



PLAY HARD,
LOVE HARD

FIRE
and
ICE

A . M . H A R T N E T T

AM Hartnett

Fire And Ice

«HarperCollins»

Hartnett A.

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Play hard, love hard. Don't fall into the lap of the enormous Russian. Do outlaw all thoughts of crazy-hot sex on living room floor with hockey player you've only just met. When junior hockey star Mick "The Dragon" Volkov first shows up on her doorstep, Julia gives her ornery student a month before he bails on his French lessons. Yet by the end of that first day, she finds herself smitten with the playful flirt beneath that intimidating exterior. Trying to keep her attraction to this bruiser in check becomes a futile exercise for Julia. Once Mick makes it clear he wants her in his bed, Julia decides to give in to temptation and discovers that "The Dragon" is just as explosive in bed as he is on the ice.

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Fire & Ice

A. M. HARTNETT



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Chapter One

The pounding was so brisk that it rattled the windows, and as Julia pushed the cold eye mask from her face she uttered her first curse of the day.

‘Oh, come on, it’s *October*. Enough with the home reno’s,’ she groaned, and looked longingly through the bathroom door to the bedroom where her noise-cancelling earphones were slung over the headboard. They were the best three hundred dollars she had ever spent and had saved her from more than a few homicidal rages as she tried to work through Mr Morgan’s noisy to-do list.

After a moment of silence, Julia sighed and pulled the mask back down over her eyes and sank deeper into the tub. She gave herself over to the fizz of what was left of her bubbles and David Gray crooning ‘*Babylon*’ from the Bluetooth speaker on the toilet tank, determined to stay that way until her phone’s alarm beeped to let her know it was time to get a wiggle on her day.

A second onslaught of pounding rose up. Through the flurry of expletives she let loose Julia realised that the sound wasn’t Mr Morgan but her front door.

She tore the mask off and it landed with a splat on the tile floor.

Someone, some *lunatic*, was hammering on her front door at ten to eight in the morning.

The knocking continued in a rhythmic burst of insistent raps while she pulled herself out of the tub and dragged her robe on. As she passed by Kris’s door she slowed with a growl, overflowing with jealousy over her roommate’s ability to sleep even if Liam Neeson broke into the house and detonated a bomb in the kitchen.

‘I’m *coming*,’ she barked as she reached the bottom step, but it did nothing to abate the teeth-chattering blows upon her door.

She twisted the knob, scowl ready to drive back her unwanted guest, but it was Julia who found herself taking a step back.

The man on her doorstep looked like he had burst free from a video game featuring barbarian raiders wielding axes and been given a makeover. Shoulders went on and on, and a chest pressed against the front of his fleece pullover. His dark hair stuck out in errant curls and licks, and the scruff of beard looked like it hadn’t met a razor that could best it.

It was the expression that cinched it. Lips pressed tightly together and thick brows almost meeting where the deep line formed between them. Julia had never seen a more perfect glower in her life...outside of mugshots.

Before she could recover and greet him, the man reached into the satchel that hung at his side and withdrew a book, which he thrust between them.

‘I am here for the French,’ he said in a thick Russian accent.

Julia looked down at the book. *Emma et Olivier: French for Beginners*.

‘Oh,’ she said, and found it a bit of a challenge to meet his intense gaze. ‘Right. You’re...really early. Aren’t we supposed to meet at nine o’clock?’

His scowl deepened, and his gaze moved slowly from the top of her blonde head to her bare feet. The temptation to follow nearly killed her. She hoped there were no coffee stains on her robe, or dried blobs of the mashed-banana face mask she’d used the other morning. It didn’t seem completely out of the realm of possibility that her visitor would make her drop and give him twenty push-ups for being slovenly.

Nostrils flaring impatiently, he tucked his free hand into the outer pocket and pulled out his phone. Using only his thumb, he swiped the screen a few times and then held up the device for her to see.

‘You said eight,’ he insisted, the word coming out as *et*.

Daring to drag her gaze from his face, she looked at the screen. There it was, the email she had sent him three days ago about their first tutoring session. The date and time was highlighted in blue. Sure enough, she had made a typo.

He was on time, and she was an idiot.

Radiating impatience, he tucked his phone back into his bag and looked expectantly past her.

Julia did a quick check to make sure her robe was still closed and then stepped aside. 'I'm so sorry. I thought we were meeting at nine o'clock. Come in, please. It'll take me just a few minutes to get dressed – ah, what is your name again?'

'Mikhail Volkov,' he said, and eclipsed her as he stepped into the foyer.

Right. The hockey player. The Dragon.

The Bandits typically provided their own English as a Second Language programme to foreign players, but for some reason this bruiser wanted to learn French. Professor Gwynn had put Volkov in touch with her just a few days ago and, though she was already stretched thin with this tutoring gig, teaching and her master's programme, she'd taken on this new client.

He didn't look around and take in the house she shared with Kris. Once he stepped into the living room, he focused on the table beyond the archway in the dining room and stuck his arm out.

'There.'

Julia was almost afraid to correct him, and it took a few more seconds to untie her tongue. 'Actually, we'll be doing this in here. I've got some videos I want you to watch on YouTube and I use the television for that sort of thing.'

He swivelled around so quickly she took a step back, and Julia waited until he had completed his assessment of the living room before she spoke again.

'So, I'm going to put on a pot of coffee while I get dressed. Would you like a cup?'

He hauled his satchel over his head and dropped it on the sofa, then looked at her.

'Let me make coffee as you dress, then we begin.'

She wasn't quite sure she wanted him wandering around the house, but she couldn't think of a reason to insist he sit down and wait, especially not after she'd screwed up their meeting time.

She pointed in the direction of the kitchen. 'Coffee is on the counter, and the coffee maker is your standard coffee maker. I won't be more than ten minutes.'

Once upstairs, she drained the bathtub and took her things back to her bedroom. As quickly as she could, she dressed in a T-shirt and jeans, twisted her hair at the back of her head and fastened it with a clip. Forgoing her full makeup regimen for the sake of timeliness, she settled for only a dusting of powder on her face, some mascara and a tinted lip balm.

The smell of coffee wafted from downstairs as she stepped into the hallway, computer tucked under one arm. Outside Kris's door she paused once more, then slipped inside.

'Kris – wake up!'

The lump under the covers didn't move, so Julia gave it a shake.

Without so much as a groan, Kris pulled the blankets off of her head and sat up. Her face from last night was smeared under her eyes and around her mouth, and her unwashed and gelled hair stood out like the bride of Frankenstein's.

'What?'

'I've got The Terminator downstairs for a French lesson.'

Kris scowled, and though it was ugly it was nowhere near the level of disapproval that the man downstairs conveyed.

'Explain.'

'Remember I told you about the hockey player that Professor Gwynn asked me about? The Russian guy? He's downstairs and he's downright terrifying.'

'How terrifying?'

‘If the house was attacked by ninjas right now, I’m pretty sure he’d have the situation under control in about sixty seconds.’

Kris giggled and sank back into her fortress of pillows. ‘Have fun with that. If I’m still asleep at eleven, wake me up.’

Downstairs, Mikhail had set up an orderly area on one side of the coffee table. *Emma et Olivier* lined up neatly alongside a spiral notebook and a thin laptop. The other side, obviously designated her slice of real estate, was clean and empty.

‘Not much room,’ he stated as she slipped her MacBook on to the surface, and he glanced at the dining table.

‘Don’t need much room,’ she said cheerfully and plucked two remotes from the caddy on the arm of the sofa.

She turned on the television and the media streamer, then went quickly to her online video channel.

‘So how it works is that we start with the sort of things you need to know if you were travelling through a French-speaking locale. Once I’m sure you can survive a week in Montréal without getting arrested, then we’ll move on to more advanced skills – but first, I need a cup of coffee. What do you take in yours?’

‘Black,’ he said, and as she headed for the kitchen she caught an impatient sigh.

She rolled her eyes as she poured out two cups of coffee. It was challenging enough teaching French to someone to whom English wasn’t even a first language, but put the attitude on top of it and she predicted that he’d give up after less than a month of lessons.

Reaching into the fridge for the cream, Julia looked over the door and peeked into the living room. Her student had clasped his hands in front of him and was twisting his thick fingers together as he looked around. Rather than surly, he merely looked uncomfortable and out of place.

With the red film of her rage gone, Julia had to admit that he wasn’t bad to look at. She certainly wouldn’t call him pretty, but as soon as she turned her back on him she felt the tiniest of shivers, compelling her to turn around and give him another look.

She resisted long enough to splash cream in her cup, then indulged as she returned to the fridge. She caught him returning her stare, though she couldn’t tell if it was annoyance or merely curiosity in his expression.

Embarrassment mingled with the thrill of being caught, Julia finished up and returned with his black and her double cream, double sugar. She sidled next to him and slid the cups on to the table. Though the work area was evenly divided, there seemed to be a disproportionate division of space on the sofa. He took up so much of it and the weight of his sprawl put her off balance. She shifted a few times to keep from sliding closer to him before determining it was a useless effort. He seemed to be everywhere, not just his body but his presence. The air surrounding her was thick with it.

To keep from rolling into his lap, Julia perched on the very edge and resigned herself to the inevitable pins and needles in her ass.

‘Before we start, why don’t you tell me why you want to learn French,’ she asked more out of nosiness than anything else, and prepared herself for another blast of that disapproval.

Mikhail instead took a loud slurp of his coffee. His thick lashes fluttered and what sounded like a soft purr rumbled from his chest.

As the sound skittered over her shoulders and settled under the skin, Julia bit her bottom lip.

Oh, my.

It was far too easy to imagine that sound wrapping around her in the darkness, as rich as the aroma of coffee that filled the room.

Desperate to banish that most unprofessional impulse, Julia opened her laptop and turned it on.

‘I am here to play hockey for Bandits, but this is my last season,’ he told her. ‘I wish to begin studies next fall. I want to stay, and I want both English and French. More opportunity.’

Julia picked up her own cup. 'Business degree?'

'Veterinary. I grew up on dairy farm. I would like to stay, but father has six sons and I am runt.'

Julia couldn't help but cast him a dubious look. Runt wasn't exactly the word that sprang to mind when she took in all of that brawn.

He went on, 'I do not want small slice of pie. I want whole. I will play hockey, and then I will live here and work here. Business is good, but it is better to learn to talk to people, make them feel better.'

He looked at her with clear blue eyes, and as he returned her smile a pair of deep dimples appeared.

Delight ran through her like warm water. Julia smiled back and curled her fingers around her cup.

'That's very helpful, Mikhail,' she replied quietly.

'Mick,' he said, and held out his hand. 'I go by Mick.'

Julia shook, and with a gasp realised she hadn't introduced herself properly. 'Oh, call me Julia.'

He raised a brow. 'Not Miss?'

This time the giggle escaped. 'No, not Miss.'

She raised her cup and took a sip of coffee. One mouthful and she coughed, and with a wave of her hand dismissed his concerned expression.

'You make a strong cup of coffee, Mick.'

'Too strong?'

'No, not at all,' she lied and set the cup back down. One sip would be enough to keep her alert until midnight.

He nudged her with his elbow. 'Strong is good. Puts hair on palms.'

This time, Julia couldn't keep the laughter in. She clapped her hand over her mouth but still sputtered around her palm.

The frown returned, and under its glare it took her another few moments to put a stopper on her sniggering.

'I think you mean *chest*, not palms,' she managed, and suffered a fresh attack as he looked down at his hands. 'The expression is "puts hair on your chest". Palms is...something else.'

'You sure? Men on team said -'

'The men on your team were being assholes. Trust me, it's chest and not palms.'

He didn't look convinced, but he nodded and tugged his collar aside and smiled. 'Hair on chest, then.'

And what an inviting chest it was. Just that little flash was enough to add a little more sensation to her flash fantasy: the brusque friction of hot skin and coarse hair rubbing against her breasts.

This surprise arousal made her ticklish and struck her dumb for a moment. Surly had further softened, and a lazy smile curved his mouth.

She fumbled for the remote, feeling foolish for squirming like this under such intense scrutiny. Relief went through her as she found it wedged between her ass and the cushions, but it was short-lived when, as she whipped the remote towards the television, it slipped out of her sweaty palm and smacked him in the chest.

'Oh, fuck, I'm sorry!' she exclaimed and reached for the remote, and stopped herself just in time. It had landed between his legs, sticking up perfectly vertical from his crotch.

Ninjas didn't seem like such a bad idea at that moment.

Mick collected the remote and held it out, but he didn't let go once she had it in her hand.

He leaned forward and his grin widened. 'Is "fuck" first lesson? How do you say in French?'

Julia couldn't get her tongue to work, and she couldn't stop the grimace that she was sure made her look like an imbecile.

'In this country they usually just say "fuck",' she managed to croak.

He raised his brows. 'Just... "fuck"?'

Julia pressed her lips together. She couldn't even imagine such a wicked word chucking into the atmosphere with that growling accent close to her ear.

'I think we should just focus on the introductions for today.'

It took some time, but as she led him through a series of formal and informal greetings her blood cooled and she got back into her usual groove. Mick had little trouble committing them to memory, but saying the words in the proper accent eluded and frustrated him. His cheeks reddened and his scowl returned, and his words became short and clipped.

Julia turned off the television and sat back with a sigh. 'You need to take a break. You practically have smoke coming out of your ears.'

He turned his scowl full force on her. 'What does that mean?'

'It's an expression. It means your brain is working too hard, like a machine that needs greasing. We still have forty-five minutes left, so why don't you take a five-minute break? I haven't eaten yet, so I'm going to throw a Pop Tart in the toaster.'

His lips remained in a tight line and his forehead broken by lines as he glared at his open textbook.

'It is not an easy language, this French. Reading is easy. Speaking and listening, not easy at all.'

Julia laughed as she rose. 'Some people would say that Russian is hard to learn.'

'That is a lie,' he said firmly, and his growl followed her all the way to the fridge.

She glanced at the clock. Five minutes would give her enough time to pop a tart and brew a less hair-raising pot of coffee, and to give Mick enough time to chill out, though it did cross her mind to offer him a belt of whiskey to mellow him out.

As she waited for the toaster she turned at the sound of the couch springs creaking. Mick entered the kitchen, his empty cup and her full cup in his hands.

'You are a student at the university, are you not? History?'

'That's right. Coach Gwynn's brother is my adviser,' she told him, and stepped aside as he placed the dirty dishes in the sink. 'He told me you didn't speak any English when you first came to this country.'

'Very little. Coach speak Russian, so not so bad to start. Team mates help – except for hairy palms.'

Julia snorted, and held her hands up when the question appeared on his face. 'I'm really not going to be the one to tell you.'

'You must. I need to know why I punch them in face.'

She doubled over, then cringed as she found herself giving in. 'People say that a man gets hairy palms when he...pleasures himself too much.'

Mick cocked his head, one brow raising up. 'That is stupid.'

'It was a bad joke to play on you.'

'No, it is stupid to think that man can pleasure himself too much.'

Struck dumb, Julia could only gawk under his scrutiny, until his lips twitched.

'That is my joke,' he told her, and shrugged. 'Not a good joke, I see.'

'Actually, it wasn't that bad,' she conceded, 'though if you really want to get back at them, I suggest you forget the violence and teach them a few fake lines in Russian for picking up women.'

'Already done, and is probably why they told me about hairy palms.'

'Then I was clearly mistaken about who the asshole is, Mick.' The toaster popped, and she quickly flipped breakfast on to her plate. 'Hungry?'

The back of her neck prickled as he moved behind her. His breath tickled her ear as he peered over her shoulder. 'Strawberry?'

Julia expelled the last of her breath through her nose in a whiny 'mmm-hmm.'

'I only like cinnamon, but I will have some of your weak coffee,' he said, and retreated.

Leaning against the counter to support her wobbly knees, Julia felt like she was turning to mush.

She kept her back to him as she nibbled on her breakfast and admonished herself for being so affected by big shoulders and scruff.

Back in the living room, Julia left him on the sofa and craned around the edge of the television to plug in the headphones. She was sure he checked her out while she bent and stretched. As she turned with the headphones in hand he all but confirmed it by quickly meeting her gaze. He raised his coffee cup with a smirk and took a sip.

She was a little shaky as she approached, and she detected a challenge once she stood over him.

‘So, since you’re stuck in a loop of listening to yourself mangle the French language, I’m going to trick you.’

‘You plan to torture me with bad music?’

‘You’re not that hopeless, at least not yet. No, Mick, I’m going to use an old trick to make you speak perfect French. I’m going to play a bunch of phrases in your ears, and you’re just going to repeat them. You won’t be able to hear yourself so you won’t be able to criticise yourself. Head back.’

Mick eased all the way back on to the sofa and rested his head on the edge. Julia chuckled as she held the headphones over him.

‘Easy, this isn’t a lap dance.’

‘What is a lap dance?’ he asked, but the twitching at the corner of his mouth betrayed him.

‘Nice try,’ she said, and dropped the headphones over his ears before her giggle could escape.

She grabbed the remote and took a step back, only to bump the edge of the sofa. Hot coffee splashed her leg and she jerked, then toppled forward, right into Mick’s lap.

The *oof!* sound he made matched his befuddled expression, but neither could compare to her scattered nerves as she felt the sting where his hand had landed on her ass with a slap.

He scowled, but there was something playful in that expression. ‘I ask for answer, not demonstration, but I will not complain.’

‘Oh...shush.’

He offered her no assistance as she tried to get up, instead looking infuriatingly pleased with her efforts as she wriggled over his lap.

Julia rolled her eyes. ‘Can you *let go?*’

‘If you fall and hit your head on the table, I might go to jail. No more French and no more hockey for me.’

His big body quaked against hers as he laughed, and Julia gave up with a groan.

Humiliation aside, his lap wasn’t a bad place to find herself. Beneath her thighs, his made a hard seat, and through his sweater she caught the tick of his heartbeat speeding up. He had yet to remove his hand from the curve of her ass, and she could appreciate the irony that the hand that had delivered the blow was the one that soothed the ache now. She’d never needed a code of conduct before when it came to her tutoring work, but as the compulsion to wrap her arms around his neck struck her, she had to admit that a list of dos and don’ts had merit.

Don’t fall into the lap of enormous Russian on my sofa.

Do speedily rise from his lap and apologise.

Don’t even think about making things worse by entertaining how easy it would be to unzip that fuzzy sweater and reach inside.

Do outlaw all thoughts of crazy-hot sex on living-room floor with hockey player you’ve only just met.

‘Jesus, Julia, most businesses just use coupons to sweeten the pot.’

As Kris clomped to the bottom of the stairs, Julia vaulted herself out of Mick’s arms and sloshed even more coffee across the table to stain his textbook. She managed to save his laptop from the puddle just in time, but there was no saving her dignity as she looked from her student to her roommate.

Still looking like a horror show, Kris waved as she headed for the kitchen. ‘Good morning, Russian guy.’

‘Hello...’ He leaned aside and watched Kris’s disappearing act, then looked up at Julia. ‘Crazy-haired woman in fluffy bunny slippers?’

Julia dropped his laptop on to the sofa and sighed. ‘That’s just my roommate. She’ll go back upstairs in a minute. I’ll – I’ll be right back with a dish towel.’

She raced into the kitchen and met Kris’s cheeky smile head-on.

‘I fell, and I have nothing more to say.’

‘Please, another thirty seconds and he would have had his hand in your bra. It’s cool, Julia. All that teaching the language of love and eventually you were going to come across someone who knew how to use it.’

‘First of all, he’s terrible at French. Second of all –’ She snapped a tea towel from the oven handle and thrust it in Kris’s face. ‘Second of all, shut up.’

Mick stood as she returned to the living room and stretched out his arm. ‘Let me. My fault for not letting you loose.’

Julia waved the towel like a flag. ‘I’ve got it. You just sit back and put those headphones on.’

She held her breath until the video played, her computer recorded and Mick recited one bland phrase after another. She signalled to him that she was stepping out of the room for a minute.

Kris hadn’t moved, save for the addition of the cup of coffee she slurped from.

Julia thumped her head against the fridge. ‘This never would have happened if I kept my job at the bookstore.’

Cackling, Kris shoved away from the counter and slung her arm over Julia’s shoulders. ‘I don’t think you could find anyone who would put grinding on top of a hot Russian on the con side.’

‘I didn’t grind,’ she said in a sigh, then groaned. ‘OK, so I did a little unintentional grinding.’

‘And did he grind back?’

‘I can’t remember. It’s all one big blur now.’ She shrugged away and ducked into the fridge for something cold. The water would probably have served her better dumped over her head, but she settled for guzzling back half the bottle.

‘*Bien, merci,*’ came from the living room in that rich baritone shambling over the words. ‘*Comment vous appelez-vous? Où sont les toilettes?*’

Both women giggled, and Julia shook her head as she headed back to the living room. ‘Better. Not much better, but better. Oh, remind me to tell you about the hairy palms later.’

Kris gurgled on her mouthful of coffee. ‘The what?’

With Kris alive and kicking – and probably eavesdropping – from her bed fort at the top of the stairs, the lesson finished without a hitch, save for Mick’s insistence that the recording of his lesson sounded like ‘robot trying to seduce bank machine’.

Still, he smiled as he packed up his satchel. ‘It was good day, even with disorganised and clumsy teacher.’

‘Hey, this disorganised and clumsy teacher just taught you how to ask where the nearest police station is. You’ll thank me if you’re ever on the run from assassins through Paris.’

He slung his satchel over his shoulders and marched towards the door, his gait far less rigid than his entrance.

‘You were nervous when you showed up, weren’t you?’

He turned before the door, sheepish as he raked his hand through his wild hair. ‘A little. You are my second French tutor. Last one frustrated me, was no help at all. I was worried to find out that I am too stupid to learn French.’

‘Are you serious? This will be your third language. That’s one more than I have. As motivated as you are, you’ll be translating for the United Nations in five years if you put your mind to it. I take it I’ll see you next Thursday?’

‘Eight o’clock.’ He raised his brows. ‘Or is it nine o’clock, after bathtime?’

There was something naughty about the way he teased her. She liked it.

‘Or,’ he went on, ‘maybe we meet sooner. Monday?’

Her first inclination was to refuse a date from a student, but quickly reminded herself that he wasn’t proposing a date. She didn’t think. She was pretty sure.

‘I’m on campus on Monday,’ she explained, peering up at him to gauge his expression. She thought she caught some disappointment, but he was so hard to read. ‘I’m in the library until about four, but I can grab a spot in the language lab for five.’

He hesitated. ‘Lab? Other people there to hear me?’

‘There are private resource rooms.’

Mick didn’t look convinced, but he nodded. ‘I will meet you there at five. Are drinks allowed in lab?’

‘I think so.’

‘I will bring weak coffee with spill-proof top for clumsy woman,’ he said with a wink. He wrenched open the door and stepped on to the porch, then spun on the top step. ‘And doughnuts with sprinkles.’

‘Don’t go too crazy,’ she called, and bounced a little on her toes as he jogged down the walkway. Broad back, narrow hips and trunk-like thighs. So much muscle moving under those layers. She prayed she would suddenly be gifted with X-ray vision.

His entrance might have been a little overwhelming, but his exit was perfect.

Chapter Two

‘Did you see Volkov after the game? It’s a wonder he had any teeth left after MacKenzie nailed him like that.’

‘Yeah, but he got his revenge, even if it did cost him a penalty. MacKenzie will probably wet his pants the next time the Bandits play the Royals. I wouldn’t want to be on the ice with Volkov when he’s in a good mood, let alone after I split open his face.’

Julia didn’t look up as Professors Decker and Carmichael made their camp at the table by the window in the faculty lounge. She kept her eyes on her laptop screen, but every word they spoke went through her like electricity.

Though she was supposed to be editing the forthcoming issue of the history society newsletter, she abandoned her task immediately and opened her web browser. Fingers flew over the keyboard until she had navigated to a local sports page.

Julia had never taken an interest in sports before. Once gym class became more than just dodgeball and relay races, she’d lost all interest and barely scraped by for the remainder of her physical education. Pilates and spin class didn’t count. Neither did that pole-dancing class she and Kris had taken last year, even if it made her ass and thighs feel like they had been ripped off Beyoncé and strapped to her body.

She hovered her cursor over the recap of last night’s game between the Bandits and the Royals and asked herself for the umpteenth time: do you really want to be this person?

Since her lessons with Mick had begun, the time online she earmarked for checking celebrity gossip had been replaced by research into the career of Mikhail ‘The Dragon’ Volkov.

Or, as Kris put it, stalking Mikhail ‘The Dragon’ Volkov online.

Though Julia hated to admit it, every time she turned on her computer she found herself wandering to his Twitter stream, which was a strange combination of Russian and English conversations broken by the occasional retweet from his favourite musicians or athletes. She didn’t have the guts to follow him, nor did she muster the courage to send him a request on Facebook. She did, however, follow the Bandits’ Twitter stream and had seen the update ‘Volkov to the box for hooking’.

She had no idea what most of it meant, but she still got a little thrill when she saw those tweets popping up in her stream.

She’d learned that her student was from a small town in Russia and was 25 years old. This family dairy she had pictured as being a small family business was actually an industrial-scale operation in Western Russia. He had played through university in Moscow before joining the Bandits last season, and he’d quickly become a favourite of the fans.

Mick was a raging hothead on the ice. He held grudges. He could be seen stalking an enemy on the ice, gliding on the periphery as he worked out his plot. He was a hell of a player, and when he went in for the kill he didn’t miss. That was why someone had given him the moniker ‘The Dragon’.

Resigning herself to today’s bout of online surveillance, Julia opened the recap of last night’s game.

As soon as the featured image popped up, Julia’s stomach lurched.

Taken as Mick stepped off the ice, the picture showed a hulking, furious beast with a busted eyebrow, blood smearing half his face and splotches all over his jersey.

She might not have known much about hockey, but staring at that picture she knew that Professor Carmichael was right: Mick had revenge in his eyes and whoever had bloodied him was a dead man skating.

Still, even with the blood and sweat, Mick was a magnificent sight to behold. Pictures like these – and she'd become an expert at tracking them down across the vast expanse of the Internet – had fuelled more than a few masturbatory sessions in the wee morning hours.

Earlier in the week she'd come across a candid shot of him on a teammate's Twitter stream: in the locker room and stripped to the waist, most of him obscured by the torrent of ice water being dumped over his head but flashing just enough skin to make Julia wish her vibrator had a turbo setting.

Not that she had needed it. She had almost bitten a hole in her pillow to prevent herself giving Kris an unpleasant and awkward wake-up call as she held the oscillating tip to her clit.

With this gory picture of him post-brawl, the image her filthy mind conjured for the aftermath was of Mick reclining in a steaming bath, head tilted back and fingers curling against the edge of the tub as she tended to his wounded brow, minus all her clothes.

She closed her browser before the scene in her mind could escalate to the inevitable outcome in which they were both in the tub, water sloshing on to the tiles, his hands on her hips and hers gripping the edge of the bath as he drove into her from behind.

Groaning, she tipped her head back and stared at a water spot on the ceiling tiles.

Do maintain a professional rapport with your hot Russian student.

Do not entertain fantasies about doing it doggy-style in a candle-lit bathroom.

Do look into the cost efficiency of a rechargeable vibrator or risk blowing this month's grocery budget on batteries.

The table juddered, and before she could raise her head Kris's face appeared over hers.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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