All That Matters
by clindzy

Summary

Red spends a long sleepless night in his Bethesda sanctuary, anxious about this ghost from his past threatening to ruin his future. This shadow is the reason he has done everything he can to protect Lizzie and even more so now that nothing can tear her away from him; he'll be damned if he allows this monster to even think about touching his reason for breathing.

Notes

Keeping in the vein of vulnerability, I find it highly plausible that Red would encounter this type of introspection before a dangerous mission or deal and would choose to share it in the form of a letter for Lizzie to read for comfort.
Original character, gender intentionally vague, will be named in the work.
Two parts.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Lizzie,

Sweetheart, as I'm writing this you're fast asleep in our warm bed as I wish I still was. There are some things that I simply had to get off my chest.

Of all the places I've been in the world, wrapped up with you is by far my most treasured. Nothing can compare to the way your body hinges close to mine or how you can see the depths of my soul in my eyes and still love me fearlessly. Of all the priceless art I've had the pleasure of viewing, still nothing is as beautiful as the complete trust you have in me; to see it reflected it at me in those exquisite azure eyes of yours will always stun me.

I know that we had an extremely rocky beginning - which I take responsibility for - and I'm grateful every day that you gave me the time to prove I was worth trusting, worth your loyalty, your faith and your love. I did what I had to back then to keep you safe. Granted, my methods were nowhere near as sophisticated and neat as they are now, but they accomplished the same ends. Some day soon, I will be able to tell you everything; the danger you were in is still imminent.

This meet will determine if the danger has been neutralized or if I need to develop an offensive attack. I hope for the former but am preparing for the latter. Know that wherever we go, I will keep you safe. And if I'm not there, Dembe will break a man's neck without blinking or shoot him in the heart if someone so much as thinks of hurting you.

I pray that you never view me as the monster that I felt in my darkest days before you saved me with those three inconsequential words, "Go to hell." At the time they tore me into shreds, tatters of who I was. I couldn't understand why those words would hurt so much but I shoved the confusion aside; I relished the pain your retort had caused. I couldn't recall the last time I had felt anything past the numbness or the requisite emotions my profession demanded. It was then that I had hope. I felt the smallest vestige of light, deep in the darkest, most innocent part left of my damaged soul that you saw something worthy in me.

My sweet girl, this is only one of the myriad of reasons I will love you until I have no more breaths to breathe. Without even realizing it, you taught me how to love again, how to be happy. I swore to protect you with my life. I never could have imagined that I would love you with everything my life had to offer.

I promise to stay smart and aware. I won't ask you not to worry, because I know you will. Know that I will come back to you, always.

Promise that you'll stay smart and aware, Lizzie.

With all my breath,

Raymond
Chapter Summary

Red confronts his past, intent on keeping his new life intact. Unaware of how deep his enemy's hatred runs and how embroiled in the complexities of Lizzie's past, Red finds himself face to face with a familiar woman.

Chapter Notes

Liz's past still has so many unanswered questions and I found myself too curious not to dive in

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Red sealed his heart, soul and love into the envelope, handing it to Dembe, standing nearby, at the ready as always. Red pushed his chair away from the desk and stood up, envelope in hand. Dembe took the letter from his best friend's outstretched fingers and pocketed it carefully, the heavy paper's creasing the only sound in the tomb quiet apartment. Dembe felt the oppressive tension bleeding out into the small room; Red walked to the sideboard opposite the picture window, picked up his favorite bourbon and poured two full glasses. Dembe had taken post at the window, watching the busy traffic below, the surrounding neighbors and passersby completely oblivious to the criminal force to be reckoned with, only bricks and mortar separating them. Red joined him, offering him one of the stout crystal tumblers. Dembe accepted the drink from his friend wordlessly. Nothing either one of them could say could express with any sort of justice any of the emotions that were blanketing the room in a suffocating quilt of stale air and desperation. Ten minutes passed with both men just watching the tedium of life on the street and drinking their alcohol.

Finally, Red spoke, "Dembe, I could not ask for a better man in which to face a foe such as Audrina with."

Just the mention of her name had Dembe's blood boiling and mouth twisting into a snarl. He had not known her 26 years ago when Red had had his initial encounter with her but he knew enough that he was well versed in her proclivities. He detested her on principle. He knew that this vile woman had played some part in Lizzie's past but he wasn't sure to what extent nor was Red; that concerned both men a great deal for obvious reasons. It made unraveling the mystery that much more difficult - Red would have to discover the complete truth but not allow Lizzie to be biased when she decided she was ready to try and remember that part of her life.

Dembe cleared his throat, focusing his thoughts and met Red's gaze head on. "This woman tried to kill two people most precious to me, Raymond. I will stop at no lengths to ensure that she is prohibited from doing so ever again."

Red knew how deep his brother's loyalty ran, how true his words were and had no doubt about the end that faced Audrina should she dare try to cross him any further than she had on that fateful night 26 years ago. Squeezing his brother's shoulder, he spoke softly but no less vehemently, addressing
what was ultimately the cause for the summation of this psychological and emotional strife, "She is not getting anywhere near Lizzie. We will keep her safe, Dembe; I've not fought this long to allow a woman such as Audrina, who relies solely on her wiles, to even entertain the thought of harming Lizzie. I only agreed to this meet to gain answers and silence this shadow forever."

"Raymond, I require no explanation and never have. You saved my life. We are family. To me, there is nothing more important; I see no reason for a justification if someone we love is hurting and we seek to right that wrong."

Dembe turned away from the window, placing his empty cup in the sink. Feeling his phone buzzing in his coat pocket, he slipped his hand into his pocket, removing the slim flip phone and spoke quietly in brisk responses.

"Your jet is ten minutes out. We need to leave now."

Red sighed and tossed back the remainder of his drink, wishing the lingering apprehension would disappear with it.

"Well, Dembe, it's a good thing I like Prague this time of year," Red said weakly, his attempt at levity falling flat.

Liz paced the floors of their house, too keyed up to even consider sitting down, much less facing that empty bed; she had awoken alone to Red's letter on his pillow. She cursed herself for falling asleep while talking to him, the late hour dragging her further into its clutches. Dembe must have given Mr. Kaplan the letter early this morning and snuck it upstairs. That woman could get in and out without making a sound, Liz had to hand it to her; still, it was barely 5 am and she had little idea where her love was. Sighing, she carefully picked up the letter, smelling Red's distinct scent and left the room, in dire need of coffee and some semblance of company.

Red stared out the window, clouds marring most of the landscape below. Dembe felt the anguish bleeding out of his brother and did the one thing he knew best. He slid his phone from his pocket, dialing Liz, ignoring the promise of Red's later wrathful rant; he'd encourage that anger into facing Audrina.

Liz felt her breath catch halfway between her heart and her throat as she saw Dembe’s name flash across her phone’s screen. Clenching her fingers into the island, she answered the phone, trying desperately for an even tone, “Dembe?”

“Liz, you have to speak with Raymond. He’s a mess.” Ignoring Red’s glare, Dembe handed him the phone.

Liz felt her vision white out, her fingers loosened on the countertop and breathed Shakily.

“Lizzie,” Red said gently, hearing how distraught his beautiful girl was, his own agonizing desolation forgotten for the moment.

“Raymond,” Liz sobbed, not caring now that she had lost all control.

Red’s heart was splintering in his chest; he felt like he was in his apartment in Bethesda all over again, the first time she had told him to go to hell, except this time there were so many more emotions riding along with this pain.

“Sweetheart, I promise I’m okay,” Red soothed.

Wiping her eyes with the shirt of his that she had taken from the laundry, Liz sniffled.
“I just don’t like not knowing where you are. I wish that I was with you,” Liz said, tears still thick in her voice.

Red scrubbed his face, thinking carefully about how to answer the love of his life, without hurting her, worrying her or compromising the memories she had yet to remember.

“You have to trust me, that I will be okay and that Dembe will not allow anything to happen to me. I assure you that when this is all over, I will be able to give you answers. Read the letter, my sweet girl. I have to go now. I will call you as soon as I’m on my way back to you. I love you with every breath that I have.”

Liz stared at the phone long after Red had disconnected, feeling a little more reassured, but still a deep apprehension in her bones that whatever her lover was doing, he needed her by his side. With a heavy sigh, she slid her finger under the envelope flap and opened it, treasuring Red’s distinct scent. Smiling as she saw his looping penmanship, she settled in to read his letter to her and reached for her now lukewarm coffee.

“Dembe, why on earth did you call Lizzie?” Red glared at him, fury flashing at him in blue gray eyes.

Matching his gaze, Dembe answered, “Because brother, both of you needed it. Now, put that anger to good use; that wicked Russian witch is going to be looking to sink her hooks back into you.”

Grimacing at the image Dembe produced, Red stalked to the front of the cabin, ready to deplane already.

“Come now, Raymond, have a drink and calm down. We still have five minutes before we land.”

Red accepted the drink that Dembe offered him, swallowed it back in one quick gulp, shuddering at its bitter taste, noting it was nowhere near his usual variety.

The jet hit the runway with a jolt, letting both men know that their meeting with Audrina was only hours away.

After Dembe had ensured the Lincoln was free of bugs and explosives, Red slid in, wishing desperately that he could hold Lizzie close to him; he would even settle for hearing her voice in his ear right now. Dembe swept an appraising glance over the man he knew as well as himself, seeing the tension coiled tightly in his body and the melancholy that he was trying so hard to hide.

“I will get you home safe to her, Raymond,” Dembe said softly, so the driver would not hear.

Heaven forbid the world at large should find out that the Concierge of Crime had a heart, much less fallen in love, hopelessly, madly in love with an FBI agent at that.

Red nodded tightly, squeezing his eyes shut to the onslaught of memories of Katarina Rostova and her best friend Audrina. How foolish he had been. He had been entranced by Katarina’s dark hair and eyes and Audrina’s silvery laugh and incredible intelligence. How fitting then that those should have been their strongest features as covert agents.

While Red was deep in the onslaught of memories of twenty years past, Liz was entranced by the words that her lover had painstakingly had put to paper. This man never failed to astound her; the light would always outweigh the shadow. No matter the disparaging he did against himself, she would always remind him of just how good of a man he truly was. By the time she made it to the end, her face was soaked in tears.
Still hundreds of miles away, Audrina paced, ready to pounce on the man that had taken away what should be rightfully hers.

Chapter End Notes

I know this update was much awaited! You have http://blacklistlizzington.tumblr.com/ to thank for encouraging this update to be posted! Expect more in the coming weeks! Thank you all for your love!
xx

End Notes

Next chapter: The meet with the ominous ghost.
Writing about these two is as easy as breathing. While I enjoy writing about them, I would love to know if you do too.
xx

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