

The Girl From Moldova

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Chapter One. Marco

When Marco heard from his wife Paola, that his father wanted to come over for a coffee, he knew something was going on. Probably something not particularly good. They hardly ever spoke. They hadn't really spoken for years, not that they ever had very much even when he was a child. His father had always been hard on him, and on his mother. He had been a real bully with them. Then after his mother's death, from a tumour, their communication had dropped off to almost zero. If they had to get in touch, for some reason or other, they would usually do it through Marco's wife. Marco really disliked seeing him, it brought up too many painful memories.

'What did he actually say?'

'I told you, just that he would like to come for a coffee this afternoon, to discuss something with us. That's all. I asked him what it was all about, but he said that he would prefer to talk about it in person.'

'How did he seem?'

'Marco, I don't know! He will be here in a couple of hours. You'll see for yourself.'

Marco was a slim man, always a bit nervous. He wasn't a very strong looking man, and his face always wore a worried expression. He was relatively good looking, and always tried to dress well, and look after his appearance, but the overall impression he gave was that of a weak, anxious person. Marco wondered what his father wanted. He knew it would be something big, his father hadn't been to his house in years, many years. His father, Antonio, would only see his grandson, Alex, when Paola would arrange to go to his place, or to meet somewhere. At 42 years old, Marco still hadn't managed to get over the difficult relationship he had had with his father as a child. Now he probably never would. Back then they spoke through his mother, Valeria, now through his wife, Paola. Luckily for Marco he had found a strong woman in Paola. She was no great beauty, but she had the inner strength that he lacked. It was Paola who managed the household, and made all the day to day decisions. Marco just wasn't very practical, and lacked the tools to run, efficiently, the family's affairs. While he was more than happy to let Paola organise these things, he inwardly blamed his father for his inability to take charge.

When he was a child his father had always tried to push him, actually bully him, into doing things he didn't want to do. For example playing aggressive sports, like rugby, which he hated. Also he sent him off on camping trips, organised through the church. Marco would plead with his mother to not have to do these things, but sometimes even she was unable to stop his father's constant bullying. Now, his feelings towards his father were a mixture of hatred, and fear. He preferred to not have to meet him face to face, because it reminded him of all his bad experiences as a child, growing up. He still

remembered, vividly, that time when as a boy of ten years old, his father took him to do a walking trail, in the hills. Halfway into the walk, right in the middle of the bush, his father sped up his pace, walking ever faster. Marco tried to keep up, but after a few minutes found himself alone, in the middle of nowhere, with no one around. He had called out for his father, but had gotten no reply. When he could walk no further, he fell to the ground, crying desperately. After a while, he managed to continue along the trail, but then found himself at a fork, one trail going one way, and the other, in another direction. With a great feeling of panic, he tried going up each of the trails a bit, looking for his father. Then he would return to the fork. Soon he couldn't even remember which trail he had come along to get there. In desperation, he lay on the ground crying. Eventually his father returned, grabbed him by the shirt collar, and fairly dragged him back to the car. On the way home Marco was sobbing uncontrollably, as his father drove in silence. When they returned home, and his mother found out what had happened, a mighty row broke out between his parents. He ran to his room, and tried to block out the yelling voices.

Even now, after so many years, Marco still hated the countryside. He had a fear of getting lost, with no one to help him. He didn't even want his own son, Alex, to join the scouts. Even in the age of scoutmasters with GPS trackers, and smart phones, he still had this great fear of his son not being able to find his way home, and being lost in the wilderness. His father had been such a bully, that the fear from those days still lingered. Paola understood his difficult relationship with his father, and, being a strong woman, had no problems with being the intermediary between them. Luckily his mother had been a strong woman too, and she had shielded him from his father, as much as she could. It was eight years now, since she had died. He still missed her, every day. It had happened right at a time when things had finally come good in his life. He and Paola were not long married, and she had been expecting their son, Alex, when, in the space of little more than ten days, his mother had died from a brain tumour. At first she had complained of severe headaches, but by the time she was correctly diagnosed, it was just too late. It was all so sudden. Luckily he had had Paola to help him through that period. Even though at the time she had been pregnant, she had always been a rock that he could rely on. Since then, his minimal contact with his father had become virtually zero contact. Now for some reason, he wanted to come and talk to them. Marco was dreading the meeting. He just knew it would be something bad. The anxiety was building up in him. With his father, there never was anything other than bad things. It was a Saturday afternoon, and Alex was at home from school. Not knowing what his father wanted, he and Paola had decided it would be for the best if Alex wasn't around. They had arranged for him to go and play at a friend's house. In any case, that was nothing out of the ordinary on the weekend. Alex would often be at his friend's places, or they would be at his. Their house was in a new subdivision, mainly populated by young families. The house itself was a two story, detached home, with a small garden at the back, and parking, off street, in the

front. It was a very safe place for kids, and they would play freely in the local park, with one or another of their parents taking turns at watching over them.

Paola had bought some little cakes to have with the coffee. Marco didn't even like that. He didn't want to encourage his father to stay any longer than was absolutely necessary. He heard a car pull into the driveway. He left it to Paola to go and open the door, while he waited in the lounge room. He heard voices in the corridor, and in walked his father, together with a frumpy, blonde woman. She looked to be in her mid 40's, little older than Marco and Paola.

'Hello son, I would like you to meet Nastya. Nastya, this is my son Marco.'

Marco's father was everything that he was not. A big man, exuding strength, never one to be intimidated. He carried himself with great surety. Even in his early 70's he was in good shape. He still had a good head of hair, now gray, and a good looking, well defined face.

'Hello. Marco. It's pleasure to meet you. Your father has told me all about you.'

The woman had a strong accent, seemingly from a country in east Europe.

'Hello, it's a pleasure.'

Marco looked over at Paola, inquisitively. In reply, she shook her head. She didn't know what was going on either.

'Look, there's no point in beating around the bush. Nastya and I are going to get married. The wedding will be next Saturday, and we would like you all to be there, if you wish. If you prefer not to come, we will understand. It's up to you.'

Marco was stunned. He had known nothing good was coming, but this? This, he hadn't expected.

'You're going to get married?'

'Yes, we haven't know each other that long, but we both love each other, and we want to get married.'

Marco stood there in silence. He just couldn't believe what he was hearing. Paola jumped in with something.

'Congratulations to the two of you! Where are you from, Nastya?'

Antonio answered for her.

'She's from Moldova. She has been living in Italy for about twelve years.'

'Where did the two of you meet?' asked Paola, trying to keep the conversation flowing, while anxiously keeping an eye on Marco.

'It was fate, really. We bumped into each other outside a supermarket. I wasn't looking where I was going, and I bumped into her, making her drop her bag of groceries. I felt terribly embarrassed about the whole thing, being so clumsy, but she didn't mind at all. I helped her collect her shopping, and we just got to talking, and, well, it all started from there.'

Marco could smell a scam when he saw one. The Moldovan woman was obviously looking for an old rich man to marry. Someone to sort out both her citizenship problems,

and her economic situation, all in one hit. A burst of anger went through him.

'Dad, you are 72 years old. Don't you think she's too young for you? It looks like she's around my age. What the hell are you doing? You realise she is probably after your money, don't you?'

'How dare you talk to me like that! You have never shown any respect for me, ever! And what way is this, to talk in front of a guest? Your mother would be ashamed of you! Listen, you useless prick, we love each other, and we are getting married. End of story. Either you come to the wedding, or you don't. Whatever you prefer. Either way is fine for me. Come on, Nastya, let's get out of here!'

With that Antonio and Nastya left. Marco looked at Paola. Both of them were stunned into silence. Neither could believe what had just happened.

'And he's got the cheek to say mum would be ashamed of me? God only knows what she would think of him!'

'Let's leave your mother out of this, eh? Maybe it's true. Maybe they do love each other. Anyway, it's probably good for him, all alone in that big house.'

Marco looked at her in anger.

'Yeah, all alone in that big house, that will become hers, when he dies. Everything mum put up with, everything she did for me, will just go up in smoke. That fat, ugly bitch isn't going to steal my inheritance from me. For mum's sake, I won't let her!'

'In any case, I think you should consult a lawyer, just to see what the legal situation is. These things can be complicated. It's probably better to look into it straight away, before the wedding.'

'Oh, don't you worry! I'll do that alright. I just can't believe it. All my life he has treated me badly. And mum. And now, now he pulls off this stunt. I don't know what I did to deserve a father like him. I'll tell you one thing. You won't be taking Alex to see him anymore, that's for sure!'

'Listen, Marco, I know you are upset, but you can't use Alex as a bargaining chip. He loves his grandad, and Antonio dotes on him. However he treated you, he is nothing but nice to Alex.'

'Well, we'll see about that.'

Marco was so angry, he couldn't sit still. He started pacing around the room.

'That bastard! Listen, I'm going for a walk, to try and make sense of all this.'

Marco headed out of the door, his wife looking after him, with a worried look on her face. She had never seen him so angry before. Although, in all truth, every time the subject of his father came up, he always got a little angry. But nothing like this. She knew this was going to be the beginning of a very bad period. Marco walked down to the park, and sat on one of the benches. It was a lovely day, there were a lot of kids playing happily, making a lot of noise. Marco felt so angry. After everything his father had put him through, now he pulls a stunt like this. His father had always bullied him, and his mother. Truth be told, he had had great misgivings when he had married Paola, and had

moved out of the family home. He had been very reluctant to leave his mother alone with him. He knew that she would then have to bear the brunt of his bullying, by herself. His mother had told him not to worry, she knew how to handle Antonio, and that it was time for him to make his own life, and start his own family. She had been such a strong woman. Now she was being replaced, with a money sucking parasite, latching onto a lonely old man. Marco vowed he wouldn't let her get away with it. He wouldn't let the two of them disrespect his mother's memory like this.

Chapter Two. Antonio

Antonio had worked hard, all his life. All he had ever wanted was to look out for his family, and provide them with all he possibly could. When their son was born he was over the moon. He couldn't have hoped for more. He had felt his life to be complete. He had the best of wives, in Valeria, and then a son as well. Valeria was a rock. She was a hard worker, and never complained about anything. She had a natural beauty that didn't require the use of cosmetic products, which she considered a waste of money. She was a strong woman, with whom it was difficult to impose your will. Valeria knew what needed to be done, and you could never shake that conviction. He soon understood that his wife was spoiling their son, Marco, but didn't mind too much. After all, he was just a baby, they would have time to raise him as a strong boy, later on. Antonio had grown up in the 50's, a difficult time in rural Italy. His family didn't have much money, and food, although always present, was never in abundance. He had started working doing odd jobs, almost as soon as he could walk. He couldn't remember a time when he hadn't been working. Even the meager amount of money he had brought into the family coffers, had helped them through those difficult years. He wanted his son to be strong, to be a good provider for his eventual family. Nobody was going to help you in this life, you had to do it all by yourself. You needed the ability to survive, to flourish, through the deeds of your own hands. He wanted to give his son the right mindset, so that he could go out into the world as a successful, strong man. It didn't take long before he realised that Valeria was spoiling Marco, too much. Whatever he wanted he got. With Antonio being away at work all day, he had difficulty imposing his will on the situation. No matter what he asked his wife to do, she would just keep on giving Marco everything he wanted. That was a recipe for disaster. That way you would turn him into a spoiled brat, incapable of making his own way in society. Those early years had turned into years of arguing. He just couldn't make his wife understand that she wasn't helping Marco at all. She was just making him less capable of surviving out in the world. Soft. Weak. Every decision about Marco's upbringing ended up in an argument. As the years passed he could see that their son was totally unprepared for life. He couldn't do anything on his own. Marco had become a mommy's boy, tied to his mothers apron strings. Antonio tried to get him interested in sport, but to no avail.

One time, when Marco was around ten years old, he took him out on a bush walk. It was an easy trail just a little way out of town. A short way along the trail Antonio hurried ahead of Marco, and hid behind some trees. He was watching him, to see how well he would react to the situation. Antonio hoped he would logically try and work out where his father had gone. In reality, he just fell sobbing to the ground. How was he going to make his way in life like this? His mother had totally ruined him. At an age when

Antonio had been working for years, Marco was not even capable of walking along a well marked trail. Angrily he had picked him up, and taken him back to the car. He just didn't know what to do. As expected, when they had arrived home, Marco went screaming to his mother. That set off another row. One of the many, where Marco's upbringing was concerned. All they ever did was argue. The reason was always the same. Whatever he tried, Antonio just could never seem to get his way. Marco was a lost case. It wasn't until Marco married, at 28 years old, and moved out of the family home, that Antonio found some peace. Finally the discussion wasn't always about their son. Finally they had some time to enjoy together, like they had in the old days, before Marco was born. Antonio and Valeria stopped arguing, and enjoyed the best times they ever had.

Whenever they could, they would go away for the weekend, or even take a week's holiday somewhere. Antonio fell in love with his wife again. He was so happy to be with her. They had lost many years disagreeing on Marco's upbringing, but now their marriage was back on track. Marco was now someone else's problem, and he and Valeria, could just enjoy life. Their lives returned to how they had been before Marco was born. The two of them always together, and their love strong. Valeria decided that they should learn a second language, and decided that it would be Spanish. Antonio didn't mind. He was just so elated to rediscover his wife, after such a long absence, he was happy to do anything with her. How they had laughed during their Spanish course! Both of them felt a bit silly speaking in another language, and it just cracked them up. Each time one would say something in Spanish, anything, the other would start laughing. One day, that happiness disappeared. Forever. Antonio would never forget that fateful morning.

'My God, Antonio, I have such a bad headache. I've never had anything like this before. Something is wrong! This isn't normal.'

'Have you taken anything? Maybe you just need some time for the medicine to take effect.'

'It started last night. Now, today it's killing me. Antonio, I'm scared! This is worse than any headache I've ever had.'

'Alright, let's go to the hospital. Don't worry, it'll all be ok, you'll see!'

Famous last words. Never had a statement been proved to have been so wrong.

From there, the march towards the end had started. At first, the doctors put it all down to just a bad migraine, and initially sent her home with some strong medicine. When it got even worse, they started to take it a bit more seriously, and did the appropriate exams. What they found was not good. What they found was the worst possible outcome. Valeria had an inoperable brain tumour. Valeria, being a no nonsense sort of person, told the specialist to give it to her straight. The specialist told them that the end would be rapid. Anything from a few days, to a few weeks. No longer. There was no treatment, just pain relief. Antonio felt devastated. He had only had his wife back for a few short years, and now this. He didn't think he could handle life without her. All his hard work, all those years wasted arguing about their son, and now this? Valeria, as

expected, took it in her stride. Her fortitude was endless. She remained strong, and had plenty of advice for Antonio. Even though she had just been given a death sentence, her first thought was for those she loved. Those she would leave behind.

'Antonio, I don't want you to fall into despair, do you understand? Living on your own would kill you. I know you don't want to hear this now, but eventually, I want you to remarry. Just because you find someone else doesn't mean you have to forget about me. But I don't think it will be good for you to stay on your own. Also, please, please try and mend some fences with Marco. At the very least, I want you to be a big presence in their child's life. I won't be around when he, or she, is born, but I want you to be there, for the two of us. Tell him stories about his grandma! Antonio, don't go to pieces on me! Promise me!'

'Ok, I promise. Listen, don't think about all that now. It's time for you to think about yourself, for a change.'

'It's too late for me. I can accept that. I want you to survive this. I want your life to carry on. This is not the end for you.'

Antonio pretended that he would do as she asked, but deep down, he knew he would never be able to mend those fences with Marco, and he knew he would never be able to find another woman like Valeria. After all they had been through together, how could she be replaced? He knew that his life would end, with hers. The only good thing to come out of it, if you could call that a good thing, was that Valeria died after a very brief period, barely ten days after the headaches started. At least she hadn't had to suffer for long.

Antonio went through the events after her death on auto pilot. He let other people organise the funeral, and the choice of the gravestone. That period was all a blur to him. Maybe, subconsciously, he had blocked it out, or possibly, the stress of it all had closed down his brain. In any case, shortly after her funeral, he found himself at home, alone. It just didn't seem possible that, after finally rediscovering the joy and happiness they had shared in the early years of their marriage, Valeria, his love, was now gone. All those wasted years, arguing over Marco's upbringing, came back to haunt him. Without a doubt, he had been too severe with his position, but Valeria had been too soft with hers. Unfortunately, they had never been able to find that middle ground, which would have been acceptable to both of them, and which would have made Marco more independent, and a stronger, more capable person. His already low opinion of Marco worsened, he blamed him for having ruined his relationship with Valeria. Before he had been born, and then after he had left home, they gotten on fine, not just fine, but fantastically. Marco had taken away his wife from him. He had ruined the bulk of the time they had had together. Antonio soon grew to despise Marco. On one front, he was able to keep his promise to Valeria. When Alex was born Antonio felt nothing but love for him. He wasn't to blame for his father's failings. On one of his visits to see Paola, and the new baby, in the maternity ward of the hospital, he waited until Marco left to sound out Paola.

'Paola, you know I don't have much of a relationship with my son, but I would really

love to be a part of Alex's life. Would you mind if I saw him? Would you help me, with that?'

'Of course! You, definitely must be a part of his life. You can tell him all about his grandmother, and the life you had together. Don't worry, I will organise everything. I know things are very difficult between you and Marco, and maybe you will never patch things up, but you definitely must be a part of Alex's life. A big part! That I can promise you.'

True to her word, Paola made sure that Antonio would see a lot of little Alex. Antonio just loved him. He always felt so sad that Valeria wasn't there to see him. Even as a little baby, he would show him photos of his grandmother, and tell him all about her. Quite often with a tear in his eye. He was determined to keep her memory alive. The years passed slowly, and painfully, for Antonio. He always felt so lonely. The only good thing in his life was when he would see Alex. By some great fortune, Marco had married a very nice person. Antonio was so grateful to Paola for letting him spend a lot of time with Alex. The rest of his days, and years, just seemed empty. He didn't know what to do with himself. He thought about dating, but it all seemed so sordid to him. He had no idea even how to go about something like that. Besides, he doubted he would ever be able to find anyone nearly as lovely as his Valeria had been. As the years passed Antonio fell into a routine. His life, whilst not enjoyable, at least had structure to it. It was a livable life, if not a happy one. All that was to change, in a moment of distraction.

One day, roughly eight years after his wife had died, Antonio was going to the supermarket, just to pick up a few things for dinner. Maybe he was thinking about what he needed to buy, or the next time he hoped to see Alex, in any case, in a moment of inattention, he bumped into a woman who had just left the supermarket, sending her shopping bag flying, with its contents falling to the ground. He quickly got to his knees, and picked up the fallen objects, putting them back in the bag. Feeling embarrassed about what he had done he blurted out an apology to the woman, a very pretty blonde, a lot younger than him. He felt terribly foolish about the whole thing, but she was very understanding, and didn't appear to be annoyed with him at all.

'I'm so terribly sorry. If anything is broken I will pay for it. I wasn't looking where I was going. Please, forgive me, it was just so stupid of me.'

'Please, not bother. Everything fine. It was really my fault. I should be more careful.'

'No, believe me, it was all my doing. Where are you from? You aren't Italian, are you?'

'I am from Moldova. I am here many years now. Italy is very pretty country, with very nice people.'

'That's so nice of you to say. You know, I would love to hear about your country. Could I buy you a coffee, and have a chat? I don't want to waste your time, but if you are not in a hurry I would love to hear about where you come from, and how you ended up here in Italy.'

'That would be nice. I don't have any Italian friends, and I would like to ask you some things, too.'

Forgetting about the shopping he had planned to do, Antonio went for a coffee with her. Her name was Nastya, and he realised straight away that he enjoyed her company, a lot. She was tall, and slightly overweight, but had a very pretty face. With her medium length blonde hair, and eastern European features, she looked absolutely lovely. After chatting for a couple of hours, Antonio asked if he could see her again, just to continue their conversation, and budding friendship. He never dreamed it would lead to anything other than friendship, she being far younger than him. He was just so happy to have found someone pleasant to talk to, a way to fill in the loneliness of his normal day. It was nice to be in the company of such a delightful woman. He realised immediately how it would look to the outside world. The old man with a prostitute, or maybe, with a foreigner trying to latch onto him for his money. He knew it wasn't like that. He felt so good in her company that he didn't care what people thought about them, besides, he had always been a good judge of character, and he believed her to be a very sincere, honest person. Right from the start Nastya was very reluctant to talk about her family, and her past. Antonio realised that it was a painful subject for her, he understood that she had not had a happy upbringing, so he didn't insist. He knew himself how painful some memories could be. He didn't like talking about Valeria, and the problems they had had with Marco. Before too long, their coffee meetings evolved into dinner out, or taking in a movie. One evening, after having dinner in a local pizzeria, they went for a walk. The evening was a bit cool, Nastya took his arm, and walked alongside him, their bodies touching. Antonio realised, in that moment, that his feelings for her were more than just friendship. He thought he was being a bit foolish, after all, she was around his son's age, but he just knew that he had to say something to her about how he felt.

'Nastya, I enjoy being with you very much. You make me feel alive. I know that I am far too old for you, but you are more than just a friend to me. Please, forgive me, if you don't feel the same.'

'You silly man! Of course I feel same. I didn't want to say anything, because maybe you think I want you for your money, or something.'

'I don't think that at all! I know that you are a very honest, genuine person. I would never think that.'

Nastya stopped walking, and put her hand on his cheek.

'I have never met nice man like you. You treat me like a person, you treat me with respect. You are good man.'

Antonio felt like he was 20 years old, he was so nervous. He really didn't know how to handle the situation, it had been so long since he had found himself in this position. He leaned in, towards her face, and lightly kissed her on the lips. He was so flustered he thought he had better get home, to think about it all. Could he really start a relationship, at his age? Could this be really happening?

'Come on, Nastya, I'll walk you home. Why don't we have a drink tomorrow evening?'

'I would like that. Why don't I come to your place?'

Antonio had butterflies in his stomach. He desired her so much, but he was just so unsure of how to proceed. It had been so long since he had been in a situation like this.

'That sounds lovely. I have some very nice wine, and I will buy us some snacks. Why don't you come over around 7 o'clock?'

She nodded in reply.

The next day Antonio was incredibly agitated, he could hardly sit still. He wanted to sleep with Nastya, but was unsure of how to make the right moves. By the time 7 o'clock came around, he was almost in a mind to call the whole thing off. He was terribly flustered. But then, when he saw her, on his doorstep, he knew it was going to go just fine. He could feel the tension in his body disappear. A warm feeling came over him. Her smile was just so beautiful, and genuine. He felt something he hadn't felt in many years. Love. Looking at her, in that moment, he knew that he was in love with her.

'Well, you invite me in, or no?'

In reply, Antonio embraced her, and kissed her. She felt so good in his arms. The evening that he had been so worried about, went smoothly. They had a glass of wine together, both happy and smiling without a care. Antonio no longer felt nervous. He no longer didn't know what to do. In fact, he knew exactly what to do. That evening was the best evening Antonio had had for a lifetime. In bed together, the two of them couldn't stop kissing, and cuddling. He now had the one thing that had eluded him in these lonely years. Happiness. He knew that he would never be alone again. After so much sadness, and loneliness, Antonio was reborn. Nastya had given him back his life.

Chapter Three. Marco

After spending the weekend brooding, Marco knew exactly what he needed to do first thing Monday morning. On Sunday afternoon he had asked around their friends, looking for the phone number of a good lawyer. He wasn't going to take this lying down. That stupid old man, taken for a ride by a bloody whore, wasn't going to get away with this! His mother hadn't worked all her life, just to have all her life's work snatched away by a money grubbing foreigner. He would put a stop to this, quick smart. Paola tried, in vain, to reason with him.

'You know, Marco, at the end of the day, It's his money, his life. We don't need his money anyway. We are doing pretty well for ourselves.'

'That's not what this is about. It's the principle of it. Taking mum's money, and throwing it away on that fat, ugly whore! I'm just not going to let him get away with that! It's so obvious that she is just taking advantage of him.'

'Well, at least listen to the lawyer. Don't go in there yelling and screaming. Give him a chance to explain things to you. Maybe I better come with you?'

She had ever seen Marco so upset in all their years together. She didn't find the situation to be so drastic. In fact, through these years of taking Alex to see Antonio, she had gotten to know him quite well. She found him to be a nice person, not the tyrant that Marco always painted him to be. It was true that people mellow out as they age. Maybe, when he was younger, he had been a bit tough on Marco, but now he seemed pretty nice. She loved having him in Alex's life.

'No, that's ok. I will sort this out. Don't you get any ideas of going to the wedding. If they go ahead with it, it will be without our participation. That's for sure.'

Marco felt incredibly betrayed. How could his father do this, to the memory of his wife? All those years she had stood by his side, just thrown out, for the sake of a money grubbing Moldovan. Surely his father couldn't be that blind? It was all so obvious. You read about these things happening all the time, almost on a daily basis. It just didn't seem possible that his father, after being such a hard man all his life, could have become so easy to take advantage of. Maybe he should see if he could get his mental faculties checked out? Maybe he was getting senile, and he had become easy prey for a blood sucking parasite? One way or another, he wasn't going to let that woman get her hands on his mother's money. Not without a fight, anyway.

Marco had found a lawyer who was a good friend of one of his friends, Pietro. Apparently he had the reputation of being a real bulldog of a lawyer. As he waited in the lawyer's waiting room, he could feel the anger in him. All those years that he had been pushed around by his father, all those years that his poor mother had stood by him, trying to protect him from his father's bullying. And now this? Along comes a young floozy,

prepared to go to bed with him, and he forgets all that his wife did for him, for all those years.

'Please, Marco, come in. Have a seat.'

Marco sat on the comfortable leather chair. The studio was lavish, obviously being a bulldog lawyer paid well. He felt that he had found the right man for his case.

'Ok, listen Marco, Pietro has explained the situation to me. I have to be blunt here, a person is free to marry whoever he wishes.'

Marco was a bit taken aback. Which side was this lawyer working for?

'I understand that, but in this case, it's very obvious that my father is being taken for a ride by someone just after his money. My mother's money, as well. She is nearly 30 years younger than him, a foreigner, with no money, and no prospects. By latching onto my father, she has hit the jackpot.'

'That may well be the case, but if your father is in agreement with the wedding, that is his choice. There is just one avenue we could explore.'

Marco perked up at that. Maybe there was a way, after all.

'If your father is not in full control of his mental faculties, we could file for right of attorney, in your name. Say, for example, he is suffering the onset of alzheimer's, or some form of dementia. But, we have to be able to prove that with medical exams. Is this an avenue worth exploring, Marco?'

Much as he would have liked to say yes, he knew that they would never be able to prove that. His father seemed to be as strong as he ever had been.

'Well, not really. But what about trying to block the wedding, on the grounds that she has used sex, with an old man, to entice him into giving all his property to her?'

'There is no legal grounds for that. Anyway, the counter argument would be that an old man is taking advantage of a younger woman, a woman who is not financially independent. To be honest, Marco, at this moment, there really is nothing we can do. Your father is free to marry whoever he likes under the law.'

Marco left the lawyers office totally depressed. It was all so obvious to him, but there just didn't seem to be anything he could do about it. That woman, that parasite, seemed to be free to take advantage of a stupid old man, and suck him dry of all his money. Where was the justice in that? Who was standing up for his mother, in all this? On his way to his office, he phoned Paola and explained it all to her. She didn't seem particularly surprised.

'At this point, I don't know what we can do. It seems like the law is helpless to stop that bitch from taking all mum's money.'

'Listen, Marco, we don't know that she is just after your father's money. Maybe they really are in love. She's from another country, maybe she is lonely here. She might not have many friends. Your father is in full control of his mind, I doubt he would let himself be taken in by, well, by anyone, really.'

'I'm not stopping here. I will think of something. She's not going to get away with this.'

'You know, you may just have to let this go. Nobody is asking you to go to the wedding, and you don't ever have to see them. You haven't seen your father in years, anyway. Just carry on like that. Stay out of it, and leave them to it.'

'I just can't. Thinking about all poor mum went through, with him, I just can't let it go.'

He went into the office, but found it hard to concentrate on his work. Marco knew it was going to be a long week. He was dreading the arrival of Saturday. Why did his father always make him feel like this? All his friend's fathers had doted on them. They had always been present in their lives, playing with them, teaching them things, just being with them. Why did he have to end up with such a bastard for a father?

He remembered the time, when he was about to start university, and he asked his parents for a car. Most of his friends had cars, paid for by their parents. Some had new cars, others with a car maybe a few years old, depending on the financial situation of their families. Marco's family had been doing well, so he was hoping for a new car, or at least, a fairly new one. What had been his father's reply?

'If you want a car, you should get a part-time job, and earn some money to buy one. Simple really. In life you need to learn the value of things. When they are just handed to you, on a plate, you don't realise their real worth. When you work towards something, you feel a sense of real achievement when you reach your goal.'

With all the study he had had to do, who could have found the time for a job? If he had worked, he would have fallen behind with his studies, and could have risked not passing his exams. Never once, in his life, had his father just been like everyone else's fathers. Poor old mum, as usual, had tried to stand up for him.

'What about this for an idea? For every Euro Marco earns towards a car, we will put up the equivalent amount. That way he will learn the value of working towards a goal, but he won't have to lose too much study time. What do you say, Antonio?'

'Sure, that sounds fine to me.'

Yeah, right. How on earth would he have been able to save up even half the cost of a car, Marco had thought. That plan didn't really make any difference to him. Luckily, his mother, his rock, had devised a way to get around it. She would give him some money, which he would pretend to have earned. His father worked such long hours, that he was never around to know what was going on in the family anyway. Thank God for his mother, the same mother that was being betrayed now. How could he just sit back, and accept this? His mother had been his saviour. Without her, his life growing up would have been hell. It had been hard enough anyway. And now, along comes this, this parasite, and just effortlessly takes her place. It just seemed like the whole memory of his mother was getting thrown out.

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