

What's In A Name?
(SERGEI II)
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Night Works Books

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"Sergei, we have to pick names. Today," Bianca added urgently. "The nurses are giving me funny looks, and the twins are going to start thinking their names are Girl and Boy!"

Smiling down at his freshly bathed daughter, Sergei used the gentlest touch possible to carefully slip her arms into the frightfully pink outfit. His fingers trembled slightly as he worked, and he was glad he had his back to Bianca so she wouldn't see how nervous all of this made him. Despite assurances from the nurses and doctors that his daughter was a big baby for a twin, she looked so small. He held his hand up against her body and marveled at the way he dwarfed her minute form.

"What should we call you? Hmm?" He addressed her in the same tender way he often spoke to Bianca. It was a tone of voice he reserved for the ones he loved.

"Well don't even think about suggesting Mouse again," Bianca warned. "Her ears are *not* that big."

Sergei traced one of her little ears. They were bigger than her brother's and did, in fact, remind him of a sweet little mouse. Bianca, however, didn't find that funny in least.

"She'll grow into them," he decided. "Won't you, *myshka*?"

"Sergei!"

He laughed softly, the sound drawing his baby girl's attention. After nursing and a bath, she hovered on the edge of sleep again. Her dark eyes tried to focus on his face. When she gripped his finger with her tiny hand, he swallowed hard and tried to breathe. With one little touch, she completely owned him.

So lost in her sweet face, he didn't realize she had kicked her legs out of the onesie until one of them whacked his arm. Two days old, and she was already an escape artist who could rival a cuffed and blindfolded Kostya! Shaking his head with amusement, he grasped her small legs and slowly worked them back inside the cozy outfit.

His thick fingers fumbled over the miniscule snaps. "Do all of their clothes have these?"

"Have what, baby?"

"These ridiculous little snaps," he replied, fighting to get them to latch. "My big hands aren't good at this sort of thing."

"Sweetheart, you seem to forget that I'm very well acquainted with all the wonderful things those big hands of yours can do. A couple of tiny snaps shouldn't be a problem for you."

Her saucy reply brought a smile to his face. He glanced back at his wife and grinned as she lovingly stroked their son's head while he nursed. Propped up in the hospital bed, she used one of those oddly shaped pillows to support the baby who

greedily drank the nourishing milk from her breast. When she shifted in bed, he caught her slight wince of pain and wondered when it was going to get better for her.

Nothing about their labor or delivery experience had gone the way she had envisioned. Nursing wasn't working as well either, but she was trying so hard. Guilt gnawed at his stomach. His part in this parenthood business had been so easy compared to hers. For him, it had been nothing but pleasure and happiness. Bianca was the one who had gone through months and months of exhausting work carrying their twins. She had endured the pain of labor and now had to recover from surgery neither of them had expected.

Bianca had done it all without complaint—and he was utterly fucking amazed by her. Just when he thought she couldn't possibly make him more proud to be her husband, she proved that she was even stronger and more brilliant than he had ever imagined.

As if sensing his gaze, she glanced up at him. In all the time they had been together, these two days and three nights in the hospital were the longest stretch she had gone without makeup or styling her hair or wearing one of those sexy, classy outfits that sent heat rolling through his belly. Somehow seeing Bianca with her hair pulled back into a messily brushed ponytail and her face bare only enhanced her beauty. No woman had ever looked as wonderful as she did in that moment. His heart swelled in his chest, thumping against his ribcage, and he wondered what the hell he had done to be *this* lucky.

They shared a quiet, knowing smile before turning their gazes back to their children. He finally managed to get his daughter dressed. Remembering the way his mother-in-law had taught him, he swaddled her in one of the blush pink receiving blankets Yuri and Lena had given them before carefully, gently, lifting her into his arms. He cradled her protectively and nuzzled the top of her head, brushing his lips against the soft tuft of dark hair crowning her head. He inhaled the sweet scent of his *myshka* before pressing a loving kiss to her cheek.

He settled into the rocking chair next to the bed and enjoyed the fatherly moment. Even after she fell asleep, he continued to rock her. He couldn't stop staring at her beautiful little face. There was so much of Bianca in her, but he could see a little of himself there too.

"What are you thinking about?" Bianca wondered, her voice barely louder than a whisper. She rubbed her thumb along their son's jaw, coaxing him to continue nursing in the hopes it would encourage her milk supply to increase.

"I'm thinking that I never thought I could ever love anyone as much as I love you," he answered honestly. "But now I see I was wrong. It's a different kind of love," he added, "but it's strong."

"Unconditional," she said. "It's unconditional love. It's complete and whole and protective love."

He nodded. "Yes."

"I liked Aleksandr. From your list of names," she explained. "It's a good name for a boy."

Secretly, he was pleased she liked that name. It was the one he had wanted most for his first-born son. "We'll have to spell it the American way so it's easier for him in school."

"All right." She hesitated. "What about his middle name? Are we going to do it your way?"

He huffed with amusement at the memory of that conversation. A few weeks ago, he had tried to explain the Russian naming conventions and had only succeeded in confusing the hell out of her. "No, I don't think Sergeyevich and Sergeyovna would be very good for middle names. Not in Texas, at least," he added with a grin.

"No," she agreed sadly. "But we should make sure they know what their names would have been like if they had been born in your country."

"They'll know," he assured her. They had already decided the children would be raised bilingual and immersed in both cultures. That wouldn't be difficult to accomplish with Dimitri and Nikolai's children so close in age to the twins. Vivian had jokingly suggested painting Moscow murals on the walls of the playroom she had decorated at the home she shared with the boss for their future playdates.

Hoping Bianca wouldn't cry, he cleared his throat and offered the first name he had been considering for their son. "Bradshaw, Bianca. His first name should be Bradshaw and his middle name can be Alexander."

She lifted her surprised gaze to his face. "Bradshaw? But—"

"You're father and brother are gone. You're the last Bradshaw. It's right for our son to carry on your family's name."

She bit her plump lower lip to squelch the wobbling that he could easily see. "Thank you, Sergei." Looking down at their son, she murmured his name with an amused smile, "Bradshaw Alexander Sahkarov. That's quite a mouthful."

He snorted with laughter. "Sounds pretentious, yes?"

"No, it's perfect. It's a strong name for the strong man he'll be someday. But—maybe we should give him a nickname? Alex?"

Sergei shook his head. "Sasha."

"Sasha," she happily repeated. "I like that."

"Good. That's done. Now we get to name you, *myshka*." He grazed his fingertips across their daughter's wispy hair. "Your top choice for her was Isabella. My top choice was Irina. Can we compromise? Isabella Irina?"

Bianca grinned. "I like that." Her loving gaze fell on their daughter. "Bella."

"Bella," he agreed and tucked her in a little tighter to his chest.

"Sasha and Bella," Bianca murmured sweetly.

Feeling happier and more content than he ever had in his life, Sergei snuggled his sweet Bella and rocked slowly. His gaze drifted from her cherubic sleeping face to Bianca and Sasha. His wife had closed her dress and cuddled their son while he dozed in a warm, milk-induced coma.

Pride and love overwhelmed him. After all the heartache and loss they had known, these innocent new lives brimming with possibility filled him with such hope for their future.

Our family. Overjoyed, he hugged Bella and kissed her cheek. *My family.* And there was no line he wouldn't cross to keep them all safe...

The End.