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## Chapter 1

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**T**he man, dressed immaculately in the gray designer suit, sat in a private booth at the exclusive New York City restaurant sipping his glass of wine. A smile touched his full, pink lips as his silver-colored eyes slid over the bevy of beautiful women inspecting him as if he was their next meal. Maybe he would sample one of the tasty treats before making the long flight back to his home in Russia. After all, Aleksandr Volkov was not a man who denied himself the simple pleasures of life and frequently enjoyed the company of beautiful women. Although this visit was predominantly business, sex was always a nice way to release stress, and Aleksandr had more than his fair share of pressure. Not only was he the head of the largest bratva in his native homeland, but he was also trying to set up a legitimate business in the States. At this moment in time, there was a quiet, palpable tension building in the ranks of his organization. What complicated matters further, were the rumors of war being whispered amongst his men between his family and the second largest bratva in Russia. Aleksandr couldn't quite put his finger on the pulse of the problem but knew something

big was about to go down. If there was one thing the mafia leader prided himself on, it was control of his vast empire, and he didn't play well with others who tried to fuck with that.

Hearing the soft sound of a woman clearing her throat brought Aleksandr out of his thoughts. His silver eyes slowly traveled up the form of an attractive, blonde woman standing before him in a tight, short skirt and white V-neck blouse. His gaze lingered on the large breasts spilling from the material before reaching out to touch her face. Aleksandr's voice was deep and masculine as he said, "Hello, little one. Is there something you need from me?"

The waitress giggled as her blue eyes slid over the large, strikingly handsome man. The man in front of her was gorgeous, clearly disgustingly rich, and there was an element of danger that made the foreign man even sexier. Hungrily licking her lips, she cooed, "I was wondering if I could get you anything to drink this evening. You can have anything you like, sir, even if it's not on the menu."

"I'll start with a Black Russian. We can discuss what else I would like after business." Aleksandr smiled affectionately, showing the waitress straight, white teeth. He then heard the breath catch in the waitress' voice when he eased his hand up the back of her thigh and under her short skirt to massage her bottom. Aleksandr licked his lips sensually and chuckled softly as he watched the young, attractive woman's knees begin to buckle when his finger traced the slit of her pussy through the bikini panties she wore. Done playing with her for the moment, Aleksandr removed his hand as his eyes touched hers. "I'll bring you pleasure later, sweetheart. Right now, bring my drink."

As the waitress scurried off quickly to do as Aleksandr instructed, he was unprepared to feel the hard grip on his left shoulder. Turning his head quickly, a smile touched his lips

once again as he said, "'Bout fucking time, old man. I was beginning to think you had changed your mind."

"It looked like you just had your hands full, son. Somehow I doubt you were worried about me." Viktor Sergei laughed as he watched Aleksandr stand up before pulling the younger man into a loving embrace. Pulling back, he patted Aleksandr's bearded face affectionately. "To have a face like yours, my friend. Must be exhausting having so many women begging to be fucked."

Aleksandr chuckled before releasing Viktor and motioning for him to take a seat. As the two men sat down, he exhaled dramatically. "It can be quite taxing at times, but I seem to manage well. How have you been, old friend? You're looking rather tired. Is Anya keeping you up at night?"

"More than you know." Viktor laughed affectionately, thinking of his lovely wife. "Anya sends her love by the way and regrets that she can't join us, but she is not feeling well."

"I am sorry to hear that," Aleksandr replied, a concerned look on his face. Viktor was like a father to him and he cared deeply for the man who had taken him in as a child. "I hope it's nothing serious. Is there anything I can do for the two of you?"

"Actually, there is," Viktor quietly replied as he eyed the younger man intently. "You know I consider you and your brother to be my own children. God did not see fit to bless Anya and me with a son of our own, but he did bless us with you."

Aleksandr sat back and watched Viktor's body language stiffen and a sadness creep into the Russian elder's blue eyes. An icy chill shot up Aleksandr's spine; something was wrong and he knew it. "Get to the point, dammit. It's not like you to beat around the bush, Viktor."

With a loud sigh, the distinguished older man said, "No, it's not, so I will just say it, but this is strictly between the two

of us and I will need your decision to my proposition before you leave this restaurant today. Understand?"

"I do," Aleksandr replied as he nodded his head in agreement. "Proceed."

Viktor let out a loud sigh as he raked an aging, wrinkled hand through his silver-streaked hair. "I'm dying," the older man blurted out as his eyes studied the younger man's face. "The doctors have told me that I have cancer and I only have six months to live. I knew I had been tired and not feeling well, but I did not anticipate this."

"Viktor..." Aleksandr began solemnly but was immediately silenced by the older man raising his hand.

"I don't need your pity or your sympathy, Alek," Viktor quickly said, knowing he could not stand to hear the younger man's words, for fear he would break down in front of him. "But I do need your help. Anya is not here today because she still has not come to terms with my diagnosis. This meeting is not intended for mourning, my son, but rather a business proposition. When I'm gone, I will need you to take care of my wife and daughters, both physically and monetarily. Will you do that for me?"

"Of course, Viktor," Aleksandr replied, stunned by the man's words. He could not believe the man before him, who looked like a pillar of muscle and strength, was dying of cancer. Death, clearly, was the great equalizer. "You can rest knowing that they will always be taken care of, but you knew that already, old friend. What is it that you are really wanting from me? I sense your hesitation, and it makes me uneasy. Just spit it out already."

"Fine," the older man replied with a growl as he pounded a fist on the table. Leave it to the younger man to read between the lines and see the truth hidden underneath. If there was one thing Aleksandr Volkov was good at, it was reading people, and that was why Viktor was about to ask him

for the biggest favor of his life. "Upon my death, Alek, you will take over as head of my bratva."

"No," the man with dirty-blond hair growled through clenched, white teeth. He had anticipated that this was coming, and quite frankly, he didn't want it. Not only was Viktor the leader of the third largest bratva, but he had just inked a multi-billion-dollar deal to expand his business to the States. In recent months, there had been so much turmoil within Viktor's mafia family that he had enlisted Aleksandr's help to clean things up. The elderly man was brilliant but lacked tight control over what belonged to him. Aleksandr was not a fan of drugs or forced prostitution, and both were rampant there. It would take months, or even years, to weed out the bad seeds, and he lived by a sort of honor among thieves' code. Aleksandr might be a killer, but there was a fairness to his method of madness.

"Yes!" Viktor shouted as he stood up and banged his fist on the table. Switching to their native tongue, he said, "I have already met with the members of the council and set the plan into action. You will be my successor whether you like it or not!"

"Fuck you, old man!" Aleksandr yelled back as he shot to his feet. The entire restaurant turned at his deep, elevated, masculine voice. "I decide my fate, not you! I told you I don't fucking want it, and last I checked, you had no problems with your hearing!"

"You have to do this for me, Alek!" Viktor pleaded through clenched teeth as he lowered his voice so the people around them would stop staring. "Think of the money that will be at your disposal. My empire is worth more than half a billion dollars. All of that will belong to you; just say the word."

A harsh, derisive laugh escaped Aleksandr's lips as his eyes darkened dangerously to a steel-grey hue. "Half a billion dollars! Are you forgetting that I am one of the wealthiest men

in the world? My net worth exceeds twelve billion. Your empire would be pocket change for me. You know why I don't want it, Viktor. I love you like a father and I respect you greatly, but your control of your *bratva* has been slipping for some time. I don't have time to clean up your fucking mess!"

Before Viktor could respond, he suddenly fell back in his chair as a wave of dizziness swept through him and a sudden, intense pain shot across his temple. When he felt Aleksandr's large hands gripping his shoulders in concern, Viktor jerked away and broke the younger man's grip. "Don't!" he barked, raising his hands. "Just give me a minute, dammit! It'll pass."

Aleksandr gritted his teeth as he released the older man but continued to stand over him with a concerned, protective stance. *Damn, Viktor*, he thought to himself! He was feeling an immense guilt for yelling at the bastard but felt an even greater pain in his chest at the news of his terminal condition. Aleksandr had no idea the man was even sick, let alone dying. Viktor knew he would never have considered being his successor, so the older man was using his current position to try to manipulate Aleksandr into somehow feeling sorry for him, and dammit, it was beginning to work!

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Viktor sat with his eyes closed as the pain in his head began to subside. Tears brimmed behind his closed eyelids. The last person he wanted to see him weak like this was the younger man he considered a son. "Alek," Viktor began, his voice soft and full of emotion. "I know the control of my territories has decreased in the last two to three years, but I have been so focused on the shit Paul has been scheming that I have become somewhat obsessed with him, unfortunately at the cost of losing solid ground in the underworld."

Aleksandr ran an exasperated hand through his dishwater

blond hair at the mention of Paul Morrison. The American bastard had married Viktor's daughter Kira two years ago and was a cowardly weasel whom Aleksandr absolutely hated. Paul was an international businessman who had several politicians in his back pocket and knew how to skirt the law. The asshole was making a mockery of Viktor's leadership or what it meant to be in a *bratva* and was allowing things into the Russian mafia that they had weeded out years ago. Paul had also started a bad habit of asserting himself as Viktor's second in command, and it was pissing off several members of the council. Not only was Paul bad for business, but everyone knew he was sleeping with multiple women and abusive to Kira. She, of course, denied the abuse and blindly followed where Paul led.

"I know you are angry with me, probably feeling manipulated, and I'm sorry for that," Viktor said, interrupting Aleksandr's thoughts. "I knew what your reaction would be, though. I was hoping you would take charge long enough to straighten things out or give leadership to someone you trusted, like your brother Nikolai. My pride won't allow me to beg you..."

At that moment, a building of a man walked up to the table and bent down to whisper something into Viktor's ear. When the large, Russian guard walked away, Viktor looked at Aleksandr as he stood up and began buttoning his suit jacket. "I'm sorry to do this, but I have to go. Apparently, my daughter Kira is in some sort of trouble that needs my attention immediately. Since you clearly need time to think about my proposition, I will give you until tomorrow evening to give me an answer. I should warn you that even if you say no, my council will seek you out upon my death. Like it or not, things have already been set into motion."

Before turning to leave, Viktor looked into Aleksandr's darkened eyes and felt an icy chill race up his spine. The

younger man was clearly enraged, and he hated to admit it, but Viktor feared Aleksandr, even though the two were close. Although his words said otherwise, Viktor knew Aleksandr would do what he wanted. He only hoped that Aleksandr's love for him trumped the anger he felt. If Viktor wasn't dying, he knew there was no way he could have gotten away with talking to Alek the way he had. Breaking eye contact with the silver-eyed man, Viktor turned to leave. He heard the loud gasps of surprise as he simultaneously heard the crashing of the table and dishes. Viktor had left just in time.

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"Fuck!" Aleksandr yelled as he flipped the table. His large body was tense with rage as he picked up a heavy chair and threw it across the room. Viktor had better be glad he was sick and that Aleksandr loved him like a father, because those were the only things saving his sorry ass right now. As his eyes shot around the room at the many patrons staring in stunned silence, Aleksandr watched men and women alike turn their heads away from him in total fear. No one wanted to feel his wrath. He might be extremely wealthy and have the face of an angel, but even the devil feared the lethal and merciless Aleksandr Volkov.

Needing to release some of his anger and frustration before he killed the next man who stepped in his path, Aleksandr motioned to his most trusted guard and quickly made his way out of the restaurant. Thirty minutes later, he found himself walking into the discreet sex club designed for the wealthy and elite. On the surface, Nona was a small nightclub, but to those in the know, it was a place where one's deepest, darkest fantasies were fulfilled, and right now, Aleksandr needed a distraction from his rage. Just as he stepped up to the bar to get a glass of vodka, he turned his head and was

stunned to see the pale-skinned redhead rapidly making her way toward the back of the club. The woman was built like an hourglass and dressed in a tight, black, slip dress that emphasized every delicious inch of her body. The black material hugged her smaller frame and emphasized her wide hips and lovely breasts, which made his cock begin to pulse with anticipation. Aleksandr couldn't see the woman's face but knew she would be amazing to look at. A smile touched his pink lips at the thought of wrapping those shapely, slender legs around his waist as he fucked her intensely. With that thought, Aleksandr watched her talk to a blonde woman before exiting through a set of double doors. The only reason the red-haired beauty would disappear through the doors was if she were looking for some fun, and Aleksandr would be more than happy to help her with that.

Needing to see the woman's face, Aleksandr downed the drink before he shot across the club. He could feel an electric current growing in the base of his spine as he made his way into the back of the building. Looking around, he growled and let out an explicative when the woman was nowhere to be seen. Where the fuck could she have gone? Was she a submissive? Did she belong to the owner? Aleksandr had so many questions racing through his mind that he did not see the ebony-haired woman approach him from behind.

"Mr. Volkov?" she asked, almost whisper soft as he turned to glare at her. Seeing the irritation in his silver eyes, she quickly offered, "I'm sorry if I startled you, but I thought you looked lost. Can I help you with something this evening?"

"Da. Did you see a redhead in a tight, black dress walk through here?"

"Of course. She has an appointment with Master Andrei. Do you know her?"

Ignoring the woman's question, Aleksandr asked, "Where is Andrei this evening? I need to speak to him right away."

"Come. I'll take you to him."

Aleksandr followed the scantily clad woman as she led him toward the owner of the club and one of his best friends. The two had grown up together before Andrei had moved to the States with his parents in his late teens. They had moved his friend and changed his name, to keep a rival bratva from killing him. Now he owned several sex clubs in the States that catered to the wealthy and elite. Andrei didn't know it, but Aleksandr had kept an eye on his friend the entire time and had guards who watched him 24/7.

Walking into Andrei's office, Aleksandr was not surprised to see him sitting on the edge of his desk, talking on the phone. If there was one thing Andrei liked to do, it was talk. As he hung up the phone, his blue eyes found Aleksandr as he yelled loudly, "Alek, you crazy son of a bitch! Why didn't you call me and let me know you were in town?"

The two men hugged and laughed as Aleksandr smiled. "I was not anticipating finding pleasure while here, my friend, but it has appeared to find me."

"Is that so? Well, you are always welcome to my submissives. Your brother, Nikolai, was just here a couple days ago. That one is quite a hit with my loves. It must be that pretty face of his. Now, what can I do for you? I hate to rush you, brat, but I have an appointment that I am late for."

"Your appointment is exactly what I would like to talk to you about, Andrei." Aleksandr smiled as he watched his friend step back and cross his arms over his large chest in irritation. "I saw a young woman with an amazing body and red hair who, I was told, was your next appointment. Is that true? If so, I want her."

Andrei began to shake his head vigorously as he shouted in their native language, "No fucking way, Alek. This is one woman I refuse to share." At Aleksandr's arched, golden brow, he said, "Besides, she's specific with what she likes. She is not

going to let just any man crawl on top of her. It has taken me a year or more to develop our relationship. I'm not going to let you fuck that up."

"Need I remind you, Andrei, that I'm not just any man. There isn't a woman alive who has ever refused me. I doubt she will be the first." Aleksandr smiled, intrigued by Andrei's quick refusal. He had never seen the Dom react this way to a woman, even his most treasured submissive, Elena. What about the redhead was so special? Walking over to the wall parallel to where Andrei sat on the desk, Aleksandr hit a hidden button and stood back as a panel slid slowly and revealed an elegant, masculine bedroom. As his eyes touched the two-way mirror, the breath caught in his throat as his cock slammed against the zipper of his pants.

Before Aleksandr, stood the most ravishing creature he had ever had the pleasure of looking at. The woman was even more beautiful up close than she had been from a distance. Nothing, though, could have prepared Aleksandr for the jolt of lust and need that shot through his body as he stared at the alluring enchantress. He not only wanted her sexually but wanted to possess every inch of her. Never in his thirty-eight years of existence, had Aleksandr been this attracted to a woman. He could not pull his eyes from her as she began to take off her clothes, let alone hear his friend Andrei speaking to him. Aleksandr watched her pull the black slip dress she wore over her mid-back, her magenta-red hair framing a lovely face, with eyes that appeared violet in color. She chewed on her full, wide lip and scrunched her pert, well-formed nose as she smoothed her hair down in the mirror. As his eyes traveled down her body, Aleksandr could not stop the moan that escaped his lips. Round, close set breasts were decorated with protruding, light-pink nipples and a well-manicured, triangle of bright red hair met him as his eyes went even lower. He then watched her turn on shapely, well-toned legs and carry

her small, narrow waist and perfect alabaster ass to Andrei's bed before crawling in and pulling the sheet up over her body. Her skin was flawless and porcelain and looked as soft as white lilies. Aleksandr found his mouth watering as he pictured his face buried in that succulent pussy as she wiggled beneath him, begging him to let her come. Fuck, he needed to be inside this woman, and he needed it now!

"Oh shit," Andrei moaned when Aleksandr finally pulled his eyes from the woman and found him. He could see the look on his friend's face and knew that his time with his favorite client would be abruptly coming to an end. "Look, man, you have to promise me that you will treat El with the utmost respect. She is not like other women."

"Does she belong to you? Is she your submissive?" Aleksandr asked, his silver eyes narrowing on his friend as he gripped Andrei's shirt and jerked him forward. "How long have you been fucking her?"

"No, she doesn't belong to me. What the hell is wrong with you? Let go of me!" Andrei yelled back, just as Aleksandr loosened his grip and shoved the Russian Dom back. Catching his breath, Andrei looked at his best friend, who stood like a towered, brick wall with his arms over his broad chest waiting for an answer. "Stop looking at me like that, dammit! She's not my submissive, and I technically am not fucking her!"

"What do you mean you're not technically fucking her? Why is she naked in your bed then?"

"I already told you Alek, El isn't typical," Andrei replied, needing a stiff drink. As he walked over to his mini bar to pour himself one, he said, "Look, I'm not sleeping with her like you think. El has been coming here for about six months, and I only eat her pussy and use toys occasionally. She won't let me go any further, although I have definitely tried, believe me. I don't know if she's married or in a relationship. Fuck! I don't even know her real name. All I know is she has a profes-

sional career, and she has asked me to call her El. She comes in when she needs a release. If you want a shot at her, then go ahead and try! I'm telling you, though, Alek, she will shoot you down without batting an eye. El has spunk."

Aleksandr walked up to Andrei, took the drink from his hand and downed it. He then patted his friend on the cheek affectionately as a brilliant smile touched his lips. "We'll see about that. Now if you'll excuse me, I don't want to keep our guest waiting." Aleksandr then released Andrei and turned to leave the room.