

Toast

Dimitar's bodyguard was sitting next to Tanas on the back seat while Dimitar was sitting next to the driver. They have put Stavros on his bus to Tsarevo and were driving to Varna in silence. The big car was swiftly gliding along the seaside road and the hum of the conditioning system was making the passengers sleepy. They were each in their own cocoon and reluctant to come out. After the first few kilometers the bodyguard had relaxed a little that Tanas was not a menacing maniac at least openly, Dimitar had breathed deeply trying to get used to the role of the responsible brother and the driver was glad that the old man was staunch enough to refuse a lift directly to his hut in Vassiliko. Few minutes before the outskirts of Varna Tanas broke the silence:

'Where are we going first?'

'Home. I will let you get home, you freshen a little, may be get a nap and if you like I will send a car for you to bring you to have dinner with us.'

'Who are "us"?''

'Me and Valkuda. Then we will talk and I will answer all your questions. There are some documents also.'

'For me to sign? Am I not supposed to be impaired?' The mockery was there in his voice before he could put a damper on it.

'No,' heaved his brother, 'I want you to see them. They are personal and concern you.'

'How intriguing!'

'Tanas, for once in your life, make it easier for both of us, will you!' Dimitar could hear the rasping notes but did not want to stop them.

'If you say so!' The older brother's smile was enigmatic. 'Where is the grieving widow?'

'Left after the funeral. Said she wanted to be alone for a while, but there is a way to contact her if there is something to settle with her.'

'Something to settle? She owns a sixth part of my company now and so do you!'

'We will discuss it tonight, let's wait!'

Tanas did not like the tone of his brother's voice. There was a shot more of a mystery that he would like. May be their father had gone to the extreme length to write that will after all and the property would transfer directly to him. That would be a nice change instead a bitter dispute with the blondie over the dolls and the rags. It would show his father's commitment. Tanas had not expected to find it so soon, but since his grandfather's death and deception the question had inevitably risen. His father had said that he intend to prepare a will completely in favor of Tanas and that would be a simple matter. He had insisted that even if he married again and again, his priority was his son, so may be he had really meant it. The day was already half over so it would not be wise to discuss it in front of his brother's staff.

The afternoon nap did Tanas a lot of good - he woke up refreshed and ready for whatever the fate could throw his way. He shaved, had a cold shower and decided to leave all business for the next day. He needed to know what exactly the world knew about his sudden disappearance before he embarked on meeting people. No doubt his absence from his father's funeral had not been unnoticed but as not a living soul had shown up at the hospital chances were Dimitar had somehow managed that part as well. Tanas was curious and strangely calm. A week ago the silence of the house would have grated on his nerves yet at the moment it suited him best. He chose not to wear a suit but made an effort to press his trousers and silk shirt. He looked at himself in the bathroom mirror and had the faint feeling that it was not him reflecting at it. The shirt was such a classic cut that the man in the silver depths could have been his grandfather, much younger than the man Tanas remembered, of course, but there were portraits around Tanas Sr.'s house that showed how much the two were alike physically.

The promised car arrived at six which was early by the local customs. Upon arrival at the big house Tanas was lead to the roof terrace. The table was set for three people. The ears of the support staff had been eliminated if the setting was to tell him something. Dimitar emerged looking as grim as a thundercloud. Again Tanas saw the tension lines that have not been there at Easter. However he did not have much time to dwell on it as the door opened again and Valkuda came in. She was startlingly beautiful in a simple green sundress with her hair loosely pinned instead of pulled tight in her ordinary bun. Tanas stood up and smiled with a pure male appreciation. Then he caught himself that he did not feel anything else towards her! That

was news to him, he had spent so much time hating her together with his father and just in few short days he had lost it completely. He searched inside himself for the resentment and bitterness but it had gone. He found something else - the thought that she was as trapped as he had been in a net of deception and hatred that drained the soul. She was younger than him yet her eyes looked somehow ancient, as if they belonged to a woman who had lived for thousand years and none of them had been a happy one. Tanas thought about Stavros's question - what made her tick? Did his brother know? By the look of him he had no idea but he was definitely frowning on Tanas still standing waiting for Valkuda to sit. She approached boldly and offered him a hand to shake which he did than turned to look at the strange ring she was wearing.

'Shall I guess that congratulations are in order?' he crooned politely.

'Well, I meant to tell you today but did not want to do it before the guys. We are getting married in few weeks. Would you like to come?'

'I would not miss it, if the bride has nothing against, of course!'

'The bride will reserve judgment for the moment. Any chance we all can sit and have something to eat as I have not had lunch yet.' Valkuda was all business.

They served themselves and Dimitar asked Tanas what he would like for a drink.

'You have soda of some kind, preferably not over sweat?'

'No alcohol with it? I have a decent cognac, vodka, wine and the entire grandpa's cabinet downstairs.'

'Oh, the old man had a pretty decent collection as far as I am aware. What did you send him into the grave with?'

'Courvoisier special but it was from a friend of his. Are you at least going to drink champagne with us, to toast our engagement, or your doctors said no?'

'The doctors did not say anything and I will drink a glass of bubbles but you mentioned documents and I want to have all my brain cells sober.'

'Dimitar!' There was a warning in Valkuda's voice.

'Val, stop it, he will survive, I am telling you!'

'I doubt a glass of wine will knock me down, Miss Martinova, let's go!'

'I am not talking about champagne and he knows. Well, if you are going to be my brother-in-law, may be you should call me Valkuda. Can we first eat at last?'

The conversation slid into praise of the food and complains about the hot weather that was melting the asphalt on the streets. The talk was accompanied by some awkward stretches of pause when Valkuda and Dimitar were exchanging furious gazes until Tanas roared into the sky, 'Kids, if I am preventing your full-blown lovers' quarrel that you need to practice for your future married life, please let me know and I will go home wagging my tail happily. But stop throwing daggers, figuratively speaking, or I will get a bad impression of engagement bliss in general. Dad was not a good example either, don't spoil it for me, I am to go there yet!'

That was so uncharacteristic of Tanas that both Dimitar and Valkuda stopped immediately and stared at him as if they were not sure how to react. The young sculptor started opening the champagne. When the flutes were full, Tanas stood and offered an even more puzzling toast.

'I wish you both to be happy and never to forget to look for what makes you tick and what you hold dear instead of confusing it with what holds you! To both of you!'

He drank and smile.

The heat was still smothering the town but the sea breeze was making a difference and the terrace was shaded. Tanas had one more sip and put down his half-full glass. 'Back to business, little brother! Let is clear it one by one. What did you tell the town about me being in a madhouse?'

'I told them that you have had a heat stroke and probably had popped a small blood vessel in the brain but it had been resolved. Given grandma's history of strokes it was not disputed. I told them that you have been in the neurology as the doctors needed access to some equipment and properly chastised your staff for not getting you to the proper department right away. That explained the absence from the funeral as the doctors feared relapse too soon. That is all. I asked them to leave you alone as you needed calm and time to heal. That is it.'

'Very generous of you. Having a mad brother would probably be easier for you but I am glad that you did not take that way...'

'You would not have done it to me either!'

'I would not have been so sure until recently but under the circumstances may be not now. If the engagement ring that my future sister-in-law is sporting is any indication I had not been very far away telling

the doctors that I have seen a dragon, may be I have been looking at her ring and got an idea. The trouble is that I cannot remember a thing about those two days, not a single thing. The last thing that I know is that we are coming to Brashlyan.'

'To tell Dimitar that your father intends to kill me. Were you in the conspiracy together?' There was steel in the voice of the green-eyed goddess across the table.

'No, I think Dad had never done such things with someone, not even with me. He had always been alone - he said and insisted he would not need me. I am curious how you overpowered him or it was an idle threat that he told me to use as a bargain chip.'

'No, it was not, but I will prefer it to remain between your father and me then! You have enough on your plate already!'

'I would politely disagree and hope you have hidden some dessert in that fridge over there. Thanks to you I was so well fed in the hospital, I am kind of used to it.'

'There is a double chocolate cake inside, you are right!'

'Very good, give it here!'

Like a screen in a cinema when the film machine had suddenly stopped, Valkuda did not move. She sat in her seat looking at Tanas relaxed in his captain chair and could not breathe. In front of her the man was not Tanas Jr. - she could not shake the feeling that it was Tanas Sr. as he had been some fifty years before at the same place and probably behind the same table. If the portraits could leave their places, she could swear that it was Tanas Sr. who had come out straight from the small frame on his working desk. There he was sitting at a table in the same relaxed pose next to a smiling beautiful woman. The faces of both were illuminated with that shared laughter that made the viewer hope to hear the joke no matter how outdated it might be. The couple looked like they were Olympians and there was not a single worry that may ever hang above their heads. It would be years before the spark would be gone from her eyes to leave the hollowness reflected in his. It would be decades before Valkuda's boss would look above his spectacles at her and say "Very good, give it here!" referring to that blasted estate-settling power of attorney that had shattered her own life again. Valkuda fought the irrational thought but it was hard as it was the first time ever she had had a civilized conversation with Tanas Jr. and for the first time she had to acknowledge how much alike the two

Tanases had been. What had happened in the short space of few days in the madhouse? She was too intelligent to believe that it was a result of medication so there should have been something that had triggered changes as unexpected as snow in August. She prayed that it would last for Tanas's sake as much as for the sake of all the people who would share his life, herself included. The young woman inhaled sharply and went to bring the cake.

The two men at the table were looking at her and would have been rather surprised if they knew that they were thinking exactly the same - that Valkuda was looking at Tanas as if he were the ghost incarnated of their grandfather. The elder brother found it mildly amusing after the afternoon encounter with the mirror while the younger one tried with all his might to stifle the nauseating wave of jealousy that was churning his insides. He tried to reason with himself that it was not fair to blame his brother for reminding Valkuda of Tanas Sr. yet reason was the last thing that he was capable at the moment. Dimitar was aware that it was petty but remembered his grandfather's phrase that all was fair at love and war. But of course, his brother had yet to read his file and find out for himself what the so called love may do to a person. There was no need to wait any longer, was it? He stood up and brought to the table a small file which he put in front of Tanas.

'No!' said Valkuda forcefully. 'Have your cake first!'

'If there is nothing that I can mar I think I can handle both, and you see, it has my name on it! So if you will be so kind to cut me, say, a modest quarter of that cake I will be much obliged...'

Tanas opened the file and started reading first the neatly penned list on the front page then the documents one by one.

Minutes passed and the quarter of the cake was put back in the fridge by the practical Valkuda as chocolate started melting untouched. Dimitar was sitting with impassive face and waiting. Valkuda was sitting there in case he needed her help and trying not to look at the man absorbed in reading. It was her who had found the file when the bank manager had given her access to Dimitar's dad private safe. She had taken out the wads of cash which surpassed her estimates in times, some jewelry, some gold and a file bearing Tanas' name on it. Her first thought had been that those were documents related to the estate of Tanas Sr. so she

had had no qualms opening it. She had realized her mistake fairly fast and had tried desperately to forget the discovery as it defied human logic. It was a dossier on Tanas Jr. starting with his few school reports on various bullying accidents and the police reports on few minor troubles he had been involved in, meticulously numbered and stored in protective plastic sheets. The following sheets contained notes, some handwritten, some printouts and some documents signed by Tanas Jr. Samples of his signature. Claims for unpaid bills which Valkuda knew were later paid by Tanas Sr. Newspapers' clips of horrendous stories concerning Tanas Jr. but somehow not mentioning his father. Photos, much more than the dirtiest, most yellowish newspapers could ever dream of, definitely private ones or private investigator's ones as sometimes they came in series. But the worst were the last few pages. They were full of researches of lethal doses of common prescription medicines in a combination with alcohol. Dissolution times, symptoms, accumulation, periods of elimination, detection, survival chances, first aid efficacy. Several prescriptions in Tanas' name fulfilled in obscure small pharmacies all over Varna for the last three months with increasing doses. Careful cross reference was showing that the lethal dose was a question of one or two prescriptions more. The last page was a list of what to remind Dimitar after Tanas' death - childhood memories with several subparagraphs added at different times as the ink was different, mother's betrayal, bad financial situation left after the pomp lifestyle that had been ruining the security business.

It did not take a genius to figure what the loving father had planned. Tanas Jr. had been as good as dead in around a month time. Hardly a soul would dispute the theory that after his grandfather's death the young man had gone depressed and was sitting secretly on drugs strong enough to knock a horse, then accidentally had swallowed more and drank a little in excess. Until someone had found that he was actually not drunk but dying it would have been too late despite the heroic first aid by his desperate father who would have been close. There would have been melodramatic scenes for Dimitar's account later. The future grieving parent had either not thought what he would do with Dimitar or he had taken the plans with him to the grave.

Should the file come into his possession before he had met Stavros, Tanas' reaction would have been a blast of atomic bomb proportions. He did not want to think what he would have done to his personal Ivan the

Terrible but there were little doubts that one of them would not have come alive of the encounter. Somehow the long solitary hours in the madhouse had been a blessing and a safety cushion. Like his grandfather, Tanas needed very little sleep and had spent the time thinking. He had come to the understanding that he had been wasting a good life in a chase of a chimera. He remembered his grandfather's diary and the bitterness of three generations of his ancestors who had run after the power and the riches only for the third to find how futile it had been and to find it when it had been too late to start anew and really have a life and not a long distance running. None of them had lived how he had wanted, pursued what he personally had dreamed about, what made them tick, as Stavros had said. They had followed a fairytale but the real life did not have fairytale's endings stored around. No doubt that financial stability made life easier - but there was a limit when the first replaced the second. His grandfather grudgingly had left him an income - peanuts by his father's standards but a fortune according to Stavros. It would have to be sufficient to keep him afloat while he was trying to come to terms of what he wanted really to do further. The file in his hands was the last cut. It did not bode well to know that for the man he had been wasting his life for Tanas had been no more than a bargain chip. It did not bode well to know that his life was weighted for how much he would be worth alive or dead and the dead one had turned more profitable. But Tanas was glad he could laugh at the subtle irony of the Parkas - his father's wish to get him out of the horizon corresponded exactly with what Tanas had planned to do in his last night at the hospital. Yeah, "The Moor has done his work, the Moor can go." Tanas put down the file and a thin smile stretched his full lips, 'Thank you for keeping it private and for showing it to me, I appreciate it!'

It was Dimitar's turn to be astonished. He had already braced for the fury and the eruption and the broken china, had carefully planned a speech on the subject, had the bodyguards ready in the next room and here Tanas was smiling like he had told him a relatively worn-out anecdote! That was the same Tanas that a week ago was spitting threats like there was no tomorrow. The same Tanas who had looked at his watch and said with glee "Fifteen minutes and ticking!'. If it was not completely impossible he would think that his brother was possessed or abducted by aliens and replaced. But he had received daily reports from the hospital and he knew that Tanas was even off any medication so his temper was on his own. He had to ask the doctors who the psychologist had been who worked with his brother with spectacular results. The doctor

was worth another visit. Dimitar had no idea how to handle the new Tanas. The young sculptor had just started to come to terms with the old personality and out of the blue the change was dramatic. He sighed.

'Who took my cake?' The tone was somewhere between mildly amused and mildly insulted. Valkuda jumped and brought his piece from the fridge. Tanas raised his fork and asked, 'Are you not getting some, I have only a quarter on my plate? Or you ate all the rest while I was entertaining myself?'

'There is some more if you wish after you manage this one,' Dimitar said. 'Are you sure you don't need a drink to wash it down?'

'No, do you?' The undertones in Tanas' voice were not benign. He chewed his first bite and almost purred with pleasure. 'It is really good cake to be spoiled with other tastes. Stay away from my share of the rest, will you?'

He forked another piece.

It may have been easier to fool Dimitar with his nonchalance but the third chair at the table was occupied by someone who knew better. Valkuda knew the signs - the angle at which Tanas' fork attacked the cake, the stiffness of his shoulders, the rigid straightness of his back while seemingly relaxing in the heavy captain's chair, the silent slam with which his water glass hit the tablecloth. She had spent years in the immediate vicinity of Tanas Sr. and had learned the body language very well. It was grating on her nerves to see the similarities as it was a painful reminder of the elder Tanassov yet it was somehow comforting to see again the grace of the long fingers which strength could bend the fork with no effort. The young woman did not want to accept that her judgment had been prejudiced as it would mean that her grandfather had been right again. Tane had insisted that Tanas Sr. had not been looking at his elder grandson at the right angle and there was more in the boy than the people around him saw in general. While telling her that she should be the next guardian he had cautioned her that a prejudiced judgment could result in wrong conclusions. Tane had insisted that her life will be intricately woven with Tanas Jr.'s one and the young woman had fought hard to keep from laughing - she had loathed the boy since she had been in diapers. She had been drilled that no Tanassov should have the ring for himself as the amalgamation may produce disastrous results - yet Dimitar had had it, saved her life and returned it to the rightful owner. Was it possible that she had been myope during all those years or had Tanas Sr. influenced her better judgment? It was unreasonable to think that

Tanas Jr. had changed radically in the space of few days. She recalled the hostility, the resentment, the sarcasm emanating from the elder grandson towards his grandfather, the bursts of temper, his abominable behavior in more than one instance. The young woman's excellent memory pulled scenes like they were unfolding in front of her at the moment. She tried to concentrate on Tanas' face in them but something kept creeping in and distracting her - his father. He was always present, lurking in the background, rarely acting himself but nothing went unnoticed by his cold stare. Tanas Jr. had been the vocal one but that diverted attention from the man behind him. Like ice daggers other details dug into her memories - her informants among the security company that Tanas Jr. and his parent ran, were afraid of the son and terrified by the father. Tanas Jr. was a negotiator, his father was the closer. The logic of the few schemes to wrestle parts of Tanas Sr.'s wealth was not the impatient noisy one of his grandson - it was cold calculation and careful planning. Valkuda had managed to detect it due to a combination of knowledge of the business and some long-term bribing which paid at the end. She felt stupid for rolling Tanas Jr. and his father in one batch - it showed that she had been watching and not seeing something vital. Tane would not be impressed with her results in protecting and taking care.

'You two had never seen anyone eating cake before? Or you are trying to hypnotize me out of my next portion? You could say something for a change!' Tanas was halfway through his piece. Dimitar and Valkuda looked at each other and burst laughing. Up to that moment the evening had been much easier than they have anticipated. Maybe with some luck it would continue in the same way.

'While I am chewing you may answer some questions as you so kindly offered today on the road!' The flints in Tanas Jr.'s tone clinked.

"So much for the easy luck!" tensed Dimitar.

'I would like to thank you for the intervention in the security company under the circumstances!' Tanas Jr. was speaking to Valkuda. 'I will appreciate if you let me know your position about it.'

'I have not have much time to go in depth with the books and it was not for me to do it either. From what the day-to-day management is concerned you have some pretty decent long term contracts and some abysmal people as a staff. I am surprised that the company is not much more profitable than it looks according to what I saw. I know it is your business but it seem to me that you should not take that much profit out of it at

the moment. Your car park is relatively sound but you will need to buy some more vehicles in a year or two max and I doubt you have stashed money for it. You have also a gross imbalance in payments and some payments are made to people who I could not find and the accountant refused to discuss with me, saying that it is between you and your father.'

'I am sorry for the interruption but you are saying we are paying to people who do not report to work?'

'Yes. They are on your payroll but they are not in the shift's schedules and nobody seems to have seen them working. However they are receiving their money on a biweekly basis like everyone else. I have not seen them signing as the last payment was the day your father died and they presumably had been already in the office to get their envelopes. The next payment is due next week so I suppose you will be signing the documents.'

'What else you found to bother you?'

'Well, I would have never employed some of the people who work for you. No training, little understanding of complex tasks, not exactly groomed, to say it mildly. Wherever they go, they come in your name, so they are a business card of sort, and these business cards may use some ironing as well as some shaping. If I were you, I would make a mandatory yearly or semi-annually evaluation and try to purge some of the worse. There are decent people around who will replace them gladly. You cannot serve the bigger contracts with people like your Velev or Pashev and I doubt you have so many incidental calls to keep them occupied full time. Granted, the week was a complete mess with your father's funeral and your absence, but I got some idea of the dynamics. Besides...'

Dimitar kept losing the line in their conversation as he was getting more and more frustrated. His brother and fiancée had fallen so effortlessly in sync over a business venture as if someone had wiped the years of hostility between them with a magic eraser. The young sculptor wanted to shake each one separately and yell, 'Hello, he came to use you as a bargain chip! Hello, she had been instrumental for you to be penniless!' Apart from a brief question whether he would like another piece of cake, Valkuda had not paid him a minute of attention - she had concentrated solely on the stupid security company in trouble. Few pins had come out of her loose hair, she had already produced her omnipresent notepad and pen and was drawing some table. Tanas had pushed aside his half eaten second slice and the chocolate couverture was sweating despite the

evening breeze. The elder brother had rolled his sleeves and was arguing some point, flexing his fingers. The day before Dimitar would have been alarmed that those fingers would circle Valkuda's neck in a mortal grip. At the moment he was not sure whether he would prefer the mortal grip to the sinuous caress with which his brother traced the diagram on the page. Dimitar remembered that Tanas and Valkuda had only four years difference while attending the Economic Faculty, so they could have met there. He wondered whether their animosity did not spur from an affair gone awry or some other unresolved matters while they were both studying. Tanas the student had bragged constantly about the girls hanging around for his attention but Dimitar could not recall names. Whether Valkuda had been one of his brother's conquests he did not recall as at that time the last thing to be interested was her. He wished he had paid more attention to his brother then. Afraid that he was making the same mistake at the moment, Dimitar stood up and stretched. Valkuda looked at him.

'As the two of you the economists are going to talk your professional jargon that we the mere mortal sculptors do not get, I am going to go to bed. You will not mind as you would not have noticed at all anyway.'

'No so fast, little one! You said you will be answering questions! I believe Valkuda and I are almost finished and then it is your parliamentary session!'

'You mean you really expect my fiancée to shut up and be quiet?'

Tanas shrugged and looked apologetically at Valkuda, 'That is a question of personal preference. I doubt the discussion about Father would be of any interest to you but I doubt there is anything you two do not share respectively whether to stay or to leave is up to you.'

'I will stay.'

'Then we may start with the business part, I guess. Did you find any will to start with?'

'I have not touched your father's personal papers, but there wasn't one in the safe. Nobody had come forward with one either.'

'I doubt he had made one although there were talks about it. That means that now I will have to talk Mila and you into selling your shares to me. If I am right, that makes a one-sixth part each.'

'You are not right. It makes one-third each.'

'How come? I own half, so father's half is split between the three of us - a third to Mila, the rest equally between us, right?'

'According to the documents, you have sold him the company - at around the first prescription.'

'I have not! And none of these prescriptions are mine, damn it. Who witnessed the transfer?'

'Margaritov, your notary.'

'So they were in it together, then. I will have to go to court and prove that my signature was forged.'

'No need, Mila does not want anything to do with the company and neither do I, we will transfer it to you for a lev each.'

'Thank you, but I don't want charity.'

'It is not a charity, it is returning stolen goods. Valkuda will arrange for it, we talked about it.'

Tanas stole a glance at his future sister-in-law. She was furiously scribbling some notes in her pad, her mouth compressed into a line of disapproval. She was just saddled with one more task and Tanas, who had pretty good idea what her schedule was with his grandfather, took pity of her. She did not look like a happy bride, more like a working horse that had had one too many rides. The glow that he had initially took for happiness looked more like a thickly veiled rage. She had lost some weight and her sundress was a little loose. What was wrong with her - she had the ring on her finger, she had the right Tanassov on road to marry her, she was about to own half of what she had helped put together for years, she was about to fulfill his grandfather's dream of being his daughter-in-law albeit posthumously for him. Tanas' sober brain cells were seeing misery where content should be. They were seeing more - that his brother had no idea about it. Dimitar had assumed that the empire their grandfather had dumped on him was an outright gift, had adopted the rule to reign but not govern and dumped in his turn the governing part on the girl's shoulders. His grandfather had worked an exhaustive schedule despite his age and that meant that for the moment Valkuda was working for two. Tanas Sr. had never left ends hang loose but even the day-to-day management took time and was bound to wear her out sooner or later. What a waste of a beautiful woman - and one with brains that was not so often found around, Tanas thought, at least Grandpa had appreciated her. He turned to Dimitar, 'Thank you, I think I can manage that. You mentioned that you have contact with Mila, I will need to know when she will be available to sign. I think I will use your notary to save time and anxiety.'

'The rent of the house you live in is paid until the end of July and the lease is in your company's name. The owner had called and said he had tried to cancel it several times as the rent is ridiculously low, but he had no legal means to do it. Do you intend to keep it?' Valkuda did not stop scribbling while asking.

'No, I will meet with him tomorrow and will arrange to cancel the lease.'

'Where are you going to live then?'

'I am not quite sure yet. I have been looking for a place of my own for a while but have not settled on anything as of yet. I have five more days anyway. Will let you know. Next question - will you spear me your manager for tomorrow morning to go over her findings in the security business. I want to clear this up. I will pay the consultant's rate, of course!'

'I think you will not refuse, Val. You did so much work there!'

'What time?' Valkuda was still writing and did not look up.

'I suppose you have your own work to attend to first, so whatever is good for you is good for me. I will be waiting for you in the office. Don't worry, I will be sober and safe.'

'Will you?' Her murmur was so low that Dimitar who was getting some ice from the cooler did not pay attention. Tanas caught the look of the green eyes at him and chose not to answer.