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# SHAME

Russo Saga - Book Three

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.  
Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's  
advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

*I dedicate this book to all of us women in the world who need a little bit of Carmen's strength in our lives. Know your limits. Respect yourself.*

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## Chapter 1

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Lucas

I keep the engine running. When they come back out, we might need to be out of here within a second. The Salvatore hit squad. The most feared men on the West Coast.

I don't really know them. Only by name and looks. Christian, tall, dark, a proud Roman nose, messy hair, and absolutely terrifying. I never start a conversation with him. Ever. I don't fucking want him to even notice me. Eric, also tall, but with a more refined look, blond like me. He seems civilized, but his looks don't match his wicked mind. Ray, as broad as he's short, missing a front tooth, with a large scar across his face. He's always grinning at me, as if we share a secret. Which we don't. I think he's just out to unsettle me, the rookie. After two years, I'm still nothing to them. I'm air. And last, but not least, Sean, a giant, oozing threat, a nose broken too many times to count, used to be a boxer, all muscle. Could be good looking, but he has a permanent scowl on his face, as if someone's wronged him.

They all know I wanna come with. I don't wanna be the

driver forever. I can shoot. I work out, hard. I practice Krav Maga, have done so since I was fourteen, at a seedy dojo in a suburb, because I want to be ready the day they ask me, the day some other poor fucker gets driver duty.

The casino owner has a gambling debt himself. He's as stupid as they come. What the fuck are you thinking when you gamble at all? It's beyond me. Few win anything, many end up by Salvatore's feet, weeping, begging for their lives. Some strike a deal and live to see another day, some disappear. I have no idea what fate awaits this particular person.

The back door of the building flies open and the four men exit, one after another, laughing, joking. Sean lights up a cigarette, and so does Christian. No one seems to be in a hurry, or worried about being seen.

I jerk as Ray slams his fist on the roof of the car. "Lucas, you little twat. Getting bored in there?"

Rolling down the window, I stick out my head. "Went well then?"

"We should have let you in on the fun, let you break some bones. He won't be walking anytime soon."

"Yeah, when'll you all let me?"

Ray looks at Christian. "Whaddaya say, oldest son of Russo. You've killed since you were in your teens, you think this young man is dry behind his ears enough yet?"

Christian Russo drops his cig on the sidewalk, crushes it under the sole of his shoe, taking his time, before he fixates his black eyes on me. "I think he'll puke at the first sight of blood."

"How old are you, son?" asks Sean.

"Twenty. How old were you?"

"Fourteen."

He glances at the others, then back at me, narrowing his eyes. "He might be a lost case, but sure, let him in on the fun next time, I'd say. See how much he can stomach."

He stares me down, but I meet his hard gaze without so

much as a flinch. I'm not afraid of them. The only one who intimidates me for real is Mr. Salvatore himself, but he hired me, so he must've seen something in me, right?

I don't wanna fucking drive for the rest of my life, I want to be a part of the gang. I want to be a mobster. My dad was a small-time thief, a junkie who did more stints in jail than anyone could count. I swore I'd make something better of my life, stay the hell away from drugs, make money, find me a girl and a decent place to live. I still live in a dump, but I can almost taste it now, I'm getting there, day by day, mission by mission.

Christian Russo rips open the door and falls down on the seat, sticking a toothpick between his teeth. "We'll take you with us next time, kid. Now get us the fuck outta here."

As I pull out, I can't help wondering what state the guy is in inside those brick walls. Has he called for help yet? Will he dare go to the hospital even? I'm both thrilled and disgusted at the same time. I fought my way through school, bullied for my dirty, sweat-smelling clothes, the poverty, for not bringing lunch to school, but I've never actually been in a fight where I'm the instigator.

Back at the residence, the group files through the hallway and disappears into the house. I wait by the door guard, unsure where to go, but then I steer my steps toward the kitchen, figuring I can find a sandwich and a beer. Before I get more than a few steps, the door to Salvatore's office slams open and a man I've never seen before comes charging out, his face white, his features contorted with rage. He storms out the front door, snarling at the guard. Then everything goes quiet.

The door to the office still stands open and I can't help glance inside as I pass it. Salvatore paces back and forth, looking like a panther on the prowl. Our eyes meet and he perks up.

"Just the man I was looking for!"

I twitch and come to a full stop, careful to hide the trepidation. "Sir?"

“I’m gonna need you to drive a very important person for me later tonight. Are you up for it?”

Is he asking? Not really. He’s ordering. Never, ever assume you have a freedom of choice.

“Of course, sir. When?”

“You are to pick up a young Miss Moreno at the girls’ house. You know where it is. Tonight at six-thirty. I want to warm up before dinner.” He laughs, but there’s no joy in the sound, only wickedness.

I stiffen. “I’ll have her delivered for you, sir.”

“Atta boy. Now get the fuck outta my sight. You’re too pretty. I don’t like it.”

I hurry toward the kitchen, frowning. He’s such a weird man. Weird and scary. But he owns everybody and everything. He’s gonna be my way out of poverty and boredom. I want something to happen. I’m ready for adventure.

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## Carmen

I don’t recognize myself anymore.

I stare at the image in the mirror, of the girl I know is me. My normally curly, unruly black hair is hanging sleek, straightened and shiny over my shoulders. I have discreet makeup in earthy colors, where I usually use vibrant shades of green, pink and orange. The dress feels expensive in how it sensually caresses my curves. Black, shiny, not something I’d ever waste money on, but the matron lent it to me. Gold sandals, bare legs. No panties.

Naked. That’s how I feel. Vulnerable. As if I’m a piece of meat, placed like a slab on a chopping block at the butchers. I don’t know why. He’s just a man, like any other man. Why am I so intimidated by this one in particular?

Luciano Salvatore.

Is it because he literally *is* the whole organized crime on the West Coast of this country? Because he owns the house I live in, with all the girls working for him? Because of the gossip? The girls who get sent there coming back with frozen faces, never ever mentioning what happened? We always gossip about the johns, but no one dares to say anything about Mr. S.

Yes. I'm afraid. I've worked here for three months. Before that, I roamed the streets for two awful years. I should be overjoyed. Not many girls in my situation get a chance like this. Maybe he'll like me? Maybe he'll make me a regular? I've heard those girls come back with gifts, money. On the other hand, I also heard that some just disappear, and I don't know what happens to them.

I don't recognize myself.

I look beautiful, but my eyes are huge and haunted.

I know I'm pretty, but I've never looked as elegant, as luxuriously affluent as I do right now. Still, I'm filled with nothing but dread, my stomach in a knot, my heart pounding heavily. I feel as if I'm walking to the gallows.

Looking around the fairly cozy room, bright, a bit old-fashioned, with old wooden furniture painted white, and fabrics with little roses on them, I wonder if I'll return here, if I'll see it again.

Dear God, let me see it again.

Dear God, make him not like me.

Three harsh raps on the door make me flinch. The matron enters before I even have time to answer.

"It's time, Carmen. The driver is here."

It feels as if all the blood drains from my face. The matron gives me a look that briefly tells of pity, then her features harden.

"He's just a man. They're all slaves to their cocks in the end. You know the trade. Work that lush mouth of yours. Ride him. Take command. You know what to do, how to make him relax. Make him come again and again, until you've spent him. He won't have time for any games. He'll be satisfied and send you on



your way. Don't ever show your fear, don't bare your throat to him. You hear me? You'll be back here before you know it." She strokes my cheek. "You're a stunning beauty. He'll love you."

My stomach clenches. I think I'd prefer if he didn't. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I force a smile and nod.

"Think of all the money, love. He pays well."

"He's just a man," I repeat, then I follow my matron, my teacher, caretaker, my new mother. It's harsh love, but it's what I have.

As I pass the common room, the conversations go silent and all faces turn toward me. I hold my head high. I have no choice, so I better make the best of it.

He's just a man.

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## Lucas

At six-thirty sharp, I'm waiting outside the house on the outskirts of the foggy city. The air here is cleaner. To the far west the sun glitters on the ocean. Closing my eyes, I enjoy the warmth on my skin, and the sharp, sweet smell of newly cut grass. A moment later the front door slams shut. I jerk and look toward the source of the sound. A tiny girl, woman I correct myself, comes down the stairs. Her steps are hesitant, her face frozen in a mask of the same trepidation I feel when I get too close to Salvatore. When our eyes meet, my gut clenches. She looks so shy, so young, so innocent. What is she doing here? Why the hell am I taking her to the monster in the white mansion?

Miss Moreno is the most beautiful woman I've seen, and I'm overcome with a protection instinct so heavy I've never experienced anything like it before.

Carmen

On the driveway waits a black limousine with tinted windows. A shorter version, not one of those ridiculously stretched ones. A man stands next to it, his arms crossed, leaning back casually against the side of the limo. He's tall and blond, blue-eyed, tanned. He looks like a Viking to me. I'm his absolute opposite. Short, even though the heels make me somewhat taller, Colombian and dark. His nose looks as if it has been broken a couple of times and it gives him a bit of a brutish look, but he has kinder eyes than most men I come across. Well, the men I come across all want something from me, their faces hungry, sometimes vicious. I rarely meet anyone who looks at me as if I'm a person. This man does.

"Carmen?"

I nod.

"I'm Lucas." He opens the back door and gestures for me to enter, so I do. He sticks his head in. "Enjoy the ride. It's not very far."

"It's cold," I say with a shudder. I'm colder on the inside than I am from the actual temperature in the car, though, but how can I tell anyone about that.

"I'll raise the temperature for you." Even his voice is kind. He closes the door and I settle in.

Black leather seats, and a mini bar that I immediately examine, curiosity getting the better of me. Sadly it's only got a few bottles of water. Maybe it's intentional. I could have used a shot of anything that is strong, that would numb me, but maybe Mr. S won't allow that. I realize we're moving, and that I never even noticed when he started driving. He's good. The ride is incredibly smooth. And much too short.

I gawk as we pass through the guarded gates to the mansion. Everything is beautiful and bright. Very non-threatening. The garden with neatly trimmed bushes, the white house, a fountain.

Birds are singing and the sun is shining. Surely a man with such good taste can't be all bad?

My family lives in a shed that gets scorching hot during the sweltering days and freezing during the numbingly cold nights. We have to go to the common well to get water, but we do have electricity. I used to love to sit and read, but since we all slept in the same room, I was always shouted at to turn off the light and go to bed. An uncle was moving to the USA, with the promise of work at a farm. I wanted something more than a dirt floor, and calloused hands. I wanted a life, so I went with him. My uncle got his arm squeezed between a cow and a wall. The bones stuck out through the skin. He couldn't afford to take proper care of it after the first visit to the hospital. It got infected, then it spread through his body and he died. We rushed him to the hospital, pale and sweaty, but it was too late, and his heart gave out. He kept trying to talk to me, but I never got to hear what he tried to say. I knew farm work, but I wasn't needed so I ended up alone, at sixteen, with nowhere to go. A girl always has one merchandise she keeps with her at all times, so I began selling my body, my mind somewhere else, drifting to the stories I had read in the books. Heroes and heroines. Dragons. Witches. Happily ever afters.

None for me. No happily ever after. Nothing but humiliation and filth. It was a blessing at first, being picked up by the matron after two years out there. I have nice clothes, a clean room, a shower. A blessing. Until today.

I have run out of luck, and I know it.