
Chapter 1

It was a dark and stormy night; foul deeds were probably afoot. Ethan Waines chuckled as the overused words flew through his mind. Then he reached into the crisps bag on the seat next to him, only to groan when he found it empty. He upended the bag and shook it. Crumbs fell into the passenger seat, and Ethan wondered how long he had been sitting in his car. He'd done it last night, too, with no results. And the night before that. And the night before that.

His father had tasked him with finding out who broke into Brach Olva's townhouse and helped themselves to a necklace once owned by Catherine the Great. Nothing else had been taken—just the necklace. Which told Ethan it was an inside job. He'd mentioned his theory to his father, Ivan Gorovich the head of a powerful mafia family. Ivan had blown up, telling his son he didn't know what he was talking about.

Ethan was not in a good mood anyway, considering he was trying to figure out who took the necklace, which belonged to his father and was being held by Brach Olva while the two of them negotiated the marriage of their children, Mikhail Gorovich, and

Galina Olva. Ethan couldn't help but think he was the one who should be marrying Galina.

But Ivan didn't think much of Ethan right now, after Ethan had kidnapped Galina in an effort to keep her from Mikhail, and it had backfired. Ethan was not really sure what he'd been thinking at the time. Ethan was Ivan's bastard, after all; well, one of many. Ivan had children scattered all over the globe. He'd been close with Ethan's mother until Mikhail had discovered Ethan's birth certificate and shown it to his mother, who had thrown a fit about Ivan being in contact with his bastard son. Ivan had cut them off, and only recently gotten back in touch.

Not that it did Ethan any good. His father basically hated him, or so Ethan thought. His mother had loved the father of her child until the day she'd died—penniless. Now Ethan was trying to get into his father's good graces by doing something that was basically undoable. Ethan was not a detective. Hell, he'd failed at every job he'd ever had. His bosses had called him arrogant, angry, and unwilling to work with others.

There was no way he was going to find that necklace, or who took it. He shook the chip bag and when nothing more came out, he tossed it in the back seat. That's when he noticed a person walking down the street. The person was tall and whip thin, but he couldn't tell much else. It was dark tonight, and there were no stars, and it was raining ever so slightly, which blurred things a little.

Ethan leaned forward. He clutched the steering wheel and squinted at the figure as he/she passed Olva's house. The figure walked to the house next to Olva's, stopped and looked around. Ethan was parked across the street and two houses down. Whoever it was looked around as if to see if someone was watching. Ethan didn't move; he hoped whoever it was didn't notice his presence in the car.

The figure turned and walked toward the Olva house. The person mounted the stairs and paused at the door. Once more

the person looked around. He/she seemed to reach into their pocket and pull something out. Seconds later the front door opened and the person disappeared inside. Ethan picked up his phone and checked the time. 1:18 a.m. This was the first time in the four nights he'd spent watching the property that someone had appeared. Strange that they would be able to let themselves in so easily.

Did they set off an alarm when they went through the front door? Ethan engaged the engine, then rolled down the window. There were no sounds. But what if it was a silent alarm? Ethan looked up and down the street, as the person in the house had done. There were no cars coming down the street.

Ethan got out of the car, letting the door close as softly as possible so as to not call attention to himself. He jogged across the street and up the stairs to the front door. He turned the knob and was surprised when the door swung open. He stepped inside, but he didn't call out. There was a security panel on the wall to his right, the light green and not red, which meant the system hadn't been on, or the person who had come in had disarmed it.

Where could they be now? Ivan had told Ethan the necklace had been in a safe room on the second floor, hidden behind a wall in the master closet. Ethan had looked at the blueprints from when the house had been remodeled. The entire second floor had been turned into a massive bedroom and master bathroom. There was also a sitting room. The closet took up most of what had been the original bathroom. Except for the safe room behind it.

Ethan listened for a sound. Had the intruder gone to the safe room? Or somewhere else in the house? It was totally quiet. He made a quick search of the ground floor rooms. No one was there.

A noise from upstairs caught his attention. It sounded as if something small had dropped. There was no noise of breakage, but he knew he'd just found the intruder. He took the steps to the

second floor. A small beacon of light was visible through the closed bedroom door. Ethan had a gun in his pocket, even if he didn't plan on using it. The sight of it in his hand could still frighten someone.

Ethan grabbed the doorknob and turned it; it opened slowly and soundlessly. He stepped inside and studied the tall figure who was searching a wardrobe. The top cabinet doors were thrown open, and the person was rifling through the top drawer.

"What are you doing?" Ethan asked.

The burglar gasped, then turned toward him. When she—for it was a woman—had come into the house she'd had a hoodie up over her head. Now it was down, and her blonde hair was done up in a braid that hung almost to her waist.

"O, ty napugal menya," she said.

"I frightened you?" he asked, thankful his mother had forced him to learn Russian.

"Leave me alone," she replied in English. "You don't belong here."

"Neither do you," Ethan answered. "This is Brach Olva's house, and I know you're not Brach Olva, and you're not his daughter Galina. Why are you in this house? What are you looking for?"

"That's none of your business," she said in a thick Russian accent. "Don't make me hurt you. Leave."

"You're going to hurt me?" Ethan asked with a laugh. "How are you going to do that? Do you have a gun? Are you going to shoot me?"

"Let me leave," she said softly. She was no longer speaking Russian, and Ethan figured it was because he was speaking English, even though he'd understood her when she'd spoken it earlier.

"Did you take the Catherine the Great necklace?" he asked. "Where is it? Do you know?" he asked when she didn't answer.

"Let me leave," she repeated.

“Not until I get some answers.” Ethan closed the door behind him. “I need that necklace. You have no idea how badly I need that necklace.”

“Kak i ya,” she responded very softly.

She needed it too? That meant she didn’t have it. Was she looking for it here? Did she not know it had been taken?

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I could ask you the same thing,” she said in English.

Someone had to be the bigger person. “My name is Ethan Waines. I’m trying to find who stole the necklace.”

“That’s easy,” she said. “Ivan Gorovich. Everyone knows Olva was holding it for him. But your father is the real thief.”

“You know who I am?” Ethan asked.

“Everyone knows you are the bastard son of Ivan Gorovich. Or one of them, anyway.”

Ethan glared at her. He hated the term bastard, even if it did apply to him. And his father was a thief. It was a well-known fact. That didn’t make the words any easier to hear.

“Let me leave, son of Gorovich,” she said.

“You’re coming with me,” he said. “We have a lot to talk about.”

She launched herself at him. It happened so fast he didn’t have time to prepare. She jumped, as if she were doing some sort of karate move. Her feet hit his chest and knocked the wind out of his lungs. Ethan hit the ground, pain shooting through him. Through blurred vision he watched as she yanked the door open and flew through it.

Ethan rolled onto his side, trying as hard as he could to catch his breath. He got up on his knees, then crawled through the door, pain shooting through his torso. He made it to the stairs before he collapsed, unable to get to his feet. He needed help, as much as he hated to admit it. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He had a few friends he could call, but his father had told him to be quiet about the situation, and his quest

to retrieve the necklace. So Ethan did something that made his stomach churn. He dialed his half-brother, Mikhail, but he cut the call off before it could be connected.

Instead he dialed 999 for medical attention. If he'd contacted Mikhail, he would have to explain about the woman who was here, and he didn't want to do that. He wanted to find information about her on his own.

She hoped he wasn't hurt too badly. Sofia ran down the street, toward where she'd left her motorbike. Finding Ethan Waines in the house was a shock to her. Using her Taekwondo training on him was the only way she could see to get away.

What was he doing there? And why had he asked her if she'd taken the necklace? The question had cause fear to spread through her. She knew she had to get out of there before he got a good enough look at her to be able to identify her later.

How could she have such an asshole for a brother? As she piloted her way toward her apartment in Tottenham, she thought about how her brother had laughed when he'd told her he'd sold a fake necklace to Ivan Gorovich.

"Dorby, are you an idiot?" she'd practically screeched. They were in her apartment, eating dinner. He'd reacted by laughing louder.

"He gave me a million U.S. dollars," Dorby said. "I'm going to give you some. How about two hundred and fifty thousand?"

"That will help pay for your funeral," she'd replied. "You have lost your mind. When Gorovich finds out he will kill you, and possibly me."

They didn't have parents to worry about, which right now was a good thing to her. She had no doubt Gorovich would figure out the necklace was fake, and he would be outraged. That's when she decided to get the necklace back before the

mobster made the discovery. She'd done research on the man, and had found out everything she could about him.

She knew he was a mob boss, but she didn't know anything about his personal life. She'd found a man who worked for him, followed him to a bar one night and plied him with drinks. That's when she'd found out he had children—a ton of them. One of them, Mikhail, The Dragon, lived close to London and was marrying the daughter of another mob boss. The man, who thought he was getting lucky that night, told her about the necklace, and how Gorovich had hidden it in his future in-law's house. That's when she decided to call on old skills and break in to take the necklace back.

Dorby was an excellent forger, but at some point Gorovich would take the necklace to an expert to have it authenticated, and Dorby would be discovered—and killed.

She'd been doing surveillance on the house for a week. No one had gone in or out. Tonight had been her first attempt to find the necklace, and she'd waited until after midnight. She'd ridden her bike up and down the block a few times, but no one had jumped out at her. So she'd parked down the block and been found in the house by Ethan Waines. She'd found out about him while she was researching Gorovich.

Sofia wasn't sure where to go now. If someone had already stolen the necklace that might solve her problems. Until the thief discovered the necklace was fake, and reported it to Gorovich. The original necklace had been taken from a St. Petersburg museum in the 1960s, and never recovered. Dorby had convinced Gorovich he'd stolen it in Szczecin, Poland, from the original thief whom he'd refused to name.

Sofia had never been there, but she wondered if she should go there now, if she might learn something about the museum burglary. She doubted it, but it was the only place she knew to go from here. The police had no clue who had broken into the townhouse, and Sofia was sure she would never find the truth.

Her late father, who had been an excellent forger and passed those skills on to his son, had known many people. Sofia still knew some of those people. She would get hold of Boris Poporoy, her father's best friend, and see if he could point her in the right direction.

Not only could it help her to possibly find the necklace, but it would get her out of London. Something told her Ethan Waines would be looking for her very soon.