

THE WIFE INSIDE
BONUS SCENE: DIMITRI
by Winter K. Willis

The diner bathes in the soft glow of fluorescent lights, casting a warm, amber hue across the worn linoleum floor. I wouldn't have noticed how beautiful it was before, but since I've met Anna, things seem so different.

I sit at a corner booth, my calloused fingers tracing the rim of my coffee cup. I don't know what possessed Anna to agree to meet me after all the things that happened, but I'm glad she did. She's not late, I'm just early.

I just got off of work, so I'm taking in the surroundings. I'm trying something new, well new to me— balance. I know who I am, but maybe if I try to incorporate more of a zen approach, Anna will take note. I don't think it's fake. I think I'm just trying to be healthy.

I pay attention to the aroma of sizzling bacon and freshly brewed coffee hanging in the air. Time stretches, each second dragging on. I lean against the cracked leather upholstery, my gaze fixed on the entrance, waiting for her arrival. A fire truck storming by the large windows flashes me back to what I was doing an hour before.

I held the unconscious guard in front of the penthouse bedroom door and knocked. It only took a few minutes before the business mogul, Dan McClintock, opened the door. For a split second, he looked erratic, angry that he had been disturbed. Then fear set in.

I let go of the bodyguard and his body fell in front of Dan. He barely stepped out of the way in time, before the guard's head hit the floor. Dan stared at me, calculating his next move. He knew that if he rushed for the gun in his nightstand, he wouldn't make it in time. He opted for a talking-strategy instead.

"You... Who are you?" he asked.

I didn't say anything and waited for the realization to set in on his face, the way it did with guys like him. It always did.

He continued, "it won't be good for you when you leave. I have ten other men, and there's no way you'll make it out."

"You *had* six other men," I said.

"Ah, I see." He walked past me into the penthouse living area, toward the stocked bar. I watched him closely in case he tried anything, but at this point, he probably knew it was too late for him.

He grabbed a bottle of expensive scotch and poured himself three fingers-worth into a glass. He pulled out another glass, poured an identical amount and gestured for me to come over. I took the glass from his hands. He raised his to me and downed it before immediately refilling it. I didn't drink mine and simply set the glass on the counter.

"You know, I've heard about you," he said as he downed his second glass. "I always thought it was a rumor. Sensationalized. People love a good story."

I didn't say anything and simply watched him as he walked across the room. He sat on one of the expensive couches facing the glass wall that looked out toward the nighttime city skyline.

He smiled. "So the rumors are true then. She is back."
"Yes. She is," I said.

"I was told not to come to this city. Do the deals remotely, they said. But I'm old-fashioned. I like to take care of business in person."

His business was the worst kind and if I thought that, it said a lot. I walked to the glass wall overlooking the city. "You know, you could have just sold her the business and drifted off into the sunset."

"Why would I sell my family's legacy? Just so that she could chop it to pieces?"

"Somewhere out there..." I scanned the horizon and made out the warehouse district. "Right about there is a warehouse that someone called in a gas leak on."

A distant explosion rang out. Fire and flames engulfed a building near where I was pointing. "Yeah. Right about there," I continued. "And that same someone made sure that all of the women you were holding in there had someplace safe to go."

"Is that someone you?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Think of me as a simple messenger. I'm just here as a courtesy."

He looked over at the glass of whiskey that I hadn't drank, sitting on the counter. He smirked. "She really thinks of everything, doesn't she?"

"It seems that way," I said.

"Well, make sure you tell Lynda Adams that even if she thinks she's good, she's just like the rest of us. And the same goes for you." He stared at his now-empty glass. "So you've

been in this room before, haven't you? Maybe when I was someplace else shaking hands?"

"Yes," I said.

"So how much time do I have left?"

"Not long now." I estimated about five minutes, but I didn't tell him that.

"Well, might as well give me the rest of it."

I walked across to the bar, picked up the bottle of scotch and walked back to him. I set it next to him. He poured himself another glass, content.

You never know how they're going to act. Sometimes angry. Often they fight it, but this is the type of person that understands business. He looked toward the skyline and quietly sipped. I walked out of the room to let him finish drinking the hemlock and scotch.

The faint jingle of the diner's doorbell snaps me back to the current moment. I straighten up, my heart pounding like an excited child. There Anna stands, framed in the doorway, an ethereal silhouette against the night. Her eyes, once sparkling with joy, now hold a guarded hesitation. The light from the flickering neon sign outside, casts a kaleidoscope of emotions across her face.

She clocks me. With measured steps, she approaches. I don't even know what I'm going to say to this woman. What can I say? Maybe I should just listen.

Our eyes lock and the intensity is still there. I can only hope that she feels the same. She is one of the few people that I've never been able to read.

She slides into the booth and I take a breath. If I am given the chance, I know everything will be fine. Balance is all I need to focus on. It doesn't matter who I really am. I'll figure out a way to balance that with the person Anna really needs.

“Hi,” she says.

I smile. “Hi.” Yes, balance is key.