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INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR
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Chapter One

Galina Nikitin couldn't believe what had just happened. There was a round of applause from the guests which tempted her to scream at the top of her lungs for them all to shut up. This wasn't worth celebration, but she couldn't bring herself to do that. Her father would be so embarrassed, and she knew there would be consequences if she did such a thing. Instead, she had no choice but to take a deep breath and plaster a fake smile onto her face.

She didn't know what went wrong. One moment, her father had told her she'd be married to a much older man, Vik Kuzlov, but now she was engaged to be married to none other than Mikhail Belsky, the son of the boss. Heir to the Belsky throne. She understood why her father did what he did, but even still, this was ... wrong. She hated Mikhail with a passion. For as long as she could remember, this man had been a bully to her.

In a shocking twist of events, she and Mikhail were the same age, well, a year apart. She was twenty-one, Mikhail was twenty-two, but she already knew he was considered one of the scariest men around. Rumor had it, he had his first kill at twelve years old. The circumstances surrounding that kill were a little confusing, but even still, she had looked in those eyes while he'd been threatening her, and known. His eyes were those of a killer.

For years this man had bullied her.

They didn't go to a normal school, but one specifically for members of the Bratva, known as Belsky High. Yep, the school was owned by him, so no matter what he did or said, Mikhail was in charge. Teachers were afraid of him. They had no choice but to go to a private school, because the Belsky Bratva trusted no one. They rarely allowed outsiders in, and if an outsider went to high school with them, they were in for a rough ride.

Mikhail had hated her on sight. She didn't know if it was because of the way she looked, seeing as she wasn't a slender blonde, but even at a young age, she'd been ... fat. Ugh, she hated that word, even her mother hated that word, and insisted she wasn't fat, she was *curvy*.

She heard a lot of people talking, and knew many insisted she was fat.

Mikhail, her future husband, grabbed her hand and locked their fingers together. She had no choice but to follow his lead, as he lifted their raised hands.

The Nikitins and Belskys had always been close. Their fathers were the best of friends, and she had gotten used to Mikhail being around her home

quite regularly. Mikhail was friends with her brother Peter, even though there was a five-year age gap, and Peter was the older of the two.

Boris, Mikhail's father, was suddenly there, nudging them onto the dance floor. This was the last thing she wanted. Her smile was starting to hurt her face.

The music started up, something slow, romantic, which made Mikhail put his arms around her and pull her close. She wanted to cringe.

"I never knew you would look forward to marrying me," Mikhail said.

There was nothing she could do while they had an audience. Her mother had told her to be very careful with her stance, especially at events like these. There were too many vultures waiting to surface, and she had no choice but to keep a smile on her face and look like the doting, loving, fiancée she'd become.

"I don't want to marry you. Trust me, this is not for me at all."

He leaned in close and tutted against her ear. "Come on, Galina, you don't have to be that way. I always knew back in high school you were tempted by me. You couldn't resist me."

"In your dreams."

"And now your dreams are becoming a reality."

She wasn't going to slap him. Her parents would be so pissed with her if she did. Mikhail was doing this on purpose to get a rise out of her.

On the night of their engagement party, her father had told her they were going to a formal event. From the moment they walked through the main doors, it had been one surprise after another.

Galina tried to ignore him, but Mikhail had always been a master at getting under her skin.

"You know what this means?" Mikhail asked.

"What?"

"That I was right when I said one day soon, I was going to fuck you until you begged and screamed for it. I was right."

Galina had forgotten about that night, when they were eighteen at graduation. There had been a huge party at Belsky High. The grounds were in a secure and private location, so no one could come in or out without Security being alerted. She never drank or partied, but seeing as it was her last day in high school, and from then on everything would be done in a college of her father's choosing, or from home. Those were her father's rules. He had told

her from the beginning she would be married to a man of his choosing, and it wouldn't be for love or anything other than business. She'd accepted her fate, so on the last night of fake freedom, she drank two shots of tequila, hoping to drown her sorrows, and try to see the chance of a better tomorrow.

With the shot glass in her hand and the bottle of tequila, she'd walked around the school, every now and then toasting to some of the worst years of her life.

At the main lockers, she had remembered all the times Mikhail had pushed her against them, at one point bruising her shoulder and side. During swimming, those bruises had been visible for everyone to see, even teachers. No one said anything, and no one cared. Strange, though, after that point, Mikhail never pushed her into the lockers again.

Then, of course, he would stuff condoms into her locker, and she was pretty sure some of them were used. There was always some other ungodly shit placed in her locker. After her stop at the locker rooms, she'd gone to the gym and the swimming pool. More memories of her clothes being stolen, and she had no choice but to run through the halls with only a towel on. The culprit: Mikhail, of course.

It was like they arrived at school, and his target for cruelty had been her. She stopped at all the classrooms until she finally made it back to her dorm room. She didn't have to share with anyone, so her room was her own space. Stepping inside, she'd been shocked to see Mikhail was there sitting on the edge of her bed. Much to her surprise, he held a key.

"Do you know how long I've had this?" Mikhail asked.

She didn't know the answer to that, and she also didn't want to know the answer to that, so she'd stayed completely quiet.

He laughed. It was a rather forced laugh.

"I've had this for as long as you've been here. Dad told me you were coming, and I made sure to have a second key made, just in case."

"Why would you need a second key?"

Mikhail didn't answer. In fact, she had come to realize he never answered that question. Just pocketed the key, and then got to his feet.

"Well, Galina, do you want to be a naughty girl tonight?"

"What?"

"Let's lose that precious virginity of yours. We all know it's useless, and will only be wasted on some ugly fat guy your father chooses." He began to chuckle at whatever joke was going on inside his head.

“Over my dead body. There’s no way in hell I’d ever be with you, so get the hell out of my room, and give me back my key.”

She tried to grab the key from his pocket, but he grabbed the back of her neck, pulling her in close, so she had no choice but to look at him.

“No way in hell?” This made him chuckle. “Oh, my sweet, precious Galina, you’re going to regret those words. One day soon, I’m going to make you beg and scream for me. I’m going to fuck you so hard you’re going to forget everything, even your own name.”

Galina pulled out of the memory. That night, Mikhail had shocked her further. After his threat or promise — she wasn’t entirely sure which it was — he’d then kissed her, hard. It had been her first and only kiss. After he’d left, she vowed never to drink tequila again.

Mikhail didn’t like crowds. He knew how to work them, and it helped that most people were afraid of him. At twenty-two years of age, he’d already garnered a reputation for being mean.

He didn’t mind people fearing him. In fact, he relished it. Being Boris Belsky’s oldest son didn’t have too many perks. It had a lot of responsibility and people looked to him to see how capable Boris was.

As for his father, he knew he made Boris proud.

With Galina in his arms, he had to look around at any imposing threat. Their enemies were always close, wanting to take control of the Belsky empire, or to find a weakness. They would never find one.

“You’re disgusting. You know that, right?” Galina said.

He couldn’t help but smile. No matter what shit he threw her way, she always came back with a bite. Didn’t she realize yet that it made her more interesting? Most of the girls at school were easy and attempted to throw themselves at him. They wanted a piece of the Belsky pie. Even though he’d known Galina all her life, not once had she ever thrown herself at him. If anything, she seemed to look at him with more contempt than anything else. While other girls attempted to dress to please him, thrusting their tits out, putting way too much makeup on and wearing scanty clothing, Galina didn’t. She never wore any makeup. He’d seen her in the morning with her hair messy, wearing old ratty pajamas, and she never showed off that impressive cleavage.

Galina had been gifted in the curves department and all through high school, while everyone called her fat, he didn’t see it.

Her ass filled jeans, her thighs looked like they could take a good fucking, and he had lost count of the number of times he fantasized about those tits. None of it changed the fact that Galina always gave him the cold shoulder. Always. She never followed him around, not when he hung out with Peter, never. He sometimes hoped to catch her stalking in the hallway, hoping to catch a glimpse of him. It never happened. Fucking never. Not even when they were in high school.

She stayed as far away from him as possible, even when he made sure no one would be friends with her. If they even tried to be friends, he threatened them or got one of his guys to fuck the girl that tried, and then the girl would be so afraid of being dumped, she'd do whatever he asked. Then of course, if there was a guy interested in her, he made sure some other girl took his attention away.

Galina had no one, and she still didn't care. She never came to him for anything, which pissed him off, but fine, he lived with it, opting to make her life miserable rather than better.

Running his hand down her back, going toward the curve of her ass, he pulled her even closer, feeling her tense up.

“Disgusting or not, you do realize you're going to belong to me, don't you?” he asked.

“I hate you.”

He tutted. “I've also been told there's a fine line between love and hate. Are you sure you haven't gotten those two feelings confused?”

She pressed her lips together. Her mother had trained her well. He expected her to give some kind of clue that they were having an argument. Instead, he got the fake smile.

“You surprise me, Mikhail.”

“I do? Tell me how.”

“I thought you would look for any excuse to get out of this marriage. If you remember, you despise me. You don't like me. I don't know what I did to make you hate me, but it had to be something. Why would you want to be married to me? I mean, I'm going to be the mother of your children. There is no divorce, only death. You will either have to kill me, or put up with me for the next fifty-plus years.”

This made him chuckle. “Tell me, Galina, which part of that scares you, because I'm in it for the long haul. Fifty years, bring it on. It will still be my name spilling from those lips when I make you come. It will be my cum

filling you up, making you pregnant with my babies.” He took a deep breath. “In fact, as I think about it, I look forward to it. Maybe we should get started right away.”

He felt her tense, and rather than allow her to cause a scene, he held her even tighter.

“Get off me.”

“No,” he said. “You need to face reality, Galina. There is no getting away from this. Our fathers made this deal. Now, you can either be a spoiled brat and cause a scene, tell them you don’t want to marry me for some fucked-up childish reason, or you do what all women do, and that is fucking deal with it. We’re in this together, and we can make it hard or easy. That’s really up to you.”

The song came to an end, and he stepped away, holding her hand up to his lips and kissing the knuckles.

He escorted her back to the table, and before he’d stepped away, several couples had already made their way onto the dance floor.

Mikhail needed a few minutes. Leaving the main hall, he went straight out to the back and took several deep breaths of air. The spa and restaurant had a beautiful scenic garden. He stared out across the lawn, seeing the superficial beauty. A lot of money was put into trying to keep it all contained and looking pristine. He hated fake.

Mikhail didn’t know when he started to hate the false, the fake, the superficial, but it was a pet peeve of his. He loved things to be a little wild.

“Sneaking out of your engagement party ... has my sister pissed you off already?” Peter asked, coming in and offering him a drink.

He declined and turned to look at Peter, who had both drinks in his hands. A waiter suddenly appeared, and Peter placed both glasses on the waiter’s tray, and that left them alone, in peace.

“No, Galina hasn’t.”

“Ah, then that must mean it’s the size of the party. Our parents do like to be extravagant.”

“In doing so, they put a target on your sister’s head.”

Peter shrugged. “Galina can handle it.”

“Can she? I thought you said she wasn’t a fighter, nor would she shoot.”

The man beside him clicked his tongue. “Yeah, there are those pesky problems. Dad got so fed up with trying to train her, he instead just hired a

bodyguard. Now that he won't allow her to leave the house, I think it makes life easier." Peter shrugged. "I tried to help, but she refused to learn, and she nearly killed me when I gave her a gun."

This made Mikhail laugh.

There was no way he would be able to allow Galina to go through life without learning a few self-defense skills, and using a gun. He didn't know how long their parents wanted this engagement to last. He figured they would be married within a few months.

Running a hand down his face, he turned to look back at the shitty garden.

"You know, my sister comes off as being a stick-in-the-mud, or at least as if she has one rammed up her ass, but that's all for show," Peter said.

"Are you trying to help me with your sister?" Mikhail chuckled and turned to see the smile wiped off Peter's face.

"I know what you did. I know why you did it, Mikhail. I know my sister and we don't always see eye to eye, but I do love her. She's my little sister and when everyone was willing to call me a fuckup and turn their back on me, she didn't."

Peter had a problem, or used to have a problem, with alcohol.

Unlike Mikhail, where killing came naturally to him, Peter was different. Killing had been difficult for him. He struggled to take life, but over the years, Mikhail had helped him. Peter's first kill had been a husband and wife. They were traitors, but Mikhail knew it hadn't been as clean-cut as that. The husband had ratted on them, not the wife, but the punishment had to stand. Both were killed. It fucked with Peter's head, especially as he later found out she'd been pregnant with a child. Peter turned to drink.

Mikhail had no idea it was Galina who was Peter's angel.

"Money, power, and greed drives everyone, not Galina. Vik would have ... you know what he would have done," Peter said.

"You don't need to say anything more, Peter. What's done is done. Galina will be my wife. I'll make sure of it."

Chapter Two

Galina wanted to stay in and honestly have a pity party over the fact she was due to be married. For the last four years, she had convinced herself she wasn't going to be married. Her father had said he was looking for a husband for her, but one never materialized. Then she heard her parents talking about a Vik Kuzlov.

She knew who Vik was, and she didn't like him. He was fifty years old, and there was a cruelty to him that was easily detectable just by looking at him. She had seen him at many events, most of the time with a woman covered in many bruises. He was also rarely with the same woman twice, so alarm bells always rang for her. Also, his previous four wives had all passed away mysteriously. No one dared to pin the problem on Vik. Rumors often spread, but nothing ever came of them. There was always some excuse as to why Vik couldn't have done it. Either way, marriage to Vik made her terrified.

As for Mikhail, he just infuriated her. The bully. Ugh, that was exactly what he was. Like now, she didn't want to go out and party, but Mikhail had insisted. In their world, he was the one who got to do what he wanted.

Her parents would not take no for an answer. She had no choice but to put on one of her nicest dresses, and because she was being so awkward, her mother was more than happy to escort her upstairs to choose something she deemed appropriate. This ended up with her wearing a deep-red dress that plunged at her chest and ended above her knee. She hated this dress, but didn't have the heart to tell her mother. It hit her curves and showed off everything. She didn't have a problem with her body. She'd been living in it for twenty-one years, and had grown quite comfortable with who she was. After years of dieting and exercise, she had come to the conclusion that this was how she was meant to look, and so just embraced it. Since then, she had found more happiness within herself.

The four-inch heels were painful, making her calves pop, according to her mother. She had no idea how women walked in these torture devices for hours at a time. She was ready to call it a day.

There was no time for makeup, but her mother bunched her hair up together, and pinned it at the back. Some curls were soft across her face, and others tightened within the bun. If it hadn't been for the fact she was

spending time with Mikhail, she would have admitted she looked rather pretty, but because this was all for him, she hated it.

It also didn't help that Peter was chaperoning them as well. She had no idea why he would even bother coming. They were at a bar which was way too loud, and besides, her brother was already surrounded by three girls.

She sat in one of the booths, arms folded across her chest, trying to make herself as small as possible, but it seemed no matter what she did, there was no escaping the bar, the noise, the gyrating people.

Mikhail had already disappeared to take care of whatever he needed to deal with, and she sat alone, bored. The water she drank tasted funny, and she had a horrible feeling it wasn't water at all. She took another sip, wrinkled her nose, and slid far away from her brother as one of the women crawled all over him, clearly trying to win whatever competition she was in to take Peter home.

Galina didn't know if she should warn them all that the only woman he was taking home was her, back to their parents' house, but she wasn't going to ruin his make-out session. Her brother had been through hell, and her parents had also sent a guard to keep an eye on Peter as well. They didn't want to run the risk he'd fail them again.

She had faith in Peter. He'd promised her he wouldn't touch another drop of alcohol and she believed him. He'd not touched a single one of the drinks that had been delivered.

The women, though, were all over him, and she wouldn't interfere with that. She kept looking around the nightclub discreetly, hoping to find some kind of exit so she could leave. Each time she tried to leave, the guy assisting Mikhail stepped in her way and forced her to stick around.

This was boring and proved to her once again that she and Mikhail were not a good fit. If he found this exciting and fun, then they were opposites. She would have much preferred to stay in, watch a good movie, and it didn't even need to be a romance movie, she'd have settled on a decent action or even a horror flick.

The woman beside her moaned, gyrating her pelvis against Peter. Galina made sure she looked away. There was nothing worse than seeing her brother with his hand down some woman's pants, and with the moans coming her way, they were getting a little too personal for her taste. Mikhail chose that moment to step back toward the booth.

"Peter," Mikhail said, completely ignoring her.

Her brother pulled away from the redhead. It was a blonde a few moments ago.

“What’s up?” Peter asked.

“We’ve got a deal?”

“Yes, deal is done. Don’t do anything stupid.”

Galina looked between her brother and Mikhail, not exactly sure what was going on. Her hand was suddenly grabbed and without any invite or instruction, she was pulled out of her seat.

“Hey, what are you doing?” she asked.

Mikhail didn’t answer, and she tried to pull out of his hold, but he was way too strong, which only made her even more infuriated.

“Let me go.”

They left the nightclub and Mikhail didn’t let her go until they were in the back of a car. There was a piece of dark glass separating them from the driver, but she felt the car moving.

“What is going on?” she asked, watching as they drove by the nightclub.

“Simple, we’re going to my place.”

She frowned. “Why are we going there?”

“For some privacy.”

“Oh, no, you’re taking me home. There’s a reason my parents sent Peter with me, and we’re not supposed to be together.”

“Come on, Galina, are you seriously going to take some archaic bullshit rule and follow it?” he asked.

“If it irritates you, then all of a sudden, I feel super happy about it.” She forced a smile to her lips, and was a little taken aback when he began to chuckle.

“Sure you are.” He blew out a breath. “You and I both know you’re not one for the nightclub.”

She didn’t like that he knew that. “You have no idea what I like and don’t like.”

Mikhail snorted. “You hated that. You kept looking for a way to escape. You’d have much rather stayed at home watching a good movie, or reading a decent book. I’m guessing it would have either been a chocolate milkshake, or a hot chocolate. Am I wrong?”

She opened her mouth and closed it. “That’s a lucky guess.”

“Not a lucky guess.”

“It doesn’t change anything.” She turned to look out the window.

“Or maybe you don’t want to admit that I’ve seen you a little too much.”

She wasn’t going to respond to him.

Mikhail had spent a lot of time at her parents’ house, hanging out with Peter, but she tried to avoid them both. She was happy to be friendless and in her own little world. People betrayed you. They constantly proved to be after their own agenda, and she found it easier to stay alone than to trust anyone.

Her life didn’t allow for many friendships, and those that had come in and out of her life had often ended in disappointment. She refused to open herself up again to anyone.

In less than five minutes, Mikhail had shown more of an interest in her life, as someone passing through, than anyone else. Not even her parents or her brother knew her that well.

She didn’t like it. It wouldn’t change the fact that he was still a stranger to her. Mikhail was going to be her husband, but that didn’t mean she had to give him an inch of anything.

Mikhail had no doubt in his mind that Galina would be easy. She was going to fight this engagement every single step of the way, and he was more than happy for her to do so. He didn’t want some submissive coward in his life. Galina had a spine, she had sass, and she turned him the fuck on every single time she used it.

Sparring with her, even in words, sent his blood pounding. Even now, he was hard as rock as he climbed out of the back of his car.

“Get out,” he said.

“No, you should be taking me to my parents’ house.”

“Galina, you and I both know your parents don’t give a fuck what happens between us as long as we both arrive at the church on time, and we both say I do.”

She wrinkled her nose.

“I can stay here all night long. It’s no skin off my nose, but don’t you want to wash the nightclub off?” he asked.

He saw that his suggestion was tempting.

Mikhail let out a low whistle. “I mean, I don’t want to freak you out or anything, but a lot of sex happens there. I’m talking orgies. You probably sat on a lot of spunk—”

“You’re disgusting.” She climbed out of the car and gave her body a shake as if warding off something sick and twisted.

In the plunging dress, her movements did superb things to her tits. They made them look so full, ripe, and ready to be sucked, not that he could see the whole of her breasts. Soon. So very soon, he was going to have his way with this beauty.

“Just kidding. After all the orgies, we make sure to hire fumigators to clean everything.” He took her hand and led her through to the elevator.

All their nightclubs were cleaned. No one, forensic or otherwise, would be able to find out who was at the bars, and that was the way they liked it.

“You’re an asshole, you know that, right?”

“And you’re just figuring this out now?” he asked, struggling to contain his laughter.

He had achieved his goal, which was Galina out of the car and easy to manage as he took her to the elevator, going toward the top floor to the penthouse suite. This had been a gift from his father on his eighteenth birthday.

Boris Belsky had never been so proud of his son. Mikhail had jumped through all the hoops, accomplished all the tasks, garnered the respect of soldiers, brigadiers, and associates. His name instilled fear and commanded respect, which was exactly what Boris wanted in his eldest son.

All Mikhail had yet to achieve was to find a wife, which he’d done, and have some kids. He knew he would need to have a son. He didn’t mind if he had sons and daughters.

Glancing at Galina in the reflection of the elevator, he knew she was going to be an amazing mother. She was the perfect candidate to be his bride. At first, his father had hoped to align with another brigadier, or at least to use a woman from either the Italian mafia or a local MC, to make him a wife.

Mikhail didn’t want anyone but Galina.

Even though Galina was offered to Vik Kuzlov.

It was the first time he had dared to question his father. He had told him straight, if Galina married Vik Kuzlov, they were signing away her life. They were guaranteeing her death. He had also told his father that if Galina died, Vik would follow, because Mikhail would see that he suffered, and then everyone who allowed their marriage to take place would be on his death list. Peter wouldn’t have made the list. It was her brother who had warned him of

what their parents were planning. He had given Mikhail enough time to deal with it, and make Galina his.

He had convinced his father how strong it would make them look. The elevator came to a stop, and he led Galina down the hall to the final door in front of them. He pulled out his card, slid it into the lock, pressed the code, and opened the door. Stepping into his penthouse suite, he placed his hand at the base of Galina's back and urged her forward.

She unwillingly stepped through. He noticed when he touched her, she tried to avoid him. There was going to come a time when she craved his touch, when she'd lean against him to get as close as possible to him. He had the patience to wait for that time.

Her coat was back at the nightclub. Closing the door, he pressed the lock into place and then moved away.

"You can go and take that shower. Bedroom's through there. I've left some clothes out for you."

He removed his jacket and threw it over the back of the sofa before heading into his kitchen.

"What's going on?"

"You don't like going out and dancing, so I figured we'd come here, watch a movie, and just hang out. I had some business to deal with. Peter knew all about my plans, and he's going to cover for us. If your parents ask, you both stayed here all night."

"I'm not in the habit of lying to my parents," she said.

"Yeah, you are, otherwise you'd have told them about all those times at school that I made your life miserable. You never did." He grabbed a beer from the fridge, along with a bottle of her favorite chocolate milk. "Now, if you don't hurry up, I'm going to be the one choosing the movie." He took a sip of his beer and left her alone.

Mikhail had a feeling he had surprised her, which was more than okay with him. He took another sip of his beer and took a seat on his sofa. He grabbed the remote and switched on the television, waiting for his woman to come back.

Galina didn't make him wait long. Within ten minutes, she was back wearing a pair of sweats, a hoodie, and looking so fucking cute. She stood beside his sofa and he patted the space beside him.

"What's with the nice guy routine? I'm not convinced."

This made him laugh. "I'm just hanging out, but if you don't want to,

you can stand and watch the movie.”

He heard her huff and then drop down on the sofa beside him.

Mikhail tried to contain his smile, but he handed her the remote. “Pick what we watch.”

“And I can choose anything?”

“Go ahead.”

“What if it’s something sweet and romantic?”

“Then go ahead.” He leaned back and took another sip of his beer.

She gave a huff and he laughed as she actually chose one of the scariest movies that had been released in decades. He’d seen the movie, he didn’t think it was scary, but after the first fifteen minutes, Galina was snuggled up against his side, with a pillow in her hand.

“Oh, God, I can’t watch. Why did I pick this one?”

“We can turn it off.”

“No, I’ve got to see how it ends. Bad choice. Bad choice.”

She kept looking over the pillow, and Mikhail used this to his advantage to wrap his arm around her shoulders and pull her close. He pressed his nose against her head, and she was so distracted she didn’t even realize he’d kissed the back of her head.

Galina smelled like lavender. He’d first detected the smell when he got a couple of the guys at school to shove her into the janitor’s closet. She hadn’t known he was there. For a good ten minutes, she kept trying the door, slamming her palm against the wood, and screaming.

He’d told the guys that if any teacher came by, they needed to warn them he was there, and if they interfered, it would cost their life.

No one had stopped him from being close to Galina. It had been dark, and she hadn’t known he’d been there. That was all he needed. It had been strange, but being there, alone in the dark with her had felt right, intimate. Even to this day, Galina hadn’t known he was in there with her, listening to her subtle breathing and the threats she made about castrating him. They had been trapped together for an hour.

“I have to go and pee,” Galina said, pulling out of his arms and rushing away to the bathroom.

Mikhail stayed right where he was. He’d asked for Peter to give him time with Galina. Her brother cared about Galina and knew Mikhail wanted to make this work.

Peter didn’t know of their history. Only the people at school knew,

and they wouldn't breathe a fucking word of it. If they did, he'd kill them all.

His and Galina's past was their own, and no one was going to mess with them.

Chapter Three

“That was a sick, twisted movie,” Galina said, closing her eyes and pressing her hands to her face. “Ugh, that was so gross. Why did I pick that? I should have picked the romance one.”

“You had the choice. You could have watched either.”

She dropped her hands and glared at Mikhail. “Did that not bother you?”

“Nope.”

“You’re sick and twisted,” she said.

This made him smile bigger. “Tell me something I don’t already know.”

“You know that’s not supposed to be a compliment.”

“Then you’re going to have to work on your insults.”

She had no idea what to say to that. “We watched the stupid movie. I got changed into these clothes. Now, take me home. You got what you wanted.”

“Are you and Peter covering for each other? And you’re staying here for the night, don’t you understand?” he asked.

Galina shook her head. “I’m not staying here.”

“I’m afraid you don’t have a choice.” He tutted. “You’re stuck here.”

“Then I’ll walk home.” She got to her feet with every intention of making her way back home, when he suddenly stopped her.

“Go ahead. Go home. Then you’ve got to explain to your parents where Peter is, or very much isn’t. With the way they keep treating him, I’m sure they’ll be happy with him letting off some steam.”

“Peter’s stopped drinking,” she said, turning toward him.

“True, but it doesn’t mean your parents trust him.” He sighed. “We both know how judgmental our parents can be. The standards they expect us to meet.” He got to his feet. “But you don’t care about that. Go ahead, walk home.”

She clenched her hands into fists. “You know I can’t. I couldn’t do that to Peter, even if it meant annoying you.”

Galina cared about her brother, and she knew the last few months had been incredibly hard on him. Their parents always expected the worst, even though he’d not touched another drop of alcohol. They still looked at him as if he was a drunk. It had been a long time since Peter had touched anything.

She knew he wouldn't because there was too much to lose. Peter believed their parents would kick him out, get rid of him. She didn't want to imagine them doing that, but deep down, she knew that was exactly what they would do.

"Fine," she said. "Where do I sleep?"

She didn't like the smile that graced his face as he got to his feet.

"I only have one bedroom, baby."

This time, she did shake her head. "No, no, no. I'm not sharing a bed with you. You're going to have to take the sofa or something. We're not sharing a bed."

Mikhail approached and he still had that deadly smile that she hated to admit was rather sexy. It was like a knowing smile that he knew what was coming, while she didn't.

"I'm not sleeping on this sofa. It's great for watching a movie, not so much for sleeping an entire night."

"Then I'll sleep on it," she said.

This made Mikhail laugh. "You want to go ahead and sleep on the sofa, be my guest, but I feel I should warn you, it's not very comfortable. I've got a nice, large bed. You wouldn't even know I'm there beside you because of the space."

She shook her head. "No, no, no." She stamped her foot for good measure and once she had done so, she felt even more of a child than before. Her cheeks heated.

"I promise you, Galina, I'm not going to fuck you. I probably could and you'd enjoy it, but we can save all of that until we're married."

While he'd been talking, he walked toward her, and now he reached out and cupped her cheek. She tried to pull away, but he then cupped her face with both hands, making it impossible for her to leave. Infuriating man!

"Think of this as practice. You're going to be in my bed every single night. Why not have a test run now? See if you like it."

"I won't like it," she said, completely convinced, and she didn't need to have any kind of practice.

He chuckled. "How would you know unless you tried it?"

Mikhail let her go and he walked away. Just left her there, several feet away from his sofa, while he went and got changed, or had a shower, or whatever.

Galina stared at the sofa. It couldn't be so bad and Mikhail wasn't

there to see her test it out. She had no doubt it would be fine. Mikhail liked the finer things in life, and she had a feeling this was one of those things. She slowly sat down onto the sofa, kicked her feet up, and leaned back into the sofa. Instantly, she knew why Mikhail had condemned the damn sofa. That infuriating man. He clearly knew. The sofa was great to sit on and watch movies and hang out, but she felt how uncomfortable it was.

“It’s fine,” she said, muttering the words to herself.

She didn’t need to have any comfort. There were a few times growing up where she slept on the floor after having a temper tantrum. Her parents had left her, allowing her to suffer the consequences of her own actions. Yeah, those nights were terrible. She could only remember doing it a few times before she gave it up, and vowed never to do something so stupid.

Like now.

Mikhail was right. Their engagement was days old, and she had spent all that time trying to figure out how to get out of being his wife. There was no escape for her. She would be his wife. She had to learn to accept that this bully was going to be her husband.

Swinging her legs off the sofa, she sat up, ran her fingers through her hair, and then got to her feet. She was exhausted.

The last couple of days had tried her last nerve, and the truth was, she was so tired, which was another reason she didn’t want to go out tonight. All she wanted to do was curl up, read, and slowly fall asleep. She hadn’t been granted with that time, so she had no choice but to accept her fate. Moving away from the sofa, she walked back to the room where the clothes had been waiting for her.

Mikhail was nowhere to be seen, but she heard the shower running.

Galina stared at the bed, and she couldn’t help but wonder if he was some kind of monster. It was huge, but she had to admit it did look comfortable. Did he have silk sheets? She didn’t have a clue. There was no point in questioning the quality of his bedroom. She went to the bed, the side closest to the shower, and threw back the covers. If she did this, it was the final agreement. She knew that. There was no getting away from the fact she would be Mikhail’s wife. It sounded so strange to her.

“I’ve got this. I can do this.”

She slid into the bed, and even though she was sitting on her ass with her legs partially out of the bed, it felt so good.

Galina had just laid down when Mikhail finally appeared in the main

bedroom. She spotted the smirk on his face, and the temptation to go and knock it off his face was strong, but she resisted. “Don’t get any ideas.” She glared at him.

“And what ideas would those be?” he asked. He purposely rubbed a towel through his hair. He had another towel wrapped around his waist, and he was flexing those muscles of his arms, showing off his ink, and looking like a man straight out of a wet dream.

Not happening.

She rolled over, so she faced away from him, but that didn’t do any good, as less than five minutes later, he was on the other side, pulling back the covers.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

He wore only a pair of boxer briefs. There was no way she *couldn’t* see the outline of his cock, it was right there, staring at her. Not exactly staring at her, but it seemed way too indecent.

“I’m getting into bed.”

She rolled back over, so she was facing the other way. There was no way she was going to be able to sleep. She would know he was there, all night long.

He settled into bed, and let out a sigh. “Ah,” he said. “This is the life.” She wanted the earth to swallow her up whole.

Mikhail watched as Galina slept.

At the start of the night, she’d been way too tense. He’d stayed on his side of the bed, giving her the space he knew she needed now. He had a feeling she was going to be difficult their first night, and he hadn’t been wrong. She’d been incredibly difficult.

He’d watched the clock for a good hour, before she finally fell into an exhausted sleep. Mikhail had then waited a good ten minutes, before closing the distance between them, sliding her against him, holding her close.

She had no idea that this wasn’t the first time he’d seen her sleeping. There was a lot Galina didn’t know. Like the fact he had a key to her dorm — the time she saw him, she figured he’d picked the lock or broken in. The truth was, being the son of the owner of the school, he had access to whatever his heart desired. He’d gotten Galina’s key the moment she had gotten her dorm room. He’d never woken her up. She hadn’t known he’d been watching her sleep, or that sometimes he would sit on her bedroom floor at the dorm

and just wait for the demons to settle.

He never told anyone what he did, not even Peter. Mikhail didn't know what it was about Galina that calmed the monster inside him, but she did. Those nights, being close to her, surrounded by her lovely lavender scent, he was able to relax and eventually fall asleep.

There was once when Galina had woken up. She'd been half-asleep, but she'd stumbled to the bathroom. He had no choice but to hide in her closet. Galina had no idea, even as she stumbled back to bed, collapsing and falling back to sleep. He'd still stayed the night, and then in the morning, he'd left her dorm and gone right back to bed.

In sleep, Galina didn't look troubled. Even at school, she had this partial frown on her face, as if something was just too complicated to work out. There was no frown, no confusion, just a peaceful woman sleeping.

He didn't want her to look like this only in sleep. In time, he wanted her to look like this always, especially when she saw him. He also hoped that one day she'd look at him with the biggest smile on her face as she watched him. That was a long way off, but he was determined to become her whole world.

Mikhail knew he had a lot to answer to. Bullying Galina hadn't been the brightest of ideas, but it was in the past. He had hated the hold she had over him. While he couldn't seem to get enough of her, Galina had treated him as if he didn't exist, and that had pissed him off in a big way.

Galina let out a sigh, and he had no choice but to create some distance between them. She wasn't ready to know he'd held her all night in his arms, and that it was one of the best night's sleep he had in a very long time.

She opened her eyes, and for several minutes she didn't move a muscle, just her eyes. Slowly, she turned her head and sighed. "It wasn't a dream."

"At least I now know I'm in your dreams." He couldn't resist blowing her a kiss as he climbed off the bed, laughing as she grabbed the pillow and launched it toward him.

"Ugh! You're not in my dreams. Trust me, you're the last person I would ever dream about."

"Keep telling yourself that."

He looked back toward the bed, and even though her hair was all over the place, and the clothes she wore covered every inch of her body, he didn't care. He saw her as the sexiest woman he'd ever seen.

Mikhail had been on his way to use the bathroom, but now he took a little detour and made his way right back to her, and climbed on the bed, pushing her down so that she was laid with her head against the pillows.

She released a little growl, which was so incredibly cute.

“Let me go,” she said.

“Nah, I don’t think I will, not yet. Not until you say the magic word.”

“There is no such thing as a magic word. Telling you to get off should be enough.”

“In most people’s lives, that is enough, and seeing as I have no intention of hurting you, or ... taking this too far, you’ll still be a virgin on our wedding night, I think it’s okay to have some fun.”

“You’re insane.”

“No, I’m very much sane, but when it comes to you, I seem to be a little bit ... I don’t know what the word is.” He couldn’t help but smile.

“Crazy. Stubborn. A jerk?”

“Either one suits, again, I don’t think they’re insults.” He held her hands beside her head and stared down into her eyes. “Go on, Galina, keep wriggling.”

The moment he said it, she stopped and glared at him, as he knew she would. The truth was, he loved her wriggling. His cock was close to being hard as rock, and it was taking every single ounce of control to keep it together and not break his promise.

On their wedding night, Galina would be a virgin.

He had until then to get her used to him, to realize his bullying was all in the past, and that he hoped to have a good future with her. No, not just a good future, but a great one. If she gave them both the chance, he knew they’d make this work. He had no doubt in his mind.

She lay perfectly still. “What do you want?”

“So you’ve never dreamt of me before?” he asked.

“No.”

He tutted. “I find that hard to believe.”

“I don’t control my dreams, Mikhail. You can be disappointed all you want, but I’ve never dreamed of you. Now, can you get off?”

“I can get off, if you want.” He made sure to put a lilt to his tone.

She wrinkled her nose. “Seriously, stop with the games, or whatever the hell this is. I don’t like it, and it’s not teasing.”

It was very much teasing, but he had a feeling Galina wasn’t ready for

him to do this.

“You know, I’ll get off, and not sexually.” He winked at her. “For a price. Actually, shall we make an agreement?”

“I’m not making a deal with you,” she said.

“I don’t know, you might like this one...”

“I doubt it.” She tried to move her hands. “Are you done?”

“Whenever you want me to stop, or you’d like me to take you seriously, you have to kiss me. The moment you kiss me, I’ve got no choice but to listen to you,” he said.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“I think it is a pretty solid bet.”

He saw her eyes trying to work it out, and he smiled when he saw her attempting to be a sneaky devil. “It won’t work on our wedding night. You and I both know what we’re going to have to do in that instance.” He tutted. “I can’t get you out of the complete responsibility of becoming my wife, Galina. I’m good, but not that good.”

She rolled her eyes. “Why can’t I just use words? You know? Like normal people.”

Mikhail wrinkled his nose. “Nah, that sounds boring. Come on, you know you want to.” He just wanted to get it to the point where she had to constantly kiss him, for everything.

“If I agree, will you get off me?” she asked.

“For a kiss. Just think of what I would do for a kiss.”

Galina frowned. “So, you’re saying all I’ve got to do is kiss you, and you’ll do whatever I say?”

“Within reason.”

“What reason?”

“I’m not going to let you humiliate or embarrass us both, if that’s what you’re thinking. You need to understand, Galina, there is no way out of this marriage.”

“I didn’t mean like that.” She sighed.

He didn’t have a single doubt in his mind that Galina would try to find a way out of their impending marriage. He couldn’t allow that to happen. Vik was still available. He’d take her, and Mikhail knew he’d destroy her.

There was no way he would ever allow that to happen. He’d deal with Vik in time.

“Do you want to give it a try?” Mikhail asked.

He knew she'd ask for something stupid and elaborate, that would be impossible for him to give her, but he knew deep down he could make this fun for both of them if she was willing to open her mind.

“Yeah, let's give this a try.”

“Then, my sweet, all you have to do is give me a kiss, and tell me your heart's desire.”

Chapter Four

One kiss.

That was what Galina had given to Mikhail. It hadn't been a hard kiss, or a long kiss, or even a prolonged kiss. Just ... a kiss. She requested that he get off her, and she expected him to be difficult, but he hadn't been.

He'd gone to the bathroom, leaving her alone in the bedroom. He wasn't gone long, about five minutes, when he told her the bathroom was for her, and then he'd opened up his closet.

She snuck into the bathroom, did her usual morning routine, and waited until she was brushing her teeth to take a glance at her reflection in the mirror. Mikhail had told her a clean toothbrush was waiting for her, the purple one.

Galina didn't know what she expected her reflection to tell her, but she hadn't anticipated looking so ... sprightly.

That was what she looked like.

Her cheeks were a deep red and she hated to admit it, her eyes sparkled. This couldn't be the case. The mirrors had to be lying.

But, last night was the best sleep she'd had in a really long time.

There was no getting away from that.

She'd not been sleeping well for a long time. Deep down, she'd known her parents would be finding her a husband, and there would be no way she'd be able to back down. Even though she knew what was expected of her, she'd not been able to fight off the fear and panic of what was to come.

Even knowing that Vik Kuzlov had been one of their choices. The man scared her. He was much older than her, and she knew he'd already had several wives already, along with a couple of kids.

Then finding out Mikhail was to be her husband — she didn't know which one was worse.

Vik Kuzlov was the worst.

And she hated admitting that.

In all the years of Mikhail's bullying in high school, she never once thought he'd be the best of two evils. It was crazy! Insane.

And yet, her lips still tingled from the kiss she had granted him just moments before. She finished brushing her teeth, ran a comb through her hair, and then stepped back into the bedroom to find more clothes waiting for

her on the bed.

Galina walked to the bed and picked up the first item, a black sports bra, with a racerback. There were a pair of pants, as well as some leggings, and that was it.

She took a deep breath. She had no idea what he had planned, but either way she'd find out.

Removing the clothes she'd worn for bed, she placed them on the edge of the bed and quickly changed into the sports bra, panties, and leggings. They were all tight-fitting and as she moved toward the mirror to see how she looked, she didn't like the skin it revealed. Not that she had a problem with her body. She accepted that dieting was not for her. It was pointless.

Grabbing the long shirt from the bed, she pulled it over her head, and then made her way back into the bathroom, tossing the sweatpants into the wash, and walking out to find Mikhail in the kitchen.

He was standing at the stove, looking every single part the man in control as the scent of bacon and eggs filled the air. She didn't even realize she was hungry, until the smells of the cooking hit her. Her mouth watered.

Mikhail hadn't seen her, or if he had, he wasn't giving anything away. For several seconds, she looked at him, watching. He used some tongs to flip the bacon over, and from where she stood, it already looked crispy.

His penthouse apartment had a semi-open space plan. She couldn't see straight through, but now, from where she stood in the dining room, she could see him cooking. From the dining room, she also saw the sitting room, as well as the main doorway, that led to the bedrooms. This place was huge. He had to have more bedrooms than the one.

"Are you going to come and pour yourself a cup of coffee, or are you going to keep drooling?" Mikhail asked, without even looking up from his flipping of the bacon and stirring the scrambled eggs.

She loved scrambled eggs. It was one of her favorite breakfasts. Bacon, not so much, but it went well with the eggs.

"I didn't know you knew how to cook," she said.

He laughed. "There are a lot of things you don't know about me."

"Will Peter be joining us for breakfast?" she asked, not interested in knowing exactly what Mikhail was referring to.

She didn't need to know anything more than she already did. As far as she was concerned, she already knew too much.

Stepping into the kitchen, she heard him tut.

“Do you even realize you do that a lot? The tutting?” she asked.

“The shirt needs to go.”

“I don’t go around showing off my body, thank you. I’m not going to start now.”

“After breakfast, we’re going to the gym. Trust me, you’re not going to need it.” He began to serve up their breakfast.

Galina poured herself some nice, hot coffee. So, Mikhail knew how to make coffee. It did smell good. She didn’t need milk, cream, or sugar. Just black coffee. She breathed in the scent and released a little moan of contentment. Galina took a sip, and then moaned. It was so good.

Okay, so it was officially not fair. Mikhail knew how to make coffee and cook.

“Do you want to enjoy your orgasmic coffee while eating breakfast?” Mikhail winked at her, and she shot him a glare, but took a sip of her coffee. Even though it was steaming, it tasted so good.

She followed him back to the table.

Scrambled eggs, bacon, and some slices of toast. She picked up a piece of toast, took a large bite, and then scooped up some eggs. They were so good. After taking her third bite of toast, she put the rest down on her plate and cut into the bacon.

So Mikhail could cook a good breakfast.

She had nearly eaten all her food when she remembered she had a cup of coffee to enjoy. Picking it up, she took a sip. It was still hot, but it tasted good.

She chanced a glance at Mikhail to see his breakfast was already gone, and that he’d sat back, enjoying his coffee while watching her. She didn’t like him watching her.

“Don’t mind me,” he said.

“Why are you watching me?”

“It’s not illegal for me to do so.”

“I know that, but don’t you have something more important to be doing, like reading the paper? Checking mails? Reading texts?”

This made him laugh.

“Your brother texted. He needs a bit more time before he comes and collects you and takes you home, so we’re heading to the gym.”

“I don’t need to go to the gym,” she said.

“You don’t know how to protect yourself. You haven’t taken any self-defense classes, nor do you know how to shoot a gun. You’re a giant pain in the ass, and now that you’re my fiancée, there is a nice little price tag on your head.”

“I don’t need to learn those things.” She had seen what it had done to her brother — killing at a young age — and she didn’t want any part of it. “Like my dad said, there will always be a guard in place.”

“And if the guards are taken out? There always has to be a Plan B, Galina. Whether you like it or not, you need to learn to protect yourself.”

“I don’t think it’s necessary.”

“Okay, so what if our enemies don’t kill you?” Mikhail asked.

“That makes no sense. They would kill me. I’m the enemy.”

“Yeah, but you’re also valuable. You’re my wife, and some people would exploit that. They would do anything and everything to get what they wanted. Could you handle hours of torture? What if they wanted to get information out of you?”

She opened her mouth, closed it, and then pressed her lips together.

“Do you think you could handle that?” he asked.

“Why would they even try to get information out of me?” she asked. “It would be pointless.”

“Some men share with their wives, Galina. Not often, but it happens.”

She glanced down at the rest of her breakfast, suddenly not feeling very hungry. When she denied the self-defense classes and the shooting practice, it had been because of Peter. She didn’t want to risk going the same way, so she fought it, now, it seemed rather immature to have done so.

His building had a gym, a pool, as well as game rooms, and many other facilities. Mikhail wasn’t the only one to live in the building. They had multiple associates, as well as family members, some close, others not, and some soldiers. Boris Belsky wouldn’t allow his son to be alone, or at any kind of risk.

Standing in the gym, there was no one around, and he’d been sure to send a message that this floor was off limits for the day.

Galina, the stubborn woman, was still in that old shirt, but it wouldn’t be long before he took it off.

“Tell me, Galina, what do you know about self-defense?” he asked.

“Nothing. You know that.”

“Self-defense doesn’t have to be what the professionals say.” He walked toward her, took her hand, and led her onto the mat.

“Isn’t that the whole point of taking a self-defense class?”

“There are all different kind of levels. You just need to know which one you’re at.” He looked at her, seeing she was uncomfortable.

Peter told him he had a feeling the reason Galina didn’t want to learn any of this was because of what happened to him.

Mikhail wouldn’t allow anything to happen to Galina, but he’d be a fool not to prepare for it. They had enemies everywhere, and they were always looking for a weakness. He wanted Galina to be able to protect herself, always.

“I’m going to attack you. I want you to figure out how to get rid of me,” Mikhail said.

“Wait, attack how?”

He grabbed her from behind, trapped her arms by her side, and stopped her from being able to move. She released a scream and started trying to wriggle. Now, he applied some pressure, making it impossible for her to stay on her feet because his weight was pushing her down. Galina had no choice but to fall to her knees, drop down, and then he had her on her front, locked beneath him, unable to move.

“That ... isn’t ... funny,” she said.

He chuckled. “But effective. You’ve got a lot to learn, Galina.” Kissing her cheek, he let her go and stood up.

Seconds later, she got to her feet.

“Now, lets see if you can escape me. I’m the enemy, *run!*”

She tried to take off, and just as he predicted, the shirt was easy to catch, and he was able to pull her in close, wrap his arms around her, and take her back down to the floor, as if she weighed nothing.

“Ugh! Again,” Galina said.

They kept doing the same dance, and her shirt hindered her. Not once, but four times. Mikhail got what he wanted, though. As soon as she realized that the shirt was the problem, she pulled it off and threw it across the room.

“There, the shirt is off, happy now?”

“I’d be happy if you were completely naked.”

She shook her head. “Not a chance! Tell me how I can stop you from grabbing me.”

“You’re thinking too hard. You’ve got to stop thinking like you know

what you're doing, and start just ... doing. Act on instinct."

"You want me to play dirty?"

"Do you think our enemies aren't going to fight dirty? If they attack, do you think they're going to look down at their watches and give you a thirty-second head start? Trust me, they're not."

"Damn it, Mikhail, I get it. I've been an asshole and now you're pissed off at me. I get it. I completely, one hundred percent, get it. So, why don't we ... you know, move on, and you teach me all the things I'm missing? Maybe we can move on from there." She held her hands into fists in front of her, and she looked so cute.

"So, we've been attacked. I'm not with you, obviously, and your guards are all dead. You're going to find the time to get into a stance and hold your fists up?"

"I'm trying."

"It would help if you had a gun," he said.

"You want me to shoot you?" Galina asked. "I could totally do that, but then I wouldn't be getting married."

He laughed. "You're not getting out of marrying me. I'm going to take you to learn to shoot, but first I want you to fight dirty. Think of what you have to do to get rid of me. I'll give you a clue — men don't like their nuts being hurt. They're protective of their dicks, but if you catch them right, they'll drop to their knees, which will give you the time you need. Especially those thirty seconds."

"You're giving me permission to squash your balls?" she asked.

"Yes." Especially as one day soon, he was going to allow her to play and get very accustomed to his balls.

For now, he was happy she wanted to fight him.

"Give me your all, Galina," he said, attacking her.

This time, there was no code, no rules, and Galina fought back.

Without the shirt, it was hard to get leverage, and the truth was he didn't want to hurt her. There was one time he'd given her a nudge, not too hard, at least he didn't think it was, and she'd collided with her locker. He'd seen the bruises it had caused, and from that point on, he never did it again.

He grabbed her arm and pulled her in close. He wrapped his arms around her, trapping her arms again, only this time she took him by surprise. He didn't anticipate her following his instructions, as she reached out to grab his dick and suddenly squeezed it.

Yes, it was tight, yes, it was painful. And he was so fucking aroused. He ached.

Mikhail let her go as he dropped to his knees.

Galina then spun around and smiled at him. “Wouldn’t this be the time I should grab your face and allow it to meet with my knee?” She grabbed the back of his head and lifted her knee as if to hit him. She didn’t.

“You know, there is such a thing as getting too cocky,” he said, and then he pounced. He reached out, grabbed her, dropped her to the floor, and then pinned her arms above her head. “You caught me by surprise once, Galina.”

With how he had her, her legs were spread and he was able to press his groin right against her core. He heard her sudden intake of breath and he stared down at her. Her face was flushed, but he had a feeling arousal was mixed with their training.

Staring into her eyes, he wished he knew what was going on inside that head of hers. She looked so fucking sweet and cute, and sexy, and he wanted her. It was a craving. He felt his cock harden and knew with how her gaze widened, it took her by surprise.

There was a sudden throat-clearing and they both looked to see Peter had entered the room.

Last night, Mikhail had done him a favor. Peter had asked if there was any way he could help him blow off steam. He wasn’t going to drink, that was done and over, but he needed to get away from the control of their parents. So, he’d done exactly that.

A part of him had been worried that Peter would take advantage and turn back to drink, but looking at him now, he saw Peter looked better. He didn’t look like he’d been on a bender.

Mikhail was happy to do him a solid, seeing as it meant he got the chance to be with Galina all night. He’d been able to sleep with her, hold her, watch her sleep without sneaking into her dorm, so for him, it was all good.

He climbed off Galina and helped her to her feet, keeping her in front of him just a little so he could gain control of his senses. He didn’t need Peter to see he’d gotten an erection while trying to teach his sister to defend herself.

“Peter,” Galina said, rushing forward and throwing her arms around her brother’s neck.

Mikhail refused to take it personally. Galina and Peter were siblings,

but one day soon, he wanted her to run to him like that, to be happy to see him.

He could wait.

It would be worth it.

Chapter Five

“Seriously? Couples do not hang out this much. They don’t even spend this much time together while they’re dating. You should know this,” Galina said.

They’d been engaged for two weeks.

Galina did not expect to see Mikhail often. There was the whole organizing the wedding, and having the right amount of time for them to be engaged. The parties, the dinners, the planning, everything in between. There was the dress, the cake, the flowers, everything to arrange. She expected to see Mikhail a handful of times.

In the past two weeks, she’d spent five of those nights sleeping at his penthouse suite, with Peter covering for them all.

After the first night, Peter had talked to her in private and asked for help. He told her he needed time to be trusted. She knew his guard reported back to their parents, and she figured Mikhail had played some kind of interference for their parents to not already know. There was no way she would tell their parents what was going on. Not that she would admit it to anyone, not even her own brother, but she loved the freedom, which was insane. Her sense of freedom didn’t come without a cost. The cost being all of her spare time with Mikhail.

Like now.

Mikhail had taken her to his father’s private estate, which happened to have a gun range on site. There hadn’t been much of a tour of Mikhail’s home, as he’d gotten her to once again change into workout clothes. This time, there was a splash of pink throughout the sports bra and leggings. She thought they looked pretty cool.

He’d promised her a tour of the house when they returned.

His parents weren’t home and she didn’t ask where they were. There was no point. Boris Belsky and his wife Anna owned a lot of property, and with business, it took them all over. She didn’t need that explained to her.

“And why should I know this?” Mikhail asked.

“You dated all through high school.” Mikhail came to a stop and she hadn’t been paying too much attention so she nearly collided with his back. She managed to stop herself from hitting him at the last minute.

He spun around. “You think I dated through high school?”

The question took her by surprise at first, but also, being so close to

him, which she wasn't prepared for.

She finally gained her senses. "Yes. I know you did. I saw all the girls hanging around you. You were constantly surrounded."

"Jealous?"

"Jealous? Why would I be jealous? I'm merely stating a fact."

"I didn't have a single girlfriend through high school. I never dated anyone."

"I find that hard to believe when they were all hanging off your arm, and pretty much throwing themselves at you."

She heard him sigh.

"They might have been attempting to throw themselves at me, but that doesn't mean I cared to take the bait, and I didn't. Most of them just wanted to bag the boss's son. I was a trophy to them."

"Which is incredibly strange, seeing as their virginity was meant to be their main selling point."

"We're the Belsky Bratva, babe. Not the mafia."

"My parents were pretty strict with me."

"Because of who your father is, but that doesn't apply to everyone. Everyone else has their own agenda. You'll see it."

She rolled her eyes and then they came to a stop. They'd gone to the back of his gardens, through a small woodland, and came out to a field with perfectly formed lines. She saw everything was set up as if they were inside a gun range. There were electrical lines to hang up large pictures to shoot at.

"We're here," Mikhail said.

Folding her arms beneath her breasts, she stood perfectly still and waited. There was a small shed, and Mikhail pulled out a set of keys from his back pocket and entered. She didn't want to follow him, so remained where she was in the open field, listening to the sounds of nature and him rustling around.

He returned with several large printed shooting targets over his arm. He placed them on the small table beside them, attaching one to the top of the device, and then clicking a button. She watched as it zoomed down the line.

"Doesn't this get water damage?" she asked. "Being out in the open, when it could rain?"

"It gets covered or doesn't open when there's rain."

"Ha, ha, very funny." She nibbled her bottom lip and waited for Mikhail as he once again returned to the shed.

He came out with two guns. She had no idea what kind they were, but one was short and stubby, the kind she saw that most cops had in action movies. The other was a long one, still scary-looking, and not one she wanted.

Mikhail placed both guns on the counter.

“Take one,” he said.

“I’d rather not. They do not look safe.” She wrinkled her nose. “Not for a second.”

He sighed. “You’re going to have to learn to shoot.”

“Why can’t we go back to the whole self-defense stuff? I was getting good at that.”

“You’re just happy hitting my balls. Grab a gun.”

Galina wanted to argue a lot more with him, but saw that it was pointless. He wasn’t going to listen to reason, so she stepped up to the table and picked up the first gun, the smaller of the two. It appeared less threatening. Whenever she held a gun in the past, it didn’t go well.

She spun around and held it up. “I picked one. There, are you happy?”

“It would be better if you didn’t just point it anywhere. Keep it down at the ground.”

“Why? It’s not loaded, so it’s not like I could—” She pressed her finger to the trigger and froze. It was very much loaded.

Mikhail let out a grunt and then sunk to the ground. Still holding the gun, she rushed to his side.

“Crap, see, this is why I don’t handle guns. Not because I’m not good, but bad things happen when I hold guns. You should ask my dad.”

She placed the gun on the floor and then ran her hands all over his body, trying to locate where he could possibly be hurting. There was no place on him that showed any kind of injury.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Galina, it’s my thigh.”

She gasped as she looked down and sure enough, his pants were ripped and blood seeped out of the wound. “We have to get you to the hospital.”

He sat up. “No, no hospital. Help me up.”

“I don’t think you should be moving. Look what I did!” She wanted to scream at him to sit down and rest. Look what she did to his thigh. This is what happened on the multiple occasions her father tried to train her. The

guards ended up injured, and after she'd accidentally shot five of them the last time, she'd gotten her father. She was a klutz. Her finger pulled the trigger, and banging happened, and it all became a nightmare. She didn't even know what the hell happened. No one died and their injuries weren't life-threatening — a graze here and there, that was all.

Galina helped Mikhail to his feet, and they walked back toward his main house.

“Your father is going to kill me,” she said.

“I'm not going to die, Galina. It's a graze, nothing more.”

“A graze? You're bleeding. That's more than a graze.” She was trying not to panic.

Great. The Bratva boss's son was attempting to teach her self-defense, and what does she do? She nearly kills him. This was not intentional. No matter how much of a bully he'd been to her in the past, she didn't want to kill him.

They arrived at the kitchen, and she moved him into position in the chair, and he flopped down. “The first aid kit is under the kitchen sink.”

This was something she was good at. “You're going to need to drop your pants.”

He chuckled. “I thought you'd never ask.”

She didn't stop looking for the first aid kit. “This is not a time for you to be making this all sexual.”

“Baby, you make it hard for a guy not to make it sexual.”

She found the kit, and sure enough, it was fully stocked. Spinning around, she found Mikhail sitting on the kitchen counter, pants off, leaning back just a little.

On the backs of his calves, spreading up to his thighs, he had some ink. It looked like a dragon's body, curling around his leg, ending at his thigh, like the dragon was clawing its way down his body.

With his pants off, she was able to see it wasn't too bad. The bullet might have just grazed his thigh.

“I can still call the doctor,” she said.

“No, no need to call the doctor. You can take care of me. It'll give you good practice for when we're married.”

“You presume a little too much.” She gave a tut, but then smiled as she got to work, cleaning and dressing his wound.

“Mikhail,” Vik Kuzlov said.

“Vik.”

They were at one of the final parties before he was due to marry Galina. She was with the women and he'd been pretending to be interested in whatever the men were saying, but the truth was, he watched Galina.

The women around her were nothing but vultures. They all wanted to know how she felt, but his woman knew how to play the game. She had to keep the fake happy face. He knew she still wasn't happy about their upcoming marriage.

Even though for the past two months, he had forced her to spend as much time with him as possible. There had been a lot of deal-making with Peter, and there had been sometimes when her brother had to come and stay with him.

Peter didn't mind that he forced Galina to sleep in his bed, or that he was forcing her to get accustomed to him being with her. Her brother understood what he was doing.

“I guess congratulations are in order,” Vik said.

“I guess they are.” He offered a smile but the truth was, he wanted to find something on Vik, to kill him.

Even though he got this vibe from the other man, he'd never been able to find anything dirty on him. There was nothing any of the guards would say. His men were loyal to him, and by all appearances, he was loyal to Boris Belsky. It still didn't mean Mikhail trusted him.

After all, he'd now stolen the next Kuzlov bride right from him, and that meant there was no one for him to torture. He had a feeling that wouldn't stop him. There were plenty of women around for Kuzlov to hurt.

Galina wasn't going to be one of them. He'd made sure of it.

“Your bride does look ... glowing,” Vik said.

Mikhail tightened his hold on the glass.

He liked to think he and Galina had gotten close. Even though she still liked to keep him at arm's length, he couldn't help but think about when she shot him a month ago. There hadn't been any pain, but he'd been able to manipulate Peter, and Galina had spent the whole weekend with him. It had been a simple graze, nothing life-threatening, but he'd been sure to play on it, to make her worried — and had gotten a load of kisses for the trouble. He took a sip of his scotch.

“That she does. Now, if you'll excuse me.” He left Vik and made his

way toward the women.

Galina was on the sofa, drink in hand, which he had a feeling would be plain water.

“Excuse me, ladies. I’d like to ask my fiancée if she’d like to dance.”

Asking her in front of everyone meant she had no choice but to accept, and she saw that. She had this smile on her face that didn’t quite reach her eyes, but she accepted, placed her hand within his, and then followed him onto the small dance floor. There were only a few couples embracing. Most of the men were using the party to talk business and shop. Mikhail wasn’t interested in talking anything.

“Are you looking forward to your bachelor party?” Galina asked.

“I’m not having one.” Peter had wanted to organize but he’d told him no, so he had settled on a night in, watching movies. Peter was going to spend the night with him, and it would be the two of them.

His father had too much business going on to worry about his son’s last taste of freedom, not that it ever mattered in their world. He knew his father was not monogamous to his mother. Boris and Anna Belsky had an understanding with each other. An arrangement. It wasn’t a love match, but they had mutual respect for one another. At least, that’s what Mikhail had come to see.

Danyl and Marina, Galina’s parents, were totally different. He had never heard of Danyl straying. He didn’t have a mistress or bastards spread across the country. They were rare.

For Mikhail, there wasn’t going to be another woman. In fact, he never wanted to be with anyone but Galina. That was his secret. Even though his father had other plans when it came to him. There was certain training Mikhail had to go through. So, even as he hated the fact he had to fuck countless women, seduce them, at his father’s orders, the whole time he had hated it. He forced himself not to think of the brunette waiting for him at school.

There hadn’t been a single girl at school that he’d been with. There hadn’t been anyone else. The sex he had was part of him becoming a man, or at least that was what his father said. Every man needed to know how to fuck, and how to handle women. That was what he had to do, so he did it. He excelled in it and hated every second, but his father would never know the truth. Neither would Galina.

“Mom wanted to have one, but I told her no.”

“And she just let you say no?” he asked.

“I doubt anyone could ever be allowed to say no, but it’s my mom, and I’m sure she’s happier doing other things than planning a bachelorette party for her daughter.” She sighed.

“You’re her only daughter.”

“I know, but she has a million other things to do.”

He didn’t want to talk about their upcoming bachelor and bachelorette parties.

“When we’re married, our life will be different.” Mikhail felt her tense. “Don’t be nervous.”

She gave a little chuckle. “How can I not be nervous? Everything is about to change. That’s something to be afraid of.”

He leaned in close to her ear. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“You’ve promised to make me beg and scream for it,” Galina said.

This made him smile. “That is very true, but trust me, your begging and screaming will all be for a good cause.”

“I find that hard to believe.” She sighed.

He moved back so that he was close to her ear. “Would you like me to show you just how good it’s going to be?”

Galina pulled back and frowned at him. “I don’t understand.”

“Go to the bathroom. I’ll come and join you in a second.”

This was a risk, but it was one he was willing to take.

Galina gave him a little bow, and then took her leave. She walked to the small group of women, and then left, heading in the direction of the restroom. He waited a few minutes, and then followed, going to the ladies’ room. There was no one inside, and then Galina opened the stall.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

He pushed inside and then pressed her up against the door. “Whatever happens, you can’t scream, nor can you moan. People may turn up.”

“Mikhail, what the hell are you doing?”

He put his hands on her hips and then slowly slid them down. She wore a long dress with a massively flared skirt, and he slowly began to bunch it up, working it up her thighs, and then he pressed his hand in between her legs. She let out a gasp.

“No sound, remember.”

He used his teeth to graze across the sensitive part of her neck, and he heard her sharp intake of breath. He rubbed her pussy through her panties,

allowing her to become accustomed to his touch, and then he slid a finger beneath the elastic and began to touch the outer lips of her sex. Another moan filled the air.

“You’re going to have to be quiet, so very quiet.” He hadn’t even touched her clit yet. At the moment, all he was doing was exploring her pussy.

She sunk her teeth into her bottom lip, and he stroked her. Galina pressed her pussy against his palm, and he used his teeth on the curve of her neck to bite down. Not enough to leave a mark, but enough to make her moan, to make her gasp.

“Fuck!”

The word spilling from her lips made him chuckle as he stroked between her soaking wet slit, and he touched her sweet, precious nub. He watched her hands clench into fists as he stroked her clit, building up that fire. Her pussy soon got slick, and she began to press against his palm.

Mikhail’s cock was so big, it hurt as it was contained within the tight confines of his pants.

He only intended to give Galina a teaser of what was to come, but then, he wanted her to know exactly what was in store with him, if she stopped fighting him. He had a feeling this was her first time with anything, and when she fell over the edge, screaming his name, he had no choice but to cover her mouth to muffle the scream, as he heard the door open.

A couple of women had entered. He was more focused on his woman than what they were saying.

He pulled her away from the door, sat down on the toilet, and took her with him so that she was on his lap. Mikhail stopped touching her clit, and waited.

The women didn’t linger long, and when they were gone, he took the kiss he’d been craving.

“And that is what’s in store for you the moment we’re married.”

Chapter Six

She was now married. She was no longer Galina Nikitin, but Galina Belsky. Her parents were happy. So was her brother.

Danyl, her father, and Boris, Mikhail's father, had shaken hands. They were now a family. The church had been full to bursting, and she had spotted Vik Kuzlov in the crowd when they had kissed after being announced husband and wife.

No one tried to stop the wedding. Peter had told her he was a little concerned Vik would try something. She didn't see why he would.

There had been no official promise. She hadn't even met with Vik, nor had there been an invite to dinner. It had all been on the business side of things, so she didn't see the big deal.

After the church, pictures had been insisted on, which had taken a long time. Now, they were at the reception, and drink was flowing, as was food.

Galina couldn't eat a single crumb as she was so nervous. She kept replaying that moment in the bathroom, when Mikhail touched her. She knew she shouldn't be thinking about it, but it was hard not to. His touch had set her body on fire, and it was like constantly on repeat in her mind.

His touch had been unexpected, just like her response to his touch had been.

They were married. Husband and wife. By tonight, there would be no annulment. They'd be husband and wife in the eyes of the law and everything in between.

Nibbling her lip, she tried not to think about the significance of that. Mikhail Belsky was her husband. The bully who had made her life miserable was now her husband. She had to keep saying *husband* over and over again in her mind to make it sink in.

"How are you doing?" Peter asked, coming to stand with her.

"Fine. How are you doing?" she asked, knowing that with all the alcohol flowing, it couldn't be easy.

"Fine. Our parents have their guard attached, or should I say two. I imagine it's so I don't embarrass them this time."

There was a guard in front of him and a second one behind him.

"If it makes you feel any better, they mean well." It didn't feel right saying so and she knew it was because they didn't want him to make a scene.

“You and I both know why they’ve done this crap.”

She couldn’t argue with him on that.

“I know nothing I say is going to change what is happening, Galina, but Mikhail is a good guy. I know you and him have your differences, but he will take care of you. He’s a much better choice than Vik.”

She turned toward her brother. “Do you really think so?”

“Yes, I know so. Trust me, Vik was a bad choice. Dad and I argued about this.”

It was nice to know her dad and brother argued about who they believed to be the best man for the job.

“Do you mind?” Mikhail asked.

She hadn’t noticed him approaching, but he held out a hand to her. The first dance had already happened, and couples were enjoying their time on the dance floor.

“Don’t mind me,” Peter said.

Galina had two choices — refuse and ignore the hand offered to her, make a scene, or simply take his hand. She didn’t want to make a scene.

She had a horrible feeling her parents would blame Peter for doing or saying something that made her react. They wouldn’t understand that she had her own mind and her own feelings. So, she slid her palm within Mikhail’s and followed him back onto the dance floor.

“Do I need to ask what that was about?” Mikhail said.

“No, there’s no reason. Peter just offering his congratulations and hinting that you’re going to be a good husband to me.”

“And what do you think?”

“About what?”

“Am I going to be a good or bad husband to you?”

“I guess that’s up to you, isn’t it?” she asked, tilting her head to the side and forcing herself to look up into his eyes.

This made him smile. “You’re not curious to know what I have planned?”

She was and she wasn’t.

“I don’t know. I guess I intended to take it one day at a time.”

This made him chuckle. “You don’t exactly have a whole lot of faith in me, do you?”

She took a deep breath. “I’ve never been married before. I don’t know what to expect.”

“Neither have I,” he said.

“True, but do you have any expectations?”

“None.”

This made her frown. “You haven’t thought about how our life is going to be?”

In all honesty, she’d spent the last few months in several different states of confusion, and she didn’t know what she wanted. On the one hand, she wanted out of this marriage, because it was Mikhail Belsky — bully, asshole, pain in the ass, and everything in between. Then, spending time with him and learning that he’s not the world’s biggest asshole, made her actually enjoy her time with him. This freaked her out, because once again she was back to the main problem, which was all the labels she’d given to Mikhail Belsky.

They hadn’t been friends. They hadn’t even gotten along.

She always tried to stay out of his way, and now she was married to him. Expected to obey his every command, sleep beside him, have sex with him, and do everything that a wife was meant to want to do. It was almost laughable considering how long she had hated him, but also, she was shocked by how much she liked his touch. At least, she thought it was.

Galina stared at her hands where they rested on his arms, and tried not to think, tried not to do anything, but she knew the countdown was already on. It had started the moment their parents announced their engagement. They would be expected to retire for the night, where they’d be going to a bedroom to ... consummate their marriage. She would have sex with Mikhail. She didn’t know if she was excited or nervous about this.

“Galina, I have no set plans. I have no strict rules. I’ve never lived with anyone but my parents and siblings.”

And because he was supposed to take over when the time was right and his father stepped down, she knew they weren’t close. She had met his younger brother and sisters. They were at the wedding, but again, their presence had been nothing more than a passing few seconds. Boris Belsky had seen to that. He wanted his son in the limelight. Their time as the next generation of Bratva.

She didn’t know if she would be able to handle everything that was coming, but she was going to keep her head held high and just deal with whatever happened. She was already married to a man she didn’t want, and Mikhail was proving to be contradicting everything she knew about him.

This was the part of the ceremony that Mikhail had been anticipating since the moment he woke up that morning. He didn't need to attend to the guests. Boris and Danyl would deal with them. Instead, he got to have his bride all to himself for the night.

She looked stunning. The dress she wore was like a second skin, highlighting all her curves, which was exactly what he'd demanded. When it came to Galina, he wanted her to look and feel like a princess, and she did.

He'd been starstruck the moment she walked down the aisle, and he was glad the priest had been able to talk, because the truth was, he didn't think he was capable of talking. Only when it came time to say his vows had he been in control.

Watching her now, looking down at the bed, he saw how nervous she was. He refused to make jokes or even attempt to lighten the mood. Instead, he flicked the lock into place, so they would have privacy, and then closed the distance between them.

Placing his hands on her hips, he moved in closer, wrapped his arms around her, and then pressed his face against her neck. She tensed up, just for a second, but then seemed to sink against him. He waited, allowing her to get used to him, and then kissed her neck.

"I'm nervous," she said.

"I know."

"I don't know what I'm doing." She let out a chuckle.

"Then how about you relax and trust me?"

"Do you have any idea how hard that is?" Galina asked. "For years, I have tried to avoid you, kept out of your way."

"I was a dick. We both know that, but now I'm your husband. I'm not an asshole kid trying to make your life miserable."

She spun around in his arms. "Why did you?"

"Because I could? I don't know why, Galina. I never allowed anyone else to touch you. You were *my* target. Mine and no one else's, and I made sure everyone knew it." He slowly moved his hands up to cup her face. "I was a jerk. I was an asshole. I don't know why I did it, because when I knew I'd hurt you, left those bruises on you, I stopped. I didn't want to hurt you. But I know I wanted you to be thinking about me constantly."

He needed them to stop talking about this so he pulled her close, sinking his fingers into her hair and holding her in place as he kissed her.

Galina at first didn't move. Her hands were by her side, but then he felt them near his stomach, but slowly travel up his body. She wrapped her arms around his neck.

Mikhail used this opportunity to pull her in close. He didn't want to let her go, not even for a second, and she let out a little moan. He swallowed it down. Running his hands across her back and then, one by one, began to open the buttons of her dress. With each button he loosened, he felt the dress start to give, and as he took care of the last one, the dress fell to the floor.

He broke the kiss and then held her hand, giving her space to step out of the dress. Mikhail let her go, picked up the dress, and moved it over to the chair in the corner of the room. Next, he moved back to her, feeling his cock harden at the sight of her in sheer lingerie that did nothing to hide her beautiful body from him. She looked stunning.

Her tight red nipples were on display, as was her pretty cunt. She was beautiful.

He stepped back toward her, took care of the bra, followed by the panties, and then Galina was finally standing before him completely naked. His beautiful bride. His wife. His fucking everything.

And she had no idea how he felt.

Wrapping his arms around her, he took possession of her lips and moved her back so she dropped to the bed. He nudged her back even more, and then spread her legs on the edge of the bed.

Pressing a kiss to her stomach, he began to trail down. As he did so, he removed his shirt. Next, he took care of his pants and boxer briefs, removing them from his body with a speed that would have normally surprised him — but he wanted Galina.

His cock was so fucking hard that being trapped in pants had become painful, so he had no choice but to take care of his dick. Mikhail moved closer to her pussy, and began to lick and suck at her precious cunt, then slid his tongue down to circle her entrance. He wanted to push his tongue deep inside her, but he'd wait. His cock got to have that privilege, not his tongue.

Drawing his tongue back up to her clit, he began to focus on her nub, sliding his tongue back and forth, working her clit, and he heard her gasp. The tension inside her melted away as he played with her body, getting her ready to take his cock. He needed her wet, soaking, and so mindless from the orgasm he was going to give her, that she wouldn't feel much pain. The last thing he wanted to do was hurt her. He never wanted to hurt his woman.

And so, he worked her body, driving her higher, sending her over the edge, hearing her scream and moan his name as he pushed her to her first orgasm. Before she had finished with the first waves of her release, he went back to teasing her clit, attempting to give her a second orgasm. He needed her slippery. Mikhail wanted her to enjoy this.

He was already the bully in her world. The monster. The asshole. He had to change all of that.

Galina was so sensitive, and her second orgasm took a lot longer than the first, but Mikhail didn't mind. He loved the taste of her pussy and knew he'd be spending a lot of time between her thighs, sucking and licking at her cunt to get what he wanted.

When she did come, it was his name that spilled from her lips, and it was the most precious sound to him. He wanted to hear her scream his name on constant repeat.

Nudging her up the bed, he moved her against the pillow and then settled between her spread legs. The orgasms had achieved their goal in making her body melt against his. There was no resistance now. No tension.

He reached between them, sliding his cock through her slit, bumping against her clit. She was exactly how he wanted her to be, completely slick, soaking, and ready to take his cock. Holding his length, he moved down to her entrance.

Mikhail had never taken a virgin before. Galina would belong to him, only to him.

He slammed to the hilt, feeling the tearing of her virginity, as he finally fucked his wife. She let out a tiny whimper, and Mikhail had to look into her eyes, and that was when he saw the tears. Other than that one whimper, she didn't make a sound. It was the single most horrible noise in the world, as far as he was concerned. He hated himself for hurting her.

In all the years he'd bullied her, not once had he ever seen the pain in her eyes. Galina always had fire. She never backed down. She was always willing to fight him, but this was different, and he fucking hated it.

He placed his hands either side of her head, staring down at her. "I didn't want to hurt you."

"It's fine."

"No, it's not fine." He saw the trail of her tear as it fell down her face and he wrapped his arms around her.

Mikhail held on tight, knowing he was giving her his full body

weight, but he had to hold her to allow the pain to pass.

Galina was now his. There was no way anyone was going to take her away from him. No challenge, nothing.

Vik had come to the wedding, even though he had told him to stay fucking clear of it. Mikhail had a feeling if he didn't fuck Galina tonight, Vik was going to make a challenge for her hand. Doctors would be called, assessments, and Vik would have found a means to humiliate him.

Mikhail had intended to wait. Even though he wanted Galina all to himself, he'd been happy to wait for the right time, to allow her to get accustomed to him.

Vik had fucked with those plans, and now he had to bring everything forward. He knew Galina didn't love him. He knew she had a certain disdain for him after all the years he'd bullied her. It was still their little secret.

Mikhail had a lot to make up for. This was going to be the start of it. He had every intention of telling Galina that she could make the first move. Even if it took a week, a month, even a year—he hoped it wasn't a year, because he doubted he'd be able to last that long—she would be the one to decide. It was meant to be romantic, a sign, to show Galina he wasn't that guy anymore.

Now, he was going to have to figure out how to win his bride. He wanted Galina to fall in love with him. After all, he'd been in love with her his whole life.

Chapter Seven

The moment she was married, that was it. There was no need for a chaperone, or even her old guard, nor was there any need for Peter. Galina got a final hug from her parents the morning after her marriage, and that was it, over.

She was a married woman now, free to make her own decisions. She had expected to return to Mikhail's penthouse suite, but much to her surprise, he'd changed his mind and they were now going away on a small honeymoon.

It was only for a couple of days, and according to Peter, it was on Boris Belsky's private island. So private, no one knew where it was, apart from Boris Belsky himself.

The trip started by plane, then car, then boat, and they finally arrived at a small dock, and Galina was in awe of the island. It was a large island, but she saw the house that had been built on it.

They were surrounded by forests and there was a small beach. The water was so clear, and the heat wasn't too hot. There was also a slight breeze.

Boris had waited for them to leave the island. He gave her a kiss to the cheek, his son a handshake, and then he pulled away and started to head back to civilization.

"This place is beautiful," Galina said.

"It's my dad's island."

"Do you come here often?" she asked as they arrived at the house and Mikhail opened the door.

Everywhere was beige, cream, and white, and it looked so clean, so crisp, and stunning. The curtains were open, and they moved with the wave of the breeze. It looked so idyllic and charming.

"No. This is my father's island. He brings Mom here whenever he's knocked up a mistress. This is his way of paying her back."

She looked toward him, a little taken aback.

"Oh, wow," she said. "Does she know?"

"Yes. The thing is, my mom doesn't care. She's just happy to be the Belsky wife. That was all she wanted. Dad insisted we come here."

"It is beautiful, even if the intentions are not great," she said. She moved to the window that overlooked the beach and ocean.

Mikhail moved toward her, wrapping his arms around her. “I won’t be taking a mistress.”

This surprised her.

“You won’t?”

“No. I won’t be taking a mistress.”

“Does my dad...?”

“No,” Mikhail said. “Your parents are one of the few couples that had an arranged marriage and fell in love.” He pressed a kiss to her neck. “They are a power couple in their own right.”

This made her smile. She didn’t know what she would do or think if her parents had been living a lie all this time.

Did she want to live like her parents or like Mikhail’s dad? To constantly be brought to an island when he’d done something like knocking up another woman? Just the very thought of it sent a jolt of pain through her chest. She hated it. Why did she hate it? Why would it matter to her? This was Mikhail. She hated him, didn’t she?

He pressed his lips against her neck, and she couldn’t help but moan as he nibbled down on the pulse right at her neck that always made her melt against him. That part of her neck was so sensitive.

She felt an answering heat between her thighs. Last night, their first time together had been painful. The pain had startled her, but Mikhail hadn’t continued. He’d held himself inside her, waiting until she was ready for him to take more. At first, she didn’t want him inside her, hoping he’d finish and leave her alone.

Galina knew her responsibility was to see that their marriage was consummated. It had hurt. But then, the pain had lessened, if not changed, and she had wanted him to move within her. She’d wanted to explore his touch.

After several minutes, it had no longer hurt, but felt so good that she’d enjoyed feeling him fuck her, and then when she’d gotten into it, he’d stopped. He’d reached his orgasm, and she loved seeing him lose control. All of this was new to her.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Fine.”

He placed a hand on her stomach and then began to slide it down. She wore a very loose dress and as he pressed his hand against her pussy, she let out a gasp.

“What about here?”

“Fine.”

He growled. “Are you wet?”

“Maybe.”

He bunched up the fabric of her dress, then cupped her pussy through her panties. Within seconds, he surprised her by tearing them off her body. He slid a finger between her slit, touching her clit, but then sliding down to her entrance. Mikhail circled her before slowly pushing a single finger inside her. She sunk her teeth against her lip, trying to contain the sounds, but failing miserably. He growled against her flesh.

“You’re soaking wet.”

Galina didn’t want to fight him. The truth was, call her crazy, but she wanted to explore those small sensations she had felt at his touch last night. She didn’t know why she loved it when he touched her. Like now, she loved his touch, the way his lips grazed her neck, and his teeth sank into her flesh.

Goose bumps erupted over her, as wave upon wave of aroused sensation flooded her body. She couldn’t get enough of his touch, of his everything.

“Please!”

He pulled his finger out of her pussy and she whimpered as he let her go, but then he grabbed her hand, leading her away from the window. She didn’t even need to ask where they were going, as they stepped into the bedroom. Mikhail grabbed his shirt, tossing it across the room, and allowing it to land on the floor.

He didn’t touch her, instead taking care of his pants, letting them drop to the floor. He wasn’t wearing any boxer briefs. Mikhail had been the first to wake this morning, so she’d not seen him dress. He woke her up to breakfast in bed, which she loved. He’d also gotten her the dress she was now wearing. She watched as he wrapped his fingers around his length, working from the base up to the root, then back down again. She licked her suddenly dry lips, and then he stepped closer.

“I love this,” he said, pressing a kiss to her collarbone.

He grabbed the dress and began to work it up over her body, and then tossed it to the side on the floor. She still wore a bra.

“Is there any way for me to put a ban on these blasted things?” he asked.

This made her giggle. “You can put a ban on them, but that’s not

going to stop me wearing them.”

“What if I add that every time I see you wearing them, I have to spank that ass?” he asked.

This made her roll her eyes.

“You’re kidding.”

He raised a brow and her mouth went dry. Mikhail removed her bra, and then moved behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist, pulling her in close. She felt the hard ridge of his cock pressing against her ass.

“I know I hurt you last night,” he said. “I don’t want to hurt you again.”

“You won’t.”

He stroked the tips of his fingers up her body, circling her nipples, then going down toward her pussy, touching the fine hairs covering her mound. One of his hands stayed between her legs, stroking through her slit, touching her clit, while the other cupped her tit, teasing the nipple. The pleasure went straight between her thighs as he stroked her nipple. The touch on her clit set her on fire. She had to sink her teeth into her bottom lip to try to contain herself.

“Do you have any idea how much control I’m forcing myself to have right now?” he asked.

“Uhh,” she moaned vocally as he slid a finger inside her, then added a second one, drawing it back toward her clit to tease her. She tried to contain the pleased sounds, but his touch was setting her on fire.

All too soon, Mikhail let her go and moved her to the bed, getting her into position, lying her among the pillows, and spreading her legs wide.

As he placed his hands on her knees, she happened to notice the wedding band she’d slid onto his finger just yesterday. A lot of men within the Bratva didn’t wear a ring, and yet Mikhail did.

She noticed men wore it around their necks, or didn’t even bother. What did it mean for Mikhail to be wearing his?

Staring down at his beautiful bride, Mikhail was determined that this time, when he fucked her, she wasn’t going to experience an ounce of pain. It would be so easy for him to just spread her legs and fuck her hard and fast, to slake this need that built inside him. This wasn’t what he wanted.

Mikhail wanted Galina to hunger for him, to want him, with equal measure that he wanted her.

And so, he leaned forward, pressing her tits together, and began to stroke the peaks. He pushed them together, and then tongued each hardened nipple in turn. Once they were nice and tight and ready, he used his teeth to create just a small bite of pain and then soothed it out with his tongue. He did this for each tit, and then began to kiss down her body, going past her belly button, then down between her thighs. Opening them up, he stared down at her cunt. She looked so fucking beautiful.

Spreading the lips of her sex, he looked at her clit and just couldn't wait another second. Placing his tongue against her clit, he flicked his tongue back and forth, and then took it between his teeth, much in the same way he had done with her nipples. He gave her time to get accustomed to his touch, and explored the rest of her pussy, sliding down to her cunt. This time, he plundered her, shoving his tongue in deep, fucking her with it.

Galina was all his. No man had ever touched her. She belonged to him and him alone. There would never be anyone else.

When he couldn't wait any longer, he brought his tongue back to her clit and focused on that pleased nub as he worked back and forth, drawing out another moan and whimper as he worked her pussy.

His name fell from her lips and filled the air, and he relished the sound, as he worked her pussy, making her come hard and fast. This time, he didn't give her the chance to have a second orgasm, but moved up the bed.

He gripped his painful cock and lined it to her entrance. She was so wet, that as he pushed forward, he was able to sink inside her, filling her tight cunt to the hilt. This time, there was no pain, no whimper, nothing. She wasn't a virgin anymore, and he'd prepared her.

He let go of his dick and took hold of her hands, pressing them against the bed, either side of her head. Mikhail wasn't all the way inside her, and he stared down into her eyes, and then slammed to the hilt, making her take the whole of his cock. She gasped and he heard the difference. The pleasure.

The painful sound she'd given him last night would stay with him forever. This wasn't going to happen today.

He held himself hard and deep, looking at her. She wrapped her legs around his waist, and he waited for her to be ready. He felt the twinges of her pussy as if she already wanted to milk him dry of his cum. He pulled out of her slowly, inch by inch, until only the tip of his dick remained, and then he thrust hard and deep within her cunt. She let out a tiny scream.

Mikhail slowed down his thrusts, and then he felt Galina moving her pelvis, working onto his cock, wanting him to take her. He fucking loved it, loved the feel of her working her pussy on his cock.

All his life, he'd dreamed of this moment, and he'd never told a living soul. Having Galina as his wife was a dream come true and one he didn't want to stop having.

She was his perfect woman.

The one he wanted.

The woman he'd fucking fought for.

Never had he fought against his father, until he'd been about to allow her to marry Vik. He couldn't have that. He would do anything for his father, but he wouldn't allow his woman to marry anyone else.

“Mikhail!”

His name came out on a pleased sigh. Galina was aroused by him, she was working that pretty cunt up to him, and he couldn't get enough. His thrust increased, speeding up, as he drove harder and deeper, taking her higher and higher, until he couldn't hold back anymore. He tried to stop himself from reaching orgasm, but there was no stopping. Slamming to the hilt, he came hard, pulsing his cum deep into her cunt, flooding her pussy.

He closed his eyes, grit his teeth, and then collapsed over her, wrapping his arms around her, and taking possession of her lips as the final pulses of his release ebbed away.

She ran her hands over his back and her touch set him on fire.

“I didn't hurt you, did I?” he asked.

“No.”

He lifted and stared into her eyes to make sure he'd not hurt her. There was no moisture, no ... nothing.

She was smiling up at him. “It didn't hurt.”

“Did you expect it to hurt?” he asked.

“I don't know. I didn't want it to hurt.” She frowned. “Isn't it strange that it hurts for a first time for a woman, but not the second?”

“It might for some women.” He'd been careful with her. Their first time together, he had made sure she was soaking wet, dripping, making her first time as comfortable as possible.

Galina's hands moved to his arms then up to around his neck, and back down again.

“What is going on in that wicked mind of yours?”

She laughed. “Wicked? I do not have a wicked mind at all, thank you very much.”

Did she have any idea how enthralling she looked?

“I think you could pull off wicked.”

She rolled her eyes. “The only person who’s wicked here is you.” She pursed her lips and looked so incredibly cute as she did so. He couldn’t get enough of her. She was just so perfect.

He would do anything for this woman. Did she even realize how much he’d done already? He stroked her cheek.

The truth would be revealed in good time.

Chapter Eight

Galina had every intention of keeping Mikhail at arm's length. They had sex on their wedding night, and she could have waited to see if that had made her pregnant. But, he'd touched her, and any chance of telling him no had gone right out the window. She couldn't bring herself to push him away because she had wanted him as well.

Then, last night they had sex, and it had been magical. There hadn't been a single ounce of pain. She loved every second of him inside her.

After their first time, they'd showered to get rid of the day's travels. They ate something, took a stroll down the beach, and ended up back in bed and having sex again. This time, Mikhail had insisted she be on top. She hadn't refused, and had straddled him. He'd told her what to do, and she'd brought him to orgasm.

Galina did have every intention of climbing off him and going to sleep, but Mikhail had a different agenda. He'd taken her to the bed, worked his fingers between her thighs, and brought her to another orgasm. Only when she came, screaming his name, did he allow them both to have sleep.

That morning, she had woken up to him kissing down her body, and they ended up having sex again. This time, he'd placed her on her knees, and he'd shown her a completely new way to fuck, and now she didn't know which she preferred.

She loved feeling Mikhail between her thighs, wrapping her legs around his waist, as he drove inside her. She also relished being on top, being the one in control. Then, for him to take her from behind — that had its own kind of magic as well, and she hadn't been able to stop the pleasure from mounting. He got deeper and seemed to be a lot harder. She loved it and hadn't wanted to stop.

Now, as they strolled hand in hand along the beach, she couldn't stop thinking about the feel of his hands on her body, or his cock. She'd never been the kind of woman driven by sex. She hadn't been interested in guys at high school. Her focus had always been her studies and trying not to be a pain in the ass to her parents as they were dealing with Peter.

The sun was setting in the sky giving a beautiful orange hue, and she found it hard to look away. She didn't want to look away.

"It's stunning, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, it is."

There was a note to his voice and when she turned to look at him, she saw that he was looking at her and not the view.

“The sunset?”

“That’s okay,” he said.

“You’re being corny.”

He stopped and pulled her in close. “Am I?”

She couldn’t help but have her doubts.

Mikhail put his hands on the base of her back, but he didn’t linger there too long as he stroked down and went to her ass. He pulled her in close and pressed his cock against her stomach, and there was now no doubt what he was thinking about.

“Is sex always on your brain?” she asked.

“When it comes to you, that does seem to be the case.” He pressed kisses against her neck. “Tell me you’re not thinking about it.”

She was about to tell him exactly that, but then his teeth grazed across her pulse, and he nibbled down at just the right spot that made her gasp. Her nipples were incredibly tight and she sunk her teeth into her lip.

“Tell me I’m wrong.”

She wanted him. Putting her hands on his hips, she tried to push him away, but there was no way she could do that.

“Maybe I should stop?” he asked.

She growled.

This made him chuckle. “Tell me what you want, Galina?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then how about we find out together?”

She waited.

“Do you want me to stop touching you?” he asked.

His hands moved off her body, and she reached out, grabbing them and shaking her head, giving him a tut. This made him laugh even more.

“Don’t stop,” she said.

“You want my hands on your body?”

“Yes.”

He pushed some of her hair off her shoulder, and then pressed a kiss to the flesh he exposed. She felt him finger the strap of her dress. Slowly, he slid it down her arm and let it fall. Galina eased her arm out of the strap, and he did the same to the other side. Together, they pushed her bodice down and he groaned.

“Do you have any idea how pretty your tits are?”

She felt her cheeks start to heat. He slid his hands up and cupped them. “Do you want me to do this?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He stroked his thumbs across her nipples, and then he leaned down.

“What about my mouth?”

“Yes.”

He sucked on one of her nipples, then moved to the other. Mikhail let go of her tits and pushed the dress down past her hips so she wasn't wearing anything. Today was the first day in her life she had decided to live a little dangerously, or at least to her it was a little on the dark side, as she hadn't worn any bra or panties.

Mikhail let out a growl as he cupped her pussy. He slid two fingers inside her and she placed her hands on his back, sliding them up, to sink into his hair. She let him go as he stood up, and then he grabbed her hips, taking her down to the sand.

Galina reached between them, opening his linen pants, reaching inside to find that he also wasn't wearing any boxer briefs, and she helped him ease out his cock.

He moved her hand out of the way, taking over, finding her center, and sliding in. Inch by inch, he thrust inside and Galina held onto him, looking into his eyes as he began to slowly make love to her. His movements were slow, deep, hard, and she matched him equally, thrusting hard and deep, wanting him, wanting this.

Mikhail took possession of her mouth, kissing her hard, and she gave him everything, knowing this was exactly what she wanted.

“How is married life treating you?” Peter asked Mikhail over the phone.

Mikhail looked toward the pool where his wife was taking a swim. He was impatient as she'd already looked up toward him, removed her bathing suit, and jumped into the water. His cock was rock-hard, and he wanted back inside her. He'd already extended his honeymoon by five days.

His father had been ready to come and collect them, but he wasn't ready to leave. The moment they left the island, reality and the real world would sink in. For the last couple of days, he and Galina had been able to find this ... peace, this middle ground, and he didn't want to take it away.

There was going to come a point where he would have no choice, but he was willing to wait as long as possible for that to happen.

Galina looked happy. She smiled at him. Laughed with him. She was everything he'd ever wanted and craved, and he knew once he took them back to the city, shit was going to happen.

"You've not called me to ask about my honeymoon, Peter. Cut the crap, what is going on?"

His father hadn't called him with any news, but he knew Peter wouldn't have any qualms about doing so. His best friend always had his back. Even though there were five years between them, he knew he could count on Peter.

"There's a rumor, Mikhail, and you know I don't listen to gossip and shit, but there is talk of a takeover, or at least ... an impending attack."

"We're always at risk of an impending attack. This is not new, Peter."

"Vik is the cause. His name is the one on everyone's lips. It would seem you taking my sister to marry is an insult he's not willing to let slide."

He tapped his leg. "I know."

"You know?"

"Vik is a grade A asshole. He's not going to go after my father's spot, though," Mikhail said.

"What is he going to come after?"

Galina broke the water. Even from where he stood, he saw the smile on her face as she pushed the hair off her face.

"Galina," he said.

Peter cursed. "You know that means death."

"He's counting on it," Mikhail said. "They're going to try and kill her, or..." He didn't need to finish. In their world, the unsaid was enough.

Vik would try to destroy Galina, and in doing so, hurt him.

"Does my dad know about this?" Mikhail asked.

"Your father doesn't take idle gossip, and he certainly doesn't listen to me."

Mikhail nodded. Boris didn't have time for men who gave in to their addictions. To him, being controlled made them weak, and in his father's eyes, Peter was weak. There were no excuses.

"I'll handle it," Mikhail said. "Keep listening, Peter. We need to know what the fuck is going on and when he plans to attack."

"Will do. Say hi to my sister for me."

He hung up the call and gripped his cell phone tightly. Vik was playing a very dangerous game. The man was clever, he knew how to work the Bratva. If he intended to take Galina, kill her, or harm her, he wouldn't allow it to be pinned on him. He wasn't that fucking stupid.

Mikhail knew he wasn't that lucky. Taking out Vik wouldn't be easy, and his father wouldn't just listen to gossip. There was no way he would allow anything to happen to his woman either. For Boris Belsky to do anything, he'd need proof. He wouldn't risk Galina's life. Not now. Not ever.

When they got back home, he was going to have to find a way to deal with Vik. He had a feeling that if he was willing to take out Galina or harm her, there had to be a way of bringing him down without Galina's involvement.

Putting his cell phone down on the desk, he moved out of the villa and made his way to the pool. Galina had started to swim but when she saw him coming, she moved close to him.

"You're looking irritated?" she asked. "What was the call?"

"Your brother. He wanted to say hello," he said.

She rolled her eyes. "You don't need to lie to me."

This did make him smile. "It was your brother."

"Which means it was business, and I don't get to know what it's about, right?"

Mikhail looked at her. He loved this woman. She had no idea how much he did love her. He had gone out of his way to protect her. Unlike his father, he didn't just want a title marriage and to go wandering to other women to satisfy an urge. Galina was everything to him.

"Your brother has heard rumor that Vik Kuzlov wants to take you from me."

Galina's eyes went wide. "You're ... wow," she said. She looked away and he watched as she licked her lips. "Okay, I guess this is because I'm now married to you and not, er, married to him."

"Exactly."

"Wouldn't that be like ... I don't know, starting a war, challenging your father? The leader of the Belsky Bratva?"

"He could do this one of two ways. He either challenges my father and attempts a takeover, which will get bloody, and he can't guarantee who would follow him or who would pick my father's side."

"And the second?"

“He finds someone to do his dirty work for him, meaning that I wouldn’t be able to pin anything on him.”

“So, I have to keep an eye out and not get killed.”

He ran a hand down his face.

“There’s more, isn’t there?” she asked.

“He could do something worse than killing you,” Mikhail said.

This made her laugh. “How can there be something worse than death? You know, death is the end. There’s no coming back from that. Vampires are make-believe.”

“He could make you wish you were dead. Torture you, rape you, take down everything that makes you, you, destroy you so you’re nothing more than a shell, then return you to me.”

“Oh,” Galina said.

“Yeah, oh.”

She took a deep breath. “That doesn’t sound good.”

This time, he raised a brow.

She looked down at the edge of the pool. “So, I guess I have to ask what is the plan, and when do my self-defense classes restart, and I think it’s time I really learned how to shoot a gun, and you know, aim it to hit the target.”

“I can take care of you.”

“I know, but I’m thinking of those times you’re not going to be available. You’re not going to be there all the time. I don’t know if Vik is a patient man. Will he wait until we get complacent? I don’t want to die, Mikhail. Nor do I want to be ... that other thing.” She shook her head. “Trust me, there are not a lot of great options here.”

“We’ll figure it out. I’ll take care of it, I promise.”

“I know you will.” She pressed her lips together. “I guess going for a swim is now off the menu.”

She climbed up and out of the pool and Mikhail grabbed her.

“Why would you need to get out of the pool?” he asked. Stepping up to her, he placed his hands on her chest and pushed. She let out a gasp before hitting the water.

Mikhail didn’t waste any time as he stripped out of his clothes and then jumped into the water to join her. She broke the surface.

“Are you crazy?” she asked.

Galina backed away as he moved closer to her. She kept moving back

until the edge of the pool stopped her from going anywhere, and he had her right where he wanted her.

“What are you doing?”

He placed his hands on her hips, and then took possession of her mouth. Closing the distance between them, he pressed his cock against her stomach, so she would have no doubt what he wanted.

“Again?” she asked, but he saw the hint of a smile on her lips.

“Always.”

Chapter Nine

“Again!”

It wasn't lost on Galina that the last time she asked Mikhail again, it was in the pool just before they had sex. This wasn't sexy, though. The reality was, her ass hurt.

They couldn't stay on their honeymoon forever, no matter how much she would want it. They had no choice but to come back to the real world, where Mikhail was taking the Vik threat very seriously. Three weeks they'd been back home, and Galina never thought she would miss Honeymoon Mikhail, but she did.

He was sweet, charming, caring, sexy, and somewhat irresistible. This man before her reminded her of Bully Mikhail — a jerk, an asshole, and impatient.

Getting to her feet, she tilted her head from left to right and kept her focus on her husband. Mikhail liked to take her by surprise in her self-defense lessons, and it was starting to piss her off with how he constantly won. She couldn't get the better of him.

Galina kept her arms down by her sides, feigning that she wasn't paying attention. She had learned the hard way, and she didn't know how much more her ass could take.

As expected, Mikhail went in for the attack. This time, she was able to dodge him, but as she went to land a blow beneath the belt, he anticipated that attack and had her arms once again locked against her body. He was so much taller and bigger than her. While one of his arms held her immobile, his other hand went to her mouth.

He was trying to envision every scenario that would end with her kidnapping. Galina had tried to do this logically, and each time she failed.

This time, she was past the point of acceptance, so she wriggled her arm behind her. There was enough leverage for her to do this, seeing as he was using one arm to hold her immobile and the other to keep her silent.

Men didn't play by the book. No one doing bad deeds played by the book. They were cruel, they played dirty, and it was time for her to do so as well.

She stroked his cock. She didn't try to hurt him, but she did take him by surprise as his grip loosened around her mouth. When he let go, she was able to get a damn good bite down on it, which she did. This time, she didn't

hold back.

Her ass needed her to not fall on it again, and she was getting tired of constantly losing. After biting Mikhail, he released her, giving her a chance to spin around, and she went for the balls. She didn't hit him, but she'd startled him enough to get away, leaving the mat.

That was Mikhail's goal for her.

The only time she could declare victory was leaving the mat. Having her foot hit the cold gym floor was sweet victory. She couldn't help but punch her fist to the sky, and then draw it back. "Yes!" She had done it, finally done it.

"You're celebrating."

"Come on, Mikhail. I wouldn't do it if this was all real. You've got more chance of me screaming and running for my life, begging for help. Not dancing around like a clown." She turned toward him. "What do you think?"

"You're learning well."

"But? I can sense a big but in there somewhere."

"I don't like the thought of you stroking other guys' dicks."

She felt her entire body slump. "Seriously? You're going to be picky about that, and not the fact I was able to use the element of distraction."

"I told you to hurt their dicks, not arouse them."

"If it makes you feel any better," she said, stepping onto the mat, and moving toward him. "I wasn't trying to turn you on." She was right in front of him now. "I was trying to win. I wasn't thinking about making you ... aroused." She placed a hand on his chest. "Were you aroused?"

Mikhail stroked her arms, and then took her hands within his. "You know I was. Whenever you touch me, I'm aroused."

She tilted her head to the side and looked at him. "I'm sorry?"

This made him smile and she hated to admit it, but she did love it when he smiled. "You don't have to be sorry." He took the hand from his chest and pressed it to his hard dick. "You've just got to take care of what you started."

She let out a gasp. "You want me to take care of your needs?"

"Yes."

"But, we're supposed to be focusing on self-defense."

"Don't test me, Galina," he said.

She slid her hand into his shorts and found that he wasn't wearing any boxer briefs. This seemed to be his permanent state and she began to stroke

his dick, working from the base up to the root, then back down again. The shorts got in the way so she pushed them down, and they were now around his knees. Mikhail didn't seem to like that so he pushed them down to his ankles and then kicked them off.

He wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close, and she gasped as he pressed his nose against her neck. "You smell so fucking good," he said.

This made her laugh. "So good?"

"So fucking good."

"I think that's sweat." Her giggle turned into a moan as he nibbled at her neck.

It wasn't long before he had removed her workout clothes and she stood in the gym, completely naked.

She made sure to take his shirt off, because if she was naked, then so was he, and she wasn't going to be the only one standing there, in the nude.

Mikhail pushed her to the floor, taking her nipples into his mouth, devoting some time to each. He flicked his tongue across each mounded tip and then sucked it into his mouth.

He let out a little growl and she tensed up as he began to kiss his way down her body. He spread her legs wide, and then his mouth was between her legs, licking at her clit, then moving down to plunder her pussy.

Clenching her hands into fists, she couldn't stop the pleased mounds from spilling from her lips. It felt so good.

He used his fingers, pushing two deep inside her and working her pussy. Flicking his finger left and right, she felt how close she was. Mikhail liked to tease her, to prolong her pleasure, making her beg for her orgasm, but this time he sent her over the edge, and she did so, shouting his name. He slowly brought her down from the edge, kissing her pussy as he did so.

Even though she was still shaken, Galina knew what she wanted to do, so when he moved up, as if to begin fucking her, she used the element of surprise and pushed him onto his back.

"You want to be on top, baby? All you had to do was ask."

"Not on top." She kissed from his neck, much like he had done, trailing her lips down his body, going toward his cock.

She felt him tense up, but she didn't stop in her quest, finding his hard cock and gripping the base.

"Galina?"

“Yes, Mikhail?”

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Simple, I’m going to give you pleasure.” She slid her tongue across the bulbous tip, and then took the whole of his cock into her mouth. Slowly, she sunk down on his length, taking him as deep as she could, and then pulling up until he popped right out of her mouth. “Or would you like me to stop?”

“Fuck, no, I don’t want you to stop.”

Mikhail wrapped her hair around his fist, and she couldn’t help but laugh, which quickly turned into a moan as he worked her head over his length. She wrapped her lips around his length and began to suck him in deep, and then pulled back up, but kept just the tip in her mouth. She flicked her tongue back and forth.

She heard him hiss, then growl, and she took more of him into her mouth. He tasted salty and was hard and yet soft, quite the combination. Moaning around his dick, she took more of him, and then he hissed.

“Fuck, I’m going to come.”

It was so unexpected and she wasn’t completely prepared for it, so it did take her by surprise as his cum filled her mouth, and she swallowed it down.

“I’m not taking a mistress,” Mikhail said. He stepped out of the room, disgusted with his father, as he went toward the main door to leave the fucking brothel.

His father had called him with an emergency. The emergency was that he had rounded up women he deemed acceptable to be taken as a mistress.

“Mikhail, do not walk away from me,” Boris said.

He spun around as he got to the door and glared at his dad. Every other time, he would have given him the respect he deserved, but not today.

“I told you repeatedly not to do this.”

“Look, I understand this marriage is new, but there’s going to come a time when you’re bored, and you’ll want another woman. Someone fresh. Someone who will excite you.”

Mikhail ran fingers through his hair and shook his head. “No.”

“Son, trust me on this.”

“Did Danyl take a mistress?” he asked, bringing up Galina’s dad.

“Danyl is different.”

“There’s no rule that says I have to take a mistress, and I’m not going to.”

“Son—”

“Dad, no!” For the second time in his life, he raised his voice to his father. “Don’t you get it? Hasn’t it dawned on you yet, that I am in love with my wife?”

Boris looked at him. “These feelings fade.”

“I’ve been in love with Galina since I was five years old.”

The smile on Boris’s face dropped.

“Yeah, that’s right. Since the moment she fell down, when we were kids, and she refused to cry, even though she had ruined her pretty princess dress and it was all torn, and her knee was bloody. Peter had to go and get his parents, because there might have been a few stones imbedded in her knee, and he didn’t know what to do. I sat with Galina and you know what she did?”

Boris didn’t answer.

“She made me sit down and have a tea party, talking about the big fight she’d been in with the garden. Told me an elaborate story, and I knew in that moment I was going to marry her.” Mikhail doubted Galina even remembered that day. It was so long ago, but he remembered. It was then that he knew she was a fighter.

“Then I turned into a dick to her. I pushed her away because I knew you’d find some reason for me to not have her. So I tried to make her nothing to me. I bullied her in high school. I did everything you asked, all the training and shit. I slept with those fucking sluts you had lined up to teach me how to be a man. All the time, Galina was there. But then, you were going to allow the woman I loved to marry Vik Kuzlov, and I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t let you do that to her. She deserved better. I know Galina deserves better than me, but I know I can give her the world. So, no, Dad, I’m not going to want a mistress, because I am living my fucking dream right now, and all I want is for her to be pregnant.”

Without another word, he walked out of the brothel and onto the street. His father had requested an audience with him, so he moved to the car and climbed back inside. He was surprised when his father joined him a few minutes later. He knew his father couldn’t be happy with him and was probably pissed off, but he stayed silent, waiting for whatever reprimand was

coming.

“I do love your mother,” Boris said. “In my own way, just as she loves me, in her way. We knew we’d make it together as a power couple, but I know she has lovers. We were not meant to be.”

He turned to his father and frowned. “Doesn’t that bother you?”

“That your mother has lovers? No, I was the one who pushed them onto her. I wanted her to have her own life, to be free of me and what I am.” He sighed. “I had no idea you had feelings for Galina. I figured you were doing a solid for Peter. Love makes men weak, Mikhail.”

“Galina doesn’t make me weak, Dad. Trust me, she makes me strong. She is ... she is this fire, and she makes me want to be better. You have nothing to worry about with her.”

“Peter told me about his suspicions. I believe he has come to you.”

“About Vik Kuzlov?” Mikhail asked.

“Yes.”

“He’s going to try and attack Galina. I will kill him.” This wasn’t a threat, it was a promise.

“Mikhail, I know you believe Vik believes you’ve slighted him in some way, but it’s not because of your marriage to Galina that he feels this way. Until I met Anna and we got married and had you, Vik Kuzlov was in line to the Belsky Bratva.”

This was news to Mikhail. “What?”

“Vik Kuzlov is a ... relative. Your uncle.”

“How is that possible?” Mikhail asked.

“Our father — your grandfather — had a mistress. She was killed, and Vik was already born, and he had a reputation. An anger. Your grandfather knew he couldn’t have a bastard on the throne, so he made sure Vik was rewarded. Made him a Brigadier, gave him a title, power, and wealth. Everything a son like Vik shouldn’t have gotten. But it was all in the knowledge, that he wasn’t going to be King. That was my job. The firstborn son in marriage.” Boris sighed. “Twenty-three years ago, I got the news that I had cancer, but it was treatable. There was always a risk it wouldn’t work, and I get tested yearly, and so far, it has stayed gone. I met Anna working at the hospital, married her, and against all odds, we had you. During that time, Vik was by my side and I told him in the event of my death, he would get everything. Belsky would return to him.”

“And then I was born,” Mikhail said.

“Yes. I have my men and guards on you at all times. Vik has never done anything to harm you, and he vowed to keep you safe, but time is slipping by. Power gets to a person, and I haven’t been able to contact Vik in two weeks. This is the longest he’s been off the grid, and no one can find him.”

This made Mikhail tense up. “What?”

“I need you to take extra care. Vik won’t go after Galina to hurt her. He’ll go after Galina to lure you so he can kill you.”

Chapter Ten

Galina looked up to see Mikhail enter their penthouse suite. He looked pale and he didn't make a sound as he closed the door and then put his jacket up on the peg beside him.

She nibbled her lip and turned to look at him. "Are you okay?"

Mikhail finally looked up. "Yeah."

"Long day?"

He walked up to her, wrapped his arms around her waist, and then took possession of her mouth. She ran her hands up his chest, circling his neck.

"Yeah."

"Want to talk about it?" she asked.

"No." He kissed her again. "Yes." Then another kiss. "No."

"Then how about we don't but completely do talk about it?"

"You totally get me." He sighed, pressing his head against hers.

She slid her hands down his back wanting to make it easier for him.

"Do you want to know what I did today?" she asked, hoping to provide a perfect distraction for him.

"What?"

"I got Peter to go to the pharmacy for me today," she said.

Mikhail pulled away. "Are you sick? Poorly?"

"No, I'm not sick and I'm not poorly. Well, I don't know if you would say I'm either of those things."

"Galina, if there is something wrong, I need to know about it. I have to get a doctor to fix it."

"I got him to get a pregnancy test kit," she said, blurting it out a little faster than she hoped.

"A pregnancy test kit?"

"Yes. We've been married for two months now, and er, yeah, I've not had a menstrual cycle in all that time." She nibbled her lip.

"Does that mean...?"

"I'm usually regular like clockwork, so not being regular is kind of scary, and I don't know if this is a good thing or not."

He cupped her face and kissed her lips. "Have you taken the test?"

"No, I was waiting for you. I was hoping you and I could do it together, you know?" She nibbled her lip.

Peter had offered to stay behind and be there to hold her hand, but she knew this was Mikhail's place. He had to be the one holding her hand.

He let her go and ran one of his hands down her body, going toward her stomach, and resting it there. "Our child could be in there, growing?"

"Yes."

She covered his hand with her own. "Our baby could be right there." She let out a little giggle. "I don't know why I'm laughing."

"Are you excited about this?" Mikhail asked. "We could be parents."

"I know, and yes, I'm excited and kind of nervous. I didn't think I'd be a young mother, but I think you and I can do this. If you can get me to shoot, then I think we've got this."

He nodded. "*Parents.*"

She laughed. "It's insane, isn't it?"

"No, it's not insane."

Galina looked at him and frowned. There was something in his eyes she couldn't quite read, and she couldn't help but wonder what was going on inside his head. "Are you okay?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. So, I guess we get to take this test, right?"

"Are you ready for it? I mean, I would understand if you're not ready. It is a lot to take in."

He cupped her face, stroking her cheeks. "I'm ready."

She pressed her lips together and then took his hand, leading him back toward their bedroom, then through to their en suite. "It's here."

Galina passed the box to Mikhail and waited, anticipating what he was going to say as he read through the box.

He opened it up and took out one of the tests. "Are you ready to pee?"

"Er, yeah, I am, but don't you want to leave?"

"No."

"Seriously?"

"You're not getting rid of me, Galina." He pressed a kiss to her lips. "I'll be changing shitty diapers soon enough. I can handle my woman peeing on a stick."

She felt her cheeks heat but then took the test from him. Her hands shook just a little as she sat down on the toilet.

"You're so red right now. You should see yourself. I bet I could fry an egg on your face."

"Oh, shut up, you're not helping me at all." She tried to ignore him

being there in the room.

“Do you not remember the whole ‘in sickness and in health’?” Mikhail asked. “There will come a time when I’ll have to clean up your sickness ... and do you remember the squirts?”

“Ew, why are you being so gross at a time like this?”

“I’m going to expect you to do the same for me. Clean up my vomit and my squirts.”

She shook her head. “I cannot even believe you’re saying these things to me right now. You’re insane.”

He winked at her. “But you’ve already peed.”

She finished on the toilet and placed the test on the counter. Mikhail had already slid a piece of tissue for her to place it on. She washed her hands and he grabbed her wrist, pulling her in close.

“Are you okay, baby?” he asked.

“You’d really clean up my vomit and squirts?”

“Absolutely, I’d call the clean-up crew.”

She gasped. “Hell, no, that is not what I’m saying at all.”

This time, he laughed. “Yes, I’m telling you how it is. In sickness and in health, I’d be there, by your side, forever and always.”

She released a breath, and it was odd, because she did believe him. Lifting her head to his, she looked into his blue eyes. She had never thought much of them before. Never considered they were lovely eyes, powerful ones that stared back at her. She was coming to see that there was a lot about Mikhail she hadn’t considered.

“Don’t you think two minutes is a long time to wait?” she asked.

“Yeah, this wait is real torture.”

“Do you think we’re going to make good parents?” Galina asked.

“I think we’re going to do what all parents try to do.”

“And what is that?”

“Try our best. It’s all we can do.”

“Look at you, Mikhail. You’re starting to sound all philosophical.”

He kissed her. “Then it must mean I’m full of wisdom, and you’ve got no choice but to listen to me.”

“I really don’t and never will understand your logic.”

And she got another kiss.

“It’s time for us to see,” he said.

She took a deep breath and Mikhail tightened his grip on her hand,

locking their fingers together. Hand in hand, they turned toward the test, and read.

Two red lines.

They were going to be parents.

He pulled Galina into her arms, and she held on tightly to him, unable to believe her happiness at knowing they were going to be parents. She had never considered this before. It was completely insane.

No, becoming parents wasn't the insane part to Galina. The insane part was that she was falling in love with her husband.

Mikhail entered the bar. He'd just gotten the call that Peter was there. He didn't call Galina as he knew she'd be upset. This was the first time Peter had fallen off the wagon.

Stepping into the bar, he came to a stop when he saw Peter, looking calm but appearing to have a mug in front of him. There was no impending emergency, no panicked barman.

"Surprise," Peter said.

He walked up to the bar.

"You can get my man anything he would like."

"Did you call me?" Mikhail asked.

"At my request. Bob, this is Mikhail. Mikhail, this is Bob."

"And he hasn't been drinking?"

"Not a single drop. Pleasure to meet you, Mikhail, but in case you didn't know, this is not a bar that serves alcohol."

Mikhail looked around and saw there was not a single drop of alcohol. "What is this place?"

"I found it a few weeks into my AA meetings. There are not many clients, and those that are, hold chips. This is a place for us. Not many people come here, and I thought it would be the perfect place to celebrate the fact you're going to be a dad." Peter stood up. "Everyone here, my best friend has knocked up my little sister. He is going to be a father."

There was a round of applause and a mass congratulations.

"Seriously, you brought me here to celebrate?" he asked.

"I figured you'd prefer a quiet celebration between us two, before the folks take over, and it's party central, and everyone is swarming the two of you."

Mikhail sat at the counter. "Your best coffee," he said, talking to Bob.

“So, this is where you come?”

“Where I don’t need to have my parents’ bodyguards watching my every move, and I can breathe without them going down my neck. Yeah, it’s all good.” Peter sipped at his coffee. “I can’t offer you a drink, but this is the next best thing.”

“You know what, this is perfect.” He glanced around, knowing Galina would want to be here. She was already sensitive to coffee, and that had made her teary-eyed this morning before he left. “You know, it’s a good thing I didn’t call Galina.”

“You wouldn’t have called Galina.”

“And what makes you think that when we both know she helped you the last time?”

“You love her, and we both know that if I fall off the wagon, you’re not going to want to hurt her. It would be my fault but we know Galina would blame herself. It’s what she does.”

Mikhail sighed. “You’re right.”

“Which part?”

“All of it, and you know it.”

Bob put a coffee in front of him and he lifted it up and took a sip. It was pretty good coffee.

“Any news on Vik?” he asked.

His father had reached out and checked each place Vik was known to have hidden out in the past, but no one had seen or heard from him. His closest men hadn’t been seen.

They had accessed security footage, which showed them getting into black cars, but there was no way to see the license plate, so they were screwed. They didn’t have a single thing to go on. Mikhail didn’t like it, so he’d tried to stay as close to Galina as possible.

Vik would try and use her to get to him. If what his father said was true, then Mikhail had tried to make himself the easier target, which wouldn’t work if his father kept sending men to him.

“Nothing concrete. There was a potential he was in the city, close to your building, but when I went to check it out, there was nothing. I don’t understand how Vik and his men could hide. They stand out in a crowd.”

Mikhail agreed and then a chill went down his spine.

“Crowd,” he said.

He frowned as that one word seemed to capture something in his

mind.

His building had a picture, an opening picture. It was a Belsky building. His father and Vik Kuzlov had built it together, and in the main reception of the building there was an image of Boris Belsky and Vik Kuzlov, both holding a set of keys.

Mikhail dropped his mug and ran out of the bar. He didn't care what kind of scene he had caused. After getting the call from Bob, he had no choice but to go to Peter, and he'd left her alone. Now, he felt like a fucking asshole.

"Dude, what's the deal?" Peter asked, coming out of the bar.

"Vik's in my building. He doesn't need a key or code to get inside because he's part owner of the fucking building, and I bet that son of a bitch has been there all this time. Fuck!" The call went to voicemail. "Pick up, Galina. Pick the fuck up."

He turned to Peter. "Call my dad, I'm going back to my place."

"It's a trap."

"I'm not leaving Galina in there. I don't give a shit. I promised I would protect her and that's exactly what I'm going to do."

He rushed to his car, climbing inside. He turned over the ignition as Peter got into the passenger side.

"You need to get out."

"No, I'm not going to leave you to go at this alone. Galina would kill me. She may not know it yet, but I believe she's falling in love with you, and you're going to be the dad to my little niece or nephew." Peter was already on his cell phone. "Just drive, I'll deal with your dad."

Mikhail pressed his foot to the gas, not caring what kind of speed limit he broke. He'd deal with the cops later. He needed to get to Galina.

Chapter Eleven

Galina had seen dead bodies before. That was nothing new, but even still, knowing that the two guards assigned to her care were now dead filled her with a deep regret.

Kneeling on the floor with a gun pointed to her head wasn't exactly fun, and she found herself getting even more pissed off as the seconds passed.

Mikhail had been gone twenty minutes after getting what looked like an important call for Vik Kuzlov to make his move. One of her eyes were already starting to swell shut and her lip was split.

He hadn't landed a blow to her stomach, so she could handle all the hits to every other part of her body, just not her stomach. She had to focus on trying to protect her midriff. She had a feeling Vik would beat her out of spite.

"You do realize this is signing your death warrant?" she said.

Vik laughed. "You think I'm going to die? Stupid girl. This has nothing to do with you."

"I know you want Mikhail, but newsflash, asshole. He's not coming."

Her husband had finally told her what had been worrying him the day they found out she was pregnant. The news Boris had told him about who Vik was and the fact he wanted the keys to the throne.

Vik crouched down. He tilted the gun to the side, but still kept it pointed at her. "You don't realize, do you?"

Galina gritted her teeth, not liking his line of questioning at all.

He tutted.

"I was under the impression you're a clever girl, but you're just as thick and stupid as the rest of them. Only good for one thing, and that is spreading your legs. I wonder if you satisfy Mikhail."

"You're disgusting," she said.

"Do you think I care about your insults?"

"You're wasting your time. Mikhail won't be coming back. He's getting Boris, and then, your little quest to be King, to be the boss, is over."

Vik laughed and then drew his hand back, slapping her hard across the face. She collapsed to the floor as her vision went a little blurry.

"Do you think I didn't watch Mikhail? I've seen the way he looks at you. He tried to hide it, but you are that kid's world. His father should have trained him better. Love makes you weak. Women are just objects to be used.

You have no other use and you're all so fucking breakable, but I saw how weak his son is. Mikhail is in love with you, so he's going to come here and he's going to give his life for you." He reached out, grabbing her hair and tugging her up.

She couldn't contain her scream as the pain rushed through her body, shocking her. Nothing could have prepared her for this.

"He's a stupid kid in love."

"You're wrong," she said.

"Well, why don't we see? If Mikhail doesn't turn up, then I don't get to kill him, and I get to kill you instead, and he moves on. Or, he comes through that door, you get to see for yourself that he loves you, and then you get to watch me kill him. If I'm feeling generous, you'll get to see me kill his father as well."

"And this is all you want, more power, more greed. This is what it's all about?" Galina asked.

"I'm the oldest son," Vik said. "This is my fucking place. Boris was never meant to have what was mine. He is not me. I'm the fucking favorite. Dad loved me, not him."

Galina tensed up as he threw her to the ground. He stood up and began to pace.

"You had the wrong mother," Galina said. "You were never going to be top dog." She felt that was in insult to dogs.

He pointed the gun at her. "I suggest you don't test me, slut."

Her face ached, her hair hurt, and she was pretty sure he'd taken a chunk out of it.

This man was crazy. He had clearly been pushed too far, and he believed he had some right to something that wasn't his.

"Who would swear their loyalty to you?" Galina asked. "You're acting like a spoiled little bastard brat."

She needed him to react, to do something that would show weakness. His men were in the apartment, all of them a witness to her insulting him. She knew it was possible she wasn't going to make it out of the apartment alive, but she had to give Mikhail a chance.

There was no way she would allow him to die. Galina didn't have a clue what she was doing. She only knew she was trying to help.

She'd never dealt with anyone like Vik Kuzlov before. The man was clearly unstable. He had no qualms about attacking a woman, but then she

had known he also liked to kill women, so that didn't exactly put her in a good place. She didn't want Mikhail to walk into this trap.

"What the fuck did you say to me?" Vik asked, stepping close. She knew she had crossed a line, but in that moment she didn't care.

Vik could kill her. At least Mikhail could live.

She couldn't help but think about her unborn child.

"You heard," she said, tensing up.

As he drew his arm back to start hitting her, she heard Peter's voice coming across the device attached to Vik's waist. They had some kind of walkie-talkie. When Vik had invaded the penthouse suite, he'd been telling whoever was on the other end to let him know when Mikhail arrived.

"Kuzlov, I've got some information for you."

Peter. Why was Peter talking to Vik?

"Who is this?"

"Peter Nikitin. You have my sister and we've got to come up with some kind of deal. I don't want my sister hurt. You wanted to marry her once, remember? I'm pretty sure together we'd make a great team."

This couldn't be possible. Why would her brother be there attempting to make some kind of deal? None of this made any sense to her.

She felt sick to her stomach. This couldn't be happening.

Peter was Mikhail's best friend. There was no way he'd sell him out. No way at all. They had to be playing some kind of plan.

"Where are my men?" Vik asked.

"Here, talk to them."

"Vik, he's a good guy. He hasn't got a gun, he's good."

Galina looked over at Vik and she didn't have a clue who that guy's voice was. Mikhail hadn't come but her brother had. This didn't make any sense.

"Come on up, kid," Vik said. He started to laugh and she hated the sound. "I should have known your brother was weak."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"I don't?" He tutted. "Your brother wants to make a deal with me and he's about to save your ass."

Galina's hands clenched into fists.

There was a knock at the door less than five minutes later.

That couldn't be possible. She had timed that it takes close to ten minutes to get from the main reception to the elevator. If all the men in the

building were correct, the elevator needed time to descend, then for them to get on before climbing up to the main floor. Whoever was at the door couldn't be Peter.

She kept her gaze on Vik as she listened. There was the door opening, and then nothing.

Seconds passed. It could have been minutes, but then nothing. No sound.

Vik's guard on the left went down, and she saw blood appearing from his neck. The right one had gone down as well, and then it was just her, Vik, and as she spun around, Mikhail. He'd stepped into the room, holding a gun.

"Hello, Vik."

"I should have known!" he growled and Galina cried out as within seconds, Vik held her in his arms, with a gun pointed to her head.

"Don't do anything stupid," Peter said, stepping into the room, gun raised, pointing in their direction.

"You lied."

"It was all a little too easy for me to do." He snorted. "You walked right into that one, thinking I'd betray my best friend and my sister."

"It's over, Vik," Mikhail said. "Let her go."

"Oh, no, you don't get to do this to me. Not again. She was meant to be mine. All of this is fucking mine."

"It was never yours. None of this is yours and you're not going to make it out of here alive."

Vik chuckled. "You think so." The gun at her temple seemed to dig into her head even more and she couldn't help but yelp. "Then how about I take your precious wife with me? I think that would be suitable. You can kill me, but I take her with me."

She looked at Mikhail and there was something in his eyes, the sheer panic, or fear, or something. She'd never seen him look so afraid. Why?

Then she remembered they had trained for this moment. Galina knew there was a high risk of her getting shot right now. But what was the harm in trying? She had enough wriggle room that she moved her hand behind her, and then grabbed ahold of Vik's cock.

The hated spiel coming from him instantly stopped. The moment she got hold of his dick, she had the element of surprise, which was exactly what she was going for.

Galina didn't waste a moment. She tightened her grip, twisted it, and

wanted to rip his cock right off, but the moment he let her go, she loosened her grip and dove out of the way. She didn't want to get in the way of a stray bullet.

Her heart raced. She felt a little sick. But she heard the gunshots and the sound of a body falling to the ground. It was done.

Pushing her hair out of the way, she didn't have time to move because Mikhail was right there. He cupped her face, but not too tightly, just held her, and then tilted her head back and took possession of her mouth.

“What the fuck were you thinking?” Mikhail asked.

“It worked. Why did you come?”

“What are you talking about?”

She cupped his face. “Don't you get it? He wanted to kill you and take every single thing that is yours.” She let out a little growl. “You're so frustrating.”

Peter cleared his throat.

“And what the hell was that? You nearly gave me a heart attack!” She stamped her foot.

“I love you,” Mikhail said.

This made her gasp and turn her attention back to Mikhail. “What?”

“You heard me. I love you, and if you think for a second I was going to let anything happen to you, then you're mistaken. I love you, and I won't let anything happen to you.”

Galina was speechless.

When he kissed her, she had to kiss him back, even though her lip was split and she was starting to feel a headache. But, Mikhail loved her.

He broke the kiss and she looked into his blue eyes. Mikhail slowly pushed some of the hair off her face. “I'd always come for you. Peter knows that. I couldn't let anything happen to you.”

“Nothing can happen to you either,” she said, sniffing. “I love you and I hate you for making me love you. I think it's so insensitive.”

He began to chuckle.

Mikhail stroked her cheek and then pulled her in close and held her tightly.

“I'm going to let you two have this moment while I call some cleaners and deal with the mess. You know, there are a few dead bodies in here.”

Mikhail took her hand and then led her out of the room. They didn't stop until they were out of the building and in the back of his car.

“You love me?” she asked.

“I’ve loved you all my life.” He stroked her cheek. “Not a moment has gone by that I’ve not loved you.”

“Then why?”

“Why was I a dick?” he asked.

“Yeah. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“I don’t know. I wish I had an answer for you, but I don’t. All my life I’ve wanted you to myself and I guess knowing you weren’t meant to be mine, that someone else was going to marry you, made me angry. I didn’t want you to belong to anyone else.”

“That is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“They were going to let you marry him, Galina. I couldn’t allow it. It’s the first time I argued with my father. I told him that if he wanted a son to rule the Bratva and to take over for him and not run it into the ground, then I got you. That was all I wanted.”

“You wanted me?”

“Yes. I love you, Galina. Marrying you was the happiest day of my life.” He reached out and placed a hand on her stomach. “And building a family with you is what I want. One day, I hope you want it as well.”

She placed her hand on top of his and smiled. “I do want that. I want us to be a family. Seeing you up there, I never felt so scared. I didn’t want anything to happen to you.”

“I guess that shocked you.”

Galina laughed. “It did ... a little.” She held two of her fingers closely together. “I wasn’t expecting to fall in love with you.” She placed a hand on his, which was still on her stomach. “How could I not? You’re an amazing guy, Mikhail, especially when you’re not being a dick.”

“We’re totally telling our kids this part of the story.”

“Which part, the one where I nearly get killed, or where I called you a dick?”

“All of it.”

He pulled her in close and she relished his kiss, even as they heard the approaching cars.

“It seems our folks have arrived,” Mikhail said. He looked out of the car window. “And the doctor.”

“The doctor?”

“You’re getting checked. I want to make sure you don’t have a

concussion or anything.” He opened the door and Galina couldn’t help but smile as she knew this was the start of something magical.

Epilogue

Ten Years Later

“And then he passed out,” Galina said.

“I passed out at the first birth,” Mikhail said, looking up from the barbecue he’d been expertly managing.

“Dad passed out?” Mikhail Jr. asked. “Nah, he didn’t.”

Galina laughed and Mikhail still loved that sound. Ten years married, three kids, one son and two little girls, with a fourth child on the way. They didn’t know the sex of their fourth, and Mikhail was happy to keep it that way.

Yes, when Mikhail Jr. was born, he was there in the room with her, and because he felt like he could handle anything, he’d asked to witness his son, and in doing so, he had passed out. It wasn’t a good moment for him.

He stressed Galina out, not to mention the full staff in attendance, at his request for their first birth. It wasn’t a good story, however, it was a funny story.

Mikhail Belsky was on the verge of being handed the throne by his father. He was considered a deadly son of a bitch, and yet, at the sight of his wife giving birth, he’d passed out. He had a feeling Galina had fallen even more in love with him that day, so he didn’t care.

He loved his wife, loved his family, and nothing could take that away from him.

Not even these blasted burgers that were a little on the thick side and weren’t cooking all the way through. He loved his meat thoroughly cooked, and he just had this barbeque pit installed, so while they sat out on the patio with the kids, it was pouring rain around them, but he insisted on cooking.

Galina had already prepared the potato salad and main salad. He had to provide the burgers and grilled mushrooms. He hadn’t even started on the mushrooms.

Stepping away from the grill, he walked toward his wife, while Mikhail Jr. knew what was coming, so had already started to yak and make grossed-out noises. Scarlett and Tammy, their little girls, were watching.

Mikhail knew he was going to have to kill a lot of men. There was no way his girls were ever dating, nor were they getting married. He’d kill them all. His little girls were going to remain little and playing with dolls, and even now he knew he was being delusional.

This was his family. The love of his life.

And the last ten years had been incredible, at times difficult, but he wouldn't change it for the world. Cupping Galina's cheek, he tilted her head back, stared into her eyes, and then kissed her.

Galina kissed him back and he felt her love, and he knew the last ten years were just the start of something amazing. He knew the next ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, the rest of their lives, were going to be just as incredible, and he couldn't wait for it.

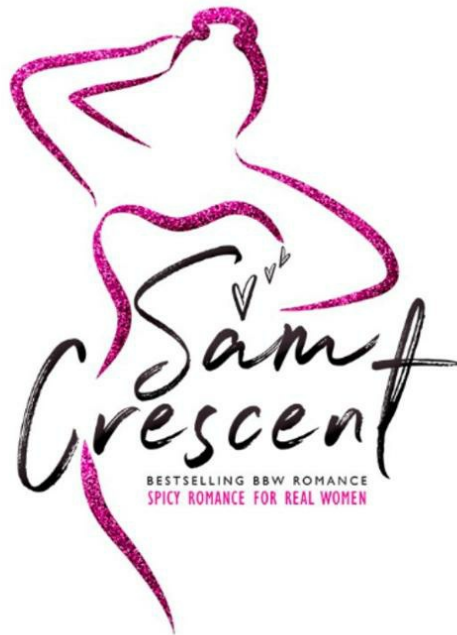
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BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER

LIKE IT ROUGH

Sam Crescent

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Sample Chapter

Chloe Baker told herself she was not going to cry, even as tears filled her eyes and her heart felt like it was breaking. She should have known, and now she felt even more foolish than she ever had in her entire life.

Her husband of exactly three hours had been ordered to marry her. Roman Sidorov. When they had met a year ago, she had known him as Roman Smith. He was supposedly a small businessman who owned a couple of restaurants, but that was the furthest thing from the truth.

He was a member of the terrifying Zaitsev Bratva. They ruled the city. She hadn't dealt with them on a one-to-one level, but they were the reason she had no family. Her parents as well as her brother had been driving home from the cinema, and gotten caught in the crossfire. They'd been killed by stray bullets.

Chloe had lost everyone that night. Her parents had not left a will, so she'd been unable to keep her home. She had no choice but to move out, selling what possessions she could in order to find a place to stay.

She worked as a bartender, until Roman came along.

The bar was owned by the Zaitsev Bratva. It all made sense now. Chloe had vowed to bring them down, and being a curvy woman, she was able to blend into places because everyone overlooked her, and she had seen some ... things.

Chloe thought about the cop she'd been going to see. He must have

been in on it as well. Paid off by the Bratva to look the other way. He sold her out.

Roman had come into the bar late one night, asking for a drink. Chloe had been the one to serve him. The first night, he didn't say anything, nor the second. For a whole week, he came, ordered a drink, rarely drank it, and then left. It was during the second week that he began to talk to her. It started as small talk. He'd bring up his day, mention work, and he seemed like a nice guy.

She found herself looking forward to his visits, even anticipating them. After the pain of losing her family, she didn't think it was possible to enjoy life again, but Roman changed that. He made her feel. He helped her to make peace. He had no idea she planned to take down the Bratva — at least she didn't think he had, until today.

Their wedding day.

The first shock had come when she entered the church and saw all the guests. She didn't have any friends, but Roman had packed the church. By the time she made it to the end of the aisle, she had spotted three people from the Zaitsev Bratva, and in that moment she had known.

The next giant shock was, she thought she was marrying Roman Smith, but had become Chloe Sidorov.

Then of course, the wedding photos. She had to stand side by side with the men responsible for killing her family. She didn't make a scene. She stayed polite, smiled, and acted like the good little girl her mother had taught her to be in those settings.

Once they got to the reception, everything had changed.

Roman had been on his cell phone the entire journey. The polite person inside her had struggled, but she had remained calm. She'd not caused a scene. She had sat there while he made his phone call, and then waited.

The moment they arrived at their reception, Roman abandoned her. There was no one she knew. No one. So, it was easy for her to make her escape, to find Roman, to find out what the hell was going on.

“Well, I have to say, Roman, you did surprise me. I suggested the girl needed to die, and you married her.”

“She won't be causing any problems. I'll take care of it.”

“I have a feeling you're going to have your work cut out for you. There's no way of hiding who you are now.”

“You told me to handle it, I did. Chloe has her ... uses.”

It had all been a setup. Roman coming into the bar. He wasn't a normal businessman. He was a member of the Zaitsev Bratva. The ink on his body should have been an indication, but it wasn't.

Chloe let out a scream as arms wrapped around her waist. After discovering the truth, she had tried to make a run for it. The guards at the main entrance had refused to let her pass. She had no choice but to attempt to sneak past the kitchen. That hadn't worked.

There were several rooms at the hotel, so she snuck inside one, found a window that opened, and climbed out of it, attempting to run through the gardens to find an exit.

"Let me go!" She tried to pummel the hand that held her, but it was no use.

Chloe refused to give up. She released a scream, and again berated the thing that was holding her. It wasn't Roman. She would recognize that touch anywhere. She was going to be sick.

She had given her virginity to Roman. There was not a part of her soul she hadn't opened up to him.

A fresh wave of anger rushed over her as she attempted to attack the man that held her captive. This was insane. Could she not escape now?

She slapped the hands again, trying to wriggle free. There was no way this was easy for the guy. She wasn't a light woman, hadn't been for some time. Chloe wanted to scream because no matter how hard she tried, he refused to let go. Insufferable man.

Anger filled her.

They were back inside the hotel, and the next thing she knew, she was being dumped on the floor. She saw the bed out of the corner of her eye, and then the two feet — Roman's two feet, in what appeared to be Italian leather, of course. Another little tidbit she should have paid attention to. Roman always had perfect-fitting suits. It was like the suit had been made for him, and from what she could see, this one had. Expensive.

Everything about him screamed money. She figured he was just a good small-time businessman, maybe was owed a few favors along the way. She had no idea the extent of those favors.

None of it was true. He wasn't owed any favors. Fear helped him get what he wanted.

"Chloe, trying to run... I didn't think you were the kind of woman to flee a problem," Roman said.

She clenched her hands into fists. How dare he? Finally, after several seconds passed, she lifted her head and glared at him.

“And I didn’t expect you to lie to get your way.”

He crouched down, his feet lifting, and he reached out, cupping her chin. She jerked back, but he grabbed her once again, this time tighter than before. There was no way for her to get him to leave her alone.

“I know you’re upset, but you and I both know you love it when I touch you.”

Heat filled her cheeks, and a certain hatred flooded her heart.

She was swift, shoving him hard against the chest, and he was unprepared for her attack. She straddled his waist. Chloe couldn’t do anything but press down on his shoulders. She was no match for him in strength. She didn’t even come close. The only reason she had gotten the upper hand was she’d taken him by surprise, and Roman was letting her.

“That was uncalled for. The only reason I ever let you touch me is because I thought you were someone else. You lied to me, and for what? You were supposed to kill me.”

She gasped because suddenly she was the one on the floor. Roman slid his thighs between her legs, and she realized how vulnerable she was, open like this. He could take what he wanted.

He tutted.

“Why would I kill you, Chloe? When I know I can have a whole lot more fun with you.” He pressed his lips against her neck and she hated the gasp that escaped.

She didn’t know what it was about this man, but he seemed to set her whole body on fire. There was no way for her to control it. She felt completely owned by him.

His teeth nibbled on her pulse, and his tongue slid back and forth, then suddenly, he moved down.

The wedding dress she wore didn’t have any straps, and her breasts were held up and confined by a tight corset built within the dress. Roman’s lips teased across the top of her dress, hinting at what he could do to her.

Her traitorous body was already on fire.

Chloe wanted to deny him.

She wanted to hate him.

In fact, she did hate him, but it didn’t stop her from loving him as well.

Roman Sidorov was not known for doing things the easy way. In fact, he was used to doing things the very hard way. He had no problem getting his hands dirty when the occasion called for it.

He had a lot of kills under his belt, and he was loyal to the Zaitsev Bratva. After the street war that broke out two years ago, he had learned of the casualties, including civilians. Roman didn't mourn people. He simply had no feelings about them, but he did work to a code. People who didn't get in the way were free to live their lives.

Now, the people in the car had lost their lives due to sloppiness.

He had already killed the men who'd attacked without thinking, causing a scene, and costing a lot of money to deal with, through different avenues of the law. The Zaitsev Bratva had legal and illegal businesses. He was one of the men responsible for making money, but keeping problems at bay. Roman knew he was the master of it. Whenever there was a problem within the Bratva, something needing to be cleaned up and dealt with, he was the one to call, in every situation and scenario.

Then a year after the incident, he got a call from a cop on their payroll about a young woman, Chloe Baker. She was attempting to give information to help incarcerate the Zaitsev Bratva. At first, he was intrigued, until he listened to everything she had — recordings, photographs — all of them coming from their own bar, Hugh's.

Hugh's wasn't a bar he frequented. The women who danced there were often desperate for a taste of the good life, and he just didn't like that level of desperation, unless he was the one doing the torture. He had gone to the bar, intent on finding out who Chloe Baker was. He had his orders to handle the problem, from Zaitsev himself.

The easy option would be to kill her. Only, Chloe had intrigued him from the moment he walked into the bar. First, she had given him a drink without a word. No conversation or even flirting. She didn't attempt to press her tits together to gain his attention, and she was dressed as most barmen, long black pants and a shirt. Obviously, she wore the female versions that did amazing things for her figure. There was another little detail he liked. Roman loved a woman with curves. He loved big tits, a nice, juicy ass, thick thighs, all of which Chloe possessed.

She never flirted with him. He had to initiate conversation, and again, this was new to him. Over the years, he had gotten used to women throwing

themselves at him, practically drooling at the title.

Rather than kill Chloe, he'd decided to enjoy her. It had taken him ten months to get her into his bed, and much to his surprise, she had been a virgin, even though he had a hunch she was. In all his forty years, he'd never had a virgin. Chloe had become a pure addiction to him. One taste hadn't been enough, so for the last two months, he'd been enjoying her every chance he got.

Marrying her was the only solution. As his wife, she wouldn't be able to get into too much trouble, at least that was what he told himself. He never planned for her to learn the truth, not so soon anyway.

"You're sick!"

"Are you telling me your pussy isn't wet for me right now?" he asked. In response, she let out a whimper.

Chloe liked it when he talked dirty. He'd never been much of a talker, and when it came to sex, he liked to fuck. With Chloe, he was learning a whole lot more that he enjoyed.

She had been a virgin, his special virgin.

No more. He'd claimed that two months ago. It was the final decision he had to ask her to marry him. Roman hadn't realized just how much of a virgin she had been. Now he knew. And he fucking loved the fact he was the only man who would ever know how amazing she felt. How tight and hot. He would be the only man to hear those little gasps as he took her by surprise and drove her higher and higher.

As he kissed along the top of her dress, hinting at taking her tits into his mouth, he reached down, pushing the wedding dress out of the way, and stroked her inner thigh. He started at her knee and traced the tip of his fingers up, moving closer toward her pussy. The moment he reached the apex of her thighs, he gripped the lace of her panties and tore them right off her body. The offending item was in the way, and he wanted to touch her, skin to skin.

He pressed his palm to her pussy and slid two fingers between her wet slit. She was soaked with her own arousal. Plunging two fingers deep inside her cunt, he pumped in and out, hearing her moan. She arched up, thrusting her pelvis against him. With two digits inside her, he pressed his thumb to her clit and stroked back and forth. Another moan.

She could try and fight it all she wanted, but Chloe loved him. She had told him so. When he asked her to marry him, she had been filled with joy. Roman wasn't a man controlled by his emotions, but he had loved how

excited she was.

It was all for business.

He knew just the right way to touch her, to set her on fire. The dress was a problem, but he didn't care.

"Tell me to stop," he said.

Chloe glared at him. "I hate you."

"There's a fine line between love and hate." He leaned in close, pressing his lips to her ear. "And I know you love me. I know you want to spend the rest of your life with me, giving yourself to me."

He repeated some of her vows back.

With one hand inside her, working its magic on her sweet cunt, he unbuttoned the zipper of his fly with the other and eased out his cock. He was rock-hard.

Roman had gone along with her silly tradition of them not having sex for the whole week. She had said it would make their wedding night more of an anticipation. He didn't need to wait a whole week as each time with her was even better than the last.

This woman was messing with his head. He couldn't seem to control himself.

Pulling his fingers through her pussy, he pressed the tip of his cock to her entrance, and then inch by inch, slid inside her.

She cried out, but didn't once tell him to stop. He gave her a chance, a few precious seconds to make this stop, but he felt her tight, hot cunt as it fluttered around him. Desperate. Hungry for cock. And he was more than willing to give it to her.

Grabbing her hips, he fucked her harder, driving in deep, filling her, fucking her. He slammed balls-deep inside her, and then stopped, pulling back so he could feel her clit. Stroking back and forth across her sweet nub, he drove her higher and higher, pushing her over the edge, and she screamed his name as she came, hard.

He held her hips, driving inside her, filling her with each thrust. Roman didn't give her a chance to come down from the peak, but he was determined to join her. He did so within minutes of her release.

This time, he drove inside her. All the other times, he'd used a condom. This time, he didn't. Nothing to protect her from having his child. Roman held her in place as wave upon wave of his cum flooded her body, filling her up. In that moment, he wanted her to get pregnant.

Chloe wasn't going anywhere. She was his wife, and he intended to keep her.

"I want a divorce," she said.

"No."

She wouldn't be getting a divorce, an annulment, nothing.

End of sample chapter

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