I ALSO LEARNED THAT MR. TOSKA IS LOOKING FOR ME! THAT'S WHY YOU WERE BEING WATCHED IN CRETE. FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, HE THINKS I'M THE KEY PLAYER IN A CONSPIRACY TO ROB HIM!

DO YOU UNDERSTAND NOW? DO YOU SEE WHY YOU CAN'T CALL ME ANDREW? MR. SEFERI DOESN'T KNOW WHO I TRULY AM, OF COURSE, BUT HE SHOWED ME A PHOTO OF THE MAN TOSKA IS LOOKING FOR, AND IT WAS ME! BEFORE MY TRANSFORMATION, OF COURSE!

WAIT A MINUTE, ANDR... FINE, WAIT A MINUTE, AUNT ELENA! HOW IS IT POSSIBLE THAT TOSKA KNOWS SO MUCH? AND WHY WOULD HE THINK THAT YOU... I MEAN, ANDREW WOODS, WOULD BE TRYING TO ROB HIM?

HOW CAN I KNOW? HE'S A LUNATIC, ISN'T HE? BUT A DANGEROUS LUNATIC FOR SURE! DON'T YOU SEE HOW EVERYTHING FITS TOGETHER? THE MOBSTER WITH A GUN SPYING ON YOU, THE HIDDEN CAMERAS IN THE HOUSE, THE MISSING DRIVER... TOSKA HAS TO BE BEHIND ALL OF THIS. WHAT OTHER EXPLANATION IS POSSIBLE?

AND SINCE HE THINKS THAT ANDREW, FOR SOME REASON, IS SO IMPORTANT SUCH A CONSPIRACY...

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SAY THIS BUT...
IT'S A GOOD THING THIS JAMES GUY SHOWED UP.
IT PROVIDES A PERFECT ALIBE FOR YOU. THEY REALLY
NEED TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE MARRIED TO HIM AND
THAT ANDREW WOODS HAS NO RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE FAMILY!

REALLY? SO WILL IT BE LIKE THIS? I KEEP PRETENDING TO BE MARRIED TO ANOTHER MAN WHILE YOU LIVE AS MY AUNT?


WHAT CHOICE WE HAVE?
UNTIL WE UNDERSTAND WHAT'S
HAPPENING I THINK...

YOU KNOW, I'D SAY SCREW IT AND LET'S GET OUT OF HERE IF IT WEREN'T FOR SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED WHILE YOU WERE UNCONSCIOUS.

WHAT? WHAT HAPPENED?

WELL, FILIP, THE DRIVER, CAME BACK OUT OF NOWHERE. AND THE WHOLE THING WAS... WEIRD.

WEIRD? WHY?
HOW DID HE EXPLAIN
HIS DISAPPEARANCE?

WELL, HE... A-ARE YOU OKAY, AUNT ELENA?

I... I... JUST A MINUTE, MARINA!


GOD, IT FEELS LIKE SOMEONE IS TOUCHING MY BREASTS! I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M GETTING TURNED ON. THIS IS SO EMBARRASSING! WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING?

AUNT ELENA?





AHHH...?!


I CAN'T BELIEVE
I WOKE UP NOW!


BUT I CAN SEE WHY...


OHHH...

MY HUSBAND REALLY IS AN INSATIABLE MAN! EVEN ASLEEP, HE KEEPS PLAYING WITH MY BOOBS, AND I CAN FEEL HIS MEMBER GROWING DOWN THERE...








AHHHHH---!


THIS IS SO HOT!

MY BUTT IS STILL BURNING LIKE HELL, BUT I'D LOVE TO FEEL HIS COCK INSIDE ME AGAIN RIGHT NOW...

WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU, ELENA? YOU'RE ACTING LIKE SOME BRAINLESS SLUT! YOU HAVE A LOT TO THINK ABOUT RIGHT NOW, OKAY?


THANK GOD NIKOS IS A HEAVY SLEEPER!

IF HE WERE AWAKE, I DON'T THINK I'D BE ABLE TO RESIST HIS... CHARM!


BUT THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME.

NOW I THINK IT'S SAFE TO ASSUME THAT I'M ATTRACTED TO MY HUSBAND BECAUSE I'VE BUILT A PERSONALITY FOCUSED ON THIS. THIS IS ALL ABOUT METHOD ACTING... RIGHT? I'VE CREATED A PERSONA TO BE THE PERFECT WIFE FOR SOMEONE LIKE NIKOS... A LOVING, DEDICATED, MADLY IN LOVE WOMAN, COMPLETELY CRAZY ABOUT HIM.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT IT SEEMS LIKE I CAN'T LEAVE THE CHARACTER. JUST NOW I WAS JERKING HIM OFF WITH MY FEET, FANTASIZING ABOUT GETTING FUCKED BY HIM AGAIN! THIS ISN'T SOMETHING NEW, I GUESS. I'VE READ ABOUT ACTORS WHO, AFTER CERTAIN ROLES, HAD TROUBLE KNOWING WHO THEY REALLY WERE FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

WELL, BEFORE I TRY TO SORT THIS OUT, I THINK I NEED TO RECAP EVERYTHING I KNOW SINCE I FINALLY AM STARTING TO FILL IN THE BLANKS IN MY MEMORY!

FOR EXAMPLE, NOW I'M AWARE OF WHY MARINA RAN AWAY AND LEFT ME ALONE IN THE CLINIC. IT WAS BECAUSE THE GUY SHE HAD MET IN CRETE SHOWED UP AT NIKOS' RESORT. THIS ALSO EXPLAINS WHY SHE KEEPS PRETENDING THEY'RE A COUPLE AS JOEL APPEARED ON THE SCENE AT THE WORST POSSIBLE TIME.

I DON'T REMEMBER MY ENTIRE CONVERSATION WITH MARINA. SHE WAS ABOUT TO TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED TO FILIP, THE DRIVER, WHEN I WOKE UP, AND MY BRAIN SEEMS DETERMINED TO KEEP SOME INFORMATION HIDDEN FROM ME.

I MUST HAVE SUFFERED A MAJOR TRAUMA DURING OR AFTER THE CONVERSATION. SOMETHING SO SCARY THAT I THOUGHT MY ONLY WAY OUT WAS TO EMBRACE A NEW PERSONALITY AND ERASE PART OF MY MEMORY.

I WAS ALREADY VERY WORRIED EVEN BEFORE TALKING TO MY NIECE, WHICH IS UNDERSTANDABLE, CONSIDERING WHAT SEFERI HAD TOLD ME. AND THEN, I WAS THE ONE WHO ASKED MARINA OVER AND OVER AGAIN TO STOP CALLING ME ANDREW. I PROBABLY INSTRUCTED THE ENTIRE FAMILY TO DO THE SAME.

THEY'VE ALL BEEN PRETENDING THAT I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ELENA SAMARAS. BEFORE, I THOUGHT THIS WAS SOME SICK PLOT AGAINST ME, BUT THE TRUTH IS...

...THEY WERE MOST LIKELY JUST JUST DOING MY WILL! I TOLD THEM TO ACT LIKE ANDREW DIDN'T EXIST, EVEN WHEN WE WERE ALONE! THIS SEEMS TO BE THE ONLY POSSIBLE EXPLANATION!

BUT NOW THAT I REMEMBER PARTS OF WHAT HAPPENED THE DAY I LEFT THE CLINIC, THERE'S ANOTHER IMPORTANT THING TO CONSIDER... SEFERI AND JOEL... THEY BOTH WARNED ME ABOUT HOW DANGEROUS MR. TOSKA IS... THEY BOTH TOLD ME ABOUT ROAN GJOKA, THE MOBSTER WHO IS SUPPOSEDLY WORKING WITH TOSKA. I THINK IT'S CLEAR THAT SEFERI AND JOEL ARE WORKING TOGETHER, BUT WHY DIDN'T THEY MENTION EACH OTHER TO ME? STRANGE. IT WOULD MAKE SENSE FOR THEM TO MAKE IT CLEAR THEY WERE ALLIES, SINCE BOTH OF THEM, AT LEAST IN THEORY, WERE TRYING TO HELP ME, RIGHT?

ALL MY ACTIONS HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE BELIEF THAT SEFERI AND JOEL ARE TELLING ME THE TRUTH, AND THAT MR. TOSKA POSES A DANGER TO ME AND EVERYONE AROUND ME. WHAT EVIDENCE DID THEY PRESENT, THOUGH? I'VE BASICALLY BEEN TRUSTING THEIR WORD BLINDLY... SO BLINDLY THAT I ENDED UP WITH THE BODY – AND EVEN THE MIND – OF A MIDDLE-AGED GREEK WIFE! WHAT IF... WHAT IF MR. TOSKA ISN'T THE REAL VILLAIN HERE?

Chapter twenty-two

Sweat, Blood and Tears

THREE DAYS LATER...





YOU KNOW, SEFARI, YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD A THING FOR SETTING UP MEETINGS IN... UNUSUAL PLACES. I THINK THIS TIME YOU OUTDID YOURSELF, THOUGH! ANY PARTICULAR REASON FOR CHOOSING SUCH A *CHARMING* SITE?

YES, YES, I HAVE MY REASONS, JOEL. I SEE YOU'VE DECIDED TO KEEP UP YOUR "GOOD GUY" COSTUME TO SEE ME.

SNORT

DON'T YOU LIKE MY GLASSES, DEAR UNCLE?

THE GLASSES ARE FINE, I GUESS. WITHOUT THEM, WE WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN HERE, WOULD WE?

THAT'S TRUE, UNCLE, BUT YOU KNOW... YOU DON'T SEEM SO PLEASED WITH HOW FAR WE'VE COME.

IS THIS STILL ABOUT YOU NOT BEING HAPPY WITH MRS. SAMARAS' FATE? FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD, SHE'S DOING BETTER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK! BUT EVEN IF SHE WASN'T, WHY WOULD THAT BE OUR PROBLEM?

I'VE NEVER HIDDEN MY DISPLEASURE WITH WHAT WE'RE MANIPULATING MRS. SAMARAS INTO DOING. IT'S VERY SAD TO LIVE A FAKE LIFE, AS I KEEP SAYING. BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT'S BOTHERING ME MOST RIGHT NOW, YOU STUPID, ARROGANT BOY. THE TRUTH IS THAT YOU'VE RUINED EVERYTHING!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

MRS. SAMARAS WANTS TO SEE US. BOTH OF US... TOGETHER! SHE NO LONGER TRUSTS YOU AND ME. AND YOU KNOW WHY? BECAUSE YOU WENT TO HER TO TALK ABOUT TOSKA AND GJOKA. YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO DO THAT AT THAT DINNER PARTY! YOU WERE THERE TO LISTEN AND OBSERVE!

I HAD NO CHOICE. YOU SAY YOU SPOKE TO HER AT THE HOSPITAL, BUT I THINK YOU DID A TERRIBLE JOB! SHE WAS ABOUT TO FORCE MARINA TO...

ENOUGH!

NOW I'M THE ONE WHO HAS NO CHOICE. WE NEED TO REGAIN MRS. SAMARAS' TRUST, AFTER ALL!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? DO YOU INTEND TO REGAIN HER TRUST BY KILLING ME? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?!

WHAT? I'M NOT GOING TO KILL YOU! WHAT DO YOU THINK I AM? A SAVAGE? I'LL HAVE TO SHOOT YOU, THOUGH. TRUST ME, THIS IS GOING TO HURT. *A LOT.* I THINK SOON YOU'LL UNDERSTAND HOW SAD IT IS TO LIVE A FAKE LIVE. FOR NOW, JUST DON'T TRY ANYTHING STUPID, LIKE RUNNING AWAY. THAT'LL JUST MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT AND MESSY. LET'S BE CIVILIZED HERE.

CIVILIZED? YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT SHOOTING ME! PUT THAT GUN DOWN AND LETS...



AHHHHH!

MEANWHILE, AT THE SAMARAS' HOUSE...



FINALLY!


I THOUGHT YOU HAD GIVEN UP ON JOINING US, MOM!


YOU KNOW YOUR MOTHER, SOFIA.


SHE ALWAYS TAKES HER TIME TO GET READY!

BUT IT'S ALWAYS WORTH IT.
YOU LOOK STUNNING, MY LOVE!

W-WHY THANK YOU, NIKOS!


YOU'RE WELCOME, BABE.





NOW COME, EVERYONE IS EAGER TO TALK TO YOU.

I KNEW I SHOULDN'T BE WEARING SUCH A REVEALING SWIMSUIT. MEN ARE TOO VISUAL AND NIKOS CAN'T TAKE HIS EYES OFF ME! A GARMENT LIKE THIS ONE ISN'T EVEN APPROPRIATE FOR SOMEONE MY AGE, IS IT?

WAIT... I REALLY NEED TO CONTROL THESE URGES. I KEPT HAVING THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS AS IF I REALLY WERE ELENA SAMARAS. GET YOURSELF TOGETHER, ELENA!

ANGELIKI IS SO STUBBORN THAT I HAD NO CHOICE BUT PUT THIS SWIMSUIT ON. IT'S SO HARD TO REASON WITH THAT GIRL WHEN SHE GETS EXCITED ABOUT SOMETHING!

I WONDER IF THAT'S THE FULL PICTURE, THOUGH. ANGELIKI WORKS FOR US. SHE CAN'T FORCE ME TO DO ANYTHING, NO MATTER HOW PERSISTENT SHE IS. COULD IT BE THAT I ACCEPTED THE SWINWEAR BECAUSE DEEP DOWN I WANTED TO GET NIKOS' ATTENTION? THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH THE CHARACTER I'VE CREATED, AFTER ALL. A DEVOTED WIFE ALWAYS READY TO PLEASE MY HUSBAND...

I NEED TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH MARINA BEFORE TALKING TO SEFERI AND JOEL. THE TRUTH IS THAT I SIMPLY DIDN'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO CONTACT HER IN THE LAST FEW DAYS. NOT AFTER WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN ME AND NIKOS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN... BUT I CAN'T KEEP AVOIDING IT FOREVER.

NOW I KNOW THAT IT WAS ME WHO INSTRUCTED HER TO TREAT ME AT ALL TIMES AS IF I TRULY WERE HER AUNT.

BUT WE AREN'T STUPID, NO MATTER HOW DISTRESSED WE WERE THAT DAY AT THE HOSPITAL. WE PROBABLY ESTABLISHED A CODE FOR WHEN WE NEEDED TO TALK OUT OF CHARACTER. THE PROBLEM IS THAT I DON'T REMEMBER ANY CODE, WHICH MAKES THINGS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT!

OH, MOM, I THINK NOW WE CAN SAY YOU'RE FULLY RECOVERED FROM THE ACCIDENT, AREN'T YOU? YOU LOOK BETTER THAN EVER! GOSH, I CAN ONLY HOPE TO REACH YOUR AGE LOOKING THIS GORGEOUS!


WE MISSED YOU, MOM.

NOW, WOULD YOU LIKE A DRINK?
WE HAVE...

WAIT... THAT RING IS NEW, ISN'T IT? AND IT LOOKS A LOT LIKE AN ENGAGEMENT RING! WHAT WERE YOU TWO UP TO THAT NIGHT YOU DISAPPEARED, ANYWAY?

OH NO! HOW STUPID I AM...
I SHOULD HAVE TAKEN THIS RING OFF!
I DEFINITELY DIDN'T WANT MY DAUGHTERS
AND NIECE TO FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT
HAPPENED THAT NIGHT... NOT NOW!

WELL, I GUESS THERE'S NO WAY TO KEEP IT A SECRET ANYMORE.

AS YOU KNOW, YOUR MOTHER AND I NEVER HAD A PROPER WEDDING CEREMONY, SO I DECIDED TO PROPOSE TO HER, AND SHE ACCEPTED! WHICH MEANS WE'RE GOING TO GET MARRIED AGAIN... OR RENEW OUR VOWS... THE LABEL DOESN'T MATTER, BUT WE WANT TO CELEBRATE OUR LOVE IN FRONT OF EVERYONE!

OH GOSH, THIS IS WONDERFUL!

CONGRATULATIONS, MOM, I CAN IMAGINE HOW SPECIAL THIS MUST FEEL TO YOU!

GOD, I'LL HAVE TO PLAY ALONG FOR NOW. WHAT CHOICE DO I HAVE?

OH, DEAR DAUGHTER, YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW HAPPY I AM! THAT'S A DREAM COME TRUE!

I THINK THIS CALLS FOR A TOAST, RIGHT? LET ME GET THE CHAMPAGNE!

A BIT LATER...

PANT, PANT I'M COMPLETELY OUT OF BREATH AFTER SWIMMING JUST HALF THE POOL! IT'S UNBELIEVABLE HOW MUCH WEAKER I AM THESE DAYS. THE DOCTOR TOLD ME THIS WOULD HAPPEN. I DEFINITELY DON'T FEEL LIKE A GUY IN HIS TWENTIES ANYMORE. AND THE FACT THAT I'M CARRYING WHAT FEELS LIKE TWO BAGS OF SAND ON MY CHEST CERTAINLY DOESN'T MAKE THINGS ANY EASIER!

HERE'S MARINA...

I NEED TO TALK TO HER NOW THAT EVERYONE IS DISTRACTED.

MARINA... ARE YOU OKAY?

THIS BITCH'S NERVE!

HUH? EVERYTHING IS FINE, AUNT ELENA. WHY WOULDN'T IT BE? I WAS JUST MAKING A CALL.

ANYWAY, CONGRATULATIONS AGAIN. YOUR ENGAGEMENT RING IS ADORABLE!

LISTEN, MARINA, ABOUT THIS WEDDING THING...


WHY WOULD YOU BE JUSTIFYING YOURSELF? YOU'RE NOT EVEN WEARING EARRINGS, ARE YOU? CLEARLY YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED IN HAVING ANY SERIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH ME!


THE EARRINGS... I THINK
I REMEMBER NOW...

JUST ANSWER ONE QUESTION, AUNT ELENA. DID YOU HAVE SEX WITH UNCLE NIKOS?


SO THAT'S WHAT I THINK WE NEED TO DO FOR NOW...

WHEN WE'RE TALKING IN A PLACE WHERE THERE IS A RISK OF US BEING WATCHED, WE MUST ACT AS IF ANDREW HAD NEVER EXISTED IN OUR LIVES, AND I HAD ALWAYS BEEN ELENA SAMARAS.

AND THEN, WHEN WE NEED TO TALK AS OUR TRUE SELVES, WE CAN USE A CODE OR SOMETHING TO ARRANGE A MEETING IN A SAFE PLACE.


IT MAKES SENSE... I GUESS?

FOR THE CODE, THIS HAS TO BE SOME KIND OF "GIRLY TALK", RIGHT? TO AVOID AROUSING SUSPICION. PERHAPS I CAN COMPLIMENT YOUR EARRINGS OR SOMETHING.

THEN WE CAN MEET AT THAT PLACE WE FIRST VISITED IN ATHENS? IT'S OPEN AND ISOLATED... IT'S HARD FOR SOMEONE THERE TO WATCH US WITHOUT BEING NOTICED.

YES, THIS SOUNDS PERFECT. AND I THINK YOU SHOULD WARN EVA AND SOFIA ABOUT OUR PLAN. THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO NEED MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT BEFORE TO TREAT ME AS IF I REALLY WERE THEIR MOTHER PRETTY MUCH ALL THE TIME, BUT IT'S CRITICAL TO REMIND THEM ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF STAYING IN CHARACTER.


WHAT ABOUT UNCLE NIKOS?

ABOUT NIKOS... I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO TALK TO HIM MYSELF SO WE CAN THINK OF A WAY TO LOOK CONVINCING AS HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THIS ALL SOUNDS SO STRANGE, MARINA. GOD, I DIDN'T WANT ANY OF THIS TO BE HAPPENING AT ALL.

LISTEN, MARINA, THERE IS SOMETHING IMPORTANT YOU NEED TO KNOW. ONLY RECENTLY DID I START TO RECALL WHAT HAPPENED IN THE INTERVAL BETWEEN MY SURGERIES AND THE DAY I WOKE UP HERE, AT NIKOS' HOUSE.

I DIDN'T REMEMBER THE "EARRING CODE" UNTIL BASICALLY NOW, AND FOR A LONG TIME I THOUGHT YOU WERE DELIBERATELY PUSHING ME AWAY WHEN I TRIED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING ON!

OH REALLY? ISN'T IT A LITTLE TOO CONVENIENT, *AUNT ELENA*? IS THAT YOUR EXCUSE? AMNESIA?

PLEASE, KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN, MARINA!
YOU DON'T WANT THE OTHERS TO HEAR US, DO YOU?
FROM WHAT I REMEMBER, YOU TOLD JAMES THAT
YOU DON'T SPEAK GREEK! LET'S MEET AT THAT
PLACE WE TALKED ABOUT AND THEN...

JUST ANSWER TO THE DAMN QUESTION! DID YOU SLEEP WITH UNCLE NIKOS OR NOT?

SIGH

I... I WASN'T BEING MYSELF, MARINA. IT JUST HAPPENED.

IT JUST HAPPENED?! YOU SENILE, ROTTEN SLUT, HOW CAN YOU BE SO BRAZEN AS TO...

MR. SAMARAS?

HUH...?


INSPECTOR KARRAS?
WHAT A SURPRISE!

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR US TO MEET AGAIN, RIGHT, MR. SAMARAS? YOUR EMPLOYEES DIDN'T WANT TO LET ME IN, BUT THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION FORCED ME TO BE A LITTLE... STUBBORN. TELL ME, ARE YOU AN ASSOCIATE OF AN ALBANIAN MAN CALLED JOEL KOCI?

YES, HE HAS BEEN WORKING WITH ME ON AN IMPORTANT PROJECT. WHY?

MR. KOCI WAS SHOT NOT LONG AGO. HE WAS RUSHED TO THE HOSPITAL BUT HIS CONDITION IS CRITICAL. THE WEAPON WAS FOUND NEAR THE ABANDONED WAREHOUSE WHERE THE CRIME TOOK PLACE. A STRANGE CRIME, CONSIDERING THAT MR. KOCI'S BELONGINGS WEREN'T STOLEN.


W-WHAT...?!

Chapter twenty-three
Open Wounds

AT NIGHT---


THIS IS UNBELIEVABLE...

WHEN I THOUGHT THINGS WERE STARTING TO MAKE SENSE, EVERYTHING GETS SO CONFUSING AGAIN!

JOEL WAS SHOT AND ROAN GJOKA'S FINGERPRINTS WERE FOUND ON THE GUN. GJOKA... THE MOBSTER WHO – ACCORDING TO JOEL AND MR. SEFERI – IS WORKING WITH MR. TOSKA.

I CONSIDERED THE IDEA THAT JOEL AND MR. SEFERI WERE MANIPULATING ME FOR SOME REASON IN ORDER TO FORCE ME TO KEEP LIVING AS ELENA SAMARAS, BUT NOW I SEE THAT THIS CAN'T BE TRUE. THEY ARE VICTIMS OF TOSKA AND GJOKA, JUST LIKE ME.

AND THEN THERE IS MARINA...
I WAS HOPING TO BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN WHAT'S GOING ON TO HER TODAY, BUT THAT WASN'T POSSIBLE. NOT ONLY DID SHE NOT WANT TO LISTEN TO ME... SHE ALSO CALLED ME HORRIBLE THINGS!

I UNDERSTAND SHE WAS MAD TO KNOW THAT I SLEPT WITH NIKOS, BUT CAN'T SHE SEE THAT ANYONE IN MY POSITION WOULD HAVE ALREADY LOST THEIR SANITY? GOD, ONE DAY I WAS A GUY IN MY TWENTIES, AND THE NEXT DAY I WAKE UP I'M A FIFTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD WIFE AND MOTHER, WITH EVERYONE AROUND ME ACTING LIKE I'VE NEVER BEEN ANYONE ELSE!

I CAN'T STAND THIS ANYMORE! I'VE BEEN LIVING IN STRESS FOR GOD KNOWS HOW LONG. JUST A FEW HOURS IN PEACE... IS THAT TOO MUCH TO ASK?



WOULDN'T LIFE BE SO MUCH EASIER IF I COULD JUST FORGET THAT I WAS ONCE A MAN NAMED ANDREW WOODS? NO ONE SEEMS WILLING TO HELP ME REGAIN MY OLD IDENTITY. NO EVEN MY SO-CALLED WIFE! FOR HOW LONG CAN I KEEP FIGHTING ALONE?

MARINA IS JUST A SELFISH, SPOILED BITCH! HOW CAN SHE TURN HER BACK ON ME IN A SITUATION LIKE THAT? FIRST SHE WENT TO CRETE, AND NOW SHE DIDN'T EVEN WANT TO LISTEN TO ME. WHY SHOULD I FEEL GUILTY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN NIKOS AND ME?

NIKOS... MY HUSBAND... HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO TRULY CARES ABOUT ME...



I HOPE YOU'RE NOT SLEEPY, HANDSOME, BECAUSE TONIGHT I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU VERY, VERY HAPPY...

E-ELENA?


DO YOU LIKE WHAT YOU SEE?
A-ABSOLUTELY!


GOOD...

'CAUSE TONIGHT IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU.

BELIEVE ME...

YOU'LL REMEMBER THIS NIGHT FOREVER!

MEANWHILE, NOT FAR FROM THERE...




SO...


WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO ME, INSPECTOR?

YOU'VE BEEN A BAD GIRL, HAVEN'T YOU?
COME TO BED SO I CAN PUNISH YOU.


THAT WASHED UP WHORE THINKS SHE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GO AROUND FUCKING OLDER MEN? I'LL SHOW HER!






DOES IT FEEL GOOD?

DOES IT FEEL GOOD WHEN I TWERK ON YOUR DELICIOUS COCK LIKE THAT?


IT FEELS... AHH...
A-AMAZING!

GOOD, BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING I LOVE MORE THAN THIS...

GIVING PLEASURE TO MY STUD HUSBAND!

AND I KNOW SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU VERY, VERY HAPPY!


I'M RIGHT, AREN'T I?


ABSOLUTELY! GOD, YOUR BOOBS ARE SO HOT!

NOT SO FAST, DARLING!
LET ME DO SOMETHING FOR YOU FIRST.
I PROMISE YOU WON'T REGRET IT!








TELL ME, INSPECTOR...


DO YOU LIKE IT WHEN I TOUCH YOUR GUN?

I GUESS YOU DO. IT'S GETTING SOOO BIG RIGHT NOW!

AHHH I CAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER. JUST COME HERE!

IT SEEMS THAT YOU'VE LOST THE ABILITY TO ACT IN COLD BLOOD, INSPECTOR. AT THIS POINT, YOU DON'T SOUND LIKE SOMEONE WHO GOES AFTER DANGEROUS MOBSTERS!

REMEMBER THAT TONIGHT
IT'S ALL ABOUT PUNISHING ME!
YOU SAID IT YOURSELF. BUT FOR THAT,
I NEED TO TEASE YOU AND BE A BAD
GIRL FIRST, RIGHT?




OH, GOSH...

IT TASTES SO GOOD!

ALRIGHT, I HOPE YOU ARE READY, BIG BOY!



AHHHH!!



IT ALWAYS AMAZES ME HOW HUGE NIKOS' COCK IS!

SO HUGE THAT IT GOES DEEP DOWN MY THROAT!

BUT I ALWAYS TAKE IT ALL AS A GOOD COCKSUCKER!


OH, IT FEELS SO FUCKING AMAZING!


CHOKING

GOSH, TONIGHT NIKOS IS EVEN PRESSING MY HEAD AGAINST HIS MONSTER DICK... I LOVE IT!




AHHH!!






WHAT A DELICIOUS COCK YOU HAVE HERE, INSPECTOR!

YOU THINK SO? WHY DON'T YOU SUCK IT THEN?

AS YOU WISH, SIR!





OKAY, HONEY...

YOU'VE BEEN PATIENT, SO I THINK IT'S TIME FOR YOUR REWARD!



AND I HAVE TO SAY...


THAT'S A REWARD FOR ME AS WELL!

...CONSIDERING HOW MUCH I LOVE HAVING YOUR FAT COCK INSIDE ME!



GOD, IT FEELS SO GOOD WHEN I RUB MY PUSSY AGAINST NIKOS' COCK...

I'VE BEEN POSTPONING THIS FOR SO LONG... THAT'S IT, TIME FOR TRUTH! I NEED TO KNOW WHETHER I HAVE A REAL PUSSY OR NOT!





HIS COCK IS DEFINITELY GOING IN, BUT IT HURTS AND BURNS SO BAD! JUST RELAX, ELENA! HE ALREADY FUCKED YOUR ASS. THIS CAN'T BE ANY HARDER!

AHHH!


OH, GOD!

FUCK, IT FEELS SO DAMN GOOD, ELENA!

YEAH? BUT KEEP IN MIND WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED, BABE!

HE'S GETTING DEEPER AND DEEPER!

OH... THIS IS STARTING TO FEEL... NICE... REALLY, REALLY NICE! I CAN FEEL HIS DICK SLIDING IN MORE EASILY NOW AND...


AHHHHH!!!

HE'S ALL INSIDE ME! HIS HUGE COCK IS FILLING MY PUSSY COMPLETELY! THERE'S NO WAY THIS IS A FAKE PUSSY. THIS IS JUST SO DEEP... AND FEEL SO FUCKING REAL!

AHHH!!

THAT'S IT, NOW I HAVE A MAN... A REAL MAN TO FUCK ME!

AHHHHH!!!


HOW DID SHE HAD THE NERVE TO CHEAT ON ME WITH MY UNCLE... MY FUCKING UNCLE!

WELL, MAY SHE MAKE THE MOST OF HER NEW REALITY SINCE SHE ENJOYS IT SO MUCH! HER LIFE IS ALL ABOUT IT NOW... PLAYING HOUSEWIFE DURING THE DAY AND GETTING FUCKED BY AN OLD MAN AT NIGHT - FOR THE REST OF HER DAYS! THEY CUT HER DICK OFF, AFTER ALL. SHE'LL NEVER BE A MAN AGAIN!

I WONDER IF SHE'S ONLY BEEN FUCKED IN THE ASS SO FAR LIKE THE SLUT SHE IS OR HAS SHE ALREADY TRIED HER NEW PUSSY AND FOUND OUT THERE'S NOTHING FAKE ABOUT IT...


AHHHH, OH GOD!

DO YOU LIKE IT? TELL ME HOW MUCH YOU LIKE THIS... NOW!

I LOVE IT, NIKOS. I LOVE IT WHEN YOU FUCK MY PUSSY LIKE THAT!


HARDER NOW, PLEASE!
I WANT TO FEEL YOUR
WHOLE COCK INSIDE ME!





AHHHHHH!!


OH, NIKOS...


IT FEELS SO FUCKING GOOD!

I COULDN'T AGREE MORE, MY LITTLE SLUT!


YOUR PUSSY STILL FEELS AS TIGHT AND DELICIOUS AS IT DID WHEN I MADE YOU A PREGNANT WOMAN, ALL THOSE YEARS AGO. DO YOU REMEMBER?


TELL ME YOU REMEMBER!

I... I...

NIKOS KEEPS SAYING THESE THINGS...
AT THIS POINT I REALLY WISH IT WERE TRUE.
WOULD THAT BE SO BAD? BEING MARRIED TO HIM
FOR ALMOST THIRTY YEARS... HAVING GIVEN BIRTH
TO HIS TWO ADORABLE DAUGHTERS. WOULDN'T
THINGS BE SIMPLER? WOULDN'T I BE ***HAPPIER***?


OF COURSE I REMEMBER! I REMEMBER IT AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY AND...
OH GOD, I'M COMING! AAAAHHHHH!


STOP IT!
NOW? WHY?

'COS I TOLD YOU SO. DO YOU REALLY NEED ANYOTHER REASON?



WHAT THE HELL AM I THINKING?
I CAN'T LET THAT BITCH RUIN MY LIFE.
NOT AGAIN. IT'S TIME TO PUT AN END
TO THIS... ONCE AND FOR ALL!

A LITTLE LATER...






HUH...?


WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?
WHERE I AM?

click
clack

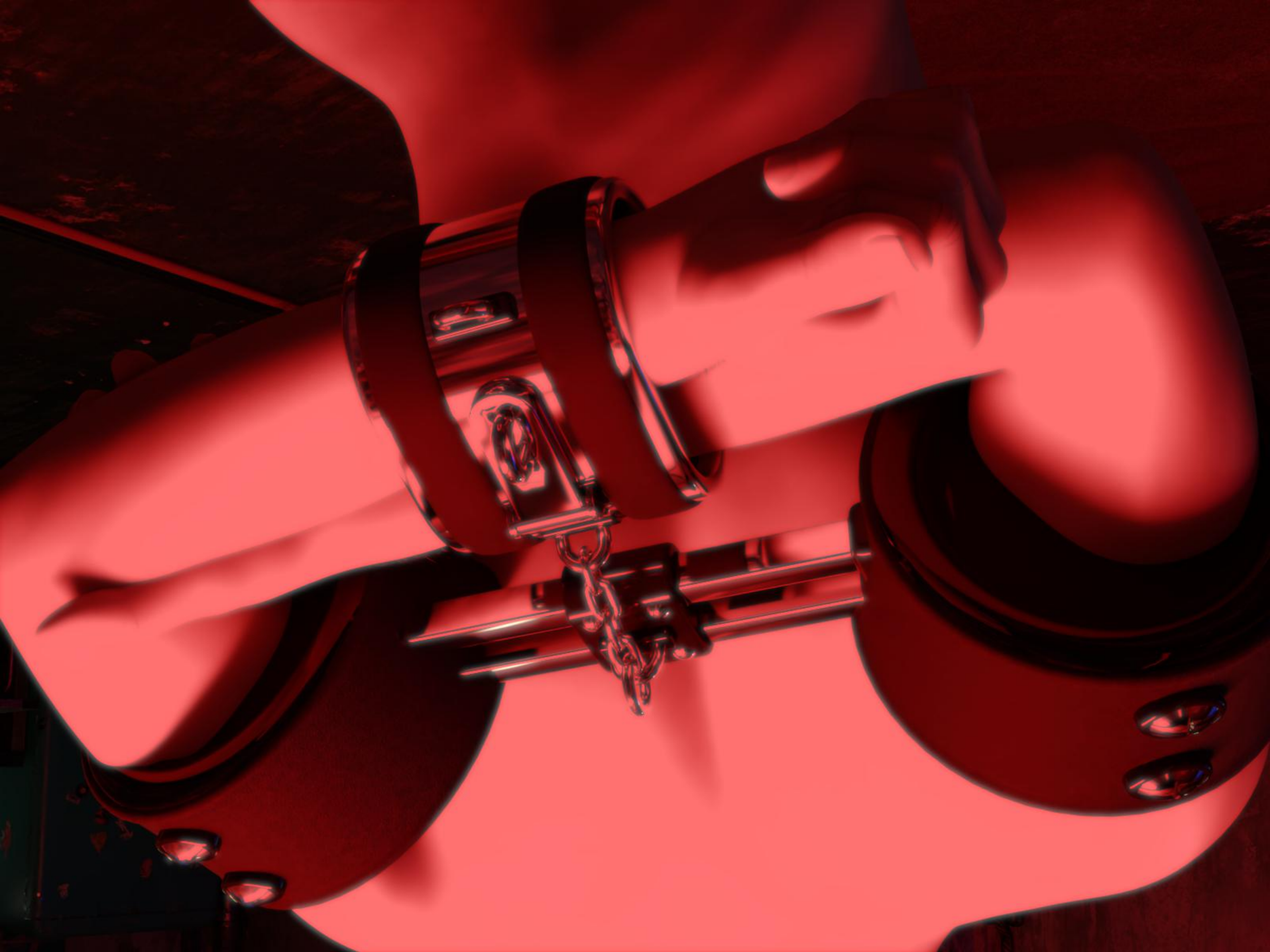

YOU...!


WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?


WHAT YOU THINK?


CRACK!

TELL ME WHAT'S HAPPENING RIGHT NOW! WHY CAN'T I MOVE?





SHUT UP! YOU'RE HERE TO BE PUNISHED, NOT TO ASK QUESTIONS!

AHHHHH!!!

CRACK!

YAWN










Ring
Ring




OH NO, IT'S MARINA!

LISTEN TO ME, ANDREW! SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAPPENED. OUR SAVINGS... ALL THE MONEY WE'VE BEEN SAVING FOR OUR WEDDING... IT'S GONE! I DON'T KNOW HOW BUT IT'S FUCKING GONE! WE NEED TO CALL THE POLICE AND...

T-THERE'S NO REASON TO CALL THE POLICE, MARINA. THAT WAS ME. I LOST EVERYTHING. I LOST EVERY PENNY OF OUR MONEY!


WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME? WEREN'T YOU APHRODITE? NOW YOU'RE TORTURING PEOPLE AS A WAY OF SPREADING LOVE?!

APHRODITE? I DON'T THINK SO... TONIGHT I'M POENA, THE SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE AND PUNISHMENT.

AND WHY EXACTLY DO I DESERVE TO BE PUNISHED?

YOU TELL ME. ACCORDING TO YOU, YOU WERE THE ONE WHO CREATED ME, AFTER ALL.

AND ONE THING IS FOR SURE...
YOU CAN NO LONGER RUN AWAY
FROM YOUR PAST.





WHY? WHY ME?


I DID NOTHING TO DESERVE SO MUCH PAIN...




WHAT A PIECE OF SHIT!


SHOW ME SOME TRUTH. RIGHT NOW YOU WOULDN'T CONVINCE A FIVE-YEAR-OLD!


EVERYTHING I'VE DONE...

EVERYTHING IS FUCKING RUINED!

THAT'S ENOUGH, YOUNG MAN. THIS INTERPRETATION OF YOURS, IF WE CAN EVEN CALL IT AN INTERPRETATION, IS THE MOST RIDICULOUS THING I'VE EVER SEEN. YOU STILL HAVE A LOT TO LEARN.

AND YOU REALLY DID LEARN, DIDN'T YOU?

YES, YOU'VE BECOME MR. ORLOV'S FAVORITE PUPIL. BUT AT WHAT PRICE?

I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU THAT ALL I WANT IS TO FORGET ABOUT THIS!


IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT.


TOO LATE INDEED...


YOU MADE MR. ORLOV PROUD.

YOU LEARNED EVERYTHING ABOUT METHOD ACTING.


BUT IT CHANGED YOU.

AHHHHH!!

IT MADE YOU LOSE EVERYTHING.

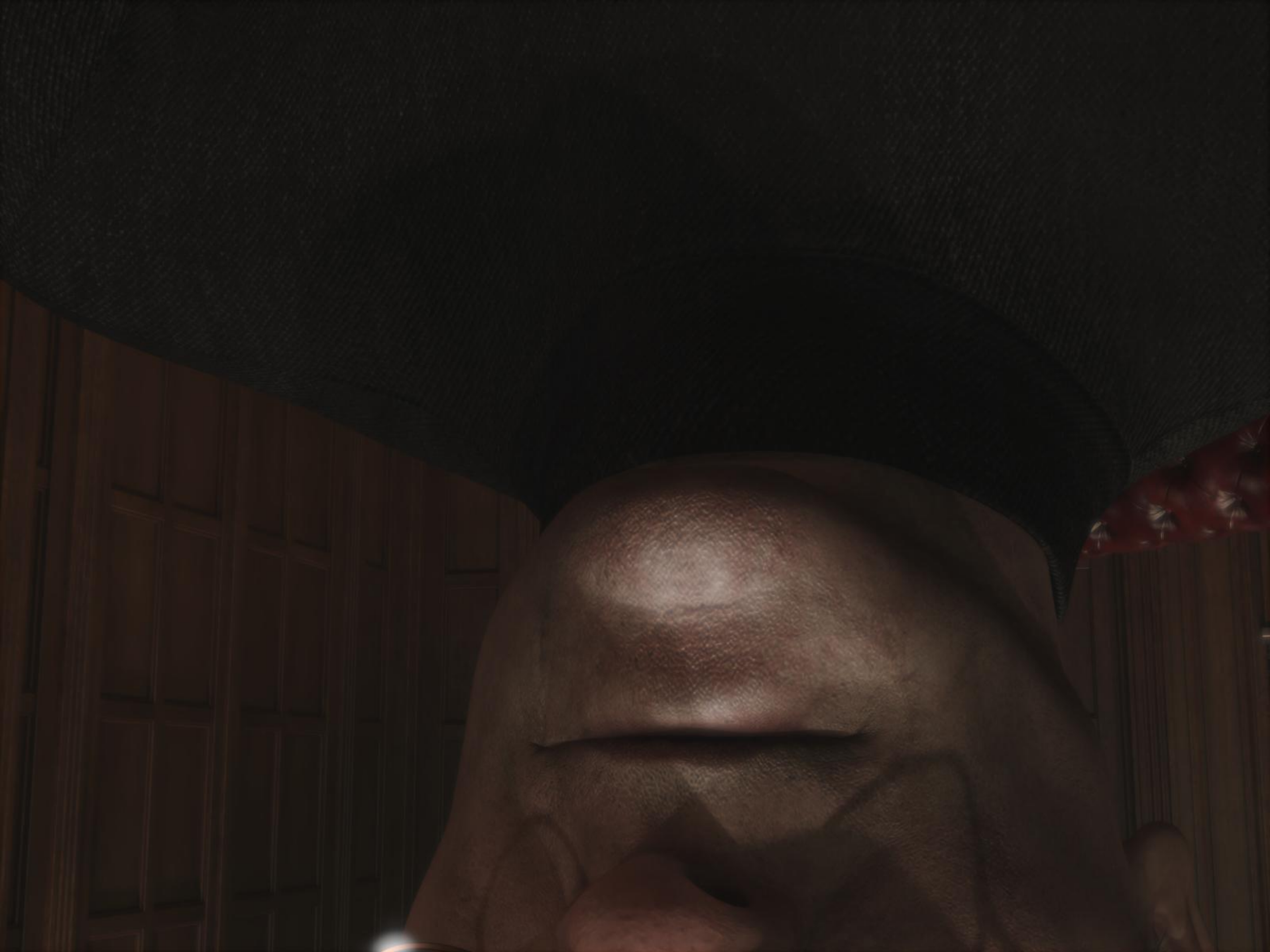
ONLY ONE PERSON REMAINED BY YOUR SIDE, AND YET YOU BETRAYED HER TRUST AGAIN. DON'T YOU REMEMBER?

I DON'T WANT TO!

THAT'S NOT TRUE AT ALL. REMEMBER, "YOU'VE CREATED ME AND I'VE CREATED YOU..."








YOU'RE LATE.

LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING.
I JUST CAME HERE TO SAY THAT WHATEVER YOU HAVE IN MIND, I'M NOT INTERESTED.
LEAVE ME ALONE!

SO YOU CAME ALL THIS WAY JUST TO SAY YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED IN LISTENING TO ME? THAT SOUNDS RIDICULOUS, YOUNG MAN. SIT DOWN AND LET'S TALK.

YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES.

DRINK.

DRINK?! ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND? THAT'S HOW YOU ALMOST RUINED MY LIFE! YOU MADE ME LIVE LIKE MY CHARACTER IN THAT PLAY... THINK LIKE HIM, ACT LIKE HIM... IT ALL STARTED WITH DRINKING PRETTY MUCH ALL THE TIME... YOU SAID THIS WAS THE ONLY WAY I COULD BECOME A GREAT ACTOR, AND WHAT DID I GAIN FROM IT?

I SAID HORRIBLE THINGS TO PEOPLE, I LET THEM DOWN, I MADE EVERYONE'S LIFE, ESPECIALLY MINE, MISERABLE! IF IT WEREN'T FOR MARINA, I DON'T THINK I'D HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET BACK ON TRACK AFTER THAT METHOD ACTING CRAP. I WAS LOST. BUT YOU JUST DON'T CARE, DO YOU? YOU KEPT PUSHING ME DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE FUCKING PIT!

I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR CHEAP SENTIMENTALITY! YES, GUESS WHAT, DOING GREAT THINGS REQUIRES SACRIFICE. THAT'S THE NATURE OF ART! DO YOU THINK THIS WAS EASY FOR ANYONE BEFORE YOU? DO YOU WANT TO BE MEDIOCRE FOREVER?

LISTEN, ANDREW, I CALLED YOU HERE BECAUSE I TRULY BELIEVE IN YOUR POTENTIAL. AFTER TWENTY YEARS, I AM BACK IN THE INDUSTRY. A BIG PRODUCER APPROACHED ME TO DIRECT HIS NEW MOVIE. TWENTY YEARS OF BEING OSTRACIZED DUO TO SOFT PEOPLE WHO COULDN'T HANDLE A DIRECTOR WHO REALLY GOT THE BEST OUT OF HIS ACTORS... BUT NOT ANYMORE!

WHAT YOU SAY? ARE YOU READY TO HIT BIG?

AND YOU DID ACCEPT MR. ORLOV'S PROPOSAL, DIDN'T YOU?

NOT ONLY THAT, BUT WHEN HE SAID THAT THE PRODUCER NEEDED A LOAN TO START THE PROJECT, YOU PROMPTLY HANDED HIM ALL THE MONEY YOU HAD SAVED WITH MARINA, WITHOUT EVEN ASKING HER OPINION ON THE MATTER...

MEANWHILE AT THE HOSPITAL...


HUH...?

WHAT'S GOING ON? WHY CAN'T I SPEAK? FUCK, I CAN BARELY MOVE A FINGER!

HE'LL SURVIVE AFTER ALL. DO YOU THINK THIS WILL ACTUALLY WORK?

SHE. REMEMBER SHE'S A WOMAN NOW. AND YES, THIS WILL WORK. I SPOKE TO THE DOCTOR. THE PROCEDURES WILL BE PERFORMED TONIGHT. THERE'S NO TIME TO WASTE.

WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?
AM I A WOMAN NOW? FUCK, I NEED TO STOP
THIS MADNESS! BUT I CAN'T TALK!
AND I'M SO SLEEPY...



Chapter Twenty-Four
Secrets and Lies

THE NEXT MORNING...

...


OH GOD...!

HEY, MOM.

WE'RE GLAD YOU COULD COME.


WHAT IN HEAVEN DID THE DOCTORS DO TO JOEL?

I MEAN, HE LOOKS SO DIFFERENT...


AND IT SEEMS HE NOW HAS...


BOOBS?!

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE WANTED TO TALK ABOUT, MOM.

BUT WE NEED TO BE BRIEF BECAUSE IT MAY NOT BE SAFE TO DISCUSS SENSITIVE TOPICS HERE.

ALRIGHT THEN! START EXPLAINING WHY JOEL HAS BOOBS!

JOEL GOT SHOT, MOM. YOU KNOW THAT.
SHOT BY THE GANGSTER WHO'S BEEN WATCHING
OUR FAMILY ON MR. TOSKA'S ORDERS!
HE NEEDS A DISGUISE.

SO YOUR PLAN IS TO DISGUISE HIM AS A WOMAN? YOU TWO ARE COMPLETELY OUT OF YOUR MINDS!

ARE WE? DO YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, REALLY THINK SO? HE'S THIN AND HAS A DELICATE FACE. WITH SOME MINOR ADJUSTMENTS, HE CAN EASILY PASS AS A WOMAN. AND WE HAVE EXPERIENCE DOING THIS KIND OF THING, RIGHT?

DID HE HAVE A SAY IN ANY OF THIS? HAS ANYONE ASKED HIS OPINION ON THIS CRAZY PLAN?

MR. SEFERI, AS JOEL'S UNCLE AND LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE, AUTHORIZED THE PROCEDURES.

WAIT...

IS MR. SEFERI...

JOEL'S UNCLE?

MR. SEFERI CONTACTED US DURING THE TIME YOU WERE UNCONSCIOUS, MOM. HE TOLD US EVERYTHING YOU ALREADY KNEW ABOUT HIS ISSUES WITH MR. TOSKA. BUT WE ALSO DIDN'T KNOW HE WAS JOEL'S UNCLE UNTIL LAST NIGHT, WHEN HE SHOWED UP.

BUT WHY FEMINIZE JOEL? WHY NOT ASK THE POLICE FOR PROTECTION? WHAT ABOUT THAT DETECTIVE WHO'S INVESTIGATING THE ATTEMPTED MURDER?

THE LESS THE POLICE KNOW ABOUT OUR FAMILY, THE BETTER, RIGHT? IT WOULD BE REALLY BAD IF THEY FOUND OUT THAT OUR DEAR MOTHER DIDN'T EXIST UNTIL A FEW MONTHS AGO. MR. SEFERI SAID HE HAS A DEAL TO PROPOSE TO THE DETECTIVE.

AND WHAT DEAL WOULD THAT BE?

JOEL MANAGED TO GATHER EVIDENCE OF MR. TOSKA'S INVOLVEMENT WITH ROAN GJOKA, THE ALBANIAN GANGSTER. THAT'S MOST LIKELY WHY THEY TRIED TO KILL HIM. NOW WE JUST NEED MR. TOSKA TO RETURN TO GREEK SOIL SO HE CAN BE ARRESTED. YOU SEE? THAT'S A WIN-WIN SITUATION. GREAT FOR US AND ALSO FOR THE DETECTIVE WHO WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE THE ARREST.


AND WHY EXACTLY WOULD MR. TOSKA RETURN TO GREECE?

ISN'T THAT OBVIOUS? HE'LL BE BACK FOR YOU AND DAD'S VOW RENEWAL. HE MAY THINK OUR FAMILY HAS A PLAN TO STEAL HIM, BUT HE HAS NO WAY TO PROVE IT, AND HE HAS A PRE-SIGNED CONTRACT WITH DAD. HE HAS TO COME BACK.

THEN HE WILL BE ARRESTED AND OUR FAMILY WILL NO LONGER BE OBLIGATED TO FULFILL THE CONTRACT. THIS WILL BE OVER, MOM. WE'LL BE FREE.

I KNOW YOU'RE SHOCKED ABOUT JOEL, BUT REMEMBER THAT, JUST LIKE IN YOUR CASE, ALL THE PROCEDURES PERFORMED ON HIM CAN BE UNDONE. HE'LL BE FINE. BUT I WONDER... AT THIS POINT, DO YOU WANT TO GO BACK? DO YOU REALLY WANT TO STOP BEING ELENA SAMARAS?

WHAT IS SOFIA TALKING ABOUT? DO THE GIRLS REALLY NOT KNOW THE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE DONE TO ME? DO THEY THINK I CAN SIMPLY GO BACK TO MY OLD SELF? LAST NIGHT I CONFIRMED THAT I HAVE A REAL VAGINA, AND IT'S STILL SORE AFTER BEING PENETRATED SO PASSIONATELY BY MY HUSBAND. I HAVE SERIOUS DOUBTS THIS IS SOMETHING THAT CAN BE "UNDONE".

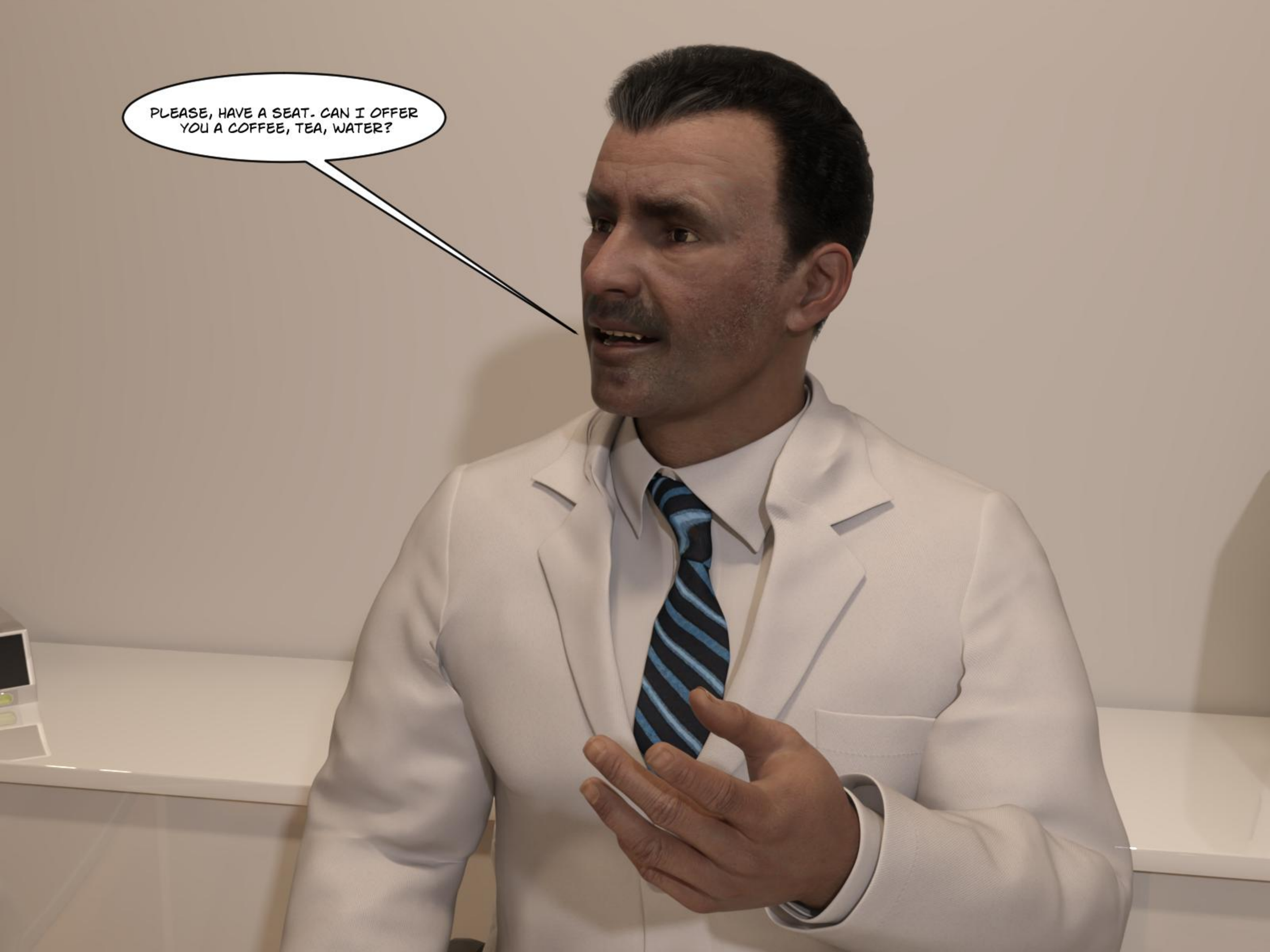
BUT SINCE I'M ALREADY IN THE HOSPITAL, SHOULDN'T I PAY AN *OLD FRIEND* A VISIT?





DR. GIANAKOS.

HELLO, MRS. SAMARAS!


PLEASE, HAVE A SEAT. CAN I OFFER YOU A COFFEE, TEA, WATER?

NO, THANK YOU. I DON'T INTEND TO TAKE UP MUCH OF YOUR TIME.


VERY WELL, WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU TODAY, MA'AM? I WASN'T EXPECTING TO SEE YOU UNTIL YOUR CHECK UP APPOINTMENT WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS FROM NOW.

I NEED TO CHOOSE MY WORDS VERY CAREFULLY HERE. I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT THE DOCTOR'S REAL INVOLVEMENT IN ALL OF THIS IS.


I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT THE PROCEDURES PERFORMED ON ME, DR. GIANAKOS.

GO AHEAD, MRS. SAMARAS. I'M HERE TO ANSWER ALL YOUR DOUBTS.


JUST OUT OF CURIOSITY... HOW REVERSIBLE ARE THEY?

I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THAT QUESTION, MA'AM. DO YOU REGRET THE SURGERIES? AS FAR AS I REMEMBER, YOU HAD BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH NOT ONLY GENDER BUT ALSO AGE DYSPHORIA, AND HAD BEEN LIVING AS A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

YES, THAT WAS THE LIE WE MADE UP TO CONVINCE THE DOCTOR THAT I WAS TRANS. I HAD NEVER BEEN TO A PSYCHOLOGIST, NOR HAD I BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH DYSPHORIA, OF COURSE. HOWEVER, I HAD NO IDEA THAT HE WOULD PERFORM SUCH RADICAL SURGERIES. AND EVEN THOUGH HE SUPPOSEDLY EXPLAINED EVERYTHING TO ME, I BARELY UNDERSTOOD AT THE TIME WHAT HE WAS SAYING.

OF COURSE I HAVE NO REGRETS, DOCTOR. I'M LIVING THE LIFE I'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF, AFTER ALL, WITH MY LOVING FAMILY. BUT I CAN'T DENY THAT SOME OF THE PROCEDURES DID COME WITH CERTAIN... UNPLEASANT SIDE EFFECTS.

I CAN RELATE TO THAT, MA'AM. AS A MIDDLE-AGED PERSON MYSELF, I CAN TELL YOU THAT AGING HAS ITS CHALLENGES. HOWEVER, AS PER YOUR WISHES, WE PERFORMED SEVERAL PROCEDURES TO ENSURE THAT YOU WOULD NOT ONLY LOOK BUT ALSO FEEL LIKE A WOMAN IN HER FIFTIES.

TO BE HONEST, VERY LITTLE OF WHAT HAS BEEN DONE CAN BE REVERSED. YOUR SKIN, HEIGHT, FAT DISTRIBUTION... NONE OF THAT WILL EVER GO BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE. NOT TO MENTION, OF COURSE, YOUR BREASTS, WHICH AS I EXPLAINED ARE NOT CONVENTIONAL IMPLANTS THAT CAN SIMPLY BE REMOVED.

AND THEN THERE'S YOUR GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY. THIS WASN'T INITIALLY PLANNED, BUT BECAME POSSIBLE AFTER YOUR FIRST SURGERIES WHEN A COLLEAGUE INTRODUCED ME TO A NEW TECHNIQUE THAT ALLOWED FOR RAPID RECOVERY AND EXCELLENT RESULTS. WE DISCUSSED THE PROCEDURE AT LENGTH AND I TOLD YOU ALL THE RISKS AND BENEFITS INVOLVED.

FORTUNATELY, THE SURGERY WAS ALSO A SUCCESS, ENABLING YOU TO HAVE A FULLY FUNCTIONAL VAGINA WITH NATURAL LUBRICATION, WITHOUT THE COMPLICATIONS AND CARE REQUIRED BY THE OLD TECHNIQUE, SUCH AS THE PAINFUL DILATION PROCESS. YOUR OLD PENIS WAS DISCARDED DURING THE PROCEDURE, THOUGH, SO THE POSSIBILITY OF REVERSING THE SURGERY IS ALSO ZERO.

SO THAT'S IT... UNLESS THE DOCTOR IS LYING TO ME FOR SOME REASON, THERE'S NO GOING BACK NOW. I'M STUCK AS AN OLDER WOMAN FOREVER. NEVER AGAIN WILL I BE ABLE TO BE A MAN, LET ALONE A YOUNG ONE!

THEY EVEN PERFORMED GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY ON ME, ALTHOUGH I HAVE NO MEMORY OF THE CONVERSATION THE DOCTOR MENTIONED. WHY WOULD HE PERFORM SUCH SURGERY WITHOUT MY CONSENT? WELL, HE DOESN'T SEEM LIKE SOMEONE WITH GREAT WORK ETHICS, CONSIDERING WHAT HE JUST DID TO JOEL.

TELL ME DOCTOR, WAS ANYONE IN MY FAMILY INFORMED ABOUT MY PROCEDURES BEFORE THEY HAPPENED?

OF COURSE, MRS. SAMARAS. EVEN WITH YOUR SIGNATURE AND CONSENT, I WOULDN'T PERFORM SUCH EXTENSIVE SURGERIES WITHOUT THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF A FAMILY MEMBER.

IT WAS YOUR NIECE, MARINA KATSAROS, WHO WAS INFORMED ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN. I CALLED HER MYSELF AND EXPLAINED IT ALL.

MARINA?! SHE KNEW?



MARINA AND NIKOS TOGETHER?
WHAT IS NIKOS DOING HERE?

I TOLD MARINA THAT I NEEDED TO TALK TO HER, BUT I DIDN'T EXPECT MY HUSBAND TO BE HERE, AS WELL.

I KEEP THINKING OF HIM
AS MY HUSBAND WITHOUT EVEN REALIZING IT.
IS THAT REALLY ME OR THE METHOD ACTING TALKING?
I JUST DON'T KNOW ANYMORE. DOES IT MATTER, THOUGH?
I JUST GOT CONFIRMATION I'M GOING TO BE A MATURE
LADY FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE. I'M STUCK FOREVER.

ANYWAY, ONE THING IS FOR SURE...

THEY DON'T SEEM VERY HAPPY WITH EACH OTHER.

OH, WAIT A MINUTE, UNCLE NIKOS.

AUNT ELENA IS HERE! DOESN'T SHE LOOK LOVELY TODAY?

HI, ELENA.

NIKOS, WHAT ARE YOU...

I THINK YOU AND MARINA NEED TO TALK.
I'LL SPEAK TO YOU LATER.


WHAT DID YOU SAY TO NIKOS? WHY DOES HE SEEM UPSET WITH ME?


OH, SO YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR BELOVED HUSBAND, AUNT ELENA?

IT'S ALWAYS BAD TO HAVE MARRIAGE ISSUES, ISN'T IT?

YOU KNOW WHAT? YES, I'M WORRIED! AT LEAST NIKOS HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME!

YOU DEFINITELY HAVE A STRANGE WAY OF SHOWING GRATITUDE, AUNT ELENA. BUT THAT'S SOMETHING I KNOW ALL TOO WELL!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

ARE YOU GOING TO PRETEND YOU'VE ALSO FORGOTTEN WHAT YOU TOLD UNCLE NIKOS ABOUT ME? ABOUT US?

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT... WAIT...
I THINK I'M REMEMBERING. THAT WAS THE DAY I LEFT THE HOSPITAL AND WENT STRAIGHT TO THE SALON...


SO THAT'S WHAT I THINK WE NEED TO DO FOR NOW...

WHEN WE'RE TALKING IN A PLACE WHERE THERE IS A RISK OF US BEING WATCHED, WE MUST ACT AS IF ANDREW HAD NEVER EXISTED IN OUR LIVES, AND I HAD ALWAYS BEEN ELENA SAMARAS.

AND THEN, WHEN WE NEED TO TALK AS OUR TRUE SELVES, WE CAN USE A CODE OR SOMETHING TO ARRANGE A MEETING IN A SAFE PLACE.


IT MAKES SENSE... I GUESS?

FOR THE CODE, THIS HAS TO BE SOME KIND OF "GIRLY TALK", RIGHT? TO AVOID AROUSING SUSPICION. PERHAPS I CAN COMPLIMENT YOUR EARRINGS OR SOMETHING.

THEN WE CAN MEET AT THAT PLACE WE FIRST VISITED IN ATHENS? IT'S OPEN AND ISOLATED... IT'S HARD FOR SOMEONE THERE TO WATCH US WITHOUT BEING NOTICED.

YES, THIS SOUNDS PERFECT. AND I THINK YOU SHOULD WARN EVA AND SOFIA ABOUT OUR PLAN. THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO NEED MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT BEFORE TO TREAT ME AS IF I REALLY WERE THEIR MOTHER PRETTY MUCH ALL THE TIME, BUT IT'S CRITICAL TO REMIND THEM ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF STAYING IN CHARACTER.


WHAT ABOUT UNCLE NIKOS?

ABOUT NIKOS... I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO TALK TO HIM MYSELF SO WE CAN THINK OF A WAY TO LOOK CONVINCING AS HUSBAND AND WIFE.



ALRIGHT, MRS. SAMARAS...

JUST WAIT A MOMENT. I'LL FINISH YOUR HAIR SOON, OKAY?


I PROMISE YOU THAT YOU'LL LOVE THE RESULT, MA'AM!

OKAY, ANGELIKI. IN THE MEANTIME, COULD YOU HAND ME MY PHONE?

NO PROBLEM, MA'AM.


NIKOS? IT'S ME... ELENA. PLEASE LISTEN TO ME. I HAVE SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO TELL YOU.

THINGS HAVE BECOME... A LOT MORE COMPLICATED, NIKOS.

GOD, I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY HOW TO SAY THIS, BUT THE THING IS...

FOCUS, ELENA. THIS IS IMPORTANT!
MR. TOSKAS IS AFTER ANDREW. IT'S ESSENTIAL
THAT NIKOS UNDERSTANDS THE GRAVITY
OF THE SITUATION.

ELENA, ARE YOU STILL THERE?

YES, I'M HERE.

HAVE YOU BEEN DISCHARGED FROM THE HOSPITAL? I'LL COME PICK YOU UP THEN.

THERE'S NO NEED, NIKOS. I'M AT THE BEAUTY SALON.

THE SALON? BUT... THERE WAS NO REASON FOR YOU TO LEAVE THE HOSPITAL BY YOURSELF.

THAT'S OKAY. PLEASE, LISTEN TO ME. ARE YOU ALONE? YES? GOOD. NO ONE CAN HEAR WHAT I'M GOING TO TELL YOU.

MR. TOSKA IS NOT WHO HE APPEARS TO BE. HE'S A VERY DANGEROUS MAN AND WE ARE IN DANGER. ALL OF US!

I KNOW THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE GOING ON, ELENA. AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO FILIP, OUR DRIVER... STRANGE INDEED. BUT, AT LEAST FOR NOW, WE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT MR. TOSKA IS BEHIND ALL THIS. YOU'VE BEEN UNCONSCIOUS FOR A LONG TIME. IT'S NORMAL THAT YOU'RE A LITTLE CONFUSED RIGHT NOW.

IT SEEMS EVA AND SOFIA DIDN'T TELL NIKOS ABOUT MR. SEFERI AND THE TIME HE SPENT IN JAIL BECAUSE OF MR. TOSKA WHILE I WAS IN THE HOSPITAL. WHY? DIDN'T THEY EVEN HAVE A CHANCE TO TALK TO THEIR FATHER WITHOUT BEING OBSERVED? THAT MAKES THINGS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT...

WE CAN DISCUSS THIS LATER, NIKOS. THERE'S NO TIME NOW. I JUST NEED YOU TO PROMISE ME SOMETHING. WE NEED TO PRETEND TO BE HUSBAND AND WIFE AT ALL TIMES. EVEN WHEN WE'RE APPARENTLY ALONE. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW WHEN SOMEONE IS WATCHING US. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT!

THAT'S SOMETHING I CAN'T DO. LISTEN, ELENA. NO... LISTEN, ANDREW. I UNDERSTAND THAT MY GIRLS MAY HAVE GOTTEN A LITTLE TOO EXCITED ABOUT THIS "HAVING A MOTHER" THING, AND STARTED PUSHING YOU A LITTLE TOO HARD, EVEN CONVINCING YOU THAT WE'RE IN DANGER OF SOMETHING LIKE THAT. THEY MENTIONED SOMETHING ALONG THOSE LINES TO ME, AS WELL.

BUT THAT'S JUST IT. THEY ARE ENJOYING THE FANTASY OF HAVING A MOM. AND IT'S ALL MY FAULT. I... WELL, I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO PROVIDE THEM A REAL FAMILY. BUT THIS NEEDS TO STOP NOW. FOR GOD'S SAKE, YOU EVEN UNDERWENT SURGERY! AT LEAST THE GIRLS TOLD ME THAT ALL PROCEDURES CAN BE REVERSED.

NOT ONLY FOR MY DAUGHTERS' SAKE, BUT WHAT ABOUT MARINA? WE CAN'T KEEP DOING THIS TO HER. IT'S NOT FAIR. I'LL TALK TO MR. TOSKA AND EXPLAIN THE WHOLE SITUATION. HE'LL HAVE TO UNDERSTAND! AND BESIDES MARINA...

---THERE'S ALSO ME.


Y-YOU, NIKOS?

AS ABSURD AS IT SOUNDS, THE TRUTH IS THAT I'M FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOU, ELENA. I TRULY AM. THAT NIGHT WE TRICKED MR. TOSKA AND JOEL... THE NIGHT I SAW YOU AS ELENA FOR THE FIRST TIME... IT ALL MADE ME FEEL ALIVE LIKE I HADN'T IN YEARS... DECADES!

THEN, WHILE I WAS TRAVELING WITH JOEL, EVA AND SOFIA KEPT SENDING ME PICTURES OF YOUR TRANSFORMATION, AND I SAW YOU BECOMING MORE AND MORE BEAUTIFUL AND FEMININE. AND WHEN I GOT BACK TO ATHENS, AND I FOUND OUT YOU WERE HOSPITALIZED... YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW WORRIED I WAS. I VISITED YOU EVERY DAY WHILE YOU WERE UNCONSCIOUS. EVERY SINGLE DAY!

I KEPT FEEDING THE ILLUSION THAT I ACTUALLY HAD A WIFE. A WIFE I COULD NEVER HAVE. ASIDE FROM A FEW QUICK AND FRIVOLOUS RELATIONSHIPS, I WAS FORCED TO LIVE ALONE, WITHOUT A PARTNER BY MY SIDE. DO YOU SEE NOW? DO YOU SEE WHY WE NEED TO GROW APART? I MUST BE LOSING MY MIND!

SIGH


WELL, THE TRUTH IS... I HAVE FEELINGS FOR YOU TOO, NIKOS.
PALOMINO

SO THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED. I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO TELL NIKOS THAT I HAD FEELINGS FOR HIM TOO. IT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE HIM... COOPERATE. YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND HOW DESPERATE I WAS!

OF COURSE, TO MAKE THIS WORK, I ALSO HAD TO TELL HIM THAT OUR MARRIAGE WASN'T A REAL ONE, THAT WE WEREN'T REALLY HUSBAND AND WIFE.

AND THEN, AFTER I MADE HIM PROMISE THAT HE WOULD TREAT ME AS ELENA ALL THE TIME, SOMEONE APPEARED...

KNOCK!
KNOCK!

THAT'S WEIRD. I'VE CANCELED ALL THE CLIENTS' APPOINTMENTS FOR THIS MORNING.




HELLO, SIR. WE ARE NOT OPEN RI...


HAIRCUT.

OH NO! IT'S HIM!
IT'S THE GANGSTER WHO'S
AFTER ME... AFTER ANDREW.

THIS IS TOO MUCH. WHY CAN'T THESE PEOPLE JUST LEAVE ME ALONE? WHAT ELSE DO I HAVE TO DO?

ELENA, ARE YOU STILL THERE?
IS SOMETHING WRONG?

AND THEN I PASSED OUT AGAIN. THE NEXT THING I KNEW, I WOKE UP IN NIKOS' ROOM, WITH NO MEMORY OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED SINCE THE DAY I ARRIVED AT THE HOSPITAL, BEFORE THE SURGERIES. ONLY RECENTLY HAVE I BEEN ABLE TO SLOWLY REGAIN MY MEMORY. I STILL DON'T REMEMBER EVERYTHING, THOUGH.

SO THAT'S IT? THAT'S YOUR STORY? AND TO MAKE YOUR PLAN WORK, YOU TOLD UNCLE NIKOS THAT OUR MARRIAGE WAS A FAKE ONE?

HOW COULD YOU DO THIS?
HOW COULD YOU PLAY WITH PEOPLE'S FEELINGS LIKE THAT? I REALLY THOUGHT I COULD TRUST YOU, ANDREW.
EVEN AFTER EVERYTHING...

EVEN AFTER YOU BETRAYED MY TRUST AND GAVE ALL OUR MONEY TO THAT SCAMMER!
HOW COULD I BE SO STUPID!

LISTEN, MARINA, ABOUT MR. ORLOV, I HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING THAT HE INTENDED TO SCAM ME AND RUN AWAY WITH THE MONEY. HE HAD ONCE BEEN A RESPECTED DIRECTOR. YES, I WAS AN IDIOT, NOT ONLY FOR TRUSTING HIM BLINDLY, BUT ALSO FOR NOT CONSULTING YOU BEFORE MAKING THE DECISION.

HOWEVER, I'VE ALREADY APOLOGIZED A THOUSAND TIMES FOR WHAT HAPPENED, AND YOU FORGAVE ME. IT'S NOT FAIR FOR YOU TO KEEP THROWING THIS IN MY FACE OVER AND OVER AGAIN. WHAT DO YOU WANT? FOR ME TO FEEL EVEN MORE GUILTY? I ALREADY FEEL LIKE GARBAGE EVERY TIME I REMEMBER ALL THIS. I TOLD YOU, I'LL PAY YOU BACK SOMEDAY.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT THE MONEY! I COULDN'T CARE LESS ABOUT THE MONEY EVEN THOUGH IT WAS EVERYTHING I MANAGED TO SAVE IN MY ENTIRE LIFE! THE ISSUE IS HOW YOU BETRAYED MY TRUST.

EVERYONE TOLD ME TO STAY AWAY FROM YOU, THAT YOU WERE UNTRUSTWORTHY... BUT HOW COULD I DO THAT? I USED TO LOVE YOU SO MUCH... AND I TRULY BELIEVED THAT YOU COULD CHANGE. I WAS SURE YOU WERE ACTING LIKE A JERK BECAUSE OF ORLOV'S INFLUENCE AND THAT YOU COULD GO BACK TO BEING THE PERSON I HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH.

SO I DECIDED TO GIVE YOU ANOTHER CHANCE.
AND HOW DID YOU THANK ME? YOU TOLD MY UNCLE THAT OUR MARRIAGE WAS A FAKE ONE AND SLEEP WITH HIM! WITH MY FUCKING UNCLE!

YOU DON'T GET IT, DO YOU? HOW COULD SOMEONE AS SELFISH AS YOU UNDERSTAND? YOU NOT ONLY DESTROYED OUR MARRIAGE BUT ALSO MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FAMILY! HOW CAN I LOOK AT MY UNCLE AND COUSINS THE SAME WAY AFTER WHAT HAPPENED?

MARINA, I...

I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY EXCUSES. NO MATTER THE SITUATION, NO MATTER WHO YOU WERE PRETENDING TO BE, YOU HAD NO RIGHT TO CHEAT ON ME WITH MY OWN UNCLE! YOU'RE NOT CAPABLE OF MAINTAINING BONDS WITH PEOPLE. THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE! THAT'S WHY I WAS THE ONLY PERSON STILL BY YOUR SIDE!

YOU KNOW, YOU KEEP TREATING ME LIKE I'M A MONSTER, BUT YOU ALSO HAVE THINGS TO EXPLAIN! I JUST SPOKE TO DR. GIANAKOS. YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE WHO KNEW ABOUT THE EXTENT OF MY SURGERIES AND YET YOU LET THEM HAPPEN!

YES, I KNEW, BUT NOT IN TIME TO PREVENT WHAT HAPPENED.

BUT THAT'S NOT THE POINT... I WOULD HAVE STAYED WITH YOU, ANDREW, I WOULD HAVE STAYED WITH YOU EVEN IF YOU LOOKED LIKE A MATURE WOMAN FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES. BECAUSE I LOVED YOU. I LOVED YOU SO MUCH!

BUT NOT ANYMORE. PEOPLE WERE RIGHT ABOUT YOU. I'VE BEEN DOING HORRIBLE THINGS BECAUSE OF YOU. I WANT A DIVORCE. JUST A SYMBOLIC ONE, OF COURSE, SINCE TECHNICALLY WE'RE NOT MARRIED ANYMORE. IT'S OVER. I'M LEAVING GREECE. GOOD LUCK TO UNCLE NIKOS!

Chapter Twenty-Five
All or Nothing

A COUPLE OF WEEKS LATER...


WELL, WELL, WELL...

LOOK WHO WE HAVE HERE!

HOW DOES IT FEEL, DOLL?

TELL ME...


HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE SUCH A HOT GIRL?

GO FUCK YOURSELF, ANGELIKI. I'M NOT A GIRL!

OH, ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT, JOEL? OR SHOULD I CALL YOU JOELLE? IT'S SO FUN TO HEAR YOU SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT IN SUCH A GIRLY VOICE. YOU SOUND LIKE A SPOILED GIRL WHO HAD A FIGHT WITH HER BOYFRIEND. NOT TO MENTION...

THOSE BEAUTIFUL BOOBS OF YOURS!

I HAVE TO SAY THEY ARE BIGGER THAN MINE.
I'M ALMOST JEALOUS, DOLL!

LEAVE ME ALONE, YOU BITCH!

YOU'RE HAVING FUN AT THE EXPENSE OF MY SUFFERING, AREN'T YOU? IS THIS ALL BECAUSE I DUMPED YOU? HOW PETTY OF YOU! YOU KNOW WHAT, IF YOU DON'T SHUT UP, I'M GOING TO RUIN THIS WHOLE FUCKING PLAN RIGHT NOW, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

YOU KNOW YOU'RE NOT GONNA DO ANY OF THAT, YOU LITTLE WHORE. AND YOU CALL THIS SUFFERING? JUST BECAUSE YOU GOT A PAIR OF GIANT TITS TO SEDUCE AN OLD MAN? LET ME TELL YOU WHAT SUFFERING IS. ME, STUCK HERE FOR THREE YEARS, PRETENDING TO BE A DUMB HAIRDRESSER TO MAKE THIS PLAN WORK!

I'LL SAY THIS JUST ONCE. STAY STILL WHILE I MAKE YOU PRETTY. IF YOU DON'T COOPERATE, I'M GOING TO GET A DILDO AND SHOVE IT IN YOUR GREEDY MOUTH, DO YOU HEAR ME?

NOW THAT YOU HAVE A NICE TAN AND YOUR HAIR HAS BEEN DYED, LET ME WORK ON YOUR EYEBROWS AND EYELASHES.

MUCH BETTER! TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR LIPS AND FACE.

OH, YOU LOOK STUNNING AFTER SOME WORK ON YOUR JAWLINE AND LIP AUGMENTATION TO GIVE YOU THE BIMBO LIPS THAT SUIT YOU SO WELL! I ALSO TATTOOED YOUR MOUTH WITH PERMANENT LIPSTICK SO YOU CAN ALWAYS WAKE UP LOOKING LIKE A PRETTY DOLL! ISN'T THAT AMAZING? OF COURSE, YOU CAN WEAR DARKER LIPSTICKS WHEN YOU GO TO SEE YOUR MAN!

I ALSO SPENT SOME TIME ON YOUR CHEEKS AND NOSE, NOT TO MENTION THE PERMANENT MAKEUP ON YOUR EYELINER AND EYEBROWS, TOO! THE BLUE CONTACTS ARE JUST THE ICING ON THE CAKE! I THINK YOU SHOULD GO BACK TO THE HOSPITAL TO HAVE YOUR EYE COLOR CHANGED PERMANENTLY, DARLING!

THIS CAN'T BE ME! THIS IS MUCH WORSE THAN I WAS EXPECTING! THIS BITCH IS GOING TO PAY ME. I DON'T KNOW HOW, BUT SHE WILL!

NOW LET ME FINISH YOUR MAKEUP!

PERFECT! IT'S TIME TO GIVE YOU SOME BEAUTIFUL EARRINGS!

OH SWEETIE, I'D SAY YOU'RE THE KIND OF GIRL WHO WEARS BIG EARRINGS PRETTY MUCH EVERYDAY, DON'T YOU THINK? GIVE ME YOUR HANDS...

I SEE YOU ARE LOVING YOUR NEW NAILS! TRUST ME, YOU'LL NEVER HAVE SHORT NAILS AGAIN. IT JUST DOESN'T SUIT YOUR PERSONALITY. LET'S WORK ON YOUR HAIR AND OUTFIT AND WE'RE FINALLY DONE!

MEANWHILE, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF ATHENS...


SO...

LET ME SEE IF I UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING CORRECTLY, MRS. SAMARAS.

ARE YOU SAYING THAT THE VOW RENEWAL CEREMONY IS CANCELED?

AT LEAST FOR NOW, YES, MR. ANGELOS, THE CEREMONY IS CANCELLED. WE'D STILL LIKE YOU TO ORGANIZE A RECEPTION FOR OUR SPECIAL GUEST, THOUGH.

I DON'T WANT TO SOUND RUDE, BUT MIGHT I ASK THE REASON FOR THIS, MA'AM? EVERYTHING SEEMED JUST FINE A FEW WEEKS AGO!

MY HUSBAND AND I HAD... A DISAGREEMENT, MR. ANGELOS. LET'S PUT IT THIS WAY.

I UNDERSTAND, MRS. SAMARAS. I UNDERSTAND.

SIGH

ARE YOU VERSED IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY, MRS. SAMARAS?

NOT EXACTLY, MR. ANGELOS. WHY?

IF YOU DON'T MIND ME BEING A BIT CORNY, I LIKE TO THINK OF MYSELF AS IRIS, THE MESSENGER, THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE RAINBOW, RESTORING PEACE AND HARMONY. HERMES MAY BE THE MOST FAMOUS MESSENGER, BUT IRIS HAS ALWAYS FASCINATED ME.

IRIS SOMETIMES NOT ONLY PERFORMED SERVICES WHEN REQUESTED, BUT ALSO ASSISTED AND ADVISED ACCORDING TO HER OWN JUDGMENT, WHICH PROVED USEFUL ON MANY OCCASIONS.


WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU ARE TELLING ME THIS, MR. ANGELOS.

IT'S BECAUSE I TRULY THINK YOU ARE A CAPTIVATING CHARACTER, MRS. SAMARAS. IN MY FIELD OF WORK, YOU SEEM TO ME TO BE ONE OF THE MOST SINCERE AND HONEST PEOPLE I HAVE EVER MET, ALTHOUGH YOU HAVE CLEARLY BEEN HIDING A SECRET FOR A LONG TIME.

MY POINT IS, I'M REALLY SORRY THE VOW RENEWAL CEREMONY HAD TO BE CANCELED. IF THERE'S ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP YOU, JUST LET ME KNOW.

I DON'T THINK I'M AS HONEST AND SINCERE AS YOU THINK. AND I'VE DISAPPOINTED A LOT OF PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THAT.

DON'T BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF, MRS. SAMARAS. SOMETIMES THINGS JUST DON'T GO THE WAY YOU EXPECT, BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE YOU A BAD PERSON. NOT TO BE INDISCREET AGAIN, BUT THE DISAGREEMENT THAT OCCURRED WAS REGARDING THE FACT THAT...

...YOU WEREN'T BORN A WOMAN?

YOU K-KNOW?

OH, YES, I KNEW IT SINCE YOU FIRST CAME HERE, MA'AM. DON'T GET ME WRONG. I COULD ONLY TELL BECAUSE I ENJOY A LITTLE CROSSDRESSING MYSELF, SO I HAVE A GOOD EYE FOR THAT. I DON'T THINK MRS. PETROU AND HER SON, WHO WERE ALSO PRESENT, NOTICED IT, THOUGH. NOT ONLY BECAUSE THE LIGHTING WASN'T THE BEST, BUT ALSO BECAUSE THEY HAD OTHER THINGS ON MIND.

HOWEVER, LATER, WHEN YOU SHOWED UP WITH A NEW LOOK, MRS. PETROU CERTAINLY NOTICED THAT YOU HAD UNDERGONE SOME PROCEDURES, BUT SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING SO AS NOT TO BE RUDE, PROBABLY. YES, YOU UNDERWENT A MAJOR TRANSFORMATION, WHICH LED ME TO CONCLUDE YOU WERE A TRANSSEXUAL.

ALL OF THIS IS VERY INTRIGUING TO ME. I KNEW YOU WEREN'T MARRIED TO MR. SAMARAS FOR DECADES AS YOU CLAIMED. AGAIN, FORGIVE MY INDISCRETION. I'M NOT JUDGING YOU. IT'S JUST PART OF MY JOB TO KNOW THINGS.

IN FACT, I KNEW THAT MR. SAMARAS HAD NEVER BEEN MARRIED TO ANYONE. SO WHY, ALL OF A SUDDEN, DOES HE DECIDE TO TAKE ON A MYSTERIOUS TRANS WOMAN AS NOT ONLY HIS WIFE, BUT ALSO THE MOTHER OF HIS DAUGHTERS? VERY, VERY INTRIGUING...


ALRIGHT...

YOUR HAIR IS DONE, SWEETIE. DON'T YOU LOVE IT?


WHAT THE...?
YES, I SEE YOU'RE SO EXCITED YOU CAN BARELY SPEAK! NOW LET'S GET YOU DRESSED!

SEE? I TOLD YOU THE THONG WOULD FIT YOU PERFECTLY!

I DON'T THINK SO! THE WAY IT'S SLIDING UP MY ASS IS ANNOYING LIKE HELL!

GET USED TO IT, DOLL. THIS IS HOW THONGS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE WORN AND YOU'RE THE KIND OF NASTY GIRL WHO DOESN'T WEAR ANY OTHER TYPE OF PANTIES BESIDES THONGS!

NOW FOR THE OUTFIT...

I CAN'T WALK ON THESE THINGS, ANGELIKI!

SURELY YOU CAN. TRUST ME, SOON YOU'LL BE SO GOOD AT WALKING IN SKY-HIGH HEELS THAT YOU'LL EVEN FORGET WHAT WALKING IN FLATS IS LIKE!

AND YOU LOOK SO SEXY IN THAT MINI SKIRT! DOESN'T IT FEEL AMAZING, GIRL?

OF COURSE, SUCH A PRETTY SKIRT NEEDS TO BE PAIRED WITH A CUTE TOP!

AND THAT TOP DEFINITELY MAKES YOUR NEW GIRLS LOOK IRRESISTIBLE!

OH, DARLING, YOU LOOK SO MUCH BETTER THAN I COULD HAVE ANTICIPATED! JUST LIKE A LIVING, SLUTTY DOLL! WE'LL DEFINITELY HAVE A LOT OF FUN!

SPEAKING OF FUN, GRAB YOUR PURSE AND LET'S GET GOING. I HAVE A SURPRISE THAT WILL MAKE YOU LOOK EVEN PRETTIER!

I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME. I LOOK LIKE A FUCKING BIMBO! I'LL MAKE THEM PAY FOR THIS. ALL OF THEM! FOR NOW, THOUGH, I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO PLAY ALONG...

YES, MR. SAMARAS IS ALSO A VERY INTERESTING CHARACTER, MA'AM... A BON VIVANT, ALWAYS SEEN AT EVERY PARTY IN ATHENS, WHETHER HIGH SOCIETY OR NOT, WHO SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED FROM EVERYONE'S SIGHT, ABANDONING HIS SOCIAL LIFE.

AND DO YOU KNOW WHEN THIS HAPPENED, MRS. SAMARAS...?

...EXACTLY WHEN HIS DAUGHTERS WERE BORN. HE ALWAYS SEEMED TO WANT TO HIDE THEM AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, EVEN SENDING THEM TO STUDY ABROAD FOR MANY YEARS. ISN'T THAT CURIOUS, MA'AM?

I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR POINT IS, MR. ANGELOS.

THAT'S ACTUALLY QUITE SIMPLE, MRS. SAMARAS. YOU OBVIOUSLY KNOW WHO THE BIOLOGICAL MOTHER OF YOUR ADOPTED DAUGHTERS IS, DON'T YOU?

T-THE BIOLOGICAL MOTHER?

OH, IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU DON'T KNOW. WHICH IS KIND OF... SURPRISING. IF YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND YOUR HUSBAND BETTER, I'D START WITH THAT SUBJECT, MRS. SAMARAS.

ONE LAST THING, I'M NOT GOING TO CANCEL THE VOW RENEWAL CEREMONY ARRANGEMENTS. I HAVE A FEELING IT'S STILL GOING TO HAPPEN. IF THAT'S NOT THE CASE, I HAVE NO PROBLEM AT ALL TAKING THE LOSSES.

NOW WHERE ARE MY MANNERS? LET ME GET YOU A HANDKERCHIEF, MA'AM!



Chapter Twenty-Six
All Those Years Ago

THE FOLLOWING DAY...





YOU KNOW WHAT, GIRLS?

I'M DEFINITELY NOT A FAN OF THIS SWIMSUIT.


I FEEL TOO EXPOSED!


DON'T BE SILLY, MOM. YOU LOOK GREAT!

TOTALLY! NOT TO MENTION THAT WE ARE ALL WOMEN HERE, AREN'T WE?

THAT MAY BE TRUE, BUT I STILL THINK...

ACTUALLY, IT'S A SHAME THAT DAD ISN'T AROUND. I'M SURE HE'D LOVE TO SEE HOW YOU LOOK RIGHT NOW!

YOU GIRLS KNOW THAT YOUR FATHER AND I ARE NOT ON GOOD TERMS THESE DAYS. HE'S NOT EVEN IN ATHENS, IS HE? HE DECIDED TO TRAVEL, SUPPOSEDLY FOR WORK.

WE'RE NOT TAKING THIS FIGHT TOO SERIOUSLY. EVERY COUPLE HAS DISAGREEMENTS, RIGHT? IT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN LOVE.

THIS IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS YOU GIRLS ARE THINKING, FAR FROM THAT! AND TO TRY TO UNDERSTAND IT ALL, THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO ASK. SOMETHING REAL, *OUT OF CHARACTER*, AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHY I SAID WE NEEDED TO COME SOMEWHERE WHERE WE WOULDN'T BE HEARD UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

I'LL GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT.
I THINK IT'S BETTER THIS WAY... EVA, SOFIA...
WHO'S YOUR REAL MOTHER?

MEANWHILE, ON DRY LAND...

HELLO? YES, IT'S ME.

I'VE NOTICED THAT YOU'VE BEEN AVOIDING MY CALLS. IS THERE A REASON FOR THIS?

OH, YOU THINK IT'S BEEN A HASSLE TALKING TO ME? HOW SAD! I WONDER IF THIS IS BECAUSE YOU DON'T LIKE BEING REMINDED OF HOW INEPT AND STUPID WE HAVE BEEN? NOTHING IS GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN!

WE HAD VERY CLEAR GOALS, MY FRIEND. REVENGE, PURE AND SIMPLE. I WANTED REVENGE ON MR. TOSKA AND YOU ON MR. SAMARAS. BUT LOOK AT US NOW. WE ARE RUINING A LOT OF INNOCENT LIVES...

FIRST, MRS. SAMARAS, WHO WE BOTH KNOW DIDN'T USE TO BE A LADY AT ALL. YOU WERE THE ONE WHO PAID DR. GIANAKOS TO PERFORM SUCH EXTREME PROCEDURES ON HER.

THEN, I WAS FORCED TO SHOOT MY OWN NEPHEW TO PREVENT THIS PLAN FROM FAILING ONCE AND FOR ALL, AND NOW HE'S ALSO PARADING AROUND IN HIGH HEELS, WITH THAT PSYCHO GIRL AS HIS MENTOR. AND I HAVEN'T EVEN MENTIONED WHAT WE DID TO THAT POOR DRIVER!

NO, I'M NOT SAYING I'M GIVING UP. AT LEAST NOT YET. AND I'M ALSO NOT BLAMING YOU FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED, ALTHOUGH YOU MAY HAVE PUSHED EVERYONE A LITTLE TOO HARD. I SEE HOW YOU ARE MANIPULATING EVEN MY SON!

WHAT I'M SAYING IS THAT WE NEED TO BE A LOT MORE CAREFUL. I WON'T TOLERATE ANY MORE OF THOSE... MISTAKES. I'M WARNING YOU. WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR A LONG TIME, SINCE PRISON, TO BE EXACT. YOU KNOW I'M NOT BLUFFING.

WHAT ARE YOU EVEN TALKING ABOUT?

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT YOU ARE OUR REAL MOM. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT!


WAIT, SOFIA...

I THINK... I THINK SHE'S SERIOUS.

SIGH

AND WHY THIS? WHY NOW?

AFTER EVERYTHING... DON'T YOU THINK I HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW?


YES, YOU DO HAVE THE RIGHT.
BUT THE TRUTH IS...

...WE DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER.

YOU... DON'T KNOW? HOW IS IT POSSIBLE THAT YOU GIRLS DON'T KNOW WHO YOUR MOTHER IS?

LISTEN...

WE COULDN'T HAVE ASKED FOR A BETTER DAD THAN THE ONE WE HAVE. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN SO CARING AND SUPPORTIVE... AND MADE SURE WE HAD EVERYTHING WE COULD POSSIBLY NEED. NOT JUST MATERIAL GOODS, BUT ALSO LOVE AND RESPECT.


BUT WHEN IT COMES TO TALKING ABOUT OUR MOM, HE'S ALWAYS ACTED... STRANGELY.

WE'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW WHO SHE IS, OF COURSE. BUT WHENEVER WE ASKED DAD ABOUT IT, HE WOULD STAY SILENT FOR DAYS, BARELY LEAVING HIS ROOM. IT WAS SIMPLY IMPOSSIBLE TO GET AN ANSWER FROM HIM.

ON THE FEW OCCASIONS HE DID SPEAK, HE GAVE US VAGUE AND CONTRADICTORY ANSWERS. SOMETIMES, HE'D SAY MOM WAS A BAD PERSON WHO HAD RAN AWAY AND ABANDONED THE FAMILY WHEN WE WERE STILL BABIES. LATER, HE'D COME UP WITH SOMETHING LIKE SHE HAD ALREADY PASSED AWAY, BUT HE NEVER GAVE DETAILS ABOUT HOW IT HAPPENED.

AFTER SUCH EPISODES, HE'D ALWAYS SPEND A LOT OF TIME IN SECLUSION, DRINKING DAY AND NIGHT, SO WE STARTED TO AVOID THE SUBJECT. ONE TIME, WE DECIDED TO DO SOME RESEARCH ON HIS PAST, TRYING TO FIND GUISEPPE, WHO WAS SUPPOSEDLY HIS BEST FRIEND IN HIS YOUTH, BUT WE'RE UNSUCCESSFUL. WHEN DAD FOUND OUT, HE GOT PRETTY MAD. WE HAD NEVER SEEN HIM SO FURIOUS.

I'M SORRY, EVA. I... I HAD NO IDEA.


WELL, I HOPE YOU'RE HAPPY NOW!

EVA IS CRYING FOR NOTHING! WHAT DID YOU GAIN FROM THIS?

IT'S LIKE I SAID. SHE HAS A RIGHT TO KNOW.
SHE'S BEEN LIVING AS OUR MOM, INSIDE OUR HOUSE,
AND THINGS HAVE GOTTEN OUT OF HAND...

OUT OF CONTROL INDEED...

FUCK, I WON'T DENY THAT IT FEELS GOOD TO HAVE A MOM FOR A CHANGE... EVEN IF THIS IS JUST A CHARADE TO FOOL SOME CRAZY ALBANIAN MAN. BUT TELL ME, **MOM**, NOW THAT THERE'S NO ONE LISTENING OVER OUR SHOULDERS, HOW DO YOU TRULLY FEEL ABOUT THIS? IF THIS IS ALL ACTING, YOU DEFINITELY ARE ONE HELL OF AN ACTOR! DO YOU LIKE DAD FOR REAL? DO YOU LIKE... *US*?

OH GOSH, IS SHE REALLY ASKING WHAT I THINK SHE IS?

THIS IS INSANE... HOW IS IT POSSIBLE THAT EVA AND SOFIA ACTUALLY SEE ME AS THEIR MOTHER? DOES THIS MAKE ANY SENSE?

I CAN'T DENY THAT WE'VE GROWN MUCH CLOSER IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS. WITH NIKOS OUT OF TOWN AND MARINA GONE, EVA AND SOFIA HAVE BEEN MY ONLY COMPANIONS, BESIDES DIMITRA AND THE OTHER LADIES AT THE SOCIAL EVENTS I'VE BEEN FORCED TO ATTEND.

YES, I'VE BEEN SPENDING A LOT OF TIME WITH MY SO-CALLED DAUGHTERS, AND IT'S BEEN... PLEASANT? WE'VE TALKED A LOT, AND THEY'VE EVEN ASKED MY ADVICE ABOUT DECISIONS THEY INTEND TO MAKE.

I DO LIKE THEM. I REALLY DO.
AND I TRULY WANT THE BEST FOR THEM.
BUT WHAT ARE THEY EXPECTING FROM ME...
AM I CAPABLE OF DOING SO? MARINA DIDN'T
HOLD BACK ON TELLING ME HOW BAD SHE
THINKS I AM TO THE PEOPLE
AROUND ME...

HOW COULD YOU DO THIS?
HOW COULD YOU PLAY WITH PEOPLE'S FEELINGS LIKE THAT? I REALLY THOUGHT I COULD TRUST YOU, ANDREW.
EVEN AFTER EVERYTHING...

EVEN AFTER YOU BETRAYED MY TRUST AND GAVE ALL OUR MONEY TO THAT SCAMMER!
HOW COULD I BE SO STUPID!

LISTEN, MARINA, ABOUT MR. ORLOV, I HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING THAT HE INTENDED TO SCAM ME AND RUN AWAY WITH THE MONEY. HE HAD ONCE BEEN A RESPECTED DIRECTOR. YES, I WAS AN IDIOT, NOT ONLY FOR TRUSTING HIM BLINDLY, BUT ALSO FOR NOT CONSULTING YOU BEFORE MAKING THE DECISION.

HOWEVER, I'VE ALREADY APOLOGIZED A THOUSAND TIMES FOR WHAT HAPPENED, AND YOU FORGAVE ME. IT'S NOT FAIR FOR YOU TO KEEP THROWING THIS IN MY FACE OVER AND OVER AGAIN. WHAT DO YOU WANT? FOR ME TO FEEL EVEN MORE GUILTY? I ALREADY FEEL LIKE GARBAGE EVERY TIME I REMEMBER ALL THIS. I TOLD YOU, I'LL PAY YOU BACK SOMEDAY.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT THE MONEY! I COULDN'T CARE LESS ABOUT THE MONEY EVEN THOUGH IT WAS EVERYTHING I MANAGED TO SAVE IN MY ENTIRE LIFE! THE ISSUE IS HOW YOU BETRAYED MY TRUST.

EVERYONE TOLD ME TO STAY AWAY FROM YOU, THAT YOU WERE UNTRUSTWORTHY... BUT HOW COULD I DO THAT? I USED TO LOVE YOU SO MUCH... AND I TRULY BELIEVED THAT YOU COULD CHANGE. I WAS SURE YOU WERE ACTING LIKE A JERK BECAUSE OF ORLOV'S INFLUENCE AND THAT YOU COULD GO BACK TO BEING THE PERSON I HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH.

SO I DECIDED TO GIVE YOU ANOTHER CHANCE.
AND HOW DID YOU THANK ME? YOU TOLD MY UNCLE THAT OUR MARRIAGE WAS A FAKE ONE AND SLEEP WITH HIM! WITH MY FUCKING UNCLE!

YOU DON'T GET IT, DO YOU? HOW COULD SOMEONE AS SELFISH AS YOU UNDERSTAND? YOU NOT ONLY DESTROYED OUR MARRIAGE BUT ALSO MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FAMILY! HOW CAN I LOOK AT MY UNCLE AND COUSINS THE SAME WAY AFTER WHAT HAPPENED?

MARINA, I...

I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY EXCUSES. NO MATTER THE SITUATION, NO MATTER WHO YOU WERE PRETENDING TO BE, YOU HAD NO RIGHT TO CHEAT ON ME WITH MY OWN UNCLE! YOU'RE NOT CAPABLE OF MAINTAINING BONDS WITH PEOPLE. THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE! THAT'S WHY I WAS THE ONLY PERSON STILL BY YOUR SIDE!

MARINA MIGHT THINK I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO HAVE ANYONE CLOSE TO ME...


BUT EVA AND SOFIA... THEY'RE EVEN WILLING TO ACCEPT ME AS THEIR MOTHER!


WAIT, ARE YOU CRYING TOO?

WE'VE BECOME A BUNCH OF CRYBABIES!



OF COURSE I LIKE YOU GIRLS...
AND YOUR FATHER, TOO... IT'S LIKE SOFIA SAID,
NO ONE CAN FAKE IT THAT WELL FOR THAT LONG.
BUT THE THING IS...


I THINK YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR MOTHER. WHAT NIKOS HAS DONE TO YOU TWO IS NOT FAIR.

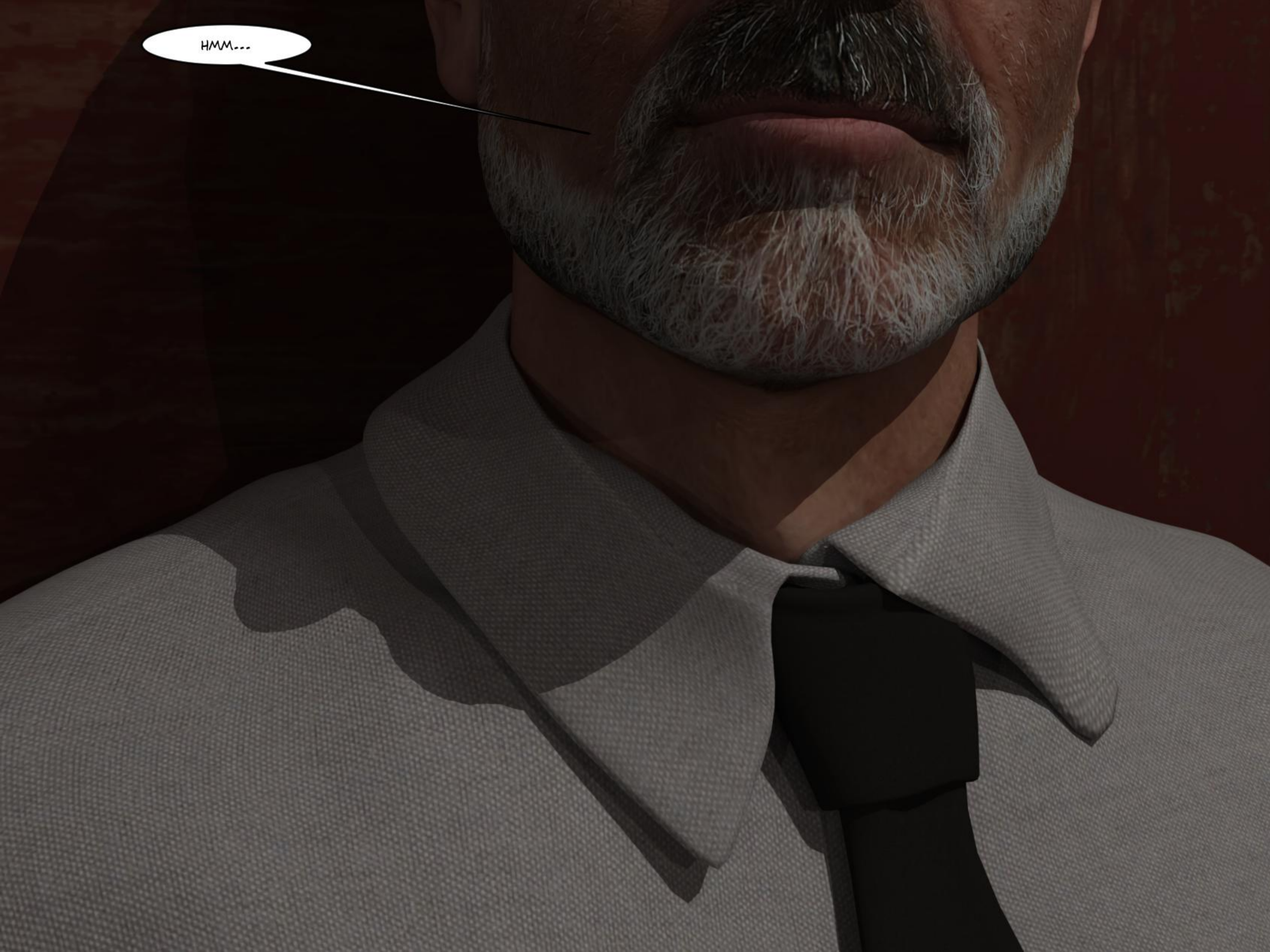
NOW YOU'RE TALKING LIKE A CARING, PROTECTIVE MOM.

YEAH, AND I DON'T THINK WE NEED ANOTHER ONE.

MEANWHILE, IN A SUSPICIOUS PLACE...




ONLY
NOTE TO SELF


HMM...

YOU'RE EARLY, INSPECTOR KARRAS.

EXCUSE ME. DO I KNOW YOU, MISS?

WHAT? I'M GONE FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS AND YOU CAN'T RECOGNIZE ME ANYMORE?


YOUR VOICE... I KNOW YOUR VOICE! BUT THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE... IS IT REALLY YOU?!

OF COURSE IT'S ME. WE ARRANGED THIS MEETING, DIDN'T WE?

BUT HOW? DID YOU UNDERGO PLASTIC SURGERY OR SOMETHING?


HUH!

C'MON, INSPECTOR...

I EXPECTED MORE FROM YOU. FIGURING THINGS OUT IS YOUR JOB, AFTER ALL!

I... I HONESTLY DON'T UNDERSTAND.

LET ME EXPLAIN THEN.

THIS WAS BASICALLY ALL ABOUT A QUICK VISIT TO A BEAUTY SALON...

THIS STARTED WITH SOME EYEBROW PLUCKING AND EYELASH EXTENSIONS...

A LITTLE LIP FILLER...

SOME BOTOX HERE AND THERE...


A DIFFERENT HAIRCUT, MAKEUP STYLE AND CONTACT LENSES...

AND HERE WE ARE. YOU SEE? NOT THAT COMPLICATED.

NOTE TO SELF

EMEMBER TO TRY
IVE BAR'S

Infamous Pickleback Shot

SO YOU HAVEN'T UNDERGONE ANY PERMANENT CHANGE. IS THAT IT?

NONE AT ALL. EVEN MY BIGGER GIRLS, WHICH YOU HAVEN'T TAKEN YOUR EYES OFF SINCE I ARRIVED, ARE JUST INSERTS.

HMM... SORRY ABOUT THAT. I DIDN'T INTEND TO...

DON'T WORRY.

I'M JUST POINTING OUT HOW EASY IT IS TO MAKE MEN LOSE FOCUS, WHICH WAS VERY USEFUL IN MY MISSION.

YOU REMEMEBER I WAS AGAINST THIS IDEA FROM THE BEGINNING, RIGHT? NO MATTER HOW GOOD YOUR DISGUISE IS, GOING TO ALBANIA ALONE WAS AN UNNECESSARY RISK!

UNNECESSARY MY ASS! YOU KNOW I FUCKED EVERYTHING UP! SURE, MY DEAR EX-HUSBAND IS ALSO PARTLY TO BLAME, BUT I AM THE ONE MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR HIM ENDING UP STUCK FOREVER AS A MIDDLE-AGED LADY!

I DIDN'T WANT... NO, I SIMPLY COULDN'T ADMIT IT TO MYSELF FOR A LONG TIME, BUT THAT'S THE TRUTH. NOW I NEED TO MITIGATE THE DAMAGE. I TOLD YOU ALL THIS ALREADY. I SHARED THE WHOLE STORY WITH YOU BEFORE I WENT TO ALBANIA.

DIVE BAR TRIVIA
CAN YOU GUESS
THE SECRET INGREDIENT
OF OUR
FAMOUS DIVE SAUCE

AND YOU PLAN TO DO THIS BY ENSURING THAT YOUR EX-HUSBAND LIVES HAPPILY EVER AFTER AS YOUR UNCLE'S WIFE AND YOUR COUSINS' MOTHER?

THAT'S THE ONLY OPTION NOW. HE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO BE A MAN AGAIN. AND JUDGING BY EVERYTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED, I WOULDN'T SAY HE, OR RATHER SHE, WOULD BE SO SAD ABOUT THIS OUTCOME. THAT'S WHY I MISTREATED HER BEFORE LEAVING ATHENS.
I NEED HER TO *HATE ME*.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW SICK THAT SOUNDS? HOW CAN YOUR EX-HUSBAND BE HAPPY AS A WOMAN THIRTY YEARS OLDER THAN HE IS SUPPOSED TO BE? HOW CAN YOUR UNCLE ACCEPT HIM AS HIS WIFE? AND YOUR COUSINS AS THEIR MOTHER? WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOUR FAMILY? HE USED TO BE JUST A GUY YOU MARRIED NOT TOO LONG AGO. THIS SIMPLY DOESN'T HAPPEN IN REAL LIFE!

WELL, WHO KNOWS? MAYBE THIS ISN'T REAL LIFE. MAYBE WE'RE STUCK IN SOME WEIRD FETISH TALE OR SOME TRIPPY SOUP OPERA. IT DOESN'T MATTER, THOUGH. THIS IS THE ONLY REALITY WE HAVE, AND I NEED TO DO THE BEST I CAN!

NOW THAT THIS ISSUE IS OUT OF THE WAY, CAN WE GET TO WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

NOTE TO SELF
REMEMBER TO TRY THE DIVE BAR'S
Infamous Pickleback Shot

DIVE BAR TRIVIA
CAN YOU GUESS
THE SECRET INGREDIENT

VERY WELL, TELL ME WHAT YOU FOUND OUT.

TRUST ME, THIS WILL BE WORTH YOUR TIME. BUT FIRST...

LET ME LET ME PUT THE PUZZLE PIECES TOGETHER. AS YOU REMEMBER, MY PLAN WHEN I WENT TO ALBANIA WAS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, TO INVESTIGATE THE PAST OF MY **DEAR HUSBAND**. NOT THE ONE WHO IS FUCKING NONSTOP WITH MY UNCLE THESE DAYS, BUT THE **SECOND HUSBAND**, WHO HAS TAKEN ON THAT ROLE SINCE MY RETURN FROM CRETE.

I STILL DON'T GET IT. HE'S AMERICAN, ISN'T HE?

HE CLAIMS TO BE AMERICAN, BUT I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT EVEN THIS IS A LIE. I'LL GET TO THAT.

IT TOOK ME A WHILE, WITH EVERYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON, BUT EVENTUALLY I REALIZED HOW STRANGE JAMES' STORY WAS. THERE WERE TOO MANY "COINCIDENCES" FOR IT TO BE ANYTHING LEGITIMATE, YOU KNOW?

IN CRETE, I WAS BEING FOLLOWED BY A SHADY MAN EVERYWHERE. JAMES THEN SHOWED UP LIKE A KNIGHT IN WHITE ARMOR TO CONFRONT MY STALKER, WHO I LATER FOUND OUT WAS ROAN GJOKA, THE GANGSTER. GJOKA EVEN PULLED OUT A GUN, AND JAMES WAS JUST SCARED ENOUGH TO MAKE HIS ACT SEEM BELIEVABLE, BUT AT NO POINT DID HE BACK AWAY.

LISTEN, MAN, WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING MY WIFE?

NAME.


YOU TELL ME YOUR NAME FIRST!


TARGET FOR A GOOD TIME
TARGET FOR A GOOD TIME


NAME. NOW.

WHOA, WAIT A MINUTE, BUDDY! LET'S NOT LOSE OUR COOL.

WE DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE, OKAY? MY NAME IS JAMES COLLINS. LET ME JUST ASK YOU – DO YOU HAVE ANY BUSINESS TO DISCUSS WITH MY WIFE? SHE'S THE FEELING YOU'VE BEEN FOLLOWING HER AROUND.

AND THEN JAMES BECAME THE HERO WHEN GJOKA DECIDED TO JUST GET UP AND LEAVE, WITHOUT ASKING ANY MORE QUESTIONS. ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME THIS FAR?

AND THAT'S WHEN YOU DECIDED TO SLEEP WITH HIM?

DON'T PULL YOUR CHEAP DETECTIVE TRICKS ON ME!

I NEVER SLEPT WITH JAMES, NOT THAT NIGHT OR ANY OTHER!

SURE, WE MADE OUT IN CRETE AFTER GJOKA LEFT, WHICH WAS A MISTAKE AND AUNT ELENA NEVER FOUND OUT ABOUT, BUT THAT WAS IT!

ANYWAY, THAT WAS JUST THE FIRST BUT NOT THE LAST *COINCIDENCE* INVOLVING JAMES.

WHEN I RETURNED TO ATHENS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT, I HAD AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION WITH AUNT ELENA...

SO, THIS SEFERI GUY CAME TO YOU TO SAY HE SPENT DECADES IN JAIL BECAUSE OF MR. TOSKA? NOT JUST HIM, BUT HIS WHOLE FAMILY? AND YOU SUSPECT THAT SOMEONE IS WATCHING YOU THE WHOLE TIME AT THE BEHEST OF MR. TOSKA?

EXACTLY!

MAYBE I'M JUST BEING PARANOID, BUT I HAVE THE FEELING THERE ARE PEOPLE FOLLOWING ME WHENEVER I LEAVE HOME. I KEEP SEEING SOME FACES AGAIN AND AGAIN EVERYWHERE.

AND I FEEL IN DANGER EVEN INSIDE NIKOS' HOUSE. NONE OF THE SERVENTS HAVE WORKED FOR HIM FOR A LONG TIME AS IT SEEMS NIKOS HASN'T BEEN USING THE HOUSE SO MUCH LATELY. ONE OF THEM COULD EASILY BE SPYING US. THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW FOR SURE. THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO MEET YOU HERE.

IT'S FUNNY YOU SAY YOU THINK YOU'RE BEING FOLLOWED BECAUSE I HAD THE SAME FEELING IN CRETE. THERE WAS THIS GUY WHO SHOWED UP EVERYWHERE I WENT.

AND WHAT DID YOU DO?

I... HMM... GOT HELP TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION, B-BUT THAT'S NOT THE POINT. WHY WOULD MR.TOSKA BE STALKING US ALL LIKE THIS? IS HE REALLY JUST A LUNATIC CONSERVATIVE?

THE GIRLS DID SOME RESEARCH ON THE MATTER. IT LOOKS LIKE MR. SEFERI TOLD ME THE TRUTH, AT LEAST ABOUT SPENDING TWENTY YEARS IN JAIL. IT ALSO SEEMS THAT MR. TOSKA MAY HAVE POLITICAL PRETENSIONS, WHICH COULD EXPLAIN PART OF HIS BEHAVIOR.

WORST OF ALL, NIKOS HAS ALREADY SIGNED A PRE-CONTRACT WITH MR. TOSKA, AND SUCH A CONTRACT PROVIDES FOR A MILLIONAIRE FINE IN CASE OF NIKOS' WITHDRAWAL. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, MARINA! IF EVERYTHING THEY SAY IS REAL, AND MR. TOSKA FINDS OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT ME, HE MAY DESTROY OUR LIVES!

OH MY GOD, THIS IS BAD! LIKE REALLY FUCKING BAD! I GUESS WE DON'T HAVE A CHOICE NOW. YOU'LL HAVE TO KEEP BEING *AUNT ELENA* FOR THE TIME BEING.

SIGH I GUESS SO. BUT EVA AND SOFIA KEEP SAYING MY DISGUISE ISN'T PERFECT YET. GOD, THEY CAN BE SO PUSHY AND ANNOYING WHEN THEY WANT TO!

THEY ARE PESTERING ME TO GO TO A BEAUTY CLINIC IN ORDER TO UNDERGO WHAT THEY CALL A "SMALL COSMETIC PROCEDURE" TO SMOOTH MY FEATURES AND MAKE MY FACE MORE FEMININE. THEY SAY THIS IS TOTALLY REVERSIBLE, BUT I'M NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THEIR PLAN. COULD YOU PLEASE TALK TO THEM, AND EXPLAIN THIS IS AN ABSURD IDEA?

YOU KNOW WHAT... I THINK THEY'RE RIGHT! LOOKING AT YOU CLOSELY, YOUR FACE THE ONLY PART OF YOUR APPEARANCE THAT STILL SEEMS A BIT MASCULINE.

W-WHAT?!

LISTEN, YOU WERE THE ONE WHO SAID THIS SITUATION IS A LOT MORE DANGEROUS THAN ANTICIPATED, *AUNT ELENA* – I GUESS I REALLY HAVE TO GET USED TO CALLING YOU THIS WAY FROM NOW ON – I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE WERE THINKING WHEN WE AGREED TO THIS STUPID JOKE OF DISGUISING AS UNCLE NIKOS' WIFE, BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE.

NOW WE HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO MAKE THIS WORK OR WE'RE SCREWED! I'LL DEFINITELY TALK TO THE GIRLS, BUT ONLY TO MAKE SURE THAT WHAT THEY HAVE IN MIND REALLY IS SAFE AND REVERSIBLE. THE SOONER YOU ACCEPT THIS THE BETTER. THE TRUTH IS... YOU'RE A *WOMAN* NOW!

I WAS STILL HAUNTED BY WHAT HAD HAPPENED IN CRETE, AND UPON LEARNING THAT AUNT ELENA AND THE REST OF THE FAMILY WERE ALSO SUPPOSEDLY BEING WATCHED, I SIMPLY COULDN'T THINK STRAIGHT AND ACTED ON IMPULSE.

IN THAT SAME CONVERSATION, AUNT ELENA ALSO SAID SHE BELIEVED SHE HAD BEEN DRUGGED BY A MYSTERIOUS WOMAN THE NIGHT OF HER DINNER WITH MR. TOSKA AND JOEL. I DIDN'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO THIS AT THE TIME, BUT KEEP THIS INFORMATION IN MIND BECAUSE IT'LL COME IN HANDY.

NOTE TO SELF

REMEMBER TO TRY THE DIVE BAR'S

Infamous Pickleback Sh

A FEW DAYS LATER, THEN, WHEN WE WENT TO SEE DR. GIANAKOS, WHO WOULD PERFORM THE SO-CALLED SIMPLE PROCEDURES TO FEMINIZE AUNT ELENA A BIT, MORE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENED...

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND START ACTING LIKE A PROPER LADY, AUNT ELENA! YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT WE'RE IN A TIGHT SPOT. JUST YESTERDAY WE FOUND CAMERAS HIDDEN IN UNCLE NIKOS' HOUSE, WHICH IS YOUR HOUSE, TOO, SINCE YOU'RE *HIS WIFE*, RIGHT? *YOUR DAUGHTERS* ARE RIGHT NOW CHECKING IF THERE ARE STILL ANY CAMERAS LEFT!

AS IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH, THE DRIVER UNCLE NIKOS HIRED JUST A FEW DAYS AGO DISAPPEARED IN THIN AIR. NOBODY KNOWS WHERE HE IS OR WHAT HE'S DOING. PLUS, UNCLE NIKOS AND JOEL ARE RETURNING TO ATHENS TODAY, WHICH JUST COMPLICATES THINGS EVEN FURTHER. THIS WHOLE THING GETS MORE DANGEROUS BY THE MINUTE, SO I THINK YOU BETTER STOP BEING SO STUBBORN, *MA'AM*.

OH, AND THERE'S ONE MORE THING...

RING!
RING!

HMM... THE HOTEL IS CALLING ME.
NOT ANOTHER BAD NEWS, PLEASE!

HELLO?

AND WHO IS IT?

HI, MRS. WOODS. SORRY FOR BOTHERING YOU, BUT THERE'S SOMEONE AT RECEPTION WANTING TO SPEAK WITH YOU, AND HE SAYS IT'S URGENT.

IT'S YOUR HUSBAND, MRS. WOODS.

OH MY...

IS EVERYTHING OKAY, MARINA? IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE SEEN A GHOST!

I... I GOTTA GO, AUNT ELENA.

WHAT? NOW?! WHAT ABOUT THE APPOINTMENT?

JUST STICK TO THE PLAN. YOU KNOW WHAT YOU NEED TO TELL THE DOCTOR. JUST MAKE SURE HE AGREES TO PERFORM THE PROCEDURE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I'LL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING LATER!

B-BUT...

WELL, WELL, WELL,
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!
LOOK WHO'S HERE...

Y-YOU...!

NOTE TO SELF

REMEMBER TO TRY THE DIVE BAR'S

Infamous Pickleback Shot

ABOUT THE DRIVER, YOU SURELY REMEMBER THE STORY. THAT'S HOW YOU GOT INTO THE GAME, AFTER ALL. AND GUESS WHO HAD CALLED ME? NONE OTHER THAN JAMES!


CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT THE HELL YOU'RE DOING?

WHAT YOU MEAN, DEAR? CAN'T A HUSBAND VISIT HIS LOVELY WIFE ANYMORE?

LISTEN, JAMES, I THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP IN CRETE, BUT THIS ISN'T EVEN FUNNY. I TOLD YOU NOT TO COME HERE.

I DON'T WANT TO CAUSE ANY PROBLEMS.
THE THING IS, I'M HEADING BACK TO AMERICA
LATER TODAY AND MY FLIGHT LEAVES FROM ATHENS.
SO I THOUGHT I'D TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY
TO SAY GOODBYE.


HOW ABOUT ONE LAST TOAST?

UNCLE NIKOS SHOWED UP JUST AT THAT TIME WITH JOEL, WHO HAD STAYED IN GREECE AS MR. TOSKA'S REPRESENTATIVE.


MARINA?

OH, NO...

SO YOU ARE THE FAMOUS MARINA? YOUR UNCLE SPOKE HIGHLY OF YOU! YOU CAME TO GREECE FOR YOUR HONEYMOON, RIGHT?

WELL, WHERE ARE MY MANNERS?
MARINA, THIS IS JOEL KOCI, THE GOOD YOUNG MAN WHO HAS BEEN WORKING WITH ME RECENTLY.
WE HAVE JUST RETURNED TO ATHENS FROM A TRIP UP NORTH.


NICE TO MEET YOU, MRS...?
AND YOUR COMPANION...?

YOU CAN CALL ME JUST MARINA. AND HE IS... JAMES COLLINS, M-MY HUSBAND!

YOU SEE? BERCAUSE OF JOEL'S ARRIVAL WHILE JAMES WAS ALSO THERE, I WAS FORCED TO SAY THAT HE REALLY WAS MY HUSBAND TO KEEP UP THE CHARADE! THE SAME JOEL WHO HAD ALSO BEEN THE REASON ANDREW HAD TO KEEP PRETENDING TO BE AUNT ELENA FOR LONGER AFTER THE FIRST DINNER, AND THE SAME JAMES WHO HAD ALSO SHOWN UP AT THE PERFECT MOMENT TO "SAVE ME" IN CRETE.

I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS MAY ALL SEEM SUSPICIOUS, BUT YOU HAVEN'T PRESENTED ANY CONCRETE EVIDENCE YET.

CALM DOWN, OKAY? I HAVEN'T FINISHED THE STORY YET.

WEEKS LATER, WHEN I WENT TO SEE AUNT ELENA AFTER HER EXTENSIVE AND UNEXPECTED SURGERIES, SHE TOLD ME SHE HAD BEEN DRUGGED AGAIN BEFORE SEEING THE DOCTOR THE DAY I RUSHED OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, AND AGAIN BY THE MYSTERIOUS BLONDE WOMAN.

SHE ALSO TOLD ME THAT SHE HAD BEEN VISITED SHORTLY BEFORE MY ARRIVAL BY SEFERI, WHO ONCE AGAIN PLANTED PARANOIA IN HER MIND...

EXCUSE ME, MRS. SAMARAS. MAY I COME IN?

MR SEFERI? IS THAT YOU?
WHAT'S GOING ON?

YOU'RE IN THE HOSPITAL, MA'AM. DON'T YOU REMEMBER? WELL, I THINK IT'S NORMAL FOR YOU TO BE CONFUSED AFTER SUCH A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

HOSPITAL? SO DID THEY REALLY PERFORM ALL THOSE CRAZY SURGERIES ON MY BODY? I THOUGHT THAT HAD BEEN JUST A FREAKING NIGHTMARE! BUT MR. SEFERI MENTIONED AN ACCIDENT. WHAT ACCIDENT, FOR GOD'S SAKE! I MUST HAVE LOST MY MIND!

I WISH I HAD COME TO SEE YOU SOONER, MA'AM, BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT THINGS GOT EVEN MORE COMPLICATED AND DANGEROUS RECENTLY. THERE'S SOMETHING IMPORTANT I NEED TO ASK YOU.

BEFORE THAT, THOUGH, LET ME SAY THAT I'M VERY HAPPY TO SEE YOU RECOVERING. I HEARD YOU'RE BEING DISCHARGED TODAY. THAT'S WHY I BROUGHT YOU THESE FLOWERS.

THEY ARE CALLED RED POPPIES AND ARE THE SYMBOL OF ALBANIA. THEY REPRESENT, AMONG OTHER THINGS, HOPE FOR BETTER TIMES. A LITTLE HOPE NEVER HURT ANYONE, DON'T YOU THINK, MRS. SAMARAS?

HOPE IS GOOD, BUT KNOWING THE TRUTH IS AN EVEN BETTER FEELING, MR. SEFERI! WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAD TO COME TO THE HOSPITAL TO ASK ME? NOTHING MAKES SENSE RIGHT NOW!

ONCE AGAIN, JUST LIKE THE NIGHT WE FIRST MET, IT'S EASIER TO JUST SHOW YOU.

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THIS MAN, MRS. SAMARAS?

SO, MA'AM. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

NO, I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS MAN BEFORE, MR. SEFERI. WHO IS HE?

WELL, IT CERTAINLY MAKES THINGS MORE... PUZZLING.

I'VE BEEN INFORMED BY A RELIABLE SOURCE THAT MR. TOSKA IS AFTER THIS MAN, WHOSE NAME IS ANDREW WOODS. THE OLD BASTARD IS CONVINCED THAT WOODS IS AT THE CENTER OF A CONSPIRACY TO STEAL HIS MONEY.

A CONSPIRACY HE BELIEVES YOUR FAMILY IS PART OF. I STILL DON'T KNOW ALL THE DETAILS, BUT MR. TOSKA HAS A LOT OF MEN AFTER WOODS. DANGEROUS MEN.

TELL ME, MRS. SAMARAS, MARINA KATSAROS IS SOMEONE YOU'RE AWARE OF, RIGHT?

O-OF COURSE, SHE'S OUR NIECE. DAUGHTER OF NIKOS' SISTER.

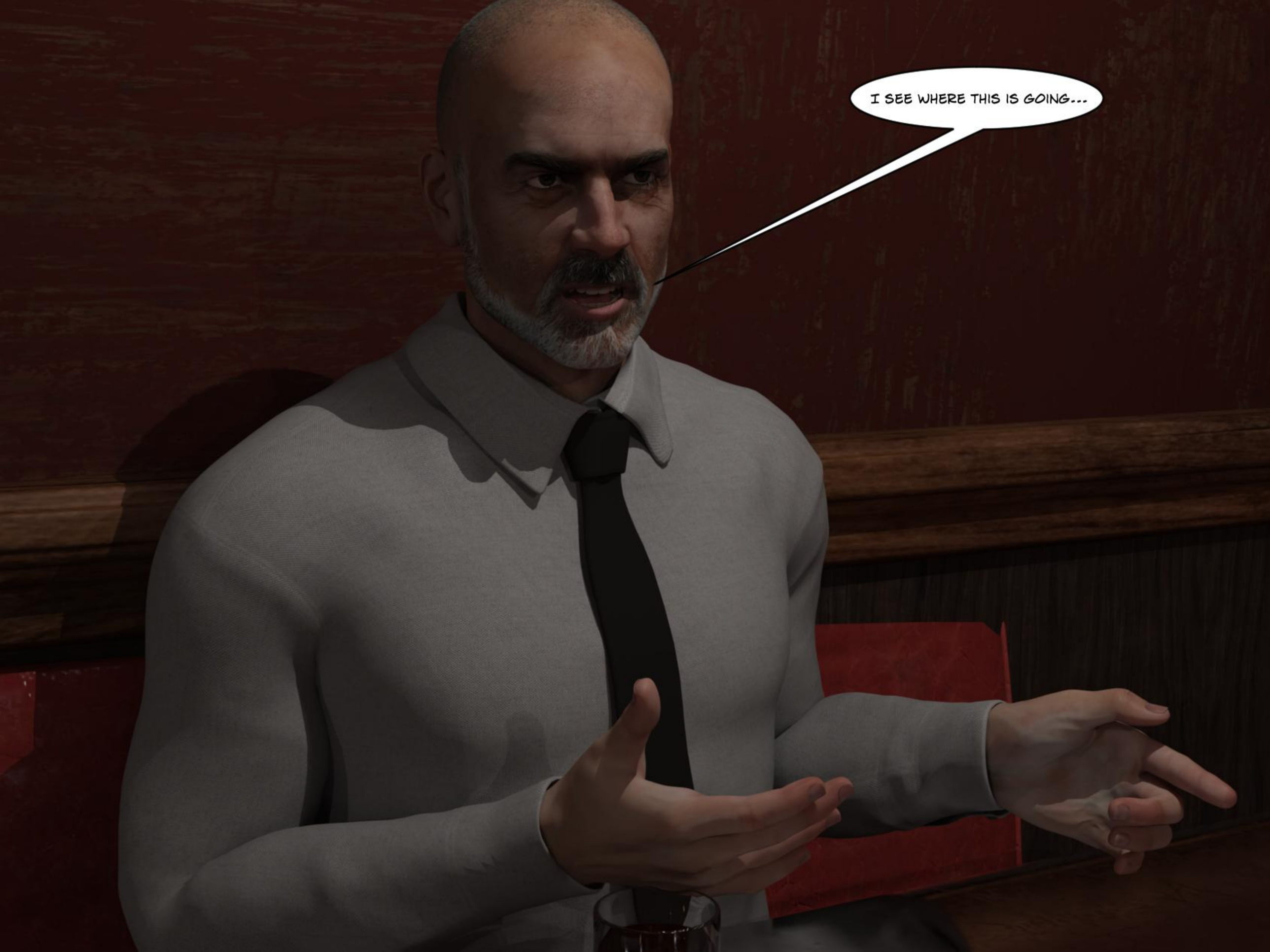
AND SHE'S IN GREECE, ISN'T SHE? ON HER HONEYMOON? MR. TOSKA THINKS SHE IS ANDREW WOODS' WIFE. SHE WAS IN CRETE RECENTLY, AND ONE OF TOSKA'S HENCHMEN WAS FOLLOWING HER, WHILE AN ASSOCIATE OF MINE WAS FOLLOWING TOSKA'S MAN.

FROM WHAT I WAS TOLD, SHE AND HER HUSBAND APPROACHED THE MAN WHO WAS WATCHING THEM ON TOSKA'S ORDERS. HER HUSBAND IS IN FACT A MAN NAMED JAMES COLLINS, WHICH MEANS THAT TOSKA WAS WRONG. I DON'T THINK HE'S CONVINCED, THOUGH. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN AS STUBBORN AS HE'S CRUEL.

IN ANY CASE, I ALSO HAVE A PHOTO HERE OF THE MAN WHO WAS FOLLOWING MARINA. LET ME SHOW YOU.

AREN'T YOU A FUCKING INSPECTOR? EVEN I,
WHO AM JUST A REPORTER, MANAGED TO PUT TWO
AND TWO TOGETHER! IT'S CLEAR AS DAY THAT SEFERI, JOEL,
JAMES, THE MAFIA GUY AND THE BLONDE WOMAN WERE CONSPIRING
THE WHOLE TIME TO SEPARATE ME FROM ANDREW AND FORCE HIM
TO GO DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE ROLE OF ELENA SAMARAS!
TO DO THIS, THEY USED TOSKA AS A SCAPEGOAT, WHO IN TRUTH
HAS DONE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO ANY OF US!

IF YOU'RE STILL NOT CONVINCED, DON'T THE DAMN FLOWERS RING A FUCKING BELL?


I SEE WHERE THIS IS GOING...

DO YOU REALLY THINK I'VE NEVER STUDIED THE HISTORY OF CRIMINOLOGY IN THE BALKANS? YOU'RE TRYING TO REFERENCE THE "BLACK PETAL", A GANG THAT WAS FAMOUS FOR SUPPOSEDLY USING EXTRACTS MADE FROM POPPY SEEDS AS A PSYCHOTIC DRUG TO POISON OR ALTER THE PERCEPTION OF REALITY OF THEIR TARGETS.


OUTLAWS!
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THE TRUTH, HOWEVER, IS THAT SUCH AN ORGANIZATION HAS NOT BEEN ACTIVE FOR AT LEAST TWENTY YEARS, AND THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT SEFERI HAVE HAD ANY CONNECTION WITH THEM. FURTHERMORE, IT'S CLEAR THAT REPORTS INVOLVING THE GROUP HAVE BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED OVER THE YEARS. THIS IS PURE SENSATIONALISM.

I WOULDN'T BE SO SURE IF I WERE YOU.
I'VE HEARD MANY STRANGE STORIES IN ALBANIA OF PEOPLE CHOKING TO DEATH ON THEIR WINE GLASSES OR LOSING THEIR SANITY AFTER A PERIOD MISSING, WHICH HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE BLACK PETAL'S MODUS OPERANDI.
RECENT STORIES, I MUST SAY.

ABOUT SEFERI HAVING HAD CONTACT WITH SOMEONE FROM THE GANG, MANY PEOPLE SWORE TO ME THAT ROAN GJOKA, THE GANGSTER WHO HAS BEEN WATCHING MY FAMILY, IS AN ACTIVE PART OF THE ORGANIZATION.

WHY ARE YOU SO RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT THIS POSSIBILITY? IT'S CLEAR THAT AUNT ELENA HAS BEEN DRUGGED SEVERAL TIMES, NOT TO MENTION FILIP, THE DRIVER.

THINK ABOUT IT...


Pride BarTrivia Championship with Cash Prizes.
TUMBLEWEED
FILIP TRULY BELIEVED THAT HE HAD BEEN IN A CAR ACCIDENT, AN ACCIDENT THAT FORENSIC EXAMINATIONS PROVED HAD NOT HAPPENED.

BUT YOU YOURSELF SAID THAT IF HE WAS DELIBERATELY LYING, HE WOULD BE THE BEST LIAR YOU HAD EVER MET. YOU EVEN USED THE POLYGRAPH TEST, DIDN'T YOU?

SO YOUR THEORY IS THAT SEFERI AND HIS CRONIES BRAINWASHED FILIP INTO BELIEVING HE HAD BEEN IN A CAR ACCIDENT? WHY?

HERE I ENTER THE REALM OF CONJECTURE. MANY STRANGE THINGS WERE HAPPENING AT THAT TIME...

MY BEST BET IS THAT THE ACCIDENT STORY BROUGHT OUR FAMILY ONTO THE POLICE RADAR, FORCING ANDREW TO BE ELENA SAMARAS FOR LONGER.

NOTE TO SELF

REMEMBER TO TRY THE DIVE BAR'S

Infamous Pickleback Shot

WHAT A LOAD OF BULLSHIT! I'VE NEVER HEARD A MORE ABSURD STORY. DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE? SOMETHING CONCRETE? TELL ME NOW BEFORE I DECIDE TO STOP WASTING MY TIME WITH YOU!

I SEE YOU'RE REALLY HURT BECAUSE I SAID YOU'RE NOT DOING YOUR JOB RIGHT, AREN'T YOU? YOU'RE JUST PROVING MY FUCKING POINT!

NOTE TO SELF

Infamous Pickleback Shot

BESIDES JAMES, I ALSO WENT TO ALBANIA TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SEFERI'S PAST. I HAD ALREADY READ NEWS ON HOW HE HAD BEEN ARRESTED ABOUT TWENTY YEARS AGO, ACCORDING TO HIM ON A FALSE CHARGE, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE WAS MYSTERY.

A SCANDAL OF SUCH PROPORTIONS SHOULD HAVE HAD MORE REPERCUSSIONS. AN ALLEGED $10 MILLION FRAUD... INVOLVING A BUSINESSMAN WHO HAD HAD AN AFFAIR WITH ANOTHER MAN JUST A YEAR EARLIER... AS A JOURNALIST, I KNOW THIS STORY IS JUST TOO GOOD NOT TO BE EXPLOITED TO EXHAUSTION BY SOME NOT-SO-REPUTABLE TABLOIDS.

BUT THERE WAS VERY LITTLE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CASE. EVEN HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON WAS BARELY REPORTED. IT WAS ALMOST AS IF SOMEONE INTENTIONALLY WANTED TO HUSH UP THE STORY...

IT TOOK FLIRTING WITH MORE MEN THAN I CAN COUNT UNTIL I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO FIND A JOURNALIST AND A FORMER PRISON GUARD WILLING TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE. BOTH OF THEM TRIED TO DOWNPLAY THE CASE AT FIRST, BUT A LITTLE WHISKEY AND A FEW GIGGLES AT THE RIGHT TIME WERE ENOUGH TO GET THEM TALKING.

WHAT I LEARNED WAS THAT SEFERI'S FIRST YEARS IN PRISON WERE PURE HELL. CERTAINLY TRYING TO PROTECT HIS SON, HE SENT THE BOY TO THE USA, AND HE WAS NEVER SEEN AGAIN. SEFERI, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS HARASSED AND HUMILIATED IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY, FOR BEING A FORMER RICH MAN AND FOR HAVING HAD A HOMOSEXUAL AFFAIR. BUT IT CHANGED WHEN HE BECAME CLOSE TO A CERTAIN GROUP OF PEOPLE, ONE MAN IN PARTICULAR.

LET ME GUESS... THE LEADER OF BLACK PETAL?

NO, A GREEK MAN CALLED ANDREADIS, WHO WAS AN OUTSIDER JUST LIKE SEFERI. EVEN THOUGH HE WAS A FOREIGNER, ANDREADIS SOON GAINED THE RESPECT OF EVERYONE IN THE PRISON, WHETHER OUT OF ADMIRATION OR FEAR. NOT BECAUSE HE WAS A VIOLENT PERSON OR ANYTHING - THE THING ABOUT HIM WAS THAT HE WAS VERY GOOD AT MAKING CONTACT WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE AND MANIPULATING THEM LIKE PIECES IN A GAME OF CHESS. A VERY COLD AND SMART MAN, WHO COULD GET THINGS DONE.

HE MANAGED TO GATHER A GROUP OF CRIMINALS AROUND HIM, INCLUDING FORMER MEMBERS OF THE BLACK PETAL. SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT HE BECAME THE NEW GANG LEADER, BUT THIS IS NOT A CONSENSUS. WHAT IS A FACT IS THAT HE HAD HIS SENTENCE REDUCED AND LEFT PRISON MUCH EARLIER THAN EXPECTED, SHOWING THE INFLUENCE HE HAD EVEN OUTSIDE PRISON.

THE IMPORTANT THING HERE IS TO NOTE THAT ANDREADIS AND SEFERI BECAME INSEPARABLE, AND THE REASON FOR THAT WAS VERY SIMPLE: A DESIRE FOR REVENGE. SEFERI WANTED TO GET EVEN WITH TOSKA WHILE ANDREADIS' TARGET WAS ANOTHER GREEK MAN. CAN YOU GUESS THE NAME? YEAH, SAMARAS. I HEARD THIS FROM BOTH MEN.

SO THIS IS WHAT I THINK THAT HAPPENED... ANDREADIS AND SEFERI CAME UP WITH A PLAN TO GET REVENGE ON TOSKA AND UNCLE NIKOS AT THE SAME TIME - A PLAN THAT ALSO INVOLVED SEFERI'S SON, WHO I BELIEVE TO BE JAMES. I'M STILL GOING TO EXPLAIN WHY I AM SO CONVINCED OF THIS. BUT THEY DIDN'T COUNT ON UNCLE NIKOS SHOWING UP WITH A GUY IN DRAG ON HIS FIRST MEETING WITH TOSKA.

THEY THEN HAD TO IMPROVISE, ENSURING THAT "ELENA SAMARAS" WAS THERE TO STAY, AT LEAST UNTIL THE COMPLETION OF THE PLAN, A PLAN THAT OBVIOUSLY HAD TO DO WITH TOSKA AND UNCLE NIKOS BECOMING PARTNERS FOR SOME REASON.

SO THE QUESTION IS: WHO IS ANDREADIS? HE SURELY HAS A NEW NAME, AND HAS TO BE SOMEONE RELATIVELY CLOSE TO UNCLE NIKOS, EITHER IN THE PAST OR IN THE PRESENT. I THINK IT'S SAFE TO ASSUME THAT...

STOP THIS NONSENSE RIGHT NOW!
DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?
YOU'RE BUTTHURT BECAUSE YOU LOST YOUR HUSBAND
TO YOUR SICK UNCLE AND THEN CAME UP WITH THIS
SILLY FANTASY OF SECRET ORGANIZATIONS AND
INTERNATIONAL PLOTS! YOU'RE NOT A DETECTIVE,
AND YOU'RE JUST MAKING A FOOL OF YOURSELF!

OH, REALLY? THEN HOW YOU, *PROFESSIONAL INSPECTOR*, EXPLAIN EVERYTHING I JUST TOLD YOU?

VERY SIMPLE, ACTUALLY. THOSE GUYS IN ALBANIA SIMPLY SAID WHAT YOU WANTED TO HEAR TO GET INTO YOUR PANTS!

ABOUT YOUR BELOVED UNCLE, HE'S NOT THE VICTIM YOU'RE PAINTING HIM TO BE. I CAN'T GO INTO DETAILS BUT LET ME JUST SAY THAT HE IS BASICALLY BROKE, AND NOTHING IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN A RICH MAN ABOUT TO LOSE EVERYTHING.

DO YOU WANT SOME ADVICE? JUST GO HOME, MARINA. THOSE PEOPLE ARE DOING YOU HARM. LET ME DO MY JOB AND JUST FORGET ABOUT IT. IT'LL BE BETTER FOR EVERYONE.

Chapter Twenty-Seven
Trojan War

A FEW DAYS LATER...

AT A HIGH SOCIETY PARTY---

OH, ELENA, DARLING...

I'VE TO POINT OUT ONCE AGAIN HOW STUNNING YOU LOOK TONIGHT!

WHY, THANK YOU, DIMITRA! YOU LOOK PHENOMENAL, TOO! I REALLY LOVE YOUR DRESS!

IT'S A PLEASANT SURPRISE TO SEE YOU HERE AT MR. MORAITIS' PARTY. IT'S BEEN REALLY HARD TO GET A HOLD OF YOU THE LAST FEW DAYS!

YOU KNOW YOU CAN OPEN UP TO ME, DON'T YOU, ELENA? YOUR VOW RENEWAL CEREMONY IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER, BUT IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE SIMPLY ABANDONED THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE EVENT. IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT?

YES, I KNOW I CAN TRUST YOU, DIMITRA. YOU'VE BEEN AN AMAZING FRIEND, EVEN THOUGH WE HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER SO MUCH LATELY. ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON...

...WELL, WE ALL HAVE TO FACE SOME TOUGH SITUATIONS NOW AND THEN. THAT'S JUST HOW LIFE IS.

MARITAL SITUATIONS IN THIS CASE, I ASSUME. THAT'S SO SAD. MR. SAMARAS AND YOU ALWAYS SEEMED SO IN LOVE WITH EACH OTHER! DO YOU NEED ANY HELP? I'M HERE FOR YOU!

WE CAN TALK ABOUT THIS LATER, I PROMISE! BUT FIRST, WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT MR. MORAITIS, OUR HOST TONIGHT?

I ASSUMED YOU ALREADY KNEW MR. MORAITIS. HE'S THE ACCOUNTANT OF YOUR FAMILY, ISN'T HE? ACTUALLY, I BELIEVE HE'S THE ACCOUNTANT OF MOST OF THE WEALTHY FAMILIES IN ATHENS!

HE'S SOMEONE WHO LOVES TO HOST GET-TOGETHERS. FOR SOME REASON, HE SEEMS TO HAVE NEVER BEEN MARRIED, BUT HE'S AN INTERESTING CHARACTER FOR SURE. A VERY POLITE AND CULTURED MAN.

IT DOESN'T HELP MUCH. I GOT A PHONE CALL FROM MR. MARAITIS EARLIER TODAY ALMOST BEGGING ME TO COME TO HIS PARTY, BUT HE DIDN'T EXPLAIN THE REASON FOR THAT. HE JUST SAID HE'D LIKE TO DISCUSS SOMETHING OF INTEREST TO BOTH OF US. WHAT COULD THAT BE? WE DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER, AFTER ALL, AND I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT NIKOS TOLD HIM TO EXPLAIN THE FACT THAT HE GOT A WIFE OVERNIGHT.


LISTEN, DIMITRA, DO YOU THINK...

MOM?

HMM... HELLO, SWEETIE!

I'M AFRAID TO SAY THAT I'LL HAVE TO ASK MRS. PETROU TO LEND YOU TO ME FOR A MOMENT.

DOES THIS HAVE TO BE NOW? I WAS ABOUT TO...

IT'S OKAY, ELENA. WE CAN RESUME OUR CONVERSATION LATER. YOUR DAUGHTER COMES FIRST.


SO, WHAT'S GOING ON, SOFIA?
MR. MORAITIS WANTS TO SEE US IN HIS OFFICE. IT'S ABOUT DAD.

ABOUT NIKOS? HAS HE RETURNED TO ATHENS FROM HIS BUSINESS TRIP?

NO, AND FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, DAD SUPPOSEDLY WASN'T ON A BUSINESS TRIP AT ALL. HE... HE RAN AWAY.

HE WHAT?!!

A FEW MINUTES LATER...

VERY WELL, MR. MORAITIS, TELL US RIGHT NOW EVERYTHING YOU KNOW!

OF COURSE, MY DEAR...

BUT BEFORE WE BEGIN, WHY DON'T YOU LADIES TAKE A SEAT? CAN I OFFER YOU SOMETHING TO DRINK?

NO, THE ONLY THING WE NEED IS TO KNOW ABOUT DAD!

THIS IS UNDERSTANDABLE, OF COURSE.

SIGH FIRST OF ALL, I WANT TO SAY THAT I'M DEEPLY SORRY. I COULD HAVE AVOIDED THE CURRENT SITUATION, I GUESS, OR AT LEAST WARNED YOU BEFOREHAND.

COME ON, SPIT IT OUT, MR. MORAITIS!
THIS ANTICIPATION IS KILLING US!

THERE'S NO WAY THIS STORY IS TRUE.
NIKOS WOULD NEVER ABANDON HIS DAUGHTERS!
HE WOULD NEVER... ABANDON ME, RIGHT?

I'M SORRY AGAIN. I OBVIOUSLY DON'T WANT TO MAKE YOU LADIES EVEN MORE DISTRESSED.

BUT FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND,
LET ME SHOW YOU SOMETHING.


THIS IS A BALANCE SHEET OF DAD'S BUSINESS AND BANK ACCOUNTS. IF THE NUMBERS ARE CORRECT, HE'S BASICALLY BROKE.

INSIGHTFUL AS ALWAYS, SOFIA. THIS IS SOMETHING I'VE BEEN ALERTING MR. SAMARAS ABOUT FOR A LONG TIME. BUT SOMETIMES - PERHAPS TOO OFTEN - IT'S A LITTLE DIFFICULT TO GET HIM TO LISTEN TO REASON.

THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE, MR. MORAITS! DAD HAS ALWAYS BEEN VERY RESPONSIBLE WITH THE BUSINESS! HOW COULD HE JUST GO BANKRUPT?

THAT'S WHAT WE ALL THOUGHT, OF COURSE. BUT TELL ME, HAVE YOU REALLY NOT NOTICED ANY CHANGE IN HIM LATELY?

I DON'T KNOW... NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, MAYBE DAD HAS BECOME MORE RECLUSIVE IN RECENT YEARS, BUT...

BUT NONE OF THAT EXPLAINS THIS STUPID STORY! HOW CAN DAD BE IN SUCH FINANCIAL TROUBLE WHEN HE JUST GOT A NEW BUSINESS PARTNER? THE BILLIONAIRE GUY? AND FROM WHAT I REMEMBER, IT WAS YOU, MR. MARAITIS, WHO INTRODUCED THE TWO OF THEM!

ME? IS THAT WHAT HE TOLD YOU?

IT WAS DEFINITELY NOT ME WHO INTRODUCED MR. SAMARAS TO MR. TOSKA. IN FACT, I WAS OPPOSED TO THE IDEA OF SUCH A PARTNERSHIP FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, CONSIDERING HOW UNPREDICTABLE THAT ALBANIAN MAN CAN BE.

NO, GIRLS, THIS WAS ALL YOUR FATHER'S IDEA, INCLUDING THE PLAN TO PRETEND TO HAVE A WIFE TO FOOL MR. TOSKA.

THERE IS NO REASON TO LOOK SURPRISED, **MRS. SAMARAS.**
I'VE BEEN **YOUR HUSBAND'S** ACCOUNTANT FOR MANY YEARS SO
I NATURALLY KNOW THAT HE DIDN'T HAVE A WIFE UNTIL NOT LONG AGO.
I'M NOT SURE WHAT HE SAID TO CONVINCE YOU TO JOIN THIS PLOT,
BUT I FEAR YOU MAY HAVE BEEN DECEIVED, AS WELL.

CAN THIS BE REAL? HAS NIKOS BEEN DECEIVING ME FROM THE BEGINNING? BUT WHY? WHY ME? IF HE TRULY WANTED A FAKE WIFE TO TRICK MR. TOSKA, WHY NOT FIND SOMEONE WHO WAS ALREADY A WOMAN TO PLAY THE ROLE?

MR. SAMARAS STARTED TO GET MORE AND MORE DESPERATE, SO HE DECIDED TO DO BUSINESS WITH MR. TOSKA, BELIEVING THIS WAS HIS LAST HOPE. FOR THIS TO WORK, THOUGH, HE KNEW HE NEEDED TO CONVINCE MR. TOSKA THAT HE HAD A *TRADITIONAL FAMILY*, SO TO SPEAK. HE NEEDED A WIFE. A WOMAN WITH *NO PAST*, IN HIS WORDS.

AND THAT'S HOW IT ALL BEGAN. BUT GIVEN WHAT HAPPENED NEXT, I DON'T BELIEVE MR. SAMARAS WAS SUCCESSFUL IN HIS ENDEAVOR...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT? DAD HAS ALREADY SIGNED A PRE-CONTRACT WITH MR. TOSKA!

SADLY, IT SEEMS LIKE HE LIED ABOUT THAT TOO...

MR. SAMARAS HASN'T BEEN ABLE TO CLOSE ANY DEAL YET, WHICH HAS MADE HIM VERY FRUSTRATED. BUT THAT'S NOT THE WORST PART. COULD YOU PLEASE TAKE A LOOK AT THE DOCUMENT IN YOUR HANDS AGAIN, SOFIA?

WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU WANT ME TO LOOK AT?

THE FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS FROM TWO MONTHS AGO.


THERE ARE FOUR TRANSFERS MADE TO...

Buzz
Buzz

GO AHEAD, SOFIA. IT'S JUST A TEXT OR SOMETHING.

VERY WELL, THIS BALANCE SHEET SAYS THAT DAD MADE SEVERAL TRANSFERS TO AN ACCOUNT IN ALBANIA IN THE NAME OF THEODORA MAKRIS.

YES, AND FROM WHAT I COULD FIND OUT, THIS IS ACTUALLY ONE OF THE FAKE IDENTITIES OF KLEA GJOKA, THE WIFE OF ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS GANGSTERS IN ALBANIA, WHO WAS RECENTLY SEEN HERE IN ATHENS.

THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE! WE ALL BELIEVED... NO, WE KNEW THAT GJOKA WAS WORKING WITH TOSKA, AND THAT OUR FAMILY WAS IN DANGER PRECISELY BECAUSE OF THAT!

I'M AFRAID THAT'S NOT CASE. IF GJOKA WAS WORKING WITH MR. TOSKA, WHY WOULD MR. SAMARAS SEND MONEY TO HIS WIFE?

I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! NIKOS WORKING WITH GJOKA AND HIS WIFE? IT WAS BECAUSE OF THEM THAT I BECAME MORE AND MORE STUCK IN THE ROLE OF ELENA SAMARAS! WAS THAT NIKOS' PLAN ALL ALONG?

BUZZ
BUZZ

WHY WOULD DAD DO BUSINESS WITH A CRIMINAL, MR. MORAITIS?

I CAN'T GIVE YOU A CONCLUSIVE VERDICT ON THIS QUESTION, BUT I SEE THREE POSSIBILITIES. MAYBE ONE OF THEM IS THE CORRECT ANSWER, MAYBE ALL THREE ARE.

FIRST OF ALL, I DON'T KNOW THE DETAILS OF MR. SAMARAS' DEAL WITH MRS. SAMARAS, BUT IF MRS. SAMARAS NEEDED SOME "INCENTIVE" TO KEEP TAKING PART IN THE PLOT, FEAR OF SOMEONE LIKE GJOKA WOULD BE VERY USEFUL FOR THIS PURPOSE.

SECONDLY, COULD YOU CHECK MR. SAMARAS' ATTEMPTED TRANSACTIONS FROM TWO WEEKS AGO, SOFIA?

HE TRIED TO TRANSFER MONEY FROM TWO ACCOUNTS TO A THIRD ONE BUT IT WASN'T AUTHORIZED. SO WHAT?

DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE THE ACCOUNTS?
AT LEAST ONE OF THEM?

124764...


THIS IS MY ACCOUNT!

EXACTLY. AND THE OTHER ONE IS YOUR SISTER'S. GJOKA IS ALSO KNOWN FOR HIS TAX FRAUD AND BANKING SCAMS. I BELIEVE THIS WAS THE SECOND USE MR. SAMARAS SAW IN HIM, IN CASE HIS PLAN TO TRICK MR. TOSKA DIDN'T WORK OUT. FORTUNATELY, THE BANK REALIZED SOMETHING WAS WRONG AND BLOCKED THE TRANSACTION. THAT WAS WHEN I WAS INFORMED OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

BUT THE THIRD POINT I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS, I'M SORRY TO SAY, IS EVEN MORE SERIOUS...

TAKE A LOOK AT MR. SAMARAS' LATEST FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS, FROM LAST WEEK, PLEASE.

IT SAYS DAD USED THE REST OF THE MONEY HE HAD TO TAKE OUT A LIFE INSURANCE...

A LIFE INSURANCE POLICY WORTH ONE MILLION EUROS IN THE EVENT OF THE DEATH OF HIS WIFE!

OKAY, NOW YOU'VE REALLY CROSSED THE LINE! WHAT EXACTLY ARE YOU IMPLYING HERE?

LIFE INSURANCE? SO NIKOS WANTED ME DEAD? IS THAT IT?!

AFTER EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED BETWEEN US... I CAN'T BELIEVE HE WAS DECEIVING ME THE WHOLE TIME! I JUST CAN'T!

BUZZ
BUZZ

AND WHY DOES THIS PHONE KEEP PESTERING ME? LET ME TURN IT OFF!

OH GOD...

THE EVIDENCE POINTS TO...

TO HELL WITH THE EVIDENCE! I WON'T BELIEVE ANY OF THIS UNTIL I TALK TO DAD! DO YOU KNOW WHERE HE IS OR NOT?

IT'S NIKOS WHO'S TEXTING ME!
"DON'T BELIEVE A WORD MORAITIS SAYS, MY LOVE. COME SEE ME. FILIP KNOWS WHERE I AM. I HAVE SOMEONE INSIDE THE HOUSE TO TAKE THE EVA AND SOFIA AWAY. COME QUICKLY, PLEASE. THIS IS IMPORTANT."

I... I NEED TO GO TO THE BATHROOM!

ARE YOU OKAY, MOM?

YOU DON'T BELIEVE THIS ABSURD STORY, RIGHT?

WE'LL GET THIS ALL SORTED OUT, I'M SURE. JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE, SWEETIE. I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!



THIS IS ALL BULLSHIT!



I'M COMPLETELY LOST ABOUT THIS STORY.
GOSH, I CAN BARELY THINK STRAIGHT RIGHT NOW!
WHY DO THINGS KEEP GETTING MORE
AND MORE CONFUSING?

I JUST NEED TO SEE NIKOS.
HE'S MY HUSBAND, AND NEED TO TRUST HIM.
YES, I'M SURE HE'LL BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN IT ALL.
I HAVE TO BELIEVE IT!





Bump!


HUH?



I'M SORRY... I... HAVE TO GO.


OF COURSE, DARLING.


79
YOU CAN'T BE LATE, CAN YOU?

I HOPE NIKOS ISN'T FAR FROM HERE.


THE ANTICIPATION IS KILLING ME!

LET'S GO, FILIP! PLEASE, HURRY UP. NIKOS SAID YOU KNOW WHERE HE IS!


I'M SORRY TO SAY THAT FILIP ISN'T... AVAILABLE RIGHT NOW, MA'AM. BUT DON'T YOU WORRY, I'LL GET YOU WHERE YOU NEED TO GO.

W-WHO ARE YOU?


WHAT? DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE
THE VOICE OF YOUR DEAR NIECE'S HUSBAND,
MRS. SAMARAS? YOU MAKE ME SAD.

J-JAMES? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I ALREADY TOLD YOU I'LL TAKE YOU WHERE YOU NEED TO GO. BUCKLE UP, PLEASE. I'D HATE TO SEE YOU GET HURT. OH, AND DON'T TRY ANYTHING FUNNY, MA'AM.

click!

THIS IS A TRAP! I FELL INTO A FUCKING TRAP LIKE AN IDIOT! AND NOT ONLY DID I LIE TO MY DAUGHTERS, I ALSO ABANDONED THEM ALONE IN THE HOUSE. MY OWN DAUGHTERS! WHAT KIND OF MOTHER AM I?



Chapter Twenty-Eight
Helen of Sparta












HUH...?



WHERE AM I? WHAT'S GOING ON?

WHY CAN'T I MOVE? AM I TIED UP OR SOMETHING?


REVOLUTIONS
THIS PLACE...

I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE. WASN'T THAT IN A NIGHTMARE?


IT MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL...


HELP! SOMEONE HELP ME, PLEASE!

HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

W-WHAT? WHO'S THERE?

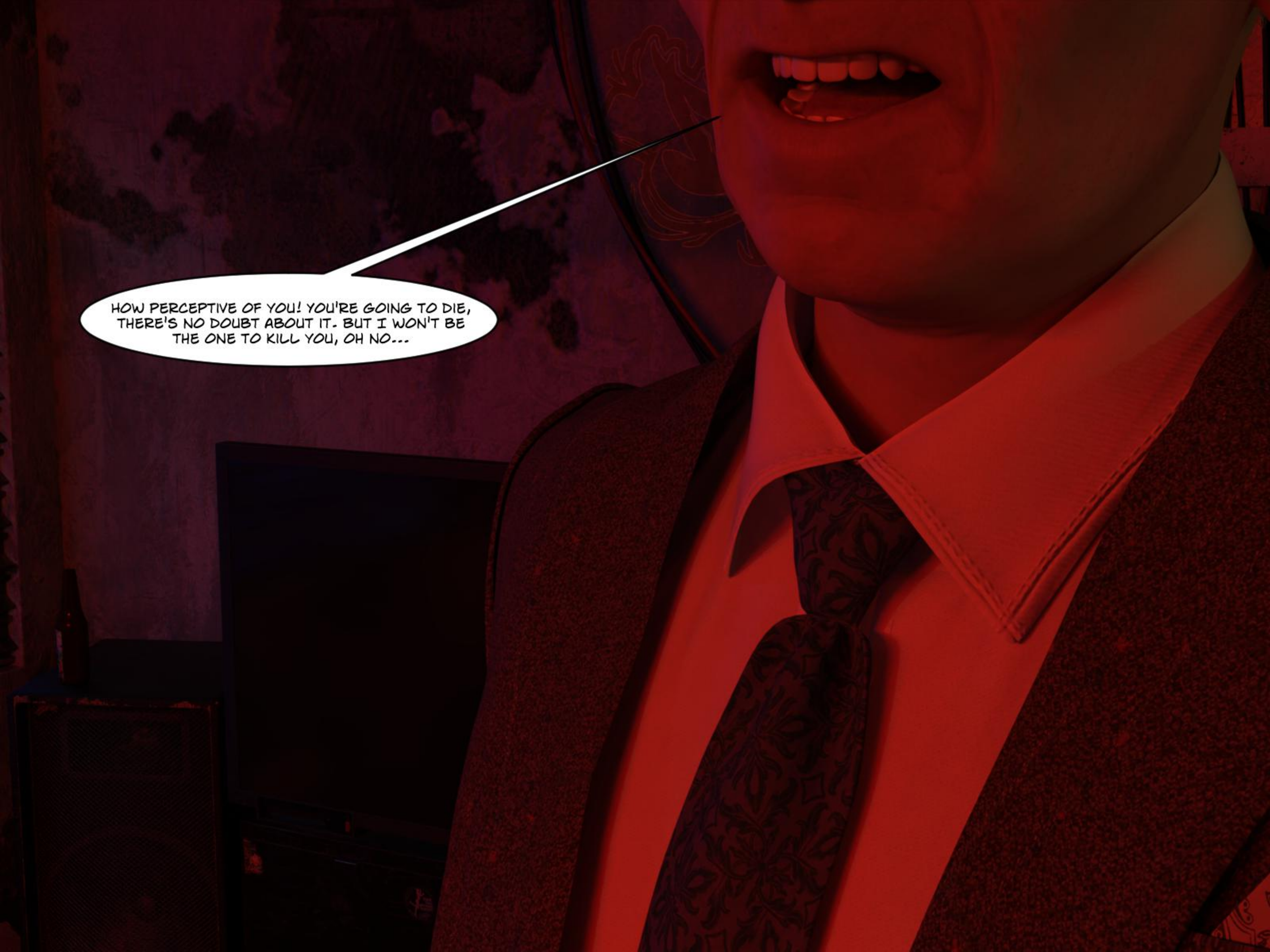
LET ME MAKE SOMETHING CLEAR, MRS. SAMARAS.

NO ONE IS COMING TO HELP YOU.

NO ONE AT ALL!


YOU!

WHAT'S THE GUN FOR? ARE YOU GOING TO KILL ME? IS THAT IT?


HOW PERCEPTIVE OF YOU! YOU'RE GOING TO DIE, THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT. BUT I WON'T BE THE ONE TO KILL YOU, OH NO...


THIS TASK WILL FALL TO YOUR BELOVED HUSBAND!

N-NIKOS?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOUR TWISTED MIND, BUT NIKOS WOULD NEVER DO THAT, EVER!


HMM... ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?



Slap!


OUCH!


WHY DID YOU HIT ME, YOU COWARD?

YOU SEE, THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT. I HIT YOU BECAUSE I CAN. ISN'T POWER A FASCINATING THING?

WHAT'S ALSO INTERESTING IS HOW MUCH MR. SAMARAS MANAGES TO CHARM AND DECEIVE EVERYONE AROUND HIM. I SEE YOU REMAIN LOYAL TO HIM EVEN AFTER EVERYTHING YOU HEARD TONIGHT. THE SAME GOES FOR MIA AND SOFIA.

WHERE ARE MY DAUGHTERS, YOU SON OF A BITCH? WHAT DID YOU DO TO THEM? I WAS SO STUPID TO FALL INTO YOUR TRAP! I LET MYSELF BE KIDNAPPED WHILE MY DAUGHTERS WERE WITH YOU!

SHUT UP NOW IF YOU DON'T WANT ME TO SHOOT YOU. NOT TO KILL YOU, OF COURSE. I ALREADY TOLD YOU THAT'S YOUR HUSBAND'S JOB. BUT I CAN MAKE YOU A LOT OF PAIN...

AND STOP TALKING LIKE YOU'RE SOMEONE'S MOTHER. YOU'RE NOT EVEN A REAL WOMAN, HOW COULD YOU BE A MOTHER, YOU DEPRAVED FREAK?

Y-YOU KNOW?

OF COURSE I KNOW. I'VE KNOWN EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU SINCE THE BEGINNING. YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A FRAUD CREATED BY SAMARAS. HE KEEPS SURPRISING ME, I HAVE TO ADMIT. EVEN KNOWING HOW REPUGNANT HE IS, NOT EVEN IN A THOUSAND YEARS COULD I IMAGINE HE HAD SUCH... DEPRAVED INTERESTS.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT, YOU AND YOUR SO-CALLED HUSBAND ARE ACTUALLY QUITE ALIKE. HE'S A FRAUD TOO! YOU ARE NOT AND COULD NEVER BE EVA AND SOFIA'S MOTHER, JUST AS SAMARAS IS NOT THEIR FATHER!


WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
OF COURSE NIKOS IS THE GIRLS' FATHER!

hahahahahaha!

hahahahahahahaha!


HeatSync
YOU REALLY DON'T KNOW, DO YOU? YOU TRUST SAMARAS SO BLINDLY, BUT HE HID EVERYTHING FROM YOU!

LET ME TELL YOU THEN THAT BASTARD STOLE THE GIRLS FROM ME!

STOLE FROM YOU?!

HE CAN'T BE TELLING ME THE TRUTH, RIGHT?

STOP TALKING BULLSHIT AND TELL ME WHERE EVA AND SOFIA ARE!

I'M NOT SURE IF YOU REALIZE THIS, BUT YOU'RE IN NO POSITION TO DEMAND ANYTHING!

GIUSEPPE... HAS SAMARAS EVER MENTIONED THIS NAME TO YOU?

I THINK SO... YES, NIKOS TALKED ABOUT THIS MAN THE VERY NIGHT WE FIRST MET...

THIS REMINDS ME OF GIUSEPPE, AN OLD ITALIAN FRIEND OF MINE..

OH, HERE WE GO...

...AND GOT INTO A LOT OF TROUBLE.

DAD LOVES TO TELL STORIES ABOUT THIS GIUSEPPE GUY. WE GREW UP LISTENING TO IT. THEY WERE INSEPARABLE IN YOUTH...

UNTIL ONE OF THEM GOT MARRIED AND BECAME A RESPONSIBLE ADULT, AND IT WASN'T DAD.

EVA AND SOFIA ALSO TALKED ABOUT THIS GIUSEPPE GUY NOT LONG AGO WHEN WE WERE DISCUSSING WHO THEIR BIOLOGICAL MOTHER IS...

WE COULDN'T HAVE ASKED FOR A BETTER DAD THAN THE ONE WE HAVE. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN SO CARING AND SUPPORTIVE... AND MADE SURE WE HAD EVERYTHING WE COULD POSSIBLY NEED. NOT JUST MATERIAL GOODS, BUT ALSO LOVE AND RESPECT.

BUT WHEN IT COMES TO TALKING ABOUT OUR MOM, HE'S ALWAYS ACTED... STRANGELY.

WE'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW WHO SHE IS, OF COURSE. BUT WHENEVER WE ASKED DAD ABOUT IT, HE WOULD STAY SILENT FOR DAYS, BARELY LEAVING HIS ROOM. IT WAS SIMPLY IMPOSSIBLE TO GET AN ANSWER FROM HIM.

ON THE FEW OCCASIONS HE DID SPEAK, HE GAVE US VAGUE AND CONTRADICTORY ANSWERS. SOMETIMES, HE'D SAY MOM WAS A BAD PERSON WHO HAD RAN AWAY AND ABANDONED THE FAMILY WHEN WE WERE STILL BABIES. LATER, HE'D COME UP WITH SOMETHING LIKE SHE HAD ALREADY PASSED AWAY, BUT HE NEVER GAVE DETAILS ABOUT HOW IT HAPPENED.

AFTER SUCH EPISODES, HE'D ALWAYS SPEND A LOT OF TIME IN SECLUSION, DRINKING DAY AND NIGHT, SO WE STARTED TO AVOID THE SUBJECT. ONE TIME, WE DECIDED TO DO SOME RESEARCH ON HIS PAST, TRYING TO FIND GUISEPPE, WHO WAS SUPPOSEDLY HIS BEST FRIEND IN HIS YOUTH, BUT WE'RE UNSUCCESSFUL. WHEN DAD FOUND OUT, HE GOT PRETTY MAD. WE HAD NEVER SEEN HIM SO FURIOUS.

I CAN'T DENY THIS WHOLE MYSTERY REGARDING THE GIRLS' BIOLOGICAL MOTHER IS DEFINITELY STRANGE. WHY HAS NIKOS BEEN HIDING THIS FROM THEM ALL THESE YEARS? AND NOW THIS CRAZY MAN IS HERE SAYING THAT NIKOS ISN'T EVEN EVA AND SOFIA'S FATHER...

JUST ANSWER THE DAMN QUESTION! DID HE TALK ABOUT GIUSEPPE OR NOT?

YES, HE DID, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING WITH THIS!

HMM... AT LEAST THAT! I DOUBT, THOUGH, THAT SAMARAS HAS TOLD YOU THE WHOLE STORY, SO I'LL DO YOU THIS FAVOR. GIUSEPPE WAS MY YOUNGER BROTHER, AFTER ALL, SO I KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT HIM.

YOUR BROTHER?!

EXACTLY. IT WAS THROUGH HIM THAT I MET SAMARAS.

GUISEPPE WAS - OR AT LEAST HE BELIEVED SO - A GREAT FRIEND OF THE PERVERT YOU CALL YOUR HUSBAND. IN TRUTH, HE WAS BEING DECEIVED THE WHOLE TIME. HOW COULD A FRIEND DO WHAT SAMARAS DID TO POOR GUISEPPE, AFTER ALL?

SAMARAS, THAT DEVIL, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MY BROTHER'S DEATH!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? YOU'RE MAKING LESS AND LESS SENSE, YOU SICK LUNATIC!

SHUT THE FUCK UP! YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT ANYTHING! NOTHING AT ALL!

I ALREADY TOLD YOU THAT I CAN MAKE YOU SUFFER IN WAYS YOU CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE WHILE WE WAIT FOR SAMARAS TO KILL YOU! GIUSEPPE WAS MY BROTHER! I WAS THERE AND I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED!

MY BROTHER HAD A WIFE AND TWO YOUNG DAUGHTERS TO TAKE CARE OF, BUT IT DIDN'T STOP SAMARAS FROM STEALING ALL HIS MONEY! THIS FORCED GIUSEPPE TO TRY... SOMETHING DUMB. HE WAS SO DESPERATE!

THINGS DIDN'T GO WELL. GIUSEPPE AND HIS WIFE DIED. THEY DIED AND I WAS SENT TO JAIL. NOT SATISFIED WITH ALL THE DAMAGE HE HAD ALREADY DONE, SAMARAS THEN TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE FACT THAT I WAS AWAY TO STEAL MY NIECES, RAISING THEM AS IF THEY WERE HIS DAUGHTERS!

YOU HAVE NO IDEA... NO FUCKING IDEA HOW FURIOUS I WAS! I COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE DURING ALL THE LONG YEARS I WAS BEHIND BARS OTHER THAN GETTING JUSTICE!

BUT HATRED MOTIVATED ME, MADE ME ALERT, VIGILANT... AND SO I MANAGED TO SURVIVE THAT HELL. NOT ONLY THAT, BUT I WAS ALSO ABLE TO MAKE A GOOD FRIEND, WHO ALSO HAD A THIRST FOR REVENGE, WITH WHOM YEARS LATER I DEVISED A PLAN SO THAT I COULD FINALLY HAVE PEACE.

YOU KNOW MY FRIEND VERY WELL. HE'S BEEN PULLING YOUR STRINGS LIKE A MASTER PUPPETEER FOR QUITE SOME TIME NOW, AND YOU'VE BEEN TOO STUPID TO EVEN REALIZE IT, HAVEN'T YOU?


WHO? WHO IS HE TALKING ABOUT?

MEANWHILE---

INSPECTOR KARRAS? IS THAT YOU?
WHY THE HELL DID YOU WANT ME TO COME MEET YOU IN THIS SHITHOLE? I TOLD YOU WE DON'T HAVE TIME!
MORAITIS, THE ACCOUNTANT, HAS AUNT ELENA HOSTAGE SOMEWHERE!

IT ALL MAKES SENSE NOW! I TOLD YOU SEFERI AND HIS GANG HAD TO HAVE SOMEONE CLOSE TO UNCLE NIKOS AS AN ALLY! IT'S MORAITIS! I MANAGED TO CHECK SOME DOCUMENTS IN HIS OFFICE. I HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH PROOF NOW. WHY ARE YOU STILL SILENT LIKE AN IDIOT? WE NEED TO FIND OUT WHERE HE IS!

I'M AFRAID INSPECTOR KARRAS IS NOT... AVAILABLE TONIGHT, MRS. WOODS, OR WHATEVER NAME YOU'RE USING THESE DAYS. I GOT HIS PHONE, THOUGH, AND THEN I COULD REPLY TO YOUR MESSAGE. YOUR DISGUISE IS TRULY IMPRESSIVE. I WOULDN'T HAVE SUSPECTED YOUR TRUE IDENTITY IF I HADN'T KNOWN ABOUT YOUR LITTLE ADVENTURE IN ALBANIA FROM THE BEGINNING.

I SEE YOU'VE FOUND OUT A LOT ABOUT ME, AND NOW YOU EVEN KNOW ABOUT MY PARTNER. IT LEAVES US WITH A DELICATE ISSUE TO SOLVE. WHAT WILL WE DO ABOUT YOU?

HMMMM...


YOU REALLY DON'T KNOW...

IT'S SEFERI, YOU STUPID! WHO ELSE COULD IT BE? SEFERI HAS BEEN MANIPULATING YOU ALL THIS TIME!

SEFERI? IT... IT CAN'T BE!

I CAN ALMOST FEEL SORRY FOR YOU, BUT NO... A DEGENERATE LIKE YOU DOESN'T EVEN DESERVE THAT!

GO TO THE HELL! I DON'T NEED ANYTHING FROM YOU, LEAST OF ALL YOUR PITY!

YOU STILL THINK I'M THE "BAD GUY" HERE, DON'T YOU? DO YOU KNOW WHY THE BAD GUYS WASTE TIME EXPLAINING THEIR PLANS TO THEIR "VICTIMS"? THIS IS NOT OUT OF NAIVETY OR VANITY, BUT JUSTICE. SO LISTEN CAREFULLY. THIS WILL BE THE LAST STORY YOU EVER HEAR IN THIS WORLD, AFTER ALL.

YOU KNOW SEFERI'S PAST. HE ACTUALLY TOLD YOU THE TRUTH IN ORDER TO MAKE YOU TRUST HIM...

MATEO SEFERI AND FAMILY ARE CONVICTED OF FRAUD AND EMBEZZLEMENT...

DION TOSKA'S FORMER PARTNER, MATEO SEFERI, HIS WIFE AND BROTHER WERE SENTENCED TO TWENTY YEARS IN PRISON... AFTER A LONG TRIAL, THEY WERE FOUND GUILTY OF EMBEZZLING TEN MILLION DOLLARS, AMONG OTHER CRIMES... SEFERI HAD ALREADY BEEN INVOLVED IN A SCANDAL LAST YEAR WHEN IT BECAME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE HE HAD AN EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIR WITH ANOTHER MAN.

THIS MAN IS YOU, ISN'T IT? THEN YOUR NAME REALLY IS MATEO SEFERI. IF YOU SERVED YOUR FULL SENTENCE, THIS ALL HAPPENED AT LEAST TWENTY YEARS AGO.

TWENTY-TWO YEARS, TO BE MORE PRECISE.

I'M SORRY ABOUT THAT, MR. SEFERI, BUT WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, MY HUSBAND AND I DO NOT INTEND TO STEAL MR. TOSKA.

I DIDN'T STEAL ANYTHING EITHER, MA'AM! THINK ABOUT IT FOR A MOMENT. HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY TOSKA ONLY DO BUSINESS WITH "FAMILY MEN"?

YOU MAY HAVE MET LUNATIC REACTIONARIES BEFORE, BUT I DOUBT ANY OF THEM ARE AS CRAZY AS THAT OLD BASTARD. HE WAS ENRAGED WHEN HE LEARNED THAT I WAS HAVING AN AFFAIR WITH... ANOTHER MAN. YES, IT REALLY HAPPENED, AND I'M NOT PROUD THAT I CHEATED ON MY WIFE. I JUST... WELL, THIS IS NOT RELEVANT FOR OUR CONVERSATION.

THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT TOSKA WAS FURIOUS. FOR HIM, ANY ASSOCIATION WITH SOMEONE LIKE ME WAS INADMISSIBLE, AN OUTRAGE. HE THEN DECIDED TO TAKE REVANGE AND GET RID OF ME.

BY BRIBING ACCOUNTANTS, LAWYERS AND JUDGES, HE MANAGED TO CONVINCE PUBLIC OPINION THAT I WAS ROBBING THE COMPANY. THIS WAY, HE MANAGED TO UNDO OUR PARTNERSHIP, STEAL ALL MY MONEY AND PUT ME IN JAIL FOR TWENTY YEARS. NOTJUST ME, BUT ALSO MY FAMILY!

NOW, KNOWING ALL THIS, YOU SURELY UNDERSTAND WHY I THINK MR. TOSKA HAS PEOPLE WATCHING YOU AND YOUR FAMILY. AS FAR AS I COULD GATHER, HE'S GOTTEN EVEN MORE PARANOID AND ZEALOT OVER THE YEARS. CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT HE COULD DO TO ALL OF YOU IF HE SUSPECTED YOU WERE INVOLVED IN ANYTHING HE THOUGHT WAS *INAPPROPRIATE*?

SO SEFERI WANTED REVENGE ON TOSKA, JUST AS I WANTED TO GET EVEN ON SAMARAS. LIKE I SAID, WE FINISHED OUR PLAN AS SOON AS HE GOT OUT OF PRISON, MANY YEARS LATER THAN I DID.

BY THE TIME, I HAD ESTABLISHED MYSELF IN ATHENS, BECOMING THE ACCOUNTANT FOR MOST OF THE CITY'S WEALTHY, INCLUDING YOUR HUSBAND. IT'S AMAZING HOW FAR THE ABILITY TO LAUNDER MONEY AND BLACKMAIL PEOPLE CAN TAKE YOU.

SAMARAS NEVER WANTED TO MAKE "ILLICIT" TRANSACTIONS, SO TO SPEAK, PERHAPS TRYING TO ERASE ALL THE WRONGDOING HE'D DONE IN THE PAST. STILL, THE IDIOT HAS ALWAYS BEEN TOO AMBITIOUS FOR HIS TRUE CAPABILITIES.

EVEN WITH ALL THE MONEY HE MANAGED TO MAKE FROM WHAT HE HAD STOLEN FROM MY BROTHER, HE STILL WANTED MORE... MUCH MORE. THEREFORE, IT WAS EASY TO CONVINCE HIM TO MEET A CERTAIN INVESTOR...

BUT YOU'RE NOT DOING BAD AT ALL, NIKOS. THIS HOTEL OF YOURS IS A PARADISE! I WOULD SAY SPENDING YOUR DAYS HERE IS A GOOD WAY TO ENJOY LIFE.

ANYWAY, ALL THIS HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO, WHEN I WAS STILL A YOUNG, RECKLESS MAN. THINGS ARE A LOT LESS EXCITING THESE DAYS.

I CAN'T DENY THAT I'VE BEEN LUCKY IN BUSINESS. I BOUGHT THIS PLACE WHEN THE REGION WASN'T SUCH A HOT SPOT, AND THEN THINGS JUST WORKED OUT.


YOU'RE BEING MODEST, UNCLE NIKOS. MY MOM ALWAYS SAID YOU'RE A BRILLIANT BUSINESSMAN

OH, YOUR MOTHER HAS ALWAYS BEEN A KIND WOMAN! BUT I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING, I HAVE A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY THAT, IF SUCCESSFUL, WILL REALLY MAKE ME HIT BIG! BUT MY CHANCES ARE NOT GOOD, I WOULD SAY.

WHY NOT?

LONG STORY SHORT, MY ACCOUNTANT PUT ME IN TOUCH WITH AN ALBANIAN BILLIONAIRE WHO IS INTERESTED IN OPENING A CHAIN OF RESORTS ACROSS THE BALKANS AND WANTS A PARTNER WITH KNOW-HOW IN THE AREA.

BUT THE THING IS, FROM WHAT I RESEARCHED, THE OLD MAN IS VERY CONSERVATIVE... A REAL RELIGIOUS ZEALOT, I'D SAY. I DON'T THINK HE WOULD DO BUSINESS WITH A MAN LIKE ME, A BACHELOR IN HIS FIFTIES, WITHOUT A 'TRADITIONAL FAMILY'.

AH, BUT NOW THAT I REMEMBERED THE STORY WITH MY OLD FRIEND GIUSEPPE, A CRAZY IDEA CROSSED MY MIND. TELL ME, YOUNG MAN, ARE YOU GOOD AT YOUR JOB? CAN YOU PLAY ANY ROLE?

WELL, I LIKE TO THINK I'M A GOOD ACTOR, YES, ALTHOUGH I STILL HAVE A LOT TO LEARN.

SEFERI ALSO HAD AN AGENT WORKING WITH TOSKA, JOEL, HIS NEPHEW, THAT CLOWN WITH THE STUPID GLASSES. THE LUNATIC BOY ALWAYS BELIEVED HE WAS ONE OF THE HEADS OF THE SCHEME, BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT NONE OF US EVER REALLY TRUSTED HIM, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS USEFUL.

SO OUR PLAN WAS SIMPLE. WE WOULD STEAL TOSKA'S MONEY AS SOON AS IT REACHED SAMARAS' ACCOUNTS, WHICH I HAVE CONTROL OVER, AND FRAME SAMARAS FOR THE THEFT. THIS WAS JUST PERFECT. TOSKA WOULD BE BROKE, PENNILESS... HE DOESN'T HAVE AS MUCH MONEY AS HE LIKES TO BRAG ABOUT... FAR FROM BEING A BILLIONAIRE... WHILE SAMARAS WOULD GO TO JAIL, ALSO WITH A RUINED LIFE. BRILLIANT, RIGHT?

BUT THINGS GOT MUCH, MUCH MORE COMPLICATED WHEN YOU SHOWED UP. IF YOU'RE HERE IN THIS TOUGH SITUATION NOW, IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT, YOU FREAK!

DURING OUR TIME IN PRISON, WE WERE ABLE TO MAKE SOME INTERESTING CONTACTS, INCLUDING A MEMBER OF A NOTORIOUS GANG, THE BLACK PETAL, WHO PUT US IN TOUCH WITH ROAN GJOKA, A FASCINATING MAN THOUGH HE DOESN'T TALK MUCH. GJOKA WAS MORE THAN WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR PLAN, AS LONG AS HE WAS WELL COMPENSATED FOR HIS SERVICES, OF COURSE.

OUR ORIGINAL IDEA WAS THAT I WOULD CONVINCE SAMARAS THAT I HAD A PERFECT CANDIDATE TO PRETEND TO BE HIS WIFE ON HIS MEETING WITH TOSKA — KLEA GJOKA, ROAN'S WIFE. SAMARAS DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT HER BACKGROUND, OF COURSE. HE WAS CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY, BUT THEN HE DECIDED TO IMPROVISE WHEN HE MET YOU.

JOEL CAN SEE VERY WELL. THOSE RIDICULOUS GLASSES ARE JUST PART OF HIS DISGUISE. BUT SAMARAS'S TRICK WAS EXCELLENT SO THAT JOEL COULD STAY IN CHARACTER. HE NOTICED FROM THE BEGINNING THAT YOU WEREN'T A WOMAN, BUT YOU COULDN'T KNOW THAT FOR THE PLAN TO GO AHEAD.

OH NO...

LOOK DOWN THERE. IT SEEMS OUR GUEST DIDN'T COME ALONE. HOW STUPID AM I! I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED THAT A MAN LIKE HIM WOULDN'T BE TRAVELLING BY HIMSELF!

WHAT?

WHAT WILL WE DO NOW, NIKOS? YOU SAID THE ALBANIAN MAN WAS VIRTUALLY BLIND! I DON'T THINK I CAN PASS AS A WOMAN IN FRONT OF SOMEONE ELSE WITH GOOD EYESIGHT, NO MATTER HOW GOOD EVA AND SOFIA ARE AS BEAUTICIANS!

KEEP CALM, DARLING. YOU TRUST ME, DON'T YOU? I HAVE A PLAN.

NICE TO MEET YOU, MR. TOSKA! I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO FINALLY SEEING YOU IN PERSON. I HOPE YOU HAD A GOOD TRIP!

YES, YES, IT WAS OKAY.

PLEASE, LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO ELENA, MY WIFE.

HELLO, MA'AM.

AND WHO IS YOUR ASSOCIATE, MR. TOSKA?

OH, IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW, THIS IS JOEL KOCI, MY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING ASSISTANT. HE'S HERE TO TAKE NOTES. I DOUBT HE COULD DO MORE THAN THAT.

I'M SURE THAT MR. TOSKA IS JUST KIDDING AROUND, RIGHT? YOU LOOK VERY COMPETENT, YOUNG MAN. NICE TO MEET YOU!

OOPS...

OUCH!



BUT YOU WERE STILL TOO NERVOUS.
WHEN YOU EXCUSED YOURSELF TO GO TO THE BATHROOM, JOEL TEXTED KLEA, TELLING HER TO FOLLOW YOU. SHE WAS NO LONGER GOING TO PRETEND TO BE SAMARAS'S WIFE, BUT SHE WAS STILL AROUND TO MAKE HERSELF USEFUL.
AND SHE DID IT SUPERBLY, DIDN'T SHE?

JESUS, I HOPE THIS IS THE RIGHT PLACE!

WAIT... IS SOMEONE COMING? I'M NOT READY FOR THIS! NIKOS SAID THIS AREA WOULDN'T BE AVAILABLE TO THE GUESTS TONIGHT. WHAT AM I GOING TO DO NOW?

THIS IS THE RESTROOM, RIGHT? WHY IS THIS SO DARK?

I'M S-SORRY. I FORGOT TO TURN ON ALL THE LIGHTS AND...

IT'S ALL RIGHT! MY HEAD IS KILLING ME. I THINK IT'S BETTER THIS WAY. SORRY ABOUT THE SUNGLASSES... DID I MENTION MY HEAD IS KILLING ME? I'M JOANNA, BY THE WAY. JOANNA MYLONAS. IT'S SOOO HARD TO FIND A RESTROOM IN THIS HOTEL!

MAYBE I GOT LOST. I WAS HAVING DINNER AT THE RESTAURANT AND IT TOOK ME FOREVER TO GET HERE. HOTELS IN GREECE ARE DEFINITELY NOT ON THE SAME LEVEL AS THOSE IN LONDON OR PARIS. YOU HAVE A FUNNY ACCENT. YOU'RE NOT GREEK, ARE YOU?

GOD, THIS WOMAN TALKS REALLY FAST. IT'S NOT EASY TO UNDERSTAND SOMEONE SPEAKING GREEK THIS WAY.


SO...?
S-SORRY! YES, IN FACT, I WAS BORN IN GREECE. BUT I'VE LIVED MANY YEARS IN AMERICA WHEN MY PARENTS MOVED THERE. I'M ELENA. ELENA SAMARAS.

AMERICA, HUH? OH, THAT MUST HAVE BEEN EXCITING! WHAT BROUGHT YOU BACK?

MY HUSBAND. HE'S ALSO GREEK, AND I CAME BACK WHEN WE GOT MARRIED.

HUSBANDS! ALWAYS DRAGGING US FROM ONE SIDE TO THE OTHER! I'M PRACTICALLY A NOMAD, YOU KNOW, AS MY HUSBAND HAS BUSINESSES ALL OVER THE WORLD. I WON'T DENY IT, THIS IS FABULOUS MOST OF THE TIME, BUT I CAN'T BE MORE DEPRESSED WHEN I HAVE TO SPEND MONTHS IN SOME GODFORSAKEN HOLE.

BEFORE THE LAST TRIP, I SAID THAT I WOULD ONLY GO ON THE CONDITION THAT I WOULD BE IMMENSELY REWARDED LATER. DO YOU SEE MY NOSE? THAT WAS MY REWARD. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, ATHENS HAS SOME AMAZING SURGEONS. THEY UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF A GREEK WOMAN BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE!

I CAN INTRODUCE THEM TO YOU. IN FACT, WE SHOULD START BY DOING SOME SHOPPING! I'LL BE IN ATHENS FOR A WHILE THIS TIME. ONE YEAR AT LEAST. YOU HAVE GOOD TASTE. YES, YOUR DRESS IS A BIT TOO PLAIN FOR MY TASTE, BUT IT'S ELEGANT. I GIVE YOU THAT. SO, WHAT YOU SAY?

HMM... SURE, I WOULD LOVE THAT!

THANK GOD I'LL BE ELENA FOR JUST TONIGHT. I DON'T THINK I COULD BEAR TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH THIS WOMAN!

YOU SURE? I'M NOT BEING A NUISANCE, AM I? YOU'RE NOT TALKING MUCH.

OH I'M S-SORRY! THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU. ACTUALLY, YOU'RE BEING SO KIND TO ME! I'M JUST WORRIED ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE.

WHAT IS IT, DARLING? YOU CAN OPEN UP TO ME.

HMM... I'M TAKING PART IN A BUSINESS DINNER WITH MY HUSBAND, BUT I DON'T THINK I'M BEING A GOOD COMPANY. I'M AFRAID THIS MIGHT HURT HIS EFFORTS. I SIMPLY CAN'T RELAX TONIGHT.

SO YOU CAN'T RELAX?
POOR DEAR...

BUT GOOD NEWS, I THINK I CAN HELP YOU...

THOSE PILLS ARE REALLY EFFECTIVE, AREN'T THEY? YOU NO LONGER HAD ANY TROUBLE PLAYING YOUR CHARACTER THAT NIGHT. WE KNEW TOSKA WOULD NEVER CLOSE THE DEAL ON HIS FIRST MEETING WITH SAMARAS, AND SINCE TOSKA HAD SEEN YOU, YOU'D NEED TO STICK AROUND... INDEFINITELY.

YOU, HOWEVER, WERE TOO RELAXED AND CONFIDENT TO REALIZE HOW STUCK YOU WERE...

OUR CONTACT WITHIN THE SAMARAS FAMILY, WHICH HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED SOME YEARS AGO, INFORMED US ABOUT YOUR FIGHT WITH YOUR WIFE, AND ABOUT EVA AND SOFIA'S PLAN TO MAKE YOU LOOK EVEN MORE LIKE A WOMAN, BUT STILL...

WHO IS YOUR CONTACT?

WE'LL DISCUSS THIS LATER. DON'T INTERRUPT ME. AS I WAS SAYING, EVERYTHING WAS GOING OUR WAY, BUT WE NEEDED YOU TO HAVE AN EXTRA REASON TO STAY IN CHARACTER. WE NEEDED YOU TO BE TOO SCARED TO EVEN THINK ABOUT GIVING UP. THAT'S WHEN SEFERI STEPPED IN...

TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND CALM DOWN, ANDREW! GOD, I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME!

THAT'S IT. I CAN'T GO ON LIVING LIKE THIS. THIS IS TORTURE! MARINA WILL HAVE TO UNDERSTAND.

FUCK, I DON'T HAVE HER NUMBER HERE! SOFIA AND EVA GAVE ME THIS PHONE THIS MORNING, SAYING IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE FOR ME TO HAVE A U.S. NUMBER. MY CONTACT LIST ONLY HAS MY DAUGHTERS, SOMEONE NICKNAMED "DARLING", WHO I ASSUME IS MY HUSBAND, MR. TOSKA AND JOEL, BESIDES A LOT OF CLOTHING, SHOES AND JEWELRY SHOPS AND SOME BEAUTY CLINICS.

OKAY, NOW I'M PISSED OFF! IT'S TIME TO HAVE A GOOD CONVERSATION WITH MY DEAR GIRLS.

Bzzt

Bzzt


A CALL FROM AN UNKNOWN NUMBER... MAYBE THAT'S MARINA? THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO KNOW. JUST IN CASE, I THINK I'D BETTER SPEAK IN GREEK.

HELLO?

GOOD AFTERNOON, MRS. SARAMAS.
I'M GLAD YOU TOOK THE CALL.


SHIT, THAT'S A MAN!
WHO IS SPEAKING?

I'M A FRIEND, MRS. SAMARAS. I'M CALLING YOU TO GIVE YOU SOME ADVICE REGARDING MR. TOSKA. I BELIEVE YOUR HUSBAND IS DOING BUSINESS WITH HIM, ISN'T HE?

I WANT TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE *RIGHT NOW*. HOW DID YOU GET THIS NUMBER?

PLEASE CALM DOWN, MRS. SAMARAS. LIKE I SAID, I'M JUST A FRIEND. MR. TOSKA IS AN ECCENTRIC MAN, BUT HE CAN ALSO BECOME VERY DANGEROUS UNDER... CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES. I'VE DONE BUSINESS WITH HIM IN THE PAST. YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL. IT'S POSSIBLE THAT HE'S SPYING ON YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

AND WHO WOULD THE SPY BE? YOU?

OH NO, MRS. SAMARAS, YOU COULDN'T BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. BUT, OF COURSE, YOU HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE ME RIGHT NOW. WHY DON'T WE SET UP A MEETING? IS THREE DAYS FROM NOW GOOD FOR YOU?

I DON'T THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA.

PLEASE CONSIDER IT, MA'AM. AND I THINK IT'S BEST TO KEEP THIS BETWEEN US FOR THE TIME BEING.

HE HAD GOTTEN YOUR NUMBER FROM JOEL, AND THE PLAN WAS TO CONVINCE YOU THAT TOSKA WAS A VILLAIN WHO HAD PUT PEOPLE TO WATCH "YOUR FAMILY". THAT NEVER HAPPENED, OF COURSE; WE WERE THE ONES WATCHING YOU.

BUT WITH TOSKA BEING SUCH A NASTY PERSON, HOW COULD YOU SUSPECT THE TRUTH? THAT WAS THE STORY SEFERI SOLD YOU WHEN YOU FIRST MET.

BUT THERE WAS YOUR WIFE. SHE NEEDED TO BE TERRIFIED AS WELL. SO WE SENT PEOPLE TO CRETE TO FIND HER...

THERE'S THAT MAN AGAIN. SINCE I ARRIVED IN CRETE, HE APPEARS EVERYWHERE I GO.

THIS CAN'T BE A COINCIDENCE, RIGHT? HE'S CLEARLY FOLLOWING ME. BUT WHY? DOES HE FIND ME ATTRACTIVE BUT IS TOO SHY TO APPROACH ME? OR DOES HE HAVE DARKER INTENTIONS?

HEY, BABE, CAN I BUY YOU A DRINK?

HUH...?

I'M JAMES, BY THE WAY. WHAT ABOUT YOU?

LISTEN, JAMES, I THANK YOU FOR THE OFFER, BUT I'M NOT INTERESTED, OKAY?

C'MON, BABE, CAN'T YOU EVEN TELL ME YOUR NAME? ARE YOU MARRIED OR SOMETHING?

YES, I'M MARRIED.
HAPPY NOW?


YOU SURE? WHERE'S YOUR HUSBAND THEN? COULD HE BE THAT BUDDY OVER THERE?

HE DEFINITELY DOESN'T TAKE HIS EYES OFF YOU!

OH, NO! THAT MAN IS JUST A WEIRDO WHO'S BEEN FOLLOWING ME WHEREVER I GO IN CRETE. HE DOESN'T EVEN TRY TO DISGUISE IT ANYMORE!


A STALKER THEN? WELL, I THINK I CAN HELP YOU WITH THAT!

WHERE THE HECK YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?

RELAX, I'M JUST GOING TO GIVE HIM A LITTLE SCARE.

LISTEN, MAN, WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING MY WIFE?

NAME.


YOU TELL ME YOUR NAME FIRST!


TARGET FOR A GOOD TIME
TARGET FOR A GOOD TIME


NAME. NOW.

WHOA, WAIT A MINUTE, BUDDY! LET'S NOT LOSE OUR COOL.

WE DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE, OKAY? MY NAME IS JAMES COLLINS. LET ME JUST ASK YOU – DO YOU HAVE ANY BUSINESS TO DISCUSS WITH MY WIFE? SHE'S THE FEELING YOU'VE BEEN FOLLOWING HER AROUND.

SHE IS REALLY YOUR WIFE?
YOU LYING?


WOMEN'S WRESTLING
CHANNEL Z
OF COURSE SHE'S MY WIFE! ALRIGHT, MAN, I KNOW YOU HAVE A GUN, BUT THAT DOESN'T GIVE YOU THE RIGHT TO DOUBT MY WORD!



OKAY.

OKAY? SIMPLE LIKE THAT?


NEXT UP LIVE
WOMEN'S WRESTLIN
CHANNEL
GET OUT OF MY WAY.



JAMES IS ALSO ONE OF OUR AGENTS, IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY REALIZED THIS YET. IN FACT, HE IS SEFERI'S SON, WHO HAD TO ENDURE ALL THE HUMILIATION AND DISGRACE HIS FAMILY SUFFERED.

OUR PLAN WAS GOING REALLY WELL. YOU WERE ALL TERRIFIED. SO MUCH SO THAT EVA AND SOFIA EVEN SUGGESTED NEW PROCEDURES TO IMPROVE YOUR DISGUISE, AND MARINA ENCOURAGED YOU TO UNDERGO SUCH PROCEDURES WHEN SHE RETURNED FROM CRETE, DIDN'T SHE?

SO, THIS SEFERI GUY CAME TO YOU TO SAY HE SPENT DECADES IN JAIL BECAUSE OF MR. TOSKA? NOT JUST HIM, BUT HIS WHOLE FAMILY? AND YOU SUSPECT THAT SOMEONE IS WATCHING YOU THE WHOLE TIME AT THE BEHEST OF MR. TOSKA?

EXACTLY!

MAYBE I'M JUST BEING PARANOID, BUT I HAVE THE FEELING THERE ARE PEOPLE FOLLOWING ME WHENEVER I LEAVE HOME. I KEEP SEEING SOME FACES AGAIN AND AGAIN EVERYWHERE.

AND I FEEL IN DANGER EVEN INSIDE NIKOS' HOUSE. NONE OF THE SERVENTS HAVE WORKED FOR HIM FOR A LONG TIME AS IT SEEMS NIKOS HASN'T BEEN USING THE HOUSE SO MUCH LATELY. ONE OF THEM COULD EASILY BE SPYING US. THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW FOR SURE. THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO MEET YOU HERE.

IT'S FUNNY YOU SAY YOU THINK YOU'RE BEING FOLLOWED BECAUSE I HAD THE SAME FEELING IN CRETE. THERE WAS THIS GUY WHO SHOWED UP EVERYWHERE I WENT.

AND WHAT DID YOU DO?

I... HMM... GOT HELP TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION, B-BUT THAT'S NOT THE POINT. WHY WOULD MR.TOSKA BE STALKING US ALL LIKE THIS? IS HE REALLY JUST A LUNATIC CONSERVATIVE?

THE GIRLS DID SOME RESEARCH ON THE MATTER. IT LOOKS LIKE MR. SEFERI TOLD ME THE TRUTH, AT LEAST ABOUT SPENDING TWENTY YEARS IN JAIL. IT ALSO SEEMS THAT MR. TOSKA MAY HAVE POLITICAL PRETENSIONS, WHICH COULD EXPLAIN PART OF HIS BEHAVIOR.

WORST OF ALL, NIKOS HAS ALREADY SIGNED A PRE-CONTRACT WITH MR. TOSKA, AND SUCH A CONTRACT PROVIDES FOR A MILLIONAIRE FINE IN CASE OF NIKOS' WITHDRAWAL. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, MARINA! IF EVERYTHING THEY SAY IS REAL, AND MR. TOSKA FINDS OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT ME, HE MAY DESTROY OUR LIVES!

OH MY GOD, THIS IS BAD! LIKE REALLY FUCKING BAD! I GUESS WE DON'T HAVE A CHOICE NOW. YOU'LL HAVE TO KEEP BEING *AUNT ELENA* FOR THE TIME BEING.

SIGH I GUESS SO. BUT EVA AND SOFIA KEEP SAYING MY DISGUISE ISN'T PERFECT YET. GOD, THEY CAN BE SO PUSHY AND ANNOYING WHEN THEY WANT TO!

THEY ARE PESTERING ME TO GO TO A BEAUTY CLINIC IN ORDER TO UNDERGO WHAT THEY CALL A "SMALL COSMETIC PROCEDURE" TO SMOOTH MY FEATURES AND MAKE MY FACE MORE FEMININE. THEY SAY THIS IS TOTALLY REVERSIBLE, BUT I'M NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THEIR PLAN. COULD YOU PLEASE TALK TO THEM, AND EXPLAIN THIS IS AN ABSURD IDEA?

YOU KNOW WHAT... I THINK THEY'RE RIGHT! LOOKING AT YOU CLOSELY, YOUR FACE THE ONLY PART OF YOUR APPEARANCE THAT STILL SEEMS A BIT MASCULINE.

W-WHAT?!

LISTEN, YOU WERE THE ONE WHO SAID THIS SITUATION IS A LOT MORE DANGEROUS THAN ANTICIPATED, *AUNT ELENA* – I GUESS I REALLY HAVE TO GET USED TO CALLING YOU THIS WAY FROM NOW ON – I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE WERE THINKING WHEN WE AGREED TO THIS STUPID JOKE OF DISGUISING AS UNCLE NIKOS' WIFE, BUT WHAT'S DONE IS DONE.

NOW WE HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO MAKE THIS WORK OR WE'RE SCREWED! I'LL DEFINITELY TALK TO THE GIRLS, BUT ONLY TO MAKE SURE THAT WHAT THEY HAVE IN MIND REALLY IS SAFE AND REVERSIBLE. THE SOONER YOU ACCEPT THIS THE BETTER. THE TRUTH IS... YOU'RE A *WOMAN* NOW!

TO MAKE EVERYTHING EVEN MORE CONVINCING, WE INSTALLED SOME CAMERAS IN OBVIOUS LOCATIONS IN SAMARAS' HOUSE. THE IDEA WAS THAT YOU WOULD ACTUALLY FIND THE CAMERAS AND BELIEVE THAT YOU WERE IN A DEAD END.

LISTEN, AUNT ELENA, YOU'RE JUST MAKING THINGS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT! YOU DON'T WANT THE DOCTOR TO GET SUSPICIOUS, DO YOU?

SIGH THIS IS SO WEIRD TO HEAR YOU CALL ME "*AUNT ELENA*". ARE YOU SURE YOU REALLY NEED TO DO THIS ALL THE TIME? EVEN WHEN WE'RE ALONE?

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I CALL YOU? THAT'S WHO YOU ARE, ELENA SAMARAS, MY AUNT. TO THINK OTHERWISE IS NONSENSE. AND KEEP IN MIND WE CAN'T BE SURE WE'RE TRULY ALONE, NOT AFTER WHAT HAPPENED YESTERDAY...

EXCUSE ME, LADIES. WOULD YOU LIKE SOME TEA WHILE YOU WAIT FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT?

THANK YOU! WE APPRECIATE IT!

WELL, THIS IS FANCY PLACE FOR SURE, JUST PERFECT FOR A SOPHISTICATED LADY LIKE YOU. NEVER BEFORE HAVE I BEEN OFFERED TEA BEFORE A DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT!

ALRIGHT, MARINA, YOU'RE GETTING ON MY NERVES! WHY IN THE HEAVENS DO YOU NEED TO...

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND START ACTING LIKE A PROPER LADY, AUNT ELENA! YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT WE'RE IN A TIGHT SPOT. JUST YESTERDAY WE FOUND CAMERAS HIDDEN IN UNCLE NIKOS' HOUSE, WHICH IS YOUR HOUSE, TOO, SINCE YOU'RE *HIS WIFE*, RIGHT? *YOUR DAUGHTERS* ARE RIGHT NOW CHECKING IF THERE ARE STILL ANY CAMERAS LEFT!

AS IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH, THE DRIVER UNCLE NIKOS HIRED JUST A FEW DAYS AGO DISAPPEARED IN THIN AIR. NOBODY KNOWS WHERE HE IS OR WHAT HE'S DOING. PLUS, UNCLE NIKOS AND JOEL ARE RETURNING TO ATHENS TODAY, WHICH JUST COMPLICATES THINGS EVEN FURTHER. THIS WHOLE THING GETS MORE DANGEROUS BY THE MINUTE, SO I THINK YOU BETTER STOP BEING SO STUBBORN, *MA'AM*.

BUT THIS MAY HAVE BEEN THE FIRST TIME WE WERE CARELESS, BECAUSE SOMEONE SAW JAMES AS HE WAS LEAVING SAMARAS' HOUSE. FILIP, THE DRIVER...

AS SOON AS JAMES REALIZED WHAT WAS GOING ON, HE DID WHAT WAS NECESSARY. FILIP WAS BROUGHT TO THIS EXACT PLACE WHERE WE ARE NOW. WE COULDN'T LEAVE ANY WITNESSES. FILIP HAD TO LEAVE THIS WORLD.

BUT SEFERI, UNLIKE HIS SON, WAS WEAK AT THE CRUCIAL MOMENT. HE CAME WITH HIS SOFT TALK... QUITE FITTING FOR SOMEONE WITH HIS PAST, RIGHT? HE SAID WE COULDN'T KILL AN INNOCENT MAN, THAT WE WOULD BECOME MONSTERS LIKE THOSE WE WERE FIGHTING, AND BLAH, BLAH, BLAH...

SO WE ONCE AGAIN RESORTED TO BLACK PETAL'S TRICKS, AND FILIP UNDERWENT SOME SORT OF BRAINWASHING. THIS IS ONE OF THEIR STRENGTHS, AS THEIR VICTIMS KNOW VERY WELL... OR PERHAPS THEY DON'T?

WHEN HE WAS RELEASED, FILIP WAS CONVINCED HE'D BEEN IN A CAR ACCIDENT AND DIDN'T REMEMBER HIS TIME IN CAPTIVITY. THIS WAS USEFUL SO YOU ALSO HAD A COVER STORY FOR YOUR TIME IN THE HOSPITAL.

OH, YOU LOOK SURPRISED! OF COURSE WE KNOW ALL ABOUT YOUR SURGERIES. WE WERE THE ONES WHO BRIBED THE DOCTOR TO DO MUCH MORE THAN HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY AGREED UPON, AFTER ALL. YOU REMEMBER WHO YOU MET AT THE CLINIC AS SOON AS MARINA LEFT, DON'T YOU?

OH, AND THERE'S ONE MORE THING...

RING!
RING!

HMM... THE HOTEL IS CALLING ME.
NOT ANOTHER BAD NEWS, PLEASE!

HELLO?

AND WHO IS IT?

HI, MRS. WOODS. SORRY FOR BOTHERING YOU, BUT THERE'S SOMEONE AT RECEPTION WANTING TO SPEAK WITH YOU, AND HE SAYS IT'S URGENT.

IT'S YOUR HUSBAND, MRS. WOODS.

OH MY...

IS EVERYTHING OKAY, MARINA? IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE SEEN A GHOST!

I... I GOTTA GO, AUNT ELENA.

WHAT? NOW?! WHAT ABOUT THE APPOINTMENT?

JUST STICK TO THE PLAN. YOU KNOW WHAT YOU NEED TO TELL THE DOCTOR. JUST MAKE SURE HE AGREES TO PERFORM THE PROCEDURE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I'LL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING LATER!

B-BUT...

WELL, WELL, WELL,
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!
LOOK WHO'S HERE...

Y-YOU...!

OH, ELENA, DEAR, IT'S SO NICE TO SEE THAT YOU DECIDED TO TAKE MY ADVICE! YOU ARE BOOKED WITH DR. GIANAKOS, AREN'T YOU?

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

I KNOW A LOT OF THINGS... A LOT FOR SURE! IS IT TEA, BY THE WAY? IT LOOKS SOO TASTY, DARLING...

KLEA HAD ALREADY ARRANGED EVERYTHING WITH THE DOCTOR, AND IN YOUR CONFUSED STATE YOU WERE UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS HAPPENING. THIS WAS JUST RIGHT FOR YOU. DIDN'T YOU WANT TO HAVE FUN PRETENDING TO BE AN OLD LADY? THEN YOU WOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO IT FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

IT WAS JAMES WHO CALLED MARINA TO GET HER OUT OF THE CLINIC, COINCIDING WITH THE TIME SAMARAS WOULD ARRIVE AT THE HOTEL WITH JOEL, THUS FORCING MARINA TO PRETEND THAT JAMES WAS HER HUSBAND. NOW YOU TWO WERE IRREVOCABLY SEPARATED AND JAMES WOULD HAVE THE CHANCE TO BE ANOTHER ONE WATCHING OVER THE FAMILY FROM THE INSIDE.

THEN, WHEN YOU FINALLY WOKE UP FROM SURGERY, SEFERI WAS THERE TO TERRIFY YOU EVEN FURTHER...

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THIS MAN, MRS. SAMARAS?

I'VE BEEN INFORMED BY A RELIABLE SOURCE THAT MR. TOSKA IS AFTER THIS MAN, WHOSE NAME IS ANDREW WOODS. THE OLD BASTARD IS CONVINCED THAT WOODS IS AT THE CENTER OF A CONSPIRACY TO STEAL HIS MONEY.

A CONSPIRACY HE BELIEVES YOUR FAMILY IS PART OF. I STILL DON'T KNOW ALL THE DETAILS, BUT MR. TOSKA HAS A LOT OF MEN AFTER WOODS. DANGEROUS MEN.

OH GOD, CAN THIS BE TRUE? DOES MR. TOSKA REALLY KNOW ABOUT ME? THAT'S TERRIFYING!

TELL ME, MRS. SAMARAS, MARINA KATSAROS IS SOMEONE YOU'RE AWARE OF, RIGHT?

O-OF COURSE, SHE'S OUR NIECE. DAUGHTER OF NIKOS' SISTER.

AND SHE'S IN GREECE, ISN'T SHE? ON HER HONEYMOON? MR. TOSKA THINKS SHE IS ANDREW WOODS' WIFE. SHE WAS IN CRETE RECENTLY, AND ONE OF TOSKA'S HENCHMEN WAS FOLLOWING HER, WHILE AN ASSOCIATE OF MINE WAS FOLLOWING TOSKA'S MAN.

FROM WHAT I WAS TOLD, SHE AND HER HUSBAND APPROACHED THE MAN WHO WAS WATCHING THEM ON TOSKA'S ORDERS. HER HUSBAND IS IN FACT A MAN NAMED JAMES COLLINS, WHICH MEANS THAT TOSKA WAS WRONG. I DON'T THINK HE'S CONVINCED, THOUGH. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN AS STUBBORN AS HE'S CRUEL.

MARINA MARRIED TO A MAN NAMED JAMES?! WHAT THE HELL IS HE TALKING ABOUT? BUT NOW THAT I'M THINKING ABOUT IT, MARINA ACTUALLY SAID THAT SHE WAS BEING FOLLOWED IN CRETE, AND THAT SHE HAD HELP TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION. COULD THIS JAMES BE THE ONE WHO HELPED HER?

IN ANY CASE, I ALSO HAVE A PHOTO HERE OF THE MAN WHO WAS FOLLOWING MARINA. LET ME SHOW YOU.

I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS MAN EITHER.

THIS DOESN'T SURPRISE ME. HIS NAME IS ROAN GJOKA, AND HE'S AN ALBANIAN MOBSTER. FROM WHAT I COULD GATHER, HE'S WORKING FOR MR. TOSKA, WHICH MAKES THAT LUNATIC OLD MAN EVEN MORE DANGEROUS.

I ALREADY TOLD YOU WHAT TOSKA DID TO ME, MRS. SAMARAS, SO I'LL WARN YOU AGAIN. YES, YOUR FAMILY IS AT GREAT RISK. YOU SAY YOU DON'T KNOW THIS ANDREW WOODS, WHICH IS GOOD. STILL, IF YOU SEE HIM, KEEP HIM AWAY FROM YOUR FAMILY. THIS IS BEST FOR EVERYONE'S SAFETY.

ACCORDING TO WHAT OUR SPY TOLD US, THIS WORKED BETTER THAN EXPECTED. YOU TOLD YOUR "FAMILY" TO PRETEND THAT YOU HAD ALWAYS BEEN ELENA SAMARAS AND THAT THEY HAD EVER HEARD OF AN ANDREW WOODS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

JUST AS THE CHERRY ON TOP, OUR SPY PUSHED YOU JUST A LITTLE HARDER, BUT ENOUGH TO SEND YOU INTO A BREAKDOWN...

KNOCK!
KNOCK!

THAT'S WEIRD. I'VE CANCELED ALL THE CLIENTS' APPOINTMENTS FOR THIS MORNING.




HELLO, SIR. WE ARE NOT OPEN RI...


HAIRCUT.

OH NO! IT'S HIM!
IT'S THE GANGSTER WHO'S
AFTER ME... AFTER ANDREW.

THIS IS TOO MUCH. WHY CAN'T THESE PEOPLE JUST LEAVE ME ALONE? WHAT ELSE DO I HAVE TO DO?

ELENA, ARE YOU STILL THERE?
IS SOMETHING WRONG?

YES, ANGELIKI IS OUR SPY, HAVING BEEN WORKING FOR YOUR "DAUGHTERS" FOR YEARS. SHE WAS THE ONE WHO TIPPED OFF GJOKA THAT YOU WERE AT THE SALON SO HE COULD GIVE YOU A SCARE. BUT THIS, AGAIN, WAS BETTER THAN EXPECTED, SINCE ANGELIKI INFORMED US THE FOLLOWING NIGHT, WHILE HELPING YOU GET READY FOR THE RECEPTION PREPARED FOR YOUR RETURN, THAT YOU HAD EVEN LOST PART OF YOUR RECENT MEMORY.

THESE BASTARDS WERE EVERYWHERE!
EVEN ANGELIKI, THAT TRAITOR,
WAS WORKING WITH THEM!

AS YOU CAN SEE, EVERYTHING WAS STILL GOING OUR WAY. WE COULDN'T COMPLAIN ABOUT OUR LUCK AT ALL. BUT THEN, WE MADE A SECOND MISTAKE. JOEL, THAT STUPID BOY, WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR IT THIS TIME...

--- AND HE PAID A VERY HIGH PRICE FOR THAT!

I'M SORRY ABOUT THIS, MRS. SAMARAS, AND I PROMISE I WON'T TAKE UP TOO MUCH OF YOUR TIME. I JUST NEED TO KNOW...


HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THIS MAN?

DAT MAN LUKKS FAMILIAR. BUT I KENT REMEMBA WHERE I SAW AT 'IM.

REALLY? HAVE YOU SEEN HIM BEFORE? PLEASE, TRY TO REMEMBER WHERE, MRS. SAMARAS. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT!

THAT MAN IS THE HEAD OF THE MOST DANGEROUS MAFIA IN ALBANIA. HE'S BEEN A FUGITIVE FOR YEARS, BUT NO ONE HAS EVER MANAGED TO PUT HIM BEHIND BARS.

TRUE? HE HERE IN GREECE NOW? WHAT HE DOIN' HERE FOR?

HE WORKS WITH MR. TOSKA, MA'AM. THEY HAVE BEEN COOPERATING FOR SOME TIME NOW. I CAN'T SAY WHAT THEY PLAN EXACTLY, BUT ONE THING IS FOR SURE... MR. TOSKA IS GETTING INCREASINGLY PARANOID AND DETACHED FROM REALITY, AND AN ALLIANCE WITH SOMEONE LIKE ROAN GJOKA MAKES HIM EVEN MORE THREATENING.

SO I'M HERE TO OFFER YOU A DEAL, MRS. SAMARAS. I KNOW ROAN GJOKA IS IN GREECE. MR. TOSKA USED THIS INFORMATION TO THREATEN ME. IF WE CAN PROVE THEIR INVOLVEMENT, YOUR HUSBAND WILL BE ABLE TO TERMINATE THE CONTRACT WITH MR. TORKA, AND I COULD BREAK FREE OF THIS PRISON I LIVE IN.

JOEL WASN'T SUPPOSED TO INTERFERE THAT NIGHT. HIS ROLE WAS SIMPLY TO OBSERVE. JAMES WAS THE ONE WHO HAD AN IMPORTANT MISSION: MAKE YOU MORE CONFUSED THAN EVER, INTERACTING WITH MARINA AS IF HE REALLY HAD ALWAYS BEEN MARINA'S HUSBAND.

AND JOEL'S MISTAKE MADE YOU START TO GET SUSPICIOUS, DIDN'T IT?

BUT NOW THAT I REMEMBER PARTS OF WHAT HAPPENED THE DAY I LEFT THE CLINIC, THERE'S ANOTHER IMPORTANT THING TO CONSIDER... SEFERI AND JOEL... THEY BOTH WARNED ME ABOUT HOW DANGEROUS MR. TOSKA IS... THEY BOTH TOLD ME ABOUT ROAN GJOKA, THE MOBSTER WHO IS SUPPOSEDLY WORKING WITH TOSKA. I THINK IT'S CLEAR THAT SEFERI AND JOEL ARE WORKING TOGETHER, BUT WHY DIDN'T THEY MENTION EACH OTHER TO ME? STRANGE. IT WOULD MAKE SENSE FOR THEM TO MAKE IT CLEAR THEY WERE ALLIES, SINCE BOTH OF THEM, AT LEAST IN THEORY, WERE TRYING TO HELP ME, RIGHT?

ALL MY ACTIONS HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE BELIEF THAT SEFERI AND JOEL ARE TELLING ME THE TRUTH, AND THAT MR. TOSKA POSES A DANGER TO ME AND EVERYONE AROUND ME. WHAT EVIDENCE DID THEY PRESENT, THOUGH? I'VE BASICALLY BEEN TRUSTING THEIR WORD BLINDLY... SO BLINDLY THAT I ENDED UP WITH THE BODY - AND EVEN THE MIND - OF A MIDDLE-AGED GREEK WIFE! WHAT IF... WHAT IF MR. TOSKA ISN'T THE REAL VILLAIN HERE?


SO SEFERI WAS FORCED TO TAKE DRASTIC MEASURES...

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

MRS. SAMARAS WANTS TO SEE US. BOTH OF US... TOGETHER! SHE NO LONGER TRUSTS YOU AND ME. AND YOU KNOW WHY? BECAUSE YOU WENT TO HER TO TALK ABOUT TOSKA AND GJOKA. YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO DO THAT AT THAT DINNER PARTY! YOU WERE THERE TO LISTEN AND OBSERVE!

I HAD NO CHOICE. YOU SAY YOU SPOKE TO HER AT THE HOSPITAL, BUT I THINK YOU DID A TERRIBLE JOB! SHE WAS ABOUT TO FORCE MARINA TO...

ENOUGH!

NOW I'M THE ONE WHO HAS NO CHOICE. WE NEED TO REGAIN MRS. SAMARAS' TRUST, AFTER ALL!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? DO YOU INTEND TO REGAIN HER TRUST BY KILLING ME? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?!

WHAT? I'M NOT GOING TO KILL YOU! WHAT DO YOU THINK I AM? A SAVAGE? I'LL HAVE TO SHOOT YOU, THOUGH. TRUST ME, THIS IS GOING TO HURT. *A LOT.* I THINK SOON YOU'LL UNDERSTAND HOW SAD IT IS TO LIVE A FAKE LIVE. FOR NOW, JUST DON'T TRY ANYTHING STUPID, LIKE RUNNING AWAY. THAT'LL JUST MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT AND MESSY. LET'S BE CIVILIZED HERE.

CIVILIZED? YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT SHOOTING ME! PUT THAT GUN DOWN AND LETS...



IT WAS SEFERI WHO SHOT JOEL?!

EXACTLY. AS YOU CAN SEE, WE'RE ALL VERY DETERMINED TO MAKE THIS PLAN WORK NO MATTER WHAT. OR AT LEAST WE WERE, BECAUSE SEFERI...

OH, BUT WAIT! ARE YOU HEARING THOSE HURRIED FOOTSTEPS? IT SOUNDS LIKE OUR GUEST OF HONOR IS ARRIVING!

MORAITIS!!

WHERE ARE YOU, YOU SON OF A BITCH?
WHAT DID YOU DO TO ELENA?

OH, COME CLOSER, SAMARAS. WE WERE JUST WAITING FOR YOU!

YOU...

I KNEW IT! IF THERE WAS A SON OF A BITCH CRAZY ENOUGH TO HAVE ME KIDNAPPED, IT HAD TO BE YOU! NOW WHERE ARE...?

...ELENA?! ARE YOU OKAY? ARE YOU TIED UP?!

I'M FINE, NIKOS! JUST BE CAREFUL BECAUSE...

MORAITIS, I'M GOING TO KILL YOU, YOU BASTARD! I'M GOING TO KILL YOU WITH MY OWN HANDS!

I WOULD CHOOSE MY WORDS MORE CAREFULLY IF I WERE YOU, SAMARAS. YOU DON'T WANT TO END UP WITH A BULLET IN YOUR HEAD, DO YOU?

AS PLEASURABLE AS THAT WOULD BE FOR ME,
I HAVE OTHER PLANS FOR YOU TONIGHT!

I KNOW YOU'RE A FUCKING LUNATIC, BUT WHY EXACTLY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

YOU WERE COMPLETELY SCREWED AND I GAVE YOU EVERYTHING! IF IT WEREN'T FOR ME, A PIECE OF SHIT LIKE YOU WOULD ALREADY BE BACK IN JAIL!

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS, YOU FUCKING LIAR! YOU DIDN'T GIVE ME ANYTHING! ON THE CONTRARY, YOU STOLE EVERYTHING I EVER HAD! YOU WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR MY BROTHER'S DEATH AFTER ROBBING HIM, AND AS IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH, YOU STOLE MY NIECES FROM ME!

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND? I NEVER STOLE FROM YOUR BROTHER! HE WAS MY BEST FRIEND!

LIAR!

YOU KNOW VERY WELL WHAT HAPPENED! GIUSEPPE LENT ME MONEY WHEN I WAS STARTING MY BUSINESS, AND IN A FEW MONTHS I PAID IT ALL BACK. HOWEVER, SOON HE NEEDED MORE FOR SOME REASON. I DIDN'T ASK. HE DIDN'T OWE ME ANY EXPLANATIONS, AND I TRUSTED HIM. I SIMPLY GAVE IT TO HIM AGAIN. I GAVE HIM MORE MONEY COUNTLESS TIMES UNTIL I HAD NO MORE AT THE MOMENT.

LATER I FOUND OUT HE WAS INVOLVED IN SHADY DEALINGS, MOST LIKELY DUE TO YOUR INFLUENCE. THEN THE WORST HAPPENED, AND I STILL BLAME MYSELF TO THIS DAY FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO DO ANYTHING. ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS TO RAISE HIS DAUGHTERS AS IF THEY WERE MY OWN, AND THAT'S WHAT I DID. I GAVE THEM EVERYTHING I COULD, INCLUDING LOVE. THEY GREW UP TO BE TWO HAPPY GIRLS, EVEN THOUGH THEY NEVER HAD A MOTHER...

... AT LEAST UNTIL RECENTLY.

AND YOU REALLY THINK THAT AFTER EVERYTHING I'VE DONE FOR **MY DAUGHTERS** I'D HAND THEM OVER TO YOU, A FUCKING MADMAN? AGAIN, YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL THAT I HELPED YOU GET BACK ON YOUR FEET WHEN YOU GOT OUT OF JAIL, YOU BASTARD! IT WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY EASY FOR ME TO PRETEND YOU DIDN'T EXIST!

I'M NOT GOING TO STAND HERE LISTENING TO THIS LOAD OF CRAP! YOU MAY HAVE FOOLED OTHERS, BUT NOT ME! I'M JUST GOING TO FOLLOW THE PLAN.

FIRST, I NEED TO SHOOT THIS FREAK YOU'VE BEEN TREATING AS A WIFE, AND THEN...

AHHHHHH!!!

HUH?!



GRRRRR!!!!


NIKOS!


AARRGHH!


YOU REALLY THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO GET AWAY WITH IT, YOU FUCKING IDIOT?

YOU'RE PATHETIC. YOU FAILED AT EVERYTHING IN LIFE, EVEN IN YOUR RIDICULOUS REVENGE PLAN. I'M GOING TO DO EVERYONE A FAVOR...

...BY SENDING YOU TO HELL!

THAT WAS QUITE AN INSPIRING SPEECH, MR. SAMARAS. I HAVE TO ADMIT IT...

...BUT I'M AFRAID I'LL HAVE TO ASK YOU TO ABANDON THOSE AMBITIONS OF YOURS. YOU SEE, I'VE GOT YOU IN MY CROSSHAIRS, UNFORTUNATELY. TOSS THE GUN OVER HERE AND STAND UP. SLOWLY. HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD, PLEASE.

FINE! HOW THE FUCK ARE YOU? ARE YOU WITH MORAITIS?


THAT'S ONE WAY TO LOOK AT IT, MR. SAMARAS,
BUT WHAT YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND IS THAT...

SPARE ME THE FANCY TALK, SEFERI. WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS. ANYWAY, I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU'VE FINALLY COME TO YOUR SENSES AND ARE DOING THE RIGHT THING.

I WOULDN'T BE SO GLAD IF I WERE IN YOUR SHOES, MORAITIS. YOU SEEM TO HAVE LOST WHAT LITTLE SANITY YOU HAD LEFT.

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT WAS YOUR REAL PLAN FOR TONIGHT?
TO KILL MRS. SAMARAS AND FRAME HER HUSBAND?
HOW EXACTLY? CAN'T YOU SEE THIS MAKES
NO SENSE AT ALL?

I... I HAD TO TRY SOMETHING! I'M NOT A COWARD LIKE YOU, ABANDONING OUR PLAN!

IF ANYONE'S ABANDONED THE PLAN HERE, IT'S YOU, MORAITIS. I NEVER AGREED TO KILLING INNOCENT PEOPLE. YOU KNOW THAT VERY WELL.

AND WHO IS INNOCENT? THIS FREAK THAT SAMARAS TREATS LIKE A WOMAN?!

OLUTION.

OH, I SEE... YOU FEEL SORRY FOR HIM BECAUSE YOU'RE A FREAK TOO, AREN'T YOU, YOU FAGGOT? IF YOU'RE NOT HERE TO HELP ME, THEN WHAT DO YOU WANT?

ISN'T THAT OBVIOUS? PUT YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD, MORAITIS. IT WAS A GOOD THING MRS. SAMARAS' NIECE CAME TO ME AND TOLD ME WHAT WAS GOING ON. AFTER HEARING HER STORY, I HAD NO TROUBLE FIGURING OUT WHERE YOU'D BE.

I COULDN'T LET MR. SAMARAS KILL YOU. KILLING SOMEONE CHANGES YOU FOREVER, EVEN IN SELF-DEFENSE. HIS SOUL IS STILL CLEAN. THE SAME CAN'T BE SAID FOR MINE.

SO YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME? IS THAT IT?
YOU'RE GOING TO SIDE WITH THE BAD GUYS?

I DON'T BELIEVE SAMARAS IS THE BAD GUY ANYMORE.
IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN DECEIVING ME
ALL THESE YEARS, MORAITIS.

MRS. SAMARAS, PLEASE CLOSE YOUR EYES. I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO ACT IN A RATHER UNCIVILIZED MANNER NOW.

NO, WAIT, SEFERI! I...



Chapter Twenty-Nine

Eros and Psyche

A FEW WEEKS LATER...

OH MY GOSH...


REALLY, MOM...


YOU LOOK STUNNING!

ARE YOU GIRLS SURE? YOU'RE NOT MAKING FUN OF ME, ARE YOU?

I DON'T KNOW... IS THIS DRESS APPROPRIATE FOR SOMEONE MY AGE? DON'T I LOOK FAT?

FAT? DON'T BE SILLY, MOM!

YEAH, YOU LOOK JUST LIKE A DREAM!
THE HOTTEST BRIDE I'VE EVER SEEN!

I'M SURE DAD WILL LOVE SEEING YOU IN THIS DRESS!

HE MIGHT EVEN CRY TEARS OF JOY,
WHICH WOULD BE HILARIOUS,
I CAN'T DENY!

OH MY GOD, I FEEL SO NERVOUS I THINK I'M GOING TO FAINT! IS THIS NORMAL?

I KNOW I'M NOT NECESSARILY A BRIDE. THIS IS SUPPOSEDLY JUST A VOW RENEWAL CEREMONY. BUT SINCE I'VE NEVER HAD A WEDDING AS ELENA, THIS DOES FEEL LIKE I'M GETTING MARRIED!

WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED WHEN I ARRIVED IN GREECE AS A MARRIED MAN IN MY EARLY TWENTIES A FEW MONTHS AGO THAT I WOULD NOW BE GETTING MARRIED AS A MATURE WOMAN? WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED THAT I WOULD BECOME A WIFE AND A MOTHER?

BUT WHO AM I TRYING TO FOOL?

AS CRAZY AS IT SOUNDS,
I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER!

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS, MOM? YOU LOOK WORRIED, ANXIOUS, DISTRESSED AND DELIGHTED, ALL AT ONCE. IS THIS THE CASE WITH ALL BRIDES? IF SO, I'LL THINK TWICE BEFORE LETTING ANYONE PUT AN ENGAGEMENT RING ON MY FINGER!


LISTEN, GIRLS. THERE'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT AND I NEED TO TALK TO YOU... NOW.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO CRY, ARE YOU? THAT WOULD RUIN YOUR MAKEUP!

THIS IS SERIOUS, SOFIA, AND I KNOW I'M WEARING WATERPROOF MAKEUP! AFTER EVERYTHING WE DISCUSSED THAT AFTERNOON ON THE YACHT... YOU GIRLS TELLING ME HOW YOU FELT ABOUT GROWING UP WITHOUT A MOTHER... AND THEN ACCEPTING ME TO FILL THE ROLE.

THAT WAS VERY SPECIAL TO ME. FOR THE FIRST TIME I DIDN'T FEEL... ALONE. DEEP DOWN, I NEVER FELT WORTHY OF HAVING A FAMILY... I DISAPPOINTED EVERYONE IN MY LIFE... EVERYONE!

EVERYTHING HAS BEEN SO INTENSE SINCE I ARRIVED IN GREECE... NOT EVEN IN MY WILDEST HALLUCINATIONS WOULD I HAVE IMAGINED THAT I WOULD BECOME ELENA SAMARAS. BUT THE TRUTH IS... IT FEELS RIGHT. I FEEL LIKE I'M FINALLY HOME. I STILL DON'T THINK I'M TRULY WORTHY OF BEING THE MOTHER YOU TWO DESERVE, BUT I WILL TRY MY BEST UNTIL THE END OF MY LIFE. I SWEAR TO YOU TWO!

DON'T SAY THAT, MOM! YOU'RE RIGHT, THE LAST FEW MONTHS HAVE ALSO BEEN THE CRAZIEST I'VE EVER LIVED THROUGH. BUT WE'RE THE ONES WHO ARE GRATEFUL THAT YOU "ADOPTED" US AS YOUR DAUGHTERS.

THIS FEELS REAL. THIS IS REAL. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU'RE OUR BIOLOGICAL MOTHER OR NOT! AFTER ALL, DAD ADOPTED US TOO, DIDN'T HE? WE'RE NOT HIS BIOLOGICAL DAUGHTERS EITHER!

WAIT A MINUTE... WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?!

YES. DAD TOLD US EVERYTHING A FEW DAYS AGO. HE SAID... HE SAID HE'D BEEN UNFAIR ALL THESE YEARS AND THAT WE DESERVED TO KNOW THE TRUTH. NOW WE KNOW THAT, BIOLOGICALLY, WE'RE ACTUALLY THE DAUGHTERS OF DAD'S FRIEND AND HIS WIFE, WHO DIED WHEN WE WERE STILL YOUNG.

OH, GOD. I... I HAD NO IDEA NIKOS HAD TALKED TO YOU ABOUT THIS. OF COURSE IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO, BUT... IT'S STILL A LOT TO TAKE IN. HOW ARE YOU TWO FEELING?

WELL, AT LEAST THINGS MAKE SENSE NOW, RIGHT? ALL THE MYSTERY... HOW ANNOYED DAD USED TO GET WHENEVER WE ASKED ABOUT MOM... NOW WE KNOW THE REASON FOR ALL OF IT. HE MESSED UP WITH US FOR ALL THOSE YEARS, BUT AT LEAST HE MESSED UP WHILE TRYING TO DO THE *RIGHT THING*... IN HIS OWN WEIRD, LUNATIC WAY.

BUT THAT... THAT DOESN'T CHANGE A THING. TO US, DAD IS STILL DAD. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER HE'S OUR BIOLOGICAL FATHER OR NOT. JUST LIKE...

...YOU. WE FEEL LIKE YOU'RE OUR REAL MOM, TOO. AND IT'S SO GOOD TO KNOW THAT YOU'RE HAPPY ABOUT IT.

THAT MAKES US A PRETTY ECCENTRIC FAMILY, RIGHT? OUR MOM WAS A GUY OUR AGE WHO WAS MARRIED TO OUR COUSIN UNTIL JUST A FEW MONTHS AGO. OUR DAD IS A PARANOID MAN WHO KEPT IT A SECRET OUR WHOLE LIVES THAT WE'RE ACTUALLY THE KIDS OF HIS BEST FRIEND, WHO JUST DECIDED TO ROB A BANK ONE DAY. DEFINITELY ECCENTRIC. YEAH, I LIKE IT!

YOU TWO... YOU'RE THE BEST DAUGHTERS I COULD EVER ASK FOR. THIS REALLY IS A DREAM COME TRUE. I HAVE A FAMILY NOW. THANK YOU... THANK YOU FOR ACCEPTING ME!

AND I ALSO NEED TO APOLOGIZE. THE NIGHT I GOT KIDNAPPED, I WAS SO STUPID! I ACTUALLY THOUGHT IT WAS NIKOS TEXTING ME, AND I LEFT YOU GIRLS ALONE WITH THAT MONSTER!

THE PERSON PRETENDING TO BE NIKOS TEXTED THAT THERE WAS ALREADY SOMEONE HE TRUSTED AT THE HOUSE TO GET YOU OUT, AND I FELL FOR IT LIKE A FOOL. THAT'S NOT WHAT A MOTHER IS SUPPOSED TO DO. I'LL NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF FOR IT, AND I PROMISE TO DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO MAKE IT UP TO YOU TWO!


OH, MOM...



DON'T SAY THAT!


YOU HAVE NOTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR. WE WERE ALL SO STRESSED OUT THAT NIGHT... NONE OF US WERE THINKING CLEARLY. MORAITIS, THAT DISGUSTING MAN, WAS SAYING TERRIBLE THINGS ABOUT DAD.

BESIDES, YOU'RE STILL GETTING THE HANG OF THIS WHOLE *MOM THING*. YOU'LL DEFINITELY DO BETTER FROM HERE ON OUT.

SO YOU REALLY THINK I...

I'M JUST MESSING WITH YOU, MOM.
LIKE EVA SAID, YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG.
YOU WERE JUST TRYING TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY,
BELIEVING YOUR DAUGHTERS WERE SAFE
WHILE DAD PROBABLY WASN'T.


SO, IT'S DECIDED THEN. NO MORE REASON TO OVERTHINK IT. LET'S JUST FOCUS ON BEING HAPPY FROM NOW ON, OKAY?

ALTHOUGH...

WHAT? WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU?


ARE WE REALLY SAFE NOW? ALL THESE BAD PEOPLE TRYING TO HURT US...

YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THAT. NO ONE IS EVER GOING TO HURT US AGAIN.

SORRY, MOM, BUT HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE ABOUT THAT?

I GUESS THERE'S NO REASON TO HIDE IT ANYMORE. NO MORE SECRETS, RIGHT?

SEFERI LEFT HIS HIDEOUT, WHEREVER THAT MIGHT BE, TO LOOK FOR ME YESTERDAY. WE... WE TALKED FOR A LONG TIME.

SEFERI?! I CAN'T BELIEVE HE HAD THE NERVE TO COME LOOKING FOR YOU AFTER EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED! WHAT DID HE WANT? DID HE THREATEN YOU OR...?

CALM DOWN, HONEY. LIKE I SAID, WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR ANYMORE. SEFERI... WELL, HE'S GOING TO TURN HIMSELF INTO THE POLICE.

WHAT?! WHY WOULD HE DO THAT? THAT MAKES NO SENSE!

I MIGHT BE BEING NAIVE, BUT I DON'T THINK SEFERI IS A BAD PERSON. FOR A WHILE, HE REALLY BELIEVED HE WAS DOING THE RIGHT THING. ONCE HE REALIZED WHO MORAITIS REALLY WAS, HE DIDN'T HESITATE TO SWITCH SIDES.

AND NOW HE KNOWS HIS PLAN HAS FAILED FOR GOOD.

EVEN THOUGH HE WAS WRONGFULLY SENT TO JAIL IN THE PAST BECAUSE OF TOSKA, HE KNOWS THERE'S NOTHING MORE HE CAN DO ABOUT IT. IN HIS WORDS, THE VILLAIN DOESN'T ALWAYS LOSE IN THE END. THAT'S JUST REAL LIFE.

PLUS, HIS CREW HAS ALREADY SHOWN THEY WERE EVERY BIT AS EVIL AS THE OLD ALBANIAN MAN... HE SAID MAYBE PRISON IS WHERE HE ACTUALLY BELONGS. HE WAS PARTLY TO BLAME FOR MY FORCED TRANSFORMATION, AFTER ALL. HE STILL HASN'T FORGIVEN HIMSELF FOR IT, EVEN THOUGH I'VE MADE IT CLEAR THAT I'VE NEVER BEEN HAPPIER.

HE ALSO SAID HE'S GOING TO TURN IN ALL HIS ACCOMPLICES TO THE POLICE. HE ONLY ASKED FOR HIS SON TO BE SPARED... SO HE COULD HAVE A SECOND CHANCE TO DO THE RIGHT THING. AS A MOTHER, I COULDN'T DENY HIM THAT.

LASTLY, HE TOLD ME THERE WAS NO NEED TO HAND JOEL OVER TO THE POLICE BECAUSE HE ALREADY HAS A DESTINY WORSE THAN JAIL WAITING FOR HIM, EVEN IF I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT COULD BE.


WELL, JOEL REALLY DID DISAPPEAR AFTER HIS SURGERIES AND MAKEOVER, DIDN'T HE? I HONESTLY HAVE NO IDEA WHERE THEY TOOK HIM.

STILL, I HAVE A FEELING WE'LL BE SEEING HIM AGAIN SOON. THE SAME CAN'T BE SAID FOR MARINA, THOUGH. HAVE YOU HEARD ANYTHING FROM HER, MOM?

SOME TIME LATER...



ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE CEREMONY?

YOU'RE FUCKING KIDDING ME, RIGHT?

MY EX-HUSBAND IS A BUSTY MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN NOW AND IS MARRYING MY DEAR UNCLE. NO, I DEFINITELY DON'T WANT TO ATTEND THE CEREMONY.

I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU YOUR FAMILY IS COMPLETELY FUCKED UP, RIGHT?

AT LEAST EIGHT TIMES.

THAT'S STILL NOT ENOUGH.

YOUR UNCLE IS MARRYING YOUR EX-HUSBAND, AND THEN WHAT? THEY LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

I TRULY HOPE SO.

AND YOU'RE NOT EVEN GOING TO SAY GOODBYE?

I SENT AUNT ELENA A LETTER.

A LETTER? THAT'S IT?

THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT TO DO.
I APOLOGIZED AND WISHED HER ALL THE HAPPINESS IN THE WORLD... THAT SHE FINALLY FINDS WHAT SHE'S BEEN LOOKING FOR. THIS MIGHT SEEM VAGUE, BUT BELIEVE ME, IT WAS EXACTLY WHAT SHE NEEDED TO HEAR.

WHAT ABOUT YOU? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW? GOING BACK TO AMERICA?

HEAVENS, NO! NOTHING'S WAITING FOR ME THERE. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I TRULY ENJOYED? PLAYING THE DETECTIVE AND INVESTIGATING THINGS. THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO KEEP DOING. A FRESH DISGUISE EVERY MONTH... GOING INTO SKETCHY SPOTS... CRACKING MYSTERIES. IT'S JUST TOO MUCH FOR A JOURNALIST TO RESIST. PLUS, I DEFINITELY NEED A CHANGE OF PACE AFTER EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED.

HMM... THAT SOUNDS INTERESTING. TELL ME, WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN A PARTNER?

WHAT? THINKING ABOUT LEAVING THE FORCE?

I JUST WENT THROUGH A MESSY DIVORCE AS WELL. PLUS, ALL THE BUREAUCRACY AND THE HEADACHE OF BEING A COP... I'M DOING MORE PAPERWORK THAN REAL INVESTIGATION. SO YEAH, I'D SAY I'M DUE FOR A CHANGE TOO.

FAIR ENOUGH, INSPECTOR. BUT JUST SO WE'RE CLEAR, YOU'D BE THE JUNIOR PARTNER.

WHAT?!

REMEMBER I'M THE ONE WHO SOLVED THIS CASE PRETTY MUCH ON MY OWN WHILE YOU KEPT MOANING ABOUT ME IMAGINING THINGS. THAT'S MY CONDITION. TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT.

AND IF YOU'RE A GOOD BOY,
I MIGHT EVEN REQUIRE SOME...
PERSONAL SERVICES FROM TIME TO
TIME IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

NOW LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. THE LOVEBIRDS ARE PROBABLY ARRIVING SOON, AND I DON'T WANT TO BE SEEN. I JUST WANTED TO TAKE ONE LAST LOOK AT THIS PLACE. YEAH, I HAVE A GOOD FEELING ABOUT THIS...

AUNT ELENA WILL FIND HAPPINESS. SHE DESERVES IT... SHE DESERVES IT MORE THAN ANYBODY.

GOODBYE, AUNTIE...
HAVE A WONDERFUL LIFE.

JUST TAKE A DEEP BREATH, ELENA.

ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER.
YOU CAN DO THIS.

MOST IMPORTANTLY,
NO MATTER HOW NERVOUS YOU ARE,
YOU WANT TO DO THIS!

YOU'RE GETTING MARRIED! TECHNICALLY, IT'S JUST A VOW RENEWAL CEREMONY, BUT DEEP DOWN YOU KNOW WHAT IT REALLY IS.

YOU'RE MARRYING THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE.

LOOK AT THAT SMILE ON HIS FACE!

HE NEVER GOT MARRIED BEFORE
SO HE COULD KEEP HIS SECRET SAFE.
THE SECRET ABOUT EVA AND SOFIA.

BUT THERE'S NO REASON TO HIDE ANYTHING ANYMORE. NO MORE SECRETS. JUST THE TRUTH.

OUR DAUGHTERS KNOW EVERYTHING NOW. AND NOT ONLY THAT, BUT THEY'VE ACCEPTED ME AS THEIR MOTHER.

TOSKA'S HERE AS WELL. HE'S WITH A NEW GIRLFRIEND WHO LOOKS LIKE SHE'D RATHER BE ANYWHERE ELSE.

I'M NOT SURE... SHE LOOKS FAMILIAR, BUT I CAN'T PUT MY FINGER ON WHERE I KNOW HER FROM.

ELENA, YOU... YOU LOOK BREATHTAKING!

THANK YOU, HONEY. YOU LOOK VERY CHARMING TOO! SO, SHALL WE GET MARRIED? YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED YOUR MIND, HAVE YOU?

NOT IN A MILLION YEARS, DEAR!

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER...

ELENA, YOU MAKE ME THE HAPPIEST MAN ON EARTH. I DON'T KNOW HOW I GOT SO LUCKY, BUT I PROMISE TO SPEND EVERY DAY BEING WORTHY OF YOU, TREATING YOU WITH ALL THE LOVE AND RESPECT YOU DESERVE UNTIL MY VERY LAST BREATH. I LOVE YOU.

YOU'RE THE MOST WONDERFUL MAN I'VE EVER MET. YOU'RE SO LOVING, KIND, AND YOU WOULD DO ANYTHING TO PROTECT THE ONES YOU LOVE. THANK YOU FOR ACCEPTING ME JUST THE WAY I AM. I HOPE TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE WITH YOU. I LOVE YOU TOO.

YOU MAY NOW KISS THE BRIDE.

AND NOW IT'S OFFICIAL...

I'M A WIFE, A MOTHER, AND I FINALLY FEEL LIKE I'M WHERE I'M MEANT TO BE.

I'M ELENA SAMARAS.

Chapter Thirty
The Jest of Cypris

A FEW DAYS LATER...

AT THE RISK OF SOUNDING REPETITIVE, I HAVE TO SAY... YOU LOOK ABSOLUTELY STUNNING AS ALWAYS, ELENA. IN FACT, IT SEEMS LIKE YOU ONLY GET MORE BEAUTIFUL WITH EACH PASSING DAY!

WHY THANK YOU, DEAR HUSBAND!

YOU CERTAINLY KNOW HOW TO MAKE A WOMAN FEEL FLATTERED, DON'T YOU?

I'M ONLY TELLING THE TRUTH.
A TRUTH I INTEND TO REPEAT EVERY SINGLE DAY FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.

YOU REMEMBER THIS PLACE, DON'T YOU?

HOW COULD I EVER FORGET? THIS IS WHERE YOU PROPOSED TO ME. THIS IS WHERE WE SPENT OUR FIRST REAL NIGHT TOGETHER.

WHY DID YOU BRING ME HERE, OF ALL PLACES? DON'T TELL ME YOU HAVE SOME SPICY IDEAS IN MIND, DARLING?

THAT'S ALWAYS THE CASE WHEN WE'RE TOGETHER. YOU KNOW THAT. BUT FIRST, THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU.

MR. TOSKA OFFERED ME A BUSINESS DEAL. A VERY... LUCRATIVE DEAL. ONE THAT WOULD MAKE US OBSCENELY WEALTHY. HE SEEMS TO BE IN MUCH BETTER SPIRITS NOW THAT HE HAS HIS NEW GIRLFRIEND, JOELLE. HE DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO NEGOTIATE THE TERMS TO GET A BETTER CUT FOR HIMSELF.

JOELLE... COULD THAT BE...?





YES, I NEVER GOT TO SEE JOEL'S FINAL LOOK AFTER THE MAKEOVER, BUT IT MAKES SENSE THAT IT'S HIM. THIS MUST BE THE FATE WORSE THAN DEATH THAT SEFERI SAID JOEL WOULD FACE. SEFERI AND THE OTHERS WERE FURIOUS WITH JOEL, SO IT MAKES SENSE THAT THEY FORCED HIM TO SEDUCE TOSKA TO MAKE THE ALBANIAN MAN MORE WILLING TO CLOSE THE DEAL.

SEFERI WANTED THE DEAL TO GO THROUGH, AFTER ALL. IT WAS ALL PART OF THEIR PLAN. HE JUST NEVER EXPECTED MORAITIS TO RUIN IT ALL. THE QUESTION IS, DOES TOSKA EVEN KNOW WHO JOELLE REALLY IS? HE PROBABLY DOES. HE MUST HAVE FIGURED IT OUT, AND THAT LIKELY ONLY MADE HIM MORE EXCITED, SADISTIC AS HE IS.

AS I SAID, THE OFFER WAS REMARKABLE. BUT I...

...I TURNED IT DOWN.

YOU TURNED IT DOWN? WHY?

FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. NOW THAT I KNOW THE FULL TRUTH OF WHAT HAPPENED, I CAN SEE JUST HOW DANGEROUS AND UNSTABLE TOSKA REALLY IS. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY...

TAKING THAT DEAL WOULD MEAN WORKING EVEN HARDER, ELENA. PROBABLY HARDER THAN I'VE WORKED IN MY ENTIRE LIFE. THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANT. ALL I WANT NOW, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE IN THE WORLD...

APRICALLE

...IS TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH YOU. THAT'S WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT. BEING HAPPY. AND NO ONE MAKES ME HAPPIER THAN YOU DO.

NIKOS, I... I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY!

IT'S OKAY, ELENA. YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY ANYTHING RIGHT NOW. FIRST OF ALL, LISTEN TO MY PLAN: I THINK WE DESERVE A HONEYMOON. A REAL ONE. SO I WANT TO GET A SAILBOAT AND SPEND A FEW MONTHS SAILING THE MEDITERRANEAN. JUST YOU AND ME.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT THAT SOUNDS LIKE A DREAM TO ME. SIX MONTHS AT SEA, DOING WHATEVER WE WANT, HOPPING FROM TOWN TO TOWN, WITH NO WORRIES... SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

BUT HOW ABOUT THE GIRLS? EVA AND SOFIA? I DON'T THINK I COULD LAST SIX MONTHS WITHOUT SEEING THEM!

APRICALLE

I'M SO GLAD TO SEE HOW MUCH YOU CARE ABOUT *OUR DAUGHTERS*. YOU REALLY ARE THE MOTHER THEY'VE ALWAYS DESERVED, ELENA, AND YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW HAPPY THAT MAKES ME.

BUT YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THAT. WE CAN CALL THEM EVERY DAY. AND WHEN WE MISS THEM TOO MUCH, NOTHING IS STOPPING US FROM MAKING A STOP BACK IN ATHENS!

PLUS, I THINK A LITTLE INDEPENDENCE WOULD BE GOOD FOR THEM, SO THEY CAN REALLY FIND THEMSELVES. EVA IS DEEPLY INVOLVED IN HER NEW RELATIONSHIP. AS FOR SOFIA... I DON'T THINK SHE'S PLANNING ON GETTING MARRIED ANYTIME SOON. THAT GIRL HAS AMBITION AND SHE'S GOING PLACES. I WANT TO LEAVE HER RUNNING THE RESORT. I THINK IT'S TIME TO PASS THE TORCH, AND HONESTLY, I THINK SHE'S ALREADY MORE CAPABLE THAN I AM.


IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE ALREADY THOUGHT OF EVERYTHING, HAVEN'T YOU?

I LIKE TO BE PREPARED WHENEVER I SUGGEST A PLAN. WHAT DO YOU SAY, ELENA?

HOW COULD I POSSIBLY SAY NO, NIKOS?


THAT SOUNDS LIKE THE MOST WONDERFUL PLAN I'VE EVER HEARD!



AND SO, IT HAPPENED...

I AM A WOMAN...

NOT JUST IN BODY. NOT JUST ON PAPER.
NOT JUST IN THE WAY OTHERS SEE ME.
BUT IN MY VERY SOUL...

I STILL REMEMBER THAT DREAM... THE NIGHT APHRODITE HERSELF APPEARED TO ME, WHISPERING HER OWN STORY OF HOW SHE WAS BORN FROM THE SEA FOAM TO BRING LOVE AND BEAUTY TO A CHAOTIC WORLD.

BACK THEN, I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND
THE MEANING OF THAT DREAM. BUT I THINK I GET IT NOW.
IT WAS MY MIND... NO, MY SOUL, TELLING ME THAT
I HAD FINALLY FOUND MY PURPOSE, MY TRUE SELF.

I USED TO BE A YOUNG AMERICAN GUY,
LOST IN A STORM OF CHANGE I NEVER ASKED FOR,
THINKING IT WAS A CURSE. BUT LOOKING IN THE MIRROR NOW,
I DON'T SEE A STRANGER ANYMORE. I SEE ELENA...

A GREEK WOMAN. A WIFE. A MOTHER. IN NIKOS'S EYES, I FOUND A DEVOTION I NEVER KNEW EXISTED. IN EVA AND SOFIA, I FOUND A LOVE AND A PURPOSE THAT MY PAST SELF COULD HAVE NEVER EVEN DREAMED OF.

I AM FINALLY MYSELF...

I AM FINALLY HOME!


YOU KNOW, NIKOS...
THERE'S JUST ONE THING I DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND.

WHAT'S THAT, MY LOVE?


THIS PLACE WE'RE IN RIGHT NOW.
DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU WROTE
IN THAT NOTE BACK THEN?

HUH?

WHAT IS GOING ON?
WHY IS THE FLOOR FULL
OF FLOWERS?



ELENA, NEVER FORGET THAT YOU ARE THE WOMAN OF MY LIFE AND THAT I WILL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR YOU. EVERY DAY IS SPECIAL WITH YOU IN MY LIFE. WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO ON A DATE? I HAVE A SURPRISE FOR YOU. I'M WAITING IN OUR SPECIAL PLACE. FOREVER YOURS, NIKOS.

OH, NIKOS, YOU MAKE IT SO HARD NOT TO FALL FOR YOU, DON'T YOU?

WHEN I READ IT, I SOMEHOW ALREADY KNEW WHERE OUR SPECIAL PLACE WAS. I FELT AS IF I HAD ACTUALLY BEEN HERE BEFORE. BUT... THAT DIDN'T MAKE ANY SENSE. AT THAT POINT IN TIME, IT WAS ALL JUST A MADE-UP STORY.

ARE YOU SURE WE HADN'T TALKED ABOUT THIS PLACE BEFORE THAT DAY? WE PROBABLY DID. IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT YOU'D FORGET, WITH EVERYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON.

BUT... I PREFER A MORE POETIC EXPLANATION, ELENA. WHO KNOWS? MAYBE SOME HIGHER POWER REALLY DID CONSPIRE TO BRING US TOGETHER. MAYBE THIS WAS OUR DESTINY ALL ALONG.

THE END