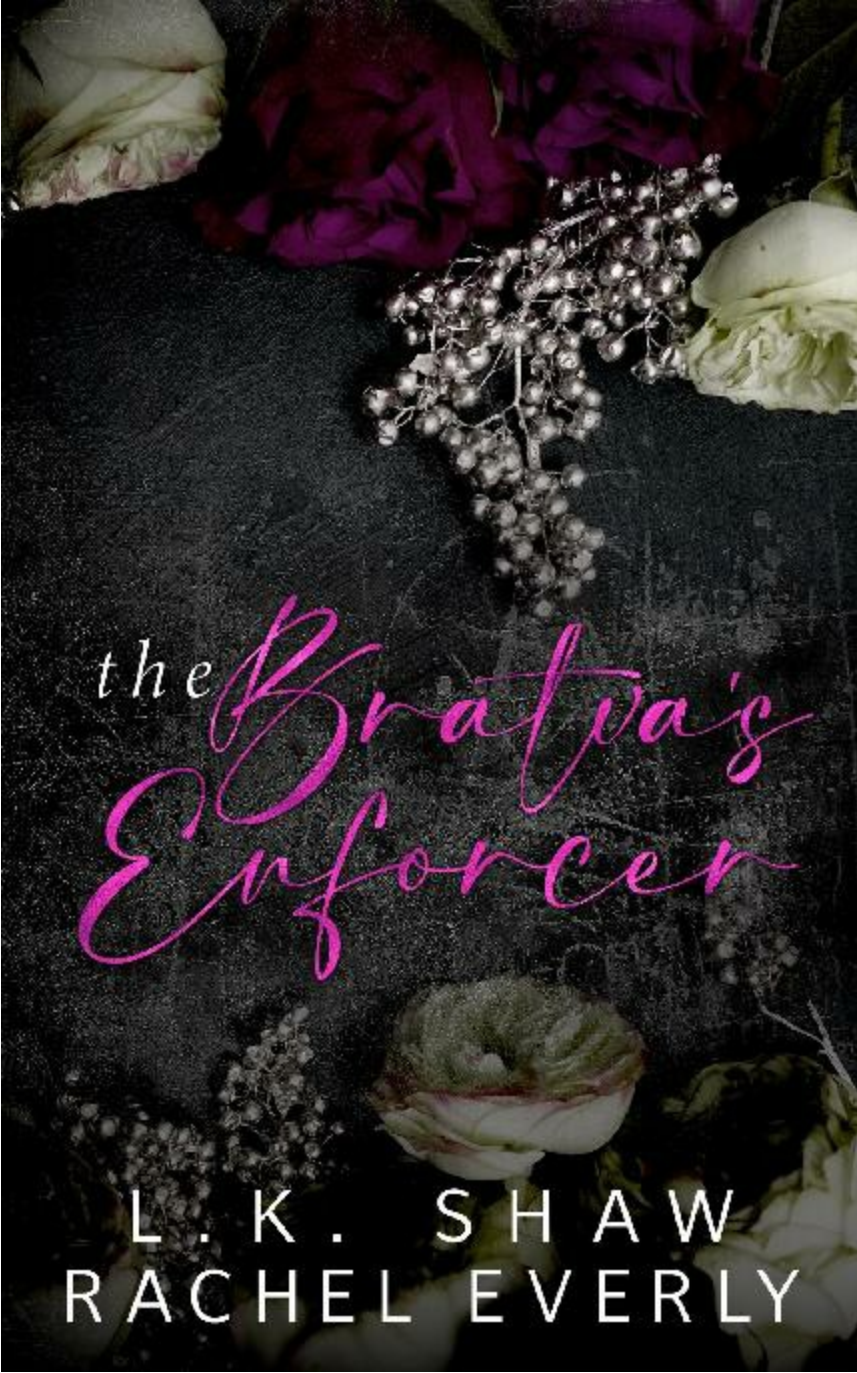




*the* **Bratva's**  
**Enforcer**

L. K. SHAW  
RACHEL EVERLY



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L . K . S H A W  
R A C H E L E V E R L Y

# THE BRATVA'S ENFORCER



L.K. SHAW  
RACHEL EVERLY

The Bratva's Enforcer

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# CHAPTER 1



NATALYA

MURKY, HALF-FROZEN PUDDLES LIE SCATTERED ALONG THE SIDEWALK. I SIDE-step around each one, and my boots click-clack on the cement. *Almost there.* I pick up the pace—my cropped leather jacket is no match for the chilly Chicago winds coming in off the water. The cold air curls up my shirt and down the back of my pants like fingers gripping my flesh.

“*Lapachka, you must be careful.*” My father’s frequent warning rings inside my head.

I have to be careful because I’m a woman. Careful because I’m young, pretty, and smart. Careful because the men in our world don’t always respect when a woman tells them no.

Considering my dad works for dangerous people, it’s no surprise he’s tried to keep me away from their wandering eyes. And any time I ask why he keeps working for them, I get the same answer. “*Because, lapachka, the money is good and I need to take care of the family first.*”

A high-pitched yowling stops me in my tracks and I almost stumble to my knees. My heart pounds a staccato beat, and I hug my messenger bag to my chest. A skinny cat darts out from beneath a parked car and knocks into me

before taking off down the alleyway. “Watch it, furball!”

Once my breathing returns to normal, I hurry down the block toward the deli. *Please don't have locked up yet.* If I want to be paid, then I need to get some invoices from Dad so I can finish the monthly accounting before I leave for a trip with my friends.

Although I'm not keen on Lucy trying to set me up with this guy that's coming, even if it will even out our numbers or if she seems to think Ben and I might click. Maybe the campfires, s'mores, and what she calls a “frat party's worth of alcohol” will make it all worth it. Plus, Ben is a total doppelganger for the Hemsworths, so maybe it won't be so bad.

When was the last time I got buzzed or even went on a date? It has to have been before college. Caring for my mom, brother, and sister take up all my free time. Not that I'm complaining. My phone chimes and I pull it out of my bag, the screen lighting up in the dimness of the evening.

DAD:

Don't worry about the books. I'll finish them tonight

I'm almost there. Last month's numbers aren't adding up and I want to take a look

I said I'd fix it

I'm about to text him back but he's already typing another reply. I stop in front of the deli.

I'll see you at home

He's really been frustrating me lately, only giving me half the stuff I actually need to do the job he's paying me for. Since I'm here, I'll just pop in, say hello, and quickly finish the account reconciliation. Then I'll leave. I have just enough cash on me to take the bus back home when I'm done. I might even have time to stop at my favorite coffee spot for a peppermint

mocha latte and cake pops for my siblings as a treat.

I push the unlocked door open and step inside. I flip the switch, but the lights don't come on. Did someone forget to pay the bill? I've been coming to this deli since I could walk, so I find my way in the near-darkness past the counter and to the door that leads to the back room. A sliver of light comes through a small crack where someone didn't close it all the way. I push it slightly farther open and gasp before quickly jumping back. I wait a minute to make sure no one noticed the sound and then edge forward again to peek around the side.

Four men, including my father, stand in the center of the room. The two standing closest to Dad work for the Bratva. And even though his back is to me, there's no doubt who the massive one with broad shoulders, thick, muscled arms, and short-clipped brown hair is.

"Where the fuck is the money, Boris?" The same husky voice that fills my dreams nightly drips with rancor.

The chill from outside creeps back in and clutches at my heart.

Daddy, what did you do?

"I can get you the money, Sasha. I just need more time." My father's voice wavers. Whatever money he's talking about, this doesn't sound good.

Mom had another infusion at the hospital two weeks ago. What if it hasn't been health insurance that's paid for any of Mom's new treatments lately? I grip my messenger bag tightly to my body. Should I call the police or will that make it worse?

"I've given you all the time I can. The Pakhan demands satisfaction," Sasha growls and circles my father who swivels his head trying to keep him in his sights.

I can't take my eyes off him either. The first time we'd met had been years ago. Before I started college. Even then my dad warned me about Sasha Baranov. Time has only made him more attractive. Harsher. More brutal. And yet, he's still the man of my fantasies with his hulking muscles and



angled jaw. Why is he asking my dad for money?

One of the men, Yuri, steps to the metal counter against the wall and turns on the large deli slicer sitting at the edge of it. The familiar whirring squeal fills the air. Then he steps toward my father. My gaze darts between the slicer and Yuri. Oh, god. He wouldn't, would he? My stomach churns and I squeeze my eyes shut. *What do I do?*

Dropping my bag onto the floor, I try to slow my frantic breathing. I didn't cry when I sprained my ankle dancing my last show. I didn't cry when our dog Vlad had to be put down or when mom was diagnosed with cancer. I'm not about to cry over this.

"Dad! What's going on?" I push open the door and attempt to rush over to my father, but Ilya and Yuri block my way with their guns drawn. I nearly pee myself.

"Natalya, no!" My father yells.

"Stand down." Sasha grabs my dad and pushes him toward Yuri. Ilya steps back but keeps his eyes on me. "Natalya, what are you doing here?"

"Me? What are you doing here?" I sweep my hand out.

He ignores me and nods toward Yuri, who drags my dad toward the meat slicer, and then turns to me again. "I will ask one last time, what are you doing here after dark, little Natalya?"

I don't like the way Sasha says my name or how my stomach flutters when he does. He cocks his head demanding an answer. His earring twinkles.

My throat dries up, and I swallow. "I'm here for the invoices to reconcile the accounts."

He grunts and turns to my dad who's trying to escape Yuri's hold, but failing. "I didn't realize this was a family affair, Boris. The Pakhan will be disappointed, but I'm sure he'll have uses for your daughter. Go ahead, Yuri."

Sasha crosses his arms over his chest. His muscles bulge beneath the inky

black cable knit sweater.

“Stop, please!” I step toward him and he holds up a hand to his lackey, who pauses. How can he do this? Who would hurt another human—my father, of all people?

Maybe it’s not too late to call the police. Except my phone is still in my bag at the door.

Sasha rubs a hand over his well-trimmed beard. “What are you thinking, solnishko?”

“Why are you doing this?” My voice shakes. I take in his wide-legged stance as if he might reach for me if I were to run.

“Boris has taken a lot of money from the business. Money that isn’t his to take. It would have been easier if it had been from,”—he glances around—“one of the other businesses, but he chose this one. The one the Pakhan has a soft spot for. His grandmother’s deli.”

“Dad? Please tell me you didn’t.” I can’t stop shaking.

“Your mother’s treatments, and your college tuition,” he sputters. “I had to. I thought I could make the money back after a few guaranteed bets.”

He says this like it makes perfect sense. Because apparently stealing is logical if you do it from the bad guys. A category in which Sasha and his boss firmly land.

“How much?” It comes out shaky.

“Natalya,” he pleads.

“How much fucking money did you take?” I clench my fists.

“Three million.” He weeps and Yuri edges him closer to the meat slicer.

I can barely swallow the information down. I don’t have anything worth three million dollars or three lifetimes to earn that much back.

“Do it, Yuri. I don’t have all night.” Sasha turns, clearly dismissing me. “Ilya, text the cleaners.”

My eyes follow his line of sight. He’s so cold and calm about chopping someone up. Dad’s face is close to the machine and the whirring vibration

ripples all the way across the room to tickle my entire body. Silver metal circles and flashes. Dad cries. I have to try and save him. Mom needs him. Luka and Lydia need him. I *want* to need him, but this feels like betrayal. He didn't protect us. Which means I have to.

"Wait. Stop. Please," I beg.

Sasha holds his hand up again and time freezes.

"Solnishko, what will you give me if I do?" He steps toward me, in my space, and reaches up to caress my cheek.

My eyes close and, for the first time, I let the tears fall. "I'll give you whatever you want. Do whatever you want. Just please don't hurt him."

"You are asking the impossible." His thumb rubs back and forth catching the tears and smearing them across my skin. He slides his hand to the back of my neck and tilts my head up. Our eyes meet, his dark as obsidian, and I fall down the rabbit hole willing him to do something.

"Please. I'll do anything you want. Anything." I sob.

Sasha studies me a moment longer. "Maybe there is something, solnishko."

## CHAPTER 2



SASHA

I STARE DOWN INTO NATALYA'S GRAY-GREEN EYES, SHIMMERING WITH TEARS that shouldn't turn me on but do. I sense the tension in Yuri and Ilya, as well as the acrid scent of fear wafting off the thief mixing with the pungent odor of bleach. My focus, however, is homed in on this slight woman who has no idea what she's just offered me. My cock is so hard I have to force myself not to adjust my jeans and the zipper that presses against it.

"Hold, Yuri." I trust he'll follow my command without question. At least none he'll voice aloud.

No doubt word will reach the Pakhan about what went down here, but I can't find it in me to care. It's not as though my obsession with my solnishko is a secret from him, even if he doesn't approve. Without taking my eyes off Natalya, I address her father.

"Your debt is now mine. Your *daughter* is now mine." Her eyes widen and she sucks in a sharp breath that makes her small but perfect breasts rise. "You have one month to pay me the three million you stole from the boss, plus interest. For every day you are late, she will pay the price. Then I'll come for your wife and other two children until you are left with nothing."

I continue staring at Natalya, daring her to look away. Beneath my fingers, her pulse quickens. I glide my thumb along her jawline, savoring the smooth silkiness of her skin. She trembles under my touch.

“You said anything. Are you prepared for what that means, solnishko?”

Her eyes change from more green to more gray. She nods shakily. My grin is triumphant. At last, I shift my attention from her to my two associates and the sniveling coward who continues to quake with fear, his face red and tear-streaked. “One month.”

I nod at Yuri, who releases Boris and shuts off the meat slicer. The older man nearly collapses, but manages to stay upright. He barely casts a glance at his daughter. Shame clings to him. He won’t meet my eyes, either.

“I’ll have it for you by then. I swear.” His voice wavers.

Experience tells me not to believe him. What will I do if he fails to meet his end of the deal? Am I truly prepared to follow through on my threat? *Worry about that another time.*

I grip Natalya around the upper arm and lead her toward the exit. She digs in her heels and tugs, trying to loosen my hold on her. “Wait. Let me talk to my dad for just a minute.”

“You can talk to him when he brings me my money.”

“Please, Sasha.” She lays her small hand over mine, a desperate plea in her eyes.

Fuck. “You have one minute.”

She sags in relief, and I let go of her, already regretting it. Not only because I miss touching her, but because Natalya doesn’t need to know how helpless I am against her wishes. She approaches Boris and stops directly in front of him. Whatever she says is soft enough I don’t catch it, but it makes him stiffen. He finally meets her gaze, and then it drifts over her shoulder to meet mine. His Adam’s apple bobs with his hard swallow and he glances back at Natalya, giving her a jerky nod.

With a rigid spine, she returns to me. “I’m ready.”

“What did you say to him?” I’m curious.

She shakes her head. “Nothing that concerns you.”

I grip her chin and lift it, forcing her to crane her neck to meet my eyes. “Everything you do from this moment on concerns me, solnishko.”

Her mouth tightens and she refuses to answer. I let it go for the moment. There are other ways I can show her just how wrong she is. Natalya walks forward, sweeping past me with her head held high. I follow right on her heels, stopping when she bends to pick her bag up off the floor on the other side of the door. Before she can loop it over her head, I take it from her hands.

“Hey, give that back.” She tries to grab it, but I hold it out of her reach.

“I’ll carry it. There’s nothing in there you need right now.”

“You have no idea what I need,” Natalya says through clenched teeth.

I chuckle and palm her nape again, the silken strands of her hair gliding through my fingers. Then I lean down and brush my lips over her ear. She tries to jerk her head away, but I tighten my grip enough that she freezes. “That’s where you’re wrong. I know exactly what you need, and I’m going to give it to you.”

Because I can’t resist, I nuzzle the side of her face, breathing in her sweet and delicious fragrance. I press an open-mouthed kiss along the side of her neck and glide my tongue across her flesh, dragging in her flavor. She shudders. Having made my point, I straighten and peer down to find her wearing a heavy-lidded expression of arousal. Natalya blinks and her gaze shoots to mine. Any pleasure she experienced is wiped away and she goes back to glaring at me, anger radiating off her.

“Let’s go,” she bites out.

I place my hand on her lower back and guide her safely through the darkened interior until we step outside where my car is parked on the street. Not that I expect her to run, but I walk her around to the passenger side and open the door. She glances at me in surprise as though no one’s ever done

that for her before. I may be a cold-blooded killer that most of Chicago fears, but this is my solnishko. The least I can do is treat her like the treasure she is.

Once she's settled, I climb behind the wheel, set her bag on the floor behind her seat, and make my way down the brightly lit street. The deli is almost right in the center of West Town on Division Street. Locals call the area "Little Russia". While I weave my way through the city toward my penthouse, I cast several glances over at Natalya. Tension radiates from her and she keeps wringing her hands in her lap, the nervous gesture bringing a slight grin to my lips.

"Why were you at the deli so late?"

She jumps at my voice and her head whips in my direction as though she forgot who she is with. After a beat, she clears her throat. "I told you. I was there for the invoices to reconcile the accounting for last month. The numbers were off and I couldn't get all the receipts to match." She gives a small self-deprecating chuckle. "Of course, I know now that they were never going to match since the missing funds were probably part of what my dad took."

A hint of bitterness creeps into her words.

"Yes, you told me that already, but my question is why were *you* there for the invoices? Your father is the Bratva's accountant—or was, rather." It had been clear back at the deli that Natalya isn't part of her dad's thievery. Her emotions are too close to the surface for her to have been faking the shock and anger she exhibited when the truth came out.

Other than the occasional illumination when we pass under a street light, it's dark inside the car, so I can't be sure, but I'm almost certain her cheeks redden. She raises and drops a shoulder and tips her head down.

"I've always had a knack for numbers, I guess. Ever since I was little. Dad started taking on new businesses about five years ago and it quickly became too much for just him, so I helped. I really enjoyed it. It's what made me decide to major in accounting." Natalya laughs although it's a bit forced

and bitter. “I figured it was easier than fighting for leads. There are a lot more jobs available for accountants than there are for a star ballerina plagued by injuries.”

I’d seen her dance only once, but she had kept me captivated, unable to take my eyes off of her. Even at seventeen, she’d possessed so much grace and elegance. It was clear then just how talented she is. I could have stood there all night watching her, but Aleksei had interrupted. He didn’t say anything, but it had been more than obvious he didn’t approve of my fascination with Natalya. And not only because of the sixteen-year age difference between us.

She shifts her body away from me and it’s obvious she’s done sharing. Finally, we reach my high-rise that sits along the lake. I drive into the underground garage beneath the building and park in my personal space. Before I can walk around to the other side, she’s already out of the vehicle with her arms wrapped around her waist. She appears so fragile. It’s an illusion though. My solnishko is far stronger than anyone gives her credit for, including herself. I grab her bag from the backseat and cross the concrete, my footsteps echoing, to the elevator. Soft footsteps follow.

Natalya shifts nervously the longer we ride in silence. As though she can’t take it anymore, she turns to me. “What happens now?”

My brow raises. “What do you think will happen?”

I wait patiently as she bites her lower lip, offering a brief glimpse of the narrow gap between her two front teeth. Something about that sliver of space turns me on. Who am I kidding? There isn’t anything about her that doesn’t. I’ve been semi-hard almost from the moment she stepped into that back room.

“I think you’re going to fuck me.” Natalya whispers it so quietly I have to strain to make out the words.

She has no idea. I close the distance between us, and she stumbles backward until she hits the elevator wall and there’s nowhere else for her to



go. Her palms slam against the mirrored surface at her hips, and she closes her eyes tightly. I trace a line down her cheek with my fingertip, once again taking in the softness of her skin. I can't wait to feel how silken the rest of her is. I've imagined her beneath me more often than I can count.

I don't stop the path my finger takes down Natalya's neck and between the opening her jacket provides where her shirt is visible. I trace the neckline, which dips down to showcase a hint—a tease, really—of cleavage. Back and forth I caress, barely grazing her skin. A flush climbs from the top of her chest all the way to her cheeks. She's hot beneath my touch.

“Open your eyes, solnishko.” The command isn't loud, but most certainly firm, and doesn't leave room for anything but compliance.

Slowly, her lashes flutter and lift, exposing the bright green irises and dilated pupils.

“I'm most definitely going to fuck you. More importantly, you're going to love every minute of it.”

## CHAPTER 3



NATALYA

MY WHOLE BODY SHUDDERS AS HIS WORDS ECHO INSIDE MY HEAD. SASHA takes a step back and I drink him all in. From the muscles bulging against the knit of his sweater to his jeans straining from the thickness of his thighs. His lips are moving, but whatever he's saying is lost beneath the ricochet of his announcement that I'm going to love him fucking me. There's no doubt he believes it. I do as well. I've dreamed about it often enough.

The elevator glides to a stop and the doors open. Sasha sweeps his arm out and I take a few hesitant steps forward until I'm standing in an open concept entryway. He strides past and for a brief second, I consider darting back into the elevator, but before I gather my nerves, the panels close with a soft whoosh.

I sag against the wall next to it as my fingers curl into fists at my hips. Sasha turns and stares at me with an intensity that causes me to shift my legs and rub my thighs together in order to abate the tingles in my body. I'm burning up with temptation but I'm also ice cold from the reality of my situation.

I've been taken by the Bratva's enforcer.

Unable to look away, the sexual tension between us thickens, as does the silence. Will he fuck me as soon as I move? Throw me down and just take me? Expect some degrading act? Fear laces with arousal. I've kissed boys here and there. The closest to touching I've gone was before my last recital when Lance Buchannan cupped me inappropriately during a dance lift. I haven't thought of that in years. He was mugged after the show, injured, and never danced again. My guess is karma had something to do with it, but the memory doesn't help as I stare into dark eyes intent on devouring me whole.

Sasha closes the short distance between us. His hand moves up into my hair at my nape and squeezes slightly. His thumb gently rubs up and down like I'm a scared pet ready to bolt. I am scared, but exhaustion is closing in. I couldn't fight him off if I had to. More importantly, do I want to?

"Come, solnishko."

I lick my dry lips and his attention falls to them. Neither of us move and the question spills from my mouth before I can stop it. "Will you do it now?"

He grunts and takes a step back crossing his arms over his chest. His body continues to block out my view of what I presume is his fuck pad. He probably brings all sorts of women here. I don't like how that makes me feel. Except, he isn't mine. I'm not really his, either, and this *arrangement* isn't permanent. If I can hold him off for the next thirty days, I might be okay.

"Will I do what, Natalya?" His gaze bores down and the tingles from before intensify.

"F-fuck me?"

Sasha chuckles, a loud booming sound that's startling. I try to move back, but I'm already pinned against the wall. Trapped in here with a killer and, most likely, a madman. What will he do to my father if he can't pay in the month he's given him? What about my mother and my siblings? I bite my bottom lip. His eyes narrow.

"I don't fuck scared little girls." His Russian accent hits the consonants hard and he steps back into my space.

I shift my weight. He puts his hands up on the wall on either side of my head, and I turn my cheek to rest on the cool wall as his breath skates over my face and neck. He smells a little like the deli, briny pickles and salty meat, but it's Sasha's unique scent that permeates my senses. It's dark, spicy, and masculine. His nose bumps under my eye, and I squeeze them shut to block out his stare. A tear escapes and I hold a shuddering breath back.

“When I fuck you, solnishko, you will be begging me for it.”

I gasp and open my eyes. He pushes himself off the wall and walks deeper into the open room.

“Come. I don't like having to repeat myself.” Sasha waves his hand in the air and, like a good pet, I follow his command.

As I step down into the living room, my thighs rub together. Shame washes over me. My emotions are like a ping pong ball bouncing back and forth. My core is damp and my breasts ache where he grazed his hand earlier. That's never happened before with anyone else.

He heads toward the kitchen, leaving me standing there while a sense of loss comes over me. I glance around. Huge, blacked-out, floor-to-ceiling windows distort the outside view. At the end of the sunken living room is a U-shaped sofa. I let my fingertips touch the buttery soft leather and follow Sasha into the kitchen where he's pulling open both sides of an extra large refrigerator. Lights hang over a white marble countertop.

“Hungry?” he asks over his shoulder.

“No,” I grumble, but my stomach decides to prove I'm a liar and growls.

His hands flex over the door handles before he reaches in and grabs several items. He shuts the door and turns, placing a few containers on the counter. I slide myself up on a bar stool while he opens them, grabs plates and utensils, and then brings everything over to me.

The selection of salads, sliced meats, and other assorted foods smell divine. It all reminds me of home when my mother was well enough to cook these things from scratch. Luka and Lydia always fought over the piroshki—

they love the small meat pies—and kutia pudding.

“You will eat something.” Sasha holds a fork out for me.

“Nyet.” Since he didn’t take no in English for an answer, maybe he’ll do so in our mother tongue.

He puts the fork down and walks around the counter to stop in front of me.

“Would you rather eat or fuck?”

“What?” He can’t be serious. There’s no way he’d actually make me choose, would he?

“You can eat something, or I can fuck you.”

“Excuse me?” My voice screeches, echoing around the penthouse. “Did you hear me begging?”

Sasha’s gaze intensifies. “I can smell your arousal soaking through your jeans. I figured you changed your mind.”

I swallow back any smartass remarks and reach for the fork. He picks it up before I can and holds it out of my reach. My face burns like it’s on fire. I’ll eat, if that will temporarily keep him out of my pants. Despite my attraction to him, I’m not ready for this, and he’s a full on wrecking ball when it comes to my emotions.

“Ask me nicely, solnishko.”

I try grabbing it, but he continues to keep it out of my reach. Teasing me like a school-yard bully who taunts the girl he likes.

“Please.” It comes out in a growl.

“Please what?” Sasha cocks his head and shows me his perfect teeth.

In another life, or even a few hours earlier, I might have imagined he was flirting with me. Apparently Bratva enforcers have a sadistic sense of humor.

“May I please have the fork so I can eat something?” The words climb out of my throat like cut glass as I suck down my pride.

“So you can beg prettily. I will keep this in mind.” Sasha grins.

He could—would—have killed my dad tonight. He could have maimed him

with the slicer, but he didn't. I guess I'm supposed to be grateful for that. He finally extends the fork toward me. I grab it, but he doesn't let go. There's a brief tug of war before he relinquishes it. A part of me imagines stabbing him with it, but that won't help my situation.

He pushes a salad in front of me. I duck my head and dig into it. I'm hungrier than I admitted to and shovel the food into my mouth. Flavors burst across my tongue. They're so good I can't stop the moan.

"Keep eating. I'll be back shortly." Sasha leaves the room.

I dig into the other containers, unconcerned with his whereabouts for the moment. There's a foil-wrapped piroshki that tastes better than my mother's, though I'll never admit that out loud. By the time I'm stuffed, my energy has waned and the exhaustion of the day returns. I glance around for my messenger bag and find it on a table by the couch.

Slipping off the stool, I rush over to check for my phone. I need to make sure Dad got home in one piece. Plus, Mom will be worried if I don't call, considering she still thinks I'm heading out of town. I also need to message Lucy. She'll freak out if I don't show up at her house in the next hour.

"Looking for this?"

I jump at Sasha's voice and turn. He's only wearing low slung sweatpants, and water glistens on his skin, drawing my attention downward. Shadows form obvious creases and valleys between his spread legs which does nothing to hide the bulge between them. His broad chest is covered in tattoos that appear to tell a story. I shake my head to focus. There's a smirk on his face as he holds up my phone between two fingers.

"Yes, actually. I need to check on my mom, and my friend is expecting me to be at her house at any time." I wrap my arms back around my middle, insecure under his gaze.

"I am sure your father will have filled her in." He steps down into the living room.

"How do I know you didn't have your goons finish him off?" I bite my

bottom lip again.

He crosses the distance between us and rubs his thumb across it. “Don’t do that, solnishko.”

I release the breath I’m holding as I stare up into his eyes.

“Ilya and Yuri follow orders, unlike your father.” He hands me my phone and brushes a lock of my hair back.

The gesture somehow encourages me to believe him. Then he palms my nape again and pulls me to him. His grip is like a collar of sorts, although I’m strangely compelled to go along with it. I step closer and breathe in his dark, spicy scent. After his shower, there’s no longer any evidence of our deli encounter.

“Call your mother and your friend, but do not tell either of them about our arrangement.” He leans his forehead against mine and his accent grows thicker with each word.

I nod. “Okay.”

“Natalya,” he warns with a gentle squeeze of my neck, as though he doesn’t believe me.

My nose is practically butting up against his. I lick my lips and freeze because my tongue touches him, swiping a droplet of water into my mouth. A low rumble comes from his chest. I try to step away but he squeezes my neck ever so slightly tighter. I swallow, and his thick fingers work up and down my throat. His hand is big enough to circle it. The sensation of being owned, controlled, and subdued by him makes me flush under his grip.

“I promise, I won’t say anything. Just please don’t hurt my family or my friend.”

“Make your calls.”

Turning my back on him for some privacy, I call my mom first. I hate lying to her about still going on the weekend trip. Next, I open the messaging app. Lucy’s already messaged me a few times excited for the weekend that isn’t going to happen, for me at least. She’s gushed about Ben and how the

cabin is set up and maybe things will click between him and me. Maybe I'll finally lose my v-card. Which isn't far off from my current circumstance.

I craft a message quickly not wanting to get Sasha angry. I hit send and peer up into his expectant face.

“What did you tell her?”

“That I had a new boyfriend and he wouldn't like it if I went with them.”

His face morphs into a sinister grin. “Good girl.”



## CHAPTER 4



SASHA

*BOYFRIEND.* SUCH A JUVENILE TERM, AND YET I ENJOY HOW IT SOUNDS coming from Natalya’s lips. Lips I’d pictured wrapped around my cock as I stroked it in the shower. I hadn’t lied. I *don’t* fuck scared little girls. Although I have no qualms about killing someone—including her father—with a single command and without an ounce of guilt, I have no desire for my solnishko to fear me. Which means patience and a cold shower with only my hand to give me release. For the moment anyway.

I sense Natalya’s weariness—I’m sure from the adrenaline crash—and settle onto the couch. “Come, sit with me.”

She hesitates and bites her lower lip again, a sign of how nervous she is. I don’t repeat myself—merely keep my eyes on her—but rather wait until she makes the right decision on her own. When I don’t force the issue, she takes slow steps forward, setting her phone down on the table first, until she stands in front of me. I reach for her hand and instead of drawing her down beside me, I tug her onto my lap.

“What are you doing? Let me up.” Natalya wiggles and pushes against me.

I merely wrap my arms around her and hold her until she settles, all while trying to control my hardening cock. I do a terrible job, because with one more move it slips between her legs. She freezes and stares at me wide-eyed.

“Have you finished?”

She nods shallowly.

“Good, then relax and talk to me.”

An adorable wrinkle appears between her brows. “About what?”

“Anything you would like.” I won’t tell her it’s because I love the sound of her voice.

At first Natalya remains rigid and quiet, but as though she realizes I’m not going to do anything more than hold her, she slowly relaxes. She’s so tiny sitting here in my arms. I’ve never been more aware of my size than I am with her. My cock hardens a bit more picturing how tight her virgin cunt is going to be when I finally fuck her.

“I’m not really sure what to say.” She twists her fingers together.

“Tell me about dancing, then.”

Natalya jerks away from me slightly and stares with surprise. “Why do you want to know about that?”

Because I want to know everything about you, solnishko. “I believe it is something you enjoy, is it not?”

She shrugs, but I sense an underlying grief. “Yes, although I don’t really get to do it much anymore.”

“Why not?” It is something she is born to do. I don’t like that she has stopped.

At last she sags against me and rests her head on my shoulder. “Between Mom being sick, trying to take care of Luka and Lydia, and all my classes there hasn’t been any time. They rely on me. Not that I mind. They’re my family and I love them. But I do miss it. I miss getting lost in the music. In the movement. When I dance, everything around me disappears. It’s magical.”

I swear, here and now, that Natalya will dance again soon. I'll make it happen.

She gives a little laugh. "That was probably more than you wanted to hear."

"Not at all. You light up when you speak of it. I can hear in your voice how much you love it."

She sighs softly, her breath ghosting along the side of my neck. "What about you? I know you work for Mr. Sokolov. Do you have any family?"

I flinch the tiniest bit. "The Pakhan and our brothers are my family."

"That's not the same." Her voice has grown soft with fatigue and she sinks deeper into me.

Natalya brings her hand up to rest on my chest. Her fingers curl tugging lightly on the mat of hair that grows there. I cover them with mine savoring the feel of her bare skin. If only the rest of her were just as bare.

"Sometimes families of your own making are better than blood."

"I s'pose," she murmurs and then her breathing evens out.

Several minutes pass while I wait for her to say something else or to snap awake remembering where she is, but she remains still. Certainly not how I planned for the evening to end when I claimed her as mine. But perhaps this is better. Perhaps it will ease her fear of me a little. I remain sitting with Natalya asleep on my lap, until my own eyes grow heavy.

Carefully, I stand, holding her tight against my chest with her legs slung over one arm while the other supports her back, and walk to my bedroom. Using my elbow, I turn on the light and lay her on the turned down bed. First I remove her shoes, then her pants, and lastly her shirt, until she is only in her bra and a tiny scrap of fabric that barely covers her cunt. My fingers itch to remove those, too, but I leave them. I do, however, remove her bra.

In the center of Natalya's small breasts, her red nipples are as hard as diamonds, no doubt from the cold. I cover her with the sheet and blanket, remove my sweatpants, and crawl in behind her to curl my body around hers.

My cock nestles in the V of her ass and I palm her breast. Unable to resist, I pinch the hardened tip. Her back arches and I slip even further between her legs. The heat of her cunt burns in the most delicious way. I slide my hand down her stomach and beneath the satin covering her.

She's completely bare of any pubic hair. I don't want anything getting in my way of feeling and tasting every inch of her. I circle Natalya's clit with my fingers and she pushes into my hand, increasing the pressure of my touch. A tiny whimper spills from her lips. I find the best movement and keep rubbing. Soon, she's soaked my hand. Even in sleep, she responds so well. Her body knows what it wants, despite the fact that her mind still fights me.

I continue my sensual assault, circling and rubbing her little swollen nub, and then slowly ease a finger into her tight channel. Fuck. She squeezes me so well. I rock my hips a little, creating friction against my cock and torturing myself with the fact that I can't bury it deep inside her. Not yet. I want my solnishko fully awake when I fuck her the first time.

Natalya moans and then shudders as her orgasm hits and more wetness spills from her soaking her panties and my hand. I give her clit a little pinch that makes her tremble once more before bringing my fingers up to my mouth and licking all her juice from them. She's got a sweet but musky flavor. I can't wait to drink it directly from the source.

Ignoring the almost primal need to fuck her, I palm her breast again and close my eyes. There will be time soon enough to satisfy my desires.



I'VE ALWAYS WOKEN WITH THE SUN AND TODAY IS NO DIFFERENT. THE LIGHT is muted by the blacked-out windows, but still the heat of it rouses me. Natalya is plastered to my side, her head on my shoulder, an arm thrown over my chest, and her leg wrapped around mine. Her glorious hair is a tangled mess spread out across the pillow behind her. She's never been more

beautiful. As though sensing my gaze on her, her eyelids slowly open, then widen, and she shoves herself away from me with a shriek. I barely catch her before she tumbles over the side.

“Oh my god, why am I naked?” She tries covering herself, but I pin her arms above her head, which pushes her chest out.

She kicks and thrashes so I throw my leg over hers, effectively holding her in place. Keeping her wrists bound together in one of my hands I palm her breast, gently kneading it, and then plucking the sweet, pebbled tip. She twists and curses at me, trying to get me to release her, but she only succeeds in turning me on even more. My cock thickens against her thigh and all her movements cease.

“That’s better.” I keep my eyes on her breast as I circle the nipple with the tip of my finger. First the left, then the right. Beneath my touch, they grow even harder. Tighter. Without stopping the circling motion, I raise my gaze to hers.

Fear and arousal war with each other in her eyes, which have shifted to bright green. She bites her bottom lip so hard, I’m surprised she hasn’t made herself bleed. For a brief moment, I want her to, so I can swipe my tongue across it and lap up her blood. I want to taste her.

“You’re naked because that is how you will sleep with me,” I finally answer her. “I want access to your body when you’re in my bed. Your breasts. Your cunt. Your ass. They all belong to me, Natalya. Don’t forget why you’re here.”

Tears well in her eyes and one spills out of the corner, gliding down her temple to disappear in her hair. “Don’t hurt me.”

I recoil. “Why would I hurt you? You will feel nothing but pleasure from me. You got a small glimpse of how it will be between us last night. You came apart so prettily in my arms.”

“What?” she shakes her head. “No.”

“Oh, yes.” I slide my hand down and cup her cunt over her panties. Then

I slowly rub my finger up and down the seam, adding just a little pressure when I graze her clit. “You don’t remember how you pushed your sweet heat into my hand. How you silently begged for more. Fuck, you taste so good.”

I keep up the movement and soon Natalya’s panties are soaked again. A small amount of blood appears on her lip. I lean forward and lick it off her. She moans and I raise up to meet her gaze. The fear has melted away, leaving only arousal in its place. She parts her legs a little further, something I’m not sure she’s even aware of, and her eyes drift shut. My finger pauses at her clit and through the wet fabric, I rub it the way she liked me to last night. Just as she’s about to reach her peak, I pull my hand away and roll out of the bed to stand over her.

Her eyelids fly open with a cry of disappointment. When her gaze drops to my cock she swallows. The movement causes more pre-come to leak from the tip as I picture her swallowing my seed. But I told her I want her begging for me to fuck her. Based on the way she’s staring at my swollen length, I won’t have to wait long.

## CHAPTER 5



NATALYA

MY BODY IS GOING HAYWIRE. I'D BEEN SO CLOSE AND THEN...NOTHING. I stare at Sasha's hard length and swallow. How is he even going to fit? A cool draft crosses over me, and I shudder. The satin sheets make me feel both dirty and decadent in ways I never knew existed before. With the cold air, my body craves his warmth like an addict. My hand grazes my belly and comes away wet. My fingertips rub back and forth through Sasha's pre-come. *I wonder what it tastes like?* As though reading my thoughts, his nostrils flare and I swear he grows larger before my eyes. He's impressive, and not just because he's the Bratva's enforcer. A title he's definitely earned.

"Enough, solnishko." He grabs my wrist and tugs me up and out of the bed.

"Hey, let go!"

Sasha ignores my plea as I stumble behind him into a large bathroom suite that's brightly lit. I ignore my topless state for a moment and stare at the glittering white marble walls with veins of gold shot through it. My nipples tighten from the cold, but all I can focus on is the prettiest bathroom ever. Not that I have many to compare it to. This one could belong to an upscale

hotel or one of those mega-mansions owned by some famous celebrity. The whole space glows under warm fluorescent lighting and heat kisses my feet.

“Why is the floor so warm?” I scrunch my toes.

“Hmm?” He murmurs and puts fluffy towels on a rack before turning on the shower. One that is nearly big enough to host a small dinner party.

“The floor, Sasha.”

“My sweet little dancer has not known such luxury before?” He gently palms my neck and directs me toward the warm cascading water.

He isn't hurting me, but I still shake my head to try and tug his domineering hand off me. Of course, he refuses to let go until I step inside the steamy shower where he backs me up against the wall so the water can reach me but not hit me in the face. The glass walls fog up quickly, enclosing us in a private oasis.

Before I can stop him, he rips off my panties and drops the pale pink satin to the shower floor making it appear crumpled and sad.

“I liked those.” I place a hand over my lady parts to try and maintain some semblance of modesty that Sasha is determined to break me of.

Sasha reaches above my head drawing closer. His dark spice tingles in my nose and I breathe him in.

“I like them better off. Don't worry, I'll buy you a hundred more pairs.” He pops the lid on the bottle he's holding and squeezes out a gel into one hand.

He rubs the two together, lathering it before massaging it into my shoulders and skin. His touch is heavenly, and I clench my jaw in an attempt to stop my moan of pleasure.

“Only a hundred?”

Our eyes track each other under the rhythmic waterfall of the shower and he continues to wash me, not leaving any area untouched. Soon it's not just the shower warming me. My cheeks bloom with a mixture of desire and embarrassment. Sasha doesn't waste time and moves in closer, tipping my



head back. His fingertips trace my brows and his thumbs make their way down my neck and over my collarbones like I'm porcelain and precious.

"To start." He dips down and puts his lips on mine.

He sucks gently, licking the space I yield to him. Unsure what to do with my hands, I place them on his chest. He takes them in his grip and raises my arms overhead, threading his fingers through mine as he deepens the kiss and brings me under the fall of water. His knee rests between my legs, and I rub myself against it. The coarse hair on his thigh tickles my core sparking my arousal.

"Sasha," I moan between nipping kisses.

Never in a million years would I have thought I'd be here with this man after he threatened my dad and stole me away.

"Solnishko," he growls, rubbing his thick hard cock against my belly.

He perches the other leg on the bench behind me and leans in, one hand loosening his hold on mine. He grips his engorged flesh, pumping himself up and down, and presses his head into my shoulder. His groans match the force of his pulls. Some inexplicable urge rises up inside me.

I want to be the one bringing Sasha pleasure.

"C-can I touch you?" I tug my hands from his grip and he releases me.

Once I'm free, sudden shyness takes over. *I don't know what to do.* I'm sure my blush reaches my toes.

He lets go of his straining shaft, the flared head deeper purple in hue, places my hand in his, and wraps it over his intimidating girth. I swallow with trepidation. He firms his hold and molds me to him. My free hand reaches for his waist and slides down his muscular backside, tugging him closer. Our foreheads touch and both of our gazes are locked downward as I pump him slowly under his guidance.

"Yes," he encourages.

I squeeze him, testing my limits, and then my finger slides over his slit. Sasha's cock pulses under my thumb. He growls and takes my hand that

graces his rear and cups it to his balls. I gently make a juggling motion and he spreads his legs wider, crowding me against the wall.

“Soon I want your lips sucking me dry.” He jerks his hand over mine, increasing the speed.

In seconds, he spurts into my palm and continues, at what feels like minutes, emptying himself. Sasha finishes at last but apparently isn't done with me. He picks me up and my legs instinctively wrap around him. He presses me into the tiled wall to devour my lips once again. I thread my fingers through his hair, clenching them tight, preparing to make him bald if he tries to stop kissing me.

“Easy.” He nuzzles my neck and pulls my arms and legs from around his body. He reaches around me and adjusts the water.

“You stopped.”

He clearly wants me, so why does he keep stopping? It only leaves me more confused.

“For now.”

I open my mouth, but Sasha cups his hand over it and gives me a look that says to keep my mouth shut. Impulsively, I lick it. His eyes narrow, making promises for later. He grabs another bottle, squirts the liquid in his hand, and proceeds to wash my hair, gently massaging my scalp. I sigh with pleasure. Then he tips my head back, carefully rinsing the shampoo out before repeating the process with conditioner.

Have I ever been cared for so sweetly?

We finish showering and exit the warmth and fog where Sasha dries me just as carefully with a heated towel. He walks naked back into the bedroom with a swagger in his step. I follow.

He opens the closet door, steps inside, and pulls a few things off hangers and out of drawers as I stand in the doorway. Everything is immaculate and has its place. I turn back to the bedroom taking in the expensive sheets and furniture that probably cost more than I'll make in my lifetime.

“How can you afford all of this?”

Sasha brushes past me and sets his clothes on the bed. He pulls on a pair of boxer briefs and adjusts himself before pulling up dark gray slacks. Still shirtless, he tosses me one of his dress shirts and resumes dressing. I hold it against me waiting for an answer to my question.

He finishes putting on his shirt and then peels off my towel.

“Sasha.” I cover my body with my hands but it’s no use. He pushes them away, slides the shirt on me, and buttons it up. His eyes take me in as he rolls up the sleeves and stands back.

“Second rule, do not ask questions about my work. It’s safer for you.”

I snort. “I didn’t even know we had a first rule.”

“We will have many, but I’m starting with the easy ones. The first is that you keep our little arrangement to yourself.”

I roll my eyes. “I bet you bugged my phone already.”

“Natalya.” Sasha manhandles me forcing my gaze to his dark gaze and fear trickles back in. “You are mine no matter how we came to be, but I’m not above a few punishments to make sure you follow my rules.”

His eyes demand a response and I nod.

“Otlichno,” he murmurs. “Come. Let’s eat something.”

Sasha leads me out into the living room and stops short, so I bump into him.

“Blyat.”

I peek around him, curious to why he’s cussing.

“Hello, Sasha.” A familiar man sits in one of the chairs in the living room flanked by four other men. All are wearing suits and dark sunglasses.

“What is this? Men in black?” I mumble to myself.

Sasha keeps me behind him, but moves farther into the room and down the step until we stand in front of Aleksei Sokolov, his boss and head of the Bratva. The last time I saw him was a couple years ago at a wedding my family had been invited to. I’d accidentally collided with him and then Dad

embarrassed me by scolding me like a child in front of everyone.

There's an air of boredom surrounding him as he sips clear liquid from a crystal tumbler that I suspect isn't water despite the fact it's not even eight a.m.. He sucks on the end of a cigar, blowing acrid smoke up into the air. I put my hand on Sasha's lower back, and he tenses under my touch. Fear slides in.

"The debt will be satisfied," Sasha says as though already knowing why the man is here.

"Three million dollars?" His boss scrutinizes me and I shift my weight nervously.

I don't have a stitch of clothing on underneath this oversized dress shirt and the cool air isn't helping. What I wouldn't give for a sweater and some damn jeans.

"I'm good for it," Sasha tells him.

His boss chuckles. "No doubt you are, but is she worth it?"

"Hey! I'm standing right here!"

All five men glare at me. I shrink back. *That might have been a mistake.*

Mr. Sokolov snubs out his cigar in the tumbler and snaps his fingers. Two of the four men advance on us and drag me away from Sasha.

"Aleksei." Sasha steps forward but the other two block him.

His boss rises from the chair. "Disrespect must be handled. First the father and now the daughter?"

He strokes his chin and the two holding me tighten their grip.

"She'll be punished. I promise you." Sasha gives me a withering stare and I gulp back any bratty retorts.

Mr. Sokolov waves his hand and I'm taken away into another room. Before the door shuts, locking me in with the suited guards, his voice reaches me.

"You and I are going to discuss this debt along with your woman's punishment."

## CHAPTER 6



SASHA

WHILE I EXPECTED ALEKSEI TO HEAR ABOUT LAST NIGHT AND BE EXTREMELY displeased, what I did not expect was for him to show up at my place unannounced. There must be more to Lovensky's thievery than I've been told. And while Aleksei is the Pakhan and leader of our entire organization, he's also a friend.

"If you threaten Natalya again, we're going to have a problem." The two of us glare at each other, neither giving an inch. "I don't give a fuck what you do to her father. He deserves any punishment coming to him. But she's mine to deal with how I see fit."

He waves me off, entirely unconcerned with my warning. "I don't approve of this obsession you have with your little dancer. I also know that you don't care." He pauses. "So long as she does not become a distraction, do whatever you would like with her. But Sasha, what were you thinking letting her father off so easily? If word gets out—"

"It won't," I interrupt and Aleksei raises a single finger.

"If word gets out, then our enemies will think us weak. You do not steal three million dollars from the Bratva—from *me*—and expect to walk away.

There must be consequences to actions.”

I run my hand down my face. “And there will be if he doesn’t return the money to me in a month. It’s not unheard of for a man to sell off his daughter to clear his debts.”

“But that’s not what he did.” My boss tilts his head and his eyes flash with pity. “He’s never going to pay back the money. And then what? You made promises of retribution. Are you going to be able to follow through with them?”

Damn Aleksei for bringing up what I’ve been trying to avoid. “I don’t know.”

“You should have just killed him and then begged the daughter for forgiveness. Or not. You are too soft with her. One of these days it will be your downfall.” He lightly smacks my cheek a few times without taking his eyes off mine before snapping his fingers. Valeryi heads in the direction Dima and Grigoryi took Natalya.

Moments later, the four of them return. My solnishko’s face is pale and there is fear in her eyes. I ache to reassure her, but not with Aleksei and his men here. He’s right. I am too soft with her. She rushes over and throws her arms around my waist, clinging to me. She’s trembling. My boss gives me one more steely glare and then he and his men get in the elevator leaving us alone.

I unwrap Natalya’s arms from me and cup her chin. “They didn’t hurt you, did they?” I might have to kill someone if they did.

She shakes her head. “No. Just stared, which made me extremely uncomfortable since I’m not even really dressed.”

I’m pissed that anyone else besides me saw her wearing only my shirt. Her body is meant for me and me alone. I take her hand. “Come, let’s get you something to eat. You’ll feel better after.”

Natalya lets me lead her into the kitchen and climbs up on the bar stool at the island. “I’m not sure I’ll be able to eat anything. My stomach is still a bit

queasy from nerves.”

I step between her legs, spreading them wide. The bottom of the shirt parts and just slightly exposes her cunt. She tries closing them, but I grip her hips and settle into the cradle they form. She stares at the middle of my chest, her cheeks flushed.

“Look at me.”

Slowly, she tips her chin up.

“No one is going to hurt you. I swear it.”

“Even you?” she asks softly. “Didn’t you tell my dad that you’d take it out on me if he didn’t pay back the money?”

While I don’t want to appear weak and easily manipulated, I also don’t want my solnishko fearing me. “He will pay it back.”

I hold Natalya’s gaze, willing her to believe it, even if I don’t. She gives a short nod, then her stomach growls. I raise my eyebrow as though telling her “I told you so”. “You will eat breakfast.”

“I’ll try.”

I’m willing to take that much. I step away and move to the refrigerator to take out eggs, onions, green and red peppers, spinach, mushrooms, and cheese. Within five minutes, I have our omelets started.

“Where did you learn how to cook?”

I glance over and she’s got her elbow resting on the island and her chin propped in her palm. “I don’t know that making an omelet counts as knowing how to cook.”

“Is that the only thing you know how to make?” she smiles.

“I can grill chicken and steak. Those are pretty much my only culinary talents. Not unless you also count putting a salad together.”

Natalya snorts. “I don’t. If I’m going to be here for a month, we’ve got to eat something besides omelets, salads, and a steak. I’ll have to teach you my mother’s recipe for the best borscht and dumplings. You’ll never want to eat anyone else’s ever again.”

I fold my arms and lean against the counter. “Bold claim.”

“One I can back up.”

“I look forward to it. Just let me know what you need and I’ll place an order for groceries to be delivered.”

She wrinkles her adorable nose. “You don’t do your own shopping?”

“Do I look like the type of person who does their own shopping?” I wave my hands down my body.

Natalya’s head cocks and she quirks her lips as though she’s studying me and thinking hard. “No, I don’t suppose you do.”

Turning around, I grab a couple of plates out of the cupboard along with a spatula from the utensil caddy and scoop an omelet on each plate before setting one of them down in front of her. I stand on the opposite side of the island as her and we both dig in. She takes a bite and then waves her hand in front of her mouth and repeatedly blows out a breath.

“Oh my god, it’s hot.” The words are garbled, but I manage to make them out.

“It just came off the stove. What did you expect?” I quickly fill a glass of water and pass it to her.

She takes it and downs nearly half of it. Her eyes are watering and she blinks them away. “Holy crap, I didn’t think it would be that hot.”

I merely stare at her as she cuts another small section off and brings it to her mouth. This time she blows on it for a few seconds before eating it. Satisfied that she learned her lesson, I go back to eating. I’m done before Natalya is and rinse off my plate before putting it in the dishwasher, along with the skillet. When I finish and turn around, she’s taking her last bite.

She pushes her plate away with a satisfied little moan. “I guess I was hungrier than I thought. Thank you, that was delicious.”

I add it to the dishwasher. As much as I would like to stay here with my solnishko and go back to bed to tease another orgasm or three out of her, I have work that needs to get done. “I have to leave for a little while.”



Natalya jerks. “Leave?”

“Yes. I have some things I need to take care of. I’ll be back in a few hours.” I stare hard at her. “The elevator only works with a special keycard, so you won’t be tempted to disappear while I’m away. Not that there’s anywhere you could hide that I wouldn’t find you.”

“Threatening me doesn’t instill any confidence that you won’t hurt me if it comes down to it.”

It’s obvious I need to make things more clear. Once again, I close the distance between us. I fist Natalya’s hair, tug her head back, then slam my mouth down on hers thrusting my tongue deep inside. My other hand palms her breast, squeezing and kneading the tender flesh. She clutches my shoulder and digs her nails in as she moans. I pinch her nipple as I release her mouth, and she shudders. The green in her eyes has darkened and they’re glazed with arousal.

“You can’t hide from me because you’re mine. I didn’t say anything about hurting you.” I loosen my hold on her hair and take a step back. “You’re going to have to learn to trust me.”

Leaving her slightly dazed, I walk to the elevator. It opens, and once I’m inside, I turn. Natalya comes into the room. I don’t take my eyes off her until the door closes, cutting off my view.

A part of me understands her fear. Especially after Aleksei’s little visit. I’m just pissed that it’s me she’s scared of.

## CHAPTER 7



NATALYA

THE ELEVATOR DOOR CLOSES WITH A SOFT CLICK, SASHA DISAPPEARING behind it and leaving me alone. Does this make me the princess trapped in a tower? A chill racks my body. A rather drafty tower, it would appear. Where's the thermostat in this place? I'm going to freeze to death in this bougie meatlocker of a penthouse. It's funny how there isn't a chill when Sasha is near, even though I've been mostly naked since I got here. He says he'll be back in a few hours, but I don't want to be a popsicle by the time he returns.

I head into the bedroom and pull open the closet door. There has to be something warmer in here I can wear. I flick the first switch. Instead of an overhead light coming in, there's a strange clicking sound and then a door at the back pops open. A reddish light comes from behind it. Is this some portal to the upside down or have I been watching too much Netflix with Luka and Lydia? My phone buzzes from the bedroom and I back out of the closet to grab it off the nightstand. It's an unfamiliar number.

"Hello?"

"Stay out of the closet, solnishko," Sasha grumbles over the purr of his

vehicle.

“How did you know I was in there?” I glance back toward it and then around the room, but don’t spot any cameras.

“It’s set to alarm me if the gun safe has been triggered. Planning something?”

“Hardly,” I scoff, annoyed at the humor in his voice. “It’s ridiculously cold in your apartment.”

I rub my chest trying to warm up but it doesn’t work. Sasha grunts.

“Don’t do that or I’m coming home.”

“Do what?” I ask.

He definitely has cameras here somewhere. “I’ll set the temperature higher and lock the safe remotely. Be a good girl, will you?” he says.

“Of course,” I mumble but he’s already hung up.

I put my phone back on the nightstand and then go to the closet again. This time, I flick the second switch to illuminate the large area with shelves and drawers perfectly placed. The door at the end of the closet is shut.

His clothes are organized in a horrifyingly precise manner from light to dark, mostly dark given his outfits of choice. He even sports an impressive collection of shoes including running sneakers, boots and fancy Italian leather loafers. He probably has more shoes than I do. I grin because the mostly stoic and closet hornball enforcer has a clothing fetish; one might even call him a clotheshorse if feeling bold.

A small island counter steals my attention next. Overhead lighting shines down on a glass top that protects a collection of designer watches. They have to cost a lot of money and some of them look more worn than others. I pull out the drawer and pick up the fanciest of the bunch, the back is engraved with the name Patek Phillipe. It’s heavy as I slip it over my wrist without having to open the locking mechanism. The pearl face glows in green, blue, and violet luminescence. I slip it off and put it back with the other ten. I turn nearly all of them over. Each one is labeled with names like Cartier,

Vacheron, Girard-Perregaux, and Rolex. There's an empty space for a twelfth one which he must be wearing today. I doubt it's a Swatch.

The three I didn't touch have cracked faces and two of them have a dead battery. Why doesn't he fix them? Are these trophies from his "job"? Thank god my dad doesn't wear one. Shaking off my suspicions I resume snooping.

I flip through his tailored clothes, swiping hangers right and left. There's a mix of suits, dress shirts, cargo pants, and sweaters. I examine a pair of sweatpants but the waist is huge. There's no way they'll ever fit me. I touch one of the sweaters and pull it off the shelf. It's a muted green—almost jade—and super soft like cashmere. I check the label. Peruvian vicuña. I pull out a half dozen other sweaters and they're all made of the same thing. Sasha doesn't mess around when he likes something. Hopefully he won't mind me borrowing one. I slip the green sweater over my head and I'm instantly warmer. I roll the long sleeves up over the dress shirt and scrounge around some more. Next, I find a pair of long socks I'm able to roll up and over my knees. Much better. Since there's nothing I can do about my shredded underwear, I'll just have to wait for Mr. Dark-and-Moody to buy me a few pairs.

Back in the bedroom, I grab my phone. For some reason, I find a little comfort with the one item that is completely mine. My finger rolls across the screen. Should I call my mom and Lucy while he's out? I have to be mindful of what I say, but I'm going to have to tell them something at some point. Especially my mom. I've lived with my parents my whole life—even through college—so not coming home for a month isn't going to work. I don't think either myself or Sasha completely thought this through, but I'm sure we can hash that out along with my underwear problem later.

Clutching my phone, I wander back out into the living area. The place is deceptively huge and a mischievous part of me decides this calls for additional poking around. I don't want to watch TV and I just ate breakfast. I've already showered, so it's like Sasha's given me no choice but to explore

my lavish cage . Besides, he never said there was a room in here that was off-limits, except for the gun safe in the closet apparently.

There's nothing exciting in the living room and kitchen so I pad in my new warm knee socks toward the back of the apartment. I count several doors and try them all. There are two more guest rooms with bathrooms. Funny how I didn't get one of those. Both are decorated immaculately with decidedly Russian influences. One has a painting of The Winter Palace in St. Petersburg over the bed. The other has a painting of St. Basil's and the Red Square. Both are beautiful. What sort of guests does he have visit him?

Down the hall is Sasha's office. It's decorated in blood red and black decor. What does an enforcer for the Bratva need an office for exactly anyway? I sit at his large desk and put my phone down. I try to open a drawer, but it's locked. The top is finished in a black lacquer so shiny it could be a mirror. I glide my palms over the entire surface. What would it be like to be laid out on top of it? I shiver and sit back down. His desk chair is comfortable and so big it dwarfs me. I swivel around in it giggling.

Is Sasha watching me right now? If so, he's getting an eyeful for sure. On my last turn at the desk, a set of Russian dolls laid out over the mantle of an electric fireplace catches my eye. Apparently criminal masterminds need a little warmth.

I move toward the fireplace. The dolls are intricately painted. They remind me of the sets my sister and I got from our grandparents one Christmas when we were little. I have fond memories of playing with them. Sasha's dolls appear worn but well loved. What kind of cold man has paintings of his homeland, expensive clothes, and children's toys in his home?

Turning to leave his office, I pause. On a side table, in a simple frame, is a black-and-white photo of a woman and a little boy maybe four- or five-years old. They're dressed simply. I pick up the picture and study it a moment before turning it over. *Sasha and Mamma in Vorkuta* is written in

pretty handwriting.

I turn it back over. His mother holds his hand and wears a scarf over her head. They're staring straight into the camera, neither smiling. With the photo still in hand, I take it back to the desk and grab my phone. I pull up a web browser and search Vorkuta. Several hits come up including one report of a disastrous mining accident about thirty-five years ago. Fifty-six men died in a methane gas explosion. The bodies were never recovered and the scarred mine shaft had been filled up by the company who owned it. My heart hurts for the little boy in the photo.

Leaving me with more questions than answers, I put it back on the table and move on to the next room. I open a set of double doors and almost back out from the glaring light shining through the large windows with the curtains drawn back. The space is huge with polished wood floors that reflect the sunlight. It's the perfect size for a small studio. I picture a wall of mirrors with a barre bar in front of it. A wave of inspiration washes over me. I stride through the floating dust particles glimmering in the sun until I reach the center of the room where I twirl and test the strength in my ankle.

I head over to a stack of boxes and pull up my music playlist on my phone. I select a dreamy mix and close my eyes, losing myself in the rhythm. Walking back to the middle of the floor, I make my bow to an imaginary audience. Then, I move. I'm stiff and a bit uncoordinated at first. It's been so long since I've danced and the strain on my muscles is making itself known. Everything hurts, but in a good way, so I keep pushing.

Time seems to take on its own meaning. It could be minutes or it could be hours that pass during this small escape from reality. Low experimental jumps, a few pirouettes, and so many plies follow. Lord how I've missed expressing myself creatively. I don't get to do that with a spreadsheet of exacting numbers. In ballet, there's a freedom of spirit and the music dictates where I go.

I dance until I'm sweating and take off the sweater, letting it fall to the

floor like a pile of spring leaves. I roll up the sleeves of the dress shirt higher and pretend my knee socks are leg warmers. My toes protest at the lack of pointe shoes, but I make do, careful to adjust my movements. I find a routine repeating the dance again and again until I'm satisfied the choreography is just right. It's private and special, not something I'd ever share, but still beautiful. I raise my arms up for a port de bras and turn and turn and turn preparing for one last grand jete. I slow into my grand finale, until I'm still with my head bowed. Slow clapping fills the room, and I jerk upright to meet Sasha's hungry gaze.

## CHAPTER 8



SASHA

THERE'S NEVER BEEN ANYTHING MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN NATALYA WHEN SHE dances. It's fucking breathtaking. "It's rude to sneak up on somebody." She unfolds her perfect body and fists her hips, although there's no real heat in her words.

"Except I didn't sneak." I prowl forward to close the distance between us. "I called your name several times. You just didn't hear me."

She lifts one foot slightly and her weight shifts as though she wants to take a step back—away from me—but then she sets it down and remains rooted in her spot. One side of my mouth curls. I love that Natalya makes a show of not being intimidated by me. Perhaps soon, it won't be a false bravado. Instead, she'll know I would never hurt her.

I come to a stop mere inches from her. My nostrils flare at the scent of her sweat mixed with her arousal. The outline of her nipples is clearly visible through my shirt she's wearing. A sort of caveman pride runs through me that my woman is wearing my clothes. Strands of hair stick to her wet forehead. I reach up and brush them off then trail my finger down her cheek. Her skin is so soft.



“You were incredible.” I’m still in awe of her grace and power.

Color rises in her face. “Thank you. It’s been so long, I was afraid I’d forgotten how.”

“Nyet. You’re a natural and that kind of talent never leaves a person.”

Natalya smiles softly. “It did feel really good to be dancing again. Reminded me of how much I missed it.”

I want to make her smile like that always. But for me alone. Her mouth slowly unfurls. The gray of her eyes shifts to more green, something that has happened every time she’s been aroused. More of her musky scent fills my nose. A new tension grows between us. I grip her hips. There’s no tell-tale line of fabric beneath the shirt. It’s smooth and flat.

“Have you been naked under this shirt this whole time?” My voice is gruff.

Cheeks that just returned to their natural color brighten again. “Considering you tore the only pair of underwear I had, I didn’t really have a choice.”

I gather up the tail of the shirt and slide my hand under it until there’s only soft skin. My grip tightens and I reach around to palm the globe of her ass. It fits perfectly within my hold. Natalya’s breath stutters, but she doesn’t push me away. Not that she could. Still, I want her begging me to take her sweet cunt. To fill her up with my cock. I dip my finger between her ass cheeks, circling the outer edge of her puckered hole. She clenches as if that would keep me out.

“Easy, solnishko. It’s just a little touch, nothing more,” I soothe her. “Open for me, my little sun.”

I don’t push her, merely wait, until my patience is rewarded. Ever so slowly, she relaxes, and her legs part enough that I can slip my hand further between them. Not wanting to make her too skittish, I move my finger away from her tempting asshole and meet the wet heat spilling from her. Natalya may not realize it yet, but she liked the feel of my finger teasing that

forbidden place. It's most definitely something we'll explore. But first, I want a taste of her juicy cunt.

I'll be the first person who gets to experience her virgin tightness. I could spill from that alone. *Control, Sasha.*

Her soft panting encourages me. I run my finger along her slit, the tip of it bumping against the swollen nub at the head of it. Natalya throws her head back and her hands land on my chest where she clutches my shirt within her small fists as her knees grow shaky. Like I would let her fall. Without removing my hand from between her legs, I grab under her ass with the other and lift. She wraps herself around me. The little jolt of movement causes my finger to slide inside her.

“Oh, god.” Her forehead drops onto my shoulder.

I carry her out of the room and down the hall until we reach my bedroom. With every step I take, I thrust my curled finger in and out of her cunt, going deeper each time. I unfold it slightly so the blunt end of my nail scrapes along the front interior lining where the small patch of nerves lies. Natalya's wetness covers my hand and her whole body shudders. I scratch it again and she bucks in my arms. I tighten my hold.

Once in my room, with the dim sunlight pouring in through the darkened windows, I lay her on the bed, withdrawing my finger, and cover her body with mine. Once again, it strikes me how tiny she truly is compared to me. She stares up at me with passion. One by one I undo each button of her shirt until it parts completely and bares her nakedness to me. The tiny pebbles of Natalya's small nipples are hard and appear as though they are reaching for me. I circle the tip of the right one loving how she arches the tiniest bit into my touch, almost begging for me. I need the words, though, and I plan on getting them.

I trail my finger down her flat stomach, drawing a line around her outie belly button. She giggles and I meet her eyes.

“It tickles,” she says quietly.

It's tempting to do it again if only to draw another laugh from her, because her entire face lights up with happiness when she does, but my rock-hard cock is getting far too needy. As am I. Instead, I continue my trek along her body until I reach her center and the place where I most want to be. My gaze follows. Her clit is so swollen it peeks out from beneath its hood.

My finger traces back-and-forth right along the edge of her clit, but not quite touching it. Natalya mewls and arches up with a whimper. Once again, I raise my eyes to lock with hers.

“Do you want me to touch you, solnishko?”

She nods frantically.

I edge the slightest bit closer, just barely grazing the nub. “What do you say?”

“Please.”

“You know that's not what I want from you.” I shake my head.

Natalya bucks again. “Touch me, please.”

I do just that. Every trick and technique I've learned over my many years, I use to please my solnishko. When she gasps and writhes, I do the same thing again. I keep my entire focus on her, paying attention to what makes her quake beneath me, bringing her to the edge time and time again without letting her orgasm. She thrashes her head from side to side in sweet agony. When her inner thighs are soaked with her wetness, I glide right through it and finger her cunt. Slowly, I insert a single finger. Her back arches off the bed and she grabs her own breast, kneading the flesh.

Is there anything hotter than Natalya pleasuring herself while I fuck her with my finger, preparing her to take my cock? I insert a second finger alongside the first, pushing them deeper inside her with each thrust until I'm scissoring them and widening her.

“Beg me to fuck you, solnishko.”

She pushes herself into me, trying to get a deeper penetration, but I drag my fingers out until only my first knuckle remains inside her. I curl my

fingers and once again scrape along the small spongy area. She screams and it echoes around us.

“Natalya,” I growl, not sure how much longer I can wait.

“Please, Sasha. I want you to fuck me.”

In seconds, my pants are on the floor and my cock is lined up with her opening. Slowly, I inch myself farther in. The head of it breaches her, but there’s a lot more of me for her to take.

“Look at me.”

Her eyes jerk open and meet mine. I reach for her hands and raise them over her head, threading my fingers through hers. I sink deeper. Pain flashes across her face, and she bites her bottom lip. It kills me to hurt her, but there’s no other choice. She’s so goddamn tight even with the preparation I gave her. She’s my first virgin. Perhaps it’s best to get the pain over with quickly.

“I’m sorry, solnishko.”

She wrinkles her forehead in confusion and with a single, powerful thrust, I bury myself to the hilt. Natalya’s cry of pain pierces my heart, but I hold still, breathing into her neck and trying to maintain the thin thread of control I have. Her fingers squeeze mine and she tries moving her arms, no doubt to try and push me away, but I tighten my grip and whisper reassurances in her ear that soon it will pass.

When her breathing finally slows, I raise my upper body up and stare down at her. There’s still a pinch of pain on her face and there’s a trail of wetness from the corners of her eyes leading into her hair. I kiss the tears away. “Natalya.”

Her lashes flutter and then lift. A storm rages in the gray within. I rock my hips just slightly and they widen. My lips claim hers in a kiss far more tender than any I’ve ever given before. I like my sex rough and dirty. There’s no room for tenderness in my life. But for once, I want to be...for her. For the sunlight to my darkness.

I thrust again, keeping my movement slow and shallow. Then faster. Deeper. Natalya soon begins meeting me pace for pace. I reach between us and repeating the same motion and pressure that brought her the most pleasure, I play with her clit. I'm glad there's nothing separating us. I want to feel everything. I want to bathe her in my seed and mark her as mine. Our bodies slap together and the sound of our heavy breathing fills the room. I breathe in the scent of sex. The musky fragrance only serves to ramp up my arousal.

Needing Natalya to reach her peak, I deepen the kiss, matching the movement of my tongue in her mouth to the movement of us coming together. I increase my attention to her clit and then, out of nowhere, she screams and her cunt clenches down on me, squeezing me tight. Since I've been in a constant state of arousal for the past two days, that's all it takes for me to come right behind her. I thrust hard once more, reaching as deep inside her as I can and my release hits me. I throw my head back and roar with it as my seed erupts from my cock.

I collapse half on top of her, making sure to keep most of my weight off. The cool air brushes across the back of my legs. Shit, I didn't even take my shirt off. Or Natalya's. I withdraw from her and sit up to remove mine.

"Lift up, baby." I gently help her out of hers and then pull the blankets over us.

She snuggles closer to me and I tug her tightly into my side. Her hand lies across my chest and she runs her fingers through the hair that covers it.

"I didn't hurt you too much, did I?"

"Only at first," she whispers, her breath hot against my skin.

I'm glad. I need to clean us both up, but I also want to savor this moment between us. Holding her like this. We continue lying there, until I brush a kiss to her forehead. "I'll be right back."

I climb out of the bed and head into the bathroom. My cock is smeared with her virgin blood. I run a finger up my length and bring it to my mouth,

flicking my tongue out to taste it. Delicious. I grab a couple of cloths from under the sink and quickly wash myself with one of them and then take the other one soaked in warm water back out to where Natalya still lies in my bed. I separate her legs and she jerks.

“Let me take care of you, solnishko.”

She parts her legs and lets me wash off the evidence of our fucking. I take the dirty cloth back to the bathroom to discard and within seconds, I’m in the bed and curling myself around her. I lay my hand over her breast and to my surprise, she wiggles closer until my semi-hard cock nestles between her ass cheeks. If she wasn’t most likely sore, I’d slide into her from behind and keep filling her with my seed until it leaks out of her every time she tries to walk. Hmm, not a bad idea.

I’ll save that for another day.

I continue holding her until her breathing evens out. Only then do I close my eyes and join her.

## CHAPTER 9



NATALYA

“ARE YOU ON BIRTH CONTROL?”

The question jolts me from my sleepy trance. Fingers tangle in my hair tugging gently until I arch back to gaze into Sasha’s smoldering eyes.

It’s a bit late to ask the question after everything we spent the past day and a half doing. The warmth between our bodies intensifies, and I roll back off his chest pushing myself up, forcing him to release the grip on my hair. I wince at the soreness in my core. His hand moves down my body to hold my waist. A thumb grazes my hip bone melting my irritation with him.

“Tell me solnishko.” Sasha’s demand sounds ominous, but the smirk on his face tells me he wouldn’t exactly be bothered by teeny tiny enforcers in training romping around the place. I put a hand to my belly not saying a word.

Sasha’s finds mine and his thick digits curl over it spanning from hip to hip. He moves a finger down and strums over my clit. I moan and wince again as he presses firmly, lighting up my desire.

I stay his touch and turn my head toward him. He has the slightest crinkles at the corners of his eyes making him even hotter in the morning

light. Considering he technically kidnapped me, I could have done worse, and I'm so thankful my mother thought ahead and sent me to a doctor before I started college.

"Yes. I've had the shot."

Sasha nods, ducking his head down to my chest, flicking his tongue over my bare breasts. My cheeks heat. I kind of understand the allure of keeping the apartment slightly cooler.

"That's too bad but probably for the best," he grumbles.

"Can I ask you a question?" I want to roll away and hide but Sasha holds me tight.

"Anything, baby." He brushes back my hair.

"The picture in your office. The old one on the table by the door."

Sasha glances away and then rolls from the bed to sit on the edge. He hunches over with hands on his knees like he might launch himself out of the room and away from my question. I read the back of the photo but I want him to confirm who it is and what it means to him. There's a bit of guilt causing this reaction in him but I need more from him beside his big cock and assurances he'll keep me safe. I want to get to know him as a person, not an enforcer.

"Sasha, I'm sorry." I place my hand on his back between the long jagged scars that run along either side of his spine. My fingertips trace the white lines and I lean in close to kiss them.

He reaches behind to catch my hand and gently pulls me down to the floor in front of him in a tangle of limbs and end up between his knees. He's impressive from this angle, but that's not why I'm here. He pulls the sheet from the bed and places it around my shoulders covering me up.

Our foreheads meet and he sighs deeply.

"Don't apologize, Natalya. I'm not upset with you. It's the memories I try to push away."

"We don't have to talk about it." I reach for his hands and entwine our



fingers.

“I said you could ask anything, and I meant it. That photo tells a story of before my life in Chicago. Before my mother made choices that would put us both on a dark path.”

“It’s you and your mother?”

“Yes. Her name is Nadezhda.” He pauses.

“She’s alive?” I ask.

“Oh, yes. She’s quite well and living in Moscow.”

“How old were you?”

“Four. It was right after the mining accident in Vorkuta, where we lived. My beginnings are humble. Nothing like what you see now.” He chuckles but the humor doesn’t meet his eyes. “The mine filled with methane gas and exploded, killing dozens of workers. My father was one of the bodies they never recovered.”

His fingers clench, tightening their hold on mine.

“It must have been so awful to be so young and lose him like that. I can’t begin to imagine losing my dad or mom.” The words turn to ash as I voice them. Sasha lost his father in a work accident. I could lose mine because of horrible choices he’s made, and it’s not at all the same. “I didn’t mean to compare the two.”

He cracks a smile.

“I know. After the accident, my mother had to take care of us. My father had been the sole provider for our family. With him gone, we had nothing. She did her best, but it soon became apparent that we wouldn’t survive much longer. She...took care of the men in our village for payment. It wasn’t until I got older that I understood exactly what that meant. She finally earned enough money to move us to Moscow where she thought she could earn more as a steady mistress to a rich businessman.”

I’m at a loss for words, so I keep quiet and let Sasha continue his story.

“That’s how I met Aleksei. His father took a liking to mother and set her

up in an apartment near to his home.”

“Sasha.” Tears pool in my eyes, heartbroken for the little boy and his mother who became a prostitute to support her son.

“Don’t cry for me, Natalya. My mother enjoyed her work, which is saying something. She was lucky none of the men beat her or hurt her badly. There was one before Aleksei’s father who was evil, but my mother took care of him. She’s a tough woman, and I think she’d like you very much.”

I laugh through my tears. “So you and Aleksei grew up together?”

“Sort of. When his father learned that my mother had a son, Aleksander took me under his wing. Aleksei was eight years older than me and nearly an adult, but he treated me like a brother. Aleksander trained me. Demanded I work for him and protect Aleksei. It’s worked out well for the most part. I don’t have any regrets and I got to come here to Chicago where Aleksei rules in his father’s place.”

“So you owe him?”

“No. I’ve paid off any debts and then some. My mother, being a shrewd businesswoman, started a cleaning business.”

“Cleaning?”

“Dry cleaning and laundry. I’m not sure I can speak to any other activities, but essentially, I’m the heir to her cleaning legacy.”

“Well, that’s unexpected.”

Sasha throws his head back and laughs. “She decorated my place. Her bedroom when she visits is the one with the Winter Palace painting.”

“Then why the sadness?”

“It took us a long time to get here, and I remember being hungry and fighting in the streets to survive. Both my mother and I made choices to protect the other during those days before meeting Aleksei’s father. Those are stories for another day.” He runs his fingers through my hair gently untangling a snarl in the back. “What does my solnishko want to do today?”

“Find some underwear?”

“Nyet. I like this look on you. What else?”

“Hmm.” I tap my finger against my lips. “What’s something your mother used to make? I mean, did she cook much growing up?”

“She did when we had some money. She made borscht often, and I miss the soup on a cold winter day. Then there was golubtsy and zharkoye when we could get meat.” He pats his belly.

“Let’s go buy groceries and I’ll show you my skills in the kitchen.”

“But I like your skills in the bedroom.” He pouts, and I lean up to kiss his lips.

I like this side of Sasha. I’ve made beet soup before with my mother and the other two are easy enough. Golubtsy is basically meat wrapped in cabbage while the zharkoye is closest to a beef stew with potatoes, carrots, and mushrooms. My mouth waters. I’m excited about the homey meals I plan to make for him. No wonder he kept his fridge stocked with items from the deli. It must remind him of home.

“Buy me underwear and groceries, and I’ll show you how skilled I am in both.” I tease him as I get up off the floor and head into the bathroom to shower.

I have no doubt Sasha will follow me. Which is my plan.

## CHAPTER 10



SASHA

OVER THE NEXT WEEK, NEITHER OF US BROACH THE TOPIC OF NATALYA'S father or the money he owes me. It's as though we're ignoring the fact that our time together is limited. Instead, we've spent most of that time talking, eating all the delicious meals she's cooked that remind me of home, and of course, fucking.

"God, yes. Harder."

I pound into her from behind while gripping her hips securely. Already faint red marks mar her pale skin. Without slowing my pace, I grab the small bottle of lube I'd tossed on the mattress before we began, pop the top, and squirt it down her ass crack and around her puckered hole. Natalya gasps and jerks forward, but my hold on her tightens.

"I told you, solnishko. You're mine. All of you. Your cunt. Your ass." I circle it with my thumb, spreading the slick lubricant all around.

She shudders beneath me, but she's stopped trying to escape. I dip inside, only going as far as my first knuckle. She moans, and while it's a minimal movement, she pushes back into me. I shallowly move the digit in and out, swirl more lube around the hole and then slide it back in, this time going

deeper. I alternate the thrusts of my cock and thumb to increase the friction on the thin membrane that separates them.

Natalya curls her fingers and clutches the sheet in her fists, her moans growing louder as she meets me with each thrust. I remove my thumb and she cries out. I could prolong her torture by drawing it out, but I want her to come at least twice before I do. I replace my thumb with one finger, then two, stretching her wide.

Her whole body shudders. "I'm so full."

"You like that, don't you?"

She nods, her cheek rubbing against the sheet beneath her.

"If only you could see how stuffed your holes are. I can't wait to see you take my cock in your ass."

As though my words were the spark that ignited the fuse, Natalya screams and rocks her hips back into mine. Her release hits. I need one more, though. I slide my free hand around and find her clit, keeping up the punishing rhythm. It only takes a couple rubs against the sensitive nerves before another orgasm hits her. A few more pumps and I bury myself deep inside and give her every bit of my come. I remain locked inside her another minute while small flutters ripple through her cunt. Finally, I withdraw my fingers and cock. She collapses face-down onto the bed with a heavy sigh while I go into the bathroom to wash up. I return with a warm cloth and take care of her like I always do.

I climb in and tug Natalya so she's lying completely on top of me. She tucks her arms tightly against herself and rubs her cheek along my chest with a soft, little purr. I wrap mine around her and gently rub her back.

"You're hard, and yet so soft and warm," she murmurs, her hot breath ghosting along my skin.

My lips curl up at her sleepy voice. My solnishko is always exhausted after a round of fucking and never stays awake long after. But then my mouth flattens.

Aleksei called me yesterday with some disturbing news about Boris. I keep waiting for how things are going to play out. I lie here, holding Natalya while she sleeps. What's going to happen after the next three weeks are up and her father hasn't come up with money? And what if, by some miracle he does, am I going to do about her? I'm not sure I'll be able to let her go. She's been mine for years. I've merely been waiting for her.

My phone rings from the bed-side table. Trying not to jostle her too much, I reach for it. "Yes?"

"You need to come down to Humboldt Park."

Before I can reply, Aleksei ends the call. Christ. I carefully roll Natalya off me and cover her with the blankets. She shifts slightly, but otherwise, doesn't move. Her breathing remains soft and even. I quickly throw on a pair of jeans and a sweater, grab my keys, and head down the elevator. Why the hell is he calling me in the middle of the night? And arranging a meeting at a park that borders Italian territory?

Considering the late hour, traffic is light and it doesn't take me long to reach my destination. I locate an open spot on the street. I barely get out of the car before Valeryi approaches. I follow him deep into the park until I make out the shapes of several men standing near the edge of the lagoon. On the ground at their feet is a large lump. One that, even from this distance, is distinctly human-shaped.

We come to stand with those already there, including Aleksei. I glance down at the body on the ground, even though I don't need to. There's only one reason I would be called here.

"The Italians offer us a gift of appreciation," Aleksei says in a dry tone.

I run a hand back and forth across the top of my head. "Fuck. What did they say?"

"Apparently the Bratva is not the only organization he 'borrowed' from."

Boris' sightless eyes stare up at the sky. The bullet hole in the center of his forehead is large and irregular, which means it's an exit wound. So he

was shot execution-style. “How did he expect to get away with this? It’s one thing to steal from us, but it’s another to take from our rivals.”

Goddamn it, what am I going to tell Natalya?

“My guess is, he didn’t plan on getting away with it.” Aleksei points out. “I think he took the easiest way out. Despite his actions, Boris wasn’t stupid. He knew about your infatuation with your little dancer. He’s also worked for me long enough to know that when one of ours is killed, we take care of their family for life. He knew you’d look after his daughter when he was gone and that I wouldn’t take out his mistakes on his family. He planned on manipulating *my* weakness.”

It’s no secret the Pakhan has a soft spot for children, even if their father was a thief. “Call someone to collect the body. I’ll take care of any funeral expenses.”

“I assumed as much. And they’re already on their way.” He pauses. “There’s still the little matter of the three mil.”

“Christ, Aleksei, I told you I’d cover it.”

“Consider it a wedding gift.” He walks away and gestures with a flick of his wrist for his men to follow.

I remain standing there another minute staring after them and then turn my gaze back to the body. “What were you thinking, old man?”

A part of me understands why he might have done what he did, but another part of me curses Boris for being a coward and taking the easy way out. And also for leaving it up to me to tell Natalya that her father is dead. With nothing left to do, I also walk away.



THE ELEVATOR DOOR QUIETLY SLIDES OPEN AND I STEP OUT INTO THE darkened penthouse. The hum of forced air comes from the vents. Otherwise, it’s quiet. Still. The way I used to like it. Before Natalya. I drop my keys onto

the side table and walk through the living area and down the hall to the bedroom. I pause in the doorway. The room is faintly lit by the light spilling from the bathroom. Natalya put some decorative nightlight in there so she wouldn't trip over anything if she had to get up in the middle of the night.

She lies naked, the sheet having slipped down to bare one of her breasts, her hair spread over my pillow. I undress again and slide in next to her. She releases a soft sigh and a sleepy half-smile curls her lips. "Where did you go? I missed your warmth."

I'm not sure if this is the best course of action, but I don't want to keep a secret from her. Even if that means our time is cut short. My mother taught me early on that secrets always have a way of getting out and it never ends well when they do.

"Solnishko, we need to talk."

Natalya's lashes flutter and she slowly opens her eyes. "What's wrong?"

I brush back the stray strands of hair that are stuck to her cheek and smooth them behind her ear. The silence between us extends.

She sits up and brings the sheet with her covering her breasts. "Sasha?"

"There's no easy way to tell you this." I blow out a breath. "Your father is dead. Aleksei called me after he found the body."

Her face wrinkles in confusion. "Wh—what?"

"Apparently he stole money from the Italians, as well. Maybe it was to cover his debt to Aleksei. I don't know."

Natalya's eyes dart from side to side and her gaze grows unfocused. "I don't understand. Why would he do that?"

"I've arranged for his funeral, and Aleksei will make sure your mother and siblings are taken care of."

"I just talked to him a week ago," she says distractedly. "He was going to hire me full-time when I finished my exam. We were going to work together. His birthday is next month."

I've never been comfortable or any good with grief. Death is a part of our



organization. We all get used to it. I'm sure I grieved when my father was killed, but it was so long ago, I have no memory of it. I do the only thing I can. Wrap my arms around Natalya and hold her. At first, she pushes against me, but I refuse to let her loose. And then it's as though the floodgates have burst open. A broken sob rips from her throat. Followed by another. She burrows against my chest that soon is soaked with her tears.

She clutches tightly to my shoulders while she cries like her heart is broken. I'm sure it is. While I doubt he was the best father, Natalya loved him. I'm sure he loved her as well. I continue holding her long after her tears have ceased, not wanting to let go. She falls asleep against me so I scoot us down so we're lying side-by-side and I tuck her tightly under my arm. We'll figure things out in the morning. One thing's for certain. I have no intention of letting her go.

## CHAPTER 11



NATALYA

STANDING AT THE EDGE OF MY FATHER'S GRAVE, I CLUTCH COLD DIRT IN MY fist. Tears run down my neck and dampen the top of my dress under my belted jacket. My hair pulls too tight from my bun and my shoes pinch as the heels dig into the rain softened ground. Staring into the hole, the soil and grass blur together.

“Moye serdtse.” My mother wraps me in a hug.

“You only call me your heart when I'm sick.” I lean into her.

Maybe I am sick. Sick with anger because my father's death was avoidable. If only he'd been honest with us.

“Come, we should go.” She urges me to move and puts her hand over mine holding the clump of dirt with me.

I squeeze harder until it hurts. I need to feel something.

When my fingers go numb, my mother gently opens them and I let it fall to the ground. It rolls and plops into the grave. There are so many things I wanted to tell my father and now I'll never get the chance.

Mom ushers me back to the group of people walking toward the cars parked inside the cemetery. I glance around. We're in a nicer, private section

of the cemetery on the back end of a hill that overlooks the city. I suppose an actual plot is better than an open field somewhere. I never asked Sasha where they found him and despite my curiosity, I won't. Knowing won't help me sleep better.

"Maybe you can tell me more about Sasha, back at his place?" She matches my slow steps to the limo that resembles an armored tank more than a car.

I stop short and glance back at the open grave. The attendants are waiting with shovels to cover the hole and the finality of Dad's death hits me. Mom tugs my jacket, pulling me forward again.

"Why momma? Why did he steal the money?"

She inhales a deep breath. "Your father loved us, but even he took his secrets to the grave, moye serdtse."

Her answer isn't surprising. Maybe she doesn't want to tell me the truth. Or perhaps she doesn't even know herself. Either way, the void inside me deepens. I can't ward off the chill of the inevitable, *what happens next?*

Sasha holds the door of the vehicle open for us and I duck my head and get inside. Luka and Lydia sit quietly opposite me with their hands folded on their laps. Mom joins them while Sasha sits next to me. I fold my hands too, but fidget. Sasha nudges me with his leg, but I can't stop. He takes my hand and places it over his knee. The fine wool of his suit pants stretches tight showing his strong leg muscles. Despite this being a funeral, he looks handsome. Guilt washes over me. I shouldn't be admiring his looks.

I glance out the window and bite my lip to stop myself from sobbing, although I'm not sure how much longer I can hold it back. It's all too much. The limo is suddenly too confining and being so close to my remaining family hits me with misery because my father isn't here.

"Shhhh, solnishko." Sasha turns his body, boxing me into the corner. He holds me in his arms and his body blocks out my mother and siblings.

"I'm so angry with him," I choke out.

“Then be angry. Be whatever you need to be. Fall apart and I will put you back together again.” Sasha kisses my forehead and I lean into him, stealing his strength for the moment.

The drive back to his place is quiet. We pull into the underground parking area and come to a stop near the elevator. Everyone exits the vehicle and steps inside our ride up to the penthouse. When the doors slide open, Ilya stands guard just inside the entryway. I’m surprised to find a handful of ladies setting up familiar dishes on the counter. My mother rushes over to thank them. They offer their condolences before filing into the elevator. Ilya nods and joins them. My mom motions Luka and Lydia to the counter and encourages them to fill their plates.

“Who were they?” I turn to Sasha.

“Wives of my work associates.”

That makes sense. Our community is good about helping each other but I’m still not familiar with how this all works in the Bratva. Do these sorts of things happen often? Would I have to do this for one of Sasha’s work associates someday?

“I probably should have thanked them.” I’m still staring at the elevator when he places his hand on my back and leads me to the kitchen.

“Another time, solnishko. Are you hungry?”

I shake my head.

“All right then. Go rest while I get your mom and the kids settled.”

“They’re staying here?” It hadn’t occurred to me that they would. “Are they not safe at home?”

My stomach drops. Will Dad’s bad decisions become an issue for all of us? Sasha’s hands clutch my shoulders and he leans his forehead into mine.

“I will take care of everything, solnishko. Your family will be safe. Aleksei knows this as well.” Sasha kisses the tip of my nose and then turns me around with a light pat on my behind.

I don’t argue. Mostly because I’m not quite ready to explain our

relationship to my mother. Although, from the looks she's given us, she's probably already guessed. Besides, there's no telling what Dad might have said to her given my days-long absence. I also believe Sasha when he says he'll do something, which is why I go to our bedroom and try to rest. I take off my shoes and untie the belt from my jacket. I lay it over a chair and crawl into the bed. Rolling onto my back, I fold my arms over my belly and stare at the ceiling. Sleep doesn't come. A few minutes pass and the door opens. I lean up on my elbows as Sasha walks in, then toes his shoes off. He pulls his suit jacket off one shoulder and then the next, his biceps straining beneath his dress shirt as he drops the jacket over mine. His eyes focus on me as he stalks closer to the bed putting his hands on his waist as he looks me over.

His chin dips down and his brows get a serious slant. "I told you to rest."

I shrug my shoulders. "Demanded is more accurate."

Sasha cocks his head and leans over to cage me between his arms on either side of me. "What can I do to make this better, baby? Your pain is killing me."

"Erase the past few weeks?" Tears flood my eyes again.

"Maybe not all of it." He pulls me up to standing. "Come, let's get you more comfortable and out of these clothes and hairpins."

Sasha removes my dress almost clinically and with incredible care. He slowly peels off my pantyhose forcing me to hold onto his shoulders as he kneels down. He tosses them over his shoulder, leaving me in only my black lace bra and underwear, and glances back up at me. Before I can say anything, he kisses my stomach, just below my belly button and then stands up.

He gently pulls out each hairpin and places them on the nightstand. When he finishes, he turns me away from him and massages my scalp for a few minutes before moving onto my shoulders. I moan and lean into his talented hands. When he's done, he kisses my neck and lingers for a moment before taking off my bra. He rubs out the offending imprints in my skin.

“Sasha.” I want more.

His arms come around my front, hugging me, and he whispers in my ear. “Rest, my love.”

Then he draws back the comforter and helps me under them like I’m a child needing to be tucked in. After a brief kiss to my forehead, he walks into the bathroom and shuts the door behind him. I lie here hot and bothered. I could join him, but the massage he gave me finally eased the tension of the day, and I stifle a yawn. It’s not much longer before sleep steals me away.



I SLOWLY WAKE UP AND STRETCH BENEATH THE COVERS. THE BEDROOM IS dark with the barest hint of early morning light piercing through the tinted windows. I roll onto my side and find Sasha awake. His dark eyes sear into me. My body stirs as if my wants and needs from the night before had merely been on pause.

Without words, I reach out and pull him in for a kiss. He doesn’t stop me. I’m glad, because I need this. I need *him*. My lips mold to his and my hands spear his hair gripping him closer. He wraps me in a bear hug and rolls on top of me, but it’s not what I want. Not this time. I wiggle out from under him, push him onto his back, and climb on top.

“My solnishko is cranky in the morning.” Sasha smirks.

“Not cranky. Hungry.” I grind against him.

He bucks his hips upward and I brace myself on wide legs that hug his waist. I plant my hands on his chest and experimentally roll my pelvis. Undulating until I find a rhythm that satisfies me. Sasha groans, grips my hips, and drags me up his body.

“Hold onto the headboard, baby.”

“Fuck me, Sasha.” I try to wiggle back down to his cock.

“Nyet.” He growls.

It's clear he's going to get what he wants, so I do what he says. My eyes lock on his at the same time his fists grab my panties from behind and rip. This man has no respect for silk and lace. He reaches for my hips again and pulls me down onto his face. His lips work over me and he thrusts his tongue upward, licking my pussy before driving it inside me while he sucks my clit. The push and pull forces me to reach my climax quickly and my body sags with its release.

"I'm not done." Sasha groans and drags my languid body down his chest.

I try catching my breath as he impales me on his cock. Despite him preparing me, the initial stretch burns. I cry out and it takes me a moment to adjust. He pulls me down for an open-mouthed kiss, drowning me with desire. "Sasha," I whimper.

Aftershocks build up into a second orgasm. He keeps pounding into me.

"Natalya." He grunts my name over and over again.

Our bodies slap together and the warm cocoon we've created grows hot. Almost stifling as I ride him. He's got me so worked up, it doesn't take much more for me to break and fall apart. I sob, collapsing over Sasha and he wraps me up in his arms refusing to let go.

I cry for myself. I cry for my family. For the uncertainty of what happens next. The dam has finally broken and the waves wash over me, obliterating everything in their path. The innocent girl I was before is gone.

"Shhh. Let it out. I've got you. I'll always have you," he says the words like a vow, a promise of forever and I snuggle deeper into the warmth of his truth. The questions I have about my father, my family, and our future can wait. I give myself into Sasha's keeping willingly. I drift back to sleep, fully trusting him and at peace since all of this began. I needed this because I needed him.

## CHAPTER 12



SASHA

ALEKSEI DEALT WITH THE ITALIANS, SO NATALYA’S FAMILY RETURNED TO their home a week ago. I admit to listening in on the conversation she and her mother had the day they left. The older woman had been reasonably upset when my solnishko told her she would remain here for the time being. Something about honoring her promise, even if her father hadn’t honored his. I don’t want her here because her honor dictates it.

Natalya sits on the couch with her legs curled up at her hip while she studies. Several books are strewn across the coffee table.

“I’ve missed you.” I kiss the crown of her head.

She bends her neck back to stare up at me and I lean down to press my lips to hers. “You see me every day. How can you miss me?”

I settle next to her and tug her onto my lap. She loops one arm around my shoulders and places her other on my chest, resting her small hand right over my heart. I cover it with mine and curl my fingers around hers to hold them. “Anytime we’re not together I miss you. I’ve been out of the house for hours. Didn’t you notice?”

Natalya’s cheeks flush. “I’m sorry. Studying for this exam is harder than I



expected. All my attention has been on that.”

I lift her hand off my chest and kiss her knuckles before returning it to its place. “You don’t have to apologize to me, solnishko. I’m proud of how hard you’re working.”

Her gaze grows distant. “I wish my dad could see me. He was always so proud of me, too. He kept telling me how excited he was for us to start working together.”

She sniffs and blinks several times while wiggling her nose as though trying to keep herself from crying. I’ve caught her in tears more than once since her father’s death. More than anything, I want to take her pain away, but I can’t. It’s something she’ll have to work through on her own.

“Do you know the last thing I said to him at the deli that day?” She doesn’t wait for my response. “I told him I’d never forgive him. I was so angry. Not just because he put himself and all of us in danger, but he lied to us. My whole life, he ingrained in me that honesty and integrity were the most important things a person can possess. And then he goes and steals money, not just from Mr. Sokolov, but from others. It’s like none of that ever meant anything.”

Two weeks ago I didn’t understand, either. Who would dare steal from the Bratva? From Aleksei? I palm Natalya’s cheek and turn her toward me. Her skin is so soft beneath my hand.

“Your father did what he felt he had to for his family. He loved you and your mother. You said it yourself, your mother’s treatments are expensive. Same with your schooling. He wanted to provide for both of you.” I rub my thumb over her skin. “Yes, he went about it the wrong way, but he did the best he could.”

Natalya blinks. “I’m surprised to hear you say that. Especially since...you know.”

“From the time I was fourteen when Aleksei’s father brought me into the fold and trained me, violence is all I’ve known. In our world, it’s about

following orders. Kill or be killed. My job, what I do, I can't change that. I didn't enjoy what I would have had to do to your father. In fact, it would have been one of my biggest regrets in life."

She cocks her head and presses herself into my hand. "Why is that?"

"Because I would have lost you before I ever had a chance to even have you." I stare hard at Natalya, wanting her to see—to know—everything. "I'm not a good man, solnishko. I've done things most people would consider unforgivable. Even you. But because of who I am—who I work for—I will continue to do them. I won't apologize for that. But there is one person on this earth who I would die for. And that person is you. You own my heart. It's been yours for years."

Her eyes widen and she straightens. "Are you...? Are you saying you love me?"

There's no room in our world for softness. But I want to be soft for her, and her alone. "Yes, solnishko, I love you. I always have."

Natalya cradles my face. "I think I've always loved you, too. Even though you were going to hurt my father, I loved you, and the guilt was nearly crushing. My heart wasn't just breaking because of what you planned on doing to him. I've never been under the illusion that you're not a dangerous man who lives in an equally dangerous world. My dad made poor decisions. It's more than clear that if it wasn't going to be you, it would have been someone else. And it was."

"I'm sorry your father is dead, but I'm not sorry about the circumstances that brought you here."

She leans forward, brushes my lips with a kiss, and sits back. "I'm not sorry either."

"Come with me. I want to show you something." I help her stand and then take her hand.

We walk through the penthouse toward the room I'd always thought of as Natalya's, even before she stepped foot in there. I open the door and gesture

for her to enter. She moves past me and stops just inside the doorway. I come up behind her and wrap my arms around her waist, pulling her into me.

“I cleared out all the boxes and had the housekeeper polish the floor. How would you feel about turning this into your own personal dance studio? You can design it however you want. Just tell the contractors what needs to be done and they’ll take care of it.”

Natalya turns in my arms and lays her hands on my chest. Tears shimmer in her eyes. “You would do that for me?”

“Of course I would. I want this to be your home and for you to be happy here.”

“I love you.”

“Maybe you should show me how much.”

The smile I can never get enough of brightens her face. “I’d love to.”



NATALYA’S FINGER TRACES RANDOM DESIGNS ACROSS MY CHEST. SHE TIPS HER head back. “Can I ask you a question?”

“You can ask me anything, solnishko.”

She does the lip-biting thing that drives me wild, but I sense the nervousness in her, so I wait patiently.

“Do you want children? I know I’m on birth control, but we haven’t even tried being careful,” she finally asks.

Before Natalya, having children hadn’t crossed my mind. Not with the life I live. An image of a little girl with her mother’s color-shifting eyes and honey-colored hair flashes behind my eyes.

“I want yours.” It’s the truth. She is the only woman I’d want as the mother of my children.

She’s quiet a moment longer. “I’d like them, too, but I’m don’t think I’m ready, yet.”

“If you’re not ready, then you’re not ready.” I run my hand up and down her hip. “No one says we have to start now. We have plenty of time.”

“You’re right.” Natalya lays her head back on my shoulder. “When it’s time, though, I hope we have a boy and a girl. And I hope he’s older, so he can protect her and look out for her. I always wanted an older brother. My best friend Lucy has one and I was always envious of how close they are. I’m glad Lydia has Luka.”

She yawns and snuggles closer. I vow to give her as many children as she wants. Aleksei had always been like an older brother to me, so it never felt like I’d been an only child. Yes, I’d been lonely before then, but it was so long ago, it’s only a faint memory. When Natalya is ready, I also want her to be my wife. My gaze shifts to the closet where I’ve already stashed the ring.

“Sleep, solnishko.”

I close my eyes as well and a peace like nothing else washes over me. My little sunshine was always meant for me and I’ll never let her go.

Thank you for reading *The Bratva’s Enforcer!*

Aleksei’s story is next in *Heir to the Bratva*

# BOOK LIST



## **Sokolov Bratva**

The Bratva's Enforcer

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

LK Shaw is the bestselling author of sexy, sinful suspense. She resides in South Carolina. She is a dog mom and self proclaimed chocolate lover, world traveler, and perpetual procrastinator. An avid reader since childhood, she became hooked on historical romance novels in high school. She now reads, and loves, all romance sub-genres. Her books feature sexy, protective heroes and the strong women they love.

[www.lkshawauthor.com](http://www.lkshawauthor.com)

Rachel Everly likes eating tacos, running marathons, and hiding out from corporate America behind a screen of naughty words. She also likes alpha-holes, car chases, exotic vacations, and waving red flags. Rachel's motto is write what you love, but don't date what you write.

[www.racheleverly.com](http://www.racheleverly.com)