

EVIE ROSE

Snatched
BY THE
BRATVA

SNATCHED BY THE BRATVA

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CONTENT NOTES

These content notes are made available so readers can inform themselves if they want to. They're based on movie classification notes. Some readers might consider these as 'spoilers'.

- Bad language: frequent
- Sex: fully described sex scenes with dirty talk
- Violence: on and off page
- Other: death of side character, dubious consent, kidnap, age gap, smex toy use, primal play/chase,

ABOUT

He's perfect. Until he kidnaps me.

I have an excruciating crush on this man who comes into the coffee shop. Every day. He's older, gorgeous, perfectly dressed. He has a Russian accent and silver eyes.

On my last shift, I stop him as he's walking out. Just to say... I don't know. I love you, marry me, and let me have your babies? Thanks for the generous tips, have a nice life?

Then he shoves me to the ground, his hard body on top of me. Shots are fired and he drags me out the back.

Before I can breathe, I've been stolen away. And the mafia boss won't let me go.

Snatched by the Bratva is a sweet and spicy age gap instalove romance, with a jealous and possessive billionaire mafia boss and the innocent girl he's been stalking...

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LINA

I know it sounds unhinged, but I treasure the notes he leaves as tips. They're crisp and bright and feel more valuable than they are because they're always perfect and they're from him. He places one into the tip jar and winks at me every weekday.

I serve him coffee, and have managed to resist the urge to drape myself over the wooden countertop next to his cup, and ask if he'd like to take me in those big, capable-looking hands.

So far.

Side of desperate girl with your coffee, sir? No charge. On the house. Complimentary.

What he'd do thereafter is honestly a little blurry around the edges. I have experience of caffeine highs that make my pupils large as dinner plates and my body twitchy as a wind-up toy. Dating? Not so much.

Which is an issue for my chosen enthusiasm: writing monster romances. Don't get me wrong, I love to read steamy scenes. I just can't seem to write them.

And my readers are getting a bit frustrated with my fade to black or tab A, slot B, attempts. They say they're unsatisfied.

Same readers, same.

Which is why after a year of scrimping and saving I'm finally going to do that MA in creative writing. Perfect combination, right? Much more likely to help me lose my V-

card and amp up my romance stories than the graveyard shift at an all-hours coffee shop.

If I can't get laid and improve my novel at university, I'm more of a sad case than I realised. Which is... Horrifyingly possible.

Anyway. It's the morning of my last ever shift. My bags are packed and in my car, which is in the long-stay I use for work. Can't park nearby—I'd have no profit left at the end of the day with the price of parking in London. I'll drive north this afternoon, probably spending the night in said car. But I'm moving on to a better stage of my life and career. I should be excited.

I am.

I totally am.

I am not mourning an entirely one-sided crush on a customer. *Sir*. It's hardly as though being a barista has a ton of strict conditions associated with it, but high on the list is not drooling. That's not like latte art. No one is going to look at my slobber and think—oh yeah, she takes her job seriously.

At half-four I allow myself to begin to get excited. I serve the few bleary-eyed customers coming in before their shifts, and watch the door out of the corner of my eye.

When a woman comes in at ten past five, smiling and chatty, wanting to tell me about her holiday, I am efficient. I make the coffee. I smile politely. I don't ask her about her flight or where she's been. I really don't want someone else spoiling the last time I'll see my sir. I all but shoo her out of the door so that when the sky is turning white-gold I'm ready to take in every part of him. To look my fill.

Every day sir arrives at quarter past five in the morning. I'm always a little self-conscious because I'm at the end of an eight-hour shift and he's clearly a morning person who just got up, but today, I'm determined to make this count.

Then right on schedule, there he is, striding through the door, gaze already focused on me. My CEO. Possibly. I have

no idea what he does for a living, but he has an air of power and grace that suggests he is used to being obeyed.

He takes my breath away.

Where I'm a normal girl with black hair, a snub nose, a permanent coffee stain on my jeans, he's a god in a three-piece suit with dark brown hair and steel-grey eyes. The shiny silver metal of his cufflinks screams wealth, as does the thick luxurious cotton of his shirt. His clothes are of the highest quality, chosen with care, and those details are insanely hot to me. Because a man who has the diligence with that sort of precise clothing, while also exuding power as sir does, I bet when he concentrates on something—or someone—it's like the August sunshine.

Honestly, this man is straight out of an advert in a glossy men's magazine, complete with scratch and sniff. The hint of his aftershave that I catch sometimes as he takes the receipt is addictive. Better than the crazy expensive Columbian single-estate coffee the boss once accidentally bought.

“Good morning, sir!” I always give customers a bright smile, but with this man, it's real. It bubbles up from my heart.

I don't know his name, so I call him sir. I tried to see it on his matt black bank card once when our payment machine was having a hissy fit about contactless, but it was written discreetly on the back.

“Good morning, kisa.” He always calls me that and I've never been brave enough to ask what it means. I suppose it's Russian for barista, or something? But the way he says it in his deep voice and rough accent sends delicious shivers down my spine.

His grey eyes look right into mine. Not glancing at the menu, or my boobs, or fiddling with his phone. Nope. When he's here, he's present. He focuses on me. Occasionally I catch his gaze dipping to my mouth, but otherwise, he's so level and collected. It's a relief at this time in the morning, after I've dealt with bleary-eyed night shift workers and frazzled young mothers.

I know his order by now, and I've got the cups ready. But we have this dance, where we pretend we're strangers. Or I do anyway. I act like I haven't been thinking about him all shift.

"An espresso to drink in, and a flat white to go." He never says please, or makes his voice rise at the end of the sentence to make it a request. There's something in his tone that is gravelly and authoritative. *Dirty*.

It's the sort of voice that if he told me to get on my knees and suck his dick, I'd do it. No questions asked.

To be fair, I wouldn't care how he said it. A soft dare. A crudely barked command. A plea, or just a crooked finger. If I got to taste him, that would be enough.

Despite always leaving a cash tip, he pays with his phone, like a normal person. Then he pulls the note from his pocket, and I can't move as his big square hands curl it and tuck it into the tip jar with a handwritten label and smiley face. Who has cash these days? Only drug dealers and old people. And although he's older than me—maybe in his late thirties or early forties I'd guess—he's not using-cash sort of old.

When he's left, I'm going to fish out that note and keep it forever, never spend it.

The stretch of his arm reveals his cuffs and a smattering of dark hair over his wrists, and a curl of dark ink. A tattoo. I'm so intrigued by what it might be, that tattoo. And the way he moves his hands is borderline—alright, for me, well over the border—erotic. It makes my pulse race.

It's not the money, I do get paid for this job and the amount isn't so much. It's *him*.

"How was your day?" he asks in a deep rumbly voice as I make his drink.

I'm always torn between taking as long as possible to spin out the time with him, and making it as quickly as I can to see if I can get that nod of approval and to the next bit of our routine that I like even better.

"The blender is on the fritz, so I had to ask a customer to leave when they started shouting about how her need for a

three AM strawberry smoothie was a human right.”

“Shall I have them killed for you?” he asks casually.

I snort and shoot a grin over my shoulder. “Overreaction, much?”

He shrugs, the corner of his mouth hitching up slightly.

“I think she was hormonal. Said something about night sweats.”

The scent of fresh coffee fills the air as his espresso hits the cup.

“Ah. Mitigating circumstances.” His eyes twinkle. “We’ll hold off on the murder.”

“She might just need some drugs,” I joke.

“That could be arranged.”

I giggle again as I grab the milk jug—freshly refilled—and start heating it. Just right. Although I’m distracted by his presence, I never burn the coffee or scald the milk. Not for him. “Your humour is so dry.”

“If you say so,” he replies evenly.

I flush and fight the urge to bite my lip. Did I push it too far? Ugh. Say the wrong thing? I hate being in my brain sometimes. All night I speak with people and try to be fun and chirpy, but get home and wonder why I’m lonely.

That’s when I think of him. In bed after my shift, more times than I care to admit I run my fingers down my body and imagine they’re his. I’m always wet if I’ve been thinking of him, and the orgasm helps me sleep.

Not happening today though, is it? I hide my face in a dip of my chin as I pour the milk over the coffee and make a leaves and flower design. The flower looks suspiciously like a heart.

I take my time screwing on the cap to his mug and placing a spoon and a little biscuit on the side of the saucer beside his espresso. I can feel his gaze on me as I carry both drinks to the service area for him to pick up, and he mirrors my movements.

I place his coffees down and wipe my sweaty palms on my apron.

Then this is the best bit. He leans his hip against the bar, picks up the espresso, and inhales the scent. There's no pretentiousness. He just appreciates quality.

Shuffling the cocoa and sugar shakers around, I surreptitiously watch his throat bob as he sips the hot crema-topped drink.

His mouth. Oh god, his mouth was made for sensuous pleasures. It was made for coffee and cream and chocolate. His lips are the perfect shade of dusky pink, full but masculine. Someone like me will never touch that mouth, but I've tried to write about it. Him. I've pressed my hand to my lips and wondered how kissing him would feel.

He sighs deeply at the second sip. "Delicious. I needed that."

"Everything okay, sir?" I ask tentatively.

A taut smile. "Fine. Just a bit stressful. Tell me how you're getting on with your new book." He never talks directly about his work, but since I let slip about my writing, he always asks.

I flush, because the hero is totally inspired by him. In every detail. "I wrote two thousand words yesterday."

"Good girl." He nods with satisfaction and drinks a little more coffee.

Umph. I melt when he praises me. Weekends were bad enough, how am I going to cope with never having my sir call me a good girl again?

"What about the cover?"

I tell him about the premade cover I found for hardly any money, and he nods. After a lifetime of being ignored, first by my parents who really shouldn't have had a child and I don't think remember I exist now I've moved out, then by almost everyone else because I struggle to speak up, the way sir takes an interest in me is a revelation.

“The cover might be a bit dark,” I admit. It’s far too easy to tell this man things.

“Dark is good,” he murmurs.

“Yes,” I squeak. My heart thuds as he tips the little cup up, draining the last of the espresso.

“Thank you, kisa.” Scooping up his takeaway flat white, he’s going before I’m ready.

I wanted more. A few more minutes, the guts to admit I think he’s beautiful. But he’s leaving, and I’m frozen. He’s striding away with those long legs—he must be six-foot-three at least.

This is the moment. The last time I’ll see him. I have to see his face again. Once more.

He’s at the exit.

I screw up my courage and dart around the counter after him.

“Excuse me, sir.”

He turns as he pulls the door open. Those grey eyes spear me as I screech to a halt before him.

Oh god what am I going to say? I should have planned this. I can’t just blurt out, *Please take me home with you, marry me, and give me babies.*

“What is it?” He moves towards me, the door swinging, then bam!

The gunshot is so unexpected, my brain doesn’t process it as real.

My sir flies forward, taking me with him.

ARTEM

It's pure instinct to throw myself over my girl, rolling in the air so I take the brunt of the fall, but flipping her and pinning her to the ground as another shot blasts over my head.

Fuck. Have to get her out of here.

A fucking mafia war isn't the place for my sweet little barista. My kisa, my kitten.

I hold her down as she whimpers in fear, grab my pistol, and fire over my shoulder. There's the squeal of wheels and more gunfire as I shoot again at whichever not-long-to-be-alive bastard who dares try to take me out, and more importantly, risks my girl.

"Come on."

"Wha-what?"

Hoisting Lina's shocked body into my arms, I half carry, half encourage her to the back of the coffeeshop and barge into the storeroom as another cascade of bullets shows this isn't over.

"The other exit," I demand. Those bastards think they have us trapped. Thankfully my bulletproof SUV is on a quiet backstreet.

"There..." She gestures around some shelves.

I shove my way through the clutter of half-opened serviette packets and piles of bags of coffee beans.

"What's happening?"

“I’m getting you to safety.” That’s not the question, really, but it’s all I’ve got as I set her onto her feet, shielded by the wall, put my finger over my lips to indicate she should be quiet, and creek open the door an inch. The street is hushed. I’m suspicious as I creep out, gun ready, but it’s empty.

They’re at the front. Thank god.

Low-key paranoia is part of being in the Bratva. It pays to be unexpected in my line of work, like parking at the back and walking around. Any other mafia boss would pull up ostentatiously at the front door. But I’m sloppy. A kingpin for only two months, I’m still used to being the man who arranges hits on our enemies and protects the boss.

Which was fine until I killed him.

I turn and reach back inside for Lina, and our eyes meet.

She understands. I drag her out, holding her fingers in a punishing grip. We cross the street and duck down the shadowy side alley where I left my vehicle.

It’s not a second too soon. A car cruises by with a throaty roar, then stops at the rear of the coffee shop.

A few more steps and Lina is walking on her own as we reach my car.

“Get in,” I say as I unlock it.

“No.” She snatches her wrist from my surprised hands—I’m not used to anyone telling me no—and darts her gaze to the main street we came from. “I can’t leave work, and I’m calling the police.” She turns on her heel and panic flares in my chest.

I grab her. Fingers over her mouth and pressing her torso to me as I open the passenger door and shove her in, my gun still in the other hand.

“Stay there,” I snarl. No compromise. My enemies cannot get hold of her.

Her gaze goes to my weapon, the whites of her eyes large like a frightened animal.

Fine. If that's what it takes to protect her.

I've slammed the door, and I'm in the driver's seat and firing the engine in a moment, gun still in hand.

"Put on your seat belt," I snap as I drive away. My whole body is on alert for continued danger, and tingling from the brief contact with Lina and her proximity.

"What the hell?"

"The seat belt, kisa. *Now.*"

"You've kidnapped me!" She eyes my gun and then the car door, nervously. "I'm not doing anything until you tell me—"

"Seat belt!" I roar as I take a corner fast.

"No need to be a dick about it," she mutters as she straps in.

I place the gun in my lap and focus on driving. Getting home as quickly as possible so I can keep Lina out of harm's way and sort this mess.

"What's this about?"

I grit my teeth and don't answer.

Obsession.

It's about my obsession with *her*.

I should have stopped.

She'd have been safe if I hadn't shown my hand, day after day, visiting this innocent girl. I already knew one other London mafia had figured it out, but that had been a fluke. Chance. I told myself I was careful.

Not careful enough.

The Mayfair Bratva is known for being obscenely rich and mean. The mean part died with my brother, Victor, but anyone who thinks there is vulnerability or an opportunity to get even now is *dead wrong*.

How did they find her? I'm so careful about my daily indulgent trip to visit Lina Breock.

I hacked the employee records so I could groan her name while I stroke my cock in the shower, hot water coursing over me as I jerk myself to an orgasm with a sharp edge of guilt. She's young. Innocent. Naive and nothing to do with the bloody mafia world I inhabit.

A split second before she lunges for the door, I see what she's trying to do and engage the locks.

She howls with frustration and fear as she pumps the handle. "Let me go!"

"Nope."

I catch her fist before it hits my jaw, and smile. The kitten is attempting to find her claws.

"Don't do that," I say mildly. "It won't work, but might hurt you."

She wrenches her hand away and from the corner of my eye I see her rub her knuckles.

I refuse to apologise, but I'm proud of her for attempting to fight, even if it's inconvenient, and obviously makes her hand sore.

"Arsehole," she grumbles.

"If you really wanted to get away, you should have dropped to the ground quickly, and kicked. Not let me get the upper hand and scoop you up. Used your legs, not your arms. They're much stronger."

She scoffs. "You just told me how to escape."

"You're not going to escape me now," I reply evenly. "Like I said. It's too late."

There's a long, thick silence.

"Tell me why were they shooting at you," she demands eventually. "Us? Me? Surely not me?"

Ah shit. This is complicated. "Because I've done some bad things."

“Oh.” Her voice is full of disappointment. Small, and a bit fearful. “If they’re not after me, why don’t you let me go?”

Because they know I care about her now. They’ve seen me hustle her out. I can’t release her because whoever they are, they’d take her and torture her, and I’d rather see London burnt to the ground than allow anyone to touch her.

It’s my fault this happened. I shouldn’t have continued to visit the *Lazy Bean*. Should appoint a second-in-command and get comfortable with being the boss. Alone. When I became kingpin that was the moment to put aside the sweet fantasy I acted out. The one where I was an averagely immoral man who flirted with the pretty barista.

“I won’t hurt you, kisa,” I say as I fly through yet another red light. “I’ll keep you safe.”

“Sure,” she scoffs, but then falls silent.

I sigh and call today’s duty guard, Kirill.

“Get everyone up,” I bark as he answers. “There’s a meeting in the main hall.”

“Yes, boss—”

The ten-minute journey across the city takes five. I’m going to have to pay off some cops because I’ve been through a dozen speed cameras.

Lina’s gaze flits around skittishly as the door opens to the underground car park below my house in Mayfair. It’s bloody good I don’t have anyone to answer to—except my own conscience and that’s a sick, skeletal ghost of a thing—because I have no idea what I’d say as I abandon the car next to the elevator.

I stride around to open the door and offer her my hand like this is the date I’ve been secretly dreaming about, rather than whatever shitshow this is.

She doesn’t take it, and I’m struck anew by her proud resilience. Even in her coffee-stained clothes, she’s a queen.

My queen. The thought is quiet but insistent. I cannot give in. She deserves better than me. This sweet kisa should

have...

Ah fuck, I'm not a good enough man to imagine her with someone else. No one would take care of her as well as I would, but I can't have her and draw her into my dark world. She's just here until I can murder every member of the mafia who threatened her. Then I'll set her free, and return to watching from a distance.

"Come." I indicate the brushed steel doors. I feel her reluctance and the furtive way she checks her surroundings. "It's pointless running. I'll catch you."

She has no option, and she knows it. Folding her arms, she stomps into the elevator. The mirrors reflect her stormy expression. It was less than an hour ago that it was a normal day for us, flirting lightly, longing for the next time I can see her, trying unsuccessfully to keep my cock under control.

She's slight and small, her dark hair pulled into a simple ponytail. I've made myself come more times than I care to remember over the thought of what her hair would look like down, falling over her shoulders as her perfect pink lips took all of my cock. And her tits. The way they're hidden under a baggy white shirt is a greater crime than anything the Bratva does.

The doors open into the original foyer of the house, and a chaos of my black-suited men milling around with more weapons than buttons on their shirts.

"Boss!" Vlad looks like he might vomit. "We were coming to look for you. We thought..."

Lina shrinks to my side and without my volition my hand goes to the small of her back.

"We're fine." I glance down at Lina, and I think that's when Vlad first notices her, such is his panic.

Around us, silence falls. All my men turn to look at me.

"Someone shot at us this morning," I tell them. "And there will be consequences."

There are murmurs of excitement and concern, along with lingering glances at my girl.

“This is Lina. She got caught up and is my guest. No one touches her,” I say a little louder. “You understand? She’s under my protection.”

There are some curious stares and my control snaps. “She’s *mine*.”

The eyes that had been speculative, taking in Lina’s beauty and the significance of her being here, snap to the floor, confused.

“Arrange the briefing rooms,” I tell Vlad. He’s remarkably awake when everyone else, except Kirill who was on duty, is still dopey with sleep. I really should appoint him as my official second-in-command. I don’t know why I haven’t. He’s eager and always there when I need him. “Work on any intel you can find. I’ll be with you soon.”

I guide Lina through the maze of formal rooms. She looks around in awe.

I suppose my house in Mayfair is quite impressive. I’m used to it, but the Georgian mansion is all wide spaces, high ceilings, marble floors, and wallpaper that is as detailed as the art of the gold-framed paintings on top.

At the back of the house, I stop in a garden-facing sitting room I use sometimes. It’s less priceless furniture and more relaxation. There’s a television and everything.

“Sit.”

Her brows knit together and I think she’s going to argue. She decides against it.

“Would you like something to drink? Eat?”

“No, I want an explanation and to go home. Back to work. Whatever. My boss will probably dock my last pay packet and I can’t afford that.”

“Last?” I catch onto that detail, because it’s been my job for many years to notice everything.

She huffs. “Well, it’ll definitely be last now, won’t it? Because she’ll sack me for leaving the place unattended.”

“Fine.” I reach into my inner suit jacket pocket and pull out my personal bank card. A sane voice in my head points out she could spend a lot of money with that card. Millions. I’d love to see what she’d buy if money isn’t a limitation. “This will fix any of those problems.”

She picks up the bank card and there it is. The reason I haven’t told her anything about me for the whole year I’ve been going to the *Lazy Bean* to see her. Realisation. Fear.

“Artem Moroz,” she says softly, and hell but I really like the sound of my name on her lips. Even better if hers was paired with it. Lina Moroz. “You’re in the mafia.”

“The Bratva,” I correct her, because this distinction matters, somehow. I’m not like the dozens of mafia bosses in London. I’m worse. Even if I’m cleaning up the worst of Mayfair businesses, I won’t hide from who I am.

“What’s that?” Her forehead creases.

“The *Russian* mafia.” I tip my head ruefully. “I lead the Mayfair Bratva.”

She closes her eyes and there’s a sort of pain in her expression, and also understanding. “You’re a mafia boss. I thought you were a CEO or something.” She half-laughs. “I was so stupid.”

“No. No, Lina. I...” I sink into the chair next to her and take a breath. Her blue-ringed green eyes flutter open and regard me. The fear has eased into distrust, but I don’t like that any better. “Not only did I take some care to be normal, I wasn’t the kingpin when we met.”

Hope flares in her expression and as she tips her head, curious. A strand of her soft-looking black hair falls across her cheek. My fingers itch to push it away.

“But now you are, and someone is after you?”

“Yes.”

“And what does that have to do with me?”

Everything. Somebody knows that I'd risk everything for my girl. I compromise, given she isn't aware she's mine. Yet. "They know where you work."

"I was trying to tell you, that was my last shift." She leans forward, and for a second my body tightens. I'm convinced she's going to touch me. "I'm moving out of London."

No. No. A dragon in my chest breathes fire. "You wouldn't be safe," I grind out. "You're staying here until I find and eliminate the threat."

"You can't just kidnap me! People will notice..." she tails off.

"Then call whoever will miss you. Now." I circle my hand impatiently. "Tell them you're okay."

Sliding her phone from her pocket, she looks at the screen, indecision flickering over her pretty features. "No."

I raise one eyebrow. Trying my patience as well as my self-control was not something I had on my list of possibilities for this scenario.

She huffs and slumps onto the back of the sofa, chin in her hands. "That was supposed to make you realise you can't do this."

"I can do whatever I want, Lina."

She jerks at her name. "How do you know my name...?"

We've been talking almost every morning for a year. She's told me about many things, but we've never exchanged names. I call her kisa and she calls me sir.

"The Bratva has a long reach of influence." Better that vague statement than letting her find out I've been stalking her. "Now phone."

The corners of her mouth turn down. "There's no point."

"Go on," I urge. "Call your friend who takes over after your shift at the coffee shop."

"Anwyn," she replies, and oof, the way she says it sounds like a sore spot. "She doesn't work there anymore. Since she

got engaged, I don't see her much.”

“I might be able to arrange for you to see her.” The words are out before I can stop them, an attempt to make her smile. My girl is skint? I have money. My girl is lonely? I'll fix that too.

Lina blinks at me in confusion and shakes her head slowly. To be honest, that's a good thing. Anwyn is married to the Westminster mafia boss, who also happens to be the only person—to my knowledge—who knows about Lina and how I'd do anything for her.

After all, he saw me murder my own brother in cold blood rather than allow any threat of harm to Lina. And in return, I promised that his girl would be safe from me. It would be a very awkward conversation all round if it turned out I had to kill Lina's friend because her husband hadn't kept his word.

I know from our conversations that her parents aren't around. “Your housemates then.”

“There's no one, alright!” she blurts out. “I'm alone!”

She hugs herself and I have never needed to take her in my arms as much as I do right now. Not to ravish her, as is usually what I want, but to comfort. To tell her she's loved and safe and beautiful, and that I'm going to give her everything she needs.

I can see that isn't welcome though. And the only thing to say is something true.

“So am I.”

“Pfft. You're a mafia boss. You have all this power and money. I bet you have no shortage of company. You could click your fingers and have supermodels on your doorstep, begging you to...” She swallows and looks away.

Reaching one finger beneath her chin, I guide her face to look into mine. What I see there is enlightening. A grumpy sadness with a layer of—yes, I'm reading this correctly—jealousy.

“I don’t want a supermodel.” I just want her. She’s all I’ve wanted since we met and there haven’t been any women in my bed or life for this whole year. “My job isn’t easy, and I don’t have anyone to confide in. I have everything to lose if anybody sees weakness.” That was true, perhaps more true before I killed Victor. “No one to talk to. When I say I’m alone, kisa, I mean it. And a genuine connection with someone who doesn’t just value me for money or power means the world to me.”

This confession is an unravelling, painful and revealing.

She scans my face and I wait, impassive, hoping she’ll see the truth there and not recognise the infatuation. The obsession.

“Is that why you come to the coffee shop?” she replies at last.

“Yes.” That at least is honest. I come to see her.

“Well. I won’t be at the coffee shop, but if you let me go, we could talk on the phone instead?” she offers.

I let her chin go and fold my arms. She really isn’t getting it. “We’ll be spending a lot more time together talking *in person*.”

Enough time for her to fall in love with me? That’s probably not achievable in decades. But I’ll take Stockholm syndrome if she’ll look up at me with reverence like she has every weekday morning since we first met.

“You think I’m going to *talk* with you?” She shakes her head firmly. “No way. You don’t get to kidnap and imprison me and also banter about how you like big books.”

I ignore her jibe. That was a fun conversation about big books, and worth repeating. But I’m stuck on another point. “You’re my *guest*.”

“A guest who can’t leave is a prisoner.”

“Fine,” I snap, and stand. “You’re my prisoner.”

“What am I supposed to do? Just sit here until you’ve achieved this goal of hunting down an unknown person or

persons?”

Come on my face. Repeatedly. Take my cock like a good girl.

The tint of sarcasm in her tone irritates me. As though I'd leave her *bored*.

“Use that.” I indicate the card lying forgotten on her lap. “Buy whatever you want to amuse yourself.”

And if you don't find anything to do, I'll make you come over and over until you can't think of leaving because you're gooey with pleasure. Then I'll fuck you and fill you up until you're pregnant with my baby and that will keep you busy instead.

I grind my teeth. Yeah, tempting as that idea is, it's not the way to treat Lina as my guest. Prisoner. Whatever.

“I'm going to call the police.” Her mouth sets into a mulish line and she picks up her phone.

“If you do that either they will ignore you, because they're in my pocket, or you'll wish they had. My men will kill them if they insist on coming into my domain.”

She gapes. “You're a madman.”

“Now you're getting it.” I prefer to think of myself as merely unhinged and powerful. But she might be right. “They can't help you, kisa. I'll let you go once the danger has passed.”

It's a lie.

She's mine. And I will never let her go.

All I have to do is get her to fall in love with me.

LINA

I said I was changing my life, but this really wasn't what I was expecting. It's been four days since I was kidnapped. No one has come for me. No one has even rung me.

I've dialled the police from my phone a dozen times, then stopped. Because what if he's right?

Actually, I have no doubt that's the truth. Mafia boss clicks. It makes perfect sense for sir. Artem Moroz.

After he left on the first day, his housekeeper, Galina, turned up. A matronly woman with smile creases around her eyes. She ushered me through the house, chattering in a combination of English and Russian. She made a point of telling me what every room was, opening doors and knocking on others.

"Mr Morez's bedroom," she said when we were at the front of the house upstairs, one side of the main staircase. And on the other side? "You sleep here."

The room allocated to me is extraordinary. It's all the cliches about old, refined luxury. Decorated in a pale powder blue with fancy white edges, the carpet is so thick you could get lost in it, and everything is spaced out, like a normal set of rooms, but for giants. Whereas in my old room I could reach my wardrobe from the bed, here I not only have a separate sitting room—this in addition to the rooms downstairs—it's like ten paces between the bed and the dressing table. I can do laps in it. Run a marathon.

I mean, I could run around it if I wanted. Actually, what I did was take a running leap into the massive four-poster bed. Only once though.

Okay, five times before I tried to be an actual adult and just look in every wardrobe and drawer like a normal-level weirdo.

I have considered escape, there is constant security. When I got close to the wall that surrounds the grounds—after several football pitches' distance of garden—a guard appeared behind me.

This house is a busy place. There are people coming and going at all hours, not that you'd know unless you were spending an unhealthy amount of time hanging around the main staircase. Which obviously I am doing.

The Bratva men are brash and efficient, rough and loud. Apart from when they pass me, see me, or have to talk to me. Then they are intimidating, but mind their own business. They don't meet my eyes, they walk past or deliver food with quiet voices. It's like there is a force field around me that turns them from panthers into black house cats.

All except one. The man Artem spoke to when we first arrived. He has this sly look when he sees me that I'm not keen on. It makes me uncomfortable, but thankfully the rest are nice.

I could be working on my book, but instead I'm constantly waiting for a glimpse of *sir*. I've swapped my cafe shifts for peeking around doorways and over bannisters in his house.

I told Artem I didn't want to see him, but it was a pathetic little lie. I miss our morning chats. I want to ask about his mafia business, and what he's doing to find the man who was after us. Him.

And he always sees me. Every time.

It's like my eyes are lasers. If I'm looking at him, he feels it, and it might take three seconds or ten minutes, but eventually he'll turn, and our gazes will meet.

Then heat sears through me. I'm set aflame by this man's stare. By his grey eyes and the rumble of his accented voice.

His attention sends liquid to my core and makes my tummy bounce.

Then, with the same inevitability as my nipples perking up—girls calm down, he's a *very* bad man—I remember that Stockholm syndrome is a thing, and however gorgeous he is and kind he seems, I shouldn't allow myself to get attached.

That beautiful bastard holds my gaze for a dozen heartbeats, a constant until I tear myself away.

The bouncing stops and my body feels heavy again when I've withdrawn. It's the most ridiculous feeling of rejection. For a year we've chatted every day. I miss our mornings together like I've chopped off a limb. I guess I thought he would ignore my request, but he seems intent on taking me at my word.

And I can't find the words to back down.

What's a girl to do but try retail therapy? I've never been able to afford to before, but he kidnapped me and gave me his card. I think it's fair that I use it.

The first day I bought a notebook and pen on Artem's card, and some clean knickers. White cotton. Plus a T-shirt and a pair of jeans. Just the minimum, right? I'm not greedy. Then some little devil on my shoulder goaded me and said, why not? And I ordered a skimpy nightie. White silk. It's aimed at brides I think, but I couldn't resist.

I kind of assumed he'd say something about my purchase. But nothing. They arrived in a neat brown cardboard package, brought to me by one of his men and left by my door with a knock.

Day two, I was braver. I bought *pretty* knickers. White lacy ones that cut over my bum in a way that makes me want to wiggle. I think of Artem peeling them off, and have to press my thighs together. Umph.

Into the shopping cart also went a new spicy fantasy romance I've been wanting to read—in hardback with gold foil page edges and an embossed dust jacket. And I purchased three full outfits, including a dress so cute it should be illegal.

The third day I got a laptop. A really expensive one, because honestly, when is he going to stop me? I bought a dozen of my favourite books in paperback, and an ereader. And I ordered the biggest, poshest coffee machine that I could find. Like, commercial quality, and lavish coffee beans.

Because two days without decent coffee? I was broken by the time it arrived, and yeah, Galina hid her indignation well, but even she admitted the coffee I made was delicious.

Honestly, a bit better than the *Lazy Bean's*.

I have polite staff who bring me whatever meals and snacks I ask for, a whole house to wander through as I please, a seemingly endless budget, and all the time to write I could want.

But I'm blocked. Cannot write. Every time I sit down to put words onto paper, I think of the reader comments about my tepid sex scenes, then of Artem and longing so powerful overtakes me that my chest might burst.

I need to see him.

I knew I looked forward to seeing him, but this is like my oxygen supply has been cut off. It was an invisible, life-sustaining thing that I had never really appreciated. Except my life-sustaining thing is six-foot-four with grey eyes.

Today, I decided to fix this. And perhaps goad my absent captor a little.

I've bought a vibrator.

If I can't have a real man, or an MA in creative writing, maybe a great orgasm will get my book unstuck.

The package arrives as I'm downstairs for once, reading the spicy fantasy romance in the garden. I smile my thanks to Galina.

"You need anything?" she asks.

"No." I'm already on my feet. I need to come. Immediately. "This is just some toiletries. I'm going to take them upstairs."

She nods and I force myself not to race up with my new treasure. But at the top of the stairs, I find myself turning in the wrong direction and I'm in front of what Galina told me was Artem's bedroom door.

Not talking with him has made me lose my mind. That's the only explanation for why I try the handle of the deadly kingpin's bedroom.

It turns.

The door swings open and I dart inside, closing it silently behind me. Fingers still on the handle and gripping my book and package to my chest, I wait, head down, for a klaxon or something.

But nothing. Warily, I look around and make an involuntary whimper. It smells like him, that rich spicy scent. Sandalwood and coffee and a unique musk. I drag in a long, deep breath.

Artem's bedroom is the dark reflection of mine. The detailing is a charcoal grey instead of white, and the pale blue is a rich dark blue with a hint of green. The floor is shiny wood. It's austere. There's almost no furniture, only an enormous bed with plain grey sheets that have a soft sheen.

Heart pounding, I toe off my shoes and creep to the bed. Now I'm here, I recognise that what I want is to come while I'm surrounded by him.

I sit gingerly, and run my hands over the smooth fabric. Closing my eyes, I can almost imagine him here, watching me. What if he was in bed? Does he sleep naked? My body flushes at the thought. I've never seen a man without clothes in real life and imagination only takes me so far, but it's enough. Lying back, I turn my head and breathe in the scent of him. I shuffle backwards until my heels hook onto the bed and my skirt falls over my thighs, a whisper of silk.

Allowing my knees to fall open, I think about the way Artem used to smile at me and my pussy clenches on nothing.

Empty, so empty.

Ugh. I'm turned on and needy for the man who kidnapped and imprisoned me.

Probably it was just from the scene in the book I was reading. Okay, yes it did have a hero with dark hair and silver eyes, but that's a coincidence. Because the hero is a powerful fae king with magic powers. He saves the human heroine from the neighbouring elf bad guys who have a war with his kingdom, and it takes some time for her to trust him, a bit of a slow burn. But when they eventually have sex, it's burning hot.

Totally different.

I snatch up the package and rip it, revealing a small silicone toy that looks like a red rose, and as I brush my fingers over the top, is as soft as petals. A button makes it vibrate, and I smile. Here we go. I don't need a creative writing course, or sir. I have a book and a toy.

Leaning back, I open the book and flick through the pages until I get to my favourite scene. The one where the hero tells the heroine that she's his mate, and he's loved her from the moment he saw her, and they first have sex.

Within seconds I'm imagining the scene. And yes, in my mind the hero looks a lot like Artem.

But pointy ears make him *not* Artem.

I touch the toy onto my now-damp knickers and ohhhh. Yes.

I pull the lace aside, and spread my legs further, touching the little rose to my clit. My back arches, and it's amazing, but not quite it. I'm empty, throbbing, and my nipples are begging to be touched.

Giving in, I put the book down and slide down one shoulder of my dress to expose my breasts. The pages fall into the middle, and I huff with annoyance.

Bringing my fingers to my breast, I pinch my nipple, sending a spike of pleasure down to where the toy is doing its work. My pussy clenches again.

Maybe a finger? I've done that sometimes, slide just a fingertip into my warm wet passage and think how it would feel if it were bigger. More.

The knickers make it awkward, but I'm too on edge to stop and remove them as I reach down and awkwardly try to get my hand into the right position around the lace. A bit of rearranging and my forefinger sinks into my own wet heat.

Oh god I'm soaked. And I'm aware of exactly why. It's being in my sir's house. In his bedroom, surrounded by the feeling of him.

But he's not here.

We haven't talked in days. I know I started it, but he can't like me much if he's willing to leave me alone. That's cool water that washes away the heat of excitement.

I need it back. The toy, my fingers, they're all nothing when my head is up to the brim with rejection.

Maybe if I could just read the passage where the hero of that fantasy romance thrusts into the heroine and tells her he loves her over and over again, that would tip me into orgasm. I wriggle my elbow to the side, trying to keep the book open, while dipping my forefinger into my pussy and keeping the rose in exactly the right place. It's like that exercise circling your tummy and patting your head. I'm entirely focused on all the things I'm holding so I ignore a sound from outside.

The toy slips off my clit and I keen with frustration. My fingers aren't enough, the vibrator won't do its job. My body desperately needs to be filled to tip me over the edge. Why didn't I buy a dildo? I fumble while trying to keep my finger sliding into my passage.

"You need help with that?"

My eyes fly open to find Artem leaning against the closed door.

LINA

My brain stutters. He's wearing his customary immaculate pale grey suit and polished shoes. His eyes are dark as he regards me.

Oh. God.

I freeze. Unable to close my legs, or turn off the vibrator, or even take my finger from my pussy.

"Because it looks like you need a bit of help," he continues.

"What are you doing here?" Because I've observed his movements over four days. It's early afternoon, and he's never returned upstairs before eight in the evening.

"You didn't think I keep tabs on what goes on in my own bedroom?" He tilts his chin up arrogantly. "I have a live feed to my phone. I saw you as soon as you walked in."

My cheeks flame. He saw everything. All my clumsiness, and the way I rolled around on his bed, breathing in the smell of him.

"It's rude to watch." I intend to sound aloof, but it comes out as a squeak.

"It's rude to start without your partner."

"This toy is my partner." I lift the little rose and I'm amazed at my own daring. "Not you." He has ignored me and walked away from me for four days. He kidnapped me. He doesn't get to just wander in and crook his finger.

“You came to my bedroom.” He unbuttons his suit jacket at a leisurely pace, shrugs out of it as he stalks towards me. He tosses the expensive garment onto the far side of the bed and stands over me and he’s a stark silhouette with a dark background. He’s an avenging angel. A sinister villain. A fae lord. He looks down, taking in everything from my naked toes to my no-doubt flushed face.

I can’t move. I thought I was turned on before, but Artem regarding me, heat in his eyes, is next level.

“You’re on my bed, legs spread, pink cunt exposed for me, and soaking wet. I think that makes you *my* toy, kisa.”

An actual, for real, can’t-help-it, whimper escapes me. My hips roll, and my clit pulses, despite the fact the toy isn’t on it.

Leaning across me, his gaze flicks between my eyes and my lips. Which are in a little “o” as I pant. He lowers his head so slowly I’m not sure it’s really happening. Perhaps I’m hallucinating what I want most in the world. He might be moving gradually, but he’s insistent. His lips touch mine, then press, then insist I open more to him as his tongue invades my mouth. Desire flares through me. It’s sweet and dirty and taking this kiss, like walking into the calm sea and finding the sand slopes away and you’re on tip-toes, being pulled by a current much stronger than you could ever be, dragged deeper until you’re swimming for your life. Except I’m not swimming towards shore. Nope.

I’m tangling my fingers—sticky with my juices—into his hair to hold him to me.

“Mmm. That’s it,” he murmurs into my mouth, then breathes in. The mattress depresses as he kneels on the bed. A nudge to my thigh and he’s between my knees. Taking my hand from the back of his head, he pulls himself free, rears up and holds my wrist as he brings my fingers to his mouth. For each fingertip in turn, he sucks them clean.

“Delicious.” His voice is a rumble and I’m helpless. Under his spell. This started with me trying—I admit it—to get his attention.

Well, I have it all now, and I love it.

He stretches over me, grabs a pillow and lifts my shoulders until I'm propped up, then plucks the vibrator from my hand. I let him, like I'm a doll.

Kneeling between my open thighs, he skims his palm over my knickers, holding my gaze all the time.

“And you're wet too. These are soaked. Did you choose somewhere comfortable to get yourself this worked up?”

I make a noise that could be denial or agreement. I don't even know myself.

The fabric tugs, then rips between his hands and he carelessly shoves the broken lace scrap into his pocket. The air on my sex emphasises how bare I am. How exposed. And my treacherous body loves it.

He holds my gaze. The pleasure as he slides the toy through my folds makes me jerk, then my back arches as it touches my clit and I choke a scream.

“Eyes on me.”

I hadn't realised I had closed them, but when I blink up at him, a smug smile hitches the corner of his mouth. He smooths his palm over my inner thigh, closer with every stroke until he gets to where I'm wet. Soaked. His forefinger pushes at my entrance as he continues to circle the vibrator over my clit.

“Nice and tight,” he comments with an approving nod.

A gentle slide in, but like his kiss, it's insistent and within a moment he's in me up to the knuckle. A withdrawal, and a second finger advances, stretching me open, and I gasp.

The vibration is as unrelenting as his dark gaze.

“Palm your breasts.”

I obey, skimming my thumbs over my nipples, and it multiplies the pleasure somehow, doubling it, tripling it. This is what I wanted earlier, and couldn't do it for myself. I needed him.

He begins to slide his fingers out and I moan with bliss and frustration until he thrusts them back into me.

I'm so close to orgasm.

"Roll your nipples." His rough voice is another layer on my arousal, and I do that too. He's pumping his fingers into me now, the vibrator rocking over my clit.

"So pretty. You're taking me beautifully. Your pink folds are gorgeous. I've never seen anything so lovely. Come on my fingers."

I break. Probably it's a coincidence, but as he tells me, my clit spasms and pleasure crests. I clench on Artem's fingers so hard pain mixes with the desire. He removes the vibrator from my clit and it's almost a relief to drop back down.

Then he's next to me, the vibrator turned off and tossed away, and he's kissing my neck as the orgasm recedes, leaving me more satisfied than I can remember. Boneless.

"That was excellent," he croons. "You're my good girl. But I need you to have another orgasm for me."

I choke on my own breath. What? "I can't!"

His fingers are still inside me and he continues to slide them in and out, oh so slowly.

"The first one was for you. Now, this is for *me*."

"I've never..." I've never come twice in a row. That's what I don't tell him. I'm way too embarrassed to say to this hot, older, experienced man that I'm a virgin who has never had more than one orgasm at a time.

"Don't you want to be a good girl for me?"

I bite my lip to stop the instinctive response. *Yes*.

By kissing my neck—how did I not know about neck kisses until now?—he makes me weak. I'm a puddle, completely his, ready to pour into whatever form he desires. I'm basically a hot melted jelly.

"Don't you want to be my best girl?"

I want to be his *only* girl.

Now he's rubbing just inside my passage and oh god that feels amazing. Like sparkles. Despite my silence I can feel pleasure gradually spiralling upwards.

Impossibly.

"You'll make me so proud of you, kisa. I know you can come for me again." His thumb starts with slow brushes below my clit, and yes. Yes, that's incredible. My clit is still too sensitive, but where he's touching me is the right side of too much, the precipice.

"Tell me."

I let out a juddery breath and shake my head, but I don't know what I'm saying. No, I don't want it? I do. No, I won't speak it aloud? No, I don't want to disappoint him by not being able to come?

I think it's that last one.

He stops moving his fingers, starting to move away, and I chase him. Without thought, my hips shift of their own accord.

"Uh-uh." His hand is suddenly on my lower belly, holding me down. "Say it and I'll make you come like a good girl should."

"Yes, sir." The words are out of my mouth, led by my pussy not my brain. I want this, despite the doubts. I'm now beyond little considerations like dignity and reality. Give me the crazy train. I need him to be proud of me.

"That's my good girl." There's a rasp of his stubble on my cheek as he smiles, then the cool of air as he's gone. The next thing I know, all the squidgy grey matter goes from my head. It's just air and tumbleweed inside my skull as he holds my thighs apart and takes a long, luxuriating lick. Like I'm an ice cream.

"Your honey is delicious," he murmurs before licking me again. A second later, his fingers ease back into me, a light stroke to my inner walls at first. I'm so wet, utterly messy, and

I'm just as he said: his toy to play with. He switches easily from licks to sucks to my clit and firm thrusts of his fingers and I bow with the intensity.

And the intimacy. He grunts, sounding pleased, as he uses his mouth to drive me into pleasure and squeezes my hip possessively.

With infinite patience, he beckons my orgasm to him. This one is his, just as he promised. He lures the desire with sweet words dispersed with filthy touches. He eats my pussy like he adores the taste, and tells me he loves it. Tells me my cunt is the best thing he's ever tasted, and he can't get enough.

I'm shaking, head to foot, already. My hands clutch the sheets helplessly. I'm vibrating like I'm his instrument and he's my musician.

"Give me one more," he coaxes. "You can do it, kisa, one more orgasm for me. You're being my best girl, don't stop now."

Then his mouth is back on my clit, and I tip over into the longest throbs of pleasure I've ever felt.

I scream, and sob, and I think I kick because he holds my legs down. This climax is drawn from me with a steel hand in a velvet glove. It has snuck up on me and now I'm drowning in the pulses that go on and on. Where the earlier one was high and almost sharp, a quick wave, this is a current, a tide. It's broad. It flows from my core right down to my toes.

I think I black out.

When I come to, the first thing I'm aware of is the blood zinging around my body. I feel more alive than I ever have before, and yet there's an ache between my legs. I'm still empty.

Wait—I'm alone.

Blinking against the light, I find my knees are together, my skirt down over my thighs. A whisper of cloth, and I see Artem standing at my side. He leans over and brushes his knuckles down my cheek.

“Brat,” he says affectionately, eyes soft. “I need to get back to work, but was that what you wanted?”

He has his suit jacket on and yeah, he does look about to leave me here alone.

All the fuzzy contentment in my body abruptly drains away. My heart tears. That was just an interlude to him, whereas it has rearranged my whole world.

How dare he treat me this way?

“I want you to let me go,” I hiss, the hurt firing into anger.

His expression shutters, the playful indulgence gone. “No.”

“You can’t keep me here, doing nothing!” I clench my fists.

And while he could justify that I have everything in the world I could want—specifically the space and time to write, which is precisely what I told him I wanted—he nods slowly. Dragging in a breath, he exhales in a rush.

“From now on, you’ll have dinner with me. Every night.”

ARTEM

I try to focus on work for the rest of the day, but I don't. I think about Lina.

Whenever it's been about five seconds since I last thought of her, I imagine I catch the scent of her pussy and my balls tighten. She might be the most delicious thing I've ever eaten. Fuck, she was so sweet and juicy and soft, like slices of peach.

The way she came for me the second time was so damn perfect. She gripped my fingers and all I could think of was how she'd feel as I filled her up with come. As I bred her, my little kisa.

My cock is so hard it's basically a steel rod, a constant reminder that I am a bad man, lusting after my innocent captive who is half my age.

I can't stop wanting her to be mine, and apparently, I can't keep my distance. When the alarm on my bedroom went off, and I opened the security camera app only I have access to that covers the key parts of the house, I couldn't believe it and saw her rubbing herself, like the little cat she is, on my bed. My heart might have ached for how she was obviously bored and lonely, but my body responded with baser instincts when she hitched up her dress.

The sight of her glistening pussy lips as she pleased herself, clearly revelling in being in my bedroom, will be with me forever. Every part of that has shown me I'm powerless when it comes to Lina. I'm not certain "no" would even stop

me if I let myself get carried away with how I really feel. I want her more than life. I thought I had my addiction to Lina under control, but it never was.

She's my *captive*.

How can I let her go?

That's part of my mind's refusal to solve the problem of who came after Lina and me. If I track down who is responsible and make them die in the way they deserve for scaring my girl, I won't have her with me anymore. But equally, I have to keep her at arm's length. If she gets close, if I give in to what I most want and pound her into the mattress until she comes on my cock and is round with my child, she'll be my prisoner forever.

"Boss?" Vlad pokes his head around my office door. "The spy teams have been dispatched for the evening." He nods meaningfully and I get the hint. There won't be any intel until the morning when they return. I should clock off, and allow the rest of my team to do the same. They've had a gruelling few days as I've worked them insanely hard.

"Thanks," I mutter. "I'm just going to see if there's something in these numbers..."

"Galina says to tell you dinner is ready."

My head snaps up. "Already?"

"As you requested?" Fear streaks over Vlad's face. "Did I tell her the wrong time? I'll get—"

"No." I check the clock on the computer screen, and he's right. It's time.

Excitement flares through me. I wonder what my kisa will have decided to wear? I instructed Galina to cook something delicious and let Lina know when and where to meet me.

"Galina says dinner is on the west terrace."

Huh. Not the grand formal dining room or the kitchen where I sometimes grab breakfast. The air is warm and fragrant with herbs and pine as I step outside and come to an immediate stop.

A white fabric-draped structure sits in the centre of the stone paving, with a table for two set in the middle. String lights, lanterns, and candles are strewn around, casting a glow in the fading evening light. A bottle of champagne is on ice in a silver bucket.

That's pretty enough. Romantic. But what takes my breath away is Lina. Wearing a shimmering turquoise silk dress, she's standing at the stone balustrade, looking out over the darkening garden. Her hair is over her shoulders, and my god, how did I live without seeing her hair down? It's remarkable. A wonder of the world, as sleek and shiny as a panther's fur.

If I thought she was entrancing in that simple white shirt she wore at work, this curve-clinging piece of temptation is enough to turn me into a beast. I simultaneously want to hide her away so no one will ever see her, and show her off for the perfection she is.

Either way, the feral creature under my ribcage demands that she is *mine*. Well, for tonight at least, I can pretend.

I saunter with deliberate steps to the champagne, pop the cork and fill two flutes, then approach Lina. Standing beside her, I offer the glass.

She accepts it, our fingers brushing and my heart skips as though I'm a boy of twenty rather than a man of twice that.

"Who did this?" Because my house is many things, but whimsically romantic is not one.

"You don't like it?" she asks, her eyebrows pinching together, taking a sip of champagne.

"I like it." If it's what she likes, yeah. I like it.

She wobbles her head. "Galina helped. Found the things I asked for."

"Good." I want her to treat this place as her own. For her to be queen of this domain. We're both staring into the waving flowers in deep shades of purple and blue.

"And I got a couple of your men to put the pergola up. Kirill, I think?" she adds.

That wild animal at my centre growls, low and jealous. “If you need help, you ask me, in future.” When she opens her mouth as though to argue, I silence her with a look. “You ask *me*. Whether it’s a pergola or you need to come, no man helps you but me. You understand?”

She rolls her eyes. “You paid for it. And it was for you.”

For me.

That phrase expands in my chest, a soft-point bullet that takes out the envy I felt just a moment ago. She did all this to have dinner with me. Sure, maybe she wanted to rile me by spending money—as if that were possible—but the result? She’s made a perfect summer evening, with all the pretty, romantic nonsense that anyone could want.

Apparently, I’m not immune to it.

“Okay,” I mutter. I probably should ban her from telling my men what to do, but they all know better than to touch what’s mine, so I guess there’s no harm.

A subtle cough comes from behind us, and we turn to see Galina disappearing into the house with a smile over her shoulder. I shake my head.

“I think we’re being told to eat while it’s hot, kisa.”

She smiles wryly. “Galina had very fixed ideas about what food was to be served.”

Touching the small of her back, I guide her to the dining table and pull out her chair for her, all formal, like this is a date and I haven’t kidnapped her and licked her out shamelessly in my bed.

“I think this is beef stroganoff,” she says, examining one of the dozen dishes. “But what’s this?” She points at the borscht.

“Better try it and find out.” I ladle the rich beetroot soup into her bowl.

Cautiously, she dips her spoon in and brings it to her lips. There’s a moment of hesitation, then she nods. “It’s delicious.”

“Try it with the garlic bread.” And then all the tension is gone. We’re chatting like old friends as I tell her about all my favourite Russian dishes. It’s the same as when we used to talk early in the morning. Relaxed, happy.

And after coffee, when before we’d separate and maintain appropriate distance, she asks about the garden. I offer to show her, and in the deep shadows I slip my arm around her shoulders and pull her in to tuck her into me. She fits perfectly.

How am I going to ask her to stay forever, when she’s so young, innocent, and sweet?

“Artem, who do you think was shooting at us?”

“Ah, Lina.” I stop next to a water lily-covered pool. “It’s too beautiful a night to talk about that, isn’t it?”

She shakes her head slowly. “Who was it?”

“I don’t know,” I admit with a sigh. Four days and I’m no closer to being certain who is after me. And more importantly, how to keep Lina safe.

“You must have some idea.”

Those words are like nails into my heart. When I find out who is the threat, and dispose of them, I’ll let her go. That’s the undertone here.

“The obvious culprit is Benedict Crosse, kingpin of Westminster.”

“I’ve heard of him.” She tilts her head. “But why?”

“He knew I liked to come to your coffee shop.”

I shrug. The truth is, Crosse suspects my weakness for Lina and has exploited it before. When Victor kidnapped Crosse’s son, I had the choice of saving my elder brother or Lina.

I shot Victor in cold blood.

Sure, I said it was because I was done with the revolting lines of business my brother favoured. That’s true. But the

reason I acted then, rather than on the slower timescale I had been pursuing, was for Lina.

Then by kidnapping her, I've revealed the extent of my obsession.

"You don't think it was him though, do you?" she says, eyes narrowed.

"No." Crosse has become almost a friend since that incident, and has started a syndicate to try to prevent the sort of incidents that led to the kidnapping of his now wife and his son. "I'm in the process of investigating Crosse, but I don't think this was him."

She presses her lips together thoughtfully. "So, who else could it be?"

One hand clenched at my side, the other resting on her shoulder, holding her to me. If only it were so easy to keep her from shying away when she knows the truth. "I took over from my brother two months ago. He made a lot of enemies."

"How?"

My throat seizes up. I would have rather not have had to tell this sweet girl exactly how evil the mafia I run is. Or, more accurately, was. Badly enough that for a whole year I held back from doing anything but chatting with her every morning. My caffeine fix, yes, but she was my light too. A candle in a dark, cold cave.

A little touch of her hand to my cheek makes my heart skip a beat.

"It's okay. Tell me."

"Victor did terrible things." This part is difficult. "Some of which I helped him do. And while he's dead now, my enemies haven't forgotten. They're still out for blood. Revenge. Some even see the change of leadership and business activities at the Mayfair Bratva as weakness. They think I'm not as strong as Victor was."

The moonlight highlights her face in silver, a fairy-tale creature in my arms. I know she's a dream I'm spinning

myself, but I can't help but want more.

"Is that true?"

This girl has a way of seeing right into my fears. "I'm not as brutal as he was. I don't do the things he did."

"That makes you stronger. Cleverer." She moves closer. "If you can still be a mafia boss and hold onto being human too, that means you can hold onto power with respect and justice rather than fear."

"I hope so." She doesn't sound disgusted, so maybe... But I run through the events of that morning again in my head, as I have a hundred times already. And suddenly I'm stuck not on why someone tried to murder me, but why she was there at the door, vulnerable.

"What were you going to say, kisa? Before whoever it was shot at us."

"Yeah..." She shifts and looks away into the darkness. "Just that I'm leaving London to go to university."

"What? Why do you want classes?" That's ridiculous. She can't not be in London. I won't allow it. It has become painfully clear that I need her.

She rolls her eyes. "To try to improve my writing."

"Who says there's something wrong with your books?" I snarl. "Give me their names." I'll kill them all. Every one of them. Anybody who one-starred her book, I'll tear them limb from limb. People who make my kisa unhappy are on my shit list, and I don't give a fuck if I'm overreacting.

She laughs, but it's a little sad, and my heart thuds as she puts her hand on my arm. It's tensed, I notice. "No, don't do that. They're entitled to their opinions—"

"Wrong opinions—"

"And besides, they're kind of right."

"No."

"They are," she insists. "My sex scenes suck. They aren't sexy. I don't feel comfortable writing them, and the result is..."

Tame. It's fine for some of my readers, but it's not spicy and I want to do better. That's why I want to do the creative writing course."

"You think that'll help?" I reply, more than a little sceptical. Education is a good thing, but that doesn't sound like the best way to learn to write sex. Clearly she has amazing fans—apart from the haters who I suppose I can allow to live if she really wants me to be merciful. So why does she need a professor to tell her how to do what she's already doing?

She shrugs bashfully. "I was also hoping to get some, um..."

Oh no. That's not it.

"Experience," I finish for her.

"Yeah. I want to lose my virginity. I've never done anything with a boy. Man. Beyond some very uninspiring kisses. I can do virgin scenes alright, but blow jobs? Forget it. I'm clueless."

That hits me like I've been knocked over the head with a mallet. There are little tweeting bluebirds and stars and everything.

She's never been with a man. The possessive and territorial monster inside me roars with satisfaction and insists she's *mine*. She didn't realise it, but she was saving herself for me. To have her first orgasm around a cock on *my cock*.

"I thought if I go to university I could get hands-on experience," she continues, twisting her fingers together. "Well. Mouth-on experience."

No. No way.

"It's too dangerous for you to leave."

She nods and glances up at me speculatively. "Do you think I could still get to my course? I've only lost a few days."

"I made you come," I point out, struggling not to growl. I ignore the bit about sex. I can't offer her that without her being mine forever. "What more do you need? What do you want to experience?"

“I want to give a blow job. To return the favour.” She looks at me from beneath her dark lashes, hair falling over her cheek. “I want to make *you* come. With my mouth.”

Tentatively, she reaches for my cock. Her little hand barely covers half my length, and I’m suddenly aware of our size difference. I would break her.

Or she’d stretch, take me. Give herself to me and let me in. I’d come right up by the entrance to her womb. Breed her.

Hell.

This girl is going to kill me.

She strokes up and my cock twitches. I grab her wrist before she can go any further. Before I lose control completely.

“Please.” Boosting onto tiptoes, my fearless kitten, she tips her chin up, tempting me to kiss her. “I want to pleasure you. I know you’d be the perfect tutor.”

I’m incapable of denying her.

“I’ll teach you, kisa. I’ll direct you in how to pleasure a man with your mouth, if you’ll give me one thing in return.”

“What?”

Your love.

That isn’t going to happen. I’m a scarred, tattooed mafia boss and she’s an innocent angel. She used to work in a coffee shop as a sweet little barista; she’s good with people in a way I’m not.

I think of the London Mafia Syndicate meeting I’ve called tomorrow night. A whole evening apart, a night lost when I’ve only just had the chance to be with her for more than ten minutes. Crosse is sure we’ll figure out who is behind the attack, then it will be a few murders, and I’ll have to let Lina go. My little kitten will go to university, lose her virginity to some other man who deserves her, write her books and be happy. Without me.

My heart can’t take it.

I need something. I can't take her virginity; I'd never be able to allow her to walk away if I did. All I can have is her company.

“One evening as my fiancée.”

LINA

I blink in disbelief. “You want me to be your fake fiancée?”

This gorgeous, powerful man wants me to pretend to be engaged to him, and in return I get to give him a blow job? Has he lost his mind? I should be paying him for both.

“There’s a meeting I want you to attend with me. You’ll need another dress, like this one.”

“Kidnapping is an expensive occupation.”

He doesn’t acknowledge my joke. “And shoes, a necklace, *wear my ring.*”

“Really expensive.” Is it my imagination or was there possessiveness of that last statement?

Wear his ring. My tummy squirms. I get to pretend to be his wife-to-be, fake that he chose me to spend his life with, that he loves me instead of my being a girl he felt duty bound to save when she got caught up with mafia business.

And I get to see him come. Feel him in my mouth. My lips tingle at the thought.

I wish this were real.

It isn’t about writing a great sex scene for my book, if it ever was. It’s not just fiction on my side. It’s...

My heart stops.

“Hey, it won’t be that bad.” Artem’s expression is instantly worried. “One night, kisa.”

That's the *problem*. Emotion clogs my throat as the realisation washes over me. We've talked every morning for a year, and I was already a bit obsessed. Now I know him better...

This is a disaster.

I'm *in love* with this man.

I want forever. I'm helplessly in his thrall as I nod, forcing myself to swallow down the tears that threaten. I've had an evening of his undivided attention, and it's as good—maybe better—than my wildest dreams. It's everything I've ever wanted, being with Artem.

"I'll do it."

He brightens, his grey eyes lighting up and a joyful smile spreading across his face. "I'll get you a ring. All the rest, you order tomorrow."

I nod. Maybe, just maybe, if I can be the best fake fiancée ever... I'm kidding myself, of course I am. But it's such a good fiction. Better than any fantasy romance I've ever read. Far better than anything I've written.

"Come on then, let's get to your lesson."

"Yes, sir."

He wraps his arm around my waist, and we fall into pace as he guides me back through the garden to the house. I'm almost disappointed to be going inside. It's such a beautiful evening, and there's an enchantment out here that I love. Like reality doesn't exist. He's not a mafia boss, I'm not a normal girl, we're not captive and captor. We've been just: us.

But where I expect him to head for the door, once on the terrace he turns towards the pergola I had put up, with its white linen drapes.

"I thought...?"

He chuckles darkly. "You thought I was going to hide you away in my lair? No, you're far too beautiful for that. I want the stars to see you and weep at your perfection."

He thinks I'm beautiful? Or, no. That's all pretend, right? If he's giving me the full fake fiancée treatment, including a seduction leading to me swallowing his cock, telling me I'm attractive is part of the act?

My heart doesn't know that. It sends out happy vibes along with blood, pumping around every channel inside me. *He thinks I'm beautiful.*

"Then why not in the garden?" I like the idea of falling to my knees on the grass, staining my dress. Maybe a stone would dig into my skin, make me bleed. The little pain and the scar would be something tangible to hold onto. Proof that this happened when I'm far away, living some drab safe life without him. A way of retaining the memory forever.

"Nope," he replies implacably, towing me with him. As we pass the drapes, he snags the tie and the curtain falls across, screening most of the seating area.

He sprawls in the largest of the comfy outdoor sofa-type chairs I bought for this evening. "Because we're going to be comfortable for this. I won't hurry your lesson."

Arms resting on the back, his spread legs make no secret of his erection. He's a dark king, hair tousled, eyes glittering. Seeing him so powerful, dangerous, and calm makes my clit desperate to be touched. It's just like when he walked in on me on his bed.

"What if someone sees from the house?" I glance towards the windows. Most of them are covered by the drapes he released, or are dark.

"Would you like someone to see you being a good girl for me?"

My heart leaps, and I... Maybe. Would I feel embarrassed, or proud?

Both. And turned on, I think.

"You better hope they don't," he continues in a gravelly tone, "because although you were made to be shown off, anyone else who sees your pussy won't see the next sunrise."

That warning shivers through me.

“Tell me what to do.” If it sounds like begging, then yeah. It probably is. Please, please let me get this right. Please let me be so good at this he’ll...

“I will.” He crooks his finger and saves me from completing that thought. “And you’ll obey.”

It’s instinctive to take a step forward. He’s taking control and there’s this look on his face saying if I don’t, someone is going to be punished.

My mouth waters. “Yes, sir.”

“Mmm.” He purrs with satisfaction at my calling him that and our eyes meet. “Get a cushion.”

“What?” I don’t move. That’s not what I was thinking. I want a little discomfort. Perhaps his cock in my throat making me gag.

“Get. A. Cushion.”

“It’s fine,” I insist. “I just want to be taught—”

“Now, or you’ll be getting my palm on your backside, not my cock in your mouth,” he snarls.

I scramble to comply because although that threat thrills me, and the way he’s so strong and dangerous is part of what makes him compelling, I do actually want to give him a blow job.

I’m desperate. When I’ve fetched a cushion from another of the chairs, I stand before him. The ferocious, dark look on his handsome face makes me squeeze my thighs together. How did I get so lucky to have him watching me like that, his gaze like the midday summer sun. Almost too hot.

“What should I do now, sir?”

He spreads his legs and eases lower in his seat with a cocky gesture that shouldn’t be attractive, yet is. On him, it really is.

“There, kisa.” He points between his feet. “Kneel there and suck your fiancé’s cock.”

I hold in my whimper as I get to my knees. My *fiancé*. I know we're pretending, I heard what Artem said. But some screwed-up part of my brain thinks that if I can give him an orgasm as good as the one he gave me, maybe he'll fall in love too?

My breath shudders out as I lean into him, my hands on his strong lower thighs. The muscles are taut, like he's holding himself back.

"Belt first."

My hands tremble as I reach out. It's fine leather, black, warm and supple as I tug it out. He doesn't help, idly trailing his fingers down my arm.

"That's it. Go on," he murmurs as I slide the leather apart.

I move onto his flies, my fingers brushing down his erection. My heart hammers. The sound of the zip is loud as the gun from days ago. Then his boxers, they're soft black fabric, and slide over his skin. And I gasp, I really do, as his cock is revealed.

It's huge. Long and thick and even as part of my brain is insisting I'd never get all that to fit anywhere in me—my mouth, my pussy, I don't think I could even grip it properly—anticipation flows through me.

And probably it's the wrong thing, but I've lost my mind. I need the hot proof of his desire blocking out everything else. I lean over him and rub my face onto him, cat-like. His length is hot and silky smooth. I know the hint is in the phrase "hard on", but I can't believe how like stone he is. Sun-warmed, velvet stone. His erection smells deliciously musky. Sandalwood and sweat and pure masculinity. His groan rumbles into me and my pussy is flooded. I'm so wet it's seeping out and dripping down my thigh.

"Oh kisa." His hands shift to the back of my head, combing his fingers into my hair, smoothing it from where it was obscuring my face.

Then he tightens his hand, tugging. I whimper. The pressure is just right, like those times that I've pulled my own

hair to experience it because I was convinced no one would ever do it for me. Except this is *better*.

“You look so pretty. Your hair is lovely, but I want to see you take my dick.”

Eagerly, I part my lips and kiss the heated length of him.

“You wanted to be told what to do?”

“Yes,” I breathe.

“Use your mouth. Your tongue.”

I begin to lap. Open-mouthed licks that make him slick. Then kisses, working my way up to the curved top, beaded with moisture. It’s salty and I love it because I think—yeah I’ve read smutty books—that it means he wants me. He’s hot and reassuringly solid in my mouth as I slip my lips over the head of his cock and test how far into my mouth I can get him.

“Cover your teeth with your lips,” he says in a low purr. “Let me see them stretched like your little pussy would be.”

I do as he directs, and push more firmly onto the back of my throat.

“That’s right. Beautiful.”

The praise lights me up as much as the feeling of his smooth length. I wrap my fingers around the substantial base of his cock, stroking up his shaft as I try to get him deeper.

And again.

Again. This time I gag, but I don’t stop. I repeat, altering the angle.

He groans and oh god that sound is so hot I’m ash. I’m a shell of a girl as I keep working, greedily trying to get more of him. Like I’d consume him if I could.

The power in this is heady. My teeth are right there, and he’s not in control of this, his eyes going hazy. He might be instructing me, but I’m doing this to him. It’s a gift and this big, scary man is moaning with pleasure that I’m giving.

I'm vaguely aware the reason for this was to experience giving a blow job. I should be cataloguing his reactions, thinking about how I'd describe this in neat little sentences and paragraphs.

But I have no words. I'm about as articulate as the cushion smooshed under my knees. I'm a creature of wet heat and nerve endings that are trilling with delight. Apparently, there is a direct line between my cheeks and my clit, because when he strokes his knuckles along the hairline of my face, sweeping tendrils of hair away and tucking them behind my ear, the pleasure is like the buzz of that vibrator I bought.

Being with him heightens every sense. I'm hyperaware of the earthy, sweet and salt taste of his cock, of the scent of the night air. The sounds of birds calling to each other as they settle into their nests and Artem's breathing, faster now than when we started. The lights I hung earlier cast his face into shadows, emphasising the square line of his jaw and his defined cheekbones. I have both hands stroking up and down the half of his length I can't get into my mouth over, and nothing has ever felt as vital under my touch.

His hand tightens in my hair. At first I think he means to hold me back—which isn't happening let me tell you. A girl like me only gets one chance to do this, and I'm gonna milk it—ah, pun unintentional—for all it's worth. Then my brain goes to encouragement, thinking that he'll force me down onto his erection. Then he thrusts up, into my mouth, hitting the back of my throat.

"I'm close, kisa," he grinds out. "Where do you want it? Tell me before I fill up your mouth."

Yes. The satisfaction in me that he is going to come surpasses anything I've done before. Good grades, book sales, nice reviews, that time I was first at sports day. Even Artem's treasured tips while I was at the coffee shop. That's all nothing compared to him giving me his orgasm. Coming for me because of my touch.

The options whip around me. I could pull away and ask him to come on my breasts, or my face. And yeah, that would

be hot, but I ignore his question.

I want to swallow it all and my mouth is too gloriously full of his cock to tell him.

“Fuck,” he mutters, and his hips jerk upwards. It’s only then I recognise how he’s held himself back. He has let me figure this out, with only slight guidance from him. But as I watch him, his forehead creased as though almost in pain, he gives in and thrusts, holding my head.

His come fills my mouth as his cock jerks. His shudders are whole body, making him vibrate. And suddenly, although his hand is still around my neck, I’m the one who is mighty. This brutal kingpin is shaking beneath me, from what I did to him. Another spurt, and another, and I imagine how those pulses must feel as he empties. He’s a brief taste of salt and sour as I pull back and swallow. Red and still seeping come, slick from where I’ve been swallowing him down, I can barely believe so much of that delicious cock went into me.

I want it again.

Who needs coffee and balanced meals? All I want is Artem’s come. Three times a day, please. Yum. I sink my lips over his head again, and he grunts. He could wake me—

“Get up here.” He tugs on my hair but his other hand grabs into my armpit, pulling me off his cock with a wet pop.

I protest, but barely get a word out before I’m on his lap, knees either side of his, and he’s kissing me.

“You were perfect for me,” he murmurs, holding me tighter. “So clever, so quick to learn. The best blow job I’ve ever had, kisa. Did you enjoy it too?”

I did, but I’m a writer, alright? Not one of those smart people who can say the right thing at the right time and make everyone laugh. I can’t figure out words on the fly and say them aloud, so I just nod.

That was everything I’d dreamed of and more. I have an imagination, but reality with Artem is even better. His cock is trapped between my stomach and his, still a hot, hard length that makes my pussy clench. Empty, so empty.

“Tell me, are you wet?”

I nod again, words choked in my throat.

“Speak to me, or I’ll find out in my own way.” Then his hand drags up my skirt and is between my legs. I cry out as he cups my open, soaked folds, just brushing my aching clit.

“You loved sucking my cock, didn’t you?” The pride and satisfaction in his voice reverberates across my skin. “I knew it.”

He slides into my folds and strokes. I cry out and bury my head in the warm cotton of his shirt as he sinks two fingers into me, and his thumb swirls over my clit. The pleasure spins from where he touches, sending a jolt through me.

“That’s it,” he whispers in my ear. “Come for me. I’m going to make you feel so good.”

I give myself over to him, and I’m so worked up it’s moments before I’m cresting. Coming with bone-shaking intensity, helpless to do anything but accept what he’s giving.

An orgasm.

Then another, built slower this time, when he won’t let me off his lap. Then a third before he’s satisfied.

But not his heart.

That black credit card he gave me won’t buy me what I want most: for this to be real.

ARTEM

There was me thinking that smoothing Lina's dress down her thighs, walking her to her own bedroom, and leaving her there with only a soft kiss to the top of her head and a promise to see her in the morning was the hardest thing I've ever done.

Nope. Not even close.

Lina looks amazing. Again. The dress is long this time, shimmering green-blue like peacock feathers, and draped over her gorgeous body. Gazing up at her from the bottom of the stairs, I realise what a mistake it was to agree to go to the London Mafia Syndicate meeting. Even though I called said fucking get-together.

Past me is an idiot.

Past me was desperate for my girl to be safe, and willing to negotiate with or kill any man to achieve it. But now I'm faced with two issues: one, I don't want to share her, especially when she looks so tempting. And two, I do not want her to leave the house. I want to keep her here and ravage her like a beast.

The hardest thing I've ever done is not grab Lina, pull her down right here, drag that delectable dress off and fuck her until she comes on my cock with a scream.

She descends the sweeping staircase with careful steps, her high-heeled shoes unfamiliar. Can't wait to have her barefoot again, her heels digging into my back, not balancing down the stairs.

I meet her at the final step, stopping her so I can see right into her eyes without looking down. Those pretty, blue-green eyes. Her hair is up in some fancy thing with pearls glistening amongst the dark strands. I want to pick out each one and sink my hands into the softness. But I'm not a prick. I know that a woman might have spent hours preparing for an event she was nervous about, and I can see in Lina's face that she's apprehensive.

It's a little disconcerting having her above me. I like it. She's a queen, and I'm her devoted subject.

"Do I look okay?"

"No."

"I thought I was doing the right thing," she babbles. "I'm sorry—"

"You don't look okay. You look *perfect*."

"Oh!" Pink flushes her cheeks, and she dips her head. And yeah, that makes her look different perfect. Sweet and delicious and so damn tempting to throw her over my shoulder and take her to bed right now. Make that blush extend all the way down as I make her come time after time after time.

"Except for one thing." I pull the ring box from my pocket, heart hammering at my rib cage as though its agitation could break it out of its prison.

I sink to one knee and offer up the open box. The moment of confusion is replaced by awe.

"It's..." She sounds choked up. "Wow, that's beautiful. That sapphire is amazing. Are you sure you want me to wear it while we're out tonight?"

"Absolutely." And keep it on her finger for the rest of her life, along with a wedding band. "Why don't you take it, see if it fits?"

With slow movements, like she might disturb the ring and make it bolt away, she takes it from the box, and examines it. I stand, and my knees creek but thank me for removing them from the marble floor. By thank me, I mean, hurt like a bitch.

“You didn’t buy it especially, did you?” She turns the ring with her forefingers and thumbs, studying it. “Or have it on loan?”

“It was just hanging around,” I lie easily. Hanging around since I bought it earlier today.

“Like a family heirloom?”

“Something like that.” I would really like it to be a family heirloom Lina passes to our daughter. Maybe even one of our daughters.

She holds my gaze as she slides the ring onto her finger and my cock throbs. It fits. Of course it does. But I let go of the breath I was holding, and damn but I want to rearrange myself below the waist. Everything is uncomfortably tight in this tuxedo. My balls are primed and ready, my cock is at full mast as she smiles shyly and says, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” I offer my arm, and she places her little hand on my sleeve. “Shall we go?”

“So, as your fake fiancée, what do I need to know?” she asks as we walk out to the car. “Who will be there?”

“Your friend Anwyn.”

“Oh!” She grips my arm a bit tighter. “That sounds good.”

“But don’t assume the wives are any less dangerous than the husbands. I’ve never tested any of the kids, but safe to say they are murderous too.”

She laughs, and I smile as though that was a joke. It wasn’t.

“Doesn’t matter, because I’ll protect you.” I let my arm slip down, fingers trailing over her naked shoulder.

That elicits a contented sigh, and she peeks up at me from beneath her lashes. She’s done something with them, and they appear even longer than usual. The effort she’s gone to warms me. I don’t care about the makeup or the dress. But I do appreciate that she has taken care to look good for me. That I love.

The evening seems like it is going to be usual. It's pleasant to have an excuse to hold Lina's hand in mine as we arrive at the meeting. There's the same posturing, boasting, and every man looks only at his partner. It used to make me jealous as fuck. Not because I want any of the other women here—they're fine, pretty wallpaper, nothing compared to Lina—but because I craved what Lambeth and Crosse had. Laurent, as well.

The woman I love at my side, and a cute kid or two. At the time, having Lina seemed as far away as the sun. Our age gap, my being chest deep in blood and mafia connections, her innocence. All insurmountable barriers.

But apparently when it comes to my girl's safety, all bets are off. I want her with me, and I want to protect her. Conflicting impulses, since she'd be safer far away from all of these men.

Then the kingpin of Canary Wharf, Rhys Cavendish, walks in looking so wound up he might explode out of his suit.

"My fiancée doesn't know I'm in the mafia," Cavendish announces. "Everyone has to pretend this is a maths club."

I blink. We're the leaders of London's grubby underworld. We're here to discuss kidnap and murder, not feign to like algebra.

"Amateur dramatics is next door," drawls Laurent.

"I'm not doing that." Rafe Blackwood, the leader of Sutton, folds his arms. "Not happening."

Cavendish glares daggers and reaches inside his jacket for his piece.

Oh great. Just what I need. Some fight breaking out over trivial nonsense that could derail this whole thing and kill any chance of me using this meeting to find out who was stupid enough to come after me. I push Lina behind me without thinking. If shit is going down, any bullet will go into me, not her.

Westminster clears his throat and both Cavendish and Blackwood shoot glares at him like two arguing schoolboys.

He tilts his chin up and they both curl their lips as they put their hands away from their guns.

“Why the hell does she think this is a mathematics club?” Lambeth asks, rolling his eyes.

“I’ve been under...” Cavendish hesitates. “A lot of pressure recently. It was a sudden situation.”

“Honesty is the best policy—”

“No,” Cavendish snaps, cutting Lambeth off.

Next to me, Lina snorts with laughter. And her amusement releases me. If she thinks this is funny. Fine. I wrap an arm around her waist and pull her flush to my side.

“We’ll do it.” I called this meeting. It runs by *my rules*.

Westminster raises his eyebrows infinitesimally. I do the same back, daring him. His blonde wife tugs on his arm and he immediately leans down so she can whisper in his ear. And whatever she says, convinces him.

He nods agreement and begrudgingly, everyone else follows our lead. Westminster might not be as rich as Mayfair, but it has influence.

“Just be *creative* with your numbers,” I say, thinking that I really have to be able to actually get down to some business talk, despite this inconvenience. Lina’s side vibrates against me, and I look down to see her face full of mirth. I pull her closer still, smiling. Damn, but seeing my girl happy is a sheer delight.

“The first rule of maths club is don’t talk about maths club,” Lambeth says, mouth twitching.

“Don’t. Start,” Cavendish snarls, then spots someone and strides away as Laurent sniggers.

“I’ll take her aside for some social stuff. Leave you boys to talk,” Lambeth’s wife reassures... I dunno, everyone, I think. We all turn and look as Cavendish meets his girl.

A blonde woman in a green dress stands in the doorway. I glance at Lina’s raven hair, so dark it’s almost blue. Her stark

beauty outshines every other woman by a mile. Far too lovely for her own good. I tighten my fingers at her waist and tentatively, as though she's not sure she's doing the right thing, she places her hand over mine.

While we're all smirking and being politely accommodating of Cavendish's stupid facade, all my attention is on Lina's hand. I can feel her engagement ring, sharp against my knuckle.

Lambeth's wife draws Cavendish's away. And fuck, I do not want to let Lina go. But Crosse's wife, who used to work with Lina, is coming over smiling, and I cannot think of a single reason that Lina should stay with me and be terrified by what I am.

Except one. I want her by my side.

"Lina!"

"Anwyn." Lina smiles with genuine pleasure. I see how this could be between us. Lina could fit into this life.

They hug and are straight into catch-up chatter. "There are cocktails waiting," Anwyn says, trying to drag Lina away, but Lina digs in her heels.

"What about the..." Her gaze flicks to Crosse and the other mafia bosses standing around and proud as fuck of her. "I could stay?"

"I'll take care of everything." She belongs with me, but I cannot be an asshole about this. Anwyn is her friend. "Go and represent Mayfair in the women's *mathematics* conversation."

She blinks up at me, surprised.

I lean down and whisper, "You're my fiancée, remember?"

For a second, she melts against me. But when I withdraw, there's a shadow over her eyes.

"Fake," she mouths with a rueful twist of her mouth, then turns away, following Crosse's wife.

I go cold.

Idiot. I should never have suggested a fake date. Nothing about how I feel is put on.

By the end of tonight, I swear I'm going to resolve this. The threat to her life, yes. Then I'm going to convince Lina—by any possible means and I'm not above seducing and getting her pregnant if that's what's needed—to stay with me.

First though, there's the minor issue of taking out whoever is trying to kill us. When we all settle around a table and whiskey is poured, I take the paper I prepared from my pocket and slide it into the middle.

“This is a list of everyone I can think of that Victor... Did some *algebra* with.” And by algebra, I mean, killed someone they loved. It's a long list. “I'd appreciate your help with identifying which of these is most likely to have been seeking a solution to their *maths problem*.”

Nobody moves. I curse inwardly. Fucking hell. I'm here, aren't I? I agreed to this ridiculous club, and now I need some assistance, they're all going to be arseholes.

Admittedly, there might be some of their names on that list. My shitty brother. I should have killed him long ago.

“If you're looking for information about *equations*, I'll need to discuss that with my wife,” Laurent says.

“Pussy whipped,” sniggers one of the others.

“If that's what you want to call it.” Laurent smirks with the confidence of a man utterly secure in his skin. “My wife is a ruthless mathematician,” he adds and makes the word seem sexy. “I value her opinion as well as her—”

“I don't think it's any of them,” Crosse flicks the paper back into the middle of the table.

“What?” That list is comprehensive. I sweated over it, as did Vlad.

There's a brief scuffle as everyone else decides they want to see what is on the list, and it ends up with Cavendish and Blackwood at a careful truce both reading at a ninety-degree angle.

Crosse shrugs. “They all know the deal. *Maths* spats happen. Most of these were a while ago, and Victor is ah—” He glances over to where the women are sitting. Probably out of earshot, but not definitely. “He’s zero now.”

Crosse doesn’t add that the most recent incident involved him, and was the tipping point for me killing my brother and his nod to me says it all. If he can forgive Mayfair for attempting to kidnap his wife, and successfully kidnapping his son, why would anyone else hold a grudge?

I swear under my breath.

“I’d look internally, were I you,” Crosse continues.

I think of my reluctance to appoint a second-in-command. How Vlad seems to be the perfect choice, but I can’t bring myself to trust him.

“What about your number *one*?”

For a moment, I don’t know who Crosse means. Whose idea was going along with this maths nonsense? It’s bloody ridiculous. Then I bristle. “Lina is not involved with this *equation*.”

“How do you know?”

I don’t.

“Or could your nephew be involved with Victor’s algebra?” suggests Laurant. “Wasn’t there a family disagreement—”

“Have you met Sergey?” My tone is sarcastic. “My nephew Sergey wants nothing to do with Mayfair. Only crossing *pens* with Crosse’s son.”

Crosse winces but nods. “If it’s any consolation, I’m hoping the child Anwyn is pregnant with currently will be more inclined to take over Westminster’s *fine mathematical tradition* than my firstborn. But honestly, I don’t think any of this list should be worrying you.”

“Anyone else?” The paper has been passed around, and there’s some chatter. But not the comprehensive, clear answer I was hoping for.

“I will look at my own team then, to solve this maths problem.” My jaw clenches. I thought everyone was happy with the changes I’d made, or at least obedient. “*Zero* is a dish best served cold. Whoever it is, I’ll make them *pay*.”

At the end of that little speech, I look up to find my kisa watching me across the room. Her eyes are wide with—fuck that’s fear, isn’t it?

Simultaneously, I realise two things. I am in love with Lina. Not obsession. Not lust. This is DNA-level love, a part of me, and will always be. Every piece of me adores her and wants what is best for her.

I love her, and she fears me. She’s only here because I kidnapped her. I turn away, heart compressing painfully.

Because the other thing I realise is—I have to set her free.

LINA

Fake.

That word rolls in my head as I listen to Anwyn telling me about how happy she is with her husband, stroking her almost flat belly, and cooing over my ring. I cannot fall for Artem Moroz. Any more than I already have.

This is all way too good to be true, and it's not true. That's the point.

And now, fool that I am, I'm glancing over at Artem and smiling. That shared smile, the understanding between us feeling like it always did when he arrived for coffee every morning at the cafe, reliable as clockwork.

I admit, it is extremely hot seeing Artem in his element. All those terrifying mafia bosses were hanging on his every word. I don't know what he said while Anwyn and I have been over here with the other women, but I'm very well aware they are the most powerful men in London. And when Artem told them to play along with that other mafia boss' request earlier?

They jumped.

And my clit jumped too.

It's nice to chat with Anwyn, and hear about her pregnancy. Even if we have to keep the non-baby conversation to coffee and books, rather than what I really want to know: how did she get her silver fox mafia boss to fall in love with her, and how can I replicate it? How can I get pregnant by my gorgeous kingpin? Could she get her husband to vaguely but anonymously threaten me, so Artem doesn't let me go?

God, I am disturbed.

Excitement trembles in my belly when Artem rises from the table he's been sitting at with the other mafia bosses, and comes over.

Holding out his hand, he looks down at me, head to the side, with what seems to be a sad smile. "Having a good time?"

I put my hand in his and, obviously I'm a fully grown adult and I don't need his help to rise from the sofa Anwyn and I have been lolling on, sipping our drinks. But he's so warm and steady, his hand is so big compared to mine. I kinda need him to help me or I might melt into a puddle. He smooths his thumb over the ring he gave me. That gorgeous ring. I wish I could wear it forever.

Artem draws me away from the hubbub of voices, into a secluded nook where sweeping curtains screen us from the rest of the room. He steps close, and shifts his hand to the small of my back, gently holding me to him. His other palm cups my jaw, and his thumb sweeps my cheek this time.

He doesn't say anything for a long moment, and looks so sad my heart begins to break for him. I'm on the cusp of asking what's wrong when he takes a deep breath, releases my cheek and reaches into a holster at his chest that I hadn't even noticed—I am so bad at this whole mafia thing. He pulls out a matt black metal gun. Making something click, he takes my hand and puts the weapon into it.

I stare at the thing stupidly, so heavy and unnatural.

"Artem..." Panic shoots through me.

Artem lifts my wrist and points the barrel of the gun at his chin. "If it's you who wants revenge, kill me. I'm fine with that. There's a silencer. Just walk out and never come back. Everyone will assume it was one of the others."

I don't move. I don't dare.

"Take it away," I whisper. I don't know what this is about, but I don't freaking like it. At all. I'm holding a king cobra, every instinct yelling to throw it far from me.

“Sure?”

“Yes!” I squeak. So slowly, with infinite care because I absolutely don’t want to trigger this thing to go off and I have never touched a gun before in my life, I move the weapon from Artem’s head.

“Take it,” I order him when it’s by my side, my voice seeming to come from a thousand miles distant.

Silently, Artem slips the gun from my hand, does something, then it disappears under his suit jacket, and I can breathe again.

I grasp his lapels and pull myself into his reassuringly warm bulk. A little hesitantly, his arms go around me.

“Well, that removes one of Crosse’s theories,” he mutters wryly, then kisses the top of my head.

“Theories?”

“He thought maybe you were part of the murder attempt.”

“Me?”

“I didn’t think it was very likely either.” And now I can hear a smile in his voice.

“His theories are bullshit,” I grumble and breathe in Artem’s scent like an addict.

Artem shakes with silent laughter, and we stand there, me in his arms, him stroking my hair, for I don’t know how long. Time enough for me to become aware of every place we touch. The heat of him. How solidly muscled he is beneath my hands and pressed to my soft curves.

“Now.” Artem sets me away from him and the grave expression is back, along with the distance between us. He swallows and I watch his Adam’s apple bob just above his collar. “If you want to go with Anwyn and Crosse, I’ve arranged for him to look after you.”

My mouth falls open in shock. If I thought the gun was insane, this might be even more so. This wasn’t what I expected. Is that why he looks so sad? My mind whirls.

“I don’t understand,” I say eventually.

“Crosse thinks that whoever came after us at the *Lazy Bean* was internal. Not another mafia, but someone within Mayfair.” He visibly steels himself. I can see how much this is costing him. “And upon reflection, I agree. It makes more sense. But I haven’t figured out who it is yet, and I promised I’d keep you safe. So go with your friend. You’ll be better protected in Westminster.”

“I don’t want to be safe.” The words are out before I can consider whether they’re wise.

“Kisa—”

“What if I want to stay with you?”

“It’s dangerous.” But his hand tightens at my waist and his eyes aren’t bleak anymore, they’re filling with wary hope.

My heart leaps that he hasn’t said no.

“I’ll help you figure out who it is. There’s one man—”

“Not if it puts you at risk,” he cuts me off.

I grasp at a promise he made. I’m willing to try anything to stay with him. I’m in this now. His life. “When you kidnapped me, you said you’d protect me.”

“I did.” He nods. “And I meant it.”

“Well.” I summon my most bratty, insistent look. “You don’t get to pick and choose, sir.”

He heaves in a breath and exhales like the weight of the world is on his shoulders. “Kisa—”

“What does that mean?” I demand. He’s been calling me kisa for a year and suddenly I can’t bite my tongue any longer.

He steps closer, crowding me into the wall behind. I boost onto tiptoes as he dips his head.

“In Russian, it means kitten. *My* kitten.” Then he kisses me.

It's sweet in a way, this kiss. Firm, but without filthy licks or nibbles. It's a statement, a press of his lips to mine. A claiming almost. I cling to him, hoping that if I just hold on, I can keep him forever.

When he draws away, we're both breathing hard.

"You want to stay with me, despite the risks?"

"Yes. I want to help." A thousand times yes. I want his ring on my finger for real and to be in his bed every night. I want to hear all his hopes and dreams and fears and be the person he turns to—not only for coffee and a smile, like we were before—for everything.

"Well. My little kitten has been creeping around my house. Tell me who you don't trust."

"All your men are very considerate, except—"

"Bastard," Artem growls.

"Nothing happened," I hurry to reassure him. "I just felt uncomfortable."

Artem's scowl deepens. "Who was it?"

"I don't know his name. He looks a bit like you, but younger."

"Sergey? No. Was it..."

"You spoke to him the morning we arrived after you..." I'm reluctant to say the word now. Kidnap seems an ungenerous way to describe how Artem has cared for me. "Snatched me away."

There's a pause.

"Oh you're kidding." And then he's holding me so tight I'm crushed to his chest. I don't care. I love being close to him. "It took you, and the fucking *London Maths Club*, to help me put two and two together."

In the car on the way back to his house, he tells me the plan as he drives, knuckles white as he grips the steering wheel.

“Promise me you’ll stay upstairs,” he demands. “I’m not having anything happen to you.”

“I promise.” And I don’t have to even cross my fingers, because I know exactly how I’ll do as he tells me, but also see what is happening.

“Everyone in the main hall. We’re going out,” he says into his phone when I nod that I understand the plan. A message for his men.

Just as when we arrived at his house five years ago—correction five days ago—Artem walks around and helps me from the car. We walk together to the elevator. But this time, I catch his hand and hold it, my heart swelling with love even as my throat is dry with nerves. He pushes the button for the ground floor, and the one above. Then as we rise, he backs me to the mirrored wall and kisses me like I’m air. Then as the elevator stops, he sets me away from him.

“Go to my bedroom, kisa. I’ll feel the alert on my phone and know you’re safe. Wait there. I’ll be with you soon.”

I believe him. But I want to see Artem at his best and worst. I have to be by his side. Cheering. I nod, and he walks out of the elevator around the corner into the main hall as the sliding door shuts off my view.

My heart thumps and adrenaline courses through me as I step into the hallway upstairs and, checking left and right as Artem instructed, remove my high heels to walk silently down the smooth polished floor. I open Artem’s bedroom, dart inside and then straight back out. Long enough to trigger the cameras, but not to miss what’s happening downstairs.

Closing the door behind me, I creep down the hallway to the sheltered spot at the top of stairs where I’ve spied on Artem before. His voice echoes up.

“I’ve dealt with Mayfair, and you all, differently to my brother’s way.”

He'll feel my eyes on him, I'm sure. He always does. But hopefully it will be in a good way.

On my hands and knees, I peek one eye around the corner of the bannister.

I haven't seen all of Artem's men gathered together before. It seems when I first arrived that wasn't all of them. They're standing in an arc with Artem in the middle, every face turned towards him as he levels a stare at the men.

"If you don't like the way I run things now, you're free to leave. Go now, peacefully, and that will be the end of it."

Seconds tick by. No one moves. With slow deliberation, Artem draws the gun and points it into the crowd of men. "But I won't have anyone endangering my fiancée, Vlad."

Warmth seeps into me. I'm still his fiancée, even as I'm shocked by Artem calmly pointing a gun at the scuzzy man who looked at me like I was meat.

Vlad sneers and steps forward. "You got Mayfair by blood inheritance from Victor. My claim is just as good. His *son*, who will restore things to the way they were. Who's with me?"

"I liked Victor's ways better," says a voice.

Two shots ring out and I freeze, all my muscles bunching me into the smallest possible space. But I continue watching, not even daring to blink, unable to look away like if I do everything will end.

A body lies crumpled at the bottom of the stairs, blood pooling at his head.

"He was going for the stairs, boss. To get your girl, I assume," a man says, almost sheepishly. "Sorry about that."

Shit. Coming for *me*? The air solidifies in my lungs.

"Not at all, Kirill," Artem replies coolly. "You've just been promoted to my second-in-command."

My gaze darts to Artem. He has a gun in both hands, and another man lies dead among the crowd. The man who said he

preferred Victor's ways.

"Anyone else?" Artem drawls.

Oh, I see now. Artem shot the vocal supporter, and Kirill shot another man who had silently gone for the stairs.

Good. It's deranged, but seeing what Artem will do to build a better organisation, and to protect me, fills me with bloodthirsty pride. I don't want to wield guns myself, but hell yeah, I like that he doesn't hesitate to kill for me. For us.

"Now. Give me one reason not to kill you, Vlad."

A space has opened up around Vlad, where Artem's men are distancing themselves from the traitor. He's upright, smirking, hands loosely by his sides, and his gaze flicks to where I'm hiding.

"You took my father from me, Artem," Vlad says. "But I'm a Moroz." He shifts a hand casually to his pocket. And from this angle, I can see what no one else can. A gun.

Fear punches my gut. Nausea inducing, sharp terror.

Artem might die without me having told him I love him. Without him having been inside me. Without having the chance we'd have a child together, a part of him to live on.

No. No way.

"Even if you think you've won, I learned more from Victor than you did," Vlad continues.

What can I do to help? Make a distraction? I look around.

"I'll ensure you regret your win—"

I shift backwards just as there's a barrage of shots, a shriek loud in my ears, pain that flares across my head, and a thump.

Then I'm on my feet, and running downstairs, regardless of what Artem said. Because if he's injured, if anything has happened to him, I'd rather die by his side than never see him alive again.

Where is he? He was—I slam right into his chest and his arms brace me.

“Lina. Are you hurt?” Artem’s mouth finds mine and our kiss is desperate, life and death, need him right now intense.

One hand at the back of my head, he forces me to look at him, scanning over me before growling. “You’re bleeding. That fucker *shot* you.”

“I’m fine...” But he’s right. There’s wetness in my hair. I reach up and touch it, and it’s red.

“The bullet must have grazed you.” He holds me closer as he turns around. Like he’ll never let me go again.

His men are where he left them, some holding their guns, some not, all staring up at us on the landing where the stairs turn.

“That is what happens to anyone who harms a hair on her head.” He jerks his chin towards the dead body of Vlad. “Kirill, secure the house. Everyone else, get some sleep. Tomorrow is a new start.”

ARTEM

I carry Lina up to my bedroom, ignoring her protests that she's fine. The sight of blood in her hair has made me insane.

"I told you to stay here." I don't release her to get us into my suite, kicking the door shut and flicking on the master switch for all the lights. "I should punish you."

"I had to know you were okay. I had to see you. Ohhh, I like your bathroom," she says as I push into the white and green tiled room with chrome fittings. I sit her on the edge of the freestanding bath that I bought because it was long enough for me to lie properly in, even though I've only used it once. Maybe I'll get Lina in it with me.

"Don't change the subject." From the medicine cabinet I pull out the necessary equipment.

"I thought no one would see me," she tries, and I shoot her a dark look. "I'm sorry."

"Better." I move her hair out of the way, and she winces. "You might still get punished. You were lucky. The bullet just skimmed past you." There's blood, but it's beginning to clot as I clean it up with an alcohol wipe.

"Is it going to have a brag-worthy scar?" she laughs. Despite her defiant words, she's shaking like a leaf in a gale beneath my hands.

"Not unless you shave your head."

The relief that she's okay is unspeakable. Seeing Vlad point his gun up to where I knew she was hiding was the worst

thing that has ever happened to me. Hundreds of times worse than any other bullet I've ever fired or had dug out of me.

I'd have never lived with myself if Lina had been seriously injured. And I'm never letting her go.

She heaves a shuddering sigh and grips me tight.

"I was scared."

"I know." I was too. Terrified I'd lose her because I was an idiot who didn't insist she went with Crosse. That she wanted to be with me was too alluring. The implication that she'd take the risks required to be a mafia queen, and stand by my side, was heady.

But I'm not sure my heart rate will go below two hundred again.

"I don't like it," she says as I put healing gel over the cut, sounding almost angry. Rebellious and stubborn, same as when I found her touching herself and using a vibrator in my bed.

"It won't. You're not going to be hurt again," I promise.

"That's not it. I don't want to remember him every time I'm scared. I like..."

"What is it, kisa?"

My little kitten digs her nails in and whispers furiously. "I like the hint of fear. I liked being caught by you, and that you're intimidating. But now what I fear more is that every time I feel that twinge of fear, I'll think of that asshole and be really afraid, rather than think of you, and be..."

Turned on.

Blood surges to my cock.

"Say it," I demand, my voice gravelly and harsh.

A second ticks past.

Another.

A third.

I grip her hair, careful of the side of her head, the silk tightening over my clenched fist, and pull her head back to look into her eyes. She gasps but meets my gaze.

“Squirmy and hot and needy,” she admits, half embarrassed, half defiant.

My cock responds in the only way I know and dragging her to her feet, I wrap my arms around her and kiss her.

“I thought you were going to die,” she says into my mouth.

“Not anytime soon,” I assure her as I kiss over her cheeks and down her neck. “I’ll never leave you alone. And I’ll never let anyone hurt you.”

“I thought I might die without having you inside me.” She’s grasping inexpertly for my belt, her movements hasty and panicked. “I thought you might die, and we’d never have been together. All I could think is that I wanted you, and you might be shot, and I’d be alone.”

“I’ll erase that memory.” I cover her hands with mine, stilling them. “I promise.”

“Make me.” Her breath is hot on my jawline. “Chase me.”

That makes me pause. Chase her?

I lower her down until her feet touch the floor, having to peel off her hands from my chest. She looks up, excitement on her face, and trust. And something else I can’t bring myself to name.

It takes all my control not to snatch her to me and rip off her dress right here.

She’s mine.

The possessive pounding through my arteries makes me want to claim her for my own. Permanently. I could rut her on the bathroom floor. But that’s not what she wants. Lina needs to erase the memory of true fear.

She needs me to change the terrifying to merely scary and exhilarating. She needs me to be her monster. I take a step backwards, putting space between us.

“When I catch you, kisa, I won’t be so nice.” I make my voice low and menacing. “The things I’ll do to you...”

The threat hangs in the air.

“Run.”

She hikes up her dress and takes off, not holding back, rushing out of the bathroom. Fast.

I move to the door and take a moment to watch her. She’s beautiful running, hair flying behind her, strong and smart. But I don’t wait for long.

What she needs is to be wanted. Desired to the point of obsession. She has to feel my power and that I’m swifter, stronger and more determined to catch her than she is to escape.

I love that. I love her.

This must be proof that I’ll protect her and keep her. No more compromise. No more denial.

So I sprint after her like my life depends on it—because it does. She does. At the door she pauses, casts a look over her shoulder, and when she sees me, a smile curves her lips before she yanks open the door to my bedroom and dashes into the next room of the suite.

It’s a sitting room that I more often use as a corridor to get to my private study at the end and she casts her eyes from side to side, figuring out which might be the better way to go. She can’t decide, pausing at the door that leads to the hallway.

“No,” I growl, and my good girl dashes past to bring me around in a circle, slipping through the plush sofas I’d love to tumble her onto. I get closer, but although I could easily catch up, I want her to enjoy this fully. I ease my steps, keeping a short distance away.

She has a burst of speed, and throws the door to my private office open wide. I grin and follow. Because what I know that

she doesn't is that room only has one way in and out. And I can shut us in.

I slam it behind me, and she comes to a screeching halt in the middle of the room as she looks for an exit.

"There isn't one." I turn the lock and drop the key into my pocket. "Now. My pretty little prey. I have you, and no one can disturb us."

She feints, then runs the other way, and I pound after her, relishing the hunt. We do laps of my desk, me allowing her to tire herself out and burn off the adrenaline of the evening. It's been a lot.

I'm wired too, on high alert, following her every dodge and enjoying her surprised squeal as I hurdle a sofa to get closer.

We play this game for minutes, me never drawing quite close enough to grab her up, always allowing her to escape.

Until she slips and nearly falls, and no way. No more hurt for my girl. After that I'm not messing around. My muscles burn as I accelerate, getting to her before she has even fully recovered and run.

Catching her by the waist, I snatch her into my arms, propelling us against the nearest wall. She struggles, clawing, and I grab first one wrist, then the other, pinning them above her head.

She tries to knee my balls and I dodge just in time with a chuckle. Then I use my hips to hold hers. She pushes back against me, and my cock responds by going from erect to furiously hard. Running after her means blood is pumping through my arteries, my cock filling to bursting.

"I won't stop, kisa." I keep her in place, helpless and in my power. "You're mine."

Her mouth falls open and those green-blue eyes widen. So damn pretty.

Grinding myself against the gap between her legs, I leave no room for her to think of anyone but me. Her beautiful hair

is soft against my forehead as I savagely press my face into her neck and bite.

“Feel what chasing you, catching you, and holding you does to me.”

She lets out a whimper and writhes against me.

“Tell me,” I order.

“It makes you hard,” she pants out.

I roll my hips, pushing against her softness so much it must hurt. But she doesn't complain, just whimpers with need. Keeping her wrists pinned in one of my hands, I sweep the other down her body in a blatantly possessive show. “I caught you. You're mine, Lina. I want to claim what's *mine*.”

She jerks her hands and I tighten my grip.

I search her face for fear, and yeah. It's there. It sends a thrill down my spine and right to my cock, which responds to her struggle with a twitch.

Releasing her, I slam my palms each side of her head. “Do you need to run again?”

She grabs the back of my neck and yanks me to her, smashing our lips together then scratches over my shoulders so deep I hiss. I hope there's blood. I deserve it for what she went through this evening.

“Take me.” Her words are muffled.

My groan is lost. Fuck, she wants it. My little prey is hot for me. I press her into the wall, covering her, telling her with my body that she's safe with me, kissing her ravenously as she tries to devour me while my mind whirrs. Can I really do this?

Drawing back, I grab her chin, forcing her to look at me. I've always known that if I cross this line, that's it. But if she thinks we're faking, that ends now. She has no idea what a possessive monster she's allowed to catch her.

“If I slip into this wet pussy, it's *mine*. You understand that, Lina?”

A smile lights her face, the easy and bright contrast to my dark and serious expression. “Yes.”

Her hands go to my belt, and I let her, dragging up her skirt by the fistful as our eyes continue to be locked. I’m shaking with need as she frees my erection and I push her knickers down before pulling her to me, kissing her. My cock presses to her core, and she’s wet. I groan as we so perfectly notch together. She already feels impossibly good.

“I’ll never let you go.” I have to make her understand, and yet I cannot stop. I’m so close—the tip of my cock is settled right at her entrance, in her soaked folds—I’m mad with need for her. “I’ll keep you, breed you, care for you. I’ll fuck you every day.”

“Artem. Please.”

Her begging undoes me.

“You’re going to be my wife.” I groan as I sink just the head of my cock into her.

She lets out a sound of surprise and pleasure and perhaps a bit of pain too. A shuddering moan with a hint of squeak. She’s so wet, but did I do that too fast for my virgin girl?

“Yes.” The word is panted out. “I want to be your wife.”

“It’s going to feel good,” I promise her, easing out and pushing in the same inch, slower this time, careful. No further. Just a taste, enough to get her used to the stretch of my substantial girth. “Trust me.”

“It does, it does. I…” And she tilts her hips, trying to get more.

“Uh-uh.” I draw back, even as my cock is begging me to take everything my innocent girl is offering.

“Now.”

“I will. I will as soon as you relax.”

“Stop teasing me!”

In answer I give her the smallest thrust in and out, still barely inside her, stretching open her entrance. “Like this,

kisa?”

She sobs with frustration.

“Or do you need more?”

“More!” She scrabbles at my back. “More. Please.”

“Mm.” I grin at how desperate she is. That is true magic. I thought I was insane, but we’re mad together, the ideal fit. “More of your future husband’s cock?”

“Yes.”

“Say it. I need to hear the words.”

“Please?” She keens, and I take pity, grabbing her thigh and easing it up mine. My good girl wraps it around my hips, opening herself to me.

“Not the right words.” I ease a little deeper and she gasps.

“Artem, that’s...” Whatever she was going to say is forgotten as I give her more shallow thrusts, sliding over her clit before slipping into her.

“Whose is this pussy, Lina? Who do you belong to?”

“Yours,” she sobs, moving with me, finding my rhythm without a single missing beat. “I’m yours. I love you, I love you.”

“Good girl.” Possessive glee fires in my chest and I ram all the way home. The hard thrust draws a cry from her and a deep grunt of contentment from me. “I love you too. I love you so very much.”

I push her more firmly into the wall, driving into her and she meets me every time. Fuck, she’s a sex kitten. So beautifully responsive. I reach down, cramming my hand between our bodies to find her clit, and stroke.

“You feel amazing. So tight and wet. You’re my perfect virgin wife-to-be. Come on my cock, Lina.”

I press just a little harder and then, as I instructed, she’s gripping my length as she comes, the sensation rippling over me, as sweet as if it were my own.

Breaking off our kiss, I keep up the firm slide of my body into hers, both because I need it and I think she does too because with every thrust she shudders with pleasure.

“I loved you coming on my tongue. But this way, on my cock, I get to watch your pretty face. It’s even better.” I love the feel of her, clenching on the most sensitive part of me as she pulses again and again, sobbing and shaking. And she’s beautiful as she comes, utterly gorgeous, those fathomless eyes closed, overcome.

“Good girl,” I say as her climax ebbs away. “So good. Now you’re going to take my seed and get bred.”

LINA

My rational brain knew Artem was huge. I had coffee with this man every weekday morning for a year. I've looked at what he's packing. Of course I noticed.

What I did not know was how he would feel inside of me, and holding me. His muscled, tattooed bulk protects me in a way I can't explain. I'm filled to bursting. I'm smothered by him, pressed into the wall, sandwiched between immovable objects.

And I want more.

Even as I float back to earth after a life-changing orgasm, I need this again. I crave seeing him come, lose control. I want my deadly mafia boss to be unable to hold himself aloof, to wreck him like he has me. It's just the two of us in this locked office lined with shelves of books and dark windows, and I love him so damn much, I'm never letting him go. He'll be lucky if I allow him to leave the house after all that's happened.

"Lina," he breathes, grabbing my arse and holding me to him, remaining firmly and deliciously wedged inside of me as he carries my not-inconsiderable weight as though I were a doll. He pushes past the doors I ran through, and takes me back to the bedroom we started in, settling me gently onto the bed and covering me with his body.

I have so many conflicting urges. I can't wait to see his naked body, I still need to see all his tattoos, but I love how he's so desperate to fuck me that we're both still fully clothed.

So when he braces his forearms either side of my head and pins me with his cock and his hips as he rolls into me, I grip his shoulders and dig my heels into his buttocks, urging him on, faster and deeper as pleasure spins from my core.

“Come inside me,” I say before I’ve processed the thought.

He said something about breeding me, and I’m desperate for that. I need to tie him to me in every way, even if that’s probably not needed. I have a feeling Artem will never let me out of his sight again.

“You want that?” he grinds the words out, a rumble of sound.

“So much.” I want to feel him unravel. “Pound into me. Take everything and more.”

He groans.

“I mean it.”

“Fuck. Little kisa, are you trying to make me rut you into the mattress? Give you friction burns? Bruises?”

“Yes.” I want his marks and to wake up and know this wasn’t a dream because there’s physical evidence in the form of every pinprick of hurt that amplifies the pleasure. “All of that.”

“I’ll come inside you, and I won’t let that come out. I swear, if you’re not pregnant after a week, I will dedicate myself to fucking you every two hours each day until you can’t walk. I’ll make sure you’re pregnant, then I’ll look after you, and our children. You have my ring on your finger.”

I’d forgotten about that. The beautiful sapphire that he gave me.

“Marry me.” He thrusts and it’s like he’s invaded me and drawing out all these sensations I didn’t realise I could have. Sparking, spinning, bubbling pleasure radiates out from where he’s stroking into me. “Marry me.”

I grip him even harder.

“Say yes, Lina. You’re going to be my wife.”

“Yes. Yes, always yes.” I’d beg for it, he doesn’t need to ask. I’d crawl on my hands and knees across broken glass and fire if I could be his wife afterwards. If this dream where he is making me feel so good, impaling me on his cock, would never end.

I thought, having used my fingers, that I kinda knew what sex would be like.

I didn’t.

It’s so much better. He’s hot, and smooth, and unlike the fateful night that he discovered me touching myself, there is absolutely no way he’s missing the spot. He’s also everywhere, above me, in me. It’s not just my pussy, it’s a whole-body experience. His skin is warm and soft as a silk-covered rock left in the sun and only enhanced by his rough stubble that scrapes at my cheek as he kisses me. It’s all so different from using a toy. He’s reverent and disrespectful at the same time, using my body and worshipping it.

And his words.

His words melt me. He tells me over and over again how I’m his good girl, and tight and perfect. How he’ll want me every morning and every night until eternity. He tells me he loves me, and fucking loves me, and fucking loves me so much, more than life itself and he’d do anything for me. How he can’t wait for us to be married and for me to carry his baby. For us to have as many children as I want and that he’ll protect and cherish us all. Me, our kids. Our *family*.

And all I do is whimper and listen and try to get him even closer. Like I could have him so deep in me I don’t know where he ends, and I begin.

I’ve never had a real family, or someone who loves me without restraint or condition. And Artem does, I know it for certain. He’s obsessed, a little crazy, but earlier today he gave me a gun and told me that what I wanted was more important than his life.

If that's not love, I don't want whatever tepid thing love is. I want Artem.

With every thrust sparks of pleasure shower through me. It's like I'm a firework, lit by his every movement. It's sweet and sharp, and though I teased him, no toy could be as perfect as he is. He's stuffing me overfull, pushing at the edges of what I can take and stretching me further than I ever thought possible. I love it as he hits the limit of me, so deep inside it's as though he's thrusting up to my heart.

"You have to come again," Artem demands. "Can you do that for me, kisa?"

My brain is stuttering. I can't speak. Come again?

Artem growls.

I'm filled with him and it's heaven but—

Then I'm empty.

"No!"

"Yes." Artem shoves me up the bed and buries his head between my thighs, licking me like a man possessed.

It's a shock. Having him inside me was delicious, tingling, and sweet, but this is insistent. He's telling me with his mouth that I'm his and I have to do as he says, even if that's coming when I think I'm finished.

He threatened punishment for my disobedience in not keeping myself safe, as he instructed. This is it.

The echo of his cock is still in my pussy, and he's giving me no space for anything but extreme pleasure, dragging me up the mountain, sucking my clit.

I writhe, and he clamps down on my thighs, holding me down firmly.

"Be a good girl for me," he says, and the words are muffled because he doesn't let up. His tongue is too much, too intense. Then he tosses me off the top of the cliff, and I'm flying. I sob and thrash. I cry out.

"That's it," he purrs.

While I'm still coming, he pulls me forward and thrusts back inside me in one smooth stroke. Another pulse of orgasm takes me, even stronger now.

"I love you so much." He grabs my hair and holds me in place. "You're my world."

I've never felt anything like this as he kisses my mouth. I can taste myself, and he's prolonging my pleasure well beyond the point of sanity.

"I'm going to breed you."

"Please," I beg. "Sir."

His silver irises are dark with emotion as he shudders above me, never letting go as he fills me with his seed in pulse after pulse. I watch each moment of his orgasm ravenously. Every rolling, heated shake of his body as he empties into me. He's gorgeous like this.

My future husband. The man who'll be the father of my children. My love. And I know beyond doubt that he loves me too.

EPILOGUE

9 years later

I place the bouquet of flowers onto the table and look at the table critically, tweak the petals and put one of the hardback books upright to show off the gilded edges. I like the display treats to be just right when Lina has a book launch.

“Dad, it’s fine. Mum will love it whatever,” Mila says, coming up beside me and leaning her head against my arm.

“Morning malyshuka.” I turn and kiss the top of her head, which she accepts with a grumble. She’s wearing cartoon pyjamas and pouting. Not a morning person, our daughter. Grumpy, just like her father.

I can’t believe that she reaches almost to my bicep now.

Every year I swear the kids can’t get any bigger, I can’t get any greyer, Lina can’t be any more beautiful, and I can’t be any prouder of my talented wife.

Every year I’m wrong.

But probably Mila is right. It’s not how I’ve arranged the flowers and books and champagne and chocolates. It’s what they represent: ten books published, after nine years together. It’s a remarkable feat, especially given we also have two children and a mafia empire to run.

“Can you get Alexi down?” I ask Mila, who rolls her eyes and pads off back upstairs to find her brother.

Our five-year-old will be awake, he takes after me that way. But he's probably plugged into whatever game—animal living? Is that what it's called?—he likes at the moment. Prone to be obsessive, my boy is going to be a top-notch leader of Mayfair. Mila is more interested in following in Lina's footsteps as a writer. I'm not sold on journalism, personally. Too many opportunities for my daughter to poke her nose in where it's not wanted, and start a mafia war.

But I'll save that worry for another ten years' time, when she's eighteen, not eight.

In the meantime, both the kids know the drill. Book launch days are special. I like to have all the family together to celebrate my wife's achievements.

I look over at the breakfast table, where there are all of Lina and the kids' favourites. Fruit salad, pan au chocolate, croissants, Danish pastries, and cereal for Alexi.

Checking everything is in place, I prepare coffee for Lina and me. On normal mornings, she makes the coffee, just as she used to when we met. But she taught me to use the machine, and while I'm not as good at it as her, I make a decent espresso.

As I finish making cappuccino for my wife, a pair of arms wrap around my waist and a familiar rose scent meets my nose, above the coffee.

Lina presses her cheek into the dip of my spine. "Thank you."

"I'm so proud of you." I turn, pulling her close and kissing her. "You've done amazingly."

She's soft and sweet in my arms, wearing a silk dress already, her black hair falling around her shoulders. My cock starts to respond, hardening. She's so gorgeous, and I still want her constantly. I know she's off for a lazy lunch with Anwyn and her other friends to continue the tenth book anniversary celebrations, and has dressed up for that. I have to work. I wonder if we have time to quickly have a personal celebration...

“Happy launch day!” Mila and Alexi burst into the kitchen and hug us both, gripping Lina’s back and my hip.

“Thank you!” Lina breaks off our kiss with a soft groan of disappointment.

Oh children. They have such perfect timing. But I can’t help but laugh and hook an arm around them both to squeeze them too.

“Mum, did you see?” Alexi demands. “You have a gold book!”

“I know, it’s called gilded edges.” We break up the group hug to admire Lina’s book. Something about dragons, though I admit I haven’t read this one yet. I surreptitiously rearrange myself so my erection is covered. That’s just for Lina. No one else.

“And your dad is very naughty,” Lina finishes, as she shows the book to the kids. “As I think that’s real gold.”

“Of course it is.”

“You’re ridiculously indulgent.” She smiles up at me. “You always made launch days so special. Shall we have breakfast, then I need to spend a bit of time on social media. My reader group will be excitedly tagging me in everything.”

Darn. No chance of dragging her to bed then.

“Dad,” Alexi says as we sit down to eat. “Why does only Mum get special treatment for her celebrations?”

I sip my espresso and raise one eyebrow. “The party we had for your end-of-year report cards wasn’t a celebration?”

“But—” Alexi has his mouth full of cereal now.

“Yes,” Mila interrupts, pinning me with her pale bluey-green eyes. They’re a mix of mine and Lina’s. “But what about *yours*? At work and stuff?”

Well, when Daddy has made a particularly lucrative illegal deal, Mummy gives Daddy a celebration blow job.

The kids don’t know the full extent of what I do. They have a vague sense that it’s dangerous and I run several

companies. That's enough for a few more years at least.

My eyes meet Lina's, and her smirk is so downright naughty that my cock throbs. It's a damn good thing we're all sitting at the table.

"You're right, Alexi. Your dad deserves more celebrations," Lina says, blinking innocently.

"Don't worry about me," I assure the kids, both of whom have wrinkles in their brows thinking about this perceived injustice.

"Why don't we have a party for Dad tomorrow morning?" Lina suggests. "You two can plan it with Galina's help."

Mila and Alexi are immediately enthralled with this idea, chattering together about what they should scheme.

"And I'll give you a gift in the *very* early morning," Lina adds under her breath, for my ears only.

"I'll hold you to that," I reply, as though I don't get it every day. I still love a five AM wake-up call with Lina. The coffee is later now, but those early hours of the day remain ours alone.

"A promise is a promise, husband. We have a lot to celebrate." And her smile is so happy my heart is too big for my chest, threatening to burst out of my ribcage.

Later tonight, or as I wake. I can't wait to discover what my gorgeous wife has in mind.

Want more Artem and Lina? [Get the Bonus Story straight into your inbox.](#)

For another protective and obsessed Bratva mafia boss hero, check out [Owned by her Enemy.](#)

Hey, if you enjoyed *Snatched by the Bratva*, could you leave a rating? It really helps indie authors and is an all-round sweet thing to do.

THANKS

Thank you for reading, I hope you enjoyed it.

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INSTALOVE BY EVIE ROSE

Mafia Boss Marriage

Owned by her Enemy

I didn't expect the ruthless new kingpin—an older man, gorgeous and hard—to extract such a price for a ceasefire: a mafia arranged marriage.

Grumpy Bosses

Older Hotter Grumpier

My billionaire boss catches me reading when I should be working. And the punishment...?

Everyone is Watching

His Public Claim

My innocence is up for auction, sold to the highest bidder.

Marrying the Boss

Baby Proposal

My boss walked in on me buying “magic juice” online... And now he's demanding to be my baby's daddy!

London Mafia Bosses

Captured by the Mafia Boss

I might be an innocent runaway, but I'm at my friend's funeral to avenge her murder by the mafia boss: King.

Taken by the Kingpin

Tall, dark, older and dangerous, I shouldn't want him.

I thought my mafia connections were in the past, and I was alone. But powerful mafia boss Sebastian Laurent hasn't forgotten me.

Stolen by the Mafia King

I didn't know he has been watching me all this time.

I had a plan to escape. Everything is going perfectly at my wedding rehearsal dinner until *he* turns up.

Caught by the Kingpin

The kingpin growls a warning that I shouldn't try his patience by attempting to escape.

There's no way I'm staying as his little prisoner.

Claimed by the Mobster

I'm in love with my ex-boyfriend's dad: a dangerous and powerful mafia boss twice my age.

Snatched by the Bratva

I have an excruciating crush on this man who comes into the coffee shop. Every day. He's older, gorgeous, perfectly dressed. He has a Russian accent and silver eyes.

Kidnapped by the Mafia Boss

I locked myself in the bathroom when my date pulled out a knife. Then a tall dark rescuer crashed through the door... and kidnapped me.

Filthy Scottish Kingpins

Forbidden Appeal

He's older and rich, and my teenage crush re-surfaces as I beg the former kingpin to help me escape a mafia arranged marriage. He stares at me like I'm a temptress he wants to banish, but we're snowed in at his Scottish castle.

Captive Desires

I was sent to kill him, but he's captured me, and I'm at his mercy. He says he'll let me go if I beg him to take his...

CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE BY EVIE ROSE
WRITING AS EVE PENDLE

Secrets of Wildbrook

Her Nemesis until 5pm

He's grumpy, she's sunshine. They're about to get snowed in together. And there's only one bed.

Her Fake Date Until Midnight

He's hot. Rich. Domineering. And grumpy.

She's kind, trapped, and soon to be broke.

Her Grumpy Neighbour until Halloween

He's gorgeous but grumpy

She's conspicuous, cheerful, and in a lot of trouble

Her Boss until Christmas

She can't stand him, but his offer is too tempting

He's a cynical billionaire with too many secrets