

# Her Russian Guardian

By

Pasha Baker

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# Chapter One

"Now arriving in St. Petersburg..." The speaker droned on as the airplane zoned in on its landing. Abby's brows were high, a huge grin on her face as she grabbed Meli's hand and clutched it.

Meli smiled as she returned the squeeze. She couldn't form the same huge grin Abby had. A knot grappled with her insides. Was this the right thing to do?

"Forget him!" Abby insisted as she tugged out her duffel from the overhead.

"I wasn't thinking about him," Meli lied.

"Sure you weren't." Abby grappled with her purse and another bag while trying to get the handle for her duffel out.

Meli grabbed her friend's purse, her handle on her duffel already free and ready to go. "Fine. But it's hard to forget when we've been together since high school."

"Which makes this the perfect opportunity!" Abby reasoned as the girls dragged their carry-ons through the corridors from plane to airport. "Time to see what the rest of the world is like."

Abby's face looked elated as they maneuvered into the bustling giant of an airport. Meli wished she could see things through her friend's eyes for once. To her, the place looked dirty, dark, overcrowded and all around intimidating.

"He dumped you, Meli." Abby reminded her as they rode the escalator down to luggage claim.

"Yes, well, for a reason..."

"Because you're going to school to get an education is not a good reason."

"It wasn't just that... he just wants to get married, have the simple, perfect life."

"The control freak's life," Abby mumbled.

"No. Just the standard life everyone wants, Abby."

"Not everyone," Abby replied under her breath as they maneuvered through the crowd, trying to find the sign for their flight.

"Kids, a large house—which he already has, a wife to come home to."

"Sounds awesome." Abby's smile stretched a little too widely across her cute face.

"Well, whatever. That's the reason he called it quits for the time being."

"Until you back out of college."

Meli shrugged and pinched her lips. "He didn't say that." They stood watching the belt spew out the various suitcases and packages, waiting silently for their moment. Meli turned away as she finished dialing and lifted the phone to her ear. "Hey David..."

"Oh, Jesus!" Abby loudly displayed her annoyance.

Meli moved a little ways away. "Hey! We just arrived."

"I can barely hear you, Meli. Why don't you call me later, when you can get a better connection?" David's voice was tinny and curt.

"I uh... will. I just thought you might like to know."

Pause. "Sure. I'm glad to hear you've arrived, Meli. Have a great time."

Tears bit at her eyelids at his cool sarcasm. "Okay. Well, I miss you." She tried not to cry, her mood shifting as she viewed her gray suitcase maneuvering its way through the metal mouth.

"Good bye, Meli." David's cold voice sliced through her chest.

Tears slid down her cheeks as she put her phone away.

"The bastard," Abby murmured at seeing her friend, shaking her head.

"Hey!" Meli's down mood was instantly forgotten as she realized someone was grabbing her suitcase. "Hey, that's mine! Stop!" She ran up to the large man grappling with her bag. He looked up at her in annoyance. "Sorry! But I think that's mine," she informed him, smiling politely.

"Gluppye amerikantsy," the man admonished in Russian as he searched the bag's tags.

"See? Kimimela Little Rivers." Meli pointed to herself. "Me."

The man glared dully, finally giving up her bag without another word.

"Thank you," Meli replied in sing song as she pulled out the handle and strolled off.

"Welcome to Russia," Abby said under her breath, the pair of them laughing at the sarcastic remark as they bustled through the endless crowd.

"Hi David!" Meli tried sounding cheerier as she made her next phone call from the hotel.

"Meli. Where are you now?"

"We just got to our hotel room and have planted our stuff, so... we're ready."

"Where are you going?"

Meli shrugged to the empty room. "We aren't sure yet... I'm still unpacking."

"Well, all these calls are going to cost a fortune."

"Yeah. Okay. I'll talk to you soon then..."

"Have you thought about what I said?"

Meli tongued her upper lip.

"Well?"

"I'm... I think you're right, David. I'm just not ready for marriage." There was a heavy pause after.

"Well, I'm not ready for half-assed, Meli. You're either all in or not." Click.

Meli stood stunned a moment. Why wouldn't he give her any options?

"What's up?" Abby asked shortly, her arms crossed as she entered the bathroom where Meli had hidden.

"Nothing..." Meli sniffled, wiping the tears away as Abby slunk down to the floor beside her. "He says he won't have it any other way." She sobbed as she leaned against her smaller friend's shoulder.

"He's an ass," Abby informed her as she stroked her hair. "He wants a slave, not a wife. I mean his whole reasoning behind making sure you remain intact—yuck!—until you get married. Makes you sound like a sacrificial pig rather than a bride to be."

Meli couldn't help but chuckle at her friend's choice of words.

"There you are!" Abby exclaimed at Meli's smile. "Now, let's go get something to eat and explore some. Isn't that what we came to do? Zack and Cody will be arriving tomorrow and I wanna have something new to wear!"

The next evening Meli let Abby do her makeup and hair, taking off her glasses, one of her 'safe haven' pieces of clothing. Meli felt lost without the thick glasses on her nose. She stared at herself in the mirror. She did look good, as far as she could tell, though she was practically blind as far as near sight went without her glasses. She wore a simple red dress, with matching shoes. Her brownish black hair brushed to gleaming and left loose from her usual braids, to lay silkily to her ass.

"Gorgeous!" Abby exclaimed clapping her hands in delight. She also looked lovely with her strawberry blonde curls and a short skirted, cream halter dress, her curly hair piled at her crown so it spilled down in a riotous cascade. "We're meeting Zack and Cody in an hour, so we need to head out soon," Abby told her as she finished her makeup, Meli moving in beside to join her, donning her glasses in order to do a better job.

The taxi dodged traffic like a pro hockey player dribbling a puck.

"I want to get out!" Meli shouted, clutching the sides of the car. "You need to slow down, sir!" she shouted to the driver.

He made a hand motion and grumbled in reply.

"What? What was that? What did he say Abby?"

"Calm down, Meli," Abby replied, reapplying her lipstick in her hand-held mirror.

"Abby! He's driving like a maniac! No. Not 'like' a maniac. He is a maniac!"

"Geez, Meli, I'm sure he's done this before." Abby rolled her eyes. "Just relax. Don't worry about it, we'll make it! Zack'll be there."

Meli quieted a moment, giving her friend a perplexed sneer. "So?"

Abby rubbed her lips together, tilting with the swaying car. "So, now there's a chance you two can get together."

Meli stared at her a moment, forgetting the careening car. "I don't think so, Abby. We've known each other since fourth grade..."

"You've known me since second. We've known David since sixth. So why not?"

Meli made a face. "Yeah, we'll see." The taxi pulled up to a nightclub that seemed to be bursting with people, lights and music. Abby dragged Meli behind her, the smaller blonde woman already starting to dance before they were even near the dance floor.

"There he is!" Abby called out waving.

"Hey!" Cody, dark haired and handsome, Abby's boyfriend pushed his way through the crowd, Zack beside him. "How's it going?" he asked after pecking Abby's forehead with a kiss and drawing her beside him as he smiled at Meli.

"Hey, Meli, you look amazing!" Zack stared at Meli as if he hadn't seen her before.

Meli frowned as she stared back at him, crossing her arms over her low cut front. "Thanks. I'm trying to get more... I don't know... comfortable? Abby helped me tonight."

"Well, she dresses you well."

Meli smiled and nodded, even more uncomfortable. "Wanna get a drink?" She tried to shake the awkward moment.

"Yeah!" Zack was very tall and very cute, but he still reminded Meli of the sniffling, clean, coiffed boy she'd gone to grade school with and beat countless times arm wrestling in the cafeteria.

"Two Margaritas!" Zack ordered at the long, glass bar. Meli sidled in beside him, trying to get through the packed crowd to the counter but a huge man with light brown hair refused to even budge an inch when she asked. When she could make her way finally to the bar without the man's help, she made certain to glare directly at him. He was tall, very muscular with some old tattoos creeping above his perfectly pressed black shirt. He glared back at her with dark blue eyes.

"I know you," Meli informed him as she got a better look. "You tried to steal my suitcase at the airport."

The man silently stared back at her, his eyes flickering slightly but so steadfast Meli coughed uncomfortably, wondering if he understood English at all or if he was just the rudest person on the planet.

"Da!" The briefest hint of a smile dawned at the corner of the stranger's mouth. "Yes! I remember you. You look... different." He frowned before he took a shot of vodka then stared at her again.

"Oh yeah... yeah... my friend Abby did it."

"Here Meli." Zack shoved a glass into her hand. "The bartender didn't know how to make a real Margarita," he grumbled. "Who's this?" he asked irritably.

"Uh, I don't know. A guy I met at the airport yesterday."

"Viktor," the large man replied. Zack stared at the man, finding him very formidable as he grabbed and shook Zack's hand.

"Hey, Viktor. I'm Zack." Zack's eyes were wary and looking slightly hurt as he nodded back to the bigger, older man, staring as the rugged Viktor slugged back another shot of Vodka.

"Viktor tried to steal my suitcase and was very rude," Meli informed Zack, the couple of drinks she'd shared with Abby in the hotel to "get started" as her friend put it, already working on her inhibitions.

"Oh..." Zack nodded nervously in agreement.



Viktor finished his third and turned a frown to Meli whose eyes were on her green drink.

"I was not rude," he replied, staring down at the top of her silky, dark head.

Meli lifted her gaze back to his. She was finding that being unable to see seemed to make her a bit braver.

"That's okay." Zack had gotten a better look at the man's tattoos as well as a few scars that coursed his arms. "Meli, we should be getting back..."

"Yes you were," Meli continued her argument.

"That is Russia!" Viktor shrugged, his hands open wide.

"Is it? Well, then Russia's rude."

Viktor moved his face closer. "All Americans are rude. And. You. Are rude."

"Really?" Meli replied, turning to the man and trying to center her gaze on his blurry face.

"Meli..." Zack was worriedly trying to get his friend away.

"Yeah." Viktor seemed to be enjoying himself.

"How?" Meli glared.

Viktor sat back a bit and pondered her question. "You guys smile, all the time."

"Smile?" Meli stared, trying to focus on the man beside her, the drinks not helping.

"Smiling is your problem?"

Viktor shrugged. "Nyet. Smiling for no reason is problem. Smiling because wind blew... smiling because I just took a shit... smiling because I have nothing in my head. You smile for no fucking reason! That is my problem. Americans smile for no reason, as if they were engines powering up. As if they were robot. That, is my problem."

Meli stared at the man whose face had gotten a lot closer, realizing there was a specific hardness that she wouldn't have even questioned let alone spoke to him if she'd had her glasses on. But there was also a twinkle in his eye.

"Okay, Dude, I won't smile at you," she replied, sipping her Margarita.

"Dude? What is up with that?"

Meli rolled her eyes. "It's a word," she replied huffily.

"Meli, let's go." Zack still found the large Russian man particularly unnerving.

"Fine."

"Hey, Viktor! Who is your friend." A stranger with wavy, shoulder length, dark gold hair, a large black Stetson and a very handsome face with happy light brown eyes sidled up to the large stiff man. Viktor seemed to stiffen pronouncedly.

"Alexei." He acknowledged the younger, more friendly man.

"Hello beautiful!" Alexei drew in closer to Meli who watched him warily, lifting her hand to shake his in reply but giving him a wet fish sort of shake due to her surprise. Alexei turned her hand and pressed his lips to its back. "What is your name?" he asked, not letting it go.

"Meli," Viktor supplied. Meli was surprised he knew it since she hadn't told him.

"Yes. Meli. Short for Kimimela." She smiled, then stifled it, frowning pronouncedly instead. "Am I not to smile at you too, Alexei?"

Alexei laughed a full handsome, belly laugh. "Please! Smile at me, Meli." He pressed another kiss, a longer one to her hand before he finally released it. Meli couldn't help but do as he asked. Alexei stared hungrily at her mouth in reply. "Oh my, Meli. Are you Indian?"

"Alexei..." Viktor growled.

"Uhhh... you mean Native American?" Meli corrected. "Yeah. A quarter Crow on my dad's side. Why?"

Viktor shook his head and ran a hand through his hair.

Alexei's smile grew broader. "Because I am a huge fan of the Cowboys and Indians!" He motioned to his hat and his jeans where she noted his big, overly flashy belt buckle.

"Ahh..." Meli's smile tightened. "Great..." She turned back to the bar to finish her drink.

"Listen, would you like to dance?" Alexei asked, placing his hand on Meli's arm.

"We were just going to find our friends," Zack interjected, grabbing Meli's other arm.

Meli considered things a moment, considered all things, including talking with David on the phone.

"You know what... I would like to dance," she replied, taking the rest of her drink and slugging it down. "Find our table, Zack, I'll be right there." She smiled apologetically to her friend.

Zack didn't have time to complain as Alexei slung a hand about her waist and guided her through the throng and to the main dance floor. "Woohoo!" he shouted as he grabbed her and began pumping his hips to the beat of the electrified music. Meli smiled, trying to keep up with the flamboyant man. He wore a loose, linen shirt unbuttoned to show off his finely tuned

physique. The margarita seemed to help her own moves a bit, though they were nothing compared to the powerful, expansive gyrations the man beside her was making. He danced as if he owned the world. She laughed, unable to hear a thing, shifting her hips when Alexei moved in behind her and carefully placed his hands on her hips, pressing his groin tight to her ass as he suggestively rolled his pelvis in order to make her join his rhythm. Meli, who hated dancing at home, rolled her pelvis to the handsome stranger's time as much as she drunkenly could, not minding his continually lessening proximity. Alexei was uninhibited as he took over the dance floor, doing a semi two-step mixed in with some sort of modern hip hop as well as general broad jazz moves. He moved to his own beat and it looked good.

Meli tried to keep up, hitching her too tight skirt up a bit as she shifted her rear about and tried to keep up with her handsome partner. She was exhausted when the music ended, panting and smiling brightly, looking about the crowd as they shouted and sang along to a favorite song. Hands circled her hips and waist and she didn't care that she was chubbier than her mother told her she should be, not at the moment. She turned her head to the man pressing up behind her, his hand curling around her waist and his face next to hers, his other hand moving in to cup her head as he leaned in closer and pulled her to his kiss.

Meli stood stiff as Alexei's lips moved over hers. She had never kissed anyone except David. His lips were gentle yet firm at the same time, coaxing hers to respond, the spinning world of people dancing about them, her friends waiting for her forgotten as she felt only the touch of the gorgeous man's lips on her own and his hand on her lower belly. She sighed as she let his tongue slide between her lips, tilting her head up as his hand tugging at her hair suggested, not pulling away as he moved in tighter to her. She quivered in the intensity of making herself let go, despite all the warnings flaring up in her brain that this was a stranger she met all of fifteen minutes ago. His decidedly male form was pressing up against hers as his hands controlled her gently, one hand forming her body to his as the other kept her face still. She couldn't believe the musky smell of him, clean and spicy and warm, making her wish to dissolve into his arms, feeling her cunny wetting at the idea of what more his obvious knowledge in the area of amour could promise. She felt dizzy as he released her. He laughed gently as he kept a hand on her back to keep her from falling.

"I like you, Meli," he informed her, his voice low in their close proximity.

"Uhh, I like you too... Alexei." She had forgotten his name for a moment, still caught up in his kiss.

"Why don't you come to my table?" he suggested, moving away and taking her arm, he smiled as he began guiding her up a stair case that stood in the middle of the dance hall.

Meli shook her head, trying to clear it of the past moment. "Oh... no. I better find my friends..." She looked about the flashing lights and haze, the room getting thicker with people the more the night wore on.

"There," he informed her as he pointed towards a table where a girl with blonde curly hair was waving wildly at them.

"Meli!" Abby circled the table with a strange grin on her face as they approached. "Hi!" She stuck out her hand to the man standing beside Meli, his hand still on her waist. "I'm Abby!"

Alexei made a sneering smile and shook her hand. "Alexei. Nice to meet you, Abby."

Meli knew she was blushing. It felt wonderful and strange that Alexei kept his hand on her waist. So familiar for having just met her, but almost protective. She felt oddly delicate as she stood next to the strange man listening but not listening as Abby riddled him with questions. She could see Abby was thrilled that Meli had already met someone else, glad that David was forgotten.

"Okay. I am going to head back to my posse," Alexei informed her decidedly, his accent making the cowboy term sound odd but cute, probably getting tired of Abby's interrogation. Meli, now feeling shy, nodded. She smiled up at him, his eyes searching her face possessively before he pressed a kiss to her cheek. "I will see you later, Meli," he informed her in a personal way, making her flush with pleasure before he pressed his lips to hers in a brash move before her friends. He released her, waving to the table as he left.

"Oh. My. God." Abby declared. "Did you just kiss a strange, gorgeous Russian man?" She squealed as she grabbed Meli's hands and drew in closer, her face about to split apart with her broad smile.

Meli smiled in return, following Abby to sit in the seat next to her that a begrudging Zack gave up.

"Sorry, Zack," she told her friend, patting him on the shoulder and leaning in closer to him as he kept his arms crossed on the table and refused to look at her. "You mad at me?" she asked as she rested her chin on his upper arm.

Zack sighed, still not looking at her. "No." He sat back in his chair. "Not really."

"Thank you." She circled his shoulders with one arm and leaned her head against him. "Cuz I love you and I don't wanna hurt you."

"Yeah..."

The mood of the friends was loose and gay and Meli wondered if she had ever felt this comfortable before when she hung out with them. Usually David was there. Handsome, tidy, smart David. She adored him. She had since they were kids and he said he felt the same. She missed his loud laugh and his joking with the other guys as they chatted about their math classes. David and Zack and Abby were always in the higher math courses while Meli and Cody seemed geared more towards art. David, a bit older and a genius, had finished school early and was already working as an electrical engineer's apprentice. His paycheck was hefty enough that he had already bought himself a house and a nice car and wanted Meli to plan their wedding.

Meli sipped her drink as melancholy moved through her. Why did he just give up on her? She had already sent in her paperwork for their local community college and had gotten her information in the mail when he found out. He had been irate. "Why didn't you tell me? Why are you doing this in secret?" he accused her angrily as he waved the letter about.

"I didn't think it mattered. I thought you'd automatically know I was going to go to college after graduation. I want to work with kids, I've always said that. I want to be a social worker."

He had stood looking pensive, the jaw muscles on his handsome, boyish face working as he considered things. "You didn't ask me. You just went and did it. We decided we were going to get married when we were Juniors! The year after your graduation was meant to be spent working on our wedding. We decided you don't need this!" he reminded her as he shook the papers.

She stood there, feeling something had shifted with him, tears already at her lids. "But I can do the wedding and go to school," she replied.

He shook his head no. "You betrayed me, Meli." He ran his hands through his wavy brown hair, frowning as he continued to shake his head. "This is a big thing, Meli. First it was when you didn't tell me you were getting your driver's permit. Like you need to drive? I can drive you where you need to go, everything else is within walking distance! Then you apply for a job at the Mac Shack. We both know you don't need to work. I make enough for both of us. I

can't have you continually lying to me like this." He let the letter slide to the counter to land amongst her parents' clutter of mail as he walked by her. "Let me know what you want."

"David?" She couldn't believe that was it. "David? You... you're breaking up with me?"

He stopped in front of her, fingering his keys. "Yeah... I think we need to call it quits for a bit. Until you figure out what you want at least."

"You can't just leave, David. Not after we've been together for two years!"

He shrugged. "But you don't care, Meli. You don't care about all I've done for you... I have a house, a car, I buy you things... this was meant to be the best wedding this town's ever seen. I told you to take out all stops, have the party of your dreams. Then we'll have a family... I mean, I had it perfect for you and here you go and betray me."

"I know you did, and I am grateful, I just thought I would get a job too, or at least an education..."

"Well, why would you need that since I am making bank as an electrician?" he admonished as he started walking off again.

"David! Please! I'm sorry!" she called after him, begging him, but she didn't say the one thing she knew he wanted to hear. That she would not continue trying to go to school.

"We're going to go to another bar!" Abby informed her, breaking her out of her reverie. "There's one just down the block."

Meli nodded, a little disappointed she would probably never see Alexei again.

The next place was a bit smaller and seedier but they could talk, though a few older people danced to the more subdued music.

"Here." Zack deposited a tray of drinks on the table, sitting another Margarita in front of Meli. It had been his idea to leave.

"So... what do we think of Russia?" Zack asked the group as they settled in with a variety plate of snacks.

"It's different. Uptight in ways, not in others," Cody replied, dipping his perogies in specially requested ketchup, which Meli was pretty sure would disgust any Russian local.

"Everyone seems so dressed up. All the time," Abby added, biting into a bit of a radish cucumber salad.

A group coming through the door broke up the sedate mood of the bar.

"Evelyn! My zdes!" the rowdy bunch of revelers announced as they walked in the door.

"Meli!" Abby said, her voice husky as she motioned for her to turn around and look.

Meli did, jumping when she realized someone was standing directly behind her chair.

"Hello, Meli." He smiled a bit too widely.

"Hey, Alexei!" she replied, smiling.

"May I sit?" he asked, though he was already doing so as she and Abby were nodding yes.

Meli rinsed her face, patting it dry as she looked at her reflection. Taking out her glasses she peered at herself, realizing for the first that she found herself to actually be pretty. Albeit plump. David and her mother never relenting on letting her know that she needed to lose weight. She smoothed the shiny, tight dress over her, noticing how it made her chubbiness come out as very curvaceous. She fixed her tits so that the crevice between them was even more pronounced, their big, plump tops threatening to spill over the tight sheath dress's collar. She inspected her teeth. Mussed then smoothed her hair, took off her glasses, posed and snapped a photo of herself and without thinking too much on it, sent it off to David, stating, "Wish you were here!" beneath it.

As she left the restroom, a shadow rose out of a nearby corner startling her.

Viktor, the large man from the airport walked towards her.

"Hey..." Meli greeted him nervously.

"Hey," he replied, stopping a few feet away and smiling purposefully, albeit frighteningly. "May I talk with you?"

"Uhh, sure." Meli nodded. "Why don't you join our table..."

"Nyet." He grabbed her arm with a hand that felt as if it were made from steel belts. "Here."

Meli blinked in reply, her tummy starting to hurt as she looked up at the large man. "Okay."

Viktor let go and seemed at a loss for words, making Meli nervous about what he was about to say. "You know I need to get back to my..."

"You need to beware Alexei," he interrupted her, his tone low and serious.

Meli frowned. "Why?"

"It is for you. He is dangerous person."

"Whatever. I think you might be a bit jealous because he is nice and..." she tapped the front of his chest. He grabbed her arm to pull her in closer. "Hey..." she complained, trying to yank free.

"Do you know who owns this bar?" he asked, his deep voice slightly hushed.

"Why would I know..."

"Alexei's father. Do you know who owns disco you were at?"

"No..."

"Alexei's father. Do you know who owns hotel you are staying at?"

"Alexei's father," she replied.

"Exactly. So, little girl, I suggest you be more careful about this man you are becoming friends with. I suggest you go back to hotel and you leave soon. Tomorrow."

"Why? What does it matter if they are his father's. So the guy is rich..."

"It does not matter that he owns these places, it matters that he likes you. Otherwise I would not be telling this."

Meli stared up at the large, stern man. She tugged at her arm until he finally let go. She stumbled back into the main room, shading her eyes from the brightness of the lights.

"Meli! My lovely, come I have bought you famous Russian dessert..."

Meli settled into the seat the handsome Alexei had pulled out for her. She smiled to her friends still shaken by her meeting with Viktor as she took a bite of the sweet, strawberry filled pastry.

"Good huh?"

Meli nodded, smiling as she took another bite. Her eyes followed Viktor as he entered the restaurant from the front and sauntered across the painted concrete floor to where the rest of Alexei's friends sat, most of them drolly drinking vodka shots and staring at the television sets that hung about the room. It was then that she realized they didn't seem like people who would just be hanging out with Alexei. She wouldn't think they were his type, the lot of them large, bitter and rough looking compared to the care-free, flamboyancy of the movie star handsome Alexei.

"You all right, Meli?" Abby asked, throwing an arm about her shoulders and nuzzling her. "You aren't thinking about David are you?"



Meli was surprised that actually, no, she hadn't been. For almost three weeks after they broke up, Meli had been so depressed she could barely eat or sleep, let alone talk about anything without breaking down in sobs. Now, for the first time in almost two months she had finally not had every other thought be about David.

She realized her phone was ringing. She tugged it out of her purse. David. "I'm going to be a second..." She began to pull her chair out when Alexei grabbed her phone.

"Hello?" he answered it.

"Stop! Please! Give me that!" Meli tried to grab the phone from the strange man, but he was too strong and easily deflected any attempt. Too shy to full on tackle him, she sat down.

"No... go on!" Abby urged Alexei on.

"Hi, David? This is Alexei."

"Oh Jesus..." Meli sank into her chair.

"Yes, I am here with the lovely Meli. Who are you?" His voice was loud and seemed to fill the restaurant despite the din of chatter. "Oh. Oh. Uh huh. So, you are Meli's fiancé?"

"EX fiancé," Abby corrected, smiling maliciously as she swirled her wine and watched Alexei with blood lust.

"Oh... Okay. Well, she is here with me and we are having very, very good time. I can't believe you would just let such a beauty go... Big titties... big butt... pretty, pretty face... You Indian too, David?"

Meli felt tears starting to rise as she grew more and more mortified.

"All right... that's enough..." Abby frowned, noticing her friends distress.

"All right. I guess I go too far. You miss out, David. Here is your beautiful Meli." He handed the phone to her.

"Hello," she replied dully. There was a good solid amount of silence, enough that she wondered if he had hung up.

"So I guess you are having a good time." David's voice was monotone.

Meli sighed. "I guess." She rose as Alexei started to get too loud and the others at the table joined him in a drinking game. She wandered outside, a cool wind whipping her legs as she stood just outside the front door. "I miss you." She closed her eyes against the tears that wanted to fall.

David didn't reply.

"I think you'd like it here..." She decided to fill the silence with her own voice, "There's a sense of history we don't have in the states. Not so palpable anyway."

"It's dangerous there. I don't think I'd like it."

"No. It's not so bad. Some really nice people... once you get to know them."

"Like Alexei?"

"He's just some guy wanting to party. You know the type. I'll head to my hotel room in a bit and never see him again."

"You gonna have sex with him?" David blurted out.

"David! Are you kidding me? Why would I do that? You know me..."

"We made a vow, Meli. Not until our wedding night." They had followed it too, for the most part. Though they had gotten deeply and well into heavy petting, they had kept to their promise of never 'sanctifying' their love.

"But we aren't getting married, David," Meli reminded him. She waited through the next pause, this one so long she was certain he had hung up.

"Good night, Meli."

"Good night, David."

She could hear their game across the room, the group with her friends gone rowdy as they all tried to sing along to the Russian drinking songs Alexei and some of his men had taught them.

"Here." Alexei plopped a shot glass in front of her as Meli sat down.

"I shouldn..."

"Up up up!" he insisted, pressing the glass to her lips. Meli complied, grabbing the glass away and cringing with the cold, silvery fire that slipped through her mouth and down her throat.

"Whoa!"

"Yup, yup, yup!" Alexei replied, plopping another in front of her and making her drink it as well.

She shoved the next one away.

"So, how's the asshole?"

"He's not an asshole, Abby." Cody sighed as he defended his long time pal.

"I mean how's David?" Abby smiled as she addressed Meli again about her ex.

"He's all right. Didn't say a whole lot."

"Funny. He didn't seem to need to call you so much when we were in the states." Abby always seemed able to remind her of reality. Meli knew she was right.

"He knows his ex-girl is meeting handsome Russian man!" Alexei butted in, circling his arm about Meli and roughly hugging her close. Meli smiled tightly, gently trying to work her way free of his grip.

"What is the matter, pretty baby? You no longer like Alexei?" he asked, releasing her.

"No, you're fine. I'm just tired. Jet lag, you know," Meli replied with a perfunctory smile.

"Ah... daa... da... all right, should I get you a ride? Have someone take you to hotel?" he asked her intently.

"Ummm..." Meli stared across the table at her best friend. Abby took another sip of her beer.

"I'm not ready to head home, Meli," she replied.

"Okay. But I'm ready."

"Good. Well, I will get my driver to take you home," Alexei insisted again.

"Well... I... uh..." Meli stuttered.

"Please. I insist. The cabs in Russia are dangerous at night." Without another word he left, walking over to the table of his friends.

"Of course..." Meli murmured in annoyance as she saw Viktor stand up at Alexei's request.

"Viktor's my best driver, Meli. He will make sure you get to hotel safe."

Meli smiled at Viktor. Viktor did not smile in return.

She closed her eyes, her brain chastising her, *don't do it, don't do it*. "Fine. Okay. I appreciate it." She grabbed her purse and gave Abby a kiss as she followed the large Russian man out the front door.

Viktor sped his blood red 1969 Mustang through the streets easily, Meli finding it amazing that he missed all the people milling about the small streets. She was partly grateful when he came to a slamming halt in front of the old building where she was staying.

"Thank you," Meli replied as she tried to stifle her shaking, both from the car ride and too much drinking.

She hadn't even pulled at the door handle when Viktor yanked the door open from the outside. He didn't say anything as he followed her to the locked main doors of the secured building. He banged the door for her when no one answered the ringer.

Finally, she was buzzed in. "Thank you," she told her large chauffer as she left him, trying to maneuver past him, irritated when he swung the door wider in order to follow her.

"You really don't have to do this."

"I am taking you to your room. I want to make sure you are safe."

Meli rolled her eyes but nodded. "Can you make sure this creep doesn't do anything?" Meli murmured to the door man as they walked by his desk, though she said it loud enough for Viktor to hear. The uniformed man just stared back at her, his eyes flicking nervously to the large man waiting beside her. Meli motioned to the screen that flipped through the many security cameras that were watching the various different halls and doors to the hotel. "Just keep an eye on your monitor."

Viktor stood beside her as they waited for the elevator, she getting more and more annoyed by the minute. He followed her into the elevator, settling in across from her as it started to head up to her floor.

"You don't have to do this," she informed him in a not so friendly way.

He continued to ignore her.

"Okay. I got this," she told him brusquely as she entered the room. He followed her in there as well. "I'm going to call the police," she growled, as he made a hurried walk through the whole room, looking into closets and under beds before he returned to where she stood watching him in amazement.

"Keep door locked," he ordered as she guided him to the front door.

"Fine. I will. Goodnight!" she called out, happily closing the door and locking it behind the creepy man.

She chuckled to herself as she shoved aside the clothes covering her bed, then collapsed upon it ready to fall asleep fully dressed. A knock at her hotel door made her rise.

"Just a minute!" she shouted as the drumming grew louder, more urgent. "Viktor! I'm fine!" She shouted at the man before she opened the door. She stopped dead. "who are you? Wha..."