

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 7

### A Hard Woman

Dursik thought Robin sounded pretty harmless. He checked his wristwatch as he hung up the phone. The antique kept better time than his cell phone. If he were still alive, Dursik's father would have been impressed that he still had the watch in his possession after all these years. The gold and onyx time piece had been in Dursik's family for three generations now. A wrist watch that old was rare. Once, shortly after coming to the US, he had lost it when a business deal went sour, but the men who took it from him had soon regretted their terrible mistake. A few days later, Dursik had run into the guy who had actually taken it off his wrist in a card room. Dursik cut the entire hand off to retrieve his heirloom and send a message. The guy survived and wore a leather sleeve over the stump of his left wrist ever since and everyone started calling him "Lefty". Dursik gave Lefty credit for not snitching about how he lost the hand. It had taken Dursik a month to clean and recalibrate the timepiece, but Dursik was both skilled and patient and the piece now ran better than ever. His father had been a master watch maker in the old country. Dursik had learned a lot by watching and what he hadn't learned by watching he taught himself by reading and doing.

It was just after 9AM. Sylvie was going to be relieved by his findings. He didn't expect further action on this Robin Randall matter. Unless he was some super secret government agent, Robin checked out to simply be some schmo selling car parts; not a cop or fellow good-fella or anything like that. Robin Randall was just some average, middle-aged jerk living a boring mid-western life with his average wife. He *did* have a second cousin doing time for embezzlement in upstate New York, but as far as Dursik had been able to dig, Robin hadn't seen or spoken to his cousin since they were kids and besides, it had turned out Garret Randall was no career criminal. He was just some sorry-ass fuck who's wife had gotten sick with a rare disorder and needed to pay doctor bills. It was hard to even call him greedy.

Dursik dialed Sylvie's private bedroom line. It rang six times and she still didn't answer. Dursik hung up the phone, furrowed his brow and pursed his lips. Something wasn't right. He had known Sylvie and Big Mo since he had come to the States 50 years ago *and* he was Little Mo's Godfather. Sylvie was a morning bird. She had a routine. There was no good reason for her to not answer that phone, even if she was using the toilet. She had a phone in there too. Dursik

had installed it himself last year when Sylvie had her hip replaced. He brushed his teeth and ran a comb over his head and hopped in his Charger.

On the way to Sylvie's, Dursik pulled through a drive through coffee stand. He ordered a black coffee for himself and a latte for Sylvie and placed both the drinks in his console cup holders. He didn't understand why Sylvie didn't just divorce Big Mo. He wasn't getting out. She never went to see him, and as far as Dursik knew, they didn't write or call each other. Little Mo had been Sylv's business partner since before Big Mo went away and Big Mo's business was now pretty much confined to the Inside. Dursik heard bits and pieces from time to time about it on the street and once he had helped procure a certain item Big Mo was looking for, but other than that, Big Mo's dealings were all Inside. Dursik watched as Little Mo grew up and knew Big Mo had no use for the kid from the start. Big Mo was like that. He decided in the first three minutes of meeting a person whether or not he liked them and if he didn't like you there was no changing his mind. Dursik had been at the hospital when Sylvie was in labor. He had driven her because Big Mo had been in a business meeting. Big Mo arrived at the hospital just a few minutes before Little Mo popped out. Mo was in the room with Sylvie not even thirty minutes after the birth then Dursik watched him walk past the waiting room and down the hall shaking his head. Dursik had gone back to the room and poked his head in the door. He found Sylvie holding the new born crying while the nurse looked on in disbelief. When Sylvie looked up and saw Dursik standing in the door she began a fresh round of sobs and exclaimed, "He said he doesn't like him! How can he not like him?! He just came out of me!"

Dursik had gone to Sylvie's side and had been her right hand man ever since. Though you wouldn't know it to look at her now, back then Sylvie had been a real looker. Over the years Big Mo had made off color comments in Dursik's presence about Dursik's relationship with Sylvie, but in reality, to this day there had never been anything physical between Dursik and Sylvie. Little Mo had been a sweet baby and a smart little kid. Big Mo had turned him into what he was now. He had chipped at him little by little everyday and when he wasn't chipping at him he had beaten him. Little Mo was the way he was for a reason. It bothered Dursik, but he never said anything about it. He just stuck by Sylvie no matter what. She had never cheated him out of payment for any job. She had always been upfront with him. She had always trusted him and Dursik liked when people trusted him. Dursik's first name was Jaromir, but there had been

another Jaromir on the scene when he first came over, so he went by his surname and that had never changed.

Dursik didn't really remember how he had gotten into his line of work. It just happened along the way as a means of survival. Fixing watches never made him enough to live on and a man needed to eat. NAZI's or Russians had killed his mother and father. He didn't know which for sure. Only a couple folks who stayed in the old village had survived and he had never spoke to any of them personally. He had been very young and escaped Slovakia with a neighbor to Great Britain early on. He remembered his father slipping the watch off his wrist and sewing it into the inside of Dursik's coat before helping the boy put the coat on and shoving all the cash he had in the house into the neighbor's hand. It was the middle of the night and the neighbor only had enough room for the child in the automobile. Dursik's mother had kissed him and cried. He never saw them again. He was seven when he last saw his parents. He was thirty-two and already in the business when he met the Statue of Liberty. It was 1970. A friend of a friend had introduced him to Sylvie and Big Mo. They were around the same age, had people from a village that neighbored the village where Dursik had been born, and had a room for rent real cheap. Dursik had lived with Sylvie and Big Mo for a year until he was making enough for his own place. He had done jobs with Big Mo off and on early in his US career, but it wasn't until after Big Mo went to prison that he pretty much began to work exclusively for Sylvie. She was a hard woman, and they didn't make them like her anymore. He trusted her implicitly and she trusted him.

As he turned into Sylvie's driveway everything looked to be in order from the front of the house. Dursik turned off the engine and grabbed both caffeinated beverages and mounted the front steps. He could hear Sylvie barking at her son and felt a wave of relief. She just hadn't heard the phone ring when he called earlier. Using a crooked pinky, Dursik rang the door bell. He had a key, but he tried to be polite when Little Mo was home. Once he rang the bell the interior of the house fell silent. After a couple minutes the door opened and Little Mo was holding his gun in his right hand by his side and ushering Dursik in with his left hand urgently.

"It's just Dursik." Mo called over his shoulder then closed the front door and turned back to speak directly to Dursik.

"Where the fuck have you been man?" Mo asked frantically.

“What are you talking about? It’s hardly 10 AM, and I only came over because Sylv didn’t answer the phone when I called. What’s going on?” Dursik answered.

“Well, whatever. Just get in here.” Mo turned toward the kitchen and motioned for Dursik to follow him. In the kitchen Dursik saw Sylvie in her ugly old bathrobe and slippers; cigarette in one hand and the other hand on her hip tapping her foot in front of some Asian-looking kid taped to a chair. So he had been right after all. Something was amiss. Dursik cleared his throat.

“And what do we have here?” He asked Sylvie as he handed her the drink he brought her. She took it and nodded bringing the cup to her lips to take a sip.

“Thank God for you.” she said to Dursik. “We have a bit of a mess. This is Max. He’s here for the statues.” Sylvie glared at Mo as she sipped the latte and took a drag off her cigarette.

“I thought the statues were for the shop display.” Dursik said eyeing Max - his restraints and condition. The kid’s face, neck and chest were marked with a significant amount of dried blood. His mouth was covered in duct tape that looked as though it had been applied and re-applied a few times, and it smelled like he may have wet himself. He was taped to the kitchen island the same way Big Mo used to do to Little Mo. Dursik wondered which one of them had done that to him, Sylvie or Mo.

“Yeah, well, so did he.” Sylvie nodded toward Mo who was standing by the refrigerator looking bored.

“Yeah, well the joke’s on him, isn’t it?” Mo replied blandly “Because we don’t have any fucking statues.” Max’s eyes widened at this revelation. Up to this point neither Mo or Sylvie had revealed the statues weren’t actually there. Sylvie shook her head and sighed heavily looking at her feet. She sat her latte down on the table and looked at Dursik as she spoke to her son.

“Mo-mo, get out of my sight and my house for the next 24 hours. I’m too old for this shit and you’re still not old enough.” Dursik nodded an almost imperceptible nod. He knew what she was saying. Mo began to protest.

“What the fuck?! What are you talking about? I live here. Where do you expect me to go?” Mo was whining like a spoiled child. Dursik answered him.

“We don’t care where you go. Just be gone for 24 hours.”

Mo stopped huffing immediately. Dursik almost never addressed him this way. He learned his lesson years ago when it came to Dursik. He used to think he and his mother were having an affair, but the last time he saw his father, Big Mo had explained it was more than that. He told Mo that Sylvie was and always would be Big Mo’s wife, but Dursik and Sylvie were each other’s family. Mo hadn’t ever told anyone about that part of the conversation. He didn’t know what it

meant until a couple years ago when he saw his mother cry for the first time since he was a very little boy. Sylvie, Dursik, and Mo were sitting around the table eating some take out. The news was on the TV and the three were chatting casually, enjoying the meal. When someone speaking Russian being interviewed by the news caster had begun speaking on the TV, Sylvie turned her head sharply toward the screen and paid attention. After a few minutes tears began rolling down her cheeks silently and her shoulders began to shake. Mo was confused. It was just some bullshit news story. Dursik had gotten up from his seat and knelt next to Sylvie, wrapping his arms around her shoulders. Sylvie had buried her face in his neck and wept until his shirt was wet around the neck and chest. Dursik had whispered to her in a language Mo didn't even recognize and then to Mo's surprise Sylvie had answered him in the same language and nodded her head in agreement! Dursik had smoothed the hair from around her face and brought her a clean damp rag from her private bathroom upstairs to wipe her face. Then he turned off the TV and they resumed eating as if nothing had happened. Mohan still didn't know why the Russian annexing of Crimea made his mother cry, but he understood then what his father had said to him years before about Dursik and Sylvie being family. Mohan stuffed his gun in the back of his pants and stomped up the stairs.

"Fine. Just let me grab a few things and I'll be gone." He said looking at the floor.

Sylvie sidled up to Dursik and the two sipped their coffee and stared at Max who now had eyes wide and full of fear. Once they heard Mo's car leave the driveway Sylvie spoke to Dursik, never taking her eyes off Max.

"Mo made the deal without even getting a deposit. This fuck showed up not long after you left yesterday to collect and guess what?" Sylvie gave Dursik time to reply.

"Max forgot his check book." Dursik responded.

"Yeah. Something like that. We went through his pockets this morning and found nothing."

"Who taped him to the island like that?"

"What?"

"Who taped the jerk up? You or Mohan?"

"I did. What's that matter."

"Oh it doesn't matter. I was just curious." Dursik started to peel the tape from Max's mouth. Max began to speak.

"Hey. Look. No one said anything to me about any money. I was just here to get the statues." he tried to explain to Dursik. Dursik just smiled.

“Just coming to pick up the statues? Is that all? And then be on your merry way?” He asked Max rhetorically. Dursik put the tape back over Max’s mouth and turned to Sylvie. “Did he come through the front door?”

“Of course not.” Sylvie grabbed the piece of rope from the back garden wall where it now sat on the counter and tossed it to Dursik. “He came over the wall. Kline and Kinney stopped him.” At the sound of their names the dogs got up from their napping spot and came into the room awaiting instruction. Dursik rubbed Kline’s ears.

“That’s OK boys. You can go lay down.” he told the dogs and they obeyed. Dursik approached Sylvie and placed a hand on either shoulder stooping down slightly to look directly in her eyes as he spoke to her, “Mohan really fucked up this time, Sylv.”

Sylvie didn’t even blink. She grit her teeth before she replied, “I know. I don’t know who I want dead more, him or Max.”

Dursik chuckled. “I can take care of both if you like.”

Sylvie laughed in a mocking kind of way. “Ha! I just might take you up on that. But for now we need to figure out what to do with our friend, Max, here. I still haven’t found out who his associates are or exactly what’s in those ugly little statues...and they still haven’t been delivered yet.” Sylvie looked over at Max who was sweating. Dursik stepped back from Sylvie and stood over Max.

“I’ll find out. Go upstairs and take a shower and get dressed. When you come down I’ll have the information you want.” Dursik stated with absolute certainty. Sylvie sighed with relief and pat Dursik on the shoulder and left him alone with the boy.

Sylvie turned on her shower as hot as she could then turned on her CD player. She didn’t know what it was about Kenny G, but that saxophone always relaxed her. When she came back downstairs Max was passed out with a bandaged hand, a pinky finger was in a baggie with ice on the table, and Dursik was washing his hands.

“So?” Sylvie looked at each item then settled her gaze on Dursik.

“So...our little friend here works with a bunch of people, but *this* job is North Korean. The girl, incidentally, was a spy. She was going to steal the statues from you before you left the airport. You’re probably lucky they picked her up. She wasn’t the girl Mo actually bought. She was the daughter of one of their top guys over there. They aren’t going to give a shit about Max here, but if the statues don’t show up today like they’re supposed to, there’s probably not much we can do



to keep Mo safe this time.” Dursik took out his lighter and lit the cigarette Sylvie put between her lips. Sylvie took a drag and exhaled.

“Well, that doesn’t make me happy, but this one’s entirely on Mo this time.”

“Yes it is, Sylv. Yes it is. You in the mood for some good news?”

“Good news?” Sylvie asked incredulously.

“Yeah. Good news.”

“Sure.”

“That doughy oaf? The one from the plane? Robin Randall.”

“Yeah. What’d you find?”

“He’s just some average asshole. I’ve been doing this a long time, Sylv, and if that guy has anything to do with anything he’s a fucking kingpin like we’ve never seen before.”

“Well, you can never be too sure. What’d you learn?”

“He works for some small automotive part manufacture outside of Detroit. He’s married, no kids and his mother’s a widow about fifteen years younger than you. He plays racket ball a couple times a week and has no connections to anyone anywhere except a cousin doing time in upstate New York, but even that is a nothing rap and the two haven’t seen each other since they were kids. It was just freak luck that he got your seat on the plane.”

“Yeah, well, I still might ask you to take a trip and who knows...maybe I’ll join you just to get out of here for a while. What are we gonna do with Max here?”

Dursik took Sylvie’s hand, “We’re going to wait for a couple hours and see if the package shows up, then I’m going to arrange a meeting. Mo’s probably going to have to cut his losses on this one.”

Sylvie shrugged. “I don’t care. As long as this fuck here is out of my house, I never have to see those statues again and I don’t have Korean goons breathing down my neck.”

Dursik started to lean forward to kiss Sylvie on the cheek but caught himself and pulled away just as there was a knock at the door.

“Really Sylv, you should consider putting in one of those home cameras at the door so you can see who is there without pressing your face to the peephole. One of these days you’re going to get shot in the face.” Dursik turned to go get the door.

Dursik squinted through the peephole. It was a delivery man with a beat up looking truck and over starched uniform. He had a box by his side that was big enough to contain a suitcase. Dursik smoothed his shirt and opened the door with a smile.

"I have a package for a Mrs. Sylvie Walensik." a man about Little Mo's age stated matter-of-factly. Dursik nodded.

"Yes. I'll sign." Dursik took the stylus from the delivery man's outstretched hand and signed his Mickey-Mouse-name, Jon Stanley, on the electronic screen.

"Thank you. Have a nice day." the man said as he pushed the box toward Dursik standing in the doorway. Dursik bent over and picked up the surprisingly heavy box and brought it into the foyer closing the door behind him. Sylvie came out and met him.

"Open it right here." She told Dursik handing him a utility knife. He took the knife from her and sliced down the long corner of the box and across the top. Sylvie pulled at bubble wrap and paper that had been wrapped around the suit case and Dursik laid it flat on the floor. Sylvie removed the lock and slid the zipper open throwing back the lid and gasped. The suitcase was stuffed with mud bricks and straw. Her clothes and the statues were gone.

"Well, what the fuck are we going to do now, Vortako?" Sylvie covered her face. Dursik put his arm around her shoulder.

"It's OK, Fenne. Dursik will take care of it, but I can't make promises about Mo-mo. Not this time. I'm old too and Max in there is disposable to these guys. They'll probably kill him just to cover their tracks."

"Did he tell you that?" Sylvie nodded toward the kitchen where Max was starting to stir.

"Not in so many words. It was what his eyes told me. Not his mouth. He was grateful when I told him I was only taking a finger."

Sylvie's cellphone began to ring in her robe pocket. She startled at the sound and looked at the screen. The number came up unknown.

"Answer it." Dursik instructed. She did.

"Hola?" Sylvie always answered the phone in Spanish when she didn't recognize the number or a call came in as unknown.

"Madame Walensik. We know what happened. We have the merchandise. Our man just returned your suitcase. You and your Mr. Stanley can return the boy, in whatever shape he is in, in one hour to the address you will find on a piece of yellow lined paper in the front zipper pocket. If you get him here before we find Mohan we will spare Mohan's life, but Mohan is to never do business in this town again, for you or anyone else. We don't care if a mother keeps her son, but if he is to ever be a man you would be wise to tell him to move away. Far away. I hear you can buy property real cheap in Detroit." and the man on the line hung up. Sylvie dropped the phone and stared at Dursik.

"They have the statues. They delivered the bag. They want Max back. If we get him back to them before they find Mo they're going to let him live." Sylvie spat.

"Well, that's far more compassionate than I was expecting." Dursik replied.

"They said Mo can't work here anymore. They said he should move." Sylvie added.

"Not a bad idea. He's too old to be living with his Mommy anymore anyway."

"Dursik...they knew he's my son."

"Sylvie. Everyone knows he's your son. He looks just like you. Half the town thinks he's my son as well." Dursik looked at Sylvie with pity. Sylvie shook her head to get some clarity.

"The address where we're supposed to drop him is in the front pocket of the bag. I'm showered, just not dressed. Let me throw something on while you get Max into the back of my KIA in the garage. Here's the keys. Put your car in the garage." Sylvie handed her keys to Dursik who just nodded and turned to take care of business. Sylvie ran up the stairs as fast as she could.

Dursik sauntered into the kitchen eyeing Max who was awake once again and groaning slightly looking at his bandaged hand.

"Your people just called." he told the boy. Max looked up at him with fear.

"Yeah. That's what I thought. They're meaner than me, aren't they?" Dursik questioned. Max shook his head yes fervently.

"I'm sorry, but we have to give you back and if we do so in a timely manner, Mo gets to live, so this is what's going to happen...I'm going to cut you from the island there and take you and put you in the trunk of Madame's car. I have your finger here on ice. They might be able to put it back on for you, if they let you live. You are not going to fight me, because if you do, I'm going to cut off your balls, and those can't be put back on. Do you understand?" Dursik explained without emotion. Max shook his head in agreement.

Dursik disappeared for a couple minutes into the garage where he put down an old blanket in the trunk of the KIA then he pulled out the utility knife Sylvie had handed him earlier from his back pocket and went back into the kitchen to cut the duct tape securing Max to the kitchen island. It was a good thing Max wasn't that big a kid. He weighed about as much as the suitcase of bricks had. Dursik tossed him over his shoulder and wrinkled his face at the smell of now dried urine on the boy's pants so close to his face. He situated Max in the trunk with the baggie with his finger and closed the trunk then went to a cupboard over a workbench and chose a set

of out of state license plates and covered the front and back plates of the car just as Sylvie stepped into the garage closing the door into the house behind her.

“Good thinking. We don’t need anyone following us that easy.” Sylvie patted Dursik on the shoulder. Dursik dug in his pocket and tossed his keys at her.

“You go out and move my car in while I back this one out then let’s go. I know that address. It’s about a twenty five minute drive from here.”

Sylvie caught the keys and nodded. She always impressed Dursik. At her age she was still sharp as a tack and harder than most of the men he dealt with on a regular basis. Sylvie backed the Charger out of the driveway and waited for Dursik to pull the KIA out and idle at the curb.

Then she backed the Charger into the garage, locked it, then closed the garage with the exterior keypad before getting in the passenger seat of the KIA next to Dursik. Max was silent.

“Do you have a hand wipe or something in that bag of yours. I have piss-stink on my shoulder.” Sylvie dug through her garish quilted monstrosity of a bag and produced a package of lavender scented hand wipes. She pulled one out and handed it to Dursik who wiped his shoulder while he drove and looked at the road.

“Thanks.” he said as he handed the used wipe back to her and fumbled with the radio.

“So, are they going to meet us, do you think?” Sylvie asked.

“No.” Dursik pulled the folded paper from his shirt pocket and handed it to Sylvie. “Under the address are some instructions. The place is an old warehouse, mostly kitchenwares and *massage* workers come though there. There’s an alley in the back with a loading dock. We’re supposed to leave him on the loading dock and leave.” Dursik said.

Sylvie pulled her pearl handled pistol from her bag just enough for Dursik to see she had it.

“I’ve got your back.” she told him.

“I know.” was all Dursik replied. They road the rest of the way without speaking listening to some idiot’s pod cast talking about Martial Arts and how many injections the Kardashian family had in their asses and faces.

When they pulled into the alley Dursik looked at Sylvie. “Don’t get out of the car unless they shoot. If they hit me, and I go down, just leave me and get the hell out of here. Max is more scared of them than he is of me.”

Sylvie just nodded.

Dursik backed the vehicle up near the dock and popped the trunk. Then he got out leaving the engine running and driver door open. He took a quick glance around and saw another kid behind a dumpster watching and a guy in an overhead window. He picked up Max and laid him

on the dock then grabbed the bag with his finger and sat it on top of the boy's chest. Then he got in the car quickly and closed the door. When they were a couple miles away Dursik pulled under an overpass, removed the fake plates and tossed them down a gutter. He was using a hanky to wipe his hands as he returned to the KIA.

"I've been thinking." Sylvie began.

"Yeah. It's good someone does that from time to time." Dursik joked.

"No. I'm serious. I'm sick of LA. I'm sick of the high rent and shitty people." Sylvie was nodding her head up and down as she spoke. Dursik started the car and pulled back onto the boulevard.

"They're right. I heard you can buy a huge place in Detroit for just a few thousand dollars and I have a couple contacts there. We could all move to Detroit and set up shop there pretty easily. I wonder if they got to Mo or not." Sylvie was fishing in her bag for her cellphone. Dursik glanced at her out of the corner of his eye. She was serious.

"Are you asking me to move in with you old woman?"

Sylvie began to laugh hysterically. "Well, you old fart, I guess I am. You can have your own room. You don't have to sleep with me."

A tear welled up in the corner of Dursik's left eye but he willed his eyeball to suck it back in.

"Sylvie, after all these years, I'd be honored to live with you."

Sylvie pretended she didn't hear him while she dialed Mo's cell number. He answered.

"It's Mom, Mo-mo. Meet us at home in an hour."

"Okay." was all Mohan replied. Sylvie hung up and patted Dursik on the knee.

"I guess we all have a little packing to do."

"I don't have much." was all Dursik said.

"Well, I don't either." Sylvie answered.