

PATENT LEATHER GENE
(working title)

2020 Lenten Season Novella
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*dedicated to the abused and slandered
and written in spite of those who abuse and lie about them*

CHAPTER 5

Special Order

Sylvie slammed the door of the Mercedes behind her. Mohan got out and clicked the trunk open with the fob on his keychain. Dursik grabbed her bag and followed Sylvie as she stomped up the front stairs of house. The traffic into El Segundo was horrible and Sylvie needed a cigarette. Mohan met her at the front door with his keys and fumbled a bit trying to hurry to open it for her. Sylvie grumbled and snatched her bag out of Dursik's hands digging for her crumpled pack of Benson & Hedges. Finding the pack she pulled a slightly bent long cigarette out and stuck it between her lips then snapped her fingers at Dursik who pulled a gold zippo out of his pocket and lit it for her. Mohan didn't allow smoking in his car. It was the only rule he was able to enforce upon Sylvie, his business partner of the last 25 years.

"I don't know how you can still suck those things down like that." Mohan said to Sylvie and she walked into the atrium of the rented house.

"Yeah, well I don't know how you get all that grease in your hair." Sylvie replied and walked up to the pedestal ashtray situated next to a glass side table with a retro-style phone on it on the far wall and flicked her ash. She covered her mouth with the back of her hand and coughed.

"Now, tell me again what happened to the girl. She was a huge investment." Mohan continued following Sylvie down a hallway leading to an eat-in kitchen with skylights. Sylvie sat her bag on a chair and opened the refrigerator. As she turned around she used her cigarette hand to open a bottle of Starbucks brand iced coffee and took a sip.

"I told you. That doughy looking oaf fucked the whole transaction up. I think he was a cop or something. He seemed to know what was going on from the moment he spoke to me." Sylvie took a long drag off the cigarette while Mohan considered her rolling his tongue over his teeth behind his lips. Sunlight glinted off his greased back ponytail. "I couldn't get two seats next to each other. When I booked them online it said we'd be next to each other, but then when I checked in, my seat was changed. I don't know why." Sylvie explained with annoyance.

"You didn't ask about it?" Mohan pressed.

"Fuck no. I didn't ask. I didn't want to draw any attention to myself. All I had was this bag as a carry on. That's always a red flag." Sophie explained.

"Well, where the hell is your suitcase? You were there a week. I know you took a suitcase when you left." Mohan pressed further.

“For Christ’s sake, Mo. I’m not getting younger. That thing got heavy with all the chachki samples you wanted me to bring back for the showroom. I shipped it back so I wouldn’t have to worry about carrying it or TSA assholes stealing stuff. It’s supposed to arrive tomorrow. I have a tracking number.” Sylvie put out her cigarette and lit a fresh one, also a bit bent, from her pack. “You did WHAT?!” Mohan was irate. “Do you know what those chachkis, as you put it, are?” Sylvie was starting to get frightened. She thought she was just picking up little statues for the window of the imports store Mohan ran as a front to launder the money from their real business dealings. Evidently she had been mistaken. “Ugly as sin, Mo. That’s what those things were.” Sylvie offered trying to mask her fear. Mohan slammed a balled fist on the counter.

“Damn it, Sylv. You better hope they show up tomorrow and in one piece. They should have fit in your carry-on. Those things are filled with vials of a designer virus.” Mohan made eye contact with Sylvie and held it for a long uncomfortable period of time. Sylvie sucked on her cigarette and blew the smoke in Mohan’s face. She was nervous about Mohan’s temper, but she was also mad.

“Damn it, Mo. I told you I wasn’t interested in muling for you any more. You’re a real dick. You mean I was carrying bio-warfare around with me all over Korea?! Are you kidding?!” The last time Sylvie had muled for Mohan it had been balloons of coke and heroin. She shoved one up her dry old vagina and decided it was a job better left to the young and made the two girls she had purchased and was bringing back swallow the rest of them. It was a mess. The balloons burst in both girls before they could get to Tijuana and they died. She had never seen so much foamy vomit in her life. It had cost Sylvie six times as much as she had originally been quoted by the coyote for transport to get rid of the bodies. When she got back she told Mohan she wouldn’t be doing any more muling after that. She had told him he needed to find someone else. They had fought over it. He said she was the only one he trusted. She had told him to shove the crap up his own ass or find a new partner. Sylvie stared at Mohan now with a hot glare. “How many other times have you tricked me like that?” She asked him, lip twitching. Mohan let out an exasperated breath and shook his head at her.

“That’s the only time you stupid bitch. I didn’t know I was getting the stuff until two days before you left. I wouldn’t have even told you about it, except now they might not make it here at all, let alone in one piece.” Mohan lied. Sylvie had unwittingly mules for Mohan on at least three other occasions and had no idea. It gave Mohan a deep pleasure to pull the wool over on Sylvie. It was a secret little joke he had with himself.

“And that’s the problem, Mo. How am I supposed to trust you when you don’t tell me everything? I tell you everything. I show you everything. We’re in this fifty-fifty. It’s half my money too.” Sylvie smacked her palm on the kitchen table for emphasis. Dursik walked past them both and down a small flight of stairs from a landing in the back corner of the kitchen. He returned in a couple moments with two giant Rottweilers. Sylvie and Mohan were staring each other down. The dogs ran up to Sylvie sniffing her up and down. Sylvie bent down to let the dogs lick her face.

“How are Mummy’s boys? Good boys! Did you miss me?” Sylvie cooed at the dogs as they licked her face and hands and legs. Mohan turned away in disgust.

“Mom, I told you it grosses me out when you let them lick your mouth.” Mohan said looking away from Sylvie and moving toward the refrigerator.

“And I told you not to call me Mom anymore. We’re business partners. No one needs to know you came out of my womb.” Dursik laughed. Sylvie snarled at him. “Shut up you doof. And don’t you go talking about that with anyone.” Dursik stopped laughing.

“Sorry, Sylv. It’s just I don’t think anyone would believe it anyway.” He said sheepishly.

“Believe what?” Sylvie asked.

“That anyone ever wanted to stick their dick in you!” Mohan spat at her.

“Come on, Mo, that’s no way to speak to your mommy.” Dursik said to him half serious, half taunting. Mohan wasn’t amused, but Sylvie had a satisfied little smirk.

“Gotta respect your elders, Mo-mo.” Sylvie chided Mohan.

“I’m going to my room.” Mohan grabbed a beer and opened it on the lip of the counter before brushing past Dursik and heading up the stairs to the upper level of the house.

“That’s right! Go to your room...and no dinner for you either!” Sylvie yelled after him jokingly, pleased with having bested her son once again. Then she dug into her pocket and pulled out Robin’s crumpled plane ticket and handed it to Dursik. Dursik smoothed it out and looked it over.

“What’s this?” He asked her.

“Ugh. That shit head boy of mine never gives me any credit. He’s gonna be the death of me. *That’s* the doughy oaf’s plane ticket. That’s his name...right there.” Sylvie pointed to Robin’s name printed on the ticket. “Robin Randall. What a stupid sounding name. See what you can find out about this asshole. I’m pretty sure he was headed to Detroit. I heard him talking about getting back to the Detroit home office on Monday to someone on the phone while we were waiting to board in Korea. See what you can find.” Sylvie instructed Dursik in a low voice so

Mohan definitely wouldn't be able to over hear. Dursik folded the ticket and shoved it in his wallet. Shoving the wallet back in his pocket he replied to Sylvie without looking at her.

"Yes, Ma'am. Not a problem. You want him taken care of?"

"No. Not yet at least. Just find out who he is. Find out if he's a cop or just some regular asshole."

Sylvie walked into an adjacent room and opened a set of French doors to a screened in sunporch. The dogs followed her and stood waiting to be let out into the back yard garden.

Sylvie opened the door for the dogs who ran out into the lush space happily. Dursik stood in the doorway between the kitchen and sitting room looking into the sunporch at Sylvie.

"And Dursik..." Sylvie said turning around to face him, lighting another cigarette.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Dursik, don't draw a lot of attention. Until this package arrives in one piece tomorrow and I find out what the hell Mo is doing with a stock pile of designer virus and we know who this clown is, I don't want even a mouse whispering about this. The girl cost a lot. We paid for some procedures plus she was North Korean. She was a special order."

"Got it. Don't worry, Ma'am. I got my ways."

"Yeah. That's what I'm counting on." She said expelling a long stream of smoke from her lungs.

Dursik turned and let himself out of the house. Sylvie waited to hear his Charger back out the driveway and pull down the street before she headed for the stairs to continue the conversation with Mohan. The dogs were laying under the shade of a Japanese Maple that had been manicured just so.

As Sylvie mounted the top stair Mohan was coming out of the bathroom. He looked at his mother and shook his head at her.

"Don't you shake your head at me you lying sack of shit." Sylvie said to him between trying to catch her breath.

"Lying sack of shit? I didn't lie to you about anything. I just didn't tell you everything." Mohan turned to face his mother straight on.

"Same thing! It was a deception."

"Oh, yeah. And you're one to lecture me on deception?"

"Business is business, Mo. You got to be 100% with me or our business isn't going to last much longer."

"What the hell are you talking about you old fool? It was better for you to not know anything about the transaction. That way you wouldn't be lying if you had gotten caught with them. You're

not as good a liar as you think you are, you know.” Mohan turned to go into his room. Sylvie followed standing in his doorway leaning against the jamb.

“What are you talking about? Not a good liar?”

Mohan was removing the plastic from and hanging fresh dry-cleaning in his closet. He didn’t turn to look at his mother as he continued.

“I mean, your voice changes pitch when you’re putting on one of your street theater shows and you left pinky twitches when you’re bluffing and your lip trembles when you’re scared. By the way, why are you scared of me?” Mohan hung the last shirt in the closet and turned around to look at Sylvie who was now tapping her foot.

“Only someone who is around me all the time would know those things, Mo.” She replied coldly. Mohan tipped his head to one side and pursed his lips in impatience.

“Oh, come on, Mom. You’re lying to yourself right now. What would you have thought if you had gotten caught with those statues and they told you what was in them?”

Sylvie thought for a minute. “I would have thought Sang was a sick fuck and that you were an idiot.”

“No you wouldn’t have. You would have thought it was a plot by Koreans to undermine the US and you would have said that to the authorities. You would have passed a lie detector because you wouldn’t have been lying. You were better off not knowing. But you just couldn’t follow directions. And now we have to wait and see if the package arrives tomorrow like you say it’s supposed to. I’m almost afraid to ask. How much did it cost to ship?”

“Not as much as I thought it was going to be. Those things were heavy!”

“Seriously, Mom. How much?”

“\$600 and some change. It was supposed to take a week.”

“Jeeze, Mom! A fucking week? Did you wrap them up so they wouldn’t get damaged? Did YOU pack the box? What did you do for clothes for a week?”

“I wrapped each one in my clothes and put them in the suitcase then packed bubble wrap around it all and closed it up. I’ve shipped back my bag before. It got here just fine. And where are the vials? Are those things like those puzzle boxes your uncle Marc used to make?” Sylvie was picturing the ugly little figurines in her mind’s eye now trying to remember if there had been any seams.

“They’re mechanized. There’s a button on each of them that’s hidden and when you press it the door pops open and there’s a lead box inside. The vial is inside the lead box.”

“No wonder they’re so damn heavy. Why lead?”

"I don't know. I guess as a joke. It's not like that shit is radioactive or anything. It's a virus."

Mohan shrugged.

"Mo, that doesn't make sense. Why are you bringing over a virus anyway? Who's job is this?"

Sylvie was skeptical of the whole story and was beginning to suspect her stupid son had himself involved in something they were all going to regret.

"You remember Sang, right?"

"Yeah. He's the little prick who sold me the statues."

"Yeah, well Sang has a second cousin that evidently is a mole at the CDC or some such bullshit." Mohan recounted.

"You mean, this is supposed to be some epidemic to be unleashed?" Sylvie was disgusted. This was beyond even her sensibilities.

"No. He said they're trying to study it or something. I don't know. I guess his cousin is a double agent or some shit."

"And you think anyone would let your ass know such information?" Sylvie pressed her son who she could tell was starting to doubt himself by the tone of his voice.

"Yeah. I don't know, and I don't care. I just know three million dollars is a lot to pay for six little statues." Mohan finished.

"Three million? Were you paid upfront?" Sylvie prodded.

"Hell no! I was supposed to put the statues in the locked front window case in the next couple days and label them as some Ming Dynasty rare antiques or some shit and Sang's cousin is supposed to come in and buy them from me." Mohan explained.

"For three million dollars? We've never carried anything that expensive in the shop. What's this cousin's name?" Sylvie interrogated.

"That's the beauty of it! I'm not supposed to put a price on them. They are supposed to just be like a display. I don't know the cousin's name. I just have a couple time frames that he or she might come in and a secret code-phrase. Then they are going to haggle with me on the price... first offer like half a million for the set and I'm supposed to go real high and we finally settle on three mill." Mohan sounded like he was trying to convince not only his mother but himself that this was a good idea.

"So you mean to tell me you don't know this person's name or if they are a man or a woman or even when they're supposed to come get these things and we're supposed to hold onto these packages of unknown sickness that could kill the both of us before we even see a dime?" Sylvie was incredulous. "And you were mad at ME about the girl?! That little twat was chump change

in comparison to this shit, Mo! She cost three quarters of a million after the eye job, skin bleaching, fee to the North Koreans, and the travel expenses.”

“That reminds me. Can she identify you?” Mohan asked his mother.

“No. I don’t think so. I never contacted her directly from my phone or laptop. It was always third party who passed on the directions to her. She only saw my face at the terminal and we never actually spoke. We were supposed to be seated next to each other. I don’t know what happened.” Sylvie was nervous. It was a lie. She had texted the girl just before they got off the plane telling her to meet her at the Starbucks kiosk just past customs, but she hadn’t used the number associated with the phone. She had used her Line2 number to send the text. Hopefully that would be enough. She already had cancelled the account and removed the App from her phone *and* put in a new SIM card. The old SIM card she had cracked in half, stuffed one half between the cushions on the LAX shuttle and tossed the other half out the window on the highway on the way home.

“Well, if you say so. Either way, we both should probably lay low for the next week or so until the bag shows up and we know something.” Mohan opened a mini fridge hidden under a night stand and pulled out another beer.

“You’re getting a beer gut.” Sylvie told him.

“Yeah? You look like a leather bag and sound like a barking man.”

Sylvie just looked at her son and left the room. The dogs were barking.

Sylvie stepped up to the window to the left of her bed and looked out into the yard in the direction of the barking dogs. She could see a young Asian man pinned up against the wall. A short length of rope was dangling from the top of the wall. Sylvie pulled a fresh pack of cigarettes from a dish on her night stand and opened it pulling out one fresh straight cigarette. A book of matches sat next to the dish. She struck one and lit the cigarette screwing up her face at the taste of sulfur from the match tip. “Well, what the fuck do we have here?” She said out loud to no one. She could hear Mohan’s door open and his foot falls toward her room. The door opened and Mohan had an urgent expression on his face.

“Mom, who the fuck’s out there?”

“I don’t know, but stop calling me Mom. We have company.” Sylvie blew smoke out the window without looking back at her son. Mohan turned back toward his room.

“I’m getting my gun.” he said. “Meet you down stairs.”

Sylvie opened the top drawer of her nightstand and fished out a small pearl handled pistol. She opened the chamber to check that it was loaded. It was. She snapped the chamber shut and tucked the gun in the back of her waistband then headed down the stairs slowly.

Mohan was already in the yard with his gun drawn. Kinney and Kline were growling low, sitting to either side of a young slender Asian man with a flat expression wearing rock climbing gloves and track suit. Mohan was breathing heavily staring the man down. Sylvie approached in a patient manner stopping just next to Kline and stroking his head. She took a long drag off her cigarette and blew it in the intruder's face. He didn't even blink. Sylvie nodded at him in approval.

"So. Just who do we have here? I know you're not a guest, or a friend of my partner here." she said nodding toward Mohan. "Guests and friends knock on the front door." The man remained silent. Sylvie took another step towards him. They were about the same height, five seven, five eight, or so. Her face was only a foot away from his. She took another drag and blew it directly in his eyes. This time he blinked and shook his head a bit.

"I'm looking for my kid brother's ball." The man said flatly without any detection of an accent of any kind.

"Is that so?" Sylvie replied. "Last I checked, Phil and Buck didn't have any kids, and the house on the other side has been empty for a month." Sylvie took another drag. Phil and Buck were an old gay couple who spent more time on beaches in Mexico than they did in their house and they hated children. The house on the other side had been vacant since the last LA brat that lived there got dumped by her rap-star boyfriend and he stopped paying her bills. The closest kids old enough to be playing ball outside on the street were at least two blocks away.

"You're gonna be looking for *your* balls in a minute if you don't tell us who you are and what you're doing real fast." Mohan offered from behind his mother. The young man shifted his head slightly to look at Mohan over Sylvie's shoulder but didn't say anything. Sylvie leaned in and grabbed the young man by the crotch and squeezed. He winced.

"So, what's your story?" Sylvie sneered in his face. She knew her breath stank. She hadn't had a chance to brush her teeth yet since they had gotten back to the house. The young man wrinkled his nose at the stink of her sour old mouth.

"I'm nobody in particular." He replied. Sylvie squeezed tighter.

"Is that so. Well, if you don't start talking here in a minute you're going to be a eunuch." Sylvie offered in a sweet tone of voice.

“Max. My name’s Max.” he finally said. Sylvie released his crotch and stepped back taking a drag off her cigarette then stamping it out on the ground with her right toe.

“OK, Max. What are you doing here?” Sylvie licked her lips. Max looked unbothered other than a small bead of sweat starting to form along his upper lip.

“I’m not doing anything.” He answered.

Mohan was annoyed. He pushed past his mother and smacked Max across the face with the side of his gun. It made a loud crack and blood trickled from Max’s nose. He licked at it.

“Trust me. You don’t want to hit me again.” he told Mohan without emotion.

“Oh yeah? And just why doesn’t he want to hit you again?” Sylvie asked. Max slowly shifted his gaze back to look Sylvie in the eye.

“Because I know what you have in there and I’m the one here to pick it up.” Max waited for his words to sink in.

Sylvie smiled and addressed her son. “You hear that, Mo? He knows what we have in there.”

Sylvie turned back toward Max. “Just what do we have in there?” she asked Max.

“Exactly. You have no idea what it is you have in there. You’re both idiots.”

Mohan smacked him again across the other side of his face with his gun, this time busting his lip. Blood trickled down Max’s chin. He wiped it with the back of his hand and looked at the smear.

“I told you, you didn’t want to hit me again.”

Mohan just laughed. “Yeah. Why not? What are you gonna do?” he asked Max. Max smiled.

“Look, you moron, I’m not going to do anything, but my associates will.” Max remained smiling.

Sylvie was starting to get nervous. Mohan was oblivious.

“And who are these associates and what do you think they can do to me?” Mohan chuckled.

“My associates are the persons to whom those ugly little statues you have belong.”

Mohan stopped laughing. Sylvie took her free hand and pushed his arm down to lower his weapon. “Let’s go inside.” Sylvie offered and motioned to Kinney and Kline to follow her. “Max, you walk ahead of us.” Sylvie instructed.

“With pleasure.”

Max headed toward the open door onto the screened in porch. Once Max was on the porch Sylvie nodded to Mohan who grabbed an extension cord that was hanging on a hook on the back of the house and used it to tie up Max. Max didn’t even struggle. Mohan and Sylvie dragged Max into the kitchen where Sylvie dug through a drawer producing a fistful of zip ties.

She handed them to Mohan who continued to further secure Max's hands and ankles. He sat Max on a chair. Sylvie circled them, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Those things are going to kill you." Max said to her. She just chuffed.

"There's a better chance that I'm going to kill you first." She told him. "Now, who are these associates of yours?" But before he could say anything else, Mohan punched him in the face and knocked him out. Then he grabbed a plastic bag from under the sink and went to pull it over his head, but Sylvie stopped him. She looked at her son sadly.

"Look, you don't know what we're dealing with here. Killing him might not be the best idea." She explained to her son. Mohan looked at her with disgust.

"Old woman, I think you are going to regret not letting me just shoot him in the yard." Sylvie sighed heavily and touched her son's cheek. He recoiled.

"One of these days you'll learn." She told him.

"One of these days you're gonna find yourself in a nursing home." Mohan answered. "Where's Dursik?"

"Dursik had other business." Sylvie said.

"That dick is never around when he can be useful." Mohan complained.

"Dursik is exactly where he needs to be. Now who are these fucks you've been doing business with behind my back?" Sylvie went to a cupboard and produced a roll of duct tape. She proceeded to use the tape to gag the unconscious Max. She used the rest of the roll of tape to secure him in his chair to the island in the center of the kitchen. Mohan looked on in bewilderment having a flash-back. His father used to do that to him when he was a kid and didn't obey. Big Mo had been in prison for the past 11 years after getting caught with the gun that shot a cop and without an alibi for the night of the murder. The last time Mohan had visited his father, Big Mo had told him not to bother coming back to see him again, that he had never liked him in the first place and he was doing just fine on the inside. Mohan had responded in much the same way as he was now watching his mother secure Max.

Sylvie brushed past Mohan and started up the stairs motioning for him to follow her. Mohan turned slowly and followed like a puppy. Kinney and Kline sat watching Max.