

Chapter Thirty-Nine

"Yes, I understand, Dimitri," Kerberos droned, while stretched out on his office couch, in the course of a tense telephone conversation.

"I have been made aware of a problematic person in your midsts, what are you doing about it?" Dimitri demanded.

"I am dealing with it," Kerberos hissed, while glaring at Ivano, who had just entered the room, taken a seat by the desk and began cleaning his fingernails with the tip of his dagger.

"You are d-e-a-ling with it? Come now, Kerberos, surely the devil's own can do better than that?"

"There is no clear threat at the moment, Dimitri," Kerberos said, while gesturing for Ivano to stop what he was doing, "and we have him on a short leash."

"Yes, yes I know all that but we have been down this path before with others and as I recall, disposal is not your forte."

"But ..."

"Do not question me," Dimitri angrily interrupted, "come to a decision quickly. He is either friend or foe, there is no other possibility."

"Of course, I will obey your wishes," Kerberos replied, but the line had already gone dead. In a fit of rage, Kerberos threw his cell phone across the room and rose to stand above Ivano.

"So, you are the spy," he growled, while pointing his long nailed index finger at him. "I've often wondered where Dimitri gets his information but this time there is no question."

Ivano smiled while wiping the tip of the dagger on his black robe. "I did not consider it spying," he said, "after all, we work for the same people."

Kerberos, momentarily blinded by a flash of light reflected off of the highly polished blade, turned back towards his desk and reached for a cigarette. "It is a matter of trust, my friend," he said, a calmness in his voice, "certain matters are best kept close at hand. You have made me appear weak to our superior by reporting a problem that in actuality may not exist."

"I'm afraid that I do not understand."

"It is possible, although remotely so," Kerberos remarked, while lighting his cigarette, "that young Michael may be telling the truth, in which case, our level of competence will be called into question."

"But if he is not?" Ivano asked, with an air of confidence.

"Then I have no doubt that you will relish in his disposal," Kerberos whispered, as he took a long drag on the cigarette and swiveled his chair to face the window.

Ivano stared at his back for several seconds, slid the dagger back into its sheath and left the room.

Ivano, generally self-assured, was not accustomed to self-recrimination but he found himself disturbed by the dressing-down that he had just received. That was entirely uncalled for, he said to himself, as he traveled the corridor away from his boss' office. The man is a sham, he has no greater court with the devil than I do ... his days are numbered. Moments later, he found himself outside of the entrance to the great hall. Hearing a sound from within, he peered around the partially opened double doors. Curious, he adjusted his robe and marched forward to the only occupied table. "What is the meaning of these tears?" he asked, hands on his hips as gazed down upon Mariel.

"It's nothing," she replied, while attempting to suppress her sobs.

"You are about to take the oath, there can be no secrets."

With a half smile, she wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and nodded affirmatively. "It's all just a misunderstanding," she said.

"What is?" he asked.

"Mick," she replied, while running a hand through her hair.

"I see, he suspects you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Well, we spies are often misunderstood, aren't we?"

"What do you mean?"

"It is not important," he said, while reminding himself to keep his thoughts in check, "tell me exactly what happened."

"He knows what I've been doing," she said, while blowing her nose with a napkin.

"Hmm," Ivano exclaimed, while thinking to himself that he had underestimated the boy. His expression softened as he chose a chair opposite hers and sat down. "What were his exact words," Ivano inquired.

"He called me a bitch and walked out of the hall."

"Hmm," he chuckled, "well, he wasn't entirely wrong, was he?"

"But you asked me ..." she said with indignation.

"Impertinence will not be tolerated," he interrupted, as he quickly rose and headed for the exit.

Once outside the hall and heading back towards Mick's room, he remarked to himself, I took him for a drone like the others-- perhaps I was wrong. He may prove useful after all.