

The Devil's Fire by Mariam El-Hafi Chapter 131 - 140

Althaia

"...What?" I breathed out, thinking I have heard wrong but the look on his face told me otherwise.

"What do you mean it was burned down?"

"Your dad sent us out here to see if we could get any leads, and we found it burned down..."

"Take me there. I want to see it."

"Thaia, we've already been here long enough, I don't want to risk your safety by staying here." He shook his head at me and I grabbed his arm, looking at him desperately.

"Please, Michael... I have to see it with my own eyes."

"Don't look at me like that." He groaned and faced away from me. He was quiet as he kept looking out of the windshield.

"Five minutes. No more than five minutes and then we leave."

Just as we neared the boutique, my throat closed when I saw the burned building. I got out of the car, barely believing what I was seeing in front of me. The boutique my mother had worked so hard for, the long hours of drawing, sewing, and putting it all together... It was just gone.

Gone like she was.

"I'm so sorry, Thaia." Michael wrapped an arm around my shoulders while I still looked at the boutique in disbelief.

Vouchers

"Why would they do that?" My voice was nothing but a mere, broken whisper. If there was one thing my mother truly did take pride in, it was how she had managed to make a name out for herself with her hard work, and the way she could be creative in the forms of gowns. And now, I feel like I've truly lost everything.

"I don't know but I promise you I'll find out whatever I can, and let you know if something comes up. They're all going to pay for this." Michael reassured me but right now, it all felt like empty words to

"Come, let's go now."

"Do you want to take a walk with me on the beach? The sun is about to set and it's a beautiful sight to witness." I asked Michael. He decided to keep me company for the rest of the day, even though I hadn't said much since we came back.

"Sure." He smiled and we made our way outside.

He had made sure I got something to eat and tried to get me in a better mood. It did help that he was here. I had forgotten how goofy he could be, and I was happy that I was able to spend some time with him since it had been so long since the last time.

"Are you sure you don't want to stay at my place instead of here?" Michael asked again, trying to convince me not to stay here on my

own.

"I appreciate the offer, but I'm just needing some time for myself." I explained to him as we walked down to the beach.

"I don't like you staying here by yourself."

Vouchers

"It's literally a safe-house. Do you really think they would send me out here if it wasn't safe for me?" I pointed. I rolled my eyes at him when he scoffed at my answer but didn't say anything else to it.

We walked alongside the water, watching and enjoying the incredible view of the sunset. There was something so incredibly peaceful about watching the warm colors of red and orange in the sky. And with the water reflecting everything, it created an even more majestic sight.

My hand reached up to touch the necklace that I always wore, only to be reminded again that I had lost it. I let out a sigh as it was a necklace I had

received from my grandfather before he passed away. It was the only thing I had from him.

I stopped walking, turned to face the water, and closed my eyes while taking a deep breath of the fresh, salty air. I loved it here... It was so beautiful and peaceful. I never knew I would like a beach house this much but the sounds of the waves made me feel calm.

"Is it true...?" Michael suddenly spoke. I turned around to face him, seeing how he looked troubled while still facing the water.

"What is?" I asked him, curious why he was suddenly wearing such a grim expression. He let out a breath and looked at me, his ocean-blue eyes looking intently at me.

"You and him... Is it really true?" I faced away, feeling my heart ache at the mention of him. I wasn't even sure if he still wanted me... And I couldn't blame him if he wanted to leave me.

I had lost a precious life in me.

"Something like that..." I muttered and my throat went completely dry. Michael grabbed me and turned me around to face him.

Post Views: 8

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

"Why him?" He asked firmly. He looked serious with his brows furrowed, making me look at him in surprise. He stepped closer to me, his hands slowly going up and resting on my cheeks.

"Why him and not me?" He whispered. I was too stunned to say anything as he caressed my cheeks.

"W-what?" I breathed out and my eyes widened in confusion.

"Althaia... I've loved you since day one. I've always wanted you." My body was completely frozen in place, unable to say anything at all as I watched his face coming closer to mine.

“Michael, I’m sorry but I don’t...” I shook my head and tried to take a step back but he wrapped an arm around my waist, preventing me from moving away from him.

“Don’t say you don’t feel anything for me either because I know you do.” I swallowed hard at the way he was looking at me.

Affectionately.

“I’m sorry Michael, but I don’t... I-I love him.” I said. Even if he didn’t love me anymore, my heart would still belong to him.

I put a hand on his chest and slightly pushed him away from me while I took a couple of steps back.

“You can’t be serious. He’s not good for you, Thaia!” Michael’s eyes turned angry as he stared at me with a frown on his face.

“He can’t make you happy. I can!” His words had me completely shocked, making me drop my jaw in the process.

“You don’t know anything about him or anything about our relationship.” I frowned, getting angry at his words.

600%

“I know what type of man he is. I’ve been around him longer than you have and trust me when I say that he’s just toying around with you.” He spat out.

“Listen to yourself! You sound completely insane.” My voice raised as I looked at him in anger.

“It’s the truth.” He said with just as much anger as I had.

“Stop it!” I yelled at him. He looked taken aback by my sudden outburst.

“You don’t know him the way I do... And I don’t know what makes you think that but I don’t feel the same way about you. I love you, Michael, but not the way you want me to. I’m in love with him.”

“All that time we’ve spent together when you came for the engagement party, all the flirting between us... Are you saying you never once felt anything for me? Because I don’t believe it.”

"I'm not going to lie and say I didn't have a crush on you before because I did, and I know there has been flirting between us... But I don't feel anything like that anymore. Whether you want to believe it or not, he makes me happy. " I said to him softly, watching him as he looked at me with his still furrowed brows but he didn't say anything.

"You're my best friend... I would hate to lose you over something like this, and you deserve someone who loves you, too. And it isn't me. Not the way you want me to."

"When did it happen?" He masked his emotion with a blank expression.

"It doesn't matter when it happened." I sighed.

H

t does when we suddenly found out that you were pregnant with is child. So, when the fuck did it happen? I stopped breathing, my eart clenching at his words while he looked at me with cold eyes.

You carried his child. How the fuck could you be that reckless with omeone you barely know?!" Michael erupted. Before I knew it, I lapped him hard across the cheek.

Fuck you, Michael." My voice was shaking in anger and unshed ears burned in my eyes. I turned around and walked away from

im as fast as I could.

Shit! Althaia, stop! I didn't mean it like that." He ran after me and grabbed my arm, but I ripped it out of his grasp and pushed him away from me.

Don't fucking touch me!" I screamed at him, a tear falling down my cheek.

How could you say that to me? After I've lost.... How could you?" A sob escaped my lips. Michael looked at me with regret written all over his face.

I'm sorry, I didn't-

"Leave." I told him firmly, not wanting him to be here anymore.

"Thaia, please..." He tried to reach out to me but I moved away.

“Leave, Michael.” He ran a hand through his hair. I was trying my best not to break down entirely.

“I’m sorry.” He gave a defeated look and went around the beach house to get to his car. I stood still, not going inside until I heard him drive away. I put a hand down to my stomach, feeling the loss

even more now.

Touchers

I heard a knock on the door, and rage filled my body as I made my way to the front door, ready to scream at Michael for all the things he had said. I swung the door open, about to say something but clamped my mouth shut.

Post Views: 9

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

“Arianna?” I said in surprise. She raised a brow at me and walked past me into the house. I shut the door and followed her into the living room.

“Is there something wrong?” I asked anxiously, thinking something has happened to Damiano.

“Yes, there is.” She turned around to look at me, and I felt my heart drop.

“Did something happen to -”

“It’s best if I do the talking here.” She interrupted me. Her whole demeanor towards me was different from what it usually was, and it didn’t go unnoticed that she was talking to me in a cold voice.

“I don’t know what your game is but you begged Damiano to let you go because you needed to be alone, and so he did. We put you in this house for you to stay safe, and do whatever healing you needed to do. Alone. But now, I find out that you invited another man over, and also went back to the house where you almost got killed without informing any of us. What if something happened to you, huh?” She snapped at me.

“Michael was with me, and he made sure everything was clear before we even went inside the house.” I said quickly, trying to let her know that I wasn’t being completely reckless about it.

"You see, that's what I don't understand. Why were you with another man?" Arianna tilted her head slightly to the side. I

frowned at her accusing tone.

"It's Michael. Someone I grew up with, and not a stranger as you're making it sound to be." I crossed my arms, not liking how I had to explain myself with whom I was hanging out.

0.004

"So, you're telling me nothing is going on between the two of you? Because it sure did look like you were having a cute moment on

the beach together." I had completely forgotten I was being watched, and it didn't strike me what it must have looked like from their point of view.

"Nothing is going on between us. He's just a friend."

"Right. Does he feel the same?" I glared at her, not saying anything as she already knew the answer to her own question.

"Why are you here, Arianna?" I didn't like the way she was toying around with me with her words.

"I came to see what was going on when I heard a man come over to visit you. You're lucky I'm the only one who knows about this because you know Damiano would kill him on the spot if he knew what had happened."

5

"Nothing happened between us." I clenched my jaw and she kept going on about it.

"You know, I don't really understand you, Althaia. You wanted to be alone yet you invited someone over to keep you company. How is that fair to Damiano? You left him when he needed you the most." Arianna said sharply.

"I didn't leave him!" I snapped at her. My breathing was coming out faster as my heart was pumping like crazy behind my chest.

"Then what do you call this?" She gestured to the house.

"I just needed some time alone. None of you know what the fuck I'm going through!" I exploded. She gave me a blank look in return.

"You're right. I don't know what you're going through, but you're

36438

not the only one who lost someone." Arianna spoke calmly.

"I know you're suffering from a greater loss, and I'm so sorry. But did it ever occur to you how Damiano is feeling? He lost a baby, too, and every day I am watching him suffer." My lip started to tremble and my heart broke into a million pieces.

Of course, I was constantly thinking about him and his feelings, but I had no idea how I was supposed to help him when all I felt was shame about it.

"You know what, stay away from my brother. He doesn't deserve this." Arianna gave me one cold stare before she made her way out of the house. I didn't move from my spot in the living room, completely broken by everything she said.

I fell to my knees when I couldn't hold it in anymore and broke down.

Was this really it? Was it really for the best I stayed away from him? Did he feel the same?

All these thoughts made me sob out loud, hiding my face in my hands as I cried hard, feeling completely shattered that I had failed to be there for him.

The little process I felt had made vanished, and I felt myself getting sucked back into the deep, dark hole with no way out.

Post Views: 8

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

Althaia

Hours went by and it was now pitch black as I was still on the floor, lying on my back while staring emptily at the ceiling. It never occurred to me just how much I had fucked up by staying in the safe-house. He had always been there for me, taken care of me and I just left him all by himself... I knew I should

have been there for him. I wanted to be there for him, yet I could barely handle looking at him without guilt eating me alive.

I blamed myself for losing our baby, it was my job to keep it safe and I had lost it. I was afraid to look at him, afraid to actually witness him blaming me for everything. That was why I had to leave... I ran away because I was scared the longer I stayed around with a flat stomach, the more he would despise me for it.

I couldn't handle it.

I slowly stood up and made my way to the bathroom. I looked in the mirror, seeing how red and puffy my eyes were.

What a fucking mess I have become.

I washed my face with cold water, hoping it would take the worst away and make my eyes less puffy. I grabbed an oversized hoodie and pulled the hood over my head as I walked to Ava and Samantha's place to get Kiara. I knocked on the door, making sure I kept my eyes lowered to the ground to avoid any questions about it because I knew it was visible to see I had been crying.

"Oh, hey, Althaia. Here to get Kiara?" Samantha asked with a smile.

"Yeah..." I had to clear my throat a little as my voice sounded off.

0.00

111

"Thank you for watching her." I tried again, sounding a bit better.

"Are you okay?"

"Yep." I dismissed her question just as Ava made an appearance with Kiara. I took her in my arms, happy to see the little furball rub her head against my chest with a purring sound.

"Thank you again for watching her."

"No problem." Ava said, and I turned around to leave, only to stop after a couple of steps before I turned around to look at them again.

“How come you reported to Arianna and not Damiano?” I decided to ask since it went through my mind ever since Arianna left. I had my suspicions about them the moment we bumped into each other but I wasn’t too sure about it. But now, I was completely sure they were working for him when I couldn’t spot any of his men. It only made sense he would put someone close to me but also someone I wouldn’t recognize so I wouldn’t feel like I was being watched. I just didn’t know why they reached out to Arianna first.

“Eh, who?” Ava raised her brows, faking confusion but I saw right through it. Samantha was quiet as she was still observing me ever since she asked if I was okay.

“I know he sent you here to keep an eye on me. I just want to know why to Arianna and not him?” I was looking directly at Samantha, who now had a corner of her mouth tilted a little upwards, confirming that they were in fact working for him.

“I

guess there is no point in keeping this a secret from you....” Ava trailed off and looked at Samantha.

“I think you know why we reached out to Arianna instead of

28.63%

11:25 MC

Damiano.” Samantha replied, and I gave her a slight nod. He wouldn’t have hesitated and killed Michael the moment he saw him. It didn’t help that he wasn’t fond of him at all to start with. Even though I was hurt and angry with Michael, it didn’t mean I wanted him to die.

“It doesn’t seem like you’re ready to see him either since you didn’t mention him once to us. If we reported to him, he would have come.” She added, and she was right. If we were to see each other again, I would rather have it be under different circumstances.

“I see. Thank you for not telling him.” I didn’t wait for them to say anything else and went back to the house.

Days passed as I continued to stay locked inside the house. I didn't know how many days had passed since Arianna and Michael were here. I had turned off my phone again in the hopes that Michael would get the message when he continued to try and call me, and send me endless messages. I wasn't interested in whatever he had to say to me when he so brutally brought up the pregnancy.

I haven't gone outside a single time, and if it wasn't because Kiara needed attention and kept active, I wouldn't have moved away from the bed. I was also pretty sure that if Ava and Samantha couldn't see the lights being turned on and off in the house, they would probably have thought I was dead.

I kind of was already.

I let out a sigh after filling up Kiara's bowl with food, seeing I would be needing to get out and buy some more for her soon. I decided to clean up to try and be a bit more productive today than the other days, not that there was much to do since I was the only one here,

58.57%

11.26 M

and I barely made any mess. Just as I was picking up some of the cat toys on the floor, I stumbled upon the box I had filled with some of my mother's things.

I took the box and got comfortable on the couch as I went through the stuff. It was a bittersweet moment for me, feeling sad that this was how I would feel closer to her, yet happy that I was able to get some of her things, and extremely grateful that they didn't burn down the house. That would have destroyed me.

9065%

Post Views: 8

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

My heart skipped a beat when I saw the chest at the bottom of the box. I had completely forgotten about it! I quickly picked it up, feeling my nerves kicking in as I opened the chest. I emptied it and laid everything out in front of me on the couch, and started to go through the papers. It looked like they were all

letters from someone but it wasn't anything I could read. It was in a different language, and not one I could recognize. How many languages did my mother just know? I had ever only heard her speak three languages but not once has she mentioned that she knew more.

My eyes scanned the letter I was holding, trying to see if there was anything I could recognize but to my disappointment, there wasn't anything. I came across the picture and took a closer look at it to examine it. It was definitely my mother when she was younger, I had seen enough pictures of her to know what she looked like back then. Not that she looked completely different but she did have long hair, and it was darker. We looked totally alike, and if it wasn't because she had freckles and the shape of her eyes was a bit different, it would look like it was me in the picture.

I turned to look at the man that was next to her. He looked to be older than her, and he had an arm wrapped around her waist. Was this an old boyfriend of hers? It seemed like it with the way he was looking at her. My mother was looking directly at the camera, smiling, while he had a soft expression on his face as he looked at her. It was actually a rather cute picture, making me smile at it.

I examined the picture closer, noticing the man had blue eyes and light brown hair. He was actually not too bad looking, handsome even. This man must have been someone special to my mother since she had kept this picture of them. Maybe the letters were from him?

I turned the picture around, seeing something was written on the back. A date was written on, letting me know that my mother was

around her early twenties in the picture. Further down something more was written.

Lunnyy svet & Solnishko.

I noticed this one word that was written several times in the letters. The more I looked at it, the more I felt like I was familiar with it. Where had I heard this word before again? I was almost a hundred percent sure that I had from somewhere. My brows furrowed as I went through my mind, hoping something would click.

"No way!" I gasped out loud, my jaw dropped in the process. There was absolutely no way.

“She will always be my Solnishko.”

His words echoed loud and clear in my mind as I looked at the picture in complete shock. I looked at the man in the picture again, and it slowly dawned on me that this man must be Mr. Alexei Vasiliev.

“There is no fucking way!” I almost yelled out and my eyes

widened in surprise. Had my mother been in a relationship with the Boss of the Russian Mafia?!

Holy fuck!

“Wow... I did not see that coming...” I mumbled to myself, barely believing my eyes. But the more I looked at him, the more I think he could actually look like Mr. Vasiliev. This new piece of information definitely made me realize my mother was so much more than she had made me believe.

I went through the papers, trying to gather them neatly so I could put them back in the chest again. I would definitely have to find

someone who could translate these letters for me. They must have been important since she had saved them after so many years.

Just as I was stacking the papers, I came across a small envelope that I hadn't checked. Curious, I opened it and looked inside,

seeing there was another letter. I unfolded the paper and at the same time, something dropped in my lap. I picked it up, seeing it was a rather fancy black card with silver writing on it. I looked back at the letter, noticing it was more a note than an actual letter, and this time, I could actually read it as it was in English.

Attend the Untamed Event at the LuxePalace. You'll meet him there.

-N.

I looked at the black card, seeing the name Luxe Palace written elegantly in silver on the card. Was this card some sort of invitation and would get her access to the place? What was even the LuxePalace? I had never even heard of that name before.

I quickly got up from the couch, got my phone from the nightstand, and turned it on. I waited impatiently for it as I returned to the couch. Ignoring the missed phone calls and messages from Michael, I went straight to the browser to do some research.

It didn't take me long to find out that it was exclusively a place for the stinky rich people. It was some sort of fancy casino hotel, and much more, just for the billionaires.

I searched for the Untamed Event, trying to see when that was supposed to happen since nothing else was written on the note. It seemed my mother already knew that place and knew when it was supposed to be since there was no more information about it.

Shit, my mother did a fucking good job in hiding this side of her life.

I guess it did make you into that kind of person if you were a part of that world. I thought she had left it for good when we moved

away.

I checked the date on my phone, realizing that the Untamed Event would be in four days. For some reason, my heart was beating fast at the thought of going there to check out the place. I bit down on my lip, wondering if it would be a good idea or not. I looked back at the note. Who was N and who was she supposed to meet there?

Maybe it could be Mr. Vasiliev?

I kept wondering and only ended up with more questions. Questions that might be answered if I went to the Luxe Palace.

Four days.

I had four days to come up with a plan, and get my ass to the LuxePalace.

Post Views: 8

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

Althaia

Four days passed in a blink of an eye, and I had spent every single day trying to come up with a plan, but it was not as easy as I had made it sound to be in

my mind. First of all, I was being watched and it was not like I could just pop out and be like 'yeah, I'm just going to the Luxe Palace, and snoop around a little because I think I might get some answers.' I was pretty sure they would drag my ass back by my hair, and this time, definitely call Damiano.

That, I couldn't risk.

I had to come up with a bulletproof plan, which meant that I had to think like them. Luckily for me, I had spent enough time around Damiano and his men to help me think in the right direction.

Secondly, I had no idea what to expect in that place, and I said to myself before to always expect the unexpected, but honestly, that held no meaning in the Mafia World. They always took it to some next-level shit. They had absolutely no limitations to their imaginations. Thirdly, I couldn't go to such a place and not expect there wouldn't be at least one of Damiano's men present and risk exposing me.

I had to become unrecognizable.

I had never felt as determined and confident as I was today. I didn't know why but I had a great feeling about this that there would definitely be a clue of some sort or some answers that could lead me to what my mother was involved in. Maybe the person she was supposed to meet up with was Mr. Vasiliev and he would be there. If I saw him, maybe I could talk to him and figure something out. It

was a long shot, but anything was better than nothing.

As my thoughts never gave me a break, bits of memories came back to me of what happened in the woods. When I had woken up at the hospital, I couldn't remember anything and Ellie said that it was a natural survival skill and a defense mechanism humans develop to protect themselves from psychological damage. I started to get flashbacks to the things that had happened, some things were clearer than others but there was definitely that moment when my mother said he attacked sooner rather than later. Someone was after my mother and she knew it but she was caught off guard when we suddenly got attacked in our own home.

Was she going to talk to Mr. Vasiliev for protection?

There was only one way to find out.

I grabbed the basket I had filled with all sorts of delicacies and a nice bottle of wine and made my way over to Ava and Samantha. I had barely made it to their front porch when the door opened, and I guess since I already knew they were working for Damiano, they didn't try to hide they were keeping an eye on me. Hence why they opened the door before I even had the chance to step close enough to knock on the door.

"Sup, Althaia!" Ava said happily, making me smile at her chipper mood.

"You're really watching my every move, huh?" I joked to which she laughed.

"Yeah, I don't feel like being discreet anymore now the cat is out of the bag anyway. Plus, a certain someone would have my head if I didn't." She gave me a knowing look.

"I guess you're right." I chuckled.

"Come on in. Cecilia has just baked you a chocolate cake." I stopped in my tracks and looked at her.

"Cecilia?"

"Oh shit, I forgot you didn't know her real name. Samantha was just a cover name in case you would get suspicious of her name sounding Italian." She explained with an innocent grin on her lip.

"That makes sense... Wait, is your real name Ava then?" I squinted my eyes at her a little, making her laugh.

"It sure is. I'm not Italian anyway so I thought it was pretty safe." She said as we made our way to the living room.

"But we had a feeling you were already on to us the moment we bumped into you."

"I did have my suspicions but I wasn't too sure. And when you asked me if I had a boyfriend and I said no, you kind of looked surprised in a way as if you already knew the answer." I pointed out to her and she looked impressed by my answer.

"Shit, you're good! And here I thought you would be easy to trick, I totally underestimated you." Ava shook her head a little in

amusement.

"I did learn from the best." I winked with a smile. Cecilia decided to make an appearance in the living room with her apron covered in flour.

"I thought I heard your voice! I had my headphones in while baking because Ava wouldn't shut up about being bored." She glared at Ava, who gave her a sour look in return.

"I guess I haven't given you much to do lately." I said a bit

awkwardly. I had stayed inside most of the time except when I went out to do some shopping for the house and Kiara

"Which is a good thing but Ava seems to forget that." She kept scolding her, and Ava just rolled her eyes at her while mumbling something under her breath.

"By the way, this is for you guys." I said, coming to Ava's rescue and holding up the basket.

Post Views: 9

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

"I just wanted to thank you for watching Kiara that day." I smiled softly at them to which they returned.

"Well, I'm not about to turn down that bottle of wine! I will get the glasses." Ava turned around and made her way to the kitchen.

"I made a chocolate cake for you, I heard it's your favorite." Cecilia smiled.

"Chocolate cake or not, I'm not going to say no to whatever you've baked." I said, which made her face brighten before she followed Ava to the kitchen.

I placed the basket on the coffee table and decided to look around in the living room. They had made it look like they had been living here for a while, and had many personal touches to it with many frames of pictures of them around the living room. They really did think of everything to make things as believable as possible.

A vibrating sound caught my attention and I looked over to see it was a phone ringing on the couch. I grabbed the to hand it over to either of them but

stopped in my tracks when I saw the name flashing on the screen, having my heart pounding.

Damiano.

Damiano was calling, making me stand still and just stare at the phone. Fuck, I really wanted to answer the call, just to hear his voice for a second. My finger hovered over to accept the call, but Arianna's words stopped me. Still, I kept debating whether I should answer the call or not but it was already decided for me when the call ended for taking too long.

I let out a breath, my heart squeezing as I placed the phone down on the couch again. The phone buzzed again but this time it was a text message. From him. I couldn't help myself and looked at the

11.20

screen to see what it said but before I could read it, I heard Ava and Cecilia making their way back to the living room, and I quickly moved away from the phone and sat down on the other couch.

"There you go." Cecilia handed me a plate with a big piece of chocolate cake, vanilla ice cream, and some cut-up strawberries on the side.

"This looks amazing, thank you!" I said excitedly, truly happy about the dessert. Cecilia always looked pleased with my reaction whenever she handed me a plate of her heavenly baked goodies.

"No wine for me." I told Ava when she was about to pour me a glass.

"Why not?"

"Wine and sugar knock me out in a second, and I'm planning on having a second plate of this." I said just as I dug into the chocolate cake. Ava just shrugged her shoulders and picked up her glass and took a sip. I noticed Cecilia had taken a look at the phone on the couch and quickly sent a text back. It didn't go unnoticed that she rolled her eyes at whatever Damiano had texted her.

"It's time for me to head back, I'm already getting sleepy." I faked yawning and stretched my arms once seeing they were halfway through the bottle of wine. It wasn't even that late as the sun had just gone down but I bid them

goodnight anyway and made my way back to the house. It wasn't that far but they still watched me until I was inside.

Now, it was time to get ready.

288 (Vouchers

I went to the bathroom where I had already laid everything out so I could get ready faster. I had about an hour before the cab would be here, and that was also enough time for Ava and Cecilia to be knocked out cold.

I grabbed the colored contacts I had bought and put them on, making my eyes appear blue instead of green. I did a dark smokey eye and a red lip. I attempted to look rich in a way, and a red lip always made you look just a bit classier. I grabbed the short, black wig with bangs and put it on, and took a look at myself in the mirror.

"Damn, I really do look different." I was completely unrecognizable, especially with short hair and blue eyes. I had four days to come up with a plan, and I had thought of everything down to the very last detail. The goal was to track down Mr. Vasiliev and try to get something out of him. I assumed the note my mother had gotten was about him, and that she would find him there. If he wasn't there, well, I would just call it a night and get my ass back home.

Easy peasy.

I slipped on a royal blue satin dress with thin straps, it had a ruched detail around the waist and a slit on the side. The slit wasn't very high and I had chosen that dress because I could wear a garter band, and hide my gun safely that way and still be able to reach for my gun with ease. If I was going to a place and meeting the Boss of the Russian Mafia, I sure as hell was going with a gun.

Pleased with my look, I slipped on a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie over my dress and packed my heels in a bag along with a clutch that I had filled with a shitload of cash from the drawer. I could have gone to the bank and withdrawn money from my account but I didn't want to risk some of Damiano's people wondering why I was withdrawing so much money when I was

doing nothing but just staying inside of the house all the time.

Post Views: 9

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

288 Vouchers

I looked out of the window that faced Ava and Cecilia's back porch, allowing me to keep an eye on them that way. I couldn't see inside but I could see their silhouettes if they moved since the light was still on. I took the binoculars I also had bought to get a better look if anything was going on from their end, but it seemed rather quiet and no movements could be seen.

They were out cold and this was my cue to leave.

I had the television on to give an illusion that I was watching something in case they were to wake up at some point, or if anyone else was watching me that I didn't know of. Either way, I was not taking any chances. I went to the other side of the house and to the window that faced away from their house. I opened the window once I had made sure no one was out there and jumped out, but making sure to leave the window slightly open for when I returned.

I crouched down low on the grass, hiding in the shadows as I made my way down the street where I had ordered the cab to pick me up. I kept looking around in case one of Damiano's men would pop out, or any familiar cars but nothing happened, and I quickly made my way to where the cab was now in my view.

"Cab for Lily?" The driver asked once I was inside. I had given a fake name to be completely sure I wouldn't be recognized. Damiano had many businesses and had people working for him everywhere. What if someone recognized my name and told him? Couldn't risk that.

"Yes."

"Cool! I'm Chad by the way, where are you off to?"

"The LuxePalace." I said a little out of breath from basically playing a spy on a mission. My heart was also pumping like crazy as I

G005

41.29 W3

288 Vouchers

continued to look around anxiously but it seemed I had made it safely and unnoticed. Chad made a whistling sound as he drove off.

“Fancy! Not to be rude or anything, but I don’t think you’re allowed in wearing that.” He took a quick look at me and my comfortable clothes before returning his focus to the road. I ignored him as I started to take off my hoodie and sweatpants and put on my heels. I grabbed a small mirror I had packed with me to make sure everything still looked okay and that my wig wasn’t out of place. It freaked me out how different I had managed to look but was very pleased with my work.

“Damn! Now you look like someone who can get in!” Chad looked at me again when he realized I was wearing a dress underneath.

“That’s the plan.” I chuckled. If Chad thought I looked like someone who could get into the Luxe Palace, then I had done my job pretty well.

My nerves were getting to me when I saw that we were getting close to my destination. My eyes widened at the large and luxurious building with lights on it, making it even more extraordinary and expensive looking. Shit, now I was scared I was underdressed for this...

Chad drove around a large round lake with sprinklers shooting water high up in the air. I told Chad not to park the car in front of the building but rather further down the street. It was still close but I wanted to assess the situation before going inside.

“This is for you.” His eyes widened when he saw the stack of money I wanted to give him.

36.02%

11.29 MO

“That is way too much!” He shook his head but I just put the money on the passenger seat for him.

“Take it because I need a favor from you. I need you to stay here and wait for me to come back. I don’t know how long I’ll be gone but you’re kind of my personal driver tonight. And if you wait for me, I will double the amount when I’m back. Deal?” I smiled and he just looked at me shocked that I would give him more money.

“Awesome! You have my word, Lily! I will wait for you.” Chad said excitedly, making me chuckle at his enthusiasm.

“Thank you!” I got out of the cab, only grabbing my clutch, and left the bag in the car with Chad.

Fancy cars were in front of the casino hotel, dropping off people dressed in fine and expensive clothing as they made their way up the stairs to the entrance. I took a deep breath and tried to blend in with some people who were making their way up. I noticed they all had the same black card that my mother had received, letting me know that it was an invitation to get inside.

“Welcome to the Luxe Palace.” I showed the man my card who was in charge of letting people in. He took a scanner and scanned my card before looking back at his computer screen.

“Enjoy, and have a nice evening, Jacinta.”

“Thank you.” I smiled and made my way in.

Shit, this was it.

I freaking made it inside. I took a deep breath to calm down my nerves and held my head high.

I’ve got this.

68.95%

11.29 NC

Post Views: 9

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

Althaia

This place was huge as I looked around and it all screamed ‘expensive’ everywhere. The floor was a glossy beige marble. design, it was so clean and polished that I could see my reflection. The ceiling was high with extraordinary chandeliers covered in crystals. And it was filled with the rich of the riches just by judging the way they were dressed and the way they carried themselves.

Now I was truly happy I grabbed a shitload of money with me if I wanted to blend in with the rich people because even at the bar was the most expensive and fine liquor served.

I tried my best not to look too lost because everyone here seemed to be knowing the place. I decided the best thing I could do was take a seat at the bar, and that way I could observe my surroundings without looking miserable. I ordered a glass of wine and almost choked on my spit at the price. It was a good thing it was only for a few hours I was pretending to be rich. Keeping up with this lifestyle would leave me broke and on the streets in no time. My mother and I did live a comfortable life with the money we made from the boutique but this was money to a whole new level.

I sipped my wine and looked around, seeing people gathered by the casino tables, gambling away, chatting with each other, and having fun. I kept an eye out, hoping I would spot Mr. Vasiliev. However, the longer I sat by the bar and did not see him, the less hope I had. I stayed by the bar long enough to finish my wine and decided it was better to explore the place.

I was starting to think that maybe he changed his mind and

0.00%

decided not to attend the event. But then again, the note said he would be here but I was just assuming and hoping it was him. I was curious about his history with my mother.

I made my way to the elevators to explore the other floors, only to slightly halt in my track when I finally spotted him. It was impossible not to when his presence dominated the room with his tall, intimidating height and a few men with him.

Adrenaline started to pump in my veins at the sight of him and I hurriedly walked toward him. I was at the far end of the other side of the room, and I was hoping I would be able to get to him before he stepped into the elevator.

By now I was half running in my heels when the elevator doors opened. I barely made it inside before it closed. I was trying to calm down my pounding heart that I was now right next to Mr. Vasiliev, who couldn't be bothered to glance my way. Three of his men were present too, and I was so lucky that there was a random couple in the elevator too, making it less suspicious that I had run to get inside.

The couple got off on the fifth floor, and I noticed the button to the 16th floor was pressed and assumed that was where he was going. I stayed still and quiet, facing away from them, and pretended it was the same floor I was going to.

The elevator came to a stop and all four of them stepped out. I walked slowly behind them, making sure to create enough distance between us to not wake any suspicions. I looked around but it seemed to be a normal hallway with hotel rooms, which was perfect for me as I pretended to search for a specific room

number.

Mr. Vasiliev and his men walked to the end of the hall and then

turned around a corner, and I waited for a few seconds before following them. I made my way around the corner just to get slammed against the wall with great force. I squeezed my eyes shut and yelped out in pain as the back of my head made contact with the wall.

I snapped my eyes open when something cold got pressed against my forehead. Cold and blank eyes were looking at me, holding me at gunpoint.

Shit!

“Now, tell me, young lady, why are you following me?” I turned to the voice, seeing Mr. Vasiliev looking at me calmly with his hands tucked into his dress pants.

Words got stuck in my throat as I got caught completely off guard. When I didn’t say anything, Mr. Vasiliev gave a nod to one of his men who stepped closer to me and started to pat me down. I was frozen in place, my heart about to burst out of my chest when the man slightly moved slit the slit of my dress to the side, revealing the gun that was safely tucked into my garter band.

Mr. Vasiliev glanced shortly at the gun before returning his gaze to me with a slightly raised brow.

“Who sent you?” His demeanor was so different here than at the auction. Which was understandable since he approached me back then, and I was looking different and had a gun on me.

“N-no one.” I hated that my voice shook when I spoke but I couldn’t help it.

Chapter 140

Post Views: 9

? Views, Released on February 11, 2024

“I had hoped I could talk privately with you.

“Explain the gun.” He was calm and collected as he talked to me. It was visible to see how unbothered I was because it was way too easy to see I couldn’t stand a chance against them. They all towered over me and glared at me with their cold, expressionless

eyes.

“It’s for my protection.” I answered honestly. I had the gun to protect myself but I hadn’t even managed to reach for it.

“I just want to talk.” I said quickly, trying to reassure him that I wasn’t sent to try and kill him but he didn’t look convinced.

“I don’t have time for this.” Mr. Vasiliev sounded bored by the situation and looked down at his watch. He looked up at the man who still held his gun against my head.

“Get rid of her.” He ordered and turned around to walk away. My eyes widened when the man removed the gun from me, only to twist on a silencer.

“W-wait! Wait!” I screamed out in pure fear but he ignored me as he continued to walk away.

“Y-you said you called her Solnishko!” I yelled out in desperation. Everyone stopped in their tracks and turned to look at me again. My breathing was heavy and my legs so badly wanted to give up on me, but I tried to pull it together.

“What did you just say?” He looked at me, now interested in what I had to say. I looked at the other men, and it seemed they were all familiar with the name.

0.00%

Vouchers

"You called her Solnishko, right? Did she by any chance call you Lunnyy svet?" Even his men turned to look at him, wondering how I knew this information. I was holding onto the tiny hope that they wouldn't kill me after saying that. He stared at me for a long time before he furrowed his brows at me.

"Who are you?" He demanded.

"If we could please talk somewhere privately, I will tell you." I spoke firmly, pretending I wasn't about to faint from fear.

"Follow me." I let out a breath, eyeing the man who held me at gunpoint to make sure he tucked his gun away and wasn't going to shoot me. He still followed closely behind me as I followed Mr. Vasiliev and his men into a room.

I expected it to be a suite but it turned out to be a spacious office. He took a seat on the couch, gesturing for me to take a seat in front of him. I hesitated a little as I looked at his men, still making sure none of them would suddenly pull a gun on me.

Once I decided I would be okay, I took a seat but made sure to sit on the edge in case I had to make a run for it. My hand was on my thigh, close to the gun since they didn't take it away from me. This didn't go unnoticed by him as he looked at my hand before meeting my eyes.

"Care to tell me now who you are?"

"I don't know if you remember me, but we talked at the auction. I'm Althaia."

"Althaia..." He said as if recognizing my name.

"I remember her looking different."

"Well..." I trailed off and took my wig off, revealing my real hair and taking out my colored contacts.

"I was just trying out a new style." I tried to joke to lessen the tension, giving a half-smile. It worked because he looked amused.

"Why the disguise?"

"I didn't want to be recognized."

"So, you're telling me you're here on your own?" He raised a brow.

"I am." I nodded.

"Were you not with Damiano Bellavia? I have a hard time believing he would let you be here on your own." Mr. Vasiliev leaned back on the couch, eyeing me as he did so. Now that I could talk to him, I hadn't expected him to be asking about Damiano.

"It's... a long story." I decided to answer.

"You shouldn't be here. It's not safe for you, especially under disguise."

"I can take care of myself." I said defensively and he gave me a 'really' look.

"Okay, you caught off guard..." I said sourly, and he actually laughed at me.

"You were a second away from being killed. You have no idea what kind of headache you would have caused me when Damiano finds out I killed you. He tends to go insane when it comes to someone he cares about. Especially last time."

"What do you mean?" I asked, his words had me curious. His eyes narrowed a little, not saying anything for a while.

288 Vouchers

"You don't know?" He smirked, making me even more intrigued by what he meant.

"Don't know what?"

"If he hasn't told you, then it isn't my place to tell you." His smirk widened, making me let out an annoyed sigh.

"You can't say that and not even tell me!" I practically scolded him.

"I suggest you talk to your man, then." He shrugged.

"He doesn't tell me much. He doesn't want to involve me in all of... this."

“Good.” He smiled and I gave him a blank look.

“My curiosity can’t handle being left in the dark.”

“Your curiosity can get you killed.”

“That’s what he told me!” I exclaimed loudly.

“You should listen to him.”

“This is not how I imagined this conversation would be...” I mumbled quietly and leaned back on the couch, feeling more at

ease now.

“I don’t get it. Knowledge is power, right? It would help me if knew stuff and give me a better understanding.”

Post Views: 10