



RUSSIAN DADDY

AMAZON BESTSELLING AUTHOR
LENA LITTLE

RUSSIAN DADDY

YES, DADDY: BOOK 48

LENA LITTLE



© 2023 by Lena Little

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

If you see this book anywhere other than Amazon, it is a stolen version of this story. My stories are exclusive to Amazon and can only be purchased through Amazon or read through Amazon's Kindle Unlimited program.

CONTENTS

Free Books

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Epilogue

Extended Epilogue

Also by Lena Little

PREVIEW

My name is Torin Tasios.

After twenty years of loyal service, I've been offered a bump up in the Russian Mob. Pakhan? I like the sound of running my own crews, but there's a problem that requires me to take a little cooling-off period before I begin.

With nowhere else to go, I decide to return to my hometown and see my mother. I left this place when I was eighteen and never looked back. Sure, I kept in touch with my mother, but the life I wanted wasn't going to be found in this one-horse town.

Trouble has a way of finding some people, and as soon as I get off the bus, I see a couple of thugs roughing up a *little girl*. I don't need to get in the middle of some small-town squabble, but I can't let these assholes hurt this girl either. Which is why I find myself taking control of the situation, and boy am I glad that I did.

This girl, so young and sweet, is the most beautiful girl I've ever laid eyes on. From the moment our eyes meet, I start seeing our future together.

As I said, trouble has a way of finding some people, and it doesn't take long for the problems I've been running away from to catch up to me. Now, I've put my mother, my hometown, and the girl of my dreams in danger, and I have to eliminate the threat before any harm comes to them.

FREE BOOKS

Get free books from time to time by signing up for my mailing list...

www.subscribepage.com/lenalittle

And please check my website....

www.lenalittle.com

TORIN

The relentless Maine wind assaults my face as I bury my hands in the pockets of my wool overcoat.

“Gavno!” I spit and scold myself for making this so difficult. I grew up here! Why didn’t I think ahead? I’m about two miles into my ten-mile hike when I hear a commotion up ahead.

At first, it sounds like some drunken local boys fighting. Then, I hear it. A woman’s voice echoes on the whipping wind. I speed up until I’m practically running and see her under the streetlight. She’s a tiny thing with long, blonde hair tucked under a bright, blue hat, and she’s frantically fighting against two large men who are laughing and putting their hands on her.

Fuck no, not on my watch.

In the blink of an eye, I’m on them. My elbow comes down on the neck of the closest man, and he drops to his knees. The second turns and tries to throw a punch, but I block it and deliver two of my own. I push him against the parked car and pummel his face with rage-fueled punches until I feel the other man grab the back of my coat. I pause just long enough to slam the back of my head into his face and hear him cry out, “You broke my nose.”

Back to the other man. He manages to take three more blows to the body before toppling over in a puddle of his own making. With the threat contained, I turn my attention to the girl. I open my mouth to speak, but the words won’t come out. I’m looking at a fucking angel and it’s left me

speechless.

I see the fear and concern on her face as I commit every perfect inch of her to my memory, but I still can't help myself. Despite the cold, my palms are sweaty and my body temperature starts to rise. That's not all that's rising as my entire blood supply seems to be rushing to my crotch.

In my line of work, women practically take their clothes off just to get my attention but none of them have ever gotten this kind of a rise out of me.

What the hell is it? Do I know her? She's too young to be someone from my past. Yet, she feels familiar. She feels like home. Like the feeling you get when you're a kid and you see the packages under the Christmas tree. You're excited because you know there's something great inside that beautiful wrapping. Whatever this is, it's got me wanting to just pluck her up and carry her off somewhere to live happily ever after.

I want to just blurt out that she's the most beautiful girl in the world and that I'm going to take care of her now, but the look of concern on her face is growing. I mean, it's probably not every day that a beast like me comes up on you. At six-foot-five, I tower over her and my arms are bigger than her head. I need to say something, but what comes to mind might scare her even more. So I hold my hands up and ask, "Are you alright, sweetheart? Did they hurt you?"

Until now, she's tried her best to look unshaken, but when I break the silence, she breaks down. Tears stain her pretty face and her shoulders heave. I step forward and almost pull her to my chest, but her body stiffens when I move so I draw back. Still, the compulsion to touch her is all-consuming. As crazy as it sounds, maybe I just need to make sure she's real. No woman has ever had this kind of effect on me before, and I wonder if she's just a figment of my imagination.

"It's alright, darlin'. I'm here now. Nobody's gonna hurt you, I swear." I reach out and rest my hands on her shoulders, checking her for any cuts or bruises. Then, I lift her chin for a closer look at her face. Her big blue eyes sparkle in the light and the sight of them makes me lose my breath.

She doesn't appear injured and that's good. If there was a scratch on her face, I'd kill both of these assholes. Jesus, I got so wrapped up in planning my

future with this girl I forgot all about them. By the time I look for them, they're limping down the street away from us. I can chase them down in a heartbeat, but I don't want to leave her. Besides, it's probably not a good idea to call the police when I'm trying to keep a low profile.

"I'm sorry. No, they didn't hurt me. They just scared me. If you hadn't come along, they would have...oh god...they would have..."

"Hush now, little girl. There's no reason to think about what they might have done. They didn't and they won't. You're safe with me."

She looks up and down the street then at the backpack strapped to my back. "Where did you come from?"

"I just came in on the train."

"That's a long way from here. Are you walking somewhere in this weather?"

I sigh. "I've stayed in the city for a long time, and I figured that by now this little town would have a taxi or two. I was wrong, so yes, I'm walking."

"To where? I'm sorry. Maybe I'm being too nosy. You just saved me from something awful, and I sound like I'm interrogating you."

"No, I get it. I remember growing up here. We didn't see many strangers, and I couldn't think of a single good reason why anyone would want to come here. It's good to be wary of strangers. "

"The scenery, I think."

"What's that?" Her statement seems to come out of the blue.

"You said you couldn't think of a single good reason why anyone would want to come here. It's the scenery. That's the one good reason."

"Yeah." I gaze down at her face. "The scenery is definitely something special and much better than it was when I left."

"So, you said you grew up here?" She pretends she doesn't see me practically drooling over her.

"Yeah. The answer to your other question is my mom's place. I'm going to my mom's house."

“Who’s your mom? Maybe I know her.”

“I’m sorry. I haven’t introduced myself. I’m Torin Tasios. My mother is…”

“Marta. Wow. Imagine that.” She grins. It’s so nice to see a smile on her face for the first time.

“You know my mother?”

“Very well, actually. I’m a teacher. I work with your mom. Well, for your mom. She and I are very close friends. She’s a wonderful person.”

“But she’s never mentioned me?”

“Oh, no. She’s told me a lot about you. I’ve even seen pictures of you but you were, well, younger. Maybe if I saw you in the daylight and under better circumstances, I would have recognized you.”

“Hey, since you know my mother and all, maybe you wouldn’t mind giving me a lift the rest of the way.”

“Oh, gosh, yes. I’m sorry. You must be freezing after walking all this way.” She presses the key fob to unlock her car doors. “I don’t usually offer rides to strangers, but since I know who you are now, it’s not a problem. I’m sorry, let’s just get in.”

She seems so confused by everything that’s happened, and she’s second-guessing everything. This is normal, I think. In my line of work, I’ve seen guys survive close calls, and they act just like this. It shakes you and makes you question everything you’ve ever believed about the world and your place in it.

“Listen, I know what you’re feeling right now. Your adrenaline is pumping and you feel a little dizzy. As you start to come down from that, it’s gonna be hard to focus and you’re gonna feel kind of insecure. That’s all normal and it’ll go away. You’ll feel like yourself again by morning. I promise. Now, tell me. What were you doing out here all by yourself?”

She nods and takes a moment to digest what I’ve said to her. I hope it makes her feel better. I don’t even really know her, but I can’t stand to see her this way. This girl should never have to worry or feel insecure. She’s too good for

that.

“I stayed after school to work on a project and time just got away from me. Before I knew it, it was pitch black out here. I normally don’t stay this late. We’ve attracted some bad characters over the past few years. This little town isn’t as safe as it used to be.”

“And you’re from here?”

“No. I was looking for a job after college and that’s how I found this place.”

“I feel like I would have remembered you if you had grown up here.”

“Well...” She shrugs and blushes a little.

“Well, what?”

“No offense but I was probably in diapers when you left town.”

A hearty laugh rises from deep in my gut. “That’s true but you said you’re friends with my mother, so I’m guessing you don’t mind being in the company of people who are older than you.”

“To be honest, I prefer it.” She smiles, but as she reaches for the gear stick, I see that her hands are still shaking.

I reach down and cover her hand with mine. “I know you’re shaken up. What happened must have been very scary for you, but you don’t have to be scared anymore. I promise. Uh, sorry, what’s your name?”

She laughs again and says, “I’m sorry. Boy, am I socially awkward or what? I’m Tess Maxwell.”

“I don’t think you’re awkward at all, Tess. In fact, I think you’re perfect.”

“Perfect? No, that’s not me. Stick around and I’ll prove it.”

“That’s a deal. I won’t be going anywhere for a while.”

“So, what brings you back to town, anyway? Your mom never told me what you do for work.”

“That’s the thing. I’m taking a bit of a sabbatical. I was in security for a

pretty large-scale operation, but I recently got a big promotion. It's a lot to handle, and it was just time for a break from the pressure."

"Considering how well you just handled those two guys, I wonder if your bosses will be alright without you."

"They'll survive. People like them always do."

"Sounds kind of intriguing."

I point out the window. "Yes, and it looks like we're here so we'll just have to delve into my work life some other time."

"Is your mother expecting you? She didn't say anything about it."

"No. That's another reason why I was walking. I wanted to surprise her. I'm thinking maybe that wasn't such a good idea. It's been so long that I don't want to give her a heart attack. Maybe you should come in with me to soften the shock of it all."

"If you think that's alright, I'd like that. I don't really feel like being alone just yet."

"Then it's settled. You're coming with me."

I take the old familiar walk up the brick pathway to the front porch but this time with Tess beside me. If she'd been here when I was younger, I might not have ever left town. I wouldn't have risen from Shestyorka to Pakhan in the Russian mob.

I'm glad it didn't happen that way. Without the money and power, I wouldn't be the man I am today and I wouldn't have as much to offer to a girl like her. No, now is the right time for me to meet this perfect angel. Once I win her heart, I can give her the kind of life a girl like her deserves.

I raise my hand to knock, but Tess just grabs the knob and opens the door.

"Marta, it's Tess. I have someone here who wants to see you."

"Tess?"

My mother enters the room. She's smaller and more frail than I remember, but she looks good. She takes one look at me and begins to cry.

“My boy! Torin, my sweet boy!” She rushes across the room, and I catch her in my arms.

As we embrace, I look at Tess who’s beaming. Our eyes meet and I hold her gaze for several moments before she says, “Looks like you two have a lot to catch up on so I’m going to go.”

“Wait, you don’t have to,” I argue. “You said you didn’t want to be alone.”

“No, it’s alright. I feel better now. I’m coming by tomorrow to show your mother what I’ve been working on. See you then?”

“Yes, of course. Let me walk you to the car.”

“No, stay here. It’s alright. This is the better part of town.”

She leaves but I remain at the door, watching to make sure she gets into her car safely. My mother takes my hand and says, “You were always so protective of women. I’m glad to see that hasn’t changed over the years.”

“Yeah, well. She’s a pretty special girl, Mama.”

“She is. I absolutely adore her. I’m glad you two met. Now, let’s have some tea and you can tell me all about your life in the city. I’ve missed you so much.”

TESS

Marta isn't expecting me until noon, but if I sit and stare at the clock for a second longer, I'll probably lose my mind.

To say that I find Marta's son intriguing is an understatement. I mean it can't be a coincidence that he showed up just in time to save me, can it? Then there's the fact that I've never seen a man like him before.

He's a lot older than me but handsome and very well put together. It's obvious that he takes care of himself since he so easily took down two men half his age, and he did it in a three-piece suit and wool overcoat. I bet that's never happened in this sleepy, little town before.

It's not just that he's handsome and a sharp dresser. It's the way I felt when I was with him. He doesn't even know me, but I could tell he wanted to protect me. Even after he took care of those men, he still wanted to comfort me. After the initial shock of his massive size wore off, I felt completely safe with him. I've never trusted anyone enough to feel like that before.

I arrive at Marta's place and, without thinking twice, open the door and step inside. I close the front door and hear a door down the hall open and close. Thinking Marta must have heard me come in, I step into the center of the living room and nearly drop to my knees.

Torin, naked except for the towel wrapped around his waist, steps out of the hallway and stands right in front of me. His wet, black hair drips water onto his massive pecs, and I can't stop looking at them.

“I-I’m sorry. I should have knocked. I wasn’t thinking,” I blurt out.

I know I should avert my eyes, but I just can’t. The thin towel straining to cover him moves, and I find myself staring at the tent his manhood has created. Oh god, he’s getting an erection, and I don’t know what to do. I look up at his face and find him smiling at me. I’m sure he thinks I’m some kind of a pervert, and now my face is on fire.

“It’s alright. No damage done, right? Mom isn’t here right now. She just ran to the market. Should be right back soon.”

“Okay. Should I wait for her or should I go?” I must sound like an idiot.

“Why would you go? Don’t be silly. Have a seat and wait for her. I’ll go put some clothes on...unless you’d rather I stay like this.”

“Oh! Yeah, sorry. You must be chilly dressed...not dressed...like that I mean.”

“No, baby girl. Cold makes me shrink, not grow.” He winks at me, then strolls past me.

Without thinking, I spin around to watch him from behind. His broad muscular back and toned butt are exactly what I expect to see. What does a man have to do to grow muscles like that? I know one thing—the boys from the football team spent a lot of time in the gym when I was in school and none of them ever came out looking like Torin.

I sit down on the sofa and try to calm myself, but I’m a bundle of nervous energy. He’s going to come back out here, and I can’t be freaked out like this when he does.

“Just act normal. You’re a grown woman,” I whisper like a mantra as I fan my face and neck with my hand.

Torin returns wearing a pair of khaki cargo shorts and a forest green t-shirt. His dark hair is combed back, showing his big, brown eyes. He sits down in the chair across from the sofa and leans forward with his hands clasped together on his knees.

“Did you sleep alright last night?” he asks.

“Yes, fine. Thank you again, by the way. I felt much more at ease when I left here.”

“No problem. I’m glad I could help. If there’s ever anything else I can do for you, just say the word.”

“Like what?”

He reaches over and takes my hand. Bringing it to his lips, he softly kisses it. “Anything, sweetheart. Anything.”

My heart beats so hard I think I may hyperventilate. He holds onto my hand, stroking my fingers, and I try not to squirm in my seat as a new sensation starts to stir in the pit of my stomach and work its way down between my legs.

“I don’t...I mean I’m not sure what you mean.”

Just then, the front door opens and Marta steps inside. Torin rises and takes the brown paper grocery bag from his mother’s arm.

“Thank you, son. Tess, you’re early. I’m sorry if I kept you waiting.” She smiles at me.

“Oh, I think I kept Tess entertained for you, Mother.” Torin looks at me as he kisses his mother’s cheek.

“Just put that down in the kitchen,” she tells Torin and comes to sit with me so I can tell her what I’ve been working on for the school’s holiday program this year.

I do my best to maintain a level of enthusiasm as I tell her what each grade will be doing for their community service and the school pageant, but I can hear Torin in the kitchen and find myself scanning the room to catch a glimpse of him. I’m so distracted I can barely keep up with the conversation.

“Tess, is there something on your mind? You seem to be a million miles away.”

No, just ten feet or so on the other side of the wall.

“I’m fine. Just a little distracted.”

“Is it about last night? Torin told me what happened. I’m so sorry. Are you alright?”

“I’m fine thanks to Torin. He saved me.”

“Well, I’m putting security in that parking lot after hours. I don’t care what the Mayor has to say about the budget. You, on the other hand, need to be out of there before nightfall from now on.”

“I will. I promise.”

“What more do we need for the pageant?”

“I need to pick up the lumber and building supplies so the art department can make the sets. I just can’t do that on my own. I’m going to need help and a truck.”

Marta’s eyes light up and she shouts, “Torin. Come here please.”

Torin enters the room, wiping his hands on a dish towel.

“What can I do for you, lovely ladies?”

“Your father’s truck is in the garage. Can you use it to help Tess make a run to the lumber yard?”

“Absolutely. I’ve already told Tess. Anything she needs will be my pleasure.”

My cheeks get hot all over again, and this time, I’m sure he’s doing this to me intentionally.

“That’s very nice. Thank you,” I say.

“Not a problem. We can go now if you want to. Then maybe we can get some lunch.”

“Oh. Marta, were we finished here?” I

“Go, Tess. The sooner it’s done, the sooner the art department can get to work. I’ll get the keys.” Marta walks away, and Torin looks down at me.

“It’s my lucky day I guess. I get to spend more quality time with the teacher.”

“I’m sure lugging around sheets of plywood and 2x4s was exactly what you wanted to do today.” I laugh.

“I told you, anything you need and I meant it.”

He takes me out to the garage where the old blue pickup truck is stored.

“Pops sure did take good care of this thing. It looks as good now as it did when I graduated high school.”

“It’s that old?” I ask and instantly regret it.

“You make it sound like they chiseled my diploma out of stone. I’m only thirty-eight. You’re already teaching, so you’re what? Twenty-four or twenty-five?”

“Twenty-four,” I answer as he cranks up the engine, which sputters at first, then quiets down and gently purrs.

“You told me that you came here for work, but you didn’t tell me where you’re from.”

“Oh, I grew up in the city. My parents are still there.”

“So, you and I have just been crossing paths, eh? I’m glad we ended up here at the same time.”

“Me too,” I confess and blush a little.

“You know, it’s alright for you to like me,” he tells me, catching me off guard.

“What do you mean?”

“You blush every time you say something nice to me. You don’t have to be embarrassed. I like you too. I like you very, very much.”

“I told you, I’m awkward. I can’t help it.”

“I don’t think you’re awkward. You’re too graceful and polished for that. I just think that maybe you’re lacking experience in certain things. Am I right?”

“You mean things like being attacked and then rescued by a hulk of a man who happens to be my only friend’s son? Yeah, I have limited experience with that.”

“I hope I’m not prying too much, but I was talking about experience with men. Are you married or seeing someone?”

“No, I’m very single. I don’t even have a cat.”

“And you live alone?”

“I do. I bought a little cottage on Eighth Street.”

“See, now I’m a little worried. Do you have a security system or anything?”

“No. Do you think I should?”

“No question. We can take care of that today too.”

We arrive at the lumber yard where my order has been waiting for pick-up. Torin tosses the boards into the truck like he’s tossing around sheets of paper. Once the truck is loaded, he tells me to wait a moment and follows a salesman inside. I sit in the truck looking out at Main Street.

There are a few people milling around as usual, but one man catches my attention. He looks out of place in this Norman Rockwell-quality scene. He’s wearing a suit with dark sunglasses and leaning against the brick wall in front of the pharmacy. Before Torin got off the train, there were only two men in town who regularly wore suits. One is the only lawyer in town and the other is the Mayor.

I can’t see his eyes but I think he knows I’m staring at him because he quickly walks off toward Church Street. Torin returns to the truck seconds later, carrying a large shopping bag. He tosses the bag in the back and hops inside.

“You should have been here a few seconds ago. You might know the man who was standing in front of Kroner’s Pharmacy.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you dress alike,” I answer and a concerned look comes over his

face.

“Which way did he go? Did you see him get into a car?”

“No, he walked that way.” I raise my finger to point. “Toward Church Street.”

Torin peels out of the lumber yard and turns left toward Church Street.

“I was just making a joke. I don’t expect you to know everyone who wears suits.”

He tries to play it off, but I can tell something isn’t right.

“Isn’t Eighth Street this way? We’re going to your place, right?” he asks.

“No, we have to drop the lumber at school. That’s the other way.”

“Oh, yeah, right. Well, I’ll turn around when I get to an intersection.”

“You’ve already passed three.”

He looks at me and says, “You were still talking,” then takes the next right.

I ponder my next move carefully. I know that something’s going on, but I don’t know if I should press the issue. He’s made it obvious he doesn’t want to tell me. After what happened yesterday though, I don’t want to be caught off guard again. “Should I be concerned about that man?”

He puts his hand on my thigh. “You shouldn’t be concerned about anything.”

I can’t explain it, but I believe him. I think that if we were driving through quicksand, I’d still believe him.

We drop the lumber off at the school then head back to my place so I can make us lunch. When we arrive, he pulls the shopping bag out of the back of the truck. “Tess, I have your security system. It won’t take long to get it installed.”

“Oh, you didn’t have to do that. I was going to call one of those companies tomorrow.”

“They’ll just rip you off. It’s better this way. Besides, it’s easy.”

“Okay. Well, can I help?”

“No. You go start on lunch. I need to make a phone call, and then I’ll get started. Pop’s toolbox should have everything I need.”

TORIN

Tess threw me when she said she saw a man dressed like me.

I may have been gone for a while but I know that nobody in this town wears eight-hundred dollar suits. I call my most trusted associate to ask if there's been any discussion of me or my current whereabouts, and he assures me that no one has been talking. I don't think he'd lie to me, but my gut tells me he might not be as far in the loop as he thinks he is.

I left the city to escape the heat coming down from a deal gone wrong with a rival family. The situation is being handled on the other side of the ocean, and I was told to keep out of sight until I was given the all-clear. I hope no one's stupid enough to follow me here for a little retribution, but if they bring a gang war to my mother's back door, they won't live long enough to regret it.

I set up the surveillance equipment in Tess's yard and finish up by placing cameras along the perimeter of the house. All that's left is to install the alarm panel inside. She doesn't know it but I've set it up so the cameras feed digitally to my cell phone. I'm not gonna have some minimum wage employee at a security company spying on my girl. Just the thought of it makes my blood boil.

"Tess, come here," I call to her from the front door.

"Yeah. Oh, you're all sweaty," she says and I look down at my wet shirt.

"It's this Maine weather. No matter how cold it is, you still bake in the

midday sun.”

“Lunch can wait if you want to give me those clothes. I can wash them while you take a shower.”

“That sounds good, but first, we need to go over this alarm panel so you know how to set it.”

She stands beside me, and I catch a whiff of her perfume. She smells like a fond memory. Is it vanilla? Maybe it’s sugar cookies.

“You smell really good,” I tell her as I input the four-digit code she’s selected.

“Thank you.”

I can feel the heat coming off her again.

That’s part of her appeal to me, I think. She’s so damn innocent.

Tess hands me a towel and shows me to the bathroom of her quaint, craftsman-style cottage. It has the same scent she does. I run the shower and undress. As I lift my clothes from the floor, I look in the mirror and grin. Wearing nothing but a towel, I bring her my soiled clothes. I run my hands down her forearms as she takes them from me.

“It shouldn’t take long, but if you’re done before they’re ready, there’s a robe in the bathroom.”

“What? You don’t like my towel?” I hold my arms out.

Her eyes are drawn to my waist, but she quickly looks away. “I think the robe will be more fitting lunch attire.”

“Maybe but a lot less fun.” I grin.

“What does that mean?” She blushes.

I shrug. “I like watching you watching me.”

With that, I seclude myself in the soft, serene luxury that only a girl’s bathroom provides, with its fluffy towels and bathmats, and floral wallpaper. My place in the city is stark white and filled with sharp edges. I like it but

there's something to be said about being inside Tess's intimate spaces. It's like seeing a part of her personality that can't be expressed with words and proves beyond reason that she's exactly the kind of girl I would put my life on the line for.

After my shower, I wrap up in the towel again. I reach for the doorknob but stop to look at the big, white bathrobe hanging on the hook. I shake my head and let the towel drop to the tile floor. She wants me to wear the damn robe so I'll wear it, but I can't guarantee that my dick won't pop right out of it when seeing her makes me hard again.

For lunch, Tess has made tomato soup served with freshly baked, crispy bread.

"What grade do you teach?" I ask as I dip a slice of bread into my soup.

"Kindergarten." She smiles.

"Get them while they're young and impressionable?"

"I just love little kids. They're so enthusiastic about everything. It makes me happy."

"Your parents must be very proud. Being a teacher is an honorable profession."

Her expression changes as sadness comes over her. I don't know what I've said wrong, but I quickly apologize. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. If you don't want to talk about it..."

"No, I've been avoiding it for a while now. Maybe it's time to let it out. If you don't mind listening. I don't want to be a downer or anything."

"Hey, don't think like that. If you want to talk, I'm here to listen. It doesn't matter what it is."

"Okay. Let's just say that my parents had very high aspirations for me, and I fell very short of meeting them."

"What do you mean?"

"My father is a surgeon. My mother is a high-power attorney. Together, they

have a lot of money and a lot of power. They expected the same from me, you know? I'm their only child, and they wanted me to continue their legacy so they could brag about me at cocktail parties the way their friends have always done about their own kids. Instead, they tell me that I wasted their money on college just to land a low-paying job. They think that my lack of ambition is a sign of laziness."

I nod. "I know a thing or two about people with money and power. Sometimes, they become blind to the things that really matter in life."

Her eyes brighten, and her voice goes up an octave. "Exactly. That's exactly how I feel. I ask myself all the time why they can't just love me for me. Why is how I look to the rest of the world more important than my happiness?"

"Because how they look is more important to them than their happiness. They don't realize it. They think that these things make them happy, but in the end, they're just hollow shells. I don't mean to speak about your family that way, but I wouldn't say it if I didn't have experience with it myself."

Her expression changes, and she looks down at her bowl of soup. I think I see tears in her eyes. I did it again. I made her cry. Damn it all to hell. I slide my chair across the floor until I'm seated beside her, and I take both of her hands onto my lap.

"Look at me, Tess. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you sad."

She looks up at me and all that I see is a lost, lonely little girl.

"You didn't make me sad. The whole situation does. You're right about them."

She starts to say something else, but I pull her onto my lap and kiss her. Her body stiffens for a second, then she wraps her arms around my neck. I rest my hands on her hips, digging my fingers into her flesh. I don't just want this girl. I need her like I need air and water to survive. I slide my tongue into her mouth and taste the sweetness that accompanies the smell of sugar cookies. I don't want to stop. I can't bring myself to let her go.

My manhood rises and presses against the warm space between her legs. A burst of air comes out of her nose when she feels it, but she doesn't try to move away. Tess moans when I drag my tongue and suck on her neck. I slide

my hands along her waist, over her ribs, and squeeze her firm tits.

The need grows inside me like a hungry beast, and I reach down under her top and open her bra. Her nipples are hard, and I need to taste them. I lift her shirt and lick the taut peaks. She caresses the back of my head and whimpers softly as I suckle and squeeze her tits.

I reach down and unbutton her pants. She wiggles in my lap, unsure if she wants me to go there, so I pause and wait to see if she's going to let me proceed. She settles down again so I lift her off my lap and push her pants and panties down to her ankles. I use my left hand to push her bowl of soup aside then set her on the table.

Her face is pink and her chest heaves as I part her thighs and lower my head between them. I lick her hard little clit, and she cries out, grabbing a handful of my hair. I reach up, taking both of her wrists in my hands, and pin her arms by her thighs.

My tongue laps voraciously at her sticky, sweet lips, and she whimpers at every pass. Her legs quiver as I gently slip my index finger inside her, and she struggles to lift her arms.

I raise my head and say, "Hush now, baby girl. I'm gonna make you come."

Her body tenses, and she holds her breath until her eyes roll back in her head. I suckle her hard clit as she's consumed by the throes of orgasmic release that leave her whimpering and exhausted.

I stand up and begin to unfasten my belt when the doorbell rings.

"We can ignore it," I tell her.

Whoever is on the other side of the door isn't taking no for an answer, and they begin to pound on the door.

"I can't. I have to see who it is," she says so I help her to her feet and watch with disappointment as she fixes her clothes.

I remain in the kitchen, nursing my killer hard-on while she checks the door.

"Torin, it's your mother," she calls to me.

“Fuck. Cock blocked by my own mother,” I growl and lock myself in the half bathroom by the back door so I can relieve some of this tension and not face my mother with a log in my pants.

TESS

“I ’m sorry to bust in on you like this but there was a man in my backyard and I didn’t feel safe being home all alone,” Torin’s mother explains.

I see Torin’s body stiffen and his jaw clench.

“What do you mean? What was he doing back there?” he asks her.

“At first I thought he was at the wrong house, but then, I saw what he was wearing and he was too well dressed to be a technician or a delivery man. So, I went out and asked him.”

“Mama, don’t ever do that again. You don’t just confront strangers when you’re all alone.”

“Normally, son, I would argue with you but this time, this time something was off. The look on his face was terrifying. Then he told me he was looking for you.”

“For me? What else did he say?”

“He said to tell you that your family is waiting for you to come home. I’m your family and this is your home. What’s he talking about?”

“I don’t know, Mama, but I just installed a security system here and I’m going to get you one too. Don’t worry.”

“Don’t worry? I’ve lived here most of my life, and I’ve never been afraid like

this. Torin, who is this man?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t there to see him. I’ll make some calls and see if I can find out. Believe me, I don’t want you to worry. I’m sure it was just someone playing a stupid joke or something. You know what my friends were like in school. One of them probably found out that I was here. Trust me, Mama. I’ll kick his ass for scaring you, I promise.”

“Please come home with me,” his mother begs.

As badly as I want him to stay, I know he needs to go.

“Let me say goodbye to Tess. I’ll be right behind you.”

Marta goes out to her car, and Torin turns to me.

“Who was the man she’s talking about?” I ask him.

“I’m not sure yet.”

I can tell he’s hiding something. I consider pressing him, but I trust him too much for that. If he says that everything is alright, I believe him.

“Will I see you again, soon?” I feel silly asking him this when my legs are still shaking from what he just did to me.

“Why don’t you come by for dinner? I’d come back here but I think my mother would feel better if I was there.”

“Oh, sure. I can do that. Should I bring anything?”

“Just this.” He pulls me to him and grabs my ass. “We have some unfinished business to attend to.”

He kisses me, and I melt into his embrace. God, I don’t know what’s happening, but this isn’t me. I don’t engage in sexual acts on the kitchen table, and I don’t lose control when a man touches me. Or maybe... I didn’t until now.

It’s not about what he did to me—although I have to admit it was amazing. It’s about how he’s managed to consume me in every other way too. I’ve only known him for a few days, and I already have a hard time imagining going back to a life without him in it. I can only hope that what he’s hiding

doesn't end up taking him away from me. That would be devastating.

I watch him back the old truck down my driveway and rest my head against the window. I'll be counting the minutes until I see him again. The truck disappears. I'm about to close the curtains, but I stop when something catches my eye. A long, black car creeps past my house, traveling in the same direction as Torin and Marta. Look at me. Am I going to start writing down license plates next? Torin said there was nothing to worry about, but he also told me to be careful.

That's exactly what I'm going to do.

As I shower and change, I realize that he still hasn't told me exactly what he does for a living. Most people that I've met, especially in my parent's circle, love talking about their careers.

If Torin is as successful as he seems, why won't he discuss his work with the same enthusiasm? Another thought crosses my mind. I try to push it away but I can't. What did the strange man at Marta's mean about him coming home to his family? He asked me if I had a boyfriend, but I never asked him if he was involved with anyone. He could have a wife and kids in the city, and I wouldn't have a clue.

Yes, I need answers to these questions, and I need them soon. I've already fallen for him. Now, I need to know what it is that I'm falling for.

I arrive at Marta's and find Torin in the kitchen wearing his mother's apron. His hands are covered in flour, and he smiles when he sees me. He rushes to me and kisses me. "I'd hug you but..." He holds up his messy hands.

"What are you cooking?" I ask, surveying the array of mixing bowls and pans on the kitchen counter.

"I'm making my favorite Russian dish. It's called Pelmeni."

"And what is Pelmeni?" I'm intrigued by his culinary skills.

"Stuffed dumplings. These are stuffed with beef. It's best to dip them in sour cream."

"And that's dinner?"

“No, not this. This is just an appetizer. Mama is making beef stroganoff.”

“I love your mother’s beef stroganoff,” I confess. “She brings it to the Christmas potluck.”

“She told me.” He winks, and I know he asked her to make it for me.

Marta enters the kitchen from another room and greets me, “Tess, you know where everything is. Do you mind setting the table? We’re almost ready.” She inspects Torin’s progress on the appetizer and wags her finger at him. “Go help Tess. I’ll finish this up.”

Torin shrugs and joins me in the dining room. He brushes my arm as he places the silverware next to the plate I’ve set on the table.

“I miss the taste of you already, baby girl,” he whispers in my ear and a chill runs down my neck. “Don’t worry. I told you I wasn’t finished, and I meant it.”

I summon up all of the courage I have. “I’m pretty sure I finished.”

He laughs at that. “Very good, little girl. And, yes, I believe you did.”

We sit down to a wonderful meal and excellent conversation. I’m always comfortable with Marta, but something about having Torin beside me really puts me at ease. The only time I get anxious is when he squeezes my thigh under the table. I don’t think I’m ready to tell my only friend in the world what’s going on between me and her son just yet.

I’m not sure how she’ll take it, and I don’t yet know what his intentions are. It would kill me if this was just a fling for him, and I know she’d get angry at him for breaking my heart. The problem is, even if it is just a fling, I know I won’t be able to avoid that heartbreak because he’s all I can think about.

Torin excuses himself several times to get up and check out the windows. Marta sees me watching and says, “I don’t think he wants us to know, but he’s concerned about that man.”

“Well, it’s better to be safe, right? You can’t be too careful these days.”

“Still, we both have fancy new security systems now. He doesn’t have to check out the window every ten minutes.”

“He loves you. He wants to make sure that you’re safe.”

“He’s always been protective over the people he loves. I suppose that’s why he installed one for you too.”

I feel my cheeks blush as I wait to see if she has anything else to add.

“It’s alright, Tess. In the time that I’ve known you, I don’t think you’ve ever mentioned going on a date or having a boyfriend. If my son has caught your attention, he must be as wonderful as I think he is. I’m going to turn in early so you two can have some time together.”

There it is, I guess. In Marta’s own way, she’s told me that she knows what’s going on and given me her seal of approval. It seems like I was worried for nothing, but with me, what else is new?

Marta goes to bed, and Torin and I sit down on the sofa together. He pulls me close and kisses me. “I’ve been waiting all night to do that.”

“So have I.” I lay my head on his chest and run a finger along his hard muscles. “Hey, you know what we should do? Let’s go into town and take a walk down Main Street. We can get some cocoa at the coffee shop and just take in all the holiday lights and decorations.”

“Now? You want to do that now?”

“Well, yeah. I could use the exercise after that amazing meal.”

“Alright, let me get my coat then. You know it’s cold out there, right?”

“Well, I’ll have you to cuddle up with.”

“Fine, but then, we’re going back to your place so I can cuddle up with you.”

“Okay, it’s a deal.” I grin.

TORIN

I hand Tess her piping hot cup of cocoa and take her by the arm. If there's one thing I can say about these cozy New England towns, it's that they know how to decorate for the holidays.

Every inch of Main Street is covered in twinkling lights and the storefront windows are filled with winter scenes, Christmas trees, and stockings on cardboard fireplaces. Christmas music plays on speakers hung from utility poles every four feet or so down the street, leading us to the town square's nativity scene complete with live farm animals.

We pass by a group of men about Tess's age, and I notice how they all look at her. I get it, but I glare at them until they notice and look away. She may be nice to look at, but I won't have a bunch of punks drooling over her like she's a piece of meat.

As we make our way to the town square, Tess begins asking me questions about my life and my work. I wondered how long it would take. She's a smart girl and I'm sure my behavior over the past two days has been cause for concern with her.

"Do you have family in the city? Could that be what the man in your mom's yard was referring to?"

"No, sweetheart. The only family I have is right here."

"So no wife or kids either? Not even a fiancé?"

“What is this, baby girl? Jealousy? No, not even a close friend. You and my mom are the only women in my life.”

“So, tell me. What is it, then? I know you said you’d handle it and I trust you, but I’d feel better knowing what’s going on. I know you lied when you tried to brush it off with your mother.”

“I don’t want you or her to worry about anything. You don’t have to.”

“I think I’d be less worried if you just told me what was going on. I have a pretty active imagination, you know.”

“That’s good to know,” I joke but she frowns and looks down at her feet.

“Does it have to do with your work and why you need a sabbatical?”

I sigh and rub my forehead. I don’t want her to feel like I’m shutting her out, but keeping her in the dark is as much for her protection as anything else. While I would love to put my foot down and tell her that my work is a private matter, I see a real future with this girl and I can’t hide my lifestyle from her forever. Maybe it’ll be a deal breaker for her, and she’ll run for the hills. But no, she isn’t like that. I can tell she’s just as invested in me as I am with her.

“Alright, I’ll tell you about my work but not out here like this. Let’s finish our walk and go back to your place. When we get there, I’ll tell you everything you want to know.”

We continue our stroll down Main Street, and I try to be discreet as I peer around corners and into alleys, making sure there’s no sign of danger. She senses the tension all the same and asks, “Did I do something wrong? Do you think I’m prying?”

I stop and take her in my arms. “No, sweetheart. You haven’t done anything wrong. Why don’t we cut this short and head back now? I think the sooner we get this out of the way, the better.”

“Oh boy, now you’ve got me worried. Maybe I don’t want to know after all.”

“It’s too late for that now, little girl. You asked me for the truth, and you’re gonna get it.”

We take her car to her house, and I scan the exterior for anything that looks

out of place. Thankfully, the sleepy neighborhood is quiet so I get out and open Tess's door for her.

"Make yourself comfortable," she says. "Can I get you something to drink or eat?"

"No, I'm fine. Just come and sit with me." I wring my hands together and consider the best way to start the conversation. She stares at me wide-eyed and completely engaged. "Here it is. When we met, I told you that I worked security for a business and that I was recently promoted."

"Right, but you never said what company or what you got promoted to."

"The business is the family business."

"But you said your mother was your only family."

"Not my family, baby girl. The family. The Russian Mob."

Her face grows pale and her mouth falls open as she scans my eyes for any sign that I might not be serious.

"I didn't know there was a Russian Mob. Is it like the Italians in the movies?"

"No, not exactly. Hollywood has a way of exaggerating everything. If they didn't, nobody would watch, am I right?"

"I don't know... Is it dangerous? I mean, has your life been in danger?"

No, I'm not going to be honest with her about that. She doesn't need to know that I've put my life on the line many times for the business. She doesn't need to know the unspeakable things I've had to do to keep myself alive.

"No, like I said, it's not like the movies."

"But what about the police? I mean, you're doing things that are illegal, right?"

"Technically, yes, but nothing that hurts anyone innocent. I mean, people make choices and some of them make bad ones. They gamble when they borrow money they can't pay back. If they didn't make these choices, then there wouldn't be a market for what I do, right? Why should the government get involved in these personal business affairs? We don't go out looking for

these people. They seek us out. Why are we the bad guys when we give them what they want and expect what they agree to in return?"

"I'm not judging you. This isn't a morality thing. I just don't want to see you get arrested or worse."

"What did I tell you? You can trust me. I've been in this business since I was eighteen years old, and I haven't spent a night in jail. I have a squeaky clean record because I don't take stupid chances. Now, I've been promoted to a position that will keep me off the streets most of the time so I'm even less likely to be implicated in anything. Do you trust me, little girl?"

"Yes, I do. I just don't want to lose you. We've just started and..."

I pull her onto my lap and kiss her deeply. She puts her hands on my face and closes her eyes.

"You're right. We just started, and we have a long way to go."

I take her in my arms and ask, "Where's the bedroom?"

Cradled like a baby in my arms, she points to the end of the hall. I carry her to her bed and lay her down. I kneel on her thighs and lift her shirt over her head then grab the center of her bra and pull on it until it snaps and breaks loose. I take her tits in my big hands and squeeze.

"You're the sexiest girl in the world," I whisper. "I want to fuck you so bad."

She swallows hard. "You should know. This is my first time."

Her words set off an explosion inside my brain. I knew she was innocent but not this innocent. How could someone like her still be a virgin? She's had to have been fighting guys off since she hit puberty. I don't know why I'm questioning it. This is a dream come true. This is my opportunity to be her first, last, and only lover.

I take so long to respond that she squirms beneath my weight and asks, "Is that a problem? I know I don't have any experience, and I don't want to disappoint you."

"Disappoint me? Baby girl, you could never disappoint me. What you need to understand is that I don't make a habit of sleeping around. I want you but if I

take you, you're mine. Do you understand what that means?"

"Yes. That's the reason I'm a virgin. I didn't want to just be added to someone's body count. I wanted to be with someone I cared for and who wanted only me. Does that sound childish to you?"

"Childish? No. I think that's one of the most mature things I've ever heard.

Without breaking eye contact, I take my shirt off. She brings her hand to my chest and traces the outline of the scar that runs from my right pec down to my waist. I lift her hand to my mouth and suckle her tiny fingers. The scar is a story for another time.

I remove her jeans and drop my pants. My swollen cock stands erect and slaps her on the belly. She stares at it as if it's the first she's ever seen. I suppose it is—in person anyway.

"I never knew they were that big," she gasps.

"Most aren't." I smirk and lift myself off her hips.

She bends her knees, and I spread her thighs, slipping one hand between them so I can finger her sweet little honeypot. She arches her back and moans as I explore her with my fingers. In seconds, she's dripping wet and ready for me.

"It's gonna hurt a little at first but just relax," I assure her as I slowly insert the tip. I press against her and hear her grunt when the tension lessens. I stroke her little clit to make up for the moment of pain and wait for her body to relax before giving her more. I feed her about half my length in slow, controlled thrusts. Her head thrashes from side to side as she loses herself in this new sensation.

"Does it feel good, baby girl?"

She replies with a breathy, "Yes."

"I'm gonna give you some more," I tell her, going deeper on my next thrust.

I can feel every muscle, every nerve ending in her tight little box as it grips my manhood on the in-stroke. I don't think I can continue to hold back. The animal in me wants to plunge balls-deep in her and fuck her like I own her, but I continue to restrain myself the best I can.

She begins to moan and the sweet sound of her pleasure drives me closer to the edge. I flip her over onto her belly and hold her shoulder down with my hands as I enter her from behind. I fill her up with my first stroke causing her to cry out.

I pause for a second and she cries, "Oh god, don't stop." That's all I need to hear. I grab her hips to hold her steady and fuck her hard until her whole body trembles.

"Shit, baby girl. I'm gonna come," I groan as my cock jumps inside her.

I dig my fingers into her ass and ride her until my explosive orgasm subsides. Panting and euphoric, I lie down and pull her on top of me. I stroke her hair and ask, "Was it what you expected, little girl?"

"It was better than I ever imagined because it was you." She smiles.

I hold her close to my chest and listen to the sound of her breathing. Not long after, she falls asleep. I consider tucking her in and going home, but I don't want to leave. She's right where she belongs, and I'm not letting her go.

I don't know what time I fell asleep, but it's two in the morning when a crash outside rocks me from my sleep. I jump out of bed and run to the living room without stopping to cover my nakedness. I open the door just in time to see a pair of tail lights in the distance.

Someone was here. I can't keep pretending that I don't know what's going on. The boss was wrong. Laying low was never gonna work. They've found me, and now, I've put everyone I care about in danger.

I close the door and sit down on the sofa. Tess is moving around in the bedroom probably scared out of her mind. I try my best to shake off the adrenaline rush I'm feeling before she sees it in my eyes.

"Tess, everything is alright. I just heard a noise. Sorry to wake you, baby girl. I'll be right back."

She comes out of the room wearing a silk bathrobe and sits down beside me.

"Are you sure everything is alright?"

"What did I tell you?"

“You told me that I don’t have to worry because you’re here.”

“That’s right.”

I have to eliminate this threat and do it quickly and quietly so she never knows that there’s any danger. My blood boils when I think about anyone coming near her. If someone hurts her because of me...well...there won’t be enough bullets in the world to stop me from coming for them. Just the thought of it causes a silent rage to churn in the pit of my stomach.

Waking up to Torin asleep in my bed is almost surreal.

It seemed like last night was just an incredible dream until now when I could see the light streaming through the curtains onto his tan, muscular body. We've had a few days off from school due to issues with the heating units, but I have to go back to work today and I don't know if I should wake him.

As he lies here, I take a moment to just look at him. He is a truly handsome man in peak condition, minus the large scar on his chest. I wanted to ask him about it last night, but I didn't want to spoil the mood. We were both so intensely into each other that it felt like nothing else in the world existed. As reality continues to trickle into my consciousness, I think, *I'm not a virgin anymore*. Does it feel any different? Physically, no, but giving myself over to Torin has made me feel more connected to him somehow.

I check the time and realize that if I don't shower now, I won't have time. I slip out from under the covers and catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. Jesus, I'm still naked! I turn to see if Torin is looking and see that he's still asleep so I make a beeline down the hall to the bathroom.

I close my eyes and breathe in the steam as the hot water slaps against my body. I still can't wrap my head around it. There's a man out there in my bed—a beautiful, strong, and probably dangerous man at that. I find my mind wandering back to his affiliation with a crime organization but no, that's not what I want to focus on. I want to focus on how he makes me feel.

I turn off the water and open the shower curtain. As I wrap myself in a towel, the smell of brewing coffee wafts under the bathroom door. He's awake.

When I come out of this bathroom he's going to see me for the first time since making love to me. Why does that make me uncomfortable? Do I think he's going to lose interest in me now? No, he won't do that. I'm just not used to being cared for. My parents gave me everything a child could ever want except for a feeling of relevancy. We didn't have a strong emotional connection, and I wasn't sure I mattered to them. I felt like if I had just up and disappeared, they wouldn't miss me.

When we had our blowout and I moved away, they pretty much proved me right. That's what this is, I think. Thanks to them, I worry that nobody will ever need me.

I run the gamut of emotions while dressing and fixing my hair, then take a deep breath and step out into the hall. I hear Torin in the kitchen and follow the sound of the clanking coffee mugs and his low-tone humming.

"Good morning, baby girl. You look nice," he says and kisses me on the forehead.

"Thank you. I didn't know if I should wake you or not."

"What kind of man would I be if I didn't get up to see you off?"

"The sleepy kind?" I grin.

"No, the inconsiderate kind."

"Will you be here when I come home or..."

He stops what he's doing and looks at me. "I have to run into the city today. I'll be back tonight, but it's going to be late."

My heart drops and all of the insecurity bubbles back up to the surface. He sees the defeat on my face and takes me in his arms. "I know the timing might seem strange to you, but I promise this is just about work. Last night was amazing, and I plan on having many more nights like that with you. I'm not distancing myself from you or pulling away. I just need to take care of some business."

“You promise?”

“I do. In fact, I was planning to bring you back a gift from the city.”

“Will you come back here tonight?”

“It’s probably going to be very late. Are you sure you want me to?”

“Yes. Come back tonight. I don’t care what time it is.”

“Alright. I’ll be here. I promise.”

I drop Torin off at Marta’s house then head off to school. I wonder if I sounded desperate when I asked him to come back tonight, but I couldn’t help myself. This is all so new to me. I think this is what falling in love feels like.

When I arrive at school, I find a man seated in a black car in my parking spot. I consider asking him to move, but I’m already running a little late. Sometimes parents park in the teacher slots by mistake so I don’t think too much about it and pull my car into one of the visitor spaces.

As I walk toward the school, I can feel his eyes on me. I want to turn around to see if he’s gotten out of his car to follow me, but I’m frightened by what I might see. I pick up the pace and hurry inside.

Once I make it into the building, I turn and look out the tall, glass windows. There’s no man out there, just children coming off buses. I tell myself that I’m just being paranoid, but my heart is still racing in my chest. Maybe being back in the classroom with my kids will calm me down.

The day passes very uneventfully, and I forget all about the man in the car. When class is dismissed, Marta stops by my room.

“Torin didn’t come home last night. Was he with you?” she asks.

“Yes, he was.” I feel like a little kid waiting for a scolding.

“Good. Do you know if he’s coming home tonight? I just want to know if I should cook for him.”

“He said he had to go into the city for work and won’t be back until very late.”

“Some vacation, huh?” She shakes her head. “He’s too absorbed in his work. Maybe being with you will open his eyes so he can see that there’s more to life than his career.”

I wonder if she has any idea what he does for a living, but I don’t dare ask.

“How are the sets coming along for the Christmas program?” she asks me.

“They’re not. Torin and I dropped off the lumber, but with school being closed, no one has had a chance to do anything with it.”

“We’re running short on time. I wonder if you would mind plotting everything out this afternoon so the kids in the art department can get started on them tomorrow.”

I promised Torin that I wouldn’t stay alone past dark anymore, but plotting out the sets would take at least four hours. He’s out of town, though. What else do I have to do to pass the time until he gets back?

“Sure, Marta. I can do it,” I answer and think that maybe I shouldn’t have volunteered for this project in the first place. What do I know about theater production anyway? Note to self, this is going to be someone else’s problem next year.

The kids all line up to load the buses. Once the building is clear of everyone but me and the janitor, I go to the auditorium to begin my work. There’s so much to do that it overwhelms me and I find myself sorting lumber and sticking design plans on each numbered piece. It’s a time-consuming and mind-numbing task, and by the time I finish, the janitor has already left and locked me inside.

I collect my things and look out the classroom window at the pitch-black sky. A tinge of fear creeps up on me as I contemplate going outside.

“Get over yourself,” I mumble. “Are you going to let one scary experience upset you forever?”

I turn the lock on the door, and the cold night air rushes in on my face when I open the door. I lift the collar on my coat, burying my face inside it and stepping out into the darkness. I pass the place where the men tried to assault me and remember the first time I saw Torin. He came to my rescue then, but

he isn't here now so I quicken my pace and round the corner to the parking lot.

I skid to a halt when I see the black sedan still parked in my parking space.

Why has it been here all day? Why is it still here when school let out hours ago? I try to see through the windshield, but I can't see anything but darkness. The hairs are standing up on the back of my neck, and I have no real reason for reacting this way until a flame flickers inside the car.

The light from the flame illuminates the face of a man who's lighting a cigarette. He looks down at the lighter and then straight into my eyes. I want to run, but I can't seem to make myself move. It's like my eyes are locked on the man and just won't let go. My trance is broken when I hear the car door open, and I speed away toward my car. It's just a few feet, but it feels like miles.

"Hey, stop. I want to talk to you about Torin Tasios," the man calls out to me but I keep moving. "I said stop. Don't make me chase you. Alright bitch, you win."

"Oh god." Panicked, I fumble with my keys, trying to use my gloved hands to unlock my car door. Why is this happening to me? What does he want? More importantly, what is he planning to do to me to get it?

The lock clicks, and I hop inside. When I reach to close the door, a hand comes out of the darkness and holds it open.

"Get the fuck out of the car, now," the man snarls with a heavy Russian accent.

"No. Let go of my door or I'll call 911."

"Reach for the phone, and I'll rip you out of the car."

"Why are you doing this? I didn't do anything to you. Why don't you just leave me alone?"

"Do you know that you're fucking a killer?"

My eyes grow wide, and I stare at the man's mouth, wondering if he really said what I think I heard.

“Oh, you didn’t know. He hasn’t told you what kind of animal he is? He kills my brother and what happens to him? He gets a bump up. How is that justice?”

“I don’t know anything about that. I don’t know anything about any of this. Please, just let me go home.”

“Your man took something from me, so I’m gonna take something from him now. It’s either you or the mother. You want me to let you go and get her instead?”

“No, I want you to leave us both alone. We have nothing to do with this.”

“Yeah, you do. It doesn’t matter that you won’t make a choice though because I’m gonna take you both from him.”

He reaches into the car and grabs my arm.

I’m sure that this is the end for me. I close my eyes and wait for him to drag me into the parking lot, but it doesn’t happen. His hand is ripped from my arm, and I hear a fight break out beside the car. I open my eyes and see nothing more than two figures wrestling in the darkness. I’m sure that one of them is Torin, but how? He said he wouldn’t be back until late.

“Drive away, Tess,” Torin yells to me but I don’t want to leave him.

“No, not without you,” I protest.

“I said go. Now, go!” he yells as he throws the other man to the ground.

I don’t want to go but I don’t want to disobey him either, so I put the key in the ignition and take off for home. I pull into the driveway and leap out of the car, making a run for my front door.

Once inside, I turn on all the lights and check every room and closet in case someone is hiding inside. Certain that I’m alone, I sit down beside the locked door and wait for Torin, praying he hasn’t been injured during his altercation with the angry man.

This is the second time he’s shown up just in time to rescue me. The first was just a random stroke of luck, but how did he know I needed him this time?

An hour passes before I see headlights turning into my driveway. I hold my breath until I hear Torin say, “Tess, open the door. It’s me.”

I unlock the door, and he storms inside pumped with adrenaline. He grabs me by the arms and examines me from head to toe.

“Did he touch you? Are you hurt?”

“No, he didn’t. You got there just in time. What happened?”

“Don’t worry about that. It’s taken care of. What did I tell you about this, Tess? Didn’t I tell you not to stay at the school past dark anymore?”

“You did but I didn’t know that someone was going to come after me to get back at you. He said that you....”

“What? That I killed his brother? Well, I did. I did it because he drew a weapon on me, and I had to defend myself. That’s where the scar on my chest came from. It was a simple collection call, and he didn’t have the money so he tried to slice me open. Yes, I killed him. I had to.”

“And what? His brother has been after you ever since?”

“No. Things cooled down for a long time. The whole thing was practically forgotten until I got promoted. That’s when his brother realized he’d have to work for me now, and he started making trouble.”

“What kind of trouble? Trouble like tonight?”

“We’re not having this conversation right now. Right now, we’re talking about you. You could have gotten yourself killed tonight, and I can’t just let that go.”

“What do you mean you can’t let it go?” My better instincts should tell me that being with him is too dangerous, but all I can think about is how devastated I’ll be if he breaks up with me right now.

He pins me against the wall and kisses me. His tongue lashes the inside of my mouth with a hostile passion that causes my heart to skip a beat. His big hands grab the front of my blouse and tear it open like he’s ripping a piece of paper.

The buttons fly across the room and bounce off the wall. He bends his head down and nips at my breasts, panting like a wild beast while tugging my pants to the floor. I find myself gasping for breath. Is this what lust feels like? If so, I could easily become addicted to it.

He digs his fingers into my hips and turns me to face the wall. He takes both of my wrists in one hand and secures them above my head. With the other, he slaps me hard on my bottom. I cry out more from the shock than the sting and wiggle my ass as his hand comes down on it again. After each smack, he rubs his body all over me, allowing me to feel his growing erection against my ass and thighs.

“You were a bad girl. I need to show you what happens when you disobey me,” he whispers and licks the shell of my ear.

I find myself longing for the next sharp clap of his hand on my buttocks. The mild burning of it is making me wet. His third slap causes me to moan as my insides begin to pulsate and throb. This time, when he rubs his manhood against me, I press my ass into it and rock my hips from side to side. I no longer care about the scary man in the parking lot. I don't care what Torin may have done to him. I just want him inside me. I want to be his little sex toy.

He smacks me one final time then cups my ass in both of his strong hands. He massages the places where his blows landed, and I whimper and bite down on my hand. I hear his zipper open and know that soon, he'll give me what I'm craving. If this is what he calls punishment, I might need to find more ways to be naughty.

He pushes my legs apart and takes hold of my hips. I brace myself against the wall and drop my head as he presses himself all the way inside me. He fills me so completely that I can feel him in the pit of my stomach, and in this position, he's making contact with something that sends wild signals to my brain.

I've read stories about the female G-spot, but I had no idea what it would feel like when a man pressed his cock against it. My every inhibition floats away like feathers in the wind and I cry out, “That feels so good.”

He growls and fucks me harder. “You're mine. You'll always be mine.”

I can feel the orgasm brewing inside me, but he stops suddenly and spins me around again. He lifts me off my feet and stuffs his cock inside me as I wrap my legs around his waist. He braces his hands on the wall beside my head, and I wrap my arms around his neck.

“I want to see your face when you come,” he tells me and I close my eyes. “No, open your eyes and look at me. I want to see it in your eyes. Come on little girl, get your Daddy’s cock all wet.”

I dig my fingers into his shoulders and press down hard on his cock as a tidal wave builds and breaks inside me. He stares through me as my face twists and my eyes roll back. Then, he grits his teeth and his nostrils flare, and I know that he’s coming too. I don’t want this moment of pure connection to ever end, but the trashing, animal lust subsides and he cradles me in his arms.

He carries me to the sofa and sits down, with me still attached to him. I don’t want to let go. I want to keep him inside me so I rest my head on his chest and say, “Just hold me here like this for a while please.”

He strokes my hair and back as we both slowly catch our breath. I don’t know if the danger is over or if some new threat will emerge tomorrow. Right now, I don’t care. I just want to be here with him inside me. The rest of the world be damned.

TORIN

My first order of business when I went to the city was to contact the boss of my current rival and see if he might intervene in my current problem.

What I discovered was that the organization frowns upon any official involvement in beef between associates, and I was an associate when this problem arose. That's problematic because as much as I'd like to permanently rid the world of my current nemesis, Dario Pankatrova, I don't want to bring a mob war to my mother's or Tess's doorstep.

I almost ended him last night in the school parking lot, but he surprised me by bringing backup. I don't make a habit of carrying a weapon when I'm not on the job, and his men are armed to the hilt. That's the only reason I let him leave with his legs still attached, and now I have to wonder when he'll return and how much firepower he'll bring with him.

As a newly promoted Pakhan, I know I'd never allow one of my crews to go off on a personal vendetta instead of making me money. This makes me wonder if this problem might be bigger than I thought and that there may be some corruption in the ranks.

What matters most now is that I somehow continue to build a relationship with Tess while simultaneously putting a permanent end to this situation. I don't know any other way to do that than by bringing the fight to them.

Tess wakes up and finds me sitting alone on the back porch of her cottage.

She joins me outside, wrapping her arms around my neck. “Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, baby. I just forgot how nice it was to breathe in the fresh, clean air. You know how the city is.”

“I do and the pollution is one thing I don’t miss.”

“What do you miss about the city?”

“Hmm, I guess the lights and maybe the convenience of things. It was nice having a gym right around the corner.”

“What do you need a gym for? You’re too little to use the equipment,” I tease her.

“I liked the bikes and the elliptical machines, but now, I can just take a walk outside.”

“As long as it’s daylight, yes, you can.”

“So there’s still a problem, then?”

“You have nothing to worry about. I promise. Now, go get ready for school. I like to check in on my mother so I’ll ride with you.”

“Okay. That sounds nice. I’ll get to spend a few extra minutes with you.” She smiles.

I guess this is how it’s going to have to be for a while. I make up excuses to watch over her so she doesn’t get scared. I don’t care. I’ll do just about anything to be with her.

We enter the school and I reminisce about the days when I was a student here. I hated coming to this place every day. I was more interested in practicing martial arts and working out than learning about history and literature.

My mother was a teacher then, and she didn’t much like my attitude. The place hasn’t changed much in twenty years, but if my teachers looked like Tess, I may have been happier to be here.

I stop into the office to see my mother who greets me with a look of concern.

“Is something wrong, Mama?” I ask as she hugs me.

“I was going to ask you the same thing. Did you find anything out about the man in my backyard? I feel like I haven’t seen you at all since that night.”

“Oh, yeah. Everything is fine. He’s an associate of mine.”

“So I don’t have to worry about you?”

“Never. I can take care of myself. I’ve been doing it for a long time now.”

“Well, it’s good to see you. You and Tess are spending a lot of time together, and I miss you. Maybe the two of you can have dinner with me tonight?”

“Absolutely. What time should we come over?”

“I was thinking we could go out.”

“Out?”

“Yes, out. We still have a restaurant in town, you know, and a pretty good one at that.”

Shit, I don’t want to tell her no but having both of them out in the open together like that is a risk.

“I’m not really in the mood for that. Maybe I can pick something up for us?”

“No. We’re going out. I haven’t dined out in a long time because I hate eating alone. Now that I have company, I want someone else to cook for a change.”

“Okay, then. We’ll go out. Now, if you don’t mind, can I borrow your car? I have some errands to run today. I’ll be back in time to pick you up.”

I drive to Main Street and park across the street from the only restaurant in town. This is something I used to do whenever my boss wanted a night on the town. I’d go first and scope the place out, memorizing the layout and looking for potential security risks.

I walk the perimeter, checking the windows and exits then head inside. I order some lunch and try to commit the faces of the staff to my memory. I remember once when a rival dressed like a waiter to get access to a boss. He was shot and killed before he got out of the restaurant but not before he killed

his target.

Satisfied with both my inspection and my sandwich, I drive to the local jewelry store to pick out a gift for Tess and then to the florist to buy roses for the two women in my life. I spend the remainder of the day sweeping the town like a beat cop on patrol. I find it hard to believe Dario and his crew are commuting out here every day to spy on or harass us. There must be a place here in town where they're holding up and I'm intent on finding it.

I've nearly given up when I decide to drive ten miles out of town to check out the seedy little motel where my high school friends used to host drinking parties. I should have thought of this place before. Dario is drawn like a cockroach to places with bad reputations. Assholes like him seem to blend in well in places like that. I park at the edge of the parking lot and watch for a while.

"It's now or never," I tell myself and approach the black sedan.

When I was in the city, I picked up a GPS tracking device. I was going to put it on Tess's car, but I think tracking Dario is an even better idea. I plant the device in the rear wheel and slip away unnoticed. No more surprises. Now, I'll know when he's coming and be ready.

I skid into the school parking lot just in time to pick up my mother. She gets in the car, but I wait until Tess comes out.

"I didn't get to tell her about tonight," I explain.

"I did. She knows to meet us at Flannery's at six."

I ignore my mother and get out of the car, stepping into Tess's path.

"I didn't think I'd see you until later at dinner," she says as I kiss her cheek.

"I know. I just couldn't drive away without touching you."

"I like that." She shoots a sneaky look at my mother who's grinning at us through the windshield.

"I'll see you later, baby girl."

"I'll miss you. I've missed you all day."

“I’ll tell you what. Go get changed for dinner and I’ll come pick you up in mom’s car. That way we can all drive over together.”

“You don’t have to do that. Flannery’s is close enough for me to walk there.”

“No, I insist. I want a few minutes alone with you before dinner.”

“Alright. That does sound nice.”

I bring my mother home and hand her the bouquet I bought for her.

“What’s this for?” Her eyes brighten. “They’re beautiful, son.”

“It’s just a thank you for your hospitality and for welcoming me into your home like this. I didn’t even tell you I was coming.”

“This is your home too. You don’t have to thank me for that.”

“Then it’s because you’re beautiful and a wonderful mother.”

“I’ll take it.” She grins and kisses my cheek.

I change into a pair of black slacks and a gray silk shirt then drive over to Tess’s to give her the gift I bought for her, but there’s no answer when I knock on the door. I try to control myself but panic sets in and I rush around to the back of the cottage to check the backdoor. I turn the knob but it’s locked as well. My heart races and I start to lose control. I raise my fist to bust out the kitchen window, but Tess opens the door before I throw the punch.

“Why didn’t you come to the front?” she asks.

“I did, little girl. I even knocked. You didn’t answer.”

“I’m sorry. I was finishing up in the bathroom and didn’t hear.”

I can feel the tiny beads of sweat that form on my forehead and dab it with a paper towel from the roll on the kitchen counter.

“You’re sweating? It’s fifty degrees outside.”

“Yeah, well, it’s two hundred degrees inside,” I grumble.

“What does that mean?”

“Nothing. I have something for you.” I hold out the slightly crumpled roses.

“Thank you. They’re lovely,” she says and takes a vase from the old china hutch in the dining room.

Once she’s placed them in water and set them on the table, I tell her, “There’s something else.”

“Really? Wow, what did I do to deserve this?”

“You have no idea what you deserve. You deserve the world on a silver platter, baby girl.”

I take the jewelry box out of my pocket and hand it to her. She gasps as I place it in her shaking hand. She opens the lid of the black velvet box, and I see the diamonds reflected in her eyes.

“Oh, Torin. This is amazing.”

“I’m glad you like it. Can I put it on you?”

“Of course.” She grins and hands me the box.

I remove the heart-shaped diamond pendant and gold chain from the box and place it around her neck. She walks to the hall mirror to take a look, and I inch behind her. I rest my hands on her hips and admire our reflection.

“Do you like it?” I ask her.

“I love it. Do you?”

“It’s pretty but I like the bigger picture more.”

“Bigger picture?”

“Yeah, look. You are in my arms like this. That’s the bigger picture.”

“I like that too.”

She spins around and, standing on tiptoes, wraps her arms around my neck.

“How did I get so lucky?” she asks.

“Lucky? You? No, I’m the lucky one.”

I feel that all-too-familiar tingle in my pants and think that maybe now isn't the time. We're both dressed for dinner, and with the way we make love, we won't have the energy to do it all over again. She feels the tent in my pants and surprises me by putting her hand over my bulge. She strokes my cock through my pants, and I place my hand on hers. "If you don't stop that, I'm gonna put it in your mouth."

She bats her eyes at me and continues to stroke me.

TESS

I'm not sure what's come over me, but this is the first time I've grabbed a man's junk.

I guess when I saw that kissing me was making him hard, I just wanted to show him that he makes me feel the same way. Now, I'm not so sure I'm ready for what comes next. He said he wanted me to put it in my mouth. And then what? Torin knows I have zero experience with boys so he must know he's going to have to guide me through this too.

He pushes down on my shoulders, and I drop to my knees and look up at him. I must look like a helpless kitten begging for his affection. He palms the side of my face, and I smile.

"You have to take it out, baby girl," he tells me so I drop his zipper and reach inside his pants.

I tug so hard I nearly slap myself in the face with his erection. With my hand still on the base, he places his hand on my head and says, "Kiss it."

I press my lips against the head and then slide my tongue across it. He nearly leaps out of his skin as he squeezes my head like a melon. I like making him feel this way. Knowing I can please him turns me on.

He reaches down and takes hold of his manhood, tapping it against my lips, so I open my mouth and wrap my lips around the tip. Placing both hands back on my head, he pushes a bit further inside then gently thrusts forward and back while holding me still. His girth stretches my jaw as wide as it can

go.

“Just relax. I’d never do anything to hurt you,” he whispers and I do my best.

Wanting to take more of him, I press my head forward and his tip slaps the back of my throat, causing me to gag.

“That’s too much, little girl. You’re not ready for that yet.”

I don’t know when I’ll be ready, but I want to keep trying. I want to give him the best head of his life.

“Suck it.”

He groans and tugs on a handful of my hair. A drop of salty liquid falls from his cock and lands on my tongue. I hadn’t thought of that part. Is he going to come in my mouth? The very thought of it makes my heart race. I want him to. I want to taste every bit of it. Just a few more strokes and he’s breathing like he’s just run a marathon. I know it will be soon and I can’t wait for him to finish, but he pulls out of my mouth and begins stroking his dick with his hand.

“No, I want to taste it,” I protest and he grins.

“You want me to come in your mouth?”

“Yes.”

“What do you say?”

“Please?”

“Say, ‘Please come in my mouth, Daddy.’”

Daddy? Damn, I really like that.

“Please come in my mouth, Daddy.”

I say it without a second to spare because as soon as he slips it inside, a deluge of salty-sweet liquid fills my mouth.

“Good girl. That’s my good girl,” he pants and strokes my hair.

He finishes and goes to the bathroom to wash up. I look at myself in the hall

mirror and gasp. My makeup has run down my face, and my hair is a mess. It's a good thing he came by early or we'd miss dinner.

I rush to my room to fix my face and hair before he comes back. Now I'm wondering why he didn't say anything about how ridiculous I look. As I put myself back together, I look down at the beautiful necklace Torin gave me and wonder if there is any significance to the heart shape. If he's planning to give me his heart, I'm ready to take it. After all, I've already given him mine.

We pick up Marta and drive to the restaurant. It's quiet even for a weeknight, and we're seated as soon as we arrive. The owner, Bob Flannery—whose family has owned the only fine dining establishment in town for the last hundred years—comes over to greet us.

“How's business, Bob?” Marta asks as he approaches.

The man shakes his head. “Things are changing around here and not for the better, Marta.”

“I know crime is up but I didn't know you were having problems. Were you robbed?”

“Robbed? Only of my livelihood. There's a gang of shady characters here from the city, and they've all but run off my usual clientele. They show up and cause a scene at least twice a week. I've called the police on them, and they haven't been back this week so maybe it's over. I don't know. I just don't understand what they're doing here. We've never had this problem before.”

I look at Torin and find him looking at the floor. His hands are clenched in his lap, and the wheels are turning in his head. He knows he's the reason these people are here. Knowing him, he wants to fix things for Bob too.

“It's just a shame.” Marta shakes her head.

“What is, Mama?”

“That these things happen everywhere. Nowhere is safe anymore. People have no morals these days.”

“Well, you don't have to worry, Mama. I'll take care of you.”

“But what about Bob and everyone else in town? See, that’s what I’m talking about.”

Torin’s expression quickly switches to one of frustration. “It’s family first, Mama. There’s no way I can protect the whole town.”

“I don’t expect you to. That’s not what I meant.”

“Yeah, well, it doesn’t matter. Looks like that’s what I’m gonna have to do.”

“Torin? What does that mean?” she asks but his phone receives a notification I’ve never heard before. He removes it from his pocket, glances at it, then scans the empty dining room.

“Let’s finish up, please. It’s time to go,” he says and places the phone screen side down on the table.

I reach under the table and place my hand in his. He looks at me and smiles.

“Is everything alright?” I whisper.

“Yes, baby. I’m just a little tense. I promise.” He tries to assure me, but I know there’s more to it than that.

Marta and I wait by the door as Torin takes care of the bill. I see him slip his phone out of his pocket and check it again. Then, he turns and takes us both by the arm, escorting us outside.

He looks up and down the street twice before proceeding to the car. He helps Marta into the passenger seat and closes the door while I start to get into the back. A thunderous crash stops me, and I bang my head on the roof of the car.

“What was that?” I scream.

“Get in the car,” Torin calls back as he reopens the passenger side door and digs for something in my glove compartment.

“Son, what is that? Why do you have that?” Marta yells as Torin rises with a revolver in his hand.

He walks toward me, and my heart sticks in my throat.

“Get in the car, Tess.” He pulls the door open and waits for me to do as I’m told.

Another thunderous boom and the night sky flashes in hues of orange and yellow. Flames break through the windows of the restaurant we just walked out of. Torin steps into the street but stops when he hears his mother call out to him.

“Where are you going? Get back here!” she shouts.

He turns, looks back at the car, and says, “There are people in there. I’m just doing what you told me to do. I’m gonna protect them.”

I think I’m in shock but I can’t take my eyes off the front of the restaurant. Torin enters through the front door, and I hear three loud bangs. Gunfire.

Why is he firing inside the restaurant? I hold my breath and then gasp when the door flies open and I watch Torin drag Bob, the waitress, and the cook out to the sidewalk and across the street. Once they’ve all been brought to safety, he runs back toward the blazing building, but instead of going inside, he rushes down the alley beside it.

We hear the sirens as the fire department approaches, and Marta and I get out of the car to check on Bob and his staff. We watch as the two tanker trucks pull up to the fire, and the fireman jumps out.

I can’t see around the big trucks to know if Torin has returned from the alley, so I cross the street. The smoke is blinding but a figure emerges from the side of the building. I strain my eyes as I pray that it’s Torin. It isn’t. It’s the same man who tried to accost me in the school parking lot. I turn to run from him but plant my face in the chest of another man who snuck up on me from behind. He smells of onions and cheap cologne, and I feel my stomach begin to churn.

The second man shoves something in my face, and the world fades to black. I can still hear the sirens and try to call out to Torin for help, but as hard as I try, I can’t seem to make a sound.

TORIN

The GPS tracker that I placed on the black sedan notified me when the car left its parking spot at the seedy motel.

When I checked, it was heading right into town. I thought I could get Mom and Tess out of there before they arrived, but I cut it a little short. The punk who set the fire is still inside when I go back in. He turns and fires at me but misses.

This game has gone on long enough now, so I fire back. One thing about me is I never miss. He hits the floor, and I call out to the civilians who are still inside. They rush out of the kitchen with terror in their eyes.

“Go outside,” I shout.

“What if there are more of them out there?”

Dammit. I need to find the car so I can finish this, but these fools would rather burn to death than face what might be lurking on the other side of the door. I grab the three of them and force them outside. I see Tess and my mother tucked safely in the car and set these people on the sidewalk beside it before going back to find the black sedan. I know the man I shot.

His name is Yuri Mestrovic. He’s a known associate of the Pankatrova crew and not the brightest bulb in the box. Dario wouldn’t send him to torch this place alone. No, he’s out here somewhere watching, and I’m gonna find him so I can put a bullet in him.

I stand in the vacant lot behind the restaurant and look up and down the street. There's no sign of them so I pull out my phone and stare at the little white dot on the street map. The car is on Main Street where I left Mom and Tess. I rush back down the alley through the smoke and heat but run right into the fire crew who question my presence at an active crime scene.

"We were having dinner here just before the fire. I went in to get the workers out," I explain.

"They're out. What are you doing now?"

"I...I didn't know if I'd gotten everyone. I was checking around back."

"Go take a seat on the sidewalk, hero. The police will want to talk to you," the fireman says.

I march past him toward Tess's car. I don't see the black sedan. They must have split when they heard the sirens.

I see my mother on the sidewalk beside Bob and shake my head. "At least one of them can follow instructions and stay in the car."

But when I arrive at the car and open the backdoor, Tess is gone.

"Mama, where is Tess?" I scream.

She stares blankly at me. "I thought she went to find you."

"Fuck!" I check my phone and watch the white dot heading north on the map. "Stay here. Maybe Bob can give you a ride home."

I look at the shaken restaurant owner who nods at me before I jump in the car and peel away. Dario Pankatrova is going to curse the day he was born. Nobody takes what belongs to me. Nobody.

My phone rings and the caller I.D. blocks the GPS tracker. I decline the call, but it rings again.

"What?" I shout as I hit the accept call button.

"That's no way to talk to the man who's taken your new girlfriend hostage."

"I'm gonna kill you. Is that better?"

“No, you won’t. Considering how quickly you left that podunk diner, I figure you have a tracker on my car. Keep following me. When we get to where we’re going, you’re gonna trade places with little Miss Apple Pie here. I’ll let her go as soon as you surrender.”

“You’re full of shit. Why should I believe you?”

“Because you don’t have a choice. If you don’t do what I say, I’ll just kill her. Then I’ll come back for your mother. Then, when you’ve felt as much pain and loss as you caused me, I’ll kill you.”

“It was a fair fight. Your brother drew on me. He didn’t follow the rules, and he paid for it just like you’re gonna pay for it.”

“You killed an earner and what punishment did you face for it? You got a fucking promotion. That’s justice? No, if I want justice, I’m gonna have to take it myself. Just follow me, asshole. I’ll call you back once we get where we’re going.”

Dario hangs up, and I slam my fist against the steering wheel. He thinks he has the upper hand, and right now, he’s right. He’s leading me out of town, and I need a plan before we reach our destination. I’m not giving myself up to him, but I’m not gonna let him hurt Tess either.

My head is so filled with rage that I can barely see the road, but I know I have to turn onto the highway soon. This asshole is headed back to the city, and I have a feeling I know where this road trip is going to end.

The lot behind the vacant factory is dark except for the light flickering from the last remaining street light. The bulbs have been shot out of the rest, and the lot is riddled with broken glass. This is where Dario’s brother and I had the confrontation that ended with him bleeding out on the factory floor.

I guess Dario thinks there’s something poetic about picking this place. Personally, I think it’s pathetic. He’s just a small-time crook who convinced himself that he’s some kind of tragic comic book villain. I see a lot of these assholes in my line of work, and sometimes, I want to ask them if they know how to read. If they did, they would know that the villains in those stories always lose.

I see the black sedan and drive around to the other side of the building. I’m

not gonna let this asshole ambush me. The phone rings but I silence it and stick it in my pocket. We're not playing his game anymore. Now, we're playing mine.

His call confirms that he's seen me so I pull out of the lot and drive around the corner. I don't know how many men he has in there, so I'm going to have to assess the threat before going inside. I creep silently through the night and begin peering into the first-floor windows. Light comes from the southeast corner of the decayed factory floor. I should have known.

He has my girl tied to a chair right where the chalk outline of his brother faded away. I wonder if his blood still stains the concrete. Soon, his brother will make a stain of his own. There are only two other men with him. If he knew me better, he'd have brought more.

I stand against the brick building and listen as the steel door opens and two men come barreling out.

"Go find the son of a bitch!" Dario cries after them.

They set out looking for me, and I wait until they disappear from sight then make my way to the door. Dario and Tess are alone inside now. It's time for me to make my presence known. I open the door slowly but that doesn't prevent it from creaking on its hinges.

"I told you to go and find him!" Dario shouts. "Don't come back without him."

I hug the wall and step quietly to the left of where he's standing over Tess. I need to come at him from behind so he doesn't have time to react. I can't have him waving a gun over her head. I have to disarm him before he can do anything desperate.

"Your boyfriend must not be too fond of you. All he had to do to buy your freedom was to give up his, and he didn't do it. He ran away like a bitch. He's probably on his way to cry to the boss and beg for his help, but he won't get it. I'm not the only one who's sick of his shit."

"He's coming to get me," Tess tells him. "And you're going to be sorry when he does."

“I don’t know why you’re blaming me. He’s the one who brought this to your little town, not me. I wouldn’t even know you existed if he didn’t lead me right to you. That’s what he does. He ruins everything.”

“No, he’s going to save me and probably kill you.”

Dario grabs her chair and begins shaking it. “He killed my brother right here. Right under this chair. If he doesn’t turn himself over to me, I’m going to kill you right here too.”

I can’t allow him to torment her a second longer. I’m not as close as I wanted to be, but I don’t care. I leap out of the shadows and rush toward him. He raises his weapon and fires. I lunge to the right and take the bullet in the forearm, but I keep coming.

He fires again and misses. He’s getting frantic now. I’m almost close enough to pounce on him. He tries to fire a third round, but I tackle him and drive him to the floor. I slam his shoulder into the concrete and yank the weapon from his hand. He kicks and punches at me, but it’s no use. I’ve lost myself. I don’t know how many times I’ve hit him, but my hands are covered in his blood and simply sliding off his battered face.

“Torin, he’s unconscious.” Tess’s voice brings me back to reality.

I look down at the lifeless man beneath me and consider my next move. As long as he’s alive, he’s a threat to my girl. I can’t have that, but shooting an unconscious man is beneath me. I get off him and untie Tess who throws her arms around me and kisses me.

“I knew you would come. I just knew it.”

“I’m not gonna let anything happen to you, baby girl. I promise. I should have made sure he couldn’t get his hands on you. Did he hurt you?”

“No. They just tied me up. Nothing else. His people will come back. What do we do?”

“If I leave now, he’s just gonna treat his wounds and come right back at us again. I can’t let that happen.”

“What do we do then?”

“See that office over there? Go inside and close the door. Stay quiet.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m gonna wait for his men to come back so we can end this.”

Tess locks herself in the office, and I tie Dario to the chair that once held her. His two henchmen return and see me standing over him with my gun resting against his temple.

“Come in, gentlemen. Drop your weapons and kick them over here.”

They do as I command.

“We’re gonna give this asshole a minute to wake up. Then, we’re all gonna have a little talk,” I tell them as the warm blood that has soaked the sleeve of my jacket drips onto my hand.

Dario groans and tries to lift his head. He winces from the pain and blinks, trying to adjust his vision. I lean in close so he can see me smiling down at him.

“You’re still alive. Do you want to stay that way?”

“You’re not gonna kill me. If you were, I’d already be dead.” He snickers so I shoot him in his left foot.

The other two men fumble about like rats in a maze. I can see that they’ve never been helpless before. They want to fight but they don’t want to be the reason that I put a bullet through Dario’s head.

Dario’s shoulders heave, and he grits his teeth, trying not to sob visibly over the bullet in his foot.

“Now, here’s what’s gonna happen. I’m gonna call the boss and put him on speaker phone. When I do, you’re gonna declare this fucking vendetta of yours over. You will swear that any business you had with me and my people is over. Then, your goons here can take you to get your wounds treated. Understand that there is no second option. If you don’t do it, I’ll kill you right now. If you do it and then come after me later, the boss will have you killed for breaking your oath. Are you ready for me to make this call?”

“I don’t know. I just don’t think you have it in you to kill me,” he spits through the blood from his cheeks.

I grab him by the hair and pull his head to the side. “Listen, you sniveling little bitch. You want to kill me for killing your piece of shit brother. What do you think I would do to protect that little girl in there? You and your brother don’t deserve to breathe the same air as her.”

“Do it. Make the call.”

This isn’t the way I normally end things. In my life, in my work, you never leave your enemies standing, but Tess doesn’t perceive the world the same way I do. I don’t want her to see me as some kind of monster.

The call is made and a broken, bested Dario vows to abide by our agreement. In this world, our word means everything, especially when we’ve given it to the boss. If he wants to earn, if he wants to continue breathing, he’ll leave us alone.

I open the office door and peer inside. Tess is crouched down behind a long, metal desk.

“It’s alright, baby. You can come out now.”

“Are you sure? What happened?” she asks as she brushes the cobwebs off her clothes.

“It’s over. Dario won’t be bothering us anymore,” I say and lead her out onto the factory floor.

She sees Dario’s men helping him to his feet and smiles. “You didn’t kill him.”

“No, I didn’t. Now, let’s get you home.”

She tries to take my hand, but I pull it away.

“You’re bleeding. Did he shoot you? We need to go to the hospital.”

“No, we need to get you home. The bullet went straight through. I’ll take care of it myself.”

We exit the factory, and I look up at the star-filled night sky. The air is crisp

and cleaner than I remember, and I take a deep breath. My girl is safe and by my side. At this moment, all is right in the world.

TESS

For the next few weeks, I watch Torin's behavior.

He's the calmest he's been since we met, which confirms that we're no longer in danger thanks to him. He was expected to return to the city once this issue was resolved, but it's so close to the holidays now that he's decided to remain here with us until the New Year. I'm thankful every day that he's here, but there's a darkness lurking just around the corner. What will I do when it's time for him to leave? He hasn't said a word about it.

It's the last day of school before winter break, and tonight is the long-awaited holiday pageant at school. Marta and I have enlisted Torin to help the crew erect the sets they built from the lumber he helped me deliver.

With everything that's happened since then, it seems like it was so long ago. The kids who found him a bit intimidating at first are now cutting up with him as he lifts the bulky sets over his head and carries them to their marks on the stage.

When everything is in place, Torin comes over and asks, "Do you need anything else from me?"

"We're about to start dress rehearsal. You can stay and watch if you want."

"No, I'd like to be surprised when I see the real thing later. I don't want any spoilers." He grins. "Besides, I have a few things to take care of for later."

"What's later?" Marta eyes him suspiciously.

“I’m taking Tess into the city for a late dinner after the show.”

“Sounds lovely. You can go to the park and see the giant tree. It should be all lit up now. I still have your ice skates in the garage. Maybe you two can go skating.”

“I haven’t skated in twenty years, Mama. I don’t need to break my leg for Christmas,” he replies. He kisses my forehead and the older children giggle. “I’ll be back in time for the show. I promise.”

I watch him exit the auditorium and can’t help but wonder what he’s up to. He’s taken a few trips to the city and had some whispering phone calls lately. I won’t ask him about his work, but I still worry sometimes.

He’s the type of man who won’t let me know if something’s wrong, so I just try to remember how capable he is. Heck, I think he can do anything he puts his mind to.

Dress rehearsal ends and I run home to shower and change before the recital. I have a general dislike for standing on stage in front of all the parents and staff, but I think that’s why Marta put me in charge in the first place. She’s always talking about stepping out of your comfort zone and confronting your insecurities.

Having Torin in the audience will help. I can just stare at him and pretend other people don’t exist. The problem is that when I arrive back at school, I don’t see him anywhere. I go straight into panic mode, thinking about all of the terrible things that might have happened to him. Marta sees the expression on my face and tells me, “He’ll be here. The train was probably delayed.”

The crowd is ushered in and all of the children have taken their places backstage, but Torin’s seat in the front row beside his mother is still empty. The lights dim. I walk to the podium to give the annual welcome address to the parents and look for him one last time, but he still isn’t here. So much for my plan to combat my stage fright.

The audience is wrapping up its round of applause for the lineup of Christmas carols played by the school band, and they’re all looking at me. I open my mouth to speak but hear the auditorium doors open. I can’t hide my smile as I

watch Torin barrel down the aisle to take his seat. He's here. Thank God, he's here.

When the curtain closes, I say goodbye to my class of toy soldiers, elves, and reindeer and meet Torin by the side of the stage.

"I'm sorry I was late. My errands took a little longer than expected. I made it in time for your opening, though. You looked great up there, little girl."

"Thank you but I was terrified."

"Terrified? You stand up in front of these kids every day, don't you?"

"Sure, but they're all five. Teenagers and adults are different."

"Either way, you looked beautiful and professional up there. These people are lucky to have a teacher like you. Trust me, we didn't have anyone like you when I went to school here. Good thing, though. I would have never graduated. The only thing I would have been concentrating on is your ass."

I blush and slap his arm. "Are we heading to the city now?"

"We are." He takes my arm, and we begin walking to the exit.

"We're going out the front? My car is parked in the teacher's lot."

"We aren't taking your car, baby girl."

"Okay, but..."

"Hush now. It's a surprise."

He opens the door for me, and I see the long, white limousine parked against the curb. The parents who are filing out of the school are staring at it too, but Torin pays them no mind. He leads me to the car where the chauffeur opens the door for us.

"This is fancy. What's the occasion?"

"You put on a great holiday pageant, and I want to celebrate."

"I don't know if my performance warranted a limo and driver, though." I giggle.

“What? You don’t think you’re a star? There isn’t a star in the sky that shines brighter than you.”

“That’s sweet. Thank you.”

“No, thank you for coming out with me tonight.”

He opens a bottle of champagne and pours us each a glass. I sip the sweet, bubbly liquid and look out the window as the scenery changes around us. It’s amazing how quickly the lush snow-covered pines disappear and the concrete landscape takes their place. At least, the city looks cleaner under a layer of freshly fallen snow, and the lights hanging from all of the telephone poles make things look a bit more innocent.

The limo stops in front of a restaurant that looks way out of my price range. Torin squeezes my thigh and says, “We’re here.”

“This place is pretty exclusive, isn’t it? I’ve read about it. It’s like the number one hang-out for celebrities when they’re in town. Don’t you need to make reservations like a year in advance or something crazy like that?”

“It is that place, and yes, most people have to make reservations a year in advance. But darling, I’m not like most people,” Torin answers as he takes my hand and leads me to the door.

“Have you been here before?”

“A time or two.”

We enter the restaurant and a man in a tuxedo rushes toward us.

“Torin, I saw your reservation and couldn’t believe it. How long has it been?” He beams, shaking Torin’s hand.

“It’s been a while, Jacob. I trust you have our table ready?”

“Of course, come this way.” The man leads us into the dining room ahead of at least twenty other people who are waiting to be seated.

It seems like someone nods and smiles at Torin from every table we pass. Some of them look familiar, but it’s difficult to place them in this environment. I’ve probably seen them fighting cyborgs or saving damsels

from burning buildings in the movies.

“Do you know all of these people?” I ask, shocked by the circle Torin has kept secret from me.

“Know them? Not really. They know of me and I know of them.”

“Why do they know you?”

“Do you think famous people don’t teeter on the edge of legality from time to time? Hell, they love to drink and gamble, and they have the finances to do it.”

“And that’s how they know you?”

“No. Again, they don’t know me. They know of me. Word spreads and people find out about the business I’m in. Why? Does it bother you?”

“No, it’s just that I’ve never met an actual celebrity before.” It does make me wonder how I stack up to the fashion models watching him from the bar.

“We’re here for a nice, romantic dinner, and I don’t want to think about anyone but you. You’re the most beautiful girl in this room or any other room, and those people are probably wondering what agency you model for or what movie you’re about to star in.”

“Ha, thank you but I doubt it.”

He takes my hand and stares into my eyes. “Don’t ever doubt it, baby girl. You’re the hottest girl in the world.”

As we eat our dinner and the wine flows, I start to feel more comfortable by his side. The idea of supermodels and actresses wanting to be with him doesn’t bother me when I see the way he looks at me. We’re connected in a way that those people will never understand. Heck, sometimes I don’t understand it either.

“My mother will never let us hear the end of it if we don’t go see that tree,” he says.

“Don’t you want to go see it?”

“I do. We just need to make one stop on the way.”

The limo rolls away from the curb and toward a side of the city I've never been to before. It's the exclusive neighborhood where the millionaires live. My parents are well off, but even they could never afford to live in a place like this, which makes me wonder what we're doing here.

The limo rolls to a stop in front of a towering white stone building.

"We just need a few minutes, Dimitri," Torin tells the driver.

"You know him?" I ask as he helps me out of the car.

"Dimitri? Of course, I know him. Why wouldn't I know my own driver?"

"Your driver? I thought you rented a limo for the night!"

"No, baby girl. Dimitri drives me all over the city when I'm working. He works for me."

My head swims as I try to consider Torin Tasios being chauffeured around all day.

"Is that why you don't have a car?"

"In this city? Why would I want to own a car here? Now, if we're going to live in the country, I'll have to look into buying one."

"If we what?"

He takes me inside the modernistic lobby of the white tower and leads me to the elevator. He inserts a key, and we're off to the penthouse. The doors open onto a large living room with a full wall of windows facing out on the city skyline.

"Torin, d-do you live here?" I stammer.

"Yeah, baby. This is me. Have a look around while I make us a drink."

I stumble around the huge space, staring at the art on the walls and the floor-to-ceiling mahogany bookcases. His place doesn't feel cold and naked like the lobby. It feels as if a rich man took his country house and slapped it inside his city house.

"This is impressive. It's beautifully decorated. I love the old-world charm."

“It’s funny how much old-world charm costs in a place like this. My Russian grandmother would never believe it, but this is what makes me comfortable. Besides, I wanted you to see it.”

“I’m happy you decided to show me where you live, but why now?”

“Because it’s time for us to make some decisions.”

“What kind of decisions?”

“Well, do you want to move to the city and live here like this or do you want me to buy a place outside of town so you can keep working at the school and living in the country?”

“Are you asking me to live with you?” My heart pounds in my ears.

“No, baby girl.” He takes my hands and drops to his knee. “I had no idea that visiting the town I grew up in would lead to my home. You. You’re my home, Tess. Wherever you are. So, will you make me the happiest man alive by becoming my wife? Will you marry me?”

“For real?” I mutter as my eyes fill with tears.

“For real. I love you, sweetheart. Marry me.”

“Yes, I will marry you.”

He pulls a ring out of his pocket. Even in this dim light, it’s the largest diamond I’ve ever seen. He slides the ring on my finger and takes me in his arms.

“I love you, baby girl. I’m gonna make you the happiest girl in the world.”

“You already have. I love you, too.”

EPILOGUE

TORIN

The message indicator flashes, and I glance down at my phone while Tess checks out the appliances recently installed in the new kitchen. I read the message once, then again.

“Dario Pankatrova ran into some trouble of his own making. He’s with his brother now.”

I shake my head, but I’m not at all surprised. Anyone who’s dumb enough to come after someone like me is too reckless to last long in this world of ours. I never want to celebrate the death of any man, but I have to admit that the timing is good. I never took my eyes off him after our peace agreement. Like I said, he was reckless and stupid, and men like that can never be trusted completely.

When I asked Tess to decide on the city or the country, it was no surprise to me that she picked the country. We’ve been cooped up in her little cottage for almost a year while our new house was being built. Now, just days away from the birth of our first child, our place is ready for us to move in.

“What are you scheming about now?” I ask Tess, who’s staring at the space next to the staircase in the hall.

“Don’t you think this is the perfect place for the Christmas tree?”

“Christmas tree? I thought we decided to skip that this year. We have to move in and unpack, and you have a trip to the hospital in your immediate future.”

“I know. I wasn’t necessarily talking about this year. We’re going to be spending a lot of Christmas here. This is going to be the spot.”

I wrap my arms around her waist and she pouts. “I can’t wait until you don’t have to stretch so much to get around me.”

“Are you kidding me? That’s my little boy in there. And you just keep getting sexier, my love.”

“Still, I’m excited to finally meet him...and to get my body back.”

“Well, I wouldn’t get too used to that. Thomas is going to need a whole bunch of brothers and sisters to play with.” I kiss her neck.

“One baby at a time, Daddy.”

My mother stops by to see how we’re progressing. She takes one look at Tess and says, “That boy isn’t going to wait five more days. He’s ready.”

“How do you know, Mama?” I ask her.

“The women in our family have always known. I can see where he’s dropped. Look, can’t you see it?”

“Well, I hope you’re right, Marta. I’m ready to move on to the next stage of parenthood,” Tess replies.

I DON’T KNOW if my mother was right or if her putting the idea in Tess’s head got things moving, but our son, Thomas, was born on the same day we moved into our new place. We’d just gotten the bed made when Tess’s water broke. Thomas came into the world just six hours later. He’s a big boy with eyes like his mother’s and a head full of dark hair like me.

On the second night in the hospital, I leave Tess alone for a bit so I can go home and get the nursery ready for their discharge the next morning. The crib and changing table are assembled, and all of the baby supplies have been unpacked and put away. I go downstairs to make myself a snack and stare at the tall, blank space beside the staircase. Shaking my head, I put on my coat

and go out to find my sweet wife the perfect Christmas tree.

Tess told me that she never appreciated the holidays until she took that first stroll to the town square drinking hot cocoa with me when we met. Now, it's her favorite time of the year. I know she wanted to celebrate Thomas' first Christmas in a special way so this tree is my way of letting her know that I heard her.

MY MOTHER IS WAITING for us at the house when we arrive. She opens the door for me and coos at the little bundle I'm carrying in the car seat. Tess is next through the door and stops just inside the threshold.

"What is it, baby girl?" I grin.

"Torin, you got me a tree?" She gasps.

"Oh, that? That was nothing, baby girl. Just a quick trip to the forest, and well, there it is."

"It's so beautiful. I love you, Daddy." Her words catch in her throat.

"No, no crying today. Today is all about love and family. We can cry later," I say as I hand off the baby to Mom and take Tess in my arms.

"You make me so happy. I don't know what I did to deserve you, but I'm the luckiest girl in the world."

"I'm glad, baby, but you've got that backward. I don't know what I did to deserve you. You just gave me a son."

"Well, you helped." She blushes. She never fails to get me worked up with her innocent little gestures. "This is happily ever after. Right, Daddy?"

"It is, sweetheart. Merry Christmas."

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

TESS

“Come on, we don’t have time,” I shout out the backdoor to the children who are playing ball when they should be getting dressed for dinner.

“Your mother said now,” Torin adds the three of them come running.

Thomas is seven now. Tania is almost six, and Tatia is four. I considered leaving them with a sitter tonight, but Marta insisted that they come. She said she wanted to show off her grandchildren at her retirement party.

“I can’t believe your mother has finally decided to retire,” I tell Torin as I straighten his tie.

“I think she just wants to have more time to spend with our kids.”

“Well, there’s nothing in the world wrong with that. She’s always welcome here.”

“And what about you? Have you given any thought to her suggestion?”

I haven’t discussed it much with Torin, but the concept has weighed heavily on my mind since Marta first introduced the idea. I continued teaching after Thomas was born, but when Tania arrived, it became nearly impossible for me to take care of the kids and the house when Torin was in the city. I needed to spend more time at home so I ended my career.

Now, with the kids being a little older and Marta retiring so she can help out with them, she’s suggested that I take her place as principal. I’ve been

stewing on the idea ever since. With Torin's income and real estate equity, we don't need the money. I didn't need to go back to school after Thomas was born. I just didn't want to leave my kids in the middle of the school year.

"What do you think, Daddy?" I ask him.

"You know you don't have to work, but I'm not going to try to talk you out of something you want to do. The school board seems game to have you as the new principal so it's really up to you, baby. You do whatever it is that's going to make you happy."

"Well, that wasn't very helpful." I laugh.

He takes me in his arms. "I'll tell you what. If you want me to make this decision for you, just tell me which way you're leaning and I'll put my foot down."

"That's not necessary. We have the whole summer to make this decision, anyway."

We load the children into the SUV and head out for the banquet hall. Marta is more than just my mother-in-law. She was my first and only friend when I moved to town.

Lost and saddened by my parents' disappointment in me, she lifted me and made me feel like being a teacher didn't make me a failure. That was just my parents' warped idea of how things should be. She made me feel proud of myself and the choices that I'd made.

If it wasn't for her, I would have never met the man of my dreams and had this beautiful family with him. I'll do anything for Marta, and I'm so happy that the town is taking the time to honor her for her contribution to the education of so many generations of children here.

"What are you smiling about, baby?" Torin asks, seeing me lost in my own head somewhere.

"I was thinking about your mother. I'm so happy to have her in my life."

"She feels the same way about you."

We arrive at the hall and unload the children. "Remember what I told you.

This is Nana Marta's special day so you need to behave."

"We will mamma, we will papa," they say and scurry off to play with some children from Thomas' kindergarten class.

Marta is stationed at the end of a long banquet table, greeting all of the guests as they arrive, and her face lights up when she sees us.

"Happy retirement, Mama," Torin teases and kisses Marta on the cheek.

"If you loved your Mama, you'd go get me a drink from the bar. I feel like I've been standing here for days."

"That's because you're very popular." He grins and heads off to retrieve that drink for her.

"So, Tess, have you made a decision yet?" Marta asks me.

"I have not, but I think I am getting closer. What would you do if you were me?"

"That's not a fair question. I don't want to sway you either way."

"But you did it, right? You had Torin and you became principal."

"I had to. There was no choice to be made. As a single mother, I needed to make as much money as possible. You don't have the same worries that I did."

"So, if you didn't need the money, you wouldn't have taken the job?"

"No, that's not what I mean. This job has been incredibly fulfilling for me. I'm just saying that I didn't have a choice but to take it. It was a good thing for me but not a choice."

"Well, you've been just as helpful as Torin." I shrug.

"You'll decide when the time is right. The right choice will just come to you."

Once all of the guests have arrived, Marta takes a seat at the table of honor. Torin, the kids, and I join her, but as soon as the band begins playing, Tania and Tatia grab Torin's hands and pull him off to dance with them.

Torin picks up one girl with each arm and sways to the music. It's the sweetest thing, the girls are over the moon.

"He's a good dad," Marta says.

"He's the best dad."

They return to the table just in time for Marta to be called to the dance floor where she's presented with the key to the city and a plaque commemorating her long and successful career. When she comes back, Torin says, "I have something for you too, Mama."

"You didn't have to," she argues.

"When I was little, I used to pester you all the time about taking a summer vacation, remember? All of the other kids bragged about trips to Florida or Mexico, and I just spent the summer kicking around town or at that church camp you tried to send me to. God, I was so jealous of those kids."

"You mean the one that sent you home for unruly behavior?" Marta laughs.

"Yeah, that one. Well, now that you're retired, I think it's only fitting that I take you on summer vacation."

"What do you mean?"

"All of us. We're going to Mexico."

"You're kidding!" Marta cheers.

"I am not. I no longer have to hear about how you can't because you have to work or how we can't afford that right now. This is it. We're going to Mexico, and you're coming with us."

As I listen to their exchange, my pending decision becomes clear to me just like Marta told me it would. I see the president of the school board and say, "Excuse me. I'll be right back."

I catch the president just as she's about to order a drink.

"Excuse me, Dr. Pendleton. Can I have a moment?"

"Oh, Tess. It's nice to see you. We've missed you since you stopped

teaching. What can I do for you?”

“I just wanted to let you know that I’ve thought about the principal position, and I’ve made my decision. I appreciate the offer, but I’m going to turn it down.”

“May I ask why? If it’s about the salary, I think we have room to negotiate.”

“No. I appreciate that, but it’s not about the salary. I want to be there full-time for my family. I know a lot of people can’t do that, and I think it’s a very special gift my husband is able to give me. It’s a freedom I shouldn’t take for granted.”

“I think that’s very sweet, Tess. I’m happy for you.”

I return to the table and take my seat. Marta and Torin both look puzzled as I sit back and grin.

“Why do you look like the cat that swallowed the family goldfish?” Torin asks.

“Because I love you and I love my life. I don’t need a job to prove who I am or what I can do. I can stay at home and teach my own children. I can be there for you when you come home from the city and not have to worry about board meetings or administrative responsibilities. And we can take our kids on summer vacations or winter vacations or any kind of vacation we like because you gave us that kind of freedom.”

“So, you turned down the job offer?”

“Yes, I did. Marta told me that the right decision would just come to me, and it did.”

“Good, baby girl. Now maybe we can start planning for baby number four.”

“What?”

“Well, I didn’t want to say anything until after you made a decision on the job, but I think we need to try for another boy or two. There are a lot of girls in the house right now.” Torin grins.

“Are you sure about that? It gets harder and harder for me to get back in

shape each time.”

“Who are you kidding? You’re just as beautiful and sexy as you were the first time I saw you.”

THE WHITE SAND beaches and crystal blue waters of Acapulco are breathtaking. Marta and I sit under an umbrella and sip our margaritas as Torin and the kids play on the shoreline. It’s another picture-perfect day of our two-week vacation.

“I’m not used to relaxing like this. I could get used to it,” Marta says.

“Torin told you he’d buy you a place down here. You should take him up on it. Then you can come and go as you please.”

“I might just do that. It’s tempting for sure.” She calls the waiter over and begins to order us each another drink, but I stop him before he goes back to the bar. I have special instructions for my drink.

“What’s wrong? Didn’t I get your order right?” Marta questions me and I suppose I can’t keep my secret from her any longer.

“You can’t tell Torin. I haven’t told him yet.”

“Tell him what?”

“I’ve been drinking alcohol-free margaritas this whole time because I’m pregnant.”

“Oh, Tess. When did you find out?”

“Just this morning. I had a feeling. I’m going to tell him tonight after the kids go down.”

“Mum’s the word. Congratulations.” She reaches over to hug me.

“Hey, what are we hugging for? What’s the occasion?” Torin asks as he towels off.

“I was just thanking Tess again for this lovely vacation. I’d hug you too but

you're covered in wet sand." She gives me a wink.

WITH THE KIDS sleeping soundly in our beachside cabana, I pour Torin a glass of wine and meet him out on the patio.

"Everyone all tucked in?" he asks, taking the glass from me. "Where's your wine?"

"I'm okay. I just want to sit with you and enjoy the moonlight."

He pulls me onto his lap, massaging my shoulders.

"Daddy, I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Anything, baby girl. You know that."

"Remember when you said you wanted another boy?"

"Yes." He turns me around and looks into my eyes.

"Well, I can't tell you if it's a boy or a girl just yet, but..."

"We're having another baby?"

"Yes." I squeal so loud I have to check to make sure I didn't wake the kids.

"Oh, baby girl. That's amazing. Thank you."

"Thank you?"

"Yes, thank you. Thank you for being the best wife and mother a man could ask for."

"Do you really feel that way?"

"EVERY SINGLE DAY."

"That's good because that's how I feel about you too. I didn't know that a father could want to be so involved with his children. Mine was never like

that, but you, they adore you. They light up every time they see you. And as a husband, well, you're still the sexiest man alive. You protect me and care for me. You provide everything for me. When you make love to me, I feel like the most desirable girl in the world."

"Because you are, sweetheart. You are."

He kisses me deeply and slides his hands under my dress. I rub myself against his erection and whisper, "Take me, Daddy. I want you inside me."

He wastes no time yanking my panties off and pulling me down on his swollen cock. He knows that even when I'm on top of him, I want him to take control. I derive my pleasure from knowing how I make him feel. I want him to dominate me and treat me like his little girl. It's been this way since our first time together, and I don't ever want it to change.

The End.

THANKS FOR READING!

Did you know you can get free books from time to time by signing up for my mailing list? Just click the link below to sign up so you'll be the first to know about new releases and get the next free book when it's ready...

www.subscribepage.com/lenalittle

And please check my revised website

www.lenalittle.com

ALSO BY LENA LITTLE

Yes, Daddy Series

- Book 1: [Daddy Next Door](#)
- Book 2: [Bossy Daddy](#)
- Book 3: [Paying Daddy's Debt](#)
- Book 4: [Daddy's Halloween](#)
- Book 5: [Daddy's Italian Friend](#)
- Book 6: [Russian Teacher](#)
- Book 7: [Daddy's Housekeeper](#)
- Book 8: [Possessive Daddy](#)
- Book 9: [Protective Daddy](#)
- Book 10: [Daddy's Destiny](#)
- Book 11: [Dear Daddy](#)
- Book 12: [Russian Doctor Daddy](#)
- Book 13: [Daddy's Christmas](#)
- Book 14: [Italian Mafia Stalker](#)
- Book 15: [Daddy's Friend](#)
- Book 16: [Possessive Policeman](#)
- Book 17: [The Debt Collector](#)
- Book 18: [Her Hitman](#)
- Book 19: [The Goalie's Girl](#)
- Book 20: [Hitman's Target](#)
- Book 21: [Daddy's Secret](#)
- Book 22: [Stepbrother Daddy](#)
- Book 23: [Daddy For A Day](#)
- Book 24: [Stepbrother Daddy's Christmas Eve](#)
- Book 25: [Guardian Daddy](#)
- Book 26: [Terror of Tuscany](#)
- Book 27: [My Irish Stepbrother](#)
- Book 28: [Valentine's Day Daddy](#)
- Book 29: [Stepbrother Firefighter](#)
- Book 30: [Paying My Daddy's Debt](#)

- Book 31: [Texting The CEO](#)
Book 32: [Defending Daddy](#)
Book 33: [Easter Daddy](#)
Book 34: [Detective Daddy](#)
Book 35: [Dean Daddy](#)
Book 36: [My Italian Stepbrother](#)
Book 37: [Biker Daddy](#)
Book 38: [My Irish Roommate](#)
Book 39: [My Russian Protector](#)
Book 40: [Mafia Daddy](#)
Book 41: [Bodyguard Daddy](#)
Book 42: [My Russian Roommate](#)
Book 43: [Italian Professor](#)
Book 44: [Mob Boss Daddy](#)
Book 45: [Paying Daddy's Debt Collector](#)
Book 46: [Sheriff Daddy](#)
Book 47: [Olympic Obsession](#)
Book 48: Russian Daddy

A Possessive Man Series

- Book 1: [Jealous](#)
Book 2: [Possessive](#)
Book 3: [Stalker](#)
Book 4: [Discipline](#)
Book 5: [Obsession](#)
Book 6: [Control](#)
Book 7: [Motorcycle Man](#)
Book 8: [Possessive Puppy](#)
Book 9: [Possessive Mechanic](#)
Book 10: [Lawyer](#)
Book 11: [Nanny For The Italian Mafia](#)
Book 12: [The Italian](#)
Book 13: [Butcher of Belfast](#)
Book 14: [Addiction](#)
Book 15: [Psycho Professor](#)

- Book 16: [Principal Obsession](#)
Book 17: [Psycho Cop](#)
Book 18: [Possessive Pitcher](#)
Book 19: [Possessive Surgeon](#)
Book 20: [Possessive Veterinarian](#)
Book 21: [Psycho Trucker](#)
Book 22: [Possessive Publisher](#)
Book 23: [Doctor's Orders](#)
Book 24: [Landlord's Obsession](#)
Book 25: [Possessive Greek Chef](#)
Book 26: [Psycho Therapist](#)
Book 27: [Texting the Boss](#)
Book 28: [My Italian Roommate](#)
Book 29: [Possessive CEO](#)
Book 30: [Stalker Stepbrother](#)
Book 31: [Possessive Doctor](#)
Book 32: [Boss' Obsession](#)
Book 33: [Hot CEO](#)
Book 34: [My Brother's Possessive Friend](#)

Dad's Best Friend

- Book 1: [Dad's Policeman Friend](#)
Book 2: [Dad's Italian Mafia Friend](#)
Book 3: [Dad's Blacksmith Friend](#)
Book 4: [Thanksgiving With Dad's Best Friend](#)
Book 5: [Dad's Doctor Friend](#)
Book 6: [Christmas Eve With Dad's Best Friend](#)
Book 7: [Dad's Jealous Friend](#)
Book 8: [Dad's Russian Friend](#)
Book 9: [Dad's Navy SEAL Friend](#)
Book 10: [Dad's Cop Friend](#)
Book 11: [Halloween With Dad's Ex-Best Friend](#)
Book 12: [Baby For Dad's Best Friend](#)
Book 13: [Dad's Mafia Secret](#)
Book 14: [Dad's Possessive Friend](#)

Book 15: [Dad's Cop Buddy](#)

Her Bad Boy

Book 1: [Opposites Attract](#)

Jealous Psycho

Book 1: [Jealous Cop](#)

Book 2: [Jealous Fighter](#)

Book 3: [Jealous Firefighter](#)

Book 4: [Jealous Protector](#)

Book 5: [Jealous Boss](#)

Book 6: [Jealous Lawyer](#)

Book 7: [Jealous Italian](#)

Book 8: [Jealous Detective](#)

Book 9: [Jealous Savage](#)

Book 10: [Jealous Serial Killer](#)

Book 11: [Jealous Stepbrother](#)

Book 12: [Jealous Bodyguard](#)

Claimed

Book 1: [Claimed](#)

Book 2: [Her Protector](#)

Book 3: [Protective Cop](#)

Book 4: [Security](#)

Book 5: [Protective Artist](#)

Book 6: [Hot Cop](#)

Book 7: [Claimed By My Stalker](#)

Book 8: [Claimed By The Convict](#)

Book 9: [Claimed By The Devil](#)

Book 10: [Claimed By My Stepbrother](#)

Book 11: [Claimed By The Hitchhiker](#)

Her Mafia Man

Book 1: [Baby For The Mafia](#)

Book 2: [Paying Dad's Italian Debt](#)

A MMF Ménage Romance

Book 1: [Her Two Doctors](#)

My Boyfriend's Dad

Book 1: [My Boyfriend's Bossy Daddy](#)

Book 2: [My Boyfriend's Doctor Daddy](#)

Book 3: [My Boyfriend's Billionaire Daddy](#)

Book 4: [My Boyfriend's Hitman Daddy](#)

Book 5: [My Boyfriend's Big Daddy](#)

Book 6: [My Boyfriend's Grumpy Daddy](#)

Conklin County Daddies

Book 1: [Bounty Hunter's Obsession](#)

Book 2: [Possessive Rancher](#)

Book 3: [My Brother's Locksmith Friend](#)

Steamy Shorts

Book 1: [Possessive Stepbrother](#)

Book 2: [The Librarian](#)

Game On

Book 1: [Protective Player](#)