

BITTER LOVE SERIES: BOOK TWO

kingdom
of
redemption

THE BATTLE MAY HAVE
BEEN WON, BUT THE
WAR HAS JUST BEGUN

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Kingdom of Redemption (Bitter
Love Duet #2)

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WARNING

The book contains intense sex scenes, explicit language, violence, torture, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Readers discretion is advised.

PLAYLIST

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Up Down- Boy Epic

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High Enough- K.Flavy

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YES MOM- Tessa Violet

Don't Blame Me- Taylor Swift

Killer- Valerie Broussard

Sex, Drugs, Etc.- Beach Weather

RANKS

Pakhan- Boss or Godfather of the Bratva

Brigadier- Captain of a small group of men (Capo in Italian Mafia)

Two-Speis- Men who watch over Brigadiers to maintain loyalty

Sovietnik- Advisor of the Pakhan (Consigliere in Italian Mafia)

Kassir/ Kaznachev- Money collectors; collecting money from Brigadiers (Underboss in Italian Mafia)

Boeviks- Soldiers

Krysha- Enforcers who keep the mob in line

Torpedo- Contract killer

Byki- Bodyguards

Shestvorka- Errand boys

PROLOGUE

Elysha's pleading cries echo in the hallway as Petro carries her away. But Mother Sophia's grip on my arm tightens, causing a jolt of pain to radiate through my arm. My eyes start to tear as fear engulfs me, making my heart race.

"No! Please let me go." I thrash against her hold but she pulls my arm so hard I nearly think she is going to break my bone.

"Elysha! Save me, please!"

"Shut up, you bitch! There is no point in fighting and you know it," she sneers, dragging me to the other room.

Please, God. Save me. Save my sister. Please.

We are getting close to my bedroom and deep down I can feel a chilling terror running through my spine that something dreadful is going to happen. Pressing my face against her hand, I bite her with my teeth digging as deep as possible into her. She lets out a screeching scream in pain, trying to get away from my assault.

"Fuck! Ah!" she yells before pushing me away and covering the bite marks with her other hand. I take my chance

and get up instantly, without thinking, I run.

I run as fast as my feet will take me out of this torturous hell, but when I get to the hall room, my steps halt when Petro's men enter the church. Before I can escape, they see me. Both of them look at each other in confusion before their eyes return back to me. In the beginning, their presence never scared me, but now that I know the truth about their monstrous sides, I could hear my heartbeat drumming in my ears.

“What are you doing here?” one of them asks, taking a step toward me.

My breathing turns shallow, my eyes widen as anxiety courses through my nerves. Taking a quick glance from the corner of my eyes, I can see that the entrance door is left open. With every step he takes forward, I move backwards until I feel the cold concrete wall against my back.

“You shouldn't be up so late,” he looks around, “where is your sister?”

“I...I,” I stutter looking at the door, my only escape.

He frowns. His shadow cascading over me and before I realize it myself, I bolt toward the door. But as if he knew what my plan was, he immediately catches me by my hair, sending excruciating pain through my scalp, making me yelp.

“Ah!” I scream.

As I am screaming in pain, I notice Mother Sophia comes in with a vengeful expression on her face. “You fucking little bitch.”

She strides towards me, and swiftly, her hand lands a hard slap across my face that burns my cheek with searing agony. Another slap hits my other cheek, as though she puts every ounce of energy and rage into it for what I did to her; the tears I've held back for so long start streaming down my cheeks. Gripping my jaw so tightly that I feel it down to my bones, she forces me to face her.

“You will pay for that little act you pulled. And not just once, Rhea. As long as you are captive here, you will know pain. What it looks like and how it exists, it will be imprinted in your memory for the rest of your life. I promise you that.” She utters every word through her clenched teeth. She looks at both men before smirking as she has already planned the first step toward making good on her promise.

“You two have been working a lot recently, I'm pretty sure you both deserve a reward.” She looks back at me. “Take her and make sure it's a sleepless night for her.”

She stands up, leaving the room, while Petro's friend drags me along the floor by my hair like a rag doll, making every nerve in my scalp scream in pain.

“Ah! Please! Let me go, please,” I plead, trying to get away from his tight grip. I keep screaming, still holding onto the lantern of hope that I will get saved. But the closer we get to one of the bedrooms, the more that hope dies bit by bit.

“Elysha!” I scream out her name at the top of my lungs in one last-ditch effort, but it's of no use.

The minute the door closes, I feel his hold loosening from my hair before I'm picked up and thrown onto the bed. I try to scramble away, but he grabs my feet and pulls me to the end of the bed. I hit his chest continuously, but he holds my hands with one before pulling out a gun from the back of his pocket. My body freezes in horror as he presses the barrel against my cheek.

“Please...” I whisper.

He smirks looking at his partner who is already undressing himself. I look away but I feel a gentle tap on my cheek.

“Uh uh, keep your eyes open, slut. I bet this is the first time you are going to see a cock, am I right?” he asks.

I open my eyes, my vision blurring from my tears. “Please, don't do this.”

He tsks, shaking his head. “Sorry to burst your little bubble but no amount of pleading will save you tonight.” The rustling of clothes suddenly stops, and I know the other man is naked. With the tip of the gun, he moves my face toward his friend. More tears run down my cheeks as shame shadows over me when my gaze falls on his naked body. His devilish grin sends shivers down my spine as he starts to walk towards me until he stops in front of me, stroking his cock, followed by my muffled grunts.

“Keep your eyes on his cock. If you look away, even once, there will be worse consequences for you,” he warns.

Disgust is eating me alive, bit by bit, as I watch him continue stroking himself, as he is finding the ultimate pleasure, watching me helpless and fearful. My throat starts feeling heavy, I can barely swallow my emotions when I see fluid leaking out the tip of his erect cock. He leans his hand forward, caressing my cheek gently, but for me, its venomous touch will poison my memories for the rest of my life. I hear more clothes rustling and the bed shifting behind me. I turn to look over my shoulder, but that same hand that stroked me softly turns painful as it grips my jaw tightly.

“Fucking look at me,” he groans, pressing his cock against the corner of my lip. I can’t bear it any longer and move my face away. Forcefully and quickly, my hands are shifted behind me as I feel the roughness of thick ropes bounding my wrists. I shriek and writhe with every ounce of my energy, but my face is buried into the bedsheet, silencing me. I am suffocating too. My lungs soon start to burn, craving for air, while my nerves begin to slow down, turning my body weak with every passing moment. I try to move my head to find even the slightest room to breathe, but the hand holding my head doesn’t budge. I can hear them laughing as they watch me suffer.

Suddenly I am pulled back. I gulp in deep breaths, with my eyes widening in horror. “See what happens when you disobey, slut?” He sneers against my earlobe and shifts me on his lap as I feel his naked cock brushing against my backside. With brutality, he angles my head towards his friend, who is

now standing on the bed. I couldn't help but scream from the pain.

“Now suck his cock like the little slut you are.”

No. No. No. No.

Without my consent, he guides my face forward, and his friend doesn't waste time impaling his cock inside my mouth. He groans, throwing his head back, but I feel myself drowning in soul-crushing pain and shame.

“Fuck,” he groans, sounding like a beast.

My cries are shut out by his cock, my eyes watering from his cock sliding in and out. “Take it. Yeah...so fucking good.”

My mind is haywire with emotions as I struggle to breathe again. But that doesn't stop him from thrusting harder and faster with long, gliding strokes, until I feel him at the back of my throat.

Behind me, the other man tears open my nightdress from the backside. I hear him spit, followed by the slick sounds of him stroking his cock, before I feel his tip rubbing against my center. None of this is pleasurable for me, that's why I am dry like the desert. A ragged sob tears through my chest as the adrenaline and reality settle down. I continue to fight even though, deep down, I know it is useless. I feel his cock penetrating inside me with a hot searing pain ripping between my legs, my body turns stiff as a statue. Both of them continue thrusting, not caring for a moment how I feel my sanity, purity,

decision, and soul snatched away from their sins. A pain I have never felt takes me in its arms with no escape.

My mind turns blank as I let the pain guide me to darkness, which I've been escaping with my sister since the night we ran away. Hot tears stream down my cheeks and soak into the bedsheet in my state of shock. Long thick fingers wrap around my throat tightly from behind, applying enough pressure to suffocate me furthermore. But I can't react...can't think, while they keep using my body for their pleasure.

"So, fucking good. Such a tight hole," I hear one of the gruff voices snarling.

"Fuck, I'm going to come. You better swallow every fucking drop."

He keeps ramming his cock inside my mouth, fucking my face, while his partner drives into me with forceful thrusts. With a few more moves, he stills while grunting in pleasure and exertion as he releases inside me, nearly choking me with his come. He ensures I swallow it all while keeping his cock inside my mouth for a moment or two. At last, he pulls away while his partner takes control, leaning on his back and taking me along.

"Fuck..." he groans. And like his partner, he spills inside me, letting out a satisfied grunt of pleasure.

But it wasn't just once. Mother Sophia told them to make it a sleepless night for me and they lived up to that demand. They keep fucking me with every chance, coming inside me again and again until the sun begins to rise. They didn't stop,

even for a moment. They don't realize how weak and numb I am that I almost passed out at one point. It took them one night to make me breathe in their living nightmare.

When they finish, they get up and put on their clothes before leaving the room, shutting the door with the soft click of the lock. I lay on the floor, smelling like sweat, and come as I barely feel the muscles in my body. During the entire horrific hours, I didn't cry. But now that I was left alone in my silence of misery, I let the tears freely fall as I sobbed, my heart aching from unbearable pain. I feel dirty inside out...impure to the root of my soul. But nothing will ever cleanse me of these nightmares that cover me like mud.

It is...unforgettable.

But all I can think about is how Elysha wasn't there for me. She didn't save me from this torture when I needed her the most. I saved her that night when she was about to experience the same horror by Mr. Jones. I shot him, sinning to save my sister. But today, when the same happened to me, she vanished.

Snap. Just like that.

She is the core reason for my now inked soul. Nothing will bring me back from this darkness. *Nothing.* And for this, I'll never forgive her.

I'm thrown into the fire of this living hell, but I won't be here alone. If I have to drag her along with me, then so be it because I will ensure she falls into the deepest caves of

darkness with no return. She will become so lost that even a flicker of hope will make her heart race with fear.

It is time for redemption, sister.

CHAPTER 1

I woke from a sudden jolt. My eyes open as I'm greeted with a blurry vision and pain rushing throughout my body. I blink once or twice but everything still looks hazy. But the burning smell of smoke whiffs around my nostrils as I feel my body warming up like I have a fever. With my other senses returning gradually, I hear a crackling sound...something that's heard when wood is burning. I shake my head to regain my focus, only to realize it was a wrong move. I try getting up, but my body is beyond my control from my injuries. The heat starts to rise with every passing minute as I feel my throat turning dry.

But suddenly, I hear the sound of a door bursting open. A gruff voice coughs because the smoke suffocates us and makes it difficult for us to breathe. The heavy footsteps thud closer, and before I know it, I'm lifted up by a rough and muscular body. For a fleeting moment, my vision regains its focus, and I see fire surrounding every inch of my sight.

Memories of being hurt and betrayed by my sister flicker in my mind. Maxwell getting captured and shot flashes in my mind, as well, making my heart race faster with fear. I give it

my all to move and fight...but my body is denying my decision.

“Stay awake,” the man mutters as he carries me towards the hall room, passing through the burning havoc of fire. The chandelier on the ceiling falls to the ground with a loud crash, with its glasses shattering into uncountable pieces. The man immediately turns around to protect me from being pierced by the shards. He looks around for another way, and that is when he tightens his hold around me before rushing towards the vast window that overlooks the garden. He places me on the floor. I turn my head toward his direction. He is in a black suit with his back facing me. He takes one of the giant vases standing in the corner. Picking it up over his head, he throws it with all his might and shatters the window. He whirls around, picks me up again, and carries me outside, saving me from Maxwell’s burning mansion.

“Keep your eyes open. You can’t die,” he whispers, gently tapping on my cheek.

“You have to live. You have to survive for the only person who matters to you. Stay awake and fight.”

The smoke no longer burns my lungs, but the pain keeps shadowing my body. Before I could ask my savior anything else, my vision starts to darken; as I get lost into a deep sleep where I’m unaware if I’d ever wake up.

Stay awake and fight.

Fight....

CHAPTER 2

MAXWELL

1 MONTH LATER

Pain is the only feeling that greets me when my consciousness returns. My eyelids feel too heavy to open. At some point, I have to wake up. I have to face this hell again because I'm bound to it. I can barely feel a muscle in my body, but even if I tried, the cuffs around my wrists which hold my hands above my head, restrain my attempts.

Ever so slowly, I open my eyes, blinking rapidly from the light streaming into the dark basement. I have no idea how much time has passed or how many days it has been, but one thing is certain, history is repeating itself. I am back to where my nightmares started, but this time, I will not break easily. I have come so far from those uncountable tortures my uncle put me through, and I won't give up quickly this time.

Never again.

I let out a trembling breath but wince from the pain aching in my chest. My entire body is covered with bruises and cuts.

There are a few fresh wounds, as well, where the blood is still seeping out, pooling on the concrete floor like a puddle. But I knew those would be treated, just to be cut open again when the guards or Francisco arrive. I want to move my arms badly, but it is impossible with the cuffs. Faint tapping sounds of heels approaching from the other side of the door catch my attention, turning my body rigidly on alert. Just from the sound, I know who it is, and the mere thought of being greeted by that person makes my nerves boil with rage and vengeance. I'd rather be tortured by Satan himself than see that person. It is someone I loathe more than anyone else.

Rhea.

Closing the door behind her, she sauntered towards me in black jeans and a T-shirt with a denim jacket over it. Her red hair is tied into a braid and her skin is glowing from the light. But that sinister grin plastered on her lips makes me want to cut her lips off with my knife. Through the collar of her T-shirt, I can see a hint of her viper tattoo's head. Standing in front of me, she rakes her eyes over my naked, bruised body from head to toe; before fixating her gaze on mine. Stretching her hand forward, she cups my jaw with her thumb, gently caressing the wound on my lips.

"Kak ty, lyubov' moya?" She speaks in Russian, asking me how I am by calling me *love* while continuing to touch my bruises.

My jaw clenches with ferocity sizzling inside me. "Fuck you," I curse with a hoarse voice.

She snickers under her breath, biting down on her bottom lip. “I wouldn’t mind at all if you did. I do miss it.”

Her hand starts to skate down my chest in a feather-like touch; before going lower to my abdomen and lightly grazing my cock.

“I miss having you inside me, Maxwell,” she whispers, leaning close to my ear while her hand resumes to grab my cock and stroke it gently. Disgust and wrath darken my soul as I move my face away from her, accepting the pain happily from the wounds around my neck. Even her touch makes my skin itch like I’m getting pricked by thorns. But she doesn’t make it easy for me. Grabbing my face, she urges me to face her, knowing my body is weak and in her control. She holds the leash. I am powerless at this point, and the thought of it is, revoking for me. She continues stroking my cock, expecting me to get hard for her.

“I remember the times you would chase me when I didn’t cave in easily. The thrill you used to get from those moments when I rejected you. But it sure made our first night together so memorable.”

She looks down with a grin, licking her lips. “Seems like I will be the one chasing now. But I can wait, Maxwell. I have waited so many years for you. I can wait longer.”

I weakly chuckle under my breath. “Then you will have to wait for eternity because, in this lifetime, you won’t have me.”

The smile on her face starts to vanish as she gazes at me with a threatening look. “I have taken everything you ever

had. The only thing left is that heart of yours that my sister took.”

“And it will always belong to her,” I state boldly. Nobody will ever replace Elysha in my heart. *Nobody*.

“It *used* to belong to her. But she doesn’t exist anymore now, does she?”

Just the mere reminder makes my heart clench with torment and guilt. Memories of losing my *an’gel* flash in my mind, twisting my gut with unsettling emotions. I have lost her forever and deep down I want to die, as well, just to be back with her. But I am unwilling to quit before I have my revenge.

“I will have you to myself, Maxwell. One way or another, it will happen,” she mutters before she tips her face lower and kisses my lips. My mouth remains immobile while she keeps her hold on my jawline. Moving back with my blood coating the corner of her lips, she traces it with her thumb before licking it.

Just then, Francisco walks in wearing a black suit with a grim look on his face when he sees how close Rhea is to me. I will get tortured for that later probably.

“They are here, Erida,” he mutters while offering me a glare. As if that would affect me in any way possible. If I didn’t have my hands tied up, I would have twisted his neck and killed him. Right here and now. Rhea nods before getting up and leaving the room, but Francisco stays rooted to his spot. The minute he senses Rhea is no longer present, he

strides toward me before closing the door with a loud, echoing bang.

In the blink of an eye, he lands a hard punch across my face, making my already cut cheek hurt a hundred times more.

He grabs my jaw, forcing me to meet his vexation-filled gaze. “I know what you are doing there. Don’t think I’m some moron, and you can get away with it.”

I snicker weakly. “I think of you more like an idiotic coward, but I’ll take the moron option, too.”

PUNCH.

PUNCH.

PUNCH.

I spit out the blood with my aching head facing the wall. With every punch he lands, my sight gets more uncoordinated. But that doesn’t stop him from channeling all his rage into every hit. My eyes feel puffy and sore in a few seconds.

“You once said that Erida and I would fall like a deck of cards just because we thought to take away your kingdom. Who is the fallen one now, Maxwell?”

PUNCH. “But if you think by manipulating Erida, you will earn your freedom. Then I must say you are the idiotic coward here. She won’t fall for your words so easily, don’t even tempt to try her.”

PUNCH. “Be glad you are even breathing because of her, otherwise your body would have been left to rot in your

mansion.”

Letting out a humorless chuckle, he stands up, taking out a napkin from his suit pocket to wipe away the remnant of blood staining his knuckles. “But don’t worry, I will torture you day and night until even when you wish for death, you’ll have to beg me.”

He turns to leave but inflicts one last punch on my jawline before spitting at my face and finally leaving me alone. I drop my head in tiredness and grief. I don’t know how I am going to escape or what I will do to avenge Elysha’s death. For now, I let myself drown in sorrow and remorse while I continue to remember how I lost my angel.

My an’gel.

CHAPTER 3

RHEA

PAST

She was dead.

Her body was still like a statue...a lifeless doll. Not moving. Not breathing.

I watched the foam oozing from the corner of her lips as it pooled on the wooden floor. Her black eyes no longer hold the light that always gave me hope for happiness. It was empty.

The police kneeled in front of her, my mother, before reaching to push away the hair that curtained her neck, checking further evidence of her death. This inevitable moment would never be wiped away from my memory for the rest of my life. I felt a warm hand clutching to mine. I turned my face sideways to meet my sister's eyes which glistened with tears and misery. But my blurry vision returned to our mother's dead body. Her sweet words that always bloomed joy and love within me started to ring in my ear her soothing voice echoed in my eardrums like a symphony.

“That’s such a beautiful drawing of mommy you made. I’m so proud of you.”

“You are my sweet little girl, aren’t you, Rhea?”

“Mommy loves you with all her heart, Rhea. Always.”

The tears made my sight glassy as memories with her started to flash in my mind with questions running along. Why did you leave us, mother? Why did you leave me?

“Seems like a drug overdose case. Probably cocaine,” the officer muttered to his teammate before jotting something down on his notepad. I frowned in confusion, unable to process the reason for her sudden death. I shook my head, unable to even believe my mother would even think of taking such a step. She had always been so happy and cheerful. Not a day passed when mother said or did something that hinted at her reckless decision on the path of slow destruction.

No. She didn’t do this. She could never do this.

They are lying. The officers were wrong.

Even though it was a whispered conversation, I could still hear what the police were saying among themselves. “Maybe the kids knew about it? Let’s take them to the police station and ask them there. They both seem to be in shock.”

I never knew. Not once did I ever see my mother taking drugs.

But what about Elysha? A voice at the back of my head asks.

I searched for any hint of her awareness about mother going down this unknown and dangerous path. Her skin looked pale from horror and distress. She was breathing heavily, with tears streaming down her face. But her deep blue eyes held the reflection of guilt. A flicker of knowing that may have been unnoticed by the officers but not me. I saw right through her and the secret she hid from me. And that was the answer I needed to know.

She knew.

Elysha knew about our mother's drug addiction but she never stopped her or told me anything. She could have helped her, but she didn't. All she did was remain silent and watch as this charade happened. A sudden rage and fury like never before emerged within my heart. My mother's death wasn't an accident...she was murdered. And my own sister was the culprit.

Elysha knew about this. She fucking knew. I lost my mother because of her and for that she would never be forgiven.

The officers came towards us and started to deliver the news, but I could barely hear them through the fury ringing in my ears. The hatred for my sister started to grow more and more. She held me close to her for comfort and support, but her mere touch felt like burning acid against my skin, leaving scars deep into my broken soul. The compassion she held in her gaze seemed like a mask she put on in front of strangers to look innocent, but that won't work on me. She may have others fooled, but I'm not them.

Two more officers entered the room carrying a black bag before kneeling in front of my mother and sealing her body inside it. They muttered something to Elysha, and she nodded in response; before leading me out with her hands holding mine. I wanted to rip myself from her touch and never be anywhere near her. But at the moment, I had no choice but to bear it.

We headed downstairs and got into the police car. Elysha sat beside me as she silently sobbed, gently squeezing my hands. But it was all fake. A false reflection of her true nature. I looked over my shoulder where the siren from the ambulance echoed as the neighbors gathered in the street. Watching as if a live show was happening, they would do nothing but pass judgment and sympathy. In the end, they would return to their homes, living their lives normally.

But us? Our lives would never be normal again. It would be haunted by nightmares of losing our-my-mother. Elysha would be at peace, probably, as she succeeded in taking the only person who truly loved me for the rest of her life.

I had no one else left but a culprit who stripped me away from love and peace. I would have to spend every day with her, breathing in her presence. The officers carried my mother's wrapped body inside the ambulance before shutting the back door, but I could still see her head peeking from the windows. We both were on our own from now, each other's guides.

But the only thing Elysha would never get from me is forgiveness. Even on her death bed when she confessed her

sins and begged me, she still won't earn it. No amount of apologies would ever heal the crack of pain in my heart that she caused.

Never.

PRESENT

Sipping on the glass of scotch with my legs resting on the marble desk, I go through the new dealing papers as I sit in my office. Everything looks set and ready for delivery, as I place the files on the table, and lean back on the chair. My eyes gaze upon the vast ceiling as my mind starts to run wild with thoughts regarding Maxwell. I let the scotch leave a soothing burn down my throat as my gaze rakes in the detailed curving of the ceiling.

When I built my estate, I had a clear vision: an elegant and vast palace that stands up with power and pride, but inside, darkness from nightmares and haunted memories ingrain the plastered walls. A constant reminder that I cannot afford to be weak. The ceilings have the same design as the church where I was held captive. Even the infrastructure from the outside looked the same but bigger. The only difference is that this time I am the ruler. The goddess. And I finally have Maxwell with me.

But not all of him.

I have taken every step possible to make him feel helpless and hopeless. His power and kingdom all lay in the palm of my hand like a shining trophy. Yet he was a tough shell to crack. But I'm not going to give up after all that I have been through and sacrificed without a single thought just to be where I am today. And having Maxwell under my control is the last thing I have yet to achieve.

It will happen, Erida. It will happen.

Patience is what you need.

I tell myself as I finish my glass and stalk toward the bar to have another. Heavy footsteps thud inside the room, and I know who it is. I suppress the urge to roll my eyes and let out an irritated sigh. While I finish pouring the scotch, I feel warm, rough hands on my shoulders as they give a gentle squeeze.

“Are the deals alright?” Francisco asks. I nod before turning around to face him. His eyes are reflecting with an undying love that he always carries for me. Most of his bruises and scars around his face are healed, but there are still a few faint marks left around his eyes, and the corner of his lips.

“The new cocaine deliveries will arrive by Sunday. I want you to go and observe, as I will be busy with the meetings,” I speak with a gentle smile, resting my hand on his shoulder.

Licking his lips, avoiding the deep cut, he wraps his arms around me, offering the same tender smile as I did. The only difference is he has a genuine smile, while mine is a façade to keep him wrapped around my fingers.

“I’m so proud of you, Erida. Despite the nightmares you have been through, you still came out so strong and powerful. You finally have everything you’ve ever wanted.” Not everything. Not yet. “But you are still holding onto something that you should have ended the night you had the chance, Erida.”

I frown. “What do you mean?”

“I’m talking about the prisoner we captured and is getting tortured at the basement. But he is the one binding you with an invisible rope. You know you can finish this once and for all by killing him.”

My blood starts to rush faster from sudden anger but I am trying to remain calm. Placing my glass of scotch on the countertop, I tangle my arms around his neck, bringing him closer. “Killing him will be too easy. Now is not the time for it.”

“You have seized everything from him, Erida. He is absolutely nothing now. What more is left?” The annoyance behind his voice is clear as daylight.

“It’s not necessary to tell you everything I do or plan, Francisco. Don’t forget your place,” I warn him before stepping away from him, pushing his hands off my waist. The sight of hurt in his eyes doesn’t bother me. It truly never does. The only times I pretend to care so I won’t lose my leash of control over him.

Meeting Francisco was serendipitous, a step to leap off, in order to get to my goal. After escaping the church, I was on

my own for a few years. My days were spent in hunger and loneliness, while my nights were filled with the shadow of crime. I was still alone a few years back, living in the basement or sometimes the backdoor, behind heaps of a dumpster at the bar I worked. It was during this time that I first met Francisco. He was a regular customer and brought his friends most of the time. One night I was waitressing at his table and heard a few words about his connection with the world of crime and the mafia. On this night, he became prey to his violent world when some of his clients ambushed him. Without thinking of the consequences, I fought for him and saved him before his enemies could pull the trigger. I was fired the next day for damaging the bar by being the hero. However, when I left the building, I saw Francisco waiting outside with a car. I could tell he was instantly into me because it only took a few hookups and some sob stories to melt his heart for me. I even told him about the past. I shared with Maxwell the troubles I faced with my sister. He told me his story, how he wanted to prove to someone that he could be a ruler too. Francisco and I connected because we both knew that this world only survived on darkness and evilness. Everything is taken either by force or by deception because the right way ends up putting innocent people in ditches. We both know we are capable of something more...something extraordinary.

As time went by, we helped each other become stronger than we both realized we were. The one thing I know of how to keep him under my control is love. Even though I don't have an ounce of feelings for him, I still pretend and say those

three words like they were meaningful, but deep down, they always leave a bitter taste whenever I utter them. I knew love would never resonate with me. It died years ago before I could relish in its arms.

Love had always made me its victim, but I turned the tables and used it as a pawn for my victory. Francisco's love holds a hint of obsession, and those emotions are strings to make him my puppet, to make him do anything for me without any objection.

Francisco grips my hand, looking at me, in a way, as if I were a stranger to him. "I was going to lose you, Erida. If Maxwell even got the hint of who you are, you and I know he won't hesitate to kill you. But this time it feels like I'm truly going to lose you and I blame that fucker for it."

"I want him broken, Francisco. I need his soul lying on the floor in shattered pieces, just like I felt when he abandoned me. I will never forgive him. What did I tell you my ultimate revenge would be when we decided to go against him?" I ask.

"You want Maxwell Reznikov to fall along with his kingdom."

"And that will happen. I have crushed his heart. The only thing left is his soul. When all he wants is to end his life but can't, that is the moment I will know success. Only then will I feel I finally got my revenge. But until then, I won't let this go."

Francisco's eyes soften as if he can feel my hidden sorrow before he steps closer to me and engulfs me in his arms. "It

will happen, Erida. I will ensure you get what you yearn for, and I promise to be there for you at that moment.”

I lightly chuckle, leaning back to meet his gaze. “You have always been there for me when I needed you, Francisco. So, I do not doubt your promise.”

He smiles, planting a soft kiss on my lips. He usually prefers to be gentle with me, but I always crave the rough and dark side. I always need that.

Gentleness only reminds me of my fucked-up childhood; which is, filled with horrifying pictures of my dead mother. Darkness and pain are my only cure for these horrors. I deepen our kiss, my hands fisting his hair tightly. He gets the hint and tightens his hold around me, so I feel the strength of his fingertips digging on my skin. Francisco grunts against my lips, with his arms around my waist, as he hoists me up on the desk. I push all the shit from the desk, not caring they make a pile of mess on the floor. My hands urgently unbutton his shirt; while he works on removing mine, both of us breathing heavily with desire running through our veins. Pushing my shirt down, his eyes look at my white lace bra, and I see his gaze darkening. He leans forward, landing an open mouth kiss on my neck, my head rolling back with my eyes closed. Letting out a moan, I feel my core tightening when his kiss starts skating down reaching to the swell of my breasts. As he pulls down the cups, my breasts bounce free before his mouth wraps around one rosy nipple as he starts to suck, with his tongue swirling around the areola.

I only feel Francisco's touch and kisses on my body, but my mind keeps betraying me; as it goes back to the one man who is my prisoner now. Maxwell.

I will never forget the night we spent together. How he spent hours exploring and touching my body like he couldn't get enough. His kisses are like a drug that I crave. And his words...his hoarse, deep voice always rings in my head when I touch myself. Numerous times I have tried controlling my mind, ordering myself to stop thinking about him. But it feels nearly impossible.

Even with Francisco pleasuring my body, all I can think of is Maxwell in his place. Francisco leans his head back when I see him. I almost can't believe it. It is Maxwell with a sly grin plastered on his face.

"What does my goddess want?" he whispers, his nose running along my jaw, sending shivers down my spine. *Dear God.*

Having the sudden urge to see his magnificent body, I don't bother undoing the rest of his buttons. Grabbing his shirt, I tear it open, pushing it off his shoulder. His body is just like how I saw it on our first night.

Perfection. Like a Greek God.

His tattoos cover every inch of his skin, with his muscles flexing. He is truly a sight to behold. I pull him closer, kissing him hard and deep, unable to get enough of him. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I claw my way down to his broad back, relishing the grunt of pleasure he lets out at the back of his

throat. Holding the waistline of my pants, he pulls it down, along with my panties, before kneeling. His dark brown eyes never leave mine, as his face holds this dark desire. Before I can process his actions, his tongue starts licking my wet pussy with long strokes.

“God! Yes!” I moan loudly, grabbing his hair and rubbing my pussy against his face. He doesn’t hesitate to give me more when his fingers start to fuck me roughly while his tongue works its magic on my clit. Only Maxwell knows what I want...what I need. He lets out a light chuckle when he notices how greedy I am getting.

“My goddess wants more, huh? Do you want your juices coating my mouth; so, I still taste you at the end of the day? Is that what you want?”

“Yes, please! I want it.”

“You taste so fucking good. So divine,” he rasps, continuing to devour me. His lips suck my clit, and his fingers make my walls clench around him. I feel my legs starting to tremble from pleasure overload. My mind is no longer in my control as it surrenders to Maxwell. I am about to come, so fucking close, but Maxwell stands up, with my juices glistening on his lips and jaw. Working down his zipper, he pulls out his thick, aching cock, giving it a few strokes. Standing closer to me, he presses his forehead against mine.

“Say you want me,” he whispers.

“I want you. I only want you,” I mutter, nearly begging.

He smiles proudly before rubbing the head of his cock against my aching pussy, then thrusting inside me with one push. I grip his shoulder, letting out a cry. *Fucking God. Fuck.*

It feels absolutely heavenly...he feels perfect inside me. He stares at me with lust-filled eyes before he continues his strokes, moving in and out.

My chest starts to heave deeply, begging for air as I feel myself getting lost in desire. The more he looks at me, the more I feel my body surrendering to him, giving up control. I have tried so many times to hate him. With every bit of my soul, it seems almost impossible. I never stopped thinking about him the first time I saw how wounded and broken he was. How cold and alone he looked, lying in that basement, with bruises and scars covering him. But unknowingly, I felt his pain. I could sense the darkness that consumed him. Even his first touch was unforgettable. It feels like my body and soul belong to him only.

But when my sister took him away from me, that's when the seed of hatred bloomed inside me. The vengeance grew stronger with every passing day.

"Fuck me harder," I demand in a hoarse voice, digging my fingernails into his skin, not bothering if I drew blood out.

"As you wish," he groans, increasing his pace that the desk starts to shake. Our shallow breathing and loud moans echo in the room as we both start to reach our peak point. I feel my nerves burning and my heart racing like never before. Pain and

pleasure are an addiction that is hard to get out of my system. But only Maxwell makes me crave for it. *Only him.*

“Fuck. You are clenching so hard around me. I can feel your walls twitching like crazy,” he whispers before kissing me deeply, swallowing my moans.

“Come inside me. Right now. I need it.”

He grunts when I nibble on his bottom lip, tasting the copper flavor of his blood from my bite. My muscles are dancing on edge, and I know I am about to come anytime now. He circles his hand around my neck, giving it an almost tight squeeze, just enough to let me breathe. I couldn't get away if I wanted to, but dear God, I don't want to escape from his hold.

Before I can blink, my orgasm explodes through me with immense intensity, and for a few seconds, my vision turns blurry. He continues to thrust through my orgasm before he joins in, and I feel his come filling me.

“Fuck,” he whispers leaning his head against the crook of my neck, while his body shudders.

I tangle my arms around him, with my breasts pressed against his chest, as I feel our bodies returning to reality gradually. Maxwell leans back to face me, but when I open my eyes, I try to hide my surprise.

It is Francisco. His eyes are a bit drowsy like mine, but there is a gentle smile on his face from the aftermath of our fucking.

I know Maxwell wasn't the one who just fucked me. It wasn't him who offered me this body-shuddering pleasure as no one can. It was Francisco all along, but this scenario happens every-fucking-time. The minute Francisco kisses me or touches my body, my mind instantly starts to picture Maxwell. And before I can get my control back, it's too late, and I let myself drown in an imaginary world where Maxwell and I are together.

I am well aware it is a betrayal against Francisco. He worships me like a goddess, but he thinks he is responsible for such intimate moments, when in reality the credit goes to Maxwell. I never tell him about it, and I don't care either. It is not like I am in love with Francisco. I will never be meant for love. He is just my pawn that I keep using for my benefit. With my gestures and words, I act like a love-sick fool. In reality, he is a fool.

"I love you so much, Erida," he murmurs, kissing me gently.

I put on a fake sweet smile, like always, which he takes as a sign of my true affection for him.

"I love you, too, Francisco," I lie.

* * *

A few days later, I returned home from another meeting; regarding the new drugs warehouse. Taking the stairs, I head upstairs to my room, but I don't know what it is, but something feels odd. Something is wrong. Without thinking, I

head to the backyard, which leads to the basement where Maxwell is held captive. The guards open the door for me, as I stalk down the dark hallway. But when I get close to the room, I hear a muffled sound...more like grunts.

I quickly open the door, feeling my heart skip a beat when I see Francisco kneeling in front of Maxwell, with his knife cutting a big cross mark on his chest. A dirty cloth is tied around Maxwell's mouth as his screams are muffled. His eyes are shut in anguish, with his hands still bound to the cuffs, above his head.

"I have waited so long to return the pain you made me suffer. And trust me when I say I'm nowhere close to being done torturing you. If I have to keep you alive for several years, then so be it. But every time you wake up, you will wish for death," Francisco warns, digging the knife deeper into his cuts, as blood starts to flow out, pooling on the floor.

"Next, I will go for your cock. Cut it into pieces and feed it to you."

Before Francisco can drag the knife lower, I step in. "Francisco, stop it!" I order.

He looks over his shoulder while Maxwell's drowsy gaze looks upon me, holding the hatred and wrath in his brown eyes.

"Leave."

Francisco frowns. "What? But-"

“Don’t make me repeat myself.” I glare at him, watching the hint of hurt on his face before he drops the knife with a loud clatter and leaves the room. Closing the door behind me, I walk toward Maxwell and kneel in front of him. His head hangs low. When I reach for the cloth, he pries away from my touch.

“I’m just helping you,” I mutter, taking it off.

“I don’t need your help, so fuck off,” he rasps.

I narrow my eyes, feeling a bolt of anger passing through me. Picking up the knife from the floor, I drag the tip along his open wounds. He grunts at the back of his throat, his body shuddering in pain.

“I’m sure you didn’t say that the first night Elysha came to help you. Right?”

I watch his gaze soften just from mentioning her name. Even after her death, my sister holds so much control over Maxwell, like no one else. How?

How could this be even possible?

I have tried hard since the beginning, accepting the dark demon that lives within Maxwell from our first night. I even changed myself for him, becoming strong, powerful, and ruthless, a reflection of Maxwell. But I’m never the woman he picks. It’s always Elysha. Dead or alive, it’s always been her.

With the back of the blood-covered knife, I trace his bruised cheek, skating it down towards his mouth, as the tip outlines his lips that I still want to kiss so badly.

“Why her?” I ask.

He frowns as if not knowing what I truly mean.

“Why is she the *one* for you? Why not me?”

He meets my eyes holding an emotionless expression on his face. “You may look like her, sound like her. But the only thing you will never have is her pure soul. Yours is tainted, like your heart. Despite nightmares Elysha suffered, she still had the strength, innocence and purity inked within. Whereas, you...you let your nightmares turn you into a beast that I loathe. Every time I look at you, I feel nothing but rage and vengeance.”

Maxwell always says harsh words to hurt me, but I don't let those bother me. But the words that leave out of his mouth now...every word feels like a stab to my heart. It hurts so much...so badly.

“Do you really think I have no innocence left in me?”

“Not even a single ounce,” he whispers.

With one quick move, I stab the knife right into his gut as he groans loudly in pain, with his eyes nearly watering. I should feel satisfaction from causing him the same agony he inflicts on me, or at least let the part of me that loves Maxwell feel pity for him. But at this point, I feel nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

“I really tried to hate you, Maxwell. Trust me. I tried so much to do that.”

He keeps groaning as his head bows down, blood flowing from his wound. If he loses anymore, I am sure he will be unconscious. But I don't care anymore.

Holding the handle, I twist it, enjoying his screams of torment. "The night I saw that darkness you had hidden, I felt it; in my *tainted* heart that you would understand me. You would understand my pain. But I never had a chance because you weren't willing to offer me one. If it isn't Elysha's so-called love, which blinds you, then you would have seen I would have accepted you as you are. That's what you do when you love someone."

I lean closer to him, my lips brushing against his. "You accept them with everything they have, even the flaws, the dark pasts, and secrets. That's what I would have done if you'd given me just a chance."

I feel my heart burning as if I am the one suffering as I pour my emotions into my words. But deep down, I know it won't bring any change because his heart still belongs to my dead sister. Taking the blood-stained knife out, I watch his body turning weak, with every passing second. But I still don't feel any different. No peace...no satisfaction.

"We could have been together, Maxwell. There was a scope for that, but you didn't even bother to see it."

Dropping the knife with a loud thud, I stride towards the exit, ordering the guards to stitch him up. Taking my car, I drive to Club Eclectic, which I now own. Passing my keys to the valet, I walk inside, bypassing the long line of people

glaring at me when the guards let me without ID. The club is crowded, as always, with people dancing to the beat of the music as the neon lights shine upon them, drinking to their heart's desires, and some fucking or getting high in the private booths. The guards nod at me, as I pass them and head towards my usual booth.

“Should I bring your usual, Ma’am?” the waitress asks me, as I take my seat.

I nod and remove my black jacket before sitting back on the plush, maroon couch, with my legs crossed. In a few minutes my drink is served.

“Get me a round of Devil Springs vodka shots, as well. Keep it coming tonight,” I murmur as I finish the rum in one gulp, letting it burn down my throat. I never start drinking unless it's nighttime or an event I'm attending. But today, I want to drown my emotions in alcohol. Let myself get lost in the dream world of euphoria for once until I don't feel this aching pain anymore. I want to forget, even if it is, for a few hours.

For the next few hours, I do what I set out to do. I drink even though my taste buds start to ache. My vision starts turning slightly blurry, but that doesn't stop me from dancing and swaying my hips to the music booming through the surrounding speakers. My body feels light but that isn't the case with my mind. I feel bodies leaning against mine, as I get lost in the beat of the song, while my skin starts to feel warm and fuzzy. Next thing I know, I am at the bar again, taking shot

after shot with people cheering me on as I finish my fifth round.

Feeling like I should take a break before my next round, I sit at my booth, singing along with *Wolves* by *Sam Tinnesz*. I get up and stand on the table, as I sway my hips. Holding onto the pole, I start dancing again with a few clubbers cheering and dancing along with me. When the music stops, I still don't stop.

I came here to get lost in the midst of strangers and nothing is going to stop me. I hear a man laughing at me, in a mocking manner, which makes me look over my shoulder. He seems to be in his forties, but he has a built physique highlighted by his fitted black suit. He is sitting in a booth with a girl on his arms, as she kisses his neck, trying to get his attention. But even she knows his attention is on me.

“Hey sugar, why don't you get your pretty ass down and dance on my lap?” he mutters in his American accent with a grin, patting his lap. The girl glares at me with narrowed eyes before she gets up and saunters to find another rich fucker.

He licks his lips looking at me from top to bottom. From his looks, it is clear what he imagines doing to me. I grin back, which makes his chest swell, as he rests his legs on top of the table.

“You want me to come down and dance like I'm one of your private strippers?” I ask with a sultry voice.

“I could make you feel more than that, sugar.” He winks.

I know his type very well but I also know how to deal with fuckers like him.

“Okay,” I say with a shrug, before he can see it coming, I jump off the table and land right on his legs, relishing the bone crushing sound. He lets out a loud scream, which bypasses the music, making everything stop around us.

I sit beside him with a sweet but devilish smile, enjoying the sight of him in immense agony. His face starts to redden, with the nerves popping out on his forehead. He continues to whine like a baby, with all his manly demeanor vanishing in front of everyone. I take his drink from the table and take a sip, enjoying the soothing burn of the bourbon.

I make a pouty face as I face him. “Aww. Does it hurt too much?”

I caress his face with my free hand, pretending to care while he wails, clutching his legs. “I can make you feel more than that, *sugar*,” I retort back with his words. In the blink of an eye, I smash the glass right onto his leg, intensifying the pain even more for him. His scream is so loud that it rings throughout the whole club. A few shards went through his pants, piercing his skin with blood oozing.

Nobody dares to come help him or fight against me. I know none of them have the balls to do it. I get up on my unsteady feet and frown, looking around. Suddenly, the entrance door bursts open with Francisco entering along with his guards. Everyone follows my gaze in silence.

He finds me right away and sees the scenario around him. He gets the picture of what must have happened. He strides towards me, while I roll my eyes, and take a bottle of bourbon from the table. I open its cap and chug down a few sips when Francisco stands in front of me with anger and disappointment painted on his face.

Like I give a fuck.

“What the hell do you think you are doing here, Erida?” he seethes through his clenched teeth.

“Enjoying the night.” I look towards the people of the club who are shivering from fear. I look at the DJ, arching an eyebrow. “Do your fucking job. Play the music.”

He nods frantically, moving swiftly to start the music again, but halts when Francisco raises his voice. “Don’t you fucking dare!” he warns before looking at me. “You are coming back home.”

He takes the bottle away and grabs my arm, dragging me towards the door. “That’s enough, Erida. Stop embarrassing-”

I wrench away from his hand, feeling rage crawling its way back to my mind, pointing a finger at him with murder written in my eyes. “I listen to no one, not even you. Don’t forget who rules here. I’m the fucking queen, so get the fuck out of my face before I get my gun and put a bullet through your head.”

His nostrils flare but he is suppressing his anger. Fucking God. When will he stop being such a pussy. “I’m trying to

protect you here-”

“I didn’t ask for it. And as far as I remember, it was you who was nearly going to die in Maxwell’s hands, and I saved you. *I* protected you.” I snap my fingers, pointing at the door. “Get. Out.”

I see shadows of hurt and guilt floating in his dark gaze, he looks around realizing I humiliated him, publicly. But I don’t give a single fuck.

He remains rooted in his position, waiting for me to change my mind, but when he notices how serious I am, he shakes his head and nods at his guards before they all leave the club.

“Hey! You better start playing the music in five seconds, or my bullet will pierce your forehead!” I scream at the DJ over my shoulder. Quickly the room fills with loud music again and everyone starts to dance along, hiding their fear and anxiety. I walk by the man still writhing in pain, grab his bottle of bourbon, and make my way upstairs until I reach the roof of the building.

Opening the door, I let the cool air brush my cheeks, sending a cold shiver through my body. I stumble towards the railing, leaning against it, sipping on the bourbon, delighted in my loneliness.

I have worked years, struggling through every living nightmare, and had my innocence ripped away from me. Very few good moments are alive in my memory but the deeper I go into this dark and violent world, the more I lose those

memories. I take another sip and watch the busy streets of Moscow. The people are going on with their normal lives, making me wish mine was different.

Normalcy is one thing I couldn't have. I sealed my fate, giving myself to this darkness, in exchange for revenge. Everything in life comes with a price and I paid mine.

I have everything in the palm of my hands now. Just like Maxwell did. And yet, I feel lost...I feel hopeless. My vision blurs with my glimmering tears as I let them flow down my cheeks, something I rarely do. I set down this path with the hope of victory, but deep down I only feel loss. Maxwell's words are like thorns, prickling my heart until it bleeds. But I've had enough of his fucking true love for Elysha.

She is gone forever. And nothing will stop me from having Maxwell. He is mine. *Only mine.*

CHAPTER 4

MAXWELL

I should be used to the pain now. My body should be numb from it, but every time consciousness lifts me back, the pain feels even worse than the moment I endured it. I gradually open my eyes, blinking to adjust to the streaming light from outside as I brace to face reality; I'm trapped in the underground.

But surprise shrouds me as I frown in confusion.

I am in a luxurious bedroom. A vast window faces me with the light streaming through it, illuminating the off-white walls around the room. I am lying on a queen-sized bed, with soft pillows relaxing my neck rather than the rough concrete walls. I try sitting up, grunting under my breath, noticing my bruises and cuts are all bandaged. I am wearing sweatpants with a heavy blanket covering my waist.

What the fuck is going on?

I look around, searching for an answer or a clue to guide me. But I am the only person in the room. Although, the notion is proven wrong when I hear soft footsteps coming from the other side of the room.

I brace myself physically and mentally to fight off the person, only to be greeted by my enemy; they are wrapped, in a towel, with her hair wet from a shower. Instant rage consumes me as I glare at her. A smug smile stretches across her lips before she saunters towards me.

“Good morning or perhaps I should say afternoon,” she mutters, going to the vast wardrobe and slides it open to pick a dress from her collection. I remain quiet, suppressing my urge to kill her right here and now.

“What am I doing here?” I ask through my gritted teeth, fisting the blanket tightly.

Instead of answering my question, she pulls out a maroon women’s blazer and positions it in front of her.

“What do you think? Does it look like I’m going for a proper meeting with the *Brigadiers*?” she asks like I am her fashion consultant.

I throw away the blanket and stand up, trying to control the agony that is setting my entire body on fire.

“Okay, going to take that as a no,” she retrieves another blazer in black color, “-now this is my favorite. What do you say?”

I snatch her dress and throw it away before grabbing her jaw, pushing her hard against the wardrobe. I enjoy watching her eyes shut in surprising pain.

“Why the fuck am I here?” I rasp, close to her face, tightening my grip on her jaw.

“God, I missed this so much,” she whispers in a choked voice, followed by a grin, which only makes my blood boil with rampage.

“I swear, Rhea, I will choke you to death and later snap your head off your body,” I warn her.

But she lightly chuckles with a shrug. “Go ahead, do your best, Maxwell. Use every ounce of strength you have left in your body. But you and I know killing me won’t bring her back.”

My hold on her turns slack instantly as I feel my heart racing, just from remembering my *an’gel*. And I hate agreeing with her words.

But it is the truth.

“What do you want with me?” I ask, still feeling enraged and disgusted by her presence.

She shrugs, walking past me to get her blazer. “Just a little help.”

I snicker. “After everything you’ve done, you need help from *me*? Even though, you know, I have nothing left to give to anyone.”

“You still have so much to offer, but you don’t want to hand it over. Don’t worry, I will make you with a snap of my fingers.” She murmurs, snapping her fingers in gesture.

Before I know it, she tugs her towel, presenting her naked body to me with a few water droplets coursing down her skin.

I instantly look away in disgust, hearing the light patting sound of Rhea drying her skin.

“You didn’t look away when you saw me naked last time.” The amusement in her voice only triggers me furthermore.

I sit on the bed, with my eyes cast to the floor, with pain still radiating through my nerves. The loud blowing sound of the hair dryer fills the room as my mind keeps racing with question after question.

Why did she bring me here when she swore to destroy me?

A few minutes later, the silence returns as she starts to get dressed.

“What is it you really want?” I ask again.

When she finishes putting on her black heels, I hear her tapping footsteps stalking toward me until she stands right in front of me and cups my jaw. Leaning my head back to meet her eyes, her thumb lightly traces my bottom lip. I pull away from her touch but she grabs my jaw tightly, followed by a venomous look flooding her eyes. She leans her face close to mine before whispering her answer.

“The first time I saw you, I knew what I wanted. *You*. And I won’t give up on that motive. Hurt me all you want with your words and power; my heart will still want you. A king like you deserves someone above a queen...a goddess. And trust me, Maxwell, I will make you want me because deep down, we are bonded by our darkness.”

Her face inches close as her eyes look down at my lips. But before she can kiss me, I turn my head sideways. She lets out a raspy chuckle and still comes closer, planting a chaste kiss on my cheek.

“Don’t worry. Soon you will be the one kissing me like you can’t get enough of me,” she whispers against my cheek before moving away and walking towards the full-length mirror.

“And as for, what I want from you right now, it is to help me run my kingdom.”

I snort. “You mean the kingdom that you stole from me. You didn’t do anything to build and empower it. You are just a replacement for now.”

“Wrong, Maxwell,” she applies a light brown lipstick on her lips before checking herself, one last time, and turning around, “It is *my* kingdom of sinners. And you are one of my pawns who will get me to the bridge of power.”

I frown in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“I was able to get most of the previous *Sovietniks*, *Kassirs*, and *Brigadiers*. But I must say, the new ones you picked are great choices, and I would love them to stay in Bratva. But they are too loyal to you. They refused my offers. And-”

“And you need my help to convince them,” I finish her words.

“Correct. So, you have to-”

“I have only one answer to that offer. Fuck you,” I spit out the words and try to stand up, only to sit back with a grunt from the sudden pain in my legs.

“It wasn’t an offer. You have no choice but to say yes. Because if you deny me, I won’t hesitate to hurt you more than you already are. So, for now, I will give you some time to think about it,” she says and gets a few guns from the drawers and puts them in the back pockets of her pants. “You have only a week to give your final answer.”

She walks towards the door and opens it, but she pauses for a second, before looking at me over her shoulder. “Otherwise, next will be your mother. And don’t think about escaping. A tracker is planted in your neck. Try to get away from me and I will find you in minutes.”

And with that, she shuts the door, leaving me worried and enraged after the threat she gave me. Only if I could snap her neck and cut her into pieces; I won’t let her die that easily. I will make her suffer until her last breath, which she will be begging for her death.

I’m sure the threat she gave about my mother is a lie because she doesn’t know where my mother is. If Igor knew what happened to me, then he would have taken my mother to a safe place by now. It is an order he is supposed to follow if something ever happened to me. And the only way Rhea would know about her is either through Igor or me.

But I have to think of a plan as soon as possible before it gets too late.

IGOR

“Any news on him?” I ask Lucifer as we sit in the living room with the fire crackling in the fireplace.

His eyes strained on the burning fire, his shadow highlighting his features as his right-hand rests beneath his chin and his other hand placed on the armrest. He lets out an exhausted sigh, letting me know his answer without speaking his words.

I close my eyes, feeling defeat engulfing me.

It has been a month since Rhea got ahold of Maxwell. I should have trusted my instincts since the day I saw Rhea. Deep down, I had a feeling that something was wrong with Rhea. By the time I was informed by our *Kassirs* that one of our warehouses, where we keep our collected extortion money, was raided, it was too late. The description matched Rhea. I didn't waste time informing Maxwell about it. His phone was off, and his guards didn't know where he went. Before I arrived at his house, I saw his residence burning into ashes from a distance.

It has been a month since Rhea got hold of Maxwell. I should have trusted my instincts since the day I saw Rhea again. Deep down I had a nagging feeling that something is wrong about Rhea. But by the time I got to know from one of our *Kassirs* that they saw a woman invading one of our

warehouses where we kept our collected extortion money...it was too late. The description fit Rhea and I didn't waste time to inform Maxwell about it. But his phone was switched off and his guards didn't know where he went. When I got close to his house, I could see his residence burning into ashes from a distance.

I was too late. I failed.

But I wasn't succeeding either right now. We know Rhea has him, but where, we don't know. She can't kill Maxwell because if she wants to rule Russia, she needs him to gain business and other information only he knows. But we can't depend on this small aspect because once she has everything she needs. Maxwell will be dead.

"It is nearly impossible to enter her mansion. All the guards are not from Russia or Bratva. It's like she created her own army and made her rules to control everything and everyone," Lucifer mutters.

I open my eyes, letting out a shaky breath, even though I know it won't calm me down.

"Catherine has been worried sick for him. She is barely eating and is looking pale and weak," he adds. Leaning toward the side table, he grabs the glass of bourbon before gulping the entire drink in one move.

"If you are trying to reduce my stress, then you aren't helping," I mutter through my clenched teeth. "I'm doing everything possible to find him before that bitch decides to kill him. She has restored every previous Bratva member, the same

members that Maxwell kicked out because they are pieces of shit and selfish bastards; now they are back, thanks to her. Everything Maxwell and I worked for will be in ashes. But I don't fucking care what she does to the Bratva. I care about saving a man who has been like a brother to me because he was there for me when my father wasn't. So, I don't need you fucking pointing out stuff that I can't control."

My rage makes me spit out words I have been trying to hold back for the past few months. But today, I no longer held the leash on it.

However, Lucifer remains silent like he doesn't give a shit about what I said to him.

I inhale and exhale heavily, clenching my fingertips tightly on the armrests, trying to calm down my racing heart. But it is all futile. Everything feels useless. Lucifer leans back against the chair while lifting his left leg onto his right knee.

"Despite our people being enemies to each other, he is the only man from Bratva who is a close friend to me. He is also like a brother to me. I'm trying hard, as well, to find him but whatever information we have, it is leading to a dead end. But that doesn't mean I have given up. Maxwell is the strongest man we know. He has gone through worse battles. I'm sure he can survive this like the King; he believes himself to be. And as for us? We have no other choice but to keep trying and wait for the right time."

I sigh, pressing my index finger and thumb against my forehead. "But what if it's too late by then?"

Lucifer looks at me for a second before turning to face the fire, responding to me with silence. And that is enough for me to know the answer we both are dreading and don't want to witness.

If we are too late, then there is nothing we can do.

Nothing.

“Has she kept the replacements that Maxwell chose when he was the Bratva?” Lucifer asks, making me frown in confusion.

“She has kept them, but most seem to be unwilling to work for her because they trust Maxwell more. She may have used the corrupted and tainted minds of the old members and used them to kick Maxwell out of his rightful place, but she is facing some issues with the replacements. But why do you want to know that?”

“Because it could be our bridge to helping Maxwell. Find out their names and meet them.”

Lucifer continues telling me the rest of the plan, and I feel a glimmer of hope rising. A hope we both are carrying for Maxwell, his freedom, and his kingdom.

CHAPTER 5

RHEA

By the time I return home it is midnight. Silence mingles with the chirping of the crickets from the garden as I make my way upstairs to my room. Dismissing my guards for the night, I head inside the bedroom, finding the bed empty. I frown and look around, checking the bathroom not finding Maxwell there. I quickly change into a black satin sling nightdress with matching underwear.

But I check the balcony, and he is there. He is sitting on a wooden chair with his back facing me. Tying my hair in a messy bun, I make my way to him and take a seat beside him. I can feel his body tensing with anger, shadowing him like a dark cloud the minute he senses my presence. I see half a glass of whiskey sitting on the table with an expensive bottle beside it. Perhaps he had one of the maids get him something.

I take the glass and finish the rest of the drink before looking ahead, like he is, witnessing the beautiful lakeside of Moscow.

“Next time don’t waste the whiskey. This one cost me a fortune,” I mutter and see his fists clenching from the corner

of my eyes.

“Don’t talk. The whole day felt much better until you came in.”

“Someone is feeling grumpy,” I tease him, unable to hold back my smirk.

“Fuck you,” he spits out.

“I would gladly take up that offer.” I turn to him, meeting his glare-filled gaze and returning it with a wink.

Unexpectedly, he gets up and wraps his hand around my throat in a tight grip. His hold deepens, and I feel my throat aching and my lungs burning for air. He leans closer with aggravation painting his eyes like he is on the verge of killing me but is controlling himself.

“What’s wrong? Can’t babble now, can you?” he seethes through his clenched teeth.

I raise my hands to get him off me; unlike the other times, he is going beyond my limit. But as if anticipating my move, he uses his free hand to catch my wrists and pinning them above my head, making my body glide down slightly.

“Every fucking time, I hear your voice or even feel your presence, I wish for nothing more than to shoot you and chop you into pieces before feeding you to the street dogs.”

“T-Then why...” I barely choke out my words, feeling my whole body trembling as it becomes more and more difficult to breathe. “Why won’t you kill me?”

He tightens his hold more, and my heart beats faster than ever against my chest. “Because you don’t deserve an easy death. When the time comes, I will kill you but not before I gift you torture and make you beg for your freedom. But you won’t have it. So, stop tempting me because your existence is enough reason for me to lose control.”

He moves back and releases his hold. I inhale a deep breath while coughing, feeling my nerves spasm. Taking a step back, he breathes heavily through his flared nostrils as if he was in my place.

“What will you get by killing me, Maxwell?” I ask with a choked voice as I try to soothe my neck. “She is never going to come back even after I die. If I exist or not, it won’t make any difference in your life.”

Letting out a deep breath, I stand up and face him with a vicious look.

“That day you expressed how much you despised me; I hated my own heart for letting your words hurt me. Trust me, if I could get the thoughts about you wiped away from my memory, then I would. But you and I know when I came to that basement years ago, you felt the darkness we both share. You didn’t resist it for a second.”

“I was barely conscious at that time. And were you the one who came to heal me? Who came with bandages and medicines so that, for a few hours, I wouldn’t be in pain? Were you the one who would hold me the whole night after those monsters tortured me to near death? Were you the one for

whom I gave my everything to be free from that living hell?” With every word coming out of his mouth, his voice got louder and louder.

“It was always Elysha. She is my *an’gel*. You may think of yourself as the goddess, but you are no less than a devil.”

I feel my throat clogging with tears threatening to stream down my face. But I stay strong as always.

“I know it is always her. It has always been her.” I let out a shaky breath. “Even with our mother, she was always her favorite,” I snort under my breath, rolling my eyes, “Fuck, despite us being twins, she always loved her more, and I always wondered why? What did she have that I didn’t?”

I swallow, licking my lips. “Worst part is that Elysha knew...she *knew* that our mother was a drug addict, but she never fucking told me. I could have done something, *anything*, to help her...to get her care. But she took that chance away from me and let our mother die...*my* mother die.”

Maxwell is silent, with a blank look painted on his face like he wasn’t expecting me to reveal so much. I didn’t expect it either, but every person has their limit.

“And with you...I felt like I finally had someone who would understand me...who would pick me first. But that fucking cunt took that opportunity.”

I let out a sarcastic chuckle, throwing my hands up. “I bet she didn’t even have to try. It was love at first sight for both of you. The way she would talk about you after coming back

from the basement like you were her Prince Charming. Out of jealousy I went to see you, but when I touched you...I didn't know my heart would want you so much. I want you more than anything else and I am willing to do anything for you. *Anything.*"

I stand close to him, slightly tilting my head back to meet his darkening gaze. "I killed her to have you. And whoever comes between you and me will face the same consequence."

"You are really crazy to think that killing the love of my life will make me want to be with you."

"I am the craziest person you will ever meet in your life. I'm crazier than you."

"It's nothing to be proud of."

I shake my head. "No. But it's something to be frightened of."

"Your obsession will be your downfall," he whispers.

I smirk, cupping his jaw and lightly skimming my thumb along his bottom lip. "Obsession is a dangerous journey that we all lead. For people like you and me, it's the most beautiful thing because it gives us power. And you can't deny that you crave power like me. We can share this obsession and be together. You and I," I whisper, leaning closer until we are breathing each other's air.

We both breathe heavily as I get closer, standing up on my tiptoes, while I continue caressing his lips. I plant a kiss on his lips before he realizes it, my entire body electrified by his

touch that I have missed so much. I lightly nibble his bottom lip before deepening the kiss. His mouth remains still for a second before I sense his lips moving slowly, returning my kiss. I feel my heart somersaulting with joy as desire takes over.

Our tongues mingle together as we start to groan and moan under our breaths. My nerves shiver, with my blood rushing faster than ever.

“Be with me, Maxwell,” I whisper against his lips. “Be mine.”

I raise my other hand to wrap around his neck; suddenly, he pulls back with his eyes widening as shock dawns on his face.

My brows furrow together as I step closer. “What’s wrong? What happened?” I ask, caressing his cheeks, feeling his scruffy skin from his five o’clock shadow.

He shakes his head, letting out a deep breath and holding my wrists, and pries away from my touch.

“No,” he mutters.

“What?”

“I’ll never be yours, Rhea. Not in this lifetime, not ever. It will always be Elysha.”

Pain radiates through my heart, making me wish I didn’t have one because it fucks me up every time, allowing Maxwell to take its leash with his harsh words.

“One thing I do agree with you is how I crave power. Something you took away from me with your conspiracy and betrayal. I bet that taking my power-my kingdom-was never your ultimate motive.”

I remain silent as if he could read my mind, he nods like he knows the answer. I hate to accept it but Maxwell is right. Taking his place as the *Pakhan* was not my motive. I only took it to make him see how powerful I could be like he was.

“You can have me, but not in the way you are hoping for.”

“What are you trying to imply?” I cross my arms.

“You said you need my help with the previous members I appointed for the Bratva, and accessing some accounts with money that only I know of.”

I remain silent, letting him finish his words.

“I will help you, but in return, you will share the power with me.”

“The Bratva is supposed to be ruled by one *Pakhan*,” I murmur.

“Who says the rules can’t change? Everything is fair in love and war, and what we have is no less than a war. That is the only way I’ll ever accept to be with you. If you agree, then say it; if not, then get the fuck out of my face.”

My mind starts to run wild with questions regarding the motive behind his offer. Whatever Maxwell does, it never comes without a benefit. So, this offer must have some kind of benefit for him.

“I know I can’t bring Elysha back, but I can have my power back. It will be shared, but it’s a compromise I’m willing to make.”

“And how do I know that in this partnership, you won’t turn out to be the viper and betray me with death?” I ask.

He snickers, under his breath, as if my question is a joke to him. “You can also do the same, and I won’t be surprised. But we both need this power and kingdom. You need my help to have all control, and I need you in this to regain my place. So, you decide whether you want your doubt to release this opportunity or take this leap of faith, and see for yourself where it leads you.”

I have tried capturing the attention of the young members of Bratva. I can’t kill them, as they have more skills than the ex-members. Unfortunately, none of them are willing to work together. Also, I can’t find their weak spot to force them to work together. I know they are loyal to Maxwell, but I didn’t anticipate their loyalty going so far.

A partnership with Maxwell is a risk. I don’t know what the outcome will be from trusting him blindly. But he does have a point. He is the only way I can get the control I need over Bratva and all members he appointed. It is a risk to us both, and we’re both wary. The only way we know is by trying, and I am willing to do that. Try.

But deep down, a part of me wants this, so I can burrow my way into his heart and let him see we belong together. And maybe, this is the path that will get me there. A risk I am

willing to embark on because no matter what, Maxwell is always going to be mine, and I will be his.

He is my king and I will be his goddess.

“Fine. We have a deal,” I lean my hand forward to shake his hand. He takes it, giving it a timid shake nodding in response.

“It’s a deal.”

CHAPTER 6

IGOR

“Are you sure about this news?” I ask as my mind starts to run wild with so many questions as confusion overtakes me.

“I’m 100 percent certain. It was announced, in today’s meeting, even Maxwell was there,” one of the *Boeviks* says through the call, sounding surprised like I am. “And after the meeting, Maxwell saw me for a few minutes. I told him about you and Mrs. Reznikov, but he said it is a big risk for you to meet with him, as Erida will find out and discover your location.”

“But was he okay when you saw him?”

“He had several bruises and scars on his face, but he didn’t show an ounce of weakness when entering the room.”

He will never show weakness. Not even when he is taking his last breath.

“Any chance he told you the reason for the agreement?”

“No, Sir. But next week there will be a masquerade party at Erida’s residence. You can come at that time and perhaps get the chance to meet him.”

“Alright. Keep me informed about the details and security of the party.”

“Yes, Sir.” With that, the call ends, and I lower my phone from my ear before putting it back inside my suit pocket. I let out a shaky sigh, looking over my shoulder checking Catherine didn’t hear my conversation from her bedroom door left slightly ajar.

I make my way inside her room, finding her sitting at the edge of the bed, with her gaze vacantly looking at the floor to ceiling window that views the backyard. Her face holds a blank look, with her skin looking paler than before, resulting from a lack of proper nutrition and sleep, shown by the dark circles underneath her eyes. The sight makes my heart sting with pain and guilt.

She is Maxwell’s mother and my late uncle’s wife, but she has always treated me like a son, showing me love and adoration, which I never got from my own mother. Even during family events or holidays she would never let me be alone or with my father; because she is the only one to know that deep down, a part of me craves affection.

She has been there for me like my mother should have been. But today, she needs someone to help her through this path of misery and suffering. Despite being present, I feel helpless.

Stalking toward her, taking a seat, I hold onto her cold thin wrists.

“Catherine, if you keep going like this, you will fall ill very soon. Lucifer told me, you haven’t been eating properly and barely leave your room. Please, at least, have some soup or-”

“I don’t know if my boy has eaten anything this time,” she whispers with a choked voice. “I don’t know if he gets any sleep being in that dungeon of hell.”

She swallows, licking her lips with tears glistening her eyes.

“I remember going through this same scenario when he was taken and his father couldn’t find him anywhere. My heart would rip into shreds every time I thought about my little boy tortured by those monsters who kidnapped him when he was barely a teenager. And now?” she lets out a trembling breath, “The same thing is happening again. History has repeated itself, where I’m again helpless and alone...where I can’t do anything to save my son and sit in distress while Maxwell suffers.”

I wrap one hand around her shoulder, letting Catherine pour her emotions that she has held back for so long. She starts to sob so much that her whole body is shivering, making my shoulder tremble. I give her hands a reassuring squeeze but nothing helps.

“You have to be strong for him, Catherine. If he knows how miserable you are, then he will be devastated. Please, Catherine, for Maxwell, for your son, you have to be strong,” I murmur, lightly kissing her forehead.

“He is alive and fighting, day and night, to be back with you. For that you need to be there for him. He needs his mother more than anything now, especially after what has happened. I know everything feels like a dead end, but I promise you, Catherine, I will bring you back your son. But until then, you have to be strong and take care of yourself. Please, Catherine.”

She keeps on crying against my shoulder for a long time, feeling the guilt clouding over me more and more. Luckily, she stops to lean back to wipe away her tears and goes into the washroom to clean up. While she is gone, I call one of the maids to bring her food, which she mostly eats.

After ensuring, she ate enough and was in a better state, I tucked her in bed and left the room to let her get some sleep she had missed for the past few nights. As I head downstairs, Lucifer enters the house with his bodyguards following him. He meets my gaze, reading my expression; I have something important to reveal to him.

“Any news on him?” he asks; immediately when I stand in front of him.

I nod. “A lot has happened but something unexpected happened.”

He frowns in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“Maxwell agreed to share the position of *Pakhan* with Rhea. They will rule the Bratva, and he promised- even agreed- to get all the members back and working together again.”

“What? Are you sure about the news?” Disbelief coats his voice, which I was expecting.

“I’m sure. One of the *Boeviks* informed me. They had a meeting today and made it official. He said Maxwell looks in bad shape physically but at least we know he is alive.”

Lucifer nods in agreement. “But if he is working with Rhea now. Then the chances of getting him out of there or meeting him are lower. He will be heavily observed by her bodyguards.”

“I know there is a masquerade party next week at her residence. That is our only chance to get to meet him and get him out of there.”

“Only you can get inside the party. I will be around the residence waiting with a car to pick you all up.”

“I should have the details of everything a few days before the party.”

“Have you told her about it?” he asks, making me look to the second floor where she is before I return my gaze at Lucifer, shaking my head.

“She has to know. She needs to know,” he murmurs.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea-”

“She can make her own decisions and choose if she wants to be a part of this or not. She has been through so much; we know this more than anyone. But Maxwell needs her in this battle too. Without her, he will be incomplete.”

“But after everything she has been through...I don't want to put her life in jeopardy anymore. I think it's better not to tell her.”

“Like Lucifer said, I can make my own decisions and I choose to be there for Maxwell.”

I turn around to look at the woman who has been surviving and waiting for uncountable days to save the only man to whom she has given her heart and soul for. Lucifer comes forward, leaning his head slightly to meet her gaze as well, and nods.

“Rhea may have had the upper hand when she went for Maxwell's kingdom. But not anymore. She thinks of herself as a goddess, but she will see an angel is more invincible than her, and her pride will shatter into pieces right in front of her, and she won't be able to do anything at that time,” she vows with a strong and determined voice.

Her hand reaches for the chain around her neck, grasping the butterfly pendant in her palm with a look of vengeance crossing her face.

“It is time for redemption. Be prepared, Rhea. Be prepared,” she promises.

CHAPTER 7

MAXWELL

“If he thinks we are running a business on a hooligan’s level. Tell him to fuck off. I never negotiate and he is not the only meth and cocaine supplier from Mexico,” I murmured, trying to control my annoyance.

Because of this fucking stupid call, I lost my appetite to finish my breakfast. But when I looked at Elysha, who was gazing upon me with her hand resting underneath her chin and a pout forming on her lips, I couldn’t help but smile at her adorable expression.

Fuck. How can she look more beautiful with every passing day?

She looked equally annoyed like I was from this phone call but her reasoning was different as she wasn’t getting me all to herself because of the fucking dealer being an asshole.

“He provides the best quality from Mexico, Sir,” one of my Brigadier in Kazan spoke. “And we killed our last supplier because he was stealing more than the actual percentage, we discussed before...” He continues speaking but my eyes can’t resist looking at my an’gel and admiring her beauty.

Elysha leans back and lets out a soft sigh before getting up from her seat and sauntering towards me. She was in a light peach colored sundress that showed off her smooth, pale skin and gorgeous legs that I wanted to kiss every inch of. She gives a timid nod at me, gesturing to me silently to push my seat back a bit.

When I do, she sits on my lap with her legs on either side, and her luscious breasts coming close to my face. I wrap my free arm around her waist, giving her a tight, possessive squeeze.

Cupping my face, she caresses my bottom lip with her thumb as I see desire starting to pool in her eyes. Her hips gradually gyrated against my cock, which was already getting hard just from her closeness. Every time I would look at her, I had the urge to fuck her so hard that whenever she moved, the ache would remind her who was fucking her pussy raw and to whom she belonged.

Mine. She will always be mine.

“Should I search for another dealer then?” I am asked from the other side of the call. Before I can respond, Elysha takes my phone from my grasp and answers for me.

“Like Maxwell said, he isn’t the only supplier. So, either tell him to cooperate or put a bullet through his head. Now, if you’ll excuse me, your Pakhan has an important matter to resolve,” she says and cuts the call, putting the phone on the table.

That’s my girl. My an’gel.

“And what is the matter that needs resolving?” I move my hands to her ass before gripping them and pulling her closer.

She lets a devilish grin stretch on her plump, rosy lips. She holds me by my jaw, tilting my head slightly back.

“A very important matter. It seems like you have been stuck to your phone a lot lately. Even your an’gel needs a bit of attention every now and then.”

Before she can contemplate, I throw away the plate, not caring about the loud clattering and crashing sound of the utensils. I pick her up and lie her down on the dining table and sit back on my chair. Grasping her legs, I pull her closer and hitch up her dress.

Fucking God. No panties.

She grins down at me as if she was expecting me caught off guard as she leans up slightly on her elbows. There was no doubt she was a fucking minx when it came to teasing me, but it was one of the things that pulled me towards her even more, making me want to make her mine...and mine only.

“Always a fucking tease,” I rasped.

She bites down her lower lip with desire darkening in her eyes. I circle her pussy with my fingers which were already soaking wet. Smearing some of her wetness, I bring my hand closer to my mouth and suck off her flavor with a hum of approval.

“Better than any meal, as always.”

She spreads her legs wider, placing her feet on the handle of my chair.

“Well, have as much as you want,” she whispers in a sultry tone.

I smirked and a wicked idea crossed my mind. Leaning up I grabbed the small jar of honey sitting a few inches away from behind her. I drizzled some of the honey on her pussy, watching Elysha arch her back as she let out a whimper. The honey dripped a bit on the table as I put away the jar and leaned in.

“Time for my breakfast.” I dove in, letting out a growl from the back of my throat as my tongue licked every inch of her wet lips mixed with honey. I felt pleasure running deep down to my soul as my heart raced faster with every passing second.

Even my cock was aching so fucking bad it was begging to be inside her tight pussy. But I wanted to savor her...relish every fucking inch of her.

“Oh, God! Please!” she cried out-loud, gripping my hair for support while her thighs started to quiver from the magic my tongue was performing. I sucked on her aching clit that had been waiting for attention while my fingers pushed inside her tight wall, fucking her deep and hard.

I could feel her walls twitching already that I felt a surge of possessiveness coursing through me as the thought of her getting so affected by my touch made me smile. She held the same control over my body and was the only woman in my life

who could affect me like this, because she is the one, I have looked for my whole life...the one my heart has yearned for years.

But now that I finally had her all to myself, I'm never letting her go.

Never.

I curled my fingers inside her, adding another finger in that she couldn't help but yelp in sensation overload. The squelching sound of her cunt, followed by her moaning, was like music to my ears.

"Please, Maxwell," she begged. I knew what she wanted; just like she teased me, I enjoyed doing the same with her.

"Please what, an'gel?"

"I need...I need...God!" She lost focus on getting her words out when I added another finger, stretching her pussy even more as she took four of my fingers. Enjoying the combination of pain and pleasure.

"Use your words, an'gel. Speak your mind, and you shall get what you yearn for the most."

"I want you inside me."

I leaned back, pulled back my fingers and lightly caressed her clit as I pushed her on the verge of losing her mind from the intense pleasure.

"You have to be more specific, an'gel," I teased her.

She whimpered in frustration, pushed her hips forward so she could feel more of my touch. Feeling dominance empowered me, I stood up before moving forward and grabbed her hair in a tight fist, urging her to lean up with her face closer to mine.

“Say, you want my cock inside your pussy and want to get fucked so hard you will be sore for hours. Say you want to be full of my come that you will feel it leaking down your legs whenever you walk. Say it,” I ordered, continuing to caress her pussy that was so wet I could easily slide in my cock.

“I want your cock so badly inside my pussy. I want you to fuck me with all your strength and passion. Come inside me, as much as you want, so I can feel your come inside me until tomorrow.”

Fucking hell.

I kissed her deeply before she could drive me crazy with her words any further. Our lips never left each other's touch for a second as we couldn't get enough, while our tongues mingled together in an erotic dance. I lean my free hand down, unzipping my pants as I take my hard and aching cock out, giving it a few strokes.

I moved my head back a bit, urging her to come forward slightly. “Spit on my cock. Make it wet.”

Shifting her face down, she lets her spit drip on the head before I smear it all over, and position it against her soaking pussy. I give her clit a few taps with my cock, relishing her breathless moans while her needful gaze met mine.

“You want to be claimed?” I muttered against her lips.

She nodded eagerly, holding onto my muscular arms for support.

“Please. I want you so much. Claim me like you always do. Claim your an’gel.”

Without wasting another second, I thrust my cock in her pussy, groaning from her tight walls already clenching around me.

Holy fucking shit. She felt beyond heavenly.

I don’t go slow like I usually did, unable to control my urge or show her my sweet and tender side. She wanted to be claimed, and I will claim her like her fucking king.

“So, fucking good. So tight,” I grunted out my words, and thrust my cock deeper and harder.

“Ah! God!” she moaned, leaned her face toward me and kissed me. “More, Maxwell. Don’t hold back.”

I don’t. I gave her every part of me, witnessed her soft skin flushed with a rosy color, perspiration coursed from her neck to the valley of her breasts. Unable to help myself, I cast my head down, licking away those droplets before sucking on her skin.

Her hold tightened around my arms and into my hair, with her legs wrapped around my hips. I lightly bite onto her skin before licking and sucking it. When I raised my head, I saw the hickey forming at the top of her breast, which made me grin even more.

I always loved leaving marks on her skin as they always reminded her and me; that she belonged to me as I belonged to her.

She cupped my face, urging me to meet her eyes that were filled with passion and love. The same emotions glistened in my eyes every time I saw her.

“You are my everything,” she whispered.

“Do you trust me?” I asked with a quivering tone as my breathing turned heavy with desire burning my nerves like an inferno.

“More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you know.”

“Maxwell,” a voice brings me back to reality, making me slightly jerk in surprise. I look around, finding some of the old *Sovietnik* and *Brigadiers* gazing at me with frowning expressions.

“Are you okay?” I feel Rhea’s hand grasping mine as she asks me with a worried look.

I move back my hand instantly and nod, exhaling a deep breath.

“Would you like some honey with the *Blini*, Sir?” the waiter beside me asks, slightly leaning as a sign of courtesy which the restaurant manager must have instructed him to follow.

I shake my head, waving him away as I sit up and dig into the *Blini*, enjoying the sweet and pleasant flavor of the thin pancake mixed with strawberries.

“Have you two given any thought about assigning my son as the next *Brigadier* of Sochi? He is smart and hard working. He has dealt with *Kassirs* from the Bratva to get more ideas for our business,” one of the *Brigadiers* says suddenly, while sipping on his tea.

I remember getting rid of him the day I became the *Pakhan* because I damn well knew he kept nearly 40 percent of our weapons deliveries and later blamed our suppliers for stealing the money.

His son carries his corrupt blood so, getting his son as the *Brigadier* would be a stupid decision that I’m never going to take.

“Well, he is your son. So, I’m sure he must carry the same devotion and sincerity for this position as you do,” Rhea mutters with a smile before cutting into her pancakes and taking a bite.

My glare-filled eyes shift to hers as I suppress the urge to bang her head against the nearest window until she is bleeding.

Has she lost her mind?

How does she expect to run the Bratva if she keeps getting corrupted and useless fuckers?

She only smiles ecstatically at me, chewing on her food as she winks at me.

“That’s perfect. I will get my son Ethan to visit you both in a few days,” he murmurs with a nod of approval and a triumphant smile.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” I whisper under my breath, making sure only she hears it.

“I know what I’m doing-”

“Trust me you do not. We are supposed to make decisions together and I’m against this. If his fucking son shows up in our office, I won’t hesitate to shoot him on the spot. I don’t care if that offends you or the deal we agreed to, but I don’t approve of this,” I hiss through my clenched teeth.

I move away from her, continuing to eat my breakfast as I try to get my rage under control. But it is impossible whenever she is around, especially making reckless decisions.

Furthermore, we discuss the expansion of our illegal wrestling and ammunition business, and how much of the percentages will be shared amongst the members based on the regions. After a few more hours, our meeting is over and all the members start to leave, leaving Rhea and I alone in the private room.

I look at the wall-to-ceiling window overlooking Moscow city, which is illuminated by natural light, with a bit of dark clouds in the distance. I even see a few snowflakes falling, but it is not very cold outside. The silence feels peaceful between us. Usually when we speak my nerves tick with irritability.

“Just because the father is corrupt doesn’t mean his son will be the same. I have seen him work for the past few weeks, and he will make a pretty good *Brigadier*,” she mutters.

Silence is the only response she gets from me as I stare at the cityscape in front of me and rest my fist underneath my jaw.

“If you are planning to sulk over my decision then, let me tell you, it’s very childish coming from you.”

Just be quiet. Be quiet.

“I don’t know how the fuck you ran your kingdom with such adolescence-”

Before she can finish her lame insult, I grab one of the closest knives and stab it through the gap between her index finger and middle finger.

She looks down at the knife rooted to the table before staring back at me with a cold expression. “You missed.”

“I never miss. It’s the deal between us that is your shield. Violate it again and the knife will go through your hand until it’s stained with your blood,” I threaten her. “You agreed to equal partnership and that includes making decisions together.”

She rolls her eyes, taking the knife out and placing it on the plate as she leans back with her legs crossed, showing off her legs through the slit of her black dress.

“I knew you were going to say no and no amount of discussion will change your mind.”

“What makes you so sure his son is the right option?”

“What makes you so sure he won’t be the right option?” she retorts back.

“A child gets half of their personality from their father, and I can bet his son is no different.”

“You are your father’s son too. Mr. Reznikov’s one and only blood. You two may share the same features and ruthlessness, but your darkness runs deeper than he ever did, making you two different from each other.”

“Never compare me to my father. He is long dead and he cared about nothing but getting the power of the Bratva. He was after the crown. I am after the throne and kingdom,” I speak, pointing a finger in her direction, “I have met his son before. I know what he is capable of and what he isn’t. He won’t be a *Brigadier*. End of discussion.”

I get up from the seat and leave the room before I end up doing something beyond my control. Outside, my car is waiting in the driveway as the driver opens the door so I can quickly enter, escaping the light falling snow.

Finally having a moment to myself, I inhale and exhale sharply, trying my best to calm myself down. It is fucking hard enough that I hate Rhea for what she did, but for her to be an indecisive *Pakhan*, it makes my blood boil even more. I worked for years to get my place in the Bratva, and she took it away from me through betrayal, thinking she could rule over it easily.

But now that I see her strategy for ruling my kingdom, I know it's on the path of doom with her stupidity. I changed the previous members for a reason, and she is digging them out... going against me.

It has been a few days since she and I declared sharing power in the Bratva, which most members agreed to. Some pretend to be okay with the decision as they have no other choice. But I remember talking with one of the *Boeviks* about Igor. He must have gotten the message and will arrive at the ball this week.

I can't escape at the moment but I have to meet Igor and arrange a plan for Rhea's destruction...to get my revenge.

For my Elysha.

At the restaurant I couldn't stop my mind from relishing in her memories. Her angelic beauty...her eyes painted with love...her irresistible touch...everything. Anytime I think about her, my heart stings with pain. I can feel it burning through my chest. My throat starts clogging with emotions, making my nerves rush at high speeds. I try to even out my breathing as my fists clench against my thighs.

She is gone. She is never coming back.

I knew if my heart accepted her love, then the darkness of my world would shadow her forever. I swore to protect her with my life. To save her from every monster and demon who dared to take her away from me. But only if I knew Rhea would turn out to be the darkness, I had to save my Elysha from, then I would have done things differently.

Regret and guilt are now my only companions till my last breath, while I hope for God to allow me to be with Elysha in the afterlife. I vow to myself, I will be the master of my own fate and I won't bow to God, as well. But for her...I will get on my knees, begging for eternity to be with Elysha.

She was my everything...she is and always will be.

CHAPTER 8

RHEA

“Can we just be done with this?” Maxwell asks with an annoyed tone as he sits opposite of me, with the small table between where a chess board sits.

“I thought chess is your favorite,” I mutter moving my black knight, weakening his white king’s chances of survival.

“Check.”

He moves his bishop in front and saves his king for now. Before I can make my next move he abruptly stands, buttoning the front of his suit. “I have a meeting on call and I’m in no mood to waste time here.”

He starts to leave and seeing his irritation feels entertaining to me. “I didn’t know you were such a sore loser. We are barely halfway through the chess match.”

He looks over his shoulder meeting my gaze and it is clear he wants to be out of here. “I was not born to be a sore loser. Unlike you, I don’t seek victory right away. I make sure to turn my opponent so powerless that there is no path to winning.

When they least expect it, I give my one last move, defeating them in seconds.”

With those words he turns away and walks out the door. I roll my eyes from his so-called attack strategy speech and get up to get some work done. I stalk toward my throne and start looking over some shipment information I need to go through.

“What the hell is going on, Erida?” Francisco asks in an enraged voice as he bursts inside my office.

I look up from the documents I am reading, meeting his gaze and disfigured hair as if he has been pulling on them every few minutes. I could easily tell what he was talking about, but I leaned back on my chair, not expressing an ounce of interest in his question.

Even his tie was loose, the buttons of his suit open with the ends of his white shirt peeking out of his waistband. Unlike other times where he maintains a perfect attire, he looks incredibly disheveled. There is a hint of dark circles underneath his eyes as if he hasn't had a peaceful night's sleep in a while. His jawline is covered with a rough scruff, making him look even more tired than he seems.

“Tell me the news I heard about you, sharing the position of *Pakhan* with Maxwell is nothing but a rumor. Spare me out of this misery that has been roaming in my mind, since the minute I heard about it.” The ray of hope he holds for his words to be truthful dusts his tone.

But my silence responds to his question, I see his hope being shattered into countless pieces within him, with no way

of being put back together. He runs a hand through his wild hair, casting his eyes down as if it is too much for him to look at me, while letting out a shaky breath.

“He got into your head,” he snorts with a sardonic tone. “I knew that asshole was going to talk his way out and get into your head. What I fear has happened, despite your assurances, that there are no chances of it.”

“It is a decision that *I* made and a lot of thought was put into it. I have told you before I don’t make any choices without a purpose-”

He snickers, shaking his head. “And what’s the purpose of this? For him to get into your bed so that he can fuck you like he used to?” he hisses out his words, cutting me off.

I stare at him coldly, holding no emotions, which I usually convey around him. Standing up and making my way toward him, I stand close to his face. His nostrils flare with his ragged and shallow breaths as if he is controlling his feelings for me.

Always thinking about me first.

“What next, Erida? Is he going to replace *me*? Will he take over your heart, which I have been after since the day I laid my eyes upon you?”

With every assumption spewing from his mouth, I can tell he is losing his mind, with anxiety and doubt clouding his sanity. I can see the madness glistening in his eyes, and there is only one way to hold the leash on his frenzy, to regain control.

I soften my expression, reflecting gentleness in my touch, as I cup his face, bringing him closer to me. I offer him a small smile while my thumbs caress his lips. His features are relaxing under my caress as he presses his forehead against mine. Closing his eyes, he exhales a silent breath as he grasps my arms with a possessive grip.

“Don’t let him win Erida. I know how badly you’ve wanted his kingdom, and you want him to yield down to the depth of his soul. I get it. You want to watch him fall until he has nothing left. But can’t you see? He is rising again.”

Tilting my head back I meet his gaze with a questioning look.

“Sharing power is his first trap and you got caught easily in it. Don’t be his prey in this game. We both know how his devilish mind works, and he will do anything within his power to push you off the throne...the same throne we’ve worked so hard for.”

The throne I have worked hard for.

Francisco will never understand the hardship and sacrifices I made to get where I am today. Nobody will ever see the helpless, lonely, and miserable little girl; who has lived and breathed amongst monsters; while they taint her day and night. Nobody will see how that little girl fought her way through nightmares, sacrificing her purity, and innocence, to embrace viciousness and violence to become the goddess she is today.

“You can still change this little agreement and return him to the basement, where he belongs, or better yet, kill him.

What use does he have of us anyway?”

“Because of him, we gained more members in the Bratva who either quit or escaped after I assumed power. They are too loyal to him. He only needs to order them once, and they agree to join with me, as well. That’s the use he has for me,” I reply honestly.

“But-”

“You tried doing what he did, didn’t you?” I interrupt him with my question, getting silence from him. “Did you succeed?”

No words come out of his mouth as he keeps staring at me.

“Are you comparing me to him now?” There is a shadow of pain behind his choked voice.

“I’m stating the facts here. I’m only using him for my own advantage. Once it’s accomplished then we won’t need him anymore.”

“But by that time, it will be too late. He will get inside your head and control every move. Before you know it, he will take his kingdom back, and you won’t have any choice but to live with regret.”

“If you doubt my intentions and mindset to rule over the Bratva, then say it directly instead of these riddles,” I spit out of my words, unable to hold back my coldness anymore.

He steps back with his rage returning on his face. “I never doubted you, Erida. But I don’t trust him. And for the distance he is creating between us...he is going to pay for it.”

Before I can contemplate the meaning behind his words, Francisco strides out of the room, shutting the door with a loud thud, almost breaking the door off its hinges. I follow him as he looks around the house before going to one of the guards by the doorway.

“Where is Maxwell?” he asks with an impatient tone.

“He is in the backyard, Sir. He is attending a phone call,” the guard responds and Francisco immediately rushes to the designated location.

Fuck.

“Francisco! Wait!” I call out to him but my words fall on deaf ears. My heartbeat races as he gets to the backyard, where Maxwell is unaware of the danger coming his way. His back is turned towards us, with a phone against his ear, as he talks to someone.

“Francisco, don’t!” I warn him. For the first time, he goes against my warning and takes out his gun from his back pocket, aiming at Maxwell.

“No! Maxwell!” I yell at the top of my lungs feeling my throat clogging with fear.

Maxwell turns around with his face constricted in shock and alertness when he sees the gun pointed at him. Francisco pulls the trigger, letting out a loud bang but Maxwell ducks down in time, avoiding the bullet as he defends himself by lunging behind the couch.

“You fucking bastard!” Francisco screams and shoots again at the couch, the bullet piercing through the cushion, with bits of cotton stuffing bursting out. “I warned you to stay away from her! But you had the fucking balls to manipulate her. Now look at what you did to us!”

He shoots again, getting closer to the couch. Maxwell gets his gun out and aims at Francisco as he pulls the trigger, shooting him straight through his right arm, which holds the gun.

“Ugh! Fuck!” Francisco grunts in pain, with blood spurting from his wound as he loses the grip on his gun while holding onto his arm with his free hand, covered with his blood.

Fucking hell. This is a disaster.

The guards quickly surround us from the chaos they hear, pulling out their guns, and aiming to attack Maxwell.

“No! Don’t shoot!” I order sharply, giving them a seething look. They look amongst each other with a hesitant expression before lowering their guns, but still keeping their grip just to be on the safe side.

Maxwell gets up with vengeful rage clouding his eyes with his gun pointing at Francisco; he is still suffering from his wound, kneeling on the ground. Without hesitation, Maxwell raises his fist and punches Francisco hard across his face. I can see blood starting to drip from the corner of his mouth.

“You motherfucker!” he curses, lying on his back and cupping his now bruised cheek.

“Next time you think of attacking me again like a fucking pussy the bullet will go straight through your heart,” Maxwell threatens him before looking at me.

“What the fuck is wrong with your lover boy? What’s the problem?”

Lover boy...seriously?

“You are the problem you asshole! You!” Francisco yells, trying to get up but Maxwell punches him again, shutting him up.

“Answer me, Rhea, because I’m a few seconds away from knocking the shit out of your annoying boyfriend.”

“It’s nothing to worry-”

“Don’t even fucking try to give the *it’s nothing to worry about* or *there is no problem* bullshit. You may be a bitch but you don’t sugarcoat shit. You are honest about almost everything. So, tell me what’s the fucking issue here?”

Surprise washes over me from the last sentence Maxwell spoke. The whole time he curses at me with every word possible. I’ve lost count of the times he called me a bitch or to fuck off. Spewing at me and crushing my heart with his venomous words. But it was the first time he appreciated something about me.

My honesty.

My heart somersaults with a light of hope shining upon me just from that fleeting moment of respect he showed me. Maybe there is hope, after all, to change Maxwell’s mind

about me and make his heart see that our darkness is worth the chance of being together.

I held back my smile. Not showing my guards a woman who is madly in love with a man she can't have, and his admiration for her is enough to make her heart swoon.

“Francisco heard about us sharing power and the position in the Bratva, and it wasn't pleasing news for him,” I answer, gazing back at Francisco as he gets up on his trembling legs, while holding onto his bleeding wound.

“I should have fucking killed you when you were trapped in that basement,” Francisco spits out, glaring at Maxwell like he is prepared to kill him with his stare, while standing close to him.

Maxwell only offers him a dark smirk before tsking and shaking his head. “When I first fought you, I really thought you were a tough motherfucker, but such petty things make you jealous. Come on, what are you? Four-years-old? I've received tougher hits and glares from *babushkas*.”

He snickers. “What next?” His eyes narrow a bit with his brows furrowing. “You see us in a meeting together and start crying like the fucking Romeo you are. Is that what's going to happen next?” He mocks Francisco, letting out a light chuckle under his breath before staring at me.

“These are the type of men you hire and expect to be the Queen of Bratva? Sorry to bust your bubble, Rhea, but get your shit together when it comes to picking the people you want working for you. We breathe in a world of crime,

violence, and darkness, staining our hands with the blood of our enemies, and fighting for every bit of power with our soul.”

He points at Francisco with an unimpressed look. “Just the news of us sharing power in the Bratva is making him go ape shit crazy on me. What more? He pisses around you to mark his territory?”

Irritation and annoyance paint my mind from his remark and makes my blood boil with anger when I look around to find my guards trying not to laugh at Maxwell’s words.

“What I do with her is none of your fucking business. She is *mine*,” Francisco seethes through his clenched teeth. Maxwell doesn’t pay any attention to him as he keeps his gaze fixated on me, telling me silently how true his words are turning out to be.

He grins sarcastically with a slight victorious look. *See what I mean?* His expression says it all.

“I can easily tell what you are planning to do. But I won’t let you succeed; I won’t let you take her away from me-”

“That’s enough, Francisco,” I order with a cold tone.

His head snaps in my direction in a frowned expression mixed with shock and hurt glimmering in his eyes. “But he-”

“Don’t forget your place in the Bratva and in my life. I may show you affection and give you attention because you have been there for me since the beginning. You have helped me through many difficult stages when I needed you the most.

But that doesn't give you the right to become my superior and make it look like you own me."

He shakes his head, facing me fully. "That's not what I meant-"

I raise my hand, halting his further excuses, with an emotionless and distant face- it's how I felt.

"*I'm your boss. Your Pakhan. You don't own me. I own you as a member of Bratva. Whatever decision I make is to be accepted, whether you like it or not, because at the end of the day, I'm the ruler of this kingdom. Not you. And as for Maxwell being my partner, that is a decision I made. I know what I'm doing. I don't need you teaching me how to rule. The last time I remember, it was me who saved you when Maxwell held your life on its very last end.*"

Francisco turns silent, his lips parting slightly as he tries to breathe. From the anguish clouding his face and eyes, it is clear each of my words stabbed him again and again, like a dagger.

"So instead of acting as if you are the leader here, be fucking grateful you are still alive," I look around to my guards before continuing, "and that goes for every one of you. Whatever you are today, it is because *I* gave you that chance; otherwise, you all would be rotting somewhere near the sewers."

I stalk toward Maxwell, ignoring Francisco's hurt eyes, as I grasp his strong calloused hand in mine and look upon him.

“Him and I are the leaders of the Bratva. Respect us and our decisions. Try to interfere or go against us, then your next breath will be your last breath.”

Everyone simply nods, keeping their gaze cast down.

“Now leave and get back to work. I don’t pay you all to be useless.”

They scatter away, getting back to work, leaving me alone with Francisco and Maxwell. But I notice my hand is still warm from Maxwell’s touch, realizing he hasn’t pulled away, unlike other times, as if my touch burns him. I relish his sensation, feeling my heart nearly somersaulting, seeing him opening up to me bit by bit.

“Erida...don’t do this, please-”

“You heard what she said. Now fuck off because seeing you is making me irritated as fuck,” Maxwell interrupts him, while Francisco keeps staring at me, expecting me to defend him.

But that won’t happen today.

Today he acted upon his recklessness, making me appear as a weak leader in front of my guards; who probably think I was letting Francisco have all the control because he is a man.

“Erida...” he barely whispers with distress oozing his tone.

I respond to him with my silence and coldness. He gets my message and shifts his gaze downwards before he nods timidly and leaves without a single glance over his shoulder.

“I am going to leave and resume my phone call meeting, which was rudely interrupted,” Maxwell abruptly says and removes his hand. But I catch his arm, turning him to face me fully.

“Are you alright? Did you get hurt?” I ask with worry coating my voice.

“Not a single scratch,” he murmurs with a dismissive tone and turns away as he walks away with his phone.

I really need to get Francisco under control, especially around Maxwell. I am trying to connect with the man I yearn for, while dealing with Francisco’s bullshit that keeps ruining my plan. Maxwell can’t deny that his heart is making its way to, feeling more than just rage and vengeance toward me. This may be the smallest step forward, but for me it is a leap towards the chance of us being together.

All I need is to have patience and hope. Maxwell is worth the wait.

CHAPTER 9

MAXWELL

“Fucking damn it!” I curse under my breath. I fix my bow tie for the sixth time, even though it looks alright. My nerves are getting the best of me, making me more frustrated with every passing second.

Igor is supposed to arrive at the party tonight, which is going to start in a few hours. It will be tough to talk to him with Rhea’s guards around, keeping an eye on me like a hawk. But one way or another, I am getting my chance to talk with him.

“Fuck it,” I mutter, ripping off the bow tie from my neck and throwing it on the bed as I run a hand through my hair.

“Mind if I help?” The familiar shrill voice makes my blood roar with rage, as always. I look at the mirror, finding Rhea standing at the door, all dolled up and ready for the party.

She is dressed in a shimmering black gown with a deep V-neck, revealing most of her cleavage and chest. Furs cover her long sleeves, a thigh-high slit shows off her legs, and black pencil heels. She has black smokey-eyed makeup, with dark, blood-like, red lipstick painting her lips. Finishing her look,

she wears a pair of diamond earrings with vipers detailing them, with the viper's head resting against her ear lobe.

“No, I'm good.”

My words fall on deaf ears; as she saunters towards me with her heels tapping against the floor. She picks up the bow tie and stands in front of me, meeting my gaze with a sultry look.

“It doesn't hurt to receive help sometimes you know,” she whispers, getting closer to me until her breasts are pressing against my chest, while she acts focused on tying the bow tie. “It's just a bow tie and you were fighting with it like a child. I couldn't help myself but come to your rescue.”

She lightly chuckles, making me suppress the urge to choke her and cut off her air supply, until her lungs are burning.

I snicker as she starts to work on the knot. “I'd rather be stabbed to death than ask for any sort of help from you.”

“Why is that?” she asks. “I will help you in any way possible, within my power.”

“Who knows? Your so-called act of help will be nothing but a trap before you decide to stab me with betrayal as you did before.”

Her hands pause for a moment, before she resumes and smooths down the collar of my suit, placing both her hands against my chest. “As long as *you* don't betray *me*, I won't have any reason to betray you.”

“Time will answer both of us in that matter.”

She grins. “Maybe it will.”

She leans up, expecting to kiss me, but I turn my head and I feel her lips pressing against my cheek. “Did I mention how fucking handsome you look?” she murmurs against my cheek as her warm breath caresses me. Her left-hand skates down my body as she touches my abs through the shirt above.

“It’s taking everything in me to stop myself from ripping your shirt off.”

Suddenly, I feel a flame igniting between us as her words begin affecting me without my consent. It is a sensation...a feeling I used to feel when I fucked her the few times before I knew of her true identity. As if the feelings were hibernating, her words awakened them from its slumber.

“Your buttons flying everywhere...revealing your muscular chest, while my nails dig into your skin.” Her right-hand cups my jaw, urging me to face her as her eyes glimmer with lust and desire.

A familiar emotion that is unknowingly starting to bloom within me as well.

“My lips kiss every inch of your beautiful skin until I can’t have enough,” she lets out a seductive chuckle, “but it’s never going to be enough for me. I will always want more and more...we both will. And I will let you do whatever you want to me, just like you used to. Remember?”

Her thumb grazes my lower lip as we both start to breathe heavily, craving air more than anything. “Kiss me anywhere you want...touch me as much as you want...drive me insane with desire with your heart’s desire. We both yearn for this and neither of us can deny it.”

Her fingertips loom over my belt. “I want nothing more but to writhe under your body until I can’t think or sense my surroundings. It will be just you and me.”

Our lips barely have any room left as she starts to lean her face close to mine for a kiss. But when a knock raps on the door, sanity pulls me away from her as I take a few steps back, both of us looking at the doorway.

“What?” Rhea snaps at the maid who has her eyes cast down.

“The guests have arrived Ma’am.” The fear in her tone is clear.

Rhea lets out a shaky breath as if she is putting a leash on her frustration. “I will be right downstairs. Leave.” She doesn’t need to be told twice as she scurries away.

“Let’s go,” I mutter as I grab my black Colombina mask, making my way toward the door. I feel Rhea grabbing my hand making me look over my shoulder.

“How long will you resist this, Maxwell?” she asks.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

She lets out a humorless laugh, coming closer to me. “Don’t lie to me or yourself. You felt the fire that we had a few

seconds ago. You wanted it...you craved it like I did and I could see it in your eyes. You will give in one way or another.”

A dark smirk stretches on my lips making her smile falter. “Keep on dreaming but you won’t succeed.” I cup her jaw, leaning close that she closes her eyes as if she assumes I am going to kiss her. “Because every time I look at you, all I see is a viper who poisoned my life. A viper who has used her fangs to kill my heart and soul with betrayal, and taking away the love of my life.”

She opens her eyes with her brows slightly furrowing.

“So, whatever you think *this* is between us, stop hoping for it. Because I will crush that hope of yours like a little girl who dreams of her happily-ever-after but in real life they don’t exist.”

I push her away slightly and head outside before she can say anything else. I put on the mask and make my way downstairs, which is already filled with guests. The large chandelier brightens the room, with black roses along with a few leaves and vines hanging from the ceiling, and some set-in vases on tables where guests are busy drinking and chattering among themselves. Waiters dressed in black shirts hold trays of champagne-filled flutes, serving everyone. A small band, matching the dress code of the masquerade party, plays their music softly underneath the stairway space; the lead female singer stands close to the microphone as she sings in a melodious, soft voice.

As I mingle with the guests, a clinking of champagne flutes catches our attention, making us turn as we find the source to be Rhea standing at the stairway. The chattering simmers down, silence taking over before Rhea starts to speak.

“Welcome everyone. I’m truly honored to have all of you at my party tonight. We each know that due to: sudden changes, these past few weeks have been chaotic for all of us. We had our ups and downs and even some misunderstandings,” her gaze shifts toward me, as if she is easily able to locate me in this crowd, watching me through her black, diamond studded Colombina mask, “But it is all in the past now. Maxwell and I have united to make the Bratva a force that can’t be tackled, even with the biggest of storms. It’s time to live in the present and prepare for the future, as we all work together like a family. Like *Bratva*.”

She raises her glass and everyone follows her motion.

“To the Bratva. May success be in our fate for eternity,” she toasts and others repeat her words, drinking down the champagne.

“Now let’s enjoy the party,” she announces and everyone returns to their chattering while some take the floor and start to dance.

I head toward the dining room where it is crowded with more people. I go to the side bar and order a glass of scotch. Wanting something stronger than the pussy shit, champagne. I sense someone standing beside me and as I see Rhea, I feel instant fury.

“Seems like I can’t have a minute to myself to have a drink peacefully.”

“Well, I can’t help myself when you are looking so irresistible tonight,” she mutters, leaning against the bar with her back against it. “Come dance with me.”

“I’d rather get shot in the head,” I retort. The waiter passes me the drink that I finish in one gulp before gesturing for another round.

“I did say to enjoy the party so let’s go and enjoy,” she murmurs and grabs my arm dragging me to the dance floor.

Fucking God. Give me strength.

She puts her arms around my neck while I rest mine on her waist. I try to keep a distance but she takes advantage of the situation and steps closer so her breasts are pressed against my chest.

For fuck’s sake.

I look around for any sign of Igor while getting myself tortured in this dance.

“I must say you dance pretty well. Usually, men are clumsy with their feet. But you seem to have a lot of practice. Let me guess your mother taught you?” she asks, making me frown.

“How do you know that?”

She shrugs. “Just a hunch. I remember my mother teaching me to dance as well...” she starts talking about her mother, out

of the blue, with a look of longing painting on her face, as if reliving the past in this moment.

“There was a small music cassette shop on the ground floor of the building we used to live in. Every evening when the owner’s son would come for his shift, he would often play rock and roll or pop music. My mother would keep the window open and would dance with me to the tune.” A soft smile spreads on her lips. A smile that looks genuine...a true emotion.

“I remember she once tried to attempt that rubber leg dance move by Elvis Presley because she was a huge fan of his,” she lightly giggled, “unfortunately she forgot she was wearing heels and fell on the floor, nearly knocking down the table. She laughed it off but later she was complaining to herself how much her back was aching.”

I don’t realize it myself, but I am smiling as if the memory is flashing right in front of me.

Her eyes rise to meet mine as they hold a raw emotion I’ve never witnessed before. “That’s how she always was. If she was ever in any sort of pain, she wouldn’t show it in front of others. Instead, she would put a smile on her face and later suffer alone.”

Eventually, my smile drops from the sudden turn of the memory she shared with me for the first time.

“It’s like she wanted to be the strong, supportive, and caring mother in front of everyone. Never giving up for a second or showing any sign of weakness. But when she was

alone and made sure her daughters were asleep, she would often go near the window, and cry silently. As if she never wanted to share her pain with her daughters...as if it was too much to bear or share.” Her voice has a broken edge to it like she is holding back her emotions.

She gently shakes her head and returns back to being, a goddess, the ruler of Bratva that everyone knows...and not the girl who adored her mother that I caught a glimpse of for a fleeting moment.

“That’s why I guessed maybe your mother taught you, as you weren’t close with your father. Because if you were, you wouldn’t have killed him.”

My hold on her waist tightens from tension as I remember my wretched father who got the death he deserved.

“He had it coming.”

“And what did he do to deserve the punishment of death from his own son?” she questions.

“That’s none of your business-”

“It is kind of my business because it got you closer to the position of *Pakhan*, in the first place. So, I should be aware of your tricks in case you plan to kill one of the members behind my back.”

Well, she isn’t wrong. I might end up doing it if anyone comes in the way between me and my kingdom. I’ve worked years to get to the position I have fought for, and if that meant I had to kill my father who was a thorn in my path, then I

wouldn't hesitate. Even at that time, I didn't hesitate for a second, before slitting his throat with my knife.

“I feel like it wasn't just to get power, you also had another motive too.”

“He used to hurt my mother.”

“Then why did she marry him in the first place?”

“Because my worthless grandfather arranged her marriage with him without confronting her. In the Bratva society, arranged marriages are common and mostly forced. My mother was a victim of that forced arrangement where she was hurt day and night. When she was pregnant with me, she could have aborted me because I carry his ruthless personality and some features of him. I would be a reminder to her of the torture she has endured because of that man, but she chose to keep me and love me with all her heart. I used to watch her as a kid getting beaten close to death by that monster. But I couldn't do anything because she made me promise not to hurt him as our people would come after us. But when I finally got the chance...”

“You didn't waste it and you took his life,” she completes my words.

I simply nod.

“I hope to meet your mother-”

“Don't even dare to think of coming anywhere near my mother,” I threaten her under my breath, watching her eyes widen slightly from my sudden warning.

“The only reason I don’t know where my mother is or how she is...is all because of you. If I do find her, I will ensure she stays miles away from you, because I know the minute you see her, you won’t hold back from using my mother as my weakness, and kill her too. Just like you killed Elysha. So, stay the fuck away from her,” I hiss through my clenched teeth.

Grabbing her wrists, I push them away and step back. She opens her mouth to speak but she looks over to someone from over my shoulder and closes her mouth.

She lets out a shaky breath before licking her lips as if trying to compose herself. “I have something important to do. Excuse me.” With that, she finally leaves me as she walks past me toward her office with some of her guards following right behind her.

I think of going back to the bar but start to walk away when a hand suddenly grabs my elbow. It is a woman.

Her face is hidden with a black Volto Barocco mask. She is wearing a black maxi dress with shoulder pads making her body look like it possesses power and control. There are cutouts on her chest and torso, showing off her pale smooth skin, along with her breasts pressed together. Her hair is pulled back in a tight bun with a few strands touching her cheeks.

“I’m sorry but I need to go,” I try to excuse myself but her grip tightens as she pulls me deeper into the crowd. Before I can say anything else, she guides one of my hands around her waist and the other holding one of her hands, with her free hand around my shoulder.

I am in no mood to create a scene so I dance with her without objection. The music changes to a soft tune as the band starts to play *Set Fire To The Third Bar*. She gets closer, engulfing me with her floral fragrance, while her thumb lightly caresses the back of my hand, sending a familiar feeling through my body...a kind of touch that I have been yearning for what feels like an eternity. A feeling that I have only felt with one person.

Quickly I feel my heart racing, my blood pumping faster than ever, with my nerves quaking continuously. My breathing turns ragged but the only thing keeping me sane is her scent and touch.

I slightly lean my head back and look down at her, feeling the urge to know the identity behind that mask.

Who is she? Can she...no...she can't.

My gaze shifts to her deep blue eyes glimmering under so many lights surrounding us. But it is the passion and intensity those ocean eyes hold, which makes my heart skip a beat... because no matter how much time passes...no matter what corner of the world I am in, I will always recognize those eyes.

Those deep blue eyes only...and only belonged to one woman. My woman.

My an'gel.

“*An'gel,*” I whisper, barely able to hear my own voice as I feel my throat clogging with overwhelming emotions.

She comes closer to me so we don't have any room left. Letting go of my hand, making me miss her warmth, she holds her mask and lifts it off...slowly...bit by bit revealing her face.

The same face that holds a beauty, which has no bounds or comparison in the world. The same face that is always painted with innocence that made me fall for her in the first place. The same face that holds true love, only for me, since the night we first met.

It is her. Elysha...she is alive.

My an'gel is alive.

CHAPTER 10

MAXWELL

“Maxwell,” her soothing, calm voice reaches my ears like they have been waiting so long for her. I close my eyes shut, feeling fearful of all these being a dream.

“Open your eyes, Maxwell,” she whispers.

I shake my head vigorously. “No. Never. I won’t ever open them.”

“You have to.”

“I won’t...this is a dream...and if it is then I don’t want to wake up. You will disappear the minute I open my eyes and I won’t let it happen...I lost you in reality...but I won’t lose you in my dream. *Never.*”

“This is not a dream and I will prove it to you,” she murmurs. Before I can contemplate, I feel her soft lips against mine planting a kiss. I feel my whole body igniting like an inferno, while my heart is thumping against my chest as if it would leave my body. My soul weeps with pure ecstasy, as it is finally in peace, as if I were back home...she is my home... she is my everything.

I kiss her back, cupping her cheeks, not giving a single fuck who watches us. If at this moment Rhea catches us, I wouldn't care because this time I will protect my *an'gel* no matter what. I deepen the kiss, while our tongues mingle together, along with our teeth lightly crashing every now and then. Her hands snake up, wrapping around my hand and fisting my hair. I nibble her bottom lip, tasting the cherry flavor of her lipstick. But it isn't enough. It will never be enough with her.

I don't know how long we kiss amongst the crowd, but we finally pull back, breathing heavily like our lungs are burning for air. I gather every ounce of my courage and open my eyes, begging God not to let her disappear.

And when my eyes fully open, she is still there. Standing right in front me...breathing and alive...and looking like the most beautiful woman I have ever laid my eyes upon.

This is reality...she is alive. Elysha is alive.

I can barely process or think of any words to say to her as I feel unexplainable joy and peace settling into my soul. But it is soon replaced with fear and I look around, making sure Rhea isn't around, and that the guards are distracted.

"Come with me," I tell her, holding her hand and guiding her to my room. The entire time, my gaze keeps an eye out for Rhea or her guards, with my mind preparing to kill anyone who dares to come my way.

The moment we get inside my room; I shut the door, locking it before turning to face her. We both remove our

masks, without wasting a second, I usher her into my arms for a tight hug as if my life depended on it.

“You are alive...you are here,” I whisper against her hair, inhaling her sweet fragrance that I missed dearly.

“I’m here, Maxwell. I’m not going anywhere,” she murmurs, caressing my hair with her gentle touch before leaning back and meeting my gaze.

“I’m so sorry,” I shake my head feeling emotions clogging my throat, “I can’t tell you how guilty I feel for not being able to save you...to protect my *an’gel*-”

“No, no, no. Don’t say that.” She frowns, leaning her forehead against mine.

“I failed to protect you and I will never be able to forgive myself for it.” I couldn’t help but feel my legs weakening as I kneel in front of her...in front of my queen. I rest my forehead against her belly, hugging her hips, while her hands comb through my hair, making me realize how I’ve truly missed everything about her.

“I’m deeply sorry...”

She stays silent for a few seconds while I relish her closeness before she kneels with me and cups my face. “It wasn’t your fault, Maxwell. I watched you give everything you had to try and save me but my own sister took away every chance possible to let you save me.”

“I should have tried harder.” I shake my head, kissing her palm.

“Don’t dwell on the past, Maxwell. This time it’s the future we have to think about. There is nothing to be sorry about.”

“I promise you, Elysha, that if need be, I will lay down my own life to protect yours,” I vow to her, grasping her wrists. “But how did you survive?”

“I only remember a few fragments of the moments after Rhea’s guard left me inside the burning mansion. But someone got in and picked me up, taking me outside. I don’t know for how long I was unconscious, but when I opened my eyes, I saw Lucifer. He explained everything to me and said Igor saved me from the fire and brought me to Italy.”

I frown in confusion. “But how did Igor know what happened at the mansion?”

“He got news from one of the *Kassirs* about a woman invading one of the warehouses and the description he got matched with Rhea. He was trying to contact you, but couldn’t reach you. By the time he got there it was too late, and after seeing what she did to me, he saved me. When Rhea changed her location, he tried looking for you, while being in Italy with me. Recently, from this masquerade ball, he was able to make a solid plan to get you out of here,” she answers. “Igor is ready with his guards to get you out of here. Some of the guards are among the crowd.”

“We can’t leave.”

Her brows furrow together as she stares at me in disbelief. “What do you mean?”

“Rhea has put a tracker in my neck and if we do escape, she will easily find us. I’m not taking the risk of letting her know that you are alive.”

“Fuck...” she whispers under her breath, shaking her head. “What do we do now?”

“There is only one thing we will do in this situation.”

“What is that?” she asks.

“Redemption.”

She remains silent as she listens to my words carefully. “Rhea took everything from you and me. She planned everything carefully, trapping us in her net of vengeance. This time, the tables are about to turn, and she will be the prey, but only if you allow it.”

Elysha swallows, shifting her gaze as she understands what I mean.

“I know she is your sister and you have done everything possible to protect her. But do remember that your own blood is driven by power and revenge. So much so that she doesn’t think twice about shedding your blood to get what she wants.”

She looks at me with rage painting her eyes and a hint of betrayal mingling around...the betrayal she felt because of her sister.

“It won’t be just your redemption. It will be *ours*. I have always listened to my heart and gave every ounce of love and affection I had within me to her. But she didn’t hesitate to crush those emotions underneath her feet. This time, I won’t

let my heart get in our way. We shall get our redemption...by hook or by crook,” she speaks with confidence and strength... just like a queen would with her head held high.

I nod. “We have to find a way to plan our redemption, step-by-step.”

“Don’t worry about that,” she puts her hand inside a small pocket in her gown, and retrieves a burner phone passing it to me, “this is my burner phone. I will get another one for myself. It even has Igor’s and Lucifer’s number programmed so you can contact them too.”

“Good idea. I will call you first thing in the morning and pass all the information onto Igor as well.”

She nods. “We will get through this together,” she smiles, making my heart yearn for her even more.

I want her so badly. I need her...only her.

I can tell she is feeling the same because her eyes reflect craving and need, she doesn’t shift her gaze from mine for a second. The fire that has been absent with her being gone now returns with her presence.

“I missed you so much,” she whispers, leaning closer while her thumb traces my bottom lip.

“I didn’t stop thinking about you for a second, *an’gel*,” I rasp. Our breathing turns ragged with our eyes closing, our foreheads touching, while our lips are merely a few inches away. Unable to control myself any longer, I kiss her deeply,

pouring every bit of my emotions into it. So does she, as if she has been waiting like me to feel this burning desire.

But I need more.

Grabbing her hips, I hitch her on my lap as her arms wrap around me with her fingers fisting the back of my hair tightly. My cock is trying to set free but my pants are a barrier. Our tongues mingle together, and our lips never separate for a second. My blood roars with need as my hands explore her naked back before they skate down on her luscious ass that I grip possessively.

“Ah!” she moans against my lips, gyrating her hips, turning greedy to get what she wants without embarrassment.

That's my girl.

I nibble her bottom lip, feeling her hands going to my tie, which she loosens. She grabs my collar and presses her chest against mine. I hear the buttons of my shirt flying around the room as she rips apart my shirt with desire possessing her mind. Her nails claw down my skin leaving a soothing burn on my back, which only heightens my craving for her.

“Fuck,” I grunt under my breath, trailing kisses down her jaw to her neck before sucking and licking her pulse point.

“Oh, God! Maxwell.” Throwing her head back, she cries out-loud, still remembering this is her weak point, which always turns her putty in my arms.

“You still look so fucking beautiful when you moan,” I lick my way down from her neck to her cleavage. “This king

missed his queen...did she think of him often?"

"Every. Single. Day," she mutters between the kisses.

I grin and decide to stand up with her in my arms and her legs wrapped around my waist. My cock aches badly, as it wants nothing more than to be inside her tight cunt quickly. Going towards the wall I press her back against it as she drops her legs, pushing the rest of my shirt lower as she leans back and looks at my muscular skin with a hungry gaze. But she lightly grazes the scars formed on my skin from the torture of Rhea and Francisco.

She frowns with sadness clouding her face, but I hold her face urging her to look at me.

I shake my head. "No more sadness, Elysha, no more pain. We have experienced enough of it so far, but not anymore."

"Just as you promised to lay your life for me, I vow to lay down my soul for you, Maxwell. I will protect you because your queen will do everything within her power to protect you this time."

I smile, feeling my chest puffing with pride before I resume kissing her. I move lower towards her chest and pull down the line of fabric covering her breasts which pop free with her nipples erect and rosy. Without wasting another second, I lower my head and suck on her nipples, relishing her cries and moans. Goosebumps cover her skin as my teeth grazes her nipple. I bite down onto her sensitive skin while my free hand squeezes her other breast.

“Oh fuck! Please...please,” she begs as I feel her legs trembling. I hitch one up to keep her balanced while I devour her perfect breasts.

“Please,” she rasps.

“Please, what? Always speak up about what you truly want, *an’gel*. Say it, and I will give it to you happily.”

She whimpers when I pinch her nipples, shutting her eyes and moaning loudly. I grab her by her throat, making her eyes snap open.

“Do not close your eyes. Keep them on me. I want to see every emotion you feel when you come for me, Elysha. I want to see that raw hunger within you...that desperation you feel when you crave my touch, tongue, and cock.”

She bites down on her lip, mewling against my arms, gripping my shoulders.

“Now say it, *an’gel*. Say, you want to be fucked with my fingers while I devour your lips with mine. Say you want your cunt stretched while your juices drip down, staining the floor.”

I nibble her cheek, tightening my grip on her throat as I watch her enjoying this thrilling moment. “Say it,” I order in a raspy voice against her skin.

She breathes achingly before swallowing and licks her lips, as if my words turned her mouth dry and her mind hazy.

“I want to be fucked by your fingers, Maxwell. Fuck me while you devour me and drip the floor with my juices. Fuck

me until I can't think straight. Fuck me hard and raw...claim your queen."

Grabbing the edge of her dress, I hike it up and tear her panties off. I can smell her from here and can't help but grunt under my breath as my fingers get slick instantly with her juices.

I smirk darkly, savoring her warmth as I slide three fingers inside her tight pussy; we both hiss. Holding her jaw, I guide her face towards me in a deep and passionate kiss. My fingers work their magic as I move them back and forth, feeling her tight walls clenching like she doesn't want them gone.

"That's right...clench for me. I wish I can show you how fucking beautiful you look right now. Your skin flushed everywhere...sweat droplets coating your flawless skin. And your eyes drowsy like you are high on pleasure...a pleasure that I control."

I add another finger with my thumb caressing her aching clit, which makes her whole-body shudder. "That's a good girl. Take your pleasure and scream for me."

And she does. Luckily her screams are muffled by the music outside; not many can hear her except me.

I hear the squelching of her cunt as my movements turn vigorous and fast; her legs struggle to stay balanced.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck. Oh God! Maxwell...I..." Her words remain unfinished as I feel her walls twitching as if she is on the verge of coming. But as she reaches her peak point, I pull

back, grinning at her whimper while she looks a tad frustrated by my actions.

“No, don’t stop,” she demands, turning me on even more with her commanding tone. I love it so fucking much when she takes control. “Make me come. Right now.”

I raise my now wet fingers and suck them clean, groaning at the sweet taste of her juices. “You will come for sure, but it will be on my cock, and you shall take my cum like the good girl you are.”

A deep wild hunger makes my blood rush faster, and my nerves pump even more. I hear my heartbeat drumming in my ears as the lust drives me insane. It’s been so long that it felt like an eternity without her touch...her essence...her taste.

Now that I have it, I want it all at once.

Like the possessive bastard I am, I don’t waste any more time and unzip my pants. Taking out my cock and giving it a few strokes. Elysha looks down at it, licking her lips as if she wants nothing more than to have a taste of it. She presses her forehead against mine, keeping her gaze fixed on me, and takes charge by pushing away my hand and taking my cock with her delicate fingers. I close my eyes in ecstasy from her warmth as her thumb swipes the pre-cum oozing from the head.

“Do not hold back, Maxwell. I craved you for all those days from the depth of my body and soul. Every night my body yearned for your touch. And today, just like you, I’m eager to have every part of you. You want to fuck me?”

“Fuck yeah, I do. So badly.”

She smiles wickedly, biting her lip, like the temptress she is. “Then fuck me with everything you’ve got. Fuck me hard that when I leave, I’m sore from the way your thick cock stretched my cunt. Fill me up with your cum that it will ooze down my thighs, and everyone will know what we did, but neither of us gives a fuck about it. *Sdelay menya snova tvoim, Maxwell.*”

Something snaps within me, the leash holding onto my control is loose when she says to make her mine again in Russian. I turn her around in one swift move making her yelp in surprise, pressing her chest against the wall. Getting my tie quickly, I grab her arms, tying them together as they rest at the nape of her back. She tilts her head back to look at me with wanton need. Holding my cock, I give it a few light taps against her bare ass that she pushes against me.

“My queen wants to be fucked hard and raw, then she shall have it.”

With that I thrust inside her warm, tight pussy, making us moan and groan from sensation overload. *Fuck...I missed her so much.*

I hold her by her jaw with one hand, trapping her whole body against mine while I continue fucking her with deep, hard strokes. My other hand grips her ass cheek tightly, making her hiss from the sweet pain before she yelps from the hits I land on her ass. The slapping of our skins fills the room, followed by our heavy breathing and moans.

“Oh, my fucking, God...so good,” she whimpers, twisting her arms to be free but also enjoying the entrapment. “More... *bol'she, Maxwell.*”

I increase my speed as I let out a deep groan, worshiping her sensation.

“Ah! *Tak khorosho,*” I tell her how fucking good she feels. “Your pussy feels so tight...fuck. It's beyond words. The way you are clenching tightly on my cock, I can tell how badly you have wanted this. Isn't that right?”

She mewls in response, to which I lightly slap her cheek.

“I asked a question, Elysha. Always answer,” I groan against her temple.

“Yes...God yes!”

“Posmotri na sebya. Tebya tak sil'no trakhayut, i ty vse yeshche khochesh' bol'shego. Kak moya zhadnaya suka.”

I feel her body drowning deeper into the pool of desire as I tell her how greedy she looks by getting fucked hard by me... just like my greedy slut. “But I have always loved this side of you. Ravenous and demanding...just how my queen should be.”

She cries louder and our moans get louder too. Her cunt starts quivering again, hinting she is getting close, so am I. My cock is weeping for release but she needs to come first. I thrust hard and kiss her, swallowing her cries.

“I can feel you getting close.”

“Ah! Maxwell! Please...please,” she keeps begging.

I keep kissing her fusing, our tongues before removing my hand from her ass and skating it lower to her clit. I rub it fast while fucking her with all my strength and watch her come undone in my arms.

“That’s it. Come for me, Elysha. Come,” I order her, groaning like a beast who is hypnotized by her.

Her moans get muffled against my lips, as her entire body shivers from the wave of her orgasm, hitting her like a trainwreck. After a few more thrusts, I follow her lead and pause, pushing my cock deep inside her cunt, filling it with my come. My mind blanks out for a moment, but I hold Elysha in my arms, knowing she won’t be able to stand for long.

We both remain like this for a few moments. Our kiss turns gentle as we savor this moment.

Interrupting the moment, there is a knock on the door, making our heads snap in that direction. We part ways instantly while Elysha tries to compose herself, and I put on my shirt quickly. Stealthily I take her discarded panties and put them inside my pocket. The knock gets louder as I pass Elysha her mask.

“Hide in the walk-in closet when you don’t hear anyone in the room, then leave,” I instructed her. She nods and starts to walk away, but I grab her arm, pulling her back giving her one last kiss.

“I love you, *an’gel*,” I murmur, caressing her cheek.

She smiles softly. “I love you too. We shall get through this together...it will be over soon.”

I nod while she hides in the walk-in closet. I make my way to open the door. It is Francisco.

“What do you want?” I ask sternly, not in the mood to argue with him. He looks tired and sluggish with his body barely keeping balance. There is no doubt he is drunk.

He stumbles in, pushing me against my chest, but it barely shifts my body. He is weak.

“You were touching her,” he slurs, making me frown.

“Who?” Does he know about Elysha?

“You know fucking well whom I’m referring to,” he points his finger at me with his eyes painted with rage. “You were dancing with Erida and dared to touch her. Who said you were allowed to be even close to her?” He seethes through his clenched teeth while trying to stay stable.

I sigh and shake my head at his stupidity. “Fucking leave. I’ve got better things to do than waste my time arguing with you. *Ostavlvat’.*” I order him to leave and walk around him. But I hear the sound of a soft tick from the safety lock of a gun click off. I know the sight that’s going to greet me without turning around.

Francisco pointing a gun at me.

“Don’t think I won’t fucking shooting you for being a smartass. The more I see you with her, the more I want to shoot you again and again. She is mine! Fucking mine!”

I face him with a bored expression. “Keep her all you want. Trust me I don’t have any inclinations to be in the same room as her-”

“Stop lying! I see how you touch her and look at her as if she means something to you...Y-you keep staring right into her eyes and she stares at yours...she never does that to me... she never...” he blabbers nonsense, but the sadness in his voice is clear. He shakes his head while holding the gun tightly. “I would kill you right now, if I could, but because of her you are alive. Because she fucking needs you to run the Bratva. Don’t think this gives you the chance to be with her for eternity...she belongs to me.”

The more he speaks, the more aggravated he becomes as his index finger presses on the trigger. I’m about to take out my gun and defend myself when my eyes widen at Elysha making her way toward Francisco from behind. My heart skips a beat in utter fear, but what she does next takes me back with surprise. She kicks the back of his legs, making him kneel as he grunts in pain and loses the gun from his grip. He turns around to see his attacker but doesn’t get the chance when Elysha lands a hard punch across his face, making him fall back and lose consciousness. Perhaps, the alcohol must have rendered him weak too, but Elysha’s knockout definitely did the work. And my God, just seeing the sight of her acting like a true queen who protects her king makes me want to fuck her again.

“Are you okay?” she asks, holding my arms.

I nod. “Nothing happened, but you should leave before anyone else comes here.”

She looks down at Francisco and back to me before nodding. “Are you sure you will be alright? I can still get you out of here.”

I smile. “Do you trust me?”

“More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you do.”

CHAPTER 11

ELYSHA

“What do you mean you couldn’t get him out?” Igor seethes through his clenched teeth in a raged tone. I don’t blame him for it. After all, our plan backfired because of some small missing information, the tracker.

He sighs, looking out the window as he is trying to control his rage. Lucifer sits in the driver’s seat and doesn’t utter a word as we drive back to the hotel.

“This was our chance,” Igor muttered.

“I know but we weren’t aware of the tracker. He explained if he went a few miles from the residence, Rhea would be notified of his attempted escape. In addition, we did not bring enough backup to take down her guards. We can still get what we want.”

Igor frowns, looking back at me. “What do you mean?”

From here I elaborate about the plan Maxwell and I discussed briefly, before I left the party. I don’t miss a detail as I watch Igor listening carefully with a neutral expression. By

the time I finish, Lucifer halts the car on the side of the road, looking at us over his shoulder.

“Are you sure this will actually work?” he asks.

“This is the only way. It may take time but, in the end, we will get revenge...the redemption we seek from her.”

Both of them remain silent, contemplating the plan with doubt hinted on their faces.

“Maxwell needs you both in this. Trust him on this as a friend,” I say to Lucifer before looking back at Igor, “as your *Pakhan*. This will work if we all work together.”

They both nod before Igor speaks. “Okay, we will do this for Maxwell. That bitch needs to be taught a lesson and get a taste of her own medicine.”

I simply nod, not wanting to comment further on Igor calling my sister a bitch. We reach the hotel returning to our rooms while our guards stand in the hallway for our protection. After finding Maxwell’s whereabouts, we left on Lucifer’s jet returning to Russia. One of the *Kassirs* helped Igor find the location of Maxwell and gave the entire floor of his hotel to us. For now, it is the only safe place for us. We plan to move to the *Kassir’s* secluded house later to avoid recognition in public. We also brought Catherine along, knowing she would have been alone in Italy, especially how much she misses her son. When I get to my room, I drop my mask on the bed before sitting down, sighing. Untying my hair, I let it fall, curtaining my face. I keep gazing ahead

towards the wall-to-ceiling window overlooking the starry night and distant buildings.

When I left the room for the party, I had it all planned out in my mind. I imagined Maxwell being in my arms after what feels like an eternity. I imagined him kissing me and telling me nothing would break us apart anymore. We both would be in bed, in each other's arms, making up for all the lost time. But none of that happened, and tonight I'm alone. And it's all because of the greed and pride which blinds my sister; she didn't hesitate to take my life.

I let out a shaky breath, running my hands through my hair, feeling exhaustion and loneliness engulfing me.

If only Rhea expressed her feelings and resentment; I would have left her alone and let her have Maxwell. I love her that dearly. She was my only family for whom I fought against demons and monsters to save her. Sometimes I succeeded, and sometimes, we both faced the consequences. But I have always thought of her before myself. After our mother died, I saw how lost and heartbroken she was, and I swore I would do everything in my power to give her a better life.

But fate loves being a bitch to us and putting us through nightmares, which still haunt my dreams. After getting her back after so many years, I finally thought we could have our happily ever after. But if I knew how much she wanted Maxwell, I would have backed away; and let her be with the man she loves. But I wasn't aware it was turning into an obsession when she decided to stab me in the back and remove

me from her life like a thorn in her path. When Maxwell asked me if I was ready to get the revenge that we both needed, I did answer she wouldn't be a problem but deep down, a part of me hesitated with the surety of that answer.

A knock at the door brings me back to reality, opening it, finding Lucifer standing with his hands inside his pockets.

“Mind if I come in?” he asks, nodding inside my room.

I step back, letting him in. Closing the door, I make my way to the mini bar, raising a glass in question if he wants a drink. He nods as I pour us some scotch. While passing the glass to him, he sits by the chairs beside the window.

“Are you alright after what happened tonight?” he asks, taking a sip of his scotch.

I look away and nod while gulping down my scotch because I badly need it to relax for a second.

“You are hesitant about this, aren't you?” I look at him in confusion at his question. “Just keep in mind what she did to you, Elysha. Do not hesitate when the time comes to kill her. When your own blood gets tainted, it can never be turned pure again. Trust me; I know what it feels like when the people you think of as your own, betray you without hesitation.”

“I told Maxwell that I won't hesitate...so I will keep that promise.”

“I hope you do; otherwise, it shall be the downfall of all of us. You have seen the consequences so learn from those mistakes.”

There is silence for a few moments as we enjoy each other's company.

“Did you have a brother?” I question him.

“A step-brother.”

“What happened to him?”

He finishes his drink, refilling it. “That is a story for another time. But I just want you to know to not let your heart control you when the time comes. If you hesitate, she will take the opportunity like she did before. This time you might not have another chance to get saved. Think carefully; before you execute this plan. Think about your redemption.”

I silently listen to his words, feeling sudden anxiety and tension taking control. He is about to take a sip when his phone rings, and when I see a genuine smile stretching across his lips, I can tell it is from Elena. He talks with her, looking relaxed after the chaos he has endured through the day. But my mind returns to Rhea and Maxwell.

I heard what Francisco said about them...and when he mentioned how Maxwell touched her during the dance, I couldn't help feeling a pang of uneasiness within my heart.

Was that an act Maxwell was pulling off to keep up with the façade...or did it mean something else?

* * *

The next morning, just like Maxwell said, I got a call from him.

“Are you alright?” I ask him eagerly, hoping the act I pulled on Francisco last night doesn’t affect him.

“Yeah. Rhea didn’t suspect anything of it,” he keeps his voice down with a hint of wariness and alert in his tone. “Are you alright?”

“Now that I have heard your voice, I’m much better.”

I could feel him smile from the other side, making my heart somersault.

“So, what do you have planned so far?” I ask.

“In three days, there will be cargo coming to the port. There won’t be many guards there, as the dealer trusts Rhea blindly not to screw up. Get ahold of that cargo and tell Lucifer to get it delivered to Italy and sell it to another dealer. I have sent you the information and time through text, tell Igor as well. *An’gel*, I don’t want you there when this happens, but you can inform me when the cargo has been seized.”

My brows furrow in confusion. “What do you mean you don’t want me there?”

“It means I don’t want you anywhere near danger. Just stay safe-”

“No,” I answer sternly, feeling insulted by his words. “You saw how I took down Francisco last night, I can do this too.”

“Francisco and the guards of the cargo won’t be the same. They won’t hesitate to shoot you or do worse things to you.” I know what he is implying but he doesn’t want to be too unsympathetic as he knows I have been through worse. “I just got you back and I don’t want to lose you again,” the misery in his voice is clear, which makes my heart sting with pain, “just listen to me and stay-”

“No, Maxwell. You call me your queen and I will prove to you that *I am a queen*; who doesn’t hide like a coward when it’s time to fight for herself. I am strong enough to take them down and steal the cargo. I may have kept this violent side of me hidden for all these years, but I feel I don’t carry such power. I will prove to you and myself that I am stronger than Rhea.”

Before he can argue further, I hang up, feeling a tad frustrated from our conversation.

I won’t hide anymore. I won’t be a damsel in distress.

I won’t be a coward.

My phone rings again with Maxwell’s name glowing on the screen. But I cut the call, not wanting to argue with him. Instead, my mind walks through a lane of memories, choosing when I lost Maxwell for the first time...the day I lost myself as well.

No. No. Please God. I beg you, God.

Don’t take him away from me...please don’t.

Those dark eyes filled with loss and sorrow will always be inked in my memory. His unconscious shirtless body, covered with blood and cuts, will always haunt me. He suffered because of me. It's my fault.

I did this...I'm to blame for his agony.

I still had a glimmer of hope that he survived, that maybe he was alive and saved by the Russian army on that train. Deep within, I wanted to grasp onto that faith and never let go, but I couldn't deny that it was a blind path I was holding on.

It was sunrise when the door to my room suddenly opened, and Rhea entered with a worried expression painted on her face. Without thinking, I got up from my bed and rushed towards her, wrapping my arms around her tightly like she was my only lifeline.

I couldn't help but sob in her arms while her hand ran gently down my hair.

"Shhh, Elysha. Shhh. It's okay, everything will be okay," she whispered. Nothing will ever be okay.

I furiously shook my head before leaning back to meet her gaze as the tears continued their journey down my cheeks.

"I-I don't know how they found us...I-I," I gulped in deep breaths, "He has been hurt, P-Petro hurt him so badly and then they shot him and h-he," I stuttered, unable to finish my words as the scenario flashed through my mind.

Rhea's face suddenly changed from worried to shocked. Her own eyes started to glisten as if she could feel the pain I was experiencing.

"W-what..What are you saying?" she asked in a hushed voice.

"One of Petro's men shot him and by the time the train arrived he was laying on the ground...his blood pooling around his body."

She inhaled a shaky breath with her lips parted, shaking her head gently, she held onto the door frame as her legs gave out, and she kneeled on the floor. When she blinked, the tears finally emerged and streaked her face with the droplets falling on her hands. I kneeled beside her and cupped her face with fear crawling its way to my heart.

"Rhea," I whispered, shaking her shoulders gently. But she was still like a lifeless statue with her eyes fixated on the floor.

"Rhea." I moved her again, begging her to respond.

"He is...dead," she muttered with emotionless and hopelessness inking her tone.

"No! No, he can't be dead. I saw the train stopping. The Russian soldiers could have seen him and saved him by now," I said those words to myself more than to her.

Rhea frowned, meeting my eyes. "And what if he is dead before they could treat him?" She brings up the inevitable

question that was wrecking my last hope, bit by bit, but I tried my best to stop myself from crumbling.

“He has to be alive. And when he heals, he will come back for us.”

She let out a heartless laugh that made my skin prickle with goosebumps.

“You’ve always lived in a fairytale. No matter what happens, you still look for the slightest flicker of hope...living with faith that happily ever after exists. But you witnessed him dying, and deep within, you know he is gone,” she muttered. I covered my ears with my hands and shook my head.

“No, no, no, no. He promised. He swore that he would be with me.”

Rhea grasped my hands pulling them away before glaring at me.

“Face it, Elysha!” she snarled. “He is dead and he is never coming back because he no longer exists. The only chance for his existence will be in our memories.”

Abruptly, a heavy pair of footsteps echo in the hallway, alerting us of those monsters’ arrival. We quickly got up and held onto each other like we always did, protecting each other. Their shadows are reflected in the dimly lit hallway until it casted upon us like darkness marking us.

“You fucking slut,” one of them sneered before grabbing Rhea and pulling her away from me.

“No! Don’t touch her!” I shrieked and did something I haven’t done before. I grabbed the nearest candle stand and hit his face with it. Groaning out loud in pain, he staggered back, falling on the ground while holding onto his wound.

“Ah! Fuck!” he yelled but recovered quickly and before I could land another hit on him, he snatched it away from me. The other monster grabbed Rhea and took her away by carrying her in his arms.

“No! Let her go!” I screamed and rushed to help her. I’ve nearly lost someone for not stepping up, there was no way I was going to lose my sister too. Before I could reach her, I was pulled back by my hair with my face being smacked against the wall. The excruciating pain nearly made my vision blurry.

“Both of you ruined everything. Because of you, now Petro is dead,” he snarled, tightening his hold on my hair.

“Both of you will pay for it.” The promise behind his words were clear as daylight. “By pain and by death.”

My entire body shivered from fear like a bucket of ice water being poured all over me. His last words felt like spikes poked into my soul. He has promised pain and death for Rhea and I. How we received pain or death was a mystery I wasn’t willing to discover. Grasping my hair, he dragged me out of the room towards the main hall room; there were lit candles on the altar. Pushing me down to the ground, he picked up one of the candles with its flame kindling the tip. Before I could protest, he pressed the candle against my arm, burning my

skin. I couldn't help but scream out loud in pain, with my eyes burning from tears.

"Ah! God!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, even though I knew nobody was coming to save me. I was absolutely helpless and a captive of agony.

The burn spread deep into my bones with my nerves aching like never before, while the dying smoke diffused into the air. "It's just the beginning, you little whore. You have so much more to endure."

I didn't doubt his words for a second. I knew my days were turning much worse than I'd imagined, even in my nightmares.

CHAPTER 12

RHEA

A knock on my office door makes me look up, I find Francisco at the doorway with a tired look, and a bruised cheek.

“The car is ready to take us to the meeting,” he informs.

I nod, putting away some of the documents I signed inside my desk drawer, before I stand up. “Is Maxwell ready?”

I open my small, compact mirror checking my makeup and hair, pushing a few loose strands behind my ear, when I realize Francisco doesn't answer my question.

“I asked you something, Francisco,” I remind him, only getting silence as his response. I look at him from the corner of my eye, witnessing annoyance and rage painting his face, and I am aware of the reason behind it.

“Is there something you want to say?” I implore, putting away my compact mirror on the desk and slipping into my long dark brown coat; while sauntering towards him. He remains quiet, his gaze never meeting mine.

I cup his face, watching the raspy sigh leaving his lips as he closes his eyes like he is delighting in my touch.

“What’s wrong? What has been bothering you so much?” I ask him in a sweet and gentle tone, trying to make him dance to my tune like the puppet he is.

“You have attended meetings before you let Maxwell out of his imprisonment. Why include him now?”

“Because he is sharing the power of a Pakhan with me and he has to be included.”

“I can join you if you need an extra bodyguard, but there is no need to take him as well,” he argues, grasping my wrists. “You never know he can turn your clients against you.”

I sigh, rolling my eyes. “And how will he achieve that, while I’m in the same room?”

His silence justifies my point, but it’s clear he doesn’t want Maxwell anywhere near me.

“I have told you before, and I’m telling you again, there is nothing to worry about. When I finally get everyone on my side, he will have no use then he can face death. Just a few more months, until then, keep your emotions under control. At this point, it is irritating, watching you act like a stubborn child. You are a man, so act like one.”

“What I’m doing is all for your own good-”

“Which I can take care of, all by myself,” I interrupt him, leaning closer as I try to sweeten our conversation, pressing my breasts against his chest and caressing his jawline. His tense body relaxes against my touch as he wraps his arms around my waist.

“Don’t include him in this meeting...there is no point because, at the end of the day, you are the true ruler of the Bratva.”

I smile and kiss him swiftly. “I’m flattered you think of me like that but I can deal with him, so stop worrying.”

I plant another kiss, this time deeply, to distract his mind.

Someone clears their throat, making me pull away from Francisco, and look over his shoulder. It is Maxwell carrying a bored and monotonous expression from our interaction. He is in a black suit with a matching shirt and pants, with a gray tie hanging from his neck, enhancing his broad and muscular shoulders even more. He also wears a long, gray trench coat reaching his knees, with all the buttons kept open. A watch rests on his wrist; as he places it inside his coat’s pocket while my gaze admires his veined hands that I badly want on me. His dark black hair is slightly tousled, and I can’t help but imagine my fingers running through his strands.

God. Is there not a single day this man doesn’t look like a Greek God?

“If you two are done with your Romeo and Juliet moment, I think it’s best we leave for the meeting,” he mutters before turning and walking away to the front door.

“Fucking asshole,” Francisco curses under his breath with his gaze narrowed at Maxwell’s direction.

“I should go,” I murmur and with one last peck on his lips, I walk away.

I get in the car and find the passenger seat empty. *Where did Maxwell go?*

“Where is Maxwell?” I asked my driver.

“He is taking another car, Ma’am,” he answers.

I step back, seeing a black BMW in front of my car, and before I can head towards it, I hear the engine starting as it drives away.

I feel frustration clouding me by Maxwell’s ignorance towards me again. I get inside the car, ordering the driver to take me to my destination. Throughout the drive my frustration turns from annoyance to anger. Every time I think I’m getting closer to Maxwell’s heart, he builds up walls around him, keeping me far beyond its boundaries.

I try to show him how capable I am and how much stronger I am than he ever was, and yet it is never enough... not even close enough to make my way through those walls that hit me with rejection again and again.

What do I truly need to do to show him how much I love him?

The car stops at the Central Moscow Hippodrome and one of the guards by the gateway opens my door. Presenting his hand for me, he helps me get out before shutting the door behind me. My guards get out of their cars as well before they follow me. As I take the snow-covered stairs, I see Maxwell standing at the doorway with his guards. We both enter the

building together, going to the second-floor, where the meeting is in the manager's office.

When we get inside, the people we are meeting are present in the room, they stand up to greet us. But one of them doesn't as he stays rooted to his seat. Mr. Welsh comes towards me with a slightly nervous smile, offering his hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Erida."

I nod, shaking his hand.

His gaze shifts to Maxwell and he offers him the same gesture. "You too, Maxwell."

He answers him with silence, making Mr. Welsh pull away his hand with a low chuckle. He looks over his shoulder gesturing with his hand to the two men behind him. "These are my sons."

The man with dark brown hair in a gray suit, steps forward with a proud smile. "This is Benett, my older son."

"I have heard great things about you both." The usual typical praising method.

"And this is my younger son, Philip," Mr. Welsh gestures towards the man, or I would rather say the boy, who still doesn't get up from his seat. He looks almost identical to his father and wears a royal blue suit, as if he wanted to stand out more in the room based on appearance. Well, his attitude is gaining him attention too.

"Philip," Mr. Welsh whispered his name through his clenched teeth as a warning. The boy doesn't give a single

fuck.

“I think we should start our meeting rather than wasting time on the meet and greet,” Maxwell mutters.

“Of course,” Mr. Welsh replies and everyone starts to take their seats at the round table.

I pass my coat to one of my guards before sitting down and crossing my legs. Maxwell sits beside me like he usually does during our meetings.

“You may begin, Mr. Welsh,” I murmur.

“Of course. William,” he mutters one of his guard’s name, who comes forward passing him two files.

“These files contain detailed information you will need regarding our goods, such as: locations, prices, warranties, and regions we export from. Everything.”

He nods at Benett, who stands and gestures to his guards to bring a heavy wooden box forward, before they set it on the table. Benett opens it and takes out the weaponries, which we plan to buy.

Usually, these meetings are handled by Francisco but this is my first time I am attending a major arrangement. I trust Francisco to handle these arrangements, he is decent with negotiating, but this time, I want to take a stance.

This is my kingdom. After all, it is my right to rule and deal.

MAXWELL

Benett takes out a Kalashnikov assault rifle, loading the bullets and readying them easily. So, it is clear he knows what he is doing very well.

“It’s an automatic gun, with fewer chances of blocking or jamming easily after several rounds. There are mostly automatics on the black market, but we produce better ones,” Benett explains. He demonstrates this by holding the gun and shooting a target board at the corner of the room, which must have been here before.

It shoots perfectly and smoothly. As far as I remember, this was highly in demand during the 1990s by the Bratva. But its production was suddenly closed, and we had to purchase most from the black market at a high price, and not all were authentic. However, the one Benett is showing has my attention.

“We have thousands in our warehouse. Each piece will cost thirty-one thousand dollars,” he adds. That is almost one-million-dollars for a shipment of rifles. Reasonably priced due to its features and quality.

I open my mouth asking for more details when Rhea interrupts.

“That’s very expensive for a rifle,” she argues, making me frown.

Where is she going with this?

Benett looks at his father who looks equally confused. “Umm, this rifle has not been in production in the usual markets for years. We are making it more affordable and convenient for Bratva.”

She shrugs. “We have better weapons at our warehouses with better pricing. What makes yours different?”

Fuck. She did not say that.

I rub my forehead, shaking my head in annoyance.

“If you don’t want to buy them, then say it,” Philip retorts from his seat, his eyes narrowing with a bored look plastering his face.

“Philip,” Mr. Welsh warns him but none of his threats reach his stubborn son’s ears.

“I would if your weapons looked more promising,” Rhea argues with a hint of displeasure and wrath in her tone.

Philip rolls his eyes and chuckles, leaning forward as if he is trying to push Rhea’s buttons. “At least it’s more promising than your fake ass leadership. You aren’t the boss here it’s clear as fuck, so why don’t you shut up and let the men do the talking.”

“Philip! That’s enough!” Benett reprimands him but Philip’s taunting eyes never leave Rhea’s fire-filled ones.

I could see her whole body trembling from anger. “Don’t forget it was you and your father who came to us. We didn’t beg for a deal. And you stay out of it because from that

pathetic attitude it's *clear as fuck* that you aren't even worthy of being in this room," she snarls at Phillip.

Philip stands up, slapping his hands loudly on the table. "How dare you-"

"That's enough," my authoritative deep voice booms throughout the room, making everyone quiet. "Stop with this back-and-forth bickering like you are children," I look at Philip with a threatening cold look, which his expression falters seeing the seriousness of my face, "I have dealt with enough little shits like you to know you are here for nothing more, but to bicker and nag like spoiled brats. You dishonor us here with your arguments. Fucking stop and shut your mouth, before I decide to use the same rifle your brother is holding to silence you forever."

He gulps, looking scared for the first time and stares at his father for protection, which makes me snicker darkly. "Boy trust me, even your father won't be able to save you. This is my kingdom; my word is law. Your father and brother won't go against me. Don't think about testing me. Sit the fuck down."

He sits instantly, looking away from fear and embarrassment.

"I apologize on my son's behalf-" I raise my hand stopping Mr. Welsh's words.

"You didn't make the mistake, he did. So, he needs to apologize," I look at Philip who is still scared to meet my eyes.

“I-I apologize,” he whispers.

“You can do better, boy,” I warned him silently.

“I apologize that I insulted you, and Ma’am it won’t happen again.”

“Good.” I let a victorious and dark grin spread across my lips. “Now, let’s discuss your offer and specifics on the rifles. We intend on buying them and we’ll help you obtain more dealers. In exchange, I want a seventy percent cut from the offers.”

“But seventy is-”

“I wasn’t asking,” I cut in before he finished his sentence. “Keep arguing, and I will make it eighty. Take it or leave it.”

I am known for my cruelty and power. Despite Rhea stabbing me in the back and betraying me, it doesn’t mean I forgot my identity. I was born to rule, and I will carry that trait ‘til my last breath. No enemy would ever be fortunate enough to take that away from me.

No one.

“We accept,” Bennett agrees to my deal. “But we also have a condition.”

“Feel free to speak up,” I mutter with a relaxed smile because unlike his brother, he isn’t stupid as fuck.

“We need a new warehouse in Russia to expand our productions. You are the Pakhan, I’m sure you can make this happen.”

Pretty smart indeed.

“Done. Anything else?” I ask everyone. “No? Then the meeting is dismissed.” I clap my hands and get up.

“Pleasure doing business with you,” I mutter as I pat Mr. Welsh’s shoulder, before leaving the room.

I hear the tapping sound of Rhea’s heels behind me. I can tell she is infuriated with how I handled the meeting, all by myself, but she doesn’t know what damage she is causing with her idiocy.

I get inside my car with Rhea joining this time. *Fucking great.*

The second the door shuts, she loses her shit.

“Why the fuck did you do that?” she screams as she faces me. “I’m Pakhan too. It’s not just you. I’m the leader-”

“Well, you didn’t act like one. What were you thinking about while arguing with him without reason?”

“Without reason?” she scoffs. “That fucker insulted me, and made me look like a joke in front of everyone in that room. I thought we were a team and would handle the situation together.”

“From my perspective, you weren’t *handling* the situation. There was no teamwork from your side because a fucking boy was trying to get on your nerves, and instead of thinking calmly, you joined him in bickering,” I retort as my nostrils flare with immense rage.

“What did you expect me to do? Be quiet?”

“I expected you to be smarter.”

She rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “You are saying this because you weren’t the one being insulted.”

“People will always insult you. Maybe this is the first time for you, but I have been insulted countless times. But unlike you I don’t start nagging about it. Here words mean shit to everyone. Nobody, and I fucking mean *nobody*, will trust you based on your words. It has to be proven through your actions. You let your pride take over your sanity and brought this disaster on yourself.”

She listens to me silently, opening and closing her mouth as if she wants to argue more but can’t find sufficient words.

“I tried negotiating as well, but you took over-”

“That wasn’t negotiating. I have more experience and knowledge on firearms than you. I knew the deal was valuable and it would have been stupid to let it go. Next time, use your brain for thinking instead of creating a dispute.” I dismiss our conversation as I sit back, facing the window as we drive back to the residence.

What happened today may have been an unintentional move, but I am glad this showed everyone I am still the King of Russia. My plans to make Rhea’s men doubt her abilities will work as more mistakes like this are made. Once they see their error of making her a *Pakhan*, they will have no choice but to revolt against her.

And today is that first step.

The first step towards redemption.

CHAPTER 13

MAXWELL

“Sounds like that was one hell of a meeting,” I hear Elysha’s voice on the other end of the call, which only makes me grin as I tell her what happened today.

“It was. It is good to attend meetings again and show everyone the power I still hold.”

“I could tell and if I was there, I would be impressed too.” There is a hint of teasing in her voice, which makes my blood pump faster.

“Why? Does my power turn you on?” I whisper, leaning back against the headboard. My eyes glance at the doorway for a moment making sure nobody is listening.

“It does more than just turn me on. I only imagine you using that dominance on my whole body and controlling my pleasure like you own every inch of me.”

“Fuck, *an’gel*. Don’t say things like that when you are miles away from me. It’s been only a few days but I miss your touch already. Only if I could show you the things I would do to you,” I rasp, feeling my cock starting to ache already.

“Then tell me, Maxwell,” she mutters in a sultry tone, setting my nerves on hellfire. “Tell me what you would do.”

So bold. I fucking love it.

Feeling up for this little game, I get myself comfortable, touching my already hard cock, which begs to be released.

“What is my girl wearing?”

“Who says I’m wearing anything?” Her challenging and teasing voice is enough to drive me insane, especially when I can practically picture her naked on the bed, spread like a meal for me to devour like a hungry beast.

“Spread your legs. Now,” I order with a deep and gruff tone, knowing it turns her on more than anything.

I hear her mewling in need. “Close your eyes and imagine me standing at the foot of the bed, watching you like a predator.”

“Yes,” she whispers.

“I pull my cock free, stroking myself, getting it ready to fuck that tight cunt of yours. You will feel stretched and full very soon. Does this make you wet?”

“Oh God, yes,” she moans. “I need you so badly. My pussy is so wet that I’m sure I will soak the bed sheets.”

Fucking hell.

“I’m touching myself, thinking of your cock thrusting in and out as soon as you claim me.”

I am stroking my cock, wrapping my hand around it tightly, with pre-come oozing that I smear on my skin. My breathing turns uneven as my pulse starts to speed up, with my heartbeat drumming against my ears. “I will claim you, *an’gel*. But first, get that cunt ready. Fuck yourself with your fingers.”

“Ah! Maxwell, please, I will come right away,” she whimpers.

“My girl will come when I tell her to. Trust me, I’m already jealous that your fingers get to be inside you and not my cock, because that cunt is mine. At this moment I get to control your orgasm. Do it, *an’gel*, finger-fuck yourself.”

When I hear her moans getting louder, I can imagine her cunt stretching and getting wetter by her fingers. My motion also turns faster, but I keep my release in control even though my balls are aching. Though I can take a wild guess and say, she didn’t put enough in her to bring herself to the brim.

“Put four fingers in, *an’gel*. You can do better than just one or two,” I groan.

Elysha gasps as if surprised. I am sure of what she is doing. Nonetheless, she complies and whimpers; through the call, I can hear the squelching sound of her wet pussy.

“Yes, that’s good. That’s my good girl. Push those fingers deeper, up to your knuckles.”

“Please, Maxwell,” she begs, I can tell she is getting very close to coming, but not yet.

“My good girl can take it. Do it, *an’gel*.”

“Fuck. Ah!” Her cries are music to my ears, while I grunt and hiss through my rasped breaths, with my cock rock hard.

“Yes, you are doing so good. Get yourself ready. Are your fingers fully soaked?”

“Yes,” she whispers, silently begging me to make her come.

“Good girl. Now smear your juices on your greedy little clit and swollen lips, and stroke faster.”

“I can’t take it anymore, Maxwell. I need you.”

“I’m with you, *an’gel*. I would be licking and sucking that cunt raw, if I was there. Instead of your fingers it would be my tongue and lips as I sucked on your clit, and later fucking that pussy with my tongue.”

“Fucking God! Yes! Yes!”

“I would devour you like a hungry predator about to take their prey. Fuck, I would give anything to taste that sweet pussy as you writhe underneath me, begging and yearning for me,” I grunt, stroking harder.

“Please, more, Maxwell. More,” she pleads.

“I would give you more. After I’m done with eating out your wet aching cunt, I would glide my hard cock against those swollen lips, before thrusting inside you. It will be raw, deep, and fast. And you will take it like the good girl you are.”

“Yes! Please, give it to me.” The pure pleasure in her voice is clear. My blood is roaring with desire as I feel myself

getting close to ecstasy. “Fuck me harder, Maxwell. Claim me. Remind me, I only belong to you.”

“Fuck, yes, you do. You are my queen. Only mine.” My hips start to buck up, my hand pumping my cock faster and faster, with more pre-come coating my skin.

“I’m so close. Oh God!”

“How much I yearn to feel your tight cunt squeezing my cock, as I fuck you, draining the come out of me as I fill you with it.”

She cries out loud, I am sure someone could hear her from outside but she doesn’t care.

“You will take my come, won’t you?”

“Yes, yes, yes. I would.” She whines with pleasure clouding her heart and soul.

“I would make you feel so full that if it leaked out, I would push it back in, so you would know a part of me is still inside you.”

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. I’m going to come.

“Rub that clit faster, *an’gel*. Get ready to come.”

“Oh God! Yes, please. I’m so ready. I can’t hold back.” It is evident she is telling the truth and it only sparks my desire more.

“Yes, come for me now.”

I hear her screaming as she finds her release, while I imagine her arching her back and throwing her head back. Her

whole-body trembling as her skin flushes from adrenaline and sweat coating her body. That sight is enough to make me reach euphoria, with my come spilling out and coating my abs as I drain out the last drops. I groan out loud, not giving a fuck if, by now, the guards in the hallway can hear me.

A few seconds pass, when I feel my mind and body returning to reality. I grab some tissues from the side table and clean myself up. I can hear Elysha's heavy breathing, which is starting to turn even. I can only wish she were here with me so I could bring her close in my arms, caressing her hair as she rests her head on my chest, with our bodies keeping each other warm and sated.

Knowing it is impossible, at the moment, I feel a sudden loneliness shadowing my heart, which is consumed with pain and isolation.

"I wish we were together now," she mutters, sharing the same feeling I am enduring.

"I know, *an'gel*, but for now because of the thorn in our path we can't be together."

She lets out a dejected sigh. "I understand. It's just I wish we never had to be in this situation in the first place. I just wish that Rhea never..."

I am aware of what she means to say, even without her finishing her sentence. She and I wish Rhea never poisoned our lives.

"Is everything prepared for tomorrow?" I ask her.

“Yeah. Everything will be set in the afternoon. Igor will send you a text after the job is done.”

I nod. “Good. You stay safe and don’t get involved in this. I don’t want you anywhere near danger.”

She remains silent before she hums her response. I knew she was pissed about this, but after losing her once, I didn’t want to take any chances of putting her life at risk again. The torment I endured, knowing she was never coming back, were the worst days of my life, and I wish to never experience it again.

“Maxwell?” she murmurs.

“Yes, *an’gel*.”

“Do you trust me?” she asked with longing in her tone.

I smile softly. “More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you do.”

ELYSHA

I switch the safety lock off on the gun, ensuring everything is ready and prepared. Igor and Lucifer are getting ready as we drive to the port, where the cargo will arrive in an hour. I zip up my black, tight jacket over my black tank top with matching pants and boots. I wear my hair tied in a ponytail.

We have the weapons and guards ready for our attack. The plan is to steal the cargo on the ship, and sell them in Lucifer's territory. This will cause the members of the Bratva to believe she is involved with the Italian mafia as well.

A *Pakhan* who may not be loyal is not tolerated nor appreciated in the Bratva.

"Are you sure about this?" Igor asks me in a concerned tone.

I nod, looking fierce and determined in my decision. "I'm sure about this. If anything happens, don't worry. I won't blame it on both of you because I'm responsible for my own choices."

"I don't know why Maxwell didn't inform me that you would be involved in this," he mutters.

I keep my eyes glued onto my gun, pretending to check my aim properly, while I notice Lucifer's skeptical gaze on me. I can tell he knows what I must have done to be here today. I am well aware that if I let Igor talk to Maxwell, he wouldn't hesitate to order Igor to keep me caged in the house. There is no fucking way I am staying back to be the damsel in distress; this is my battle too. I lied to Igor, telling him Maxwell gave me the green light to join him and Lucifer. This was the only way I could come and keep it hidden from Maxwell. Especially since he asked me about the plans last night and requested, I stay out of danger. I feel like I am betraying him by omitting the truth from him, but I also have no other choice.

Soon the car is stopping at the corner of a building by the port. We get out and start taking our positions: Igor stays with me, our backs against the rough walls, while Lucifer and his men take their positions on the rooftop of the building, as our overwatch.

It is night time making it slightly tough to see the dock, but the streetlight is enough to see the cargo coming closer. It is full of several and vast containers like Maxwell said it would be. Looking over my shoulder, I nod to Igor as he signals his men to get ready. My heart starts pounding faster with adrenaline rushing through my body. I try to calm myself and think thoroughly, but in this intense situation it is difficult.

The cargo stops at its designated spot with men starting to step out. They prepare to take out the packages they have, while keeping their guard with guns in their hands.

“I will go in first,” I inform Igor in a hushed voice. Before he can protest, I head forward and hide behind empty wooden boxes. Luckily, they don’t see me, and I signal for Igor to join me.

“Lucifer just texted, he sees eight more people at the deck,” Igor lets me know.

“Tell him to use the snipers he has to take them down and use silencers on their weapons as well. I see only a few people working to get the containers off the ship, they will be outnumbered easily,” I guide him, while Igor gives the instructions to Lucifer.

We wait until we get the all-clear signal from Lucifer.

This is the chance.

“Let’s go,” I tell him.

Instantly the silence no longer exists; bullets are shot from both sides. Thankfully Lucifer’s men guard us when we get in the line of danger, and by the time we get to the dock, most of them are killed.

I feel breathless from the chaos. When we take down the last man, I can’t help but to smile victoriously looking at Igor, who looks equally pleased. We don’t waste time and hurry onto the ship, going towards the deck area through the stairs, when suddenly gunshots ring out, with some hitting the railings.

Fuck.

“Elysha, get back, get back,” Igor screams at me, grabbing my arm and pulling me back rapidly.

We take a safe position in a corner with our backs against the wall as the bullets keep raining like hellfire.

“Fuck, I didn’t know there were more men inside,” Igor curses, shaking his head.

I tried thinking of a plan to lure them to our target, and getting them out of the way. That’s when an idea hits me. At some point, they will need to pause and load their guns, that is when we need to attack them at full charge. I tell Igor about my plan and he nods, trusting my instincts. A trolley full of boxes by the corner catches my sight, I instruct one of the guards to pass it to me. Holding onto the handles, I give it a

push as I think the attackers might mistake it for us, and they waste their bullets on the empty boxes. When I hear the clicks of their guns' hammer as they fumble for their magazine to reload, I signal to Igor.

Rapidly we rush up the stairs and aim to shoot, as I watch the men around me falling to the ground with blood pooling around them. Some had knives but before they could raise them, it was too late. It only takes us a few minutes to make the whole place look like a crime scene, with dead bodies lying around.

“I think that is it,” I mutter, breathing heavily as we look around ensuring there are no survivors.

“Yeah, I think so too. Let's get the containers, as quick as possible,” Igor says and orders his men to start getting to work. He texts Lucifer to send his men for extra help and heads downstairs. Soon the trucks are loaded with the packages of cocaine, heroin and meth. Our men worked quickly, sweeping away every last trace of the packages, until nothing but vacant containers were left.

Watching our plan succeed, I feel this wave of pride washing over me, with boldness making my chest puff up.

I did it.

I actually did it.

This is my first time participating in a dangerous, thrilling, and vicious action. The adrenaline only pumps up my nerves, making my stomach jitter with an unknown euphoria that I

have never felt before. A sudden thought passes me, and I call out for some guards and direct them to help me set an example for our enemy. I want Rhea to witness that I wasn't afraid of consequences anymore. I wasn't weak or fragile like she took me to be.

I have ferocity hidden deep down the caves of my heart, which I have never let out. It was always kept in the dark where I thought it belonged, but not anymore. Not this time. I will show her what a real threat is...what being feared means.

The goddess will finally see the ultimate power and viciousness a queen holds when protecting her king and herself.

When we are done, my hands are coated with blood, with a few staining my dress as well. A long time ago, this sight would have made me feel guilty or sick. But now, I wear it like a souvenir...a mark that reflects the dangerous and dark side of this queen.

This night has been a thrilling first experience and certainly won't be the last.

"Elysha what have you done?" Igor's voice carries both astonishment and anxiousness as he sees the horrendous view in front of him.

"Just leaving my mark. Letting her know, it's time to start fearing me."

"This wasn't part of our plan," he curses, grabbing my arm and looking at me like I have lost my mind, but I don't care.

I smile sweetly, offering him a nod. “You are right. It wasn’t part of our plan, but it is a part of *mine*.”

He frowns. “This isn’t safe, Elysha. We shouldn’t risk more when we are playing this game with all our lives on the line.”

“There is no fun in a game when risks aren’t included, that’s what makes it better. This is me taking risks and having fun, showing Rhea who I am.”

Igor turns silent for a few seconds with a cynical expression clouding his face. I can sense his mind running wild with questions, but for now, he doesn’t seem to be in the mood to argue.

“We should leave,” Igor mutters grimly.

After ensuring we have everything, we start evacuating the docks, including Lucifer and a few of his men from the building’s rooftop. The trucks drive away to their designated places. As we leave the dock a security camera on the streetlight catches my sight. I stand in front of it, almost thinking to let Rhea see her worst nightmare coming back. But added suspense would be so much more fun.

Raising my gun, I aim at it, and shoot.

BANG!

CHAPTER 14

RHEA

Gruesome. Vile. Chilling.

That's how I would describe the sight in front of me. The stench of the dead bodies that lie around is so foul that I am almost on the verge of puking the longer I stay.

When I got a call, early in the morning, regarding an emergency at the shipping port, this wasn't what I expected.

Lifeless bodies cover the dock of the ship with the floor now coated with nothing but blood. Most of them have bullet wounds, telling me they had a quick death. But even after their deaths, they suffered more torture.

Some had brutal wounds while others didn't have their arms, legs or heads. The limbs were probably thrown into the ocean. Their naked skin is covered in blood with deep knife cuts on their chest and a bloody message written for me.

START BREATHING IN FEAR.

I gulp deeply, licking my dry lips, turning around, and try my best to stop seeing the message flashing in front of my eyes. I head to see the empty containers filled, mostly with

snow. I run a hand through my hair, with tension fueling my nerves as I grit my teeth from rage.

“Any clues that might tell us who was behind this?” I asked one of my men, who simply shook his head.

“We searched before your arrival, Ma’am, but they didn’t leave a trace. The security cameras were also shot down.”

My gaze casts down to the snow covering the dock, which is now crimson from so much blood. I dig my boots deeper, crushing the snow, wishing it was my enemy’s head underneath my feet.

“Don’t let anyone know about this until we catch the culprit,” I state before facing my men with a look of warning. “And if I find anyone talking about it, then you all will end up like those dead bodies over there.”

They simply nod with nervousness hovering their faces. I walk away, suppressing the urge to kill someone just to take my anger out. When I get close to the car, the driver comes forward to open the passenger door, but instead I go to the front, ordering him to give me the keys. I need time to myself to think through this disaster.

Without caring, I drive at full speed with my hands holding the steering wheel in a tight grip. My mind runs wild with flashes of those dead bodies flooding my sight, especially that message.

START BREATHING IN FEAR.

I bid farewell to fear long ago, getting rid of it from my life like it never existed. I have been afraid of darkness many times in my life, but this time, that gruesome scenario is enough to tell me my enemy is merciless. I try to breathe evenly, but I feel my throat tightening from anxiety that makes me press on the brakes suddenly, with the car halting in the middle of an empty road. I quickly get out, inhaling and exhaling deeply. Unable to hold back, I let out a scream of wrath. I comb my fingers through my scalp, holding it in place allowing myself to calm down.

There is no doubt; this heist was more than just stealing the cargo and killing those men. That message means more than a threat. It is a sign...a sign that my enemy wants to know that my throne and my kingdom are at risk of being taken from me.

I have to get those packages back before my dealer, who trusts me with his cargo, finds out and starts blabbering about it to other members in Bratva. Especially, after what I did at the meeting, resulting in Maxwell taking charge. People are starting to doubt me.

Nobody, I mean *nobody*, can make me look like a weak and useless woman, because Erida wasn't born to be thrown away from the kingdom she worked her ass off to get into.

Whoever brought this disaster upon me will pay with their miserable lives. They will experience a living nightmare that even death will seem like an easy escape.

* * *

“Are you sure there was no one around at that time? Not even a passerby, who could have seen it?” I ask Francisco, who shakes his head as his response.

Tilting my head down, I breathe deeply and close my eyes. However, it proves futile; as I thrash away all the files, papers, and decors on my marble desk.

“Fuck!” I yell, pinching my temples as I walk back and forth in my office. It’s been fucking five days, and there are no signs of finding any traces of my enemy. I’ve had calls from my dealer, but so far, I’m ignoring him, not in the mood to deal with his shit.

I am aware I can’t keep up with ignorance. After all, his five-million-dollar worth of goods are at stake.

“Hey, you should try to relax,” Francisco mutters softly, coming behind me and rubbing my shoulders. I push away his hands irritably.

“I can’t fucking relax, Francisco. If you were in my place, then you would not be so unbothered. As a woman, *Pakhan* too, this is a matter of my honor and pride that I hold in the Bratva. I have worked day and night for it, and I won’t let a fucking random asshole ruin it for me,” I hiss through my clenched teeth.

I rub my face, letting out a silent sigh, with silence dawning upon us.

“We have tried everything, Erida,” he starts, casting a concerned look at me. “I searched the cargo ship again and

again, including the port area. I have tried my best.”

I let out a dry laugh, placing my hands on my hips. “Well, it seems like you didn’t try hard enough. I’m not getting the results I want!” I reprimand him, ignoring the hurt coursing in his eyes.

For fuck’s sake. I’m surrounded by a bunch of whiny pussies.

“Just leave me alone,” I tell him with a dismissive drift in my voice. When his footsteps echo away from the room, I let out an exasperated and tired sigh.

I told Maxwell about it, as well, but he wasn’t much help. All he said was that’s what I get for not including him in a shipment plan. I didn’t bother informing him about this, as it was fixed before him and I joined positions. Being in Bratva meant there would be enemies and I am prepared to deal with them, but this new enemy is definitely someone I wasn’t ready for.

Deciding to take a few minutes off, I walk out of the room and look for Maxwell. Through the guards I find he is underground taking care of a recent “issue”. I head there, when in the dark hallway, I hear faint grunting sounds getting louder the closer I get. When I open the door, I find Maxwell punching the shit out of a traitor he found yesterday. He hangs upside down and is being used as a punching bag by his tormentor.

His sleeves are rolled up and his suit jacket rests on the table at the corner of the room. His victim’s hands are tied,

with his face covered with blood and deep cuts and bruises. Even Maxwell's knuckles are crimson, but he doesn't stop as he lands hit after hit, breathing heavily.

When my steps tap inside, he pauses his actions and turns his face toward me. I see the darkness, violence, and roughness in the features of his face. It is clear he is out for blood, and he will take it from his prisoner. He looks at the man who must have passed out from his abuse. He rolls his shoulders, and takes off the brass knuckles he is using, setting it on the table. Turning towards me, he crosses his arms, resting his back against the table, carrying a cold and monotonous look.

I'm not going to lie, but every time I see this brutal side of him, it always sends my blood rushing and my nerves igniting with a heated desire instantly. This part of him is what makes me crave for him day and night.

But suppressing my emotions, I step inside as neither of us utter a single word.

"I'm going to take a wild guess and assume the packages are still missing, and your dealer has been on your ass with questions regarding his shipment," he states the obvious, sprinkling salt on the wounds my ego is suffering.

I seethe in anger quietly.

He responds with a dark smirk before letting out a humorless laugh. "Just one enemy has you so tense. I wonder what will happen to you in the future?"

“So hilarious,” I offer a tight smile. “This isn’t just my problem. You should be doing something to figure out who the fuck did this too.”

He only shrugs. “I wasn’t involved when the deal was made, so why should I bother finding the culprit?”

I stalk towards him, controlling my urge to take a gun and shoot him for acting like a smartass.

“You said, we would share power, and resolve any issues towards the Bratva like a team,” I press my index finger against his chest as he looks towards it. “But you aren’t doing shit. I’ve been handling this on my own. What sort of partnership is this, huh?”

He grabs my wrist with a tight grip, which he might break my bones, pulling away my finger from his chest. I don’t show him the slight pain I am feeling.

“I kept my end of the bargain; it was you, who made the deal and didn’t bother to inform me. Now, when you are in trouble, you come running to me for help,” he mutters with his face coming close to mine as his warm breath fans my cheeks. I could feel the intensity taking over the atmosphere, making my heart pound against my chest at full speed. I swallowed and I felt my throat getting dry all of a sudden.

“It’s your mess so fucking deal with it, before you have to answer to your dealer.”

My nostrils flare in anger as I narrow my eyes. “You think you are so smug, and if you were in my place then you would

easily handle it, huh? Some things are beyond your power, not everything is in your control.”

He lets out a dry sadistic laugh. “I would have resolved it in seconds. You are still very new to this, but don’t worry, you will get used to being defeated by your enemies. It’s only the beginning.”

Maxwell pushes me away, taking a sharp and long knife from the table behind him, and makes his way toward his prey, to resume his torment. But he halts his steps and looks over his shoulder at me.

“However, if you desperately need my help, then I have two conditions. If you accept it, then you might discover where your packages are.”

I scowl at him. “I couldn’t find even a trace of those fuckers, what makes you so sure that you can do it?”

“I have my ways,” he mutters, continuing his walk and standing in front of the hung man, who is lightly grunting from pain while regaining his consciousness, only to get tortured more.

“And what are those ways?” I ask, crossing my arms, feeling a shadow of doubt crawling upon me.

“That is none of your business. If you want my help, say it; if not, then you know where the door is.” He kneels in front of the man with a wicked, vicious smile that he usually saves for his enemies or victims, showing how fearful he can be.

“Now, where were we?” he asks him even though the man is in no state to mutter a word. “Where are your other friends who helped you steal the money from our casino with your conning plans?”

“I...I don’t know,” the man rasps with his voice choking like he is going to cry from fear. “Please. I beg you...I really don’t know.”

Maxwell only sighs and holds the man’s right ear. “Waste another second by not telling me the names of your friends and I will cut off your ear. I won’t repeat myself.”

“No, no, no. Please, please. I beg you,” the man yells with a weak voice, writhing vigorously against his restraints but knowing it is futile.

True to his words, Maxwell cuts off the man’s right ear as blood oozes continuously with his bloody ear on the ground. The man screams in pure agony as his body trembles from panic and terror.

“Ah! Ah! Ah! God! Fuck! It hurts!”

Maxwell points the bloody knife at him, offering him a threatening gaze.

“Now answer, before I start cutting all your body parts, one by one, and then feed them to the street dogs. I need the names.”

The man sobs loudly. He has no choice but to finally cave, as he tells the names of his friends before continuing to cry again.

“That was easy,” Maxwell mutters. “Well, it was really nice talking with you.” Promptly he stabs the knife between the man’s eyes and drags it down, splitting his face in half. A puddle of blood forms on the ground with a few drops sprinkled on Maxwell’s face too. He looks unbothered by the result of his work and stands up.

“And what’s your answer?” Maxwell asks me, staring at me with a cold stone expression.

I contemplate for a few seconds, before nodding my answer. “Fine, but what are your conditions?”

“That you will know when the job is done,” he simply states. “Give me a few days and I will inform you regarding your package. If you can hold back your dealer till that time, then good for you, otherwise I don’t have anything else to say.”

Before I can argue furthermore, he turns around and leaves the room. I let out a shaky breath while my mind starts to run wild with thoughts regarding Maxwell’s plans. How are his resources strong enough that he can find the culprits easily? Or is there something more to all of this that I’m not figuring out?

I can’t help but feel this deep doubt pooling in my gut. I can sense something is off about the whole cargo theft and Maxwell. He looked too calm and relaxed about it and didn’t scream or yell when he heard what happened and the loss we might be facing.

I also have no proof or leads that I can use to discover my answers. The only thing I can do is wait and see. Although, if I

get a hint of Maxwell doing something to betray me, I won't waste any time turning him just like the hanging man he killed and tortured a few seconds ago.

MAXWELL

"Is everything sold?" I asked Igor on the call. Looking around and over my shoulder, every now and then, as we talk. I am in my room, but I don't want to take any risks.

"Yes. Lucifer sold all the packages to his Camorra members and a few foreign dealers too. Word will soon spread about the whereabouts of those missing packages. Don't worry."

I breathe in relief. *Thank fuck.*

"Good. Now listen to me carefully," I mutter, as I continue telling him the rest of the future plans I decided upon. During the remainder of the call, Igor remains quiet and listens attentively.

"But it could raise major doubts in Rhea's mind. There is a high chance for it," Igor argues when I finish telling him my plans.

"There won't be. Trust me on this. She is desperately looking for help and this is the best chance to use this to our advantage."

"And what about Elysha?" he asks.

“I will talk to her about it, don’t worry about that.”

“Alright. I will start setting up everything.”

“Igor, one more thing,” I murmur when a sudden thought crosses my mind. “I heard from the guards, that someone left a bloody message for Rhea on the deck with the dead bodies of the men who were responsible for the cargo. Who did it? You or Lucifer?”

He turns silent, making me feel anxious with every passing second.

“It was Elysha.”

I scowl in utter confusion as I shake my head. “What?”

“Elysha did that while me and Lucifer were getting the packages out of the cargo-”

“No, I mean what the fuck was she doing there?” I hiss through my clenched teeth, as my grip tightens on the phone with tension.

“You told her to be there, that’s why she joined us.”

“Are you fucking insane? Why would I tell her to go somewhere where her life is endangered? I strictly told her to stay back.”

“But she told me that you didn’t have any objections to letting her join the plan and attack with us.”

My heart sinks with betrayal caused by the woman I least expect it from. She lied.

Elysha lied to me and Igor, getting involved in a brutal and dangerous situation where I could have lost her...again. She used the advantage of the moment and put us both in the dark.

How could she?

“I will call you later,” I muttered before hanging up the call. My grip is so rigid that I can break the phone. My nerves spike with pure rage and worry from the thought of my *an’gel* being amongst the wolves, who wouldn’t hesitate to skin her alive. She could have died again, and I wouldn’t have known...I wouldn’t have been there to save her again.

Fucking hell, Elysha. Why did you do this?

I breathe heavily through my aggravation, running a hand through my hair as the words in my head keep repeating, again and again, no matter how much I try to suppress it.

She could have died. I would have lost her again.

She could have died...she could have...again...

I heard through the guards, how they saw dead bodies lying everywhere on the dock as if a monster came in and slaughtered them all. But what they spoke about most was the message written for Rhea with a knife scarring their chest. I could only imagine the bloodbath that Elysha caused, but I didn’t expect her to be this ferocious. I don’t know what influenced her to do this or what was going through her mind, deciding to make Rhea feel fearful.

But I do understand Elysha wants her sister to know that she is no longer her caring and loving sister, who will sacrifice

everything to protect her. That side of her is gone, now she has turned into something darker, and poisonous who won't stop until she gets her redemption.

Elysha is the strongest woman I have ever met, and it was her strength and fierceness that drew my heart toward her, like a magnetic pull. But after discovering this new side of hers, I am pleased to see her ruling like a queen. Although I am worried at the same time, feeling fearful I might lose the innocent, angelic girl I fell in love with in the first place.

What are you up-to, an'gel?

What is bringing all this chaos?

CHAPTER 15

ELYSHA

I knew it was a risky move to be out in public and meet Maxwell. But after his urgent text to me, I could sense he was aware of what I did during the heist at the port. He probably wants to scold me for lying to him and going behind his back.

I didn't expect any compliments from him for acting like a brave person because I knew he would only focus on the fact that I didn't listen to him.

I was at the local farmers market in an alleyway, wearing a knee-length coat with a full-sleeved maroon shirt underneath paired with black jeans and boots, keeping myself warm from the cold. The entire city of Moscow was covered with snow. Through my black sunglasses hiding most of my face, I could see Saint Basil's Cathedral from afar. The chatter and buzz from vendors and their customers filled the atmosphere as some bargained while others tried luring their customers with goods.

I look around trying to blend with the crowd when I suddenly feel a hand grasping my arm. I instantly become

alarmed and am about to beat the shit out of the person when my motion stops as I recognize that touch...a touch I would know even among millions.

Maxwell.

He wears a thick black coat and matching shirt and pants, looking muscular and intense all at once. His hair is slightly messy; I notice the five o'clock shadow turning thicker around his jawline, cheeks, and throat. I bet from his rough face; he could easily intimidate anyone.

Keeping our heads down, he drags me deeper into the market, halting to look left and right before taking a right turn and opening the first door he sees. There are two teenage boys inside, who gasp from our arrival.

“*Ostavlat’*,” he ordered them to leave in his thick and gruff Russian. The two boys don’t waste a second and leave us alone, closing the door behind them. We are possibly in a storage room with huge sacks of wheat surrounding us in long piles, with wheat dust scattering the floor. It is mostly dark, but the natural light coming through the small window on the wall gives us some view.

Maxwell faces me with a grim look, offering me his silence, which makes me feel uneasy. There is no doubt he is pissed, beyond words, and the rage burning his eyes only intensifies my discomfort.

I swallow the lump in my throat, but I never look away from his seething gaze. He may be furious now, but even I had my own reasons to go against him.

“Did you hesitate?” He breaks the silence with his question.

I frown in response.

“When you lied to Igor?” He resolves my confusion.

“I knew Igor would listen to your orders if I told him what you-”

“Did you hesitate or not? Yes or no, Elysha?” Maxwell interrupts me with his cold tone, which makes my heart ache.

I shake my head. “I tried to make my lies sound as real as possible.”

“Did you think once how I would feel when I found out about your betrayal?”

I nod. “I did. It pained my heart thinking about it, because I knew you would be both mad and disappointed, and I wasn’t wrong.”

He lets out a dry laugh, shaking his head. “I’m neither of those, Elysha. The first thing I felt was so much worry that I could barely think straight.”

I turn silent feeling speechless.

“One thing kept repeating in my mind: I could have lost you again. You could have died again. That’s the only reason I didn’t want you at death’s doorstep,” his face leans closer to mine as we both breathe heavily. “I watched you die once, Elysha. But I don’t have the strength to endure that suffering again.”

He cupped my face, pressing his forehead against mine as our breathing syncopated. I close my eyes and hold on-to his wrists, savoring his touch that I missed these past few days.

“When I lost you, I truly didn’t want to live anymore. A king is meaningless without his queen, because she is the keeper of his heart and soul. And you had every part of me with you...everything of mine belongs to you. Without you, there is no me.”

I shake my head, caressing the pulse points on his wrists. “Don’t say that because I wouldn’t want you to take your life.”

He laughs without humor. “I wouldn’t need to do anything, *an’gel*. Even if I did live, I would have been nothing but a breathing corpse, an ice-cold, lifeless soul whose entire world filled with emptiness, darkness, and misery. And trust me, *an’gel*, I did live that life when Rhea kept me captive in the basement of her house. She could have killed me, cut me from limb to limb, and I wouldn’t have reacted because I had nothing to live for with you being gone.”

Oh, Maxwell.

My heart aches so badly, hearing the suffering he went through while I was healing. Tears threaten to stream down my eyes from the misery he is sharing with me, making me wish I should have done something since the beginning to stop this chaos.

“Worst part was when I was afraid your memories would be erased from my mind with time. I had nothing being held dear to me that carried the essence of your presence. Your

memories were the only thing. For the first few days I smelt your fragrance on me...I even had fragments of your warmth. But those started to vanish into thin air. I kept thinking of you every fucking second, but I realized if by the time I got old, then even these memories would be gone and I wouldn't realize it. My *an'gel's* existence would be truly wiped away and I won't have any control over it." He poured every ounce of his emotions, fears, and anxiousness in his words without hesitation. And I felt them all hitting me deep into my soul, gutting me with unyielding agony and guilt.

"I could have experienced all those again if something happened to you at the port and I wouldn't have been there to protect you. Please, *an'gel*," he tucks back my hair, tilting my head up to meet his darkening gaze, "I am strong to conquer and destroy the world, but you will be my undoing. My ultimate destruction. Do not let me suffer like this again."

I closed my eyes for a second, licking my dry lips and feeling a teardrop rolling down my cheek, before I opened my eyes and expressed my own buried thoughts.

"I had my own reasons too, Maxwell. I didn't want to be some weakling staying back-"

"You are not weak. A queen like you is never weak," he mutters with a stern, possessive tone.

"But I felt vulnerable and frail when I woke up. All the memories of my sister betraying me and hurting the man I love, washed over me like cold water. And I couldn't stop thinking about how I let my emotions blind me and bring

mayhem upon us that could have been avoided. Most of all, I couldn't do anything to protect you, and that's a feeling I never want to experience 'til my last breath."

Our places are changed as he turns speechless and listens to me intensely.

"I know I shouldn't have lied to you like that, but I had no other choice. I had to prove to myself and to Rhea that I'm no longer weak. I have healed and I have come out stronger than ever. This time I will be the mayhem in her life and before she can contemplate, everything she treasures and sacrificed to get her kingdom will break into crumbles. I cannot promise you that I won't go against you in situations where I will be seen as a weak person, but I do promise you that I will come back to you. I will defy death to be with you, Maxwell."

He smirks with wickedness and pride coloring his face as he leans, his face, and kisses my forehead, letting me rejoice in his gentleness.

"I won't hold you back again, *an'gel*. Because I know my queen is stronger than me and can protect herself. But next time, no matter what, make sure you take every precaution to keep yourself safe."

"I will," I agreed with him.

"And hearing what you did to those men and how you wrote that message, I must say I'm impressed," his voice holds a teasing attribute, making me flush as I offer him a smile.

“Porochnaya korleva dlva porchnogo korolya,” I mutter in Russian.

A vicious queen for a vicious king.

“Something I truly enjoy seeing for the first time; it certainly suits you.”

I grin and wrap my arms around his neck as I stand on my tip-toes and plant a kiss on his lips. He lets out a grunt that vibrates against his chest, intensifying the kiss by holding my neck possessively while he guides me to walk backwards until I have nowhere else to go.

Our kiss turns deeper and harsher with our teeth clashing and tongues mingling. Instant desire floods my nerves, making my whole body ignite like an inferno with my heart hammering against my chest. My hands skate down and work on unbuckling his belt, while Maxwell licks his way down my neck, before sucking and nibbling on my pulse point. I am sure a mark will be left there when I leave and he wants that. He wants me to remember him by marking my body.

But even I wanted to leave my own mark on him too. I kneeled and took off his pants, along with his boxers, as his rock hard, throbbing cock springs free. He lets out a groan while closing his eyes, and places his hand against the wall for balance, while his other hand holds the back of my head. I take him in my hand, stroking him up and down, taking my sweet, sweet time tormenting him.

“Fuck,” he hisses, gazing down at me with his eyes burning with pure lust.

I give his cock a long lick, never breaking eye contact, starting from the base to the head before planting a kiss on top. I smirk wickedly and slowly take him into my mouth until I feel him hitting the back of my throat. I couldn't help but hum and moan, watching him shiver.

“Oh God!” he groans, fisting my hair. I breathe through my nose as my lips move back and forth, engulfing his cock with the warmth and tightness of my mouth. The sight of him going insane with desire is truly bewildering. But I want it to be rough...I want more.

Giving another long lick I lean my head back and smirk. “Stop holding back, Maxwell. Fuck my mouth.”

He pants heavily with his broad shoulders heaving up and down as his muscles tightened against his coat.

“I want to be acquainted with your dominance, the power that made me crave your darkness day and night. Show your queen the dark side, Maxwell.”

His expression darkens as if my words triggered him and brought out the demon within that he has been holding back.

“Open your mouth,” he orders in a deep gruff voice which sends shivers down my spine.

I do as I'm told as he holds my chin. “Wider and show me your tongue,” he grunts.

I part my lips until my jaw is aching and push out my tongue more. “Good girl,” he praises me, making my blood rush with full speed.

“That maroon lipstick definitely suits you,” he mutters, tapping his cock against my tongue as I whimper in response.

“I bet it will look even better on your cock, reminding you later to whom it yearns to be with,” I whisper.

“You want to mark me, *an’gel*?” he asks, lust oozing in his voice.

“Yes. After all, you belong to me as well.”

He nods with a look of approval passing his eyes as he continues tapping my tongue with his cock, while I taste his pre-come.

“Then mark me, *an’gel*. Let me carry your reminder when I’m away from you again,” he snarls, thrusting his cock deep into my mouth, which I instantly gagged from surprise.

His fist tightens on my hair and I feel the tingle on my scalp, which only heightens my desire. My pussy is already wet, as hell, just from having his cock in my mouth; that’s how much he affects me physically, luring me with pure pleasure. His hips move with rapid speed with the choking and gurgling sound of my mouth echoing around and blending with his grunts. Maxwell doesn’t hold back; he gives it all to me just how I crave for it.

Rough. Deep. Dominant.

“Take off your coat and open your shirt. Let me see those luscious breasts,” he demands as he fucks my mouth without any mercy. I take off my coat and start unbuttoning my shirt, feeling my legs weakening.

As my breasts pop out, he pulls away, making me whimper in anticipation and need, before he positions his cock between my breasts.

“Keep that mouth open,” he groans. “Press your breasts together. I want to fuck both your breasts and mouth.”

Holy fuck.

This is getting more intense.

I do as he says, I lean my mouth closer to the head of his cock as I watch it moving back and forth between my breasts and also filling my mouth. My pussy is throbbing to be touched and I wish badly to touch myself.

“Look at me,” Maxwell mutters, tilting my head back as he crouches forward as he spits in my mouth. “Now let that spit drip down your breasts.”

I let the string of spit coat my chest watching it glisten. He wraps one hand around my throat, giving it a squeeze, before resuming to thrust his cock between my breasts and fucking my mouth raw.

More and more spit dribbles down my chin as I make a mess. But neither of us care about it because it only makes the whole pleasure more passionate.

“So fucking good,” he hisses through his clenched teeth.

Both his grip and thrusts make my mind go insane with desire that I could barely think normally. He is using me like I am his whore whom he got just for his pleasure. Any other

woman might have felt uncomfortable with it, but this is an intensifying connection we both share and enjoy.

And there was no shame in it because, at the end of the day, I know how much he cherishes me.

“Ugh! Fuck, I could fuck your mouth for hours, *an’gel*. Your face would start aching and you would struggle breathing, but you won’t pull away. Am I right?”

I nod hazily as I feel my whole body turning lax as it becomes hypnotized by the spell Maxwell put on me.

“I can bet your cunt is soaking wet. I could easily slide in fuck you like there is no tomorrow. Your cunt is probably begging for my cock and to be filled with my come.”

I nodded again as he spoke my mind.

“But let’s fill that mouth today. I want to see you swallow my come when I tell you so.” The promise his words hold, my God, I felt to my core, which flutters with yearning.

Oh God. I will come just from his words.

He increases his speed not caring about the gagging sounds I make. Our eyes never leave each other’s with passion devouring our sanity. His cock glistening with my spit as I savor the salty flavor of his pre-come with a muffled moan. He throws his head back and curses under his breath.

“Fuck, I’m about to come. Is my *an’gel* ready for my come?”

I moan my response followed by a greedy nod.

“Shit,” he hisses, fucking my mouth harder before he pushes all the way in and pauses, grunting and groaning loudly in response. I feel his come spilling onto my tongue while feeling my pussy aching with want.

A few seconds pass, before he pulls out and kneels in front of me, holding my chin. I see his cock coated with my spit and stained with my lipstick. All marked by me.

“Show me, *an’gel*,” he orders in a deep voice.

I open my mouth and show him the come resting on my tongue.

“Good girl. Now swallow.”

I do, savoring the taste before parting my lips and revealing the result.

He licks my lips before he plants a quick deep kiss. My entire body was still on fire and pleading for his touch. Just one touch.

As if he could read my mind, he pulls down my pants along with my panties, which he puts inside his coat for later. Parting my legs, he sucks his fingers before skating them down to my pulsing pussy and circling my clit. My hips instantly buckle from sensation overload, followed by a loud moan, while Maxwell only chuckles darkly, seeing my torment.

“Fuck, *an’gel*. You are drenched just from my cock in your mouth,” he rasps against my chin. “I can’t describe how much

it pleases me seeing you like this, all wanton and needy for me.”

He pushes three fingers inside me, hitting against my walls that start to quiver immediately. *Oh God, I can't...too much.*

“Mmm, that’s it. Clench around my fingers, *an’gel*. Make a mess, I don’t care, use my fingers to get your pleasure.”

This is all too much for me. Fucking hell.

I fist his shirt for support while he continues gently kissing and licking my cheek and jaw, as his fingers continue fucking my pussy.

“Just like I made your mouth messy and dripping, let’s try that with your cunt too, shall we?” He teases me furthermore with his words as I whimper helplessly.

Before I know it, he increases his motions so fast that my thighs are shaking like crazy. The squelching sound of my wet pussy reaches my ears as it mixes with his animalistic groans as if I was his prey and he was devouring every part of me. My eyes roll back with ecstasy coloring my soul.

I could feel wetness pooling out more and more that I bet I was going to flood the floor. As if Maxwell took notice, he keeps hitting my wall that I feel it on my G-spot.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

“Yes, you are getting there. I can feel it from how tight your cunt feels around my fingers like it doesn’t want to let go.”

“Please, please. God!” I wail out loud with my back arching and legs trembling.

“Say it, *an’gel*. Say what you need.”

“I-I,” I moan, unable to gather my words to speak what I thirst for. “I want to come. Please.”

I feel his wicked smile against my cheek before he grasps my jaw with his other hand, kissing me deeply while fucking my pussy faster and harder with his fingers, hitting my G-spot again and again. An unknown, earth-shattering sensation flutters in my core...the feeling is just indescribable; I couldn’t help but feel indulgence in Maxwell’s kiss with my eyes shutting while my body surrendered to him wholeheartedly.

“Come, *an’gel*. Come for me.”

The next second, an orgasm rips through my body and soul as I feel more wetness pooling out from between my legs. Leaning my head back with a loud cry, I watch myself squirting against his fingers. Maxwell follows my gaze as it’s highlighted with lust and amusement.

“Good, you did so good. Such a good girl,” he speaks out his hushed words.

I pant heavily, swallowing deeply with my throat feeling dry from screaming and moaning. I feel Maxwell’s soft kisses against my temple and cheek, making me lightly giggle.

Without thinking, I move and sit on his lap, wrapping my arms around him and resting my head against his neck. He

hugs me back tightly as we both breathe gently, nestling in each other's warmth and affection.

This is what I always missed when Maxwell was away.

This tenderness...gentleness...the love.

He has always carried the attributes of a psychotic, ruthless, and merciless man who only cares about his kingdom. A dangerous man, whom everyone feared and didn't hesitate to kill his enemies or any person who came in his way, plucking them away like thorns on a rose stem. But this gentle side of him is a rare sight. Nobody has ever seen him this way and he never thinks of initiating it for others. But for me he didn't feel any shame or discomfort in showing this part of him that he keeps buried within the deep caves of his soul. As if with me, his heart wasn't inked with darkness, it was painted with love and adoration, which only came out into the light when I was with him.

I know that once we part ways after leaving the market, every part of me will be yearning for this moment we are living in. At night, I would be greeted with loneliness and silence, and the memory of this time will only bring tears to my eyes because all I could do was think about us, even though I wanted nothing more than to be in his arms.

A place where I felt the safest...a place where I knew peace existed.

* * *

A couple of days passed after my last meeting with Maxwell. I try to not let myself suffer from isolation, but it feels like a futile attempt. It is the time of dawn when I decide to leave my bed after being unable to get a blink of sleep. Putting on a robe around my nightdress, I head downstairs, where it is still dark. I knew the maids weren't awake yet, but I didn't bother waking one up, just to make some coffee. I could do that myself.

As I get to the kitchen, I get all the utensils needed and wait with my back against the counter table while the water boils. Suddenly I hear soft footsteps echoing inside the room, and I can guess who it is.

It is Catherine.

She is in her long light blue nightdress with a robe on as well. Her tired eyes and slim figure were enough to tell she wasn't eating and sleeping well. When she finds me in the kitchen, she offers me her sweet, gentle smile that often reminds me of another close one in my life who used to greet me with the same gesture.

My mother:

"I didn't know you woke up so early," she muttered, coming towards me and taking a seat on one of the chairs beside the kitchen table. I join her and turn to face her.

"Maxwell wouldn't be happy knowing about you not sleeping or eating properly," I murmured.

She lets out a sad sigh, looking at her joined hands on her lap. “I try for him. I really do. But my mind can’t stop thinking about the torments he must be facing.”

I take her hands into mine, giving them a reassuring squeeze. “He is safe and alright, Catherine. But he will be hurt knowing the state you are putting yourself in.”

“Is he really safe?” she asks, her eyes glistening with tears. “I often hear the plans you and Igor make, and all I can think of is what if Erida finds out about them and the first thing she does is go after my son. What if she takes him away from me forever?”

I shake my head with a look of purposefulness. “Nothing will happen to him, Catherine. Have faith in me and I vow, to you, that he will be back with us soon. I will lay my life down for him, if needed, and bring Maxwell back to you.”

She remains quiet, but with a timid nod, she gives me her response. Sniffling, she blinks back her tears and gazes down at our joined hands.

“You shouldn’t do it.”

I frown. “What?”

“Do not risk your life.”

I smiled at her gently. “I will without hesitation. I love him so much that I can die for him.”

“I know my son, Elysha. And he loves you so much that he wants you to live for him.”

I turn speechless, unable to think of an answer.

“I have seen the way he looks at you and I have always wished for something like this for my son. When he lost you the first time at that abandoned church, he turned insane with the will to find you. He wanted to do everything within his power to find you and save you. But as time passed, I saw the shadow of darkness taking over him. The love he carried was withering away...until you came back into his life again. After having his *an'gel* back I saw my old Maxwell returning. The boy who searched for love through the dark paths of violence and ruthlessness has returned when he got you.”

My throat constricts from heart clenching emotions as I listen to her words.

“I know the misery you are going through even though you don't reveal it to others. But I do have faith in both of you that this chaos will soon be over from your lives. The rest is up to fate, my dear.” She cups one side of my face, offering me her motherly gesture.

“And you don't have to hide your sorrows when with me. I see you as a daughter and truly care about you.”

My lips press in a thin line as I suppress the urge to shed tears while nodding my head.

“I'm here for you, my dear.” She smiles at me with a soft expression.

“I know and I will bring Maxwell back, Catherine. I promise you.”

“I hope so, dear. I really hope so.”

“But you should take care of your health. Like you said, you see me as a daughter. So, at least for your daughter, please eat something,” I request of her, watching the hint of guilt shining in her eyes.

I get up and finish making the tea, bringing a cup for her along with a plate of cookies. “Please have something.”

Her fragile hand goes for a piece as she brings it to her mouth and takes a small nibble. She continues taking another bite slowly and drinks the tea too. It wasn't a lot, but it is progress. The worry for her son has made hunger vanish from her body. Oftentimes, I have seen the maid return to the kitchen with a cold tray of food. I have also heard Catherine cry alone or in Igor's arms, speaking about Maxwell only. Several times I even went to offer her food that she would refuse.

But seeing her at least eating something made me feel better, as I hope she will look after herself from now, properly. Despite being a stranger, she has treated me with respect and appreciation since our first meeting. She never judged me for the shit storm my sister brought into our lives. Any other woman would have despised even looking at me because, after all, I look like my sister. But Catherine didn't do that.

She hasn't projected any negative thoughts or acts towards me that might have made me think she couldn't bear the sight of me. Instead, here she is, comforting me and calling me her daughter.

“I have thought to ask you this before,” she starts, as my mind pulls back from deep thoughts, “but I wasn’t sure if it was my place to question you.”

My brows furrow together. “What is it?”

“I have wondered about where your mother is.”

I swallow the lump in my throat and lick my lips with memories of my mother hitting me like crashing waves.

“She died a long time ago,” I whispered. My heart aches just thinking about her.

“I’m sorry to hear that, my dear.” She squeezes my hands as a sign of support.

“If you don’t mind me asking...what happened to her?” she questioned.

The second those words come out of her mouth, the bone-chilling memory haunts me again, flashing right in front of me...as I witness my mother dying all over again.

PAST

“I’m hungry,” Rhea whined beside me as we walked down the sidewalk, holding her hands. I was shivering from the cold weather through the small holes in our winter clothes that mom promised to sew.

But it has been two weeks now since she said that. Maybe we are out of threads again.

Our worn-out, brown boots scrunched against the snow as we headed to our house with some loose Christmas lights we found in the dumpster. Mom said she would bring the tree, so Rhea and I took responsibility for the decorations. A few of the bulbs were missing but there was nothing else we could find. I saw Rhea's ears turning blue from the snow, so I passed her my wool cap.

"No, I'm good," she lied. Ignoring her words, I put the cap on her head, and just for fun, I pulled it down so that her eyes got covered.

"Hey!" she giggled, pushing the cap slightly up as we both chuckled.

We got close to our building and took the dark, half broken stairs where the walls were mostly cracked and had ashy patches with random spray-painted words, which is better not to say, as mother tells us sometimes.

"Oh no!" Rhea exclaimed, smacking her forehead, making me guess she must have forgotten something, as usual.

"What did you forget to get this time?" I teased her, holding back a grin.

"Home Alone DVD. Ugh! I told mom I would bring them, and we could use Mrs. Carlson's tv to watch it."

"We can bring it later. It's no big deal."

"Not for you because you and mom will be teasing and taunting me about it later, and saying how I forgot to bring it."

I shrugged. "Well, it's true."

“Oh, shut up. I will go back and bring it. I will be back in fifteen minutes.”

Before I could protest, she trudged down the stairs and headed outside. I shook my head with a sigh and headed towards the main door to our studio-sized room. I twisted the door handle and opened it. On instinct, I pulled away my boots and placed them in the shoe box, ensuring the floor didn't get any snow. Otherwise, mom would scold me for hours about it.

As I headed toward the small kitchen plus living room, I immediately turned still from the sight that greeted me. My body turned so rigid that I didn't feel anything...think anything...do anything. I did hear the clattering sound of the lights slipping from my hand, but I didn't bother with them anymore because what I saw was something I never expected to witness.

All my senses were blurred with my heart hammering against my chest as I struggled to breathe.

It was my mother lying on the floor looking...lifeless.

Dead. She was...dead.

Her hair was sprawled on the floor as her still eyes, which no longer held any emotions, stared at me. Foam covered her mouth, some of it dripped down onto the floor. I don't know how long I just stood there, but my feet dragged me towards her before I kneeled beside her body.

My entire body started to tremble in seconds as my vision turned blurry from my tears with my heart aching like never

before...it felt as if I was the dead one.

She can't be...she can't...mom won't leave us.

I brought my shaky finger close to her nose, begging God that this may all be just a nightmare and soon I would wake up from it. But my prayers were unheard when I didn't feel her soft breathing against my skin. I gasped, placing a hand against my mouth as my tears started to stream down.

"No," I barely whispered my words. Shaking my head, I felt my entire chest in agony as if I was getting stabbed uncountable times with no way for me to heal.

"No...this...no," my voice choked as I couldn't breathe.

I hold onto both mom's shoulders and shake her. "Mom, please wake up." I begged her, not caring that it made me sound like a weak girl...something my mom always told me not to be.

"Mom. Don't do this...please. I beg you, mom. Don't leave us." I started to sob, but I didn't stop shaking her, still hoping by some miracle, she would come back. "God, no, please. Mom, p-please don't go. Come back. I swear I will do anything you tell me."

Her sight turned unfocused through my tears as I felt my throat constricting and my mouth turned dry from sheer loss and pain.

"I-I will wash my own plates. I will also learn sewing and cooking, and never make excuses about them. I promise you

that I will make my own lunch and never bother you. Just... come back."

But she remained unmoved by my words. There was no response.

Just an eternal silence from her.

I quickly got up and ran outside, knocking on our landlord's door who lived just across the hallway. I knocked on the door vigorously, uncaring if I broke it.

It felt like an eternity when Mrs. Carlson finally opened the door, looking slightly irritated, but her expression soon shifted when she noticed my distressed look.

"Mother...she...her body...I saw foam on her mouth... she," I could barely muster up the words to speak properly about what I saw. But thankfully, Mrs. Carlson understood and joined me back to our house.

When I opened the door, I heard her gasp. "Oh no."

"Please, help her. She isn't waking up." I cried even more, feeling my tears would never stop.

She goes towards my mother and pressed her fingers against her neck, doing the same actions I did a few minutes ago, checking if she was breathing. I expected her to call a doctor or someone...anyone...to help my mother. Instead, her face was painted with pity and sadness as she slowly walked towards me and held my shoulders.

"I'm sorry, dear. But she..." She closed her mouth for a moment like she was piecing her words. "Your mother is

gone.”

My body turned still like a statue as my mind and heart defied to let her words sink in. I shook my head vigorously, and my eyes shifted toward my mother’s body which didn’t move an inch.

“I’m truly sorry, Elysha. I’m very sorry for your loss.”

“No! No! No!” I pushed away her hands and rushed back to my mother, hugging her middle as I wailed. “You are lying. You don’t know anything.”

She isn’t dead. She promised she would never leave us.

She has to be alive. What will I do without her?

I wanted her at every step of my life. I wanted her to be there when I finished high school. She needs to be there when I graduate and get a job. I promised to build a mansion just for her when I grew up. Who will live there if she is gone?

I needed her there to walk me down the aisle when I married the man I was in love with. I wanted to see her getting old and surrounded by a family she always wished to have that was full of pure happiness and adoration.

She has to be part of all those memories...all those moments. Otherwise, what’s the point?

When I reached for her hand, I felt something between her palms. Frowning, I lifted my head and looked at it. I turned speechless at the object that took my mother’s life; pure rage engulfed me.

It was a syringe. I knew what it was used for as I have seen several men and women around our area become prey to it day and night. The worst part was that my mother was one of its prey. The injection took her life, leaving her lifeless body here with me. It took my mother away. My eyes fell on the scattered crayons and papers that were peeking from the bottom shelf beside the window, reminding me about the birthday card I was making for her. She wouldn't get to see my drawing, which included me, her and Rhea. The top space was left empty for me to write, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MOM, but there was no point in finishing the design.

It was meaningless.

My gaze moved toward my mother's pale face. Her cheeks weren't rosy anymore. The light in her eyes vanished into thin air. She was truly dead.

Our mother was...gone...forever.

She just...left us. All alone...alone.

CHAPTER 16

RHEA

The snow frosts the window in my office, but somehow, despite the view of Moscow getting blocked by it, there is something beautiful about the coldness. Leaning back on my chair, I keep my gaze fixated there as my mind runs through some memories unknowingly...most including my mother.

Every time winter felt heavy, it would remind me of the biggest loss in my life. It would remind me of the reason behind my vengeance.

But my heart weighed heavily with sadness because today would be my mother's birthday. Even though she wasn't here to celebrate this day, I drink bourbon in her honor, just like I am right now.

It is too early to drink, and I am slightly tipsy, but that doesn't stop me from drinking as I drown myself in memories of my mother.

Abruptly a tap on the door snaps me back to reality, making me turn my chair sideways as I find Francisco standing at the doorway with a grim look.

“What is it?” I asked, taking a sip of my bourbon.

“You are actually letting him win,” Francisco mutters with a reprimanding tone. I scowl at him even though I know to whom he is referring. It’s almost like he is obsessed with Maxwell more than I am by talking about him constantly, although it is to make him look like the villain.

“He is taking over your meetings and now you have let him handle the issue of the cargo. I told you I was looking for it-”

“Did you find anything?” I interrupted his words, making him silent as his jaw ticks from a mixture of embarrassment and anger.

He shakes his head. “Not yet, but I’m still going through every detail possible to find out about those packages. I will find the bastards who dared to go against you and attack you behind your back.”

I roll my eyes. “It’s been fucking more than a week now, Francisco, and I’m seeing zero progress from your side.”

He snorts, letting out a dry laugh. “And did Maxwell get any information about the culprits?”

“No, he hasn’t,” I answered, gulping down the rest of the drink.

“Then, what makes you so sure he will be able to do the job? What makes you think he is more capable than me?” Francisco questions me, stalking toward the table and placing his palms flat on the surface.

Fucking hell. God give me strength.

At this point, I'm so over his back and forth bickering with Maxwell it's really getting on my nerves. I swear the more he keeps up with his adolescent act the more I feel like shooting him and shutting him up forever.

"I don't know how to make this clearer for you, but you need to think this through, Erida. Since the day you allowed him to share power with you..." he pauses before letting a tired sigh, "you have changed. It's like he controls you."

His last sentence makes my blood boil in annoyance and rage as I stare at him with a seething expression.

"Be mad at me all you want, but you and I know it's the truth. There is still time, Erida. Just fucking get rid of him because he is useless. Trust me. If you are worried that it will take more time for us to get the trust of his men, then leave that to me. I will get it done for you." He walks towards me and kneels beside me, taking my hand in his as he carries a gentle, pleading look. "You know very well that I will do anything for you. *Anything*. I have always been there for you. It was *me* who has been beside you through every step, not Maxwell."

He gives a gentle squeeze to my hands before bringing them against his cheek as if craving for my touch. "I don't want him to come between us and break the bond we have. We both love each other, but he keeps coming back like a poisonous hogweed who is hurting us both. All you have to do is get rid of him and all our problems will be solved."

I remain silent, witnessing the desperation in his eyes. “Why are you letting him rule over you like this? Remember who you are, Erida. Remember how he left you and chose your sister over you.”

Hearing those words does make my heart ache and my throat constrict with unknown emotions. Every time I think of how Maxwell chose Elysha and not me, it makes me wish she never existed in the first place.

“He didn’t accept your love then and he doesn’t accept it now. Believe my words, Erida. You came into his life like a viper to ruin him, but now he is turning the tables, and you are becoming his prey. When the time comes, he won’t hesitate to poison you like a viper. Before it’s too late, come to your senses and pluck him out of your life.”

Francisco slightly sits up, leaning his face close to my cheek, before his free hand cups one side of my face. He runs his nose along my cheek as we both close our eyes and exhale a deep breath.

“I want my Erida back. Where did my goddess get lost in the midst of all this? Listen to me, please. End Maxwell once and for all, and all our problems will be solved. And it will be just you and me. If needed I will take his place.”

That’s when his words hit me as my sanity sees through the fog of manipulation Francisco is putting me in. I must say, I would give him an *A* for his effort, but little does he know it’s a futile attempt to twist my mind; when I have got his under my shackles to be used, anyway I want.

Turning my face, I stare at him, faking love in my eyes which always works on him like dark magic. Holding his jaw, I sweetly smile at him and gently kiss his lips.

“You will always be my everything, Francisco, and you are right about Maxwell.” My response brings a smile to his lips, and I can see he is already falling for my lies. “And you have been there for me whenever I needed you. I need you to trust me on this and give me some time.”

I caress his jaw gently while he closes his eyes and leans to my touch. I keep kissing him between my words, trying to sweeten the deal. “Once I get everything set and running, I will take care of Maxwell. Soon nobody will remember his existence.”

He lets out shaky breaths falling deeper into my trap. I skate my hand down and lightly caress his cock which starts to harden under my touch.

So, fucking easy.

“You will take his place and be by my side too. You will be ruling beside your goddess, but...”

“But what?” he rasps, lightly groaning from my touch as I squeeze his cock over his pants.

“You will need to wait. I just need a little bit more time to get rid of him.”

“Fuck,” he curses under his breath. I kiss the corner of his mouth, licking his bottom lip, while continuing to stroke his cock.

“You will share power with me, Francisco. I promise you that.”

“Oh God,” he groans.

“But you will need to wait. Won’t you?”

He only moans in response as I feel him getting close to his orgasm.

“I need your words, Francisco.” I rasped with a seductive tone. “Tell me, you will wait and stop with these constant arguments by trusting me. Say it.”

“Fucking God.”

Gripping his jaw with my other hand, I force him to look at me. “Say it.”

“I-I will wait and stop with my arguments by trusting you...Fuck, fuck, fuck.” He hisses through his clenched teeth when I feel his cock throbbing with his pants getting wet from his come.

I grin against his cheek before offering him a peck. “That’s more like it.”

He looks breathless and nearly exhausted from this small handjob session. Wouldn’t even call it a handjob in Francisco’s case. But, at least, he will fucking stop with his back and forth complaints about Maxwell.

“Why don’t you go and take care of a meeting at the club for me?”

“Anything for you,” he whispers.

“Good.” I praise him and plant a swift kiss. He gets up with a teasing smile on his face, while I pretend to feel shy from it. But once the door closes, I drop my act with my facing turning stoic.

I couldn't believe that fucking asshole tried to get in my head and take over my decisions. I will deal with him later, at the moment, I am in no mood to start a fight. Abruptly, I hear the door opening again, which somehow irritates me more. But when I see Maxwell entering with a green file in his hand all my annoyance is erased. He slaps the file on the table, making me frown in confusion.

“What's this?” I ask him and grab the file that has a few papers inside.

“The places where your cargo went.” His answer makes me sit straight with awareness as I instantly start reading the file as fast as possible. And what I read only ignites my mind with rage and disbelief.

“How the fuck did they get a hold of it?” I snarl, throwing away the file before I stand up and stare at Maxwell with a vengeful gaze.

He only shrugs, looking way too relaxed. He stalks towards the couch chair and table where a chessboard rests before he takes a seat, crossing his legs.

“You better tell me how on earth the fucking Camorra got ahold of the cargo and sold it in their regions!” I yell, demanding an answer.

But Maxwell's silence was getting on my nerves with every passing second.

"My job was to find out what happened to your cargo." He points at the dropped file with his open palm. "You have it right here."

I run a hand through my hair in frustration, cursing under my breath.

"Seems like you are at a great risk," Maxwell mutters. I turn my face sideways and see him staring at the chess board with a small smirk.

"What?"

He picks up the white queen, placing his move. "That's checkmate."

I walk towards him and look at the game where the black-king-piece had nowhere safe to move. He completed our unfinished game. I was defeated in one move.

"You should really think more wisely when playing the game, Rhea. It takes only one wrong move, and before you know it, you lose."

I point a threatening finger at him. "I don't need a lecture from you. And how did you get this information, while my men have been trying for days, and didn't find a trace of the cargo shipment?"

"Like I said, I have my ways."

"Stop being so fucking smug."

“You are welcome.” Oh, how I wish to slit his lips so he would fucking stop smiling.

“I need to know who gave you this piece of information and if that person is reliable or not.”

“You will be meeting him soon because he is going to be rejoining the Bratva.”

I dryly chuckle with my brows furrowed. “And who gave you permission to make that decision?”

He nods at me. “You did. Remember my conditions?”

Fuck. What did he do now?

“One of them is to bring the man who gave me this information back to Bratva.”

“Why did he leave in the first place?” I asked him, crossing my arms.

“Because you could have killed him.”

I frowned in confusion. “Who is this guy even?”

“Igor.” My eyes slightly widened in surprise. Maxwell’s cousin. Well, he isn’t wrong after attacking Maxwell months ago and taking away his kingdom. I knew his cousin might come after me. I even planned to kill him, but he just vanished in thin air after the night I killed Elysha and entrapped Maxwell.

“And you will give him Francisco’s place.” I didn’t miss the demanding tone in his voice.

“I can’t just-” My words are cut-off when Maxwell stands tall, looking down at me with a dark, stern expression.

“I gave you what you needed...what you nearly begged for. Don’t forget that. The least you can do is be thankful and maybe start worrying about how you will be answering to your dealer about a five-million-dollar shipment of his goods being sold to the Camorra.”

I try to look stubborn and stony, but inside worry crawls into my nerves. I have to find some way to manage that problem later. I was sure if I didn’t give my dealer an answer soon, then it wouldn’t take time for the rumor to spread and everyone in Bratva would be after me, coloring me as a traitor. But first, I need to handle this new condition of Maxwell’s.

“He is like my right-hand man and I made him the *Kaznachey* of Novosibirsk. I will later need to explain to other-”

“Shh,” Maxwell cuts off my words again, placing a finger against his lips, gesturing to me to be silent. “You agreed to my conditions so you shall keep it. Otherwise, I’ll be telling others about the loss you are doing against the Bratva by mingling with the enemies.”

I stare at him as if he has grown three heads. “How dare you blackmail me?” I seethe through my clenched teeth. “You know well what happened at the port was planned by my enemies, and I had no idea about it. Moreover, I had no clue about the cargo being sold to our enemies-”

“Not my problem, Rhea. You will allow Igor to be part of the Bratva and give him his position back. I don’t give a single fuck what you do with Francisco, but by tomorrow Igor better be the *Kaznachey* of Novosibirsk, again. He will have his rightful place back that you stole from him...just like you stole from me.”

My nostrils flare in rage, and before I know it, I pull out a knife from my pocket that I always keep with me and aim to stab Maxwell’s chest. But as if he anticipated my move, he grabs my wrist with a vice grip and whirls me around with my back pressed against his chest. One hand is trapped behind me while my armed hand, holding the knife, is now resting close to my neck. Maxwell leans his head close to the side of my face as he rasps against my ear.

“Don’t even make that mistake, Rhea. I’m not helpless or wounded like last time. Because if you try to stab me, then trust me, I will plunge your knife right through your skull.” His cold, threatening voice sends chills down my spine, and for the first time a part of me feels a bit scared from his words.

“It’s better if we do this the easy way where you agree to my terms.”

I snort. “What next? You will put the demand for me to give up the whole kingdom to you?” My breathing turns harsh and my pulse races fast.

He tsks. “You always make the mistake of thinking I’m like you, Rhea. We are far from alike. I earn my power, not steal it through some stupid, meaningless bargain. But I will

save you the stress by telling you that I don't plan that as my next condition. Though it sounds tempting but still no."

He swiftly takes the knife away from my hand, before pushing me away. A few steps away, I take deep breaths to calm myself down in order to think rationally in this situation.

I turn around and face him slowly, trying to suppress my irritation. He stands near the chess board with his arms crossed.

"So, do you agree with my terms?" Maxwell asks, pointing the knife at me.

I nod timidly, no longer in the mood to speak with him about anything.

"Good. You will meet him in a few hours. And next time, think twice before pulling such a stupid stunt." He stabs the knife right into the board, making the pieces rattle, with some falling on the ground with a clattering sound. Without any further argument, he walks by me, and leaves the room.

I comb my fingers through my hair. Suddenly, I feel my head hurting from anxiousness and worry. I had to think of something fast and soon before my dealer plans to paint me as a traitor. I inhale and exhale as my mind runs wild looking for a solution. Pure fury clouds me, especially from the way Maxwell took charge, thinking he is back to being the king. My eyes land on the fallen pieces where the black-king-piece was.

It was not hard to understand that Maxwell compared me with that fallen king, in reality, indirectly telling me how I was unable to survive in my kingdom. But I will show him...I will prove to him that I'm nowhere near like that black king piece. I will rise and show him what I can, telling everyone that I'm worthy of ruling the Bratva...I'm worthy of being the goddess of this kingdom.

I may have yielded just this once, but not again. Not anymore to him; it is time to give Maxwell a reality check.

CHAPTER 17

IGOR

The fucker actually did it. His plan worked.

I step into Rhea's house where her guards don't point their guns at me. Instead, the doors open for me as I get in through the entrance door. Putting my hands inside my pants pockets, I head forward into the vast living room, which is full of elegant and expensive decors, and furniture. I stand at the foyer, watching the long, vine-like, structured stairs that look a bit similar to Maxwell's previous house.

"Good to see you again, Igor." My cousin's voice makes me turn sideways, where he stands with a smug smile, wearing his perhaps most expensive-looking black suit.

I grinned at the genius bastard. "Good to see you, too." After months of speaking through phone calls, I finally get to see him again. A part of me feels relief returning to mind as I am seeing him again.

Safe. Powerful. And ready as ever to get his kingdom back.

He walks towards me before standing in front of me and engulfing me in a brotherly hug. We pat each other's backs while I feel my nerves, at last, relaxing and easing from tension.

We move back and share a wordless family affection.

"I still can't believe your plan worked," I muttered, still amazed and stunned.

"When I say, it will work, then I make it work no matter what. And nothing can stop me."

That is what I admired about Maxwell. He never gave up. Even when there are barely any chances for victory, he still searches and searches for its path until he gets his hands around it. Just how a true leader should be.

"I even got your position back," he says.

My brows arch up in surprise because I was surely not expecting that. "How?" I instantly asked.

He simply shrugs and winks. "Just happened."

I chuckle under my breath, shaking my head. Seems like there is real hope for us to get our redemption and kingdom back at the same time.

"You cunning bastard."

"Why, thank you," he jokes. "Come on, you need to meet Rhea." He slightly leans close to the side of my face whispering his next words. "And after that, we need to plan our next move. So, let's get this over with quickly."

I nod my response, and we both head toward Rhea's office. Maxwell barges in like he is the one who owns the place, not her. The room looks somewhat similar to Maxwell's previous office, which existed in his last house...which she burned down. Seems like she rebuilt it to remind him what used to be his now belongs to her.

Bitch.

She is seated in her chair, looking like the cold-hearted woman she is with her legs crossed and both arms resting on the chair's handles. When her gaze finds mine, sheer disgust and annoyance color her eyes. As if I was a low life, she didn't even want to breathe in the same room with me.

Well, tough luck, darling. Things will start changing before you can even adapt.

"You must be Igor," she muttered, offering me a carved smile.

"You must be the woman who isn't getting her shit together recently," I retorted.

She innocently pouts as a mocking gesture. "Unlike you, I don't run away from my shit and hide for months, only to be coming in through favors."

Oh, how I wish to shoot her right now with uncountable bullets, watching her body pierced with holes with blood draining from her body like a river.

She smiles when I don't answer her back, turning left and right on her chair. "I heard from Maxwell that you got to know

about what happened to my cargo's packages. How did you find out about it?"

"What can I say? I'm better at finding things compared to your whiny boyfriend and useless men."

"I didn't ask for your criticism about the people around me. I need to know how reliable your information is and how you get a hold of such crucial stuff?" She was clearly annoyed, and to be honest, it suited her.

I snort, shaking my head. "Seems like you are still a newcomer even after months of ruling something that doesn't belong to you. Otherwise, you would trust my words like a Pakhan because a member of the Bratva is like a family to the Pakhan. I suppose you missed out on that pointer, or else you wouldn't be questioning my hard work."

She narrows her eyes, tapping her fingertips on the table. "Be glad that Maxwell recommended you; otherwise, your dead body would be lying on this floor while I made sure the last drop of blood drained from your body." I caught the threatening tone in her words, but I didn't show any uneasiness. She could menace me all she wants, but I won't be falling into her trap. I bet she is looking for the smallest chance to find a reason to kill me right in front of Maxwell, but there is no way I am giving her that satisfaction.

Just like Maxwell, I am going to bring hell to her life.

"Enough of this, Rhea. If you don't trust Igor, then get one of your useless men to help you next time instead of coming to me and begging for help." Maxwell reprimands her as her jaw

ticks from ferocity coloring her eyes. “He has been part of the Bratva since he was a teenager. He is notorious for getting the deepest information about something that no one else can find. Contrary to Francisco, Igor here is smarter and hardworking than him, which makes him worthy of being part of the Bratva. And just like we respect each other’s positions, you will show the same respect to Igor as well.”

Rhea remains silent, throwing daggers at Maxwell with her spiteful gaze and slightly ragged breathing, as if she was trying to control herself. Slowly she faces me and leans back against her seat.

“If you are so useful, how about you show your worth to me by finding out who was actually behind the cargo theft and the men who came along?”

“I tried but-”

“Well, you didn’t try hard enough,” Rhea interrupts my words. “Maxwell isn’t the only Pakhan here, I’m part of it too. I’m willing to trust you only if you show me your worth.”

I let out a dry laugh. “I think I have clearly shown my worth by giving you the information you were seeking the past few weeks. Answer me this, did Francisco find a single trace of the cargo.”

The silence she responds with makes my chest swell with an egotistical pride.

“Just as I thought,” I muttered. “All I know is that the Camorra has already sold your goods and there is no way of

getting them back. Make your peace with it and move on.”

She smirks darkly, increasing that annoying tapping of her fingertips against the table. “You don’t know me yet; otherwise, you would be aware when I want something, I get it by hook or crook.”

I laugh humorlessly again. “Yeah, good luck with getting it back from the Camorra because if you plan to attack them, then your dead body will be the only thing that will be returning back to Russia, in tiny little pieces too.”

If she even dared to go after Lucifer, he will torture her until her last breath, and even after death, he wouldn’t spare her.

“I think this is enough bickering for today.” Maxwell gets between our conversation looking irritated with the situation. “I will take Igor to his residence, and then you and I can visit the underground fight tonight.”

“I won’t be attending. I need to think about the cargo so you can go on your own.” She abruptly stands up and leaves the room. Making sure to push me slightly as her shoulder smacks against mine.

Fucking bitch.

“I swear I was so close to choking her to death,” I hiss through my clenched teeth with my fists tightening by my sides.

Maxwell chuckles, patting my shoulder. “Welcome to my world.” He leans close to me with his expression suddenly

turning stoic and cold.

“But keep your emotions under control around her and her men, especially Francisco. She is allowing you here because I gave her the proof that you belong here more than any of her other men. I bet she will try to enrage you again and again to throw you out of here.”

I grinned. “Don’t worry about it. I know how to control myself around her, and she can try all she wants, but she won’t succeed.”

“Good. Keep it that way. And also, from now on, keep an eye on Francisco as well. He is looking after some of Rhea’s meetings nowadays. Maybe through him we can find more ways to torment her.”

I nodded in agreement. “I will keep you updated.”

“Good. Now go back to your residence. I will meet you at the fight.”

“You will be participating?” I asked with a frown.

Maxwell shrugs with a playful smile. “It’s been a while, so yeah; I will be fighting against one of the fighters tonight. And look after my queen while I’m inside the cage.”

“Elysha is coming too?” I wasn’t aware of that.

“Of course, she will be.”

“But what about the people there? Won’t they be skeptical-”

“Only if they see the difference, which I’m sure they won’t.” This bastard and his acts of thrills and risks. But now he turned Elysha like him because his queen loves such dangerous actions.

These two psychotic lovers are really made for each other with their bitter love keeping them together.

CHAPTER 18

ELYSHA

For a second it felt wrong and odd, to pretend to be my sister. But luckily the scarf helped hide my dark hair which is different from Rhea's, and just from seeing my face, the guards let me enter the underground with a respectful nod.

The moment I get in, the loud cheering and howling of the crowd filled my ears. Walking inside, passing through the men almost behaving like lunatics from excitement, I search for Maxwell while ensuring I can keep up with my cover.

It was surely a risk, but Maxwell said he needed to see me.

But as I get closer to the cage, surrounded by men letting out animalistic cheers, my eyes widen in surprise when I see Maxwell inside it.

He is shirtless with his bare, muscular body covered in blood and sweat, and his black pants tightening against his legs every time he moves. His hair is tousled, and his face carries seriousness and wildness I haven't seen before. And just that mere sight is more than enough to make me feel breathless. His opponent looked equally strong like him, possibly even more than Maxwell, but that doesn't stop

Maxwell from fighting against the challenger and him into a prey. I watch their fists connect on their bodies from their ferocious hits and punches, making them nearly lose balance. They are heavily breathing like they need a break, but even that excuse doesn't separate them from fighting.

Maxwell lands a strong punch across his opponent's face resulting with blood spitting from his mouth, followed by another hit from his calloused fists. His opponent staggers back, hitting his back against the wires from the cage. But Maxwell doesn't let him have the chance to get his shit together when he smashes the side of his face against the cage, making the entire space rattle. The hollering doubles up with people screaming so loudly my ears hurt a bit.

The poor man groans and yells in pain, and I can see his skin digging deep into the sharp wires with a few blood drops leaking out. Maxwell's hungry gaze found me as they darkened with an unknown devilish look.

Fucking God. How can this monstrous side of him look so hot?

My heartbeat paces up just from his heated gaze that he kept fixated on me, while hitting his opponent's head again and again against the wire. The man tried to defend himself, but his body was starting to accept defeat. This dark side of him was gruesome and horrid, but it was also a part of him that I couldn't get enough. Being in love with Maxwell meant accepting everything about him. The power and fervor that he always held was like a terrible beauty being born. Whether it

is the man who will lay down his life for me, without thinking; or the man who rules as a powerful, psychotic, and fearsome king...every part of him shapes Maxwell into the man he is, and every part will always be loved by me...his queen.

His opponent's body starts to turn weak and slack from Maxwell's brutality; he didn't pause for a moment, coating the wires and the floor with his combatant's blood. At some point, the man must have passed out because he stopped fighting and dropped onto the ground with a loud thud when he was finally let go by Maxwell. He looked like a lifeless soul; his entire face bruised, cut, and wounded so badly that he was barely recognizable. I see Igor entering the ring to make an announcement about the match.

"The winner, everyone!" he shouted, presenting his hands towards Maxwell, who was still looking at me, but this time with a victorious bloody smile. The crowd cheered in celebration, with some slapping the cage in enthusiasm.

Maxwell walks out of the cage and stalks toward me as he takes my hand, guiding me away from the crowd and onto the second floor. He got to the first door he saw and opened it, letting me in before locking the door behind him. It was possibly a room built for resting because it had a long couch beside the window, a king-sized bed with side tables, bottles, and a small rack with several towels and changing shirts. Beside the couch is a small table with fruits like strawberries, blueberries, and papaya set on a bowl.

I took a seat on the bed while Maxwell went ahead and wiped the blood and sweat from his body before putting on a black T-shirt. “Did anyone suspect you when you got in?” he asked, while heading towards the side table and pulling out a pack of cigars. He sits on the couch and lights up the cigar, taking a deep, long drag instead of treating his bruised face.

I shake my head while crossing my legs and slightly lean back against my hands. “Why did you want me here tonight?” I questioned while he continued smoking, blowing thick smoke into the air.

“Because I was missing my *an’gel*,” he said simply.

“We spoke on call last night, and I clearly remember you sleeping contentedly after coming when I sent you the video.” Not going to lie, but when I sent him the video of me touching myself and squirting a bit, I didn’t expect him to send me a picture of his thick cock covered in come.

“It’s not enough. I want this distance between us to be over as soon as possible. I’m tired of not having my *an’gel* in my arms every night where she feels safe. I’m tired of coming to a place I can’t call home because you aren’t there.”

My heart aches from his words. I get up, heading towards him and sitting on his lap sideways. His arms wrap around me and pull me closer while I press my forehead against his.

“It will be over soon, Maxwell. We just need to have patience and make our moves carefully,” I muttered, lightly rubbing my thumb back and forth along his rough, scruffy cheek. His facial hair was growing from not shaving for

months, possibly. It made him seem more masculine and calloused, which suits him. It was a new look that I didn't mind at all, and it made me curious about what he would be like with a beard.

“When will it be over?” He asked as if he was hoping to find a definite time to get over this chaos we were surrounded by.

I shake my head, hating the fact it shattered his hope. “That I can't tell you because I'm unaware of that. But I do know when all of this is over, you and I will be finally at peace...we will be back together...our *home*.”

He nods with a soft smile and takes another deep drag of his cigar. Suddenly feeling bold, I take the cigar from him and inhale the burnt tobacco smoke, feeling the soothing ache in my throat and lungs before I exhale the thick white smoke. But watching the shocked and amused expression on Maxwell from seeing this sudden intrepid act of mine is truly a highlight I enjoy.

“Just when I think my queen couldn't look more beautiful and fucking hot, you prove me wrong,” he grunts against my neck. “Since when did you start to smoke?”

I pass him the cigar and feel my cheeks slightly flushing from a tinge of embarrassment. “You were gone for a meeting, and I was roaming around your mansion. I found a cigar in your library and thought to give it a try.”

He lightly chuckles with his chest vibrating against my body. “I can imagine you coughing vigorously on the first

drag.”

I nodded with a shy smile. “My eyes were tearing up instantly, but eventually the burning sensation felt good.”

“I didn’t know my *an’gel* had sneaking tendencies.” He kisses my cheek and smokes again.

“I want to try another drag,” I rasped, looking at him with a seductive gaze. As if a thought passed his mind, he didn’t let the smoke escape. Instead, he cups my jaw and brings my face closer to him. I part my lips while his is a few centimeters away from me. He gradually opens his mouth and lets the smoke travel between my lips while I inhale. The moment feels so intimate and sensual that I feel my core clenching from it. I could even feel his hardness digging against my thigh as he is turned on from this amorous moment.

I lean back and breathe out the smoke, keeping my gaze fixated on Maxwell’s lust-filled eyes like he wants to eat me alive like a hungry beast.

He stubs down the cigar on the nearest ashtray and suddenly grabs my hips, making me turn around with my back resting against his chest.

“Take off your pants. Now,” he ordered with his deep gruff voice that holds dominance which always turns me the fuck on.

I didn’t waste time and quickly got rid of my pants and leaned my head back against his shoulder, feeling his small wet kisses along my neck to my cheek.

He parts my legs which were already starting to shiver from his burning touch, as my whole body ignited like an inferno. God, the control and effect this man holds over my body are indescribable.

“You know what? Let’s make you feel full today,” he whispers with a dark promise behind his words, which makes my heart pound against my chest. He leans towards the fruit bowl and grabs a piece of strawberry. He rests his head at the crook of my neck and leans down to look between my legs, where my pussy is dripping wet and aching.

He brings the strawberry against my pussy lips, circling it around and teasing me.

“Ah!” I moan, feeling super sensitive from the coldness of the fruit. I feel Maxwell smirking while he continues tormenting me, now circling the strawberry against my clit. My entire body starts to shake with pleasure making my mind and soul run wild, and I give up the control to Maxwell, letting him do as he pleases.

But the bastard makes me mewl when he moves back the strawberry and takes a bite. His eyes close instantly, followed by a groan as if he is savoring the sweet flavor of the fruit and my pussy. Just the sight is enough to make me feel undone.

Holy fuck.

“Mmm. Absolute delicacy. A flavor I can devour for hours,” he grunts before his lips crushes against mine in a deep passionate kiss. I taste the sweetness of the fruit and my juices, followed by the fervent sensation his kiss makes me feel. I

grab his hair from behind, feeling the strawberry return to my pulsing pussy again.

“Let’s see how much you can fit.”

He pushes the strawberry inside me, making me clench around it while my insides start to flutter. Before I can get used to the first one, he puts another one in me, and I start to feel full.

“Holy fuck!” I whimpered, arching my back while I felt my balance loosen from my legs quivering. But he made sure, his hold against me was firm, keeping me upright.

“Don’t let them fall. Keep them inside you.” His husky voice against my ears made me roll my eyes.

My legs are on the verge of losing their balance but he keeps them apart. “Legs up. Keep them this way and don’t you dare move them. I want you to spread and open for me.”

I feel the juices of the strawberry dripping out of my pussy with a few drops falling on the floor as I start to make a mess. But Maxwell is absolutely unbothered by it as he strokes his cock with its head caressing my wet pussy, making me whimper and shiver even more.

“Now it’s time to fill you even more.” With that he pushes his cock inside as more juices oozed.

Oh. My. God.

“Holy fuck!” I moaned out loud, gripping his arms tightly with my nails digging into his skin. My insides are instantly so full that I am losing my mind.

“Ugh! So fucking good,” Maxwell rasped under his breath, thrusting his cock in and out, with the squelching sound of my pussy and our moans echoing through the room. The slapping of our skins mingled while sweat droplets streaked down my neck. I tried to keep my legs apart and balanced on his thighs as he increased speed, hitting that sweet spot inside my clenching wall.

This was beyond heavenly.

Keeping me steady with one hand against my belly, he moves his other hand and wraps it around my jaw, tilting my head back before planting his lips on my neck for an open-mouth kiss. I feel his tongue swirling around my pulse point which only triggers my desire before his teeth bite onto my skin, driving me insane.

“God...Ah,” I mumbled incoherent words that I could barely understand, while my eyes rolled back.

“You feel so fucking heavenly, *an’gel*. Absolutely perfect.”

I was only able to whimper, biting onto my lip as my pussy clenched around his throbbing cock.

“Shit,” he hissed under his breath. “Every moment with you feels phenomenal...it’s beyond words.” He turns my face towards him and kisses me deeply, continuing his deep, hard thrusts, coating his cock with my juices, along with the strawberries.

“No matter what, *an’gel*, I can and will never get enough of you.” He lightly nibbles my bottom lip, making my pussy

throb even more. “You were made for me, only for me. A queen born for her king. And trust me, I will worship your body every day like this, while your heart knows how devoted I am to you...only to you.”

I feel my heart skipping a beat from the emotions his words held as he didn't hesitate carrying his heart on his sleeves for me.

“And you were made for me,” I muttered against his lips, as he smirks in response.

“Yes, *an'gel*. We were always meant to be.”

I nodded and deepened our kiss as his cock fucked me harder and harder, making me get closer to my climax. Sweat droplets coated his chest and neck, while my neck was perspiring from our fucking.

It feels so intense...it is always passionate and vehement with him. I could spend the rest of my life, basking, and cherishing this sensation like a true treasure.

“Fuck!” I yelled, shutting my eyes and tilting my head back as I felt a body-wracking orgasm heading toward me. But Maxwell made me look at him as he didn't want to miss a single reaction I faced when being with him.

“Eyes on me, *an'gel*. Yes, that's a good girl.” He praised me while I tried to keep my eyes open, watching his face darken with pleasure from my hooded sight.

“Come for me, *an'gel*. Come right now as your cunt fills with my come.”

In seconds, my body reacts to his demanding words and every nerve within me trembles from an electrifying sensation as I moan out loud, coming hard in his arms. He also follows me and reaches his climax; while his cock throbs inside my pussy, filling it up with his come.

I pant heavily, feeling my throat dry when Maxwell gently moves away from me and makes me lie on the couch. He kneels in front of me and spreads my legs, looking between my thighs with a prideful and dark expression. His fingers lightly trace my pussy lips, making me mewl as I am still sensitive. I feel his come leaking out, but like the possessive bastard he is, his fingers push it inside while slowly circling my walls.

I try to push away his hands but he only pushes his fingers deeper.

“Only mine,” he promises. “Now let’s see, how much more come can you take?”

He stands up and completely takes off his pants as I keep lying down, knowing, very well, I will be sore tomorrow. But I have no objection to it, not when it comes to Maxwell.

* * *

“Are you sure about it?” I hear Lucifer asking Igor over the phone. His brows furrowed with a tensed and serious look. He scratches his jawline and shakes his head while listening to whatever news Igor is sharing.

I could say it was definitely bad news.

He talks for a few more seconds with him before hanging up the call with a nod.

“We have a problem,” he states, looking at me from the other side of the lounging couch, while the chirping of the birds echoed around the garden.

“What is it?” I asked, now feeling a tad worried, but I didn’t express it.

“Igor said, Rhea hasn’t been back home for two days now. Even her guards are unaware of where she is. Francisco has been looking for her and trying to call her. They haven’t found her yet.”

I frowned in confusion as I sat upright. “What?”

He nodded. “The guards said the last time they saw her was at her office before Maxwell and Igor left for the underground fight. They didn’t even know when or where she sneaked out. She also took half of her men with her and must have strictly ordered them not to respond to any contacts when they are with her.”

“That is very odd. Where could she have gone?”

He shrugs and looks ahead at the garden, mostly covered with snow. I could sense Lucifer thinking deeply, but perhaps he was unsure about it himself.

“What are you thinking?”

He sighs softly. “I don’t know, I just have this bad feeling.” He shakes his head. “Like my heart is pounding hard with worry, which I have never felt before.”

“Worry about what?” I questioned.

“I can’t explain it in words but I can feel something is not right.”

Unexpectedly, his phone rings and he picks it up without looking at the screen.

“Lucifer,” he answers. He is silent for a few seconds before his expression suddenly shifts to a rageful look as if he is going to murder someone without hesitation. His eyes looked bloodshot, his jawline trembling from clenching his teeth tightly.

“The second I land in Italy, your body will be six feet under because I will bury you alive myself,” he threatens the other person on the call before he hangs up and suddenly stands up before striding inside the house. I follow him, hot on his heels, watching him order his men to get the cars ready. He is already on-call with someone else to get his jet ready right away.

“What happened, Lucifer?” I ask him with a raised voice.

He halts and turns around, giving me a look that would make his enemies scared to death.

“Your sister has been found. But she won’t be returning to Russia because I’m going to kill her.”

“W-What?” I stuttered from shock washing over me. “What do you mean? What are you talking about?” I stand in front of him.

“Rhea somehow found that I was involved with stealing her shipment, and not only did she take it back, but she dared go after my daughter.”

Fuck.

He points a finger to me, breathing heavily. “Because of your sister, my daughter is traumatized. She fucking dares to go after the only person who matters to me more than anything else, in this world. It’s time for your sister to pay, and I will make sure to deliver her chopped body parts to you.”

I knew he was serious and telling the truth. And I am aware he won’t hesitate to fulfill his promise to me. Once he leaves, Lucifer will only return to deliver the news that Rhea is dead. She will be dead before I know it, and all her chaos will be gone from my life.

It is not Lucifer’s right to kill her. If anyone has that control, it is me. Only me. She ruined my life more than any of her other enemies, because I am and will always be her first foe. There is no fucking way Lucifer is going to torture her to death. But I know he isn’t in the right mindset to listen to me. If this is how Rhea’s end is coming, then I have to do something quickly.

Why did you have to go after his daughter, Rhea? Why?

Lucifer turns to leave when I hold onto his arm. “I will come with you.”

He shakes his head. “No, you are not. This is my matter-”

“My sister is involved, so I’m part of this matter too. I will come with you and help you kill her. I want to watch her be tortured to death and see her feel the pain that I have felt.” It was a half-lie, but I tried sounding as honest as possible.

“If needed, your guards can be around there to ensure I don’t do something I will regret later.”

He is silent for a few seconds, contemplating my offer, but he eventually gives in. “Fine. Get in the car.”

I don’t waste time, and I join him for the ride. The whole journey, I think of every way possible to get Rhea away from Lucifer and have the opportunity to kill her in person, as I reveal to her that I was alive despite her attempts to get rid of me forever. A nagging feeling peeks out from the back of my mind, clawing at me with an unknown guilt and devastation that I was really trying to get rid of.

Even when we reach the airport and get on the jet, that feeling is still there. Lucifer looks at me a few times as if searching for my discomfort with this whole idea, but I give my best to not express it to him, knowing well he would probably leave me at the airport and leave on his own.

“Where is your daughter now?” I ask him while he looks out the window where the view is full of white, gloomy clouds.

“She is with the guards and her nanny at a safe place.” He rests his fist underneath his chin while his legs shake up and down from anxiousness. “Rhea got inside the school where my little girl was playing with her friends. She came and emptied the classroom while pointing a gun at her forehead. Rhea then scared her by pressing the trigger again and again, but my daughter didn’t know it was empty; it frightened her more than anything else.” He lets out a shaky breath. “My daughter started to sob while your sister was playing this fucked up game with her and at the end warned that if her father ever crossed her then next time there will be bullets.”

Oh My God.

Lucifer would never forgive Rhea for this act. Now, I wasn’t surprised why the idea of murder was roaming in his head. What Rhea did was beyond reckless, and she didn’t know the new war she declared.

If more of the Camorra members knew that the Pakhan of Bratva pulled such an act on a family member, they would be coming after their enemies. It will keep going back and forth until no one is left. She could have just fucking got her shipments and returned home. But she took it too far and crossed a line.

Fuck if I was in Lucifer’s place, I would do the same.

But I was not him...or maybe I was as we are after the same person who only ruined our lives in every way possible.

CHAPTER 19

RHEA

My flight got canceled because of the bad weather, so I had to wait a day 'til everything cleared for take-off. I can't wait to get home and show Maxwell and Igor that nobody dares to go against me.

Nobody can make me look like a weakling and a failure in front of the Bratva. I will fight tooth and nail to prove my worth. It was a bit tough to get more information; if Igor had his secret ways of finding out who stole the shipment, then I could find ways to find out about my enemy.

It was challenging when I started looking for the buyers but I was able to track one of them from an inside source. Even though he was merely a local dealer, it only took a few punches and threats to get him to sputter out all the secrets about who he got my packages from. Although I never met Lucifer, I couldn't understand why he would come after me and attack me. But I bet after the warning I gave to his daughter. He must know by now what I would do if he plans to challenge me again.

I brought some of my men with me, who were now dealing with getting the shipment back to Russia before we left. I wasn't able to get them all as some were sold. But whatever was left, I am taking with me. I can't wait to see Maxwell's smug face when he is proven wrong by me.

I am crossing the street to make my way toward the hotel I am staying at, pulling my woolen coat around me as my footsteps scrunch against the heavy snow. It is getting dark and tremendously cold.

I reached the lobby and took the elevator to my floor. The door opens when I get to my floor; as I step out into the hallway and turn a corner, I find several men standing outside my room, and I quickly move back.

Being careful, I try to take a peek and discover Lucifer, himself, standing with his men, probably to kill me. One of his men came out of my room and informed him about my absence. Also, I can see a woman with black hair beside Lucifer, but her face is mostly hidden from the men around her. Although there is something familiar about her...as if I have met her before. Who could it be?

I step back and plan to escape when I collide with a waiter carrying a tray of tea which lands on the carpeted floor with a loud crash; while we both gasp.

"Get her!" I heard someone ordering. I didn't need to look back to see they were after me as I dashed out. Not waiting for the elevator, I take the stairs as I hear a group of thudding footsteps right behind me.

The railing I hold onto as I descend sparks as a bullet hits it, making me flinch; I realize they started to shoot at me.

Shit.

I finally got out of the hotel and rushed outside on the road.

“I need her alive! She will die by my hands only.” I bet it was Lucifer making that order to his men as they chased me. Meanwhile, I quickly take out my phone and let my men know to track me. I have a gun and a knife on me, but I needed the right time and place to use them. I increase my pace and get to a nearby alleyway, hiding behind a pile of garbage. I take out my knife to get it ready.

I take a peek at the men running past the alleyway, but the last two guys at the end catch me watching them, and they don't hesitate to come towards me. I become prepared and charge at them, stabbing the first guy into his chest and kicking his companion in the balls, watching him kneel and wheeze in pain. Taking out the knife, now coated with blood, I stab the man again, but this time, ending his life instantly by aiming at his throat. Blood spurts out like a broken nozzle of a pipe, with some spraying on my chin and hand and the snow turning red from it. The guy who is kneeling lets out a roar in rage when seeing his friend dead, but even he doesn't get to live much longer when I plunge the knife into his mouth.

“She is here!” Another voice hollers as I look up to find a few already coming toward me. I quickly take out my gun and shoot as many as possible, slowing them down and killing

others. Fate is being a bitch to me as I run out of bullets and rush out of the alley instantly.

Damn it! Where the fuck are my guards?

More shots ring out as they keep shooting at me. But thankfully, it is nighttime, and they are missing their aim.

We get into a more crowded place on the main street. It is bustling with people doing their normal nighttime work, walking around, or attending to the people with their services. I passed through the crowd, looking over my shoulder now and then to watch my attackers still following me. The people around are giving confused or irritated looks, some even cursing in Italian, but I didn't bother about them.

I decide to change my route and cross the road. But suddenly, a car drives on the same path, and before I'm aware of it, my body collides with it. Next, my head hits the ground so hard that everything around me becomes a blur instantly. My ears are buzzing, and the only thing I can see is the fuzzy vision of people surrounding me.

No. No. No. I need to get up.

I shook my head, trying to recover, but it was a wrong move because it made my headache even more, with pain radiating through my whole body. The people start to move back, and I get an unclear vision of men standing in black suits, possibly, and I know, I am captured. I still try to get up, only to be kicked down. I feel someone grabbing my jaw tightly, intensifying the agony furthermore.

“You will pay for what you did to my daughter. And I swear every minute of torture will be pure hell for you. In death you will regret ever crossing me.”

I couldn't speak for some reason, but eventually my body started to turn weak enough that even my will wasn't enough to let me fight back. This was the moment where I truly allowed fear to engulf me, because being weak is what scares me the most.

Being weak made me suffer countless nightmares when I was captured. I swore, I would never allow this weakness to return, but this time it was beyond my control. I hated it...I loathed it.

Gradually, I couldn't feel much of my body, and when I heard a loud bang, I let myself accept my fate, entering the world of darkness.

ELYSHA

BANG!

The second the shot echoes, people around me scream and screech in fear, and start to run around like madmen. My hand is still aimed forward with my finger pressed against the trigger of my gun. I watched a bit of smoke coming from the muzzle caused by the force of the bullet.

I was panting heavily before, but after pulling such a stunt, my breathing gradually turned slow. But my heart was still

beating so fast I could hear it drumming against my ears loudly. I gulp and lower my hand, watching Lucifer's men staring back at me with shock before the next second, they point all their guns at me.

“Non sparare!”

My gaze shifts towards the person I fired my gun at and I know I am facing severe consequences for this. I was well aware that I fucked up badly...really bad.

But why did I do it? I had no answer to that myself.

“How fucking dare you?” Lucifer yelled, followed by a low grunt as he tried to stand up. A few of his men keep their aim at me, while others keep a watch on Rhea. He strides toward me while I watch the blood leaking out of his wound from his arm.

Lucifer had his fair share of enemies and rivalries, getting hit, shot, and hurt countless times. At this point, a bullet in his arm was almost nothing to him. But when he stood in front of me, I gave it all to stand strong and not to let my fear come out in light. His face is red from rage with a hint of betrayal because, I'm certain, he never expected me to shoot him. Especially not after all the things he has done for me.

“You fucking shot me! How could you even think of doing that?” His tone inked with vexation. “I fucking saved your life. I even had my men fucking protect you.” He points his finger at himself with determination, trying to emphasize his point. “I was helping you get your redemption. And this is how you repay me?”

“You were going to kill her and that is not your right-”

“It was my fucking right the second she came after my daughter,” he seethed out his words through his clenched teeth. “I could have easily killed her in the first place at the ball for harming my friend, unlike you, who returned like a coward! But today, she crossed the line and made me her enemy. She will die by my hands, and nothing will stop me.”

“I won’t let you take away my redemption.” I challenge him, looking him dead in his fiery eyes.

He only smirks darkly. “You think you can stop me? Especially, in my own territory, surrounded by my men. Yeah, good luck with that.”

All of a sudden, more gunshots rained on us like hell fire. Lucifer’s men instantly come towards us to be in a guarding position. Gripping my gun tightly, I prepare to defend myself when I notice our attackers going to Rhea’s unconscious body. That’s when the realization hits me as I understand she must have informed her men to save her.

Gunshots ring out one after another like a chaotic battle, few even get injured, and some sacrifice their lives for their leaders. I feel Lucifer’s tight grasp on my hand as he leads me out of danger inside the nearest building, while Rhea’s men start to retreat when they get her body inside their car.

The door of the building bursts open while Lucifer and I get inside. I look around and find the place to be a local apartment. No one was there on the floor with us; eventually,

we heard the gunshots outside stop. A knock follows, and Lucifer opens the door as if knowing it's one of his men.

"Sono scappati, signore," the guard informs with a panting, ragged voice. Sweat coated his neck and forehead with a few drops of blood on his chin and suit.

"Quanti uomini abbiamo perso?" Lucifer asks.

His guard looks over his shoulder before answering. *"Sette, signore."*

Lucifer nods grimly, turning deathly quiet. As if the guard gets the silent message, he leaves us alone.

The quietness nearly feels suffocating, so I decide to end it. "I know what I did was wrong, and I owe you many times for the things you have done. But-

"You turned weak," Lucifer interrupts me, while staring at the door with a stone cold expression.

"And this will happen again, Elysha. Even if it was not me, who was after your sister today, and you had her right in front of you, where you could kill her easily, you still wouldn't do it. You can't kill her."

This time ferocity and anger clouds me, poisoning my mind with utter frustration. "I'm. Not. Weak." I speak out every word with boldness and grit.

He turns to look at me with a humorless smile. "Did you shoot me to save Rhea?"

I shake my head and roll my eyes. "I shot you because-

“Yes or no, Elysha?” He doesn’t let me finish my sentence which only infuriates me more.

“Listen, I don’t need to-”

“Yes or no, Elysha?” His voice rises, fueling my anger.

“Lucifer, you are just-”

“Fucking, yes or no! Just answer!”

“Yes! Yes!” I yelled at top of my lungs, for a moment not caring if that made me look weak. But the next second, instant regret hits me like a trainwreck as my mind turns hazy, and suddenly my eyes glimmer with unshed tears.

“You can’t do this, Elysha; as long as you live with the thought that your sister still exists in that wretched woman, then you can’t get your redemption. Every fucking time you will waste your chance and save her, even risking your own life like you did today.”

I don’t argue because even I couldn’t deny that every word he speaks is nothing but the truth...the truth that I had tried to suppress every time it bloomed in my mind.

“You are putting yourself and Maxwell in danger because of this futile hope. Stop expecting you will get your sister back because the day she tried to kill you without remorse and separated you from Maxwell was the day you should have known your sister doesn’t exist anymore.”

“I know what she did was unforgivable and I will get my revenge for that-”

“At this point I highly doubt that.”

I press my lips while thinking what to say next because words vanish from my mind. “I will kill her. I will.”

“Whom are you trying to convince? Me or yourself?”

“I...” *Fucking damnit! What’s wrong with me today?* “I don’t know what came in my head and why I did...” I run a hand down my face.

Shit.

I lick my lips and let out a trembling breath, trying not to let my tears stream down.

“Your hope also put my daughter at risk and my seven men died as well on that path.” He leans towards me and I get the courage to look into his eyes which are distant and empty. Even the respect he held for me was gone. “Put your emotions aside, Elysha. Otherwise, in this redemption, Rhea will win again, and, this time, you will not come back. That last bit of sisterly love you hold for her will be your annihilation. So, think clearly, before you decide on this path. I should kill you, for what you did today, but my vow to my friend is the only thing that is holding me back. Because of Maxwell’s friendship I’m letting you live, but don’t take that for granted, as there won’t be any second chances for you.”

He moves back and opens the door, but pauses for a moment.

“You want to be the queen, then start acting like one; otherwise, you will end up being a pawn, no one cares about.”

Lucifer leaves, closing the door with a loud thud.

CHAPTER 20

RHEA

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

The sound of beeping reaches my senses first as I return to consciousness. It is dark everywhere, but gradually light starts to float along my vision. Pain instantly strikes my head as my eyes start opening, and I'm presented with a blurry white sight. I blink a few times and everything starts to become clear, as I realize I am in a hospital.

I try to get up but that pain hits me, making me hiss.

"Fuck," I rasped, weakly raising my hand, which has needles attached to it, press it against my temple, feeling the roughness of the wrapped bandage. My throat is dry like sandpaper, so I didn't bother to speak much. But when I get all the strength possible, I am able to sit up and look around, with my gaze catching Maxwell's sleeping body on the couch.

I frown in confusion from his presence. The last thing I remembered was being attacked by Lucifer and his men. I was in Italy, but Maxwell being here might mean I'm back in Russia. I guess my men got there on time.

The door to my room opens and a nurse comes in, halting for a second when she sees that I'm awake. She steps towards me, watching Maxwell who is still sleeping in a sitting position, with his head resting against the wall, but I notice his hand is inside his jacket pocket, which could only mean he was armed and prepared even when he was asleep.

“When did you wake up, Erida?” she asks, getting an iPad from the side table close to my bed.

“A few minutes ago, I think. How long have I been out?”

“It's been forty-eight hours. You hit your head pretty hard. Any headache or pain?” She notes on the screen.

I tell her all the information she needs, wanting to get it over with quickly. She observes me getting a few peeks at Maxwell, and the corner of her lips lifts in a small smile.

“He has been here since you were brought in. He was quite worried when he saw the wound on your head, and he spoke with the doctor to do everything possible to fix you as soon as possible.”

He did?

“I don't think he has left after the doctors got you in this room.”

That explains him sleeping here.

“I will send the reports to the doctor, he will be with you soon.” With that she leaves, closing the door softly.

My eyes remained fixed on Maxwell's peaceful, innocent face as if all traces of coldness, ruthlessness, and rage vanished from his soul. All those things he carried towards me as a sign of showing his hatred were no longer there, and I was thriving in it.

I didn't expect him to visit me, more than seeing him staying here the whole time. He even made sure I was taken care of, no matter what. He could have left and possibly instructed the guards to keep an eye on me, but he didn't do that. He instead showed his care for me.

He stayed back...for me.

That thought is enough to make my heart flutter with pleasant emotions, which only Maxwell makes me feel.

The door opens again; this time, instead of the doctor, it is Francisco, rushing inside with a horrid expression plastering his face.

"Erida! Oh, thank God." His short commotion wakes up Maxwell, who only rolls his eyes and stands up, stretching his arms.

Francisco comes towards me and engulfs me in a hug, kissing my head. "I was so worried for you. I saw the nurse left, and she told me you were finally awake," he mutters against my hair. I pretend to care and touch his arms but look at Maxwell from the corner of my eyes.

"You were so worried that instead of you, I had to spend my ass sleeping on the couch," Maxwell mutters, followed by

a yawn.

Francisco steps back, giving him a murderous look. “Unlike you, I was helping Erida and dealing with her kingdom while she was away.”

“Whatever. If you are done with your soap opera drama, then I’m heading out. I need a real bed. You two carry along being love birds.”

He starts walking away, making me wish harder that he would stay back a bit more. “Maxwell, wait.”

His steps halt, and he turns to face me. I get away from Francisco’s arms, and despite my legs feeling weak, I still carry myself towards Maxwell, looking at me with curious-filled eyes. When I get close to him, I nearly stumble, but I feel his strong, muscular arms around me as I grasp onto his shoulders and rest my head against his chest.

“Thank you,” I whispered, pressing closer to his body. “Thank you...for being there for me.”

He is quiet for several seconds, and I don’t feel his arms around me anymore. But I didn’t let it bother me because I knew he didn’t want to show his emotions when Francisco was around.

“I was doing my duty.” *It felt more than a duty.*

He untangles himself from my arms and leaves while a small smile stretches on my lips, with my cheeks flushing as I can still feel his warmth against my skin.

Maybe we have a chance after all.

“Come, rest a bit, Erida,” Francisco says as he guides me back to bed. I sit down, wanting to leave the place already.

“When can I get away from here?” I asked him and folded my arms.

Francisco lightly chuckles as he sits beside me, pushing a loose strand of hair behind my ear. “I missed you so much, especially your sassiness. But to answer your question, the doctors will possibly run a few tests, and then you can leave.”

“Good. Did my guards get the cargo back to Russia?” I questioned, my mind starting to tick with plans to approach my dealer about his restored supplies.

“Yes. They are safe in our warehouse and don’t worry, I have taken every precaution possible to guard the cargo properly. Nobody will steal it again.”

I nodded. “Okay. I will need to talk with the dealer, and ensure he doesn’t get the chance to open his mouth to spew rumors about me.”

“I will talk with him, Erida. You need to get proper rest-”

“I got this. I’m awake now, so I can get back to work just fine. Plus, I got injured, I am not dead. The sooner I get back to work, the better because I don’t want others to think I’m weak from a minor accident.”

Fuck, I still remember how helpless I felt when I couldn’t do anything to protect myself as Lucifer and his men surrounded me like a rabbit hunted by a wolf. I thought I was

dead when I heard the gunshot, thinking he must have shot me. But it was someone else, I suppose.

Was it one of my men? Is that when they came in?

I also started remembering the woman with him. Who was she?

It was clear she was with Lucifer and must be working with him; otherwise, she wouldn't have been there when he was trying to hunt me down. She was part of his plan to kill me. It seems like, besides Lucifer, she was my enemy, too, as she participated in his scheme. I will find out who she is because there is no fucking way I was going to spare a single person involved in an attempt to get rid of me.

“You don't have to jump back into work and stress yourself more, Erida. It's not good for your health. I'm here.” He cups my face. “I will look after your kingdom while you recover, stop worrying so much.”

Before I could protest, the doctor enters, and our conversation ends for now as I'm taken to get tests done.

But once I leave this place, I will be back to rule my kingdom. There is no fucking way, I am letting the Bratva think of me as a weak woman because once they get that picture stuck in their heads, they won't hesitate to crush me under their feet.

I won't let that happen.

Never.

CHAPTER 21

MAXWELL

I sit in the sitting area of my balcony, looking at the glimmering night sky of Moscow with light snowfall taking place. It is a beautiful sight to witness, but somehow it makes me feel lonelier than ever, making me wish my *an'gel* was here with me.

It takes me back to the time I took her on a date, where it was just her and I. The night, I mustered the courage to make her my queen, officially, but it was also the night that I lost her. Even now, I felt like I was losing her.

When I got the call from one of Rhea's guards about her getting injured, it was news I wasn't expecting. She was currently at the hospital getting the best treatment to recover as soon as possible. But when Lucifer informed me of what Elysha did, I felt pure shock taking over me.

She actually shot Lucifer to save Rhea.

After hearing about it, something within started questioning Elysha's motives for our redemption. She could have easily killed Rhea that day and gotten what she had been waiting for all these days.

Then why didn't she?

I have been debating on calling her to confront her about it, but I keep myself back from it. The only interaction we had was when Elysha texted me to get an update about Rhea. That was all.

I take out my phone and go to her contact, with my thumb hovering over her number.

Just call her and get it over with.

Letting out a deep breath, I finally call, and as if she was waiting for me, she picks up on the first ring.

“Maxwell?” There is a hint of hesitance in her tone, which I am hearing for the first time.

“Yeah, it's me.”

There is a long silence between us; this has never happened before. It feels tense and unusual between us as if, suddenly, we have turned into strangers.

“What happened, Elysha?” I break the ice, getting straight to the point.

“I...I really don't know,” she whispered with a slightly cracked voice.

Just hearing her like this makes my heart ache as I wish to be there for her and wrap her in my arms, telling her I'm with her no matter what.

“You have to meet me halfway here, *an'gel*. Please, just tell me. Why did you save Rhea?”

Silence looms over us again.

“Please, Elysha. I won’t judge you for your actions at all. I’m just trying to understand your reasons here.”

“I know you are, Maxwell. I know. But the problem is...I don’t know the answer myself,” she mutters and I patiently listen to her. “I really don’t know why I did that.”

“You shouldn’t have gone there in the first place. I would have handled Lucifer-”

“He would have killed her, and he had his reasons as well. It was us, who was behind the plan, but an innocent child ended up being the target. It is my redemption, and I was not letting Lucifer take that from me.”

My redemption? Is she actually seeing this as a path where she is on her own?

“I agree, he would have done that, and only we have the right to kill Rhea because she was the one who brought this storm in our life. But you also betrayed the man who saved you, and was helping you, too-”

“Are you saying that I should have let him kill her?” Elysha interrupts me again, as I start to feel a tad impatient.

“That is not what I meant. I’m trying to find a valid reason behind your decision, where you choose to betray our friend to save our enemy.”

“And like I said, I don’t know what got into me that time. All I knew was I had to do something to stop Lucifer from making a stupid decision-”

“No, Elysha.” I shake my head. “I really think there is more to it. You know it too, but you are hiding it from me.”

“I don’t want to talk about it-”

“Too fucking bad. We will have this conversation tonight,” I cut off her words, suddenly feeling fury pumping in my veins. “Was it out of fear?”

“What do you mean?” she asked, and I can tell she is getting irritated with our bickering.

“Did you get scared that you would lose your sister?”

“Stop fucking blaming my emotions for my actions, Maxwell.” There is a hidden threat behind her tone; this time it feels as if I didn’t know her. “I’ve heard it from all of you, again and again, to keep my emotions in control around her. And I’m tired of all of you judging me like this.”

“It’s hard to stop when you keep pulling up excuses after saving your sister, even though she didn’t hesitate to fucking shoot *you*.”

She scoffs humorlessly. “If this is your way of indirectly suggesting that I won’t kill her when the time comes, stop worrying, Maxwell. She will be on her knees while I point a gun at her.”

Previously, I would have believed her, but today even she could understand that her words weren’t confident. It is like she was lying to herself and I.

“If you are having second thoughts about our redemption, then tell me now, Elysha,” I murmur.

“Why? Is that how you are feeling too? Has your mind changed by being with her all the time?”

Fury colors my mind as my grip tightens around my phone.

“Be careful what you say next, Elysha.”

“What’s the point of talking about all this?” she sneered. “To me, it sounds like you don’t believe me. I agree that I could have let Lucifer kill her and be done with our revenge. But what about you, Maxwell?”

I frown. “You had so many chances to kill her...to ruin her, before you knew I was alive. What were you waiting for?”

Now, I turn silent, contemplating what she said as I feel the bridge between us starting to crack.

“She fucking freed you and made you her partner. That gave you an opening to have your redemption, but you didn’t do it. Before you blame me for my emotions, make sure you question yourself about your actions.”

Her words really hurt my pride and heart, but I suppress the agony, not wanting her to be aware of the damage she just did. Although, from my silence, she gets the message and lets out a shaky sigh.

“Maxwell...I-I’m so-”

“I will talk with you later.” With that I hang up the call.

Make sure you question yourself about your actions.

Her words ring in my mind, again and again, like a mantra as I actually think about what she meant. Especially, how my *an'gel*, is starting to doubt me.

I have heard many times; that the path of redemption will always bring raging chaos with the people around you. The path is so dark on this, that the bond you share, will be tainted. Your heart won't carry goodness at a certain point, turning into a heart of darkness.

This is what is becoming of us now.

There was no one else to blame but us, and unfortunately, there was no turning back. We led ourselves into this cave of doom, and now we have no choice but to go deeper into it.

RHEA

It takes me a few days to recover, while I try not to let my frustration get the best of me. It's really fucking annoying sitting in bed the whole day, and doing nothing. But thankfully, it didn't last for long. I have a scar or two on the corner of my forehead and some on my arm from the accident that is still healing.

I am tying my hair in a loose bun, keeping a few strands on either side of my hair, when Maxwell steps into my room. I meet his gaze in the mirror and smirk, seeing such a delicious view of him in a deep brown suit and white shirt. The way his clothes hug his muscular body makes me wish I could take

them off right away and caress every inch of his beautiful skin with my hands and lips.

“*Kto-tovyglyadit ochen' goryachim,*” I muttered, feeling amused when he rolls his eyes from nuisance as I tease him of looking hot.

I turn around and saunter towards him, making sure he sees my swaying hips and my perfect figure, highlighted by my tight blue jeans with a black-sheer top revealing some of my skin and my bra. My silver heels tap on the floor as I stand to his front, staring into his eyes.

“You look chirpy today,” I murmured, while he kept a monotonous face.

“I’m not here for your chit-chat. Just tell me, why did you tell me to get ready at fucking six in the morning? I have better things to do than wasting time with you.”

“Chirpy and grumpy. *Ya sovsem ne protiv,*” I tease him; furthermore, watching him fume silently. “But to answer your question. We are going on a little trip today.”

“Where?” He frowns.

“You will know soon enough.”

“For fuck’s sake!” He curses under his breath, pinching the space between his brows. “If this is some sort of stupid joke of yours, I will shoot you-”

“It’s not, so stop worrying. Now let’s go. We have a flight to catch.” I take my fur coat from my bed and leave the room, with Maxwell trailing right behind me. We get into the car and

drive to the airport. Today is an important day for me; it is a moment I have been holding onto for years. After many dead ends and hours of seeking information, the moment has finally come.

It's here. The second, my men sent me information I had been searching for, for so long, I nearly couldn't breathe. Instant tears of happiness pooled in my eyes and I couldn't control them as they streamed down my face.

We get to the airport and make our way towards my jet. We take our seats and fly to our destination.

“What's a favorite memory you have with your mother?” I asked Maxwell, seeing his confused face it is clear he wasn't expecting me to ask this question. He is quiet for a moment, before he looks outside the window.

I did the same and turned away.

“You are lucky, you know,” I start, but I keep my gaze fixated on the thick clouds surrounding us, “Maybe your mother isn't here with you right now, but you have countless memories with her...memories that you can remember anytime, and they will flash right in front of you, making you feel as if she is right there with you. You could think of her, imagine every little detail about her.”

I smiled softly, gazing endlessly at the gloomy sky.

“Her face, her hands, her soft hair. Especially, whenever she laughs or smiles. Just that fleeting moment of happiness she feels is more than enough to make your heart feel

weightless and in bliss. That's how strong memories are. That's what mothers make us feel because they truly love us, and do everything possible to give us more, despite not having enough for themselves."

I lick my lips and let out a shaky sigh as I realize my eyes are slightly teary. But I don't cry, not wanting to show Maxwell my vulnerable moment.

"Where are you going with this, Rhea?" he asked. But I don't meet his gaze, knowing well he would be able to see right through me.

"Nowhere. I was just curious about you."

"That didn't feel like curiosity."

This time I face him, trying my best to keep a still face. "Then what did it feel like?"

"Longing. It felt as if you were longing for someone close to you...someone with whom you didn't need the feeling to be a goddess. Someone that reminded you about your buried soulful heart."

I am speechless.

"How are you sure about it?" I question him.

He doesn't answer me and lets the conversation end there for now. Almost, seven hours later, we end our journey and it is nearly afternoon. But I don't want to wait 'til the next day. Our driver is waiting for us already and I direct him to the address while our guards follow us.

“Why are we in London?” Maxwell asks, looking around the buildings and the snow-covered streets as we pass the River Thames.

“To find someone.”

“Who are we finding?”

“You will know when we get there,” I simply state. I could feel my heart beating at high speeds, with my throat constricting from overwhelming emotions. I can’t describe quite clearly what I am feeling, and I don’t know why this sudden nervousness is taking over.

The drive felt like forever but we got to our designated place. I gulped and took in a deep breath.

Here goes nothing.

I tugged my coat closer, feeling freezing-cold out of nowhere...especially from inside, with my heart nearly jumping out of my chest.

“A graveyard?” I heard Maxwell asking beside me as we walked ahead. “Who are we meeting here?”

I continue walking, my footsteps crushing the thick snow as we pass several gravestones. Even though it is only a few, it still feels like an eternity reaching the one I came here for. And then I found it.

Melissa Davies Jones.

1981-2013

Daughter and Beloved Mother.

I feel all the air leave my lungs as I look at my mother's gravestone. It is a short, wide frame, made of rough stones, which is half covered in snow with the writings carved in. Some of the letters are barely seen due to the cracks. I kneeled with my breath shaking as I wiped away the fallen, crusted leaves, and twigs where her casket should be.

Did she even get a casket? Did anyone else come to her funeral when we were taken under foster care? Any friends or distant family? Or was it just a man or two who simply buried the body of a random woman, who died from drug addiction? Was she truly all alone?

Just thinking these questions makes my vision blurry with tears as I sniffle trying not to let my emotions get the best out of me. But that control is slipping as I try to remember my mother. I can barely envision her face.

"Is that..." Maxwell's question fades away, but I can guess what he is hinting towards.

"My mother." I nodded. "This is her grave and I finally found it." My voice was hoarse and a tear streaked my cheek.

He curses under his breath as a response, while I continue cleaning my mother's grave that has not been taken care of for several years.

"I looked for her everywhere. After we got into foster care, no one gave a shit about what happened to us. They didn't inform us where our mother was buried. But I never stopped looking for her, and today, I have finally found her."

I stand up and nod in approval. “I will get my men to clean this properly and set some flower pots around her. She liked roses a lot, you know.” I smiled through my tears, while trying to avoid Maxwell’s question-filled gaze that was mixed with pity.

“She worked as a gardener once and got a rose from the garden. I helped her get some good soil for the flower. And Elysha got a plastic bottle as a pot.” I laughed at the thought of it. “She and I were putting soil together when she accidentally got some on her favorite butterfly dress. She tried to rub it off, only to smear more on her dress from the wet soil already in her hands. I laughed uncontrollably, while she cried at the mess she made.”

I felt this wave of nostalgia hit me, my heart feeling its soothing warmth that I haven’t experienced for a long time.

“Mother then came in and tried to control her laughter, but even she failed, and eventually, the three of us were giggling. But that rose got to be a part of our home, and since then, we would always take care of it. Although, after she died, I didn’t get to see that rose again.”

“How did she die?”

“Drug overdose.”

“She was an addict, I’m assuming.”

I nod my head. “She was. But I didn’t know until the day I saw her dead body. There was one person, who already knew and thought keeping it a secret would save my mother.”

Maxwell brows furrow together. “Who?”

“Elysha.” I answered. Instant rage poisons my blood. “She knew that my mother was a drug addict. She kept saying, again and again, how she should have done things differently...how she should have saved my mother, before it was too late.” I swallowed. “How she should have been there for my mother and it was her fault. And damn right it was her fault.”

“Did she ever tell you that?”

I turned towards him. “That bitch didn’t have the guts to say it to my face. But she at least confessed it in front of God,” I scoffed, “-tried to repent for her sin when we were held captive in that fucking hellhole.”

“She confessed?”

“Yes. And I heard it all. Your *an’gel* is nothing but a fucking monster. She is the viper in my life who poisons me and takes away everything. *Gadyuka*.”

PAST

I laid in bed, watching the moving shadows on the floor of the trees outside. The wind howled around with the distant sound of the train whistling with its arrival to the area. But my mind kept thinking of the usual living nightmare I experienced a few hours ago. Those monsters make sure every day is hell for my

sister and me, forcing us through sufferings we never imagined.

Tonight was no different.

It was those monsters forcing me down on their beds and taking me against my will. No matter how many times I screamed for help or begged them to stop, it never worked. They would still rape me, beat me even sometimes, and took me unconsciously some nights.

As if my weakness gave them strength.

I heard the bedroom door open, but instead of thudding footsteps it was a soft sound, and I knew who it was. But I was in no mood to talk at all. My back faced the door and I closed my eyes, pretending to be asleep. I heard Elysha getting closer to me and standing beside my bed for a while as if she was checking if I was asleep.

But then I heard sounds of muffled crying followed by sniffles. I felt her kneel beside me, with her hand softly touching mine like she didn't want to wake me, but still had something to say.

"T-this is all my fault. A-all m-my fault," she stuttered through her sobbing while she tried to keep it down.

"You keep suffering again and again...every day and night for my own actions. Why didn't I do something when our mother was alive? I-I should have saved her." Her voice was hoarse but I could still hear it clearly.

“I feel so guilty...it is as if it keeps weighing on my shoulders with every passing day. I feel like a sinner who is inked with defeat and loss. We have lost our mother, but I feel like I will be losing you soon, Rhea.” Her hand reached forward and lightly touched my cheek.

“I don’t have it in me to look into your eyes and share this guilt. But maybe confessing to the Lord might make a difference.”

She was going to confess her sins to God, but she wasn’t brave enough to share it with me. Did I mean that little to her?

“I don’t know if you exist or not. But I have no one else to speak up about my sins. You are my only option, and I can’t keep this in my heart any longer,” she spoke.

“It is a fragmented memory but I often think about it,” she started. “One day I saw mother’s hand shaking as if she was freezing cold. Slowly her arms started to shiver and I noticed how dry her lips looked. She looked like she wasn’t getting enough sleep. Instant worry hit me and I asked her about it, but she didn’t tell me the truth.”

She snickered under her breath. “She told me that she was feeling feverish and it would pass soon with some meds. And like the naïve daughter I was, I believed it. I noticed it again a few days later, but I didn’t ponder too much about it after the excuses she gave me. But now I realized, those were the signs.”

She started to sob at this point, pressing her hand tighter against her mouth. “I shouldn’t have believed her and done

everything to help her. I should have understood those were signs of drug addiction. I don't know if it was by choice or she was forced...but I should have done something...anything."

Her muffled sobs filled the room, while heartbreak and wrath washed over me like cold water. I was on the verge of crying, knowing this harsh truth, my own sister let our mother die like this. I have known it from the day I saw her lifeless body, but now hearing it in detail felt even worse.

"I failed as a daughter...and now I'm failing as a sister. Forgive me God. Please...forgive me."

She doesn't deserve it. And she will never deserve it.

Because of her ignorance I lost the only person who truly mattered to me...the only person who loved me from the bottom of their heart. But now she is gone because of Elysha.

Gone forever.

I heard Elysha crying more for a long time, until she fell asleep with her hand holding mine as a sign of support. But it was all fake. None of this was a symbol of affection, it meant nothing. It was a façade she put up to hide from her unspoken truth. But now I know it all.

And I swear on my mother's soul, I will walk down the path of revenge and watch my sister go through the same suffering that she let my mother experience.

An eye for an eye.

A death for a death.

CHAPTER 22

MAXWELL

I listen to Rhea's side of the story, seeing her absolutely open and vulnerable for the first time. The goddess who ruined my life and took everything away from me, vanished at this moment.

In front of me, is a young girl who lost her mother and is blinded by loss, so much so that she opted to blame her sister to lessen the pain. The day their mother died, both of them died along with her.

Their innocence, their lives...their sisterhood.

All were ripped into shreds with no way of putting them back together. I assumed, this whole time, the root of her redemption was because of our connected past. But it ran deeper than I thought, and it was still a fresh wound to her soul, even to this day.

"I will never understand how you could fall in love with her, but not me. I guess she had you wrapped around her fingers by playing the fucking victim."

"Did it bring you peace?" I asked.

“What do you mean?” She responds to me with a question.

“When you killed your sister, did you feel the peace you sought through your redemption?”

She turned quiet and looked towards her mother’s grave. “She deserved to die. She fucking had it coming for what she had done to our mother and me. She didn’t deserve to be with you and become your queen.”

“That doesn’t answer my question,” I argued.

“I don’t owe you any fucking answers. Plus, you don’t give a shit what I feel or don’t feel, so stop pretending as if you fucking care about me, asshole!”

I could tell my questions were infuriating because I was talking about things she must have ignored all these times. She knew the answers as well, but this was Erida. Not Rhea.

Erida refused to accept those answers and let Rhea come out in the light.

“Then why bring me here with you?” I interrogated as I stepped closer to her.

“Because I want to show you, what a fucking horrible person your *an’gel* is. I wanted you to see that I deserved the love and not her. She didn’t lose anything this entire time! I did!”

I shake my head. “That’s where you are wrong.”

She frowned but the rage was still evident on her face.

“Your vengeance and pain blinded you so much that you didn’t let yourself ask the right questions about your sister.”

“What are you talking about?” she asked.

“She was a mother to both of you. It wasn’t just you who lost her; Elysha did as well. She was also alone like you and went through the same agony. When your lives were endangered, she was willing to put her life at risk to save you because she didn’t want to lose another loved one. She didn’t want to lose her only *family*,” I tried to explain, hoping she would accept this reality.

“Despite the horrors, she went through. She didn’t stop looking for you. She was always thinking about and praying that you were alive and safe. Even though you made her your prey with your betrayal and conspiracies, she cared about you. She cared about her sister.”

Rhea shakes her head with vigilance as if refusing to hear the truth, but not today.

She has to know.

I won’t let Erida come between her and the hidden truth. It has caused her enough damage, but today it has to end.

“Just stop defending her-”

“I’m just stating the obvious. The reality that you have ignored several times. After you trapped her, those monsters then took her away and sold her to fucking demons who didn’t hesitate to torture her every *second* of her time. Meanwhile, you were planning to find me, she was living through daily

nightmares. And even after that, she didn't quit on you. When our captors told her that you died, it was a shock to her, but she refused to believe it. And when she finally reunited with you, the last thing she expected was being backstabbed by her sister."

Rhea turned silent, breathing heavily as she seethed through the rage. However, I noticed the hint of guilt starting to cloud her face.

"Have you given a single thought if your mother would really want you to kill the only family you have left and the person who loved you with all of her heart...just like your mother did?"

She didn't utter a single word.

"Have you asked yourself, if she didn't want to share her sins with you because she thought you would hate her, and that would make her feel alone and heartbroken?"

Silence.

"You asked me how I was sure that you felt longing?" Curiosity colored her eyes.

"Because I have felt that since, the moment, you took away my *an'gel* from me. You may have killed her but her memories will always live in my mind. But that sense of longing... would have never escaped from my mind. You feel that too regarding your mother and your sister-"

"Stop it," she interrupted me, stepping back and shaking her head.

“No, you have to listen.” I grasped her arms, pulling her closer. “You have sworn that you will do everything possible to wipe away Elysha’s existence from my life, but you are failing to do that when you are the one remembering her.”

“Maxwell, don’t do this,” she threatened me, but I didn’t give a shit about it.

“You just remembered a moment with her from your childhood. I saw the pure joy and nostalgia flooding your face. At that moment, I saw Rhea and not Erida-”

“Rhea died the day she lost her mother-”

“Lie to yourself all you want. But deep down, you know she is still alive and misses her sister. Your mother connects you both because at the end of the day, she is still your family.” I tighten my grip around her, when she tries to writhe away from my hold.

“I swear to God, Maxwell, I will fucking kill you and bury you here-”

“Do whatever you want, Rhea,” I sneered. “But you can’t run away from this truth.”

“What do you think the truth is!” she screams at my face with her skin turning red from fury. “She fucking killed my mother! And I will never forgive her for it!”

“It wasn’t Elysha who forced your mother into taking drugs. It wasn’t her who made your mother overdose. It was all your mother’s choice-”

“She could have fucking saved her!” Rhea cried out loud. “If she knew about our mother falling into the trap of death and darkness, then why didn’t she save her? Why didn’t she do anything?” I saw her eyes sparking with tears of pain.

“Because she was an innocent child like you, who never thought their mother would take such a drastic step. She was naïve like you were and unaware of the circumstances. In this scenario, nobody is to blame but fate itself.”

Tears stream down her face as she gives up, her act of being strong in front of me. She also stops struggling against my arms and starts sobbing. Before I know it, her legs give away as she kneels on the floor, hiding her face behind her hands. This is a side of Rhea I have never seen before. For the first time, I am seeing a scared little girl who lost everything in her life.

That girl has finally come into the light after many years.

I kneel beside her and lightly touch her arm, unaware of the purpose of doing it.

Quickly, her sobbing stops and she moves her hand away, looking at her mother’s grave with bloodshot eyes and a flared nose. She bites down on her lip as if contemplating something, before she wipes away her tears and stands.

“No...No way.” She runs a hand against her hair as she lets out a deep breath, while I frown in confusion.

“I have been weak many times before, but I won’t let you turn me into a weakling again as part of your redemption, just

so you can get your kingdom back.”

I stand instantly, feeling instant rampage in my mind. “I still want to get my redemption, trust me. But Elysha would want you to know the truth, your mother would want you to accept this truth.”

She lets out a dry laugh under her breath. “You don’t know a damn thing about me, Maxwell. I brought you here expecting that you’d finally see how similar we are, and that our enemy isn’t so different. She ruined both of us. But love has truly become your annihilation that you refuse to see the *truth*. And to be honest, I’m glad that I killed her.”

My fists clenched tightly with rage pumping in my veins as the image of Elysha getting shot comes to mind.

“I’m truly happy that she died because she deserved it more than you did. Be thankful that I didn’t let you join her in hell. Unlike her, you have a long way of torment and suffering ahead.” The warning tone in her voice is clear as daylight. “It is a no brainer to understand you joined hands with me just to get your redemption to ruin me...just like I ruined you. Give your best attempt. But in the end, I will come out as the strong and powerful goddess who brought chaos in your life.”

Before I can say anything to her; the ringing of her phone breaks the tension between us as she picks up the call.

“What?” she answered with an irritated tone.

Slowly her face starts to change from fury to confusion to shock that is mixed with anger.

“When did it happen?” she asked, listening to the caller respond

Without responding to anything else from her side, Rhea cuts the call and puts away her phone.

“What happened?” I break the silence.

“Someone broke into our casino and robbed all of the money from the vault in our office. The entire Bratva knows about it.”

What?

Who the fuck has done that?

ELYSHA

I tried distracting my mind as I read *Dante's Inferno* while sitting in the library room. My back resting against the couch with my feet on top of the small table. The snow fell outside, making the windows look nearly frosted. But I realize I haven't flipped to the next page for hours.

I have been staring at the same sentence for a long time and haven't read the next sentence. I couldn't help but think about my sister. After she got out of the hospital, I heard through Maxwell that she recovered pretty fast and was back to working again.

But I can't help but wonder if she has fully recovered or not. I watched how badly she was injured in that accident, and

it should have required her more proper care. I shouldn't be bothering about these things, and yet no matter how much I try to suppress them, they keep emerging in my mind.

I shut the book and let out a frustrated sigh as I stand, putting away the book. I run a hand through my hair, while I walk back and forth in the room.

Why the fuck am I thinking about Rhea? Why do I care?

I knew it was a mistake when I betrayed Lucifer by saving Rhea. Even Maxwell was surprised by my action, and when he questioned me about it, things got tense between us pretty fast. I kept avoiding the topic, but Maxwell was determined to find out, which only made me furious that I said some things I truly regretted. We haven't spoken much since that night, even though I called him every night to apologize, only to get my call canceled or a cold response about our next plan. But I can tell that he doubts my intentions about Rhea and our redemption.

And to be honest, I really don't have any answers as to why I saved Rhea. It felt...instinctive. As if I *had* to save her, and before I knew it, I was raising my gun.

I am irritated by thinking of that moment and decide to call Maxwell. It is only ten o'clock in the morning, he must be at the mansion, and perhaps I could discuss my next plans with him. When I try to connect my call with him it goes straight to voicemail. Feeling confused, I try a few more times only to get the same response. Instant worry hits me and I opt to call Igor.

"Elysha," he responds on the second ring.

“Where is Maxwell? I have been trying his phone but he isn’t answering.”

“I was going to call you in a few minutes,” he muttered.

“Why? What happened?” I asked him immediately.

“Maxwell is with Rhea and they went to London.”

I frown in confusion. “London? For a deal or meeting?”

“I’m not sure but I heard from the guards that,” he pauses as if hesitating to say his next words, “Rhea...um.”

“Just spit it out, Igor.”

“From what I’ve heard, it seems; Rhea might have found your mother’s grave, and she took Maxwell with her to visit the place.”

I turn speechless as I feel my heart hammering against my chest at a fast pace suddenly. “W-what?”

“She has been searching your mother’s grave for a while and they went to the location.”

“Did Maxwell know about this before?” I question him.

“I don’t know about it, Elysha. But, maybe yes; otherwise, he wouldn’t have gone out with her unless it was for a solid reason.”

I hang up the call and feel my breathing turn ragged as if my lungs are craving air. My whole body feels cold like ice, with overwhelming emotions clogging my throat. I sit back down and hold onto the chair handles tightly.

London. The place where Rhea and I were born. The place where we lived with our mother and also lost her. Our enmity started from there and today she was back to the same place, visiting our mother.

But Maxwell?

How could he do this to me? If he knew, why didn't he share it with me?

She was my mother too and I deserve to see her grave...I deserve to show my respect to her and tell her how much I have missed her all these years. However, Rhea is the first to visit her grave with Maxwell by her side. Tears blur my eyes with a few drops landing on the floor.

Maxwell is well aware of what our mother meant to me. He even understood the mountain of guilt I carried my whole life because I thought I was the reason our mother died. But today, he betrayed me, by taking away my chance to ask for forgiveness from our mother. Instead, he gave that opportunity to his enemy, our enemy.

Unable to help myself, I started to cry, feeling heartbroken, and a sudden ache crushing my soul.

Has his feelings changed for Rhea? Did being with her actually change his mind about her? Has he looked away from our redemption at this point?

Even if he wasn't aware of this change, I know he would immediately tell me about finding our mother's grave.

But he did not.

He keeps telling me not to lose focus or let my emotions become my obstacle again. But now he is the one who lost track of this path of redemption where he didn't hesitate to betray me.

And what will you do? Let them unite, as a team, while you let your heart and soul get wrecked?

The voice within makes me question myself as I move away my hands and sniffle with a new wave of determination coming towards me.

How many times are you going to let yourself turn weak?

How many times are you going to sacrifice your heart for the people you love?

How many times?

I shake my head. "No...maybe," I say to myself, "Maybe he wasn't aware all along. Think through this, Elysha."

I try breathing evenly to calm my nerves. But the more I thought about Maxwell going with Rhea, the more it hurts. The more it pains. The more the betrayal stings.

"He can't betray me. He won't..." Even to myself I was starting to sound unsure.

He already betrayed you. What more will it take for you to see through this façade?

I grabbed my hair in a fist, clenching my eyes shut in pure frustration. "He...Maxwell can't betray me. He won't...she is just trying to fuck with my mind. It's all a lie...lie."

Would it be a lie if it's about the man you love starting to have a change of heart regarding your enemy?

“No...” I barely whispered.

Face it, Elysha. Face the truth.

“The truth...” The truth is that the man I love stabbed me behind my back just like my sister did, but this time it hurts way worse than ever.

I close my eyes for a second, giving it all to keep my emotions under control so that I wouldn't get blinded again before I wipe away my tears. I open my eyes, feeling emptiness and detachment ruling over my heart.

Truthfully, I never thought I would be wounded so deeply that pain would be my only companion. Dullness was the only thing that made me feel better, and my grit empowered my will as I thought of my next move to show everyone what I'm capable of. What I had in mind was something Lucifer and Igor would disagree with, but at this point, I didn't care anymore.

I was prepared to bring havoc this time with everyone witnessing who is the true queen. Taking a deep breath, I fix myself and stride out of the library, heading towards the hallway where Lucifer's men are gathered together in a poker game.

“Where is Lucifer?” I ask them as all their heads turn toward me.

“He went to Italy this morning for some personal matter,” one of them answers.

“I need you all to do something important, and it’s more interesting than wasting your time, sitting on your asses the whole time.”

They frown for a moment before curiosity paints their faces. Taking my chance, I tell them everything about my plan, not missing a single detail. By the expressions it is clear they are very interested in the plan.

“What do you all say? It’s the best way to get revenge on someone who dared to go against your Capo.” I spice up the deal by making them think it will make their leader happy.

Some nod and some look skeptical, deciding to stay behind. But those who agreed are enough for me to execute everything.

“Let’s do this,” I mutter with a wicked grin and we all make quick arrangements going through our plan.

* * *

The casino was already bustling with guests and the sound of money as I stepped inside. Every person I passed gave me a nod of greeting as if they knew who I was.

Perfect for me.

I walk ahead like I own the place and keep an eye out for any suspicious moves. People are busy winning and losing money. The guards are around every corner for tight security. I

take the stairs to the second floor where Rhea's office is most likely, I hear someone calling out Erida's name.

"Erida!" I turn still but get my act together and turn around with a monotonous, cold face.

It was a man dressed in a pastel-colored suit, with a young man following right behind him. Judging from their age and features, I took them as father and son.

"I didn't expect to see you here today," he mutters with a forced smile.

I shrugged. "I just got in the mood to rob the casino. So, here I am."

The man laughs, taking my words as a joke. "You have quite the sense of humor, doesn't she, Fedor?" he asked his son, who definitely looks like he doesn't want to get involved in the conversation.

"Yes, she does," he simply muttered, avoiding looking at me.

"This is my son, who came back from Turkey last week. And he wanted to join the Bratva, following in his father's footsteps. Why don't you go ahead and talk with her, Fedor?" The man urged his son, patting his shoulder and lightly pushing him towards me.

"I will be at table number twelve." Fedor's father leaves his son with me.

Definitely, not what I had in mind or being part of my plan. I roll my eyes and head upstairs with Fedor following

right behind like a lost puppy.

Fuck.

“Have you done something different with your hair? I remember you being a redhead,” Fedor spoke, possibly going for a lame-ass joke.

I remained quiet and looked for Rhea’s office.

“Are you looking for someone?” he asked.

“The office.”

“Um, I believe it’s at the right corner. The large wooden door.”

I pause looking at him with a smirk. “You have been here before?”

He nodded with a frown. “Yes. But you own this place, how come you don’t know where your office is?”

“It’s hard to keep track as I rule over Russia and have many offices,” I answered, hoping he wouldn’t suspect me. Thankfully he buys my bullshit.

“I...I think I should mention this to you before things get awkward. But my dad wants me to woo you.”

I let out a light chuckle. “You and your dad must live in the Victorian times because nobody says *woo* anymore.”

“He wants me to make you fall in love with me so that-”

“So that you can rule with me. Yeah, I get that.” It takes a no-brainer to understand his father’s motives.

I find the door, and two guards nod at me and let me get inside. Fedor also followed me without any reason, making me wish to shoot him out of frustration.

“But I just want you to know that I respect you and don’t wish to pursue you regarding any relationship.”

“Oh my, I’m in disbelief,” I say with an emotionless voice while remembering where the safe is. Maxwell mentioned it and said something about it being an old-school trick with a book. I go to the shelf and touch every book spine, getting to my goal while Fedor blabbers on.

“I don’t stand any chance with you because you and Maxwell are likely to end up together.”

My movements halt with my body turning still like a statue from his words, before I meet his gaze over my shoulder. “What did you say?”

Fedor suddenly seemed nervous and gulped while looking away. “I-I mean...I have heard people talk and...” he stammers out his words as I stalk towards him, contemplating if I should hear this.

“What do they say?” I demand him to tell me.

His forehead is starting to sweat a bit with his breathing turning uneven from discomfort he experiences in my presence.

“They...T-they talk about how you two always attend everything together. You two sometimes get physically close

with each other and share a few glances every now and then,” he pauses like he is unsure if he should continue.

“Keep talking,” I ordered him coldly.

“I...um...a-and that Maxwell said, yes to being your partner because you look like your sister. S-so, he is just having the best of both worlds where he gets the other sister and half of his kingdom.”

Physically close? Share a few glances?

Maxwell never mentioned those to me. Was it before or after I came back? Doubt mixing with betrayal fuels my detachment towards the man I love, intensifying the agony within my soul even more.

I was starting to feel uncertain about my current plan, but after hearing this news regret vanishes from my mind.

“Leave. Right now.”

Fedor didn't think twice as he dashed out of the room, probably going to tell his dad about his weak-ass attempt to woo Rhea. But she didn't need any other man when Maxwell was beside her.

And the worst part was...Maxwell was accepting of being with her. He may not be aware of it, but he is starting to fade from my life.

She first ruined me by making me the victim of numerous nightmares still fresh in my mind. And now she was destroying me by taking away the man I gave everything to.

But the tables are turning, and she will become my victim, my prey to be ruined and shattered.

I take out my phone and send the signal to the men, and a few seconds later, I hear gunshots booming, followed by the screams and screeching of the guests. I turned towards the shelf and started to look for the safe, returning my focus to bringing devastation to my sister's life.

This time she will truly feel sorry for thinking about poisoning my life. I will darken her life with so much venom; she will lose all hope of being cured.

CHAPTER 23

RHEA

It was a mess. Pure chaos.

It was as if a tornado came in and turned everything upside down. Most of the poker and card tables were broken in half or flipped over. The slot machines have broken screens from the bullets. The bar area had shattered bottles with the expensive liquors drenching the seats and tables, along with the marble floors. Many blackjack cards and casino tokens were scattered on the ground along with blood puddles that I stepped on, walking towards the second floor.

I reached my office, as expected, the damage was done there too. All the books were on the floor, and the shelf parted. Inside, where millions of my money were supposed to be, are now gone, leaving me with a completely clean, and empty safe.

All my hard work was ripped into shreds and stolen from me. And by the disaster I was surrounded by, I could only assume the person definitely wanted to reflect upon their shrewd plan and moves. They want to outsmart me, and I must say it definitely caught me off guard.

I hear heavy footsteps behind me and find Maxwell entering the room as he witnesses the scenario around him. He looked equally shocked like I was, but his face carried an unknown annoyance.

I look at the corner of the walls where the cameras were shot and destroyed. My mind immediately thinks of the time my cargo was stolen. The street cameras there were also shot like this.

“It’s the same person who stole our cargo,” I stated.

“How can you be so sure?” Maxwell questions me as he walks forward and sees all the money gone.

“The security cameras have been tampered with, and they attacked us again when I wasn’t around. The question is how the fuck they know when I’m gone.”

I run a hand through my hair as stress makes my head hurt. Many Bratva members come to the casino, and I bet they witnessed it all. I could get information from them about how the person looked, but at the same time, they will be shooting insults at me one after another.

I couldn’t escape it because they would think of me as a coward.

“We have to find this fucker soon, before more of my reputation is ruined. The Bratva members will be on my ass for this disaster-”

“I will meet you later,” Maxwell says out of the blue, making me confused.

“Where are you going? We have to go to talk with the other members to settle this situation,” I argued.

Maxwell faced his back toward me and let out a deep sigh. “This is your casino and your problem. You can deal with it on your own.”

Is he being serious right now?

“What the fuck!” I cursed at him, but he didn’t pay attention as he left the room.

I scream in frustration, tugging at my hair. I walk back and forth with my hands on my hips and my mind running like a wild horse with no answer at the end line.

“Fuck!” I muttered through my clenched teeth.

My phone starts ringing as I get a call from Francisco. I roll my eyes and look at the ceiling, finding the energy to deal with the upcoming bullshit on my way.

“What is it?” I answered him.

“Erida, you have to come to the underground meeting right away. It’s getting chaotic here with everyone questioning your actions, especially the *Brigadiers* and *Kaznachevs*. They are demanding your presence right away,” Francisco informs me as I shut my eyes and feel my head about to burst from tension.

“I’m on my way. Get them under control.”

“I have been trying-”

“Stop being a worthless piece of shit and try fucking harder!” I reprimanded him before cutting the call and getting to the underground meeting location.

The whole drive, I felt my blood boiling with ferocious rage, with my nerves racing at full speed. My breathing turned uneven as sweat droplets streaked down my neckline and forehead. The second the car stops at the location; I get out with my men following behind me.

The meeting is at the underground location where Maxwell’s wrestling matches usually take place. It was usually open for the public, but when it came to meetings, then no outsider was allowed in. I stride to the chamber and enter, where all the Bratva members are already seated around the large oval table. Their furious and irked eyes look at me as if I didn’t belong there...didn’t belong among them. Francisco was at the corner of the room before he walked towards me.

I kept a still face, not lowering my guard for a second.

I take my seat at the end of the table, which is reserved for the Pakhan, with Francisco standing beside me like my right-hand man.

“I know what happened was unexpected. I didn’t know someone would plan to ambush our people like this and rob us,” I started when I heard some scoffs.

“You should have expected that when you planned to go against the Camorra,” one of the *Brigadiers* murmured, taking me back with surprise.

How do they know?

I look at Francisco who looks equally confused like me. The *Brigadier* smiled and shook his head as a sign of disrespect he carried for me.

“We have been running this organization very well for a long time. We indeed had our enmity with the Camorra for a long time. But we made a truce a year ago, and even today, we follow it. But you broke that when attacking one of the Capo.”

“He had it coming for-”

“We do not care about the excuses you make, girl. You may be new to this organization and helped us get our rightful place back. But there are certain rules that even the new generations won’t break. We accepted you despite being an outsider, but you are making us question that decision now.”

I saw red in front of me, with my instinct to kill this old bastard right here and now kicked in.

I let out a dry laugh. “You accepted me because all of you had no other choice. It was either me or living the rest of your lives being nothing but a bunch of boring ass old men spending their lives behind their whores.”

Everyone’s eyes widened at my insulting words, but at this point, I didn’t give a shit anymore.

“I gave all of you a second chance. A chance that Maxwell took away and gave to other people. Instead of being fucking grateful, all of you are being assholes right now. Without me, none of you could have regained your positions.”

“At least Maxwell knows how to make smart decisions to run the Bratva properly,” another *Brigadier* passes his comment. “And he didn’t go out like a lunatic after the Camorra as you did. But now that you are here, please enlighten us why you chose to attack a Capo’s family?”

Motherfucker!

“He...” I hesitated for a moment. “He had something that didn’t belong to him, so I just wanted to get it from him and warn him not to repeat such theft.”

Everyone frowned upon my reason. “And what did he have?”

“That’s personal and none of your business. Instead of focusing on the Camorra, focus on looking for the fucker who stole millions from us at the casino.”

Another man slaps the table and stands, getting all our attention. “This is just outrageous! I have had enough of your lies and excuses. If you can’t rule like a Pakhan, then just say it, girl.”

The more these men called me a *girl*, the more my blood burns like a volcano that is about to erupt any time. It took only one fucking incident and they don’t respect me anymore.

Fucking nonsense.

“Because so far you have been hiding things from us. Covering your mistakes like a child-”

“Watch it, old man,” I threatened him, to which he grinned as if I was making a joke.

“Or what? You will make your right-hand man attack us. After all, he does all the work for you, while you are busy kissing Maxwell’s ass.”

My fists clenched tightly as I imagined it being wrapped around his throat, while I choked him to death.

“Francisco here was able to get your stolen cargo back and saved our reputation in front of our top dealer. I can bet while he was busy searching for the shipment, you were busy spreading your legs for Maxwell.”

I feel Francisco’s palm against my shoulder as if telling me indirectly to calm down. But it was getting impossible from all the nonsense this bastard was spewing at me. I swear if he says one more thing about me, there will be hell for him to pay. I watch others nodding in agreement with him, but few keep their judgments neutral.

“I agree. I think we should start looking for other options. Francisco is a better option at this point than a weak girl-”

BANG. BANG.

Another member starts to speak, but he doesn’t get the chance to finish his words when I abruptly stand up and shoot him, watching his chest bleed instantly from the bullet that pierced his heart.

Everyone’s horrified eyes go to the dead body which sits on the chair. Before they look back at me, Francisco’s face is in shock.

“W-what have you-”

BANG. BANG.

The *Brigadier*, who was talking too much before, has been silenced, forever; joining his dead companion.

My hand trembles slightly, and for a moment, I'm unable to hear anything. Everything feels like a blur. My throat turns dry, and in the haze of this mess, I feel someone touching my shoulder. I look at Francisco, who faces me with disbelief.

“Erida...what have you done?”

I faced the members again, who were rooted in their seats, unable to understand what to do next as if they thought I would shoot the next person who opened their mouths. And to be honest, I didn't trust my mind anymore, so there was a chance of that happening.

I lower my hand and try to put up a brave face as I gulp down my fear and anxiety.

“I...I,” my voice was raspy like I haven't had a drop of water for days. I cleared my throat and placed both palms on the table, wearing the mask of the fierce goddess I am.

“I have rebuilt your lives, and I can erase it, just like they are,” I nod towards the dead members of the Bratva, “I accept my flaws but none of you are perfect. Maxwell got rid of you because you betrayed this organization. I gave you a second chance; don't think, if I'm gone, you will have your place. Keep in mind, Maxwell will kick out every one of you the second I step out. That time none of your useless insults or unity will save you.”

They all listen to me in stillness, with my voice echoing through the room.

“I made the mess so I will deal with it. You, fuckers, can either yap and get shot or shut the fuck up while I clear up this problem. Understood?”

I was greeted with silence.

I slap the table, making them all jolt or gasp in unison from the loud thud and vibration.

“I asked a question,” I ordered out loud.

“We understand,” everyone answered meekly.

I smirked. “Good. Now get your asses out of this place, before your presence annoys me more, and I think of shooting all of you old bastards.”

They didn’t waste a second as they all stood up and scrambled out of the door, leaving Francisco and I alone. I sat down and held my head.

This is a fucking disaster.

“You are lucky they didn’t order their guards to kill you after the stunt you pulled,” Francisco comments before placing his hand on my shoulder as a sign of support. But I shook off his touch and looked down. Feeling annoyed and enraged that I don’t have enough words to describe the length of my emotions.

“You told them, you got the cargo back!” I seethed through my clenched teeth.

“I didn’t tell them anything...they just assumed I did it when I brought the cargo back to Russia-”

“Save your fucking lies for someone else. If you think you can take my place by taking credit while I do the hard work, then you better leave the Bratva. I won’t have a worthless man like you beside me. I have come so far on my own, so I can run my future even without your lousy help,” I cursed out my words.

Francisco’s face instantly turns emotionless. But I could see the hurt darkening in his eyes, but I didn’t bother caring about him anymore. With everyone favoring him as my replacement, this is something I am not going to accept. Francisco needed to go, and I had enough of his puppy love affections and control freak attitude.

“Get rid of those bodies. I’m in no mood to see them,” I ordered Francisco. He stays rooted in his place for a moment, but eventually gets the guards to take away the dead bodies.

“Do we have any footage at all to know who robbed the casino?” I asked him when we were finally alone.

“First, tell me, where were you?” he questions me instead as my brows scrunched together in confusion.

“I was away for some personal reason-”

“Not today, Erida. You have to tell me where you were.” This time Francisco sounded demanding and stubborn as if he wasn’t going to let this go until I gave him a clear answer.

Not wanting to stretch this argument, I roll my eyes and answer him. “I was in London to see my mother’s grave with Maxwell. Go ahead and start arguing; he is fucking with my mind.”

Francisco lets out a dry laugh while shaking his head.

What is wrong with him?

“I won’t need to say that today because you will believe my words no matter what. Finally, you will see the truth.”

“What are you talking about?”

“While you were away, Maxwell played his move behind your back, and got someone to rob the casino.”

I sat up, listening to him attentively. “Who?”

“Your sister. Elysha,” he states like it is a fact.

I close my eyes and try not to be more enraged than I already am. “You know what? I don’t have time for your made-up stories so you can make Maxwell the villain,” I stand up, “If you don’t have footage of the *alive* person who did all this, then you can get out of my face. I would rather do all this myself than get your stupid story as the excuse.”

I turn and start to walk towards the exit of the room when screams from a video possibly echo through the room. I frown and look over my shoulder, finding Francisco holding out his phone, and on his screen, a video inside the casino was playing. I head to him and watch the scene happening in front of me. The angle seems to be from a hidden camera on one of the poker tables. The guests were running around and

screaming as the masked men rained hellfire with their bullets, turning the place into a murder scene.

My eyes fall on a woman stepping down the stairs, seeming unaffected by the danger around her. Even the men didn't attack her, and I could tell she was the one who planned all this. I couldn't see her face because the table must have toppled over, only giving me a view of her body from her neck to her feet. A man running by the camera suddenly stumbles and falls on the floor. When he notices the woman sauntering towards him with a gun in her hand, he starts begging for his life.

"Net pozhaluvsta! Net! Net!" he pleaded. But it was no use because she pointed the gun at his head and pulled the trigger. Instantly, the man's body jerked from the force of the bullet, before he fell on the ground. A girl's scream follows and a young blond girl kneels beside the dead man, holding onto his shoulders as she sobs.

My enemy got closer to the body and kneeled, possibly to make the girl her next target. And what I see next makes my blood run cold as I go through the biggest shock of my life, with my eyes widening like I've seen a ghost.

It is Elysha. My sister.

And there was no doubt about it, because after all, we are twins. I looked at the face I thought I would never come across again after burning her to death. But she is alive and breathing, in flesh and blood.

But...how?

“Were you his wife? Did you love him?” Elysha asks the weeping girl. She shakes her head in response.

“I-I was his whore.”

Elysha smiled, sadly as if something was broken within her. “Good. You got lucky by not falling in love, because love is a myth. It’s just an idea that gives people the false hope of eternal happiness, only ending up as endless agony for you.”

“Please, don’t hurt me...please,” the girl begged. Elysha looked mindlessly at her for a moment, before nodding at her to leave, giving her the chance to escape, which the girl took right away.

Elysha looks down at the dead man and lets out a shaky breath before she gets up and goes away from the camera frame, ending the video there.

“S-she is...” I stammered, unable to find the words to express myself.

“Elysha is alive, Erida. She has been alive this whole time. Igor and Maxwell also knew about it.”

I stared at him, feeling betrayal hitting me like a crashing wave.

“Maxwell knew?”

Francisco nodded. “He has known the whole time, and he was the one who planned with Elysha to steal your cargo. And today, he succeeded with his new plan of robbing the casino while keeping you distracted in London. I can give all the proof you need.”

I have seen enough to understand everything and connect all the dots. I feel the ground leaving under me, making me unstable as I staggered back and sat on my throne.

Maxwell betrayed me. My sister betrayed me again.

My tears made my sight unfocused as I thought of the moment I poured all my deepest secrets to Maxwell. After his visit at the hospital, I hung onto the hope that he was starting to think differently about me...that he was starting to feel something for me. I thought maybe he had given up on his redemption, giving us a chance.

But my stubborn and stupid emotions forget, how could he mine when his heart belonged to my enemy?

Elysha was the only thorn in my path that I tried to get rid of, but somehow, she has bloomed again in my life, stinging me more than ever, with Maxwell being the poisonous viper. Everything hurts so much. No words are enough to describe my agony. But I know now isn't the time to let my pain take over, and I give it all to suppress it down to the deepest caves of my tainted soul.

I don't know how the fuck she survived, but this time she won't be coming back from the dead. And this time, there will be two dead bodies because Maxwell has sealed his downfall by going against me.

I will fucking make sure of it.

“He still got the tracker in his neck?”

“Yes and it's active,” Francisco informed me.

“Good. You can leave. Don’t bother coming back because I don’t need you anymore.”

“But-” I raised my hand to shut him out. Thankfully he leaves the room without any argument. After this betrayal, I was never going to trust anyone anymore.

“Those two thought they could get their redemption so easily, but I will show them what real redemption looks like. I started off with a battle, but they turned it into a war. Now they will face the wrath of the goddess,” I vowed to myself.

It is time to step into the kingdom of redemption.

Be prepared, sister. Be ready to face your annihilation.

MAXWELL

I didn’t bother taking a driver or the guards with me as I drove myself, as fast as possible, to meet Elysha. I needed to know she was safe. I got out of the casino to look for her, when I got a text from her with an address. I didn’t waste my time and took off to the place.

The sun sets as night slowly starts taking over; by the time I reach the building near the abandoned airport, it is dark and cold. I remembered the place because it was in this building’s underground was where Elysha, was brought to me as a slave.

Leaving the car, I start walking inside the building, finding Elysha right away; she is sitting, on top of some boxes,

hunched over with her arms resting on her knees with her gaze cascaded to the floor. Something felt different about her. Something unfamiliar.

I stalk inside making sure she hears me, but she remains unmoving.

“Elysha,” I whispered her name as I got closer to her. I touch her shoulder giving it a gentle squeeze, but she still doesn’t respond.

I kneel beside her and cup her face, looking at her lost face as if there was nothing left within her. I frown and urge her to look at me.

“Elysha, what happened?” I asked, feeling my heart thumping from worry. “Did someone hurt you?”

She nodded slowly. “Your bitter love did.”

I felt even more confused. “What are you talking about? Please, tell me what happened. You are scaring me.”

“I can never scare you because maybe my love doesn’t rule over you so strongly like yours does on me. You have changed me many times, but this moment, it was a change I wasn’t expecting.”

I hold her hands as a sign of comfort. “What have I done? Just tell me because I don’t know what-”

“Where were you today?” she asked suddenly.

“I was out of Russia for few hours, but then I heard you robbed the casino-”

“Were you with Rhea?” she questions me again, interrupting my words.

I nodded as I watched her eyes shut like she was in immense pain, but she held back from portraying it through her tears. She stands up and runs a hand through her hair, seeming frustrated and disheartened.

“I kept telling myself there was nothing for me to worry about, something happening between you and Rhea. I thought I was insecure without any valid reason and that I should trust you with all my heart...you would never betray me. But then you go with Rhea to meet the person who was also my loved one, and you let her share her grief with you and not tell me about it.”

“How did you know where I went with Rhea?”

“That isn’t the main point here. She is your enemy as well. Or did you forget that she killed the woman you love...loved.”

I stride towards her gazing down at her in disbelief. “*Loved?* I still love you, *an’gel*,” I held her face, pressing my forehead against hers, “You live within my soul, heart, and blood. You always will. And the only way I will stop loving you is when I’ll be nothing, but a lifeless body.”

“Do you love Rhea?” her eyes were closed as if she was unsure about my words and emotions.

“Look at me, *an’gel*,” I demand from her, thankfully she does while holding deep rooted agony in her gaze.

“I do not love her. I cannot and I never will. You two only share the same face, but are very different from each other. And this dark heart of mine,” I bring her palm against my beating chest, “only belongs to you, where it gets the light it seeks for.”

Tears streak down her cheeks with her nose turning red. She remains quiet and only snuffles in response. I could sense her doubt lurking in the shadows.

“I understand our distance may have created suspicion in your mind. If I was in your place, I would have burned the man alive, and chopped him to pieces to be thrown in the sea. There will be times when we will face such downfalls, but the reason it happens is for our trust to be tested.”

She presses her lips, listening to me without any arguments.

“You have been betrayed many times, *an’gel*, and I don’t blame you for feeling betrayed by what I did. Especially after nearly dying by the person you loved as your family. But I give you my word that you will never have to face betrayal with me, *an’gel*.”

This time she starts sobbing as I cradle her against my chest, touching her hair to soothe her. I kiss her head and tighten my hold around her.

“I will never hurt or betray you, *an’gel*,” I promised her. “I was unaware of why and where Rhea was taking me. Otherwise, I would have let you know right away about your mother’s grave.”

“It really w-wrecked me when I heard about it. My mind was running wild with the thought of losing you. And when I went to the casino, the people there started to gossip about you and Rhea. They said how you two are...”

She couldn't finish her words like it was too much for her.

“Hush, you don't have to say anything, *an'gel*. It was your inner conflict that made you question us. But you have to believe me and my words.”

She nodded gently before leaning back and gazing up at me, her eyes re-painted with love lost in its way amid her agony. I softly smile at her and lean in to kiss her forehead.

“I'm really sorry,” she whispered. “It was reckless of me to go on with the plan without telling you or anyone else.”

“It was and I hope you will never repeat such things again,” I muttered.

“I promise you, Maxwell. It will never happen again.”

All of a sudden, we hear a distant screeching sound of tires, making both our bodies turn still, and alert.

“Did someone follow you?” Elysha asked.

I shake my head. “I was all alone.”

“Who could it be then?”

Her question was answered, in a few seconds, and my heart dropped dead on the ground when I saw Rhea and her guards striding inside the building. Elysha's eyes widened as

she went through the same shock like I did before we looked at each other, knowing we were in serious trouble.

Before we could go for our guns, the guards aimed their weapons at us, outnumbering Elysha and I. Even Rhea, took out hers, and pointed it towards Elysha.

It felt like history was repeating itself. The part where I was in a dangerous situation with the chance of losing my *an'gel* again. This time fate wouldn't be on our side.

“Hello, *sister*,” Rhea greeted Elysha with a devilish smile.

CHAPTER 24

RHEA

I was truly a fool.

A joker among the deck of cards, played all along by the king and queen. But not anymore. And certainly not again. They have gone too far this time, trying to rip me away from my kingdom and making me look like a fallen goddess. I may have fallen for their tricks and schemes, while blinded by my foolish trust.

A trust I carry for Maxwell, and I thought maybe...just maybe, this time he would see me through the façade I always put up and accept me for who I am- despite the destruction I brought into his life.

But once again, my sister took it all away from me. She defied death and returned to my life, only to poison me further with her vengeance...her redemption.

Oh well, I have killed her before; who says I can't do it again?

“I wish I could say I was happy to see you back from the dead, Elysha. But trust me, the emotions I'm feeling are

nowhere near happiness,” I cursed at her through my clenched teeth, keeping my gun aimed at her.

“What can I say? Death and I don’t get along. A queen will always come back to save her king.”

God damn it! Even her voice infuriates me.

“Hmm. I will make sure this time you are *actually* dead.”

She lets out a humorless laugh, shaking her head. “Let me guess. You will get your men to do the work, and later you will take the credit for my death.” She claps her hands, offering me a mocking look. “It’s the least I’ve been expecting from you since last time.”

I know she was trying to prickle my pride with her taunting words, and I shouldn’t let my mind win so easily against her. But she didn’t tell any lies. However, if she is challenging me, I’m more than happy to make her kneel at my feet as she faces defeat and death together.

I drop the gun and take off my jacket, preparing myself to fight one of my ultimate enemies, my sister.

She arches her eyebrows in slight surprise, before smirking like an evil woman, a look I have never seen before.

“Let’s change history then. This time, I will kill you with my bare hands and watch the light leave your eyes.”

“Not before I give you a taste of your own medicine, *sister.*”

I look at Maxwell, who is prepared to fight for the woman he loves, and I know he will become a barrier to my fight. I nod at my men, who don't waste their time ambushing Maxwell. Seeing this, Elysha goes to save him, but I beat her to it and blow a punch to her gut.

"Fuck," she groans in pain, holding onto her stomach with her body slightly crouched forward.

I take my chance to hit her across her face, basking in the sight of her on the floor and suffering, and I grin in satisfaction. But she attacks me by kicking my ankles with all her might, which I fall on the ground as well.

"Ah! God," I hissed in pain. It takes us a few seconds, but we both get up and she gets an opportunity to land punches to my face and gut. Agony radiates throughout my body as I stumble backward until my back hits the brick wall. I can feel my face bruising and taste the metallic flavor of blood in my mouth.

Raising my arms, I try defending myself, but her hits don't stop for a second. My eyes land on a beer bottle that rests on top of a pile of boxes. Without thinking, I take it and smash it hard on her head.

"Ugh! Fuck!" she screams, holding onto her head for a moment before I kick her chest as she falls back with a loud thud.

As I get to Elysha, she takes one of the shards of glasses, and stabs my leg with it. I yell in utter agony as my leg buckles, making me lose my balance. Blood streams down my

legs, puddling below me, but my mind is too determined to be weak. I didn't dare pull out the glass, knowing more blood would spill. Enduring the pain, I took another blow from her with my lips busting open more, that I felt it puffing from pain.

You can't lose to her. You can't.

I keep telling myself again and again like a mantra, even when my vision turns blurry. But the moment I feel her punches turn weak from tiredness, I let her endure the same pain, and thrust a shard into her arm.

I breathe heavily, with my throat dry like a desert. I gulp deeply and shake my head to steady my mind. I didn't realize that through the fighting, we ended outside of the building. Ignoring the darkness surrounding us, I get up and fight for my life and pride.

Spitting blood from my mouth, I kick Elysha right on her temple. It hurt like a motherfucker to use my injured leg, but it was worth seeing my sister suffer. Rage clouds my vision as I go for my sister, whose miserable life is going to end, once and for all. I hover over her and position my legs on either side of her. Holding her by the neckline of her dress, I force her head to lean forward. Her face is covered with bruises, and a few cuts are visible under eyes and cheeks. Her eyes are barely open, and her breathing turns ragged and shallow like she barely had any consciousness to respond. Seeing her like this makes me feel satisfied beyond words, but deep down, an unknown, hidden part of me feels uneasy from this sight.

One part of my mind is telling me to stop this and another part of my mind is telling me, this won't lead to any good. Reminding me of the bond we shared since birth.

She is your sister. She sacrificed everything to protect you.

Don't do this, Rhea. Don't.

That unknown voice is trying to hold me back, bringing out the old Rhea, who once loved her sister with all her heart. But that was Rhea, this time, it's Erida speaking and taking control.

She took away the man you fell in love with at first sight. She knew it, and yet she ruined that man for you.

Even after years, she didn't give him up and tried to be part of the kingdom you worked so much for.

Most of all, you lost your mother because of her. No. Not this way.

I shake my head, snapping back to reality. "No, Elysha. Open your fucking eyes. Last time I couldn't witness your death properly. But this time, I will see you take your last breath as the light leaves your eyes forever. You will see who holds control over your life. *Me*, Elysha. I, *Erida*, hold the leash to your life."

I plan to end her life by banging her head against the concrete ground, again and again, until she bleeds to death with the back of her head split and swollen from pain. Before I can engage, she pulls a trick by looping one of her legs around mine, and twisting us around with all her force, and I end up

on my back with her on top. Rapidly, she twists the glass in my leg as I scream at top of my lungs in agony. I think it might be me who will die from blood loss.

“Ah! Fucking hell! Ah!” I screeched, hearing my wounded voice echoing. But that soon stops when she punches me, making me cough out blood. My entire face starts to sting, but that doesn’t stop her from hurting me continuously. Before I realized it, I was in her shoes by being weak, bloody, and barely unconscious. At one point, my skin becomes numb from her hits, so I lie there and take it all.

Suddenly, I don’t feel her fists anymore. Through my hooded eyes, I see she has stopped and is on her feet, looking down at me in a monotonous expression.

Coughing some more, I breathed raggedly, trying to sit up. I notice her hand going behind her pocket as she pulls out a gun and points it at me. It isn’t her this time who is on her knees and on the verge of her last breath, with death staring right at her.

It was me.

The goddess. And this time she has fallen.

This time the queen has won.

CHAPTER 25

ELYSHA

This is my chance. My only chance for redemption.

All I needed to do was pull the trigger and the bullet would pierce right through her forehead, ending her life in a flash. She would be gone forever. No longer able to poison my life.

But...she would never come back. My sister...I will lose her again.

Just the mere thought of it makes my hand tremble for the first time, and even the gun in my hand starts to shake, with my aim faltering. My breathing turns uneven from sudden anxiousness ruling my heart.

The memories of what my sister took away from me start playing in my mind, trying to make me strong and determined for my motive. But also, the memories of us since our childhood, with all the cherished moments, including the tormenting times as well, make my throat constrict with emotions.

I have to do this.

No. You don't.

She is my enemy.

But she is also your sister, your only family left.

She tried to kill me and take away the love of my life.

She was unaware of the truth with redemption blinding her...just like you are now.

My thoughts kept battling with each other while Rhea kept gazing up at me with her face covered in blood and a few bruises from my punches as she knelt on the ground. She looks exhausted but fearless even when death meets her eyes.

She has always been strong no matter what.

Always be fierce. Protect each other forever because you two can't trust anyone but your blood. And you two will always be connected by blood and heart.

Our mother's words rang in my ears as I realized the conclusion to this situation.

"Connected by blood and heart," I whispered.

Rhea's eyes widen slightly, seeming surprised I still remember our mother's words after so many years. And as if Rhea could read my mind, I notice her body turning relaxed a bit with comprehension painting her face. Both of us; experience this epiphany where we finally understand, there is no end to this war.

There is no end to this redemption.

There never is until one person chooses to give up on it.

I lower the gun with my hands still shaking as I let out a silent sigh, licking my dry lips.

She frowns as if she didn't expect that from me, looking back and forth from the gun to me. I could sense she was still alert, in case I changed my mind, but I knew I wasn't going to.

She shakes her head, offering me a humorless smile. "Don't drop it, Elysha. Just don't. I can tell you have waited a long time for this moment-"

"I have," I interrupt her, feeling my voice breaking a bit from feeling overwhelmed. "I have thought of every possible way to save Maxwell from you and make you pay for the suffering you have put me through. But deep down, a part of me keeps reminding me to step away from this redemption. And at this moment, I will be doing that."

"Why?" she questioned in a reprimanding voice like she couldn't understand if I had lost my mind or what?

"Even if I did kill you, I will never find the peace I have sought through this path of revenge. My mind will be tainted with continuous thoughts of the moment I killed my sister with my own hands. You started this war long ago, and I got involved for myself and Maxwell. But I can't unsee the destruction that all of us are going through."

"Mother was always right. You are too naïve for this world. The three of us are destined for this darkness. There was no other choice." She lets out a dry laugh.

I shake my head with disapproval. “There is always a choice, Rhea. It’s never too late.”

I drop the gun, hearing the loud thud. Rhea looks down at it before shifting her stare at me.

“And its mother’s saying that brought me back to sanity. You stepped into this violent world after her death, so remember her now and think of the moment she told us to protect each other.”

I witness her gaze softening from mentioning our mother. She turns silent as if she is truly back to all those years ago when mother would often take us apart from fighting and, in the end, would tell us that Rhea and I should always be together.

We should always stick together and protect each other. After all, we are sisters, by blood and by heart.

“I kept my promise all these years, Rhea. I gave my best, saving you from darkness, even putting myself first through torture and nightmares. Indeed, I sometimes failed you, but I swear if you would have just talked to me,” I press my lips, feeling my eyes tearing up a bit from the pain I was feeling, “I-if you would just tell me about all the hatred you carried for me, I would have tried to fix that, by letting you take out your anger on me. If you told me you loved Maxwell the first time you saw him, I would have stepped back. And I never knew that our mother was an addict. Yes, there were one or two moments where I had my doubts, but I never expected our

mother to be on such a dark path. I was unaware; otherwise, I would have done everything to help her...to save *our* mother.”

Her eyes narrow, glimmering with tears, on the verge of streaking down her cheeks.

“You are lying,” she whispers.

“I have nothing to gain by lying to you then, and I still have no motive for lying to you now.” I shrugged.

“All you had to do was speak your mind,” I muttered, distressed from seeing what we have become after all this chaos. “The love we needed to carry as sisters isn’t the same anymore. We are responsible for ruining it and turning it into bitter love.”

Those tears she was holding back finally fall as she silently cries from my confession. I kneel in front of her and grasp her hands. For the first time, she looks away from me as if unable to face me from guilt and shame.

“But we can still fix this if you free yourself from redemption and give us a chance for happiness, Rhea. It’s all in your hands.” I cup her cheek with one hand, which turns crimson from her blood. “Destroy Erida, and bring back my sister. My, Rhea.”

I silently begged her, watching her crying and sniffing, with her shoulders shaking from this miserable moment we both are going through.

Unexpectedly, I hear thudding footsteps from behind. I instantly look over my shoulder, expecting an attacker, but

when I see Maxwell, I calm down.

He sees the state we are in, frowning in confusion. I could tell thousands of questions were popping into his mind. And most of all, he wanted to know why I didn't kill Rhea yet.

He has a gun in his hand as he comes closer, being careful in case Rhea does something reckless. Maxwell points the gun at Rhea with a murderous expression, and I could understand he was being protective towards me, especially after what Rhea did to me last time.

“Elysha, get away from her,” he ordered. He didn't call me his *an'gel*. He is being dead serious.

But I stayed rooted where I was. “Maxwell it's okay-”

“No, Elysha. I won't make that same mistake again. Get away from her, right now.”

I stood up, not wanting to risk anything more. But Rhea stays on the ground as she continues to cry.

“Maxwell, you have to listen to me. We need to stop this. Nothing will be gained from this redemption, trust me. None of us will be at peace as long as we are part of this battle.”

“You may be ready to forgive her, but not me, *an'gel*.” My Maxwell was still there. “I have seen the hatred she carries for you, and there is no path to get your sister back. She is miles away from the truth and that will never change. On the other hand, I suffered every fucking second with the memory of you lying on the ground, helpless and alone...just like I was. I swore I would protect you and I failed that day, and believe me

that moment still keeps running in my mind like a haunted dream.”

I stand in front of him, tilting my head to meet his gaze, which is full with the fire of vengeance and rage.

“You wanted to kill her because I didn’t exist in your life anymore, but I’m here,” I touched his arm, urging him to think clearly through this. “I’m right in front of you. Alive and breathing. There is no need for this destruction, Maxwell.”

He shakes his head. “How can you forgive her after what she did to us? Especially you, Elysha.”

“Because in the end, she will always be my sister. I swore to our mother I would protect her. Just like you are keeping your promise to be there for me, I’m keeping mine regarding my sister,” I finally tell him the truth that I was suppressing all this time.

He breathes raggedly, unable to piece together his actions. “This is madness, Elysha. You will regret this later.”

“Maybe, but I will carry another deeper regret for the rest of my life if I kill my sister right here and now. She is the only family I have left. Please listen to me and trust me on this matter, Maxwell. I need your support and help to unite me with my sister. Just please.”

“I can’t lose you again. I can’t live with constant thoughts of Rhea trying to kill you again if I let her live. I just can’t. And you have cared too much about your promise, Elysha, and

see where that led you. Are you sure you want to risk it all again?"

"The ones you love are worth the risk," I murmured.

"I made the same promise, but I didn't keep it," I hear Rhea muttering with a choked voice. "The very thing that bonded us...I broke it all and set it on fire like it didn't matter."

Rhea sniffled, wiping away her tears as she stood and walked toward me. Maxwell still kept up his guard, so she maintained a safe distance.

"It is all my fault, and I," she pauses, shaking her head while she looks for the appropriate words to pour out her guilt from her thorned heart. "I may have started this war, but now I-"

Rhea doesn't get to finish her words when her body suddenly jolts forward as she lets out a hiss in pain when I notice a needle in her neck. Frowning, she touches that and pulls it out but unexpectedly she passes out and falls. I rush towards her and hold her shoulders when I feel something pierce my arm.

I look down to find the same needle stuck to my skin. Before I can realize it, my whole body turns slack as if all the energy in my body got drained out. I fall and the last thing I see is Maxwell running toward me. A car stopped behind him, with a man stepping out and pointing a gun toward him.

I open my mouth to warn him, but I can't feel anything. I can't speak my words as I watch through my blurry vision, Maxwell dropping down as well, besides me.

I can't do anything else because soon everything turns dark and quiet.

CHAPTER 26

MAXWELL

A chilling shiver runs through my body to wake me up. I feel the coldness of the snow against the side of my face while my eyes are gradually opening. I am greeted by blurry vision and the wind howling like a snow storm is on its way. A deep thudding sound reaches my ears, before I can see who it is, I feel a harsh kick to my face.

“Ah!” I groaned in pain feeling another kick.

“Wake up!” a deep, gruff voice ordered, kicking my stomach.

“Fuck!” I grunted, snapping my eyes open fully and looking around my surroundings.

We are near a forest with all the snow-covered, tall trees around us. Every inch of the ground was also covered with heavy snow, the dark, misty sky above us with the moonlight shining upon us. There were few broken or disarranged headstones, signaling there used to be a graveyard here. I look at my side and what I see makes my heart beat out of my chest

from fear. It is Elysha lying on the ground with her eyes closed, signing she is unconscious. On her opposite side is Rhea, who is in the same position.

No. No. No. This can't be happening again.

I try getting up to save Elysha but I can't move my hands. That's when I notice it is tied tightly with thick ropes and the drugs that made me unconscious are still running in my system, keeping me weak. I have no clue if either Lucifer or Igor are aware of our absence, but there is a slim to none chance they'll arrive here to rescue us.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk." I hear a person tsking at me, when I look up, I discover the person to be Francisco. "Who would have thought; Maxwell Reznikov would be back to where his journey as a weak boy started."

I frown in confusion. *What is he talking about?*

"I swear, the day I saw you, I wanted nothing more but to carve your skin out of your body and then chop you to pieces to feed it to the dogs. But just for one person I didn't do it. For one person that was abandoned and left powerless because of you, I held back. Just to see this sight one day... to see Maxwell Reznikov falling from his throne and being beneath us."

"If it's about Rhea, then you are a bigger idiot than I thought you actually are," I muttered, only to be kicked across my face and I felt my head aching tremendously.

“Shut up!” he growled with an enraged expression to his face as if on the verge of shooting me at any time with the gun in his hand.

I hear a rustling sound and look seeing Rhea gradually waking up, taking in her surroundings. Elysha also regains consciousness, a few seconds later, looking around before her gaze lands on me with worry and tension reflecting in her eyes.

“Ah, good. Both of you are awake too. Perfect timing,” Francisco murmurs, moving towards them, and I notice they are tied up too.

He kneels beside Rhea first, smoothening back her hair from her forehead before caressing her cheek. But Rhea looks far from affectionate like she always does around him; she holds aggravation on her face, while Francisco looks at her dreamily with a strange smile.

“So beautiful,” he whispers.

“You asshole! What the fuck is wrong with you? How dare you betray me like this?”

Instead of answering her with words, Francisco punches her in her face, shutting her up.

“I betrayed you? How about we start with how you betrayed me first?” he hissed through his clenched teeth. “The whole time, you used me to your advantage. Though I was doing the same, at one point, I thought to change my mind and give you my heart,” he grabbed her hair in a tight fist, but she

refused to show weakness, “But you stepped on it like my feelings held no value. Just for you, I was willing to change my mind; until you turned out to be nothing but a serpent who poisoned my heart.”

“So, this is your plan? To kill all of us and take the position in Bratva?” she snickers. “You have been nothing but a shadow no one notices. You will remain a shadow even after I die.”

Francisco chuckles darkly. “Sorry to break it to you, *Rhea*. But it was always you who lived in the shadows. I gave you the reason for your identity; without my help, you would have been nothing,” he looks at me, “same goes for you, Maxwell,” his gaze shifts to Elysha, “and you as well.”

He stands up, leaving us in utter confusion.

Because of him? How?

That is when I hear a car’s engine coming from behind, making me look over my shoulder. Two cars halt together, with guards coming out, all armed, and opening the passenger door. A man dressed in a heavy gray coat comes out, with the guards following him closely. The closer he gets, the more features I can see clearly. He seems to be in his late sixties, with white hair covering some parts of his bald head and some surrounding his jaw and cheek, but they didn’t hide his saggy, wrinkled face. His walk was weak and a tad slow, but he held an unknown power and authority like he carried the will of a young soul. His dark brown eyes meet mine with a narrowed gaze as if he recognized me before rage and disgust colored

his stare. He stops in front of me as he kneels, leaning close to my face like he is searching for something within me. A dark, weak grin stretches on his face before he grabs my jaw with all his might.

“We finally meet again, Maxwell,” he mutters in his Russian accent.

Again? I have never met him in my whole life.

“Remember me? You shouldn’t forget the man who pushed you first into the world of nightmares.”

My eyes widened in utter shock as memories hit me like a trainwreck, reminding me of my captors who punished me every day and night, inking my childhood with terror and suffering. He was one of my tormentors.

“Even your father knew me, if the bastard didn’t put me through such misery, then I wouldn’t have to attack his son. But like father like son, even you were after me when you became the *Pakhan*. I bet he fed you the same lies he did to others, I was removed from Bratva...all of you hold no respect for me and the years of hard work I put in for this organization by falling into your father’s lies,” he spat out the words.

And that is when realization hits me about his identity.

It’s Demyan.

The man who was banished from the Bratva for being a traitor. A shadow, lurking behind us, waiting for an opportunity to attack, but I was not aware of all of this being his plan after so many years.

He looks around and nods at the nearest tree, which was half torn, it has nothing but its thick trunk left. “Get the three of them over there.”

He stands on shaky legs and nearly tumbles, but Francisco comes to his side, putting his arms around Demyan’s shoulder.

“I got you,” he mutters, helping Demyan stay upright.

He smiles, patting his cheek gently. “*YA znayu, moy syn. YA Znayu, ty vsegda budesh’ ryadom s ottsom.*”

Moy syn?

His son? Francisco is Demyan’s son...what the fuck?

The guards grab the three of us by our tied hands as we are dragged to our destination. My mind starts running with every possible idea to get out of this and to save Elysha and Rhea before it’s too late. They push us towards the trunk, having us stay seated with our backs against the tree trunk. Rhea is positioned to my left side, while Elysha is on my right.

I notice her gaze shifting for a second, directing at her tied hands. I take a quick look and see a sharp-edged stone in her palms that she must have found on the ground. Maintaining a stone-cold face, I pretend I don’t see anything, while Francisco and Demyan come towards us with the guards moving back.

They both stand in front of us with their shadow over us.

Demyan grins and scoffs. “I truly wish you didn’t kill your father so soon. I wish he were still alive and kneeling like a weakling like his son is now. He would have gotten to see

where his son was kept and tortured as a child. Look around you, Maxwell...remember all these?"

I frown and look around, feeling nostalgia hitting me as I sense familiarity regarding this place.

The snow...the deep forest...the headstones...

All these only belonged to one place, which was always vivid in my nightmares. This is the exact place Demyan and my uncle kept me captive. The church, from the outside, symbolizes purity, but inside, filled with darkness and sins. I could feel my heart ready to burst out of my chest and my breathing turning shallow from remembering the torture the innocent and harmless boy went through because of these monsters.

Demyan snickers. "Brings back so many memories, doesn't it?" his gaze moves towards Rhea, staring back at him without showing any hint of fear like the goddess she was, "and you?"

Demyan inches towards her. "You may look like an innocent, naïve girl who is good enough to be a trophy wife. But the ink on your skin reflects your true personality. A viper...one who doesn't hesitate to deceive others for their fortune and after preying on them, you shed your skin looking for another hunt."

She shrugs like his words mean nothing to her. "Not my fault if your son is the *innocent and naïve* one to fall for in the trap of this viper, whining now and then like a bitch whenever he fails in something," she retorts.

In response, Demyan slaps her sharply, her head snaps sideways with her hair curtaining her face.

“Francisco was right. You are a brat, but don’t worry you will get an ending a viper deserves. Being stomped under the hunter’s feet as you are the prey.”

“Can’t wait,” she teases.

He shakes his head and then looks at Elysha when I feel her passing the stone to me. Without wasting time, I take it and start cutting the ropes as fast as possible while my heart races against my chest in immense tension.

“And you?” he claps as if he was impressed with her, “You showed women are good for something. I never thought a stubborn and heartless man like Maxwell would be in love with a nobody.”

He chuckles while I feel my hand loosen a bit, despite the ropes turning colder and my fingers starting to struggle because of the freezing atmosphere.

“You have Maxwell wrapped around your fingers so well; I bet if you tell him to stay still while Francisco beats the shit out of him, he would do it.” He pretends to think about something as I feel the ropes getting loose enough for me to break free and I lean a bit closer to Rhea, silently passing her the stone. She understands my gesture and takes it in her hand, starting to work on her restraints.

“On second thought,” he looks at his guards over his shoulder, “*Derzhi yego I zastav’ vstat’ na koleni.*”

His men come towards me, grabbing my shoulder and taking me a few steps away from Elysha and Rhea before they force me to kneel. Demyan gets closer to Elysha, holding her by her jaw and digging his fingernails into her skin. She lightly hisses but stays strong, not wanting to expose that we are almost free. Meanwhile, Francisco heads toward me with a wicked, pleasing smile as he cracks his knuckles. My eyes never leave Elysha, who stays strong for herself and me while I silently promise to save her from that evil fucker.

“Tell him, girl. Tell him to stay still while my son beats him to death.”

Her lips don't move to speak what he wants her to say, which only infuriates him instantly as he takes her hair in a tight fist. “Tell him!” he orders her in a raised voice. “Tell him right now, or else I'll get my guards to have their way with your sister. I will make sure you watch every second my men will fuck every hole in your sister.”

That gets a reaction from her as her eyes widen in pure terror for Rhea. Her lips part slightly, struggling to choose between the man she loves and her own blood. I nod at her, helping her to make a choice.

Her eyes briefly close with regret before she speaks. “S-stay still, Maxwell... a-and let Francisco beat you to death.”

Before I know it, Francisco lands his first punch across my face and waits for a second expecting me to react, but when he sees I remain unmoved, he hits me again. I grunt from his punches as they keep raining on my cheeks and jaw, one after

another. Feeling my face swell from pain, it radiates through my skull, nearly blurring my vision. Blood coats my lips, and a few droplets oozed from the cuts on my cheek caused from his ring. Francisco lets out a roar before channeling every ounce of his power into his last punch before it connects with my face making me fall on my back with immense agony. Blood stains the white snow, turning it crimson as my breathing turns ragged and shaky as my lungs struggle for air.

I can only hear Francisco and Demyan laughing, celebrating their so-called victorious moment.

“All these years of waiting were worth seeing you in this state, Maxwell. I cannot describe the inner peace it brings to me. I don’t know what this woman has done to you but her pussy must be the only thing that has put you under her spell. Otherwise, why would you even bother about a nobody like her? You are nothing but a girl, abandoned by her own mother and sister and fucked day and night by several unknown men. I bet they enjoyed it because I did,” he winks at her.

When I understand the meaning behind his words, anger inks me to the core of my soul.

“It was my plan, after all, to get your uncle to kidnap you. In exchange, I watched you get beaten close to death, and when you were unconscious, I fucked your precious queen. Many times.”

Rage blinds me with a thirst for vengeance and the blood of my enemy that I wish to do nothing more than dig Demyan’s grave right here and now. The mere thought of him

daring to touch my *an'gel* makes me want to crush every bone in his body and cut him to millions of pieces. Even through my blurred vision, I see Elysha on the verge of crying but giving it her all, not to shed a single drop. She is truly my queen.

But deep down I keep that rage on a leash to be used at the right moment.

“Everything you had will be gone right in front of your eyes. I will wipe away your existence as if you didn't even breathe. And once you are gone, my son will take over the Bratva, the rightful leader.”

I start to laugh weakly at first, but it soon starts to mingle with the howling of the wind, echoing around. I balanced myself on my side, meeting Demyan's gaze, filled with confusion from my laughter.

“Being a rightful leader. You mean, beating a man while he is tied, then I can imagine him hiding like a pussy when his enemies invade him,” I mutter and continue my chuckling, ignoring the ache radiating through every nerve in my body.

I feel Francisco pulling me up by my collar, staring at him with a vengeful expression while his nostrils flared in pure rage as if my words triggered him.

“What the fuck did you just say?” he hisses through his clenched teeth.

“The truth, princess,” I answered bluntly with a smirk.

He punches me again but it is slightly weak and hesitant.

“Guess your father raised you like he was, a fucking pussy. Did he also teach you to suck cocks in case his little princess couldn’t get to mingle with other people properly?”

He pulls my neck back with force. “Shut the fuck up, you motherfucking asshole!”

“Why? So your men will finally see that they are working with a bunch of weak and old-ass people who only show their power when their enemies are helpless.”

Francisco and Demyan look at their guards, trying to read their expressions carefully as if they were searching for even the slightest hint of doubt on their faces. From the corner of my eyes, I look at Rhea who gives a timid nod, gesturing she is free. I try to loosen my rope fully, while keeping my hands behind my back to keep up with the act. That’s when I notice a knife sheathed in Francisco’s belt and see my chance to save all three of us.

I clench my fists and roll over on my shoulders to prepare. Quickly, I grab Francisco’s knife and plunge it into his knees.

“Ah! Ah! Fuck!” he screams out loud, suffering, all the guards go for their guns to shoot me on the spot. But I take out the knife, now covered in Francisco’s blood, before I go behind him and position the knife against his neck. Kicking on the back of his knees, he lets out a screeching scream as he kneels on the floor with blood oozing from his deep cut.

“One move and this knife goes right through his neck,” I warn his guards and look at Demyan, who no longer holds any amusement or pride on his face. Worry and nervousness paints

his demeanor as he gestures to the guards to drop their weapons.

Rhea and Elysha don't waste a second as they get rid of their restraints and take away the guns from the guards and Demyan as well. They emptied the bullets and threw some of them away, keeping only three for us to use.

"Now let him go," Demyan says in a threatening tone. "You were accusing my son for being a coward, but you are doing a cowardly act."

I narrow my eyes on him. "Unlike your son, I have the strength and brain to take down my enemy. I don't need weapons when it comes to defeating them."

"Seems like you are not always true to your words as you hold my son hostage with a weapon. What difference do you and a coward have?"

I know he was trying to trigger me by using masculinity bullshit to play his games on me, but it didn't matter to me as I had to think about Elysha and Rhea.

But just as I'm about to get us out of here, I notice one of his guards getting a small gun from his back that he must have hidden well. Before I can react, he aims the gun at me and pulls the trigger. In reflex to guard myself, I bring Francisco's body in front of me, and when the fire rings through the howling, cold wind, we both stumble back, landing on the snow.

I feel my entire body rushing with adrenaline, my mind turning fuzzy. I feel something wet on my hand. I look down and see blood coating my palms mixed with snow. I frown for a second, only for realization to hit, knowing what must have happened.

As I sit up on my elbow and look over at Francisco, I find his lifeless eyes staring at the night sky with a bullet hole between his forehead. A scream catches my attention as I see Demyan yelling in agony, even though he wasn't the one to get shot. It is a father crying from the pain of losing his son.

“Damien! No!” He didn't care about showing his weakness in front of his men. He also didn't care about maintaining his power and dominance as he kneels in front of his son's dead body and cradles him against his chest, cupping his blood coated pale face.

“Please, no, no, no. God no.” Tears stream his face as he gently rocks back and forth with Francisco in his arms. “Don't leave your father, Francisco. You are all I have...please. Please don't leave me.”

I slightly grunt from the hits and punches as I try to get up on my shaky legs. Seeing this sight does make me slightly remorseful of taking a man away from his son, but the other part of me puffs his chest in pride for taking down his enemy.

“I-I'm extremely sorry, Sir,” the guard who tried to shoot me comes forward, looking scared and apologetic. “I didn't mean to-”

He never finishes his words as Demyan fishes out a gun from Francisco's pocket and shoots the guard right at his heart, killing him on the spot. I hear the distant and familiar sound of the whistling of a train.

The Russian army train.

I look at Elysha and Rhea, who hold the same expression of surprise and hope just as I did. But the question is, how do I get them both to the train without making Demyan and his men notice our absence?

The sound of the train also caught Demyan's attention. He looks at us with vengeance flashing in his eyes as if, at this moment, he is going to do everything possible to turn our lives into a nightmare before killing us.

"You," he hisses out, my presence like venom to him. "Your father destroyed me before and now you did the same by killing my son. It's your turn to suffer now."

I expected him to kill me with the gun in his hand, but he stared at his guards in a silent command to make me suffer longer. They understood without a single word spoken before they all charge toward us while Demyan stayed with his dead son.

CHAPTER 27

ELYSHA

There were so many guards coming at Maxwell and some approaching Rhea and I. But all I could think about was protecting them both.

I failed them before but not today. I will save them till my last breath. I glanced at Rhea for a second and saw her preparing to fight as well. For the first time, we were here for each other and not for ourselves. Protectiveness and determination took over my mind and soul as I tried to gain strength through the remnant of the drug in my body.

Adrenaline pumps in my blood as a guard tries to attack me, raising his fist. In defense, I move away from his punch and land a hit with my elbow against his nose.

“Ah, fuck!” he groans out loud in pain, holding onto his nose. Before he could turn, I kicked his knee with all my might making him lose balance. I quickly climbed his back, wrapping my legs tightly around his neck as he started to wheezing, struggling to breathe.

I kept my focus on suffocating the man when another came at me, trying to tackle me from behind. But Rhea takes over and punches the guy so hard that he falls, hitting his head against a rock, and starts bleeding. She returns to fighting her other opponents, joining in with Maxwell.

The guy beneath me becomes drowsy as his face turns pale from a lack of air. Quickly, his body thuds down on the snow, not moving or breathing anymore. Looking over my shoulder, I see two men holding down Maxwell, with another approaching him with a wicked grin. I quickly dig into the dead man's pocket, luckily finding a knife. Without hesitating, I rush towards the man and plunge the knife into his neck, watching him choke on his blood as he bleeds to death.

Maxwell manages to take care of the other two men, breaking him free of their hold.

“Maxwell!” I call out to him before throwing the knife at him. He perfectly catches it and stabs both the men back-to-back onto their knees.

As they scream in anguish, I head towards the one on the right, punching and kicking him on his wound, taking away his chance to hurt Maxwell. I briefly looked at Maxwell, who stabbed the knife into his opponent's eyes before pulling it out and passing it to me. Without wasting a second, I plunged the sharp blade right into the fucker's open mouth, enjoying the sight of him bleeding.

Most of the guards were dead by now, but some were still alive, and I didn't know how long we could keep up. I can

hear the loud whistling of the train getting closer. It is our only way of escaping at the moment, and we have to leave fast.

“We need to leave right now!” I yelled through the roars of fighting, getting Maxwell and Rhea’s attention. They both also understood we couldn’t keep fighting for much longer. Seeing more men coming at us, we use our guns and try shooting as many as possible, but Maxwell is soon out of bullets while Rhea and I have only a few left.

We drop our defenses and run away from the men following us into the deep, dark forest. The three of us didn’t need to find out where we were heading; this route was imprinted in our minds since the first time we were here. My lungs start burning for air, my muscles ache from running, and my feet are aching from a small stone hitting my sole. But I kept all that pain under control; this wasn’t the time to let my suffering win over my strength. It was time to be strong. I was going to fight tooth and nail.

Nothing will stop me.

I was the queen. I will prove it to Maxwell and Rhea but to myself as well. Looking over my shoulder, I don’t see any signs of the guards. It was both a relief and worry because it meant we lost them or they were on another path to attack us. Not to mention, Demyan must be coming after us too.

“I see it!” Rhea exclaims, pointing towards the empty, snow-covered tracks, bringing the light of hope and solace.

“Thank God,” I rasped.

We headed towards the track, finally letting out a breath of calmness.

“I think it’s getting closer. The second it stops, we need to head inside one of the empty compartments,” Maxwell says, licking his lips and breathing heavily.

“I think it will take us close to Moscow. Most of the Russian army trains stop there,” Rhea adds, looking at the either side of the track where the train would come. A few seconds later, the ground starts to tremble, with the rumbling sounds of the train getting louder and louder.

I gaze around feeling uncertainty churning in my stomach. And that’s when I noticed there was no stop post like there was all those years ago, meaning the train isn’t going to stop.

Fuck.

“The train won’t stop; there are no stop posts,” I mutter quickly, feeling panic streaming through my nerves.

“What?” Maxwell frowns, his eyes widening in shock. He follows my gaze and understands my point.

He gulps, running his hand through his hair as he looks at the direction of the train and the track back and forth.

“We have no other choice but to run and jump into the first empty compartment we see,” Rhea says, and neither of us has any other suggestion to add. She was right and it was our only choice.

Oh God. This is our only chance.

Please, God. Please...guide us to safety. Help Maxwell and Rhea get to safety.

I silently pray to God from the bottom of my heart... something I stopped doing a long time ago. I thought maybe He didn't exist as there was no path to rescue me in all those years of torture. I lost all hope in God, but today, for my sister and her love, Maxwell, I was taking that leap of faith.

For their safety, I was willing to go down the path of a belief that wrecked my heart again and again with disappointment, while I hoped this time it would work and at least save the two people who matter the most in my life.

It is blind faith, and only time can tell if this will work, or not.

Please, God...please.

RHEA

The closer the reverberating sound of the heavy wheels of the train against the track gets, the faster my heart starts to pace. My throat feels dry like the Sahara, my mind barely functioning from all the tension and worry clouding me.

For the first time in a long time, it was not revenge nor power that I sought like I needed my next breath.

It is freedom and safety for my sister and her love, who she couldn't live without. Since our mother died, I have always blamed her for every bit of sorrow I suffered. I even tried to

kill her while blinded by vengeance. But she has always been there for me.

She could have let me die among those guards or even killed me whenever she had the chance. But unlike me, her heart is too pure. Maxwell was right; my soul has been tainted with darkness that there will never be any hope for even a ray of goodness...because my darkness would kill it right away.

I thought our darkness would unite our hearts and Maxwell would finally be mine. But I realize he isn't purely inked with sin and corruption like I am. Elysha was the one who guided his heart to walk out from the walls that always surrounded Maxwell...she showed him love and made him a better man.

Her man.

My mind may have been the one that kept feeding me with lies and delusions about Maxwell belonging to me. But in reality, he was never mine, to begin with. He gave up his heart to his innocent *an'gel*, who first saved him in the basement from immense suffering and pain.

This time, I won't take away that chance from her. She has faced nothing but nightmares throughout her life. It is time for my sister to get her happily ever after.

The whistling of the train brings me back to reality from my thoughts. It is coming from the left side as I see the steam train with smoke clouding on its roof and wheels. It would be a bit tough to find an empty compartment with the smoke blocking our view, but we have no choice but to try.

As it gets closer, the three of us prepare ourselves while Elysha and I hold onto our guns in case our enemies come out of the shadows. I take a deep, shaky breath keeping my gaze focused on the train.

This is it.

CHAPTER 28

MAXWELL

“Here it comes,” I mutter, with the rumbling engine nearly piercing through my ear drums as it starts to pass by us. Luckily it isn’t too fast, and we can run along with the train, trying to find an empty compartment. It was hard to see through the smoke, but I finally found one, wide enough for the three of us to get in.

“Found one!” I called out to them and they followed my gaze. We run towards the empty compartment as fast as possible.

I take Elysha’s hand, bringing her closer before my hands move toward her waist. I hoist her up, helping her to reach the door handle before she gets inside. I feel myself on the verge of breathlessness and tiredness, but I give it my all for Elysha and Rhea. Looking over my shoulder, I take Rhea’s hand and guide her the same way, with Elysha helping by leaning her hand forward and helping her sister get in.

“Quick, take my hand, Maxwell,” Elysha says, stretching her arms out for me. My palms grasp her tightly and she uses

her strength to pull me forward.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

The three shots ring out loud with a sudden agonizing pain hitting me like a wrecking ball that my whole body jolts.

“No! No!” Elysha screeched out loud. I already started to feel weak with my vision blurring. My hands turn slack but Elysha keeps her grip firm. My breathing also turns shallow and short, while my legs don’t carry any more energy to run. I feel blood smearing throughout my whole back where I was shot.

“You fucking asshole!” Rhea curses out loud as I watch her taking out her gun and shooting someone behind me.

“Hold on to me, Maxwell. Hold on,” Elysha begs with tears streaming down her face. My heart started to pound faster, pumping blood faster through my nerves, but weakness takes over my body and soul.

Through my drowsy gaze, I watch Rhea holding onto Elysha and pulling her back with all her might. From the force, Elysha holds my hand tightly and pulls me inside the compartment. My side hits the hard ground as I groan in pain.

“Fuck...” I rasped out my words.

“Oh my God...no, no, no. Please, no,” I hear Elysha’s sorrow-filled words as she examines the wounds on my back.

“He is bleeding a lot,” Rhea says with worry coating her voice. “He needs a doctor as soon as possible. But Moscow might still be hours away-”

“No! I won’t lose him,” Elysha cries before she comes in front of me and cups my face. “Maxwell, look at me.” She lightly taps my cheeks trying to keep me awake.

I give it my best to keep my eyelids opened, but the pain keeps winning me over. I hear her ripping her dress before balling the fabric pieces and pressing them against my wound to help the bleeding to stop.

But something within tells me this might not work.

“Stay with me. Stay with me, Maxwell. Please.” She whispers close to my face with a few of her tears falling onto my cheek, as she rests my head on her lap. Watching her broken because of me, only makes my heart shatter. But at this moment, I feel helpless as I can’t do anything to soothe her.

She keeps caressing my face, smudging her palms with my blood. I raise my trembling hand, brushing my fingers against her pale and smooth skin, feeling her warmth that is always my beacon to hope.

Suddenly, her eyes widen for a moment as if she is hit with realization as she peers up at Rhea.

“The army,” she rasps. “They should be on the train. They can help us.”

Rhea nods frantically, agreeing with her sister. “I will get them.” She pauses for a second, meeting my gaze and silently promising me to bring help before she opens the door to the next compartment.

“Help is coming. Stay awake, Maxwell,” Elysha whispers, wiping her tears that seem to be flowing endlessly.

I wanted to stay awake and be with Elysha. There is nothing more that I want. However, my pain rules over my entire body as more blood drains from my wounds. I can barely muster the strength to move, and eventually, my hand drops from Elysha’s cheek. But she uses her other hand to keep them in place as if not wanting to escape my touch for a second.

“Please...I can’t lose you...I can’t.” She shakes her head as her face turns red from crying.

“You carried...these same emotions in your eyes when you first saw me in that basement. The look of worry and despair...as if you could feel my pain. I will never forget that night.”

“Don’t speak to me like this, as if...as if it’s goodbye,” she says with a hint of rage.

“Maybe it is...”

Elysha shakes her head vigorously. “No, don’t you dare,” she warns, even though she knows it is the truth.

I chuckle lightly, feeling my chest start to ache badly. “I would do it all over again. I would go through all those nightmares and terrors just to be with you,” I cough a bit, closing and opening my eyes to try to focus on Elysha to have one last image in my head, “You had my heart since the first

time I laid my eyes on you. And it will always be you; your name is imprinted in my heart and soul.”

She presses her forehead against mine, sobbing at this point.

“Please, don’t leave me. Please...I beg you, Maxwell. I won’t be able to survive.”

“Yes, you will. You are a queen, remember. And queens are born strong...no matter how much suffering and sacrifices they go through they find their way to freedom and peace. Do not just survive, Elysha, just because I won’t be in your life. *Live* and rule your life like a queen. And forgive your sister because she is all you have left. She was blinded by redemption like we were, *an’gel*. Be with her because no matter what she is still your family.”

“You can’t leave me...you can’t.” She sniffles.

“I don’t want to...I really don’t. But maybe this is how my story ends. An ending I never expected but also a moment I have no control over.”

Elysha leans closer and kisses me deeply, savoring our last moment together. I return her kiss, putting all my strength into devouring her sensation and touch, before the time arrives when I will never feel it again. I wish for nothing more, but to stop time so we can be in this moment forever.

But it was impossible.

“You will always be my *an’gel*,” I whispered.

“Only yours,” she answers.

I smiled weakly, feeling my heartbeat starting to slow. My nerves followed the same pace as if my body was starting to prepare to lose the battle. This was it...my final time.

“Do you trust me?” I ask one final time.

She continues sobbing. “More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you do...” Her final words fade away in my ears. Everything starts to feel numb...starts to feel cold...dark.

I couldn't think...couldn't speak...couldn't feel.

My vision begins to turn foggy and I can't see Elysha anymore. She isn't there. Not anymore.

I am all alone with the light escaping my sight.

It is only darkness...only...darkness.

CHAPTER 29

ELYSHA

Cold. Numb. Lifeless.

There was no warmth to his skin. His pulse wasn't racing anymore. And his eyes...held no light of life.

It was all gone.

Maxwell is gone...he is...dead.

I feel my throat constricting with my heart-wrenching emotions. My mind is turning hazy from shock and heartache; I feel like I might faint.

No...He can't be dead. He...he can't die.

Abruptly the door bursts open with Rhea and a soldier right behind her.

"Tam! Pozhaluysta, pomogite yemu," Rhea begs for help from the soldier.

I let my heart be inked with hope when he comes forward and checks on Maxwell. He pulls down the skin beneath his eyes before pulling out a small flashlight and shining it over

Maxwell's eyes. He then takes his hand, pressing his fingers against his nerve point for a few seconds.

He sighs and places his hands against his chest, pushing it down three times to perform CPR. He does it a few times as I keep my gaze glued to Maxwell. A few moments later, the soldier stops.

There was condolence painted on his face while my heart dreaded hearing the words I never even dreamt.

"Mne zhal' eto govorit'. No on merty." The soldier declares Maxwell to be dead.

"No! He can't be!" I screamed like a lunatic. "He is not dead! Keep checking him and do CPR!"

He looks at Rhea with a pity filled look. *"Mne zhal'."*

"No! You can't stop! If you won't do it, then I will!"

I lay Maxwell's head gently on the ground, positioning myself beside him. I follow the same procedures as the soldier, pumping his chest again and again, while blowing air into his cold and numb mouth.

You can't leave me. You can't.

I don't know how much time passes or what's happening around me, but when I feel Rhea's arm around my shoulder, I shake it off.

"No! I have to do this. I won't give up on him," I tell her mindlessly.

“Elysha,” she mutters my name in a way that only holds remorse and misery...and pity. I slap away her hands.

“Don’t, Rhea. Just...don’t.”

“Please, listen to me-”

“No!” I push her away. “Let me help him!”

“Elysha!” This time she says it more forcefully, halting my movements with my hands pressed against Maxwell’s calm chest. I keep my eyes fixated on Maxwell because I wasn’t brave enough to see Rhea’s expression full of pity for me.

Pity for losing the man I gave my heart and soul to.

“It’s okay, Elysha,” she whispers, putting her arms around me, resting her forehead against my temple. “It’s going to be okay.”

I shake my head. “No...it’s never going to be okay. He... he can’t leave me.”

She hugs me tightly as I finally lift my hand away from Maxwell’s chest.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Elysha,” she whispers against my temple.

Unable to hold back myself anymore, I finally let my heart crumble with sorrow and misery taking over my mind and body. I sob out loud, letting the tears stream down my face.

Experiencing heartbreak like never before, I cry in Rhea’s arms as she tries to console me, caressing my hair and whispering gentle words.

“He vowed to be always with me...he lied,” I spoke in a choked voice as I continued weeping.

“This is all my fault,” Rhea says. “Only if I wasn’t too blinded with redemption...he would have been alive. I should have known more about Francisco before letting him enter our lives. I’m so sorry.”

I had no words to give her for an answer as I cried harder and louder, with my vision blurred by my tears.

I can barely feel myself breathing. My mind is not functioning anymore. And my heart...it may be beating at the moment, but in reality, it is dead.

Sniffling, I look at Maxwell’s lifeless body, unable to think of what I will do next or when this nightmare will end...or maybe it never will. It will haunt me for the rest of my life.

I hold his hand, wanting some sort of comfort that I always sought from him. My fingers lean towards his wrist when I feel a weak and small pulse.

My heart skips a beat as I jerk upright in shock. I look at the soldier immediately. “I felt a pulse. *U nego yest’ pul’s.*”

He takes Maxwell’s wrist as a beam of hope rises; I pray to God for his life, joining my hands together.

The soldier’s brows furrow with his eyes slightly widening. Rhea and I both lean forward, anticipating his answer.

“*On zhivoy. Yego pul’s slabu. Odnako on mozhet spastis,*” he muttered before instantly getting up. “*Ya skoro vernus’ s*

meditsinoy i perevyazt.”

Informing us he will return with some essential stuff to treat Maxwell; he dashes out of the door.

I lightly tap his cheeks, trying to wake him up. “Maxwell? Can you hear me?” His whole body was limp, but as the soldier said, he was still alive. There is hope. There is a chance.

“Please, stay with me,” I beg him, holding his hand. “Don’t leave me. Please stay...stay.”

I kissed his forehead as my tears continued their journey. “You will be okay. You will be safe.”

Soon, the soldier returns with a bag, taking out some injection, thread, and needle to attend Maxwell’s bleeding. The whole time, I held onto his hand, keeping my fingers pressed on his pulse point.

I don’t know how much time passes with the soldier helping Maxwell and the train taking us back to Moscow. But when I hear the zipping sound of the soldier packing up his belongings, I instantly look at him.

“*Budet li on v porvadke?*” I desperately wanted to know if Maxwell would be alright or not.

The soldier gives a small smile as he stands up.

“*Yego pul’se vse yeshche slab, no ya ustanovil korvotekhenive. Otvezite vego v gosptal’, kogda doberesmya do Moskvyy. No poka on v poryadke.*”

I finally let out a breath of relief as he mentioned Maxwell being alright for now, but he would need immediate medical treatment when we reached Moscow. This time it was tears of joy and solace.

He is alive. He is safe.

I feel Rhea's comforting hand cupping my shoulder for reassurance as we smile at each other. I could finally breathe again, having Maxwell return to me. He still looked pale and injured, with several bandages wrapped around his back where he got shot. I wish I had the chance to kill Damyen, who shot him as we were getting on the train. I don't know how he found us, but he must have followed us as we were running away.

But now I will keep my love, my king, protected. And this time, I will do everything to keep him safe.

Everything is going to be alright.

Nothing will ever tear us apart. Nothing.

CHAPTER 30

MAXWELL

Pain is the first thing that greets me as I try to find my way back out of the darkness. Then, sound reaches my ears as I get closer to the light. Something was beeping but I couldn't tell what it was. All I know is, I had to get out of here. I had to break free somehow.

The sound gets louder and louder, the pain also intensifies with weakness grasping my body. But I fight through every obstacle, enduring the agony as I leave this darkness.

My eyelids slowly open, my sight being blurry. My skin prickled with tension. My head hurt badly. A familiar distant sound of the train reached me, nearly making me worried that I might be back to the same hell where my innocence was ripped away. But as my vision starts to find its focus, I let out a breath of relief, not seeing the familiar dark and stenchful basement. I feel someone's warmth against my chest. When I look down, everything appears clearer, I feel and see the person move. I notice her long raven black hair as she lifts up and sees me, she gasps.

That's when I see her.

I see her.

It's my girl. My queen. My *an'gel*.

Her beauty is as mesmerizing as it was, since the first time I saw her. Nothing has changed and it never will. Maybe I have truly died and this is my heaven. She cups my face, looking grateful and happy to see me.

“Maxwell,” she whispers my name in her sweet, gentle voice. “Are you still in pain?” Her voice was so angelic, just like her. She was wearing a loose wool maroon sweater which covered her hands and up to and her neck. The dark circles under her eyes and her pale skin were enough to tell me she was sleepy and tired. But even in this state she looked absolutely beautiful to me.

I swallow, feeling my throat drying as I try to speak, but it is difficult to get out a single word.

“I will get the doctor,” she mutters, with worry coloring her face as she gets up. I hold her tightly against me with whatever strength I have left. Fearful that if she was gone, she wasn't going to come back.

“Don't leave me. Stay,” I mustered out the words. “Don't leave me alone.”

“I never will, Maxwell.” She kisses my lips gently, pressing her forehead against mine. I see a tear streaking her cheek, I feel my heart ache from the sight. “And don't you dare leave me again.”

“If this is heaven then trust me, we are never going to be separated again.”

She chuckles lightly through her crying. “Thankfully, by the grace of God, you are still alive.”

“I only remember telling you goodbye and your warmth before I lost consciousness. The rest is blank for me.”

“Damyen shot you when you were getting on the train. But luckily, Rhea had her gun and she killed him. You lost a lot of blood that your body couldn’t hold onto any strength. We found a soldier who was on the train and he treated you, trying to stop your bleeding. We got you to the nearest hospital from the station, from there the doctors helped you. You have been out for the past three days, but you are finally awake. There was a moment on the train when he declared you...” She looks away. She couldn’t finish her words, and she didn’t need to. The fear and suffering her voice holds, are enough to tell me what she has been through.

If I were in her place, I would have probably killed myself. I didn’t want to exist in a world where I lost my love, all over again. I could only imagine the heartbreak she felt because of me because I have been there every time I lost her, and I would never wish that upon her to feel that agony.

I raise my trembling hand, cupping one side of her cheek, urging her to meet my eyes.

“Hey,” I whispered. “We are both okay now. We both have each other for the rest of our lives.”

She sniffles as she nods. “I was just so scared.”

“I know, *an’gel*. I’m so sorry you had to suffer that. But I’m alive and I’m with you. Forever. All the darkness in our lives is now gone, and we can finally have a life where it’s just you and me, just like we have always wanted.”

“You and me,” she muttered.

Ruining the moment, I hear the door opening with soft footsteps entering the room. We both turn our heads to find Rhea standing at the doorway. She gasps, seeing me awake and lets out a shaky breath. Instant remorse, tiredness and guilt cover her face, like she truly regrets committing all those sins.

I notice her eyes glimmering with tears that she is trying to hold back as she shakes her head. “I-I can’t do this.” She turns to leave as if all this is overwhelming her.

“Rhea, wait,” Elysha calls out to her, making her halt with her back facing us. She is in similar attire like Elysha, but wears a gray sweater with black jeans, while her hair is tied in a ponytail. Elysha goes to her sister, turning her around and bringing her towards me.

She helps me sit up slightly while I control the urge to grunt in pain.

“It’s okay, Rhea,” Elysha whispers. “You can tell him.”

But she shakes her head again, unable to meet my gaze. “I can’t.”

“You are brave enough to speak your mind, Rhea,” I muttered. “Tell me whatever is in your mind because

suppressing it won't be of any help.”

I could tell what she was going to say. It was all written on her face. But I let her have the chance to pour out her emotions; otherwise, it would taunt her mind forever.

She swallows, letting out a trembling breath, before looking at me straight in the eyes. “I’m sorry,” she shifts her gaze towards Elysha, “I’m truly sorry.”

Her voice breaks a bit but she stays strong and continues. “You both are in this state of misery because of me. I let myself get blinded with envy and redemption that I did not care about who got hurt. You almost died because of me and I also let my sister die once. I never realized the price I’d pay and those around me.”

I listen to her silently.

“I was enraged when we lost our mother, and I blamed Elysha for it. I also felt heartbroken and jealous that you chose her over me, even though we both look the same. But I now realize why your heart yearned for her because a king always returns to his queen. I confessed to Elysha all the times I tried to make you mine. I needed to tell her because the secrets were killing me inside. She understood and forgave me, even though I don’t deserve it.”

She blinks back her tears, not wanting to look weak. “And I have learned my lesson too. Redemption never brings peace. Take one step into it; there is no turning back until you get sucked so deep into it that you become part of the kingdom of redemption.”

Rhea touches Elysha's hands, offering her a sad, small smile. "But I promise you that from now on, I will never be a burden in your life. You spent your days and nights protecting me from every danger. Now be free from that responsibility and live your life."

Elysha frowns. "And you?"

She shrugs. "Let's see where fate leads me."

"Don't give up your control over fate," I murmured, giving her a serious look. Her brows furrowed in confusion from my words. "Never trust fate to drive your life. It won't hesitate turning into a bitch and ruining you for eternity. Rule your destiny and tell fate to fuck off."

She lightly chuckles at my words. "After what I did, I shouldn't be even anywhere near you both."

"That's guilt making you think that," Elysha said. "You have repented for your sins and redemption no longer exists in your mind. I forgive you."

"So do I," I added. "You may stay as long as you want."

Unable to hold back, Rhea starts to cry softly, wrapping her arms around Elysha. "I don't deserve this. But I promise you, I will make it up to you both."

Elysha caresses her hair, soothing her sister as always. "I know. I just wanted my sister back and I'm glad to have her."

"Me too," Rhea murmured, hugging Elysha tightly.

“You know, I could actually use a fearless and cunning woman like you in the Bratva.” They both part as Rhea’s face holds a questioning expression.

“You can still be a part of it. You are more than worthy to be a member of the Bratva.”

“I don’t want to be the Pakhan, that place will always belong to you. But I don’t mind dealing with the local gang members. The other members of the Bratva will object to this, that I’m sure of. They are nothing, but a bunch of lousy, lazy, old fuckers.”

“Leave that to me. I can assure you, they will not object when they aren’t holding their positions anymore. In case that fails, then killing them seems much more of a fun option.” I smirk, followed by a nod. “I was thinking of starting some bike and car races around Russia. Also, I need someone who can handle my underground fighting matches.”

“You can still read people’s minds. Good to know your brain is still functioning.” The three of us lightly chuckle, sharing this jovial moment we have never experienced together.

We speak for a few more minutes, while Rhea informs me, my mother, Igor, and Lucifer are on their way. She soon excuses herself to leave and gets the doctor to check on me, leaving me alone with my *an’gel*.

I need her closer, so I take her hand and pull her towards me, enjoying her shriek of surprise, followed by a giggle. A

sound that I missed badly because it always made her look more beautiful and radiant.

I push back her hair and cup her face, leaning forward to kiss her. But she pulls back, making me frown.

“You are not in the right condition to kiss. You need rest now. The more you rest the better-”

“Shh,” I don’t let her finish her words. “Enough talking, it’s getting a tad boring.” I teased her.

“I haven’t touched you for so long. Nothing will fucking stop me. Not even you. Put that beautiful mouth of yours to better use and kiss me.”

I skate my hand behind her head before fisting her hair and tilting her back as she gasps. I lightly nibble on her jaw, loving the way she is squirming under my touch. “And if you think while I’m recovering here, I won’t fuck you; then you are so wrong, *an’gel*. You will be taking my cock like the good girl you are until you are screaming, that even the pedestrians outside the building will hear you.”

She bites her lips, knowing it makes my blood rush faster. “Is that a promise?”

“Oh, no, *an’gel*. It’s a vow. A king’s vow to please his queen that she won’t know where she begins and ends.”

My lips licked the corner of her lips, I am about to kiss her when the door opens, with the doctor coming in. Elysha tries to move back, but I hold her hair tighter, keeping her close to me.

The doctor looks flustered and shocked at the intimate sight in front of him. He opens and closes his mouth to say something but doesn't know what to say or do exactly.

“Leave us,” I threatened the doctor with a serious, cold voice.

“But your checkup-”

Luckily a gun is at the side table. Using my free hand, I get it, and aim at him. “You have two seconds before I pull the trigger and let the bullet go right through your forehead. One.”

I didn't need to count to two because he takes my threat seriously and rushes out of the door.

“Was that really necessary?” Elysha asked, rolling her eyes.

I place the muzzle of the gun below Elysha's chin, watching her grin in a wicked excitement. I loved how much she loved the darkness I carried and embraced it with open arms.

“He was a barrier. So, I got rid of him. Now, where were we?”

“You were describing how you would fuck me hard and deep, and later I would suck your cock, that you might be unconscious again.”

“Not if I get you there first with my tongue, fingers, and cock. You will be a writhing mess,” I whispered against her lips.

“I like the sound of that.” She plants a kiss on my lips before it takes only a few seconds for us to get lost in each other’s touch, turning our kiss passionate and deep. We could never get enough of each other, so this is no exception. Our tongues mingled together as I devoured her mouth like a hungry beast. I couldn’t wait to taste and touch every inch of her naked body later.

I didn’t know what would happen next or what the future held for us. But I do know she is with me, and I am with her. I couldn’t be in a more blissful and euphoric moment than I am in right now.

And all because of her.

My *an’gel*.

CHAPTER 31

MAXWELL

The moonlight streamed through the small, caged window in the basement. It was mostly dark, but the light was enough to show me the perfect view of my an'gel. We sat beside each other with our knees pulled up on the dirty floor. Our backs rested on the rough walls.

Every inch of my body hurt like hell because of the monsters that made me suffer every second, making me wish I didn't exist anymore.

But being with her gave me that beacon of hope to live... for her.

I didn't just want to survive the pain. I wanted to live and be with her.

She rested her head against my shoulder, her arms looped around my elbow. My hands lightly caressed her soft, small fingers, which made my heart warm. Her touch always healed my wounds no matter what.

“Have you ever thought about what your future might be like?” I asked her. She shifted her head sideways, gazing at me with those innocent eyes.

“I used to but after the way my life turned into a mockery, I stopped even thinking of the possibility for a future.” The sadness in her voice was clear that my heart hurt listening to her.

I offered her a soft smile. “Maybe just imagine for now.”

She smiled back. Dear God...How can she be so beautiful?

“Someone is curious tonight.”

I shrugged. “Could be. Now close your eyes and tell me how you imagine it.”

She gently closed her eyes, taking a deep breath.

“Tell me everything, an’gel. Give me a vivid picture,” I murmured close to her ears.

“I see myself standing close to the seaside. Nothing but waves crashing with some splashing on my bare feet, covered with sand. I hear seagulls as well, as they fly around freely. There are cliffs around us, covered with greenery as the wind caresses me. I see you as well.”

“Me?”

She nodded. “You are right behind me with your arms around me.” I noticed her cheeks flushing. “Your lips close to my ear as you whisper sweet words and tell me how much you love me.”

“I do love you,” I rasped, softly kissing her cheek. She opened her eyes, looking back at me with shyness reflected on her face. “And don’t stop thinking about your future.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I will make it a reality,” I held her face, pressing my forehead against hers, “I promise to turn every future and dream of yours into reality. It will be just the way you described.”

She bit down onto her lip, making me want to kiss her.

“When we get out of this nightmare, no shadow of darkness will follow us. It will be just you and me with a life full of possibilities of a happily ever after.”

She nodded before leaning forward and gently kissing me with her soft lips.

“Maxwell?” Elysha’s voice brings me back to reality as I turn to face her. We are still inside the car as I drive us to our destination. For a moment, I was lost remembering one of our beautiful memories from a long time ago, but today it was fresh in my mind.

“What were you thinking?” she asks.

I only shake my head with a smile, adoring her beauty. She wears a blue sundress with butterflies printed on the fabric. Even her butterfly necklace hung around her neck. Her hair is left down and spreads along her back, highlighting her innocence furthermore.

It's been a few months since I have fully recovered and got to rule back over my kingdom. I got rid of every fucking enemy who had the audacity to betray me in the first place. I got my control back over everyone and ruled as a true king should, with power, dominance and pride. I also let Rhea have ownership of the illegal car and bike races, along with the underground street fights. And so far, she has been doing very well. Elysha has joined this sinful world with me, accepting my darkness without hesitation by becoming one of my *Sovietnik*. She most certainly prevails like a queen; she's fierce, smart, and brutal.

“Will you tell me now, where we are going exactly?” She questions, clearly being impatient.

It makes me laugh lightly as I enjoy teasing her. “You shall soon see.” My eyes remain on the empty road with *Sex, Drugs, Etc.* by Beach Weather playing on the radio.

“You have been saying that since our flight last night, and during this three-hour drive, but your *soon* doesn't feel anywhere close. I have also been trying to guess through your attire. Since it's the first time, I have seen you wear something casual like a black T-shirt and blue pants.”

“We are getting close actually.” I take out a blindfold from the compartment and pass it to her. “Put this on.”

“Are you planning for kinky sex in the car?”

“As tempting as that is, no. Now, stop asking questions and do as you are told. And, when we are returning then yeah, we are fucking in this car.”

She giggles and shrugs, then puts on the blindfold. A few minutes later, we get close to the spot; I notice Elysha's brows furrow with a curious look.

“Is that the sea? I can hear the waves crashing.”

I don't answer her, feeling excitement and nervousness hitting me like a trainwreck. I have never been this anxious about anything. I can't remember the last time I felt like this, but this moment got the best of me.

I park the car near the Sakhalin Cliff before I get out and help Elysha out of the car. Holding her hand, I guide her forward until we reach close to the water side.

“Take off your sandals,” I told her. She does and wiggles her toes into the sand.

“Ready?”

“Just do it already.”

I lightly snicker before pulling off the blindfold. She blinks her eyes to adjust to the light, but soon she gasps in surprise, turning speechless. Her eyes take in the beautiful sight in front of her.

A view that she only dreamt of but never had in reality.

But I turned it into reality for her. Her dreams will be brought to life and not exist as fragments of her imagination.

“The sea, the sand, the wind, the seagulls,” I wrap my arms around her, leaning close to the side of her face, kissing the back of her ear, “-and me.”

“You remembered,” she whispered with emotions, nearly choking her voice. She plants her hands on mine as they stay around her stomach.

“I never forgot, *an’gel*.” I kiss her cheek.

“This feels even better than I imagined. This feels like home.”

I sigh, inhaling her sweet floral scent that mingles with the earthy fragrance of the sea. It is indeed home.

“You know, I had this same scenario pictured in my head when you shared it with me. But it had a small change.”

She looks at me over her shoulder with a frown. “And what’s that small change?”

I tried to control my pounding heart as I felt anxiety crawling into my mind like a shadow. Taking a deep breath, I take out the box and kneel in front of her. She is stunned and quiet, at the moment, with tears sparkling in her eyes as she feels overwhelmed with waves of emotions.

I open the box and take out the diamond ring with a butterfly on top. Her lips part in utter surprise, but she is unable to speak the words in her mind.

But I see the love and adoration pooling in her eyes, all the nervousness and anxiety is gone. My heart starts beating at a stable speed. Just those pure feelings in her eyes, for me, are more than enough to let me know that our hearts will always belong to each other.

I will be hers and she will be mine.

“I’m no Romeo or Prince Charming. I’m nowhere near those two, which every girl dreams about, but I will be the man you have always wished to have. A man who wears his heart on his sleeves for you, someone who will protect you ‘til his final breath, and who will treat his queen with honor, respect, and love. I will be that man for you, *an’gel*.”

I lean the ring upwards. “Marry me.”

She blinks through her tears with a teasing smile. “You aren’t even going to ask?”

I shake my head with a wicked grin. “Why would I bother to ask when I already know you are mine.”

She lets out a raspy laughter, rolling her eyes. “God only knows when will you stop being so arrogant?”

“Never, *an’gel*.” I tease back. “But I will be yours for eternity.”

“Do you promise?” she asks.

I stand up, wanting her to see the feelings I carry for her through my eyes and words, as I palm her cheeks and lean closer to her.

“Do you trust me?”

“More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you do.”

I take her hand, pushing the ring onto her slim ring-finger. Elysha smiles brightly, gazing up at me like I am her

everything, as if we are each other's world. She leans up on her tip-toes, and we indulge ourselves in a deep, passionate kiss that will stay imprinted in our memory for years.

Among one of many.

A peace settles in my dark heart forever.

I always thought power and pride were something I would always seek as the ruler of a kingdom of sinners. But everything changed when my *an'gel* came into my life. Even though I lost her and took a route to a new darkness by becoming part of a kingdom of redemption, I found my freedom through my queen again.

This is the new beginning of our lives, where our hearts and souls are connected until death. Our love is definitely not simple nor a normal one. It is dark, ruthless, painful, and full of misery. But through all the suffering, we get our ending through our love...bitter love.

EPILOGUE

8 YEARS LATER

ELYSHA

I look at the backyard, where the tree leaves wave along the warm summer breeze. My nerves start to relax with the soothing sunlight touching my skin as I sit on the balcony, enjoying the peace and quiet. I smile softly and look down at my swollen belly underneath my white summer dress. My hands caress it softly as I feel the baby kicking against my touch.

I chuckle under my breath from the connection with my soon-to-be-born child, only two more months.

It has been a blissful eight years. Fate finally led me to my happily ever after with the man I love most in the world. It feels like yesterday he proposed to me and we got married at the church with our family and friends accompanying us in our most cherished memory. I smile shyly at the memory of Maxwell claiming me as his wife on our wedding night and how our hours of fucking broke the bed. But it didn't stop my possessive and protective man making me weak in my knees

for the next few days. And when he promised to raise many children with me, he wasn't joking.

The next year, I got pregnant and gave birth to our beautiful daughter, Inessa. She truly changed our world, making it more wonderful and memorable with each passing day. And Maxwell is definitely living up-to the saying, "fathers love their daughters beyond measure", because that little child has him wrapped around her fingers.

To my surprise, I feel two strong calloused hands on my shoulders, which makes me smile and jittery from inside. There's only one person who could make me feel that way.

Maxwell.

I tilt my head back and find him right behind me, looking down at me with love and affection. It's as with each day, his love for me grows more and more. He is in a dark gray suit and pants with a black tie complementing his gruff and dominant appearance. His muscles tighten against the fabric, highlighting his features even more.

"When did you come back?" I ask, feeling his right hand skating up and holding my jaw. He leans my head back while caressing my bottom lip with his thumb.

"Just now and I couldn't help, but watch you for a few minutes. You look so beautiful and angelic," he mutters. Maxwell hunches forward and kisses my lips, sending an electrifying sensation down my body. He deepens his kiss, using his tongue to caress my lips before mingling it with my tongue as goosebumps scatter on my skin. I already feel my

legs pressing together to ease down the aching I'm feeling on my pussy. My hormones are definitely out of control, but whenever Maxwell is in the picture, his touch makes my mind go crazy with desire and yearning.

He grins darkly against my lips as if he knows the effect he has on me. "Someone definitely missed me."

"You were gone for four days, of course, I missed you," I whimper.

He nibbles down onto my lip and I moan softly. *God, the things this man makes me feel.*

"The phone calls weren't enough, I'm guessing." I shake my head at his words, which only gets him to chuckle. He grips my jaw a tad tighter and my heart starts to pound against my chest. "I think I will make you wait a bit longer, *an'gel.*"

I mewl in desperation.

"I want you to be begging for my cock tonight. I need you so desperate that the thought of my cock fucking your cunt raw will be enough to make you dripping wet for me."

Holy fuck.

He kisses my cheek before muttering against my skin. "But when I get you all to myself tonight, you better be on your knees. I've been spending the past four nights jerking off to the thought of your mouth around my cock. And tonight, you will be on your knees, naked, with your mouth wide open and your tongue out. I will be fucking that mouth raw and hard, and I won't stop even when you are gagging and choking

because I know it's a sign of you wanting more of it like a little slut. Am I right, *an'gel*?"

"Please, Maxwell," I beg, closing my eyes and clearly imagining the scenario vividly in my head.

He plants an open-mouth kiss on my lips before pulling back. "Tonight, *an'gel*. Tonight," he promises.

I'm already drenched from his dirty talking and I might not survive until tonight.

I narrow my eyes on him. "You are such a bastard. Wait 'til I'm done giving birth to our child. I will definitely kick your ass for being such a tease."

He only laughs and walks in front of me, gesturing for me to stand up. I do, and he takes my seat, spreading his legs and pulling me down onto his lap. He wraps his arms around me and kisses my temple, with his other hand touching my belly.

"Our son is growing stronger," he murmurs with a proud smile.

"Your son has been kicking a lot lately," I say, putting my hand over his.

"He just wants to be out soon and meet his mother and father. He is eager, *an'gel*."

"At this point, I'm eager too and want this to be over."

"Well, we both know after he comes out, you will be complaining about how much you miss being pregnant."

I slap him lightly across his face, which makes him laugh heartily. “I do not complain.”

“You most certainly do. But hey, I don’t mind it, moreover, it gives me the green light to put another baby in you.”

My cheeks flush from embarrassment as I smile shyly and fiddle with his tie.

Suddenly, my phone rings on the side table, and Maxwell passes it to me. I look at the screen to find Inessa’s piano teacher’s number flashing. I frown in confusion and feel worry crawling into my mind.

“Mrs. Reznikov?” Ms. Carry mutters on the other line.

“Yes, this is her,” I answer. Maxwell looks at me with a serious expression.

“I am calling regarding your daughter; she and a boy had a fight. She is currently in the administrator’s office. We would like you to come in to talk about this intolerable behavior.”

“Where is that boy?” I question her.

“Mrs. Reznikov, once you get here you will get your answers.”

I hung up the call, feeling tense about what must have happened to our daughter. “Inessa and a boy had a fight. We need to go there right now.”

Maxwell doesn’t wait as we both get up and drive straight to Inessa’s piano class. We get inside the building, where some students are still taking their lessons, with their parents waiting

in the lobby for them. Maxwell and I head towards the administrator's office and get inside, where Inessa sits in the corner chair, fiddling with her hands.

She looks almost identical to her father, including her eyes and nose, but she got my hair color, carrying a look of innocence and pure beauty. That's why we named her Inessa, which went along with her angelic beauty. She looks up when she sees us, but when I see a small bruise on her hands, I fucking see red and start fuming.

Who the fuck dared to hurt her?

Beside me, Maxwell looked enraged as if he was ready to hunt down the boy who hurt Inessa. But we both keep a calm demeanor when Ms. Carry and another teacher greet us.

“Good to have you here, Mr. and Mrs. Reznikov. I'm Richard, nice to meet you,” the man mutters and stands up to shake hands with us, but we take our seats, giving them the silent treatment.

Richard retreats his hand back awkwardly and sits down. “Um, Inessa stand beside your parents.”

She comes towards us and Maxwell looks at his daughter with a softened gaze. He holds her hands and doesn't dare to touch the bruised area as if afraid he would hurt her.

“Mrs. Reznikov, your daughter-” Maxwell raises his hand to stop Richard from talking, but the death glare he offers him is enough to make Richard look nervous.

Maxwell looks back at Inessa, gently caressing her cheek. There is no rage, no aggravation, and no darkness. Every time he looks at her, he doesn't hesitate to wear his heart on his sleeves for her. He doesn't even care if people will judge him for being soft-hearted, what he truly cares about is what his daughter feels and thinks.

“What happened, Inessa?” He asks her gently.

“That boy has been teasing me for days. I didn't say much at the start and ignored him. But today, he tugged on my hair and pushed me down. I got up and he surprisingly hit my butt. So, I kicked him and started punching him until blood came out of his mouth.” She speaks honestly and bravely. She is speaking the truth.

We raised our daughter with love and care. We even taught her not to tolerate anything wrong around her or to her. I have trained her a few times to fight and throw punches, and I was proud to see her learning so well. Maxwell and I knew that we couldn't raise our children in a world where they think bad things don't exist; it would be a life full of lies, which would wreck them in the future. So, we decided to make them prepared for their future beforehand and be ready to face reality bravely.

That little fucker. Once I get my hands on him, I will show him what hell looks like.

“You did good, Inessa. I'm proud of you for standing up for yourself,” Maxwell mutters and kisses Inessa's forehead. I touch her shoulder and bring her into my arms.

“Is papa mad?” she whispers against my ear. I shake my head with a gentle smile at her.

“You did nothing wrong. You defended yourself. Is that how you got the bruises?” She nods. “We will get some ointment for that, and we are proud of you for fighting so bravely.”

She smiles and hugs me, wrapping her arms around my neck. I keep her that way, knowing she is seeking comfort, while I let Maxwell handle the matter.

“But that boy was bleeding, Mr. Reznikov, he nearly passed out from a few punches,” Richard argues.

“So you won’t tolerate beating, but you will tolerate a boy harassing a girl?” Maxwell retorts, turning Richard speechless.

I look down at Inessa and cup her face. “Why don’t you go and wait in the car, *lyubov*? Mama and papa will be with you soon.” She nods and leaves the office.

“The boy’s father is demanding to expel your daughter. And what she did was wrong-”

“Who is the father?”

“He is a politician, Mr. Reznikov. I don’t think-”

“Name.”

Richard looks at Ms. Carry in confusion before returning his gaze to Maxwell. “Leonel Maksim.”

“Are you two new here?” he asks, and both Ms. Carry and Richard nod in response.

“I assumed so, and from your behavior, it’s clear you both are fucking hypocritical servants hired by the politician to save his son’s ass every time.”

They both gasp, and Richard opens his mouth to argue, but he doesn’t get his chance. “Your asses may belong to Leonel, but I can get rid of him in seconds,” he snaps his finger to emphasis his point, “I fucking own Russia and Leonel is nothing but a nobody for me.”

Richard gulps and looks at me, expecting me to help him in some way. *You are on your own, asshole.*

“But the worst case here is how you allow bullying and harassment to go on, but when someone takes action to defend themselves, then your asses itch to go and save the day,” he leans back, placing his knuckles underneath his chin, “my daughter did nothing wrong. She doesn’t deserve to be here like she is to be punished. But the boy who caused this should be here.” He demands, looking at Ms. Carry. “Go and bring that boy.”

“Um...Mr. Reznikov, I think we should settle this without creating a scene. I just...oh my God.” Richard’s whole body shivers from fear as he looks at the gun Maxwell put on the table between his speaking.

“Say one more word and I shoot you right here,” Maxwell threatens coldly.

Ms. Carry dashes out to get the boy, while Richard’s wide and horrified eyes await for her return. In a few seconds, she comes back with a blond boy right behind her, he has a

swollen lip. His attitude and expression says he is a politician's son and thinks he could do whatever he pleases.

“Dmitri, come here,” Richard mutters. Dmitri rolls his eyes, wishing to do something better than be here, but he heads towards us and looks at Maxwell.

“So, you are the little shit harassing my daughter.” Maxwell states.

Dmitri shrugs. “She is being whiny. It's called having fun with *friends*.”

“Is that why you got punched by her and cried like a *whiny* bitch?”

Dmitri starts to look uncomfortable from Maxwell's dark and cold demeanor.

“M-my dad will handle this. I don't need to be here. She punched me and that is not accepted-”

Instantly, Maxwell pulls him closer by his collar, giving a death glare he saves for his enemies. And it is enough to make the boy whimper and shiver in fright. The boy looks at Richard, silently asking to help but when he doesn't move, Dmitri knows he is fucked.

“You know what is not accepted? Assholes like you, who dare to hurt my daughter. Listen well, boy, because next time you won't be alive to hear what I say.” He tightens his grip on the boy's collar that I could see his veins popping. “If you think your father's good-for-nothing political power will save your ass from me, then you are dead wrong. Before you can

even blink, I can make your father and your entire family vanish forever, including you. So, next time you even dare think of going after my daughter, remember, I will be here to cut you to pieces and throw you in the sea. And you will apologize to Inessa; out-loud and in front of everyone tomorrow. Got it?”

Dmitri looks too frightened to respond properly, but he simply nods.

“Good. Now get out of here before I’m tempted to cut you.”

He doesn’t hesitate and runs out of the room the minute Maxwell lets go of his collar. I’m sure the boy will be crying for hours after his lessons today.

“And for you, Richard, make sure I don’t have to visit again regarding my daughter’s protection. I have guards around the premises, and if something happens to her, they will pull the trigger at you first. Let’s go, *an’gel*.”

We stand and leave the room with Maxwell putting his arm around me as we head to our car. Inessa is in the back seat, waiting patiently for us. Maxwell tells the driver to take us home before gesturing to Inessa to come towards him.

She instantly climbs onto his lap with Maxwell protectively engulfing her in his strong arms. His features soften under her touch as he looks relaxed. Nobody could tell he just threatened a child a few seconds ago.

“Does your hands hurt, *milyy*?” he asks.

Inessa shakes her head.

“We will get you some medicine and how about after we go to your favorite park to play?”

She nods and smiles warmly at her father and me.

“Where did you learn to punch so well?”

“Mama taught me last year and said to use them whenever I need to defend myself.”

Maxwell smiles at her proudly and kisses her temple, before he looks at me with, *I will fuck you so hard tonight* eyes. “Mama taught you well.”

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

MAXWELL

The years have passed. Years filled with the most memorable days of my life. It has been a life full of content and peace, filled with love, and happiness, that I never thought I would get or even deserved.

But I was proven wrong.

My *an'gel* showed me what the real meaning of life is... what a happily ever after means, which people often read in fairytales. I always thought that bullshit only existed in fiction, but Elysha made it a reality for me.

The beginning of my story was written with hopelessness, loneliness, and darkness. But my *an'gel* changed that story for me, using the ink of her passionate love to give me an ending I believed.

A happy, good, and peaceful life.

Everyday isn't perfect because life itself is never perfect. We had our ups and downs and shared moments of happiness and downfalls. But our eternal bond always guided us while we stepped into the light together.

Every stage of our lives was ...*beautiful*.

Our marriage. Our children. And now, our grandchildren.

Each and every one of those memories are cherished in my mind until I take my last breath. I was beyond happy living in our small world. Especially with our two sons and daughters Elysha gave me. They grew up before my eyes, leading their lives however they wished, while holding respect and attachment with us.

I gave them everything a parent should, but I made sure they knew the harsh and tough side of life. Nothing comes easily with a snap of your fingers. We treated them equally and made sure they grew up independent and strong. Our sons chose to be part of the Bratva, leading the organization ruthlessly as their father and mother used to, carrying on the legacy. Our daughters, however, opted for a different life, they chose to rule over their self-built empires.

We knew that this part of our lives would never leave us even if we tried to escape, so instead, we chose to accept this life as well, as our children. They are all happy and flourishing with normal lives, including their spouses and children.

It is a blessed life and I feel thankful for every second. Now, as I sit in the backyard, watching my wife play tea party with our granddaughters and our two- grown- daughters. Our sons are on their way, bringing their families along for the get-together.

She has aged fine with time, with a few wrinkles on her pale face, and her hair is now mostly gray. But for me, she still

looks the same, the young and innocent Elysha to whom I lost my heart in the dark basement.

Even to this day, she looks so fucking beautiful and beguiling to me. As if she could sense my gaze, turning her face and looking at me with narrowed eyes, followed by a smile. She says something to our granddaughters before slowly getting up. It is slightly discomfoting for her body to do the usual things she used to do easily.

With time we both are trying to adjust to these new changes.

She walks towards me, taking a seat beside me, and places her hand on my thigh. I wrap one arm around her, and pull her closer before planting a kiss on her forehead. She smiles softly at me while we gaze at our little family playing around.

“Rhea called; she said she might be a bit late,” Elysha tells me.

“She owns the restaurant we all will be going to.” I chuckled. Rhea also got her version of a happily ever after with a man who loves her to the depths of her soul, accepting every part of her.

Elysha follows my suit, lightly laughing while I look at her, admiring her beauty even after so many years.

Noticing my gaze, I watch her cheeks flushing from shyness, which only makes my heart skip a beat.

So innocent.

“What are you thinking?” she asked, gently caressing my chest.

“What a beautiful life I have all because of you.” I softly kiss her lips for a quick peck.

“And you made my life beautiful with your love.”

“It will always be that way ‘til our last breath, *an’gel*,” I vowed, holding her hand resting against my chest as my fingertips skimmed over her wedding ring, which she has never taken off since the day I proposed to her.

I had my silver wedding band, which I wear proudly more than my skull ring, which I abandoned a long time ago after I quit my position at the Bratva. I chose to be with my *an’gel* full-time, doing simple things.

Her eyes glimmered with the same love we both shared, and hope to carry together even when we leave this world, spending the rest of eternity together.

“You promise?” she whispered, making me smile.

“Do you trust me?”

“More than myself.”

“Do you love me?”

“More than you do.”

КОНЕЦ

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shanjida Nusrath Ali is a 20 year old English major student by day and an aspiring independent author by night. Known for her mafia romance book, *Cross My Heart*, she loves to write about characters going through a dark and heartbreaking path to love with consequences at every turn and coming out stronger in time.

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Wow! Like seriously wow! I can't believe the story of Maxwell, Elysha and Rhea is finally completed. After a whole year, they got their conclusion. To be honest, Maxwell's whole story started out as a joke among me and my bookstagram friend. And when I started writing his book, I planned it out to be a standalone. But the more I wrote his story, added Elysha and Rhea, their connection and their past, I just knew I couldn't put it all in one book.

I won't lie, but when I released Kingdom of Sinners, I thought not many would be interested in it. But my God! The amount of comments and texts I got regarding book two, definitely blew my mind. But at the same time, it made me nervous too. The first book's success and response, put the expectations bar so high, that I started doubting myself if I will be able to reach that level again with the second book. Hence, the ONE YEAR HOLD. Although, I later got my inspiration back for book 2 through my characters. Because for the first time, I wanted to know as well what ending would Maxwell, Elysha and Rhea have.

I'm definitely emotional saying goodbye to these three, but they will always have a special place in my heart and my shelf, lol. Will they ever be back again? I don't know. Maybe or maybe not. But I'm truly glad that I created them and their world of bitter love.

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