

PLAY NICE

GEMMA HALLIDAY



MINOTAUR BOOKS  NEW YORK

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

PLAY NICE. Copyright © 2012 by Gemma Halliday. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. For information, address St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010.

www.minotaurbooks.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Halliday, Gemma.

Play nice / Gemma Halliday. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-312-65607-2 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4299-5048-0 (ebook)

1. Assassins—Fiction. 2. Retribution—Fiction. 3. San Francisco (Calif.)—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3608.A54836P53 2012

813'.6—dc22

2011033691

First Edition: March 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PROLOGUE

Take it off.”

Anya looked across the over-furnished room at the man who'd issued the command. General Fedorov. Fifties, salt and pepper hair, eyes as dark as two bottomless pits. He took a deceptively casual position, leaning back in a plush, velvet armchair, one leg crossed over the other. But Anya wasn't fooled. She could see the tension still present in his limbs, as if he were ready to pounce at the slightest provocation. He held a lit cigar in one hand, the cloyingly sweet scent tickling her nostrils as she complied, slipping the straps of her dress down her right shoulder, then the left. She shimmied her hips until it fell to the floor, leaving her bare beneath his gaze but for the red, patent leather heels on her feet.

“Like this?” she asked, her voice barely a whisper.

Fedorov nodded, looked her up and down. A flicker of appreciation crossed his sharp features. He took another long drag from the cigar, as if dragging in the sight of her, then slowly blew it up toward the ceiling.

“Come closer.”

Her stomach clenched. But she did. Her long legs crossing the distance between them until she was standing directly in front of him, so close she could feel the heat emanating from his body.

“And now?” she asked.

“Kneel down.”

Again, Anya did as she was told, her bare knees hitting the cool marble floor. She swallowed a shot of apprehension, noticing the growing bulge beneath his tailored slacks.

*You've done this a thousand times before. You can do it again.
One last time.*

“And now?” she asked. Even though she knew full well what “and now” would be. They’d been watching him for weeks. They knew his habits, his mannerisms, what kind of soap he washed with in the morning, and what color socks he wore at night. What kind of cigars he smoked and what kind of recreation he indulged in. Blondes. Expensive ones. If they were lucky, he let them leave in the morning. Others became just another casualty of war.

Fedorov reached out, trailing a finger down Anya’s cheek. His hands were rough, calloused, like him. She shivered but leaned into his touch all the same, doing a kittenlike mew deep in her throat. He gave an answering groan, telling her she’d done her research well. He liked.

His hand left her face, and Anya could swear she felt her skin sigh in relief. Fedorov moved to set his cigar down, his free hand reaching for his zipper.

“No. Let me,” Anya purred, sliding her hands up the expensive wool fabric that covered his thighs. “Please,” she begged.

A smirk crossed his features before he picked up his cigar again. He liked it when they begged.

She smiled up at him, holding his eyes as she slowly lowered his zipper. She did another feminine coo, letting her eyes flicker to him as she licked her lips.

He chuckled, leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes in anticipation.

Anya’s heart pounded in her chest, her hands shook. No matter how many times she did this, nerves always hit her. She supposed some small part of her was glad. At least it was a sign she was still

human, still had some notion of right and wrong. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath.

Then quickly thrust the zipper back upward, jamming Fedorov's scrotum in the sharp teeth.

He howled, hands going to his crotch as he jumped to his feet.

But not quickly enough. Anya's right hand shot out and grabbed the double-action revolver he always kept strapped to his right ankle. She didn't hesitate, didn't think, didn't feel.

Just aimed and pulled the trigger.

The first shot took out his right knee, sending him to the ground just long enough for Anya to put some distance between them. She backed up, quickly firing off another to his temple. He hit the ground with a sickening thud, and the room was plunged into eerie silence.

Two deep breaths, in and out. Anya's heart pounded in her ears, her hands steady now as they held the revolver straight-armed in front of her. Mission accomplished. It was done.

And done well.

She could almost hear the praise of her handler's voice echoing in her head.

Perfect shot, my dragi, my darling. Now get out.

Three seconds. She knew in three seconds his bodyguards would be at the door. A quiet syringe to the neck would have made escape easier, but in the skimpy dress Fedorov had wanted her to wear there'd been nowhere to hide it. She'd had to work with what she had on hand. Noisy as it was.

Two seconds.

Anya grabbed her dress, slipping it back over her head as she dove for the pair of French doors leading onto the balcony. She quickly pushed one open. But instead of jumping toward freedom she slipped behind the heavy, velvet curtain at its side, holding her breath.

She heard the doors to the general's bedroom burst open, a cacophony of shouting voices drowning each other out as bodyguards

swarmed the room. Anya closed her eyes, trying to make out how many. Three. Maybe four? Heavy footsteps hit the polished floor, running to the body, down the hall, toward the French doors. She was sure her heart was pounding loudly enough to match the stomping rhythm of their boots.

The scent of cheap cologne warned her one of the Russians was approaching her hiding spot. She closed her eyes, letting her knuckles go white as they tightened around the revolver.

He shouted something to his pals, so close that his voice made her jump. He'd noticed the open door. More footsteps, leading out onto the balcony. More shouting. A thin line of sweat trickled down Anya's back as she clutched the gun to her thigh. If they found her, she was done. She was good, but three to one were odds no one could escape from. Especially when the three were trained killers.

Then again, what am I?

She shoved that thought deep into the recesses of her brain, focusing instead on the commands one Russian was shouting to the others. She wasn't fluent, but she'd picked up enough of the language to understand he was telling them she'd escaped, over the balcony. Go find her.

Three pairs of feet pounded out of the room, receding down the hallway.

She waited, counting off two beats before daring to move a muscle. Slowly, she drew back the curtain, using reflections in the windowpane to check the room. The general's lifeless body lay slumped in the middle of the floor.

Alone.

She sprang into action, adrenaline pumping through her limbs as she crossed the room, out the door, running left, opposite the exit, she knew. Deeper into the compound, but farther away from the expanse of property outside the general's bedroom window where the bodyguards would now be searching for her. The sound of her heels pounding with practiced speed was muffled by thick carpeting as she counted the doors she passed. Three, four. She'd been studying

the blueprint of the house for weeks, but she still held her breath as she passed the fifth door and slowed, opening number six and slipping inside.

An empty office. Just as it was supposed to be.

She quickly shut the door with a soft click behind her, hearing her own ragged breath fill the silence. The room was dark, moonlight filtering through the window the only light. Anya blinked, letting her eyes adjust. The windows faced east, toward the woods, beyond which ran a little used road where a car awaited her. Her handler had set up surveillance on the road to monitor every person who'd gone in or out of Fedorov's compound for weeks. All she had to do was get to the car, and she knew they'd all be watching her on their monitors from their big, safe room that, as far as anyone knew, didn't really exist. Her handler, the generals, the faceless men who controlled her fate.

And she'd finally be safe.

She paused, put her ear to the door, praying she didn't hear the telltale pounding of feet behind her.

Nothing.

She crossed to the window, lifting it open. The bite of night air stung her cheeks, giving her instant goosebumps in the flimsy dress completely ill-suited for Kosovo in the spring. But cold was an indulgence she didn't have time for. Instead, she pried the screen from its frame with her fingernails, dropping it to the floor as she threw one leg, then the other over the sill.

It was a two-story drop. One she'd anticipated, but it looked far higher now that she was straddling the sill, all that empty air below her.

You can do this. You're almost there.

If she thought about it a second longer, she knew her resolve would waiver. So she didn't, instead, kicking off her shoes, she plunged into the darkness. She hit the ground with a thud, sharp pain instantly shooting up her left leg. Anya bit down hard on her lower lip to keep from crying out, her hands sliding out from under

her in the dewy grass. She looked down. Her left ankle was twisted under her. Probably sprained.

But pain was another thing she had no time for.

The taste of blood filled her mouth as her teeth ground down on her lip. She struggled to her feet, favoring her right side. She forced her legs to hold her up, then glanced around in the dark, quickly getting her bearings. Ahead of her lay an expanse of grass, a fence to the left leading to the yard where the general carried out his own private training exercises. She shuddered. She'd seen the files on his victims and could only imagine the tortured souls who still haunted those tainted grounds.

Still grasping the revolver in her hand, she turned right. A wooded area lay at the edge of the grass, but it was a good ten yards to the tree cover. Ten yards where she'd be completely exposed. She could only pray that the Russians were still searching the other side of the compound for her.

Ten yards. Ten yards . . . and then you're free.

Anya dashed forward, running as fast as her injured ankle would allow, half hopping, half dragging her leg along as she kept her eyes on the tree line ahead. Her arms pumped at her sides, her lungs burning, her eyes watering at the sting of cold wind whipping past her. Six yards. Five. She was almost there.

And then she heard it.

The crack reverberated through the still night like lightning, a tuft of grass at her side flying into the air.

They'd found her.

While she'd hoped they wouldn't, she was really only surprised it had taken them this long. The general had been a sadist but a smart one. The men he'd hired were nothing less.

Anya jagged to the right, then left, never decreasing her speed as she made a zigzag pattern across the lawn. Tufts of grass flew at her sides, spattering her legs with mud as bullets embedded themselves into the soft ground.

Three yards left. She was almost there.

Another shot rang out, and fire instantly erupted in her right arm. Anya cried out, falling to the ground, her left hand immediately going to the sharp sting slicing through her bicep. She rolled onto her right side in the grass, shot off two wild rounds toward the house. Pain blinded her. She had no idea if she'd hit anything, but the bullet hail stopped for a second. Warm liquid seeped through her fingers, and she bit back a scream. She would not give them the satisfaction.

The gunfire ceased for only a moment, then the Russians began again. Relentless. The air filled with deafening shots, chunks of grass beside her jumping, spraying cool mud onto her cheeks.

She rolled left, then right, pulling herself up onto her knees as she twisted away from the hail. She looked up. The tree cover was only a few feet way. So close. She could make it.

She *would* make it.

Anya turned, firing two more rounds back toward the house before the revolver made an empty clicking sound. She threw it, making a mad dash for the trees, her bare feet slipping on the wet earth, her teeth chattering against the cold. Five more feet. Four.

She heard shouting behind her, the Russians scrambling for their vehicles, their dogs, their spotlights, organizing an all-out search as she reached the cover of the woods. She wasn't home free yet, but the tall pines bought her time.

She tripped over the uneven ground, roots rising up from the earth to slow her pace. Dried pine needles bit into the soles of her bare feet, low branches scratching at her exposed arms and legs. She heard the sound of wings flapping overhead, birds rising angrily from the highest branches at the sudden intrusion into their territory.

But she kept running.

The woods sloped downward, toward the road, but she didn't slow her pace all the way down the hill, tripping the last few feet as she reached the dirty pavement. On the far side, a shiny silver sedan sat up against the bank.

Anya let out a cry of relief. It was almost over.

Freedom.

She stumbled across the road, listening to the sound of Fedorov's loyals in the distance, Jeep motors humming as they closed in on her.

She threw the driver's side door of the sedan open, fingers fumbling in the dark beneath the console for the switch to start the car. She found it.

She paused, the pain in her arm spreading into a dull ache as her index finger hovered just above the switch. She knew they were watching her, waiting with anticipation almost as great as hers. Would she make it out before Fedorov's men caught up with her? Or would they be training someone new to take her place? All eyes would be on the screen now, the room hushed, men with grave faces all leaning forward, holding their collective breath as she disappeared inside the car.

Anya slid her bare thighs onto the leather seat, listened to the roar of motors drawing closer, breathed in deeply the frigid night air scented with pine, leather, and her own cloyingly sweet blood dripping down her arm. She stared out the window at the sight of moonlight shimmering off the frostbitten street, creating a deceptively serene scene.

And then she flipped the switch.

An explosion rocked the air, an orange fireball engulfing the shiny, silver car in one giant fist as smoke billowed up toward the top of the pine trees.

CHAPTER 1

Jesus, would you just do it already?”

Anna shivered, shifting her umbrella to the other hand, her teeth rattling together. Rain fell in fat droplets around her, splashing back on the cuffs of her jeans as she stood on the small square of lawn, shifting from foot to foot. She could feel mud squishing into the grooves of her running shoes and cringed. She'd have to carry them up the stairs unless she wanted her landlord bitching about muddy footprints again. In one hand she held the umbrella, in the other a leash connected to a stubborn-as-hell boxer who was currently being very particular about where he did his business. Anna thought for a moment he might have chosen his sweet spot when he paused to sniff at the azalea bushes flanking her apartment building. But no. He turned up his black nose and continued pacing in the rain. Anna had a sneaking suspicion he was enjoying this.

“Come on, Lenny,” she pleaded.

Lenny looked up, trained his black eyes on her, cocked his head to the side. Then went back to his pacing.

Anna narrowed her eyes at the jerk.

Originally he'd come to the shelter from a family who'd been moving to Chicago and couldn't take a dog with them. They'd promised he was an excellent watchdog and very companionable. The companion part he'd proven right away. She could hardly walk two

steps in her tiny apartment without running into him. The watchdog part had turned out to be the biggest joke she'd ever heard. Lenny's deep baritone bark was impressive, but he was more likely to lick an intruder to death than attack. Still, half the idea of a watchdog was for show, so she hadn't had the heart to unload him on someone else.

She just wished he'd show a little more cooperation.

"Please, Lenny. I'm cold, I'm wet. I'll give you three bacon treats if you just pick a spot and take the shit. What do you say?"

He ignored her completely, sniffing the flowerbeds along the walkway.

Anna wiped a raindrop from her cheek, wrapping one arm around herself to stave off the chill. Normally she didn't mind the rain so much. She loved the smell of water hitting the oil-stained streets, the crisp color of the San Francisco sky that it left behind when the clouds parted. Almost as if the entire city were being washed clean, given a fresh start.

But tonight she wasn't a fan. The rain cut down on her visibility, left her feeling too exposed standing out in the open.

Her gaze swept the street. The dim glow of streetlamps bathed the neighborhood in pale yellow hues, rows of old Victorians lining the block of narrow, three-story buildings painted every color of the rainbow over the years. They banked right up against each other, one after another, trailing down the hill toward the bay. Across the street were a used bookstore, an Asian market, and an all-night Laundromat. Only the Laundromat's lights were on at this time of night, a sole occupant visible inside, reading a book as he waited for his clothes to finish. It wasn't a particularly busy street for San Francisco, one of the things Anna had liked about it when she'd first moved in, but it was close to the park and Muni, and the rent was relatively cheap.

And her landlord hadn't asked any questions when she'd installed a state-of-the-art security system.

Anna tore her gaze away from the street, focusing again on her stubborn partner.

“I swear to God if you don’t do it now, you’re holding it until morning,” she threatened.

Lenny walked over to the azaleas and, miracle of miracles, this time squatted down. Anna said a silent thank you, pulling a plastic baggie out of her pocket. She waited until he’d finished, then transferred the leash and umbrella into one hand as she crouched down to pick up Lenny’s offering with the other.

But the rain must have made her grip on the leash slippery. Because as she bent over, Lenny gave a tug on the end, and the leather slid out of her hand, the umbrella falling to the ground, rain immediately pelting her as she lost her balance in the muddy grass.

“Goddammit, Lenny,” she shouted, throwing one hand out to break her fall. She slid forward, mud streaking down the side of her jeans as she lunged for the dog. He’d taken off like a shot into the dark evening, bounding down the rain-soaked sidewalk.

“Lenny!” she called, her cries immediately swallowed up by the storm.

Abandoning the baggie, she grabbed her umbrella, useless now that she was soaked to the bone, and picked her way back over the square of lawn, hitting the sidewalk just in time to see him shoot across the street into the Laundromat.

“That’s it,” she muttered to herself. “No bacon treats for you, asshole.”

Reluctantly she set off after him, crossing the street. As she pushed through the glass doors of the Laundromat, warm, humid air immediately hit her like a blanket. She scrubbed her wet hair out of her face, scanning the room for the dog.

He had the sole occupant of the room backed up into a corner, his book held up like a shield as Lenny tattooed his clothes with muddy paw prints.

“Lenny,” she yelled, “get down.”

Which, of course, he ignored, completely enamored with new-person scents.

Anna crossed the room, her wet shoes squishing with every step, and grabbed the end of his leash from the floor. She gave a sharp tug. “Down. Now,” she commanded again.

This time he complied, letting his captive go as he took a step back to sniff a box of detergent on the floor instead.

“Sorry,” she said to the man.

He was tall, at least six feet, lean with broad shoulders beneath a cotton shirt, unbuttoned at the top. His jeans were worn at the knees, his shoes dry, indicating he’d been inside for a while. His hair was a warm chestnut color, curling a little at his neck, just slightly longer than current fashion would dictate. His eyes were a deep brown, so dark, she noticed, that they were almost black. He had a square jaw, a day past needing a good shave, and his build was tight, all angles, like an athlete’s.

He lowered his book as Lenny stepped away, the corners of his mouth tilting upward.

“No problem. I only peed myself a little,” he joked.

Anna felt an answering smile. “I swear he looks more vicious than he is.”

“I’ll take your word for that.” He slowly sidestepped the dog. “I’ve always been more of a cat person, myself.”

“Well, on a night like tonight, I don’t blame you.” She looked down at her jeans. It would take an act of God to get those grass stains out.

The man reached into a plastic laundry basket and pulled out a towel, tossing it to Anna.

“Here. You look like you’ve been swimming.”

“Nearly,” she said, gratefully drying her face. “Thanks, but you know I’m just going back out in it.”

“Nick.” The man stuck his hand out at her. “Nick Dade.”

Anna looked at it for a minute. Then gingerly took it. “Anna.”

His grip was firm, strong, his skin a little rough as if he worked

with his hands regularly. Definitely confident, but careful not to hold on too long.

“Just Anna?”

“Smith. Anna Smith.”

“Hmmm.” He crossed his arms over his chest, leaning back on his heels. “Smith. Very mysterious.”

Anna laughed. “No, very plain.”

“Well, it’s nice to meet you, Anna Smith. You live around here?” he asked, gesturing to the windows.

Anna paused, bit the inside of her cheek.

Don’t talk to strangers.

She nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“It’s a nice place. Quiet at night.”

“It is. I like it.”

“The architecture’s amazing. I love all the old buildings. It’s incredible to me that so many have survived not one, but two major earthquakes.”

Anna nodded, running the towel over her hair, trying to squeeze out the bulk of the rainwater. “That’s one of the reasons I moved here,” she agreed.

“Where from?”

Anna looked up. “What?”

“Where did you move from?”

Don’t talk to strangers. Don’t get personal.

Anna looked away, turning her eyes to Lenny, still circling the detergent box.

“Oh, I’ve lived all over. I’m a bit of a nomad. What about you? Local?”

He shook his head. “No, I’m just visiting a friend in town. Thinking of relocating, though. It’s a fun city. You lived here long?”

Anna shrugged. “Long enough, I guess.”

“Long enough to know a place for good Chinese?” He took a step toward her.

Without meaning to, she took one backward.

“In San Francisco? You’d have a hard time finding bad Chinese.”

He laughed, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “Come on, you must have a favorite?”

“Okay, if I had to pick one, I’d say the Shaolin Palace. Down the street a couple of blocks. They deliver twenty-four hours.”

“Oh, definitely my kind of place.”

A dryer dinged behind him, signaling the end of the cycle.

“Well, I guess I’ll let you get back to your laundry,” Anna said. She dropped the towel on the counter and tugged Lenny toward the door. Having ascertained the detergent box didn’t contain anything edible, he complied.

“Wait,” Nick said, taking a step forward. “Are you busy tomorrow night? Maybe you could walk me through the Shaolin Palace’s menu, huh?”

Anna chewed on her cheek again.

Don’t get personal.

“Sorry, I have plans tomorrow. With my boyfriend.”

“Oh.” His smile faded. “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Yeah, well, good night,” she said quickly, pulling Lenny toward the door.

“I guess I’ll see you around, Anna Smith.”

She raised a hand in a wave, then pushed out into the sheeting rain again. It hit her like ice after the warm, sticky air of the Laundromat. Giving up altogether on the umbrella, Anna crossed the street, ducking her head against the torrent as she ran up the walkway.

He’s watching you.

She stole a quick glance over her shoulder. He had his back turned to the windows, pulling clothes from the dryer and dropping them into his plastic basket.

She shook her head. He was just a nice guy trying to get a date. The foul weather was making her paranoid.

“Come on, Lenny. Let’s go dry off.” She slipped her key in the lock and let herself into the lobby, Lenny barking gleefully beside her. She tugged off her wet shoes before leading him up the two

flights of stairs. For all the good it did. Her feet still made a trail of wet footprints on the worn, wooden steps. Not to mention Lenny's muddy contribution. She'd be catching hell in the morning.

Two apartments shared the third floor. Mrs. Olivia, a seventy-three-year-old widow and sudoku addict, lived in the one on the right. Anna was on the left.

She shoved her key into the lock and let Lenny bound into the room ahead of her, skidding to a stop at his food bowl and lapping up the crumbs. Anna shook her head as she keyed her PIN into the security system. That dog had a one-track mind. We should all have such a simple life.

She shut the door behind her and locked it, then secured the chain, deadbolt, and armed the alarm system again before stripping off her wet clothes and leaving them in a pile by the door. A long, hot shower sounded like heaven.

She padded into the kitchen, throwing a cupful of dog chow into Lenny's bowl, then crossed the small studio apartment, pausing briefly at the front window. She pulled the edge of the curtain back and peeked out.

He was still there, folding towels at one of the counters, his head bent over his work, his hands moving in quick, practiced movements. She had a fleeting vision of laughing over a plate of chicken chow mein with him. His eyes crinkling at the corners, mouth twisting up in a warm smile.

But before it could go any further, she quickly shut the curtain.

She'd been in San Francisco too long. She was getting too comfortable here. It was time to move on. Maybe somewhere in the Southwest. It had been awhile since she'd been to the desert.

She stepped into the bathroom and turned on the shower, letting the hot water fill the tiny room with steam.

Liar.

Dade watched her disappear from the window, her silhouette

crossing the apartment. He knew for a fact she didn't have a boyfriend. As far as he could tell, she didn't have any friends. Which didn't surprise him. From everything he'd read, she wasn't exactly the social type.

He grabbed the last of his clean towels from the dryer, folding them end over end as he kept one eye on the window of the third floor. She wouldn't go out again tonight. She'd feed the dog, take a shower, then sit on her sofa watching TV. At midnight, she'd turn out the lights, throw on an old T-shirt, set her alarm, and go to bed.

He'd watch until then, until he was sure she was down, then catch a few hours himself before setting up camp outside her work in the morning. An animal shelter near the park. He found it ironic that she spent her days saving cats and dogs from the needle considering her former life.

He tucked a pile of towels into his laundry basket. The same pile he'd been washing every night this week. Though, tomorrow, he'd have to find something new to occupy his time, thanks to her damn dog.

He shook his head. Dade hadn't intended any contact. He didn't like contact. He liked things clean and simple. He did his surveillance thoroughly, chose his weapons carefully, and did his job quickly, unseen, without any complications. Contact with the target made things complicated.

Not that he'd really anticipated this one being simple. For one thing, she was a woman. Dade didn't normally take on women. Women and children were civilians as far as he was concerned. But once he'd read the file on Anya Danielovich, he'd decided to make an exception.

She'd been one of the go-to agents of the KOS, the former Yugoslavian intelligence agency, in the years leading up to the Kosovo conflict. Years that were particularly bloody in the country's history. Factions breaking off from one another, allies becoming enemies. One day you worked for the good guys, the next they were the bad guys. Politics and race relations thrown together in a stew that re-

sulted in military units without leaders, guerilla factions acting under whoever had the funds to feed them, and power being wielded by those who had no one's best interest at heart but their own. When all the dust had settled, the country had splintered and the KOS was no more.

Officially, that is.

From the file Dade's client had provided, Anya had never served in the military, and there was no record of her formal training. In fact, there was no record of her at all up until her first job, where she'd taken out a wealthy Serbian businessman whose funds were being funneled to the wrong people. During the next four years she'd neutralized a total of twenty-four men. Most clean hits, none ever officially investigated. All before her twenty-first birthday.

Dade glanced across the street. She was out of the shower. He watched her bare silhouette slip a shirt over her head and pad across to the next bank of windows where she pulled a glass from a cupboard, filling it at the sink.

He had to admit, he had a hard time reconciling the woman he'd just met with information in the file. She'd seemed too . . . normal. Human. If he'd met her under different circumstances, he wouldn't have thought she was anything but your average girl. A little on the skinny side, maybe, but friendly enough not to raise suspicions.

But there'd been no mistaking her. Even with her blond curls dyed black and fifteen years between her and the baby-faced assassin in his file, there was no doubt in his mind. It was the same pair of huge blue eyes, the same full, pouty, lips. The same high cheekbones, round hips, and long legs she'd worked to her advantage across Eastern Europe. She'd done a good job eradicating any hint of an accent from her voice, but he figured she'd had time to work on it. And if she were half as good as the file said, she would have. She wasn't stupid. She'd known what was at stake when she left Kosovo.

He wondered if she knew what was at stake now?

Officially, Anya Danielovich had died in a car accident fifteen

years ago. She'd been a twenty-year-old student out partying too late, drinking too much, and wrapped her car around a tree along a deserted stretch of the highway. A maintenance worker had found her the next morning, her car burned out, her remains charred to a crisp.

Unofficially, the file said she had died in a car bombing outside the compound of General Fedorov, a man later intelligence reports proved was working all sides of the conflict to his own profit. What she was doing outside his compound was a question no one asked. Though Fedorov hadn't survived the night either.

But in reality . . .

Dade looked up at the window, watching her form cross the room, sink down on the sofa, and flip on the television, casting a blue glow throughout the apartment.

In reality, Anya was his latest contract. And he'd never been fooled by a pair of sexy legs and pouty lips before. Dade knew that evil came in all sorts of packages.

This time, Anya Danielovich would stay dead.