

RAZOR'S EDGE

AMERICAN YAKUZA III

A woman's face in profile, wearing a black hood that covers her eyes and forehead. She has bright red lips. The background is dark with a subtle light flare behind the hood.

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Chapter One

Luce's head bobbed back, waking her from a sick, twisted nightmare where a Russian sadist cuffed and beat her. But it wasn't a dream.

She jerked her arms, which were twisted around the rungs of the chair she'd been intimate with the last couple of days. Her shoulders screamed in agony, frozen from being tied behind her back. She tried one more time to escape from the metal bracelets. The blood from her raw wrists coated her palms as she tried to push one side off and then the other.

No use. They were as tight today as they had been when Petrov placed them there. She just needed one minute to kill the bastard.

A slight draft wafted through the dark, dirty room. The smell of urine, blood, and her own sweat hovered around her the way warm fog on a humid Southern night levitated over the surface of a pond full of scum. She pushed her tongue against the nasty, bloody rag Petrov had shoved into her mouth when her wails of pain became too loud. When she'd spit it out and told him to go fuck himself, he'd slapped her, almost knocking her out, and tied the gag in place.

It wasn't as if the noisy neighbors were going to say anything. They'd fought a battle royal every night she'd been here. Bottles crashed against the walls, and sobbing women had lulled her to sleep, when she could sleep. She suspected she was in one of Petrov's whorehouses, judging by the constant yelling in Russian. Every once in a while she caught a Russian female voice, but other than that, she heard mostly men screaming and women crying.

She couldn't stand her own stench. What she wouldn't do for a shower. Her stomach cramped again. Great. Her period was coming. She couldn't cut a break, even if she had a dozen pairs of rusty scissors. Since they weren't giving her a shower, she doubted they'd provide any feminine products. *If they'd only open a window.*

Wasn't this rich? How could the head of one of the biggest crime families sit trussed up like a Christmas pig just waiting to be put out of her misery? She knew how. Her mind had been wrapped around a beautiful brunette who'd just fought the fight of her life and was just barely coming back from a vicious attack, thanks to that bastard Frank. The fog of revenge was edging further in on her thoughts, trying to shove out everything else, but she needed to stay focused on getting out of the room and saving her own life.

Luce pushed against the rag, hoping for just enough room to push down the bile threatening to spew. "What a way to go," she muttered. "I'll die drowning in my own puke."

Pulling in a staggered breath, she was sure she had at least one broken rib and probably a collapsed lung. The pain ebbed through her chest, each breath becoming shallower than the last. It felt like a knife was wedged between her ribs. That was the least of her worries as she looked down at the revolver and the single bullet that sat on the coffee table in front of her. Problem was, Luce doubted she'd survive another round of Russian roulette. Her number was bound to come up. She needed to devise a plan, fast.

For two days she'd taken a beating and now had a hard time making out anything in the room. Her reward for being stubborn. She refused to tell Petrov where his wife and daughter were—bargaining chips to get her hands on Frank—but maybe she should reconsider her options. She'd hoped Frank would be the one to eventually come in and mete out her punishment.

No luck, so far. Clearly Petrov was saving all the fun for himself.

"Luce." Petrov's voice boomed as the door slammed against the wall. "Jesus, it stinks in here."

She tried to follow him as he pranced around the room. Just two minutes. She just needed one hand free and two minutes. Then he wouldn't be strutting around like the cock of the walk. She envisioned her hand digging into his throat, his windpipe between her fingers and thumb. She could almost hear the soft, squishy bits popping as she squeezed, choking the life out of his sorry ass. She'd take pleasure watching him die in front of her. That's what kept her alive, that and Brooke. A pang of relief settled her. At least Brooke was somewhere safe and out of Petrov's reach.

"How is that sweet little sister of yours? Mei, right?" His broken English assaulted her ears. He'd made a point of trying to have a conversation with her each time he came in, but it was always one-sided. Her contempt for him kept her mouth locked shut. Responding to the arrogant prick would only spur him further, and she wanted this over, one way or the other.

Luce rolled her eyes and looked away, dismissing him.

"What's that?" Petrov said as he lowered his head close to her face. "God, you stink. What would Brooke say if she could see your filthy ass now?"

Luce turned her head toward him and blew her nose. A smattering of blood spattered on his face. Within an instant, a stinging slap snapped her head back. Her reward for the defiant gesture.

"I got to give it to you, Luce. You don't give up," he said, wiping his face. "I should put you in one of my whorehouses. With that body, those exotic looks, and that tenacity you would be a hit. Once you healed up, but then, you know? Funny thing about men. They like to beat on women, and well, we know you can take a punch. Ehh?"

"Uck you," she mumbled around the gag.

"Yes, yes. Petrov knows you want to fuck him, but honestly, you're not my type. Now where is my wife and daughter? Tell me and I make this quick, no spinning cylinder. I just put bullet..." He stuck his finger between her eyebrows. "Here, da?"

"Iss off."

"Ha, ha. Good for you. Tell you what. If you survive this round, which I doubt, I let you take a piss in the bathroom instead of that bucket." He pointed to the paint bucket in the corner responsible for much of the stench in the room.

Petrov picked up the revolver and made a dramatic show of swinging the cylinder open. He spun it.

Zip, zip, zip.

He pushed the single bullet into one of the chambers and slapped it closed. Short, shallow breaths kept pace with the tick, tick, tick of the cylinder as he spun it again.

Luce remembered the same exact scenario playing out in the past, but it was her father who sat on the business end of a revolver.

Luce could see the muscles working as JP clenched his jaw tight. He was going to be a pain in her ass until she dealt with him, and she now had her grandfather's permission to handle the issue he'd brought upon her family. As she looked down his chest, she caught a glimpse of chrome pop out from under his jacket. Reaching for the gun, she pulled a .357 revolver from a shoulder holster. She shot Sammy a look and shook her head. It pissed her off that he'd missed something so potentially dangerous. She would deal with that disappointment at another time. This time was reserved for a family reunion that wouldn't end well.

"You're such a fucking cowboy, JP. A chrome revolver. Really? How come I'm not surprised?"

Hefting the weight in her hand, she noted the pearl handles. Her father was never a practical man, from what she remembered, and his choice in guns confirmed he still had an even bigger ego. Pushing JP's head forward as she released her grip on it, she took a step back and turned the gun over in her hand. It was impractical, clunky, and more of a showpiece than a working piece of equipment. Nothing like the .380 she had strategically placed back in her waistband.

As she rolled the cylinder, the light reflected off the ridges of the spinning barrel. She pulled the catch and emptied the bullets from the gun. Luce made sure JP was watching as she slid a single bullet into one of the chambers. She made a show of closing the cylinder with the flick of her wrist. Hearing it lock, she spun the cylinder again. When it stopped, she looked at her father.

"So, tell me again why you're here, JP."

Pointing the business end at her father, she cocked her head, squinted her eyes, and waited. If he was scared, he didn't show any sign of it.

He looked down the barrel pointed at his forehead. "You wouldn't dare."

"Oh, but I would. Now, let's try this again. What are you doing here, and don't make me ask again."

Luce pulled the hammer back one click, feeling the hatch pattern on the hammer bite into her thumb. One more click back would make the gun ready to do what it was made to do, kill. Locking eyes with JP, she willed her stoic features not to change. In fact, she hardened her stare at the one man she hated more than Petrov.

"I wasn't doing anything. I was having a drink in a club, relaxing. I didn't know it was one of your grandfather's."

"It isn't one of his. It's one of mine, and I think you knew that, didn't you?"

"Since when do you have the money to own a club?"

"Since my grandfather made me oyabun. I own everything now, JP."

"Well, this changes things, now, doesn't it?"

"Not for me."

Another click of the hammer, and it was ready to do her bidding. She was in control of her father's life, and she liked the feeling. Her heart was beating so hard she could hear it pounding in her ears as the blood rushed through her body. She had waited for this moment for decades, and she wasn't about to be denied. Putting the barrel against his thigh, she moved close enough that her nose was almost touching his. She wanted him to look her in the eyes when he lied, again.

"Last time. Sure you don't want to change your story?"

"You won't shoot me. I'm your father."

Luce looked at her genetic maker and smiled wickedly. She hated him more than anything on this earth, and here he was toying with the idea that he could play the "daddy" card. Could he actually believe that somehow, being his daughter, she would give him a pass for all the things he had said and done in her life? Oh, was he going to be disappointed. Luce pulled the trigger, and the empty pop echoed throughout the warehouse. It was his lucky day.

Karma was a bitch, wasn't it? Well, if she had her way she'd make it her bitch today.

The muzzle of the barrel pressed against her temple, just as it had every day for the past two days. She shifted, planted her feet firmly on the floor, stiffened, and sat up ramrod straight. She thought of her father as he looked straight at her, the barrel of his chrome deliverance pushed

against his head.

“Just like you to go out like Yakuza.”

“Uck you.”

The click of the hammer being pulling back echoed through the room like a death knell. Looking straight ahead, she took a slow, deep breath and held it. The ension was so thick it was hanging like moss from a Southern oak. She could see Petrov was getting off on the dramatic display. A smile creased his greasy face.

Suddenly, it was as if someone had hit the slow-motion button on the world as she caught sight of Petrov’s finger pulling the trigger.

Bang!

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“God damn, you’re one lucky bitch, Potter.” Petrov laughed, slapping Luce on the back. Her insides were jelly. And if she didn’t know better, she thought she’d wet herself. She had dodged a bullet, literally, and time wasn’t on her side. A cramp exploded through her body, doubling her over with a groan.

“Okay, okay, no need to be so dramatic, Luce.” Petrov snapped the cylinder open, dropped the bullet into his palm, and looked at it. “Must be a magic bullet. Ha, ha.” He shoved it in front of her face for a look, then placed it back on the table just as he’d done the past two days.

“Pee,” Luce choked out, reminding him of his promise.

“Okay, okay. Petrov is man of his word. I’ll send one of my guys in to take you wee wee.” He said the last part of the sentence in a singsong, childlike voice.

“Mmm,”

“What?”

“Mmmm,” she repeated.

He reached up and pulled the gag off, and she spit it out. “Pee now.”

“Patience, Grasshopper.” Petrov laughed uncontrollably at the reference.

“Fuck you,” Luce, defiance coloring her reply.

SWACK. Petrov backhanded Luce.

She tongued the broken lip, the coppery taste of blood coating her mouth. He reached down and squeezed her chin between his beefy hands, forcing her to look up at him.

“Do you kiss Brooke with that mouth? You really should be nicer to your captors. I’m the only reason you’re still alive. And I’m not finding myself able to put up with more bullshit.”

Luce tried to avert her gaze. The sight of him made her want to puke on purpose.

He jerked her face back and forth. “Look at me when I’m talking to you, bitch.” He held her face while he backhanded her again. His knuckles connected with her jaw, rattling her head. “I said, look at me.”

Luce’s eyes were so swollen she could barely see his face, but she could feel and smell his hot breath on her own face. Whatever he’d had for lunch wasn’t agreeing with him.

“See. Two bosses can be civil to each other. Da?” He pinched her chin tight before releasing it and pushing it away from him. “You know, Luce, you’re still beautiful woman. Perhaps we can come to agreement...you know...” She could feel his lips moving her hair over her ear as he spoke. “How do they say? Quid pro quo. You give me something. I give you something.”

She wasn’t giving this bastard anything, except maybe a knife in the gut. If he was lucky,

she wouldn't twist as she jerked up on it and cut the fat bastard.

"You promised me I could go pee. Are you a man of your word or not?" Her voice sounded like gravel being rubbed together. She swallowed hard, but what little saliva she had burned as it went down.

Petrov sneered. "Petrov always man of his word." He stalked to the door, practically pulling it off its hinges as he opened it. After he yelled something in Russian, Luce heard chairs scraping against the floor and feet running in different directions. At least two other people were in the house, not good odds for someone in her condition.

"Someone will come to take you to the toilet."

With that Petrov was gone and yelling more Russian. Luce had to come up with a plan, and quick. Otherwise she was sure the next time he raised a gun, he'd make sure she was dead. At least that's what she would do.