

ANDREW V. KUDIN

The Black Swif



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Power is the goal, and they'll do anything for it.

The Soviet Union is on the verge of collapse. The communist regime is rapidly losing its grip on society. Criminal gangs battle fiercely for control of Ukraine's capital, plunging it into chaos and violence. Immerse yourself in a whirlwind of intrigue, betrayal, and moral dilemmas.

When a quiet young man from an intellectual family rises to lead one of the most brutal and bloodthirsty gangs in modern Ukrainian history, he is forced to confront life's eternal questions. What is love—and does it truly exist? What matters more: the pursuit of dreams and knowledge, or the ruthless accumulation of wealth?

Based on a true story, *The Black Suit* is a gripping thriller that plunges readers deep into the dark world of Soviet crime, unbridled passion, and patriotism—a place where understanding the past is the only key to surviving the present.

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ABOUT THE BOOK "THE BLACK SUIT"

(introduction to the English edition)

Today, few people remember that during Soviet times, the topic of organized crime was strictly forbidden. According to official ideology, crime simply could not exist in a country actively building communism.

Before Andrew V. Kudin, no one dared to openly explore this subject. He was the first.

In 1993, his novel *The Black Suit* was published for the first time—but only in an abridged form, censored by the authorities. Despite these restrictions, the book achieved phenomenal success: all 25,000 copies sold out within days. Today, this edition is considered a bibliographic rarity.

Many years have passed since then, yet *The Black Suit* has lost none of its gripping intensity. The novel is based on real events, and some of the names appearing in the text are authentic. Most characters and their real-life counterparts are no longer alive. Today, censorship no longer stands in the way, making it possible to publish the complete, original version of the novel—with minor author revisions—in 2025.

The Black Suit is a powerful story of love and loneliness set against the violent confrontation between two rival street gangs during the severe crisis preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The novel is compelling both historically and psychologically. The author, who holds two Ph.D. degrees, one in Law, with a specialization in criminology, and one in Philosophy and Religious Studies, has dedicated many years to studying criminal psychology.

Now, for the first time, this extraordinary story is available in English.

PART I





CHAPTER I

It was late evening, and Kiev was slowly sinking into an anxious, restless darkness. Outside the open window, the leaves whispered softly, idle witnesses to the quiet turmoil within. Pale, ghostly light spilled into the hallway, casting wavering shadows across the faded wallpaper. From the kitchen doorway, his wife watched him silently.

“Don't go,” she finally whispered, her words rough, brittle, and pleading.

He didn't answer immediately. His fingers trembled slightly as he tied the laces on his sneakers, each knot tightened as if this simple act could steady the shaking reality around him. But reality refused to remain still, slipping through his fingers like sand.

“It's necessary,” he murmured softly, forcing steadiness into his voice, steadiness he didn't feel inside.

She looked wearily toward the window. Across the street, beneath the pale glow of a flickering streetlamp, a car waited, its windows darkly tinted. From the apartment, she couldn't see who was inside. There were no license plates—as if the car were an unmarked ghost, eager to disappear into the silence of the night.

“At this hour?” Her voice shook slightly, disbelief blending with quiet desperation. “Please... think of us. Think of your family, your children. Oleg is a scoundrel. Why must you go with him?” Her words lingered between them, suspended like an unanswered prayer.

He straightened, carefully slipping his apartment keys into a side pocket. Tall and broad-shouldered, he carried himself with the quiet confidence of someone accustomed to physical strength. His short, dark hair, neatly trimmed in an athletic style, framed a face marked by a faint scar on his chin—a souvenir from a childhood fight. His deep-set, steel-gray eyes revealed little emotion.

Since childhood, he'd been nicknamed “Elephant” for his bulky frame and deceptive clumsiness—a nickname earned when he'd accidentally knocked over a table full of food during a birthday celebration. When he finally met his wife's gaze, something inscrutable flickered behind those guarded eyes—something she could neither fully grasp nor understand. “Oleg isn't a scoundrel,” he said quietly. “He's a friend.”

Before she could reply, he turned away and headed toward the door. She heard the quiet metallic click of the lock as it closed behind him.

From the window, she watched helplessly as her husband's shadow hurried toward the waiting car. He disappeared into the BMW, swallowed by the darkness. Then, as if mocking her silent pleas, the car's headlights flashed brightly, slicing through the night like two sharp blades.

The low, defiant growl of the engine filled the street, blending into the restless hum of the city, which tonight—as on so many nights before—refused to sleep.

At the same hour, in another neighborhood of Kiev, a similar scene was unfolding outside a different apartment door. Another man stood in the hallway, about to leave, the same quiet tension etched into his face.

“I won't be long, you know...” he said softly, almost apologetically, aware he was making a promise he couldn't truly keep.

The young woman nodded weakly, the silk robe loosely draping over the delicate curves of her naked body, barely concealing the smooth, inviting skin beneath. Her dark hair fell softly onto her shoulders, framing her eyes.

“I know,” she said softly, her voice distant and cold. Her words carried no emotion, as if she were utterly indifferent to everything happening around her.

For a brief moment, his deep, clear-blue eyes met hers, holding onto the warmth and comfort they had built over time. Those eyes had witnessed everything—days of quiet joy, nights filled with uncertainty, and all the subtle shades of passion and pain that bound them together.

“Say hello to Oleg,” she added quietly, genuine warmth evident in her voice. Clearly, she knew his boss well, and something in that casual phrase briefly stirred his jealousy.

He nodded mechanically, breaking eye contact. His thoughts had already drifted elsewhere. The man had the polished, Hollywood charm of someone naturally likable—the kind of appeal that effortlessly drew women's attention. With his looks, he might have found easy success as an actor—perhaps even starring in adult films. It was precisely this attractive, almost innocent appearance that had earned him the nickname “Angel.”

Again, the familiar sound echoed softly through the apartment—the quiet click of the front door lock marking the boundary between safety and danger, comfort and risk. Pausing briefly on the landing, man felt the familiar, subtle ache of leaving home behind. But there was no turning back now.

Taking a deep breath, he moved quickly down the stairs, pushed open the heavy door, and stepped out into the night.

At the far end of the street stood a four-story monolithic building, its barred windows casting harsh, yellowish light onto the wet sidewalk below. The concrete and steel structure rose silently above the city, indifferent and imposing. Inside, officers hurried from room to room, their footsteps echoing sharply on faded

linoleum floors. The crackle and static of radios filled the air, interspersed with tense, clipped orders.

In a cramped briefing room lit by glaring fluorescent lights, Special Forces soldiers secured heavy body armor. Weapons clicked into readiness—magazines inserted, safeties checked.

Near the lockers, a gray-haired officer silently adjusted his helmet strap, his fingers trembling slightly, betraying an anxiety he would never openly acknowledge. He was only a few months from retirement and had no desire to venture anywhere tonight. Opposite him, another officer sat on a worn wooden bench, meticulously tightening his bootlaces. The aroma of stale coffee drifted from paper cups scattered across tables cluttered with hastily scribbled notes and maps.

No one knew exactly where they were heading or what awaited them upon arrival. The orders had arrived abruptly, passed down from someone distant and unseen. They sensed rather than knew that beyond these walls, an invisible presence was closely watching every movement, every anxious glance exchanged, and every synchronized echo of heavy boots pounding across the floor.

Outside, the rain intensified, softly tapping against the windows as if counting down the seconds. Yet neither the rain nor the city cared one bit about the commotion inside.

A fine rain fell softly, settling onto the dark asphalt and catching in the hair of those gathered in the street. Passersby hurried along, casting nervous glances at the cluster of parked cars and the silent men standing beside them.

At that moment, a black BMW emerged from the shadows, its tinted windows reflecting the streetlights like polished mirrors of obsidian. It moved swiftly and smoothly. At the opposite end of the street, another line of cars waited quietly, their outlines blurred

by the gentle drizzle. As if on cue, men began stepping out, faces hidden beneath hooded jackets or collars turned up against the rain.

The BMW stopped precisely in the middle of the street, between the two rows of waiting cars. A man stepped out leisurely, seemingly unconcerned by the tension filling the air. A heavy silence settled over the street, disturbed only by the faint tapping of raindrops against metal and pavement.

At that same moment, on the opposite side of town, a completely different scene was unfolding. In the quiet solitude of a dimly lit apartment, two girls—first-year university students—sat absorbed in a movie. The soft glow from the flickering television illuminated fashion magazines tossed carelessly onto the couch and textbooks piled haphazardly by the bed.

Posters of popular foreign bands hung on faded wallpaper, while Soviet-era novels and neatly arranged videotapes lined the shelves.

“Oh my God, it’s so late! I promised I’d be home by ten o’clock...” one of the girls suddenly exclaimed, her voice trembling with anxiety and guilt. Her eyes darted nervously toward the old wall clock, and she pulled her sweater tighter around her slender shoulders, as if that might protect her from her parents' inevitable anger.

Her friend, lounging casually on the worn couch, playfully rolled her eyes. “Viola, relax—they’ll forgive you. Just tell them you couldn’t find a cab. That always works.” Clearly, she wasn’t overly concerned by her guest's anxiety.

Viola glanced at her friend from beneath long, dark lashes, genuine worry reflected in her brown eyes. “You don’t know my parents,” she whispered softly.

She picked up the phone again, nervously dialing the familiar number. Her heartbeat quickened with each harsh beep of the busy signal, amplifying her growing sense of panic.

“Still busy,” she sighed, frustration tightening her throat. It felt as if the universe itself was conspiring against her attempts to keep such a simple promise.

“Hey, calm down.” Her friend's gentle voice drifted lazily through the haze of cigarette smoke, mingling with the faint scent of vanilla perfume lingering in the air. “Look, there's always a cab on the corner. Finish the movie first, then go home. You'll see—everything will be fine.”

Two rows of parked cars lined either side of the street, forming a narrow corridor that seemed to converge at the heart of the city thoroughfare. In the center of this corridor stood a group of men beneath a lone streetlamp, its dim light filtering through the branches of overhanging trees.

“What do you want?” The words hung sharply in the air.

“You've stuck your nose where it doesn't belong, Oleg,” replied a heavysset man, his voice thickened by a strong accent. “Your people are doing business on my territory. If they trade here, they must pay.”

“Ahmed, who gave you the right to decide where I can or cannot go?” Oleg sneered, a note of contempt sharpening his tone. “This city doesn't belong to you, and Ukraine is not your country. Go back to the Caucasus and carve up your land in the mountains however you like.”

Headlights from approaching cars suddenly pierced the darkness, illuminating the tense confrontation. Gang members standing in the street stepped cautiously back onto the sidewalk, where chestnut branches stretched overhead, casting eerie patterns of dancing shadows onto the walls of nearby buildings.

“Why are we even talking to him?” one of Ahmed’s guards snapped irritably, his voice edged with hatred.

Oleg's gaze slid calmly toward the guard. His eyes held steady, filled with confidence and devoid of fear.

“You want war?” Ahmed's voice cut coldly through the strained silence, authoritative and uncompromising. “Oleg, my decision remains unchanged. You’re too young to interfere in my affairs.”

Steam rose lazily from the porcelain tub, fogging the mirror and softening the light of the lamps to a soft golden glow. Lali lay in the warm water, her long dark hair cascading freely over the porcelain rim of the tub, the damp strands lightly touching her bare shoulders. Her eyes were closed, her lips slightly open in silent pleasure as the drops slowly and sensuously dripped down her smooth olive skin.

The warm water enveloped every curve of her body. Her fingertips moved leisurely along her collarbones, traveling down to the soft curves of her firm breasts. She was enjoying the exquisite solitude.

The sudden ringing of the phone pierced the silence, reluctantly snapping her out of her reverie. Without opening her eyes, she gracefully reached out and brought the receiver to her ear.

“Lali? Hi, it's me, Karina. What are you doing?” - Her friend's voice broke through, tense and impatient.

Lali smiled lazily. “Just taking a bath,” she mumbled.

“O... Ahmed didn't call?” Her friend's tone didn't change. As if she knew the answer in advance. “I'm so tired of their overnight trips! I'm alone all the time.”

“I don't know. He doesn't obey me,” Lali replied carelessly.

“Mind if I drop by your place? I have a bottle of wine,” asked her girlfriend.

“Come on in.”

Lali carefully put the phone down and sank into the warm, luscious embrace of the bathwater. A slow smile spread across her lips in anticipation of her friend's arrival.

Her friend arrived surprisingly quickly. When the doorbell rang, Lali stepped slowly out of the bathroom, wrapped herself in a silk robe, and walked leisurely to the door, opening it without haste.

“Hello, dear,” her friend greeted coldly, brushing a strand of blonde hair from her face.

Standing just behind her were two unfamiliar men.

What is more dangerous—the avenue filled with the cacophonous roar of a crowd, or the quiet, unremarkable streets that silently beckon? Calm, inconspicuous streets create the illusion of safety, just as calm reasoning keeps turbulent emotions in check.

“Why bother each other?” said the man standing to Oleg's right, his voice soft and catlike. He wore a rough wool sweater and spoke soothingly, as if trying to ease the tension.

“Life in the underworld is hard—we all know that,” the man continued. “But there aren't many of us, and the city is huge. There's room enough for everyone.”

The man in the sweater and Ahmed were about the same age, both in their early forties. They shared a sturdy build and outward calmness, yet stood facing each other rather than side by side.

“Let's think this over and find a compromise,” the man went on gently. “You'll see—the conflict will resolve itself. By the way, you mentioned war. Rest assured, there are no winners in war. Everyone loses—some more, some less. Make no mistake about that.”

Her long, disheveled black hair spread across the white sheets like a tangled river of darkness, starkly contrasting with the pristine linens. Calm and fear mingled in her lifeless eyes.

Soft curtains fluttered at the open window, letting in pale, muted light that fell gently across the girl's face, casting an eerie glow. The bedroom walls, painted in the softest shade of lavender, whispered serenity.

The silence was broken by two male voices.

There was a note of regret in Elephant's gruff voice. "She looks completely innocent."

Angel shrugged indifferently. "She was just an animal in a skirt."

Elephant slowly ran his palm over her naked, still-warm breasts, then gently closed Lali's eyes.

"Beautiful," he murmured softly. "We should've fucked her before we strangled her."

Angel smirked coldly. "It's not too late."

"Stop it," Elephant replied, sharply jerking his hand away. "I don't do corpses."

"I don't think Lali would mind," Angel responded without emotion. "Besides, she's still warm."

Elephant gave him a wary glance and stepped aside. Sometimes he couldn't tell when Angel was joking and when he was completely serious.

At the same moment, across town, the movie ended. Viola got up reluctantly, feeling anxiety clenching in her chest. She dialed her home number again, but her parents' phone was still busy.

"God, I'm walking right into a storm," Viola muttered nervously. "I completely forgot to warn my parents I'd be late. They're going to be furious."

Her friend merely shrugged, not paying attention. "They'll get over it," she replied lightly, clearly oblivious to Viola's concern.

The girls stepped outside. The air was colder, with the faint odor of wet leaves and distant rain. The city was in shadow, silent except for the occasional rumble of cars passing in the distance.

Viola looked anxiously at the empty road. Not a single cab was in sight.

“Oleg,” Ahmed said slowly, a poorly concealed threat lurking in his voice, “I hope we won't have to meet again.”

Oleg smiled, his expression calm, revealing nothing. “Who knows,” he replied casually, as if it were something trivial. “But one thing I can promise you—everything will turn out for the best.”

He was skilled at hiding his true feelings behind a relaxed mask.

At that moment, car headlights sharply, slicing through the darkness. Their intersecting beams threw shadows onto the wet pavement. Silently, the figures behind Ahmed and Oleg dissolved into the night, leaving only a heavy, unsettling silence behind.

“I'd crush that bastard,” Ahmed hissed through clenched teeth, anger finally spilling out. Only now, sitting in the car after negotiations, did he let his true feelings surface.

“Did you see how they tucked their tails?” muttered one of the fighters from the back seat, a note of respectful admiration in his voice.

The burgundy Honda rolled onto the Patona Bridge, gliding quietly through the sleeping city toward Ahmed's home.

“Call the chief of police tonight,” Ahmed instructed the heavysset driver casually. “Thank him, and tomorrow drop off the money—for covering us today.”

A man in a warm gray sweater sat in the back seat behind Oleg and looked anxiously at the road ahead. His name was Gosha, and he was Oleg's counselor. Today he had managed to relieve the tension during the negotiations with Ahmed's gang and prevent a shootout. An experienced criminal with three prison terms under his belt, Gosha didn't like to take unnecessary risks. He was valued for his cunning and feared for his guile.

"You'll kill us if you drive like this!" snapped Gosha suddenly, clutching the seat as their car swerved dangerously into the opposite lane, narrowly missing an oncoming truck. "We're going home, not to the cemetery!"

"Slow down, Rakhit!" ordered Oleg sharply to the driver, thinking hard about something.

The needle of the speedometer gradually drifted to the left as the car slowed down. In the back seat, Gosha slowly relaxed, carelessly reaching into his pocket for a cigarette.

A short telephone conversation.

The gray-haired policeman exhaled with relief as he removed his armored vest. "Stand down, everyone," came the order.

A four-story building. Iron bars on the windows. People exhausted by constant tension. Today the cops didn't have to move out. Tomorrow, or perhaps in a few days, they would again put on their body armor and pick up their weapons. For most police officers, this routine was the essence of their existence. Holding a gun gave a man strength—a pleasant, intoxicating illusion of power. Yet, it remained only an illusion. Most police officers were puppets, and puppets weren't supposed to question who pulled their strings.

Far away, in a richly furnished apartment, a stout man sat at a kitchen table. He wasn't yet fifty, but heavy life experience had

carved deep lines into his face, making him look much older. His police uniform lay carelessly across the back of a chair. Wisps of cigarette smoke drifted lazily upward, dissolving near the ceiling. He didn't know the men who followed his orders, and they didn't know his name.

An ordinary apartment building on the left bank of the Dnieper. The entrance was slightly dirty, and the stairwell hadn't been cleaned in a long time. Ahmed had once put great effort into ensuring the adjacent apartments belonged exclusively to his gang members, not random neighbors. In this building, Ahmed had no reason to fear. Yet his animal instincts still whispered to him: stay vigilant.

Instead of saying goodbye at the door to the bodyguard who lived one floor above, Ahmed entered the apartment with him—a habit he usually avoided. Ahmed glanced quickly into the living room, then moved cautiously to the bedroom. A floor lamp near the bed cast pale, sickly light onto a crystal vase filled with artificial flowers. Lali lay motionless, her face turned toward the wall.

Ahmed switched on the lights in the bathroom, kitchen, and toilet. The bodyguard, rubbing his short nose impatiently, shifted his weight from one foot to the other in the doorway. Ahmed had grown overly suspicious lately, and it often got on the bodyguard's nerves.

"Something wrong?" the bodyguard asked, barely hiding his irritation.

"You'll pick me up tomorrow morning," Ahmed replied calmly. "Don't oversleep."

The door closed behind the bodyguard. Ahmed stood silently at the bedroom doorway, unbuttoned his pants, and stepped toward the bed. Something about Lali's position—her unnatural stillness—bothered him. He leaned closer, intending to examine her, when suddenly, as if struck by a powerful electric shock, he

collapsed backward onto the floor, convulsing, unable to utter a sound from the excruciating pain.

Quickly and efficiently, someone unfamiliar slipped a plastic tablecloth beneath Ahmed's twitching body, careful not to stain the carpet with blood.

Two voices spoke quietly above Ahmed.

Elephant's voice trembled slightly, though it retained its rough firmness. "I envy your nerve. I could never do something like this..."

Angel answered softly, wearily. "At the end of their conversation, Oleg promised Ahmed that everything would turn out for the best." He paused, looking down at Ahmed, then smiled—a wide, open smile, chillingly devoid of warmth.

"You have no idea how much trouble I'm going to be in!" Viola exclaimed, almost crying in frustration. Still no cab in sight.

Suddenly, a BMW with tinted windows swung around the corner, sped past the girls, then abruptly came to a stop. The car slowly reversed, pulling up beside them.

"Where are you headed, girls?" asked a young man sitting beside the driver.

"Nowhere," replied Viola curtly, her eyes fixed firmly on the empty road ahead.

"My friend doesn't get into cars with strangers," the second girl said pointedly, her voice deliberately loud, though she studied the dark-haired fellow with undisguised interest. He grinned, clearly enjoying her attention.

"Haven't we met before? No? Strange, considering we all live in the same town..."

There was a brief, uncertain silence. The brunet opened the car door.

“Get in.”

Viola hesitated. An unspoken question hovered heavily in the air: Should she go or not?

“Just go,” her friend urged loudly. ““Go ahead, don't worry. If they try anything stupid, we'll track them down easily by their license plate.”.”

After another moment's hesitation, Viola hugged her friend and climbed into the car. The BMW took off sharply, vanishing around the corner seconds later.

Viola's friend watched the spot where the car had disappeared, muttering quietly in bewilderment, “A car without license plates. Strange...”

The left bank of the Dnieper. The streetlights were broken, but today their absence didn't matter. The clear sky flooded the buildings with cold moonlight, coloring everything in pale silvery hues. The silence here seemed unnatural, and casual passersby rarely wandered into these deserted night streets.

Ropes descended silently from a darkened sixth-floor window. Two bagged bodies slid down, slowly spinning through the air. Strong hands gently picked them up, cushioning the landing as if it were something fragile.

Two silhouettes appeared at the open window and stood still for a moment. In the silence of the night, distant sounds - the faint barking of a dog, the distant rumble of a passing car - became discernible. Then, one by one, the two figures smoothly descended the ropes.

A moment later the ropes fell to the damp grass. The night fell into silence again, undisturbed, as if nothing had happened.

Under the bridge near the metro station, a traffic police officer waved down a car with tinted windows. The BMW obediently slowed.

“ID,” the officer said, leaning toward the driver's window.

Without a word, the driver slipped a crumpled bill into the policeman's pocket and stepped on the gas. The officer paused for a moment, then leisurely walked back to his patrol car.

“Will there ever come a day when I stop running into cops?” Rakhit sighed, shaking his head as the speedometer steadily climbed upward.

Viola sat quietly in the back seat, feeling anxious. Finally, she broke the silence. “Are you always this rude to people?”

“He had an unhappy childhood,” Oleg replied, turning to her with a faint smile.

“What is there to discuss politely with cops?” Rakhit snapped sharply. “They're just rats sniffing around for easy money. No self-respecting man would wear that filthy uniform.”

“Not everyone's the same,” Viola said quietly, feeling awkward, as if she'd stepped into unfamiliar territory. “Cops come in many forms.”

Oleg openly studied her long brown hair cascading loosely down to her waist, her short skirt, her shapely legs. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, he gently ran his fingers along the back of the seat, as if it were the girl's bare back.

“Spend enough time rummaging through garbage, and eventually you'll start to stink, too. That's how it is with cops—they chose their fate, and now they've got their special odor,” Oleg remarked thoughtfully.

Viola glanced around critically. “Your car isn't exactly fresh either. It smells like smoke.”

Oleg raised his hands apologetically. “Neither Rakhit nor I smoke. We dropped off a friend just before meeting you.”

The BMW drove smoothly into a quiet neighborhood on the outskirts of the city.

“That's my building,” Viola suddenly said, pointing at a high-rise ahead.

Circling a flowerbed, the car stopped near a row of pay phones. Viola anxiously reached into her purse, searching for money.

“Here, take this,” she said softly, holding out the crumpled bills. Her heart was beating faster now.

“Pretty fingers,” Oleg murmured, his gaze lingering on her hand.

“That's not good enough,” the driver teased, smirking.

Viola felt irritation mix with anxiety. She added another worn bill, pressing her lips tightly together. “Enough now?”

“Forget about the money,” Oleg said calmly, ignoring the bills hanging awkwardly in midair. “Give me your phone number instead.”

Her breath caught. “I don't give my number to strangers. And I never meet people on the street.” Her voice trembled slightly, revealing her uncertainty. “Just take the money.”

But the money remained untouched.

“Then let's get to know each other properly,” Oleg insisted gently, sensing her hesitation. “When are you free?”

Viola paused briefly, her nerves fluttering. “I'm busy,” she said sharply.

“All day?”

“Until six.”

“Then let's meet at seven.”

“Where?”

“In the city center. At the Khreshchatyk metro entrance.”

“I might not come,” Viola whispered, unsure of herself.

Oleg smiled knowingly. “Are you always so cruel?”

“Goodbye,” Viola said abruptly, stepping quickly out of the car. Her heart raced as she hurried toward the driveway.

“She won't come,” Rakhit remarked lazily, watching her disappear.

“She'll come,” Oleg replied confidently. “Trust me, she'll be there.”

The streets of the city gently dissolved into the embrace of night. A soft spring breeze drifted through the window, tenderly brushing Viola's long brown hair as she lay in bed. Her eyes, still open, lingered thoughtfully on the distant stars and their quiet, silvery glow.

“He's kind, very charming... but a little rough,” Viola thought with a touch of sadness. A faint regret tugged at her heart as she wondered if she'd ever see him again.

Unconsciously, her hand slipped slowly down along the inside of her thigh, coming to rest gently between her legs. Her breathing softened, becoming steady and calm, while her long lashes fluttered downward, carrying her thoughts on wings of desire into the sweet depths of sleep.

“Oleg, you don't need me anymore tonight?”

“No, Rakhit. Get some rest. I'll see you tomorrow.”

Without waiting for the elevator, Oleg quickly climbed the stairs to the third floor. He paused briefly on the landing, listening as the metal elevator rattled past him on thick cables. He never trusted elevators—they reminded him of traps that could suddenly stop between floors at the most inconvenient moment.

As soon as he stepped into his apartment, the telephone began to ring. Oleg picked up the receiver and heard Angel's voice, soft and weary, as if coming from the underworld:

“Everything's done, Oleg. You don't have to worry.”

Above the desk hung an icon. For a long moment, Oleg's dark, authoritative eyes stared into the gentle, forgiving gaze of Christ.

“Forgive me, God...”

END OF EXCERPT

This preview contains pages 1–24 of the complete volume.

The complete edition comprises 192 pages.