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RAIIF

LOVE AND LOYALTY



AVERY NORTH

RAIF - BOOK 5

LOVE AND LOYALTY

AVERY NORTH



CONTENTS

[Stay in Touch With Avery North](#)

[Other Books In This Series](#)

[Free Books](#)

[Also By Avery North](#)

[Love and Loyalty Prequel](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Reviews](#)

[Other Books In This Series](#)

[Stay in Touch With Avery North](#)

[Free Books](#)

[Also By Avery North](#)

[Join Avery North's Readers Group](#)

[About Avery North](#)

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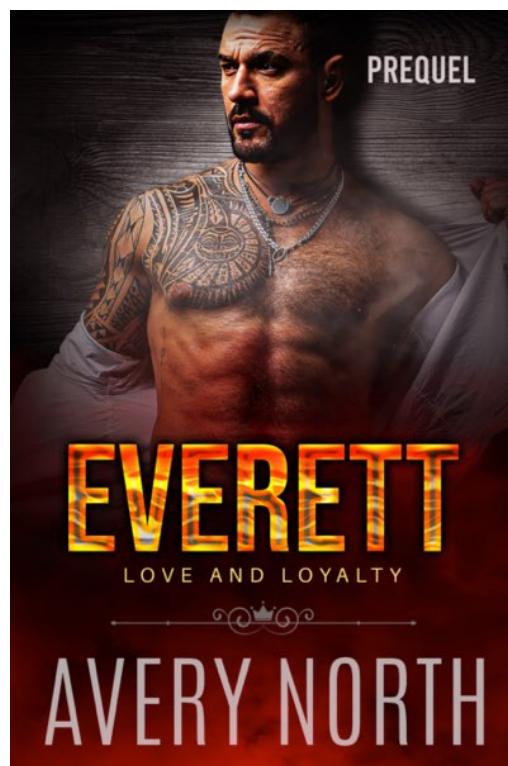
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CHAPTER 1

Raif had been sitting in a sterile room, staring at the walls, for over two hours. If this was how they got suspects to talk here in France, it wasn't working as all he really wanted right now was to rest his head in his hands and sleep. It had been a long flight, and the restful weekend with Alina was not working out the way he had planned.

His brain turned to Alina and the devastation that she must be going through at this moment. Losing her mom like this would tear her apart. After her family had spent a year searching for her, this was the worst possible outcome that Raif could imagine for their story. All he wanted was to go to Alina, wrap his arms around her, and make everything better. Based on his current location, he had a sneaking suspicion that was not about to happen anytime soon.

The door finally opened, and in walked a two men around his age, both wearing suits. Neither said a word as they pulled up chairs across from him and lowered their muscled frames down onto the seats. They both sat staring at him without speaking for several minutes . He was getting a bit frustrated with all the theatrics.

Finally, one of them, who was wearing a blue suit, spoke. "So, want to tell us why you are in Paris today?"

“I was meeting my girlfriend,” he said, a bit surprised this was the question they had chosen to lead with.

“And your girlfriend is?” The first man said. Raif hadn’t been shown badges or any other form of identification but assumed they were local police. However, he still wasn’t not completely sure what they wanted from him.

“Listen, I need you to cut out the crazy dramatics and trying to sweat me out,” he said briskly, not wanting to give them Alina’s name. He needed to figure out why he would be a suspect in the poisoning of her mother – if that was, in fact, what had happened and it wasn’t just a weird rumor spreading on network television around the globe. It was hard to tell the real news from the fake stories that would end up debunked within a week. “What am I being held for?”

“I see you’re a tough guy,” the first man chuckled. “We know your girlfriend is Alina Molachin.”

“Okay, wonderful. And I know that her mother died today, but I was headed here to meet Alina, so I don’t know why you think I would have been involved in what happened to her mother,” he replied, deciding to get straight to the point.

“We know you didn’t directly, but we need to figure out a few things as your mother was personally named as a person of interest by the family due to a failed business dealing,” the other guy, wearing a gray suit, said. Raif decided that blue suit guy and gray suit guy was how he would think of them. He wasn’t as clear about law in France as the United States, so he wasn’t sure if the same rights applied.

“Great,” he said. “Then you have no right to hold me.”

“We just told you that your mother might be responsible for poisoning your girlfriend’s mother, and you believe that is

an invitation to leave?” Blue suit guy asked, furrowing his brow in confusion.

“Yes, as I don’t speak to my mother except when she decides to interfere in my life. What possible reason would I have had to help her? I love Alina; my mother can go to hell,” he said simply.

“Oh, and you think that just because you can act the tough guy, we should let you go?”

Raif stared at them for a long moment. “I do have a question. What prompted you to get a warrant for me so quickly? I mean, the news made it sound like it was a new situation developing, and you met me at the hotel. Why? Were you asked to detain me by someone in particular?”

“Yes,” grey suit said.

“Excellent,” Raif said. “Can I see the paperwork or have my call now?”

“You think this is America,” the blue suit sneered.

“Nope, definitely not,” he said, “but I have a tough time believing you will be able to hold me for long.”

“Wanna bet?” Grey suit asked, pushing his shoulders and looking menacing.

“I do,” Raif said, sitting back. “Lawyer, or no more cooperation.”

“You do realize how much trouble you are in here, right?” Gray suit growled.

“Great, then I need my attorney,” he said simply and sat back.

He had a bad feeling it would be an exceptionally long night, but he wasn't going to say or do anything these two could use against him. He wondered if Alina's family had used a favor to get him thrown in jail or whether it truly was because of suspicion cast upon his mother about her involvement with the Molachin family. He didn't trust his mother one bit, especially after discovering what she had done to the Molachin family, but poisoning someone on the other side of the world seemed a bit of a stretch – even for her. As Alina and he wouldn't be able to meet, he had time on his hands until he could. He wondered if this was how all innocent people felt, right until the minute they were thrown down a dark hole for several years.

CHAPTER 2

““ **A**re they completely mad?” Alina shouted at the television. “I thought the news was supposed to report the truth, not make things up! Every station,” she said, flipping through the various channels on her television, “is showing the same rubbish.”

“She was poisoned,” Artem said defensively.

“Yeah, by the doctors who treated her, who had no idea she had an underline thyroid issue. Her body was weak, Artem, and I miss mother more than anything,” she said desperately as yet another news story flashed up. She fell into the upholstered chair behind her with a thump. “Oh, God!”

“What?” He came around from the entryway where he had been standing to stare at the television. “Oh, no – come on, who would have arrested ... ” he stopped and stared at the television. “Oh, Paris?” He chuckled. “Guess I know why you were so keen to get there for the fashion show.”

She swatted at her brother, “Artem, they have arrested him. Yes, I was meeting Raif in Paris, but what would have prompted them to arrest him?”

“I would bet our police being involved in the investigation of mother’s treatment until that new examiner was brought in

has something to do with it. I'm sure they will sort it all out, and your boyfriend will, of course, wish to visit you once again," he said with a deadpan expression.

"You are incorrigible," she said and stomped through the house in search of her purse.

She stopped in her tracks, nearly toppling over, when the front door swung wide. "Did you hear?" Ivan asked as he entered.

"Which part? All the crazy theories of mother's poisoning, or the fact that they arrested Raif?"

"Yep," she heard Artem say as he appeared beside her. "Did she tell you that he was going to be in Paris? She didn't tell me."

"No, but I am no longer surprised," Ivan said simply. "Keeping them apart is like trying to stop the rain." He rolled his eyes at them. "I have already called the attorneys to see what might be done."

"Truly?" She asked, taken aback. Ivan had been Raif's biggest critic when she first introduced them. He had appreciated Raif's business acumen and the improvements he suggested for the factory. However, she hadn't expected him to go the extra mile to help him out of such a sticky situation.

"Yes," Ivan said stiffly. "I don't have to love the man, but he did come to support you when mother was in hospital. Additionally, he has been nothing but helpful with his suggestions and even providing staff to help with the factory expansion. I have nothing against him."

"So, you accept that we are together?" She asked, looking at him carefully, trying to gauge his reaction.

“Are you certain you can’t find a good Russian man? Why does it have to be someone who lives halfway across the world, in America?”

She just shook her head and turned to Artem for support. Unfortunately, he just put his hands up to indicate she was on her own with this.

“Raif is so good to me. He is smart, hardworking, and even when everything is stacked against us, he keeps fighting for me,” she said simply. “I know you were there when mother gave her approval, and you know that if she liked and approved him, father would have as well.”

Ivan crossed his arms across his chest and stood looking at Alina, reminding her of a petulant toddler, for a solid minute. “Fine, I will object to your relationship.”

“Thank you,” she said, clapping her hands together and smiling at him gratefully. “Now, can you please find out if your attorney can get him out of trouble yet? And seriously, can we do something about the ridiculous stories flying around? I don’t think mother and father were this popular when they were alive.”

“You know that drama sells, my dear sister,” Artem replied. “You know, even Lana married someone who was in the news a lot. The women, the parties, and his family – wow! And she still found a way to see past all of that to the real person. You just get used to filtering it out. By now, I would think you were used to it, considering the mean things they write about you after your shows.”

She spun on her heels toward her brother. “Are you trying to start a fight, Artem?”

He held her gaze for as long as he could before breaking. “I have you now thinking about other things than Raif in jail, right?”

She squinted her eyes at him suspiciously. No matter how old she got, being around these two always made her feel like an insecure little girl. However, that was better than the alternative of being ostracized by her family. The more they worked together, the more Ivan came around to the new clothing line. Additionally, the time they had spent with their mother had been enough to bring them all back together. It was better, though the foreseeable future might be a little bleak she was certain that everything would come together in the best way possible.

Now, she just needed to ensure Raif was released from jail as soon as possible. She was going to owe him for this misunderstanding.

CHAPTER 3

“Son, are you sure?” His father asked over the phone as a car took Raif from the police station to the airport. “I mean, it has been quite an eventful couple of days, and getting you out – despite them having zero proof or just cause to arrest you in the first place – was pretty difficult. It turns out it was just a couple of overzealous police officers who were taking the word of another department knee-deep in an investigation. This was an existing case they were working on, and then when Alina’s mom died, they panicked and issued warrants before getting anything else sorted. They just wanted to question you, but in the end, they didn’t have enough to even warrant that, so you had to be released.”

“So, was Alina’s mom poisoned?” Raif asked, grateful to be walking free. He, of course, had made sure to swing by grey suit and blue suit’s desks on the way out to wave goodbye.

“I guess it mimicked a possible poisoning, but turns out it was this rare thyroid condition, I believe. It was brought on by the dehydration, injuries, and subpar care after she was hurt. Honestly, there is a reason I run an electronics company and

not a surgery center – medical things confuse me,” his father finished with a small sigh.

“Well, I’m certain I will get the full story when I see Alina. I hope that you can hold the fort down without me for a while. Of course, I have a phone, laptop, and everything if you need me to weigh in on anything. I just want to ensure I provide a supportive arm for Alina through the funeral, and then we will see where we go from there,” he finished up.

“I understand,” his dad responded, but there was a hesitation of some sort in his voice.

“What is it?”

“You know we already have Everett splitting time between here and Russia. Son, I know you love this woman – I can tell beyond any doubt I might have had in the beginning that this is serious. The issue is, are you considering doing something that might require me hiring somebody to help full-time? If so, I think we just need to acknowledge that it should happen sooner rather than later,” his father replied, apprehension clear in his voice.

Raif had to think about it for a minute. “It’s a valid concern, dad, and I don’t want you having to do the hours you are for much longer. You have worked hard and deserve a good retirement. Let me get through the funeral, and I will give you an answer on where we stand after. Is that fair?”

“Definitely,” his father agreed. “Oh, I gotta run, Raif. That meeting with the leadership team on the new 401K is about to start. I will fill you in when we talk next.”

“Sounds good,” he said as the car drove onto a small airstrip. He was going to surprise Alina and hope that she

wouldn't kick him out. He was desperately tired and in need of a shower after spending a night in jail.

Hours later, in the dead of night, another car delivered him to Alina's front door. As he watched the cab driver exit the expansive drive, he calculated the time zone difference and wrinkled his nose as. It was quite late, he thought for a moment. *Seriously, you came halfway across the world; knock on the door!* The voices in his head shouted. He knocked and waited. At first, no sounds came from within.

Then a shuffling, and finally he noticed someone peek out the front window. The door was flung open, and Alina leaped at him, circling his waist with her legs. "Oh, my goodness, why didn't you tell me you were coming?" she screamed so loud that it caught him off guard, and he worried that the neighborhood would wake up.

"Maybe we should go inside," he suggested. "I've already spent one night in jail this week, and I don't want your neighbors calling the cops on me."

She giggled as she kissed his neck and then slid down the length of him. "You do look a bit worse for wear," she said, standing back a bit and looking him up and down. "Shower?"

"I'm game if you are," he said, amazed at how easily they could fall into a routine when they were together. He carried his suitcase into her suite, and she pointed out where the towels were kept.

"I hope you don't mind," she said as he turned to find her nightgown in a puddle at her feet. "I might join you."

"Please," he said, feasting on the sight of her. From her long legs to the perfect strip between her legs and her pert, rosy-tipped breasts, she was magnificent. He would do a lot

more jail time if this were the welcome he got, he mused silently.

The massive stone shower was amazing, with heads pointing in all directions that immediately started to soothe the tension from his tired bones and muscles. Alina stood behind him, lathering him up, as she circled to ensure his balls and rod were well and truly cleaned taken care of. That attention meant that when he did turn in her direction, he was ready for a proper welcome back as she grinned at him.

Pushing her against the wall, he rolled a nipple between his thumb and index finger, burying his tongue deep in her mouth. Like a thirsty man, he drank from her sweet dewy mouth until he simply needed more.

Grabbing her buttocks, he lifted her, poising himself at her entrance as she slowly, excruciatingly slowly lowered herself down the length of him. He grew harder if possible, as she came to eye level with him. They sat intimately connected as all the worry of the last days fell away and the passion between them reignited.

He pressed her against the wall, grinding his hips against hers. His penis loved the massaging action of her tight channel as she continued to work him like a violin. She knew exactly when to move in tiny circles to make him feel as though he would lose his mind as he trailed kisses down her neck. Then she grabbed hold of his neck as he exited and entered her three times in quick succession.

“Oh, my,” she moaned into his mouth, tongues dueling as they moved against each other, harder and harder, trying to seek the satisfaction that only the other could provide. The hot water provided even more stimulation to every nerve ending

and carried away the sweat of their exertion. “Please,” she whimpered as he encircled her waist tightly.

A couple of hard, well-positioned thrusts, and she was screaming out her release; as she convulsed around him, he was catapulted over the edge into his climax as well. Together they stayed conjoined, allowed the shower to cleanse them, and calm their racing pulses into normal rhythms.

Finally, he carried her from the shower, wrapping a huge towel around them, and slipped into bed. Five minutes later, spooning her perfectly in the middle of the ornate four-poster antique bed, he was soundly asleep. That was where they stayed until the rude morning sun awakened them.

CHAPTER 4

The following morning Alina sat across from Raif, unable to wipe the smile from her face. “I need to help finalize some arrangements today,” she said. “Then maybe we can take a walk, and I can show you some of my favorite places?”

“I would love that,” Raif said, sipping his coffee. “How are you coping with your mom’s passing?”

Alina had to think about the question for a minute. She had been so heartbroken when her parents were missing, and they had no answers as to what had transpired with them. This feeling was different, a softer kind of grief, as she had had the time with her mother to clear the air and settle matters.

“I honestly am going to miss her every day. I am grateful for the time she came back to us, though. It gave us time to talk about so much, though we didn’t end up answering the big question about her and father’s final moments together. On the other hand, all the crazy gossip and news stories ... ” she just shook her head. “I simply do not understand why people are so interested in spreading lies about others.”

She knew that she was a public figure of sorts due to her family’s business and her modeling career. Did that honestly give them the right to be as intrusive as they were? That was a

question she was struggling with these days, this latest stupidity of Raif being detained in regard to her mom's death made it harder.

“I know that can be super tough,” Raif said.

“And then the police overreaching and having you detained,” she said, reaching out to lay a hand over his. “I am so sorry about that, Raif.”

“Honestly, it's all good. Someday I will have some amazing stories to tell our kids about how we met and the crazy ride of getting tougher,” he said and Alina froze at his words.

“Our children? You think we will make it that far?”

Raif looked at her, cocking his head to the side. “I hope so. You don't believe that is where we are headed?”

Alina sighed, “I would love that, and you know I adore you. I talk to Lana, and she is so happy with her situation with Everett. They live part-time in each country – would that be something you are open to?”

“I don't know,” Raif said with a deep sigh. “I have a company to run – well, actually, Everett and I have senior leadership in the company now. Because of the huge agreement with Ivenchko's company, it works okay for him to bounce back and forth. But both of us doing so would take a lot of coordination. I mean, I would want to visit, holidays and the like,” he glanced down at his coffee. “I just don't know how we might manage it. Maybe we should just enjoy the time, let you get past the funeral and your family more settled, then we will see.”

“Okay, I agree – let's give it this week,” she stopped and turned in the direction of the front door when a knock

announced someone was waiting outside.

“Were you expecting someone?” Raif asked as she stood and padded toward the entrance.

“Nope, maybe it’s a delivery or something,” she answered absently as she opened the door.

“Anja and Victor,” she said, throwing her arms wide and embracing her sister-in-law. “What are you doing here?”

“Mom has errands,” Victor announced loudly.

“Hey, Raif,” Anja said, giving Alina a sideways glance. “I see you have been safely delivered from French prison.”

“Nice to see you too, Anja,” Raif chuckled as he crouched down to Viktor’s eye level. “How are you, tough guy?”

“Can you play football like Americans?” Victor asked.

“I can. Do you think maybe we should do that one of these days?”

“Now,” Victor demanded as Raif looked up at Anja with an apologetic glance. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to distract him.”

“It’s all good,” she replied, glancing at Alina, “don’t you have to go to the funeral parlor today?”

“I do. Are you coming too?”

“Yes, but would you be able to watch him for just a bit, Raif?” Anja asked Raif.

“If Alina doesn’t need me, I would love to,” he said, holding his hand up for a high five from Victor. The child was so cute as he jumped as high as he could to slap his hand. “Yeah, we will play American football, but where will we get a football?”

“Actually, friends of ours sent him a tiny soft version,” Anja said with a chuckle. “It’s in the car as he doesn’t like to be far from it. He will absolutely love doing that with you, as Ivan has been so busy lately.”

“I would love it,” Alina heard Raif say as her heart expanded a bit more.

Honestly, was there anything Raif could do that she wouldn’t think was the best thing ever? Was there a flaw in this man? If she didn’t find one soon, she had a sneaking suspicion that she might actually consider moving to America to be with him – and that was definitely not something she had ever thought possible. She loved Russia, the culture, the food, and the amusements she had grown up with. On the other hand, Raif and America might be a powerful mix she simply couldn’t pass up on.

CHAPTER 5

Raif was exhausted by the time Alina got home, and quite glad that Anja was ready to take Victor home. For someone so little, the little boy was difficult to keep up with. He had run around catching and throwing the football for close to an hour, then the same amount of time playing in the swimming pool, followed by a quick lunch, and back outside to play hide and seek. Raif considered himself to be in decent shape, but he was ready to call it a day.

“How was it?” Alina asked, leaning back against the door that Anja, carrying a tired Victor, had just walked out of.

“Well, it was a ton of fun, but I think I might need a nap,” he said wearily as she chuckled loudly. “What?”

“I thought we might go down to the open-air market, maybe stop at a small café. I want to show you my city and what I love about it, and I could use some time just – how do you say – de-stressing after these last few weeks.”

Raif could deny her nothing and nodded his head. “Let me change my shirt, as I’m not even sure what half these stains are, and then we can go,” he said with a dramatic wave of his arm in the air.

She giggled. “I might make you an iced coffee if that might improve your energy?”

“I would love that,” he said, bending to kiss her cheek before heading for her room. Once upstairs, he realized that he hadn’t checked his phone all day, and he should probably take a peek. Unfortunately, six text messages and one voicemail from his father were on the screen. As he grabbed a clean shirt, put some deodorant on, and checked he looked OK in the mirror, he listened to the messages. Nothing was overly problematic, though a couple of the documents for the latest projects had been sent to his computer. He could check those later and so moved to the text messages.

Again, a couple of small work things, and then Roslyn’s name appeared. He glanced at the door to the room as if half expecting Alina to catch him before he deleted the message without reading it and blocked her number. There was no chance in hell he would allow Roslyn to interfere with his happiness, and it was annoying that she kept reaching out. The final message was from his mother. “Seriously, like I haven’t had enough to worry about this week,” he muttered to himself as he deleted that one also. Slipping the phone in his pocket, he went back downstairs, determined to have at least one day free of worries, stress, or crazy drama.

“Ready?” Alina asked as she flung her crossbody bag over her head and held out a cup with a handle and lid to him. “I think I got it right, but you want to try before we go?”

He took it and blowing took a tentative swig. The rich, vibrant flavors were intoxicating with just a hint of a nutty creamer that was not sweet like what he normally had. “It is great,” he said, glancing at the cup as if somehow it would magically reveal what was inside. “What is it?”

“That is for me to know and for you to keep coming back for more,” she said with a wrinkling of her nose. “Now, let’s get going.”

“This is nice, somehow not as hot as I figured it would be this time of year, and the breeze feels great,” he said as he put his head into the wind.

“I know Victor wore you out, but I normally walk because parking close to the market is a bit of a problem when they are busy,” she said, looking at him as she considered what the best course of action might be.

“I’m game,” he said, holding up the mug. “I’m getting my second wind now.” He smiled at her.

Alina pointed out old sights and famous places along the way. She knew this area like the back of her hand.

“I’m just amazed at how old some of the architecture here is,” he said. “You know our country definitely doesn’t have this. I am in love.” He stared in awe at the gargoyles perched on a church they were passing. That was not something he would see in his hometown.

After one long cobblestone path, they turned, and a market sprang up in front of him. He didn’t understand the language spoken around him, but the vibrancy here was infectious. He savored the aroma of fresh baked goods as Alina picked out some squash and other vegetables. Then on to another table, and another, each displaying a different delicacy or craft.

Alina chatted away to people in both English and Russian. He couldn’t tell if she already knew everyone or if it was just a very friendly crowd out today. The fatigue he had been feeling earlier had fully evaporated in this energetic place.

When done, they continued walking and stopped for a light midafternoon lunch. The waiter spoke broken English and was happy to converse with Raif and help him learn a bit of the menu in Russian. Finally, as the sun looked as though it was going to merge into the horizon, they trudged home. He couldn't remember a day in recent memory that had passed with so much activity and new experiences. He chuckled at how infrequently he checked email and his phone here as Alina kept him on his toes.

He didn't want to give her up, but in the quiet moments he found himself mulling over a final decision for his father. He loved being with Alina, but he had worked hard to continue his father's vision for Nedelson Electronics. He just hoped that maybe a compromise would be forthcoming because if push came to shove, he honestly had no idea what he would do.

CHAPTER 6

Alina finished clearing the plates, glancing happily over at Raif. She noticed he was rubbing his shoulder again and suddenly had a brilliant idea. When her friend Mariana had got engaged a year ago, she had had taken her friends to a parlor to learn how to give erotic massages. It was intended to help connect people in the most sensual way, and the women had a lot of fun and many laughs that afternoon.

As she thought back to what she had learned, she was pretty convinced it would work on Raif. The lounge out in the small pool area might be just the place, she thought, filling their wine glasses one last time as she moved back to the table.

“I have a special surprise,” she told him, holding out the wine glass.

“Oh, yeah?” He asked, giving her a suspicious look. “Am I going to like this idea, or is it going to make me a laughingstock?”

“I don’t know, but I will give it a try, and then you can tell me at the end what you think,” she offered with a smile, holding her hand out to him. Once he placed his much larger palm atop hers, she tugged at it to bring him to his feet.

They walked outside, and he gasped at the sight. “Wow, it’s beautiful here at night. This place is great – not too crowded, but you have the benefit of everything so close. And that view!”

“It was my parent’s dream house,” she said as he followed her.

“This was their house? Wow, that must have been hard,” he took a long sip of wine.

“At first, but honestly, it somehow makes me feel closer to them now. I kept a few of mother’s things around the house and many of our most favorite pieces of furniture and then interlaced that with my style.”

“It works. It’s comfortable and really homey,” he said simply.

“You don’t feel your home is comfortable and homey?”

“Not really. I always think I would love to find something for this wall or that, but then I go out to look and realize it just isn’t my thing.”

“Well, when I’m in town next, we shall make it homey and comfortable,” Alina promised as she laid one of the lounge chairs with the cushion completely flat. “Now, get naked and lay down.”

“Um, really naked?”

“Well, that part is more for me,” she giggled, leaning up to kiss him, and he immediately dropped his clothes into the stack. As he reclined on his belly, she admired the view. Starting right into the massage, she quickly realized why this was considered erotic. She was already getting turned on by the feel of his skin.

Knowing what a tough and exhausting day he had had with Victor plus all the walking around town, she tried to remain laser-focused on his needs rather than hers. Using a bit of lotion, she ran her hands down his tense muscles, molding, kneading, and working his warm body with her hands. Of course, she had to make sure that her fingers slipped around his waist and down almost to his pubic area to ensure he had no doubts that she was ready for other activities he might be interested in. Then further down to his supple and taut buttocks, she applied just enough pressure to work through the muscles holding in all the activity of the day.

She worked and toyed with him for nearly thirty minutes until he suddenly flipped over on the chaise lounge and hauled her onto his lap. "I think I'm relaxed enough," he said in a husky tone, raising the back his lounge slightly so that he was mostly sitting. He slipped a hand under the robe she had put on over her swimsuit and started to massage her breasts. She was already keyed up after having free range of his body and could feel the her arousal between her legs. Moving one leg over the top of him, she straddled him as he moved the bottom of her swimsuit out of the way.

She lifted herself as he grabbed hold of her butt cheeks and continued massaging as she lowered herself fully onto his member. That erotic massage had been all the foreplay either of them needed. He continued to grip her buttocks as she rode him wildly. This man that could take her from a carefree day at the market to the heights of pleasure in a matter of hours and she considered him her greatest gift these days.

He moved forward to run his tongue over her nipple as she continued the assault on his length. Moving, working, and panting her way toward the goal her body sought, she went

faster, encouraged by the noises he made and the hands that gripped her backside with greater urgency.

Then, as if possessed, she grabbed hold of his shoulders to brace herself and moved hard and sure, up and down in frenzied movements as the pressure built. She was like a wild animal as her nails dug into his soft skin. He allowed her to take her pleasure from him and soon she was right there. She was flying, and with one last thrust down his shaft, she split into a million pieces, seeing bright stars in her eyes as the climax captured her entire body.

After she had properly recovered, she opened her eyes to see him grinning at her. “You are amazing. That is what I would like for dessert every night.”

She could only swat him playfully as she grinned because there was no way she was going to deny that request.

CHAPTER 7

The following morning Raif and Alina made plans to go to the factory. As he was in the country and could help provide some direct insights into the expansion plans now underway, Raif was excited to progress. Additionally, while Alina did a few things for her clothing line and called her agent, he would be able to get in some work calls.

When they arrived, he told her they should say hi to Ivan. She looked at him incredulously, probably worried about them starting something. But Raif understood that while Ivan was a tough cookie, he did seem to do everything he could for the love and protection of his family. That devotion he could work with.

“Ivan,” Alina said after knocking lightly on the door to his office. “I thought you would be here also.”

“Yes,” he said as Raif moved around Alina so that Ivan could tell he was there also.

“Raif,” Ivan said, standing and moving toward him. Raif looked at the man’s face and immediately knew something was not right with him. As he extended a hand to Ivan, he kept his eyes trained on his face.

“Good to see you,” he said as they shook. “I’m so sorry about your mother, though I heard they finally figured things out.”

“Thank you,” Ivan said with a small nod as he swallowed hard. “I am sorry you got caught up in the craziness. Sometimes in their urge for answers, I know that police officers can be a little overzealous.”

“It’s all good. I hope that we’re okay and that you don’t think it will detract from the occasion tomorrow if I attended the funeral with Alina?” He wanted Ivan’s permission as he was the head of the household now, and in this society that was a major thing – heck, even in some parts of America, it was considered respectful to ask the older brother or father’s permission to date or marry a daughter. Sure, many individuals had abandoned these traditions, but not Raif.

“I would be honored for you to attend. I have heard that Lana will be here also,” Ivan replied.

“I was hoping you could show me the line improvements,” Raif said gently. Despite his brave front, he could tell Ivan was in a contemplative mood this morning.

“I am going to my office as I have a conference call I must attend,” Alina offered. “Am I safe to leave the two of you alone?” She teased, though the look she shot both of them was deadly serious.

“We are fine,” Ivan waved her away. “Go ahead!”

Raif just nodded when she turned to him and she slipped away, and he turned back to Ivan. “So, how are things going?”

Ivan gave a slight harumphing noise. “Not great. I am dealing with several press requests right now because of the situation with my mother, as you can imagine. Additionally, a

group of workers we desperately needed for the line work backed out because of some of it. Instability in the company they claimed,” he said with a roll of his eyes. “They seem to forget that I have been at the helm for a year now while my parents were missing.”

“And you have to stay brave for everyone to top it off,” Raif added. “I know that was my dad’s greatest fear for years, that someone would see him break and move in for the kill.”

“I do not wish to sell any part of my family’s company, but the vultures are circling. We have plenty of cash; while we have had a few bumps along the way, we are not, by any means, in trouble. I just ... ” he stopped and frowned distractedly.

“Hey, I run a big organization also,” Raif said. “I know that we might not always see eye to eye about Alina and our relationship. But you should know I respect and love her enough to do anything to help make you more comfortable. Though I also think you and I might be able to help each other as sounding blocks for the business side of things. If you want to talk, I’m here.”

“A group has surfaced claiming that my father promised them part of the company in exchange for a loan,” Ivan replied. The reddening of his face showed this was a very touchy subject, so Raif allowed Ivan to get it all out before he said anything. He was truly humbled that he was approaching him as an equal with something that was such a big personal burden at this moment. “I do not understand why he would have needed this loan. It was not put on the books for the company, nor anywhere in his personal belongings that I can find.”

“Is it an amount you can pay back?” Raif asked.

“It is – that is why I’m confused,” Ivan offered. “He had to have used the money for something he didn’t want anyone to be able to find for some reason.”

“Well, while you figure that out, I would get this group paid,” Raif suggested.

“I know, but they are not forcing my hand. They don’t want payment, but part of the company – in fact, a sale of the company,” he said. “Please, my sister, brother, and wife know nothing of this, but I’m curious – do you have any idea what I might try to rid myself of them? I will pay the amount with interest should they provide a note clearing the debt. I have engaged a very discreet attorney to handle this, but even he has some concerns about the case’s legitimacy. He simply can’t prove it.”

“I do have a thought,” Raif said. “You said that Lana is attending the funeral?”

“Yes, she arrives later today. She said she tried to reach Alina, but now I think I know why she was unsuccessful,” Ivan said, raising an eyebrow at Raif.

“Well, she employs two American bodyguards. The men have an interesting history and can be very useful when uncovering dirt without anyone knowing,” Raif offered.

“Really?”

“Yes, they were helpful with the Everett situation,” he said simply as he didn’t wish to air his friend’s dirty laundry. “Why don’t we see if we can get a little time with them and if they are able to help? Of course, I would ask Lana’s permission without telling her why.”

“Of course,” Ivan said with what appeared to be a genuine smile crossing his face. “Thank you. I would not have thought

of such a thing, and maybe they can help.”

“Now, about that tour. Maybe we can figure out that problem next,” Raif suggested.

“Yes,” Ivan said. “It might not be so bad having you around after all.”

“Well, that might be the nicest thing you have ever said to me,” Raif replied as they headed toward the factory portion of the building.

CHAPTER 8

Alina glanced about at the amazing crowd, a sea of black attending the funeral mass in the church today. Most of the faces she did not recognize, but it was an amazing show of support for her mother's legacy. She tried to focus on the words being said, but her mind was restless and sat with Artem on one side and Raif on the other she felt like she might burst. Not until this moment had the full impact of what was happening hit her.

Raif arriving so soon after her mother's death had given her an outlet to forget everything for a little while. This loss that had been a year in the making, and while they now had answers for it all that didn't fill the gaping hole inside her. Raif moved his hand to cover hers, and she glanced up at his sweet face.

His devotion to her happiness and always putting in the time to make her feel special even when he was far away reminded her of how her father had been with her mother. She was mad that so many, including Raif's mother, had tried to soil that relationship. Though it was odd, she couldn't find it in her heart to blame Raif for his mother's actions. He was no fan of the mother who had abandoned him as a child. She contacted him only when she needed something. Alina didn't

want that for him, as everyone deserved a caring, constant force in their life as her mother had been for her.

Finally, the service was over, and the family stood at the back. They waited in line to greet all those who had attended. Her feet ached, her heart thudded in her chest, and her wayward mind felt on the brink of breaking as the final person passed by her with murmured words of comfort. She walked away to the side of the church before bending over and allowing the emotions to flow.

“Hey,” Raif’s reassuring voice sounded as he rubbed her back.

“Are you okay?” Lana’s voice joined in.

Alina swallowed hard and turned to them as tears streaked down her face. “I don’t understand it. My brain was on fire today, but when speaking to everyone, I couldn’t pay attention.

“Honey,” Lana said sympathetically. “You are saying goodbye to your mother, under some very trying circumstances and the glaring lights of those watching you. I would have been surprised if you didn’t have a panic attack.”

Alina closed her eyes and realized that Lana was right. That was all this was, a mild panic attack.

“I just hate that so many people watch us. Not because I’m beautiful, or because they want to know what I’ll do next – they are waiting to see some small crack in my demeanor. I wish I had been poor and without any of the things I have so that nobody would care.”

“I get that,” Raif said as he gently rubbed her back, pulling her spirit to a quieter place. “Unfortunately, you were born a little more beautiful than say ninety-nine percent of the population, and you are rich and successful, and people are

fascinated by such things. I think it is harder these days, but you don't have to worry about that with us," he said as she glanced from him to Lana.

Lana stepped forward and embraced her tightly. "I really am so sorry for your loss. I have to say," she stepped back. "I'm glad she came back for a little time and was able to share information about my mom and give you a little closure that you didn't have with your father."

"I'm truly glad for that also," Alina agreed with a small smile. "It would have been hard losing both and having to live the rest of my life never knowing what happened."

"So, we will go together to bury her next to your father, knowing they are together watching over you," Lana said.

"And then we can go have some vodka," Raif said, causing both women to giggle.

"Sounds good," Alina said, walking back, flanked by both of them. She was feeling better and more in control already. she still wanted to run away or shout at the unfairness of everything, but she was going to hold her chin high, and tomorrow was a new day. She knew her mother would always be with her in spirit, and as the days got easier, she would celebrate that. Today, she could only survive the ceremonies that they needed to go through and keep putting one foot in front of the other.

She laced her fingers with Raif's and drew comfort from that connection in particular.

CHAPTER 9

The party went long into the evening. The traditional dinner after the funeral had welcomed many people who wished to pay their respects. As the evening wore on, the group dwindled to only close friends and family, and the alcohol started to come out. Then the games.

“I am pretty good at this,” Alina said, holding out a deck of cards to Raif.

“I believe you might be when sober,” he said with a chuckle. “But you definitely aren’t right now.”

“Oh, don’t challenge her,” Lana said with a burst of laughter. “I survived a few years in college with this girl.”

“Oh, my sister was a party girl?” Artem teased. “Who knew?”

“Not me for sure,” Ivan said gruffly, though his tie was nearly undone and his wife was sat on his lap. They had sent the nanny home with Victor as the guests left, but Raif was happy to see they were sticking around. It was nice just to spend time with Alina’s family.

“I think we should go dancing,” Anja said, throwing her hands in the air.

“Let’s do it,” Alina said, turning to Raif and planting a huge kiss on his lips. “Think you can keep up?”

“I’m not sure,” Raif said, looking over her head at Lana with worried eyes.

“I will call the car,” Artem offered.

The vehicle must have been parked close by because it arrived mere minutes later and they all started piling in. Raif had never been to a Russian club and truthfully, hadn’t been to many American ones, and was a bit worried. On rare occasions Everett had dragged him out as a third wheel. He was a passable dancer, but his uneasiness in those situations meant he normally ended up stood at the peripheral of the dancing crowds like a wallflower. Considering that Alina was anything but the girl who danced with wallflowers, he knew he would have to step outside his comfort zone tonight.

“I’m surprised to see you out like this,” Raif shouted to Ivan over the loud chatter inside the car, which was more of a limousine style though not as long as a stretch. “Dancing doesn’t seem to be your thing.”

“Really? You think?” Anja said as she glanced at her husband. “Do you know how we met?”

Raif shook his head.

“He came to the bar in college one night and walked right up to me. Grinding against me and so proud of himself,” she giggled, running a hand over Ivan’s chest. From the dreamy look in Ivan’s eyes as he gazed at this wife Raif could tell she was the man’s weakness. “He said to me, ‘you want to get out of here?’” She giggled again. “I, of course, was trying to be good, but he got me. We never spent another night apart.”

“Wow,” Raif said, glancing at Alina. “Were you aware of this?”

“No!” she said with a chuckle as the vehicle came to a hard stop, and everyone swayed.

They exited and headed for the back of the club, and Raif was next surprised to see them all waved through. He glanced about, trying to figure out how that had happened. “You guys come here often?” he said to no one in particular.

“My sister, the world-famous model, can get men to do anything she wishes,” Artem replied to cause Raif’s chest to constrict as he turned to Alina.

“Is that true?” Raif asked, glancing at Alina. They hadn’t talked all that much about previous boyfriends or her life before they met. He knew she was a model, and the way her family lived, but had she been a party girl before him?

“We all have secrets,” she said. “I’m here with you now and don’t intend to ever be without you, so why worry?”

Well, darn it, he thought. She had a good point, and he allowed her to drag him along behind her. The place was packed, and he could feel the beat through his entire body. Music, lights, and swaying bodies moving in unison to the beat filled the place. You simply could not stand still in a place like this, and the group made its way to the dancefloor immediately.

He turned to see Lana taking a picture of him. “What are you doing?” He shouted. It was the only way to communicate in the deafening club.

“I pretty certain that Everett is going to want evidence this happened,” she teased.

“Funny,” he growled, knowing full well he would hear about this when he got home. Everett loved to poke fun at him, and continued to relish in the stories as Raif started to enjoy more out of life. Maybe after all the times Raif had given him grief about his partying ways, this was payback.

“Come on,” Alina urged, grabbing his hand as the crowd swallowed them up. There wasn’t a clear place to dance, but a few feet in she simply plastered herself against him and started gyrating. He knew how to respond to this and found himself tuning into her rhythm, responding to each hip thrust, running a hand down her body as they swayed to the music.

CHAPTER 10

The following morning Alina opened her eyes with a grimace. She could recall everything about the funeral, the church, the burial, and even the dinner party after in her mother's honor—such a somber and serious occasion. But then the crazy started with a few innocent shots and some card games among close friends and family. Finally, the ride to the club and more drinks with dancing – and that was when things got fuzzy. The pounding in her head told her it had been a great night, though, and glancing down, she realized she hadn't undressed when they got home.

She glanced over to see Raif, still clothed also, sprawled across the entirety of the bed except for the small area she had been lying on. Standing up, she decided to take a shower to see if she could rectify the horrid sticky feeling across her skin and in her mouth. Turning on the shower to steam up the bathroom, she managed to take a sip of water with aspirin and brushed her teeth before stepping out of her clothes into the amazing steaming waterfall.

She enjoyed standing there for a few moments before she was interrupted by a gorgeous hunk of a man walking naked toward her. "Have room for one more?" Raif asked with a lopsided grin.

“Definitely,” she replied with a grin. They stood absorbing the amazing steam, lathering each other up and refreshing themselves after the wild night before. After about five minutes, finally, Raif broke the silence.

“That was some night.”

“I think we all needed to blow off some steam – as my American friends always say,” Alina offered.

“Agreed. And Ivan – wow. I have to say that was my biggest surprise for the evening.”

“Yeah, Anja can get him to do things I would never have imagined possible.”

“Speaking of which,” he said, bending to capture her lips with his, nibbling gently and turning her on. “I was thinking we turn off,” he said, reaching to flip the handle of the shower, so they stood soaking wet in the space, “that and maybe turned something else on.”

She watched him grab a big towel and quickly wrap it around his waist after running it haphazardly down his body. Then he turned to wrap her in another and led her from the shower. Then, without warning, he bent and lifted her over his shoulder.

She giggled hysterically, kicking without much force in a mock effort to get him to release her. He only did so when he unceremoniously dropped her on the plush bed. “You are a madman,” she shouted at him.

“Oh, baby,” he replied, crawling up the bed on all fours towards her, “you ain’t seen nothing yet.”

“Really?” she said, moving her hands to capture his face and draw him to her. He opened her towel and slid a hand inside, running it down the length of her warm heated skin.

As they kissed, he moved against her slightly, and there was no hiding that he wanted her as much as she craved him. This lovemaking was slow and like a drug to her system – not hard but still passionate, more a dance of body, souls, and spirit.

They were aligned hip to toe, and he suckled on a breast as she ran encouraging hands up and down his spine before he returned to her lips. As he entered her slowly, she knew that she loved this man; she wanted to have many more moments like this with him. Life without him wasn't even a possibility for her. As they moved slowly in their erotic dance, they fit perfectly together. She felt that love turn to tension as her body responded to him.

He moved from her right to her left breast, ensuring every inch of skin in between was kissed with butterfly-light movements. Her skin was on fire, and she craved more of his touch. Moving to her ear, he stroked the lobe with his tongue, continuing to build momentum where they were joined together. When his mouth plundered hers once again, she was ready. Tangling with his tongue as one hand slid the length of him to that perfect rounded behind, she grabbed him tightly, encouraging his wild movement.

They could not get enough of the other as they kept their bodies aligned, drawing from the heat of the other. The friction built to fire as he continued to move in and out with firmer motions. She massaged, caressed, and ran her fingertips over his skin wherever she could reach. As the tension built, a slow, steady desperation reared inside of her. She gyrated slightly to create new sensations as he seated against her throbbing mound time and again. Soon nothing but panting and moans could be heard.

He kissed her firmly one last time, and simultaneously thrust hard as he could be several times. She needed him to finish and she wanted to be there with him – her mind was crying out as he carried her to the edge. She held onto his shoulders as he finally carried her over the edge of the madness into relief. They collapsed next to each other, trying to regain their breathing patterns. Shockingly, that had seemed the most vanilla of their lovemaking sessions so far, and yet in some ways more erogenous as she felt connected in a brand-new way to this generous, giving man who could drive her mad with that tongue of his.

“Well, good morning to you too,” Alina said with a huge grin as Raif rolled to his side of the bed and covered himself with the duvet. “Can I get that wake-up call every morning?” She asked, putting a hand over her eyes, still not fully recovered.

“That can be ...” he stopped as a hard knocking sounded on the door. Alina glanced at Raif, who just returned her confused look.

Suddenly, without warning, Lana burst into the room. “We have to go,” she said, looking at Raif; her face was flushed, and she looked angry and slightly sad in some way.

“Lana,” Raif said, sitting up. “What is going on?”

“Don’t you answer your phone?”

Raif glanced around but couldn’t see the device nearby. “I must have left it downstairs after the dinner,” he said, confused. “Why?”

“Your father had a heart attack last night and is unconscious,” she said and Alina heard Raif gasp. “And your mother showed up at the company this morning claiming that

she is now in charge. She told Everett he was fired five minutes after he arrived at work this morning,” she screamed, looking on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

AFTERWORD

Dear Reader,
Thank you so much for taking the time to read Raif, Book 5 of Love and Loyalty Series.

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It would be amazing if you could take the time to give me a fair and honest review of the book [on Amazon](#).

Thank you.

Love,

Avery

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