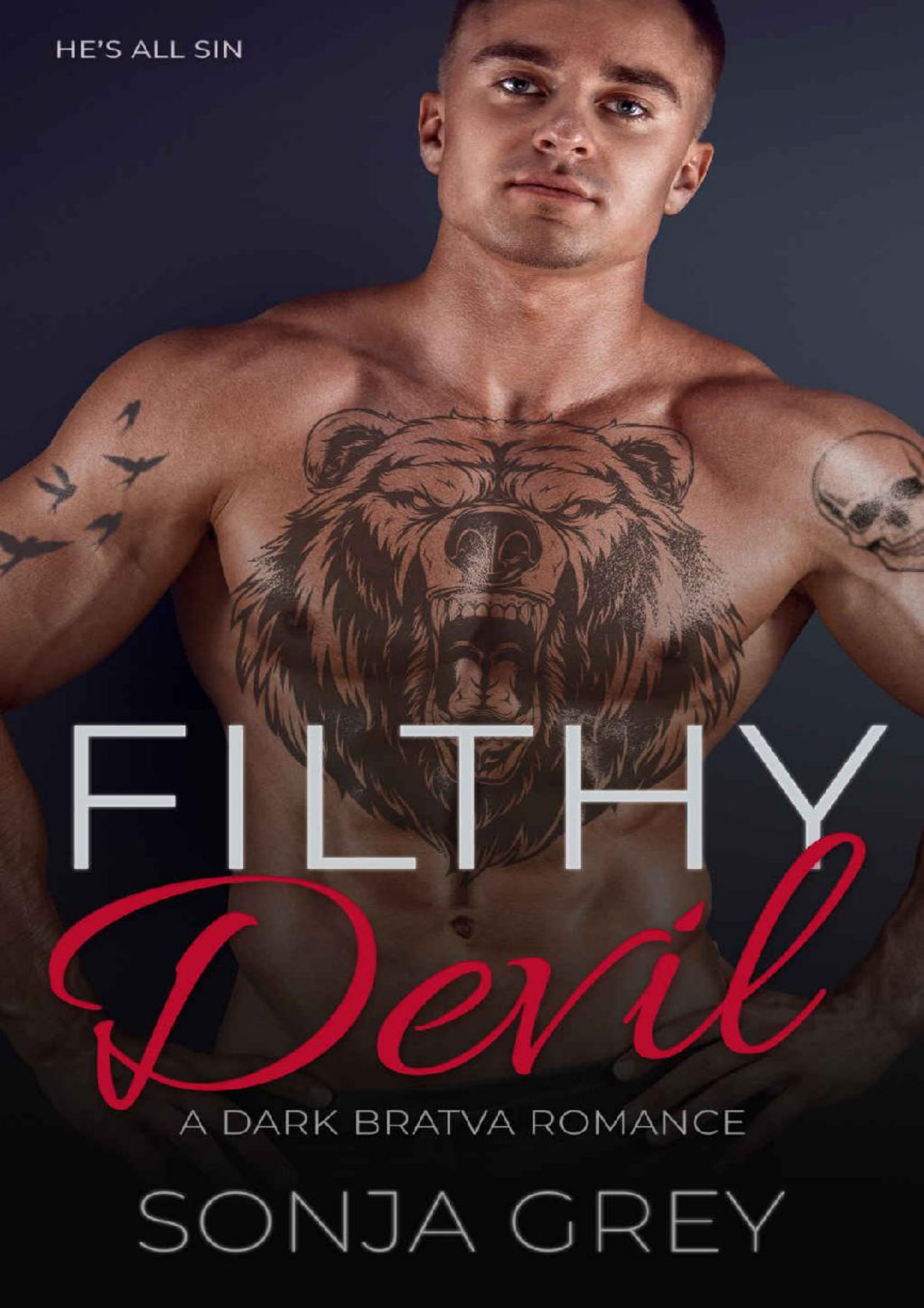


HE'S ALL SIN



# FILTHY *Devil*

A DARK BRATVA ROMANCE

SONJA GREY

# Filthy Devil

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*A Dark Bratva Romance*

Medvedev Bratva


Book 3

Sonja Grey

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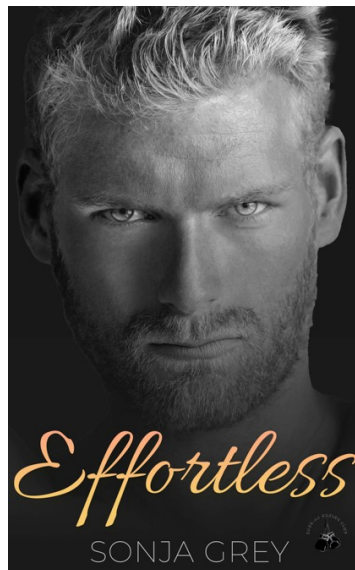
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Filthy Devil

# Blurb

**He may look like an angel, but he's all sin.**

Evie:

An abusive father and a job as a night janitor.

Yeah, life doesn't get much better than this.

I'm convinced my future is a bleak one, but then I accidentally rear-end an Aston Martin.

The driver is the most gorgeous man I've ever seen.

Valeri Medvedev is a man I would happily fall on my knees to worship.

I had no idea he was a dangerous Bratva boss.

All I saw was the sexy smile, the dimple in his cheek, and the body that made my mouth water.

I was blinded by him...and then I found out the truth.

He's dangerous.

He's a killer.

And I'm the one he wants.

Valeri:

For the first time in my life, I'm obsessed with a woman.

When Evie hit my car, she became mine.

Mine to protect.

Mine to claim.



Mine to possess.

I shouldn't be allowed to touch something so innocent...  
but I will.

I'm going to lay her down and show her all the depraved  
things I want to do to her.

Soon she'll be screaming my name and embracing the  
darkness that only I can give her.

# Trigger Warning

This story does contain an abusive, alcoholic parent, physical violence against the FMC (not by the MMC!) as well as a bit of graphic violence, pregnancy, on-page childbirth, some breath play, explicit sex scenes, including anal, and mature language.

# Chapter 1

## *Evie*

**Y**et again I think about how easy it would be to push my dad down the stairs. His drunk ass wouldn't even know what hit him. There would be nothing but a startled cry, shit-brown eyes wide with fear, and then he'd be gone. The only thing left to hurt me would be the stench of his rotten breath until not even that would remain

And then I'd finally be free.

I push the temptation aside when a wave of guilt hits me, not so much because I actually feel bad about my thoughts, but more because it's the same way my mom died, and I'm pretty sure it's because he did the exact same thing I'm contemplating. I refuse to be like him. We may share DNA, but that's where it ends. I'm nothing like the bastard.

"Get out of the way, girl," he slurs, pushing me aside and stumbling toward his bedroom. He has no idea how close he just came to death, and hopefully he'll never pick up on my homicidal thoughts because the man is a mean drunk. I have enough bruises from him. I don't need any more.

I watch his clumsy walk down the hall before he disappears out of view. He'll be sleeping it off for the night. Just a typical Tuesday at the Finch house. With a heavy sigh that sounds like it belongs to a ninety-year-old instead of a soon-to-be twenty-one-year-old, I head downstairs, grabbing my bag from the counter on the way out the door.

My dad's pride and joy sits in the driveway. The black Ford F-150 is waxed and shining, making our small, dirty-

white house stand out even more. The neighborhood is rundown, but our house is definitely the saddest on the street. It used to embarrass the hell out of me when I was younger. Now I'm just used to it, I guess. One more embarrassment to add to the ever-growing list.

Instead of taking the truck that would make my life a hell of a lot easier, I take to the sidewalk, following it down to the bus stop at the end of the street. It's already dark, making it seem even more ominous than usual. If I had a choice, I wouldn't choose to walk these streets after the sun sets, but not all of us get options in life. Some of us are just born into shit situations that we have to spend the rest of our lives trying to crawl the fuck out of.

The rumble of a motorcycle has me freezing in place. I grip the strap of my bag tighter and duck my head, hoping like hell it's not who I think it is. The closer it gets, the more I curl into myself.

“Evie!”

I pretend I don't hear anything, but when he drives the huge motorcycle onto the sidewalk in front of me, I have no choice but to acknowledge his presence. As I lift my eyes, I catch sight of the mermaid with the blue tail that's painted on his gas tank, the one with the enormous bare tits. The image just screams *I'm a real classy guy and one hell of a catch*.

“I'm going to miss my bus, Lyle,” I say and try to step around him.

“Why were you ignoring me?”

He's not wearing a helmet, and I really wish he was because now there's nothing hiding his long, stringy hair and old, wrinkled face. Old isn't exactly accurate. Lyle's my dad's friend, and he's only in his late forties, but his life choices have aged him, so has his *damn the man* attitude about wearing a helmet. Deep wrinkles are etched into his weathered face, and his skin looks so sun damaged that I'm pretty sure he's sporting skin cancer in more than one spot. To make matters worse, his bottom lip puckers out from the huge wad

of chewing tobacco he's sucking on. When he spits out a long string of brown juice, I have to force myself to not dry heave.

"I'm not ignoring you. I just need to catch the bus or I'll be late for work."

"Hop on. I can take you."

"No thanks," I tell him, because no way in fuck am I getting on the back of his bike, pressing my body up against his, and wrapping my arms around his giant beer gut. No fucking thanks. Ever since I hit puberty, Lyle's given me looks that make me feel like there will never be enough layers of clothing between me and him. Even in my work coveralls, he eyes me like he's picturing me naked.

Fucking pervert.

I walk around his bike and pick up my pace, seeing the bus's headlights turning the corner.

"Pretty little girl like you shouldn't be walking the streets alone," he hollers over his idling motor. "All kinds of dangerous men out there."

When I turn back to look at him, he gives me a wink and revs his engine. I push my glasses back up when they start to slip and run for the bus. I swear I hear him laughing behind me, but I don't turn back to check.

"Pushing it kinda close tonight, sweetheart," Gale says, swinging the doors shut behind me.

"I know," I pant, taking the seat right behind her.

She shakes her head, turning the bus down the next street and picking up speed. "You know I'm not allowed to wait if you're not here, and that guilt would eat me up, honey."

I smile and pat her shoulder. "Don't worry about me. I'll be fine, even if I do miss the bus."

She just shakes her head again and starts to hum so low I can barely hear it. Gale's been driving this bus for as long as I can remember. She's been taking me to and from work ever since I turned thirteen and convinced someone to hire me. It was just a job at a car wash for a few hours every day, and the

pay was shit and under the table since legally I couldn't be employed, but it was still my first taste of freedom, and it ensured I had enough to buy some groceries. My dad was always forgetting to go to the store. As long as he had his beer, he didn't really care about anything else. He was more than happy to drink his supper. Gale used to save me half her lunch, telling me she was trying to lose weight and that I'd be doing her a big favor by eating it for her. Even then, I knew she was just trying to make it seem like I wasn't getting handouts, but I was too hungry to say no. She's one of the kindest people I've ever met, and if I ever win the lotto, I'm giving her a huge chunk of it.

The bus bounces along the pot-holed streets until we reach the highway and things smooth out as we head further into the city. Traffic picks up when we hit the downtown area, and I read the neon signs as we pass them. So many clubs and bars, all the places people my age should be going to, and I've never been to a single damn one of them.

When Gale stops us near the library, I stand up and give her a quick hug. "See you when the sun comes up."

"I'll be here, honey." She pats my arm and gives me a smile. "Be careful."

"I always am," I tell her, grabbing the railing and stepping off the bus. The other passengers follow me off, and I give Gale a wave before she pulls away from the curb, on her way to the next stop a few streets over.

The walk to the library isn't long. It's late enough for the sidewalks to be busy, and I quickly disappear into the crowd, just like I like it. With my oversized coveralls and my big glasses, it's like I don't exist. Add in my short height and the way I keep my head ducked down, and I'm damn near invisible. Weaving my way through the crowd of people who are off to have way more fun than me, I make it to the stairs of the library and stop to watch a group of laughing women. They pass me without a second glance, way too focused on the club across the street. Inferno is always packed, and tonight is no exception. The large, black building already has a line outside, and by the looks of it, it's filled with women who look

just like the group that passed me—beautiful and with enough fabric to sort of count as a dress...if you squint and the lighting is dim.

I grab a piece of gum from my bag and watch them cross the street and make their way to the end of the line. I try not to be jealous, but I am. The walls I've put around myself are for my own good, but that doesn't mean I always like it. When I was little, the walls were to make sure no one ever saw the bruises or the fact that I was all skin and bones since I was forced to skip so many meals. The last thing I needed or wanted was for child protective services to come and take me away, possibly putting me into a home that was even worse than the hell I already knew. As I got older, I didn't bother to tear the walls down. It's not like I could invite girlfriends over to the house for a sleepover. What would they think when my dad showed up drunk and started throwing things around? Dating was also out of the question. My dad's always been paranoid that I'm going to meet someone and leave him all alone. I've seen how mean my dad can be, how violent, and I never wanted to risk him hurting someone.

The walls are so deeply embedded now, and I'm scared they won't ever come down. At this point, I'm not even sure how to go about dismantling them. My only friends are Gale, the sweet bus driver, and Jerry, the man I work nights with. Both are in their sixties, the grandparents I never had.

Blowing a bubble, I turn and walk up the steps to the massive public library that looms in front of me. It's one of the coolest places in our city, way more fun than the club across the street, at least that's what I tell myself. When I pass the large, bronze lion out front, I pet his nose, like I do every night, and then give his round ass a smack before grabbing my employee keycard and entering through the side door.

The lights are dim and my feet echo through the hall, making it seem even bigger than it already is. Making a quick stop, I drop off my bag in my locker and grab my phone and earbuds. I'm scrolling through my audiobooks when Jerry walks in.

“Hey, kiddo. How's life treating you on this fine night?”



I laugh and look over at his smiling face. He's the happiest person I've ever met. Grabbing his coveralls, he slips them on over his jeans and T-shirt, zipping them up as he waits for me to answer.

"I'm good, Jerry. How about you?"

"Stuffed, darlin'," he says, patting his stomach. I laugh because as much as he talks about needing to lose weight, it never stops him from getting seconds on all the pies his wife loves to make. I can't say I blame him. I've tasted her pies. They're fucking incredible.

"What'd Betty make tonight?" I ask with a smile on my face.

His eyes glaze over when he tells me about the fried chicken and okra with mashed potatoes and green beans smothered in bacon grease and homemade cherry pie for dessert. I feel my arteries start to clog just from the description, but my mouth also waters. They're both originally from Georgia, and those Southern roots come out in her meals.

He gives me a wink. "It's possible there's a piece of pie waiting for you in the employee fridge."

"Seriously?" When he laughs again, I say, "Thanks, Jerry, and be sure to tell Betty thanks for me."

"Will do, kiddo." He walks over to grab the large mop bucket and begins filling it and adding in cleaner. "Which floor are you starting on tonight?"

"I'll take the second, if you don't mind."

"You just like to work in fiction so you can sneak peeks at all the books," he teases me with a laugh. "You're the only person I've ever met who likes to look at books while also listening to one."

"I do still get all my cleaning done," I remind him with a laugh.

He smiles and gives me a wave goodbye as he pushes the mop bucket out onto the main floor. We'll meet up again over the course of the night, but for the most part, it's a very

solitary job. Once I've got my audiobook going, I fill up my own bucket and load up a cart with everything I'll need before pushing it all to the elevators near the main entrance. While I wait for the doors to open, I chance a quick look outside, noticing that Inferno looks even more packed than when I first got here. It'll stay that way until they close. The owners must make a killing on that place.

The elevator dings, pulling me back to my reality, which is not a night of drinking and dancing and meeting hot guys. My night will be spent cleaning dirty floors and bathrooms and dusting books that not too many people even bother to check out anymore, and there will most definitely not be any hot guys anywhere near me, which I guess is sadly for the best.

At least I have a slice of homemade cherry pie thanks to Betty. That shouldn't make me so happy, and the fact that it does might be the most depressing realization I've ever come to about myself. Ignoring the depressing thoughts and visions of me being fifty and still pushing this goddamn mop bucket around, I lose myself in my audiobook instead and get to work. The night passes quickly. I eat my PB&J around three in the morning with a book in hand and then savor the slice of cherry pie before getting back to work. By the time the sun starts to rise, I'm exhausted and more than ready to collapse into my bed and sleep the day away.

Putting away all my supplies, I tell Jerry goodbye and make my way outside. The sky is just starting to lighten up, and it feels unnaturally quiet. It's my favorite part of the day. Maybe it's because I always experience it when my shift ends and another night of cleaning is over. At least then I can forget about work for a little while.

I give the lion his usual ass pat and nose rub and jog down the steps. The sidewalk is empty as I make my way to the bus stop. Gale is right on time, and as soon as she opens the door, I stagger in and take my usual seat behind her.

“Tired, honey?”

“Yeah. I bet you are too, though.”

She laughs and shuts the doors, pulling away from the curb and back in the direction she just came from. “I’ve got it easy. I get to sit on my butt all night.”

“It’s still a hard job,” I tell her. “I don’t know how you handle the stress of driving this big bus through downtown.”

“People know better than to get in my way,” she says with a laugh. “If they hit me, they know it’s not my bus that’s going to be taking the brunt of the damage.”

“True enough,” I say with a smile, leaning my head back and wishing I could just fall asleep right here. With the way the bus is rocking, I could easily be out in seconds. I watch the scenery outside the window slowly change from downtown high-rise apartment buildings that probably cost more per month than I could ever hope to earn, to nice, rich subdivisions filled with mini-mansions, and then finally to the dumpy part of town. It always depresses me to have to come back here. People who have money never seem to understand how damn depressing it is to live somewhere that’s visually unappealing. It affects your entire mood to see nothing pretty, nothing that makes you smile, and certainly nothing that makes you want to actually stay outside. It just adds salt to the wound to know that the ocean is so close, but you’d never know it from our neighborhood. I’d give just about anything for some pretty trees and flowers and a view of the water.

When Gale stops at my corner, I give her a quick side hug and tell her I hope she sleeps well. Her shift is just about to end too, and despite what she said, I know she’s just as tired as I am.

“See you tonight, sweetie,” she says, patting my hand.

“I’ll be here,” I assure her, stepping off the bus and giving her a wave goodbye.

I walk as fast as my tired legs will carry me, and I’m all set to crawl under my covers when I walk inside and see the note on the counter. The handwriting is barely legible, which means my dad got up last night, drank several more beers, and then decided he needed to yell at me about something. I curse the whole damn universe when I see what he’s written.

*I used the last of the toilet paper. Get some when you get off work.*

A murderous rage rushes through me, but when it leaves, I just want to sit down and cry. I'm so fucking tired, and I feel gross after a night of work. I can go without a lot of things, but toilet paper isn't one of them. Fighting the urge to go upstairs and strangle him in his sleep, I tug off my coveralls and grab his keys, because I'll be damned if I'm taking the bus again. I should have plenty of time to run to the grocery store and get back before he wakes up. It's not like he needs to be in for work. He lost his last job, one of many, and has been milking those unemployment checks like a starving baby at the teet.

With a groan, I head back outside and start the truck, praying like hell he doesn't wake up. He'll kill me if he catches me touching his precious. Backing out of the driveway, I head towards the grocery store. It's the world's fastest trip. I run in, grab the toilet paper and add in a couple of things we're out of and then book it back to the truck. The rising sun is right in my eyes as I pull back onto the main road. I fidget with the visor, but I'm too damn short for it to make a difference, and with my glasses on, I can't wear sunglasses. I squint and try like hell to see. When the light up ahead turns yellow, I start to slow down, but the combination of blinding sunlight and lack of sleep makes my worst nightmare come true when I hear the thud of me hitting the car that's already come to a stop.

My hands grip the steering wheel while my heart races and my body breaks out in a light sweat. I squint out the window, groaning when I get a good look at the car I hit. It looks expensive, like *really* expensive, and then I see the door open.

*Sweet Jesus.*

The man who steps out looks like he just got done posing for the cover of some posh men's magazine. His suit fits him like a glove, accentuating the broad set of shoulders headed my way, and the dark sunglasses hide his eyes from view, so I have no idea how pissed he is. I do notice the chiseled jaw that's covered in a day's worth of dark stubble, though, and is

that a neck tattoo I see peeking out from his suit? God, why is that so sexy?

When he's at my window, I'm still clutching my steering wheel and trying not to hyperventilate. He bends down so he can see me and calmly knocks on my window, waiting for me to roll it down. My face is beet red, and I'm trying like hell to not cry and make this whole thing even more awkward and embarrassing.

Knowing there's no way my ass is getting out of this, I roll down the window and say, "I'm so sorry."

I want to sound strong and in control, but it comes out as a shaky, pathetic whisper. I feel stupid enough as it is, but why did he have to be so gorgeous? That just makes it a thousand times worse. I'm fully aware that I probably stink of cleaning supplies and that I must look as tired and worn out as I feel.

"You hit my car," he says, and his voice is just as deep as I knew it would be, and he has an accent, but I'm not sure what it is. Sexy is how I would describe it, unbelievably sexy.

"I'm so sorry," I repeat, because that's really all I've got.

He looks at me for a few seconds, at least I think he is. His glasses are too dark for me to see anything, and when I start to fidget, his lip quirks up the tiniest bit before he says, "Follow me so we can sort this out."

He leaves before I can respond. When the light turns green, he takes a left, and I follow him. I know if I try to run, he'll follow me, and I can't handle that kind of embarrassment on top of what I already feel. My hands start shaking when I think about my dad's truck. If there's a dent, I'm fucked. He will kill me for this. Mr. Sexy turns into a parking lot, and I get a better look at his car. An Aston Martin, of course it fucking is. I park next to him, noticing the dent he's sporting in his bumper thanks to yours truly, and it takes all the courage I possess to force my ass out of the truck, hoping like hell this guy is in a merciful mood.

## Chapter 2

## *Valeri*

I get out of my car and lean against it, waiting for the girl to work up the courage to face me. She's obviously terrified, and that fear is the only thing keeping my temper in check. I just bought this car last week, and I'm not thrilled about it already having a dent. I watch her take a breath and then open her door. The truck is way too fucking big for her, and it's not anything I would've ever guessed she'd be driving if I'd just seen her walking around. She looks like she'd need a little stepladder just to get into the damn thing.

"Oh my god," she groans when she sees the small dent in the front bumper. Her hand comes to her mouth and for one horrible second I fear she might actually pass out. When she makes her way over to me, I notice she's shaking, and that has warning bells ringing all through my head. Upset, yes, that makes sense. Angry and pissed, I'd expect nothing less. But scared to death? That's not normal.

My eyes run over her small frame and the long, dark hair that's pulled into a high pony tail. The clothes she's wearing look like they came right off the rack of a discount store, and the huge glasses that are at this moment slipping down her nose are designed to make her invisible. It's almost working. Everything about her feels like it was done on purpose to make a man's eyes run right over her without a second glance. My curiosity is piqued, although it shouldn't be.

Her voice shakes when she says, "Would you be willing to work something out with me without involving the police or insurance?"

I have to bite back a laugh, because I sure as fuck wasn't planning on calling the cops. My brothers and I run the most powerful Bratva in this city, and the last thing I want is a cop nosing around, even if it is just to write this up and give her a ticket.

"Is this your truck?"

"It's my dad's," she whispers, fidgeting with the sleeves of her shirt and worrying her bottom lip. I watch her tongue as it runs over the plump lip, and the fact that she's not even trying to be sexy just makes it all the sexier.

"What exactly did you have in mind?" I ask her, wondering if she's going to offer me sex. It wouldn't be the first time, and I'll be very disappointed if she does. She seems different, and I can't help but like that about her. I'd hate to find out she's just like so many other women I've met.

When her light brown eyes meet mine, there's nothing in them but genuine fear and worry. "I can slowly pay you back over time. I'm really sorry. I can't believe I hit you. The sun was in my eyes, and I'm tired, and it just happened so damn fast."

She doesn't look drunk or high, but I ask anyway. "Why are you so tired? Been out partying all night?"

"What? No. I just got off work."

"Where do you work?"

"At the library."

I lift a brow at her. "You work at the library at night?"

She sighs and looks even more uncomfortable when she says, "I'm one of the night janitors."

If she thinks I'm going to laugh, she's got another thing coming. I would never make someone feel bad about the kind of work they do. I know I hate it when people judge me for what I do. It may not be quite the same thing, but still.

I take out my phone and look at her. "What's your name?"

"Evie Finch."



I put her in my contacts along with her number when she gives it to me and then send her a quick text with nothing but the smiling emoji so she'll have my number.

“Do you need me to get in touch with your dad about his truck?”

Her eyes widen and she takes a quick step closer before she thinks better of it and stops, hugging her arms tightly around her chest. “No, please don't do that.”

I get that her dad won't be too happy about this, but her reaction goes beyond that. She's not just worried he's going to be mad. All my gut instincts tell me he's abusing her, and god does that piss me off.

Stepping around her, I take a look at the dent on the front bumper and snap a quick photo of it before sending it off to a mechanic who's helped the Bratva out in the past, asking him how long it would take to fix this. His response is immediate, and when I see that it'll take less than an hour, I put my phone away and turn back to Evie.

“Follow me. I have a friend who can fix that for you.”

“But,” she starts to say, and then stops as her cheeks heat up in embarrassment.

“Don't worry about the cost. He owes me a favor.” It's sort of true. The first part is anyway. I'll pay to fix the truck, but I'm not going to tell her that.

When she's still standing there, debating what to do, I say, “Get in the truck, Evie, and follow me.” I smile and add, “Try not to hit me this time.”

Her mouth drops open before I give a soft laugh and get back in my car. I wait until she's ready before pulling out of the parking lot. Keeping a close eye on her so I don't lose her in traffic, I lead her to the garage on the other side of the city. My oldest brother, Vasily, runs the northern part, and my other brother, Volodya, runs the southern. As the youngest, I get the middle, smaller section, but I'm more than happy with the arrangement. My area may not be as big, but it's the busiest and includes all of downtown. I thought maybe I'd get

homesick for Moscow when I first came here, but I've grown to love this city, and it already feels like home, especially with my older brothers now married and with kids. No way in hell would I ever move away from my nephews. Family is everything. At least it is for me. I'm guessing Evie could do without hers.

When I hit the next red light, I watch her through my rearview mirror. She's holding up a hand, trying to block the morning sun from her eyes as much as possible, and nervously tapping the fingers of her other hand on the steering wheel. I give her a little wave and then laugh at the very awkward return one she gives me. Smooth is not a word I'd use to describe Evie. I find it oddly refreshing. Once the light turns green, she follows me to Mac's garage, parking the big truck in front of the open stall.

"Morning, Mr. Medvedev," Mac shouts, waving at me with a hand that's already stained with grease.

Jogging over to us, he wipes his hands on an already dirty rag and then throws it over his shoulder. Evie gets out of the truck while Mac squats down in front of it, studying the dent.

"Still think you can have it done within the hour?" I ask him.

He nods his blond head at me, running his fingers over the bumper. "Yeah, this will be easy to fix." Looking over at my car, he raises a brow at me. "What about yours?"

"You can take a look at mine next if you've got the time today."

"I always make time for the Medvedev brothers," he says, and my eyes shoot to Evie, gauging her reaction, but either she's the world's best actress, or the name doesn't mean anything to her. Interesting. Very few people in this area aren't aware of our Bratva, at the very least the Medvedev name gets mentioned because we own so many damn clubs—strip clubs, nightclubs, a few restaurants, and even a women's shelter that Vasily's wife runs. Evie has evidently never heard of us, which makes me wonder even more about her. The library she works at is right across the street from Inferno, one of our most

popular clubs, and I wonder if it's possible that she's never even been inside. She definitely looks the right age to be spending her weekends hitting the clubs, but if she were, then she'd know my last name.

"I'll go ahead and get started then." Mac stands back up and comes over, holding his hand out for the keys. Evie drops them in his palm and then takes a step back, hugging her arms across her stomach and worrying that bottom lip again. She pushes her glasses up her nose when they start to slip, a movement that seems as much from habit as from necessity, and then turns her eyes to mine, briefly meeting my gaze before looking away.

Mac drives the truck into the stall while I point across the street. "Want a cup of coffee while we wait?"

She looks over at the small café and fidgets with the end of her sleeves, pulling them lower so they cover half her hands. "Sure, I guess." Then she looks at the truck and adds, "I need to get my wallet from the truck."

"Don't worry about it. It's on me."

"You've already done too much," she argues.

"It's just a cup of coffee," I remind her. "Overpriced, I'm sure, but still just a cup of coffee."

She nods, pushes her glasses up again and then follows me across the street, looking back at the truck every few feet.

"Mac's great," I say, trying to reassure her. "When he's done, you'll never be able to tell there used to be a dent there."

I open the door to the small café for Evie, noticing that my words don't seem to have had an effect on her. She still looks tense and worried. After we order two lattes and she turns down my offer for a blueberry muffin, we head to one of the small tables in the corner that gives us a clear view of Mac's garage.

"So how old are you, Evie?" I ask once we're seated.

That question alone makes her blush. She grabs her drink, pulling it closer and says, "Almost twenty-one."

“Almost?”

“Yeah, later this month.”

I lift my latte in a cheer. “Well, happy early birthday then.”

Her mouth quirks up the tiniest bit. “Thanks, Mr. Medvedev.”

I laugh and say, “Call me Valeri.”

“Where are you from?” Her question seems to surprise her, like it came out before she could think better of it. She quickly says, “You don’t have to answer that. I was just curious about your accent.”

“I’m from Russia.”

“The library has a pretty big section devoted to Russian literature.”

“What’s your favorite?”

She sets her drink on the table and pulls her sleeves down again. “I really like Chekhov’s short stories.”

“I wasn’t the world’s best student,” I admit with a laugh, “but I do remember reading and liking his stories when I bothered to show up for class.”

The small smile she gives is quickly hidden when she takes another drink. Pushing her sleeve up, she checks the oversized watch she’s wearing, and my fingers tighten around my own drink when I see what looks like the start of a dark purple bruise. She pulls her shirt back down, hiding it from view, but her fear about the truck makes a lot more sense now. I shouldn’t care. I’ve known her for less than an hour, and, yeah, it sucks if her dad’s abusive, but I don’t know this woman, and I’m sure as hell not responsible for her. The fact that I’m now worrying about her going home is irritating to say the least.

The soft buzz of my phone pulls me from my confusing thoughts. When I look at the photo that’s just come in, I can’t help but laugh. Volodya’s sent me a picture of my youngest nephew. Misha’s smiling at the camera, proudly showing off

his newest baby tooth while Maddie's caught in mid-laugh, trying to hold his squirming body.

*Still babysitting him tonight?*

I quickly respond that of course I am and set my phone down. Evie darts her eyes away, but it's obvious she was curious and staring at the photo. She probably thinks it's my wife and son. Normally, I wouldn't volunteer information about my family, but I don't want her to think I'm married.

"My nephew and sister-in-law," I say, before scrubbing a hand over my jaw because I really can't figure this girl out or my reaction to her. She's the exact opposite of what I usually go for, but there's no denying I'm intrigued by her.

"He's really cute," she says. "I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to be nosy."

"If I was worried about you seeing my phone, I wouldn't have set it down. All my messages are in Russian anyway," I say with a smile.

Her eyes quickly run over the tattoos that are peeking out from my suit. "Do you have a lot to hide?"

I shrug. "Doesn't everyone?"

She looks back out the window, tapping her fingers nervously on the table. "I suppose we all have our secrets."

I'm surprised by how badly I want to know hers. I can't remember the last time I was actually curious about a woman. Truth be told, I'm not so sure I ever have been. I love women, I really love sex, but I've never been in love. I have flings, not relationships, and I've always been fine with that, but over the last year, I've noticed that the one-night stands aren't quite as much fun as they used to be. I blame it on my nephews and on getting shot. My brothers' families have made my life seem even lonelier, and recovering from that damn bullet wound had given me way too much time to think about my life. I didn't expect a mid-life crisis at twenty-seven, but life is full of unexpected surprises.

She checks her watch again and lets out a yawn that's quickly hidden behind her hand.

“You must be exhausted. All this is cutting into your bedtime.”

“It’s fine. I’m the idiot who ran into you.”

“It was just an accident,” I reminder her. “One that’s easily fixed.”

“It is because of you. I really can’t thank you enough, Valeri. I promise I’ll pay you back as fast as I can for the damages.”

“I told you Mac owes me a favor. You don’t owe me anything.”

“No, that’s not fair,” she insists. “Plus, that favor is getting used up by fixing the truck. Your car still needs to be fixed.”

I’m about to insist she doesn’t need to pay, because no way in hell am I taking a dime from her, when she stands up so fast the chair nearly topples over. The few customers around us look over and then just as quickly lose interest and go back to eating and drinking.

“I think he’s done,” she says, pointing at Mac, who’s backing the truck out of the stall.

I stand up, hiding a grin at how much shorter she is than me, and motion for her to lead the way. We both toss our empty cups in the garbage on the way out, and when I step closer, pushing the door open for her, I swear I feel her whole body tense before she practically runs out the damn door.

Following her across the street, I watch as she immediately walks around to the front of the truck, desperate to see if the dent is still visible. I stop behind her, not at all surprised to see that all traces of the fender-bender are completely gone. If it has an engine, Mac’s a goddamn wizard with it, doesn’t matter if the problem is under the hood or something cosmetic.

“Happy with it?” I ask her.

She’s still lightly running her fingers over where the dent was like she can’t quite believe it’s really gone. “Yeah, it’s amazing.” Standing, she holds her hand out to Mac. “Thank you so much. It’s perfect.”

He shakes her hand and then takes a step back, putting his eyes back on the truck, because Mac is way too smart to check out a woman who arrived here with me.

“I’ll get started on yours now, Mr. Medvedev,” he says, taking the keys I hold out for him.

Once he’s in my car, Evie turns to me, fidgeting even more than usual. “I’m so sorry about all this and that you have to stay here even longer.”

“Care to keep me company?” I ask.

She blushes a deep red and pushes her glasses back up. “I really need to get back home. I’m sorry. I’ve been gone too long as it is.” Opening the truck door, she looks at me and says, “Please text me the cost for your car. I can slowly pay it back.”

I don’t bother arguing with her because I’m too stunned by her dismissal. For the first time in my life, I watch a woman turn me down and walk away. Before I can think better of it, I take a step closer and put my hand on the door so she can’t close it. Her brow scrunches in confusion.

“Do you need me to follow you home?”

“What?”

I don’t want to make her uncomfortable by bringing up the bruise I caught a glimpse of earlier, a bruise that really could have come from all sorts of things. I suspect her dad is abusive, but there’s no way to know for sure at this point.

“You seemed really upset about the dent. I’m more than happy to follow you back and explain things to your dad.”

I’ve barely gotten the words out before she’s shaking her head. “No, please don’t do that,” she practically begs.

I study her for a second, noticing the way her hands have started to shake again. Convinced that my first instincts were right about her dad, I say, “I texted you, so you have my number. Call me if you need anything.”

She gives a soft nod, but it’s not good enough.

“I’m serious, Evie.”

I keep my eyes locked on hers until she whispers, “Thanks, Valeri,” and then grabs the handle, shutting the door and forcing me to back up.

Before she turns out onto the road, she gives me one last look and then drives off. I take one of the seats in Mac’s small waiting room and send a text to Pavel, one of the guys in our Bratva who’s damn good at digging up information, and ask him to send me anything he can find on Evie Finch.

While I wait for Mac to finish, I send out a few texts to my men, making sure everything is okay. Evie isn’t the only one who hasn’t gotten any sleep yet. Someone tried to interfere with one of our weapons shipments that came in last night at the docks. We managed to kill three of them, but the others disappeared. We stripped the bodies, looking for any tattoos that might tell us who they’re with, but there was nothing that stood out. The bodies were dumped in the ocean right before the sun came up, and I was on my way back for some much needed sleep when Evie hit me, throwing my entire morning off course.

I pull up the message thread, wondering if I should text to make sure she got back okay, but then I shake my head and get ahold of myself. I’m not fucking texting her like some smitten teenager or obsessive stalker. Shoving my phone back in my pocket when Mac appears, I thank him and pay for both vehicles, adding in a nice tip for squeezing us in on such short notice. He pockets the money with a big grin and tells me to get in touch the next time I ever need anything.

The drive to my penthouse apartment doesn’t take long. My brothers both have oceanfront houses on a lot of land, but I’ve always been a city boy at heart. I like to be right in the middle of all the action. Stopping in front of the private elevator to the penthouse, I type in the four-digit code and wait for the doors to open. Since the elevator opens directly into my apartment, I insist on changing the code every week. Paranoid? Maybe, but I’ve got a lot of enemies, and I’m not trusting a year-old code to keep me safe.



Once inside, I don't even bother with a shower. Instead, I set my phone's alarm so I'll have plenty of time to wash up before babysitting duty, strip down to my boxer briefs, flip the switch for the blackout curtains to come down, and then crawl under the covers. I'm asleep in minutes, and I don't budge until the alarm starts its obnoxious beeping eight hours later.

With a groan, I roll out of bed and take a hot shower, letting it fully wake me up. I know I've gone and fucked my sleep schedule up, but I was too damn tired to stay awake until tonight. Drying off, I hook the towel around my waist and check my messages. Nothing from Evie, not that I'm horribly surprised by that. It still bothers me, and now I'm left wondering if she made it back okay or if her dad found out and beat the hell out of her.

Not my concern, I remind myself, but the worry doesn't go away. It stays with me as I make a cup of coffee and pull on a pair of jeans. I wait to eat because I know Maddie will have something for me. She's used to me raiding their fridge whenever I come to watch Misha. Pulling on a T-shirt, I step on the elevator and head down to the lobby. I've almost made it out of the building when I spot the blonde woman waiting for me.

I let out as quiet of a groan as I can and give a pointed look to the security guard on duty. He gives me an apologetic look, but there's nothing to stop this unfortunate meeting. It's already in motion.

"Valeri!" she squeals, running at me and throwing her arms around my waist.

I give her an awkward shoulder pat and then try to pry her off me. Lisa was an unfortunate decision I made several weeks ago, and the poor girl is not taking the hint, even though I've made it painfully obvious that the night we shared is never going to be repeated.

"I need to go," I tell her, pulling her off me and taking a step back.

"You're ignoring my calls," she pouts, and I curse my past self for not picking up on the fact that she's clingy and way too

needy for a one-night stand. Volodya's constantly warning me about situations like this, and he'd laugh his ass off if he knew he was right. Before he met Maddie, he wouldn't even bring a woman back to his house. He was militant about it.

"I am," I tell her, because being nice just isn't cutting it. "I never meant to lead you on. I made it very clear that I wasn't looking for anything beyond the night. I'm sorry if you didn't believe me, but you need to stop calling me and coming to my apartment."

Her blue eyes narrow before the overly cheerful façade falls back into place. Laughing, she waves a hand at me like we're just playing around. "I get it, you're busy. I'll just come back another time."

The tight dress she's wearing barely covers anything, and when she presses her arms together, making her large tits stick out even more, I have to fight the urge to roll my eyes.

"I am busy, but you're not coming back another time. You and I are not a thing, and we never will be. I'm sorry, but you need to leave and not come back."

I feel bad for being so blunt about it, but I've tried nice, and it doesn't work. It just makes it worse. Her face falters for a second before the mask is back in place. She gives me a big smile and walks away, making me wonder if she even heard a damn word I just said. Once the doors shut, I look at Bill and shake my head at him with a groan.

"Do not let her back in here. I don't care what in the hell she promises you. Don't let her in."

"Sorry, Mr. Medvedev. She snuck in while I was helping Mrs. Loman with her wheelchair."

"You have to watch her," I warn him. "She's sneaky."

"And a little unhinged," he adds.

"Definitely," I agree, giving him a wave goodbye before heading to my car.

Even though it's not on my way, I drive further downtown so I can go past the library. Aside from some dim lighting on

the second floor, the large building is mostly in darkness. I can't help but wonder if she's already in there and how she ended up with that job in the first place. Most young women work in clubs or waitress at restaurants. Not too many go the janitorial route.

I'm still thinking about it when I wave to the guard on duty outside of Volodya's house. Igor opens the gate and waves me through, and before I've even parked my car, their three large cane corsi come running up to me. The dogs are so big that all I have to do is look out my window and we're face to face. I laugh at the goofy look on Pulya's face and open the door, giving her a good scratch behind the ears before giving her brothers some love.

They follow me to the door, wagging their tails and whining happily while I knock and wait. Usually, I'd just barge in, but Volodya's made it very clear that since he got married I'm no longer allowed to do that. He's answered the door barely dressed with a beet-red Maddie hidden behind him on more than one occasion, so now I always knock and wait. Thankfully, my brother is fully dressed when he opens the door this time.

"Wow, going all out for tonight, huh?" I ask him, eyeing the nice suit he's wearing.

"It's our anniversary," he says with a shrug.

"No, it's not."

"The anniversary of when I kidnapped her."

I follow him into the kitchen, shaking my head at what a complete psycho my brother is. For the longest time, I did worry about his mental health. Everyone in the Bratva commits murder, it's just a given, but no one seems to enjoy it quite like Volodya, and no one else has such a love of knives. Most of us just prefer to take a quick shot and be done with it, but not him. If there's any way for him to use a knife, he's going to. He also has a higher kill count than me, which is a constant source of irritation. One day I'll beat him, but it won't be because I actually enjoy the killing part. It'll just be because I really want to see the look on his face when I do it.

Maddie's changed him, though. A side of him I never even knew existed came out after he accidentally kidnapped the wrong girl and took Maddie instead. I knew she was the one for him when she was still breathing the next morning.

"Hey, Valeri."

I turn to see Maddie walking into the kitchen with my smiling nephew in her arms. He squeals when he sees me and tries to lunge my way. Laughing, I take him from her and pull her in for a quick hug.

"Hey, little sis. Ready for your big romantic kidnapping anniversary?"

She laughs, but her whole face lights up, because whatever kind of crazy my brother is, she's definitely down for it.

"Of course she is," Volodya says, scooping her up with a hand under her ass to make sure her dress doesn't ride up. She laughs and wraps her arms around him, looking at him with so much love that I have to look away before I start to get envious.

Turning my attention to Misha, I give his chubby cheek a kiss and start talking to him in Russian. His big, whiskey-colored eyes, the same as his daddy's, stay glued to mine, and I swear he understands every word I'm saying.

When Volodya eventually puts Maddie down, she tells me she already put a casserole in the oven for me and then tells me not to let Misha stay up too late like last time because it really screwed his sleep schedule up.

"He wanted to see who won the hockey game," I remind her, because we've been over this before. "It was a shootout, Maddie. It would've been cruel to not let him finish watching it."

"He's barely one," she says, giving her son a smile.

"The memory of his coolest uncle letting him stay up late to finish a hockey game is in there somewhere."

"The coolest uncle?" Volodya asks. "Vasily will be so happy to hear that."

“The truth can sometimes be painful.” I hand Misha to my brother and take the casserole out when the timer goes off, giving Maddie an appreciative smile. “Thank you. I haven’t eaten all day.”

“I wish you’d meet someone,” she tells me yet again.

“He meets lots of women,” Volodya cuts in.

She smiles and squeezes my arm. “Someone nice who’s not just enamored with you because you’re a Medvedev.”

Volodya leans against the counter. “He’s yet to meet one of them.”

Before Maddie came into his life, my brother rarely smiled, but he’s giving me a smug grin now that only grows when I tell him to fuck off in Russian. He just laughs and gives his son a kiss before putting him in his walker. The dogs immediately gather around, letting him clumsily pet them while they form a protective barrier around the walker.

I fix a huge plate of food while Maddie goes over the list of what needs to be done and what he’s allowed to eat while I try not to laugh at the little mother hen she’s become.

She points a finger at me. “Don’t you dare laugh at me.”

I hold up my hands. “I wouldn’t dream of it. You can stop worrying, though. I’ve got this, and I’ll call if I have questions or he sneezes or whatever.”

Volodya laughs while Maddie glares at us, but I can tell she’s fighting a smile. They both bend down and tell Misha goodbye and after they’ve finally left, I give my nephew a smile and walk into the living room.

“Come on, Misha. The hockey game’s about to start,” I tell him and then laugh when he gives an excited squeal and follows after me in his walker, chubby feet pounding over the hardwood floor.

I find the game while Misha plays with the toys on his walker, wondering how long it’s acceptable to wait before texting Evie.

# Chapter 3

## *Evie*

I've just finished my 3 a.m. supper when my phone buzzes. Confused, I stare at it, wondering who in the hell it could be. I don't get texts, especially not in the middle of the night. When I see Valeri's name pop up, I let out an audible gasp that I'm thrilled Jerry isn't around to hear.

*Just wanted to make sure everything went okay with your dad.*

I have no idea what to do or say. I'm sure he's just checking up on me because I acted like a complete weirdo in front of him, freaking out about the truck and turning bright red every time he even looked in my direction. God, that whole encounter had been so embarrassing. Luckily, I'd managed to get home before my dad woke up, and he hadn't noticed anything off about the truck. Valeri saved my ass.

*After a ridiculously long time, I finally settle on, Everything went great. I can't thank you enough for all you did. You really saved me a lot of grief.*

I send it and then immediately wish I'd written something else, maybe something flirty or witty, anything other than the boring message I just sent. God, how do women do this? I see the dots moving, letting me know he's writing something, and I swear I don't breathe until the message comes through.

*I was happy to help and I'm glad it went well. You working tonight?*

I don't have to think too much about the next message. *Yeah, just got off my supper break.*

When I read his next message, my heart stops and I break out in a light sweat.

*I'd really like to take you out sometime, Evie. Would you let me?*

What the fuck? I immediately glance over my shoulder like there's going to be a group of people laughing and pointing at me, because surely this has got to be a joke. I'm so convinced of it that I actually type *Is this a joke?* and send it before I can think better of it.

*Why would this be a joke?*

I debate going into a huge explanation of why this most definitely has to be a joke because beautiful men like him don't ask girls like me out. For once in my life, I save myself the embarrassment and instead try to think about how to politely get out of this. I can't go out on a date with him. It doesn't matter if I want to. It doesn't matter that the hour I spent with him yesterday was the best goddamn hour of my life and I haven't been able to stop thinking about him. None of that matters. Going out with him would only hurt me in the long run—either with a broken heart when he decides I'm not good enough or a bruised body when my dad finds out I'm seeing someone.

It kills me to do it, but I type out *I don't think it's a good idea, but it means a lot that you asked.*

I reread my text and blush so bad I feel like I have a fever. What I wrote sounds so fucking pathetic because it is pathetic. My whole life is just one big incredibly sad embarrassment.

*Well I think it's a great idea. You have a birthday coming up, and I'd love to help you celebrate. I'll give you some more time to think about it, Evie, but I should warn you that I'm a stubborn man, and I've kind of got my heart set on this.*

That's not at all the response I was expecting. I'm still wondering what in the hell to say to that when another text comes in.

*Talk to you soon, Evie.*



I'm too stunned to respond, so I just put my phone away and get back to work. A million questions run through my head, making me so distracted that I can't even listen to my audiobook. Valeri is a gorgeous man, and the more I think about it, the more convinced I become that he's only doing this because I said no. He's probably never in his life had a woman tell him no about anything. It's intrigued him, and I'm sure he'll grow bored with this soon enough when the newness wears off.

The rest of my shift is spent worrying and thinking about the man in the expensive suit with a dimple in his cheek and the most vivid green eyes I've ever seen. Add in the sexy accent and it's really just too much, isn't it? No one can be that fucking perfect. He must have some massive hidden flaw somewhere or a really tiny penis, like miniscule small. Something tells me the man is packing below the belt, though. He was way too quietly confident, like he didn't even need to try; it's just who he is.

It doesn't matter, I remind myself. I'm not going on a date with him, and I have zero experience with men thanks to my overbearing, drunk father, which is all the more reason for me to keep my ass away from him. If Valeri knew that my one and only sexual experience was from a boy in seventh grade who was dared to kiss me, he'd laugh his ass off. Everyone thought it would be hilarious to see him kiss the school freak. He'd run up, barely touched his lips to mine, and then acted like I'd given him some horrible disease by the way he'd scrubbed his hand over his mouth and ran to the drinking fountain. If my walls were any less thick, that memory would still hurt, but I killed that part of myself a long time ago. Nothing good comes from putting yourself out there, and that's exactly why I won't be saying yes to a date with Valeri. Guys like him date supermodels, not janitors.

By the time Gale drops me off near my house, I'm more than ready to go to sleep. I want to just disappear for a while and forget about the man who's making me wish things were different. Thoughts like that are dangerous. They make you want things you can't have and that just makes your present life all that much more depressing. I had resigned myself to

my sad little life, and I sure as hell don't need some gorgeous man coming in and fucking all that up.

After a quick shower, I fall into bed and pull the blanket up, hiding the early morning sun from my eyes. Sleep has always been my escape, and I happily throw myself into it today, more than ready to not feel anything for a few hours.

The next few days pass by the same as usual. Valeri doesn't text me again, and I pretend I'm happy about it. I go through my routine, showing up for work and then sleeping as much as possible, until I'm convinced he's forgotten all about me. I'm so convinced of it that I almost lose my footing and fall down the concrete stairs outside the library when I see him leaning against the bronze lion after my shift ends.

"What are you doing here?" I ask, running my eyes over him, amazed that he's just as good-looking as I remember him being. He's not in a suit this time. He's in jeans and a black T-shirt, and I can't stop staring at his tatted-up arms. The man obviously works out, and I have the sudden, insane urge to run my tongue over the veins that run up his forearms. He gives me a big smile, showing off that sexy dimple in his cheek and takes a step towards me.

"I was waiting for you. I thought about texting you, but figured you'd just ignore me." He gives me a wink that makes my heart race. "Or turn me down again."

"I need to catch my bus," I tell him, stepping to the side and heading down the stairs.

He falls in step beside me. "Have breakfast with me. I can drop you off at your house when we're done, so it's okay if you miss the bus."

"I can't eat breakfast with you."

"Why not?"

I stop midway down the stairs and look up at him. He easily reads the *are you kidding me?* look I'm giving him.

"What? Why not?"

I gesture at my dirty coveralls and look at him like he's lost his mind. "I'm filthy, and I'm in my work clothes."

He gives me a small smile. "I think you look beautiful."

My harsh laugh has him lifting a dark brow at me. I wave my arms around like a nut. "What the hell is going on? Is this a joke? Did someone put you up to this?"

I look around like I might spot someone laughing and pointing at me, but the people around us are all on their way to work and too caught up in their own lives to give a shit about mine.

"What do you mean?" he asks, looking genuinely confused. "I don't understand."

I see Gale pull around the corner and as soon as she stops, I sidestep Valeri and make a run for it.

"Evie!" he hollers after me, but I don't turn back. I run like a big scaredy-cat and don't stop until my ass is in the uncomfortable plastic seat.

"Who was the man with the fine ass?" Gale asks, maneuvering the bus back into traffic.

"No one," I mumble, hoping she'll drop it. She does not.

"What did he want? Was he bothering you?"

She seems so troubled by the idea that I have no choice but to tell her the truth so she doesn't worry.

"He wanted to take me to breakfast," I finally say.

She meets my eyes in the bus's large rearview mirror. "And you chose to take public transportation instead of spend a nice morning with that gorgeous man?"

I groan and lean my head against the metal pole behind her seat. "Gale, you saw him. He's way out of my league."

"Honey," she starts, and I know from her tone that I'm in for it. "Don't you dare put yourself down like that. You're a beautiful young woman and the sweetest person I've ever met. That man would be damn lucky to have someone like you. Don't ever let someone make you feel like you're beneath

them. Don't give them that power. And I don't care how gorgeous he is, if that man doesn't treat you like you deserve to be treated, then drop him, because he's the one that's not good enough."

"Thanks, Gale," I whisper, feeling my throat tighten at what she's said. She and Jerry are the only people to ever show me any kindness, and even though I have a hard time believing what she's just said, that doesn't mean I don't appreciate it like hell. "He was actually pretty nice," I admit.

She smiles and gives a soft laugh. "Then don't worry, sweetie. He'll be back."

I don't say it out loud, but I kind of hope she's right. She gives me an extra tight squeeze before I get off the bus, and as I walk home, I feel my phone buzz in my pocket. I'm just about to check it when I spot the motorcycle parked outside our house. Not even knowing that Valeri is texting me is enough to stop the dread from forming in the pit of my stomach. If Lyle is here at six in the morning that can only mean one thing—he and my dad have been drinking all night again.

As quiet as I can, I slip inside and tiptoe through the kitchen, biting back a groan at the empty beer cans lining the counter. When I step into the living room, I'm not surprised to see my dad passed out in the recliner, but I'm not expecting Lyle to still be awake.

"Morning, Evie," he slurs, nearly making me jump out of my damn skin. He's sitting on the couch, arms draped along the back, knees spread wide, and pot belly hanging over his pants. The picture is complete when he lets out a belch and then gives me a smile. I ignore him and turn to go upstairs, taking the steps two at a time, not stopping until I'm in my room and shutting the door.

Dropping my bag, I let out a sigh and pull out my phone, eager to see what Valeri texted. I'm just about to read it when my door is thrown open with a bang.

"What the hell?" I yell, quickly backing out of my messages.

“Who are you texting?” Lyle’s filling my entire doorway with his mass, bracing his hands on the doorframe and looking just as pissed off as usual. He takes a step towards me, fully entering my room, filling me with a mixture of fear and anger. “Let me see your phone.”

He holds out his hand like I’m just going to give it to him. I put my phone back in my pocket and try not to show how anxious he’s making me.

“I’m not giving you my phone, Lyle, and I wasn’t texting anyone.”

“You better not have a boyfriend, Evie. You know your dad wouldn’t like that.”

“I’m almost twenty-one,” I remind him.

His dark eyes narrow as he comes closer, forcing me to back up into a corner. He’s close enough for me to smell his foul breath—the perfect mix of beer, chewing tobacco, and unwashed mouth.

“Don’t get sassy with me, little girl. Your dad and I have an understanding, and I’ve been patient long enough.”

“What does that mean?” I ask, even though I’m terrified I already know what he’s hinting at.

“It means that he told me I could have you once you were old enough.” His eyes run over me as his lips curl up in a disgusting leer of a smile. “You look pretty damn ripe to me, honey.” He lets out a small laugh. “Although it is hard to tell with all the baggy clothes you wear. Why don’t you take those coveralls off and let me have a good look at what I’ve been waiting so long for?”

I push him as hard as I can and run from the room, locking myself in the bathroom across the hall. He chases after me, pounding on the door.

“Open the damn door, Evie!”

“Just leave, Lyle,” I yell back. “I don’t care what my dad told you. I’m not yours.”

He lets out a harsh laugh. “Not yet, sweetheart, but you will be.”

He bangs his fist against the door hard enough to make me jump back before walking off with a laugh. I sink to the floor, wrapping my arms around my legs and letting my forehead rest on my knees. I don't cry. I don't wish my life was different. I gave up on that fairytale long before I even hit my teenage years. I just sit, more numb than anything else, and debate whether or not it's safe to bolt back to my room. The buzz of my phone has me pulling it from my pocket and lifting my head. Valeri's been busy. I swipe up so I can read the messages from the beginning.

*I'm really sorry, Evie. I'm not sure what happened, but I didn't mean to upset you. I really did just want to take you to breakfast.*

A few minutes later, he sent: *Please answer me so I at least know you're okay.*

And then: *I really fucked this up. I'm sorry.*

And the last message, the one that has me sucking in a quick breath says, *The truth is that I can't stop thinking about you. I would really love to see you again. Can I please take you out? We can go anywhere or do whatever you want. I just really want to see you again.*

My chest constricts at his words, making me feel like I'm on the verge of a panic attack, because god do I want to say yes. With my passed-out father downstairs and his drunk, pervy friend, all I can think about is how badly I want to go out and for one fucking night forget how lousy my life is. It's a dangerous game, though, one that could easily end with me being broken-hearted and more depressed than ever. I'm still not sure what to do, but it makes me feel like shit to know that he's worrying about this.

*I'm fine, Valeri. I'm sorry I freaked out.*

His response is immediate, and I love that he doesn't make me wait. *I shouldn't have ambushed you outside your work. Not my smoothest moment.*

*No, it was very sweet of you. I shouldn't have run off like an idiot.*

*You're not an idiot. Can we try this again? Maybe breakfast after your shift tomorrow?*

I think about it and decide that breakfast is the most harmless option. My dad won't be awake, and I can always say I had to work late and missed the bus if he does actually wake up and notice I'm not back at my usual time.

A huge smile spreads across my face while I type out *I'd love that.*

*Get some sleep, Evie. I'll be there to get you tomorrow morning. ;)*

I try not to read too much into that winky face. I've never texted a guy, and I've sure as hell never flirted before. I'm in so far over my head that it's not even funny. There's going to be no hiding how damn awkward I am around him. Pushing that worry aside, I do what I do best and stand up so I can go escape into sleep. I press my ear against the door and wait several minutes until I'm sure Lyle isn't waiting in the hallway for me. Peeking out, as soon as I see it's clear, I bolt into my room and lock my door. I put my phone on the nightstand to charge, slip out of my coveralls, take off my glasses, and then burrow under the blankets. Everything else will just have to wait while I slip into the familiar blackness and disappear.

When I wake eight hours later, the first thing I do is grab my glasses and check my phone. There aren't any new messages, and the disappointment is quick and sharp, and it scares the hell out of me. I just met him, and I barely know him. I refuse to go crazy over the gorgeous man who's showing me attention. My life is pathetic enough. I'm not going to add to it by becoming super needy and dependent.

My growling stomach reminds me that it's been way too long since I've eaten. After making sure Lyle is gone, I make a quick stop at the bathroom and then head downstairs to fix something to eat. My dad is sprawled out in his recliner with a beer in one hand and the remote in the other. I really hate that I share DNA with this man. Ignoring him, I walk into the

kitchen and start gathering everything I need to make a sandwich.

“Make me one too,” he hollers out, still flipping through the channels.

I bite back my smartass comment and instead grab a second plate. When I hand it to him, he takes it without so much as a thank you, never taking his eyes off the action movie he’s watching. When I don’t move, he gives me an annoyed look.

“What?”

“Lyle forced his way into my bedroom,” I tell him.

“I’m sure you’re exaggerating,” he mutters, turning his eyes back to the TV.

“He said that you two have an arrangement, that you promised me to him. What the hell did you tell him, Dad?”

“Don’t you use that tone with me,” he growls, setting his sandwich down so he can point his finger at me. I know I’m treading on dangerous ground, but I’m not some piece of fucking cattle that he can sell off to the highest bidder.

“What did he mean?” I ask again, working to keep my tone relaxed.

“He likes you.” He gives a shrug and relaxes back into the chair. “It’s not like anyone else is showing any interest, and let’s face it, Evie, a girl like you isn’t going to have boys knocking down the door. Lyle’s a good choice for you, and he promised me he won’t ever take you from me. He lives so close that you can still come and take care of things over here after work.”

It takes me several seconds before I can speak, and when I do, I can hear the quiver in my voice. It has nothing to do with fear and everything to do with the rage that’s boiling right beneath the surface.

“So you and Lyle came up with this plan for my future, a plan where I’ll be married to your best friend, who I think is



disgusting by the way, and then I can take care of him and you and go to work? That's the future you see for me?"

His eyes harden when they meet mine. "What the fuck else are you going to do?"

"I could meet someone," I say before I can think better of it. "I could fall in love and marry and get the hell out of this dump."

In a second, he's up, spilling the plate on the floor and giving me a sharp smack to the face that barely misses breaking my glasses before fisting my hair and holding me still. Tears prick my eyes, but I refuse to let them fall.

"Have you met someone?"

"No," I whisper.

"I better not find out that you're planning on running off with some strange man like a little whore, Evie."

"I'm not." I try to get out of his grip, but he just pulls my hair harder, making me hiss in pain. The whole side of my face stings, but I force myself to remain still. "I haven't met anyone. I was just saying that maybe there's another option besides me ending up with Lyle. I don't want to be with him."

"Pretty girls get choices," he says with a harsh laugh. "Girls like you take what they can get."

My dad shoves me aside and gives the plate a hard kick, sending it flying across the floor. "Pick up this goddamn mess and make me another sandwich."

I bite my lip and do what he says, just like I always do. I clean up the mess and then make him a new sandwich, using all my willpower to not throw it in his damn face, and then go upstairs to shower. I don't bother making myself anything. I've lost my appetite.

All the hot water is gone by the time I step out of the shower. Using the corner of my towel, I clear off the mirror and cringe when I see the bruise forming on my cheek. Of all the times for me to mouth off, it had to be today. I don't own a lot of makeup, but I've got a bit of concealer I can use.

Covering it as best I can, I move on to my hair. Even though I have to put it back for work, I stick my brush in my bag so I can ditch the ponytail after my shift is over. The final touch is my nicest pair of jeans and a long-sleeve, pink-and-grey striped shirt. My black sneakers have seen some miles, but it is what is, and I don't have the money to replace them.

Before I leave the house, I hide my outfit beneath my work coveralls so no one will be the wiser. My dad's already well on his way to being drunk by the time I walk past him, and I don't bother saying anything to him. Instead, I let the door slam shut behind me and hightail my ass out of there before he can yell at me for it. Lyle's nowhere to be seen, and I pick up my pace before my luck runs out, joining the two other people already waiting at the bus stop.

We only have to wait a few minutes before the bus comes barreling around the corner. I hang back, letting the other two get on first before I do the same. Gale's smile falters when she sees me.

"What happened?" She eyes my face with a look that's half sympathy, half fury.

"Nothing," I quickly say and take my usual seat behind her. "I just fell. It's okay, Gale. I promise."

She knows I'm lying. She's seen bruises on me too many times to believe it's all from me being a klutz. I had to beg her when I was younger to not call Social Services, convincing her that it would be far more dangerous to take a chance on a home I knew nothing about.

"I decided to say yes to breakfast," I tell her, hoping to distract her with my news. It works. Her whole face lights up as she shoots me a quick backward glance.

"That's great, honey. I'm so excited for you." She turns serious when she says, "Don't forget that he better treat you right. I don't care how gorgeous he is. If he doesn't treat you like a princess, then screw him. There's plenty of fish in the sea."

I smile at how protective she is and pat her shoulder. “Don’t worry. It’s just breakfast anyway. I’m guessing it’ll probably be a one-time thing.”

“Then he’s an idiot.”

As if sensing he’s being talked about, my phone buzzes and I quickly dig it out, feeling my face heat up when I see that he’s sent me a text.

*Morning, Evie. Hope your work is easy tonight, and I can’t wait to see you when the sun rises.*

When I look up, I meet Gale’s eyes in the mirror, and the look she’s giving me is one I know all too well. It’s the pitying look that I’ve seen my whole life, especially from older women. When I was little, it was the other kids’ parents who would look at my ill-fitting clothes and shoes that were falling apart with that same look on their faces, and I’ve always hated the rush of shame it brings. I know Gale doesn’t mean it that way, but I see everything in that look. *Poor Evie getting all excited about a boy texting her for the first time.* It makes me feel stupid.

“Don’t look at me like that,” she says.

“Like what?”

“I’m just happy for you, and I’m sad that your life has been so hard. Don’t read anything else into it, Evie.”

Guilt hits me and I nod my head at her. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t ever apologize for having pride, just make sure it doesn’t blind you to the truth of things.”

I know she’s right. It’s easy to get mad and misread people and situations. Anger is much easier to feel than hurt, and when people used to stare at me with pity, I’d cling to the rage rather than the hurt that was always filling me up. The truth is those women just felt bad for me. They saw a neglected child and it broke their hearts. I was just too young and scared to see any of that.

She wishes me luck before I get off the bus, and I promise to tell her all about it the next time I see her. As I walk the rest

of the way, I send a quick text to Valeri, telling him that I hope he has a good night and that I'm looking forward to seeing him too. Before I've even given the lion his usual smack on the ass, I've got a response.

*See you soon. ;)*

I walk into work with a big smile on my face. Not wanting to explain everything to Jerry, I try to keep my excitement tamped down, but I think he suspects something. I've always been a hard worker, but I don't want to be all sweaty and rundown looking when I see Valeri, so I take it extra slow tonight. It's the first time I've ever cut corners and been lazy, but I tell myself I'll just clean extra hard tomorrow night to make up for it.

The shift seems to last forever, but when it's finally over, I unzip my coveralls and stuff them in my bag. Pulling out my ponytail, I run a brush through my hair and study myself in the bathroom mirror. The bruise looks even more obvious in the harsh fluorescent light, but I'm hoping it won't be so obvious outside. It's probably overcast anyway. Maybe that'll help.

Shouting a quick goodbye to Jerry, I race out the side door and look around for the gorgeous man that I can't seem to stop thinking about. I was right about the overcast day, but even without the sun, it's obvious that no one is waiting outside the library. I keep looking around, hoping he'll suddenly materialize, but he doesn't. I walk over to the lion and sit down beside him, figuring that maybe he's just running late. I don't have any new messages from him, and when I see Gale's bus come and go, I start to realize that he's not going to show up. My face heats up and my eyes get glassy, and the painful reminder of why I don't ever get my hopes up hits me like a fucking sledgehammer. Pulling my glasses off, I swipe at my eyes and curse my own stupidity.

# Chapter 4

## *Valeri*

I look at the clock again as I race through the early morning traffic and curse aloud in Russian. There's no one else to hear it, but it still makes me feel better. We had some issues last night with a local biker gang that seems to be under the impression that they can sell drugs in our city as long as it's within the bar they own. It took a couple of their members being beaten to a pulp to convince them that they're wrong. Needless to say, I didn't want to show up for our breakfast date covered in blood, so I'd had to go home and shower and change, and now my phone is dead and I can't even text to let her know I'm on my way. She has no idea what I do for a living, and it's refreshing. I don't want to scare her off, and I don't want her to only see me as a Bratva boss. I want her to get to know me first, and then I can slowly ease her into the rest.

Parking along the curb, I jump out and race up the stairs. When I don't see her, I sigh and run my hand through my hair. I'm just about to run to check the bus stop when I see movement from the corner of my eye. Turning, I see her sitting with her arms wrapped around her knees, head tucked down, resting against the bronze lion outside the main doors. She looks so fucking small and sad, not like she's a little bummed out at being stood up, but more like she's genuinely hurt by it, and it kills me to see it, to know that I was the cause of it.

“Evie,” I yell, running over to her.

She discreetly runs a finger under her glasses like she's been crying, and it just turns that knife a little more in my chest. I kneel down in front of her, waiting for her soft-brown eyes to meet mine. It takes her a few seconds, but when she does, I curse my own negligence for letting my phone die, because she's definitely been crying, even though she's trying like hell to hide it.

"I'm so sorry I'm late. Something came up with work, and then my damn phone died." I sigh because this just sounds like excuse after excuse. "I'm really sorry," I repeat, hoping she can hear how much I mean it.

"It's okay."

"It's not. You thought I'd stood you up. I hurt your feelings, and I'm truly sorry."

She seems surprised by my words, and when she turns her head to avoid my gaze, I see the dark bruise that covers her cheek. Without even thinking, I reach out and gently hook a finger under her chin, tilting her face to the side so I can get a better look.

"That bastard hit you, didn't he?"

"What?" She tries to jerk her head away, but I tighten my grip, holding her in place but being careful to not hurt her. "I just ran into something at work," she whispers.

I bring my other hand up, running my thumb gently over her bruised skin, knowing I'm going to be paying her lousy father a visit very soon. She sucks in a quick breath at my touch, her face and neck turning a deep shade of red, and I know she's completely oblivious to how beautiful she is.

"Look at me, Evie."

I wait until she turns her eyes back to mine. Mine soften when I see the embarrassment and shame in hers.

"I'm not going to make you admit it, but I'm not stupid. I know that bastard hits you, and I want you to promise me that you'll text me if you need me. I don't care what time it is. Will you promise me that?"

“Yes,” she whispers.

Knowing that’s as good as I’m going to get right now, I run my thumb over her soft skin one last time before holding my hand out for hers.

“Come on, you must be starving.”

She hesitates for just a minute before putting her much smaller hand in mine and letting me pull her to standing. Her coveralls must be stuffed in her bag, and it’s the first time I’ve seen her with her hair down. I like it. I have the sudden urge to run my fingers through it to see if it’s as silky as it looks. Images of her riding me with her hair falling down, caressing my chest in waves while she works her hips run through my brain, surprising me with the intensity and vividness of them. My cock immediately perks up, and I have to push the images away before I really scare the hell out of her with a painfully obvious erection.

Grabbing her bag, she slings it over her shoulder, a smile playing at her lips when she realizes I’m not letting her hand go. There’s something so unbelievably sweet and innocent about her, something I haven’t been around in a very long time.

When I open the passenger side door for her, she hesitates and looks around. “Where are we going?”

“A small diner a few streets over. It has the best food around. We can walk, but it’ll take a while.”

She thinks for a second and then shakes her head. “No, it’s okay. We can drive.”

I smile and help her get in before shutting the door and walking to the driver’s side.

“This really is a beautiful car,” she says and then gives me a small smile. “I can’t believe I hit it. I’m really sorry about that.”

“I’m not. If you hadn’t hit me, then I never would’ve met you.”



She blushes and looks away, but not before I see the smile on her face. Easing out into the morning traffic, I ask her how her night was.

“The same as usual. It’s not a bad job. I mean, I get to listen to audiobooks, and I really like my coworker. Jerry’s a great guy.”

An immediate stab of jealousy hits me. Who the fuck is this Jerry guy who gets to spend every night with her?

“Oh yeah? Has he been working there long with you?” I ask, trying to sound curious but not too curious.

“He’s been there way longer than me. He’s excited to be able to retire soon. He and his wife are planning on traveling around in an RV once he’s done. They’ve been looking forward to it for years.”

Relieved that Jerry is much older and married, I tell her that sounds like fun as I turn down the next street.

“So what do you do?” she asks. I knew the question was coming, and I know she’s going to hate me when she later learns the truth, but for now I keep it vague.

“My brothers and I own a few places in town.”

“How many brothers do you have? I remember you mentioning a sister-in-law and nephew at the café.”

“I have two older brothers, both of them married, and they each have one son. My oldest brother’s wife is pregnant again, and we’re all pretty excited about it. How about you? Any brothers or sisters?”

I ask the question even though I already know the answer. Pavel’s file on Evie had been small to say the least, but it had been enough to infuriate me and make me even more desperate to spend time with her. She’s not had an easy life—a mom who died when she was ten, alcoholic and abusive father, never enough money, and her first job listed was when she was fifteen. It didn’t even come close to telling me all I want to know.

“No, I’m an only child,” she says, fidgeting with the strap of her bag and looking out the window.

Parking outside Nelly’s Diner, I drop the questions because it’s obvious they make her uncomfortable. There will be plenty of time for me to get to know her.

“I hope you’re hungry,” I tell her with a grin. “Because you’re going to want to try everything.”

She smiles and gets out of the car, not waiting for me to walk around and do it for her. I’m guessing it never even occurred to her that I would. Her face lights up when a red Mini Cooper pulls into the parking lot.

“You know them?” I ask.

She gives a soft laugh. “No, I just think Mini Coopers are really cute, especially the red ones.”

When I grab her hand again, she pushes up her glasses and ducks her head in embarrassment, and it’s the cutest damn thing I’ve ever seen. I hold the door open for her, ignoring the hostess who immediately gives me a big smile and instead keep my eyes on Evie.

“Table for two, please,” I say, still not looking over at the hostess who’s trying damn hard to get my attention.

“Right this way.” I ignore the snippy tone she uses when I refuse to smile and flirt with her.

We follow her hand-in-hand, and when she stops at a booth in the corner and hands us two menus, I thank her and then sit down across from Evie, who’s already looking through her menu.

“What are you leaning towards?” I ask her, watching her eyes dart around the menu.

She chews her bottom lip, hypnotizing me with the movement and scans the menu before saying, “The Sunrise Celebration.”

I laugh and give a nod. “Nice choice. I think I’ll have the same.” After the waitress comes over and we place our order, I say, “I’ll be very impressed if you manage to eat it all.”

She takes one of the cups of coffee when the waitress drops them off and thanks her, giving the woman a sweet smile. While she adds creamer and sugar, she says, "I'll be able to finish it. I'm starving."

"How do you like the overnight schedule?"

She gives a small shrug. "I like the night. It's quieter and everyone else is asleep."

"It must be kind of lonely though."

"I guess you get used to it." I can tell I'm making her uncomfortable again by the way she pushes her glasses up. It's her little tell.

She takes another drink before asking, "So do you always stay up all night, or did you just wake up really early?"

"Sometimes I do, but usually I'm more late to bed and late to wake."

"I hope you're not missing sleep because of me."

"It would be worth it."

I smile at the blush she gives and then scoot my mug aside when the waitress comes back with our food. Evie's eyes widen when she sees the large plates, making me laugh.

"I have complete faith in you," I tell her after the waitress leaves.

"I didn't realize it would be this much food."

"Come on, we'll do it together."

She picks up her fork, eyeing the bacon, hash browns, scrambled eggs, and plate of waffles on the side, clearly unsure of where to even begin.

"I like to start with the savory and end with the sweet, that way the waffles seem like a dessert," I tell her, picking up a piece of bacon and taking a bite.

She shakes her head at my sound plan and grabs the syrup, dousing her waffles in it. "It's all about the mix of salty and

sweet,” she says, dipping her bacon in the syrup. “That’s really where the magic happens.”

When I hesitate, she laughs and says, “Just try it. You’re gonna love it.”

I smile at her enthusiasm and grab the bottle of syrup, pouring it over my waffles and then dipping my bacon in it. Holding it up, I raise a brow at her. “Only for you would I do this, Evie.”

She smiles and watches me take a bite. Her smile grows when she can tell I like it.

“Told you,” she says, drenching her own piece of bacon again and taking a big bite.

“You were right,” I admit with a laugh. “You’ve completely changed how I think about food now. I’ll never look at breakfast the same way again.”

“Just wait till you try salted caramel ice cream or a hamburger with bacon and syrup. The possibilities are endless, Valeri.”

I smile and say, “It’s a date then.”

“Huh?” she says around a mouthful of food, blushing even harder when she realizes what she’s just signed herself up for.

“That’s two more dates you owe me. One for ice cream and another for hamburgers.”

After she chews, she says, “It could just be one date for hamburgers and ice cream.”

I think about it and shake my head. “No, I like my way better. I get to see you more.”

She looks like she’s about to say something, but instead she fills her fork with eggs and takes another bite. I’m surprised by how much I enjoy just being around her. She’s nice and funny and laidback. She’s not looking around at the small diner, giving me the stink eye for not taking her to someplace more expensive, and she’s not slowly working her way through a fruit bowl with a pinched look on her face,

claiming that she just doesn't require a lot of food like other women. She's a goddamn breath of fresh air.

When she takes her last bite, she gives me a triumphant smile and pushes her empty plate aside, piling everything onto it so it's easier for the waitress. "I can't believe I just did that."

I laugh and toss my napkin onto my own empty plate. "I knew you could do it."

She smiles and then looks at her watch, her face quickly changing from happy to worried. Her bruise is more noticeable with the light coming in, and to keep my temper in check, I think about how beautiful it's going to sound when I break all the bones in her father's hand. The thought cheers me up, but all that goes to shit when I look up and see Ilya and Nikolai walk in. They've been with the Bratva since my older brother took over after our dad was killed, and my desire to ease Evie into my lifestyle is going to be a lot harder if these two walk over. Nikolai does all our tattoos, and the man is covered in them. Ilya has about the same number as I do, but three tatted-up Russians is enough to make most people suspicious. I silence my groan when Nikolai looks over and meets my eyes. He sees Evie, and his smile grows as he elbows Ilya and nods in our direction.

When they start to walk over, I look at Evie and say, "A couple of my friends just walked in, and we've been spotted."

She looks over, easily spotting the two large men who are headed our way. The scared, nervous look comes back, and when I see it, I don't even have to think about it. I get up and scoot in next to her so Ilya and Nikolai can take the seat across from us.

Before they can even open their big mouths, I tell them in Russian, "She knows nothing about the Bratva, and it better damn well stay that way."

They laugh and stare at Evie with open curiosity. Nikolai holds a tattooed hand out to her. "Hi, I'm Nikolai."

She shakes it and says, "Hi, I'm Evie." Ilya introduces himself next as the waitress comes over with a big smile on

her face, turning the charm on while she takes their orders and then clears our empty plates.

“What happened to her face?” Nikolai asks me in Russian.

“Her father. Don’t worry, I’ll be having a word with him about it.”

He smiles and says, “Call me if you want some help with that.”

Switching to English, Ilya asks, “So how did you two meet?”

Evie blushes and says, “I hit his car.”

They laugh and take the coffee the waitress drops off for them.

“You hit his brand-new Aston Martin?” Nikolai asks, making her cheeks turn an even brighter red.

“It was easy to fix,” I say, reaching over and giving her thigh a soft squeeze to let her know I’m not even slightly mad about it. I feel her body tense at my touch, but when I don’t move my hand, she slowly starts to relax. I make sure to keep my hand closer to her knee because something tells me Evie isn’t very experienced, and the last thing I want to do is scare her away. After a few minutes of Ilya chattering away about what breakfast he’s in the mood for, she slides one hand under the table and rests it on top of mine. The move leaves me grinning like an idiot. Nikolai quirks a brow at me, and the amused glint in his eyes lets me know I’m never going to hear the end of it.

I spread my fingers, and she immediately threads hers through mine. I stroke her hand with my thumb, amazed that something so small as holding hands can be so damn erotic. I can’t even remember the last time I held hands with a woman. I usually go to the club, find someone who catches my eye, and either go back to her place or mine or, hell, just find a dark corner somewhere. There isn’t any romance, no emotional attachment, at least not on my end, and when they leave, I never think about them again. It’s not that I’m trying to be an ass. I just never wanted anything more. Evie’s already

changing that, though, because I feel like I've already become obsessed with her. If she knew I had someone dig up information on her, that I've already driven past her house on more than one occasion, and that I've changed my entire schedule so I can watch her on her way to and from work, she'd probably scream and run in the opposite direction. I wouldn't blame her if she did. I'd chase her cute ass and bring her back, but I wouldn't fault her for trying to get away from me.

Evie convinces them both to order what we had, and after they've placed their orders, she turns to me and says, "I really need to get home."

I give her hand a squeeze and finish the last of my coffee. "Dip your bacon in syrup," I tell them. "It'll change your life."

Evie laughs and grabs her bag. "It was nice to meet both of you."

"You too," Nikolai says with a grin.

Ilya bumps Nikolai's shoulder and points at the bench seat that Evie and I were just sitting in. "Move your ass over there. We're not dating." Then he looks at Evie and smiles. "I'm sure we'll see you again soon, Evie." In Russian he adds, "Your brothers are going to love hearing about this."

I smack his arm and laugh. "Just for that, I'm going to let you pay for us."

Nikolai laughs. "I'll let you pay for me too."

"It's worth it just to see you smiling and holding hands under the table like some love-struck teenager," Ilya says with a laugh.

They're still laughing when I tell them to fuck off. Smiling, I lead Evie out of the diner with my arm around her shoulders.

"Wait, we didn't pay," she says, turning to go back inside.

I tighten my hand on her and laugh. "Ilya wanted to pay."

"Oh, he didn't have to do that. I should go back in and thank him."

“I’ll tell him you said thanks. It’s okay, Evie.”

She clutches her bag, still looking unsure, but then glances at her watch again and decides it’s more important that she get home. I open the car door for her again, and when I get in on my side, she quickly says, “You can just drop me off in front of the library. I can take the bus home.”

“I can drive you home. It’s not a problem.”

She shakes her head. “No, please. I need to take the bus.”

Instead of arguing, I drive her back to the library, parking my car near the bus stop.

“When’s the next bus?”

“In twenty minutes.” She reaches for the handle and says, “Thanks for breakfast, Valeri. I had a really great time.”

I laugh and reach over to move her hand from the door. “I’m waiting with you. There’s no way in hell I’m driving off and leaving you at the curb. It’s bad enough I’m letting you take the damn bus.”

“You don’t have to wait. I’ll be fine.”

Leaning closer, I reach up to tuck a strand of her dark hair behind her ear, noticing that it’s just as soft as I imagined it would be. Her whole body stills, and I’ve never seen anyone look so damn uncomfortable. It’s like she has no idea what to do, and it embarrasses the hell out of her.

“Tell me something, Evie. Do you look so uncomfortable because you don’t want me to kiss you, or because you want it so badly it scares the hell out of you?”

“I’m not so sure this is such a good idea, Valeri,” she whispers.

“For me to kiss you?” I ask, running a finger along her unbruised cheek.

She blushes even harder and darts her eyes to the side. “For us to see each other, for any of it.”

“Why?”



“My dad won’t like it.”

She tries to pull away, but I cup her face and wait for her light brown eyes to find mine. “I’m going to be completely honest with you. Okay?”

“Okay,” she whispers.

“I don’t give a fuck what your dad likes or doesn’t like.” Her eyes widen in surprise, but I don’t stop. “I like you, Evie. I can’t stop thinking about you, and I want to see you again.” I smile and run my thumb lightly over her bottom lip. “And I really want to kiss you.”

“Why?”

I laugh at the absurd question but stop when I realize she’s being completely sincere. Her brow is scrunched in worry, and she looks so fucking vulnerable.

“Well, *lapochka*, I want to kiss you because I think you’re beautiful, and I want to know what you taste like.” I smile at the way her cheeks heat up. She’s embarrassed, and I wonder if she even realizes the way her lips have slightly parted at my words. She may be nervous, but her body knows what it wants. “And I like you because you’re unlike anyone I’ve ever met. You intrigue me. You’re sweet and funny and down to earth. I enjoy being around you, and I want to know you better.”

She’s not used to compliments and they make her uncomfortable, so she ignores them and instead focuses on something else. “What does *lapochka* mean?”

“I’ll tell you on our next date.”

She smiles before she can stop it, and when I lean closer, she doesn’t back away. I can feel the heat of her breath against my lips, and I’m already rock-fucking-hard and wishing I could spend the whole damn day in bed with her. When I run my tongue over her bottom lip, she lets out a soft moan that’s not at all for show. It just slips out because it felt so good to her she couldn’t stop it. Embarrassed, she pulls back.

“I’m sorry. I should go.” She fumbles with her bag and is about to reach for that damn door handle again when I cup the

back of her head and pull her towards me, capturing her lips with mine and kissing her like I've been dying to ever since I first saw her looking scared to death after she'd rear-ended me.

For the briefest moment, she stiffens, but then I feel her whole body soften as she lets out another moan and opens her mouth to me. I give her bottom lip a soft suck before sliding my tongue between her lips and delving inside with a groan of my own. I want to possess every goddamn inch of her and claim it as mine. Her tongue runs over mine, timid at first and then hungrier as her instincts take over, and soon she's reaching up to cup my face, pulling me closer and sucking on my bottom lip hard enough to have me fisting her hair and nearly dragging her onto my lap.

By the time she pulls away, the windows are fogged up, including her glasses, and she lets out a small laugh before taking them off to clean them with her shirt. Hooking a finger under her chin, I tilt her face back up, seeing her for the first time without them.

"You're so beautiful, Evie." She always looks gorgeous to me, but without the glasses covering half her face, her beauty is stunning.

The sound of the bus has her putting her glasses back on and grabbing her bag. "I'm sorry. I need to go. Thanks for today, Valeri." She hesitates for just a minute before leaning forward and kissing me one last time.

"Text me when you get home so I know you're okay," I tell her before she can rush outside.

"I will," she promises with a smile and then shuts the door and runs for the bus stop.

I wait, giving her a wave when she turns back for one last look before disappearing onto the bus. Wanting to give it enough time to get ahead of me so it's not obvious I'm following her, I check my phone that's still hooked to my charger, groaning when I see the messages from my brothers. When I open the group chat, the first thing I see is a photo of me holding the door open for Evie outside the diner.

The first message is from Vasily. *Ilya just sent me a nice photo, little brother. Who's the girl? Then he adds, You seeing this, Volodya?*

*I'm seeing it all right, and I'm laughing my ass off. Valeri out with a woman who he obviously didn't pick up from a club? Who is she? We want answers.*

I put my phone away without answering and instead follow the bus that Evie's on. I've already memorized the route, so I veer off onto a side street, parking so that I can see her house but she won't be able to see me. A few minutes later, I see her walking down the sidewalk, and just the sight of her has me smiling again. The smile dies when I watch her hide behind her dad's truck, hurrying to pull her work coveralls back on and then put her hair up. I watch her transform before my eyes. She's no longer the smiling girl who was just in my car kissing me like she'd never be able to get enough. Now she's the girl I first saw, the one who looks scared, always tensed and waiting for the next blow, and it makes me want to kill her dad.

Unlocking the front door, she walks into the house like she's trying to be as quiet as possible, and I'm guessing her dad is passed out drunk and she's hoping he'll stay that way so he won't realize she's coming home later than usual. I don't realize how tense I am until I feel my phone vibrate and I see that it's a text from her and feel my whole body relax, knowing that she's safe in her room and didn't get caught by her dad.

*Just made it back. Thanks for breakfast. I had a really great time.*

I smile and type out a response. *I had a great time too. Thanks for waiting for me, and again, I'm really sorry I was late.*

*You were worth the wait.*

*So are you, Evie, although I hope I don't have to wait so long to see you again. I'll be thinking about that kiss we shared nonstop. It's going to drive me crazy.*

I watch the moving dots, seeing them stop and start over and over again, knowing she's flustered and trying to figure out what to say.

*I'll be thinking about it too.*

I laugh at her tame response. I love that she's so shy. I got a tiny glimpse of her sexual side in the car today, and I'm looking forward to bringing that part of herself out in the open again.

*Get some sleep, Evie. I'll see you again soon, beautiful. ;)*

*Night, Valeri.*

I toss my phone aside and drive back into downtown. She's not the only one who needs to get some sleep. I'm going to need to figure something out because this schedule is going to kill me. I'm guessing she won't appreciate me barging in and changing her life, but it's coming because I'll be damned if I'm going to let her stay in a house with some raving, drunk jackass and continue to let her work a job that forces her to stay up all night long doing janitorial work. Some big changes are coming Evie's way, because I like her. I like her way more than I should for only knowing her a few days, but there's no denying that I want her, and I'm not so sure I'm going to want to let her go.

# Chapter 5

## *Evie*

I'm still riding the high from our date when I get off work the next morning. I'd been so scared my dad would know I was late coming in, but he'd been passed out on the couch and none the wiser. I'd woken up to several texts from Valeri, and not even a night of cleaning up other people's messes had been able to put a damper on my mood. After I say goodbye to Jerry, who's clearly curious about my unusually good mood but too sweet to pry, I shove my coveralls into my bag and make my way out of the building.

We haven't officially made any plans for today, so I'm trying to not get my hopes up, but as soon as I step outside and see Valeri, it's like every cell in my body lights up. A voice in the back of my head is warning me to not get too attached to him, but when he cups my face and brings his lips to mine, that voice is quickly silenced by the taste and feel of him. He cups my face so damn sweetly, slowly leading me backwards until I'm flush against the building and he's cocooning me with his much larger body. I've never felt so safe in my life.

He's careful to keep a few inches between our bodies, and I wonder if he has any idea how inexperienced I am. I'd like to think I'm doing an okay job of hiding it, but I really have no fucking clue what I'm doing. All I know is I've never felt like this before, and I want more. His tongue runs over mine, sending another spark of pleasure straight to my pussy, making me think it might actually be possible to orgasm from just a kiss. Something tells me that if anyone could do it, it would be Valeri. The man is obviously quite skilled.

When he pulls back and rests his forehead against mine, I'm out of breath and feeling a little lightheaded. "Wow, you're really good at that," I tell him.

He smiles and gives my top lip a soft bite. "It's all you, *lapochka*." His tongue runs lightly over my lips. "I've been thinking about kissing you all fucking night."

"You told me you'd tell me what that word means."

Pulling back, I smile when I see his dimple. "Is this a date, though?" He checks the large, black, military-style watch on his wrist, the one that looks like it costs more than I made all of last year, and looks around. "I'm not so sure it counts as a date if it's not even seven in the morning."

"I think it does. We're together, aren't we?"

He leans closer and cups my face. "We're definitely together, Evie."

I blush because I'm not sure if he means that we're together as a couple or if he's just talking about us being together here, and I'm too embarrassed to ask. His finger lightly runs over the bruise that's still covering my cheek.

"*Lapochka* is similar to sweetheart in Russian," he murmurs, studying my face and smiling when I feel my skin heat up, knowing I've just turned a deeper shade of red. People who don't blush have no idea how embarrassing it is. I have absolutely no control over it, and it's always giving my awkwardness away, making it impossible to just play it cool.

"It just so happens that I planned ahead, and I have a way to officially turn this into a date. Do you have a couple of hours?"

"Yeah, that should be fine."

"Good." He gives me one more quick kiss and then grabs my hand, threading his fingers through mine before leading me down the concrete stairs and to his car. He opens the door for me and helps me in, and once again I'm surprised by how damn sweet he is. I've never met or been around anyone like him. He makes me feel special and cared for and not like I'm poor, pathetic Evie. He has no idea that Evie exists. I can be

myself with him and not the person that everyone else sees me as. It's like being given a clean slate.

While he drives us across the city, I keep looking around, trying to figure out where he's taking me. When he's not shifting, he's resting his hand on my thigh, and I love how he always reaches out for me. I hadn't realized how starved I've been for affection. Aside from the little side hugs I give Gale sometimes, I don't get touched. My mom was affectionate, but she died when I was ten, and it's hard to live off memories because they will never be enough.

Valeri turns down a gravel side road that leads into a forest before opening up in front of the ocean. I stare out my window, watching the waves crash against the beach before turning to look at him. He's studying my reaction, trying to gauge if I like it or not. My face must say it all because he smiles before popping the trunk and getting out. I quickly follow, meeting him behind the car.

He laughs and hooks a finger under my chin. "You really don't like waiting for me to open the door for you, do you?"

"I just forget," I tell him. "Plus, I'm really curious what you have back here."

Giving me a wink, he opens the trunk, and I clap my hands in excitement when I see the picnic basket and plaid blanket. He laughs at my reaction and then reaches down to untie his boots.

"Come on," he says when I keep standing there. "You're not going to want to get sand in your shoes."

I tug off my old sneakers and tuck my socks inside, thanking whoever is listening that I'm not wearing a pair of holey socks today and set them inside next to his black boots. We both roll up our jeans before he grabs the basket and I grab the blanket. Walking out onto the sand, I look up at him and smile. It's been years since I've been to see the ocean, and I've missed it. The sun isn't high in the sky yet, but it's out, and I can tell it's going to be bright and sunny later on. The nice cool breeze coming off the water makes the long-sleeve tee I'm wearing perfect, and when Valeri's satisfied with the spot,



he helps me spread out the blanket before sitting down and patting the space next to him.

“It’s so beautiful here,” I tell him, looking around at the empty beach. “How’d you find it?”

“I know a lot of interesting, private places,” he says, giving me a smile. My traitorous mind immediately assails me with images of him bringing all kinds of other women here, and the place suddenly doesn’t seem all that awesome. He notices my mood change, even though I try to hide it. Reaching out, he cups the back of my head and pulls me closer. “You’re the only woman I’ve ever brought here, Evie.” He points to the right. “You see that big rock down there by the fence line?”

I look over and nod my head.

“That’s the start of my brother Vasily’s property. I’ve walked down here before with his dog, that’s how I knew about it.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to get all weird.” I look back out at the water, feeling like an idiot. “I’m not very good at this.”

“Good at what?”

I decide to keep it vague and say, “I don’t date much.”

He gives me a big smile. “Good.”

Knowing that he’s probably dated an ungodly number of women, I turn my attention to the basket before I start asking questions and learn things that will just haunt me and make me feel like shit.

“So what did you bring?”

“Open it up and see.”

Pulling the basket closer, I lift the lid, smiling when I see the assortment of food. There are breakfast burritos, containers of fruit, and a thermos of coffee. He’s even added some creamer and sugar, which means he was really paying attention at the diner.

“This is perfect,” I tell him. I run my finger over the edge of the basket before looking at him. Valeri is intimidatingly

good looking, and when those vivid green eyes are staring at me, making it clear that all his attention is on me, I find it hard to breathe. “You don’t have to go through so much trouble for me. I hope you know that.”

“This isn’t trouble, Evie, and even if it was, you’re worth it.”

“No, I’m not,” I say without thinking.

He cups my face, running his thumb lightly over my skin. “We’re going to need to work on your self-esteem. You’ve been taught certain things by your father, and that needs to change. I’m the one you should trust, *lapochka*, not him.”

I don’t know what to say, but he doesn’t seem bothered by my lack of a response. He just smiles and kisses my forehead before grabbing the thermos and pouring us each some coffee.

“I hope you’re not disappointed that I didn’t make any of this. I’m not very skilled in the kitchen.”

“I’m not disappointed.” I take the mug he offers and pour in some creamer and sugar while he gets out the food. There are so many things I want to ask him, so many things I’m curious about, but I don’t want to bombard him like it’s a police interrogation, so I just settle on, “How old are you?”

He smiles and unwraps his burrito. “I’m twenty-seven.”

“Do you miss Russia?”

While he chews, he looks out at the water and shakes his head. “I like it here.”

“Where are your parents?” I ask, forgetting that I was just going to ask the one question.

He laughs and takes a drink. “Someone’s curious today.”

“Sorry. You don’t have to answer.” I take a bite of my own burrito just to shut myself up.

“I don’t mind your questions. My father died several years ago. My mom is still heartbroken over it and has no desire to leave Russia because that’s where her memories of him are.”

“I’m so sorry. My mom died when I was young. I know how hard it is to lose a parent.”

“I was at least older when it happened. I can’t imagine how hard that must’ve been for you.”

I shrug my shoulders and tuck a blowing strand of hair behind my ear. “I wish I could say that my dad was so heartbroken that he started drinking to try and cope with it, but the truth is he was a nasty drunk before she died, and her death just made it worse.” I’m surprised I’ve told him all this. I never talk to anyone about my personal life, but Valeri makes me want to share things with him, to open up in a way that I never have before.

“I’m very sorry, Evie.”

I grab the container of fruit and give him a big smile. “It’s fine. No more sad stuff. I don’t want to waste what little time we have.”

He smiles and tosses his wrapper in the basket before stealing one of my strawberries. “True enough. There are far better ways to spend our time.”

When he cups the back of my head and pulls me closer, I don’t resist. Setting the container aside, I gladly turn my attention to him. He tastes like the strawberry he just ate, and I’m hungry for more. I may not have experience on my side, but I have years of sexual frustration that’s boiling over, making it impossible for me to stop. Every time his lips touch mine, every swipe of his skilled tongue, the feel of his hand cupping my head in a possessive grip—it all works together to make me feel like I’m about to fucking explode.

Something takes over, some ravenous part of myself that’s never been allowed to come out awakens under his touch, and I’m not sure which one of us is more surprised when I push him down onto his back and straddle him. He groans against my mouth, kissing me harder and pulling off my glasses before threading his hands in my hair. When I press harder against him and rock my hips, I’m stunned to feel the hard length of him beneath me. I may be a virgin, but I’ve fucked myself more times than I can remember, and I’ve always had

to make due with just my hand or the showerhead. My whole world grows a bit bigger when I feel his hard cock against my pussy. I couldn't stop now even if I wanted to.

Like a woman possessed, I grind against him, so fucking greedy for every second of pleasure I can get. I kiss him harder, moaning against his lips until the orgasm thunders through me, giving me no choice but to scream and give in to my release. With a growl, he sucks my bottom lip, giving me a hard enough bite to send another shiver through me as he slides one hand down to cup my ass, grinding me even harder against him. The movement sends aftershocks all through me, and once the rush of pure ecstasy starts to fade, the reality of what I've just done hits me full force.

He feels the change and somehow knows exactly what I'm thinking. Giving my ass a soft smack, he breaks our kiss with a big grin on his face. "Please tell me you're not regretting what just happened, because I fucking loved it, Evie."

I try to turn away, but he cups my face, refusing to let me go, so I do the only thing I can do and close my eyes, which just makes him laugh. I can't help it, though. I'm too embarrassed to look at him right now.

"I can't believe I just did that," I whisper.

"I'm really glad you did." He runs his fingers over my face, gently tracing a line along my cheek and forehead and down my nose before ghosting them over my lips.

"It seems selfish," I admit.

"How so?"

I'm glad I can't see the amusement in his eyes, because hearing it in his voice is bad enough. He laughs when I give an embarrassed groan. "I know you're used to more," I whisper, fully aware that his hard cock is still pressing against me. "But I'm not ready for that."

"Then we wait," he says, and the calm, *it's no biggie* tone of his voice has my eyes popping open. "There's my girl." He smiles, and I blush.

“What the hell are you doing with me?” Before he can say anything, I rest my hand on his chest and say, “You could have anyone, Valeri. We both know it. I can’t understand why you keep wanting to spend time with me.”

I give a surprised yelp when he quickly flips us. His body hovers above mine, putting just enough pressure on me so I can feel how big and powerful he is but not enough to make me feel like I’m trapped, although I most definitely am.

“I want to spend time with you, *lapochka*, because you’re the one I want. I don’t give a fuck about any other woman.” He presses his cock harder against me. “And stop worrying about me. I’m not going to die from a hard-on.”

When I wrap my legs around him and pull him closer, he groans and gives me a wink. “You trying to make a liar out of me?”

“No, I’m afraid I’m going to wake up and realize this was all just a dream, so I want to touch you while I can.”

His face softens as he looks down at me, bracing his forearms on either side of my head so I’m completely cocooned by him.

“I’m not going anywhere. I can promise you that.”

I reach up and cup his face, wanting to touch him, to memorize every damn detail. His face is smooth today, and when he smiles, I run my finger over his dimple, savoring the feel of him beneath my fingers. He’s perfect, and it makes me worry about so many things.

“I’m a virgin,” I blurt out like an idiot.

He smiles again. “I picked up on that.”

“That obvious, huh?”

“Not because you did anything wrong. You’re just very hesitant and shy.” He runs his thumb along my cheek. “I love that you are, Evie, please don’t be embarrassed, and I’m glad you told me. I know we just met not that long ago, but I want you to know that I’m not seeing anyone else. I haven’t looked at another woman since I first saw you.”

“You’re not?”

“I’m not. Are you?”

I laugh and say, “No.”

“Good.” He leans closer, kissing a line down my jaw until he’s burying his face against my neck, lighting my body on fire again when he gives me a soft bite and then licks away the sting. “I want you all to myself,” he whispers.

When he moves his hips, grinding his hard cock against me, the friction on my still sensitive pussy pulls a gasp from my body. He groans and licks the crook of my neck, slowly kissing his way down.

“Valeri,” I whisper when I feel him pull the neck of my shirt down.

“Relax, baby, the shirt’s staying on.”

My breath hitches when I feel his teeth graze my skin. He’s still pressing his cock against my clit, hitting me right where I need him to, and I think I’m wetter than I’ve ever been in my life.

He kisses along my collarbone before dipping lower, being careful to not pull my shirt too low.

“Valeri,” I whisper again, feeling the orgasm start to build to the breaking point.

“I’ve got you, *lapochka*.” He gives me one more rub, pushing me over the edge before he presses his lips to my skin and sucks hard while my body bucks up to his. Grasping his head, I tighten my legs around him as my back arches up and everything else fades away except the man who’s completely transformed my life, and it’s only his body that’s keeping me from floating right up to the damn sky.

When I start to slowly come down, he murmurs against my skin, “You have no idea how badly I wish I could keep you here all day, giving you orgasm after orgasm until you can’t even remember your name.”

I run my hands through his thick, dark hair, unable to stop the goofy grin from spreading across my face. He gives me

one more kiss before lifting his head. Running his finger over the skin he just sucked, I look down at the deep purple hickey he's given me. I'm no stranger to bruises, but this is the first one I've ever been happy to see.

"When you look in the mirror, this is the bruise I want you to focus on." He reaches a hand up to brush my cheek. "This one you don't see. Only mine. Do you understand?"

I nod my head.

"The only marks you should ever have on your body are ones that I've given you, *lapochka*, and I can't tell you how much it pisses me off to know that another man has dared to mark your beautiful skin."

He shakes his head softly, and the pained look on his face surprises me. I figured he wouldn't be thrilled to know my dad sometimes hits me, but I hadn't expected him to genuinely be upset by it. Aside from Gale, no one else ever has been.

"I'll be fine," I tell him. "Most of the time I can avoid him."

"I don't suppose you'd let me get you out of there?"

When I try to sit up, he scoots back to give me room. The dark grey Henley shirt he's wearing looks mouthwatering on him, highlighting how fucking ripped he is. I look away so I can focus and grab my glasses, slipping my protective armor back on.

"I'm fine, Valeri. I'll eventually save enough to get my ass out of there, but until then, it's home."

"What if I could get you an apartment? Hell, you can stay with me. I know that sounds crazy, but I have plenty of room."

"Don't you think you should at least know me for a full two weeks before you invite me to move in?"

"Fine, I'll ask again in a few days."

I smile, but he just lifts a dark brow at me because he's definitely not joking. I've never had anyone be protective of me, and I'm not at all surprised to find that I really like it.

“You’re not going to want to hear this,” I tell him, “but I need to get back.”

“At least let me drop you off at your house instead of the bus stop.”

“He can’t know about you,” I quickly say, grabbing onto his hand. “He would be furious, and I can’t have you getting hurt because of me.”

He squeezes my hand and leans closer. “Do not waste a second of your time worrying about me. He can’t hurt me. You’re just going to have to trust me on that.”

I start to pack up the basket, wishing I could spend all day here with him. Seagulls squawk above us, hoping for some food, but I remember reading that feeding them actually does more harm than good, so I resist the urge to give them scraps and instead tuck it all back inside.

“Can I please drive you home?”

I knew at some point this would come up, but I hadn’t planned on it being today. “I’m embarrassed for you to see where I live,” I finally say because it’s pointless to lie about it. “And my dad can’t know about you. He may not be able to hurt you, but he can hurt me.”

He sighs and scrubs a hand over the back of his neck. “You have no idea how close I am to just taking you back to my place.”

“You can’t just kidnap me,” I say, trying to lighten the mood.

His green eyes lock on mine. “Yes, I can.”

Instead of fear, a shiver of pure pleasure and excitement runs down my spine at the thought of him throwing me over his shoulder and taking me off to a place where my dad will never find me, a place where I won’t have to live in fear, but then reality sets in and I start thinking about how unrealistic that is. You don’t run off into the sunset with a guy you’ve just met. For all I know, Valeri regularly meets women and woos them in less than two weeks. If anyone could pull that off, it’d be him.



“You have nothing to be embarrassed about, by the way. I don’t give a shit about any of that.”

I appreciate what he’s saying, but that doesn’t mean I want his fancy-ass car parked out front of my shitty house anytime soon.

“How about I drop you off at the end of the street or something?” He puts his hand over mine, stilling the mindless fidgeting I’m doing. “It kills me to watch you get onto that damn bus.”

“Gale’s actually a really sweet lady. She’s been driving me to work since I was a kid.”

“A kid? How old were you when you got your first job?”

“Thirteen.”

He studies me for a second, and I meet his eyes, worried I’m going to see pity in them, but instead a soft smile plays at his lips and I swear there’s a glint of pride in them. It’s not at all what I was expecting. Squeezing my hand, he says, “You’re a fighter, Evie.”

I remember all the times I ran to my room in fear and hid under my bed. “Yeah, I’m not so sure about that. Enduring isn’t the same thing as fighting.”

“You do more than just endure. You work hard, you always have, and you haven’t let it make you hard and mean.” His fingers stroke my bruised cheek. “You haven’t let him break you. There’s a sweetness in you that I’ve never seen in anyone else.”

I grab his hand and kiss the palm before standing up. He’s about to make me cry, and that’s the last thing I want to do right now. I look out at the ocean one last time and dig my feet in the sand, letting the breeze whip my hair around.

“Your brother is lucky to live here.”

He grabs the basket and blanket and stands next to me. “I’ll bring you back anytime you want.”

I look up at him, somehow always surprised by how much taller he is than me. “You can drop me off close to where the

bus stop is,” I say, even though it makes me nervous to do it. I can’t hide where I come from. He’s going to find out eventually if we’re going to keep seeing each other, and I can’t bring myself to break things off with him, even if that would be the smart thing.

He smiles and kneels down, turning his back to me. “Hop on.”

Happy for any excuse that lets me touch him, I wrap my arms around his neck and laugh when he stands up. Hooking my legs around, he grabs my thigh with one hand while I take the blanket from him. I keep my face pressed close to him and kiss the tattoo on his neck.

“I like your tattoos.”

He laughs and starts walking us back to the car. “I’m glad you do. Nikolai, the guy you met the other morning is a tattoo artist. He did most of mine.”

“Do you have a lot?” I ask, already picturing a naked Valeri and wishing like hell I could see it for real.

“I do,” is the only answer I get.

I kiss his neck again and breathe in his scent. His cologne is mouthwatering all on its own, but underneath it is all Valeri, and that’s the smell that has my thighs clenching even tighter around him. He pats my thigh before setting me down by the trunk of his car so we can get our shoes. I laugh when he grabs my shoes and socks and squats down, reaching for one of my feet. I lift a foot, laughing harder when he runs his hands over me, getting all the sand off.

“Ticklish?” He looks up and gives me a wink. “I’ll have to remember that.”

He slips my sock and shoe on and then does the same to my other foot before putting his boots on. Grabbing my hand, he opens the door for me, and I stare out at the beach until he gets in and starts to drive us away.

“I want to take you out for your birthday. Do you think you could get the night off?”

“This Friday? I can try. I’m sure Jerry wouldn’t mind. He’ll probably be thrilled. He hates when I work my birthdays.”

“Do you have someplace you want to go? I’ll take you anywhere you want.”

I think about it, but I already know where I want to go. I’m sick and tired of watching it from the outside. “I’ve never been to Inferno,” I say. “I see it from the library, and it’s always so packed. I’ve always wondered what it’s like inside.” When he hesitates, I quickly say, “We don’t have to go there, though. I’m happy with whatever you want to do.”

He brings my hand to his mouth and kisses it. “If Inferno is where you want to go, then that’s where I’m taking you.”

I’m about to ask if he’s ever been, but he says, “I hate to bring it up, but I won’t be able to see you tomorrow morning. I’ve got some stuff I need to take care of.”

“That’s okay. I actually have an eye appointment after work, so I wouldn’t have had much time anyway.”

Once we get to the library, I give him directions to my house, getting a little more nervous the shorter the distance gets. He parks against the curb near the bus stop, and even though I know he can’t see my house, just knowing how close he is to my dad is making my hands sweat. My eyes keep scanning around, making sure I don’t see Lyle on his motorcycle, but the road is deserted and quiet. I grab the coveralls from my bag, and he doesn’t comment when I unbuckle and start to slip them on. He does give a soft laugh when I have to awkwardly wiggle my ass into them before putting my arms through and zipping it up.

Before I can tell Valeri thanks for the amazing morning, he’s cupping my face and pulling me closer, pressing his lips to mine in a hungry kiss that immediately wakes every part of me back up. All my fears drip away when he’s near, and even though I know how dangerous that is, I can’t bring myself to care. Instead, I kiss him back, losing myself in him once more.

# Chapter 6

## Valeri

Evie's soft whimpers fill the car, and I wonder if she has any idea what that sound does to me. My cock is painfully hard and straining at my jeans in a desperate attempt to be set free, and it's maddening. I've never in my life just made out with a girl. Even as a teenager, it was older women who showed an interest in me, and they were more than happy to just get right down to the sex. As frustrating as my hard-on is, I'm realizing it's an exquisite kind of torture that I'm quickly becoming addicted to, or maybe I'm just a masochist and I want to see how much pain I can take.

"I have to go," she whispers, breaking our kiss. Her hands clutch at my shirt, and her breaths are fast little pants that I feel against my lips. God, I want to eat her up. I want her laid bare so I can take my time and taste every goddamn inch of her, and then I want to claim her with my cock, knowing mine will be the only one she ever has.

"Thanks for going to the beach with me today, *lapochka*, and for using my cock to make yourself come."

She lets out a mortified groan and whispers, "Oh my god."

I laugh and kiss her again, cupping the back of her neck and keeping her close to me. "Don't be embarrassed. You looked so fucking sexy, and you can use me anytime you want, but I want something in return."

"What?" she whispers.

"Promise me you won't make yourself come without me." I slide my hand down her coveralls and cup her pussy in a

possessive grip, pulling another whimper from her. “I’m a jealous man, sweetheart, and it would break my heart if I thought you were making those sweet little moans without me there to hear them.”

I nibble along her jawline before giving her earlobe a soft bite. “Can you do that for me? Can you keep your hands off that sweet pussy of yours?”

“Yes,” she whispers, but it turns into a moan when I cup her harder, letting my fingers rub against her clit.

“Good girl.”

The sound she makes and the way her body trembles at my words makes me wonder if she just had a mini orgasm. I smile and run my tongue over her ear. “You okay, *lapochka*?”

“Yes.” Her voice is shaky, and I can hear the need in it. Curious to know how much it would take, I give her another rub, smiling when she immediately rocks her hips and lets out a soft moan. She breathes my name out, and fuck do I like the sound of it on her tongue.

“Give me one more, baby. Be a good girl and come for me again.” I’m so fucking desperate to slide my hand into her panties, to feel the wet heat of her pussy against my skin, but I resist the urge, not wanting to make her uncomfortable. She runs her hands through my hair, pulling me to her mouth so she can kiss me, working her hips even harder and then moaning when I press my thumb right where she needs me and increase the friction, sending her over the edge again.

I swallow her screams, working my hand while her body bucks against me and she gives my tongue a suck that has my cock producing more pre-cum than I ever thought possible. When a shiver runs through her, I loosen the hold I have on her and slow my hand down, knowing I could so easily give her another, but I resist. For now anyway.

She smiles against my lips and then gives a soft, lazy laugh. “You’re ridiculously good at that.”

“Your body is very responsive to my touch. I’d give you another if you didn’t have to go.”

“I’m not so sure I could handle another.”

“One day I’m going to test that theory.”

Her eyes run over me like she’s trying to memorize every detail of this moment, and I know exactly how she feels because I’m doing the same damn thing. How the fuck am I going to let her go, knowing she’s going to be in the house with that abusive jackass?

She reaches a hand up and runs her finger over the jaw that I’m currently tensing. “Stop worrying about me. I’ll be fine, and I’ll see you on my birthday.”

“I will worry, so text me often.” I give her pussy one last squeeze before reaching up to cup her face. “Promise me you will text me if he hurts you again. I’m serious, Evie. I don’t care what time it is. Text me.”

“I will. Please try not to worry.”

I caress her skin with my thumb. “That’s not possible. I feel very protective of you.”

She smiles and gives me another quick kiss. “I really need to go.”

“I’ll miss you, Evie,” I tell her, and I mean every word of it. She stays on my mind when I’m not with her, haunting my thoughts, and that’s not something I’m used to.

Her blush is adorable when she says, “I’ll miss you too,” before opening the door and stepping out.

She gives me a cute wave before ducking her head and running down the sidewalk, no doubt eager to sneak inside before her dad wakes up or before I can change my mind and drive past the house that I already know she lives in. Once she’s turned the corner, I get out of my car and follow her. The closer she gets to her house, the more she caves in on herself, and when she sees the motorcycle parked next to her dad’s truck, she grows even smaller, hugging her arms across her chest with her head tucked so low I’m surprised she can see to walk. After she goes inside, I stay where I’m at, watching the house and waiting for her to text me.

*I'm here. They were still sleeping it off, so you can stop worrying. ;)*

I already know I'm not going to like the answer before I even ask the simple question. *They?*

*My dad's friend is here. Lyle's a creep, but at least he's passed out. I'll be fine. I'm just going to lock my door and by the time I wake up, he'll be gone.*

I'm surprised my phone doesn't break from how hard I'm clutching it. I can't tolerate her staying here too much longer. It's going to give me a fucking heart attack.

*He's enough of a creep that you need to lock your bedroom door? Has he hurt you before?*

Her response is slow, and I've already promised myself I'm going to kill this Lyle fucker before it even comes in.

*No, he's just kind of a pushy perv. Apparently he and my dad have come to some sort of crazy conclusion that I'm going to eventually end up with him. It's insane.*

I take a slow breath, forcing myself to walk back to my car before I go inside her house and kill Lyle and her dad, which will only scare the hell out of Evie. It takes several minutes before I can manage to type out a response that won't freak her the hell out.

I settle on, *I think Lyle and I need to have a talk.*

*Please don't. It's really fine, Valeri. I rarely see him.* After a few seconds, she adds, *I had a great time today. Thanks for everything.*

I know she's changing the subject, and I let her for now because I know she's not ready for me to go in there and haul her out. It's definitely coming, though. My heart can't take this kind of worry.

*I had a great time too. My favorite part was when you came with my name on your lips, all three times. ;)*

I can easily picture her blushing as she reads that, and before she can respond, I add, *Don't forget that you're not allowed to touch my pussy.*



*Yours, huh?*

*Yes, mine.*

*You're making me blush again.*

*I know. I start my car, ignoring my angry, frustrated cock. Get some sleep, beautiful, and text me when you wake up.*

*Okay, goodnight, Valeri.*

*Goodnight, baby.*

Turning around, I drive back the way I came, heading to my own place so I can get a few hours of sleep before I need to meet my brothers. When things are going well, the Bratva can pretty much run itself, but we're expecting another shipment of weapons in tonight, and after what happened last time, we're bumping up security.

When I walk inside, the building manager comes rushing out to greet me. Someone must've told him about the Lisa encounter. He's probably terrified I'm going to move and lose him a shit ton of money or that I'll kill him. The man isn't stupid. He knows who I am.

"Mr. Medvedev, I'm so sorry about the unfortunate incident the other night. I just wanted to personally assure you that it won't ever happen again. I've had a talk with Bill about it."

I stop and cut in. "I hope Bill isn't in any trouble. It wasn't his fault she snuck by. He was helping one of the residents with her wheelchair."

"Of course not, sir," he quickly says, and I swear to god, I could probably tell him to kiss my right ass cheek and he'd do it right here in the goddamn foyer.

"Good." I turn and walk to the private elevator. "Is Andrew around? It's time to change the code."

"I'll go get him," he quickly says, racing off to do my bidding. That man really needs to get himself a set of balls.

A few minutes later, Andrew comes walking over, rolling his eyes at the manager who's following behind him like a

little puppy. Andrew does most of the maintenance around here, and he's one of the most laidback people I've ever met. He's also not that much taller than Evie, and he doesn't seem to give a rat's ass about it.

"That's all I needed. Thanks," I say, dismissing the manager without a second thought.

After he's gone, Andrew laughs and says, "That man has no pride."

"No, he does not. Considering how far he's got his nose up my ass, I'm surprised I can even walk."

Andrew laughs and sets to work. Once he's canceled the last code, he waves me over and turns his back so I can punch the code without him seeing. I do zero, five, one, eight, May 18<sup>th</sup>, the day I first met Evie. Evidently, I'm turning into a romantic.

"I'm done," I tell him, stepping back so he can lock the panel back up.

"You're all set, man." He gives me a friendly smile and starts to walk off. "See you next week."

I get on the elevator and then take a quick shower before crashing for several hours. When I wake, the first thing I do is check my phone. Stretching out on the bed, I rest a hand behind my head and smile when I see several messages from Evie. I scroll up to the top so I can read them in order.

*Morning, Valeri! I hope you're having a good day. I miss you already.*

*Maybe I shouldn't say that. Is that too much? I don't know. The truth is I really have no clue what I'm doing. All I know is I met a gorgeous man who's also kind and funny and he made me orgasm three times and now I can't think straight.*

I laugh out loud at her rambling texts and keep scrolling.

*Now I'm pretty sure I'm texting too much. For some reason I keep thinking that texting again will fix it, but that's just making it worse, isn't it? Now I'm the crazy girl who won't just shut the hell up.*

I check the times and see that she manages to wait five minutes before the next batch of texts came in.

*Are you really not seeing anyone else? How is possible that you're single?*

*Okay, I'm going to go take a shower. At least I'll have to put the phone down to do that. I'm really sorry about all the texts. God, this is embarrassing.*

The last text came in twenty minutes ago, and I smile as I type out a response.

*Morning, Evie. Don't apologize for all the texts. I loved waking up to them. By the way, I'm not single. I have an adorable girlfriend who blushes every time I look at her, comes so sweetly every time I touch her pussy and call her my good girl, and sends me long rambling texts that always make me smile when I read them. ;)*

Her response is immediate. *That's because my boyfriend is so damn good with his hands.*

I laugh and type on my way to the bathroom. *I only used my hand once, sweetheart. ;)*

Easily picturing her blush as she reads that, I set the phone down and take a quick shower. I briefly think about jerking off to relieve some of this damn pressure, but I'm not allowing her to come when I'm not around, so it only seems fair to deny myself as well. Although, she did get to come three times yesterday, so I guess it's not the same thing at all. My cock is screaming at me for some relief, but I turn off the water and ignore it. Maybe I'm a masochist after all because I'm starting to like the constant need, the feeling that I'm going to lose my goddamn mind if I don't get inside her. It's addicting. *She's addicting.*

While I brush my teeth I send her another text, asking her for a photo.

*Why?*

*Because I don't have one of you, and I want one.*

I swear I can hear her sigh through the phone. The photo that comes in makes me laugh. She's facing the camera, but she's rolling her eyes, and her cheeks are a pretty shade of red because she's embarrassed but doing it anyway. I'm always amazed at the photos women will send me, but I've never been sent one like this, and I love it.

*That's perfect. Thank you. You're so beautiful, Evie, even when you're rolling your eyes at me.*

*I want one of you. It's only fair.*

I hurry up and take one, but instead of rolling my eyes, I stare right at the camera and smile. My hair's still wet, and all I'm wearing is a towel tied at the waist, so I make sure to only show a small sliver of chest. I don't want her asking about all my tattoos and scars. I'm still not sure how to break the news that I'm a Bratva boss, and I sure as hell don't want to do it over a text.

*Damn. I kind of feel like I should have to pay you money for that shot.*

I laugh out loud and toss my towel aside before walking back into my room naked. I call her while I grab a pair of boxer briefs, and when she answers, her hello is a breathy whisper.

"Is it okay that I called?"

"Yeah, I just can't talk loud. Thanks for the photo."

"Thanks for mine. I just wanted to hear your voice before I have to leave."

"Where are you going?"

I grab a pair of jeans and say, "I need to do some things with my brothers. Nothing crazy important or anything." While I tuck my gun in the back of my jeans, I smile and ask, "So have you been a good girl and kept your hands off that perfect pussy?"

The sound of her taking in a quick breath makes me laugh. "I can feel you blushing, Evie."

“I haven’t touched myself,” she admits, “but you make it difficult when you send me photos where it’s obvious you’re shirtless and wet.”

“Good. I’d hate to make it too easy on you.”

“You’re definitely not.”

Laughing, I say, “I’m about to make it a little harder. Slide a hand into your pants, Evie.”

“What?” her breathy question has my cock twitching in my pants.

“You heard me. I want your hand on your bare pussy, and I want it now, baby.”

I hear her breath hitch and then the barest of moans.

“Are you wet for me?”

“Yes,” she whispers.

“Good, now press a finger against your slit and slowly slide it in, but just one finger.”

“Fuck,” she whimpers as I snake a hand into my own pants to lightly stroke myself.

“Tell me what you feel like.”

Her breaths are coming faster, and her voice is strained when she says, “Hot and wet, so fucking wet, Valeri.” She lets out another moan that has me gripping my cock even harder. “And tight.”

“Jesus Christ,” I growl, wondering why the fuck I’m torturing myself like this. “Slide your finger out and bring it to your clit. Are you there?”

“Yes.”

“You get four rubs, baby, but only four, and don’t you dare fucking come.”

Her gasp is sexy as fuck.

“Ready?” I ask her.

“Yes.”

“One,” I count, stroking the length of myself as she rubs along her sensitive clit. “Two.” I hear her gasp and say, “Three.” Her breaths are fast enough for me to warn, “Fight it, Evie. You’re not allowed to come when I’m not there.”

“Mm-hmm,” she moans, and I wait until I hear her take a deep, steadying breath.

“Last one, baby. Four.”

“Fuck,” she groans, and there’s so much frustration in it that I can’t help but laugh, even though I’m feeling the pain too.

“Hand off your pussy,” I tell her, “and lick your finger clean like a good girl.”

I hear the wet sounds of her obedience and let out a pained groan of my own. “God, you’re perfect, such a good girl,” I praise her, smiling when she lets out another moan at my words.

“I’m going to be thinking about that all day.”

“That was the point,” I say with a laugh. “I’d hate for you to forget about me.”

“Impossible,” she says, making my smile grow even as I tuck my painfully hard cock back in my pants.

I hurry up and put a T-shirt on and grab my boots before walking into the kitchen. “I’ll miss seeing you in the morning, but I’m excited to have tomorrow night with you. Don’t forget to ask Jerry for the night off.”

“I won’t forget, and I’ll miss you too.”

“I need to get going, but text me later and be careful.”

“Okay. You be careful too.”

“Always, beautiful.”

After we hang up, I do something I never thought I’d do. I go through and clean out my phone, deleting the women in my contacts and all the photos I’ve been sent, not feeling even slightly apprehensive about doing it. My cock has finally calmed down, and none of the women in the photos even make

it twinge. All I can think about is how awful I'd feel if Evie ever saw any of it. I can't erase my past, but that doesn't mean I want to throw it in her face. Once it's scrubbed, I grab my keys and leave.

It doesn't take long to get to Vasily's. I nod at the guards when they open the gate for me, and when I knock on the door, I start laughing at the sound of Dmitri's voice yelling my name. As soon as Nina opens the door, he comes running at me, throwing his little arms around my neck and squealing when I pick him up and spin him around.

"Uncle Valeri!" he yells in Russian.

I hold his squirming three-year-old body and kiss his cheek while Nina laughs at his excitement. Keeping a tight hold on him, I pull her into a side hug and kiss the top of her head, noticing the small baby bump that seems to get a little bigger every time I see her.

"How are you doing? Still feeling okay?"

"I'm good. The morning sickness has gone away, thank god." She smiles up at me and laughs. "Vasily showed me the picture. Who is she? We're all dying to know."

I groan and look at Dmitri. "This family can't keep a secret, Dima. You remember that when you start dating."

He just laughs, and when I set him down, he runs off with Ruslan, the large Tibetan Mastiff that Vasily rescued when he was just a pup. I follow Nina into the kitchen and smile when she doesn't even ask and just starts fixing me a plate of leftovers.

"Have you got it out of him yet?" Vasily asks, walking in and pulling his wife in for a kiss while laying a protective hand on her belly.

"My interrogation techniques aren't as good as yours."

Vasily turns her around and wraps an arm around her upper chest, holding her tightly against him. "Come on, little brother, out with it. Who's the girl with glasses that you had breakfast with? Ilya and Nikolai said she was very sweet and definitely not some girl you just picked up at a club."

“Sounds like you guys have it all figured out already,” I say, laughing at the look Nina gives me.

“Please tell us. We’ve been dying for you to meet someone. At least tell us something about her.”

Knowing they’re never going to stop until they get some info, I take the plate of food from the microwave and grab a fork. “Her name is Evie Finch, she’ll be twenty-one tomorrow, and I met her because she accidentally rear-ended me.”

Nina squeals and claps her hands. “That’s so romantic!”

I laugh. “Hitting my brand-new Aston Martin is romantic?”

“No, the fact that you didn’t even care that she hit it is what’s so romantic. Even telling the story, you’re smiling and not at all pissed about it.”

“Very true,” Vasily says, eyeing me like he can read my every thought. “This is very unlike him. So when do we get to meet her?”

“I just met her a few days ago, and she knows nothing about the Medvedev family.” I groan and lean against their island. “I asked her where she wanted me to take her for her birthday, and she mentioned that she’s never been to Inferno. I could tell she really wanted to go, and I couldn’t say no.” I groan and ignore their amused faces. “What the hell am I going to do?”

“Invite us to come along so we can help,” Nina says, making Vasily laugh.

“You see what a smart woman I married?” He kisses her cheek, and I have to remind myself that this is the same brother I’ve seen gut a man on more than one occasion.

“She is very smart,” I agree, “but don’t you think it might freak Evie out to be bombarded by everyone?”

“We can be subtle,” Nina assures me.

“Since when?”



She laughs and smacks my arm. “I’m serious. We’ll just be there, with Volodya and Maddie of course.”

“Of course,” I say around a mouthful of food.

She ignores my sarcasm. “And we’ll just happen to run into you. I swear we won’t be invasive. We’ll give you your space. Won’t we?” She tilts her head to look up at Vasily.

He gives her a big smile and kisses her. “Absolutely.”

She doesn’t see the shit-eating grin he gives me. My brothers have been teasing me about finding someone. I admit I’ve given them hell about turning into big softies for their wives, but the truth is I love my sisters-in-law, and I’m thrilled they’re so happy. I’m about to eat a huge fucking slice of humble pie, though, and I oddly don’t give a fuck.

“Hurry up and eat that,” Vasily says. “We need to get going.”

I shovel in the last of the food, putting my plate in the sink as I holler out in Russian, “Dmitri, come give me a hug goodbye!”

He comes running back to me with Ruslan right behind him. His hands are filled with building blocks, and the big smile on his face is infectious. I love being an uncle. I scoop him up again and tell him I love him and that I’ll be back to see him again soon.

“Maybe he’ll bring a friend next time,” Nina says, because her Russian is really getting damn good.

Vasily laughs and smacks her ass before lifting her up in a big hug. I turn my back on them to give them some privacy and walk with Dmitri into the other room. He shows me what he’s making with his blocks, and when his parents walk in a few minutes later, Nina’s hair is messed up and she’s as red as Evie gets. Vasily just looks smug.

“That’s fast even for you,” I tell him and then laugh at the look he gives me.

“Keep it up, little brother. You’re going to need my help Friday night to run interference.”

He's not wrong. I've picked up a lot of women at that club, and my hope is that they'll all stay home this weekend. I should've told Evie I'd take her somewhere else, but I couldn't bring myself to tell her no. Hopefully that won't come back to bite me in the ass.

After we say our goodbyes, I follow Vasily down to his boathouse. The sun has already set by the time we get on his boat and he steers us further out, but there's still enough light for me to see the stretch of beach that I took Evie to. The memory of her grinding against my cock makes my damn mouth water. I'm going to have to rethink this whole no masturbation thing.

"I'm glad you met someone," Vasily says, speeding the boat up while I sit in one of the chairs and stretch my legs out.

"Her dad hits her, and I'm going to have to kill him at some point."

"Yeah, good luck with that. Nina wouldn't let me kill her dad, even though I still say the bastard deserved it."

"I have to ask permission?"

He laughs. "I'm just saying that she may never forgive you if you kill him. You can always hurt him, though. That'll make you feel a little bit better."

"Well, I'm definitely getting her the fuck out of there as soon as I think she'll let me. Her dad is an abusive drunk, and his friend is a pervert who likes to hit on her. The only reason she's still there is because I don't want to terrify her by kidnapping her and bringing her to my place."

"It worked for Volodya," he says with a laugh.

"True."

"Just don't do anything crazy, and if you do decide to take him out, bring one of us with you."

"I know I'm the youngest, but you've got to stop worrying about me so damn much."

He smiles and ruffles my hair like he used to do when we were little. "Never going to happen, little brother."

I find it impossible to be angry at my brothers, and they take full advantage of it. I do push his hand away, though, even if I am smiling when I do it.

“So tell me what’s going on tonight.”

“Volodya and some of the other guys are already there, watching for the shipment, and we have shooters on the rooftops to make sure no one else decides to join us.”

“Still no idea who it was that interfered?”

“Not yet.”

When we get closer to the docks, an old, rundown part of the city where you’re more likely to get stabbed in one of the back alleys than make it out unscathed, a wave of déjà vu hits me. This is almost the exact same spot where I was shot last year. Vasily slows the boat down, letting us drift closer as we both scan the area. Most of the lights aren’t working, but there’s still enough of them to allow us to see the crates that are being unloaded from the one and only docked boat.

Vasily checks his phone. “Volodya’s men are unloading the shipment. He says everything looks good so far.”

Grabbing a pair of night vision binoculars, I scan the water around us, making sure there aren’t any other boats creeping around. The water is clear, so I turn my attention back to land. The boat is nearly unloaded, and as soon as it’s empty, I watch Volodya hand the dealer a large duffel bag stuffed full of money. Once the boat leaves, I see movement near one of the vacant buildings on the right.

“Right side,” I tell Vasily. “Two men sneaking around the building.”

“Fuck,” Vasily growls, sending the message to Volodya as he steers us to the dock. As soon as we’re close enough, he tosses the rope to Ilya, who quickly ties us off. We step onto the dock as Volodya and his men take off running.

Grabbing my gun, I follow after them with Vasily right behind me while the others start piling the new weapons into the three black SUVs we have parked and ready to go. Racing around the corner, I stop short when I see Volodya with a man

pressed up against the building and a knife at his throat. I recognize the blade. It's a painful-looking thing with a serrated edge—my brother's favorite and one I've seen him use to end many lives. This sorry bastard is about to add his name to the list.

"The other guy took off," Volodya says. "Nikolai and Oleg went after him."

As if on cue, I see movement further down and soon they're walking up with a man between them. His hands are already tied behind his back.

Vasily walks up to him as Oleg and Nikolai stop, letting the man fall to his knees. "Anyone else here tonight?"

"No, just us," the man on the ground says. He's trying to act like he's not scared, but he definitely is. His wide eyes dart around, and he keeps looking at the blade pressed to his friend's throat.

Vasily calls one of the shooters on the roof and asks him in Russian what's going on. After he hangs up, he tells us that Volodya started running after them right as they were spotted and that there were only two men. Switching to English, he asks, "Who do you work for?"

"We don't work for anyone," the guy says like a real dumbass. "We were just coming down here to buy some drugs."

The only person surprised when my brother pulls his gun out is the idiot on his knees. The shot is quiet since he's using a silencer, but even if it had been loud, no one in this part of the city is going to be calling the cops. The guy against the wall groans when he looks over and sees the large hole in his friend's head.

"Fuck, man," he says in a shaky voice. "He was telling the truth."

I laugh and shake my head at his stupidity. "We only need one of you to torture for information," I explain to him because the guy obviously needs some help. "Unfortunately

for you, you're the only one left. This will go a lot easier for you if you start telling the truth."

Oleg and Nikolai drag the body off to dump it in the ocean while I walk over to tie up the man's hands. His neck is bloody because Volodya keeps his knives really fucking sharp, but it's a superficial wound, and he won't be dying anytime soon, no matter how much he may wish it.

"Heard about your girl," Volodya says in Russian. "I'm looking forward to meeting her tomorrow night. Maddie's going to be so excited."

I look over at a grinning Vasily. "You two are like a couple of gossiping old ladies."

They both laugh while the guy with his hands tied looks at us like we're a bunch of psychos. He's not completely wrong. We drag him into the empty building and get to work. Turns out they weren't just there to buy drugs. Evidently we have a motorcycle gang who thought it would be a good idea to steal some of our weapons.

I smack the bloody, beaten face to try and wake him back up. "Stay with me, John," I tell him. "You can't die just yet. You still haven't told us where we can find them."

He moans something incoherent as blood bubbles up from his mouth and then his whole body tenses.

"Fuck," I say. "He's having a heart attack."

"Goddamn it," Volodya mutters, pulling his knife from John's thigh, but the man is too far gone to even feel it.

"I should've let the other guy live. It's hard to detect a weak heart, though," Vasily says in his own defense. "He'd looked healthy enough."

"People don't do enough cardio nowadays," I say. "You gotta keep that heart healthy."

When we drag him out, it's after midnight, and all I can think about is Evie. I wonder what she's doing right now, and I decide on the spot that I'm going to pay her a surprise visit at the library. A couple of the guys take the body from us to go

weigh it down and dump it. Looking down, I see blood on my hands and arms, but there's just a little bit of blood splatter on my clothes, very easy to miss if you're not looking for it. I walk to the docks and lean down so I can scrub the blood off me. When it's washed off, I stand back up and face them, shaking my arms to get the water off.

"You can't tell I just tortured a guy, right?"

My brothers look at me and laugh. "You're going to have to tell her what you do," Volodya says.

"I will, but not tonight."

"Don't wait too long before you spring it on her," Vasily warns. "The sooner you know if she can handle it, the better."

"She can handle it," I tell them. I don't add that she has no choice because I'm not letting her go. She'll learn to be okay with it. She'll have to.

Ilya and Nikolai take the boat back with Vasily while Volodya drives me back to get my car. His '69 cherry-red Camaro is in pristine condition, and he laughs as he speeds down the road. Once on the highway, he weaves through traffic, getting us back to Vasily's in record time. Before he drops me off, he smacks my shoulder and says, "See you tomorrow night."

"Don't make me regret telling you."

"You didn't tell me, you little shit. I had to hear it first from Ilya and Nikolai and then from Vasily." He raises a dark brow at me. "You might want to tell me something no one else knows before I start feeling left out."

I sigh because even though he's joking, there's some truth to it. We've always been close, and I would have told my brothers about her myself if we hadn't been ambushed at the diner.

"She works at the downtown library. She's a night janitor."

"She's a hard worker," he says, and I can hear the approval in his voice. "Marry her, Valeri."

I laugh, but he doesn't join in. "I'm being fucking serious. Is she sweet?"

"Very."

"She's nice and willing to work a job that most women would turn their noses up at, and she's managed to catch your eye and keep it for longer than an hour. Remember how you told me Maddie was the woman for me because she was still breathing after being in my company for more than a day?"

"Yes," I say with a laugh. "I still stand by that."

"Yeah, well it's the same thing with Evie. Women don't make an impression on you. They never have. You fuck them and forget them. It's been that way since your fucking balls dropped. This girl has, though. That means something."

"Yeah, I know," I tell him, opening the car door. "I'm going to go sneak into her work and see her."

He laughs and drives off with a wave. I make a quick stop to grab a bouquet of pink roses from an all-night store and then head straight for the library. It's surprisingly easy to sneak into, and I add that to the list of reasons of why she needs to quit this job. I'm just hitting the main area when I look over and see an older man watching me.

"You must be Jerry," I say, giving him a friendly smile.

His eyes run over my tattoos and the roses I'm holding as he steps closer. "You must be the reason Evie is coming into work smiling."

"I'm Valeri," I say, holding out my hand. "And I'm glad she's smiling."

"Evie's a good kid and one of the sweetest people I've ever met," he says, pointing a finger at me. "And you may be younger and in way better shape than me, but I promise I will find a way to kill you if you hurt her."

I smile at him and nod my head. Jerry is the only man to threaten my life and live to tell about it, but he'll never know that. "She's lucky to have you as a friend, and I will never hurt her, so you don't need to worry about trying to kill me."

He studies me for a second before deciding I'm telling the truth. Going back to his mop, he says, "She's on the second floor tonight."

"Thanks, Jerry," I say, already walking to the stairs. I take them two at a time, eager to see my girl again.



# Chapter 7

## *Evie*

I get to a steamy part in my audiobook, but all it's doing is making me think about Valeri and how good it had felt when he'd cupped my pussy like he owned it and then made me come so fucking easily. I finish cleaning up the last row of books and turn, nearly having a heart attack when I see Valeri leaning casually against the wall at the end of the aisle, staring at me with a heated look that has me sucking in a quick breath of air.

The pink roses in his hand are gorgeous, and when he curls his finger at me, beckoning me over, my feet start moving automatically. I have just enough time to think about how awful I must look before I'm standing right in front of him. His smile is pure sin when he drags a finger along my cheek before pulling out one of my earbuds.

"Oh wait," I quickly say, but it's too late. He's already putting it in his ear, lifting a dark brow at me when he's thrown right into the explicit sex scene.

"Aren't you full of surprises," he says, giving me a wink. He listens as the man in the story lays the woman down and spreads her thighs wide before burying his head between her legs. Valeri leans closer and ghosts his lips over mine. "Listen, *lapochka*, listen to everything he's doing to her, because it's exactly what I want to do to you."

"Damn," I whisper.

He smiles and cups the back of my head, fisting my ponytail and tilting my head back even more. Giving my

bottom lip a soft suck, he lets his teeth graze over my skin, and when the man slides his tongue into the woman's pussy, Valeri slides his tongue between my lips, pulling a moan from me as my knees grow weak. I listen to the woman climax in the story, but all I can think about is getting closer to Valeri. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I hike a leg up, smiling when he immediately cups his free hand under my ass and lifts me with ease. I cling to him, not caring if it makes me look needy or desperate or whatever the fuck else. I want him. I want him more than I've ever wanted anything in my life.

Pulling back, I take out my earbud and grab his too before stuffing them in my pocket. "I just want you," I say, cupping his face and looking into the green eyes that are now so familiar to me.

He smiles and grabs the roses he brought me. "Sorry they're a little squished, but that was one hell of a hello kiss."

"They're so beautiful," I tell him, bringing them closer so I can smell them. "No one's ever bought me flowers."

"I've never bought anyone flowers, so it's a first for me too."

"Good," I say, making him laugh. I know I'm going to get very few firsts with a man like Valeri, so I'm going to cherish every single one of them. When I tighten my legs around his waist and lean closer so I can run my tongue over his top lip, he lets out a groan and squeezes my ass.

"You drive me crazy, Evie," he whispers against my lips. "You're all I can fucking think about."

"It's the coveralls," I tell him. "They drive the men crazy."

He gives a deep laugh, and the sound of it has quickly become one of my most favorite things. "Other men better not be looking at you, but you do look adorable in them."

I run my fingers over his stubbled jaw, kissing the dimple when it makes an appearance and then slowly working my way to his ear. His breath hitches when I run my tongue over his earlobe before giving it a suck.

“I think you’re trying to kill me,” he groans when I rock my hips, desperate to grind against something.

“You’re the one who showed up at my work looking all sexy,” I remind him. “This is really all your fault.”

“I did show up, but I also caught you listening to your book, so something tells me you were already riled up before I even got here.”

“Only because it made me think about you,” I tell him.

“Oh yeah? What were you thinking about?”

I kiss his neck, hungry for the taste of him. “I was thinking about how much I liked it when you cupped my pussy like you owned it.”

He fists my ponytail again and pulls me back so he can see me. His eyes are darker, the pupils blown, and the look on his face is one of pure, raw need.

“I do own it, Evie. Every fucking inch of you is mine and only mine.”

If anyone else said that to me, I’d be running as fast as my short legs would take me, but in Valeri’s arms, all I can do is nod in agreement, because every part of me is already his, even if he hasn’t taken it yet.

“There’s a study cubicle in the corner,” I say, pointing behind him.

He gives me a wink and carries me to the small room. When he shuts the door, there’s enough light coming in from the main room for us to see each other. He sets me down on the table and kisses me hard. I set the flowers aside and tug off my glasses because they constantly get in the way and then start to unzip my coveralls. When I begin to pull them off my upper body, he groans and breaks the kiss.

“What are you doing, *lapochka*?”

“I don’t know,” I admit, because I’ve been clueless and running on nothing but instinct ever since he first pressed his lips to mine. “I just want you closer.”

When I've pulled them down to my waist, he groans and slides his hands down my body, gripping my hips and tilting me back before cupping my pussy like he knows I love. His fingers drag along my jeans, sending shivers of pleasure all through me, but it's not enough.

"More," I moan, reaching down to unbutton my jeans.

"Fuck," he groans, watching me unzip my pants. Without a word, he scoots the chair out and picks me up, sitting down with me in his lap so my back is pressed against his chest. I feel the hard length of him beneath my ass and rock my hips. "You feel what you do to me? You're about to make me lose my goddamn mind, baby."

He slides a hand across my stomach and slowly drags a finger along the top of my panties, just barely dipping inside. Goosebumps rise all over my skin, and my heart is racing so fast I can feel every damn beat. I watch his fingers, waiting for them to dip lower, and when he doesn't, I hook my thighs outside his, spreading my legs even wider and let out a frustrated huff of air.

"Is this what you want?" he whispers against my ear.

"Yes, please yes," I beg, feeling him smile against my ear.

He slowly slides his hand down, touching me where no one else ever has, and the sensation has me gasping and reaching down to clutch at his thighs for support.

"Jesus fucking Christ," he groans when he's cupping my bare pussy. There's nothing between us, and as much as I'm dying for him to slide a finger inside, he doesn't. He just cups me tightly, keeping a finger pressed against my slit, and the sensation is maddening and exquisite and fucking perfect.

"You're so wet, baby." His voice sounds strained, and his accent is thicker than usual.

"Please, Valeri," I beg.

His other hand slides under my T-shirt and runs over my stomach, grazing my skin in a featherlight touch that I swear nearly pushes me right over the edge. I rock my hips, trying

like hell to get myself off. He laughs and gives my earlobe a soft suck.

“My sweet girl is always so hungry and eager to come.” He gives me a soft bite that pulls a mewling sound from me that under any other circumstance would leave me embarrassed. Now I just don’t give a fuck. All I can think about is how damn good this feels and how badly I need more.

“Please,” I beg again, trying to rock even harder.

He gives a soft laugh and bites the crook of my neck while slowly dragging his finger over my clit.

“Oh fuck,” I moan, and right when I’m about to explode, he stops. I let out a frustrated groan and grip his thighs harder.

“Patience, sweetheart. I’m enjoying this way too much to rush it.”

He keeps teasing me, bringing me right to the edge and then pulling back until I’m shaking and my body is so desperate for release that I’m on the verge of tears.

“I can’t take any more,” I pant. “Please, Valeri.”

“God, I love watching you come undone,” he groans. “I’m afraid to slide into you. I’m afraid that once I feel the wet heat of your tight virgin pussy I’ll lose all control.”

“Do it,” I beg, spreading my legs even wider.

He groans and slowly presses his finger even harder against my soaking wet slit, parting my lips and delving inside. “Fuck, baby, you’re going to be the end of me.”

My head falls back as he slowly starts to finger-fuck me, hitting my clit with each stroke, and when I start to come, he turns my face so he can kiss me through it. My hips rock and buck against him while my tongue finds his and I moan his name, clenching around his finger and feeling drunk on pure ecstasy. Wanting him closer, I turn my upper body as much as I can, wrapping my arms around his neck and kissing him harder while he works my clit, keeping the orgasm going far longer than I ever thought possible.

By the time the aftershocks start, I'm shaking and more than a little in love with him. I'm in big, big trouble. I've fallen too hard and too fast, but there's not a goddamn thing I can do about it. I'm completely lost to him.

"Valeri," I whisper, resting my forehead against his. His green eyes are hooded with desire, and I know if he asked me to, I'd happily give him my virginity right here in this tiny study cubicle.

"Yes, *lapochka*?" he says in a lazy voice, softly rimming my clit with his finger as another aftershock runs through me.

Instead of humiliating myself by declaring my love for him, I say, "I want to do something for you."

"You already do plenty for me."

"I'm being serious. It's not fair. I want to make you feel good too."

"You already do, baby." He gives me a wink and slowly slides his hand out of my pants, bringing his wet fingers to his mouth. I watch him suck them clean, surprised when he closes his eyes and lets out a groan before saying something in Russian and pressing his lips to mine in a hungry kiss. His tongue presses inside, running over every inch of my mouth, and when I give it a suck, he growls and gives my bottom lip a hard enough bite to sting.

"Fuck!" He pulls back with a gasp, putting some distance between us and trying to get control of himself. Tightening his grip on me, he kisses my cheek and says, "I'm sorry if I hurt you. Just give me a second. You test my control like no one else ever has, Evie."

"You didn't hurt me. I liked it," I tell him, and then I wiggle out of his grasp and kneel between his thighs.

"Evie," he warns when I lean closer and reach for the button of his jeans. I notice a few red dots of paint, and I smile because it makes me feel a lot better to know that I'm not the only one in this relationship who's walking around in old clothes that have a few stains on them.

“I want to do something for you,” I tell him, ignoring the warning look he’s giving me and instead eyeing the large cock that’s straining against his pants. Good god, the man is huge! Enthralled, I run my fingers over him, meeting his eyes when he sucks in a quick breath.

He cups my cheek and runs his thumb over my lips, groaning when I part my lips and suck him in. “Goddamn, baby, I’m only human.”

I slowly pull my head back, sucking his thumb the whole time until he pops free. “I want to do this,” I tell him. “Please let me.” I reach up and slowly pull his zipper down, and then meet his eyes for another embarrassing confession. “I’ve never done this before, so I should probably warn you that it might be terrible.”

“Impossible,” he says, cupping my face and leaning closer. “Are you sure you want to do this? Don’t do it because you think you have to, because I’m fine, Evie. I promise.”

“I want to do this. I want to do a lot more than this, but I didn’t think you’d agree to that.”

He smiles and kisses me gently. “You’re right about that. No way in hell am I fucking you for the first time in a tiny cubicle at your work. I want all night with you and more room, and I don’t want to worry about Jerry calling the cops because of the noises you’d be making.”

My face heats up at the mention of my coworker who’s blissfully ignorant of what all we’re doing up here. “That’s probably for the best,” I whisper against his lips. “Please don’t laugh at me if I do this all wrong.”

“Evie, I would never laugh at you, and knowing you’ve never done this before but that you willingly got on your knees for me has me so close to losing control that I’m going to be using all my willpower to not come all over your sweet face as soon as your lips touch me.”

My heart speeds up even more at his words, and when he reaches a hand into his jeans and maneuvers his cock out, my mouth drops open. I may not have firsthand experience with



dick, but I do have access to the internet, and I know for a fact that most men don't look like this. Valeri is a goddamn work of art. He's thick and long and he's covered in pre-cum. The sight of it trailing down his shaft has me licking my lips and scooting closer.

When I bend down and run my tongue up the length of him, he growls something in Russian and grabs onto the base of my ponytail before pulling my hair tie off and slipping it on his wrist. He runs his hands through my hair, fisting it tightly as I run my tongue along his head. Reaching up, I wrap a hand around his thick shaft, not at all surprised that my fingers don't meet.

“Tighter, *lapochka*,” he growls. “You're not going to hurt me.” When I tighten my grip, he groans his appreciation. “That's right, baby, just like that. Now let me see you wrap that pretty mouth around my head.”

I run my tongue over his slit and dig my fingers into his muscular thigh before slowly sucking his head in while I move my other hand up and down his shaft.

“Fuck,” he growls, watching me suck him harder.

Wanting to see him come undone from my touch, I try to take him in some more, but I don't get far before I gag around him. My eyes dart to his, but instead of disappointment, he looks like a man who's barely hanging on. His jaw is clenched, the vein in his temple is throbbing, and I can feel how tense his body is.

“You're embarrassed because you gagged, baby?” he asks, his accent even thicker than before.

“Mm-hmm,” I moan around him, and when I gag again, my eyes water so badly that they spill over, tears streaking down my cheeks. He releases one hand from my hair and trails a finger over my cheek before bringing his wet finger to his lips, licking my tears from his skin.

“You have no idea how sexy you look choking on my cock, sweetheart. You think it's embarrassing to have tears running down your face while you try to take me in, but

goddamn, this is an image I'm going to replay over and over again for the rest of my life."

I take in a slow, deep breath and keep my eyes on his as I lower down even more, gagging once again because I'm clearly not a natural deep-throater, but I don't give a fuck. The desire and approval in his eyes is clear to see.

"That's my good fucking girl," he praises, sending a rush of pleasure straight to my pussy. I'd walk through hell if at the end of it he'd call me his good girl and look at me just like he is right now. Ignoring the way my eyes are watering and the sharp sting from how tightly he's fisting my hair, I lower down another inch while I keep working him with my hand.

My lips are stretched tightly around him as I slowly pull my head back up and take in a quick breath before lowering back down. I find my rhythm, working my hand and mouth together as his breathing picks up.

"I'm close, baby," he growls, warning me to pull back if I don't want to see this through to the end, but I don't stop. No way in hell am I quitting now. I work him harder, letting my spit drip down so I can twist my hand around his wet shaft as I continue to work him while I moan around his cock and suck harder.

When I feel his body tense, he groans something in Russian, his cock swelling even bigger, threatening to split the corners of my mouth right before he lets go and I feel the wet heat of his release hit the back of my throat. He pulses inside me, giving me everything he has until he's finally empty and a shiver runs through his body. When he starts to soften, I take full advantage of it and take him in all the way, licking and gently sucking him clean while he massages the sting from my scalp and lets out a contented sigh.

"Holy fuck, baby," he says, his voice relaxed and lazy. As soon as I slide him out of my mouth, he's reaching down and lifting me onto his lap. His thumb runs over my swollen lips before he kisses me slowly, savoring the fact that I taste like him. "Let me take you home," he whispers against my lips.

“I can’t. I need to get back to work.” I give a soft laugh. “This isn’t exactly what I’m being paid to do.”

“Quit, come home with me, let me take care of you, Evie.”

I pull back so I can see him better. “You’re so sweet, Valeri, but you know that’s crazy.”

“It is, but I don’t care, and I’m not sweet, *lapochka*. I just am to you.” He cups my face, tracing a line over the bruise that’s mostly faded. “I want to take care of you, and I don’t give a shit that we just met. I don’t want you going back to that bastard.”

“I’ll be fine,” I tell him, hating that he looks so worried. “Don’t be sad. Tomorrow’s my birthday, and we’ll have the whole night together.”

He plays with a strand of my hair and studies me with his green eyes. “There will come a time when I’m just going to grab you and not let you go.”

I laugh, but he doesn’t join in. I know he’s worried, so I lean in and give him another kiss. “Thanks for letting me give you a blowjob.”

That does make him laugh. “You can suck my cock anytime you want, sweetheart, but tomorrow night I’m going to be the one burying my head between *your* legs, and I might very well stay there all damn night.”

“Happy birthday to me,” I say, making him laugh again.

“Come on, baby.” He smacks my ass before helping me up so he can tuck himself back in and zip his jeans up. “Show me what I need to do out here.”

“What?”

He smiles and helps me fix my coveralls. “No way in hell am I going to just walk off while you’re stuck here cleaning.”

I grab my flowers and glasses and walk with him back out to the main area. He refuses to let me do a damn thing. He sits me on one of the tables, gives me a kiss, and then grabs the mop and does the entire floor on his own while he asks me a million questions about myself. By the time the sun is rising,

he knows just about every detail of my life, minus some of the more embarrassing moments that I decided didn't need to be shared. It's not until we're saying goodbye that I realize he kept me so busy talking about myself that I didn't get to ask him anything.

"I have a million questions for you too, you know."

He smiles and pulls me closer. "I'm not near as interesting as you."

I laugh at how absolutely absurd that is, but he cuts it off with a kiss that makes everything else disappear. Valeri doesn't just kiss. He consumes and invades every part of me until nothing else exists. I lose myself in him every single time he touches me, and judging by the cocky grin playing at his lips when he finally lets me go, he knows it.

"You're way too good at that."

"Only because you drive me crazy, baby. I can't get enough of you." He picks me up and pulls me in for a tight hug while I gladly cling to his powerful body. "I know you haven't been to sleep, so it may not feel like it yet, but happy birthday, *lapochka*."

"This is already the best birthday I've ever had." I squeeze him tighter, savoring that rare feeling of being completely and fully happy. Before I met Valeri, these moments were so fucking rare that I could barely remember how it felt, but he makes it seem normal to walk around in a state of pure bliss. It's so effortless with him. I don't even have to think about it.

"I don't want to let you go, but I've got to do a few things before tonight. I'll pick you up at the same place I dropped you off the other day, okay?"

"Okay."

"Text me so I know you're safe."

"Okay," I say, smiling even bigger at how damn protective he is.

"I'll see you tonight, baby."

"Okay."

He laughs and kisses me again. “I’m going to miss you.”

“Okay,” I say and then squeal when he tickles me.

“Okay? No, I’ll miss you too, Valeri?”

I laugh and choke out an “I’ll miss you too, Valeri.” By the time he lets up, tears are running down my face, and I’m out of breath. I cup his face and kiss him. “You know I’ll miss you like crazy and not just because you give me such good orgasms.”

He smiles against my lips and smacks my ass. “Better be nice or I’ll make you wait a really long time before you get another.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Try me, baby.” He smacks my ass hard enough to sting. “That’s a small preview of what you’re getting later. Twenty-one spankings, *lapochka*.”

I rock my hips and suck on his bottom lip. I could get used to having all of Valeri’s attention. I’m already completely addicted to him, and I know that may not be a wise choice, but I can either hold part of myself back to avoid getting hurt, or I can embrace this miraculous opportunity with both hands and hope like hell it doesn’t ever slip through my fingers. I’d rather experience this, even if it does end with my heart being shattered into a million unfixable pieces, than hide from it and regret it for the rest of my life.

With a pained sigh, he kisses me one last time and sets me down. “Don’t forget to text, and I hope your eye appointment goes well.”

“I will.” I grab my flowers, giving them one last big sniff before handing them to him. “Can you hold onto these for me?” Before I hand them over, I snap off the head of one rose, smelling it again before putting it in my pocket.

“That might be the saddest fucking thing I’ve ever seen, Evie. I swear to god, I’m getting you out of that fucking house, and then you’re going to be surrounded by fresh flowers every goddamn day for the rest of your life.”

I cup his face and smile up at him. “Thanks for coming to visit me.”

“I’ll keep visiting until I can convince you to quit,” he says, giving me a wink before he turns around to leave. I’m so focused on his perfect ass that I don’t notice he’s looking over his shoulder and caught me staring. His deep laugh has my cheeks heating up, but it’s not really my fault. The man’s ass is amazing. “See you soon, baby.”

Jerry’s giving me a big smile when I come back down to my locker. “I like your boyfriend. He may have a lot of tattoos, but it’s obvious he’s crazy about you and completely devoted to you.”

I couldn’t hide my smile even if I’d wanted to. He laughs and shuts his locker before turning back around and handing me a card. “Happy birthday, Evie.” He gives my arm a soft pat as he walks by. “Just a little something from me and Betty, honey.”

“Thanks, Jerry. You didn’t have to do that. It’s enough that you’re covering me for tonight’s shift.”

“We wanted to.” He gives me a wink. “First round of drinks are on us.”

I laugh and say, “Tell Betty I said thanks.”

“Will do.”

He leaves while I quickly step out of my coveralls so I can run to get my eye exam done. One of the perks of this job is that it does come with some very basic insurance so I can at least stay up to date on things and I don’t have to worry about a simple UTI emptying my account of what little money I have. The doctor is just one street over, and I’ve got a little time to kill, so I open my birthday card, smiling when I see it’s a cute puppy with a birthday hat on. They’ve tucked two twenties inside, and my eyes get a bit watery at how damn sweet they are. I decide to treat myself to a birthday latte on my way and then pocket the rest.

When I walk out of the doctor’s an hour later, I’m down to ten dollars thanks to my co-pay, but I do have two pairs of

sample contacts. I couldn't afford to order any, and I'm pretty sure the doctor slipped me an extra sample pair out of pity, but I'm not saying no to it today. I'd rather swallow my pride and have the contacts. I check my watch and decide I have time for a quick stop at the Goodwill store on the corner. It's where I've always bought all my clothes. I tell myself that it's the environmentally responsible thing to do because there's too much waste in the world already, but the truth is, it still embarrasses the hell out of me. I'm not walking in here because it's trendy or responsible; I'm here because I'm broke and I've always been broke, and every time I walk through the racks of clothes, painful memories hit me of being teased at school because nothing I ever wore looked new. Most of the stuff was faded and ill-fitting.

When I pass by the children's section, I notice that the selection they have is way better than the stuff they had when I was little. Back then the store was brand-new and the selection was half of what it is now. It makes me feel better to know the kids have more options than I did. Hopefully it'll help them avoid the embarrassment that I endured.

I stop at what I always call the fancy rack. It's the one I usually avoid because I've never had a use for it, but I want something special for tonight. I flip through until I find a really cute off-the-shoulder top that's in a vibrant red that hasn't yet faded from too many washings. I examine it closely, not too surprised when I see a tiny black stain along the very bottom. It's on the side, though, and I don't think it's noticeable. I push aside my annoyance at someone donating a shirt that's already stained and instead turn my attention to the skirts. I'm not usually a skirt kind of girl, but I really want to go all out. It's my birthday, and I have a gorgeous boyfriend who can't seem to keep his hands off me and plans to bury his head between my legs later. If that isn't reason to celebrate, then I don't know what is.

Using the last of my money, I pay for everything and walk back to the bus stop. After getting home, I text Valeri to let him know I'm okay, and then I force myself to get some sleep so I'll be ready for tonight. After I wake, I spend a ridiculous amount of time getting ready. My dad and Lyle are drinking at

the bar tonight, and it's the best damn birthday present he's ever given me, not that he's ever actually gotten me anything, but still. I sit around in my robe while my new clothes finish drying and try to figure out how to put a damn pair of contacts in. It feels weird to not have my glasses, but it's also kind of nice, like I've shed a piece of my armor that I no longer need. I want Valeri to see me, and I'm tired of hiding, of always trying to be invisible. He makes me want to be seen.

Since my dad is gone, I don't bother with my coveralls, I just slip on my black sneakers, and pack a small bag of everything I'll need for the night. I'd worried about the shoes, but they actually look pretty cute with the outfit, so I let that worry go. I've got bigger things on my mind. I'm nervous and excited about staying at Valeri's, but I have to push all that aside or I'm going to end up freaking myself out so much that I won't even have the nerve to leave the house.

When it's time, I grab my bag and practically run out the door. I see his car parked near the bus stop. Gale is about to leave, so I wave my hand at Valeri, letting him know I'll be just a second, and then hop on the bus super-fast to give Gale a hug.

"Happy birthday, sweetie," she squeals, hugging me tightly before pulling me back and running her eyes over me. "You look beautiful." She grabs the card she has tucked away and hands it to me. "Here you go, and I want to hear all about your date. I noticed your good-looking boyfriend is parked and waiting." She gives me a wink and then pats my cheek. "Go have fun, honey."

I give her another hug and then leave so I don't mess up her schedule. When I get to the car, Valeri's leaning against the passenger side door, waiting for me. He's in jeans with a black, long-sleeve Henley this time and his black boots. He's gorgeous, stunningly so, and I stop short when I see the hungry look he's giving me. I hear Gale drive off, but I don't even turn to give a last wave. I can't look away from Valeri's intense green eyes. Pushing off from his car, he slowly walks towards me like a wolf stalking his prey. I get why small animals freeze in the presence of those that are bigger and



stronger, because I couldn't move even if I wanted to. I'm surprised by the realization that some part of me does wish I could run off just because it would be one hell of a thrill to have him chase me.

*"Lapochka,"* he says in a low voice when he's standing right in front of me. His finger runs over one of my bare shoulders. "You are breathtaking, baby."

I smile and blush and my heart does some sort of weird flutter, and for the first time in my life, I feel beautiful, I feel special, and I feel wanted.

# Chapter 8

## *Valeri*

**E**vie makes me feel like I've been knocked on my ass every time I see her. Even with her coveralls and glasses and no makeup, she's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, but tonight she's gone all out, and I'm speechless. I cup her face, feeling the heat of her blush against my palms and tilt her up to me as I bend down to kiss her. Her hands grip my forearms, squeezing me as she opens her mouth wider for me, letting me in so I can taste her.

She's all I've thought about since I left her early this morning, and she doesn't know it, but there's no way in hell I'm letting go of her again. This morning was the last time I'm watching her walk off, the last time I'll be left wondering if she's safe or if her dad is drunk and in a bad mood. When I pull back, she's breathless and her light brown eyes are glazed with lust. I watch her, memorizing every damn detail.

“Happy birthday, Evie.”

“Thanks.” Her smile is adorable, the perfect mix of innocence and arousal.

I run my fingers over her upper chest, pulling the top of her shirt down just enough to show me the bruise I left on her skin the other day at the beach. My thumb grazes the hickey, reminding me that soon I'll be claiming the rest of her. This body is going to be covered in my marks, but none of them will be from anger. Every single one will be from love, because there's no denying it. I've fallen completely in love with her, and my need to possess every inch of her is unlike anything I've ever known.

“Come on, baby,” I tell her, wrapping my arm around her shoulder and guiding her towards the car. Once we’re both in, she gives me a huge grin.

“I’m so excited to see what this club is like,” she says, killing any plans I had to gently nudge her in a different direction for tonight. I can’t take this from her. All I can do is hope it goes smoothly. I grab her hand and kiss it while heading downtown. The club is already packed with a long line out front, and when I park right in front of the building, she darts her head around in confusion.

“Is this a parking spot?”

I hold back a laugh and say, “It is for me.”

She looks at the long line and then back to me, trying to figure out what’s going on. I kiss her hand again and then turn it so I can kiss her inner wrist, running my tongue over her skin before letting it go and smiling at the breathy moan that escapes her parted lips.

“I want you glued to my side in there, *lapochka*. Do you understand?”

“Yes, well, not really,” she admits. She eyes the large, black building in front of us. “Is it that big in there?”

I laugh and give her inner wrist another kiss before letting her hand go. “No, baby, I want you close to me because every man in there is going to try to hit on you, and if I see one of those bastards put their hands on you, I can’t promise I’ll be able to control myself.”

She lets out a breathy “okay,” and then nods her head when I tell her to wait for me to come open her door. I eye the line as I walk around the car, grateful that I don’t recognize any of the women that I can see. Ignoring the smiles and waves, I open the passenger door and hold out my hand for Evie, pulling her body tightly against mine as soon as she’s out. Keeping my arm around her shoulders, I lead her to the door. The bouncer on duty gives me a nod and steps aside so we can pass.

“Evening, Mr. Medvedev,” he says, giving Evie a polite nod as well but being damn careful to keep his eyes off her.

Evie gives me another confused look when we walk inside and bypass the woman collecting cover charges.

“Why didn’t we have to wait in line? And how did he know who you are?”

I pull her into a corner so she can hear me over the pounding music. Bracing my hands on either side of her, I lean down and ask, “Do you remember I told you my brothers and I own a few places in the city?”

Her eyes widen in surprise. “You own this club?”

“With my brothers, yes.”

She laughs and shakes her head. “I feel like an idiot.”

“Don’t feel like an idiot. You were so excited about coming here. I didn’t want to ruin it for you or make you feel like we couldn’t come.”

“What else do you own?”

“A few other clubs, a couple of restaurants, and my oldest brother and his wife own a women’s shelter not far from here.”

“The cute yellow one?”

“That’s the one.”

She thinks for a second and says, “That place looks really nice. They’ve done a great job with it.”

“They have,” I agree. “I hate to spring it on you, but you’ll probably meet them tonight.”

“Really?” I can tell she’s starting to panic, so I lean down and kiss a line across her cheek, pressing my lips against her ear. “There’s no pressure, baby. They’re just really excited to meet you.”

“Why?”

I laugh and give her earlobe a soft suck. “Because you’re the only woman I’ve ever told them about.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. Now come on, birthday girl, let’s get you a drink.”

I grab her hand and keep her close to me as we weave our way through the packed club. The waitresses all smile at me, along with several of the women around us, but I ignore every damn one of them. At the bar, I pull her in front of me, pressing my chest up against her back with one arm wrapped firmly around her upper chest. I’m making it very clear that we’re together, and so far it’s working.

I lean down so she can hear me and ask, “What do you want to drink?” while my thumb lightly grazes her skin.

“What are you having?”

“Vodka,” I say.

“I’ll have that too.” She puts her hand over mine and tilts her head closer to me. “I’ve never drank before. I’ve always hated it because of my dad.”

“Would you rather not? I don’t give a shit about having a drink, Evie. We can just stick with water or a soda.”

“No, I want to try it. I’ll have a vodka with you.”

I kiss her cheek and hold up two fingers for the bartender. He knows me well enough to know what I’m asking him for and soon two drinks are on the bar in front of us. I grab them and hand one to Evie. I down mine quickly and set it back on the bar for a refill while she takes a hesitant sip and then coughs.

“Wow,” she says too low for me to hear, but it’s easy enough to read her lips. She takes another small drink, and when that goes down better, she quickly tosses back the rest. Her eyes water, but she doesn’t cough, and the triumphant smile she gives me has me laughing and kissing the top of her head.

“Another?”

When she nods, I set her glass next to mine, and then turn my head when I hear a familiar voice yell my name. With a

groan, I hurry up and down the next shot because I'm sure as hell going to need it.

"My brothers are here," I tell Evie, who quickly reaches for her second shot as well.

Vasily's hand smacks my back before Nina gives me a quick hug, and then Volodya wraps an arm around my shoulders and gives Evie a little wave.

"You must be Evie," he says, letting me go so he can pull Maddie in tightly against him.

"Hi," Evie says, looking at all the new faces.

I point everyone out one by one and introduce them, and then say in Russian, "Please don't scare her off."

Volodya laughs and starts ordering drinks, handing a Dirty Shirley to Maddie and a bottle of water to Nina.

"Oh, what's that?" Evie asks.

"The best drink ever," Maddie quickly says. "It's a Shirley Temple with Vodka. Nina got me hooked on them."

"I think I want to try one of those," she says, looking up at me. Then she looks at Nina, "You're not having one?"

Nina laughs when Vasily picks her up before she can answer.

"My baby won't be drinking for a while," he says with a proud smile on his face.

Evie looks down at Nina's stomach, noticing the small bump that the darkness of the club had hidden from her just a few minutes ago.

"Congratulations," she says with a laugh, giving Nina a hug when he puts her down and then taking the Dirty Shirley from me. "I forgot that Valeri mentioned you were pregnant."

Nina smiles and pats her baby bump. "Thanks, we're really excited about it."

When a slow song starts, the deep, throbbing tune vibrating along the floor, Vasily picks Nina back up and says,

“I’m going to go dance with my beautiful, pregnant wife.”

Volodya grabs Maddie’s hands and starts to pull her to the dance floor. She laughs and chugs the rest of her drink. “You know I have two left feet, Volodya.”

He laughs and pulls her closer. “I know, and it’s so fucking sexy to watch you try and dance.”

She tries to look pissed but fails horribly. He drags her out onto the dance floor as I step closer to Evie. I raise a brow at her. “What do you think? Want to go and dance with my insane family?”

“I like them,” she says with a laugh. “I feel like I should warn you that I also have two left feet.” She downs the last of her drink and then fishes out the cherry with her straw so she can eat it.

I smile and lean down so our lips are almost touching. “I bet we can find a rhythm together.” I lick her bottom lip, tasting the sweet cherry, groaning at how badly I want her. Grabbing her hand, I pull her to the crowded dance floor because I know if I start kissing her, I’ll never stop. I force a path for us, ignoring all the grinding bodies around us, and when I’ve found us a small patch of dance floor, I pull her to me and wrap my arms around her, moving my hips to the music while she blushes and darts her eyes around.

“Eyes on me, *lapochka*,” I tell her. “No one else but me.”

She nods, and I feel her body relax. When I slide a thigh between her legs, she wraps her arms around my neck, smiling when I bring one hand down to cup her ass. My other hand slides up her thigh, my fingers grazing along her bare skin.

“You look fucking amazing in this skirt. I love seeing your legs.”

She shakes her head at me like I’m nuts, but I just squeeze her ass harder and keep her pussy pressed firmly against my thigh while we dance and lose ourselves to the music and each other. The songs change, but I barely notice. All my focus is on the woman in front of me who captures all my attention so damn effortlessly. I’m so lost to her that it takes me a second



to realize someone's tapping on my arm. I turn and see a smiling redhead that I have a vague memory of picking up a few months ago.

"Mind if I cut in?" she asks, barely sparing Evie a glance. Her eyes are on me, and I recognize the predatory glint in them.

I feel Evie's body tense, and when she tries to pull away, I tighten my grip on her, refusing to let her go.

"Yeah, I mind. I'm dancing with my girlfriend. Go find somebody else," I yell at her above the music, and then turn back to Evie, hoping the woman will just take the hint and leave. I should've known better. They never just take the fucking hint.

"Don't you remember me?" she says. "Because I sure remember you."

The tone of her voice makes it obvious that something happened between us, and I hate the look of pain that flashes across Evie's face. I don't have to worry about the redhead anymore because I hear Volodya yelling, "Get the fuck away from them or get out of the fucking club!" He pats my back on his way past us as he shepherds her along, but the damage is already done. Evie watches her walk off, and when she turns back to me, she keeps her eyes everywhere but on mine.

"I'm sorry," I say, not knowing what else to do.

"It's okay. I mean, I know you have a past, Valeri. Thanks for not dancing with her or anything."

"God, Evie, I would never do that to you." I cup her face and force her to look at me. "I would never do that to you," I repeat, "and I have no desire to dance with anyone else. You're the only woman I want."

She nods and looks around. "I need to use the bathroom. Where are they?"

I pull her back the way we came and lead her to the end of the bar where there's a long hallway behind it. "The employee bathrooms are down here. It'll be way faster than using the others. Are you okay?"

She smiles, but it doesn't reach her eyes. "I'm fine. I'll be back in just a minute."

"I'll be right here."

I watch her walk away, feeling like absolute shit. I turn back to the bar, and that's where Volodya finds me a few minutes later, downing another vodka because I sure as fuck need it.

"Sorry, little brother, I got to her as soon as I could."

"It's not your fault. I should've known better than to come here. Thanks for getting rid of her."

"Of course. She wasn't pleased about it," he says with a small laugh, "but she's gone now."

I sigh and run my hand through my hair before checking my watch again. She's been gone too long, and I don't like it.

"I'm going to go check on her."

"Holler if you need me," he says, motioning for the bartender to bring him a drink.

I walk down the hall, and a chill runs down my spine when I hear a voice that I hoped like hell I'd never hear again.

"Is that my shirt you're wearing?" Lisa lets out a harsh laugh that's like nails on a fucking chalkboard. "It is. I recognize the small stain on the side. I donated that to Goodwill. Oh my god, is that where you buy your clothes?"

I'm almost to the door when I hear Lisa add, "Valeri is mine, so you'd better stay the fuck away from him. Like he'd ever want you anyway. That's probably why he called me up last night. He's bored with you already and wanted a good fuck."

By the time I throw the door open, I'm so pissed I can barely think. My eyes immediately find Evie, and the look on her face breaks my damn heart. She's pressed in the corner, tears running down her face, cheeks red with embarrassment, and she's refusing to look at me. I cross the distance and pull her into my arms.

“Valeri,” Lisa starts to say, but I wrap my arms tighter around Evie and give her a look that cuts her words off and has her clamping her goddamn mouth shut. Too little, too late.

“Tell her the fucking truth,” I growl at her, using every ounce of willpower I possess to keep my temper in check. If she were a man, she’d be bleeding out on the goddamn floor right now.

“What do you mean?”

“Tell her the goddam truth! Did I call you last night? Have I ever fucking called you?”

She thinks about lying, I can see it so clearly on her face, but she wisely decides against it. “No,” she mutters.

“You were a mistake I made several weeks ago,” I tell her, “and you’ve been chasing after me ever since. I don’t know how to make it any clearer to you. I don’t want you. It was a mistake, one I will never repeat, and I have no desire to ever see you again. But you already know all this, don’t you?” I cup Evie’s head, keeping her pressed tightly against me, feeling her body shake and hating how upset she is. I kiss the top of her head and caress her back.

“You crossed the line when you came in here and hurt my girlfriend.” I lift my head and yell for Volodya.

Seconds later, he enters the bathroom. I keep my eyes on Lisa, letting her see how fucking pissed I am. “Take this bitch and get her the fuck out of here. She’s banned from the club. She’s fucking banned from every damn place we own.”

“Valeri, you can’t do that!” she yells at me, stomping one of her high-heeled feet down.

I ignore her tantrum and switch to Russian. “Make sure she understands I’m serious.”

Volodya smiles and grabs her arm. When she tries to jerk it away, he tightens his fingers and says, “Don’t fucking test me. I should be out there with my gorgeous wife, and instead I’m stuck kicking your sorry ass out of here.”

“Don’t ban me,” she whines.

“You shouldn’t have fucked with my little brother or his girlfriend,” he says, hauling her ass out of the bathroom.

Turning to Evie, I cup her cheek and try to tilt her face to mine, but she fights me, keeping her head ducked down.

“Please don’t hide yourself from me, *lapochka*.”

“I should never have come here,” she whispers. “I don’t know what the hell I was thinking. I let myself forget the truth.”

“What truth?”

She finally meets my eyes, and the pain in them is like a knife to the gut. “The truth that I don’t belong here, and I don’t belong with you.” She shakes her head and goes to push her glasses up out of habit, but they’re not there, and it only makes her give a frustrated sigh.

“I want my glasses and my coveralls, because that’s who I am, and I never should’ve let myself forget that. I don’t belong on the arm of the man who apparently every woman in here has fucked. I belong in the library, cleaning up after women like her,” she says, angrily waving a hand at where Lisa had been standing. “Women who know they can just drop their shit on the floor because someone like me will always be waiting to pick it up. Women who donate their stained clothes because they know that someone like me will come along and buy it, knowing the only way I’m going to get a shirt this expensive is if I buy it used and dirtied.”

She’s crying by the time she finishes, and there are so many things that I want to say, but all that can wait. I pick her up and hold her while she cries, wetting my neck with her tears and shaking against me until I can’t stand it, because if I hear her cry for one more second, I’m going to burn the whole goddamn world down to make it stop.

“You’re killing me, baby,” I whisper, brushing back her hair and kissing her cheek. “I’m so sorry she hurt you. I’m sorry about my past, more sorry than you can ever know, and I hate that it’s hurting you, that it’s touching you in any way. I would change it if I could, but I can’t. All I can do is promise

you my future. I understand how you feel, but you're wrong. You're not below any other person, and I refuse to stand by and watch you let someone like that bitch make you feel bad about yourself."

"She was just telling me what I already know. I needed the reminder, Valeri. It's okay, really. I mean, we were kind of doomed from the beginning anyway."

"You think so?" I say, unable to hide the anger from my voice.

"You're so far out of my league that it's not even funny. You're an Aston Martin. I'm the public bus. There's no changing that."

"Bullshit," I say, fisting her hair and pulling her head back so she's forced to look at me. "I will not accept that, Evie. You were mine the second you hit my car, and I'm not letting you go. Not now, not ever. You think I give a shit that you don't have money?"

I don't wait for her to answer. I just lean closer and say, "I've got news for you, sweetheart, what's mine is yours, so you're loaded. You've got more money than anyone else in this club."

"Valeri," she starts to protest, but I cut her words off with a kiss, reminding her of the truth of things. She's hesitant at first, but when I give her bottom lip a soft bite and force her lips apart with my tongue, she moans and lets me in. The kiss is hungry and hard, and when I let her go, she's breathless.

"I love you," I tell her, whispering it against her lips. "I've never loved anyone, Evie Finch, but I fucking love you." I let out a soft laugh. "I'd planned on telling you that later and not in a bathroom at the club, but I don't want you to ever doubt how I feel. This isn't a game to me. I know it's quick, but I don't care. I love you."

Her eyes are watery again, but the pain in them is slowly fading. She cups my face, resting her forehead against mine and lets out a small sigh. "I love you too, Valeri. I'm just scared."

“Of what?”

“Everything,” she says with a soft laugh. “My dad, the future, constantly running into women you’ve slept with. It’s just a big change for me.”

“Let me worry about all of that. You don’t need to worry about anything ever again.” I give her another kiss. “That’s what you have me for.”

“And I’m terrified that you’re going to break my heart,” she admits in a whisper.

I smile against her lips. “That’s never going to happen, baby. I’m a goner, Evie. You’re it for me.”

The tightness around my chest eases when I see her smile.

“There’s my girl,” I whisper, running my eyes over her beautiful face. “Tell me what you want to do, baby. We can go back out there and have a few more drinks, or we can go home, or I can take you somewhere else, anywhere you want to go. I’ll be happy with whatever you decide.”

She runs her fingers along my cheek while she thinks. “I want to go back out there. I don’t want to let her ruin our night.”

“Then we’ll go back out there, and we’ll leave whenever you want.” I smile and give her another kiss. “My family really likes you.”

“I like them too. You and your brothers have more tattoos than I think I’ve ever seen,” she says with a laugh, reminding me that there’s still so much I need to tell her. “Their wives seem really nice.”

“They are, and I knew they’d love you.”

I set her down, and she turns to the mirror, groaning when she sees her reflection. “God, I feel stupid. They all know I’ve been crying in here, and that’s exactly what I look like I’ve been doing.”

“You look beautiful and perfect and sexy as hell.”

She meets my eyes in the mirror, looking at me like I must be blind. I give her ass a smack, smiling at the way her eyes widen in surprise.

“That doesn’t count as one of your birthday spankings. You got this one because you put yourself down, and I don’t like it when you do that. It’s something you’ll need to stop doing unless you want to constantly be walking around with my handprint on your ass.”

“Someone’s bossy,” she teases, a small smile playing at her lips.

“God, sweetheart, you have no idea.”

She turns around with a laugh and wraps an arm around me, letting me lead her out of the bathroom. As soon as we’re back in the main area, Maddie and Nina come up and pull Evie towards them. When I raise a brow at them, Maddie laughs and says, “We need a drink and some girl talk.”

Evie smiles at me to let me know she’s okay, and I watch them walk to the other end of the bar, noticing the way all the men keep their eyes averted and give them a wide berth. Everyone knows who Maddie and Nina are married to, and no one here has a death wish. Word has already started to spread, and soon everyone will also know that Evie is mine.

I walk over to Volodya and Vasily. They’re leaning against the bar, and Vasily is already holding a shot of vodka out for me. Volodya’s wearing a smug grin that makes me laugh. He looks way too happy with himself.

“Thanks for getting her ass out of here,” I tell him.

“Maddie caught up with me on the way out, and she gave that blonde hell. I thought she was going to rip her throat out in the parking lot. My little *kiska*’s claws came out tonight.”

The look on his face has me turning to Vasily. “He fucked her up against the side of the building again, didn’t he?”

Vasily laughs while Volodya downs another shot and then keeps grinning. “What can I say? I love it when she’s feisty.”

Every few seconds, our eyes stray towards the other end of the bar, keeping a constant watch over our women. Evie is laughing at something Nina's said, and seeing the three of them together feels so damn perfect and right, like Evie was the missing piece that was always meant to be here.

"You've got it bad, little brother," Vasily teases, elbowing my arm.

"I do," I admit, unable to take my eyes off Evie's smiling face.

After a few more minutes, we decide we've waited long enough and walk back to the three women who have completely transformed the Medvedev family. Maddie and Evie each have a freshly made Dirty Shirley in hand while Nina reaches for her bottle of water. As soon as Evie's close enough, I wrap an arm around her upper chest and pull her back against me while I lean down and kiss her cheek.

Instead of going to the VIP section, we spend a couple of hours by the bar, laughing and talking and drinking, although we go easy on the alcohol since no one is here to get drunk. Well, maybe Maddie is, judging by the way she's going through her drinks. When she eats the cherry from her latest, Volodya laughs and takes the empty glass from her.

"I'm cutting you off, *kiska*. Your mom and Boris are babysitting tonight, and I have plans for you later that don't involve holding your hair back while you get sick."

She laughs and looks up at him like he's her whole world. "I'm not so sure I can run."

"Can we get a water?" Volodya hollers to the bartender. "Better sober up quick then."

Evie looks up at me with a confused look. I laugh and kiss the tip of her nose. "Don't ask."

After a few more minutes, Vasily sees Nina yawn and calls it a night. We say our goodbyes, everyone hugging Evie, wishing her a happy birthday, and basically welcoming her into the damn family. Evie smiles and hugs them all back, saying she can't wait to meet their kids. We watch them leave,



and when I ask her if she's ready to go too, she gives me a big smile and nods her head.

Keeping a tight hold on her, we weave our way back through the crowd that's only grown since we walked in, until we're finally outside. After hours of being in the club, I breathe in a lungful of cool night air and dig my keys out of my pocket. After we're both in, she turns to me and asks, "What did Maddie mean about not being able to run?"

I laugh and start the car. "Volodya loves to chase her."

She laughs, but she doesn't seem disgusted by the idea. If anything, she seems a little intrigued. It's going to be a lot of fun discovering what Evie likes. I have a feeling she might surprise me.

"You ready to go back to my place, or did you want to do something else?"

Her cheeks are already a little flushed from the alcohol, but they grow even redder when she says, "I want to go back to your place."

I pull away from the club and drive the short distance to my apartment building. She looks out the window, watching the brightly lit downtown pass by, and when I park in my reserved spot, she gives me an excited smile and points at the car next to us.

"Oh my god, it's a red Mini Cooper!"

She hops out of the car without waiting for me to open the door for her. I laugh and grab her bag from the back before walking over to her. She's eyeing the brand-new car with a big smile on her face.

"It's exactly like the one we saw at the diner. They're so cute!"

I smile at her, not telling her just yet that it's one of her birthday presents. "Come on, baby," I say, taking her hand and leading her inside.

She takes one last look at the car before following me. I stop and introduce her to Bill, who's still working security at

the front door.

“This is my girlfriend Evie. She’s allowed in no matter what time. Please let the other security guards know.”

“Yes, sir,” he says, giving me a nod and smiling politely at Evie.

I pull her away, and at my private elevator, I punch in the code and then tell her what it is. “I change it every week, but that’s what it is now in case you ever need to get up here on your own.”

“The day we met,” she whispers, giving me a sweet smile. “I never would’ve guessed you were such a big softie.”

I laugh and pull her into the elevator with me. “Only for you, *lapochka*.” When the doors shut, I’ve already picked her up and pressed her against the wall with my tongue running over the roof of her mouth. The poor girl’s not going to be able to walk straight by the time I’m done with her.

# Chapter 9

## *Evie*

**V**aleri kisses me like he'll never be able to get enough. My head is swimming from everything that's happened. I feel adrift, but I cling to him because he's my anchor. I push aside my fears about my dad finding out about us, about bitchy exes who will always try to make me feel like I'm beneath them, and about my own doubts that he's far too good for me, because fuck all that. Life is too goddamn short, and right now the most beautiful man I've ever seen is kissing me like his life depends on it, and I'd be a damn fool to let anything come between us and ruin this moment.

When the doors open, he carries me into his apartment. I break the kiss so I can look around, eyeing the floor-to-ceiling windows that give an amazing view of the lit-up city around us. I never even knew places like this existed. It's an open floor plan with comfy-looking leather furniture, a gas fireplace, and to the side is a big kitchen with stainless steel appliances and a countertop that probably costs more than I would ever believe possible. On the edge of it is a crystal vase filled with the pink roses he bought for me.

"Wow," I whisper when he walks further in, and I'm able to see the huge rooftop terrace beyond the windows. I can't see everything, but I glimpse the corner of a pool and a hot tub.

He drops my bag on the counter and sets me down. "You want your presents now or your cake?"

"What?" I laugh, watching as his face lights up in a big smile.

“I kind of cheated on the cake and asked Vasily’s cook to make it, but it’s for the best. Anything I would’ve made couldn’t have possibly tasted good. Katya’s been with our family since before I was born, and she makes the best damn cakes.”

I have so many questions about his family, and I can’t help but think that I’m missing something important. I noticed tonight that Nina and Maddie both had bear tattoos on their forearms, exactly like the one I’ve seen on Valeri’s. When I’d asked them about it, they’d waved it off as if it was no big deal and said something about the Medvedev name coming from the Russian word for bear, so they got the tattoo with their husbands’ names beneath it once they got married. There’s a loyalty there that I’ve never seen before, and I’m still puzzling my way through it, but all that gets put on hold for tonight. I don’t want to think about anything except Valeri.

“You didn’t have to get me anything,” I tell him, but he just laughs.

“How about presents and then later when we’ve worked up an appetite, we can have cake?” Before I can answer, he leans down and kisses me again, giving my bottom lip a soft bite. “There are other things I’d rather eat first.”

I suck in a quick breath, feeling him smile against my lips before he pulls back and gives me a wink. “Time for presents.”

He grabs my hand as I take a quick sniff of my roses before he leads me down the hall and into what has to be his bedroom. It’s massive with more floor-to-ceiling windows and one hell of a view. I bet you can see the ocean from here when the sun is out. On his king-size bed are two wrapped gifts. Excited to see what he got me, I slip off my shoes and climb onto his bed, ignoring the nerves that start to tickle at my spine. I have every intention of giving everything to him tonight, but I can’t help but be a bit nervous about it.

He sits down next to me, watching as I grab my presents. He laughs when I run my fingers over the silver wrapping paper and the big red bows on top.

“No one’s given me a wrapped gift since my mom died,” I say, and then wish I hadn’t when I see the way his eyes grow sad. “Thank you, Valeri.”

He smiles and brushes a strand of hair behind my ear. “You haven’t opened it yet. You may hate it.”

“That’s impossible.” I set the smaller gift aside and very carefully open the other one, not wanting to tear the paper. My jaw drops when I see it’s a book of Chekhov’s stories. It’s a hardback, dual-language edition, and I absolutely love it. When I open it, I see that he’s written something in the front.

*Happy birthday, Evie. The first of many we’ll share together. Love, Valeri.*

“It’s so perfect,” I whisper, carefully thumbing through the pages and running my fingers over the beautiful yet completely foreign Cyrillic on the left-hand side. “Will you read them in Russian to me?”

He laughs and nods his head. “Of course, and I can help you learn Russian if you want.”

“Yes,” I quickly say, making him laugh again. “I would love to learn it. It sounds so sexy when you speak it.”

“I’ll have to remember that.” He gives me a wink and hands me the smaller gift. “One more.”

Based on the size, my first thought is jewelry, but when I open it and a black key fob falls into my hand, I look up at him in confusion.

He cups my face and says, “Just remember that it will break my heart if you turn down my gift. You remember the Mini Cooper that we parked next to?”

“You didn’t,” I whisper, already trying to give him the gift back. “It’s too much, Valeri, way too much.”

“It will never be enough. The car is yours, and that’s your own reserved parking spot. I’m never going to worry about you riding the damn bus at night again. My heart can’t take it, *lapochka*. I have to know you’re safe.”

He grabs the key fob and sets them on the nightstand with my new book. Turning back to me, he threads his fingers through my hair and pulls me closer. “Last night was very unfair. You gave me the most amazing blowjob, but I only got to lick the taste of you from my fingers. It’s been driving me crazy all damn day.”

“It has?”

The soft groan he gives has my stomach doing a flip and my pussy starting to ache with the desperate need to be filled. His lips lightly run over mine, sending little sparks of pleasure all through me.

“Tell me what all you’ve done, Evie,” he whispers.

“Nothing.” As embarrassing as the truth is, I can’t lie to him. “I was kissed once very quickly and very badly, but that was in the seventh grade.”

He keeps his eyes on me, but they’re not filled with pity, and he’s not laughing at my complete lack of experience. “I need you to tell me if you want me to stop.”

“I don’t want you to stop,” I quickly say.

He smiles and gives my top lip a soft suck. “I haven’t done anything yet, sweetheart, you might change your mind.”

“I won’t. I want everything with you.”

“Everything, huh?” He gives a soft smirk, making me blush even as I clasp my hands behind his neck and part my thighs. “It’s a good thing you’re used to staying up all night, because it sounds like you won’t be getting much sleep.”

His lips trail a line along my jaw before I feel his teeth graze my earlobe as his hands slide down my back, slipping under my shirt before slowly peeling it off me. Right as he’s about to pull it off my head, I grab his wrists and meet his eyes.

“I don’t look like those women at the club,” I warn him, even though I’m pretty sure he’s already figured that out.

“You look a thousand times better, *lapochka*. You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen, and I want to worship

every goddamn inch of you.”

When he tries to pull the shirt off again, I don't resist. He tosses it aside, and I'm thrilled to get rid of the reminder of Lisa. I plan on throwing it in his fancy fireplace before the sun rises. My red strapless bra and skirt are all that I'm left in, and when he runs his eyes over me, I resist the urge to cover my face and hide. His green eyes take in every inch of me, and when he spots the old bruises on my arms and stomach, his jaw clenches and a flash of pure rage fills his eyes before he gets control of himself. He runs his fingers over the yellow, fading marks.

Bringing his eyes back to mine, he says in a tone that's deceptively calm because I can feel the rage beneath it, threatening to boil over, “If he ever lays a hand on you again, I'm going to kill him.”

Wanting to take away the worried, angry look on his face, I pull him closer and press my lips to his. His body immediately softens, the tension leaving him as I lay back and take him with me, wrapping my legs around his waist as soon as he's on top of me. Sliding my tongue between his lips, I run my hands over his back, pulling on his shirt, wanting to feel his skin against mine. Ever since he sent me that photo, I've been dying to see him without a shirt. When I tug harder, he smiles against my lips and pulls back so I can yank his shirt off.

“Damn,” I whisper at the sight of him. There's a huge bear tattoo covering most of his chest along with several others that decorate just about every inch of his tanned skin. Mixed in with them are some brutal-looking scars. My eyes run over him, darting from sexy tattoos, to scary scars, to all the peaks and grooves of muscle that I want to explore with my tongue.

“You're the sexiest man I've ever seen,” I tell him.

He gives me a wink. “Did you think that before I took my shirt off?”

I laugh and reach up for him. “You know I did.”

Before he lets me pull him down, he hooks a finger under my chin and says, “Take off the bra, baby.”



Pushing my fears and insecurities aside, I choose to trust the heated look he's giving me instead as I reach around and unclasp my bra. When I toss it to the side, he lets out a groan and brings his body close to mine.

"So fucking perfect," he whispers while he slides one hand up my stomach, lightly trailing his fingers over my breasts before cupping one in his large hand and running his thumb over my taut nipple.

"Valeri," I moan, already feeling like I'm about to explode. My heart is racing, my breaths are coming faster and faster, and the ache between my legs is quickly taking over. Soon I'll be nothing but a raging ball of lust. When my short nails drag along his back, he gives a wicked-sounding laugh and pinches my nipple hard enough to make me gasp.

"There are so many things I'm going to teach you, baby, and the very first thing is that I'm in charge of your pleasure." He rolls my nipple between his thumb and index finger, drowning me in a mix of pain and pleasure until I'm whimpering and desperately rocking my hips up in an effort to get myself off like I did at the beach. He presses harder against me, pinning me to the mattress so I can't move. His hard cock digs into me, taunting me with how close it is.

"Please," I beg, scratching his back again. When all that gets me is a smug grin and a wink, I decide to try for pity and say, "But it's my birthday."

"It is, isn't it?" He smiles and brings his mouth to my chest, kissing his way to the nipple that isn't currently being pinched and tweaked. When his tongue runs over me, I gasp and clutch at his head, fisting his dark hair and arching my back up for more. The heat of his breath on my wet skin has goosebumps rising all over me. He slowly sucks my nipple into his mouth as my pussy clenches in anticipation. Filling his mouth with me, he groans and gives my nipple a sharp flick of his tongue while he pinches the other one even harder. Right when I'm convinced I can't withstand a second more of this exquisite torture without losing my damn mind, he pulls back and growls, "Roll over."

It takes a second for his words to get through my lust-filled brain, and when they do, I start to panic. He notices and gives my nipple a quick kiss before saying, “Do you really think I’d take you from behind for your first time, baby? You think I want to miss out on seeing your face when I slide into you?” He brings his mouth to mine and kisses me slowly, savoring the taste and feel of me. Pulling back, he says, “I think you’re forgetting that I promised you a birthday spanking. I’m going to turn your sweet ass red, and then I’m going to bury my face between your legs and eat your pussy, but I don’t think I’m going to let you come.”

“What?” I say so quickly that it makes him laugh.

“I like keeping you on the edge, *lapochka*.” He gives a small shrug. “You’re fun to tease.”

Before I can complain, he stands up and slowly pulls my skirt and panties off so I’m completely naked and exposed. He eyes my recently shaved pussy and groans a “Jesus fucking Christ” and scrubs a hand over his stubbled jaw. “You make my mouth water just looking at you, baby. Now roll the fuck over and don’t make me ask again.”

I’m not surprised that Valeri has a dominant side in the bedroom since everything he does screams *I’m a possessive alpha*. I’m more than happy to give up control and let him take charge. I hurry up and roll over, thankful that at least the overhead light is off. Moonlight can cover a multitude of sins. I’m relieved when I hear his sigh of appreciation right before his hand cups one of my cheeks, giving it a firm squeeze.

“Every inch of you is perfect, baby, every fucking inch.”

His fingers dance along my skin, and then he’s gripping my hips and roughly pulling me down so I’m bent over the bed. I lift my head and try to turn around when I hear him pulling down his zipper.

“No, sweetheart, head down.”

He waits until I put my head back down before I hear his zipper being lowered the rest of the way and then the rustle of fabric as he pulls off his jeans. I know he’s naked right behind

me, and the temptation to turn around is so strong that I start to wiggle in place. He gives a soft laugh behind me and drags his fingers down my spine.

“You want so badly to look, but you’re too much of a good girl to disobey me, aren’t you, sweetheart?”

He’s not wrong. I want the good girls. I want the praise. I want to please him. “Yes,” I whisper.

“So perfect,” he murmurs against my skin, kissing his way down my spine.

When I feel his cock, the thickness of him pressed up against my side, I moan and fist the blankets, using all my willpower to keep my eyes fixed on the bed beneath me. I’m not expecting the first spank when it comes, and the scream of surprise and pain is out before I can stop it.

“That’s one, baby.”

“You’re not really going to give me twenty-one, are you?”

I can hear the smile in his voice when he says, “Maybe, maybe not,” before he spanks my other cheek. “Two.”

I fist the blankets, biting my lip to keep quiet as he spanks me three more times. When he runs his fingers over my stinging, hot flesh, I let out a moan at how good it feels.

“Spread your legs, Evie.”

Scooting my feet further apart, I wait to see what he’ll do next. I feel his leg come in between my thighs, nudging me even wider. When he’s satisfied, he cups my ass and then gives it a soft pat.

“Does that count?”

He laughs and gives me a hard spank. “No, but that one did.”

I smile even though my ass feels like it’s on fire. Not being able to see him has all my senses on high alert. I have no idea if I’m about to get another spank or a soft pat or even if he’s still standing right behind me. I can sense his presence, but that could all be in my imagination. After what feels like

several minutes but is probably less than one, he lightly drags a finger along my slit, making me cry out from how damn good it feels. My body is starved for his touch, desperate and needy for it, and that one stroke leaves my body shaking.

“You’re soaking wet, sweetheart,” he groans. “So fucking wet you’re dripping down my hand.” When he slides a finger into me, I moan his name and drop my head to the bed, rocking my hips against him as best I can. The next spank he gives me is way more pleasure than pain.

“Goddamn,” he growls. “Your tight little pussy clenches so good when I spank you.” He spanks me two more times and mutters something in Russian as my body instinctively clenches every time his hand hits my ass.

I’m ready for my next spank, eager and already craving the sting, when I feel his hands on my hips seconds before he lifts me up and runs his tongue along my slit.

“Fuck!” I moan, burying my face in the bed as his tongue parts my lips and dips inside, fucking me in long, slow strokes until my head is spinning and I feel the pleasure start to build deep inside me. He slides his tongue out and then runs it over my clit, pushing me closer to the edge. Right when I feel the beginnings of the release that I’m so fucking desperate for, he pulls back and gives my clit a sharp smack, killing my orgasm as tears spring to my eyes from the sheer injustice of it.

“Ten,” he says, and the amusement in his voice has me smacking my hand against the mattress in anger, but I don’t turn around. My reward is another slow lick of his tongue along my poor clit and then he continues it, licking along my slit, but he doesn’t stop there. I don’t even get the chance to be embarrassed before he’s grabbing my cheeks and spreading me wide, running his tongue all the way up to my asshole. He circles the place I always thought would forever remain forbidden, and the rush of pleasure takes me by complete surprise. I gasp and fist the blankets so tight my knuckles ache as he lights my body up from the inside out.

I’m panting by the time he pulls back and gives my ass one more spank. “I could spend the whole night eating your ass

and pussy, sweetheart, but if I don't get inside you, I'm going to lose my fucking mind."

He gives my ass cheek a soft bite and slowly kisses along my skin, nipping and sucking and licking until I'm begging him to fuck me. He works his way up my back, pressing his hard length against my ass while he gives my shoulder a soft bite.

"Turn around, *lapochka*," he whispers against my ear. "I want to see you."

I quickly flip over, stunned by the dark look he's giving me when I'm on my back and he's looking down at me like he's seconds away from devouring me whole. His broad shoulders and powerful body loom over me, making me feel so damn small in comparison. He slides an arm under me, scooting me further onto the bed before positioning himself between my legs. I spread my thighs wider for him, but when I feel his thick head nudge my pussy, my whole body tenses.

"I'm scared," I admit, because god is this going to hurt like a son of a bitch. I'm guessing his big dick is a challenge for any woman, but for a virgin? I'm afraid he's going to split me in two.

"Just relax, baby." He rubs the head of his cock over my clit, pulling a gasp from me. "Trust me, *lapochka*. Trust me with your body."

I nod and wrap my arms around him, cupping the back of his head and running my hands through his hair when he kisses me. The kiss is slow and deep, and the entire time his lips and tongue are teasing me, he's sliding over my clit. He's covered in pre-cum, and I'm soaked in my own arousal, making it easy for him to glide over my sensitive skin. He's kept me on the edge for so long that I can already feel how close I am. I moan, begging him with my body to keep going. I feel him smile against my lips before he pulls back just enough to whisper, "Don't worry, baby. I'm not stopping this one," before he kisses me again.

When the orgasm hits, it's blinding. I cling to him, feeding him my screams as my entire body tenses. I kiss him harder,

instinct taking over as my body demands more. I want him in me. I want him spreading me wide. I want the pain and the pleasure. I want it all.

“Please, Valeri,” I beg, even as the orgasm slowly fades away, leaving me feeling completely relaxed and drunk on ecstasy. “I need you inside me.”

“Fuck, baby,” he groans, positioning the head of his cock against my soaked slit. “I love you.” It’s a whisper against my lips right before he slowly starts to slide into me.

“I love you too,” I pant as he presses in and I feel something inside me break. The sharp prick of pain has me clutching at him even tighter, digging my nails into his back as every part of me tenses up.

“Easy, baby,” he murmurs against my lips. “Just breathe.”

I focus on his voice and take in a deep breath, willing my body to relax.

“That’s my good girl. Your tight virgin pussy is spreading so good for me.” He slides in a little bit more, pulling another gasp from me. The pain is intense, but underneath it, I get a taste of the pleasure. It’s just out of reach, but I know that soon it’s going to flip, and the pain will be the lesser of the two.

“God you feel so fucking good,” he groans, giving me another inch. Bracing himself on his forearms, he runs a finger along my cheek and looks at me with so much love in his green eyes that it makes the pain seem like a distant memory. Nothing can touch me when he looks at me like that.

He keeps his eyes on mine as he slowly slides in the rest of the way until he’s fully inside me and we’re locked together in a way that I hadn’t thought possible. It hurts, but it also feels so fucking good. His thumb brushes aside a tear that’s slipped out.

“You okay, baby?”

“Yes,” I whisper. “Never better.”

He smiles and moves his hips just enough to give me a taste of what’s to come. My eyes widen at the different

sensations running through me. Keeping himself still, he leans closer and gives my bottom lip a soft suck.

“This is your home now, Evie. *I’m* your home.” The heat of his breath runs over my wet lips, sending a shiver down my spine. He licks and nips at my skin while I run my fingers along his muscled back, memorizing every perfect inch of him. “Say it, sweetheart,” he whispers against my lips.

“You’re my home,” I say, meaning every word of it.

“I’m never watching you walk away again. I’m never going to worry about you being hurt again. You’re mine, *lapochka*. You have been since the first second I saw you.”

I nod my head and bring my hands to his face, pulling him closer for a kiss. He gives me what I want, claiming my mouth just as thoroughly as he’s claimed my pussy. When he starts to slowly fuck me, I moan and cling to him even tighter. The pain is intense, but so is the ripple of pure ecstasy that washes through me. He groans and kisses me harder, sliding his fingers down my cheek and jaw until he’s wrapping them around my neck, squeezing me hard enough to feel the pressure, but not so hard that I can’t breathe. My pulse races against his thumb as he thrusts into me even harder.

“I want to possess every goddamn inch of you,” he growls against my lips. “I want your body, your mind, your soul, your every fucking breath,” he says, tightening his grip and cutting off my air, leaving me completely at his mercy as he pounds into me in a hard, unforgiving rhythm that’s lighting my whole body on fire. “And I want your pleasure. Now be a good girl and come all over my cock. Let me feel it, sweetheart.”

My lungs burn, but he doesn’t let up. My nipples slide along his chest with each hard thrust, and when my body starts to tense, he loosens his fingers so I can suck in a deep breath as I come so hard I see stars. He groans something in Russian when my pussy clenches even tighter around him. My fingers run over him, feeling the taut muscles, knowing he’s dying to let go but refusing to give in to his own release.

His hand leaves my neck to cup one of my breasts, giving my nipple a hard enough pinch to make me moan and arch my

back up to him. Sitting up, he grabs onto my hips, holding me in place. His eyes run over me before settling between my legs. He watches as he slowly slides out of me.

“Fucking hell, baby,” he groans. “You look so goddamn good clenched around my dick. Watch me fuck you, sweetheart.”

I lift up on my elbows, my breath hitching when I look down and watch him slowly slide back into me, spreading me in a way that I would’ve said was impossible an hour ago. He’s soaked in my juices and even in the moonlight, I can see the bloody streaks that paint his thick cock.

“You see the blood, baby?” His accent is thick and his voice low. “That means you’re mine. I’m the first man to fuck your sweet pussy, and I better damn well be the last. No one else will ever know what you feel like, what you taste like, or how fucking sexy you look when you come. This is only for me. *You’re* only for me.”

“Yes,” I moan, nodding my head and rocking my hips when he brings his fingers to my clit, rubbing my slippery bundle of nerves while he thrusts into me in a steady rhythm that has me clutching the bedding and whimpering his name. When I start to come again, he groans, watching me as my body writhes and my pussy tightens around him. He doesn’t let up, fucking me through it while working me with his fingers until I’m whimpering and reaching my hand down to move his.

“Oh, I don’t think so, sweetheart,” he murmurs, easily brushing my hand aside before pinching my clit and giving it a soft squeeze. “This is mine, and I can do whatever the hell I want with it.”

To prove it, he rolls my overly sensitive clit between his fingers, making me buck up from the mattress as my body instinctively tries to curl in on itself. He gives a soft laugh and gentles his movements, lightly pressing his thumb against my bundle of nerves and very slowly working me in circles until I couldn’t speak even if I wanted to. If I could form words, I’m not sure if I’d beg him to stop or to never stop. He knows what



I want, what I need, because my body speaks to him in a way that words will always fall short. He reads me so easily, and when he leans his body over mine, covering me and surrounding me with his heat and scent, it's the exact thing I need. Releasing my clit, he slides his hands under me, wrapping an arm around my back as the other slips down to cup my ass. Holding me tightly, he fucks me hard and kisses me with a hunger that takes my breath away.

This time when the climax hits me, he lets go too. My arms and legs tighten around him as I swallow his grunts and growls while my pussy grips his pulsing cock, my body begging him for everything he has. The kiss turns slow but no less hungry. His tongue runs over mine before he gives me a long, slow suck. My body shakes with the aftershocks, and feeling it makes him hold me tighter. Even after he's empty and growing soft inside me, he keeps kissing me like he never wants to let me go.

"I love you," he whispers against my lips.

"I love you too." I run my fingers over his beautiful face and brush aside a strand of sweaty hair. "Best birthday ever," I whisper, making him smile.

"It's not over yet." He gives me a wink and slowly slides out of me, cupping my face when he sees me wince. "Time for a nice long soak, baby."

"You don't have to do that. I'll be fine."

"Evie, don't deny me the pleasure of taking care of you, not when I enjoy it so damn much."

"Okay," I whisper, trying to get used to being cared for and loved.

"Good girl," he says, grinning down at me before sitting back. His hands run over me before he gently parts my thighs. "God, you're gorgeous."

I let out a surprised gasp when he lowers his head and runs his tongue up my sore slit. Keeping his mouth close, he says, "You think I wouldn't want to taste you because you're filled with my cum?" He gives a deep groan. "I love that you taste

like me. I love that it's mixed with the coppery taste of your first time. Fucking hell, sweetheart, I could eat nothing but you for the rest of my life and die a very happy man."

He slides one finger into me while kissing along my pussy lips. Keeping his head buried between my legs, he brings his wet finger to my mouth.

"See how good we taste, baby."

I part my lips so he can slide his finger in, sucking him clean as he licks and kisses my sore pussy. He groans when I suck his finger harder, swallowing our combined release, and when he lifts his head, I sit up and pull him to me, kissing him and filling my mouth even more until I'm surrounded in us. Wrapping his arms around me, he picks me up and carries me to the bathroom without breaking our kiss. When he turns the light on, I pull back so I can see him. I find it hard to believe that I just had sex with this man. It seems too good to be true. Refusing to let me go, he walks to his enormous tub and starts the water.

I rest my head against his shoulder, breathing in his scent and tracing my finger along the skull tattoo on his neck, which seems so out of place with how sweet he is. When the bath has enough water in it, he very carefully puts me in it and kisses my head.

"I'll be right back, baby."

He turns and walks away, not even remotely self-conscious about showing me his ass. Although, he has no reason to be. It's a damn fine ass. I wonder what it's like to be so confident and at ease in your own skin. I'm already sinking down under the water so maybe he won't notice how small my boobs are when he comes back in. It's stupid, he's already seen them and felt them, but still. Old habits die hard. I'm so used to hiding, and it's hard to stop and let myself be seen.

When he walks in naked, singing Happy Birthday while carrying a tray with a cake that's lit up with twenty-one candles, I laugh and pull my knees up, wrapping my arms around them. The tray fits across the length of the tub, so he

sets it down when he's finished singing and raises a brow at me.

"Make a wish, Evie."

For the first time in my life I don't wish for anything. I just wish for it to stay the same because in this moment, I have everything I need. It's perfect, and I never want it to change. After I blow out the candles, he laughs and kisses me before getting in behind me. He wraps his arms around me and hands me a fork. I get a forkful of the chocolate cake and take a big bite.

"Damn," I mumble around the mouthful as I fill the fork again and feed him a bite.

He closes his eyes and lets out a soft laugh. "That's damn good." When he opens his eyes, he gives me a wink. "It doesn't taste near as good as you though."

I smile and take another bite. We eat as much as we can while I relax against him and soak in the hot water. His hands run over me, caressing my wet body, unable to keep still.

"I want to know everything about you," I tell him.

I expect him to laugh or make a joke, but the look he gives me is so sad that it has me cupping his face and kissing his tense jaw.

"What if everything you find isn't good?"

"I already know about the past women," I say, trying to make a joke of it. "Well, I know of two, but I'm guessing there are lots, lots more, and I'd really rather not know the whole truth of it, Valeri. I already feel like you're way too good for me."

He puts his hand on top of mine and kisses my inner wrist. "Don't ever think that. You're the one who's way too good for me. I can't take away my past, but I can promise you that no other woman will ever have me, not my heart, not my thoughts, and not my cock. You own everything, baby. Every single part of me is yours and will be until the day I die."

“The first time I saw you, I thought you were so intimidating. You got out of your car, and I about had a heart attack. Those dark glasses and your suit, god,” I say with a laugh, “I was so embarrassed. I never would’ve guessed that we’d end up right here, and that you’d be so damn sweet.”

“When I first saw you, I thought you were beautiful.”

I snort out a laugh and try to turn away. He cups my face, holding me in place, and kisses my inner wrist again.

“I did. I thought you were gorgeous, and I thought that you were hiding yourself away, and I was curious about you and wanted to know more. I could also tell something was wrong, and I didn’t want you to leave. After you drove off, I kept thinking about you, kept wanting to text you and talk to you. I couldn’t get you out of my head, and I didn’t want to.”

I scoot the tray down and turn so I can straddle him. He sighs and wraps his arms around me, pulling me even tighter against him. I trace a line along his jaw and say, “I love you, Valeri Medvedev, and I don’t care about your past or whatever bad you think you’ve done. Nothing will ever change how I feel about you.”

Leaning closer, he presses his lips against my chest and murmurs, “I hope that’s true, *lapochka*,” before running his tongue over my skin. “Because I can’t ever let you go.”

I want to ask him about his scars and about his past, but I don’t want to ruin this moment with questions that he may not want to answer right now. Instead, I run my hands through his hair, sliding my pussy along his cock when I feel him start to harden beneath me. “You won’t ever have to let me go,” I tell him, knowing that none of the answers he could give will make me change how I feel about him. “I’m not going anywhere.”

When his lips find mine, I open for him, giving him my body again, giving him everything, until I’m left shaking with barely enough strength to keep my eyes open. The last thing I remember is the covers being pulled over me and his strong arms pulling me in closer as he wraps his body around mine.

For the first time in my life I fall asleep feeling completely safe and loved.

# Chapter 10

## Valeri

The first thing I do when I wake is reach for Evie, but there's nothing but cool sheets beneath my hands. My eyes jerk open as I sit up and look around. I'm just about to holler for her when I spot the handwritten note by her pillow. My heart races as I pick it up and read what she's written.

*Valeri,*

*I'm going to run to my dad's and get some of my stuff. Don't worry, he went to the bar last night, and they always stay over at Lyle's house when they do that. I'll be in and out before he even gets back. Please don't be upset with me for not waking you. I don't want you to meet him. I can't have you getting hurt because of me. I'm taking my new car, so at least you don't have to worry about me on the bus. I'll be back as soon as I can.*

*I love you,*

*Evie*

I check my watch, feeling the worry start to rise when I see it's close to noon. I have no idea what time she left, but I'm guessing she should've been back by now. I text her, and when she doesn't respond, I call. When that goes straight to voicemail, everything inside me grows cold. I run to the bathroom and then throw on some clothes while I text my brothers, telling them what happened and then sending them her address. Before I leave, I grab my gun and the baseball bat that's propped in the corner of my closet.

Vasily's text comes right as I step on the elevator. *We're on our way.*

I barely register any of my surroundings as I walk through the building and get in my car. The drive to her dad's is a blur, and when I see the red Mini Cooper in the driveway, I let out the breath I'd been holding. I've replayed a million different scenarios on the way over here—none of them good. I don't know what I'll do if I walk in there and he's hurt her, or worse. I know my brothers are going to be pissed I didn't wait, but I can't not go in, not when I know she's in danger. The motorcycle isn't around, so I'm assuming Lyle's still at his house. Grabbing my bat, I get out and walk to their front door. Pausing, I press closer and see if I can hear anything. After a few seconds, I hear a man yell, "You stupid fucking whore!" right before there's a loud smack of flesh hitting flesh and Evie's scream of pain.

And that's when I officially lose my shit.

Throwing open the door, I grip the bat and rush inside. My instincts take over, forcing me to give the room a quick scan to make sure we really are alone, and when I see it's clear, I follow the screams of pain, running past the small living room and into the hall. The sight that greets me is something I'll never forget. Evie falls to the floor from a punch her dad's just given her, and after she's on the ground and trying to curl into a ball, he pulls his leg back like he's going to kick her. I don't give him the chance.

"Back the fuck away from her," I yell, closing the distance between us and punching his surprised face as soon as he turns around. The loud pop of his jaw dislocating does nothing to quell my rage. He falls to the floor like a fucking baby, clutching at his face. Men like him are always so quick to dish out pain and always such fucking pussies when they have to experience it for themselves.

"Evie," I say, kneeling down by her and brushing her hair out of her face. Her nose is bloody but not broken, and there's already a couple of new bruises forming on her face. She clutches at my arms, crying so hard I can barely understand her.

"I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have come here alone. I thought he'd be gone."



I pick her up and kiss her temple. “It’s okay, baby. It’s not your fault.”

Vasily and Volodya rush in a second later, guns drawn, and when they see that we’re okay, Vasily says in Russian, “Are you trying to give me a goddamn heart attack?”

“I couldn’t wait. He was beating her.”

He scrubs a hand through his hair and looks over at her dad, who’s still moaning and trying to get to his feet, and then looks at Evie. “Is she okay?”

“Yeah, he got a few hits, but I was able to stop him before it got any worse.”

“Why do your brothers have guns?” Evie whispers in my ear.

I sigh and ignore the pointed look Volodya gives me when he realizes that I still haven’t told her the whole truth about us. Turning to Evie, I say, “I’ll explain later. First, I need to take care of your father.”

“What are you going to do?” Her eyes are wide when she looks from me to her dad and then to my brothers.

Instead of answering, I say, “He hurt you *again*, and if I hadn’t walked in when I did, you’d be in the hospital, *at least*, Evie. He could’ve killed you.” Just thinking about it has me almost in a rage. I set her down, wrapping an arm around her and pulling her in for a hug as I kiss her head. “I need you to go wait on the porch.”

“What? No.” She shakes her head and looks up at me like I’ve lost my mind. “What are you going to do to him?”

“I’m going to fucking kill him,” I say, hearing Vasily and Volodya give a joined groan at how badly I’m handling this.

“You can’t kill him,” she says, taking a step away from me. Her eyes fall on her dad, and I see the war going on behind her eyes. She hates him, but he’s still her dad, and she can’t just turn her back on him, no matter how much she may want to.

I sigh and shoot Vasily a scathing look when he mutters in Russian “Compromise” in a singsong voice.

Hooking a finger under Evie’s chin, I tilt her face up to mine, groaning at the sight of her beaten face. I run a finger under her nose, wiping away the blood before showing her the bloody finger as evidence.

“He hurt you, Evie, and I will not just walk away and let that go.”

“You broke his jaw,” she whispers.

“It’s not enough.”

“Please don’t kill him,” she finally says, turning those big, brown eyes up at me. “I have my reasons for not wanting him dead. I’m leaving, and I’m never coming back. It’s enough, Valeri. We can just leave.”

“Not good enough,” I repeat, because I need vengeance. I’ll never be able to look at myself again if all this asshole gets is a broken jaw. I run my thumb over her newly bruised cheek. “We’re compromising right now because we’re in a relationship, and I love you.” I resist looking over at my brothers, both of whom I’m guessing are trying to not laugh. They know how badly I want to kill the fucker, and they would be more than happy to end this abusive asshole’s life, but they also know that you can’t just go against the woman you love.

“The compromise,” I continue, “is that I’m not going to kill your piece of shit father, but I am going to break every fucking bone in his hand because he dared to raise it in anger against you.”

She starts to protest, but I kiss her lips to stop her and say, “I’m afraid I’m all compromised out, sweetheart. That’s as good as it’s going to get.”

“No, you can’t,” she yells when I let her go to grab the bat at my feet. Her face is pale at the idea of what’s about to happen. It’s not going to be pretty, and I don’t blame her for not having the stomach for it. It’s nothing I would ever want her to see, and I don’t expect her to watch it now. Looking

over at Vasily, I give him a nod and gently scoot Evie closer to him.

“Valeri!” she yells, lunging for me, but Vasily grabs her and clamps a hand over her mouth to stop her from screaming.

“I’m sorry, Evie,” he tells her, “but you can’t keep screaming. Your neighbors will call the police, and we can’t let that happen just yet. Let’s go sit on the porch for a little bit. I’ll tell you the story of how I met my wife. Maybe it’ll help you understand our low tolerance for men who prey on women.”

Her body slumps, the fight leaving her, but when her eyes meet mine, I see the hurt and confusion in them, and it kills me.

“She’ll be okay,” he tells me in Russian, turning her around and leading her out to the porch. Before they step out, he takes his hand off her mouth, and she doesn’t scream, so I take that as a good sign. She gives me one last look before walking out the door. Once it’s shut, I turn my attention back to her dad.

Volodya nudges him in the lower back, pushing him down before pressing his knee into his back, pinning him to the floor. He smacks her dad on the cheek, pulling a pained moan from him because of the broken jaw.

“You shouldn’t beat your daughter, jackass,” he tells him and then looks up at me. Switching to Russian, he grins and says, “This is going to hurt like a motherfucker.”

There’s a reason Vasily chose porch duty. It’s not because he can’t stomach this sort of thing. I’ve seen him laugh while putting a guy’s head on a spike. Nothing fazes him, but he gave this to Volodya for the simple reason that he knew how much our brother would enjoy it. Plus, we all know he’ll be able to comfort Evie better than Volodya could. He’s really only sweet to Maddie. He wouldn’t be mean to Evie. It’s more that his idea of comfort might be to offer to come in here and slice off her dad’s balls with one of his knives. I’m not sure that would make Evie feel any better.

Kneeling down by her dad, I wait until he meets my eyes. His are a darker shade of brown than Evie's. I don't see anything of her in him. He's pathetic and mean, and his daughter is sweet and perfect.

"I know you heard what I'm going to do to you."

He moans something, trying to form words, but I ignore him.

"You brought this on yourself. You've been beating her for years, and now it's time for you to feel a little bit of what you've put her through. You don't deserve her, and you will never see her again. She's mine now, and I'll be taking care of her from here on out. You are no longer a part of her life. Do you understand?"

He moans an "Mm-hmm."

"If you ever try to hurt her or get in contact with her again, I will kill you. Do you understand?"

"Mm-hmm."

"Good." I stand back up and press my boot against his arm, pinning it in place. "This is going to hurt. Try to be a man for once in your life and take it with some dignity."

Volodya puts a hand over his mouth because we both know he's going to scream, broken jaw and dignity be damned. With the image of Evie's bloody face clear in my mind, I raise the bat and bring it down with enough force to break several bones on the first swing. His muffled scream fills the room, but I'm hoping it's not loud enough to filter out to the porch.

"He's fucking slobbering all over my goddamn hand," Volodya groans. "I hate it when they do that. It's so fucking gross."

I give her dad's hand a few more solid hits before concentrating on the fingers. He passes out before I even get to the third one.

"It's good to see you in love, little brother," Volodya says as I bring the bat down yet again.

I laugh at my psycho older brother and get to work on the ring finger. By the time I stop, I'm fairly confident that her dad will never be able to use his right hand again.

"God, that's going to suck when he wants to jerk off," Volodya says with a laugh, wiping his wet hand on her dad's shirt to get the drool off. He's conscious and groaning, and he's in for many weeks and months of pain. It'll give him time to reflect on his shitty parenting skills.

Volodya rolls him over and unsheathes one of his knives, letting Evie's dad get a good look at the vicious thing. I didn't think the man could get any paler, but I'm proven wrong when he goes a few shades lighter.

"Do I need to remind you that you'd better not say shit to the cops about this?"

"Mm-mmm," he moans, shaking his head and wincing when it hurts his jaw.

"Good, because if I find out that you talked to them or told them anything about us, I will come back in here while you're sleeping and cut your fucking balls off before I shove them down your goddamn throat."

I knew slicing off balls would come up, and I'm so glad he didn't go with Evie to the porch. We both head up the stairs to grab her stuff, ignoring her dad's moans and pleas for help. I scrub a hand over my face and say in Russian, "She looked at me like I was a monster."

Volodya slaps my back. "She'll forgive you. She loves you."

We find her room easily enough. She's already packed up most of her stuff. I grab the few things that are laying around and shove it all into the last empty box. I eye the small bed and the way she's tried so hard to make this dreary room as cheerful as possible. The blue paint on the walls and potted plants in the window help, but there's no denying the depressing air to this house. It's seen too much pain to ever feel cheerful, no matter what color you paint the damn walls.

Grabbing the boxes, we head back downstairs, stepping over her moaning father and walking out without a backward glance. He can lie there crying all he wants. He's not getting a drop of sympathy from me. The fucker will live, but I know he deserves to die, and it's irritating that I can't finish him off. When I step onto the porch, I can't bring myself to meet Evie's eyes. I'm too afraid of what I might see.

Volodya follows me to my car and helps me load the boxes into the back. I open the passenger side door for Evie and wait.

She stops several feet away and asks, "What about my car?"

"Volodya can drive it back."

Volodya laughs. "The fuck? God, you owe me big time," he says in Russian. "No one better see me in this goddamn tiny car."

Any other time, I'd laugh my ass off at seeing my brother squeeze into Evie's Mini Cooper, but I can barely even manage a smile at this point. Vasily's laughing enough for the both of us and taking photos as Volodya flips him the bird before driving off.

"I'm sending that to everyone," he says, laughing even harder. "Maddie's going to love that."

Evie gets in the car, and I shut her in before walking over to Vasily. "Thanks for coming and for talking to her."

"I didn't tell her about the Bratva. That needs to come from you." He smacks my back and digs out his keys. "Get your ass out of here. The cops will probably be here soon."

"Yeah, if the neighbors haven't called yet, I'm sure her dad will manage to crawl to his phone and do it himself. I'm going to bust his windshield out before I leave, though."

"Make it quick," he warns over his shoulder.

Instead of answering, I tighten my grip on the bat and walk over to his precious fucking truck, the thing he cares about more than his own daughter. She'd been so terrified at the small dent she'd put in it, but I'm about to do a hell of a lot

more than that. I knock out the headlights first and then start on the windshield. Watching it splinter and crack is therapeutic as hell. I keep beating at it until it caves in, and then I make quick work of the other windows before finally backing away. My eyes run over his ruined truck, and I'm finally able to laugh. With a smile still playing at my lips, I get in the car and toss the bat in the back. Pulling away with a squeal of tires, I get us the hell out of there before the police show up.

Evie doesn't say a word, and the drive back is a quiet, tense one. As we pull into the parking garage, I spot Vasily leaving with Volodya in the passenger seat. They give us a wave as they pass and then I'm pulling into my parking spot next to her car, wishing like hell we could start this day over again. She stays silent, grabbing a couple of boxes and following me inside. I look over at her in the elevator, eyeing the damage to her face and the way she won't meet my eyes. Once the doors open and we step into the apartment, I've had all the goddamn silence I can take.

"Evie," I say, but she throws her hand up to cut me off.

"I don't really feel like talking right now."

Several different scenarios run through my head, things that I should probably do, like give her some space, offer a comforting hug and tell her I'll be here when she's ready, but fuck all that. That's not the kind of relationship we have. I close the distance between us, ignoring the flash of shock and anger that flits over her face, and pick her up, holding her tightly against me.

"Fuck that," I tell her. "I'm not letting this come between us, and I'm sure as hell not going to let you just disappear and close yourself off to me."

"Let me go," she yells, struggling against me, but I just hold her tighter until she finally gives up and slumps against me.

"I can't let you go," I tell her. "Even if you hate me, I won't let you go. I'll lock you in this goddamn room with me and make you remember how much you love me."

“Apparently I don’t even know you, Valeri. I just watched you threaten and beat my dad, and then you destroyed his truck. Who the fuck are you, and what in the hell is going on?”

I can feel her putting walls up, hiding herself from me, and it fucking kills me to see it. I can tolerate a lot of things, but Evie pulling away from me isn’t one of them.

“Don’t hide yourself from me,” I whisper against her neck. When I kiss the spot right behind her ear, I feel her body stiffen, and it pulls a pained groan from me that pushes me over the damn edge.

“No,” I growl against her skin, setting her down long enough to roughly pull her yoga pants down, taking her panties with them. “You are mine, *lapochka*, and I think you need to be reminded of that.”

Before she can say anything, I’ve got her pinned against the wall and I’m already undoing my pants and freeing my cock. Gripping her hips, I lift her up and press the head of my cock against her slit. She sucks in a quick breath and clutches at my shoulders.

“I’m going to remind you that every part of you belongs to me, that there is no going back, and that I will burn this whole goddamn world down if it keeps you safe.”

Keeping one hand on her ass, I slide the other one under her shirt and then under her bra, pushing it aside so I can fill my hand with her. She lets out a soft whimper when I brush my fingers over her taut nipple.

“That’s my good girl,” I murmur against her skin, kissing a path along her jaw while I very slowly feed her my cock, one thick inch at a time. The tight wet heat of her envelops me, and it’s like pure fucking heaven on earth. It’s unlike anything I’ve ever experienced before.

“You’re my home,” I whisper against her lips when I’m fully seated inside her. “I can’t survive without you, Evie. I love you so goddamn much.”

“I love you too,” she whispers, and hearing those four words loosens something inside me and pushes aside the



darkness that's been threatening to consume me ever since I woke up this morning and couldn't find her.

Her hand goes to the back of my head, pulling me closer and kissing me with a hungry desperation that mirrors exactly how I feel. I want to take my time with her, go easy on her because I know she's sore, but the way she's sucking on my tongue and digging her heels into my ass while her pussy clenches so fucking tightly around me makes it impossible to do anything except fuck her good and hard. Dried blood still covers her lip, and I taste the coppery tang of it on my tongue, reminding me of last night and how she'd bled on my cock. She moans into our kiss when I give her nipple a hard pinch while she fists my hair hard enough to sting. When she comes, she breaks our kiss to scream my name, and the sound of her ragged cry and the way her pussy is squeezing me as her body convulses with her release quickly sends me over the edge right along with her.

I growl her name and thrust into her even harder. Each pulse of my cock sends a rush of pure, raw ecstasy through me until I'm gasping and resting my forehead against hers as my heart races and my body trembles. I'm completely spent and empty, and I'm fully aware that she's the only woman I've ever been inside without a condom. I should be worried, but I'm not. Filling her sweet pussy with my seed has become my new favorite thing. I'm completely addicted to it. I'm completely addicted to *her*.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you everything sooner."

"I want you to tell me everything now." She softens her grip on my hair and runs her fingers through it before sliding one hand down to cup my face. "Thank you for finding me. I'm sorry I freaked out. I've just never seen that side of you before."

"I never wanted you to see that part of me, but seeing him hit you," I shake my head at the memory. She runs her fingers over my jaw when she feels it tense beneath her hand. "I wanted to fucking kill him."

“I know, but I’m glad you didn’t. He’s not worth going to prison over.”

I give a soft laugh. “They’d have to catch me first, and I know how to dispose of a body so it will never be found.”

“I can’t tell if you’re joking.” She studies my face, her brow scrunched as she searches for the answer in my eyes.

“I’m not joking, baby.”

“Who the hell are you, Valeri?”

I sigh and give her one more kiss before slowly sliding out of her. Instead of putting her down, I walk to the couch and sit down, keeping her on my lap so she’s straddling me. She fixes her bra and then rests her hands on my stomach, fidgeting with the bottom of my T-shirt.

Ignoring the question, I ask, “You said that you have your reasons for me not killing your dad, what are they?”

“You can’t sidetrack me. I want to know the truth.”

“I know, and I promise I’ll tell you everything, but please answer my question.”

She keeps fidgeting with my shirt. “I’ve imagined killing my dad so many damn times,” she admits. “You have no idea how many times I almost shoved him down the stairs when he was drunk, but I always resisted because I refuse to be like him. Do you know how my mom died?”

“I did some research on you after we met and I couldn’t get you out of my head. She fell down the stairs when you were ten and died of a broken neck.”

“Did she fall though?” She worries her bottom lip and looks out the large wall of windows. “They’d been fighting. I was hiding in my closet, and I could hear him screaming at her. He was drunk like usual, and I remember hearing his angry shouts, and then my mom’s sharp scream, and then the sound of her crashing down the stairs. He killed her. I know he did. He may not have meant to, but he pushed her down those damn stairs, and every time I thought about killing him, I’d remind myself that I’m not like him. I don’t want his death on

my hands. I don't want to carry around that guilt, and I don't want him tainting my life any more than he already has."

"You're nothing like him, Evie. He deserves to die, and I'd be more than happy to take care of that for you and spare you the guilt and pain of it, but even if you asked me to do it, you are nothing like him." I brush back her hair and tilt her face back to me. The bruising looks even worse in the sunlight, and the dried blood is driving me crazy. "I knew you were a fighter the first time I saw you in your big coveralls. You're the most amazing person I've ever met, baby."

Standing up, I carry her into the bathroom, grabbing her clothes on the way. She gets dressed while I button my pants back up and grab something to clean her face. Sitting her on the counter, I wet a washcloth with warm water and stand between her legs. Carefully wiping the dried blood from her face, I think about how quickly she's become my whole world. I'd do anything for this woman.

"I'm still waiting," she reminds me with a small smile.

Figuring it's better to just lay it all out there, I say, "My brothers and I run the Medvedev Bratva."

I wait for her anger, but all she does is tilt her head and ask, "What the hell's a Bratva?"

It's so unexpected that I let out a laugh and cup the back of her head, giving her another kiss. "God, I love you, baby." She's waiting for an answer, so I say, "It's the Russian mafia. My brothers and I run this city." I lift my hands to signify the area around us. "I run the downtown section."

She shakes her head softly. "I should've known something was up. The tattoos, the money, the way people act like they're afraid of you, the women, god, I'm such an idiot. Even the mechanic who fixed the truck, *Oh, anything for you, Mr. Medvedev*," she says in a cute but horrible impersonation of Mac.

"You're not an idiot. You're sweet and kind, and you don't look for bad in people." I clean the rest of the blood from around her nose and then cup her face. "Nothing I ever told

you was a lie. I may not have told you the whole truth, but I never lied to you. I showed you who I am, just not all of who I am.”

“My dad called me a whore when I came home and he saw the car and the smile on my face. He’s always told me that pretty girls get choices in life and that women like me just have to take what we can get.”

“It’s not too late for me to go back and finish what I started,” I tell her, wishing I’d broken a few more bones before I’d left.

“I don’t care about my dad right now, what I want to know is if he’s actually right about this.”

“What? Evie, you’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. He’s an asshole, a complete jackass, and he doesn’t deserve you, that’s for damn sure. He wanted to hurt you, to break you down so that you wouldn’t leave him. He didn’t want you to think that you could have a better life. Shitty people do that. They want others to be miserable just like them.”

“I know he’s an ass,” she says, “but what I mean is, if you’re a mafia boss, then doesn’t that mean that you’ll have mistresses and stuff like that? You said you own several clubs. Do you own strip clubs? Is that how you plan on spending your time? How do I fit into this life?”

“You fit into my world right at the center of it, baby, because everything that I am now revolves around you.” I cup her face and look into the light brown eyes that are now as familiar to me as my own. “I will never cheat on you.” I grab her hand and bring it to my cock. “This is yours and *only* yours. It will never get hard for anyone else.”

She rolls her eyes at that, but I shake my head at her.

“I’m serious, baby. It’s just not possible. You own every part of me. And as far as strip clubs go, yes, we own a few, but I think the more important question is have I stepped foot in one since I met you, and the answer is no. Will I ever step foot in one again? No, I will not. You’re the only woman I want to

see, Evie, and I understand if you have your doubts. I'll happily prove you wrong again and again."

She worries her bottom lip while she thinks about what I've said, and I know it's going to take some time for her to trust me. She's been told her whole life that she's not pretty enough, not good enough, and that she'll be stuck with someone like Lyle. She's wrong, though, and over time she'll learn to believe me instead of all the insecurities that have been forced on her. She pulls my shirt up, exposing the large bear tattoo.

"This is super important, isn't it?"

"Yes." I pull my shirt off the rest of the way. "My brothers have the same tattoo. It shows that we're all three bosses in our Bratva. This one," I say, showing her the bear on my forearm with my name written beneath it in Cyrillic, "is the same one that every member of our Bratva has. They don't have my full name, though, just the last name. When we get married, yours will be identical to mine."

"When, huh?"

"Yes, when." I smile at her blush and pick her back up, carrying her to the bed. "That tattoo on your arm will send a message. It will mean that you're mine, and that if anyone touches you, they'll pay for it with their lives."

She thinks about that for a minute and then says, "Vasily told me about how he met Nina, that she begged him for help when she was being held against her will at a brothel. He said her dad sold her to them to pay off his debt."

"Yeah, her dad was a real asshole too." I get on the bed and pull her up against me. "She wouldn't let him kill the bastard either."

She rests her head on my bare chest and traces her fingers along my tattoos. "Did he break his hand like you did?"

"No, he sliced his face up pretty good so he'd have to see the scars every time he looks in the mirror."

"I'm glad you broke his hand," she whispers.

“Me too, baby.” I kiss her head, smiling when she gives a big yawn. Neither one of us got much sleep last night, and I know her body must be exhausted.

“Can you set your alarm so I don’t sleep too late?”

“Why do you need to get up at a certain time?”

“I have work tonight.”

I laugh and stroke her head. “Sweetheart, you’re done working.”

“I can’t just leave Jerry like that. It’s not fair to him. He and his wife have been so kind to me. She often packs him extra snacks so he can share. They don’t know all the details, but they know things have been kind of rough for me.”

“We can go in together tonight and talk to him about you quitting, and I also want to get you added to all my bank accounts so you have access to everything.”

“So I’m like super loaded now?” she asks with a laugh.

“You are.” I run my fingers through her hair, marveling at how soft it is. “What do you want, Evie? Anything you want, you can have.”

She thinks for a second, still tracing her fingers along my skin. “I want to give Gale some money.”

“The bus driver?”

“Yeah, she’s always looked out for me. I always told myself that if I ever had money, I was going to give her some. I also want to help Jerry and his wife Betty. I told you they’re saving for an RV. Maybe we could give them something to help out with that.”

“So no big shopping sprees or spa days or a closet full of shoes? You just want to give it all away?”

She hears the amusement in my voice and kisses my chest. “No, I wouldn’t mind getting some new clothes, ones that are brand new so Lisa can kiss my ass if I ever see her again, but I don’t give a shit about designer labels and a closet full of

shoes. I wouldn't say no to a bookshelf full of books," she says with a smile.

"I'll keep that in mind." I'm already planning the home library I want to have built for her as she lays her head back on my chest.

Her voice is a whisper against my skin when she says, "Tell me about your scars."

"Which ones?" I ask with a laugh.

"All of them."

I give her a brief rundown of the various knife wounds, most of them silvery lines of scar tissue from where I've been sliced, but a couple are from actually being stabbed. Her fingers run over the worst one, the bullet wound from last year.

"That's from when I was shot. The bullet grazed Volodya's arm and hit me in the chest. Hurt like a son of a bitch," I say with a laugh.

She lifts her head, but she's not laughing. She looks terrified. "Your life is always going to be in danger. People are always going to try to hurt you."

"My father was murdered, and it destroyed my mom."

Her eyes widen even more. "That doesn't make me feel better."

I grab her hand and hold it against the bullet wound. "What I'm trying to say is that, yes, it's a dangerous lifestyle, but you can either choose to live your life in fear, or you can embrace it and enjoy every damn second of it. You think people with boring safe jobs are guaranteed to grow old? That's not how life works. I'm careful, baby, and I will always keep you safe." I bring my other hand up and run my fingers over her bruise. "Although you're trying your damndest to prove me wrong."

She positions herself on top of me, blushing when I lift a brow at her and smile. Scooting down a bit, she lowers her face and slowly kisses all of my scars. She takes her time, licking and sucking and kissing my old injuries, erasing all the

bad memories associated with them and driving me wild in the process. Her nose drags along my skin as she nuzzles and nips and teases until I'm painfully hard and straining against my jeans.

"Fuck, baby," I groan when she runs her tongue over my abs before shimmying out of her clothes and reaching for my zipper.

"You're right, Valeri, there are no guarantees in life, and I'm not wasting a single second that I have with you."

I lift up so she can pull my pants off, and when I'm naked, she quickly straddles me. I drink in the sight of her—the hungry look in her brown eyes, the blush to her cheeks, her perky tits and pebbled nipples, the line of her hips, the curve of her round, perfect ass, and the sight of her wet pussy, still dripping cum from the last time I fucked her.

"Goddamn," I groan, gripping her hips as she lifts up and grabs my cock, putting me right where she wants me. Her sexy moans fill the room when she slowly slides down my length, taking me all the way in. My shy girl throws back her head and rocks her hips, losing herself in the moment and it's the sexiest goddamn thing I've ever seen. I watch her fuck me, rocking my hips to meet her rhythm, and when she starts to come, she runs her nails down my chest and screams my name.

Needing to taste her, I sit up and wrap my arms around her, bringing my mouth to hers. She clings to me, her body shuddering with her release, and kisses me like her life depends on it. I suck her tongue into my mouth and squeeze her ass, moving her against me and rocking into her even deeper. Her tits scrape my chest while her nails dig into my back. I know her clit is borderline painful right now because she just came, but I push her through it, not letting up until she's feeling nothing but pleasure and close to another orgasm.

This time when I feel her wet pussy tighten around me, I let go with her. How I even have anything left to give, I don't fucking know, but my cock pulses inside her, giving her what her body is demanding from me, and when I'm empty and her



body is shaking in my arms, I hold her tighter, breathing in the scent of her as my heart races and my entire world narrows down to nothing but her.

I collapse back on the bed, taking her with me, and that's how we fall asleep—her body on top of mine, my cock still buried inside her, and the feel of her soft breaths on my neck, and it's fucking perfect.

## Chapter II

## *Evie*

“**F**eel better?”

I look up at Valeri’s smiling face as he opens the library door for me. “Yes, lots.” We walk out into the cool, dark night, hand in hand. Jerry had been thrilled to hear that I no longer needed my job, and had insisted that I just quit on the spot instead of putting in my notice. He said they had plenty of applicants and they’d have a new hire in no time. As happy as I am to no longer have to do the janitorial job, I’ll never forget the good memories associated with it, the quiet nights, the yummy desserts that Betty would sometimes slip in for me, the pride I’d felt when I got my first paycheck, and, of course, the night with Valeri when he came to visit me.

“We really need to get our schedules fixed,” he says with a laugh.

I give the lion’s ass one last pat and rub his smooth nose. “We do,” I agree. “I’m looking forward to seeing the sun. Maybe we can go to the beach again.”

He wraps an arm around me, pulling me closer. “We can go anytime you want.”

“You still owe me hamburgers and ice cream,” I remind him.

“I do, don’t I?” He looks across the street at the crowd outside Inferno before turning his head to scan the rest of the street. “Have you ever been to McGinty’s Pub?” he asks, pointing to a small place at the end of a row of buildings. The outside is lit up with fairy lights in the colors of the Irish flag.

“No.”

“Perfect.” He tightens his grip on my hand and leads me down the concrete stairs to the sidewalk. “I’ve never been there either. We can experience it for the first time together.”

As we get closer, I can hear the traditional Irish music filtering out from the pub and see the crowd of people inside. We cross the street at the light and when we step inside the dark interior, we’re greeted by a smiling hostess wearing a short, plaid skirt and a big smile on her face.

She eyes Valeri, and even in the dim lighting I can see the light flush that creeps up her cheeks. I can’t blame her for the reaction. The man is gorgeous, and he’s always going to have an effect on women, but when he wraps both his arms around me from behind and leans down to kiss my cheek, she takes the hint and turns her smiling face to me instead.

“Table for two or do you want the bar?”

“Table,” I tell her, and then follow her as she leads us through the crowded bar section and to a quieter area with tables and booths. The music isn’t annoyingly loud, just enough to add to the atmosphere, and the catchy, upbeat tune has me wanting to tap my foot to the beat. She stops in front of a booth in the corner and lays the menus down.

“Your waitress will be right with you.”

I tell her thanks and am about to scoot into the booth when Valeri puts his hand on my waist and stops me, guiding me to the other seat before sliding in next to me instead of on the opposite side. He’s chosen the side that’s facing the rest of the pub so our backs aren’t to anyone, and he’s taken the aisle seat so I’m safely cocooned in the corner. I watch his eyes scan the crowd. Outwardly, he appears calm, but I know he’s taking in every detail of the place and watching the crowd for any signs of danger. Had he not just told me about the Bratva, I would’ve never known he was doing it.

“Are you always on high alert?”

When he’s satisfied with what he sees, he turns his face to mine. “Yes, especially when you’re with me.”

“Do you carry weapons and stuff?”

He laughs and slips his hand under the table, resting it on my thigh. “Yes, baby. Always.”

“How come I’ve never noticed?”

The wink he gives me has me sucking in a quick breath. “Because I didn’t want you to.” Noticing the hitch in my breathing, he smiles and hands me one of the menus. “Pick out what you want, baby. You haven’t eaten enough today.”

I smile at how overprotective he is and take the menu. I’m still studying it when the waitress comes over. She also eyes Valeri with obvious interest, but he doesn’t even glance at her. He’s too busy looking at me. God, a girl could get used to this.

We order a couple of cheeseburgers with fries, and when she leaves to get our drinks, Valeri cups my face and pulls me in for a kiss. It’s slow and sweet, and it leaves me wanting more. A few of the other tables are filled, but no one pays us any attention, especially with the way his body is hiding mine from view. Most of the crowd is at the bar where there are several TVs playing various sports. The crowd is a bit rowdy and loud, especially when someone scores a goal or fails to block one, but the place has a laidback feel to it that I like.

The waitress drops off our drinks, but Valeri never takes his eyes off mine. He hooks his hand under my knee and lifts my leg, hiking it over his so my thighs are spread. Dragging his fingers up my inner thigh, I grip the table and whisper his name while my eyes dart to the couple who’s being seated near us.

He squeezes my inner thigh. “Eyes on me, *lapochka*.” When I meet his green eyes, he smiles and says, “Good girl. Now unbutton your jeans for me and unzip them.”

“Valeri,” I whisper, my eyes darting away from his before he makes a *tsk-tsk* noise at my disobedience. I quickly turn back to him, and the wicked grin he’s giving me has me quickly reaching for the button of my jeans. I watch him scoop out a small ice cube from his drink before putting it in his

mouth. He sucks it clean and then pinches it between his fingers.

“Eyes on me,” he says again, bringing the ice cube to the top of my pants. I keep my eyes locked on his as he traces a line with the ice along the top of my panties before slowly dipping inside. His lips quirk up when he slides the ice lower before letting it go. The cool, wet cube slides down my pussy, landing right against my clit. He laughs at the sharp gasp I give. When I try to wiggle and bring my hand between my legs, he says, “Don’t you fucking dare. That stays right where it’s at, and when it melts, you’re getting another one.”

I’m about to argue, but I see the waitress coming towards us with our food, and the ice on my clit is making it damn near impossible to think about anything other than the stinging cold on my sensitive skin.

“Did you just take your eyes off me again, sweetheart?”

“Shit,” I whisper, making him laugh.

The waitress drops off our plates while Valeri keeps a hand firmly on my thigh and I try to keep my breathing even. My cheeks are burning hot and my clit is ice-fucking-cold. I avoid looking directly at the waitress, so she turns her focus to Valeri.

“Can I get you anything else?”

Valeri turns to me with a very amused grin. “Do you need anything else, baby?”

“No, I’m good.” I try like hell to appear normal and give the waitress a smile. “Thank you.”

She leaves a bottle of ketchup and walks off while I turn my eyes back to Valeri. “Oh my god, that’s so fucking cold!” I whisper-shout at him.

“I know, and you’re about to get another.” He sucks another ice cube clean and angles his body so I’m completely hidden before slipping his hand into my panties. This time he doesn’t just let it go. He keeps the ice pressed tightly between his fingers and my skin and slowly drags it lower. “Eyes on me,” he reminds me.

I lock onto the familiar green, almond-shaped eyes, using him as my anchor while he slides the ice lower and circles it around my clit. I gasp and grip the table, but I don't break eye contact.

"That's my good girl," he praises. "Fucking take it, sweetheart." He presses the ice harder against me, and I can't help but squirm beneath his ice-cold touch. It feels like too much, like I have no choice but to fight against it, but when he moves the ice just enough to run the pad of one finger over my poor abused clit, it sends a spark of pleasure through me that has my eyes widening and my mouth dropping open. The cocky smirk he gives me says it all. The man is way too fucking good with his hands. He keeps rimming me with the ice and occasionally brushing his finger over my clit until I'm panting and begging him with my eyes to end this torture. I rock my hips as best I can, trying to get myself off, but he knows what I'm doing and pinches my clit in warning.

"You think I should let you come now?" he asks, leaning closer and brushing the thumb of his other hand over my parted lips.

"Yes," I whisper. "You definitely should."

He smiles and swipes the ice over my bundle of nerves before replacing it with the pad of his finger. "Let's see how quiet you can be while you come for me. Soak my hand, baby, and melt this ice with your hot little cunt."

"Fuck," I whimper as he works me harder, sliding his finger lower and dipping into my slit while keeping the ice cube pinned against my clit. The mix of sensations makes it hard to breathe. He runs his finger over my mouth, pushing past my lips.

"Suck me, sweetheart," he groans.

Watching his green eyes, I run my tongue over his finger before slowly sucking it in. It's not easy to tell with the dim lighting, but I see his pupils dilate, turning his eyes dark as his jaw tenses. He mirrors my movements, sliding his finger into my pussy at the same speed as I'm sucking him into my mouth. When both are buried inside me, he groans and works

my pussy while I keep a tight grip on the finger in my mouth, trailing my tongue and teeth over him until his eyes are heavy-lidded and his breaths are coming faster.

Right as I start to come, he whispers, “That’s my good fucking girl.”

I keep my lips wrapped tightly around his finger so I don’t scream my release to the whole damn pub. The ice cube’s already melted, but the coolness still remains, mixing with the heat and sending pleasure to every inch of my body. My pussy pulses with my orgasm, clenching around his finger while I grip the table so hard my fingers ache.

“So fucking perfect,” he murmurs, watching every detail of my release and the way it’s left my body shaking. His finger slowly slides out of me, gliding along my overly sensitive skin before he holds it up, letting me see how wet it is. Keeping his finger in my mouth, he sucks my juices from his other hand with a ravenous look in his eyes.

When he pulls out of my mouth, I suck him the whole way until he’s free and then pull him closer so I can kiss him. Running my tongue over his, I taste my pussy on him and deepen the kiss while he cups the back of my head and opens wider for me, plunging his tongue into my mouth so I can suck it and get my fill.

I’m two seconds away from straddling him when he pulls back with a groan. “God, you test my limits, baby.” He rests his forehead against mine and takes in a slow, deep breath. When he’s back under control, he gives me one more kiss and then pushes my plate in front of me. “Eat, *lapochka*. You’ve earned it.”

I smile and button my pants back up. Grabbing the ketchup, I squirt some onto my plate and dig in. He laughs at the appetite I’ve worked up and pops a fry in his mouth. The cheeseburger is greasy and delicious, and it tastes even better after the orgasm I just had. We laugh and eat, and when I’ve cleaned my plate, he gives me a wink and gets the waitresses attention to let her know we’re ready for the check.



Walking back to where we parked, he keeps his arm tightly around me, always making sure he's closest to the street so his body is between me and all the traffic. One second we're laughing and I'm thinking the night couldn't possibly get any more perfect, and the next second I feel his entire body tense as his fingers dig into my arm, pulling me even closer to him.

I look up, seeing the look of pure rage on his face before I follow his gaze. "Oh my god," I whisper when I see his car. Someone's beaten the hell out of it. The windows are broken, the hood and sides are dented, and both headlights are shattered. His phone is already out as he sends a quick text, but before I can ask him what's going on, I hear a voice behind us.

"Put the fucking phone away and don't move. If you do, I'll shoot her."

I feel the rage radiating off Valeri's body, but his voice is deadly calm when he says, "If you hurt her, I will kill you so fucking slowly that you'll be begging me for death long before I'm done with you."

"Maybe," the man says, "or maybe I'll just kill you both."

Valeri's harsh laugh is as cruel as it is cold. "Fucking try it. I know you know who I am. My brothers will come for you. They will find you, and they won't just kill you when they do. You made a big fucking mistake tonight."

"Shut the hell up and start walking," the man growls. "Take the small alley up ahead on the left."

Valeri's arm is still wrapped tightly around me, and before we start walking, he angles my body in front of his to keep himself in between me and the man who evidently has a gun pointed at us. I look around, but the people driving by aren't looking or caring, and the sidewalk around us is empty.

"It's all right, baby," Valeri whispers, giving my arm a soft squeeze. Louder, he asks, "Judging by the baseball bat you took to my car, I'm guessing her dad sent you."

"More like friend of a friend," the man says, and I have no idea what he's talking about because my dad doesn't have any

friends beyond Lyle, and I can't imagine him even knowing where to find Valeri or having the brain cells needed to orchestrate something like this. "Her dad is in the hospital with a hand that will never work properly again and a broken jaw."

Valeri laughs like we're still on our date instead of being forced down a dark, creepy alley with a gun pointed at us. "He cried like such a fucking baby when I took the bat to him."

"Let's see how much you scream when I break every bone in your goddamn hand," the guy growls from behind us.

"I look forward to you trying," Valeri says, and I swear to god he actually sounds like he can't fucking wait.

Stepping into the alley, I slow my pace down because it's darker here, and I'm worried that others might be hiding in the shadows.

"Hurry up!" the guy yells at me.

Valeri's thumb caresses my arm, comforting me as I walk further in. "Yell at my girl again, and I'm going to cut your fucking tongue out before I kill you."

The man laughs, but even I can tell how fake it sounds. "Keep walking to the motorcycle up ahead."

"You taking us for a ride?" Valeri asks. "I hope you don't expect me to ride bitch. I'm not going to cuddle up behind you and wrap my arms around your big gut while you drive us off into the night."

"You're not going anywhere," the man says. "She will be, though." The laugh he gives makes my skin crawl. Valeri feels my body stiffen as he gives my arm another comforting squeeze.

"That's not going to fucking happen," Valeri says in a voice that doesn't hold a single trace of doubt in it. He gives my arm one more squeeze and then quickly pushes me aside so I'm no longer in front of him in case the gun goes off. I take a few more steps and press myself against the building, and by the time I turn to see what's happening, Valeri already has the man pinned up against the brick wall across from me with a knife pressed to the man's throat.

“You okay, baby?” he asks me.

“I’m okay,” I tell him, feeling my heart race as the adrenaline courses through me.

The man grunts but doesn’t try to speak. Valeri’s pressing the knife hard enough against him to let him know if he talks, the movement will make the blade sink in.

“I need you to come here, Evie. Can you do that for me?”

“Yeah.” My voice is shaky along with the rest of me, but I push off from the building and take a few cautious steps towards him. When I’m close enough, he briefly turns his head, running his eyes over me, reassuring himself that I’m okay. His green eyes soften when they meet mine, but then turn to ice when he turns back to the man.

“Do you recognize him?” he asks me.

I stare at the man, taking in his dark blond hair, the beard that’s grown long enough to look unkempt instead of stylish, and the eyes that are dark brown and wide with fear and anger. When his eyes dart over to meet mine, Valeri digs the knife in hard enough to draw blood.

“Don’t fucking look at her,” he growls. The man quickly looks away, but I see the way his hands are balled into fists, and I know how much he’s dying to lash out. There’s no way Valeri is going to let that happen. Even when he had a gun pointed at his back, it still felt like he was the one in control.

“No,” I say, “I’ve never seen him before.”

Valeri keeps the knife pressed firmly against his neck and says, “Grab my phone, baby. It’s in my back pocket. Text one of my brothers and let them know there’s one man and we’re in the alley by the library.”

Reaching my hand out, I slide my fingers into his back pocket to grab his phone, and because the man’s ass is my weakness, I can’t resist giving him a squeeze before I pull my hand away. He gives a soft laugh while I try to open his phone.

“What’s your passcode?”

“Your birthday.”

I smile and type it in. The chat thread immediately opens since he'd been texting Vasily when the guy first showed up. It's all in Russian, so I hurry up and switch to the English keyboard and type out the quick message.

"Done," I tell him after I hit send.

Thankfully, the response is in English so I can read it. *We're on our way, Evie.*

"He said they're on their way." I slip his phone back in his pocket. "How'd he know it was me?"

He gives me a quick wink. "It was in English." Putting his focus back on the man, he tells me, "Scoot back a bit, baby."

I do as he says and take a couple of steps back. Satisfied I'm not in any danger, he releases the pressure on the knife just enough for the man to answer when he asks him his name.

"Steven," the man says, and I can tell he's trying to be gentle when he says it, not trusting that the knife won't cut him again.

"Well, Steve, you really fucked up tonight coming after me while I'm with my girl, putting her in danger, threatening to take her with you, pointing a motherfucking gun at her and threatening to shoot her."

The rage in Valeri's voice takes me by surprise. Each word out of his mouth is harder and colder than the last, and if I was Steve, I'd be pissing myself.

"I was told she was Lyle's," Steve says, making my eyes widen in surprise while Valeri barks out a laugh.

"You're fucking joking, right? Lyle, her dad's fat fuck of a friend?"

Steve gets defensive and tries harder to talk his way out of this. "That's what he told me, man. I wouldn't have come after you if I'd known the truth."

"Anyone with goddamn eyes can see that there's no way in hell she would be with him."

“I didn’t know,” Steve says, and I can tell by his tone that he’s getting pissed about the whole situation. “He just said that you and your brothers busted Jim’s hand and then took his daughter with you. He said that Evie’s his and that I was to get the little bitch back.”

The low growl coming from Valeri has goosebumps rising on my skin. His tone is gentle when he says, “*Lapochka*, turn around and don’t look back.”

He doesn’t have to ask me twice. I turn and face the other building, every instinct on high alert. I can sense them behind me, and because I know I’m not supposed to look back, it’s almost impossible not to. I fight the urge and keep my eyes glued to the old, dirty brick wall in front of me.

“You good, baby?”

“Yes,” I whisper.

As soon as he hears my answer, I hear something wet and fleshy and then Steve’s deep groan followed by a repeated gruesome squelching sound that I hope to never fucking hear again as long as I live, and then a heavy, dense thud that I can only assume is his body hitting the ground. I don’t turn around. Not when I hear Valeri breathing right behind me, not when I hear Russian being yelled and I know his brothers are here, and not even when Valeri whispers my name and presses his body against mine, wrapping an arm around my upper chest and kissing my temple. I see the blood on his hand. It’s smeared like he tried to quickly brush it away, but it’s there. The memory of the red stains I saw on his pants before I gave him a blowjob take on a whole new meaning.

“It’s okay, baby,” he whispers.

I recognize the voices around me even if I don’t understand the words being spoken. Vasily and Volodya are here, and they’ve brought Nikolai and Ilya. Valeri talks to them while his thumb caresses my collarbone and the curve of my neck. The touch is comforting, and I cling to it while my mind still refuses to process what just happened. My boyfriend just killed a man, and I stood here and listened to it. Just like seeing Valeri with that baseball bat, it’s impossible for me to

grasp both sides of him. He's terrifying when he's in Brava mode, but even when he was angry and seconds away from ending a man's life, he still kept his voice gentle for me and waited until I was turned around so I wouldn't have to live with that image in my head.

He keeps me facing towards the wall until I hear what has to be the sound of Steve's body been dragged further down the alley. Gently turning me around, he keeps his arm wrapped around me and my body pressed tightly against his with his hand cupping the back of my head. While he talks to his brothers, he runs his fingers through my hair, and it's so damn soothing that I soon forget we're still standing in a grimy alley while his friends dispose of the man he just killed. I surround myself in the familiar scent of his cologne and the feel of him—his fingers in my hair, his hard chest pressed up against me, the comforting sound of his heart beating a steady rhythm into my ear.

When I wrap my arms tighter around him, he kisses my head and whispers, "You're doing so good, baby. I'm so damn proud of you."

I'm about to ask what the hell he could possibly be proud of when all I did was close my eyes and manage to not piss my pants, but then he's turning us and saying something in Russian. I look over and see Steve's motorcycle. Valeri's pointing to the topless mermaid with the blue tail that's painted on the gas can and telling his brothers something.

"It's the same picture Lyle has on his," I say, and even though my voice is barely more than a whisper, Valeri hears it and looks down at me.

"What, baby?"

"The mermaid, it's the same one that Lyle has painted on his gas can. He once came by the house with a few other bikers, and they all had the same mermaid."

He looks over my head at his brothers and says something else in Russian before looking back down at me. "Do you know where they hang out?"

“Yeah, it’s the same bar my dad goes to drink at. It’s called the Blue Lagoon. It’s not too far from my dad’s house.”

Valeri smiles and kisses my forehead. “Thanks, baby.”

He seems excited, but I can’t for the life of me figure out why. Laughing, he speaks Russian to his brothers and keeps stroking my hair. Nikolai and Ilya come back down the alley, and when they hear what’s going on, they both smile and laugh too. Nikolai hands Valeri a set of keys and then surprises me by giving my shoulder a soft squeeze.

“You doing okay, Evie?” he asks.

I turn my head and smile up at him. “Yeah, it’s been an exciting few days.”

“Yeah, I bet,” he says with a laugh.

I look over and see Vasily smiling at me while Volodya gives me a nod and a small smile, which I’m learning is all you get if you’re not Maddie.

“Welcome to the family,” Vasily says, making me laugh.

“No going back now,” Volodya adds and then laughs when Vasily smacks his arm and says, “Way to scare the hell out of her.”

“It’s okay,” I tell them. “I don’t want to go back,” and despite everything I’ve seen, it’s true. I love Valeri, and this is a big part of who he is. I can either accept it, or I can run and never see him again. No way in hell am I doing that. Just the thought of it has me squeezing him tighter.

He returns my hug and says something in Russian that makes his brothers laugh. Nikolai walks over to Steve’s bike and hikes a leg over. “I’ll go dump this,” he tells them. He looks at Ilya, “Follow me so I can ride back with you, and then we can do the body.”

Ilya nods and when Nikolai starts the bike and drives off, Ilya tells us a quick goodbye and then runs down the alley to catch up. Vasily and Volodya each give me a pat on the back before they start walking off. They say a few more things to Valeri before waving and disappearing around the corner. I’m

about to say something, but my words are cut off when he cups my face and tilts me up right before he presses his lips to mine. His hands tangle in my hair, fisting the long strands and deepening the kiss, coaxing my tongue with his until I'm kissing him just as hard as he's kissing me. He groans and picks me up, carrying me the short distance to the brick wall before setting me back on my feet and bracing his hands on either side of my head.

"I need you," he whispers against my lips before pinching my bottom lip between his teeth and giving it a soft tug. Running one hand down my body, he cups my pussy in a possessive grip that makes my hips automatically rock against him. "I need to be inside you, baby. I need to feel your tight, wet pussy wrapped around me. I need to remind myself that you're safe."

I nod and grip his shoulders as he roughly unbuttons my pants and yanks them down. He groans and cups my bare pussy, plunging three fingers inside as I gasp and cling to him.

"So fucking wet for me," he growls against my lips, finger-fucking me harder and faster, filling the dirty alley with the erotic, wet sounds. "That's my good girl," he murmurs when my body starts to tense, already so close to the edge. He brings his other hand between us and starts to rub my clit while his fingers dive into me again and again.

"Valeri," I whimper as my legs start to shake.

He smiles against my lips and rubs me harder, throwing me into the orgasm and shattering me into a million pieces. The rough brick digs into my back as I pull him closer and bury my face in his neck, pulling his shirt down enough so I can sink my teeth into his skin.

"Fuck!" he growls when I break the skin and taste blood. Fisting my hair, he pulls me back and the wicked grin on his face should be a warning, but I'm too far gone to care. "My girl wants it rough tonight?"

"Yes." I slide my hands down his body and undo the button on his jeans. I work the zipper down, but it's too slow



for him. He takes over, freeing his large cock and then grabbing my hips and lifting me up.

His fingers dig into my ass as he presses the head of his cock against my slit. "Eyes on me," he growls.

I meet his green eyes, only taking them off him for a second when he slams into me and they roll back before I can stop it. My lips part on a gasp from the shock of having all of him at once.

"Fuck, you feel good, baby. So hot and wet, and so goddamn tight."

He doesn't go easy on me. Every thrust is hard and deep, every kiss is a bruise to my lips, and I can feel the anger radiating off him from what happened tonight, but it's not directed at me. Underneath all that rage is a fear that I could've been hurt, and this brutal fuck is his way of proving to himself that I'm here, that I'm his, and that he owns me fully.

I fist his hair and give his tongue a suck that has him gripping my ass even tighter. Without letting up, he brings a hand between us, soaking his fingers in our joined arousal before bringing them back to my ass. He smiles against my lips when I let out a surprised yelp at the feel of his finger pressed against my asshole.

"Mine, sweetheart," he murmurs against my lips. "Every goddamn part of you is mine."

I nod my head as he slowly slides his finger into me while he keeps fucking my pussy like he owns it. The warring sensations flood through me, making everything else disappear. He buries his finger to the hilt, fingering my ass slowly while he speeds his hips up.

"Valeri," I moan, clinging to him so tightly I'm not sure I'll ever be able to let go. "Oh god!" I scream as the orgasm slams into me.

"That's right, baby," he growls. "I'm your god. I'm your fucking everything, just like you are to me. Now take my cum like a good fucking girl."

My ass and pussy clench down on him, pulling a feral-sounding growl from him as he buries himself inside me and lets go. Every pulse of his cock heightens my pleasure until I'm coming again before I've even fully come down from the first. My body shudders as I kiss him slowly, savoring the sensation of him growing soft inside me while he keeps his finger buried in my ass and the aftershocks leave me breathless.

"Holy shit," I whisper, making him laugh.

"Look at me, baby."

I pull back and look at him, still reeling from the orgasms. Thanks to a streetlamp not too far away, there's enough of a glow for us to see one another. His eyes soften as they run over my face.

"Was I too rough?"

I smile and cup his face. "No. It was perfect."

He gives me a gentle kiss and rests his forehead against mine. "I'm sorry about tonight. I need you to know that I would never let anything happen to you. I will kill anyone who hurts you or anyone who even threatens to. It will be the last fucking thing they ever do."

"I know you would, and I'm okay. I knew you'd keep me safe." I brush aside a strand of hair from his forehead. "You going to keep your finger in my ass all night?"

He laughs and kisses the tip of my nose. "I might. It feels damn good, especially when you come and tighten around me."

"I never thought I'd like anything like that," I admit.

"But you do?"

I blush even harder and nod my head. "I do."

"God, there are so many things I want to do to you, baby." He gives me one more kiss while slowly sliding his finger out of my ass and lifting me off his cock. Setting me down, he gently pulls my pants back and then tucks himself away.

“I’m sorry I bit you so hard,” I say, sliding his T-shirt down enough to see the mark I left on him.

He laughs and smacks my ass. “I fucking loved it, baby. You can bite me anytime you want.”

I smile as he grabs my hand and pulls me against him, leading me out of the alley that’s no longer scary at all. The sight of his destroyed car makes me pause on the sidewalk.

“I’m so sorry about your car. I don’t know what Lyle was thinking.”

“It’s not your fault, and don’t worry, Mac loves a challenge. I’ve already texted him. He’s going to tow it back to his garage and get started on it tomorrow.”

He leads me to a black motorcycle that’s parked near the curb. “It’s Nikolai’s,” he says when I look back up at him. He grabs the helmet and gives me a kiss before slipping it over my head.

“But you don’t have one,” I say.

He pats the top of my helmeted head. “I’ll be fine, baby.”

I watch him get on and start the bike. I thought that Valeri couldn’t get any sexier, but seeing him on that black motorcycle proves me wrong. Even though my face is shielded by the helmet, he can read my body language when he looks over at me. He laughs and gives me a wink.

“You know, sweetheart, I do own a motorcycle just like this, and I can take you for a ride anytime you want.”

He gives me a wink and motions for me to get on. I position myself on the back and wrap my arms tightly around him, already planning a million different scenarios that involve Valeri on a motorcycle. He reaches back and gives my thigh a comforting squeeze before pulling away from the curb and speeding down the street. I’ve never been on a motorcycle, and it’s just as much fun as I always imagined it would be. The rev of the engine, the feel of his abs beneath my fingers, and the thrill of zooming through traffic pulls an ecstatic laugh from me that has him reaching back to give my leg another pat. Life with Valeri is never going to be dull.

# Chapter 12

## *Valeri*

I watch Evie as she walks around the counter, giving the newest bouquet of flowers I brought her a sniff on her way.

Her face lights up every time she sees them, even when she has no idea I'm watching her. She's not going to be happy when I tell her I have to go out tonight. Last night had been a close call, too close of a call, and I haven't been able to get it out of my head. That fucker had pointed a gun at her, and his death had been too quick.

Tonight is about revenge for more than just coming after my girl, although that is reason enough. The man who'd had a heart attack while Volodya was questioning him had the same mermaid tattooed on him and so had the other men who'd tried to interfere with our weapons shipment. I hadn't put it together because it's not an image I've ever seen associated with any of the locals we've run up against, but there's no way in hell it's a coincidence. We're going to be paying a visit to the Blue Lagoon tonight, and no one will be leaving it alive.

Evie walks towards me, a soft smile on her beautiful face, and when she curls up in my lap and rests her head on my chest, I wrap my arms around her and wish like hell I didn't have to go. It's the first time in my life I've wanted to just stay home instead of go where the action is because there isn't anywhere else I'd rather be than right here with her.

I bury my nose in her hair and breathe in her scent. She kisses my neck while her fingers play with the back of my hair. Just that simple touch is enough to make my heart speed up and my cock start to stiffen.

“I have to leave in a few minutes, baby,” I say, hating the way her fingers still and her body tenses ever so slightly. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“You’re going after them, aren’t you?”

“We have some unfinished business with them,” I say, trying to keep it vague.

“Because of what he did last night?”

“Partly,” I tell her, and then pull her closer for a kiss. “I can’t tell you details about what I do, baby, but I promise it’s the only thing I’ll ever keep from you, and the only reason I’m doing it is to keep you safe.”

“I know,” she whispers against my lips and kisses me again. I savor the taste and feel of her until my phone buzzes in my pocket and know it’s my brothers letting me know they’re waiting for me downstairs.

“I have to go,” I tell her, kissing her one last time before standing up and taking her with me. Carrying her to the elevator, I keep her in a tight hug until I’m forced to set her down. “Don’t leave the apartment, and text me if you need anything at all. I’ll answer as soon as I can.” I cup her face, running my thumb over the bruise that’s slowly fading, grateful that it’ll be the last time I ever have to see it marring her skin. “I love you, *lapochka*, so goddamn much it scares the hell out of me.”

She smiles and runs her fingers over my dimple. “Good. Now you know exactly how I feel.” Her smile widens when I laugh and give her ass a good squeeze. “I love you, Valeri. Be safe and come home to me.”

I rest my forehead against hers. “I will, baby. I promise.”

Giving her one last kiss, I force myself to break contact and step into the waiting elevator. She hugs her arms across her chest and tries to hide how worried she is, but I see it in her beautiful eyes. I hate it, but I also know it won’t be the last time that my work causes her worry and pain. I’m determined to make sure she never regrets choosing to be with me. I’ll make sure the moments of worry are outweighed so strongly

by the moments of pure bliss that she'll barely notice them. With one last smile, the doors close and her face is hidden from me. I immediately miss her, but I force it aside and put all my focus on work. By the time I get in the back of Volodya's Camaro, my head is fully in the game, and I'm ready to end some lives.

"How's Evie?" Vasily asks from the passenger seat.

"She's good. She took it better than I thought she would," I admit.

"Was that before or after you fucked her up against the wall in the alley?" Volodya asks with a laugh.

"How the fuck did you know about that?" I ask him.

He laughs even harder and pulls us out onto the main road. "I didn't."

I try to be pissed, but I can't be. I can't ever stay mad at either one of them. "Bastard," I mutter, but that only makes him laugh again.

"You walked right into that one," Vasily says.

"Yeah, yeah," I tell him, digging my phone out so I can send Evie a quick text before we reach the bar.

"If you want to call her, you can," Volodya teases. "We'll be quiet, won't we, Vasya?"

Vasily laughs. "So when are you going to propose to her? You did clean out your phone, right? God that must've cleared up some storage space."

I wait for them to stop laughing. "Have your fun. I deserve it. I teased you both when you turned into massive softies, so have at it. I'm going to propose very soon, and I did empty my phone."

"Nina wants you both to come to supper this week so Evie can meet Dmitri and Misha," Vasily says. "Be sure to have a son, too, so we can get the next Medvedev generation going."

I smile at the thought. "I'll do my best."

“He may have been conceived last night,” Volodya says. “God, wouldn’t that be fitting? One of the next Bratva bosses conceived because his daddy couldn’t resist fucking his mom up against a dirty building right after he’d stabbed a man to death.”

“He’ll get along great with your son,” Vasily says. “We all know he was most likely conceived in the woods after you chased his mom down like a fucking psycho.”

Volodya laughs instead of getting offended. “Yeah, he was.” He gives a small shrug. “Maddie’s fun to chase.”

I laugh and read the text that Evie just sent, telling me she’s about to go for a swim in the rooftop pool.

*Did you pack your suit?*

*No. ;)*

I bite back a groan at her response. Images of her wet, naked body run through my mind, and now it’s mixed with what my brothers just said. What if she is already pregnant? It’s a thought that would’ve sent me into a fierce panic before I met Evie, but now I’m sitting in the backseat with a huge fucking grin on my face while I try like hell to not get hard because now is definitely not the time.

When Volodya stops the car, parking against the corner near the bar, I turn all my attention to what’s about to happen. He checks his phone and then turns to us. “Everyone’s ready and waiting.”

The Blue Lagoon sits back from the street, and it’s a rundown-looking place that no one would ever pass and think, *hey, let’s stop in here for a drink*. It’s clearly designed to be uninviting for everyone who doesn’t have a standing invitation. The small parking lot is filled with motorcycles, and I’m betting they each have a topless mermaid with a blue tail painted on the gas tank.

“Everyone knows that Lyle’s mine, right?”

My brothers look back at me, each of them wearing a wicked grin, revealing that deadly part of themselves that they usually keep hidden away.



“Don’t worry, little brother,” Vasily says. “He’s all yours.”

Volodya checks his knives and then sends a quick text to Maddie, probably telling her to get her running shoes ready, because when he gets back to her tonight, he’s going to want to hunt her down. Nina and Evie aren’t going to be getting off the hook either. The Medvedev brothers will be going home after this with one thing on our minds. Tomorrow our women will carry around an ache between their legs, every step reminding them of us.

“Let’s fucking do this,” Vasily says, sending out the command to everyone as we get out of the car.

Soon the night is filled with the sound of motorcycles drawing closer. We’d told our guys to come on their bikes so it would be easier for them to slip in and out, and also it won’t look so suspicious from the outside to see a parking lot packed full of motorcycles when it’s a known biker bar. The first group comes in as we turn onto the cracked path that stretches to the door. Classic rock filters out from the dark bar as I grab my gun and click the safety off. The second group comes into the parking lot while the third one stays around the perimeter to keep others out and to alert us if the cops decide to show.

Men dressed in black sweep along the building, watching the windows and backdoor. I catch sight of Oleg’s white-blond hair before he ducks around the back, and soon Nikolai and Ilya are next to us, both wearing excited grins as they ready their guns.

Vasily looks back, giving us a nod before he opens the door and steps into the dark interior. We quickly fan out, covering every angle. The jukebox flips to a new song while the crowd eyes us, clearly not thrilled to be interrupted. Several more of our guys rush in, and when Volodya sees the bartender start to reach for something, he jumps over the bar and slits his throat before anyone even realizes what’s going on. As soon as they see the blood, all hell breaks loose. Some of the bikers start yelling while others try to reach for weapons, but we’ve got them outnumbered. I hear a few silenced shots behind me, and when the asshole in front of me reaches for his gun, I put a quick bullet in his head and then

point my gun at the next guy. He wisely keeps his hands where I can see them and doesn't attempt to move.

When a waitress comes out from the back, she looks around and then glares at the roomful of Russians. She's older and judging by the hard look in her eyes, she's been working this job for a long time and seen it all.

"Sit the fuck down," Vasily yells at her, kicking the chair in front of him in her direction.

She sits down, but makes it damn obvious she's not happy about it. When we're sure no one else is going to try anything and Oleg hollers in to let us know the back is secure, we turn our attention to the men in the room.

"Which one of you is Lyle?" I ask, scanning the crowd of men. There are a few women, all of them waitresses, because most of the people here are older men who look like they're desperately trying to relive their glory days and the only women they can get are those who are being paid to be here.

When no one raises their hand, I point my gun at the man closest to me. "I'll shoot you all one by one," I tell them. "I really don't give a fuck."

The man in front of me holds his hands up and shakes his head. I knew he'd rat out Lyle, but even I'm surprised by how quickly he does it. "Fuck this," he yells and points a finger at a truly ugly man sitting at the bar. His hair is long and greasy, and even in the dim lighting, I can see the big gut hanging over his jeans. Knowing this asshole used to stare at my girl and make her feel so unsafe that she had to lock her goddamn door has me tightening my grip on the gun as I walk over to him.

"Well that didn't take long. You don't seem to inspire loyalty, Lyle," I tell him.

He looks up at me, the rage obvious in his eyes. They're small and too close together. He's the kind of ugly that's irritating to look at because his unattractive features are mixed with a really shitty attitude. It's a combo that ensures most everyone hates him within seconds of meeting him.

“What the fuck do you want?” he asks, trying to appear tough even though I can see the slight tremor in his hands.

“I’d like to know why you’re going around telling people that Evie is yours, and I’d like to know why you sent that jackass after us last night.”

“Fuck you,” he growls.

I fist his dirty hair, cringing as the greasy strands meet my skin, and slam his head hard enough into the bar to break his nose. He screams and brings his hands to his face only to quickly pull them away when even his gently probing is too painful to bear.

“Those were perfectly reasonable questions,” I remind him. “You’re the one who had to be a jackass.”

“You busted Jim’s hand,” he moans like that gives him the right to send some goon after Evie.

“I did. He beat her, and you just sat back and let it happen. Of course, I expect nothing less from a piece of worthless shit like you. Evie told me how you like to stare at her, how you told her she was going to be yours.” I let out a harsh, disgusted laugh. “You should never have been allowed to even be in the same room as her. Jim is alive because Evie is a better person than me, and she asked me to spare his life.” I smile and lean in closer, ignoring the rancid smell coming off his unwashed body. “She didn’t say anything about you, though.”

I slam his head against the bar three more times and then throw him on the floor. He tries to crawl away, but I kick him in the ribs so he’ll curl up into a ball and stay put.

“Don’t even fucking think about it,” I hear Volodya say from behind me. I turn to see the older waitress slowly reaching her hand behind her back. Instead of his usual knife, he has a gun in his hand, and it’s pointed right at her chest. “I won’t warn you again.”

I see the look in her eyes and know she’s about to make a very stupid decision. She assumes that because she’s a woman, she’s safe. The reality of her situation is a bullet through her heart when she keeps reaching for the gun she must have

tucked in the back of her jeans. Her eyes widen in shock, and her wheezy gasps fill the now dead-quiet bar. Everyone watches her die, and when she's slumped over, I turn my attention back to Lyle.

"You should never have come after Evie, but the truth is you were already a dead man. The second she told me about you, I knew it was going to come to this, that I wouldn't be satisfied until I put a bullet in your head."

"I didn't know she was yours," he groans.

"You do now, though, don't you?"

"Yes." He nods, grasping onto the small hope that I'll let him live.

"It's nice that you'll get to die an enlightened man, Lyle. That makes me feel so much better."

I don't give him a chance to respond. The shot to the head puts him out of his misery, and when I'm satisfied that no trace of life is left in him, I turn and give Vasily a nod.

He walks around the bar, eyeing the men who are left and the scared waitresses. "Who's the leader?"

When no one says anything, he stops in front of a grey-haired man with a long, salt-and-pepper beard, finding their leader based on body language and impeccable instincts.

"You know who we are?" Vasily asks.

The man takes a drink of the whiskey in front of him. "I do."

"And you run this big titty mermaid gang?"

I laugh because god do I hope that's really their name. That would make my fucking day. The man obviously doesn't have a sense of humor because he doesn't even crack a smile. Instead he glares at my brother.

"I do," he says, and this time it's much closer to a growl.

"You had your men try and fuck with our shipments."

The man shrugs. “We’ve been watching you and thought it would be an easy way to get our hands on some more guns.”

“Regretting that decision yet?” Vasily asks, a cruel smile playing at his lips.

“I may have underestimated you,” the man admits. “But I’m willing to work something out, maybe cut a deal.”

Vasily laughs. “Why in the fuck would we make a deal with someone who can’t offer us anything in return? We’re not really in need of a bunch of fat, old bikers.”

“This place reeks of Bengay and talcum powder. God, I bet they douse their balls in that shit so they don’t chafe while they ride around,” Ilya says in Russian, making us all laugh.

“Anyone else bored with this?” Vasily asks in Russian.

“Fuck yes,” Volodya says.

“Don’t shoot the waitresses,” Vasily says before shooting their leader between the eyes. I take out the two men closest to me, and within seconds every person in the bar is dead, aside from the waitresses who are trying like hell to not freak out and make themselves more of a target.

I walk over to them, tucking my gun against the small of my back so they know I’m not about to shoot them. They look up at me, eyes wide with fear. The four of them are clutching each other’s arms, supporting one another even as they’re shaking and crying.

“Here’s what’s going to happen,” I calmly tell them. “You’re going to get your purses and show us your driver’s licenses. We’re going to take photos of them, and if any of you speak to the police about anything that you’ve seen tonight, then we’re going to find you and pay you a visit. Believe me when I say you don’t want that.”

They nod their heads in unison, more than happy to agree to my terms if it gets their asses out of here alive.

“Good. After we’ve taken the photos, you’re more than welcome to empty the cash register and whatever safe may be in the back and split the money between the four of you.”

More nods from the group as I wave Nikolai over and let him finish. A couple of them whisper a “thank you” before they scurry to the back to get their purses. The blonde at the front with the shirt that looks two sizes too small gives Nikolai a smile when he winks at her. Well, that’s one way to get her silence.

Volodya’s giving orders to burn the place and the motorcycles out front when I walk over to him. His shirt is splattered in blood. I shake my head at him.

“Why you insist on the knife, I’ll never know.”

He laughs and looks down at his shirt. “Guns are so impersonal.” Reaching over, he ruffles my hair like he loves to do, mainly because he knows it irritates me. “I believe you got four kills tonight.”

I smile and lift a brow at him. “How many did you get?”

He laughs at my hopeful tone and then crushes it by saying, “Five.”

“Motherfucker,” I groan while he slaps my back.

“One day, little brother.” He laughs again. “Just not tonight, obviously, because I kicked your ass.”

“You only got one more,” I remind him. “Are you sure you didn’t just shoot the same person twice, because that doesn’t count.”

He starts counting off by holding up fingers. “I slit one throat, shot the woman, you’re welcome by the way, and then shot those three bastards in the corner booth when Vasya took out the leader.” He wiggles his fingers. “Five,” he repeats with a smug grin on his face.

“Thanks for killing the woman,” I tell him, laughing when he keeps wiggling his fingers in my face like we’re fucking kids and he’s trying to annoy me to death. I shove his hand away, making him laugh. “Come on. Let’s get the hell out of here.”

“Gladly. I’m ready to go home.”

“Yeah, I bet you are,” I say as we walk over to Vasily.  
“Ready?”

“Yeah, the waitresses just left, and I’m pretty sure I saw one of them getting on the back of Nikolai’s bike, big surprise to no one, and Ilya and the others are about to get the fire started.”

We walk out into the cool night, the jukebox still serenading us with the best rock the ‘70s had to offer, and make our way back to Volodya’s car. I text Evie on the drive back. *Be there soon. You better still be naked and in that pool when I get there.*

Her response is quick, and I know she’s been waiting to hear from me. *Floating naked as I type this.*

I smile at the image and put my phone away. He pulls into my parking spot to drop me off since my car will be at Mac’s for several more days.

“Have fun,” Volodya says with a laugh.

“Don’t forget about supper at our place,” Vasily reminds me.

I promise I won’t and then get out of the car. They drive off as I race inside, eager to get on the elevator and up to our apartment. I already think of it as ours, but it also bothers me that the place isn’t just filled with memories of us. I’ve brought other women here, and I hate that. I don’t want memories of anyone but us.

As soon as the doors open and I step into the apartment, I’m pulling my shirt off and laying my gun on the counter as I walk by. When I step through the French doors, my pants are already unzipped and I’ve kicked my boots off. I stop at the edge of the pool, watching Evie lazily floating on her back, wearing nothing but a cheeky smile. Her hands and feet move through the water, keeping her body afloat as she lifts her fingers in a cutesy wave.

My eyes run over her naked, wet body, and in seconds my jeans are off and I’m jumping into the heated water. She squeals and dips below, trying to swim away from me. I laugh

and dive under, quickly closing the distance and wrapping my arms around her before we surface. Laughing, she grasps the back of my neck and brings her mouth to mine, kissing me hard. I can tell how much she's been worrying by the way she's clinging to me so tightly and by the way her mouth is ravenous on mine.

I run my fingers down her spine, feeling each vertebrae as I go until I'm sliding my finger between her cheeks to rub the one hole that I'm pretty confident she thought she'd go through life without it ever being penetrated. I groan when she bites my bottom lip and slides her pussy along my hard shaft as I rim her asshole with the pad of my finger. Fisting her wet hair, I pull her back, exposing her neck to me so I can kiss my way down. Her pulse races against my lips when I slowly nudge my finger into her. Her body fights me at first, but when I give her neck a soft nip and run my tongue over her, she relaxes and lets me in. My teeth graze over her, nipping a line along the crook of her neck before I latch on, sucking hard as I bury my finger inside her, groaning at the feel of her tight ass clamping down on me.

She moans my name and works herself harder, shamelessly using my cock to get herself off, and I fucking love it. I finger her ass and bite down on her delicate skin, wanting to devour every damn inch of her. When she starts to come, her whole body tenses before she screams my name and lets go. I hold her tighter, wanting to feel every tremor that runs through her. I nip at the pulse beating erratically against her skin and slow my finger down when her hips begin to still.

"I love how much you love having my finger in your ass, *lapochka*," I whisper against her neck.

She laughs and runs her fingers through my hair, moaning when I lift her up enough so her tits are out of the water. With a groan, I wrap my lips around the closest one and pull her into my mouth. I run my tongue over her hard nipple before giving it a soft bite that makes her throw her head back and moan my name again.

"I was worried about you," she whispers, dancing her wet fingers along my face while I tongue her nipple. "I was scared



something would happen and I'd lose you."

I give her one more hard suck before pulling my head back. "I will always come back to you, baby, and you will never lose me."

Bringing her face to mine, she kisses me slowly, running her tongue along mine and letting out the sweetest moans I've ever heard. Every time I think about being the only man to ever taste her or feel her, it drives me fucking wild. No one will ever know her like I do.

I slide my finger out of her ass and slowly walk her to the stairs. She's left the outside lights off, but built-in lighting around the pool is giving off enough light for me to easily see her without obscuring the view of the sky above us. I carry her to a large, round lounge and lay her down.

"Watch the stars, baby," I whisper against her lips. "Watch them while I fuck you."

She nods and keeps looking at the sky above us while I slowly slide into her, groaning at how damn good she feels. The overwhelming sense of coming home always takes me by surprise. When I'm fully seated inside her, I grab onto one of her thighs and hike it up so I can go even deeper. She gasps as I rock her hips up and slowly start to fuck her, igniting all those hidden nerve endings. The wet heat of her pussy surrounds me, gripping me, and already tempting me to let go. I grit my teeth and hold back my own pleasure, wanting to give her another orgasm.

"You're my whole world, Evie," I whisper against her cheek. "You're staring up at the stars, but my whole universe is in my arms. Nothing exists for me without you." I kiss a line down her jaw. "You are everything to me. Every. Fucking. Thing," I say, each word punctuated by a hard, deep thrust.

She screams my name so sweetly as my cock slams into her in a relentless rhythm while she tightens around me. Her body urges me to let go, the tremors in her tight little cunt run along my shaft and pull a feral-sounding groan from me as I give in and shoot my seed inside her, filling her up until my

balls are empty and my whole body is shuddering from the force of it.

“Fucking hell,” I groan against her neck while I catch my breath.

She laughs and dances her fingers along my back. Her heart races beneath me, and I hold her tighter when I feel a shiver run through her.

I kiss my way to her lips. “I love you,” I whisper, cupping her face and kissing her gently. “I’m sorry you worried.”

“I love you, and it’s okay. It’s hard to be upset about anything after the orgasm you just gave me.”

I laugh and kiss her again. “I’ll remember that.” Rolling on my back, I take her with me so she’s snuggled up against me with her head resting on my chest while her fingers caress my skin. “Vasily wants us to go over there for supper soon. They all want you to meet the kids.”

“Okay. I’m excited to meet your nephews.” She’s quiet while her finger traces the edges of the bear tattoo. “Do you want kids?”

I smile and twirl a strand of her hair around my finger. “I do. I really hope you do too because, baby, I have not been taking it easy on you.”

She laughs and kisses my chest. “I’m glad you haven’t been.” Lifting up, her face turns serious when she looks down at me. “Have you ever gotten anyone pregnant before?”

“No, Evie.” I cup her face, brushing her hair aside so I can see her better. “I’ve never not worn a condom before. You’re the only woman I’ve ever come inside, *lapochka*.”

“Really?”

“Yes, baby.” I roll her over again and stay on my side. Running a hand down her body, I stop when my palm is flat against her lower stomach. “I can’t fucking wait to see you swollen with our child.”

She laughs like I’m joking, but when my gaze turns darker, she sucks in a quick breath and bites her bottom lip.

“You have no idea how much it turns me on to think of you pregnant with our baby, knowing that I’ve claimed every part of you and the whole goddamn world can see it.”

“I’ll get very big,” she warns.

I grin and drag my fingers up her body to cup one of her breasts, already imagining her body swollen and plump and glowing with her pregnancy. “You better, sweetheart.”

She laughs and pulls me down for a kiss. I lose myself in her again, and by the time I carry her to bed she’s so exhausted she can barely keep her eyes open. Once she’s tucked in, I grab my laptop before joining her, wanting to do a little house hunting before I fall asleep.

# Chapter 13

## *Evie*

The next couple of days pass by in a perfect blur of amazing sex, laughter, and zero worries about anything.

I feel like I'm on the first vacation I've ever been allowed to have, and it's so perfect that I constantly feel like I need to pinch myself. When I wake up in the morning, my first thought is no longer on my dad and what my chances are of avoiding his fists before work. I don't fall asleep wishing for a different life, because I'm already living the one I want.

When I step into the kitchen and see a bouquet of pink roses and white calla lilies waiting for me on the counter, I smile and bury my face in them, drinking in the scent and the feel of the velvety petals against my skin. Still grinning like an idiot, I pull back and pick up the note that's folded beside the vase.

*Morning, sweetheart,*

*I had to run out to do a couple of things, but I'll be back soon.*

*I love you, baby.*

*Valeri*

*P. S. There's a box of those godawful frozen pancakes you like so much in the freezer.*

I laugh and dig the box of blueberry pancakes out, tossing a package into the microwave. He's nuts. These things are delicious. When they're done, I add enough syrup so they're practically floating on my plate and dig in. I'm just finishing my last bite when I hear the soft ding of the elevator doors. Putting my plate in the sink, I run over to him, laughing when

he scoops me up and kisses me. It's slow and sweet and over way too soon.

He smiles against my lips. "You taste like you just drank a bottle of syrup for breakfast. I may have gotten type 2 diabetes just from that kiss."

"Oh please, it's not that bad," I say, but even I can feel the sugar rush I'm still riding.

He laughs and kisses me again.

"Thanks for my flowers, Valeri. They're so beautiful."

"They reminded me of you. I'm glad you like them."

"You don't need to keep buying me things."

"I will never stop, so you might as well save your breath."

I smile but stop arguing. We'd gone shopping the other day, and the amount of clothes I now have hanging in the closet is more than I've ever had in my entire life combined. I finally had to just grab his hand and pull him out of the store. I'm grateful for the things, but it still makes me feel a bit uneasy to have all this.

"What are you thinking?" he asks, studying my face, smiling when I push my glasses up.

"Nothing. I was just thinking about my new clothes and everything you've done for me."

"And that makes you frown?" He lifts a brow at me. "Clearly, I'm doing something wrong if that's the case."

"No, you're perfect," I tell him, smiling so he knows I'm not upset. "I just don't ever want you to think that I'm greedy or using you for your money or whatever."

His deep laugh surprises me. "Yeah, you're definitely not a gold digger, baby. I knew that pretty much right after we met. I would never think that about you, and I love getting you things, so please don't feel bad about it. I've never had anyone to spoil, and it's way more fun than I ever thought it would be."

He carries me into the bedroom and sets me down by the closet. “Hurry up and get dressed. I want to show you something before tonight.”

Supper with his family is later, and I’m equal parts excited and nervous. I haven’t seen Nina and Maddie since the night at Inferno, and the last time I’d seen his brothers, I’d been standing in an alley right after Valeri had killed a man. It’ll be weird to just experience an ordinary, domestic evening with them, especially seeing them around their kids as normal dads and husbands. I wonder how they’re able to compartmentalize so damn well.

Valeri leans against the doorframe, looking effortlessly sexy in jeans and a white T-shirt, one hand tucked slightly into his pocket as he watches me. I recognize the predatory glint in his green eyes. He always looks at me like he owns me, and instead of feeling offended, I just feel damn lucky, because there’s also so much love in that look. Every time I see it, I feel safe and loved and worshipped.

I force my eyes away so I can grab some jeans and one of my new shirts. “Too casual?” I ask, holding up the black-and-white striped tee.

“It’s perfect, baby.”

He watches me change, running his eyes over me and letting out a soft groan when I bend over to pull my jeans on.

“You make everything look so damn sexy,” he says, and then raises a dark brow at me when I start laughing. “I’m being serious.”

“I know you are,” I say, patting his chest as I walk by. “That’s what makes it so damn sweet.”

He follows me into the bathroom, watching as I wrangle in a pair of contacts. I’m getting much better at it so it doesn’t take long. I run a quick brush through my hair and put on some moisturizer and then a little bit of makeup.

I turn back to face him. “Okay, I’m ready.”

He steps closer, running a finger along my cheek. “Have I told you how much I love that it takes you minutes to get

ready instead of hours?”

“I should probably spend hours,” I admit, “but I’m not all that great with makeup, and I’m kind of lazy. Plus, I no longer have to spend extra time trying to cover bruises.”

He leans closer and kisses my forehead. “You’re naturally beautiful,” he corrects, “and you’re definitely not lazy, and you will never have to spend time trying to cover bruises ever again.”

The sharp smack on my ass pulls a small yelp from me that makes that predatory glint in his eyes shine even brighter. “All the marks I leave on you will always be hidden and will always be the result of extreme amounts of pleasure.”

I fist his shirt and pull him down to me. “I like those marks.” I run my tongue over his bottom lip and slowly suck it, letting my teeth graze over him before biting him hard enough to get his attention and to let him know that he’s not the only one who likes marking what’s his.

“Behave,” he whispers. “I need to show you something, *lapochka*.”

“Oh yeah?” I run my hand down his flat stomach and keep going until my palm is pressed tightly against his hard cock.

“Such a fucking temptress.” With a groan, he stands back up to his full height and grabs my hand. “Be a good girl and you’ll get your reward later.”

I follow him out of the bathroom, but that doesn’t stop me from reaching over to squeeze his ass. He laughs and pulls me tighter against him.

“I think you’re obsessed with my ass, sweetheart.”

“I am,” I say, not even bothering to deny it. It’s the most perfectly sculpted thing I’ve ever seen.

The Aston Martin is parked in its usual spot, and I still can’t believe Mac was able to fix the damage. He’d called yesterday to say it was ready, and Valeri hadn’t wasted any time in getting it.



“If I didn’t know how much you love me, I’d get jealous of the way you look at this car,” I tell him when he stops to open the door for me. Even though I’m just kidding, Valeri still presses me up against the car and pins my arms behind my back with one of his hands. His body molds to mine, leaving zero space between us.

Ghosting his nose along my cheek, he stops at my ear and whispers, “Nothing is more important to me than you.” His fingers dig into my wrists while his cock presses hard against my stomach and his lips graze the shell of my ear. Hot breath hits my skin, sending shivers down my spine. “Say it, sweetheart,” he murmurs, dragging my earlobe between his teeth.

“Nothing is more important to you than me,” I whisper, my voice shaky and strained.

“Good girl.” He nips the skin beneath my ear before letting my hands go and stepping back. His eyes run over my flushed face and the way my chest is rising and falling with my fast breaths. “Get in, baby, before I fuck you in the parking garage.”

When I hesitate, he laughs and gives me a wink. I decide I’d rather not risk someone walking in on us so I get in and try to behave. He won’t tell me where he’s taking me, so I stare out the window and try to guess. When he turns onto the road that leads out of downtown, I ask, “Are we going to the beach?”

He smiles and shifts gears, refusing to answer my question.

I look back out the window. “Are we going to Vasily’s house early?” After a few more minutes, he turns onto a side road that leads into a wooded area. The tall trees loom around us, shading the road and making it seem like we’re way further from the city than we actually are. “You going to show me where you dump the bodies?” I tease.

“That’s not funny, sweetheart,” he says, but I can see the smile playing at his lips.

When he turns into a long, paved driveway, I get really confused. He drives around a bend, revealing the cutest craftsman-style house I've ever seen. The trees aren't as dense here, but there's enough to still provide a bunch of shade and make it look like something out of a fairytale, especially with all the wildflowers and birdfeeders.

"Who lives here? This place is amazing."

He turns off the car and looks at me, studying my reaction. "I'm very glad you think so," is all he says before getting out and walking around to open my door.

Once I'm out, I start walking towards the house, wanting to see it better. It's like the thing is calling to me. Valeri keeps watching me as he follows a few steps behind.

"Seriously, who lives here?" I ask him again, walking up the steps to the dark blue front door.

"Do you want to see inside?" he asks, still not answering my questions.

"Can we?"

He smiles and pulls out a set of keys, opening the door for me and stepping aside so I can go in. "Oh my god," I breathe out, looking at the empty, beautiful house, things slowly clicking into place. There are built-in bookshelves in the living room and a large fireplace and wide-plank wood floors that run the entire length of it. A set of stairs is off to the left, but I ignore that for now and walk further in. It opens up into a large kitchen with a line of windows that overlook a massive backyard.

"Holy shit," I whisper at the sprawling view of the ocean just a few hundred feet away. There's a pebbled path from the back deck, leading down to the private beach, and I can't take my eyes off the rolling waves hitting the shore. My throat is tight and my eyes are threatening to spill over when I feel Valeri standing behind me.

His finger grazes along the nape of my neck. "Look at me, *lapochka*."

I turn around right as he lowers himself down to one knee, and I clamp a hand over my mouth while the first tear falls. He grabs my left hand and gives me a sweet smile before kissing it. Keeping it cocooned in his, he brings his green eyes to mine.

“I was lost to you the second I saw you, Evie. I’d convinced myself that I would never find someone I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. I told myself that I could be happy just being around my brothers and their families, that being an uncle would be enough, but then you stepped out of that truck and changed everything. I wanted it all when I saw you. You made me want everything.”

He gives a soft laugh. “I always thought I’d want to live downtown, but I don’t want that anymore. I want a place that’s just ours, that’s just filled with our memories, so I bought this one because I thought you would like it, and because as soon as I drove down the driveway for the first time, I imagined seeing you on the porch swing while our kids ride their bikes in the driveway.”

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a black, velvet box while I keep crying, unable to take my eyes off him. When he opens it and I see the beautiful diamond inside, I let out a little squeak of a noise that makes him laugh. It’s gorgeous, a large, round diamond in the middle that’s surrounded by smaller ones that fan out and circle around the platinum band.

“I love you, Evie Finch, and I will never love anyone but you. You are my life, my entire world, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I want a family with you. I want to grow old with you, and I want to wake up every single morning with your body tucked up against mine so I can feel the beat of your heart against my skin. I can’t live without you, baby. Will you marry me?”

“Yes,” I manage to croak out right before he slides the ring on my finger and looks up at me, the smile on his face easily big enough to reveal his deep dimple. “I love you so much, Valeri, and I can’t believe you want to marry me.”

He stands and lifts me up, sitting me down on the kitchen island. “Believe it, *lapochka*. You’re all I want, and as long as I have you, I have everything.”

More tears fall because I’m so damn happy, and when he sees them, he cups my face and kisses me, brushing them away with his thumbs as his tongue slides along mine. I hook my legs around him and run my hands through his hair. The weight of the ring on my finger is a constant reminder that I’m his. The kiss turns hungry, both of us desperate for more of the other. His hands slide down my back before gripping my shirt and breaking the kiss just long enough to yank it over my head. His fingers make quick work of my bra, and soon I’m naked from the waist up and he’s gently lowering me back as he kisses a line down my neck and chest.

I lose myself in the moment, threading my fingers in his hair and arching up when he wraps his lips around my nipple and sucks me in. My thighs widen, my nails drag along his scalp, and my heels dig into his ass, trying to get him closer. He unbuttons my jeans while he tongues my nipple, and by the time he’s peeled them off along with my panties, I’m shaking with need.

With a groan, he grips the backs of my thighs and spreads me wide, splaying me open before him. “Fucking hell, my fiancée is gorgeous.” His green eyes run over my pussy, and he lets out another groan when he presses my knees to my chest, rocking my hips up and giving him a view of everything. When he spreads me even wider, I feel my pussy lips part, and that’s all the invitation he needs. Lowering his face, he runs his tongue up my slit in a long, slow lick that makes my damn toes curl. When he hits my clit, I gasp and rock up to him, fisting his hair even tighter.

With a growl, he lets go and hops up onto the island with me. “What the hell?” I ask him, still a bit dazed from how good his tongue had felt.

He smiles and lays down, pulling me up on top of him. “Sit on my face, baby. I want you to fucking smother me with your pretty pussy.”

We haven't done this yet, and when I hesitate out of shyness, he grips my hips and puts me where he wants me. I look down at his beautiful face between my legs. "I'm not sure what to do," I admit.

He gives me a sweet smile and kisses my inner thigh. "You're going to grind against my face, *lapochka*, and then you're going to come all over my mouth. I want to be soaking wet by the time you're done."

His fingers dig into my hips, lowering me down until I'm so close I can feel the heat of his breath against my pussy.

"Do not go easy on me and don't hold back." He gives my clit a soft suck, letting me feel the soft graze of his teeth along my sensitive skin. "I'll know if you do, baby, and I won't be happy."

He gives me one more soft bite before sliding his tongue into me and pulling me down harder against his face. I rest my hands on top of his and slowly rock my hips, experimenting with movements and reveling in the sensations they bring. His tongue feels like it's everywhere at once, dipping into me, running over my lips, flicking my clit, and then rimming it in a way that has me rocking my hips even harder, grinding against him. He groans his approval and digs his fingers in harder.

I look down at him, seeing the diamond on my finger when I reach down to fist his hair before I meet his green eyes. They're heavy-lidded, pupils blown and dark with hunger, and I see the command in them to ride him harder, so that's exactly what I do. I obey my fiancé's silent command and work my hips, using him like he wants, and when I start to come, I scream his name into our beautiful kitchen and soak his beautiful face.

He keeps his fingers on my hips, holding me in place as he greedily laps up my release, and only when he's satisfied does he loosen his grip. I hear the sound of his zipper being undone, and when he sees my smile, he gives me a wink, lifting his hips up enough to free his cock. His hands are on my hips in a second, lifting me up, sliding me down his body until I'm hovering over his impressive erection.

I pull his shirt up, wanting to feel his skin against mine before I reach down and wrap my hand around his shaft as best I can, positioning him where I want him. He slowly slides me down his length. I may be on top, but he's the one in control, and just when I think I can't possibly take any more, he rocks his hips up and feeds me the last couple of inches.

"Every time I step foot in this kitchen, I'm going to remember how goddamn sexy you looked taking my cock," he growls. He raises and lowers me again, this time faster. "How amazing your tits looked bouncing with each hard thrust."

I moan as he rocks his hips, thrusting into me at the same time as he slams me down.

"And how tightly your pussy clenched around me, your body begging me to give you my cum again like the good fucking girl you are."

My nails drag along his chest, and I'm so lost to how good he feels that I barely notice the way the hard countertop is digging into my knees. I'll gladly take the bruises. I'll even smile when I see them tomorrow, remembering how damn good this felt.

"Please," I beg, feeling the tension start to build as he fucks me harder.

"Please what?" he growls, his abs tensing beneath my fingers with each hard thrust.

I can barely form words, but I manage to say, "Please, Valeri, I'm so close."

When he splays one hand across my lower stomach and drags his thumb over my clit in an excruciatingly slow rub, I throw back my head and moan while my hands slide up my body to cup my tits. I feel stretched too thin, so close to the edge and dying to jump off the damn thing. I pinch my nipples, loving the deep groan he gives at the sight of it.

"You going to take my cum like a good girl?"

"Yes," I whimper. "Fuck yes."

“Every fucking drop, baby,” he growls, circling my clit again.

“Yes,” I moan, and then it turns into a scream when he rubs me harder and slams into me at the same time. My vision darkens with my release, thundering through me with enough force to leave me shaking. I give into it, letting it consume me as Valeri pulses inside me, giving me exactly what I’d begged him for.

With one last shudder, I lean forward and press my lips to his. Kissing him through the aftershocks until we’re both completely spent. His arms wrap around me, pulling me tighter against him.

“Welcome home, baby,” he says with a soft laugh.

I smile and kiss him again. “Anywhere you are is my home.” I look around and add, “But I really do love this place. Thank you, Valeri.”

He gives my ass a soft smack. “Want to see the rest of it?”

“Yes.”

Smiling at my excitement, he slowly lifts me off him and then helps me down. We get fixed up, and then he grabs my hand, threading his fingers through mine, and shows me the rest of the house. It’s just as perfect as I knew it would be. There’s plenty of room with four bedrooms, but it’s not so big that it doesn’t feel like a home, and every room has an amazing view of either the ocean or the pretty woods and wild flowers that cover the front and sides of the property. One of the last rooms he shows me is a near the back of the house, a room that’s filled with large windows looking out at the ocean and every wall is covered in bookshelves. He pulls me in for a hug when he sees that it’s made me start crying again. I never thought I would ever see a place this beautiful, let alone get to live in it.

When we step onto the back patio, Valeri says, “We’ll need to add in a security gate and post some guards, but the property is twenty acres, so we should have plenty of privacy.”

“Guards?” I ask, wondering if he’s joking.

He is not.

“Yeah, and I thought we could get a couple of dogs.”

When he sees I’m still trying to wrap my head around the idea of having armed guards on the property, he cups my face and kisses my forehead. “The apartment was safe because there was only one access point and there were always people around who could call the police or be witnesses if someone tried to come against me.”

He looks around at all the land we now have. “I will never have a moment of peace without guards. Anyone could sneak on the property, and the thought of someone hurting you,” he shakes his head and clenches his jaw, cutting off his own thought. “I won’t allow that to happen.”

“Okay,” I tell him, resting my hands on his chest. “We can have as many guards as you want, and I’d love to get a dog. I always wanted one but was too afraid at the idea of having to leave the poor thing with my dad all day.”

“We can get as many as you want. Volodya has three, and you’ll see Ruslan tonight. That’s Vasily’s Tibetan Mastiff.”

“Sounds big.”

He laughs. “He is. He’s attached himself to their son and follows him around like it’s his only mission in life now.”

I laugh at the image and wrap my arms around Valeri, resting the side of my face against his chest while I watch the waves crash against the shore, trying to wrap my head around the idea that this beautiful place is my home now, and the gorgeous man I’m holding is my fiancé.



# Chapter 14

## *Valeri*

**E** vie's eyes widen when I pull up in front of the guarded gate outside Vasily's house, waving to the armed man on duty before he pushes a button to let us in. The gate swings open while she lets out a soft breath and scans the land around us. It's still light enough for her to get an idea of how big the place is. She sees a house off in the distance and points at it.

"Is that their house?"

"No, that's where Andrei and Svetlana live. I'm sure they'll be here tonight too. You haven't met Andrei yet, but he's been with us since Vasily took over in Moscow after our dad was killed. Svetlana grew up with us and has been like a sister. Her mom's been cooking for the Medvedev family since before I was born."

I wave a hand at the land around us. "Vasily has forty acres, so he has a couple of other houses on his property. There's another one up here on the left that a bunch of the guys live in. Vasily had it built after he brought Nina here because he was sick of Ilya's one-night stands walking around and causing trouble."

"That was nice of him."

I laugh because nice isn't a word that's often used to describe him. "He'd do anything for her," I tell her, reaching over to give her hand a squeeze. "Both my brothers are completely devoted to their wives. The same way I am and will be devoted to you."

She smiles and lifts my hand up to kiss it. I catch sight of her diamond and smile. I love seeing it on her. I'd chosen something that she would've never picked out for herself. Had I taken her to the store, she would've picked out the smallest ring she could find, not wanting to spend money or draw attention to herself, but my beautiful fiancée was made to shine, damn it. She's done hiding away, and she's worth every damn penny of that ring's price tag.

I pull the car next to Volodya's and get out to open her door. When she's standing next to me, I cup her face and lean down to kiss her. "Relax, baby. They already love you."

She smiles and nods, but I can tell she's still a bit nervous. Grabbing her hand, I pull her towards the front door. Right after I knock, Nina throws open the door and waves us in. She gives me a big hug and then wraps her arms around Evie.

"It's so good to see you again," Nina squeals and then grabs Evie's hand when she sees the ring. "Maddie, get over here and look at this!"

I laugh while they huddle around Evie, looking at the ring and hugging her again.

"Damn, Valeri, you did good," Maddie says, walking over to give me a hug. "Congratulations, I'm so happy for you."

"Thanks, little sis," I tell her, kissing the top of her head. When Svetlana walks out from the back, they wave her over. "Evie, this is Svetlana, and that's her husband Andrei and their daughter Alina," I say, pointing him out to her.

"Hey, Evie," he calls, leaning against the counter with his daughter in his arms.

Evie waves at him and then returns the hug Svetlana gives her. She's smiling, but I can tell she's a little overwhelmed, so I snake an arm around her and pull her towards me.

"Come on, I want you to meet my nephews."

On the way to the living room, Vasily stops us and gives her a hug before smacking me on the back with huge grin. "Congratulations, brother, on the upcoming wedding that you

swore you'd never have." He squeezes Evie's arm. "Welcome to the family, Evie."

"Thank you." She returns his smile while leaning even more into me.

"Are the kids in here?" I ask him.

"Yeah, with Volodya."

We pass through and find Volodya sitting on the couch with his son in his lap while Dmitri plays with a huge pile of blocks on the floor at his feet. He's building a tower that I'm confident is going to topple any second.

"I heard the commotion," he says with a grin. "Congratulations to you both." He meets Evie's eyes and says, "Welcome to the family."

"Thanks." She looks at Misha and asks, "Is this your son?"

Volodya ruffles his son's hair and gives one of his rare full smiles. "It is." Misha's hyper-focused on the toy in his hands, but when he hears his dad's voice he lifts his head and gives a big smile. It grows when he spots me standing in front of him.

I tell him hi in Russian and then take him when he lunges for me. Volodya laughs and hands him over. "Misha, this is your Aunt Evie," I tell him. He smiles and drools and reaches for her. I swear I see her heart melt right there on the spot. She grabs onto him and pulls him against her, laughing at how damn cute he is.

She studies his face for a second and then looks at Volodya. "He looks just like you."

I didn't know my brother was capable of smiling that big. He beams at his son and then snags Maddie when she walks by, pulling her down into his lap.

"She said he looks just like me, *kiska*. Now we just need a daughter who looks just like you."

Maddie laughs and returns his kiss. "Soon, baby. He's barely one. I need more space between them."

He keeps her on his lap and whispers something in her ear that makes her blush a deep shade of red while I turn and squat down next to Dmitri and pull him in for a hug, making sure to steer clear of his wobbly tower. He tells me hi in Russian and then asks who the woman standing next to me is. I laugh and kiss his cheek.

“This is Evie,” I tell him in English, “and she’s just agreed to marry me.”

He eyes her for a second and then nods his head, apparently giving her his three-year-old stamp of approval. Getting up he walks over and holds his hand out.

Vasily walks in and laughs. “Dima, aunts get hugs not handshakes.”

Evie kneels down and opens her free arm to him. He wraps his arm around her and his little cousin and tells her hi in Russian. She repeats it, and hearing her speak my mother tongue has me grinning and giving her a wink. Mentally I’m already making a list of all the phrases I’m going to teach her, none of them appropriate for her to speak in front of anyone but me.

“And this big guy,” I say, running my fingers through the thick, black fur, “is Ruslan.”

Evie laughs when Dmitri runs over and starts to rub the dog’s belly. “Good boy,” he tells him in Russian before going back to building his tower.

“Wow.” She walks over and gives him a good scratch behind his ears while Misha plays with a strand of her hair. “I’ve never seen a dog this big before.”

“I hadn’t either,” Nina says, coming in to stand next to Vasily who immediately wraps an arm around her and pulls her closer. “He’s so gentle with Dima, though.” She pats her stomach and looks up at Vasily with a big smile on her face. “I wonder how he’ll be with a little girl to protect.”

That gets our attention. Volodya laughs while Maddie lets out a squeal and claps her hands. Andrei and Svetlana beam at them while their daughter laughs at everyone’s reactions.

“A little girl?” I ask.

Vasily’s whole face is lit up in a grin. “Yeah, we just found out today.”

“Man, I can’t wait to see you surrounded by baby dolls and princess costumes,” Volodya says with a laugh.

“Just wait until she wants her Uncle Volodya to play dress up with her,” Vasily says, shooting me a big grin.

“Maybe she’ll be a tomboy,” Nina says.

“I’m painting her nursery pink anyway,” Vasily says. “She can change her room later if she wants, but I’m actually looking forward to pink, girly things. Our family’s always been men. It’s about time we livened things up.”

He looks over at Andrei holding his daughter. “It’ll be good for Alina to have another girl to play with. They’ll keep the boys in line.”

As if on cue, Misha lets out a squeal. He grabs Evie’s hands and uses her for support as he pulls himself up onto chubby, unsteady legs. He loves walking with help, but he’s still hesitant to do it on his own. Volodya smiles and leans forward, holding his hands out for his son. Misha laughs and takes a few more ungainly steps until Volodya scoops him up and sets him on his lap next to his mom.

“All right, Katya’s left us with a shit ton of food, so I hope you’re all hungry,” Vasily says, leading the way to the kitchen.

While the others follow, I grab Evie and pull her against me. “Doing okay?”

She smiles and wraps her arms around me. “I’m doing great. I really love your family, Valeri. You’re so lucky to have them.”

I think about how lonely she must’ve been growing up with no one except an abusive father. I don’t know how in the hell she survived it, especially while remaining so damn sweet and nice.

“They’re your family now too,” I remind her, “and soon we’ll have our own kids running around.” I give a soft laugh

and kiss her head. “The holidays are going to be so much damn fun.”

She runs her hands along my back and laughs. “They will be. I can’t believe how quickly my life has changed.”

“Me too, but I’m so fucking glad it happened.”

I cup her face and kiss her before we join the others in the kitchen. With loaded plates, we decide to eat on the veranda since it’s so nice out tonight. Ruslan runs around, eating scraps and then following behind Dmitri when he finishes up and runs for his little scooter.

It’s a perfect night. Usually I’d be the lone single guy here, and as soon as it was over, I’d hit one of the clubs, but just the thought of going back to that life is enough to depress me. As soon as Evie is finished, I pull her onto my lap, needing the reminder that I never have to go back to that again. She relaxes against me, wrapping an arm around my shoulders and kissing my cheek.

“I love you,” she whispers in my ear, and fuck if that isn’t my most favorite thing ever.

I squeeze her hip and turn to meet her eyes before giving her a kiss. “I love you too, baby.”

When I look back at the table, everyone is staring at us. The women all have the *aww, that’s so cute* look on their face, while the guys are all wearing smug *I told you so* looks. I laugh and ignore all of them, kissing my fiancée again.

“So how do you like the house?” Vasily asks her.

“It’s so beautiful,” she says, resting her hand on mine.

“I was surprised when Valeri told me about it. He’s always insisted he would never move out of the city, but he’s doing all kinds of things lately that he swore he’d never do,” Vasily says with a laugh. “It’s a good property, though, and it’s equal distance from me and Volodya, so that’s nice.”

“We’ll have to have supper at our place next,” Maddie says. “You haven’t seen where we live yet. My mom has a house on our property with my stepdad.”

“Oh, that’s nice.” She hesitates for a second, and I know she wants to ask something.

I give her hip another squeeze. “What is it?”

She blushes when she looks over at Maddie. “I was just wondering what your stepdad thinks about all this,” she says, waving her hand around at all of us. “Like the Bratva stuff.”

We laugh, but she has no idea why.

Her brown eyes meet mine. “Should I not have asked that?”

“No, baby, it’s fine. We’re just laughing because Boris works for us. When Maddie and Volodya got together, her mom was going through cancer treatments. They moved her onto their property so they could look after her better, and she hit it off with Boris.”

“Is your mom okay?” Evie asks her.

Maddie smiles and nods her head. “She’s fantastic. Cancer free and never happier.”

“That’s great.” Evie smiles at her and then nervously fidgets with my fingers. I know she’s naturally shy and that this is a lot for her. I run my fingers over hers and then trail a line up her inner arm, smiling when she sucks in a quick breath. I love that I can make her breath hitch with just one touch.

Nina brings out the desserts, and I tighten my grip on Evie’s hip when she goes to scoot back into her own chair. When she meets my eyes, I give her a wink and keep her on my lap. Eating my own slice of pie, I run my thumb under her shirt, caressing the smooth skin of her hip. I’m completely infatuated with her, and I’m not embarrassed to show it. My lap is exactly where she belongs.

When she finishes her pie, she sets down the plate with a sigh and leans back against me. “I’m so stuffed.”

I smile and kiss her cheek. “Not yet, baby, but you will be,” I whisper in her ear.



She laughs and then starts to get up. “I want to help clean all this up,” she tells me when she sees Nina start reaching for plates. Svetlana hands Alina to Andrei, and Maddie also jumps up to help, giving Misha a kiss on the head before grabbing their plates. They disappear into the house, leaving the men on the veranda.

“I heard everything went well last night,” Andrei says, switching to Russian and reaching for his drink. He’s had to sit things out the last few weeks after a stab wound during a dispute in Vasily’s territory. He got lucky and will be good to go in another few days, but he still hates missing out on anything.

“Yeah, I don’t think we’ll hear anything else from the mermaid bikers,” Vasily says. “There may be a few others around the city who weren’t there last night, but it was a small outfit, and I doubt they’re going to want to risk their lives by showing their faces again.”

Dmitri races around on his scooter several feet away while Misha falls asleep against his dad’s chest. It’s hard to believe that they’ll be running the Bratva when they’re older. I remember playing with my brothers while our dad conducted business. It had been normal to us, something that was always a part of our lives, just like it will be for our sons.

We talk about an upcoming shipment of drugs and how much we expect to make this month and how best to deal with a local thug who’s decided to start fights in two of our clubs last week.

Volodya runs his fingers through his son’s hair. “I can handle him easy enough.”

“Let’s give him a warning first,” Vasily says. “If he does it again, he’s all yours.”

Volodya smiles and kisses Misha’s head. When our women come back out, all talk of business stops. We switch to English and the topic changes to funny stories about the kids and the boat Volodya and Maddie are thinking about buying. By water it wouldn’t take long at all to get to my brothers’ houses, and

it's definitely on my to-do list. Plus, I really want to fuck Evie out on the water.

When Dmitri walks back over rubbing his eyes and yawning, we start on the goodbyes. Evie and I get a round of hugs and more congratulations on the engagement, and by the time we're back in the car, we're both more than ready for some time alone.

"When do you want to get married?" I ask her on the drive back.

"Soon. I'm ready now."

I smile and give her thigh a squeeze. "Perfect."

She laughs and rests her hand on mine. "We're not really doing it tomorrow, are we?"

"No, baby, but soon. I want you to have a nice dress and a photographer, and my brothers would kill me if I eloped with you and left them out of it."

After a few seconds, she says, "I'm not going to have anyone there."

"You'll have me, and my family is your family."

Her hand tightens on mine, and when we get back to the apartment, we start making plans for the move. After a few hectic weeks of movers, buying new things for the house because I insisted we start from scratch, not wanting anything from the previous life I had, we finally move in. Mixed in with the relocation has been our wedding plans, and it's been insane. Evie and Maddie and Nina have been in top-secret mode about the dress, and I can't wait to see it on her tomorrow.

"What are you thinking about?" Evie asks, coming up behind me on the deck and wrapping her arms around me.

"About how much I can't wait to see you in your wedding dress tomorrow."

"I hope you like it."

I smile and pull her down so she's sitting between my legs on the lounge chair. "If it's on you, I'll love it."

When I reach a hand around to cup one of her breasts and pull her tighter against me, she laughs and says, "Don't even think about it. It's bad enough we're breaking tradition by staying in the same house tonight. We can't have sex."

"Who said anything about sex?" I lean closer and nip her earlobe. She's in her pajamas and not wearing a bra, so I take advantage of it, running my thumb over the hard nipple I see straining against the thin fabric of her shirt.

"The next time I fuck you, *lapochka*, it'll be when you're my wife."

She smiles and grabs my thighs when I pinch her nipple between my fingers, tweaking it until she's arching up and moaning my name.

"This hardly seems fair," she says, her voice raspy with want and need.

I laugh and slide her shirt up, revealing the perky tits I will never be able to get enough of. I fill my hands with her, massaging her and letting her nipples scrape along my palms. She thinks I'm being mean, but this is going to be far worse for me than it will be for her.

When I slide one hand down her stomach, I stop at her lower belly and whisper, "How late are you now?"

"Over a week."

I smile and stroke her skin, knowing without a doubt that she's pregnant with our baby.

"It could just be stress about the wedding and move," she reminds me, but I shake my head.

"I don't think so. I think my baby is already growing inside you, *lapochka*, and I can't tell you how fucking feral that makes me."

She moans and rocks her hips up when I slide my hand under her panties and cup her pussy, resting one finger along

her soaking wet slit. I keep it there, knowing it's driving her crazy.

"Please," she begs.

I pinch her nipple again and drag my finger along her slit, soaking my skin and making my cock so hard it's almost painful.

"Please what?" I ask, circling my wet finger around her swollen bundle of nerves before pinching it. I hold her nipple and clit between my fingers while she gasps and her whole body freezes.

"Don't you dare tease me and not let me come," she warns.

I laugh again and nuzzle her ear. "Do you really think you're in any position to issue demands, sweetheart?" I pinch her harder, reminding her who's in control.

"Fuck," she moans, digging her fingers into my thighs in an effort to try and keep herself still.

My teeth graze her earlobe. "Maybe I should make you wait," I murmur against her ear. "Maybe I like the idea of you being left wet and wanting, an ache between your legs that you know you're not allowed to do anything about."

She gasps when I loosen my grip on her and rim her clit while I drag my palm along her nipple, mixing pleasure with the pain.

"Maybe I like the idea of my wife in her wedding dress with a pussy so wet her arousal is dripping down her goddamn thighs."

"I'll be like that anyway," she says, making me smile.

"Good answer, baby."

"It's the truth. You drive me crazy, Valeri. You know I'm always wet for you."

She's not wrong. Every time I slide my hand down her pants, I find her wet. It's fucking intoxicating. She has the same effect on me. I can't stay soft around her. It's impossible.

“That’s because this little cunt was made for me.” I slide my finger over her slippery, swollen clit again, pulling another gasp from her. “Remember when I took you to the beach and you used my cock to make yourself come?”

She laughs, and I smile at the sound. There was a time not that long ago when that would’ve made her duck her head in embarrassment, but now she just laughs and rocks her hips up even more.

“I’d do it now, too, if you’d let me.”

She lets out a frustrated groan at my laugh. “Easy, baby, I’m going to give you what you need.” I nip the skin beneath her ear. “I will always take care of you, sweetheart.”

I smile when she lets out a breathy “Thank you” as soon as I start to rub her clit again. Sliding two fingers into her, I work her pussy while I gently pinch her nipple and roll it between my fingers. She rocks against me, her body writhing in a way that makes me have to grit my teeth to stop from taking her. I was serious about what I said, though. The next time I fuck her, she’s going to be Evie Medvedev. Her soft whimpers fill the night air, drowning out the crashing waves, and when she turns her head, I press my lips to hers and kiss her with a hunger that consumes every part of me.

The wet heat of her release floods my hand as I swallow her screams and pinch her nipple even harder, wanting her to feel the sting of it warring with the pleasure that’s racing through her. I feel the rapid beat of her heart against my arm, and when I suck her tongue into my mouth, her whole body shudders so damn beautifully.

Releasing her sore nipple, I cup her breast and slow the kiss down, savoring the taste of her and the way her hips still gently rock against my hand. Giving her clit one last soft rub, I bring my soaked fingers to our mouths and slide a finger in between our lips, groaning when the taste of her pussy hits me. Our tongues run along my finger, sliding over my skin as we both lap up the taste of her. When we’ve cleaned one finger, I slide in the other until I’ve swallowed everything I can get. It

hasn't sated my need for her, though. It's only made it a thousand times worse.

Pulling back, I rest my forehead against hers and try to will my body to relax. It doesn't work. I cup her face and kiss her once more before leaning my head back and letting out a sigh as I pull her back to rest fully against me. I stroke her hair, keeping her top pulled up because I like looking at her tits, and think about our wedding.

"I can't wait to marry you, Evie."

"I can't wait to marry you, Valeri."

I smile at the drowsy sound of her voice. She's spent and tired and ready for bed. I carry her upstairs, laying her down in our bed before wrapping my body around hers. Before she falls asleep, I pull her shirt off and cup one of her tits in my hand, holding her tightly against me as she falls asleep. With my cock digging into her perfect, round ass, it takes a long time before I join her.

When I wake, my hands search her out, but there's nothing but cold, empty mattress around me. Panicked, I sit up and call her name. It takes my sleep-addled brain a second to notice the note she's left me.

*Good morning, Valeri,*

*I'm leaving to go to Nina's to get ready. I didn't want to wake you because you're not supposed to see me before the wedding. We broke enough rules last night. Plus, I don't trust myself around you right now. Your cock digging into my ass woke me up this morning, and you have no idea how close I came to sliding you into me. I plan on waking you up like that very soon, by the way.*

I let out a pained groan at the image she's put in my head as my cock rages against my boxer briefs, demanding to be given some relief.

*Text me when you get up. I love you more than I ever thought it was possible to love someone, Valeri Medvedev, and I can't wait to become your wife.*

*Love,*

*Evie*

I send her a quick text, and I'm still grinning like an idiot when my brothers show up a few minutes later with their tuxes in garment bags and a bag of food. I let them in and grab one of the sausage biscuits that Katya's sent them over with, taking a big bite as they follow me into the kitchen so I can make some coffee.

Volodya takes one of the barstools and nods when I hold up a mug to see if he wants some. He grabs one of the biscuits and shoots me a grin. "So do you need us to talk to you about your wedding night? Certain things will be expected of you, and I'd hate for you to let the Medvedev name down."

I laugh and tell him to shut the fuck up. Vasily sits down next to him and takes the mug I offer. After I've added in some sugar, I lean against the counter and finish off the biscuit.

"So how's she doing?" I ask.

"She's at our house with all the other women. She looked excited and a bit shell-shocked," Vasily says with a grin.

"Have you seen the dress?" I ask.

"We have," Volodya says. "And we're sworn to secrecy."

"You're my brother," I remind him.

"Maddie said if I told you she wouldn't let me chase her for a month. Sorry, little brother, these lips are fucking sealed."

I laugh, unable to get upset at my psycho brother. "It's probably for the best. I want to be surprised."

"Nervous?" Vasily asks.

I grab another biscuit. "Not at all. She's the one."

"So all three of the Medvedevs are officially taken," Volodya says, grabbing a bottle of vodka from the bag they'd brought. He lines up three shot glasses and fills them to the top.

"It's ten in the morning," I remind him, but he just laughs and scoots one over to me.

“I don’t give a shit what time it is. My little brother is getting married today.”

We raise our glasses as Vasily says, “To a long and happy future for you and Evie.”

Volodya adds with a wink, “And I hope she lets you chase her every now and then.”

I laugh and drink the shot. As soon as I set it down, he’s filling it again.

“Have you heard from Mom?” Vasily asks. “I talked to her a couple of days ago. She seemed okay. I think I might have convinced her to come over for a visit soon.”

“Seriously?” I ask, nearly choking on my drink. We’ve been trying to get our mom to visit or even move here for years, but she’s always refused, not wanting to leave the place that reminds her of our dad. She’s missing out on so much life, though, and it’s getting harder and harder to just stand by and watch it.

“Yeah, but I’m not sure when. I told her that we just found out we’re having a little girl, and she was very surprised when we talked about your wedding. She was convinced you’d stay a bachelor forever.”

“Yeah, yeah, join the club,” I say, swinging back the next shot, not at all surprised when Volodya immediately refills it. “I’m not walking down the aisle drunk,” I remind him.

“Please, you’re a Medvedev. You’ve got vodka running through your damn veins, and don’t be such a pussy,” he adds because he knows it’ll make me laugh. My brothers are the only ones who can call me a pussy and make me laugh about it.

We finish the breakfast and drink more vodka before it’s time for me to jump in the shower. I’m anxious to see Evie again, and I’m more than ready to hear her say *I do*. My brothers laugh at my inability to sit still and the way I keep double-checking my tux to make sure everything looks good. They changed while I was in the shower and started letting people in so they could set up. We wanted to get married down



by the beach. When I'd told Evie that my brothers were both married at their homes, she'd loved the idea and immediately wanted us to do it. Adding this memory to all the others we're going to share here sounded perfect to me too.

I look out the bedroom window, watching the caterers and photographer get set up, and when I can't wait a second longer, I say, "Okay, it's time to go downstairs."

Vasily laughs and checks his watch. "We're still a little early."

"I don't give a fuck. I can't wait any longer."

"Hang on," he says, sending a quick text to Nina. He reads the reply and looks up at me from where he's sitting. "They're five minutes away. Time to go down and get you married, little brother."

# Chapter 15

## *Evie*

I've never been so damn nervous in my life. The entire morning I've been surrounded by women primping and pampering me, and as much as I appreciate it, it's all so foreign to me that it's left me even more anxious than usual. I look at the huge security fence that was installed right after we moved in as Nina turns onto our driveway and stops in front of the gate. The armed guards do a damn good job of remaining as invisible as possible, but when Nina rolls down the window and waves one of them over, there's no mistaking the man for what he is—a trained killer who's been ordered to take down anyone he deems is a threat.

“Morning, Mrs. Medvedev,” he says, giving her a quick nod, but he doesn't relax, and his dark eyes never lose their alert focus.

“You're on duty all day?” she asks him.

“Yes, ma'am.”

“I'll make sure someone brings you some food and cake later.”

He starts to tell her that's not necessary, but she waves off his hesitancy. “It's only a plate of food. You can balance it on your lap and still shoot any intruders.”

He looks like he wants to crack a smile, but all we get is a slight upturn at the corner of his mouth. God, this guy could give Volodya a run for his money.

“Thank you,” he tells her in Russian, one of the few words I’ve managed to learn, and then waves us through.

“The armed guards take some getting used to,” she says with laugh.

I smile and try not to let the nerves get to me when we pass through the gate and the house comes into view. I pull down the vanity mirror so I can check that everything still looks okay. The dress is gorgeous, the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen, and when I look down at it, I can’t help but run my hands over the delicate lace and beadwork, needing to convince myself that this exquisite gown is actually mine—not used, not off the discount rack, but full price and brand new and only for me.

“You look so beautiful,” Nina says once she’s parked in the driveway.

“Valeri’s going to have a heart attack when he sees you,” Maddie says from the backseat. Misha and Dmitri laugh and smile at the excitement, not having any real idea what’s going on but loving it all the same.

“Thanks,” I tell them. I know I’ve gotten damn lucky with these two. They’re sweet and laidback, and they’ve welcomed me into their families with a warmth that I hadn’t been expecting.

Looking back at Maddie, I say, “I never got a chance to thank you for what you said at Inferno. Valeri told me that you really let Lisa have it.”

Maddie laughs. “Heck yeah I did. That woman is a b-i-t-c-h,” she says, spelling it out so Dmitri won’t repeat it. “Erase her from your memory, Evie. She’s not worth a second of your time.” She gives my shoulder a soft squeeze. “I’m not going to lie. All three Medvedev brothers were man whores.”

“Maddie!” Nina laughs.

“Sorry, I should’ve spelled that one too, but it’s the truth. They’ve been with more women than I want to think about, but I will say this. They are loyal to the end. When they make a commitment, they stand by it, and I can say with absolute

certainty that not a one of them would ever cheat. When they fall in love, that's it. Game over."

"Agreed," Nina says. "They may do some shady stuff, and they're obviously capable of you know what," she says, giving her son a quick wink, "but they're good men, the very best."

I remember the story Vasily told me about rescuing Nina from the brothel, and I couldn't agree with her more. They're good men, and family is everything to them.

"I know how lucky I am to have him," I tell them.

"Maddie and I both feel the same way," Nina says. She looks up at our house, knowing her husband is in there somewhere. "I can't imagine my life without him."

"Okay, before we all start crying in the dang car, let's also remember that they're darn lucky to have us," Maddie says with a laugh.

They laugh while I nod and take a deep breath before opening the car door and stepping out. I'd had to have the dress hemmed because I knew there was no way in hell I'd be able to manage heels. The woman at the bridal store had been less than thrilled, but I'd refused to budge. I know myself, and I know what I can handle, and heels for the first time in my life on the most important day of my life was never going to happen.

I straighten the veil that's trailing down the back of my head and pull it forward so it's covering my face. I may not have had many wedding fantasies, since I assumed it was never going to happen, but when I would allow myself to daydream, I always imagined a veil over my face that my husband would lift up before he kissed me. It might be silly, but I wanted to live out that daydream.

Nina checks her phone and smiles at me. "They're ready and Valeri is so excited he can barely stand still."

They both run a hand over their red dresses, making sure everything is smoothed out and not ruffled from the drive. There's no hiding Nina's baby bump in this dress, and I swear she's glowing even more than usual.

“You two look amazing,” I tell them. “Thanks for agreeing to stand up there with me.”

“We’re thrilled to do it,” Maddie says. “We’ve been waiting for this day for a long time, and we’re so freaking excited to have you in the family.”

I give them each a hug, willing the tears to go away because I know how hard they worked on my makeup. Maddie grabs Misha, gushing over his little tux, while Nina reaches for Dmitri’s hand.

“You ready to carry the rings for Uncle Valeri and Aunt Evie?” she asks him.

He smiles up at me and says, “*Da.*”

I laugh at how damn cute he is and then follow them around the side of the house. Our backyard has been completely transformed. The caterers have set up tables and chairs all over the back deck and into the yard, and down by the beach are lines of chairs, all of them filled with black tuxes and more neck tattoos than I’ve ever seen in one place. The entire Bratva isn’t here, but a lot of them are. I’d thought about inviting Jerry and Gale, but didn’t want it to lead to any awkward questions about who all these men are. I did tell them that I came into an inheritance from an uncle that I never knew I had and that I wanted to give them some of the money. After a ton of begging, they both finally accepted. Last I heard, Jerry and his wife are working their way through the Canadian Rockies, and Gale is recently retired and loving it. I smile at the thought and scan the crowd. I spot Maddie’s mom and Boris, Andrei and Svetlana, and her mom Katya. None of them have noticed me yet, and when I take a step closer, Nina grabs my arm and gives me a smile.

“You’re supposed to wait here.”

“I am?”

She squeezes my hand before letting me go and then hands me my bouquet of roses and lilies.

“I’ll see you down there.” She gives me another big smile before walking off with Dmitri.

I look around, wondering what in the hell I'm supposed to do. After a few seconds, I start shifting my weight from foot to foot and worrying my bottom lip. A noise to my right has me turning my head, and when I see Valeri step out of the house, my heart stops in my chest. His black tux fits him like a glove, and when his green eyes meet mine, mine immediately start to water no matter how hard I try to fight it.

He gives me the sweetest smile I've ever seen and slowly walks towards me. He takes in every inch of me, his dimple never once disappearing, and when he's close enough, he whispers my name with such reverence that he makes it sound almost like a prayer.

"Am I in the wrong spot? Aren't you supposed to be down there?" I ask, worried that I've already embarrassed myself and got it all wrong.

He grabs my hand and kisses the back of it. "You're absolutely stunning, *lapochka*, so beautiful it makes it hard to breathe when I look at you."

"I'm trying really hard not to cry," I tell him, and he smiles at how shaky my voice sounds. "You look gorgeous, Valeri, so perfect it doesn't seem real. Why are you up here?"

"Did you think I'd make you walk down there all on your own?"

My throat tightens when I realize what he's done. He knows how nervous I've been about this and how uncomfortable it made me to think about not having anyone to walk me down the aisle and give me away, so he decided we'd walk it together.

"Thank you," I whisper.

"I will never leave you to face anything alone, baby. I will always be here for you, no matter what."

I nod, not trusting myself to speak and run my hand over his freshly shaved cheek. His green eyes are filled with love, and I can't look away. He slips his hand under my veil and runs a finger along my cheek.

"Ready to become my wife, *lapochka*?"

“Yes,” I answer, and there’s not a shred of doubt inside me. All I feel is love and excitement and a gratefulness that makes me appreciate every second of this all the more. I will never take him or our life together for granted.

When he takes my hand, I squeeze it and smile before he leads me down the path to the waiting guests. As soon as everyone sees us, the music starts and Volodya holds his arm out for his wife. His other arm is busy holding their son, and their matching tuxedos look so damn cute. Vasily and Nina are the next to go down and right behind them is Dmitri, carrying our rings, his face fixed in concentration because he’s convinced that everything hangs on his ability to keep our wedding bands safe and secure.

“Showtime, beautiful,” Valeri murmurs, giving my hand another squeeze before placing it on his arm. He keeps his hand on top of mine as we start down the path. Everyone turns around to watch us, and even though I don’t have any of my own family here, I still feel surrounded by love. I went from having no one, to having everything. This is my family now, and this is where I belong.

We stand at the front and face one another, and everything else fades away. All I can see is the man I love, the man who’s about to become my husband and partner in life. I keep my eyes on his as we say our vows and exchange rings, and when it’s time for him to lift the veil, he pulls it back slowly and cups my face.

“There’s my girl,” he whispers right before he kisses me and makes it official. I wrap my arms around him and kiss my husband. We pull away reluctantly, and he rests his forehead against mine as everyone cheers around us.

“I love you, baby.”

“I love you too,” I tell him.

We’re soon surrounded by a crowd of people wanting to hug and congratulate us, and I can’t stop smiling. Soon the liquor is flowing, plates are being filled, and the tux jackets are discarded as white dress shirts are rolled up to the elbows, revealing tatted-up forearms. After we’ve made the rounds,



Valeri leads me over to a table by the house where Nikolai is already waiting with a grin. Valeri had told me that Maddie and Nina had both had their tattoos done right after they were married. I'd immediately asked him if I could do the same. I don't want to break tradition, and I'm also crazy excited to get the tattoo.

"Ready to join the club, Evie?" Nikolai asks, giving me a big grin as he reaches his hand out for my arm.

"Absolutely." I sit down and stretch my left arm out.

Valeri stands behind me, laying a hand on my shoulder and kissing the top of my head.

"Never thought I'd be inking Valeri's name on someone," Nikolai admits with a laugh. "Of course, truth be told, I never thought I'd be inking any women for the Medvedev brothers."

"Things change," Valeri says, taking the drink Vasily brings him.

"That they do," Volodya says, coming to stand on Valeri's other side. "Welcome to the family," he tells me, and the grin on his face makes it obvious that the drink in his hand isn't the first of the night. "Maddie," he hollers, looking around. "Where's my beautiful wife?"

She laughs and walks over, giving me a thumbs up when she sees what's about to happen. Volodya wraps an arm around her, pulling her in for a kiss. "I remember when you got yours, *kiska*," he murmurs against her lips. She laughs and kisses him back.

My attention snaps back to Nikolai when I hear a mechanical buzzing sound and he grips my arm, holding me still. "Just relax, Evie. It's going to sting, but I'll be as quick as I can."

Valeri laughs. "That's what he tells all the girls."

"Fuck you," Nikolai says, laughing and preparing to make the first mark.

I reach up and grab Valeri's hand right before the needle hits my skin. It's not near as painful as I thought it would be,

but I wouldn't say it's pleasant either. I've heard enough stories about Nikolai's tattoos to know the man is a sort of legend within the Bratva. He's so talented that he does it all freehand. I watch the bear slowly take shape while the others continue to drink and laugh.

Valeri leans down and whispers in my ear, "You have no idea how much it turns me on to see you taking my name, baby. If I could, I'd bend you over the table right now and fuck you until you couldn't walk straight."

I feel my face heat up at the image and the raw desire I hear in his voice. He nips my earlobe and then stands back up, keeping his hand wrapped around the nape of my neck while his thumb caresses my bare skin, easily taking my mind of the sting of the tattoo.

"Wow," I say once it's all finished. Nikolai dabs some ointment on it before wrapping it up in a clear wrap. "Thank you so much, Nikolai. It looks amazing."

He grins and rolls the tension out of his neck before taking the shot Vasily offers him. "My pleasure, Evie, and welcome to the family."

I laugh when Valeri picks me up and shouts something in Russian. All the men laugh and cheer and take another shot. He pulls me closer, bringing his mouth to mine and kisses me until I'm two seconds away from begging him to take me inside. He sees the look in my eyes, how badly I want him, and gives me a wink.

"Soon, *lapochka*, but first, cake."

"I'd rather have you in my mouth," I tell him, making him groan and give my bottom lip a soft warning bite.

"God, you drive me crazy," he groans, carrying me over to the large cake that everyone's crowded around.

We feed each other the delicious cake, pose for so many photos that I think my smile is permanently glued in place, and then dance and laugh some more. I drink the nonalcoholic champagne that Valeri keeps sneaking me because we're pretty sure I'm pregnant but don't want to say anything until

I've taken a test. When the sun starts to set, he grabs my hand and pulls me closer to the shore.

“Where are we going?”

“I have a surprise for you.” The mischievous grin on his face makes me laugh and look around, wondering what in the hell he's talking about. “It's a wedding present.” He points out at the ocean. “I hope you like it, baby.”

I follow his gaze and my mouth drops open. Vasily and Volodya are standing on a beautiful yacht, waving to us as Vasily guides it closer to the boathouse that's been sitting empty behind our house. Volodya jumps out and ties it to the dock while Valeri laughs and grabs my hand, pulling me against him.

“It's so beautiful,” I tell him. It's easily big enough for us to live on if we wanted, and it's been decorated with white fairy lights, making it look so damn inviting and romantic.

“I thought we could spend the night on it tonight, maybe even for a few days,” he lifts a brow at me, gauging my reaction. When he sees how excited I am, he relaxes and leans closer. “I'm so glad you want to because I can't get the idea of fucking you on the deck out of my mind. If you'd rather spend our wedding night here, though, please tell me.”

“No, I love this. It's perfect, Valeri.”

“Come on, I want to show it to you.”

He grabs my hand and when we meet his brothers on the deck, he stops and gives them each a hug. They laugh and say something in Russian before Volodya runs his hand through Valeri's hair, making Valeri laugh and swat his hand away. Vasily gives me a hug and so does Volodya before they walk off, the latter on legs that aren't quite as steady as they were an hour ago.

I follow Valeri to the end of the dock and then suck in a quick breath when I see my name written on the side in a pretty cursive font. “You named it after me?”

“Of course I did. I love your name. Nothing else could do this yacht justice.”

He holds out his hand and helps me on board. He smiles at how I can't resist touching everything. The deck is large with plenty of places to sit, and it even has a hammock in the corner. The inside is just as impressive. It's like walking into a gorgeous, mini apartment with the most amazing views imaginable. There's a leather couch and several chairs, a kitchen with everything we could need, and everywhere I look the walls are lined with windows, the peachy sunset on full view.

I follow the path to the back and let out a soft gasp when I see the large corner bedroom. Running my hand over the soft blue bedding, I look out the rounded windows and then walk over to peek into the bathroom, which is way bigger than I envisioned, complete with tub and separate shower.

"I can't believe this thing," I tell him, walking over to the window and looking out at our lit-up house and all the guests still walking around and laughing. I spot his brothers dancing with their wives while Nikolai holds Misha, laughing at something Andrei's telling him and Dmitri runs around with a big smile on his face. All the Bratva's men look relaxed as they enjoy the night off from their regular duties.

When I hear the motor start and feel the boat move, I let out a surprised yelp and run back the way I just came. "We're moving!" I tell Valeri, who's standing at the helm, looking completely relaxed as he maneuvers us away from the dock.

"We are," he says with an easy grin, reaching an arm towards me and motioning me closer. "Wave goodbye, Evie."

I look over and see all our guests waving and raising their glasses to us. Valeri hits the horn, making them all cheer as he laughs and turns the boat. I wave and laugh while he steers us further out into the ocean.

"Don't worry, baby, my brothers will make sure everything gets taken care of at the house."

I lean into him and smile. "I'm not worried."

He laughs when I run my hands down his chest and start to unbutton his dress shirt.

“Someone’s eager,” he murmurs, dragging a finger over my upper chest and leaving a trail of goosebumps along my skin.

“I am.” My fingers shake in my excitement, but I finally get them all undone and then slowly pull his shirt off. My eyes run over him, and when I spot the new tattoo on his chest, I look up at him and whisper his name.

He smiles and lightly runs a finger along the outside of my new tattoo. “You’re not the only one that Nikolai inked for the occasion.”

I turn my attention back to my name, written across his heart like he’d been saving this one patch of skin just for me. “It’s in English.”

“It is, and it’s the only time I’ll ever have something permanently written on me that’s not in Russian.”

I laugh and then stand on my tiptoes so I can press my lips to the skin right below my name. “Thank you, Valeri,” I whisper, knowing what this symbolizes to him. It’s a permanent vow to me, a promise that no one else will ever have his heart but me.

“It’s you or nothing, *lapochka*,” he says, cupping the back of my head. He holds me against him while he steers us along a path that he’s clearly mapped out ahead of time. When he eventually slows down and drops anchor, I look out, trying to see through the darkness, but there’s only the sound of water lapping against the boat and nothing that’s visible beyond a few feet.

“Where are we?”

“A secret spot that I found not too long ago. When the sun rises, you’ll see a small island with sandy beaches and the prettiest blue water.” His hand slides down my back before splaying his hand over my dress and cupping my ass. “I’m going to fuck my wife in every available spot and in every position I can think of.”

“That sounds like I might need to do some stretches first to limber up.”

He laughs and presses me harder against him, letting me feel his erection. “That wouldn’t be a bad idea.” His lips ghost along my cheek before he tugs on my earlobe with his teeth. “But I can promise that you’ll still be sore, baby.”

I drag my nails along his chest, lightly scraping them across the peaks and grooves of his muscles. “Maybe you’ll be sore too,” I tell him.

He throws back his head and laughs before fisting my hair and tilting my head up to the sky. His other hand wraps around my neck as he leans closer. “God, I hope so.”

Keeping me in his tight grip, he kisses a line from my hair, slowly working his way down my temple and then my cheek, working a path to my mouth. By the time his lips press against mine, I’m already breathless. I know he can feel my pulse racing against his hand, hear the ragged breaths I’m drawing in around our kiss, and feel the way my body is starting to tremble.

“So fucking perfect,” he whispers against my lips. He picks me up and carries me back to the deck, setting me down on one of the round loungers. The fairy lights around us put off the perfect amount of light, allowing me to see the green of his eyes and blown pupils as he burns through my dress with his gaze.

“Show me what’s mine.” His voice is strained, accent thick, and when I reach for the zipper on the side of my dress, he stills my hand. “No, lift it up. I want to eat your pussy with your dress on.”

A moan escapes at his words as my hands clutch at the fabric of my dress, quickly pulling it up until it’s bunched around my waist and I’m spreading my thighs without him even having to ask. The approving grin he gives me sends a rush of pleasure through me.

“Good girl, baby.” He runs his hands up my thigh highs before hooking a finger under one of the garters. “I fucking love this,” he murmurs, leaning closer to catch the silky ribbon between his teeth and give a soft tug.

I lay back, my dress still fisted in my hands and look up at the stars filling the sky above us. With the bunched-up dress, I can't see his face, but I can feel his lips as he kisses a line up my inner thigh while his thumbs slide under the tops of my thigh highs, lazily dragging along my skin before he spreads me wider. When he gets to my center, he nuzzles my pussy. I hear him take in a long, slow breath before groaning and running his tongue along my lace-covered slit.

“These are beautiful panties, sweetheart, but they're not going to last the night.”

He doesn't give me a chance to respond, just grips them in his teeth and pulls back hard enough to rip through the delicate lace. As soon as my pussy is exposed, he growls something in Russian and then latches onto me with a hunger that steals my breath. His hands grip my thighs, holding me in place as he kisses and nips at my pussy lips until my whole body is quivering with need. I feel the heat of his breath hit my clit when he gives a soft laugh at the sounds he's pulling from me.

“Is my wife eager to come?” he asks, giving my clit the softest of licks.

“God yes,” I moan. “Valeri, please.”

“You do beg so sweetly, baby.” He circles my bundle of nerves with his tongue, rimming me while making sure to never give me too much. He keeps me on the edge until I'm shaking and gasping and pleading with him to let me come. When he takes pity on me and latches onto my clit, I scream his name and come harder than I ever have in my life. My heels dig into his back as my hips buck up against his insatiable mouth. I break into a million pieces, shattered by pure ecstasy, and I never want it to stop.

Vibrations hit me as he growls against my pussy, rolling my clit with his tongue and pushing me straight into another orgasm. My ragged screams shoot out into the night sky, but there's no one else around to hear them. When my whole body goes limp, Valeri gentles his movements. Soft licks and kisses cover my pussy as I catch my breath. I'm still dazed when he stands and strips out of the rest of his tux.

His face glistens with my release, and the sight of it awakens some savage, possessive part of myself. As soon as he's close enough, I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him down before running my tongue over his wet chin.

"You should always taste like my pussy," I tell him.

"Goddamn," he groans. "My girl's gone feral."

He smiles and reaches up to slide my zipper down. Without taking my dress off, he pushes the top down enough to reveal my white, lacy strapless bra. Dipping his fingers under the lace, he roughly pushes it down as well, exposing my bare breasts.

"You're so beautiful, baby. My heart stopped beating when I saw you in this dress. Every part of me stilled, like I'd been waiting my whole life just to get to today, just to get to *you*."

I run my fingers up his chest, dancing them over the old bullet wound that could've easily ended his life and changed the course of mine until I'm clasping them behind his neck and wrapping my legs around him. The thick head of his cock presses firmly against my slit, but he doesn't slide in.

"I need you inside me," I whisper against his lips and then run my tongue over them, lightly dipping inside and pulling back when he opens wider for me. "I need my husband to fill me and spread me wide."

With a groan he kisses me and slowly slides in, feeding me his cock until I'm gasping and digging my nails into his back because of how fucking good it feels. He cups the back of my neck, and the feel of his wedding band against my skin has me rocking my hips even harder against him.

"Mine," I moan, giving his bottom lip a bite as I tighten my arms and legs around him.

"I'm all yours, baby, and only yours," he growls, fucking me right into another orgasm. He slams into me in a brutal rhythm that toes the line of being too damn much, but I don't fight it. I give myself over to him, drunk on lust and ecstasy and pure fucking bliss. My body tightens around him, urging him to let go with me, and with one last growl, he buries



himself inside me as deeply as possible, squeezing his fingers around my neck to lock me in place. His cock pulses, filling me with his seed while I cling to him so tightly that we no longer feel like two separate bodies. He consumes every part of me. I breathe in the scent of his cologne and lick the salty sweat from his neck, feeling the vein beneath my tongue as he groans one last time before his body stills. His breaths are hot on my skin and his body heavy on top of mine. I run my hand through his hair while the other traces a lazy path along his back.

His thumb caresses my neck before he slowly slides out of me and then rolls over. Resting one arm behind his head, he grabs me with the other and pulls my body up against his. Kissing my forehead, he says, "I love you so much, baby."

"I love you too, Valeri." I kiss his chest before looking back up at the stars. "It's so peaceful here."

"Have you decided where you want to go for our honeymoon?"

I smile because he's been asking me for weeks, but I haven't been able to settle on anything. There are too many choices, and the more I research, the harder the choice becomes, but suddenly I know exactly what I want to do.

"Right here," I tell him, sitting up on my elbow so I can see him better. "I want to stay on the yacht and drift around with you. I want to pretend that we're the only two people left on earth, no responsibilities, no worries, just you and me."

He smiles and cups my face. "That sounds perfect, baby." Dragging his finger down my neck, he adds, "Just so you know, I'm not done for the night, just taking a breather."

I laugh and pat his chest. "I never doubted it."

His fingers run over my nipple and along the curve of my breast. "There's one more thing we need to do before you take this dress off."

"What's that?" I ask, looking down at how ruffled it is.

"For the last few weeks I've been fantasizing about you in this dress, *lapochka*. It's the only time you'll ever wear it, and

it seemed like such a shame to take it off you so quickly, so I decided that I wouldn't let you out of it until it was an absolute mess, not until I thought it was filthy enough." He drags a finger along the white fabric. "It's not dirty enough, baby. I don't even see any tears in the lace."

He lifts up onto one elbow and slides his hand up my thigh and around to my ass, squeezing my bare cheek in his large hand. Pulling me closer, he brings his hand further down so he can drag a finger along my pussy from behind. I let out a soft moan when he brings his wet finger up, pressing it against my asshole.

"I can't get the image out of my head of fucking your sweet little ass in your beautiful wedding dress, baby," he says, sliding his finger into me.

I moan his name and bury my face against his neck as he slowly finger-fucks my ass. My breaths are soft pants against his skin, and when he speeds his finger up and I bite down hard enough to make him groan, he adds in a second finger.

"That's my good girl," he praises. "You spread so goddamn good for me, baby. Feel how fucking hard you make me."

I slide my hand down his body and grip the cock that's already fully hard again. He groans and keeps working his fingers, getting me ready for something much bigger. Part of me is terrified, but part of me is also excited. It feels completely wrong but in a good way, and I want to experience everything with Valeri, even if it stretches my comfort zone a bit.

Sliding his fingers out, he rolls me onto my back and then reaches for the suit pants he'd thrown on the deck earlier. Grabbing a small bottle from his pocket, he holds it up and gives me a wink. I laugh and shake my head.

"Did you seriously have a bottle of lube in your pants the whole time?"

He laughs and holds it over his dick, squeezing out a generous amount before gripping his shaft and spreading it all

over until he's dripping with it.

"You bet your sweet ass I did." His face softens as he leans over me and closes the distance between us. "I want to claim every part of you, baby, but I don't want to do it if you don't want it. Tell me to stop, and I'll stop. No questions asked, Evie. I'll stop as soon as you tell me to, and you won't disappoint me at all if we don't do this."

I nod and cup his face. "I want to try."

He smiles and kisses me gently. I feel him reaching for the bottle of lube, and then his fingers are pressing against my ass, coating me in the lube until it's dripping down my ass crack.

"Don't I need to roll over?"

"No, baby, I can do it like this."

He positions my legs so they're resting on his shoulders and then tilts me up before pressing the head of his cock against my puckered hole. My body tenses. It's impossible not to, and when he feels it, he cups my face and kisses me slowly.

"Just relax, baby. I've got you."

He distracts me with the soft caress of his tongue along mine and the feel of his hand sliding down to cup one of my breasts. Pinching my nipple, he sucks my tongue and presses harder against me, working himself beyond the tight ring of muscle.

"Fuck," he groans when his head starts to slide in.

I moan at the warring sensations. It feels taboo as hell, and although there is a burning sort of pain, it's not all bad. I can feel the pleasure right beneath it, urging my body to relax so I can fully embrace and enjoy it.

"Take a breath for me, baby," Valeri whispers against my lips.

I do as he says and take in a big lungful of air before slowly blowing it out. As soon as I do, he slides in some more, pulling a gasp from me at how fucking big he feels.

“Good girl, baby. Good fucking girl.” He groans and feeds me another inch. “Play with your pussy, sweetheart. Let me hear how much you like me fucking your ass.”

Sliding a hand between us, I push my dress up even more and cup my pussy, feeling the cum that’s leaking out of me, but also my own arousal. It soaks my hand as I start to work myself. Sliding two fingers in, I fuck myself as Valeri slides in the rest of the way, making me feel fuller than I ever thought possible.

“Fuck,” he groans, hearing the wet, erotic sounds of my greedy cunt, the evidence of how much I like his cock in my ass. “You’re so sloppy wet, baby. This is how I always want you—needy, dripping wet, and begging for my dick.”

“Yes,” I moan, because I couldn’t agree more.

“Make yourself come.” He nips my bottom lip and gives my nipple another pinch. “Rub your swollen clit with your slippery fingers, and then I want you to slide three fingers into your little cunt when you start to come. I want both your holes stuffed when you scream my name.”

I nod my head because I’m too far gone to form words. He slides his tongue between my lips, kissing me deeply while he thrusts into my ass even harder and my fingers run over my clit, circling my bundle of nerves as I tease myself, drawing out the pleasure. When I feel the beginnings of the orgasm, I back off, letting it taper off before I start to rub myself again. I’m completely drunk on pleasure, every nerve ending lit up and sparking.

“Are you edging yourself, sweetheart?” He pulls back with a sexy grin on his face.

“Yeah,” I admit. “Is that okay?”

His smile grows. “Fuck yes it is. Keep doing it.”

I run my fingers over my clit again, surprised when he brings a hand up and covers my mouth with it. His eyes meet mine before he says, “Trust me, baby,” and clamps my nose shut, completely taking away my air. “Keep teasing yourself,” he says, his words pushing through my panicked brain.

It's only been seconds. There's no way in hell I'm in danger of suffocating, so I tell my thinking mind to fuck off and start to rub my clit. My lungs start to burn, but I keep going, feeling my body stir back to life. When I'm seconds away, I start to wiggle beneath him, needing air, and as soon as I do, he releases his hand. I suck in a lungful of air, feeling it course through me, and the sensation is so euphoric that I can't help but smile and look at him in surprise. He gives me a wink and clamps his hand down again.

I keep edging myself while he switches between denying and allowing me air. The whole time he slowly fucks my ass and keeps his eyes locked on mine. It's the most intimate thing I've ever experienced. I put myself completely in his hands, giving everything over to him, including the very air I need to live.

When I let out a whimper the next time he releases his hand, he kisses me and says, "Does my wife need to come?"

"Yes," I moan, knowing I can't hold out much longer. My whole body is shaking, and the orgasm is so fucking close I can feel it right beneath the surface, just out of reach.

"Come for me, baby," he growls, allowing me one last breath before covering my mouth and nose again. He fucks me harder while I rub my clit with a frenzied desperation. It doesn't take long before my whole body is tensing with pleasure. I slam three fingers into my pussy, and my eyes roll back in my head at the sensation of feeling so damn full I'm about to split. He pulls back his hand as I suck in air, pressing the meaty part of my palm against my clit, coaxing another orgasm out of my already spent body while he pulses inside my ass with his own release. It's the most amazing thing I've ever felt, and I revel in every sensation, letting it consume me.

When we both start to come down, I can't do anything except breathe. My limbs feel too heavy, and I don't have the strength to move them.

"Jesus Christ," he groans, resting the side of his head against my chest and letting out a soft laugh. "I may not

survive this honeymoon. I think you're trying to kill me, sweetheart."

I smile and stroke his cheek. "I think the wedding dress is officially defiled."

He laughs. "I think so too. We did good."

"We did. I don't think I can move."

Lifting his head, he gives me a sweet smile and kisses my chest. "You don't need to, sweetheart. That's why you have me."

He slowly slides out of me, his brow furrowing with worry when he sees me wince. Peeling my dress off me, he lets it fall to the deck and then gently grabs onto the backs of my thighs, pushing my knees to my chest so my ass arches up again.

Despite what we just did, embarrassment rushes over me. "What are you doing?"

"Easy, baby. I just want to make sure everything's okay and that I wasn't too rough." My face feels like it's flaming hot as he gently spreads my cheeks and examines my ass. "There's nothing to be embarrassed about, *lapochka*." He gently lowers me back down before scooping me into his arms, holding me against his bare chest. "You look okay, but I'm going to run a warm bath for you. You need to soak for a bit."

"Only if you join me."

He smiles and kisses my forehead. "I'm not about to leave you alone, baby. Don't worry."

He runs us a bubble bath and then slips in behind me, wrapping an arm around my chest and pulling me against him. He always makes me feel so loved and safe. I relax into him, smiling when he positions my arm so that my new tattoo stays out of the bathwater. At some point I must fall asleep, because the next thing I know the morning sun is waking me up, and I'm in bed with Valeri. I imagine a lot of things for our first morning together as a married couple, but I never once envisioned me making a mad dash for the toilet, kneeling down and losing every damn thing I ate the day before.

# Chapter 16

## *Valeri*

The feel of Evie bolting from the bed has me reaching for the gun I left on the nightstand last night, but instead of some unknown threat, I hear what the real problem is. Setting the gun down on the bathroom counter, I rush to her side and hold her hair back as her small body heaves and shakes.

“Baby,” I whisper against her head, giving her a kiss as she trembles against me.

“God this is embarrassing,” she groans when her poor body is finally empty.

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about.” I give her another kiss and then hurry up and wet a washcloth for her. Pressing it against her forehead, she sighs and leans into me.

“I guess I might be seasick after all.” Her voice is shaky and soft, and I hold her tighter against me, rubbing her back in soothing circles. When she’s feeling well enough, I help her stand and lead her to the counter where she immediately grabs her toothbrush.

While she gets cleaned up, I walk back into the bedroom and then come back carrying a small box. “I’m not so sure it’s seasickness, *lapochka*.”

She eyes the pregnancy test I’m holding. Her hand stills mid-brush as her beautiful eyes get a little bigger.

I smile and set it on the counter. “It says it’s best to use it first thing in the morning. Want me to stay?”



She spits out her toothpaste and grabs the box. “Do I want you to stay and watch me pee on a stick? I think you getting up close and personal with my asshole last night and then seeing me vomit this morning was enough reality for one honeymoon. We need to keep some mystery in this marriage, don’t we?”

I laugh and kiss her, tasting the mint on my lips and tongue after I’ve pulled back. “I’ll be right outside. Don’t read it without me.”

“I won’t,” she promises.

I step out and pace the bedroom, barely noticing the breathtaking view out the windows that circle around the room. When I hear the door open, I rush over to her and wrap my arms around her.

“We have to wait three minutes,” she murmurs against my chest.

“It’s positive. I know it is.”

She hears the excitement in my voice and tilts her head to look up at me. “Are you really that happy about it? It’s not too much too fast?”

I cup her face, kissing the tension away from her scrunched-up brow. “I’m more than happy, baby, and it will never be too much with you. I can’t wait to start a family.” Planting my hand on her lower belly, I say, “I can’t wait to see you big and pregnant.”

She laughs and rests her hand on top of mine. “I’ll remind you that you said that when I’m nine months pregnant and can’t even see my own feet.”

“You won’t need to. I’ll be too busy fucking you and proving that it’s true.”

I smile at the red blush that spreads across her cheeks, but before I can kiss her again, I hear her phone’s timer go off in the bathroom. Picking her up, I carry her in, and we both stare at the two pink lines on the stick. I’ve already read the instructions, so I know exactly what those two lines mean.

Laughing, I wrap my arms around her even tighter and press my forehead to hers.

“We’re having a baby, sweetheart,” I whisper.

She laughs and cups my face, running her fingers over my dimple like she loves to do. “A baby,” she whispers back.

I hold her for several more minutes, wanting to memorize every detail of the exact moment when I went from being a husband to also being a father. Technically she’s only a few weeks pregnant, but I can already envision the little guy. I lift her up even higher, making her let out a squeal when she’s high enough for me to kiss her stomach.

“Our son,” I say, giving her a wink.

“Or daughter,” she says with a laugh when I pull her back down and then carry her to the kitchen because she still looks too pale for my liking.

“I would love a little girl, but I have a feeling it’s going to be a little boy. The next generation of Medvedev bosses.”

I set her down in one of the comfy chairs near the kitchen area and she quickly puts both hands on her stomach, already trying to protect him from the scary world. “I can’t think about that yet. If I start to worry about all that, I’ll go crazy. Leaving him when he’s old enough for school is going to be hard enough.”

“I will never let any harm come to him, *lapochka*.” I start the coffee and grab some herbal tea for her before reaching for the eggs. “I can’t wait to tell my brothers.”

She smiles and watches me start breakfast. I keep waiting for the fear to set in about becoming a daddy and about being married and bonded to one woman for the rest of my life, but I’m too busy being happy. Instead of fear and the dreaded claustrophobia that used to accompany thoughts of getting a woman pregnant, I feel nothing but an ecstatic happiness that makes it impossible to stop smiling.

The rest of our honeymoon is a perfect mix of swimming, relaxing, and fucking, and by the time I steer the yacht into our boathouse, we’re already planning our next trip out. Every day

I wake up with my wife in my arms, and it seems like every day, our son grows a little bigger. When the doctor told us we were having a boy, I'd laughed and given her a big *I told you so* look and then kissed her so hard that her face was still beet red when we left.

Now she's nine months pregnant and so beautiful that every time I look at her, it freezes me in place. It always takes a couple of seconds for me to get my bearings, to remember that she's mine and that this really is my life now. I lean against the doorframe of our son's nursery, watching her, and I know the exact second she realizes I'm here because a smile spreads across her face before she looks over her shoulder at me. She's wearing her glasses today, and the sight of them always makes my cock twitch, reminding me so much of the first time I saw her.

"You're so beautiful, baby," I tell her, running my eyes over her rounded belly and the way her hips have filled out. God, every stage of this pregnancy has just made me hornier than the last. I feel like a fucking teenager again, unable to think about anything other than sex.

She watches me walk towards her, a smile playing at her lips. "You're insatiable, Valeri."

I smile because she's right, but also because I see the heat and desire mirrored in her own eyes. She's been just as insatiable as I've been. For a while there, I was actually worried I wouldn't be able to keep up with her. I did, of course, but it had been a terrifying couple of days for me.

As soon as I'm close enough, I cup her face with one hand and bring my other to her belly. Leaning down, I kiss her slowly, savoring the taste and feel of her, and when our son gives a hard kick, I smile against her lips. He's a feisty little guy, and I'm afraid he's going to be just like me. God help us. I can already feel the grey hairs coming in.

Sliding my hand up, I cup one of her swollen breasts, running my thumb over the hard nipple I can feel straining against her shirt. She's filled out everywhere, including her tits, and they've been extra sensitive so I've barely taken my

hands off them the last couple of months. When I start to kiss a line down her neck while unbuttoning the pink-and-grey plaid shirt she's wearing, she moans and runs her hands through my hair.

"I need you," I whisper against her skin, pulling her bra down and wrapping my lips around the hard, pink nipple that's waiting for me.

"Then take me," she moans, arching her chest out for more.

With a groan I give her another hard suck and then scoop her up into my arms, carrying her to our bedroom. Sex while pregnant has been an interesting, creative endeavor, and when most positions became uncomfortable for her, I surprised her by installing a sex swing. It's my new favorite fucking thing, and I can't wait to use it to its full potential when she's no longer pregnant and can tolerate rougher things.

Before I lift her into it, I set her down and slowly strip her gorgeous body, leaving her glasses on because I want to fuck her while she's wearing them. Seeing her pregnant does something to my brain every time I see her naked. I want to beat my fists against my chest and growl like a fucking animal, letting the whole goddamn world know that she's mine. It's ridiculous, I know, but the desire is there all the same.

"Fucking hell, Evie," I murmur, running my hand along the curve of one breast, drawing my fingers over her skin and across her nipple. "How is it possible that you get more beautiful every single day?"

She smiles and starts to pull my shirt off. "You're the gorgeous one, Valeri, and now I want to see my sexy husband wearing nothing but a smile."

I laugh and help her out, undressing in record time before scooping her back into my arms. She'd insisted we install the swing in our large, walk-in closet because when my brothers bring their kids over, the little rascals run all over the place, and the last thing either of us wants is to be asked if they can play on the unusual swing hanging from our bedroom ceiling.

I'm okay with the compromise, especially after adding in a few extra mirrors so I can easily see her from every angle.

When I set her down in it, she grabs the straps in front of her and wiggles into a comfortable position while I hook her legs through another set of padded straps that keeps her thighs spread open nice and wide for me. Weightless, she hangs in front of me, splayed open and looking so damn sexy that just the sight of her has pre-cum dripping down my shaft. Her rounded belly is between us, and the swing is angled so she's more sitting up than laying down to keep her more comfortable, allowing me to keep my eyes on hers as I step closer.

She's at the perfect height for me, and when I drag my finger along her pussy, she moans my name and begs me to fill her. I can't resist tasting her, so instead of sliding into her, I bend down and fill her with my tongue instead. Her gasp rings through the air, mixing with my groans as I delve in even deeper, coating my tongue with her slick arousal. I could happily keep my head buried between my wife's legs for the rest of my life. I never get tired of it. I'm always starved for her, craving her taste. I'm completely addicted to her.

Running my tongue over her, I kiss and suck on her pussy lips, slowly working my way to the swollen, pink bundle of nerves that she's desperate for me to touch. When I give her a soft flick of my tongue, she moans my name, trying like hell to move, but she's completely helpless in this position, and I take full advantage of it. I kiss and suck and nip on her delicate folds until all it takes is one slow lick of my tongue and she's coming so hard her voice cracks as she screams my name. I feast on her until she's whimpering and my mouth is full of her release. I swallow her down with a growl and kiss my way up her belly, worshipping her body with my lips. Her hands run through my hair, and she lets out another strangled gasp when I latch onto the closest nipple, sucking her tit into my mouth until I can't get any more in. I gorge on her body, gluttonous and greedy, knowing I'll never be able to get enough but trying all the same.

“Valeri,” she moans, kissing a line along my forehead because it’s the only thing she can reach. “Please, I need you inside me.”

I pull my head back, sucking hard the whole way until her nipple springs free from my mouth with a wet, audible pop. Her eyes are dark with lust, pupils blown and heavy-lidded, and when I position my cock at her entrance, she smiles and cups my face, needing me closer.

“I love you so fucking much, Evie,” I groan as I slowly slide into her, forcing her tight pussy to spread for me.

“I love you too,” she whispers against my lips.

I fuck her slowly, not wanting to hurt her, and it’s the most exquisite torture imaginable. Time stands still as I lose myself in her body, rocking into her in long, slow strokes that leave her panting and digging her nails into my shoulders as her whole body tenses with need. When I pull another orgasm from her body, I watch her pussy clench around me, soaking my cock as she moans her release, and the sight of it pushes me over the edge with her. Crashing my mouth against hers, I kiss her and bury myself as deeply as I can. Her pregnant belly presses snugly against me, and the sensation is nothing short of heaven.

With my hand cupping the back of her head, I kiss her slowly, not wanting to break contact just yet. I kiss her as I grow soft inside her, and when I carry her to bed, it’s not long before she’s asleep. Pressing my chest against her back, I rest my hand on her stomach and close my eyes. It’s not until the next afternoon that she lets out a pained groan and shoots me a look that instantly has me on high alert and closing the short distance between us.

“Valeri,” she moans, gripping my hand and closing her eyes as the pain washes over her.

“It’s okay, baby.” I rest my hand on her belly, surprised at how firm it feels, like her whole body is cramped up. My heart races, and truth be told, I’m scared to death, but no way in fuck am I going to show it. She grits her teeth when another

pain hits her, and seeing her like this and knowing I can't do a goddamn thing to take it from her is killing me.

As soon as the pain passes, I help her sit down and then run upstairs, taking them two at a time and bursting into our bedroom to grab the bag that's been packed and ready for days. I send a quick text to my brothers, letting them know it's time as I run back downstairs. Evie's wide eyes land on mine as soon as I rush back into the living room.

"I'm scared," she whispers, stroking her belly and looking so damn small and frightened.

I kneel down and place one hand on her belly and cup her face with the other. "You're the strongest woman I've ever met, baby, and I'm so damn proud of you. You're going to do great, and we're going to meet our son very soon."

She smiles at the mention of Aleksandr and clutches my hand. "Okay, let's do this."

"That's my girl." I lean closer and kiss her belly, telling our son in Russian that I love him and can't wait to meet him and to go easy on his mommy. Slung the bag's strap across my chest, I carefully lift my wife and carry her to the car. I give the guards a nod as we leave and then I use all my restraint to not speed down the road at a hundred miles per hour, especially when she digs her fingers into my thigh and lets out another pained moan.

"You're doing so good, baby," I tell her.

She surprises me with a laugh. "I'm not really doing anything, just sort of taking it."

"Well, you're taking it so damn good, baby," I tell her, making her laugh again.

The drive to the hospital feels like it takes forever, but finally I'm carrying her inside and putting her in the wheelchair a nurse rushes out to us with. I must look as terrified as I feel because she smiles at us and says, "Everything's going to be fine. Let's get you up to the fifth floor and into a room."

Evie gives her a weak nod, and I try not to worry about how pale her face looks. I'm so used to seeing her blushing, and the lack of color feels wrong. We take the elevator, and after a nerve-racking few minutes of being forced to fill out the damn paperwork, I'm finally standing next to the bed as the doctor examines her.

"You're almost fully dilated, Evie," Dr. Ferguson says, her blonde head buried between my wife's legs as she checks her cervix.

"What about an epidural?" I ask when Evie clutches my hand again and lets out a pained moan that cuts me to the quick.

"We can do one now if your wife wants."

I brush a sweaty strand of hair from Evie's pale face. "Do you want one, baby?"

"Fuck yes," she whispers, making me laugh. I look over at the doctor. "She says yes please."

"I think the answer she gave was the more accurate one," Dr. Ferguson says with a smile. "I'll send someone in to do it right away and then we get to meet your son."

I lean down to kiss my wife. "I'm so proud of you," I tell her, giving her another ice chip.

She gives me a weak smile and runs her finger over my cheek. "I really hope he has your dimple."

I smile and kiss her again. "We're about to find out."

The epidural has me more nervous than I think I've ever been. I've been shot, stabbed, and sliced more times than I can remember, but seeing that young fucker insert a giant needle into my wife's back puts all that to shame. My wife's got fucking balls of steel. She gets through it like a champ and when it takes effect, I see her face visibly relax.

"Wow, that's so much nicer."

I kiss her forehead and help her lay back in bed, and when Dr. Ferguson walks in, my heart starts racing. The nurse checks Evie's vitals and makes sure everything is as it should



be and then stands by the doctor, ready to hand her things as needed. Evie's feet are put into the stirrups and her gown is pushed up, revealing the stomach that's rock hard as another contraction hits her. The epidural's taken the edge off, though, so it's not near as bad as it was.

"Okay, Evie, when I tell you to push, I want you to bear down and push as hard as you can," Dr. Ferguson tells her as she scoots her stool up closer and angles the light where she wants it.

Evie nods and gives me a smile that's equal parts terrified and excited. I bring my face close to hers and squeeze her hand when the doctor says to push. Evie's face scrunches in pain and pure determination as she starts to push our son into the world.

"You're doing so good, baby. I'm so fucking proud of you," I tell her, kissing her forehead and watching her go through so much pain for our family.

The next several minutes are a mix of pushing and stopping, and when I start to worry about her being too tired, Dr. Ferguson finally says, "His head's out. Do you want to see your son, Valeri?"

I met Evie's eyes and kiss her again before walking to the end of the bed. I'm so stunned by what I see that my English and Russian fail me, and all I can do is gawk. Our son's little head is out, and at first all I see is a wet mop of dark hair, but then the doctor angles him as his shoulders slip out, and I get my first view of his face.

"Evie," I whisper, squeezing her leg and feeling my eyes well up and not caring one bit about it. "He's so beautiful, baby."

Our son's face is scrunched up, but I can see the roundness in his chubby cheeks and the cute, tiny nose and sweet mouth. He's perfect, and I'm overcome with love for him.

"One more push, Evie," Dr. Ferguson says, and then our son is out and his screams fill the room, making me laugh as tears drip down my cheeks.

I kiss Evie as she starts crying when they put him on her belly and she gets her first glimpse of him. The nurse helps her position him against her chest and when he starts rooting around, Evie laughs and helps him to latch on. She looks up at me, and the wonder and awe in her eyes is exactly how I'm feeling.

"He's so beautiful," she whispers, looking back down at him and running a finger along his cheek.

"He is," I agree, kissing the top of his little head. When he opens his eyes, we both laugh at the vivid shade of green, the exact same color as mine.

"He looks just like you," she says with a laugh. "Hi, Aleksandr," she whispers, bringing his hand to her mouth so she can kiss it. "We love you so much."

She looks back up at me and runs her fingers over my wet cheek. "You've brought so much love into my life."

I wrap my arms tighter around my wife and son and kiss them both. "You've done the same for me, *lapochka*. I'm so glad you hit my car, baby."

She laughs and kisses me. "I'm glad I did too, and I'm glad you didn't just give up when I tried to push you away."

"That was never going to happen, baby. I'm a stubborn man, and I wanted you, Evie. From the second I saw you, I knew you were mine. I love you so much."

"I love you too." She smiles and kisses me again.

We watch Aleksandr nurse himself to sleep and together we memorize every detail of his little body, marveling at how perfect he is. My whole world is in my arms right now, and I will do whatever it takes to keep them safe. Aleksandr Medvedev may be running the Bratva one day alongside Misha and Dmitri, but for now, he's my little boy, and I'm determined to give him a carefree childhood for as long as I can.

I meet my wife's eyes and smile. She's given me everything, far more than a man like me deserves, and I'm so damn grateful I get to spend the rest of my life with her. When

she cups my cheek again, I grab her hand and kiss the inside of her wrist, breathing in the familiar, comforting scent of her. *Mine*. The word always runs through my head when I'm near her. It's a mantra, a chant, a prayer—it's one word that means everything. My wife, my lover, my best friend, my whole world, and now the mother of my child.

“I love you, Evie Medvedev,” I whisper against her skin.

She smiles and caresses my cheek. “I love you too.”

# Epilogue

# Evie

## Two Years Later

**W**alking onto the back deck, I pause when I see Valeri and Aleks kneeling down together in the back corner. Our son's face is pinched in concentration as his chubby, toddler hands pat down the rich, dark soil in the pot. Ranger, the German Shepherd mix we adopted last year sits proudly beside them, watching over our son like it's his sacred duty.

"Very good," Valeri tells him, reaching a hand up to ruffle his hair in a way that makes Aleks tip his head back and laugh with the kind of abandon that kids manage so easily, the dimple in his left cheek prominently displayed. "Mommy's going to love this."

"*Da*," Aleks says with a giggle.

Valeri speaks to him in a mix of Russian and English, and I swear he understands both of them equally well.

"Mommy loves flowers," Aleks says, and I smile at the way he pronounces the words, trying so hard to get it all right. He's growing up way too fast. Every milestone he hits breaks my heart at the same time as it fills it. It's a constant battle of wanting to hold on too tightly and knowing I need to let go just a tiny bit so he can actually enjoy his childhood without me hovering over him. He's only two, I remind myself for the millionth time.

"Yes, Mommy loves flowers," Valeri says in agreement, helping our son plant a few more large, orange marigolds in

the big planter.

I love watching Valeri with Aleks. He's been the most hands-on dad since the first moment he was born. I love that our son will never have to hear angry shouts or feel the sting of his father's hand. Valeri would rather die than hurt him. I've never even heard Valeri raise his voice to him, not even when he gets asked a million questions during breakfast after he's been out working all night. He just smiles and ruffles our son's hair and talks with him for as long as Aleks wants.

Valeri lifts his head and gives me a wink, letting me know that he's been aware of my presence this entire time. I'm not surprised. No one sneaks up on a Medvedev. He whispers something to Aleks, who jumps up and positions his small body in front of the planter. He gives me a big grin, showing of his baby teeth and then jumps aside with a loud, "Surprise," revealing the flowers they planted for me.

I drop my mouth in surprise and clap my hands. "Are those for me?"

He nods his head and giggles, and then runs over, throwing himself in my waiting arms. I close my eyes and breathe in the scent of his favorite berry shampoo and kiss his cheek.

"I love it so much," I tell him. "Thank you, sweetie."

Grabbing his hand, I walk over and smell the orange blossoms. "They're so beautiful."

"Daddy helped," Aleks yells with a big smile

"Just a little bit. You did most of it, little man."

Standing back up, I wrap my arms around Valeri and pull him close. "Thank you for my beautiful flowers," I tell him before he kisses me. I get lost in that kiss, just like I do every time he presses his lips against mine. Time stops, and everything else fades away until nothing exists except him. Only now my ears also stay alert for our son.

When I hear him squeal and yell, "Uncle Vasily!" we both pull apart with a laugh.

“We’ll finish this later, *lapochka*,” Valeri whispers against my lips.

Vasily and Nina walk around the side of the house, carrying plates of food. Their daughter, Natalia, stays close to her daddy’s side, but as soon as she sees Aleks, she smiles and runs over to him. Her eyes are just as dark as her mom’s, but they’re usually lit up with the same mischievous glint that Valeri swears is all Vasily. She’s already keeping them on their toes.

“Hey, Dmitri,” I say, pulling my nephew in for a hug and then give a wave when I see Volodya and Maddie appear with their kids.

Dmitri smiles and lets me love on him before I finally release him so he can go play with Misha. I kiss Natalia’s head, laughing when she shows me her pink fingernails.

“Beautiful,” I tell her.

“Daddy did them for me.”

I laugh and look over at her tatted-up dad, who’s giving me a smile and shrugging his shoulders. “She wanted to watch a princess movie with me while I painted her fingernails. We did the toes, too, didn’t we, sweetheart?”

She laughs and looks down at her pink sandals, the same shade as her toenails.

“I’m actually getting pretty good at it,” Vasily says with a laugh.

Nina smiles and pulls me in for a hug. “Nobody would ever guess what big softies they are,” she whispers.

I laugh and nod my head in agreement. We get to see a side of them that no one else does. They may be the most dangerous men in the city, but right now they’re smiling and laughing and watching their kids play. Volodya’s youngest son, Yuri, is nestled in his arms, his big grey eyes staring out at everyone. Maddie gives his head a kiss before walking over to join us. The Medvedev family just keeps growing. Valeri and I are thinking about trying for another soon, but for now, I’m

still on the pill. I love the idea of having more kids, though. I want a big happy family, the kind I always wished I'd had.

“Tatiana said she'll be coming in for a visit in a few weeks,” Maddie says, following me into the house so we can start getting the food ready.

“That's great,” I say, grabbing the plate of hamburger patties from the fridge. “I'm so glad she's been visiting more.”

“Yeah, me too.” Nina grabs the veggie tray and a few sodas. “I know they've missed having their mom around, and I'm just glad she's not the mother-in-law from hell.”

“Hear, hear,” Maddie says, making us all laugh. “We got damn lucky.”

Maddie's not wrong. Tatiana Medvedev may have been hiding away from the world after her husband was killed, but she's slowly learning to live again, and she's been nothing but kind and loving to all of us. Meeting her grandkids was the reminder she needed that life isn't over yet. There's still so much left to live for, and I'm glad she's finally ready to take that step. She visits several times a year, but we're hoping she'll agree to move here soon.

Loading up the patio table with food, we sit down and munch while our husbands man the grill. Valeri flips a burger and gives me a wink, smiling when he sees my cheeks flush. The desire in his green eyes always makes me blush, no matter how hard I try and stop it.

When it's time to eat, we round up all the kids and dig in. Valeri squeezes my thigh under the table and passes me the bowl of potato salad, making sure my plate is filled before he gets his own food. He takes care of me in a million different ways, and I'm so grateful for every single one of them. I lean over and surprise him with a kiss.

“You're the best husband ever,” I whisper in his ear.

He laughs and presses his lips closer so only I can hear when he says, “Thinking about those orgasms I gave you this morning, sweetheart?”



Memories of him waking me up with his head buried between my legs has me sucking in a quick breath. I swear when I close my eyes, I can still feel his tongue running up my wet slit.

“I am now,” I say, making him laugh again.

“Be a good girl and maybe I’ll lick your pussy again later.”

My face is beet red when he pulls back. His green eyes light up in amusement when he sees the effect he’s having on me. He kisses the tip of my nose. “So perfect,” he whispers before pulling back so I can get some much needed air.

All through the rest of the meal, my mind keeps drifting back to what Valeri whispered in my ear. It doesn’t help that he keeps shooting heated looks my way and caressing my skin. Right now, he’s running his thumb along the nape of my neck. He knows it drives me crazy when he does that, and judging by the wicked smile on his face, that’s exactly why he’s doing it.

“You’re so mean,” I whisper, making his smile grow even bigger.

“I never said I was nice, baby.”

How anyone can look so innocent while being anything but is beyond me. Valeri is the devil you never see coming. You expect brutality from his brothers. There’s a hardness to them that their younger brother lacks, on the outside at least, but it’s all just a beautiful illusion, because beneath the sexy dimple and big, green eyes is pure sin. I know this about my husband. He’s a monster, a man who kills people for a living, but he’s also the love of my life, the father of our child, and the man I couldn’t ever live without. I won’t ever pretend I don’t know who Valeri is, because to love him is to love all of him, and I do—completely and unconditionally.

“I love it when you look at me like that,” he says, leaning closer to kiss my forehead.

“Like what?”

“Like a woman in love.”

“I am a woman in love.”

He smiles and kisses me again. When the kids start yawning, everyone starts packing up. I give a round of hugs, kissing my niece and nephews while the cars get loaded. Next week, the family dinner is at Volodya’s, and Aleks is already shouting the names of his Uncle Volodya’s and Aunt Maddie’s dogs. Feeling guilty about his excitement, he hugs Ranger and kisses the top of his dark head. I hear him whisper, “Best dog,” against one of his furry ears.

Valeri laughs and scoops our son into his arms, carrying him inside and upstairs for his bath. I finish cleaning up and then join them. Aleks is surrounded by bubbles and toys, laughing at something Valeri is saying in Russian. I’m still slowly learning the language, but my two-year-old son is miles ahead of me.

I kneel down on the fluffy bath rug and grab one of the pirate boats floating on the surface, joining in the fun. After he’s sufficiently wrinkled, Valeri wraps him in a towel and gets him in his favorite rocket ship pajamas before we all cuddle up for his nighttime story. Tonight the book is in Russian, and I’m proud to say that I actually understand it. It’s geared towards toddlers, but so what? Progress is progress.

After several goodnight kisses and making sure Ranger is comfy in his dog bed, we turn on his nightlight and quietly slip out, Aleks already asleep and clutching his stuffed dog.

“God I’ve missed you,” Valeri says, already picking me up and nuzzling his face against my neck, licking and sucking the delicate skin and lighting my body on fire with each swipe of his tongue until I feel like I’m about to combust.

“I’ve been with you all day,” I remind him, running my hand through his dark hair.

“Yes, but I haven’t been inside you since this morning, and that’s too damn long, *lapochka*.”

I’m about to tell him I completely agree, but he gives the crook of my neck a bite that takes away my words and sends a shiver of pleasure down my spine and between my legs. He

carries me to our room, setting me down by the bed and running his hands over every inch of me as he slowly peels the clothes off me.

Sliding my hands under his shirt, I pull it off and toss it aside, leaning closer so I can kiss the tattoo of my name written across his heart. His body is just as mouthwatering as it was the first time I saw him, and I can't resist kissing across his pecs and then slowly working my way down his tight abs.

"Fuck," he groans, running his hands through my hair and fisting it tight enough to sting, just how I like it.

I run my tongue over his skin while I undo his jeans and slide them down along with his boxer briefs. When his thick, hard cock springs free, I let out a moan of pure appreciation that makes him give a soft chuckle. It quickly turns to a groan when I run my tongue along his slit, lapping up the bead of pre-cum that forms. He tightens his grip on my hair as I wrap my lips around his head and slowly suck him in.

"Goddamn," he growls, feeling my tongue swipe around the ridge of skin that always drives him crazy. "Fuck, I love how you suck my cock, baby."

I'd smile if my mouth wasn't so stuffed. Over the years, I've gotten a lot better at taking him in, and when I lower onto him, I only gag a couple of times before my lips hit the base and he's so far down my throat that I can't breathe. I wait for permission, forcing my body to relax, even though comfortable is the last word I'd use to describe a blowjob with someone as big as Valeri.

"Such a good fucking girl," he praises, massaging my scalp and running his thumb down my stuffed cheeks. I moan and move my tongue along his shaft as much as I'm able to. The sensation pulls another groan from him. My eyes spill over, and when he sees it, he swipes a finger over them and then keeps his eyes on me as he brings it to his mouth and licks it clean.

"Every part of you belongs to me, *lapochka*. Your body, your tears," he drags one finger along my throat. "Even the goddamn air you breathe. I want it all."

“Mm-hmm,” I moan, feeling my lungs start to burn.

“Good girl,” he praises, fisting my hair again and slowly pulling me up his length. As soon as I can, I breathe in through my nose, the ache in my lungs disappearing as the ache between my legs grows stronger.

He thrusts into me again, threading his fingers through my hair and holding me still while he drives into me until spit is dripping down my chin and my mouth is starting to grow numb.

“Fuck, sweetheart, you have no idea how badly I want to shoot my seed down your sweet throat.” He brings one hand down, wrapping his long fingers around my neck and squeezing tight enough for me to feel how much he’s holding back, to feel the restraint coursing through his hand and radiating up his arm. “I want to feel your throat working beneath my fingers as you swallow every damn drop I give you.”

I whimper around him, begging him to do it, but he tightens his grip on me and pulls back instead, watching me suck him the whole time until he’s popped from my mouth, and I’m left wanting.

“Please,” I beg, looking up at him.

He grins and reaches down to pick me up. “Don’t worry, baby, you’re going to get it, but I want to come in your pussy tonight. I’ve been thinking about burying myself in your tight, wet cunt all damn day.”

Laying me on the bed, he quickly pulls his jeans off the rest of the way before positioning his body above mine. My fingers run up his muscled arms, skating over the veins and the taut line of muscle across his upper chest. When he slides into me, I grab onto his broad shoulders and cling to him, wanting him as close as possible.

“I love you so much, baby,” he whispers against my lips while he cups the back of my head and kisses me slowly.

The moan of pure bliss that breaks through our kiss when he’s fully seated inside me has him smiling against my lips. I

let him gloat. The man's definitely earned it. He fucks me slowly, letting me feel each deep stroke until my whole body is shaking. Sliding a hand down my side, he grips my hip, holding me firmly in place as he speeds up, fucking me in a hard rhythm that quickly pushes me over the edge.

"That's right, baby," he groans. "Squeeze me tighter."

My body shakes with the force of the orgasm, and my muscles tighten even more, gripping his thick cock and pushing him over the edge with me. His tongue delves between my lips in a hungry kiss as he pulses inside me, giving me everything he has. He doesn't let up until my whole body is filled with a liquid heat that makes me feel boneless. My arms fall from him and a soft laugh escapes from my parted lips.

"Damn," I whisper, making him laugh.

He looks down at me, brushing aside a strand of my sweaty hair and ghosting his lips over mine while he whispers, "I'm not done with you yet, baby."

\* \* \*

Valeri

I look down at my exhausted, spent wife and smile at the confused look she's giving me.

Slowly sliding out of her, even though I hate to do it, I groan at the loss of contact and then start to kiss my way down her chest. It always amazes me how damn good she tastes, every single part of her.

"Valeri," she whispers, her voice raspy, the sultry way it always sounds after she's come hard.

"Hmm?" I murmur, swiping my tongue over one perfect nipple.

She moans and lazily runs her fingers through my hair while I tease her body back to life.

“I made you a promise earlier, and you’ve definitely been a good girl,” I whisper against her skin.

“Fuck,” she moans when I give her a soft bite. “I don’t know if I can take any more.”

I laugh and let her tit go, kissing a line lower. “You know I love a challenge, sweetheart.”

When my head is between her legs, I take in the sight of her used pussy and groan. So fucking gorgeous. I love it when she’s swollen and dripping my seed. I get closer so she can feel the heat of my breath against her overly sensitive clit, and when I give her a quick lick, she rocks her hips up and lets out a sexy gasp.

“Too much,” she moans, and when I laugh, she shoots me a warning look. “Don’t even think about it,” she whispers.

I barely hear her, I’m already latching on and giving her a hard enough suck to make her fist the blankets and bite her bottom lip to keep from screaming. I still my mouth, letting her catch her breath, and when she’s calmed down, I slowly start to lick and suck, bringing her body back where I want it.

The taste of us fills my mouth, pulling a deep groan from me while I worship my wife. Despite what she said, I manage to make her come three more times, and by the time I pull my head back, she’s barely coherent.

“You okay, baby,” I murmur against her cheek, smiling at how dazed she is.

“Wow,” is all she manages to whisper.

Laughing, I lay on my side and pull her tightly against me before grabbing my phone. I click on the app for the baby monitor so I can check on Aleks. Evie uses the last of her strength and squeezes my wrist, letting me know she wants to see too. I lower the phone so we can both watch. He’s lying on his stomach with one chubby arm still wrapped securely around his stuffed dog.

“He’s so perfect,” she whispers.

“He is.” I set the phone aside and wrap my arms around her before kissing her cheek. “And so are you.”

“I love you,” she whispers, grabbing my hand and giving it a kiss.

“I love you, baby.”

With my wife in my arms and our son asleep across the hall, I let my eyes drift shut, already looking forward to tomorrow.

THE END

In case you missed them, get Nina and Vasily’s story here:

[Devil from Moscow](#)

and Maddie and Volodya’s here: [Bratva Devil](#)

Keep reading to find out how to get a free bonus sex swing scene!

# Thank You!!

I hope you enjoyed Evie and Valeri's story. I can't wait to hear what you all think of it!

If you have the time, I'd be so grateful if you could leave a review. Every review helps my books get seen by more people, so even if it's just a star review, it really means the world to me!

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# Devil from Moscow

# Medvedev Bratva



## Devil from Moscow

**I never expected to fall for a devil.**

Nina:

You know the story where the hero comes in and saves the day, rescuing the heroine right in the nick of time?

This isn't that story.

Instead of a knight in shining armor, he's a sexy, tatted-up Bratva boss with a reputation for being brutal and fierce.

Vasily finds me after I've already been brought to my lowest—broken by cruel men until I barely recognize myself.

He doesn't offer me salvation.

He offers me protection and revenge.

And I gladly take it.

Because I don't need a knight in shining armor.

I need a villain who doesn't mind getting his hands dirty, a man who will make those bastards pay for what they did to me.

I never expected to fall for the devil with blood on his hands.

I never expected to crave the comfort of his powerful body.

But our arrangement quickly turns into something more as he teaches me what real pleasure feels like, and soon I'm addicted.

Vasily:

When I first saw her, she was broken, alone, scared.

I couldn't leave her, so I did the only thing I could do.

I claimed her as my own and gave her the protection of my name.

She knows who I am, knows my reputation and the bloody stories they tell about me.

But she's not the one who needs to fear me.

It's all the men that hurt her who need to be scared.

Because I'm coming for them.

One by one I'm going to take down every single person who dared to hurt what's mine.

Because Nina *is* mine.

She was mine the second she wrapped her arms around me and begged me for help, and I'm never letting her go.

# Bratva Devil

# Medvedev Bratva



## Bratva Devil

**He loves the chase.**

**Turns out I love to get caught.**

Maddie:

The world's worst meet cute—I walk in on him slitting a throat.

I run like hell, but he really loves the chase...judging by my body's reaction, so do I.

He kidnaps me, thinking I'm someone else, but when he finds out the truth, I manage to convince him to hire me as his maid instead of offing my ass.

He's dangerous, deadly, and the man never cracks a smile.

He's also gorgeous, sinfully sexy, and ridiculously protective.

I shouldn't want him.

I shouldn't love the dark, raw hunger I see in his eyes.

And I definitely shouldn't taunt and tease him.

The truth is Volodya is more beast than man, and I want to see him lose control.

I want to be the one to send him to his knees.

Volodya:

As a Bratva boss, I'm not allowed to make mistakes.

But I make a big one when I kidnap the wrong damn woman.

It's not safe to let her go, so instead I take her up on her offer and hire her to work for me.

Under my watchful eye, I make sure she does what she's supposed to and upholds our agreement.

But as much as I try to keep her at arm's length, she keeps getting under my skin.

All the possessive and protective instincts that I never knew I had come out with Maddie

She likes to tease me and taunt me, trying to get me to claim her.

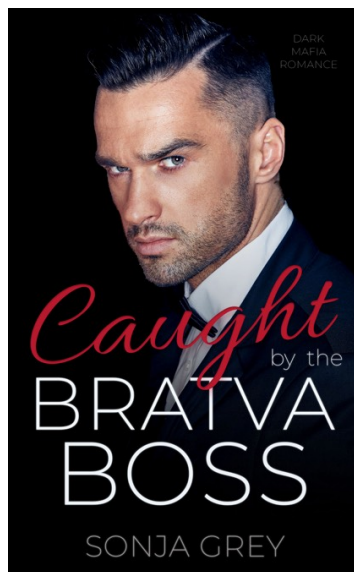
But she has no idea how much I enjoy the hunt, how much I enjoy seeing her squirm.

When my little *kiska* starts to run, I'm more than happy to give chase.

Because I will be claiming her, *all of her*, and when I do catch her, she's going to scream who she belongs to loud enough for the whole damn world to hear.

# Caught by the Bratva Boss

# Fedorov Bratva



## Caught by the Bratva Boss!

**Mikhail Fedorov is the most powerful Bratva boss in town,  
and I've just broken into his house.**

Charlotte:

This was supposed to be an easy score.

In and out.

No harm, no foul.

But when Mikhail catches me red-handed and wraps those strong arms around me, telling me in his sexy accent that I picked the wrong damn house to rob, I know my goose is cooked.

I expect the police and a future behind bars,



but this Bratva boss has other plans for me.

Locked in his house with no way to escape, the tension between us builds to the breaking point.

He taunts me, pushes all my buttons, and leaves me wanting so much more.

The only question is which one of us is going to break first.

Mikhail:

No one steals from me and lives, but the beautiful thief I've just caught has me rethinking that credo.

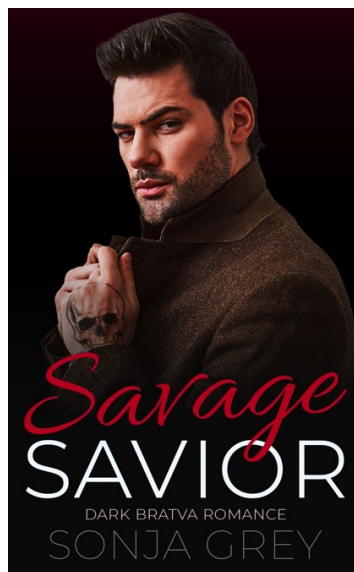
She's a scared little rabbit before the wolf, but I can't let my sweet bunny just walk away, not after she realizes who I am and what I've done.

And especially not after I get a taste of just how sweet she really is.

No, I'm keeping her, whether she likes it or not.

# Savage Savior

# Fedorov Bratva



## Savage Savior

**To everyone else he's a killer, the man they run from in fear,  
but to me, he's the only man who's ever made me feel safe.**  
Riley:

They call him Death.

He's a scarred, tatted-up wall of muscle,  
a highly trained killer that I should be running from,  
but I'm lost to Artyom from the first moment I walk into  
his club and meet his sexy, grey eyes.

Everything about him is dangerous, raw, primal—a barely contained savage.

And now all his focus is on me.

He knows I'm in trouble, and he promises to protect me, to free me from my brother's quick fists and his vicious friend.

To everyone else, he's a monster.

To me, he's my fierce protector, the one who would do anything to keep me safe.

Artyom:

People call me Death.

It's a nickname earned in blood and one I fully deserve.

Everything I touch turns red, but I can't stay away from her.

She's a pawn in her brother's game against the Fedorov Bratva.

Too innocent to be working in my club,

too innocent for me,

but I can't let her go.

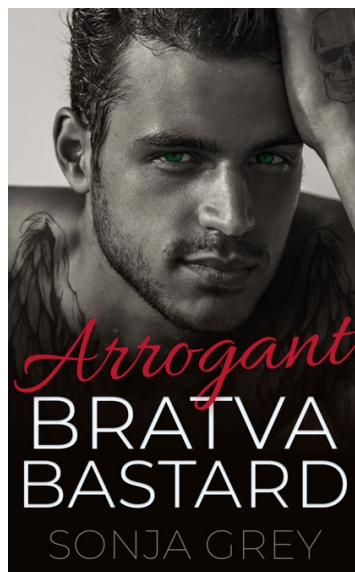
She was mine the second I laid eyes on her.

And I'll happily kill anyone who tries to take her from me.

Because no one touches what's mine and lives.

# Arrogant Bratva Bastard

# Fedorov Bratva



## Arrogant Bratva Bastard

**I've spent my life running from my family's mafia ties.  
I never expected it all to end in the arms of an arrogant  
Bratva bastard.**

Gia:

Growing up in a mafia family taught me that I want nothing to do with it.

I washed my hands of all of them and ran off with my younger brother before they could sink their claws into him.

Years later, the Fedorov Bratva took down the Rossi mafia.

I thought that was the end of it.

But now it's up to me to go back and take care of my uncle's estate.

Turns out the Russians don't want me here, and they've sent a masked, cocky Bratva member to watch over me until they decide whether I'm a threat or not.

Forced to his house, I resign myself to the fact that we'll be roomies for a while.

I tell myself it'll be easy to hate him, but the attraction between us is sizzling hot, and it's getting harder and harder to remember why I'm supposed to keep my distance.

Yuri:

She's the enemy, plain and simple.

When she catches me snooping around, I have no choice but to keep her with me.

Now I'm on babysitting duty—stuck being around her, watching her every second of every day.

She pushes all my buttons, but it's not just anger I feel.

No, there's also a good bit of lust.

All I need is just one time with her. One time and she'll be out of my system.

Turns out one time will never be enough, and I'll do whatever it takes to keep her by my side, even if that means tying her to the damn bed.

# Grumpy Bratva Hitman



## Holiday Standalone



### Grumpy Bratva Hitman

**Instead of a stocking full of coal,  
this year my grumpy ass is getting a wife.**

I hate Christmas.

I hate everything to do with the holiday.

So why am I suddenly obsessed with the Christmas-caroling,  
little ball of winter cheer that's found her way into my life?

She likes candy canes and hot mugs of cocoa, and I kill people  
for a living.

These two worlds were never meant to collide.

But all that changes when she sees me taking out my latest  
target.

I don't leave witnesses—not even cute ones in reindeer-decorated, knitted caps.

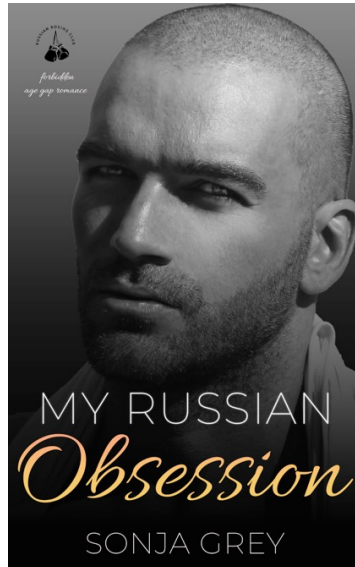
Now, I'm left with a choice: take her out of the equation permanently or make her my wife and give her the protection of my name.

The last thing I'm expecting is the raw desire between the two of us or the fact that I'm falling so hard and so fast for her.

This Christmas just got a whole lot more complicated.

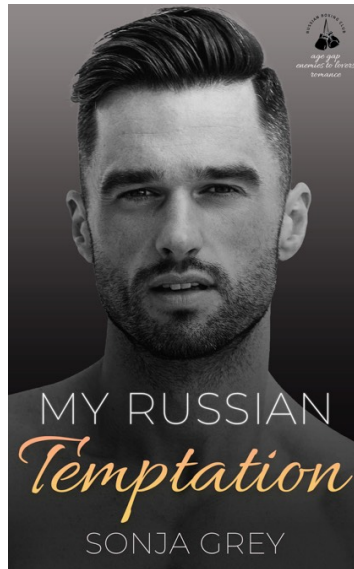
## Russian Boxing Club Series

If you'd like more age gap, steamy romances, then please check out the Russian Boxing Club series! It's an interconnected series, but they can be read in any order.



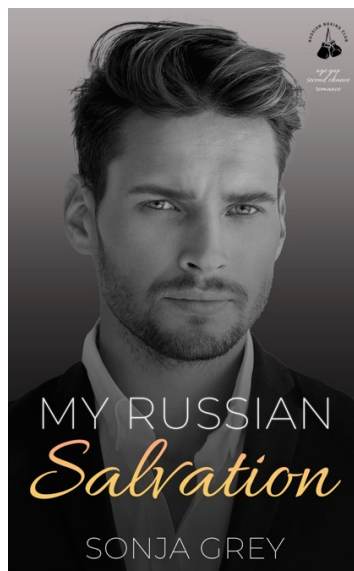
Forbidden Age Gap!

[My Russian Obsession](#)



Enemies-to-Lovers Age Gap!

[My Russian Temptation](#)



Second Chance Age Gap!

[My Russian Salvation](#)

# About the Author

Just like her last name, Sonja loves morally grey characters and alphas with a hidden heart of gold. She loves strong men with mile-wide soft spots for the women they love and who will stop at nothing to keep them safe.

She writes mainly age gap, steamy romances where the lines between good and bad blur into a beautiful, sexy shade of grey.

Zero cheating and HEAs are always guaranteed!

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