



Love and Other Cages

Emilia Ares

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A young woman in love makes an impossible choice to protect her family in Love and Other Cages, a fascinating thriller in an ongoing series.

A couple's happiness is threatened by the Russian mafia in Emilia Ares's enthralling series romance novel *Love and Other Cages*, about sacrifices made in the hope of saving others.

Mina attends high school in Los Angeles and lives with her mother, who's an immigrant. Her absent father's questionable dealings lead to a retaliatory home invasion after which Mina's mother is hospitalized. Fearing that further harm will come to her loved ones, Mina isolates herself. She breaks up with Oliver, her entrepreneurial boyfriend whose electronics resale business is under investigation and who has only just come to terms with his own turbulent past. And then she is abducted and transferred overseas, where she has to rely on courage and intelligence to survive.

Oliver's persistence once Mina disappears drives the novel forward, while references to previous events in the couple's lives add a sense of urgency. Meanwhile, Mina's abductors exhibit cool authority; their tactics are brutish, and they threaten her family, creating a fraught atmosphere. However, hints that some of Mina's captors were once victims themselves provide nuance, as do the internal hierarchies among the criminals. Herein, no one is immune to retribution—or depth. Indeed, some of Mina's handlers express empathy toward her. The novel becomes dizzying as she faces indoctrination in an isolated woodland mansion.

The perspective alternates between Oliver and Mina, increasing the book's sense of suspense. Oliver's amateur sleuthing results in a few false starts before he seeks outside help, though. His worries are tempered by a new business hire and friend who is encouraging and tries to rein in some of Oliver's impulses, yielding some lighthearted moments. Mina, in turn, endures the abuses of captivity in measured, gripping installments. Facing torture, she is anguished and loses herself in tender memories of her mother, whose warmth and quirky humor motivate Mina to stay alive.

Indeed, Mina proves to be a formidable heroine: though placed in a vulnerable situation, her survival instincts remain strong, securing ongoing interest in her plight. However, the process by which Oliver fills in the necessary gaps in his knowledge to discover what happened to Mina is slow-moving, stalling the narrative. Further, a credulity-straining coincidence leads into the book's cliffhanger ending.

In the thrilling romance novel *Love and Other Cages*, an arresting, star-crossed couple's trials illuminate a secretive Russian network.

KAREN RIGBY (August 23, 2024)

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