



BOOK

4

RAJIF

LOVE AND LOYALTY



AVERY NORTH

RAIF - BOOK 4

LOVE AND LOYALTY

AVERY NORTH

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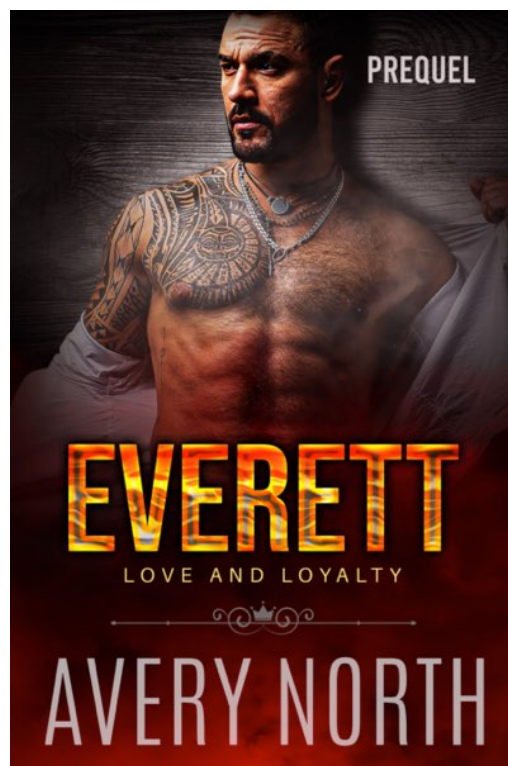
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CHAPTER 1

““**W**hat?!” Raif snapped as a knock sounded at his office door. He was not himself this morning, and, honestly, he didn’t care. Since returning from Russia, he had been a hot mess and running on caffeine and adrenalin. His bad mood didn’t bode well for anyone who got in his way but knowing that Alina had done him wrong in such a way twisted his insides painfully.

“I just have the sales reports you asked for,” his administrative assistant, Rachel, popped her head into his office, her expression nervous. “Also, there is a lady here who says she would like to see you?”

“A lady – what lady?” He asked as his irritation climbed another notch. Normally, Rachel was super helpful, totally professional, and efficient to a fault. Right now, though, she swallowed hard and looked unsure what to do. She hadn’t asked for the visitor’s details, but as she moved back against the door, the reason for her unease became evident.

“Raif, darling,” Roslyn said, sailing through the open door and glancing about. “Amazing view,” she said, looking out the window. “Thank you – you can go,” she said, dismissing Rachel with a flick of her hand.

Raif felt his anger direct onto a new target. “Roslyn, you are an unwanted guest in my office. You have no right to speak to my staff in such a manner,” he said, glancing over at Rachel. “Thank you, Rachel.”

“I’m sorry,” Rachel muttered.

“It’s all good,” he said as the fire of earlier subsided. He might not be having a great time at the moment but taking it out on someone like Rachel, who tried her best every day, was simply wrong.

“Roslyn, what can you possibly be thinking coming here?” He thought back to their last interaction and immediately felt his stomach clench. Alina had been there, and it had been obvious they were spending the night together. He wondered what Roslyn was doing here.

“Can’t I stop in to see an old friend?” she said innocently, turning that smile on him – the one that she used when she wanted him to do something. During their relationship, he had fallen victim to that exact pout more times than he cared to remember.

“No, because we aren’t friends. As I recall, it was your choice to pursue other relationships and endeavors more in line with where you saw your future,” he said, quoting the words she had so eloquently delivered before walking out of his life for good.

“You know,” she said, keeping her eyes trained on the scenery beyond his office and away from him. “I didn’t think you would amount to anything. I mean, don’t get me wrong, your dad always did well for himself, but with friends like Everett Morance you paled in comparison. I was reading the *Times* the other day and saw the article they did on you. It

seems both Everett and you are being credited with the massive expansion of your business.”

“Thank you,” he said, not sure what other reaction she was expecting when she finally turned her eyes to his.

“You still seeing that silly Russian model?”

Raif inhaled deeply to steady himself. “Alina is not some silly Russian model,” he said, avoiding the question as he didn’t want to dissect it with Roslyn of all people.

“I guess if you say so,” she said, moving to his desk and bending over so that her ample cleavage was on full display, wrapped in tight-fitting, expensive silk. She might think that kind of thing was a turn-on, but he just wanted to scream at her to get out. None of his old feelings for this woman were present anymore.

“Roslyn, you’ve barged into my place of work in the middle of the day – is there a point to this visit?” He trained his eyes on her directly and didn’t waver even when she stuck out her lower lip in what she thought was an endearing manner.

“I thought maybe we should have dinner and catch up. It has been ages, and I miss you,” she said, stepping back and looking very sure of herself.

“Roslyn, let me make this abundantly clear. You broke my heart years ago, and these days I wouldn’t date you if you were literally the last woman on the face of the planet. I don’t like your pettiness and gold-digging ways. There is nothing for you here, and I must ask you to leave.”

“Raif,” she said, not looking the least abashed or put off by his words. “I know I hurt you, but I promise you won’t regret

giving me a second chance. I am the best thing you ever had.” She licked her lips seductively.

“Well, that I know isn’t true, because that would be the silly Russian model you just made fun of,” he said, shocking himself with the words as much as Roslyn.

“Seriously?”

“Seriously,” he replied and sat back. “Please show yourself out. I have work I need to get back to.”

“Well, I never,” she said and turned towards the door. “You will regret this.”

“Doubt it,” he retorted and immediately bent his head over the work on his desk, not even giving her the satisfaction of watching her exit.

As a young guy, he had to wonder why he hadn’t seen through all the stupidity she spewed. It was probably because only one thing was important to him back then, and while Roslyn had been good in bed, Alina was the whole package. She had long ago eclipsed Roslyn, and now he realized that as shocked as he had been by the words he had overheard back in Russia, maybe he needed to give her a chance to explain the comments. Or possibly, he just needed to try harder to change her mind.

CHAPTER 2

Alina sat beside her mother's bed, wringing her hands together. Just yesterday, she had been doing so much better and well on the way to recovery. Then today, Alina had arrived to find out her mother had slipped into a coma. It didn't make sense, and even the doctors seemed baffled by the development. They had been talking about releasing her, but overnight she had taken a massive turn for the worse.

"How is she?" Artem asked, walking into the room quietly, startling her out of her thoughts.

"I don't understand it," she said quietly, looking at the tubes that now kept her mother alive. She had been so excited to have her back, and then the stories about Rayne Bishop had started. It was amazing to see how her mother and Lana had bonded, even though she still thought she was Rayne. Lana had left last night to return to Everett for some time as they didn't do well apart. She had promised to visit again soon, and Alina's mother had been all smiles upon that goodbye and promises to catch up again. Then this.

At the same time, she had to deal with Raif keeping her at a distance, which she didn't understand either. The night that he didn't show up, she had felt that everything was walking

toward a great place. Even Ivan had been a big fan of the plans Raif had introduced, and while he had put them in touch with another project manager at Nedelson to start the project he was not communicating at all. In a roundabout way, she had asked Lana about it, but she didn't know what was going on with him either. Alina could have used him right now and hated this need for his presence that had blossomed in all areas of her life. If he wasn't going to commit all the way, how was this going to work?

“Hello?” Artem asked, waving a hand in front of her face. “You with us today?”

“I don't think so, to be honest,” Alina responded. “I just feel like every time things start to come together – poof,” she said, making a bomb-style gesture with her hands. “And then I'm sitting here not understanding it all.”

“Boyfriend still not calling?” He asked gently, sitting in the chair on the opposite side of her mother's bed.

“No,” she whispered. “I know I should be focused on mother right now. I just don't get why she is getting worse and why Raif has taken himself out of my life. I've been working hard, and he is such a hard worker as well. In addition to our big visions for the future, we have an amazing time together. Something just continues to get between us, though.”

“It can be a challenge. Relationships with people of similar backgrounds, countries, and such are tough enough, but the two of you being from such different places in the world, with your schedules,” Artem just shook his head.

“I think that Lana and Everett were starting to make it look so easy, I didn't realize how tough this would be,” she said with a heavy sigh, glancing back at her mother. “Have the

doctors said anything new about why she slipped into this coma?”

“No,” Artem said. “I will say, though,” he glanced at the door as if he was ensuring no one about. “Ivan would like to bring in a special team just to look at everything.”

“What do you mean? You think someone could have done this to her?” she asked incredulously. “That is ... ” she stopped talking, a shiver running through her body. “You think that our parents’ accident might not have been so accidental?” She asked, reading his expression.

“Yes,” he answered seriously. “We have become aware of some parties seeking to grab control of aspects of the business. Ivan is dealing with it, but there are rumors that our parents might have known something they weren’t supposed to about people trying to take control of not only ours but other businesses.”

“People don’t kill people or make their planes disappear because of business,” she said, still not believing it.

“I know you might not understand how big the business is, but we do hold some prime vendor agreements grandfathered into our operations that others can no longer access due to some new trade laws. It’s not just the value of our business but those contracts that someone might wish to use or take,” he said quietly.

“How much money?” Alina questioned. Money was the root of everything. She knew her family business was successful, but not on par with, say, Ivchenko or Nedelson.

“A billion,” he said and her breath caught in her throat. That was five times the highest estimate she would have put on their holdings.

“That is,” she sighed. “Wow, I guess Ivan and father knew what they were doing. I had no idea it was on that level now.” She sighed, glancing again at her mother. “I just don’t understand, though, why mother would be injured. It makes no sense. While she always provided a listening ear and advice, father was the true leader of the business before Ivan. Besides, she had the mental capacity of a child after her return.” She felt as though as was pleading a case. The fact that anyone would have wanted to injure her mother seemed impossible. She had to believe it was something less sinister.

“I hope that you’re right, and that this is just loose tongues telling tales,” Artem offered up. “I know that no matter what, she will be grateful to you for taking the time away from your business to stay by her side.”

“Thank you,” she said. “I can’t imagine being anywhere else.” She frowned and bit down on her lip.

“What is it?”

“I’m supposed to have a show in Paris,” she said. “I need to let my agent know that I won’t be able to attend.”

“You can get there and back in just a couple of days, can’t you?”

“Yes, but if I left her, and something happened ... ” she shook her head. If that happened, she would regret it for the rest of her life.

“You and I both know that mother would be more distressed by everyone fawning over her and not pursuing our lives. She was your biggest fan and loved that you started modeling to see the world. I will check in religiously and ensure she is not alone for long while you’re away.”

“Let me think about it,” she said, reaching out to smooth a strand of her mother’s hair that had fallen onto her cheek. She had truly thought things were on the mend, and that they would soon have her mother home. She couldn’t lose her now, not after a year of thinking her dead and then finding her once again. She just couldn’t.

CHAPTER 3

“I’m so glad you could join us for dinner tonight,” Lana said. “I would have made something fancier if I’d known you would be here.”

“Are you kidding,” Raif said, patting his belly. “That was amazing. Anything I don’t have to cook is a bonus for me. And honestly, you didn’t have to do this right after getting back from Russia.”

“Oh, I wanted to and am glad we got to catch up,” she said, gathering the plates and dropping a kiss on Everett’s upturned face as she passed him. Lana was the best, and the evening spent catching up with her and Everett outside of work was exactly what Raif had needed. He had been aching to ask if Alina had said anything after he left, but didn’t want to put her in the middle of their strife-filled relationship at this moment.

She came back and lowered herself into her chair, staring at him directly. “So, why did you leave Russia in such a hurry without a word to Alina?”

“Sweetie,” Everett said, reaching out to take her hand. His tone made it clear he wanted to give Raif a break, but truthfully, he was glad she had opened the door.

“She was using me, and I wasn’t going to let her keep doing so,” he said, and Lana’s eyes grew wide in disbelief.

“That woman, my friend, was heartbroken when you left without a word,” she said emphatically. “Whatever crazy thing you heard must be wrong, or you misunderstood.”

“Lana, I didn’t misunderstand. I heard her tell the person on the phone that she didn’t care how much daddy’s money had bought me and that I wasn’t that good in bed. That I wasn’t good looking, and she just needed one more thing from me before cutting things off completely.”

He expected Lana to see his side and agree, but instead her face blanched white and then a deep shade of red. “Did she ever tell you about the fling she had with her agent before you two met?”

“No,” Raif said and his heart pounded nervously in his chest.

“She has the Paris show left on her contract with him, and then she intends to find someone new. His dad was her original agent, and he transferred all his clients to his without any notice. Alina wanted out of the agreement. I would imagine she was talking to a friend or a lawyer when you overheard because you are right. She told me the details the day after you left, and that matches. She is smitten with you, and I promise you that she would not have been talking about you like that.”

“Oh,” was all Raif could manage to say as Lana turned and slapped Everett on the arm.

“Hey, what did I do?”

“You men are so stupid when your feelings are involved. You keep running away and then pining after us. Try talking!”

she shouted in exasperation.

“Okay,” Raif said bashfully. “I will call her and try to clear the air, I promise.”

Lana just shook her head at him. “With her mother and all, you need to be supportive.”

“I promise,” he said, running his hands through his hair as he imagined that awkward conversation. “I will talk to her as soon as possible.”

“Maybe you need to decide if you are all in or not first,” she said, her gaze moving between him and Everett. “If you are going to continue to toy with her – that’s just not fair.”

“You’re right,” Raif said with a deep sigh as he sat contemplating. “I can’t focus on work, and it’s disruptive when we go back and forth like this. I promise I will have a frank and decisive conversation with her.”

“Good,” Lana said. “That family has been through the wringer, and I think you are amazing together. I know they were appreciative of your ideas for the automation of their company and the time you took to meet with them at the hospital.”

“I was grateful in both cases that I could be on hand when they needed the support,” he said as he stood and headed for the door. “Thank you, Lana. You did good,” he said, directing the last statement to Everett, who immediately wrapped an arm around his wife.

“I know, now maybe settle your own love affairs,” Everett quipped as Raif nodded and slipped through the door.

CHAPTER 4

“I’m so glad we got to clear the air,” Alina said as she and Raif finished up a nearly hour-long conversation. She had been so relieved to hear from him she had felt tears fill her eyes a few times during the discussion.

“I can’t believe I could honestly think so little of you,” Raif said. “I guess the daddy’s money thing and bed comments hit me hard.”

“Say no more, let’s put this behind us,” she said as she reclined on her bed. “It’s too bad you aren’t here as I have the perfect tension-relieving activity we could partake in. Of course, this distance is not such a positive to make that happen.”

“You’ve never tried phone sex?” Raif teased her as the moist center between her legs continued to throb. Just the sound of his voice had her turned on.

She should be upset at how much turmoil he had caused with his sudden departure after his misunderstanding her conversation. Unfortunately, it appeared she couldn’t stay mad at him for any length of time.

“No,” she giggled into the phone. “I never have.”

“Really?” Raif sounded a little huskier now. “What are you wearing?”

She found a smile curving her lips as she played along with him. “Nothing at all,” she said, though, in fact, she was in a thigh-length heavy flannel nightgown. Glad of the empty bedroom, she hiked it up to reveal her naked thighs. “What about you?” She said, trying to use the sexiest voice possible.

“Nothing but a smile,” he returned as she found her fingers moving to the mound that was begging for attention. She rubbed in gentle circles as she heard his breath quicken.

“Are you touching that favorite part of mine?” she whispered, moving along her fold as she bit back a groan. She could see Raif mimicking these motions in her mind.

“Just imagining that creative tongue of yours wrapping around me has me hard,” he said as she put the call on speaker and placed the phone on the pillow, before pushing deeper with her fingers. Her free hand moved to her taut nipple and gave it a gentle pinch that sent a wave of pleasure through the nerve endings of her body.

“Oh, Alina,” Raif said, even more breathless than before. “I need you here with me, riding me.” She couldn’t believe how much she craved the man that was thousands of miles from her at this moment.

She stoked and flicked, working herself into a frenzy. “Raif,” she gasped as she could feel her climax build. “You need to be in the country soon!”

“I have a quick twenty-four-hour board meeting at Ivchenko Electronics there in two days. I can’t stay because of several critical meetings back here, and I know with your mother it’s not possible for you to get away.”

She tried to do the math to make that trip work out and realized she couldn't. "That is quite a few miles, and I will be leaving for Paris soon for that show I committed to," she whimpered, continuing to stroke herself.

"Man," he said, and she could tell he was in a similar state as herself on the other end of the line. "We can make something work, I'm sure, soon."

"Definitely," she said as she tweaked the nipple harder, and moved her fingers in and out of the wetness at the apex of her legs.

Suddenly the phone buzzed in her ear that another call was coming in. She groaned aloud as she turned and saw Ivan's name on the screen. "Raif, I have to go," she said huskily. "I'm so sorry." She wanted to cry from the denied climax and her entire body complained when she pulled her hand back.

"Okay. Talk soon," he whispered. "I need a cold shower."

"You and me both," she said, ending the call. Taking several calming breaths, she picked up the other line. "Ivan, is everything okay? Is mother okay?"

"Yes," Ivan assured her. "There has been no change; Anja is sitting with her and will call if we're needed. As agreed, so you can rest tonight."

"I appreciate it," she said, feeling a bit guilty at the recent call that had taken up time she should have been sleeping. However, she was not sharing that revelation with her brother.

"We have another problem," Ivan said. "And I wondered if maybe you could stop by the plant in the morning."

"Okay, what kind of problem? Is it something that should be done tonight?" she asked, sitting bolt upright. Her brother

would not include her unless it was a true concern, and she was feeling the tension of a new kind building in her body.

“No, I need to rest and consider a few things also,” he said, but his tone was off in some manner that Alina could not put a finger on.

“Okay, what time?”

“Could you swing by before going to the hospital to relieve Anja? The nanny is with Victor, so we will have some time.”

“That works,” she said. “You sure it can wait?”

“Yes, goodnight,” he said gruffly but didn’t immediately hang up. “You know I do love you, even if sometimes I don’t show it. The stress of running this business gets the better of me sometimes, and I’m feeling the loss of father tremendously right now.” His heartfelt words surprised Alina. It was unusual for Ivan to show any familial love or affection for her. Sure, she knew he cared; it just wasn’t his forte to put that into words.

“I appreciate all you do for the entire family,” Alina responded.

“Goodnight,” he said again and then hung up.

Alina sat staring at the phone for quite some time. “Well, that was odd,” she said to the empty room. Glancing about, she realized that between her sexual tension and this odd call she definitely wouldn’t be sleeping anytime soon. Jumping from the bed, she decided to bathe and maybe enjoy a glass of wine. Tomorrow looked to contain some discoveries from Ivan, but normally those weren’t positive.

CHAPTER 5

“Dad,” Raif said, walking into his father’s office the following morning. His normally hearty-looking dad looked almost green. “You look horrible. Did you tie one on last night?”

“You could say that,” he said, taking some aspirin from his desk drawer and popping them in his mouth, swallowing them down with a huge swig of coffee. “I met up with your mother,” he said with a sardonic twist of his mouth.

“Why?” Raif asked viciously before he could successfully filter the comment. “I thought the attorneys were tasked with hammering out the divorce?”

“Because it has come to my attention during some forensic accounting audits being done by the law firm we hired, that she has definitely used our company on numerous filings in the past couple of years. We found loans she had taken out, business dealings where she offered our services in exchange for consideration, and one of the associates we can now tie her to,” he shook his head. “Well – turns out they are not the kind of person we want to be associated with us.”

“In what way?” Raif said, moving forward. He might not have always loved his money-hungry mother, but he had not

thought of her as a criminal before. Doing such things with a company that she was not part of was a problem.”

“How did we not know about this?”

His father inhaled and exhaled, “I need you to stay very calm.”

“Okay, should I be sitting down?” He asked, leveling his father with a direct gaze.

“Yes, but I’ve asked Everett in also,” he said, holding up a finger. “This information will impact him as well.”

“How is Everett ... ” he broke off and turned when a slight knock at the door sounded.

“You asked to see me,” Everett said as he entered, and his eyes alighted on Raif. He raised a brow, but Raif could only shrug.

“Come in,” his dad said with a flourish, “and close the door tight behind you. We don’t want this to be overheard by anyone.”

Those words caused Raif’s blood pressure to shoot even higher. Everett did as instructed, and then sat next to Raif, both facing Geoff Nedelson, who was still sitting behind the desk.

“I have been handed some information that Selma was the one who started the ball rolling for the Ivchenko and Molchalin business interests in Russia. I know it was made to seem as if they were internal decisions and things happened organically but it turns out that Selma and a group of investors she owes a lot of money to have been pulling some of the strings.”

“How?” Everett said, looking at him. “I’ve done the engineering, and Raif and yourself brokered the deal. What

would that have to do with Selma? And why is your ex-wife rearing her head in the business anyway?"

"Because she isn't his *ex-wife*, and it turns out my father, as smart as he is, allowed her to continue to appear on documentation, in accounts, and in our life to this point." Raif replied tersely.

"What?" Everett said. "So, if something happened to you, she would have a stake in the company?"

"Yes, and to be honest," Geoff inhaled. "I think that might be the plan."

Raif's head jerked back at this and he felt as though his brain short-circuited. "You think she is hoping something will happen to you? So that she can gain control of Nedelson?"

His father held his hands up placatingly. "Now, please hear me out. I found out quite a lot of last night from your loose-lipped mother, and I've already put several things in motion to try to stop this typhoon of greed and destruction she has aimed at us."

"Dad ... " Raif started, but Everett reached out and laid a hand on his arm. "Let's hear him out, so we have all the information.

Raif nodded.

"You know Gene Knibbs in finance and Gary Heintz in legal?"

"Yes," Raif said. "Both have been here a long time. How are they connected?"

"Apparently, Gene has gambling debts that have gotten out of control, and Gary a prostitution problem," Geoff said with a resigned sigh. "This group that your mother is in bed with got

to them. They fed her information on the Ivchenko deal, and then Molachin. When we didn't bite right away, they went to them directly, pretending to be representatives of our company. I believe that she is hedging her bets that we won't make legal claims because of your familial ties, Everett. She upped the ante recently with Molchalin – and, honestly, there are hints that someone was bribed on that lead. Something to do with grandfathered trade agreements and some other relationships that they want. They are about to try a hostile takeover there,” he said quietly.

“What? How?”

“Blackmail,” her father said. “They want those contracts, and I didn't get all the details, but I got enough to know that these are scary people. I contacted the attorneys concerning the information. I met with your mother on my own last night, which of course, they are mad at me for, but I need you both to help. We are going to be documenting everything and trying to use what black and white information we have along with Gary and Gene's testimony to try to transfer the company immediately to you,” he said to Raif. “Everett, I would like you to take on a COO role to bolster the management further, as these two members of senior staff will be removed. Raif, go to Russia on the planned trip and maybe do a little sniffing there if anyone knows anything. Do not let it become known that we are on to this group.”

“What does Selma have to benefit from this?” Everett asked. “I mean, if she divorced you now, I'm sure it is going to be a great payday.”

“Her head has never been wired on right,” Raif bit out. “I bet she is doing it simply for the thrill.”

“I agree,” his dad replied. “She just seemed so pleased to have gotten something like this over on me. She kept saying she was going to take everything from me, that Raif and I had turned our backs on her, and I should have just turned a blind eye to the infidelities. She thought we could have been a power couple.”

“She is unstable,” Everett said, shaking his head. “We need to get moving on this. Have you notified legal and finance? We are going to need a forensic team combing through everything.”

“Already on it, I’ve expanded the scope of the team looking into my divorce to the company also,” he said, turning to Raif. “I’m sorry, son.”

“It’s not your fault,” Raif replied, trying to smile at his father. “I know you loved her and just wanted things to resolve peacefully. I never foresaw this kind of double cross, though.”

“Me neither,” his father muttered. “Me neither.” His head drooped. “I honestly thought with some freedom she would come back to me, but this ... I should have smartened up a long time ago and seen her for who she truly is.”

“Well, we can fix this now,” Everett said in a determined tone. “You cannot see her alone ever again, though. Once she realizes you are onto her, it could be bad.”

“Agreed,” Raif said.

“I understand,” Geoff said, though his expression was that of a beaten man. He had poured his entire life into this company, and now his traitorous wife was trying to strip that from him. But that would not happen on Raif’s watch.

CHAPTER 6

Alina showed out the last of the contractors she and Ivan had been working with and turned to her brother. “Thank you. I promise you will never regret helping me get this up and going.”

“I know,” Ivan said. “When we found mom, something at that moment made me realize how unbelievably narrow-minded I was being. I had some market surveys done, and your idea has worth. I know that traditionally we have stuck to creating textiles in mass production, but this could work. Besides, you are a third-party owner in the company, and your voice should matter.”

“Did you do something with my real brother?” Alina asked him with a giggle. “This is not the Ivan I know.”

“I’m trying,” he said with a grin. “Besides, it was forward-thinking to bring Raif and his family’s business offerings to us. They will add much value to the lines, and for that also, I’m grateful.”

“Wow,” she said with an overwhelming urge to hug her brother. She decided not to hold it in and reached out to pull him tight. “After Paris, I was already at odds about signing with a new agency after this contract. Maybe it is time to come

home and help run this new division and expand the holdings totally for the entire company.”

“I think that’s a good idea,” he said just as his phone, which had been buzzing off and on for quite some time, started to buzz again. He furrowed his brow at the screen. “I must take this. Maybe we can talk more when I come to see the mother in the morning?”

“Definitely, and I appreciate Anja sitting with her. I just have to finish a few things and then I’ll head over to relieve her this evening,” she said.

“Artem went over, and I forgot. He said he could take the evening if you can stay late?”

“Perfect,” she said as they parted ways, and she headed toward her office area. Her phone started buzzing as well, and her heart began to race. She pulled it from her pocket, hoping it wasn’t news of her mother. She was pleasantly surprised to see Raif’s name on the screen.

“Hello?” She said, curious why he would be calling so early.

“Hello,” he replied. “How are you?”

“Great. Where are you? I thought you had meetings at Ivchenko today before heading home tonight?”

“I did, but I talked the pilot into preparing a flight plan that would let me see you first. Any chance you could meet me at the airport hotel?”

“Now?”

“Well, you could wait three hours, but I will be gone.”

“Any idea about how you are hoping to fill your time? I mean, this is a long way for a booty call,” she said, grinning at

her use of the American term that one of the models had explained to her when she first went to America.

“Not if that booty is yours,” he said.

“Oh, you sweet talker. Text me the information, and I’ll be on my way,” she said.

“Alina?” Raif said hesitantly just as she went to hang up. “I know you have a lot with your mom and such. If you can’t do this, I won’t pressure you.”

“If you think I am going to allow you to leave my country without seeing you,” she blew out a big breath. “You are crazy! I will be there,” she assured him and ended the call.

Moving quickly, she gathered her items, flicked out the lights, and made for the exit. It was silly how excited she was considering she would only be able to see Raif for less than two hours, but she would happily take ten minutes with him. Just being able to hold him tight would bolster her against what was going on in her life, and she was looking forward to it more than she could imagine.

Luckily, she knew the route to the hotel he texted by heart, which was amazing considering her brain had lost all processing power after that call. She was going to be with him again soon, and her entire body was alive with anticipation.

CHAPTER 7

Raif glanced at the door again and back at his watch. He was trying desperately to focus on the television despite it being in a different language. He knew that it would take Alina some time to get here, but he felt like a teenager about to go on their first major date. He was giddy, nervous, and going a bit stir crazy when his phone buzzed.

Scrambling to the table where he had left the device, he saw a number he didn't recognize. He was about to answer when there was a knock on the door. He swirled around, knocking the phone to the ground as he made for the door.

"Hello?" He heard his mother's voice coming across the line.

"Odd," he muttered, picking it up and standing silently, finger poised to hang up. She had used an unknown number for fear he wouldn't pick up. He would bet money on it. As a second knock at the door sounded, he moved his finger across the screen, disconnecting. That was drama that would simply have to wait.

Glancing in the mirror, he smoothed his hair and moved over to the door. As soon as it opened, he felt his heart skitter at the sight of Alina framed there.

“You look stunning,” he said.

“Seriously?” She said, pushing past him with a raised eyebrow. “I have been at work for hours, sleeping in the hospital at night and missing you constantly. I look a wreck, but I appreciate you trying to be kind.”

“You still look amazing to me,” he said, grabbing her hand and pulling her in tight embrace. Wrapping his arms around her waist, he drew her to him for a deep, lingering kiss. “Hi,” he whispered when he finally released her lips.

“Hi,” she whispered as a smile lit up her face. “I can’t believe you stopped at the airport for a couple of hours.”

“Yep. I’m going to sleep on the plane, and I’ll have to go straight to the office in the morning, but it was worth it,” he said, lowering his head to kiss her again. Feeling calm at last, he stood, hugging her tight as she rested her head against his chest.

“I hope someday we will be able to have more than a stolen moment here or there,” she said, glancing up at him. “Maybe figure out what we both want from this relationship.”

“Well, you just called it a relationship,” he teased. “That is a step in the right direction.”

She playfully swatted him. “You are incorrigible. Considering though I can’t even look at another man anymore, this better be a relationship. Even if we live in different time zones, for the time being.”

“I’m on board if you are,” he said, gazing down at her with a look that melted her insides. “Now, do you want to go grab a bite to eat?”

She looked at him like he was crazy. “No, I want you naked and on that bed in a minute,” she said, slipping her

shoes off and moving her hands behind her back to unzip her skirt.

“I like where you are headed with this,” he said as he urgently undressed, placing his clothes neatly on the chair beside him.

“Now,” she said, moving towards him. “You are going to sit in that chair where you so neatly placed your outfit.”

“I thought the bed?” he said as he gazed at her.

“Nope. As you were the one who left me without any notice the last time, I get to tell you what to do. Okay?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said as he fell into the chair. She grinned to see that he liked to be bossed around, as he was already hardening nicely. “Oh,” she said, reaching out to stroke his length, “you seem to like it when a woman tells you what to do.”

“A little,” he said, and his voice caught in his throat as she stroked him harder and harder. “At least I like it when you do it.”

“That,” she said, bending so her breasts were at his eye level, “is good to hear.”

He reached out with his tongue to suckle her nipple as she moved to straddle his lap. She didn’t low herself yet, wanting him to tease her into a wetter state first. Raif slipped a finger inside her and she gasped, throwing her head back. It was always like this with Raif; hot, heavy, and perfect for making her forget everything for a little while.

As he worked her body like a master, she moaned, moving in little motions over his twitching length, and tormented them both. When she simply could not hold out another second, she

slowly lowered herself inch by inch as she guided his member inside her, and he allowed a deep moan to pass his lips.

“That feels amazing,” he said, placing his hands on her hips, guiding her as she started to ride him. They moved in perfect unison as she continued to lift and lower, bracing herself on his shoulders. She rode and rode until she was certain she was going to explode.

“Come on,” he whispered in a tone akin to a prayer. “Cum for me, baby!” He gritted his teeth as she rode him in a frenzy with more aggressive movements.

She was right there, grasping for release as the tensions mounted, her muscles seized, and then, “ahhhhh!” she gasped as the climax ripped through her entire being.

She wound her arm about him and allowed her body to relax against him. No words were needed right now, and they held each other tight until both their breathing returned to normal. Finally, she moved backward a bit and smiled sweetly at him. “You were saying something about dinner?”

“Room service work?” He asked with a chuckle.

“Most definitely, and then maybe another round of dessert before you have to go?”

“Oh, I’m up for the task,” he said as he reached across the table for the menu.

CHAPTER 8

Raif whistled as he walked down the hallway. He was on top of the world as the board prepared to announce record earnings. The meeting he had flown back from Russia to attend was regarding the earnings news and other bits of information regarding Nedelson's future projects. He and Everett had been installed as CEO and COO, though the courts would decide on when it became legal as his mother and her team of attorneys was audaciously asking for her to be brought back into the fold in a similar capacity. Raif was grateful that he would not have to see her in person, or they would be having words – probably a few that would make his grandmother roll over in his grave.

Trying to put that thought aside, he walked into the lab. Everett, despite his new management title, was hard at work, soldering some device. “You know, we do pay you to run projects and not to do the menial work?”

“I know,” Everett said, not even glancing in his direction. “I just like to stay sharp, and this is going to be instrumental in our next few projects. This device weighs only a few ounces, is RFID resistant, and,” he held out the finished prototype, “it can do the process of a full-sized heavy-duty gaming computer.”

“Amazing,” Raif said, moving the keys and screen with his finger, “Wow, a full keyboard slides out. I love the backlighting. Are you thinking we need to still approach the gaming company about a possible partnership?”

“I think there is some possibility there, but I’m not the numbers guy,” he said with a wrinkling of his brow. “Speaking of which,” he said. “You never did have time to get me up to speed on Russia. How is the line at Ivchenko doing?”

“Great. The staff there loves it, and we got the green light to retrofit the next factory with the same setup as the first.”

“Nothing to tweak?” Everett said, giving him a confused look. “I mean, I know we are getting good at this, but normally there are some kinks.”

“The engineer on that side said that the troubleshooting was so intuitive that he was able to reprogram the few little speed and pacing factors where needed. Additionally, they would like to ask for our support with R&D on several new projects. They are trying to remain focused on the manufacturing and feel that since we are already piggybacking, their lines would be beneficial. When you and Lana are over there next could you iron out those details and then forward to legal to review?”

“Definitely,” Everett said. “This is all good news. Any chance you were able to talk to Alina? I know that the distance between the town where their factory is and Ivchenko is too far to drive, so I wasn’t sure if you’d have time. But Lana has been bugging me for an update.”

“Well, as it turns out, pilots can book little layovers on their itineraries,” Raif said, feeling his face heat as Everett stared at him. “So, yes we ... talked.” He cleared his throat in embarrassment.

“Wow,” Everett said, punching his shoulder playfully. “Taking a page from my playbook, I’m impressed – didn’t know you had it in you.”

“I know,” Raif said with a grin he couldn’t wipe from his face. “Neither did I. She is going to Paris in a bit, and I was going to look over the schedule here to see if I can go there at the same time. You and Lana have found a balance, so here’s hoping that we can also.”

“What about your mom? If she did cause Alina or her family harm while trying to go after their company – and Alina’s father,” Everett grimaced, “that might not sit well.”

“I know,” Raif acknowledged. “I didn’t get into it with her this trip, as I wanted to know what the forensic accounting team and dad’s legal team found first. Also, she is dealing with her mother being in a coma right now, so that is mostly what we discussed over dinner that night. I guess she was doing better and then took a dramatic turn for the worse.”

“Yeah, Lana said they were talking about sending her home when she was there. Then she talked to Alina, and found she is back on machines and unconscious,” Everett added.

“Yep, that is what I heard. I didn’t want to add to the stress, though she did say Ivan signed the purchase agreement for a setup at the main assembly line there. That, of course, will give me another reason to visit, if she isn’t able to go to Paris,” he said, trying to stay hopeful.

“Well, I know you both have a lot on your plates, but I hope it works out. You might want to stop in to see your dad, though, if you haven’t already.”

“Yeah,” Raif said, remembering his first stop that morning. “His secretary said he wasn’t feeling good and was working

from home. What did you want me to check on him?”

“He looks terrible, Raif,” Everett said worriedly. “I don’t know if he has seen a doctor, but he was sweating and looked out of breath when I passed him in the hall yesterday.”

Worry spiked through Raif.

“I talked to him on the phone after the board meeting,” he said, recalling that moment. “He did sound tired, for sure, but I didn’t see anything overtly wrong. I’ll take some time to swing by and check on him, though. Let me know when you want to set a meeting with the game company we discussed, and I’ll ask Rachel to set it up.”

“Just have her check my calendar; it is up to date. Anytime works for me, the sooner, the better. If they don’t want to bite, we might need to find another option. I want to find a hook for this device.”

“Agreed,” Raif said, turning toward the door. “I will have her coordinate it with the various teams. And thanks for the heads up on my dad; I’ll let you know if anything is truly amiss.”

“Sounds good,” Everett mumbled, but Raif noticed he was already fully engrossed in the prototype in his hand. The man was a consummate inventor, and, despite his continued trajectory to management, it would probably never change. That was okay with Raif; his best friend was brilliant and everything he made continued to benefit the company. Their future at the head of this company was looking brilliant with them as an unstoppable team.

CHAPTER 9

Alina was sitting beside the bed as the doctors came in, consumed by her fear. The change in her mother's condition continued to baffle them as her systems seemed okay, but still, she didn't regain consciousness.

"We are going to continue to monitor with a wait and see attitude," the physician that had been brought in for another opinion said.

It was so frustrating that with all the education at their disposal, case histories, and other data, all they had to say to her family was 'wait and see'. Her mother was no longer able to breathe independently, but she also wasn't getting worse according to the doctors. What did that mean? Was this how she would live out the rest of her life?

"I have a show in Paris," Alina said and she saw Ivan glance up at her, surprised.

"Are you considering going?"

"It's the final show in my contract," she said, biting her lip. "The penalty is high if I don't. If you think she might take a turn for the worse, or I absolutely shouldn't go, just tell me." She glanced between the doctor, Ivan, Anja, and Artem.

“She could be like this for an hour or a year. We are continuing to consult other specialists, run tests, and work diligently to find her ailment’s underlying cause. Something had caused her body to go into this coma state, which is normally related to brain function. At the same time, we haven’t seen anything alarming. I don’t want to decide for you, but I also can’t tell you what to do. I’m sorry,” the doctor said and immediately made for the door.

“Alina,” Ivan started, but Anja reached out to him.

“Ivan,” his wife said quietly. “It’s the final show, and Alina is coming home to help permanently as you wish. The three of us can stay with your mother, and should she take a turn for the worse, we can call Alina right away.”

“I agree,” Artem interjected. “There are three of us, and no sense paying out a huge fine when she can go and be back in no time. How long do you need?”

“Three days,” Alina said hesitantly. “I wasn’t able to get fitted for everything in New York. But I promise I can take a flight back right after, and if something happens in the meantime, you call, and I’m here.”

She felt like she was letting everyone down. She glanced at her mother, whom they had fought so hard to find and bring home. She felt her heart thud miserably in her chest. She wanted to be here but she also wanted to be there at the show. Most of all she wanted to be past the drama, heartache, and trouble they were mired in right now and at a point in the future where everything was right in the world again.

“We got this,” Anja said as she looked at Ivan. “We can’t expect life to stop while your mother is in hospital.”

“I agree,” he said hesitantly. “But this is the final show, right? If you want to get this clothing line up and running, and engage with the company on a more involved basis, we need you here.”

“I understand,” she said, bending over to hug her brother. “I promise this is it, and honestly, I will be here to see mother through this, help with the company, and fully engrained in everything here at home. I just need to fulfill my obligations first.”

“I can hear father now,” Artem said with a smile. “That sounded like it came straight from his mouth.”

“That is true,” Ivan agreed. “Safe travels, and we will keep you abreast of any changes.”

“I will stay tonight as my flight is out in the morning,” she said.

“No, I have this,” Anja offered. “You need time to pack and prepare.”

“Are you sure?” Alina didn’t want to put more on her sweet sister-in-law.

“Positive,” she said with a nod.

“Great,” Alina said as she picked up her bag. “I will come for a few hours in the morning, so you can run home and shower before I leave.”

“Sounds great,” Anja replied as they hugged, and Alina headed for the door.

As she approached her car, the phone buzzed in her purse. She swallowed hard and pulled it from her purse. Her shoulders relaxed with relief when she saw the name on the screen.

“Hello, Raif,” she answered with a grin.

“Hello, gorgeous,” he replied. “So, I’m hoping you are headed to Paris tomorrow?”

“I am. There is no change with mother, so we decided it’s fine for me to head out and then get back as quick as I can.”

“Wonderful. I booked a suite at this amazing hotel I just happen to know some well-known models are staying at this weekend,” he said in a tone that told her his face was also split in a smile.

“Excellent, I can’t wait until tomorrow night then.”

“And maybe we can have a conversation about something else I have been meaning to talk to you about.”

“Oh?” She said, her tone sounding more worried.

“Nothing to worry about. I just want to carve out time for us to talk. Normally, we do a lot of things but no serious discussions about the future.”

That made her heart take flight. The future? That was a first.

“I look forward to it,” she said and told him her flight details. As she hung up, she found herself glancing back at the hospital before getting into her car. Somehow it seemed wrong to be so happy and so worried at the same time. She did hope that Raif and her mom would have lots of time down the road to get to know each other – that was her dearest wish at this moment. However, only time would tell if her wish would be granted.

CHAPTER 10

Raif had excused all but the cabin staff from the flight tonight, as he had worked all day. He knew that he needed to get some sleep, and he didn't require a whole crew to look after him. As he settled further into the plush chair, he stowed the laptop as his eyes stung from staring at the screen for too long.

He had worked for twelve hours before getting on the private plane to carry him over an ocean to his girlfriend. Shocked that word was what came to mind, he hoped that by the end of this trip he would truly be able to call her that. He closed his eyes and leaned back on the headrest, still hoping, and soon found himself carried away into the blackness of sleep.

He turned when something caught his attention; there, outlined in the window, was a lean figure wearing nothing but thin nightgown. In the twilight he couldn't see all of her figure, but the silhouette was enough to get his engines revving. Swinging his feet over the side of the bed, he padded towards her – the rounding of her backside a masterpiece.

Wrapping his arms around her middle, he could feel himself already getting hard against her backside. "Come inside," he whispered, still not able to see all the details of her gorgeous face.

“Sweetheart,” Alina’s features finally appeared in the inky darkness. She reached up to bite his bottom lip until he slipped his tongue inside the sweet recesses of her mouth and took some revenge. As their tongues entwined in a battle of wills, he grabbed her buttocks and lifted her up.

She wrapped her legs around his waist as he carried her into the suite. He pressed her against a wall, and he leaned into the warmth of her body. Moving together, they kissed, groped, and worked each other up to a sweaty need level that was off the charts. He could feel himself knocking at her sweet, moist core. This was where he felt the most alive, those seconds before they came together, and everything was perfect once again.

He leaned in, nibbling her earlobe as he pushed inside of her. She reached above her head to grab the window frame for support as he thrust into her. She took everything he could give and continued to moan words of encouragement and beg for more. She gripped his shoulders to hold him tight against her as he delivered pure pleasure to both of them.

As he thrust harder and faster, her nails left marks on his skin, delivering a pinch of pain that only encouraged him further. She begged, and tightened her grip with her legs as he continued to work up to the magic release they both were seeking.

“You are so amazing,” she said in a voice heavy with pleasure. Her husky tone egged him on as he thrust hard into the depths of her. Never did he feel more alive than when he was with her.

He was close, and from her ecstatic cries, he knew she was right there with him. He massaged her butt and continued to pound into her. Her body was like an instrument and he was

the only maestro who could make it sing. They were flying, and soon he felt the pressure building ...

“Sir,” a voice jolted him from his sleep. Blinking, he saw the copilot standing beside him with an odd expression.

He glanced down to check he was decent as he could feel his erection stretching his pants. Luckily, there was table in front of his seat from when he was working, and so nothing was evident to the man standing there. “Yes?” He asked, rubbing his hands over his eyes. “Are we landing?”

“We did land, a few moments ago,” the copilot replied.

Great. Raif pulled himself together. The dream had been hot, but soon he would be holding the real deal. He hoped that by the end of the weekend he and Alina would be on the same page about their future and where this was headed. He was looking forward to spending a couple of days between her shows exploring this great city.

There was a car waiting, and soon he was standing at the hotel’s check-in counter. The receptionist was busy, so he turned to watch the television on the wall nearby. Suddenly, he felt his heart plunge to the ground as a headline with subtitles in English flashed on the screen.

“Katja Molachin dead, foul play suspected.”

Raif walked toward the television in a daze. Alina was surely not coming if her mother were dead, but the situation was even worse if foul play was suspected. What could have happened? He carefully read the subtitles scrolling along the bottom of the screen, desperate for more information: poison was suspected, and further tests would be done. At this time, the family had been asked not to leave the country, and no further comments were given.

“Well, crap,” he muttered. “That is going to be a big problem.”

His phone buzzed, and he saw it was Everett.

“Have you heard?” Everett’s voice was tense.

“Yeah. What do you think could have happened?”

“I don’t know, but, Raif, the police were here looking for you.”

“What? At the office?”

“Yeah, I’m sorry. We had to tell them where you were headed,” he whispered.

Raif looked behind him and saw a serious-looking group of uniformed police officers walking briskly towards him. “It’s okay. They found me,” he said and disconnected the call as he moved forward, hands in the air.

AFTERWORD

Dear Reader,
Thank you so much for taking the time to read Raif, Book 4 of Love and Loyalty Series.

Join me to find out what happens next to Raif and Alina. The story is filled with romance, love, drama and suspense.

HERE'S WHAT TO EXPECT.

Raif - Book 5: Love and Loyalty Series

Can love unite their two opposite worlds? Or will their different lives tear them apart?

Dragged into the media firestorm circling Alina's family tragedy, Raif is determined not to let it scare him away from her. He's tired of running, and he's willing to do whatever it takes to win her heart – once and for all.

Grieving after the loss of her mother, a surprise visit shows Alina a side of Raif that she never knew. She's convinced that they're perfect for one another... if they can just manage to catch a break from her chaotic family drama. But they're two powerful people with big dreams, and bridging the gap between their opposite worlds will be no easy task.

And just when it seems like the media attention is slowing to a simmer, they get hit with the biggest twist of their lives – and this time, it might bring their relationship crashing down.

Tensions are rising for Raif and Alina, and everything they've worked so hard for is at stake. The stage is being set for an epic finale, and you won't want to miss this wild card instalment. [Grab your copy here today!](#)

REVIEWS

I really hope you enjoyed reading [Raif- Book 4: Love and Loyalty Series](#).

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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