



PUPPET MASTER

POV: *Ryder*

I'm sitting behind my desk, staring at the camera footage of the dance floor. I knew she'd be here tonight. She's wearing a short black dress that barely covers her sweet, round ass. I want to carve my name into it and watch the blood run down her legs.

There's a knock on the door. I look up from the screen.

"Yeah?" I say through gritted teeth. I hate being interrupted when I'm busy with my little doll.

Gino steps inside. "Boss, we have a problem."

"For fuck's sake, what now?"

He shifts nervously, eyes flicking to the screen behind me for a split second before looking away. He knows better than to stare too long.

"It's the Russians. They're at the back door, asking for a meeting. Something about a delivery being late."

I lean back in my chair, jaw tight. My gaze drifts back to her—twirling on the floor like she does not have a care in the world. Like she doesn't know someone's watching. Like she doesn't know I own her.



"They can wait."

"Boss —"

I shoot him a look sharp enough to slit a throat. "I said they can wait."

He nods silently and closes the door behind him. I press my fingertips together and exhale slowly. This girl... this fucking girl is going to ruin me. But not before I ruin her first.

I zoom in on the footage just as some idiot puts his hands on her waist. My vision goes red. Touch her again, and I'll make you eat your fingers.

She laughs, head thrown back, eyes gleaming, completely unaware of my gaze. The guy's hand lingers too long on her hips. My jaw clenches so hard it aches.

I tap the intercom. "Gino. Dance floor. Now."

His voice crackles a moment later. "You want me to bring her up?"

"No," I growl. "Get the asshole in the white shirt with the wandering hands. Take him to the basement. Make sure he walks out with a limp."

There's a pause. "Got it, boss."

I lean back, satisfied for now, fingers drumming on the desk as I watch the footage like it's a private show made just for me. She's mine. She just doesn't know it yet.

She turns suddenly, like she feels me. Her eyes scan the room, her smile faltering for a second—just a flicker of confusion on her perfect face. My chest tightens. She knows. Somewhere deep down, some part of her senses me. Watching. Waiting.

I wonder what she'd do if I walked down there right now. If I wrapped my hand around her throat, pressed her against the mirrored wall, and whispered her fate in her ear. Would she run? I hope she does. I love the chase.

I rise from my chair, my hand adjusting the hard line pressing against my zipper. She does that to me without even trying. I grab my coat from the chair and slide my gun into my waistband — not because I plan to use it, but because men like me don't get the luxury of walking around unarmed.

I take the private elevator down to the floor behind the VIP lounge. My footsteps echo in the narrow corridor. The music grows louder with every step. I open the door to the private room and join the men who are waiting for me.

"Good evening, gentlemen. I hear there's an issue with the last delivery."

The man with the large scar across his face responds, "Yes. There's no delivery. We have a client for her, and he's not happy she hasn't arrived yet."

I close the door behind me and take my time lighting a cigarette, letting the silence stretch just long enough to make them uncomfortable.

"No delivery," I repeat slowly, blowing out a cloud of smoke. "That's a bold complaint to bring into my house."

The scarred man doesn't flinch, but I see the tension in his jaw. The others stay quiet—smart. They know who's in charge here.

"She was scheduled for last night," he says. "Our client paid in full. He expects quality."