
A BABY FOR THE
BRATVA

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter 1

Starla Anderson bit her lip to stop her teeth from clattering under the deathly cold of a Russian winter's night. She didn't want to wake any of the other girls sleeping alongside her in the damp, frosty, concrete dormitory.

She supposed the cold would have been a different story if she were snuggled between thick layers of fleece, on a luxurious mattress in an electrically heated room, with a good book, a bottomless mug of hot tea and a bottomless box of chocolate. But she may as well have asked for her very own universe in that case.

Sister Nadya, who pretended not to tolerate her presence one bit, constantly told her to bear it. After five hard years in the threadbare orphanage, her soft American bones should have toughened up by now already. It never did and it never would, not for as long as she lived. But the thought of leaving Russia, of leaving the only family she had come to know and love, never crossed her mind. And that was why at twenty-one years of age she hadn't left yet.

This was her life now. Since the moment she turned sixteen, and her mother died in a horrific fire, leaving her stranded and

alone in Russia, with only her mother's best friend, Sister Alena to look out for her.

But God, everything would be so much more manageable without the miserable wrecking cold. She closed her eyes and fantasized about the thick fur blankets she could buy, one for each of the nine girls in the orphanage, once she was paid for the gown she was sewing. She had gotten unbelievably lucky when Sister Alena who had become Starla's unwritten guardian, had bravely taken her designs to a very wealthy socialite. Starla had had all her designs immediately commissioned and was a few hours work away from finishing the second gown.

There might even be money left over for a few pairs of boots and a good few pairs of socks. And there were still five other gowns to sew which would mean more money than the orphanage had seen in forever.

Sewing at night was the only thing that got her through cleaning other people's houses during the day. She could have left when she turned eighteen, but the thought of going back to America seemed entirely too foreign to her now. Russia was her home, as much as she hated and loved it both. She was determined to upgrade the condition of the orphanage and make sure the younger girls got a proper education. She just had to work hard.

With a hopeful smile on her face, Starla forced herself to drift into sleep. She had no idea how long she must have been asleep, but a heavy sheet of doom sunk into her skin moments before she was roughly awakened. It was almost as if even in her sleep she had sensed the moment her life would again change forever.

"Starla. Starla. Up. Get up. Starla." The tiny hands of Sister Matrina shook her awake, as her equally tiny, though shrill, voice whispered urgently at her in Russian.

"Sister Matrina? What is it?" Starla asked softly in the dark but already the other girls had begun to stir from their sleep.

"Oh, child, bad things are happening," Sister Matrina cried

in Russian. “You must dress at once. Sister Nadya needs to see you. At once. At once.” With her signature shaky movements Sister Matrina switched on a light. She then told the other girls to hush and go back to sleep before she opened the closet and extracted the only decent dress which the girls shared whenever an occasion demanded so. Starla had embellished it with odd bits and no matter how old it was, it did look very pretty.

Sister Matrina continued to mumble in her mother tongue what a bad thing this was, and she prayed for strength and guidance.

Starla refocused under the dim light glaring from a globe hung precariously from the ceiling then glanced at the old clock on a small table. She couldn’t fathom a reason Sister Nadya wanted her dressed at two o’clock on a Wednesday morning.

Rising from the bed, she stunned her whole system as her toes touched the naked floor. Damn the cold. Still frazzled, Sister Matrina helped her into the good pair of socks they owned, telling her to hurry or she’d anger the beasts.

Beasts? What beasts? But then this was Sister Matrina after all. She operated on two modes only, frenzied and highly frenzied, no matter what emotion the situation demanded. She also had a secret love for horror stories and Starla wondered if perhaps the good nun was confusing fantasy for reality with some late night Lovecraftian.

She decided she would humor Sister Matrina and see where it would take her. The other girls were less circumspect and did not miss an opportunity to tease the nun as she ran around gathering stuff for Starla to wear.

“What is it, Sister Matrina? The end of the whole world as we know it? Again?”

“Or the Koshchei? Or the Vodyanoy?”

This started a raucous argument amongst the girls as they debated exactly what could have caused the nun’s latest frenzy.

Starla smiled to herself even as she shivered when she

removed her nightdress, donned a bra, then slipped on the dress which was hardly warm enough to wear in the middle of winter anyway, certainly not at this time of night. She had to admit she was curious to see how this would play out and whether what had set off Sister Matrina was real or imagined.

The girls were getting louder and louder and, of course, liked nothing better than to tease the nun at every opportunity they got, even at this ungodly hour.

“But perhaps it’s Anton, with a marriage proposal,” the most romantic girl of the group said.

“At this hour?” All the other girls threw pillows at her.

It was definitely not Anton. She still hadn’t said yes to him taking her to the movies, a marriage proposal was farfetched. Besides, while she liked the sweet boy, he was more a friend.

Sister Matrina tried her hardest to hush the girls, her pleas falling on deaf ears—once they got started, they were hard to stop. She mumbled prayers as she put all Starla’s belongings, hardly much into an old broken suitcase.

“The Bratva,” Sister Matrina shouted, as she tried to fold one of Starla’s nightdresses. Trembling too much she gave up and stuffed the garment clumsily into the suitcase.

“The Bratva are here,” she said again, and the noise gave way to silence as it fell over the room, extinguished like a bucket of ice-cold water over the flame of a matchstick. There was now no mistaking Sister Matrina’s antics for anything other than real, genuine fear.

Starla patted the heads of the three youngest girls as they ran to her and hugged her legs, begging her to stay. “It’s all right, I’m sure,” she said.

Starla had lived long enough in Russia to know the scary connotations that went with that word. The dread it incited, the sheer terror it ignited. Her knees caved and she sat on the bed. Everyone hoped never to cross paths with the Russian mafia so why was she being summoned?

What was happening?

“What are they doing here? What do they want with Starla?” the girls asked, full of concern now.

Sister Matrina said nothing at first, her eyes filling with tears instead. Dagger spiked dread pierced Starla’s skin as the girls themselves cowered in fear. The beasts that had scared Sister Matrina were not the harmless ones found between dog-eared pages of old books, but the real live ones and they were here.

For her for some unknown reason.

Her gaze darted to the now empty side of the closet she shared with one of the girls. She didn’t own a lot of things, but that Sister Matrina had packed everything she was worth created an uneasy feeling in her belly.

“Please, child, you must hurry,” Sister Matrina said finally, handing Starla her boots. “We have kept them waiting long enough, and they have threatened to burn the place down if we don’t do as they say,” she added. The girls murmured worriedly, coming to Starla now.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine,” Starla assured them again even if she had zero confidence in her words. “Maybe they’re here because they heard I’m such a good seamstress,” she said with a laugh that didn’t quite carry any merriment as she put on her boots. “And they want me to create a gown for their wives... or something. Go back to bed. I’m sure it’s nothing at all, anyway.” She insisted and gave them one big brave smile then followed Sister Matrina out, her well-worn boots hardly making a sound on the frigid floor.

There was no way in hell she was leaving with men from the Bratva to go anywhere, she decided, if that’s what having all her possessions packed up meant.

Starla had come to know the long dark passages of the orphanage well in the five years she’d lived there. The raw pain of losing her mother hadn’t dissipated and it followed her around

here at the orphanage like a ghost she had only gotten better at hiding.

While she tried to remain calm, her nerves were on edge. Sister Matrina's own rattled demeanor didn't help her one bit. But by the time they neared Sister Nadya's office and found Sister Nadya and Sister Alena in what sounded like a heated conversation, whatever doom Starla was about to face had become inherently real. Too real.

"Sister Nadya, please, no," Sister Alena whispered urgently. "I beg you. Not Starla..."

"Sister Alena?" Starla asked as she closed the distance between them. The normally comforting face of Sister Alena, with her pleasantly pale complexion and soft watery blue eyes was replaced with sheer terror and fear.

"Starla," Sister Nadya said, immediately smoothing down Starla's hair and inspecting her attire. She then nodded with her lips tight. "Good. There is no time to waste."

"Please, Sister Nadya, I beseech you. I beseech you. Not my Starla." Sister Alena tugged at the sleeve of Sister Nadya. "There must be another way."

"Sister Alena, enough," Sister Nadya hissed with that familiar sternness in her voice that no one dared challenge. She was never more Russian than when her patience had been tested, which seemed to be her permanent mode. "Who will you propose I send?" she asked in heavily accented, though perfect, English then slipped her left hand in the sleeve of her right arm and vice versa as she waited for Sister Alena to answer her.

"Answer, Sister Alena. Who will you have me send instead? Look at those girls." Sister Nadya jerked her head at the other girls. Starla turned to find all nine girls had resisted staying in their room and now stood in audience of God knew what was happening.

"Those three," Sister Nadya pointed at Cara, Tatiana and Yeva. "They may be of age, but not one of them will survive a

day, an hour in their... their grasp, not with what they have planned,” Sister Nadya said and she failed to mask all the fear from her words. “Starla might well. As to finding another way. There isn’t one. Not adhering to their demands will result in all of us being in danger. You know this well enough, Sister Alena. We do not have the luxury of making enemies out of those kinds of men. You know what they can do when crossed. But will you have that instead? Take us all down to save one girl. Or... sacrifice that one girl to save us all.”

For a moment, as brief as a shadow, Starla witnessed the always rigid, and uncompromising Sister Nadya falter a moment before she righted herself back into her strict disposition. “Starla will survive this.”

“But how can we send her to them when...” Sister Alena whispered fiercely. “What if they know. What if they found out? We can’t trust anyone. We promised to protect her.”

“They are not here for that reason, Sister Alena. They know nothing about her, how could they, and you know this well enough. If the girl does as she is told she might be able to see this through and remain unscathed until the end. As unscathed as one could be given what is going to happen to her once they have her. Now no more.”

“Sister Nadya—”

“That is enough,” Sister Nadya raised her voice then turning toward Starla, she gripped her arm and pulled her toward the door. “Now, Sister Matrina, be kind enough and fetch my coat, the girl is going to need it where she is going.”

Sister Matrina nodded, then hurried away, still mumbling for peace and strength.

Tears running down her face, Sister Alena looked at Starla.

“What are you talking about, Sister Alena? What if they know what? What aren’t you telling me?”

The woman who had become Starla’s maternal figure, swiped at her tears and shook her head. She pulled Starla in for a

hug. “Just that you’re innocent, so young and they are bad men, Starla. And they will take what they want.”

Needing to comfort her, Starla pulled out of her embrace and looked her in the eye.

“I’m sure it’ll be all right, Sister Alena,” Starla said. “I’m tougher than I look, you always say that.” She wished she could offer the woman who had looked after Starla as best she could and loved her even more, some truer words of comfort, but without knowing exactly what was on the other side of the door, she didn’t want to make promises she couldn’t keep and that thought scared her.

But there was something about Sister Alena’s concerns that niggled at her. What had they not told her?

“I’m so sorry, child. I always promised your mother that no matter where I am in the world, I would keep you safe when she could no longer and now... now I am sending you to a... dark, dark abyss and you may... you may not be strong enough to survive it. Oh, my sweet girl. I’m so sorry.”

“Sister Alena!” Sister Nadya said, yanking Starla out of her arms. “Since you cannot compose yourself, I suggest you go to your room and let me conduct this business myself.”

Sister Alena wiped her tears and straightened her shoulders as she glared at Sister Nadya. Never in all Starla’s time in the orphanage had she seen such insolence from Sister Alena and worse directed at Sister Nadya herself.

“Now, Starla these men. What they want from you is—”

The door to Sister Nadya’s office swung open and startled the sisters enough that they huddled together, with Starla in the middle as if they were protecting her. Starla could only see an enormous shadow in the frame of the door.

“We don’t have the whole night, Sister. Is she ready?” A voice commanded from the doorway.

“Yes, yes. My apologies,” Sister Nadya said unable to disguise the quiver in her voice. To Starla, she whispered, “Just keep your

head down, girl, and do as they say. Do as they say for the safety of all of us here and your own.” Her tone became so soft and sad that it knocked Starla even more. What on earth was happening?

Nothing about the room seemed familiar to her now as Sister Nadya guided her in. And yet she knew this room as intimately as she did her grief over her deceased mother.

She had sat in a chair in this very room, feeling smaller than the sixteen years old she had been, sobbing as she tried to grasp what was going to happen.

It seemed like yesterday when her mother, had rushed home to their tiny New York apartment—an apartment they had only lived in for three whole nights. They moved a lot across the states. It was hard to make friends, but her mother was her best friend anyway.

Cynthia had been so happy that day she couldn't stop crying because at last everything was going right for her. She twirled Starla around and had hugged her. She had a massive surprise for Starla, she had said and began layering in the things that were going to happen. They were going to visit Sister Alena, her mother's best friend and Starla's godmother. But it wouldn't just be a visit, it would be forever because they were immigrating to Russia, all the documents were in order. That was her mother's big surprise.

Moving to Russia was not something Starla wanted to do, but she had never seen her mother so happy. And now she would always remember her that way, at her happiest. Her last memory of her mother.

Nothing had happened as Cynthia had planned except the part where Starla stayed in Russia... forever... as an orphan in the orphanage where Sister Alena worked and never left her side.

But now, Sister Nadya's office had taken on a whole other aura. Three ominous shadows lingered in the hazy flickering light. Three massive intruders obscured everything that was old

and decrepit yet always pristinely clean about Sister Nadya's office. Nothing looked the same, familiar. Nothing ever would.

Her gaze flitted up, her neck straining to take in the dark figures towering above her. It took one fleeting glance to take in the three strange men occupying Sister Nadya's office as if they owned it, before Starla whipped her head down, her breath caught in her throat, her heart pounding in her ears.

She wasn't accustomed to being around males, hardly anyone at the orphanage was. The one boy she knew who shyly and secretly asked her out once was the grocer's son, Anton and she saw him for five minutes every other Wednesday when he delivered a box of over ripe fruit for the orphans. A sweet, lanky boy she really liked. But just not enough. But he was nothing like the men openly appraising her now.

They crowded the office with their bodies, their height and more so with that sense of brute power they emitted so carelessly.

She shut her eyes and tried to rinse her mind of the images her infinitesimal glance at them had imprinted in her brain. Even while she couldn't clearly see their features in the dimness, their presence overwhelmed her.

Three men.

Russian mafia.

Powerfully scary. Deadly.

A trio of clenched jaw lines highlighted under the dusky beams of the desk lamp, structurally hard and unforgiving. Three pairs of unmerciful eyes continued to scour her, penetrating her skin and incinerating her bones.

Fear bit into her like frostbite.

What did they want with her?

Why had Sister Nadya deemed her the bravest to see this through when she stood quivering in her boots, not from the cold like she usually did, but from her sheer unadulterated fear.

Like a mighty feline beast one of them closed the distance

between them to stand within a hair's breadth of her with Sister Nadya at her side.

"Is she the best you have?" His deep rough, husky Russian-edged voice clinked over her iced skin but ignited a firestorm in her belly. His words seemed to poke at her pride, as if he were disappointed at the choice made for him. She raised her head a little and regretted her reaction immediately as her gaze locked with his, a gulf of dark blue eyes shrouded with hardness that seared her soul. But she refused to back down, never mind that she was forced to swallow around the lump of unease blocking her throat.

She had never seen anything as such a contradiction before. Utterly spine-chilling on the surface yet in the tarnished light, mesmerizingly beautiful. His steely penetrative glance seemed to weaken her knees and she had to remind herself to stand tall.

"*Da*, she is the best, the strongest girl we have," Sister Nadya said and again Starla had never known anything existed that could scare Sister Nadya. But these three men killed that perception entirely.

"She's American?" another voice asked, in English. She could barely discern his features fully, but as her gaze followed the direction of his voice, her heart stopped beating altogether. He stood with his hands inside his trouser pockets, the coat he wore carelessly pushed back out of the way of his pockets. The white of his shirt stretched over a chest wider than three of her together could fit. His face remained hidden in the shadows, but he exuded unmistakable danger.

Her heart thudded. She had no idea how to deal with these men, and there were three of them altogether.

"She is American," Sister Nadya said quietly.

"But she speaks Russian?" the man standing before her asked. Starla fisted her hands to halt the deep desire to hug herself, as if she somehow needed protection from the men whose presence seared her skin and nerves.

“She... understands it.”

Starla took a half-breath. She had a love-hate relationship with Russia. She had refused to speak the language even though she could speak it as fluently as a native if she wanted. While she called Moscow home, it was also the city that took her mother from her on their first night there. Sister Nadya had told her it was a childish retaliation not to speak the language, but it was all Starla could have against the country and she needed something to hold against it.

“Remove your clothes,” the man said. His words were like bullets fired into her, perforating her body. Why did she have to take off her clothes? What did they want with her? What was going on?

“If... if you will allow, we haven’t told her what to... to expect. There hasn’t been any time and we were about to tell her before when you... you summoned us in. If you please, we would like to be the ones to tell her. To explain this to her. To prepare her.”

Tell me what? Sister Nadya spoke as if she were preparing Starla for her execution.

“Please, just a moment. This is all a sudden rush and we haven’t had a chance to... For just a moment?” Sister Nadya stumbled over her words, repeating them, nothing like the stern woman preceding her reputation here at the orphanage.

“You have a minute,” he said, his impatience as tangible as a real living thing.

Well, excuse me.

Who the heck did they think they were? Oh right. The Russian mafia, she reminded herself. Sister Nadya slinked away in a manner wholly uncustomary for her. She dragged Starla with her then closed the door behind them.

She shooed the other girls back to bed immediately or face dire consequences in the morning. Starla knew they would only pretend to leave.

Sister Alena who hadn't left her place outside the door, rushed to her. "Just do as they say, my darling girl. Just do as they say, and it will be over soon." She sobbed.

"What will be over? What do they want with me?" Starla asked. She had reached the end of her patience. It was bad enough they had critiqued her as if she were a basket of waxed fruit in the dim lighting of Sister Nadya's office, but it was quite another to not know the exact reason for them doing so. She had waited long enough for proper answers.

"What is going on?" She turned to Sister Nadya, the only one who would give her straight answers without sparing her feelings.

"Starla," Sister Nadya began, gripping Starla's arms tightly once she commandeered her out of Sister Alena's embrace. "Listen to me. You are to go with these men. They need a woman to have a... to have a baby."

Nothing could have shocked Starla more than if Sister Nadya had said they were aliens from another planet, here to abduct her. Frowning heavily, she swerved her attention to the closed door housing the ginormous shadows which had freaked her out as much as fascinated her curiosity.

What? A baby? They wanted a baby. From her? Did they know she was a virgin and hadn't even been kissed by a boy before? And they wanted her to have a baby? Were they mad? Were they all mad?

Everything made even less sense now.

"I don't understand—"

"You don't need to understand, Starla," Sister Nadya whispered harshly. "We don't have a say in the matter. They asked for a girl of a suitable age to... to use... until she is pregnant. They just need a viable body, that is all. It is not hard to understand that." Her lips thinned into a line so tight they could barely be seen, but her eyes were drowning in defeat and apprehension.

Everything felt surreal and not for the first time Starla

wondered if she were dreaming all this up. Then a horrible thought crossed her mind.

“Wait, do they mean to have the baby right now? Is that why they asked me to remove my clothes?”

“Don’t be silly, child. They’re taking you away and will keep you until you have delivered a child to them. Do you understand? They asked you to remove your clothes so they can... so they can... inspect... your body.”