Ascension

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Summary

The sequel to Facilis Descensus Averno. See the first fic for more information.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Kudos and comments are appreciated.
"Awakening is not a thing. It is not a goal, not a concept. It is not something to be attained. It is a metamorphosis. If the caterpillar thinks about the butterfly it is to become, saying 'And then I shall have wings and antennae,' there will never be a butterfly. The caterpillar must accept its own disappearance in its transformation. When the marvelous butterfly takes wing, nothing of the caterpillar remains."

~ Alejandro Jodorowsky -

The woman's eyes slitted open to close again as light stabbed her through the lids. She groaned quietly. Taking a deep slow breath she released it willing herself up. The disinfectant smell of the room around her threatened to overwhelm her. She pulled at her arms to find them pinioned. Panic began to surge in her and she yanked at her limbs.

"Easy, easy," she heard as a hand laid itself gently on her shoulder. Turning her head, she opened her eyes to see a woman with striking blue eyes smiling down at her. Her mouth was ashes and she growled quietly.

"Now Alexandra. I can see that your experience with electro convulsive therapy is clearly on the more painful side of the spectrum. I am going to give you another mild sedative and then we will speak again after you've had some time to rest and reflect." The woman smiled as she filled a hypodermic.

The younger woman on the table desperately yanked at her arm again and again, trying to escape the descending needle. It was to no avail. Her last conscious thought was "My name is Alexandra?"

When she next opened her eyes she found herself in a room in deep gloom. She had a mild headache and still no frame of reference for where she was or even who she was. Her fingers traveled over slightly rough cotton sheets until she could push herself up. Looking down she saw she was wearing something that looked like white scrubs. Plucking at the front she found an imprint that read... Warrensville Sanitarium.

The woman gulped dryly. She was crazy? She didn't feel crazy. A bit hung over but... She pressed herself up slowly from the bed to her feet. She looked down at legs, shaking as she stood. The linoleum was biting cold under her feet and so she slid them into a pair of cheap hospital slippers nearby and moving along the wall for support, found her way to the window.

The asylum showed elegant signs of being a former hospital for the well heeled tuberculosis cases, but soon found its career housing the most chronic cases of mental illness, including a few notorious serial killers, as well as scarred Veterans suffering shell shock from subsequent wars since it's opening in 1907. Lack of funding had turned the old decaying buildings into the last stop for the underinsured and the criminally insane lifers.

She looked out past glass and chicken wire and bars to see gray skies over a dirty snow covered field edged by a handful of skeletal trees and surrounded by a fence. The woman watched distractedly
while a man in an orange ski jacket walked out into the snow and alternated between deep drags and swinging a baton in dizzying circles. She turned from the cold window and looked around.

It was like a cell. There was a layer of something like foam on the walls and floor, a small mattress mounted on a pair of drawers, and a one piece metal toilet and sink set up in the corner. A shelf desk hung glumly over a chair. "Ain't the Ritz," she croaked out.

There was a soft knock. She turned slowly to see the woman from earlier slide into the room. Blue eyes searched for her and opened wider momentarily as she found her. The woman brushed her brown hair back from her face and pulled out the chair to sit on it facing the bed.

"Please have a seat Alexandra." The woman crossed her legs and moved a clipboard and folder into her lap.

Alexandra (though she was still not sure about the name) moved across the room slowly to sit on the bed across from the woman. "Who are you?"

The woman's head tilted a moment before she smiled winningly. "Of course, some memory loss is certainly not outside the realm of possibility after ECT."

"Are you my doctor?" Alex asked, her brow furrowed. She couldn't explain why but she felt her stomach tumble at the thought.

"No. I am integrally involved in your placement and treatment, but I'm not officially your doctor." She opened the folder with a sly smile. "More a concerned co-worker." She looked up with an upraised brow. "Now, how are you feeling Alexandra?"

"How am I feeling?" Alex frowned. "I'm feeling hostile. What the hell is all this?"

The other woman watched her with a raised brow. "I take it you don't remember why you were incarcerated in this facility?" She took out a pen and made some notes.

"NO."

A sigh escaped her. "Alexandra, you are a dangerous woman. You were out of control. You hurt the people that you were never meant to. What we are trying to do here, is to make you fit to go back to your previous life, or something approximating it."

"Who are you?"

The woman smiled. "I'm Amanda. You can consider me a facilitator. I want to bring you back from the strange... dangerous place you were in, to the world you knew. Today, you were given ECT. In theory, it will help you... reset. At least, that is the hope." She closed the folder. "You should rest. I will be back tomorrow." Standing up she headed for the door. She looked back, her face pained with concern. "We only want to see you back to the things that make you happy dear Alexandra. To your proper place in the world." Amanda left and the lock tumbled.

Alex scrambled to the tiny window in the door and watched until Amanda was out of sight.
room. "Jason, tonight you will proceed with the plan we discussed. Any questions?"

He smiled. "None, Ma'am. I know exactly what to do. I'll leave the girl in pieces."

"Excellent." Amanda smiled and looked down the hall toward the door she had just left. "The best part about a picture in pieces, is reconstructing it any way you want." Her brow went up at the eager young man as she turned back and walked back toward the parking lot.

Percy walked slowly beside her as they moved along the snow crusted path. "How is are princess today?"

Amanda smiled. "Her memory resembles Swiss cheese... and she is feeling angry and vulnerable. She is almost ready for molding."

"I ordinarily wouldn't authorize going to such lengths to prepare an assassin, but Alexandra, well, she is something special." Percy offered Amanda popcorn from his small paper sack as he looked up into the gray sky. "Young, strong, and dependent on us for identity and purpose. It's going to be a fine day."
Down in the offices at Division, the air is cool and still. Decorators with their color wheels have tried
in recent years to brighten the subterranean space. The result is no more than funeral home cosmetics,
but Nikita tried. The entirety of the place had gotten a facelift since she took the reigns with her team.
The training areas were expanded and the lunch room set in a location that reflected more of a
peaceful work environment opposed to the prying eyes of operations staring at them while they ate.
She wanted everything about Division to be new and improved, as if somehow she could erase the
permanent damage Percy and Amanda had done to them. Division, after all, had come a long way
from the days when she was a recruit. Most of Percy and Amanda's fascistic policies were replaced
with a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Nikita was proud of what she had accomplished in the
years since their demise.

Nikita looked out and smiled as she watched the crowd on the mats. A friendly spar had turned into a
team builder...well, more of a betting party. Every blow caused a wave of cheers and curses. Nothing
spoke more to her of the change of management than this moment. She wished her best friend Alex,
who fought so hard for this could be here to see it. She probably would have taken on the winner.
Choking, she turned to school her face. Even if it was funny as hell, she still had to play the role of
the boss.

Michael came into the office and looked past her. "Quite the fight. Gyre and Jane both are mean
infighters. I imagine they'll be in bed together by nine."

Nikita snorted. "What is it with ass kicking and sex?"

"I don't know. We could spar and do a little exploration on the subject."

Nikita backhanded his stomach as she passed. "Play nice. We can be naughty after hours. We have
to be role models while on the clock."

Michael grinned. "Role models. You went rogue and fell in love with your handler. Who also by the
way... went rogue. You have done more damage before nine am than these kids will do all day.
Yeah. Role model." He dropped into a chair and tossed a zip drive on her desk. "Birkhoff did that
analysis of traffic you asked for. What are you looking for?"

"There are some new players in town and I am trying to get a handle on who and what they want."
Nikita kept her face carefully blank. She did not want to get anyone upset over her gut feelings. She
just really really hoped she was wrong about Amanda moving through the shadows. Alex had risked
her life to put an end to Amanda. The thought of all of that suffering in vain left Nikita feeling
frustrated. Could Amanda have survived gun shot wounds and the fall overboard into shark infested
waters? Nikita sure as hell hoped not. Alex shot the bitch and she went off the end of a yacht, but
after the Apocalypse, it would be roaches, Cher and Amanda, if her gut was anything to go by.

Nikita turned the zip drive over in her fingers as she pulled it toward her. Michael smiled. "I get the
hint. Let me know if there is anything I can do." He stood and walked to the door. He turned around.
"I love you."

"I love you too." Nikita smiled and waved. The smile faded as she began perusing the files on the
drive.
Alex opened her eyes as the door unlocked. A head came around the edge of it. A dark haired man in his twenties looked in and smiled. "Hey Alexandra. Dr. Bill says you have to spend some social time in the commons room. Let's go sunshine. Up and at em."

Alex groaned and pushed herself up and off the narrow bed. "Seriously?" She wiped at her eyes. "I feel lousy, Jason."

He gave her a look. " Seriously Alexandra. You need it now more than ever coming off another treatment." He pulled the door open wider. "Just go to the TV room and vegetate for a few hours and I'll be off your back."

"Fine." She pushed her bare-feet into the cheap scuff slippers and began to follow him down the hall. Alex looked doubtfully into the open door of the TV room. A woman sat on the threadbare couch watching the television flicker in the corner. A man with stringy gray hair was minutely inspecting a red checker as he sang "Living on a Prayer." A third person, possibly female was making use of poster paints and news prints to document the scene outside the window in colors not found in nature. Alex cringed.

"It's a little quiet right now. Most of the patients are having dinner and meds, so I'm afraid you'll be on your own with this lot for now. Rowdy bunch. Have fun." He grinned and sauntered away.

Alex thought briefly about bolting, but the end of the corridor had a barred door and a very large man on the button. She sighed and decided to make the best of things. She scuffed slowly around the room. Painting is solitary, she decided leaving the woman to her tree. Shaking her head at the tuneless belting, she moved to the couch.

She looked at the other end of the couch. "Hi." No answer. Alexandra shrugged and looked at the screen. Sighing, she tried to figure out the action on the screen. After several minutes she shook her head again. "Are you really watching this crap? It's reruns of shit that wasn't any good the first time it showed." She looked at the other woman who was still staring blankly at the screen.

Alex stood up and flipped through the channels. She smiled as Charlie's Angels ran across the screen dressed in their prison blues as theme music flowed. The woman beside her turned her head to watch Alex who backed up to land lightly on the couch. Alexandra laughed at the banter around the intercom. The woman looked back up at the screen. She looked back at Alex. Her face tightened and she leapt at the relaxed woman at the other end of the couch. Her teeth were bared as her fingers tightened on Alex's throat.

"Get off me bitch," Alexandra pushed out. The woman's talons were pressing insanely deep into her throat. She slammed her fists into the attacking woman's stomach. No effect, save for the tightening of those steel fingers. "Stop before I hurt you!" she managed to push out with the thread of air she had left in her. Alexandra smashed her hand into the other woman's nose. She felt it break but the woman's huffering breath was still blowing hard against her face and she saw black sparkles at the edge of her vision, Alex hit her again. The pressure released as the woman's eyes rolled up and she went limp. Alex pushed the woman off her to the floor. She panted.

Footsteps came and she turned, crouching behind the arm of the couch. The orderly looked in and saw the body on the floor. His eyes widened. "What the hell did you do?"

"She... she attacked me." Alex managed hoarsely.

"She's a catatonic. Iris hasn't moved on her own for two years." Jason looked at her for a long time.
You killed a vegetable."

Alexandra felt like she'd been punched in the stomach. Could this all have been in her mind? The tenderness at her throat felt real, but could a catatonic suddenly attack? She was numb as she was led away to her room.

A vegetable? She was shaking hard. What the hell was she that she could kill with ease or automatically? Was she a monster? Is that why she was boxed into this linoleum and concrete cell?

Her eyes widened as the orderly pulled out some restraints. "Be a doll and lie down. Make it easy on both of us," he ground out.

Alexandra was in shock but not that far in shock. She threw a fist at his face. He grabbed her wrist and used her momentum to slam her face first into the wall. She tried to struggle away but he leaned hard into the immobilized shoulder. He jabbed her with a needle. She felt cold in her body and slowly melted against the wall.
Chapter 3

Alexandra woke to the sound of heels. She tried to sit up, but found herself tightly constrained. Her wrists and waist and ankles were bound in the five point leather restraints. She yanked hard. Leather creaked as she strained against it. Amanda rustled nearby. Alex turned her head. "Amanda?" she whispered against a painful throat.

Amanda looked at her for a very long time. "Merlins should never be tied down." She began detaching the restraint belt.

"Merlin?" Alex was confused. "Woman...last night…"

"A merlin is a hunting falcon of smaller size but almost uncanny agility. They do not require the whole world as a hunting territory but where they hunt they kill. Quickly. Quietly." She removed the last wrist restraint. "There was no woman last night." Amanda went upright.

Alex touched her throat. "But."

"Where a merlin strikes, there is nothing left behind. There was no woman last night... nothing left to worry about. We have a great deal to talk about Alex, but later. For now, I expect you to rest."

Rachel frowned. "He's not biting." She squirmed slightly on the hard wooden chair. They were parked in a small flat across a plaza from the research tower of Mugal Corp. The anti-espionage protocols of the facility made a tiny short range camera planted on the CEO the best chance of getting the codes Birkhoff needed. Get the codes and he could get far enough into the Mugal systems to fake the other codes needed to get what Division wanted to stop a weapon development pipeline that started at this impressive address.

Gollum, a very single minded and occasionally creepy gentleman sat to her right and leafed through his latest copy of Guns and Ammo. "He's biting," he mumbled. "This issue needs a centerfold. A long sexy fold out, many many rounds of ammunition. So close to being a perfect book, but damn... just shy of perfection." He slammed the magazine closed and swiveled his stool to face the monitor with Rachel.

She waved her hand on the screen. "We need him to go toward the computer complex and enter the main code series. If he doesn't, then we are dead in the water. The camera can't go on forever. He needs to go." Rachel was furious. They had not sat here for so long for nothing.

Gollum snorted. "What are you going to do? Put him over your shoulder and carry him there and say pretty please type in the codes?"

Rachel frowned again and paced. Her face suddenly brightened. "Got it." She ran for the door.

Gollum yowled. He grabbed his holster hiding jacket and quickly threw it on. "OPs... The quiet sit and watch job? Not so much. The looney toon has left the building."

There was a sharp cracking sound in his ear from Nikita breaking a pen. "Damn it... not again. Keep her in sight. We have a team coming up to take station."
"Copy that." Gollum grabbed his keys in case Rachel decided to go for a high speed chase and barreled down a staircase trying to catch up with his younger partner who had a hell of a head start. She ran into the tech building and toward a pair of guards who put their hands on the butts of their weapons. She cried hysterically. Gollum threw himself behind a column. He drew to the side to keep line of sight while allowing the natural traffic of the area to keep him out of view.

One of the guards drew his weapon and started locking the doors to the heat of returning lunch eaters. The other talked into a walkie talkie. The CEO himself came to the lobby. Rachel threw herself at him and started talking fast. She was pointing out into the plaza and acting hysterically. He signaled a guard to follow him and left Rachel with the one holding a drawn weapon. She leaned into the counter.

The guard backed up and popped a box of Kleenex onto the counter next to the weeping woman. He stared around trying to look fierce in his ill fitting rent a cop uniform. Gollum opened his comm.

"Status?"

Rock, another one of Rachel's battle scarred ex-partners came through the device. "He's going to the complex, based on codes he is trying to lock down. Must have told him an industrial spy was gonna get his ass. Bitch is crazy but she gets the job done."

The guard's weapon went flying and spinning along the tile as Rachel hit him in the stomach with the electronic sign in keyboard. She then sent it edge on into his face sending him against the counter. Rachel ran for the gun, and grabbing, pointed it at the windows. The people locked out on their return from lunch decided to leave for the day, in a stampede. Gollum was left without cover. Rachel wiggled her eyebrows just as the guard tackled her.

Her elbow flew back and contacted his face with a crack. He yowled and fought for the gun. It went off twice. Gollum ducked back behind a column just as one of the bullets cracked it. "OPS! I want a new fucking partner! I'm done with this!"

"Cover her and get her home. That is an order." Nikita's voice revealed a knife sharp anger. She knew that Rachel's continued recklessness was going to get someone killed eventually. Something was going to have to change and quickly. Gollum was so not in the mood for being in the middle of this. He drew his Division issued weapon and watched for his chance.

Rachel kicked back into the guard. His knee failed under the stress and he fell back the gun discharging. Gollum tracked him as he fell away from his partner and fired a shot. He cursed as the sound of sirens began to rise. Rachel went to the guard's body and patted him down for the keys. She came up empty. Gollum hand signaled her and fired three times into a plate of glass. She went through the shattered window and they bolted to the right.

People were coming toward the scene of the disaster. People couldn't seem to resist whatever the danger. Gollum pulled Rachel behind a hot dog hawker and followed him a few feet til the sound of police running went past. He then dragged her down into the inky abyss that was the parking garage sub-basement nearby.

Gollum stopped and turned to Rachel who looked at him curiously. "It worked," she declared. He shoved her hard against the concrete wall and turned to keep walking.

"It worked," she shouted outraged.

He turned and stopped. "No it didn't. You got the codes hooyah. You are not dead and in heaven or hell or whatever with your girl. No... your bid for suicide did not work." He straightened his jacket. "I will not work with you again. I won't work with anyone who doesn't care if they drag bystanders
into the grave with them." He turned and walked on to the car.
Amanda smiled as she opened a roll on the table beside the dental-like chair. This was going to be the more interesting part of retraining Alexandra's mind. The ECT gave the younger woman a bit of a reset. She had considerable resistance to mind control and the ECT simply wore away all of that in preparation for today.

Amanda began examining the equipment that she helped design. She took a needle from the sterilization pouch and affixed it to the device. She hummed happily as she hit a pair of keys that caused the needle to ease forward to a point where the head stilling straps and the eye covers would leave young Alexandra's forehead.

She ran the diagnostics. The sound files would leave the young woman disoriented and open to suggestion, the small half shells that were designed to cover her eyes providing private screens would program the hates, loves, and goals of Amanda herself. Images of Nikita and the people she loved would soon turn into targets to be eliminated. The needle would serve a dual purpose of stimulating areas of the brain during the first phase, and puncturing Alexandra in the frontal lobe, short circuiting what feeble resistance she still had after everything else had been done to her. Amanda had spent two long years perfecting her device and it's ability to get the job done. She was confident that Alex would serve her and her alone this time.

Amanda brightened as she heard the young woman in the corridor. She didn't know exactly what images she would conjure to weave narrative around the programming, but Alex would be enjoying a unique experience. Amanda brought up the computer to ready status and stepped back so Alexandra could be placed and strapped into position.

The woman stopped. She turned slowly taking in her surroundings. She stood in the middle of a road that seemed to stretch on forever. Trees grew heavy and thick with scrub on either side. There were buildings barely visible over the top of the trees down one side of the road. Her brow knit. She looked left again before turning back the other way.

"Where am I?" She looked down at her hands. Short nails and clean skin. A jumpsuit and tennis shoes completed her outfit. "Who am I?" She thought long and hard. "Who am I?" she asked herself again. A dust devil pushed a few leaves in a dance at her feet. She looked up again and traced the top of a small town over the trees with her eyes. Sighing, she began to walk.

The young woman walked down a main street in a small town. She passed the obligatory soldier statue standing guard on a green and a gazebo. She looked expectantly into window after window. No dogs barking or tipping over garbage cans. No teens smoking on a bench. She had not seen a single car drive by... Not a single living being moved in the town that she could see. She walked on until she spotted a local diner.

The bell at the top of the door rang as she stepped inside the restaurant. "Hello? I need a doctor? How about some water?" She dug in her pocket and pulled out a few wrinkled bills. "I have money. Not much but a sandwich worth maybe." She looked around. Nothing. Spotting a phone, she picked it up and put it to her ear. "Hello?" Not even a dial tone answered her. She swallowed hard.
The woman put a dollar on the counter and took a doughnut out of a pile under a glass dome. She chewed slowly as she looked through the front window. Her eyes narrowed. She pushed out of the diner and ran across the street and into a dress shop. Her hand went out to push on a shoulder. "I need help." What was left of her stale doughnut fell from her fingers as the arm flew one way and the rest of the mannequin fell the other.

She stared at the arm as if not comprehending. She looked around and picked up the arm. "Is somebody there? Please," she whispered repeatedly. No one in the changing rooms. No one in the stockroom. She climbed the stairs to the owners apartment. "Please... Hello?"

She looked around at the neat apartment. Still, no one. She picked up the phone and dialed for an operator. No tone. She looked out the window and strained her eyes. The gloom was gathering. She jumped as she turned, catching a mirror from the corner of her eye. She stepped closer, tilting her head. She had a youngish face. "Hello me," she whispered. "What say you and me look for the cop shop."

The woman moved to the town hall. She was terrified now. It was as if she was the last person on earth and part of her was afraid that her heart would explode if she found herself not alone and at the same time that it would deflate if there was nothing.

She moved quickly up the steps. The woman pushed the well oiled door open slowly. Her footsteps echoed lightly. She wanted to call out her fear and her need for a doctor and her own name if she knew it and a thousand other things, but she was afraid. Her fingers brushed the pebbled glass over the sheriffs office door. She pushed at it and walked inside. No one in sight. She hesitated before picking up the CB microphone. "Hello? Can anyone hear me?"

The seconds ticked away. No response. Her face twisted briefly. She grabbed a book of tickets and threw it. Her hand frozen in midair as her eyes widened. She crept up on a desk. She peered at the glass sitting on a file. The cubes still swam in it, the condensation beading on the outside. Her finger slowly moved forward to barely touch the glass. No illusion. A cold drink and the ice was still big.

Her head swiveled back and forth. She crept to the door to the back where the cells were. The door moved in and she peeked around the door jamb. No one had walked past her out, and here were jail cells and no one in them. The woman moved past each of the cells. At the end of the short hall, she slid down the wall and wept.

She wept until she felt sick. Her head came up suddenly. She moved to the front and looked out through a window. Dusk was slowly embracing the main street. She could have sworn she heard something. She lowered herself slowly down the stairs. She was afraid to add her own clatter to the near total silence.

She felt oddly grateful to the bird that provided a soundtrack to her adventure. The young woman drifted into the elementary school. She ran her fingers over name tags. She wondered again who she was. She looked up at a creaking and smiled. "Is someone there?" She moved to close the window which had admitted the creaking of the tetherball chain. Was she the last person on earth? She began to think so.

She moved through the deserted streets again. The woman looked into a camera mounted above an antique store door. Could someone be watching? "Please ... someone. I know there has to be someone watching. Please talk to me."

She began screaming, just hoping the sound might attract attention. She looked down the street at a grinding sound. At first low, the noise growing slowly. She stopped screaming and turned to face the rising noise.
She drew back out of the road. A John Deere tractor furnished with a pair of small snow plows on front rolled slowly by as she stood watching it. There was no one in the driver's seat. She ran after it. Jumping on and pulling herself inside she found a brick against the gas pedal. She grabbed at the brick, tossing it off. The green John Deere stopped, idling.

"Someone is playing games with me," she growled. Jumping into the Deere's seat, she turned it and began to go in the direction it came from. She drove with a fierce look on her face. Someone playing with her...they had to know her right? She would learn her name and then she would run this plow up their asses.

She saw a plywood sign. Snow Plow for sale in large red letters. It was at the edge of a long driveway. She saw a flannel clad man laying in the driveway next to a stack of bricks, his wheelchair several feet behind him, wheel spinning in the air. She jumped off the tractor and ran for the man.

"Hey! Are you okay?" She came to a grinding sliding halt on her knees beside the still man. She carefully turned him over. Air exploded from her lungs as she stared at a mannequin face with white eyes and blank expression.

Her hands smashed outward sending a glass of water flying across the hospital room. She tried to catch ragged breath.

"A dream a dream...just another dream." she whispered.

She stood and yanked out the needle connecting to her IV. Stumbling forward, she made her way to the door. Quietly opening it, she looked into the dark hall. Blood smeared down the corridor wall. She began shaking as her eyes darted back and forth. She slid against the wall below the blood smear toward the nurses station. The nurses station featured dried blood puddles and a single finger, dark and nasty. She wondered where the owner of the finger was now. Her head spun at the sight and smell.

A metal cart near by caught her eye. She pulled up the top to take out a tubular leg. She heard the creak of leather and turned to see someone staring at her from behind black leather and a gas mask. She raised the metal leg, combat ready.

The figure ripped away the mask to show a woman with icy blue eyes.

"Alex. Alex. Its me!" The woman dropped the leg with a ringing clatter.

"I'm Alex?" She was badly confused.

The woman looked down the hall. "We need to take this to the roof. Can you help hold off the freaks for a few flights?"

"What's going on?" Alex whispered, terrified.

The woman swore and reaching over the nurses station, snagged Alex's hospital gown and pulled at her.

"We have to go... Now." The woman began pushing her toward the staircase.

Alex pulled at the handrails propelling herself upwards. She was feeling dizzy and sick. The other woman put her arm around her and began moving them faster.

They pushed to the roof and looked out over a cityscape clouded by the rising smoke from burnt out buildings. She moved slowly toward the edge to look down over the hospital grounds. There was a
sprawling tent city below. Large dogs moved in the small gaps. Birds lined the edges of tents and
tops of haphazardly parked cars. The gas mask made sense now. This was the place people would
have come to die. These were the scavengers and the inheritors of humanity.

Alexandra bit back an urge to scream. The cramps running through her stomach helped with that.
She dreamed that she was the last woman on earth. It may very well be a near thing depending on
just what led to the tent city below.

She turned around to face the woman. The leather clad woman stepped close. "You are important to
us. You aren't alone when you are with us."

Alex blinked and felt frozen as the gun came up. "Why?"

The woman's head cocked. "You're meant to live and die for us alone, Alexandra." The bullet threw
her backwards off the hospital roof.

Alexandra jumped, her eyes opening as she sat up startled and confused. Was it all just a dream? She
ran her fingers through her sweat soaked hair, looking at the chair across from her. The chair
occupied by Amanda, the woman with the icy eyes.
Chapter 5

There was a cold rain all Saturday, and Rachel sat near the window watching it pepper down on the growing puddles in the lawn. She had a dog-eared copy of Leaves of Grass on her lap, a pen tucked behind her ear, and an empty mug of hot chai tea at her feet. Since the death of her wife, she spent more and more of her time outside of Division alone. Sometimes, she still felt as if she were waiting by the window for her to come home, as if she were away on one of her business trips. As the weeks turned into months and the DNA tests from the State Forensic lab confirmed that the charred remains were indeed that of Alexandra Udinov, she lost all hope in there being some kind of mistake. Nikita pushed her to let go, and Rachel knew that it was her way of pushing herself to let go, too.

As the one year anniversary of her death crept up, Rachel felt herself withdrawal even more. She thought about the wild and wonderful year they spent married. It was the best days of her life. Now, as she sat with the pain of her loss, the guilt and the memories of the night that took Alex from her began to overwhelm her.

Alexandra frowned as she cracked open a cold frappuccino. "It just doesn't feel right, Rach. Almost...easy."

Rachel turned to her. "We looked for days for a way to take this guy down. If we don't do this now thousands might die because of his bombs. We need to take him down before he disappears again."

"I know... I know. And with that terror cell wandering around looking for another explosive's expert for their glowing package it could be more, but something about today is just hinky." She shrugged. "Just nerves, I guess. It's nothing."

Stepping closer, Rachel removed the Starbuck's bottle from her wife's hands and slid her hand over Alex's stomach. She smiled and leaned in for a slow sweet kiss. "I got your back and Nikita has both our backs. We'll take this guy and then you and I..."

Alex smiled. "You and I?" she prompted.

"Bed and breakfast for the weekend...maybe minus the breakfast?" Rachel tapped Alex's chin.

Alexandra raised a brow. "Naughty woman." She smiled, leaning in for another kiss. "Let's get the fucker. We have a weekend to plan and toys to buy."

A black clad figure slowly made her way over the roof of the warehouse. Alex slid down a rain gutter to the long row of windows that, back a century helped light a hundred women as they stitched shirtwaists. She cut the glass and pulled it out. Unlocking the section of window she slid in. The bomb-maker worked in the office that was suspended amongst the catwalks like a spider in its web. Alexandra began creeping toward it as Rachel began working her way through the obnoxious number of locks on the door below. She used a small mirror to look over the window sill. He was moving materials inside a sealed container with robotic arms. She wasn't sure whether to be grateful he was working with bio bombs or terrified he was working with bio hazardous materials.

Alex took out her gun and watched. When he moved away from the casing to open his computer, she
walked in with her Glock in hand. "Raise your hands if you want a chance in hell of staying alive long enough to turn rat on your buyers."

He looked and smiled, cautiously spreading his hands out and up. She moved left to stand between him and his fun kit. "Back to the wall." She tapped her comm. "This is Alex...Target acquired."

Rachel frowned. "On my way. Oh, and nice of you to wait for me-, hotshot." She opened the door and began making her way up the nearest stairs to the catwalks.

Alex grinned. "That's super spy, remember?" Her grin faltered as she saw the explosive's expert grinning. "What the hell are you smiling at fun boy?" She was starting to get nervous. He was too fucking happy to be a dead man.

His outstretched hand pointed and he grinned. Alexandra turned and lost consciousness.

Rachel was halfway across the catwalks when the office exploded. She barely caught hold of the catwalk rail as the whole thing twisted and bucked and tried to rip away from her. She crawled up the metal flooring, her fingers bleeding as she threaded them through the grating. "Alex," she screamed past the ringing in her ears. "Alex."

Tears ran down Rachel's face as she relived the events for the hundredth time. Standing to her feet, she tossed the book in the chair. To hell with the rainstorm outside. She was going for a very long run.

Alexandra frowned as she traced her finger over the window. She was deeply deeply unhappy with the pointless internal drama that was her life. It didn't feel safe sleeping, she felt even less safe awake. She wondered how long she had been in the hospital. Did she have a family? Was there someone special who was missing her right now? Was she alone in the world? She figured she must be. Everything was a complete blank. She only knew her name because they insisted it was Alexandra. Very little felt familiar to her, even her own image in the mirror. The days in this place seemed to run together now. She knew it had been many, many months, but exactly how many she didn't know.

The treatments often left her empty and blank. Thinking about the last 24 hours made her feel crazy. She was almost hyperventilating, trying to stop a panic attack from taking hold. She felt a low hum in her ears as she moved toward a blackout. The only thing that felt familiar to her besides Amanda was these random and debilitating attacks. Alexandra closed her bloodshot eyes and tried imagining constructing a castle, block by block. It was so boring it helped take the wind out of her fear's sails... Somewhat.

She leaned her forehead against the window. Alex felt the room was moving around her a little still, but she was getting control back. She was pulling back from the blackout. She pressed herself up to stand. The trolley was creaking down the corridor with covered trays of food like substances. She would eat soon, and then she had to figure out how to deal with the demons that crowded her mind.
Rachel slammed her hand against the button on the alarm clock, it had taken two tries to nail it but there was sleepy satisfaction in the win against the annoying beebeebee. Half asleep, she pulled the blanket over her head and sighed. Another restless night of little sleep. She had long since gotten used to it, more or less. Kicking the covers off, she pushed herself up and sat on the side of the bed, her toes brushing the top of her black watch flannel slippers. Mornings like this required coffee, lots and lots of strong black coffee. She turned her head as she slowly moved toward full consciousness and looked at the picture on the nightstand beside her. "Another morning, super spy." She smiled grimly at the picture of them together. She dressed slowly, made coffee and moved through her morning ritual. She was running late for work, but found it difficult getting out of first gear. It was going to be that kind of day.

She stepped off the elevator at Division to the buzz and rattle of her cellphone. Plucking her phone from her pocket, she scrolled through her messages as she walked down the corridor. She grumped her way through the list of advertisements in her inbox. Penis enlargement. Check. Home mortgage adjustment. Check. Doggie breath tablets. Check. A one line text message. Nikita wanted to see her right away. Shaking her head, she walked down the hall like a twelve year old about to see the school principal. She took a deep breath and knocked on the office door. Nodding as she heard the call to come in, she reached to open the barrier.

Nikita looked harried as she bounced her attention between a computer and a haphazard pile of papers. The woman before Rachel tucked a pen behind her ear and looked up. "Hey. Sit. Okay Rachel?"

"Of course," she responded before sinking into the comfortable sofa near the door. She bit back laughter as Nikita blew out an exasperated breath as she fended off a call and tossed a stress ball into a corner trash bin.

Nikita straightened and smiled at Rachel. "Hey."

Rachel grinned at the other woman. "Hey. Busy day, eh?"

"I think I really do want to retire now. Turns out I can do missions, but the paperwork?" She snorted. "So I know I've been busy lately and wanted to touch base with you. How are you doing?"

Rachel rocked slightly from foot to foot for a moment. She knew where this was going. When Nikita touched base with her it was always the touchy feely stuff. "I'm doing well Nikita."

"How are you sleeping? You look tired, Rachel."

"Me? I sleep like a baby... like a rock... I'm ready for a new assignment."

Nikita looked at her closely. "You have been racking up the field work non-stop. I have been pairing you up and you are wearing out partners with your drive. That screams diversion Rachel. You need to deal not throw yourself into trouble so you don't have to cope with things."

"I am dealing just fine Nikita."

The older woman frowned. "Maybe. I will have a job for you shortly, but not until you have a new partner. Give me a few hours to try and round someone up."

"You can send me alone you know. I am competent." Rachel was seriously getting annoyed now.
She wanted to be in the field where she thought she could do some good.

Nikita shook her head. "I'm not Percy and Amanda, Rachel. I value the lives of my team members and that means I send no one out there alone if I can avoid it. When they paired it was because they were as worried about rogues as getting the job done. I do it because I want the job done and everyone home in one piece."

Rachel scoffed. "Even in pairs, not everyone comes home."

She looked at Rachel for a long time. "Everyday I wake up and remember Alex is not in the world too, Rachel. It's painful but we have to think about what's in front of us and not who was behind us... You know that is what she would want for all of us."

Rachel shook her head. "Whatever. Just let me know when you find me a new partner and I can get back to work."

Nikita nodded sadly. "Of course." She watched as a stiff shouldered Rachel stalked out of the room. Considering a moment, Nikita picked up the phone and dialed. "Hey. I know I said I wouldn't bother you unless there was an emergency, but... I think Rachel is headed into a tailspin and I need a little help. Can I move you to active field duty for a little while?"

Alex opened up the plastic tray after a long frustrating morning of staring at the paint chipped walls of her room. She was ready to chew nurses when her tray arrived. She snarled. Salisbury steak, the bane of people with taste buds. She looked up as her door knob turned. Amanda came in. Alex forced a smile.

Amanda's head tilted as she surveyed the scene. "Are you alright Alexandra?"

"Aside from a potential case of food poisoning from the mystery meat, I'm doing okay."

Amused, Amanda sat on the bed and crossed her legs. "Really, I would think they would remember the first rule here. If you cannot immediately identify the meat, you should bury it in gravy."

A slab of meat looked lonely beside an ice cream scoop of barely gravied mashed potatoes. Alex tried to imagine it as real food. She didn't even have any interest in trying to work out what the greenish stuff in the corner was. She thought it might be Jello, but if it wasn't she didn't really want to know.

She frowned up at Amanda. "How about serving me food that I can identify?" She sighed. "I don't know what I'm doing. I can't remember shit and I don't know what I'm eating and you are kind of familiar but that doesn't take me far..."

Amanda smiled and held up a hand. "I cannot fix everything, but give me an hour to find you some real food. Be patient Alexandra. You have come a long way. Recovery cannot be rushed...much."
Chapter 7

Alexandra sat on the bed and stared at the darker streaks in the institutional linoleum that covered her floor. She barely moved as she heard a light rap on the door following the 'shoosh' of the hinges. She took a fortifying breath and looked up at the thin doctor and the woman she knew as Amanda. He moved into the center of the room with a timid glance at his companion. He cleared his throat and opened her folder.

She looked from one to another. Alex then looked down at her braided hands. She was being slowly eaten alive by her dreams, by thoughts of the woman she killed and now she had to talk to this idiot doctor who looked like he would blow away in a stiff breeze? She barely bit back a groan.

Piercing blue eyes watched her, weighed her. Amanda patted the doctor's shoulder. "Doctor. Out."

"But..." The doctor waved his clipboard. He frowned. He was supposed to be a god in his own hospital. That's what the white coat and the stylish tie was supposed to convey.

"Do we need to revisit our discussion?" Amanda asked lightly. She smiled. This was not the smile of a friend but rather of a predator who just spotted a light lunch.

The doctor shook his head and fled to check on the patients without a guardian demon.

Amanda turned back and drew out a chair. She sat almost knee to knee with Alexandra. "You have been having bad dreams again."

Alex remained still for long moments before nodding slightly. "I killed a woman," she confessed. "I dream dreams of her and I dream of being alone." I don't know what dreams are worse," she offered quietly.

"Dearest Alexandra," Amanda cooed as she stroked her face. "You still don't remember yourself do you?"

Alex looked up, her face torn with grief. "Tell me, I can't take this anymore."

Amanda put her fingertips against a tear and drew it away. "First Alexandra, wash your face. You are not one of these sheep within these hospital walls to gnash your teeth and weep at your fate."

Looking at the older woman for long moments she stood and went to the tiny sink and splashed warm water on her face. She turned and looked at Amanda who smiled gently. "There you are Alexandra. Much better."

Alex sat back on the bed and looked at Amanda with serious eyes. "Tell me," she insisted.

Amanda watched her for several long moments. "You my dear Alexandra are something extraordinary." She slid back in the chair. "Some years ago a young woman was recruited by an organization I worked for. Brilliant, gifted beyond words. She was the epitome of what we look for."

She locked eyes with the younger woman across from her. "You Alexandra."

Alex leaned forward. "What am I?"

Amanda smiled. "You are a spy, an assassin, whatever your country needs you to be. Whatever I need you to be."
Alex couldn't help the belly laugh. "You're joking."

The older woman looked at her, just looked at her until the laughter dried up. "You Alexandra are unique. You have a gift. I helped you fulfill your potential and..." she again reached forward to brush fingertips against Alex's cheek. "I was your rock Alex, as you became mine. We were very close, you and I." She feigned deep sadness.

"One of the groups dedicated to destroying all we worked toward took you from us... from me, Alexandra. It broke my heart to watch them drug and manipulate you into betraying us, betraying me."

Alex watched the other woman's face. "Why?" she asked.

"They wanted your potential." She waved her hand to indicate the hospital room. "We recaptured you and began the process of undoing the damage."

"You drugged me and electro shocked me." Alex grew furious.

"We began replacing the sedatives with placebos as soon as the drugs they were using on you began to leave your system and the electroshocks, though unpleasant are necessary to offline certain hardware elements they surgically implanted."

Alex ran her hand through her hair. "This is crazy."

Amanda stroked her cheek. "Crazy is what they made you. I am trying to help you undo that." She smiled. "We are almost there Alexandra. We are almost home." She leaned forward and kissed Alex's forehead. Her thumb wiped casually at the lipstick.

"My dreams," Alex whispered.

"That woman never existed and you, my dear Alexandra, will never be alone. You have me."

Amanda's fingers slid over and around Alex's.

The modern cafeteria at Division was dull, a monotonous repetition of lunch trays and mindless chatter. The strong smell of the mystery casserole emanated from the hot food line, and the bottles of water sweated in a basket near the end of the line. The overpowering mixture of food smell in the air only added to the stuffiness and general funkiness of the area. Rachel ran her fingers along the edge of her tray internally bitching about the air circulation. Nothing looked very appetizing, as she slowly moved down the line. Why did she bother? She never liked eating at Division anyway. Giving up on selecting an entree, she snagged a Styrofoam cup from the dispenser, and poured hot black coffee. Taking a sip, she turned heading toward the desserts.

She sighed, trying to choose between blue jello and a slice of cheesecake so thin you could read Sunday comics through it. She frowned. Really what was the point of dessert if you couldn't be bad? A lesson she learned from Alex long ago. She smiled at the memory even as it flashed through her head. A hand snaked past her, grabbing both dessert plates and throwing her out of her silent reverie. "Hey," she whined. Turning, she found Caitlin there.

Caitlin grinned and slightly wiggled the plates. "Looking for these?" She held first one then the other mere inches from the other woman's nose. She was loving watching Rachel trying not to let her
sugar addiction show.

Rachel pouted. "Just because you get to sit on your butt looking at computers all day..."

"Oo that hurt." Caitlin edged back. "Come on sunshine. We are sitting in the corner and you are eating both desserts."

Rachel grinned. "A true friend." Her nose followed the sweet treats. "What are you doing here anyway? Can't be the haute cuisine they lay out here."

"You have no idea just how good a friend I am Miss Rachel. I just freaking agreed to leave my comfy chair to be your partner for a while." Caitlin chuckled and placed the plates on the table before sitting back in a faintly stressed looking red chair.

Rachel stopped dead, her eyes narrowing. "What is Nikita thinking?"

Caitlin shrugged. "Who knows and who cares. I am taking a break from the geek stuff and working with a woman with the finest active field duty ass in the business. Come on already. You know I've never liked being a desk jockey since coming home. I was thrilled when she suggested it." She smiled and swiped Rachel's juice bottle with a grin. Caitlin watched Rachel's almost sexual enjoyment of her dessert with a smile. "Do you eat everything with that kind of enjoyment?" Her brow rose.

Rachel almost choked as she caught the innuendo. "I hardly see you for months and you start with the flirty flirty right off? Nice." She rolled her eyes and stole back her juice for a drink.

"Rachel, you haven't exactly been that easy to talk to. Besides, what kind of person would I be if I gave up on the people worth fighting for?" Her broad smile brightened the table.

Barely suppressing a grin, Rachel finished eating swiftly and looked up. "Let's get to work."
Chapter 8

The piercing sound of the old and poorly maintained gurney screeched its way down the hospital hallway. The fluorescent lighting overhead flicked on and off almost in time to the rapid beating of her heart. The scene mimicked the opening of a B rated horror film, only this was no movie, this was her life... Her life, she thought, and she had no control over it at all. "I don't need this." She cried out. "Please...no."

Alex's pleas turned into threats and then screams as they pushed her further down the corridor and into the treatment room. It was not her first round of electro-convulsive therapy. It was not even her tenth. The truth was no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't remember how many times she had been through this, she just knew each time she fought.

"Let me go.... I have rights!" She pushed through her teeth at the orderly who refused to look down at her.

Struggling, she pulled at the leather wrist restraints holding her firmly to the gurney. An orderly gripped at the sides of her head, as a nurse carefully wrapped the plastic band of electrodes around her forehead. It took all of three seconds for the sweat to make the plastic feel like hell on her skin.

Amanda stepped into view. "Just relax, Alex. This is going to make you better, stronger." She pulled out a mouth guard and held it close to the helpless woman on the table.

"I don't need this... I'm better now. You said I was doing better." Alex was terrified. She lost so much of her memory the last time. She could lose everything. Pain was nothing, what would ECT take from her this time. How could this be a good thing?

Amanda smiled. "Yes, Alex... and you want to continue to do better don't you?"

"Please Amanda... no." Her head could barely move under all the crap, but she tried to shake it. Tears dripped from the sides of her face, as her teeth tighten around the mouth guard Amanda shoved painfully in followed by a brush of thumb over the restrained woman's lower lip.

"This is important work we are doing here, Alexandra." Amanda reasserted.

Alex felt the sting of the needle feeding her a mild sedative. Her eyes were pleading with Amanda.

"Four hundred volts." Amanda told the waiting tech. She smiled down. "We are freeing you from what they did to you. This pain? It's simply one more nail in their coffin for what they did to you. You can use this to strengthen yourself Alexandra."

Alex arched painfully against the restraints and the world fell away.

Rachel shook her head. Another freakin' day, another freakin' chance to blow more pieces of paper to shit. She checked the weapon in her hand. The weight was on the heavier side, the safety was ready to go off in preparation to destroy attacking paper men. A half-dozen ammunition clips lay on the small shelf at the head of the lane. She grabbed one at random and loaded the weapon with a firm click. Assuming the proper stance, she raised the gun.
Rachel did not so much squeeze the trigger as she stroked it. The large gun roared bucking in her clenched hands and trying to knock her backwards with its recoil, but she had braced herself well and stood steady. She fired again, and then a third and fourth time. In the enclosed space of the firing range, the shots were like thunder, beyond even the ability of the noise-blocking headset she wore to eliminate them completely. The back-flash of the weapon punched through the tinted lenses she wore and made black-fringed holes in her vision. She blinked to clear her eyes and waited for her hearing to return to normal before raising a cover and turning to look at Caitlin with a raised brow.

Beside her in the firing-range lane, Caitlin slapped the recall button as she looked at Rachel pointedly. "This ought to be good," she muttered quietly. Rachel was good. She really hated to tell her though. That kind of thing could go to her head and make her cocky... or cockier. Cocky made a body sloppy. She turned to watch the paper with a wry grin. Electric motors whirred, and the paper target made the long trip back to Rachel.

Even before the target had returned, Caitlin could see that all four of Rachel's shots had hit their marks. The target's paper heart hung in tatters. She shrugged lightly. About what she expected.

She had qualified on every make, model, and caliber of firearm cleared for Division field use and more than a few that weren't, but this specific weapon was new to her. It was nothing special, a 44 magnum Desert Eagle, but every gun had its peculiarities. She would make it an extension of herself as she done with so many other cordite and lead spitting weapons.

"You pulled to the right on the last shot." Caitlin remarked conversationally.

"It's still a kill-shot," Rachel replied. The words came out more defensively than she had intended. Caitlin had been in the spy game a lot longer than Rachel. She was an expert in the field and out. Rachel valued her opinion and sometimes even her instruction, but today she didn't want to hear it. Not from Caitlin, not from Nikita, not from anyone who dare express an opinion. Any day, she thought, any day but this one.

"Not as reliable, though. Pick one target zone and stick with it. Don't try to be fancy. Just relax and let go." Caitlin kept her tone even. She didn't like the defensiveness in Rachel's tone. Bitchiness in the field only helped so far.

Rachel frowned. Who did Caitlin think she was? She was not a rank amateur. "I relax just fine." She grabbed her bag and left every muscle tensed as she did.

Caitlin rolled her eyes as the other woman left rubber peeling out and away. "Yeah, I can see that," she muttered. She turned to clean up the lane. Rachel was all prickles today and she couldn't account for it.

Alexandra groaned. "Fuck!" she breathed out. Her head felt as if she had been hit with a sledge hammer. Her jaws and limbs ached even as she tried to stretch them. The low hum and vertigo had returned, as it always did after ECT. She remembered nearly nothing, and the harder she tried, the more her head ached. She moved her jaw trying to make the dull ache go away. She felt like crying in rage and pain.

"How are you doing, Alexandra?" Amanda asked from somewhere to Alex's right.
Alex snarled. She was in pain and this bitch was asking her to add to it by talking. "How the hell do you think? I'm in hell and you are the devil."

A sad sigh came from the gloomy corner of the room where Amanda sat. "Alexandra, every time I think you are getting better, something like this comes out of your mouth."

"I am ... better. I'm sorry. I have a headache."

Amanda sat silently for endless moments sharpening a fear that was forming in Alex's chest that she had gone too far. "Perhaps I can get you something for the pain. In the meantime, it would do you well to remember that I am the only one in your life that hasn't given up on you."

Alex felt relief. She made sure to speak in a more civilized tone. "Speaking of that, my memories aren't coming back. Its frustrating."

"They may never return. You have to make peace with that fact. Frankly, you are better off without them. You were a terrible person, Alexandra. You turned on me and the others who cared for you. You were a murdering terrorist."

Alex flinched at that assessment. She had trouble seeing herself become that, but hadn't she just murdered a woman? Who knew what she was capable of. "I ... I'm better now."

Alex could feel Amanda's eyes on her, weighing, assessing. "Yes, a few more treatments and you will be ready."

"Ready for what?" Alex asked, almost afraid of the answer. 

"The next step in your recovery. Rest. I will have someone bring you something for your headache." Amanda stood.

"Wait."

Amanda drew into the small circle of light around Alex's bed. "Yes?"

"Did I... was there anyone special in my life? Family? Friends? A lover?" Alex stared at her willing Amanda to answer yes, she wasn't alone.

"Yes, Alex."

Alex almost smiled in her relief. "May I see them?"

Amanda looked away for several seconds with an obvious expression of pain. "I'm sorry Alex. I don't know how to tell you this, but you killed them all."

"What?" she gasped out in disbelief.

"When you betrayed your country you also betrayed all of the people who loved you. Some of your loved ones died by the hands of the terrorists who turned you, others died at your very own hands."

"That... no that can't be." What kind of monster was she? Alex hated this murderous bitch that Amanda described...this terrorist that was none other than herself. "I don't deserve your help. Why should I even bother to live?"

"You still have me Alex. I believe in you. I will get you through this... and we will take our revenge on the people who destroyed your life...and that my dear is worth living for." Amanda perched beside her and slowly slid arms around the younger woman.
Alexandra sobbed into Amanda's shoulder. "When can we begin?"

"You have a few more treatments before your evaluation. If all goes well, I'd say very soon."

"I'll do whatever it takes to recover and make you proud," Alex replied brokenly.

"Oh Alex, I know you will."
Chapter 9

Michael and Nikita pored over the file on one of their latest operations. "If they can retrieve the prototype and wipe the mainframe then the fact that Dr. Phelman is dead will slow down their ability to reach that level of technology again for at least six months." Michael moved the initial assessment of Dr. Phelman's baby, a ground based satellite disrupter to one side as he focused on his picks for teams.

Nikita frowned. "That's assuming that Phelman was paranoid about his process. What if he was working with someone. They could rebuild even without him."

Michael barked a laugh. "Stealing, career butchery, and less savory acts describes our line of work and applied physical science positions. He wouldn't want anyone running off with his patents. He was that paranoid." His tone of self assurance was soothing to Nikita's worry. She didn't want this dangerous technology to end up in the wrong hands, which was basically any hands. A universal ticket to knock out world wide communication and spy satellites was a plum, a dangerous plum.

"We'll put the boys on retrieval and give the zip with the virus to Rachel and Caitlin." Nikita moved through the files. She drew out plans for the facility and started sorting the information for presentation.

"That doesn't leave much room for Rachel to go all cowboy again. That's good." He frowned. "Should we be less subtle about those two?"

Nikita laughed. "Less subtle than making them partners?"

"Invite them and our favorite Nerdy Couple for dinner in a few days?" Michael countered. He was pretty sure that Rachel would try to kick their asses if there was not a buffer. Seymour and Sonia, the Great Wall of Peace.

Nikita considered for long moments. "Don't tell them. Invite them separately. Don't let them back out."

Michael barked a laugh. "They'll crack. Once you are on someone's case they crack. It's all just a matter of time."

Grinning, Nikita picked up the zip drive containing Birkhoff's magic mainframe killer. "Corner Caitlin. I am off to find Rachel to give her this and a piece of my mind... and an invite."

Caitlin drove slowly down the hill toward the cemetery. She followed the curving road the silent necropolis, eyes peeled for a car she knew and a stone she didn't. She pulled up just past the spreading oak that partially obscured the angel statue below. She pulled the keys from the ignition and just watched for a long moment. She knew what Alex was to Rachel, but it was still hard to just stand back and not scream 'get over it.' It had been a year, and still Rachel wasn't showing any signs of moving on with her life. She knew Rachel would get there in her good time and not before.

A woman brushed a thin layer of snow off the top of the tombstone closest the statue. She placed a rose there, brushing her fingers over the soft petals, remembering soft skin under them. A smile,
those eyes, Alex rose in her mind as Rachel stood in the chilling breeze.

The blond woman walked slowly up. "Rachel. I've been looking for you for hours."

Silence. "Rachel? You could at least answer your phone once in a while."

Rachel half turned. "It's her birthday." She looked back and took a long slow breath.

Caitlin rubbed her forehead. "She's gone Rachel. She's been gone a while now hun. She wouldn't want you to be like this. You need to move on."

"I don't want to hear that right now Caitlin." Rachel bit down hard on a growl. She knew she had to move on, but she was at Alex's grave for fuck's sake. Why couldn't everyone just leave her alone.

Caitlin nodded. "We have to go Rachel. Nikita's getting pissed... There's a mission waiting for us."

She headed back toward her car.

"Cait."

Caitlin turned. "Yeah?"

"I'm not... ready. I want to be." Rachel sighed as her fingers brushed cold stone.

Caitlin nodded at her ex-girlfriend. "I'm here when you're ready." She smiled. "I'll see you back at work."

Rachel nodded. She barely registered as Caitlin drove away.

Alexandra looked at the exercise room and grimaced. She looked at Amanda.

Amanda sighed. "Between budget cut backs and patients lobbing equipment at one another, there is a decided lack of equipment here." She stepped forward and pulled open the cage. "There are pins so you can climb the wall. A chin up bar... Oh, a jump-rope. I wonder how that didn't end up a garrote for some wandering nurse." She turned. "Begin with what you have Alexandra. Work hard. I am summoning a physical trainer I know who is excellent at turning potatoes into fine specimens for field work. She will help you reach your peak... again."

Alex frowned. "I guess it could be worse. When do I meet this trainer?"

Amanda smiled. "It could be far worse... and remember you did promise me that you would make me proud. I expect you to do your best. As for your trainer, soon... when I think you are ready."

Alex liked the sound of that. She grabbed the pegs and looked up at the holes in the wall for pulling herself up. "Bring her on. I'm ready. You'll see."

Amanda nodded. "You will be locked in here for the next three hours. Make good use of your time. I will arrange better meals for developing the necessary muscle. We have a lot of work to do. Good day Alexandra."

The young woman leapt up and got a peg into a hole and dangled a few inches off the ground. She swung her other arm up and put a peg in the next hole. "See you later, Amanda." She began slowly
pulling herself up into the climb. Amanda watched her for a few moments and nodding headed out into the corridor. Percy was there.

"Well?" he asked with a raised brow.

"She is almost ready for Grace."

He frowned. "And you believe that this is necessary? This sexual entanglement?"

"Alexandra is like a baby duck. She is looking to imprint. While there is an underlying imprint process going on that binds her to me, the emotional and sexual partnership will act as further insurance that she will not imprint in more unfortunate places. Grace is aware of the situation and is more than willing to pursue this and to put a bullet in Alex's head should she fail to fulfill our needs... Remember Percy, Alexandra has no past, no memories, and we are creating her future."

Percy watched as Alex's limbs shook under the strain of wall climbing. "Have Grace "imprint" quickly. I want Alexandra in the field as soon as possible."

Amanda smiled. "Grace will begin soon enough, but Alexandra must believe that she is making the first move. She has an underlying need to submit to a strong woman... Nikita, myself, but when the relationship turns sexual, she wants to believe she is in charge. Grace has been studying Alexandra's file. She knows exactly what to do."

Percy nodded curtly. He watched Alex almost miss landing a peg and driving herself all the harder for it. He hoped that this woman was worth all the work. He smiled as he imagined Alex standing there with Nikita's head in her hands.

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**Rachel** and Caitlin pulled on their Kevlar. "Can't believe we gotta play back up singers to that nutjob Gollum," Caitlin bitched quietly.

"Be good. He is bats, but he and Rick get to go in the door first."

"Yay. You go third. I don't want blood on my shirt." Caitlin quipped.

Rachel punched her arm. Caitlin grabbed her arm and faked an injury. "Oh god. I'm hit, I'm hit." She stumbled in a small circle, dramatically acting like she was dying.

Rachel chuckled. "So bad. Play nice, Cait."

Caitlin turned with a sneaky smile. "What'll you give me if I'm good?"

The other woman tapped her chin and looked up at the ceiling as she considered possibilities. "Chocolate?"

Caitlin bounced up and down. "I'll take the chocolate, but how's dinner sound?"

Rachel shook her head ruefully. "I don't know. I have a million things to do tonight."

"It's just dinner." Caitlin responded quietly.

"Maybe another time." Rachel said sadly.
Chapter 10

Rachel turned off the car and stared a long moment before exiting the vehicle. She closed the door of the car and tried to paint on a convincing smile. Dinner away from Division, away from the little table in her kitchen. This was supposed to be a good thing and Nikita and Michael were doing their best being more than friends. They were family, and family stuck together through the good times and the bad. She sighed and went to knock on the door. She grinned slightly at the two spies and their ideas of picket fence lifestyles.

Nikita opened the door with a smile. She was wearing a light green t-shirt that stretched in all the best ways and was practically bouncing to see that Rachel actually showed up. "Hey. Everyone else is here. Hope you're hungry."

"Starving." She drew off her black leather jacket. "Everyone?" she asked hesitantly. Damn it. She used to be able to smell a set up. This was going to be awkward and annoying. She handed over her jacket with a deep sense of foreboding. This could get really ugly.

"Birkhoff, Sonia. They arrived first. The Nerd is currently making Michael crazy in the other room." Nikita put the jacket up with a smile. She turned back and motioned toward the well lit room to the left where the sounds of conversation were drifting from. Based on the overwhelming quantity of conversation tagged with Seymour's less than dulcet tones, Michael must be losing his mind by now.

"Who else?" she asked suddenly nervous. Rachel knew there had to be a who else here. There was definitely a single friend for the single friend vibe for this dinner party. Ah, there it was again. The smell of set up.

"Me," came from the doorway, from which emerged sounds of sizzling and smells of food seduction. Damn, Rachel knew that voice.

Rachel turned to find Caitlin grinning. She turned back to Nikita glaring. It was bad enough they played with her emotional life but to use a woman she had to work with? A woman she had broken it off with in the past? A past that still left a lot of question marks swirling through her head. She was so not going to growl, well maybe a little. Her shoulders tightened as she found the words to yell at Nikita.

Caitlin laughed. "You set me up blah blah blah. I already yelled at her. She swears dessert is worth it."

Rachel sighed. "We will be talking about this Nikita." came out in a whisper.

Nikita smiled broadly. "I hope so." She sniffed. "Food calling. Go make nice... Help yourself to a drink." She scooted off quickly.

"If I didn't know better, I would say she was making the quick getaway." Rachel muttered darkly.

Caitlin snagged Rachel's arm and drew her through the doorway on the left. She tugged her silk shell slightly. "I didn't know," she confided to her field partner and friend. She was trying to get Rachel on a date but not this.

Rachel frowned. "I'm not blaming you. I'm blaming the Nikita-Michael Love Machine. Damn it. Why can't they just leave well enough alone already."

"They can't help wanting to see everyone happy. They have seen miserable and they've seen happy
and now they just fiddle with people trying to share the good bits.” Caitlin shrugged eloquently. "Enjoy the ride."

Rachel snorted. Michael looked up from where he was trying to read a bar manual as Seymour talked about Star Trek as a blueprint for a society. "What'll you have?" he asked brightly. His eyes darted to Birkhoff and back. "And please, a long bar order would be fine."

Caitlin laughed. "White wine is fine. Seymour? Where's Sonia?"

Birkhoff waved his hands. "I told her that Borg were not in any way shape or form sexy and she ran off to help chop veggies or something."

Rachel stole a maraschino cherry. "How could you say that? Seven of Nine is hot." She dropped a cherry stem onto her tongue and tied it into a knot with nary a thought.

Caitlin's eyes widened as she dropped the knotted stem onto a coaster and chewed on the cherry.

He looked at her. He looked at the kitchen. He looked back panicky. "You think she thinks Seven is hot?" Birkhoff went pale. "Is she gay? She can't be gay, she gave me sex. I mean there was that thing with the tongue and the... oh god... is sonia gay?"

Rachel laughed. "Relax Birkhoff, she is probably into Locutus." She dropped her hand onto his shoulder.

"Old guy sex? She wants old guy sex?" Birkhoff looked freaked out and slightly nauseous.

Caitlin slapped his shoulder again. "Go talk to her big guy."

Birkhoff scuttled out.

Michael smiled brightly. "Thank you Rachel."

Caitlin shook her head. "I lost that conversation about three words in."

Rachel's brow rose as she turned to look at Caitlin. "You don't know Seven of Nine?"

Caitlin shrugged. "I went CSI and Criminal Minds myself, oh but I do like Chicago Fire. You should watch it sometime."

"You should be. Three of the sexiest women and four of the best drinking games ever came out of Star Trek." She pointed at the wine bottle sitting on top of the bar. Michael poured with a grin. "You so need to vegetate more woman. Isn't that like part of the whole sitting on your ass in front of the computer lifestyle that Operations affords?"

Caitlin shrugged. "I went CSI and Criminal Minds myself, oh but I do like Chicago Fire. You should watch it sometime."

Rachel snorted. "And they think we should hook up."

Michael choked on his coffee. "Maybe I should go check on the food," he managed after the coughing faded.

"Rachel and Caitlin smiled at one another as he left. Rachel shook her head. "Think we can torture them all through dinner?"

Caitlin laughed. "The way you're going, they are in for a long supper."

Nikita came out hands on her hips. "Which one of you is going to tell me why the Nerd is shaking
like a leaf?"

Rachel and Caitlin looked at each other and burst out laughing. Rachel squeezed out a "Borg sex" between gales of laughter as they made their way past her to the food.
Chapter 11

Nikita rubbed at her temple as she looked at the amused looking Rachel and Caitlin. "Probably shouldn't have been refilling your wine glass every time Birkhoff went into a tailspin," Caitlin noted casually. Nikita did not drink to hangover often and Caitlin felt it would be a waste not to tease the other woman about it.

Rachel dropped her face into her hand. The sound emerging from behind her fingers sounded suspiciously like choked laughter.

"Vvvvery funny." Nikita responded with a raised brow and evil eye. "You two were really in prime form last night. You should just go out on a date on your own and save us all from your evil doings."

Rachel shook her head still trying to cap the the sniggering. "Don't you start too, Nikita."

Nikita smiled at the younger woman. "Fine. Let's get the two of you out on assignment so that I can recover from this headache in peace."

Rachel frowned. She turned and looked at Caitlin who was grinning and leaning back on the bench. She looked happy soaking in the sun in her t shirt and faded jeans. "Seriously? Do you never let up? We are supposed to be working here." Rachel asked as she drained the last of her burnt tasting hot dog cart coffee with a grimace.

Caitlin laughed at the other woman. "Look at what I would miss out on if I gave up." She lifted her hand at the younger woman.

Rachel got up and walked to the garbage can ten feet from the park bench they were watching the target from. She crouched and smiled as she picked up a toy for a little boy riding crankily in a stroller. The frazzled mother lifted her head off the phone long enough to mouth 'Thanks,' before going back to bawling out a dead beat dad and scurrying along the path.

Caitlin watched her with a smile. "Want one?" she asked as she then watched the kid being rolled through the park.

"A date?" Rachel asked confused as she sat again.

"Well that too. I mean a cookie snatching, curtain climbing, dust collecting rug rat." Caitlin chuckled as she opened a brown bag and pushed aside the small dart launcher to get at her sandwich. Her eyes cut over from under her lashes to watch Rachel's face.

"A kid?" She frowned again. "I hadn't really thought about it much since Alex..." she trailed off.

Caitlin shrugged and took a bite. She chewed and swallowed before responding. "Fair enough. "She swallowed down a small wave of sadness at the ambivalence. "So about the date?" she asked trying to recapture the lightness of two moments ago.
Rachel laughed. "Okay, Caitlin. I will go out with you... but no promises."

"About fucking time," came Michael's thin voice through their comms.


Michael came though again with "Back up is in coming... Alpha start cutting the herd."

Caitlin smiled. "One distraction coming up."

Rachel shook her head as she got after her. "Can't believe I agreed to this date."

Caitlin laughed. "I can. I'm hot."

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The air was almost as tasty as every plate full of food she had walked past to get to the small corner table. Leave it to Amanda to pick the best five-star restaurant for their meeting, Grace mused.

Grace wore her 'self of the day' like a badge. Cape Cod bitch with optional manicure and five inch high heels. Grace usually kept her characters a bit more subdued, but imperious orders from Amanda tended to bring out her less refined looks. Her blue eyes froze the air between them as she grew angrier. Part of her was relieved not to be Amanda's little project this time, but a lot of her hated that Amanda was so obsessed with this woman. She dropped her Prada clutch on the paper white crisp linen, and slowly eased into the chair across from Amanda. She shook her thick black braid over her shoulder, and stared at the older woman for seconds.

The waiter poured tea. Amanda savored the steam, the aroma, the color, the sound as it delicately descended into the cup. It was a meditation of its own, an all too brief removal from...

"How can you drink that crap?" Grace asked bluntly. She grinned briefly. She didn't like this persona, but she liked the way it freed her mouth.

Amanda took a long slow breath and smiled at Grace who was busy admiring the manicure on her nails. "It is not a Jaeger Bomb Grace, but tea has its attractions. Sit up straight"

Grace snorted delicately before squaring her shoulders. "Is that better, or should I leave and come back?" came with a note of sarcasm. She tilted her head back and looked up at the ceiling. "So this girl I'm to ... take in hand? Why me?"

Amanda looked over at Grace. "You are able to bring her along physically and are close enough in age to transition from a mentor to... whatever else is needed to keep her in line."

Grace's brow shot up. "You are pimping me out? I would be offended if I didn't already know she was an Udinov." She unbound her braid, and shaking her hair became the Grace that hovered near her center. She was Amanda's piece of clay. Her posture shifted, even her fingers moved differently as her chameleon self shifted to business mode.

"She is a very special agent. She needs to be shaped in every way." Amanda sipped her tea and looked over at the volatile younger woman. "I believe you are the best choice."

Grace looked down at her nails. The fancy floral design and the classy Cape Cod bitch would need
to go. She was thinking French tips, but figured the physical training would call for nail breaking. "I
better go with something a bit more subdued if I am going for drill sergeant." She stood. "I'll be ready when you need me." She pushed her now loose hair back behind her ear.

Amanda pretended hesitation. "I wonder if you were the best choice after all. All it would take is one of your quick changes to make her suspicious."

"Listen Amanda, I have been your little secret project for years. I bet I was doing manip-seduction missions before your pet junky knew which was the fun end of a needle. Just give me a good long leash and I will bring your girl home," Grace affirmed before leaving.

Amanda smiled darkly as Grace left. Alexandra at this point was well on her way to voluntarily submitting to anything. Grace would ensure that the young agent would be fully bound and not even be aware of it. Amanda had such plans for Alexandra, and they all led straight back to Nikita.
Candles flickered romantically in the small authentic Italian restaurant. The waiter pulled the chairs from the white linen table. Caitlin had almost swallowed her tongue at how beautiful Rachel was in the almost knee length black dress. Even the delicate sound of her thin chain bracelet against her glass was sexy to Caitlin. She was going to have a hell of an evening.

She smoothed the green silk over her knee. Caitlin smiled as a cloth napkin landed delicately in her lap. "Thank you," she offered to the young waiter who wore the dignity of a head waiter like a costume. He smiled gently and began extolling the virtues of the chef's specials, as the two women shared a conspiratorial grin. It was the last bit of camaraderie for a while.

Rachel fidgeted slightly with her butter knife before attacking a roll from the basket between them. She was trying to get into the rhythm of the date. They made small talk, but as fond as Rachel was of Caitlin, she was having trouble. She frowned as she focused quite strongly on her roll and butter. Thoughts of Alex plagued her no matter where she was or what she did. She tried to pull herself out of the past, out of memories of the Russian woman, and focus on the food in her hand. The aroma of fresh baking wafted up from the roll. The butter melted onto the white flesh of the roll. It was a delicious sight but this was not an exercise in hunger but avoidance.

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Caitlin frowned. "No one is ever going to meet up to your expectations are they?" She hated the thought that Rachel was not happy on this date, but either that bread was unique or she was unhappy she was here.

"What?" Rachel looked up startled.

Her date leaned forward over the table. She snagged the roll from Rachel's hand and put it to the side. "No one is Alexandra Udinov. You know, the woman you compare me to every minute of every day. I can see the disappointment in your eyes. It was a mistake... It's been over a year, and I'm still living in the shadow of a ghost… I shouldn't have brought you here." She looked around wondering where the waiter was. She grimaced as she realized he was almost all the way across the restaurant smoothing his jacket over his stomach as he waited for a gentleman to hand him his menu.

Sadness flicked across Rachel's face. She didn't want to hurt Caitlin. "Caitlin... I'm... sorry. I didn't realize that I made you feel that way."

At first a shrug was her answer, eventually followed by "Well, you do... I should take you home before this evening gets any worse,"

Rachel's fingers moved to cover the other woman's hand. "Please Caitlin. I know I'm not the best date here. I am trying to get past the awkward 'thinking too much about everything part' of the date ... and I know if you give me a chance, I think I can get us to the 'having fun and wishing the night would never end' part of this."

Rachel grinned.

"Okay ... okay. Let's get through the meal and then find somewhere less obnoxiously overdone romantic. You'd think Nikita picked this place." Caitlin laughed. "Let's go to that all-night steroid factory on Third. I bet a night of climbing walls would be way more fun." She pulled the basket from Rachel's side of the table, "And no more rolls for you missy."
Rachel affected a huff and snagged one of the disappearing rolls. "Going to need energy if I'm going to leave you in the dust on the wall." She smiled smugly.

"Oh no you didn't."

"Oh yes I did."

They both quieted as the waiter placed their orders on the table. They broke out in immediate giggles as he left. Caitlin smiled brightly as she dug into her main course. "Seems the evening is looking up," she noted.

Rachel twirled her fork in the pasta. "You'll spend the rest of the evening looking up trying to find me up on the wall."

They began giggling again. The rest of the dinner was a quilt of joking challenges and counters delivered through ever more full mouthfuls and gales of laughter. It was fairly late when they pulled into the gym parking lot. "Why the hell didn't we just come here to start with?" Rachel wondered aloud.

Caitlin tossed her a duffel bag from the trunk of her car. "Should be plenty of work out clothes in there."

"Clean?"

Caitlin grinned. "I'll never tell." She led the way in and flashing her membership card she told the woman at the desk that she brought a guest. Signing in, she waved Rachel on into the changing room. She smiled and turned her back on Rachel as she disrobed. Looking at the very edge of a mirror in the next section she could see that Rachel was assessing her backside. "I still have a fine ass, don't I?" She grinned and pulled on her t shirt.

Rachel cleared her throat and turned. "Wasn't looking," she said. She turned her own back to begin changing.

Caitlin laughed. "Well, you will certainly see enough of it when we climb." She smiled as she shut the locker and pulled on her shoes before trotting out into the main gym area. She walked past row after row of shiny equipment, and the only very occasional bedraggled looking off hours work out junkie.

The entire far wall was set up as a sports climb wall with plastic hand and foot holds pegged into surfaces at many different angles. Each level of difficulty was graduated to, from Climbing 101 to hanging from a cliff wondering what you were thinking difficult. Chalking up, Caitlin walked back and forth until she was joined by her date. She smirked. "First to get all the difficulties win?"

"What will I win?" Rachel asked.

"When I win, I expect you to sit on my lap in the steam room." Caitlin replied with a cocky grin. She clapped her hands releasing a chalk cloud.

Rachel laughed and clapped her chalk as well. "When I win," Rachel thought long and hard. "You have to make me cookies...with chocolate chips."

Caitlin's eyes narrowed. "Then I will have to win." She gasped and went pale, her eyes focused on the main doors. "I don't believe it."

Rachel turned toward the door to begin swearing as she turned back to see Caitlin leaping for the
wall. "You bitch. I'll kick your ass." she shouted.
Chapter 13

Michael smiled and rolled toward the center of the bed, kissing Nikita deeply. "Finally, a little time for us," he said happily.

Nikita brushed her fingertips along the line of his jaw. "I have been looking forward to this." She pulled him over her. Nuzzling him, her fingers brushed his sides.

"Hi," he greeted with a loving smile.

She chuckled quietly. "Hi there." She leaned into his soft inviting lips. She needed this as much as he did right now. Her light moan turned into a louder groan as she heard the ringing of a cell phone.

Michael signed, rolling toward his nightstand. Yanking at his phone, he waved it. "I'm in the clear. It's yours."

She grimaced as she answered her cell phone, and he mouthed 'somebody is in trouble.' while waving a finger in an admonishing way. She covered the phone with her hand. "I'll be just a minute." Removing her hand, she barked, "What?" Michael grinned and lay back folding his arms under his head.

"Nikita?" came through timidly.

"I told everyone not to call unless there were lives at risk or there was a nuke involved, so why the hell are you calling Nerd?" she asked sharply.

"Is Amanda a big enough nuke for you?"

Nikita suddenly felt the world stopped. She rolled up on the side of the bed. "Repeat that."

Birkhoff hesitated a moment only. "Amanda is alive and well, and causing holy hell again. I also see some activity I don't understand, but that can wait."

Nikita felt like she had been punched in the gut. Alex almost died to kill the bitch and here she was again. She pressed on her abdomen and straightened up. She shook her head at Michael who was watching concerned. She smiled and patted his leg. "Now Nerd, I want you to listen to me very carefully. I want your analysis on my- " She stopped suddenly. It was unlikely that Amanda would do anything in the few hours before she made her way in, but if she didn't look into this now she would not be able to eat, sleep or, and here again she looked at Michael, make love. "I will be in shortly. I need your full analysis printed out and the short short version for immediate review. I will be in, listen to you, and then turn around and come home in record time. Do I make myself clear?"

Birkhoff sounded puzzled. "I could give you the high points over the phone."

She shook her head. "Some things should never be discussed even over a secure line." She cut the connection. Nikita turned. "Michael..."

He shook his head. "You will never be able to relax. Go. But you get back here. I want some time with my wife."

She leaned in and kissed him. "Thank you Michael."
"Want to talk about it?" he asked as she dressed hurriedly.

She looked at him for seconds. She shook her head and smiled. "I want to see if Birkhoff is hallucinating. If he is, I don't need witnesses to what I'll do to him."

Rachel looked into the mirror as she dabbed herself with perfume. She hummed as she added a daub between her breasts. She wanted to feel beautiful to Caitlin. She smiled as she turned slowly to check how her loose hair looked above her barely there underthings. Her eyes locked onto a reflection of a picture. Moving slowly, Rachel sat on the side of the bed and picked up the photograph. Her fingers moved slowly over the image of her wife's face. "God Alex. I miss you. I can't... " Her eyes slid shut. "I have to move on baby. I can't keep hiding from the world." She kissed the photo and gently sat it back in it's place. Her heart tore a bit, but she couldn't live in the past anymore.

Rachel moved swiftly to the closet and pulled out the hanger containing a little blue dress beneath a dry cleaning sheath. She pulled it on and spun slightly to get at the zipper, dragging it on as she walked as if to escape her pain and wish for Alex. A fifteen minute drive found her at Caitlin's door. She smiled as Caitlin gingerly walked out. While she was accomplished in heels, she found herself deeply unhappy with wearing them when she wasn't on the job. She smiled at the blonde. Her date was worth a truly fabulous pair of heels.

"Here I was about to walk up to the door and knock and do the whole date thing," Rachel playfully bitched as Caitlin dragged open the door and lowered herself slowly onto the seat. She could move in this dress, but it was so not recommended.

She took a moment to drink in Rachel beauty before sheepishly saying "Aw." Caitlin pouted. "I could go back and we could try again." She opened her door and leaned up and out.

Rachel tugged forcefully on Caitlin's arm. Caitlin landed back onto the car seat. Rachel grabbed Caitlin's face and pulled her lips to her own. She had planned on a grinning little peck, but as Cait's warm soft lips pulled on hers, she moaned and smiled, lingering. Pulling back proved harder than she thought. She felt herself blush.

Looking out of the car window, she patted the steering wheel. "Where am I driving O Date Lady?" Rachel asked trying to lighten things up.

"I'm no lady," Caitlin retorted as her hand massaged Rachel's knee.

Rachel gave her the evil eye then smiled before putting Cait's hand in her lap. "Behave and navigate. I am a good girl. No putting out before you buy me dinner."

Caitlin laughed and pointed. "Head north. I'll get us there."

They soon found themselves at an intimate little table at an authentic French restaurant. Candles barely lit the available space leaving the interior feeling like isolated pockets. The two at the table could feel like they were alone in the world. The conversation stayed light and companionable with more than a few flirty forays. Rachel looked over and smiled at Caitlin in the flickering light. "Thank you," she said sincerely. She was so glad that Caitlin hadn't given up on her months ago.

Caitlin swallowed a bite of Lemon Soufflé. "Thank you," she responded. She cut a bite and held it out to her date.
Rachel leaned forward and delicately removed it with her lips. She closed her eyes and savored the flavor. Caitlin nearly groaned at the sensuous delight on Rachel's face. She slipped her foot from her shoe and brushed her toes against the silky length of Rachel's hose covered leg. She wanted nothing more than to touch this woman, so very close to her.

"Mmm someone is being very bad." Rachel teased quietly, her eyes still closed and her head slightly tilted. A smile gently curved the edge of her lips.

"We had dinner and I even shared my dessert." Her toes stroked Rachel's thigh. She froze as fingers found her foot. Would she be rejected? Her eyes slid closed and she moaned as deft fingers slid along foot and leg.

Caitlin opened her eyes and waved to the waiter. "Check please." Smiling at Rachel, she stood. "I'll drive."

Rachel slid into the passenger seat, her hand gliding to cover Caitlin's on the stick shift. Caitlin looked over and smiled wickedly, her eyes full of need. She leaned in and met the other woman's lips. Their kiss was slow and warming. Caitlin's hand slid to the younger woman's side and on to her back to pull her closer. The scent of her date was intoxicating, dizzying.

Her lips traveled the length of Rachel's throat, feeling the vibration of the other woman's groan. Lips stroking back up, she hungrily kissed Rachel's mouth again, devouring it. Her fingers stroked at the soft skin just above the fabric of the stylish dress.

Rachel was a taut string in the hands of her date. Every breath the power of her lover's touch threatened to pull her further under. She fell into kiss after kiss pulling away just enough to let Caitlin start the car. They found their pleasure in touches and kisses as they drove.

Her fingers never left Rachel as they drove. Rachel smiled as Caitlin pulled up to the house. Her teeth raked Caitlin's throat just below her ear. "We're here." she whispered. She tugged on the earlobe gently with her teeth. Caitlin moaned and turned to look at her with desire darkened eyes. Her fingers wove into Rachel's hair, pulling their lips forcefully together again.

"Do you want this?" she asked against those warm wonderful lips.

Rachel nodded, tugging her from the car. "Yes, I want you, Caitlin."

Nikita tapped her fingers as she looked over the data flowing over the Nerd's screen. Her brow was knit tight. She looked at Birkhoff as she straightened. "So let me get this straight. They are walking in the shadows, selling assassins and spy work to the highest bidder all over the world and Amanda is commuting daily to some sanitarium in the burbs." It sounded insane. Why would she play in an ancient out of the way insane asylum when she had bigger fish?

Birkhoff's fingers stroked the keys again. He knew the answer, but it just didn't compute somehow. "Yes," he finally agreed.
"Why? It just doesn't add up." Nikita frowned trying to think of angles.

Birkhoff shook his somewhat shaggy head. "No idea, Nikki. Their computer system is prehistoric, I would need a direct link to get more. Maybe they are recruiting patients?" He asked brightly. "When Percy was alive and in charge of Division he had no issue recruiting at similar places." Birkhoff drank down the end of a Red Bull and tossed the can missing the garbage. He made a face at the can and went back to his computer.

Nikita shook her head. She walked over to the can and shot it at the basket with a 'tink'. "Stick to being a Nerd," she advised. She chewed her lip as she paced back and forth a few feet. "Most people in those places... their brain chemistry is fucked to begin with from the amount of medication shoved in them. Places like this are for the most chronic cases, people with criminal pasts. I realize Amanda likes a challenge, but they are in the establishing stage with the Amanda Big Show. She wouldn't play a game of high odds and crappy chance at this point. She wants clean agents. Something else is going on there."

"She goes there daily, but usually only for an hour or two. Is this worth a look?" Birkhoff started pulling up the floor map he found for the hospital.

Nikita sighed and waved a hand at the screen. "Personal interest of Amanda. That alone makes it worth a peek. Not a big enough game for a full team though. Give me a sack of bugs and cameras and I'll take a late night stroll. Maybe we can find out her game with minimal effort."

"Amanda and minimal effort." Birkhoff shook his head. "That mind witch is high maintenance and maximum effort. Be careful. This could be Nikita candy." He swiveled and looked at her evenly. He did not like anything to do with the mega bitch. He was already starting to worry about Nikita's safety and the others he loved. Amanda was starting to look invincible.

Nikita smiled at him. "Traps are fun, Nerd. The secret is to get the coyote to trip it... him... or herself." She leaned into the screen. "Show me those floor plans again." She pulled a pad out of her pocket and grabbing a stylus, she started making some notes. It was going to be a very long night.
Chapter 14

Nikita pulled down the high powered night scope. She leaned back in the y of the tree from which she had been watching. She frowned. Could this place be just what it appeared? There was only one watchman on the outside of the building and he followed every clocking round puffing on a joint. She thought he was likely so high that the Vienna boys choir dressed in Spider-man costumes could climb the building and he would be none the wiser. She watched as the shaggy red head meandered his way past the face of the building yet again.

She dropped down from the tree she was in and went to the fence. It was an antique. Imposing as hell, made of blackened iron and completely useless. Nikita tossed a rubber mat over the spikes on the top and climbed up and over. She pulled the mat and sent it winging into a nearby bush. She would need it on the way back out but carrying it around could only cause problems. Watchman Dopey would likely never spot it anyway. He was lucky to still know where the watch stations, or indeed the building was.

Crouching and running, she made it to the office section of the decrepit hospital. She smiled as she realized that the bars on this set of windows was not set in but a set that could be unlocked and swung out. Administrator's back door, she reasoned as she pulled out her lock picks. She planted her feet on decorative stones in the less than stellar decorative greenery and started work.

Making swift work of the lock and sliding in through the window, she lowered the bars just as the guard giggled to himself rounding the corner. Nikita dropped below the sill and waited for him to move away. She looked for places to bug. The office she was in had a trio of metal desks and stacks of correspondence. Definitely not the lead doctor's office.

She worked her way through various offices before she heard a noise. One of the hospital attendants must be making evening rounds. She ducked into the records room, a dismal land of moldy smelling file cabinets with a battered desk and a huge desktop in the middle. The woman slid in behind the computer desk and uncovered the guts of the computer sufficiently to hook in a device given to her by Birkhoff.

"Birkhoff. Its in." Nikita announced into her comm unit.

"Uploading and running files with everything we've got. Maybe something will pop out," he responded after a moment.

Nikita frowned. "Doubt it but what the hell. Got the offices. Going to see how close I can get to the patient wards."

"Just don't end up getting locked in." Birkhoff joked.

Nikita ducked into a broom closet as she spotted an orderly pulling out a cell phone. "Amanda," he started," Our friend in thirty six had another nightmare. Doctor wants her on sleep meds for a few days." He listened for long moments. "Placebo for the girl. Got it." His voice faded out as he continued down the hall, his keys jangling in the otherwise quiet hall.

Nikita frowned. Girl in 36. She chewed her lip. If Amanda was interested in this woman, she had to find out why. Nikita peeked out and caught sight of the nurses station. Two were locked in the booth surrounded by glass with chicken wire and watching television together. She crawled under the glass
in the station and moved down toward the hall slowly trying to not squeak shoes on the shining
linoleum. She looked up and around. Motion detectors and a lock on the door. She smiled. Taking
out a racquetball, she threw it as she picked the lock and slid into the hall. Every motion detector
went off at once while she crouched in the corner near the hinge side of the door. She smiled as the
personnel pounded up and then wandered away bitching loudly about old ass systems.

Nikita sped down the hall and peeked in a window to see a weeping woman her dark hair curtaining
her face. Room 36. Why was this woman so special to Amanda? The woman raised her face for a
moment. Nikita's breath caught and she heard crepe soles and jangly keys. Time for another walk
through. Nikita sped down the hall and slid into a dark corner of the art room.

"Nikita, you aren't going to believe this," came Birkhoff's hushed voice.

"Alex is here," Nikita answered quietly.

"File has her as Alex Smith but yeah, she fits the profile but there isn't a picture on file. Nikki...She's
supposed to be dead. If we were wrong and Amanda's had her all this time...I-

Nikita looked out as the orderlies passed. "I can't leave her here."

"You are not going to get her out as is. She is on enough meds to make an elephant limp." Birkhoff
read through the file. "She's scheduled for ECT in three days. Nikki...it's not her first round of
treatments. It's not even her third. This girl has been getting an unethical amount of brain fry. We
have til then to get her out. We need a plan. I'll get everyone..."

"No..." she broke in suddenly, "We need a plan, but something is weird about this. Keep it quiet
until we are sure." With a deep feeling of regret, Nikita crept away.
Chapter 15

Caitlin threw her head back and laughed as Rachel drove the boat. She spun the wheel rocking the two of them first right then left. They had begun the day with a bit of sunbathing and picnicking on a tiny island just off the coast.

"What the hell was that for?" called out the other woman.

"Had sand in... uncomfortable places," she called back.

Caitlin wrapped arms around her. "Shouldn't have seduced me on a beach then Miss Thang." She kissed Caitlin's temple. "Are we going to make a dinner reservation?"

"I'll be sure to make one after you ram the dock." Caitlin called out.

"Oops," called Rachel as she spun tightly sending up a wave. She giggled as she adjusted their approach and shut down the engine.

Rachel leaped off the speed boat and hitting the dock secured the ropes tossed to her by Caitlin. She laughed. "I see I am going to be doing all the heavy lifting in this relationship." She pulled at her shirt which was glued in spots to her skin by spray. She was smiling widely at another beautiful day.

"Not so much come nightfall," Caitlin retorted. She bounced out of the boat onto the end of the wooden dock and slipped her hand through Rachel's elbow as she stood after the last rope had been wound around the last cleat.

Rachel smacked her arm. "Are you saying I'm heavy?" She loved their easy conversation. A gull glided low overhead as she watched.

Caitlin laughed her throaty laugh and sliding her hand down along Rachel's arm, she spun Rachel. "You are light as a feather." She kissed Rachel's cheek. She looked up and waved. "Hey Nikita," she called out. "I'm going to take a shower and make those reservations we talked about," she added in a conversational tone. She whistled as she imaged a poorly lit restaurant and a well lit smile from her date. She waved as she passed Nikita.

Rachel walked up to Nikita and took in her tight facial expression and frowned. "Nikita, what's going on?" Her arms crossed in front of her as she took in the unhappy body language of the other woman. She was pretty sure she wasn't going to like this.

Nikita turned and watched Caitlin bouncing up the steps toward the house. She turned back. She looked as if she would speak and then licked her lips looking down. She couldn't do it. She couldn't hurt Rachel again until she knew what was happening. For all she knew Amanda had surgically altered some girl to look like Alex or something. She forced a smile and shook her head. "I was just having a bad day, and was in the area so I thought I'd check on you... Looks like you two had fun."

Rachel's smile spread. "We did. Thank you for helping me, getting me back out there." She hugged Nikita tight. "If you need help with your bad day let me know okay? I owe you so much." Her hand moved to squeeze Nikita's upper arm.

Nikita shook her head and pulled back. "You have plans. Go. I'll see you at the office tomorrow. Have a good night." She was being eaten up by thinking of what would happen if Alex was alive.
and Amanda had her and … Just when Rachel was getting her life back.

Nodding Rachel shouldered a duffle and patted Nikita's shoulder as she passed. "You and Michael should have a night on the town. Decompress." She smiled. She worried for her friend.

"Maybe you're right," Nikita said quietly. Nikita watched until she lost sight of Rachel. Pulling her phone, she dialed out."Birkhoff its me."

"Did you tell her?" He asked after a moments hesitation. He was uncertain about all this as well.

"What if its a classic Amanda mind fuck. We need to get this Alex Smith out of the hospital and somewhere isolated. We can't get Rachel's hopes up until we know the truth." Nikita rubbed her temple. She was getting a massive headache thinking about all this.

"Hope you're right. Rachel is not going to be a fun friend if she finds out we held out and it turns out to really be Alex."

"Don't you think I know that? I'm the one that brought Caitlin back here...Try to find Amanda's orderly and let's get together a plan to take them both. We need answers and Alex may be too medicated to help."

"So we get all good cop bad cop on the nurse? Sounds fun." He sounded puckish through the phone.

"I'll be the bad cop. You be the Nerd and you stay the hell out of my way. I need to know what the hell is going on now."

Birkhoff's eyes widened. "Copy that."
Chapter 16

Amanda found Alexandra in the day room. She smiled at the younger woman who was looking out a window. She no longer had interest in fighting over tv channels with any of the other patients. Amanda approached her and waited until their eyes met. "Come with me," she said quietly.

Alex rose and followed her slowly. "Where are we going?"

Amanda led her to the opposite end of the building and opened a door. It was a sunlight room as large as the day room but with no furniture. The floors were covered by mats and bordered by stacks of more mats. A familiar orderly stood at the far end in work out clothes. Alex looked at Amanda curiously.

The older woman turned to her. "You have been out of the game for quite some time now Alexandra. This gentleman here will be helping you. Simply... trust your instincts. I will return in an hour to accompany you back to your room." With that Amanda stroked her shoulder. "You are ready," Amanda said. "Show him what you are capable of." She leaned into Alex's ear. "Show no mercy."

Alex drew back to look at her face. "I..."

Amanda stroked her face. "He is a liability, that is why he was put here. He has been selling us out and as you were, you were incapable of giving him anything to sell. Trust your instincts. I want to take you home, my Alexandra but I need to know that the Alexandra who made this country safe is still within you."

Alex nodded. She needed to be out of here. She closed her eyes. She would trust this woman who had been beside her. She would unleash the killer a second time between these walls. Bright eyes opened and appraised the man across from her. She would spar to loosen up but sooner or later her instincts would wake and she would ensure this man was no longer a danger.

Percy smiled as Amanda joined him behind the mirror. "You really think this is an adequate test?"

Amanda watched intently. "Of her total commitment? No. Whether she trusts me enough to get her there? Very much so. If she passes, we will remove her for proper retraining and put her on low value jobs with distinct overtones of patriotism woven into the narrative. When she is secure in her identity, which is simply her original identity with a new brand name, we send her in to clear out Nikita's little clubhouse."

"Our clubhouse," he corrected.

Amanda smiled. "Soon enough."

The orderly bounced up and down lightly before circling. "So I hear you were one of the top dogs in the day." He chuckled. "Day is done." He closed and hit her with two quick raps to the chin.

Alex shook her head and bounced back a step. She circled slowly. Trust instincts. Trust instincts. She repeated to herself. Her forearm shot up to brush back a blow, just a fraction too slow. Her head whipped back from the blow. Her body followed to the mat.

"Just a little girl... Hardly worth the effort," the orderly groused as he left his fighting stance to put hands on hips.
Alexandra spat out a mouthful of blood. She pushed herself up. "No, you're not," she retorted as she stood up.

He snarled and began circling again.

Amanda nodded. "She just woke up."

"Reflexes are slow," noted Percy.

"Not for long." Amanda moved to the side to pour a cup of coffee.

They watched as the blows came faster and more frequently. The cold smile as Alex's foot smashed the hospital attendant's knee would have made a shark think twice. The orderly was all about bent pride at this point however and didn't notice the smile. He roared.

She smashed the same knee a second time before putting her fist into his stomach and double tapping his face firmly. He was bent almost double trying to catch his breath when she landed on his back. Alex wrapped legs around him and began pulling and throttling his throat. Applying the leverage from her grip, she heard a crack before he fell to the mat.

Amanda took a sip. "Lacking in subtlety, but a positive result. I look forward to honing the blade."

Percy nodded. "I look forward to Nikita bleeding at my feet." He began to walk to the door. "Move her in two days after the current series of jobs." He opened the door and began moving down the hall toward the stairs.

Amanda rejoined her smiling. "Well done Alexandra." She looked at the corpse with clinical detachment. "Tomorrow I will introduce you to your physical therapist. She will prepare you for renewing your life in the field. You will relearn movement, breathing. I found a therapist who will be able to also help you with your martial arts practices. Your fighting skills rehoned, you will come to know the faces of the enemy and you will rejoin the world of the living."

"You're leaving?"

Amanda smiled at the slight plaintive tone. "You my dear friend Alexandra will always be close in my heart, but you are now ready for more than I can offer. I must lend myself to the good fight, continue the work. My time will be scarcer and your need greater." Amanda moved forward and laid her lips lightly on Alex's temple. "I will remain close," she whispered with a smile and a soft tone. "Grace will take good care of you."

Alexandra moved to the window. Her emotions torn over her own ability to kill with little remorse. She had sat in darkness long after Amanda had left. Alex fretted at the thought of the sole familiar person in the world not being there as often when she woke. Her brow knit as her eyes scanned over the long lawn. She caught sight of a figure crouching low and running toward the building. She watched curiously as a rope fired up past her window toward the roof. Her face tightened.

Amanda had told her that she was the sole spy in the building. The others were the usual assortment of psychiatric patients that one would find in this place. Amanda said they would send a van when they were to move her in a couple days. This stank of cloak and dagger and not one van in sight. She nodded. She would attempt to be out of the room before the spider got up this high and if that failed, well, her instincts were working better now.
Amanda smirked as she watched several screens. Alexandra's hands had tightened into fists. She was going to fight if the shadowy figure came in after her. On another screen, a replay of the previous visit by a woman who appeared to be Nikita herself. She was climbing the outside toward the room Alex had been in.

Amanda poured her tea and crossed her ankles as she slid back to watch the show. The hospital had ancient security. She had added a few cams when she checked Alexandra in to the asylum. Nothing on radar until the last week. Suddenly, cameras had joined hers and someone had lurked outside Alexandra's room.

They would know the truth of Alex's survival soon enough, but it would be on her and Percy's terms and in their time. Amanda smiled satisfied as Nikita burned through the bars of the window on the room in which she had seen Alex during her last visit.

Nikita dropped the bar sections into her bag before she raised the window. The woman she was looking for was standing in the shadows in the corner. "Alex," she whispered. "It's me."

The woman stepped forward and stared at her. Her mouth hung open and she slowly moved her finger to Nikita to touch her as if checking her reality. Nikita's face twisted before she reached for her comm. "Birkhoff... It's not her."

"Are you sure?"

Nikita bit back a sob. "Yes... Yes, I'm sure."

Alex tried to adjust herself to see what was going on the next window over but she couldn't get the angle right. Amanda had moved her room. Was it to save her from attack by the other group she had mentioned? She figured as much.

Amanda raised her teacup to the intrepid Nikita lowering herself on the screen. "Cheers. We will see you very soon."

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Nikita frowned into her glass. "Thank God we didn't get everyone involved here."

Birkhoff folded his arms. "Rachel would've-." He leaned forward and drank deeply from his mug of lukewarm coffee.

Nikita frowned. "I know." She looked around at the dark office. "Let's go out and get a real drink."

He nodded, following her out of the office.
Alexandra woke bleary and slow at the sound of her door unlocking and opening. Her head turned slowly to see a shadow. She blinked her eyes clear, and looked over to see a woman walk in with a confident stride. She was wearing a very distressed WW1 Imperial German flying jacket and looking around the room slowly. Her eyes opened a fraction wider as she saw Alex looking at her. Shrugging off her coat and pushing her glossy raven black hair out of her face. "Good morning, Alexandra," the stranger offered quietly with a half smile. Her blue eyes were luminous in the early morning sun coming through the window.

Frowning, Alex sat up. "I'm guessing you are Grace?" she asked, her voice still rough and sleepy sounding after her restless sleep. She pushed her feet out from under the washed out looking institution issued blanket and to the floor. She cringed at the cold linoleum stabbing her toes before sliding her feet into scuff slippers. When she looked up from her feet the aged leather jacket was draped over the desk.

Grace nodded and sat in the wooden chair she dragged from under the shelf desk nearby. She crossed her long denim clad legs and smoothed the front of her lavender silk shell as she relaxed back against the less than comfortable back. "I'll be your physical trainer and over all handler from this day forward. We have a couple days before you get moved and I intend to get you well on your way physically. I am told that you are already quite gifted, but that you merely need to remember just how skilled you are. So consider me your hand holder and ass kicker from now on Alexandra."

Grace smiled companionably. She cocked her head slightly as if waiting for a response of some consequence.

Alex focused on the other woman's face for long moments. She decided to try blunt. Ass kicker did not seem to indicate friendship in the offing. "How do I know you are qualified for the job? For all I know they gave you this job because you suck in the field. Tell me about yourself, Grace." She stretched slowly trying to wake up fully. "You get on Amanda's bad side? She want me to kill you, too?"

Grace smiled tightly. "If you want to be on my good side? Talking about the extraneous bullshit and speculating on my past is not a good start. Get dressed. Breakfast in ten and then I will be kicking your ass around for a while."

Alex stretched out her legs with a yawn. Breakfast had been the usual bore, but at least she had a new routine to look forward to now. Her eyes slowly followed Grace through her moves. She wanted to know more about this woman. "So... you are a physical trainer? What's your philosophy?"

Grace's brow rose. "I kick your ass every time you try to shirk off."

Is that a philosophy or a modus operandi?" Alex couldn't help it. She just wanted to bug this woman. She was not expecting her this morning. She may be adaptable when it came to surprises, she wouldn't know, as little as she remembered about herself, but she was currently not fond of them. Alexandra found herself regretting her smart ass start to the day. When she was about to reach the end of her energy, Grace would proceed to change forms of exercise. They ran, stretched and
sparred. The instincts that took out the bastard orderly were not finely tuned enough to keep up with the powerhouse.

Alex chuckled as she eventually slid down a wall. "Want to go out for drinks sometime?" she asked trying to throw the other woman off balance. She lightly rubbed one of her new set of bruises as she looked up through her eyelashes.

Grace looked over frowning. She had to keep to a tight rope to start. Stand off a bit, but leave a door open to later moves by Alex or herself. "Get up and lets go again. You move like a ninety year old smoker with one leg." She shifted her center of gravity down in preparation to fight the other woman. She waited a few heartbeats. "I.. We need to focus right now." She tried to broadcast vulnerability.

Alex noted it. "I can do focus," she replied quietly. She gathered herself and prepared for another onslaught. There was something about this woman. Intriguing. Alex went down hard on the mat and tried to get her breath back. Grace stood over her with a smirk.

Sighing, Grace extended her hand. "We have a lot of work to do." She offered a tentative smile. "Give it another go and then we'll eat."
Alex took her hand. It was warm and gentle, though she could feel the slight callouses she could see ghosts of in her own hands. She allowed herself to be guided up. "Free afternoon?"

Grace shook her head. "No. But... how about if I promise not to kick you in the stomach after you've eaten lunch."

"That'll have to do."

Grace frowned. She knew about the orderly. She knew that Alex's instincts were just under the surface and that is what she needed to see. How to get them to rise without an up swell of anger...
"No promises for before." She moved right as the other woman got herself set again. A quick flick flurry of kicks greeted Alex. She wheeled back clumsily.

Alex's face set. She could play hard. She went back in fighting. She felt her frustration rising but instead of getting sloppier, she felt herself getting tighter, more powerful. It was like a drug singing in her veins. She couldn't remember her past, but suddenly she was remembering the skills she possessed. Like a flood, it was all coming back to her now. Every skill set she held from the past. It was a blood tinged tsunami rising in her.
Chapter 18

Alexandra flipped her grip on the knife smoothly. She smiled and circled left. Grace crouched low and took up her knife again. "You will be in the field before you know it." she noted keeping her eyes on the other woman. Give a little confidence, hand out a little asswhipping, now to get the baby duck to jump her properly. This was not one of Grace's tougher assignments.

Alex cocked her head. "You think I'm ready?"

Grace barked out a laugh. "I didn't say that. I need to see some fire first."

Alex roared and took a sudden leap toward Grace, who backed up half a step before realizing that Alex was yanking her chain and standing still a few feet away with a grin on her face. "You want fire or you want effective?" Alex asked with a raised brow.

Grace nodded with a grin. "I like it when you get tight."

The other woman sidled up. "I have been working out with you for weeks and that is the first real compliment I've gotten out of you."

Grace cocked her head. "I want your body honed, not your head inflated."

"I can do honed," Alex responded, as she stepped even closer. She took Grace's raised brow as a challenge and leaned in to kiss the other woman. She brushed her lips against Grace's tentatively, then returned for a brief though deeper taste of those lips.

Grace looked at her appraisingly. Alex's face flickered nervousness for a moment. "Just a kiss, it doesn't have to mean anything." she said sliding her hands into the pathetically shallow pockets of her sweats.

Grace's lips curled. "Well that would be a pity. Get a girl interested in a little more... horizontal form of exercise and leave her all lathered up and hanging? Kind of rude there."

Alex's smile returned, the caddish one that had preceded their first kiss. "I may not remember much, but I know I'm not the type to leave a woman hanging." She stepped forward again, her body a breath away from Grace's. Her fingertips slid down over the lycra that Grace wore.

Grace's lips curled. "Well that would be a pity. Get a girl interested in a little more... horizontal form of exercise and leave her all lathered up and hanging? Kind of rude there."

Alex yanked down the shoulder straps of the leotard and twisted Grace's wrists in them. Grace's eyes flew open and she bucked slightly against the binding straps. "Hey," she yelped.

Alexandra pressed a hand against Grace's stomach. "Not a word," she growled. She forced Grace back step by step until she fell against a pile of mats that had sat in the corner waiting for their occasional spritz of disinfectant.

Grace looked up and starting to sit up was pushed down firmly but not painfully. Alexandra's face took on a strange composed look. She was in her zone. Grace pressed up against the restraining hand. Not hard. She wasn't fighting. She was merely letting Alex know she was looking for her
boundaries. This was the dance she had been expecting. The woman now moving to straddle her hips was the woman that she had been told would come out eventually.

Alexandra leaned in and took command of Grace's mouth with a rapacious hunger. Her fingers twisted the woman's left nipple swallowing the sounds that came with that touch. After weeks of long daily work outs and training sessions with Grace, Alex knew that this is what she had been craving, needing. She needed to conquer, to own this woman's body.

She broke off contact and stood. Alex pulled off her shirt and bra and after neatly disposing of them she removed the rest of her clothes. She stood staring at Grace who was looking at her hungrily, her eyes devouring Alex.

"You're a little over dressed. Let's see what we can do about that." Alexandra stalked forward, her eyes burning with desire.

Alex hastily yanked off Grace's remaining clothing, leaving her in just her panties. "Put your hands up," she commanded. Grace obliged as Alexandra held both of her wrists in one hand and leaned in to whisper in Grace's ear. "Here... I am the one in control." She grinned as her eyes and hand explored Grace's well sculpted body. Her hand stroked breasts, squeezed nipples, caressed ribs, and moved down the other woman's back until she gripped her backside in one strong hand.

Alexandra's free hand slid under the waistband of Grace's panties and traveled down until it reached her center. Her mouth fell over Grace's, her tongue exploring the crease of her lips before she pushed inside and Grace's body arched. She gasped as Alex entered her with two fingers, her head spinning wildly as she realized just how much she wanted her younger charge. Alex's fingers slid deeper inside her and unearthed her wetness, using it to glide her thumb in circles over her hard nub. Alexandra's mouth moved to her jaw then on to the sensitive spot where her neck met her shoulder. Grace gripped tightly to her neck as Alex picked up the pace with a strong, fast rhythm. Throwing her head back with a moan, she begged in a whisper for more. Alex licked the hollow of Grace's neck as she drove deeper into her.

Alex suddenly slowed her pace in a teasing manner, holding her close to the edge of orgasm, but refusing to let her fall over. Grace pushed up against the other woman's fingers trying to bring her release. Alex smiled and began to fuck her hard again. Stars exploded behind Grace's eyes and she lay there panting for long moments. "Not bad for a woman who's been out of the world awhile," Grace said breathlessly.

She turned her head as she watched Alexandra walk naked across the floor to the equipment locker. "Bet you can't wait to see what I can do with the rest of the equipment," Alex noted quietly. She turned and looked at Grace with dark eyes.

"That's a bet you'd win," Grace replied just as quietly.
Caitlin chewed her lip and stopped before they reached the cars in the parking lot. She turned to Rachel and stared for a few seconds. "I know we had plans tonight..." she trailed off looking for the right way to bring up what she had planned to tell the other woman.

Rachel looked up frowning from her bag. "Are you standing me up?" She pulled out her Giorgio Armani sunglasses and put them on her head for the drive home.

Caitlin shook her head. "No. It's just... If... I..." She looked down at her boots for long moments before looking up again. "There is someone I want you to meet." Caitlin fidgeted with her key chain as she tried to look cool in the face of this particular conversation.

Cocking her head, Rachel looked at the other woman. "You act like I am meeting your parents or something. Since we're both Division, I know that can't be the case... so, what's up?" Now she was getting nervous. What in the world was going on, Rachel thought.

Caitlin's lips quirked. "Or what pretty much covers it." She dangled the keys nervously in her fingers. "I'm driving." She hit the alarm button and at the beep beep she opened the doors. She slid in and put her key in the ignition. Busying herself helped with the nervousness. She worried that what she had to tell Rachel could ruin their relationship in an instant. She wondered how to broach the topic, as she stared at the steering wheel.

"You're going to give me plenty of time to be nervous, aren't you?" Rachel asked with a grin as she slid in and reached for her seat belt.

Caitlin looked across the car at her date. "Better you than me," she replied with a wink.

Rachel looked around curiously as they drove out of the apartment buildings and condos that defined the area. "So..Where are we headed?"

"I have to pick the surprise guest up, and I thought we would go somewhere for dinner." Caitlin announced as she carefully dodged through the evening rush.

"A threesome?" Rachel grinned. "Why Caitlin, I had no idea."

Caitlin chuckled. "Behave or I will let him pick the restaurant."

Rachel frowned. "Him? Who are we talking about here Caitlin? What's going on?"

She cleared her throat. "I had a sister."

Rachel frowned. "Him? Who are we talking about here Caitlin? What's going on?"

She cleared her throat. "I had a sister."

Rachel looked over at her frowning. "Had?"

"She passed away some time ago." Caitlin frowned, gripping the wheel. "We were very close when we were little. I guess we drifted apart when we were teenagers, I got caught up with a bad crowd, and one thing led to another and I ended up at Division. You know that story. Anyway... When I left Division I broke the cardinal rule. I reconnected with my old life... not all of it, just my sister."

Caitlin paused as she choked back tears.

"I'm so glad that I reconnected with her, Rachel, because I got to spend the last few months of her
She was already quite ill when I learned about it, but as painful as that was for us both it was also a gift." Her eyes darted over to Rachel as she finished explaining.

"What was wrong with her?"

"Cancer."

"Oh," Rachel grasped around for something to say to that. "Caitlin, I-I'm so sorry. I-"

Caitlin watched her struggle with what to say next. "Rebecca is gone now, but she left me something on her death bed... something very special... Someone...very special." She looked in the mirror trying to drive and see Rachel's face at the same time.

"Someone?"

"I have a son now, Rachel."

Rachel felt like a fish, gasping on a pier. She looked over wide-eyed. "A son?"

Caitlin nodded and smiled proudly. "He just turned four and he's cute as a button."

"A son." Rachel repeated, trying to grasp the situation.

"He changed my life, my priorities. I couldn't be happier about that, Rachel. He means the world to me... I want the two most important people in my life to get to know each other."

"And Nikita...she let you in the field knowing this?" Rachel was truthfully more boggled by Cait being allowed in the field as a Mom than Cait being a Mom... though it was a close one.

"She doesn't know and you aren't going to tell her... not now... not yet. The fieldwork... its temporary. I don't want any problems before its all done."

Caitlin frowned. "You won't tell her will you, Rachel?"

Rachel shook her head lightly. "You must have your reasons... right?"

Caitlin took a long slow breath. "One or two," she responded lightly. "I'm looking at one right now."

Silence fell between them. Rachel stared out the passenger window.

"Rachel, if its too much... I'll understand. I know this isn't fair to you. I've been wanting to tell you for months, but I was afraid of losing you all over again, and now that things are serious between us you deserve the truth. I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you, and I hope one day when you look at my little boy you will see him as your own."

Caitlin looked at Rachel. Her expression was unreadable. She continued looking out of the window in silence.

"I'll understand if you want to stop seeing me, Rachel."

Rachel leaned her head back into the seat rest. "Do me a favor..."

"Anything Rachel, you know that."

"Stop by the pharmacy. I should pick up some antacids if we're going to one of those pizza places with the animatronics." Rachel smiled at the woman beside her. Could she really have a future with
Caitlin? The possibility of motherhood, though frightening, didn't sound like the worst thing in the world. She wove her fingers into Caitlin's and squeezed gently. She was worried about her lover and now her lover's son. The life they were in was unforgiving. She tried to keep her expression light.

Caitlin beamed. "Your wish is my command m'lady."
Amanda walked slowly around Alexandra. She smiled eventually. "You seem... more centered Alexandra. I am gratified to see that.

Alex grinned. "Getting my body back in order kind of helped my mind." She smiled over at Grace standing in the corner. Amanda's eyes followed hers, a brow raising. Grace gave a barely perceptible nod.

Amanda sighed. "You will still need to take it slow and easy sliding back into the life. I have a job I believe will suit."

"I can do whatever it takes Amanda. I'm ready," Alex stated confidently.

They soon left the office, folder in hand. The new facility was all concrete and steel and Alex craned her head back and forth trying to take it all in. Amanda had said that the black hats had taken the original facility. She shook her head. "What?" she asked as she realized Grace was talking.

Grace frowned. "I was asking if you were ready for a job that probably has a fatality at the end of it."

Alex stopped. "Those bastards are trying to steal defense secrets. Thousands could die if we don't do this."

Grace smiled. "Let's go gear up then. We have a long night ahead of us."

Grace gave a half smile as she zipped up her jacket. "You need to settle down now Alexandra." She had been watching Alex fidget as she got ready for the OP. She had checked and rechecked her weapon three times already.

Alex looked over and put her hands in her light jacket's pockets. "I can't remember the last time I did this."

Grace smiled and ran her hands up and down Alexandra's arms. "It will be fine. Like falling off a log."

Alex looked back at her thoughtfully. "Not much like it."

The other woman moved in closer. "I've got your back. Amanda's got both our backs. We will take out this guy and..." she trailed off with a seductive smile.

Alex felt her center shift. She couldn't know that phrase from her last day of her old life, but she felt it set her off balance for a moment. She didn't know why she felt crazy for a moment, but it was time to strap on. She got a hold of herself and nodded curtly. "Let's get this job done. I want to get back to business as usual." She pulled out a balaclava from her back pocket. "Just don't want to be wearing this annoying thing."

Grace shook her head with a smile. "You have a very useful face. You need to keep from burning it
in the circles we move in." She rolled a car key around her finger. "Are you ready to get your stripes back Tiger?"

Alex grinned tightly. "That's Merlin to you." She slid into the car in the dark underground garage, her grip tight on the balaclava. She was fairly vibrating with her nervous energy. This was to be a glorified smash and grab, but she was but a little scared.

Grace got in and started the engine. "Team One rolling," she announced squeezing Alex's spare hand before putting the hand back on the car wheel.

A young man came out over their ear pieces. "Target vehicle is at Fourth and North headed east. It is projected to reach the warehouse district in five. Status?"

Grace checked their GPS. "We will intercept as soon as its in the district."

"Maximum force is authorized. Get the case and make sure there are no witnesses Team One."

Amanda back in the high tech lair smiled as seconds passed. Percy nodded. "She's not fighting it."

"True test will be the trigger," Amanda noted. "But given how stubborn she is, if she had a problem, she would have kicked at a kill order the first trip out." She crossed her arms and watched the screen in Percy's office. On the floor below the tech team was guiding Alex and Grace in their pursuit.

Grace's eyes narrowed. "We have visual."

Alex checked her seat belt. She knew what was coming and she was not happy about it. She pulled on the balaclava and pulled out her weapon before bringing down her window. They came abreast the target car and she shot the tires. Grace accelerated hard to get past the car before it skidded and flipped. She hit the brakes hard and palmed the wheel. "Do it."

Alex took a deep breath and ran for the car. She slid along the broken road to reach into the upside down machine. A young man dressed in black with blood painting ribbons on his face hung upside down. He was desperately trying to get unclasped from the safety belt. She reached in, her hand hanging mid air a moment as he began to speak.

"Ops ... help... me," his broken voice begged to an equally broken comm to Division.

She looked at him sadly and grabbed the case from where it landed on the car roof. "They can't help now.," she whispered before a thrwip announced the bullet leaving her silenced Glock for his temple. "Secured the case," she announced. She looked around. "Damn." She threw the case in the open window of the car. "Got a witness, pursuing." Alex ran down an alley dodging cans. A small hooded figure stopped at a wall and tried to jump high enough to pull itself over. Alex stopped and raised her weapon, the once again disengaged safety making a click. It wasn't loud, but it was enough. The figure turned.

A teen girl slowly slid down the wall, her hands held out in front. She whimpered, tears already running down a filthy face for a torn nylon flight jacket. Her feet in holey tennis shoes drew in close to her body as if the imposition of limbs could stop the bullet. Alex looked at her. Grace came through her comm. "Status Merlin."

Alexandra held a finger in front of her balaclava obscured mouth, silencing the girl. She fired her weapon into the ground. "All clear." She switched off her comm and looked at the girl. "Say anything and I will find you and put a bullet in your head." She switched it back on and ran back to the car and the waiting Grace.
Chapter 21

Grace leaned back against the concrete wall and took a big bite of Fuji apple, as she waited for Alexandra to put her leather jacket in the locker. She chewed contemplatively while she gazed. The younger woman had been very quiet on the way back and remained silent in the locker room. "What?" she finally asked, her gaze searching and concerned.

Alex looked over startled. "What? I don't know what you mean?" She began turning up the sleeves of her shirt. Alexandra flipped over the cloth precisely as she turned blue eyes back to the task. Letting that teen girl run could cost her everything. She was a dead woman if she let them read that on her face, and as much as she would like to trust Grace, she knew they weren't fully there yet.

"You've been... distant all the way back, Alexandra. Tell me what's on your mind?" Grace stood upright and stepped over to brush fingertips along Alex's forearm. She smiled in what she hoped was an encouraging way.

Alexandra shrugged. Her eyes drifted down. She didn't want this woman to read what she had done. "I was... this was my first time back in the field. I'm just trying to ... run it through in my mind. I'm processing, that's all." She plucked the apple from Grace's fingers faking a devil-may-care grin. "I need to become the best again, and I need to analyze my performance to get there."

Grace couldn't put her finger on it, but something here was just off. She made a note to watch Alexandra more closely. She plucked the apple back as Alex took a bite. "That is what you have me for, Alexandra. You did very well out there, now let's go tell the queen pain in my ass how things went," she suggested puckishly.

Alex lifted her head to gaze back at her. "You should be nicer about Amanda."

Grace made kissing noises before rolling her eyes at the younger woman. "Let's get this done. Maybe we can make it to a club before we have to turn around for the next job."

Alex cringed slightly as they walked. "I don't think I'm supposed to get drunk. Amanda said..."

"Amanda said.. pfah. Amanda is your problem on the clock. I am your problem around the clock." Grace grinned as she slid a hand in Alex's back pocket. Alex turned into her. Grace's warm lips met her own before Alex pushed the other woman into the locker, pinning her and gripping the sides of her face. Grace moaned as Alex roughly slid her fingers down her body and up her inner thigh.

"Here?" Grace moaned against her lips. "What about our debrief?"

Alex pulled back. "I am going to fuck you against this locker, then we can debrief with Amanda and go make trouble in the city," Alex grinned, pressing their lips together in a passionate kiss.

Amanda stared at the desk top screen. She clicked through page after page of computer files. Percy sat nearby in a throne like Louis XV chair contemplating the outcome of Alexandra's mission.
"Alexandra is coming along well. She didn't hesitate to do her duty. I'm pleased."

Amanda's eyes darted between the computer screen and Percy. "Agreed."

"She will be needed sooner rather than later," he responded, his forefinger tapping gently on the end of the armrest.

"We need to finish testing her properly first. I will send her into a fight with people she would know... Keep Grace at her back to aid her or put her down if there is any... difficulty." Amanda sipped her tea.

Percy leaned back into his chair. "Do you think it likely that she will break?"

Amanda's lips curled. "She's ready. I do not see a cancellation in Ms. Udinov's immediate future. We will give her a few more days to settle in here... then throw her into the big show, high stakes work, face to face with known Division operatives. That will be all the test we need to ensure her readiness... and then -"

"And then... we send her for Nikita and her inner circle." Percy smiled.

Nikita paced back and forth across the office floor. Rachel looked over at Caitlin who shook her head almost invisibly. Rachel twirled her hair, anxiously. She wanted Nikita to know about Caitlin's son. She knew that Caitlin was only in danger because she wanted to protect her in the field. She didn't know how, but she wanted to protect Caitlin and her son, but she couldn't tell anyone without Caitlin's okay. Nikita turned on her heel and stopped. Caitlin and Rachel turned eyes toward her.

"That should have been an easy run," Nikita shook her head. "No one should have known about the drop much less the run." She rubbed her forehead. "If I thought for one moment..."

"He did not die because of anything you did Nikita. It is not your fault," Rachel said quietly.

"Mole?" Caitlin asked. She looked out of the office window toward the rest of the facility. "If there is a mole inside Division," she began.

Nikita's face hardened. "Then we will find the vermin. We may need you two to run a few blanks."

Caitlin turned back toward Nikita. "Blanks?"

Rachel turned to Caitlin to answer. "Fake missions to draw out the black hats."

Nikita nodded at the younger woman. "I trust you. I trust me. We tell no one, but our inner circle. We will smoke the mole out."

Rachel looked out into the corridor. "How do we begin?"

Nikita sighed and sent a text message to Birkhoff calling him into the office. "We begin with a very convincing story. Something good with expensive hardware."

"What kind of story do you have in mind?" Caitlin asked.

"The kind that sets a trap for our rat." Nikita smiled. "I need to brief Michael and the others first... if
it is a mole... we will find him or her... and use the rat to our advantage."
Rachel stuffed her hands in the pocket of her black hoodie and puffed out a breath. She looked over at Caitlin who was waking up her device. "You need to pull out of this Cait. Please, you have a child at home to take care of ... and that is far more important than the risk of field work." She pulled her hands free of the sweatshirt pocket and nervously tapped at her leg. She didn't like this at all. She had lost Alex in the field, and like hell if she was also losing Caitlin to this life.

Caitlin looked up, her brows knit. "Rachel, we already discussed this. Do you think that I would be okay letting you go into these things without back up?" She tapped the screen bringing up the link to Birkhoff and Nikita back at Division. She took a moment to look up at Rachel, her finger hovering over the final keystroke.

Rachel saw the fierce expression on Caitlin's face and looked down. "Just ... be careful. Just because it is a fake mission doesn't make it any less dangerous. You have a child waiting for you at home. He needs you... I ... need you."

Caitlin smiled. "Speaking of home ... I know this is not the time or the place, but I have something to ask you." Caitlin paused.

"Okay, so ask?" Rachel looked at her confused.

"Rachel, I'd like it if you moved in with me ... with us."

"Caitlin ... I -"

"Rachel, I love you... and when I said forever I meant it. You don't have to answer right away. Take all the time you need. Just promise me you will at least think about it?"

Rachel smiled. "I'll let you know at dinner tonight. I'm making your favorite. How does seven sound?"

Caitlin nodded and hit the final stroke. "Birkhoff."

"It's about time. You two take time off for a little adult one on one?" he asked grumpily.

Rachel half smiled. "Don't give us shit for the planning at your end Sunshine."

Birkhoff eeped as Nikita thumped the back of his head. She leaned toward the camera. "We ran the jobs through a few different sets of eyes. We needed to get it all over the clock. Are you two in place?"

Caitlin nodded. "Ready, Boss. Let's set a mouse trap." She picked up the small shaving kit at her feet. "Zip drive and cash in the bag. We have a clear line of sight to the drop."

Rachel took out her binoculars and scoured the gray beach park. "All quiet." She frowned. "We drop in one, the second team drops in their can and we switch locations and bins. All things considered, it sounds easy enough. How did you find someone you could trust for the second team?"

Nikita chuckled. "Wear your hoods up. We will give all of your familiar faces plausible deniability."
"Copy that."

"Michael," Caitlin said quietly as she spotted a car down at the far end of the lot.

Rachel snorted. "Nice. Are we sure this communication is secure? I would hate it if all of this fake spy stuff had to go to waste."

Birkhoff's face went pale. "Are you doubting my ability to keep rodents out of my computer, young padawan?"

Nikita closed her eyes and shook her head. "Nerd, chill out. It's a fair question. We are dealing with Amanda after all. Everyone focus... Team two is up and ready."

Rachel flipped up the hood on her sweat shirt and waited for Caitlin to do the same. "How many of these fake missions are there?"

Nikita raised her shoulders slightly. "Ryan figures three to get the top suspects, but frankly, as many as we need to flag the rat."

Caitlin smiled. "I love Russian Roulette. Multiple chambers and one bullets. Odds are good. OW." she barked as Rachel thumped her shoulder.

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**Amanda** frowned as she carefully reexamined the readout. "A group of missions, small number of well trusted individuals involved... All of which are in Nikita's personal inner circle. What are you up to now, Nikita..." she trailed off.

Percy sipped at his glass. "Our pet inside Division is due to be debriefed shortly, but has no information as yet on this."

Amanda looked up from her readout. She sensed Percy's anxiety replacing his calm cool exterior. She knew when to be the voice of calm and reason. "It could be any of a number of reasons for this particular series of missions, Percy. Our insider seemed certain that all of these missions were indeed linked. Perhaps an over complicated passing process? The better question might be what they are passing not why they are passing it. I hardly think that it is some form of trap. Even Nikita is capable of more subtlety than that."

Percy crossed his arms. "I want to know the why and the what, Amanda. We have to be prepared for the possibility that she knows we have someone on the inside of Division. We cannot afford a single mistake at this stage of the game. Do I make myself clear?"

"We are already prepared for that possibility. Relax, Percy. They do not know about our mole, and besides, we have a back up plan in place should he be discovered."

Percy unfolded his arms and walked toward the over sized window. "Well then... we need to know what these missions Intel... Sooner rather than later would be good."

Amanda flashed what she hoped was a reassuring smile. "I will get our insider motivated. Fresh Intel or a quick cancellation will be in short order."

"Good." Percy looked out of the window at Alexandra and Grace sparring below. "It could be an
excellent opportunity for young Alexandra."

"It could indeed. I will pull Grace aside tonight." "In the meantime, I will set our mole to work getting enough to thwart our friends at Division." Amanda smiled again before returning to her readout.
Alexandra opened the door and stepped out onto the roof of the former grand hotel that was the base of operations for Amanda and Percy's new organization. She walked to the edge and running her fingers over the wall that surrounded the roof at waist height, she looked out over the city. She smiled as she heard the quiet motor adjusting one of the disguised satellite up-links behind her.

This place was a marvel of in your face nonexistence. A big sign hung on the chain link fence outside the turn of the century hotel. It read: Condos now available. Alex smirked. The sign was practically guaranteed to hang forever outside this externally run down building. If someone gets curious, change the name of the bank and everyone assumes that there was a huge structural fault no one wants to take blame for and thus the building stands in its limbo forever.

The inside of the colossal hotel is something else entirely. Internally, the hotel bore all the hallmarks of an architect with heavy roots in Edwardian England. All of the rooms had exquisite appointments. They may have been webbed and under five inches of dust, but every room spoke of quality. Amanda sealed off all of the rooms facing the street and put windows in the rooms facing the air above the grand ballroom that defied bullets and devices that turned glass vibration into eavesdropping gold.

Alex spent most of her waking hours in the grand ballroom. She and Grace drilled constantly to prepare for her missions. She felt Percy's eyes on her from his perch in the glassed off band stand from which he directed the Organization. His cold stare often left her uneasy.

She looked down to the street again. Few people were aware there was ever anybody in here much less the hive of constant activity. In the Cold War era bunkers were added to this edifice and doors and tunnels leading to underground parking and sub lines for blocks around. Alex didn't know what the owner back then was thinking. It was a big expense in a hotel that had seen better days. Maybe the government helped. She didn't know for certain, but it was an excellent place to put people. Amanda and Percy had shown that magnificently.

"Alexandra... I thought that I might find you up here," Grace said quietly from the door to the stairs. Alex turned, her eyes lustfully wandering over the other woman, who was clad in tight black jeans and a revealing white tank top. Grace leaned against the door frame. She was watching the silent woman at the edge of the roof. "Penny for your thought?"

Alex smiled and walked up to Grace. She hooked her fingers in Grace's waistband and leaned in with a kiss. Grace's fingers tangled in her hair. Long moments passed before Alexandra pulled back. "Let me guess. We have a new job to prep for?"

Grace chuckled. "You think that the only reason that I would look for you is if we had a new job? Maybe, I just wanted something else from you."

Alex raised an eyebrow. "What did you have in mind?"

"Oh, I have all sorts of things in mind."

"Such as?" Alex asked.

"Such as, using that gorgeous body of yours for something other than our next mission." She smiled, her words dripping with dark desire.
Alex grinned. "Think we can find a room without a camera? I am not an exhibitionist."

"I think I may know a tunnel with a cot and no cameras ... if you don't mind a bit of an adventure and a few dust bunnies."

"I am always up for an adventure, besides it won't be the dust bunnies that I'm getting dirty with, Grace," Alex responded. "Lead the way."

Rachel leaned back into her chair and turned a toothpick over and over in her fingers. She watched as Michael and Nikita slowly picked at their food. She had hoped for a more festive and anxiety free zone when she revealed her plan to move in with Caitlin, but the threat of their worst enemy hung in the air threatening to spoil her happy news.

_I will wait until after I move in tomorrow to tell them. The news will come as a pleasant surprise when everyone is more relaxed and less concerned about the mole and Amanda, she thought to herself._

Caitlin strolled back from the hall at the other end of the Italian restaurant. She smiled brightly as she sat down next to her girlfriend. "This is not a funeral is it?" She looked down at herself. "I am vastly under-dressed if it is."

Nikita smiled at her. "Not a funeral... I was just hoping that our mole would be easy to find. I should have known that anything involving Amanda would be more difficult."

"We will find the mole," Michael reassured them. "It will just take a little more time than we planned. Ryan and Birkhoff are on it as we speak."

Rachel put down her toothpick and sipped at her lemon water. "When has anything ever been easy in this business, or with that ... monster." She frowned, trying to pushed thoughts of Alex from her mind, as the pain and anger began to rise. It hurt her too much, knowing that Amanda lived on, still creating chaos, while Alex died an unknown hero. She swore that one day she would see Amanda dead for all that she put them through.

"This last job was easy," Michael joked, taking another bite from his pasta dinner.

"Passing shit from one hand to another is always easy," Caitlin noted. "It's just a matter of time. We will find our rat."

Nikita shrugged and nodded. "Sooner or later, hopefully sooner." Her smile brightened as the waitress came around the corner.

"Let's order another round of drinks."
Chapter 24

There was a heavy smog hanging in the hot still air over the ruins. Alex blinked fiercely at times to keep the acidic and filthy air from drying out her eyes further. She tugged the front of her tank top, her face twisting at the feel of the cloth sticking to her sweat dampened skin. "Status?" she asked, as she continued to walk between rows of marble columns. She slowed slightly as she walked through each shadow seeking some small relief.

Grace came over her comm. "Relax. They are there, but are watching that you are aloneish before they swoop in."

"Too sticky to swoop," Alex muttered. "This smog is melting my eyes," she groused.

A pair of tourists walked down the row of columns opposite snapping pictures. She watched them walk to the small museum at the end of the promenade nattering cheerfully and clicking incessantly. A guard standing in one of the thin shadows of the columns checked his watch and adjusted the strap of his automatic weapon before dropping lightly into the dead dirt a few feet below the lip of the stone walkway, He trotted away soon cresting a small hill. "Showtime," Alex announced.

"Keep it clean," Grace reminded her.

"Yes, Mom," Alex retorted as she swung her fanny back into an easy to reach position.

"Oh, you will pay for that one later. Here they come."

A pair of men, out of place in dark suits made their way up the promenade from the marble stairs at the end. One had his hand stilled on his stomach obviously to be closer to his beloved gun. 'Fast draw,' Alex thought with an inward chuckle.

She slid her aviator sunglasses back on and held open her arms. A thick Russian accent boiled tar like from the tall man's throat. "Money," he said simply.

She held up the innocuous Hello Kitty drive on her bracelet. It contained everything needed to brighten this man's day. His dark eyes narrowed at the cartoon kitty before he held out his hand. Her brows rose. A loud grunt escaped him. The gun man nodded and drew out a larger drive.

Alexandra's lips pursed and she took the drive swiftly connecting it to a small tablet from her pack.

"So... plugging. If the taste is solid, you get paid for the drive and the decryption for the remaining files."

"Do not take your eyes off of them until you get the decryption code," Grace reminded her.

"Right," she groused, as she waited for the transmission.

"It looks good. Give them the money," Grace responded.

Alexandra nodded, sliding the drive and tablet into the fanny pack before offering up the pink Hello Kitty drive. The Russian connected on his own tablet and watched as his bank balance grew very large. He nodded to his gunman.

Seeing the gun man's hand move with purpose to his holster, Alex dived to the side clearing the column in time to hear stone chips ripped away by bullets.
"They fucked us," Alex noted conversationally as she dropped down to the dirt below and pulled a small hand gun and a weight on a filament free of her pack. She swung the weight in small circles as she peeked up.

"Need backup?" Grace asked, though Alexandra's tone had told her the woman had disassociated and was now like a machine in pursuit of her mission. She was in the zone.

"Nope." She needed to give the Russian to Amanda for interrogation, but that would be easy enough. The Russians were walking away with the gun man facing backwards watching for her. She scampered low across the dirt. Drawing close she flung the line, the weight circling the Russian's ankle. He collapsed hard to the stone.

The gun man's eyes traced the line and fired twice trying to keep her head down while he freed his boss. It didn't work. She calmly popped back up and the weapon bucked in her hand dropping the gun man. She pushed herself up and walked to the Russian struggling to rise. She kicked him in the head. "Grace. Get a team in here... and a cleaner. One for removal, one for the cleaner."

Alexandra met Grace at the hotel overlooking the ruins stretching and baking in the sun. Water cascaded down over her brunette hair, rinsing the last of the coconut shampoo from her thick locks. "That was a fucking mess you know." she whispered.

"Come again?" Grace asked, looking up from her computer screen toward the bathroom.

Alexandra pulled her face from the water and turned off the shower, as she reviewed the mission in her mind. "This entire mission was a mess." Alex tossed her long wet hair back, as she stepped out of the shower, and reached for a towel. "Someone could have gotten killed. You know? Like me," she muttered as she toweled off after a very long shower.

"I had your back out there, never doubt that."

"I don't ... doubt you, Grace."

"You did an excellent job, Alexandra ... I'm pleased with how it went."

"But, will Amanda be?"

"Amanda will just have to be happy with tearing the sequence out of the prisoner," Grace replied as she sent off the report she had been typing up.

"What was this all about, Grace?" Alex asked frowning.

"It's about the people who were responsible for fucking the organization over. The people who turned you... This will help get someone in and around their clubhouse when the time is right."

Alex kissed the side of Grace's neck. "Me?"

Grace turned, her expression serious. "Do you want it to be you, Alexandra?"

"They took everything from me. I owe them pain, and I owe Amanda and the organization for what I did. Hell yes, I want it to be me."
Grace cocked her head and smiled. "Then race the clock. Be ready when they need you to be ready."

"Speaking of being ready. Are you ready to be ravished?" Alex asked, her eyes steely.

Grace stood and stripped off her shirt.

"Always"
Caitlin dropped lightly onto the grass and rolled with a weight tight to her. She moved her other arm over her face to protect it as footfalls came thundering along the ground toward her. "Oof!" She pulled her arm off her face and wrapped it snugly around the small warm body that had fallen on her. She stood with a roar.

Parker shrieked giggles as he tried to wiggle loose and pull the football free all at the same time. His tow hair was in her face as she swung around to run.

"Oh no. Oh no. Team Caitlin is tackled but not down. Team Parker is trying to strip the ball. It's down to the wire." She faked a crowd noise before she spiked the ball and began dancing still holding Parker. He was dancing under her arm. They froze as they heard a musical laugh from behind them. Caitlin spun and grinned. Parker waved from his position under her arm.

"Hi Rachel," he said happily. Their frequent trips and meals together over time had him enamored with her.

"Well hello there Parker. Who's winning the game?" Rachel dropped her duffel bag to the grass before scooping up the ball.

"Mommy, but I almost got her." Rachel laughed. "Next time I will be on your team. We will win easy."

He cheered. His mom put him down and he ran swiftly to hug his teammate. Caitlin soon joined him, giving her girlfriend a gentle kiss. "Two against one? Nice."

"Oh and just shy of six feet against three feet is fair?" Rachel stroked Caitlin's cheek. "Little dirt."

Caitlin cast a glance at the bag. She chewed her lip. She looked at Rachel inquisitively.

Rachel shrugged. "I started to pack the rest, but I figure if you want me around bad enough, you are going to help me carry it all."

Laughing, Caitlin ruffled Parker's hair. "Honey, take Rachel in and get her some juice while I get her bag?"

Parker grabbed Rachel's hand. "Come on Rachel, I will give you one of my juice boxes." He giggled as she allowed herself to be tugged along. Caitlin slipped the duffel strap over her shoulder and followed them with a grin.

Parker opened the fridge and pulled out a juice box pressing it into Rachel's hand. "Thank you, Parker," she responded as she sat at the kitchen table. Her eyes followed as he knelt on one of the chairs and pulled a pile of construction paper and crayons towards himself.

"I'm gonna draw us," he announced.

"Wonderful."

Caitlin put the bag on a small side table and watched them for long moments. She frowned as she felt her pocket vibrate. She saw from Rachel's expression her cell phone was vibrating too. Caitlin
opened the message. "We need to go in."

Rachel looked from her to the sad looking little boy watching them. "Mommy?" he asked.

Caitlin smiled. "Well little man. I think we need to call your favorite sitter and make a date for a special dinner for all of us when we get back."

"Margo?" he asked.

"Lady Margo of the Giant Craft Chest," she affirmed.

He smiled. "Okay." Parker went back to drawing.

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**Nikita** leaned over Birkhoff's shoulder. "Show me the footage again, Nerd. This time slow it down."

He sighed and took a sip of his energy drink. "I love showing things a million times. I sent this to you, Nikki. You could watch it over and over again all by your lonesome." He looked up at her glare. "Rewind and replay," he responded tiredly.

Nikita's eyes narrowed as she regarded the grainy footage. "And there's no way to clean it up?"

"This is cleaned up. The warehouses in the area are interested in people breaking in, not people passing by." Birkhoff ran it again frame by frame. "Two of them. General shape female. Both masked. One is the driver, the other is the troublemaker. She is good. She took out our guy without hesitation. Moves fast and sure of herself…up until..." The screen flicked to the footage of a different camera. "Here." He tapped the screen. "She pussied out of the witness purge and bolted back."

"That doesn't make any sense. An operative allowing a witness to go free? Amanda would cancel her for that." Nikita shook her head. "I wish I could put my finger on what is so familiar about that operative." Her eyes darted up. "Rachel and Caitlin are here. Tell Michael to get the case and come to the office. Good job getting the footage before Amanda deleted it. Keep working, Nerd. I want more on Amanda's operatives than the drek you've pulled up so far."

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Michael soon joined them in the office. He slid the long black case onto the desk. "We sent out some feelers and came up with word of a job coming up locally. An assassination will take place on Wednesday. It is the perfect time for us to make a move." He opened the case to show a sniper rifle of advanced design. Rachel and Caitlin looked at the rifle and then at Nikita.

"You want us to assassinate someone?" Rachel asked.

Nikita looked at the two women standing before her. "We are aware of two possible targets. Two teams, eyes and trigger in the prime hunting locations. Two additional teams kept close. My gut says sniper based on the terms of the contract that we were able to learn. It is the only safe way for Amanda's operatives to get the job done. Amanda stands to gain money and contacts from this. She will bring out her best for the job. We want you two to take one of the snipers. Find them. Take them
out if you have to, but try to capture if you can. We need information. If we can get our hands on one of Amanda's operatives, we can beat it out of them."

Rachel nodded. "Sounds like a plan that gets us one step closer to Amanda. When and where?"
Chapter 26

Grace pulled into the parking garage. The stolen late model and fairly common car moved slowly like a circling shark up the ramps. Light flashed as they wandered through sunlight and into shadows and out again.

"Did we really have to steal THIS car?" Grace sighed. About three levels up, they pulled to a stop in a space facing the center of the structure.

"The more mundane the better. We need to blend in... besides, we won't be driving it again."

Grace pulled the emergency brake and took out the keys with a jingle. Leaning her head back against the headrest, she took a long slow breath.

"Damn... this is going to be a very long day."

Alexandra laughed and tugged at her jumpsuit making sure the snaps were all done up. "Just a little rooftop camp out, Grace. We need to be in position before the boys in blue start with the saw horses. I brought a bag of chips and some bottled water. I will consider sharing, if you turn that frown upside down."

Her companion gave her the evil eye. "There will be too much activity to make a trip down for anything, so you better share."

The young Russian chuckled and nodded sagely. "Spirit of adventure. I like that. Let's get this done." She stretched her long lean frame up and out of the car moving to the trunk. Her brow rose. "Trunk?" She tapped the corner of it impatiently.

Grace came around and opened it. "Bossy." She smiled as she was whirled and pressed back against the raised trunk lid. Alex leaned into her pressing her knee between Grace's legs onto the edge of the bumper.

"Just the way you like me," Alexandra replied in a seductive tone. Her hands curled around Grace's wrists and raised them pressing them against the edge of the lid. "Tell me how much you like it," she demanded.

"Why don't I show you just how much when we get up top?" Grace leaned in and kissed Alex, her tongue brushing against her full bottom lip. Her lips moved slowly down Alex's throat. "We'll have all night once we establish the hide," she whispered against tender skin.

Alex immediately released Grace's wrist as she pressed harder into her lover's body to reach in and pull out a backpack. She looked Grace in the eyes. "Best get a move on then," she responded. She slung the straps over her shoulders even as she pulled back.

Grace felt the heat of her lover's leg between her own pull away. She groaned quietly. "Let's do this." She turned and grabbed a jumpsuit like the one Alex was wearing and started pulling it over her clothes. "This outfit kills me. Grey institutional style jumpsuit. I may have to jump off the building if anyone sees me in this."

Alexandra chuckled. "We'll stop at Saks after."
"Throw in dinner and a head to toe massage and we will be talking." Grace tossed the duffel onto her shoulder. Alexandra was carrying the disassembled sniper rifle that she had blown the top off the range scores with in her pack. Grace had all the basic necessities in her own, including a sheet that would allow them to blend in with the roof of the building that Alex had chosen for her nest. They knew should a chopper blow over they would be none the wiser.

Grace frowned as she looked up at the building. "Are you serious?" She looked over at Alexandra. "Are you sure about this roof?"

Alex's lips curled. "Let's get up top." She tugged her window washing jumpsuit and jumped from the top of a van sitting in the alley alongside the building onto the scaffold. The bag at her back bounced hard as it settled after her jump onto the grate. "Hurry up." She looked up the ropes of the window washing platform as she waited for the thump and vibration of her partner joining her.

Grace pushed the other bag onto the grate and pulled herself up and over. "You remember how this goes?"

Alex barked a laugh. "Like falling off a building. Get your ass up here and start unpacking while I take us up." She moved to the control panel and started raising the platform up the side of the glassy building. When the target came up to the church across the way, they would be up on the roof of a "secure" building with the sun out of the way and a clear line of sight. The "peace conference" that would be hiding the next move in a secret war would be taken care of and Amanda would be happy. Alex smiled. She planned this all out herself. Grace had some question about the building she had chosen, but Amanda approved because she saw what Alexandra did, two possible angles to get the man they wanted to blow away. It was going to be a perfect job.

She pulled the pack off her back to her hip. They would be in place for the night and almost half a day before the hit. She was excited and nervous all at the same time. Hopping onto the roof, she turned and laughed as Grace hit her center mass with the rest of the gear. Alexandra walked the gear to the other side of the building behind the tower cooling unit. Out of sight of the usual patrols, nest under roof camo, bag of chips and a beautiful woman. She leaned down to place the rifle bag down on the ground.

Grace whistled as her eyes wandered over Alexandra. She chuckled as Alex whirled. She followed as the other woman crooked a finger. "Need some help?" she asked.

"Need something," Alex shot back. "We got lots of time to kill til its time to kill. Come here..." Grace moved forward with a smile.
Rachel ascended the stairs with a grimace. She pulled at the shirt that had been crisp many many floors ago. "Why the hell did I let you talk me out of the elevator?" she groaned as they moved up toward the office space that Nikita had suggested for their vigil. It would have a great set of lines of sight on the target area and several of the possible nests. Too bad it was so many stairs away.

"Your ass needs it," Caitlin joked as she patted the ass in question. She frowned a quick moment as she tried to orient herself. She gave up. Caitlin would just have to look for the sun when they got where they were going. Way too many flights going in circles. She was all turned around.


"Have you ever tried to cook with a hyper curious kid in the house in the middle of the night? One who smells cookies from across the state while asleep? That was survival." Caitlin grinned and marched past Rachel. Rachel caught her shoulder and turned her. Rachel looked at her eyes a moment as if she was about to say something then closed her mouth. Caitlin's smile spread. "I love you too," she replied gently. She looked up the stairs. "C'mon, two more flights. Get your ass up those stairs, before I turn into a drill Sargent." Laughing, she adjusted her bag again and started to climb, her fingers trailing on the cold metal of the rail.

Rachel huffed and smacked Caitlin's ass before jogging up the stairs past her. "Take a good look. You may not be seeing my ass tonight," she tossed back. She jumped up and down and threw a few air punches like Rocky as she reached their landing.

Caitlin laughed and caught up with Rachel on the landing. They left the concrete and steel spine of the building and found themselves in a short corridor with dim lighting and dull institutional carpeting. Caitlin unlocked the main door of the floor's offices. She then led the way past the offices of a now defunct call center not bothering with stealth in the echoing rooms of the former company. "Outsourced," she murmured as she walked past a tangled mess of cords and wires left in the center of the main space when the place dried up. She turned slowly. "Which one?" she asked quietly as she tried to orient herself again. She sang "Cheater," under her breath as she saw Rachel pull out her gps. She chuckled.

Rachel's eyes narrowed. "Go to the left. We'll take the corner. The range will suck, but it will give us line of sight to an extra couple of buildings. The potential target will get out of his vehicle, go through the well wishers, news people and other nosy neds before he reaches the door. That would be all the time this sniper needs." Rachel was already computing the best location for her rifle and possible nests among the buildings standing tired but still beautiful around the neighborhood.

"Nikita seemed awful sure this would be a sniper." Caitlin looked through the windows trying to pick out the target zone. "I'd say the nosy neds crowd would be great camouflage." It was less survivable but seemed a more sure way of making a man dead. Snipers missed and then couldn't get a new bead before they had to pocket their brass and their rifle and run.

"Our black hat wouldn't want to lose an agent on the hope that they could survive being hemmed in. This is a quiet job. Get it done and have your gun for the next job." Rachel opened her pack. She began to pull out her gear. "Sniper would probably establish early. He would set up, get a range then cover the weapon so there isn't a sun glint to point him out.
Caitlin began cracking windows. "If he comes here, we'll take him. Between my spotting and your shooting, he is one gone son of a gun." She turned and smiled. "We've got a hell of a wait. Want to sit?"

Caitlin sat down leaning against a wall. Rachel slid down, sitting against her lover, enjoying the feel of Caitlin breathing behind her. Cait cleared her throat nervously. Rachel looked at her. "What?"

Caitlin leaned forward, wrapping her arms around her. "Worried about the mission?"

Rachel shook her head then smiled as Caitlin's lips delicately moved along the side of her throat. "No, pumped up actually. The sooner we score one of Amanda's operatives the better." She wanted that bitch out of the game soonest. Amanda was a fucking snake.

"We will get her, Rachel." Caitlin affirmed.

Rachel nodded. "I know."

Caitlin leaned slightly, plucking a small red box from the pocket of her black Levi jeans. She passed it around the front of her lover.

Long fingers brushed the velvet. "What's this?" Rachel knew what often came in boxes like this but it couldn't be, could it?

"Open it."

Rachel turned slowly, her shoulder coming to rest against Caitlin's as she tucked her legs under her, her eyes narrowing at the engagement ring. "Cait, this must've cost you a fortune."

"Nonsense. You're worth every penny." Caitlin frowned as seconds past. "Is it to soon?"

Rachel turned and looked down at her. "You and Parker already feel like home to me. You are my family. No, Cait... it's not too soon... you sure it's not too soon for you?"

Caitlin chuckled. "This is not a matter of me being in love with you intermittently Rachel, it never stopped. I love you and want you to be my wife. Is that a yes?"

"It's a yes." Rachel smiled as Caitlin slid the ring on her finger. They kissed slowly and lovingly.
Chapter 28

Grace moved slowly to the edge of the camo cover and peered out. She tugged the cloth tight as a police helicopter flew over. It slid roughly over her exposed skin, her hands, her face. "I cleared the path. All of the surveillance in the building below will fail if we have to use the alternate exit route."

Alexandra nodded, and tugging lightly to settle her cap brim low over her eyes, she leaned into the rifle. Her hands were itching for activity but she had to be still. She had her lens capped to keep from glinting. There was little risk of being noticed, but she would not lose the shot because of sloppy work. She had ranged in the dark so this moment would be as quick as possible. She chewed her lip and found herself stilling.

Grace watched her lover and assignment. Alex had a still dead look on her face only occasionally marred to a lip chew. This was the Alex that Amanda had worked so hard to raise from the ashes of her dark witch mind fucking. This was the Alex that divorced her instincts and skills from the woman herself. Grace's lip curled. She turned to the weather station. "Wind still steady," she noted calmly and quietly. The machine was ready to roll.

Alexandra's eyes flicked. "First of the escorts," she announced. The target would arrive in the middle of the cars coming to the conference. Not early, not quite fashionably late. He was important at this conference, but not that important. The importance would arise when he laid out his so called peace plan. She reached for the scope lens cap. She leaned in and began to sweep the kill zone slowly. She watched as early arrivals left their cars. Alex noted where they exited to walk between the cops at the end of the steps. Her breathing slowed as she and the weapon melded.

Caitlin's breath caught as she slowly swept her binoculars over the nearby buildings. "Flash," she noted.

"Where?" Rachel responded as she brought up her own rifle. Alexandra had spent hours teaching her. She was already a fine shot, but Alex had helped hone her, mold her into a capable sniper. She smiled sadly as she thought of her lost love. She adjusted her grip and moved to the sill beside her soon to be wife. She dropped down into position. The rifle steadied and she leaned into the lens of the scope. The stock nestled perfectly and she looked out of the scope looking for her target.

"Across, roof, over three... no four." Caitlin said as she continued to stare through the binoculars. "Nikita, your assassin will be on the account firm tower."

Nikita came through their coms. "Sending a team to round up and clean up. Stop the assassination any way you can."

Rachel clicked the range finder and swept the roof til she found her counterpart. She tried to find the quiet between heartbeats that Alex had taught her about and her finger moved from the guard to the trigger. Caitlin, the room, everything faded to white noise as she found her target. A camo sheet and a hat obscured the face that was already half hidden by the weapon. Rachel began working out the effects of the slight cross wind. She let the small target fill her whole world. Nikita wanted this one
alive, just as well. The odds of hitting the flesh of the other guy's body was slightly better than the sliver of head showing. She took a breath and squeezed between the heart beats.

Grace caught a flash as she scanned around. "Alex," she said just as the other woman bucked. Her face was spattered by the mist of blood. Her eyes opened wide. "Alex," she cried out. She opened the comm. "Merlin hit."

Rachel pulled back the rifle. "Hit. Clean up aisle five." Her lips pursed. She never stopped hating shooting people no matter how much they deserved it. She turned to Caitlin. "Let's bag this crap and give the pick up crew some back up."

Caitlin tossed her gear into her bag. "Nikita, topside team going to back up. Let's bag this guy."

Nikita came through. "The team is almost to the top. You two can stay on the ground level in case he gets past. Just keep your eyes open."

A whimper came from Alexandra who was barely supported by Grace. "Ops, We were hit before the job," she updated. Alex was trying to stay steady in the shock and blood loss, but she was in trouble. She trembled.

"Team two is dispatched. They'll take care of it. Status?"

"Merlin bleeding heavy. We need medical."

"Get her out of there."

Grace snorted. "Hadn't thought of that." She opened the roof door hoping to go down the stairs so they could raid a first aid box on the way. She cursed. A door from the top floor of offices was opening. With only a couple extra flights between that door and the roof, there was not much time. Alexandra was bleeding heavily but was able to move her feet. Grace snagged the camo and pushed Alex onto the window washer platform pushing the cloth over her. She dropped them several floors before she counted off twenty. She stopped the drive and pushed Alexandra under the control panel wrapped in cloth as best she could. She grabbed the squeegee and spray and wiped at the window.

The cleaner and his Division team looked around the roof. He cursed and waved his team to check the rest of the roof. He frowned as he knelt beside the apparent location of the nest. "Nikita, taking a blood sample at point of impact. No sign of the assassin. Maybe we will get a hit in the computer?"

Nikita responded swiftly. "Get everything you can." She opened the comm. "Rachel, Caitlin, the assassin got past. We didn't get what we came for but we did stop an assassination. I call that a win. Good job. Take a final look around and then head home."

Caitlin smiled. "Nikita, engagement party tonight if you can get away." She smiled bigger at the whoop through the line.
Chapter 29

Nikita threw on her jacket and smiled as Caitlin and Rachel came in. She held her arms open wide. They both hugged their friend and boss. "You two..." she said happily. She wove her fingers in Caitlin's hair and playfully pulled her so they were eye to eye. "Treat her right or I make you scrub the detention cell with your tongue." Laughing, Nikita hugged them again. "I'm buying dinner."

They were laughing around the table as Michael came in. He stooped and kissed Nikita before snagging a roll and sitting down. "I hear congratulations are in order." He waved for the waiter.

"About fucking time..."Birkhoff chimed in.

Nikita snorted. "Enough hard cider Nerd." she chided as she grabbed his glass and moved it away. "We need some food here to soak up this one's buzz."

Caitlin looked at her watch. She saw Rachel looking at her with a small grin. She smiled and made a subtle hand sign with thumb and little finger. They had worked out their own code to guard their secret. Rachel nodded almost imperceptibly. "For Gods sakes Caitlin. You have cordite under your nails," Rachel groused good naturedly.

Caitlin laughed. Time to call Parker, she thought. "Nag nag nag. Save it for the honeymoon." She pushed her chair back. "I'll be right back. Washing up." She kissed Rachel's temple and went into the shining white bathroom to call home.

She leaned against the stall wall and smiled as she pushed speed dial. "One ringy dingy... two ringy dingy... Hey little man. What are you doing up?" She chuckled at his sleepy tones. Her baby boy only got more adorable as the days went on. "Rachel and I can't wait to see you. I want you to dream sweet, okay? We will be home soon." She cocked her head as footsteps sounded outside the bathroom and passed on. "Put Margo on baby and go to bed." She chuckled. "Rachel and I will make your favorite breakfast." A few moments passed. "Hi Margo. Everything okay?" She nodded vaguely. "Celebration. We'll be there soon. Gotta go." She laughed. "You too." Hanging up her smile grew. Life didn't get better than this.

Rachel pushed her chair back out for her, as she watched for the wink that would confirm that everything was well back at home. Caitlin slid in and stretched lightly before turning toward Rachel's chair. She laughed as Caitlin waved her fingers for inspection. They needed a better code next time. "Food's here," she announced as she heard the cart being pushed toward their table. The celebration went on well into the night. Food and laughter were constant companions until they closed out the restaurant.

Grace went back and forth. The room was not nearly big enough for pacing but she was giving her
best effort. "Someone knew we were coming." She was furious. This was supposed to be a straight forward hit. Shoot, collect kill brass, walk away. Her steps grew heavier in her agitation.

Amanda sat in her chair. She leaned back and watched her protege. She looked down at her nails as if determining if it was time for another manicure. "The contract was advertised more widely than expected. It happens." Amanda watched Grace through her eyelashes trying to read the agitated woman.

"All the work, it could go to waste. I saw her. She is a fucking machine. She is a precision fucking machine." Grace was trying to grab any of the crappy historical odds and ends in the room and toss it. She was deeply frustrated.

"She will survive," Amanda noted quietly. She looked at the door leading into the inner chamber. "She is... very hard to kill. The work is not lost."

Grace slammed her hand into the wall. "Always so fucking cool." She shook her head. "All those years trained by you and I never could be that cool." She hissed out another frustrated breath and turned.

A man in tan scrubs came out wiping his hands. He tossed the paper towel in a nearby waste basket. Patching up Organization agents was becoming a full time job for him and he looked it. He looked incongruous among the dark and heavy decorating of the antechamber. "She's clear. As per your orders I am not going to give her the heavy duty pain meds. She is conscious if you wanted to talk to her."

Amanda stood. "Thank you doctor." She saw Grace moving for the inner door. "What are you doing Grace?"

"Checking on her." Grace responded as she turned to face Amanda.

Amanda's eye narrowed. "How sweet."

Grace's face grew stormy. "You think I can't keep my feeling out of my assignments? Are you thinking I am compromised? Alexandra needs to be kept on track. I am her track right now."

"See that you do not try to overwrite my work Grace. It would be ill advised if you were to... move her focus." Amanda took a slow breath. "Tell her that I have gone to Prague for a mission and that I send my regard." She turned to leave.

Grace nodded and headed in. She saw Alex still looking ashen as she picked at her dressing. "Hey! The doctor just patched you up. No pulling at the bandages."

Alexandra looked up and smiled. "Hi."

"Hi. Amanda had a job. She says... get well." Grace moved closer. "How are you?"

Alex sighed. "They won't give me anything for pain."

"Something about you being a bad assed party girl once upon a time I heard." Grace sat beside Alex. She slowly slid her hand over Alexandra's pulling it into a clasp. "You scared me."

"I... It didn't even feel like me there..." Alexandra looked down at their hands. "When I'm working sometimes I shut off."

Grace nodded. "I saw that, I've seen that. Not all bad love. You kick ass when you aren't
philosophizing."
Nikita retied her wind blown scarf and watched the grey waves growling onto the rocky beach. Michael jumped up and down a few times his arms flapping against one another over his chest. "You want to go in the field, I am all for that. It's practically a holiday with you, but next time can we please stay out of the Arctic Circle?" While he exaggerated the Artic Circle, it was much colder here than back home. His leather clad fingers ran over the buttons of his wool coat. He looked at his watch yet again. Activity was keeping him warm.

"Out of the way meetings are usually considered more out of the way in cold places than warm. Most people want to stay away from cold." She turned with a smile on her face. "We can go whale watching later."

Michael's brow rose. "Salty spray icing us. How sexy is that?" He replied with a sarcastic note. He loved his wife's love of animals, but cold was starting to wear on him just a little.

"Whales, Michael. Watching Whales," she said trying to stoke his enthusiasm. She pulled off her gloves with her teeth turning away from Michael slightly. Nikita lifted her chin. "Car coming up the access." She tucked the end of her scarf into her coat before sliding her hand into her pocket and checking on the handgun. Her phone rang. She pulled it out as the two men got out of the car. It was a text from the lab rat she had processing the blood, requesting immediate contact. The men crunched along the rocky beach. She swiftly typed in a response and pocketed the phone.

"Is everything okay?" Michael asked.

"Lab rat drama. I will call him tonight." she said dismissively. It was more important to focus on the trade. They needed this information.

"Fantastic. Let's go buy some weapon information." He opened his arms and called out in Russian.

They moved forward along the rocky beach toward the men in the long dark coats.

Nikita lay back on the hotel bed. The trade had gone well. They would be flying back in the morning. She turned on her side and watched Michael strip down. He was grimacing as he pulled the fabric away from his body with two fingers. He did not fare nearly as well on the whale watch having gotten far too close to a blowhole about to blow. She grinned. He smelled of things best not talked about, but it was worth every sniff. "We need to figure out a wedding gift for Caitlin and Rachel."

He barked a laugh as he tossed his socks toward the rest of the pile. "They just got engaged." Grabbing an extra towel he headed for the bathroom and turned on the shower.

"They're on a roll and you think fast on your feet but you really suck at picking out presents." She laughed and pulled out her phone. "Damn. I forgot the lab rat." She rolled on her back and dialed. "Watson? What is going on?" The beautiful spy rolled to the side of the bed, suddenly realizing she was thirsty.
She stood and opened the minibar trying to ignore the price list. Nikita grabbed a fruit juice after long moments staring at her choices and waved at Michael as he made his way into the shower. He mouthed 'join me.' Smiling, Nikita pointed at the phone. 'soon.' she mouthed back. She pulled the tab on the juice can and sipped as she tried to keep up with the mighty mouth on the other end of the line.

Watson was jabbering on and on. She picked out familiar phrases here and there, but most of it was tangled scientific jargon. Nikita decided to boil things down quickly so she could enjoy some time with Michael. "So you ran the blood." She started simply.

"Yes. I just .. was saying that..." he began drawing breath to repeat his explanation.

"Five words or less," she growled out. She had great respect for people like Watson and Birkhoff, but they could wear on her nerves.

Watson hesitated so long that Nikita checked the line was still open. "Alexandra Udinov was the shooter. Yeah, that's five," he said in a self congratulating tone. She could almost hear his grin through the line.

Nikita sank down to the bed. "Repeat that. Use more than five words," she said almost breathlessly. The wind was well and truly out of her sails.

"The blood sample brought back from the sniper nest? It is a match for the sample we have on file for Alexandra Udinov," he confirmed.

Nikita took a few shaky breaths. She watched Michael wash himself as she tightened her fist. "Are you positive?" she asked tightly. Her lips pursed as she considered the effects this news could have on everyone. Should she tell Michael? This could kill Cait and Rachel. She needed to know what was really going on here. It had to be one of Amanda's mind games, it had to be ...

"I ran it three times."

"Bury it," she commanded.

"Bury it?" Watson was puzzled but he was ready to do it.

"Bury it. I will work this out myself. You don't let a whisper of this leave the lab. If I hear it..."

"You won't," Watson assured her. She broke the connection and chewed at her thumb slightly.

"What about a tropical vacation?" Michael called out.

"What?" she called out.

"Wedding present. Tropical vacation with no guns or shady rendezvous."

Nikita forced a chuckle. "Will think on that." She swallowed down her distress with her years of practice. She needed to find out more before she unleashed a shit storm. She sucked in a shaky breath and stood to remove her shirt. She moved toward the shower. "Room enough for me?" she asked as the curtain moved back.
Alexandra slowly sat up with Grace's help, her good arm pulling slightly at the hospital gown that was put on her after the shirt was cut off for surgery. "So, who hit me?" She frowned deeply, her brow creasing. This sucked so very much without Vicodin or Morphine or any other worthwhile pain killers. She tried to focus past the sharp pain in her shoulder where the stitches were tightening in the skin. The light came in from the stained glass in shades of red and gold as well as the white of the bright lights above her. She shook her head at the cross between old hotel and modern hospital room. She was running on pain and rage at this point.

Grace frowned. "You need to focus on healing right now Alexandra." She felt the woman tremble lightly under hands at the strain and pain.

Alex's eyes looked into hers with the fierceness of her namesake. "Tell me." She began turning to slide her legs off the bed. "I want to know." The Merlin appeared to be going into a stoop in preparation to take someone out.

Grace looked for long moments into Alex's face, she wanted Alex grounded for this, not on the hunt, not yet. "You know who..." she started, trailing off.

"The guys that mindfucked me," Alex growled. She eased herself straight up, gently rolling her shoulders back. The stitches were tight. She needed to get her shoulder loose and fast. "They have a lot to answer for and they will."

Grace smiled tightly. "Yes they will. You just focus on recovery... heal and I will get you your chance," she promised.

Alex's jaw jumped. "Done." She looked at Grace. "Get me my chance...soonest."

Twenty minutes later Grace walked out of the room and hit speed dial. She held the phone to her ear as she punched the elevator call.

"Amanda?"
Her jaw tightened. "Of course. She is already clawing the walls trying to get her own back." Silently she cursed the ancient elevator. A faster one had been installed, but it was understood that it was for people on the job.

Grace moved into the elevator with a swift stride. She turned punching the tired looking button for the ground floor. Grace's eyes narrowed. "She will fight you. Make it sooner... Put the mole to work. We need her to strike decisively. Give her a taste for blood... Maybe this unfortunate injury can be used to our advantage after all."

Grace listened before nodding. "I'll prep her. Amanda? Don't spare the horses." Grace turned off her phone. "Fucking elevator." She kicked the door panel.

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**Birkhoff** swiveled with a hanging jaw. "Are you serious?" His eyes were wide as he followed Nikita with them.

Nikita nodded and sat on a nearby tabletop pushing a disk box out of the way. "Watson triple checked the results." Her fingers flipped through the disks aimlessly.

Birkhoff turned and stared at his computer. His fingers twitched lightly over the surface of the keyboard. He wanted to search for something, but he didn't know how to begin. "Is this an Amanda mindfuck?" he asked, his voice quiet.

Nikita looked at his posters on one wall. Her brow rose at the Sexy Women of Sci Fi theme. "I do not know. I can't tell anyone until I know more." She looked pained. This was about all her friends and it killed her.

The Nerd stood and paced the short distance to his door and back. His fingers moved through his hair as he moved in an agitated way. "I can go through the hospital stuff again. I never looked over the footage after your little trip." He moved to the table Nikita was sitting on and started flipping disks with a frown. He started sliding disks toward his computer. He was bouncing as he flipped back and forth considering the problem.

Nikita nodded. "That's a start. You do that Nerd. I will work on a confirmation for current Alex involvement." She stood.

"What do you think?"

She turned a Rubik's cube over in her fingers before tossing it into a basket filled with odd magazines and trinkets. "Get the hospital footage looked at, analysed. I am going to wait a while for Alex to heal, if she can." She took a deep shaky breath.

Please god let them not have killed her. "Then? I am going to give our little rodent a bite."

"Rodent?" he asked with a confused look.
Nikita gave him a dark look. For a genius, sometimes Birkhoff lost track of things horribly. "The mole. Keep all of this under your hat Nerd. This could still all be a mindfuck."

Birkhoff looked at her sadly. "What if it's not? Caitlin and Rachel, this'll screw with them. We should say something...anything."

"What?" she asked. "What the hell would we tell them? Hey congrats on the engagement, by the way the first wife might be alive or this could all be an Amanda special?" She walked to the door. "If this is Alex... I will know. I trained her... I know her. Right now, We need more. Get me more Nerd." She walked out without a backwards glance.

Birkhoff slid the first of the disks out of the plastic case. "I hope you aren't there Alex. I want you to be alive, but you alive, could really make life complicated for everyone. Especially if Amanda's programmed you." He slid the disk in. The machine leapt to open the files. Birkhoff pulled up another program. He input the parameters for Alexandra Udinov. The program would seek out a figure that matched her in a general way and then he would pull the frames up one at a time to sort them. He chewed his lip as the computer hummed and pulled out his key ring fingeriing a Star Wars flash drive Alex had given him a million years ago. He looked up at the monitor and cringed at the number of frames to go through. It would take all night.

"It's going to be a Red Bull kinda night."
Caitlin shut the refrigerator door with her foot and handed Rachel a glass of chilled white wine and then slid open the glass door leading to the moon lit back yard. Rachel walked through with a smile and headed for the porch swing at the far end of the concrete deck. She ran her fingers over the white painted wood plank back. She slid back into the swing and looked up at the full and clear moon.

She took a small sip from the delicate glass and rolled it in her mouth enjoying the crisp flavors. Her eyes closed until she felt the swing move slightly as another took up a seat on it. Rachel opened her eyes and turned toward Caitlin. "So..." she purred with a seductive smile. She slid her leg up on the bench and moved closer to her lover.

"So..." Caitlin laughed. "I love that shirt." She stroked her finger over the front of Rachel's shirt. The silk allowed her finger to glide effortlessly. Her eyes followed the path, her lip curling at the warmth and scent of her lover, under her finger, so close.

"Naughty," Rachel chided smiling. She leaned over slightly to place her wine glass on the ground near the base of the swing. She smiled seeing her lover doing the same with her own glass. She leaned forward to brush her lips against Caitlin's. Caitlin groaned quietly against her lips. Rachel pulled back slowly and not without regret. Her fingers trailed over Caitlin's jaw and throat.

Caitlin scooted closer and brushed her knuckles over Rachel's breast. "You are simply amazing." She leaned in and kissed Rachel's jaw before sitting back to look at her.

Rachel smiled happily. "So are you."

Caitlin slid her hand over Rachel's thigh. "I love you," She stroked hair back over Rachel's ear. "I was wondering if I could be serious for a moment?" Her brows lifted. She felt Rachel tense briefly. Rachel's brow slid up. "Oh?" She shifted slightly. "What are we talking about?"

Caitlin leaned an elbow on the back of the swing. "I was thinking..." Her fingers moved slowly through her hair as she looked at her fiancee.

"Definitely worried now." Rachel's smile spread. She slid her hand on Caitlin's knee. "Just kidding baby. What's on your mind?"

Her lover lightly backhanded Rachel's stomach. "I want us to have a good life, the three of us." A beautiful and true smile still lit Caitlin's face but her eyes watched Rachel seriously. What came next was important to her. To all of them.

Rachel smiled broadly. "We don't actually exist, but I think Birkhoff could help with an adoption." She had not seen herself as a mom but thinking of the little boy in the house above made her very happy. She flashed on the painting she helped him hang on the fridge just that evening before shooing him off to bed. In that instant she knew that she wanted to be his mother.
Caitlin chuckled. "I think the Nerd would jump at the chance to give us a gift we would actually use. Especially one that won't cost him a cent... and I would be thrilled not to get Lord of the Rings coasters." She chewed her lip and hesitated.

"What?"

Caitlin's eyes flashed away and then back. "I want you to consider something else..." Her tones were slow and hesitant. She was going into more dangerous territory. Rachel was full of love. The adoption, that was the easy part. She took a breath and girded herself.

Rachel tilted her head. "What is it Caitlin?" A note of worry crept in. She shifted slightly on the wooden seat.

Her lover looked down at her hand on Rachel's thigh. Her fingers kneaded at it gently. "I... I know you are invested in what we do..." She sighed quietly. She had to admit it to herself. She was a little scared. Rachel could really break her here.

"Are you trying to tell me that you don't want to have sex anymore?" Rachel asked jokingly trying to break the mood she felt starting to form.

She stroked Caitlin's cheek.

Caitlin dove in. "I'm trying to tell you that our little boy needs a family." She shrugged slightly. "A real, forever family." Her eyes pleaded for understanding.

Rachel swallowed hard. "You want us out of Division."

Caitlin nodded, her eyes still downcast. "I know you can't just drop it, but..."

"But retirement..." Rachel's hand shook as she reached down for her glass. She took a slow sip. "Adoption is easy.

Retirement..." She took another sip. A small shaky breath. "For you, for us, our family... I can do this... eventually."

Caitlin smiled. She chewed her lip. "Not like Nikita's retirement."

Rachel shook her head. "Not a running gag. Just... I need time. I... need to be involved in finishing this thing with Amanda. You understand?"

Caitlin leaned in for a lingering kiss. Her smile was huge. "I do ... and I will be by your side through it all." Her arms went around her lover. "Thank you Rachel." A huge weight lifted from her shoulders.

Rachel's finger slid down Caitlin's spine slowly. She leaned in and kissed her lover deeply. "Take me to bed already," she purred.

Caitlin stood and reached down drawing Rachel up and against her. Their bodies melted together as they dove into another long slow kiss. Caitlin's palm pressed the small of Rachel's back pressing them tighter. She moaned at the heat against her. Rachel leaned back slightly. "No grass stains," she purred.

Caitlin grinned. "If you get naked there won't be any."

"You're a regular comedian." Rachel kissed her. "Bedroom now or you have a cold night ahead."
"Wouldn't want that." Caitlin took Rachel's hand and drew her into the house, the wine glasses left standing under the moon beside the porch swing.
Chapter 33

Rachel laughed hard from her desktop perch as Nikita sat in an office chair on wheels nearby. "Please, please tell me you got photos." She wiped at a tear that leaked out in her amusement.

Nikita chuckled at her friend. Rachel was always beautiful, but when she was happy and having fun, she made everyone around her happy. "Even if I hadn't gotten a picture, which I did, as soon as he heard about the blowhole incident, the Nerd started surfing spy satellites to see if there had been one in the area." She pushed the chair to reach the desktop to grab for one of the wraps from their weekly lunch. She savored the crispy sprouts before crumpling her paper up.

"Oh poor Michael. Snotted on by marine mammals." The office rang with the laughter of the two women. Caitlin knocked and leaned around the door. Her brows shot up at the picture of the two woman convulsed with laughter. She smiled happily and waited to be noticed.

Nikita waved her in and stood to intercept Rachel's soon to be wife. "Get in here you." She took two large steps toward Caitlin to hug her. Caitlin and Rachel looked at one another with concern as the hug went on and on. Nikita finally pulled back and tugged her to the desk. She took a couple steps back as if to take a mental picture of the two of them. She looked from one to another. "I love you two and want to see you happy." Suddenly, she felt torn again. What if Alex were alive? Should she tell them? What if it were an Amanda mind game? Guilt and conflict were flickering at the edge of every thought. Rachel and Caitlin exchanged another puzzled glance.

Another knock came to the door frame, this one hesitant. Nikita looked over and frowned. "Nerd?" she asked as she realized it was a sheepish looking computer geek in a World of Warcraft t-shirt standing there.

Birkhoff 'eep'ed as he caught sight of the two other women in the room with Nikita. He pulled back momentarily before sticking his head back around the doorframe. "I have the preliminary on that special project you asked me about? You know ... Project Crazy Ivan?" His voice trailed off and he pulled his head back around the door.

Rachel chuckled. "Crazy Ivan or Crazy Birkhoff?" She snagged the bridal magazine from Caitlin and started flipping through the pages.

"Hey!" her fiancee protested feebly.

"You snooze, you lose." Rachel smiled contentedly as she stopped on an article about wedding cakes.

Nikita smiled. "I am just going to kick the Nerd around. You two... think" her hands fluttered slightly, "chiffon or cake or something." She went through the door and walked up to Birkhoff who was in a doorway a few feet down trying hard to not look paranoid and failing miserably. "What?" she hissed.

Birkhoff shot a look at Nikita's office door. "What if..." he whispered hoarsely.

She shook her head. "They are busy. Was she there? In the footage?" An edge entered her voice and
tight shoulders revealed just how much this could change everything for her.

Birkhoff frowned. "The footage is pretty limited. Certain places only. I ran facial recognition and she didn't pop up. It could be as simple as cameras being in the wrong place to catch her or she was at the wrong angle for recognition to work...you know, on a gurney or something. I could go frame by frame. Maybe..."

Nikita shook her head. "No." She folded her arms and steeled herself. "Alex is dead. Amanda is fucking with us. It is that simple. If she was there, we would have found her." She looked at Birkhoff. "Go back to work on the mole project. I want that rodent."

Birkhoff nodded. "Okay, Nikki. I'm all over it" He frowned and bounced slightly foot to foot, anxious to be gone, but still held by his curiosity. "Why would Amanda leave Alex blood laying around?"

Nikita tilted her head. "We spun our wheels on it. She knows exactly what she is doing. She yanked our chains and we followed. It cost us time that could have been spent working on the mole. Enough of it. Get back to work." She spun on her heel and went back to the office and smiled as she spotted Rachel holding the magazine and Caitlin throwing up her hands. "What's up?"

Rachel looked up with amusement dancing in her eyes. "How's Crazy Ivan?"

Nikita barked a laugh. "Crazy Ivan is dead long live Crazy Birkhoff." She slid onto the desktop to sit beside Rachel. Peeking over the other woman's shoulder she saw she was looking at the incredibly full advertisers section. "What were you two thinking on the whole wedding front?"

Caitlin grinned. "Elvis chapel in Vegas?" She oofed as Rachel backhanded her stomach. "What? I want fun, no guns and no one looking down their nose at me."

"I want something that at least smells wedding-ish and without a one armed bandit by the door," Rachel countered, her brow up.

Nikita frowned. She knew Rachel would not want another beach wedding. That would have invoked Alex who was being invoked plenty by Amanda just now. She grabbed the magazine.

"You two are going to get married on Michael's dime. That is our wedding present... The actual wedding. Now get out of my office so I can plan."

Rachel laughed. "Not that I don't trust your tastes Nikita, but this won't involve whale snot right?"

Nikita smiled. "You will love it." She looked from one to the other. "Go already."

Nikita poured herself a cup of tea and sat at the desk to flip through the bridal magazine. She sighed as she drifted through one variation on a theme after another. She perked. Nikita reached for her phone.

"Hello? I was looking through a bridal magazine and I saw your ad... what exactly do you mean by Quintessential N'Awlins?"
Chapter 34

Grace turned over and watched Alexandra sleep. The other woman's eyes were closed and the lids looked almost bruised. She had suffered the past couple days as the shoulder wound healed without benefit of pain killers. At least the doctor had shown enough mercy to give Alex something to help her sleep through some of it. Grace almost stroked Alexandra's cheek, but pulled away to avoid waking the other woman. Grace slid from between the sheets shivering lightly at the chill in the room.

She moved into the bathroom of the former old hotel room and pulled a tablet computer from its hiding place behind a false drawer front. She closed the fake door carefully, latching it back together with a small and swift upward pop. She opened the computer and placed it beside the sink. She triggered a program and turned to pull on a robe that hung on one of a pair of hooks behind the bathroom door.

Grace settled the silk on her shoulders and tied the belt tightly as if girding herself for battle. In a sense, she was. Amanda didn't have friends. She had protegees and tools and enemies. Grace never really felt secure in the more positive of those states. Reaching over, she pulled the shower curtain and turned on the water. The sound of water obscured the small sounds of the computer waking up. Grace moved to the door and closed her eyes listening carefully for any noise from the other room. She didn't hear her lover, probably too exhausted to wake to the white noise of water or the things the shower covered. Grace smiled tightly before she turned on her program.

"Punctual. Very good," Amanda noted before sipping delicately at her tea cup. She was apparently still enjoying the jet set life. She was dressed very carefully and the wall behind her was decorated in a lovely figured fresco.

Grace growled slightly at the back of her throat at the other woman's tone. "Do not start with me this morning, Amanda."

"Oh dear," Amanda commiserated. "Someone has not been exercising you properly. I really must have a word with young Alexandra on the subject."

Grace straightened up. "Bitch," she whispered.

Amanda chuckled into her cup. "Have you been working on your boundaries, Grace?"

"My boundaries are just fine. Thank you," Grace's arms crossed and her face was stony. She hated Amanda pressing her buttons. She had played apprentice to this bitch and that was quite enough time being manipulated thank you very much.

"Very emotional response." Amanda tilted her head. "You are her handler. Make sure you are aware of that fact even when your little charge is... wooing you. Understand?"

"Whatever. Are we done with the love fest, Amanda?"

Amanda's brow arched delicately as her eyes traveled to take in her protegee's state of semi dress. "It would appear that you are dressed for one. I will simply end our status meeting with this... Keep an eye on your charge Grace. It would appear that the major players are flying down to New Orleans in ten days. Given the level of frothing young Alexandra has been doing of late on the subject of her former coworkers, it would not be out of character for her to behave... somewhat irrationally."
placed her cup on the saucer and placed them both somewhere off screen.

Grace frowned. "Why would Division send its best and brightest to New Orleans?" She wracked her brains, but couldn't think of anything big enough to draw down one of Division's major players, much less several of them.

"That is unclear at this time. You just insure that she does not go there. We will give Alexandra her chance, but not until she is fully capable. She requires more time to recover." Amanda's eyes flicked over Grace's shoulder. "Better take your shower before you use up all the hot water." She smiled thinly and ended the connection.

Grace's face was full of thunder. "Bitch," she whispered again before plucking at the false drawer and tucking the tablet computer back in its hiding spot. She was starting to untie the belt when a knock sounded on the door. Grace startled and turned to open the bathroom door.

Alexandra's blue eyes slid slowly down Grace's body. Her fingers touched the soft bare skin left uncovered by the overlap of the silk. She smiled with a seductive hunger. Her naked form moved with feline grace though one shoulder was still black with bruising and stitched together.

Grace slowly backed into the bathroom, Alex moving to stay inches away. "How long have you been up, Alex?" Inwardly, she fretted that Alexandra would have heard something of her and Amanda's conversation, especially that of Amanda noting her relationship with Alex, while it had required pretending at being the lover, was drifting a bit far into that territory. She hated that bitch all over again for that. She bit back a groan as the heat of Alex's body pressed against her. That scent, that unique scent that was all her lover enveloped her.

Alexandra's fingers brushed down the front of the robe separating the sides and leaving it open. Alex's hand gently cupped a breast and brushed her thumb over the nipple. "I just woke up," she said matter-of-factly. "I woke up hungry."

Grace's eyes closed as Alex's fingers barely touched her skin waking it. She groaned quietly. "We could go down," she suggested weakly.

Alex pressed her back toward the shower. "Robe off," she said, her voice hard. "We will be eating in this morning."

Dropping the robe, Grace leaned against the cold tile of the shower wall, as Alex moved in after her, eyes hard and bright as a lion over a gazelle. Alexandra drew the other woman's wrists up the wall and smacked them there lightly. "Stay," she commanded as she knelt to devour her lover.
Chapter 35

Rachel and Caitlin sat on the bench in the changing room quietly. Rachel slid her fingers over Caitlin's. "It's time to talk to her," she said quietly. She looked at her pale and nervous fiancee.

Caitlin looked at Rachel's fingers wrapped around hers and slid her other hand on top. "We have to right?" She appreciated Rachel being strong, especially considering Rachel would sooner be in a firefight than disappoint Nikita.

Rachel nodded with a smile. "Yeah we have to." She raised Caitlin's hand to her lips. "Let's do this." She smiled bravely for her love.

They stood as one and made their way to Nikita's office. Caitlin hesitated before raising her hand to the door. She cleared her throat. "Nikita?" she called quietly.

Nikita opened the door, her smile bright. "Come in already. Did we have a lunch date?" Her brow knit. "What's going on?" The grim expressions of her two friends were making her concerned. She stepped back and waved them in. Nikita followed them.

Rachel's hand moved to the small of Caitlin's back, guiding her to the desk. "We... we wanted to talk to you about the wedding plans." She took a deep breath.

"We have to talk to you about them."

Nikita frowned. "You guys know?" She had mentioned the plan to a handful of people that Rachel and Caitlin would probably have invited, but she warned them not to ruin the surprise. No wonder moles got on so well here.

Rachel laughed. "Spy central. The cafeteria lady told us. New Orleans?" She leaned back against the desk.

The older woman smiled. "My plans a problem?" She tried not to feel hurt. This was their wedding after all.

Caitlin shook her head and took a deep breath. "They... they just aren't quite big enough."

Nikita's head tilted. "Not big enough? How so?" She reached for her mug and took a sip. Her two friends were taking their sweet time cluing her in.

Caitlin and Rachel shared a look. Rachel spread her hands. "We have another guest."

Nikita laughed. "Is that it? You two looked like you were coming to tell me my dog is dead."

They shared another silent look.

"I have a dog?" Nikita was getting freaked out.

Caitlin settled on the edge of the desk. "Family."

"What?"

"My guest is family."
Nikita's brow knitted again. "Division agents don't have family."

"I do... now." Caitlin stood nervously again. "I... we have a son." She smiled at Rachel who had taken her hand again.

Nikita sank into her favorite chair bonelessly. "How?"

Caitlin shook her head. "Long story."

"I was sending you on missions with the resident loose cannon." Nikita said angrily. "How could you not tell me you had a child?"

"Hey!" came from both of the fiancees.

Nikita got up and paced agitated. "What if..."

Rachel nodded and held up a hand. "The what if leads me to my next bit of news." She sounded sad and Caitlin laid a hand on her shoulder.

"I'm not sure I can take this," Nikita responded quietly, her hand touching her forehead.

"Retirement. I, we want to retire. For Parker... His name is Parker."

Nikita nodded. "Yes, of course, of course." She was still processing. "You have a son... Parker." She was looking a little vacant at this point.

Caitlin looked at the puzzled super spy and then over at her lover. "I think we broke her."

"Michael's gonna kill us," Rachel responded from the corner of her mouth.

Nikita's smile slowly spread as she turned to look at them. "You damned well better have a load of pictures."

Caitlin held out her hand. "Get over here. I've got a phone full of them."

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**Alexandra** slid into the alley. She checked behind her before leaping for the fire escape. It caught for a long moment before the metal screamed. She pulled herself up slowly, her shoulder screaming.

Alex moved to the nearest window and jammed her small pry bar into the space between plywood and wall. She had found this abandoned building on a short 'errand' run and had been depositing gear and cash as often as she could get away from notice.

Dropping back down lightly, she heard a noise. Fearing discovery, she tucked in behind a garbage dumpster. She frowned and looked out. No sign of Grace swooping in knowing Alex was getting ready to hit back. She froze as she heard the sound again. Alex crept forward. The sound came again.

Alexandra moved a piece of blown cardboard aside and found a dog, its sides all bone, She frowned. It had most likely died of starvation. This wasn't the source of the sound. Then she saw it. A small body moved in the shadow of its dead mother. Alex pulled the small puppy away. She backed up against the brick. Her trembling fingers moved slowly over the tiny and fragile pup. "You're alone too," she breathed out.
She didn't hear everything between Grace and Amanda, but she heard enough to know that she needed to question who was on her side. Here was one little guy who had even less to count on than she did. His tiny claws raked at the warm flesh of her palm as his mouth searched for sustenance. Her heart that had begun to feel frozen suddenly cracked. A tear rolled down her face. She dug in her pocket. There was a chunk of money inside. Maybe she could buy this frail little guy a chance.

"I can't take you little man," she whispered. "I'm bad people." The puppy's response was a weak mewling cry. Alex opened her coat and slid the puppy into her garment. "What is it with me and saving lives in alleyways?" she asked in a low frustrated voice. She went in search of the nearest veterinary clinic.

Grace stepped around the light pole. She frowned as she puzzled over the lump in Alexandra's jacket. It had taken forever for her to catch up with the woman. She pocketed the GPS and continued after the other woman while working over the mystery of why this alley and what was under the coat. When she saw Alex turn into a vet clinic she halted. Her eyes narrowed and she slid back into a nearby shop. She would solve the mystery as soon as Alex got clear. No need for her to know that she was lo-jacked.
Chapter 36

Rachel moaned deep in her throat as she slowly began surfacing from what had been an unusually deep and heavy sleep. Her eyelids tightened. There was light in the room. It wasn't that annoying light that crept slowly through the curtain every morning. Bathroom. She turned over. Caitlin's pillow was dented but empty.

Blinking she tried to get her brain to bubble.

"Caitlin?" she called in a sleep roughened voice. Her eyes slowly took in the bedroom shadows still heavy in most of the room, the only light coming from the direction of the bathroom. The shower started. Rachel's brow knit as she looked at the clock in confusion. "It's 3:30 in the morning, Cait. A little early for a shower isn't it?" She rolled back over and started rolling herself up to a sitting position.

Rachel slid feet into slippers and stood. She moved toward the bathroom, concerned about what could cause her love to be showering at such an hour. "Did you have a nightmare, Caitlin?" she asked as she rubbed her hand over her eyes, willing herself more awake. She tugged off her night shirt and pulled her feet out of her slippers. She slid the shower door back and slipped in behind her fiancee. Facing the spray of the shower, she closed her tired eyes and cleared away the last of the sleep. She smiled as she felt the woman in front of her turn and slide arms around her as a warm body pressed into her own.

"Naughty."

"Am I the one that jumped into an occupied shower?" she heard asked jokingly.

Rachel's eyes popped open. This was not Caitlin. Her fingers shook as she raised them to touch the woman holding her. "Alex? Is it really you? Are you really here?"

Alexandra laughed. She pushed wet hair from Rachel's face. "Who else would be in our shower, silly?" She leaned close and kissed Rachel's shoulder. Rachel's heart was a pounding trip-hammer. Her heart didn't know whether to break, heal or explode. Her fingers brushed slowly over Alex's face, her lips. She leaned her head against the older woman's and breathed in her scent.

"You are pale as a sheet, Rach."

Rachel surged forward and wrapped her arms around Alexandra. "Don't ever leave me Alex, not ever," she said in a desperate voice.

Alex stroked her back. "I would never leave you. I'll always be with you baby." She kissed the top of Rachel's head. "What's wrong, Rachel?"

Rachel shook her head and kissed along Alex's shoulder. "Nothing... it's nothing. It was just a bad dream. You're here now."

Alexandra pulled back and cradled Rachel's face in her hands. She looked at her for a long moment. "Are you sure?"
Rachel smiled and blinked against the water still falling in the shower. Her hand brushed Alexandra's stomach. It quivered under the pads of her fingers.

Alex laughed breathily. Her fingers curled around Rachel's wrists. "Now, now." She leaned in and kissed Rachel hungrily slowly turning her to stand under the shower head. "Let's see if we can't make this more real for you." She reached for the bath pouf and using the large loop of thick string that usually hung it from a small hook, she slipped the thing over the shower head. Rachel looked up and smiled. Her arms stretched up placing her hands in the space left in the loop. She bit her lip and looked at Alex. "And is this where you want me Ms. Udinov?"

"Why Rachel, how did you ever guess?" Alexandra leaned in and kissed Rachel, her teeth nipping at her lover's lower lip. She pulled back to look at her with dark eyes. "How could you ever dream that I'd be away from you? You belong to me," she growled. She kissed and nipped at Rachel's throat. "You are mine forever."

"Yours," Rachel whispered feeling fingers slide down her body and pressing her back against the tile wall. Her skin was hot and wet from the steam and the shower and her need for Alex. It felt as if a lifetime had passed since her body was possessed so perfectly.

Alex slid her hands, spread and firm up Rachel's torso. Her eyes stared into those of her lover. She smiled slowly, as she drew nails over the wet skin of Rachel's abs. "Please Alex, don't tease me. I need you," she whispered.

Alex's fingers moved gently over her before their eyes met again. "For you, Rachel, anything," she whispered.

Her lips and teeth moved slowly over Rachel's throat as her hand gripped Rachel's hip. Their bodies slid against one another. Alex nails teasingly raked lightly over Rachel's thigh.

Rachel groaned and lifted her leg slightly to wrap it around her wife. Alex smiled against her lover's skin as her fingers moved along Rachel's inner thigh. Her fingers slid lightly over Rachel's center, circling painfully slow. Rachel's head fell back. "Please," she pleaded.

Alexandra smiled. Her fingers moved more firmly over her lover's nub and slid back and into Rachel whose breathing was already going ragged. Her strokes were firm and deep the way Rachel liked them for long minutes before slowing. Her eyes opened to Alex who was watching her face. She caught her breath. "You going to make me beg?" she asked with dark eyes.

Alex's eyes slid down Rachel's body. Her fingers were slowed to keep the contact and the frission of feeling but provide no release. She fingered the platinum necklace around the younger woman's neck. "This says you're mine. I can do whatever I want with your body." Rachel tried to press her leg against Alex to pull her closer. "Yes...yours," she breathed. "Please," she pleaded. She released her own wrists and pulled Alex against her. "Mine," she growled against Alex's lips.

Smiling fiercely, Alexandra turned her into the cold tile wall, pressing her body against Rachel's back. "Is this what you want?" She whispered, wrapping her fingers around her hair, and tugging. Rachel gasped as Alexandra's other hand slid up her inner thigh and found her wetness, slipping inside her once again. She began driving into her lover hard and fast, Rachel's head falling back as Alexandra's teeth and lips moved along her shoulder. "Come for me," she commanded.

Alex pressed her harder against the wall, controlling and consuming her body. She moaned with every thrust, as Alex whispered into her hair, pushing her over the edge. Her eyes closed as her
orgasm crashed.

Rachel's eyes flew open as she came a second time. She blinked as she caught her breath. She was not looking at Alex. There was no steam, no tiles... no Alex. A tear rolled out of the corner of her eye as she heard Caitlin's voice in the next room talking to Parker. Alex was gone. Just when her heart had mended, her brain came and kicked it to pieces again. Her knuckles slammed into the headboard. Caitlin came in. She saw Rachel staring up. "Did Parker's little adventure getting a glass of milk wake you too?" Caitlin asked, grinning.

Rachel looked over. "No," she whispered, still a little shell shocked.

A look of concern fell over Caitlin. She slowly lowered herself beside Rachel on the bed. Her hand rested lightly on Rachel's stomach. "Are you okay? Did you have a nightmare?"

Rachel blinked her eyes clear. "I just... Hard night."

Caitlin leaned forward and kissed her gently. "I'm sorry I wasn't here."

Rachel smiled tremulously. "I'm okay... really." She stroked Caitlin's cheek. She sighed as she let go of the mists of the dream. "Will you hold me Cait?" she asked. "Until I fall asleep?"

"Hold you forever Rachel," Caitlin responded gently.
Grace watched as Alexandra slid away from the small vet clinic with a quick glance around. Moving in she frowned. She had never been a big fan of animals, perhaps too many years being Amanda's protegee. She fought the urge to hold her breath as she entered a room filled with scents of wet dog and antiseptic. Grace moved to the desk to one side of the room and waited patiently beside a fish bowl filled with little milkbones.

A tall woman clad in puppy dog covered scrubs smiled brightly as she looked up from a file folder. "Well hello there." She half stood to see over the desk and frowned. "No fuzzy child today?" she asked in a puzzled tone.

Grace shook her head. "No, no fuzzy child. I got a call from my... sister. She came in here with a little..." Grace hesitated and rubbed her forehead. "I'm sorry. Migraine. She was just here and I wondered if she was still around?"

"Ohhhh," the woman responded with a sympathetic look. "Miss Alexandra Smith and the newborn puppy?"

Grace nodded gratefully. "Is she still here?" She looked around as if expecting the subject of their conversation to wander in any second.

"No dear. The little puppy she found is here. The poor thing. It was far too young to lose its mother and Miss Smith couldn't take it with her. She has a travelling job, as I am sure you know, and can't take care of it until it is old enough to wean."

Grace's brow knit. Alexandra Udinov with a puppy. She was Amanda's protegee long enough to know what that meant. Leverage. Alex must have been trying to feed the mother when she could get away and now she had the puppy. The mother was probably dead. Alex had an interest in seeing the puppy better. Grace almost smiled. "What would be involved in caring for the puppy?" She smiled thinly. "My sister has such a tender heart. God bless her. I could take care of the puppy for her until it's stronger."

The receptionist smiled broadly. "Family is such a wonderful thing." She briefly frowned. "Miss Smith paid in advance."

Grace shook her head and waved a hand. "You keep it. Put it on account or something. The puppy will need shots and such later."

The receptionist's smile grew again. "If you will have a seat, the doctor will talk to you about what the dear little puppy will need, and I will make up a new mommy kit for you with pamphlets and some baby milk and other things."

"Wonderful. Thank you." Grace looked around. "I'll sit down until the doctor is ready." She made her way to a chair and tried to ignore the spaniel sniffing her shoes. She closed her eyes and waited. She would get one of the jr. pukes from operations to give the puppy its milk and all and then, when Alex needed a little... push, the extra leverage would be barky and waiting.
**Nikita** opened the door. "Michael. The wedding plans are ready. I can't wait to see the look on Caitlin and Rachel's faces when we get there. We have a plane set up and..." she frowned. "What's wrong? Michael, what is it?"

He shook his head. "I'm just really worried, Nikita." He paced back and forth across the carpet.

She sat on the desk and patted beside her. He sat down leaning back on his hands. "We are losing a damn good agent ... and at a time when we are supposed to be focusing on Amanda's mole."

She shook her head. "They have a child now." Nikita curled her hand around Michael's. "It's just too dangerous for them to be in the field. They need to be there for him as he grows up. We can't begrudge them that." she smiled sadly. "Family is important." She caught the sad look on his face as he thought of family he had lost. She stroked his cheek. "We will get away from here one day and have our own," she promised.

He barked a laugh. "There is a saying around here. Like Nikita's retirement. Never going to happen."

Nikita tilted her head. "I wouldn't say never. When we can make this place strong and make sure that it will not be the bloody tool of the vultures and a black hole for kids." She smiled. "Like Nikita's retirement." she said sadly.

"Not like that. We will make it possible." Michael smiled at her. "I want us to have a life." He shrugged. "And if we are needed from time to time after, we'll find a way to make it all work."

She leaned in to kiss him tenderly. "Thank you Michael. You get it more than anyone."

He barked another laugh. "Alex would have got it. She would have still kicked your ass for not having a fuller life outside the office, but she would have gotten it."

Nikita smiled sadly. "She would have at that. Wish she was here."

Michael shook his head. "Hell no. She would raise holy hell at that wedding. She never let a thing go easy."

She laughed hard. "Good point." She picked up her phone. "I have pictures of our soon to be honorary nephew. Wanna see?"

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**Alexandra** entered her room and walked to the window. Peeling the curtain away, she looked out at one of the interior views, a square void over the Grand Ballroom roof. She looked up at a little piece of sky. She had enough money and some weapons for New Orleans, all she needed was the head start. She wondered just how much Grace was Amanda's creature. Could she buy time from her or would she have to run quietly. She shook her head. No. She couldn't risk throwing her chance away, she thought. She could only count on herself.
Alexandra slid into the computer chair. She looked at her coworker. "Hey."

He looked at her confused. "Hi?"

"I have been out of the game for a bit and wanted to practice." Alex turned on her monitor. She looked over to see him shrug.

"Practice away. I need to work." Without another word or glance, Alex was left to her own devices.

She didn't remember how to do it at first. Alexandra surfed a bit and slowly began opening the programs behind webpages. Low security at first then higher. Based on what she'd been told, while she was no Queen Hacker, she was more than capable of making her way through security and slowly, she proved it to herself. Hours past. She waved off Grace's suggestion of a meal and marked when her coworker in operations pushed back from his desk to leave for the day.

Alexandra looked around. There were several others in the room, but they were wrapped up in their own work.

The information for New Orleans was kept from her, but it was not hidden particularly deep. Alex mentally noted the information about where and when before she turned to practicalities. She began to make a few travel arrangements. She would not be travelling in style, but she would travel without notice and swiftly. Alex chewed her lip. The question was, would she travel fast enough.

While there didn't seem to be any particular plans in place for taking out Division in New Orleans, there would be a team locally set in case Amanda or Percy decided to do something at a later time. Alex could also pretty much count on Grace sticking to her like super glue. Alex needed to tie up the folks who could tie her up. She looked around again. Smiling, she began putting together a small program. It was not particularly sophisticated. It would simply tell the local team that the situation had shifted from its original location to the Chalmette Battlefield. It was not far away but it would get them far enough off that she could take care of business when the time was right.

Alexandra leaned back as she shut down her computer. That only left her watchdog. She couldn't totally hate Grace or Amanda. Her little bit of time on the dark side with Division made a monitor necessary. She couldn't exactly love Grace for this either. She'd had enough of being in the dark and being controlled. Alex sighed. She still had a few days to work this out.

Grace ran fingers down Alexandra's spine as she stepped from the steamy shower. "Hey stranger," Grace started.

Alex turned to her. "Grace." She looked at her door and then back at Grace with a raised brow.

Grace stepped in close and ran her lips along the column of Alex's throat. "We are spies babe. Picking locks is just good fun," she murmured against Alexandra's hot wet skin.
Alex stepped back. "What's the plan?" She loved the way Grace's lips felt on her skin, but she was going to keep her head clear.

Grace looked at her puzzled. She shook her head. "Amanda rang and said she'd have a job for us in a few days."

"Great." Alex grabbed her bathrobe.

"Is something the matter?"

Alex turned back. "Like?"

"I know your little secret, Alexandra. I know about the dog."

Alexandra's eyes narrowed. "What do you know about the dog?"

Grace smiled and held up her hands. "I know you had a puppy being taken care of by a local vet. I moved him somewhere safe."

Alex took one staggering step and then another. Her eyes looked flat. Her voice was even. "Why would you do that, Grace?"

"Do you have any idea what Amanda would do if she found out you had a dog? She would fucking rip him to shreds to make a point if she got pissed."

"Where is he Grace?"

Grace swallowed hard. The quieter and stiller Alex got the more she knew that this was the Alexandra people feared. She looked over her shoulder at the door. "He is safe. He is down in the research lab. I got a 'do not experiment' tag on his cage."

Alex stepped close, her hand resting on Grace's throat. "Let's go check on him."

They were soon in the research lab. Alex watched as one of the lab assistants fed the puppy, who was already beginning to look better and stronger. She walked into the lab and lifted the puppy out of the lab assistant's hands.

"Hey!"

Grace shook her head. He quieted and stepped back. Alex checked the puppy thoroughly. She looked at Grace. "He was safe where he was."

"No, Alexandra." She motioned for the assistant to leave. "Amanda would have found him. She would have used him."

Alexandra sneered. "Some days I wonder who is the real black hat around here." Her eye caught site of a refrigerated room. She walked to it. "Stay. I need to get more milk." She walked in tucking the puppy close to her skin and under her shirt. She grabbed a vial and headed toward the airlock door with it hidden next to her palm. She growled at Grace. "Stay back," she said as the other woman moved to follow.
Alexandra paused in the doorway. She turned and looked at Grace. "You know, I may be fucked in the head, but I know where I need to be." She flicked the vial at the room sensor and shut the airlock door. She looked through the window at the wide eyed woman and thumbed the communication panel beside the door. "It's curable. No worries. You are just stuck for a while." She turned and walked away, the puppy wiggling against her.

"Okay little man... Let's go find you another babysitter and then mama's gotta fly."
Chapter 39

A hand lightly touched her shoulder. Alexandra looked up startled, pulling her earplug out. The stewardess leaned in. "Please fasten your seat belt, Ma'am. We will be arriving shortly." Alex smiled tightly and fastened her belt. She looked around at the other passengers in the coach section. They were showing the signs of a journey soon completed. Mostly, they were just waking up and shaking themselves into motion. She looked under her seat to double check the satchel. Amanda had opened a legitimate shop to cover a few of the firm's jobs. Companies across the country trusted Amanda and Percy's cover company to transport their important carry on sized papers and products. It was mind bending. If there was a transfer of interest to the two of them, or an agent needed to get somewhere without notice, simply substitute a highly trained field worker for the usual run of housewives and college students.

Alexandra walked through the airport, handing over a mass of files detailing embezzlement within a large toy company. It had made boring reading in the rest room, but resealing the satchel made for more fun. She was trotting to a rental counter when she spotted a shop filled with touristy clap trap. Smiling, she went over and lifted a mardi gras mask. "How much?" She handed over a bill with a smile and whistled happily all the way to her little gas burner.

Soon she was on her way to a local delivery company. She dropped one of her fake IDs on the counter. "You got a box for me?" she asked as she looked around at the bare walls and scratched and dented counters of the office.

A grizzled man in a light blue uniform shirt looked at the card. "Right, please wait here." He moved off with a small limp and returned with a well sealed box. She smiled happily as she signed for it.

Taking her box to her rental, Alex flipped out a knife. She cut the tape and then cut up the pillows inside. She pulled a gun and several clips free. "Sniping is fun, but nothing beats a personal touch." Smiling, she drove to the place where she intended to set up and wait. She pulled the black and red checked domino mask free of the paper bag. It felt damned silly, but Amanda's insistence that she keep her face from being compromised still held some weight and New Orleans, even at this time of year was just too damned hot for a balaclava. That would be all she needed, sweat and itching. The mask was the perfect substitute, she thought.

Rachel and Caitlin's fingers clung tightly to one another as roads passed outside the window. They looked out the front of the limo with anticipation.

"Where are we going?" Rachel asked, her voice excited.

Nikita chuckled. She and Michael (who was on the phone with Birkhoff who was driving the rental car full of other guests) were sitting on the bench seat across. "A place quintessentially N'Awlins according to the wedding planner."

"Like that big Cathedral you see on tv all the time?" Caitlin asked idly as she passed a stuffed bunny down to Parker who was on the roomy floor of the limousine. She looked up at her friend with a
raised brow.

"What's ca-tee-dal?" he asked from the floor. Parker had slept the whole trip and was still a little quiet. He would wake when he got some sun.

"A place where your mama is likely to burst into flames," Rachel said with a grin. She eeped at the fingers poking into her side. She leaned into Caitlin.

Parker tugged his mother's pant leg. "No playing with fire," he said with a frown.

Caitlin's brow rose at Nikita. "You heard him. No playing with fire." She stroked his hair back smiling as he curled against her leg.

Nikita laughed, shaking her head. "It would take a year to get into St. Louis Cathedral, or longer, plus I figured your preference for Elvis impersonators in Vegas meant no church. Our wedding planner said that would be another icon of New Orleans."

Rachel shook her head mystified. She was wracking her brain. "I can't think of another icon besides Bourbon street or..." she trailed off. "Oh wow," she whispered.

Caitlin looked at her curiously. "What?"

Rachel shook her head slowly. "Either we are having our wedding on a street full of music bars... or we are having it in a..."


Caitlin began laughing hard. She wiped at tears. "Perfect. It's absolutely perfect." She kissed Parker's forehead as he looked up curiously.

Rachel looked at her with wide eyes. "Perfect?"

Caitlin kissed her hand. "Perfect." She smiled and gave Nikita a thumbs up.

Nikita looked over to Rachel who nodded with a grin. Nikita took a shaky breath. "So, I won't have to kill Scott later."

Caitlin smiled. "This is going to be a fantastic day." she reached an arm around and hugged Rachel to her side happily.

Alexandra slid into the shade of a mausoleum. She would work her way slowly through the cemetary until she found the location where the targets were gathering. She was beginning to have doubts about Amanda and Grace, but more about the lengths they were willing to go to keep her on a straight and narrow. The Division crew would pay for mind fucking her, and then she would approach Grace and Amanda about their manipulations.

She pulled back into a shadow and held up a cheap disposable camera as another bunch of tourists passed. Looking up the main aisle, she caught sight of a black limousine and she moved to get a better look.
"Show time." she smirked, strolling toward the gate.
Percy sipped at his cup and looked at the screen. Amanda was surrounded by a halo of sunshine. She smiled. She looked positively angelic. Percy knew better than to trust that particular appearance. He slid the cup on the desk as he received a message from another part of the facility. "Well Amanda, it appears that Alexandra was quite correct. The disease she unleashed to lock down the lab was quite curable. Your leash on Alex will remain in isolation, but she will soon be up and at 'em."

Amanda's face grew more amused by the second. "I knew she would be able to get away from Grace for this, but such ingenuity."

"Alex's hallmark," Percy noted. "Do you think she might manage to take out Nikita and the others in New Orleans?"

Amanda sat back for long moments. "I believe she will do a great deal of damage before returning to us. Do I believe that is the endgame? Unlikely. For all her work, Alexandra is still in a... primordial state. She has growing to do before she is the form of Death. This is simply... a bit of exercise for her. And it is a midterm examination result for us." She looked to the left and picked up a plate. "I rarely indulge in beignets, but when in New Orleans." She smiled brightly. "It appears that is a personal expedition by our counterparts."

"Oh?" replied Percy. He had come to take tea with Amanda on a regular basis and he had never been bored. She always had something interesting to add. He frowned at a face in his window. His brow rose. The face disappeared. Percy wished that he had thought to go to New Orleans. Remaining here and taking tea by computer was not nearly as relaxing. "What has brought them out of the woodwork in droves?"

Amanda sipped her tea. "Our young Merlin will be attacking the wedding of her wife."

Percy's smile spread. "You'll have to take pictures. That will be quite the ceremony."

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**Michael** lifted Parker up to give him a great view. The rest of the Division family gathered in a loose semicircle around Rachel and Caitlin and the preacher that the wedding planner had found for the occasion. The elderly man looked like a retired Blues Brother who had been pickled and dried out several times over the years. He looked up and smiled at the two women. He looked around and lifted his battered Bible, the cover creased and slightly sunbleached by years of use. "Dearly beloved..." he began.

Alexandra slid along the top of the mausoleum until she was close to the wall. She raised herself and spotted the crowd. A few of the faces were pinned to her pells back at the former hotel. Alex watched from her perch as faces from her list of people to asskick drew up in an arch around a pair of women holding hands and mouthing I love yous. No one was watching for trouble as a preacher half spoke, half sung his way through a marriage ceremony with speed and passion. Smiles grew on every face save one. Gentle kisses were shared in the circle of friends as the romantic moment drew nigh. Alex checked her weapon one last time. She smirked. The wait was finally over. She fitted the
mask to her face and bound it behind her head with the ribbons. The woman Amanda called Merlin was ready to strike.

Everyone clapped and hugged as the women kissed, gently at first, theatrically as the small crowd egged them on. Rachel laughed as Caitlin dipped her.

The preacher leaned in and whispered to the couple. Caitlin looked at Nikita and made a handsign. "Oh." Nikita said. "Oh... just one second."

She started jogging toward the limo. "The check is in the limo," she called out.

Alexandra leapt from the top of the mausoleum to the top of the wall. She looked down as she heard a young boy call out, "Cool."

She dropped to the ground, but Michael had seen the gun when Parker yelled out. He kicked it free of the woman's hand. Alex's hand wrapped around his ankle and yanked hard. Parker tumbled to the ground as Michael tried to get his balance back. She slammed her foot in his face hard. Spinning she kicked a pair of agents coming at her.

Nikita gasped as she turned toward the sounds of a fight. The woman in the mask, her moves, it convinced her more than DNA or hospital files. Alex was alive. Alex was alive and pulling a gun off a former fellow agent. Nikita began running toward the fight. Alex raised the gun at Rachel and Caitlin. Parker ran at Caitlin.

Alex caught the motion out of the corner of her eye and turned the gun. She saw the little boy and hesitated. An agent grabbed her arm. She slammed her hand up at his nose breaking it and sending fragments into his brain. Her foot slammed into Rachel's chest as she ran up. Rachel fell back, trying to get her breath back.

The masked woman dropped and then slammed her body upwards into Birkhoff who had been running to try to get Parker out of the way. He smashed to the ground. She turned and saw Nikita raise a gun in her direction. Rolling to the side, she came up beside the wall. She threw herself up on the wall and was soon running between mausoleums.

Nikita cut to one side of the hot pursuit. She knew Alex, the way she thought. She would catch Alex and shake her 'til her brain came loose.

Alexandra took a peek behind as she rounded a corner. They would catch up in a moment no doubt. She turned her sweatshirt to the other side which was decorated in a loud plaid and dropped a ball cap on her head. She tucked her hair into the hat and dropped the mask in an empty flower urn as she joined the back of a tour group. The tour group didn't notice as the woman at the back was slammed to a stone lid.

Alex hissed out a breath as the corner tore at her shoulder. She flung an arm behind, knocking Nikita off balance. Alex sent her foot into Nikita's midriff. Nikita slammed a fist into Alex's knee. "Alex. Stop this. It's me."

"I know who you are... Mind fucking bitch," Alex yelled as she cracked a small vase against the older woman. She scrambled clear. Nikita gave chase.
Chapter 41

A small luxury car screeched to a stop in front of Alex. The darkened window came down. Amanda smiled from the interior.

"Hello Alexandra. Shall we talk?"

Alex slid into the open window just as Nikita came up through the gate of the cemetery. The car sped away bearing Alex.

Nikita came to a stop on the grassy verge and looked around. She grabbed a motorcycle out from under a tourist. "Enjoy the sights," she yelled. She gunned the engine and tore off after her former boss and her formerly dead best friend. She tapped her earpiece and called out a request via phone.

Alex looked at Amanda who was calmly and swiftly dodging through traffic. "You aren't surprised I'm here." She pulled her seat belt across her body and fastened it. Amanda was a good driver, but in the spy business it pays to prepare for sudden and disastrous stops.

Amanda smiled and looked into the rear view mirror before cutting a pair of lanes to turn right. A pair of cars fishtailed in her wake trying to keep from hitting her. They crunched together instead. "I would have been more surprised had you not put in an appearance. How are you feeling Alexandra?"

Startled the other woman looked at her for a moment. "Are you fucking serious?" All the things Amanda could ask and this was it? Alex might as well still be in the loony bin.

"The wedding was a bit of a surprise I admit." Amanda asked her eyes probing Alex's face from the mirror.

"What wedding? Oh that thing with the targets... It was convenient. I wish I got them earlier. Interrupt 'I do' they might try again." Alex smashed her fist onto the car console. "Damn it." She was frustrated. She brushed blood from her face.

"You will have your chance to eliminate the targets." Amanda smiled. The fact Alex didn't register the wedding and its personal meaning for her was an excellent sign. She frowned as she looked to the right. Fishtailing the car, she barely missed the flying limo coming from a cross street. Amanda calculated and smiled. "Perhaps I could arrange a second chance sooner rather than later." She spun her wheel and headed south.

Michael roared. "Are you serious? How?" He cursed. "She got past me." He palmed the wheel and moved into pursuit behind the motorcycle.

Nikita slid through gaps between cars. "It was Alex. Just trust me on this." Amanda's car flew up a curve and then over a small hill.

The limo slid hard around a corner, moving to an adjacent street in order to try to cut them off. Michael hissed as his comm nearly distracted him as he navigated a narrow gap. "What?"

"Give us a way to go," Rachel said as she took Birkhoff's rental around a corner at full speed nearly
tipping it. She was driving the general direction that she had seen the little train of vehicles go off in. She hoped they hadn't doubled back at this point. "Wake up the GPS Caitlin."

Caitlin frowned and tried to get the rental cars directional aid past the restaurant quick pick menu. "Working on it baby." She cursed quietly, as she came up with the hotel listing. She kept stabbing at the keyboard.

"Where's Parker?" Nikita demanded over the open comm. She leaned the bike hard to get through a farmers market. She barely managed to keep upright as a man throwing himself at a stand managed to knock loose a stack of watermelons. The car had bounced the wrong way up a parking ramp and was skidding down the other side less than a hundred yards away.

"Birkhoff's got him," Caitlin responded. "Which way?" She finally got the map up. "We're live. Where are you?"

"You are retired," Nikita roared. "Get back to Parker."

"Bitch crashed our party. We want to know why." Rachel narrowly dodged a subcompact and looked at Caitlin. "Get Birkhoff to tell us."

Birkhoff handed his handheld Nintendo 2DS to the boy sitting against the wall eating a beignet. "Here you go Parker." He cupped his ear. "OW. Stop screeching." He grabbed a tablet out of his computer. His phone rang. Slapping the Bluetooth into his ear, he started locating the chase scene in progress. "Birkhoff. What? Nikita?"

He chewed his lip a moment and then opened the comm. "Rachel, you guys pick us up. Nikita wants us circled."

Rachel growled. "Are you kidding me?" She looked at Caitlin. "Fine... coming back." She slapped her hands on the wheel. "We're benched."

Caitlin slipped her hand over Rachel's. "Let's go get our son. Nikita can handle this."

Rachel thought a moment before smiling. "Our son." She slowed down and turned on the turn signal and prepared to go back to Parker.

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**Amanda** aimed her car toward the forest of masts at the dock. Alex looked at her. "Shouldn't we head toward an airport?"

The other woman smiled. "Do you know what is the most important skill you have Alexandra?"

"What?"

"No matter the odds, no matter the number of times someone tells you no, you get it done." Amanda undid her seat belt. "I'm going to give you your second chance, and I will even send you to the inner sanctum to do it." She looked over. "You're ready Alexandra."

"Ready for what?" Alex pressed the cut on her face.

Amanda opened the door and looked at Alex. "Good luck. Cancel them all. Grace and your puppy
will be waiting Alexandra. Don't let us down." She leapt from the car. Alex turned to get her own door, but that was the moment that the left side the car went up a ramp and flipped the car.

Nikita's eyes widened. She didn't see Amanda hit the ground, but she noted that Alex's door didn't open. "Alex," she screamed as the car flipped and sprayed sparks down the concrete. She dropped the Yamaha and ran toward the wreak. Pulling the door open, she dragged a dazed Alex clear.
Chapter 42

Nikita dragged the dazed younger woman several feet away from the crashed car. She didn't smell gas, but she was still worried as she saw the damage the flying roll had done to the vehicle. She lightly slapped the other woman's face. "Come on Alex, help me here. Wake up... We have to get out of here." She cradled her friend as she tried to shake her to her senses.

Alexandra shook her head and looked at her savior for several moments before recognition set in. Her eyes widened. Taking a deep breath, she bucked out of Nikita's arms. She pushed back and scrambled with hands and feet to get away from the other woman. She stood and turned before lightly curling her fists. Her feet set for a fight. "Let's go. Let's do this," she snarled. Alex feinted a kick, ignoring the ringing in her ears.

Nikita circled back and away. She had to get Alex away from the car just in case it blew. She also had to find a non-lethal way to take the other woman down. She blocked a flurry of punches before backing toward a ladder on the outside of a boathouse. Nikita ignored the sounds of the limo coming into the dock area as well as the swelling crescendo of police sirens that the city wide run had netted.

She had to be very careful here. Alex had gotten Division training, but more than that, Alex had been trained by Nikita herself. Nikita flung herself onto the ladder, hearing the shriek of the bolts as she swung her legs out to meet the woman coming after her. Alex stumbled back two steps before moving forward again. She caught Nikita's ankle in a second kick and twisted.

Nikita gasped and fell hard to the side onto a 55 gallon drum. Her other foot cracked Alex's jaw. Alexandra growled and grabbed a rod. She raised it to crack Nikita, who was throwing herself to the ground on the other side of the drum. Her fingers pressed lightly on the new soreness of her ribs. Alex crumpled to the pavement. Michael stood there with a four by four in his hands and a dark look on his face.

He looked down at the young woman with a still look on his face. It was like a part of him was still in shock, and couldn't believe this. He looked at Nikita. "How long have you known?" He tossed the block of wood to the side and helped Nikita to her feet. "How long did you know she was alive?"

Nikita shook her head as she moved toward the other woman. She crouched and checked Alex's pulse. She frowned at the blood on her formerly dead friend's head. "We thought it was all a mind game a la Amanda. We didn't think it was her, that she was really alive."

"Who's we?" he asked in a dangerous tone.

She looked up at him. "We, Birkhoff and I, we thought it was a mind game. We didn't want to see everyone hurting again. We were so sure that it was just a mind game."

He looked down at Alex, his face cloudy. "She tried to kill you. There was no hesitation. What now?" He looked toward the city and the sirens.

Nikita stood. "We get her out of here and then..." She looked sad. "We can't tell Rachel that Alex is alive, not yet."

Michael nodded and grabbed Alexandra, putting her over his shoulder. "This isn't like last time, Nikita. She was stone cold. Amanda made her a danger to us, didn't she?" He toted her toward the limo with a grimace.
The older woman led the way to the limo and opened the back. She pulled her belt and wrapped it around Alex's wrists. "She's very dangerous. We have to lock her down until we can fix this again." She hopped behind the wheel and started the engine. "What now?"

He looked out the window as he sat on the passenger side of the front portion of the long vehicle. "Send them on their honeymoon. Neither of them deserve this...Then we go back to Division... and try to bring Alex back from the dead."

She looked over at him. "Michael. I'm sorry." Her fingers slid over his hand and squeezed. He turned his hand over to cradle hers.

"So am I." The muscle in his jaw jumped. "I'm not stupid. I know the line of work we are in. Secrets are in the blood but this... this shouldn't have been one of them." He still looked hurt. Nikita's frowned with pain and regret.

She nodded. Nikita looked into the passenger part of the limo using the mirror. "I'm sorry. We'll fix this."

Michael nodded. "Call them."

Nikita pressed in Rachel's number. "Hey," she greeted.

Rachel opened her side of the conversation with "Did you get her?"

Nikita looked over at Michael. She frowned. "We got her. She... she's something else entirely. We're bundling her up for interrogation at Division."

"Right, we should find out who sent her. My money is on Amanda."

"Mine, too. Never a dull moment with her on the loose."

"Well, you did promise an exciting wedding." Rachel chuckled.

Nikita faked a chuckle. "That I did."

"Need us to head home?" Rachel asked. Caitlin smiled and shook her head as she cradled the little boy wrapped around a handheld video game. Some things never changed. She watched her new wife's face.

Nikita shook her head at the phone. "Rachel... You and Caitlin are done. Retired. Go on your honeymoon and find your bliss. You've earned it."

Rachel smiled and squeezed Caitlin's hand. "You need us, you know how to find us."

"Not gonna. Now get the hell out of dodge. Have a wonderful time." Nikita faked a chuckle and closed the connection. She pressed speed dial again.

"Birkhoff. Get the wedding guests scrambled and ready to fly to Division."

"No Bourbon Street?"

"Birkhoff... Alex is alive and we have her. Sort of. She doesn't seem to be our Alex anymore."

Birkhoff chewed on that for long seconds. Had Alex been in that hospital after all? "So just straight bourbon."
"Something like that."
Chapter 43

Nikita looked through the one way glass as the doctor finished looking over his patient. He looked at the mirrored glass before he hung a bag on the tree and hooked it into the IV running into the young woman's arm. The doctor looked around the sterile room, picking up bits of gauze and a needle, placing it on the rolling tray. It was a prison cell of a hospital room and it was his intention to keep it that way. He had done a stint in a maximum security prison before he had been approached by Michael to serve his country in another place, in another way.

He lightly ran fingers over the sheet on the side of the bed from which he worked. The small implant he found had been placed in a special container, breaking it off from monitoring. He was now checking that there was not one piece of metal or plastic left behind that could be turned into a weapon. His stint in max had taught him just how many things could be dangerous from plastic knives to toothbrushes and saran wrap to large splinters of wood in the right hands. The doctor was the one to be around this individual and he was not interested in finding out if the captured woman was as dangerous as his new bosses said.

Tugging at the restraints a final time, he turned and wheeled the surgical tray from the room. He stopped briefly to look at Nikita. "Implants out. There are signs of a recent gunshot wound, mostly healed. I'm going to keep her under for another few hours til the rest of the tests come back." He turned and walked down the gray concrete corridor deep in the underbelly of Division toward his office.

Nikita turned and looked through the window again. Michael stood from his chair nearby. "Definitely her?" He had watched quietly as his wife had paced through the removal of the chip and the overall examination. She had been as edgy as a cat.

"Geek squad matched her up. It's definitively Alex." Nikita took a long slow breath. "What the hell did Amanda do to her to make her attack us?" She chewed her lip and crossed her arms in her concern and confusion.

Michael shook his head. "We won't know until she wakes up." His hand slid over to grip her shoulder lightly.

Nikita looked out of the glass at the unconscious woman "If then. Alex is stubborn as hell at the best of times. I doubt she is just going to sing." Nikita reached for the jacket draped over her husbands other arm. "Everyone in the know is locked down?" She tugged on her jacket and checked the pocket to make sure her cell phone was still inside.

"Everyone," he confirmed. "You sure this is the right course of action?" his concern was easy enough to read.

Nikita shook her head "This is the only course of action until we know what the hell is going on, Michael." She looked up into the corner of the room. "Get these feeds moved to my personal computer. I want to know if Amanda's mole twitches in this direction."

Michael nodded. "I have about a dozen recruits ready for the field. I don't want them out there until we get the mole locked down." He hated to hold back those who were ready, but they were still green and would be easy pickings for agents with greater experience.
She turned and frowned as she stared at Alex's monitors. "Seems like we are increasing the number of people inside Division who want us dead."

"Tactically, never the best move." He wrapped his arms around her, standing behind her as they both stared into the nearly empty room. "We will sort this out."

She nodded vaguely. "I'm going to sit with her awhile, Michael."

He nodded and stepped back slightly. Their friendship had meant so much to Nikita. He would not begrudge her the time to sit with her best friend, newly back from the dead. She turned to face him. Michael gently stroked her cheek. As she looked up, he leaned in and kissed her tenderly. "I'll hold the fort. I'll even bring dinner down if you want to stay." He smiled and reaching out, took her hand, squeezing it supportively.

She smiled. "No Michael. I mean for my husband to take me to an expensive restaurant for dinner tonight."

"Expensive?" His brows came up. It was an unusual request from his down to earth wife.

Her smile became predatory. "If you want to get lucky sailor, it'd better be." She lightly backhanded his chest with a broad smile that didn't quite reach her eyes in her concern for Alex.

He kissed her again with a grin. "Understood." He grabbed his own jacket off the back of his chair. "I shall return, after I see to the children." He waved as he left.

She walked into the room with a chair rolling under her fingers. It was soon in a position close to the bound and unconscious woman. Nikita slid into the chair and opened a book. She couldn't focus on the dancing words and was glancing up more and more often. "Alex," she said quietly. "What the hell happened? How did Amanda get to you?"

She leaned her head back and took a deep breath. "Amanda must have really done a job on you. Well, we kind of knew. There were records... we thought they were you and then we didn't think it. She scrambled you with ECT and then what? Used drugs?" She stood and paced. Nikita turned to look at the younger woman. "I'm sorry... You didn't deserve this, baby girl. We will bring you back."
Alex blinked up at a light panel above her head. This was getting way too fucking common. She blinked again slowly willing her eyes clear. She saw a face interrupt the light. Her eyes narrowed trying to read the darker patch in front of the light. Her pupils adjusted. Nikita. Mind fucking Bitch Numero Uno. She yanked hard against straps as she surged upward trying to get at the woman. Teeth clicked as she even tried to bite the woman. She looked down at her bound wrists and pulled and twisted. "No!" She bucked against the bindings. "You get away!"

Nikita backed up a step and held out her hands. "Alex, Alex, calm down. You'll hurt yourself." She circled to the end of the bed, out of reach of the other woman's teeth. "I know you're angry and probably frightened..."

"Fuck you. You won't get me again." She nearly dislocated her shoulders thrusting herself down to try and kick at Nikita the best she could with her ankles bound as well.

Nikita took a shaky breath and took another step back. "Amanda screwed with your brain Alex. You have to know who is really on your side. You have to know," she said almost pleading.

Alex yowled her outrage and shook the hospital bed hard with her struggles. She was not listening to the lies. This is how she landed in the nuthouse to start with. These fuckers would not get a second chance to take her mind from her.

Nikita held up a hand to the doctor who was about to press a needle into a sedative vial. "No. Do not give her anything."

The doctor shook his head concerned. "She will hurt herself like this." He held up the needle. "A mild sedative." He looked down at the fiercely grimacing woman.

She shook her head. "No. She won't trust us if we dose her. Amanda will have told her something like we brainwashed her. We can not dose her." Her lips pursed.

The doctor nodded and put the medication back on the tray. "It will take some doing to get food and water into her, but she should be fine without the medication." He frowned as he considered a moment. "We can do this."

"Fuck you," Alex looked at him with wide eyes a split second as if considering the possible equipment they would use to try to hold her still long enough to get food into her. She shouted at her captor. "Let me go and we'll settle this right."

"Amanda messed with you Alex. We aren't the enemies."

"I'll tear your throat out with my teeth," she yelled back fiercely. This bitch would not get the better of her, not again. Amanda knew she would be stronger than a second dose of this bullshit. She raged.

Nikita nodded slowly. "We will need to interrogate her. We'll work out a protocol for getting her off the bed in a bit. Doctor, take care of her." She left the room with a backwards glance, rewarded only by the sight of her friend and protegee spitting at her.

Michael was waiting behind the glass. He looked pained as he watched the violently angry young
woman on the hospital bed. "She's pretty far gone Nikita," he said regretfully. "My guess is that she had an A number one brain fuck done on her. I get the feeling she only knows you from pictures at this point." His expression said what he couldn't about the chances of having their Alex back from this.

"Amanda is not going to win here Michael. That's Alex. She belongs with us." Nikita stalked out of the observation room, her shoulders stiff with tension knowing the kind of odds Michael was thinking Alex had.

Michael was soon matching her steps. He looked in a side room as they traveled from the heightened security area and gave a hand signal to Birkhoff, who soon joined the parade. "Anything?" Michael asked shortly. His face was tensed at the emotions he was reading off his wife.

Birkhoff frowned as he narrowed down what anything could mean. "On the implant? Basic find-me and kill."

Nikita pulled up short and swiveled to face Birkhoff. "Why wouldn't she blow it?"

Michel laughed grimly. "You have to ask? Releasing Alex anywhere she doesn't want to be is like tossing a bomb vest into a room. Amanda liked her because she had a nasty habit of doing maximum damage with minimal things going her way." He looked back down the way they came. "I don't doubt that this is precisely what Amanda had in mind for Alex."

Birkhoff's face twisted. "Works with the rest of the news."

Nikita stared at him balefully. "No traffic, she is not even looking."

The nerd nodded. "Amanda has not made peep one about anything, not the New Orleans thing, not Alex. She is probably in holding."

Michael looked to Nikita. "She doesn't use weapons she hasn't thoroughly vetted."

Nikita held up her hand. "No Michael. We are not going to just give up here. This is Alex."

Michael shook his head. "We have to look at the possibility that we might not be able to bring her back. This is not the same as last time."

Birkhoff scuffed his toe slightly. "There is something else."

They both turned to look at him as if they had forgotten his presence. "What?" Nikita asked impatiently.

"Amanda's not looking, but I think there is someone who is."

"You think?" Michael asked puzzled.

"Ran some correlations. Think I have a hit for Alex on the code name Merlin. If Merlin and Alex are the same, someone put a picture out addressed to her."

"Picture?" Michael teased out. "Is there under laying code?"

Birkhoff shook his head and slipped a piece of paper out of his back pocket. "It's a picture, not signed or encoded. It's out there in the places any of Amanda's little boys and girls would be trained to go in cyberspace." He unfolded the picture and held it up. "Maybe its a trigger?"

Nikita took the picture with a frown. "Why would anyone send Alex a picture of a puppy?"
Alex watched the nurse balefully as she moved around her checking her pulse and general health indicators. The woman was dressed in green scrubs and moved over her with a professional air. Alex frowned as she realized the woman had a surgical mask on. "What? Am I contagious?" she asked sharply.

The nurse looked at her for long moments. "I was told you spit." She went back to work. She came to the side of the bed. "Bed pan?" she asked in a bored tone.

"No," Alex barked. She yanked at her wrist as the woman checked her skin at the restraint points.

The nurse stared at her for a long time, making Alexandra uncomfortable. "There is a pole with a loop on the end. Dog catchers use it on combative canines. I pull the cord, you choke. The pole keeps you far enough away from me that you can't damage me. If you keep fighting me, I will get the one I have in the other room."

Alex stared at her balefully. "Fine," she ground out. She almost jumped as she heard, "Merlin," barely whispered and an object pressed into her hand. Alexandra curled her fingers around it and looked away from the nurse.

The nurse started tossing objects on her tray. "The doctor will be around soon enough. You behave yourself and who knows? You might be bound to a chair before you know it." she added cheerfully. She pushed the tray ahead of her toward the door beside the large mirror.

Alex watched her move to the door and through. Amanda's girl then. Good to know there was an agent of Amanda's handy if she needed it. Her lips tightened. She looked at the mirror and the camera in the the room. Someone was no doubt monitoring her, so she would have one chance at this. She had to get loose before the doctor came back. He was not the type to assume she didn't have a weapon.

She slowly ran her finger along the object in her hand without raising it where it could be seen. A long thin plastic handle with a small sharp blade that coolly sliced into the tip of her thumb when she checked it. A throw away scalpel. She could work with that. She reviewed her situation. Leather restraints could be defeated with one free hand. Way to defeat? Don't mess with the restraints themselves. Attack the thin lead that lead down from the restraints to where they attached to the bed. Something she learned during her lengthy stay at the asylum.

Alex would have to work fast. She looked first at the mirror and then at the camera. Deciding that she could safely work on the side that the scalpel was in, she began cutting. Alexandra hoped like hell that the blade would not dull or break before she could saw it through. She looked up and closed her eyes as if napping. She tried to put a mental picture in her head to motivate her. She was vaguely startled that the image her brain chose was not Amanda or even Grace.

She turned her head at a vague sound. The doctor. She stopped sawing and slipped the scalpel into hiding. If he searched thoroughly, he would find it but she had a feeling he was going to be interrupted. "Hey, Doc. Did the nurse tell you that I was a good girl?" she said mockingly as he leaned in to put the tympanic temperature gauge into her ear. He looked up startled.

"Nurse?" he blurted before the scalpel cut his throat. He grabbed the gash trying to keep the bleeding
controlled as she finished slicing the lead. He stumbled back.

She got her other hand unbound and was working on her legs as he stumbled to the door. She knew she'd be locked in if he got their first. Pushing herself violently off the bed, she landed awkwardly but recovered to slam the doctors tray against his head. She bolted out of the door as an alarm went off.

"Shit." She ran out into the hall. Looking at her options, she ran toward the corridor full of doors. Opening one, she found a supply closet. She heard running footsteps and clambered up the shelves to brace herself over the door. The door slammed open and a gun muzzle swept the room. She dropped and fell into the gunman forcing him off balance. She slammed his wrist and freed the weapon. She shot him and turn to aim at his partner who was coming out of the hospital room at a run.

Nikita got to the end of the hall and saw the standoff. "Damn it," she whispered and aimed the tranq gun at her friend. Alexandra yelped at the needle entering her flesh. She half turned with the gun toward Nikita before getting too boneless to continue standing.

Michael skidded around the corner with the rest of the response team. He looked at the chaos left in the hall and through the open door of the hospital room. "Metal restraints." he said. He looked at one of his men. "Take her to interrogation. I expect metal restraints on her at all times." He frowned. "There will be hell to pay if she gets loose again."

He looked at Nikita who was looking torn at the sight of Alex being dragged down the hall by her arms. "This is what Amanda wanted. Alex tearing loose and us too frozen by memories to do what needs to be done."

"Amanda is not going to keep her. Alex is ours. I refuse to lose anything more to that bitch." Nikita looked around. "When I reviewed the footage from the camera, there was a nurse in her room."

He looked puzzled. "There is no nurse."

She looked at him. "Amanda's other toy. Find the woman who was in here. I am going to get Alex warmed up."
Shaking her head, Alexandra tried to sharpen her fuzzy awareness. She was deeply unhappy, she knew that. She looked at her wrists. Metal restraints were firmly tightened to hold her wrist to the molded plastic over metal of an armrest. Alex knew even before she tugged that it would not be as easy to free herself this time.

Her neck screamed as she moved her head around to look at the room she was in. Now this was more expected. This interrogation room had been made to make people being questioned feel dark despair. It was all grey in here and she felt at home. She looked straight ahead into the corner where Nikita sat.

Nikita watched Alex without a sound. She wanted to know what was going on in her friend's head. She sipped at her tea and set the paper cup on a small table beside her. This room was just as Amanda left it. The woman had a set of interrogation rooms set up for various types of interrogations, like pairs of earrings to match different outfits. That still kind of blew Nikita's mind.

This one was a distressingly grey room with a heavy chair in the metal set in with metal restraints. There was a comfortable chair placed in the prisoner's eyeline with a very civilized end table beside it. It clearly showed to the prisoner who was in charge and just how little worry the interrogator was in over being in there. It was of course all illusion. The delicate frothiness of the interrogator's furnishings was gilding over an iron core and bolted feet.

Alex frowned as Nikita continued to watch her. "What?" she barked impatiently.

"You didn't kill them." Nikita leaned back into the comfortable chair.

"Kill who?"

"Basically... most of the people you seemed to want to kill. There was the junior agent at the beginning, and you killed Scott at the wedding, though that is unsurprising considering you yourself were under threat of death at that point. But by and large, you did maximum destruction with minimal loss of life." She watched Alex intensely. "You had your wife and her new son in your cross hairs, but didn't pull the trigger. Do you remember Rachel? How much of you did Amanda leave intact?"

Alexandra sneered. "Amanda said you played games." She leaned her head back on the molded plastic headrest.

"Amanda would know, given that she is a long time games-master." Nikita sipped her tea. "She fucked with your head Alex. That's what she does."

Alex scoffed. "Seems to be a theme in the business."

Nikita smiled wryly. "It is. What do you remember Alex?"

"I remember that you are the one that screwed with my head and got me sent to the nuthouse."

"False." Nikita stated simply.

Alex shook her head and looked to the side. The walls were much less complicated than staring at the other woman and her tea time furniture.
"You had ECT, didn't you? When we briefly picked up your trail at the mental hospital, there was a record of ECT. What else did Amanda do?"

Alexandra answered with silence.

Nikita smiled. "That's my girl. You always did go all hardass when you get uncomfortable." She ran her finger over the rim of the paper cup. "That's ok. Used to drive me nuts back when we were just starting out together. Still frustrating, but now I think its kind of cute. You know... like a puppy."

Nikita didn't miss the eye motion at that. A sudden flick betrayed what? Her lips pressed as Alex went back to stillness. She would review the footage to find out exactly what she said that prompted response. Her voice softened. "You are and will always be my best friend Alex. I have no compunction about shooting you full of tranqs when you go on a bloody rampage but I have always and will always love you."

Alexandra's eyes watched her as she stood and picking up the cup, moved out of the room.

Nikita stood facing the monitors in front of Birkhoff. As he began the analysis of the footage she drifted in time. She remembered the angry young woman she recruited in her drive to shut down Division. She thought of the angrier young woman who learned her best friend and mentor was also the murderer of her father. Alexandra tended to be a woman of edges. The thing is, when push came to shove she was also a woman who had an instinctive need to protect those weaker than herself and a woman who had a deep core of love under about a hundred feet of prickles. Amanda would use those things in a heartbeat to control Alex. Nikita wondered if she had.

Birkhoff swiveled to face his boss and friend. "We had stress indicators in various spots. Mostly where expected. ECT. Talking about memory. Amanda. Weirdly puppies brought off a hit."

Nikita shook her head. "Amanda doesn't tend to be big on the attach the kid to a puppy and kill it school of control, but she is not above it. I would have thought she would used a human control on Alex. Foster emotional attachment and use it as a lever, but it is possible that our girl fought that scenario." She frowned watching Alex move in the chair experimentally tugging here and there.

Birkhoff's face twisted. "Amanda is using a dog to control Alex? That is just fucked up." He nodded. "Amanda all over. So what do we do? Free the dog, free the Alex?"

Nikita blinked at him. "Any stress at the mention of Rachel?"

He turned back and checked. "None."

Nikita's breath hissed out. "She got wiped. Her memory probably starts at the hospital."

"We can get her memory back?" Birkhoff turned again to face Nikita.

Nikita looked miserable. "No way to tell. And even if we can, will she keep believing Amanda's version of reality?"
Chapter 47

Michael tugged Nikita into his lap as he collapsed into a deep chair in the corner of the darkening living room. Curling into him as she landed softly there she slowly released a deep breath. "It's Alex, but she is..." They were at home, but she was still, in her mind, deep underground in Division. Her fingers curled around the fabric of his shirt as her head curled into his shoulder.

"Amanda's creature," he supplied in a tense voice. Alex was his friend and family too, but he had to take the hard road and be the devil's advocate. His wife was too important to him not to do this, to say these things. His fingers brushed over the soft fabric covering her shoulder. "She is not ours anymore, Nikita. That woman... that dragon bitch... did a number on her."

Her head came up and she looked at him fiercely. "Not for long." Her fingers tightened into a ball in her sharp bright anger at the situation.

He stroked fingers slowly and lovingly over her spine as he smiled at the protective mama lion that he had come to love even more as time went on. "Would it help to bring Rachel back?" Not ideal to his mind but if it would work... They were still in Hawaii, but perhaps they could be brought back. It would not be the hazardous duty that they retired from. His mind was working out the possibilities.

Nikita shook her head sadly. "Amanda burnt out her memories. If she does remember anything of her life before, its vague or... she is disassociated from it. There was no reaction to Rachel's name."

She laid her head back down gently on his shoulder. "Alex doesn't remember her own wife. Bringing Rachel back could only cause heartache. She's with Caitlin now."

He sighed quietly. "So, what do we do? How do we bring her back from this?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. Her memories center on Amanda bringing her back and Division being populated with bad guys. We reinforce that when we have to tranq her or manhandle her from interrogation to cell and back. We have to do something to make her see that we are not the black hats." She shifted in his arms to make herself more comfortable.

He kissed the top of her head. "That will be some trick if she has been Amanda's project. She will see ulterior motives in everything."

Amanda smiled in a welcoming and regal fashion. More than a few people had wondered in the past if she had been a courtier in a past life with her aura of nobility. She leaned forward to brew the tea with all the grace and ceremony of a zen tea ceremony. Grace and Percy watched her as she gently poured from her favorite pot. Percy accepted his cup. Turning it on the saucer he lifted it to his lips. "You have changed the blend," he noted in an approving tone.

"I've been experimenting," Amanda responded gently. She turned toward Grace's cup, moving the pot in position over the delicate china.

"That's never good," Grace muttered. She held up a hand. "No thanks. I am in the mood for an espresso not some fruity tea concoction." She shifted back into her flowery chair with a grimace. She
wanted to be anywhere but here in this moment.

Amanda's brow rose. "You have received a certain amount of latitude given your recent illness, Grace, but do not mistake it for forgiveness," she chided as she poured her own cup of the fragrant brew and placed the pot back on the tray.

Grace snorted. "What forgiveness? You wanted her to break out." She was still itching from the tossed vial's contents. The disease had been treatable as Alex had said, but had caused her skin to rash horribly. She was quite angry to learn that Amanda had assumed that Alexandra would get away. She was angry that Amanda had not warned her just how motivated Alex could get.

Percy shook his head. "Whether it was planned or not, you failed in your given assignment." He slid the cup and saucer back into place. "Now that we dropped the rattlesnake in the nest..." he trailed off.

Amanda smiled over the rim of her cup. "Our... friend in the fold released her briefly from Division's secure medical suite. Alexandra caused a bit of trouble but was recaptured." She took a sip and selected a tea cake for her plate. "She showed a strong interest in making Division pay. It was gratifying."

"And our mole's prospects for aiding her a second time?" Percy asked as he enjoyed a slice of cake of his own. He felt that Amanda's little rituals were boring, but he did enjoy the time he spent with her mind in whatever form that came. She was of far different stuff but their minds were both swords.

Amanda took a moment to sip gently from her own cup. "Slim indeed. While she was apparently not identified she feels that any attempt to move into the area of Division where Alexandra is kept, could only result in an end to her usefulness to us."

"And how do you feel about Alexandra's odds of releasing herself?" Percy asked. He slid further back in his chair.

Amanda's lips curled. "We will simply have to give her something to use as a distraction." Her brow rose delicately.

"What do you have in mind?" he asked.

Her eyes turned to Grace. "How would you feel about going to Hawaii, Grace?" Her hands descended to raise the linen napkin to her lips. "Perhaps you might redeem yourself."

She looked confused from one to another. "What's in Hawaii?"
Chapter 48

Rachel smiled as Caitlin stroked Parker's hair. They had gone to the beach and played in the surf for hours. Despite sunblock, all three had a pink glow about them. They would pay in the morning, but it would all be worth it. Parker smiled and curled to his side with his stuffed rabbit.

She put the bag with the aloe from the hotel gift shop on a table beside the fold out couch in the main part of the huge suite. It would be handy when they needed it. She stepped back as Caitlin came toward her and closed the door to Parker's room. Smiling, she backed up slowly drawing Rachel with her.

"I still can't get over this place," Caitlin smiled as she drew close to her lover. Rachel took Caitlin's hand and led her to the couch. They curled together, Caitlin nuzzling Rachel's throat. Thick pillows cushioned them.

Rachel laughed throatedly. "I think Birkhoff and the guys overcompensated getting us this room. Room... more like penthouse." Rachel smiled. "Parker was so exhausted. He's out cold, isn't he?" she asked, jerking her jaw toward the door.

Caitlin grinned and stroked Rachel's side slowly. "That last round of frisbee of yours flattened his battery."

Rachel slid her fingers slowly over Caitlin's chest. "Whatever will we do with our evening?" she asked nuzzling the other woman's silky throat.

Her wife leaned in and captured Rachel's lips. Her teeth raked the other woman's lower lip before a tongue brushed over it. Rachel's groan drove Cait to press her lover into the couch. She pulled back slightly. "Should we move to the other bedroom?" she asked, her voice already sounding husky.

Rachel pulled her back down. "I want you now." She slid Caitlin's shirt up. Her lover pulled it off impatiently and pressed close.

Caitlin's hand slid over her stomach leaving trails of fire behind on sensitive skin. "You don't say." She leaned in and kissed her lover's throat. Moving back to Rachel's lips her tongue slowly explored the other's mouth. Her fingers brushed over the fabric between her and Rachel. They slowly undressed one another.

Caitlin's nails raked over Rachel's stomach. Fingers moved through her hair. They made love slowly as if they had forever.

The heat between them dissipated slowly as they lay together. They curled around one another on the couch, a small throw blanket pulled over them. Their fingers stroked lightly over one another's slick sweat coated skin. Rachel smiled. "You make me so happy, Caitlin." She felt like purring.

Caitlin kissed Rachel's jaw. "You make me happy too. Thank you for marrying me." She laughed quietly. A quiet cry came from the other room interrupting their tranquil moment. Caitlin's head dropped. "Probably the burn," she said tiredly.

Rachel grabbed her t shirt from the floor. "Stay here Cait. It's my turn." She smiled and drew on pants swiftly, jumping lightly to pull on both legs at the same time.
She shuffled in to find Parker restless. "Hey Parker. What's wrong?" she asked the small boy gently.

Parker looked over at Rachel from behind his bunny. "Skin hurts."

Rachel stroked the boy's hair. "I have some aloe and I can get you some more medicine." She kissed his forehead. Getting the aloe, she tried to ease the boy's pain. It helped him relax again, but it seemed likely he would need more help to stay asleep.

Caitlin was in the doorway smiling. Rachel slid her hands onto Caitlin's hips. "I have to go get some children's aspirin from the gift shop."

Caitlin kissed her hungrily. "Don't spare the horses. We have a lot of rooms to christen tonight." She smiled and stepped back. Rachel took half a step forward before laughing and stepping back again.

"Don't get started without me."

Rachel laughed on her cell phone, as she made her way downstairs. "I'm sure... The gift shop has lots of pain relievers. I bet I can find something for the little man. I'll be back up before you know it." She smiled broadly. "I love you too Cait." She hung up and tucked the phone in her pocket. She hummed quietly as she pulled a box off the shelf in the small shop and moved to pay. Stopping, she pulled a rose from a bucket. "This too."

Rachel entered the elevator. A woman in a ball cap and with big sunglasses ducked in and slid into the far corner. "Don't look at me," Grace ground out in a low voice.

"Who are you?"

"Friend of a friend."

"How cliche." Rachel blew out an exasperated sigh.

"Alex is alive. Nikita knows where." The woman said before pushing past and pressing a button, getting out on a random floor.

Rachel's eyes rounded and she tried to catch the door. "What? I... What?" She looked up at the floor indicator. The elevator doors opened. She walked as if on death row toward her room. She dropped her key card from nerveless fingers. She knelt down and picked it back up. Opening the door, she entered to hear Caitlin and Parker talking. She gulped and got out the bottle for Parker.

Caitlin saw her face and stilled. She gave a smile to her son and accepted the bottle. Dosing him, she tucked Parker back up and took Rachel's hand to lead her from the room. "What's going on Rachel?" she asked quietly.

Rachel paced back and forth before the couch. "Alex is alive. Nikita knows where." She shrugged. "Some woman told me that in the elevator."

"The Alex?" Caitlin stood up. "Alex as in Alex your first wife?"

Rachel put her hand over her chest. It was crushingly painful on so many levels. She turned toward Caitlin. "I don't know what to do." she whispered.
Nikita frowned and paced slowly. Michael watched her. "What's the latest?" he asked quietly. He moved to slide a hand onto her shoulder, stilling her pacing. Nikita closed her eyes and took a deep slow breath. Opening them, she merely pointed at her laptop which ran the video feed from Alex's cell. Nikita was not happy. They had to tranq Alex yet again getting her from chair to cell. Alex was determined to fight them with every ounce of her being. Michael saw the young woman beginning to stir.

The world returned, but only slowly. First came light, making its presence known even through closed eyelids. Following it was a sour, metallic taste that filled her mouth, then Alexandra could hear her own heart beating. She opened her eyes and immediately wished she hadn't. The fluorescent glare stabbed at her from above. She blinked her stinging eyes several times, but it didn't seem to help. For some reason, her vision was slower to adjust than it should have been. Her surroundings were soft-edged and blurry, and she could feel the aching pain from the sedative that had rendered her unconscious. Her muscles felt like lead, and they seemed to work against her as she sat up on the edge of the small metal cot and focused in on her surroundings.

The cell was small, but modern by design. It held a small metal shelf bed with thin plastic mat and a gray wool blanket, a stainless-steel toilet and sink combination near the far wall, instead of prison bars she looked through thick plexi glass that lined the front of her new prison, and a heavy looking door complete with a thick Plexi glass section that ran the center, two thirds of the length of it and meal slot that completed the inside of the holding cell. The space between the cell and the door, seen blearily through sedative hangover and plexi glass, held a small gray metal table and two chairs, suitable, she figured, for interrogations. She could barely make out the dark-haired guard on the other side of the closed door. Where was she? She didn't know. More surprising was that she was still alive, albeit a prisoner. Amanda and Percy would not be pleased when she had to explain this later.

"Beats waking up in another hospital bed."

Caitlin's thumb ran over and over Rachel's knuckles. She knew her wife was in pain. Wife? Maybe. Rachel's other wife was back among the living. Caitlin didn't know where she and Parker were standing, but Rachel had too much pain written on her face to try to hammer anything out. She sighed quietly as they drove up to the Division entrance.

Rachel turned at the sound of the sigh from Caitlin. She kissed her lover's temple. "This doesn't change us," she said quietly trying to swallow the small sounds of doubt in that declaration.

Caitlin looked at her for long moments. "Should I come in with you?" she asked squeezing the fingers in hers gently.
Rachel shook her head. "No. You go get Parker and take him to lunch. I... I need to do this myself."

There was a sharp pain in Caitlin's heart at that. Rachel didn't need her there. Was that a sign? She was so torn by all of this. "Okay." she said, her voice cracking like a gun in the silence of the car.

Seeing the pain on her new wife's face, Rachel's twisted. "I'm sorry," she said quietly. She leaned in and gently kissed Caitlin. "I'll call when I'm done. We can... we can go out on the boat or something after."

"Yeah." Caitlin nodded slowly and ran knuckles along Rachel's cheek. "We'll be waiting."

Rachel assumed that if Alex was Alex, she would have been contacted before now, so she decided to head straight for the detention area. She smiled as she realized she was still in the computer with access. Rachel headed for the main elevator. The control panel light slid down behind the buttons to illuminate one floor number after another. Suddenly, the elevator shuddered and came to a halt. Rachel waited ten long seconds for the doors to open. They didn't. Instead, a small light flashed on the control panel, positioned above a card reader slot. She understood instantly. Access to this floor demanded special authorization. She would have to go to Nikita for it.

Rachel strode with a fierce look on her face to the office. She wanted answers from Nikita. She needed to know just how long Nikita had been keeping this a secret. Without knocking she walked in. Nikita sighed. "Was wondering how long that would take." She stood from where she had been stooping, leaning on her desk.

Rachel stood stiff and still, unsuccessfully hiding her fury about the deception. "It won't take a minute. Let me in there."

Nikita shook her head sadly. "It's not the best time for this."

Rachel's eyes grew darker with storm clouds. "You... you are keeping me from Alex?"

"I am keeping you from an Alex that doesn't know any of us, Rachel. I am trying to keep you away from heartache."

"I'm a big girl. You let me in or I will fucking break in."

"She's been manipulated by Amanda. She doesn't know herself and she is attacking at every turn. It just isn't safe."

Rachel's eyes were steel. "Let me in."

Rachel made her way down the elevator once more. She opened her bag and took out the electronic pass-card override that Nikita had given her to access the floor. It fit perfectly into the slot, and the doors slid back with a chime to reveal another, smaller elevator lobby. In its center was a guard station, manned by a slender fellow with a wisp of a mustache. He looked up in shock as Rachel
exited, and reached for his clipboard.

"Sign here."

She scribbled her name on the paper, along with the date and time, handing it back to him. He looked at the clipboard and then back up at Rachel, eyeing her picture identification card clipped to her upper left hand pocket before he pointed toward the steel door.

"Follow me."

He stepped past her, leading the way to the metal door. Keys rattled as he unlocked the door and held it open for her. Without a word, he pointed the way and soon returned to his post.

She took two long steps and then a third that led her further down the empty corridor. Her stomach plummeted as she stood in front of the room that held Alexandra's cell. She smiled at the guard standing by the door, before she turned the knob and pushed it open, walking inside. All of the security precautions Nikita had taken might have seemed excessive if it had been for anyone other than Alexandra Udinov. To Rachel, it felt a lot like walking into death row, or Gitmo, and she worried about the reception she would receive from the woman she once called her wife.
Alexandra was sitting on the shelf bunk. Her long arms were wrapped about her legs as she stared at the wall. She refused to look as the door of the outer room opened. Probably a meal or something. If it was time for more quality time there would be the sound of more people.

She smiled proudly at the fact that these Division jokers were taking her seriously now. Amanda would be happy. Alexandra leaned her head back and waited for the person outside her cell to talk. Her brow knit as the outer room door opened and a woman stepped into the room attached to the cell. The outer door on the cell swung open leaving a plexiglass wall fit for communicating through. Watching from the corner of her eye, she saw the door from the outer room to the guard area close and the woman slowly take in the surroundings.

The other woman leaned against the wall. Alex slowly took her eyes off the wall and deigned to look at the interloper. The woman was dressed in a black silk shirt and jeans and was so beautiful it made Alex's teeth ache. She turned back. She'd seen this woman before. Where? She smiled coldly. "Aren't you supposed to be on your honeymoon?"

"Do you know who I am Alex?" Rachel asked quietly. She was shocked at this woman before her. She was in red scrubs and sitting in a ball on a little shelf that masqueraded as a bed. Her lank hair and thinned features were saddening. Alex had always vibrated with energy. This woman was a study in cold marble. She had an almost dead look to her eyes in the brief moments they turned on her. Rachel swallowed. "What did that bitch do to you?"

"Who? Nikita?" Alex turned and looked at her puzzled. Wouldn't this woman know?

Rachel shook her head. A part of her wanted to move in closer, even to enter the cell, but the lack of belt and having to wear slippers reminded her that this Alex would not welcome closeness. "Nikita is not one of the bad guys Alex. I'm talking about that venomous bitch... Amanda. She did do this to you, didn't she?"

Alexandra chuckled. "Everyone has vastly different opinions of what color hats everyone should be wearing."

Rachel's jaw muscle bounced as she grew angrier. "How did Amanda do it? She get you with drugs? ECT? Immersive programming?" Her hand curled and uncurled as if eager to get around Amanda's throat.

The other woman couldn't contain the twitch at the mention of some of her experiences at the state hospital. So much pain... So much confusion. Alexandra gathered up her tattered shreds of confidence in Amanda. "Amanda saved me from you fuckers," she snarled.

"She is using you, Alex. It's what she does." Rachel shrugged. "If you have spent more than five minutes with that woman you know her feelings on the value of human life. You really think someone who felt that way about people is wearing the white hat?" She said it as calmly as she could, but she was desperately reaching out to her former love. "Come on Alex. You're smarter than that."
Alex turned her face away and stared at the wall. She had already had thoughts about Amanda that were disloyal. Alex had no doubt that Grace was right about what Amanda would stoop to get what she wanted, but she was still not ready to turn her back on the woman who brought her back.

"Who are you supposed to be then?"

"Your wife," Rachel responded quietly. She had a moment of guilt thinking of the woman she had just married. Caitlin had understood her need to do this. Her heart was feeling bruised now.

Alexandra barked a laugh and looked at her incredulously. "Wow. Way to 'til death do us." Alex wanted to hurt this woman. If she was so effin' in love with her as to marry her, how did Amanda get her?

"You were dead... You died in an explosion." Rachel pressed her hand over her eyes a moment and took a shaky breath. "You were dead." She felt stricken all over again. Here was Alex, but her Alex was dead. Maybe. This was killing her.

Alexandra sneered. "You don't look like my type anyway... You know, you fucking people play the games you say Amanda plays. You drug me and cage me and ... get out."

"We would never be what Amanda is Alex." Rachel shook her head and took a half step closer.

"Amanda saved me from this... this shit." She was getting angry, really angry. She had doubts about Amanda and Grace, but they were her doubts to deal with, to work through. She didn't need strangers telling her what reality is. She burst off the shelf and threw herself into the wall by Rachel who started at the sudden and violent motion. Her hands slammed the plexiglass with incredible force. "No more games. Go play house with your new wife and get the fuck out of my face. This isn't a petting zoo, bitch. Tell Nikita I'm getting very fucking bored already. Kill me or release me. No more games." She turned and hammered at the door as she yelled up at the small camera in the corner. "Take this bitch out of here. Guard? You hear me? NOW!"

"Wow," Emily said breathlessly, as she slid a box onto Nikita's desk. "Who is that?" She asked at the shouting from the video monitor.

"Old friend," Nikita replied dryly. She accepted the package and waved at the door. "We need your tac report pronto."

Emily shook her head. "Right. No problem." She turned and left.

The young intelligence agent took a right where she should have taken a left and entered a seldom used terminal station. Opening a shell program, she sent an encrypted message. There was only one place in Division where Alexandra Udinov could be. It would be tough, but with some outside help, she could set Alex free to fly again. She wondered who Amanda would detail to help her.
Chapter 51

Grace sat, her head laying back against the head rest. Her fingers tapped on her thigh. A wan desk
girl looking young woman emerged from a Honda the next row down and she headed into the
megamarket. Grace's lips curled and she left her car to follow. The young woman stood in the
produce section looking over zucchini squash. She was chewing her lip.

Grace took a bundle of cilantro from nearby and passing close whispered, "Quash and ruin." She
grinned as she continued through produce. Amanda annoyed the almighty piss out of her, but she
had some fun recognition phrases. Standing in front of the roll display, she looked around
surreptitiously. The lovely thing about megamarkets after the evening rush, they had few customers
and even fewer employees that gave a shit as long as their paycheck was secure. She picked up some
potato rolls as Emily joined her.

"Know where she is?" Grace asked conversationally. She adjusted her worn leather jacket as she lay
down the rolls and looked over at the donuts next to the rolls.

Emily swallowed hard. "She is in the lockdown cell." Her voice shook slightly.

"So any overt attempt at rescue and the guards are ordered to shoot her." She shook her head. "What
a lovely friend Nikita is." Grace looked back at the traitor. She wondered idly what doomsday device
Amanda planted in her to get her to cooperate because with her acting so nervous, Emily wasn't here
as a true believer.

"I... I don't know if the guards have those orders. All I know is that she is in there." Emily looked at
her a moment before looking around guiltily. "You are going to get her out?"

"We," Grace corrected. "We will get her out." She pulled her wallet out and counted her money as if
mentally calculating a grocery bill. She smiled and put it back in her pocket. She reached out and
took down a clear plastic box containing muffins.

Emily shifted from foot to foot. "They'll catch me. They'll know I'm-" she hissed as Grace caught her
wrist in a harsh painful grip.

"You will simply ensure that no one is looking at me, rat. I am taking all the risks, you just disrupt
the video feeds and set off a gas bomb in some out of the way spot so people are looking elsewhere,
if I need a distraction." Grace released Emily's wrist. "Amanda did not pick a winner with you. Did
she?" She took out a pen and made a note on the muffin box.

Emily flushed brightly and looked around. "It's bad enough I have to do this."

"Yes," Grace said as she turned to face the other woman. "You do have to do this." She dropped the
muffins in Emily's little basket. "We don't have to like each other, and really, I don't like you even a
little. We have a job to do. We have to unleash Merlin so she can carry on bleeding Division to
death. Maybe Amanda leaves you alone after, I seriously doubt it. Deal with it. Number is on the
box. Contact me when you are ready."

"How do I get you in? Do I?" Emily started.

Grace snorted. "I barely trust you with static. I only trust you with that, because I can see Amanda
put a dead agent walking leash in your head. Don't you worry. Amanda made sure that she and
Percy could always wander around freely when the time was right. Just get me in the front door.” She glared. "No fuck ups. Now that I'm here? Amanda's the least of your worries."

Emily's eyes widened. She closed her mouth and scurried away. Grace turned and grabbed a donut with a piece of paper. "Fucking amateurs. Amanda? What the hell is with the fucking amateurs?"

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**Caitlin** held her wife as Rachel wept helplessly against her shoulder. Her fingers stroked through silky hair. It had taken an hour to get Parker to go back to sleep when he saw how upset his new number two mommy was when she got home. All thoughts of time on the boat vanished as Caitlin wrapped her arms around Rachel, prepared to weather a storm.

Rachel's red eyes eventually raised from Caitlin's shoulder. "She's breathing. She's walking around. The Alex I knew is dead."

Caitlin nodded and stroked Rachel's cheek. "What do you want to do?"

A laugh barked out. "I want to kick her ass and Amanda's too."

A smile spread on Caitlin's face. "I don't think that Nikita's going to be on board for that love."

Rachel shook her head. "No. Nikita would love to see the Queen Bitch get her own but she would take a bullet for Alex."

Caitlin chuckled. "I heard a rumor she took a bullet from Alex."

Rachel lightly back handed her wife's stomach. "Be nice to the lady that retired us so sweetly." She sobered. "If Alex is in there, Nikita will find her. That of course being if she can keep Alex in a cell that long."

"And if Alex does wake up?"

Rachel looked at Caitlin, the sadness, the confusion written in her eyes. "Then she will have to deal with me and my wife."

Caitlin kissed her tenderly. "We'll stick around in town and help Nikita."

"Because you know I loved her?"

"No silly. Because I love you." Caitlin took Rachel's hand and kissed it. "You take care of the people you love and this person who you love, will take care of you."

Rachel shook her head. "The one I feel sorry for is Nikita. Alex does not do well with incarceration."

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**Grace** pulled a bag out of her trunk and closed it. Inside were weapons and climbing gear. She looked around and climbed the stairs to her seedy motel room. When everything was set, she was going to set hell loose in Division in the form of Alexandra Udinov. She pulled out a photo from the
side pouch of her bag and slid it into the zip up pocket of the jacket she would be wearing going in. She hoped Amanda was right about prods for the younger woman should she be hesitant to play. Grace was still itching from the last time Alex got annoyed.
Chapter 52

Grace dropped lightly out of the dark mouth of the duct onto a bright industrial carpet. She slapped a bit of filthy dust or dirt off her elbow and onto the grimly cheerful floor covering before bending down and retrieving the duct cover. She squeezed a bit of adhesive onto the cover and standing on an upended wastebasket she held it in position long enough to stick. It would be tight enough to fool casual eyes, but one good hard yank would access the escape route.

Emily had put it in entry log that a super high security HVAC tech would be in the upper levels doing maintenance on the equipment that kept everyone down below alive. Emily had made it clear to Grace that moving further into the secure beehive was Grace's problem not hers. Grace collected her lojacked ID with a grin and headed to the loudly thumping heart of the air and temperature control in Division. She took a small roomba out of her equipment bag and put the ID on it. Once she had a suitably mobile distraction in play, she lit the flashlight and began looking for a certain panel. All of the ducts down to the fun levels were trapped save the escape duct. Grace smiled as she found it.

It was dark in there as she made her way through the dusty tunnel, too much like a tomb, to the intersection where a ladder down waited. She quietly cursed Emily and Amanda. When Amanda had come and taken her from her former private school years ago, she had made this all seem so glamorous. She toyed with the idea of killing Amanda's pet mole on her way back out. She would be in deep deep trouble, but she was starting to get used to that feeling. Nikita and Alexandra had both survived being on the wrong side of her mentor. It could be done.

She opened the door when she was finished putting back the panel. Peeking out, Grace saw a guard station. That has to be by the cell, she thought. She had to get close enough to the guard to take care of him. Grace pulled off her HVAC uniform and adjusted her hair clipping on a fake Division ID she had hidden in her bag. She smiled brightly as she came into his view.

Alexandra paced in the cell stretching and working the muscles in her shoulders. The one still ached from being shot. "What do I know... what do I know." she said quietly, "I woke up in the hospital having ECT to offline the implants and undo the damage done by Nikita and her merry band of freaks....no I don't know that for certain... Amanda told me that. What do I really know? Think... Hospital. ECT. What else do I really know." She looked around. "I know that I am really fucked."

Alex startled. She heard a noise come from the outer room. She struggled to see what was going on but it was just beyond the door to the guard station. A head came through the door looking around. Grace swiftly zeroed in on the other woman. "Miss me?"  Grace sauntered slowly up to the door and stared at Alexandra. " You look like shit, although still better than I did with the disease you gave me back in the lab."

Grace looked at the lock and with a flourish produced the guard's key card. "Not mad," she continued conversationally. She looked up into the conflicted eyes of Alexandra Udinov. "I get it. People get funny about animals." She quickly pushed in the numbers along with the key card and the door slide open. She stepped inside. "The thing is... I'm sorry." She looked around. "Ready to
blow this pop stand?"

Alex shook her head. She needed time to work out who was lying to her and to work out their destruction. "No... You have to go."

"What the fuck did you say?" Grace stepped forward. "Quit screwing around. This is our one shot."

Alexandra sat on the tiny shelf bed. "You fucked me for Amanda. Didn't you?" Her fists clenched. "Everyone lying to me. Everyone manipulating me. I am here to kill these people and here I will stay."

"Not a chance Alexandra. You're useless in a cell. At least let's bust out and steal some weapons. We can gun them all down and bolt." Grace grabbed at her arm.

Alex ripped her arm away. "Leave me."

Grace frowned darkly. "These people will kill you. Come back with me. I... I love you Alexandra."

Alex stared at her for a long moment. "Since when?" She asked bitterly.

Grace crouched. She pulled out a photograph. "We need you Alex. We love you. Come home to us."

Alexandra stared at the picture of the puppy. How did Grace keep finding him? "What did you do to him?" She asked her voice becoming dangerously calm sounding.

Grace tried to project calm. "He's fine, love. He is waiting for us. Please."

Alex stood. Grace smiled and leaned in to kiss her. Alex accepted the kiss but showed little enthusiasm. Grace looked at her puzzled. "I'll leave the cell. You are leaving Division alone. You hurt my dog before I get out and I will kill you."

"Amanda wants..." Grace began.

"Amanda wants chaos in Division." Alex strode out of the cell. She looked down at the guard and crouched to take his gun. She held out her hand. "Keys."

Handing over the keys and the pass-card, Grace watched Alexandra move to the door. She decided to try one more time, "Please Alex, I love you." Alexandra turned and looked around herself.

"Thank you Grace." She moved toward the outer door with a determined look. Seeing the guard laying behind the desk she crouched and came up with a gun which she tucked into her scrubs. Alexandra looked back at Grace. "Help me find Nikita's office before the camera's reset."

Grace smiled as she saw Alexandra's business face. "With pleasure."
Nikita smiled at Birkhoff's shoulder. "Good job everyone." It had not been easy. Even while her personal drama with Alex was going on, there was a whole world that, whether they knew it or not, needed Division. She watched smiling as two of her techs traded high fives. "Collin. Basher. You two get our team the rest of the way home." She looked down. "Birkhoff. I believe you are late for the convention center."

Birkhoff's eye rounded as he saw what time it was. He scurried out. "I'll get you a comm badge," he called back.

Nikita shook her head and laughing made her way to the office. She nodded to passing agents as she entered. Nikita moved to the desk to turn the monitor towards her when she noticed it already had been turned. She straightened slowly and turned around.

Alexandra was standing in the corner near the door. A rolling chair was in front of her. She toed it into motion. Nikita stopped it with her own foot and raised a brow.

Alex grinned. "They are all alive ... although it was touch and go with one of your men. I'm sure he will pull through though. I had to get past them to talk to you... so it is what it is," she said as she waved a hand at the small but still impressive pile of lethal hardware. Nikita picked up one of the weapons and made a show of looking it over while she tried to work out why Alex would get free and not run.

She looked at her best friend. She waved a hand at the couch. "Have a seat."

Alexandra sat slowly watching the other woman. "I get the I love yous and the want to help yous and one way or another, I am on a leash."

Nikita nodded. "I imagine you are stuck with she said-she said between myself and Amanda at this point." She sat at the mid point of the couch, close enough to indicate comfort with Alex but far enough for defense. "You hurt people I cared about and tried to bite off my face so I am sure you can see why I used caution."

Alex jerked her chin at the chair full of guns. "And now?"

Nikita smiled. "And now you seem more reasoned, I ask your thoughts." It was a strange truth that Alex got more logical as her dangerousness increased. Nikita had always wondered at this and thought in the outside world her friend would be heavily medicated for disassociation or PTSD.

Alexandra watched Nikita's face. "I want proof."

"The trouble with our business is proof is not always what it seems, Alex. I will set you up with files that are not currently sensitive. Your life in both... Divisions." Nikita took a shaky breath. "And I'll tell you how we met though every time it comes up you try to slug me."

Alex's eyes narrowed. "Free access?"

Nikita shook her head. "Not completely. Some things are still sensitive. You would also be monitored." She waved her hand at the chair. "You are a little too good at getting in trouble for me to let you run around with free access."
Alexandra nodded. "You said you loved me?"

Nikita slowly extended a hand to touch her fingertips to Alex's. "And always will," she said in a voice full of emotion.

Alex blinked slowly. She couldn't put her finger on it, but something about this woman resonated with her now that they were talking companionably rather than adversarially. She tried to find a way to respond that wouldn't reveal this thought. She pulled her hand away slowly.

Nikita chewed her lip as she looked for a way to ease the rising tension. "You still like pie?"

Alex looked at her as if she had gone mad. She looked up at the blaring sound of the alarm. "Took long enough," Alexandra muttered.

The office door opened and Michael entered. "Nikita! Alex has…." He drew up short and yanked out his gun. Alex threw herself at the chair full of weapons and pulling one, aimed at the man. She slowly rose from a crouch.

Nikita stood between them arms out and turning slowly. "Put the guns down. Both of you. Now." She waved at Michael. "It's under control."

Michel looked past her at the pale but fierce looking woman on the other side of Nikita. "Obviously," he said dryly.

Nikita looked at Alex who replied, "Don't look at me I'm the one with trust issues." She took a shaky breath. Alexandra nodded at the man. "You are Michael. Trainer. Agent... and Nikita's husband. Amanda said you would be a secondary target because Nikita is the wind beneath your wings. You'd crush like an empty soda can without her. I'm not interested in wasting a half-assed second stringer anyway." She handed the gun to Nikita who had the other hand on Michael's chest.

Michael's eyes narrowed. "And shooting at the wife's lunatic ex who can't seem to pick a team is so much better." He grimly slid his weapon back in the holster.

Alexandra smiled. "At last, someone who makes sense." She said. Refreshing to have someone willing to be a smart ass back. She turned her eyes back to Nikita. "What shall we start with... possibly faked files or slugging?"

Nikita looked at her husband. "Michael, could you please go an get us some pie ... lots and lots of it... and tell Rachel and Caitlin that we have jobs for them. If they want to come on as part time office workers that is." She waited until Michael left and then looked Alex in the eyes. "We'll start with how you and I met." Her jaw tightened as she prepared for another round of righteous fury from Alex. "It all began with Operation Pale fire. Back when Percy and Amanda used to run Division…"
Chapter 54

Alexandra crossed her arms in front of her and frowned lightly as she sat back in the comfortable couch in Nikita's office. The long story had lasted longer than the food, but it was finally coming to an end. She had a stormy and disbelieving look on her face as she summoned a response to the tangled tale. "So if I had the big happily ever after, how did I end up dead?" She had followed the ups and downs of this other Alex and still felt very disconnected from her. This was more of a fairy tale to her than reality.

Nikita looked at her friend pained. "You, like me, recognized that just because Percy and Amanda were out of the game didn't make the world safe. We are specially skilled individuals who would not do well retiring to write greeting cards or something."

Alex mused a moment. "There was a young girl from the streets, Who couldn't even spell keats. She could blow guys away, In and out, everyday....."

Alex frowned. "Can't think of the last line. Guess you're right."

Nikita chuckled as she drew a long leg up onto the cushion. "Exactly. Because of your past, you had a special passion for shutting down the sex trade, but we worked together on a lot of fronts." She sipped from a paper cup and watched her distracted looking friend. Things really were different with Alex. She had hardly reacted to the news that Nikita had killed her father. She would never admit it, but not being slugged was the bigger blow.

Alex trailed her finger idly through the pie crumbs on her pie plate and licked them off her finger. "You make me sound like a saint." She said off handedly as she continued processing with a frown.

Nikita shook her head. "You would try a saint but be one? No. You've always been pig headed and annoying and far too good at killing people. You have an incredible heart and when you love people they know they've been loved, but you and I? We're monsters who try to stay on the side of angels."

Alexandra chewed on that thought for a long while as she slid her plate back on the tray. "Amanda tried to make it prettier." She finally remarked. Alex appreciated the difference. She still didn't necessarily buy what this woman was selling, but she could play along and see where this very different feeling rabbit hole went.

"It takes work, Alex... but we are the good guys. You... are the good guy. You are one of the best people I know. No matter how much life throws at you ... you just keep getting back up and trying harder. And Amanda? Amanda has gotten rich and powerful on making these things prettier. Kids don't stop to think about the downsides." Nikita turned her cup in her hands as she watched Alex mull things over. "You know you will be on lock down. It'll be a fairly comfortable lock down, but I can't give you total access or freedom while you are bouncing one side to the other of the fence."

Alex shruged. "I get that. I will behave as long as no one's in my face." She yawned. " This has been a busy day." She stretched and wiggled her bare toes.

Nikita chuckled. " Escape, disarming half the staff and sitting through your life story? I would be too. Tomorrow, I will arrange limited and heavily monitored use of the computers and the workout room. Tonight, I am going to arrange for you to sleep in one of the recruit rooms." She looked down at the
fanned toes. "I think we can find you some shoes while we're at it."

"I'll be guarded of course," Alex replied wryly. She decided Nikita would have to be amazingly
dumb to not have her monitored.

Nikita rolled a chair chock full of guns into a corner and raised her brow on reply. Alexandra nodded
and smiled. She didn't need weapons or a particularly long leash to do damage.

Michael poked his head in. "Everything going well in here?". He asked with a false cheerfulness. He
had a smily poker face on the knowledge that he had several people in the hall waiting to ventilate
Alex if he gave the word.

Alex looked at him blandly. "I was just putting the moves on your wife and we were about to get
naked. Come back in an hour."

Michael entered the room and crossed his arms as Nikita backhanded Alex's stomach. "Memory
back?" He asked brow raised. Nikita married him, but he still smarted at times thinking this woman
had been with her first. He frowned.

Alexandra smiled. "So I was bold in seducing Nikita as the old Alex too?" She stood. "Good to
know. Which way to my new cell?" She asked Nikita with a saucy exaggerated wink. "You can
show me around."

Michael gave Nikita a dark look as she moved to pick up the phone and order an intake room
freshened up with clean sheets. Nikita smiled and winked at him. He nodded knowingly. Alex
would not get under his skin.

Alexandra smiled happily as she was guided to her new room. Setting Michael off could become
quite an enjoyable hobby... and if she decided not to trust this lot either, his obvious discomfort with
her past with Nikita could be a very useful tool. She began turning scenarios over in her head.

Grace pressed fingertips to her forehead. Fucking Amanda probably knew Alex would stay, but the
fact she had not gotten Alexandra out would still count against her. "Fuck," she pronounced. Her
hands slammed the steering wheel. "Fuck!" She shouted. She turned the key. Worst of all, whether
she ran or took the heat, she would have to take care of the mutt. She would sooner take the heat
from Amanda than see the anger and hurt from Alexandra again. She moaned. "Oh God. Tell me its
not real love." She slammed the wheel again. "Fuck."
Chapter 55

Rachel picked at the snack tray that Birkhoff had assembled for her first day as a part time office worker slash Alex sitter. It was a nice gesture, but it was all junk food. Crumpling a diet soda can, she lobbed it toward a nearby garbage can. She waved frantically as it hung the rim before tumbling in.

"Two points," came from the other desk in the room. Alexandra's piercing blue eyes looked at her over the top of the monitor. "Bored already?" She wasn't thrilled with having someone watching her every move on a remote terminal, but at least the women Nikita picked were eye candy.

Rachel grinned sheepishly. "No. I live to back seat drive you when you are file surfing."

Alex grinned and skidded her standard issue rolly office chair out from behind the desk. "Pass me that bag of chocolate bridge mix and let's just talk for a bit." She crossed her ankles far out in front of her, the picture of friendly relaxation.

Rachel considered for a long moment before snagging the sack and wheeling toward the other woman. "What do you want to talk about?"

Alexandra accepted the bag with a grin. "How about me?" She shrugged and popped the top of the bag with the eagerness of a teen.

Rachel barked a laugh. "Your favorite subject then?"

"Ouch. It had to have been important to you too or why marry me?" Alex picked through absently and drew out a chocolate. It was largely cover as her merlin eyes watched from the sheltering eyelashes for flickers of response.

The flicker came and went almost too swift to seize upon. Rachel leaned back in her chair and lightly laced fingers over her stomach. Her tone was light as she responded. "Had to marry you. You were so pathetically in love with me and let's face it, a roll in the hay with you was fantastic even with your inflated head." The curl of her lips softened the lines of her words.

A chocolate cream hurled through the air bouncing off Rachel, leaving a small streak on her white camp shirt. "Oops," Alex replied in a sassy voice. "What's your wife think of us working together?"

"She thinks your ass is hers for half of these shifts so you better play nice," Rachel retorted as she brushed at the chocolate.

Alexandra narrowed her eyes. "Let me get that."

"Yeah thanks... just grab some wet paper towel or-" Rachel gasped as she suddenly found her lap full of Alex whose tongue was suddenly dragging slow and flat over the chocolate on her breast. Rachel's hands fluttered to the sides in her surprise. She gasped as Alexandra's teeth scraped her nipple as she tugged at the shirt with her teeth.

Alex's eyes rose to hers, deep and dark and predatory. Her breath whispered harsh against Rachel's skin. Rachel's eyes half closed as her body remembered what her mind screamed at her to shunt away. Alex leaned in, as her lips heavy and fever hot descended on hers.
Rachel's fingers curled strongly almost but not quite painfully in the other woman's hair. She moaned as Alexandra's tongue first demanded then forced entrance. Rachel felt a maelstrom break loose in her body as Alex's lips, teeth and tongue plundered her mouth. Moans shook free as she felt Alex's heat through thin scrub pants stretched over her thigh. She broke her mouth away. She groaned as teeth descended to her throat. "Oh god Alex," she whispered. Her eyes shut and she tilted her head back. For one perfect moment she was back where she was meant to be.

Alexandra ran her tongue over the reddened flesh where her teeth had pressed. Her nose crinkled slightly and her lip curled but not in the kind of smile a returned lover might have. This predator had wanted the measure of her prey and had it. She rocked herself against Rachel's straining thigh before schooling her face into a mask of contrition.

Her breath was ragged as she pushed herself off the other woman, half stumbling back to her office chair, her eyes never leaving the tiled floor. "Oh god oh god. What did I do? I'm so sorry, so sorry." She said almost panicked sounding. Her hands were at her temples as she shook lightly.

The confused look in Rachel's eyes soon gave way to deep concern. She launched herself to kneel at the side of the other woman's chair. She awkwardly patted Alexandra's arm. "Alex... Alex, it's OK. We... we have h-history and.... We'll forget it. Forget it happened. Don't freak. Please don't freak."

Alex whimpered. "I didn't... Oh god. I wasn't... I don't want to mess anything up. You just... feel... I'm sorry." She dropped her face into her hands.

"You didn't mess anything up. Just relax Alex. We're friends. We'll forget this even happened. No one needs to know," She felt Alexandra begin to hiccup under her hand. "Listen... I'm going to get you a bottle of water. Just relax. Everything's okay. Nothing happened." Rachel went to the fridge in the next office to get a bottle. Her head spinning wildly.

Alexandra's fake hiccups stopped and she smiled grimly. Rachel and Caitlin. One kiss. One pile of guilty feelings and secrets. One string to pull to get two women to dance. She was starting to have fun with her vague plans to keep everything off balance.

She pasted contrition back on her face as Rachel came back in with the bottle and hiccuped her thanks meekly. "I'm sorry. We still... friends?" She asked quietly and in a needy voice.

Rachel covered Alex's hand with her own. "Of course. Friends forever Alex," Rachel replied with a smile. She rocked back on her heels. "Let's go work out for awhile, then come back to the computer stuff."

Alex nodded weakly. "Okay."
Chapter 56

Alexandra took her time as she moved the soap against the sponge in her hand. Thanks to being an oddly statused individual, living between guest and prisoner, she had the privilege of using the main female shower room at off peak hours, with light technological leashing of course. She closed her eyes as hard hot spray stung away at her skin. She hummed a mostly tuneless ditty as she drew the soapy yellow sponge over her skin. Alex pursed her lips as she realized her nipples were still expressing their own thoughts about her earlier encounter with Rachel. There was something about the raven haired girl that turned her on. She reminded herself that desire was not permitted outside of the mission. Ignoring the perky nonsense of her nipples, she lathered and scrubbed briskly, trying to remove the younger woman from her mind. It didn’t work for long. Within seconds her mind was back to naughty thoughts that went far outside the realm of the work she was trying to accomplish.

Kissing the woman had been hot, but it had to be strictly business. Unless she found a magic bullet that told her to do otherwise, she was going to go ahead with her plan to destroy Division. She just wanted to play with non bloody scenarios first. She could always get the nine mils out later if she didn’t want to play anymore.

She smiled as she heard a woman come in. There had been a some one in the gym working up a sweat as Alex had headed for the showers. She had wondered how long she would hang out beating the punching bag into submission. "Hey there Nikita," she called out, not bothering with the look over her shoulder to see if she was right.

Nikita chuckled as she removed her gym clothes. "Fancy meeting you here. Where's your minder?" Tossing a towel over the low wall separating the communal shower area from the lockers, Nikita moved into the steam thrown up by Alexandra's extended shower.

Alex turned as she soaped her abs to watch Nikita head to the next shower head down. "Computer minder went home to the wife. The steroid taking muscle pile minder is probably sitting in the hall watching his monitor." She wiggled her wrist. " Love these lojacked armbands." She added wryly.

Nikita laughed before raising her face into the the spray. She turned to soak her hair. "How was your first day reading about yourself? Any progress on who the good guys are yet?" Nikita watched the younger woman's face as she began working shampoo through her hair.

Alexandra turned to stare at the tile for a moment. "Its a lot." She said simply and quietly. Her eyes flicked to Nikita. "This is all just… It's a lot."

Nikita looked at her long time friend sympathetically. Alex was a smart alek and could be coldly calculating in a tough situation, but Nikita knew that Alex wasn't like that through and through. She had a kind and loving heart, and deep vulnerability. Nikita rinsed the last of the shampoo and moved slowly to hug her friend so as not to startle her.

Alex saw Nikita coming at her and swallowed a smile. She was rather enjoying her little games. Her arms moved around the body of her former mentor. She affected a quiet sigh and leaned slightly into the other woman. Nikita seemed slightly startled at the capitulation but then accepted it, stroking Alexandra's hair.

Alex calculated. She swallowed heavily. "I don't know anything and I'm scared." She pressed her eyes to Nikita's shoulder. "Why do you feel safe to me?" She whispered, her breath warm against the
shower dampened shoulder.

Nikita pressed a kiss to the hair of the lost young woman. "We've always been each other's safety Alex and always will be." Her concern for the brunette was manifest.

At the kiss, Alexandra slowly looked at the other woman. Her blue eyes were filled with confusion and conflict. She brought her lips tremulously to Nikita's.

Nikita felt Alex's shaky breath and almost timid brush of lips on hers and did not have the heart to deny this woman this small measure of comfort. Nikita's arms slid more firmly around her best friend's shower slick body, as her lips moved gently and lovingly against her former lover's. Michael would understand. Nikita knew this in her heart. She could give Alex this moment right? For all their little wars, they knew their places in her heart.

Nikita heard a tiny whimper from the other woman. She drew her lips up to kiss Alex's eyelids. "Its okay, baby girl. Everything will be okay now."

Alexandra slid her fingers to Nikita's shoulder and gripped gently but firmly. "I'm sorry," she said quietly.

"What for?" Nikita asked with a gentle smile.

"You are the only person who feels right and…" she trailed off.

"And?" She prompted quietly.

Nikita felt trembling arms hold her tighter and a face bury in the crook of her neck. She tried to work out the words that Alex couldn't seem to say. "How 'bout…" she whispered, "How about I take you to your room and hold you while you rest?"

Alexandra drew back. "You…would do that?" She asked, her surprise evident.

Nikita stroked her cheek. "Of course." She smiled as Alex before reaching out to give her a quick peck and a strong hug. "Let me wash up and we'll go."

Alexandra nodded mutely and quickly soaped herself again. Strength for seduction of Rachel and vulnerability to disarm. Vulnerability alone to get to Nikita. She was going to enjoy pulling strings. She ducked her face under the stream one more time making a show of scrubbing. Were there tears? No. Did Nikita know? Now she wouldn't. She pulled back and went to find her towel on the wall.

She barely hid the smile as her silent companion gripped her shoulder as they walked to the room that now served as a very comfortable cell. Her fingers pressed on Nikita's as the Division minder shuffled behind them.
Nikita kept her breath slow and even as she smiled down. Alexandra's head rested on her shoulder as she gently stroked the younger woman's back. Nikita had drowsed from time to time, Alex's even breathing relaxing her utterly, but the brunette's sleep was heavily punctuated by nightmares, and the longer she held her, the more concerned she became.

Nikita fought at times with guilt and justification when it came to her best friend and former colleague. If it weren't for her, someone else would have killed Alexandra Udinov. If it weren't for her, Alex still might be caught up in the sex trade, or likely long dead of a heroin overdose or worse. If it weren't for her Alex would not be in the life. If it weren't for her, Amanda wouldn't have left the Russian woman in this half Alex-like state of mind. She smiled sadly as she felt the other woman rise slightly at the feel of Nikita's fingers slowly circling on her back. Sometimes, she was just like a cat with nine lives, Nikita thought. She was a survivor... her Alex always had been.

Nikita kissed her former lover's temple and smiled again to hear the younger woman mumble sleepily. None of it mattered in the end. She would see Alex back from this, come hell or high water, and when she did, Amanda would pay for it all. She frowned as her pocket vibrated yet again. She pulled out the cell phone and frowned to see Michael's number and the time. Her thumb swept over the face of the phone before tapping at it. She sighed. Michael would be hurt that she was skipping their plans, but he would understand. He played the devil's advocate in all this, but he loved Alex too.

Alexandra stirred on her shoulder. "What's up?" She mumbled.

Nikita slid the phone away. "It's nothing Alex," she said smiling gently.

Alex pressed herself up and back against the wall in the dim room. "I'm sorry Nikita." She picked lightly at the rumpled blanket.

"Don't be Alex. I'm happy that I can be here for you." Her hand stroked the younger woman's forearm to find itself trapped in Alexandra's grip. She felt rather than saw Alex staring at her through near darkness. Nikita smiled as the other woman's lips descended and briefly brushed hers. Warmth uncurled in her chest. Alex ran fingers delicately through the other woman's silky hair, before leaning back.

Her voice was gravelly with deep sleep. "Someone needs you. You should take care of them."

"But.." Nikita found warm fingers over her lips a moment before another gentle kiss.

"Thank you Nikita," Alexandra said warmly. "Go on. I'll be here tomorrow."

Hugging the Alex that Nikita was sure was coming back to her, she left for her office. If she hurried, Michael would still be there.

Alexandra wrapped her arms around her legs. She felt a twinge at the thought of playing a woman who despite playing in the Game, seemed determined to be open with her. Nikita had not entirely succeeded at driving the nightmares of solitude away which Alex could only assume would only ease when she found where she truly belonged and destroyed the people who had messed with her. The plan was still on. She would not let emotion stop her from revenge.
Michael angrily stuffed a messenger bag. He paced around Nikita's office making sure he had everything he needed. Nikita came in with a smile. "Freed up after all. What's for dinner?" She asked.

He shook his head. "Don't you have the Alex Show to deal with?"

Nikita looked confused at the anger in her husband's voice. "What's going on?"

He walked across the office to grab his phone. "We made a deal Nikita. I would work with your obsession for the Life, but there were going to be things sacred to us. There would be nights nothing but Apocalypse would screw with."

"Our date…" she began.

"You have been blowing me off since you got wind that she was alive. You just spent hours with her and look at you. Bedhead and wrinkled clothes. Are you sleeping with her again?"

Nikita scoffed and crossed her arms. "Do you realize you sound like a teen girl right now?"

"You are avoiding the question," he roared. "Are you fucking her?"

Nikita crossed the floor to close the still cracked door. She saw the agents in the hall with slack jaws and groaned. She turned. "First, lower your voice. Second, I did not fuck her. Alex is our family and we do for family…all of us."

"Amanda turned her Nikita… and you are playing house with her." He snarled. "She needs to be tossed in a cell, throw away the key."

Nikita walked up to Michael with a cold look. "She is acting a hell of a lot more on our side than you are right now."

Michael rocked back on his heels as if he had received a physical blow. "Look at that. She doesn't need to be in the room to do Amanda's work." Drawing himself up he left.

Nikita sank to the couch, swiping tears from her eyes.

Percy knocked lightly and let himself into Amanda's room. He watched her silently as she read something off her screen. She looked up. "Come in Percy." She said ironically.

"Thank you I will," he responded. He tossed a thin red file onto Amanda's desk. "This agent… Grace. The one you brought on board to manipulate Alexandra, the file is heavily redacted. You don't redact files going to me."

Amanda calmly watched him as her fingers stroked at the keyboard before closing the laptop. "Grace was… a personal project with possible long term payoffs. She is still not ready. I will brief you when she is worth it."
He sneered. "I don't like when you try to game me. Do remember that."

She smiled warmly. "Of course Percy. Oh… our mole says Alexandra has set Nikita and Michael at one another's throats."

"I would prefer she slit them, but there is entertainment value to that. Tell me more….."
Rachel frowned into her cup of coffee. It felt like it had been full moments before and here it was down to a little puddle of dregs. She leaned back grumbling and snagged her silver thermos from the shelf nearby. Her eyes narrowed and she leaned toward her monitor. "No using my caffeine addiction to try to get into naughty files Udinov," she groused as she poked a couple keys denying the move by the other woman before returning to her caffeine fix.

Alexandra chuckled richly as she affected a long stretch, causing her chair to squeak slightly in protest. "Just checking to see if you can unscrew and censor at the same time." She popped her head out from behind her own monitor with a cheeky grin. "Apparently, you can." She went back onto the computer and pulled up another file about the heroic actions of Super Alex, the friend of Division types and mortal foe of just about everyone else.

Rachel sipped her coffee and put down her cup trying to ignore the feeling of heat on her already burned tongue. "Very funny. Get back to it Alex. You only have another two hours to mess with me before I can go enjoy a hot soak and cool sheets." She smiled, and leaning her chin into her hand, watched Alexandra crawl slowly through another document to try to find herself. She blinked slowly and yawned. These files were endless some days. She blinked again and realized the file hadn't moved in some time. Her brow knit and tried to work out what was going on.

Rachel straightened in her chair and shot a look at the other woman's station. "Are you doing okay over there, Alex?" No feet under the desk. Her hands went to the arms of the chair to push up when familiar fingers moved around her throat.

The fingers of Alexandra's right hand tightened just enough to let Rachel know the woman behind her was in control and not interested in relinquishing it any time soon. "Alex?" Rachel asked quietly. Her eyes were round as she slowly lowered herself back to the seat.

The hand tightened and released as Alex hissed, "Is that a no in your voice?" The index finger caressed Rachel's throat as the others pressed. An offer? A promise?

Rachel swallowed dryly. "No Alex. Please," she whispered. Alexandra's left hand slid into Rachel's shirt and pinched a nipple already growing hard as if aware of needing Alex before Rachel. She felt pain and arousal in a single touch. Her head tilted back exposing her throat further, offering a kind of surrender. Alex stared down at her for seconds. She moved both hands to massage at Rachel's shoulders before descending to unbutton her shirt and pull each side wide, revealing her bra. Fingers slid down her chest and into the right cup of her black lacy bra, caressing, kneading, and pinching her hardened nipple between two fingers.

"I want to see you Rachel. Take off your clothes. Show me."

Alex walked slowly to the desk and leaned against it, her eyes dark and heavy on the other woman. Rachel drew the shirt slowly off her shoulders before releasing the bra to let it fall lightly to the floor. She could no more deny her Alex than she could deny gravity. Her nipples were hard and begging to be hurt just a little bit more. Her fingers slid to her pants. She unbuttoned them and opened them by sliding her hands flat into the front. They slid from her hips and she stepped out. Rachel went to her knees and slid forward. Her nails scraped lightly over Alex's legs.
Alexandra looked down and slid her fingers into Rachel's hair. She looked down into eyes that cried out their need even as Rachel slid her cheek against the fabric covering Alex's knee. The seated woman drew up the younger off of her knees with a grip on her hair and an unreadable expression.

Rachel gasped as Alex neatly stepped out of the way and pushed Rachel against the desk. Her hands slapped the desktop as she fell forward against it. Her knees almost buckled as Alex reached around and twisted her nipple again. Rachel moaned as Alex's heat warmed her from behind.

Alexandra stepped back after pressing her body into Rachel's for a heartbeat. She ran nails over Rachel's skin. Alex said, "Mine," as her fingers pressed her lover. A moment passed. Hand struck Rachel's ass hard and heavy. She bit her lip. It came again, calling a moan from Rachel who felt the hand of her lover and her scent binding her.

"Mine," Alexandra asserted again.

"Yours, always yours," Rachel responded almost tearfully. She heard a zipper pull down. Something cool and long pressed into her liquid heat as Alex forced her legs to spread. "Please," she begged.

Rachel rolled forward to her toes as Alex pressed her weight to her again. Her head rolled back as Alexandra's fingers pinched her clit. "Good girl," was whispered in her ear. Her eyes almost rolled back at that hot exquisite breath on sensitive skin.

Rachel's labia were teased apart before Alex's favorite thick strap on split and filled her in a single powerful motion. Her head fell almost to the desk at the deluge of sensation as her former wife took her.

Alex's hand at the crook of her neck drew her up again. "You will stay with me," Alexandra said firmly. Rachel responded by pressing back toward her lover, matching her strokes. Their rhythm was hard, rough. It was a thing of pure need, lovers too long separated reclaiming. Rachel's breath grew harsh, gasping as Alexandra's fingers curled heavily on her hips as they pounded on. Alex was taking her. Alex was taking her home... The heat spiraled and she rode it. Rachel came hard and crashed to her elbows on the desk, Alex heavy on her back. She shivered and whimpered as fingers that had pinched and tore at her began to caress her lovingly.

"Rachel," was whispered in a voice of love and wonder.

Rachel purred, "Alex," as she regained control of her breath back and opened her eyes. She blinked dismayed as she found herself looking at a mug and a monitor and the desk from the wrong side. Her hand trembled as she touched the mug, verifying reality. She looked around. Tapping the keyboard, she closed two sessions at once.

"Hey," came from the far station.

Rachel shook her head. "I have to go. I-I'm... I'm not feeling well," she ended lamely. She grabbed her bag and thermos and scurried out.

Alexandra looked after her with a thoughtful expression. She smiled as she flipped her notebook closed. She had heard every word that she had said in her sleep. "Sexy dreams with me?" She said quietly. "I can work with that."
Nikita crossed her arms and looked down. "You want me just to walk away from my best friend when she needs me?" She felt hurt and angry at the way Michael had waited in the office to ambush her. In his eyes, he had apparently been doing the romantic thing, but his timing just really stunk. She frowned as she pulled herself up to sit on the desk.

Michael shook his head. "No. I'm asking you to come with me for a short romantic getaway. I am asking you to leave the person Amanda left in Alex's body in capable hands. We need time, Nikita." He edged forward to stand between her knees. His hands rested on her hips. "When we came back we agreed to make time for us."

Nikita was torn. She loved both Michael and Alex. "But now?"

His eyes were hard for a moment. Her eyes slid closed. Michael was right. "I'll ask the girls if they can do extra shifts." She quietly acceded. Nikita grabbed her leather jacket and slid around Michael. "I'll go let Alex know."

Alexandra looked up at the knock. "Come in," she called. She smiled at the woman who came around the door. "Hey Nikita."

Nikita smiled and drew out the desk chair and pulled it to beside the bed. She sat down and looked at the other woman who was tucking a bookmark into a paperback. "Good book?"

Alex waved it slightly. "For an intelligence outfit, you guys don't stock a lot of intelligent books."

Nikita leaned forward and poked the cover up. She cringed. "Next on the list, upgrade the bookshelf." She looked down. "Listen Alex, something's come up."

Frowning, the other woman rose to a sitting position with a concerned look on her face. "What's come up?"

"Michael and I are leaving on a short trip. I will be gone for a while." Nikita thought blurtling it out would ease the tension in her stomach but no, it didn't help.

Alex tossed the book to the bedside table and paced the length of the room. She looked upset. "You're leaving me alone here," she said quietly. She rubbed her forehead.

"No, no. Not alone. Caitlin and Rachel will take care of you... and Birkhoff would love to spend some time catching up. I'll ask for people to pick up the slack with you. You will not be alone in this."

Alexandra's eyes looked hunted and haunted. "They aren't you Nikita. None of them are you."

Nikita stood and wrapped her arms around her friend and former lover. "It'll be okay, I promise. We will be back in no time."

A sigh found Alexandra's cheek on Nikita's shoulder. "I wish you didn't have to go," she whispered.
And she meant it. It wouldn't be near as fun f**king with just one pair. She wanted the complete set. She tightened her arms and lifted her head. Leaning in, she brushed her lips against Nikita's. "I need you here. Be safe on your mission."

Nikita cringed slightly at the assumption that the trip was business, but let it lie. She would leave Alex with the thought that only the world in jeopardy was enough to tear her away. She stroked Alex's back. "Why don't we have some lunch and you can ask the questions..."

Alexandra leaned back. "Questions?" She looked puzzled before a faint smile. "Okay. Maybe I have a few... How the hell did Amanda survive if I am such a bad ass?"

Chuckling, Nikita drew her hand down to Alex's and tugged her along. "For that, we may need two runs on the dessert bar." She made a mental note to call Rachel after lunch.

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Caitlin's brow creased as she watched Rachel move dreamily from fridge to counter to stove. "If I didn't know better, I'd say you're pregnant," she teased.

Rachel turned in surprise. "What?"

"What what? You are off in lala land and trying to put pickles on a sundae and maraschino cherries into a pasta." Caitlin stood and backed Rachel to the counter. Her hands on the granite on either side, she leaned in and kissed Rachel's throat. She smiled as fingers caught up in her hair. Her lips drifted up to sweetly dance with Rachel's. She pulled back. "So what's up, Rachel?" Her eyes narrowed slightly. "This Alex thing?"

Rachel shook her head. "Just a little tired. Those files almost put me to sleep today." Her smile grew huge as she heard a call from the front door. "Parker's home," she announced.

Caitlin went to grab the munchkin, her wife laughing to see them play all the way to the kitchen table. Rachel picked up her ringing cell. She made properly appreciative faces as Parker showed her finger paintings and grabbed himself a handful of grapes to munch while she was cooking. Caitlin threw him and his bag of grapes over her shoulder to take him to put his jacket away in the hall closet.

Rachel jerked her chin to the patio as Caitlin returned. She needed to fill her wife in on the call from Division.

"You're taking extra shifts?" Caitlin asked frowning.

Rachel nodded, sighing. "It's just for a couple of weeks. Nikita and Michael haven't had a moment to each other and its tense between them. They just need some time, Cait."

"So you sign up without even consulting me? My opinion means what in this, Rachel?" Now she was getting frustrated. She understood that Rachel was hers, but this was still not appropriate in her mind.

"I didn't think you would mind, Caitin. Why is this a big deal?"

"Why is this a ... Are you serious? You spend enough time with Alex without adding to it."
Rachel nodded. Her fingers moved through her hair. "You want me to..."

Caitlin shook her head. "No, no. I'm sorry. I... get a little jealous." She smiled. "It'll be okay." The last thing she wanted was to alienate her wife.
Chapter 60

Alexandra looked around the much more spacious room. It had obviously served as both bedroom and office at one point. She looked at Nikita with a raised brow. "Guilt?"

Nikita barked a laugh. "A little. This is Amanda's old room. It's a little more spacious and classy than the recruit rooms."

"I'm still leashed though," Alex ended the statement.

Nikita's response was merely a pair of raised brows. She looked over her shoulder as Michael's head popped through the door. "Okay Michael... okay. On my way." She turned back and moved to close the distance between herself and Alex. She smiled as the younger woman's arms wrapped her just as tightly. Nikita stepped back and wagged a finger. "Play nice while I'm gone Alex." Smiling, she left.

Alex shoved her fingers into her back pocket and turned slowly taking in her new environment and nodding. "This will do... for now." Smirking, she went to poke around her new hidey hole.

A knock some time later got the Russian woman's attention, as she made her new bed with the rather high thread count sheets that Amanda had stored in the room's closet. "It's open," she called. She smiled as Caitlin came in with a large box. Tucking the corner of the bed, Alexandra came and lifted the heavy box from Caitlin's arms with a grimace. "Hello Caitlin. What's in the box?" she asked as she put it down on the corner of the desk.

Caitlin grinned as the box thumped down. "Rachel sent a stack of boxes of your stuff so you can look through. I've got a cart in the hall filled with boxes." Caitlin was in a good mood. She felt secure with Rachel's love, but she was not adverse to seeing Rachel say goodbye to Alex's crap. "She thought it might jog some memories."

Alexandra grimaced. "Just moved in and I'm already getting cramped with stuff." She sighed and helped offload the little cart in the hall. She peeked into one of the boxes as she placed it on the coffee table. "Kind of a mixed bag in here." Alex stared at Caitlin as the blonde looked around the beautiful apartment like room.

"Want some coffee? Apparently, they trust me with appliances now."

A broad smile broke out on Caitlin's face. "Thanks but I have to get back. I promised Rachel I'd take her out for a late lunch when I got done here."

Cocking her head, Alexandra asked, "How's married life treating you?"

"Wonderfully."

"Rachel always looks happy when she talks about you," Alex noted absently as she poked in a box. "Thank you for not being a jealous type, all the time she spends with me." Alexandra couldn't help slipping the last bit in as a poke to an anthill. She was interested to find out if there would be a swarming.

Caitlin looked at her for long moments. "You were her wife and her best friend. I respect that past. Course, if you cross the line with her I'll stake you out covered in honey." She grinned. "Gotta go. Have a good day." Caitlin left with a wave.
Alex smiled happily as she found some candles and a tea set and other far more interesting toys in the box she was searching. "Life's too short not to cross some lines," she responded long after the other woman had left. She set to unpacking.

Alexandra was drumming her fingers on the arm of the chair as a woman with a trolley came in. She frowned crossly. "You don't knock?" she asked tersely.

The woman looked at her startled. "I... I was told to deliver lunch as you didn't have an escort until dinner time tonight."

The woman in the chair looked at her with narrowed eyes. "I know you." Alex leaned forward. She didn't know many by name, but all the faces she knew, she knew from either photographs or personal contact since her awakening. Her eyes opened. "The medical room." This was the woman who gave her the scalpel so she could escape the straps. Now this was an interesting development.

Emily made a shushing hand gesture. "Quiet."

Alexandra laughed. "This was Amanda's room. Do you honestly think she made it that easy to eavesdrop? Put the food on the table and have a seat. I want to know who the hell you are and why you'd cut me loose." The conversation went on for quite some time before Alex slid forward in the chair powered by her interest.

"Michael and Nikita are in Vancouver, and most of the agents not already on something left for Mumbai. Sounds like it's time for a party." Alex gazed silently at the other for long moments turning these developments over in her head.

Emily nodded quietly as she turned a coffee cup in her hands. She was not thrilled to be Amanda's plaything. Having to give Alexandra the same control on the basis of the fact that she remembered her? This just really sucked.

"You are certain?"

"Yes."

Alexandra smiled. "Seems you are a handy woman to know Miss Emily," She watched the miserable woman for a long moment and stilled her face. It seemed that Emily needed a little structure.

"Thank y-" Emily started, still staring down.

Alex grabbed her wrist. "We will be discussing some plans and I want you to listen carefully. You will be expected to carry through your part without question." She began to outline what she wanted in great detail, her grip, iron on Emily's wrist. The mole listened with eyes wide. "You understand? No interruptions Emily."

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, Ms. Udinov. There will be no interruptions." Emily nodded and stood. She blinked back a tear of helplessness and mentally rehearsed how to arrange for Alex's escort for the evening to show up early and not be interrupted.

Alexandra nodded and waved a hand. "Excellent. Now get out."
She smiled and started taking out the tea set and the candles. Alex laid various items under pillows and in the nightstand. She looked around before moving around the room lighting candles.

"This has to be perfect."
Chapter 61

Rachel jogged down the hall to Alex's new place. She grinned and rapped on the door. "Time for computer fun," she called out. Her brow creased as she didn't hear anything from the other side. Not a big surprise, as Amanda no doubt sound proofed. She leaned to put her ear against the door, just in case. Shaking her head, she punched in the unlock code. Stepping into the very nice quarters of the former queen bitch and now her ex-wife, she found the Russian woman sitting in front of the low table in front of the couch. Vanilla wafted from dozens of candles as steam lifted from the delicate tea pot sitting on the table beside a small plate full of cookies all on a tray.

"Alex?" she called quietly to the woman cross legged on a folded blanket at the end of the table. She looked beautiful in the flickers of the candles. Rachel shook her head and tried to focus past all those confusing feelings she got around her former wife.

She sat still and quiet for long moments before blue eyes slowly opened. "Rachel?" she responded with a slightly distracted air. Her brow creased. "What time is it?" Alex looked around as if for a clock. Emily had done well getting Rachel here early. She had barely had enough time to zip through setting the scene before she heard the lock being manipulated.

Rachel smiled and moved to sit on the couch. "I'm early. Emily said you were... agitated. She thought you might need to get online earlier rather than later."

Alexandra nodded. "Nikita left and... I felt a little... " She shrugged with a wry smile. "I made some tea and thought I would try some meditation." She raised her arms and stretched hard as she uncrossed her legs.

Rachel's brow shot up. "Meditation? That's new."

Alexandra snorted and slowly stood. She sat down next to the other woman. Rachel shifted uncomfortably. Alex hid the smile that her reaction brought. She leaned forward and poured some hot tea into the tiny cups that came with the tea set. She extended one to the other woman. "Have some tea with me?"

Rachel turned the cup in her hands. She smiled and took a sip. Nodding, she put the cup down. "It's good."

"Have some more," Alex said quietly, watching as Rachel leaned toward the teapot to fill her little cup. She reached out and slid her fingers over Rachel's as she detected a tremor. "You okay?" she asked.

Rachel drew her hand away as she slid the pot back onto the table. "Fine. Just a little tired." She gave a small smile.

The other woman feigned a casualness as she picked up her own cup and sipped. She was watching Rachel like a hawk. Cute, Alexandra thought, as she drank some tea. Cute, with the slightest hint of fear that most would have missed if they blinked. It was sexually arousing and deep within it felt far too familiar. She obsessively studied the younger woman's quirks from day to day. Rachel's odd mix of chill and familiarity was delightful. She figured Amanda would have a lot to say about her extra curricular activities, but she figured what Amanda didn't know wouldn't hurt her, and besides, this was her show. She would destroy whom she wanted, how she wanted. If she desired to play sadistic
little mind games, she would. After all, Amanda knew a thing or two about that subject herself.

Alexandra watched as Rachel fidgeted slightly to cover a slow slide away from her. Reaching over, she slid the tea set slowly to the side and sat on the coffee table, her knees keeping Rachel in one place on the couch. Her hands landed on Rachel's thighs gripping. "What's wrong?" she asked earnestly.

Rachel shook her head. "I told you already, Alex. Just tired."


Rachel's eyes focused on hers. She tried to look away only to be dragged back. "It's nothing."

"Nothing," Alex scoffed. "Nothing like that dream you had the other day where every time you said my name in your sleep you sounded like you were begging for more?" She leaned in and nipped Rachel's jaw. "What were you begging for Rachel? What are you so afraid to want from me?"

Alexandra raised her eyes to Rachel's again. Her mouth found Rachel's as she pushed forward off the table to straddle the other woman's lap.

Rachel broke her lips away only to find them captured again. Teeth pressed into her lip, a promise of punishment if she continued to resist. She felt Alex grab her wrists and twisted them behind her. Rachel bucked under Alexandra, but whether the edge of excitement she felt or trying to get Alex off her was something she wouldn't be able to say. "Alex," she protested.

"No. No more denial even as you whimper for me in your dreams Rachel," Alex said firmly. She wrapped her hand around both wrists freeing a hand to slide down Rachel's cheek, down to her chest. "Your heart is beating like a bird's."

"Please," Rachel whispered.

Alex leaned in and kissed Rachel fiercely. Her teeth and lips made their way down the exquisite column of Rachel's throat before teeth scraped to her earlobe. "You are mine."

"Alex," she whimpered. She gasped as Alex rocked against her, her fingers tightening on Rachel's wrists.

"You are mine." Alex released Rachel's wrists. "It's too late. I'm there, inside you Rachel. You dream about me. You touch yourself in the shower, feeling me on your skin, my scent is all over you. You still belong to me."

Rachel's breasts heaved as she breathed heavily, bringing her wrists up between them. Part of her screamed to push this woman away. The rest of her curled her fingers into Alex's shirt. Her forehead rolled forward to rest on Alex's shoulder. She swallowed heavily. She closed her eyes and tried to think of Caitlin's touch only to focus on the heat and weight in her lap. She felt lost and torn.
Rachel stood under the pounding spray of the hot shower. She had gotten home to find Caitlin and Parker gone. It was a relief in a way. There were so many things in her head, swirling, shouting for some sort of resolution. She put her jacket on a hook and dropped her bag before walking slowly up the stairs to the master bedroom. She stripped herself and moved to the bathroom. All the parts of her that felt right with what she had felt today and all the parts that felt dirty were driving her crazy. She needed a shower to feel clean again.

Dropping a thick forest green towel on the sink beside the large shower she turned on the water. Rachel stared long and hard in the mirror as she waited for the steam to cloud the glass and break the eye contact. Her fingers trailed over skin absently as she waited before she moved into the water. Her face tilted up as her hands circled with the soap. The tears flowed unseen as water streamed down. She loved Caitlin. She loved Alex. Her heart was aching at the knowledge that two woman claimed it and she knew she would have to turn one away in the end. That the question was even in her mind at all made her feel even more guilty. She was after all... a married woman.

Caitlin smiled as she opened the bathroom door and saw her wife under the water behind the clear sliding glass door. She lowered the bag to the floor outside the steamy bathroom. She was glad she had thought to leave Parker with a babysitter. She had wanted to surprise Rachel with a date this evening. Might as well start the evening a little bit early. Looking through the shower door, she watched a moment as the water slid down the beautiful woman's body. Her eagerness to touch that woman's skin rose like the temperature in the bathroom.

She pulled off her clothes and dropped them silently to the tile before she padded to the shower. Ordinarily, she would have folded them neatly and placed them on the shelf, but her need was growing as soap covered her wife and lover. She stepped in to wrap her arms around Rachel. Caitlin laughed as she felt the small jump of the other woman in her arms. "For an ex spy, you sure aren't aware of your surroundings," she joked. Leaning into her wife's body, she kissed a shower slick and heated shoulder as her hand passed slowly over Rachel's stomach.

"Caitlin," Rachel whispered as her eyes tightened. She leaned back against her wife. The touch of her wife was healing. Her head fell back against Caitlin's shoulder as she focused on breathing and the oh so gentle touch over her stomach.

"I love you Rachel," Cait said as she kissed Rachel's neck. She lifted Rachel's hand to kiss it. A long moment passed as she caught sight of some bruising on the other woman's wrist. Her thumb ran over the small dark mark marring that perfect delicate looking but very strong wrist. "What happened?" she asked, her brow knit in concern.

Rachel shook her head and drew the wrist away. She wanted to talk to Caitlin, but she wasn't ready. "I..." She turned slowly in the protection of Caitlin's arms to face her wife. "I was working out with Alex. She got a little enthusiastic breaking an arm lock." She gave a slight smile and leaned forward to lay her lips on Caitlin's collarbone.

Caitlin gave a happy sigh at the gentle brush of lips. Fingers moved through Rachel's damp hair. "Want me to kick her ass?" Caitlin asked with a chuckle.
"No." Rachel took a breath. "I took care of it. I give as good as I get. You know that." She continued to kiss up toward Caitlin's jaw, hiding her face as she did. Her nails trailed lightly over Caitlin's abs. This woman never stopped making her feel good and she wanted to make Caitlin happy. She nuzzled Caitlin's throat.

Caitlin smiled. "I do know that about you." Her fingers followed water flowing over Rachel's breasts. She looked up to see Rachel lift her head and give a radiantly slow smile and tilted her face into Rachel's hand as it rose to brush her cheek. Her hands slid around to pull Rachel's body tight to her.

"I love you Cait." Rachel leaned against the other woman, her lips hot and hungry. She could not take back the day. She could not fully regret the ways she felt in Alex's arms today, but she could move forward. She could move forward with her wife.

Alexandra smiled as Emily came in after a timid knock. "You are becoming a regular visitor." She sat back in her chair and stared at the pale woman with hard eyes.

Emily shoved her hands into back pockets and stared at the floor. "You're going to get me caught."

Alex laughed. "Me?" She waved her hands at the room. "I barely leave my room."

"I have two messages for you. Every time I get contacted, the risk gets worse for me." Emily threw a book from the shelf near the door. "Look at you. You don't even care. You are nothing but a low rent Amanda." Between the exasperated exhale and the panicked inhale, Emily slammed hard into the wall, stars wheeling in her vision.

Alexandra leaned in. "Tell me the messages and get the hell out of my face."

"Amanda says have fun, but keep in touch." Emily looked everywhere but the flame in Alex's face. "The other one... G-Grace, she said she needs to talk to you. Find a way or she will."

Alex drew Emily's face up. "Get out."

Alexandra quietly went to her chair. She snorted. Low rent Amanda indeed. She leaned forward and began thinking. Time for some communication.
Chapter 63

Alexandra sipped at her tall glass. Rolling the juice in her mouth, she savored the sweet sharp flavor as she removed her meal from the tray. She was eating in the main hall today. For the most part, she was isolated in her new room but she had convinced one of her off peak babysitters to bring her down for a meal. Part of her rehabilitation. She smiled as she looked around at the wide well lit room filled with small tables. "I see that the number of teens in Division is down from back in Amanda and Percy's day," she said conversationally.

Joan, her watcher for Caitlin and Rachel's day off looked up sharply from the obsessive arranging of her food tray. "You remember then?" The red head's brow knit as she tried to read the Russian's face. She was not an enthusiastic member of the Alex squad but she tried to pull her weight.

Alexandra shook her head, amused at the other woman's ears pricking. This woman was not the picture of discernment at the best of times. "Nope. I saw the files for some of the missions and intakes and such. They were opportunistic recruiters of punk kids." There was a note of disgust that she would not bother hiding even if Amanda was standing there. There was no grey on this for her.

Her dining companion placed her napkin on her lap. "I was in one of the last intake classes before the regime change. Those two were sharks. Worse than sharks. Sharks don't put bombs in their baby sharks' heads." She picked up her fork and put a bite in her mouth. She chewed thoughtfully. "Food's better now too."

Alex quickly turned her head to hide an unavoidable eye roll. She saw another batch of people drift in from other parts of the facility. She smiled as she watched them fill their trays and make their way to various tables. Turning back she took a bite. "Not bad," she muttered, "but it needs seasoning." She reached for the pepper only to cause the salt to roll off the table. "Damn it." Picking up the shaker, she frowned. "Spilled it." Alexandra grabbed the napkin by her plate and cleaned up a bit of the salt on the floor. She popped her head up and looked around. "Getting more." She put the empty shaker on her tray and went to the next table.

Alex smiled down at the surprised diner. "Hi. Borrowing salt." Snagging the shaker, she turned back to the table, gave two good shakes and went back to the other table to replace the salt. Her eyes flicked to the shaker before she smiled. "Thanks for the loan."

Emily stuttered slightly. "A-anytime." She waited until Alexandra and her keeper were well involved with their meal before she picked up the shaker. A small folded paper fell off the bottom. It read 'tell G to be patient.' She really hated to be the go between. If Amanda didn't have her wired...

Frowning, Emily went back to her station after disposing of her tray and the note. She tapped away before looking around. Various desks remained empty as most of the crew had taken advantage of a slow period in the current mission to get some food and coffee. She opened her browser and found the appropriate false picture on the appropriate website. Opening the communication program, she typed in a quick message.

Seeing the rest of her crew starting to come back in chattering and balancing large quantities of coffee, Emily began backing out of the program. She waved at her coworkers and silently cursed the women that made it impossible for her to be a part of them rather then apart from them.
Grace sat back in her chair. Her hand absently stroked the puppy. She still didn't like dogs, but she was gradually accepting this little pup into her heart. That was a really good thing as Alexandra would kick her ass if the little guy got hurt. Her hand reached up and curled around her coffee cup. She took a deep drink of the cooling beverage. "Your mama wants more time, little guy."

She put the mug down. When Alex went to Division, Grace had moved back to her home of choice. It wasn't much, but was her place away from the games of the woman who had basically run her life on and off since she was a teen. The siding that the railroad car was on sat in a region filled with decaying warehouses. It was decorated with all the comforts of an upscale home, though small. It was quiet and well hidden and most importantly, it was all hers. It was the perfect lair.

"Dog... I have to get up." Grace stood, placing the puppy on the deep carpet. Her bare feet moved silently toward her kitchen. A quick rinse and a bag of grounds from the freezer later, the coffee machine was bubbling along. The puppy paced alongside her as she went about making food. He knew she made him a little piece of meat as she cooked for herself. "I do not know Dog. I don't think I can leave this as is."

She looked down. "I know Dog. You hate doggy daycare and all... I need to tell your mama the truth." She leaned against the counter. "Big tough bitch falling for one cold ass assassin. The stuff dreams are made of." She flipped a little piece of stew meat onto the tiny plate in the corner that she had designated Dog's zone. He moved clumsily, but enthusiastically toward the treat. She smiled.

Picking up the phone, she hit speed dial. "Yeah. Its me. Don't start with me Amanda." She nodded lightly. "I will help you if you help me." She smiled. "Tell me the fastest and least obvious way to break into your old office." Listening for a bit, she picked up Dog's bowl and filled it. "Get off my ass, Amanda. I just want to make sure your girl is still on track. I'll be in tomorrow to get the details." Hanging up the phone, she looked down. "Eat up Dog. Tomorrow its kibble in the kennel." She plated her dinner and went back to her chair.
Amanda smiled. Grace grimaced as she came in wearing an old denim jacket and a peaked hat. Amanda's smile immediately put her in a bad mood. "You look too cheerful Amanda," Grace noted as she moved to sit at a small table with a pile of various sized papers, mostly blueprints, on top.

Delicately sitting down across from Grace, Amanda raised a cup of tea and held it chin level, savoring the fragrance as she watched the younger woman. "I find it interesting that you say you have a more ... clinical attachment to Alexandra, and yet you come to me for ways into Division. You know that any such way would be dangerous and you have to know that Alexandra will not move until she is ready and yet, here we are again. Is any such visit really in the character of a half interested babysitter?" She sipped her tea as her brow ascended to emphasize her point. "What makes you think there is another way in? Percy would have been very careful about revolving doors into his realm."

Grace barked a laugh. "What he doesn't know..." She indicated the blueprints. "He is paranoid about people getting in. You were always paranoid about being able to get out. Tell me where your second escape route is Amanda."

The older woman looked at the younger for a long moment and smiled. "There was a reason I chose you Grace. I needed a young girl, flexible enough for training both of body and of mind for this work, someone who could be independent but still be worked with to keep you out of the Division proper. You also had to have one other distinguishing feature, my eyes. I am, as always, deeply gratified to see you have my eyes." She put the cup down gently and pulled one of the prints toward her.

Grace shook her head. "You picked me, seduced me away from a normal life, trained me. I'm done. No more being used, no more being your occasional weapon. When I finish at Division, I am retired. Normal life, normal job, and if I have any say, a normal family." She shook her head angry that she let this life go on this long.

Amanda handed an 8x11 mini blueprint to Grace. "Everything is written on the back." She watched the other woman slam out of the room. "and I am your family." She smiled and sipped again.

**Emily** moved into the room off to the side of the main computer complex. She smiled and waved at Rachel. "Hey Rachel," she greeted in a warm tone. She looked eager as a kitten with a piece of string.

Alexandra watched her entrance with a raised brow. She lowered her eyes quickly to her computer screen as Rachel looked around for the person speaking to her. She smiled and raised her massive coffee mug. "Hey Emily," she greeted back. "How is life in Birkhoff's Kingdom?" Taking a sip, she put the mug back and swiveled slightly in her chair to look at the new girl in the room.

Emily chuckled quietly. "It's okay. We miss seeing you around there." She looked at Rachel through her eyelashes.
Rachel shook her head. "I'm having so much fun being in here though," she answered dryly. She tapped away on her computer for a long moment. "Alex..." she said with a warning tone and a bared teeth predator smile.

Alexandra grinned innocently. "What?" She tapped for a few seconds. "Take all my fun why don't you?" She crossed her arms and leaned back. "Hi Alex, nice to see you Alex, how the hell have you been Alex?" she spouted at Emily with a teasing tone.

Emily gave her a cross look and glanced back at Rachel. She slid a disk onto Rachel's desk and smiled tremulously. "I remembered you liked that one dungeon game and... I happened across another one like it."

"Fantastic," Rachel responded brightly as she picked up the disk. "Thanks Emily." She slid the disk into her carryall beside her.

"Um," Emily continued. "We... some of the techs from ops, well we were going to go to a Japanese grill after work. I... I wondered if you wanted to come?"

Alexandra snorted quietly and pretended to be reading her screen. Rachel shrugged. "I have to go home after this. Caitlin and I have a special dinner planned. Maybe next time?"

Emily didn't hide her disappointment well, perhaps that was the reason she was considered tech material rather than field material when she was brought in. Alex's frown grew more pronounced. She cleared her throat drawing the attention of the two other women in the room. "I'm done for the day, Rachel. I have some thinking to do. Why don't you go home to your pretty wife? Emily can walk me back to my room." She smiled winningly before hitting her computer's shut down and threading her arm into Emily's.

Emily guided Alexandra to the door. "Come in Emily, just for a bit."

The tech frowned. "Why?" Her suspicion of the other woman was plain on her face.

Alex smiled. "No worries, we'll just talk here in the hall."

Emily hissed a breath and pushed Alex into the room. Alexandra laughed easily as she got her balance back and turned to the other woman who was making sure there was no one nearby in the hall before closing the door. "Are you crazy?" Emily snarled.

The other woman shrugged. Alex stepped close and pushed Emily hard. The tech lost her balance and fell heavily into the corner. She turned around. "You are fucking crazy!"

Alexandra smirked. "First, you are dumb enough to call me a low rent Amanda and think you can get away with it. Then, you do that fucked up imitation of a flirt with Rachel? MY Rachel!" Alex stepped closer and sneered as Emily raised her hands to protect her face. "Don't be stupid. What kind of idiot would leave obvious bruises on your face?" Emily lowered her hands slowly.

Alexandra looked at her as if from a distance. "You are lucky Rachel didn't notice you. I will not have your stupid school girl crush messing anything up. Emily. What would you have said when Rachel realized you two were the only ones there at the grill? They went to a different grill, but gosh we already ordered?" She smiled darkly. "Yeah, I know what you were up to..."

Emily shook her head. "No. I wouldn't."

"No you wouldn't. I intend to make sure of it. Rachel is not going to deal with your crush and I am going to demonstrate why I am not a low rent Amanda." Alexandra tangled her fingers in Emily's
collar, barely registering Emily trying to push her back.

"H-h-how?"

Alex brought their faces together. "Amanda leaves beating the shit out of people to others." She smashed Emily back into the wall before proving her point.
Chapter 65

A single heavily shaded light burned in the early evening. Alexandra steepled her fingers as she sat in the dim light of her room. She had gone through file after file on her search for herself. She read about her first kill on a mission, and her first broken order. The Alex that had gone before her was a slippery slippery woman to define and just when something felt familiar, she would find herself fielding another kind of Alex altogether. Closing her eyes, she pictured herself in the dream from the hospital. She was alone and all identity was ripped from her. She was standing again in that jumpsuit in the middle of a road in the middle of nowhere.

Even here, surrounded by people who supposedly knew her, Alexandra was unable to form a cohesive picture of who she truly was and in its way, it was breaking her heart. She supposed taking her frustration at her lost self out on Emily the mole was not the best way to make things better, but it stopped the circling in her head as did her little games. She sighed and leaned her head back against the top of the comfortable chair. Alexandra looked up at the shadowed ceiling. Something needed to click, really click soon because she felt a little insane at all the slippery not-knowings in her head. Feeling lonely, she stood to make her way to the microwave and her little jar of instant coffee. There would be no more Rachel to seduce or Emily to beat on tonight, but she was not ready for the bone deep tiredness setting in to take her to bed yet.

She was just opening it and looking around for her favorite coffee mug when her closet door suddenly opened. Alex blinked and blinked again as she couldn't believe what she was seeing. "They didn't shut down your route in from last time?" she asked Grace, puzzled to see the woman again.

Grace smiled as she drew her dusty jumpsuited frame out of the trapped closet. "Good to see you too." She shucked off the hat she was wearing low on her forehead and tumbled her hair with her fingers. "Amanda had an extra rat-hole to dodge through. Thought I could swing in for a visit."

"Somehow, I am not surprised," Alexandra replied dryly. She waved the jar still in her hand. "Coffee?"

Grace sighed. "What is it with the women in my life and evil brews?" she muttered.

Alex's brows rose. "Women?"

"You and the mega-bitch. You and coffee, her with tea." Grace plucked the jar our of Alex's hand and put it firmly on the counter before drawing out a bottle of water and swigging it to clear the large volume of dust she was certain she inhaled on the way down here. She closed it and turned it in her hands, suddenly nervous. She looked up at Alexandra as the bottle was drawn from her fingers.

Alex stared at her for long moments as she placed the bottle on the counter beside the coffee jar. "You went to a lot of trouble to get back in here Grace. What couldn't be said through Emily?"

Grace laughed mirthlessly. "What could be said through her. Her brain bomb is under Amanda's thumb and I am through having Amanda have access to my life."

Alexandra took Grace's hand suddenly and drew her to the couch. She pressed her down and back into the cushions before folding herself up onto the couch beside her. "What's going on Grace?"

Her eyes slid shut as Grace's fingers slid over her cheek, feather light. Lips touched lightly over
Alex's lips, her cheeks, her eyelids. Alexandra felt Grace's warm breath caress her skin and slid her fingers over Grace's wrist. Her eyes opened as she sensed Grace's face a breath from her own. Grace was pale. "I love you Alexandra," she whispered. "Not in Amanda's gaming way. I truly love you," she said firmly and with an underlying passion. Her fingers stilled on Alex's cheek as she watched the other woman's face for a response.

Alexandra blinked. She looked away trying to process this, to figure out what she felt about what Grace just announced. "Grace..." she began in an uncertain tone.

Grace turned Alex's face back her way. "If you aren't there, I can wait. I... I needed to say it. I needed to see you and say it. Just please don't tell me no." She scoffed. "Please don't tell me I've been living with a dog for nothing." She smiled, but the look in her eyes was pleading with the other woman.

Bright eyes zeroed in on Grace's. "The dog?"

Grace blinked back tears that threatened to fall. "Yeah, your little mutt is alive and well and eating better than me most days."

Alexandra smiled. She couldn't have explained the need to protect the little guy, but it was strong and it was one part of who she was as Alex that she felt was true. It meant something to her that this other woman had taken care of her dog though it would have been troublesome in the light of her occupation as a globetrotting assassin. Her fingers on Grace's wrist lightened and her thumb circled the other woman's pulse. Alexandra leaned in and pressed her lips there. "Thank you," she said quietly. She leaned in for a kiss. "How long can I keep you?"

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**Emily** paced back and forth. She was muttering to herself. She picked up her gun and put it down. "I'm dead. I'm dead anyway." Her knee twinged as she turned on a leg that got kicked when Alexandra Udinov decided to express herself. "Why? Why would I let this go on?" She picked up the weapon again and turned to face the door.

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**Nikita** put down her wine glass and frowned. She looked at Michael who was laying out dinner on their picnic blanket in the bright of the full moon. "I just had a bad feeling."

He frowned. Looking at the pate, he put it down long enough to tear the french bread in half lengthwise and then slide the pate into it as a sandwich.

"Vacation lasted longer than I thought. You drive. I'm starving."
Chapter 66

Emily took a shaky breath. It was time and past time she quit letting the women like Amanda and Alexandra run her life. She sat at her desk and took out a gun cleaning kit. When Amanda found out that she was expressing herself with generous bullets, she would be dead either by Amanda's hand or any of the hundreds of guns in this underground lair. She would go out like any good suicide, she figured. She would prepare herself with a hot shower and fresh weapon ... and a letter. There always had to be a letter. She was debating what would be in such a note as she heard a knock. She slid her gun and cleaning supplies toward the drawer before stopping and sliding it back. She was in Division. It was probably only Birkhoff who didn't play with guns as often as the others. She slid her chair back and rose turning toward the door. Her eyes widened as she saw the woman standing beyond.

"R-Rachel?"
Rachel gave a sheepish grin. "Can I come in?"

Emily stepped back and watched as her crush looked curiously at the gun cleaning set-up before settling in the desk chair, turning it toward the bed. Emily sighed quietly and sat on the bed. She hoped her day wasn't about to get more complicated. "What can I do for you Rachel?"
Rachel looked at her for a long minute. Emily shifted uncomfortably under the intense gaze. The woman in the chair finally spoke. "What's going on Emily?"
Emily shook her head. "You can't help me Rachel. No one can help me." She regretted the words immediately. She was going to get her life back today and having Rachel's nose in her business would just complicate things too much.
Rachel slid her hand over Emily's. "You need to talk to someone. There are a lot of people here who care about you and want to see you happy."
Emily barked a laugh. She felt warmth in her chest knowing someone cared, but Rachel was exaggerating the number of people who would care if she vanished off the face of the earth. "I- I'm okay. I had a stressful month... but I can fix it now. I know how to fix it now." She smiled and turned her hand over to squeeze Rachel's hand, savoring a single moment with a woman she had long admired. Letting go, she shrugged. "It's all good."
"I'm here to help Emily." Rachel frowned. She was concerned, but if Emily didn't want help...
"Caitlin and I would like it if you would have dinner with us."
Emily smiled tightly. "I will let you know. I have to get some things done Rachel."
Rachel nodded. "Okay Emily. Just- Think about it... please. We would very much like to see you.

Alexandra kissed Grace. Her fingers drifted down over her lover's stomach. Grace grabbed Alex's fingers and brought them to her lips. "Don't get me started Alexandra," she growled playfully. "Your keepers will be back soon."
"I should just say to hell with it and leave with you." Alex grinned winningly as she continued teasing Grace.
Grace snorted a laugh. "And leave your fun and games hanging? You have things to finish and you know it." Grace kissed the younger woman's temple, memorizing the feel of her warm body against her. "Dog and I will be waiting."
Alex looked startled. "Seriously? That was the name you came up with?" She chuckled. "You better be waiting. I'm still not sure how I fit into this world, but I want to fit next to you and Dog." Alex arm's snaked around Grace's neck. She leaned in and kissed Grace slowly and thoroughly. "I'm going to sort things out and then I am going to find you."
Smiling, Grace pulled back and pulled on her cap. "Back to the dust for me. Try not to drive the ladies around here too nuts."
Alexandra laughed. "Take all my fun why don't you? Get the hell out of here Gracie. Feed my dog." She waved Grace back to the closet where Amanda's back door was hidden. Grace blew a kiss as she pulled herself into the tiny hatch.

**Nikita** entered Division and immediately ran into Rachel. She grabbed the younger woman's arm to keep her upright as they laughed at the blind corner. "How are you doing Rachel?" she asked in amused tones.
Rachel picked up her messenger bag from where it fell on the floor. She shook her head. "I'm doing okay. I was just... Have you talked to Emily lately?" She normally would have immediately launched into an interrogation about Nikita's trip, but she was deeply disturbed about her time with Emily. Nikita looked confused. "Computer geek Emily?"
"Yeah. I was just talking to her and..." Rachel shrugged. "I just... have a bad feeling? Sorry. I just worry."
Nikita smiled. "And I am glad you do. I'll check in on her after I get back up to speed."
"Thanks Nikita. I have to get to babysitting duty. I'll interrogate you about your vacation after." Rachel grinned.
"And how is that babysitting thing going? Alex behaving herself?"
Rachel shook her head with an impish expression. "No, but if she did, she wouldn't be Alex."
"True enough. I'll swing by and harass her after I take care of everything else," Nikita smiled before breaking out into laughter. "Maybe I should swing by there first. I'm gonna give you the day off. I'll babysit her today."
Rachel's brow rose. "You sure?"
"No, but let me see what I can do."
"I'll stick around for a couple hours. You two can get into a fight and I'll swing in and rescue whichever one of you is getting pummeled today."
Nikita laughed. "My hero. Go have some lunch. I'm off to play with Alex."

**Emily** took a deep breath. Sliding the clip in, she was ready. It was time to turn in her resignation as Amanda and Alexandra's punching bag. She turned and left for Alex's room.
Chapter 67

Nikita leaned in the doorway and knocked after punching in the code for the door from the outside. She smiled as she looked down the hall and spotted familiar faces going toward the computer room. It was good to be home. She chuckled. It was a good thing that Michael was not psychic. She turned back as she heard the inner privacy lock disengage. Alex opened the door almost immediately. The grin on the Russian woman's face spread into a whole hearted smile, "Nikita," she greeted. She could admit it to herself. Seeing Nikita back felt good to her even if she didn't fully understand her own feelings about the other woman.

"Hey Alex. Hope you don't mind a change of babysitters for the evening," Nikita said as she leaned in for a hug.

Several moments into the hug, Alex stepped back and away from the doorway. "Well, you know I was planning all kinds of evil times for Rachel, but guess I could adjust it for you." She waved Nikita in. "I have to get my notes together and grab a jacket for that meat locker of an office." She barked a laugh as she looked around for her belongings.

"Mind if I use your bathroom? I just got in and ran into Rachel." Nikita paused in the middle of the room for a moment for Alex's answer.

"Go for it." Alexandra went to shuffle together some papers. The notes were usually ignored because weird as it was, once the facts were in her brain they were sticking. It seemed the memory worked fine now. She grinned and took extra pens. She would not take that for granted. There had been too many things taken for granted since she woke up on the table in the state hospital. She laughed quietly as Nikita disappeared into the bathroom. Alex was still amazed on a daily basis by it. The shower was designed for a true sybarite. She wasn't surprised with the kind of person Amanda proved herself to be. Could be awhile before Nikita emerged.

Alexandra looked up and frowned as tones came from her door lock. She half turned toward the bathroom. "Did Rachel-" she began before realizing Nikita would probably not be listening from within. Tossing a folder on her stack and leaning down for her bag, she gathered her belongings together.

When she arose from her crouch position, the strap of the bag slid from her hand as if in slow motion. Emily stood there framed by the doorway, her face pale, her hands shaking slightly as she held a gun. Her lips slowly thinned as she visibly prepared herself.

"Don't do this Emily," Alex said quietly as her hands went up showing their emptiness.

Emily's face nearly cracked with the dark smile. "Don't do what? Stop all this?" She laughed quietly.

Alexandra's muscles tightened as she prepared to lunge away. Emily shook her head. Alex cocked her head. "You won't get away with killing me. Even if I don't kill you, you know it won't fly with Nikita or anyone else in Division."

"Don't want to really. If you don't use me, Amanda will. If she won't someone else will pick up my leash." She sighed. "I was fucked up before Division, but I was just fine fucked up." Emily pulled the trigger. She was a computer geek and out of practice with the kick, but the mug on the cupboard just to the left and behind Alex exploded. "Shit," she yowled and prepared to fire again.
Alexandra threw herself to the side using the couch for cover. Bullets punched out puffs of fabric and filler from her hiding place and she looked around for a weapon, any weapon. "Stop this Emily," she called out before rolling toward the end of the couch. A teacup exploded as it hit the floor as Alex grabbed a gracile end table. Her eyes widened as she saw the bathroom opening. She cocked her arm back and raising herself up briefly, flung the table. Alex cried out at a bullet creased her forearm. She hit the floor hard even as she heard the satisfying crack of the end table hitting the other woman.

Emily stumbled back to the wall. She raised the gun again, this time with one arm as the other had taken a hit. "Goodbye Alexandra," she said as she moved to the right to get her clear shot.

She looked stunned as a cracking noise came from the direction of the bathroom. Looking down, she saw blood welling from her midsection as she sat hard. Looking at the bathroom in shock she saw Nikita framed in the doorway holding a Glock on her. Her hand fell to the floor with the gun, her fingers almost lifeless in her shock.

"Alex get the gun," Nikita said tightly.

"Gut shot," Emily breathed out.

"You'll live," Alex grunted as she crawled over toward the other woman. Her arm was all fire, but she didn't think it would be a good idea to make herself a better target by standing.

Emily shook her head and smiled. "Don't want to," she breathed against the pain. Suddenly her hand tightened on the gun. Alexandra's eyes went wide as she saw the movement. The gun flew up. Nikita fired, a fraction of a second before Emily's gun went off. Nikita's bullet shredded Emily's shoulder. Emily's bullet shredded the underside of her jaw and up through her brain. The gun clunked.

Alexandra was still, blood splattered over her, as she tried to overcome the chill knot inside herself enough to breathe. It wasn't as if she hadn't seen death before, even stupid death since she regained herself, but still... Emily was a creature of Amanda. Alex, if she was completely honest with herself was too. New Alex was as much Amanda's toy as this poor geek had been.

Alex began to shake.
Nikita knelt beside Alex and seeing the pale ice that was her friend's skin as she remained on hands and knees so close to the dead woman, gathered the younger woman to herself. Alex had a remarkable ability to disassociate herself from chaos and blood, death and mayhem. Things didn't touch her. When something went around her defenses however, Alex would tumble and fall hard. Something about this went around her young friend's defenses. Her fingers barely brushed over Alexandra's hair. Her heart went out to her.

"What the hell happened?" Nikita asked quietly as she felt the Russian shudder against her.

Alexandra blinked slowly before turning her head into Nikita's shoulder. "She didn't want to be Amanda's toy anymore," she whispered pained by all the implications of the blood spreading around them. She didn't hear the door as it opened again.

Nikita looked up at the security team that came in with their guns drawn. "Get Rachel and Birkhoff to my office now," she ground out tightly.

Alex shook as she pressed away from Nikita. She first crawled then pushed to her feet with the help of the now battered couch. She stopped only when her eyes were dazzled by the tile of the bathroom. She leaned over the sink, her hair falling around her. Turning on the water, she lifted a hand filled with it to her lips. It didn't ease the taste of bile and acid in her mouth. Her eyes tightened as she saw that some of the blood spatter was joining the swirling water.

"Alex," Nikita said quietly. She didn't want to touch her without warning. If business Alex snapped into place, she may not be able to tell friend from foe after what just happened.

She heard a shout from the other room. Rachel was standing in the doorway, her jaw hanging open as she looked down at the body of Emily sitting against the wall. "Alex," she shouted again in her panic. Looking around she spotted Nikita who held her hand up. "Office. Go to the office," Nikita said quietly. Her face tightened again as Rachel looked on the edge of balking. She watched until Rachel slowly withdrew.

"She was Amanda's toy. I am- Amanda's toy," Alex said quietly in a pained voice behind Nikita. Her hands patted water on her face again and again.

Nikita turned. "What do you know about Emily and Amanda?" she asked, her tone harder than she meant.

Alex looked up, her eyes pained. "Amanda was running Emily. Don't know how, don't know why."

"And you didn't see fit to tell me?"

Alexandra stood and stepped close. "One, I didn't know whose side I was on and two, you weren't here," she replied, shouting the last. Alex smashed her fist into the tiles on the wall. The bright flare of pain cleared her head for a fraction of a second so she did it again and again.

Nikita caught her fist and dragged it back to her chest. Alex struggled against the tight grip that was leaving streaks of blood from her knuckles across the shirt. "I'm sorry," Alex cried out not to the woman holding her, but to the woman who was even now being unceremoniously dumped on a litter and taken away.
Alex cried out again. "I'm sorry." Her head hung down over the blood fist that Nikita held against her chest. "Nikita, let me go." Her pain filled voice made the request more than a simple 'release me.'

Nikita sighed. "Alex," she whispered. "Everything is going to be alright."

Alexandra's face hardened suddenly. "Everyone needs to let me go or I will make things alright my way," she declared in a chillingly calm voice.

Nikita froze at this tone. This was the Alex that she was afraid would step in. "We're going to put you in another room for now and then after I talk to her, I am sending Rachel in to sit with you for a while."

Alex stared toward the blood smear on the wall. "Grand," she said simply.

Looking out, Nikita spotted a security officer. "Stay here," she told Alex before walking out to him. "Jake, get her back in her old recruit room, and put her on suicide watch."

He looked speculatively at the other room. "You think she'll try to kill herself?"

"No, but if she decides to break toward murderous rage, we'll be watching for much of the same things." Nikita clapped the young man's shoulder. "Be gentle with her. In her state, she will break you in two if you piss her off."

Nikita soon found herself pacing her office with Birkhoff and Rachel watching her. "How the HELL was Amanda controlling Emily? How the hell were you not aware Birkhoff? How the hell was Alex aware, but not you Rachel?" She paused. "Let's start with those questions, shall we?"

Birkhoff bent over his computer. "I am running a few programs through Emily's files as we speak. Amanda probably set her up like all her little toys. Brain bomb. Emily doesn't have any family, so there wouldn't be any leverage there."

Rachel had her face in her hands, her face was twisted with sorrow as she raised it. "She said she was okay, that she worked out how to be okay."

Nikita stopped pacing and took Rachel's hands. "You tried to help her, but she'd already decided. None of this was on you. You tried to help Emily."

Rachel shook her head, tears flowing slowly down her face. "It shouldn't have been like this. And why would she try to take Alex with her?"

"Amanda was probably using Emily as a mule to get to Alex. She saw Alex as Amanda's visible bit where it could be reached and tried to reach her."

Nikita and Rachel both stared at Birkhoff. "That was actually kind of insightful," Nikita responded. "Get everything you can Birkhoff. Rachel, I need you to take care of Alex. She is in a dangerous place right now."

Rachel nodded. "I'll call Cait then head down."
Chapter 69

Rachel knocked lightly before slowly opening the door to the recruit room. She half turned to indicate to the guard on the door to get back. He stepped back only as far as the opposite wall. She gave him a half smile before stepping in.

Alexandra was seated in the chair facing a desk built into the wall of the room. She was as still as death. Her hands were clasped together before her on the surface battered by dozens of recruits before her. Her breathing was slow and calm. That worried Rachel more than tears would. She moved around the perimeter of the room to sit on the narrow bed. She patted it quietly.

"Just as uncomfortable as I remember." Rachel cocked her head looking into Alex's closed face from the side.

Alex cocked her head for a moment before opening her eyes on her hands. She watched her thumb slide over her other hand in slow circles. "You should probably leave Rachel," she said flatly.

Rachel shook her head. "Not a chance Udinov. I am here and here I stay."

The chair crashed heavily to the floor as Alex wrapped her hand around Rachel's throat and pressed her back and down into the mattress. "I am not in need of a babysitter."

Rachel lay quietly, struggling to still her breathing. She looked up into the face of Alexandra Udinov her former wife with all the calm she could muster. Her ears were beginning to sing. "Alex," she croaked quietly.

Alex blinked. She released Rachel and scooted back off the mattress. She went to pick up the chair and after lifting it and swinging first one way then another, she put it down facing Rachel.

The other woman lightly chafed at her neck as she sat up. "Feel better now?" she asked wryly.

The young Russian frowned. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Rachel barked a laugh. "When you are on the edge, implacable calm breaks through better and faster than screams and pummeling."

"Fuck you know."

Shaking her head, Rachel shucked off her shoes. "Anger from you is less dangerous. I can work with that." She pulled her shoes off and tossed them across the room. She pulled her legs into a lotus. "Shit," she groaned. "That doesn't get easier."

Alex simply raised a brow. She shook her head.

"Don't start with me Udinov." Rachel sighed. "You need to talk about this."

Alex gave a single harsh laugh. "You're the interrogator?"

"Nope. I'm the friend." Rachel looked at Alex sadly. "Emily wasn't very good at being with people. I always felt a little sad when I'd see her leave at the end of a day. She would look at the others. There would be this moment, you feel the yearning from across the room, but then she would school her face and hide herself in stillness and silence." She shook her head. "If I had tried harder, if I had put
everything aside when I saw it the first time? If I hadn't let her lie to me about being fine?" Her fingers brushed away a tear. "Emily needed a friend and I let her push me away. I don't know if I could have saved her, but she..." Rachel took a shaky breath. "Everyone deserves a friend."

Alexandra blinked rapidly before looking down at her hands, folded on her lap. "Amanda would have killed her sooner or later. Emily was a piss poor tool. She went out on her terms."

"Not all her terms," Rachel responded looking into her former wife's face.

Alex snorted. "That's right. I fucked her over by not dying."


Alexandra rolled her eyes. "Is it time for my part in this touchy feely crap?" She got a dirty look in return. Shaking her head she re weaved her fingers. "Emily was... She was. She is gone." Alex stood up and went to the door glowing out the little glass panel at the security guard flirting with a passing worker. "Isn't that asshole supposed to keep you safe? What the fuck?"

Rachel stood and placed a hand on Alex's shoulder. "Tell me."

"Tell you what?" she roared.

"What do you want? How do you feel? What is your plan? Anything would be a start."

Alexandra pushed past her and kicked at the chair. "You know what I want? I want to leave. No more doors that unlock to everyone but me. No more people who know the score and don't tell me cause it would make me less effective for whatever bat shit crazy crap they have planned." She turned and got almost nose to nose with Rachel. "Get me the fuck out of here. Retire me. Put a bullet in my head if you have to, but I will not continue with this bull shit tug of war between two sides that can't seem to make up their minds what color hat they are wearing."

A knock sounded and Alexandra turned her head to glare at Caitlin who was peering concerned through the little window. She opened the door. "What's up ladies?" she asked quietly.

Alex roared and bounced up to sit on the desk. She crossed her arms. "Hey Cait. We were busy fucking up one wall and down the other but hey... long as you're here jump in so we can call it an orgy."

Caitlin shook her head. "Denial." She pulled herself up on the desk next to Alex. She signed. "Rachel? Go get beers and Twinkies. This will be a long one."

Rachel smiled at the two women who meant so much to her. "Beer, Twinkies and I have to stop and talk to Nikita on the way." She gave the door a knock. The guard opened it.

"What are you talking to Nikita about?" asked Alex.

"Non bullet retirement packages." She said as she turned to walk away.

Caitlin looked up at the ceiling. "These rooms suck."

Alexandra shook her head. "You have no idea."
Chapter 70

Caitlin jumped down from the desk. "So the plan is to retire?" She sighed. Retirement in their community was a tall order. People tended to keep the game going even when a body had decided they were well shot of it.

Alexandra looked down at her hands. "Sort of." She sighed. "I can't be in the middle of this little squabble anymore or be locked up or... I'm just tired of living on everyone else's terms, Caitlin."

"So a Nikita retirement? Live on the beach until you are needed again?" Caitlin smiled and leaned on the wall nearby to watch Alex. The Russian did look tired. Caitlin's heart went out to the other woman.

Alex snorted. "Nikita retirement. Something like that."

Caitlin looked around. "It won't be easy. You know that. You don't have any of your memory back, but I bet you know that Amanda doesn't like it when people tell her no and this..." She waved her hand around. "This doesn't just stop when you feel burned out."

"You retired," the young Russian noted.

"Had to. I have a family and me going down in a hail of bullets would hurt my family too much." Caitlin grinned tightly. "Could invite you for a family barbeque sometime if the retirement thing works out. I burn burgers with the best of them and as long as you promise not to try to seduce my wife while she is making her famous coleslaw out of a bag recipe, I would be glad to have you there."

Alexandra laughed. "You want me to promise..." She affected a cringe. "Damn you ask a lot." She looked thoughtful. "I could bring someone maybe?" she asked hesitantly.

Caitlin's grin grew to a full smile. "You dog. You have someone don't you? From Division?"

Alex shrugged. "Not really." She smiled.

Caitlin's eyes widened. "From Amanda's camp?"

Alexandra blew out a breath. "She is negotiating her own kind of retirement."

"Wow.. Not easy." Caitlin knew that particular statement to be the epitome of an understatement.

"But worth doing. I want this." She held out her hands. "I have a dog to take care of."

Caitlin laughed. "Alexandra Udinov with a dog. Pit bull?"

"Now you are just teasing." Alex hopped down. "I have no idea. It's fuzzy and barks."

"I'll burn a burger for him too." Caitlin shrugged. "You and Rachel have a lot of history Alex. I may have been a bit standoffish with you, but.." She held out a hand. "Friends?"

Alex took the hand and leaned it. "We can try." She grinned.

Caitlin looked toward the door. "If ever there were a cue for the beers to show up..."
Nikita sighed and rubbed her temple. "You want us to let her go? She doesn't remember anything about us or her true self yet, and ... She is dangerous Rachel. I love Alex, but that's the bottom line here."

Rachel nodded. "I don't think she will be a big danger to us unless we make her one Nikita." She shook her head. "Seeing Emily kill herself because of Amanda's shit, I think it woke her up a little." She self consciously rubbed her neck. "She is dangerous, but I think things could be improved with just a little trust and a little help on our parts."

Nikita paced for a moment before turning back toward the other woman. "So what do you suggest... we buy her a houseboat and a case of beer?"

Rachel chuckled. "We can always cut the bowline if she gets naughty again." She sighed. "Seriously Nikita, I think she needs to spend time with a shrink who doesn't have any agenda past her health and her insurance, and she needs to be away from the game, at least until she has her feet back under her. If I know Alex, once that happens, you'll need a crowbar to pry her away from the life. We take care of her and she will take care of us because as much as Amanda fucks with her, that is who she is at the end of the day. That, and I still have faith that she is going to get some of her memories back in time."

Nikita nodded and sat on the edge of the desk. "True enough. I do love Alex. I want her to be happy." She sighed. "I'll talk to Michael about how we can make this happen."

Rachel smiled. "And I will go get some beer for a little retirement party we're throwing in the recruit room."

Nikita laughed. "I'll swing by later if Michael's head doesn't explode."

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Amanda scowled at the monitor. Percy came up to join her. "Really Amanda, you'll get terrible crow's feet that way." He wore a thin smile that looked for all the world like a scimitar. It was a dangerous smile and just one more thing that Amanda didn't need to make the day complete.


"Not so much I think. I understand your asset is no more and Alexandra appears to be in a holding pattern on her rampage." He reached forward and tapped the computer a few times. "Has Nikita reclaimed Alex for Division?"

Amanda smiled darkly. "It won't matter."

"And why is that?" he asked with a raised brow.

"Because its time to rewrite the narrative. This was a story of bloody revenge. I intend to change the storyline to one of love and death. Romeo and Juliet."
"Starring?" he prompted.

Amanda pulled up a file. "Alex as Romeo and a special guest star as Juliet. She did just the other day bring up the idea of retirement. "She looked at a picture on the screen with a dispassionate face. Her hand curled slightly.

Percy scrolled through the file. "Given Juliet's parentage, how could she fail? She will give the performance of a lifetime." He turned back to Amanda. "Some would say I am sentimental allowing you to continue wasting resources on this, but... it is rather entertaining."
Chapter 71

Grace lifted the cell phone to her ear as she stirred the soup. The now former assassin/spy closed her eyes as she inhaled deeply. She was re-discovering the joys of things like food since she decided to separate her life from her former employers. Little things that never hit her radar before were starting to bring her real joy. She raised an eyebrow at the mooch who was stretching on her leg. His sandy furred head rested as he stared up soulfully. "Hello?" she greeted as the phone on her counter buzzed. It ended up tucked in between her ear and shoulder as she added a few more spices to the bubbling pot. She wagged a finger at Dog before scratching his ear. Pulling her mouth away from the phone, she whispered. "Soup. For me. Go away." Her brow knit as she caught a familiar voice over the line.

"Alexandra?" She pulled the phone away before bringing it back to her ear. "What number is this?" Grace queried as she looked down into the pot. She pulled the soup pot off the burner and put it to the side with barely another glance as she frowned. "Who the hell is Caitlin?" She frowned as she listened intently to her girlfriend.

"Your wife's wife... that's not confusing at all. What?" A smile spread. "Really? When do you-" Grace looked up as Dog ran to the door. Her eyes narrowed as it opened and she lifted a gun from a hastily opened drawer beside the stove. The cold metal felt like an extension of herself as much as she was trying to distance herself from it and everything it represented.

Dog barked and danced wildly around Amanda's very expensive boots as she came with an air of confidence and ownership. Amanda's brow rose as she watched him dashing back and forth sniffing and barking at her boots and hem of her emerald dress. She stooped and lightly touched Dog's head. He silently backed away from her, suddenly appearing as if he had just spotted a much much bigger predator. Amanda rose to engage Grace's eyes. Her lips curled in a friendly way.

Grace nodded and firmly placed the gun on the counter. Amanda was more likely to send someone else if she wanted to kill her. "I have to go. I have to teach Dog about being a better watchdog. Call me later." She disconnected and tossed the cell phone on the counter, never lowering the muzzle of her weapon as Amanda wandered looking at art here, and then chairs there before selecting an overstuffed recliner to lower herself into. "Did I invite you here Amanda?"

Amanda looked over at her protege halfway down the length of the converted train car. "I don't believe so Grace, but I think you will be glad I came." She took another look around as if she had all the time in the world. She was queen and all was right in her world.

Grace barked a laugh. "Yes, I can see that happening."

Amanda looked at Dog who lay in the corner bed staring at her. "A nice dog. A lovely home."

"Kill Dog," Grace commanded as she pointed at Amanda. She shrugged as he merely twisted his head at her. "Look Amanda. You can tell he hasn't been in your care." She pulled down a bowl and poured her soup hoping that this would be brief enough to enjoy her work. Moving to the kitchen bar, she came around and walked to a chair opposite the embodiment of evil in her living room.

The older woman sighed. "You have always been difficult Grace. You were worth the effort, but difficult." She crossed her legs and slid back into the chair. "I think you should reconsider your decision not to work with me." She picked up a knick knack from the small table beside her and
pretended interest in the glass ball. She turned it over a few times before returning it to the table gently.

"Or what? I don't have a brain bomb like those poor asshole kids you recruit. You haven't got shit on me that you can use without blowing yourself especially as I studied under Percy a few times. Mr. Black Box himself is a hell of a teacher. You can't make me do anything I don't want to do anymore." She crossed her arms and scowled. This really was the last thing she needed just now. She had a hard time believing she ended a call with Alexandra for this woman.

Amanda chuckled as she rested her cheek against impeccably painted nails. "Oh, you will want to do this. After all, you wanted a way out of the life, didn't you? It means happily ever after for you and your paramour." She smiled widely. She baited the hook.

"Fuck you," Grace responded casually. She was curious, but trusted Amanda about as far as she could toss a planet.

Sighing, she tried again. "I am aware of your trust issues, but I believe that you will see the benefits." Grace sighed. "Who do I have to kill, mother?" The last word dripping off her tongue with disdain.

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Alexandra frowned at the phone. She looked over at Caitlin. "She had to go. Something about Dog not being a very good guard dog."

Caitlin chuckled. "You seriously call the dog Dog?"

"Yeah?" Alex passed the phone back to the obviously amused woman.

"Thank God you never had a child."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Frowning, Alex turned as Rachel returned with the beer.

Caitlin grabbed a cold bottle. "Alex and her girlfriend have a dog... named Dog." She laughed and sat down as she continued to laugh, struggling with the bottle cap.

Alexandra saw Rachel looking at her in surprise and with something else... Something like disappointment. Rachel threw on a grin and sat in Caitlin's lap grabbing the bottle and opening it. "Seriously? Dog?"

Alex shook her head. "It's a dog," she complained good naturedly.
Chapter 72

Rachel and Caitlin laughed as Alex looked on bemused. "I'm glad you two are having fun." She was taking some serious teasing over the fact that the dog was called Dog. It wasn't even her idea but apparently, these two weren't letting that slow them down at all. Alex felt like a member of the family, all warm and fuzzy and ready to kick their asses all at the same time.

The door opened and Nikita led Michael through. Alexandra shook her head and pulled herself entirely onto the desk as they filled up the middle of what was left of the floor space in the room. "Come on in. Plenty of room. Want a beer?"

Michael looked around with a frown. "Caitlin, Rachel, we need to speak to Alex alone for a while." He was looking particularly stiff. Alex slowly blew out a tense breath.

Hopping off of Caitlin's lap, Rachel pulled her wife up and out of the chair. "Time to find some sugary treats to soak up the brew, baby." She smiled tightly at the newcomers. Nikita and Michael did not look entirely happy and she could feel her shoulders tightening in anticipation of the bad news Alex seemed likely to receive. She hoped she was wrong.

Caitlin waved. "See you soon Dog Mom," she called cheerfully, still enjoying a mild buzz as they exited.

Alexandra chuckled, the grin fading quickly as she looked at Michael. "Bullet retirement?" she asked. Better to cut to the straight shit, she thought.

Nikita snorted and leaned on the wall beside the desk Alex was perching on. "We're not Amanda and company, Alex."

Michael shot a look at her. "We are also not just coming into this business, Alex." He sat down on the bed without ceremony. "Nikita has been bending over backwards to be good to you. It puts us in an awkward position here." He unbuttoned his dark suit coat. His holster gleamed dully from under his arm. Alex tried not to tense any further.

She nodded slowly. "Still locked in," she said darkly, dropping her beer bottle into the small trash can. Her fingers tightened on the edge of the desk. Her heart was beating slowly in her ears as her feelings of frustration began to return.

Nikita held up her hand. "Hold on Alex, there may be a way to give everyone here a little bit of what they want and need."

Michael nodded. "We've worked out a way to give you a certain amount of flexibility while leaving us able to ensure that you will not be playing sniper taking out one of us or...well, just working with Amanda to get under our feet."

Alex's brows shot up. "Brain bomb?"

"RFID, Ankle bracelet for the new age," he shook his head. "Injectable tracer, not something easily shielded into uselessness or dug out. Essentially, it's Percy's old tracker without the bomb."

Nikita followed Michael up. "Like Michael was saying, we wanted to give you a certain amount of independence and yet we needed to be aware of your location. We want to sort out a place to live"
and we would basically lo-jack you. Something to keep us all a little more secure."

"Amanda will track me down and kill me. How the hell am I supposed to be feeling safe pinging in some computer?"

The older woman sat next to Alex and slipped an arm around her. "The chip and the two terminals picking up the chips will be encrypted to the hilt. They may pick up a ping, but without the correct terminal to run the algorithm, you could simply be a Shelby or a Ferrari that some insurance company tagged." She shrugged slightly. "And one other thing, and this is about making you feel safer and giving you a little independence to keep you feeling safer. We, Rachel and I were talking earlier and one of us cracked a joke that got me thinking. Would you feel safer being able to move easily?"

Alexandra frowned. "Pack a bag and move? What? You want me to rotate apartments?" She frowned. She didn't really want to play musical apartments, but it would be more secure.

Nikita smiled. "I was thinking you could rotate harbors. I want to put you on a house boat. If things didn't look right, we could play with the registry from here and you could pick up anchor. No one would be the wiser."

Alex looked back and forth. "Seriously?"

Nikita nodded slowly. "Seriously. We love you Alex. We want you to know that we appreciate all you did for us in the past. The past that you are a little fuzzy on, obviously. We hope that you feel a desire to help in the future, but either way, we want you to know we care about your future."

Alex frowned. This could work. She wondered how Grace and Dog would feel, spending a little time at sea or on a river or whatever houseboats traveled on. This could be a chance to start fresh. "What comes next?"

Michael nodded. "Next would be simple, I take you to medical. We give you a local and drop a locator into you. We set up a schedule for you to check in and see a therapist inside Division weekly. Then Nikita wants to take you to a boatyard not far from here where apparently she used craigslist to track down some possible new places for you."

"Craigslist?" Alex asked wonderingly.

Nikita shrugged. "This is coming out of the new and improved and not funded by private bad guys Division budget. You might have to do some work on whatever we find."

Alex barked a laugh. "Get me a hammer and paintbrush."

"That's the spirit. After that, we will be talking holidays." Nikita pulled Alex up. "Are you ready?"

"Do I get to kick the lock before we leave?"

Nikita smiled affectionately. "Once we are on the other side. I wouldn't expect any less."
Alex closed her eyes as she ran her fingers over the worn wooden and brass fixtures that ran around the perimeter of her new home. She and Nikita had climbed over around and through a half dozen boats before they had found this aged treasure. Alexandra smiled as she thought of the moment they had walked up to it, dirty, tired, and about ready to call it quits and start looking at little studio apartments when they moved to the last of the houseboats sitting in the dry dock area. It was a much older houseboat, a leftover from the seventies, but Alex loved it. Two staterooms, an actual tub, two big engines to help her move along when she wasn't feeling particularly safe.

The Russian woman looked out onto the water. The sun made almost painful lights bounce off the small waves as she faced away from the dock. It had been a bit difficult to secure the last slip in this dock but it was worth it. The holiday had some small parties here and there in the marina, but most people had gone off to much larger homes of friends and relations. Alex took a long slow breath as the smile spread further.

"Ahoy Miss Behavin'!" came from the dock side of the vessel.

Alex scrambled around the boat to see who was shouting to find Grace standing there with a half dozen bags and a dog. "Dog!" she called back.

Grace shook her head. "Good to see you too." She laughed as she helped Dog the Clumsy Puppy aboard the houseboat and then toted the groceries aboard. "Which way to the kitchen... sorry, galley?"

Alexandra laughed and pointed as Dog did his best to paint her face with saliva. She looked up puzzled. "Why do you need the kitchen?" She followed the other woman who was turning slowly in the galley, hands on hips.

"What is it with us and narrow living spaces?" Grace asked.

"Prisoner mentality. What are you doing here?" Alex asked perplexed.

"It's Thanksgiving. I very much despise my family, so I thought I would foist myself on the only person on the planet more pathetic on Thanksgiving." Grace smiled.

The Russian's eyes narrowed. "I'm pathetic."

"Seriously pathetic." Grace stepped closer, her arm sliding around Alex's waist. "I seem to be finding pathetic to be strangely sexy right now."

Alexandra brushed her lips against Grace's. "Aren't these Thanksgiving dinner things amazing amounts of work followed by deep food comas? When would we be enjoying our pathetic sexiness?"

Grace brushed a finger along Alex's sensitive lower lip. "I bought a heat and eat meal. Just stick it in the oven and work up an appetite."

Smiling, the Russian pressed Grace back against the counter. "Narrow homes or no, I have a very comfortable bed with plenty of room for working up appetites."
Nikita chased Parker across the backyard as Rachel and Caitlin pulled various pans off burners and out of the oven. Caitlin's brow knit. "Pissed?" she asked as a pan of green beans came off the burner heavily.

Rachel snorted. "No. She's free to do what she wants. That was the point of the whole boat thing. I just thought..."

"That she would want to be with her family." Caitlin waved a marshmallow until Rachel opened her mouth and then popped it in. "She doesn't remember you or Nikita. She is still trying to remember herself. A little alone time would be good for her."

"On Thanksgiving?" Rachel asked in a complaining voice. She was not happy in the least about the situation.

"She hurt your feelings." Caitlin nodded. "Holidays won't mean the same to her as they do us, not yet. Maybe not ever." She laughed as Parker ran by. "Hey hey hey. No stampedes in the house." The little boy giggled as he went to the living room for some quality time with his fire truck.

Nikita snagged a chunk of celery laughing as Caitlin slapped her hand. "What are we talking about?"

Caitlin gestured at her wife. "Rachel is pissy that Alex picked dead fish smell over turkey and tofurkey with us."

"I am not pissy." A very not pissy woman slammed some more rolls into the oven.

Caitlin merely raised a brow.

Nikita shook her head. "I can't say I'm not disappointed myself."

Shaking her head, Caitlin pulled out some rolls and put them on the counter. "She'll get there guys. Let her write her own schedule for a while. We'll pop in with casseroles and gobs of well meaning advice and boom, one day she will be our same old cranky Russian."

Nikita laughed. "Good point."

Rachel looked thoughtful. "How long until Michael gets here?"

"About... no Rachel."

Caitlin looked from one to another. "What are we noing?"

Rachel shrugged. "We have way too much food."

Nikita laughed. "Bring her a doggy bag after. Let's feed the rsvp'd crowd first."

Rachel slid out of the pick up and landed lightly on the parking lot just beyond the dock. Toting a
big bag of food, she wandered down to the slip Nikita said was home to her former wife's houseboat. It was a little rough around the edges, but Rachel could see what Alex liked about it. A diamond in the rough likes a good diamond in the rough.

She smiled and shifted the bag. Her foot froze on the bottom step of the ramp. A shadow appeared on the thin fabric over a window. Another shadow joined the first. Rachel's smile slid away as she worked out what it was that she was seeing. A bad taste filled her mouth. She was married, but that wasn't making her feel better about another woman kissing Alex.

Rachel dropped the bag on the end of the short ramp to the boat. She backed away with a dark expression.
Chapter 74

Grace kissed her way across Alexandra's collarbone. Her fingers trailed over the warm soft skin of Alex's abs. She grinned as she heard a groan rise slowly from the woman under her. "Where the hell are we?" the Russian slurred. Dog perked up at the other end of the narrow space and padded toward the two of them on the floor.

Her girlfriend barked a laugh. "We're in what passes for a hall." She leaned up and stretched, chuckling as Dog licked Alex's face.

The younger woman pushed him back and half rolled away. "Explains the pain in my back." Her eyes popped open. "Oh damn it. I have an appointment. I'm going to be late!" She scratched Dog's ear and sat up. "Fucking rug burn," she groaned rubbing her back.

"What kind of appointment?" Grace asked as she gingerly stood. She hissed quietly. "I am getting way too old to sleep on carpets from the age of disco."

Smiling, Alex followed her toward the front. "I have to check in regularly at Division so Michael's head doesn't explode and Nikita said something about finding me a shrink." She reached through the doorway and brought a handful of water to her mouth before straightening up in the door frame.

Grace looked over, her brow knit. "You are going to let someone into your head, Alexandra?" She couldn't imagine the younger woman trusting someone after the way she'd been mind fucked by Amanda.

"It's part of the deal, Grace. I had to do it, and besides, not an Amanda," Alexandra replied emphatically. "Nikita found a shrink with enough clearance and without a Division past, but with experience with..." she trailed off trying to find the right words.

"Experienced agents?" Grace offered helpfully.

Alexandra smiled. "Something like that." She turned toward Grace who was digging in a grocery sack that was filled with bars of soap and toothpaste and other bathroom necessities that Alex had not quite gotten around to putting away. "Come with me?" she asked hesitantly.

Grace looked at her, confused. "You want me dead, Alexandra?" She shook her head. "They would shoot me for being one of Amanda's agents." She pulled out a toothbrush and turned on the water.

Alex frowned. "Ex-agent. Wait in the car so I can take you out after?" She looked down. Her leg was getting scratched by Dog standing against it. "Ow. Okay. Okay." She looked back at Grace. "I don't know what he wants."

Grace rolled her eyes. "Time to learn about dogs, Alexandra. First lesson. When he does that, it's because he owns you now. Food, water and elimination thereof." Grace smiled. "Thankfully, your problem now." She lightly pressed the brunette back out of the bathroom and shut the door.

Alex looked down at Dog. "You eat cornflakes?"
Rachel and Caitlin drove up to the lot that served the fifty plus acre farm and a super secret hideaway called Division. Caitlin chewed on a tootsie pop her son had given her that morning. "This watermelon is fantastic," she managed around the candy.

Rachel smiled. "You're worse than Parker with the candy. You know that right?"

Caitlin aimed a silly grin at her wife. "So how long are you going to be down there?" They had a whole afternoon to enjoy before Parker got home and they were scheduled for a new couch search and lunch.

"I-" Rachel leaned forward to peer through the windshield. "Isn't that Alex?" she asked frowning. "Who's that with her?"

Caitlin tossed the lollipop stick in the ashtray. "Must be Alex's love muffin whashername... Grace. She's a looker isn't she?" she asked absently as her tongue worked a bit of lollipop loose from her teeth.

Rachel looked over crossly. "Want her?"

Snorting, Caitlin put the car into park. "Why would I want her, Rachel? I've got the hottest woman in the world sitting right here with me." She smiled broadly at her wife watching her unbuckle herself.

Flashing a smile, Rachel popped out of the car. "I won't be long. I love you Cait."

Getting into the elevator, tucked in the corner of a quiet building, Rachel waited for Alex to wander in. The laid back looking Russian beauty was leading a lanky puppy on a leash and grinning. "You're certainly in a good mood." Rachel noted before she keyed the special command that would send the elevator down deep into the earth.

Alex stretched. "It was a good night."

Rachel's brow rose slowly. "Hooked up with the woman in the car?"

Tilting her head trying to work out the tone that was just used, Alex responded, "Grace, my girlfriend."

"Must be an understanding girlfriend," the other woman muttered shifting her bag to the other hand and smiling down at the small dog looking up at her.

"What?"

"I said she must be understanding to be okay with you fucking around when you were in Division. Is she a slut too?" Rachel blurted. She cringed at what had come out, but she was not going to apologize for any of this.

Alex's eyes were wide as she looked over at the other woman. "Wow. You are in a foul mood. What's your problem?"

Rachel sneered. "Who has a problem?"
Alexandra slapped the emergency stop. She turned looking at the other woman calmly before she grabbed the front of Rachel's shirt and pushed her to the back wall. "Look, I don't know if Caitlin is just not fucking you properly or its your time of the month or what, but you need to chill out," she growled angrily. Turning back, she pulled the stop back out and frowned at the door. Dog was standing stiffly watching first one then the other woman before moving to the other side of his human mom.

Rachel hit the stop. She ignored the fuzzball who was low to the floor with sudden anxiety and roughly grabbed Alex's arm. When Alex turned, she kissed the Russian thoroughly and aggressively before releasing her and pulling the stop again. "She's the one you're fucking, but I am the one you loved." She responded, her shoulders tight as she tried to control her breathing.

Alexandra watched her leave the elevator and stop beside Nikita. Nikita turned and smiled. "Hey Alex. I have someone waiting to talk to you. I'll bring you there. Since we missed Thanksgiving with you, I'm throwing a houseboat warming on your roof next week. Just so you know." Nikita laughed and crouched to greet Dog. "Who's a big puppy?"

Alex looked over at Rachel, who's ears were red. "Going to be a hell of a party."
Chapter 75

Nikita lifted the cloth shopping bags out of the back of her car. Michael frowned as he looked around. "House boat." He shook his head. "I still can't believe she's on a houseboat.

Chuckling, Nikita handed a sack to her husband. "Don't knock it. It's an apartment she can move." "And that's a good thing?" Michael put down the bag and looked in it. "Did we just buy out a liquor store?"

"She just moved in here, Michael. She probably has three cans of spaghetti-os and jar of mustard at this point. Besides, she isn't the one drinking remember? If we want to have a proper party with proper lubrication, someone needs to bring the liquor."

"What about food?"

"Rachel and Caitlin took care of Thanksgiving, so I told Birkhoff to round up some decent food." Nikita stopped dead and turned around. "I buggered that up didn't I?"

Michael laughed. "Some of us like Cheez Whiz and Hot Pockets."

Grace opened another lawn chair on the broad roof of the house boat. She looked over at Alexandra who was trying to set up a sunshade. "Where did you get the chairs?"

Alex looked around before turning back. "Bought from the guy four boats down for twenty and a flash."

"I have a gun and a jealous streak." Grace dead-panned.

Barking a laugh, Alex pulled the chain for the shade positioning it over the table they'd set up for the food. "Okay. I paid thirty bucks and no flash. Though I pulled the neckline of my shirt down just a little before talking to him."

Grace shrugged and opened the new grill turning on the gas to it. "Well that's just good bargaining technique, babe."

"Ahoy," Nikita called out.

"Get up here," Alex called back as her feet hit the deck after jumping off the chair she had been standing on to fiddle with the shade chain.

Nikita looked at Grace with eyes narrowed as she came up top. Grace laughed as she caught the look. "Don't worry. I am mostly retired."

"Mostly?" Michael asked, brow raised. They wanted to like her for Alex's sake, but they didn't trust anyone outside of their inner circle.

"I'm not stupid. You ever see what happens to people who give Amanda a definitive 'fuck off'?"

Grace smiled. "The grill's almost ready." She gestured and started pulling things out of the bag Michael had placed on one of the small tables scattered around.

The others joined shortly, Rachel and Caitlin leading the way with some of the half dozen bags that Birkhoff and Sonya had purchased for the party. Birkhoff started off unloading food with a grin. "Sonya made me put the food back and she picked new stuff out."

"Our hero," Rachel muttered as she pulled out many things that were not Cheez Whiz or Hot Pockets.

The food sizzled on the grill as the afternoon slowly wore to evening. Grace for the most part simply watched the interplay between the various people at the small boat warming with a sphinx smile.
Alexandra worked her way into the lounge chair beside Grace and proffered a glass of white wine. "So?" Alex finally asked.

"Hmm." Grace replied. "I do like Nikita. Michael has his plans, and his suspicions of you and me by the way, but she jumps into things, damns the torpedoes, leaves worry to her boy because that's his strength." Grace smirked. "You two had a thing didn't you?"

Alex choked on her water. "Me and Michael?"

Grace smacked her leg lightly. "You and Nikita."

The Russian gave a half shrug and watched the older woman check on the grilled artichokes Michael was nursing. "There was definitely something with Alex 1.0 and Nikita. She and I, I would have been silly not to see where things were..."

"Where were they?" Grace asked watching her girlfriend's face.

Alex grinned. "Naked showers but no bondage."

"Nowhere near fun enough then. Okay." She looked around. "Definitely naughty with the ex-wife."

Grace sipped her wine. "The woman is shooting me eye daggers every five minutes."

Alexandra laughed. "She has it bad for Alex 1.0 but she doesn't know me anymore than I knew the woman she was married to back then." She winked at Rachel who quickly turned back to her date and Sonya.

Grace shook her head. "You play nice wench."

"What do I get if I play nice?" Alex mused as she put her empty glass on the deck and snagged Grace's for another sip.

"I tell you where the silk ropes and other fun things are hidden." Grace took her glass back. "Caitlin. She has no interest in you sexually. She is a bit... not quite jealous... when it comes to you and her wife. Wary maybe, but secure at the same time." She mused. "Honestly, if you were men I would see you two banging drums and wearing loincloths around a fire declaring your brotherhood."

Alexandra snorted. "And now I am stuck with that image."

Nikita came up to them in their lounge chair and sat on the end. "Michael and Birkhoff are having too much fun with the grill. What the hell is with men and fire?"

Alex and Grace looked at one another and burst out laughing. Wiping her eyes, Alex shrugged. "One of those things."

Nikita smiled looking from one to another. "Wasn't sure I'd like you Grace, but you don't seem so bad."

Grace shrugged. "I may have to shoot at one of you good guys one day to save my own ass, but you aren't so bad either."

"Grace was just telling me that she thinks you're pretty cool..." she looked at Grace, "or was it pretty hot?"

"Hot and cool works." Grace smiled winningly. "Help me make Alexandra terribly jealous and dance with me?"

Nikita laughed and taking Grace's wineglass, passed it to Alex. She held out a hand and then led the way to the center of the deck as Alexandra turned on the radio beside her. Grace danced with cat-like grace and a sensuality that smoked and Nikita was keeping up and challenging her to more with every beat. All eyes were on the two women and their display save two. Rachel was watching Alex thoughtfully. She slowly drifted toward the edge of the bow and leaned forward, closing her eyes and shutting out the world around her.

The party faded from her. She no longer felt the sweater she had been wearing to ward off the evening chill, but rather a short white sundress. The daylight gone, she was seeing the warm summer night so long ago. A honeymoon cruise. Her lips curved in a smile.

Rachel open her arms wide and leaned further over the bow of the cruise ship.
"Are we reenactting that scene in Titanic, or are you thinking of jumping, cause you know, you jump, I jump." Alex said from where she was standing holding their wine glasses. Rachel giggled as she turned to face the Russian woman.

"I thought it was something like, I'm the king of the world!" Rachel shouted dramatically. Alex eyes darkened as she stared at the other woman."Did I tell you how beautiful you look tonight, Rachel?" She lowered the glasses to the deck and stepped forward to her new wife.

"Not so bad yourself, Ms. Udinov."

Alex beckoned her closer and circled her lazily, reaching out a hand to stroke her hair, her left breast, her buttocks. The brunette stood behind her and pressed up against her back fully, reaching around to encircle the younger girl's waist. Rachel stood quietly, enjoying the sexual tension. Alex's hand slid slowly up from Rachel's waist to her chest, fingers caressing her hardening nipple before travelling upward to her throat.

"The only thing that got me through that boring dinner with the Captain was the thought of my fingers inside of you."

She spoke hypnotically, a single finger teasing the other woman's bottom lip. Rachel opened to it, sucking, licking, teasing, as Alex continued to whisper near her ear from behind.

"But, someone might see us."

Alex's fingers roamed underneath the fabric of Rachel's dress, slowing dragging her nails over and up her inner thigh.

"I guess you will have to be very quiet then."

Rachel moaned encouragingly and turned her head toward Alexandra, her tongue snaking out to playfully swipe her lips. In an instant she found herself in full on lip-lock, her tongue sparring with the other woman. Alex groaned into her mouth and moved closer, fingers grasping at her wrist to spin her dizzily around and toward the bow of the ship.

Pushing her back gently against the railing of the ship's bow, she let her fingers tease beneath her panties. Alex enjoyed holding her to that edge both physically and mentally. Fingers caressed and retreated, took possession and then stroked around.

Rachel was ready to resort to begging to quench the lust dripping from her, flooding her inner thighs. "Please," she whimpered.

Alexandra's fingers didn't delay and slipped inside as if they were made for nothing else. A hot wet flood greeted her and eased her deep within her wife. Filling her, she moved within. She took Rachel to new levels to the sound of the boat slicing through waves.

Rachel groaned deeply. "I love the way you fuck me."

Alexandra fucked her with two fingers, burying them deeper with every thrust. Rachel wrapped a leg around her wife, pulling her closer. Her back arched hard in orgasm. She leaned forward and curled her arms around Alex, burying her face in her neck and savoring the feel of fingers still in her.

"And they say marriage ruins your sex life. I beg to differ."

Rachel turned as she felt a hand on her back. "Caitlin."

"Penny for your thoughts." Caitlin smiled as she offered a plate.

Rachel took a bite of the fruit on the plate. "Was just thinking about getting you alone."
"Oh?" Caitlin smiled. "I wouldn't say no to that, beautiful." She winked as Rachel.

Caitlin leaned in for a slow deep kiss. "I love you." She said pulling her wife into her arms.

Rachel's eyes slid shut on the image of Alex curled up with Grace. "I love you too."
Chapter 76

Nikita sat on the rail of the boat in her pea coat, silk camp shirt and black jeans with a casual grace. Her eyes were closed as she soaked in the sunlight, smiling. Alex looked at her from inside the living room and raised a brow at the unexpected and early visitor. She looked down toward something at her feet and gestured. The door opened and suddenly Nikita was forced to grasp desperately at the rail as Dog tried to toss her off in his attempt to get in her lap. Alex grinned as she crossed her arms and leaned in the door frame in her own classy boxer short and tank top combo. As chilly as it was, she hardly seemed to notice the cold.

Laughing, the older woman pushed Dog back down and shifted to stand on the deck. She looked over at Alex whose brow was raised in a silent question. "Hope I didn't wake you. I was thinking we could hit a big box store to get you some more necessaries. Maybe get lunch?"

"Crazy thing, I have this wacky object called a phone. You did buy it for me right? You remember it?" Alex padded forward to lean against the rail that Nikita had been sitting on earlier.

"Sorry." Nikita dropped into a crouch to rub the offered Dog tummy. "Michael is off to another continent and I was a little..."

"Horny?" Alexandra replied with a smile. She enjoyed teasing this woman knowing Nikita wouldn't take offense.

"Lonely," Nikita countered. "You may not remember you, but you definitely have rediscovered your sense of humor." She stood placing her hands on her hips as she waited for her old friend to decide.

Alex nodded. "I have to drop Dog at the day care but then we can play."

"And Grace?" Nikita asked pretending a peek through the windows.

Shaking her head, Alex whistled quietly to Dog who padded toward her. "She went home last night. Something about returning a call to her bitch mom or something." She entered the boat and turned back. "Turn on the coffee maker and grab some. I have to get showered and changed."

They wandered down colorful and full aisles in the store. Christmas music and smells piped in were making cheery thoughts in some of the customers and homicidal ones in others. Nikita pulled down a humidifier as they wandered through the hardware and small home appliance area. Alex laughed. "I live on a boat, I think I get enough moisture Nikita."

Nikita shook her head. "Good point." She sighed as she put it back. "Are you doing okay Alex?" she asked quietly. She wanted to see where her friend was at without trying to go through the shrink. They went back a ways and Alex's health meant a lot to her as did her friend's need for privacy.

The Russian's brow rose. "I'm in a store with thirty miles of aisles drinking courtesy coffee and the bathrooms are at the other end of the place. I am feeling a little tense."
Nikita laughed. "I know that feeling. Well, now I do. I usually don't shop here. I meant generally."

"I know what you meant." Alex replied wryly.

"Do you... have you had any memories of your life before?" Nikita placed a box of light bulbs in the seat of the cart and then watched Alex's face carefully.

The brunette decided to throw her a bone. "I get moments where things seem familiar," she offered. She shrugged. "Not a lot..."

"That's fantastic. Amanda couldn't have completely wiped you out then." Nikita was beaming.

Frowning, Alex pushed the cart back to the main aisle barely avoiding getting wiped out by an angry looking woman pushing a cart full of kids. "Are you always this..."

"What?"

Alex gestured at a Christmas tree display two aisle further down. "Alex 1.0 must have been a real star to light you up like this."

Nikita gave a half smile. "Alex 1.0 is, whether you know it or not, a big part of you now. She was my best friend and even occasionally my lover and I would not be everything I am today without a steady dose of her... of you." She tossed a wreath and a small table tree into the cart. "Life is more interesting with a little Alex in my life." She smiled and ran her hand across Alex's shoulder.

"Even looking through files, I still don't really know her. I'll have to take your word for it that she was worth knowing." She grimaced at the tree. "Do I need a tree?"

Nikita slid her hand onto Alex's forearm. "You are worth knowing. What you remember or don't, it's not you, not all of you. I hope you remember, I really do but you are pretty magnificent either way Alex." She grinned. "And hell yes you need a tree. No glass ornaments though. Don't want your dog eating them."

"Right. Rawhide chew ornaments it is," Alex declared. She frowned and pulled the phone from her pocket as Nikita grabbed a box of ornament hooks.

"Everything ok?" Nikita asked when she turned back.

"Forgot I gave Grace this number. She wants to come hang out tonight." Alex tapped in a reply and then pocketed the electronic device.

"I like Grace. I really hope she gets untangled with Percy and Amanda. She could be in a lot of danger just working with them... and it's not good for you to be tangled up with that again." Nikita threw out offhandedly.

Alex grimaced. "She's no angel but she has a deep self interest that will manifest in withdrawal from that life just the same."

"Are you sure?" Nikita stared at her, watching her face for only she knew what.

The younger woman shrugged. "No, but I have great faith in her need to be away from Amanda. They must of had a very bad working relationship in the past. She really doesn't like her."

"Who does? Lunch?"

Grinning, Alexandra tossed in a dog Christmas stocking. "Coffee in my system is screaming yes if
only to get to the restrooms at the other end of this place."
Chapter 77

Alexandra smiled as she pulled out various goods that she and Nikita had picked out on their little expedition. She was not eager to admit it, but she liked having a friend even if the friendship felt second-hand at times. Alex often found herself wondering if the Division folks were there for her or if they were looking for Alex 1.0. She snorted. At least she knew where she stood with Michael. Up Shit Creek.

Opening a drawer, she began making a traditional junk drawer with a fistful of tools and a bunch of Christmas ornament hooks. She poked into various bags trying to see if there were other junk drawer staples handy to toss in.

Alex turned back to the kitchen cupboard and the bag she had started with. Her hand twitched toward the gun in the next drawer as she heard a sound on the ramp between her house boat and the dock. Her blue eyes looked down as she saw Dog dancing in a circle. She smiled and relaxed marginally. Dog knew his people better than Alex did. "Grace, Dog?" she asked with a grin.

Dog ran for the door and made circles in front of it, eager for his other mother who was on the other side. Alex left the Glock in the drawer and went to open the door. Dog ran through and bounced up and down against Grace's leg. "Oh for fuck's sake Dog, these are new pants." Grace groused.

"Dog down," Alex commanded only slightly successful. He sat on his haunches and kept dancing one of his front paws on her pants.

Grace laughed and relented, crouching to scratch Dog's ears. "Hello Alexandra," she said with a smile, looking up through her lashes. She stood and opened her arms.

Alex moved forward and slid arms around her lover. "Hey Grace," She responded before capturing the lips she had missed the night before. She stepped back into the boat and raised a brow taking another step.

Grace paced in after her. She stopped dead as she entered. "Did you buy out the store?" she asked in an amused tone. A dozen bags from a local big box store covered the small dining table and several larger boxes were stacked or leaning nearby. It tickled her that her lover might have a secret shopping addiction.

The Russian grinned. "Nope, but I did get a few important items."

"Like what?" She picked up a box containing a christmas tree with a laugh. "Where will you put it all?"

Reaching into a bag, Alex drew out some cheap handcuffs. Grace smiled. "Yay, shopping spree." Her smile faded. "I have to talk to you first." Grace felt the wrong kind of butterflies in her stomach for a moment. She was not looking forward to this conversation at all.

Alex's eyes grew dark and she stepped close again. "After," she growled. She tucked the cuffs into her back pocket. The scent of Grace's perfume was making her dizzy with want.

"After," Grace whispered.

Alex's lips were possessive on hers, causing sparks to fill her body. She pressed her back step by step, her lips never leaving hers, her fingers never stopping as they tore away her clothes. Grace gave herself utterly to the woman who commanded her with looks and barely a word. The cuffs were not
even needed. Grace surrendered herself to the moment and the woman who soon perched above her. After several hours, Alexandra wrapped herself around Grace who was nuzzling her shoulder. She smiled. "What did you want to talk to me about?" she asked absently.

"Amanda," Grace said grimly. She lay her head on Alex's shoulder. She didn't want to talk to the younger woman about this, but not telling the truth about what was going on was only another bomb in their relationship.

"Amanda." repeated Alex thoughtfully. "She wants something?"

"One more job and she retires me for good, Alexandra," Grace responded quietly. I hope, she thought.

"What kind of job?" Alex asked, her fingers circling on Grace's back. This was starting to feel a little like pulling teeth to Alex. She wondered why Grace was so hesitant. They hadn't had trouble discussing work before.

The other woman took a shaky breath. "She wants me to assassinate someone." There... There was most of it. The hard part would be the who, but really Alex would be better off without certain people in her life, Grace thought.

"Me? Nikita?" Alex guessed.

Grace shook her head. "No." She was trying to get ready to reveal the name. She didn't want to put Alexandra in the middle or herself on Alex's shit list or on Amanda's hit list.

Alex shrugged. "Probably some bit player in some back door power play. She'd kill you if you didn't." She kissed the top of Grace's head. "Get it over with so you don't get a bullet in the head and get out."

"Part of me thought she wouldn't, but she would." Grace was still blown away by the fact that her mother was such a cold hearted bitch. Well not entirely. She had been trained by the bitch after Amanda had decided to reclaim her. A secret that she kept from Alexandra and everyone else in her life. Somehow, being Amanda's daughter felt just too dirty for her to tell anyone, much less her girlfriend. It was a secret she would never tell.

"Do what you have to do to stay alive. If you need my help... I'm in. What Nikita doesn't know won't hurt her. We'll play the rest by ear."

"No matter what?" Grace asked. She was hanging on this promise. Alex could end up hating her, but Grace could survive long enough for Alex to come to realize it was for the best... she hoped.

Alexandra shrugged again. "I'm hardly an angel myself. We'll figure it out." She drew Grace up into a lingering kiss. "Thank you for telling me. You said you would be straight with me on these things and you have been. Thank you." She smiled a lazy smile. "Love you Grace."

Grace smiled back. "I love you Alexandra." She laid her head back on Alex's shoulder and blinked back tears. She really hoped the woman she loved wouldn't kill her for this.
Chapter 78

Grace was sitting drinking coffee in borrowed boxer shorts and a tank top as the sun rose. Smiling, she put the mug on a side table and stood. She pulled open the Christmas tree box. Alexandra had gone out at sunrise having decided that they needed a hearty breakfast that neither of them had anything to do with cooking. At loose ends, Grace slowly extracted the Christmas tree from the box.

"Seriously?" she said as she looked at the compressed tree like object as she drew the sorry looking thing out of the box. Shaking her head, she attached the top of the tree to the main body and leaned over and snagged out the legs. A few false starts saw her balancing the tree on a small coffee table and starting to pull the branches out. Her head tilted. "Oo festive," she said dryly. Hands on hips she turned slowly and started pulling out decorations and strings of lights from the scattered bags around the same area.

"Fa la la la something something," she sang under her breath. She looked over to Dog who was hiding his nose under his paw in his doggie bed nearby. "Never said I could sing Butterball." She tried to figure out how to hang the ornaments on the tree with the little tiny rings on them before finding a box of ornament hooks. "Need a manual for this shit," she muttered. She was trying to figure out how to unwrap some garland from the cardboard as she occasionally let loose with a string of curses. She was fully trained in infiltration and assassination, this blue and silver tinny garland shit would not defeat her. She tossed it to the side to come back to in a few minutes.

Grace was untangling hooks when she heard feet on the boat ramp. Relief washed through her. "Alexandra." The thought of seeing her love and pawning off the decorating made her happy. She smiled and padding over in bare feet, opened the door. Her smile slipped. "Not Alexandra," she said out of the side of her mouth to Dog. She pasted on a fake grin and waved. "Hello Rachel."

Rachel stopped dead, her brow creasing. "Hi. Grace right?" She looked around. "Alex here?" Shaking her head, Grace stepped back slightly holding the door open. "Alexandra will be back soon. Get in here before all the warm air goes out." So not in the mood for neighborly, but not interested in finding out how Alex would react if she left a boot in Rachel's ass, she was going to try for friendly.

Shrugging, Rachel entered the boat house taking in the scattered decorations and laid out light strands. Her head cocked as she looked at the Christmas tree. "Let me guess, never decorated a Christmas tree before."

Grace snorted. "How can you tell?"

Rachel started pulling the balls off the tree. "Anyone who'd decorated before knows that putting Christmas lights on last is a good way to get an ulcer." She paused long enough to pull off a three quarter length wool coat and toss it onto a nearby chair.

"What are you doing here Rachel?" Grace had not had nearly enough caffeine to deal with back seat decorators. Her arms crossed as she leaned back on the wall.

"Oh," she said distractedly as she pulled off another ball dropping the festive piece of plastic into an empty box. "Think I left my earring. Thought I'd swing by and check Alex's deck."

Grace smiled. 'Got a pretty good idea which of her decks you want to check." She grabbed her mug and padded to the kitchen. "Coffee?"
Rachel turned with a frown. She blinked. It would not do her relationship with Alex a lick of good to get into it with Alex's girl... no matter how skanky and rude she was. "Coffee's good."

Grace put another mug down by Rachel and then circled back to a wall away from her. "As the omnipotent queen of holiday frivolousness, how shall I proceed with the decorating?" She asked cheerfully.

Rachel reached for her mug and put it closer. She chewed her lip and turned. "Did I do something to piss you off Grace?"

Grace snorted. "You don't know her Rachel. This whole thing with you all gooey eyed and jealous? It's sad and ridiculous and right now I have more than enough sad and ridiculous without you around. Go focus on your own life and your own wife."

Rachel shook her head. "You... you are just another one of Amanda's head games. What happens when she finds out that you are just another way to control her, to keep her from knowing who she really is?" Her hand gripped a cheap nutcracker ornament til her knuckles were white.

Anger flared. Grace tried to quell it but it rose. She picked up a ball and whipped it at Rachel who barely got her hand up in time to deflect it from hitting her face. "You know nothing. I am putting it all on the line for her, for her happiness. Get out."

"This is Alex's place. Why don't we let her decide?"

Grace roared and running forward she went down to tackle the other woman. They hit the floor on the other side of the table tangled in the tree. Rachel got a knee up hard into Grace's ribs and sent her rolling back. She straddled the former agent of Amanda's and raised a fist. Her face calmed. "No... I won't sink to your level." Rachel stood and walked out of the boat house.

Grace punched the air in pent up frustration. Dog came over and licked her face. "Where the hell were you?" she asked angrily before standing up. She looked down at the crushed tree and heard the door open behind her.

Alexandra stood looking at the devastation. "What the hell happened?"

Her lover sighed. "I put the bulbs on before the lights and found out why you don't do that."

"Why's that?" she asked slowly.

Grace turned. "You get the urge to clear the tree in the fastest possible way so you can start over."

Alex toed one of the ornaments at her feet. "Fair enough."
Cracking open a cold beverage, Alex came back from the kitchen and sat on the far end of the couch sliding her feet on Grace's lap. She waved the can lazily at the newly decorated tree sitting on the coffee table, a fluffy tree skirt wrapped around the base. "It looks really good."

"Hmmm," Grace replied absently as she let the twinkling take her out of herself. She was having trouble truly relaxing, but this was helping, peace, quiet and of course blinking tree lights all over the place. Kind of hypnotic and it only took them an hour to figure out where the instructions to make them blink had ended up.

Alex whistled. "Earth to Grace."

Grace smiled and looked at Alexandra. The smile did not quite show in her eyes. "What?"

"Penny for your thoughts?" The Russian woman inquired.

"Is that what you think my thoughts are worth, Alexandra?" she asked back playfully.

Alex poked at Grace's belly with a sock covered toe. "I'm unemployed now. It's all I can afford."

Grace chuckled and looked around at a living room festooned in festive tree lights. "Somebody better warn the electric company."

Alexandra gasped and dramatically clutched at her heart. "Be nice. It's my first Christmas all over again and I want lights."

"Fair enough." Grace smiled and dropped her head back against the top of the couch. "I have to take care of stuff tomorrow," she said regretfully.

"Definitely. Pack your shit up and move in here." Alex took a deep drink of her soda and passed it to Grace who took a sip as she wiggled to get more comfortable.

"Oh you are so suave." She turned her head and looked at Alexandra, her smile broadening and this time lighting up in her eyes. "You turn a girl's head Alexandra Udinov." She chuckled. "If you still want me to officially move in the week after Christmas, I will, but only if you lift the heavy shit," she said wagging a finger at the other woman.

Alex looked around the houseboat with a bemused grin. "Do we have room for heavy shit?"

Grace laughed. "Once we put the Christmas stuff in storage we will." She moved down the couch and stroked Alex's cheek. "Let's go to bed. I have an early day tomorrow."

Alex captured her lover's lips. "Yes. Let's." She stood and turned to offer her hands to her lover. Grace slid her hands into the Russian's and let her pull her up and then pull her into the bedroom.
Grace sighed. She had been around and around and there was only one ideal location for what she was going to do. She was just delaying the inevitable. This had to be done so she could be free. She would take one last look from her soon-to-be sniper nest and then return the next day.

Years of training flew by. Amanda kept her out of Division proper while she was still a figure there. It was not to keep her daughter safe, it was to keep an ace in her sleeve. Grace had pretty much always resented Amanda, but still ground out the work to the Queen B's satisfaction. She was damned good and had a future in it where most lost their future the moment they were recruited. The day came when she was the one behind the brain needle, hatching her own wicked plans, but Alexandra Udinov changed all of that. It surprised Grace how very good it felt to turn her back on everything, look to a new day. She only hoped Alexandra would want to be there when she was finished.

Looking out the round window, she saw her target. She made her hand into a gun shape and pointed it downward as a woman walked to her car. "Bang," Grace said.

"Hey," she said then frowned as she heard voicemail click on. "It's Grace. I got your number and I just... I want to say sorry about the whole catfight thing. It was cliche and shitty. I know you are not happy about me, for a lot of reasons. I am not thrilled about you for others. I just think we could put it aside to... I don't know. Alex doesn't need a shitstorm. Okay? We cool?" Grace pulled the phone away from her ear and stared at it a moment before closing the line. "That didn't sound at all pussy."

"Amanda, hit the button for speakerphone. "Yes?"

"The target will be right where you said she'd be."

"You know what to do." She closed the line.
Chapter 80

Grace attached the scope and frowned. The weapon was heavy in her hands and was getting heavier. She pulled a headpiece onto her head. She blew out a slow breath. The cars were far and few between during daylight hours between residents of the area going in to their office and mates hauling kids and running errands. She had found a house for sale near her target and had set up on boards set across large pink swaths of insulation in the attic. She put her head down a moment steeling herself in a way she had not had to before in her career as an assassin.

The cool air hit her like a slap as she cranked the circular window open. She had haunted the neighborhood the day before looking for angles, but this was the best shot she had. She pressed the rifle down to the edge of the window and swept her hair back behind her ear before leaning into the scope and sweeping the house opposite. She frowned and tensed as a flash caught her eye. She took a breath and settled down. She was not in the field hunting another hunter. She was there to take out a rabbit that was nibbling at the best of the veg. She settled in to wait.

Grace's eyes slid shut. "Not a rabbit," she whispered. "Oh crap, what am I doing?" She pulled out her phone. Bringing it to her ear, she listened to the busy signal before hitting the cut off on voice mail. "Damn it Alexandra." She was ready for what she had to do to keep her life, but at the same time the knowledge that Alex's blithe acceptance of her need did not cover people she cared about stayed her hand. She would try again in a few minutes.

Alex answered the phone with a puzzled frown. She didn't recognize the number. Unless this was an inquiry about her internet speed, it could not be good news. "Who is this?" she asked.

"Dearest Alexandra," drawled the voice on the other end of the line.

"Amanda." Alex's face was darker now.

Alex could almost hear the other woman's snake-like smile at the greeting. "We have a problem Alexandra." Amanda announced simply.

The Russian woman shook her head. She did not want to deal with this woman today. "I haven't any problem, Amanda."

"I realize you have not regained your full memory yet, but I understand you have developed affection for some of your former colleagues at Division."

"Not your problem."

Amanda hesitated. "It is when one of mine goes rogue to kill someone off the books, specifically one of your former colleagues."

"What the hell are you talking about Amanda?" Alex was starting to get really agitated now.

"Grace has left us with a rifle she was not to take for a mission she was never given."

"Bullshit. She told me you set her up with a retirement mission."

"Have I ever been that graceful about retirements, yours not withstanding Alexandra?" Amanda tsk'd through the phone. "Her new tracker indicates she is across the street from a married couple of your
acquaintance, Caitlin and..."

"Rachel," The younger woman breathed out.

"I do not like off book shootings Alexandra. I thought I would allow you to take care of it rather than send cleaners after her. We'll call it professional courtesy."

Alex ended the call and tossed the phone on the counter absently as she drew on her jacket. She forgot to tuck it in her pocket as she left. She drove hell-bent for leather for Caitlin's house and then stopped a few doors down. Options flew through her head in quick succession. She could go in and warn Rachel and Caitlin, but Grace would pay for it when it got back to Division. Grace would be dead by Division. On the other hand, she could be Amanda food too. Alex just confirmed to herself the best option was to grab the other woman and simply run. It worked for Nikita, she would make it work for them. She looked at the house and the houses surrounding and seeing a for sale sign, broke in. She went up floor after floor looking for Grace.

"Grace," she called out as she made the attic. Seeing the other woman at the window with the rifle, she froze. "Grace," she began. "Put down the rifle." She said quietly raising her hand as if she could take the weapon from across the room.

Grace shook her head. "I tried to tell you what she put me up to Alexandra. I have to do this or she'll take me out, best case." She nestled herself against the stock and tried to pretend she was not waiting for ideas and other options to make her put the sniper rifle down.

"Amanda called me. She says you're off book."

Grace half turned over the stock of the rifle to look at Alex in disbelief. "Are you-"

Whatever it was she was going to say was lost as her head exploded with a bullet. Alex screamed. Jumping across the insulation, she came to a stop, dropping next to Grace. The Russian cradled the older woman in her arms. "No, Grace, no." she screamed as if the other woman could hear her.

She looked out the shattered window and saw Caitlin and Rachel outside of the front door, both clutching firearms. Alex looked down at the bloody remains of her lover's head. Her mind and her heart flared in bright white light. She was gulping in air before everything went still in her. She picked up the rifle and Grace's cell phone.

Dialing as she left the attic, she put it to her ear. "Send cleaners," she said simply before dropping the phone and crushing it under her heel. Unnoticed tears slid down her face.

Amanda frowned. Closing up the phone, she received a message from the computer confirming a retirement hit on Grace. One of her finest shots was working on his audition project for joining the cleaners. Amanda dispatched him to clean up the mess he made. She tapped the off switch and closed her laptop. She picked up an infant's hospital band from her desk. She cut it off Grace before she shuffled the girl off to a foster family until she was old enough for training.

"You could have been so much more, Grace."

Amanda slowly rolled the hospital band between her fingers. She opened her fingers to let the bracelet drop into a waste basket. One of her better tools, but not one made to last.
Chapter 81

Alexandra, pale and still faced, walked silently to her car where she ditched it several doors down. Her own breath sounded harsh in her ears and the rifle was cold and hard in her hand. She pressed it up under her jacket to keep it from being headline news if any housewives were looking at the woman cutting through yards in this nice suburban neighborhood. Pulling away from the curb almost a half block from where Caitlin and Rachel had retreated into a house and were peering from the windows, she swiftly pulled a u-turn and drove back to the lot near her dock.

The sun was low over the hard grey looking water as she stared out of the windshield. The water slapped the wood of the docks hard leaving boats rocking slightly everywhere in sight. Alex's head and heart was hurting. What the hell happened? She kept asking herself. She couldn't be this wrong about the players in this, could she? She gripped the steering wheel hard, knuckles waxy white with the grip as she stared down at the weapon in the seat beside her. A low growl started low in her chest. Only will kept it from rising through her body as a soul rending scream. Leaning her head back, she gulped air trying to get her control back. She twitched as a car shrieked to a halt on her bumper.

Michael pushed the door open and leaned through the window in the door with his Division issued weapon. "Alex get out of the fucking car." he called out. His face was stern but not angry. Alex tore her eyes from the rear view mirror. She was barely holding on right now and this was not helping. "Or what you shithead?" she whispered. "What?" she yelled back. She pulled the rifle to put it out of easy sight but still in easy reach. She was not interested in a fight in this moment, but she would not go down without one. Her eyes followed the man from Division as he edged closer.

Michael's eyes narrowed. "Your implant placed you across from Cait and Rachel's when shots were fired Alex." He moved pantherlike toward the front of the car. "What's going on here Alex?"

Shaking her head, she picked up her phone and speed dialed. "Nikita, someone butchered Grace. It sure as fuck wasn't me and fuck, the only guns I counted were Grace's and Rachel's and Caitlin's." She looked out her window at the man with the gun standing there. "Michael has a gun pointed at me. I can only assume you had second thoughts about the boat." She looked out at Michael who had moved up to her window. She puffed out a breath.

She listened for a few seconds then hit the button to roll down her window. She held out the phone. "Nikita for you." Her other hand drifted away slightly.

Michael frowned and took the phone. He was bringing it to his ear when Alex slammed the rifle butt into his face, then as he dropped the phone and took a half step back, she slammed the car door into his middle. It was quick work to lay him on the pavement. She picked up the cell phone.

"Nikita. I put Michael on the ground. Be sure to remind him that the next time he fucking comes at me with a weapon pulled, he will not survive it." She listened a moment. "He's alive but dozy. I don't know who shot her. Could be you guys or could be Amanda fucking with me again. I don't give a shit." She sighed as Michael blinked.

Standing on his wrist, Alexandra picked up Michael's gun and winged it into the marina. "You are an asshat Michael. You are a straight as an arrow asshat. I actually like that. Nice knowing where I stand with someone. Here's the thing Michael, Grace had her head blown off and I don't know who
did it. If you and yours want to remain intact, you'll stay out of my fucking way until I figure out where I stand." She looked to the water. "You'll need to requisition a new weapon." She shrugged and went back to the car and took out the rifle. Her fingers were white where they wrapped around it.

"Alex," she heard behind her. She turned to see Michael pushing himself off the ground. He rubbed his wrist as he watched her.

"What?" She ground out. She was all out of patience now. Listening would not be her strong suit today.

"It wasn't us," he said. "Grace... it wasn't us. I swear."

She snorted. Her fingers tightened and loosened convulsively on the rifle. "Easy to say Michael." Alexandra cocked her head at the sound of her phone buzzing in her pocket. "Not now," she muttered to it.

"What will you do?"

"If I figure it out," she started waving her rifle, "someone dies, until then, I think I am going to get very very drunk." She stalked off for the ramp leading to her travelling sanctuary.

He moved to the bottom of the ramp. "If you need an asshat..." he called out.

"If I need an asshat, I'll be in touch." Alex slid open her door and walked into her home. She absently pressed Dog down as he stretched up on her leg. She moved to check her fuel levels. She would move to a different marina and then figure things out...or get drunk and figure things out. She looked at the paper bag that still contained some the copious amounts of liquor Michael and Nikita brought to the party. Sobriety was out of the question.

"Drunk first. Bloody revenge after," she vowed as she turned the key. Alex went out and cast off the dock. First though, she would need to get away from the people in this little drama.

She looked down at Dog, who rubbed his head against her leg, whining. "I know son... I know."
Chapter 82

Alexandra smiled darkly as she leaned down over the blond in her bed. She felt the icy slide of the drugs entering her system courtesy of a random dealer who drifted by back at the club. Her binge drinking alone had ended up in a search for a club and more liquor and more contact with anyone dealing or using along the way. The woman bit her lip as she looked upward watching Alex tighten the knots that bound her wrists above her. Her body undulated under the Russian woman. Alex ran her nails down the young woman's arms. She leaned back up into a sitting position and took her vodka bottle from the bedside table. Her eyes were stroking up and down the other woman's body as she brought the bottle to her mouth.

"Hey there, don't be greedy now," the bound woman said in a low tone. Her breasts lifted as she rocked upward against Alexandra as she straddled her.

Alex tipped the bottle back, relishing the feel of the liquor sliding over her tongue and warming its way down into her stomach. It numbed her, but never enough. She took another swig before looking down. She leaned forward and pressed the end of the bottle to her lover's lower lip and tilted it just enough to send the burning liquid into her opened mouth. The bound woman made a great show of running her tongue on the lip of the bottle as Alex began to raise it. Alex smiled and slid the bottle on the table.

"Mmm lover, you like it top shelf don't you," the other woman purred.

Alexandra leaned down and kissed the naked shoulder. Her teeth then scraped the tender flesh before her tongue swirled over the place. She felt the other's groan through her lips and savored the heat of the skin under her. Her fingers pinched a nipple causing a yelp. She pulled herself up to look in Ashley, no, Brittney, no, Sabrina's eyes. The woman stilled at the hard look in the other woman's eyes. Her breathing grew more labored. Alex could feel the tension and lust building though she had barely touched the woman beneath her on the motel bed.

Alexandra's lips and teeth slid over Sabrina's skin. The bound woman breathed heavily through the tender touches and bit her lip as teeth pressed into tender flesh. Alex ran her tongue over a nipple then pulled at it with her teeth. Her fingers twisted the other fiercely. Sabrina cried out bucking against the Russian.

Alex felt her world shift as she tasted the flesh under her. Other skin flew under her fingers, other times drifted through her mind. She found herself thinking of other voices, other touches. She found herself tasting others as her mouth shifted downward.

She forced herself not to drink from the fount. Alex drew herself back up. As her teeth pressed firmly into the column of throat, her nails slid down over the bound woman's stomach. She smiled tightly at the hiss. Her fingers moved down taking command. Fingers curled in hair and twisted almost cruelly before stroking the tormented skin tenderly. Her finger circled Sabrina's clit, occasionally brushing it, never truly touching it. The other woman's frustration rose as she tried to move to the finger teasing her.

"Damn it. Finish me," Sabrina begged as she moved her hips desperately.

Alex grew still as she drew back to look down at this woman who had so willingly let her tie her up and who begged to be fucked by a woman she didn't even know. Sabrina looked back flushed.
"Please," she begged, her bright hair surrounding her face like a halo.

Closing her eyes, Alex leaned forward and lost herself to the touch again. The anonymous nature of this moment freeing her from her anger and her guilt and her pain. Her thumb circled and pressed the clit beneath it as her fingers slid deep into Sabrina. The heat, the wetness filled her hand. Sabrina rose to the Russian's hard and fast rhythm and came, Alex's teeth pressing into her throat again. Sabrina screamed her pleasure.

A dry applause came from the other side of the room. Alex threw herself off the bed and toward the gun she had hidden in her coat. Her eyes were wide as she saw Amanda sitting in the chair by the door. She was dressed elegantly in a Chanel suit and was pouring a plastic cup of wine from the array of bottles on the scarred table. She raised the weapon and pointed it. Amanda simply smiled. "Your reflexes do you credit Alexandra."

Sabrina started twisting in the bed. "What the fuck? What the fuck?" She was trying to free herself and push herself away from Alex's side of the bed all at the same time.

"Honestly Alexandra, you are quite the lovely vampire." Amanda stood and shucked her jacket. She moved forward to stand over Sabrina who was looking at Alex terrified. Her hand hovered over the frightened woman as a horrifically gentle smile transformed her features.

"Don't hurt me. Don't hurt me," Sabrina begged Alex who had moved the gun slowly toward Amanda over the bed.

"Why are you here?" she pushed out between gritted teeth.

Amanda smiled. "You are never alone Alexandra, I am always with you."

Sabrina screamed and continued trying to push herself off the bed, the side Amanda was standing on. Something wasn't right. Alex blinked. Amanda faded like a bad dream. There was a taste in her mouth. Her nightmares about being alone were one thing. Alcohol and drug driven hallucinations that was really really bad.

She blinked again. Grabbing a pair of silk panties from the floor, she wadded it into Sabrina's mouth. Her shaking hand dropped the gun and moved to the phone. She dialed. "I need help," she whispered.
Chapter 83

Michael crouched beside Alex on the nubby carpet of the cheap motel room floor. He sniffed in distaste at the aromas of barely cleaned motel space as his fingers brushed the door behind him closed. "Seriously?" he asked as he looked over at the woman struggling on the bed. He sighed. Alexandra had sounded rough, but he wasn't expecting it to be this ugly.

The brunette shook her head and rolled back onto her ass against the wall. Her hand pressed her blue eyes before sliding over hair. "I had... I mixed things wrong I think. I saw..." Her head dropped.

Michael could smell the alcohol on Alex's breath. She was shivering, barely covered by the shirt she pulled on after she called. "What did you see?" His eyes moved to the struggling woman nearby and then back again.

"A waking nightmare... Amanda," she whispered. Alex curled into herself. "She's in my head," the desperation in her voice was sharp.

"That'll do it." Brain needles and ECT... months of programming. All of that time with Amanda in the state hospital did far more damage to Alex than the booze and pills ever could. He knew exactly why Amanda was in her head, even though she clearly didn't yet understand it. He thought to himself. Michael rose and began tossing clothes into a pile beside the Russian woman. "Get dressed, Alex. We need to get well away from here."

He looked over at Sabrina again. "I'll call Brigham. He has some short term memory obliterating chemical that might do for this and then you and I will go have a talk. I think you're due for one."

"Had one with Nikita's headshrinker," Alexandra responded as her fingers shakily buttoned the shirt loose around her. Her fingers grabbed at her pants, near her bare feet.

"Headshrinker doesn't know you from Cain and Nikita is way too soft where you're concerned. Time for a straight as an arrow asshat." He pulled out a phone and began calling in the cavalry. He generally didn't approve of mind altering, that was more Amanda's thing, but this naked woman in the bed would be much much better off without a memory of the last few hours. "Shouldn't be too hard for Brigham," he said holding the empty vodka bottle. "You two did half the work yourselves." His face creased with distaste as he dropped the bottle where Brigham would see it and know to clean it.

Rachel and Caitlin were sitting around their kitchen table with Nikita. The other room was alive with sounds as Parker 'flew' around the living room with his favorite cartoon airplane. It barely touched the somber mood in the next room. Caitlin shook her head. "No. I don't- Grace?" She shook her head again shocked. The sound of a gunshot had sent the two women running out looking for whoever was firing in broad daylight in their neighborhood. The thought that it had been the end of someone they had just recently been partying with was leaving Caitlin in shock.

"That's what Alex said." Nikita rubbed her temple. "The whole area had been sanitized in a big hurry. There isn't much to go on." She shifted in her chair. "The local police went looking, but there
is less than nothing. They are chalkling the sound up to back fire rather than gunfire. I have a team looking for the things they wouldn't know to look for."

"Could..." Cait trailed off. She shook her head.

"What?" asked Rachel having a feeling about what was coming next. Her head was throbbing. Her fingers moved in a circle on her temple.

"Could Alex have done it?" Caitlin asked with a guilty look at her wife beside her.

"Not a chance," Rachel snapped angrily.

"Grace dead In our neighborhood, Grace dead. She could have been after one of us and Alex was protecting us or something. We have to look at all the possibilities here," Caitlin pleaded.

Nikita shook her head. "The math doesn't fit. If Alex killed her, why would she and why would Grace be targeting either of you and who sanitized the scene? Who took the body?" Nikita poured her cup full again. "I don't understand any of this."

Rachel turned her cup slowly. "Amanda... Amanda had to have killed Grace." She took a sip. "She would have gotten one of her toys to do the dirty work, but Amanda did it. This stinks of her."

Nikita looked thoughtful as she asked "But why across the street?"

"Alex, Alex was coming back to us. Amanda doesn't like to lose so strong-armed Grace into... something. Alex would naturally follow to stop it and boom. Amanda takes out Alex's girlfriend to fuck her mind up again. She is damned effective at mind fucking. It's her forte."

"Where is she?" Caitlin asked Nikita. "You guys are tracing her, aren't you?"

Nikita nodded slowly. "Michael got a call from her. He's going to talk to her."

Rachel was puzzled. "Why would she call him?"

Nikita shrugged. "Only one with a reasonably neutral past? It's not the first time he's picked up the pieces."

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**Alexandra** paced. Coffee after coffee and much crying and yelling later, Michael was still sitting on the hood listening with his seemingly endless patience. Alex threw her arms wide. "Now I can't even get drunk over seeing my girlfriend's head getting blown off?"

Michael slowly worked out his kinks as he stood. "Amanda's little fun and games with your head goes back a long ways Alex. She has been screwing with you for years.. and I really hope the day comes that you remember. You have a history of drug and alcohol abuse, that wasn't as much the trigger, but you shouldn't be drinking. The stress combined with the drugs and alcohol may just trigger hallucinations, but any way you slice it, Amanda is at the root of this. Wish it had been pink elephants. You would have been happier with that, but that is not how she programs." He sighed. "The thing is, drugs and alcohol make it worse, isn't clearing your head Alex."

Her face creased. "No, but I know what will. Can you take Dog for a while?"
Michael shrugged. "I suppose or I can talk someone into it. What are you planning?"

Alex stood very still for long moments. "We are going to fake a couple deaths. Then, I intend to pay a visit to the mind fucking bitch herself."

"She could see right through it."

"Make sure Dog has a good home. Tell Caitlin and Rachel to get their asses to Division. I have to shoot them on the way out." Alexandra angrily grabbed her black leather coat. She wasn't one hundred percent on who did what, but she knew weapons. Talking it out, she realized that a pistol shooting up into a tiny round window a couple stories up from the front porch across the street would not be likely to be accurate enough for what she saw, but she had a feeling a visit to Amanda could sort things out for sure.
Alexandra sat in her car, the sun dazzling on the hood of it as she waited with great patience. She sat very still staring straight ahead toward the mall parking lot. She played the moment of Grace's death over and over in her head. She could almost feel the spatter of the blood hitting her again. It was deep pain, but pain she forced herself to relive. If her chain of logic was in any way flawed, she was ready to switch from the blanks to her fully loaded magazine. Even that over sized hand cannon that Caitlin favored couldn't throw a bullet that kind of distance with that kind of accuracy on an almost flat trajectory. The bullet had to come from high, sniper country, not the housewife zone where the two women had been standing.

Her hand stroked the gun before sliding over to the two mags sitting side by side, her fingers tracing in the top, learning which was which by feel. Caitlin and Rachel would be coming out geared like Hollywood Red Shirts. Little explosive packs and fake blood would sell the deaths. She hoped. To get back into the old hotel where Percy and Amanda ruled, she needed the deaths sold. She needed to be their pet again and not someone they would be strapping back into the chair.

A light flashed on the dash. It was a prearranged signal for her as they had decided the odds of the plan being sussed out being too high if they used the phone. Caitlin and Rachel were ready to "die." Nikita and Michael were ready to sell the con. They would hang back in the mall as if they were having one of their little discussions until a minute had passed, until the sound of bullets had ripped the air. They would get the women on stretchers going to just the right people in just the right hospital and Caitlin and Rachel would drop out of sight for a while until Alex got into the hotel or died trying.

Alexandra's cell phone rang. "Hello," she said blandly. Her head was back against the leather head rest as her eyes narrowed. Who was calling her at a time like this?

"Hello Alexandra. I called to see how you were doing." A truly lovely voice with all the emotion of a snake came through.

"Amanda. Can't talk just now. About to kill the bitches." Alexandra was calm. She knew that seeming keyed up would only make a false note in this carefully orchestrated plan.

"Vengeance though rarely authorized is always fun. Enjoy yourself Alexandra. Enjoy yourself and come join me for tea after." Alex could almost hear the smile.

"Uh huh." Alex hung up as she saw her targets emerge. Her fingers stroked the other magazine just to be sure she was picking up the right one. She slid in the magazine and opened her car door. A few bystanders were going by to or from their little shopping trips. Perfect. "Hey," she yelled standing behind the open door and gripping her sidearm.

Rachel smiled and waved as if they were best friends about to go on a shopping spree. "Hey Alex, what's up?"

Alexandra lifted her gun up and placed it on top of the car. "Did you really think I would let you get away with it?" Her voice was still calm though edged with something, anger, suppressed violence. She thought of Grace lying there and she felt it all again under the ice.

Caitlin stepped forward her hands raised. "Woah woah woah Alex. We don't know what you're
talking about." Her hands moved down and wide. "You need to calm down and talk to us. What the hell is this about?"

Alex smiled darkly. "You know damn well what this is about, Caitlin... This is for Grace."

Caitlin was pulling her own gun as her chest exploded three times in quick succession. She flew back with the force of the blast. Rachel screamed Caitlin's name as she was interrupted pulling her Division issued weapon by another hail of bullets. Nikita was just coming around the corner with her own gun drawn as Alex slid into her car and reversed away. Her windshield spiderwebbed under a bullet impact in the corner. "Fucking Nikita," she snarled as she spun her car and drove away leaving large trails of burnt rubber behind.

Nikita knelt by Caitlin, her hand pressing down on the bloody front of the white shirt. She looked over to Michael. "Call an ambulance," she shouted. He dialed as his own hand pressed on Rachel's wounds. He yelled into the cell phone for help. Bystanders stood by, apparently not interested in doing more for the apparently dying young women than to film them with their cell phone cameras. Caitlin fluttered her eyes open. "Ow," she whispered.

An ambulance streaked in. Rapidly unfolding their gear, the paramedics loaded the two women into the back and zoomed away. Police sirens began to wail toward them. Nikita looked at Michael. "You go take care of things at the office, I'll chase the ambulance."

Alexandra's hand was shaking even as she pulled it from the wheel of the car. She couldn't believe how shooting Caitlin and Rachel had affected her, even as a fake. "Fucking A," she ground out. Picking up the phone with her off hand, the Russian woman slid the back of her phone off and pulled first the battery and then the simm card. She was not about to take chances on a posse. Smiling tightly, she pulled out a piece of shielded material and put it over her chip. It would not completely block her location from Team Nikita, but it would make her location nebulous. She wanted to deal with Amanda, she didn't want well meaning gate crashers. She tossed the card out the window and turned her car toward the hotel and the bitch queen, Amanda.
Alexandra pulled up several blocks shy of the hotel. Percy and Amanda had made it look like it was uninteresting, unworthy of attention and anything but the nest of assassins and spies. It was and it was dangerous as hell. Alex going in, would be betting that Amanda fell for the magic trick that left Rachel and Caitlin in pools of blood. Not a safe bet by any means.

She took a deep breath and pulling the magazine that was now much lower on blanks, dropped it to the floor mat. Alex picked up the deadly magazine and sent it home. She looked around before leaving the car and taking a moment to tuck the gun into her holster. Smiling, she trotted to a newsstand and bought a juice.

Walking slowly down the cracked sidewalk in this less than pristine neighborhood, Alex picked out cameras and eyes. The perimeter around the hotel had expanded. Alex's eyes narrowed. Expanding the perimeter was a bigger move than it would appear on the surface. Having the eyes out more meant greater chance of being seen by the wrong people... a cop looking for footage of a police chase looks up and notices a lens in the street light assembly for instance.

Alex took a shaky breath and continued on. She smiled boldly and lifted her juice bottle at a watcher who was just a little too clean to be homeless. "Hello sunshine." she greeted.

He hid his face further by pulling up his ragged collar. The man in the pile of garbage bags and bits of cloth mumbled into his shirt cuff. She was fooled even less by the hard glint in his eyes.

"Might want to pass the word that I'm in the neighborhood to Amanda. Would hate for her to be surprised. Tell her I will be running a couple errands and then I will have tea with her tonight." She touched a pair of fingers to her forehead. "Ta. By the way? Be more convincing if you smelled. Rub on some tuna can oil or something. Little eau de authenticity." She snickered and walked away.

Frowning, she tried to think of a way to enter the hotel on the sly. She wanted in on her own terms and practice never went wasted. Enjoying the idea of a challenge, she smiled and kept an eye out for opportunities. Her eyes widened at the sight of a shwarma shop down a block in an ancient building. "Time for lunch," she noted following her nose.

She watched the world pass outside the window as she ate. Alex smiled and went back to the restroom. A quick left led her to stairs into the storage in the cellar. She smiled again as she found access to the underworld. Using a nearby pan's handle for leverage, she pulled it up and dropped below the cellar. Splashing down, the brunette shook her foot trying to avoid getting her socks completely soaked. Hands on hips, she turned slowly.

She was curious where the cameras and other detecting devices were down here. Not if there were any, but where. Alex started walking. Whenever she came to an intersection, she looked for the usuals, cameras, heat detection, motion detectors. She soon had a rough idea where everything was on the shwarma side of the old hotel. Alex leaned against a wall trying to ignore the fact that the high water mark was above her shoulder in this area.

It was stupid. She was going to try to slip in without getting pegged, but really, making trouble was expected. They would look at her with suspicion if she wasn't making trouble. She jogged back toward where she entered. The cook was yelling at her as she emerged. Alexandra hit him and dropped him before grabbing the big log of lamb meat on the spit, a nearby jug of oil and a small
battery operated fan. She dropped down again and used the meat and fan to great advantage.

She clung to the ladder as she watched the rats congregate. Smirking, she waited until there was a frenzy on the meat then poured oil on the tunnel and water before going back up into the shop. Alex knocked out the screaming cook again and dropped a light before slamming the cover and running for the front of the shop. A fireball lifted the heavy sewer cover before it settled. Alex looked down. The initial blast cooked several rats but stampeded the rest toward the hotel and Amanda.

As the camera on that stretch turned to follow the mass of rats, Alex stepped under and draped one of the sizzled rats on the lens before closing with the rats. The heat and motion saw them, but having seen the mass of rats in the camera, there was a chance they wouldn't think that the rats were joined by Alex.

Checking her location by simply reading the worn legends on the walls, she soon found the sewer cover that she wanted. Alexandra climbed and pressed the lid up and to the side. She came out surrounded by guns. Putting her hands on her head, she turned slowly. Amanda and Percy stood nearby.

Percy nodded. "You never cease to amuse me Alexandra. Welcome home." He turned and walked away. He was apparently leaving her utterly at Amanda's mercy.

Amanda came close to the former agent and slowly walked around her. She affected a sniff. "Tea is ready when you are Alexandra. Please take a shower first. You are a bit... undesirable." She smiled. "A rat stampede. Marvelous." She too left the room.

Alex turned to one of the black garbed men with machine guns that surrounded her. Their lack of sense of humor was apparent. "One of you assholes better know where I can find a bar of soap."

One of the unsmiling men shook his head. "After you told him he smells too clean, Roger won't be needing his soap. I will go get his extra bar. Jonesy, take the agent to her room."
Walking down the corridor, Alex rolled the sleeves on a borrowed chambray shirt. She frowned in the dim hall light as she struggled to get the roll right. After the shooting of Rachel and Caitlin near Division's very doorstep, she didn't bother stopping for her clothes and the clothes she had been wearing were too full of rat crap and sewer stink to put back on. She nodded at the occasional familiar face drifting by as she moved toward Amanda's quarters.

Knocking on an aged oak door, she whistled tunelessly. Hearing a muffled summons, she strode into Amanda's office and quarters in the rambling antique of a hotel. She smiled as she ran fingers on the finely grained table beside the door. "Very nice Amanda," she offered looking around at the new appointments to the space since she had been here last. Amanda loved a continuing project.

Amanda smiled and stood from her desk as her fingers pressed the computer in front of her closed. She gestured at a nearby conversational area well appointed with elegant chairs and tables. A tea set sat on a tray on the table in the middle. Moving with a feline grace, she sat down slowly watching Alex's face..

Alex leaned against the back of a chair. She looked down at small plates of sandwiches and cake and grinned. "Ahhhh, all the trimmings of a kinder, gentler age."

Amanda smiled and leaned forward to pour tea into the cups. "You clean up nice, Alexandra. Please have a seat."

Affecting a certain degree of ennui, Alex sat back in her chair crossing her ankle over her knee. Her brow rose. "So, what's up?" she asked leaning her cheek on her hand.

"How are you doing after your time with Division?" Amanda asked casually as she slid back into her chair with a cup of tea. She gently stirred it before lightly placing the spoon to the side.

"Dandy. They tried to make me their ideal Alex and then they shot Grace, so I shot them back." She shrugged. "Long story short."

Amanda cocked her head, a small smile showing her amusement. "You are rather unique Alexandra. Not many can travel quite so... casually between our camp and Division. Do you have any thoughts on why that might be?"

Alex shrugged. "I'm easily manipulated and look hot in a bikini?"

"Are you?" Amanda took another sip and slid her tea back onto the table. "You are easily manipulated, on a certain level. You retain a measure of distance from the manipulations, even as you affect being manipulated. You are at your core, you. A grey woman, you do not ascribe to the rules of others and therefore are able to wear many different masks very comfortably. As long as the people you work with don't break your personal code, you are a highly effective ally."
"Shoot my girlfriend," Alex said trailing off.

"End the partnership."

Alex shrugged. "Didn't come back with much for you."

Amanda smiled. "You came back though. The fact that you shot not one, but two of Nikita's close friends, that was just a delightful bonus." Her smile grew.

Alexandra's eyes narrowed. "What?"

"You were also experimenting some next gen hardware for us as well. It remained undetected in the heart of Division. The range of the data trap was, to be quite frank, pathetic and it could not transmit from within Division, but it was invisible to them and that part of the experiment alone was worth it."

"So I was your guinea pig."

"When it seemed likely that you would be going to Division, it hardly would have been worthwhile not to test. Your awareness might well have given its presence away."

Alex frowned before shrugging. "True enough."

Amanda steepled her fingers and considered the young Russian across from her. "So what do we do now?" she asked reflectively.

"I'm back. I am not really interested in being an active part of your fun and games, but we can talk about possible jobs." Alexandra knew true retirement was unlikely, but she would be damned if she was just going to give up her independence without a fight.

"First, I think we need to get you legally recognized," Amanda replied calmly, nibbling a tiny sandwich.

A frown creased the Russian's face. "What? Why?"

"Alexandra is an effective ally. Alexandra Udinov the heir of Zetrov alive and well is an even more effective ally." Amanda instructed as she smiled at the younger woman.

Alex snorted. "And here I thought you wanted me for my body."

"That too." Amanda smiled. "Your old room is available. I will do some further research on your resurrection in the public's eye and we will meet with Percy tomorrow to discuss where we go from here."

"So I'm dismissed," Alex said blandly.

Amanda gave a single nod. "Indeed. Oh, and Alexandra?"

"Yeah?"

"Nothing personal, but it would be in your best interests not to explore."

Alex flipped off a salute and left Amanda's office with a frown. She had not known what to expect. A bullet in the brain was the end of several of the scenarios she considered. She was not sure what to make of Amanda bringing her old life to the fore. It couldn't possibly be good, but perhaps it was time to reclaim the wealth and power being an Udinov afforded. She looked over her shoulder at the door behind her again. Every nerve in her body sang out that Amanda is the one she needed to drop
a bullet in for Grace. She would play the game but only as long as it took to do right by her now dead lover.
Alexandra paced the length of the hotel room and back again. She tended to not be particularly interested in the long game. Playing things by ear was far more fun and interesting to her. This being closed in again was really rubbing her the wrong way. All this time for thinking was making her want to kill something.

Her hands ran along various surfaces as she walked. When she stopped her fingers were on the door. Her eyes closed as she fell into the memory of sitting with her stocking feet in Grace's lap. She frowned as the memory morphed. Another lap another day, another face... Rachel. She was as still as death trying not to disturb the memory that bubbled up. Taking a shaky breath, she opened her eyes. Was Alex Version 1.0 starting to wake? If so, it was time to make things interesting. Alex 2.0 wasn't going to go out without some fireworks.

The Russian woman stripped off her borrowed shirt and black jeans. She pulled a robe from a hook and slid on some slippers from under the edge of the bed. She smiled as she tied the robe and began walking for the elevator. Keep your friends close, your enemies closer. Worked wonders when your plan was to slit throats.

Amanda opened the door. A smile spread and her head cocked. "Alexandra," she greeted. Curiosity rose in her face as her eyes trailed down Alex's lightly covered body. "And to what do I owe the pleasure of a second visit?"

Alexandra stepped forward, her fingers trailing along Amanda's neckline. "Came to see you Amanda." Her thigh showed naked as it slid out between the sides of the robe. Alex smiled as her foot slid from a slipper and moved up the silk of the older woman's hose.

"And Grace?" Amanda responded, her brow rising.

The younger woman shrugged. "I was fond of her, but she really was messed up. She went to kill the ex wife I didn't even remember, which frankly spoiled all my fun." Keeping her tone light, the Russian slid her fingers over the stomach of Amanda's rather expensive looking dress. Her smile spread as she felt the muscles beneath the fabric reacting to her.

"And now?"

The brunette pressed Amanda back until she could close the door behind her. Sliding her hand to Amanda's shoulder, she turned her and pressed her into a wall. "And now, I need other fun," she whispered a breath away from Amanda's lips.

Amanda looked amused. "Why me?"

"You've been there for me, my rock. Maybe I want to thank you for it." Alexandra hungrily kissed Amanda. Her hands gripped the other woman possessively, fingers tightening and sliding over various parts of the other woman's body.

Amanda drew her head back. "Doesn't this make you the little slut?" she asked in a teasing voice her brow high.

Alex drew back and pulled out her robe belt, tangling it around her hands and held them out. "Guess I need to be punished," she said with a smile as she looked up under her lashes.
The older woman slid away and opened a drawer. She pulled out a short length of silk rope. "Terry cloth is not my binding of choice." With a dark smile she advanced on Alexandra who was rapidly swallowing her deep seated drive for control in sexual situations in order to keep this going. She slid the robe back off her shoulders, letting it drop and pool to the ground around her.

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Alex slid to the edge of the bed hours later. She felt the good kind of soreness as she stretched, her hands having been untied about an hour before to allow her to service Amanda properly. Standing, she tried to remember the way to the bathroom in the dark. Her foot struck the garbage can. She bent over and pushed the few bits and pieces of plastic wrap and paper into the can before standing it back up. Her fingers encountered something odd and she simply took it with her rather than mess with the can in the dark again.

Turning it over in the light of the bathroom, she realized it was a tiny hospital band. Her eyes widened as she read the words on it. Learning that Grace was Amanda's daughter didn't change her mind on whether Amanda did it. The tossing of the bracelet left Alex pretty sure where Amanda stood. Her lips tightened. She would enjoy what came next.

Alexandra slid her feet in a sleepy way on the carpet as she emerged from the bathroom. She managed to avoid the can this time and soon was in the sheets. She stretched as nails slid down her body from the other side of the bed. Amanda came from the dark to lean over her.

"Mine," Amanda growled as she bit Alex's throat firmly, just barely avoiding breaking skin.

"I am your fiendish creation," Alexandra affirmed as she rolled them over.

Amanda's eyes widened as Alex's tone penetrated. She tried to sit up even as the bathroom garbage bag came down over her head. Amanda's fist struck at Alex, though the awkward angle took most of the steam out of the punches.

Alex held on tight to the other woman. "You killed your daughter for the game," she snarled. "How fucked up are you?" Her knee slammed into Amanda's ribs as she bucked. The bag was drawn tighter as the limited air grew stale. Amanda sucked at the bag, trying to puncture it any way she could.

Amanda soon lost consciousness to the lack of air to keep fighting with. Alexandra held the bag tight still before releasing it. "You are a sick bitch. If you wake up, I'll take great pleasure in hunting you down to empty a clip in you." She stood and shrugged. "Guess I picked a side after all."
Chapter 88

Alexandra dropped lightly to the cracked and filthy pavement beyond the chain link fence. Her feet stung lightly as she landed on the buckled sidewalk. She patted her hands together to knock off rust and dirt from the deceptively old looking fence around the old hotel. Smiling, she took a deep breath of air. She hated that Grace had to die for all this, but now she knew where she stood. It was a relief though it was born of grief. Her fingers plucked at the hospital band in her pocket. She sighed quietly. Now for the fun part. Time to get away.

The pants that she had on were ill fitting making walking just a bit uncomfortable, but as she was trying to get out of a secure location while naked at the time she grabbed them, she felt pretty lucky to have them. She cringed as she looked down at the not quite designer jeans, just not too lucky. Her shoulders rotated in the t-shirt she found hanging on a hook in the communal shower area as she moved down the sidewalk. It clung to her like a second skin and gleamed in the early street lights. She pulled the scuff slippers she had pocketed during her brief run through the lobby and pulled one on hopping before hearing a metallic click come from behind her.

"You smell worse. Good work," she said without looking. Alex so didn't need this right now. "Son of a bitch," she whispered under her breath. Seemed like everyone wanted to make her day nastier.

"What are you doing out here?" the homeless guy queried with a tone of not really giving a shit. "You came all this way to hang out with us and now you are just what? Slipping away? Think we should head back in." He edged closer, his weapon raised.

Alex closed her eyes and exhaled slowly. She looked at the faint shadow drawing closer to her on the sidewalk. She lifted her hands out and away from her body, just above her waist line. "Seriously?" she asked. "Having far too much fun now."

"Get your ass moving girl," he growled.

The young woman spun, releasing the slipper at him from her right hand even as she moved to the side. He twisted slightly to avoid the flying footwear as his gun bucked repeatedly. "There goes subtle," she muttered as she kicked the second slipper at his face. Closing on him, she launched a series of fast and fierce punches before alleviating him of his weapon. She knocked him hard against the forehead with the butt. "Not pretty, but it worked," she judged.

She heard the buzz of the hive waking up and paused only long enough to steal Scuzzy's shoes. She bounced lightly pulling on the battered keds before running down the still mostly quiet street. Alexandra cut down the first alleyway pointed away and started looking for a car. Seeing a man trying to get into his auto, presumably to get to work at some fast food joint, she grabbed his shoulder and spun him before punching him out.

Alex grabbed the fallen car keys from the street and rolled the man away from the vehicle. She slid into the battered Honda, lightly gripping the cracked wheel. Her face crinkled. "Scuzzy smelled better," she remarked looking down at a crinkling sound. She pulled a a paper bag translucent with grease out of the pedal area and tossed it into the back with a few dozen others before turning the key and trying to find out just what the venerable hatchback could do. It took only a few minutes to determine that the owner didn't give two shits about the cosmetic appearance of the little car, and couldn't be bothered to change out the extremely old looking pine tree hanging from the rear view, but he loved his engine. She flattened the gas pedal.
She lost the last of her pursuit as she pulled into a truck coming right around a corner. The black SUV swung past at full speed every second pulling further and further away. Smiling, Alex reversed her stolen car out of the truck, whistling tunelessly. She moved into a parking garage to change vehicles. She had a look of regret as she patted the dented bumper. "Good ride." The brunette grabbed herself a late model Toyota and soon found herself at a bank of phones at the mall.

"No change," she said in annoyed voice after a search of her pockets. "Damn it, I hope there won't be a problem reversing charges on a secure line." She pushed in the number with a sigh. Waiting for someone to take the call she scoped out the people around her. No one stuck out, not like she did in the junior clothes and the holey keds. "Hey Nikita. I might have wrapped Amanda's head in a plastic bag." She smiled. "I said plastic bag, not wooden stake." She turned and watched a woman walk past. "Any chance you could use a slightly used agent with very little memory of her past?" She frowned. "Retirement is just not what its cracked up to be and drinking... well that just brings out the stupid."

Alexandra looked around. "I'm at a mall. I would shop til you get here, but I don't know who's pants I'm wearing, and they were even more broke than me." She shrugged. "I wouldn't... wait, what Christmas party?" She growled. "Fine, I will go, but you better have another pair of pants I can wear. I am not partying with camel toe."

The Russian woman sat stiffly on a metal park bench across from the phones. All she had to do was wait. Nikita was sending Michael to round her up. "If nothing else, at least I'll get fed. Think the boat's back down to Spaghetti-Os." She rubbed her forehead. "Grace... I'm sorry. I don't know if I got her. She is still in my head... One way or another I will get her if she is still alive, for you."
Michael took one look at Alex in her adventure wear and started laughing. He shook his head as he was amused by the dignified young Russian trying to pull off a camel toe both literally and figuratively. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I..." He started cackling again. "I can only imagine how you ended up naked to have to steal those clothes." He finally pushed out.

"Very funny, Michael." Alex stood stiffly and crossed her arms. "You have clothes for me to change into?" She shifted uncomfortably. "These pants are riding up."

"Nikita thought you would be better off with something new." Michael waved a credit card and started wading through the increasing crowds of last minute shoppers. Alexandra trotted after him with a disgruntled look. She was not in the mood for shopping in retail hell but finally came to the conclusion that it was the only way to get denim out of the most uncomfortable places. It didn't stop her from glowering at him when he stopped for a pretzel or a nun cutting her off going into a department store.

An hour later, and two snippy store clerks later, they were on their way. Alexandra stared out of the SUV window with a frown. "Did you know Amanda had a daughter?" she finally asked.

Michael looked at her surprised.

"No. Though I shouldn't be surprised by that. Amanda hides things well." It would have been just like her to hide her daughter from fellow spies to have an extra ace.

Alex pulled out the hospital band and slowly rolled it through her fingers. "Grace... Grace was Amanda's daughter." She blinked hard against the wave of sadness that threatened to swamp her. Grace wouldn't have wanted her all mopey and weepy. She leaned her head back in the rest.

"We didn't kill Grace, Alex. You know that now don't you?" Of course she did but Michael needed to hear it.

"The psychotic shrew did." The brunette rolled the band one more time before tapping it on her chin. "She must have recruited her own daughter."

"Division didn't. Either Grace tracked Amanda down on her own or Amanda..." His brow creased as he thought about just how cold Amanda's blood really was. Michael tapped the steering wheel thoughtfully. "Please tell me you did something Alex."

"Don't think it killed her, but I tried to suffocate her."

Michael's mouth twisted. "Merry Christmas." He patted her shoulder awkwardly. "I'm not entirely sure she can be killed. A vampire or something
fouler. You did good." He smiled. "Are you ready for dinner?" He signaled
to get off the expressway. "Be just us adults tonight." He said. They were
doing something kid friendly, but Parker was going to a friend's house for a
Pre- Christmas birthday party extravaganza.

Alex assumed the most kid like person she knew. "No Birkhoff?"

He chuckled. "Birkhoff and Sonia are busy eating other people out of house and
home. We are going to have a nice dinner and then head to a Christmas
Carnival nearby so we can all pretend to be kids ourselves."

She pushed away the heavy sadness again. Alexandra was determined not to
let darkness claim her tonight after all she went through getting out of
Percy and Amanda's fun house. "Sounds good." She tugged at her new shirt.
"Thanks Michael, for you know..."

He shrugged. "Keeping you out of trouble keeps life interesting."

Alex barked a laugh. "Bet you say that to all the girls."

"Just you and Nikita." Laughing, he pulled into a lot, his headlights
briefly lighting up Nikita, Rachel and Caitlin leaning on the back of a
sedan chattering. "Ready to deal with this?"

"Nope." She gave a half smile. "But what the hell. I got all dressed up."

Several long awkward silences punctuated a dinner filled with stilted
conversation. It seemed nobody at the table seemed able to figure out what
would and would not upset Alex and so they often trailed off. Rachel made
Alexandra almost uncomfortable watching her face for clues as to how she was
feeling. Alex felt herself under a microscope. She finally wiped her lips
with a napkin and slid back in her chair. "So what's with the carnival?"
she asked.

Nikita smiled broadly. "We were trying to decide what to do tonight and when
we looked at events for the area, we found a little carnival. It raises
money for a local church and its charities and I enjoy emptying a midway."

"Emptying a midway?"

"Assassins have more practice with their aim and coordination than most
folks. Makes us demons in games on the midway. After all, there is a limit
to just how much they can cheat and still get suckers coming in." Nikita
finished up her meal and put her fork on her plate.

Michael snorted. "No goldfish."

Nikita's eyes rounded. "That would be cruel. You are carrying home at least one giant unicorn doll."

"Of course."

"I'm in for the funnel cakes and hot cocoa," offered Caitlin, smiling.

"You eat the funnel cakes all you want. I want to hit the rides," responded Rachel.
Caitlin did a face palm. "I'm still dizzy from the never ending merry go round last week." She looked up. "Alex, you go on the rides with her."

"You buy me a funnel cake?"

Caitlin grinned widely and held a hand out across the table. Alex took it in hers for a firm shake. "Done."

The night sky was illuminated by the multicolored lights of the winter carnival. Children ran to and fro on the midway with cotton candy and game tickets in hand. The carnival took place behind a mega catholic church and school with sweeping swirling lines lighting crazily with the busy colors of the festival. A midway stretched the length of the athletic field and everywhere were rides to bounce you, dip you and rock and roll you. It was full of machines and carny pitches and cover bands competing with happy fest goers. Alex stopped in front of the main music stage, listening to the band play a heart felt Christmas classic.

Rachel strolled up near the other woman. "Ferris wheel first?"

Nikita immediately grabbed Alex's arm. "Ride after I beat you." She laughed and pulled her down the midway. They took shots sending tin cans everywhere. Alex frowned. "Sights off." She jumped. "Damn it. What was that?"

"Its a game. Have fun. We aren't in the field." Nikita smiled as she took a prize from the guy running the booth.

"Especially when I'm winning."

Alexandra pointed to the rope ladder climb. They wandered over to see who could climb faster.

Michael simply sighed quietly as Nikita passed over her stuffed bear.

"There is one thing you keep forgetting." Alex remarked as they waited for the buzzer.

"What?"

The buzzer sounded and as Nikita started climbing Alexandra threw herself at the other rope toppling both of them. She crawled over and kissed Nikita's nose. "Sometimes I don't play to win." She laughed and pointed at Rachel. "Let's ride woman."

Nikita laughed and accepted Michael's hand up. "So sweet when they're all grown up and assholeish," he observed.

"The Alex we know and love," she countered. She kissed her husband and dragged him down the midway with a laugh.

Rachel twirled her hair anxiously as she stared at her hands. She fondly thought about their first date as the Ferris wheel began to move. Alex had taken her to a summer carnival when she was a recruit. It was a memory she held onto when life as a recruit inside Division was unbearable. She secretly hoped the evening would stir Alex's memory even if they were no longer together.

"Stop doing that."
"What?" Rachel stuttered out.

Alex grinned. "That thing your doing with your hair."

"Oh, I didn't realize that I-"

"It's fine."

Alexandra saw her breath as they reached the top of the Ferris wheel. "This is probably more fun in summer," she concluded with a grin. She stuffed her hands into her new jacket pockets as she looked over at Rachel.

Rachel leaned against her absorbing her former wife's warmth and simple presence. "They do it in summer too. Apparently there was a call for holiday fun and with the mild winter expected, they decided to expand from the gym carnival to a real carnival." This whole evening was miles away from Alex having to fake Caitlin and Rachel's murder to get close to Amanda, and she was enjoying it to the hilt.

Alexandra stared out at the lights surrounding them on the parking lot and athletic field of the church and its attached school. She blinked and felt herself elsewhere and elsewhen again. Her fingers warm and wrapped around someone else's at a summer version of this fair. Her heart felt too big for her chest in this vision and she knew it was the person holding her hand. She blinked and saw a vision of Rachel laughing and pointing out rides as they walked a midway full of people in shorts and t-shirts. She didn't feel cold anymore. She was having fun. The overlap of memories she was having raced through her slightly disorientating, but opening her up to a past that wasn't all worth forgetting. She didn't want to blink. She didn't want to release the flashback that made her feel something so warm and wonderful. There was an intensely strong memory of the woman beside her dancing and another wafting cotton candy. Alex could almost taste cotton candy lips on hers.

She felt her jacket sleeve being yanked. Alex blinked to see Rachel grinning happily beside her as their car descended.

"Are you okay, Alex?"

The other woman tilted her head. "5 by 5."

"Ready for more?" Rachel asked with a huge smile. She was excited about every ride in the place from the Tilt-A-Whirl to the Ferris wheel to a baby roller coaster and it showed.

The Russian woman smiled back at her infectious joy. Alex 1.0 was right. Being with Rachel like this was fun.

"Ready for anything." she affirmed.
Chapter 90

Alexandra's fingers slid through the papers on the desk. She tossed one stack on the floor. Grinning with a fake innocence, she looked up at a sound of exasperation. "Was that important?" She asked.

Nikita snorted and yanked boots off to grab her tennis shoes. "Everything on that desk is important." She smiled as Alex went to work destroying the little bit of order she had carved after the bureaucracy hit her desk with its paper hammer. This was the friend that she knew and loved and after a few months of touch and go working her back into Division, it was good to see Alex home.

The younger woman held up a sheet. "Ordering eggs and blue jello." She whipped it over her shoulder. "So very vital." She shifted through another stack.

"This place runs on blue jello and eggs," Nikita responded as she bent to her laces.

The Russian raised a shoulder. "That actually explains a few things." She pulled out another paper. "Seriously? There are reports to file on how a team thinks they will accomplish a mission and how many bullets they think they'll need?" She looked over, her eyes narrowed. "You do know that in our line of business random is not just a word right?" She shook her head looking at it.

Nikita laughed. "That is an earlier Division thing. Michael insisted we keep it up. Something about a good way to spot people in reality and people about to redline."

Alexandra took out a blank sheet. "I intend to..." Her tongue peeped out as she stared at the ceiling. "I intend to save the world with three bullets." She scribbled out what she just wrote. "Four bullets."

"Redline," Nikita judged snorting. She looked at her friend with penetrating eyes. "How's it been going? With the shrink I mean?"

Alex smiled engagingly. "Good. Three months since Grace. I am still angry and occasionally dabbling in meaningless sex to clear my head, but that is apparently closer to me than not." She chuckled. "Had a few flashbacks to old Alex the past few months, but nothing mind blowing."

Nikita stood. "Like what? You haven't mentioned them to me."

"Anger and sex." Alex laughed and dropped a few sheets of paper in the bin for shredding.

"Now what were those?" Nikita asked in a complaining voice as she strode over to the much cleaner desk.

"Psych evals. Totally useless in the Two Wrongs Squad."

"Two Wrongs Squad?" she puzzled.

"We shoot and steal and destroy motor vehicles so Mr. and Mrs. Joe America can sleep better." Alex slid the roly chair back. "I can see why you wanted to spar today. This desk would make me want to hit something too." Her feet crossed on a small clear section as she looked over at her friend.

Nikita laughed. "It's not the only reason you're here today Alex."

Alex's feet popped off the desk and if she had antennae they would be standing straight up. "Mission?" Her load was being kept light still and she was itching for something heavy.
"Yes."

The Russian grinned. "Fun missions with shit blowing up?"

Nikita shook her head. "You'll simply be taking over a babysit. Basically, a few years back Division got their hands on a doctor with a very special gift for weaponizing viruses. She got a conscience."

"Not conducive to long life," Alexandra murmured as Nikita pulled her out of the chair and sent her to the couch with a pointed finger.

"We got her out and put her in a new life as a small town doctor. We had an agent calling on her every few months but as you know Rachel retired and she and Caitlin have been focusing on trying to find a house away from the East Coast."

"Away from us," Alex said bitterly. Rachel and Caitlin had almost altogether stopped talking to the gang just after Christmas when they started thinking migration. Alex felt hurt about the whole thing. She couldn't understand why either of them wanted to retire.

"Away from the temptation of working for Division. What we do can be crushing or it can be addictive and I think they were realizing that walking away was just not that easy. Anyway, the doc has been getting fidgety and we can't afford for her to bolt if someone looks at her funny. She does that and it would be like flushed partridge."

Alex held out her hand like a gun. "Bang."

"Exactly." Nikita looked at her computer screen. "Rachel and Caitlin are coming in and then you will fly out and do a kind of handover."

"Why me?"

Nikita sat with her on the couch. "The doctor despite a lot of time and effort spent on her accent, not a native of Kansas. She was born and raised in Russia. It was hard enough to get her to trust Rachel and her chosen local liaison. We hope that the changeover will go more smoothly if she had something in common with her primary case agent."

Alex smiled. "Speaking the same language doesn't make for things in common."

Nikita shrugged. "You also happen to be free for it. You are basically the plain face of Division. There is a local liaison to ghost her out of sight if things get spotty, but you are the one ultimately responsible for keeping her world stress free."

"Fantastic."

They looked over at the door. "Come in," Nikita hollered at the door.


Alex looked over at Rachel and gave her a small smile. "Seems we'll be working together one more time."

Caitlin sat down on the arm of the couch and heartily slapped Alex's shoulder. "It'll be fun. The three of us in the heart of Kansas."

"Fun and cozy," Alexandra mused. She looked over at Nikita. "Brief us so we can get on with hitting shit." She looked at the other two before looking back. "Want to be loose for the flight."
Chapter 91

Caitlin was reading a book from a tablet on the other side of the jet's cabin as Alex and Rachel poured over a file. They had to go through quite a bit of background on the woman before the changeover and the small private plane made for enough quiet space to do it in. Rachel shook her head. "I would be very careful talking Russian around her," she opined.

The Russian woman looked at her vaguely confused. "Why is that?"

"Her American employers were not the only ones who squeezed her to get what they wanted. The Russians were just stupid enough to kill the family member they were using to squeeze her. She might be a touch...touchy about that part of her past." Rachel looked up from the paperwork she was perusing and smiled. "In case I didn't say, it's good to see you again Alex."

Alexandra shrugged. "Good seeing you." She looked over at Caitlin sitting near the front partition. "You two found your little nest away?" she asked with just a touch of bitterness.

Rachel looked at her puzzled for a moment. "We weren't comfortable where we were. Grace was shot across the street from us. That means not just Division knew where we were. It wasn't safe and then there is the whole getting drawn in again and again thing." She shook her head. "We haven't found a nest yet. Caitlin wants to look around while we're in Kansas."

"Fabulous."

"Alex," she lowered her voice and placed her hand on Alexandra's. "Alex, we aren't ditching you."

"Three months of silence?" Alex stood. "Could of fooled me." She jerked her thumb over her shoulder. "Facilities."

Alexandra stabilized herself against the sink as turbulence made the floor under her feet buck lightly. She knew that Rachel was Caitlin's girl, but since the memories began working into her mind, she felt more possessive of Rachel and angry that Rachel seemed to have no problem blowing her off. She shrugged. If she was going to be hanging out with the two of them, she would hang with Caitlin more. Grace had been right. If they were men, they would have been sitting around a fire in loincloths declaring brotherhood. Easy being silent sitting with Caitlin or drinking beer or shooting the shit with Cait. Rachel was just too much a bundle of difficulties to worry about. Alex leaned forward and rinsed her face.

"This is the pilot. We'll be landing shortly. Please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelts."

Alex left the bathroom and buckled in across from Caitlin who was shutting down her kindle. "Spy novel?"

"Lesbian BDSM with a vague spy sub-plot," Caitlin responded with a grin.

"So a good book."

"Really good."

Alex laughed. "When we get to Nowheresville we'll find a motel with the good showerheads," she said winking.
Caitlin laughed and kissed Rachel's cheek as she sat down. "Or maybe I'll borrow the wife for a few."

"Just a few?" Alex asked her eyes wide. "You aren't doing it right."

Rachel put her eyes in her hand and shook her head. "Why do I let you two play?"

When the plane landed, Alexandra got off and looked up. "Air feels weird." She slung her back pack on.

Cait descended the stairs from the plane. "Massive line of thunderstorms sliding into the area according to the pilot."

Alex frowned. She looked over at Rachel who was typing into her phone. "Do we delay?"

Rachel shook her head. "Local says Dr. B is on the knife's edge of a full freak out. There's been an upswing of strangers passing through her little town and the doctor has panic attacks even when she knows they aren't hunters. We need to get this over with and increase her feeling of stability."

Cait sighed and looked up at the sky. "Let's move then. I want us under a roof so we don't drown when the storm finally hits."

The brunette shrugged. "Gonna be a long drive either way. Shouldn't worry though. You aren't likely to melt." Alexandra grinned evilly as she strode off for the small building housing two vending machines and a car rental office.

"Hey," Caitlin yelped after her.

Alex fiddled with the radio dial. She flinched as high pitched sound filled the car. "Shit," she muttered as the warning followed. "Tornadoes."

Caitlin shook her head. "Nuh uhn. There's a motel up three miles. Time to park it and wait for the storm to pass."

Rachel shook her head. "We have to be there on time or she will smell something funky and bolt. John, the Local says she's that wired."

"Fair enough," said Alex from the back seat. "We stay on schedule then."

Caitlin pulled over and looked from one to another. "Are you two out of your heads? This is Kansas in tornado season." She pointed at another sign for the motel. "You know why they advertise their hearty cinder block construction? Cause its Kansas, place where whole cows get swept up by weather."

"If Dr. B runs, she will be without cover. Someone will find her and drag her in and ...I don't know...weaponize rabies or something, Cait. We can't afford it. The world can't afford it," Rachel responded.

Alexandra looked out at the clouds. "Saw a TV show about apocalypses... apocalypsi? Whatever. They figured if rabies was suddenly sneeze based the population would be down four billion in about two years," she said in an almost dreamy voice as she watched the colors change.
Both of the women in front turned to stare at her before looking back at one another. Rachel shook her head. "Cait? You get us a pair of rooms. We'll run in, grab the doc, bring her back to the motel. I'm sure she is no more interested in being in the path of a tornado than we are. We'll be back before..."

Rain landed hard and loud on the windshield. Alexandra laughed. "Before it gets worse."

Caitlin nodded and started the motor. "Do what you have to, but afterwards, you and I need to talk."
Alexandra frowned as the deeper sound of the rain became punctuated by hail. Her nerves exploded with each cracking sound against the car. "That can't be good, Rach." She was not thrilled by the weather in the least.

Trying to get a hold of Dr. B and the local liaison was not working out well for the agents, and they couldn't reschedule at this point even if Dr. B's tendency toward paranoia weren't quite so pronounced.

Rachel looked over at her former wife. "Worried you'll melt?"

The Russian laughed. "Just worried about dents in my dome."

"Is there anything left up there to damage?" Rachel asked in a teasing voice.

"CAT scan folks seemed to think so." She looked down at the GPS that she had put in her lap. "Another mile then a left."

"Not so many roads here that I forgot how to find her, Udinov."

Alexandra laid her head back on the rest. "Amanda said she would help me get my name back again."

Rachel snorted. "You do rise from the dead on a disturbingly regular basis, which has to be a special hell with the bureaucracy." She looked over. "Tempted?"

"To take my name back again? Yes. To accept help from the Wicked Witch... hell no." she leaned forward. "Do you hear something?" She asked, brow creasing as she listened.

Rachel's face blanched visibly in the dim car as she pulled to the side of the road and looked around. "It sounds like the roar of a fright train... tornado." Looking around she made out an old farm half the length of a field away. She ran the car into the tall grasses of the fallow field desperate for something to save their asses if the tornado swung their way.

"That barn is sticks," Alex announced. "No way it'd hold." Images of skewered spies caused her to tense, her heart beating faster. She had no problem capping nervousness in combat, but weather was unpredictable and ferocious. The lightening flashes showed through dangerously wide gaps in the walls of the barn ahead, each look further eroding Alexandra's interest in going nearer.

"Old farm... old cellars. We can't stay in the open and the drainage ditch on the other side is too shallow if the shit hits the fan. Ow." Rachel wanted to rub her skull after a hard bump sent her into the roof of the little car, but kept her hands on the wheel. "Keep your eyes out. I'm going to drive around the buildings. Search fast." She used her defensive driving skills as the combination of winds and water and bumpy ground made the whole area a real trial to drive, edge entered her voice as she kept asking "Where is it?" under her breath.

The wind pushed the small car into a side slide into one of the old barn walls. The mortar crumbled onto the hood from the stone bottom part of the barn as planks crashed down on the hood from above. "Not getting our deposit back," Alex called out above the rising noise. She pointed as they drove a little further. "There." Lightning lit up the sides of a black column winding sinuously toward
Rachel kicked open her door against the wind and ran toward the cellar. She yelled at the sight of a chain. The Russian shot the old Master lock and they descended into darkness, Alex dragging down the half door as they went.

Wind and mud and rain blasted them as the half cellar door flapped open and then ripped away with an almost animal scream. They moved back further finding a crate to sit on with some shelter from the horrific weather. Alexandra feeling Rachel shivering next to her, pulled her leather jacket to the side and enclosed them both, more or less.

Rachel pressed her face against Alex, her arm wrapping around something solid in the chaotic event. Her breathing was ragged with fear at the rising sounds of the storm. Alex triggered the flashlight app on her phone and put it on a suddenly revealed shelf nearby. She wrapped herself around her former wife in the now dimly lit hole and looked up at the driving rain above. The rain flew sideways appearing as silver stilettos when revealed by the light. Alexandra kept whispering, only half heard by Rachel, who took courage from the reassurances of the woman holding her tight.

The wind soon stopped trying to pluck them out of their burrow and the rain eased up, the sliver of sky they could see easing from black to grey. The older woman whispered against Rachel's temple. "Think the car's still there?"

Rachel laughed into Alex's shoulder and slowly, not entirely willingly unfolded from her former wife's embrace. She stood and made her way out of the old cellar. Alexandra followed cursing. "Stupid phone. I need one you can basically hit with a bazooka and it still works for more than a fucking flashlight." She looked around in the light rain. "Wow."

A giant path was now cut through the field that they had just driven over. The tornado had passed close enough to tear away one side of the barn, but not close enough to take the little red car. Alex stared through a hole in the windshield at a piece of hay that apparently had pierced the glass and embedded itself in the driver side head rest. She looked at Rachel who had just spotted the same thing. "No deposit," she agreed.

They followed the path of destruction almost all the way to the little town Dr. B. called home. Rachel slowed down as they passed a mobile home on its side half laying in the road. Alexandra whistled. "What makes you think they aren't trying?" Rachel frowned and looked ahead. "There's John."

"Thought he was glued to the doc until we got here?"

They followed the path of destruction almost all the way to the little town Dr. B. called home. Rachel slowed down as they passed a mobile home on its side half laying in the road. Alexandra whistled. "Why are we mucking around with C-4? Someone needs to put a tornado in a can."

"What makes you think they aren't trying?" Rachel frowned and looked ahead. "There's John."

"Thought he was glued to the doc until we got here?"

Rachel introduced them swiftly. "Now can we please get the doc and get the fuck out of here?"

"Your wish." John pulled his coat tighter and sloshed toward a storefront Doctor's office with apartments above, and apparently a cellar below.
Chapter 93

Dr. B turned out to be a woman in her late forties or early fifties, though the obvious stress on her face was sending Alex's estimate up fast. Her file showed her to be a calm, collected, sane workhorse in the death spray business, but the development of her conscience and subsequent attempts by individuals to make that conscience go away had left her a nervous and hunted looking woman. When Dr. B peered out from behind a stack of plastic storage containers, she was a fearful woman. A gun shook as it came around the corner. "Who are you?" she barked.

John shook his head. "Chill Doc. I got your Primary here and the new girl." He leaned up against the wall content to let the next several minutes play out as they will.

The doctor edged forward, the gun still gripped tightly, but pointed down toward the floor. The shadows in the cellar, from the half-assed emergency lighting made her nose appear mountainous and her eyes cavernous. "Rachel." Her lips tightened. "And how do I know its you and you are not under coercion from this new girl?" She looked nervously past them to ensure they weren't followed. Alex was pretty sure they put her in this one horse town in the middle of nowhere because she would jump at every stranger in anyplace bigger and easier to get to.

Rachel smiled. "Because I would use the other phrase rather than...blue suede shoes." She stepped close and opened her arms. "Hello Bella."

The doctor came forward and hugged Rachel. She pulled back and slapped the younger woman's shoulder. "You girl. Why are you leaving me with this..." she waved at Alexandra.

"Alex," Alex replied her lips twisted in wry amusement.

The doctor peered in her direction."What?"

The Russian smiled broadly. "Why are you leaving me with this Alex? That was the question right?"

Bella turned to look at Rachel. "You have me with a smart ass?" Her brow rose.

Rachel barked a laugh. "She's a smart ass, but if you are ever in trouble, she would be the best friend you could ever have."

"Aw, that's sweet," Alex cooed. "Now can we please go to the nice reasonably safe motel?" She looked over at Dr. B. "You too. You can update me while we enjoy an area several miles from where the last tornado hit."

Bella looked over at John. He nodded. "I'll go take care of your cat while you catch up with Rachel and Alex."

They were soon in the car headed toward the motel when another tornado touchdown was announced in earsplitting fashion over the radio. Alex shook her head. "Uh no. No more fucking tornadoes. Floor it Princess," she said gripping the other woman's shoulder as she leaned forward looking around for swirling clouds.

Rachel snorted and gave the Russian a look. "Not my idea of a good time either Sunshine."

Bella looked from one to another. "Are you two girlfriend girlfriend?"
Alex laughed. "Rachel's wife would have to vote resoundingly no on that one."

They soon roared into the parking lot of the motel. The sky was no longer just dark with heavy and threatening clouds, but also with the swift descent of nightfall. Alexandra looked at the not-so-high-class establishment. "Terrific. So... you get Bella and yourself settled. I am going to get a pile of food from the diner over there so I don't evaporate."

Bella frowned. "A human cannot evaporate... unless..." she looked thoughtful.

Alex shook her head. "You are out of that line of work Doc. I'll get a little of everything so you can eat too."

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The good doctor was sitting on the far bed in the dated but fairly nice motel room when Alex arrived with an armload and a plastic sack of food and drink. Bella was wrapped around a pillow, leaning forward and rapt in her attention which was focused on a blank wall. "What-" Alex managed before the older woman shushed her.

Alexandra slid the food onto a nearby dresser and tiptoed over to the bed to sit next to Bella. Leaning forward, she found out what the doctor was listening to... Rachel and Caitlin fighting. "Paper walls," Bella whispered before putting a finger to her lips. The young Russian swiveled to lay stomach down on the bed and put her chin in her hand. It beat watching what passed for TV lately.

Caitlin was angry, that much was clear through the crappy walls. "What were you thinking, Rachel? You drove right into a fucking tornado. Do you have a fucking death wish?" The sound of her words faded in and out slightly as if she were pacing angrily.

Rachel was not as angry, but her words were terse. "It's the job. You know this. For God's sake chill out. It's done. I'm fine."

"Don't you give a fucking crap about your family?" The retrieval was done, but apparently not Caitlin's pissy mood.

"How could you even ask me that? I am bending over backwards to show..."

The sound of a fist or a foot giving a dresser a smack came through the wall. "Bending over backwards? This is all show? It's the job you love isn't it? I'm second place to the fucking job... You're an adrenaline junkie just like Alex."

Rachel's voice was quieter, almost placating, barely passing through the wall. "I quit the fucking job for you. I love you and ..."

Alexandra's jaw had dropped during all this. She looked at Bella who at some point had ended up laying on her stomach next to her like girlfriends at a ninth grade sleepover. She grinned. "This is better than the tele-novellas at the nut house," Alex whispered.

The doctor stared at her for a long moment before Alex turned back. "I wasn't nuts. I was amnesiac and supposed to be dead. It was a thing," she whispered.

The doctor nodded solemnly. "I'm supposed to be dead too. They made me general practitioner in Kansas, so really its like I am still dead."
Alexandra chuckled. "Think we'll get along just fine."
Alexandra rubbed her face sleepily as she padded down the worn and faded hall carpet to the soda and ice machines at the end of the corridor. She and Bella had fallen asleep much the way that they had been when they were awake. They were laying out like girls at a sleepover gossiping, their arms around pillows and heads close together for conspiratory whispers. She chuckled as she remembered the way they had whispered for hours so as not to derail the occasional entertainment from the other room.

Bursts of arguments eventually became the unmistakable sounds of make up sex. Despite a dark feeling in the pit of her, hearing it, Alex giggled right along with Bella. The look on the older woman's face told her she wasn't truly pulling that part off. Alex loved having someone around who got that it was a part some days. Too bad Bella had left a couple hours ago to go back to her life and her cat, secure in the knowledge that her Primary actually did give a crap about her future safety. It felt good to Alex, having an evening like that, freeing.

She came around the corner and into the small dark vending area, almost running into Rachel. Rachel exhaled hard and laughed quietly before backing up into the space only lit by the fronts of the vending machines. "Imagine this. What is it with us and dark corners?"

Alexandra stared at the other woman a long moment before giving into the dark hungry place that had been curled in her stomach as she lay there chuckling with Bella. She advanced on Rachel, her eyes never leaving her. The empty ice bucket that had been dangling from her fingertips was tossed in the ice machine as she moved forward. To hell with thinking. It was time for raw instinct to take over.

Rachel gasped as she continued moving back. She saw a familiar hard light in the other woman's eyes and though she had the marks of lovemaking with Caitlin all over her robe clad body, she fell into those eyes and felt her nerves begin to sing. "Alex," she whispered. This was not the Alex that teased her or cuddled with her on cold carnival rides or in storm cellars. This Alex was the storm itself and just seeing it was making Rachel short of breath in her excitement.

Alexandra's fingers came around her throat and pushed her back into a dark place between two vending machines. Her fingers plucked the ice bucket away and put it atop the soda machine, as she continued to push forward driving Rachel to the wall. She leaned in and smiled coldly as Rachel's lips came forward for hers already swollen with hungry kisses with another woman.

Neatly avoiding the kiss, she breathed in Rachel's scent at her throat, her lips resting for only a moment to feel a hummingbird pulse below the skin. Rachel groaned as Alex's hot breath bore down on her skin, drowning her senses. Her hand moved, roughly opening the robe. Rachel made a sound. Alex's teeth clenched hard though not hard enough to break skin on that long column of throat for a long moment before Rachel moved back and raised a hand. "Oh no you don't," Alex growled. "Not a sound from you. Not a touch from you." Her fingers found and twisted a nipple. Rachel's head fell back hard as she bit her lip trying to keep silent.

"I smell her all over you, slut." Alex growled. Despite not remembering the majority her life married to Rachel, she seemed to have no difficulty with feeling ownership of this woman.

Her teeth raked Rachel's shoulder as her breathing grew ragged. She felt nails drawing over the skin
of her stomach, the muscles there dancing to Alex's tune as she grew wet. She heard someone shuffling on the worn carpet in the hall. Alex pressed a hand over Rachel's mouth as they grew closer. Her fingers on her other hand reaching up.

Rachel nearly jumped as ice was tumbled into an ice bucket not six feet from them and a piece of ice moved over her nipple. The ice hit like a hammer, followed immediately by a hot mouth. Alex's tongue swirled on the nipple before teeth latched on and pulled at it. Rachel couldn't fully contain the moan. Slippered feet slowed and sounded as if they turned slightly before moving back to the carpeting in the hall.

"Its not bad enough," Alex whispered, "that you smell like another woman, you had to make noise after I told you not to."

Alexandra pinched Rachel's clit lightly between her heated finger and the sliver of ice. Rachel nearly saw stars. She pressed her hands to the walls behind her to keep from touching Alex, leaning on her. The brunette slid her fingers down the other woman's slit. "Wet as a shower. You are such a dirty girl, Rachel." Alexandra's breath was wolf hot on her neck again. Teeth found her throat again as fingers shoved roughly into her.

Rachel was struggling to control her breathing. Alex growled into her throat as she felt the other woman's hot walls clamp around her digits. "Ah ah ah," she whispered and eased out. She brushed her clit lightly, smiling a little at Rachel's almost convulsive movement. "So tight on me, so hot, so wet. She doesn't know how hard you want to be used. Does she?" The Russian felt Rachel's eyes on her. Alex looked up and locked her own eyes on the other woman, as deft fingers pressed in again.

Rachel's eyes never left hers as fingers roughly pressed in again and again. Alexandra smiled darkly and pulled her fingers away. "Clean them and then turn around."

Rachel, leaned forward slightly to suck her own flavor from the Russian's fingers. She licked the palm lightly before a look from the other woman moved her along. The other woman turned and faced the wall, her hands placed on the wall, her legs spread. "I am going to fuck you like a whore deserves to be fucked," Alex stated before driving her fingers into Rachel. She roughly ran them in and out of her lover on the wall, her hips motion betraying her desire that it be her wearing a strap on doing this. Rachel was gasping and rocking when her elbows gave out and she fell forward to the wall feeling relief for the firestorm within from the cool wall against her cheek.

Alex pressed on until she began to feel those tell tale little muscular contractions beginning around her fingers. She stepped away wiping her fingers on her shirt as she leaned against the next machine. Rachel pushed herself off the wall, slightly wobbly. She felt on the knife's edge of cumming as Alex pulled away. She looked at her betrayed.

Alexandra looked at her coolly. "Best get back to the wife." She took Rachel's full bucket and left.

Rachel closed her eyes on tears as the shower pounded on. She felt Caitlin join her, rubbing a gentle finger over Rachel's neck. "Damn honey. I don't remember biting... I'm sorry." She gathered Rachel
into her arms, her brow creasing as she tried remembering biting the woman she loved.
Caitlin chewed at her cuticle as she surreptitiously watched Rachel and Alex as they moved in slow motion through the flight. Her finger randomly moved the pages of the e-book she had been pretending to read since shortly after take off. Alex spent a lot of time avoiding looking at Rachel. She had mostly looked out a window though would look up crossly as her former wife drifted around the cabin. Rachel moved her fingers over her neck where a light bruise could be seen as she would chew her lip thoughtfully from time to time. She began to find excuses to try to talk to Alex as the flight time slowly passed. Caitlin was definitely getting weirded out by her own suspicions.

Shaking her head, she turned off her reader and closed the cover. She took a deep breath. There was no point jumping straight to paranoid thoughts. "Rachel, did you think anymore about the Midwest?" Leaning to the right she slid the reader onto a table. Casual, she was definitely going to go for casual.

Rachel looked up from where she was grabbing a bottle of water on her third aimless pass of the tiny galley area. "Not really. No on Kansas and well... anyplace in Tornado Alley." She grinned and pulled the cap off. "What do you think Alex?" Alexandra continued looking out the window. "Yo Alex." Rachel shook her head. Alex distracted didn't tend to be a good thing.

"What?" The Russian looked crossly at Rachel. She really wasn't in the mood to be in a tin can with Rachel and Caitlin. She had a lot of feelings swirling in her head after the adrenalin and the sexual heat of the previous day. She needed to think. She wanted to touch, no possess Rachel. She wanted to do right by Caitlin. She wanted to push her former wife into the rest room and fuck her senseless. The truth is she wanted anywhere but here. She checked her watch. Not nearly enough time had passed. "What?" she asked again.

Rachel and Caitlin shot one another amused looks at the glowering from the corner seat. "Caitlin and I were talking about good states to move to," Rachel replied. "We wanted to know what you think?"

"That I want you up against the wall," was Alex's first thought. Frowning, Alex shrugged. "As long as you aren't buried in snow or blown away in twisters." She stretched. "How long?"

"Another hour,' supplied Caitlin. She smiled as Alexandra stood and stretched. "You come to our housewarming barbeque?" She really did value the odd sort of friendship that had been growing with Alex. She understood the woman was pissed about the non-communication lately, but clean breaks were hard.

Alex’s stretch stopped suddenly. "When?"

Caitlin laughed. "Did you take something? You're acting a little high." She stretched her legs out in front of her and grinned.

Frowning, the Russian shook her head. "Sorry. I was daydreaming a little. Catch me up."

"Rachel and I are trying to find a retirement house far enough away from Division where retirement could possibly stick." Cait informed her tossing a crumpled bit of paper at her friend.

Alex batted it away handily. "Hmmm," she said thoughtfully. "Did someone let Nikita and Michael in on the whole sticky retirement thing?"

Caitlin barked a laugh. "Nikita's teflon. She could move to the Moon and retirement would still
bounce off. Anyway, as soon as we pick a place, I think we should have a barbeque and was thinking you should come bearing your usual attitude and of course a case of premium beer."

Alex nodded. "Burning shit. I can get behind it." She smiled at her friend. It had been hard with Rachel and Cait making a life elsewhere, but she really wanted them happy, deep down...somewhere...really...deep down.

"So what were you daydreaming about anyway Udinov?" Rachel responded with a grin as she leaned against the wall. The grin wasn't reaching her eyes.

Alexandra turned toward Rachel. Her eyes were just as flat as Rachel's in that moment, her grin as false. "Taking the two of you and entering the seven mile club in style." She waved expansively. "Look at all this great furniture that I could tie you girls to."

Caitlin snorted. "Keep it up Udinov and I'll have you on a leash for the party."

"Mmmm," hummed Alex. "I'm not the one who wants leashing," she said winking. Grabbing the bottle from Rachel's hand she headed toward the restroom.

She washed her face impatiently. The brunette needed to get her life stabilized.

Caitlin turned and looked at Rachel. "She is feeling spunky."

Rachel snorted. "Tease her and she comes back with a litany of sexual positions to horrify us with." She nodded as she turned and grabbed another bottle. "Definitely spunky."

Caitlin looked thoughtfully at her wife. "Does it?"

The other woman's brow drew tight. "Does what what?" She took a deep drink of water.

"Does it horrify you? Kinda thinking it turns you on."

Rachel looked at her wife for a long moment. She put down the water bottle and sauntered over to her wife, Smiling, she straddled Caitlin's legs and leaned in. Her brow rose. "Some of those positions might be fun... with the right wife."

"Oh? And which wife is that?" Caitlin asked, her brow rising in teasing mimicry.

Rachel kissed her wife. "Only one I got." She kissed Caitlin fiercely. "And if you ask again I will twist some bits you wish to remain untwisted." She smiled and leaned in to kiss Cait again, trying to ignore the acid in her stomach.

Alex came out of the bathroom. Her face distorted at the sight of Rachel and Caitlin twisted together in a seat. She drew on her poker face and moved back to her seat. "Geez you people need to get a room," she snarked.

Caitlin smiled at her wife as she drew back startled. "We're not getting a room, we're getting a whole house."
With landing, the three women began walking toward a pair of vehicles sitting in the parking lot nearby. Caitlin stopped suddenly as her cell phone began to sing Homeward Bound. "Hello?" she answered as Rachel swung to a stop to watch her. Alexandra walked a step or two further and halted. She turned with a little curiosity nibbling the edges as she sighed.

Caitlin began rubbing her temple. "Okay... Yeah. Okay. That's great." She smiled at Rachel. "Talk to you later." She closed her phone. "Gina has a hot lead on a house. You ride with Alex and give a report while I take care of a few things and check out the hot lead."

Rachel moved closer and gave Caitlin a lingering kiss before smiling and backing up. "I will be as fast as I can." She watched her wife continue on to their car with a grin.

"You do that." Caitlin's smile was bright as she moved on past Alex, slapping her arm. "Might be barbecue sooner than you'd think."

Alexandra nodded and walked to her car, dropping into her seat. "Son of a bitch." She turned the key as Rachel knocked on the window. She hit the lock release and turned around to look for her sunglasses.

Rachel watched her for a moment after dropping into her seat. "What's up?"

"My driving glasses. I thought I left them on the dash." Alex leaned over past Rachel to root in the glove box.

Rachel opened the box between the seats and drew out a pair of glasses. "You still never remember where you put them." Laughing, she relaxed into her seat. "Some things never change do they hun?"

She smiled and dropped them in Alex's open hand.

Alexandra frowned and put on the sunglasses before backing out of the space. She had a dark expression on her face as she scanned the traffic passing the tiny airfield.

"What?" asked Rachel as she noticed the look.

"What what?" Alex responded as she turned left and headed toward Division.

"Foul look on the face. What the hell is eating you?"

"Don't call me hun."

"What? Why?" Rachel was getting confused now.

"Don't pretend you know me," Alex growled sliding in and out of cars.

"What?" Now Rachel was getting pissed.

"That Alex is dead."

"No shit? I hadn't got that memo. Fuck is your problem, Udinov?"

"You are." Alexandra slammed her hand on the wheel.
Rachel pointed. "Park now."

"We need to-"

"Time to park...now."

Alexandra pulled through the park to an isolated area. She frowned before stomping into the trees. She turned and watched Rachel approach. She ran her hand through her hair as she began to pace.

Rachel stopped suddenly. "What the fuck is all this..." Her face changed. "Is this jealousy?"

Alex threw up her hands. "I am not fucking jealous."

"Then what is your fucking problem?"

"I don't have one."

Rachel looked at her darkly. She took a step closer. "You certainly didn't have any taking me in a fucking motel hall. Is that what this is about? You claim me and kick me to the curb and when you see me with my wife instead of crawling back for more you... you what?" She kicked the tree nearest. "Is that what this is? You? Jealous? You hate seeing me with someone else?" She took a step and turned furious. "If you want me, fucking claim me and fucking keep me."

Alex drove her back against the tree, her fingers spread on Rachel's chest. "I don't sleep right. I see you over and over and over. Alex 1.0 drips into my brain and she screams when she sees you kiss Caitlin and I want you. I want to fuck you. I want to claim you forever and ever, and I know its wrong and I don't care, but I do care and its fucking making me feel crazy."

Rachel, her chest heaving with ragged breath stared at the other woman for long moments before grabbing Alex and pulling her into a kiss. Hunger was in every nip at the lips, movement of the tongue. Alexandra moaned and responded, feeling the whole of herself burst into flame, pressing forward into Rachel who pulled at Alex's jacket.

The jacket fell into the dirt and Alexandra felt unleashed. She tore at Rachel's sweater tearing it up and off. Rachel felt the rough bark at her back as Alex drove her back into the tree. Alex's fingers slid down over Rachel's stomach. Her head fell back against the tree as Rachel felt the other woman nipping and kissing down to where fingers tore Rachel's pants downward. Rachel's fingers roughly curled into Alexandra's brunette hair.

Alex pressed her face close breathing deeply of Rachel's aroma. Ghosts of this scent haunted her nights. She felt Rachel shiver in the cool breeze as her lips pressed against the mound. Her hands slid up. One of her former wife's hands guided hers to the silk of the bra. Alex's eyes slid closed before she ascended again.

She leaned into the half naked woman under her as she tried to regain control of her breathing. "I'm going to take you home," Alex whispered. "You're retired. I'll report in at Division." She felt Rachel's arms slide around her as she shook not from the cold but tears. Rachel was clinging to her hard in that silent part of the park.

"Tell me that you don't want me," Rachel begged, the first tears rolling slowly down her face.

Alexandra tried but couldn't stop the sob. "I can't." She felt the warm body of her former wife under hers. Her heart felt fractured.

"Fuck you, Alex. I'll call a cab." Rachel pushed Alexandra back and tried to pull her clothes
together.

"Rachel," Alex began.

"Leave now!" Rachel responded.

Alex turned sadly and left not seeing Rachel sink to the forest floor with a sob.

Nikita looked up at the sound of the office door opening. Dog bounced off the couch and ran to Alex who knelt for a hug. "Good trip?" she asked.

Alex buried her face in fur. "Bout what I expected."
Chapter 97

Rachel ran her fingers along the sill of the large picture window. Sighing, she rubbed her temple. A rainy day splashed just beyond the glass and it matched her inner landscape. She summoned a smile as she heard her wife coming into the living room. "How was it?" she asked more cheerful than she felt.

Caitlin barked a laugh. "It's a basement. Everything seems to be hooked up to something else and there are no major leaks down there."

Rachel turned with a raised brow. "Score?"

Her wife looked up at the ceiling with a mischievous grin. "Nine out of ten. I'm taking a point away for that god awful tree in the backyard."

"Parker is going to love that tree and want a swing and a house in it." Rachel's arms crossed as she watched Caitlin's face, animated and lit with possibilities.

"Like I was saying..."

Rachel laughed. "A perfect home."

"Home," Caitlin spun happily. "I like the sound of that."

"The realtor in the kitchen will love the sound of our money going into it."

Laughing, Caitlin took her wife into her arms and kissed her temple. "I will take care of things at this end. I'll get Parker settled in and take care of the details if you take care of the moving guys and other loose ends in Jersey."

A brow rose at that. "I get the hard stuff?"

Caitlin kissed her. "I will reward you properly when you get back here." Her hand strayed and squeezed Rachel's ass playfully.

Rachel laughed. "Color me loose end woman."

Rachel walked slowly down the dock as if to her execution. This was not a loose end she was looking forward to. She had a terrible habit of losing resolve every time the subject much less the person of Alex came into the picture. She knocked on the houseboat door with a grim expression. She could do this. She could put this all behind her. Probably. She sighed as she knocked again.

She was nearly knocked off balance by Dog who came flying up the ramp behind her. Rachel turned to see Alex sweaty from a run coming up the ramp, coiling a leash. Rachel's eyes looked at the leash and naughty thoughts abounded. The Russian stopped to look at her a moment before unlocking the door and gesturing Rachel in.
Alexandra walked to the fridge and took out two bottles of water, handing one to her former wife before opening her own and taking a deep drink. She walked past Rachel to drop her keys in a bowl by the door. "What are you doing here, Rachel?"

Rachel took a deep breath and put her bottle down. "I want closure, resolution." She tried to look sternly at her former wife.

The other woman turned and watched Rachel a long moment over the top of her water bottle. She took a swallow and put the bottle aside. "I'm sweaty as hell, I'm going to take a shower." She turned and walked away.

Making an exasperated noise she watched Alexandra move deeper into the boat and Dog settle into his bed in the living room. She wandered to a window and looked out onto water as she sipped the water and waited trying not to picture her former wife soaping up.

Alexandra seethed. She could see it in Rachel's face. She herself didn't know what form the closure should take. Rachel wanted to dump everything at the Russian woman's door. Alex was to blame for it, for everything. Alex's lips slowly spread in a smile. As she shut the water off, she reached for her robe and went to her bedside table. Rachel wanted everything spoon fed to her. Alex could do it.

Rachel sighed as she put her hands on the counter to lean forward. She was reaching for the window crank when she was pushed hard against the counter. Alex's fingers wound in her hair and pulled her head back. "You want me and you don't want me. You want your comfy marriage and you want..." her legs were pushed apart. "me to fuck you out of your senses."

"I..." Rachel began.

Alexandra struck Rachel's ass with her other hand. "No. You want boundaries? You got them. You come to me vacillating and not knowing how to let go?" She smiled and pressed her hand between Rachel's denim clad legs. "You will get what I want." Alex pressed Rachel forward, bringing the strap on up between those legs. She leaned hard against Rachel's back.

Rachel moaned. She felt the strap on only lightly, but she knew its feel. She remembered what Alexandra could do to her with it. Her eyes slid closed and what little remained of her resolve flowed away like water.

"You're wet already aren't you?" Alexandra's sneer was obvious in her tone. "You are my fucking slut when you are with me." Her hand slid around her former wife to open the jeans between her and the woman before her. "I bet you are already soaked." Her touch was rough, hand forceful seeking the truth of her statements.

Rachel took in a shaky breath. "Please Alex."

"Please Alex what?"

Rachel lowered her head. "Fuck me please." She felt guilt thinking of her loving wife at home, but when she was like this with Alexandra Udinov, she was all need.

"I am going to fuck you and use you like you deserve." Alexandra affirmed before yanking down jeans and underwear.

Hours later, Alex raised herself on elbows to look over at her former wife laying on the floor nearby, exhausted and satisfied looking. Alex shook her head and looked up at the ceiling a moment. She stood. Alex stood over Rachel and looked down. She swept the clothes from the nearby counter. Rachel looked startled as her shirt landed on her.
"What?" she asked confused.

"I got what I wanted. You fucking leave." Alex picked up her robe and drew it on.

"I.."

"Save it Rachel. You are just going to resolve to tell me to kiss your ass... until next time. I got better things to do." Alexandra gestured to Dog who followed her to the bedroom.

Rachel pulled her clothes to her feeling suddenly dirty. Alex brought out the best and worst feelings in her. She was an addiction that needed ending, but the craving just would not go away.
Chapter 98

Alex groaned as she lay back on Nikita's couch. "What the fuck?" A few weeks of grinding through mission after mission had left her physically exhausted and now this. Her other hand dropped to Dog's head where he lay on the floor beside her. She was just feeling way too stressed out to deal with anything more.

Nikita raised her brow from where she was leaning against her desk. She thought she was delivering good news. "I'm asking that myself Alex. Every time Rachel's name comes up you get weird." Nikita's eyes narrowed. "Tell me you haven't been sleeping with her."

The younger woman looked over. "So don't need this right now." She threw an arm over her eyes. "A fucking barbecue." She wanted to go. She wanted to take Rachel away from that homey little party and find a dark corner and claim her forever. She wanted to do right by Caitlin and tell Rachel she didn't want her. She was beginning to feel schizophrenic.

Nikita's eyes narrowed. "Did you sleep with her?" she enunciated carefully. Her entire frame began to tense.

Alex snorted. "No."

"Knock boots?" she immediately followed up.

Alex thought a moment. There were slippers involved. "No."

Nikita picked up Alex's feet and slipped to the couch. "What is it?"

Shaking her head, Alex looked to her oldest and dearest friend. "I get feelings around her and I don't know what version of me is cooking them up." She looked down at Dog to avoid looking at Nikita. His eyes were closed in pleasure at the ear scratching.

Nikita sucked in a breath. "What feelings?"

Hesitating, the Russian reached for words. "I want to go caveman on her." She saw the expression on her friend's face as she looked up. "But I don't want to at the same time. I don't want to hurt anyone. I just..."

"Caveman sounds a lot like you the first time around, but considering our little shower scene and our skirting the edges of appropriate, it might be new Alex's horn dog thing too. You need to think this through Alex. I love you, but I am not sure I would stand in Caitlin and Rachel's way if they decided to kick your ass."

Alexandra groaned again. "I shouldn't go to the barbecue."

Nikita sighed. "They would know something's up."

"Send me on a mission."

Nikita snorted. "Make it even more obvious that something's up and that I know about it?"

Alex groaned and covered her eyes.
Looking out of the car window, Alexandra let her eyes roam over the modern brick house that would serve her former wife and friend Caitlin as cozy little home. "Very homey," she offered dryly.

Michael chuckled. "Someone sounds very anti-retirement." He finished parking the car and looked up at the house himself.

Nikita nodded. "Some people just don't do a picket fence."

"But you will," he said jokingly.

"Retirement any day now," she confirmed kissing his cheek. She grinned at his sudden laugh. "Alex, grab the veggies."

Alex took up the tray and slid out of the car whistling Dog out of the seat well where he had lain. "Let's get this party started," she said without enthusiasm.

Caitlin opened the door and hugged everyone as they came up waving them through. "Come on in," she said. "Rachel's charring the meat and tofu out back and I have a tub of beer out there too." She laughed to see Dog and dropped down to give the canine a good scratch behind both ears. "I know someone who is going to love meeting you." She looked up at Alex. "Parker sees Dog, you may not get him back," she concluded with a smile before leading them back toward the smell of charcoal.

"Who's Parker?" Alex mused quietly as the others moved down the hall toward the glass doors leading to the backyard.

Alexandra stroked Dog's head as she sat in a lawn chair soaking up sun and listening to the music from the stereo system. She looked over as she heard a shriek. A small boy was being carried upside down and giggling by Caitlin toward her. Her brow knit as they stopped and Caitlin lowered the boy. "Parker, this is Dog," Cait introduced. "He's Alex's friend."

The bright eyed boy tore his eyes from the dog and looked at Alex who looked at him stunned. "Can I play with your dog?" he asked.

Alexandra blinked and then reached in her pocket for a worn tennis ball. "This is his ball. If you throw it, he'll bring it back."


Dog followed his ball. Alexandra watched. "Parker... he's your boy?"

Caitlin smiled. "Sister's boy, but she passed so I am raising him as mine... with Rachel's help of course."

"Of course," Alex replied weakly.

"We need more ice," Rachel called to Caitlin.

Alexandra grabbed Cait's arm. "I'll get it." Getting up, she trotted to Nikita getting the keys.

Rachel looked after Alexandra puzzled before handing the spatula to Michael who took on new duties with a grin. Rachel followed Alex through the house. "What's going on?"
Alex turned. "You have a fucking kid."

"Parker is a good boy."

Alex nodded. "Very sweet, polite. You have a beautiful son and you fuck around with me?" She shook her head.

Rachel frowned. "You fucked me too, babe." *It was more than fucking,* Rachel thought to herself. She loved Caitlin, but she loved Alex, too. She was in over her head and she knew it.

"Not anymore. Do you understand me?" Alexandra replied firmly. "You want a decision. There it is. Take care of your wife and your boy. I'm done with you, Rachel."

"Alex," Rachel began.

"I'll be back with the ice soon. You should keep Michael from charring things." As Alex left, she mentally kicked her own ass. She could accept fucking around behind Cait's back from time to time, but screwing up the future for one innocent little boy... she wished she had known earlier. Tears formed in her eyes. Whatever this was with Rachel had to end. *Time to get on with life.* She frowned not knowing where to start. She made a mental note to see about new docks in new places. Time for new Alex to leave old Alex well behind.
Alexandra frowned as she stared at the ice freezer at the liquor store. Her hands were jammed in her jeans pockets and she leaned toward the cold glass. She was thinking not of seven or fourteen pounds of frozen water, but of dropping the bomb with Rachel. She met Parker and knew she couldn't go on with what she was doing with Rachel and it sucked majorly, but she knew it had been right. She heaved a sigh and throwing open the door, grabbed a bag of ice. After paying, she drove back and stared out of the front windshield at the red brick home with the shiny brass numbers and thought.

Lifting the bag from where it had been beginning to melt on the passenger seat, she made her way back. "Cait," she called lifting the bag.

Caitlin laughed and grabbed the ice. "Thanks Alex. Grab another drink," she invited happily.

"Can't." Alex looked grim as she looked to her friend, grimmer as Rachel slid up and grabbed the bag from Caitlin.

Nikita frowned as she joined the group leaving Michael to char the tofu dogs in peace. "What's up Alex?"

"Had a phone call while I was out. I have to catch a flight back. There was some trouble at the marina." Alexandra gave a half-hearted smile. "I'll have to call a cab and get to the airport." She looked over at Dog who was running in big circles with Parker. She didn't want to ruin their fun. She raised her fingers to her lips. Nikita grabbed them.

"You head out. I'll see that Dog gets home when Parker is done running him into the ground."

Alexandra smiled gratefully. "Thank you, Nikita." She gave her a heart-felt hug. "It was a great party guys," she said to Caitlin and Rachel as she drew out her cell phone. "What's the local cab number?"

Rachel handed Caitlin a pair of salad tongs. "I'll drive you."

Alex smiled tightly. "Perfect." Waving, she headed out toward the car, the smile slipping away to grimness.

Alexandra stared out another windshield, this time at the small local airport. She was stiff in her seat. "Thanks for the ride." She reached for the door release to find Rachel grabbing at her. "What?" she asked gruffly. She really didn't want to re-hash this now that she had gotten things settled in her head. Fuck old Alex. Fuck old habits. Fuck... don't fuck Rachel.

"Don't," Rachel pleaded. Her face was inches from Alex and her perfume was making the brunette nuts.

Alexandra shook her head and removed Rachel's hand. She sighed. "Don't what? Mess up your new son's life?" She locked eyes with Rachel. "You wanted me to decide so you could be free to have the
best of lives worked out, without a drop of sweat from you, and now that I have you are trying to pull me back to the middle."

"You don't want me?" Rachel's tears carved a way down her cheeks. "Tell me." Her voice was cracking with her upset. Her heart felt cracked, too. She wanted the firm choice, but she also wanted Alex. "Please Alex."

Alex's eyes closed and she saw Caitlin's face and Parker's smile and she knew. "I can't want you. I won't go there with you again," she whispered. "It's not going to happen again."

"Please," Rachel whispered. "I feel you... all the time." She glanced out at the airport. "Say the word and I will fly away with you... Please Alex. We can run away and start over."

"It's time for you to go home Rachel. Kiss your wife and son. I'm done with all of it." Alexandra pushed open the door and slid out walking swiftly toward the glass doors of the airport.

Rachel's head sunk to the steering wheel and her chest heaved with sobs. Their relationship from recruit to marriage flashed through her head. She never stopped loving Alex, not even when she fell in love with Caitlin. She wanted her old life back... her old Alex. She raised her head. One more try. She grabbed her keys and ran for the entrance. She would put it on the line one more time.

Alex accepted her ticket and looked it over as she walked to where the cracked plastic seats stood in sad rows in the small airport. A hand grabbed her shoulder and half spun her. Alexandra saw her former wife's face covered in tears for only a moment before Rachel took her face in hands and kissed her fiercely. Alex melted against Rachel for half a moment, savoring those lips one final time before drawing back close enough to feel Rachel's heat, but far enough to get perspective.

"I won't let you go," Rachel said, grabbing Alex's wrist. Her face was covered in tears, but her voice was steel. She was determined.

Alex shook her head. "You don't get a say, not anymore." She took a step back and another, despite a pull to go back to those lips. "You put it on me and I won't hurt your family anymore than I have." Her head dropped. "I... just, go home Rachel... go home to your family." She gripped her ticket convulsively, the fingers of her other hand running through her hair.

Rachel's head shook then dropped. She backed away and turned, her heart breaking in her chest. She was shaking as she walked out. She felt everything as a terrible mess. She couldn't do this. She had to do this. This is what the situation was and she was too damned strong not to survive. Alexandra Udinov had taught her that lesson long ago. She would tell the truth... most of it to Caitlin and work her relationship out. It's what Alex wanted her to do.

Alexandra sat slowly in the old cracked plastic chair and prayed that the plane would board soon. She hated feeling exposed sitting in this little ass end airport waiting for the plane to take her back to New Jersey and her lonely houseboat. She wiped tears from her cheeks, hands shaking. She was just feeling burnt out now. Her fingers slid over her lips. Her eyes closed as she replayed the kiss. It was over. This memory was going to help with a lonely night or two, at least til Dog got back to the boat with her. She shook her head. Time to throw herself into something... anything.
Alex sat on the arm of the sofa frowning. "Dog and I need a vacation. What the fuck could be wrong with that?" She picked her way through the red and white striped bag containing gummy bears in her hand and finally selected a green one for instant decapitation and eventual mastication. She smiled down at Dog who was looking at the bag in her hand. "Later," she muttered to him. He pawed the toe of her tennis shoe hopefully.

Nikita looked over from where she was sitting cross legged on the top of a desk poking at her drink from the same old fashioned soda fountain and candy store. "You don't take vacations." She took a sip watching the young Russian closely. She was curious what could prompt this driven woman to kick back suddenly.

Alexandra gave a half shrug. "Old Alex maybe not, but I want a fucking trip. I need it." Her blue eyes refused to look up from the striped bag as she searched through slowly. Dog put his paw on her leg and whined quietly.

The other woman sighed and continued to watch her. "Where will you go and why?"

Alex shook her head. "Gonna throw a fucking dart at the map. I just need to decompress." Another bear joined the first in her stomach. "I just need some time off the map." She shrugged.

Nikita chewed on that statement for a minute. "Sat phone," she finally said unfolding from the top of the desk and choosing to lean on it instead. She crossed her arms and projected firmness. She shrugged. It never worked on Alex anyway. She picked up her drink again.

"Sat phone?" Alexandra replied with a raised brow.

Nodding, Nikita took another sip. "Sat phone. I want to know where you are and that you are okay and not being strapped onto a mental ward bed and I want you to talk to your head shrinker once a week." The thought that the bad guys could fuck with her friend again was horrific to her.

"Oh for fuck's sake," Alex moaned rolling her eyes. She tossed a bear at Nikita who caught it handily before tossing it in her mouth. "Yes Mom."

Nikita smiled. "Mom me if you must, but I intend for you to be safe. You are my best friend..." she trailed off.

Alex held up a finger. "Besides Michael."

"Besides Michael." Nikita smiled broadly. "I need you to take care of you." She took another sip. "Is this about the Rachel thing?" she asked quietly.

Alexandra snorted. That was bound to come up sooner or later. She shrugged. "That's sorted," she responded shortly. She still got blown away by the situation.

"Is it?" Nikita asked intently. She knew that Alex wasn't telling her the true reasons behind this exit. Part of her worried that Alex wasn't planning to come back.

"It is," Alex responded intently. She screwed up the top of her bag and tossed it onto a small table nearby. She grinned as Dog snuck closer to that side of the couch.
Nikita nodded. "Good. Sat phone and I will let you and Dog run amok."

The younger woman smiled broadly. "Amok amok amok." Dog looked up at her and thumped his tail at her enthusiastic tone before laying his chin on the table with his nose against the bag. She gave Nikita a hug and began mentally packing a bag.

Caitlin sat down and stared out of the window for a long moment. Rachel pressed her eyes and licked her lips nervously. "Aren't you going to scream at me?" Rachel asked quietly.

"It's over?" Caitlin wondered aloud. She ran her finger around the lip of her wineglass more for something to do than anything else. There was a cacophony in her head and heart and she just needed it to quiet down. She sighed quietly.

Rachel nodded. "It's over. It never really started up with us. It was all sex in weird places. It..." She was about to tell Caitlin that it didn't matter, but when she was feeling honest with herself, it all mattered to Caitlin. She hung her head. "I love you. I am making a life with you. That's what I want. That's all I want."

"You had a life with her." was the reply.

"Had." Rachel tried to think of a way to do the impossible right thing, fixing this without causing pain. "I didn't want you hurt. I just... when she looked at me like old Alex sometimes I..."

"Let her fuck you in weird places... got that part." Caitlin rubbed her head. She was hating every second of this conversation. She wanted to clear the air, but this was horrible.

"It's done."

"She's out of your system now?" Caitlin asked cringing slightly at her own tone.

Her wife swallowed hard. "She is." Rachel crouched near Caitlin's feet. "I didn't tell you this to hurt you." She frowned at the scoffing sound from her wife. "I told you because I love you and if we are going to make this marriage everything it can be, I need us completely honest and committed."

Caitlin leaned forward in her seat putting her elbows on her knees. "I knew there was something. Just couldn't nail it down." She hung her head. "This hurts."

"I know," whispered Rachel. "I'm so sorry. Please forgive me, Caitlin. I know that I don't deserve your forgiveness, but I need it."

Caitlin looked up and searched her face. "You know that I will likely trot this out for years everytime you try to yell at me for not putting my fork in the dishwasher."

Rachel smiled tremulously. "Years?" she asked barely drawing breath in her rush of hope.

A distressed look crossed the other woman's face. "Don't do this again. Don't..." her voice cracked. She looked away.

"Never," her wife swore.

Caitlin reached up slowly to brush Rachel's cheek. "I love you so much. I am hurt and angry, but I
can move past it if you have. I want us to have forever together."

Rachel captured her hand and brought the palm to her lips as tears rolled down her face. "I want that too. You and me and Parker."

"Til death do us part like the thing goes."

"Just like that," Rachel affirmed.
Chapter 101

Alexandra smiled as she heard her pocket chirping along with the copious number of birds. She pulled it free of the cargo pocket and put it to her ear. "Hi Mom."

"Hi smart ass. How is the mystery vacation?" Nikita's amused voice came loud and clear through the phone as Alex waited for Dog to quit sniffing something several yards back.

"Ew, ew, ew Dog. Stop rolling in it. No dead things. Bad Dog." Alex smiled to hear Nikita's laughter as she gently waved at the wronged canine. "It's good. We are having the time of our lives out here."

"Out where?" Nikita prompted with a smile.

"Uh, no. Not even a little clue. I give you a clue then the first time the world gets threatened there is a helicopter hovering over my head and then I have to come up with a creative way to kick your ass. I am trying for less stress not more."

"Understood. Have you talked with your doctor lately?"

The younger woman laughed as Dog ran up the path to circle her feet, his nose seemingly attached to the ground. She adjusted the shoulder strap on her back pack and looked toward where the path began to ascend the first mountain. "The doc is busy and I'm fine."

"Alex."

"Yes mom. Tomorrow. I'll call for an appointment to chat tomorrow."

"Do it or Birkhoff will track the phone and I will be in the helicopter myself."

Barking a laugh, Alex knelt to rub Dog's ear. "Bye Mom."

"Bye Baby Alex," Nikita drawled before cutting the connection.

Alexandra stretched out her legs into her sleeping bag and smiled down at her furry companion for the hike. "Good Night Dog," she whispered before closing her eyes. She was just drifting as orange light opened her eyes. She heard the whup-whup of a helicopter and groaned. "Fuck Nikita. You're killing me." Some vacation, she thought.

She rolled up and patted the nervous looking Dog. Alexandra pulled her hiking boots on and tied them before opening the tent, roughly dragging at the zipper. The light that woke her up was bright in her eyes, no longer muted by tent fabric. She shaded her eyes trying to see the figure of the woman walking toward her out of the circle of brightness. "Nikita... what did I tell you?" she grumped, pushing her hair out of her eyes where it landed as the rotors continued circling over the helicopter.

Amanda stepped clear of the blinding light dressed in a little black dress and shoes entirely
inappropriate for mountainsides. "I'm not Nikita Alexandra and you will be telling me nothing." She
nodded at the guard beside her as he came out of the same bright light. He raised his gun and fired at
Dog who was blown back by the force of the blast. Alex screamed and fought as she was grabbed
by several men in bullet proof gear, Amanda stepped close and looked down at the Alex suspended
between her henchmen. "You are so fun to play with Alexandra. Let's do it again." She smiled
coldly and raised a needle. A few drops flew up from the end before she stabbed the young Russian.

Alex shot up screaming. Her lungs were on fire as she gulped air. Dog licked her face trying to calm
her down. She wrapped her arms around his neck and shook and cried into his fur. The days were
wonderful on the trail. The nights were hard. She was still in hell some nights when the nightmares
came and they always came.

Amanda was still so low profile as to not be seen, but Alex knew she was alive and her dreams
reflected that. "So need to finish that job," she muttered. "All these trees, there has got to be a decent
stake around somewhere."

She pulled herself back into her sleeping bag, still with an arm wrapped around Dog's neck. He
settled against her with a sigh. Dog was the best thing for her PTSD and she was thankful for him.

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**Rachel** smiled as Caitlin slid her arms around her and kissed her cheek. "Morning," she mumbled.

Barking a laugh, Rachel pointed to the corner of the kitchen. "Coffee IV over there."

Watching her wife pad to her morning infusion of caffeine, Rachel sipped at her orange juice and
grinned. "Let me know when you actually wake up."

"Where's Parker?" Cait asked as the first scent of the brewed beans hit her.

"He's out in the sunshine." Rachel had the little boy fed and out early so Cait could get some sleep
and coffee before dealing with anyone that high energy.

"Can't face bright light yet," Caitlin mumbled and settled against the counter to drink her coffee. She
would go out and play with him after she woke up properly.

Rachel walked over and leaned next to her wife stroking her face. "Ever think about another one?"

"Coffee? Hell yeah." Caitlin turned toward the carafe. She topped off and continued trying to wake
up as she kept eyes closed to the morning sun streaming through the kitchen window.

"Another kid." Rachel responded. She smiled. Her wife was not the most aware individual before
her first pot some days.

Caitlin's eyes opened wide and she searched her wife's face intently, suddenly awake. "Another one?
Seriously?"

Rachel nodded with a smile. "Let me know when you wake up and we can talk."

Caitlin grinned and put down her mug. She slid arms around her wife. "I want her to have your
hair," she said happily.
A brow rose in response. "Her?"

"Totally. We need a little girl here." Caitlin drew Rachel's hand up drawing her into a dancing spin before settling into a hug.

Rachel laughed. "That will be fun when she hits high school."

"We'll be there to lay the smack down on her dates."

"Tag team mom action." Rachel kissed Caitlin. "I like that."

"I love it." Caitlin smiled and relaxed in her wife's arms.

"I love you."

"And I you."

The whole thing with Alex had made for a rocky couple of months, and Caitlin would have trouble with the images in her head for a long time, but all she cared about right now was the beautiful woman in her arms and her current and future kids.
Alex took a deep breath. When she had picked the long trail before her, it was with the knowledge that she intended to spend a lot of time alone with thoughts and Dog, well and truly away from people. She had only met one other person on this side of the mountain she was currently climbing. They had sat at the side of the trail and for the most part silently shared company and freeze dried berries. He slid his enormous pack back on and left with only a few words about a weather battered section above.

Alex smiled down at Dog who was looking mournful at the non-meaty snacks. "Strong silent type. Wish I knew more people like that." She dug out a Milkbone and offered it to the head perched on her knee. He took it tail wagging.

"Of course, I already have that in you." Smiling again, she stood and tugged on her own back pack. The Sat phone rang. Picking up and opening the line, she started. "Mom, its been forever. How the hell are you?" she started up the trail as she connected with the rest of the world.

"Are you going to start with me already Alex?" Alex could hear the smile on Nikita's face.

"No of course not. How is life in the viper's pit?"

Nikita sighed. "Full of vipers. We got confirmation that your favorite bitch queen is kicking. She apparently has put out word that she would like to speak to you."

"Oh?" Alexandra tried not to picture Amanda. She prayed for a wolf or something to show up because Amanda's face was like peanut butter on the roof of her mouth. Stuck...usually unpleasantly. She frowned and kicked a rock.

"Price on your head. Required acquisition status... alive."

"How sweet."

"You never did tell me the details of your last meeting with her," Nikita hinted through the phone.

"Its a little embarrassing." Alex followed Dog up the trail.

"Try me."

"We were naked and there was sweating and moaning."

This time Alex heard a grimace. "With Amanda?"

"Don't start. I've seen pictures of some of the people you fucked on the job."

Nikita laughed. "Good point. I want you to be careful. We're trying to keep everything about you need to know but..."

"We're in a business where everyone is convinced they need to know. Got it." Alex turned slowly. "I picked a good spot for vacation...Only seen three people total since I started."

"Recipe for good vacation or for an ambush," Nikita responded from across the miles.
"I am armed and ready for anything." Alex smiled. "Tell Michael this is perfect the next time he tries to get you retired." Her fingers brushed the pouch containing her weapon for the trip. Don't leave home without it, she thought.

"Ha ha ha," Nikita dripped sarcastically. "Get rested so I can beat on you some more soon. The gym is lonely without you."

"Miss you too. Talk to you later." Alexandra closed up the phone and tucked it away. "Fuuuuuck," she drawled. She looked down at Dog. "Get her face out of my head will you?" She so did not need to think about Amanda. She dug out Dog's favorite ball. "Go long?" she asked.

Dog wagged his tail and ran in circles looking for his ball to leave her hand. Alex laughed and tossed the ball. She was watching it rather than the trail and landed her foot on a piece of broken slate. It slid away and sent her rolling to the side and a small drop. Her breath exploded like TnT as she hit a large rock side on and then spun to find herself, her eye a fraction of an inch from a tree branch tip. She froze.

She felt herself elsewhere. She was sitting in a dentist chair. Her limbs were strapped. The rocks and dirt that covered her from the fall were nowhere in sight. She felt the strap around her head as a needle stood poised an inch from her eye. She could just see Amanda sitting before her and to the side slightly to get a better view of the needle and the woman it would soon plunge into. Alex screamed.

She fought the straps. She was fighting to free herself from this moment. Alexandra felt wetness on her cheeks and thought it must be blood from where the strap rubbed or tears from her eyes. Slowly the edges of the vision frayed and she knew that she was not there with Amanda. She felt small paws running over her anxiously and a tongue on her face.

Alex drew her hands from the remembered straps on the arms of the dentist chair and desperately gripped fur, grounding herself in the here and now.

"Just another flashback, it isn't real... it isn't real."

She wept into Dog's fur in relief. She could not, would not ever give Amanda that chance again.

Rachel took a deep breath. She smiled as Caitlin's fingers tightened on hers. "I'm a little nervous," she admitted.

Caitlin nodded. "Want to leave?"

Her wife smiled. "Hell no hot shot. You wanna knock me up then we are here to talk to the doc about just that thing."

Laughing, Caitlin leaned forward to snag a baby book off the table in front of them. "Any thoughts on the baby names?"

"Gertrude?"

"Are you looking for trouble Rachel?" she replied good naturely.
"Always, Part of my charm."

"Definitely part of your charm," agreed Caitlin smiling as their names were called by a nurse.

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**Amanda** smiled as her newest cleaner came in. He sat down and waited. Her smile didn't waver but froze slightly. "You called me in?" he prompted.

"Are you aware you shot my daughter?"

His cocky look faded. "You have a daughter?"

"One that you shot." She tapped her computer. "You have a chance to make it up to me."

"Anything," he pledged.

"I want Alexandra... alive. You start thinking about ways you could help me make that happen." Amanda's smile broadened. "Now get out."

He scrambled out and a woman joined Amanda from the adjoining room. "Where did you get that guy?"

"Probably the same place you got that half wit actress that you had pretending to be you when he pulled the trigger, Grace." Amanda turned. "Nicely done at that by the way."

"Genes don't lie. I know when you are slithering in my direction Mother." Grace picked up a bag and slung it over her shoulder. "Time to get my show on the road."
Chapter 103

Alex sat overlooking a deep valley with a long and lonely path meandering through it. She took a deep breath and smiled. A million miles from anything and she couldn't be happier about it. She lay back on the long flat rock and soaked up sunshine like a plant. Dog nestled his face against her shoulder and sighed contentedly before settling to his quiet snore. Several weeks on the trail had left her tanned and slightly filthy, but truly happy. She missed the wave sounds on her boat when it came time to sleep, but the sound of wind through trees was almost as good. She idly wondered how long she could stretch her vacation time.

Her smile faded as her sat phone chirped. "Oh for fucks sake," she griped as she fished it out of the cargo pocket of her shorts, trying not to move anymore than she had to in order to avoid disturbing her travelling companion and his dreams of milkbones and reconstituted beef stew. She put it to her ear. "What?" she barked quietly.

There was a long moment of silence in response to her tone. "Alex. Its Nikita."

"Of course it is. You and the headshrinker are the only ones with this number and the headshrinker waits for me to call." She frowned as Dog began stretching himself. He had been all peaceful and relaxed and she was not happy he was disturbed. This had better be good.

"Alex, your doctor in Kansas..."

It took a moment to connect the dots leading to a name. "Bella?" Her sleepover buddy. She felt fondness for the good hearted former death virus concocter.

"She says that she has been approached and not by a farmer with bunions."

"What about her local guy?"

"He went missing when he went to investigate the woman who approached her." Nikita paused. "She is freaking out. We need to get her relocated and we need to hook her up with a new local liaison, but she is not about to accept anyone on the word of a voice on a telephone." Nikita hesitated. "Should I try to call in Rachel?"

Alex slowly sat up. "Where is she? It'll take me a while to climb back down but..."

"Helicopter will be to your location in five minutes." The relief in the voice on the other end was palpable.

Alexandra snorted. "Tell the nerd his nads are mine."

"I'll buy the earring hooks. Call me when you are transferred to the charter flight to Kansas."

Alex and Dog stood atop the flat rock taking a last look at their peaceful hike through the mountains. Their vacation was over. "There better not be any more fucking tornadoes," she groused as she began scanning the area for the spot the chopper would put down.
Rachel laughed as Parker looked up from his sundae as they sat in the ice cream parlor a few miles from their new home. Caitlin got a napkin and started wiping the little munchkin's deposits of fudge and strawberry ice cream away. "We have something to talk over with you buddy," Caitlin began, a little nervously. She dipped the napkin in her glass of water and went back to wiping his nose.

"Mm kay," responded the lover of ice cream.

Rachel grinned and waved her wife on. "How would you feel about a little brother or sister?" Cait asked shooting Rachel a dirty look.

He shrugged. "Girls are weird, can I have a boy?" he asked almost absently.

Rachel snorted. She saw Caitlin's look. "What? Even I knew that was coming." She ruffled his hair. "It's not a shopping thing, Parker. We don't get to pick."

His face screwed up. "I get to be big brother?"

"Yes."

"I get to boss them around?"

"We were thinking you could teach the baby and protect the baby," Caitlin responded.

He shrugged again. "Mm kay." He picked his spoon back up and went back to his ice cream.

The cleaner stared at the happy little family through his scope. "So cute it could make you puke," he observed quietly from his perch across the street. He put down the scope and leaned on the edge of the roof on his elbows. "Now how to do this big enough to draw the rat from her hole?" he asked the air. His breath exploded out of him as a foot drove into his ribs.

Grabbing at the ankle, he pulled hard and threw his body on the leg attached. His other hand freed itself and went for his gun. He yelped as a small throwing blade appeared between the bones of his hand.

Grace kicked his face. She smiled as his head bounced off brick. She took out some zip ties and bound him up and then sliding down an adjacent wall pulled a can of root beer out of the pocket. Snapping the pop top, she settled down for a long cold drink. Sloshing the bit in the bottom around a moment reflectively, she leaned over and poured the dregs over his nostrils. The cleaner awoke coughing and sneezing the liquid he snorted in his semi conscious state.

"Remember me?" she asked with a smile. She knelt up briefly to drag his go bag over and sat back down to dig through. "Ah ha," she called triumphantly as she yanked out a bag of jerky and a bottle of water.

His eyes narrowed before rounding. "You. I shot you."

She barked out a laugh before nibbling at a piece of jerky. "Bland," she declared. "You made it yourself didn't you?" she accused.
"Amanda wanted you dead," he declared.

Grace smiled. "So either you fucked up by not killing me, or you fucked up by telling me who sent you. Wow, how the hell did you survive training?"

She sipped at the water. "You might have a chance to survive the week." She snorted. "Wouldn't count on it, sloppy as you are."

He looked around. His situation was not good. He had to buy time to get out of this. "How?"

Grace slid down so they were eye to eye. "We use the happy family to force Alexandra out of hiding, but my way, my time."

"Why?" he asked.

She hit the top of his head lightly with a flashlight she pulled from his bag. "You really are a dumb ass. When someone owns you, you don't ask questions. You just fucking do or die. Got it?"

He nodded.

Grace looked over the edge of the roof at the family. "We will get to them soon enough."
Chapter 104

Alex tossed her bag from the trunk of the rental car to the ground with a frown. Closing the trunk lid, she sat on it. Dog pawed the bumper between her feet. "Kansas fucking Kansas," she grumped. She got the cap off her water and drank it clearing road dust from her throat. She looked down at the dog on the ground by the car. "Last time we roll down the windows anywhere with that much dirt whether you want to hang your head out the window or not."

Dog suddenly half spun and began prancing. Another dog came running at them to stop suddenly two feet away and performed a play bow. The golden retriever and Dog then began circling each other sniffing. "Doggy handshake."

Alex laughed. She looked into the handful of battered trees that fringed the rest stop. "For goodness sake Bella, I'm here. You can come out now."

The older woman poked her head around a tree and looked around slowly. "No one else here?"

Alexandra smiled. "If there were Dog would be checking their pockets for treats already."

The former viral researcher came down toward the Division agent and the dancing dogs carrying a baseball bat. She smiled sheepishly at the raised brow raised at her. "I didn't know how to use it as death doctor, but I am very damned good as the second baseman of the local softball team."

Alex laughed and dropped off the trunk. She half danced to avoid getting knocked over by the playing dogs and walked to the doctor's side. "What's going on Bella?"

"I was seeing walk ins one afternoon. A woman came in. She was tall and had dark hair. She called me by my name...my real name and handed me a card. She... encouraged me to call the number and soon."

"Did she give you a name?"

The doctor shook her head. "No. She said she would send an associate to speak to me if she hadn't heard from me in few days."

Alex smiled. "Good."

"Good?"

"I'm in the mood to kick some ass."

The doctor shook slightly as she looked at the monitor. Her finger pressed the image provided by the new camera in the waiting room. "I don't know him," she said. She looked over at Alex who was dressed in scrubs and a bulky over knitted cardigan that concealed a few choice tools of the trade in the lumpy knitting.

Alexandra smiled and squeezed her friend's shoulder. "I am going to answer your job offer and then
we are going to get you hooked up with a new local and a new home."

Bella looked up with a touch of panic. "No snow."

Alex snorted. "You live in tornado central and you are freaking over snow?" She shook her head. "I'll suggest rural Florida or something."

The Russian doctor smiled. "I like Mickey Mouse."

"Fantastic." Alex deadpanned. "You stay. I'll take care of this guy and come get you."

Bella put the bat on the desk with a grim look. Alexandra's brow rose. "Just don't hit me," she warned the doctor before leaving the room.

Alex pasted a smile on her face and picked up a folder before walking into the waiting room. She looked at the name on the folder. "Mr... Rasmussen?" she asked with a welcoming look before tucking the folder against her chest. "I am taking you back now."

The six foot tall man unfolded from his chair into the shape of a glowering fullback. "Where's the doctor?" he asked.

Alex held a hand pointing toward an examination room. "I have to take your temperature and then the doctor will see you."

"Fine," he groused.

He grimaced as he lifted himself on the padded examination bed. The paper crinkled under his ass. "Let's get this done," he commanded. She leaned down to pull at the little shelf for his feet and rose inches from him.

"Righty oh," she chirped as she pulled a blood pressure cuff off the wall. "Be a good boy and I will give you a sticker," she said winking.

He aimed a disdainful look at the younger woman. Rasmussen shook his head and ignored her as she pumped the pressure up. His eyes flicked back. "Isn't that a little tight?"

She simply smiled. "What brings you here?"

"None of your business. Release the cuff its too tight," he growled.

Alex pulled off the cuff. "Are you always such a baby?"

"Bitch," he barked as she turned away. When she turned back, she pulled a gun and pointed it at him.

"Don't you want a sticker?" she asked sweetly.

His face tensed and his fingers twitched. "You don't know what you are getting into bitch."

"Into trouble," she quipped. "Same shit different day."

He roared and tried to rush her. She cracked him with the butt of the gun. His hand chopped at the fist holding it. She lost the gun but hit him with a blast of pepper spray from her pocket. Rasmussen yelped and clawed at his eyes. Picking up a jar of tongue depressors, Alex cracked him again dropping him.
Rasmussen lay dazed. She put a sticker on his forehead. "Good boy," she chirped before grabbing the zip ties from under the sink. "Time to talk."

After finding the trail the opposing team used to find Bella, Alexandra crossed her arms and looked down at the fullback tied to a very uncomfortable chair. "I interrupted a perfectly nice vacation for your bullshit. You guys want viruses, sneeze in a petri. The doctor doesn't do that anymore." Alex laid him out cold and went looking for Bella. She barely managed to dodge the baseball bat.

"What took so long?" Bella complained.

"Wanted to make sure I knew how they found you so they wouldn't be able to again."

Bella frowned. "And?"

Alex rubbed her sore knuckles. "I'm thinking that you should consider the burgeoning field of medical coding and billing if you insist on medical jobs."

Bella groaned. "Is that the best I can do? I like being a doctor."

"How about I guarantee occasional under the table work."

Bella nodded slowly. "Let's get me certified in paperwork."
Rachel laughed and caught the car keys as they were flung to her over the low top of the bright green car. Parker frowned as his mother opened the car door to put him in the car seat. "If we get a baby, we should get a dog," he reasoned as he was strapped in. He opened his shopping bag and pulled out a pair of sunglasses that he had picked out in the store.

The two women looked at one another. "Oh?" asked Caitlin. "And how do you figure that?" she asked with a grin.

"Dog was smart and he would protect and play and the baby would love him. Would Auntie Alex let us have Dog?"

Rachel's knuckles whitened slightly on the wheel as she backed the car out of the parking space at the local big box store where they stopped to get his sunglasses and sunscreen for their afternoon expedition. "I don't think so Parker. Auntie Alex is very attached to Dog. He is her son."

Parker smiled. "Auntie Alex can live in the guest room then Dog would be there all the time and Auntie Alex wouldn't be sad cause she would have him with us." He was very pleased with his solution.

Caitlin snorted. "That would be fun on so many levels. Tell you what buddy, Mama Rachel and I will talk about the dog thing later."

"Grown up talk time?" asked Parker frowning behind his cartoon festooned sunglasses.

"Yes," his mom confirmed.

"I don't get to talk in grown up talk time."

Rachel laughed. "Required that you have a license to join in." She peered through the windscreen. "Almost home," she announced.

Caitlin nodded. "I'll run in and get the bag."

"What bag?" Parker asked looking out the window at the passing houses.

Rachel turned at the corner. "Mom forgot to load the cooler bag with our picnic lunch before we left. We need it for the zoo part of our day."

"Zoo!" Parker called out. "I want a lion." He roared.

Caitlin leaned into Rachel. "We might be better off with Alex and Dog in the house."

Rachel laughed. "Don't count on it." Her smile grew at the raised brow. "Now go get the lunch woman, we've got a lion to adopt."

Her wife ducked out of the car and trotted back toward the house. She opened the door and entered, tapping her forehead. "Now where did I leave it?" She smiled. "Kitchen," she muttered.

She came to a sudden stop as she entered the kitchen. A woman sat on the counter beside the cooler bag with a gun casually placed beside her. Her head came up as Caitlin entered. She smiled. "Hello
Caitlin. Long time no see."

"Grace," she whispered in response. "You... died."

Grace's smile widened. "Good. You are current with the news. I was hoping to avoid the long exposition bullcrap."

The homeowner slowly moved to the right. She had stopped carrying a gun, but there was a few in the house. "What's going on?"

Grace hopped down with her weapon in hand and pulled out one chair, kicking out another. "Quick and dirty so you can go on with family fun day." She sat down and put her gun filled hand on the table top. "Sit already. We have a bit to go over."

Caitlin perched in the chair like a bird about to fly. "What?" She was still trying to deal with the shock of Grace alive. She had seen the mess that had been made of Grace's head. Hadn't she? It had been one of the reasons they moved. She swallowed hard.

Grace shrugged lightly and tried to look friendly even with a hand cannon. "Amanda wants Alexandra rather badly. Alexandra has been... uncooperative." She grinned. "As usual. I told her to leave it to me to draw her out, but she is bull headed."

"I don't understand."

Grace glanced toward the front of the house. "I was the kid of an assassin. It's shit. You guys retiring for Parker? I am impressed and glad to see he'll get a better deal than I did. Amanda tried a quick and dirty to get Alexandra out in the clear, but she assigned an idiot named Rasmussen for the follow through. Alexandra gave him hell for the underestimation and now Amanda wants to use your family."

Caitlin's jaw tightened and her brow knit. "I'll kill her," she ground out.

"No you won't," Grace responded calmly and quietly. "I am telling you what I am telling you in order to get you clear. Right now there is a sniper scope trained on your adorable little boy." She shoved Caitlin back down as she tried to rise from the kitchen chair. "He will not fire unless he gets an order to do so. He is a pretty decent shot. He killed my body double. He will not miss, but he's a dumb ass and controllable."

"Who's controlling him?" Caitlin asked her eyes narrowed.

"Me unless Amanda works out my game."

She absorbed that a moment before looking back up at Grace. "What happens now?"

Grace smiled. "You and your family play as usual. If I need a little something I will tell you. I intend to see that boy stays out of the game however."

"You're going to kill Alex for Amanda?" Caitlin asked quietly.

Grace nodded. "Just the way Amanda had me killed." She smiled and winked referring to the unsuccessful shooting. "I just want all of us out of the game."

"Parker..." Caitlin whispered.

"He is in good hands. The sniper will be dead as soon as I can arrange it. Trust me?"
Caitlin cringed.  
"Good," Grace replied. "I am not trustworthy. I am just the best of the options. Take your family. Don't say a word to anyone. Watch for a call from Jane Eyre. I will let you know what to do." She lifted her head. "Here comes Rachel. Don't tell her. She is the most likely source of fuck ups here. She is also handy for selling this if we can keep her believable." Grace stood. "Have fun at the zoo."
Chapter 106

Coming down from the airplane after it had finished its taxi over towards its home hanger, Alex spotted a relaxed looking Nikita leaning casually against the side of her car. Dog, after the pilot freed him from his travelling crate where he had been imprisoned for landing, came bouncing down the steps to run to Nikita and throw himself against her legs. Nikita knelt to scratch his ears with a smile. "Hey there buddy. How was it?"

The younger woman smiled as she came down the remaining steps and hit the tarmac, adjusting her bag on her shoulder. "If I tackled you would I get my ears scratched too?" Alex asked in a fake plaintive voice. She moved around toward the open trunk and dumped her backpack into it.

"Tackle me right and you might even get a belly rub." Nikita smiled as she stood up and held open her arms for a hug with her much-missed friend. "How are you Alex?"

The Russian smiled as she held Nikita tight, enjoying the hug very much. She needed a good hug from time to time and Nikita was expert at it. "Doing well. Having a little trouble deciding if it was the vacation or the ass kicking that left me so refreshed."

They looked at one another as they drew back and chorused, "Ass kicking."

Nikita blew out a breath. "Amanda is upping her offer for you."

Alex shrugged as she leaned on the car beside her friend. "She can offer Fort Knox and a box of Lucky Charms. No one is going to collect. If I go, it'll be under my own power."

"And with a large caliber handgun, no doubt." Nikita opened the car door and hit the unlock so Alex could get in the other side.

The brunette smiled and moved around to slide into the other seat. She put on her seatbelt as Nikita started the engine. "Stake and garlic but same idea."

"I want you to stay under for a few weeks," Nikita told her. She didn't look over as she knew how unhappy Alex would be about her request. The younger woman did not hide in her room with any kind of grace or joy.

She frowned in return. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"We are putting out some feelers and we need to keep you out of sight."

"I don't need protection." On this point, Alex felt very strongly.

Nikita aimed a serious expression at her. "Deal with it. I won't lose my friend again. Just keep your head down until we know who the big players are and then I will personally drive you to the first one's house for tea, biscuits and ass kicking." She chanced a look over. "Besides Nerd is working on having you declared alive."

Alex mumbled darkly. "You better and why would I want to be declared alive?"

Nikita looked over amused. "Last I checked, most people like being rich."
**Amanda** walked into the room that Percy had rented for this single meeting. She looked over the small group of men and women assembled with a slight disdain. Percy half hid his smile at her feelings as he adjusted the hotel podium. As she joined him, he remarked, "Our agents are tied up. You will simply have to make do with the independents I brought in." He did not hide his amusement very well.

"You are enjoying this," Amanda remarked casually. She looked around the room. She recognized some of the faces. Not the highest of caliber, but not all street thugs either. He obviously was not fully backing her nearly obsessive hunt for the Russian, but he was not backing away either.

He took a long slow breath before answering. "It's not often I see you this uncontrolled. It's... illuminating." Percy was determined to ensure that she not get this uncontrolled again, however he had to do it.

Her eyes narrowed. "You and I will be having a conversation when this is over."

He handed her the mouse for the laptop tied to the projector. "Yes. You probably won't enjoy it much Amanda. Do make sure you clean up these loose ends when you are done with them." He walked toward the door without a single glance back.

Her eyes followed him from the room. She signaled a man standing next to the light switch and turned on her presentation. "This is the target. She is to be brought in alive."

**Rachel** cornered Caitlin in the kitchen after a long afternoon in the zoo. Her wife had been uncommunicative and not nearly as happy as she had been before they got there. Even Parker seemed puzzled at his mom's quietness as they moved from animal to animal. "Cait. What the hell is going on?"

Caitlin looked up from the tub of ice cream she had dug out of the back of the freezer. "What?"

Rachel opened a drawer and drew out a spoon of her own. "Rocky Road is your crisis ice cream." She took a spoonful and ate it. "I didn't even know we still had some in there."

"It's not crisis ice cream."

Rachel gave her a withering look. "It is crisis ice cream so talk or I will make your life hell."

Her wife took her time sweeping her spoon around the edge of the tub and bringing it to her mouth. "Uh..." she trailed off.

"We're trying honesty these days Cait. What's going on?"

Caitlin tossed her spoon into the sink and then leaned forward against the kitchen island. "There's trouble and I am not supposed to tell you about it."

"Why?"
Caitlin's head hit the counter and stayed there for a long moment. "How's your acting?"

Rachel looked puzzled. "My acting." She shrugged. "I was with Division. Every day was about either a role or a gun."

Caitlin sighed. "I'll tell you but when the time comes, you have to sell grief and whatever other emotions we need."

Her eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about Cait?"

"Let's start with Grace is alive and move on to Alex is in trouble."
Chapter 107

Grace frowned as she looked at the pictures of hired guns that slid out of the envelope. Her fingers spread them out on the table as she leaned in to look at them. "Fucking Amanda," she whispered under her breath. She looked across the room at the man disassembling a sniper rifle into a specially made backpack. "Got a delivery from Percy for you boyo." She gestured at the table top.

The cleaner looked up. "What kind of delivery?"

"Pictures of rivals for our prize. You need to make sure these fuckers don't mess with the family. Best if they don't get close enough for them to catch sight." She held up a few pictures. "We don't need them spooked or in a crossfire."

The cleaner sighed and shook his head. "Why don't we just go grab the family and interrogate them like normal people. Why are we just sitting around like this?"

"Because asshole, the endgame happens to be catch Udinov. She was trained by both Nikita and Amanda. When she is not being sedated or whatever Amanda was doing, she is paranoid and with razor sharp reflexes. If she sniffs trouble, we will be shit out of luck. Either she won't show up or if she does, it will be to put a bullet in your skull. That family in there is the lure but if they throw out a scent of fear, Udinov will smell it. You will be lucky if she just kills you then. Amanda would do a thousand times worse if you screw this up."

The cleaner looked at her angrily and then stood shouldering his bag. "I'm a fucking babysitter then." He moved toward the table with a hard gait. He was not happy with any part of this from working for Grace to being a babysitter.

Grace's anger at dealing with this lack wit boiled over. She smashed her hand down on the pictures. "You are a babysitter with shoot to kill orders. Don't let any of these fuckers get close or get away." She grabbed the bag and put it on a nearby shelf and kicked a chair toward him. "Sit down and study these pictures."

He looked like he would hit her for a moment before nodding slowly. "I'll keep the chicken hawks clear." The cleaner sat down and began sorting through the pictures that Percy sent.

Grace was more than a little worried that Percy was undermining Amanda by handing the pictures to her. That meant he knew that Grace was not operating as Amanda's girl. She hated to think what might end up happening to Amanda, but only for a moment. Amanda deserved worse. If Percy was going to cut her out or if he was going to bury her, Amanda deserved worse.

She went to her jacket and pulled out a key ring. "I've got a street truck with a lift and some coveralls. I'll install cameras around the neighborhood. I have rented a house nearby for us to set up as a base. Get going as soon as you deal with the clean up here." Drawing on the jacket, she left not even looking back at the damage done when the cleaner emptied this property of bums and wild animals. The rental was closer. This former hospital's clock tower was great for a long distance shot in a small town, but they needed to be closer to where the monsters would be crawling around.

Once the family had been ringed with cameras, she would face down the scariest monster of all, the woman she loved. She hoped Alexandra would be more forgiving than in her nightmares. "This will be fun," Grace announced dryly.
Alex paced around the office. Michael sat on the edge of the desk and watched her huff out a breath as she would reach corners. He grinned. "There are better ways you could be using your time," he noted.

She stopped and turned. "I hate being stuck." She felt ready to dig herself out of Division if she had to. This was ridiculous.

He shook his head. "Be patient Alex. Amanda will come or send someone and then we will be all blown up and you can waltz away." He smiled winningly before sipping at his mug calmly.

She growled at his facetious tone. "Quit being an ass, Michael." She turned and then turned back. "They found Bella. How long until they find Rachel and Caitlin?" she shouted waving her arms.

He sighed. "Birkhoff is monitoring the chatter for that and I am sending a team to check things out." Michael put down his drink. "Just calm down."

"Who?" she asked in a deadly tone with narrowed eyes.

Michael shrugged. "They're from after your time Alex." he inwardly cringed as he realized his mistake a moment before she blew her top.

"Kids? You're sending kids?" she shouted. She knew that Michael and Nikita were not Percy and Amanda. They didn't recruit dumb kids and they were careful about clearing new people for field work but still...

Nikita came in the office, Dog on her heels and shot her husband a look. "What did I tell you about telling her who you sent?" She tossed a folder and the leash onto the coffee table and strode over to the agitated young Russian.

He shot a look at the door. "I thought this room was sound proofed." He frowned and went across the room to flip open the file on the coffee table.

Nikita snorted. "Not quite proofed. Apparently the shouting gets through because it sent both Ryan and the Nerd scurrying the other way."

"It's Caitlin and Rachel and the kid and you sent babies?" Alex was still agitated and walking around waving her arms. Nikita went over and took hold of the Russian hugging her tight and rubbing her back as Dog circled their feet before standing against Alex's leg.

"I sent the best of the new crew. The bad guys and our little family... they won't even know that they are there."
Jonah jumped his skateboard over the stairs from the park down to the sidewalk level. He flipped his sandy colored Justin Beiber hair back. At twenty three, albeit a very young looking twenty three, he hated the hair, but it had served its purpose. He was dismissed out of hand in nearly every surrounding. He was just another borderline skate rat wandering the neighborhoods looking for things to jump and people he could talk into buying beer. He gave a grin to the fuzzy haired young woman with him. "Okay. I got the steps without braining myself, which means its your turn." Tipping the board up he grabbed it.

Janey tucked her hair back behind her ear and reached into the deep pockets of her military style jacket as if looking for something. Jonah would have bet cash that she was making sure her gun was easy to pull. She liked her gun... a lot. "I've got a five that says you can't do it again." She moved closer to him and whispered, "Mom mobile driven by man with a flat top and heavy duty facial scar." This wasn't one of those towns where everyone knew everyone but you could definitely spot people who didn't quite belong.

Jonah laughed and spun slowly in the direction of the street. He pointed to the left as his eyes flicked to the driver to confirm her assessment. "We'll head to the ones at the top of the hill. More impressive. Can't wait to see you match me on it." He offered his hand. His fellow agent took it and they swung the linked fingers as they headed toward the other end of the street. He stopped suddenly and patted himself. He took out a battered pack of cigs and parked one on his lip and held up a finger stilling her on the sidewalk. Jonah jogged over to the parked minivan with the stick figure family on the back. "Hey man. Got a light?" he asked Flat Top hopefully, knocking lightly on the door frame.

His dark heavy eyes landed on the skateboarder. "Buzz off kid," Flat Top growled. He leaned his head back and turned his eyes back out the windshield. He was looking for something. That much was obvious. Jonah's eyes caught a brief glimpse of iron on the man's waistband.

Jonah leaned back slightly with a foolish grin. "Okay man. I'll leave you to case the neighborhood." He winked and pulled the cig off his lip as he stepped back.

Flat Top's hand shot out and grabbed his collar. "What was that?" he ground out.

Jonah affected fear and wiggled back as his hand snaked in after his gun which was hidden beneath his own jacket. Both he and Flat Top stilled immediately and looked over at a very non-descript man in a nice suit sliding into the passenger seat. "Kid," the new guy said gently, "Forget you ever saw this mook." He waved Jonah off and smiled at Flat Top.

Flat Top growled and began reaching toward his armpit with the other hand, but stopped before getting there. His hand drew off Jonah's collar and away from his holster. The Suit smiled winningly at Jonah. "Go," he said. There was an almost inaudible click and Flat Top's hands slowly moved to the wheel of the van.

Jonah started walking away, his body tight. He tightened further at the fwip sound followed by a quiet sound of pain behind him. He refused to look back as he moved back to Janey. "Get Nikita on the line," he said tightly. "This place just became shark central."

Janey nodded. "Let's pull back, get a little closer to the house." She took the skateboard and handed him the phone before leading away into an alley.
Grace shimmied through the air ducts, smiling when she got to a new sensor. She tapped her wrist computer into it. Unleashing a program, she waited, humming a show tune and checking her nails. "Damn. A chip," she said quietly. A minute later she saw a grill lift clear and a gun come up followed swiftly by a head wearing night vision for the darkness in the ducts. She raised her hands. "About time. You guys are so slow." She shimmied forward. "Take me to your leader."

Alex came running toward the interrogation area. Nikita stopped her with a hand to her chest. "You said there was a breach I needed to deal with?" she asked tightly. "What's going on, Nikita?"

"Put the gun away," she gently suggested. On seeing the Russian do that, Nikita nodded and stepped out of the way. Alex moved to the window to see a familiar face on the woman strapped to the chair. She gasped. "She's dead," Alex proclaimed. Grace looked very comfortable and alive in the bonds.

Nikita shrugged and stood shoulder to shoulder with her best friend. "Apparently she's another savant when it comes to baffling. She is not saying much, but I get the feeling it's because she hasn't found her audience yet."

Alex opened the door and walked in. She stood in front of Grace who smiled from where she was cuffed in the chair. The young Russian struggled for words for a minute before settling on a slap.

Grace tsk'd. "You always preferred actions to words. Good to see you again Alexandra." She smiled winningly and tilted her head back slightly to catch Michael's eye in the corner. "Be a love and get me something to drink. Your air ducts are dusty as hell. I could have sworn that there was a system in place for that." Michael nodded and moved out of the room.

"How are you alive?" Alex responded tears in her eyes. She began pacing in agitation. This wasn't possible. Grace was dead.

Grace shrugged. "Sixth sense for Amanda's bullshit. We need to talk lover." She smiled.

"Ya think?" Alex asked fiercely.

"Amanda is losing not just control, she is losing Percy. The shit is about to fly and it might be healthiest for everyone if we just take care of business."

"What business?"

"Killing you of course," Grace said with an air of mischief.
Chapter 109

Alexandra snarled as she got to the corner of the interrogation room. She was getting deeply agitated now. It felt like days since she started pacing and it was starting to piss her off. Grace smiled slightly as she watched her from the chair. "So... I am not the only prisoner here then?" Grace asked lightly. She couldn't help needling lightly. She loved this woman, but watching her angry was like holding a balloon. Way too much desire to find a pin.

The young Russian looked at her with narrowed eyes. "Fuck you."

Grace's smile spread. "You are also brilliantly articulate when pissed. Something else to treasure."

She couldn't help needling lightly. She loved this woman, but watching her angry was like holding a balloon. Way too much desire to find a pin.

She tilted her head. "Scratch my nose? The wrist bindings are fun, but makes my nose itch because I can't reach."

Alex growled. "Kiss my ass."

"I would but I am a little tied up," Grace chirped. She looked toward the mirror as Alex stalked behind her. "We don't have time for this. Amanda is being put in a corner and as much as she likes mind games, if she loses her cool over all this she will lose all grasp on subtle."

Alexandra stopped dead at this and stared at the other woman in the mirror for several moments. She moved around to the front where she could see Grace's face. "What's going on?" Her eyes narrowed as she stared at the other woman.

Grace bit her lip a moment. "Percy is turning on Amanda. She is going over the edge on the whole bring Alexandra in alive thing. He gave her rope in the form of freelancers."

"I converted one of her other toys into a hunter seeker for the scum she has converging on the best Alex bait on the planet. I am hoping she doesn't work out what I've done."

"Alex bait? Rachel and Caitlin?" The brunette ran her fingers through her hair. "And how does killing me help?" she asked confused.

Nikita came in at this point, scowling. Dog wandered in on her heels and leaped into Grace's lap. Grace yelped. "What have you been feeding him?" she asked as he turned contentedly in her lap before putting paws on her shoulders to hold her for kissing.

Alex's lips quirked briefly before settling back into a dark expression. "Now...about killing me."

Grace wrested her face away from Dog's tongue. "Amanda wants you alive. We kill you convincingly enough she... ew" Grace bucked lightly under the licking onslaught.

Nikita chuckled at Dog's obvious affection for the bound woman. "We convince Amanda that Alexandra Udinov is unavailable, then she is out of luck permanently with Percy. She comes out and we nab her?"

"Those are the basics." Grace ducked her face. "Untie me already ladies," she yowled as she dodged the tongue.

Nikita looked over at Alex before moving forward. She swiftly unbound the woman who grabbed Dog and lay him on his back so she could scratch his tummy. Grace frowned. "Whether Amanda
works out what I did to her junior cleaner or not, she is going to know someone is fucking with her pack of freelancers."

Nikita stepped toward Grace and snapped her fingers. The wiggling dog slid off Grace's lap and sat on Alex's feet. "Good boy," she said quietly before her eyes flashed back.

Alexandra looked at Nikita amazed. "When did you do that?" She looked down at Dog who looked up at her lovingly.

"Spare time. He's easier to train than his mama." Nikita watched Grace rub her wrists. "I had a couple agents in the area with Rachel and Caitlin. They reported an influx of people who don't fit the demographics in the area, and they reported someone laying waste to them. A quiet man, they said."

Grace cringed at his being spotted. "That would be the pet cleaner. I told him if he wants Amanda's eternal gratitude, he needs to keep Rachel and Caitlin from being scared. Told him you wouldn't pop your head up long enough for capture if there was even a hint of anything paranoia inducing." Grace stood and walked to Alex. "We have to spoil Amanda's day and to do it, we need to take advantage of the crowd of hired guns. We make Amanda think you are dead 'cause one of them lost their cool."

Alexandra let out a long slow breath. "And Rachel and Caitlin?"

She shrugged as she stretched cramped muscles. "They sell the lie well enough, Amanda will be out with Percy and either pulling out completely or blowing a gasket."

"She'll have something else lined up," Nikita responded.

Grace shook her head. "She is too on edge. Alexandra did you do something to set her off? She is getting too tightly focused on you."

Alex shrugged. "I slept with her. It was a thing."

Grace rubbed her temple and looked over at Nikita. "You knew?"

Nikita nodded. "I thought she would shoot her. Just goes to show... can't predict Alex."

"No you can't." Grace looked over. "I'll need to get back. I have to stay on the cleaner to keep him and Amanda apart. You need to come with."

Alex leaned down and patted Dog before beginning to pace again. "What will happen?"

Grace took a shaky breath. "Crossfire. We set up a huge crossfire and you die graphically and dramatically."

"And how do we protect Rachel and Caitlin?" Alex's fingers curled up. "I am assuming I have to pop up at ground zero where all the vultures are circling?" She began pacing again.

Grace shook her head. "We can't give them a head's up. We need this to look spontaneous and real."

"No!" Alex frowned. "There is a little boy involved. They are starting a fresh life."

"We all want a happy ever after here Alexandra. I am trying to get us here." Grace raised her arms. "Please Alexandra. We are only doing what we have to here."

Alex frowned. "No hugs for you. Not while they are in danger."

Grace grinned. "Then I will just have to save everyone."
"Guess you will," Alex responded grimly.

Nikita sighed. "Let's go plan the big death scene."
Chapter 110

Alex frowned as she looked down over the town from the clock tower. "So this was your clubhouse?" she asked sensing Grace over her shoulder. She cared deeply about the woman standing beside her, but just wasn't sure about letting her back in after everything that happened. She vacillated between wanting to kiss Grace again and wanting to slap her again.

Grace grinned and slapped Alex's shoulder lightly. "When Amanda's freebooters started swinging through town, we set up a clubhouse a little closer to the girls. I wanted them safe and it seemed better to park my fox next to the hen house." She unrolled a map nearby and began marking position of freebooters that the cleaner hadn't gotten to yet. There weren't many. She told the cleaner not to pick off all of them, to leave some in an outer ring so that they could be drawn in when the time was right. They needed a nice big firefight.

Janey walked in with Nikita, her holey army jacket flapping loosely around her. She dumped a duffle on the table in the middle of the large space before wandering to another table in the corner to peel a bottle of water from the table there. "Jonah's got the rest of the gear," she announced as she walked over to the opening just under the clock face. "Cool. I like the bones of this look out." She leaned out briefly to look upward before pulling the access door closed again. She took a deep drink of water and followed it with a yawn.

Alexandra stared at her for a long moment. "How the fuck old are you?" She couldn't imagine that this kid could be old enough to fit in the new Division's program.

Janey snorted. "Old enough to kick your ass Miss Thang." She turned and shot the half empty water bottle into the corner wastebasket. "Score," she declared happily.

Nikita chuckled and started pulling boxes of ammo from the bag and spread them over the table. "Janey and Jonah are both gifted. They couldn't infiltrate some of the parties we infiltrated when we were doing that sort of thing regularly, but they can work themselves into ordinary scenery very very well." She nodded back at Janey's smile. "They have a future in this business if they want it." She drew out some extra magazines from the bag and started putting them next to various boxes of ammo.

Alex looked her protege up and down. "Kid," she dismissed, her arms crossing over her chest.

Janey threw her jacket at the Russian. "Asshat. Seriously Nikita, I gotta work with this ass?"

Nikita smiled. "Match made in heaven. It's like you never went on hiatus Alex." She started feeding some bullets into one of the magazines as she settled into a folding chair.

"And fuck you too," Alex responded dryly. She walked over and pulled the tops off the ammo boxes. "So we have blanks and we have... whatever the fuck these things are." She held up a bullet that looked like nine claws sitting on the casing. "What the fuck are these things?"

"RIP. Radically Invasive rounds," Jonah declared as he put several rifle cases on the table. "Deadliest bullet you never want to meet. The claws actually separate on contact causing nine bullet tracks for one bang. Really cool. Lots of penetration at target, but doesn't ricochet much or hit the next guy. Good bullets. Only kill what you hit and boy you really kill him."

Grace rubbed her temple. "This kid wasn't trained in the old regime right?" She leaned against the
wall and crossed her arms as she watched the players. She still had doubts when Nikita announced that they would use the team already on the ground to help sell the firefight and these kids weren't convincing her.

Nikita smiled. "New regime. Deadly as the old one, but with a greater sense of responsibility and honor." She shrugged. "That's what we're going for."

Jonah belched and flipped his hair back. "I recycled last week." He turned. "Gonna bring up the vests and the blood packs. Be right back." He started down the long winding stairs to the van parked in the shadow of their hideout.

Janey rolled her eyes. "He recycles beers like a champion alcoholic. So what's the plan?" She parked herself on the top of a folding chair, her feet on the seat and picked at her bike gloves. "Blood packs say we don't kill everyone. Who are we shooting and who are we blowing away?"

Nikita pulled out a rifle. "Kill black hats except the black hat working for Grace until he stops working for Grace. Pretend to kill Alex. Try to keep everyone else alive and well." She began examining the rifle before adding a scope to the top. "We'll work out specifics in a minute when everyone is together."

Janey picked up a pair of guns from the table top and held them at arm's length like a movie villain going in for the mass murder scene. "Need to get some skateboard tape on one of these bad boys. Would hate to shoot Alex with the wrong gun." she said in a teasing voice.

Alexandra looked over at her oldest friend. "Somebody else is going to shoot me right?" She so didn't want to trust her life to the slightly insane acting skater pixie sitting on the chair playing with fire arms.

Nikita smiled. "Well damn. Guess I need to re-do the whole plan." She put ammo on the corner of her printed out layout. She chewed her lip as she pored over it.

Grace blew out a breath. "Glad the professionals are in charge. Wonder if it's too late to side with Amanda." She grinned and held up her hands as both Alex and Nikita glared at her from their respective corners. "Kidding. Get Justin Bieber up here and let's plan the party so I can go hook the cleaner up with his part."
Amanda was feeling nothing but chill coming from the office down the hall. She had very strong self-preservation instincts and they were telling her to saddle up. She smiled gently as she opened a drawer on her desk pulling out a firearm and a burner phone. She tended more toward subtle responses to bad issues, but she had to survive. The gun would make her another pair of boots on the ground. If Alexandra was anywhere near her former paramour, she would give up rather than watch that sweet little family die.

If things went south, that was the burner phone's place. She would put a call in to an old friend with a hot job prospect. Perhaps friend was strong enough for them to make a real run of a partnership. Amanda was not big on friends. She liked powerful people more. Percy had a retirement package picked out for Amanda, but Amanda knew a few things about ducking out on those kinds of parties.

Amanda smiled and picked up her keys. She had a long flight ahead of her. She didn't want to miss the party.

Alex eased along the side of the house. She lowered herself behind the bush bordering the front porch. Looking over, she watched Grace drop down beside her and open a link to her pet cleaner. "Status?" Amanda's daughter asked. She leaned her head back as she listened to him list out his progress on the kill list. She nodded to Alexandra.

The Russian was careful not to move herself into the cleaner's line of sight as she cast her eyepiece around the house where Rachel and Caitlin lived. While they worked hard to keep things normal appearing, the youngest member of the household had been removed from the firing zone on a "camping trip" with several other young boys in the area.

Nikita nodded from her spot in a tree as she saw the scope moved in her direction. She eased her way along a thick limb until she could make contact with the edge of the roof toward the back. Padding lightly along the back edge of the roof, she began scoping the back area of the property. There was a phone truck in the alley. She frowned and crawled to a convenient window and slid in. Dropping her pack, she began laying out arms and ammunition. The rope was drawing in. Soon it would be a noose and this was her neck. Her part was to get the black hats who tried to come from the back side where the cleaner couldn't reach.

Janey and Jonah came boarding down the street. They laughed and tricked up and down on the sidewalk. Jonah flipped up his board and poked Janey as she went by. "What the hell?" she responded popping her own board up and turning toward him angrily.

"Chill girl."

"Girl? Did you just call me girl? Fuck you." Janey pulled out a crumpled pack of cigarettes and parked one on her lip before sinking to the curb. "Get the fuck away." She held up her hand as he tried to respond.

"Fine. Fuck you too." He dropped his board and rolled away, his shoulders tight in anger.
Grace listened carefully. "Don't fire... We do not know who she is and Amanda will shit bricks if we take out people we aren't paid for." She smiled and nodded at Alexandra who was watching her. "Get the photos then smart ass. No. Do it now and confirm." She heard the sounds of the cleaner leaving his post to get the envelope of black hat pictures and whirled her finger at Alex who turned and whirled hers at Janey.

Janey rolled under a nearby car and began unloading weapons and ammunition. She would take out people who got too close to the front while Jonah was mussing his Bieber hairdo working his way into bushes on the side of the property half hidden from the cleaner's view by the neighbor's wilderness gardening style. She pulled out a device that looked like an old transistor radio and started sweeping. "Got a couple of pings," she reported.

"We need to bring everyone a-running. Time to get the party started." Alex pulled out a a small remote. "So glad there's only a handful of cop cars in this town." She pressed the button. "Cop cars disabled," she reported quietly.

Nikita smiled. "Let's set everyone's radio off. How many calls do you think they'll get for shots fired before someone realizes that none of the cars run?"

"Let's make it lots of calls," Alex responded. She pulled out her phone and texted 'Down' to Rachel and Caitlin, urging them into the basement of their new home. They both had weapons and knew how to use them, but this was about making sure Parker would have a family when the day was done. Alexandra looked down and ran her fingers slowly over the various blood packs to make sure they were seated properly to blow when needed without popping a hole in her. She looked over at Grace.

Grace smiled and grabbed the front of Alexandra's vest. Their lips joined for a long moment before they both pulled back. Grace winked. "For luck, sexy."

"Who needs luck when we got firepower and super sneakiness on our side," Alex responded with a grin. She pulled out her weapon. "Start the fun and I will go out and whip the troops into a frenzy when its time."

Grace opened her comm to the cleaner. "We need eyes on those sons of bitches and we can't wait anymore." She nodded. "I put eyes on her at a gas station. She's in the area. We need to draw her out... Fire on the house, but no hitting anything important. We need to turn over rocks, not bury the bait." She smiled at the cleaner's response.

Alex smiled tightly as Grace nodded. "You got him when the shit storm hits?"

"The bastard won't know what hit him."

A shot rang out from over their heads.
Bullets carefully fired into window sills where they would be buried by wood rather than flesh. Alex drew her eye from the eyepiece she used to spot the pet cleaner's shots. "He's not bad," she murmured. She was not fooled for even a second into believing that he was on their side. The pet cleaner was still one of the bad guys, specifically Amanda's pet rather than their's. His interests were just served by the same things as their's for the moment. He was a danger that Grace would need to take out in the end. Alexandra looked up the side of the building to see his muzzle flash again.

The Russian woman looked at the skater pixie hiding under the car. She was continuing her scans for people moving toward them, watching for police scanners with her little toy and feet with her eyes. She pointed out past the house with a half circle. More feet, coming on like ops or police. The police cars were down with blown distributor caps and the station was at the other end of town, so most likely it was Amanda's freebooters trying to keep their target from being shot by competitors also run by Amanda. Alexandra shook her head at the lack of coordination.

Amanda wanted Alexandra alive and in a very bad way. It would be unfortunate all the way around if someone came in with a dead Alex slung over their shoulder. Alex was not particularly interested in capture or death, so she was ready to play dead when the time came. She just wanted lots of killers in the area to witness. The brunette nodded to the other Division operative in the side yard. "Go Justin Bieber," she whispered to the comm with a grin knowing how he would respond to her pet name for him.

"I'm not fucking Bieber," he growled into the comm before he sent a set of sandbags out of a heavy rifle at the newcomers. They weren't going to kill off their witnesses, but they were going to be held well back. There was a heavy pair of thuds as the bags hit and the man fell. "I am a fucking sandbagging machine." He drew his gun and laid it beside him. The freebooters would not be as nice. They would come after him, using real bullets. He would switch weapons when they did. His job was just to slow them down, but his imperative was to also come out alive. "I need a fucking haircut," he muttered darkly.

Nikita spotted another car coming. "SUVs and light late models. Get creative already people." It flew up the back alley toward the phone truck blocking one side of narrow passage. She needed them on the side of the house where it would do good so she let her machine gun rip. It tore the back bushes apart and some of the fire tore into the front fender of the vehicle causing the man inside to close the door he was opening. The car quickly reversed and headed back out toward the street leaving black rubber behind it. The freebooter would no doubt come around the other side. None of these guys wanted heavy fire. They wanted to stop the guns that could kill their meal ticket while remaining alive.

"Do you need us?" came through the comm from the basement of the target house. It was Caitlin concerned by the sheer firepower they were hearing over their heads.

"You and Rachel stay down below," Alex barked. "Leave it to us." She was ready to finish this and was just waiting on Grace to take care of herding a couple more and the cleaner into the trap.

Nikita chimed in. "Cleared the back, black hats headed Bieber side."

"I'm not fucking Bieber," Jonah barked. "They spotted the sandbagged guy. They are looking confused."
Alexandra barked as she looked through her scope in that direction. "They can't figure out who didn't get the memo."

While attention was drawn away from the front, Grace moved up beside the cleaner. "Talk to me." She peered around the window frame for others.

"Subtle is out. Fucking lone wolves are tearing up the damn neighborhood." His teeth were grinding as he moved his weapon to the right to try and get one of the freebooters in his sights.

Grace frowned. "I think subtle was out the minute we fired on the house."

"Why did we? You said it was bad to scare the mice."

"Alexandra is in town. We have troops beating the bushes on the perimeter now. She will have a choice. Save the mice or watch them die and still get caught." Grace frowned as she caught movement out of the corner of her eye. She carefully triggered the comm to catch her next words. "I caught movement to the other side."

The cleaner frowned. "I don't..." He went silent as his own comm went into action. He stilled and raised his muzzle slightly. "I see something," he said carefully.

Grace leaned over his shoulder slightly to see what he saw. What she didn't see was his elbow until it was too late. It smashed in her face hard. She threw herself back and away. Slightly dazed from the blow, her fingers had a little trouble grabbing her weapon. The cleaner was rising and turning toward her with his rifle. She did the only thing that made sense in her dazed moment. She slammed into him throwing them both hard out of the window on the front of the building opposite Rachel and Caitlin's house. A fraction of a second of them fighting to be on top as they landed far below the window.

Alex's eyes widened as the window exploded and Grace and a man in a jumpsuit went flying through the air. She stood and prepared to rush over as a voice came over the comm. "Dear Alexandra."

"Amanda," she whispered.

"What a lovely family you have here."

Nikita tensed. "She's in the house."

"Alex run," Rachel yelled into the comm.
Amanda smiled at the two women in front of her. The basement had been well lit and was full of bright colors clearly on its way to being a sort of family play room. It was a lovely place for one bound and one barely conscious woman. "This is a very nice space. A nice place to kill...some time."

She pulled a syringe from a small pouch attached at her belt. "I love what you've done with the place." She placed an extra magazine on a shelf nearby as well. "Perfect for murder and/or mayhem."

Rachel's eyes narrowed as she looked toward the usually elegant woman dressed in ninja wear. "What happened to your lets have some tea before I torture and murder you thing?" She tugged at the cuff that ran around a bright blue painted support post, chafing her wrist. She looked at Caitlin who shook her head in a daze as she struggled back into a seated position against the nearby wall. Amanda had pistol whipped her during an earlier attempt to free Rachel.

Amanda's brow rose as she looked at the bound woman. "I do try to keep things civilized Rachel. The simple matter of fact is that Alexandra has made my world a great deal less settled than I enjoy."

She smiled engagingly. "I am simply playing her game."

The other woman shook her head. "What'd she do? Remind Percy that you're a skank in designerware?" Rachel snarled.

The older woman tsk'd. "If you must know," she paused to listen to a sudden increase in firepower as well as feet overhead, a search? Perhaps. The question was if it was the right searcher. "First she undid all the work I put into her retraining. That was not good. It made me look... bad in front of Percy. Then she fucked me. Literally. I have really lost patience with our little Russian." She smiled as the door shook above them. "Thank you for installing such lovely doors. Very secure."

Rachel looked down a moment before gulping down a large breath. The last thing she expected was more Alex sexcapades. "No. I can't even be surprised. Her libido is nuts even when she's not being mindfucked." She looked straight on Amanda. "At least she had enough taste to leave you spinning."

She lifted her chin defiantly.

Shots fired up above and then another weapon discharged into the door, the knob ringing with impact. The heavy wooden barrier began splintering under the assault. Amanda smiled. She picked up a gun. "Heckler & Koch MP7. Armor piercing rounds, 950 rounds per minute. Not subtle but very effective." She held up the syringe in the other hand. "And a lovely little concoction designed to make her pliable. I am equally drawn to the possibilities." She strode over to Caitlin who was beginning to stand and placed the muzzle against the other woman's forehead. "Stay down. You're bait. I would hate to have to make an even bigger mess. So much more complicated to have to hunt down the child for bait."

She stepped back as Caitlin lowered herself to the nubbly carpet on the floor.

Rachel's voice was cold. "We will kill you." She yanked hard at the cuff. Turning, she tried to remember the niceties involved in dislocating her thumb so she could slip the cuff.

Amanda laughed. "All of Nikita's friend's start to sound alike after a while." She stepped back to see who was pounding down the basement stairs. "And what did happen to our little friend?" she called
up as steel toes thumped down the final half of the stairway.

Grace's face, smeared down one side with blood, twisted in a snarl and raised her weapon. "After you sicced him on me? I put him down." She shook her head. "Fuck, you are a bitch."

"Really Grace, you are becoming as troublesome as your paramour." Amanda tilted her head and aimed without looking at Caitlin. "Rachel, control your wife before she becomes an unnecessary fatality." she added conversationally.

Rachel looked over and shook her head at Caitlin who was again beginning to rise. She pulled back as far as the chain would allow to grip her wife's shoulder. Their time to fight would come.

"Nikita! Get me over there!"

Nikita slid through a window on the second floor of the house. "Alex, keep your head down. The kids will try to take some heat off of you."

Janey hissed through the comm. "We are not kids. Just fucking hold your horses. You're the bright one who decided to pull all the black hats in. Patience."

Alex ducked back as yet another freebooter decided that her yells at her comm and the world at large were the source of their problems. The cleaner, after having landed badly on the base of the bush that broke his fall was moaning and trying to pull himself off the wood. Alex had been flabbergasted when Grace had pushed off his body and went into a run for the house across the street. It was driving her nuts that Grace was over there but not her.

Alex growled. She needed to be over there Rachel and Caitlin needed her badly. She took aim and fired inches over the struggling cleaner at a man in army surplus. "Die already."

Nikita moved swiftly through the rooms on the second floor dismissing them as swiftly as she peeked in. What she wanted was in the basement. She didn't want to leave Alex and the kids to hold down the black hats swarming much less the cops that would eventually join the party, but this was a time for a cooler head. She moved swiftly to the first floor, drifting toward the kitchen at the back of the house. The door down to the basement was there.

Nikita stopped dead in the doorway to the kitchen. There was very damned little intact about the knob side of the basement door. It stood open to whatever lay below. Nikita edged forward.
Janey yelled inarticulately as another burst of gunfire ripped through her partner's hiding place sending small bursts of blood and leaves flying into the air. "You fuckers!" she finally screamed before ripping out another clip and slamming it into place. She put down the killer that tore the Justin Bieber clone apart and began wiggling forward to try to blow her way over to the skateboard rat. Her fingers tightened white on the skateboard tape on the gun she intended to blow half the neighborhood away with.

Alex's eyes widened at the sight of the fuzzy haired girl suddenly becoming a Tinkerbelle Rambo with her rage and grief filled face. A movement out of the corner of her eyes forced her to pull back from the corner of the building protecting her. The battered cleaner, having struggled out of the bush was coming at her with a knife. Weakened as he was by a fall, it was reasonably easy for Alex to slam the wrist against the siding, causing the weapon to fall to the packed dirt below. The cleaner snarled and began fighting her more methodically.

Nikita moved down a handful of steps with extreme caution until she could get a view of the colorful room below. A handful of bullets ripped at the place where the wall above no longer met the stairs she was on. She moved back slightly and took a breath. Amanda was downstairs, well-armed, and prepared for her. Why was this never just an easy in and out? she wondered as she balanced carefully on the non squeaking part of the stairs.

"I've been disappointed. That is not a good thing Nikita." She heard from Amanda. She also heard the sound of metal striking flesh and a thump. "Stay down I won't tell you again." she hissed at Caitlin. She motioned at Grace to relax as she tightened her frame as if preparing to attack.

Nikita frowned. "Just here to keep you warm until Alex can kill her way through your pack of army toys upstairs," she delivered in a falsely cheerful tone. She mentally reviewed the layout of the room as she had seen it during the housewarming party. Amanda had probably come in the basement door to the outside. Caitlin had put in a security door, but such things rarely stopped a motivated killer.

Amanda snorted a most unladylike snort. "I already have Caitlin, Rachel and Grace. Really, this is simply becoming ridiculous."

"Ya think?" came from a corner of the room below.

"Grace. Please feel free to sit quietly in the corner with Caitlin." Amanda retorted.

Nikita edged closer to the wall, careful not to come into view. "Amanda, let them go."

"No," she said casually. Amanda knew she had the cards. Her lips curled in a dark smile.

"Amanda, you are setting yourself up for badness. Don't do this."

"Alexandra for the the three musketeers here. It's a very simple equation Nikita. I have no desire to play any more games."

The sound of sirens wailed through the area. Some of the black hats bolted, others prepared to fire at both cops and the home team. Alex used the distraction to get across the street to Janey's car. She
cursed quietly at the tears on Janey's face. She grabbed at the fatigue jacket the young woman was wearing. "You can't get out to him."

Janey looked at Alex betrayed. "Fuck you. He's my partner."

"You get yourself killed, he will be your nothing. If the cops get to him, he will be in the hospital. Break him free then if he's alive. Trying to get to him will get you both dead."

Alexandra watched Janey look over at her partner where he lay barely visible. His hand flexed lightly. "I can't leave him to..." Janey began.

Alex grabbed her collar. "Leave him or watch him die with you." When she saw the change on Janey's face, she pulled her toward the curb side of the car. "We need to get in the house."

Amanda pushed at the screen of her phone. "I believe that it would be in everyone's best interest to change venues. Caitlin dear, you go start my car. The red one parked in the second driveway. I will keep your wife and her friends company until you can bring it around to the alley." Caitlin frowned.

Amanda swung the weapon toward Rachel and tossed a key. "Grace, be a dear and go with her."

"What makes you think I won't take her and run?"

Amanda laughed. "Alexandra cares for you. Run and get her exwife killed and she will turn that affection to pure burning hate. I think that virus Alex gave you over her mutt will be nothing compared to what she would do then." Amanda called out. "Nikita, be a dear and let Alex know so she doesn't shoot the chauffeurs. She smiled. "Run along."

Nikita relayed the situation to Alex. Alex frowned and considered as Janey shot another bounty hunter. "Its not that easy. Its never that easy. What the fuck is she up to?" She turned again toward the house. "Nikita..."

Nikita's eyes followed as Grace and Caitlin became briefly visible heading for the outer door for the basement. Caitlin's eyes met Nikita's. A brief smile passed and Nikita spared a nod for Caitlin. Her head swiveled as she heard Amanda speaking quietly.

"Amanda, what the hell are you up to?" she called out.

Amanda chuckled. "Rachel, be so good as to use these keys to unlock yourself. We'll be leaving shortly." She flicked her eyes toward the stairs and Nikita. "What makes you think I'm up to something?"

Nikita frowned. "You're awake and breathing for starters and letting them run so far without a stronger leash for the second."

"You've found me out Nikita. I am simplifying matters." Amanda smiled as she watched Rachel's face. The keys she was using to unlock the cuffs fell from nerveless fingers as her now cuffless wrist fell to her side.

Nikita's eyes widened. "Grace, Caitlin, get out of there!" she shouted to the comm only to feel the entire house shake. The sounds of windows shattering were barely heard in the wake of the blast.
Chapter 115

Flaming bits and pieces of a car were hitting the ground all around the suburban war zone. The red car that Amanda sent Grace and Caitlin to was a smoking memory in a driveway two doors down. Alexandra started racing in the direction of the bulk of the car as Janey covered her. She dropped lower as cops bounced out of a vehicle a short distance away and started yelling at all and sundry to put down their weapons. She pretty much knew it wasn't necessary as everyone was suddenly focused on blowing away fuzz. The fuzz were more interested in learning how many bullets their cars could take than firing back apparently.

Alexandra came up to the blackened remains of the car, the heat from the fire keeping her back from it as it still licked what remained of the general form. She was panting the too hot air as she moved around it trying to see if anyone might have survived Amanda's lethal game playing. She spotted Caitlin lying crumpled in the bushes. She could see large black and red streaks on the prone woman's clothing from smoke, fire and blood. There wasn't any movement but the simple fact that she was there instead of being a crispy critter was encouraging. "Caitlin!" she shouted as she moved in to try to see if her friend was even alive. There was no sign of Grace anywhere.

Amanda tsked in the basement though the faint reptilian smile belied the response. She loved putting people emotionally off balance. It made for interesting responses. "It seems one of the complications remains complicated." Having the comm unit of the team supreme was so very helpful. She smiled at Rachel whose face was twisted in fury and grief. "Congratulations. Based on Alexandra's response, it appears you may still be married."

Rachel growled and tugged at the cuffs. "You tried to kill her you bitch." She was about to lose her temper and it was showing. The whole idea of keeping a level head, assessing the situation and then dealing with it was getting away from her. She just wanted to be loose so she could rend the other woman.

Amanda shook her head at the wild eyed fury before her. "Really, you need to calm down. I am not above trying to pass a corpse off to Alexandra to lure her. We are leaving now." She began reaching into a zipped pocket and retrieved a handcuff key.

Nikita moved down a step. A bullet tore the edge of the tread. "Toss your gun down here Nikita. I am leaving and I really don't need anymore nonsense from you." Amanda continued calmly. "You blew up your car," Nikita announced flatly. Amanda's callous expenditure of life never failed to raise the bile in her. She looked down at the torn up step and tried to formulate a plan. "I blew up a car. My car is parked in an alley space on the other side. Do be a dear and toss the weapon. The gun pointed at Rachel's head is getting heavy and my trigger finger is getting cramps."

Nikita tossed the gun. Bullets were not going to do it this time. She needed to get close. Guns have a specific range of efficacy and people tend to be far too arrogant when the range is too close to realize that there are more effective weapons close in. A well trained individual, close in, could seriously dent Amanda's confidence. "Coming down," she announced.

Amanda tossed the handcuff key to Nikita. "Unlock Rachel from the support and lock her to your right wrist Nikita." Nikita raised her brow. Amanda smiled in response. "Don't worry Nikita. I will keep you from being bored."
Nikita watched her like a hawk as she did as she was told. Amanda smiled broadly. "You did that very well Nikita. We will be out of here in no time." She stepped in closer, but before she could get close enough for a wrist grab, Amanda veered to Rachel.

Rachel flinched. "What the-" her words were cut off by a sharp pinch in her arm as Amanda drew back. Rachel's brows knit together as she looked down at the arm. A cold flowing sensation and then lightheadedness followed. Rachel's legs began buckling. Nikita grabbed her friend's arm and got under it leaning Rachel against the post.

"What did you do?" Nikita hissed.

Amanda tossed the needle into a bag. "I ensured that you would not be in any position to fight me. You will be carrying Rachel, or rather dragging her as the handcuff will no doubt make carrying terribly inconvenient." She smiled and triggered the small comm unit. "Do be a dear Alexandra and see that the second group out of the basement fairs better than the first."

Nikita's eyes narrowed. "She'll kill you."

Amanda snorted in a most unladylike manner. "Even as this new Alexandra, she is very concerned with the well-being of her loved ones. She will bluster and threaten, but in the end, she will give herself to me to end this day with you and Rachel free."

After hearing Amanda's declaration, Alex checked that Caitlin was alright for the moment and got around to the side of the house and followed as Nikita helped the mostly limp form of Rachel leave the house with Amanda behind. Alex edged up. Amanda turned and waved the gun to Alex. "Join us."

Alex slid her gun into her belt holster and trotted up to Rachel. She took the woman's slack face in her hand. "What did you do?" she said fiercely.

Amanda smiled. "Merely kept her out of the fight." She motioned to Nikita. "Its kept Nikita well behaved as well."

Alex looked over. "Let them go."

"As soon as you and I reach the car, I will do that." Amanda motioned them forward seemingly unmindful of the still continuing cracks of gunfire. Alex wondered if Caitlin would survive until Nikita could get back to her and if she would survive another visit with Amanda.
Chapter 116

Alex slid into the car beside Amanda. Her eyes didn't leave Nikita and Rachel until the car shrieked out of the alley. The gun fire was warming up again as more police joined the party from the next town over. A spiderweb of cracks appeared in one of the passenger side windows. Alex began calculating her odds. Amanda smiled seeing the calculations on the young woman's face.

"Oh Alexandra," she said calmly.

Alex turned and looked just as Amanda's gun came hard and heavy toward her head. Alex barely pulled out of the way and grabbed the steering wheel. A hard yank sent them hurtling down a steep incline toward the large industrial trash bin below a small apartment building.

The airbags exploded even as the passenger side window's destruction was completed by Amanda's weapon, firing wildly as her fingers tightened on impact. Alex pulled herself partially out of the window to give her legs enough room to smash into the other woman, already dazed by the airbag that blossomed suddenly. The blood from a cut over her eye left her half blinded, but she'd be damned if she would pull out of this fight before this bitch was properly subdued.

Her hand gripped the wrist of the older woman as she tried to draw her gun back. Alex slid her fingers to press between the tendons in the back of Amanda's hand forcing her to release the grip. Hissing, the woman fought the airbag slowing her down and tried to move toward Alex. She used her free hand to reach into a pouch.

Alex tried to pull herself clear, The glass was still present enough to leave deep scratches in both her hands and tears in her jeans. She fell backwards at the feel of a pinch in her ankle. She growled at the hypodermic in her ankle. Pulling it free, she saw the plunger was still mostly in the back position. Hopefully she was not drugged enough to fuck her up the way Rachel had been.

"Bitch," she stated. She grabbed at the fallen gun and popped up to look in the car. Amanda had left it. "Son of a bitch," she screamed.

She began running after the older woman only to fall as her leg went numb. Apparently it was enough for local numbness. She howled as Amanda turned a corner and disappeared. Alex yelled into her comm. "Status. For fucks sake status,"

Nikita answered first. "Did you get her? Are you loose?"

Alex snarled. "She got away." She cursed loudly and colorfully.

"Get back here. We need help to get clear." Nikita sounded exasperated. "The kids and Caitlin will have to be taken in the net and go to the hospital. We'll work out extraction logistics later."

Alex ran back to the driver's side. Looking at the front of the small car she winced. "I'm trying to get the car moving again." It took a little bit of effort, but she pulled clear of the trash bin and reversed all the way back up the incline, the sounds of the damage to the vehicle apparent. She barely missed being totaled by what could only be one of the freebooters fleeing the scene. Spinning the wheel, she got in a forward gear and sped up the alley.

Nikita opened the back door on the battered little car and pushed Rachel in far enough to climb in after and shut the door. She looked into the mirror and saw Alex's face. "Can you drive with one
"Seatbelts," Alex ground out even as she swung the car to avoid a cruiser with full lights and howling siren. It made a fast u turn and came after them lights blazing. Alex peeked in the mirror to see them. "Longest day ever," she noted as she slammed her foot into the gas. She manhandled the slightly sluggish steering wheel and turned them into the four block down town area.

Alex sped up as they approached the picturesque gazebo in the center of the village green. "What the hell?" Nikita shouted.

The gazebo splintered, basically exploding in the collision. The police car was showered with wood and skidding as the driver responded instinctively to the impacts slid hard toward a park bench and a big oak tree. "Buh-bye," Alex called out as she swung the car south. "Fuck! Not one break," she yelled as the check engine light came on.

"Ignore it. Everyone does," Nikita called out as she saw where Alex was looking.

Alex looked briefly in the mirror. "Basic maintenance goes a long way Nikita," she lectured dryly.

Nikita gave back as good as she got. "So does not driving into every object you can find."

"I missed the tree didn't I?" Alex cast a glance in the mirror. "I think we're clear."

Nikita looked back. "Then let's get rid of the car. Any car Amanda knew about is not our friend."

Rachel stirred. "Caitlin," she moaned. Her wrist tugged lightly at the handcuff holding her to Nikita's side. She looked around confused looking.

Nikita and Alex exchanged glances. The older woman stroked Rachel's face. "Good to see you waking up a little sleeping beauty. We need to get out of town and fix everyone up before we bust her out of the hospital."

Rachel blinked, sounding clearer as she asked "Hospital?"

Alex shook her head. "Cait'll be fine. Let's let the docs do the hard work before we get into this." She tried to brush blood out of her eye. "Now is time for a little sunset riding."

Nikita looked back at the town receding through the back window. "It's a nice town."

"Dandy. Great for wars and cookouts," Alex replied.

Rachel frowned. "Alex needs to shut up," she slurred to Nikita.

"Seconded." Nikita leaned forward between the seats. "Get us to that car dealership at the county line."

"Eye?" she asked seeing the blood. She found herself thrown back hard into the seat by Alex's sudden acceleration.
Chapter 117

Alex slid into the car and immediately began hot-wiring. She frowned as she tried to touch the wires to cause the ignition to fire the vehicle up. Nothing. "Fucking lemon!" she shouted before pushing out and heading for a different car toward the far end of the lot. She had eyeballed a few different cars as they came in. Light colored, late model, but not too late model was the ideal. Easy to hot-wire was a big plus too. She smiled as she watched Nikita and fake ID number four clear the last of the worker bees out of the little shack where dealers would drink coffee and watch for suckers. Woman had a real knack for playing the concerned law enforcement type.

"When can we come back?" the used car salesman complained as he was being shooed. He pulled absentely at his tie as he walked. He was obviously not happy at the disruption to his day.

Nikita shook her head as her hand gently landed on his back steering him toward the employee parking section. "The bomb squad is on its way. My colleague is examining the vehicles for the explosive."

The overweight worker looked sullen. Even Nikita's touch, known to make men happy the world over could not put a smile on his face. "I can't believe any of our customers would be this pissed."

"I wouldn't have thought so, but with the profusion of explosive making sites on the web, people are a lot more tempted in that direction." Nikita looked in the direction of the main bulk of town from which shrieking cars and popping sounds continued. Another small explosion ripped a house from that direction. "Looks like the explosives squad found another." She announced with a cheery sound. "I would have thought the one here would be next. Seems our bomber is doing things out of order. Who knows what will go boom next?"

The salesman's eyes widened and he began shuffling backwards before turning and running for his car. He was not so dedicated as to wish to die for this place.

Nikita moved toward Alex who was three rows down and pulling things from under the dash. "How are we doing?" She leaned in to watch the young Russian with a concerned look.

"First one was a dud. Not even a little functional. I'll wait til this guy pulls away before I connect the wires. You sure we have to do this without the keys?" Alex cursed quietly as she plucked at wires. Hot wiring was not difficult, just annoying when one is sitting a few yards from the keys.

Nikita shook her head. "They locked the keys up when I said I needed them to leave. I didn't want anyone being any more suspicious."

Alex brushed the wires and smiled as she felt the engine. Fully functional and roaring. "You get the security feeds?"

"I have been doing this a very long time now Alex." The older woman looked over the top of the car. "He's clear. Start the car and I'll go get Rachel."

Nikita walked around the side of the salesmens' building. Rubbing her wrist where the handcuffs had bonded her to the other woman just a short while and an even shorter piece of wire ago. She frowned as she saw the back door of the car cracked. Trotting up, she saw the back seat empty. Looking around quickly, she saw Rachel wobbling through a row of parked cars toward a dirt road along the back of the property. "Damn it. Rachel."
Rachel began to wobble faster. She needed to get to Caitlin.

Nikita grabbed her arm. "Where are you going?"

"I have to get to Caitlin."

"Caitlin is in the hospital. The police are probably putting a guard on her door after calling her a material witness." Nikita pulled Rachel's arm around her neck and began leading her back.

"I am not leaving her there," Rachel said struggling.

Alex drove up and looked through an open window at the two women. "You want to walk?" she called out looking puzzled.

"I can't leave her there," Rachel protested again.

Nikita opened the back of the car and shoved Rachel in. "We are not going to dump her or the kids. We just need to be 100 percent."

"Now." Rachel demanded.

"Perfect," Alex responded. "You will really intimidate Amanda in this shape."

"Amanda?" Rachel queried weakly. The drugs were wearing off, but they still had her out of it.

"She will go for Caitlin if she sees us going there when we can't fight her off. We have to get reinforcements to watch and extract our people." Nikita looked out the window. "Amanda wins if we don't get you two where she can't use your loyalties against you." She huffed. "Get us to a phone Alex."

Alex mashed the accelerator. "On it."

It was a half hour before Nikita spotted a gas station with a still functional pay phone. Alexandra pulled in. The older woman moved toward the device planning to get the reinforcements in. Rachel dropped her face in her hand and started sobbing. Alex came around the car and slid into the back seat. She wrapped her arms around the distraught woman. "It's going to be okay," Alex said in a soothing tone.

Rachel abruptly pushed out of Alex's arms and slapped her. Alexandra's fingers went to her cheek. "It was going to be okay," she said tightly. "We were going to have a baby and a new life and look out, Miss Larger than life assassin had to go and throw her drama around again. Fuck you."

Alex blinked slowly. "Baby? Larger..." She shook her head as Rachel left the car.

Nikita leaned into the car with a rueful look. "Haven't lost your touch there Alex."

Alex brushed her hair out of her eyes. "Apparently not. Is there someplace to wash the blood off my face?"

Nikita passed a key to her. "Out back. I'll go fetch Rachel."
Chapter 118

Alex leaned back in the very uncomfortably sticky vinyl seat. She puffed out air as Nikita sat down beside her with a grimace. "world over, bus stations have the filthiest most uncomfortable seating," came from her best friend. She looked over at Nikita.

Niki handed over a cold soda can with a weak grin and leaned back. "We are not exactly low key. We needed a low key place."

Alex's brow knitted. "What next?" as she wrapped her fingers tightly around the can. Popping the top seemed like too much effort after the day.

Rachel frowned as she got back up yet again and paced a few steps back and forth in front of the other women. The oranges and greens of the tired looking building where putting her on edge almost as much as Alex and Amanda's little pas de deux getting her wife almost blown up did. "We get Cait back and then Cait and I go somewhere else and forget to tell Alex." She ground out, holding up her hand as Nikita tried to hand her a soda.

The Russian turned to watch her pissed off ex wife. "I didn't want-" she began to say.

Rachel held up her hands. "We all know what you wanted." She shook her head. "We need Caitlin out of that hospital. Is there another option for a doctor?" She shook her head. "I don't want Division all over this. Its like Amanda is a fucking hound looking for that scent. I want Caitlin Amanda-free."

"Bella," Alex offered quietly as she turned the can in her hands. She was hunched over now, looking almost diminished by the events of the day.

A laugh barked out. "Of course. The Russian assassin wants to turn care of my wife over to the crazy Russian bug maker." Rachel knew that Bella was paranoid but a great doctor, but could not resist another dig on Alex.

Alexandra looked up at her briefly before returning her eyes to the can. "She was a doctor in Kansas and is as invested in her low profile as the two of you," she reminded her ex.

Rachel looked over to Nikita who nodded and said "If you want Division free, she might be your best option."

"Fuuuuuck," Rachel responded angrily. Her arms tightened around her middle as she continued to stalk back and forth.

"Baby?" Alex asked quietly still staring at the soda can in her hands. This day was one slugging after another.

"Yeah, Alex. We want a family with multiple munchkins on a jungle gym in the backyard. Preferably a backyard that will not even be in the same state with you any time in the future." Rachel was furious. Caitlin was hurt and hours from extraction and here she was stuck with her ex wife who pulled trouble the way a flower pulls bees. It was making her crazy not being with Cait when she needed her.

"Rachel, you are not being fair." The older agent chided her on behalf of Alex. She hated to see two beloved friends like this, though after the day they had she wasn't surprised by it.
"Not?" she spluttered. "Not being fair?" She shook her head. "How long til extraction?"

"Two hours. The hospital has everyone stabilized and under guard. We will extract soon as possible. The kids will get shipped to Division. Caitlin... Bella?" Nikita asked in a calm voice. Alex was whipping herself. Rachel was whipping her. Nikita needed to be the voice of reason here.

Alex whispered, "Baby," again. She popped the top, chugged the soda in her hands quickly and tossed the can in the garbage before stalking off for the women's room.

Rachel paced back and forth another moment before following her. The former agent's shoulders were tight and her hands balled up in fists as she pushed her way into the bathroom. "Caitlin almost died." she called out, not willing to let Alex go without another round.

Alexandra's feet shifted in the stall. "And I am pretty sure Grace died today," she said quietly.

That stilled Rachel a moment. "Pretty sure?" she asked quietly.

"Thought she died before." Alex sighed. "I'm sorry."

Rachel's face hardened and she slammed her hand into the door of the stall. "Think that makes it better?"

"What do you want me to say?" Alex sounded distressed. The toilet flushed and she went to wash her hands. "Amanda is nuts. I should have known better than to think she would play this like a reasonable person. I thought I just had to pretend to die and poof she is out of your hair."

"Caitlin is in a hospital bed and I can't be there. I- " Rachel sobbed. "I have to tell our son that his mom won't be home for a while because of all this. Amanda should have never been this close." She hit Alex's shoulder. "She should of- Why didn't you stop her?" she cried out before sobbing and dropping her face into her hands.

Alex pulled her to her shoulder. Rachel reared back and slapped her again. Alex grabbed the hand and pulled it down as her other arm wrapped round to hold Rachel close as she sobbed again. Her ex wife began to cry in her arms. Alex stroked her hair. "It'll be okay. Caitlin will be okay. I'll take care of Amanda. She'll never get near again," she whispered as she laid gentle kisses on Rachel's hair.

Nikita came into the bathroom and smiled tightly to see her friends. "If we're going to set things up with Bella Alex, we'll need you to call as soon as possible," she said quietly.

"Just... give us a minute," she responded. As Nikita withdrew, Alex closed her eyes. She absorbed the scents, sounds and feels of the woman in her arms. She was determined that this would be the last time that Alexandra Udinov would bring her exwife's life into chaos and peril. She took a deep breath. "Time to get your new life started Rachel."

Rachel stepped back nodding. "Let's get this done."
Caitlin stretched and smiled happily at her wife from the top of the examination table in the small office at one end of Bella’s not-quite-palatial new trailer. The older woman was moving on in her new life as a medical coder, but she occasionally kept her hand in by helping out her broke neighbors in the park. Caitlin had been wandering in for treatments for months since the car bombing. Rachel was damned determined to keep them under the radar. "Quit hovering already. I'm doing great," Caitlin chided her wife.

Bella smiled and put her stethoscope in a nearby drawer. Her delicate fingers arranged the tools absently before she swivelled back. "Dr. Caitlin I presume?" she teased.

Rachel shook her head. She needed a bit more of a professional opinion for this. "Bella?"

The older woman shrugged and replied, "What she said." She rolled her chair over to Rachel and gestured to the small angel in the faded bassinet that she had in the corner of the office for babies visiting. "And you? How are you doing?"

"Just fine. We'll be back next week for the baby wellness check." She frowned at the chipped mug with buck teeth filled with orange juice. Bella was annoyingly unwilling to give a breast feeding mother caffeine. As if her collection of ugly hand made mugs was any less upsetting to her system than a bit of coffee.

Bella snorted. "Like you would tell me if you were sick. As bull-headed as the other one." She said, her accent fading in and out as she felt no need to conceal her roots with these women.

"Alex?" Caitlin asked with a grin. She hopped down from the exam table and kissed the top of her wife's head. She raised an eyebrow at the face Rachel pulled at the name. "How long are you going to hold a grudge?" she asked quietly.

Snorting again, Bella turned on her computer and accessed a black ops program that allowed her to make prescriptions without making herself a target. "Alex is not a bad person, merely efficient at annoying people with large caliber weapons from what I hear." She chewed her lip as she opened her records. "You should be almost done with the pain medications, yes?"

"Yes. I've switched to otc stuff. No more scripts needed." She was proud of her ability to wean herself away before pain medication was a problem. Her family and new life inspired her there.

Bella smiled. "When is your son coming by again? I have new stickers for the little ones." She waved a few colorful lizards and mice on sticky paper that she pulled from her desktop.

Caitlin chuckled as she saw the once scary scientist showing a great enthusiasm for little kids and the things that make them smile. "He is dying to spend time with his Auntie Bella. Soon." Smiling she held out a hand. "Do I get one?"

Rachel stood. "We have to get a move on. I'm only off work til lunch is over."

Bella took a sticker out of another drawer and stuck it on Caitlin. "Seal of approval. Go make trouble." She smiled at the little gold star on her new friend's collar.
"No more trouble," Rachel affirmed before walking out.

Caitlin shrugged. "She's still..."

"Yes. Go on and spend lunch with your wife." Bella shooed her out.

Caitlin followed a few steps after gathering up the infant and turned to the former weaponized virus maker. "Come over Saturday. I'll make ... something. It'll be edible."

A slow grin spread across the older woman's face. "I will bring the Alka Seltzer." She felt the loneliness as her front door closed on the lonely little trailer again. It was a shame that there seemed so many obstacles between her and the rest of the world. Bella took the small collection of ugly coffee mugs to her kitchen for washing.

Caitlin laughed as she dropped her son off at his after school program and the baby at a sitter for a little Mommies Quality Time. She drove home and leaned back in her car seat. She was very happy with her life right now, but she wished that Nikita and Alex were a part of it again. A small part without weapons or drama, but a part of it. She knew Rachel was still struggling with her decision to close that door. They could talk about it again that night after Rachel was done with her office hours.

Getting out of the car, she walked toward the front door of their new home, a small three bedroom on the edge of a small town in the middle of nowhere. The perfect place to start over. She turned as she heard a small noise behind her. Her smile faded. "Hello Amanda," she greeted quietly. This is not the happy evening at home she had planned.

Amanda smiled calmly and stepped forward from around the tree that had hidden her while she waited. "Would you like to offer me a drink Caitlin?" She said as her finger traced the outline of a handgun in her jacket pocket.

The younger woman sighed. "I will but it has nothing to do with like."

They were soon seated in the living room with steaming mugs of tea. "What do you want Amanda?"

Tucking her long hair back, Amanda reached forward with her other hand to take up a cookie. "I no longer work with Percy. I have taken a new position and it is very... consuming work. I want to leave a message for Alexandra that while I will not be around much, I will not forget her anytime soon." She drew out the gun and very slowly clicked off the safety of it.

Caitlin shook her head. "You won't touch my family. I'll kill you first."

Amanda smiled. "Why would I kill the best possible bait for when I do have time for games again?" She sipped at her mug. "I will leave a message that will indicate how close to home I can get to hurt her without destroying the most valuable game pieces." "Wonderful tea. I will really have to steal the box when I leave so I remember to pick up more." She put down the mug and raised the weapon.
Chapter 120

Rachel breathed deep as she got out of her car, savoring the clean air of Nowheresville and their new life. She was glad her day was over and she could spend some quiet time with her wife before claiming their children. Smiling, she pulled out her door key from the tangle on her ring. The smile faded as fast as it had came when she saw the front door of her little home ajar. Going back to the car, she pulled up a thick rug she had stuffed under one seat that concealed her gun case. A moment later, she was sneaking up on the front door with cautious looks around.

The gun barrel made a harsh too-loud sound sliding on the door as she used it to open the entrance wider. Edging in, she slowly moved into the house looking for trouble. Following procedure for clearing of buildings, she moved inward until she found herself smelling a familiar and awful cocktail of cordite and blood from the kitchen area. Rachel gasped in air through her mouth, but the smell and all it could mean clung to her with fierce talons. The blood was pumping hard through her body as she moved forward into the kitchen. Her heart froze in her chest as she caught sight of part of the kitchen table just beyond the breakfast bar.

A rose printed tea cup with saucer and a small plate with a nibbled looking cookie on it sat on the visible edge of the table. A dark pool was just beginning its spread into visibility. Rachel's breath grew more ragged as she heard the drip of a viscous fluid coming from that direction. Her hand began shaking and her vision was partially obscured by fearful tears. She leaned heavily first on wall then counter moving forward. Slowly, the scene emerged.

Inches. A teacup lay on its side in a dark puddle in the middle of the warm pine table. Another inch. A finger tip, cold and white began to come into view. Rachel almost turned and ran. It was too much. She didn't want to see. She didn't want to know. She steeled herself and tightened the grip on her gun. She had to know. The shaken woman inched further.

The sound of the gun hitting the kitchen tiles was like a cannon in a library, but Rachel couldn't hear it. There was nothing but the silent screaming in her head at the view of the full kitchen table. Her wife lay with her face facing the window as if to soak up the remaining light of the day. If it weren't for the horrific blood spatter, Rachel could have thought her wife merely resting up for their Mommies evening. Her mouth opened and closed repeatedly. She didn't have words. She couldn't have squeezed a scream out of her iron bound lungs to save her life.

Her breaths grew more ragged. The teacups. The genteel touch screamed Amanda. The fact that it was set out, Caitlin knew what was coming. She knew Mommies Evening would never happen. Rachel mentally tried to force the world into reverse knowing she could not change this. Her hand pressed against her middle, the other covered her mouth. Rachel stepped closer to the table and pulled fingers from lips to place her fingers on her wife's throat, even knowing what she would feel. Cold flesh, pale and hard as marble slid under her fingers as she desperately searched for a pulse, one single beat that would proclaim this nightmare could end happily. Her fingers stopped only after long moments of searching.

Rachel's tears fell on Caitlin's hair as she knelt into the puddle of blood beside her wife's chair. Each of her own heartbeats seemed to expand behind her eyes and in her skull and she felt herself losing time with each one. She knew she had moments before what glued her mind together was spun away and she might black out. She needed back up. Her nearly nerveless fingers found her phone and she
hit speed dial, her eyes never leaving her wife's body. The first try, no words came out. The second, "Nikita, Amanda came. Bring... come ... and bring a clean up crew. Bring a fucking arsenal too," she whispered harshly.

Nikita pulled the cell phone from her ear and stared at it for long moments. She looked over at Michael who moved closer at the paling of his wife's face. "Tell Alex to wrap up her job. We need her here," she said harshly. Part of her wanted to throw the cell phone against the wall, punishing it for the words she heard and what they had to mean. She turned back. "We have a situation with Rachel and Caitlin. Get a team together. We need to move now."

Michael nodded and headed for the secure phone on the desk. Putting it to his ear, he went into action. He turned back shortly. "I'll pull the car around." He grabbed the car keys and slugged the last of his coffee before pulling on his jacket.

Nikita looked at him puzzled, still a little shell-shocked imagining what kind of damage Amanda did to cause her friend to sound as broken as she did.

"What?"

He grabbed her jacket from the coat tree in the corner and tossed it to her. "You'll want to go," he announced matter-of-factly.

Nikita looked at her desk and the towering piles of hated paperwork. "But.." She had a responsibility here... right?

"Ryan and I will keep the place running. You take care of family." He gave her a crooked smile and ushered her out ahead of him.

Nikita dialed Rachel's phone over and over all the way to the airport. No one picked up. If they had, she would have been deafened and torn to pieces by the howls of pain and rage that would have pierced it from the other end.
Alex smiled humorlessly over the top of her sniper scope. Moments before she had targeted one of the most powerful men in the world and whispered "Boom," as she caressed the trigger, the pressure just shy of what she would need to propel lead. She knew down to the last inch of her that had she taken the shot, his men would have been scraping bits of him off the wall behind him. It was gratifying in a way, this quiet kind of counting coup. She sighed. As gratifying as pretending to shoot a world class fixer was, she had a job. She could look him up on her own time, after she made sure that the fixer didn’t get what he was buying.

Up on top of an old cream brick building, barely able to stand on the edge of a canal, Alex pressed the ammunition home before checking the device she had tied into a street level weather station. Bad guys who feared snipers tended to feel safer in this area. There were plenty of squashed together buildings, but they were crushed in up against a meandering canal. Any building higher than a handful of stories tended to end up in the canal. It made it easier for bad guys' bodyguards to watch for trouble. Thankfully for someone like Alex, it just made things fun.

She was a good bit further down the canal from the meet. Her colleagues would have likely parked closer but they would have been easier to spot. She had a less than optimum angle but with the sardine buildings cutting off half the winds that might have played havoc with her aim, she was still sitting pretty. Smiling, she saw the man carrying what looked like a kindle disguised in a bad book style cover come through a tight alley even further down the canal than the fixer's crew. In reality, it was kindle in a bad cover with its guts ripped out and replaced with high density data storage. If the fixer got his hands on it, the data in the device would be busted up and sold off to scum bags from one side of this world to another. Alex leaned in and adjusted her scope one last time. She was going to make sure that the fixer had no opportunity to do his thing.

The gentleman bearing the bombshell in the bad book cover was moving slowly up the side of the canal. He had a definite limp and slowly dragged his fingers along the rail as he moved toward the meeting. His face showed signs of more than a few bloody fights in his youth but his suit screamed demure civil servant. Alex snorted quietly. However else he played his games, Raskov was rarely demure. She would take out the data and make sure it couldn't be reconstructed by the undercover man. She fired twice in rapid succession. Before the bullets could hit targets she was tossing her gear in the bag and moving toward the door. Looking back would have merely confirmed what she already knew and her spotter in a houseboat nearby would see.

"Device hit. He was gripping hard so he took it in the canal with him when the second round struck. Nice. Home base is looking for you." her spotter Hans murmured into his mic from the back of his boat. "Damn fish took my bait again."
"Roger that. Headed for extraction and then I'll give them a ring." Alex dropped the beat up paper bag containing the gear into the maw of a garbage can. It would be picked up later, enough time later to ensure she wouldn't be found with the evidence. Hopping off a curb she set a brisk pace for her tourisy little hotel. She pulled out her phone and put it to her ear after dialing.

"What's up?" she asked as she dodged a flower cart. Alex had made arrangements with Nikita not to take long distance on her comm during a job. Michael and Nikita mothering her while she was trying to get a shot off was seriously going to piss her off one day so she told them to use a spotter relay for anything other than a Stand Down. Flashing a finger, she called for a coffee. Digging her pocket, she thumped some money on the cart's counter and sipped as the jr. agent in charge of phone tag went in search of Michael. She blew on her coffee as she continued down the street.

"Alex?"

"Michael. Heard you were looking for me?" Alex took a sip and quietly hissed as too hot coffee scalded its way toward her stomach.

"Alex. We need you back here right away."

"Oh hell no. You guys said I could have a few days off in Amsterdam after I took the data out of circulation." She made a face at the hot coffee and blew over it. "Get one of the young Turks to play your reindeer games."

Michael was silent for a long moment. "Amanda paid a visit to Rachel and Caitlin."

Alex stopped dead almost getting run into by a gaggle of tourists following a man with a little yellow flag. "What?" she asked weakly.

"Amanda found them. We are still trying to figure out how. Nikita is on her way to find out what happened there."

"Rachel?"

His voice came through the phone tight and angry and apparently frustrated at nest sitting while
Nikita was off hunting Amanda. "Alive. Beyond that I don't know."

"Get me a plane to where they were hiding out. And Michael?"

"Yes?"

"Make sure I have a fucking arsenal when I get there."

"Hunting party in the box on its way as we speak. ETA to airport?"

Alex tossed the coffee cup into a trash can and trotted into the road waving for a cab. "Not soon enough. Getting a cab. Will call you when I get there."
Rachel stood up. Her wife's blood was thick and drying black on the lower half of her tan slacks as she turned and walked slowly for the basement door. Nikita's number flashed on the screen of the phone left in the blood pool beneath Caitlin's body as she called again and again, but Rachel was no more aware of it than Caitlin was now. Her bloody fingers stroked a light switch on the painted cinder block wall as she moved past the door to the basement landing. Rachel walked heavily downward into the part of the house forbidden to guests and children alike. She turned slowly in the small circle of light thrown by the naked bulb in the center of the subterranean room before walking back toward the stairs. She pulled a battered brown leather case from a hiding space beneath the stairs.

The cold faced woman lifted the case to the folding table by the dryer and after opening the tiny travel lock, pulled at the zippers. Soon a hardened laptop and two locked cases were also on that surface. She opened the laptop and typed a series of commands and passwords designed to open the electronic world to her. Apparently the little airport nearby was becoming quite a little hub. She smiled grimly. She had enough time to make her flight... or rather Amanda's flight. She turned her attention to the other cases. Caitlin wouldn't need her gun anymore and two guns would hole Amanda faster than one. She loaded the weapons tucking them one into a clip holster and one into her belt before carrying the laptop up the stairs toward her car.

The miles rolled away without her awareness. Her eyes were focused on the road in front of her and what she planned to do when she got to the airport. The smell of blood from the stains on her pants were solidifying her resolve to kill the bitch or die. She took the next turn so sharply her car road up the curb and killed a great deal of grass before the tires settled back on the road surface. Her fingers drifted from the steering wheel again and again to stroke the gun beside her as if to reassure herself of its presence.

A grim smile crept across her face. It was made more frightening by the blood she'd streaked across it pushing her hair back. Almost there. The airport was just a little further and looking briefly at the dash clock, she had enough time to kill. Her teeth were bared as she drove past the parking lot to land her car on the curb in front of the main building's door. She pulled herself out of the door of the
car and reached back in for her weapon. Caitlin's gun lay nestled in a holster on her hip. One or the
other, the vampire bitch was going to die and if there was any justice in the world, she would be
laying there in a spreading puddle of her own blood as Rachel walked up to deliver the coup de
grace to her fucking forehead.

Amanda sipped at her paper cup of tea and grimaced. There were damned few airports anywhere in
the world with palatable tea but this one was an even greater travesty than usual. A man in a blue
suit and a pilot's cap nodded to her. "We are refueled and ready to go when you are." he announced
smiling. She dropped her cup of tea in a nearby waste basket and stood gracefully.

Screams came from outside the private waiting area that Amanda had paid an obscene amount of
money to use. She sighed as she heard scrambling from beyond. She smiled at the pilot. "Please get
the jet warmed up. I will join you shortly." As he left, she opened the latches on her briefcase and
reached in for her gun. She smiled as she tucked it in. It appeared as if Rachel returned home a
smidge sooner than expected.

Rachel stalked past the counters where screaming auto renters and plane ticket vendors screamed and
ducked. She turned slowly and walked to one of the counters. Reaching down, she pulled up a
woman like a mole from a hole. She growled. "Stop screaming. Where is Amanda?"

"I- I don't know who you're talking about." The young woman's eyes were round and afraid at the
sight of so much blood much less the sight of a large caliber hand gun. She tried to pull away.

Rachel's fingers tightened on the woman's uniform vest. Her teeth gritted as she pushed out the next
words. "5'7", Reddish tint to her hair, light eyes and acts like a fucking princess on holiday."

The woman looked to a man behind the next counter over. "I thought she was a- I mean he
thought- We thought she was a model on a shoot or something."

"Why the fuck would anyone in their right mind come here much less a fucking model?" Rachel
ground out. "Where is she?"

The shaking woman lifted her arm and pointed to a door on the far end of the building. Rachel
ignored the sounds of sirens as they slowly grew in volume. She dropped the informant and stalked
to the door, pulling out her second gun. Death was in her eye as she pressed open the door. The room was appointed with stuffed chairs rather than the plastic hell seats in the main concourse. The door leading to the runway was just swinging shut. Rachel yelled inarticulately before continuing on toward the door. She stopped just short, kicking a foot into the closing gap. She ducked her head forward, pulling it back just barely before bullets pounded at the door frame. Rachel kicked the door fully open and started firing both weapons in the general direction the shots came from. She screamed as the plane pulled away.

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