

The Restoration

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Trigger Warnings

Graphic Violence
PTSD
Alcoholism
Torture
Suicidal Thoughts
Explicit Sexual Scenes
Pregnancy
On-Page Sexual Assault
Breeding Kink

Daddy Kink
Breath Play
Praise/Degradation
Edging

*To Kasey, I hope you've stocked up on your eyeball condoms.
You're gonna need them.*

and to Varn, I hope this makes up for book one.

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CHAPTER ONE

Dmitri

Everything hurts .

My father put me through some rigorous training, but no amount of priming could prepare me for the real deal. Blood seeps between my fingers as I hold pressure on the wound on my abdomen. Looking down, there's so much blood I can hardly swallow.

This is bad.

The sound of a car door shutting draws my attention to my left. *No. Fuck. Natalia can't find me like this.* I'm too weak to stop her and when she throws my door open, the look on her face shatters me. She's staring at me with her mouth gaping, eyes widened in shock. Her face is as pale as the white tank top she's wearing.

"Nat..." I gasp, my chest heaving. "Call Eric," I manage to choke out. I can only imagine how bad I look right now. I never wanted her to see me like this. I also never imagined I would be in this position; something I should've been prepared for with the amount of power my family has.

The wounds that litter my body range from nicks to stab wounds, with the occasional cigarette burns. My captors also took my left ring finger. Sadness courses through me knowing

I likely won't be alive to see a wedding band on that finger. "Nat..." I whisper again, snapping her out of her trance.

My eyes stay on her as she makes the necessary phone calls, forcing me to focus on something other than the blood that continues to pump out of my wounds. Her voice shakes when she asks, "Dmitri, how did you drive like this? What happened? Who did this?" She kneels down to apply pressure to the wound on my stomach, trying to stop the bleeding.

Struggling to breathe, I rasp out a few words. "Didn't drive. Was dumped." I place my hand over hers. "Look...look at me Nat." I try to pull her attention to my face rather than my mutilated body. I steel myself, pushing down the pain in an attempt to remain strong for her. Strong until the end, just like we promised. "I love you, Nat. Y-you are the biggest ray of sunshine. Promise me you won't let him make you hard." The words come with a shaky breath. My body is growing numb, and I can feel myself beginning to slip into the darkness. Dots scatter my vision.

"I'm not promising you shit, Dmitri, you're not leaving me," she demands, her voice breaking.

"Natalia," I plead, attempting to squeeze her hand. "Please."

"I promise," she whispers in defeat, the word breaking off on a sob. The tears streaming down her face only confirm that my death today is inevitable.

"I love you, Nat," I whisper again, her tears continuing to paint her face. There's so much more I want to say to her, but I'm so weak, nothing comes out, no matter how much I force it.

My baby sister, I'm so sorry I'm leaving you.

"I love you, Dmitri. Thank you for always being there for me and being my best friend. You don't have to suffer for me. I'll be okay..." Her last words I hear before everything goes black.



Slipping my shoes off, I step up onto the large rock that extends out over the water. I sit the pizza down and watch my sister and her best friend, Declan practically sprint to the water. We chose this as 'our spot' because, unlike everywhere else around the lake, the rock provides a different place to sit rather than the dirt or sand.

. It's not one of those cliff-like rocks that are high above the water. This one sits down in the embankment, creating something like a table.

Flipping my sunglasses on I lay back, placing my hands behind my head. I close my eyes, listening to Natalia and Declan chat about nonsense. I can't help but feel a pang of jealousy toward Natalia. She will never have to go through the level of training Declan and I must go through. She can live a semi-normal life.

A splash of cold water brings me out of my thoughts. "Damn it Natalia!" My sister practically doubles over in waist deep water, and I glare at her.

"Oh come on, I was just playing around!" She says between laughs.

"Come eat before the pizza gets cold," I tell the two of them, to which they both scramble to reach the rock first. Declan beats Natalia, and she sticks her tongue out at him.

Digging into the pizza, quiet stretches between our trio.

"Crowd in, let's take a picture!" Natalia says after finishing her slice, earning a displeased groan from me and Declan. Natalia was always taking photos, no matter what she wanted to document things that made her happy. I may give her hell about it, but you do whatever you can to not go insane in this life.

Squeezing between Declan and I, Natalia grins as she hands Declan the phone. Flipping it around in selfie mode, the three of us smile for the photo.

"I'm framing this one," Natalia says as she examines the photo on her phone. "It's going on my wall."



“He’s starting to come to,” a low voice to my left says.

My eyes flutter open, and I wince against the harsh fluorescent lighting.

“Dmitri?” My mother’s voice comes from the right. Turning my head to face her, I’m confused when I see giant crocodile tears running down her face. If I wasn’t in so much pain, I would scoff at the never ending show she puts on.

“Mom?” I croak, my throat dry.

“Oh God! I’m so glad you’re okay,” she sobs, her hand reaching out for mine.

Turning to my left, I see my father and Eric talking in low voices. “What’s going on?”

“Dmitri, do you not remember anything?” Eric asks, glancing over at my father.

“I mean, yeah, I do. The last thing I remember is Natalia calling for you guys.” I reach up to rub my forehead and furrow my brows when I see the bandage wrapped around my left hand. “Why is mom acting like I died?”

Eric and my father exchange another glance, my father giving him a nod. “Well”— Eric clears his throat —“technically, you did die. We were able to bring you back, but it was real touch and go for a few hours.”

I nod, closing my eyes and swallowing hard.

“Also…” he trails off, looking down at his paperwork. I know he’s avoiding me.

“What Eric?” I snap, my frustration getting the best of me.

“You’re technically still dead,” my father answers for Eric.

“*What?*” I try to sit up in bed, but immediately regret the decision, as a searing pain rips through my abdomen.

“Take it easy,” Eric warns, stepping closer to the bed and lifting my shirt to examine my stomach.

“*Take it easy?* I’m clearly alive and well. Where’s Nat? I need to talk to her.” *Fuck, have they told her I’m alive?*

My father gives me a stern look. “Unfortunately, for everyone’s safety, we can’t allow that, Dmitri.”

“She thinks I’m dead, doesn’t she?” No one answers my question and my frustration builds. “*Doesn’t she?*” I thunder, causing my mom to jump beside me.

“Yes,” my father finally answers.

“How stupid are you people? Don’t you know this will destroy her?” I fist the sheets in my good hand, clenching my jaw.

“Damn it, Dmitri! Stop acting like an entitled brat and listen! We don’t know who tried to murder you. So until then, we need you to stay dead. We can’t tell Natalia because if she were to be captured, they’ll do whatever they can to get information out of her. It’s best this way. For everyone,” my father snaps. Even on my literal death bed, he lacks compassion. The fight in me deflates quickly. An overwhelming sense of understanding sinking in.

I hate to admit it, but this asshole has a point.

Fuck.

CHAPTER TWO

Dmitri

Two Years Later

Mason

Pick up beer on your way home.

Gotcha. I'm leaving Kara's now.

Shaking my head, I slide my phone into my pocket. My roommate, Mason, apparently decided to have a few friends over tonight, even though it's been a long day and I'm ready for a shower and my bed. Opening the door to my blacked out Chevy 2500, I turn to look at Kara, who stopped at the end of the sidewalk.

“Are you sure you have to go?” She asks with a pout. “I was hoping you'd stay longer.”

To anyone else, Kara and I look like a normal couple. However, I've made it clear that I'm not looking for a long-term relationship. We have a mutual understanding that this whole arrangement is mutually beneficial. I like to have the

benefit of the doubt that it's still only a friendship. I know it is on my side. She's hot, definitely. But feelings get you killed.

"Listen, Kara. I think we need to end whatever this is." I rub the back of my neck, my other hand gesturing between the two of us.

"What?" She asks, a look of bewilderment on her face.

"I just think it's ran its course."

"Dmitri, what..." she starts, but the look on my face lets her know I'm serious, and she immediately stops whatever she was going to say. "Okay," she huffs, crossing her arms over her chest and shaking her head.

"I'm sorry," I mention, climbing into my truck. Backing out of her driveway, I turn left toward the liquor store.

Once I have two thirty packs of beer and a fifth of my favorite whiskey in tow, I make my way to my house.

When I moved here two years ago, Mason immediately took me under his wing. He showed me all the ins and outs of the body shop we worked at, and his friend group accepted me without hesitation. After being dropped in the middle of nowhere Arkansas, hours away from your family who has you playing dead, it doesn't seem like a bad life. Actually, it definitely could be a lot worse. He is the one who introduced me to Kara, then five months later, Mason and his fiancée broke up. Which then resulted in him moving in with me. Not that it's an issue since my life was pretty boring. I went to work, came home, drank some whiskey, then went to bed. It was just me in this huge house.

Pulling in the driveway, I survey the four cars that belong to our friends. At least he kept the get together to a minimum like I asked.

Shutting off the truck, I grab the beer and my stuff, making a mental note to come back for my whiskey after my shower. Leaving it in the truck will give it a nice natural chill that will make it perfect to drink. Heading inside, I place the beer on the kitchen counter. Strolling onto the patio, I greet everyone letting them know there's more beer in the house.

“I’m going to shower and probably go to bed,” I inform them, a collective groan echoes throughout the group.

“Okay, grandpa. We will keep the shenanigans to a minimum,” Mason teases, brushing by me and walking out of the house with a thirty pack in his hand.

“I’ll see y’all tomorrow.” I turn and head back into the house. After a short debate, I decide to grab my whiskey before my shower.

Whiskey in hand, I go to shut the vehicle door and hear a throat clear behind me. No hesitation, I whip around, my free hand immediately pulling the switchblade from my pocket, and my fight or flight reflex kicking in.

A relieved exhale whooshes from my lungs as I look down, seeing a petite blonde with wide blue eyes staring back at me.

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to startle you,” she rushes out, taking a step back as her eyes fall to the switchblade in my hand. For a mere moment, fear isn’t the only emotion captivated in those depths. It’s an emotion I’ve not recognized before, but I don’t have time to dwell on it.

“Fuck.” I lean forward, placing the whiskey on the ground. “No, *I’m* sorry. Just give me a minute.” Placing my hands on my knees, I hang my head momentarily. Taking in a deep breath, then exhaling, I pick the bottle up again. I shove the switchblade back into my pocket before looking down at the pretty blonde in front of me.

Something stirs deep within me, and I catch myself staring at her for a moment too long.

“Can I help you?” I ask, finally regaining my bearings and grabbing my prized whiskey.

“I’m looking for Mason Turner.” If my sudden outburst scared her, she doesn’t show it now. Her voice is strong, even her body language is normal. If anything, her shoulders straighten even further, chin tilted upward in defiance.

Weird. And oddly arousing.

“What do you want with Mason?” I eye her suspiciously, brows furrowed protectively. Mason hasn’t told me about a new girlfriend, so I’m wary.

“I went to the last address I had for him, and his fiance said he would be here,” she states, pointing at the house before crossing her arms over her chest. “Do I need to start yelling for him? Cause a scene?”

“Fiance? What?” I pause for a moment, processing what she said. Shaking my head, I smirk. She’s a feisty one, that’s for sure. “No, don’t make a scene. Just, come on.” I motion for her to follow me.

Leading her along the sidewalk that takes us to the backyard, we stop in front of the gate, and I lower my voice. “I probably wouldn’t mention the fiance thing...” I mutter, opening the gate for her and allowing her to walk in before me. The guy’s laughter fills the air as she makes her way toward him. One of the guys nudge him, which seems to sober him.

“Ansleigh?” Mason stands from his seat, worry flashing across his face as he meets her halfway.

“Why are you the hardest man to track down?” The girl, *Ansleigh*, scowls at him.

“Why are you here?” He counters, eyes flicking between myself and his sister.

“I wouldn’t be here if you wouldn’t have changed your phone number after you abandoned me.” She raises a challenging eyebrow, arms crossing over her chest in defiance. “I lied. I would definitely be here. You just would’ve had a heads up instead of me banging your door down.”

“I’m going to ask one more time, why are you here? Is Bryan with you?” Mason looks back toward the gate as if waiting for a third person to walk through.

“No. I came alone.” She adverts her eyes, looking at the ground. Her shoulders slump, defeat evident in her body. “Bryan and I split up. I found out he was cheating on me with a girl he worked with. Since mom and dad kicked me out after

you left...” Ansleigh trails off, glancing around the firepit at the people who are now staring at the two of them.

“How about you guys come inside?” I suggest, motioning toward the doorway. They both agree quickly, following me into the house.

Placing my whiskey on the table, I glare at Mason who immediately throws his hands up in surrender. “No one is going to touch it, swear.”

Giving him a nod, I exit the kitchen. Walking back to my bedroom, I hear their conversation continue just before I shut the door. Shaking my head, I walk over to my dresser. Grabbing a pair of gray sweats and a t-shirt, I walk into the ensuite bathroom. Cranking on the shower to the hottest setting manageable, I undress. Glimpsing at my bare chest in the mirror, I run my fingers over the many scars that mar it.

Tattooing over scar tissue is a gamble, but it was one I was more than willing to take. Instead of pieces that were solid black, the artist suggested watercolors or designs that flowed more freely. That way, if the ink bled or migrated, the design wouldn’t look awful or blurry.

It’s been two years since I woke up from my coma, and while adjusting to life in Arkansas hasn’t been awful, I deeply miss my life back home. Each touch to the marks is like a reminder of the shit I went through. In more ways than I can count, it’s simply another cue on everything I sacrificed just to save my family. By now, I would’ve already taken over for my father. I would have probably been married off to a power match that was deemed suitable. But now...

My mind wanders to Natalia. How is she doing? Is she training? Has my father broken her spirit? Did she keep her promise?

Shaking those thoughts from my head, I step into the shower and under the warm spray. My eyes close as I tip my head back, letting the stream wash away the feeling of apprehension I feel around today.. It’s rinsing away everything negative from my thoughts, just like I need it to.

Taking my time with my shower, I finally step out into the steamy bathroom. Grabbing a towel, I dry off and throw on my clothes. Exiting the bathroom, I remember my whiskey in the kitchen.

Shoving my hands into the pocket of my sweats, I stroll down the hall. It's quiet, so I assume Mason and Ansleigh have finished their discussion.

However, when I walk into the kitchen I notice that they seem to be in the middle of a stare down.

"Okay you two," I sigh, walking over and grabbing my bottle of Jack. "What's going on?"

"My brother is being completely unreasonable." Ansleigh turns her attention from Mason to me.

"I am *not*," Mason protests, leaning against the counter. Raising his hand, he waves it across to her. "She will be here for an extended period and thinks that staying in a hotel would be cheaper than renting from someone."

"I mean, he's not *wrong*." I twist the cap off, lifting the bottle to my lips. The deep burn soothes me as they work themselves back into an argument.

"Sorry if I take the opinion of a caveman with a grain of salt," the tiny blonde snaps, her arms flailing beside her. *Damn, she's vicious. I hope she bites.*

"Is that any way to talk to someone who's about to offer you a place to stay." I raise a challenging eyebrow, taking another drink. "For free."

"Man, you don't need to do that." Mason raises from the counter.

"I know I don't have to," I swipe my phone off the counter and start to walk back toward my room. "But if my sister showed up and needed somewhere to stay, I would hope that my roommate shows her the same compassion, especially since we have more than enough room."

"But-" he tries to argue again, and I hold my hand up, cutting him off.

“This is non-negotiable.”

“What’s the catch?” She huffs, searching my face for signs. There aren’t any to find.

“No catch. Just helping out a friend.” Tipping the bottle, she holds my gaze until I swallow. Her eyes travel to my throat where my Adam’s apple bobs.

“Thank you,” Ansleigh says, giving me a relieved look, albeit still a little skeptical.

“Mason will show you where your room is.” My voice is flat, eyes focused straight ahead.

Retreating to my room, I slam the door. The goal of forgetting my family goes completely out the window as I flop down on my bed. Very rarely do I drink the entire fifth in one night, I like to stretch it out over a few nights.

Tonight is an exception to the rule.

CHAPTER THREE

Ansleigh

“He hates me,” I whisper to Mason as we grab my things out of my car.

“No he doesn’t,” he assures me, bumping my shoulder gently. “He just takes some...getting used to, that’s all. He’s not always this angry.”

“Are you sure he won’t murder me in my sleep?” I question, keeping my voice low. Mason grumbles, his irritation under his breath, showing me to the spare bedroom. “I mean it Mason, you should’ve seen how quick he pulled that switchblade out of his pocket earlier.”

“Ansleigh Kate,” Mason scolds, throwing my suitcase on the bed. “I’m only going to say this once. Dmitri has gone through a lot of shit. Like, *a lot*. Don’t ask questions. Don’t stare at his scars if he gets comfortable enough to walk around without a shirt. Don’t stare at his missing finger. Just, don’t do your normal shit. Okay?”

Missing finger? Scars? Who is this guy? Is my brother in a gang?

What the fuck?

“Hello? Earth to Ans.” Mason waves his hand in front of my face, brows raise in irritation. “Do you understand?”

“Yes,” I mumble, looking over my shoulder at the door. “What’s his deal?”

“Ansleigh.” He spears a hand through his hair in annoyance.

“Okay, okay.” I hold my hands up, holding in my smirk. “I won’t ask anymore questions. I’m too tired anyways.”

“I will see you in the morning. We can figure things out then.” With that, my brother turns and exits the room.

Shutting the door softly behind him, I turn back to my suitcases. Digging through one of them, I finally find my pajama shorts and t-shirt. I sit down on my bed after changing, replaying the last twenty four hours in my mind.

“Ansleigh, we need to talk.” Bryan comes to stand beside me as I’m washing dishes.

“What’s up, babe?” I turn to face him, drying my hands off on the hand towel. When I see the look on his face, my brows furrow. “Bryan? What is it?” His shirt is a frumpled mess, hair tousled every which way, and looks as if he’s not slept in days.

“I fucked up, Ans.” He looks down at his feet, shifting his weight nervously as his fingers stab through his hair. “I fucked up,” his voice cracks as his nose and under eyes become red.

Setting the towel down, I lean against the counter for support. Something tells me I’m going to need it. “What did you do, Bryan?”

“I...” he trails off, like he’s trying to find the right words to say. With a deep breath, he looks me dead in the eyes. “I slept with someone else.”

His words hit me like a freight train, completely blindsiding me. “What?” I choke out, air suddenly struggling to enter my lungs.

“It didn’t mean anything,” he rushes out. “You mean everything to me, not this stupid mistake.” Opening and closing my mouth, I can’t fathom to hear what he’s saying. *Why do people think those words provide any sense of*

comfort? 'Hey, I went out and destroyed our relationship, but it didn't mean anything because I love you.'

I didn't realize it was that hard to keep your genitalia in our pants.

"I can't...when? How?" I ask, wracking my brain and trying to remember when this could have possibly happened.

"When you went on the trip with your friends two months ago." He keeps his voice low, still avoiding my gaze. My heart hammers in my chest, the stupid organ slamming blood so fast through my veins I think I might be hearing things wrongly. "I'm so sorry, Ansleigh."

"You're sorry?" I scoff, folding my arms across my chest. "Why are you even telling me this?" I ask, my voice rough with irritation. If I thought I was betrayed before...

"Because...she's pregnant."

"What the fuck?" I shriek, taking a step away from him, trying to get around the kitchen island. He reaches out to me, but I jerk away from his touch. His damn face falls as if I'm the one who did this to us. "You're saying you've had unprotected sex with another fucking woman. You decided your dick wasn't getting enough action, huh?" I can't help but want to reach out and slap him.

And I do just that.

His head whips to the side, the sound ricocheting off the painted drywall. "I deserve that." Reaching up, he wipes away the small patch of blood on his lips where it split. "Ansleigh, please," he pleads, but I shake my head. It takes everything in me not to shake out my hand from the harsh hit.

"I'm not going to stand here and play step-mommy. I'm going to get tested for fucking STD's since you obviously don't have an issue with your mini cock getting fucked by any desperate whores."

"Baby, you don't understand," he begs, dropping onto his knees. "You can't leave me, Ansleigh. I need you."

“Get out.” I point to the door, my voice wavering. “Get the fuck out of this apartment right now and don’t come back.”

“Where am I supposed to go?” He frowns, obviously not expecting this reaction. He stands, and a frown takes place on his lips.

“I don’t care. I will be gone when you get back.” I shove past him, heading to the bedroom.

“Baby, please don’t go,” Bryan pleads, hot on my heels. “I fucked up, and I’m so sorry. I can’t take it back, but I can try to make it up to you. I will do anything.”

Spinning around, I look at him, face scrunched in disbelief. “Do you honestly think I’m that stupid, Bryan? There’s no way in hell I’m going to stay with you.”

“Get. Out.” I point to the door. I don’t care how much he begs. I’m done.

“No.” He grabs my arm and spins me around. Then, he rolls his shoulders back and stands his ground as if I’m below him. He may as well be looking down his nose at me.

“No?” I laugh mirthlessly. “No? What do you mean ‘no’? You are the one who fucked around, and now you get to find out. I will give you five minutes to get the fuck out of my apartment before I call the police.” Spinning on my heel, I slam the door in his face.

“You’re going to regret this!” He shouts before loud stomps echo away.

Good fucking riddance.

Shaking my head, I stand from the bed. I had already been debating ending the relationship, but this was the final nail in the coffin. I only married him to make my parents happy. After chasing their approval in any aspect of my life, I settled for a mediocre partner. The perfectly mediocre life.

All of that changes today.

Peeking my head out the door, I slip out of my room and quietly make my way to the kitchen. Mason sent all of their

friends home after Dmitri stormed off. Since it's late, I assume both men in the house are sleeping.

Opening the fridge, I pull out a beer. Cracking it open, the sizzle itself is relaxing. I lean against the counter, staring out the window, willing myself to just move on. Unfortunately, my brain occupies my time with shitty flashbacks. All of the times we had trash sex, and I had to finish myself off later. The shitty late nights of wondering when he's going to get his act together or when I'll be able to stand up to him.

Taking another sip, I relish in the bitter taste. Men are the bane of our existence, that's for damn sure.

"Do you often drink other people's beer?" A voice comes from behind me. Some of the liquid spits out of my mouth as I rip the can away from my mouth.

"I'm sorry?" I turn to see Dmitri sitting at the kitchen table, hidden in the shadows. "I figured since it was for everyone that was here earlier, I could have one. Or are my assumptions incorrect? Were you going to tease them by dangling said beer in front of them like salivating puppies?" I can't help the smidge of sass that pours from my sarcastic words.

He grunts barbarically, picking up his now empty whiskey bottle. Standing, he walks over to the garbage, tossing it inside with a clatter.

"Just don't touch the whiskey, *solnyshko*," he growls as he goes to walk past me.

"Hard to drink something that doesn't stick around for long," I mock under my breath, taking another slug from my own can. Just as he walks past me, he stills. My heart drops to the floor as he remains unmoving for several long moments.

He leans down, his lips brushing against my ear as he mutters, "that's no way to speak to someone who's letting you stay here out of the kindness of their heart. Haven't you heard the phrase, *don't bite the hand that feeds you?*" He gnashes his teeth together with a little growl so damn close to my ear a shiver zings down my spine and straight into my pussy.

Unfortunately, this momentary lapse of my hormones isn't lost on him.

He smirks, standing to his full height.

“Good night.” He walks away, leaving me standing in silence. I don't move until I hear the latch on his door as he shuts it. Exhaling harshly, I finish my beer and throw the empty can in the trash.

Tiptoeing down the hall, careful not to disturb anyone, I head back into my bedroom. Grabbing my phone off the dresser, I roll my eyes at the barrage of text messages from Bryan begging me to come back.

Plugging the phone up, I climb into bed and pull the covers over my body and snuggle into them. This day has been too fucking long.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dmitri

“Good morning!” Ansleigh chirps as I walk into the kitchen, and the smell of coffee fills my nose enough to keep me from being too snappy. Looking over at the clock, I surprise myself when I realize that it’s nearly eleven a.m., much later than I normally sleep.

I grunt, ambling over to the coffeepot and grab a mug from the cabinet above it. After pouring myself a cup, I turn to the other two occupants of the room.

“How did you sleep?” She asks with an annoyingly bright smile. She must be a fucking morning person.

“Fine.” I take my cup and walk out the back door to the patio, wanting nothing more than a little peace. Sitting down in one of the chairs, I keep my gaze on the automatic vacuum scrubbing the bottom of the pool.

It’s been a full week since Ansleigh moved in and although I’ve tried to keep distance, the blond haired vixen keeps trying to worm her way into my good graces.

The back door slides open and I roll my eyes.

Can’t I get some fucking peace anymore?

“Look,” Mason sighs, sitting down beside me. “I know that you’ve been through some shit, but...Ansleigh, she’s sensitive,

man. You being a dick to her is crushing her.”

“Mason,” I begin, but the door opens again. I don’t have to look over my shoulder to know who it is.

“Don’t mind me,” Ansleigh tinkers softly, walking over to one of the lounge chairs by the pool. My eyes track her movements, watching as she lays a towel down, placing a beer and a book on the table beside her. Her tiny red bikini leaves little to the imagination, the sight sending a spark of excitement straight to my dick. It makes her tanned skin seem like it’s glowing. Shaking my head, I avert my eyes before Mason catches me.

“What the fuck are you looking at?” Mason turns to me, eyes narrowed accusingly.

“She was speaking. It’s rude not to look at someone when they’re talking.” I roll my eyes at him, knowing damn well that’s not going to fly.

“Oh, now you’re being nice to her?” He scoffs, crossing his arms over his chest.

“You *just* told me to stop being a dick,” I counter, raising my eyebrow at him in challenge. Can’t say he didn’t try.

“Ansleigh, couldn’t you cover up?” Mason grumbles, not even looking in her direction.

“All the important parts are covered,” she scoffs in protest, laying back and opening her book without another thought. “Quit being overbearing and focus on you.”

I chuckle as I lift my mug to my lips again, not giving a shit as my best friend stares holes through me. He pushes his chair back and storms back into the house as I struggle not to laugh.

Looking back over at Ansleigh, she gives me a smirk with a wink and then shrugs her shoulders. She stretches out on the lounge chair, and suddenly I’m thankful that I’m still sitting. The definite hard on I’m sporting now would be hard to cover up.

Busying myself with my phone, I try not to stare at her. I try to look everywhere except at her, but *fuck* she makes it

impossible. During one of my quick glances, I catch the title of her book. Curiosity strikes me, so I do a quick internet search.

Apparently, she's into *mafia smut*? Whatever that means. Another search reveals the definition for smut and suddenly my face turns red. Exiting out of my browser, I lay my phone down on the table, and finish off my coffee.

After a few minutes, I'm comfortable enough to make a quick dart into the house. I notice she has her nose stuck in her book, so I quickly stand and walk into the house, abandoning my mug in an effort to not get caught.

I'm working the evening shift at the shop today and have to be there in an hour and a half, so I retreat to my room before Mason can ask any questions.

Grabbing my clothes, I walk into the bathroom and turn on the shower. As I wet my hair, my mind wanders back to Ansleigh and her barely there bathing suit, instantly making me hard again.

My fist has a mind of its own, trailing down my stomach and gripping my cock tightly. I can't stop my fist from tightening over myself like it's trying to imitate how tight her pussy would squeeze me. One long stroke to the tip, and there's a drop of cum ready to be unleashed.

"Fuck," I draw out, groaning as my head tilts back and hits the wall from pleasure. I can imagine her on her knees, my hand gripping her hair tightly while she sucks my cock like her own personal lollipop. Her throat would be hot and wet, extended to its capacity as I'd force her to take my length. Just thinking about the gagging sounds she'd make...

Forcing the thoughts out of my head, I hurry through my shower. The faster I can get out of here and get to work, the better.

Once I'm dressed, I grab my phone and keys off the dresser. Walking out of my room, I bump straight into Ansleigh, who was looking down at her phone.

"Shit," she mutters. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine," I huff, stepping around her.

“Have a good day at work!” She chirps, and I can’t help but roll my eyes.

Her smile fades and regret fills me to the brim, her eyes darkening in their shade of blue to one of sadness. The last thing I want to do is make her upset, which is ironic because that’s basically all I’ve done since she got here.

Stalking out of the house, I climb into my truck and head to work, trying to keep my mind from wandering to the petite blonde residing in my home.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ansleigh

One Month Later

“Hey Ansleigh, we are having a bonfire tonight. You should come,” Erin announces as she rounds the corner of my desk, propping herself against it.

Things have been tense at the house, and I’m still convinced that Dmitri hates me. Although my brother assures me that’s not really the case, I just can’t shake the feeling. In an effort to not be surrounded by awkward tension and the need to make it on my own, I got a job at the bank last week. Erin has been showing me the ropes while I settle into my new position.

“Sure, that sounds fun!” I reply with a smile, logging out of my computer.

“Great, here’s the address.” She hands me a sticky note, and I gladly accept, sticking it into my purse. “We are heading over there in about an hour.”

“See you then!” After she leaves my desk, I clock out and head to my car.

Work is only fifteen minutes from the house, so I’m home in no time. Walking inside, I sit my purse on the counter and go straight to my room. Changing into a pair of jeans and a v-

neck t-shirt, I slip on a pair of shoes. Pulling the hair tie out of my long blonde hair, I flip over my head and shake it out from a long day. The band slides on my wrist in case I need it later.

Going back to the kitchen, I grab the sticky note out of my purse. Opening one of the drawers I search for a notepad and pen. When I finally find what I'm looking for, I leave Mason a quick note, telling him I went out with some people from work, along with the address.

Once inside my car, I type the address into my GPS. It's about a thirty-minute drive, so I turn on my favorite podcast and begin the drive.

Pulling down the dirt road, my mind immediately goes to the insane amount of serial killer documentaries I listen to.

Get it together Ansleigh. You're being ridiculous.

Parking beside a random vehicle, I get out and look around. There are at least thirty cars here, and I feel the anxiety creeping into my bones. I'm not big on crowds of people, especially when I only know a few.

I was under the impression that it was going to be a small get together, not a full on party. Putting on a brave face, I make my way over to Erin, who I recognize by her raven black hair.

"Hey Ansleigh!" Erin greets me with a smile and loops her arm through mine. "Want a drink?" She gestures to the keg behind her.

"Yes please," I mutter, knowing I'm going to need some liquid courage to get me through this large crowd.

Before I know it, one drink turns into two, then that turns into four. By the time I realize it's time to cut myself off, I'm fully drunk. Sitting down on a log, I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket.

Seven text messages and a missed call from 'Caveman'.

Oops.

When I open them, they're all pretty much all the same. My inhibitions seem to go out the window as my thighs rub

together. I swear I can feel his scowl burning into my body just through his messages.

Caveman

Did you make it to the party okay?

Ansleigh?

Hello?

Hiiii Dmitriiii :)

Caveman

It's about fucking time.

Do you know that it's almost two a.m.?

Not believing him, I check the clock. *Oh fuck, it really is.* Looking around, I see that the crowd has thinned out, only a handful of us remaining.

What's the matter, caveman? Worried about me?

Worried.

Caveman

No, but I'd rather not have to deal with your brother if you go missing.

Are you sur about that?

Fuck, sure.

Caveman

Ansleigh, are you drunk?

So what if I am?

Caveman

I'm coming to get you.

No. I'm fineee.

Looking around the party, I catch the eye of a guy standing a few feet to my right. He's standing beside the beer pong table and gestures from it to me. I smirk.

I'm about to play beer pong with this really nice guy!

Caveman

Like hell you are.

Too late.

Taking a selfie with my new found partner, his arm around me, I send it to Dmitri.

See. I'm having fun.

Caveman

He will remove that arm from around you if he knows what's good for him.

Lighten up, caveman.

Turning my attention to the game, I ignore my phone vibrating. Ever since I left Bryan, I've just been going through the motions. Although I was unhappy, no one reacts well to being cheated on.

Letting loose, I forget about everything. Bryan. Dmitri. Everything. That is until twenty minutes later, when the sound of a very familiar truck echoes through the woods.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

Branston has his arm around me, celebrating our recent victory. My eyes scan the crowd, just waiting to see the devil himself. Then I spot him. If looks could kill, Branston would be dead right now.

"I apologize in advance," I mumble as Dmitri gets closer, shrugging his arm off my shoulders. "What can I do for you, caveman?" I slur with a sly smile. Looking up at Dmitri as he comes to a stop in front of me, his eyes move from me to Branston, his gaze darkening tenfold.

"I'm taking you home," he grumbles, grabbing my wrist. I flinch slightly but then relax when I realize that his grip isn't tight at all.

"No, thanks." I pull my wrist back, glaring at him.

"Get in the truck, *solnyshko*," he demands, turning back to me. "Don't make me carry you."

"You wouldn't dare." I place my hands on my hips, challenging him.

He shrugs his shoulders, taking a step closer. Grabbing my hips, he lifts me up and tosses me effortlessly over his shoulder. It takes a minute to register that he's actually done it, the sharp indent of his shoulder into stomach sends reality back into me.

"What the fuck? Dmitri, put me down!" I pound my fist on his back, but my rant falls on deaf ears as he continues his

march down the path. I don't stop my tyrant of complaints until we get to his truck.

He opens the passenger door and gently places me inside. Not giving me a chance, he quickly fastens my seatbelt over me, and I take in his features while his face is inches from mine.

"You know, you're pretty hot," I slur with a giggle.

"And you're pretty drunk." He gives me a final leveling look before shaking his head and shutting the door.

"Drunken words speak sober thoughts," I yell out the window as he walks around the front of the truck, and I swear I see a smirk on his face. Leaning my head against the window, I close my eyes, praying for everything to stop spinning.

We make it approximately five miles down the road before I suddenly become nauseous. "I'm gonna be sick, caveman," I mutter, placing my head in my hands.

"I swear to everything...don't throw up in my truck," he groans, glancing over at me.

"You better pull over then," I rush out, gripping my stomach and slapping a hand over my mouth.

Coming to a screeching halt on the side of the road, I don't even have a chance to take off my belt as I open the door and immediately empty the contents of my stomach. If I wasn't puking my guts up, I would be completely taken by surprise when a hand gathers all my hair while the other rubs my back soothingly.

When I'm finished I take the napkin that Dmitri hands me, wiping my mouth.

"Thank you," I murmur, shutting the door back. "Are we almost home?" I question softly, resting my head against the cool glass of the window.

"Not even close," he replies, his tone softer than before. He pulls back onto the highway, continuing the drive home.

When we get home, he helps me out of the truck and to my bedroom. Taking my shoes off, I stumble into him. He catches me with a soft chuckle, his eyes crinkling in the corner.

“Be careful, *solnyshko*.” His tone is a mix between soft and annoyance.

“Why do you hate me?” I ask softly.

“I don’t hate you, Ansleigh,” he huffs, looking away from me.

“Then why do you act like it?” I can’t help the squeeze my heart gives at his answer.

“Because it’s better this way.” He leads me over to my bed, pulling the covers back motioning for me to climb in.

Slipping under the covers, I turn on my side, still facing him. “What if it isn’t?” I yawn, closing my eyes. I’m trying not to fall asleep, but as I try to blink them open, they stay shut.

“Good night, *solnyshko*,” he whispers, turning the lamp off beside my bed. Before I know it, he’s quietly closing the door, and I’m drifting off to sleep.

CHAPTER SIX

Dmitri

“Why do you hate me?”

The sadness in her voice makes my heart clench. I wasn't lying when I told her that it was easier this way.

Walking into the living room, I hear keys jingling at the front door. When it swings open, Mason raises an eyebrow.

“Where is Ans?” He asks, looking back out at the driveway, noticing that her car is missing.

“She's in bed,” I state, sitting down on the couch.

“Where's her car?” He continues on with his barrage of questions.

“Address is on the counter.” I gesture to the kitchen, flipping through the options on the television.

“I have so many questions,” he grumbles as he stomps past me and into the kitchen. “Why the fuck was she out there?” He walks back into the living room holding the sticky note.

“Someone invited her to a bonfire,” I shrug, not taking my eyes off the television. I swear if this guy doesn't shut up and go to bed, I'm going to knock him out.

“And she went?” He asks, standing in front of the TV. Shooting him a glare, he does right by moving away.

“Obviously, genius.” Rolling my eyes, I stand from the couch, shut the TV off, and toss the remote onto the couch. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

He doesn’t say another word as I walk down the hall and to my bedroom.



The next morning, I’m pleasantly surprised to find that I’m awake before everyone else. Quietly sneaking into Ansleighs room, I leave her two pills and some water with a note.

Solnyshko,

Hopefully your hangover isn’t too bad. This should help.

-Your Caveman

Since I’m the only one awake, I decide that an early morning swim is what I need. I change into my swim trunks and head out to the pool. Sinking down into the cold water, I let out a relieved exhale.

Swimming a few laps around the pool, I can’t stop thinking about Ansleighs words last night. I know that I have been a little cold to her, but I can’t risk dragging her into the darkness with me. The demons of my past haunt me at every turn, and my darkest thoughts are brought into the light from the flames of being trapped in my own personal hell.

My life is too fucking complicated to allow myself to feel anything for her. Especially if someone were to find out I’m alive. I can’t risk anyone getting hurt because of me. Even being friends with Mason is a risk.

Coming up for air, I jump back slightly when I see Ansleigh standing at the edge of the pool.

“Thank you for the meds,” she whispers so softly I almost don’t hear her, and her eyes drop to the concrete below her feet.

“Don’t mention it,” I mutter, sinking down in the water, suddenly self conscious of the scars that litter my body.

“I’m sorry that you had to come and get me last night,” she continues, wringing her hands. “Also, I’m sorry for almost puking in your truck.” I huff a laugh.

“I wasn’t about to leave you drunk at a party with people you don’t even know, Ansleigh.” I cross my arms, placing them on the side of the pool at her feet.

After a contemplative look, she sits down on the concrete in front of me, crossing her legs. She’s changed out of her clothes from last night, now wearing a pair of shorts and a crop top. Her blonde hair cascades down her back, fanning out around her shoulder.

“Can we please call a truce?” She asks quietly, picking at the skin around her nails.

“Ansleigh,” I groan, scrubbing my hand over my face.

“I just don’t understand, Dmitri.” Her bottom lip quivers, and I clench my fist.

“I’m sorry,” I strain and wade over to the steps, climbing out of the pool. Grabbing my towel, I can’t bring myself to look at Ansleigh again, the heat from her stare burns my body from behind as I retreat back into the house.

After a shower, I throw on my work clothes and head into the kitchen. Pouring myself a to-go cup of coffee, I turn to leave but stop in my tracks when I see Ansleigh standing in the doorway.

“You don’t have to worry about me anymore,” she assures, brushing by me. “I have enough saved up that I can start looking for apartments this week.”

“You don’t have to do that.” Chest straining, I have to clear my throat to prevent a protective growl from coming up. If she moves out...

“I do. I don’t want to stay somewhere I’m not wanted, and I’ve clearly overstayed my welcome.” She grabs her purse off the table, shrugging it over her shoulder. “Mason is taking me to get my car, and hopefully, by the time you get back from work, I will be gone.”

“If that’s what you want...” I trail off, keeping my back to her. “We will help you move everything when you find a place.”

“Great. Then it’s settled,” she agrees, though it’s meek. Not saying another word, I head out to my truck.

The drive to work seems to take forever as my mind races. I don’t know why I am so surprised by her wanting to move out. If someone treated me the way I treated her, I would feel the same. If someone treated my sister like that, they would be dead. Simple as that.

Maybe I *should* lighten up. I’m just so afraid of being responsible for the destruction that will undoubtedly come from being with her. Not to mention, she’s my best friend’s sister.

Finally arriving at work, I throw myself into the current car I’ve been working on the last two days. Lost in my thoughts, I just go with the motions for the duration of my shift. So when the other guys start cleaning up and clocking out, it takes me by surprise.

Looking at the time, I realize I could have gone home half an hour ago. Quickly cleaning up, I jump in the truck and head home.

As I pull in the driveway, I notice that Ansleigh’s car isn’t here. Afraid I’ve fucked things up completely, I jump out of the car and make my way inside.

“Where’s your sister?” I ask, walking into the kitchen where Mason is making a pizza.

“I don’t know, on a date?” He shrugs, not turning around to look at me.

“A date? With who?” Leaning against the counter, I try to appear nonchalant.

“Why does it matter?” He finally turns to look at me, his arms crossed over his chest.

“Why do you not care who she’s out with?” I counter.

“She’s a big girl, she can handle herself.” He levels me with a glare.

“Just like she handled herself at the bonfire when she was so trashed she almost puked in my truck?” I’m baffled at how careless he is when it comes to his sister’s safety.

“Why do you care all of a sudden? Don’t tell me you’ve decided to make a move on my sister,” Mason says.

“It’s not like that,” I rush out, probably a little too quick.

“She’s off limits, Dmitri.” He turns his back to me, resuming his pizza making, indicating that the conversation is over.

Rolling my eyes, I stalk to the bathroom. Turning on the shower, I wait for the water to reach the right temperature. As I wait, I dig through my pants pocket and pull my phone out.

If Mason isn’t going to make sure she’s safe, then I sure as hell will.

When will you be home? We need to talk.

Placing my phone on the counter, I pace around for a few minutes while I wait for a reply. When I realize it’s not coming anytime soon, I jump in the shower to try and keep myself busy, even if only for a few minutes. Quickly washing away the dirt and oil from my body, I finish my shower in record timing. When I get out and dry off, my phone pings.

Solnyshko

I’m on a date and we have nothing to talk about.

Yes we do.

Just...enjoy your date.

She leaves me on read, and I clutch my phone in my hand. I don’t know why the idea of her being on a date infuriates me,

but it does. Walking into the kitchen, I make myself some food and settle in on the couch.

Two movies in, and I glance at the time on my phone, worry starting to set in. Ansleigh should be home by now. Just as I go to text her, I get a notification from her.

Solnyshko

Caveman.

I fucked up.

Those simple words send my heart racing. Is she hurt?

What happened?

As I wait for her response, I lean forward on the couch and run my hand through my hair. If I lose my shit, I won't be able to help her with whatever situation she has going on. Finally, she replies, but her response doesn't settle my mind any further.

Solnyshko

He wanted to take me to the lake.

He said we could see the stars without any of the city lights getting in the way.

I don't know where we are, but it's just us, and I just don't have a good feeling.

Share your location.

I will be there soon.

When her next message comes through, I swear I can hear her pleading.

Solnyshko

Please, hurry.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Analeigh

“Who was that?” Cody asks as he walks back over to me.

“Just my brother. I was telling him that I would be home later,” I lie, holding my phone between my hands tightly. He eyes me suspiciously, and I quickly avoid his glare. Putting some distance between us, I walk toward the edge of the water.

Not getting the memo, he follows me. I feel his presence before his touch. Sliding his hand along my waist to my hip, he grips it tightly and presses his body against mine. Inhaling sharply, I hold back the shudder of disgust willing itself up my spine. I was one hundred percent drunk last night when I agreed to go on this date with him, and when I got the text earlier confirming this, I was still pissed at Dmitri, so I decided it would be fine to go on *one* date.

I should've known better.

Slipping out of his grip as nonchalantly as possible, I turn to face him.

“It’s getting kind of chilly. Maybe you should take me back to my car?” I rub my arms with a small smile, pretending to be cold and hoping to appeal to a protector side. When we finished dinner, I left my car at the restaurant because we were supposed to go to the movies. However, we ended up taking a detour to the lake, and I have no way to escape.

“Nah, I can warm you up,” he whispers in my ear, taking a step toward me.

“No thank you, I’d rather go home.” I take a single step back.

“Come on,” he grabs me again, his hand going down to the waistband of my jeans.

“Take me back, Cody,” I protest, stomping my foot like a child using my hand to push his hand off me.

He obviously doesn’t like that answer and pulls me back against him harshly, his deep breath skating over my neck as his hand slides up my shirt. The hard bumps on his hands don’t sit well on my skin. Closing my eyes, I swallow hard before shoving away from him.

“Don’t fucking touch me.” Walking to the car, I open the door and grab my purse. When I turn around, he’s standing there again. Reaching forward, he tangles his hand in my hair, pulling my face to his. He kisses me sloppily, and it takes everything in me not to throw up in his mouth. Pushing on his chest, his grip on my hair tightens to the point of pulling a few pieces, and he continues the assault.

Clearly he isn’t going to stop, so I grab his hips, bring my knee up and make contact with his balls.

“*Fuck!*” He curses, letting go of my hair and shoving me away.

Using this as my chance, I take off running. Thankfully, I chose sensible shoes with this outfit and not heels. I’m honestly not sure where I’m going, but I know that Dmitri is on his way to me, so I don’t want to go far.

Unlocking my phone, I dial Dmitri’s number. He picks up on the first ring.

“*Solnyshko*, I’m two seconds away,” he assures me, his breath almost as heavy as mine.

“Please hurry,” I whisper, hands shaking to the point of nearly dropping the phone.

“Stay on the phone with me. I’m going past the turn right now.”

As headlights wash over me, an immense amount of relief floods my veins. He comes to a screeching halt in the shoulder, throwing it in park, and jumping out. Rushing over to him, he meets me in the middle and cups my face in his hands.

“Are you hurt?” He asks, scanning my face over and over again to make sure. I shake my head. He rubs a thumb over my cheek, wiping away stray tears. “Get in the truck, Ansleigh.”

“What are you going to do?” I ask nervously, grabbing his wrists to stop him from leaving me.

“I’m just going to have a little chat with him.” He hoists me up into his truck, buckling me in.

“Be careful.”

“Don’t worry about that. Just sit tight. I will be right back. Lock the doors,” he demands, reaching behind the seat. He walks away from the truck, my attention turning to the baseball bat in his hand as he twirls it around.

Slumping back into the seat, I keep my eyes on him until he disappears around the corner. Once I no longer see him, I switch back and forth between the darkness where he disappeared and the clock on the dash.

Ten minutes later, Dmitri comes back into view. Immediately straightening up, I unlock the door. My eyes follow him as he walks around the front of his truck and opens the driver’s door.

“He’s not going to be bothering you anymore.” He tosses the bat into the back seat, then turns to face me again. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

“I will be...” I trail off, looking down at my shaky hands. “Thank you for coming. I know I should’ve asked Mason, but he doesn’t seem to care about anything I do.”

“If you’re *ever* in a situation where you’re uncomfortable, call me. I don’t care what I’m doing. I will be there in a

heartbeat.” He reaches over, gently gripping my chin, tilting my face up. “I mean it, *solnyshko*.”

“What does that mean?” I ask, referring to the nickname. He raises a brow, contemplating for a moment.

“*Solnyshko* is a Russian nickname meaning ‘little sun,’” he explains, his hand moving to caress my cheek. “We use it as a term of endearment. It’s for someone who shines light in another person’s life.” His brown eyes search mine, as if he’s waiting on me to pull away. I’m slightly caught off guard by his confession. That’s definitely not what I would have thought it meant.

“I feel like I’m the opposite of that,” I whisper sadly, leaning into his touch. “Every time I see you it’s like I have ruined your day.”

“Trust me, Ansleigh.” He leans closer until we are just a breath apart. “You’ve done the opposite.”

As I pull my bottom lip between my teeth, his eyes drop to my lips. I lean forward, closing the distance between us. Our lips meet and the feeling is almost electrifying. I used to think that the way people described their first kiss with someone was dramatic. Not anymore.

Dmitri’s hand slides from my cheek to the back of my head, holding me in place. All of the tension that has been growing between the two of us dissipates with each second that passes.

Then, it stops. Dmitri pulls away abruptly, leaning back in his seat away from me.

“We should not have done that.” He slides a hand through his dark hair, gripping tightly and looking out the window.

“Why?” The frustration is clear in my voice. “It’s obvious that we *both* want this, Dmitri, so why?”

“You’re my best friend’s little sister.” Dmitri keeps his gaze locked on the darkness outside as he turns the key in the ignition.

“So? I could be the fucking president’s sister, and that would mean nothing when it comes to *my* personal life and who I

choose to see.” I reach over, trying to grab his hand, but he pulls it away from me.

“We *can't*.” His statement is short and firm, indicating no room for argument.

“Just take me to my car,” I mutter, crossing my arms over my chest and turning away from him.

“Ans-” he begins, but I cut him off.

“Don't bother.”

With a sigh, he puts the truck in drive, making a u-turn and beginning the drive to the restaurant where I parked my car.

I stare out the window at the shadows as we pass under the streetlights. A knot forms in the bottom of my stomach, the reality of the fact that I will never be more than ‘Mason's sister’ coming back to haunt me.

It's always been this way. Sports, school, and everything in between. I'll never escape his shadow.

When we arrive back at the restaurant, it's closing time so there are hardly any cars in the lot. As I unbuckle my seatbelt, he pulls into the spot beside my car. I reach down and grab my purse, opening the door just as he opens his mouth.

“Thanks,” I mumble before he gets a chance to speak, slipping out of the truck.

“Ansleigh, wait,” he calls.

Shaking my head, I shut the door on him. I quickly unlock my car and climb inside, a heavy exhale leaving my lungs as I relax into my seat. Every fiber of my being is begging me to let go and just let the tears fall.

Straightening my spine, I turn on the car and grip the steering wheel. I will *not* let him see me cry again tonight.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Dmitri

Watching Ansleigh get out of the truck, not even acknowledging me as I call after her, causes something to stir deep within me. Clenching my fist, I throw the truck in reverse and pull out after her, my mind racing a mile a minute.

Why the fuck can I not let her in? Why is my mind struggling to accept her into my fucked up reality? She's been nothing but nice to me since she got here, and I've been a complete asshole in return. It's not like anything can happen between us again, Mason would murder me. Yet, why does my stomach curdle as if I'm committing the ultimate sin by not letting her within reaching distance?

Before I know it, we are home. Parking my truck behind her car, I quickly shut it off and get out. I try to get to her car to open the door, but I'm not fast enough. Her door gets thrown open and slammed shut.

"Ansleigh, talk to me."

"No, Dmitri. I'm done talking, or not talking, since that's mainly how it is with us," she grits as she pushes by me.

"*Solnyshko*, please," I plead.

The fiery blonde in front of me whips around, shoving her finger into my chest, a no bullshit gleam burning from her

gaze. “No. You don’t get to call me *solnyshko*, or whatever, anymore. You’ve made it very clear that I am nothing more than Mason’s sister. I’m done. I’m moving out tomorrow. I signed the papers before my date from hell. You don’t have to worry about me anymore.” With that, she turns on her heel and storms into the house, slamming the door behind her.

I wait several minutes, just processing everything before silently walking in the house. I walk through the living room where Mason is standing by the couch with a random girl.

“Hey man, I’m going with Meghan to a party, I probably won’t be back tonight,” Mason informs me, walking over to put his shoes on. “I don’t know what Ans is pissed about, but you have fun with that,” he calls over his shoulder as they walk out the door.

“Yep. Night,” I mumble as I stalk to my room and slam the door.

Once inside the comfort of my room, I jerk my shirt off and toss it into the laundry basket beside the dresser. Shortly after, my pants follow suit, and I crawl into bed trying not to think of the woman that’s slowly taking over my every waking thought.

“I wonder if Ivan will crumble when he realizes he has lost the heir to his throne?” One of my captors boasts as he slices yet another long wound along my abdomen.

“In your fucking dreams,” I grit through clenched teeth.

Flexing my hand into a fist, I try to break my restraints once again. I can feel my strength weakening. I have no idea how long I’ve been here, but I know I’m losing blood and I more than likely won’t make it out alive.

My mind drifts off to my place of calm, surrounded by my family. We are having one of our weekly family dinners, my sister is giving my father a hard time about being more involved and my mother is at her wits end with all the shop talk at the table.

I could stay in this memory for days. It was one of the last times we were all together and truly happy. Unfortunately, I’m

quickly brought back to reality when a searing pain shoots through my left hand.

My scream echoes through the room, my eyes falling to the source of the pain. My ring finger. Gone.

“*Fuck!*” I sit up in bed, gasping for air. I had no idea I’d fallen asleep.

“Dmitri?” Ansleigh’s soft voice carries through the room. She’s standing in the doorway, clutching a blanket around her. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” I look down at my hand, flexing my fingers, the immense pain still here as if I was really back in that moment. I forgot to take my medication today which explains the phantom limb pain. “*God damn it.*”

“You didn’t sound okay,” she says quietly, looking at me intently.

“Just a nightmare,” I grumble, running a hand through my hair.

“Do you need anything?” She asks softly, stepping inside the room.

“Yes,” I mumble and trail off, my mind racing. “Is your brother home?” I ask hesitantly, and she shakes her head. “Get in.” I pull the covers back and move over so she can climb in the bed with me.

“I’m still mad at you,” she mutters.

“Just come here, please.”

Finally she gives in, walking over to my bed. She lets the blanket that rests on her shoulders fall to the floor. The sight before me takes my breath away. She’s wearing nothing but a t-shirt that comes just above her knee and leaves very little to the imagination.

The second that she climbs in bed, I wrap her in my arms and pull her close.

“Dmitri,” she starts, but I lean down pressing my lips to hers. She stiffens at first, stunned by the action. Then, she

relaxes and reciprocates the kiss. My hand slides down to her hip, down the curve of her ass and to the back of her thigh. Hoisting her leg over my hip, I roll us so that she is on top of me, barely straddling my already hard cock.

“We shouldn’t do this,” she echoes my words from earlier, as she reaches for the hem of her shirt.

“One night,” I whisper, sliding my hands up her thighs, going straight to her hips and grip tightly. “One night to be just you and I. No Mason’s little sister. No Mason’s best friend. Just Ansleigh and Dmitri for *one* night.”

“I can handle that,” she agrees without hesitation, tearing her shirt off and tossing it to the side.

“Fucking perfection,” I mutter as I take in her naked body above me. Her breasts on full display, I feel my cock thicken more at the gorgeous sight.

She smiles down at me, scooting her hips back so that her pussy rests over my erection. Ansleigh moves her hips, rocking against me. Gripping her hips tightly, I flip us over so I’m hovering over her.

Kissing down her neck to her breast, I suck a nipple in my mouth. A soft moan falls from her lips as she closes her eyes. Her hand slides up the back of my neck and rests on the back of my head.

Continuing my trek down her body, I place kisses along her stomach and to her hips. Grabbing her ankles, I push her legs up letting her knees fall open and leaving her fully exposed to me. Her breath hitches as I lean down, placing a kiss to the inside of her thigh.

Torn between taking my time with her, devouring her sweet pussy, and burying my aching cock deep inside her, I kiss up to her pussy lips. My tongue delves between them and finds her clit, a sharp hiss slipping past her lips. Her hips jump at the sudden contact, and she tries to close her legs around my head.

Placing my hands on the insides of her thighs, I hold her legs open as I continue my assault on her pussy. Her cries fill the room, urging me to continue. Licking and sucking on her

swollen clit, I grip her thighs tightly to keep her from going anywhere.

“If I remove my hand, are you going to be a good girl and keep your legs spread for me?” I question, pulling my face away from her pussy, only to have her hips trying to follow.

“Yes,” she breathes, her voice repeating it over and over again.

Sliding my hand up her thigh, I slip a single finger inside of her. A breathy groan leaves her lips as I lower my mouth back to her clit. She whimpers, her legs twitching as she attempts to keep them open.

“Keep them open, pretty girl,” I warn, the vibrations against her clit eliciting another moan from her.

Smirking against her pussy, I begin to work my fingers in and out of her, and her back arches as I hit her sweet spot. Her hands fly to grip my hair, tugging roughly.

“Fuck, yes,” she rasps, her eyes closing. “Please don’t stop.” Her hips buck, riding my face as she chases her release. Just as her orgasm is about to crest, her legs close around my head.

I immediately remove my fingers and sit back with a *tsk*.

“I’m sorry, *please*,” she begs, gripping the bed sheets.

“I warned you, *solnyshko*.” Sliding off the bed, I stand and pull my boxers off. My dick springs free and I grip it, stroking slowly. Grabbing her hand with my other hand, I pull her up until she’s sitting on her knees.

“What’s your safeword?” I prompt.

“My what?” She asks, raising an eyebrow in confusion.

“I’m about to have my wicked way with you, but if things get too much, you need a safeword,” I explain, looking down at her.

“Blueberry,” she blurts.

With a nod, I lean down and kiss her once more. “Suck,” I command, placing my hand on the back of her head, guiding her forward.

She whines, clenching her thighs together, desperate for a release. Gripping her chin in my hand, I lift her face to look at me.

“Maybe next time you’ll listen. You will come when I say. Now, spread your knees, hands on your thighs. If you even attempt to touch yourself, you will not come tonight. Is that clear?”

“Yes, daddy,” she whimpers.

“What was that?” I question.

Daddy? Fuck, I like the sound of that.

She hesitates, clearly not sure what to say.

“Yes, daddy,” she repeats, a slight blush creeping up her collarbone.

“That’s right, baby girl. I’m your daddy,” I growl.

She spreads her thighs like I demand, placing her hands on her lap.

“Now, open that pretty mouth and suck my cock.” Her mouth opens and I push my hips forward, sliding into her mouth.

The second her lips wrap around my cock, I groan. My cock jumps in her mouth, warmth spreading over my shaft. Sucking me down, her throat strangles my cock. I’m already so damn close, I shove her face backward and off me.

“Turn around,” I instruct her, and she complies without delay. My hand snakes up her back to the nape of her neck, intertwining in her long blonde hair and gently putting pressure. “Bend over.”

Doing as I say, she bends at the waist until her face is in the sheets. Sliding my dick along her pussy, I coat myself in her arousal, and place it at her entrance. Notching my thick head into her tight hole, I push in slightly before pulling out. She mewls and whimpers into the sheets. Slowly sliding inside her, a long, drawn out groan rumbles in my chest.

“Fucking hell,” I grunt as she pushes her hips back against me, forcing me to fill her to the brim with my cock.

Releasing the tight hold on her hair, I bring that hand down to grip her hips roughly with both. My hips move faster with each thrust, her loud moans fueling my desire.

“Don’t stop. *Please*, daddy,” she moans into the covers, and I know I’m done for. There’s no going back after this. My hand releases its bruising grip on her sides, sliding around to her front. Working her clit over, the sounds that come from her informs me that she is close to another orgasm.

Feeling my own building deep inside me, I know I’m not going to last much longer. Moving my fingers faster along her clit, she grips the sheets in her hands.

“*Fuck!*” She draws out in a scream, her pussy squeezing my dick as she comes undone. It’s not long after that I find my own release, holding her hips back against mine.

Once we both regain our bearings, I slowly pull out of her and grab a towel to clean up our mess. When I come back out of the bathroom after discarding the towel, she’s sliding her clothes back on.

Slipping my boxers back on, I look at her confused when she walks to the door.

“Hey, where are you going?”

“I figured you wanted me out after that,” she admits softly.

“No, I said one night. That means you’re staying.” I walk over to her and tug her to me. “Come on, let’s go to bed.”

She nods, allowing me to lead her back to the bed. Climbing under the covers, she cuddles up to me, her head laying on my chest. Her hand rests right above one of the larger scars.

My arms slide around her waist, holding her close to me.

“What are we going to do?” She asks after a few minutes.

“About what? Mason?” I ask, and she nods. “We will figure it out,” I reassure her, placing a tender kiss on her collarbone.

“Come on, it’s late. We should get some rest,” Ansleigh whispers, resting her hand at the nape of my neck.

“Yeah,” I reply with a nod, sliding her off my lap, and slipping under the covers behind her. Laying her hand on my chest, my eyes track her movements as she lifts her hand and traces the scars across my chest. I inhale sharply, and she freezes. There’s no doubt that she can feel the pounding of my heart.

“It’s...it’s okay,” I implore. “I’m just not used to it. I’ve not let anyone get close enough to examine them.”

“I can stop,” she rushes out, jerking her hand back as if I’ve burned her.

“No, I promise, you’re fine.” I grab it and place it back on my chest.

Letting out a small yawn, she closes her eyes. “Good night, Dmitri.”

“Good night, *solnyshko*.” I lean down, kissing the top of her head.

CHAPTER NINE

Analeigh

I can't breathe. Why can't I breathe?

My eyes pop open and immediately land on Dmitri. I'm on my back, and he's straddling me, his body weight making it difficult to take deep breaths. However, that's not what's making it hard to breathe. That's when I realize Dmitri's hands are wrapped around my throat.

"*Dmitri!*" I rasp out, smacking his forearms. My hands fly up, scratching at whatever part of him I can get my hands on.

He doesn't respond. Not to me, anyway. Instead, he is shouting in Russian. I can't even begin to comprehend what he's saying because of the ringing in my ears, the heat on my face and the lack of oxygen. His brown eyes are hard, no emotion showing at all.

"Dmitri, please!" I wheeze, my hands clawing at his face. It isn't until my nail drags down the side of his face that he blinks rapidly. Horror flashes across his face as he takes in the scene below him.

"Fuck. Fuck. *Fuck!* Oh my God." He scrambles off of me, falling off the side of the bed and into the floor.

Coughing, I sit up in bed, trying to take deep breaths. My breathing slowly returns to normal as I clutch my chest,

willing my beating heart to slow. Wiping the tears from my eyes, my heart breaks as Dmitri panics.

“*Solnyshko*, I’m so sorry,” he rushes out, putting his hands in his hair. “I’m sorry,” he repeats, rocking back and forth. Climbing off the bed, I slide down to the floor in front of him.

“Hey,” I rasp roughly, reaching out to touch his arm. He recoils, folding into himself. “It’s okay. I’m fine.”

“You’re not fucking fine, Ansleigh. I could have killed you!” He yells, causing me to flinch involuntarily. I’m not scared of him.

“But, you didn’t!” I raise my voice, matching his.

“I almost did! I had my fucking hands on your throat. Your face...God, I will never be able to get that out of my mind. Look in the mirror. I left *bruises* on you, they’re already forming,” his voice breaks, hands raking through his hair harshly. “I’m so fucking sorry.” He looks at me with eyes full of sorrow.

Moving closer to him until he’s backed against the wall, I take his hands in mine. “Dmitri,” I say, trying to keep my voice steady.

“Get out,” he growls, his voice low as he jerks his hands away like I’m the one who burned him.

“Dmitri...don’t shut me out, please,” I try, but he clenches his fists and slams them against the floor.

“I said, *get out!*” He bellows so loudly I swear the windows rattle. Standing quickly, I slowly retreat out of the room and across the hall to mine.

Sitting down on the bed, hands in my hair, I stare at the wall as I try to process what the hell just happened. Even after he told me about his past, I fully believe he would intentionally hurt me.

Looking over at the clock, I let out a sigh. It’s five a.m., so I might as well get up anyway. Walking to the bathroom, I take in my appearance. My eyes are bloodshot, and sure enough, handprint bruises are beginning to form around my neck.

Grabbing my makeup, I apply a few heavy layers. Finally, I'm able to cover them enough so that they're not visible.

As for my eyes, well, I'm just hoping that Mason doesn't ask. Maybe if I hurry I can sneak out of the house before he comes home. If not, I'll just lie and say I didn't get much sleep.

Going back to the bedroom, I grab a pair of leggings and a t-shirt out of my dresser. Throwing them on, I twist my hair into a loose braid. Shooting a quick text to my boss to tell her I won't be in today, I throw my phone back on the bed. By the time I'm ready it's six thirty, and I tiptoe out of my bedroom to make as little noise as possible.

Walking into the kitchen, my steps falter when I see Dmitri standing at the coffee pot with his back to me. Unsure how to approach him, I clear my throat to let him know that I'm in the room. He whips around, almost spilling his coffee. Neither of us say anything as we stare at each other.

My heart breaks when I take a step forward, and he backs away with a deer in the headlights look. Luckily, he can't go far because he gets trapped between me and the counter.

"Please talk to me," I whisper softly, reaching out and placing my hand on his bicep.

He flinches and keeps his eyes trained above my head on the wall behind me. "Just stop it, Ansleigh. Do you know how desperate you sound trying to get me to talk to you? To not push you away?" He spits. "I've paid for someone to move your stuff out for you. All you have to do is give them the address of your new apartment."

Tears form in my eyes, I move to the side so he can walk past me. He basically bolts out of the kitchen, slamming his door once inside his room.

I scream out in frustration, picking up his coffee cup and launching it across the room. It hits the wall, shattering into tiny pieces and splashing coffee all over the place. I don't even bother cleaning it up as I head back to my room, slamming the door behind me just as hard.

CHAPTER TEN

Dmitri

I almost killed her.

The thought runs through my mind for the millionth time in two weeks. Unable to take the guilt, I grab my truck keys and head to the convenience store for the second time this week. Every second spent sober is another second I wish I was dead.

I *thought* by keeping her away that I was protecting her from danger, and I was, but I didn't know the real danger was me.

Grabbing four fifths of Jack, I head to the register. The clerk eyes me suspiciously, and I roll my eyes, throwing down a couple of bills and telling him to keep the change. Walking back out to my truck, I put the alcohol in the passenger seat and begin my drive home.

Pulling into the driveway, I grab my items and get out of the truck. Passing Mason in the hall on the way to my room, he stops me.

“What the fuck is going on, Dmitri?” He asks, eyeing the glass containers.

“Nothing. Get out of my way,” I mutter, pushing by him.

“You've been a recluse since Ansleigh moved out. I figured you would be jumping for fucking joy considering how much

you hated her.” His words stop me in my tracks, but I quickly shake them off and continue to my room. Slamming my door, I make sure that he knows the topic is no longer up for discussion.

Placing three of the bottles on my dresser, I crack the seal on the fourth. Sitting down on the side of the bed, I turn the bottle up. Images from that night flash through my mind. The look of terror on her face, the way she was gasping for air. No matter how much I drink, I can't seem to shake the memories permanently burned into my brain.

I don't know how I'm supposed to move on and have a normal life.

Why did Eric try and save me when he could have just let me go? I'm states away from my family. I'm a fucking alcoholic who tried to murder the only person I've *really* cared about in two years.

I don't understand.

Why did this have to happen to me?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Ansleigh

Dmitri wasn't lying when he said that he had paid someone to move me. Within three hours all of my stuff was moved from his house to my new apartment.

That was two weeks ago.

As I sit here surrounded by mostly untouched boxes, I realize I should probably start unpacking if I want to have a semi-normal life. I've tried to see him a few times, but every time I go over there under the excuse of wanting to see my brother, he doesn't come out of his room.

"Ansleigh," Mason snaps, shaking me out of my thoughts.

"Yeah?" I say into the phone.

"I said, I don't know what to do about Dmitri anymore," he repeats.

"Do you want me to try?"

"It couldn't hurt," he sighs.

"I'll be there in five," I decide, standing from the couch and grabbing my keys. Hanging up the phone, I head out to my car and drive to their home.

He's standing outside on the porch when I arrive, a look of irritation blankets his features with his hands shoved into his

pockets.

“I have to go to work,” he grumbles when I approach him. “So, good luck, but call me if you need me.”

“Gotcha.” I walk by him into the house, heading straight to Dmitri’s bedroom.

After a few knocks and no answer, I start to get pissed and bang on it instead. “I know you’re in there, Dmitri. Open the fucking door.”

“Go away,” he slurs from the other side of the door.

“I’m going to kick your ass when I get this door open.” I head to the kitchen, looking for anything to pop the lock. Finally coming across a paperclip, I flatten it out as much as possible.

Slipping it inside the doorknob, I feel around inside for the groove and sigh in relief when I finally locate it. When I hear the familiar pop of the lock, I twist the knob and step inside.

“What the fuck, Dmitri!” I take in the sight of the room. An empty liquor bottle clinks against another as I make my way further inside. They’re littered all along the floor, some on the dressers like decorations.

“What are you doing here?” He asks, taking a swig from his half empty bottle.

“You don’t get to ask questions,” I chide, walking over and jerking the bottle out of his hands. It sloshes around, some spilling on the cluttered floor.

“Give it back,” he growls, standing from the chair he was sitting in and towering over me.

Putting a single hand on my hip, I raise my brow in challenge. “No.”

“Now, Ansleigh!” He reaches for the bottle and thanks to his sluggish reflexes I’m able to step out of his reach. Sprinting to the bathroom, I turn to face him as he barrels toward me. Turning the bottle on its side, I watch as the amber liquid pours down the drain. It’s almost empty as he makes it to the

doorway. “You *bitch*.” He backs me against the wall, and I put my hands on his chest.

Standing to my full height, I push on his chest, causing him to stumble backwards thanks to his lowered inhibitions. “No. You’re not going to call me a bitch,” I command, backing him up. “*You choked me*. I should be the one hiding from you, but all I want to do is *help* you. I *know* that wasn’t you, Dmitri. It wasn’t the man I love.”

“You don’t know shit, Ansleigh,” he growls, not realizing that I have backed him into the shower. “And you definitely don’t love me.”

“What I do know is that you are going to get your shit together.” I reach around him and turn the water on. As soon as the cold water hits him, he lets out a string of curses.

“God damn it!” He tries to escape, but I push on his chest again, stepping under the spray with him. He may be a foot taller than me, but with his inebriated state it’s easier to push him around. “You don’t fucking love me, Ansleigh. Sleeping with you was a mistake. All it did was make you clingy.”

My heart clenches at his words, a slight fissure adding to the already broken pieces. Before my brain can even register what’s happening, the sound of my hand making contact with the side of his face echoes through the bathroom.

“You don’t get to tell me what to do. I don’t even know what you’re doing here. Trying to play *hero*? Do you have some type of savior complex? This isn’t the fairytale bullshit you read about in your mafia books,” he spits.

My hand flies through the air again but before it makes contact, he grabs my wrist. He jerks me forward and sends my body hurling into his. My heart hammers against my chest, anticipating his next move.

“What’s the matter, *solnyshko*? Do I *scare* you?” He leans down, muttering in my ear.

“No,” I lie, lifting my chin, trying to even my breathing.

“See, I have twenty-four years of training. I know when someone is lying.” He rears back to look at me, his brown eyes

searching mine. Neither of us speak, the shower pouring down over us the only sound in the bathroom. He drops my hand, grabbing my face with both hands. He rests his forehead against mine, closing his eyes. Almost like...defeat. "I should scare you."

"But you don't," I whisper, gently placing my hands on his wrists.

In the next breath, his lips are on mine. Grappling, my mind whirls from wanting to shove him away to jumping his bones here and now. Pushing him away, I take ragged breaths, having a stare off to see who caves first. Without words, we both must have the same thought process. Slamming together, he grabs the back of my thighs and lifts, wrapping my legs around his torso as he devours me.

"Please," I whimper, my hands snaking into his hair. I grab a fist full and pull, tilting his head back with force.

"Ansleigh," he groans. The sound of my name sends excitement straight to my core. He reaches back, shutting the water off. Gripping my thighs tightly, he steps out of the shower and carries me over to the counter. Sitting me down, my legs stay wrapped around him. Reaching behind his head, he grabs the collar of his shirt, pulling it up and over his head in one swoop.

He grabs the collar of my v-neck with both hands, ripping it down the center. Before I can protest, he unhooks my bra, throwing it to the side. Snaking his arm around my waist, he lifts my ass off the counter, using his other hand to jerk my leggings down to my thighs. Shivering slightly as the cool marble touches my bare ass, Dmitri untangles my legs long enough to pull my soaked leggings off the rest of the way. Stepping out of his sweats, he tosses them into the pile of sopping wet clothes.

"We shouldn't fucking do this," he mutters, crashing his lips back down on mine. His hand snakes into my hair, tilting my head back. He trails kisses down my neck, sucking and nipping at the skin as he goes.

“We shouldn’t,” I agree, wrapping my legs around him. I pull him closer, his hard cock pressing against my entrance.

“Tell me to stop,” he grunts, his body visibly shaking with the force to keep himself at bay.

“No.”

“Fuck it,” he mutters. His hands grip my hips as he thrusts into me. He bites down on my collarbone, no doubt leaving a mark. He’s marking his territory.

My head rolls to the side, eyes closing. My hands move to rest on his shoulders, giving me some leverage as my body jumps with each rough thrust.

He leaves a series of kisses and bites along my collarbone, up to my neck. He grips my ass, lifting me from the counter. Dmitri pulls out of me as he places me back on the ground. A frown forms on my face at the sudden loss of contact.

He flips me around, facing the mirror. His hand slides up the front of my body to my neck, gripping tightly.

“I want you to watch as I fuck you.” He places the tip of his dick at my entrance once more. I nod my head in understanding. My hips impatiently press back against his, pushing the tip inside.

“Such a greedy little cum slut,” he murmurs, pushing the rest of his length inside.

With a moan, my head drops down, forehead resting against my arms. His hand reaches down and fists my hair.

“I said watch!” He pulls on my hair with the demand, forcing me to look in the mirror. “I won’t tell you again. Do you understand?”

“Yes, daddy,” I moan, white knuckling the counter. Gripping my hip with his free hand he pulls me back against him roughly, the movement causing my breasts to bounce with each thrust.

“Who does this pussy belong to?”

“Y-you,” I rasp and sputter out, barely forming thoughts and trying to keep my eyes on him.

“That’s my girl.” He releases the grip on my hair, moving so that both hands are gripping my hips.

“Play with your clit,” he commands. Without hesitation, I obey. My fingers strum across my nerves without abandon. With his relentless thrusts and the stimulation from my clit, I know I’m mere seconds from detonating.

“That’s it,” he encourages degradingly, the slyness in his tone spurring me on. He never takes his eyes off mine as he pounds into me ruthlessly. “Come for daddy.”

Hearing his words do the trick, sending me over the edge. My walls tighten around his thick cock, a scream coming from my lips as my climax courses through me.

“*Fuck*. I’m gonna fill your pussy full of my cum,” he pants. “Pump you so full of my cock that you won’t be able to walk.” Seconds later his hips stutter and still as he empties himself inside me.

He pats my ass once before pulling out. He lifts me back onto the counter and places a kiss to my lips. His hand trails down my thigh, back to my still sensitive pussy.

“I can’t go again,” I rasp, still trying to catch my breath.

“You will if I say you will.” His finger slides along the cum dripping out of me and pushes it back inside me. “As much as I love seeing you a dripping mess, it makes me so fucking hard just thinking about you walking around full of my cum.”

He reaches over to the towel, cleaning his hand off and then wiping my thighs.

Feeling like we’ve made some progress, I pull him close to me and rest my head on his chest.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Dmitri

“Dmitri,” she mumbles after a moment, pulling away and looking up at me. “Please don’t shut me out.” Her hands cup my cheeks, her voice soft. Resting my forehead against hers, I close my eyes.

“Ansleigh, I don’t want to hurt you again. What happens if I don’t wake up next time?” I ask, frantically. “If I kill you, I won’t recover from that.”

“We will figure it out, D.” She pulls away and looks at me.

“I don’t trust myself,” I whisper, dropping my eyes to the floor. “I can’t.”

“*I* trust you.” Her voice holds far too many emotions for me to even fathom dissecting.

Stepping away from her, I grab a towel from the shelf beside me, wrapping it around my waist. “You shouldn’t.” I turn and walk out of the bathroom, shutting the door behind me softly.

Looking around the bedroom, I run a hand through my damp hair. Taking in the empty liquor bottles that decorate the flat surfaces, my eyes land on my last full bottle. Glancing over my shoulder at the closed bathroom door, I reach out, grabbing the neck of the bottle. The instant gratification is enough for me to twist. Hearing the familiar crack of the seal,

I close my eyes, lifting the bottle to my lips. The sweet, smoky liquid slides down my throat with ease. An easy groan escapes me without permission, but I don't care.

“Are you fucking kidding me right now?”

I don't have to be an expert at reading people to know that Ansleigh's emotions are running through the gauntlet. My eyes find hers as I lift the bottle again, maintaining challenging eye contact as I take another long swig. She sneers nastily, glaring me into my early grave.

“You can't help someone who doesn't want it, *solnyshko*.” Throwing her a t-shirt since I ripped hers and a pair of sweats, I walk over to my bedroom door. Holding it open, I wait for her to exit. I make the mistake of glancing at her once more, immediately regretting the decision. Her blue eyes are full of unshed tears as she clutches the shirt to her bare chest.

“You're right, Dmitri. Maybe you *are* a lost cause,” she mutters as she shoves past me, walking out the door.

Closing it behind her, I lean against it, closing my eyes. The raging war inside me still churns as I walk over to my bed and climb inside. The look of defeat on her face, the coldness in her voice as she spoke...it all twists my heart into a vice grip.

What the fuck am I doing?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Analeigh

During the next two weeks, I find myself going stir crazy during my time off. I decided to pick up a second job just to keep my mind busy, and man was it working.

Finally having a night off work, I'm sitting on the couch when my doorbell rings. Right on cue, Cooper, the American Bully I adopted from the shelter, begins his non-stop barking. I try to shush him, but he keeps on. Making my way to the door, I glance through the peephole, and my eyes widen. Quickly unlocking the door, I shush Cooper again and attempt to shoo him into the other room.

"What do you want, Dmitri?" I ask, holding the door so that Cooper can't get to him.

"Can I come in?" He asks, nervously shifting his weight to the other foot. Awkward silence stretches between us as I observe the man standing on the doorstep. His dark brown hair is tamed, his eyes aren't bloodshot like they were the last time I saw him, and he doesn't reek of alcohol.

Every fiber of my being is begging for me to reach out and run my hand through his hair, to pull him close to me and forget everything that happened. My heart yearns to let him in, but my brain won't allow it. My eyes fall from his face to the

bouquet of flowers in his hand, and I glance away quickly tapping my fingers on the door frame.

“Dmitri, I have nothing else to say to you,” I lie, keeping my voice steady. He nods silently in understanding.

“It’s been two weeks, *please*, Ans,” he pleads. When I don’t reply, he sighs. “At least take these and read the note.” He slowly hands the flowers forward, and I take them from him.

“They’re beautiful, thank you.” I look down at them, pulling the note out from between them.

“You’re welcome,” he mumbles, rubbing the back of his neck. “I guess I will get out of your hair now.”

I watch as he turns and walks down the sidewalk to his truck. I force myself to stay quiet, to not call out to him and have him come back. That will just hurt my heart even more, and I’m not sure I can handle that right now.

“At least take the flowers and read the note.” Dmitri’s words echo in my brain as I shut the door and lock it.

Placing the flowers on the kitchen table, I gently dig through the stems and pull out the note. I don’t know what his version of a note is, but this is a full blown letter.

Solnyshko,

There’s not enough words in the two languages I know that would describe how sorry I am. I know I hurt you, I could see it in the way you looked at me, a broken man bleeding to make you hurt the way I hurt. There’s no amount of passion I can use to say just how sorry I am for that night, for pushing you away. The things I said to you were in an effort to break your spirit, effectively ruining everything for us. Except, I don’t want that. I want nothing more than to have you in my arms, day and night.

Sleeping with you was not a mistake. I was hurting and I wanted you to hurt too. I needed you to hate me because I was thoroughly convinced that things were better off this way. The only mistake I made was not keeping you in my bed longer and convincing you how right we are together.

Ansleigh, I promise that if you give me a chance, I will do everything I can to show you that I'm not a lost cause.

I would like the opportunity to take you out on a date, to make up for the things I did and said. Be ready tomorrow night, eight pm sharp. I've already checked with your work, and I know you're off. Wear a nice dress.

-Caveman

When I get to the end of the letter, I raise my eyebrow. He thinks I'm just going to go on a date with him? The audacity.

A date? Who says I want to go on a date with you?

Caveman

Are you texting to cancel?

I might be.

Caveman

If you plan on canceling, let me know now so I can cancel the reservations.

I think you should cancel them.

Caveman

Solnyshko.

No, Dmitri.

You think that some flowers and dinner will magically make everything better, but it won't.

I'm sorry, but I can't do this hot and cold shit anymore.

Watching as the status turns from 'delivered' to 'read', I watch as the bubble appears and disappears several times before disappearing completely. A bit of sadness courses through me as I realize that he isn't going to text back. Part of me hoped that he would put up more of a fight.

Going into my bedroom, I change into my favorite red silk nightgown and quickly braid my hair, tossing it over my shoulder.

I'm standing in the kitchen, stirring a cup of tea, when Cooper suddenly stands and growls.

"What is it, boy?" I ask, placing the cup down on the counter just as a knock at the door causes him to bark. Shushing him as I walk to the front door, I pause as Dmitri's voice comes from the other side.

"Ansleigh, open up." Crossing my arms over my chest, I unlock the door and open it just enough.

"What are you doing here?"

"Let me in." He pushes on the door, a pleading look on his face.

I hesitate, but finally move out of the way, and he brushes past me, placing a folder on the back of the couch. "Couldn't this have waited until morning?" I ask, slight irritation in my voice as I close the door behind him. "What's in the folder?"

"No. It couldn't." He turns to face me, ignoring my question. He takes a step in my direction, and I step back, surprised by his movement. We continue this game until my back is pressed against the door. His hands go up above my head, resting on the door as he towers over me.

“I know I fucked up, Ansleigh. I’ve been a complete ass to you. I tried to *kill* you, for fucks sake, yet you stayed. You tried to *help* me.” He hangs his head momentarily before continuing. “Ever since you scared the shit out of me that night you showed up at my house, I have been completely in awe of you. I walked around for weeks wondering what it’d be like to kiss you, then when I finally got the chance, *fuck*. I knew I wanted yours to be my last. It didn’t matter that you were my best friend’s sister.”

“That’s not what you said after we kissed,” I comment, looking away from him with a strange sense of longing.

He’s quiet for a few moments. Even though I’m not looking at him, I can feel him staring at me.

“*Solnyshko*, I have to tell you something,” he finally admits. “I’m not who you think I am.” He looks up at the ceiling, exhaling. “My real name is Dmitri Belov.”

“Okay,” I say, furrowing my eyebrows. “I don’t understand.”

“I’ll explain everything, but please, don’t run when I tell you the truth. You also can’t breathe a word of this to anyone.” I silently nod, and he takes that as his cue to continue. “The reason that’s a big deal is because...” he trails off, looking back down at me. “I am the heir to the most powerful mafia family on the east coast.”

A beat of silence passes between the two of us as I process his words.

“Yeah, okay.” I place my hands on my hips. “Very funny, Dmitri. The mafia doesn’t even exist.”

“It very much does, Ansleigh.” He studies my face, and I know he can tell I don’t believe him. He drops his hands, walking over to the couch and grabbing the folder. He hands me the folder, watching as I open it warily. My hand moves to my mouth as I pull out a newspaper article. An obituary. Not just any obituary. *His*.

“Dmitri...” I trail off, scanning through the other documents. His birth certificate and photos of his family. It’s

all here. Everything that would confirm someone's identity is right in my hand.

"Why do you think I was so quick to pull that knife on you when we first met? You snuck up on me, caught me off guard," he explains. I glance back over the obituary, trying to process everything. "I'm supposed to be dead, Ansleigh. All of this," he lifts his shirt, gesturing to his scars and missing finger, "is from the day I essentially died."

I close the folder and walk over to the couch, sitting down. My head spins with so much misinformation. "I don't know what to say..."

"I am taking a very big, *very real*, risk at telling you this. It puts everyone I know and love, including you, at risk. This is why I acted like I did toward you. I couldn't let you in, couldn't let you see the person I am. The person who did this is ruthless, and if he finds out I'm alive...well, it will be very, very bad. I couldn't live with myself if something happened to you because I was selfish." His voice is low, but steady as he comes to sit beside me on the couch. The amount of self-loathing I can hear in his tone alone...

"So, why are you telling me this now?" I ask softly, tossing the folder on the coffee table.

"Because I don't want to run from you anymore. I'm tired of pretending that I hate you when, in reality, I love you."

"You...love me?" I question, raising an eyebrow.

"Of course I do, Ans. I'm tired of acting like I don't...but that still doesn't change the fact that you could potentially be in danger now," he reaches over, placing his hand on my knee. "I shouldn't have told you, but you deserved to know that I'm not really an asshole."

"I understand, Dmitri," I whisper softly, moving to sit on his lap tentatively. When he gives a nod of approval, I straddle him and cup his face in my hands. "Thank you for sharing this with me."

"There's still a lot of shit that you need to know, but right now, I don't think I can go there." Shaking his head, he closes

his eyes. “Not tonight.” He leans forward, pressing his forehead to mine.

“Whenever you’re ready,” I whisper in understanding, kissing his lips gently.

“I’m scared,” he admits, closing his eyes and placing his hand over mine.

“Scared?” I question, confusion evident.

“Yes, I’m scared. Two years ago, I didn’t even want to be alive. I survived when I shouldn’t have, but what for? To be tucked away in some random ass town in Arkansas for the rest of my life? I had given up hope on so many things, Ansleigh. Then you showed up. It’s like I could finally see the silver lining.”

“You acted like you hated me for the first month I was here,” I point out, keeping my voice soft.

“Because I knew as soon as I let my guard down this would happen. I’m terrified that I won’t be able to protect you if someone were to find out about me. You’ll be their first target.” He moves his hand to my cheek.

“Don’t run from me,” I whisper as he places his forehead against mine. “Teach me how to protect myself. Let me help take some of that burden from you, Dmitri.”

He doesn’t say another word, but nods his head instead. I reach up, sliding my hands around the back of his neck. He flinches slightly and gently grabs my wrists.

“Not around the neck.” His words are soft as he moves my hands to rest on his shoulders. “It’s triggering,” he explains when he notices my questioning look. I nod as understanding sets in. He drops his hands from my wrists, sliding them down to my hips.

“Do you want to stay the night?” I ask him softly, climbing off his lap and reaching my hand down for his.

“I-I’m not sure if that’s a good idea yet,” he answers honestly, taking my hand and standing.

“Cooper won’t let you hurt me,” I assure him teasingly. “He is a very good watch dog.”

He steps back away from me, shoving his hands in his pockets. “Alright,” he says after a few moments of what I assume is an internal debate.

“Come on, I was just heading to bed.” I lock the door and then motion for him to follow me into the bedroom. Cooper follows right on my heels before bypassing me and going over to his bed in the corner.

“Are you sure, Ansleigh?” Dmitri hovers in the doorway, looking unsure as he takes in my bedroom.

“I’m sure, come on.” I reach out and grab his hand. Leading him over to the bed, I grab the hem of his shirt and lift it up, attempting to pull it over his head. He gives me a small smile before he assists in the removal of his shirt. I bite my lip as I watch his muscles flex.

My hands rest on his chest as I admire the intricate ink that decorates his skin, in what I’m going to assume is an attempt to cover his scars. Tracing over the flesh, they slowly slip lower, undoing his belt.

After pushing his pants down around his ankles, he steps out of them and kicks them to the side. Climbing into bed, he pulls me tight against his chest. I smile softly at him, snuggling into his embrace.

“Thank you,” Dmitri whispers softly.

“For what?”

“Not giving up on me.” He kisses my forehead, his hand dancing across the silk fabric of my gown. He pulls the hem up slightly, resting his hand on my ass.

Leaning up, I gently press my lips to his. “I won’t give up on you, Dmitri.” Pulling back, I make sure to have his eyes on me. “I love you.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Dmitri

“ I love you.”

Long after Ansleigh falls asleep, her words replay in my mind. My hand brushes through her long hair as she sleeps soundly beside me. I’m staring at the ceiling, too afraid to sleep.

What if I hurt her again? What if she’s gone when I wake up?

This woman, who waltzed into my life at the worst, but best, possible time, has flipped it upside down completely. A foreign feeling stirs in my chest, and I wonder if this is what love feels like.

“Dmitri?” Ansleigh’s sleepy voice comes from beside me, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“Yeah, babe?” I ask, looking down at her.

“Have you not been asleep?” She rolls closer, leaning her head on me. “I can hear the cogs turning.”

I hesitate, afraid to be honest with her.

“You’re not going to hurt me,” she mumbles after I don’t reply.

“You don’t know that,” I retort quickly.

“I trust you.” She slides her arm around my waist, pressing herself impossibly closer to me. “Go to sleep, D.”

“Don’t worry about me,” I assure her. “I’ll be fine.”

“You know that lack of sleep makes the nightmares worse.” Leaning up, she places a tender kiss on my lips before turning over, placing her back to my chest. “Go to sleep.”

“Okay.” My arm goes around her waist, holding her tiny frame against me protectively.

I exhale sharply. She’s not wrong. The lack of sleep will only make the nightmares worse. Closing my eyes, I allow myself to start drifting off to sleep.



The next morning, I wake with a jolt, yelling coming from the hall. Cooper is also barking his head off. Jumping out of bed, I throw the bedroom door open and come face to face with a pissed off Mason.

Before I can open my mouth, Mason’s fist is flying toward my face.

“*Mason, stop!*” Ansleigh screams as it makes contact with my chin. Rubbing my jaw, I catch his next punch in my hand. Gripping his fist, I can hear the bones popping as I back him out into the hallway.

“I would think twice before doing that again,” I growl.

“Dmitri, please.” Ansleigh places her hand on my arm, the touch instantly calming me. Looking over at her, she looks terrified. I let out a sigh, momentarily hanging my head.

“I’ll let you go, if you agree to keep your cool.” I turn my attention back to Mason who is quivering in front of me.

He nods frantically. I drop his hand and take a step back.

“Is this why you moved out? So, I wouldn’t find out?” Mason asks, looking at Ansleigh.

“No. I moved out because I wanted to,” she snaps at him, glaring with her arms crossed over her chest.

“My sister?” Mason looks over at me, cradling his hand. “What the fuck is your deal?”

“You didn’t care when she was dating literally anyone else. Why do you care now?” I counter.

“Because it wasn’t *you*.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I raise an eyebrow.

“You’re a drunk. No one knows anything about you or your past life. I hear you at night yelling in Russian while you’re sleeping. Forgive me if I don’t want my sister with someone like you.” His eyes look to Ansleigh. “Ans, come on we are leaving.”

“I’m not going with you,” Ansleigh spits, coming to stand beside me.

“I know it’s hard for you to think with your brain, but this is one time you need to listen to it instead of your need for some dick.” Mason reaches for her, and she shrinks away from him.

I step in front of her and grab him by the shirt. “Here is what you’re going to do. You’re going to get out of this apartment, go back to *my* house that *I* paid for, pack your shit and find somewhere else to live. I want you out of there, *today*.”

“W-what?” He stammers, taken aback.

“You heard what I said. I’m giving you five hours. If you’re not out, well, I hope for your sake that you are. I don’t care if she is your sister or not, you will not talk to *my* woman like that.”

“Where the hell am I supposed to go?”

“I honestly don’t give two shits.” I shove him against the wall. “Five hours. Clock is ticking.”

Letting go of him, he gives me one last look before pushing off the wall. He gives one last look at Ansleigh and I can tell by his hesitation he’s debating saying something.

“*Out*.” I point to the front door, following behind him.

Once he's finally gone, I lock the door behind him. Turning to face Ansleigh, she's still standing in the same spot. As I get closer to her, I realize she has tears in her eyes.

"*Solnyshko*, I'm sorry." I grab her hand and pull her to me.

"Why are you sorry?" She snuffles, resting her head on my chest. "I'm the one that should be sorry. I didn't mean to come between you and my brother."

"Did you hear the stuff he said about me?" I ask, pulling away from her. I lift her chin so I can look into her eyes. "He is clearly not my friend if he thinks that."

"I know..." she trails off, eyes searching mine.

"I would give up a thousand friends like Mason if it meant I could have you," I tell her honestly.

"You're just saying that." She tries to hide the smile forming on her lips but fails miserably.

"I'm not, Ansleigh." I brush her cheek with my thumb. "I have somewhere I want to take you today."

"Oh?" She questions, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes, go change. I need to run home and grab a change of clothes-" I stop when her expression changes.

"Is that a good idea?"

"I will behave," I promise her. Going to her bedroom, I throw my clothes back on from yesterday. Walking back out to her, I cup her cheek in my hand. "Do you know how hard it is for me to leave you when you look so fucking hot in that?" I gesture to her silk nightgown, and she rolls her eyes.

"Be careful." She turns her head to the side, kissing the palm of my hand.

"Always." I kiss the top of her head, then her lips. Stopping to pet Cooper on my way out the door, I look over my shoulder at Ansleigh. "See you in a few, pretty girl."

Once inside my truck, I exhale heavily. This morning did not go how I anticipated it to. I *am*, however, grateful that I

was able to sleep through the night without having a nightmare.

Lost in thought, the drive to my house goes by in a blur. Getting out of my truck, I see Mason's car in the driveway and remind myself that I said I would be on my best behavior for Ansleigh.

Going inside the house, I head to my room, placing the folder I took to Ansleigh's on the dresser, intending to put it away after I shower. After my shower, I walk into the bedroom and the sight in front of me makes my stomach churn.

Mason is standing at the edge of my bed. My eyes shift from him to the open safe on my bed, to the folder in his hand.

"I *knew* you weren't who you said you were." He holds up the papers with anger in his eyes.

"If you've read that, then you know exactly what I'm capable of." I cross my arms over my chest, leaning against the door frame and effectively blocking his escape.

"Stay away from my sister," he grits. "She will never be safe with a monster like you."

"That's her decision, not yours." I step toward him, causing him to flinch. "I take back my five hours. Get out of my house *now*. Grab a bag with essentials and get out. If you breathe a word about what you read to *anyone*, you're not only putting yourself in danger, but Ansleigh as well. Now, if you show your face around here again, I swear to God, Mason. I will kill you. Get the fuck out of here."

He nods rapidly. Stepping out of the way, he darts out of the bedroom and seconds later, I hear the front door shut.

Throwing on a pair of jeans, I slip a fitted black t-shirt on. Grabbing my gun out of my safe and heading back out to the truck.

Returning to Ansleigh's apartment, I jump out of the truck and head inside.

"Babe, you ready to go?" I ask, walking through the front door.

“Yeah, give me one second.” Her voice carries from the back of the apartment. She comes out of the bedroom in a pair of jeans and a white crop top, her hair tied up in a messy bun.

“Is this okay?” She asks, looking down at her outfit tentatively.

“Of course it is. Why wouldn’t it be?”

“Bryan never let me wear anything like this. He told me, ‘just because you act like a whore doesn’t mean you should dress like one’, and I’m just self conscious about it,” she says looking down at her feet.

“Ansleigh,” I object, walking over to her. “First of all, you are *not* a whore nor do you act like one. Second of all, Bryan was an insecure little bitch. Wear whatever you want. Fuck, you could wear a table cloth, and I wouldn’t mind. Let them look all they want. You’re coming home with *me*.”

She smiles slightly, looking back up at me. “That I am.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Ansleigh

“Ans, you okay?” Dmitri questions, coming to stand in front of me.

“Yeah, I’m good.” I nod once to reassure him. “Can I try?” I ask, reaching for the gun. He smiles warmly and hands it to me.

I never thought I would find myself in a gun range, learning how to shoot a gun. However, I also never thought I would be dating someone in the mafia.

“There are ten rounds left. Show me what you got, *solnyshko*.” He takes a few steps back, waiting intently.

Standing how he showed me, I lift the gun and aim at my target. Taking a deep breath, I pull the trigger, firing round after round. When I’m finished, I place the gun down and look over at Dmitri. He presses the button to bring the target closer so he can examine my efforts.

“Wow, I’m impressed.” He hands me the sheet, and I look it over. “That’s really good for this to be your first time.” His smile grows, an emotion on his face that I’ve never seen before. Pride.

“Thank you,” I blush.

“Are you hungry?” He asks, making sure the gun is empty before putting it away.

“Starving.” I slip my hand into his, lacing our fingers together. He leads me out of the gun range and back to his truck. Climbing inside, he smacks my ass playfully.

“Hey!” He winks just before closing the door. When he’s inside he starts it, and I relax into my seat as I hear the familiar rumble of his truck.

“What do you want for lunch?” He asks, pulling out onto the highway.

“I could go for a nice burrito.”

“Your wish is my command.” He reaches over, taking my hand once more. He laces our fingers together, bringing my hand up and kissing the back of it.

Minutes later he pulls into a parking lot, parking beside a food truck. Raising an eyebrow, I look over at him.

“Trust me.” He squeezes my hand. Jumping down out of the truck, I observe the menu as we approach. A couple options catch my eye, but I settle on the Hawaiian burrito.

After ordering, we step to the side and wait.

“What do you want to do after this?” He runs a hand through his hair.

“I’d love to go swimming,” I answer honestly.

He nods, stepping forward when our names are called and grabbing the food.

“Swimming it is.”

We walk back to his truck to eat. Stealing glances at him as we enjoy our food, a million thoughts run through my mind.

I’ve never been comfortable in these situations. The last six months of our relationship, Bryan, and I barely had civil conversations. When we did have one, I was always waiting for the other shoe to drop. Usually it did.

Dmitri’s hand on my thigh pulls me out of my thoughts.

“*Solnyshko?*” he questions.

“Hmm?”

“I asked if you were ready to go?” He tucks a strand of hair behind my ear. “You looked pretty deep in thought, though.”

“Yeah, sorry.” I look down at my half eaten burrito, closing the lid.

“Why do you apologize so much?” He asks, tilting his head to the side.

“It’s just a habit,” I shrug, keeping my eyes locked on the white styrofoam container. He studies me for a moment before he puts the truck in reverse, backing out of his parking spot.

“Do you want to just grab a bag and stay at my house for the night?” Dmitri questions as he pulls up to my apartment complex.

“That will be fine. I have to bring Cooper though,” I mention, opening the door.

“I’ll be waiting right here,” he agrees with a smile. “Bring that nightgown you wore last night. I would like to properly tear it off you tonight.”

Blushing, I roll my eyes and climb out of the truck.

Making my way inside, I grab a couple outfits and three sets of lingerie. Searching through my drawers, I finally find my bathing suit. Stuffing everything into one bag, I throw it over my shoulder and go to the kitchen where Cooper’s food and water bowls are.

Emptying the water bowl, I grab his food and leash.

“Alright buddy,” I say, fastening his leash. “Let’s go.”

Upon exiting the apartment, I make sure everything is locked up and then head back to the truck.

“I didn’t know you had so much stuff,” Dmitri jokes when I open the door and help Cooper inside.

“Me either,” I reply with a laugh, climbing inside.

Once we arrive at his house, he brings the dog and all of his supplies in while I carry my bag. Setting the stuff down in the kitchen, he opens the back door and lets Cooper run free.

“The fenced in backyard will come in handy,” he chuckles as he stands in the doorway watching the dog run amuck. “Are you ready to get in the pool?”

“Yeah,” I reply. “Let me go change.”

Grabbing my suit out of my bag, I walk to the guest bathroom. Quickly undressing and sliding on my bathing suit, I emerge from the bathroom just as he comes out of his bedroom.

“Fuck, are you sure you want to go swimming?” He asks, his gaze lingering on my chest.

“I’m positive.” I roll my eyes and shove him playfully.

Walking out of the house and onto the patio, I make my way over to the pool. Slowly taking each step, I enter the chilly water. Goosebumps immediately rise on my skin, and I shiver.

“Cold?” Dmitri mutters in my ear. I jump slightly not realizing he was so close.

“A little bit,” I admit, turning to look at him.

“I can warm you up,” he teases, pulling me into his arms.

“Can’t we just swim without you trying to stick your dick in me?” I smirk, placing my hands on his shoulders, being mindful of his neck, my legs going around his waist.

“I can’t help it.” He moves in, kissing my neck.

He wades over to the side of the pool, pressing my back against the wall. His hands grip my waist, pulling my hips down onto him.

“Feel how hard you make me?” He questions in my ear, grinding his hard dick against my clothed pussy. “I just want to bury myself inside you.”

More goosebumps litter my arms as he speaks, his words stoking a fire deep within. His lips move down my neck, nipping at the delicate skin.

“Dmitri,” I breathe out, closing my eyes and leaning my head to the side.

He smirks against my skin, his hand sliding up my back. He tugs on the string of my top, effectively untying it in both places. In one swift motion he tosses it behind me onto the concrete.

Reaching down, he undoes the ties on my bottoms, removing them from my body. I slide a hand down between us, undoing the tie on his swim trunks. My hand works to free his dick, pushing his shorts down below his hips.

He lifts me just enough to place the head at my entrance, wasting no time. His body cages me in, pressing me against the wall of the pool as he slowly works himself in and out of me until he is buried completely inside me.

“You’re so fucking tight,” he groans, thrusting his hips against mine, each one slow, deep and deliberate.

“Dmitri,” I breathe, gripping his shoulders. “Stop playing and fuck me like you mean it.” With his hands on my hips, his pace picks up. He pulls my hips down on his with each thrust, slamming our bodies together.

“Fuck, yes,” I moan, digging my nails into his shoulders.

He grabs the back of my head, tangling his fingers in the roots of my hair. Tugging on them, he jerks my head back, giving him full access to my neck. Leaning down, he bites into the flesh. Trying to be mindful of his neighbors, I hold back the surprised groan.

“Don’t you dare,” he grits in my ear.

“Don’t what?” I question breathlessly, closing my eyes as he continues working his hips with mine.

“Don’t hold back. I want to hear those fucking moans.”

“But your neighbors...” I trail off when he tilts my hips in a different direction, sending waves of arousal to my core.

“Will know exactly who you belong to by the time I’m done with you.”

My pussy clenches around his dick. His words send excitement coursing through me. I never thought I would be turned on by the fact that others could hear. Until now.

He pulls out of me and flips me around before sliding back inside me in one quick motion.

Snaking a hand around to my front, going straight for my pussy. A loud moan caused by his movements falls from my lips.

“That’s it, baby. You take daddy’s cock like a good fucking girl.”

His words stoke the fire deep within, dragging me closer to my impending orgasm.

“Fuck,” I moan, pushing my hips back to meet each thrust.

“Goddamn, Ansleigh. I can’t wait to put a fucking baby in you.”

His words spur me closer to my orgasm, a loud moan comes from deep within as my pussy clenches his cock.

He groans at the sensation, hips stuttering against mine as his own orgasm rips through him.

With a heaving chest, he leans forward, placing a kiss to the back of my head.

“Fucking hell,” he says, sliding out of me. Turning me to face him, his eyes fall to my chest. I follow his eyes, looking down to see tiny scrapes from where he had my chest pressed against the concrete wall. They aren’t bad, just minor scrapes.

“Did you mean that?” I ask, leaning against the side of the pool.

“What?” He asks, tilting his head to the side.

“About putting a baby in me?”

“Most definitely. I can’t stop thinking about what you’d look like if you were pregnant.” He doesn’t hesitate to answer, his tone indicating he’s serious.

“Then I guess we better get to work.” I smirk, swimming away from him. When I reach the top of the steps, I look at him over my shoulder. “Coming?” I ask.

He practically sprints out of the water, and I giggle. His arms wrap around my waist, and he carries me into the house.

“I hope that sweet pussy of yours is ready, because I’m going to fuck you over and over tonight,” he growls into my ear, sending shivers down my spine.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Analeigh

The next morning, I wake to find Dmitri gone. Although I knew he was going to work this morning, I had hoped that I would be up when he left. Frowning, I grab my phone off the bedside table and check the time. Shooting up in bed, I raise my eyebrows.

It's one thirty in the afternoon. I've not slept that late in years. I guess that's what happens when you get fucked so well you barely remember your name.

Stretching out my sore limbs, I lean back against the headboard and scroll. I have a few missed texts from Dmitri, but just as I go to read them my phone rings.

"Good morning," I chirp as I hold the phone up to my ear.

"Good *afternoon*," Dmitri says from the other end, and I can hear the smile in his voice.

"I didn't mean to sleep so late," I begin to apologize, but he stops me.

"*Solnyshko*."

"What?"

"You don't need to apologize," he says. "Can I video call you?"

“Of course,” I reply instantly.

My phone beeps indicating he has asked to video share. Accepting the request, I hold the phone out in front of me, a smile still plastered on my face.

“How’s work?” I ask, pulling my knees to my chest. I can tell from his surroundings that he’s on lunch, sitting in his truck.

“It’s alright,” he says before taking a bite of his sandwich. “I’d rather be home eating something else for lunch, but I guess that’ll have to wait for dinner.”

My cheeks flame, butterflies dancing in my stomach. “Is that so?”

“Mhmm,” he confirms, a devilish look in his eyes.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I was just imagining all the things I want to do to you when I get home.”

“Oh yeah?” I ask, curiosity peaked. “Care to share?”

“Well, first things first. When I get home, you’re going to be completely naked and in our bed.” He pauses, taking a drink of his water. “Then I’m going to tie you up and feast on that delicious pussy of yours.”

My thighs clench, fire stirring deep in my core.

“Then, after you’re a whimpering mess, I’m going to thoroughly fuck you. I’ll fill your pussy so full of my cum there’s no way you won’t get pregnant.”

“You promise?” I breathe, fighting the urge to slip my hand between my legs and take care of myself. I love when he talks to me like this, and he damn well knows it.

“I’m a man of my word, Ans.” He winks, and checks the time on his watch. “Well, pretty girl,” he sighs, finishing off his water. “Unfortunately, I have to return to work. I will be home in a few hours. You heard me. Naked.”

“Yes, Daddy,” I purr, knowing what it does to him.

“You’re going to pay for that,” he groans, shifting in his seat.

“Looking forward to it,” I tease, blowing him a kiss. “Love you!” I quickly hang up the phone. He’s never said it back, but I don’t mind. I know he does, even if he doesn’t say it. He shows it.

Deciding to mess with him one last time, I pull my shirt off and roll onto my back. Holding my phone at the right angle, giving him a full view of my almost naked body. My hand slips into my underwear, and I snap the picture, hitting send.

He replies almost instantly.

Caveman

Get your hand away from my pussy.

But I need to.

Caveman

No.

Fine, but I’m going to pout about it the rest of the day.

Caveman

If you’re a good girl, the wait will be worth it. Trust me.

I have to get back to work while trying to hide the fact that my dick is rock hard.

Sorry!

I laugh as I throw my shirt back on. Finally deciding to climb out of bed, I pull on a pair of shorts and make my way into the kitchen. Rummaging through the fridge I make a mental note to go grocery shopping before Dmitri gets home. Throwing together a salad, I grab a bottle of water out of the fridge.

Cooper barks, sitting down at the back door with a whine. Rolling my eyes, I laugh, walking over and opening the patio door. He darts off, chasing a squirrel.

Turning back to my food, I hurry and scarf it down. I only have three hours before he gets home, and if I'm not naked on the bed, I fear for the torture my poor pussy will endure.

Walking into the bedroom, I skim through my belongings. Throwing on a sundress, I apply a minimal amount of makeup and quickly braid my hair. Double checking my reflection in the mirror, I slip on a pair of sandals and head to my car.

Half an hour later, I'm strolling down the aisles and scolding myself for not bringing an actual list. Grabbing what I can remember from memory, I throw in a few steaks to grill tonight.

Turning down the aisle closest to the checkouts, I make it halfway down the row before a thought makes me stop in my tracks.

Unlocking my phone, I pull up the calendar. Hands shaking slightly, I turn to my left and stare at the row of pregnancy tests. In a panic, I grab four different boxes.

Butterflies dance in my stomach as I hurriedly scan my items through self checkout.

Is this really happening?

Getting caught at every single red light on the way home makes the drive seem twice as long. I let out a breath and slump into the seat after putting the car in park.

"Alright." I rub my hands over my face and then sit up straight. "Pull yourself together, woman."

Going to my trunk, I open it and gather the grocery bags. Refusing to make more than one trip, my arm feels like it weighs a ton by the time I reach the front door.

Dumping them onto the counter, I rub the indentation marks on my forearm. A quick glance at the clock sends a slight thrill through me. Dmitri got off work fifteen minutes ago and will be home any minute.

Quickly putting all of the groceries away, I take my stash of pregnancy tests and place them in the bathroom cabinet.

The loud rumble of Dmitri's truck can be heard from the parking lot.

Shit.

Ripping my dress off, I kick my shoes off at the same time. Removing my bra and thong, I hear the front door open, and Dmitri greeting Cooper as he enters. The faint woosh of the water as he turns on the kitchen faucet.

Rushing to the bed, I scramble across the sheets and lay on my stomach, kicking my feet in the air just as my personal Adonis walks through the doorway.

"Such a good girl," he praises, walking over to me. Maneuvering so I'm on my knees, I place my hands on his chest and smile up at him.

"I'm so glad you're home."

"Likewise, baby." He leans down, capturing my lips in an agonizingly slow, but passionate kiss. His hands slide down to my ass, pulling my body flush against his. Relishing in the feel of his lips on mine, I grip the front of his shirt tightly.

"I think this should come off," I mutter against his lips. He breaks the kiss to pull the shirt over his head and toss it to the side.

"On your back," he commands, lightly swatting my ass. I giggle, laying back on the soft sheets. He reaches above me, between the mattress and headboard.

"Arms up." My hands go above my head, and he gently takes my wrist in his calloused hand. The sound of velcro fills

the room, and I tilt my head toward the sound.

“What’s that?” I ask. My question is answered when a fabric cuff is placed around my wrist, the other following shortly behind.

“Too tight?” He asks, running his hand along my cheek.

“No,” I assure him, clearing my throat.

“What’s your safe word, baby girl?” His movements halt after the question.

“Blueberry.” He smiles as he pulls two more straps from the foot of the bed. After my ankles are secured, he hovers over me with a wicked grin. Anticipation stirs inside me, causing me to squirm under him.

He leans down and kisses my lips softly before trailing kisses down my neck and bare chest. He sucks a nipple into his warm mouth, swirling his tongue around the sensitive bud. His fingers tweak the other, making sure they both get attention.

Slowly kissing down my body, he settles between my legs. He wastes no time lowering his mouth to my pussy. His tongue flicking over my clit sends waves of pleasure dancing through my veins.

He slides a finger inside me, curling it against my g-spot. Working another in, he continues the relentless pounding of his thick digits. Pressure builds inside of me, one that I’ve never felt before.

“Oh, God,” I gasp, clutching onto the cuffs for dear life. “Stop, stop,” I beg over and over as the most powerful sensation ramps into my stomach. He doesn’t stop, if anything, he goes faster. Harder.

Then, it happens.

“That’s it,” he growls as I cum. Ears ringing, I’m sure I’m shrieking. “Squirt all over my face, baby.”

Before I can come down his cock is shoved inside of me without mercy. He pushes inside of me without abandon, growling things about filling me full of his cum and making a

baby with him. They don't even register, but I know I'm screaming my approval.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Dmitri

Looking at the beauty in front of me, my hand traces the curve of her body. Her eyes are closed with a lazy smile on her face. I can tell by her breathing she isn't asleep. She shivers as my fingertips graze over her hip, scooting closer to me.

Reaching down, I grab the covers and pull them over us. Wrapping my arm around her I press our bodies together. Kissing the top of her head, I linger for a moment.

“What’s on your mind, D?” She asks, placing her hands between her head and pillow.

“Nothing,” I answer, running my hand over her hair.

“Don’t lie to me,” she says with a yawn, opening her eyes to look at me.

“Marry me.” The words are out of my mouth quicker than intended, but I mean them.

“That’s not funny,” she frowns, straining against my hold trying to get loose. Letting go of her, I sit up.

“I’m not kidding, Ansleigh.” She chews on her bottom lip, my hand instinctively reaching up to pull the flesh from between her teeth.

“Why?” She asks softly.

“Because I love you. That’s why,” I state. “In the short amount of time I’ve known you, you’ve made me feel more alive than I have in my entire life,” I trail off, trying to find the right words.

“Dmitri.” She reaches over, grabbing my hand.

“I never want to experience the dull life I was living without you again. I want to grow old and have babies with you.”

“Before I say yes,” she hesitates and my stomach drops. Dread slowly creeping through my veins.

“What is it?”

“There’s something I need to do.” She climbs out of the bed and disappears into the bathroom.

What?

Following behind her, I lean against the door frame.

“Is that-?”

“Yes.” She answers without hesitation, opening a pregnancy test.

“Are you late? Do you think you are?” I can’t stop asking questions. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Slow down there, cowboy.” She opens the foil packet and pulls the test out. “Let’s just see what it says, okay?”

“Okay,” I nod, cracking my knuckles. “Okay. I’ll wait outside while you finish doing your thing.” Stepping out of the bathroom, I place my back against the wall. Leaning my head back, I let out a soft sigh. A smile grows on my face as I think of the possibility of having a little Ansleigh or a little me running around.

“You can come back D.” When I round the corner, she’s standing leaned against the sink with her back to the test.

“It says to give it the full three minutes, so I’m not gonna look until my timer goes off.” Stopping in front of her, I grab her hips and lift her onto the counter.

“Why do I need to wait on your answer?” I ask, cupping her cheeks. “Will the outcome of this test change your mind?”

“Well, no.” She doesn’t elaborate, so I gently press my lips to her forehead and drop my hands. As much as I want to press further into the issue, I know that pushing her won’t help any decision be made.

I check the timer and groan when I see it still has a minute left.

“Can’t we check now?” I ask anxiously.

“It’s just one more minute,” she chuckles and playfully rolls her eyes.

With my hands back on her hips, I rest my forehead against hers. “No matter what this test shows, I still meant what I said. I love you, Ansleigh.”

“I love you too, D.”

The shrill ringing of the timer bounces off the tile walls. Ansleigh takes a deep breath, slowly letting it out. She reaches over, grabbing the test and holds it in front of her.

Craning my neck, I look down at it with her. One line.

“Negative,” she sighs, placing it back on the counter. “It’s negative.” She looks up at me, her eyes sad. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? Why are you sorry, *solnyshko*?” Confusion laces my voice.

“That I got your hopes up,” she mutters, swiping the test off the counter and tossing it in the trash. She slides off the countertop and goes to push by me. My hand on her bicep stops her.

“Baby girl, please don’t apologize. We have plenty of time to have kids,” I assure her. “Plus, think of all the fun we get to have while trying.”

Ansleigh nods, gently pulling her arm from my grasp. She walks to the bedroom and grabs her robe, slipping it on. She disappears from the room and I’m left standing in the bathroom, dumbfounded.

What just happened?

Walking back into the bedroom, I grab a pair of shorts out of the drawer and slide them on. Heading into the kitchen, I stroll up behind Ansleigh and slide my hands around her waist.

“Talk to me,” I murmur in her ear.

“Go start the grill,” she states.

“Ans-”

“Dmitri. Just do what I asked, *please!*” She turns and shoves a plate of steaks at me.

“No.” I grab the plate from her and set it on the counter. “What is going on?”

“Nothing,” she protests, arms crossing over her chest as she glares up at me. When I don’t move, her shoulders slump in defeat.

“I don’t know. I didn’t even think I wanted kids right now,” she says, looking down at the floor. “When that test came back negative, I was crushed. Stupid, right? Why am I so upset over something I didn’t even know I wanted?” Her voice cracks at the admission.

“That’s not stupid, Ansleigh.” I reach out and pull her into my chest. “I promise we will keep trying.”

“What if I don’t want to even try? I don’t know if I can take the constant feeling of my chest caving in,” she whispers, bringing her hands around my waist and clasping them.

“Then we leave it up to fate. We’ll keep doing it and it’ll eventually stick,” I assure her, hiding the hopefulness in my voice. I don’t want her to feel even worse.

She pulls back, looking up at me. “I like the sound of that.” She finally gives me a smile, and I kiss her forehead.

“Don’t stress over it, Ans. Let’s just have fun and enjoy it, okay?”

“*Now* will you go turn the grill on?” She asks, handing me the plate of steaks again.

With a quick peck to her cheek, I grab the plate and exit to the patio.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Ansleigh

Three Months Later

“D, come on. I’m going to pee myself,” I groan, shuffling from one foot to the other.

“You’re the psycho who didn’t want to pee before we left the gym, Ansleigh.” He comes to a stop beside me, reaching over and unlocking the door for me. Rushing in, I head straight to the bathroom. Dmitri comes in as I’m finishing up and leans against the doorframe.

“Well?” he asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Well, I haven’t dipped it yet.” I wave the unopened pregnancy test in the air and turn to the disposable cup.

“How late are you now?”

“A week,” I reply, putting the cap back on the test and placing it on the counter. While I’m not getting my hopes up, I want to let myself believe this is our month. Propping my hip against the counter, I steeple my fingers and rest my chin on top of them.

Dmitri comes over and rubs my shoulders, his eyes catching mine through the mirror. I smile nervously and place my hand

over his as it rests on my shoulder.

The timer goes off on my phone and Dmitri stops me before I pick the test up.

“No matter what,” he prompts.

“There’s always next month,” I finish the sentence, and he removes his hand. He started that after my first mini freak out over the negative test. It’s oddly comforting.

Flipping the test over so we can look at it, I sigh heavily and toss it into the trash.

“Next month.” Dmitri promises, and I nod. Although I don’t fully believe it.

Standing on my tiptoes, I kiss him softly.

“I really hate to leave you,” Dmitri says, rubbing the back of his neck. “I told Evan I would come in and work from one to four.”

“It’s okay. I’m going to go downtown and do some shopping.”

“Do you want to bring home some take-out for dinner?” He asks, walking to the bedroom and grabbing his work clothes.

“Yeah, I can do that.” I strip out of my gym clothes and turn on the shower. While I wait for the water to warm up, I slide my wedding rings off and place them on the counter. Staring at them, I smile softly.

Two months ago, I finally said yes to marrying him. He went out that same day and bought me a ring, and we were married at the courthouse the next day.

“How am I supposed to leave when you do that shit?” Dmitri groans as he walks back in the bathroom to give me a kiss.

“Maybe it’s a trick.” I raise an eyebrow and smirk. “Is it working?”

“Fuck that job. I don’t need the money.” He lifts me up, wrapping my legs around his waist. My hands go to his shoulders with a giggle.

His lips are on mine within seconds, hand tangling in the roots of my hair. He pulls on my hair, leaning my head back and trails kisses down my collarbone and back to my neck.

“God,” he rumbles against my skin. “I *really* should go.”

“You don’t *have* to.” I slip my hands into his hair as he sucks lightly on my neck. “Stay with me.”

“I can’t, *solnyshko*,” he groans, pulling back slightly.

“Go on, we can finish this tonight,” I promise, resting my forehead against his.

Reluctantly, he places me back on my feet.

“I’ll see you after work.”

“Love you, D.” I step into the shower.

“Love you too, baby girl.” He shuts the door behind himself as he leaves.

Taking my time in the shower, I rinse away the tension from the gym and the annoyance I’ve felt over the constant negative tests.

When the water starts to turn cold, I get out and wrap a towel around my body. While slipping on my house shoes, I hear the front door open. Wondering why Dmitri would be back so quickly, I walk out of the bedroom, and down the hall.

Just as I’m about to round the corner, I stop. An unfamiliar voice talks lowly from the living room, and I press my back against the wall, making myself as small as possible.

“Are you sure this is the right house?” The guy says, and I assume there’s someone else with him. His tone is gruff and deep, one that sends a shiver down my spine. “It doesn’t scream ‘mafia don’ to me,” he adds, and I hear faint chatter through a telephone. I can’t make out what the other person is saying, yet there is no doubt that they are looking for something. Or someone.

Panic courses through me, but I keep myself calm. If I start panicking, I will be made.

Slowly retreating back to the bedroom, I quietly close the door. I pre-turn the knob to avoid the *click* alerting them that someone is home. I can hear Cooper losing his mind in the backyard, his claws scratching the glass of the door.

Grabbing my phone, I dial Dmitri's number. It rings several times before going to voicemail. Silently cursing, I dial it again, pressing the phone to my ear once more. Voicemail. *Again.*

"*Please, pick up, Dmitri,*" I whisper to myself, hands shaking as I attempt to calm myself.

On the third try, he finally answers.

"*Solnyshko?*" He asks, questioning clear in his voice.

"Someone is in the house," I whisper, tears finally welling in my eyes. No matter how much I want to cry, I need to stay silent.

"What do you mean?" His voice is more alarmed now. I swear I can hear his spine go straight.

"There is someone here, and I think they're looking for you," I hiss, tucking away a stray piece of hair. "What else could it mean?"

"Okay. I'll be there as soon as I can, baby. Get my gun out of the safe and hide. Do not come out until I say."

"Okay," I whisper. On the other end of the line, I hear his truck roaring to life, the door slamming. "I'm on my way, baby. Stay on the phone."

Quickly making my way toward the safe, I shakily type the code in while Dmitri mutters assurances. Grabbing his gun, I release the magazine and see it's fully loaded. I cock the chamber slightly, the glint confirms it's already loaded. Tiptoeing to the closet and hiding in the bottom behind a row of clothes, I hold my breath.

I can barely hear the footsteps in the hallway over the hammering of my heartbeat.

"Ans?" Dmitri questions, his voice louder than necessary.

“I’m here,” I whisper back, turning the volume down. “He’s outside the bedroom.”

The bedroom door opens, and I’m frozen in place. The hinges practically scream over my erratic heart. Fear courses through my veins as I grip the gun tightly in my quivering hand. My finger stays off the trigger, just like I was told.

The light from the bedroom spills into the closet as the door opens. Folding my lips into my mouth, I force myself to keep my eyes open.

Silence meets me as the door closes slightly. I wait with baited breath, not trusting myself to speak.

The clothes rip apart, and he grabs my foot, pulling me from my hiding spot. “Well, what do we have here?” He asks, grinning widely. His teeth are bright white, almost too damn white.

I scream, dropping my phone in the process as I attempt to scramble away. When he drags me into view, I notice he’s on his knees. “No!” I scream, shoving my feet into his chest. It doesn’t even seem to phase him. Instead of his face staying happy, he snarls. His spit splashes on my cheek as we grapple.

“Fucking bitch,” he grunts, his giant fist landing to blow on my cheek. Taking the opportunity, he pins me down on the ground with his body, wrenching the gun from my hand. I reach to grab it back, but his hands grip my wrists and pin them above my head. He’s seated between my legs, forcing them open. He laughs, as if this is just some sort of game, before pinning my ankles under his calves, butterflyed out.

His eyes go to my phone on the floor of the closet. Perking up, he reaches over and picks it up, placing it to his ear.

“Hello, Dmitri,” he purrs, licking his lips as he peers down at me. Swallowing is almost impossible past the lump in my throat.

I can’t hear Dmitri on the other end, but the pleased look from the man on top of me says he is getting the reaction he wanted.

“You better hurry. The pretty blonde lass beneath me would be the perfect toy for the Murphy Clan.”

He places the phone on speaker, allowing me to hear Dmitri. He lays it beside us on the floor, a slimy grin on his face. Yanking my elbows down, I try to catch him while he’s off guard. He just fucking cackles at my failure.

“Let her go. I will come with you if you just let her go.” His voice is steady, not at all portraying how I’m currently feeling. “She has nothing to do with this.”

“Aye, I think I will have a go with the lass before I take you both with me.” He sits up, my eyes widening in horror as he undoes his belt, button popping. The clinking and scraping of leather sound makes me physically ill.

“*No*,” I whimper. His hand goes from my hands to my throat, gripping harshly, nothing like Dmitri. He cuts off air as tears stream down my face, and I fight against his hold.

“I swear to God, if you harm her in any capacity I will fucking gut you,” Dmitri shouts through the phone. I’ve never heard him this angry before. This is what I’m looking for, and it gives me another wave of fight. Struggling against his hand, I claw at his face, screaming as my nails sink into his skin. He grunts, dropping the phone on the carpet as he fends me off.

“We will be waiting for you,” the stranger above me snarls, smashing the phone with the butt of his gun.

“Get off of me,” I cry out, flexing my thighs and jerking around. There is no use. I’m only fucking exhausting myself, but I can’t give up. I won’t fucking give up.

Leaning down, he licks the streaming tears from my face. A slight whimper leaves my lips as I buck upward, trying to force him off of me. Thrashing my head, our noses clash with a nasty crunch. I don’t know who made that noise, but I refuse to stop.

Growls reverberate from his chest, his jeans get pushed down his hips with little struggle. Bile rises in my throat as he pushes the fabric of my dress up, and I’m slightly relieved I actually decided to wear underwear today. Not that it matters.

He rips the fabric away in one quick motion, my skin burns against the harsh cloth. I swear my skin rips with it.

“Please, don’t.” My whimpers only irritate him further, and he rears back, slapping me across the face. An instant metallic taste fills my mouth from what I assume is a now busted lip.

“Keep your mouth shut,” he growls. His hand grabs my jaw, pulling me to look back at him. Before I can blink, his lips land on mine. Rough hands rip at the top of my dress, yanking the hem down and under my breasts. Struggling, he gropes and tweaks my nipples. Pinching too roughly and tugging them downward. I scream against his mouth, the rancid taste of his mouth on mine slips between my lips as he pries me open.

His hand slides up my thigh, the closer he gets to his target, the faster my heart hammers in my chest. I shift slightly, trying to get away from his touch but that only spurs him on.

“Quit fucking moving,” he grunts, and I cry out as he roughly shoves a finger inside of me. His other hand returning to my neck, I gulp in as much air as I can before he cuts off my supply. My body recoils with every second his skin touches mine. I can feel him shoving his fingers into me quickly, curving them around my insides.

The faint sound of Dmitri’s truck pulling in the drive sends relief flooding every inch of my body.

“You’re fucking dead,” I manage to rasp, just as the front door slams.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Dmitri

A thousand thoughts run through my mind as I pull up to my house. I can hear Cooper in the backyard barking when I get out of the truck. Rushing into the house, I can hear Ansleigh's cries echo through the house from the front door.

"Ansleigh!" I yell, running to the bedroom in a cold sweat. When I bust into the bedroom, rage boils deep within me .

Racing over, I wrap my arm around his neck, squeezing tightly as I lift him from on top of her.

"Get the *fuck* off!" I snarl, keeping my hold on him as he claws at my arm. His legs flail, thrashing around as he attempts to fight me off. Nails sinking into my skin, I grit my teeth and tighten my hold. I don't let up on the pressure until he finally stops fighting, going limp in my arms.

Dropping him to the ground, I step over him and rush to Ansleigh, helping her sit up.

"*Solnyshko*," I whisper, looking her over. "My God, I am so sorry." I pull my shirt off and place it over her head, helping her put it on. "I'm so sorry," I repeat. It's like a chant, over and over, in an attempt to reassure her. Let her know that I'm here.

She doesn't answer me though, just continues staring into space. Overwhelming guilt eats at me, gnawing at the heart

that hammers in my chest. This is the second time she's been in danger because of me.

Gritting my teeth, I look over my shoulder at the man passed out on the floor. I made a promise, and I plan to deliver.

Standing, I pull Ansleigh up with me and place her on the edge of the bed. "I'm going to grab a few things. I will be right back, okay.?" I squat down eye-level with her. Trying to keep my eyes from venturing to the cuts and bruises on her face.

Again, no answer.

Clenching my fists at my side, I exit the room. This fucker is going to pay for harming my girl.

Grabbing a chair from the kitchen, I make a pit stop in the hall grabbing a roll of large contractor trash bags. Walking back to the bedroom, I roll the man out of the middle of the floor with my boot. Placing the trash bags on the floor, I set the kitchen chair on top.

Staring at the chair for a moment, I rush out of the room to grab a few more items. Ratchet straps, a blow torch, and a scrap piece of metal from my garage make its way with me on my ventures. It's moments like these that I'm thankful for my civilian profession. Making a final pitstop on the way back, I grab the block of knives from the kitchen.

When I reenter the room, I place the knives, torch, and metal on the dresser and throw the ratchet straps over my shoulder. Hoisting my victim up, I dump him in the chair and secure him to it tightly.

Glancing back at Ansleigh, I feel a whole new rush of hatred for the man in the chair. She's not moved since I left her, staring directly at the wall. Walking over to my sound system, I turn on some loud music so that the neighbors won't be able to hear the screams that will undoubtedly come from my revenge.

"Ans." I turn to face her again, squatting down in front of her. My heart breaks as I take in her appearance. She has a gash on her cheek and a busted lip. "I need you to go to

another room.” She doesn’t even see me, but I place my hand on her knee, shaking it lightly.

Finally she snaps out of her daze, looking at me. She shakes her head slowly, sliding her hand around my wrist. Her eyes stay locked on mine as she squeezes lightly. I nod, a silent understanding stretching between us.

Standing to my full height, I roll my shoulders. Stepping onto the plastic, I reach over and grab the small paring knife out of the block. Pausing over the man, I twirl the handle of the knife between my fingers.

“Last chance, baby girl. I really don’t want you to see this,” I call over my shoulder just as the man begins to stir. She doesn’t move, and I take that as my green light.

Bringing the blade of the knife down, I spear his thigh. He jolts awake with a scream.

“Hello, motherfucker,” I snarl, jerking the knife out of his leg. Blood seeps out of the wound, dripping onto the plastic.

Grabbing the poultry shears out of the block, I also pick up the blowtorch and metal piece.

“I told you I was going to gut you if you harmed my wife.” I admire the blades of the shears as I open and close them, walking over to his right side where his hand is strapped down. “By the time I’m done with you, you’re going to wish you had listened.” I reach down, taking his pinky between my fingers. He flinches away, and I place the shears around his finger.

With a forceful *snip*, I smirk as he howls in pain. Heating the metal up with the torch, I place the piece against his bleeding wound. His flesh sizzles as it cauterizes the wound.

I do this to each finger on his right hand, pausing each time he passes out from the pain.

After his right hand is done, I stand back. Deciding I’ve had enough with the shears, I put them down and grab the carving knife.

Sliding the blade lightly along his neck, I watch his Adam's apple bob with a gulp as the tip slips by his jugular. Pressing into the skin, I slide the knife down to the top of his shirt, leaving a small trail of blood behind.

Cutting the fabric down the middle, I yank it open, allowing unobscured access to his chest and stomach.

He squirms in his chair, knowing that whatever is coming next isn't good.

Without wasting another second, I set to work skillfully carving up his skin. Each slice brings retribution for his assault on Ansleigh. I'm so into the carving that I almost don't feel the small hand on my bicep.

Stepping back from the man, I turn to see her staring at me with tears in her eyes.

"I wish you would've left, baby." I say, thinking she was upset over the bloodshed. Instead, she surprises me and holds her shaky hand out.

She's still not speaking, so I follow her gaze. Noticing that it's fixated on the knife, I raise my hand and hold it out to her.

"This?" I ask, raising an eyebrow. Her eyes flick up to mine before dropping back down. She looks...passive.

"May I?" She questions, chewing on her bottom lip.

"Are you sure?" I ask, tipping the knife slightly. "This is something you will never forget." I can't let her go through with something without letting her know the consequences.

She gives me a short nod, wiggling her fingers. "And I'll never forget what he did to me," she mutters softly, voice wobbling before her shoulders straighten.

Reluctantly, I hand the knife over.

To my surprise she doesn't even hesitate. It's almost like she's changed into a different person.

"You're going to love this," she says looking down at him, her lip raised in a snarl. Stabbing and slashing at his skin, she smiles as he cries out in agony.

With each slice of the knife, tears stream down her face as she continues taking her aggression out on him.

His screams turn into whimpers, before stopping all together. I step up behind her, grabbing her shoulders lightly.

“Ans,” I say softly, sliding my hands down to her wrists. “It’s time to stop,.” I whisper into her ear.

She slumps back against me, breathing heavy. Sobs leave her tiny body as her shaky hands place the knife into mine.

“D. I need to get out of here,” she breathes. Her breath is coming out shallow and rapid. “Please get me out of here.”

Turning her to face me, I nod. “Okay, we can’t go out of the house looking like this.” I remind her. “So let’s shower, and I will get this body taken care of.”

She nods but doesn’t move. I lift her in my arms, carrying her into the bathroom.

Helping her out of my shirt, I turn the water on, letting it warm up.

Sitting her on the counter, I lean down, kissing the top of her head. “I’m so sorry, baby.” She doesn’t reply, only staring into space again.

When the water is at the temperature she likes, I help her in. As I go to leave to tend to the shit show in the bedroom, she grabs my arm. “Please. Stay.” Her voice waivers, cutting through me.

“I have to make a phone call. I will be right back,” I promise her.

She clutches my arm tighter. “Please, don’t leave me.”

I sigh, knowing that I need to get the body taken care of.

“Look at me,” I whisper, lifting her chin to have her look into my eyes. “I *have* to make this phone call, okay? I will be right back after. I promise.”

She reluctantly nods, her tears mix with the water streaming down her face.

I retreat to the bedroom, placing my hands on my hips as I look at the man. Going through his pockets, I find his cell phone. Taking a picture of the last number he was in contact with, I drop the phone to the floor. Unsure of what else to do, I go over to the safe and pull out the burner phone I have. I'm only supposed to use this for life or death situations, but since I've been found, I think this warrants a phone call.

Dialing the number, I wait for someone to pick up on the other end.

"Hello?" My chest tightens at the voice, it's been so long since I've heard it.

"Dad." I clear my throat, waiting for him to explode for me using the phone.

"What happened? Are you okay?" He asks, and if I didn't know any better, I'd say he was worried.

"Someone found me. I don't know if he has told anyone else about me, but I don't have the resources to deal with the mess that has been made. He mentioned the Murphy clan, and well, I'm currently standing over a *very* dead body with no way to get it out of my house. It's bad, dad."

"I can have someone over there to take care of it within the hour. Luckily, we anticipated this and sent you somewhere with allies. They won't ask questions," he says. I can imagine him pinching the bridge of his nose in annoyance at my fuck up.

"I'm sorry this happened."

"It's not your fault," he assures me. "Just make sure you're not home when they come to deal with the body. I will send a few of my men to deal with the clan. Don't worry."

"Thanks dad," I say, running a hand through my hair. "I have to run. My wife was here when it happened. She's not okay."

"Wife?" He questions.

"Mom and Nat would love her," I comment, laughing at the image of Ansleigh, mom and Natalia ganging up on me.

“Maybe you’ll get to meet her one day.”

“Hopefully. Listen, I would love to chat more, but we are really risking your life being on here any longer. Burner or not.”

“Yeah, I understand,” I croak over the frog in my throat. Sadness flows through me, not ready to say goodbye yet.

“Stay safe,” he says before disconnecting the call.

Placing the phone back into the safe, I head to the bathroom to Ansleigh. I frown when I notice that she is in the same exact position she was in when I left.

“Baby, you have to hurry. We have to go.”

“Where are we going?” She croaks, finally turning to face me.

“We are gonna go back to your place. I have someone coming to clean this up but we have to be gone before they get here.” I kick my shoes and socks off, stepping inside the shower with her.

Pulling her to me, she slumps into my embrace. We don’t say a word as I stand there holding her tight against me.

After a few moments, I cup her cheeks, lifting her face. “We have to go, honey.” Stepping out of the shower, I grab a towel and wrap her up in it. “Stay here and I’ll grab your clothes.”

Walking to the bedroom, I discard my wet pants and throw on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. Grabbing her bag I throw a few articles of clothing for me, my gun, and her phone inside, then walk back into the bathroom, setting it on the counter.

Rummaging through the bag, I pull out another dress. Not bothering with her bra or underwear, I stuff them back into the bag. Sliding the dress over her head, I lean down and kiss the top of her head.

“Come on,” I say softly, throwing the bag onto my shoulder. When she doesn’t move, I scoop her into my arms. “Keep your head against me,” I instruct, and she does. Burying her face into my shirt as she clings to me.

Walking out of the house, I hoist her into the truck. “I’m going to grab Cooper and his food. I will be right back, okay?”

“Okay,” she mumbles, staring out the windshield.

Rushing back into the house, I grab Cooper’s food and his leash. Opening the backdoor, he bolts in the house.

“Come here, boy,” I say softly as I kneel, reaching for his collar.

He trots over to me, nuzzling me as I latch the leash. Leading him outside, I help him into the truck and then throw everything else in as well.

Climbing inside, I let out a heavy exhale before starting my truck. Backing out of the driveway, I turn left and head to Ansleigh’s.

The ride to her apartment is quiet. I reach over, resting my hand on her thigh, and she flinches away from me. I keep glancing at her, worried.

Pulling into her apartment complex, I park beside her car and get out. Going over to her side, I open her door.

“Do you think you could walk inside while I grab Cooper and the other things?” I ask. She nods and slides out of the seat, waiting for me to get everything. Cooper jumps down and sits at her feet, panting as he looks up at her. She gives him a small smile and then walks to her apartment. She punches the code in and walks inside, holding the door open for me.

Once inside, I lock the door. Placing the bag on the couch, I walk into the kitchen. Getting Cooper settled back in, I refill his food and water bowl. When I return to the living room, Ansleigh is nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Ansleigh

Dmitri's voice carries through the empty apartment as he grows closer. I'm rummaging through my dresser, looking for pajamas when he walks in the room.

He comes to stand beside me, not saying anything at first. He takes a deep breath and clears his throat.

"Ans, I can't even begin to express how sorry I am," he whispers, turning to face me.

"Don't. Please." I stop him before he can say anything else. "I just...I don't want to talk about it, D." Turning my back to him, I walk to the bathroom, locking the door behind me. The last thing I want to do is rehash what happened today.

Once inside the bathroom, I pull the dress off and then slip on my fuzzy pajamas.

When I walk out back into my bedroom, Dmitri is sitting on the edge of the bed. "Come here," he murmurs, reaching for me.

I hesitate until the pained look on his face registers. I step closer to him, taking his hand, and he gently pulls me to him.

"I know you don't want to talk about it," he begins, placing me on his lap. "I would just feel so much better if we got you checked out."

“D...” I trail off, looking down at my hands.

“You don’t have to tell them what happened, we will just say it was a breaking and entering gone wrong,” he assures me.

Closing my eyes, I contemplate his words. “Please don’t make me.”

“Okay,” he relents, resting his head against my shoulder. “I won’t bring it up again.”

“Thank you,” I mutter, his arms tightening around me.

We sit in silence for what feels like forever before I slide off his lap. “I think I’m going to go to bed.”

“Sure, let me take Cooper out, and I will join you.” He stands from the bed, and I pull the covers back, climbing under them.

Snuggling into the covers, I turn onto my side, placing my back to the door.

As the reality of today’s events sinks in, I close my eyes tightly, trying to hold back tears. I can still feel his touch, and I feel absolutely disgusting. I’m so thankful that Dmitri showed up when he did.

No matter how much I will them away, the tears cascade down my face. Quiet sobs fill the room, my chest aching.

Behind me, I hear Dmitri shut the bedroom door and his clothes hitting the floor as he undresses. He doesn’t say a word as he climbs in the bed behind me. His arm goes around my waist, pulling my back flush against him.

“I love you, Ansleigh, more than anything.”

I place my arm over his and squeeze, tightening his grip on me.

My cries dwindle to soft sniffles as I cry myself to sleep.



“Ans, are you sure you’re alright?” Dmitri asks, bringing me a glass of water and medication.

“Yeah, this headache is just awful.” Swallowing the pills, I place the glass on the nightstand. Standing, I sway slightly before Dmitri steady’s me. “I’m going to take a bath to see if that helps ease the pain.”

He follows me into the bathroom, watching intently as I turn to fill the tub with water.

“You probably have a concussion from the blows to your face.”

“Will you bring me a bag of frozen peas?” I ask, ignoring his comment.

While he’s gone, I undress. I didn’t want him to see the bruising that formed where the man held me down. Throwing in one of my favorite bath bombs, I sink down into the water.

Sliding my hands along the bottom of the tub, I pull my knees to my chest and rest my head on them. Eyes closed, I hear Dmitri fumbling with the bag of peas as he walks into the bathroom.

“Here *solnyshko*.” Dmitri places the bag on the back of my neck.

I feel a small hint of relief between the warmth and coldness, but it’s not enough.

“It hurts so much, I could throw up,” I mumble.

“I know I said I’d drop it, but I really think you should get checked out.” I look up at Dmitri as he sits on the side of the tub.

“I’m fine,” I protest, choking down the bile rising in my throat.

“No you’re-” He starts but I quickly stand from inside the tub and jump out, rushing to the toilet.

Clutching the porcelain, I empty the contents of my stomach.

“You’re going. That’s final, Ansleigh.”

I don't fight him, knowing he will drag me kicking and screaming. "Let me put some clothes on." I stand from the floor and grab a towel, wrapping it around me. As much as I try to hide the bruises on my thighs, I notice the way Dmitri's jaw clenches when he spots them.

He doesn't say anything, but I know it's killing him. Reaching over, I pull him to me. "Please don't," I whisper softly. "I don't blame you, so don't blame yourself."

"How?" His voice cracks. "How can you not blame me? If our paths hadn't crossed, you wouldn't be in this mess."

"D, you don't know that. It could've happened to me anywhere for any reason." I know trying to reassure him isn't going to work, but I'm going to try anyway.

He shakes his head and steps away from me. "You better get dressed so we can go. It's gonna be crowded at this time of day." Then he walks away leaving me standing in the bathroom alone.

Dropping my hand to my side, I retreat to the bedroom. Allowing the towel to fall from around me, I grab a pair of leggings and an oversized v-neck. Once I'm dressed I walk down the hall to the living room.

"I'm ready," I mumble, playing with the hem of my shirt. "Let's go." He slides his shoes on and walks out of my apartment. Locking the door behind us, I follow him out to the truck and climb inside.

The ride to the emergency room is so quiet you could hear a pin drop. With the headache still pounding away, I lean my head against the cool window glass and close my eyes.

Minutes later, I hear Dmitri shift into park and turn the truck off. He opens the door and gets out, still not saying a word. I'm too sick and tired to fight with him so I let him have his moment.

Checking in at the desk, I let them put the arm band around my wrist and then take a seat beside Dmitri.

His hand goes to my thigh out of habit, and I stare down at it for a moment before placing my hand over it.

“I love you, Ans,” he says softly.

“I love you too, D.”

He goes to say something else, but a nurse calls my name.

We head through the double doors, and follow her to a room where she asks me a barrage of questions.

After assuring her multiple times that it was a breaking and entering gone wrong. She gives Dmitri a few questionable glances and on the last one, after making me repeat again what happened, I start to lose my temper.

“My husband was at work when this happened. He rushed home once I called him. I know he looks big and scary but for you to badger me with the same question over and over because you *assume* I’m not telling the truth is ridiculous.”

“Ansleigh,” Dmitri says from the chair in the corner.

“No,” I turn to face him, gesturing to her. “I’ve seen the looks she keeps giving you and it’s not sitting right with me.”

“Don’t get yourself worked up, *solnyshko*. It’s only going to make your headache worse.”

“I apologize. I just need to be thorough,” the nurse says, handing me a cup. “We need a urine sample.”

Taking it from her, I slide off the bed and make my way to the bathroom. When I’m finished, I walk back to the room and sit it on the metal tray sitting beside my bed.

A different nurse comes in to draw blood.

“Is all of this necessary?” I ask, watching the blood run into the tube. “I came in for a migraine that won’t go away.”

“We’re just making sure that there’s no underlying reason for the headache,” he assures me as he switches vials.

When he removes the needle from my arm, I slump back into the bed.

“Do you mind handing me something in case I need to throw up again?” I ask, feeling another wave of nausea roll

through me. He nods, opening a cabinet and handing me an emesis basin.

“The doctor should be in soon. Would you like me to turn the light down?” He asks, gathering the vials in his hand.

“Yes please.”

He turns the lights down and leaves the room.

Placing my hand over my stomach, I close my eyes. “I have *never* been this nauseous before.”

“Hopefully it’s just from a concussion,” Dmitri scoots his chair over to the side of the bed.

The female nurse from before walks in and begins opening supplies for an IV. She sees my questioning look when she searches for a vein.

“The doctor wants to give you some fluids and nausea medication while we wait on your results. It may make you drowsy.”

“Anything to make this headache and nausea go away,” I reply.

Once the IV is started, I can tell the medication is working after half an hour. At this point we still haven’t seen a doctor, and Dmitri is getting restless.

Ten minutes later, an older man walks in.

“I apologize for the delay. We were waiting on your test results and there was an emergency.” He sits down on the stool. “I understand you took a blow to the head and think you may have a concussion?”

“Correct,” I reply.

“I’m going to do a quick neuro exam to see if you’re having any cognitive or memory issues,” he slides closer to me. After a few tests, he sits back and rests his hands on his lap. “I’m going to order a CT just to be sure nothing more serious is going on, but I think you just have a mild concussion.”

Nodding, I let out a sigh, leaning back into the pillows and closing my eyes.

“Also, don’t worry, a CT scan is safe for the baby,” he says as he stands from the stool.

My eyes pop back open, and I sit up straight, ignoring the headache. “I’m sorry...the what?” I ask, unsure if I heard him correctly.

“Did you not know?”

“No, I had a negative test yesterday.”

“It must have been faulty because your HCG levels are through the roof.” He looks at the tablet in his hands. “I can’t say for certain, but these numbers align with around six to eight weeks. I recommend making an appointment with an OBGYN this week.”

“Are you...are you sure?” Dmitri asks, obviously in shock as well.

“Bloodwork doesn’t lie.” He places the tablet under his arm.

“She went through a lot yesterday. I want her to be checked thoroughly.” Dmitri stands from his seat.

“We can’t just do ultrasounds all willy-nilly.”

“Can’t the stress hurt the baby though?” My husband is protective over me, but seeing him act like this is a whole other level.

“D,” I say, reaching out to touch his arm.

“I want that ultrasound,” he demands.

The doctor studies him for a moment before he sighs. “Okay, we can do a quick check.”

“Thank you,” Dmitri says, sitting back down.

“Someone will be by to take you to the CT and ultrasound soon.” With that, he exits the room.

“Let’s not get our hopes up,” I say softly, reaching for his hand. “I’m scared.”

Dmitri leans over the side of the bed and kisses the top of my head. “Me too baby, but we can’t just throw all hope out the window.”

“It’s just easier this way,” I whisper, picking at a loose thread on the blanket over my legs.

He squeezes my hand in a reassuring manner.

Fifteen minutes later, I’ve finished the CT and we are being taken to ultrasound. Entering the room, we are greeted by a cheerful ultrasound tech. Dmitri takes one of the two seats in the room.

“Here’s a sheet, and I’ll step out so you can undress from the waist down.” She hands me the paper sheet, and I wait for her to exit. Taking off my leggings, I hand them to Dmitri. A few seconds later, she knocks before entering.

“Alright, so since we aren’t sure how far along you are, I will be doing an internal ultrasound. Just scoot to the edge here, lay back and relax.”

Doing as I’m told, she slides the wand inside before clicking away at her screen.

“So, it looks like you’re about...eight weeks,” she observes. Turning the screen around to show us, she points to a spot. “Here is Baby A,” she moves to another spot, “and Baby B.”

“Wait,” he pauses, eyes wide. “What do you mean ‘Baby A’ and ‘Baby B’?” Dmitri asks, leaning forward as if he’s blind. Standing, he gets right next to the bed and squints. She adjusts the vaginal doppler, getting back into focus.

“Do you see those two blobs?” She asks, pointing to the spots again. “That’s two babies.” I turn to look at him, but he looks frozen. She snickers softly, removing the doppler. “Congratulations, dad.”

“Holy shit,” he mutters. Reaching up, he grasps my hand in his. There’s a familiar emotion swimming in his eyes...love. “Two.” He kisses my hand twice.

The tech hands him a printed photo, and he stares down at it in awe.

“You can get dressed, and then step out when you’re ready. I’ll take you back to your room.” The tech leaves the room, and I sit up from the bed.

I'm moving on autopilot, trying to wrap my head around the fact that I went from no baby to two within the span of twenty four hours.

When I'm dressed, Dmitri walks over and takes my hand. We step out of the room and the tech takes us back to the emergency department and to the bay I was in previously.

I'm just getting situated in bed when the doctor comes back in.

"So, after reviewing your scan, it looks like everything looks good. Your CT was negative, so just follow the mild concussion protocol I gave you and you will feel better in a few days. I highly recommend scheduling an appointment with the OBGYN department soon."

"Yeah, I'll do that as soon as I get out of here," I assure him, checking the clock.

Finally getting my discharge paperwork, the nurse removes my IV and sends us on our way.

Walking out of the hospital, Dmitri leads me over to the truck and opens my door.

"D..." I trail off, looking down at the ultrasound in my hand. "We're going to be fucking parents," I whisper, looking up at him.

"Fuck yeah we are, *solnyshko*." He beams down at me, and his smile is contagious.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Dmitri

Two Years Later

The incessant ringing of a phone pulls me out of a light sleep. Since the girls were born my days of sleeping deeply have vanished.

Looking at my phone, I realize it's not the one ringing. Neither is Ansleigh's.

Odd.

Then realization hits me. It's my burner.

Jumping out of bed, I rush to the closet, hoping to catch whoever is calling at this time of night. My stomach is in knots, I know this can't be good.

Finally getting into the safe, I grab the phone and hit the green button.

"Hello?" I ask breathlessly.

"It's time," the voice from the other end says, and I realize it's not my dad. It's Eric.

"What happened?" I ask, leaning against the doorframe of the closet.

“I’d rather not discuss it over the phone. You should just come home.”

“Eric. Tell me what happened.” I glance at my wife who is stirring.

He hesitates, and I imagine him rubbing his face like he used to when he would deliver news that he didn’t want to.

“It’s your parents...they’re gone.”

“What?” I ask, clutching the phone tightly, surely he is joking.

“I can’t risk telling you anything about it over the phone. You need to get here as soon as possible. Meet me at this address tomorrow at 9 p.m.”

“Yeah...” I fumble around the desk in the corner of the room for a pen. Writing down the address, I look at it once more before another wave of nausea rolls through.

“Eric?” I question. “Nat?”

“She’s alive, but that’s all I can tell you. She’s left town.”

“But she’s alive.”

“Yes,” He assures me.

“Okay, I will get my things together and be on the next flight out.” Disconnecting the call, I walk back into the closet and grab a duffel bag. Coming back out to the bedroom, I place it on the bed and let out a shaky breath.

At this point, Ansleigh is sitting up in bed, her eyebrows furrowed in a questioning look.

“I have to go, Ans.” I walk over to the dresser and pull out a few changes of clothing. “I don’t know when I’ll be back. I don’t know how bad things are.”

“What’s going on, D?” She asks as I walk over to the bed and sit down on the edge.

“My-” I stop, not believing I’m about to say the words. “My parents. They’re dead.”

“Oh, D,” she whispers. I feel her arms wrap around me from behind, her chin resting on my shoulder. Placing my hand over hers, I let out a sad sigh.

“I haven’t seen them in almost five years, Ans. I missed out on so much with them. They never got to meet you or the girls.”

“I am so sorry, baby.” My grip tightens around her hand, and she kisses my shoulder. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No. I have to fly out tonight. I don’t know how long I will be gone.”

“That’s understandable. Take all the time you need honey,” she slides off the bed and steps in front of me.

“I hate leaving you and the girls...” I trail off, placing my hands on her hips and pulling her close to me.

“We will be fine,” she assures me. “Don’t worry about us.”

“I love you, *solnyshko*.”

“I love you, Dmitri.” She places her hands on my cheeks, leaning down to kiss me softly.

“I will call you as soon as I land, okay?” She nods, and I stand grabbing my bag. Sneaking into the twins’ room, I kiss their heads, careful not to wake them.

Ansleigh walks me to the door, and I kiss the top of her head.

“Be careful, D.”

“Always, baby girl.”

Climbing into my truck, I shut the door and let out a heavy exhale.

Backing out of the driveway, I head toward the airport. I have no idea what I’m about to walk into, but I’m prepared for anything.

About the Author

Maia Terry is a small town author from Kentucky where she lives with her husband and two amazing kids. Picking up writing at a young age, Maia loved creating a world that she could control, one where she could escape. Now, after a fourteen year hiatus, she builds on that love as she continues to use writing as an outlet. The real life aspects in her works hit home for so many, allowing them to connect on a deeper level with each character. Writing not only allowed herself to escape, but she wanted to create a world where she could give

that reprieve to others as well. Now, Maia slowly expands her universe. Check out more of her works:

Crumbling Empire

Fatal Vow

Mended Oath

Split Persona

The Restoration

The Cattaneo Brothers

Fateful Deceit [April '24]

Vengeful Dominance [Summer '24]