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## Prologue

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*Moscow, Russia*

*Fifteen Years Ago*

“If he makes me wait much longer I may break down the door and shoot him.”

Galina Olva looked up from her book to where her father, Brach Olva stood looking out the window.

“We have business to discuss, and he’s treating me like a servant.”

“Calm down, Father,” Galina said. Her voice lacked emotion, but she didn’t care. She’d never really cared for her father, but her mother had insisted she come with him today, so they could spend time together. Not that she wanted to really spend time with either of her parents. She would rather be with her grandfather back in England. He was teaching her to hone her skills as a writer, and that’s what she wanted in life.

She was happy her parents sent her to boarding school in England instead of Russia. But that meant, in many ways, she

didn't know her parents very well. She didn't spend enough time with them. Truthfully, she didn't want to. Her mother loved her father with all her heart, but Galina wasn't sure how she could. Her father was a mobster, a man who made money through other people's suffering. He ran numbers, as her grandfather said, and houses of prostitution.

Even at the age of sixteen, Galina knew what her father did for a living was wrong. She knew from what she'd read in newspapers that there were several Bratvas in Russia, including the one run by her father, and by Ivan Gorovich, the man they were here to see. Why her father was here she didn't know. Galina just wished she wasn't here, too.

She put her nose back in her book, 'Timely Actions', the latest book written by her grandfather. She'd barely read a page when a booming voice filled the room.

"I can only get you out of so much trouble," the man yelled. "You are not a true dragon, it's only a nickname your friends gave you. You have to learn to control yourself."

The answer came back in Russian, and was spoken so quickly, Galina didn't catch the words. She knew her father was not happy that she was not fluent in Russian, but she'd forgotten a lot of it since she'd moved to England.

"How do you know this Gorovich person?" she asked.

"We worked together when we were younger," he replied. "When the leader of our Bratva, Criss, got sick, he had no heirs. So he divided his holdings between myself and Boris. I think he expected us to work together, but that has not happened. Boris is ruthless. He has taken over other families. I, on the other hand, have floundered somewhat."

Her father sounded sad, and Galina wanted to say something that would comfort him, but she wondered if her father was telling her the truth. "It's not as if you're poor. You have a great deal of money." At least she thought he did. He owned several houses in Russia, and three in England that she knew of.

“But Boris is racing past me in the professional world.”

Galina snorted out a laugh. “Being in the mob is the professional world?”

“Keep your voice down,” her father hissed.

“Why? He’s not your boss, is he? Are you afraid he’ll think less of you?” Galina didn’t wait for an answer. She put her nose back in her book and started to read. If her father was angry with her so be it. As far as she was concerned, he could stay that way, and if he didn’t like it he could send her back to England. She would be very happy with that.

The room grew quiet and she read in wonderful silence. But then her heart seized when her father said, “I’m sorry you hate me so much.”

What was she supposed to say to that? Words didn’t form, and finally she said, “I don’t hate you.”

“Then what do you hate?” he asked.

“I hate the response I have to give my friends at school when they ask what my father does for a living. I have to say, ‘He’s a businessman in Russia’. I can’t tell them he runs drugs, and kills people at the drop of a hat. It’s hard to tell your friends your father is a criminal.”

More silence. Galina returned her attention to her book.

A deep voice boomed out, “When I get asked that question, I tell them my father can annihilate their family with one swift stroke.”

Galina looked up at the man who had spoken. She thought he was about three or four years older than her. He had shoulder-length dark hair and piercing blue eyes.

“Does that answer make you proud?” Galina asked.

“It does,” the man answered.

“You’re the one they call The Dragon,” she said. “Is it because dragons care for nothing but gold and trinkets? Dragons don’t give a damn about people?”

“Galina!” Her father pointed his finger at her. “Behave.”

But the man laughed and said, “Exactly. So, behave, little girl, or they won’t have to bury you. They’ll just scatter your ashes in the wind.”

“I don’t think your reach is that far,” Galina said. She snorted and shook her head, then returned her attention to her book. He might be gorgeous, but he was an ass. Thank goodness she didn’t have to put up with him after today.

“He’s waiting for you.” Galina looked up to see The Dragon point at her father, and then jerk his head toward the area he’d just come out of. Her father left the room without saying a word, and Galina started to read again.

“Someone needs to teach you some manners,” he said.

“Would that be before or after you turn me to ash with your fire-breathing skills, that don’t exist?”

Galina looked up to see his eyes narrow in her direction, then he shook his head. “You’re not worth the trouble.”

Then he stormed out of the room, and she couldn’t help but smile.