of the vicious monster behind that demeanor. My eyes immediately set upon *her*. She witnessed the whole scenario, but unlike others she doesn’t give off her anxiety or fear from my act. She is so indifferent from the women that usually frequent this place.

I take a seat with my arms resting on the counter. The other men excused themselves, leaving me alone with my goddess. Before I can tell

her my order, she scrambles to the shelf to get the strongest scotch from the shelf.

Hmm. A woman who knows what my heart desires.

There are the ones who hide behind men in fear but wanting power, and there are ones who are bound to dangerous men unwillingly. But there is also her.

She doesn't need a man. She needs herself.

She has her own power and rules over herself, being the true goddess she is. Today she knows who I am and what I do, and yet she holds to her ground, or she can be masking her fear from the horror she saw today. I had worked day and night to earn the power and respect I have today, and it's never bothered me because every person knows who I am, and yet her unawareness of my identity has been disturbing my mind since the day I met her. Putting the ice cube, she passes me the glass. When she looks around, finding the bar empty, her brows furrow in confusion.

"Am I missing something here?"

I shrug, sipping the golden umber, enjoying the soothing burn in my throat. "Could be the execution I pulled off."

She narrows her eyes with her arms crossed on her chest, giving a slight lift to her breasts. I can't help but let my eyes roam over her perky breasts.

Wonder what color her nipples are?

She snaps her fingers at me, making me look up at her while she glares at me. "My eyes are up here."

"I know." My eyes drop to her breasts again.

"And you are looking at them like the pervert you are," she tells me. I take a few more sips from the glass.

"You barely know me, beautiful. Pervert is minimal to nothing title for me. And you have a phenomenal body, looking at you is like admiring a fine beauty, and I find no shame in doing that."

I smirk, sipping my drink.

She opens her mouth to say something but feeling speechless she closes her mouth, and busies herself into cleaning the counter. People behind me start to roar as Igor announces the beginning of the fight. Usually, seeing men fight for life with blood on their hands, is a sight I never want to miss. But today, I have my eyes set on an even better scenario. Feeling my eyes on her, she turns to look at me.

“You stare a lot.”

I shrug. “I don’t see it as a problem.”

Rolling her eyes, she shakes her head before leaning closer against the counter. “So, have you ever been inside that cage?”

I nod, my eyes looking straight into her dilating dark pupils. “Uncountable number of times.”

She nods. “How often do you fight?”

“Whenever I feel like it.”

She arches an eyebrow with a gentle smile on her face, making my blood rush faster. Fuck. Just that little smile makes her even more beautiful.

“The winners here get to live and win the betting money. What prize do you get?”

I shake my head, chuckling under my breath before I finish the rest of my drink. “I never fight to get a prize.”

“Then what do you fight for?”

Leaning closer, I watch her plump lips parting, making me want to kiss the fuck out of her. Instantly, everything around us fades away. It’s just me and her... our faces close to each other that I feel her breath tickling my five o’clock shadow. She feels it too, I can see it in her eyes. I can feel it in her shallow breathing. I can’t miss her olive skin prickling with goose bumps.

“I fight for power. The pride,” I whisper against her cheek, hearing her gasp.

My lips caressing her smooth skin, making my nerves shiver. The urge to get her over my shoulder and take her into my office to explore every inch of her is way too much. The feeling is so raw and primal, that I feel my control slipping away. That's not something I give up easily.

Then why do my urges have no control when it comes to her?

"I fight for myself only."

She turns her face slightly, making our lips so close that we have a few centimeters gap. Her eyes looking straight into mine as if she can see right through me. She is even seeing the reflection of the monster that lurks inside me, but unlike others it isn't haunting her. Her eyes are speaking something else... it's as if she is fascinated by it.

"You do fight for a prize. But it's not for the power or pride," she breathes.

My heart leaps from her words.

"You fight to let that dark demon within you be free once in a while. It's for your own freedom from that demon. It's always about your own freedom." Her forehead rests against mine. "Your freedom is your prize because you know the value of it more than anyone else over here."

I frown with her words taking me back by surprise.

She is really seeing *me*. She is seeing the demon. But how?

How can she see it?

I have never allowed anyone to have a glimpse of it, not even my family or Igor. Even when my mother begged for me to let this dark side of me go, she still didn't recognize it.

Who is she?

"Tell me your name," I growl licking my lips.

She bites her bottom lip, never breaking eye contact.

"Earn the right and I will tell you," she whispers and before I can muster my words, she moves back, and with a smirk on her face she heads to the storage room, getting back to her work.

Grinning from my little firecracker's attitude, I sit back, spending the rest of my time at the bar while watching her work. Our eyes meet every now and then, the intense connection between us evident and strong. We have chemistry for sure.

Now we'll just get to see who falls first, the king or the goddess?

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 5



MAXWELL

PRESENT

MY PHONE BUZZES on the nightstand, startling me awake. Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I grab it, quickly answering the call.

“What?”

“Three dealers at the brothel have been found dead. Somebody chopped their body parts and hung them in the hall ceiling. All the girls are scared to death.”

“Did they leave any message?”

“There is a note, but it has your name on it.”

“Get the cleaning squad there and tell Meredith to handle the girls. I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

When I get dressed, I take my guns and knives with me like I always do, and head to the driveway. Taking my Bugatti, I step on the pedal and drive off, knowing my guards are following behind.

I don’t waste time getting to the brothel. Without caring to park my car, I immediately get out and rush in the building. I bust inside the hall, and the first sight that catches my attention is the pool of dark red blood, covering

every inch of the floor. As I look up, I find body parts being hung from the chandelier above. The cuts, the whip marks and few burnt areas are proof enough for me to know that they were tortured to death.

After they were killed, the murderers must have cut them into pieces and sneaked inside the brothel and hung them.

All these must have happened a few hours ago because the blood is still dripping down on the floor. Igor comes towards me and follows my sight.

“The guards were injected with drugs. They are in the hospital now.”

“Give me the note.”

He hands me a folded paper with few blood stains on it.

My name is written in cursive at the top.

Been years since we met, hasn't it?

I thought of sharing a memory with you. What do you think? Do hanging bodies remind you of anything?

I turn the page but there is nothing else written.

No initial. No date. Nothing at all.

“Who is it from?” Igor asks.

“No clue. There is no name.”

“Could it be Demvan?”

I shake my head. “Unlike this one, he always wants his enemies to know it's him. He's always been a show-off.”

“Do you want Nicholai to know?”

I give him a glare. “Nicholai is nobody now. I'm the Pakhan, not him,” I spit out my words. My anger pacing up with every passing minute. Nodding, he leaves my side to go and talk to Meredith.

The cleaning squad arrives that time and in minutes they get to work, removing and bleaching the floor to remove the blood stains.

Usually in such situations, I would ask for advice from my father, but as I killed him myself, I'm on my own from now on. Why did that fucker have to be an evil mastermind in such things?

I look at the hanging bodies again, frowning in confusion. Whoever it is, did it to bring back a memory. But what memory? Squinting my eyes, I move around the dead bodies, trying to figure out the answer behind the mystery. But when I reach the opposite end of the room, that's when it catches my sight.

Few body parts are hung horizontally, and it's never done that way. Raking a hand through my hair, my eyes land on the shadow of the dead bodies with the floor being spotless clean now. Looking back up and down, the answer finally gawks at me. It's a word.

Just reading that single word brings every horrific memory that haunts me at night. It's a word only the monsters I know of called me. My heart starts pounding faster and faster, with my blood rushing like it never had before. Ringing noises start echoing around me as realization hits me.

The day I had escaped from the living hell, I comforted myself with the thought no one will ever use that word. No one will call me by that name because thinking of that reminds me of the monsters who have summoned me into the shadows. But reading this... Now I know they are back.

Mal'chik.

Boy in Russian. Every pain and every torture they inflicted, barely hovered in my memory, but just that single word triggers those horrors.

They are back to drag me into the darkness. But this time, I won't be weak. I have power, I have strength and control. I won't let those monsters pull me back to that living hell again.

They want to play games? Well, they can do their worst, for all I care. But I will always win because I'm the Satan of that very hell.

"Do you want me to handle the rest here?" Igor asks from behind.

Without a look I nod, my eyes never leaving that word shadowed on the floor.

"Maxwell? You alright? You look a little pale."

I shake my head, regaining my posture as I straighten my body, putting my hands inside my pockets. “I’m alright. I have to go.”

Before he can protest any further, I leave the building. One of the guards opens the door of my Bugatti.

“Don’t follow me,” I order, getting inside the driver’s seat.

“But, sir—”

My ferocious glare is enough to halt his words before he closes the door for me. In a few minutes I get out of the city and take a turn to the highway with the dark roads and starry night welcoming me as I keep going deeper and deeper.

I don’t know where I’m going, or what I’m going to do. All I know I need to get away from this darkness for a while. Just for a few hours to let myself fall for the belief that I will rule over those monsters.

I will make them pay for what they did to me.

I will make them suffer for the guilt they caused me.

But deep down, I don’t know myself if those beliefs will turn into reality.

I keep on driving until dawn emerges and I have to be back to the city. By the time I get to my house and check my phone, I find several texts and calls from Igor and Nicholai.

Ignoring them all, I tear at my tie then thrust it to the floor before I remove the remaining clothes followed by the same violence. I head to the shower. Standing under the cold water cascading over me, my hands rest on both sides of the wall. Letting out a heavy sigh, I lean my head down and close my eyes for a moment to drag myself away from the glimpse of my past.

I try to think of good moments or something else, like literally anything at all. But before I know it, my imagination takes a trip to my little firecracker.

Her fierceness. Her beauty. Her hidden innocence. Her stunning body. Every unseen inch of her flash in my head.

Just thinking about touching her smooth, flawless skin makes a desire course through my nerves. The thought of her makes the demon within me calm down on its own. Like a Siren, her beauty makes her more alluring. Feeling my cock pulsing, I wrap my hand around it, craving to get rid of this sudden desire lurking within me. I picture her at the bar as I keep thinking of a different outcome of our moment together.

A scenario where we crave for each other's touch. A moment where we both want to only belong to each other. Giving a light squeeze to my cock, I move it up and down. I get lost in my fantasy and it nearly feels real.

She licks her lips, as we both face each other, our eyes never straining away. The desire is evident in her gaze as they darken, matching mine.

"You fight for your dark demon, but I want to see it. Show it to me," she whispers against my bottom lip.

Our breathing turning shallow as we both stand on opposite sides of the bar, with no one but us in the arena.

My hand immediately grabs a fistful of her hair making her gasp in surprise. "You want to see the demon?"

She nods greedily.

"What are you willing to do for me?" I grunt, biting her lip. I earn a whimper from her.

"Anything," she whispers.

"Be careful what you wish for, beautiful."

"I'm a big girl to know what I wish for. Are you a man enough to fulfill my desires?" she taunts me, as we both smirk from her sassy attitude. My cock actually hurts from being so hard from her words only.

I snicker under my breath. "I'm man enough to claim my woman."

My lips instantly collide with hers into a feverish kiss. Demanding. Lustful. Passionate.

Her hands curl around my wrist as she matches my pace, kissing me with the same hunger. She locks her gaze with mine once more before nibbling my lip. Fuck.

“Come to me. Right now,” I order, and surprisingly she saunters towards me, swaying her luscious hips, taunting me further.

“Kneel.”

She bites her lip, looking hesitant for the first time. Grabbing her hair again, I tilt her head back, listening to an audible whimper from her lips. Absolute music to my ears.

“I said kneel. It’s time for you to please your king,” I grunt against her cheek, before kissing it and then moving to her lips. With one final rough kiss, she kneels in front of me. Her eyes all sultry and sensual, making my blood rush faster and faster. I watch her eyes move across my body, taking in the bulging muscles straining against my shirt. I undo my pants and boxers and push them to my ankles.

My enormous cock pops out, hard and dripping with precum from the minute her sassy attitude welcomed me.

“Suck me and you better swallow every drop.”

Without any further protest, she takes my cock in her hand and opens her mouth, slapping the head against her warm and wet tongue. Such a little tease.

Offering me her grin followed by a wink, she pushes her mouth all the way to the base and then back, moving slowly as if she is trying to savor this moment. Her eyes locked with mine the entire time, sucking my cock as she watches my reaction.

I gather her hair in a single hand and push and pull out of her mouth slowly at the beginning. But with the desire pooling inside me further, the demon within me takes control and starts to fuck her mouth just like the way it would to her pussy, when the time comes.

I thrust my hips and penetrate her hard every time, making saliva drool down her chin, followed by the tears smearing her eye makeup already.

The sight turns me the fuck on.

I had several girls sucking me off, but never have I felt anything like this before. She is a goddamn goddess at everything,

I grab her head with both of my hands and fuck her mouth without mercy. Her hands rest on my thighs for leverage while she sucks my cock. Not once does she budge off with my power, instead it's the opposite. As if this is what she really wants and craves for.

My cock starts to ache and I feel myself coming anytime now.

"You will take my come in your mouth?" I grunt.

She nods with greed reflecting in her eyes.

"Aren't you a greedy little thing?" I snicker with a smirk before continuing my thrusting.

"Take it all, beautiful because you've earned it."

Her tongue swirls around my head more, heat flooding my cock and fire spreading from my stomach and thighs.

She mews, closes her eyes and sucks me harder, preparing herself to take my cum.

I squeeze my cock for dear life, feeling my balls aching, and I shoot, jerking harder and harder as I spill.

"Fuck. Fuck!" I groan. "Shit."

Holy fuck. I drop my head to the shower wall, my come spilling out, and I slow my hand, the muscles burning as I sigh in relief.

I don't remember the last time I jerked off, maybe when I was thirteen because afterward, I never needed my hand to relieve myself.

But now that she fills my fantasy, I want more of her. Just jerking off to her thoughts isn't enough. I want to claim her beyond my fantasy.

But why her?

What is it about her?

Taking my hand off my cock, I fist my fingers, aggravated.

The last time I allowed a woman to control me was my wife, and that was a failure. This time, I won't let any fucking woman control my mind and soul like previously.

This time I will be the ruler of my life.

And anyone who dares to intervene will face consequences.

Even *her*.

After standing under the shower for God knows how long, I finally emerge, taking a towel and dry myself before wrapping it around my waist.

Steam diffuses around my room from the bathroom when I head for my bed.

Picking up my phone, I dial to one man who would get me past this situation.

I need to know about her.

After two rings he answers the call.

"What do you want?" he asks, coldness reflecting in his tone. Nothing unusual about it.

"I thought married life and having kids will change you. Boy I was wrong."

"Get to the fucking point."

"I always do. So, here it goes. I need you to find information about someone. A woman."

There is silence for a few minutes before he grunts his answer. "No."

"I didn't ask for it, Perses. I'm telling you to do it."

This time I match his tone.

"When it comes to finding about someone for you then that person is dangerous, which means I don't want to be involved." There is a sound of a little girl giggling in the background but it soon fades away.

Imagining Perses married and having two kids while living the life of a decent man is something impossible. But after he fell for his blind ballerina,

things changed. It's true that I tried to steal her away from him because he deserved it for sleeping with my late wife.

But Hope, his wife, is really something else. She has the power to change any criminal to a decent man. Even though dragging Perses from the world of terrorists had its own consequences. And that's when I helped him and fought to save his family.

"Don't forget you owe me thrice. I surrendered my revenge, saved your family and gave you a chance to live a normal life. And you are Perses. A man who never turns away from his words."

I can feel the anger radiating from the other side because he knows every word I speak is the truth.

"Fine. Send me her picture and I will contact you in a week. But if this causes any trouble to my family, then I will come for you," he threatens.

Before I can muster my words, he hangs up.

Yep, still the same brooding and arrogant Perses. Wonder how Hope handles him.

CHAPTER 6



MAXWELL

PAST

SITTING AT THE CORNER, my eyes keep casting back to the locked doors every few minutes. To distract myself from the wait, I count the same five torn cardboard boxes again and again.

But it's no use as my mind keeps straining back to the thought of her arrival. The last time she was here, she ran away with tears in her eyes, instead of that little smile she always offers me. My whole body is aching from the hits, punches and lashes I took in, but it is my daily routine now.

I have literally lost count of the days I have been here. But most of all, I'm even losing the hope of ever getting out.

Rocking back and forth, I hug myself tighter, feeling the cool air prickling my skin. Sleep is drowsing in my eyes but I shake my head with determination to stay awake for her.

I have to apologize. I need to explain to her about my harshness. Will she understand? Will she listen to me?

She rarely speaks anything. But for some reason, I find comfort in that. Her silence is a balm for my loneliness, and I don't mind at all.

The sudden sound of the door being unlocked makes me look up, my heart pumping faster with anxiety as I take deep breaths to calm myself. Her short shadow projects on the ground while she takes little steps to enter.

Standing on my shaky legs, I walk out of the dark and try to perch up tall. But with a bruised knee, it's difficult.

She is in a floral frock today with her hair being loosened.

God, she is like an angel.

Limping to her, I notice the first aid box in her hand. She looks up at me with her eyes slightly wide. She usually finds me lying on the cold floor, perhaps seeing me walking is a surprise to her.

"You are here." My voice is a bit scratchy from all the screaming.

She nods and points to the ground.

Understanding her gesture, I take a seat.

She walks in before closing the door, letting the darkness settle back in. Opening the kit, she takes out the cotton balls and antiseptics as if she knows what type of pain I am in. In the dim light I can still see her silver chain dangling from her neck, hinting to me she must be religious.

Sitting back, she takes my arm and starts to apply the medicine. I don't hiss in pain unlike other times. I am too focused on the warmth of her small hand. Her hair drapes around her face as she focuses on her task, biting her lip.

"Why did you come back again?" I ask, licking my dry lips.

She halts for a second but continues without answering me. I tuck a losing strand of her hair behind her ear, tilting her chin up.

Her glossy, black eyes meet mine. But she shakes off from my touch and I notice her lips wobbling.

Leaning closer, I hold her hand to pause her task before cupping her cheeks so that she has no other option but to look at me.

"Why did you come back?" I repeat with a hushed voice.

“B-because...” she stutters, her voice croaky and shaky as if she is on the verge of crying.

“I know how the pain feels. Especially when you don’t have anyone to treat your wounds. And I can’t imagine you suffering like me.”

Her eyes cast down.

She bears the same pain as me?

I frown with my forehead resting against hers. I catch a sight of the first tear streaking down her chin as my heart shatters right there and then.

“Where does it hurt, an’gel?”

Taking my right hand in hers, she places it on her back. That’s when I feel something. The rough cuts prickles against my fingertips that even with her clothes on I can feel them. That’s how deep they are.

My body freezes with the realization that she suffers like I do, but unlike me, she has no one but herself to look after. She is a prisoner, too.

Looking back at her with more tears running down her cheeks, I let out a shaky breath. “Oh, an’gel.”

I cup her face with my fingers, digging inside her silky-smooth hair.

“You will never have to bear it alone. Let me treat your wounds,” I whisper against her temple.

“Let me...”

Caressing her now wet cheeks with the back of my hand, I run it down her neck, moving to the back of her dress till I reach the zipper. Her breath hitches as I slowly drag it down until it reaches the end line.

“Come here.” I motion her to sit on my lap and she does with her back against my chest.

With the dim moonlight trespassing inside the dark basement, I can still see the fresh and old bruises and cuts on her skin. Taking the first aid kit, I press the wet cotton ball ever so gently on her fresh wounds. I don’t miss the hiss of pain clenching out from her lips, making my heart beat faster as if I’m the one who is suffering.

Now I know how she feels every night when she comes to soothe me from the pain. I press again and she nearly jumps up from my lap. Instantly, I plant a soft kiss on her old wounds, distracting her.

Her breath hitches as she looks over my shoulder, meeting my dark gaze. “Just feel my lips on your skin, an'gel. Focus on my touch and every pain will disappear.”

“Is that what you do?” she asks, leaning closer to me.

I nod. “Always.”

Nodding back at me, she holds my free hand and looks forward. With each dab, I press a kiss to her beautiful skin watching goosebumps scattered all over her body.

Few minutes later, after putting on the bandage, I zip up her dress, but she doesn't get up from my lap. Instead, she leans back with her head resting against my shoulder.

“Please, don't make me go again,” she whispers, leaning her head back and looks at me.

Offering a weak smile, I tuck away the hair on her forehead before planting a kiss on it. Presenting me with a soft smile, she snuggles closer to me. My arms wrapped around her as I swear to protect her no matter what.

I will always protect you, angel.

Ya budu zaschishchat tebya, an'gel.

** * **

PRESENT

“YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD him last night.” Igor is still trying to talk sense into me after what happened last night. “He is the most respected member

and hearing the news from one of soldier's isn't something Nicholai was expecting."

I sit beside him at the table, knowing I have no other choice. "Like I told you last night, I'm the Pakhan now and I rule over Russia. I don't explain myself to anyone. It's my problem and I will solve it."

"But you aren't playing along with their rules. Not involving him when he was the Pakhan for fuck knows how many years, is an insult for him and the people."

"Do I look like somebody's bitch?"

"When it comes to such stuff they are old fashioned and are meant to be involved—"

"Just shut it, Igor. I'll take care of the matter because this is my shit, not theirs."

I'm aware that Igor isn't wrong. Not only Nicholai, but even the other ex-Brigadier's will be pissed for not letting them be involved. They still think they are fucking important.

Igor shakes his head. "I'm saying it for your own good. You are like a fresh blood for them. They are looking for any reason to end you because you are the root of their destruction – their downfall."

I grab his shoulder, giving him a gentle squeeze. "I will handle it. I've been through worse and this is nothing for me."

Patting his shoulder, I sit back.

He sighs, looking back at the door of the meeting room while being surrounded by my guards.

"Okay. Deal with it then."

"How is it going with that Latin girl?" I ask, changing the tension that is built in the room from the minute we got here.

He looks back at me with a smug smile. "She is hot but not my type."

I snicker, pulling out a cigarette from the box on the table before igniting it's top and inhaling it deeply. The soothing smoke burns down my

throat, reaching my lungs.

“Since when do you have a type?”

“I don’t know man. Just getting tired of fucking whores every night. Without the... connection it feels like a plain, meaningless fuck.”

Blowing out the smoke, I offer a cigar to him which he takes and joins me. “What are you looking for? Marriage?”

He inhales a deep drag, not meeting my eyes like he is trying to mask his emotions. “I don’t know...”

“You always know everything, Igor. Hasn’t your father already got a wife ready for you?”

He shakes his head as the smoke diffuses out from his nostrils and lips.

“I barely remember her. It was a business transaction for my father because that asshole knew getting me engaged at the age of sixteen will seal his deals without any hassle.”

“Have you met her after that?”

His brows furrow. “Fuck no. I don’t give a damn if we are still engaged or not. I mean, who would even remember that and still go on with it. She was a fucking child when I first met her. I’m ten years older than her.”

I was a witness of the ceremony myself when we were young. His father wanted half of the Omsk city for himself. And the best way to seal that deal was getting Igor engaged with the Brigadier’s daughter.

That was the only time I’ve ever seen her and barely have any resemblance of her appearance. I wouldn’t blame Igor if he forgot about her because times have changed. No one cares about Omsk city anymore.

“What if her father comes back for the deal?”

He chuckles under his breath. “Yeah, right. That old man has one leg on the ground and the other in his grave. He can die anytime just like the deal.”

Just then the door opens with Nicholai and a few other Brigadiers enter the room. All their grim faces holding anger and disrespect.

Here we go.

Stabbing the lit bud of the cigar against the ashtray, I sit back, composing myself like the king I am. They all take their seats, and as always Nicholai opens his mouth.

“Not even a week passes and trouble is here.”

I remain silent with my index finger resting against my lip.

He leans forward, folding his hands on the table. “You were made the Pakhan for a reason. And instead of succeeding, you are failing—”

I raise my hand to shut his words and luckily for him, he does.

“Exactly my point. I’m the Pakhan now. Not you. Whatever decisions are made will be made by me. You aren’t my guardian or my relative that I have to consent with you. I’m a man, not a boy,” I growl the words with a raised voice.

Igor tries to stay away from the matter but his appalled expression proves that even he is taken aback by my words.

Nicholai grinds his jaw with a glare. “You are making a mistake. If you were someone else, I would have shot you by now.”

All my men point their rifles right at him. The atmosphere becomes more tense, the silence deafening because of the threat lingering in the air.

I give a subtle wave of my hand, and the men immediately lower their rifles to the ground once more. My gaze strains on Nicholai the entire time because I know my guards would obey me. My lips twitch with a wicked grin. “Are you really that stupid to threaten a Pakhan? To threaten *me*?”

He gulps as if remembering what sort of hold I have on him. I meet the eyes of other Brigadiers who are as pissed as Nicholai himself, but even they don’t have the balls to do anything about it.

“So how do you propose to deal with it? Hanging bodies of our own people in a brothel doesn’t show the control and power you are supposed to have, Maxwell.”

I shrug. “We all have made mistakes and that’s what makes us powerful, Nicholai. Don’t tell me you were the perfect Pakhan of Russia. You, me and

everyone here have fucked up several times and learnt from those by overpowering them. So let me handle it my way. You may leave,” I mutter.

Turning away from them, I grab another cigar but when I don't hear the retreating footsteps, I look over my shoulder.

“I said you can leave. I have better things to do.”

The harsh screeching of the chairs being pulled and hard thuds of footsteps give enough proof of how pissed they are.

“You might have made new enemies. Congratulations,” Igor says, taking his last drag.

I chuckle a dark laugh. “Just because they smile at me and pat my back during public appearances, doesn't make them my friends. People like us never have friends; we aren't meant for friendship.”

“Have you figured out anything about the note?”

“You are very inquisitive today,” I tease him.

“And you are less talkative today.”

“Just not in the mood to answer you.”

He rolls his eyes and gets up, buttoning back his suit. “Fuck you. At least will you answer, if you would be at the cage fight today, oh royal highness?”

He even bows like those boring ass court men, making me laugh.

“Yeah. I will be there.”

With that he leaves the room while I sit alone in my solace, with the cigar as my only companion.

CHAPTER 7



MAXWELL

PRESENT

ENTERING THE CHANGING ROOM, the other fighters turn quiet instantly and move away, nodding their heads in acknowledgment. No one dares to look me in the eye as I start to change into my fighting clothes. I get undressed, putting on my black boxers, and taping my hands with the white sagittal band. As I leave the room, my eyes shift towards the bar. But finding a guy, half naked like me, talking with her and touching her arm, makes my blood boil. Lucky for him, I am his opponent today. I head for a quick drink. Her eyes flash with a myriad of emotions. She takes a step back and busies herself making my drink. Just seeing her, knowing what I want, makes my cock hard. Leaning against the bar, she places the glass in front of me. There is no fear in her eyes unlike others, but the admiration as she looked down at my body. made me want to kiss her so damn much.

Her eyes take in the tattoos I have inked on every inch of my built-up body. It feels as if she's caressing the tattoos with her eyes. I feel my nerves speeding up.

She eyes the skull with a crown on its head which is surrounded by thorns and flowers, stems crawling to Satan inked on my back. My arms are covered with more skulls and fallen petals from the rose, up to my knuckles. When she notices I caught her watching, she immediately looks away.

The asshole is now gone and talking with other men around the ring.

“You are fighting him?”

I nod. “And I will win.”

She scoffs. “Of course. Even if you were weaker or less experienced than him, you’d win. No one stands a chance with great Maxwell Reznikov.”

I tilt my head, not sure what she is referring to. Does she think my opponents lose on purpose to stroke my ego?

I lean in and she follows my motion, until our faces are close. Just like last time, the fire instantly ignites within me.

“You think people lose because of who I am?”

She shrugs. “Why else would they lose? To get killed by you later on because you lost?”

I chuckle with a nod, as I look back and forth from the cage to her.

“I won’t win then.”

She frowns.

I smirk, leaning closer as I drag a fingertip along her smooth cheek. “I will let him beat me up until I’m on the verge of dying. I won’t hit, I won’t defend myself. You want me to win, then one sign from you and I will kill him,” I mutter, nodding to my opponent.

“You are bluffing,” she retorts.

With a smirk and a wink, I head towards the cage. The look she gives me tightens my balls, wishing I could relive my fantasy. Something about this woman draws me in, and I will find it out for sure.

“If I win, then I want to know your name. I want my reward, beautiful,” I say over my shoulder.

I step into the cage under the screaming and thunderous applause of the crowd. Everyone cheers for me, with only a few people calling out my opponent’s name. I catch my Aphrodite watching me from the bar, half pretending to be doing her job, whereas her whole focus is on the fight right now. Just like every person’s here. The guy called Popov warms up by leaping and throwing punches in the air. Igor enters the cage. It gets completely quiet. He starts explaining the rules that everyone knows and heard million times.

“The bets are all closed now. One rule only, survive till your last breath, or fight to take another’s last breath. Let the fight begin.”

The men start to cheer once more as Igor leaves the cage, locking the door. *Fight by The Under*, starts to boom through the speakers. Popov cracks his neck, rolling his shoulder while his dragon tattoo bulges with his muscles. He gives me a fierce look that may have made his previous opponents piss their pants, but for me he is nothing but an asshole who was probably going to die. But today, I am not in control. It all depends on her. He hits his chest and instantly charges at me with a battle cry. His fist punches across my jaw, making me stagger and my back hit against the cage. The audience starts to go wild expecting me to throw a punch, but I just stay motionless, taking another punch against my gut and the other across my other cheek.

I find her watching me with worry in her gaze as she starts to walk towards the cage, maintaining her distance from the wild audience. With a roar Popov punches me again and again until I feel blood dripping from my nose and lips. I can feel my cheeks burning and my insides twisting, but I still don’t raise a finger. The whole time she is my only focus.

My eyes now start to swell. My vision is getting blurry. The men surrounding the cage are taken aback by my unexpected behaviour. They no

longer cheer or scream as if they realize I am going to lose.

I lose my balance, falling on my ass when Popov kicks my shin. He roars in the silent room, raising his hand in victory even though the fight isn't over.

I turn my face to look at her.

This time she is scared for sure, her wide eyes and pale face are evidence enough to know what is going in her mind. The loud thudding sound of Popov approaching makes her realize that she has to decide now.

The second she shakes her head and takes a step like she is going to save me; I make my move blocking Popov's punch by holding his wrist tightly. In seconds, the tables turn. The crowd joins back with their cheers and screams.

Kicking him on the chest, I make him move away and get on my feet instantly. He charges at me again swinging his fist, but I kick his shin. It brings him to his knees and I take the chance to straddle his neck. I wrap my arms around his throat and choke him using all my strength that I see his face turning red very soon. He falls on the floor on his stomach. Taking the opportunity, I lift him up and throw against the cage, making it rumble. Popov holds onto his chest and coughs as he tries to get on his feet. I go after him and jump-kick him with his back hitting the cage hard. When he hits the ground with a loud bang, I crouch over him and rain hard punches on his face until his blood coats my hands. He starts to heave but I don't give him a second to rest.

Again, and again. Punches after punches. Hits after hits. His body turns limp but that doesn't stop me.

The moment his body becomes slack, I know it's time. Everyone screams, encouraging me to finish this. To let them see what they paid for. And I do.

One last hard punch across his face and I can tell he is dead.

The bell rings, and the cage opens. Igor enters, checking for his pulse, but not finding any he declares me the winner.

I look around for her – for the woman I fought for and earned the victory. I look through the crowd and the bar but she is nowhere to be found.

Where did she go?

I get out of the cage and head straight to the changing room, while unwrapping the bandages around my wrist. Taking a napkin from the bar, I wipe away the excess blood from my face. When I enter the room, my steps halt when I find who was waiting for me.

It's her.

Grinning, I close the door behind me and saunter towards her like a predator after its prey. She's standing near the bench with a bottle of water in her hand as if she needs some sort of excuse to be here. Putting the crimson bandages down, I lean in front of her, so close that her breasts are touching my chest.

She looks up at me. No fear. No hatred.

Her eyes are filled with desire that makes my blood pulse faster. My cock aching so much for her touch.

"I thought you might need some water," she whispers, raising the bottle. Taking it, I take a few sips before placing it with the bandages and look back at her. My eyes darkening as I take in her beautiful sight. She is more than a head smaller than me and less than an arm length away.

She scans my body up and down. "So much blood... so many marks and cuts..."

I chance a look down realizing the bruises are forming from Popov's punches. The cuts on my rib cage, the dark marks on my abs and shoulder will last for quite a while.

"I've had worse."

"Don't you need a doctor."

“Doctors are for pussies.”

She opens her mouth to argue, but before I know it my hand snakes around the back of her neck, bringing her closer to me, my fingers digging into her hair.

“Enough with the chit-chat. I’m a man of my words. Are you a woman who keeps her word?” I whisper against her cheek.

She closes her eyes as her breath turns shallow.

“Yes, I am.”

Pressing a chaste kiss to her skin, I slightly tighten my hold on her. Her arms circle around my waist.

“Tell me your name, beautiful. An Aphrodite like you should be called by her name.”

“Rhea. My name is Rhea.”

Rhea.

The goddess of power. It suits her.

“Rhea,” I mutter her name like it’s the most beautiful name I’ve heard of.

Such a perfection. Her name... her body... her personality.... everything.

Every fucking thing about her is beautiful.

How can anyone be so graceful?

My lips skate up feeling the goose bumps on her skin. Her breath hitches as our lips shadow over each other.

“Somebody will come...” The hint of shyness in her voice makes my blood roar. Fuck.

“What makes you think I care?”

“Of course, you wouldn’t care. Even if someone came, you wouldn’t pull away. A man like you always wants to show off.”

I snicker, licking her bottom lip, watching her eyes close in ecstasy.

“Show off or not, but I always make sure that people know what’s mine. And from today onwards, you are mine, Rhea.”

Biting her bottom lip, she opens her eyes, looking straight into mine with the same fierceness that has captivated my attention the very first day.

“Then what are you waiting for?” she challenges.

I don’t waste any more time as I claim my goddess with a deep kiss. I grip the back of her hair tightly, pressing my mouth, our tongues mingled together. Plump, soft and sweet. Way better than my fantasy. She tastes like mint and candy. So sweet and addictive. My lips treasure the initial contact while she kisses me back. My bloody hands coat her neck and face, but she is oblivious to it as if she doesn’t mind getting dirty. Parting her lips, she invites me further, meanwhile her fingernails dig into my skin.

My fingers sink deeper into her hair. Our mouths move faster the longer we kiss. She is experienced for sure. That makes me both impressed and possessive at the same time, making me want to kiss her until memories of her past lovers are erased from her memory. The chemistry between us is explosive and intuitive, as if we are made for each other. She keeps kissing me like she wants to empower me like a goddess after her own kingdom. Her desires are being clearly reflected with the way her lips and tongue explore mine. Her hand moves towards the nape of my neck as her fingernails leave a soothing burn on my skin.

I don’t want the kiss to end. It turns into something passionate. I end the kiss abruptly, pressing my forehead against hers. “Remember who you belong to now.”

Opening her eyes, she tries to steady her breathing, offering me her scorching gaze.

“No matter who kisses or touches me, Maxwell. I never belong to anyone.”

Peeking her tongue out, she traces my lower lip making me growl.

“But with you? I might reconsider.”

With one final peck, she steps back and walks out of the room.

I smile to myself, looking at her hips swaying before she is out of my sight.

She will more than reconsider - eventually.

* * *

A FEW DAYS passed by after the night of my cage fight. But she stays in my memory permanently.

Rhea. She has a name now.

Every time I close my eyes, the way she kissed me fills my mind immediately. The way she tasted... the way she touched me... the way her body felt against mine.

All those images project in my head again and again, making me question how can a woman like her affect me so quickly.

Is it just the chemistry or something more?

Luckily, after Perses gets the name and picture of Rhea, it doesn't take him much time to get information on her. I have the file in my hand as my car drives through the traffic. Opening the file, I am greeted with a picture of her along with her name written below.

Rhea Barinov.

As I read through the information, I get to know more about her, but it doesn't seem enough. She is twenty-seven years old.

Three years younger than me.

Orphan since the day she was born. Her aunt is her guardian but even she passed away a few years ago. Born and raised in New York. She moved here a few months ago. That's all there is. Nothing else important.

These are things she can tell me herself when the time is right. But there's something more I'm looking for in order to solve the mystery.

She is a puzzle for me that I can't put together.

I put the file aside when the car stops by the bar where a dealer is waiting for me. Buttoning up my suit, I get out and enter the club. The booming music welcomes me with thousands of men and women getting lost in the sea of alcohol, drugs and lust. Neon lights brighten up the dance floor and the entire club. Making my way through the crowd, I head upstairs to the VIP lounge, finding the dealer, Albert, sitting on the couch with a girl on his lap.

Approaching him, I take a seat across him and that gets his attention.

Dismissing the girl, he leans back, getting into business.

For the next hour it's talking and making deals, until he signs the paper. Standing up, he nods at me with acknowledgement and leaves. Good thing he knows how much the hand shaking irritates me. I sit back and order a drink to ease myself for the night.

I crack my neck, soothing the muscles as my eyes rake through the dancing crowd. But that's when something catches my attention. Or rather someone.

Rhea.

She is at the bar with a few girls surrounding her. Must be her friends. She's wearing a black spaghetti dress, her hair loose and even with the smoky eyes and makeup, she looks hot as fuck. I know that just as well as every other guy who is checking her out. But she doesn't care to give them even a second of her time. It isn't her thing and it never will be.

Because no man will ever be worthy of her. Only I can do that. I have the right.

Her friends saunter towards the dance floor, meanwhile she stays back, sipping her drink. By that time my drink arrives, but I am no longer interested in it. I'm more invested in the blond asshole making his way towards her, like he thinks he can win her, and with that fucking grin plastered on his face, makes me want to punch the shit out of him.

Fucking loser.

Even Rhea notices him and from her expression it's clear she is not interested. Despite her saying no and pushing him away, the asshole keeps trying to get close to her, making my blood boil.

Without thinking, I head towards the bar. He is getting closer and closer to her, the anger and discomfort is visible in her posture.

"I'm not fucking interested," she hisses.

He just brushes it off like it doesn't matter to him and leans in to kiss her. Before I can pull my gun out to shoot him, she kicks him in the groin, making the fucker kneel. He howls in pain. Her eyes fill with the flames of hell as she grabs him by the collar and knees his head.

I stop in my tracks with that proud grin on my lips, watching my fierce Rhea fighting her own battle like the goddess and fighter she is.

"You bitch!" the asshole yells and stands up, Rhea prepares herself to take another punch but is dragged back by two other guys.

He grins, stalking towards her.

What a pussy. He really needs two extra guys to show off his power. Rolling my eyes, I approach him, standing between him and Rhea.

"Let's not create a scene here, shall we?" I mutter, leaning against the bar countertop.

"Maxwell?" Rhea whispers, struggling between the men holding her. I wink at her, enjoying her shocked expression.

"What the fuck do you want mate? It's none of your business unless you want to get your ass kicked."

British. No wonder he has zero clue who I am.

"Everything that happens in this city is my business."

He snickers. "What are you the president or something? Fuck off before I shoot you," he warns, giving a hard push on my shoulder.

I don't budge an inch. Offering him my vicious and cold look, I lean.

"Trust me, you don't want to mess with me. This is my first and last warning before you die right here and now—"

He grabs my collar with a vice grip, reflecting his anger through his words. “Fucking bastard! Do you know who I am—”

I don’t let him finish his sentence. In the blink of an eye, I headbutt him hard, watching him stagger back. Instantly, I grab his neck, smashing his head hard on the counter. Both his men move to attack, but I take out my gun in time, shooting them both with a perfect bullseye shot between their eyes, knowing well nobody would give a shit about it and not one would dare to lodge a complaint when I have the police on my side.

That’s when the music suddenly stops, followed by gasps of shock and fear. Everyone’s eyes are now focused on the brutal scenario. The asshole struggles against my hold as I hold him down. Taking my gun, I aim it against his temple.

That makes him still in seconds; his eyes bulge with fear.

“I warned you,” I mutter.

“H-hey... I will just leave. I won’t—”

“Apologize,” I order, grabbing his neck harder and facing him towards Rhea.

Understanding what I mean, he looks at her but the fire is still in him.

“I-I’m sorry,” he mutters.

Pressing harder on his pulse point, I warn him, “Say it like you fucking mean it.”

He gulps, clenching his jaw. “I’m sorry.”

I finally let him go, witnessing him reel back and rush out of the bar. The crowd has their eyes strained on me with fear and shock. The club bouncers come in and take away the dead bodies like it's their normal task. Which is not a lie.

Grinning, I place my gun back inside my suit and stand tall with my shoulders straightened.

“What? None of you fuckers were going to help her. So why are you still staring? Get back to whatever you were busy with. Enjoy.”

The music blasts again, urging everyone to return to their normalcy.

“What are you doing here?” she asks with her hands on her hips.

So sexy.

I sit back and order two glasses of scotch for me and her.

“You are welcome,” I say with the smile never leaving my lips and my eyes gawking at her ravenous sight. How I wish I could bend her over and fuck her right here and now.

“I asked you a question. What are you doing here? Are you following me?” Her eyes narrow with suspicion.

I chuckle, resting my left hand on the countertop.

“I’m not that obsessed with you, beautiful.”

She rolls her eyes. “And how am I supposed to believe that?”

“Have I lied to you before?”

That shuts her mouth.

“Where are your friends?” I ask her, placing her drink in front of her. She pauses for a few seconds before taking a seat and taking a sip. My eyes land on her lips as they smudge the glass with maroon lipstick.

“I don’t know. Probably sitting with some rich snobs in black suits,” she mutters with her eyes looking up and down my suit as I follow her gaze with an amused smile.

“Hilarious,” I comment, drinking the scotch.

“You’ve seen nothing yet.”

I lean closer, placing my hand on her thigh.

“I’m curious to see what you’ve got.”

I dig my fingers into her soft skin, making her gasp.

“What are you really doing here?” she asks, leaning back as if she needs some space.

Won’t work, my goddess .

“I was here for some business with a drug dealer.”

“Sounds fun.”

“Trust me, those meetings are always boring as hell.”

“Then why do it?”

“Because it’s part of who I am and it’s my duty that I have to fulfill.”

She bites her bottom lip, this time leaning closer with her eyes darkening. My nerves start to jitter just from that sight.

“Duty as the Pakhan of Bratva or duty as Maxwell?”

“What’s the difference, beautiful?”

“I don’t know. You tell me. I’m just sharing my thoughts.”

She licks off the droplets of the scotch from her upper lip, making the demon within me want to conquer her.

“I want more than your thoughts, Rhea.”

Her brows furrow slightly as her eyes question me.

I sip my drink, watching her look at my throat as if my Adam’s apple moving is a fascinating sight for her. I lick my lips and place the glass on the countertop, while she keeps looking at me.

“First, answer me, beautiful. Did you think about me after our kiss?” I ask.

“No.”

I smirk, knowing she’s lying but her eyes betray her.

“How often?”

“Not even once.” She looks down.

So much ego for one woman. If it was someone else, the person would be dead by now. But the self-esteem and attitude really suit her, seeing her wearing both as her own jewelry of pride makes me want to have her more.

“Did you touch yourself while thinking about that kiss?”

That makes her look up instantly as her pupils dilated with lust. I know what the answer is, but I want to hear it from her mouth.

Cupping her jaw with one hand, I keep her fixated on me.

“Answer me fearlessly. Lying isn’t your style and you know it.”

Her lips part as she starts to breathe heavily.

“Yes,” she answers.

“Does my goddess want more?” my lips hover over hers, teasing her... taunting. Making her beg to be with me. Even if just for one night.

“Yes...”

“What does my goddess want? The minute she says it, she will have it. Say it, Rhea.”

“You.” She gulps, giving a gentle lick to my bottom lip. “I want you tonight. All of you... I want to be consumed by your darkness.”

My heart thunders from her words, urging the demon within me to show her what lurks behind my darkness. She wants me tonight and I can give it to her. She will have me but not the demon within me... only I have the control over him. Not her.

“Then what are we waiting for? Let’s go.”

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 8



MAXWELL

PAST

SOMETHING DIFFERENT HAPPENED TONIGHT. Something that was unexpected. The monsters didn't come to torture me. They didn't come with their weapons to hurt and nearly kill me. But what did happen was something I was waiting for since the moment it ended. My angel's arrival.

Like always, she tip-toes inside the room in her floral dress. Today it's yellow, like sunflowers. Her hair is tied in a ponytail. Beautiful. So, beautiful.

From the corner I stand up and walk towards her. She brought her blanket along with two small pillows this time. I wet my dry lips and push back a few messy strands before standing in front of her and smiling.

She looks up at me with a soft smile, blush making her cheeks crimson. I brush my knuckles along her soft skin, watching the goosebumps scatter on her skin.

"You cold?" I ask.

She shakes her head and shies away, walking to the torn mattress. My only bed in this whole basement.

She puts the blanket and pillows down, setting them up. I kneel beside her, kissing her shoulder. She blushes more, shyness creeping all over her.

“Let’s lie down?” she offers.

I nod and lean down on the mattress that has minimum to none space for her. I inch aside to give her more room but that task seems to be unaccomplished.

She giggles, watching me struggle. “Why are you moving so much to the end? You will end up lying on the floor.”

I chuckle under my breath. “I want to make some room for you, so that you wouldn’t end up on the floor,” I tease her.

She offers me her gentle smile that makes my heart skip a beat every time. She moves and lies down with me but inches closer to me that her head rests on my chest and her legs tangle with mine. “There. Now I have my own sleeping space.”

She chuckles, burying her face in my chest.

I wrap my arms around her, bringing her closer to me that there is no gap between us. Nothing parting us.

We stay on the mattress just like that. Not caring if it’s still a bit cold even with the blanket. Not caring that the only light coming in is the moonlight. Not caring if it’s too creepy in here.

All that matters is us. Me and her.

I comb my fingers through her soft hair, loosening the hair band and letting her hair veil down. She seems to be lost somewhere today. Her fingers are drawing lazy lines and circles on my chest.

I tilt her chin up, meeting her eyes. “What’s wrong?” I ask.

She gulps, biting her bottom lip.

“I... I was just thinking...” Her words trail away like she doesn’t wish to finish her words.

“Thinking what?” I urge her, my thumb brushing her jaw.

“Will you always be here?” she barely whispers. A strange emotion oozes in her voice.

Sadness. Longing. Heartache.

Even she knows I can't be here forever. I can't be a prisoner here for the rest of my life. At some point my father will come to rescue me. When?

That I don't know. But he will come.

And when he does, I will have no option but to leave.... leave her...

She tugs on my dirty T-shirt collar. “Tell me. Will you always be here?”

I lick my lips, trying to think of an answer that will be true but also won't break her heart. I know I can't lie to her. Instead, I offer her my silence.

I let out a heavy sigh, pressing my forehead against hers.

“I'm not leaving now. Here, in this moment, I'm with you.”

“But what about later?”

“I don't know about later, an'gel. But I can promise you now. I can promise you this moment.”

She contemplates my words in her mind for a moment, but I can see it in her eyes that how much she wants more time with me. How eager she is to be with me, despite not knowing me well. But I'm nothing but helpless in this situation.

“Okay. Whatever time I have with you, I want to take it,” she whispers.

“I want the same with you, an'gel.”

I kiss her forehead, my fingers combing deeper into her hair, feeling the softness of her curls.

Her arms wrap around me tighter like I'm her personal teddy bear. I feel her entire body relaxing under me, as our bodies mold together perfectly.

She is made for me. She is sent for me from heaven.

“Tell me more about you,” I mutter, breaking the silence.

“What do you want to know?”

“What is your favorite thing to do?” I ask. I could have asked her name, but for some reason I don’t want to. I want to call her my angel. It suits her.

“I like playing the piano. I sometimes play it when...when they are not here.”

I know who ‘they’ are. Those monsters that hurt both me and her.

“How did you learn to play?”

“My mother. She taught me when I was six.”

There is a hint of nostalgia in her tone, and it’s evident how much she must miss her.

“What about your parents?”

“I... I don’t know.”

I frown in confusion, looking back at her. That’s when I notice her eyes tearing up a little. My heart sinks, making me want to take away the pain she is trying to hide. I cup her face, tracing her lips with my thumb.

“What happened, angel? You can tell me.”

She shakes her head, trying to swallow back the sorrow. “No, I can’t.”

Her trembling voice is making my heart ache more and more.

I tilt her head up, urging her to look at me.

“Tell me, an’gel.”

She blinks back her tears, stopping herself from pouring out her emotions.

“I-I have never seen my father and my mother died two years ago. It was all before I was taken.”

Her voice breaks down from her confession. Shock overtakes my emotions.

“What do you mean?”

The tears start streaming down her cheeks as her bottom lip wobbles.

“I was enslaved. I’ve been brought here as a slave and been used like one. I have lost my freedom.”

My angel was enslaved. Has her freedom ripped away from her.

* * *

PRESENT

I TAKE her to my house, telling my driver to quickly drive. It's an eight-story tall building surrounded by tall iron gates that make it nearly impossible for anyone to trespass. Flourishing landscape blocked the view of the house. The entire premises are surrounded by hundreds of guards in their bulletproof vests, holding rifles.

Rhea is quiet as she walks with me, taking in her surroundings. I've had women here before, and they were checked thoroughly at the security gate. Rhea doesn't get such treatment.

I open the door with my fingerprint, guiding her to the elevator and we get to my floor. She takes in my vast living room with the floor to ceiling window. A staircase leading upstairs to my gym and bedroom. But I have a feeling none of these are going to impress her.

"You wake up with a view of the city. Of course."

I chuckle under my breath as I guessed it right.

"I'm the Pakhan of Bratva. It would be a shame to not show off a little bit of my power."

I lead her upstairs where she faces the floor to ceiling window and gasps with the sight in front of her. It is indeed a beauty to watch the whole dark city from here, blending along with the starry night sky. The moonlight highlights more of her beauty, making her look elegant in this dress of hers.

Shutting the door, I move towards her and grab her waist, whirling her around to face me. My desire escalates the minute our lips connect into a deep, passionate kiss. Her hands immediately skate around my neck, as she

brings me against her body, gripping my collar. I feel her pulse trembling with passion, but she doesn't falter being in charge. She undoes my tie and takes off my jacket while kissing. I feel this deep hunger building inside me. Wanting to make her mine forever.

With a nibble on my bottom lip, she pushes me against the wall before stepping back. Gripping my shirt placket, she rips it apart as the buttons fly everywhere and land on the floor with soft thuds.

Her nails drag across my chest as they skim down my abs.

I grab her waist, feeling her tits against my chest. I lift her up and carry her to the bedroom while I devour her neck. Sucking on her pulse point, making her back arch as she moans loudly. Lying her down on the bed, I step back and remove the rest of my shirt. She breathes heavily, looking me up and down with nothing but lust. I hover over her as her hands press roam my body.

"Fuck, you are so sexy," she whispers.

Kissing me, she unbuttons my jeans while my hands find her luscious breasts that are begging to be sucked. I kiss her neck, dragging my tongue down her collarbone. Pushing away the straps, I pull down her dress and luckily, she has no bra on. Her nipples are a rosy pink color. Without wasting any more time, I grab one breast and suck another, watching her writhe.

"Oh God..."

Pinching her puckered nipple and biting onto the other makes desire skyrocket for me.

"Please... more."

Oh, your wish is my command, my goddess.

Pushing down the rest of her dress, I grip her silk lacey panties, and rip them off her, returning the favor. She lies there naked and beautiful. I even stand back to admire her beauty. Her heaving chest, her flushed skin and her darkening gaze.

Every inch of her is perfect from top to bottom. Unzipping my pants, I push them down on the floor along with my boxers, letting my cock spring free. Taking a condom from the drawer, I seethe myself with it. She stares at it like it's her first time seeing a cock. "Holy fuck."

I grin, holding her ankles. "Still want me to fuck you?"

Rhea looks up at me, mirroring my grin, leaning up on her elbows.

"Stop wasting time with your talk. Get here and fuck me now."

That is my last straw, as I pull her to the edge of the bed by her ankles, earning a gasp from her. I can see her pussy glistening and aroused. I swipe two fingers along her wet slit before I taste her sweet and slightly salty flavor on my tongue.

Fuck. Even her flavor is perfect. I needed more.

I kneel in front of her and kiss her sweet pussy, lapping on her juices that coat my chin and mouth. Meanwhile, her hips start to buck as she wraps her legs around my shoulder. Feeling greedier, I slightly part her wet lips and thrust my tongue as I start to tongue fuck her.

"Maxwell..." she gasps, her hands fist my hair. Her eyes are tightly closed as I keep swirling my tongue inside her cunt.

Fuck. This is heaven on earth.

I can't help but let out the strings of Russian words coming out of my mouth.

"*Ya kochu pozhart kazhddy dyuym tebya,*" I whisper, telling her how much I want to devour every inch of her.

Her hips buck even more as I feel her walls twitching. Like she is on the verge of coming. I immediately stand up and hover over her. My fingers grabbing the back of her head as her face arched back.

"You are coming on my cock for our first time," I order before positioning my cock at her entrance and pushing in.

She wraps her legs around my hips, her heels digging into my ass. Her hands roaming over my sculpted body like she is trying to familiarize

herself properly with my body.

She feels tight but so damn good. It's an incredible feeling every time I pull and push inside her. My cock stretches her, feeling more and more of her. Her pussy gets more wet making it easier for me to thrust harder and deeper. I moan and look at her, never wanting to look away. Her mouth is parted as she moans with me, her eyes looking right at me. My entire body flexes with every move. But watching her body shiver from my fucking is the most beautiful sight.

And so, I fuck her. Hard.

Soon, her walls start to spasm as she closes her eyes, crying out as she comes. Her entire body crumples beneath me.

I kiss her, gripping her hair tighter as I continue fucking her.

"Maxwell! Yes!" Her head rolls back, and she screams out loud. My cock starts to twitch and my balls are aching for relief.

"Please, more! I want to come again," she moans and begs.

"Fuck yes! Come with me. Now."

She bites her lip with her eyes still shut. Grabbing by her hair, I slightly shake her head and she opens her eyes.

"Eyes on me when you come. I want to watch you and you better watch me, beautiful," I demand.

She listens and does what is told.

And just seeing that sight makes me come, too. With a few final thrusts I spill inside the condom, wishing it wasn't there at all, while she moans against my mouth. Her body trembling. We both close our eyes, relishing in the moment. Our bodies tangled together in a sweaty mess.

The room is already smelling like sex and her perfume along with my cologne. Both of us are getting down from the high of desire. It is fulfillment. Peace.

Something I never knew I would feel again.

And I want this moment to last for hours, even though I know it isn't possible.

“Wow... that was...” her words fade away in a hushed voice.

Grinning, I kiss her cheek and lips, gaining a low moan from her.

“The night isn't over yet, beautiful. And I'm nowhere near done with you.”

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 9



MAXWELL

PRESENT

RHEA'S HEAD rolls back and her fingers dig deeper into my hair. Her head resting on my shoulder with her back against my chest as she sits on my lap.

"God... please, more." Her moans ring around the quiet house.

Kissing her pulse point on her neck, I suck on her skin while working my magic with my fingers buried in her pussy. It's nearly four o'clock. We have been fucking for hours. We're tired but neither of us wants to stop.

She wants my body as if I'm her last supper and she needs to have as much as possible in one night. Her nearly slack body and mewling sounds are evident of how exhausted she is, but she isn't going to quit either.

Meanwhile, I have come so many times that I'm out of condoms now. My cock needs some rest for sure but I still want her to come. I circle her clit with my thumb while my two fingers are inside her, pumping in and out.

"Do you want to come, beautiful?" I whisper, licking her earlobe.

“Yes. Please, Maxwell,” she begs in that sweet and sultry voice, making my blood roar.

“Then come for me. Come now,” I order and as if my words are the last trigger for her to let go, she comes.

Her eyes shut with her mouth gaped open. Every inch of her trembles and shivers, her toes curling in with the intensity of the pleasure she is perceiving.

Her pussy is gushing, making my fingers wet. When she comes down to her senses, her whole body relaxes beneath me.

Pulling out my fingers, I put it in my mouth, sucking off her juices. Tasting her addictive sweetness as I hum in appreciation.

Fuck, it feels so damn good.

I cup her chin, tilting her head back and plant my lips on hers, sharing her taste. She returns the kiss while our tongues dance together, her mewling with eagerness.

“You should visit me daily and make my nights way better,” I whisper.

“Mmmm,” she mutters against my lips before pulling back and getting off my lap. Running a hand down my hair, I get off the bed and make my way to the bathroom to get cleaned.

When I return putting on my sweatpants, she is already dressed and ready to leave, slinging her purse on her shoulder.

“Leaving without saying goodbye?”

“Goodbyes are said to the people you care about. And it’s clear I don’t care about you.”

So sassy even after the hard fucking. She looks for something on the ground when her eyes land on her half-torn panties.

She shrugs. “Well, they are of no use to me. So, keep it as a token of our fucking.” She pulls on her heels and combs her hair with her fingers, ready to exit.

“Goodnight,” she mutters with a half genuine smile and walks towards the door.

“Wait.” I grab her elbow.

“My driver will drop you.”

I wrap my arms around her waist while she has her arms around my neck.

“It’s okay, I can get home—”

“No excuses. Just tell him your address and he will take you.” I tuck a loose strand of her red hair.

“Are you always this bossy?”

“Are you always so sassy?”

She chuckles under her breath, rolling her eyes.

With my hand resting on her back, I lead her outside.

“Take Rhea to her house.”

My driver nods and heads to his seat. I open the car door for her, earning an arched eyebrow like she didn’t expect me to be a gentleman.

“Thanks for tonight, I guess. Otherwise, it would have been boring.”

I smile, cupping her face. “You can visit me anytime you want.”

She holds my wrists, shaking her head. “This can’t happen again.”

I frown. “Why not?”

“Because it’s unethical. You are my boss and I work for you. This is wrong.”

Bullshit. I can tell easily. The boss-employee isn’t the issue at all, otherwise she would have rejected my offer back at the bar. She came with me willingly and could have denied me, too. Rhea is one of the very few brave people I know who have the guts to tell me ‘no’ to my face. The reason is something else.

“You know lying doesn’t look good on you, beautiful.”

She squares her shoulder, those walls building around her again in defense. Rhea tries to get away from my hold, but I hold her tightly.

“Tell me, Rhea.” I know my voice sounds demanding but I have to know.

She bites her bottom lip with a heavy sigh. “It’s complicated.”

“My middle name is *complicated*. I was raised in a complicated life. So, tell me now, what is the matter?”

A glimmer of fire lights up in her eyes as her jawline clenches.

“Fine. You want the truth? Here it is.”

I wait for her to answer but that one word she tells me just feels a gallon of cold water being poured on me.

“You.”

I remain silent, allowing her to continue. “It’s you. I don’t want to be with a man like you. Aggressive. Dangerous and harmful to me. I lead a normal life and want to keep it that way, Maxwell. I need someone who would be a human rather than a monster in everyone’s eyes.”

I feel my throat constricting with guilt and hurt clogging my windpipe. Buried memories are trying to dig out their way in my mind. But I stay composed in front of her.

“The fucking was phenomenal and I can’t deny the chemistry we have together but that’s all there is going to be between us. Lust. Attraction. A sin that we both want to commit but because of severe consequences we can’t continue this. We can’t be—”

“Bounded by sin to each other.” I finish her sentence.

“Exactly. You are just not capable of affection and love. It’s crystal clear with your nature.”

Putting my hands inside my pockets, I step back no longer interested to listen to what she wants to say.

“Goodbye, Rhea,” I mutter, sounding cold and distant already. She feels the change as she holds onto the door with a tight grip. Her eyes hold a hint of guilt in it but she doesn’t take her words back.

“Bye, Maxwell.”

With that she gets in while I'm standing there and watching the car drive off until it is no longer in view.

I head back inside, but instead of going to my bedroom, I go inside my office to look for one thing that I've hidden for so long.

I open the desk drawer, retrieving the only picture that I have left of my late wife. It is a picture of me and her on our wedding day. I'm in my black tux, while she's wearing a white wedding dress with a small bouquet of white roses on her hand. We're standing beside each other, looking at the camera with a fake smile we both are used to, trying to look like the perfectly married couple in love.

I trace her flawless face, skimming my fingertips along her porcelain skin. Her dark black hair is styled into a bun with the veil tucked in it. She always preferred her hair up. She was a massive attention seeker. And never missed the chance of attending balls and high class functions.

She is the ideal wife material. No wonder my father chose her for me. But if he knew before what a whore his choice would turn into, he wouldn't even consider her.

I can never forget the day she blamed me for not trying to be involved in our marriage. That was the first and last time she yelled at me.

CUTTING THE STEAK IN HALF, I take a small piece before popping it in my mouth, enjoying the juicy tender meat. My wife, Felicia, sits on my right as always, eating her favorite chicken soup.

"Have you talked to Ms. Salvatore about the charity?" I ask.

She nods her head, looking down at her food.

"What about the catering? Is that done?"

She nods again but this time her lips twitch.

"And the decorations and guest lists? Is it all ready?"

She drops the spoon with a loud clunk and leans back. Her eyes hold the fire of anger that I haven't seen before.

I frown in confusion, but hold my composure.

She lets out a heavy sigh. "When will this stop?"

I don't respond, allowing her to elaborate.

Her lips wobble a bit as her eyes shine with tears which were on the verge of streaking down her cheeks.

"It's always about the functions, charities and family dinners, isn't it?" Her voice trembles a little.

"Felicia, if you want to say something just say it," I mutter in my cold and neutral tone.

She lets out a sarcastic laugh. "Will there ever be a time when you ask about me and what I need?"

"Felicia, you are still not making sense—"

She slaps her hands on the table, halting my words. Her eyes are wide with fury radiating from head to toe.

"Will you ever love me as your wife, or are you going to keep using me as some cheap publicity stunt?" As soon as those words leave her mouth, they dig deep into my soulless heart.

The first tear streams down her cheek.

"It's been three fucking years since we got married. You come home, we talk about these charities and functions. Then we go to bed and either sleep or have a meaningless fuck!"

More tears course down, smudging her makeup. With the back of her hand she wipes them away, getting more makeup all over her face. This is a sight of my perfect wife that I have never seen before.

Broken. Hurtful. Desperate.

"I thought I could change you. Spark even a light of affection. But it was all futile."

She pushes away her plate and bowl, spilling soup all over the table and the floor.

“You are incapable of falling in love.”

With that she stormed out of the room, leaving this unknown guilt weighing on my shoulders. It’s true we have been married for a long time. We talk about everything except about us, our relationship. She still supports me despite the cold nature she gets every day from me. All she asks for is affection.

Affection. Care. Love.

Love? Am I really capable of it? Will I ever be?

I KEEP ASKING myself that question again and again that night. And the question still haunts me. Will I ever be capable of love?

I take the bottle of whiskey from the mini bar, opening the lid and downing half of the liquor at once. With the photo frame in my hand, I walk towards the fireplace, watching the flames dance and rattle as it illuminates my shadow in the room. I look down at the picture again, drinking more whiskey.

I thought to give our marriage a chance. After that night, I changed for her, trying bit by bit, day after day to win her heart. But what did I get in return?

Betrayal.

The minute I found my wife in bed with another man, the seed of loving that was trying to grow, was ripped away from my heart before it could even bloom. I didn’t hesitate to kill her because that’s what every person who crossed me deserved.

Now all I have left of her is this picture. My throat welcomes the burn of the whiskey, letting it soothe the ache even if for a few moments.

Tonight, hearing those same words from Rhea made me realize that I will never be capable of love. It was long gone the day I faced hell. And holding onto any sort of remembrance is futile.

Sign of weakness.

And I stopped myself being weak ages ago, I'm not letting it happen again.

With one last look at the picture, I throw it into the fire. Bidding farewell to the last memory of my late wife. Neither during the funeral, nor right now did I say rest in peace to my wife. I knew she was rotting in hell for her betrayal. There was no point lying.

I will never be capable of love.

* * *

GOING through the list one final time, I hand it over to Igor.

"This is all we have?" I ask.

He nods. "More supplies will be here by the end of the weekend."

I nod, looking around the drug warehouse. It is dark everywhere. The workers carry out the boxes of cocaine from the truck and put them inside.

It's been a few days since my night with Rhea. I saw her in the underground, doing her work, but didn't bother interacting.

It felt torturous to be away from her even though my desire rose up every time I looked at her. But it had to be done. I wouldn't let her affect me furthermore.

As the final shipment is delivered inside the warehouse, I stalk downstairs and head to the basement where all the slaves are brought. It is dark and wet, as barely audible sounds of whimper echo through the walls.

Igor follows me inside as I light a cigar and stand beside the cage where the young girls and women are chained.

The business of slaves is something I don't find pleasant but to maintain my power and image it is a necessity.

"They got the new ones today?" Igor asks.

I nod my head. "Yeah. All came in today."

"Some look very young. Are you sure they are of legal age?"

"You know well that Patrick is given strict instructions for bringing girls. And I'm sure he doesn't wish to die."

He nods. "If that's all then I'm going to head home."

Without waiting for another word, he walks outside and leaves.

Speaking of the devil, Patrick walks in through the back door in his black worn out shirt and pants, with a hoodie on top. When he sees me, he switches to being my pawn like everyone else in my kingdom.

I gesture at the cage. "Are these all for today?"

He nods. "Yes, sir. The rest will arrive in two days."

I blow out the smoke as it rises to the ceiling.

"Would you like something to drink, sir?"

"I'm here for business not entertainment."

He bows his head in fear. "Sorry, sir."

Suddenly, out of nowhere the sound of chain falling reaches my ear along with the cage door opening.

What on earth?

I see a figure standing close to the cage, still and brave. I narrow my eyes to get a clear picture, but it's too dark to see.

The men, along with Patrick, rush towards her to get her inside the cage. I wait for a few moments, watching her stand there and knowing she will cower away. But within the blink of an eye what she does next takes me aback.

Patrick reaches for her shoulder with a vise grip, but she takes the chance and kicks him on the chest with all her might. The other two men charge at her, but she dodges their moves and retrieves a gun from one of

the useless assholes. She doesn't hesitate to pull the trigger and shoot them both in their hearts twice in a row. Patrick takes the chance, grabbing her from behind. But she even dodges his move by kicking his shin and hitting his nose with the back of her head, making him fall on the ground.

Rolling my eyes, I drop the cigar and approach her with quiet steps. She senses my movements and points the gun at me.

"Little girl, drop the gun. It's not a plaything," I mutter with a cold tone.

She stands tall and strong, gripping the weapon for dear life as if it's going to save her from me.

"No! Stay back!" she warns with a scratchy, faltering voice but stays strong to her roots.

"Or what?" I stand right in front of her with the gun pressed against my chest. I feel it wobble through my clothes. "Little girl, life is never fair. So, this is your only chance to see if you deserve a life or not. Pull the trigger or fucking get inside."

"If I have to kill each and everyone here to get the life I deserve, then I will." I hear the click of the trigger but there is no loud bang. There are no bullets left and yet she keeps pulling the trigger again and again.

"No, no, no, no."

I grab both her hands, making her drop the gun, with her chest colliding with mine. But when I see her in light, my world shifts.

My heart drops right there and then with fear. Rage soon gets exchanged with utter shock as I see Rhea in front of me.

Those same deep dark eyes, heart-shaped face, and plump lips. But her hair color is different. What catches my sight more are the bruises and marks under her eyes and lips, making her look almost unrecognizable. Even her arms and exposed legs have several lash marks with few fresh wounds. I frown in confusion.

What the fuck is she doing here?

I grip her arm, bringing her close to me, as her suddenly fearful eyes look up at me.

“How the fuck did you end up here?”

Her brows furrow as if she is unable to understand a single word I’m saying.

I squeeze her arm tighter, watching her wince in pain. But none of it matters.

“Let me go! Who the fuck do you think you are?” She writhes against my hold, but it is all a futile attempt. I grip her jaw and make her look into the demon’s eyes that she is awakening.

“How the fuck did you end up here, Rhea? Fucking answer, me!”

“I don’t even know you! Let me go!” she screams even with her hoarse voice, punching my chest rapidly with her tiny fist like a lunatic. Her silly act ignites my anger more as I hold her hands tightly with one hand, placing it behind her, while the other skates around her neck, making her head arch back.

“Stop being a bitch—”

My words are left unfinished when her knee kicks on my groin, I step back from instant pain. My entire body shivers as I kneel on the ground.

Fucking bitch!

Taking the chance, she looks around and dashes away to the door which leads to the alleyway. The guards follow her but I command them to stop.

She is mine.

Taking deep breaths, I suppress the pain and run after her. The air crackles as she turns into my prey.

Hearing my thudding footsteps getting closer, she looks over her shoulder. Even from afar I can see the fear in her eyes. She gives it all to run as fast as she can, but she is no match for me. With each step I take, a new purpose urges me to get back my control.

She is fast, and I notice her shoulders sagging in relief when she gets to the main road. Cars zoom through the road with people walking and moving on with their normal lives. Among them, she looks like she doesn't belong there. But even the crowd won't save her from me.

She bypasses them with her bare feet carrying her as far as she can go. But when her eyes find the nearest police station, she doesn't hesitate before dashing towards the building.

Rolling my eyes, I cross the street, heading to the police station where Rhea is talking to two officers and points at me.

"Please, help me," she begs, looking back at me with ultimate fear as if I'm going to kill her. When the officers recognize it's me, they take a step back. Fear and respect reflecting in their eyes and posture as they don't dare meet my eyes.

"Mr. Reznikov, how may we help you?" the blond officer asks in Russian. Meanwhile, Rhea looks back and forth at me and them in confusion.

I wave my hand, "Won't be necessary."

"Why aren't you doing anything? He is trying to attack me!" Rhea yells at the top of her lungs, looking betrayed and confused. Her body shivers from her still wet clothes but she doesn't allow it to weaken her.

I nod at the officers to leave and they do. With lips parted in shock she is aware of her defeat. Turning to me she looks around again for help, but after witnessing the scenario she realizes there is nobody to help her. Taking tentative steps back, she makes a move to run off again. But this time I'm prepared. I wrap my arms around her waist and carry her over my shoulder. Thrashing and kicking against my hold she screams to be set free.

"Let me go! I said fucking let me go!" She lands rapid punches on my back but I tighten my grip on her as I walk us back to where my car is parked.

“Get ahold of her and make sure she doesn’t run off,” I order one of my guards in Russian as he takes Rhea and drags her to the back of the car.

Letting out a heavy sigh, listening to her high-pitched protests and thrashing as I get inside the car. Looking down at my slightly wet and dirty clothes, I try to suppress my anger.

Questions after questions run through my mind after the scenario I witnessed.

What happened to Rhea? Why was she acting like this?

Why did she pull off such a stunt? Who hit her like that?

But most of all... what was really happening?

By the time we get back to my house, it’s way past midnight. Getting out of the car, two guards take out Rhea from their car as she continues to fight.

“Let me go! You assholes! Let me go!” she yells.

I nod at the guards to take her upstairs. “To the guest room.”

Bobbing their heads at me, they take her away meanwhile I go to my bedroom and change out of my clothes.

When I head to her room, a loud crash from inside makes me sprint towards the room. Bursting inside, I find her standing with a knife in her hand. Four of my guards try to approach her as if she is some wild animal ready to pounce.

One of the men tries to get to her. Her breathing escalates as she doesn't hesitate drawing the knife and slashing across his arm and cheek with ferocity.

The others scramble for their guns but I halt them.

“No, I need her alive,” I order and they hold back.

When she looks at me, I see the desperation in her eyes. The desperation for freedom, for an escape.

“Stop it. Right now,” I order.

I stalk towards her with the demon lurking behind me as my shadow. And as if she can sense it, her hand starts to tremble even though she holds her head high. Showing no fear.

“Rhea, drop the knife. We can do this the easy way or the hard way,” I mutter in my cold, emotionless voice.

“My name is not Rhea, stop calling me that,” she hisses out her words like a curse.

Her eyes keep straining back to the guards who are waiting for my order to either kill her or take her away. Understanding her point of view, I look at them.

“Leave the room. Don’t come back until I say so.”

They hesitate for a second before they clear out, leaving me alone with Rhea.

“They won’t hurt you. So, drop the knife now.”

She holds onto the knife tightly with both her hands. “Your words mean shit to me. I didn’t ask you to save me! I’d rather die than be tortured again...” The last words make her voice tremble, nearly on the verge of tearing up.

Her bruised lips wobbles a little before she blinks back those tears, not willing to show weakness to me or anyone.

I have no idea what she is talking about or what torture she is indicating to. I saw her last night at the underground, and she seemed absolutely fine. What the fuck happened in just one day that made her turn into a lost, wild animal?

“Drop the knife and we can talk about this.” I hold up my hand then slowly lower it. “I won’t harm you.”

“Fuck. You.”

Gripping the knife tightly, she charges at me, aiming for my heart. My thick legs propel me backward and get me saved just in time. I throw her

wrist down and knock the knife out of her grasp. It clunks down on the floor at the corner.

“No!” She rushes to get the knife back but I’m quicker and capture her in my arms, locking her arms behind her back with her back against my chest.

“No! Please, let me go! Have mercy on me,” she cries out loud, thrashing against my grip.

Getting frustrated with her act, I whirl her around and slap her across her face.

“Fucking stop it, Rhea!” I scream at the top of my lungs, hearing my voice echo around the room.

Her face is turned sideways with her dirty, unruly hair veiling her face from me. Gripping her jaw, I turn her towards me, meeting her hatred-filled eyes.

“My name is not Rhea! Stop calling me that.”

“You stop lying. I fucked you for hours, watched you for days. One thing I’m damn sure about is your name,” I growl.

She frowns in confusion. “What the hell are you talking about? I have never met you in my life. And I wouldn’t allow you anywhere near me.”

Her voice reflects the promise of her words.

But when I look into her eyes, I see it.

The truth. The shocking truth that wears its crown in front of me, making me look like the fallen god. One thing I do read well is when someone is lying. But at this moment, I can see that she isn’t lying.

“What is your name then?”

“It’s Elysha.”

CHAPTER 10



MAXWELL

PAST

“FUCKING CUNT,” the monster growls in the dark. When he finally drops the bloody metal pipe on the floor, his other companions drop theirs as well. Without any more words or a look, over my shoulder they leave the room and lock the doors. Tonight, they drained out every ounce of energy from my body. The minute the door close; my eyes shut on their own. Darkness blankets me as my consciousness starts slipping away for the night.

But a blurry vision of a figure floats in front of me.

It’s her. I just know it.

It’s my angel.

I want to touch her so badly. I wish to engulf her in my arms, feeling her pleasant warmth against my body. I want to kiss those lips, feeling my pain evaporating into thin air.

But tonight, I am beyond weak. I am wrecked. And it breaks my heart that my angel has to see such a disaster lying on the dirty ground.

How badly I want to keep my eyes open, just to see her. But my body gives up as I drift back to the darkness.

But I can still feel her warmth. She is touching me... my bloody cheek as it skates down to my deeply cut lip. Her fingers lightly touching my bruises as if she's trying to map it out.

But for some unknown reason it feels different.

The touch, the sensation... It all feels unfamiliar.

I know it's her but at the same time I don't know it.

What is going on? Who is it truly?

I no longer have the interest to seek the answers. More darkness... getting lost.

When I wake up again, it is still dark outside, with only the moonlight shining in. Did I sleep through the whole day or am I still reliving the same night?

I have no clue. For some reason the pain isn't burning on the surface anymore. It is there but it is bearable. Frowning in confusion, I touch my lips and eyes, feeling the blotches of liquid antiseptic. Only one person would treat my wounds.

My angel.

But I feel someone's presence behind me that makes my skin crawl. The moment I'm about to turn around a hand touches my shoulder. My heart speeds up a notch.

"Don't turn around," a shrill feminine voice whispers, a voice that I'd recognize anywhere.

My an'gel.

I stay still on the ground, until she guides me to a sitting position. That's when I feel a smooth silk cloth being wrapped around my eyes as she blindfolds me, depriving me from the ray of light. I am sucked deeper into darkness, yet I stay strong for her.

"What are you doing, an'gel?" I ask, facing over my shoulder.

"I just wanted to try something. Do you trust me?"

I nod. "Always." There is no hesitation in my voice.

I feel her moving in front of me as she sits on my lap. Her hands skating around my neck. Sensation warms up my body and yet there is uncertainty running through my nerves. I feel her fingertips tracing the back of my neck, reaching up and tugging my hair back as my face arches back. For a few fleeting moments there is no motion, all I can feel is her eyes on me.

All of a sudden, the atmosphere just shifts between us. My breathing accelerates.

Her fingertips move further and further to my face, caressing my cheek. Her lips dusting soft kisses on my forehead. Moving to my eyes, my nose, before finally reaching her goal. My lips.

But this time everything is different. Everything is more electric. More intense. I have dreamed about our first kiss, a heavenly moment I imagine while I go through hell. And having it right now, in this moment, I feel like my angel is dragging me back to earth with her.

This time she isn't gentle and shy. She is bold and forward. Her kiss feels more as if she's marking me. As if she is imprinting all her emotions in it, even including the dark side.

I cave in and kiss her back, cupping her face. Tracing her wet bottom lip with my thumb. A dark emotion takes over me as I have the sudden urge to match up with her deep, hard passionate kiss but I hold back. I hold back for my angel. My angel deserves gentleness and kindness. This sudden urge is just for a fleeting moment.

Her lips pause for a moment, as they hover over mine.

"I see you," she whispers.

I frown, licking my aching lips. "What?"

"I saw it." Her tongue traces my lip, making me groan. "I saw your yearning. It was there."

I gulp, pushing back that urge down that is emerging back again. "I... I don't want to hurt you."

She shuts me up by planting her lips on mine. Kissing me harder than before. Her fingernails digging into my shoulder, but for some reason this pain is soothing. This pain is pleasant.

I kiss her back gently, still not trying to give up. I'm losing myself day after day, but I'm not willing to lose my angel.

"You don't have to fight it. Give in."

I shake my head. "I can't..."

I am about to take the blindfold off, feeling suffocated by it, but her little palm stops me. "Give in, Maxwell... I'll be here. I won't leave."

She won't leave. She will be here.

My breathing turns shallow. My lungs are burning and my blood is rushing faster. What is happening?

"Give in, Maxwell," her shrill voice beckons me as she kisses me again, but this time she is gentle and I'm not. I give in. I let that dark shadow give in to my urges.

My lips collide with hers as we continue to devour each other. My hands digging into her hair, fisting a handful of it while my other hand grabs her waist and brings her closer to me.

Fuck.

She tastes even better. Sweet and addictive. I am drowning in this addiction so much that I don't want to be pulled back.

"More, Maxwell," she moans against my mouth.

Our tongues dance together. Our teeth clash. Both our lips swollen and aching from our hard kiss but none of that matters. What matters is us.

This new connection we formed. This dark desire we both created. I feel my bulge restraining against my pants but I'm not willing to go so far tonight. This kiss is a little door to our own dark heaven and that is more than enough for me. Her nails scratch on my still fresh bruises, making me growl in agony, but her lips never leave mine. She swallows my cry, allowing me to share the pain with her.

“Hurt me, too, Maxwell.”

My entire body goes rigid. Every being within me wants to pull away but I can't do anything.

Taking my right hand, she places it around her neck, both her palms pressing my hand deeper into her skin. My body starts to tremble with fear, but I give it all to remain strong.

“It's okay... it's me,” she whispers.

Is it?

A wave of emotions washes over me as the urge gets darker. My hand turns sweaty and starts to shake under her touch. A voice deep inside my mind tells me to do it, but my heart is having its own doubt. Feeling my whole-body raging with fire like she is a splintering coal, I take my hands away from her body and push her off of my lap.

I inch further away from her, raising my hands in a warning.

“Don't come near me. Stop it,” my own voice shakes with emotions clogging my throat.

“Maxwell—”

“No! Leave. Leave right now.”

As if taking pity on my situation she doesn't argue furthermore, and I hear her fading footsteps as she leaves the basement.

The minute she does, I rip off the cloth that blindfolded me. My eyes blinking continuously, adjusting with the moonlight shining inside the basement through the small caged window.

I heave for air as I lean back against the wall.

What happened there?

Why was my angel behaving this way?

What changed?

So many questions race in my mind and yet I have the answer to none of them. Confusion overwhelms my mind.

Trying to recall the entire scenario, I search for any sort of hint but nothing comes out of it.

But what bothers me the most is the thought of enjoying the type of pain she implicated on me. I suffer through torment day and night, and I know how much I despise it. I loathe it.

But tonight, the pain turned into something I never expected it to be. It turned into a soothing touch.

It felt different.

It felt... peaceful.

* * *

PRESENT

IT IS hard to sleep after what I discovered. But to confirm the truth I have to find the answer myself. I know where Rhea lives and I drive there at once. Parking my car a few blocks away, I get out and stand tall, looking at the old apartment. Going around the building, I find the fire emergency stairs even in the dark alley and take the path. She lives on the third floor, and by the minimum amount of security anyone can trespass into her house.

I slide up the window and slowly walk inside her apartment. It's a studio-sized apartment, but she added few homey touches to it with the books and simple decorations. The bed is made perfectly and everything is arranged. The quietness of the room declares that she isn't home.

How can she be here when I have her chained to bed back in my house?

I had no other choice but to chain her, I knew well she would try and run off again.

I walk to the tiny kitchen and living room that barely has space for one person. I go back to her room and rummage through her wardrobe. It is

filled with her clothes and lingerie. But there is nothing to confirm my suspicion about her.

Suddenly, I hear the front door lock rattling. Looking around, I hide behind the curtains in the corner, mingling with the dark.

I hear soft thudding footsteps and clattering of keys getting closer to the bedroom. I see a figure standing beside the light switch, flipping the switch on but shaking its head when the light doesn't turn on.

"Not again," the figure says in a shrill feminine voice.

My entire body freezes from the recognition. I know that voice... I would recognize that voice anywhere.

She gets closer and stands in front of the floor-length mirror as she starts to undress. I can't look away because I have seen every inch of her beautiful skin that night, and the memory will always be imprinted in my brain.

She changes into a pale pink t-shirt and matching shorts before taking a comb and brushing her hair. When the moonlight comes shining over her, I can see the color of her hair.

It is back to red color.

I frown in utter confusion meanwhile she goes inside the bathroom. Taking my chance, I leave the apartment through the window, making sure it is closed. By the time I get to my car, I take my phone and call my guard.

"Sir," he answers at the first ring.

"Is she in her room?" I ask, my hands clenching around the steering wheel.

"Yes, sir. I haven't left since the minute you ordered me."

"Check again. Right now," I bark my order.

There is a pause for a few seconds before he answers.

"She is chained to the bed, sir. But it seems like she is asleep right now."

I hang up, unable to take in so much in one night.

This can't be happening. It's impossible. Taking the file I have on Rhea from the glove compartment, I go through her information, line by line for the hundredth time and I'm still clueless at the end. I rest my head back against the seat and close my eyes.

"What the fuck is going on?" I ask myself.

How could she be in two places? Does she have a twin sister?

Does she know about it?

There is nothing mentioned about her having a twin sister in the information Perses sent me. I am on a dead end with no clue where to go from here. I'm getting sucked into this maze deeper and deeper.

Running a hand through my hair, I let the frustration diffuse for a little while as I drive back home.

But not once does she leave my mind.

I reach home and rush upstairs to the guest bedroom. Guards are standing on either side of the door, but I don't acknowledge them. I barge inside, and there she is.

Elysha.

She is asleep with her few loose hair strands cascading over her forehead. Both her slim arms are chained against the headboard. She already has more bruises around her wrists from pulling on the chains. I walk towards her, trying my best not to wake her up, and kneel beside her.

How is this possible?

How can the same woman have two different sides and both being unaware of it?

My eyes rake over every inch of her skin, trying to figure out the difference. But at the end, there is no difference except for the hair color.

I caress her smooth skin with my knuckles, earning a gentle whimper of protest from her. Even her warmth feels similar to hers. Her softness matches Rhea's. My fingers skate down to her jaw and then her neckline, watching the goosebumps scatter on her skin.

But the more I touch her, the more familiar she feels. The connection feels stronger... even stronger than Rhea. Nothing is clear now; nothing is upholding an answer. But I will move heaven and earth to find out the answers. I will discover who is lying and who is conspiring.

* * *

“WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?” Igor asks, puffing out the smoke from his mouth as we drive through the black-market street.

I am smoking my cigar as well, filling the whole car with the expensive tobacco smoke.

All sorts of underground criminals are here, some even live in the skanky old buildings. It's like a small town for the criminals where either they make deals or sell anything illegal. This is the only area where the police aren't allowed to be at.

“You will find out soon,” I mutter, inhaling a deep drag of the cigar.

He sighs. “I heard from the men you've got a woman in your house. What's that about?”

My insides churn just thinking about her, but I stay composed.

“Didn't know you were into gossiping,” I say dryly.

“Is she a slave?”

I glare at him. “None of your fucking business. Drop it.”

He shrugs. “Just asking. A woman never stays in your house for more than a few hours.”

“You seem really interested in my sex life. Not getting laid lately?”

He chuckles under his breath with the smoke diffusing around him. “I have two girls in my bed almost every night. So, my sex life is way better than yours and you know well how that ends up.”

I know all too well. We have shared women before but it was ages ago. Both our tastes have changed over the years.

When I see the dark brown building with a neon stripper sign glowing, I crush my cigar on the hidden ashtray holder underneath the arm rest of the seat.

“We are here.”

Igor follows my suite and gets out of the car. Buttoning up our black suits, we walk inside. The people around gawk at us, looking surprised and terrified at the same time. The bouncers guarding the door even clear the path for me as we get inside the club.

The smell of cheap perfume, cigars and alcohol mixes with the air. A long lane of poles that end being attached to the main stage has it's usual naked or half naked dancers doing their job while the hungry wolves have their money-worth entertainment.

Money by Cardi B, booms through the speakers, making the strippers dance to the beat.

“What are we really doing here?” Igor asks as his eyes rake up and down a blond stripper, shaking her ass and hips with a seductive smile.

Rolling my eyes, I look around and find the room I'm looking for. Poker room.

“We are here to meet someone,” I mutter nodding towards the room.

“Does it involve some action?”

I shrug. “You will see. Just be prepared.”

We enter the room like kings with pride and power. Every fuckers' eyes land on us. Some even look shocked at our presence. My eyes scan around until it stops on one man I'm looking for.

Lorenzo.

Due to the huge scratch mark on his face, he catches my attention. We both take a seat at his table where three more people along with him are playing poker.

“You won't even ask if you two can join?” says the bald guy sitting to my right.

“Those are the courtesy of a gentleman and we both certainly aren’t that,” I speak as my eyes never left Lorenzo.

He too never falters with his cold gaze.

“What brings you here, Maxwell?” he asks, dropping his cards on the table, pausing the game. He sits back against the chair in his T-shirt and pants, showing off his fire tattoos on his muscular, olive-skinned, arms. Even his dark brown hair is unruly, with his veiny eyes showing he must have been sleep deprived for days. Resting one elbow at the back of the chair while the other rests on my crossed leg, I ignore the fact he called me by my name.

“Did you have anything to do with re-opening child prostitution?” I ask in Russian with venom in my tone.

Everyone is aware how much I loathe that. Which is why I banned this illegal and inhuman activity. So when I get the news about it, I know I have to take care of it myself.

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” he responds in his thick Russian accent.

“Don’t fuck with me because you know well what will happen.”

He snickers, leaning forward. “Oh yeah? You think you rule Russia now, but trust me we all know that you will fall from your throne very soon.”

I feel my jaw ticking with the anger that starts to boil within me. I have the urge to crush his skull right here and now.

“I will rule Russia till my last breath. And if I have to kill fuckers like you to prove that I’d be more than happy to elaborate.”

It isn’t a threat but a promise.

With a devilish grin he takes out a huge knife that can clearly slice anyone into pieces with a single swift. When I take a quick look, the other men have their hands inside their pockets, waiting for a signal to attack.

I look over my shoulder finding the other men looking at me like I'm about ready to be squashed by them.

"Okay. Let's do it the civilized way," I mutter with a sly smile.

Lorenzo charges at me raising his knife, anticipating the move I grab and twist his wrist, making him lose his blade. Taking it in my hands I stab it right through his hand to the hilt that half of it goes through the table.

"Ah! Fuck!"

Blood splatters everywhere on the table and listening to his cry of agony is just so soothing. His men all stand up to attack, but Igor has me covered and shoots them all in a row as they stagger in their seats.

More come at us, some even pull out their guns and others have more courage to fight with their bare hands. Taking out my gun, I make a perfect shot on their foreheads, enjoying the sight of blood oozing out of the hole. They fall on the ground as their useless souls leave their body.

The ones who survive, attack me and Igor by throwing punches, but anticipating the move we block it and fight back. Igor is busy beating the shit out of his opponent, while I punch my enemy's face back-to-back.

He falters back with a grunt, falling against a chair and smashing it into pieces with his weight. Suddenly I feel two arms around my neck, catching me by surprise. The hold tightens around me, giving it all to choke me to death. His strength nearly makes my vision blurry, until I kick his shin, making him loosen his hold. Whirling around, I hold both his hands in a vice grip and slam my head against his. Holding onto his head and jaw, I return him the favor and twist his neck as I hear his bones crack, enjoying the sight of him falling dead in a second.

Looking over my shoulder my previous enemy is still trying to get back on his feet. I beat him to it as I take the sharp end of the wood piece and stab it right through his throat. He chokes on his own blood. Igor takes care of his enemies too and heads to the restroom to clean his hands.

There are few blood drops dripping from my suit and hands but it only makes me feel stronger. I walk over to Lorenzo who is whimpering from the dagger in his hand. His face constricts with pain, making the veins popping on his forehead.

“Who is falling now?” I ask sarcastically. Taking my seat, I comb back my hair and gaze upon him with a cold stare.

“Who gave you the permission to reopen the business?”

He wheezes through his clenched teeth, fighting hard not to utter a word. Rolling my eyes, I hold the knife and twist it further in. He screams at the top of his lungs.

“I won’t repeat myself again. Answer now or the next second this knife goes right through your eye.”

The fear and agitation shining in his eyes show that he is willing to do anything now.

“Okay... Okay. I’ll tell you.”

Leaning forward, I keep my hold on the handle of the blade.

“Speak,” I sneer.

“A m-man came into the club a few days ago and brought bags of money. H-he said he wants us to reopen the businesses you put a stop to, and that he will make sure nothing happens to us.” His voice sounds clogged with anger as if realizing he shouldn’t have listened to the stranger.

“He had a thick beard and a viper tattoo around his neck. Black hair. His hands were covered with tattoos too, and he didn’t seem like he was from around here with his accent.”

“What’s his name?”

“I-I don’t know.”

I twist the knife, making him scream again with his other hand slapping on the table. “Fuck!”

“What’s his name?” I ask coldly.

“I really don’t know. I swear... urgh! He just came in and said your time is l-limited and that you will be killed soon. Ah! Fuck!”

“Who is stupid enough to even kill me?” I ask myself as my mind races through every enemy of mine who could think of plotting against me.

“P-please, I have told you everything now. Please let me go,” he barely whispers.

Looking back at him I offer him a smug smile before standing up and taking out the bloody knife. “Of course. You served your first punishment now it’s time for the other one.”

His wide fearful eyes meet mine. “W-what do you mean?”

I grab the back of his neck and drag him out of the club, not giving a fuck that everyone stops and gasps at the sight.

The minute we get out; I throw him on the street.

I twist the knife around my fingers, watching him crawl back and looking around for help. But deep down he is aware nobody is going to be his savior.

I look around and yell out my words of threat.

“Everyone knows here who I am. Everyone of you knows how powerful I am even without my army. Yet, he,” I point the knife towards Lorenzo, “—chose to go against me. You have heard what happens when someone goes against me. Now see what actually happens.”

The minute I finish those words I throw the knife right through his left eye as he screams at the top of his lungs. Blood gushes out like a waterfall when I withdraw the knife and stab his right eye. The women around scream or gasp in fear, some even look away. But that doesn’t stop me from getting it back and stabbing it right through his throat, witnessing him choke on his blood and die.

“I’m sure this will clear all your doubts. So, whatever business I have shut down, they will remain closed. Got it?”

Everyone nods in unison. Looking over my shoulder, I find Igor standing at the doorway and gesturing to leave.

We came in like nothing happened and we are leaving with chaos. But I have to find out who is trying to steal away my crown. Who is plotting behind my back to take away my kingdom?

Who is this stranger?

Who is he?

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 11



MAXWELL

PRESENT

I AM welcomed home by the sounds of glass crashing upstairs.

“Get the fuck out!” Elysha’s muffled yelling reaches my ear as I head up.

One the maids rushes out of the room, avoiding eye contact with me.

“I’m sorry, sir, but she—”

I raise my hand and stop her words, waving her to leave. I walk inside, locking the door behind me, and find the broken plates and untouched food all over the floor.

And there she is sitting at the edge of the bed. Still and fuming with her arms crossed. She tries to carry herself with confidence and power, her back straightened with that fire sparkling in her eyes.

“Why am I here? I want to get out,” she barks her order as if she is the lady of the house.

I narrow my eyes, resting my hands inside my pockets. Gone is my bloody suit, as I stand tall in front of her in my black shirt and dress pants.

“This is my house. And you are my,” I shrug, “—let’s say guest. So, behave or else be treated how I would treat a brat like you.”

Her scorching gaze is throwing daggers at me.

As if my words are the last straw, she suddenly throws herself at me, taking out a broken glass piece that I don’t notice and stab it in my shoulder.

A grunt escapes my throat but I don’t let my body lose.

Gripping her wrists tightly, she lets the shard fall on the floor from the pressure as I twist her around with her back against my chest. She writhes and thrashes with all her strength, but when I take out my knife and hold it against her throat, she goes still.

My, my. Someone has spunk within her.

This is the first time a woman doesn’t hesitate to attack me and the sight itself is a turn on for me. It may seem fucked up but when have I ever cared?

Turning her around, with her hands behind her back, I trace her neck with the sharp end of the blade.

“What? No more bravery?” I sneer. Every time I think of giving her a chance to explain calmly, she ends up testing my patience. Well, this ends now.

The fear shines in her eyes as she looks up at me. Her skin ashen with her legs trembling. I don’t care if I can feel the blood seeping from my wound. I don’t give a fuck if my shirt and floor are already getting stained.

“From now on, this is how I will communicate with you, as you don’t know how to talk properly. Understood?”

She remains silent.

I press the tip slightly against her nerve point, making her gasp.

“I asked a question, slave. Answer me,” I threaten.

She nods with her clenched jaw and flared nostrils. Mixture of fury and fright oozing from her body. “Understood.”

“Good. Now that you are cooperating, we can move forward.”

I skate the blade down her neck to her collarbone.

Her olive skin starts to crawl with goosebumps as her breathing accelerates, brushing against my stubble.

“You are going to stay here for a while till everything gets clear. You’re under my roof, you follow my rules. Got it, slave?”

“Yes,” she barely whispers.

“Follow the rules and don’t try to escape. It will be a futile attempt. Understood?”

“Yes.”

I nod in acknowledgement. “Good.”

I let her go as she stumbles against the bed and returns her glare. The sight of her being this little rebel reminds me of Rhea. But I shake the thought away immediately and head to the door.

“The maid will bring you a fresh tray. Eat and don’t throw it away. I hate wasting food,” I order.

“I thought I was your guest,” she calls back.

“The civilized title was taken when you went against me. Now you have a new title. *Rab*,” I say over my shoulder and leave her room.

Slave.

I head to my office when my phone starts to ring.

I answer without seeing the name with an irritated tone.

“What?”

“That is not a way to greet your mother, Maxwell,” my mother, Catherine, scolds me from the other end.

I close my eyes, running a hand through my hair. Unbuttoning my shirt, I drag it down to see the wound. It isn’t that deep but the cut requires stitching. I put the call on speaker and take out the tools to deal with my wound.

“Sorry, mother. Just been busy and stressed.”

Leaning against the desk, I start stitching it and pour a little vodka over it to sterilize the cut before I retrieve the phone and take a seat.

“Everything alright, dear?” she asks, sounding worried and tense already. My mother has always been there for me, despite the hell my father put her through. She married him out of obligation but she still loved him. That’s why I haven’t told her that I was the one to kill her husband. I am well aware she won’t look at me as her son if she knows the truth, and I’m not willing to risk that. My mother means the whole world to me.

“When has the life of Bratva ever been alright, mother?” I say as I open my laptop and access the security cameras to my underground.

I hear her sigh, sensing tiredness. “You could have quit, Maxwell. Your father isn’t...” she clears her voice, “—he isn’t alive anymore and we could have left. Start a new, better life.”

I scoff. “You and I both know mother that this dark life never leaves you. It will stick to you like your own shadow.”

She is silent for a few seconds, knowing well my words speak reality.

The security camera opens and I click on the one screening the bar area. And there she is. Rhea.

I shake my head, unable to wrap my head around this mess. She is working back and forth, serving drinks to the few men around the bar area. Her movements show confidence and pride.

“Are you coming home this weekend?” my mother’s calming voice brings me back to reality.

“Maybe. I’m not sure.”

Even to myself I sound distracted.

Fuck.

One woman isn’t enough and now I have two to drive me insane.

“Maxwell, what is wrong? What is bothering you?”

“Nothing, mother.”

“Maxwell Reznikov. I am your mother, so do not lie to me. Tell me what is wrong,” she demands because she is the only woman who can order me.

“I don’t know, mother. I try to prove myself that I’m stronger and more powerful than anyone else... Yet I still end up feeling lost.”

“Maxwell... you have to let that past go.”

My brows furrow as my lips thin, I am well aware what she is referring to. But deep down I know I would never be able to let go of that part of my life.

“Even you must realize, mother, it might never happen.”

“Maxwell, you know we tried and there was nothing there. Your father searched the place and so did you, but the basement and the house were empty.”

The guilt that I always keep buried in my heart is trying to dig its way out from the graveyard.

“Let it go, Maxwell. It was not your fault,” she murmurs, the desperation clear in her voice.

I know the memories that haunt me at night are soon going to flood back in, but this isn’t the time.

“I have to go, mother. Got a meeting.”

She lets out a heavy sigh but doesn’t protest. “Okay. Take care, dear.”

“You, too, mother,” I say and hang up.

Looking back at the screen, I zoom in on Rhea as she works unaware of my invisible presence. She does part time at the library, too but sometimes does morning shifts in the underground.

What connection, except for the face, do they have?

What am I missing here?

She talks to the other bartender, whispering something in her ear and goes to the back room. But returns a few seconds later with a bag as if she is about to leave. Perhaps she is heading for the library.

Shutting my laptop, I change into better clothes, head to the garage and take my Tesla, driving to the library.

* * *

PARKING THE CAR, I head inside and luckily, I find her instantly, standing at the reception desk. I have to figure her out and her secrets. With Elysha, she would be at my house and I can get anything out of her. But with Rhea, it is a challenge. She is my Aphrodite who doesn't let go off things without a fight and breaking her walls will be difficult. A challenge I am willing to accept with open arms.

With my hands inside my jacket, I walk towards her with thudding footsteps. Few people around me immediately recognize me and mind their own business as they look away.

Rhea is looking at the monitor screen, busy with her job, but hearing my footsteps catches her attention. And when she looks up the surprise in her face is a sight to behold.

"Hello, beautiful," I mutter with a grin.

"Maxwell... what are you doing here?" she hisses out her words.

"I'm here—"

"To see me? I swear if you are here to ruin my job, I will end you right here," she threatens, leaning closer with that familiar fire blazing in her eyes that always makes my blood rush ten times faster.

"I'm here to look for some books," I say calmly, watching her anger replaced with shock.

"Since when do you read books?" she asks, crossing her arms.

"Since the day I learned to read, beautiful."

She narrows her eyes with suspicion hinting in her gaze.

I rest my hands on the desk, leaning closer to her, witnessing her skin turning red just from my approach.

“What books do you need?” she asks, getting back to her role.

I take in her sight from head to toe. Her red hair curled back, her olive skin looking flushed. Her floral frock showed off her smooth skin and tanned legs.

“Few books by Shakespeare,” I mutter.

“Aisle seven, upstairs.”

I arch an eyebrow. “Won’t you guide me to the floor as part of your job?”

“I’m sure you can find the way.”

Just then the manager of the library walks in and halts immediately when he sees me before continuing his faltered steps.

“Mr. Reznikov. What a surprise. How may we h-help you?” the anxiety mirrored in her posture and words, and I take advantage of it.

“I was expecting a better service actually.”

His face pales in seconds. “W-what’s wrong, sir?”

“Your librarian here just told me the aisle and floor. What if I need suggestions? What if I need to know additional information? Who would assist me then?” I speak with an unimpressed tone.

“My apologies, sir.” He turns to Rhea whose glare might burn me alive.

“Rhea, go and assist Mr. Reznikov with whatever he needs.”

She nods, plastering a fake smile and walks around the desk before standing in front of me.

“This way, *sir*,” she hisses out the last word like a curse before walking ahead. I follow her, enjoying the view of her ass as we head upstairs. It is mostly empty, but even the few people there get up and leave.

We reach aisle seven and she stands at the entrance.

“Oh, no. After you,” I say as she rolls her eyes and walks down the aisle until we get to the *William Shakespeare* section. I look around, finding nobody around.

“Which book are you specifically looking for?” she asks, crossing her arms.

“Venus and Adonis.”

She scans through the shelves and quickly finds the V section on the shelf that I am facing. She stands in front of me, her back closer to me. Then she raises on her toes to look for the book from the top shelf. The air between us suddenly changes, and she feels it too.

Our attraction is a living force. Growing gradually with every passing second.

I move closer until my chest is against her back.

“Did you find it?” I whisper against her ear.

Her breath hitches as her hands slow down while searching. I put both my hands on either side of her head, caging her in my arms.

“I-I’m still looking,” she barely whispers.

I hear her gulp, her breathing becoming shallow and heavy.

“Have you read the book?” My breath dusts against her ear lobe, her neck arching back slightly on reflex.

“No.”

“Everyone thinks Shakespeare had some poetic approaches in his novels and poems. But if you look deeper, even he expressed his desires.”

“How?” she asks, looking over her shoulder.

“Like everyone else he had his desires deep down, and he expressed them with his words that had so much depth, only few people understood it,” I whisper, brushing my lips against her cheek, watching her close her eyes, followed by a shaky breath.

My nerves start to rush faster, my blood racing like a horse. I place my hands on hers which rest on the shelf handle. Our fingers twinging together.

“Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry,” I whisper as my lips drag down her neck, planting a tender kiss on her skin, “Stray lower...”

Lowering my hand, I caress her breasts with the back of my knuckles, feeling her nipples pucker against her dress. My hands go lower and lower until they reach the end of her uniform.

Hitching it up slightly, I trace the outline of her panties. Rhea's entire body starts to shake, her heavy breathing the only sound in the silent aisle.

"Where the pleasant fountains lie..." my words fade away as I move aside her panties and trace her already wet pussy lips. She gasps, throwing her head back with her ass digging against my hard cock. Using my index and middle fingers, I trace those wet soft lips while rubbing her clit. Her legs start to tremble, making me wrap my other hand around her waist to keep her steady. Both her hands tighten around the shelf handle, as I watch her eyes close in pleasure and her throat bobbing.

"You know what it means?" I ask, kissing her earlobe with a gentle nibble.

My fingers work their magic rubbing her sensitive clit, watching her writhe in this dark desire we both feel.

My cock is aching so much that it is painful. Her head rests on my shoulder with her hair tickling my jaw.

"He was talking about fucking her with his mouth. You remember that, don't you, beautiful?"

"Ah!" she moans but bites down on her lip as if still aware that we are in the library with people downstairs who can hear her.

Her entire body is hypersensitive with her nerves throbbing.

And my words work like a trigger, making her pussy more wet that her panties are soaked.

"How I sucked your pussy. My tongue tracing every inch of it, feeling your juices coat my lips," I groan.

Her eyes open for a moment as they darken with raw desire. Taking my fingers out, I place it on her lips.

"Suck," I ordered.

Her eyes flash slightly before she takes my fingers and starts to suck hard on them, flicking her tongue as her eyes close, followed by a gentle moan.

My cock is now begging for release. Her tongue works around my fingers as if she is sucking my cock, swirling the end and then licking up and down from the base.

“Taste yourself, beautiful. Feel what I felt when I could still relish your taste even after days.”

She moans and mewls, rubbing her ass against my straining cock. Letting go of my fingers with a plot, she turns her face, looking hungry and desirable.

Like the fucking Aphrodite she is, she takes charge and grabbed my hair from back. Turning her face towards me she pulls me down and kisses me with every ounce of passion exploding inside both of us. I taste her salty sweetness, feeling my deep dark desire rising up. She grabs and pulls my hair, continuing to rub against my cock, awakening the demon within me. Our tongues tangling together with my hands grabbing her waist in a possessive grip.

Unable to take it anymore, I whirl her around and kiss her deeply, trapping her hands above her head with one hand. She gets in the moment and jumps on my lap, knowing I would catch her. I squeeze her ass with my free palm as her legs wrap tightly around me while we devour each other like we can't get enough.

She nibbles my bottom lip as she tries to get away from my grip but I tighten hold on her hands.

“Please,” she murmurs against my lips.

“Please what, beautiful?”

“I want to touch you. Please, let me.”

Her tone almost sounds like she is begging, and it only highlights my yearning for her.

“When will you learn, Rhea, that I will always control your body, your mind and your soul,” I squeeze her ass and kiss her neck, “—because deep down we both know you want this control. You crave for it just like me. No matter how strong a goddess is, at the end of the day she has to return to her king for her reward.”

And that inferno of desire is lighting in her eyes.

“Then fuck your goddess because she has been waiting for her reward for days. And you better make it good.”

I let out a dark chuckle under my breath before nibbling her throat. “My beautiful, it won’t be just good. It will be fucking phenomenal.”

I continue kissing her while I unzip my pants, taking out my cock and move aside her panties before thrusting inside her.

“Ah! God!” she moans quietly.

I move my hips and fuck her against the shelf making the few books fall on the floor.

“Please, let me touch you, Maxwell,” she whispers against my lips.

Taking pity on her, I let go of her hands and use both of mine to grab her by her ass as I fuck her, pouring out every ounce of pleasure that is locked in.

Her fingers roam everywhere, feeling my muscular body. She seems so eager that she digs inside my jacket and pushes it off, her hands mapping all over my body.

We both pant like we ran a marathon, both getting sucked deeper and deeper in the pool of passion and lust... attraction.

“Fuck. Every time it feels amazing with you,” I grunt, kissing her cheek, increasing my pace.

“Yes! Please, more, Maxwell.” She cups my face, looking straight in my eyes.

“I want more,” she whispers as she takes my right hand and wraps it around her neck, giving it a gentle squeeze.

My hand falters for a second but I compose myself not to show weakness in front of her. The dark demon within me is emerging... emerging... emerging.

I give a little hard squeeze on her neck. Seeing her moan and throw her head back, is the last straw of my control.

Growling, I fuck her harder than ever against the bookshelf, making it shake.

With my grip her head jerks back but she doesn't seem to mind because in her eyes she is sharing the same demon as me. She wants it, too.

Hurt her more.

The demon within me whispers into my ear, making me yield to his whispered command. And I do as I am told.

I grip her neck tighter, feeling the muscles of her windpipe. She feels the change but doesn't show her fear. Pleasure skyrockets within me as I feel my balls aching for release. Her walls clench around me but her voice is getting shrill and choked from my grasp.

"Maxwell, please. M-make me come... n-now. Come with me."

Those barely spoken words, that pain... her voice makes my spine shiver from pleasure overload. Even the demon within me agrees and fucks her ruthlessly.

No mercy. No pity.

Her eyes roll back; her body turns slack as her hands lose their balance from my body while she lets out choked moans. Her pussy starts spasming. I follow her cue as I spurt my cum inside her, feeling my body shivering from coming so hard.

I grunt against her neck, kissing her cheek and then her lips.

"I see you," she whispers.

The high of power and control drains from my body from her words, striking up a memory I don't seek shelter. The guilt hits me right across the

face. Seeing my fingerprints already marking around her neck is making the guilt heavier in my heart.

Straightening my clothes quickly, I avoid eye contact with her.

“I have to go,” I barely finish my words before leaving the library and heading to my car. I don’t even care if she is pissed or surprised. The only thing that matters to me is calming down the demon within me that is sitting in its old throne with a victorious smile. I won’t let it win. Not again.

No. No. Never again.

I won’t let myself drown in the old memories and sink deeper and deeper.

I’m the king now and I will always rule over Russia and myself.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 12



MAXWELL

PAST

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT GOES BY. Days pass by in a blink of an eye. My nights are spent in solace while my days are filled with torture. But tonight is the absolute definition of hell. I expect the monsters to beat me up as always but they have something else in mind. Something that will haunt me every night till the day I die.

My angel lies beside me on the floor. Her head resting on my chest with my arms protectively around her. The topic of the night when she blindfolded me has not been brought up again. It lasted for a fleeting moment and talking about it seemed useless.

“Isn’t your family looking for you?” she asks, her fingertips tracing my healed bruises.

I look down at her face with innocence swimming in her delicate beauty.

“They must be. I don’t know how long it has been, but I know my father must be looking for me,” I whisper.

Her body shrinks and moves closer to my wounded one. My arms tighten around her as I sense the discomfort. Combing my fingers through

her soft curls, I meet her eyes.

“What’s wrong, an’gel?”

She shakes her head and snuggles closer to my neck. But before I can urge her to answer me, I hear the faint sound of footsteps. I immediately sit back, feeling my heart racing more than it ever has and look around.

“You have to hide,” I whisper.

Her haunted eyes meet mine and she clings close to me. Finding the pile of boxes at the corner, I take her there and hide her behind them.

Cupping her face, I urge her to look at me. “No matter what happens, do not come out. Okay?”

Her hands tighten on my wrists. “No. Please, don’t go—”

I shake my head. “Do. Not. Come. Out. Promise me!” I mutter through my clenched teeth as the footsteps get closer. Anxiety engulfs me into its arms, making my nerves rush faster.

“Promise me, an’gel.”

She offers a shaky nod.

I rush back to the center of the room and that’s when the door bursts open. The monsters’ step inside the darkness, carrying their soulless hearts with them, with their own demons lurking behind them.

One of them pushes me to the ground while the other kicks me in the gut. I grunt in pain.

“Your father is indeed a cunning man. But we are worse than him,” the monster with dark hair spits out in a thick Russian accent. His foot hits me right across my face and I feel my lip being cut. I groan again in agony, but tonight I hold it back. Tonight, I keep my pain on the leash... all for her. I won’t let my angel see me weak.

“Yogo otets deystvitel’no sblizilsya. Nam nuzhno prepodat yemu urok yego soobrazitel’nosti.”

My father attempted to search for me and, because he failed, I have to pay the price. The monster behind me pulls my head back with his vice grip

on my hair. I wail, wincing in pain as he throws me against the wall. The hard wall striking against my cheek makes the bruises feel even worse. But seeing my angel witnessing the hell I am becoming a part of is worse. Another one pushes me down on the floor and I hear the rattling of the familiar chains. Before I can contemplate, I feel the cold, heavy chain being tied to my ankle, jerking me upside down. The pull made the muscles on my right leg ache even more.

“Your father never listens,” the monster with dark hair growls, punching me in the gut.

“You know who he should listen to?”

PUNCH.

“He should listen to me. You know why?”

PUNCH.

He kneels, meeting my eye level, grabbing a fistful of my hair.

“Because you should always listen to your siblings.”

Even in the fog of pain, I try to recollect the meaning behind his words. Confusion takes its place in my mind.

What is he talking about?

He snickers, showing off his wicked beast-like smile.

“Confused?” He lets out a chuckle. “Your father is, too. But I’ll tell you the secret because it’s a lesson you will remember for the rest of your life.” He stands up, letting go of my hair.

He takes out a knife from his pocket, pointing the blade at my abdomen. My skin already starts to burn with fear.

“Has your beloved father ever told you about his brother that he abandoned?” The tip of the blade traces my skin. Sweat starts to stream down from my forehead.

“I was meant to rule, but your father took that right away from me. Who knew your own blood would poison your life? He painted me as the traitor.

For years I have waited for a chance to make your father suffer. And God gave me that chance by bringing you to me."

He sighs heavily. "I know as your uncle; I should treat you like my own son. But your father made me see the true world where your blood can't be trusted. Old or young; it never matters. At the end they are born to be two-faced, even if it doesn't belong to them. But see how the tables have turned?"

He moves the knife lower and lower until it rests on my chest.

"He took everything from me but now I have his future in my grasp. I can't describe with words how much seeing you in pain satisfies me. So, be prepared for agony for the rest of your life!" he yells, raising his hand to stab me. On instinct, I close my eyes but when I hear the familiar shriek, I feel like I'm going through thousand deaths.

"No!" my angel screams, getting the attention of the monsters.

Tears stream down from her eyes as she rushes towards me and stands between me and the man as if she is shielding me from the darkness.

"Don't hurt him," she says with a hint of bravery in her tone.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" the monster seethes, grabbing her chin.

"No! Don't touch her," I plead even with my weak voice, wrangling from the chain.

He looks at his companions before turning his gaze at me with a wicked grin.

"Ah... seems like we have Romeo and Juliet here." He laughs out loud with the others joining him.

"You are seriously trying to protect her even though you can't do anything, huh?" He bites his lip with his cold smile before he looks at my angel.

"And you, little traitor. Have you forgotten your place already?" He tightens his hold on her chin, making her wince as she hits his wrist.

I writhe with all my strength, not caring if my ankle tears apart.

Seeing me struggle, I see his eyes narrowing as if he was plotting something. "I have a better idea."

He nods at his companions.

"You two go ahead and teach this little brat where her loyalties truly lie." He pushes her towards the monsters and they drag her out of the basement.

"No! Let me go! No!" Her high-pitched voice soon starts to fade away.

The door closes.

My heart starts to drum faster against my chest. Horrible and heart clenching scenarios of what my angel must be going through flashed through my eyes.

"As for you, the nights will get even worse."

When I don't respond, he grips my hair tightly, making me wince. "Now that I know your weakness, it's going to be so much fun..."

The monster keeps speaking but I'm no longer able to hear him. He keeps punching and hitting me until I bleed, but I no longer feel my own pain.

The only pain that exists is in my heart and it's unbearable. Nothing compares to it.

** * **

PRESENT

A FEW DAYS pass and I do everything possible to try to not acknowledge the problem that is eating me alive. But it's hard to do that with Elysha staying under my roof and Rhea working in my underground.

But what truly bothers me, are their connections. There was none. I contacted Perses again but he said he got his information from the public records. Anything he could find, and it wasn't his job to find if the statements were true or false.

I couldn't blame him because he did what I asked him for. But why would the public records lie? What is Rhea hiding?

I even searched for any information on Elysha, but it's hard to find things about someone who was trafficked into Russia. It only means going back to the root of her getting kidnapped. Which seems pointless unless she reveals her own past. I don't see her much as she stays and eats in her room most of the time. I have no complaints but that ends today.

It's a late evening and dinner is ready. I walk into her bedroom without knocking. The room is dark but the fireplace illuminates her figure sitting on the couch with the cold Moscow air whistling in. She immediately stands up, surprised by my appearance. I head in further, watching her grip the furniture, as if that's her protection.

Her chest rises and falls with fright which she was trying to hide, but her eyes still marked with strength and bravery. She won't go down without a fight. Her resemblance to Rhea makes it somewhat difficult to act differently towards her. Just the mere sight of her makes me remember the night I fucked Rhea, and it makes me feel like I fucked Elysha, too.

"Come down and eat, *rab*."

She doesn't speak or move.

"Don't make me repeat myself or else there will be consequences."

She crosses her arms over her chest and clenches her jaw. "Go fuck yourself."

I look down at the floor with a devilish smile, letting out a cold, dark chuckle before glancing back up at her. "You really prefer to be in pain, don't you?"

I lunge at her instantly and drag her to me by her hand. She screams and thrashes against my chest, fighting against my hold.

I throw her on the bed, tucking her legs between mine and hold her down on her stomach. She is no match to my weight and even she is aware of it, but that doesn't stop her from fighting me. I tug her pants down along with her panties.

"No! Stop!" She tries to turn to punch me, but she has no control. I keep her pinned down and unbuckle my belt.

The sound itself makes her entire body shudder with fear. "No! Please don't do this! Please!"

I turn her over so we face each other and press her to the mattress, pressing her hands above her head.

"Stop it, please! I can't take this anymore!" Tears come into her eyes. The first ones I've ever seen since the day she has come here. She didn't cry when she was in that cage. She didn't cry when I caught her. She didn't cry when I threatened her. But this? Even though I don't plan on raping her, the mere starting point is turning into her breaking point. I only planned to scare her but it seems like I've taken it too far. My cock is rock hard seeing those tears in her eyes. I'm a sadistic bastard for reacting towards her in such a way, but a part of me feels uncomfortable with the sight of her tears.

"Please... don't do this..." Fresh tears roll down her cheeks. Every inch of me shuts down. My arousal no longer exists. Her tears don't reflect sadness or heartache. Those are the tears of defeat. Surrender.

She's already had enough and has no more strength to go through this living hell all over again. She just can't.

And right then, even in the dim light, I see the reflection of the demon in her glistening eyes. I get off her and buckle my belt before leaving her room.

I head straight to my bedroom, losing both my appetite and interest for tonight.

Sleep doesn't emerge either and doing work isn't on my mind. I am too furious.

Furious at myself...furious at my own demon.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 13



MAXWELL

PRESENT

Leaning against the pool table in my office, I aim for the solid orange towards the right corner pocket. I hit the ball with the cue, watching it go smoothly into the socket. I move to the other side, leaning against the table. At this moment, there's a knock on my door.

"Enter."

Elysha walks in wearing a pale blue top with black pants. Her dark raven hair partially wet as if she just got out of the shower.

She saunters in further, standing near the desk. Her eyes cast on the tattoos on my forearm which are exposed by the folded sleeves. There are several of those inked on my arms and she gazes upon them intensely. I can feel her eyes navigating from the detailed viper through the sword to the cage.

"Did you need anything?" I stand back. My voice breaks her focus. Her cheeks flush from embarrassment of getting caught.

The same ferocity is back in her demeanor with her walls guarding her.

"Why did you bring me to your house?" she asks.

"Because I can." I walk towards the cue rack on the wall placing it back.

“But why me? There were others, too. So why did you take me and bring me here? What do you want from me?”

She crosses her arms over her chest, her posture holding the challenge of not backing down.

“Seeing as you’re my slave, I don’t owe you any explanation.” I keep my hands inside my pockets as I stalk towards her.

Her eyes narrow. “I’m not your slave, stop calling me that,” she hisses out her words.

I cup her jaw, making her look at my cold, soulless eyes. I notice her stagger back but she holds up her composure quickly.

“I saved you from being sold to another monster, which means I own you now. Your life, your freedom, your body... Everything you have belongs to me.” I give a light squeeze to her chin. “And trust me, you don’t want to cross me. I’m more ruthless than your previous masters. What you had before was child’s play. With me it will be as if you’re existing in your own personal hell.”

My breath dusts over her cheek as I give a gentle nibble on her skin. “But something tells me you want it.”

Elysha looks at me with confusion.

“Maybe a part of you does want to experience darkness.” I kiss her soft, olive skin, hearing her breath hitch. My nose running down as it reaches the nape of her neck. I inhale her floral scent before licking her skin. She breathes heavily with her chest going up and down, her hands holding onto my arms, with her fingernails digging into my skin. My blood starts to roar, igniting my whole body.

I smile against her skin as she leans back her neck in response to give me better access. I suck on her skin, working both my tongue and teeth, my other hand digging into her raven hair. I can feel her pulse racing, her skin warming up. The ray of victory swells in my chest. With a last kiss, I lean back, pressing my forehead against hers, cupping her face. Her eyes are still

closed as if she is dazed by my touch. But when she feels the absence, her eyes open and realization soon hits her like a wrecking ball. She immediately wrenches away from my hold. I can't help but smile.

"Guess I'm not wrong," I say with pride.

"Fuck you."

"I'd rather fuck you." I trace her throat and she slaps away my hand.

"Just tell me why I'm here? I want to know," she demands.

I hold her stare, feeling my arousal sprouting from her strength. I've seen many slaves in my life but none of them held the candle of hope and power like Elysha does. Slaves always give up after a few times, but not her. She still holds onto the hope of being free someday.

"Tell me, because if there is no valid reason then you have to let me go. I deserve to be free."

I scoff. "If you are going to start with your human rights speech, then keep it to yourself."

"Every person deserves to be free. If you were in my place, you'd deserve it, too."

Unknowingly, she switches the memory gear of my past. Instant rage hits me as I clench my fist feeling the lava boil within me. I was in hell too and I didn't deserve freedom. I wasn't even treated like a human being. Freedom is taken, not deserved.

"But I bet you won't understand that. A monster like you doesn't even know the meaning of freedom. You take it for granted—"

Before she can finish her words, I grab her by her throat, pinning her down to my desk. Her survival instincts kick in but I hold her with my weight.

"That meaningless hope you have about being free from this cage and living a normal life is bullshit. Deep down you know it, too, because no matter what, your nights will be haunted by those memories. They will never leave you. And as for me—" I tighten my grip, watching her eyes

widen with fear, “I’m not the monster, I’m worse than that. I’m the king in that chess who is willing to do *anything* to destroy his opponent and seize my freedom.”

She smiles coldly. “Then you are more trapped than I am.”

I snicker. “Little girl, you still live in the world of fairytales where a prince charming and happy people exist. I have seen more darkness than you. I was born and raised in darkness. Mark my words when I say, they are nothing but lies to feed you to a world that doesn’t prevail. The actual world is hell where the demons rip away the innocence of the angels, and you are one of them.”

“You still can’t keep me captive.”

I sneer. “And who will stop me? You?”

“If I have to then yes,” she answers right away, being the spiteful woman she is.

“You may have been taught to be brave but there is a difference between being brave and being stupid. So, don’t be stupid.”

“Then what the fuck do I have to do to be free? Just tell me what you want!” Her impatience oozes from her tone. What I truly want from her will require time and patience, but I can still take something from her. Something more valuable. *Herself*.

Grinning at the idea, I answer her, “Prove your worth.”

She frowns. “What do you mean?”

I trace her bottom lip with my thumb, feeling her softness... craving to kiss those lips.

“Show me that you are worth the freedom. I saved you from being sold, which means you cost me millions. So, show me your worth and you will be set free.”

Her eyes narrow with the fire blazing in her eyes when realization hits her. “You want me to fuck you to be free?”

I grin. “If that’s one way then feel free, little girl.”

“Never. I’d rather kill myself than let you anywhere near me.”

“Then sorry to burst your bubble of hope, little girl, you are stuck here for the rest of your life. Your eternity will be spent in slavery.”

The hint of defeat in her face is enough to prove my point. Just then, my phone rings. I move back and pick up the call while watching Elysha walk out of the room without a second glance.

“Where are you?” Igor’s voice snarls.

“Igor, you may be my family but don’t forget who I am to you. So, watch it with your tone,” I respond coldly. There is silence for a few seconds before he speaks again.

“Our new drug shipment has been stolen.”

Confusion takes over me from his statement. “How the fuck did that happen?”

“The men said they were unloading it at the dock when a few cars came in and few armed men got out. Took away all the deliveries and even killed some of our men.”

My grip tightens on my phone. To the point it can easily break.

“But there was something else, too.”

“What?”

“A message for you.”

I frown, but the night at the brothel floods my memory as I try to connect those two events.

“What does it say?”

“This is only the beginning. Your walls won’t protect your kingdom much longer, Maxwell. Your fall is coming,” Igor says.

I hang up immediately and walk towards the bar, making myself a strong drink. Finishing it in one gulp makes me crave for more, but it won’t help with the unknown destruction that is knocking on my door. I have no lead. No clue to begin with. Who is after my kingdom and why.

Anger and ferocity poison my blood. The sacrifices and hard work I put into becoming a king now feels to be in vain. My crown is being taken away from me by a faceless enemy.

As I look to my side, I see the defeated and tired reflection staring back at me. But I regained my demeanor instantly. Nobody will take my kingdom away from me. Not even God himself.

The more I look into the fallen king's eyes the more vexation blinds me. With a loud roar, I threw the glass of scotch towards the window, watching it break into millions of pieces.

My enemies are starving for war and it's time to kill them with their own greed.

* * *

BY THE TIME I reach the docks, the area is mostly empty. Noticing my arrival, Igor walks towards me.

"I talked with some of the men who are still alive. They didn't speak much. Only that their faces were covered with black masks."

"Is that the new style of the underworld now? The Batman look?" I walk ahead with him following me.

Few men are sitting on the ground with one holding onto his bandaged arm.

"You," I nod towards him and stand up instantly.

"Come here." He doesn't waste any time and stands in front of me with his eyes casted down. I am about to ask him questions but close my mouth when I see his eyes widening with fear, his legs trembling. The sight is definitely not just from the fear of my presence, but something else. I look around and point towards the building where the deliveries are kept. He gulps and we both start to walk inside the building when I feel Igor following me.

“You stay here.”

“But—”

“I wasn’t asking, Igor,” I sneer over my shoulder as I step in with the worker. Thankfully, the room is empty.

“Speak. Leave one single detail or lie to me and your corpse will be dumped in the ocean.” I cross my arms, waiting for him to say something.

But he stays silent with his lips quivering. Sweat starts to drip down from his forehead, and his head casts down further as if he doesn’t have the strength to speak.

Rolling my eyes, I take out my gun and flick off the safety, pointing it at his head. His entire body shakes like a drug addict during the withdrawal.

“Three seconds before I pull the trigger. So, speak now or prepare to die.”

“Sir, please—”

“One. Two.”

“Sir, I can’t—”

“Three.”

He instantly falls on the ground, holding my leg. “Please, please, please, sir. I have a family. Please, sir. I will tell you everything.” His fingers tightly grip onto my black pants.

Clenching my jaw, I let out a ragged breath as I pulled him up by his collar. “Speak,” I order.

“Three cars pulled in—” His hoarse voice shakes, “men in black suits dashed out and started shooting at the head security. T-then they killed the ones who tried to flee. One of them came to the front when we were held hostage and ordered us to deliver the boxes inside the truck that was to the side of the building.”

He gulps. “He then said if... if he wants us to live under such poor security with a Pakhan who doesn’t...”

“Who doesn’t what?” I shout with my words echoing throughout the building.

“W-who doesn’t know how to protect his own people then we were fools. He told us to either join him or live another day to die the next. Some of our men didn’t waste time and joined him... and some of us stayed back, sir.”

Vexation is an understatement for what I am truly feeling.

“Were they wearing masks?”

He shakes his head. “No, sir. We lied because we were scared.”

I narrow my eyes. “What did the man look like?”

“The man seemed to be in his twenties. He had black hair and stubble on his chin and jawline. He even had a viper tattoo on his neck. It was clear from his accent that he wasn’t from Russia.”

The same man who bribed Lorenzo to reopen the businesses I put an end to.

“Did you see anyone else?”

He narrows his eyes as if he is trying to recollect every bit of memory from the attack.

“There was a woman maybe.”

I frown. “A woman?”

He nods vigorously. “The car at the very front. I saw a woman in shades. I couldn’t see her clearly because of the glass.”

“Leave.” I let go off his collar, watching him stagger back and looking down at the ground.

He leaves the building at once. Meanwhile, I just stand there all alone.

A woman?

A fucking woman is trying to steal my kingdom?

But first. I have to find this other man. The man with a viper tattoo on his neck. If he is the one initiating all the moves to get everyone on his side

one by one, then I have to find him quickly. But who could this woman be? And since when has a woman even thought of defeating me?

When I exit the building, my eyes scan around when it finds the security camera on the light pole.

“Igor,” I call out his name.

“What is it?”

I point to the camera. “I want the footage in that camera in my office within fifteen minutes,” I ordered before walking away and driving back home.

And exactly cross the threshold, I receive the video on my laptop.

I play it as the screen flashes with black and white cars turning up on the dock suddenly. The worker is right about the attack and the unknown man, too.

I zoom on his face.

The description fits perfectly. Black hair. Stubble on his chin. Viper tattoo on his neck. Even his hands are covered with tattoos, too. He looks like he is in his twenties. That’s when my eyes go to the car behind him. A distorted figure inside catches my sight. I narrow my eyes and zoom in further, but it is starting to get a bit blurry. However, I can still see a woman inside the car. Slim body, slender arms. Her face is directed to the side, her thick long hair veiling her face, but even she has a viper tattoo around her neck. I narrow my gaze further and what I see takes me aback. She has the same viper tattoo I have on my right forearm.

I look down at my arm, tracing the detailed tattoo with its mouth open. The only difference is that hers has Jesus Christ cross necklace dangling on its neck.

I sit back. Looking back and forth at the man and the woman, trying to recollect every bit of memory where these two may have existed. But they never existed in my life before. Until now.

Though something within me tells me I should look out for that woman more. This isn't a game of chess between two kings.

It is a dangerous, ruthless game between a king and a queen. And I have to think about my moves around the queen before I get a checkmate and become her victim.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 14



MAXWELL

PRESENT

I am in the underground office, going through the list of new members when Igor comes in.

“Any news on the shipment?” He gets to business right away.

I shake my head. “None. But I did find a few leads.”

He frowns, taking the seat opposite me. “What leads?”

“I found the man who created the commotion, Lorenzo talked about and a woman.”

“A woman? Like a victim or slave?”

“No,” I sat back in my throne. “She seemed more like the master planner behind all these. And it’s very clear what she is after.”

For a few seconds Igor remains quiet as he tries to process what I’ve just revealed. He rests his arm on the desk, drumming his fingers on the surface.

“Should I get my men to search for both of them?” he offers.

I nod. “Yes. But make sure the news doesn’t reach Nicholai. I don’t need more of his bullshit.”

“Don’t worry. He will know nothing.”

“We just need to get a hold of this man who is doing half of the work.”

Igor hums in agreement, tapping his index finger against his lips.

“Do you think Damyan might be behind it?”

I give it a thought but frankly he has been hiding for years now. It would be pointless for him to strike suddenly when he knows how much power I hold. “Could be a possibility, but I do not see the valid reason for attacking now. Our community is much stronger now.”

“You’re right. He hasn’t come out for ages. He would need stronger connections to make such plans.”

A knock on the door ends our discussion.

“Enter.”

The sight of Rhea greets me. Or should I say an angry self greeted me.

Igor grins wickedly before getting up and heading for the door. “I’ll get going then.” With that he closes the door, leaving both of us alone in my office.

“You asshole!” she screams through her clenched teeth.

“Good afternoon to you, too”

“Cut the crap. Do I look like some whore to you?” She stomps towards me, resting her hands on the desk.

“I’m not following. Speak directly.”

She slaps her hand against top with a loud thud. “What you did at the library. How fucking dare you? Not only do you harass me at my workplace, but you also use me as your whore and leave,” she yells.

“I didn’t see you complain.”

She opens and closes her mouth as if she is out of argument. But she’s looking for one. I walk around and stand in front of her.

“Fuck you, asshole.”

“Are you sure that you are here to fight? It seems like you need something else.”

I look deep into her eyes and for some unknown reason I don’t look at her the same way I always do. After finding out her identity is a lie, I look

at her more like a guilty person.

What are you hiding, Rhea?

She points her finger at me with a vicious look. “Do not come to my workplace again or else—”

“Or else what? You will report about me or file a harassment case?” I arch an eyebrow with a challenging, almost amusing expression.

She snickers. “You think everyone is second best in front of you. But one day when you truly see who you are, you will discover that *you* are below everyone.”

I clench my jaw but offer her a cold smile instead, tracing my fingertips along her red lips. “*Prekrasnyy*, I was born to rule. One single hunch of anyone trying to take away what is mine, I won’t hesitate to end his life, and that includes you as well.”

Her lips part with a hitched breath. The familiar tension between us takes place but she moves back, not letting it stretch further.

“I don’t invade your privacy or your workplace—”

I arch an eyebrow. “I beg to differ from what you are currently doing. Not only are you invading my private moment, but you are in my workplace, too. And do not threaten me. Don’t forget I’m your boss, not the other way around.”

Her nostrils flare. “Just stay away from me. What we had was one time only. We will never work together.”

“And trespass into my apartment again and *I* won’t hesitate to hurt you.”

I frown. “How can you be sure it was me?”

“Your cologne is pretty strong, so it wasn’t tough to figure out,” she mutters before storming out of my office.

There is truth behind her words. We will never work. The devil and the angel are never meant to be together. It’s forbidden.

But I have to keep an eye on her. She is hiding something and I have to know what. I make my way outside when my phone rings.

I check the screen, finding Nicholai's name flashing. *The fucker is on my ass twenty-four seven.*

Rolling my eyes, I accept the call as I continue to walk down the hallway. "Nicholai."

"Maxwell," he responds in his gruff voice.

"We both know you didn't call me to chit-chat. So get to the point because I have other important things to do."

"Are you sure? Because the way you have been dealing with your kingdom isn't looking that promising."

"And the last time I checked, I clearly remember not giving a fuck about your opinion."

He grumbles softly as I feel the anger radiating between us. "You are digging yourself a grave, Maxwell. Don't be so blinded by pride that you do not get to see who your true enemies are."

I step inside the main hall, welcomed by the buzzing of criminals as they start placing their bets on the cage fighters. Before I can control myself, my eyes go to the bar area. Rhea is working as usual, oblivious to my gaze.

"I have been in this game half of my life, Maxwell. We know better than you, and you will need us."

I smile wickedly. "And yet, here I am. I became the Pakhan of Bratva rather than your son. I climbed the stairs of success without *your* help."

"You are still making a mistake—"

"And I still don't fucking care," I snap.

"Listen well, Nicholai, because I will not repeat myself. Your time was up the minute you handed me your power. You are *nothing*. This is my kingdom now and I am the king. I will rule over Russia till my last breath. So, stop fucking interfering."

I end the call and my eyes return to Rhea who is making drinks for the customers. She is talking with one specific man which is something she usually doesn't do. Most of the time she keeps the chatting to a minimum. But with him it feels different. I walk closer, noticing his black hair and gray suit with matching shoes.

I frown in confusion. Something feels wrong. But the well of doubt goes deeper and deeper as I get a closer look on the man. Suddenly, my nerves spike up instantly when I see the viper tattoo on his neck. Before I know it, I rush towards the bar, getting past the crowded cage area where the men are shouting and cheering with the fight going on.

But by the time I reach the bar, the seat that the man occupied is empty. Even Rhea is nowhere to be found.

"Where did that man with a viper tattoo on his neck go?" I ask another bartender.

He looks flustered.

I roll my eyes. "Fucking answer, you coward!" I scream.

His body trembles with fear from my high voice and he points towards the exit. I run outside as fast as possible. The street is dark and mostly empty. I frantically look around. The silence greets me with the shadow of defeat lurking behind me.

The problem is slipping from my control gradually. Nobody except for the listed members of the underground are allowed to enter. Then how the fuck did he get the pass?

I know each and every member because they have to report to me to get verified. And if I saw him then I would have recognized him right away. But it would be a futile attempt at this point. I had to look for another way. And it seems like Rhea needs to be watched all around the clock, starting from tonight.

* * *

FEW DAYS HAVE PASSED by but no further clue was found about that man. I have put my men to watch on Rhea everyday but nothing suspicious took place.

I am sitting on my throne, smoking one of the Cuban cigars, watching the smoke diffuse into thin air as it sweetly burns my lungs and windpipe. It is way past midnight, but sleep seems to be deprived from my eyes as I sit on my balcony, the sight of my glimmering kingdom looking back at me with pride.

Elysha also keeps her distance since our last encounter. I didn't let distance bother me because I have other things occupying my mind.

But the soft knock at my door catches my attention.

“Enter.”

The sight of Elysha in her nightgown surprises me for a moment. I was not expecting her. I keep smoking my cigar, gesturing for her to come closer. She is hesitant at first, but soon complies and stands in front of me, replacing the sight of the city with her bruised yet beautiful, curvy body.

“What brings you so late at night?” I ask. I anticipated her to argue with me for getting her checked by a doctor the other day. She has been trafficked here and I wanted to take precaution in case she carried any disease from her previous master.

She gulps. “The other day you told me if I showed you my worth, you would let me go.”

I nod, prompting her to continue.

“Did you mean it when you said you’d let me go then?” she asks with her hands wrangling in front of her. I can sense the nervousness easily from her tone, but she isn’t willing to show her fear like the fighter she is.

“Yes, I did.”

“And you want me to believe you from your words only?”

“My word is the law. So, when I say something, I do it. Never doubt that.”

“And if I say no?”

I sit back, blowing out the smoke. “Then I won’t touch you at all. You’ll remain as my prisoner for the rest of your life though.”

“I have a say in what we do? Or the things you will do to me?”

“Have I shown any gesture that says you would be forced into submission?”

She shakes her head with her arms crossed over her chest.

“Since the day you came here, you may have been kept captive but I didn’t treat you like a slave should be. But do not take my generosity for granted if you are going to use your pussy to manipulate me. You will be nothing but another warm body for my pleasure who is earning her freedom. Do not forget that.”

I don’t intend to be angry, but somehow her questions are infuriating me. I have given her more freedom than anyone else, and yet she dares to suspect my judgement.

“So, if I say no... you will stop right away?”

I stand up with my shadow cascading over her. She angles her head upwards to meet my eyes. I cup her face with my thumb parting her lips, tracing the wet inner skin of her mouth.

“You won’t say no.”

She frowns in confusion. “How can you be so sure? I have been through hell for what feels like ages. So, how can I not expect the same from a monster like you?” she retorts.

I couldn’t agree with her more. I have had slaves before, and I have unleashed my rough side with them. They’ve witnessed how cruel and harsh I can be.

But with Elysha...

Why do I feel so unsure?

“Just like the way I have to trust you to see if you are worthy of your freedom, you will have to trust me the same way to know I won’t do

anything that will harm you or will be against your choice.”

I know she has them almost every night. I hear her screams and pleas ringing from her room.

“Trust me, little girl. No matter what I do, my touch—” I kiss her cheek, whispering my words against her soft skin, “my kiss, my dominance... Everything will please you.”

I run my nose down her chin, slightly nibbling her and earning a gasp from her as her arms hold onto mine.

“I will be inked in your body. My sins will make you my little sinner who craves for her devil. Wishing to be a part of his sinful heaven.”

She gulps, keeping her eyes fixated on me, searching for the moment I will falter on my words. But seeing the truth behind my words urges her to look down and lets out a deep breath, calming her nerves, before she holds her dress and pulls it over her head, shedding her clothes. Everything except for her bra and panties.

And there she stands in front of me.

Naked and vulnerable.

At my mercy.

CHAPTER 15



MAXWELL

PAST

THAT NIGHT HAS BEEN HAUNTING me day and night like a shadow. Her screams and pleas still ring in my ears. No matter how many times I cover them with my palms, the sound echoes in my mind. In my memory. A new emotion is inked in my soul after seeing my angel being dragged into darkness by those monsters.

Guilt.

It weighs heavy on my heart like an iceberg. She screamed for help, begged for it, and yet I couldn't do anything to save my angel. I failed her and myself. And with her not seeing me for the past few days keeps hurting my soul more than ever. Why would she come back to see the boy who failed to save her?

Why would she come in this dungeon of hell to see the weak little boy who wasn't strong enough for her?

She must hate me with every bit of her heart. She must consider me as one of the monsters. But deep down I know I have to see her. I have to know if she is safe. I have to confront myself with my own eyes that my angel still

exists. And the only way for that to happen is getting out of this basement. This time I won't fail. And finally, I find my chance when one night I lay on the ground after one of the monsters tortured me. Tonight, they seemed different. His hits and punches were weak, and his steps were uneven. Even his eyes looked droopy.

After he is done, he leaves as usual but then something catches my eye. The door is not closed properly.

Anxiety rushes through my blood when I try to get up. Only one thought keeps popping up. I have to see my angel.

Gathering courage, I open the door gently as the sudden light makes my eyes squint. Looking to the right side of the corridor, I find it completely empty. Taking small steps, my eyes keep frantically looking around for any sign of danger. I keep walking forward until I come across a large wooden door.

My heart starts pounding so much that I can hear it ringing in my ear. I can sense the danger waiting for me on the other side, but something within me was urging me to go inside. A sudden pull that I couldn't describe. But seeing my angel is worth the risk of facing those monsters.

With a deep breath, I push the heavy door open and see the staircase leading up. Following the path, I head upstairs with my limp leg, a few drops of blood from my wounds fall on the ground, leaving a trail.

By the time I reach the end, I find another hallway. It's bigger with huge stained glass. Colored artworks of Jesus Christ and his apostles are painted on the glass. The moonlight shines on it, reflecting the colored ray of light on the floor. Sweat streaks down my forehead and I feel shivers running down my spine. Stalking towards one of the windows, I discover more of my surroundings. There is a vast ground. The rest of the building is pretty much hidden with the fog, but still slightly evident. I was right all along. I am locked inside a church.

Walking down the corridor, I take the first turn and find a narrow hallway. There are many different doors on both sides. Each has a number on them with a candle light beside the door frame.

Can she be inside one of these rooms? Which one can it be?

I know I have only one shot in this, otherwise I might alert the monsters. The hallway is dead silent but a sudden loud cry stops my pace. I immediately follow the sound and don't hesitate for once as I open the door.

It's my angel.

She is on her bed thrashing and turning, looking like she is in pain but her eyes are closed. Shutting the door behind me, I rush towards her and cup her face.

"an'gel, wake up," I whisper, giving her a gentle shake.

Her body starts to quiver as she continues screaming. "No! Stop! No!" she keeps yelling.

I shake her harder when she suddenly opens her eyes and frantically looks around. When she finds my vision, she instantly moves back, clutching onto her blanket. Narrowing her eyes, she discovers that it's me. Surprise reflects in her widened eyes. I'm taken aback when she launches herself on me and hugs me tightly, burying her nose against my throat.

Her breathing shallow and deep while she holds me for dear life.

A moment passes by as she remains in my arms. I touch her slender waist, bringing her closer to me. Her sweet scent fills my nostrils, bringing me back to my home. She is my home.

"What are you doing here and how did you escape?" she whispers, cupping my face as if she still can't believe that I'm here.

My heart summersaults just from her beautiful sight. Seeing her innocence after days brings back the peace I was craving for.

"I had to see you," I bow my head. Guilt hits like an ocean wave. "I couldn't protect you that night. The monsters took you away from me... I-I'm so sorry."

She tips my head back and I see the tears glittering in her eyes while her fingertips trace my scars and bruises. She is wearing a full-length satin nightgown, her cross-chain dangling from her neck. When I touch her wrist, she suddenly winces. Frowning, I push back the material and what I see shatters my heart into uncountable pieces.

Deep wire cuts cover both her hands; the marks still look fresh. As if she was cut with wire just before I came to her. Her skin looks bloody red, no longer tanned and smooth.

“W-what happened?” my voice is shaky with dread.

Her head bows as she tries to cover her scars, but I stop her.

“You will never hide from me, an’gel. Tell me what happened?”

Fresh tears form in her eyes, her lips wobble. “I got punished by God for trying to help you... I was punished for my sins.”

I wipe away her tears, unable to bear the sight. “You committed no sin, an’gel.”

She shakes her head but I urge her with my words. “You can never commit a sin. You are an angel sent from heaven. Without you I would have been lost. You healed my body and soul.”

I press my forehead against hers. “Those who hurt you are the sinners. They don’t even deserve to be anywhere near you. I can’t describe in words how sorry I am that I couldn’t protect you, an’gel. Please forgive me.”

“It’s not your fault. It is my fate and it always will be,” she snuffles and caresses my cheek, “I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I should have listened to my parents... but I didn’t and now I’m paying for my sins.”

“Never blame yourself, an’gel. Fate may have been cruel to you, but I give you my word, I will protect you and we are going to escape this place.”

She leans back with a shocked look mixed with confusion.

“What?” she rasps.

I nod. I am not going to wait for my father or his men anymore. I won’t let my angel get tortured by those monsters. And if I have to risk my life for

it, then so be it.

“We both will escape this place. I’m done waiting. I promise to get you out of this hell and live with me.”

She remains silent as if relishing my words.

I know it will be difficult, but certainly not impossible. But all I need is for her to trust me. To have faith in me. After what she has been through, I know it will be difficult for her to trust me, but I am willing to wait for her.

“Trust me on this, an'gel. We will be free.”

She gulps; her entire body is still with tension. She opens and closes her mouth as if hesitating to speak up.

“You are serious about it?” she asks, clutching to my hands.

I nod. “I mean each and every word. I don’t have a plan right now, but just give me some time and I promise we will be out of here.”

Her eyes never left mine as new hope started blooming within her until a sudden doubt crushed it. “But... Why are you doing this? Why save me when you can save yourself first?”

I let out a shaky breath. “Why did you heal me when you could have left me dying like a nobody?”

“Because I know your pain. I heard your cries echoing in the building night after night. I would cover my ears first to block it out... but soon this agony walked right into my dreams. My heart clenched every time when night arose.”

She licks her lips with more tears running down her beautiful face. “One night I couldn’t take it anymore. That night I was so scared to come to you because I knew they would surely find me, but all that mattered to me was helping you.”

Shaking my head, I let out a chuckle. “And here you were thinking of yourself as a sinner. You are nowhere close to it. You are my an'gel. My queen.”

I kiss her cheek, witnessing her skin blush already. “I will protect you no matter what, because since that first night, you brought back something that those monsters corrupted with their sins. My heart. You gifted me my heart, my light back with your innocence and purity, and I will forever be indebted to you for it.”

She takes my right hand and places it against her beating heart.

“You have my heart, too.”

I take hers, planting it against my racing heart. “And my heart will always be yours, an'gel.”

Before I can say anything else, she leans forward and kisses me. Unlike our last time, it feels gentle and soft. There is no darkness in it. It's paradise. I hold her face between my palms and kiss her back. Our lips tentatively touching, our tongues peeking out to touch for a fleeting moment. Her fingertips combing through my hair as they skate down and wrap around my neck.

“Do you trust me?” I whisper against her lips.

“More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you do.” She smiles before continuing to kiss me, when suddenly heavy footsteps echo in the hallway. We both move back with a frown. Panic and fear paint all over her face as the sound gets closer and closer.

“Hide under the bed,” she whispers before lifting the end of the bedsheet. I kneel and crawl under the bed when the door opens.

My view is blocked by the sheet but I can clearly hear the footsteps getting closer until they stop beside the bed. I put a hand to my mouth to stop myself from making any sound.

“Why are you awake?” a shrill female voice speaks.

“I had a nightmare,” my angel barely whispers her words.

“You have nightmares every night, but that doesn’t mean you will disturb others sleeping,” she hisses.

“I-I’m sorry—”

A loud slap echoes in the room followed by my angel’s whimper.

“I’m tired of hearing you say those words when you don’t mean them. God despises liars. Wasn’t your punishment enough to teach you a lesson? Answer me?”

The woman must have sat on the bed as I feel it shift. My angel lets out a sudden yelp but the hurt is evident in her voice. My nerves shake with ferocity, and for the first time in my life I have this deep need of hurting somebody. That cruel woman.

“P-please, mother Sophia. My hair... it hurts.”

“And you deserve it. No wonder your family stopped looking for you ages ago. There are other children in this church, and yet nobody troubles me as much as you do.”

Another cry slips from my angel’s mouth and I almost crawl out to go and save her. But I can’t... I am helpless again. My fists clench together as my jaw ticks with anger.

“Worst part is that you are lying again. You went to see that boy, didn’t you?” she mutters through clenched teeth.

My heart thuds faster. How does she know I’m here?

“I can see the trail of blood. You must have gone downstairs again and helped him. Went against the rules, again! But enough is enough. Last time it was your hand, but this time it will be your legs. Then you won’t be able to walk down and commit more sins.”

“No! Please, no!” my angel cries out loud.

“Get up!” she orders and the bed shifts. I have to do something. I won’t allow her to hurt my angel anymore.

“No! No! I don’t want to go! Please! No!”

Before I can think any further, I crawl out of the bed, not giving a fuck if I get caught. She is dragging her towards the door, both of their backs facing me. Looking around, I find a glass bottle on the nightstand. Grabbing it with a vice grip, I charge towards the woman. Before she can leave the room, I slam the glass against the back of her head, shattering it into pieces.

“Ah!” she cries.

In reflex her hands immediately go for the back of her head as she wails in pain. Her legs give out, making her kneel while she clutches her head.

She turns her head slightly and finds me. Her eyes widen with shock. I know what’s about to come next, and before she can scream for help, I take one of the broken glass pieces and stab it against her throat. Blood gushes out of her throat, turning her white nightdress crimson. In seconds she dies, choking on her own blood, lying on the wooden floor. Lifeless.

I am so lost in rage that the sight of her dead body is soothing my soul. It feels as if all my pain gets channeled to her body and she has taken it away with her. The dark demon that I buried in the shadows is smiling at me with pride for what I did.

“Oh my god,” my angel’s whispered words drag me back to reality. Surprisingly, my own sin doesn’t bring any ounce of guilt. At the back of my consciousness I keep telling myself that she deserved it. Anyone who tries to hurt my angel deserves it.

But when I look up to find those innocent eyes replaced with fear, my heart constricts. My nerves turn cold as ice.

I look down at the pool of blood surrounding the dead woman while her empty eyes gaze upon me.

My angel starts breathing heavily, her breath turning shallow and short as she kneels down hugging her middle. Tears run down her cheeks. Her eyes never leave the body.

“T-they will know...” she whispers.

Kneeling in front of her, I cup her cheeks urging her to look at me. “I did it to protect you. Otherwise she would have hurt and I can’t bear that anymore. Please understand.”

She shakes her head. “You don’t know what you have done... if they find out it was you, they will kill you and drop your body in the closest river. You don’t know who these monsters are and what they are capable of. You have no clue how this place is worse than hell.”

I am already a part of this hell. Those monsters forced me into it. I have to know their secrets in order to escape, but first, the matter at hand must be resolved.

But how?

As if she can read my mind, she walks towards the door, looking left and right down the hallway before returning back and standing in front of me.

“You have to go back to the basement right now. I will handle this.”

I frown. What?

I shake my head furiously. “No way. I committed the crime, and I will deal with it—”

“You are not understanding the depth of this situation,” she cuts me off. Running her hand through her hair in frustration, she lets out a heavy sigh before grasping my arms.

“You will return to the basement.”

I open my mouth to argue but she halts my word again.

“For me. You will do this for me.”

That shuts me instantly. For her? I’m willing to do anything for her. But how can I leave her to deal with my sin?

“Please, I beg you. Leave now, and I will take care of this. I don’t want you to die, I’m never going to lose you. So, please. Go.”

She urges me by pushing my shoulder, leading me towards the door. She stops for a second before rushing to the nightstand and takes out a small bottle, bandages and cotton, and hands them to me.

“Take these and treat your wounds. You will be safe in the basement.”

“Will you come down to see me?”

Her eyes glimmer with sorrow and pain, and I know my answer then.

“Please, go.”

With a heavy heart I start walking while she’s standing near the doorway with the dead woman behind her. With a sad smile she closes the door. I stand there for a few seconds like a statue.

With a shaky breath I blink back the tears, giving it all to be strong as I continue walking back to my prison. The entire time I can feel the dark soul following me. His hands on my shoulder, a sign of only support I’m getting tonight. A sign that I have unleashed him, and there is no turning point.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 16



MAXWELL

PRESENT

I GRASP HER CHIN, never looking away as I drink in her beauty. With the moonlight shining on her I can see more definitions of her curves, her bruises on her skin make her look like a warrior who will never surrender to anyone.

Caressing her cheek, I plant a tender kiss on her neck as she arches back, giving me more access. Her arms wrapping around me for support while I keep sucking and nibbling on her skin. I feel the instant electricity, the unknown connection with her.

As if I already know her body. My hands slide down the valley of her back, grabbing her ass cheeks with a possessive grip. Her breath hitches as her eyes keep looking at my lips, already hungry for more.

Grinning, I tip her head back. “Does my little girl want to be kissed?”

She nods.

I lick her bottom lip, earning a moan from her that has my blood rushing faster and faster. “Words, little girl. Yes or no?”

“Yes,” she whispers, leaning closer to my lips.

Grinning wickedly, I grab her hair before pulling her into a hard kiss that has her entire body turning to jelly against mine. Her hold around my arms tightens with her fingernails digging into my skin. I can taste the sweet strawberry and cherry flavor on her supple lips. She tastes so sweet... so addictive. Both our tongues mingle together. Our mouths never separating, like we are each other's last meals. My spine crawls with deep desire with the craving to mark her right away. I swallow her moans. My hands skate down her ass and I pick her up, her legs immediately wrapped around me while we continue our passionate kiss. Instead of walking towards the bed, I head forward against the balcony railing with the city skyline. I want to claim her right in front of everyone. The entire Russia will see me marking her. Making her mine.

She groans with the cool feeling of the rod against her naked back, but she doesn't falter unlike other women. My hard cock is begging for release, but before that I need to taste her more. I want more of her.

Letting her go as she stands on her own feet, I pepper kisses along her neck, skating down. Kissing the smooth valleys of her breasts, the plane of her taut belly until I kneel down, reaching the apex of her thighs. Her hands wobble against the railing but she contains her composure. Goosebumps travel all over her skin, making her more flawless despite her bruises and marks. Hooking my fingers into her panties, I pull it down with one swift move. My nostrils waft with her sweet honey scent.

Fuck. I need to taste her. Badly.

I run my nose along her thighs, move up as I reach my goal and inhale deeply. Fuck.

She smells so intoxicating.

"God, please," she moans out loud.

"Beg, little girl," I order in a hoarse voice.

Instead, she leans her body closer but I don't give her what she wants by moving back. She needs to give me what *I* want first.

“I said beg. Call me Master.”

Elysha looks down at me with hooded eyes, licking her lips. Her chest rises and falls with deep, heavy breaths.

She shakes her head. “Never.”

Fuck. Her pride would be my undoing.

“You better beg because every nerve in your body is calling for me, little girl. I can keep going all night without hesitation.”

I drag a finger along her wet pussy lips, watching her hips jerk. Her legs are shaking already.

She wants this badly. Just as much as I want her.

“Say it, little girl.”

“Please. M-make me yours,” she barely whispers as if those words feel like cold stones in her mouth. She doesn’t call me her master but she still begs. The feeling of victory that rises in my chest is what I live for.

“Good girl,” I mutter before kissing her wet cunt. My tongue traces her wet lips while my fingers circle her needy clit. Her body is trembling with sensation overload. She is out of control. Her eyes are shut tightly, hiding her dark gaze from me. Moans echo around the balcony as she throws her head back. So breathy, so sweet. Her moans and cries feel like music to my ears and my fingers becoming drenched from her juices.

“Please,” she whispers.

Moving my fingers faster, I plunge my tongue inside her pussy, swirling the end around her wet walls. Her pussy clenches in response, making me grin. Her juices coat my jaw and mouth, and I want to keep it that way until her scent fades so that I can bury my face between her legs again. Her thighs rub against the five o’clock shadow on my face, making her skin prickle in a delicious manner.

Sweet Jesus.

If sin had a flavor then it would be hers. Sweet like honey and addictive like drugs.

I part her legs furthermore, licking every inch of her pussy. Her hand is fisting my hair. She thrusts her hips forward, taking what she wants without any shame or hesitation.

She whimpers when I keep fucking her with my tongue and fingers. I can clearly tell by the jerk of her body that she is close, but she isn't going to come. Not yet.

Her first orgasm will be by on my cock.

With a growl I pull back and stand up. Hearing her whimper of protest is like music to my ears as her lust filled eyes meet mine. Both of us breathing heavily, craving for air. She has been with so many monsters that she may have forgotten what true pleasure feels like. But the way she is looking at me now, it's clear she is seeing a new insight to the world of dark desire, and that she is both scared and curious to know more about it at the same time.

Her hands rest on my chest, her fingertips caress my tattoos like they truly fascinate her. Most of the time, people get scared from my oversized body and fully inked skin. But not her. Even though Rhea has seen my tattoos and she looked at me the same way, there was still a hint of fear in her eyes. But Elysha... She is admiring them. She traces the detailed ink of Moscow city, my kingdom, on my abdomen, skating up to trace the skull tattoo. She frowns before her eyes land on the skull ring on my hand as she connects the dots.

I rarely let anyone touch my tattoos as they define my life journey, a dark path that I travelled alone. A journey only I'm aware of. The pain, destruction and darkness I went through. And with Elysha touching those memories it should bother me, but for some unknown reason, I feel like she knows my destiny.

No. Stop overthinking.

She isn't here for your heartless soul. She is here for her own freedom.

Shaking my head, I grab her wrists and put them around my neck before I pick her up, leaning her back against the railing. She gasps in surprise from my sudden change in demeanor but doesn't complain.

I unzip my pants, taking out my aching, hard cock and give it a few strokes before gliding it up and down her wet cunt. She moans, throwing her head back with her fingers clawing my neck, leaving marks.

"Say you want to be claimed by me," I grunt against her neck.

She bites her lip, hesitating with her words.

I grab her hair tightly, making her look at me. "Say it, little girl. I let it pass once but not this time. Show me your worth by telling me who you want to belong to at this moment," I grunt out my words. Waiting, I'm torturing myself too. But I don't care. I need to hear those words from her.

Her lip wobbles when I give a few taps on her wet cunt with the tip of my cock.

"Say the words, little girl, and your nightmares will be replaced by my memories, my touch and sensations only. Let me in, *malyshka*." I glide my cock inside her just once and pull it out to see how shiny it looks with her juices.

Her eyes close tightly and I feel her defense stumbling, but when she opens them, I know my answer.

"Claim me, please," she begs, tilting her head back as she surrenders to me.

I laugh and give her a swift kiss. "Now that's more like it."

I don't waste any second as I grab my cock and slide between her folds. My hands clamp down on her waist as I ease into her. I close my eyes from the delicious pressure and her warmth, and stay buried inside her for a couple of heartbeats before I withdraw almost all the way and move back into her. She moans and I thrust into her harder with the slaps of our skin echoing. Her forehead rests against mine with our breaths fanning over each other like breeze.

I am so lost in pleasure that I missed something I didn't see coming. I feel a sharp tip of the blade before I can see it as it rests against my throat. I look up finding Elysha looking at me with a serious expression, expecting me to beg for my life. Little does she know instead of being serious and alert, the sight of her trying to kill me without any fear makes me even harder and turned on. She looks so fierce and vulnerable at the same time. She knows the army of guards in my house will kill her when they find out what she did, and yet here she is, holding a knife against my throat.

She must have had it hidden inside her bra the whole time.

"Do it," I whisper, leaning closer to the blade as my cock remains inside her.

She frowns and pulls my head back by my hair, resting the knife against my throbbing skin. "One swift move and you will bleed to death. Nobody will even come to save you."

I grin. "I know better than you, little girl. I have killed countless men with my knife jabbing right through their throats. So, go ahead because this will be your only chance to ever kill me."

Leaning closer, I nick my skin slightly and feel the blood dripping from the cut. Her hand trembles slightly but she remains strong. "Don't you fear for your life? You will die in seconds and you should be afraid of death."

"Death is not scary, it's the fear of what comes after that scares us. It is a shadow that follows you from the day you are born. I died a long time ago, little girl and I've never felt alive since then. Go ahead and kill me. Take your chance."

I hold her wrist, bringing the knife deeper and deeper. Her eyes widen with guilt and fear that she is trying to hide for so long, making her body shake that she loosens her grip on the knife.

She had her chance.

I immediately take away the knife from her and turn the tables by placing the sharp blade against her throat. She gulps with her body turning

into stone, but fear and agitation are crystal clear on her face.

“You had your only chance, little girl, but that stupidity within you took away your only chance for freedom. Never be weak, take what is rightfully yours.”

I move my wrist, slightly nicking her skin and watch the small droplet of blood running down her throat. Her eyes widen further as if she can't believe I really cut her.

“That is for the stunt you pulled. Next time it will be worse.”

I throw away the knife and fist her hair. I lick her wound and continue thrusting inside her. She gasps from the sudden motion, wrapping her arms around me in reflex. I lean back, licking my lips, tasting the copper and honey flavor of her skin. Elysha doesn't mask her surprise with my act, but from now onwards she will know how fucked up I am.

Soon, she gives into her own desire too and begins meeting my thrusts. I speed up my thrusts as I dip my fingers in her still wet cunt and circle her clit before bringing my fingers to her lips.

“Suck,” I order.

She parts her lips and starts sucking on my fingers, tasting her juices and mine. Her tongue swirls around the end, giving me a clear picture of the way she would be sucking my cock soon. My thrusts become more rapid and hard as we both start panting, perspiration dripping our bodies. Pounding harder and harder, she moans and cries out loud as she is lost in pleasure.

“Come for me, *malyshka*. Now,” I grunt.

Soon, her moans spiral out of control, with her teeth clamping on my fingers and her nails leaving marks along my neck.

“Fuck.”

My own release is fast approaching and even she is close too. My balls tighten as I slam into her and Elysha arches, her walls squeezing down on my cock. She cries out in ecstasy. I let loose, and come hard as I keep on

thrusting. Eventually, I slow down my motions. I hold Elysha in my arms. She is limp with her head resting against my shoulder.

I cup her face and plant a rough kiss on her soft lips, sharing her own taste before I lean back and meet her haze-filled eyes.

“This is just the beginning, little girl. You have so much more worth to show.”

* * *

THE ENDLESS SCREAMS and cries of agony bring joy to my cold heart. Seeing the unfaithful fucker being tortured by my men is truly a sight to behold. I sit back on my chair with my ankle resting on my knee with my left hand on top of it. My men keep beating him with their chain-covered fists which are turning crimson from his blood. Bruises and deep cuts paint his naked body as he is bound to the wooden cross against the wall. I even hear the cracking of his bones but that doesn't stop my men from punching him with all their might. He deserves it for betraying me.

I finish the rest of my scotch, placing it on the table before I stand up. I shed off my gray suit, placing it on the chair and starting to fold up my sleeves, before I unbutton the top two buttons.

“That's enough,” I order and my men stop immediately, taking a step back. The fucker coughs and heaves for air with his head hanging down. He looks dead already but he won't die so easily. Not until I get my answers.

I step in front of him with my hands inside my pockets.

“Let's get to business, shall we?” I clap my hands together.

He grunts a whimper but doesn't meet my eyes.

I shake my head. “You knew this would be your end result and yet you were so stupid to even think about going against me.”

He gulps.

“I made myself clear what happens to traitors,” I roll my eyes. “If you wanted to die early, all you had to do was put a bullet through your head. Why bother me doing that task for you?”

His fearful eyes snap up to me as his body starts trembling.

“Don’t worry. I won’t put a bullet through your useless skull. That would be way too easy.”

“P-please, sir. Forgive m-me...” he barely speaks out his words with his hoarse, broken voice.

I lean closer, offering him my cold, emotionless look that makes the fear in his eyes grow furthermore.

“Really? And what did those whores do to you that you not only killed them, but also cut them and hung them from the chandelier?” I hiss.

The fucker was finally caught today when I heard him talking with his buddies in the underground bar about killing those whores a few weeks ago. He is one of the most demanded weapon suppliers among the new criminals. He is an arrogant egomaniac for sure, but killing the whores is something, I didn’t expect from him. His own words were evidence enough and he was brought to the basement of my house to be tortured to death. But first, answers are needed.

His lips teeter with the blood drooling down his chin.

“I w-was... I was bribed, sir, and t-those whores... they humiliated me. T-they deserved it—”

I land a hard punch across his jaw before he can finish his words. “Who bribed you?”

I have a hunch already but I need it to be confirmed.

He remains quiet. I punch him again as his blood starts coating my knuckles.

Silence.

“Who,” *PUNCH*.

“Bribed,” *PUNCH*.

“You.” *PUNCH.*

Still no answer.

I frown. Pure rage starts burning my nerves as I keep punching him again and again, giving him more bruises that his face is barely recognizable. My skull ring cutting his skin more. His mouth drooling with blood and spit.

His head isn't moving anymore, neither is his body showing any sign of motion. The fucker lost his consciousness. Rolling my eyes, I nod to one of my men towards the table with the torture tool set on top. He takes the syringe with a high dose of adrenaline in it and passes it to me. Holding the injection with my thumb resting on the plunger top, I stab the needle on his nerve point pressing onto the plunger before taking it out. In a few seconds, the fucker wakes up with a scream and wide-open eyes as he looks frantically everywhere.

“You are not allowed to die yet,” I mutter before walking towards the table and taking the hammer and long, thick needle and walking back to my victim.

His horrified eyes beg for mercy. “S-sir, please. I beg y-you...” he stutters his words.

“I’ve already wasted enough time on you. I will ask one last time. Tell me everything you know about the man who bribed you and you will be set free.”

He frowns as if he can't believe I am offering him freedom.

“But if you don't answer—” I tap the head of the hammer lightly against his temple, “then this will land on your face. So, speak.”

He hesitates for a second, but seeing the terror, he answers. “T-the man's name is Francisco. H-he took me out for drinks after I left the brothel. Then he offered me a million if I shake hands with him... I-I accepted it and when he said he will help me kill those whores because I was humiliated then I couldn't resist it and then—”

Francisco.

“Where is he? What else did he say?”

He swallows. “Nobody knows. He approaches everyone personally. He said that his leader will soon be taking over Russia. S-she is really powerful and will do anything to make you fall from your throne. And your f-fall has already begun, sir,” he mutters with his half-hearted threat hidden behind his words.

“She is targeting all the new criminals in your territory along with the ones who are against you.” He lets out a shaky breath, “Many have already joined her side.”

“What is her name?”

He shakes his head. “I don’t know, sir. N-none of us have seen her. Francisco is the one doing all the dealings.”

So Francisco is the knight of this black queen.

“What is his next plan?”

The fucker coughs, spitting out the blood with his head hanging low. “H-his n-next targets are the retired members. Brigadiers, Kaznacheys and the Pakhan.”

Nicholai.

Of course, he would go after them because that asshole won’t hesitate to plot against me. I was a thorn in his son’s throne after all. I need to take care of Nicholai before Francisco makes his move. But I have to look for the other ex-members, too. They are nothing but fucking dogs, lapping behind Nicholai and waiting for his orders.

“I-I promise not to tell anyone, sir. Please have mercy,” he begs, pulling on his restraints.

I nod. “You kept your word, and so will I.”

He let out a sigh of relief.

“Death is true freedom.” I grin, watching his relief falter and horror taking its place instantly.

I grip the hammer, looking down at it. “It’s been a while since I used this. Hmm... Let’s give a different twist to it.”

I arch an eyebrow before stepping closer and positioning the nail in front of his eye. It is pretty long that it will surely penetrate through his skull.

“N-no! No! No! Please! No!” he begs as he starts to thrash against his restraints.

I tsk, shaking my head. “Sadly, you didn’t stop when those whores begged for their life. I’m worse than you, so what makes you think I will stop?”

“Don’t worry. The pieces of your body will go where they belong. In the gutter.”

With that I hit the hammer against the nail as it goes right through his left eye. He screams at the top of his lungs, his body trembling like he is being electrocuted. Blood spatters out of his eyes with a few drops sprayed on my face and shirt.

Taking another nail, I place the tip against his right eye and repeat the same action, watching it puncture through his eye, splattering more blood. His entire body quivers vigorously with his voice turning raw from screaming. His entire face is covered in blood. Eventually, his motions start to slow down until an inch of his muscle stops moving.

I have more than enough information to look for Francisco. He is hiding in the shadows like his queen, but not for long. Both of their ends are coming closer. I look down at my bloody hands, sighing to myself as I decide to take a shower.

“Take care of his body,” I order my men in Russian and head out. When I reach the main gate, I feel someone’s eyes on me. It feels so intense and raw. I instantly look up, finding Elysha standing on the balcony looking at me with wide eyes and confused look. I don’t have time for her bullshit or judgement. Ignoring her, I head towards my room where I take off my

clothes and enter the shower. I turn it on, and warm water pours down on my skin. Blood mixes with water, creating an eerie color. I feel the familiar tingle on my spine and my eyes rise up finding Elysha's reflection on the glass door. She is standing in a doorway. Her eyes rake over my body as if she is drinking in my sight. But for some unknown reason the sight of the blood being washed away from my skin doesn't bother her. Instead, she just stands there looking at me with such intensity that has my blood rushing.

"Did you kill someone?" she asks in a hushed voice.

I snicker as I rest my hands against the wall. "What makes you think that?"

"Because you are erasing the evidence of your sin."

"He deserved it for betraying me."

There is silence for a few seconds except for the sound of the water against the floor.

"Is it that easy for you to kill someone?" I see her walking inside and leaning against the sink.

"I was born to bathe in blood. So, yes, it is that easy for me. When something satisfies you, then you keep craving for it more and more. For me the scream, pain, fear... it's what I live for. They satisfy the demon within me." I run a hand through my wet hair before I turn to face her.

Her eyes move from my chest to my abdomen, going lower and lower until she sees my now erected cock. Her lustful gaze turns me on and I have a sudden urge to fuck her. But more than that, I need something else today.

I slide open the glass door and grasp her arm, pulling her inside. She gasps from the sudden attack but recovers soon. Adrenaline is still rushing through my body and hormones go on full blast the moment she licks her lips.

"I'm not here to fuck you," she whispers.

I fist her hair, tilting her head back and give her a possessive kiss. "Too bad because I want to fuck you."

I spin her around, letting the water cascade over her, turning her clothes wet and giving me the perfect sight of her pebbled nipples. I curl my fingers under her shirt and rip it off, not caring that it's tearing at the seam.

She cups my shoulder while my forehead rests against hers.

Gripping her hair tighter, I kiss her again. Her mouth tastes divine and fucking God... I can't have enough of it. Since our night at the balcony all I want is her.

Our kisses turn frantic. Harsh. Frenetic. Like she feels that I need her and she is willingly submitting to me.

"Fuck..." she mutters under her breath. I lick the top of her lips, pulling her closer with her naked back resting against the glass door.

"I may let you fuck me for my freedom but don't miss out the hatred I carry for you."

I chuckle under my breath. "This fight. This bravery you have, little girl, makes you even more beautiful."

She narrows her eyes with her jawline tensing. "I'll fuck you however I want, but your hatred makes me want to have you even more."

I whirl her around, her hands and front pressed against the steamy glass. Kneeling down, I push down her pants along with her panties and grab her ass cheeks while getting on my feet. I run my nose along the back of her ear, giving her a soft nibble.

She moans when I squeeze her ass. Her entire body flushes as her head rests against my shoulder. But she seems to be having some other plan when I feel her hand coming behind her and grabbing onto my cock. I can't help but grin when she starts moving her hand up and down with a few gentle squeezes. With a growl I grab both her hands and pin them against her back. "Don't tease me, little girl, unless you want to get fucked hard."

Elysha scoffs. "As if that would stop your arrogance from having what you want."

Fuck. Her hatred is indeed a turn on.

Before she can continue with her sassiness furthermore, my palm lands on her ass with a hard, loud spank. Her cries of pleasure are like a melody I can listen to for hours.

“You like that, don’t you?” I whisper against her ear and give another hard spank. She bites down on her lip, stifling her moans but I need to hear her voice. I bite onto her shoulder, hearing her yelp as I keep slapping her ass cheeks. Left and right; again and again and again.

Her cheeks are turning rosy pink already, making her body look more desirable. Her head lolls against the glass door in a lazy manner, making her gaze hazed with desire. I am overtaken by lust; I turn her to face me and grab her jaw.

“*Vstat’ na koleni i sosast moy chlen,*” I mutter against her cheek.

“What?” she asks with a frown.

“I said kneel and suck my cock. I’m going to fuck that sassy mouth now.” I give a slap on her breast, making her whimper before she kneels down in front of me.

I rub her cheekbone with my thumb, moving it along her bottom lip. “Even though you say there will be hatred between us, you and I both know that you belong to me.”

I grab a fistful of her hair, pointing my cock against her lips, smearing the precum on her like lipstick. “*otkroy rot, malen’kaya debochka.*”

Even though she doesn’t know Russian, she got the hint of what I want.

When she parts her lips, I shove my cock inside her and start pumping my hips. I want to be rough, make her throat ache but when I notice her body tense, something inside me makes me want to be gentle.

I pull back again, but this time I move my hips in a slow, aching pace as she tries to get adjusted to my size. When she looks up at me that innocence within her makes my heart beat faster. Even she realizes that I changed my pace for her. But when she nods her head, as if reassuring me it’s okay, I take the lead and increase my pace bit by bit until she is comfortable. I

thrust into her throat, making her gag. Both her muffled moans and lustful eyes are going to be my undoing. Her dark gaze begging for release.

“Touch your pussy. Make me and yourself come,” I grunt, tightening my grip on her hair.

She immediately puts her hand between her legs, circling her clit. Her tongue rolls around my cock as I push inside and tilt my head back with my eyes closed to relish in the feeling.

Fuck.

I groan and grasp her hair tighter, using it as reins, fucking her mouth harder. After the small amount of comfort I showed her, she doesn't seem to mind my harshness. In fact, she looks so lost in desire that it's clear she is liking it a lot. And wants more and more.

“You look so fucking beautiful when pleasure oozes from every inch of your body.” I caress her cheekbone.

She eagerly licks my cock and I watch it bounce up and down her throat, making her gag again but that doesn't stop her. Her thighs start to tremble with her eyes shutting tightly as she continues touching herself.

“Come for me, little girl. And once you do then I'll come on your face. You want that?”

She nods eagerly and starts rubbing faster and fucking herself with her delicate fingers. Soon her entire body quivers that her legs give out, making her sit back on the heels of her feet as she orgasms beautifully with my cock in her mouth, gasping and moaning. When she returns back to reality, she continues sucking me harder and faster this time while I'm trying to hold back my groans. I feel myself getting close as her warm, wet mouth works its magic.

Grunting, I pull back from her mouth and grab my cock. “Mouth open, tongue out.”

She's doing exactly what she's told and I start stroking myself in long and hard motions. Just her sight is making my spine tingle and my balls

heavy for release. Her hands caress my thighs while her dazed eyes never leave mine.

“Not yet,” she whispers, making my brows furrow.

She shakes her head. “Hold it back. Good things come to those who wait.”

Her gaze darkens from her bold words and unknowingly, I do hold back and keep stroking myself, feeling my release close to its end. For the next few seconds she keeps me on the verge when she finally nods.

“Now. Come for me, now. I want to taste you so badly.”

Few more strokes and I come, thick and heavy, onto her tongue and chin.

For a fleeting moment my vision turns blurry until I get my composure back and look down at Elysha. She cleans me up, licking every drop from my cock and sits back with a proud smile while she licks off my cum from her face and stands up.

I frown, not understanding the reason behind her expression.

“You know what’s even better?” she asks and leans closer, tracing her fingertips along the skull tattoo.

“Making the king bow. Making him dance to your tune. Feeling like a—” she shrugs, pretending to think of a fitting word, “queen.”

Realization takes place when I figure out she tried to control me a few moments ago and I fell for it.

Grinning widely with a ray of victory glittering in her eyes, she winks at me and leaves the bathroom wrapping a towel around her.

I chuckle under my breath, taken aback by her sudden change of act which is surprisingly good. Really good actually. And for the first time, I do see her in a different way. I see her as a queen.

After finishing my shower, I text Igor to come to the underground today and that we have things to discuss. The sooner I get my hands on Francisco, the better.

I get dressed while calling Nicholai next. Putting the phone on speaker, I place it on the study table while fixing my tie as I stand in front of the mirror.

“Maxwell,” Nicholai greets me with his usual cold tone.

“Nicholai, how have you been doing?” I ask.

He is silent for a few seconds before continuing. “What do you need, Maxwell?”

“I want to know how you are doing,” I tease him a little, and can’t help but grin hearing the irritation in his voice.

“I’m well. Now get to the point, I don’t have all day.”

“You are retired, Nicholai, which means you have all day. And as your Pakhan, you will give me your time.”

I can imagine him clenching his jaw with anger shining in his eyes.

“What do you want?” he grits out the words.

“You know, I changed my mind about your son.”

“What do you mean?” His sudden interest is evident in his words.

“What I mean is he never got the chance to prove himself. And I was thinking of giving him that chance. Maybe I could make him the new Kaznachey for Ufa. But that will happen if he proves he is worthy.”

There is silence for a few seconds and I can already imagine his mind running its wheel to decide whether I’m lying or telling the truth.

“And what do you want in return?” he asks.

Of course, I want something. Everything has its price.

“How about we discuss it at the meeting today?”

“Not today. I-I have a family event.” I frown when I sense his lies. A part of me is guessing that perhaps he is meeting Francisco today or in a few days. The fucker is already getting his claws on my kingdom and I have to act fast.

“I have a charity ball the day after tomorrow. How about we meet then? My son will be there too and we can discuss things furthermore.”

“Of course. I will be there.”

“I will send you the details and arrange something if you bring your companion.”

“No problem. Can’t wait for our meeting.” I hang up.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 17



MAXWELL

PRESENT

I sit down on my throne in my underground office and call for one of my men. He enters the room, standing tall and strong. For the past few days, he has been following Rhea. After seeing her with Francisco, coincidence or not, I had to keep an eye on her. Something about her is starting to feel different.

“What have you got so far?” I ask, resting my hands on the vast maple wood table.

“I haven’t left her side even for a second, sir. But she didn’t meet a man that you described or any suspicious person.”

I frown in confusion. Wait. What?

“Anyone that entered her house?”

He shakes his head. “No one, sir. She leaves the house in the morning for the library, does her shifts in the underground when needed and gets back home for the night.”

How could this even be possible?

I had high hopes for finding something, *anything*, about Rhea, but everything is leading to a dead end.

“Have you wired her phone?”

He gives a sharp nod. “Yes, sir. The transcript should be at your desk by evening.”

I nod, waving my hand for him to leave. I sit back with a sigh, my head facing the ceiling with my hands resting on my lap. Why was Francisco talking to Rhea that day? Or was it just a casual customer-bartender conversation?

I rub my forehead, feeling my muscle becoming tense with stress. My mind drifting back and forth between Elysha and Rhea. Every time I look at her, I see the reflection of Rhea. I know they must be connected. There must be a mystery behind it. But my dark as tar heart keeps thinking about Elysha, while my mind can't stop picturing Rhea. I know it's fucked up to want two women at the same time but who said anything in life is normal?

Both have the same face and yet they differ so much from each other. Rhea is the goddess who never allows a man to lead her life. And there is Elysha, who is a warrior, a true queen, willing to fight endless battles for her freedom. Both of them are carrying their pasts on their shoulders, and from either of them I have to know the truth.

My phone pings with a message, bringing me back to reality. Unlocking it, I find Nicholai's message about the details for the charity ball.

It's a masquerade ball with formal wear. I roll my eyes. His wife couldn't have chosen something better. Something other than this pathetic theme. He even mentions taking a partner, and the first person that comes to my mind is Elysha.

Since the day I brought her to my house, she hasn't gone out anywhere. She isn't allowed to. In this short time I have known her, I am well aware she isn't going to quit. One way or another she is looking for an opportunity to escape. But with hundreds of guards surrounding the premises twenty-four seven, there's no way out. Though I would like to see her try only to catch her again because the thrill of chasing someone has always been my

favourite. She knows what power I hold and it will take me seconds to find her. So, if she was even thinking of escaping then it was all futile.

Just then Igor enters the office with a Cuban cigar between his teeth.

“Have you found anything from that fucker? You didn’t say much in your text. As always,” he asks, taking a seat in front of me.

I nod, resting my index finger against my lips. “A lot actually.”

He leans forward looking serious and concerned. “And?”

“The man’s name is Francisco. He is the right-hand man of the woman who is after my kingdom. So far, he got the new criminals on his side and now he is after ex-members of our community.”

“Fuck...” he whispers, inhaling a deep breath of the cigar before letting out the smoke in thin air. “What is your plan now?”

I tell him about the charity ball and what I’m going to do. His serious face is soon replaced with a wicked grin when I finish talking.

“You indeed have the mind of a Satan.”

I grin back. “I was raised in hell after all.”

* * *

A MAID KNOCKS on my door when I get out of shower with a towel wrapped around my waist. Her eyes cast down as usual.

“Sir, your mother called. She is arriving in fifteen minutes,” she whispers.

“Prepare her favorite meals. Make sure the deserts are sugar free.”

Nodding her response, she leaves. After getting dressed, I walk out of my room and my feet stop at Elysha’s door. I can’t tell my mother about her. If she discovers I’m keeping Elysha as my slave, not only will she be furious but somehow persuade me to set her free. And I definitely have no intention of letting her go so easily.

Without knocking I barge inside her room. Her shriek welcomes me as she suddenly turns half naked with the shirt clutched against her chest.

“What the hell is wrong with you? Can’t you knock?” she shouts and puts it on.

I chuckle under my breath. “What’s with the shyness now? It’s not like I haven’t seen you naked before.”

She glares at me, buttoning up the top buttons before crossing her arms. “I’m earning my freedom from you bit by bit. The least you could try is treat me with decent human courtesy. If you can’t give me that then get the fuck out.”

I stalk towards her until her back is against the mirror, my hands resting on either side of her while she keeps her scorching glare on me.

“Don’t forget you live under my roof. If I want, I can throw you in the streets where men will devour you like hungry hyenas. So, think before you speak.”

She narrows her eyes as the anger starts to demolish with the hint of fear. I lean closer. Her floral fragrance fills my nostrils. Her skin is glowing even without any touch of makeup. It feels as if with every passing day she gets more and more beautiful. I have the sudden urge to kiss the hell out of her and fuck her right against this glass. But my mother would be here any moment now. “You won’t leave the room for the next few hours.”

She frowns. “Why?”

“That’s none of your concern. Stay here and don’t come downstairs.” I push away from her and head towards the door.

“I’m not your fucking dog, Maxwell,” she mutters through her clenched teeth.

“No, but you are my *rab*.”

I shut the door behind me and go downstairs. Few minutes later black BMW pulls into the roundabout, black tinted windows with bulletproof glass. I reach the car and open the passenger door. My mother steps out in a

long, floral, light blue dress with matching flats. Her black hair is straightened and the moment she sees me her eyes glimmer with happiness and pride. She offers me the same gentle smile that I am so used to since childhood.

She immediately engulfs me in her arms. I am a grown ruthless man who faces violence and darkness day and night. And yet, my mother is the only person to whom I never show my bad side. She deserves every bit of happiness in her life.

“My son... I missed you so much.” She lets out a happy sigh.

She is shorter than me, her head rests against my chest with her arms wrapped around my waist. I squeeze her back, pressing a kiss against her temple.

“How are you, mother?”

“Have you got taller since the last time I saw you?”

“You saw me a few months ago. So, yes, the change in height has happened.”

She chuckles and pulls away, resting her hand on my cheek.

“You look so...” she pauses for a few seconds, “—old.”

We both laugh, I take her hand, kissing her palm before guiding her inside the house. I hardly see my mother because of my work, but whenever I do, it brightens up my whole day. Her love and adoration for me is the only pure thing in my life.

For the next thirty minutes mother and I spend the time in the backyard, sitting in the lounging area while having our lunch. She is looking radiant under the warm sunlight. Something she lacked when she was married.

My mother got married to father like any other arranged marriage here. And like other mafia wives she faced the same consequences.

Pain. Sadness. Loneliness.

She used to have bruises and cuts on her face and body all the time. Even heavy makeup and long-sleeved clothes did close to nothing to hide

her bruises caused by father.

And now?

She looks so happy... so in peace.

“How is the orphanage running?” she asks after the maids take the plates from the table.

I sit back with a sigh. “It’s going very well. The children are loving the new toys you sent them.”

Her smile widens. “I’m very glad. I was thinking of sending a few teachers to homeschool the children.”

I nod. “That’s a very good idea. I’m sure they will appreciate it.”

The orphanage was my mother’s idea. She persuaded me to participate in at least one noble deed and building an orphanage was her recommendation. It’s been a few years since it has been built, but I never let her know that half of the kids were part of this cruel world. Some were illegally smuggled here for being sex slaves and some were saved from brothels. I don’t know if saving them and giving them a new home was a noble deed, but I do know that no child deserves to be robbed of their innocence.

Just then my phone rings and I excuse myself to take the call. After ten minutes I return to the lounging area and my heart stops. My mother is sipping her favorite green tea, but someone else joined her.

Elysha.

She fucking disobeyed me.

She is in her pale green shirt with black pants, her hair is braided, making her look like an angel. With her legs crossed and sitting with grace, she looks like a fucking queen, indeed.

When she hears me approach, her eyes look up to me. And she has the nerve to fucking smile.

Fuck. She did this on purpose. I swear if she manipulates my mother, she will have hell to pay.

“Hey, baby.” Elysha rises from her seat to greet me, her arms wrapping around me with a kiss on my cheek. This is the first time I don’t have any desire to return her kiss. All I want to do is punish her for her disobedience and she will be afterwards for sure.

“Hey, sweetie.” I crane my neck down and give her the coldest kiss I’d ever given anyone. “Seems like you have met my mother already.”

She nods and takes her seat, patting the chair beside her.

My fists clench but I give it my all to control my anger. Especially since my mother is beaming upon seeing Elysha.

Fuck. She never looks at a woman in my arms that way. This is bad, really bad. I take my seat when Elysha places her hand on my thigh, pretending to be my lover. The gesture doesn’t go unnoticed by my mother as she smiles while sipping her tea.

What the fuck is Elysha playing at?

“Would you like some more almond biscuits Mrs. Reznikov?” she offers with a sweet smile.

“Of course. They taste delicious.” There’s that smile again. Fucking hell, this can’t be happening.

Mother turns to me with narrowed eyes. “Why haven’t I heard about Elysha before, Maxwell?”

“Uh... I have been busy with work lately. It slipped my mind.” I can already sense my mother likes her, and she rarely likes any woman. Especially after my ex-wife.

“How long have you known each other?”

Before I can come up with an answer, Elysha cuts me off. “We have been together for a few months now. He saved me when I needed it the most and then he told me to move in with him.”

Her answer is a curtailed truth.

“Aww. Maxwell, when were you going to tell me about all these? Every time I call you, you say you are busy.” My mother sounds a bit hurt and I

glare at Elysha for causing it.

“It’s not his fault, Mrs. Reznikov. I told him to keep it a secret because everything happened so suddenly. I wanted to get adjusted first before meeting you.”

She nods. “I understand, dear. And please, call me Catherine.”

This is getting worse and worse.

I have to remember all the lies Elysha makes up for my next visit at mother’s house. I have to keep up with the charade, knowing well mother would be furious if she found the truth about Elysha being my slave.

“What brought you to Russia?” my mother asks.

She shrugs. “I decided to travel the world. I have always wanted to visit different countries, see and meet new people, get to know about new cultures and languages. So, here I am.”

I refuse to participate in their conversation. I will surely end up blurting the truth. But now it is too late, so I keep quiet.

“That’s very nice. So are you planning to stay here permanently?” It is hard to miss out the hope in her voice.

No. No. No. She is already starting to take this too seriously. I have to change the subject before things slip through my control.

“Mother, how is the new charity for the disabled kids going?”

“Great. The responses are very positive so far,” mother says. “Even Brigadiers’ wives have donated money.”

“That’s very good. I’m happy to hear it’s a success.” After father’s death, mother has kept herself busy with charity work.

Mother turns back to Elysha. “I can take you to one of the functions if you want? I’m sure you will love it.”

I clench my jaw, sending a death glare to Elysha as a warning.

Don’t you fucking say it, little girl.

Elysha grins. “I will give it a thought, Catherine.”

With a gentle smile my mother finishes her tea before getting up from her seat. "I should head back now."

We both follow her and walk her to the door. Elysha wraps an arm around my waist while mine rests around her shoulder. My mother kisses me on the cheek. "Take care, dear."

"You too, mother."

She squeezes me hard before whispering in my ears. "Elysha is a lovely girl, Maxwell. I really like her."

I force a smile. "I'm glad, mother," I kiss her forehead and open the door for her, "Have a safe drive."

She looks at Elysha who is standing beside me.

"It was a pleasure meeting you, Elysha."

"You, too, Catherine. Visit us again soon."

The second the car is out of sight my demeanor drops, and I turn hostile towards her. Even her smile is gone and her arms are no longer around my hips. She looks up at me with a fearless expression.

"You have no idea what you have done today. You are in trouble for sure," I whisper through my clenched teeth, grabbing her by her jaw as her fingers dig in my skin.

"Isn't that the purpose of a game? To find your opponent's weakness?" she asks confidently. No sign of fear is reflecting in her eyes, and that only makes my blood boil with fury.

"I have had enough of your bullshit and I'm so over you treating me like a nobody."

"That's because you are."

She grins. "I'm sure hearing that will make your mother feel so proud about you."

I tighten my hold on her and lean closer with a murderous look. "Don't fucking bring her into this. Cross the line and see what happens."

"As if you have never crossed any line, Maxwell."

I have crossed many lines. It is in my nature. After all, Satan fell from heaven for doing the most devilish deeds. But my mother is a different story. She got to my weak spot this time and she is aware about my mother liking her already. She can use it to her advantage and turn my mother against me. I can't tolerate my mother's disappointment.

I close my eyes for a second, letting out a deep breath. Then I pull away from her and let go of my grip on her jaw. "What do you want?"

"I want things to change between us." She crosses her arms.

Putting my hands inside my pockets, I nod at her to continue. I can't fucking believe I am negotiating with my prisoner. I must say, she is starting to turn the tables and is playing her moves very well this time.

"I want to be treated like an equal. Just like you are the king of your kingdom, I want to be treated like a queen."

I stay quiet, listening to her demands while controlling myself not to grab her and back her against the wall.

"No more bossing me around, and you will give me the privacy I deserve. That means knocking on the door before you come into my room."

Why the fuck didn't I tell my mother I was busy today? I should have locked away Elysha in her room. At least that way I wouldn't end up standing here and listening to her demands like a fucking moron.

"And I want to sleep in your bed some nights."

"Be careful, little girl. You are crossing your line."

She arches an eyebrow. "Be careful?" she snickers.

"Guess you have forgotten in this short time but let me remind you—" She saunters toward me with a grin and places her hand on my chest as it traces upwards, "You are the one here who should be careful before I tell the truth to your mother and I would hate myself for hurting her because that woman doesn't deserve disappointment."

I narrow my eyes. "You could simply leave now for all I care, but remember the bigger dangers that lurk outside and that I won't be there to

protect you.”

“I’m well aware I’m going to be captive in these four walls but I do deserve respect. Keep your end of the deal and I’ll keep mine, too.”

I don’t like any of this bullshit. However, this one time she has me by my balls.

“And don’t call me slave or *rab* anymore. I hate that word and the memories it brings.”

I growl, grabbing her waist in a possessive grip. “It’s not my problem that you got yourself the title by stepping into the world of slavery.”

She grasps my hair tightly and pulls it back as a sign of warning. “Not everyone is born into royalty like you. I’m giving myself to you fully to earn my freedom and in return I want the rights and respect. I have no desire to hurt your mother’s feelings. I may have been snatched away from mine ages ago but I do know your mother wouldn’t appreciate what you are doing to me,” she says coldly.

I never should have underestimated this woman. Since the first day, she didn’t quit fighting no matter how many times she was defeated. But when I offered her my deal, she accepted that pretty quickly and I should have been alert since then. I should have watched her moves before she made her plan. And today she achieved it.

Seems like I’d met my match. I met my queen.

CHAPTER 18



MAXWELL

PAST

CLOSING the door shut behind me, I walk to the corner of the room and kneel with my arms around me. The guilt starts to weigh heavier with every passing second while I keep questioning myself for the sin I committed.

I killed someone. It is all my fault. But my angel is the one who is going to pay the price.

For hours I kept thinking about that lifeless woman's body. The way I killed her and didn't stop for a moment.

Am I a monster, too, just like my tormentors?

I couldn't have a blink of sleep but when the sunlight flows inside the room, I hear faint heavy footsteps approaching. My nerves tense up with anxiety, as I instantly lie down on the floor and pretend to be asleep.

I hear the door opening but I stay still as a statue.

"What the fuck," I hear my uncle curse in a hushed voice. "You fucking moron. Didn't you lock the door properly? Were you that fucking high last night?"

"I...I didn't—"

“Just save your useless excuses,” he warns before closing the door, followed by the click of the lock.

I open my eyes, letting out a deep breath. And right away my thoughts go back to my angel.

But for the next few days things suddenly change. The monsters don't come at night.

And me?

I spend restless days and nights, pondering about my angel. Uncountable questions run through my head with no answer emerging.

Is she alright? Have they hurt her?

Did the monsters find out about the woman I killed?

My own body is healing and some of the bruises are starting to fade. But the sight of those wire cuts on my angel's hands are still inked in my memory, making my body shudder with tension. I want to break through the door and just go save her. However, I feel beyond helpless.

A few nights later, I hear the door lock rattling, making me alert and be prepared for the monsters to enter. But it isn't them. It's her.

When she enters the room, walking stiffly and the moonlight shines upon the bruises on her lips and under her eyes, I feel my heart being cut out from my body.

I quickly stride to her, wrapping my arms around her. Unable to hold back my emotions any longer, tears glisten in my eyes from the inner agony. I caused her the pain. I'm the person to blame for all of it.

“I-I'm so sorry, an'gel. I caused you all these—”

She cups my face, looking me right in the eyes. “You didn't do this, it's not your—”

I shake my head furiously, not allowing her to defend me, when I am truly the one who committed the sin.

“Don't. Don't defend me. I should be punished. I killed that woman but you had to pay the price for me.”

I lean my forehead against hers. "I don't know how I will ever repay you... I can never be able to make it up to you for the pain you have suffered."

She sniffles as tears start to stream down her cheeks, but she still holds onto me like she wants to seek comfort from me.

How can she even want to be anywhere near me? Near the boy who caused her more pain... how can she even bear to see me?

How can she even want me to be her support?

For several minutes we hug each other, letting our emotions drain us with sorrow and pain.

Next thing I know, she takes me by my hand and guides towards the small mattress. Sitting on it with my back resting against the wall, she sits on my lap and wraps her arms around me with her face nuzzling my neck. I caress her silky, soft hair with my jaw resting on top of her head.

Her body shakes as she starts to sob in my arms. I feel the guilt weighing heavier with every passing second.

"Please, tell me what I can do, an'gel. I will do anything for you."

While sniffing with her sorrow-filled eyes looking at mine, she licks her lips as if feeling hesitant to speak up her mind.

"Tell me, an'gel."

"I-I..."

I wait patiently.

Letting out a deep breath, she finally speaks. "I want you to help me escape from here."

I nod. "What do you want me to do?"

She keeps looking at me for several seconds as if she thinks I'd deny her. But little does she know, I am willing to do anything for her. Anything.

"I want both of us to escape. You and me," she whispers.

"But how?"

"I have a plan."

For the next few hours, she talks about the planning she had done for the escape. She didn't miss a single detail. It is risky, for sure but it's the only chance we have to escape from here.

And for her, I am willing to take any risk. Anything at all.

After she finishes telling her plan, she looks at me with a glimmer of hope, faith and trust.

"So, will you help me?" she asks.

I nod. "I promise, I will do everything possible to help you escape. You will have your life, your freedom back."

She smiles gently and instantly wraps her arms around me, hugging me tightly. I press my nose against her smooth hair, inhaling her sweet scent that always calms me down and sends a soothing feeling through my heart. For a moment, I feel like I'm back home. For a moment, I feel safe.

When she leans back, her chain gets stuck to the end of my collar.

It isn't her usual cross chain. It is a silver necklace with a butterfly pendant hanging at its end.

"Is this yours?" I ask.

She nods with a soft smile. "My mother gave it to me on my tenth birthday."

I trace the brown and black wings of the butterfly when she moves her hands back and unhooks it. Bringing it in her fist, she offers it to me.

"I want you to have it," she whispers.

I frown. "But this is yours."

"This is like a piece of my heart. A piece that I want you to have because I trust you. With you I see a new hope that I've lost a long time ago. Just like how I felt when I had my life, my home. But now? You are my home... a part of me."

My heart swells from her love and trust, I lean in and kiss her lips gently.

I take the necklace and kiss the butterfly pendant keeping my eyes on my angel, watching her cheeks flush.

“Do you trust me?”

“More than myself.” She kisses my cheek with her soft lips.

“Do you love me?”

Moving closer to my mouth, she plants a sweet and gentle kiss before whispering. “More than you know.”

** * **

PRESENT

I BARGE inside her room but the bed is empty. I walk towards the balcony and she isn't there either. Finding the bathroom door open, I stalk inside and there she is.

Elysha's naked body soaked under the bubbled water in the bathtub while her eyes are closed in relaxation. Her hair tied in a messy bun with her head resting against the end. Making my footsteps loud and clear, I reach her and kneel beside, relishing her beauty.

Her eyes are still closed but she is aware of my presence because her shoulders turn tense suddenly.

“I told you to knock when you come inside my room,” she mutters.

I grind my teeth together to suppress my anger.

“I will do it next time,” I said.

She opens her eyes and arches her eyebrow, giving me a doubtful look, as if she doesn't believe me.

“What do you need now?” she asks but my gaze fell on the swell of her breasts which was glistening.

Fuck. I want to lick those droplets off her skin.

Shaking my head, I try to focus on our conversation I came here for.
“There is a charity ball I have to attend tomorrow night.”

“And what does that have to do with me?”

“You will come to the ball with me.”

Her eyes widen in shock, but then her brows furrow in confusion, and I can already sense her thoughts running wild.

“No deals. No plans. It would be just like any other normal function; I will attend my business and meanwhile you can mingle with the wives.”

She gives me a blank look for several seconds. “I don’t know what happens at a ball or what people do.”

I frown. “What do you mean?”

She looks down at the bubbles, a saddening smile stretches on her lips. “I’ve never had a normal life. Since I was a kid, I have always been trapped,” she says with a broken voice.

I shouldn’t feel sorry for her. She is a slave after all. The scenario is a common one among many slaves who were captured. And yet, my heart clenches, making my chest feel tight with pressure and ache.

“Were you sold or kidnapped?” I ask, offering her a stoic expression. But I can’t help myself and touch her cheek with the back of my hand.

“Kidnapped. So many nightmares filled my days and nights that I barely have any memory of how my destruction began. All I know is that since that day everything was taken away from me without my consent. My family, sister, my childhood, my innocence, my body. *Everything*. I was never able to even see if the world has its beautiful side.”

Is she referring to Rhea?

Later I have to know more about her sister, even though I have my suspicions about who it is.

“It doesn’t, little girl,” I whisper as my eyes never leave her sight.

Her head turns towards me and her vulnerable eyes meet mine, holding so many emotions.

Sadness. Regret. Misery.

“Beauty doesn’t exist in reality. It’s just a mere reflection the cruel world shows us just to play with our emotions. The only beauty that exists is in the darkness.”

I lean closer as my thumb brushes her cheekbone.

Her lips part and the goosebumps scattering on her skin are hard to miss.

“I have seen darkness. There is nothing but agony and cruelty.”

I shake my head. “That’s where you are wrong. What you faced was reality. The life I live every day is true darkness where I rule with pride.”

“And what do you get in return?”

My thumb skates down and traces her lips. “Power. Control. Respect.”

Elysha leans forward. Her wet hand grasps my wrist. “But what’s the point when you gain all these out of people’s fear?”

I snicker under my breath. “Who said the world is fair? By fear or by lies, you *take* what you deserve, little girl. By hook or by crook.”

Something dawns on her. Realization? Understanding? Whatever it is, it's clear that my words have changed something within her.

Her shoulders lean back as she moves away from my touch and returns to her previous posture from when I first got in. This is her way of saying the conversation has ended, but it won’t end until I say so. I stand up and her head cranes back at my movement.

“Be ready tonight and come to my bedroom by ten,” I order in a cold tone.

“No,” she mutters.

“What do you mean *no*?”

“Have you ever heard of the word?” Her eyes narrow.

“I have several times when I slit my enemies throats or cut them into pieces,” I say casually as if it is the most normal conversation topic. She doesn’t seem fazed by it, but I know she is hiding her disgust.

“I told you that you will show me respect and give me my rights. So, if it’s sex you want then you have to ask for it.”

“That wasn’t part of the deal.”

“It was. You just gave an order to me like I’m a dog,” she hisses out her words before standing up, completely oblivious to her dripping wet, naked body.

Fuck. The little minx.

Walking towards the shower, she quickly washes off the remaining soap. Wrapping a towel around her, she exits the shower and stands in front of me. This girl is definitely asking to get fucked hard until she screams in ecstasy. And tonight, she will.

“You have to ask for it like a normal person.”

I put my hands inside my pockets and fake a curious expression. “How so? Please elaborate.”

She crosses her arms. “Compliment me, flirt with me like a gentleman who wants to both adore and fuck me.”

I smirk. “So, you want me to *compliment* you, bring you roses or chocolates like I’m your boyfriend.” I snicker.

I run a hand through my hair. “The story between us will never be a love story, little girl. I’m no Romeo and you certainly aren’t Juliet. Romances are for wimps, but there is one thing on your list that I can do and that is to fuck you. Just because I’m agreeing to your demands, don’t think I’ll forget about mine.”

She glares at me as her jaw ticks. “And here I thought I had a say when it comes to fucking.”

I grab her hair, tilting her head back as I lean forward, my warm breath and lips caressing her cheek. “Little girl, you and I both know how much you love having my cock inside your cunt. I can already smell from here how wet you are for me.”

She remains silent, breathing heavily with her hands clutching my arms.

“After the act you pulled in front of my mother, you deserve to be punished.”

Just hearing the word *punished* has her eyes snap open. She tries to move away from my hold, but I don’t allow that.

“I haven’t hurt you in any way possible that will resemble your nightmares and I have no intention to do that. But tonight you will be ready because nothing will save you.”

Before she can protest any further, I leave her room.

* * *

A KNOCK COMES on my door exactly at ten. She is here. I open the door, finding Elysha dressed in the black lingerie I picked for her. She is in a sheer black lace bra, with matching stockings and garter belt. Her raven hair curtain her neck. Her olive-skinned face had no makeup on, making her look even more attractive.

Her eyes also take in my sight as I stand at the doorway, wearing only my black jeans and nothing else.

“Come in,” I mutter, moving aside to let her pass in.

She enters with hesitant steps but still carries her grace like a queen. Closing the door, I point her to stand at the center of the room.

The moonlight highlights the beautiful curves of her body. Shadowing over her, I watch her tongue licking her lips.

“Are you going to hit me?” she whispers.

“Maybe. But it won’t cause you pain.”

She swallows. “Will you really stop when I say *no*?”

“I have to keep my end of the deal after all.”

But I don’t want to hurt you like your previous master did. I almost say those words out loud, but act against it. She doesn’t need to know my thoughts. I take out the silk, gray scarf from my pocket.

“Do you trust me?” I ask.

She nods. *That isn't a sufficient answer.*

“I haven't given you any reason not to trust me. I need the words from you. Do you trust me, little girl?”

Her eyes haze upon mine as if she is trying to see through me. “Yes. I trust you.”

With a slight nod I tie the scarf around her eyes and blindfold her. I pause, checking if she's still with me. “You will call me *sir* tonight.”

She opens her mouth to argue but I press my index finger against her lips. “No arguments tonight. I give you whatever I wish for and you will take it all. I can feel fear thumping through your pulse.” I trace her smooth neck. Her body shudders for a second as she leans her head back, giving me better access.

“But you have to trust me. Tonight, we will erase that fear. Understood?”

She nods.

“Answer me, little girl.” My tone is sharp.

“Yes, sir.”

I take a few steps back, relishing in her beauty before walking to the bedside and clicking on a switch. My appetite for sex has its variations, but I modified my room especially for such occasions. The restraining grid comes down from the ceiling and I click the button again, stopping it at my desired height. I take the handcuffs from the bed along with the riding crop and make my way towards Elysha. Her breathing is already accelerating with anticipation but she is relying on me for guidance.

This is off to a good start.

“Hands forward.”

She swallows and extends her hands. I fasten the leather cuffs with the chain in the middle to each of her wrists. I'm methodical but somehow her presence and nervousness are distracting me. Holding her hands by the

hook of the cuffs, I attach them to one of the gaps on the restraining grid, making sure the holds aren't loose. She stood with both her hands bound above her head.

I move back and slowly walk around her like a predator admiring his prey before his attack. "I wish you could see yourself with my eyes. You would know what true beauty looks like."

I take the riding crop and use the tip to trace her smooth back. She gasps in surprise and arches her back. Her back is a perfect curve, each vertebra outlined from her nape to her fine, fine ass. I skate the crop lower reaching the top of her thigh and smack her pussy in between.

She cries out loud.

"Legs apart and don't close them no matter what," I order.

She parts her legs while I continue my journey and smack her sensitive pussy now and then, making her quiver.

"Ah!" she moans, throwing her head back.

I stand behind her, leaning closer to her ear.

"Your body is shivering with desire, isn't it?" I whisper, giving a nibble to her earlobe.

"Yes, sir," she rasps, her hold tightening around the cuffs, head back.

"You want to come while your pussy is being slapped?"

"Yes, please."

I spank her across her behind, harder this time.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, sir," she cries.

"But it's a punishment. So, you will take your punishment first then your reward."

She whimpers a protest but another smack on her ass quiets her down.

I take the nipple clamps from the bed and stand in front of her before lowering her bra as her breasts bounce out. My mouth immediately waters

from her puckered nipples. Without a second thought, I cup one breast while feasting on the other.

“Oh god,” she shouts in a gargled cry as I continue to suck on her rosy nipples, moving back and forth between them.

Desire ignites my nerves, making me hungrier for her. My cock is aching already, fighting its way against my jeans. Moving my mouth back with a plop, I put the nipple clamps on her now sensitive and wet nipples.

Her back arches followed by a cry of pleasure. “Please. Oh God!”

I can see her areolas turning red with goosebumps prickling her skin. With a quick possessive kiss, I retrieve the riding crop and caress her ass with it in circular motion.

“You have disobeyed me several times, you argued with me and let’s not forget what happened when my mother arrived. Three mistakes and five hits for each. And you won’t make a single sound. One sound from you and the number will rise. Understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

SMACK.

A loud crack echoes in the room as the crop lands a sharp slap on her ass. I see Elysha biting her lip, trying her best to control her moans and cries. *Good girl.*

SMACK. SMACK. SMACK.

I rain hits after hits on her ass, striking both her cheeks. From her scrunched up face it is evident that the crop is hurting her, making her skin burn. But she hasn’t reached her limit yet.

“You won’t disobey me next time.” *SMACK.*

“You won’t cross me again.” *SMACK.*

“Understood, little girl?” I ask. My voice turned hoarse from excitement.

“No, sir.”

Frowning, I walk towards her, taking the blindfold off. Her eyes blinking rapidly before they set on my face.

“What did you say?”

She shakes her head while breathing heavily as if she just ran a marathon. “I said no, sir. Following those rules means becoming your slave, being under your control. I swore to myself I’ll never let that happen. I won’t let anything control me. So, no, *sir*. I won’t follow those rules. Hit me an uncountable number of times but I won’t fall.”

Fucking shit.

For a minute I stand there speechless. Her boldness, bravery and fierceness take me aback. I am sure she knows if she disobeys me in this, I will keep hitting her with the riding crop until she bleeds. But she stays strong. True to herself. She doesn’t care about being hit and tortured, she is used to it and willing to take more in order to remain true to her words.

Her vow is the only piece of soul she has left.

I can easily take it away from her after she manipulated me by threatening my mother. But deep down, for once, I don’t want to cause her pain.

For once I don’t want to strip away something so close to her heart.

For once, I don’t want to be ruthless.

Because after what feels like ages, she reflects a part of me I lost in my childhood. She recites the same words that I did to myself when every bit of me was stripped away. Something inside me snaps. Something that changes my whole motive to hurt her and control her. Dropping the riding crop, I rip apart her panties. I quickly undo my zipper, taking out my aching cock and giving it a few strokes. Her hungry eyes look down at my motion while she licks her lip and breathes faster. I grab her jaw and kiss the fucking hell out of her. My other hand circles around her aching clit before I thrust two fingers inside her wet, clenching cunt.

Fuck. She is soaking wet.

With my hands under her thighs, I lift her up and she wraps her legs around my waist. With one thrust I'm inside her.

She feels like a paradise.

I take a moment to savor the queen in my arms. Her skin, her beauty... her bravery. Everything about her is perfect. I start to move, relishing each and every thrust. Feeling her, on and on as my own breathing turns harsh and shallow, followed by grunts. I plant an open mouth kiss on her neck, feeling her racing pulse. Her scent fills my nostril, fills me. For once, I don't want this moment to ever stop.

"Fuck," I grunt when her wall clenches around my cock, nearly making me come inside her right there and then.

"Please, more." Her voice is barely audible.

I speed up my moves. The slapping of our skin is the only sound playing around the room along with her cries.

"Kiss me like you only want me," she whispers.

How can I deny her?

Kissing my way up from her neck, I reach her plum lips and grant her wish. Our desire burns our bodies into flames of pleasure. I brought her home to discover her secrets, make her bound to me like a slave. But she presented me a side of her I've never seen in a woman before.

I may be harsh towards her, sometimes even a monster she would hate. But she has earned my respect.

Suddenly she tenses and her body convulses around me. Seeing such breathtaking sight of her head thrown back and her eyes never leaving mine, I let go of myself. I spill inside her, filling her. Holding her. Reserving her.

Mine. All fucking mine.

With a lingering kiss, I pull out of her and unbuckle the cuffs. She turns limp in my arms and her hands sag around my neck as if she has no energy left. Carefully, I take off the nipple clamps. I cradle her body and carry her,

laying her on my bed. Her eyes turn drowsy the minute her head rests against the pillow. I go to the bathroom and get a wet towel for her. Sitting beside her I clean her, earning a little whimper from her as she is sleeping in my bed.

After changing my clothes, I get on the bed, pulling the blanket over us. My eyes look up at the ceiling as I try to process the series of events that happened tonight.

I feel the bed shift and I face her. She is still asleep but turns to my side and her arm rests across my abdomen with her head against my chest. I stay still as a rock, unaware of what to do.

I have never let a woman be so close with me. Not even my ex-wife. But with Elysha the walls around me that shrouded me from comfort are starting to break, brick by brick. Her warmth brings an unknown peace that I lost touch with a long time ago.

She is so different.

Here I am trying to figure out her connection to Rhea, but at this point I truly don't know what I am looking for anymore. I am getting lost more and more.

She snuggles closer to me, tightening her hold around me. Eventually, I wrap my arm around her waist with my other hand resting on hers.

CHAPTER 19



MAXWELL

PRESENT

I jolt awake, feeling cold and alone. The bedroom is dark with the exception of the moonlight entering through the windows. I look to my right finding the space empty.

I jump to my feet and search the room for a sign of Elysha but she isn't there. Was I that deep in sleep that I didn't detect her movements?

Grabbing my gun from my nightstand, I storm out of the room and head downstairs. She couldn't run away because it is impossible to get past all the guards on the premises. When I reach the backyard, my eyes make out a slender figure in the lounging chair. Elysha.

I relax and discard my gun on a sideboard before I stalk towards her.

She is wearing one of my T-shirts that reaches up to her knees. She looks so little and vulnerable. Facing up, she is looking at the glittering dark night sky filled with stars. Her knees close to her chest as she hugs herself.

Even with my heavy footsteps she doesn't acknowledge me, making me realize she is deeply lost in her own thoughts.

"What are you doing here?" I ask, sinking into the seat beside her.

Her eyes never leave the stars shining in the sky.

"Couldn't sleep."

“Nightmare?”

She nods. “They never seem to leave me, no matter how hard I try.”

I rest my hand on her back, gently caressing her. “What do you dream about?”

She lets out a shaky breath. “Those monsters. All of them in one place, taking their turns with me while I beg and scream in pain. Sometimes they are hurting me with their whips and cane as if I’m some sort of stress reliever for them.”

I notice the single lone tear running down her cheek. “I keep telling myself that one day these nightmares will be over. I will be free and have a normal life. But deep down I’m lying to myself.”

I stare at the side of her face and wait for her to meet my eyes. She never does. It feels as if telling me her fears while looking at me, would be a sign of weakness for her.

“First, I lost my family and every person that mattered in my life. Then my innocence and light. No girl ever asks for such life, and yet fate brought me such cruelty.”

I lick my lips. “You said something about a sister, too. Where is she?”

“Dead.” One devastated word that holds a blank emotion in her tone.

I frown in confusion. “How? Did you see her die?”

“My sister and I both were captured at a very young age. I tried to run away one night, promising her that I will come back and save her but our captors found out. One of them took her away somewhere while I was getting beaten and raped. When he returned, his hands were covered in blood.”

She snuffles, shedding more tears.

Then what about Rhea? How could they both look so alike and yet unaware of each other’s existence?

According to Elysha, her sister died but she didn’t see her dead body. It could be possible her captors tricked her, breaking her with sorrow and

chaining her to their brutality.

“How did she look like?”

She swallows, biting her lip with more fresh tears streaming down. “If you are trying to make me feel guilty for failing to protect my own sister then you’ve succeeded.”

Fuck. I shouldn’t have taken it so far knowing it’s a delicate subject for her. She is already shrouded in sorrow, and with my questions it is making guilt ink on her heart.

“I really don’t know why I was even born. It’s like I was never meant to be gifted with innocence. A childhood with memorable moments. Turning into a teenager and soon a young woman, fulfilling her own dreams while having her own little family. None of those ever knocked on the door of my fate.”

She has a glass of scotch on the side table which she picks up and finishes in one chug. She is trying to drown her nightmares with this golden poison.

“Do you really want a normal life so badly?” I whisper.

She lets out a sarcastic laugh. “Just because you prefer to live a life full of darkness doesn’t mean others want it, too.”

“How do you know the normal life you are fighting for so badly will bring you happiness?”

She refills her glass and takes another sip. She forces herself to swallow as if she is sick of the burn down her throat, but yet she wants it.

Just like I crave for the similar burn when I drink.

“One day people will know about your nightmares. And the minute they do, they will change their demeanor in seconds. Your life will be filled with pity and disgust because, in reality, normal life is going to turn into suffocation.”

“Then what do you suggest? I should spend the rest of my life breathing in your kingdom of sinners where the monsters haunt me day and night?”

That's what you want me to do?" she sneers.

She isn't wrong. My kingdom is, indeed, the kingdom of sinners.

"Who said you have to be the victim? Find your own purpose in this dark world that took everything from you."

She frowns and finally looks at me.

I caress her cheek with my knuckles, looking deep into her dark, bloodshot eyes. *So beautiful.*

"And what's that purpose?" she asks.

"That's for you to discover. Darkness can be beautiful if you see it in a different light, Elysha. You are a warrior and I have no doubt you will get your revenge from this dark world by showing your true power."

"And if I fail?"

I shake my head with a grin. "You won't fail because the queen holds the ultimate power. She is born for victory."

Her thoughts are running wild from my words. "Revenge isn't always the answer. Revenge only brings revenge."

"Forgiving isn't always the answer either."

"Have you ever thought of choosing a different path?"

I grin. "I chose this life; it didn't choose me. You don't get what you deserve, you get what you take."

Her lips part while she lets out a sigh and finishes her drink. Using her palms, she wipes away, now dried, tears before trying to stand up on her legs. I immediately hold her and cradle in my arms with her head resting against my chest. When she falls asleep again, I can't help but think about Rhea as well. So far, my suspicion towards her led me to no proof about her connection to Francisco. I can kidnap her and torture to get the information I need. But I also don't want to risk losing the chance of finding Francisco by kidnapping Rhea.

I got the transcript of her call and so far nothing skeptical was found.

It is like with every one step forward, I am taking five steps back.

* * *

I FINISH TYING my bow tie and grab my black jacket. Slipping it on, I button up the last few buttons and take one last look in the mirror. Charity balls aren't usually my thing because I know half of these are just for show. Even this ball isn't any different. I head downstairs where the guards are already waiting for me as they run me through the security schedule today. With parties and charity balls the extra security is arranged. After the discussion they all head out towards the driveway when the click of heels on the stairs makes me turn around. Elysha is descending, looking like a divine sight to behold.

She looks absolutely stunning in her black gown. The long slit gives me the perfect view of her olive skin and toned legs with matching black heels.

Fucking hell. I want those legs wrapped around my hips.

Her hair is styled into a beautiful bun with few loose strands touching the sides of her face. Her smooth skin no longer holds bruises and marks. She is the picture of perfection. I saunter towards her, feeling a sense of pride and gratitude, and kiss her cheek. "Elysha, you look absolutely breathtaking."

She flushes but doesn't break eye contact with me, showing her bravery as always.

"Shall we?" I extend my hand. She accepts by hooking her arm through mine.

Getting inside the car, we travel in comfortable silence in the back. I skim my thumb across her exposed thigh, sensing her growing anticipation. I can sense the wall of anxiety building around her. This is her first-time stepping foot outside my castle and engaging with so many people. People who are part of the Bratva.

Cruel. Brutal. Dishonest.

“Relax,” I whisper in her ear. “This is your chance to show the power you carry in this kingdom of sinners. Today you will control it and be the queen.” I kiss the back of her ear, making her shiver. My tongue peeks out, tracing her earlobe before giving it a gentle suck. Elysha closes her eyes, pressing her thighs together with her head thrown back and inhales. Her smoldering eyes meet mine and she leans forward. Her hot breath caresses my lips as she keeps teasing me while licking and biting her lip.

“Why do you suddenly have so much faith in me?” Her whispered words ghost over my mouth.

“Nothing that concerns you,” I lie, leaning closer to kiss her but she pulls back with a smile.

“Why don’t I believe you?”

I grin loving this playful side of hers. I opt not to answer her and get the black box underneath the seat.

“Here.” I pass it to her.

With a frown she opens it and arches her eyebrows in surprise when she sees a mask inside. “It’s a masquerade ball?”

I nod. “They arrived today. Look under the masks, there is something else for you.”

She picks up her black Colombina mask and gasps seeing the diamond bracelet, shimmering and shining with its natural beauty. *Just like her.*

She picks it up, tracing the rare black diamonds as her eyes take in the beautiful set, but the hint of discomfort is evident. I take the bracelet from her.

“Give me your wrist,” I say in a demanding voice.

She shakes her head. “I will lose it. I can’t—”

“Then I will get another one for you. I have more money than you can imagine.” I take her wrist and put the bracelet around, locking the hooks.

“No matter how many diamonds you wear, little girl, none of those will do justice to the true beauty you are.” Her cheeks turn red from blushing.

“Why black diamonds?” she asks. “I thought men go for regular ones.”

“You are a rare soul like this diamond and you deserve something unique.”

And it symbolizes her passionate soul.

Flawless. Perfection. I almost add but refrain from the idea.

The BMW joins the line of cars arriving at Nicholai’s house. Elysha strains to have a look. Grinning, I take my mask and put it on before passing Elysha’s hers.

When we pull up into the driveway, we are both in disguise. Elysha looks stunning, absolutely dazzling, and tonight I want to show her off as my most-prized possession that everyone can look at, even dream of having but can’t ever lay a finger on.

We both exit the car with her arms hooked through mine. Long, gray lanterns hang over the drive. As we inch closer to the gate, I can see they are everywhere. A raven black carpet runs along the porch of the mansion, leading inside the house. I protectively place my arm around Elysha, resting my hand on her waist as we follow the black carpet with the Bratva’s people dressed in their finery and wearing all manner of masks. But when they notice my arrival, everyone parts their way, giving us an open path to walk. Some nod in acknowledgement and others just keep their eyes casted down. Every member of the Bratva is here along with their family .

There are many small chandeliers, brightening up the entire hall. All the tables and chairs are arranged with glass vases filled with bouquets of black roses in the center. A stage is set up underneath the second-floor balcony area where the musicians are performing *The Way You Look Tonight* by *Frank Sinatra*. A waiter approaches me with an unsteady posture, holding a tray of glasses brimming with champagne. I take one before passing it to Elysha and have a glass of my own.

“There are so many people here,” Elysha whispers beside me.

“All the Bratva members are here.”

She frowns. “The what?” she asks with a frown.

“We are the Bratva community. It means *brotherhood*. It’s *the Syndicate*.” She gulps, letting out a shaky breath. I squeeze her waist, urging her to look at me. I already can see that she understands what that means. I know she must have at least heard that word before. No need to explain further.

“Don’t worry. Not a single man here is brave enough to even think about making a move on you. You are mine and they all knew it the minute we stepped inside.”

“Maxwell! A pleasure to have you here.” I hear Nicholai’s deep voice. He approaches me in his black suit and custom feather mask.

“Glad to be here,” I mutter. His eyes immediately go to Elysha, looking at her from head to toe like the bastard he is.

But my cold face makes him back off.

“And who is this beautiful woman?”

“This is Elysha. And Elysha this is Nicholai. He is the host of this function.”

She nods with a polite smile, tightening her grasp on my suit but holds her grace with pride. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

He nods back before looking at me. “The auction will begin in a few minutes. How about after the dance ceremony we discuss business?”

“Of course.”

His wife soon joins along with his son, both dressed accordingly to the function. “Mr. Reznikov, it’s an honor to have you here. How have you been? And how is your mother?” she asks.

I offer a half-hearted smile. “She is well. Thank you for asking.”

“I hope she is doing well after your father’s death. Poor woman.” The fake concern and consoling words make me want to choke her.

“She is doing very well with a new life she deserves,” I say with a crooked smile. Her expression falters with jealousy, knowing well my

mother has the privilege of leading a happy life that every wife here wishes for.

“Enrico, why don’t you show Mr. Reznikov and his lady friend their seats?” she says to her son who is tightening his jaw with irritation.

“Sure. This way,” he mutters through clenched teeth before heading towards the front table. Behind us, the guards follow at a safe distance. Taking our places, Elysha looks around the grand decoration and arrangements.

There is a hint of fascination in her eyes as if she is seeing all these the first time.

Then it hits me. This is her first ball.

Such decorations, glam and beauty are something she was unaware of.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” I ask.

She looks at me with a flushed face as if caught doing something she isn’t supposed to do. “It is very beautiful. Must have cost a fortune.”

Just then a microphone taps catches everyone’s attention. Nicholai stands at the center of the stage with a mic in his right hand with a glass of champagne in his left.

“Welcome, ladies and gentleman, to our charity ball. It’s an honor to have the Bratva family under one roof. Our Pakhan.” He raises the glass towards me.

I pick mine and nod in acknowledgement.

“The Brigadiers, Bratoks and Authoritets are all here. And it will be a night to remember. So, a toast to Bratva.”

Everyone raises their glasses, so does Elysha.

“*K bratstvu*,” he says.

“*K bratstvu*,” the entire room repeats, taking a sip of the champagne.

“I should start learning Russian perhaps,” Elysha whispers.

I grin. “I can teach you. But in my own way,” I whisper in her ear.

She bites her lip and looks forward, trying to hide her playful smile. The charity soon starts and people begin to place their bids. I participate just for the show because I am aware none of this money is going for a real cause.

Once a sinner, always a sinner.

An hour passes by and the auction finally ends. Dinner is served after that and everyone digs into the delicious meals laid in front of them.

Elysha looks a bit at loss but doesn't falter at her demeanor. Everyone around her takes a peek or two at her and starts to whisper in Russian.

Who is she?

I have never seen Maxwell with another woman in public after his wife died.

She looks so beautiful and elegant. Is she Russian?

I heard she is a whore.

How can she be here? She definitely doesn't belong in any of the families.

They all whisper their useless thoughts while Elysha finishes her meal without any knowledge of what people are thinking. In some way, I assumed she wouldn't care. Just like me, she doesn't give a single fuck what people say or think about her. What matters to her is being true to herself.

None of them even deserves to look at her. They are all unworthy of my queen.

Moments later the musicians take their places and start to play music for the dance ceremony. Some people stay in their seats while others go ahead with their partners.

I stand up. "Get up. Dance with me."

Elysha remains in her seat with a frown. "No."

"What do you mean *no*? I can tell you want to dance, so get up."

She crosses her arms. "Not until you ask me politely. Show me the respect you promised."

I clench my jaw but there is no point in getting mad. I did promise her and I'm a man of my words.

"Will you dance with me?" I ask in a calm tone.

She smiles and gets up, taking my hand. "I would love to."

I lead her to the dance floor and pull her close. Her one hand holds mine with the other resting around my neck. I touch her smooth skin. The band begins to play *People Are Strangers* with everyone swaying to its tune.

Elysha falls easily into step with me as my thumb caresses her skin. Her chest presses up against mine with her eyes peering up at me. She's captivating as I twirl her around the dance floor, and she grins with delight dancing in her gaze.

This moment... this closeness feels so...

Peaceful. Soothing. Calming.

We move together in a waltz. Her hands grasp my shoulder as we whirl around the floor, her radiant face lighting up the room.

"I didn't know you could dance," she whispers.

"You don't know half of the things about me, little girl." I turn her around and bring her back again.

"What if I said I want to know more about you?"

I snicker under my breath. "Trust me, little girl, the less you know, the better for you. Nobody ever wants to know about Satan because they know he is the most destructive soul. That's all there is to know about him."

This time she chuckles. She holds my hand tightly where my skull ring and her diamond bracelet connect.

"Everyone thinks Satan is someone with horns and a tail, like they talk about in the Bible. But the Satan I met is different. He is beautiful in his imperfect way. A dark beauty that carries its charm inside his black heart. After all, Satan was an angel once."

I stand there speechless which rarely happens.

How can she find even an ounce of beauty within me that never existed?

Or it did a long time ago...

She lets out a deep breath and with a slow pace rests her head against my chest as we continue to sway with the music.

“Every time I look at you, deep down I see someone else hiding inside you. Someone who was lost a long time ago, and yet is still there,” she whispers.

My heart starts beating faster and faster with her words. The air around me tightens my throat with unpleasant emotions.

“None of my captors have ever treated me like a human. And here you are... another captor but so different from the monsters I’ve met. Not only did you treat me like a human being in your cruel way, but also made me feel like a queen. Last night, I gave a piece of myself to you that only belonged to me. Tonight, I want that same thing from you, Maxwell.”

Anxiety. Angst. Agitation.

Appalled by waves of emotions, I swallow the lump in my throat. After what I have been through, I never let myself open up to anyone. Yet, she wants to know the angel hiding behind Satan's shadow.

My lips suddenly feel dry as words vanish from my mind. All that can reflect in my head are the nightmares that haunt me. The monster within me shakes its head, not allowing me to tell her my darkest and deepest secrets. Just then the music ends, rushing my consciousness back to reality. I instantly pull away from her, getting my shit together.

My eyes meet Nicholai’s who nods, indicating it is time for business now.

I look back at Elysha, unable to meet her innocent and confused face.

“Stay here and don’t leave. I have some business to take care of and then we will leave.”

As I’m about to leave she grasps my arm. “I will come with you.”

I shake my head. “You can’t. Stay here. The guards will protect you. You don’t have anything to worry about.”

“They aren’t *you*. No one can protect me the way you do.”

She takes me aback with her words again, but gathering my courage and pride, I shake off from her hold and stride towards Nikolai.

“Let’s discuss in my office,” he mutters.

“Of course. Lead the way.”

I follow him inside his office where his son is already waiting, sitting in his father’s chair. He gets up and stalks towards me, extending his hand.

“An honor to meet you, Mr. Reznikov,” he says. Such a sudden change in hospitality. Guess he had a serious talk with his father after his crude attitude.

I put my hands inside my pockets, not bothering to waste my time on him. “Let’s get to business.”

“Sure. Would you like a cigar?” he asks.

“No, thank you.” I walk towards the desk and take a seat. Nikolai walks toward the shelf and gets a metal box. Taking out an expensive Cuban cigar, he lights up the end before taking a deep drag.

“You sure you don’t want one? Enrico got it from his last mission in Cuba.”

His son gives a prideful smile, puffing out his chest as if he won the Olympics. I suppress the urge to roll my eyes.

I sit back, resting my feet on my opposite knee and take off the mask. “Doing minor tasks as part of the *Shestyorka* doesn’t qualify as a *Brigade* of Ufa territory.”

The sudden fire of anger in Enrico’s eyes is evident. If I wasn’t the *Pakhan*, he would have definitely taken out his gun by now and shot me.

Too bad I own his ass now.

Letting out the smoke through his lips and nose, Nikolai takes his seat, dusting the burnt tobacco on the ashtray and placing the metal case on the table. “You said you will make my son the *Brigade* for the cocaine territory in Ufa. Every member of the Bratva is aware that you always have a motive

behind every action. I want to know about the one you have behind this decision, too. After all you took the throne that rightfully belonged to him.”

I tsk, shaking my head with a smirk. “Don’t lie to yourself, Nicholai. After the little secret which you already knew about, you wanted to make your son *Pakhan* just to cover it up.”

He remains silent and takes a few more drags with his shaky hand. Enrico walks towards me, taking off his mask as well, standing tall and straight in front of me.

“Mr. Reznikov, I’m a changed man now. And I can absolutely assure you—”

His words get stuck on his tongue when I raise my hand. “Men’s nature is sometimes like a dog’s tail. No matter what you do it always remains twisted, never turns straight.”

I turn to Nicholai with a cold stare. “If you want your son to be the *Brigade*, then you have to tell me everything you know about Francisco and his leader.”

Nicholai’s eyes widen with shock as he looks back and forth from me to his son. “I-I don’t know what—”

“Don’t even dare to lie. You have always been a respected member of the Bratva. Your betrayal and lies are nothing but insults to the years of respect you have earned from your people.”

His hands start to shake more with his mind running through every excuse possible to feed me all the bullshit.

“Tell me about him, and not only will I let this pass but your son will become the *Brigade*. So, speak,” I order.

He gulps, letting the cigar rest on the ashtray. Perspiration runs down from his forehead to his sideburns, confirming my suspicion about him being involved with Francisco. I slam my hand against the desk, making both of them jump in fear.

“Fucking speak!” I roar.

“It’s not just me—”

“I’m well aware that other members are involved, too and the motive is absolutely obvious. Revenge. But this is your one chance of making things right before the Bratva finishes you before I do.”

I feel the cold metal head of the gun against my temple. I roll my eyes in annoyance. “Not another fucking word about my father, Maxwell. How dare you come into our house and dishonor my father?”

His father throws a nervous glance at me when he sees me still at Enrico’s sudden attack.

“I have had enough of your bullshit.” I hear the safety lock click on. “If I have to kill you to become the *Pakhan*, then so be it. You never deserved it.”

I watch Nicholai relaxing in his chair as if buying my act that I truly feel powerless and defenseless. He inhales a deep drag before standing up with a grin and walking towards me. Both father and son stand side by side, peering down at me like an ant about to be squashed.

“That day I didn’t have any other choice. But today the tables have turned, Maxwell,” he sneers, leaning down and coming close to my face. “You think you are the king of Russia, when in reality everyone sees you as nothing but the little, wounded and fucked up boy who was kidnapped by his uncle. You were weak then and you are still weak now, Maxwell.”

My face holds no emotions but deep inside the lava of rage is boiling my blood.

“I warned you that soon your downfall will come, but you were too blinded by your pride. Francisco and his new leader are your destruction. We only agreed with him just to rip you off from your title. The minute you die—” He pats his son’s back, “my son will become the true king and we made sure that happens through Francisco. But with time we will take down his leader, too.”

Nicholai stands back with a scoff. “After all *Bratva* is meant to be ruled by men, not women. She is just a pawn, pretending to be a queen. But must say she is a smart one and that’s the only reason she is still alive. And allow me to resolve your queries about Francisco.”

He coughs before taking a final drag of the cigar. “We did have a meeting with him. His leader, Erida, already got half of the experienced *Bratva* members on her radar. Some are even present at the party, laughing behind your back. Next week they will be stealing another shipment of the drug coming to your cousin’s city,” he mutters with a sly grin.

Enrico tsks. “Unfortunately, even he will die, too. A sniper will be at the nearby building to shoot him.”

Nicholai and Enrico’s faces are filled with pure evil joy and victory. But little do they know their own downfall is knocking at their door. The thought makes me smile which soon turns into a dark laughter.

“What’s so fucking funny?” Enrico sneers, pressing the gun harder against my forehead.

“You will see very soon,” I say and sit back with a relaxed posture.

Nicholai’s jaw grinds in annoyance. “Son, just fucking shoot—”

His words are left incomplete as he starts to cough, covering his mouth with his free hand.

He keeps coughing and wheezing for air like he is struggling to breathe. His hold on the cigar loosens and he wraps both his hands around his throat. Enrico immediately drops the gun and goes to his father, enfolding his arm around his shoulder as he looks in distress. I take the gun and empty the bullets.

“Father, what’s wrong? Tell me,” he says, panic and anxiety oozing from his tone.

Nicholai keeps coughing and loses his balance as he lands on the carpeted floor. His entire body starts trembling while Enrico undoes his tie and unbuttons the top buttons of his shirt. But nothing works.

I stand up, walking towards his father's desk and take a seat. The sight of the two traitors being broken bit by bit is such a soothing vision.

Nicholai keeps struggling, his face soon turns red. But a few seconds later his movements eventually slow down until he lies on the floor like a lifeless body, looking up at his son.

Enrico's wide eyes are filled with tears as his lips wobble. "No...no. Father, wake up." He shakes Nicholai's limp body but there is no response.

He grunts at the back of his throat, pressing his forehead against Nicholai's with his eyes shut. I pick up the metal box, turning it upside down.

"Must have been expensive, huh?" I ask and open the case. Taking one of the cigars, I twist it between my fingers. Enrico looks at me with his bloodshot eyes, tears streaming down his face. *Fucking pussy.*

"Don't know the flavor but I sure can tell it was worth every penny to watch your father die."

"Y-you... You did this... You killed him," he seethes out the words through his clenched teeth.

I shake my head with a shrug. "I didn't buy it for him. You did, Enrico. So, technically you killed him. But—" I fake a thoughtful expression, tapping my index finger against my lip. "On second thought, I did kill him. Partially. It was my idea to mix the drug in the cigars beforehand because everyone knows how much he prefers that over an expensive liquor."

I get up and walk towards him as he stays kneeled down. "Your father had it coming for betraying me. But I am thinking about the ways to kill you as well."

He smirks through his tears. "As if the people out there would let you walk away freely when they find out you betrayed the *Bratva* by killing its oldest member and his son. Everyone knows about your problems with my father."

I scoff. “You never really deserved the title of *Pakhan*. Do you think I’m that stupid?”

I take out my phone and go to the recordings, hitting the play button.

“If I have to kill you to become the Pakhan, then so be it. You never deserved it.”

“I warned you that soon your downfall will come, but you were too blinded by your pride. Francisco and his new leader are your destruction. We only agreed with him just to rip you off from your title. The minute you die my son will become the true king and we made sure that happens through Francisco. But with time we will take down his leader, too.”

“That day I didn’t have any other choice. But today the tables have turned, Maxwell. You think you are the king of Russia, when in reality everyone sees you as nothing but the little, wounded and fucked up boy who was kidnapped by his uncle. You were weak then and you are still weak now, Maxwell.”

“After all Bratva is meant to be ruled by men, not women. She is just a pawn, pretending to be a queen. But must say she is a smart one and that’s the only reason she is still alive. And allow me to resolve your queries about Francisco.”

“We did have a meeting with him. His leader, Erida, already got half of the experienced Bratva members on her radar. Some are even present at the party, laughing behind your back.”

I tap on the stop button and watch all the color drain from Enrico’s face. The victorious smile no longer exists.

“What do you think people out there would say when they find out about you and your father’s - no, sorry - *late* father’s betrayal. And what if I even show them pictures of you fucking men. That would be the perfect cherry on top, don’t you think?”

He gulps and starts to breathe heavily. The fear is so clear in his eyes that I swear, he will piss his pants for sure. Sweat streaks down from his

sideburns to his jaw and neck. He knows well of the chains of cruel fate he is bound to and there is no escape.

Nicholai is just a mere pawn to get his son under my control, like a puppet.

And everything works perfectly. Not only can I catch Francisco but also make Enrico do anything. The strings are looped through my fingers and I am in control.

“M-mr... Mr. Reznikov...I-I... Please don’t do this to me...” Every word of his comes out as a stutter.

“Let’s skip to the main point then, Enrico. You wanted to know about my motive, right?” I place my hands inside my pockets as I circle around him like a hawk.

“You will be doing whatever I tell you. Deny me and I will let the members of the *Bratva* deal with you. They will rip you apart into pieces with their bare hands because you know well betrayal is intolerable in our community.”

“I will do it,” he says instantly. “I will do whatever you tell me, Mr. Reznikov.”

I grin and pat his head. “Good boy.” I stroll back to the chair.

“I will make you the *Brigade* of the drug dealings area. Francisco will surely know that and will call you for another meeting. You will go and gather every information you can.” I raise my index finger, pointing at him with a threatening look.

“If you dare to trick me again, then I will crush you like a delicate flower without any remorse. Understood?”

He gives a shaky nod.

“Use your fucking words, you wimp,” I sneer. He casts his eyes down and nods.

“Understood, Mr. Reznikov.” He looks down at his dead father again. “What about my father? What will I tell them out there?”

I wave him off. “Use the oldest trick in the book. Tell them your dad died from a heart attack. The drugs damaged the heart and lungs. No one will question anything furthermore.”

I get up from the chair and put on my mask again before leaving the room and walking down the dim lit hallway.

Be prepared, Erida, because the bricks you’ve put to make your own kingdom are soon going to fall at your feet. And that time, you will see who truly won.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 20



ELYSHA

PAST

I WAKE up with a jolt by a sudden bump. My surprised eyes gaze around the dark surrounding. We are still inside the car, driving through a rocky, rough road, illuminated by the headlights only. My sister's head is resting on my shoulder as she sleeps, looking very exhausted from what we have been through. The tattering of stones and dirt against the tires, drums in my ears.

The man who agreed to give us a lift is still driving, keeping his focus on the road. I sit straight, rubbing the sleep away from my drowsy eyes.

I look down at my sister, giving her shoulder a gentle shake.

"Hey, wake up," I whisper, and her eyes flutter open.

She looks a bit annoyed as always whenever her sleep is disturbed. My lips quirk up into a smile.

"Where are we?" she asks, looking around like I did a few seconds ago.

I shrug. "I don't know."

I look back at the driver and notice the car is slowing down. From a distance I can see a large silver gate with my narrowed eyes, as I dip my head to peer through the window.

“What place is this?” I ask the man.

He looks over his shoulder with a half-smile before gazing ahead.

“It’s a church.” As if his words need evidence, a sudden loud sound of church bells echo through the area.

The gates are already open, and he drives further before parking the car at the driveway. Turning off the engine he gets out of and opens the passenger’s door for us.

“Come on,” he mutters in a gentle voice.

Clinging onto my sister’s hand, we both get out of the car slowly. I’m greeted by the dimly illuminated sight of the vast church. From outside it looks very vintage and old. It is clear it must have been built ages ago and yet it still holds onto its natural beauty. It is absolutely majestic. A rock statue of Jesus Christ’s cross perched at the top roof. Even in the low light the detailed stone work on the walls are evident. I feel my sister squeezing my hand tightly while she looks around the ground fields and forest that surrounds the entire premises.

Cold wind gusts the atmosphere, prickling my skin as we follow the man walking up the gray stone steps and into the foyer of the church. Century old artworks line the walls. There are huge paintings drawn on the vast windows. We head further inside where a polished marble statue of Maria Goretti stands at the altar.

“Wow,” I hear my sister’s whispered astonishment as she takes in the view.

That’s when a woman dressed up in a nun’s cloth enters the room. Her porcelain skin and eyes suggest she is in her forties perhaps. With a polite smile she walks towards us, a silver cross chain wrapped around her hands.

“Petro? I didn’t know you would be visiting tonight. I thought you said you would be out of town for work,” she says in a sweet as honey voice with a sophisticated tone.

Petro chuckles under his breath before looking at us.

“Yeah, but I changed my plan, Mother Sophia.”

Mother Sophia’s eyes fall on us as she smiles brightly. “And who are these two little angels?”

I wrap an arm around my sister’s shoulder in a protective way, bringing her closer to me. As if she can sense our uneasiness, her expression softens along with her deep blue eyes.

“It’s alright. You two are safe here,” Petro reassures us but deep down I don’t feel satisfied with his answer.

“Mother Sophia, please take them to the bedroom and see if you can find some extra clothes for them.”

She nods and looks back at us. “Follow me. Let’s get you two changed and dried. Come with me.” She offers her hand with a soft smile.

Just this simple act of kindness makes us both flinch back, making Mother Sophia and Petro looking at us with pity and confusion.

“It’s alright. No one will hurt you. You are safe here. Come with me. I’m sure you two must be hungry.”

As if on cue our stomach growled from hunger.

“Come on. You two can rest in your room while I get you two something to eat.”

I look down at my sister who is gazing at me with a blank expression, unaware if we should follow her or not.

Gathering up my courage, I tightly grip onto her hand and we go along with Mother Sophia through the door she came out from. We walk down a huge hallway. The floors lit up by the colorful reflections of the moonlight over the window arts. She takes a turn, leading us to a narrow corridor with rows of doors on either side.

Heading towards the end door, she unlocks it and pushes it open. “This will be your room. You can share the bed if you want, and if not then either of you can use the next room as well.”

We walk inside, taking in the sight of our new room. A single bed edged to the wall with nightstand tables on both sides. A small wardrobe is on the opposite side. But the main attraction is the giant window which illuminates the same colorful lights like in the hallway.

“There are clothes and towels in the wardrobe. I will be back with some food,” she mutters before leaving.

My sister lets go of my hand and walks to the bed, taking a seat. Exhaustion is clear in her eyes.

Grabbing two towels and fresh clothes from the wardrobe I stand in front of her and help her dry her hair.

After we both are decent, I sit beside her and grasp her hand.

“Are you feeling better now?” I ask.

She nods, biting her lip. “Will we stay here?” she asks.

I let out a shaky breath. “I’m not sure. But for now, this is the only safe place.”

“They seem to be nice people. And it’s a church, so, I don’t think anything bad will happen here.”

I nod and realize she does have a point. It’s the holy paradise of God where the shadow of sin can’t pass. We have nowhere else to go, no one to contact either. Everything that we have been through is nothing but a series of unfortunate events. But maybe Petro driving at the highway is a sign from God.

Maybe he was sent by our mother to save us from all the horrors we were going through.

“Do you think mother sent an angel to save us?” my sister whispers as if she can read my mind. She holds the butterfly pendant of her necklace, caressing its wings. I have the same necklace, and it is the only souvenir we have left from our mother.

I shrug. “Maybe.” I touch my butterfly, questioning if really this is what mother really wants for both of us.

Or maybe not. Everything happened so quickly and I feel glad that we both are safe now, but deep down something feels unsettling.

Why am I feeling it?

“I don’t know why but it really feels like we are finally safe. And I don’t want to run away anymore.” She is speaking calmly but I don’t miss the way she is begging me internally to stop running.

“I just can’t... we have been running away from everything for a long time. And it got us where? We have no parents, no home. But now? We finally have a roof over our heads and maybe we can have our new family here. I’m just tired of escaping.”

The exhaustion in her voice is clear as daylight.

I instantly wrap my arms around her, feeling the splinters of our horrific past stabbing in my heart. We have been through a lot since the day we lost our mother. Even I am tired of all these.

But no more. It all ends tonight. Right here. Right now.

“I promise you. No more running. No more hiding. From now onwards we won’t just survive, we will live.”

She looks at me with her eyes watering up followed by a small smile. Her arms wrap around mine and she engulfs me in a tight hug.

It will be different from now.

“Everything will be alright?” she asks.

I nod. “Everything will be alright. I promise.”

** * **

IT’S BEEN A FEW WEEKS, months perhaps since my sister and I have settled down in this church. Winter is here, filling the church ground with heavy snow. And so far, everything is going well. Mother Sophia stays here on the second floor, and manages everything. Besides us, there are few other girls as well close to our age. All of them are nuns and dressed up as one every

day. Mother Sophia even urges me and my sister to dress up like a nun. At the beginning it did feel a bit odd because we never visited church. But eventually, when she started to recite the Bible and tell us stories related to God and the way He has everything planned for everyone, I got more and more involved in it.

She even often gives us chores to do and sometimes they are hard, but as we have nothing else to do, we follow her rules. We now have food, a home and most of all we have each other.

But some things are budging in the back of my mind, that only leaves an insecurity within me. At first, I didn't notice it that much, but as days passed by, I perceived that there were no visitors at the church, except for Petro and a few of his friends, who often came during the weekends and brought boxes of clothes and foods for all of us.

It feels odd that despite the building being a holy house of God, nobody from around here comes for prayers. Even the graveyard in the backyard creeps me out.

Also, the other girls are quiet most of the time. They do what they are told, no questions, no arguments. They wake up, eat, do their chores and go back to their rooms, as if they are toys twisted with keys and will only function the way they are built.

I even tried to talk with a few of them but something seemed off. Once I tried to make small talk with Martha who has her room just across from me, but she barely said a single word. The girls are so quiet that it feels suffocating. Their emotionless eyes even give me little to no answer to my queries.

I take off my veil and crown band, loosening my hair. Removing the rest of my tunic, coif and wimple, I change into my long night dress. My eyes look over my shoulder at my sister who is sound asleep from tiredness after gardening chores she did. Smiling at her innocent sleeping form, I walk towards and hitch up the covers before snuggling in bed with her. I clutch

onto my butterfly necklace and picture our mother being here with us. Soon, exhaustion overtakes my mind, bringing me into a deep slumber.

** * **

MY SLEEP IS SHATTERED by a sudden loud cry echoing through the hallway. Frowning, I immediately sit back and look for my sister. She is still asleep by my side and I let out a sigh of relief. Another loud cry echoes as I remove the covers and open the door gently.

“What’s wrong?” I hear my sister’s hoarse, sleepy voice.

I look over my shoulder and shrug. “I don’t know. I think I heard someone crying.”

“Who is crying?” she asks, sitting up and walking towards me while rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

Another cry echoes but this time it sounds like the person is in pain. It sounds like it belongs to a girl.

“Do you think it’s Mother Sophia?” she asks.

Worry engulfs my mind and before I know it, I make my way out with my sister following behind. We head towards the main area where the altar is. The cries echo again.

It is coming from upstairs. Taking the pathway at the right corner, we immediately head up, walking through the corridor where Mother Sophia’s room is. But as we get closer, a different sound greets us.

“Fucking tie her wrists, asshole,” Petro’s rageful voice rings aloud.

“Shhh. Be quiet. The girls will wake up.” Mother Sophia’s tone is no longer gentle and calm like always.

We slow down our pace and tip-toe furthermore, standing right beside the door frame. Craning my neck, I try to get a peak of what is happening. I sensed an unnerving feeling settling in my gut. My throat turned dry and my heart is racing faster than ever.

The door is slightly ajar, giving me the view of Petro and Mother Sophia's back which is dimly lit by the moonlight.

A muffled cry is coming from the room but I can't find the source. I can hear my sister's shallow breathing beside me with her hands tightening their hold on mine.

Something is definitely wrong.

"Five million has been transferred, Petro," one of the men speaks.

"Good. Get this girl in the car and deliver her to the client," Petro orders. He sounds so different... so terrifying.

What client?

"The next girl should be delivered to the next client within fifteen days. Now go." Petro moves aside and that's when the horrific sight haunts me to my soul.

It is Martha. Her hands are tied up tightly with a rope and her mouth is shut with duct tape. Tears are streaming down her face and her eyes are swollen. Fear and tension are pooling her green eyes. Her brown hair is all messed up along with her now dirty nightdress.

My mouth parts from shock and fear. Even my sister's breathing turned ragged.

She is thrashing against their hold but one of the men picks her up and is heading towards the door. My sister and I quickly hide behind the nearest pillar, while hearing Martha's muffled cries and pleading, followed by the heavy footsteps of Petro's men. My heart is beating so fast that I can hear the sound drumming in my ears.

When the footsteps fade away, we get out of the shadow and hear more of Petro's conversation with Mother Sophia.

"What plans do you have for the twins?" she asks, sitting on her bed and smoking a cigarette.

"I need to take their pictures and then add it to our collection to show some clients. Having twin slaves is pretty rare, but it has its own perks as

well. The clients will for sure pay ten million at least for both of them.”

I know very well who he is talking about and it only brings more fear within me. More than when we lived with our foster parents. She lets out a circle of smoke through her lips before taking another drag.

“I will get it done. Don’t worry about it. But don’t forget to give me my share as well.”

He lets out a sigh, running a hand through his hair.

“We’ve been either kidnapping or taking girls for the last three years. We have sold them to the highest bidders for millions, and one day hasn’t passed by when I didn’t give you your share. So, I don’t need a fucking reminder. Your job is to keep things normal here so that no one suspects what is going on.”

“I know my job well. I do half of it for you,” she argues, exhaling smoke through her nostrils and lips.

He scoffs. “Just keep the girls in line and get me the fucking pictures by this week,” he orders and snatches the cigarette from her fingers before taking a long drag.

Everything makes sense now. Realization hits me like a heavy brick, bringing back guilt and fear that was buried.

We ran away from one hell to be summoned into another.

This place may be a church from the outside but inside it holds a horrifying reality. Now I understand why the other girls won’t talk with us. It is out of fear... out of risking their own lives.

Petro runs a sex trafficking business, selling girls to monsters like him while Mother Sophia helps him. They pretend like nothing is happening in front of the outside world.

And we are his next victims.

I meet my sister’s astonished and fearful eyes before I hold her hand tightly and bolt downstairs.

“What will we do now?” she whispers.

“We have to get out. Right now.”

As we walk down the stairs and pass the hallway, my feet accidentally bump with one of the wooden benches, making me wince and shriek in pain at the same time.

The sound is so loud that I am sure Petro must have heard it because within seconds his thudding footsteps ring out loud. From the balcony he immediately finds us and from the look on our faces he figures out what we must have discovered.

“Fuck,” he curses, dashing towards our direction. I tighten my hold on my sister and we both rush towards the main door.

Bursting it open, we run outside with our feet stomping on the cold pile of snow. It slows us down for sure but neither of us looks back. Everything is so dark that I can barely see anything, but that doesn't stop us from running.

But when we reach the iron gate and I try to push it open, it is locked.

Fuck. No. No. No.

This can't be happening.

Before I can look around for another way out, I feel a strong hand grabbing me by my neck. I come face to face with Petro while Mother Sophia holds onto my sister. She is shrieking under her vice hold.

“Let us go! No!” I scream at the top of my lungs, scratching his arms in defense. But that only infuriates him more and he slaps me right across my cheek that the sound echoes around us. It is so harsh that I can already feel my lips bleeding.

Gripping me by my hair, he drags me inside with my sister behind us. I can feel the pain piercing through my scalp before he locks the entrance door and pushes us down the floor below the statue of Jesus Christ.

He takes out his gun, clicking on the safety lock before pointing it at our direction. I protectively wrap an arm around my sister, holding her as

tightly as possible. I feel her trembling with fear but there is nothing I can do to soothe her when the same fear is clutching me by my throat.

“Make one more sound and I won’t hesitate to shoot either of you,” he threatens in a cold as ice voice, making my spine shiver.

Mother Sophia sits on one of the benches looking so calm as if this is having a casual conversation. I started to see her as a mother figure but after seeing this side of her, I hold nothing but disgust towards her.

“If you two think you can escape from here then let me burst that little bubble of hope you have.”

He kneels in front of us with a dark venomous look on his face that makes us cower back until our backs are against the base of the statue.

“No one can escape from here. There is nothing but forest surrounding us. The main town will take days for you to pass. And with the heavy snow you two will probably die on your own. If not, then the wild animals won’t think twice before hunting you down.”

With every word he speaks, my hope for escaping is vanishing into darkness.

“The key out of here is me. So, there is no escaping no matter how much you think or try. And the punishment you two will have after the stunt you pulled tonight–” he snickers under his breath, licking his lips, “–you won’t be able to leave now.”

I frown in confusion and before I know it, he pulls me up, throwing me over his shoulder and heading upstairs.

“Stop it! No! No!” I hit his back with all my might but he doesn’t budge even once.

My sister’s cries for help reach my ears as Mother Sophia drags her towards another room downstairs.

Petro opens one of the doors and strides inside, throwing me on the bed. Locking behind him, he stalks toward with a look that makes my nerves shiver with anxiety. I can barely breathe or think.

As if he knows I am going to run again he quickly reaches underneath and takes out two handcuffs before binding my wrists to the bedpost.

Petro's body shadows over me, leaving a sick feeling in my stomach from terror like never before.

"No! Stay away!" I hiss angrily, giving it all to remain strong.

"Somebody, help me!" I cry out loud. Petro slaps a hand over my mouth as his body tackles me down.

"Nobody will come and save you." He looks at my cross necklace and grins. "Not even God himself."

I squirm, trying to remove his weight, twisting my wrists, but it only stings my skin.

"Get off me!" I spit out. My heart pounding in my chest and my stomach churns with fear and hopelessness.

"I can tell just from your innocence that you are a virgin. And after tonight you won't look at yourself the same way again. It's been a while for me since I fucked a virgin pussy."

My heartbeat gallops when his hand leans underneath my nightdress, taking my shorts and panties down in one swift move. I squirm, thrashing my legs but it's no use. It's all futile.

Tears sting my eyes when he starts to unbuckle his belt and pulls his pants down. I instantly look away, shutting my eyes.

All I can do is blame myself for falling into another trap. For being so naïve and stupid. I should have escaped with my sister the day I started to feel there is something strange about this place. We should have escaped the night we arrived. Things would have been different.

I shut my legs together but he forces them apart before tracing my center and letting out a low grunt. Shame and disgust hit me like a wrecking ball.

"Fuck. Maybe I won't sell you to a bidder. I will keep you to myself, my little slut."

Helpless tears blur my vision as he rips my dress, exposing the rest of my body.

“And once I’m done with you, it will be your sister’s turn.”

No. No. Not her. Not my sister.

“Stay the fuck away from her.”

He chuckles darkly, licking his lips. “You’ve got a spunk in you, don’t you? I will have so much fun fucking it out of you.”

He holds my jaw so tightly that I feel his fingernails digging into my skin. “You and your sister will both be my slaves until your last breaths.”

He rests his body between my legs when I feel his erection against my thigh.

God. Please. No. No. No.

“Stop, please!” I plead. “Please don’t do this. I beg you.” My sob rings out in the room as I give it all to fight him. But it is useless.

A gut-wrenching pain rips through me as he thrusts inside me, not caring that I am absolutely dry. I wail in agony as he moves back and thrusts in again, taking everything from me bit by bit.

My innocence. My sanity. My purity.

Everything is gone. Vanished.

His ragged breath dusts on my cheek as he grips my face, forcing me to look at the monster who is destroying me to my soul.

Tears keep running down my cheeks until I feel like I don’t have anything left. The pain gets worse and worse every time he moves. This is a moment that will be inked in my memory even when I die. It will be a nightmare that will haunt me when I’m in a deep slumber.

“Fuck yeah. You feel so tight. So, fucking good.”

His words will ring in my ears, day and night. Guilt and shame will be part of my shadow, and nothing will ever save me from these.

Nothing.

“This is your punishment, slut. And with every mistake you make, it will get harsher.”

I cry in pain, but he doesn't stop. He keeps moving in and out with a grin on his face as if he has never felt so satisfied.

He clamps his hand down on my mouth, muffling my cries and grunts as he continues with his thrusts. I cry harder because now the pain radiates every part of my body.

But it hurts the most in my chest. My heart no longer belongs to me. It is now shadowed by darkness and cruelty.

After what feels like eternity, he shudders and slumps down on top of me. I can feel something inside me and it makes me even more disgusted with myself. His hand slips off my mouth while I stay there motionless and quiet.

I can't move. I can't speak. I can't hear anything.

It is all blank. Empty.

I no longer exist. I feel absolutely nothing.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 21



ELYSHA

PRESENT

“MA’AM?”

The voice of the waiter jolts me back to reality as I look up and see his eyes hidden behind the black mask.

I shake my head, licking my lips and letting out a deep breath as I try to fight back the horrendous memories.

“What would it be ma’am?” the waiter asks again.

I frown. “Huh?”

He nods towards my empty glass. “Would you like more wine or prefer some other beverage? How about some scotch?”

I nod with a shaky smile. “Sure. Yes, please.”

The waiter replaces my empty glass with a half full scotch before he leaves. Taking a few tentative sips, I let the scotch burn down my throat helping with the distraction. I look around and find everyone in their own world, talking, dancing, laughing and drinking. Having a good time.

I notice some of them looking at me, throwing a dirty look as if my sight makes them sick and angry. Ignoring them I focus on the band playing

melodious music as I enjoy my scotch. The screech of the chair makes me turn around to face a woman taking a seat beside me as she shows off her fake enthusiastic smile.

She does look gorgeous and elegant in her black shimmering gown as it shows off her curves and cleavage. Her blond hair is tied into a side bun. Her left hand shows off her diamond ring and proof of her being married.

“Hello. We haven’t been introduced yet,” she mutters sweetly.

“No, we haven’t. My name is Elysha.” I move my hand forward and she takes it in, giving it a light shake.

“My name is Sienna. I have never seen you before.”

I knew this was coming. Damn it. I should have thought of an answer beforehand. “I am a guest of Mr. Reznikov.”

She arches an eyebrow. “Mr. Reznikov usually doesn’t have guests as far as I know.”

I frown. “Are you his personal assistant?”

She keeps up her fake smile before turning to look over her shoulder as if looking for someone. But when she doesn’t find the person she is searching for, she immediately drops her smile and lets out a huff as she sits back. Gone is the perfect replica of a housewife.

“*Moi shcheki tak silno bolyat,*” she mutters in Russian.

“What?”

She looks back at me giving a nervous smile. “I said my cheeks are hurting badly from constant smiling.”

“Then why do it?”

She rolls her eyes, waving off her hand. “Don’t ask. Everyone here is intrigued about you. *Maxwell’s new fling.*”

“Are you one of his ex-*flings*?” I ask, returning her fake smile.

She grins, biting her lip. “No. I had the least interaction with Maxwell. He is always closed off around women. He barely acknowledges them, especially after his wife’s death.”

My entire body turns still, my heart free falls from shock and a hint of uncertain pain. “What? His wife?”

She nods, raising her hand half way for a waiter as he immediately rushes to her and passes a glass of champagne.

“Yes. He was married but a few years later his wife died during a mafia attack. Since then, he has kept his distance from women.”

“You know a lot about him for someone who had little to no interaction with him.”

She smirks as her cheeks flush. “I never said I had *no interaction* with him. We had our moments together—”

Her words get halted when I lean closer, offering her a cold stare. “You must be one of many he fucked and seeing me with him is just hurting your ego. And I’m sure you must have come here to warn me that I’ll never be his and soon he will get bored of me. Blah, blah, blah.”

Sienna’s eyes widen a bit with unexpected surprise as I notice her fingers tightening around the stem of the glass. Perfect.

She should be nervous. I may have signed up to come to the party to feel normal among people, but I damn well didn’t sign up to be threatened by a nobody.

“Let me tell you something, darling. You will always be one of many. That’s a title you will carry for the rest of your life. But me? I will be known for being the queen who stood beside her king.”

She snorts. “You? His queen?” she chuckles.

A grin pulls across my lips while I cross my legs. One hand resting on my knee while the other is on the table. I sit like a queen should, holding no shame and doubt in my posture and words.

“Yes. *His queen* because unlike you, he takes me out and holds me by his side. Pretty sure he never even cared to look into your eyes while fucking you,” I sneer.

Her silence gives the answer to my question.

I smile with victory puffing in my chest. She gulps the champagne in one go before letting out a short snicker under her breath. “At least I wasn’t a slave he paraded around just for the show. To keep his image of Pakhan intact.”

The word makes my soul burn like inferno, triggering memories that are trying to dig their way out of the graveyards. Again.

No. Don’t go there.

“You think your dress and makeup will hide those scars that easily. Scars that have been left by God knows how many masters. And let’s be real – a slave can never be a queen,” she whispers with a smirk that I want to slap away so badly.

Who said you have to be the victim? Find your own purpose in this dark world that took everything from you.

Maxwell’s words ring in my ear, as if my subconscious is seeking some sort of guidance.

Find your purpose, Elysha.

I let out a deep breath. “Slave or not, he feels no shame or remorse being with me. You said yourself he barely acknowledges a woman. Yet I’m the one who stays in his castle, shares his bed and stands beside him like a queen beside her king. I’m no doll that was born and dressed up to live in a man’s shadow.”

She narrows her eyes with her jaw ticking in anger. *Hit a nerve, I suppose.*

“My scars carry the times my soul has never been shattered. Scars that will remind me I’m a warrior at heart and a queen in my soul. So, with or without Maxwell, I won’t ever be a slave. I will always be a queen who wears her crown that no sinful soul deserves to see.”

Sienna opens and closes her mouth. Words abandon her lips as she gets up and strides away without any further argument.

I sigh heavily as a nervous laugh escapes my mouth. Maxwell was right. Darkness can be beautiful if you make it.

I get up, heading towards the restroom when one of Maxwell's guards calls out to me.

"Elysha! Where are you going?" he asks. I nearly forgot about the security.

"I'm going to the restroom. Don't worry."

He nods towards the door. "I'll be waiting in the hallway."

With a nod I continue walking and enter the bathroom. There is a woman already inside. She reapplies her nude shade lipstick. I finish my business in the bathroom and by the time I get out the woman left. Taking out lip gloss from my black glitter purse, I put it on my plum lips. Putting it back inside, I look up to see my own reflection in the mirror. My eyes fall on the fading scars on my arms.

When I saw the sleeveless gown laid on my bed, I got anxious and nervous about my scars. But I was more scared of the look of disgust people were going to show me. But surprisingly, I only received curious gazes from each and every person in the room. Maybe it was the death glare Maxwell threw every once in a while, but at the end I didn't feel ashamed.

I feel like for once I don't want to blend in. I want to be seen like a queen. A queen who belongs to Maxwell.

Belongs to Maxwell?

I frown and meet my own confused gaze in the mirror. Do I really want to belong to him?

Do I truly want to be by the side of a man who has me captive?

Who has me bound by his rules in his kingdom? A man who sees me as a slave as well?

He may call me by that cursed title all he wants, but unlike the other monsters I was chained to, Maxwell treats me differently.

He treats me like a human.

He carries power, pride and viciousness in his nature. But it only draws me closer to him. He is like a tainted soul, conveying uncountable sins without any regrets, but deep down that evilness shows its dark kindness.

Since the day our paths have collided, I sensed something different about him. At first, I acted out of survival instincts. After so many years of being raped and beaten, one thing I know is not to trust anyone but yourself. Throughout my life every man I met was nothing but another face of a monster, hiding under the disguise of a human. But with Maxwell it wasn't the same.

I felt nothing but hatred towards him when he captured me. The night when I thought he was going to force himself on me... something just broke within me. But when he saw me crying and begging to stop, he stopped. Just like that. No further arguments.

I remember lying in bed for hours, thinking he will come back with a whip or paddle in his hand to punish me like others did. But he never returned.

His deal though made my blood boil as I got to know what a heartless man he was. But when he fucked me on his balcony and I looked into his eyes for the first time, I saw something.

A familiar pull towards him. It felt like I saw those deep, dark eyes somewhere before... a long time ago.

Maybe he felt it too and his own walls grew stronger with his cruelty and harshness towards me. But despite all those, I still want to know him. It is crazy and I am aware of it. But deep down, I can feel it in my gut that we have some sort of connection. Every time he is near me, I feel that electric pull instantly.

But why? Why him?

The bathroom door opens and I shake my thoughts away, looking down at my purse. The loud music faintly echoes inside the bathroom as the band plays *Secrets and Lies*. I zip up my purse and look up in the mirror again.

But the sight that stands behind my reflection makes every nerve in my body go still like cold ice.

My eyes and mouth widen with a gut-wrenching shock. The air leaves my body instantly. I can't move. I can't think. I can't speak.

This... this can't be possible.

"Elysha. It's me."

The familiar shrill voice reaches my ear, bringing a wave of nostalgia in my mind. Memories filled with laughter, joy, pain and guilt crash into my soul like a wrecking ball. That very voice called out to me uncountable times since we were kids.

I breathe, inhale and exhale heavily, begging for more air into my lungs. The person that stands right behind me is someone I thought I have lost forever.

Whose loss ignited guilt in my heart for years. And seeing the living sight of her makes me feel like I am dreaming.

"Rhea..." I whisper out the name.

Rhea. My twin sister.

My sister whom I lost years ago. My sister... whose chopped body parts images have been haunting me day and night.

But here she is. Standing alive and breathing in a black gown, except for her hair is different. It's red now. A mask loosely hangs from her hand.

I shake my head with my eyes shut.

"This can't be real. I'm dreaming. This—"

I feel the warmth of two hands cupping my shoulders, making my body shiver with goosebumps prickling my skin. I open my eyes and slowly raise my head.

She is still there. My sister is still here.

I turn around, tears making my vision blurry, feeling like any minute she is going to vanish into thin air.

But she doesn't disappear.

Before I can think, I immediately wrap my arms around her, engulfing her. I feel her hands around me, both our faces buried in each other's necks.

I tighten my hold around her, still fearful of her disappearance. I don't know for how long we stay like that, but for me it feels like an eternity.

Finally, we both move back and look at each other with tears in our eyes. I cup her shoulder then her face, reassuring myself again and again that this isn't a dream. My sister is alive.

"It's really me, Elysha." She chuckles, holding onto my wrists, planting a kiss on my palm.

I swallow the lump in my throat and press my forehead against hers. "I'm so sorry, Rhea. I...I can never describe to you how sorry I am for not protecting you." A fresh tear streaks down from my eye.

She shakes her head. "It isn't your fault, Elysha. Never blame yourself. Our fates were too cruel for our separation."

My heart still carries the burden of guilt and no amount of console will ever take it off. I lean back and offer her a shaky smile as I touch the loose strands of her now red hair.

"When did you decide to change your hair color?" I ask with a smile through my tears.

She snickers. "Just thought a change was needed after so much has happened." She looks at me from top to bottom with a proud smile.

"You look so beautiful..." Her words fade away with a hint of unease in her tone.

My brows furrow together in confusion. "What's wrong? Is everything alright? And how come you are here?"

I fire up the questions that have been stuck in my head the minute I saw my sister.

She looks over her shoulder at the door before walking towards it and locking. When she returns back, her whole demeanor changes instantly.

The atmosphere grows more serious and tense, making my nerves run with anxiety and sudden fear.

“Rhea, what’s going on? You are scaring me,” I whisper.

She licks her lip and lets out a heavy sigh. “I thought I would break this down to you bit by bit, but we don’t have much time.”

I hold onto her elbows tightly as I feel agitation spreading like black ink onto my soul. “Are you in danger, Rhea? If you are then say it right now. I can help you this time. I know someone who will help us—”

“Are you talking about Maxwell Reznikov?” she completes my sentence.

“How do you know?”

She nods, letting out a shaky breath and crosses her arms. “Because I met him before you and we got a little close, too.”

“What do you mean you met him?”

“I work at the bar in his underground and we met there. And soon we got really close and I slept with him.”

I shouldn’t be feeling any pain after hearing this but for some unknown reason... it hurts. It hurts knowing that Maxwell slept with my sister, even though he didn’t know she is related to me. The lump in my throat makes it feel clogged with emotions while my heart beats faster than a horse.

“But then I left him because I didn’t want to be with a monster like him.”

He isn’t a monster. I almost said.

“But then I saw you that night with him. I was on the same street and I saw you running towards the police. I couldn’t believe myself that you were actually here and alive. I was rushing to get to you but Maxwell got to you before me and just took you away.”

“Then why didn’t you come to his house and take me away?”

She places her palm against my right cheek. “You know well I couldn’t risk it. He is the Pakhan. He rules every corner of Russia. If he even told a

random woman to shoot me then she wouldn't hesitate to do it. We both need to be safe to get out of here. Nothing can be risked when it comes to Maxwell."

"Rhea... believe me in this. I have been with Maxwell for weeks now and he is different. He may always wear the mask of Satan for the world but underneath... there is someone who can help us."

She snorts, rolling her eyes. "I knew this would happen. I hoped he wouldn't get you wrapped around his strings and make you his puppet."

I shake my head vigorously. "You are getting it wrong, Rhea. He—"

"What does he hold over you, Elysha? Does he know about me? About *us*? Did he threaten you with my life?"

I shake my head. "I don't think he knows about us."

She frowns and I can feel her mind running a mile with thoughts just to figure out the mystery behind it.

"Is it your freedom?" she asks.

My eyes cast down with guilt, knowing well that I deserve to live a life of misery because of losing my sister, and yet I want freedom... a normal life with her in it.

My silence answers her question and she lets out a humorless snicker. "Bravo, Maxwell." she slowly claps her hand, "It only took him a few days to get you under his control."

I gulp, licking my dry lips. "You are getting this all wrong, Rhea. I don't know how long you've known him but he isn't the man that the world knows," I say as my tone turns defensive and aggressive. "The world knows nothing about anyone. You and I both know that very well since the day we were abducted. Normalcy is myth. Darkness, pain, corruption and lies are the actual façade the world is built up with. But as long as you are prideful, powerful and ruthless then this darkness can be beautiful."

Rhea steps back with a smile that clearly says she isn't impressed with my words. "Here I was thinking I would be able to save my sister from that

Satan, but my sister isn't even here."

I frown, realizing what I actually said. We both were dragged into this dark world against our will. We were never meant to be part of this darkness. Our innocence, respect, freedom... everything was ripped away from us. We both loathed this world since the first day.

But here I am. Standing in front of my twin sister, justifying and defending the world and its king, Maxwell.

"He is no saint, Elysha. Believe me."

"He is no evil either, Rhea. Believe me," I retort.

She shakes her head looking down as if unable to meet my eyes from disgust, which only reflects the pain in my heart. Her slender fingers run through her red hair.

"Can't you see that he is brainwashing you?" she grasps my shoulder, "We both suffered and know what darkness looks like and it's nowhere near beauty, Elysha." Her words sheathe through her teeth like venom.

"He saw me and you as well. He definitely knows we are related, and he is just using you for his fucked-up tricks just to mind fuck you."

As her words settle in my mind, realization punches me in the gut with a sickening feeling. Maxwell knows my sister, he literally slept with her and knows we are related, and yet the other night he kept on asking about my sister like he was actually curious to know about me. It felt like someone was willing to see what was hiding deeper within me, but he was just playing with my head, pretending he knows nothing.

Holding me by my shoulder she turns me around and we both face the mirror, watching our reflections with her behind me.

"Maxwell is using us, Elysha. He first fucked me because I was just a challenge for him. The minute I caved in he was done and didn't look back again. He is doing the same with you. He is using you for his needs and when the time comes, he will leave you as well... just like he did all those years ago."

“What? Years ago... when? What are you talking about?”

Her dark eyes glimmer with sadness and pity. “Maxwell is the boy who left both of us years ago. He is the boy who promised both of us freedom but he was the one who escaped and never returned for us.”

A gasp of shock leaves through my parted mouth as I feel my word turning upside down. I know which boy she is talking about.

I knew that boy since the night I went to him and healed his wounds. I can never forget in a million lifetimes about our moments.

Our kiss... his touch... his pain.

Everything is still fresh in my mind like it all happened yesterday. Rhea, reminding me about him, brings all those deeper, faded wounds back as they bleed out with sorrow and betrayal.

Maxwell is *him*.

Did he know all along?

As if Rhea could hear my unuttered question she speaks up.

“He doesn’t know yet but he is getting suspicious about it. I heard him talking about it in the underground. That’s why he is keeping you, to get more clues about our connection. He is using you like he did before.”

My blurry vision meets her eyes on the mirror while she watches me with pity. I hate it. I don’t want her pity.

It has never resolved anything. It is nothing else but people believing you are weak. Vulnerable. The betrayal that I buried years ago, when he never came back for me, ignited like an inferno.

“Don't shed tears for his betrayal, Elysha. He was never worth it,” she whispers close to my ear, making me realize I am actually crying. My mascara smeared around my eyes.

“But it’s not over yet. We can still get our freedom and our revenge.”

Memories of the night I first got here and he kept calling me Rhea flashes in my mind. I was so eager to find a way out that I didn’t pay much

attention to what name he referred to me as. Now that I see it, see the truth... It hurts.

I let out a shaky breath before I meet my own gaze. I look broken... lost. I feel like a deer who got fooled twice by the same predator, falling into his trap again and again.

This is the same image I witnessed when he left me and took my heart along with him, leaving me broken. I was shattered then and now, years later, he is breaking me again.

My head casts down as I lick my lips, tasting the saltiness of my tears that I'm wasting over him. Over Maxwell.

This time I don't let anger and pain simmer to be buried into my bank of memories. Not this time. *Not ever again, Maxwell Reznikov.*

He may have broken me once but not again. This time the queen will rule, watching the king being defeated. I will be his nightmare dressed like a daydream. I will be the kindle of fire that will burn down his kingdom that he built with blood and darkness.

I look back up, letting determination for revenge germinate within my dark heart. He wants a battle, I will show him war.

My gaze shifts towards my sister who carries the same expression as me, giving a gentle squeeze on my shoulders.

"How do we do this?" I ask with my cold and emotionless tone.

"I have a plan and someone who will help us."

"Who?"

"Francisco."

CHAPTER 22



ELYSHA

By the time I leave the restroom with my guard following behind carrying a suspicious look, Maxwell enters the main hall. His eyes scan around with a frown, but when they settle on me they soften for a moment. But immediately the roughness crawls back as if he realizes the environment he is in.

Were any of his words about his respect towards me true? Was he lying since the first day?

I wonder if the affection he had for his own mother was faked as well.

He walks towards me with his confident strides, carrying the power and pride in the room like the king he is.

“Where did you go?” he asks, standing in front of me with his hands inside his pockets.

I keep a calm face but inside I am scorching with devastation and aggravation. He puts on his fake mask to throw dirt in my eye. In order to wound me again, but this time I am prepared and ready with my own fake mask on.

“The restroom.”

He nods and looks around. “We should head back. It’s getting late.”

I nod back and hook my arm through his as we make our way outside. Once we get inside the car, he takes off his mask. My eyes are fixated on the empty streets of his kingdom.

After a few minutes of absolute silence, his phone starts ringing. He picks up the call right away as if he was waiting for it and answers it. Though he doesn't say anything. The voice from the other side is muffled but I hear the name Nicholai.

"Give her my condolence and the funeral arrangements will be taken care of. Tell her not to worry about it," he mutters and hangs up the call before looking at the passing streets.

"Whose funeral were you talking about?" I ask, unable to hide my curiosity anymore.

"Nicholai's. He died from a heart attack a few minutes ago," he says in a monotonous tone as if it is a casual conversation.

I frown, feeling something is off about it. He lost one of his members and he has no sign of actual sympathy written on his face.

"Did he really die of a heart attack?"

He faces me, offering me a blank look before leaning forward. He presses a button and I hear the screen window coming up, giving us privacy from his driver.

"What makes you think otherwise?" he asks with a hint of threat behind his voice.

"You just seem so calm. Everyone there looked like they would give their life for Bratva. Yet, you have no sign of emotion from the news. No sympathy, no respect either."

Suddenly, he grabs my waist, hoisting me up and places me on his lap. His one hand tightly wrapped around my hips with his other hand, taking off my mask before they dig into my hair. I look down at him as he presses my forehead against his.

The instant electricity builds up between us, my anger and pain start to dim slowly. And as my eyes meet his, I can't help but think of the boy I met that night.

He looked so wounded and broken then. I was so fearful to even touch him, thinking he will shatter like a glass right in front of me.

How can that broken boy be so ruthless and heartless today?

What changed?

I felt it... the connection... the longing. I felt it all since the day he captured me but I wasn't ready to acknowledge it. Now all those emotions feel like a stab at my back, making my skin bleed like a river.

"This is the reality, Elysha. You can't even trust your close ones. Everyone is after you the second they see you ruling over your life, having control over it unlike becoming the slaves like them," he whispers with his lips dusting kisses over my cheeks.

My entire body starts to warm up with the heat of desire. I close my eyes, taking deep breaths to suppress it but his lips outsmart my distraction. His hold around my waist tightens and I feel his erection digging against my ass.

"So you arranged a murder conspiracy to keep your kingdom in place," I mutter.

He grabs my hair in a tight fist, making me gasp as he leans my head closer to him. He licks his lips. His hungry eyes meet mine.

"I'd rather kill someone than become a prey. I have been there once and I'm fucking sure I never want to return. I won't ever bow down to anyone."

He has been there, and I know it because I bore that weakness with him. Night after night I would visit him, risking my own life just to make sure his wounds were treated.

But unfortunately, I got blinded by his kindness, I got trapped by his innocence that I didn't see my downfall until it was too late. I was such a fool to pour out my heart to him.

“Do you trust me?”

“More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you do.”

Love. Trust.

All meaningless to him. They are nothing but a way for him to bribe me. To trap me in his net while he got free.

I feel his hand skating through the slit of my dress, navigating further until his knuckles brush the lace of my panties.

He lets out a grunt at the back of his throat before hooking his fingers against the loop and tearing it apart. I intake a rasped breath feeling the mixture of lust and anger swelling in my nerves. For days he fucked me and I let him. With every intimate moment we spent, I felt my lost self, returning back bit by bit.

But tonight, I want to fuck without any affection.

I want the hate. The pain. The lust.

I want it all and setting us both on fire like there is no tomorrow. The atmosphere soon shifts and I get comfortable on his lap by striding him. I pull out the pins letting my hair loose. Cupping his face, I dig my fingernails against his subtle, earning a hiss through his clenched teeth. His lustful eyes scorch my body while his hands cup my ass, giving it a hard squeeze. The car starts to slow down, indicating we are at the driveway of his house.

“I want to fuck. Right here, right now,” I whisper and nibble his bottom lip. His nostrils flare, the hunger flashing in his eyes before he clicks on the switch again.

“Park on the driveway and leave. Don’t open the door for us and tell the guards—”

I shake my head. His eyes widen with surprise when he realizes what I mean. Let his men also know how fucked up I can be.

There is a few seconds silence between us, except for our ragged breaths before he speaks again. “Tell the guards to leave as well. Now,” he barks his last order, reflecting his desperation.

The car stops and I hear the driver speaking quickly in Russian, followed by several footsteps until complete silence dawns on us.

Without any further thought I kiss him deeply, pouring out every build-up emotion I had locked down. My fingers thread through his thick hair, holding it into a tight grip. I am sure I am hurting him but I don’t care.

He kisses me with everything he has, behaving like a hungry predator who can’t get enough of me. He licks my neck from the back of my ear down to the swell of my breasts. I shiver. My hips gyrate against his caged erection. I feel his eyes boring into me as he continues to lick my skin.

Maxwell cups my breasts through my dress, kneading and pinching my nipple in an almost painful way. It makes me grow even wetter. I close my eyes to avoid those hidden fake emotions. My straps fall down, making my dress loose and giving Maxwell the opportunity to take my uncovered breasts into his mouth. He sucks hard with his tongue circling around my nipple. I throw my head back with a loud moan. His lips clamp harder, making my mind go crazy with anticipation.

Get him under your control. Rhea’s words echo in my mind bringing me back to reality. He is controlling my desire like always. *Not tonight.*

I hold his face and pull him away from my breasts with a plop sound. Arching my back against his hand on my ass, I grab his hair making his head tilt back.

We both keep breathing heavily as our eyes darken, drinking each other in with desire fueling our bodies and hunger for our own obsession.

Keeping my eyes on him, I tug on his tie and rip open his white shirt with the buttons falling apart. My fingers skate down on his body with my nails clawing on his skin. I release the tension on my nerves by hurting him. He hisses but doesn’t mind at all. His inked skin is turning red with my

nails leaving marks before my hands start to work on unbuttoning his pants. His calloused ones roam my naked back, sending tingles down my spine.

Taking his hard cock in my hand, I give it a few strokes. The sound of his choked-up grunts when I squeeze him is like music to my ears. He is so hard that his veins are popping on his skin with precum leaking at the top. Swiping my thumb on the head, I collect the sticky come before sucking it clean.

Maxwell is about to lose his mind for sure. I can see in his eyes how badly he wants to devour me and make me his. He groans and attempts to sit up but I push him back on the seat.

“I want to fuck, so we fuck my way,” I whisper.

Hitching my dress up, I sit on his aching cock, letting my wet pussy lips lube it up by moving back and forth.

“Fuck,” he hisses, closing his eyes as his fingers dig into my skin.

The friction makes my insides clench, deep desire makes sweat drip down from the back of my neck.

“Put my cock inside you. Right now,” he orders, breathing harshly.

I shake my head with a dark snicker as I grab his neck. “Not everything has to go according to the plan of the king.”

He arches an eyebrow. “Why is that?”

“Even the queen has her needs. I have taken your pain for days and turned it into pleasure. Tonight, it’s your turn to return the favor.”

He smirks but it immediately gets replaced with his scrunched-up face from pain that my fingernails are causing.

My desire starts to skyrocket and I get wetter with every stroke against his pulsing cock. Unable to stand it anymore, I take his cock, guiding it to my center and lower myself.

Both of us groan, throwing our heads back. He brings me closer before I continue to slowly move up and down, feeling the sweet, sweet ache.

But when I look back at his face, his eyes are closed with his lips parted as he floats in pleasure, making his betrayal hit me all over again.

I start to move faster and harder. He groans and grunts, keeping his dark eyes fixated on me.

This is little to no pain for him at the moment, but when the time comes, he will know what I truly felt when he left me. He will understand the true meaning of agony and abandonment.

Why did you leave me alone when I needed you the most, Maxwell? Was my love not enough? I mentally ask him even though I know he won't be able to answer.

The rage fuels my motions and passion to hurt him. By this time, I can feel the blood trickling from his skin.

"Fucking God," Maxwell groans out loud and starts to move his hips too, turning the ache into mind-numbingly desirable one.

The sounds of our skin slapping, followed by my loud moans and his groans fill the atmosphere.

"Ah! Faster," I whisper harshly.

He picks up the pace, making both of us get at the breach of intensity. He reaches up and cups my face to bring me closer before claiming it with his mouth, his tongue taking possession of me.

"Fuck, you feel divine every fucking time I'm inside you," Maxwell rasps. I moan in response. It does feel divine. It feels like heaven every time. But the betrayal is too deep.

I try to shut my mind off and only focus on the way I am hurting Maxwell while using his body for my pleasure.

Maxwell's hands move down, clasping my hips. I cling onto him for dear life as I throw my head back, gasping and whimpering. The sound of his moan spurred me on even more, triggering both of us to orgasm at the same time.

The windows are fogged from our moment. Our foreheads are pressed against each other while we take a moment to let our nerves calm down. I open my eyes and find my fingernails coated with blood. *Maxwell's blood.*

The ping of guilt shouldn't be there because that's what I wanted. I wanted him to be in pain and I got that. But the satisfaction I was looking for isn't emerging.

God, what the hell is happening? Why am I being so weak?

He follows my gaze, and instead of being shocked he offers me a wicked grin. I am left speechless when he brings my index finger to his mouth, licking the blood clean.

"Pain and pleasure are a deadly combination. But dear Lord, what a sinful and divine combination it is," he whispers, leaning in and kissing my lips softly as I taste the copper flavor on my tongue along with his sweet, minty flavor.

"Hurt me all you want, little girl. Get back at me for hurting you, but remember that Satan was born for pain. So, give it your best shot," he challenges me with his gruff voice.

But when our gazes meet, I realize why that ray of guilt shines upon my soul, and it terrifies me like nothing ever had.

I quickly look down, trying to catch my breath, and calm down my racing heart and pulse.

Maxwell kisses my shoulder blade. "But I like this side of you. It gives me a reflection of my own self. Powerful and fearless."

I stiffen and would have pulled away if his hands didn't cage me against his body.

Eventually, he pulls out of me and we fix our attires and clean up. I can't meet his gaze. I can't let him see through me this time.

I let myself be free but this time I have to be more careful, especially with my heart which still beats for Maxwell with the undying love he sought years ago.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 23



ELYSHA

PRESENT

The next morning, I head downstairs for breakfast. Maxwell is already at the table, sipping his regular black coffee while reading the newspaper.

His brows are furrowed in focus but when he hears my footsteps his eyes meet mine for a fleeting second. Then they drop on the paper again. His skull ring rests on his left hand, where it always remains. So far, I've never seen him without it.

I take a seat on his right this time rather than at the furthest chair. One of the maids comes in and serves me the usual breakfast I have been having since the day I came here. I dig into my food, feeling famished suddenly. But my mind is somewhere else. It is running at the speed of a hamster on a wheel to find ways to gain Maxwell's trust.

Rhea told me to find as much information as possible about his business to deliver to Francisco. I don't know who Francisco is but it is clear he wants to rip away the power and kingdom Maxwell built with blood and corruption. He wants to bring Maxwell back on earth... back to reality... where he would be a nobody.

Nobody.

But *how* is the question.

I have circled around his property several times to look for an escape, but just like a king his castle is heavily guarded. They even patrol the premises at night. There is even security at my door which I'm sure Maxwell assigned strictly for me. Rhea did give me a burner phone last night to contact her, but with the men being at my door twenty-four seven, it's risky. If I called her and the guards found out, then Maxwell wouldn't hesitate to kill me and my sister. There is no way to pass the information to Rhea unless I meet her outside personally, without anyone following me.

"What are you thinking?" Maxwell's gruff voice snaps me back to reality as I look upon his darkening eyes.

I ignore the stab of betrayal to keep my mind calm. He is a master at reading people, and I can't risk giving away my thoughts to him.

I shake my head with a shrug. "Nothing."

He sits back with his fingers resting on his lips that has kissed every inch of my body several times. Just thinking about it makes my nerves shiver with need.

Don't go there, Elysha. Don't fucking go there. There was never a connection.

He keeps staring blankly as if waiting for me to elaborate.

"What?" I retort back.

"Just waiting for you to tell the truth. It's crystal clear that something is bothering you because after last night you do seem... different."

"Is that *different* bad?" I mutter coldly, offering him a deadpan expression.

He grins wickedly like the Satan he is.

"Might be bad for the people who think being your true self isn't a moral deed. They always want that person to blend in. Trust me when I tell you, Elysha, a queen like you isn't meant to do that. You are meant to hold your head high without fear or shame."

My heart skips a beat right there and then. Here I was seconds ago, feeling clueless and lost in my thoughts. And he brings strength swelling in my nerves. His fucking words work like black magic that is like a charm but taints your soul with darkness.

“Something has definitely happened last night because what happened in the car was very unlike you.”

Our moment last night immediately flashes in my mind, making me flush. The passion, the anticipation... the desire.

“What happened last night at the ball, Elysha?” he asks, leaning closer.

I shake my head. “What does it matter to you?”

Suddenly he grasps my chin with a tight hold, but not painfully, urging me to look at him with a brave face.

“You are mine. Everything that you do matters to me.”

“You mean everything your *rab* does, matters to you?”

He narrows his eyes with annoyance written on his face. “You and I both know you have thrown away that title the day you showed your fierceness by challenging me. I respect you for that fierceness and bravery now.”

Fucking liar.

“So, don’t call yourself a *rab* unless you want to get on my nerves. Either be brave or be stupid. Stick to one because confused women never appeal to me.”

He lets go of my chin and sits back, but his anger is still shadowing over him. I can feel it.

Just then his phone rings and I see the name *Mother* flashing on his screen. He quickly answers before pressing it against his ear.

“Hello, mother,” he mutters, his voice no longer cold and furious. As if a switch is flipped and his entire demeanor changes.

“How is my son today?” I hear from the other side.

He smiles softly. "I'm doing well. How did your appointment go?" he asks.

I frown, feeling curious about what appointment he is talking about.

"It went well. The doctor said it's nothing to worry about. She said it is just stress from all the charity work."

I notice Maxwell's jaw ticking but he doesn't speak anything about it.

"Speaking of charity, carnival time is coming, and I thought of arranging a small event for the children."

He is silent for several seconds before nodding slightly. "Whatever you wish, mother. Don't worry about the budget. Do whatever you feel is good."

"Actually, I was thinking if you could join in, too. The children will love your company."

There is that uncomfortable silence again before he breaks it with his deep, gruff voice. "I will be busy, mother—"

"I knew you would give that excuse. But I really want you to come to this, Maxwell. Please... for me."

"I will think about it. And let me know when your next appointment is."

"Of course, son."

Another silence passed by, but this time Maxwell's mother speaks first. "Is Elysha with you right now?"

His eyes widen slightly with surprise before moving towards me. "Yes. But why?"

"Pass the phone to her, dear."

Without any question he gives me the phone and I take it hesitantly.

"Hello, Mrs. Reznikov."

"Hello, Elysha. And I have told you to call me Catherine, my dear," she says with a laugh.

I chuckle slightly under my breath. "Of course, Catherine."

Maxwell's eyes settle on me. Cold and dark.

“Anyway, I wanted to invite you to a small carnival I am arranging. I would love it if you joined with Maxwell and spent the day with the children.”

I freeze on the spot because the question is totally unexpected. I can't say *no* to her because that would be rude, and I don't want to say *no* anyway. I can use this opportunity to know more about Maxwell and plot against him.

“Sure. I'd love to.”

“Great. I'm sure the children will be delighted to meet you.”

Maxwell extends his hand. “Give me the phone,” he orders.

He is too anxious that he snatches it from my grasp. “Mother, I will call you later. I have an important meeting.”

“No problem, dear. The event will be next week. Don't be late.”

“Of course, mother. Take care.”

“You, too, son.” She hung up.

Maxwell looks livid.

“What?” I ask. “I didn't tell her to invite me.”

With his hard jaw he snaps his fingers, and as if the maid knows what he wants, she miraculously takes away his empty plate before leaving the room. Even the few guards leave me and Maxwell alone.

“Are you annoyed that your mother invited me?”

“No.”

I roll my eyes. “Then what is it about? What has made you feel so irritated?”

“It's about betraying my mother. It's about making her step into a false world where she hopes that I will...” his words fade away as if he wishes to keep them incomplete.

“You don't have to come with me. I will tell her on the day you weren't feeling well.” With that he abruptly gets up and starts to leave the dining room.

“Wait.”

His footsteps pause but he doesn't turn. I stride towards him. No fear. No hesitation.

I stand in front of him, facing his cold glare.

“My life is already a mess and I certainly don't need a man like you to make it worse. I have told you before that I expect respect and equality in exchange of keeping this a secret from your mother. And if you really care so much about her finding out what her dear son is hiding underneath that polite and sweet demeanor then let me go,” I mutter in the heat of exasperation and irritability.

“Set. Me. Free,” I hiss the words through my clenched teeth, repeating my ultimate need the millionth time in front of the man who took it away from me in the first place.

He remains quiet as he stands tall and proud like the king he is in his kingdom of sinners. But the coldness is crystal clear in his attitude, and it only makes me hate him more because the sight itself still affects me. *He affects me.*

“I'm not that easy to manipulate, little girl. You think using my mother as a weakness will make me free you? Don't even care to bring you back to reality, but you are mine now. I'm not letting you go that easily.”

My brows furrow with confusion and fear of being trapped again with another monster, but it's worse this time.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“I mean what I say. You are not leaving that easily—” He cups my face with both his rough palms and leans closer, “—because once something is mine, I never *ever* let that go. You belong to me now and no one else.”

Belong to him? Is he in love with me?

No. It can't be. He is incapable of love. Blood starts pounding in my ears. “Are... are you falling in love with me?”

He chuckles under his breath immediately as if I told a joke and it is indeed funny.

“How can you still live in the world of delusion after everything you’ve been through?”

His words feel like the harsh snap of a whip that I’ve experienced several times, but this time the pain is in my heart, burning my nerves.

“I have no heart that is built for love. It is and always will be tainted with darkness and sin. Even God himself can’t perform a miracle and bloom love in my heart,” he whispers. His face shadowing over me as his nose traces my temple, inhaling my scent. His deep hum reflects his approval as if he is addicted to it like a drug. My skin scatters with goosebumps and my shallow breathing starts to surrender under his grasp.

“Don’t ever mistake my twisted kindness for love. I was never made for it. Stop looking at a glimpse of kindle in a dark, endless tunnel because it has no existence there.”

I am already telling myself he is not even worthy of being in love. Satan himself craves for hatred and darkness... just like Maxwell does. But hearing those harsh words make reality even more unbearable.

“You came here as my slave and you will be living under my roof as that. Only difference is, you get the privilege of normalcy that a slave never gets. You will get the respect and equality in exchange for giving me what I want. So, be lucky.”

I turn my head to face him, looking up at his dark eyes that hold the reflection of a devil I wish I never met. I return his gaze with the same coldness. My heart starts to thaw from his harsh words.

“Be lucky? For what?” Hatred oozing from my voice.

“For being a slave to another monster? A man who pretends to be an innocent angel in front of his mother, keeping her far away from reality?” I snicker, “You are scared to lose your mother because of the secrets you are

hiding but I call it bullshit. You don't know about real loss because that only happens when you love someone more than you love yourself."

I snicker in disgust. "No wonder your wife never loved you."

The second he hears those words, I feel his hand moving down to my neck and tightening its grip on me. The grasp is rough. That makes it a little difficult for me to breathe but I stay strong. I won't break in front of him... never again.

"Who the fuck told you about her?" he sneers.

"You think people worship you out of fear, but in reality they still see your weaknesses. They talk about how your love for your wife made you weak. I really wish they knew that you don't have a heart to even feel love."

His jawline ticks as I hear his teeth grinding against each other.

"What? Did I hit a nerve, *sir*?" I ask.

His other hand grips the back of my head, pulling my hair strands and making my head tilt back. I hold onto his arms, feeling the stretch in my muscles from my neck being craned furthermore.

"You don't know anything about me, so you are in no position to judge me. You are a slave, so do what a slave should do."

He brings his face closer to mine as I watch his nostrils flare. The moment makes me see that if any feeling ever exists between us then it is hatred.

Only hatred.

I slap his hand away and move back with a look of revulsion on my face. "Now that I see your true reflection, I do know one thing about you without a shadow of doubt. You are nothing but a selfish and heartless soul disguised as a human."

I will always hate you, Maxwell Reznikov. I swear on my last breath.

CHAPTER 24



MAXWELL

PRESENT

SHE LEAVES RIGHT AWAY, not bothering to listen to me any further. I got what I wanted.

I only promised to give her respect and equality that she never got the opportunity to experience, and I was willing to do both for her.

But last night something happened. Something has changed. *She has changed.*

She is stronger than the day I met her. But in her deep black eyes, I see something else, too. An unknown emotion that she is hiding very well.

My mother took me by surprise, asking Elysha to join the carnival. But the moment realization took place that I *wanted her* by my side, it made me see how much she was taking control bit by bit.

It angered me so fucking much that inside I was boiling with ferocity like a volcano about to explode. The only thing I knew would let that control go was being heartless to her.

That's what I did, and that's what I will be doing from now on while keeping the end of our deal.

Then why the fuck did it pain my dark as tar heart to see her being hurt by my words?

Why? Fucking why?

Elysha mentioning my dead wife did trigger my anger. Even though I didn't love my wife, I still felt used. And the thought itself was enough to make me want to kill her all over again. Maybe someone from the party has told it to her. They usually act as if they had no other fucking job but to blabber bullshit about others.

Although Elysha didn't hesitate for one second to use it to weaken me, and like a fucking moron I let her.

She doesn't know even half of what I've been through. Despite the hurtful past she must have endured. But she will never be able to understand my ultimate pain.

No one will ever understand. *No one.*

I don't owe Elysha any explanation about my wife or about my past. I will meet her demands because I am a man of my word, but I won't let a fucking woman control my life again.

If she wants to live in the delusion that my wife was the victim, then so be it. It gives her more reason to hate me which I truly want.

But it still fucking hurt to see that look of aversion on her face. That repulsion in her eyes.

I run a hand through my hair, cursing under my breath. I tear my gaze from the door where she left moments ago before I walk in the same direction and leave the house. Getting inside my car my driver takes me to the underground gun supply. The area is protected from unwanted eyes by the curve of the peninsula. All resorts and motels are on the other side. That's where tourists mostly visit.

Another car pulls beside mine, but I know who it belongs to.

Lucifer.

I grin when he exits the car with his own guards following him. He hasn't changed much. His dark raven hair is pushed back with his five o'clock shadow making him much older than he already is. His navy-blue suit fits tightly against his broad physique as he walks towards me.

"You look old," I mutter teasingly.

"You don't look bad either, grandpa. Your white hair is already showing," he retorts.

I chuckle as we embrace each other in a brotherly hug. Lucifer always has been a close friend of mine even though he belongs to the Italian mafia. We share a few businesses for our own benefits, helping each other. But that notion changed for Lucifer after the biggest tragedy wrecked his world.

"It's great to see you, my friend."

Lucifer pats my back before moving back. "It's good to see you, too."

We head inside, passing the security gate and other chambers.

"How is Elena?" I ask.

His face immediately softens when I mention his daughter. "Very curious as always. She never stops asking questions." He snickers under his breath.

"But she recently joined kickboxing class and she is really enjoying it."

The news take me by surprise, but also I didn't expect anything else. After what he has been through, he is super protective of his daughter. Even though he treats Elena like his little princess, he is determined to raise a queen who would never have to depend on anyone to defend her.

"She is turning into a fighter. Impressive," I say.

He smiles proudly. "That's my daughter."

My guards follow me inside the meeting room where the new dealers from London are waiting for us. It is a sphere room with a huge black, wooden table at the center. Our dealers, Nathan and Julius, are already sitting and discussing something.

Their fair skin and dirty blond hair make them look quite young for being involved in the world of crime. Seeing both of us approaching, they stand up and shake hands with us, before we all take our seats.

We are surrounded by our own guards but theirs are outnumbered by my men.

Julius starts off the meeting as he puts on his glasses.

“Let’s get to the point, shall we?”

I nod and sit back while he snaps his fingers at his man who brings a duffel bag and places it on the table with a loud thud.

“We got all the new models for you. These arrived last week,” he mutters and opens the bag, taking out a black, polished AR-15.

Then he takes out a case that holds twenty silver bullets and starts to load them in. “This model holds twenty to thirty bullets and can be fired from a range of four hundred to six hundred meters.”

He swiftly unlocks the safety buttons and places the weapon on his shoulder, aiming the gun at the glass with a mannequin behind it which was already set when we got in the room. He pulls the trigger and we all watch the bullet going at horse speed and shattering the glass and hitting the mannequin with a perfect shot. I look back at Lucifer who nods his approval. The model does seem really good

“A clean shot.” He puts it down and takes out the rest of the gun from the bag, putting them in a serial line, “We are the first suppliers of this but we want to expand it.”

He sits back, pushing the glass against the bridge of his nose. His brother, Nathan, looks at me with a stoic expression.

“We only have territories around America and Jamaica who provide our weaponries, but with the help of your shipping routes we can broaden our supplies.”

I nod with my fingers tapping on the table as I give more thought to it.

He turns to Lucifer before speaking again, “And you have enough extra storage space to keep our weapon supplies hidden from the authorities.”

Lucifer looks at me as we exchange silent thoughts about the dealings.

“We will give you twenty-five percent profit from every sale. The money will be deposited right away to your accounts.”

I frown as I lean forward with my hands resting on the wooden, polished surface. “You not only want the shipping routes but even the storage. And yet you offer only twenty-five percent profit. Do we look like fucking beggars to you or are you both fucking amateurs?” I mutter with coldness oozing from my tone.

“You are dealing with a Kaznachey and a Pakhan who control the main cities. Remember you came to us for help. We didn’t fucking come to you to waste our time with such pity offers,” Lucifer grunts out the words through clenched teeth. Anger is seeping from our bodies, making the atmosphere fill with tension and silence.

Julius snickers under his breath with a grin plastered on his face which I want to fucking pierce with my blade.

“But we *are* offering, Mr. Reznikov. The way you are handling Russia—” he snorts, “—very few people would make deals with you.”

“What do you mean?” Lucifer asks with her brow furrowed.

“News spread faster than wind, Lucifer. Mr. Reznikov has been recently having trouble with an unknown nemesis who is wiping half of his territory. And he still hasn’t caught him.”

How I’m badly craving to draw my knife out and curve it on his yapping mouth until he bleeds out.

I feel Lucifer’s questioning look on me, but I stay quiet. Now isn’t the time.

“And yet you come to us to expand your business. We won’t accept more than sixty-five percent. Take it or leave it, or else find someone else for your business.”

My words seem to affect Nathan more as his eyes suddenly widen with tension and anxiety.

“No! Mr. Reznikov, he doesn’t mean that,” he starts. His vexed eyes dart towards his brother, who keeps his gaze fixated on me. Not willing to comply with his brother’s decision.

It is clear the fucker is here to provoke me rather than have a deal with me. He is waiting for the moment where I will lose my control and do something reckless.

Both of them may look in their twenties but fucking God, they are like toddlers in the dark world of crime.

The fucker definitely didn’t do his homework, but unfortunately for him, I did my part.

Letting out a sigh I get a grip on my simmering rage and lean forward.

“Mr. Reznikov, I apologize on my brother’s behalf. He is not—”

Julius rolls his eyes with a scoff. “Nathan, I told you before about this. Maxwell Reznikov may have been known as the next king of Bratva once, but soon even that title will be taken away. His days are numbered.”

I grin, looking calm. Way too calm.

“Don’t forget who has been so eager for this deal to happen, you little shit.” I am done with formalities.

“Your arrogance proves the worth of your business which has barely even taken its first step,” I speak.

His jaws ticks as he looks back and forth from his brother to me while trying to remain serene. But it is clear from the sweat trickling down from his sideburns that it is becoming difficult for him.

“You want this deal to happen more than anything, especially your uncle. Otherwise your own weapon production company is definitely going to slip from your control.”

Both of them have their mouth parted in shock as they look at each other.

“It’s better for both of you, lousy fuckers, to agree,” Lucifer says as he snaps his fingers and points to the door.

“Or else there’s the door for you both to walk out.”

Julius wants to argue again but his brother shoves him back by his shoulder.

“We agree to your terms, Mr. Reznikov. You will get the profits without any complications.”

Julius' face is flustered with anger and embarrassment.

“Good.” I nod as my eyes never left Julius’s scorching ones.

“We can start the shipments by next month. They should be ready by then. Get the paperwork set by the next few days and we both will look over it. Deal?” I ask.

Nathan nods and leans his hand forward. “We have a deal, Mr. Reznikov.”

I don’t shake his extended hand and just offer him a blank stare. Feeling awkward by it, he retrieves it back and smoothens his suit.

Lucifer nods at me and we both get up to leave but I halt and turn around again.

“Oh, one more thing,” I say. Both brothers look at me with curiosity.

I lean forward and press my palms on the table. But my eyes are glued to Julius only.

With a speed, I take out my knife from the inside of the suit pocket before plunging it in Julius’s right hand resting on the table.

“Ah! Fucking shit!” he screams with eyes wide open as his veins pop against his skin. His guards instantly raise their guns at me but even their aim falters when they notice they are massively outnumbered by my men, who have their weapons ready and loaded.

“Fuck!” he groans, watching the blood streaming from the back of his hand and pooling on the table.

Few of the blood drops splash on my suit as well.

I lean closer to his face as he breathes in and out through his teeth. His brother isn't arguing, knowing well he would face the same consequences if he tried to fuck with me.

"Next time don't fucking insult me. Be glad it's your hand and not your throat."

I feel Lucifer's hand on my shoulder. "Let's leave, Maxwell. I've been bored for the past fifteen minutes."

I stand back and adjust my suit.

"In case you have a death wish, no worries. Just piss me off and in a few seconds the knife will be plunged right between your eyes," I murmur like it's a casual conversation and pull out the knife while he wails in pain again.

"Fuck! Urgh!" he cries out loud with his other arm holding onto his wrists.

"Stop whining, you pussy," Lucifer mutters before we both leave the room.

I make my way to my car but Lucifer stands in my way.

"Woah, not so fast, fucker," he sneers with his brows furrowed. And from the frustrated look on his face, it's clear he won't let go of this topic that easily.

"What?" I ask.

"You better tell me what the fuck happened back there and what that whiny asshole was talking about."

I sigh heavily, rolling my eyes as my fingers tap against the car door. Lucifer is a stubborn motherfucker and after what happened I'm definitely not in the mood to argue with him on this.

"Fuck," I curse under my breath. "Get in the car and I will tell you."

"Don't leave a detail and you owe me a suit, too. That fucker's blood splattered on mine."

I look at his suit, noticing now that it indeed has blood stains. "Since when do you care about those?" I ask with my arms crossed.

“Since the day I found out I have a daughter,” he retorts.

We both get inside the car as I order my driver to take us back home.

“Now start talking.”

And I do.

I unveil everything that has happened so far with Erida and Francisco. The murder of the prostitutes. The disloyalty among the Bratva. The attack at my drug warehouse. Even the plans I’ve got set for next week.

By the time I finish explaining, the car pulls up at the driveway of my residence.

Lucifer remains silent as one of the guards opens the door for us and we leave, walking inside my house.

“Just grab a suit and shirt from my room. I’ll be in my office,” I say and we head in different directions.

When I get to my office, I start making strong drinks of scotch for us. As I’m about to put ice cubes, soft footsteps echo in the hallway. I know well who they belong to.

Elysha enters the room but suddenly stops as if she isn’t expecting me to be here.

“I-I thought you went to work,” she stammers. I frown in confusion, feeling a hint of doubt in the air.

“It’s my house. I can come and go as I wish,” I mutter before walking towards her.

She is trying to stand tall and confident but her eyes never meet mine, making my doubt deepen even more.

“What are you doing in my office?” I ask. My hands resting inside my pockets.

“I was just bored staying in my room. So I was just roaming around. I didn’t get to see more of your house.”

Absolute bullshit.

She crosses her arms, trying to look poised but she must know it isn't working. I get closer to her, her floral scent wafting around me.

She has to lean her head back to meet my gaze as she is much shorter in height. Her skin is already prickling with goosebumps and her cheeks turn red from blushing.

But before I can ask her anything else, I hear the tapping of shoes heading our way. I look over her shoulder, finding Lucifer walking towards us. His brows furrow in confusion when he sees Elysha standing in front of me.

She follows my gaze and turns around, coming face to face with Lucifer.

"Who is this?" Lucifer asks in his monotone voice.

"This is Elysha. She is a guest of mine," I tell him.

His blank expression gives enough of an answer to me that he's definitely not buying any of my bullshit.

I shake my head, letting out a husky breath. "Go upstairs, Elysha," I order.

Elysha looks at me with a death glare. "As you said I'm your guest, so don't order me like I'm a dog."

Lucifer's lips quirk up into an amusing smirk.

"I'm sure she can stay, Maxwell."

I will fucking shoot the bastard.

I shake my head. "Some other time." I grab Elysha's arm and guide her out of the room. "Stay upstairs." Giving her order, I slam the door shut and turn to Lucifer who still has that smug grin plastered on his face.

"She is quite unique," he says.

"She is a pain in the ass," I murmur and I take the glass, passing it to him.

We both sit down towards the window side where a small table with a game of chess lays between the two chairs.

The warmth of the sun flows over us like a soothing blanket.

Lucifer takes a few sips of his drink before setting it down on the table, his eyes strain on the chess board with his index finger resting against his lips.

“So, you plan to catch Francisco sometime in next week?” he asks before moving his white pawn forward.

I put the black pawn forward while drinking the golden umber. “That’s the plan. Catching him would be like breaking Erida’s pillar of power. It will be a strike that will bring her to me.”

Moving his knight, Lucifer sits back.

“But my question is, how did she get to know so much about your business areas just in a few days?”

The same question has been roaming my mind for weeks now, but no answer has crossed my mind. The men I have working under me wouldn’t dare to cross me. Unless they don’t hold value for their own lives and family.

I’ve replaced every old member of the Bratva with the ones I fully trust to do their jobs without a shadow of betrayal lurking over them.

“My own people, who gave me this power, are going against me. All for what? Fucking jealousy.” I make my bishop move close to my pawn.

He snickers under his breath.

“They will soon realize who the worthy ruler is when you catch Erida and kill her. Those assholes always want darkness – day or night.” He moves another pawn.

“Taking one down just to get their fill. And that’s what they are doing to you as well. They want to take you down because you took something from them. Their rights. Their rights to live in darkness that is filled with violence, blood, sex and addiction. And with the new power Erida is offering, they will jump right into the opportunity.”

I roll my eyes with a sigh as I take another sip. “I reached that theory before you did, Lucifer. The sooner I kill her the better.”

I take his pawn with my knight. He takes my knight with his other pawn.

There is silence for several moments as we continue to play. Both of us leaning forward with our eyes focused on the game. But our minds are somewhere else. I notice his bishop threatening my queen now.

“How come you missed telling me about Elysha?” he asks with a grin.

I look at him with a glare. “She is not important.”

“I beg to differ. You never have *guests* in your house. Especially a beautiful woman like her.”

I sigh. “Just drop it.”

“I would if she was just a slave—”

I groan in frustration at the back of my throat, giving him a death glare. “Focus on the fucking game.”

He corks an eyebrow. “So, she is a slave then.”

Fuck.

The fucking bastard knows mind tricks better than me.

“Not surprising at all. But it does surprise me that she is roaming around the house like a free woman. Usually your slaves don’t leave their room and keep waiting for your next command.”

He isn’t wrong. I’ve had slaves before and they were my little puppets. I pulled their strings and they danced to my tune, however I wanted them to. But I only used them for my own pleasure.

They never questioned or argued, knowing well it was futile and also none of them wanted to cross me. I even chained several slaves in my room, whipping them into orgasms and ending the session with a hard fucking.

But, at one point, it all stopped.

I stopped it all after Elysha.

I guard my queen with my knight. “Let me worry about how I treat my slave. None of your fucking business.”

Even though that’s what she is now to me, pronouncing the title suddenly makes the taste on my tongue feel bitter.

“I’m enjoying this too much, so no can do. However, I just feel like she is more than a slave.”

I grind my teeth together, trying to calm down my nerves as Lucifer tries to dig deeper into my thoughts.

“She means nothing to me.” Even to me my voice sounds heartless and cold.

He moves his rook. “Check.”

My king got trapped while I tried to save my queen.

“You value your queen more, I see.”

I strip off his bishop from power with my king. “I’m not afraid to fight my own battles. I don’t need a queen.” I smirk and he narrows his eyes.

“You can lie to the whole world but I’ve known you for a long time, Maxwell. I know well when you are telling the truth, and when you are lying,” he says, and we resume playing until it’s time for him to leave.

After a few more drinks and two hours of discussion, Lucifer leaves my residence with his guards. I return back to my office and get back to dealing with paperwork. But even after staring at one line for the past thirty minutes, all I can think about is Elysha.

Why does she feel different? Why do I call her my slave and still feel uncomfortable deep down?

Why are you different, Elysha? Why?

CHAPTER 25



ELYSHA

PRESENT

THE MINUTE he shuts the door on my face, I let out a sigh of relief. I don't waste any more time and I dash upstairs, taking out the phone from my pocket. I go through the pictures of the documents I took in Maxwell's office.

My heart is still beating fast from all the adrenaline rushing through my veins. After making sure the pictures are clear, I open the text option and attach the pictures.

But when it's time to send it, my finger hovers midway.

Something just suddenly feels off... Something doesn't feel right.

My mind keeps chanting to get my revenge and be free from Maxwell's chains. To be back with my sister.

But my heart is against my mind.

The unsettling feeling makes my throat clog with heart-clenching emotions. I sit down on my bed. My eyes are strained on the text screen.

I have the pictures of the documents and locations of Maxwell's warehouses and dealings. Just like Rhea asked for.

It is a risk, for sure, but I finally have the ticket to my freedom. Yet, I don't want to leave.

Why?

Once she gets all these, Rhea will send the information to Francisco who will help us escape Russia so that we can start a new life. A normal one.

But what about Maxwell?

What will happen to him?

There is no doubt Francisco will use this information against Maxwell to destroy him. To ruin his kingdom.

"Just do it. End this once and for all," I whisper to myself. My hands are tightening around the phone as my breathing turns shallow.

My heartbeat starts drumming in my ear, turning my nerves into a wreck. Letting out a shaky breath, I exit the text menu and put the phone back inside the nightstand drawer.

I rake my hands through my hair as I crouch forward.

What is wrong with me? What is happening?

I lie down on the bed. My eyes look up at the ceiling. My thoughts are running wild while I try to calm down myself. But it all seems pointless. Everything seems meaningless. I close my eyes, letting my consciousness rest for a bit. Letting it escape the reality for once.

Loud muffling cries woke me up from my slumber. Moonlight streaks into my room as I rub away the sleep from my eyes. Rhea is sleeping by my side looking exhausted and bruised after what Mother Sophia did to us.

My back still hurts from the whip lashes she gave, and I wince in pain as I get up from the bed and tiptoe out of the room.

The other girls are asleep in their own rooms, or it can be they are awake and trying to ignore the ringing cries of the stranger. The screaming and wails have been echoing through the church for days now. I usually give my all to ignore it but tonight... I just can't.

I can't anymore.

It is gruff and husky like a masculine voice.

I follow the echoing sound and reach the dark basement. Clutching onto my butterfly chain, I pray to God to give me the courage to face what is coming at me. The screams get louder followed by grunts and growls. Few curses are rasped when suddenly it all stops.

My heart plummets in my throat with fear when I hear footsteps coming in my direction. I quickly hide behind the pillar, mingling with darkness.

"Call his father and check if we got those drugs ready for that little shit. I'm nowhere even done torturing him," Petro's rough voice echoes in the basement as he passes by and finally heads outside with his men.

I let out a shaky breath and try to think of what he meant by what he had said.

He is torturing someone? In the basement?

How much crueler can he be? How much monstrosity does Petro have hidden within him?

Enslaving innocent girls while raping and torturing them behind the purity of church isn't enough for him?

Pretending to be innocent for others while behaving like an animal in the dark isn't enough for him?

There hasn't been a moment where I didn't regret the decision of ever getting in his car with my sister. Not only did Rhea and I get into trouble, but we ended up living in another hell which is worse than the previous one.

Something tells me I have to do something for the stranger. Something deep down is urging me.

Just one peek. Then I will leave.

Just one peek.

I carefully open the door and the sight that greets me makes my breath hitch. It is a boy. His hands are chained with his head bowed. His entire body is covered with bruises and blood.

Some of the blood spilled on the dirty floor forming a pool.

It is clear as day that he has been tortured way beyond his limit and he is barely breathing... barely surviving.

My heart pangs with so much hurt that my eyes swim with tears of pity for him because I also know what pain feels like. As I walk inside, he gently leans his head up and meets my gaze.

Suddenly, something shifts.

The minute our gazes collide, I feel a zap of electricity passing through my nerves, making my body shiver with emotions. I stalk closer until I am standing in front of him. His eyes hold fear that only makes my heart ache.

He looks broken - just like me, but yet he looks so attractive. So perfect. He is taller than me so I have to crane my neck to see his face. He seems to be close to my age. His black hair is tousled and he has a slightly build-up body. The grooves of his chest and abs are painted with blood as he just stands there being strained and half naked.

“Are you still in pain?” I ask, recoiling inside for asking such a stupid question. Of course, he is in pain.

He nods his response.

I try to blink away the tears from my eyes, getting my demeanor in check. I look around to make sure nobody is inside the basement, but also desperately looking for something to soothe his wounds.

“Don’t make a sound. Shhh.”

Without waiting for his response, I head out and return with a bowl of water and first aid box.

Realizing there is no way to get him out of the cuffs, I get a stool from the corner and use it to meet up to his height while I treat his wounds.

I scrunch up a cloth to muffle his cries but seeing the terror in his wide eyes makes it difficult for me not to shed tears. He turns his face away when he realizes that I am using the cloth. His body is rigid.

He doesn’t want to be gagged again.

“I won’t hurt you. It’s for you to be quiet or else he will hear you.”

But he doesn’t budge.

I cup his face, skimming my thumb along his bloody cheek, and that’s when I feel his body relaxing.

My eyes never leave his as I feel a soothing unknown warmth flooding down my body.

“I won’t hurt you. I promise.”

I don’t know what changes but as if my calm voice is a balm to his fear, he eventually allows me to treat his wounds.

The entire time he remains silent, except for a few hisses under his breath whenever I dab his cuts with a cotton ball.

But every time I look at him, I find his gaze upon me like he can’t believe I am there. As if I am someone unexpected to come in during his nights of horror.

And somehow the feeling is mutual for me because he is someone I wasn’t expecting to meet.

A hand skimming along my cheek awakes me. But I stay still, pretending to be asleep because I know whose touch it is. Even in the darkness I will recognize it anywhere.

Maxwell.

A pleasant shiver mixed with nerves rushes down my body. His rough fingertips send a soothing feeling in my heart as if that’s what I all wanted deep down. He is the one to rip me away from my freedom which he owns now. Because of him I have been away from my sister for years, and went through slavery, experiencing every unimaginable nightmare that I wouldn’t wish even on my enemies.

He continues to caress my cheek before his hands move down and his thumb caresses the outline of my lips.

“Why do you feel so different, Elysha?” he barely whispers out his question as if he doesn’t want me to hear it, but can’t help ask as well.

I remain silent, trying to even out my breathing as his words leave an unsettling emotion in my gut.

“You were supposed to be nothing but my slave. How come things are suddenly changing things between us? How?”

Silence.

“I know I should stay away from you. I should let you go, but I just can’t. Even the thought of you being away...” His words fade away like he can’t complete his sentence.

“I keep telling myself to let you go, but with every day passing by I’m feeling something that I buried ages ago. A weakness I don’t want to ever go back to.”

I hear a shaky breath being released before he speaks again. “After what I’ve been through, I’m not letting anyone become my weakness. I have made up my mind and there is nothing you can do about it.”

Then I feel his lips on mine for a gentle kiss. My nerves start to race right away but I control myself from reacting. He can’t know I am awake, listening to everything.

His gentleness took me by surprise, sending shivers down my spine. It’s like he is savoring the moment. As if it is never going to come back again. This will be the only time he is ever going to be gentle with me.

Soon he leans back, depriving me of his touch before I hear the gentle thud of the door shutting.

I slowly open my eyes and sit up. My fingers are tracing my lips where I can still feel his touch, his sensation.

It is evident that he didn’t want me to hear his confession. But now that he shared a piece of him, it confuses my emotions even more. Just today he was saying he is incapable of love, but right now the gentle touches he left said otherwise.

I have seen monsters in my nightmares and in reality, and Maxwell is no less different. But somehow, deep within him, his innocence exists. His

passion that made me fall in love with him years ago is still there, buried in his heart.

But it can be brought back. I can bring it back.

Rhea warned me about the conspiracy that Maxwell got both of us in but my heart doesn't allow me to accept it. It keeps telling me something else is there too. There has to be another side of Maxwell's bitter love.

Something isn't adding up and I have to talk to Rhea about it as soon as possible. Before it is too late.

"I made up my mind, too, Maxwell. And nothing will change that."

* * *

A FEW DAYS pass by after Maxwell's confession in my room. He is out most of the time, but it feels like he is ignoring me on purpose.

He usually sends one of his maids or guards to call me for meals but none of that happened. He didn't come to my room after that time. Even for sex.

The only times I see him is when he arrives home early, and right away goes to his office to work.

I have talked to Rhea and I hated lying to her about not being able to get the information yet. She sounded adamant about finding it quickly but I have to figure things out about Maxwell before I make a decision.

"Elysha, we don't have much time," she mutters tiredly on the phone.

"I know but I'm trying," I whisper, looking over my shoulder while I talk with Rhea in the bathroom.

"Try harder. Don't you want to run away from Maxwell?"

I don't know. I almost answer.

"Yes. I do want to escape him but I haven't found anything yet."

She sighs. "We only have two weeks. Otherwise Francisco won't hesitate to hunt us both down for not giving him what he wants."

I frown. “Wait. What do you mean ‘hunt us both down’? I thought you said he is on our side.”

“He is on nobody’s side. He called few days ago and was very pissed off that it is taking so long for you to get a few fucking information,” she hisses.

“He threatened to kill us if we fail.”

What the fuck?

“Why would he do that?” Fear for my sister’s life being endangered again fills my heart.

“Because he can, Elysha. That’s why, at least for your life’s sake, get that information quickly.”

Before I can ask anything else, she hangs up the call.

I quickly return to my bedside and hide the phone.

I have to get my shit together because I don’t have much time. I have the things I need to give to Rhea but I have to find some answers of my own.

Letting out a heavy sigh, I leave my room to have a walk in the garden. I need to calm my mind.

As I walk down the hallway, I pass Maxwell’s room which has its door open. Most of the time it’s either locked or closed.

I look around and there are no guards around, so I head inside. The song *Drugs* displaying on the radio alarm clock on his nightstand, starts to play, filling the silence in the room.

Maxwell is nowhere to be in sight as I walk further in. I step in his walk-in closet, finding rows of his clothes on both sides with polished shoes below. A long ottoman is placed in the center with a mirror at the end of the room. I find myself running my hand along all his clothes. I pick up the sleeve of a black overshirt and bring it to my nose to sniff. It smells exactly like him. Wooden and musky with a hint of mint fragrance. It is really intoxicating. His smell always makes butterflies churn in my stomach. My

gaze lands on his gun, resting on the top drawer. Feeling curiosity blooming within me, I pick it up and I feel it weigh in my palms. I see Maxwell carry guns and knives all the time. It is as if those are his garments. However, this one looks a bit different than the guns Maxwell usually carries.

I skim my fingertips along the handle and the trigger, feeling the roughness of the gun. It is definitely loaded for how heavy it is.

How easy it really is to take someone's life just from one pull of the trigger.

I wish life was as easy as death itself.

"You are turning very sneaky lately."

I jump hearing Maxwell's sudden gruff voice. He is standing in the doorway in just a towel wrapped around his waist. His hair is dry which means he must have taken a bath.

How come I didn't hear him? How long has he been standing there?

"It's impolite to snoop into other's stuff, you know?"

A surge of heat shoots through my body in embarrassment.

He walks towards me and I can't help but rake my eyes upon his wet, muscular body. Droplets of water run down the hard planes of his body down to the V of his abdomen. His inked skin looks more defined.

He towers over me, crossing his arms as my back rests against the wardrobe.

My core tightens with a mixture of desire and anxiety when I look at his darkening gaze.

"What? No comebacks today?" he asks and I don't miss the slight quirk of his lips in amusement.

"I was just going out for a walk and your door was open... I saw your gun and got curious." I say honestly.

"What about the gun got you curious?"

"I wanted to know how it's used."

He snickers. "Thinking of using it on me?"

I roll my eyes. "As if I'd ever win a fair fight with you."

He leans closer so that I feel his breath dusting my cheek.

"Who says I've even fought fair?" He grins and takes the gun from my hand.

His nose runs over my ear, making me squirm.

"And the gun skills you showed on my men the night I met you tell a different story. You know how to aim and shoot."

"I-I just want to learn to use this one because it seems a bit advanced. And I don't want to just know, I want to be as good as you in case I'm ever in danger."

His hand caresses my arm and my skin breaks into goosebumps, my core tightening as his fingertips skims up, barely brushing the sides of my breasts.

His lips gently nibble my earlobe, making me whimper, every inch of my body begging to be touched by him.

Maxwell draws back, cupping the back of my head and looking directly into my eyes with a dark possessive look.

"I always protect what belongs to me. You don't have to worry about anyone coming after you because I will be there to protect you even from their shadows."

Then why didn't you come to save me? Why didn't you come back?

I almost ask but refrain myself, feeling too lost in his addictive touch.

"But if you want to learn then I can teach you," he whispers.

"But as I will teach you then don't I deserve payment for that?" he asks with a smug grin that makes my pussy wet.

His eyes dilate with desire. I feel the tip of the gun tracing my cheek as if it is his fingers.

"Such as?" I ask, playing along.

He slides the gun lower. "There are so many things I can take from you, little girl."

I am wearing a frock that reaches up to my knees. I have panties underneath which are drenched by now from arousal. His free hand snakes around my waist, bringing me closer to him.

He presses into me, his hot breath on my lips. "But seeing this dark desire in your eyes is the fucking best."

"Is that so?" I whisper in a sexy voice that makes him groan.

"Even when you know that I hate you, you still desire me?" I ask.

He smiles in a way that almost makes me come right there and then. The gun moves lower until it hitches up my dress and traces my panties.

I moan. Maxwell's mouth takes mine as he keeps rubbing the gun back and forth against my aching pussy.

"Your hatred and anger are what that turns me on more than anything, little girl. Everyone has a fucked-up addiction. For me it's your hatred, because when I see it in your eyes mixed with desire all I want to do is grab you and fuck you until you can't feel your body."

It is fucked-up for sure, but what is more fucked-up is me enjoying his addiction. It is crazy that he is kissing me while he is rubbing his gun against my wet pussy. But deep down I want it. I crave for it.

I rock against him, desperately seeking for more friction. He tightens his hold around me while his lips start to devour my neck, sucking and kissing my pulse point.

"You feel the same, don't you, little girl?" he rasps as his tongue continues its tortuous journey.

"God, yes," I whisper, throwing my head back.

Maxwell watches me, breathing heavily like I am. Slowly he moves my panties aside with the gun and rubs the cool metal against my wet pussy.

My breath hitches through my clenched teeth as I shut my eyes in sensation overload.

"Tell me, Elysha. Does such a thrill turn you on?"

I look at him with drowsy eyes. “Such a thrill usually used to scare me. But with you danger feels so passionate that I want it even more.”

He snickers darkly under his breath and increases the pace of his gun, driving me insane with desire which is leading me to the peak of orgasm.

“Come for me, Elysha. I can smell your scent from here. You are so close.”

I pull his face close to mine, feeling the hunger to have his lips on me. My mind going haywire from his touch.

Soon I lose control as my orgasm takes over my shuddering body. I feel my knees giving out on me. But Maxwell holds me against him tightly, swallowing my moans and cries with his kiss.

My drowsy eyes meet his darkening gaze, surging another wave of desire coursing through my nerves.

He slowly pulls back his gun, and holds it between us. It is coated with my juices.

I don’t know what possesses me but what I do next even takes Maxwell aback with surprise. I grip his hand, holding his gaze and bring the gun close to my face. Peeking out my tongue, I lick the smooth metal surface, tasting myself on it.

He groans and grips my head before placing the weapon back on the drawer. Holding me by my legs, he walks back and sits on the ottoman as I sit on his lap.

I quickly loosen his towel, moving a hand between us and starting to stroke his already hard cock.

“*Blyad'. YA budu dumat' o tebe kazhdy raz, kogda ispol'zuyu etot pistollet,*” he rasps in Russian.

“I don’t know about gun training but you better teach me Russian,” I whisper, skimming my thumb over his tip, feeling precum oozing. His deep Russian accent always turns me on, even though I am clueless what he is saying. But I never miss the dark emotions it holds behind his words.

“Every time you speak Russian I feel it in my core.”

He takes my lips in a hard kiss.

“I was telling you that I will think of you every time I use this gun. And I can teach you Russian because I would love to fuck you and hear you scream for your pleasure in Russian.”

I keep stroking him while he leans one hand down and rips away my panties. He cages both my hands behind the small of my back before thrusting inside me in one push. His free hand digs into my hair, pressing my forehead against his. Arching my back, I take more of him inside me, feeling my walls clenching from his deep thrusts as he hits my sweet spot. My lips part and I rock my pelvis when he grunts low at the back of his throat.

My eyes close in ecstasy as I feel his fingers stroking my cheek. When I open my eyes and look down at him, he nods towards his side, craning my face towards the mirror.

“*Posmotri v zeklalo, malen'kaya debochla,*” he says.

My entire body turns into a puddle just from his words, especially when my eyes rake down his naked body. The way his muscles bulge on his biceps. The way his waist has that perfect, veined V.

“Keep your eyes on the mirror. Watch us. Watch me claim your body again and again, Elysha.”

My eyes never leave our reflection as my breathing hitches when his hand goes down, cupping my ass.

“Watch my body worship yours. Every inch of yours deserves to be cherished.” His eyes lock on mine in the mirror, and I can see the hunger in his eyes that makes my heart race faster.

There is something emotive about those words. It feels as if he is seeing me as someone more than just his possession. More than his slave.

“You are so fucking wet. Your juices are running down to my balls. Even your thighs are wet. So fucking hot.”

He kisses my neck, turning my body hypersensitive. And watching it in the mirror is beyond sexy.

“Yes, Elysha. Watch us.” And I do. I only watch us... watch him. He looks so strong and powerful with his muscles flexing beautifully under his tanned skin with every thrust. All masculine, all manly, all mine.

He picks up his speed and slams harder into me, and in a few fleeting seconds I scream out my second release. He keeps me upfront with his hold on my body while he continues thrusting harder and deeper. His breathing turns labored, and he follows me, finding his own release. His whole body flexes, enhancing the definitions of his muscles even more, and I almost come again from seeing such perfect sight.

How can he look so magnificent like a Greek god?

He lets my hands free, resting his head against my chest as he listens to my racing heart coming to a steady pace. I wrap my arms around him, engulfing him in my arms while his hands stroke my back.

A state of relaxation and peace settles within me. Even though there is betrayal and hatred from both our sides, I can't help but sense the lost connection I feel between us.

That love I carried for him back then kept emerging up, no matter how much I tried to push it down. Even though Rhea said Maxwell is the villain in this story, I still now had this feeling in my gut that it's somewhat not right.

Maxwell always stabs me in the heart with his harsh words but his touch tells a different story.

“I heard you that night,” I whisper.

He remains silent.

“You said you feel something for me. Something that could be your weakness. What did you mean by that?” I ask, feeling his body turning rigid and the connection lost.

Grabbing my hips, he pulls out with a low grunt and sets me down on the ottoman, taking the towel and patting himself dry. He busies himself getting dressed in a navy-blue shirt and pants.

“Why did you tell those words when you thought I was sleeping? Why not when I am conscious?”

He ignores me and finishes getting ready before leaving the walk-in closet and heading to get his phone. He is going out.

I grab his arm, turning him towards me, facing him with a glare. “Stop being a coward and answer me.”

His eyes dagger with exasperation. “I don’t need to explain anything to you. Remember you are just—”

“A slave,” I finished his sentence. “I know that. You are a perfect reminder. But I know what I heard and I want the truth from you. What feelings do you have for me?”

He remains silent, clenching his jaw, avoiding eye contact for the first time. Cupping his face, I urge him to look at me.

“Please. All I need is the truth.”

Please, tell me. Please.

I just need the truth from him because everything depends on it.

He can even see in my eyes how much the truth means to me. He knows his words can change things between us.

He pulls his hand away from my hold as he looks in my eyes with a blank stare. As if he switched off his hidden emotions in seconds... as if it is that easy for him.

“I don’t fucking owe you anything. Your job is to be my slave and do what a slave must do.”

He points a finger at my face with a warning.

“And stop fucking thinking that I feel something for me. It doesn’t exist there because I don’t have a heart or soul to feel those bullshit feelings. Get that through your head as soon as possible.”

My heart prickles with every harsh word being uttered from his lips. Every word feels like a slap on my face as the tears blurring my vision.

Buttoning his suit, he leaves the room, shutting the door with a loud thud.

I stand there for several seconds all alone in the empty bedroom. My nerves are jittering from pain and heartache. I can feel that he is lying because words didn't hold much confidence like they always do. But still they hurt like a motherfucker. A sudden stream of anger and humiliation swells in me and before I am aware of it myself, I march downstairs to Maxwell who is about to leave through the entrance door.

Speeding up my pace, I make it in time and rush outside, turning him by his shoulder.

"You keep saying that you don't have a heart or soul. Well guess what? You don't have the courage either. You are nothing but a coward." I shove him hard in the chest.

His jawline ticks from rage. I see nerves popping on his forehead with his arms tensing by his sides. His eyes clouding with dark anger which must be reserved for his enemies. I know I must have hit a nerve but I don't care. I want to hurt him and the only way is by attacking his ego, his pride.

He should feel the pain that I'm feeling.

His guards are looking but even seeing Maxwell boiling with rage, about to burst anytime like a volcano, they look away, pretending they aren't listening.

"At least I know what I truly am. But you? You don't. You do nothing but pretend in front of everyone. Even yourself and your mother. She would be ashamed of you."

I know that is the last straw because bringing his mother into this is a hard limit for him. It takes me a few seconds, but realization catches up to me that what I said was wrong. He holds a special place for his mother in

his soulless heart. I provoked him with my words, hoping to hurt him but instead I cut the loose string of ferocity he was holding back.

Before I can open my mouth to apologize his hand moves at viper speed, holding onto my neck tightly. For once his grip is tighter than usual, making it difficult to breathe. Whirling me around, he pins me against his car, not caring his guards are still around.

“You think you know me but you are nowhere even near to knowing my true self. You should be grateful for still being alive and in much better condition.” The hatred that leaves his voice makes my body shiver.

His eyes narrow. “For the hundredth time, I don’t fucking care about you. You know why? Because this will be your last chance. Go against me and I will sell you to someone else.”

I frown, grasping his wrist. I shake my head, not allowing myself to fall for his words.

He grins darkly, making my heart pound faster.

“Stop believing I have humanity within me. I have sold many slaves in my life. What is one more?”

He tightens his hold with his fingertips digging into my skin that I am sure he will leave marks.

“So, for the final time, I don’t owe you a goddamn thing. You are just a slave I fuck whenever I want, and however I want. My slave.”

My heart shatters into uncountable pieces when I hear that word. He doesn’t call me by my name and the boldness behind his words prove that he is serious about what he said.

This whole time I thought he felt something for me. The boy who gave me hope for a new life years ago was hiding somewhere beneath that wall. But now the truth is looking at me right in the face.

He gives a final squeeze before releasing me and pushing me away from his car. His look is ice-cold, freezing just like the Arctic Circle.

I always hold my head high when I talk to Maxwell but today, I am the first to look away. The defeat shrouding my body. I was fighting for something that never existed in the first place. I was going to choose him over my sister.

He gets inside the car with his guards following him before he drives away.

I stand there at the driveway, soothing my own wounds as always. But now, as the fog of doubt clears my mind, I know what I have to do.

I know whose side I am on and I must do what is right.

Fight for my freedom by hook or by crook.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 26



MAXWELL

PRESENT

I AM HAVING a hard time focusing on Igor's voice. All I can think about is Elysha and how broken she looked when I left.

I am never going to admit to her that my feelings are changing for her. I would never allow that for. I have let myself become a slave to my own emotions and it only led me to my destruction. I won't let history repeat itself.

I am not hers. I would never be.

She has to deal with it and finally come to her senses that she will only be a slave in my life.

I shouldn't have let things get so far with her. I should have kept my mouth shut and stayed closed off like I always do.

"Maxwell, if you didn't want to come today you could have just said so. It's clear your head is somewhere else." Igor says with an arched brow and annoyance written all over his face.

I narrow my eyes at him. "I'm listening. And we have been over this topic a hundred times now. No need to repeat the plan again and again."

He shakes his head. "It's not about listening. You've been acting strange lately. What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing." I take out a cigar and light it up before taking a deep drag.

Igor remains silent for several minutes as if he is trying to read me.

"If you have something else to say then fucking spit it out, Igor."

"Is it about Elysha?" he asks.

I can't help but roll my eyes. "For fuck sake, stop listening to the guards gossiping. Since when did you turn into such a gossip woman?"

He lets out a light chuckle. "I didn't hear anything from the guards. But I could tell from the look on your face."

I frown. "What look?"

"The look that says you are thinking about a woman who is changing you with her pussy maybe."

I don't think. I lung towards him and grab him by his throat, slamming him hard against the nearest pillar.

The people at the underground suddenly stop, watching what is happening with wide eyes.

His body is tense and his right hand rests on his gun holster but he doesn't make a move to attack me. If it was someone else, he would have shot bullet after bullet.

"Talk another word about her and I will throw you from the rooftop."

I loosen my fingers and step back, inhaling a deep breath, calming breath, as I glare down at Igor who is rubbing his throat.

The bustling of the people continues again as I raise my hand to one of the servers to bring me my usual drink.

"That proves it then huh?"

"Proves what?" I rest my hands on the railing, looking down at the cage fight going on. People are screaming and cheering.

"It proves that you are feeling something for your own slave which has never happened. It is fucking with your mind and you are letting it control

you.”

“There are no feelings between me and her. And it’s none of your business, so stay the fuck away.”

Rubbing his throat, he leaves me alone while I continue to smoke.

I hear another approaching footstep, hoping it to be a server but when I look over my shoulder, I find Rhea standing there. A tray with my scotch resting on her hand.

She is in her bartender uniform but I can’t help but rake my eyes over her from top to bottom. I know she isn’t Elysha but my mind keeps picturing as her. The only difference is the hair color.

She saunters towards me, meeting my gaze before leaning the tray forward. “Your drink, sir.”

Fuck. It is a word I usually hear from Elysha when I am fucking her, but hearing it from Rhea’s lips sends the same impact through my nerves.

I take the drink, returning my gaze on the cage fight, but I can still feel Rhea’s scorching gaze on my back.

“Do you want anything?” I ask, sipping my scotch.

Silence from her side greets me but I don’t hear her retreating from my cold tone.

“If you don’t have anything to say then I suggest you leave before I fucking shoot you,” I warn her.

She snorts. It makes me turn around to face her, watching her cross her arms. “What else can you do? All your problems are solved by killing someone.”

She walks forward until she is so close to me that she has to tilt her head to meet my eyes. Her closeness makes my pulse race with a sudden dark hunger that I feel every time Elysha is around me. The feeling that I am hiding from.

“Why is that always your way, Maxwell?” she asks.

“Is that what you want or what that darkness lurking inside you wants?”

She cups my face with the warmth of her palms caressing me. Something about her touch reflects the same warmth Elysha reflects. But her words and emotions are different.

She leans my head closer to hers, pressing her forehead against mine. “There are other ways to resolve problems, Maxwell.”

With every word she utters, I feel myself getting lost in her. Her voice is like a hypnotic magic that always grabs me by my soul. As if she can see right through me like no one else. Before I know it, her lips touch mine in a passionate kiss. Hard and deep.

Her fingers skating up and tugging onto my hair as she moans against my lips. My blood starts to rush faster. I feel myself immersed in the heated kiss.

She bites on my bottom lip, tugging at it before tracing it with her tongue. She is mixing pain and pleasure, urging the monster within me to emerge and take her.

But out of nowhere it isn't Rhea who flashes in my mind. It is Elysha.

Her innocent beauty and smile fill my memory. The way she defends herself and never backs again... her anger... her hatred... her compassion.

Everything.

Suddenly, even the thought of being anywhere near Rhea makes my throat clog with guilt. I immediately push her back by her shoulder, both of us breathing heavily. Her dark, lustful eyes look up, meeting my monotonous gaze, making her frown in confusion.

Suddenly, I don't want to touch her. I don't want to see her. The unknown guilt is so deep that it is disturbing me like never before.

“What's wrong?” she asks.

“You are fired.”

“What?”

I glare at her. “I said you are fucking fired. Never show your face again.”

I turn my back towards her, sipping my drink.

She scoffs, letting out a humorless chuckle. "I'm fired for what? Making a *move* on the boss?"

I remain silent, not bothering to answer her.

"The rules didn't matter to you when you fucked me that night or at the place I work."

Just thinking about those moments makes me wince and weigh the guilt even more.

"At least have the fucking balls to look me in the eyes and answer me," she sneers.

I simply lose it and whirl around, grabbing her throat, giving her a death glare that would even make my enemies cower back.

Her eyes widen as if she wasn't expecting me to grip her with such a harsh hold. "Listen well because I won't say this again. Pack your shit and leave. If I even see you at the entrance door, I will shoot you first and then watch you bleed to death. I don't owe you anything. Not even an explanation. I'm the boss here, and what I say goes. So leave right now before I'm tempted to kill you here," I warn, pushing her away that she falls on the floor.

I am prepared for her to argue back but seeing my cold, ferocious expression she gets the hint that I am deadly serious. Without a single word she gets up and strides downstairs, heading straight to the back door.

First, it was Elysha challenging my temper and now it was Rhea.

I run my hand through my hair, feeling frustration overcoming me. I am fucking pissed off at the fact that I even felt something for Elysha.

I feel guilt like I was cheating on her with Rhea. Why the fuck is my mind returning back to her when all I'm trying is to stay away from her?

My mind and heart seem to be disobeying me, and it is only making my rage rise up.

Everything feels out of control and the only person I can blame all this chaos on is Elysha. I can easily get rid of her but even the thought of letting her go makes my heart sink.

But why? Fucking God, why?

There is no point asking. All I can do is ignore her and focus on my work more.

Focus on my kingdom.

* * *

IT IS TIME. And my only chance.

I have one shot in this, otherwise everything will turn to shit. My men are already in position, guarding the warehouse as we wait for him to arrive.

Francisco.

The moment I get him, he will suffer through hell. It is almost midnight and there is no sign of him. According to Enrico, he should have been here thirty minutes ago. Something feels wrong. The workers continue to transfer the new packages inside the warehouse while I wait on the ground floor, hiding behind the shipment.

Igor is at the back entrance with the other guards for backup. More trucks are arriving with the drug supplies as I keep waiting for my nemesis to arrive.

If that fucking Egor lied to me then I will grant him a death wish for sure.

“What do you mean you can’t open the B5 storage room?” I hear someone asking as I look over my shoulder.

“The door seems to be jammed, sir.” The worker speaks, standing in front of the manager.

Frowning, I walk towards them as they both notice my arrival and immediately look down with nervousness on both their faces.

“What’s the matter?” I ask the worker.

“The door for B5 isn’t opening, sir.”

“Has this happened before?” I ask.

He looks at the manager before answering with an uncertain tone. “Yes, sir. Few other rooms in the underground are having problems with the locks.”

I frown, looking at the manager. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I did get someone to fix it a few days ago, sir. But it seems like the locksmith didn’t fix it properly.”

I am listening to his reasoning but at the same time my mind is off to several thoughts. The worker said the underground rooms. The underground storage has a different route, and is used for the highly expensive drugs. Not everyone could get inside because the door is accessed by a password. Something that the manager only knows.

Even the locks have seven sets of combination and just opening one set will take months.

A sudden realization hits me. I don’t wait for them to speak furthermore. I just run outside, rushing towards the underground floor. Using the thumbprint emergency access, I get inside. I shut the door locked before getting my gun out and taking steady and cautious steps inside the vast grey painted hallway. Calling Igor or the guards would be a risk I am not willing to take at this moment.

Rustling sounds reach my ear as I walk closer to the storage area. The strong smell of cocaine and heroin whiffs around my nostrils.

“Get those quickly. We have to leave soon.” I hear a powerful, gruff voice ordering around. Leaning against the wall, I slightly peek to be prepared for my enemies.

There are eight men carrying boxes out of the storages while a man in a blue suit stands with his hands resting on his hips. When he turns sideways, I know exactly who he is.

The man I've been looking for all these days.

Fucking Francisco.

Loading my guns, I let out a quick breath before I aim and fire. One after another I start to shoot at every fucker before they even have a chance to react. Two head towards me while I am distracted by firing, both of them charging at me to fight with their fists.

But I don't hesitate to pull the triggers and shoot them right in their heads.

It takes me a few mere minutes to kill Francisco's men. Their lifeless bodies pile over one another as their blood flows on the floor. Now only one man is left. Francisco.

"Only seven men? Really?" I ask, walking towards him, stepping over his dead men.

"I am the Pakhan and you bring only seven men to fight with me. I'm very offended."

He snickers, shaking his head. "No wonder you always missed out on my actions. You are so blinded by your pride. You always think you are above everyone, but in reality, you are not even worthy of breathing the same air as your people."

His eyes look down at my guns with a dark smirk.

"Always choosing the easy way out. I think a weak man always choses options that are just like him. Fight me like a real man."

I chuckle, throwing my guns away. "I'm impressed that you even had the courage to challenge me, but trust me, when I beat you and take you hostage, I will make you see hell that even my worst enemies weren't lucky to see." I promise before shedding my suit and folding my sleeves up.

He does the same, preparing to fight me.

I motion him to come forward and he doesn't wait. He charges at me like a wild bull, raising his fist. But I dodge to the left, punching him right in his gut, making him crouch. He winces. I raise my elbow for another

attack but he grips my waist and throws me down on the floor before landing a punch right across my cheek. I was expecting another hit, but I recover quickly from his hard punch and hold onto his collar as I drag him down and hit his head with mine twice until he falls back.

We both stand up as I punch him on his face with full force. Holding him by his hair, I slam his head on the wall. He moves his hand back, hitting me right in the nose with his elbow. I can feel the blood dripping before I wipe it off with my knuckles. He turns and his cheek is already bruised and there is a cut from my skull ring with blood oozing out.

“It was so easy to take your kingdom bit by bit. But don’t worry. Nobody will remember you when your power will be taken away, and there is nothing you can do about—”

I punch his face again before he can finish, feeling anger blooming. He punches me back thrice in a row.

My lips are swollen already as I feel the pain radiating through my skull. The copper taste of the blood on my tongue.

He kicks me on my chest, my back hitting the wall with a thud as I fall on the ground.

“Erida was right. You were weak as a kid and you are still weak. Only difference is you are hiding behind your pride and ego.”

He crouches in front of me with a blood smirk.

“Everything will be taken away right in front of your eyes, Maxwell. Each and everything will burn while you witness it all as a defeated man. Even that whore of yours. What’s her name again?” His eyes narrow as if he is thinking about her name. But I know well who he is talking about.

“Yes. Elysha. I will make her my own personal slave. And fuck every hole she has on her body. I’m sure she will scream and cry, and I live for that.” He leans closer.

“I dream of that. And when the time comes, I will fucking own her. Maybe I will let you watch, too.” He winks.

I instantly grab his throat, squeezing it harshly until his eyes are bulging. I stand up, taking him along with me as he starts to struggle with breathing. I punch him so hard in the eye he falls back. Rage consumes me so much that all I can think about is killing him for even thinking about hurting Elysha.

She is mine. Only mine.

Mine to own and protect with my life.

“Get up, asshole.” I spit on him.

He climbs to his feet then sprints at me for another punch but I kick him in his knee, making him kneel down as I knock his face. Blood starts to come from his broken nose as I keep raining punches after punches on him.

My knuckles are turning crimson already from his blood but that doesn't stop me from beating him to death. I don't even allow him to breathe or think for a second with every hit he gains from my fists.

So much blood is oozing out that he starts to cough before falling on his back.

I straddle him, feeling nowhere near the end of being done with him.

“She.” *PUNCH.*

“Is.” *PUNCH.*

“Mine.” *PUNCH.*

He can't speak as the blood is clogging his throat. His eyes are barely open like he is starting to lose his consciousness, or rather his life.

His hands are no longer moving as they remain still by his side. I am in euphoria, unable to break myself from the chains of fury and jealousy.

I feel someone suddenly dragging me back, but I pull away and continue punching Francisco.

“Fucking stop, Maxwell! He will die right here!” Igor yells as he and my men try to pry me away from the fucker. The guards carry his unconscious body outside while I stand there

“Take care of these bodies,” I rasp to one of my guards as he nods before ordering others to drag away the dead bodies. They will either be burned or thrown in the ocean, I don’t fucking care.

I control my breathing with my eyes strained on my fucked up knuckles.

“What the fuck is wrong with you? Were you trying to kill him?”

“Leave it.” I walk past him. I’m not in the mood to discuss any of this.

“Hey!” He turns me by my shoulder. “He was barely alive. We need him to find out about Erida and to save our Bratva. Our kingdom.”

I glare at him, pointing a finger at him. “I own the Bratva. I’m the ruler, the boss. Not you. It’s *my* fucking kingdom.”

He glares back at me with his jawline tightening but it is clear he is trying to hold back.

“I have it under control now. So take care of the mess and then get back to dealing with your job that I handed over to you as Pakhan. I don’t need lectures from you about my duties. Got it?” I warn him.

He nods, looking down. “As you say, *sir*.”

He walks away, leaving me finally alone.

What the fuck came over me?

It is clear that even my enemies know about Elysha now. Why wouldn’t they after I showed her off at the party?

But all it took was just one wrong word against her for Francisco to trigger my anger. One word against her and I absolutely lost it. Blood still streaks down from my mouth. Taking out a cigarette, I light it up before inhaling a deep drag. I’m not sure if Francisco used Elysha to show he will literally take everything or it was just to see how it was going to affect me. But out of all this I got one answer for myself.

Elysha is my weakness.

No matter how much I hate her or treat her harshly, she still possesses my mind... my soul.

History is repeating itself indeed. I am turning weak again by a girl. The thought itself provokes my anger even more but what is the point?

My eyes land on my ring which is covered with Francisco's blood. I have worked day and night to earn this. I have killed so many men, taken territories from my enemies, and started every profitable business possible. After years of hard work I earned this.

Everyone thought I did it for power, and it is certainly one of the reasons. But nobody knew the actual reason behind it. Nobody will ever understand.

It is buried deep in my heart that only I am aware of. And it will be a secret I won't ever disclose.

But now Elysha is turning everything upside down.

The familiar pull... the familiar feeling I have every time I'm with her is still undiscovered by me. Every day I ask myself why everything feels so good with her? Why does her walking away from me leaves a bitter taste in my mouth? Why does she feel like a breath of fresh air I have been searching for?

Few minutes later I leave the building and head back home. After freshening up and changing to a white shirt and black pants, I head downstairs to deal with Francisco. One of the guards opens the door for me. Francisco is already tied with tight and thick ropes on the chair. His head is moving, which means he is returning back to his senses. Folding up my sleeves, I nod at my man to put a chair in front of him for me. I take a seat, leaning back as I watch his drowsy eyes looking around.

"Seriously? Are you going to torture me with knives, guns and hammers? That's the best you got?" His voice is raspy and slightly weak.

When he sees me not cracking a smile at his pathetic amusement, he remains silent, watching me.

There is no sight of fear or worry on his face, but I am going to change that very soon. He dares to cross me in the worst possible way.

I will rain hellfire on him until he would rather be dead than tortured by me.

“Where is Erida?” I ask.

He answers me with silence. I stand up and hold his shirt, ripping it open with the sleeves dangling on the handles. Unlooping my belt, I twist it around my hand.

A cruel sadistic smile spreads across Francisco’s face as he knows what I am going to do. But he doesn’t know the fucked up, twisted shit I am going to pull on him.

“Every time you refuse to answer, you get punished. If I have to rip off your skin to get what I want, then so be it. Just remember you waste your life on someone who isn’t here to save you.”

By saying that, I notice his gaze faltering as if I’ve hit a nerve. I frown.

“Where is Erida?” I ask again. He remains silent again.

I strike my belt on his chest like a whip, hearing him muffle his scream through his clenched teeth. I land another strike with full force, leaving an instant red mark on his skin. His breathing turns ragged.

He continues to remain silent which only urges me to whip him again and again and again. His skin is red until he can’t take it anymore and releases his scream of agony.

“Ah!” he grunts.

“Not the answer to my question.” I keep on hitting him when I notice dots of blood coming out from his bruises. I aim for those wounds, landing hits after hits. Soon, his eyes turn drowsy again. Like he is about to faint again from pain. I stop, dropping my belt.

I take the bucket beside the table and pour it all over him, letting the salt water burn his skin even more. He instantly yells at the top of his lungs, breathing through his clenched teeth. His eyes are wide open as he looks down at his wounds before looking at me with wrath reflecting in his eyes.

“Got my answer?”

“Fuck. You,” he rasps.

I shrug, picking up my belt and continue to hit him. His screams and agony are what I live for. His pain is my ultimate prize. Every ounce of anger and humiliation I feel because of this fucker and his whore is all being channeled to him.

“Ah! Fuck!” he screams with his Adam’s apple bobbing. The nerves on his neck pulse against his viper tattoo.

“Where is Erida?”

His head leans down again and before he can see it, I pour more salt water on him, watching his entire body shiver and writhing. Seeing him so helpless is the perfect sight.

For the next one hour I keep lashing on his skin until my belt is covered in blood with the droplets trickling down on the floor. But the fucker hasn’t opened his mouth.

So far all the actions he took under her order gave a clear picture that he is loyal to her. It will take more than torturing him to death to get my answers.

Dropping my belt, I lean forward, grabbing his jaw tightly as his heavy eyes look at my cold gaze.

“This is just the beginning. Once I get her, I promise you both of you will wish you never had the thought of even going against me.”

He snickers weakly. “Time will answer you, and when that happens you will be the one kneeling. Not us.”

I offer him a dark grin which makes his expression waver. “Then you don’t know me very well. Neither am I a hero, nor am I a villain. I’m the nightmare that haunts them both. I’m the Satan. The ruthless king born in hell.”

He gulps, listening to my ice-cold tone.

“Don’t worry. I will make you regret your decision every day. Even until your last breath, you will blame yourself for being so stupid.”

I move back and look at the guards.

“Don’t let him sleep. If he even closes his eyes for a second then torture him for hours,” I order them before leaving the room.

Francisco isn’t going to break that easily. He is like a loyal dog for Erida. It will take time to know about her exact location, but until then by using him I can get my stolen dealings back.

I head to my room, noticing light coming from Elysha’s room. It is way past midnight and she usually is asleep by that time. I stalk towards her door, raising my hand to knock but I pause.

A sudden hesitation paints my mind as the memory of how harsh I was towards her comes along. I am tempted to leave and go to my bedroom, but before I know it myself, I open her door gently, twisting the knob.

The lights are turned on but she isn’t on the bed. I glance towards the balcony and there she is standing against the railing.

I step inside quietly while she is too lost, looking at the view that she doesn’t notice my presence. Every time I try to stay away from her, I feel myself getting sucked back. She stirs feelings within me that I have avoided for years. She keeps confusing me and controlling my buried feelings unknowingly.

“Why aren’t you asleep?” I ask.

She slightly jumps from my unexpected gruff voice.

“Not your business.”

“You are usually asleep before midnight.”

She snickers, looking at me over her shoulder. She is in a silk nightdress as I see her flawless skin through the transparent fabric. I instantly have the urge to run my fingers along her skin but I refrain myself.

“I just couldn’t sleep.”

I frown, feeling something off here. I walk towards her before standing beside her. She doesn’t meet my eyes.

“What’s wrong? Is it your nightmares?” I ask her.

She remains silent but her stiff body language says something else. She is hiding something. An assumption raises in my mind but it can only be confirmed by her, and I want her to speak out those words.

Holding her by her chin, I urge her to look at me.

“Were you waiting for me?”

Her eyes strain on mine as she keeps her mouth shut, being stubborn as always. She shakes her head before trying to look away.

I keep my grip on her chin and move closer.

“Lying doesn’t suit you. It’s very unlike you. And you are the bravest woman I’ve ever met.”

Her lips part as if she isn’t expecting me to say those words.

“The truth, Elysha.”

She shakes away from my hold as I notice her jawline clenching. “Why do you care? Why would you care about your *slave*’s words?”

I narrow my eyes.

“If you are here to fuck your slave then just get it over with and leave. The more I look at you, the more I’m tempted to take your gun and shoot you.”

She starts to leave but I grab her by her elbow, facing her. “Why were you waiting for me?”

She looks down as she answers. “I wasn’t waiting for anyone.”

“And yet here you are standing on the balcony.”

She keeps quiet as she finds herself at a loss for words.

“Why were you waiting for me?” I ask again, feeling my patience running thin.

Elysha remains quiet again but when she realizes I am not leaving her without an answer, she breaks her silence.

“I wasn’t feeling safe.”

I frown in confusion. “There are more than a hundred guards surrounding the premises. You are the safest woman in the entire Russia. If

you are worried about an ambush then don't worry, my guards will make sure nothing will happen to you."

She doesn't respond back, giving me the hint that this must be her answer and I start to walk out of her room.

"Nobody can protect me like you."

My steps halt at the doorway with my back facing her as she continues to speak.

"Your enemies won't fear your guards. They all fear you, knowing how strong and ruthless you are. I don't want to wait for you because I'm just a slave after all. But no matter how much I try, I can't fall asleep until I hear the click of your bedroom door being shut... I know then that you are here and I'm finally safe."

I feel my heart pounding so fast that I can hear it ringing in my ears. Her words leave me speechless. I can barely think.

I turn around to face her, holding a stone-cold expression.

"Why do you trust me so much?"

She shakes her head with a shrug. "I wish I knew because at least then I'd stop whatever this feeling is and really start hating you. No matter what you fucking do, my mind ends up thinking about you. And after how you treated me and reminded me of my place, I want nothing more but for you to disappear from my life, so that I can be free from a Satan like you."

I wish I could hate you too, Elysha. I wish I could unshackle my emotions from your hold.

* * *

THE NEXT DAY AFTER WORKING, I return home early. I am enjoying my glass of scotch while sitting in my office when one of the maids gives me an invitation.

"Whose invitation is it?" I ask.

“It’s from the Travis family, sir. Mr. Victor wanted to personally invite you but you were busy. The engagement is today and you are requested to join the ceremony,” she says and leaves the room.

I don’t bother opening the card because I know Viktor Travis only has one son. He is one of the rising businessmen who runs his own little side profession of weaponry production. He was the one who requested me to meet Julius and Nathan for that meeting. I invested millions in him to get easier access for my international business through his winery line . But the fucker is also a major pain in the ass. He is like a lapping dog who only waggles his tail for his master.

Me.

Even though I have no interest to even look at his face, I have to attend the engagement for publicity. But it also means I have to bring a date. And only one person can come with me.

Sighing heavily, I finish my scotch and head upstairs where Elysha is sitting in her usual spot, reading a book. She hears me enter the room but doesn’t bother to acknowledge me.

“There is an engagement party I have to attend and you are coming with me.”

She remains quiet as her eyes stay fixated on the words of the pages. She only raises her fingers to flip it over.

I frown in confusion. Usually, she protests or goes against my actions. This version is very unlike her. “Won’t you say anything?”

She cranes her neck up, looking at me with a blank expression. “Slaves aren’t allowed to speak, right? What does it matter what I say? You will take me to the party one way or another.”

She looks back at the book on her lap, dismissing the conversation before it even started. Arguing with her seems pointless, as it feels I am not talking to Elysha I know who has fierceness in her bones, so I leave the room and go back to work.

But how can I focus when I keep thinking about Elysha submitting so easily. She doesn't even have a spark of ferocity in her eyes. It is absolutely vacant. Blank.

A part of me does wish she would ask something, anything at all, but the other part is happy my words have worked and she is keeping her distance.

By evening I finish my work and get ready for the party.

I quickly finish getting dressed in a formal black tux, keeping my guns and knives hidden inside, before I step out of my room just in time to see Elysha exiting her room as well. And dear God she is a sight to behold. My eyes rake down from top to bottom of her gorgeous body.

Her full-sleeved, golden gown is shimmering under the light. The deep V of her dress ends below her breast line, giving an alluring peak of her cleavage. Then my eyes land on the black diamond bracelet I gifted her that will show everyone how different she is in a crowd of strangers. Her hair is let down with the ends styled into loose curls as they rest over her left shoulder, showing off her smooth neckline. A small golden clutch bag rests between her palm and fingers.

When our eyes meet, I see a hint of desire in her gaze but she immediately covers it up with a monotonous look.

"I'm ready," she says and heads downstairs without waiting for a response from me.

When we arrive at Victor's house, Elysha is by my side with her arm hooked around my elbow. It is a formal occasion so I order my guards to stay outside. When everyone sees my arrival, they all nod at me but never dare to meet my eyes. Elysha takes notice but if she has any reaction towards it, she hides it very well.

Victor spots me and right away walks towards me, raising both his hands to shake mine.

“Mr. Reznikov, it’s an honor to have you here,” he murmurs, greeting me. He looks at Elysha and even though it is for a fleeting moment, the look of wickedness in his eyes doesn’t go unnoticed by me.

“And you are?” he asks, leaning closer to her to take her hand in a polite gesture. But I pull her closer to me, sending him a death glare. He cowers away instantly.

“She is with me. So, treat her with respect.”

He nods with a trembling smile. “Of course, Mr. Reznikov.”

I feel Elysha relaxing beside me, but the first guests crowd around us before I can ask her if she is alright.

My gaze keeps returning back to Elysha who is surrounded by the glow of the chandeliers lighting, looking luminous and beautiful as she engages in conversations every now and then. She lies, saying she is here to travel and her posture never falters. Just like a true queen.

Strong. Elegant. Perfection.

As I look around, I see men looking at her with fascination but the women glaring at her in jealousy, as if she is unworthy of standing beside me.

Fucking idiots.

None of them even have one ounce of the powerful personality that Elysha carries. They are the ones unworthy of even setting their gaze upon her.

For the next few hours, we keep mingling with the guests when Victor announces the ceremony about to happen now. Just then his son and his soon to be fiancé come down from the second floor. They stand at the center of the room and exchange rings, followed by the loud clapping of the guests as they complete the ceremony.

Now the soon-to-be-wedded couple greets the guests and eventually comes to me. But when I find Gregor’s eyes landing on Elysha with his

gaze darkening, like he is already thinking about all the things he would do to her. Like a father, like son.

If only I could shoot both of them right here and hang their bodies from the chandelier then I would.

“Congratulations, Gregor,” I wish him in an emotionless tone as he shakes my hand with a nod.

“Thank you, sir. And thank you for attending the ceremony.” He looks down at his fiancé, putting his arms around her. “This is Charlotte, my fiancée.”

She greets me with a polite smile but it is so fake that even a short-sighted man can tell easily. “Nice to meet you, Mr. Reznikov. I’ve heard so much about you.”

I’m sure she did.

She looks back at her fiancé and notices his gaze on Elysha. The jealousy and anger on her face is clear that even her fake smile and shit ton of makeup can’t hide it.

Charlotte gets her fiancé’s attention by engaging in a conversation but when he sees the same death glare I sent to his father, he looks away pretending to remain calm. The party continues with its usual flow. People are talking among each other while drinking and getting their pictures taken by a few photographers for tomorrow’s papers.

“Dad would like to talk to you in his office. It’s about the meeting from a few days ago,” Gregor mutters to me discreetly. I nod before whispering to Elysha that I will be back in a few minutes.

Gregor guides me to his father’s office where Victor is already waiting. Taking a seat by his desk we start to discuss the meeting with Julius and Nathan.

“Is the international shipping ready for Germany?” I ask him.

He nods towards his son who brings a file to me. Opening it, I scan through all the information, having everything I told him to do.

Very impressive.

“Your weapon and drug shipments will be ready to deliver by next Monday,” Victor says while I continue reading.

After I’m done, I put it back on the table and lean back.

“But here at the end it says there will be a ten percent tax charge. Why is that?” I ask in a dead serious tone.

He gulps in nervousness, looking back and forth from me to his son.

“It’s a requirement, sir. Otherwise, the authorities might get involved,” Gregor states.

“I’m running a business here, not charity. The dealers will already get the profits, so over that I’m not paying for anything else. Not even a single ruble,” I order.

Gregor and Victor both nervously look at me before Victor leans forward with an uneasy and fear filled expression.

“Mr. Reznikov, if authorities get involved then it might cause a scandal—”

“You have way more scandals than that, Victor. Let’s be honest here. Every family member of yours has some sort of secret or scandal they are involved in. That’s nothing new. Yet, I make sure it doesn’t affect your winery business. And I told you to do just one job, one fucking job.”

Victor looks already shitless scared just from my tone, and his son is being no support either.

“Get this resolved. Otherwise, it will take me one minute to ruin your reputation and get you and your family behind bars for years.”

He shakes his head vigorously. “No, no, no. Please, Mr. Reznikov. I will make sure that no issues happen. You gave my word.”

“I better have everything ready by next week.”

After a few more minutes of discussion, I get up and leave the room and look for Elysha. But she isn’t around.

Confusion fills me and I head upstairs to look for her. And I do find her, but the people surrounding her already told me that something is wrong.

It is Charlotte and what seems to be two other women among the guests, and they are all accusing her of something.

“See? She took it. I know people like her very well,” Charlotte says, crossing her arms on her chest.

“Call the guards and tell them to check her. Maybe she is hiding more jewelry under her dress. Women like her should be stripped naked and thrown out,” the woman in emerald color gown hisses.

“I’ve told you again and I will still say the same thing. I didn’t steal your bracelet and I don’t know how it ended up in my purse,” Elysha states boldly, refusing to cower back from the false accusations of these fake, jealous bitches.

She steps closer to Charlotte who backs away from her strong demeanor. “Call the guards or your husband, I don’t care. But if any of you dares to even touch me, then I won’t hesitate to either break your hands or shoot you.”

The three of them gasp, looking at each other.

“Who does she think she is? Call the guards,” Charlotte sneers. She turns to call for the security but when she sees me standing, her entire body turns still.

Elysha and the other two women see me as well and turn quiet.

I stalk towards them with a cold glare. In seconds the three of them hold fear in their faces.

“What seems to be the problem here?” I ask Elysha.

She holds my gaze fearlessly, unlike the other three because she knows she isn’t the culprit.

“She stole my bracelet—”

“I didn’t fucking ask you,” I sneer at Charlotte, watching her eyes widen before her face casts down.

The other women start to back as well. "Take another step and see what happens," I warn them.

"What happened, Elysha?"

"Charlotte took me upstairs to show the rest of the house. I went to use the washroom and then when we were heading out, Charlotte started to look for her bracelet. Then these two came and started to accuse me and then snatched my purse, where they found her bracelet. But I didn't steal it."

"She is lying. I know women like her—"

I turn to face Charlotte who takes a few steps back right away.

"Now, you tell me what happened?" My tone is cold as stone while she is struggling to even meet my eyes.

"I-I was waiting for her to come out of the restroom, b-but... then m-my bracelet was m-missing and it w-was in her purse."

Her unconfident, stuttering words are enough proof to show who is the culprit here. I stand close to her until her steps are blocked by the wall against her back. Her breathing turns shallow with anxiety.

"If you really think, I'm going to buy your stupid as fuck accusation towards Elysha, then you don't know me well. Before you could even utter your bullshit, I knew, standing from a few feet away, who is the liar."

"The bracelet was found—"

"Don't embarrass yourself any more than you already do every day with your stupidity."

She looks at her friends to help her but luckily, they are smart enough not to cross me.

"What were you saying about Elysha being stripped naked and thrown out again?" I cross my arms, looking broader which makes her cower away.

She shakes her head vigorously. "I-I didn't mean that... I was just—"

I shake my head slowly and she shuts her mouth right away. I nod towards her friends who scamper to Charlotte's side, looking scared just like her.

“You said a woman like her deserves it, but it's bitches like you who do. So, take off your dresses.”

The three of them look up at me with wide eyes, Charlotte is almost on the verge of crying.

“Please, Mr. Reznikov... I’m sorry—”

“I said, take it off. All three of you.”

“Please—”

Before Charlotte can finish her words, I grip her throat, muffling her shriek while her two friends already start to shed tears.

“Maxwell, stop it,” Elysha mutters, holding my shoulder, urging me to move back. But my hold tightens around Charlotte’s neck.

“Maxwell, please, stop. It’s not worth it,” Elysha pleads.

I look at her and it takes just one look, *one look* and my nerves turn calm right away. My anger slips away.

“They insulted you,” I sneer.

“And they are sorry for it. Now, leave it,” she whispers imploringly.

I look back at Charlotte who seems like she might faint from seeing the fierceness in my eyes. “You are getting spared because of her. So be thankful. But if you ever even think of insulting her again—” I squeeze her neck a tad tighter, making her choke a bit, “—then even your fiancé won’t come to save you. She is a queen. You better respect her like one.”

Her body shudders from my warning but she nods her response. I release her and the three of them immediately run downstairs.

“We are leaving,” I mutter and grab Elysha’s hand, taking her with me and soon out of this charade.

I start to drive us back home but the anger within me is still kindling inside me. My grip gets tighter on the steering wheel as I step on the speed pedal more.

“You didn’t have to do that. She will create an unnecessary scene later,” Elysha whispers.

I scoff. “After the way I threatened her, she won’t dream of telling anything to anyone. And she deserved it for insulting you.”

“Why do you care what people say about your slave?” she asks, her eyes looking ahead at the dark road being illuminated by the headlights.

My jawline clenches as I feel incapable of answering her question.

“I care,” I whisper. She turns to look at me with her brows furrowed, but I don’t meet her gaze.

“It’s true. You are nothing but my slave, and that’s the only connection we will ever have. But I can’t stand anyone treating you any less, because despite our arrangement, you are the strongest woman I’ve ever met. Every time I see you, I see a woman who will stand her ground to protect herself and her pride. A woman like you is rare to find in this world of darkness, and such rare beauty should be treated with respect.”

We both turn silent as I continue to drive. Both of us not knowing what to say any further on this topic.

But then suddenly, a strange beeping sound rings in my ear, making me frown in confusion.

I check my phone but there is no incoming call, and Elysha doesn’t own one. I am slowing down the speed pedal when I hear the beeping sound turning continuous.

Shit.

It’s a bomb.

CHAPTER 27



ELYSHA

PAST

THE SCREAMING KEEPS ECHOING throughout the church. Even the thick walls show no mercy to my aching soul, letting those painful screeches reach my ears. The added groans and grunts make my heart beat faster than that of a healthy horse. I face the window with both my hands pressed tightly against my ears as I curl myself into a cocoon. My throat is dry like sand and my breath turns ragged and deep from fear and anxiety.

The moonlight streams through the colorful stained glass, making my dark room shine with glowing lights. But these colors are all fake. Just like this place. Just like this hell.

How can God let the sinners live under his roof and allow them to commit sins? How can God be so cruel? So heartless?

A loud, long groan is released before silence dawns in. I wait for a few minutes before carefully lifting my hands.

Should I go?

Should I help her?

Licking my dry lip, I swallow the lump in my throat and get up from bed. Slowly unlocking the door, I take steady and quiet steps towards the neighboring door. Perspiration makes my entire skin turn warm as if I have fever.

Did that monster leave?

I press my ear against the door, listening for any sign of the monster being present inside the room.

Silence. Nothing but silence.

Looking towards the empty hallway on my left, I slowly open the door and enter. And there she is lying.

I gasp at the horrific sight that greets me. Another one that will be added on my shelf of nightmares, haunting me day and night.

My sister lies on the floor, naked. Bite and scratch marks covering her neck, breasts and belly. Her raven black hair is no longer straight. Instead, it is tousled in a mess with few strands shrouding her face from me. Her arms wrapped around herself as she shivers on the cold floor.

There are no cries. No whimpers. No words at all.

Tears that I have been holding back streak down as I rush towards her. Kneeling down, I make a move to touch her but halt my hands just a few inches away, hesitation overtakes me along with the fear of hurting my sister.

Taking a deep breath, I smoothen away the hair from her face. Her lifeless eyes stare blankly at the ceiling.

“Rhea, can you hear me?” I barely whisper.

She moves her head to meet my eyes, but her deadpan eyes send shivers down my spine. Did the monster break her beyond repair today?

“Let’s get you to bed.” I help her get up and lie her down on the crumpled bed sheets. Did he torture her here and then threw her on the floor?

As she lies down without any sound, I cover her naked, bruised body with a blanket and rush towards the wardrobe to find her clothes and some medicine. When I get to her that's when I notice the soundless tears being shed from her eyes.

"I..." my words fade away. What am I even supposed to say when she is suffering from my actions?

Why did I go down to the basement and help him?

With shaky hands I open the box and take out the ointment. With a small amount of the liquid on my fingers I put it on her wounds and bruises. Unlike other times she doesn't hiss in pain. She is showing no emotions at all.

After treating her wounds, I take the white nightdress and help her put it on. She rests against the headboard, looking towards the window. I place my hand over hers, feeling how cold and distant my sister is.

"I'm sorry... I-I shouldn't have gone down again."

Painful silence greets me. "Please say something, Rhea. Please..."

She shakes her head. "It wasn't your fault. I didn't get punished for your sins."

I frown in confusion. "What?"

She looks at me with her lifeless expression that only rips my soul into pieces. "I went downstairs to see him a few days later when you told me about him."

"What?"

Rhea nods. "I felt his pain, too." More tears stream down her face. "I saw the darkness in him that we both suffered. Difference is... We want the darkness to be over while he craves for it."

He craves for the darkness? He wants the pain and agony?

I shake my head and cup her face. "He can't. He is different and I know it." I lick my lips, biting down on my bottom lip.

“He wants freedom from this hell like both of us. But he will leave when the time comes.”

She scoffs with a hard-hearted smile. “Then why did he murder mother Sophia?”

My lips part but no answer is revealed from my side. I’m clueless myself why he killed her and kept hurting her. That dark look in his eyes as he saw her blood pooling around her was something I will never forget. Since the night I met him, that was the first time he looked at ease. He looked... relaxed. At peace.

“You don’t know him like I do, Elysha,” she whispers. “You are trying to be like him as well. Otherwise you wouldn’t have helped him to cover for his sin.”

I shake my head. “He didn’t–”

“Don’t lie to me, Elysha. I may be only two minutes younger than you but I’ve seen you night after night going to him. Even though you know the consequences.”

It is my turn to be silent. I don’t know how to answer her. Am I turning into him? Craving for darkness?

How could that be possible?

“But sometimes it’s okay to want darkness, Elysha. It has its own beauty.”

My brows furrow in confusion. “What are you saying? You mean, you are okay with this pain and torture?” I caress her cheek with my thumb. “Why are you talking like this?”

She shakes her head. “You are asking me? You called me for help when he killed mother Sophia. You could have done the so-called noble duty and informed others about it. But what did you suggest, Elysha?”

I let out a shaky, ragged breath, feeling my nerves jittering. She is right. I did call her right away, explaining everything to her. However, there was no other option but to bury mother Sophia’s body in the graveyard right

behind the church. It was risky and could have gotten both of us killed. But those monsters would have discovered the sin we two were covering up for.

“It was your idea to bury her body in that graveyard. It was also your suggestion to write that fake letter, fooling those monsters that mother Sophia left this church on her own. If that isn’t the sign of darkness then I don’t know what is. He is changing you and there is nothing wrong with that.”

The monsters would have started to get suspicious about her sudden disappearance. Writing the letter helped to cover our tracks. Now nobody even dares to mention mother Sophia’s name. But whenever I clean the backyard, the sight of her grave makes me shiver with fear. As if she is to come alive and choke me to death.

“We both know our family is never coming to get us. We are on our own in this. But we can use him and get out of this inferno.”

She holds onto my wrist, giving them a gentle squeeze. Her fingers slightly graze on my wounds, making me hiss.

Turning my wounds towards her, she carefully traces the deep, still healing, wire cuts on my skin. The day the monsters caught me in the basement they didn’t hesitate to punish me for my sins. I clearly remember two of them taking me to the altar and pinning me against the table. One captured my body with his and started to touch my skin with his lips like a wild, reckless animal. I cried as loud as possible, pleading to God for help. But all I heard were the evil laughs of those monsters as they kept touching me everywhere. But when I tried to protect myself by slapping one of them, things turned even worse. With eyes full of vengeful anger, one monster held me while the other returned with sharp wires on his hand. Before I knew it, I felt the sharp sting of the wire being penetrated onto my skin with blood pooling out.

The pain burned throughout my body like fire. My throat was sore from screaming out loud, but deep down I knew nobody was going to save me. I

had no option but to endure it. For days I couldn't move my hands because every time I did, every nerve on my arm started to burn. Mother Sophia told me that I deserved it for going against the rules. Everyone knew no one was allowed in the basement, and yet I went against the rules. I committed a sin and deserved to be punished.

"He calls you an'gel, right?"

I nod with my eyes on my scars, watching her fingers tracing them.

"He can help us, Elysha. He is our only chance. He will get us out of here and from there we can deal with the situation together—"

Just then the door bursts open and a tall, unsteady figure lurks at the door with a bottle in their hand. It was the monster.

My heart speeds up instantly and I feel Rhea clutching my hands for dear life. I immediately wrap my arms around her as the monster steps inside the room. The familiar smell of scotch is wafting in the air.

He grips my arm with a fierce force before getting close to my face. "You should be in bed now," he slurs his words.

I grit my teeth, giving it all to bare the pain but when he grabs my hair I give in and screech.

"Get the fuck up!" he growls and drags me up with him.

"No let her go!" I hear Rhea's protest as she holds onto my other arm. The monster comes to her and gives a sharp slap across her face, making her fall back on the bed.

"No!" I scream.

"I had enough shit to deal with today and I'm definitely not in the mood to punish you," he sneers. His eyes fall on her bruises and marks as he gives a wicked grin. "Ah. Seems like my brother already had his fun with you."

The reminder makes her shrink back in bed. She wraps her body tightly with the blanket like a shield.

He lets out an evil chuckle while his breath stench of scotch, nearly making me throw up. "I think I will send him again to you to teach you another lesson."

As if his words turn on a switch, Rhea goes still and looks away. Her blank eyes look back at the window as if she returned to her own solace. The monster drags me out of the room and enters inside mine before throwing me on the bed.

He drinks from his bottle in a clumsy manner. Then he wipes off the droplets with the back of his rough and dirty hand. He stalks towards me while unbuttoning his white shirt, revealing his hairy chest and that scary bear tattoo.

"Take off your nightdress," he orders and begins to unzip his black pants.

I crawl back from his touch, feeling fear clogging my throat. "No. Stay away."

"Do as you are told, you little whore, before I rip off that dress myself. He takes out the belt, placing the bottle of scotch on the side table and wraps it around his fist.

"I said take off your dress."

I move away, looking around for anything to protect myself with but before I can find anything, it's too late. He grabs me by my ankle, pulling me towards him and caging my body with his heavy one. I thrash against his hold, punching his chest as hard as I can but his humorless laugh indicates it is a futile attempt. Grabbing both my wrists, he ties his belt around them, leaving no room before binding the end of it to the bedpost. I tug against the restraint, meanwhile he pushes off his shirt with that sickening grin on his face.

No. No. No. Please, God, no. Not again.

I kick my legs at his stomach with force but he holds both my legs and spreads them apart. With his face gradually coming close, it makes me sick

to my stomach. Tears are streaming down my face while my voice never gives up on calling for help.

“No! Please, no! Help!” I scream.

He rests both his scruffy hands on either side of my head before leaning closer and taking a deep whiff of my hair. I move my head away but he follows my motion.

“I have been hard since the morning, watching you in that little tunic.”

I thrash and writhe harder, shaking my head like a lunatic.

“Please I can’t anymore. Please stop.”

I feel his hands tugging down my panties and his erection brushing my exposed belly. I cringe, feeling disgusted and ashamed.

He chuckles with his breath fanning my cheek. One of his hands cups my breast, gripping it hard while the other one touches the place between my legs. More tears stream down my face with my emotions being poured out along with my sorrow.

“You want this, I can tell,” he whispers against my neck.

That’s when I feel his erection pressing against me and trying to penetrate through my walls. I know this is it and no help is going to come. The only thing I do in such moments is close my eyes and keep praying to God to help me out of this hell.

And so, I do it.

CHAPTER 28



ELYSHA

PRESENT

“LISTEN TO ME CAREFULLY NOW, ELYSHA” Maxwell’s voice suddenly turns serious.

Frowning, I look at him and I can feel something is wrong.

“Take out my phone and call my guard Jose. Put the phone on the speaker.”

I immediately do as he says and call Jose who answers after the first ring.

“Sir,” he answers.

“There is a speed sensitive bomb planted on the car engine. If I stop, slow down or speed up then the car will explode.”

What?

My heart starts to beat faster from panic and even though I have no clue what to do, I look around for any sort of hint that would save us.

“We are right behind you, sir. You can open the door and jump into our car.”

Maxwell shakes his head. "I can't take my feet off the pedal. Any chance there could be something behind the seat?"

"There is a briefcase, sir. But it might not be heavy enough."

"It will shorten the time but it's the only option. Wait for my signal and then bring your car close to mine."

"Yes, sir."

The atmosphere is so tense and dangerous that I feel anxiety crawling in my nerves.

"Elysha, there should be a briefcase at the back. Get it now."

Nodding, I lean to the back side and quickly look for the briefcase. I find it under the seat before passing it to him.

He signals his guards with the back headlights and soon their car speeds up beside us. Maxwell faces me with a cold, serious look.

"I will open my door side and then you climb over me and get to the other car."

"But—"

"Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you. Jose will catch you. You will be safe."

I shake my head furiously, feeling my heart pumping so fast from the adrenaline rush. "It's not about me. How will you get out?" I ask.

A surprised look replaces his expression for a second before he looks at the car beside him. "Nothing will happen to me, either. Now go, we don't have much time."

Without waiting for me to respond, he wraps one arm around me and hoists me on his lap, and opens his door.

I can hear the engine roaring with the wind gusting on my face. The door of the other car is already open, and the guards are waiting.

"I'm not leaving without you," I scream, clinging onto his shoulder. "You have to come with me, Maxwell. Please."

"I will be with you, don't worry. You have my word."

Before I can say anything further, I hear the beeping sound increasing. Maxwell's eyes widen before he warns his guards to stop their car, and he continues driving.

Suddenly, he gets his hands away from the steering wheel and wraps them around me like a shield before he jumps off the car as we roll down the rocky road. The next thing I hear is an ear-piercing boom that makes the ground tremble.

The smoke is so heavy that we both start to cough, but luckily, we aren't that close to the blast.

I hear the halting screech sound of a car and look up to find the guards scampering out and heading towards us. Maxwell raises his hand, gesturing he is alright but he keeps looking at me. He cups my face. "Are you alright? Are you hurt?" he asks.

I nod, feeling speechless.

I look at him then back at his wrecked car which is burning like a firewood. And that's when something hits me. This will be his life. A life filled with danger and darkness.

But a few moments ago, the slightest thought of losing him made my soul ache to its core. I shouldn't feel anything like this for a Satan like him, and he shouldn't be looking so concerned about me either. Yet, here we both are.

Surrendering to our buried emotions.

* * *

I REMAIN silent as Maxwell drives down the gravel road. The radio is turned off so the only noise is the crunching of the stones beneath the tires. It has been a few days now since the night of his car blasting, the night where we almost lost each other. The night we got a peek at each other's emotions.

We haven't talked much after that and more distance grew between us. I would have refused to leave today but I gave word to his mother.

My eyes are strained in the middle of nowhere. I have no wish to join Maxwell to this function but I am bound by my words. Even from his sour mood it is clear he doesn't want me here. There are no cars, no buildings, barely any people. Nothing but fields and trees surrounding us.

It is so beautiful that I can't help but get mesmerized by it. He continues to drive another mile when I see a building in the distance. There is a giant metal gate which has flower vines wrapped on its rod. A guard standing there opens it for us and he drives inside until he stops the car at the driveway. We get out and the first sound that reaches my ears are the joyful giggles and shrieks of children. The fresh scent of wild flowers whiffs around my nostrils while the heavy wind caresses my hair and cheeks. A few cars are parked near the fences.

Resting his hand at my back, we walk forward and circle around the building. The sight that greets me makes my brows furrow in surprise.

There are children running around the backyard, playing and some are talking to each other. And behind them is a beautiful field filled with red and white roses with butterflies shrouding over them. It is like seeing a piece of heaven built on earth. So beautiful.

Few wooden tables and benches are set with plates on top where some of the guests are sitting and talking with one another. Maxwell's mother catches my sight. She is in a pale pink dress with her hair tied in a bun. She is helping a young boy tying his shoes.

As if she can feel our presence, her eyes gaze up at us, followed by a sweet smile while we stalk towards her.

"You two made it," she mutters, hugging her son and kissing his cheek, before she moves to me, engulfing me in her arms.

"I'm so glad you came, Elysha. It really means a lot."

“I’m happy to be here, Catherine. It looks so beautiful,” I mutter, looking around, taking in the sight.

“I agree with you but all these wouldn’t be possible without my son here. He turned this place into a heaven.”

My head turns to Maxwell whose expression tells me he wants this to be kept as secret.

“He built this for all these children to have a home and family of their own. Every child you see here has been through a lot after losing their parents, but Maxwell did everything possible to give them the light of hope for a better life.”

I’m left speechless. I have no clue what to say. I have only seen the ruthless and heartless side of Maxwell. I’ve never reckoned him as someone to care for anyone other than himself and his mother. But yet here he is. The one who cares about these children and giving them a life they were deprived of by fate.

Maxwell’s body tenses as he looks around for an excuse to escape this conversation. Luckily, his mother takes pity on him, telling him to mingle with the kids.

“Why don’t you come and help me set the food?” Catherine asks.

I nod with a shaky smile as I follow. We walk around the left side of the building and enter the kitchen where the cooks are preparing the meal. It smells ravishing. They all nod at Catherine with a gentle smile before returning to their tasks. I follow her to the corner where she stands by a window and begins cutting some apples. I help her with the fruits but my mind keeps racing with question after question.

“You seem to be somewhere else, Elysha.” Catherine’s tender voice makes me look up at her. I offer her a nervous smile.

“I’m alright. Just overwhelmed by the beauty here.”

She smiles sadly, looking at the window and I follow her gaze. Maxwell is sitting on the bench with a six-year-old boy who is reading a kid’s book

to him. He has a grin on his lips with an amusing look I haven't seen before.

"This is the only place where he is his true self."

I turn to Catherine with a frown. "True self?" I have seen Maxwell's true self and this is not that.

"Everyone knows him as the Pakhan of Bratva who was born to flood Russia with blood, violence and corruption. But nobody knows this side of him except for these children. He built this place for a reason."

"What reason?" I ask.

She shrugs with a smile. "He thinks I'm not aware of it but I have known it from the beginning. All these children you see are not only orphans but also pure souls who were trapped in slavery and child trafficking."

My heart skips a beat. "What?" I barely whisper out the word.

She nods. "He saved them all from a lifetime of nightmares. Just to rectify what happened to him years ago and I know it still haunts him. I can see it in his eyes. But he isn't willing to give up."

"What happened to him?"

Catherine looks at me with uncertainty but I hold her hands, giving them a gentle squeeze of reassurance. I need to know this. I have to.

"He was kidnapped by his uncle when he was a teenager. He was held captive for months." Her voice breaks down a bit as if the memory itself is painful for her.

"His father looked for him everywhere but then one of the governors informed us that our son was found in a Russian military hospital. Wounded, hurt. Blood covered his body..."

She snuffles with her eyes blinking rapidly.

"It took five days for him to gain his consciousness back. And the minute he opened his eyes, he just looked frantically around for someone."

"Who?"

“*An’gel*. His angel. That’s what he kept chanting again and again. For several days he was distraught and would hit the doctors to leave the hospital, just to search for his *an’gel*. It took a lot of time to calm him down, but the day he recovered he begged me to take him to the place where he was held captive. His father denied him since day one because he thought Maxwell was going through a trauma. But I saw the desperation in his eyes, I saw the truth. So I took him to the place but when we reached it, there was nothing. There was no church or gate. There was nothing but a burnt building and snow.”

No words evoke in my head as I stand there speechless, listening to Maxwell’s past that shadows in the dark. The truth.

“He kept screaming *an’gel* for hours. He looked everywhere like a lost soul for her. For days he was quiet... and when he started to fall into his father’s steps, he searched for her. Day and night, he would look for any clue that would lead to her. He even went to several brothel ambushes, hoping he would find her. But when he saw how it was turning him weak and vulnerable, he stopped. He stopped looking for her and turned into something he never wanted to be. Maxwell bought this place and constructed it into the building he was held captive in. But by bringing these children, helping them all, he turned it into a heaven.”

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I lick my dry lips when my eyes return to Maxwell. He is in the same place with the boy with his arm over the boy’s tiny shoulder.

Why did he stop? Why did he give up?

Why Maxwell?

My gut starts to churn with an unsettling feeling that makes my throat clog.

“He hides these children’s past from me but I know it all. Deep down my sweet little boy is there. He is just lost in this dark world with no one to guide him into light. He only shows this side of him around me but I won’t

be here forever. One day I will leave and then what? Then he will fully shut himself down. Even the slightest hope will be lost.”

Few tears stream down her cheeks and even I realize I am crying as well when my vision blurs.

“But with you,” she touches my shoulder, offering me her soft smile, “You can bring my lost son back, Elysha. Since the day I saw you with him, I didn’t miss the way he looked at you. I saw that spark in his eyes. That hidden love for you. All he needs is guidance, my dear. Someone to be there for him.”

My eyes cast down as tears keep running down. I bite my lip. I feel guilt engulfing me. What have I done?

“Do you love my son, Elysha?” she asks with her eyes gleaming with hope while mine held with uncertainty.

This whole time I let myself believe that Maxwell was using me. He would never feel something for me... he wasn’t meant to be. But now?

After what I did and what I have heard from his mother, I realize what a terrible mistake I’ve made. I can’t think through the fog of guilt and pain... I don’t know what to do.

“Mrs. Reznikov, the stage has been set,” one of the maids comes to us to inform Catherine.

“Of course, uh... take all the food outside when the show ends.”

We both secretly wipe away the tears and walk outside, ending the conversation for now.

“Come on, the kids are excited for the puppet show. Let’s all head inside.”

With a nod she gathers everyone into the building. Maxwell joins me, putting his arm around me and leading me in. It is a two-story building. We walk down the main hall-room where two sets of stairs on either side lead up to the second floor. The interior looks quite old with all the carved designs, but it still holds its elegance at the same time. We all take our

respective seats on the wooden benches and look ahead where a small stage is set with a velvet tent.

The rustling and whispers of the kids echoes in the vast hallway, leaving a calming feeling within me. There is just something pure and beautiful about this place. As if it was built to show everyone that innocence still exists. The more I look, the more I realize how the architecture is similar to the church we both were held captive in. Maxwell built it for the children but deep down he wanted to punish himself by relishing the memories.

“Are you okay?” he asks with a hint of concern in his tone.

I nod without uttering my response.

“What did you and my mother talk about for so long?”

“Nothing. I was just helping her with the food.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it too. What did you tell her?”

“If you think I talked about how you treat me like your personal whore, then don’t sweat it. I didn’t ruin your perfect image in front of her. Just drop it and watch the show,” I whisper angrily, crossing my arms and looking ahead, quitting on his questions for now. When the lights turn dim, everyone’s attention returns to the stage. The show starts with two cotton puppets dressed up as girls while the narrator recites their story.

“Once upon a time there were two sisters,” a shrill feminine voice comes from the back of the stage. Just hearing the word *sisters*, makes my mind ruffle with deeper guilt.

“They lived in a beautiful palace as princesses. Loved by the king and queen.” Few kids at the front clap in joy while I feel an invisible wall capturing me into old memories. Rhea and I never lived the life of princesses. Both of our lives started in a dark journey we weren’t prepared for.

“They were living a happy life together, but one day their kingdom was attacked.” The audience gasps when fire made of red cotton clothes is moving. My breathing turns shallow when the memory of me and Rhea

being tortured by our foster parents fill my mind. I grip the bench tightly so that I can feel the veins popping against my skin.

“The king was so worried that he didn’t know what to do. But then...” The sound of horse hoofs fills around as the two girl puppets are riding a horse with wooden swords. The kids cheered again when they figured out the princesses were going to fight their own battles. Just like Rhea and I did.

“The two princesses came in and fought for their kingdom. Kicking the bad people’s butts.” The kids let out hearty laughs. Even the adults join in with a light chuckle but the entire atmosphere makes me feel suffocated.

The show will have a happy ending for sure. But what about me? What about Rhea?

What about Maxwell?

If I knew the truth before I would have convinced Rhea about it as well. Now it is too late. Too late.

Without thinking, I get up from the bench and stride outside. I notice a few people glancing at me but I don’t care. Not anymore.

I let out a shaky breath, feeling gut churning. I press my palm on my belly. He looked for me... Maxwell looked for me but he gave up.

He just gave up like that.

He got married and moved on, ruling over his kingdom. I was gone from his memories and he let that happen. He actually let that happen.

“Elysha? What happened?” I hear Maxwell’s worrisome voice behind me but I don’t turn. I can’t face him. Not after what I’ve heard.

“Just leave me alone. Go inside.”

He stands in front of me with his brows furrowed. “What happened, Elysha? Tell me.”

His hand rests on my shoulder but I shake away from his hold. “Don’t touch me.”

He frowns. "Why did you run away like that? What the fuck happened? Just tell me."

Tears threaten to drop down from my cheeks but I hold my head high, remaining strong from outside, even though the truth is crushing me from inside.

"Why do you care? I'm just a slave to you, right?"

I push him hard on his chest, watching his jawline ticking with an emerging anger and frustration.

"Why would you care what your slave feels? Why would it even matter to you if something is bothering me or not? Tell me why?"

He remains quiet while his cold gaze meets mine.

"Just tell me the truth once, Maxwell. Why would you care what I feel?" I hate myself for sounding like I am begging him to give me an answer, but it is driving me insane... The hidden truth is hurting me day after day that I can't take it anymore.

Just then the door opens and by the look on Maxwell's face it is clear that Catherine must have noticed our absence.

"Is everything alright?" she asks.

I blink back the tears and offer her a polite smile.

"Everything is alright, mother. Don't worry."

Fucking liar.

She looks at me with concern painted on her face as she cups my shoulder. "Is something wrong, Elysha?"

I nod. "I'm just having a headache. I didn't get much proper sleep last night."

"Oh. Then you should go and take some rest, my dear."

I shake my head. "No, it's okay—"

"No buts. And there is not much to do now. The children will eat and play some more." She turns to Maxwell. "Take her home because she is suddenly looking pale. She needs proper rest."

Maxwell nods and holds my arm as we say goodbye to Catherine and head back to the car. Throughout the drive the silence returns again. But this time it is suffocating. As we get close to the city, the clouds no longer brighten up with the sun. It is dark and gloomy, sending a message to everyone that a storm is coming.

Maxwell parks the car in the driveway and instantly gets out before opening my door and forcing me out. He drags me upstairs to his room, shutting the door with a loud bang.

“What the fuck is wrong with you today!” he yells. “And what were you thinking? What if my mother heard that? What if one of the children heard it? Do you have any idea how it would have affected my mother?”

I remain quiet.

“Speak up!” he screams at the top of his lungs, making me jolt with surprise. The sound of the thunder crackles loudly outside as the room turns dark with no natural light coming in.

“Do you love me or not?” I ask directly.

Maxwell just stares at me blankly as if words escaped his mind. I walk towards him, holding his suit collar.

“Look me in the eye and answer it, Maxwell. Do you love me or not?”

“I have told you before, Elysha—”

“That you are incapable of love, I know. But were you incapable the night you were wounded and I walked into that dark basement and healed your scars?” I whisper.

His brows furrow with confusion. “What?”

I cup his face, looking him in the eye like I did the first night I saw him.

“I won’t hurt you. I promise,” I whisper.

His eyes widen with shock as he grasps my wrists.

“H-How do you know this?” he asks, nearly begging.

“How can I ever forget about the boy who was held captive with me and yet he gave me hope for freedom?”

His mouth opens and closes but no words come out of his lips. Shock and pain flashes in his eyes as they start to glisten.

His shaky hands cup my face and emotions I haven't witnessed before cross his face. Guilt. Pain. Realization.

"*An'gel*" he whispers.

I nod, letting the tears run down my cheeks, my walls breaking bit by bit.

"Is it really you?" he asks.

"It is me. I'm the girl you promised a new life to... A freedom that I lost hope for. But you are not the same boy I fell in love with." I move back, shaking my head, watching him frown again.

"You just forgot about me. Just like that."

He shakes his head taking a step forward, but when I raise my palm he stays still.

"You looked for me and that's very generous of you, Mr. Reznikov. Even more generous of you to think that I might be dead and not only did you give up but you buried your memories. You just got married and move on!" I scream, channeling all my pent-up rage into my words. The thunder crackles even louder before the rain starts to pour.

"And what did I do?" I point at my own self. "I waited. Deep down I just kept praying that you are alive and you will come and save me." My voice starts to break as I swallow the lump in my throat.

"After you killed Petro, his men dragged me back to the church. And the next day they took me somewhere else... Another hell. You want to know what happened to me while you were off being married and ruling over your kingdom?"

He remains silent but his eyes say that seeing me like this is breaking him inside. Well too late for that concern.

"I was sold from one monster to another like a fucking ragged doll. They used me like I was some sort of cheap whore... T-they just fucked me,

raped me whenever they wanted, however they wanted.”

He winces as if he is the one who suffered.

“It didn’t matter to them if I was tired or unconscious. They just cared about fucking me and beating me as they wished. But I never gave up. I tried to escape several times but with every try it got harder and harder to be free. But I only thought about you and my sister.”

His eyes widen a bit as he tries to put pieces together of what I am confessing.

“Yes. My twin sister, Rhea. Whom you didn’t hesitate to fuck and then leave her. Just like you are doing to me.” I let out a humorless laugh. “The only difference I think is that you are keeping me longer than her and I wonder why.”

He doesn’t look surprised as I reveal about my sister. The fucking bastard knew the entire time. Of course he wouldn’t be surprised. He planned it all.

“But then fate brought us back together. And here I am back in your life as your *slave*. That time I was blinded by the pain we both shared, but now I truly see who you are. And that is a fucking Satan.”

A sob cracks through my throat as I can’t hold onto my emotions anymore. I’ve had enough... I’ve been through enough. I fall onto my knees, crying and feeling myself breaking apart.

MAXWELL

I DON’T KNOW what to say. I kept her captive in the first place to know the truth and break her down. And here it is. She told the truth and she is on her knees, sobbing. Broken. Whenever I achieved something, I have always felt proud of myself.

But this?

I am nowhere feeling proud. Instead, a gut-wrenching pain I have never felt before started to ache in my chest. Guilt and shame clouds over me.

It is true that when I lost her, I searched for her everywhere. Years went by and I still kept looking. But I never gave up. I never forgot about her.

I go to my walk-in closet and retrieve the only thing I've had of her for years. One thing that I keep as a reminder. Then I walk back to her and kneel. Cupping her beautiful face, I urge her to look at me, nearly begging her to give me a chance.

I finally have my *an'gel* back. But I was blinded by fate to see what I have been searching for was finally back in my arms. The mistake was that I hurt her beyond repair along the way. And that guilt will always live with me.

"*An'gel...*" I whispered the name I gave her a long time ago. A name that I buried into my past.

"How could I ever forget about you?" I ask, my heart aching against my chest. It is indescribable. But when she averts her gaze, it seems she doesn't want to listen to me.

"You never left my memories, my heart and my soul. You were imprinted within me the night I first saw you, *an'gel*."

I press my forehead against her cheek, feeling her tears wetting my thumb.

"I kept searching for you everywhere. I never gave up. I fought day and night to gain more and more power just to get a hold of every business possible. Hoping I would finally find you. I wanted to move heaven and earth to get my *an'gel* back. I would have done that in a heartbeat. So, the moment I found you then I can finally have you in my life forever."

I lean my hand forward and open my palm in front of her, presenting her the butterfly necklace she gave to me. A gasp leaves her lips as she finally looks back at me.

“I never forgot about you, *an’gel*. That can never happen. Even when I die and rot in hell, you will still live in my memories. You will live in my soul.”

I kiss her forehead. “I was turning weak from losing you. Every day that passed by, I kept drowning in my own sorrow. I couldn’t stop thinking about you and what you were going through. Soon, I realized I was turning weak and my weakness was the reason I lost you... I even lost myself. That’s why I swore to shut myself off. Everything I ever felt, I turned it off.”

I lick my lips, feeling my throat getting clogged with emotions that it was getting hard for me to breathe.

“My marriage was just a responsibility I had to perform for my father and the Bratva. My dead wife meant nothing to me. Even then I was thinking about you. I knew since the night you fought me in that underground that there was something familiar about you. I should have listened to my heart... If I knew before it was you, I wouldn’t have enslaved you... You don’t deserve that.”

She stands up, shaking her head and walks to the balcony door as if she needs space. I hold onto the butterfly necklace and walk to her.

“You were just using me, Maxwell. You kept lying to me and I fell into your lies. For the first time after years... I didn’t feel I was a slave.” She lets out a shaky breath before turning to face me with her bloodshot eyes.

“You made me feel like I was your queen and then you just ripped it all away from me like it meant nothing to you.”

I have no explanation for that. I did lift her caged soul with my words but when fear of letting her control me came over me, I returned her back into that cage with my cruelty.

“You always want to be in control and it will always be there. I may have been fooled back then but being here with you, seeing your true side, made me realize that you will always prioritize yourself. I will be nothing

but your slave because you will make me bow to you. But you won't be willing to do that for me in return."

Every word is a stab to my heart, enhancing the pain more and more. But I deserve it. At this point I am willing to do anything for her... Anything at all.

Because my Elysha, my *an'gel*, never deserved to be treated like a slave. Not even by me. And I should have seen that... I should have listened to my instincts instead of being blinded by my pride.

"So, the question still remains, Maxwell. Do you love me or your kingdom more?" she asks, a single tear trickling down her cheek.

She wants a straight answer. No bullshit. No more mindfucks. No more lies.

She shared her horrors with me. She shared how other monsters took her from me, defiled her, and how she still carries those burdens of shame on her shoulders. All because I was too late to save her.

"Would you rather rule with your pride over your kingdom of sinners, or would you rather be with a broken, used..." she muffles into her hands. "...and damaged slave."

If ripping my heart into two is what she wants to do with her words, then I am okay with that because I will happily give every bit of my soul to her. She can have it and do whatever she wishes. If it means that it will mend her wounded, shattered heart. No words would ever be enough to earn her apology, but if it has to be something that I have never done for anyone then so be it.

I do the only thing I can only for her. I fall to my knees before her, before my queen... my *an'gel*, begging for forgiveness as I bow down to her with my kingdom overlooking us both.

"I can't describe enough for how unworthy I feel for failing you. No words will ever be enough to mend your sorrow and horrors. But as I bow down to you, I promise that I will protect you till my last breath. I submit

myself to you. My heart, my soul, even my kingdom... I give it all to you. If right now you ask me for my life, I will give it to you because it belongs to you, *an'gel*. Without you it is all meaningless," I declare, my hands resting on my knees with my palms facing up.

I don't look up to meet her eyes. I don't deserve it.

"I'm so sorry for failing you, *an'gel*. For breaking your heart and soul. But most of all, I'm sorry for destroying that light within you because of my pride. I will spend a lifetime if I have to... to make it up to you."

I can't hold back my emotions anymore. I just can't.

The tears finally shed down from my eyes as I keep my head down and look at the floor. The rainfall gets stronger with the harsh wind blowing in.

"I swore to never bow to anyone. But for you, Elysha, for the love I have carried for you since the night I saw you... I will kneel before you, my kingdom will kneel before you because without the queen, the king is nothing."

I profess my love for her but her silence is like a bullet piercing my heart.

Finally, after what feels like eternity, I feel her fingers underneath my chin, tilting my head up. But my guilt and failure make me too weak to meet her eyes.

"Look at me, Maxwell," she whispers. I look upon her, seeing my queen standing with tear-filled eyes, but still looking so beautiful that it hurts.

She cups my face with her palms and crouches down, pressing her forehead against mine. "I waited so long for you..."

She bursts into tears. "I-I... waited for you every day... through every horror I went through... I only thought about our memories."

I nod shakily. "I know, *an'gel*. I know. And I'm so, so sorry that you had to go through so much."

I cup her face, my thumbs are caressing her smooth skin while my other fingers dig deeper into her raven hair.

“But I swear on my own life that from this day onwards, I will protect you from every shadow of danger. I will cherish you and respect you more than myself. You will be my queen for eternity.”

“I missed you so much.”

“I missed you more, *an’gel*.”

I meet her eyes. “I will make up to you for every mistake I’ve made. For you, I will be a better man. And I promise to burn down each and every one who even has the thought to touch you. They all will pay for it.”

Tears spill down her cheeks. “Just promise me you won’t leave me again.”

I kiss her forehead. “Do you trust me?”

She smiles softly as we both relish in our memories. “More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you do.”

“I should have tried harder. I needed you then, and I still need you now, *an’gel*. And I let my pride hurt you. Please let me make this right. Tell me what I can do for you? What can I offer you to take the nightmares away? Anything you want, it’s yours. I will be your slave, begging for forgiveness everyday if you want. Just tell me what I can do.”

She wipes away her tears and leaves me speechless as she holds the lapels of my suit and brings both of us to stand up. I will accept whatever punishment she will give me. But what she says next is unexpected.

“Make love to me,” she whispers. “Show me how much you love me. That’s all I ask for. I want the Maxwell who I fell in love with in that church.” Her gaze casts down.

“But I want it to be gentle with you. I want you to worship me like your queen.”

Before I can answer, she leans up and presses her trembling lips to mine.

My hands itch to explore her but I refrain myself, worried she might not be sure about my touch. When she realizes I am not touching her or kissing her back, she moves away with a frown. Doubt shadowing her eyes.

“D-don’t you like me anymore after what I confessed?” she asks.

My brows furrow as I shake my head. “Never, *an’gel*. Never think that. I love you more than I have ever loved anyone. Your past never bothered me and it never will. What matters to me is the love and trust you carry for me in your heart.” I swallow the lump in my throat. “It’s just... I have never made love to anyone. It’s always been meaningless fucking for me. Because after I lost you, I didn’t want to feel anything for anyone.”

As if she could read my hesitation, she takes my hand and guides me inside. We stand at the foot of the bed and I don’t miss the shiver of nervousness that runs down her body as she pushes my suit off my shoulders. Her eyes never leave mine while her hands snake down on my chest, making my blood run faster.

She rises on her tiptoes as her hot breath brushes my jaw. Her hands continue to run down as they guide my hands to touch her face. Taking a step closer, I lean down and kiss her gently. Our lips capture one another’s like lost lovers reuniting after years. Cherishing each other like we both craved for it. My hands skate to her back while I continue kissing her and tugging down the zipper of her dress. She moans into my mouth, deepening our kiss as her arms snake around my broad shoulders. I allow her to take control as I slowly make my moves, unsure if I don’t lose control and this will be too much for her.

As her dress becomes loose, I push it down along with her panties, getting greeted by her soft naked body beneath my fingertips. It sends sparks down my spine. I lean back, raking my gaze down her beautiful and alluring figure.

“So beautiful,” I whisper.

Her cheeks flush with her eyes casting down. Tilting her chin up, I leave a gentle peck on her lips before meeting her eyes.

“People always say being in love is a destruction. Little did I know being destroyed would feel so pleasant.”

I lean down, kissing her neck. My dark urge is starting to emerge but I try to be gentle for her. I draw her against my body by her waist while she starts to unbutton my shirt with urgency. But my desire is getting stronger, moving to the rough side that I always craved for. My hands shiver a bit. I try to control myself. Control the monster within me.

She feels me retreating back and looks at me with a frown.

“What’s wrong?” she rasps, cupping my face.

I shake my head, resting my forehead on her shoulder.

“I’m trying to be gentle for you but the urge to be rough with you keeps getting stronger. And I’m failing you again...”

“You are not failing. The fact that you are trying for me... Trying to control your urges, shows you giving it all.”

She pushes my shirts off, touching my chest. Her fingertips outline my tattoos, skating towards my abs. Her breathing turns shallow, as if simply touching me is turning her on.

With my back facing the bed, she pushes me down. I sit on the edge, resting on my elbows. She works on my belt, unfastening it before she tugs down my pants along with my boxers. She holds my already hard cock and starts to stroke me up and down. I groan in pleasure, feeling my nerves on fire.

It is torture for me but it is so pleasant at the same time. My head tilts back when her tongue traces the head. She licks off the precum. *Fuck.*

I look down to find her kissing and pumping my cock gently. Like she is savoring the touch and taste. Slow and gentle. My cock responds in appreciation, hardening further.

“Fuck.” My voice is hoarse and I feel her plum lips sucking me. Closing my eyes, I surrender to the rhythm she sets.

Fuck. Her cheeks turn rosy... She’s wary.

I am losing my mind just from seeing her like this, and I’m sure I’m going to come like a fucking teenager.

I quickly cup her face and pull her away before crashing her lips with mine. She tastes luscious. My tongue explores her mouth as she explores mine.

“Do you have any idea how much I want you, Elysha?”

Her lips part as she inhales, and I reach up to touch her cheek.

She’s stunning in every way possible.

Scooping her in my arms, I set her on the bed and look down at her gorgeous and flushed body. The monster... the darkness is starting to calm down. Strangely, I don’t just want to fuck her and be rough and hard.

I want to cherish her... Worship her body like it is an altar.

“Oh, Elysha. You are indeed a born angel. You have a beautiful skin, pale and flawless. Makes me want to savor every kiss I plant on your skin.”

Her skin flushes, more like shy.

I lean closer, sitting between her legs. Grasping her hips, I run my tongue along her waistband up to her navel. She inhales sharply, throwing her head back.

Fuck. She smells and tastes good, a sweet and addictive taste that I crave for like a drug. I nip her hipbone and her hand grasps my hair tightly. Her eyes are closed, her mouth slack, and her breathing shallow. I run my nose along the apex of her thighs, inhaling her sweet, sweet scent.

“You smell so good.” My voice is husky with desire and anticipation. She is panting. Her eyes are fixed on me.

I have never desired anyone the way I do Elysha.

Holding her knees, I spread her legs while her body starts to squirm.

“Keep still,” I tell her, and lean down to continue kissing and moving lower. Her body relaxes more and more as if she is getting lost in my kisses. Just like I am getting lost in her sensation.

She is trusting me to be gentle with her and I will be. She wants this... Really wants this. Her pink nipples are already hard, making it tough for me not to suck on them harshly.

Control yourself, Maxwell. For her. Do it for your an'gel.

When my eyes land on her wet pussy, I almost groan with my cock jerking in attention. She looks sexy and innocent all at once, bringing out my protective as well as predatory side. No man ever even dares to lay his eyes on such forbidden beauty.

I bow down my head, needing to get a taste. I drag my tongue along her glistening pink slit. Fuck. She tastes sweeter every fucking time. Elysha lets out a moan of pleasure, closing her eyes in ecstasy.

“No, look at me,” I command and her eyes dart down at me.

I lick her with my eyes strained on her. My tongue is stroking her pussy long and deep with the tip of sliding in and caressing her upper wall, tasting that torturous sweetness.

“Oh God.” Her whimper sends a new wave of possessiveness through me as I savor her taste. I take one soft fold into my mouth and suck gently while my tongue strokes her inside. Her cheeks are flushed, her lips parted with shallow breathing passing through.

“You are mine,” I rasp as her taste swirls on my tongue, fueling my arousal even more. I take a long lick along her slit. “Say it.”

Elysha’s eyes glisten with need. “I’m yours.”

All mine. My lips clasp around her clit as I suck and swirl it with my tongue at the same time. Her eyes opened wide, lips falling apart for a moan as she yanks on my hair, lifting her pussy against my face. Her legs start to tremble with her thighs closing back, but I keep them apart as I continue to

devour her pussy. I lick her, making sure she hears how much I am enjoying this. How pleasant it is for me.

“God. Maxwell, please,” she rasps.

Her chest leans forward with her hands gripping my hair harder. I lap at her with more fervor, and then my beautiful angel throws her head back, crying out loudly as she reaches a body trembling orgasm.

I move back, breathing heavily. My cock is throbbing so furiously, I am sure I’ll come the minute I’m inside her. I burn with need.

I kneel between her legs as she looks at my twitching, hard cock with desire filling her body. Stretching out over her, I put my hands on either side of her head, taking my weight on my elbows. My palms cupping the side of her face.

“You want this, *an’gel*?” I ask.

“More than anything else,” she whispers. “I only want you. Make me yours, Maxwell.”

I pull up her knees, positioning myself to take her at a slow and steady pace. Her eyes never leave mine as she waits eagerly for me. She really wants this... as much as I do.

Stroking my cock against her aching slit, I slowly push in, watching her eyes widen along with her lips parting. She gasps when I fully sheath myself deep inside her. Our lips shadowing over each other in a feather-like touch.

She’s like heaven on earth, so tight around me. Her hands rest on my forearms as she breathes huskily.

Should I move now?

As if she can read my mind, she gently nods.

“It’s okay. It’s us right now. You and me.”

“You and me.” I nod gently. The darkness within me is ceasing. A feeling that I have felt the night I met her starts to emerge back.

Love. Adoration. Faith.

Everything she made me feel is returning back. It feels like I am finally back home. I want her to be mine, but right now... I'm only hers.

I ease back slowly, feeling her walls clenching before I push into her again and claim her, knowing she will always be mine to cherish.

"More?"

"Yes," she breathes, her hands skating up and touching my back.

This time I thrust into her deeper but slowly.

"Again?"

"Don't stop," she pleads.

Her trust in me is so overwhelming, and I start to move. Slow and gentle. I want both of us to come at the same time, both of us getting lost in each other. I want this woman like my next breath.

She raises her waist, matching my thrusts, my rhythm. Holding her beautiful face, I kiss her gently while I claim her. Claim our love.

Kissing the corner of her mouth, I lean back to look into her eyes. I need to see her.

"Ah! Maxwell," she gasps. I continue moving in and out, feeling my cock aching for release. She groans loudly, her eyes scrunch up tightly.

"Eyes on me, *an'gel*."

She looks back at me giving it all to not close her eyes.

"I want to watch you come. See your eyes pooling with love and desire as your walls clench around me when I give you my cum."

"God! Please, Maxwell."

"What does my queen need? Tell me, *an'gel*."

Her brows furrow with her mouth open wide. I feel her walls clenching even more tightly. She is on the verge of coming.

"Say it, Elysha."

"Please, Maxwell. Make me come. I n-need you," she cries.

"Whatever my queen wishes."

I increase my pace and her insides begin to quiver, responding immediately.

Between each thrust I utter one word. “You. Are. Only. Mine. Nothing. Will. Take. You. Away. From. Me. Nothing.” Her body starts to tremble as she is getting closer.

“Come for me, *an’gel*,” I grunt.

And on my words, she shudders around me. Her orgasm rips through her and she cries out my name. My name on her lips is my undoing, and I come inside her.

“Fuck. Elysha,” I whisper, drained yet elated, losing all senses and reason as we both get lost in euphoria.

I am panting, trying to catch my breath. Just like her. We’re forehead to forehead as we look at each other.

She cups my face with her thumb caressing my sides.

“I love you so much,” she whispers.

After losing her I knew those words would mean nothing to me. They would carry no emotions in my life. But hearing those words from my angel, brought a wave of emotions I gave up on years ago.

But this time I wouldn’t shut them down. I would embrace it with her by my side. By my woman. My *an’gel*.

“I love you, too. So much.”

I always will, my angel, because my love only belongs to you.

CHAPTER 29



MAXWELL

PRESENT

“*PRIVET*,” I mutter, suppressing my smile.

“Pr...Pri” She huffs, rolling her head back against my naked wet chest. “Why is a simple *hello* pronounced with such a heavy vocal in Russian?”

Annoyance is reflected in her tone as she is trying her best to learn Russian, but seeing her flushed, pouty face only brings amusement to me.

I grab the glass of scotch from the side table and take a sip.

“It won’t be that difficult once you get the hang of it,” I murmur and bury my nose against her throat.

“It’s easy for you. Whenever you speak Russian you sound even hotter.”

I chuckle under my breath, placing the glass back on the table and pulling her closer to me, making the soapy water splash on the marble floor. We both are relaxed in each other’s arms, my back resting against the bathtub with the view of the city overlooking from the vast window.

“Do I now?” I kiss her throat, making her gasps. She wriggles against me with her ass grinding against my cock.

We made love the whole night. We only got a few hours of sleep before we continued to cherish each other's bodies. After years our love is united. There is no chance in hell I am going to miss any moment with her.

"If you are seeking a compliment then stop hoping for it," she teases.

Caging her in my arms, I lightly nibble her neck, making her squeal.

"You don't have to say it in words, *an'gel*. Seeing you writhe and whimper when I suck your pussy..." My hands travel down her slick body, cupping her mound and watching her eyes close followed by a whimper, "When I kiss your lips."

Turning her head sideways I kiss her soft lips, while I stroke her warm, wet folds, earning a breathless moan from her.

"When you come around my cock like you can't get enough... And when you take my cum, not caring it's oozing out of your wet pussy, it's all the compliment I need," I whisper before pulling my fingers back.

She whines, looking at me over her shoulder with a frown on her face. Seeing my smirk only makes her more annoyed.

Jesus. How can someone look so fucking beautiful?

"You are so arrogant."

"Tell me something I don't know, *an'gel*."

She snickers under her breath, getting comfortable against my chest. Her fingertips start to trace the tattoos on my arms and hands.

She lets out a sigh before speaking. "I remember you having bruises on your arms. Whenever we spent the nights together, I would trace them. It felt as if I got those marks on my skin. But now... it's all covered with ink."

I remain quiet, not knowing how to respond to that. I remember those nights too, because when I saw bruises and scars on her skin... I felt this pain as well.

"Did you get them to hide your scars from other people?" she asks.

"Mostly, yes. Some thought I wanted to intimidate people with my power. But no one knew the true reason behind these."

“What is the true reason then?”

I never wanted to tell anyone about my tattoos but she would be the only person to ever know this.

“I got them a year later when I joined my father’s footsteps. I hated the scars my uncle left. Every time I looked in the mirror, they only mocked me, letting me know how weak I was. But when I got to the tattoo parlor, I wanted to have something that would remind me that even being in that hell, I had a light of hope from my angel.”

She turns to face me fully, sitting on my lap.

I spread my arms on either side of the bathtub, leaning back a bit.

“My tattoos are filled with every darkness I felt, but see the dark outlines... because that’s the light of hope you gave me that time, *an’gel*.”

She looks at the tattoos on my chest and arms, leaning back. Her eyes are focused on the dark outlines which had hidden butterfly figures.

Elysha doesn’t blink for several moments as if she is speechless. But when she looks up, her eyes are glistening with tears. I cup her face immediately, hating myself for making her cry again.

“Hey. What’s wrong?” I ask.

She sniffles, shaking her head. “I was so wrong...”

I caress her cheeks, trying to soothe her sadness.

“You never forgot about me, about us. But I never forgot about you, Maxwell. Every time I suffered through a horror, I only thought about the memories we shared. It was the only way I could survive through those moments. I felt so weak when those monsters would hurt me... use me... and there was nothing I could do about it.” Her gaze lowers down as if she feels shame and guilt.

I tilt her chin, urging her to look at me. I feel anger spiking up. Not for her but for those worthless monsters who caused her pain.

“You are not weak at all. You aren’t a victim. You are a survivor, a true fighter. A queen who has never given up. You are a woman who doesn’t

need a man. You are a woman that men like me dream to have. And I feel fortunate that you gave me a chance to be your king. You will never have to go through any pain or suffering, ever again. You have my word.”

She nods with a softening gaze. “Nothing will ever tear us apart. We’ll always have each other.”

I kiss her gently and lean my forehead against hers.

We both remain silent for several minutes, enjoying the peaceful moment.

“Can I ask you something?”

“You know you can ask me anything, *an’gel*.”

“If you knew about my sister, then why didn’t you tell me anything? And how do you know her?” she asks.

A question I have been dreading to face is knocking for an answer. But she deserves my honesty after everything I have put her through.

I look into her and tell her everything. How I met Rhea, what happened between us and why I kept her.

She listens to it all quietly, keeping her eyes fixated on me. After I finish revealing all the secrets, I wait for her answer. Any sort of response from her. But she remains silent.

“Are you still seeing Rhea?”

I shake my head. “After our first night together, I stayed away from her. I even fired her from work and afterwards I didn’t meet her.”

She looks slightly hesitant about something but doesn’t approach the topic.

“If you think I have feelings for her, then I promise you, *an’gel*, she means nothing to me. You are the only one I want. No other woman in my life will ever even come close to you. No one.”

She nods shakily. “I trust you more than myself. I know you won’t break my trust again. But...”

“But what?”

“I want my sister back in my life. I want her to be a part of it. So, I need to meet her.”

“Of course. You can meet her.”

She frowns as if she isn't expecting me to agree with her right away.

“I thought you would say refuse me.”

“She is your sister. You lost her and if you want her back in your life then I won't stop you. Whatever you want, I will grant it to you, *an'gel*.”

She offers me her gentle smile before planting a swift peck on my lips.
“Thank you.”

“Anything for my queen.”

ELYSHA

I'VE BEEN CONTINUOUSLY PACING in my... *our* room for the past few hours. It has been a few days since Maxwell and I confessed feelings to each other. Things started to change between us with every passing day.

He moved everything from my room to his. Every morning he wakes me up with his gentle kisses and every night we fall asleep in each other's arms.

Maxwell has even started to fuck me more than ever. As if he is making it up to me for our lost time, but I don't complain either. We can't get enough of each other.

Maxwell confessed every hidden truth and secrets he had. He promised to gain my trust and he is giving it all. When he told me about sleeping with Rhea, it did hurt my feelings but at the same time he isn't the one carrying secrets.

He has a hunch that she is connected to Francisco in some way but he isn't sure about it.

I am not brave enough to tell him the things I did behind his back. I just got Maxwell back in my life and I can't lose him again.

Today Rhea is coming to meet me, and I have to tell her everything. Make all this stop before it's too late.

A sudden knock on my door halts my pacing and I see a guard standing in the doorway.

"Your sister is here, ma'am."

Maxwell ordered every member and guard in his house to treat me with the same respect and fear they have for him. I am no longer a slave. I am queen of Russia.

I nod. "Please, guide her here."

A few seconds later Rhea enters the room in a green tank top and black jeans. Her thick red hair is curled back. A small purse dangles on her left shoulder.

When her eyes meet mine, I can see the cloud of worry and tension. She immediately comes up to me and engulfs me in her arms in a warm hug, her face resting on my shoulder like a child holding her mother. I immediately wrap my arms around her, too, feeling overwhelmed with delight.

Moving back, she looks at me. "You look really nice, Elysha. You don't have bruises or scars anymore."

I nod. "I have finally healed."

She smiles but it soon vanishes when she can sense something ominous is about to happen.

"I didn't expect Maxwell to allow me in his mansion after he fired me."

"I know. I asked him because I needed to talk to you. I found something."

She frowns. "What did you find?"

"The truth."

"What truth? What do you mean?"

“Maxwell never betrayed us in the first place. He did come back to the church to look for me but by then we had already left and the church was burnt down.”

Her face is expressionless as she listens to every word I utter.

“He never gave up on me. Maxwell kept searching for me at every corner of the crime world. But fate finally brought us back together. Then he confessed every secret he buried for years—”

“And that makes everything alright? Everything he did to both of us in these past few months, doesn’t matters to you anymore?” she asks, a hint of irritation emerging.

“Revenge isn’t always the answer. Revenge only brings revenge, Rhea. We can end this—”

She shakes her head, letting out a humorless snicker.

“You still can’t see it, can you? He has brainwashed you with his fucked up promises and words, and you actually fell for it.”

“He owned up to his mistakes and he is doing everything he can to make it up to me. And we aren’t any different, Rhea. We went behind his back to destroy his kingdom. We have betrayed him, too. But it can still be fixed.”

She runs a hand through her hair in frustration, shaking her head and not meeting my eyes.

“We can stop this, Rhea. We can move on and have a life of our own here.”

She looks at me like I have lost my mind. “Who are you? You are not my sister.”

I shake my head, feeling my heart sinking with her words. “Rhea there is no point in getting revenge. Nothing but guilt will be our shadow till our final breaths. We are better than this. Don’t send the information to Francisco and things can still be saved.” I whisper out my final words, hoping the guards don’t hear me.

There is a look of disappointment and disgust on her face as I feel my own sister parting away from me.

“I can clearly see who is standing in front of me. And it’s not my sister. My sister would be there for me. She would move heaven and earth to have me back.” She shakes her head. “In front of me is standing Maxwell’s whore. His slave who is wrapped around his fingers and is dancing to his tune.”

A sudden anger is boiling up from her harsh words, something I never expected from Rhea.

“You think you are special because you are too busy sucking his cock, but when the day comes he will kick you out of his life then don’t come crying to me.”

“I know you are mad at me right now. But all I’m asking is for you not to send the information to Francisco—”

She snickers. “You might have quit on the revenge easily but I’m not you, Elysha.”

I frown. “What do you mean?”

“I have already sent the information to him. So now, I will do nothing but watch Maxwell being destroyed.”

Silence fills the room as the guilt and fear for Maxwell’s life make me feel nauseous.

“I have to talk to Francisco and get—”

“He isn’t Maxwell, Elysha. But who knows, he might change his mind if you fuck him like you do Maxwell?”

Before I know it, my hand raises up striking across her cheek in a hard slap. Her face is turned away from me as she breathes heavily with her jaw clenching.

“I have been there for you since the day we lost our mother. I have done everything possible to protect you and even bared through the horrors for you. In the church I would sometimes get raped four times a night so that

you had one night without any of those monsters touching you.” Rhea still didn’t look at me. “When I saw the blood on his hands and there was no sign of you... I wanted to die right there and then. I wanted to kill myself. I almost did when I tried to hang myself. But then I told myself how disappointed you would have been with me if I chose the easy way. And now that I have my sister back after so many years, I don’t want to lose her again. We had nothing but darkness in our whole life. Now that we are getting a chance to live a life in the light, you want to risk it all because of revenge.”

My vision is starting to get blurry from the emerging tears.

“So, you may think you don’t know me, but in reality, I don’t know my Rhea anymore either. Because the Rhea I know has always wanted to have a life that won’t be haunted by nightmares. She would do everything possible to escape those horrors and have a life she always dreamt of, instead of chasing after revenge that will only drag her deeper into the exact same darkness.”

She finally looks back at me but her eyes hold no emotions at all. They are blank... absolutely cold.

“You did try but you didn’t try harder, *sister*.”

If she had the intention to rip my soul with her words then she succeeded.

“You can live happily ever after with Maxwell all you want. But I won’t be a part of your fairytale.”

Giving a blank stare, she swallows before letting out a shaky breath. “Have a nice life, *sister*.”

Without waiting for me to respond, she leaves the room, slamming the door behind her. I have lost my sister several times, and every time it felt like a part of me was separated from me. This one time I get her back and she leaves my life again. I am separated from my own self.

But deep down I know I have to tell Maxwell. I know he will never forgive me for what I did but I have to tell him. I have to save him.

I am already late but at least I can warn him.

I decide to tell him right now as I head outside. The guard is still at the door luckily.

“Where is Maxwell?” I ask.

“He is in the basement, ma’am. He is busy with work.”

I stalk downstairs feeling my guard following me.

“I can go by myself. You don’t have to follow me,” I say over my shoulder as I descend.

Asking one of the maids, I find the basement. It is mostly dark but it seems like the place is built for a special reason with all the steel walls. I find only one door at the end of the hallway but as I get closer, I hear a grunt. It is raw and deep... like someone is in pain.

My steps turn hesitant when the sounds turn weak.

There are no guards at the door, so I slowly open it just to get a peak. But what I see is something I am not prepared for.

A man is tied down to a chair. He is badly injured, or tortured I would say. He is naked except for a black underwear, every inch of him is covered with blood from his bruises and scars. His index finger and thumb are missing, along with a few toes. But none of those matter to Maxwell who is standing in front of him and keeps punching his face again and again, despite his own hands turning crimson.

He doesn’t look like the Maxwell who loves me... the man who promised to protect me and cherish me forever. I am looking at an absolutely different person.

I am looking at Maxwell who is the king of Russia. A man who cares about nothing but power and blood. A ruthless man who will do anything for his kingdom.

He doesn't feel any ounce of pity for his victim who is barely responding anymore. Maxwell notices it too because he moves back, rolling back his shoulders and nodding to one of his guards.

"Give him the dose," he orders. The guard goes to him with an injection in his hand before pressing it against the man's left arm. Within a few seconds he wakes up with his eyes wide open and he looks around frantically. But when his eyes meet Maxwell's, I can clearly see the fear.

"I can do this all day if I have to. I will wake you up from the dead to make you endure my personal hell," Maxwell mutters before holding the man by his bloody jaw.

"Where are the rest of the drug supplies kept?" he asks.

The man's lips are barely moving but Maxwell tightens his hold on him, forcing him to answer.

"T-they.... are at a...p-pharmacy...warehouse in Korolyov..."

Maxwell leans back with a grin that sends shivers down my spine.

"That was easy, wasn't it? But you have so much more to give and I will keep my promise of torturing you until you beg for death."

The man is already dead from the way he is tortured. He has literally nothing else to offer and yet Maxwell is not going to quit. If he has to take his soul, he will do it.

"You thought of taking away my kingdom. Just for even thinking about it, you deserve the worst punishment and that is living in my hell. You and that bitch will fall like a deck of cards, Francisco."

My whole body turns still as I hear Maxwell saying his name. Francisco.

My breathing turns shallow and I feel my blood rushing faster. My brows furrow in confusion as I try to piece everything together.

If this man is Francisco then who did Rhea send the information to?

I hear another punch being landed by Maxwell. Unable to take it anymore, I quietly move away before sneaking out of the basement,

pretending I was never there in the first place.

Is it possible that by the time Rhea sent the information to him, he was already captured by Maxwell?

Maybe Rhea is unaware of Francisco's disappearance. But as he is here then Maxwell is safe... but Rhea?

She is blinded by revenge at the moment. Words won't do any justice to what is shackling her. Rhea has left furiously after our quarrel. She won't listen to anything I say now.

I need to give her some time to calm her mind. She is not thinking clearly and will ignore me after what happened today.

The only thing I can pray for is that time will be on my side and things will finally fall into place.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 30



ELYSHA

PRESENT

It is the end of November. Snow starts to cover the grounds partially with the sunlight peeking through the dark clouds as winter arrived. Few more days passed by after my last conversation with Rhea and discovering Francisco had been held captive by Maxwell for a few weeks now. But neither did I ask about Francisco nor did I disclose my secret to Maxwell.

Now here I am with Maxwell who is giving me self-defense training. He has been teaching me for the past few days and I even improved my shooting skills. But today it is very hard to focus when he is only wearing his pants and his chest and arms are glistening with sweat. Every time he moves his arm to show me an action, my eyes immediately land on his muscles, sending shivers down my spine. Those same forearms that I remember clenching the same way they did this morning when I was moving up and down on his lap, his cock thrusting deep inside me while his hand cupped my neck.

“Are you even listening to what I’m saying, Elysha?” Maxwell whispers close to my ear. He has both my hands caged against my chest.

“Yeah... I am.”

His snicker proves he doesn't buy my bullshit. He whirls me around, pressing his hand against my lower back.

"Liar." His lips dust over my cheek, making me giggle. "Focus, *an'gel*." Rolling my eyes, I move back and raise both my fists.

"Good. And as I was saying before, put all your pressure and force in your fists. Again," he mutters and raises both his palms. I hit his palms back-to-back like he showed me.

Next, we move to a few kicking tactics but this time he is the one distracted when he kneels down to correct my feet. His eyes are focused on my bare legs, with his knuckles brushing the back of my knees. He lets out a low grunt at the back of his throat and his hand slides up, reaching my ass.

"Who isn't focused now?" I tease him, looking down with a smirk. When he meets my gaze, that dark desire is clear in his eyes.

He stands up, showing off his well sculpted body. Stalking towards me, he backs me against the nearest wall. My breath hitches when he traces the swell of my breasts. His eyes are on my mouth. Feeling the urge to tease him more, I lick my lips, earning a low groan from him. It makes my skin prickle with goosebumps.

"I can't decide something," he whispers close to my lips.

"Decide about what?" I ask.

"I'm finding it hard to decide how I should fuck you right now."

I gasp, feeling myself getting sucked in by his words of passion. His voice feels like hands moving over my body and into my mind like a soft, teasing caress.

"What do you think, *an'gel*? Would you prefer me taking you from behind, your hair wrapped around my fist? That beautiful ass pushing against my hips as your cunt gets filled with my cock."

My mouth opens on a gasp as I feel myself at loss of words.

Relentlessly, he continues. "Or do you want your legs wrapped around my waist and your hands around my neck as I fuck you looking at your

beautiful face?” His fingers trace over my already puckered nipples, over my clothes as he resumes his taunting. “I think I’ll prefer the second option. I want to watch your eyes gleaming with want. Your face reflecting with so much desire with every thrust I give you and feel your wet cunt tightening around my cock. The moment we both know we belong to each other. Just the two of us.”

“*Dumayu voz’mu oba varianta*,” I whisper in Russian.

He grins as I tell him I want both choices but there is also pride shining in his eyes. I’ve been practicing daily and so far I have been doing very well.

“My greedy little queen,” he whispers with his mesmerizing smirk.

Just as he is about to lean down to kiss me, there is a knock at the door. Frowning, he looks over his shoulder, finding his guard looking anywhere but at us.

“What?” Maxwell asks, his voice changing to a cold tone instantly. He stands in front of me, shielding me from his guard’s sight.

“You have a call, sir.”

“Who is it?”

“Lucifer, sir.”

He nods at him to leave before he faces me.

“I have to go. The call is important.”

I pout, feeling a bit disappointed that such a perfect moment is ruined but that makes him chuckle and he gives a gentle peck on my lips.

“I will be back in a few hours.”

But as he is about to leave, I wrap my arms around his neck. “You know what I wish more?”

“What?” He grins.

“To spend one day with my king. No guards, no calls. Just me and him.”

He snickers, caressing my cheek with his knuckles. “Unfortunately, for that you would need to be with someone else. And that is never going to

happen.”

I huff. “I know. But I really wish I had such a day.”

Smiling, he presses a kiss on my forehead before leaving the room.

Maybe someday we both will have a time like that. Someday.

MAXWELL

ALMOST AN HOUR LATER, I finished my call with Lucifer about all the information I got from Francisco. I go to my room and take a quick shower before I look for Elysha.

She is in the living room, sitting with her legs tucked underneath, a book sitting on her lap. As I get closer, I can hear her reciting Russian words.

She is learning Russian everyday and she is a fast learner indeed. I lean against the doorway and just watch her, focusing on her speaking skill.

But a thought crosses my mind as I keep looking at my beautiful angel whose beauty is glimmering even with the snow coating the floor to ceiling window.

Elysha is trying to cope up with my life. She is learning my culture and is adjusting with it because of me. I promised her that I will give her every happiness in the world. But today, when she said she wished to have a day where there would be no guards, no calls and just the two of us, I felt her disappointment.

She asked for such a simple thing, whereas not only did she forgave me and gave me another chance, but she is living in my world, my kingdom without any complaints.

Even the engagement party where she was being treated unfairly flashes in my memory. But perhaps it is time that everyone gets to know she only

belongs to me, to her king. And that she is her king's queen. The single thought itself makes my heart race faster, my nerves jittering but after so many years, it feels right.

It feels peaceful.

Having her all to myself and seeing a future where my queen is waiting for me to come back, feels like the right choice.

Getting an idea, I head back to my office and make a few phone calls.

* * *

TWO DAYS LATER, Elysha is sitting by my side with her eyes blindfolded while I drive to our destination. Soft music is playing from the radio. She has been curious since the moment I told her we were going somewhere special. Expecting it to be another fancy party, she dressed in a long, black spaghetti gown. I didn't tell her to change because no matter what she wore, she always looks like perfection.

"Will you just tell me where we are going? The suspense will kill me," she groans like a child, making me chuckle in amusement.

"Have patience, *an'gel*. Good things come to those who wait," I tease her while she huffs and tries to control her impatience.

Soon we reach our destination and I park the car at Moscow Canal.

"Are we here?" she asks, turning her head to my side.

Leaning closer, I grasp her chin between my index finger and thumb and place a swift kiss on her soft, rosy lips. "You are the most impatient woman I've ever met."

"So, can I take it off now?"

I look down at her beautiful dress and I feel tempted to take it off myself, or maybe rip it off her.

As if she can read my mind, she grins. "I meant the blindfold. Stop with your one-track mind, Mr. Reznikov."

My mouth finds hers as they touch into a possessive kiss. “With such an alluring queen like you, it's hard to even think straight, *an’gel*.”

With one last peck, I get out of the car and rush to her side, helping her step out. Her soft curly ends are swaying with the wind. Elysha holds onto my hand. It’s surprisingly warm for the beginning of winter because even the beginnings are zero degrees which is still cold. Using me as her guide, I take her to the spot before we both halt.

“When I tell you to open your eyes, do it,” I whisper close to her ear, feeling her nerves shiver just from my voice.

I take off the blindfold before putting it inside my pocket and pressing my hands on her shoulders.

“Open your eyes.”

And when she does, she gasps right away from the sight in front of her. The vast Moscow Canal being surrounded by greenery as it overlooks the city. Whereas the black sky is filled with stars like a beautiful canvas. Its reflection falls on the canal. And even from the distance we can see the beautiful cityscape. Fireflies glimmering around the trees.

“Maxwell...” she whispers. Leaning back, she rests her head against my chest and my hands wrap around her waist with my face brushing her side.

“This is... it's heaven.”

I have my own heaven right in my arms.

“But why?” she asks, looking at me over her shoulder.

“My queen asked for one simple thing. A day with me, her Maxwell. I promised to give you happiness, and this is me giving my *an’gel* the happiness she deserves.”

“So, no guards? No calls? No meetings?”

I shake my head. “None. Just you and me. Only us.”

She smiles softly before looking back at the mesmerizing scenario.

“And I wanted to refresh our memories, too.”

She presses her hands on mine and lets out a sigh.

“I think of those memories every night, Maxwell. They always remind me how I fell in love with you in the first place.”

I kiss her cheek, tightening my arms around her.

“We had nights like this. You being in my arms as we look at the moonlight and starry night through that small window in the basement. But you know what the best part was?”

“What?”

“The minute I had you in my arms, I felt like I was in heaven, just like I’m feeling right now.”

Elysha turns around, wrapping her hands around my neck and I lean my head down, pressing my forehead against hers.

Shadow Preachers starts to tune in from the radio, filling in the silence.

Before we know it, our bodies start to sway with the music as we dance slowly.

“You are my heaven, too, Maxwell. With you I feel at peace,” she whispers, her eyes darkening with raw emotions.

Smiling at each other, feeling at peace and comfort, we continue to dance in this darkness while our love shines upon us. The aspiration of being together forever blooms within us. Taking her hand, I whirl her around and bring her back against my chest as she giggles, making my heart skip a beat.

She looks so beautiful that it hurts.

“Let’s bring more things to this date.”

“There is more?” she frowns, looking surprised.

I take her to the back of the car and open the back door, pressing a button the seats get folded back. We hop inside and I get the champagne and fruits.

We sit back and I fill our glasses and pass her a glass while she looks at me with amusement.

“Who knew Maxwell Reznikov can be romantic?” she teases, clinking the glass against mine.

“Anything for my queen.” I wink and take a sip, feeding her strawberries and cherries as we enjoy the view of the canal. Afterwards there is a peaceful silence that neither of us want to break.

I click another button and the rooftop slides open, and set the glass and fruits aside as we both lie down and enjoy the starry night.

Elysha is getting engulfed in the beauty of the stars that are filling the night sky while I feel like I am falling in love with her all over again every time I look at her.

She turns her to face me, a gentle smile that makes my heart swell.

At that moment I just know. I know this will be our forever.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 31



MAXWELL

PAST

I WAIT. Time ticks by at a slow pace but I keep being patient. It is going to be tested tonight and I have to pass. I have to escape tonight. I am going to embrace freedom tonight. No matter at what cost.

I am doing this for myself but mostly it is for my angel. She has suffered a lot, but not anymore.

She will come with me and live in my house. Experience a life she deserves. Happiness and content will be kneeling at her feet, showering her with love, respect and care.

I will cherish her for the rest of my life. She will be my queen and I will be her king.

The monsters shouldn't be here tonight, according to what my angel told me. They have been gone since morning. This is my only chance.

I take the wooden, half-broken boxes and stack them over one another before placing them against the wall. Climbing on them, I jump and immediately grab for the rusty, metal bars. I ignore the sting of pain coursing through my body from my still healing wounds.

There is no time for being weak.

I look in the corner and she is right. There are tightly bolted screws on both sides of the window that are attached to the bars. Balancing on one hand, I take out the screw opener.

Keeping my grip tightly on the bar, I start to unscrew the bolts. I can feel my hands shivering as if cold water is poured all over my body. The snow is making it even more difficult. But I have to be strong. I must be strong.

My palms are turning sweaty, as it got difficult to grip on the bar while working on the screws.

In my mind I keep praying to God that I don't get caught and that no one hears my attempt to escape. If I lost this chance then everything would be over.

One screw loosens, making the bars a bit detached. But as I start working on the last screw the faint sound of footsteps crushing the snow echoes from outside. My body becomes still.

I gulp down my throat, feeling sweat trickling down my neck and sideburns. I hold my breath, waiting for the sound to get closer. There is a long pause for several seconds.

I stay as still as possible. It is so close I can see the side of the person's foot. It is a man in brown boots. There is a small stain of blood on its side that makes the anxiety crawl on my skin.

Please, don't see me. Go away.

Please, don't see me. Please, don't see me.

I keep chanting those words again and again like a mantra, begging to work its charm. And luckily it does.

The person turns to the other side and walks away. I wait until the sound no longer exists, ignoring the numbness on my palms.

When I am sure there is no one else, I return back to my task and speed up. I don't have much time left.

After a few more turns the last bolt comes loose. Ray of relief and victory comes over my soul. I let go of the bars and step down the boxes to retrieve the metal pole. I hit it against the bars, pushing it out. With a little smile I step up on the stairs of boxes and jump to hold onto the open concrete base of the window. I can taste freedom before feeling it. I am getting closer to my goal. I am finally getting free.

I inhale a deep breath and give it all to squeeze through the window with a grunt at the back of my throat.

With one last push I am outside.

The cold wind gusts across my face with the moonlight leading me towards my path. Looking at the snow covered ground, I find the attached bars and place them back in the window to hide my tracks

My heart is pounding faster than ever with a tsunami of emotions. I look to my right and try to remember the path my angel told me about. I start walking, looking for the graveyard area while hoping blindly that no one sees me in this foggy weather.

Walking with my limp leg proves to be even more painful. The wound still aches and burns on my skin. But I don't stop, I can't stop.

The fog is getting thicker, blanketing the entire area and making it difficult for me to find the graveyard.

Suddenly my knees bump against a solid rock surface. I frown and turn around to see what it is.

A name and date are engraved on it with a few snow dusted on it and then realization hits me.

It's a tombstone. I am at the graveyard.

My skin prickles with goosebumps. The cold is surrounding me. I wrap my arms around myself and start to walk ahead, looking for my angel.

One after another I pass the tombstones until I see a large black gate. It looks quite old as if it was built years ago.

My limp feet scrunch against the ground and I slowly walk towards it while looking around for a roaming danger. The fog starts to clear up a little as I get closer, but when I see a figure standing at the corner, my steps halt.

I squint my eyes to get a better look even though fear is cascading over me, followed by doubt.

As if the figure can sense my movement, I see its head turning my way, making my heartbeats drumming in my ear. But when I see those deep black eyes, I right away know who that is.

My an'gel.

I chuckle under my breath with the cold smoke coming from my lips, and I start to walk faster towards her. She is here. She is safe.

When she realizes it is me, she rushes towards me. Her black hair shrouds her shoulder. Tonight, she is in a different outfit and it isn't her nightdress. It is a pale pink frock with floral design on it. She looks like a divine beauty. Just like an angel. Her chain glittering in the moonlight.

God is indeed on our side today.

The moment she gets close to me, she jumps into my arms with her hands wrapped around my neck. I nearly lose my balance and wince from the pain in my leg, but I ignore them both the minute her warmth captures my body. My arms wrap around her tightly as I inhale her sweet, honey scent with my nose buried in her hair.

"You came," she whispers, clinging tighter to me.

"Where else would I be without my angel?" I kiss her temple. "I promised to free us both and I will keep my promise."

I lower her down and cup her face. Unable to help myself, I kiss her soft, supple lips. Her arms tighten around me as she returns my kiss with a gentle motion.

But suddenly a distant scrunching sound makes us both move apart with a gasp. I quickly look around and find the thick, dusty pillar, and take my

angel's hand, pulling her behind it.

The sound gets louder and louder. My back presses against the hard, concrete column as I hold her in my arms like a king protecting her queen at any cost. Her breathing turns shallow and she buries her face against my chest. I can feel her body shivering from fear... fear of getting caught.

The scrunching gets so close that I nearly think the person is going to come towards the pillar.

"We will get caught," she barely whispers close to my ear, clinging to my body.

I shake my head and round my lips, pressing my index finger against it to gesture her to be quiet. The figure gets close with its back facing us. One turn and he would catch us right away.

I look around, realizing we are close to the corner of the building. This is our only shot.

I gaze down at my angel, nodding my head behind her. She looks over her shoulder and understands my gesture. She nods gently, glancing back at the monster. I hold her hand while my eyes stay on the monster, and we both walk slowly towards our only path of freedom. With every step we take my heart skips a beat, perspiration streaking down my back. But with few steps we finally make it around the church.

"We have to hurry, the train should be here any time now," she whispers.

I nod and this time we both run as fast as possible towards the forest, getting lost into the deep and dark woods. My angel stays at my side, gripping my arms.

"Did you bring the flashlight?" I ask.

She puts her hand inside her pocket, fishing out a small flashlight before turning it on for me.

With the help of the light we navigate through the darkness, pointing at the bases of the trees to make sure we don't crash into anything. Our feet

fall deep into the snow with every step we take.

“What if someone follows us?” she asks. “I heard them talking that they might return soon.”

“The clouds are very dark. The upcoming snow storm will cover them. Don’t worry.”

I keep the lead, unaware how deep this forest is. The trees are close together, narrowing down our path but our determination for freedom keeps us moving forward. We have to go quickly.

“It’s so cold...” she whispers, wrapping her arms around herself. I take off my torn cloth, ignoring my prickled skin which is freezing and put it around her.

“This should help,” I mutter and keep her close to my side as we continue walking.

This snow is spiteful. Everywhere my gaze lands upon, it is covered with it, making the entire place look like a kingdom of ice.

“Are you sure the train will come?” she asks.

I nod, letting out shallow breaths through my clenched teeth. “It will come.” It has to.

The more time passes by, the more struggle it becomes for both of us. My angel’s steps are turning small and slow due to the massive heap of snow covering the grounds. The wind is turning fierce, daggers in our eyes, and our gaze begins to smart, only to be dry a moment later.

Silently I keep praying to God to save us from this hell and guide us to our freedom. The freedom we both have been craving for months.

But the wind keeps challenging us with its force and coldness. However, it will make it harder for the monsters to follow us. Just in case. I am fighting for both of us, and I am not going to stop... no matter what.

It gives me the strength to go on. To move despite the freezing weather and the pain radiating in my nerves. We both are getting exhausted and slow, but we don’t stop.

We cross more trees and enter deeper into the forest, even though the wind isn't harsh on us anymore. The snow is descending as well, giving us more space to speed up.

I can feel freedom getting closer and closer to us.

"Do you see anyone following us?" she whispers her words.

I look over my shoulder, finding nothing but emptiness.

I shake my head in response. "I think we are getting close. The snow isn't heavy anymore."

"We just need to find the mountains. The tracks are in that area."

I nod and narrow my eyes, flashing the light a bit higher to find what we were looking for.

But then it happens.

Few moments later I see the mountains being illuminated by the flashlight. "Found it. I found the mountains. Look."

She looks up, fogged breath passing through her lips as she smiles shakily and looks back at me with pure joy.

"We are close," she murmurs.

I kiss her temple and we start to walk faster, heading towards the arms of freedom.

Another few more minutes pass and then suddenly we both stop with what we see.

The railway tracks.

We did it. We made it.

"We actually did it," she mutters with a shaky voice as emotions flood in her tone like a stream.

I wrap my arms around her tightly and kiss her forehead.

"We are getting out of here. We are going to get our lives back," I speak while trying to remain strong even though the cold weather is consuming me with the passing time. But the heartwarming picture of being back home with my angel by my side works like a balm on my weakness.

I look towards the platform where the train usually stops for a few seconds. “Are you sure this is the stop?” I ask.

She nods vigorously. “I heard them several times talking about it. It is a train for the soldiers and it always leads to the main city.”

Moscow. My home.

The distant whistling sound of the train echoes through the forest. Our ticket to freedom is at our doorstep.

But another sound tunes in, making both of our hearts stop.

The rustling of footsteps followed by gruff voices and moving rays of flashlights come from behind us.

Shit. They followed us.

“Oh no. They found us.” She never looked so terrified. “They will kill us.”

Yes, they will.

But I won’t allow it.

She holds my hand tightly, looking at me with a fierce gaze. “Run. Hide now. I will go with them and you wait till the train comes. Save yourself.”

I frown and meet her fierce expression. “The hell I am. I’m not leaving you with those monsters ever again.”

The footsteps are getting closer.

“Please, you have to hide and save yourself. They won’t spare you—”

“I’m not leaving you alone in this, an’gel. I will protect you till my last breath.”

“I found them!” A deep, gruff voice screams and all the footsteps shuffle closer, heading towards our direction. The train is coming closer to our direction but we can’t wait for it that long. By the time it stops here, we will both be taken away.

I grip her hand and we run forward towards the other side of the forest. But they are faster than us. One of them catches my angel, grips her by her hair in a tight fist while she screeches out loud.

“Don’t fucking touch her!” I yell before taking out the knife I had hidden in my pants pocket and don’t hesitate for once before stabbing him in the eye.

“Ah! Fuck!” he yells in excruciating pain. His hands shake as they shadow around his bleeding eyes and he kneels on the ground, his blood dripping down on the snow, turning it crimson.

I pull the knife out with a grunt and help my angel get up.

“Get them!” another yells. I look up, finding the monsters rushing towards us as my uncle is leading them with a gun and flashlight in his hands.

“Come on,” I murmur and we start to run again. The whistling of the train coming closer.

BANG.

I can feel the bullet piercing my leg as I stumble upon the snow.

“Ahh!” I grip my leg, the bullet piercing right through my flesh.

“No! No! Please, no,” I hear my angel cry out loud. She kneels beside me and holds my shoulder.

“Got you now.” My uncle’s footsteps are audible as he approaches me.

I lie there, bleeding all over the snow. When I look up, my uncle is gazing down at me before glancing over his shoulder and nodding at one of his men. He walks to my angel and pulls her up but her hands are tightly wrapped around mine.

“No! Please, don’t do this! Don’t hurt him,” she begs.

I pull her closer to me with all my might. “Fucking let her go,” I warn and I try to stab his hand with my knife.

But I feel a harsh kick to my face, making my body roll over on the snow, dizzy and confused. I lose a grip on my angel.

The man grips her by her neck, pulling her against his body and holding the tip of a knife to her neck.

“No...” I can barely talk or see.

“Take her away,” my uncle orders and the man does what he is told without any further questions. He picks her up over his shoulder and starts to walk away.

“No! Let me go! Let me go! No!” She hits his back again and again, with her legs stomping on his chest but it doesn’t stop that monster from taking her away.

My uncle kneels in front of me, gripping my jaw tightly with a cold as ice look. “Like father, like son. Stubborn as always.”

I try to get up again but he pushes me back with a hard shove.

“You really think you can fight me in this condition?” he asks, snickering under his foggy breath.

“I will fight you till my last breath if I have to,” I barely whisper out my words.

“Even your fate is as weak as you are, boy,” he shows his gun and places it against my forehead, “One pull and your soul leaves your body forever.”

I hear my angel whimpering and screaming as she fights against her captor’s hold. “Don’t hurt him, please. I beg you! Take me, please.”

Tears stream down her face, turning her nose and cheeks red.

My uncle looks over his shoulder with a frown then back at me. “You took all this risk for what? To save that whore?” Astonishment clear as daylight in his tone.

“She has been fucked by each and every man of mine. I think I even took a turn on her as well. A girl like her is definitely not worth sacrificing your life for, boy.”

He laughs loudly while my cold blood is starting to boil with rage and vengeance.

“If only my brother could see what a weakling and pussy-whipped his son has turned into.”

I clench my jaw and fist, giving my uncle a challenging expression. "And I wish my father could see what a coward his brother is," I snarl with a weak grin.

His smile vanishes in seconds and is replaced by ferocity. He fists my hair, hurting my roots. "What the fuck did you say, mal'chik?"

I snicker this time. "No wonder my father got rid of you. A man like you who is scared to even fight a boy is definitely not worth being anywhere near my father's throne."

I spit on his face, watching it drool down his jaw. His gaze turns monstrous, as if it is taking everything in him not to kill me right here and now. "You will kill me by just pulling a trigger and later brag in front of your men about it. But you and I will know that you chose a coward's option just because you don't have the balls to even fight a boy."

He growls before punching me across my cheek, making me stumble over.

"You fucking piece of shit!" he yells as I hear his feet shuffling while he stands up. His shadow is towering over me and I roll on my back, trying to stand up again. I quickly hide the knife without him noticing.

"You want to fucking fight? Then let's do this. If I have to rip you apart limb by limb with my bare hands, then so be it," he threatens.

Pushing myself off of the snowy ground, I get up on my injured leg, my steps are wobbly but determination runs through my nerves. Determination for freedom. For freedom for my angel.

Rage turns my body warm despite the cold wind prickling my skin. He dares to touch her with his unworthy and impure hands. But most of all he is one of many who tainted her spirit the most. And for that he will pay with his blood. With his rotten soul.

With a loud roar echoing through the forest, I charge towards him with my limp steps as I go for a punch to his gut. But he dodges that easily and holds my wrist before twisting it. I groan in immense pain but doesn't stop

my free hand landing a punch where I aimed for before. He grunts with my unexpected strong hit.

He twists my wrist more and I feel my muscles snap.

Using my right leg, I kick his shin and punch his cheek right away. His legs falter and his grip on my wrist loosens. His men make a move to defend him but he raises his hand.

“No one fucking come closer. Back off!” he grunts. His veins popping against his skin from anger.

They all back away on the other side of the railway tracks, taking my angel along the way.

I have to finish this once and for all. There is not much time left.

But before I can attempt my next attack, he charges at me. He grabs me by my neck, pressing hard onto my Adam’s apple and forcing me to kneel this time as he keeps landing hit after hit across my cheeks.

I feel my skin cracks. My entire face is sore at this stage and my legs start to weaken.

My vision is turning blurry as the harsh nature and my uncle are achieving what they aimed for by making me weak.

“No... please. P-please stop... I beg you...” my angel cries out loud. The sorrow is ringing in her voice.

Blood oozes out from my nose and cracked cheek. I barely hold onto my consciousness as he keeps landing punch after punch, coating his rough knuckles with my blood. My entire body is turning limp from pain, and he finally lets go of his grip around my neck. I fall on the ground which is now coated with my blood and spit.

My ears start to ring while my vision is battling to stay alive. My breathing turns shallow and slow.

I can hear the train being almost here. The roaring of its engine getting louder and louder.

“Who is the coward now?” he hisses out his words as kneels in front of me. Grabbing my face, he turns my head to look at his vicious, lunatic gaze with my barely opened eyes.

“Say it, boy. Say that you were the fucking coward here. You are the one who lost and is about to die like a nobody in this cold storm.”

He tightens his hold on my jawline, bringing his face closer to mine.

“Say. It.”

Letting out a shaky breath, I meet his gaze.

“I am a Reznikov, uncle. We are born as kings and we die as kings. But not me,” I mutter out the words through my swollen, bruised lips. I feel the copper taste of my blood on my tongue. I slowly move my hand inside my pant pocket, gripping the knife handle.

“I am the worst in the Reznikov family. I am Satan and I will be the eternal ruler of Russia. The kingdom that you never deserved. Even in your dreams. Because it needs a worthy king.”

In the blink of an eye, I take out the knife and plunge it with a sharp move right into my uncle’s throat.

“And I will be that worthy king. See you in hell, uncle.”

I twist the knife, watching the red fluid gush out like a waterfall from his throat. His eyes wide open as he starts to choke on his own rotten blood.

“May your soul rot in hell.”

I push the knife deeper, witnessing the light in his eyes fading away eventually. His body falls back with a soft thud. A pool of blood forming around his head.

I look at my side and see an unfocused vision of the train arriving.

BANG.

Another bullet penetrates my stomach this time as one of the men shoots me, searing a gut wrenching and indescribable pain throughout my body. I fall on the ground beside my uncle and hear a faded cry ringing in my ear.

“No! God! No! Let me go!” I heard her voice... her pleas... her begging.

But my mind... my body... They just gave up.

My head hits the snow while my body turns limp. No longer able to fight back.

“Let’s go. We have to fucking go or else the soldiers will know,” someone yells and the footsteps starts to fade away by the loud roaring sound of the train engine and whistling. I feel the ground trembling as my vision gets blocked by it.

But through the little space between the rail tracks and wheels, I don’t miss out the final vision of my angel being taken away from me. Her eyes swollen from crying and I see her mouth moving.

The men holding her tightly, and soon even her vision dwindles with the darkness of the forest until I can’t see her anymore.

My skin is turning cold and pale. My heart is slowing down.

Everything turns blurry. I can’t breathe, focus or feel.

Distant footsteps... Someone calling... More footsteps.

Can’t see anything in this darkness.

I’m sorry, my angel. I’m sorry, an’gel.

My an’gel...

CHAPTER 32



MAXWELL

PRESENT

PARKING the car at the driveway, I help Elysha step out. Our feet scrunching against the snow-filled ground. I am used to the cold weather of Russia but it seems like Elysha doesn't mind it either. However, I know well she is going to change into warm clothes and sit beside the fireplace while being in my arms. But that will happen if she agrees to stay after what I'm about to do. My footsteps slowly follow hers and I feel anxiety rushing in my nerves. I have never felt this way before but I have also never done anything like this.

We have come a long way and have crossed many hurdles of struggle. For years we were separated because of fate. But now?

All I can think about is being with her for the rest of my life. I have lost her once and it ripped my soul. I lost a piece of myself that I only gave to her, to my queen... To my angel.

My heart only beats for her and it always will.

As if she can sense my mind running, she stops at the rocky pavement of the front yard and turns to face me with a frown. "Everything alright?"

“Uh...yeah. Everything is alright,” I mutter but even the uneasy tone of my voice makes me cringe inside.

What the fuck is wrong with you?

You fucking rule over Russia and you are hesitating like a pussy to tell her your feelings?

“Are you sure?” she asks, biting her lip as if the situation is amusing to her. “You look... nervous, which is a very rare sight.”

I shake my head vigorously. “No. I’m not nervous about anything. I was just... thinking about something.”

Suddenly her expression changes from amusing to serious. Her lips slightly part with doubt glimmering in her eyes. “Are you regretting having me here? With you?”

This time I frown with shock, feeling a sudden rage and possessiveness claiming me.

I lean closer and cup her face with my fingers digging deeper into her hair, my thumbs brushing both her rosy cheeks.

“Never, my angel. You being in my life will never be a regret of mine,” I whisper and step closer.

Her arms snaking around my waist and her beautiful breasts pressed against my chest. And her eyes... fuck.

So much innocence. So much love for me.

I was nervous a few moments ago but seeing her love for me, it’s making me drown in those beautiful dark black eyes with the hidden emotions now peeking out into the light.

“I don’t know what it was about you, but the second I saw you that night in the dungeon, I just felt a connection.”

I shrug. “It was so instant that I kept questioning myself about it for days. But now I know why.”

“Why?” she asks.

“Because your God made you for me. He knows only you have the power to rule over my ruthless heart.”

She smiles and kisses my palm with her plump lips.

Fuck. If she says yes, I will worship at her alter for the rest of my life.

“But you don’t want this.”

She frowns with hurt glooming on her face as if I’ve slapped her.

“You want a man who will give you all the happiness in the world at your feet. He will protect you even from the shadow of danger. But in my world, you will always be under the roof of danger and threats. It’s the world I was born and raised in. But for you... I will change my world. To be with you, I will turn hell into heaven.”

Her face softens as tears start to build in her eyes. The sight makes my heart ache, but at the same time makes her look so beautiful that I feel like I’m falling in love with her all over again.

Elysha grabs my wrists, shaking her head. “You don’t have to.”

“What do you mean?”

She smiles shyly with her cheeks flushing. *So beautiful.*

“If being in your world means to have you forever, then I want to stay in that world. Hell, or heaven... none of it matters to me as long as I have you by my side. And I love you just the way you are. Even when you are ruthless, you will be the king of my heart, Maxwell.”

Her words are more than enough to melt my heart.

“I have always loved you, Maxwell. Satan or not, my love has surrendered to your dark heart for eternity.”

She is as deep in love with me as I am with her.

Maybe more than me.

“And what if I said that I want you to be my queen officially?” I ask with a sly grin.

Surprise flashes on her face as she realizes the meaning behind my words, but the doubt is still lingering somewhere in the dark.

“W-what are you trying to say?” she barely whispers with her hushed tone.

I chuckle under my breath, feeling amused. “I’m asking you to marry me, my little foolish angel.”

She gasps, looking at me for several seconds in silence, making those few seconds torturous for me. But when she smiles with her tears streaming down her face, I can feel what her answer will be.

“What do you say, angel? Would you like to be this king’s queen for eternity?”

She giggles through her tears, biting her lip. Her eyes close as her head leans down.

“Answer me, angel,” I mutter softly before kissing her cheek.

“It all feels like a dream, Maxwell. A dream I want to live in and never open my eyes.”

Wave of emotions crashes into my soul as my eyes take in the sight of my still lost angel. She has been through so much that now even a simple gesture of expressing my love for her seems like a dream to her.

I wish I could catch every fucker who crushed her dreams and innocence. I would have cut their hands that dared to taint her pure skin. Put a butcher’s knife right through their heads for even thinking about defiling her. Chop their cocks and balls that made her feel impure.

I would have done every unimaginable torture to them. And one day I will hunt them down and punish each and every one of them that even had the guts to look at her. Look at my *an’gel*.

But for now I am going to make sure that from this moment onwards every dream of hers comes true. Every reality she lives, she gets to live without fear or any hint of doubt.

Skimming my thumbs on her cheek, I lean forward and kiss each of her closed eyelids.

Her breathing turns ragged from my gentle touch, her hands tightening around mine.

“Does it still feel like a dream?” I ask.

She gradually opens her eyes, looking at me with adoration like never before as she shakes her head.

I kiss her forehead with my nose inhaling her sweet, sweet scent.

“Say yes, angel. Say yes and be with me.”

Letting out a shaky breath, she smiles and parts her lips to answer.

BANG.

Suddenly, her body jerks against mine with her face scrunching like she is in enormous pain, followed by the loud sound of a gunshot ringing in the air.

“Ah!” she groans out loud.

Elysha’s knees go weak as she collapses on the snow with her arms gripping mine for support. Her eyes and mouth wide open in shock and agony. When I look down, I see her shoulder part staining with blood.

BANG.

Another gunshot echoes but this time I feel the scorching pain on my leg, making me lose my balance.

But I ignore it all and hold onto Elysha. Blood seeps from her wound as she breathes heavily.

The bullet hit close to her chest, another inch and it would have penetrated through her heart.

I have to protect her at any cost.

I take out my gun and kneel in front of Elysha to scoop her up in my arms. With my limp leg I head towards the car. She needed to go to the hospital right away.

But as I’m about to open the door for her, another bullet hits my other leg and I fall on the ground with Elysha in my arms.

I grunt from the nerve wrecking agony but it's nothing compared seeing my angel being hurt.

“Maxwell,” she whispers, breathing heavily through the pain.

“I will protect you. I promise.”

I try to get up, grunting and hissing as I give it all to ignore the agony in both my legs.

But suddenly, something hits the back of my head with a hard force. The pain feels so excruciating that my vision blurs for a moment.

There is a ringing echoing in my ear and the ache flowing throughout my body is not making things easier. Out of nowhere, I feel a hand gripping my arm and dragging me further away from Elysha, before dropping it and kicking me twice right on my cheek.

“Ah!” I groan in pain, feeling it crawling my nerves and burning it like acid. I feel the blood seeping from my wound.

Shaking my now heavy as rock head, I blink continuously to have a clear vision. That's when I see the figure walking towards Elysha. A long rod iron in hand with it's end skating along the pavement.

I scrunch my eyes shut but when I open them again the sight that greets me with a vicious grin makes my whole world stop in seconds.

It is Rhea.

She is in a black long dress with heels on. She faces me with a smile that makes my skin turn cold. A smile I am familiar with because I hold the same expression every time I face my enemy to bring hell to him.

But today I am the victim.

Elysha's half-conscious body lies on the snow while her sister stands tall, tapping the end of the iron rod on the ground but so close to her face.

I can see the drops of blood coating it but deep down even I know what she is going to do next. I reach for my gun and aim at her. However, someone else kicks me on the arm, nearly breaking my bones and takes my gun away.

I groan loudly, feeling my entire body burning now.

My face turns towards my angel whose drowsy eyes meet mine. Her red hand leaning forward as if she's begging for me to hold her. To protect her. Tears stream down her cheeks, landing on the snow. Her body is turning weak from so much blood loss that she can barely keep her eyes open.

Rhea moves the rod and taps it lightly on Elysha's temple.

"She has always been the first. Always," Rhea whispers coldly. No emotions. No rage. No sadness.

Her blank stare gazes upon me. "I am the one who showed you pain can be beautiful. So... soothing," she twists her lips. She doesn't break eye contact, "I saw the *real* you that very night. Even through that blindfold I saw the demon we both shared, Maxwell."

She looks down at Elysha and snickers sarcastically.

"But she took you away from me. She always takes everything from me." Rhea kneels in front of her sister with her face shadowing over her.

I try to get up again but another kick to my arm makes me falter.

"Remember how our mother died because of you, Elysha?" Her shaky voice gives off the buried memories that dug its way out.

"You knew she was addicted and yet you let her die. Guess what, *sister*—" she mutters with a hiss like the word is a curse. "You killed me too that day along with *my* mother. You never considered her family because she loved me more than you. And today, even after years, you are doing the same fucking thing."

She grabs Elysha's hair into a tight fist, tilting her face up. My angel can barely make any sound from being physically vulnerable.

My vision starts to clear up more and that's when I notice men in suits surrounding my premises. And they are not my men for sure.

She brought her own army to take me down.

Fucking bitch.

“I fell in love with him the night I saw what we shared together. Something you and him will never have. And yet... he chose you. He fucking chose you!” she yells, dropping her head with a loud thud before standing up. Rhea turns towards me with a lunatic smile plastered on her lips. The madness that reflects in her eyes speaks so much about her obsession. I am well aware she would do anything to get what she wants. By hook or by crook.

The same craziness that I held for years.

“I looked everywhere for you. I moved heaven and earth just to get you back in my life. And when I finally found you, had you in my arms... my sister took you away from me. I told you before that I won’t be part of your fairytale. But I will be part of your destruction.” Pure rage storms in her and immediately looks back at her sister. Her grip on the rod tightens and I know what she is going to do.

But before I can get up, Rhea shifts her hand back before swinging it down and hitting Elysha with the rod across her face.

“No! Stop!” I scream and try to get up right away. I hear Elysha howling in pain. Her body now trembles like a leaf in the wind.

Using every ounce of my strength, I get up. This time I’m prepared to take any motherfucker down who tries to stop me. The one who kicked me, charges at me again with his fist raised for a punch. I block it right away with my arm, twisting his wrist and slamming my head against his nose, watching the fucker collapse on the ground. Few other men corner me as they lung at me all together.

Four of them hold both my arms while the rest of them point their guns at me. *Fucking bunch of cowards.*

One of them lands a punch on my face, making my body nearly stagger but the other guard keeps me upright. The hit is so hard that I instantly feel blood dripping down my nose.

I shake my head to gain back my focus and when he comes closer to hit me again, I take my chance and slam my forehead against his with full force. Using every ounce of my strength, I get away from my restraints and strike the other on his jaw with my elbow. My steps nearly falter from the wounds on my legs, but I don't let the pain weaken me.

I start landing punches and hits, one after another, to whoever charges at me.

The copper taste of the blood coats my lips and I feel the nerves in my skull aching. But none of it matters. All that matters is saving my angel. My Elysha.

One fucker after another falls on the ground and groans in pain as they kneel in front of me. Though all of them attacking at the same time gives them the opportunity to land a few punches on my body, too.

None of it stops me from beating the shit out of everyone. My eyes gaze back at Rhea with ferocity I've never felt before. The blood coated rod is still on her hand as she stands beside Elysha's body. More of her men come with their guns raised.

"Don't," she orders and like her fucking bitches everyone lowers their guns.

I turn to face her wretched face.

She lightly taps the rod beside Elysha's head as she meets my eyes with a stoic look.

"Let her go, Rhea. You want vengeance from me, right? So, hurt me and fucking let her go," I seeth the words out like venom through my teeth.

She twists her lips as if planning for something even worse to destroy me. "You are willing to do anything for her to save her life?" she asks, leaning the rod a bit closer to Elysha's temple.

If she wasn't that far from me then I would have snatched that rod away from her hand and smashed her skull with it until it got twisted.

“Just let her go. Let her leave and you can take all your years of buried rage out on me. Kill me if you have to, but you let her be free.”

She stalks towards me with a grin, her head held high. Even with her heels she barely reaches my chest.

“Kiss me,” she says.

I frown. “What?” My eyes immediately dart towards Elysha who is staring at her with her barely open eyes.

Rhea grasps my jaw with her fingernails digging into my skin, triggering my pain from the bruises, and forces me to meet her gaze.

“Do as you are told, Maxwell. Kiss me like you kiss my sister. Kiss me like her life depends on it.” She leans closer with her breasts pressing against my chest, “Let that dark demon within you take the lead. Unleash it on me, and I will set her free.”

Her face moves closer until her lips are ghosting over my bloody ones. She peeks out her tongue and traces my bottom lip, tasting the trickling blood while her hands slide through my messed-up hair and tugs it into a tight fist.

Just that one single touch makes my skin crawl like acid being poured over me. She has a purpose behind this meaningless kiss. The bitch wants to break her sister even more than she already had.

My angel is already broken physically but Rhea won't let her slip that easily... Not until she takes away everything from her sister and me.

I grab her hair and pull her head back as she grins in victory. With dark lust pooling in her eyes like a hungry predator.

I lean closer so that our lips are almost touching. Her eyes close in anticipation before I whisper, “I'd rather kill myself than even feel the slightest touch of your lips.”

Her eyes snap open and when they do the ferocity is igniting like an inferno.

I have called her a goddess several times and I wasn't wrong for once. She is indeed the goddess.

The goddess of hatred. Evilness. Darkness.

But every goddess falls one way or another. Rhea would face the same denouement when I twist her fate. Just like she is doing to mine.

Our gazes never falter as we match each other's fire of war.

She snickers, twisting her lips. "You just signed up your own death wish, Maxwell."

Suddenly, I feel a sharp stab on my back.

"Ah! Fuck," I grunt.

A sudden kick on the bullet wound on my leg makes me hit my back on the ground.

My body is turning weaker with the amount of blood I am losing but my mind and soul are still determinant and strong to save my angel. The only thing I can hope for is that I can save her in time.

I hear more footsteps coming from the entrance of my house and that's when I see men dragging a limp body of Francisco out of the house.

Rhea lets out a gasp, but even I can tell from here that it is all fake. She rushes towards him and cups his face with a worrisome look.

"Oh my God! Francisco, baby," she whispers, not caring her hands are getting coated with blood. His wounds and cuts are still fresh from all the torture I put him through. His eyes are barely open but he is still conscious and smiles seeing Rhea in front of him.

"Erida..." he barely whispers.

It is just one word. One fucking word.

That's all it takes to realize I am caught in the trap of my nemesis since the day I've laid my eyes on her. Starting from our first meeting to her showing up every now and then was all planned.

Francisco is just a pawn for her. One she is using to gain control in the Bratva.

Rhea leans her forehead against his and kisses his bruised cheek. “You are safe now. You are safe,” she whispers as tears stream down her face. It all looks so fucking real that even I would fall for it.

I did fall for her acts.

I should have listened to my gut instincts since the day I started to doubt her.

“The guards will take you to the hospital. I will meet you soon.” More tears run down her face as she kisses his forehead. Before Francisco can mutter his answer, the guards take him away from the residence.

The minute she hears the car door slam and the wheels screeching as it drives away, she rolls her eyes and wipes away her tears. “It always takes way too much effort to cry like a girl in distress.”

With a sigh she walks towards me, turning into the fucking viper, hiding under human skin.

“Remember when you asked me what is the greatest sin I ever committed?”

Her ruthless, cold gaze never leaves mine.

“It was falling in love with you. But it’s never too late for redemption, right?” she asks.

When she is met by my silence, she nods towards her men. They don’t waste a single second and start to kick me again. Every kick feels like a wrecking ball, searing through my bones. More blood falls on the snow. My shirt is all wrinkled and dirty and crimson. My head throbs like a hammer has been smashed against it. It feels like forever when they finally stop.

Not leaving a single ounce of energy in my nerves, I can barely breathe or keep my gaze focused as I lie on my back.

I feel soft hands caressing the side of my face but I don’t turn to face her. Even her sight makes me loathe her.

“You have always taken away something from someone, Maxwell. It has always been about you. But now that I took away your kingdom, your

power, your right... I can finally understand why you craved for it. I see it now. It was to keep that demon within you alive. It's always been about that demon."

Cupping my face, she forces me to look at her even though I try to keep my head still. But the moment her fingernails dig into my wounds, I cave in.

"But you are weak now, Maxwell. You have nothing to offer to anyone. Not even yourself. It's my time to rule now. Every story starts with a king that once upon a time ruled his kingdom. But it's time to rewrite the chapters. It's time for the goddess to rule."

She gets up and looks at one of her guards with a somber expression. "Take her inside the house and tell the others to bring the stuff from the car. It's time."

The guard nods to the few men behind him before he strides towards Elysha.

My heart starts to beat faster from instant fear.

No. No. This can't be happening.

"No! No! Don't fucking touch her!" I yell at the top of my lungs in my hoarse voice, begging fate to not take her away from me. I have lost her once. I can't bear to lose her again. The men continue to kick my body with every ounce of strength they have. The man kneels down in front of her and leans his hands underneath her body. She is limp in his arms as he carries her inside the house. The other guards return back with metal containers. The distant smell of kerosene fills my nostrils. They start to spatter it around the house, preparing it to be ignited on fire soon.

Elysha's drowsy eyes meet mine for a fleeting moment, and I can't miss the fading hope in her eyes. The men eventually stop when my body can barely move. I can feel the blood seeping from my wounds and cuts. Bruises from the kicks make every bit of my muscle feel sore.

She knows this is her end. She knows she will never see me again.

She gave up on me.

I shake my head furiously. “No!”

With my injured leg I give it all I have to stand up when one of the men kicks me right across my jaw, sending severe pain rushing through my face. I fall back but I try again. The man carries her upstairs until they both disappear from my sight, making my heart stop.

I can't fail.

I have to save her before I lose her forever.

Just when I'm about to attempt again, I feel a needle penetrating through my skin. Before I know it, I feel my own body giving up and falling back on the ground. I lie there for what feels like ages. My muscles start to relax, erasing any trace of tension I had a few moments ago. I watch a blur figure walk towards the house with a lighter in hand. I blink several times to focus on the vision in front of me as I watch them throw the kindled lighter towards the house. In a few seconds the fire starts to spread like ink on a paper, inflaming the house and everything inside it on fire.

“It hurts, doesn't it? It hurts like a havoc destroying you bit by bit,” Rhea snarls.

“I came back to be with you, Maxwell. I changed myself just for you. I turned myself into a monster so that you would worship me. But she took away that chance... And you let her. That's when you truly broke me, Maxwell. That's when I felt that havoc you are feeling. Unfortunately for you, there is no cure for that pain because you will be bearing that guilt in your memory even when you rot in hell.”

Tears that I haven't shed for ages stream down my cheeks. I watch the only woman I've ever loved burn. She doesn't scream... She doesn't cry. She is dying in solace.

And me?

I lie on the ground like a fallen king as my soul gets murdered by loss and heartache. Memories after memories flash in my mind with sorrow as

my only companion. Her smile... her beauty... her innocence... my angel.

My an'gel.

"I trust you more than myself."

"I have always loved you, Maxwell. Satan or not, my love has surrendered to your dark heart for eternity."

"I will always be with you."

"Nothing will tear us apart."

She promises me but I should have known those promises would turn into ashes from my sins.

The pain radiating through every nerve in my body is nothing compared to the ache in my soulless heart. Words will never be enough to describe the agony that's eating me alive. I never thought love would be my destruction. But I let it shackle me to its power. I let it control me, consume me day after day until I had nothing left.

Blood runs from my nose to my lips, leaving the copper taste on my tongue. My mouth is bruised, my ribs are most probably broken and I can barely feel my legs as I lie on the ground. My mansion, my castle is burning and I can't do anything about it.

I am powerless.

Weak.

I feel the blood clogging my throat and I start choking with my eyes tearing up. The only sight that greets me in this dark time is of the only person who took everything from me in a flash.

Rhea.

"Darkness is a beautiful thing, isn't it, Maxwell? Look behind you and see the paradise darkness can create."

I feel her familiar hands cupping my jaw and turning me to face my burning kingdom. It is blurry but I can't miss the flames and smoke shrouding every inch of the house.

How could I have been so blind?

How could I have missed this?

But just seeing that ruthless, victorious smile reminds me of the only light in my life. And now I have lost her, too.

I never allowed a woman to rule over my heart like a queen... I once did and it led me to my downfall. I swore afterwards to never believe in love again because it doesn't exist.

Love is a drug. The more you take it, the more it drags you to its darkness until there is no turning back. It feeds you with lies, showing you a world that doesn't exist in reality. But when realization hits you then it's too late... You lose everything.

And today... I lost everything.

My kingdom.

My power.

My queen.

Rage, revenge and darkness has taken its throne back in my mind. I was a fool to throw those away, but not anymore.

My vision starts to get distorted. The pain and agony is engulfing me in its arms with every passing second. The drugs make me weaker and weaker, leaving no strength within me to fight back.

Her fingers tighten their grasp on my jaw, making my head tilt up, facing those wretched dark eyes. The sight of victory in them fires my motive for revenge even more.

"So, tell me now. Who won, Maxwell?" she whispers and takes her gun out.

"The king? The queen?"

She grins and points the gun at me.

"Or the goddess?"

Before I can mutter my words, I feel the head of the gun being placed against my forehead, followed by the clicking of the trigger

To be continued...

OceanofPDF.com

COMING SOON

BITTER LOVE SERIES: BOOK 2

OceanofPDF.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I hope you guys have enjoyed Maxwell, Elysha and Rhea's story so far. More to come pretty soon on the continuation of their dark story! If you enjoyed it then please consider leaving a review. I would truly appreciate it <3

This book has really been an intense journey for me. I was nervous and scared, well... mostly nervous xD The concepts mentioned in this book have never been used in my previous books so it was kind of a risk taking moment for me. But I really can't thank the people in my life who have supported me in this journey.

First of all definitely a big thank you to my editor and badass author bestie- Anna Widzisz. If you think I had to check your surname on instagram to write down here then you are absolutely right xD I truly can't thank you enough for the editing and all the suggestions you've given me. You are truly a life saver! I love you so much for it and definitely gonna do my best to make you like Maxwell in book 2 xD And really can't wait to finish our book together babe! <3 You da best and always love you!

Secondly- thank you to my wifey, Elysha! I wrote this book for you because you've been obsessed with Maxwell for a pretty long time xD But I also wrote it because I wanted to dedicate a mafia story as a sign for how our friendship started. How you've supported me and always been there for

me through rough times, too. I love you so much for it, my wifey and always will! <3

Thirdly- thank you to my PR and fairy godmother, Julie. I really feel so glad that I got to meet you and how much you've helped me with my book. Your support and help means the world to me! So, if you think as long as I'm writing books and gonna be needing your PR help then you are absolutely right xD Love you!

Fourth- definitely thank you to my readers because without you guys I won't be here where I am today. So, no matter what your love and support for my books is always appreciated! <3

Lastly, thank you to my parents and my brother for their support. It's a bit tough in my culture and country for a nineteen year old girl like me to do something on their own. I was definitely scared at first when I decided to write, but I will always be thankful for the support you guys have given me. Especially, my mom, thank you for believing in me and never letting me down.

OceanofPDF.com

MORE BY THE AUTHOR

DARK LOVE DUET SERIES (PERSES AND HOPE)

Destroyed (Dark Love Duet #1) : <https://amzn.to/2GrHL2k>

Freed (Dark Love Duet #2) : <https://amzn.to/2TjGm5r>

(SHORT NOVELLA ON PERSES AND HOPE)

Omerta Anthology: A Very Mafioso Christmas:
<https://amzn.to/2X2lhwX>

(LUCIFER AND THEIA)

Cross My Heart: <https://amzn.to/3i2Mjgb>

Sinners MC: A Motorcycle Club Anthology:
<http://mybook.to/SinnerMCBuy>

JOIN MY READERS GROUP FOR LATEST UPDATES AND NEWS:

[SHANJIDA'S DARK PARADISE](#)

OceanofPDF.com