



GREER

A SAVAGE KINGS MC® NOVEL

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LANE HART

D.B. WEST

GREER

SAVAGE KINGS MC - VIRGINIA

LANE HART

D.B. WEST

COPYRIGHT

This book is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogue were created from the authors' imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual people or events is coincidental.

The authors acknowledge the copyrighted and trademarked status of various products within this work of fiction.

© 2023 Editor's Choice Publishing

All Rights Reserved.

This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Editor's Choice Publishing

P.O. Box 10024

Greensboro, NC 27404

Edited by One Love Editing

Photo by Wander Aguiar Photography L.L.C.

Model Renan

Cover by Marianne Nowicki

WARNING: THIS STORY CONTAINS REFERENCES TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE. THERE ARE ALSO GRAPHIC SEX SCENES AND PROFANITY, WHICH ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR ANYONE UNDER 18.

CONTENTS

Synopsis

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Epilogue

Afterword

About The Authors

SYNOPSIS

Greer's bar was already struggling to make ends meet before a homeless woman wandered in asking him for a job. She just so happened to also catch him at the lowest moment of his life.

Celeste is running from a past that doesn't want to let her go. Tired of driving from town to town, living out of her car, she's desperate for any job that pays cash and will allow her to keep a low profile.

Greer isn't happy about hiring Celeste, but he can't let her walk away without trying to help her. He reluctantly gives her a job cleaning the bar and arranges for her to have a free room at his friend's motel for as long as she needs it.

With each day that goes by, these two opposites continue to clash while doing their best to avoid the sexual tension.

Once Celeste is under Greer's skin, he doesn't want to let her go. She refuses to tell him why she's on the run, afraid he'll get hurt if they become too close.

But Greer knows that he and the Savage Kings MC may be the only ones who can protect her from the monster chasing her.

CHAPTER ONE

Celeste

“Hello?” The heavy oak door barely creaks as I take a step into the dark, empty bar. The sound of my flip-flops sticking to the hardwood floor is the only thing I hear. The place is obviously not open yet this morning, but the door was unlocked when I tried it. There was a Harley and a luxury car in the parking lot, so the owner must be around here somewhere.

This place, this dirty bar, is my last hope in Rockland. I’ve been to every other business in the small beach town, but either no one needs any help, or they just don’t want to hire a woman they don’t know.

If this bar, Gritty Greer’s, isn’t hiring, then I’ll have to figure out a way to at least get enough gas to make it to a larger town, one that hopefully has fast-food restaurants. The dollar menus are my best friends lately, and they have been sorely missed this week. I had to steal a small jar of peanut butter from the gas station yesterday. It wasn’t my proudest moment, but I was just so damn hungry.

While I patiently wait for the bar’s owner to appear, I hear someone shrieking – a feminine voice screaming. It sounds like she’s in distress, and the noise seems to be coming from the area in the back of the bar.

There’s no way I can leave until I check on her. How many times did I wish that there were someone willing to come to

my rescue?

“Hello?” I announce myself a little louder as I start walking behind the bar to investigate. Not wanting to be completely defenseless, I snag a glass bottle half-full of whiskey on the way past the shelves of booze.

Easing closer to the open entryway at the back of the bar, I hold up the bottle by the neck like a bat. There’s a storage room full of boxes and junk even more dimly lit than the front of the bar. That’s why it takes hearing the woman crying out again before I notice her. Them.

Wow. She’s not screaming in pain. It’s definitely in pleasure, based on how she’s bent over cases of what I’m assuming is beer with a dark-haired man kneeling behind her. His fingers are digging into the back of her thighs, his face pressed between her spread legs. Since I’ve got a side view of them, I can see his tongue sweeping up and down, flicking rapidly. The sight makes my belly clench in a way it hasn’t in a very long time. I haven’t had sex in almost three years. It’s been a lot longer since a man went down on me, although never to completion.

And while I’m well aware that it’s not an activity some men enjoy, this guy looks...miserable? His tongue is working hard, sure, but he’s inspecting something on the ceiling instead of focusing on what’s right in front of him. Is he thinking? Waiting impatiently? I don’t know, but it’s the kind of look I imagine I have on my face when I’m making a grocery list, trying to remember what I forgot that I need from the store.

“Oh my god! *Oh, god, Greer!*” the woman wails. I can only see her from the bent waist down from my spot in the entryway, but there’s no missing the way her thighs tremble despite the man’s grasp on them.

And that’s my cue to get the heck out of here.

I slowly take a step backward to try and escape the intimate scene without their notice. One step and the damn sticky, wooden floor creaks loudly just after her moans had quieted down.

Of course, the man now gapes in my direction. He doesn't stop his ministrations for even a second, though. Instead, his eyes widen in surprise, sure, but they also look sort of curious. Possibly a little angry?

Shit.

Those dark eyes sweep up and down my body, holding me hostage. I don't take another step as they consume me. I swear they darken when they come back up and lock on my own eyes. He stares at me while his tongue continues to lick her slowly, as if performing the act now just for my viewing pleasure.

Then, he reaches one hand down to cup the bulge at the front of his jeans like he's turned on by my awkward gawking.

And if I thought I was turned on before, well, it's nothing compared to the warmth spreading all through me and concentrating especially between my legs.

As if he knows how my body is responding, his gaze dips down to the apex of my thighs, hidden behind my denim shorts, for a few seconds before his tongue retreats into his mouth. Swiping the back of his hand across his lips, which are surrounded with a day's worth of dark facial hair, he stands up, way up, so tall and threatening in his faded jeans and black leather vest over a black tee. I know I should leave because he caught me watching them, but my body refuses to move an inch.

"Mmm, please, Greer. I need you inside of me," the woman begs after his long pause.

His name is Greer, as in the owner of the bar, obviously.

Without saying a word to me or to her, his hands move down to undo his jeans, freeing his long, hard cock. The denim falls down his thighs as he strokes himself proudly before finally looking away from me. He reaches over to pick up a foil package from a nearby stack of boxes like he left it there intentionally for this moment. His teeth tear the wrapper open before one hand holds the base of his shaft while the other

rolls the condom quickly down his length. As soon as the rubber is in place, he guides it forward into the waiting hole.

“*Ohhh,*” the woman moans as he fills her. He begins moving in and out of her, holding her hips with both hands... and turns his head to stare at me again as he moves inside of her.

His hard, powerful thrusts are enthralling. When I realize my jaw is gaping, I close it, then bite down on my bottom lip to keep it that way. The man, Greer, doesn't miss the small movement. His heated eyes narrow, zeroing in on my mouth.

He moves faster, their bodies slapping, her moans growing ridiculously loud again, even though he doesn't make a single sound.

I keep standing there, watching them, watching him watch me, until she shouts his name in that breathless way like she's getting off again. That's when his eyes finally drift closed. He shoves deep inside of her two more times and then holds still. His head falls back, lips parted, face twisting while he obviously finds his own release.

His shoulders twitch, his spine straightens, and then it's over.

“Enjoy the free show?” he asks.

His voice is deeper than I expected, startling me. I open my mouth as if to answer before he pulls his latex-covered dick out of the woman. She whimpers as he leaves her slumped limply over the stacked cases of beer and turns to me so I get a good look at all of him. The woman's skirt is still raised, so her entire ass is on display, but she doesn't seem to care about that or that someone else is in the room.

After tossing the condom in a trash can, he fixes his pants, then walks right up to me, plucking the bottle of booze from my hand, still waiting for my response. There's less than three feet between us now as I take in his towering height. I'm even more speechless now than I was when he was screwing the woman.

Sorry doesn't seem like the way to go since it's not really my fault I walked in on them screwing each other's brains out. Well, he was screwing her brains out, at least. She was just there, accepting his pleasure the whole time as if she didn't really care if it was good for him.

"I, um." My mouth is so dry I swallow, then gesture with my hand over my shoulder. "There wasn't anyone in the bar..."

"No shit. We're still closed." His growly statement confuses me.

Now he has the nerve to look and sound angry as if he didn't know I was standing here the whole time? As if he didn't enjoy finding me watching them.

Him.

Whatever.

Asshole.

"Maybe...maybe you should keep your door locked until you decide to open."

"I didn't expect anyone to come barging in first thing this morning," he grumbles back. "Who are you? What do you want?"

It's hard to remember after everything else...

Behind him, the woman finally stands up straight. She glances over at us while tugging down her skirt that matches her suit jacket I can now see. Her fingers comb through her straight, shoulder-length blonde hair, looking awfully fancy for someone who just got bent over and fucked by a rugged bar owner. Biker, too, based on his leather vest or whatever those guys call them.

Without a word, the woman staggers off in the opposite direction from us. There's a ray of sunshine illuminating the dim storage area before I hear the bang of a door shutting. Wow. She just up and left without a word. Weird.

"What do you want?" the man, Greer, asks again, this time more slowly, like I'm an idiot. "Well, other than the obvious."

The obvious? Oh. He thinks I want to have sex with him just because I watched? I definitely will not be sleeping with him. In fact, I suck in a deep breath, then tell him the truth about why I came in. “I was wondering if you’re hiring.”

“Hiring?” His dark brows climb in surprise. They’re full and nearly black, the same color as his flop of messy hair and shadow of a beard.

“Yes.”

“No.”

“No?” I repeat.

He coughs up a chuckle. “No, I’m not fucking hiring.”

“I’ll do anything.”

When he arches an eyebrow, I shake my head. “Not... that.” I wave my hand toward where they were just going at it on stacks of boxes. “But anything else. I’ll wash dishes, scrub toilets, whatever you need.”

“I don’t need anything. Even if I did, I can barely keep the lights on, much less pay someone a salary.”

Damn. Is he serious? He can’t be as broke as I am, but he’s obviously not going to hire me.

“Well, thanks for the free show, as you referred to it,” I utter as I start walking back through the bar to the door.

“You did enjoy it, then?” he calls after me.

I just shake my head of messy brown waves. There’s no point in trying to deny it or admit it, so I walk out of the bar and climb back into my car.

CHAPTER TWO

Greer

What. The. Hell.

First things first, I open the bottle of Jack Daniels the random woman was holding for some damn reason and fill my mouth with the amber liquid. After swishing it around, I tilt my head back to gargle and then spit it out in the sink.

Now...where the hell did that woman come from? And fuck, I don't even know the name of the brunette with the blazing green eyes. Seems bizarre since she watched me eat out Suzanne, then fuck her. I've never had anyone watch before, didn't ever have any interest in spectators during the act. I was just going through the motions required of me, trying to remember if I ordered the tequila this week before I saw the sexy woman standing there watching us.

Tiny jean shorts that barely cover more than panties showed off her long, tan legs. Through the thin cotton fabric of her light-yellow tank top, it was immediately clear that she wasn't wearing a bra because her nipples were poking through the material.

She's the reason I got rock-hard. The reason I actually got off and didn't just pretend to finish like the last several times. I liked seeing the desire on *her* face. She was captivated. Thunderstruck. And while she may have tried to leave at one point, having watched me eat out Suzanne the entire time or

just got a surprised glimpse of me tongue fucking her, the creaking wood floor gave away the little voyeur at the end.

The security cameras could probably tell me how long she was watching before I caught her.

Suzanne didn't seem to give a shit about having a witness before she slithered out the back door on legs still shaking from her two orgasms.

Pulling up the app for the cameras on my cell phone, I scroll backward through the captured feed until I find the moment she pulls up in her piece-of-shit faded blue car in the parking lot.

I turn the volume up and hear her call out when she walks right through the front door I left unlocked because Suzanne showed up at the ass crack of dawn.

When the woman spots us going at it, she freezes, then keeps watching for about two silent minutes before trying to back away. That's when I heard her for the first time. My ears aren't as good as they used to be, or I probably would've stopped when I heard her come in, leaving Suzanne right on the edge. She would've been fucking furious if I got her close, then left her hanging.

I'm still not sure why I didn't stop between the oral and fucking. Maybe because the woman didn't look like a threat. She seemed to be enjoying the show, and I wanted her to keep watching me.

After I watch the woman on the video hurry out the door after our brief conversation where she asked for a job, I pull up the current live feeds. There's one camera inside the front of the bar, one watching the back of the parking lot where stock is delivered, and another on the right side of the bar, mounted over the door to capture the customer lot.

That shitty little car of hers is probably old enough to legally drink, and it's still sitting in the lot. Why hasn't she left? Car problems? As ancient as that Camry is, I wouldn't be surprised. But if it wouldn't crank, she would've come banging on the door asking for help. Wouldn't she?

Whatever. She's not my problem. The parking lot never fills up, even at night, so I try to forget the brunette and her green stare, deciding to lock up and go take a hot shower before getting my work done for the morning.

I was intending to stand under the scalding water until at least one layer of my skin peeled off, but the desire to check the cameras again cut my shower short.

In my towel, I snatch my phone off the bathroom counter. Yep, she's still here.

Once I'm dressed, I go downstairs to unload several boxes of beer, unable to resist pulling out my phone from my jeans pocket to check the camera every few minutes. Still, she sits there.

While wiping down the tables and sweeping, I glance at the damn device no less than five more times.

When an entire hour has passed and she still hasn't moved the vehicle, I start to think something might seriously be wrong, but she's just too scared of me to come in again to ask for help. That's why I finally decide to go find out for sure.

Tossing my phone down on the counter behind the bar, I go unlock the front door to quietly stroll up to the vehicle, deciding on a little payback.

When I'm standing right next to the lowered windows, leaning down to see into the driver's side, I ask loudly, "Why haven't you left?"

"Jesus!" the woman hollers as she pops up from the reclined driver seat...where she was laid back sleeping?

"It's not fun having people sneak up on you unannounced, is it?" I ask her, even if I'm full of shit. I liked it when she did it to me an hour ago. "What are you doing sleeping in my parking lot? I'm not gonna change my mind about hiring you."

"Fine. Damn. I'll leave. It's not like it's busy out here..." She trails off as she reaches for the lever to put the back of the seat upright again.

Wait. Why didn't she go home to sleep? Unless...she can't...

I peek into the back seat of the car and see pieces of clothing laid out on the rear seats as if they're drying. A balled-up hoodie is what she was apparently using as a pillow.

"Are you living out of your car?" I ask her.

"It's none of your business, asshole."

She didn't deny it, which is basically an admittance.

"Fuck," I mutter as I turn away, shoving my fingers into my hair and pulling the strands. Nobody lives out of their car unless they're broke as hell with no home to go back to. And I am an asshole if I let her drive off only to park somewhere else. Somewhere fuckers might do more than sneak up on her to ask what she's doing. What if my sister, Gina, was in the same situation? I would never let her live out of her car, but if she was, I would want someone to help her out.

"Wait," I say, spinning back around to the woman's window just as her car sputters to life. "I can't pay you much..."

Her long, brown waves whip around along with her neck, her green eyes wide. "That's fine. Anything is better than nothing."

"I guess so," I agree, even if she doesn't know how little I can afford.

"So you're really offering me a job after you just said you wouldn't change your mind?"

My teeth grind together. "Yes."

"Okay, cool. Just a few questions before I accept."

"Seriously?" She's so desperate she said she would do any work, but she won't yet accept the job I reluctantly offered? I assume she's just being difficult until the questions come.

"How much will you pay me?"

"Hell, I don't know. Ten dollars an hour?"

She just blinks at me, as if trying to make her pretty eyes water. And then she bites down on her bottom lip to entice me further, just like she did when I was fucking Suzanne. I guess I owe her for making that whole ordeal more tolerable.

“Fifteen dollars an hour. Take it or leave it.”

She nods and asks, “Could you pay me in cash, you know, under the table?”

Cash? Who carries cash nowadays? But that’s not a deal breaker for me now that I’m so damn determined to help her for whatever reason. “Sure. Why not. It won’t be much of it anyway.”

“Great. And, ah, could I...I’ll do whatever work you need me to do when you’re not open, but I can’t be around people, customers.”

She can’t be around customers? Is that some sort of female code I’m supposed to understand?

“Why not?” I narrow my eyes to study her face, which is dotted with a few freckles, trying to figure out her deal.

“I just can’t,” she says softly, staring straight ahead at the weeds that need mowing.

“You have a whole lot of fucking demands for a woman so desperate for a goddamn job. I offered you one even though I don’t even know your fucking name. How can I be sure that you’re not a con artist waiting to rob me blind?”

She doesn’t look like a con artist. Would a con artist be living out of her car looking sweet and sexy all at the same time? Maybe. Pushing those thoughts aside, I take a second to consider her latest request. While I could use help serving at the bar at night, most of the grunt work I need done is in the back and when the bar is closed.

“Doesn’t sound like you make enough to rob. And do you even attempt to be nice to your customers, or do they just put up with your grumpy ass to get drunk?”

Biting back a grin at her sassiness and peculiar demands, I tell her, “It’s my bar. If they don’t like my grumpy ass, they

can go somewhere else.”

Turning her face to mine again, she asks, “Isn’t your bar the only one in town?”

“Yes.”

A smile curves her lips, drawing my attention to them yet again. Of course, I’m thinking about how they would look stretched around my cock. “That’s what I figured,” she replies.

Fuck. If I hire her, which I apparently did despite not really needing or being able to afford the help, any fantasies of fucking her mouth or anywhere else on her sexy body are thrown out the window. I’ll be her boss, be in a position of power, however slight. No matter how much I want to get her naked, it would feel wrong to put her in that position. She might go along with sex just to keep getting the measly salary I offered to pay her, which would be so fucked-up.

I would be taking advantage of her shitty situation, just like Suzanne is doing to me.

Hell, for the first time since our agreement started, instead of being sated from the monthly romp, I just feel...fucking disgusting.

Too bad it’s not a situation that will be changing anytime soon unless there’s a flood of new alcoholic citizens or tourists to Rockland in the near future.

“Does this long silence where you’re staring at me with a scowl on your face mean you changed your mind?”

“No,” I say with a heavy sigh. “And apparently, you don’t just need a job but also a bed to sleep in.”

“I’m not that desperate,” she quickly remarks, misunderstanding my comment.

“Hold your fucking horses, Daisy. I wasn’t offering you *my* bed. I know someone who might can give you a cheap motel room. At least temporarily.”

“I’ll be fine. And my name’s not Daisy.”

Is she nuts? “You can’t sleep in your fucking car!”

“Sure I can. I have been for weeks.”

“Weeks?” I repeat in disbelief. “Where do you use the bathroom? Shower?”

Studying straight at the weeds once more, she says, “Not that it’s any of your business, but I’ve been using the beach showers.”

“The public beach showers? The ones meant to rinse off sand and salt water?”

“Water is water. I just take my shampoo and soap...”

“Jesus fucking Christ, woman.”

“I don’t want your pity.”

“Yeah, well, too bad. That pity is the only reason I’m giving you a job.”

I can tell by her tightly clenched jaw that she wants to tell me to go to hell but needs the money more.

It occurs to me once again that I don’t even know who she is, and I’ve offered her a job because she’s pretty and living out of her car. “If you don’t want me calling you Daisy for those short-ass shorts you’re wearing, then tell me your name.”

“Celeste.”

“Just Celeste?” I repeat, waiting for her to give me her last name. When she doesn’t, I’m not entirely surprised.

“Okay, Celeste, let me make a call about the motel room. The only way you’re working for me is if you stop sleeping in your goddamn car.”

The least she deserves is a bed to lie in at night, a door with a lock on it, and a real shower. If Remy will consider giving her a discount, I’ll pay whatever he asks. It’s not like his rooms cost much anyway.

“Fine.” Her reply is so faint I barely hear it, just see her lips move.

“Great. I can already tell you’re going to be an incredibly obedient and respectful employee that I don’t need. How lucky am I to have found you?”

Blowing out a breath, I stride back toward the bar to get in touch with Remy, wondering what the hell I’m getting myself into with this woman. I don’t know why I give a shit, but I just can’t let her be homeless. Despite all her feistiness, the defeated look in her forest-green eyes makes me think she’s near a breaking point, about to give up and surrender to... Fuck, I don’t want to find out what her surrendering looks like.

And I’m not all that surprised when she calls out to my retreating back, “When do I start?”

“Now,” I answer and hear her car engine instantly shut off.

The wrecking ball of a woman may as well go ahead and crash into my damn business now since she already busted her way into my personal life this morning.

Her car door opens and shuts before I make it back inside, so I grab my cell phone from behind the bar and head out the back door for some privacy to call Remy, hoping she won’t follow me.

“What do you want this goddamn early?” Remy’s gruff voice asks, making me realize how early it is to be calling him for a favor.

“Oh, be nice. He wouldn’t be calling unless it’s important.”

I know for a fact the woman reprimanding him is his girlfriend, Avery.

“Sorry to wake you two,” I tell him.

He growls and says, “Thirty seconds or less, Greer. After that...anything out of my mouth will only be...gibberish.”

How long has it been since I woke up with a woman in my bed initiating morning sex? A decade? Longer? Fuck, I’m getting old.

“I need a favor,” I blurt out, understanding the urgency. I wouldn’t want to waste time on the phone either if I had the

option of screwing my beautiful girlfriend. Not that I've ever had one of those either. Guess I'm old *and* pathetic.

A grunt I interpret as "spit it out already" is Remy's reply.

"Do you have any vacant motel rooms right now?"

"Why?"

"I know someone who needs a place to sleep that's also cheap."

"Oh, hell yes."

"So, you have a room available tonight?"

"Yeah. God, I fucking love you." I'm pretty sure that last part wasn't directed toward me.

"Okay, great. Send me the bill and, ah, let me know if you need her to leave for guests."

"Her?" he asks before it turns into a long, loud gasp.

"My new employee. I'll tell you later. Thanks, man. I owe you one." I end the call before I become an eavesdropping voyeur on any more of their sex noises.

CHAPTER THREE

Celeste

“**M**y friend Remy owns the local motel. The only motel in town,” Greer says when he comes back into the front of the bar after stepping out to make a phone call. “A room will be ready for you there this afternoon.”

So, I really am going to be working for the man who I watched screw some woman this morning. Why the grumpy bastard not only caved on giving me the job but is also determined to find me a place to crash, I have no idea.

While I know I should be happy that he went to the trouble of getting a motel room, I can't afford it, and I'm not sure it's worth the risk of having to give anyone my full name.

No, I absolutely cannot do that.

“Look, I appreciate the job more than you know and the offer for the room. But I can't accept.”

“Sure you can. I'm paying for it.”

“You are? Why?”

“Maybe to convince you not to tell anyone about what you saw this morning.”

“What?”

“It's a small town, Daisy. Keep your fucking mouth shut.”

“Fine,” I tell him. “But stop calling me Daisy. And you don’t need to pay for the room.”

“Remy’s a friend and the owner. Like I said, if you want the job, you have to take the room.”

“Do I have to tell Remy my whole name?”

“Why wouldn’t you give either of us your whole name?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Complicated?” He stares at me, waiting for me to say more. But I won’t. I’ll walk away from the first offer of employment in weeks if I have to before I’ll give him my name. Celeste was a character in a book I think I recently read. I don’t even remember which one, but for some reason, the first time someone asked my name after I hit the road, it was the one I blurted out.

“Fine,” Greer eventually agrees with an annoyed exhale. “Don’t tell me or Remy your last name. But if you fuck either of us over –”

“I swear I won’t fuck you over,” I promise him. “You’re the first person to take a chance on me, so I won’t screw up this opportunity.”

“Oh yeah? How long you been living in that piece-of-shit car of yours?”

I ignore that question to glance around the bar. “So, what do you need me to do?”

“Uh.” He surveys the bar, turning this way and that before he says, “I’ll show you around, then you can start washing some glasses from last night.”

“Okay.”

“First of all, don’t go upstairs.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s my personal space.”

“Alrighty then.”

“You only need to worry about the front of the bar.”

“What about the storage room stuff?” I ask with a grin.

“Don’t worry about that shit either for now.”

“Fine.”

“Each day when you come in, put all the chairs up on the tables, sweep, then mop...”

“As if you actually mop every day.”

A vein in his forehead bulges. “How do you know I don’t mop every day?”

“Ah, well,” I start and then proceed to try and lift one of my flip-flop-covered feet, then the other, proving to him that both stick to the floor.

He grunts in understanding. “Since it’s my bar and I’m the only one who works here, no, I don’t mop every day. Now that’s your job.”

“Great.”

“After the floors are dry, put the chairs back down and wipe off the bar and tables.”

“Easy.”

“The men and women’s bathrooms are down that hall,” he says, pointing a finger in their direction. “Clean both bathrooms each day, floors whenever.”

“Just clean the floors whenever?”

“Yeah. The men’s room floor will need to be cleaned more often since men can’t piss straight when they’re drunk.”

“Can’t wait. Sounds super fun.”

“The women aren’t much better with all the feminine products everywhere. Don’t even get me started on how many times the toilets have been clogged by that shit.”

“Yes, how inconvenient for you to have to occasionally plunge a toilet while us women endure a bloody, agonizing week every month.”

Bracing his hands on his hips, he huffs. “It’s so awful they come to my bar so they don’t have to fuck up their own

bathroom, is that what you're saying? You're so sympathetic, you get plunger duties too."

"Sorry, *boss*."

"Whatever. Just try and get the place clean. Then, if you want, you can help make sure the bar is stocked." He ends his instructions with a heavy sigh. "Do you have any questions?"

"Yes. Do you keep the doors locked when the bar isn't open?"

"Usually, the doors are locked."

"They weren't this morning."

"This morning was a fluke."

"Well, I would feel much safer if I could check that they're locked when I come in each day."

"Fine. Just don't expect me to give you a key."

"So how will I get in?"

"What?"

"If the doors stay locked and I'm not getting a key, then how will I get in?"

"How about you can knock on the door, and I'll open it. Yeah?"

"Sure. But what if you don't hear me knocking because you're, ah, distracted."

"Then you can wait at the damn door until I hear or see you on the security cameras."

Ah, there are cameras. Should've known. And I get the hint that he threw that information out there to try and deter me from stealing or whatever.

"Will you pay me for the time I spend waiting for you to open the door?"

Closing his eyes, he pinches the bridge of his nose. "I'm already regretting giving you a job. Do you really want to keep pushing me?"

“Sorry. I’ll shut up and get to work now.”

“Great idea.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Greer

Half an hour later, Celeste is mopping the floor for a second time while I try to count the cash in the register behind the bar for the sixth time. I can't keep my eyes off her. I had no idea someone could look so sexy while pushing a dirty, wet mop around.

I direct my eyes to the register cash again, counting out her pay for the past three hours, just as she says, "So, who was that woman?"

"What woman?" I mumble without looking up

"The one you were...*with* this morning in the storage area and don't want me to tell anyone about."

"Oh." Now, I look up and find her staring at me. "None of your business."

"She's not your girlfriend?"

"No." Hell no.

"Just a hookup?"

"Something like that."

"She didn't exactly look like your type."

Putting the money aside, I cross my arms over my chest in annoyance. "You just met me. What would you know about my type?"

“I don’t know. The two of you...I wouldn’t have pictured you together.”

“Before you stood there and watched us fuck, you mean?”

“Again, it’s your fault the door was unlocked. I came in and then heard her scream...”

“So, you were what? Concerned for her safety?”

“How was I supposed to know your tongue was in her?” she asks innocently.

“I take it you’ve already been to every other business in town asking for a job?” I ask to change the subject.

She lowers her eyes to the mop again. “Yes. Nobody was hiring.”

“Or they didn’t trust you enough to hire you,” I guess since I know the locals. They all treated me the same when I first moved into town. “I’ve never seen you around here before. Where are you from, Daisy?”

Her narrowed eyes tell me she’s not a fan of the nickname. All the more reason to use it. “Doesn’t matter.”

“So you get to ask me a shitload of personal questions, but you won’t even tell me your last name or where you’re from?”

“You didn’t actually answer my personal questions...”

“Then I guess we’re even,” I declare. “That’s enough for today,” I add, ready to get her out of here so I can get my work done. “You can head over to the motel just down the road and get checked in.”

“Okay. What should I do with the mop and filthy water?”

Another jab at how dirty she thinks my bar is, not that she’s wrong.

“You can leave it there. Come around here to get your money, then go out the back so the floor can dry.”

Without delay, she skips over and plucks the twenties from my fingers.

“Thank you.”

I nod and follow her through the storage room to the back door. Her ass in those shorts is the stuff of wet dreams.

“Hey, Daisy?” I call after her.

“Yeah?” she turns around to ask, and I nearly run into her.

Rocking back a step before her tits brush my chest, I hate to ask but must for my own sanity. “Could you maybe wear some longer shorts tomorrow?”

“Sorry, but it’s hot as hell, and I don’t own any longer shorts.”

“Of course you don’t,” I grumble. My eyes lower to her perky breasts, her nipples noticeably hard again. Oh hell. There’s no way I’m going to ask her to wear a bra. Ever.

“Anything else, boss?” she asks sweetly, no doubt noticing my lowered gaze.

Shaking my head, I try to sound as unaffected by her as possible, even though my dick is so hard I’ll have to take care of it as soon as she’s out the door. “Nope. See you tomorrow,” I tell her beautiful braless tits.

I’m already looking forward to tomorrow’s torture.



Celeste

The fact that it sounded like Greer was speaking directly to my breasts when I left the bar has me smiling the entire time I’m putting gas in my car.

That’s rule number one of being on the run. Being able to get away is more important than food. At least tonight, I can have both, thanks to the leering bar owner.

Even if I had longer shorts or semi-comfortable bras, I wouldn’t wear them for him. Boss or not, nobody tells me what clothes I can or can’t wear. Not anymore. It’s my body;

I'll wear what I want and as little fabric as I want. Anyone who has a problem with that can kiss my ass.

Besides, if men are checking out my legs, ass, or boobs, they're not paying attention to my face in case a photo of me happens to pop up on the news one day...

The motel is right down the road from the gas station, which is where I drive to next. It's been weeks since I've lain in a real bed or had an actual shower.

Parking near the office of the small, single-level motel, I head inside, hoping the person working is too preoccupied with their phone to notice me.

No such luck.

"Can I help you?" a pretty blonde behind the desk asks with a smile.

Oh.

Remy is a woman? I assumed it was a man and didn't think to ask. Not that it matters. I just would've liked to prepare myself to meet Greer's beautiful female friend before standing in front of her literally like a homeless person.

"Hi. Um, I think Greer spoke to you earlier about, ah, a room for me?"

"Oh, right! You must be his new employee."

"Celeste," I say with a nod.

"I'm Avery. My husband, Remy, owns the motel. He's the big blond, grumpy Viking. You'll probably see him around."

Why is it a relief that she's not Greer's close friend? "It's nice to meet you. And I appreciate the discount."

Turning around, she grabs an old-fashioned key with a number key chain from a peg on the wall. The only key left on the wall. "It's no problem and no charge. The room is yours as long as you need it."

Oh, wow.

"Are you sure?" I ask when she offers me the key chain.

“Yeah. Remy said Greer never asks for favors or has any employees, so you must be important.”

Important? Yeah, right.

“I’m not. I’m just passing through town, and Greer was nice enough to let me work a few hours.”

“Well, let us know if you need anything while you’re here. Josie will be by to clean the room each day and put out the towels.”

“Okay. Thank you.” I make a note to myself to hang the Do Not Disturb sign as soon as I get into the room. Hopefully, they’ll clean while I’m at Greer’s in the morning so I won’t have to talk to anyone else around town.

The fewer people I meet, the better.

At most, I’m not planning to stay in Rockland for more than a week. Maybe two weeks since it’s nearly impossible to pass up the free room.

All I know is that I can’t get too comfortable here, no matter how convenient things may be. Constantly moving is the only way to avoid being found.

I know that won’t work forever, at least not if I stay in the United States.

Maybe I should save up the money I make working for Greer to head to Mexico or Canada. Since being cold sucks and can kill me, I dismiss going further north immediately. I’ll go south where it’s always warm and at least be comfortable on the run.

CHAPTER FIVE

Greer

Celeste looked like a different woman when she came in for the second day. Like she had a good night's sleep and a warm shower or something that had an equally positive effect on her attitude.

That positivity begins to wane after the third day when she wants to argue with everything I ask her to do.

My way of doing everything is apparently the wrong way.

The bar is a pigsty.

And my tiny office is a disaster area.

Her bitching is the one thing that helps me keep my mind out of the gutter since her attire hasn't changed all week. The shorts and tank tops may change color, but they're all short and tight as hell to torment me.

"I think that'll do it for today," I tell Celeste when she finishes sweeping, mopping, and wiping off tables.

She stares me down, refusing to take the money in my extended hand. "That's it? I've only been here an hour."

Before I can form a response, she marches past me into the storage area. "And-and your stock is a mess. How do you ever find anything in here or in your office?"

Trying to see what the problem is with the piles of boxes, I tell her the truth. "I just walk through the stacks until I see

what I need. It's not a big deal."

"Putting all of the brands together would be a start and save you so much time."

And cost me so much money for the time it'll take her to do that shit. I'm about to tell her so when Celeste goes over and bends down to lift a case, allowing me to look down the front of her shirt to the cleavage of her bare breasts.

Fuck me.

"You...you don't have to move all these heavy cases," I tell her.

"They're not that heavy, and I could use the exercise," she says as she takes the case over to the empty opposite side of the room and sets it down while I stare at her ass. Up and down she goes while I just...stand there and watch her like a lazy jackass.

It's not a free show, though. No, I know it's costing me, and yet I don't help her. Mostly because I have no fucking idea why she's moving them or where, but mostly because I'm a horny asshole.

Besides, Celeste probably wouldn't want me to help because it would speed things along and cost her money. The longer she can drag out this little project of hers, the better for her. And apparently, for me too.



Every day after she moves all of my cases around, it's more of the same. Celeste takes over while I stand back and let her do whatever the hell she wants because she looks so damn good doing it.

Dress codes in workplaces begin to make a hell of a lot of sense. Men are distracted way too easily. While that's not fair to women, it's the truth. We apparently can't get any work done around a scantily clad, sexy woman.



Celeste

Greer's bar is a disaster, and I love it.

The basic chores he gave me to do the first few days barely kept me at the bar for two or three hours. While the little bit of cash was nice, more would be better. More would get me to Mexico, where I can slink away onto a city or beach, hopefully becoming invisible.

That necessity is where my organization plan came into play.

The filthy bar just needs a woman's touch.

I also realized that the more I bend over, the longer Greer doesn't seem to mind if I drag out my time working.

He never hides his ogling of my breasts and ass either. I feel his eyes on me almost every second I'm in the bar. I should be furious and disgusted by his blatant stares, but I'm not. He's never tried to lay a hand on me or even come within three feet of me even, though we're always alone together. I feel...safe around him. Or maybe it's just nice to be around a man and know he isn't pulling a Peeping Tom, watching me through binoculars without my knowledge. Been there, done that. Burned the T-shirt.

Greer seems like a good guy all around, even if his words are usually somewhat gruff. Despite all his grumbling, he gave me a job and a hotel room because he felt sorry for me. In a way, I guess I feel like letting him look his fill when we're in the same room is a way to give him something back. A thank-you of sorts. I'm guessing the grumpy bastard would prefer my method of appreciation to saying some meaningless words every day.

"What the hell are you doing to my bar today?" Greer asks when he finds me in his office with a pile of papers in my

arms.

Smiling sweetly at him, I ask, “Can I order some office supplies?”

His dark eyes narrow suspiciously. “What kind of supplies?”

“Folders, hanging file folders, maybe a little cabinet to put everything in using alphabetical order?”

He stares at me – my face, not my breasts – for a long second. “Whatever. Use my laptop to put it all in the online cart, and let me see it before you buy.”

“Will do,” I agree. “Once I do that...I’m not sure what other work I can do in the office here until the supplies come.”

“We can get the files or whatever sent with two-day shipping,” Greer suggests. “And for today...my loft could use some cleaning.” He points straight up to the ceiling.

“Oh. You live up there?” I ask warily. He may have mentioned that before, while warning me not to go up there.

“It’s not much, a bed, bathroom, and little kitchen, but since I’m here all the time, it’s all I need.”

“And you want me to go up there now to clean?”

“After you put in the order.” When I don’t respond, he follows up with a frown, “Why? Is cleaning upstairs a problem? You’re the one who wants more hours.”

God knows I need the cash, but going upstairs to where he sleeps, showers, and fucks feels too intimate. The bar is the bar; it’s business. The bedroom is...personal.

“You don’t have to,” Greer says when he notices my hesitancy.

“No, it’s fine. I just didn’t know you lived here.”

“Remy’s motel rooms are probably classier.”

“I doubt that,” I tell him with a snort. “So what needs to be done exactly?”

“Just dust, vacuum, tidy up, or whatever you have time for.”

“Okay, I’ll get on that as soon as we put this order in.”

I sit in the chair in Greer’s office while he hovers over my shoulder, watching me search and add items. When I’m finally done, he buys it all without bitching.

Then, it’s time for me to go clean his living area.

“I guess I should go on up,” I say as I make my way over to the narrow enclosed stairs against the side of the wall.

“Have fun,” Greer mutters.

“You’re not coming upstairs with me?” I ask, not sure if I want him to say yes or no. Sex would complicate things in so many ways, but then again, it would feel good to be held for a little while or fly high from the sensual pleasure. It’s been so long I don’t remember having either of those things.

“No,” he answers stiffly, leaving no wiggle room.

“You’re not?”

“It’s one open room and a bathroom. I don’t think you need the fifty-cent tour.”

“Oh. Okay,” I say, relieved and yet a little disappointed.

The wooden steps creak as I trudge up them.

As Greer warned, the living space in the loft is almost as sad as my car. There are no windows, no sunshine. The only light is from bright fluorescents hanging over the kitchen and bathroom, which, judging from the exposed wiring, look like they were strung up there as an afterthought. At least he has a kitchen. I miss cooking. Hell, I miss *food*. Maybe Greer will let me cook a few meals for him so I can get something decent in my belly for once.

In the rest of the space, there’s only the basic furniture – a bed no larger than a double that looks too small for his big frame, a dresser but no closet, a bathroom with only a stand-up shower, and then the kitchen with all the basic appliances.

A small flat-screen hangs on the wall near the bed, but the dust is so thick on it either Greer doesn't use it much or never cleans. Possibly both.

Of course, I snoop around too. There's nothing gross or creepy, making me even more certain Greer is not a serial killer or stalker. A box of condoms and a half-used tube of lube in the top drawer of the dresser were the most scandalous things I found. It makes me think of my vibrator drawer the police have probably found by now. Man, I miss those bad boys. The vibrators, not the police. Fuck those bastards.

While I'm tidying up the small space, I eat a bruised banana that I found by a dented loaf of bread. I pop a piece in the toaster, then add a little strawberry jelly to it. I finish up the cleaning with a KitKat bar I found stashed in a drawer with some other candy, probably leftover from last Halloween. I don't care. Chocolate is chocolate.

CHAPTER SIX

Greer

Celeste did a great job cleaning my loft. I felt like a dick when I realized she ate my food while she was up here. Not much, just a banana and some toast based on the scent of the burnt bread in the air. I should pay her more or give her more hours if she's that damn hungry. She's tall and sexy, but there's no doubt her ribs are more prominent through her tops than they should be.

Doesn't she have family? Someone to help her out, someone she could ask to borrow money from?

The next morning, I get up early to go make us both some breakfast, then carry it downstairs because inviting her to eat up in the loft doesn't seem like a good idea.

I don't need to be around her within sight of a bed. I already want her too much as it is.

I've just brought everything down and laid it out on the bar when Celeste walks through the front door I unlocked for her. Her long brown hair is wavy as usual, most likely because it's still damp and she lets it air-dry. Today, she's wearing a pair of cutoff white shorts and a pale blue T-shirt to torment me. The shirt is so paper-thin I can tell there's lace lining the cups of her bra underneath.

"What's this?" she asks.

Her words make me pause in my inappropriate gawking at her. She sounds...pissed as she stares at the spread of food.

“Breakfast.”

“Why?”

Is she serious?

“Why else would I make food? Because we both need to eat?”

“So it’s pity food?” she huffs as if she’s angry that I’m offering to feed her starving ass. Yes, I can see more of her rib cage than I would like through her tee.

“What are you talking about?” I ask, pretending I didn’t get up early and cook out of pity. “Are you hungry or not? I just made this for myself and thought it would be rude not to offer.” It’s a lie, of course. If she doesn’t want pity, then I’ll go back to infuriating her.

Her green eyes continue to take in all the food. Her throat even bobs as she visibly swallows like her mouth is watering. “You burnt the bacon. And the biscuits.”

She would have to find the fault in my offering instead of just saying thank you.

“Then don’t eat them,” I mutter with a heavy sigh because it’s too early for her bullshit. I pick up a plate to start filling it up just as Celeste reaches for a slice of bacon. She takes a big bite off the end. I should’ve known that telling her *not* to eat it would be what convinced her to do it. I think she just enjoys being contrary.

Fuck me raw, though, if I don’t hold my breath as I watch her, waiting to see if she’ll throw it in the trash or take another bite.

“I’ve had better,” she remarks before finishing off the piece in two more loud crunches.

“Of course you have.”

“If you want, I could come early to cook you a decent breakfast every morning.”

I'm not sure if she actually thinks my cooking is so bad that she would rather do it herself or if she just wants more hours. Honestly, I just like the idea that breakfast could become a routine affair for the two of us. Every morning? I shouldn't like the sound of that as much as I do.

"Fine," I agree. "Make a list of what you need from the grocery store, and I'll go buy it later."

"You will?"

I give her a shrug that says why the hell not? It's not like I can send her out for this errand if she doesn't even want to deal with a few customers in the bar. Lately, it's been more than a few with all of the newly patched-over Devil Hounds looking to show off their new skull king patches and trying to get some ass. Word has apparently gotten around that the bar is packed full of new bikers because women I've never seen before have been piling in too.

It's fucked-up that those bastards got their Savage Kings patches before me when their club was eradicated from existence for pissing off the original Kings.

And I should try to hook up with one of those new willing females to stop thinking about my sexy new employee.

"You're such a...manipulative asshole," Celeste says, making me recoil.

"What the fuck?" I snap at her. By doing something nice for her, for agreeing to give her more hours I can't afford to pay, she thinks I'm being a manipulative asshole?

But then she reaches for a biscuit and flashes me a playful smile. Goddamn it if the sight doesn't make me want to throw her over my shoulder, take her upstairs to my bed, and never leave.

I force my eyes from her and focus on filling up my plate instead.

Celeste ends up with twice as much food on her plate. Then, we both sit on the stools at the bar, one empty one in between us as if we need the buffer.



Celeste

Greer cooked breakfast for me.

I've never had a man do that before. I'm always the one cooking, mostly because I like it, but I guess because the men I dated didn't have time or the interest.

He's not good at it by any means. The eggs are a little too runny, the bacon and biscuits a little charred. To Greer, it's probably not a big deal, but I'm a perfectionist when it comes to cooking.

And I'll finally get the chance to do what I love again.

Nothing extravagant, just breakfast. Still, it'll be nice to be in a kitchen again.

Thankfully, Greer offered to go to the store to pick up everything so I don't have to. It's weird how well he knows me after such a short time together, barely a week.

Not that we're together. We're just employee and boss.

I don't go sit in my motel room at night thinking about how hot it would be for him to give me naughty jobs like getting on my knees to polish his dick with my mouth or bend over the now organized cases so he can work out his frustration. Nope. I definitely don't think about any of that, until I remember the woman he was with the first day I came into the bar. That's when most of the heat fizzles out of my solo pleasure sessions.

Since the motel only gets about ten television channels and I don't have a cell phone, there's nothing else for me to do to pass my time at night. I enjoy the beach during the day, but at night, it's too dangerous.

I can't help but wonder if while I'm alone in my room, Greer is in the packed bar, serving people drinks and servicing the prissy, loudmouth blonde.

I can't come out and ask him if she's a regular or not. And even if I did, he may not tell me the truth. Or at least I wouldn't believe him.

I have serious trust issues. But after giving me the job, helping me get the motel room, and now feeding me breakfast, it's hard not to want to trust Greer.

But I can't.

Not after everything that's happened. The less he knows about me, the better. I'll work for him to save up enough cash to move down to Mexico in another week. Or maybe two. The free motel room is an offer I won't get anywhere else, which means either sacrificing my limited cash on paying for a room or going back to sleeping in my car.

It's incredibly hard to sleep out in public like that. I would prefer a tent, if I actually owned one. It's the glass and having to sleep so close to the window. I'm always worried about who may sneak up on me. If they'll be strangers or known individuals. The latter is more terrifying.

Pushing all of those thoughts aside, I selfishly ask for more perks from Greer.

"I noticed you have a washer and dryer in the storage area."

"Yeah?" Greer grunts.

"Could I use it, too, if I do your laundry?"

He shrugs. "Sure. Why not."

"Thanks."

I am not at all sad about saying goodbye to handwashing my clothes in bathroom sinks.

"The supplies you ordered came in yesterday afternoon," Greer says between forkfuls of eggs.

"Yeah?"

"Guess you'll stay busy with organizing today after the usual chores?"

“Oh yeah. Shouldn’t take but...maybe three or four hours.”

Greer grumbles a curse, but he doesn’t object.

He’s practically wrapped around my little finger after a week. I wonder what a few more weeks with him will look like?

I already know I’ll stick around too, even if it’s not smart.

Not just for the money anymore either.

Part of me is dying to get the storage room treatment from Greer at least once before I leave town.

Just once, though. More than that and I would be risking getting too attached to him.

That definitely wouldn’t end well for either of us.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Celeste

“**W**hy didn’t you ask for help?” Greer asks, hurrying over to grab two plates from my arm when I make it down to the bar.

“I had it,” I tell him.

“What the hell is all this?” He sets the plates down on the bar and hovers over them, sniffing, examining.

I add my two plates and tell him, “It’s eggs benedict with ham on an English muffin, and for something sweet, German apple pancakes.”

Picking up a fork, he pokes at a chunk of apple with a frown. “Those are pancakes? They look more burnt than my biscuits yesterday.”

“Just try them before you bad-mouth them, jackass,” I huff, then take a seat on one of the stools at the long bar to dig in.

“Like you did my breakfast yesterday?” he asks with a raised brow.

I open my mouth to argue with him but realize he’s right. Instead of telling him that, I simply say, “Touché.”

I refuse to wait for him to cave and take a bite, ready to dig in to my food. It took all my restraint to not scarf the pancakes down as soon as they were finished because they smelled so

yummy. Thankfully, I wasn't as hungry today as I have been the past few weeks, so I was able to resist.

Now, though. "Mm-mm. Damn, I'm good," I declare between bites.

"You couldn't just scramble or fry an egg or make normal pancakes?" Greer asks, still standing over the plates, poking at the food with one of his fork's prongs.

"If you don't shut up and try it, I'm going to..."

Now Greer's dark eyes lift to mine, full of challenge. "Going to what?"

"Poison your food tomorrow," I tease him.

Shaking his head, he takes a deep breath, then shovels a mouthful of eggs into his mouth.

"Mmm," he says, finishing the eggs, ham, and half the English muffin before moving on to the pancakes. I think his eyes roll back in his head. "Fuck me. I take it back." Pointing at the pancakes, he says, "These may look burnt as hell, but they're actually really good."

"I know," I tell him confidently.

After a couple more bites, he smirks and says, "So, you're not going to poison my breakfast tomorrow?"

"Are you going to bitch before you try my cooking again?"

He shrugs.

"Then I guess I won't poison you. Yet."

"I appreciate it."

"What work do you need done around here today?" I ask him when I push my plate away.

"You're not gonna eat the rest of your cakes?" Greer asks.

"No, I'm stuffed." My palm goes to my stomach, which is nice and full and finally silent. It had been growling constantly before our last breakfast. "Why? You want them?"

"Hell yes." He reaches for my plate to drag it closer and finish it off.

“Well?” I ask when he still hasn’t answered my question.

“I assume you still have to clean up my kitchen from making all of this?”

“Yes.”

“Then the usual after that, I guess – chairs up to sweep and mop the floors, then wipe down the tables.”

“Okay. That’ll all take me about twenty minutes.” Really, it’ll take me about an hour or two because I’m fastidious and slow, dragging out my time.

“Then you can do inventory to see what beers we’re low on.”

Great. That’ll take as long as I want it to take. I’m sure I can stretch that job out for another hour, making it about four with breakfast.

“Is that enough hours for you, Daisy, or should I give you more work?” Greer grumbles.

Gathering up the now empty plates, I tell him, “That should be enough. Thanks, boss.”

“Thanks for breakfast. Where did you learn to cook shit like this?” he asks.

“Oh, I, ah, used to be a chef.”

“Used to be?” he asks.

“It’s a long story, and I should probably head up to the loft to clean up the mess I made.”

On the way up the steps, I try to decide what to make for Greer tomorrow morning. Cooking is either a pain in the ass or not a big deal to most people. But to me? It’s what I always loved to do. And it’s nice to be able to do it again, even if I’m only cooking for one instead of hundreds at a busy restaurant. My *own* restaurant.

Everything I ever worked for was lost the night I ran.

I knew the consequences at the time, though. And if I had to make that decision again, I would do it in a heartbeat.

Being poor but free is better than being well-off and living my life as a prisoner at someone else's whims.

And I will never be anyone's prisoner again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Greer

The longer Celeste works for me, the more jobs I actually have to find for her. Her presence means I can't get a damn thing done until she leaves each day.

It's shameful, but I can't seem to look away from her no matter how hard I try. When she's sweeping, mopping, wiping down the bar. Everything she does in her tiny shorts and snug tops is hot as hell, making me think all the things I shouldn't.

By the start of her second week, the bar is cleaner and more organized than it's ever been...and Celeste is the only one of us who knows where anything is. I think she did that shit on purpose so I have to keep her around.

Not that I have any plans of firing her or cutting back her hours anytime soon.

No, I would keep her around twenty-four hours a day if I could afford it.

At night, I'm constantly looking over my shoulder for her. But she never comes by the bar after she finishes up her work, and I know better than to ask her.

The worst thoughts I have at night are the ones where I wonder how much money it would take to get her in my bed just once.

It's so fucked-up I've considered slamming my dick in a drawer to calm the hell down.

Despite how much I want her, I don't want to pay Celeste for sex. I want us to both want it. I think we both do, but I know that crossing that line as employee and boss would be wrong.

Or maybe I'm just convincing myself that she's flirty with me when she's just trying to butter me up to make more cash.

I'm well aware that there may come a day when Celeste doesn't show up at work, when she disappears from town without a word, leaving as fast as she showed up.

That's why I'm so relieved when she knocks on the bar door every morning. It means one more day with her and possibly her last.

And for some reason, I know that if we were to have sex, she would take off and never look back afterward.

I'm nothing more than a blip on her radar as she keeps running from whatever the hell requires her to only use cash and not go out in public.

If only I knew what she was running from, maybe I could help her. Help her so that she can stay in Rockland a little bit longer.

But there's no way she's going to ever tell me the truth. Just like I don't believe her name is actually Celeste.

At least she's here today. Or here in the bar somewhere.

When I walk into the men's bathroom to take a piss, I find her in the last place I expected. There she is on her hands and knees, scrubbing the floor. Or she was until I apparently startled her.

"Jesus," she mutters quietly before she gets back to work.

"Sorry," I tell her, even though I'm not sure what I'm apologizing for.

Instead of leaving, I continue to stand there and watch her.

"I'm almost finished in here," she informs me. "The floor is disgusting. Some stains wouldn't come up whenever I

mopped,” she tells me without turning her head back around. When I don’t respond, she adds, “Is there a problem, boss?”

A problem? Oh yeah. I’ve got ninety-nine of them, and they’re all because of this woman.

“Yes, I have a problem. Have I told you how much I hate those damn shorts of yours, Daisy?” I can’t help but admit truthfully.

“Oh. Sorry, boss. Do you want me to get rid of them for you?” Celeste asks. She gets to her feet and turns to face me, leaving her scrub brush and supplies on the floor.

“I would absolutely love for you to get rid of them,” I lie. I enjoy the daily torture.

When her fingers go to the button on her shorts, I can’t even fathom what she’s doing. A moment later, the zipper is lowered, and then the denim falls to the floor.

Celeste steps out of the material, leaving her standing there in the middle of the men’s bathroom in nothing but her flip-flops, a pair of black panties, and the same snug yellow top she wore the first day she came into the bar.

Then she gets back on her knees so her ass is to me, revealing that her panties are nothing but a black thong. The tiny strip of fabric rides up her perfect ass cheeks as she resumes her work.

“Oh fuck,” I groan aloud at the view when she goes back to scrubbing the baseboard. Forward and back, forward and back, she moves on her hands and knees. “Fuck me all the way to hell and back.” I tilt my head to the side to get a better look at that ass of hers, the fabric intimately cupping her pussy. I get light-headed from how fast the rest of the blood in my body heads south. I was hard before when I saw her like this in those shorts. Now I’m aching, in near agony from how swollen my cock suddenly gets.

“You okay back there, boss?” Celeste looks over her shoulder, pausing in her scrubbing. When that amazing ass of hers stops jiggling, I realize she’s waiting for me to respond to

something. Words fail me. “You wanted me to get rid of the shorts...”

Yes, yes, I did. I also want her to get rid of the top and panties. Would she remove those if I asked?

I would if I could remember how to speak.

“Want me to put the shorts back on?”

“No!” I exclaim, shooting that idea down hard and fast. “It’s just...wow.”

“It’s not a big deal. This is no different from a swimsuit. In fact, I wear it to the beach...”

A puff of laughter escapes me, her statement snapping me out of the fantasy where I’m on my knees too, tasting her. “Bullshit.”

Celeste sits back on her heels and shrugs. “I do.”

“You do not.”

“Haven’t had any complaints either.”

“No shit,” I mutter. Clearing my throat, I lift my eyes from that thin sliver of black between her thighs, unable to resist asking her, “The beach near the motel?”

“Yeah.”

“How often do you go down there?”

“Every day. It’s free, so...”

“Every day. You wear these panties to the beach every day.”

“These or other pairs.”

“Just those?”

She slips her fingers under the thin yellow spaghetti strap of her tight top on her shoulder. “And tanks like this. It’s not a topless beach.”

Immediately, my dirty mind is flooded by thoughts of water soaking into that thin, pale shirt. “Holy shit.”

“Should I put the shorts you hate so much back on before you stroke out or what?”

God no. I never want to see those shorts or any other material covering her beautiful ass again.

“Stop talking and get back to work,” I order her.

With a smirk, she turns back to face the wall. One palm flat on the floor, the other with the scrub brush, she gets back to work taunting me.

Reaching down, I have to press my palm to the fly of my jeans to get some kind of friction before I die. She’s my employee, I remind myself over and over again. Does she think I’ll pay her more for the show?

“I’m not paying you extra to look at your ass,” I tell her just to be clear.

“I know,” she replies in agreement.

Then I’m unable to glance away as I watch her rocking back and forth. Suddenly, my hips are doing the same, pressing my dick to my palm. The door behind my back even begins to creak with my movements. I need more pressure, though. I need to fist my dick and tug on it.

I could leave, go to the other bathroom, and jerk off thinking about this visual, but I’m not sure if I could accurately capture all the little details of her before me.

Fuck it.

She knows exactly what she’s doing to me; it’s what she probably even expected would happen when she took those shorts off. Besides, she’s already seen my dick before.

The sound of my zipper going down is loud, echoing off the walls of the bathroom tiles. It’s all the warning I plan to give her. Her scrubbing pauses for a moment before I swear she puts even more ass into it.

Fucking tease.

After a quick lick up the center of my palm, I reach into my boxer briefs to finally fist my aching shaft and free it.

There's no holding back the groan that escapes past my lips. As I squeeze and stroke up and down, I stare at the center of her panties, wanting to tug the slender strip to the side to run my tongue down her crease and shove my dick inside that tight, wet heat.

The way she's moving makes it even easier to imagine both of those things happening.

Behind me, the closed door bangs softly in the rhythm of my pumping fist and thrusting hips.

"If you come on the floor, do I have to clean it up?" The woman has the nerve to ask me that question as she looks at me over her shoulder, her eyes going straight to my dick in my hand.

"Fuck yes," I tell her.

The thought of her on her knees in front of me is what sends me over the edge a minute later. My head falls back, eyes slamming shut focused on that sole image as my balls tighten. My cock swells a second before it erupts. I don't even try to catch the cum in my palm as it pulses free. "Fuck yesss," I groan as I twist and tug my shaft, milking every last drop from it.

I'm still struggling to catch my breath when I open my eyes. Celeste has already moved. She's on her hands and knees, her face no more than two feet away from my dick. That rag in her hand wipes up the mess I made like it's no big deal. Now that she's facing me, I get to see her tits sway back and forth through her shirt since she's not wearing a bra. Rarely does. Not that I'll ever complain. A shudder runs through me as I imagine painting those heavy tits with my cum. My dick is fully sated for now, though, unable to do more than twitch with her face and body so close to it.

"I should charge you extra for this" is all Celeste says as I shove my dick back into my pants to fasten them.

"Why? It's your damn fault."

She bites down on her lip, unable to help her grin as she sits back on her heels to look up at me. God, I shouldn't love

seeing her kneeling so much. It's the kind of thing I think I would kill for; to have it happen on a regular basis.

"I've never had a man I'm not fucking jerk off right in front of my face before," she informs me. "But I think I prefer it to being secretly fantasized about behind my back."

"Are you saying men need to get consent from a woman before fucking her in their head?"

"Unless she's a porn star, it would be the considerate thing to do," she says as if she's completely serious.

"You must not have any idea how often men think about sex."

Finally getting to her feet, Celeste says, "Next time, maybe you should bring some oil or lube, boss. I wouldn't want your dick to chafe."

"Is there going to be a next time?" I ask her, praying for a yes. "Or will the sexual harassment police be coming to arrest me now?" I know what I did was fucked-up, but I'm currently unable to feel bad about it.

Her green eyes are glazed over with lust when she looks up at me, telling me she's just as horny as I am. I wish I could slide a finger over the crotch of her panties to find out if they're wet. It's a shame I can't tell because of the dark black fabric.

"I asked you for a job after I walked into the bar and found you eating some woman's pussy, then stayed to watch you fuck her. I think we've both surrendered our sexual harassment rights."

"Good." I'm glad she's not pissed about me getting off while watching her. "As long as you understand that none of this" – I wave a hand at her sexy-ass half-naked body – "is part of your job and won't earn you more money for showing skin or less for covering up."

"Understood," Celeste agrees. Going over to where she dropped her shorts, she bends over in an intentionally sultry way to pick them up and slip them back on. "Can I leave now?"

“Of course you can leave.”

She lifts her eyebrows, and it occurs to me that I'm blocking the door, the only exit. Fuck. “I won't stand in front of the door next time,” I promise her as I reach back and open it for her. I don't want her to feel like she's trapped in here with me until I let her go the next time I get off watching her work in her panties. Before paying her for the day.

God, this is so fucked-up.

“I'll grab your cash from the register,” I tell her as I follow her out of the men's bathroom.

CHAPTER NINE

Greer

No shorts becomes the new norm for Celeste after we start having breakfast together.

If someone had told me that a beautiful woman would one day cook for me every day and do all her chores in a thong, I would've called them a dirty liar. I didn't realize Celeste's perfection existed.

The next morning, when I walk into the men's bathroom after breakfast looking for Celeste, she's not on the floor. Oh no. She's cleaning the mirrors over the sink, reaching up high to wipe back and forth with a rag. It's yet another sexy-as-hell position in a blue thong and snug pale blue top, making me want to fuck her. Since the top and panties match, I'm guessing she did that on purpose.

In this position, I can see her ass and her tits jiggle in the reflection. Her eyes catch mine, and she grins as if she knows exactly what she's doing.

Was she sent to this town just to torture me for the rest of my days on earth?

I can't touch her. I *won't* touch her. But goddamn if I don't think about doing her constantly.

I lean my back against the wall, not the door as promised, then reach for my zipper just as Celeste says, "Are you always

this horny? Fucking women in the storage room and jerking off in the bathrooms every day?”

“Like you don’t know exactly what the fuck you’re doing running around the bar in your panties. There’s nothing wrong with looking and not touching, right?”

“It’s your bar, boss. You can look wherever the hell you want.”

The reminder that I’m paying her to work in the bar in her underwear causes my gut to clench with guilt. Too bad my throbbing dick overrules it in this decision. She practically gave me her permission.

Asking her to take her shirt off is on the tip of my tongue, but I swallow the words down. Honestly, being able to watch her heavy tits sway under the thin fabric, see her nipples poke through it, is far more titillating than bare tits. If I can’t touch them or lick them, then I don’t need to see them in all their glory.

Fuck, I would give anything to come all over them, to taste her, to get inside of her.

But she’s only a tease, not giving me the least encouragement to put my hands or mouth on her.

I’m not even entirely sure if she even wants me.

“Are your little blue panties wet, Daisy?” I blurt the question out, needing to know.

“Yes,” she answers softly. Then, a grin. “The sink was damp when I leaned against it.”

“I should’ve been more specific, shouldn’t I? Is your pussy wet?”

“I don’t have a cat.”

Now she’s being intentionally difficult.

“Is your cunt nice and slick or not? If you don’t know, slide your finger inside to find out. That’s an order,” I tell her.

“You could come see for yourself.”

“How can I do that?”

“By looking up.” She widens her stance in invitation while continuing to wipe the glass mirror.

Naturally, I do what any other horny man would do. I go lie down on the men’s bathroom floor to slide underneath her and see what’s between her legs.

And fuck me, the light blue fabric is dark blue in spots. Large spots.

My mouth waters, wanting a taste. I can’t even see Celeste’s face, just her legs and what’s between them.

My hand is already inside my pants, stroking my cock, when her fingers slide into the front of her panties.

“Oh, fuck, you’re killing me.” The woman is too good to be true.

Celeste leans forward like she’s bracing her other hand on the counter and moans, nearly undoing me.

“Does that finger inside of you feel good?” I ask her.

“Even better than normal...because you’re watching.”

Fuck me, I like that answer.

“You strut around in nothing but your panties and a tank top to tease me and yourself, don’t you?”

“Y-yes.”

“If I paid you a dollar for every time I’ve thought about tasting your pussy or bending you over and fucking you hard and fast, you would be a rich woman, Daisy.”

Her fingers go still like I’ve somehow said the wrong thing. Maybe the mixing of money and sex doesn’t feel right to her either.

Trying again, I stroke myself faster and ask, “Have you thought about sitting on my face?”

“Mmm.”

I think that was a moan of agreement.

“You could do it right now,” I tell her. “Just squat down and pull those wet panties to the side...”

“I’ve never...”

“You’ve never what?” I prod. When she doesn’t answer, I take a stab in the dark. “Sat on a man’s face? Came on a man’s tongue?”

“I haven’t.”

A long groan escapes me as precum leaks from my cock.

“You want to, though, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“I would lick you so damn good, Daisy. You would wake up craving my tongue every day after that. You would keep your wet panties on and pretend like you didn’t mean to roll over and straddle my face.”

“Oh god,” she whispers as her legs begin to tremble on either side of my head. “Oh! Ohhh!”

Knowing she’s getting off sets me off too.

It’s a slippery slope we’re on, one I don’t want to ever end. But I know that one day soon, it will.

Celeste will walk away and never look back. And I’m not sure if I’ll ever recover after she leaves.

CHAPTER TEN

Celeste

I've never masturbated in front of a man before. Well, I had never watched a man jerk off either before Greer. Both things just seemed right with him, as odd as that may sound.

Greer makes me feel like I'm a different person, a wild, sexy woman who knows how to make men crazy.

That couldn't be further from the vision I have of my "old" self.

There was only one man I drove crazy, just not in the good way.

I'm not even the least bit embarrassed when the last of the tremors fade and I remove my fingers from my panties.

I just turn on the sink and wash them like it's the most natural thing in the world while Greer continues to lie on the floor with his head between my flip-flops.

"My dick is going to get raw if we keep this up," he says as he sits up and gets to his feet. I watch as he fastens his pants in the reflection of the mirror.

"I told you so," I say with a smile. "You need to keep some oil or lube in here."

"Right. And then every guy that comes in here at night will be jerking off."

"Ew, yeah. I don't want to clean up their messes."

“But you don’t mind cleaning up my messes?”

I shrug. The truth is, I think it’s hot when he gets off in front of me. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t keep watching.

“I should probably go stock up the bar.”

“Yeah. I should probably relearn how to catch my breath after that,” he replies with a smirk as he braces his hands on the sink next to me.

Smiling like an idiot, knowing I did that to him, I’m halfway through the newly organized storage room when I see the man standing at the open back doorway.

I scream like a banshee at the man in a grey hat and shirt a second before I see the cases of beer stacked on his hand truck. Even then, my racing heart slams against my ribs, threatening to burst free.

“Uh, hi.” A broad grin stretches across his face as his eyes lower to my lack of bottoms. “I called out, but...”

“Sorry,” I say, feeling stupid for not noticing someone else was in the building and for standing in front of him in so little clothing. Feet frozen in place, I tug on the hem of my tank top as if it’ll magically become about four inches longer to cover up my panties.

“Celeste? What’s wrong?” Greer calls out from the bar a second before he appears behind me and sees what caused my shriek. “What the fuck?” he shouts, reeling back when he sees the delivery guy.

A second later, he moves to stand in front of me, blocking me from the other man’s view.

“Sorry, man,” the delivery guy says. “I called out...”

“Well, you should’ve left or waited outside instead of barging the fuck in here!”

The guy points at the door. “It was propped open.”

“That’s, um, that’s my fault,” I whisper to Greer. “It was warm in here earlier...”

“Just stop gawking and hurry the fuck up!” he snaps at the guy.

“It’s not my fault you let your girl walk around half-naked,” the man unfortunately mutters.

It’s the wrong thing to say to the man I know is already on edge.

Greer charges toward him. Grabbing him by the front of his shirt, he shoves him backward through the doorway. Once he’s outside, Greer quickly unloads the hand truck, then throws the thing out the door before slamming it closed and turning the dead bolt.

“Fucking asshole.”

Striding toward me, Greer’s calloused palms gently cover my shoulders, then slide up and down my arms as his dark eyes examine my face. It’s the first time he’s ever touched me, I can’t help but notice. Leaning into his warmth would feel so nice and comforting.

“Are you okay?” he asks softly.

I give him a nod because my throat feels so tight. My eyes begin to sting now, even though the danger, or perceived danger, is over. I’m okay. I’m safe. Greer wouldn’t let anyone hurt me.

And it’s selfish of me to put him in that kind of danger.

When I take a step back, Greer’s hands drop from me.

“Can I...do you mind if I go?”

“No, of course not,” he says.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” I tell him as I turn toward the doorway to the bar. I don’t even know if I’m lying to him or not. I should leave tonight, hit the road while it’s dark, and drive until the sun comes up.

That’s what I need to do, right after I see the ocean one more time.



Greer

The way Celeste ran out of the bar worries me. She didn't even stop long enough to put her shorts back on. Nope. She just walked outside, leaving them behind the bar.

Now more than ever I need to know what she's running from, or who, that drives her to such distraction.

I just hate that the delivery guy busted in and scared her off.

The first place I go is her hotel room. I knock and yell through the door to let her know it's just me, but there's no answer. Thankfully, her blue piece-of-shit car is still parked in the lot.

Either she's in her room and not answering, or she walked to the beach.

Slipping my sunglasses on, I take the sandy path from the motel, hiking through the dunes to come out where the ocean waves crash onto the flat expanse of beach.

On the left is a group of people playing volleyball on a sagging net, and on the right, there she is, standing knee-deep in the waves in the same clothes she was wearing earlier.

"Hey, man!" A kid in red board shorts who I recognize as Jordan, the other Savage King prospect, jogs toward me from the volleyball group. "I don't think I've ever seen you outside the bar," he says when he comes to a stop in the soft sand beside me.

"Yeah, well..." I trail off as my gaze returns to the woman in the waves.

"She's hot as hell, right?" the prospect remarks, making me grit my teeth. It's ridiculous to want to be the only male to see her in those panties.

“Yeah.”

“I’ve seen her out here a few times now but don’t have the balls to try and talk to her,” the kid tells me. “Besides, anytime one of the guys starts walking toward her, she takes off.”

“She takes off?”

“Yeah, like she just leaves the beach.”

Because she’s shy and doesn’t want to talk to anyone? No, because she’s running from someone. I can barely get her to stop talking at the bar. Not that I mind. It’s been nice having someone around the bar during the day. “I wish I could pay her to work all day, every day.”

“Huh?” Jordan asks, making me realize I voiced that thought aloud.

“Nothing. She’s my new employee.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I just don’t have much work for her or the cash to pay her for more than a few hours a day.”

“I haven’t ever seen her at the bar.”

“She only works during the day.”

“Oh. Well, that sucks. But it looks like you’ve already called dibs, so...”

“Dibs?”

“Unless you want to introduce me?”

“Fuck off,” I huff, making the kid chuckle. “And tell your buddies to stay the fuck away from her too.”

I don’t know why she doesn’t want to be around other people, but I will gladly help keep other men away. Like the delivery guy eyeing her up and down...

“That’s what I figured,” Jordan says with a sigh. “You want to fuck your employee.”

“Watch your mouth,” I warn him, removing my eyes from her to glare at him through my sunglasses.

“You’re not denying it, though, are you?”

Rolling my neck around to make it pop, I admit to the prospect, “Lately, that’s what she wears when she’s working for me.”

“That? The panties and the tight top? That’s all she wears around the bar?”

“Yes. Well, that and flip-flops. The floor can be sticky.”

“Jesus. No wonder you’re out here eye-fucking her. You want her bad.”

“I can’t touch her.”

“Sure you can.”

“No, I can’t. She’s my employee. I’m paying her to work for me, not screw me.”

“Couldn’t the screwing just be a bonus you both agree on?”

“No.”

“Why not? She obviously wants you too.”

“Why do you say that?”

“A woman wouldn’t strut around in just that little bit of clothing unless she wants to provoke a man.”

“Or get me to pay her more.”

“Or that,” he eventually agrees, making my teeth clench so hard it’s a wonder my jaw doesn’t break.

I fucking knew it. Whatever game she’s playing is about money. Nothing else. She doesn’t actually want me, just my cash.

And it’s worked.

I lie awake at night thinking of shit for her to do just to keep her around the bar. I’ve even thought about applying for a business loan, not only because I need it for some repairs, but because I could use it to make her full-time.

Yes, I would pay her to stand around and bend over in those panties all day long.

Just as the thought occurs to me, Celeste leans down to put her hands in the low waves, causing me and Jordan to both groan.

“I bet that ass looks even better up close,” he says.

“Oh, it does.”

I’m telling myself I need to leave, that the bar opens soon and I need to be there to let in the happy-hour customers. But my boots don’t seem to want to budge in the sand.

And of course, I wait too long, staring silently at her with Jordan next to me. At least he has an excuse – he’s a horny teenager. I’m a grown man who should have more common decency. Celeste turns around, her eyes darting around the beach...and land right on me. Well, me and Jordan. She freezes, looking surprised to see me or the two of us watching her.

“Fuck,” I mutter.

If I had to guess, she’s wondering what the hell I’m doing out here, staring at her without paying for it.

“What excuse are you gonna give her for watching her like a perv?” Jordan asks.

“No clue.”

“She got a key?”

“What?”

“Does she have a key to the bar? If she works there, she should probably have one, right?”

“You think I should give her, a strange woman I don’t know, a key to my business to basically ask her to rob me just because she’s hot?”

“Better than letting her think you’re a psycho pervert.”

Maybe he’s right.

When Celeste finally moves, her shoulders are hunched, eyes on the sand as she walks up to grab her things on the beach – a white towel. She wraps it around her chest, covering the majority of her body, and then she's hightailing it to the beach access that connects to the motel.

“Shit.”

“Told ya. You spooked her, man,” Jordan says. “Sucks to be you,” he adds before he jogs back over to his friends playing beach volleyball.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Celeste

“Celeste, wait!” Greer calls out as he chases after me.

It was like an awful dose of déjà vu, spotting him somewhere I never expected, then having him follow me.

The man gave me a job and a motel room to stay in without even knowing me. Why would he do that? To be nice? No. Of course not. It’s my own damn fault for teasing him. I blurred the line between business and sex, and now there’s no going back.

“Celeste!”

There’s something about being alone with him out here on the beach path that freaks me out, even if we’re more alone in the bar together every day. I guess I just expect him to be around there since he owns the place, but I didn’t expect to see him on the beach, my little spot of beach where I go to relax.

Instead of getting caught in the path alone with him, I hurry to the motel parking lot, where there are at least usually other people coming and going. Avery seems decent enough, but her husband and Greer are more than just friends. They’re in the same biker club together. She won’t be an ally to me. If my own brother and mother didn’t believe me...

I spot a Harley next to my car and know it’s Greer’s. He came to the motel looking for me before wandering out on the beach. Why is he being so persistent?

Motel key clenched in my hand and ready, I make it inside my motel room, lock the dead bolt and chain, then rest my back against it to catch my breath a moment before his fist bangs on it. Thanks to the air conditioner unit blaring, I shiver from head to toe as the cold breeze sticks my damp tank to my skin.

“Celeste? I know you saw me and heard me calling after you!” Greer yells through the door.

“What do you want?” I holler back.

“You’re seriously not going to let me in?”

“No, I’m really not. What do you want?” I ask again.

“I, um, honestly? I guess I just wanted to apologize for freaking out earlier at the delivery guy. And, um, also, I had to see for myself if you really wore that thong to the beach.”

“Now you know. There’s no need to keep talking about the delivery guy. I told you that was my fault.”

Greer doesn’t say anything for a while. Then, “Jordan, the kid I was talking to on the beach, is a prospect for the club too. He was out there playing volleyball with friends.”

“And?”

“And I told him to tell them not to bother you.”

“Okay.”

“He said you take off if anyone tries to approach you.”

“So?”

“So, what’s up with you? Why am I the only person you’ll talk to?”

“Because I need the money.”

“Right. That’s what I thought.”

I tell myself that I don’t care if he sounds disappointed. Being around Greer is a necessity. Teasing him, though...I shouldn’t have done that. Yes, I wanted him to let me work more hours this week, but I shouldn’t have stooped so low to

ensure it without expecting he would want more. Hell, I masturbated in front of him today!

If I'm being honest with myself, I love the way he looks at me, watches me, touches himself because he gets so turned on. I shouldn't, but I do. Unlike when Eric would do those things.

Another reason why I should leave town tonight.

I start to wonder if Greer's left until he speaks again. "I get it, okay? I won't go down to the beach again and stare at you like a creep. When – *if* – you come back to work for me, you can keep the same hours and keep your shorts on. From now on, my dick will stay in my pants where it belongs. I don't know what the fuck I was thinking. You're just so hot it makes me stupid, but that's my fault, not yours. Screw the bar. I should probably get out more. Date or at least try to get laid more..."

The urge to say, *No, don't*, surprises me.

Why does the thought of Greer with another woman make me want to break out the claws and hiss like a freaking cat?

My head lolling against the door reminds my racing heart that this situation is different than the last. Greer is different. It's not one-sided. I'm attracted to him, even if he is my boss. I want him to watch me and want me so much it makes him stupid. I like how sexy he makes me feel. I never actually wore my underwear to the beach before taunting him.

Seeing his reaction...it's what gave me the confidence to say screw it, go out there during the afternoons to soak up the sun while enjoying the calm ebb and flow of the waves.

When I get back to the motel room each day, I'm so worked up from flirting and teasing Greer that I barely touch myself and I come. And what do I think about each time? Either him jerking himself off or his tongue licking that woman. The woman he refuses to talk about, but who thankfully hasn't been back. I'm not complaining about her absence. I would happily bend over and take her place...

The chill in the air is suddenly a welcome sensation against my now overheating flesh. Between the arousal and

embarrassment of flipping out a few minutes ago, I could combust right here against the door.

“Celeste?”

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” I say since I’m ready for this awkward conversation to be over. Greer probably thinks I’ve lost my mind.

And while I should leave town now, it feels impossible to walk away from him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Greer

I have no clue what the fuck happened with Celeste today. I shouldn't have gone to the beach, shouldn't have followed her back to the motel. She obviously didn't want to talk to me. I was no different than those assholes on the beach coming up to her, hitting on her. For some reason, I thought that it would be different between us. That I was different. I thought she trusted me.

I take another gulp from the bottle of Jack I've been nursing all night.

"You okay, man?" Remy asks when he takes a stool at the bar. "Never seen you drink like a fish."

"Long day."

"Uh-oh," he mutters. "This have anything to do with your new smoking-hot employee?"

Glaring at the asshole, I say, "I wonder how Avery would feel about your description of my employee."

"Hell, those are the exact words my wife used to describe her. I haven't even caught a glimpse of her yet."

"Not that you haven't tried," I finish for him.

With a smirk, he doesn't even try to deny it. "I have tried, but only because I'm curious about the type of woman my girl thinks is smoking hot. And now you're trying to change the

subject, so I'm thinking she's the reason you can't walk a straight line."

Shaking my head, I take another gulp from the bottle still clutched in my fingers. "I can get as drunk as I want. I'm home." With a heavy sigh, I stare blankly into space, trying to piece her actions together. "She's a stunner, but something is up with her. She's...confusing."

Remy chuckles. "What woman isn't? And can I get a beer, or did you drink them all before I got here?"

I grab the first bottle I see, pop the top, and slide it in front of him. "I know women are confusing, but Celeste is more frustrating than most. She is smoking hot, and for the past few days, she's been doing her chores around the bar in nothing but a thong and tank top."

"Whoa," he drawls, eyes going distant. "I wonder if Avery would work at the hotel in that same outfit..."

"I seriously doubt it," I tell him.

He rubs his scruffy chin, still deep in thought. "Around the house, though, I bet she would be game."

"I didn't tell you that to add additional spice to your sex life," I snap at him. "I told you because I stupidly assumed that because I want her that she felt the same. She doesn't. It's about getting paid. I keep letting her work longer hours because..."

"Because you like eye-fucking her."

"I'm paying to eye-fuck her. How messed up is that?"

"Well, if she's down, then I don't see the problem. Especially for an hourly rate? You can't get that show at a club."

"It's not just that. I think I just want her to want me back, and it sucks to realize she doesn't. She won't ever..."

"Want to fuck you? That sucks, man. All that teasing and the only thing you get out of it are blue balls."

“Uh, I get a little more than that.” The alcohol warming me makes my lips loose as I briefly consider shutting up before roundly rejecting the idea.

Remy lifts his eyebrows, waiting.

“I, ah, she lets me, you know, rub one out in front of her.” I refuse to tell him about her hand in her panties.

“Really?”

I nod and add, “She even cleans up the mess...on her hands and knees.”

“Goddamn. No wonder your head is spinning. That woman is definitely playing games with your dick.”

“You think I should keep paying her? Remember, I’m just about broke.”

“Maybe. But it sort of sounds like she’s into it if she’s willing to cross that big of a line. Either that or she’s setting you up for the world’s biggest sexual harassment suit ever.”

“No shit,” I agree. “She doesn’t seem upset afterward. Mostly, she just looks smug as hell. But whatever. Tonight, she sort of flipped out when I saw her at the beach, and I told her to keep her clothes on from now on.”

“Why the fuck would you do that?”

“Because yeah, she’s hot, but I’m gonna lose my goddamn mind if I can only look but not touch her.”

“How about this,” Remy starts. “What if you keep the flirty, sexy shit on hold until after her shift or whatever ends? Keep it separate from her work. That way, you’re not paying to fuck around with her.”

“Maybe...” I trail off. “Fuck!”

“You want to see her ass all day long?”

“Hell yes,” I admit. “But you’re right. There has to be some sort of...separation to stop messing with my head.”

“Good luck. Not that it actually sounds like that big of a problem.”

“Thanks,” I tell him.

If Celeste shows up tomorrow morning, then I’ll make sure we talk about this shit once and for all, even if it means her keeping her clothes on. It’s really for the best because if another delivery guy catches a glimpse of her half-naked like the one today, I’ll kill them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Celeste

I'm nervous today going into the bar after how awkward things were yesterday. Not the mutual masturbating but running from my boss on the beach. How crazy is that?

The door is unlocked when I knock and twist the knob, so I walk inside.

"Hey," Greer says softly from behind the bar as my eyes adjust to the dim interior. He looks at me, my face and not my boobs today. "You came back."

How did he know I debated that?

"I came back. And you look..." I search his face, the bags and darkness under his eyes. "Bad night, or are you hungover?"

"Both, and I'm sorry about yesterday."

I'm more concerned about him admitting he had a bad night and drank too much. Because of me? Because of how I blew him off? Shit.

"It's fine, Greer," I tell him honestly. "I...I may have overreacted. Yesterday wasn't about you."

"Oh. Okay."

"So can we just forget about it?"

“Sure. Yeah,” he agrees. “But I think we should talk about the shorts.”

“What about them?”

“Don’t take them off while you’re working. Unless you want to. No, I mean, don’t do it for more money, okay?”

“I’m not.” He lifts an eyebrow that says he believes otherwise. I think this is the longest he’s gone without looking at my chest even once. I’m a little worried about him. “Organizing this place from top to bottom is all I’ve been doing for more money.”

“Seriously?”

“Like you didn’t know,” I tease him with a roll of my eyes and a small smile.

“Yeah, I did figure you were doing that to extend your time. But the shorts, are you sure?”

“I’m sure,” I tell him. “I-I like how you look at me.”

“You do?”

I nod my head. “And I like watching you...come.” Those words are spoken softly because I’m embarrassed to admit them. My cheeks warm, but Greer seems to perk up at those words. I swear he puffed out his chest a little.

“We can both look but don’t touch.” He says it as a statement not, a question.

“I didn’t say that.”

“That would...Celeste, you know I would love to touch you, even if it’s one-sided,” he tells me, and I understand exactly what he’s saying. The memory of him on his knees with that woman... And why do I wish he had used his nickname for me instead of my fake one? “Can I just ask for one stipulation to the touching?” he asks, snapping me out of my thoughts.

“Okay?”

“After hours only for the touching. What I mean is, not while you’re on the clock. I won’t pay you for that. Not

because I don't think you're not worth it but because you're worth so much more than I can afford."

Either he just said I'm better than a whore, or I'm an expensive whore, I'm not sure which. And it doesn't matter. "Agreed," I say, biting my lip to keep from smirking.

"Good."

"Great."

Then we just stand there and stare at each other. Greer's eyes finally dip down to my breasts. I know what he sees – my nipples hard, drilling through the thin fabric of my white top. Yes, I wore white today because I knew it would make him crazy.

Eventually, he lifts his gaze and says, "Ready to get to work?"

"Yes," I agree. And today may be the first that I don't try to draw out more hours.



The tension between me and Greer is off the charts the rest of the morning. Anticipation. That's what it is hanging between us, taunting us both. I want him, and we're both wondering what will happen when I'm off the clock today. It's the first day that I've wanted to get off early. Getting off is exactly what I have in mind, but Greer doesn't seem to want to make the first move as he offers me my cash for the day.

"Are you heading out to the beach later?"

"Maybe." I shrug as I slip the cash into my shorts pocket. The shorts I kept on all day, only because I thought that once they were off, I might break Greer's off-the-clock rule.

"I won't come out there again," he says, and then his brow furrows as he reconsiders. "At least not without giving you a heads-up first."

"It's a public beach. You don't need my permission."

Greer fingers scrape over his scruffy jaw. “But you don’t want to be bothered by anyone when you’re out there.”

“I wouldn’t mind your company,” I assure him. “I told you I overreacted yesterday.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” He studies me – my face, not my breasts – and I can’t help but blurt out, “Why did you drink so much last night?”

“Why do you think?” is his instant response.

Me. He got drunk because of me.

“What’s your favorite kind of liquor?” I ask him.

“Jack Daniels. I went through a bottle and a half last night. Why?”

“We should do a shot together before I leave.”

His dark eyes turn heated when he says, “Even if the motel isn’t that far from here, I’m not letting you take a shot and drive off.”

“I didn’t say I was going to drink a shot. I said we should do one together.”

Grabbing the half-full bottle of Jack from the shelf, I take it to the bar counter. Then, I undo my shorts, letting them slide down my legs before I step out of them and my flip-flops to hop up on the bar.

“What are you doing?” Greer asks, sounding both intrigued and slightly nervous.

“Are you mad I have my feet on the bar?” I joke as I straighten my legs out in front of me in my panties and top. Opening the bottle, I lie back nearly flat on my back, lifting my shirt in my free hand as I go. Then, I slowly pour enough amber liquid into my belly button until it overflows. “Oops.”

Glancing over to where Greer hasn’t moved a muscle, I stare at him and wait. His jaw is clenched tight as his eyes roam up and down the length of my body laid out on his bar, wearing only my panties with my shirt tugged up right under

my breasts. I keep hold of the bottle of Jack in case he wants a refill because I have no doubt he's going to take me up on this offer. He's been tugging on his cock this week while watching me work, so I know he'll cave and put his mouth on me now that I'm offering.

"It's time to look and touch, Greer. Oh, and taste."

Those words have him pushing away from the counter and coming over. He stops in front of my belly. His eyes are still exploring what's laid out in front of him when he says, "You know I'm thirsty as hell, Daisy. Once I start licking you, I'm not gonna stop until I taste every inch."

By taste every inch of me, I know he means that spot between my legs. He's warning me, making sure I understand what he plans to do. And I want it so damn much.

"Good thing you're thirsty because I've been soaking wet all day."

One second, Greer is standing beside the bar, and the next, he's vaulting himself up and *onto* the bar. In a smooth move I didn't think the grumpy man was capable of, his knees straddle my lower body on either side of my own, his palms planted next to my hips and face poised right above my stomach. He's intimidatingly big and dominating above me, and I love it. His dark eyes hold mine as he slowly lowers his mouth down, down, down, taking his time, teasing me like I've teased him all week.

Goose bumps erupt down my arms when finally, his tongue darts out, swiping over my belly button to lap up the liquor. My back arches on a whimper, sending the liquid running down my lower belly. Greer is faster than gravity, chasing the whiskey with his tongue, catching every drop before a single one reaches the waistband of my panties. In fact, I'm a little disappointed by how fast he slurped it all up.

When he lifts his mouth, I notice just how hard I'm breathing, my chest rising and falling, my stomach muscles clenching with need.

“Is that what you had in mind, Daisy?” the jackass asks with a smirk, knowing very well that it wasn’t.

Bending my knee, I brush it against the bulge I know is waiting in the front of his pants, making him hiss, and then it’s my turn to be smug. “I guess you weren’t as thirsty as you claimed.”

Greer sits back on his knees and removes his leather cut, taking it off and tossing it on a nearby stool on the other side of the bar. His eyes narrow but remain locked on me as he proceeds to take the liquor bottle from my hand, which I had forgotten I still held. Lifting it to his mouth, he swallows a big swig, then tips the bottle over, spilling the rest of the contents all over me. The amber liquid overflows onto the bar, then the floor, before he flings the empty container over his shoulder.

“Holy shit!” I exclaim. I just got the stickiness off the floor!

I start to sit up. Greer’s mouth is all that stops me as he licks his way up my stomach. My head falls back on the counter hard enough to leave a knot as my body goes limp underneath him. Once I’m down and out, he roughly shoves my shirt up to my neck, revealing my breasts to the cool air.

“These fucking tits,” he grumbles, rubbing the side of his scruffy face between them. “I want to suck them, fuck them, and come all over them.” Greedily, he sucks on the left one as much as he can fit in his mouth. His tongue flutters over it the entire time, making me think of where else I want to feel his tongue.

“Oh, wow,” I moan and squirm. My fingers grip the edges of the bar as tight as possible, like I might fall off despite the man hovering above me. Greer’s upper and lower teeth graze my nipple as he gives it a gentle tug that makes me yelp before he moves to torment the right one. His hands never touch me, only his sexy mouth, his beard rough against my soft, sensitive skin.

My head is spinning, panties soaked from liquor and arousal as he sucks hard enough to leave a hickey. Thank god

my boss finally snapped. Lips finding my neck, he again sucks on my flesh, sending a jolt of pleasure straight down my core.

I moan his name as my hips lift, needing his fingers, mouth, or cock to appease the throbbing between my legs.

As if Greer's having the same problem, he lowers his pelvis to mine, grinding his hardness against me.

"Yes!" I cry out. My legs spread wide to wrap around his waist, needing to feel more of him. But then he moves again, this time down my body. He sucks on the damp skin of my stomach, then lower until finally, finally, he jerks the front of my panties down. Just the glide of his knuckles brushing over my slit as he drags the thong down and off makes me writhe while shouting his name.

Greer's hands finally touch me for the first time. Gripping my raised knees on either side of him, he spreads them apart and pushes them to my chest.

"*Ohhhh god!*" I scream at the first hard swipe of his tongue on my flesh.

Lifting his head, Greer says, "Don't call me god until you get on your knees to worship me with your sexy mouth. Today, it's my turn."

Before I can respond, his tongue slurps me up like I'm his favorite liquor and he doesn't want a drop to go to waste.

The urge to buck my hips is stifled by the way he's still pressing my knees to my chest. That's why I resort to grabbing a handful of his hair and tugging it until his mouth is exactly where I want him so I can...

"*Oh god!*" I scream the words at the top of my lungs as the pleasure overwhelms me. My body thrashes on the bar through the tremors of the best, most intense orgasm of my entire life. It's like nothing I've ever felt before. So good. I feel so damn good and, yes, worshipped. Only an unselfish man who adores a woman would give this kind of world-changing pleasure while getting nothing in return.

But I'm not the only woman Greer's had his tongue in lately, am I? Maybe he just enjoys it. And while he hasn't

asked, I want my mouth on him.

“You...you’re...really good at that,” I tell him honestly as I throw my limp arms over my head. Greer’s grunt sounds like “no shit” as he kisses my inner thighs before sitting back on his heels. The front of his jeans shows how much he enjoyed the act but still needs his own relief.

“I can’t move yet, but if you crawl up here, I’ll suck you off.”

The man looks at me like I just offered him the moon. And as suddenly as his shock and need appeared on his face, they’re replaced with a frown and expression I can’t name.

“Another time.”

He’s turning down my offer? “Are you sure?”

“I’m not paying you for it,” he says.

“I know. I’m off the clock,” I remind him. Teasing him, I ask, “Are you going to dock my pay for the tongue fuck?”

“No. But you do owe me a bottle of Jack Daniels.”

“There wasn’t even half left in that bottle!” I huff indignantly.

“Now there’s none left. That’s the price of getting off on my tongue. Take it or leave it.”

“You’re ridiculous,” I tell him as I climb down and search for my panties. Despite the way I’m still tingling between my legs, I’m also pissed he turned my offer down to pleasure him. “And just so you know, for future reference, I prefer tequila for body shots.”

“BYOB, Daisy.”

“Bring my own bottle?” I can’t help but laugh as I redress, my legs still weak from how badly he made them shake. “You seriously won’t pay for a bottle of tequila to get your dick sucked?”

“I’ll think about it.”

“I’m sure you will, you cheap bastard. You think about your dick in my mouth every time I clean your cum from the floor while kneeling in front of you, don’t you?” I ask, needing to hear him say it.

“Of course I do,” he thankfully admits. “But my dick isn’t going anywhere near your mouth in this bar.”

Separation of work and pleasure. I get it, even if I’m obviously not opposed to the line blurring. Earlier, he only mentioned wanting to touch me after hours. I guess I can’t touch him unless we’re out of the bar.

“Well, you know where my motel room is,” I tell him as I head to the door. “And you better mop that shit up before it gets sticky!”



Greer

I may be the dumbest man in the world. Turning down Celeste’s offer to finally go down on me, to let me fuck her mouth on the bar, that was idiotic.

But I just have to keep things separate. Getting her off at the bar feels great, but I can’t accept anything in return here. Here, in this hellhole where I fuck Suzanne every month.

I know Celeste was thinking about my mouth on the other woman either before, during, or after I licked her pussy. How could she not when that’s what I was doing the first moment we met? Fuck, I hate that too. She saw me at my lowest. But I guess she was at her lowest at that moment too, penniless and homeless.

At least she’s better off now.

Me? I’m digging my hole a little deeper each day.

Still, none of those thoughts kept me from going upstairs to rub one out with Celeste’s flavor still on my tongue, her

scent filling my nose. God, I could eat her pussy all day and night on that bar.

“You look happier tonight. You fuck her?” Remy asks that night.

“No.”

“No?”

“I did eat her out on the bar.”

“Jesus, man!” Remy groans as he lifts his phone and bottle of beer off the bar in a hurry.

“I wiped it down afterward. Besides, there was a lot of whiskey involved, so it basically cleaned itself.”

“Wow. That was like way too much information, man.”

“Sorry. I just had to tell someone.”

“Tell someone that you’re paying her to eat her pussy?”

“I took your advice, fuck you very much. She was off the clock when I had my tongue inside of her.”

“Yeah, okay. I understand how it works. I don’t need the dirty details. But good for you.”

“I have to figure out how to convince her to stay in town.”

“Keep tongue fucking her. That should do the trick.”

“How do you know?”

“Because everyone knows women fall in love with a man after he gives her a bunch of orgasms. It’s like a scientific fact.”

“I think you’re full of shit.”

“And I think you’ll still take my advice, won’t you?”

“Probably,” I admit with a sigh. If orgasms and money are the way to keep Celeste around, then I’ll give her all I have of both.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Greer

“Anything else you need me to do today?” Celeste asks before noon on Monday.

“No, but I’m sure you’ll think of something,” I tease her with a grin as I look up at her standing in the doorway of my office.

“Actually, I was wondering if it’s okay with you if I go ahead and head out.”

She wants to leave? That’s unusual. “You’re done already? You’ve barely been here an hour.”

“I’m not feeling great.”

Shit. Now that she mentions it, her face does seem a little pale. “What’s wrong?” I ask as I get to my feet to go examine her closer.

Celeste takes a step back, though, retreating from me with her hand going to her lower belly. “It’s nothing. Just a bellyache. I’ll be back tomorrow.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?” I ask, wanting to slap my palm on her head and check for a fever, but apparently, she doesn’t want me to touch her right now. “How bad is the pain? Do you need to go to the emergency room?”

Now she gives me a small smile that makes me feel a little better. “I’m fine, Greer. It’s nothing I haven’t dealt with

before. I'm just gonna go lie down. No beach for me today."

"Okay, yeah. Call me if you need anything?"

"I don't have a phone."

"The motel does. You can call the bar, or I can give you my cell number."

"I'm sure I won't need anything, but I'll call the bar if I do," she says confidently. "See you tomorrow."

She turns around and heads to the back door, leaving me standing there, worried and stunned, wishing I could do something to help her. That's when I remember I haven't even paid her for her time today.

"Celeste, wait," I say when I jog to catch up to her. Reaching into my pocket, I pull out two twenties and offer them to her.

"Thanks." She gives me another small smile that worries me more than appeases me before she walks out the door. She's never so...nice. There's always sassiness with Celeste, but today, it's absent.



I can't stop thinking about the mysterious woman and her ailment the rest of the morning. In fact, I'm eating lunch before it finally occurs to me what's probably wrong.

My phone is in my hand, calling my sister a second later to get confirmation from another woman.

"Hey, Greer!" Gina answers cheerfully, my opposite in every way. With a sixteen-year age difference between us, that's not really a surprise.

"How are you? Do you have a minute to talk?" I ask.

"Sure. I'm between classes. Why the call instead of a text?"

"Oh, because I have a question. An odd one."

“Oh-kay...” she drawls. “What’s your question?” she asks while I’m still trying to figure out how to ask it.

“Do women...women get stomachaches during their, ah, time of the month, right?”

“Seriously? My big, bad brother is calling to ask me about periods?”

I wince at the last word. Since sex ed, I’ve known women have monthly cycles, etc., but it wasn’t anything I’ve thought about since. My mom never mentioned it, and Gina was a toddler when I moved out. I’ve never had a girlfriend, no serious relationships where it ever came up.

“Why do you want to know about periods? Oh! Did you meet a girl?”

“No. I have a female employee, and she left early, so...”

“So you want to know if she was lying about the pain?”

“No. No, I believe her. I just was wondering what I could do to, I don’t know, help?”

“That’s so sweet. You like her!”

“She’s my employee,” I repeat, refusing to admit to my little sister that we’ve recently crossed the employee line and fooled around. Gina might be a twenty-three-year-old college student, but she’ll always be my kid sister.

“Well, there’s not much you can do, Greer. The girl needs to curl up with some chocolate, a heating pad, and some Midol.”

“What’s Midol?”

“A pain reliever for periods.”

“Oh. I doubt she has any meds. Or a heating pad.”

“Then she’s aching bad,” my sister remarks. “It sucks, but we deal with it every month.” After a long moment, she says, “So tell me about this employee of yours.”

“There’s nothing to tell. Honestly, I get the feeling she’s just passing through town.” The words leave my lips and feel

like a knife in my gut, knowing Celeste could up and leave any day now. She's not trying to put down roots, just stay fed. Why she's on the move, going from one shit job to the next, living out of her car along the way, is beyond me. And despite Remy's suggestion to increase the number of orgasms I give her, I doubt there's anything I can do to keep her around longer.

Fuck.

Next week will be a month since she started.

A month since Suzanne was here...

"Greer? Are you still there?"

"Yeah, sorry," I reply. "Thanks for the information. I probably should know this period shit by now."

"No kidding."

"Could you text me like what supplies..."

Laughing, Gina says, "I'm sure she has her own supplies, Greer!"

"They're pretty expensive, right?"

"Yeah, but..."

"She can barely afford to feed herself, so..."

"Wow. Okay, I'll send a text with photos of the products if that will help."

"Yes, it would," I agree since the words probably wouldn't mean a damn thing to me anyway. "How's Mom?" I can't help but ask before ending the call.

"She's good."

Two words, and that's it.

"Well, tell her I said hello."

"You could call and tell her yourself," she suggests. But both of us know I won't.

My mom still hasn't forgiven me for getting our old man locked up when I was sixteen. Gina had just been born, and I

refused to let him lay a hand on her. I couldn't protect my mom, or myself, but that baby girl... I remember my determination so clearly. I hatched a plan to get rid of my father. I got him good and angry one night after he had been drinking, and then I went to the police.

My choices were to turn him in or kill him. I decided I wanted him to spend years in prison rather than do the time myself. I should've known he would do something stupid to get himself killed before his release date.

The three of us were all better off without him, even if my mom still refuses to admit it. And Gina, well, I think my sister blames me for never having the chance to get to know our father. I wish she could understand that she's better off, safer without him in her life. My sister never had to deal with the constant bruises and broken bones. She never heard the screaming. She didn't hear our mom constantly crying, pleading for him to stop hurting her.

Still, despite the pain, our mom loved the drunk, temperamental son of a bitch. She thought he would or could change. I knew he wouldn't.

"Good luck with your employee lady friend," Gina says, drawing me out of the nightmares of my past.

"Thanks," I tell her before ending the call.



Celeste

When I see Greer standing on the other side of the motel door through the peephole, my first thought is that he's finally coming to collect on that blowjob I offered the other day. The second is that this is the worst time ever because my abdomen currently feels like it's being ripped apart in opposite directions.

"Greer? What are you doing here?" I ask through the door.

“I know it’s late, but...” he starts as I brace for the booty call request. “But my sister said this stuff might help you.”

“What?”

“Will you open the door this time, or should I just leave the bag on the stoop?” When he turns to the side, I see the plastic bag in his hand.

Curious, I undo the locks to open the door for him.

“Hey,” he says as he eyes me up and down, taking in my favorite baggy pajamas. If I could only bring one with me from home, I’m glad it was these, even if they’ll always remind me of that final night...

“Were you expecting me to sleep in a lace teddy or something?” I tease him.

“What? No,” he replies before a grin spreads across his face. “In my dreams, you sleep in the nude.”

“Of course I do.” I can’t resist rolling my eyes. “What did I tell you about asking a woman before you jerk off thinking about her?”

“I didn’t figure you would mind since I jerk off in front of you all the time. You have to know that you’re the only one I think about when I’m alone with my hand.”

Somewhere in that dirty statement may have been a morsel of something sweet.

“What are you doing here? Isn’t the bar about to open?”

“Yeah, so I can’t stay but a moment. One of the prospects filled in for me while I went out to grab all this.” He offers me the bag in his hand.

Peeking inside, I find a thin box that has the words “Heating Pad” on it, several candy bars, feminine products – the good stuff, not the knockoff brands I’ve been using – and a small box of Midol.

“Uh...” I start, not sure what to say.

“My sister said the heating pad and meds helps when she’s...with the cramps, and that it never hurts to have

chocolate too.”

“Oh.” He has a sister? Wow. And he didn’t come over for a blowjob. He brought me a period survival kit. Something warm and fuzzy spreads all through me.

“Thanks, Greer. That’s...really sweet of you.”

He shrugs. “I just wanted to do something. I don’t like the idea of you in pain.”

He doesn’t like the idea of me in pain. Or penniless. Or homeless.

That warmth begins to settle in an area of my belly that’s been aching all day, and I just move without thinking. Grabbing the front collar of Greer’s shirt with my free hand, I pull him to me until he’s close enough for me to stand on my toes to press my lips to his.

It’s the first time our mouths have ever met, despite the fact that his lips have been between my legs.

The kiss is soft, Greer obviously caught off guard by my sudden attack. But as soon as I sweep my tongue over his parted lips, he gets into it. Both of his hands are now free, so they spear through my hair, tilting my face to kiss me deeper.

This man...

There are no words for him, his generosity, his soft heart under his grumpy exterior. I want him so much that I curse the stupid time of the month.

But we can still do other things...

I peel my lips from Greer’s but keep the grip on his shirt to tug him into the motel room. Once he’s in, I shut and lock the door behind him.

“Ah, I should get back to the bar,” he says softly.

No. No, I refuse to let him reject me again. He wants me, I know he does. Why else would he go to all the trouble of buying me period shit?

“Sit,” I direct him, pointing my finger to the foot of the nearby bed, still messy from where I was just wallowing in it.

“What’s going on, Celeste?”

“Just sit down and shut up,” I tell him again. When he arches an eyebrow, I add, “Please?”

Finally, he lowers his ass to the mattress. His palms slide up and down the top of his jean-covered thighs as if he’s nervous. I place the bag of goods next to him, then step between his legs to spread them wider, making room for me to kneel between them. Greer looks confused, his brow furrowed at first, until I reach for the button on his jeans.

“Fuck,” he bites out. “Celeste, you don’t have to...”

“Shut up,” I tell him again. My fingers slide his zipper down, then pause. “Unless you really don’t want me to put my mouth on your dick?”

“*Fuck*,” he says again, the swear more drawn out this time. “Hell yes, I want your mouth on me. But not now, not if you’re hurting.”

“You know what else I’ve found that helps with the cramps?” I ask him.

“What?”

“Getting myself off.”

“You...”

“Oh yeah. Orgasms even last longer during that time.”

“And you’re gonna get yourself off now?”

“Yes.”

“While you suck my dick?”

“Uh-huh,” I agree. “Now, will you let me pull your pants down?”

Without another word, Greer lifts his hips and shoves the denim down, along with his cotton boxer briefs. His semi-hard cock pops up as the material frees it. I don’t give him any more time to make excuses. Wrapping my hand around the base of his shaft, I hold him still, dipping my head down to lick his crown.

“Ah, fuck, Daisy,” he whispers as he leans back, hands braced on either side of the mattress as he stares down at me. “I could come just seeing you on your knees.”

“I know,” I tell him. “You have. Several times, remember?”

When he flashes me a knowing grin, I put his entire cockhead in my mouth to suck it, making his head fall back on a swear-filled groan.

“Goddamn, Celeste,” he grunts as I run my tongue up and down his shaft, over the vein and all around to get him nice and wet so he’ll slide down my tongue easier.

Seeing him look so wrecked by my touch, my mouth, turns me on more than being on my knees ever has before. Not that I’ve done it many times, and not recently.

I love the smell of the leather that always lingers on him, his salty flavor that I taste when I squeeze him, and he growls.

Finally taking pity on him, I part my lips to take him deep, sliding over my tongue again and again.

Greer stares down at me with heavy-lidded eyes. He keeps his hands on either side of him, fisting the bedding as if he’s trying to keep his hands off me, off my bobbing head. I move my mouth faster and faster up and down his cock, my lips burning from being stretched around his girth. He’s the perfect size, not too thick or long enough to hurt but big enough that I can’t stop thinking about him between my legs.

That reminds me...

Reaching down, I press my fingers to my clit. Even through my clothes and with feminine products, it feels good enough to make me moan. Greer feels the vibration, and apparently, it snaps the last of his control. His hands shove into my hair on both sides like when he kissed me, and his hips buck, driving him deep into my mouth.

“Five more seconds,” he grits out between clenched teeth. “Give me five more before...”

I don't let him finish his sentence. I apply suction all the way around his shaft.

"Oh fuck!" he exclaims as I suck and swallow hard enough that his cock thickens and then pulses with his release down my throat. I keep my lips sealed around him while my tongue works over his head, the explosion of his orgasm triggering my own as my fingers dance over my clit.

I pull my mouth off him and gasp through my orgasm as Greer pants, "Jesus, Celeste," then falls flat on his back on the bed.

I wish I could tell him the truth, tell him my real name so he doesn't have to call me by someone else's. Since I can't tell him all that, I fix his pants and crawl up on the mattress next to him to say, "Daisy is growing on me."

Greer's head lolls over to look at me, brow furrowed again in confusion before understanding dawns. "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

Sitting up, Greer's big palm cradles the side of my face as his lips find mine. Pulling back, he whispers, "Thanks for that."

I shrug since saying you're welcome for the blowjob doesn't seem like the right thing to say.

"Now, take your meds and plug in the heating pad, you stubborn woman."

"Okay." I flash him a smile, not minding those orders.

"I better get back to the bar."

"Yeah, you should," I agree, even though I wish he could stay here. It would be nice to just curl up in bed with him and watch shitty television.

"See you tomorrow?" he asks as he stands up and adjusts his clothes.

"Yeah, I'll see you tomorrow."

And it's not a lie this time. I will definitely see him tomorrow, even if I shouldn't.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Greer

Tonight, the last thing I expected when I went to Celeste's hotel room was for her to go down on me.

I wanted to protest. I tried to refuse her because I knew she was hurting. But she was so insistent, and fuck, I wanted her lips around my cock so bad.

I left the motel on my bike, knowing that I have to figure out something else with Suzanne. I've known it since I first saw Celeste. But then tonight, she kissed me, and everything feels different.

I've got one week to apply for a business loan, to sell my soul, or take whatever drastic measure it takes to keep the bar and her.

During any downtime I get at the bar, I start my research, ready to figure out what it will take to fix the shit I got myself into.



Maybe my eyes are playing tricks on me, but I swear Celeste looks even more beautiful when she walks into the bar the next morning in the bright, early sunshine, wearing the same yellow top and short jean shorts that she had on the first day she came in. Not that she has many options of clothing, but it's still my

favorite outfit, no matter how many times I see the shirt and shorts on her.

“Hey,” she says in greeting.

“Hey,” I reply from where I was waiting for her, holding the front door open and feeling like an awkward dipshit teenager. I don’t know if I should try to hug her, kiss her, or pretend she’s just my employee. I wish I could pay her to tell me what she’s thinking, what she wants me to do.

“How are you feeling?” I ask, and she stops abruptly about a foot away from me and the door as if she’s considering getting back in her car and fleeing from the question.

“Better. I’m fine. It’s really no big deal.” She twirls her car’s key ring around her finger instead of looking at me.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. The first day is always the worst,” she explains before finally looking back up at me. “Not that you needed or wanted to know that.”

“No, I’m glad you’re feeling better. And I’m sorry you have to deal with that shit every month.”

“So am I,” she says with a grin when she comes closer, drawing my gaze to her full lips. It’s impossible not to think about them wrapped around my dick last night.

And even though I’m not sure where we stand after that, I throw out an arm to stop her from just walking past me and place a kiss on her cheek. Celeste, thankfully, turns her head to mine, letting me capture those perfect lips with my own to kiss her properly.

She grips two handfuls of my shirt under my leather cut to pull me closer. At the same time, one of my hands moves to cup the back of her neck, and my arm winds around her waist. I pull her inside the bar to let the door shut behind us, making sure to lock it. Then I press Celeste’s back to the wooden structure so I can crush the front of my body to hers, brushing my chest against her tits.

When my lips move down to her neck, Celeste tilts her head to the side to give me access but then says, “Greer?”

“Yeah, Daisy?”

“What are we doing?”

My lips pause at the place where her shoulder and neck meet. I sigh over her skin, making her shiver. “Do you mean right now or in general?” I ask as I lift my head to see her face again.

“The latter. The former may depend on how you answer,” she says with a closed-lip smile.

“I don’t know what we’re doing,” I tell her honestly. “I guess that’s up to you, right? So...what do you say?”

“Last night, the other day on the bar, I want those things to happen again.”

“Me too,” I tell her honestly because I don’t think I’ll ever get enough of her mouth on me. And tasting her? Fuck, I would eat her pussy all day, every day if she would let me.

“Are you...do you do those things at night in the bar?”

“What?” I ask in confusion.

“Do you fool around with other women who come into the bar? Do you ever see that woman at night?”

“No. No, to both,” I amend. “I haven’t been with anyone since that day you came in.”

“But you never told me who she is or if you two are still seeing each other.”

“We’re not together, and I don’t want to see her again.” That is also the truth. Avoiding her, though, may be problematic. Just because I don’t want to see her doesn’t mean it won’t happen. Not that I’m going to explain that to Celeste. I don’t like keeping that shit from her, but it’s not like I’m the only one with secrets. “How about I’ll tell you more about her after you tell me why you avoid people?”

Her lips purse together, making it clear she’s not going to talk.

“That’s what I thought,” I say through my clenched teeth as I take my hands off her and step back. Heading behind the bar, I grab my phone and keys. “I need to go to the store.”

“Right now?” Celeste asks as she pushes off the door to approach me. “What about breakfast?”

“Cook something for yourself or don’t. I’ll pick up something while I’m out,” I tell her when I reach for the door. “Need anything?”

“No.”

“Then I’ll see you later,” I say before closing and locking the door behind me.

I don’t know why I’m running away. It just feels like we’re in the middle of our first fight, and...I fucking hate it.

I hate that I can’t tell Celeste the truth about Suzanne because I’m so goddamn ashamed. I wish I had never agreed to do what she wanted in the first place. All those times before Celeste even showed up in town make me feel cheap and dirty, but now, with the way I feel about my new employee...

I don’t want Celeste to know because I’m afraid she’ll never let me touch her again once she finds out the pathetic lows I’ve stooped to in my life or some of the foul things I’ve done.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Celeste

So, I get the feeling that Greer is mad at me. The harshness of his voice was the first sign. The second was when he didn't come back to the bar after he was supposed to be going to the grocery store.

I think we had our first argument. And while I want to believe that he doesn't hook up with any women in the bar at night when I'm not around, I'm not sure I trust him that much yet.

Of course, I understand why he got angry. I haven't told him why I was living out of my car or why I try to avoid running into anyone in town.

I do my normal chores throughout the bar to get it ready for tonight, then go upstairs to the loft, cleaning it from top to bottom.

Greer's bed looks especially cozy once I make it. I washed the sheets two days ago, so it's not time to wash them again. I can smell his leather and masculine soap all over it, especially on the pillows. Feeling ridiculous, I lean down a little further, trying to sniff out any feminine fruity scents, girly shampoos, or perfume. Thankfully, I don't catch even a hint of a woman's scent.

And what do I do once my insane sniff test is done?

Since I can't touch Greer at the moment, I slip my flip-flops off to lie down on top of the made-up bed that smells like him, cuddling down on one pillow while clenching the other to my chest. The bed is soft, and with his scent surrounding me, I feel...safe.

That's not something I've felt in a long time. Sleeping in the motel room is slightly easier than in my car. At least there's a door with a lock. But whenever I do get a few hours of sleep, I startle awake, worried he's found me, that he's standing beside the bed watching me again.

Here in Greer's loft with two locked doors between me and the parking lot, it feels like nothing can touch me, only Greer. But since he hasn't come back after our argument, I begin to think he may not put his hands on me again.

I was only planning to close my eyes and relax for a few minutes before I got up and smoothed out the bedding before Greer caught me lounging in his bed.

But apparently, I fell asleep. When I open my eyes, someone is there, watching me sleep from the other side of the bed. He doesn't scare me, though. Mostly, because it's his bed, and secondly, because I know he won't hurt me. At least not intentionally.

"Shit, sorry," I say as I sit up and swipe my fingers over my mouth to make sure I wasn't drooling. Thankfully, I didn't.

"I'm not paying you for sleeping in my bed." His voice isn't as terse as it was this morning, making me certain he's just teasing me. Still, I feel like a fool for sleeping on the job.

"I wasn't planning to go to sleep. I just don't sleep great at night. What time is it?"

"A little after three," he replies. "And why don't you sleep great at night?"

"Three? In the afternoon?" I repeat, ignoring his question.

"Yeah. The bar's about to open."

"Shit!" I exclaim again as I get up and slip my flip-flops back on my feet. "I got everything done while you were gone,"

I assure him.

“I noticed.”

I start for the stairway but pause to ask, “Where have you been?” Now I sound like a stalker or a jealous girlfriend demanding to know his every move. “Never mind. It’s none of my business.”

“Celeste, wait,” Greer says, making my feet freeze. I hear his heavy footsteps stomp across the floor behind me.

“I’m sorry for earlier,” I glance over my shoulder to tell him, figuring he’s waiting for an apology. “And for sleeping in your bed.”

“I don’t give a shit that you slept in my bed,” he huffs, his fingers jabbing into his dark hair that looks messier than usual. I think there’s a week’s worth of scruff on his face too. Was I only asleep for a few hours or days?

“But you give a shit about what I asked earlier? It’s none of my business, I know...”

“Yes, I didn’t like your questions,” he replies. “But not for the reason you think. I’m not seeing her. I don’t want to see her again. Her or anyone else. And that can be your business if you want it to be.”

I think he’s trying to offer me an olive branch, a chance to give him a little trust in exchange for his. I just can’t.

As if realizing my lips are going to stay sealed, Greer says, “Fine. Don’t tell me. I wish you would, but I understand that there are some things we have to keep to ourselves.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” I tell him before I blurt everything out and beg him to help me. That’s the one thing I will never do. Maybe I’ve hung around town longer than I should’ve stayed already. It’s almost been a month.

“Wait,” Greer says again, grabbing my arm gently to halt me but not to hurt me. “Will you promise me something?”

“Depends on what it is.”

“Will you tell me before you up and leave?”

How did he know what I was thinking? I don't have a chance to ask him before he offers up an explanation.

"You've got that terrified, ready-to-bolt look in your eyes like you had the first few days."

Nodding, I wet my lips, then tell him the truth. "I can't stay here much longer."

"But you'll tell me before you leave?"

"I'll try," I say since that's as much of a promise as I can give him. "I have to go...before the happy-hour customers come in."

"I know," he says with a sigh, like it's not what he wanted to hear but will accept it nonetheless. "See you tomorrow?"

"Yeah, see you then," I reply. I really do hope I get to see him tomorrow. If I don't, I know I'll regret it. And that's a scary feeling.

I've been getting too close to Greer. I'm being so damn selfish. It's not fair to put him in that sort of danger.

Tomorrow should be the last day in Rockland.

But I'm not sure if I can make myself leave just yet.



Greer

She's leaving.

Celeste is going to fucking up and leave, and I get the feeling that there's not a damn thing I can do to stop her.

Part of the reason I think she'll go is because she doesn't trust me completely, especially not after our initial introduction. I have to convince her that I haven't screwed around behind her back, and that I'm not keeping any secrets that would be dealbreakers.

I wish she would come to the bar at night to see for herself, but I know that's not going to happen. I just wish I knew why.

She fell asleep in my bed for hours, and when I woke her up, she said she doesn't sleep great at the motel. Probably for the same reason she looked exhausted the day we met from sleeping in her car.

It's not safe. She doesn't feel safe.

So why won't she let me help her? Protect her?

And fuck, she didn't even ask for her pay before she ran off again today. That's not like her at all. I'm not sure what she's been saving up for, but I assume it's to help her keep running from whatever or whoever is chasing her.

I wish I could beg her to stay. But I can't. At least not yet. First, I have to get rid of Suzanne before I can do anything else with Celeste.

That's why I spend the day at the local banks, applying for the business loans I found in my search last night.

My fingers are crossed that they'll come through in time because the end of the month is just around the corner.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Greer

The money from the business loan dropped into my account yesterday, thank fuck. It wasn't even a quarter of what I needed, but it's something, so I won't be empty-handed when I tell Suzanne to fuck off.

At the sound of her knock on the front door, right on schedule unfortunately, I find Celeste in my office and ask her, "Can you go upstairs while I deal with some business?"

"Business?"

"Someone's here, so unless you want them to see you, get upstairs." That threat should work better than any other with her.

The knock sounds again, so I jerk my head toward the stairs.

"Fine," she huffs before she finally gets up to leave.

"And stay up there until I tell you that you can come down."

"Wow. You're a bigger dick today than most," she grumbles as she walks past me.

"I'm just helping you avoid people," I mutter.

"Right."

Once I hear her footsteps on the stairs, I take a deep breath, then go grab the white envelope bulging with cash that I tucked in the register for safekeeping.

As soon as I open the door, a smile spreads across Suzanne's face. "Hi there."

Her shoulder-length blonde hair is perfectly coiffed like usual. Her sleeveless black top and white skirt probably cost more than I made all month. Like usual, she smells like money, thanks to some expensive perfume. I used to consider it was a nice, inviting smell. Now, it turns my stomach.

I reminded her of my text that she blatantly ignored. "I told you I would meet you somewhere else later today."

"I couldn't wait. I've been thinking about your tongue all month. Too bad you were busy last week."

The woman needs to get a hobby other than spending her dead husband's money. I could only put her off for a week to buy myself more time on the loan. She refused to let me meet at her place, probably because she doesn't want any of her uppity friends to see me at her estate and think she's been slumming it with biker trash. Which she has, of course; she just doesn't want anyone in her social circle to know.

"Yeah, I had some shit I needed to take care of first. And that's why I wanted to meet you somewhere else. Here." I hold out the envelope to her, but she doesn't take it.

"What's that?"

"This month's rent."

"Rent?"

"That's right. Take it. Our previous agreement is over."

Slowly, she lifts her hand to accept the thick envelope from me with only two fingers, like it's filthy. "Over?"

"Yes."

"And why is that?" Her glare says it all – she's pissed. It's probably not even because she'll miss the sex. She doesn't like that I'm rejecting her. In fact, she looks furious, like she wants

to beat me upside my head repeatedly with the stack of cash. Guess she's used to always getting what she wants.

"You want to know why? Well, it's just not going to work for me any longer."

"You're seeing someone, aren't you?" she huffs in understanding.

There is no fucking way I'm going to tell her a word about Celeste.

"No. No, I'm not seeing anyone. I just...we're done."

Yes, at first, when money was tight and the horny widow offered me a deal, I said hell yes. It's not like I have any time for dates or sex anyway while running the bar every night. And pussy is pussy. Or so I thought. Suzanne is perfect and beautiful, which made me want to dirty her up, fuck her hard and fast like she begged for. Now, though, it feels like I'm the one she's made dirtier.

Suzanne's cheeks are a bright shade of red when she waves the envelope around. "How much is this?"

"Twelve hundred."

"If our...deal is off, then you're going to have to get caught up on your back rent."

"Caught up? What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Don't use that biker language with me."

I rub my forehead as I try to even figure out an estimate of that math. It's way too much... "Suzanne, seriously, what back rent? What are you even talking about?"

"Our deal was based on our ongoing agreement. If you're done, then you owe me for the past six months."

Gritting my teeth together, I tell her, "That's fucking bullshit, and you know it!"

"Language!" she sneers at me like I'm a child.

I want to tell her to go fuck herself, but I don't. She's still my landlord whether I like it or not. "You know I don't have

that much cash.”

“Then I guess it’s time for me to sell this building and be done with it.”

“There’s no way I can get a loan big enough to buy it from you!”

“I know. That’s too bad.”

“So, because of your jealousy, I’m going to lose my bar?”

“It was never *yours*. You were just leasing the building from my late husband.”

“You’re a fucking bitch,” I tell her. There’s no point holding my tongue any longer. She’s angry, and she’s not going to change her mind. “Did you actually think I would want to screw your dry cunt forever?”

With a huff, she turns and stomps off to her car, taking the cash I bent over backward for while at the same time screwing me one final time.

I slam the door so hard the building shakes, and it bounces open again. Pressing my shoulder to it, I shut it and lock up.

The silence in the bar doesn’t last long.

“Are you okay?” Celeste asks quietly. When I glance over to the bar, I find her in the same damn place she stood and watched me and Suzanne fuck last month.

“I told you to wait upstairs!”

“Something’s wrong –”

“It’s none of your fucking business!”

“Greer...”

Her face, the way she says my name, it’s all in pity, letting me know she heard it all. She knows exactly what was going on, even though I told her to keep her ass upstairs.

Going behind the bar, I grab a bottle of Jack and take a big swig while staring at the wall, unable to even face her.

“That’s right, Celeste. I whored myself out to that bitch to keep the bar. Now you know I wasn’t lying when I told you I

couldn't fucking afford to hire you!"

"I'm sorry..." She pauses, then adds, "I'm sorry you had to do that."

And that's the final straw that makes me lose it. Having her know the truth feels even worse than I thought it would. I swear the fancy breakfast she made this morning is about to come right back up.

"She shouldn't have –" she starts, but I can't listen to another word from her. The shame is too much to deal with. And now I know it was all for nothing. The bottle in my hand goes hurling across the bar, hitting the dartboard all the way on the other side.

"Greer, let me help."

"Help?" I snap, finally turning to look at her. "You can't even help your fucking self!" I take my anger, my humiliation, my goddamn failure out on her.

"I can help if you'll let me..."

"Fuck you."

"Fuck me? Fuck me because I offered to return the favor by trying to help you keep the bar?"

I can't do this. I can't have this conversation about my business going belly up with her. The bar may have been a shitty, pain-in-the-ass place, but at least it was mine. The past few weeks, Celeste even made it look like less of a hellhole. There's not a single inch of the building that doesn't remind me of her. But I know it's only a matter of time before she up and leaves me and this town. She doesn't trust me enough to tell me what she's running from or ask me to help, and she never will. Once I lose the bar, I'll lose every last piece of her too.

"Get out," I tell her because it's time to face the music. We're done. The bar is done.

"What?" she huffs.

I don't even know what to say. You can't break up with someone you were never with to begin with, can you? No, she

was just a desperate girl passing through town, needing a job. One I gave her and she repaid me for by driving me fucking crazy by being a goddamn tease.

Celeste was never going to be mine in any way but one – the guy who gives her cash.

And I'm fucking done being him.

“We're done. You're fired.” The words burn my throat, or maybe it feels raw for the same reason my eyes are burning. Now I wish I had finished the bottle of Jack before throwing it.

“What?”

I scrub my palms over my face. “You heard me. Get. Out.”

When I drop my hands, she's just staring at me. Her green eyes begin to glisten, and it fucking breaks me. I head for the front door, needing to get out of here, to hit something or someone, to take off leave this shit behind...

“Seriously? We're done?” Celeste yells at my back. “Then why did you end shit with her today of all days, Greer? Tell me...tell me it wasn't for me!” Her words catch on a sob that I feel pierce through my soul. And still, because I'm too furious at myself to admit the truth to her, I lie through my teeth when I say, “It wasn't for you,” before I walk out the door.



It takes all of about ten seconds after the bar door slams shut behind me for me to regret everything I said, the rash decision to push Celeste away because I was so goddamn embarrassed. She knows what I feel for her. She figured out what I was doing, and I fucking hate it.

Still, I climb on my Harley and take off down the road. I hit the first two curves too fast and nearly lose control of my bike. In my rush to leave, I left my helmet in the bar. The threat of having my brains smeared on the asphalt has me slowing down. I can't die today, not yet. Not when everything is so fucked.

I hate the way my entire body aches because I hurt her. A few words from my mouth are responsible for the pickaxe digging into every single bone at the exact same time. One fucking fight with Celeste, and it's like I've lost my center of gravity. The whole world is off-kilter. The road underneath my tires is unstable.

And it'll stay that way until I fix shit with her.

I know what it'll take.

I have to suck up my humiliation and apologize to her. Then, I have to try to explain why I did what I did before begging Celeste to forgive me for taking out my anger, my fuckup, on her.

That's the part that takes me the longest, figuring out what to say. But eventually, I turn around and drive straight to Remy's motel.

The parking lot is crowded, more crowded than I expected. I circle through it three times, searching for Celeste's car. Not seeing it, I back my bike into an empty spot to wait for her, however long it takes. That's when I spot Remy strolling out of the office, heading straight for me.

"You looking for Celeste?" he asks as he approaches.

"Yeah."

"She's gone."

"Gone?" I exclaim as I scramble off my bike.

"She turned in her keys a little while ago, thanked me, and left."

She turned in her keys for the free room she was living in, even though she can't afford a hotel room, much less an apartment? She'll be sleeping in her goddamn car again, and it's my fucking fault.

"Fuck!" I shout to the sky. My fist clenches, and it takes every ounce of my restraint not to slam it into something.

"Whoa, man. Calm down," Remy says, taking a step back as if he knows I'm a powder keg about to explode. "What the

hell happened?”

“Nothing,” I mutter as I throw my leg over the seat. “Get out of the way.”

“Hold up,” Remy says, putting a foot on the front wheel before I can crank the engine again. I don’t give two shits if he’s giving me an order as his prospect. The only reason I don’t turn the key is because he’s my friend, and I have no fucking idea where I would even go to try and find her.

“You’re not gonna tell me what happened, are you?” he asks.

“No.”

“Maybe she’ll come back,” he says, making me scoff. “Hard to pass up a free room, right?”

“I appreciate you letting her stay here,” I tell him. “I know she did too.”

“It’s nothing.”

“That’s bullshit.” I glance around at the most cars I’ve seen in the lot in months. “Every room is booked, isn’t it? I told you to let me know if you needed her out of the room.”

“Eh, it’s not like I really need the money. Avery is used to being broke now. She thinks it keeps me humble.”

I shake my head, unable to even force a grin at his attempt at humor.

“So what did you do to fuck things up with Celeste?” I like how he immediately assumes it was my fault.

“I fired her.”

“Wow. That explains her red eyes.”

“What? She was fucking crying?”

“Ah, it was probably just allergies,” he hedges while scratching the scuff of his unshaven face. “Why did you fire her?”

“Hell, I couldn’t afford her in the first place. But today, she overheard shit she shouldn’t have...it’s all fucked-up.”

“Call her. Tell her you fucked up and beg for forgiveness on her voicemail if she won’t answer.”

“She doesn’t have a phone. Fuck! I should’ve bought her a phone.”

“Goddamn. She’s really that broke?”

“I don’t think a lack of funds is the only reason she doesn’t want a phone,” I grit out. “Something’s up with her. She wouldn’t tell me what, but she refused to work the front of the bar, to be around any customers. I don’t even know her last name or where she’s from...”

“Maybe she’s just shy.”

“It’s more than that. I wish I fucking knew what, though.”

“Reece, the IT genius for the original Kings, could probably find out for you.”

“I’m sure he would love having a prospect give him work to do.”

“Oh, right. About that,” Remy says. “I was gonna give you a heads-up tonight. Tomorrow’s our monthly meeting. It’s time for the big vote.”

“What big vote?” I ask, wondering why he’s telling me shit now when he knows that I’ve got more important things on my mind.

“The vote on giving you your patches, dumbass.”

“Oh. Already?”

“Already? You want to keep wearing that fucking prospect rocker?”

“Fuck no.”

“Then come to the meeting tomorrow night. You’ll have to wait in the garage until the vote, but I’m sure everyone will want to congratulate you when we hand over the patches.”

“I can’t close the bar,” I tell him. Now more than ever, I need every penny I can scrape together. Not that it’ll ever be enough.

Fuck, I'm gonna lose the damn place, and there's nothing I can do about it. There's no way I'm telling Remy that pathetic truth today, though.

"Hollis can cover for you."

"Who?"

"Bear's prospect," Remy clarifies. I've seen the quiet military man around plenty of times the past few months, but I didn't know his name. Everyone just calls him prospect. "I'm sure the former soldier can sling a few beers for a couple hours. If Reece cleared him, then I seriously doubt he's a thief."

"Fine," I huff since I'm ready to finally get the damn patches. Being a prospect, wearing the blank cut, makes me feel like a child.

"Don't sound so excited. You know Jordan would kill to be in your spot. He's still got some time to put in and some growing up to do."

"Yeah, I know. It's just everything with Celeste..."

"Shit with her will work itself out."

"How can you say that when I don't fucking know where she went or how to contact her?"

"Get your patches, then talk to Reece. If anyone can find her, it's him."

"If you say so."



Celeste

Well, it's time to start all over again, just as soon as I cross the southern border into Mexico.

I hate it, but at least I have the money I saved from working for Greer. From teasing him and fooling around with

him mostly.

Damn him! Damn him for not telling me and then for pushing me away when I found out who the woman was from that first day.

I had a feeling that it was something...ugly from the way he avoided talking about her. I should've made him tell me before this morning.

The fact that he broke things off with her meant something, no matter what he said. *I* meant something to him.

And yet, he let his pride override whatever he felt for me instead of just being honest.

Deep down, I know he did me a favor.

It's for the best that I'm leaving Rockland now. I stayed too long as it is. It's not like I could stick around forever. I *have* to keep moving and starting over. Greer firing me was the best for both of us.

Because no matter how pissed I am at Greer right now for hurting me, I never want him to suffer for being with me. I couldn't handle it if he got hurt or sent to prison for shit he didn't do.

I kept my secrets from him to keep him safe, while he kept secrets to hide his financial problems from me.

I knew that the bar wasn't making much money, that he was telling the truth about not being able to hire me because he could barely afford to keep the lights on. If there was a way for me to help him, I would have. But I can't even use my full name or check my bank account without worrying it'll be flagged, that my location will be revealed to the wrong person.

At least this time, I'm on the road with a little more cash than I had before, thanks to Greer. I have money for gas and can even afford a hotel for a few nights, which is all I hope it'll take to get to the border. I don't know what I'll need for the border crossing, but I'm sure I'll be able to figure something out without resorting to hiding in a trunk. I'll do whatever it takes, though.

Ugh, but keeping my attention on the road tonight isn't as easy as it should be. There's a burning ache in the center of my chest that's been there since Greer fired me.

And I'm not sure if it'll ever go away no matter how far I drive.

Unlike before, I can't ever escape Greer or the way he made me feel. We may have only had a few weeks together, but they were the best of my life.

I thought opening my own restaurant, maybe even starting a franchise, was what I needed to be happy in my life.

It turns out I was wrong. I wasn't missing something to make me feel whole. I was missing someone.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Greer

“**Y**ou look like you’re awaiting an execution tonight rather than becoming a member of one of the biggest clubs in the country,” Jordan says to me as I sit slumped in the front waiting area of RJ’s garage.

“It’s just a few patches,” I tell him.

He scoffs before hopping up on the counter, legs dangling free. “Just a few patches. If I were a Savage King, I would kick your ass across town for that.”

“Too bad you’re just a prospect like me. Honestly, I wouldn’t mind an ass kicking.”

“Hot girl dump you?” he asks.

“We weren’t even together.”

“You were hooking up, though, right?”

I glare at him in response.

“I don’t need the details. It was obvious you were thunderstruck by her weeks ago.”

“She left town. There’s no way to call her or find her...”

“The club has connections. They’ll find her for you.”

“How? Celeste probably wasn’t even her real name.”

“You got a photo of her?”

“No,” I answer before I remember the security footage.
“But I do have a video.”

“Even better. With facial recognition or whatever, the Kings’ IT guy can track her down. One of the perks of being a member. They can do all sorts of cool shit like that.”

“If you say so.”

“You’ll be kissing their asses and singing their praises when they find her,” the kid says with a smirk.

“Don’t you have anything better to do tonight?” I ask him.

Grinning wider, he replies, “I may have someone to do later.”

“Why not do them now? Never know when you’ll lose her.”

“Or him,” he adds.

“Or him,” I agree.

“After Thane came out, some of his Devil Hounds buddies admitted they were bicurious.”

“Good for them.”

“The Savage Kings are one of the few clubs that don’t have a problem with who their members fuck. It’s why I wanted to join them. Abel, Hugo’s friend, is in a throuple with a man and a woman. How fucking awesome is that?”

“Two people to keep happy? No fucking thank you. I couldn’t manage it with just one.”

Thankfully, voices echo from the garage before Remy, his brothers, and Hugo walk into the connected office.

“Congrats, man,” Remy says as he slaps the big manilla envelope in his hand against my chest.

It’s not sealed, so I look inside, finding the rockers, skull king patch, and a smaller Rockland one for the front of my cut. There’s also a thick document, most likely the rules of the club.

“Thanks,” I tell him.

“You weren’t ever much of a prospect. Never did a minute of grunt work for us,” Remy says with a grin. “But you keep us liquored up every night, which is more important. We appreciate you taking care of us all at the bar and are glad to have you at our table. See you there next month.”

“Yeah, I’ll be there,” I agree before all the guys give me a handshake and back-slapping hug.

I can’t help but wonder if I’ll be out on the street looking for a job and a place to live by the time the next Savage Kings meeting comes around. I guess it depends on how fast Suzanne sells the place.

Fuck me. I’m about to be in the exact same situation as Celeste. I’m so lost in those thoughts I don’t even realize that everyone is still crammed in the office watching me.

“Greer, man, try to contain your excitement, would ya?” Colt teases.

“Sorry. Lot of shit on my mind.”

As if he knows what I’m thinking, Remy says, “Have you heard from Celeste yet?”

“No. Not that I expect to. She’s probably halfway to Canada or Mexico by now, running from whatever the fuck is chasing her.” Realizing the whole crew is listening, I add, “If anyone asks, you’ve never seen Celeste around here. Got it?”

“Sure, man,” Remy says. “Ruger, you hear that? If someone asks you about her...”

“I’ve never seen her, so it won’t be a lie,” the blondest Fulton brother assures us.

“Thanks,” I tell them. “Now, who wants to go get drunk?”

“Fuck yeah!” Jordan exclaims louder than the other guys.

“Not you, prospect.”

“Goddammit.”

“Don’t worry, kid. You’ll be drinking and patched in before you know it.”

“Greer’s right. And until then, you’re our designated driver,” Colt tells him with a wink.

In response, Jordan, Colt’s soon-to-be stepson, flips him off with a smile.



Several hours later, I’ve sewn on all my patches while guzzling Jack and beers, which means the world is not just off-kilter. Now, it’s actually spinning around me.

There’s not enough alcohol in the world to make me forget Celeste or the way I hurt her.

“I’m fucked. So fucked. I fired her. What the hell was I thinking?” I prop my forearms on the bar to hold myself upright and lay my head on them. I bet I could sleep standing up right here.

“You talking to us?” Ruger asks. I look up and find him and his boyfriend, Thane, staring at me from their stools on the other side of the bar. They’re sitting so close that their shoulders are touching, as if a sliver of space between them is too much.

“You two,” I start. My arm is heavy when I lift it and point a finger at them. “You two are so lucky. It all worked out. No more Devil Hounds or rivalry. Both of you get to wear the bearded skulk kling. Bearded sulk klean?”

“I think you’re trying to say bearded skull king,” Thane replies. “And I also think you’ve had enough to drink.” Turning to his boyfriend, he asks, “How do you dry out a bartender?”

“Is that like a joke? Am I supposed to know the punchline?” RJ asks.

Thane laughs and gives him a sweet kiss on the cheek. “You are fucking adorable. And no, it’s not a joke. Seriously, how do we get Greer sober when he works and lives in a bar?”

“I don’t need to be sober,” I assure them when they stare at each other with hearts in their eyes and have a conversation like I’m not there.

“No clue. At least he won’t be driving,” Ruger tells Thane, ignoring my comment.

“True. We could haul him upstairs away from the shelves of booze.”

“Yeah, we can do that.”

When they get up and come behind the bar, I try to back up a step and trip over my own feet, barely catching myself on the bar counter. “Fuck l-off. I’ve got cus-somers...custmers to serve.”

Thane chuckles. “Dude, I don’t think you could pour a shot into a pig trough right now without spilling a drop. We’ll handle your customers.”

“Why would I pour shots in a pig trough?” I ask in confusion. “That’s disgusting. Nobody’s gonna drink that shit.”

“No, they won’t,” he agrees. “Now, let’s get you upstairs and into bed.”

“Fine,” I huff since I can barely hold myself up.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Greer

The next night, my skull is still throbbing, thanks to my hangover. I woke up drooling on my pillow without the slightest idea how I got upstairs.

The last thing I remember is getting my patches at RJ's garage, then coming back to the bar. From there...nothing.

I endured the pain all day long, figuring it's the least I deserve for what I did to Celeste.

Caving, I find the bottle of pain relievers from under the bar and take two because my head may explode if I don't do something. I'm chasing the first one down with Jack when the stranger who sat down at the end of the bar half an hour ago speaks.

"Hey, man. Can I get a refill over here?"

I had been ignoring the stocky man dressed in a suit with a buzz cut because he said he only wanted water. Fuck. I can't pay bills or save the bar by giving out water.

"Give me a second," I mutter. I swallow the last pill before I go grab his glass to take it to the water hose. I can feel the asshole's eyes on me while he waits. He's been doing that shit since he sat down, staring at me, staring at the regulars.

I slide the nearly full to the top glass in front of him so hard a few drops slosh over the top.

“This your bar?” he asks, ignoring the water he was so thirsty for a second ago.

“Yeah. I’m the Greer in Gritty Greer’s,” I answer him. *At least for now.* My fingers massage my temples where the headache is the worst.

“Nice place, even if it’s in the middle of nowhere.”

“Not really in the mood for chitchat, so do you need anything else?” I snap at him since I don’t know if he’s being a dick or what.

The man reaches inside his suit jacket, and for a second, I think he’s gonna pull a gun on me. Instead, he removes a 4x6 photo. Turning it around to me, he asks, “Have you seen this woman around here?”

I instantly recognize the woman’s body and her face, even if it’s in profile. I may have spent a lot of time looking at her tits and ass, but I could draw her face from memory, especially the look on it when I fired her. The only difference in my Celeste and the woman in the photo is that her hair was blonde when it was taken. Is that her natural color? She’s walking, and you can tell it’s not the kind of picture she posed for or maybe even knew was being snapped. What. The. Fuck.

Oh, hell no. I’m not telling this random asshole anything about her. I figured Celeste had a good reason for only wanting to work in the back of the bar, never up front with customers since she’s not all that shy. This dick is probably that reason.

Taking the photo from his hand to play up the lie, I pull it closer to my face. “Nope. Don’t think I’ve seen her around here. Why?”

“She’s my wife,” he says, which is the last thing I expected. My chest feels like it hollows out – the burning is like nothing I’ve felt before. “She’s been missing for three months.”

She’s missing. I sure as shit have been missing her. And three months? Only one was here, so...for two months, she was living out of her car?

And she's *married* to this son of a bitch? He must be a huge piece of shit if she's running from him, flying under the radar like her life depends on it.

"Wow. Sorry, man. That's awful." I try to sound as sympathetic as possible. "I hope she's okay."

"Me too. She's a fugitive on the run for attempted murder. I just want to find her before the feds. Keep her out of prison and hopefully avoid any sort of confrontation, you know?"

Bull-fucking-shit.

I don't say that, but I'm thinking it so hard I'm surprised he didn't hear it being shouted from my head.

Hell, maybe Celeste is a fugitive, but I doubt it. First of all, I just can't see her attempting to kill anyone. Second, no fucking body in their right mind would go around saying in public that they're trying to help a wanted fugitive evade the feds. That's just stupid.

"Have you checked in with our local PD?" I ask to see his reaction to legit law enforcement being involved. "It's a small town. They know everyone."

"I'll head to the station first thing in the morning," he replies. He pulls his jacket back to show off the badge on his belt and the gun in his shoulder holster.

Fuck.

Either he's actually a cop, or he's pretending to be one. Still, I'd bet my bar, while it's still mine, that he won't actually talk to the local cops.

God, I hope he doesn't. I doubt any of them ran into Celeste while she was in town, but they could've seen her at the motel...

"Well, good luck," I tell him.

"Thanks." He pulls out a business card to slide it to me across the bar. "Give me a call if you see her?"

"Sure thing, man," I agree, picking up the card. At least I have a name now and where he's from, if it's a legit card. If so,

his name is Eric Ryans, and he's a detective with the San Francisco Police Department.

I try to act normal, like he hasn't just turned my world upside down after our short conversation. When he becomes absorbed by his phone and stops staring at me, I think he may have actually bought my lies.

Ending up here, in the bar, was probably a coincidence since there aren't that many businesses in town open this late. But something or someone tipped him off to her being seen in the Rockland area. I just wish I knew what.

Celeste could be in trouble, either with the law or with this son of a bitch who seems determined to find his wife. All I want to do is help her, but I don't have the slightest clue where I can find her after I lashed out and fired her. God, I'm an idiot.

When I get a free minute, I pick up my own phone to text Remy, asking him for the number of the Savage King's IT guy he mentioned the other day.

Remy's response is quick, so as soon as the asshole strolls out of the bar without touching his glass of water, I call him up.

"Yeah," the gruff voice on the other end of the phone snaps impatiently.

"Is this Reece Hunt?"

"What do you need, Greer?"

"How did you..." I start to ask how he knew it was me before I remember. "Right. You must run all the background checks for prospects."

"I don't only know who you are but where you are and that you finally got your patches all sewed on."

"Jesus," I mutter as I glance up at the security camera mounted up in the corner of the bar. I thought it was secure, protected by passwords and shit. Should've known. I feel a little violated but damn impressed. Good thing I fucked

Suzanne in the back, or there would've been more witnesses than just Celeste.

Hold the fucking phone. Does that mean he saw me and her...

"Not very sanitary, but my wife enjoyed the Rockland-style body shot," he says as if he knows exactly what I'm thinking. I hate that he saw Celeste mostly naked, writhing on the bar, or that anyone saw her like that. I wonder what Celeste would say if she knew...

Celeste. Right.

"The woman from the, um, body shot, do you think you could find out who she is and where to find her?"

"Child's play," the man says.

"I would really appreciate it," I tell him. "And, ah, I hate to rush you, but..."

"It's a matter of life and death?"

"Possibly."

"Isn't it always?" he says.

"I guess so. Oh, and could you look into the hefty man who came into the bar earlier tonight and asked about her? He said he's her husband and flashed a San Francisco PD detective badge, but he may have been lying about either or both things. The name on his business card is Eric Ryans."

"I'll find out everything I can about them both," he says before abruptly ending the call.

I hope he can not only tell me everything about Celeste's past but also where she is right fucking now. I've got to find her and warn her. Because a woman like her wouldn't change her hair color and hide from her husband and possibly the feds unless there's a damn good reason.



The next morning, as soon as my eyes open, I grab my phone off the charger beside the bed, hoping but doubtful that Reece found something, anything, on Celeste yet.

But there it is, an email with an encoded file. So much shit scrolls by on my phone screen when I open it up I have to take a moment to reorient the device and scroll back to the top. The first thing that jumps out at me is the fact that her real name is Cera Bradford, based on the driver's license with her photo. Reece even found her damn birth certificate. I quickly note that she was born in Belmont and her birthday is September fourth before moving on to the next document – a three-month-old arrest warrant issued by the San Francisco Police for attempted murder.

Goddamn. She really is wanted.

I keep scrolling, reading news articles about her shooting a detective and stealing vehicles. They claim she's armed and dangerous, which blows my fucking mind. By the time I reach the end of the file, I know that the man who showed up at the bar is the man she's accused of shooting, but there's no marriage license. A public document like that would be easy as fuck for a pro like Reece to find, so if he didn't send one, it must not exist.

All I can do for now is reread every document and wait, hoping Reece finds Celeste soon, before that lying bastard Eric uses his own resources to track her down.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Celeste

The musty, smoke-filled Riverpark Motel in Chattanooga makes Remy's look like a five-star resort. It's the only place I could find that would let me pay in cash, though.

By now, I should've been in Texas, but my stupid heart is too broken to keep driving.

Since the air conditioner isn't working, I lie in bed on towels I put on top of the gross bedding, staring at the brown water stain on the ceiling above me.

I wish I was anywhere else in the world tonight. I wish I was still in Rockland. When I stopped in the small beach town, desperate for a job, I never expected it to begin to feel more like home than my newly built house or hard-earned restaurant on the Bay. It just goes to show that money can't buy happiness. I was happier with Greer, scrubbing toilets in his bar, knowing how badly he wanted me than I've ever been.

That jackass loves me, even if he won't admit it to himself.

Loved me, in the past tense, since it's over and done.

I had no idea that last morning would be our last. If I had...well, I don't know what I would've done differently. My current circumstances limit all the good options.

I've just closed my eyes to try and pretend I have a different life when a banging sound makes me jerk awake.

It was probably someone knocking on the door of the room next to mine. Still, I sit up in bed, straining my ears to listen for any other noises. Hopefully, voices from next door.

When the pounding sounds again, my heart thumps hard and fast in my chest while the rest of my body becomes paralyzed. That was definitely a knock on my door.

No. Please god, no!

I haven't been here but an hour at most. There's no way he could've found me so fast.

"Celeste?"

The voice isn't the one I was dreading. No, it's one who causes a flood of relieved air into my lungs. It's Greer. I'm off the bed, heading for the door a half a second later.

My fingers though, pause on the chain. What in the world is Greer doing here in Tennessee? How the hell did he find me? It's impossible. Unless...did he put a tracking device on my car or some shit?

I slowly, quietly, put my eye up to the peephole to see if I'm hallucinating.

But there he is...

At first, I can only see part of his hair that's mussed from his helmet like his face is pressed to the door. Then he takes a step back, and I can see his distressed face. His dark eyes have bags under them, and his beard is even thicker than usual.

"Please open the door, Celeste," he says while staring at the peephole like he knows I'm watching him.

I don't know why he's here or what he wants, but the urge to throw my arms around him despite what a jackass he was before is so strong my shaking fingers unlatch the chain and turn the deadbolt.

"Greer? What are you...how did you..." I ask when I crack open the door.

"Celeste...now I get why you didn't trust me," he says, interrupting my stammering. "Why you wouldn't ever talk

about yourself or show your face in the bar.”

“W-what do you mean?” I ask, refusing to admit to anything.

“Your *husband* came to the bar looking for you last night and mentioned you were wanted.”

The blood drains from my face, and my stomach does a cartwheel so fast I nearly vomit all over Greer.

Oh no. If Eric was at the bar...

“Shit!” I exclaim. Peeking my head outside, I stand on my tiptoes to search the motel parking lot, then the nearby streets for any cars without headlights or vehicles slowly creeping. “He could’ve followed you!”

“He didn’t follow me. I made sure,” Greer says, but he has no idea how sneaky that bastard can be, so I keep an eye on the road, watching from the second-story balcony of the motel for him to pop up out of nowhere.

“Seriously, Celeste. He bought my lie when I told him I hadn’t seen you. It’s a good thing you left the motel when you did. Remy said he’s still staying there and asked about you when he checked in.”

“Oh no.”

“Remy told him he hadn’t seen you, the same thing RJ said at the garage, and every other business in town told him too.”

“Really? Are you...are you sure?” I finally tear my eyes from the empty street to look at Greer in surprise. God, it’s good to see his stern, handsome face again.

“Yes. I swear.”

“But why would they lie? Remy, RJ...they don’t know me. They don’t know...”

“You’re one of us now. We protect our own. And RJ never saw you, so it wasn’t a lie.”

“Oh. Right. Well, um, thank you. Thank them for me?” I say as I try and reassure my fear that every word he said is true. Greer wouldn’t lie to me. He can be a dick, but he’s not a

liar. Not like Eric. Which reminds me... “We’re not...he’s *not* my husband.”

“He’s not?”

I shake my head, then hear and feel Greer’s sigh of relief. Or maybe I imagined it. After all, less than a week ago, the man before me yelled at me to get out, that we were done. Remembering how much his words, his flat dismissal, hurt me, I start to wish I hadn’t answered the door, even if his heads-up may have just saved my life. If Eric was in Rockland, then I have to go, to get to the border as soon as possible.

“Who is he?” Greer demands as if he’s entitled to my past, my demons.

“It doesn’t matter. Thank you for lying and, ah, for warning me.” I try to close the door on him. I need to get my shit and take off as soon as he leaves.

“Celeste, wait.” His palm slaps against the door, his strength preventing me from shutting it. “If I could find you, then he will too. Come back to the bar with me. Let me keep you safe.”

“Keep me safe?” If my teeth clench any harder, I’ll need a dentist to repair the chips. All that fear clouding my head morphs into anger. “We’re done, you’re fired, get out? Remember when you said that shit to me a few days ago?”

The biker’s shoulders visibly deflate before he lifts a hand to grasp the doorframe. “I’m sorry about the other day,” he whispers as if it takes a great deal of effort to force the words out of his mouth. “Everything was going to hell, and I took it out on you. Trust me, the second you walked out the door, I wanted to take every one of those words back. But by the time I got to the hotel, Remy said you had left, and I didn’t know how to find you.”

I scoff and use all my strength to try and close the door in his face again.

“Celeste, wait, please.” His brown eyes are as soft as melted chocolate when he says, “You were right, okay? I

ended shit with Suzanne for you. I couldn't...being with you felt wrong after what I did, what I was doing with her."

I swallow down a little of the fury, enough to tell him the truth. "I'm sorry she made you do that, but it doesn't excuse..."

"She didn't make me. I wanted it at first. I did. It seemed like a good deal for a while. Then you came along, and I've never wanted her the way I want you."

His words, his stupid but honest words, cause me to let up on the tug-of-war with the door. The force of Greer's strength causes it to slam against the wall a second before he crosses the threshold, reaching for me.

How long have I waited, wanting him to put his hands on me, to grab the sides of my face and cover his lips with mine because he cared, not because he was horny?

A month? Only a month? It feels like a lifetime.

After a deep kiss, he pulls back to say, "We'll stay here tonight, but then you're coming home with me, and we're not leaving my bed until I've had you every way possible."

"That...that sounds like it could take a while."

"However long it takes. I'll keep the bar closed for weeks or months if I have to. Just please come home with me."

"I don't know...I don't know if I can do that, Greer."

"Then give me tonight. Tell me everything so we can try to figure this out together."

I nod because I don't want to be alone. I feel safer, stronger, with him here.

But Greer still doesn't understand the danger he's in by just being near me. Once he finds out, he'll gladly leave in the morning to go back to Rockland without me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Greer

As soon as Celeste gives me her nod of agreement, I reach for her. She throws her arms around my neck at the same time and holds on tight. “I’m sorry,” I say into her hair while inhaling her familiar scent. “So damn sorry.”

“I know,” she replies.

I hold her as long as I can until she pulls away.

“We should probably shut and lock the door.”

“Yeah,” I agree, doing that for her since I’m closest. Once it’s locked up, Celeste takes my hand and pulls me over to the bed.

The bed with three towels laid out covering the bedding.

“Towels, huh?”

“It’s gross, but I’m too tired to get back on the road tonight,” she explains as she carefully lies down on one and pats the one beside her for me.

As soon as I toe off my shoes, I stretch out in the bed, facing Celeste. She curls up to my chest as I wind my arm around her.

“I don’t know how, but I’m glad you found me.”

I stroke her hair and kiss the top of her head. After the drive, I’m fucking exhausted, but first, I need answers.

“Tell me about him, the man who is so desperate to find you.”

“Ugh, it’s a long story.”

“Well, I’m not going anywhere,” I remind her. “And I know your name is Cera, not Celeste.”

“Are you mad I lied?” she whispers.

“No, I just want to know if I should call you Cera...”

“No. I’m not her anymore.”

“Celeste it is,” I agree. “But I would like to know about Cera, what happened to her, and why she had to run from him if you trust me enough to tell me.”

I can’t make her talk to me; I just wish she would. All I can do is wait and hope. And wait some more. It could take days or weeks or even months before she’s ready to tell me her secrets. However long it takes, I’m not going anywhere.

Finally, Celeste says, “His name is Eric Ryans. He’s my brother Chris’s best friend and his partner.”

“A detective in San Francisco.”

She lifts her head to look at me. “Yeah. How did you know?”

“The same way I was able to find you. Someone in the Savage Kings can find everyone’s dirt,” I tell her. “What he couldn’t find was a marriage certificate, so why does the son of a bitch claim to be your husband?”

“Because he’s fucking insane!” she huffs. She presses her face to my chest and shakes her head. Quietly, she adds, “One day, about two years ago, Eric started showing up out of the blue – at the restaurant where I worked, at my house, even at the fucking grocery store. At first, I thought it was just a coincidence. Then, he started asking me out and was very persistent. Even after I turned him down multiple times, he kept showing up, saying he wanted us to at least be friends...”

“You didn’t want anything to do with him?” I guess.

“No, I didn’t. But he wouldn’t give up. Whenever I saw my brother, he was there too. Before long, he was literally *everywhere*. I asked him to stop following me, to leave me alone.”

“He didn’t?”

“No. He insisted that we were meant to be together, even if I couldn’t see it yet, and that he would wait until I came to my senses.”

“Did you tell your brother?”

She nods. “He told me I was overreacting and that Eric didn’t know any other way to show me how much he cared except by being around me. My brother begged me to give him a chance, to agree to date him. I actually thought about it. I thought maybe I was just being a bitch, that I was wrong about him. He was nice-looking, had a good job, was loved by everyone in town. I thought there was something wrong with me that I couldn’t see what they all saw in him.”

“But you were right?”

“I woke up one night, and he was there, standing in my bedroom, watching me sleep.”

“What the fuck?”

“I yelled at him and told him to leave. He wouldn’t. He said I was overreacting, that he was just making sure I was safe, so I called 9-1-1, knowing my brother wouldn’t do shit. The police showed up, and *he* answered *my* door, turned them away before I could say a word. He told them there was an intruder and that he ran them off.”

“Wow.”

“After that, I added more locks to my doors and windows and started taking photos and videos with my phone whenever he showed up in public. I showed them all to my brother and our mom. They both thought it was *sweet* that he was so devoted to me. Sweet!” she exclaims indignantly as her fist clenches the tee under my cut.

“Sounds insane, not sweet.”

“He was a psycho stalker who everyone else thought was sweet! A hero with medals, going around the city solving murders, saving lives, putting away bad guys. He was apparently a wonderful person, and I was just being a stubborn, bitchy woman. A foolish idiot who couldn’t see the perfect husband standing right there in front of me waiting oh so patiently for me to figure out we were supposed to be together.”

“So, you ran from him?”

“No. I started to date Justin, a cute but shy, harmless waiter from work, to prove I wasn’t interested in Eric once and for all. Justin and I went out to dinner three times, only had three dates. The night we were supposed to have our fourth date, when he was going to come over to my place for dinner and possibly more, Eric planted a brick of cocaine in his car. His street cop buddy was on patrol that night. He pulled Justin over and arrested him.”

“Jesus.”

Pulling back to look at me, I see the glisten of tears in her eyes, even in the dark room. “Justin, a sweet, scrawny guy who never had a speeding ticket or anything else in twenty-six years, is serving thirty months in prison for a crime he didn’t commit!”

“Goddamn.”

“Nobody believed me when I told them he was innocent. *Nobody*. Not my brother or my mother or anyone at the police station. It was me versus the entire world. So, I wrote a letter to the district attorney, to the local news stations, telling them about the stalking and the setup of Justin.”

“Let me guess – the bastard was pissed at you for ratting him out?”

“Eric was fucking furious with me.”

“Did he hurt you?”

Celeste shakes her head again, then lifts her eyes again. “I thought he was going to. He broke into my house when he found out. He busted a window to get in this time and went

nuts! He was roaring, throwing anything he could pick up in his hands. Everything barely missed hitting me. Then, he pulled out his gun. He didn't point it at me, though. He switched off the safety, cocked it, then held it to the side of his head. If I wouldn't agree to be with him right then and there, he told me he would kill himself."

"He manipulated you to do what he wanted all along?"

"I couldn't be responsible...I thought he would really do it, and that scared the shit out of me. So, I caved. I said what he wanted to hear."

"Fuck, Daisy." I cup the side of her face and swipe my thumb over her cheek to wipe away the dampness.

"I caved and let him kiss me. He put the gun down on the kitchen counter. When he tried to do more, I told him we should wait until our wedding night. He reluctantly agreed but held me there, his arms holding me so tight I felt suffocated. That was the last straw. I'd had enough of him, of his manipulation. When he wouldn't let me go, my eyes went to his gun lying there on the counter. I just knew that if I didn't get away right then and there, I would end up married to that bastard, doing whatever he wanted for the rest of my life just to keep him from hurting himself or anyone else I cared about. And it finally clicked in my mind that he would snap one day when I didn't do what he wanted, that he would hurt me before he would actually hurt himself. So, I decided to hurt him first."

"You shot him?"

"Just in the leg. So he couldn't run after me! I grabbed my keys and ran to my car. Then I just drove all night in my pajamas. I couldn't call my brother or my mom to help me. I was suddenly the bad guy in the whole ordeal, not the victim. Never the victim. So, I just keep driving. When I ran out of gas, I stole a car from the gas station since I knew I couldn't use any cards. I left with nothing but the car and the pajamas I was wearing. All I could do was take one car after another, changing license plates to give myself time to get a little further from California. I became the crazy, unstable woman

who shot her ‘fiancé’ and stole cars. I’m probably wanted by the FBI for all of it now...”

“God, Daisy. I’m so fucking sorry.”

Celeste collapses against my chest again and lets me hold her as she cries, her sniffles the only thing that gives her away. “I won’t let him near you again,” I promise her.

She shakes her head, which is tucked underneath my chin. “You can’t stop him, Greer. If you try, he’ll kill you or send you to prison. He’s untouchable.”

“Fuck that. I don’t care what it takes – I’ll find a way to touch him. If anyone can take him down, it’s the Savage Kings,”

“You really think so?” she asks.

“I do. We’ll do whatever it takes to make sure he never comes near you again.”

Her damp lips press a kiss to my throat. “Thank you for believing me.”

“Anyone who doesn’t is a goddamn fool,” I tell her honestly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Celeste

One kiss on Greer's neck turns into two, then three as I make my way over his beard to his lips. Once those meet, there's no stopping what comes next.

And I don't want to.

He believes me. I always knew he would, even if I had told him the whole truth the first day we met.

I wasn't sure if anyone would ever believe me after my own family made me feel like I was crazy.

Not only that, but I want to believe Greer when he says that he and the Savage Kings could take on Eric. Any plan is better than hiding out in Mexico or constantly running for the rest of my life.

If I can stop running, then Greer and I can be together. I can help him save his bar. Everything will be perfect.

Even if this motel, this room, is far from perfect, we're together, and that's all that matters.

Greer apparently feels the same. He rolls on top of me, pressing me into the mattress with his bigger, heavier body, the hard length of him telling me how much he wants me. Lying underneath him makes me feel safe and protected, like nothing can hurt me because he won't let it.

As our kiss deepens, I slip my hands up the bottom of his shirt to touch his warmth, the strength in his muscular back.

I want him inside me. Need him there. I shove his shirt and the leather cut up and over his head, then reach between us to undo his jeans.

“In a hurry?” Greer chuckles before he licks a line down my neck.

“We’ve had a month of foreplay,” I remind him. “I want you naked and inside of me.”

“Fuck, yes,” he easily agrees before his hands yank my shirt off and my cotton shorts and panties down my legs.

His mouth moves down to my breast, licking and sucking on my nipple while he shucks his pants. Then, he suddenly freezes and mutters, “Fuck.”

“What? What’s wrong?” I ask as I lace my fingers through his hair to make him look at me.

“I don’t have a condom.”

“Good,” I reply. “I’ve heard it’s better without them.”

“Oh yeah?” Greer asks as he pushes himself up above me. Reaching down, he drags the tip of his cock through my slit, making me gasp and spread my legs wider, eager for more. “You sure?”

“Yes. My IUD is good for a few more years. Did you... you used condoms with her, right?”

“Always,” he replies.

“Me too, but I just...I want to feel you. Every hard inch stretching me, every last drop you spill...”

Greer’s mouth crashes down on mine. Our lower bodies slam together, bucking frantically, searching for relief. My hands on Greer’s back pull him down on top of me as I tilt my hips, seeking him out. Only when I lower my hands to dig my fingernails into both of his ass cheeks does his cock find its way home. He sinks into me slowly, groaning the entire time.

We gasp into each other's mouths as his pelvis grinds into my swollen clit, and I lock my legs behind his knees. He's buried in me perfectly, and as our tongues intertwine again, we begin slowly moving together, each of us moaning softly as Greer gives me time to adjust to his intrusion.

"Harder," I demand as I break our kiss, throwing my head back into the pillow to look into his eyes. "Take me, Greer." My voice rises as he thrusts into me fiercely, his scruffy cheek grinding into my neck as he bites my shoulder.

He does as I ask, picking up his pace and slamming into me fiercely as I dig my fingers into his arms, his back, anything I can reach. My hips match his pace until my thighs and lower belly quiver and unleash an orgasm so intense I bite down on Greer's shoulder, much like he's doing to me. I realize he's coming with me as he suddenly stills as my walls clamp down on him, and his entire body vibrates like a live wire above me.

It feels like it lasts forever, the powerful contractions around his throbbing cock echoing through me for so long I get lost, my only focus that blazing thrill raging between our bodies. I only start to recover when Greer, still practically gnawing on my shoulder, makes a sound somewhere between a snarl and a grunt and begins moving his hips slowly against me.

I giggle into his ear and ask him, "You all right there?"

In response, he meets my gaze, then leans in to kiss me slowly, thoroughly, while continuing to grind his semi-erect cock inside of me. "I'm all right for now," he agrees as he pulls back to smile at me. "But we're going to need more towels if you're going to sleep on this bed tonight."

"I wasn't going to be able to sleep anyway." I grin back at him as I feel him hardening inside me again. I shift underneath him until we're once again in a perfect position. I want to hear that little snarly grunt a few more times tonight, and Greer seems all too happy to oblige me.



Greer

“Good morning,” I say to Celeste as soon as her eyes open.

“Good morning,” she replies with a smile before ducking her face, cuddling to my chest.

I run my fingers up and down her bare back, remembering how amazing last night was finally being with her. But it’s nothing compared to this morning. I just wish we were anywhere else.

“You know, this is the first time I ever woke up in bed with a woman I love.”

Celeste’s head rears back. Her eyes are clearer, more awake, when she asks, “You love me?”

“Of course I love you. Have for a long time.”

“How long?”

“Ah, I’m not sure. Since the day you left work early.”

“Not because of the blowjob.” I press my finger to her grinning lips, knowing that’s what she was thinking. “When you told me you had a stomachache, that you didn’t feel well, I realized I would do anything to make it better, that I wanted to be there with you taking care of you. I never wanted to do that for anyone other than my mom and sister.”

“Wow,” she says. Absently, she stares at my lips and lifts a finger to run them over them. “I’ve known I loved you since... probably that same day. You had already done so much to help me, but then you showed up with the care package. It was so sweet. Nobody had ever done anything like that for me before. Most men run for the hills at the mention of a period. But you didn’t.”

“Huh,” I mutter, wondering if we should’ve told each other how we felt then instead of waiting so long. There’s no way

either of us would've said a word, though, not until we stopped keeping secrets from each other.

"Yeah," Celeste says, burying her face into my skin again.

"I hated when I couldn't find you and didn't know how to contact you. It was the worst feeling in the world, thinking I had lost you for good, all because of my temper. I hate that I took my failure out on you."

"Now will you tell me what happened with the bar, how you and her..." Celeste trails off, and I know what she means.

"I'm losing the bar. Have been for over a year now. What I make isn't much, and I send most of it to my sister, Gina, and my mom. Gina's in college, working on her master's in nursing now. She's brilliant and got a bunch of scholarships, but there's still shit they don't pay. I bought her a car so she wouldn't have to take the bus, and I make the payments on it."

"What about your mom? Why do you send her money?"

"I feel like she blames me and maybe even hates me. And I guess I think paying her bills will give me her forgiveness. I know it won't, but it's better than doing nothing."

"Why do you think your mother hates you?"

"Because I sent my father to prison right after Gina was born for assault and battery. I wanted to protect her, to protect my mom from his fists."

"I'm sure she understands that, Greer."

"Maybe she did, but then he got jumped by some prison gang. They killed him a few weeks before his release date."

"Oh no. I'm so sorry."

"It was my fault. If I hadn't sent him to prison..."

"That wasn't your fault. You did it to protect them. Once he got out, who's to say he wouldn't use his fists again?"

"Maybe...maybe you're right about that," I agree. "I've never thought about it from that perspective."

“Him dying could have been a blessing in disguise. People don’t change, Greer. You know that.”

“I know. He was an abusive alcoholic who took everything out on us, his wife and son. I missed a lot of school with broken bones or bruises that were too visible. After he died, I planned to stay in town, to help my mom raise Gina. But she didn’t want my help. So, I left. I’ve been sending them money since I turned eighteen.”

“And the bar? I wouldn’t think you would want to be around other alcoholics...”

“Making money off of drunks like my father seemed like some sort of revenge of its own. It was stupid, but it gave me something to do, something I was halfway decent at and could do all on my own. At least, until you came around. You made me realize I needed help after all. I just didn’t want to admit it to myself.”

“I’m glad I met you.”

“Me too, Daisy,” I agree. “But the bar...it seems like a lost cause now. Suzanne’s husband, William, owned the land and building. He was the person I started leasing from originally. Then, when he died of a heart attack last year, Suzanne inherited all of his properties. I was already two months behind on the payment when he died. The management company he used told her I was late, and she showed up here one day out of the blue.”

“And made the offer?”

“I think she came to see the property, decide if it was worth keeping or selling. But we talked, and she was flirty. William had been about thirty years older than her. Hell, she’s younger than me. She was obviously lonely, had been long before he passed away. I’m guessing that she was too scared to have an affair while they were married because of her prenup. She would’ve probably lost everything. So, she hung on until she outlived him. Once he was gone, she told me she just wanted dirty, filthy sex, no strings attached.”

“Wow.”

“I gave her what she wanted right then and there, fucked her against the wall, hard and rough. I thought it would be the only time. But afterward, she was high on endorphins, said it was the best sex she had ever had, and offered me a deal.”

“Sex once a month in exchange for rent?”

“Oh, she wanted to fuck me whenever she wanted, but I wasn’t going to give her that, so I turned her down.”

“She wouldn’t take no for an answer?”

“She came down to once a month, and I figured what the hell. I could agree to fuck her once a month if it meant keeping the bar, bringing in income, and not having to pay rent. It’s not like I had any time to date, and I wasn’t looking for a serious relationship either. So, I stupidly agreed.”

“I hate that you touched her,” Celeste says, placing a kiss on my throat.

“It was fine at first, maybe because it did feel dirty, and fuck, she loved it. But then, it became a necessary chore.”

“I could tell you weren’t enjoying it that day...”

“No, I wasn’t. Not like I do when I’m with you.”

“I liked watching you.”

“Why do you think I hired you?” I tease her. “I could tell you liked watching, that you might let me fuck you too. I never imagined it would be so much more than that between us. That day, I had no idea so much more even existed, that it could feel like this with you.”

“You love me?” she says again like she doesn’t believe it.

“I love you,” I assure her. “And I want you to be free from that son of a bitch, whatever it takes.”

“I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“The fucker won’t even know who I am until it’s too late, okay? Trust me?”

“I trust you,” she replies.

“Are you ready to pack up and go home?”

“Yes. This place is a dump.”

“It really is,” I tell her. With one last kiss on her cheek, I let her roll out of bed so I can do the same.

When we’re both getting dressed, she says, “So, the patches are new. Something happen after I left?”

“Ah, yeah. I officially got patched into the Savage Kings.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thanks.”

“You look good with them, even more badass, especially from behind.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“I have the Kings to thank for finding you. And hopefully, they’ll help me save you too. For now, how about we leave your car here?”

“Just leave it?” she asks, brow furrowed.

“You can pack your things into the saddlebag on my bike. But the car...it’s how Reece tracked you down.”

“Shit.”

“I’m sorry. We’ll get you another one as soon as we get back.”

“I should’ve known the piece of junk would stand out like a sore thumb.”

“Now that we do, leave it here, maybe throw him off your trail for a while in case he tracks it too.”

“Okay. Thanks, Greer.”



As soon as Celeste and I get back to the bar, I make it clear that I want her staying with me, even at night, rather than go back and forth to the motel where that fucker was staying.

The first call I make is to Remy. He tells me the man turned in his key and left yesterday morning. It's a small blessing, but I know it's temporary.

The next time he comes back around, I want to be sure it's the last. For most men, it's hard to imagine the terror a woman must feel when confronted with this kind of monster. They are a special kind of predator with very specific prey. I know personally because my own father was molded with the same clay. Men like Eric equate respect with compliance. If you don't do as you're told, they take it as a personal insult. And oh, how they despise being insulted. These tiny men with their impotent fury absolutely lose their goddamned minds when you challenge them...which leads me down a trail of thought that culminates in me making another call to the Savage King IT guru and fixer, Reece, to discuss steps we can take together to settle this once and for all.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Celeste

Staying in the loft with Greer is so much better than the motel. He sneaks up to see me at night, and during the day, well, things are back to the way they were before, at least for now. Eric left town, and I don't leave the bar, even in the new, used car Greer bought, so I should be safe for now.

It could be weeks or months before he comes back to this area. Maybe he never will, but I doubt it.

It's nice getting back into our old routine to help keep my mind off all the what-ifs.

"There you are..." Greer starts before trailing off. This morning is the first time I'm cleaning the bathroom in my panties since we slept together. I bite my bottom lip while keeping my eyes on the wall, waiting to see how he'll react.

"Oh, hell, baby. You're killing me."

"Am I?" I ask without looking back at him. I hear his footsteps on the tiles as he comes closer.

"You know I'm gonna do more than stand back and stroke my cock this time, don't you, Daisy?"

"You're the boss," I reply, giving him the green light.

With a growl, he drops to the floor behind me, one hand fisting my hair, tugging it backward while the other...the other

jerks up the back of my thong, making me cry out in surprise at the sensation of the material tight on my pussy.

Greer's lips devour my neck, and then he whispers in my ear, "This floor is so fucking clean I could eat you off of it."

Between his naughty words and the friction of my too-tight panties clenched in his fist, there's now a flood of arousal soaking the cotton. But his dirty mouth isn't finished yet.

"You're gonna sit on my face, and then I'm gonna fuck you so hard you scream my name until your throat burns."

"Greer..." It's the only word I'm able to say, giving him not only my permission to do both of those things but also letting him know how badly I need him.

With one last wet kiss on my neck, he releases my hair and my panties. A second later, he's beside me on his back. Clutching my thigh, he lifts it to maneuver so his head is between them. I gasp as his tongue pushes against the crotch of my panties. I'm ready to rip them out of the way, but Greer's fingers are way ahead of me, yanking them to the side and swiping his hot, wet tongue over my flesh.

"Oh shit!" I scream. My bones all melt at the same moment as I sink down onto his face, losing all inhibitions. My arms flail, needing something to hold on to before I fall face forward. The bathroom counter is all that's within reach, so I grab onto it with my right hand. Greer rumbles something that sounds like muffled approval before he begins devouring me. His frantic tongue is everywhere, thrusting inside of me, sliding from my clit to my ass, then back down again. His beard is abrasive and tickles all at the same time on my inner thighs.

My hips begin to rock back and forth, urging him where I need more attention. His dark eyes stare up at me, watching every little reaction on my face, hungry, horny, and so freaking hot. When the tip of his tongue finally focuses solely on flicking at my clit, I let him know how good it feels.

"Yes! Right there! Don't stop...don't –" My words cut off when two of his fingers that were holding my thong to the side

thrust into me.

The world goes pitch-black before white stars explode in my vision. There's nothing but the pleasure. So much pleasure courses through me in intense waves.

When I'm able to see and hear again, my palms are both flat on the floor, and Greer's face is no longer under me. I hear the unmistakable sound of his zipper being pulled down behind me.

I start to spread my legs wider in anticipation, but he makes a sound of protest. "Put those beautiful legs together. I want you as tight as possible."

His palms grasp my hips and slide down the outside of my legs, pushing them together. "That's it, Daisy. Just like that."

Feeling the brush of his cock as he lines himself up, my thighs automatically try to widen to accommodate him. Again, he slams them shut, then shoves forward, stealing all the air from my lungs as he slowly fills me.

"Goddamn, you feel good," Greer says when he finally stills, impossibly deep inside of me.

The first time he pulls out and thrusts inside again, it's almost painful. A few more powerful thrusts, and I'm panting from the internal pressure of whatever spot he's suddenly hitting over and over again.

"Too...too much," I try to tell him between gasps.

"Oh, Daisy. Is this the first time a dick found your G-spot?" Greer chuckles. "Get ready. It's gonna be a big one." Without slowing his stride, his hand goes underneath me, fingers finding my clit to rub it. The words that spew from my mouth after that are unintelligible.

Shifting the focus from the pressure building inside of me relaxes those tightly coiled muscles just enough that it happens. A dam bursts inside of me, a powerful one in force and substance. The pleasurable tremors overtake my limbs until my arms can't hold my weight up anymore. Arousal pours from me, soaking my inner thighs and Greer's cock. Even my face is wet. How the hell did that happen?

“Fuck yes, baby. Ride it out. So damn tight when you milk me.”

His words make me realize that while my arms gave out and my cheek is pressed to the bathroom floor, my hips are still bucking. They’re slamming back onto his shaft fast and furiously, totally out of my control like they no longer belong to me but to someone else.

A sob escapes me as my inner walls continue to clench and clench around Greer, unable to take him deep enough.

“Harder! Please...harder,” my mouth begs, also going rogue because there’s no way I can survive through any more orgasms as insane as the last one.

Greer gives me exactly what I ask for, though, fucking me until my body is flattened to the floor from head to toe. My thighs are still clamped together, muscles tight as he fills me up over and over again, driving my pelvis into the hard surface. It’s as if that was all I need to soar into the sky again. I vaguely hear myself screaming Greer’s name as he roars above me.

“So good. So fucking good,” he whispers between pants after he stills, his face pressed to my neck. “Are you okay?”

I nod because I haven’t caught my breath enough to speak. The only sound I can make is another sob.

Above me, Greer goes still, then reaches for my chin to turn my face to the side. “Shit. You’re crying.”

“Am I?” Guess that explains why my face is wet along with the rest of me from sweat or arousal.

“You sure you’re okay?”

I nod again. “It was just...wow.”

“No shit.” His chuckle rumbles through my back, his cock twitching where it’s still buried, making me moan. “Fuck. Sorry.”

His weight lifts off me, and then he’s pulling me up and into his lap, my back to his chest, which is still clothed in his tee and leather. His jeans are still on too. The man is basically

fully clothed while I feel like I've been stripped bare, more naked than ever before. More tears slide down my cheeks, and Greer swipes at them urgently. "Hey," he says, gripping my chin to turn my face up to his. "Did I hurt you?"

"No. No, it was just intense. Physically and emotionally."

"Good intense?"

Unable to help my smile, I tell him, "Yes, a very good intense. It felt like I shattered apart and haven't been put back together yet..."

"I've got you," he says, placing a kiss on my temple. "I'll help put you back together."

His arms wrap around me, holding me to him for how long, I'm not sure. It feels too good to move. I'm not ready to leave the bathroom or face the world, to deal with what I know is coming eventually. To try and lighten the mood for us both, I say, "From now on, we should only fuck on the bathroom floor."

"Yeah?" He chuckles and squeezes me to him tighter. "I think I can manage the same results on a softer surface too."

"You think so?"

"Uh-huh."

Groaning, he buries his face into my hair. "God, I already want you again, but my knees are throbbing. I'm getting too old for this shit."

"Too old to fuck on a hard floor?"

"Yes."

"We could get you some knee pads. I could use them too..."

"Jesus. Your mouth, your body, you make me crazy."

"You make me crazy too," I tell him. "I needed you and the distraction. Have you...have you heard anything about where he went?"

"No, not yet."

“And the bar?”

“Still haven’t won the lottery to save it. The Realtor put the For Sale sign out front last night, which means now everyone in town will know I’m losing it.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’ll figure something out. I’m more worried about you and your situation right now.”

“Believe it or not, I have the money. I have assets I can sell in San Francisco...”

“No, Celeste. You’re not selling anything. You can’t without him finding you. I’m not an idiot – I know that’s why you only use cash. Just let me handle the bar shit on my own, okay?”

“You are so damn stubborn! Why can you help me even if it’s dangerous, but I can’t help you out?”

“Because...” I trail off, unable to explain.

Pushing away from my arms to stand up, she says, “Find me when you can finish that sentence,” she huffs as she walks out the bathroom door.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Greer

“So, what’s up with the For Sale sign out front?” Remy asks from his usual stool that night.

“It is what it is.”

“You’re selling the bar? Why the fuck didn’t you tell us?”

“Trust me, it wasn’t my decision.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know I don’t own this land and building. I’ve been leasing it. And the rent isn’t cheap.”

“You can’t make payments?” Remy surmises. “But business is better than ever with the former Devil Hounds packing in here and bringing women from all over the area.”

“I know. Business has been good lately. But I have other financial obligations.”

“Your family?”

“How did you know?”

“I just assumed. You don’t gamble, you’re not a drug addict. You’re not a big spender. That only leaves one thing – family, or at least someone you care about.”

“My sister and my mom get most of what I earn.”

“Why? Isn’t your sister in her mid-twenties now?”

“Yes, but she’s still in college, working on her master’s. She doesn’t have time to work.”

“Well, maybe it’s time to tell her tough luck, buttercup, and have her get a job, even if it’s part-time. What about your mom?”

“She barely knows what day of the week it is. There’s no way she can hold down a job.”

“That still doesn’t mean the burden should fall to you. I get it, though.”

“I fucked up my mom and sister’s life, almost as badly as my father did.”

“I seriously doubt that’s true.”

“It is.”

“And you feel like you have to pay their way for the rest of their lives to make up for whatever you think you did?”

“I sent my father to prison, and he was killed in there before his release date.”

“Shit,” Remy mutters. “That sucks, but it wasn’t your fault. Unless you framed him...”

“No,” I grit out, thinking about how Celeste’s stalker framed the man she was dating. “No, my old man went to prison for his own stupidity.”

“Then it wasn’t your fault that someone killed him on the inside. Unless you hired an assassin in the prison?”

I just stare at him. I get the point he’s trying to make, though. Like Celeste, he’s saying I shouldn’t blame myself. But I do. And nothing will ever change that.

“Look, I’m sorry about the shit that went down with your family. I get it. I would do anything for my brothers too. Eventually, you got to let them make it on their own, figure shit out for themselves. Maybe it’s time for your sister and your mom to take care of themselves.”

I don’t say anything in response to that advice, so Remy adds, “Now, what’s the situation with the bar? Maybe the

Kings can do something.”

“I don’t want any more help from the Kings.”

“Why not? The club is loaded.”

“I just got patched in, I’ve already bothered Reece so much he won’t call me back, and I don’t believe in taking handouts.”

“It wouldn’t be a handout. The club could just be your backer – they own a piece of the bar but let you run it however you want, and they get some of the profit.”

“I don’t want to ask them for any more help. I’ve already pushed too far; I don’t want to be the ‘new problem member.’ I don’t want anyone’s help.”

“Which is why I’m guessing you’re losing the bar.”

“Fuck you.”

“Sometimes we all need a little help, man. There’s nothing wrong with asking for it either. Unless you don’t want your girl to know...”

“Celeste knows about everything.”

“Good. And her advice?”

“She wanted to help, but I wouldn’t let her. Now she’s sort of giving me the silent treatment.”

“Been there. Hate to be you.”

“I can’t take her money, not when it means bringing the trouble she was running from to our doorstep, and I haven’t figured out how to handle him.”

“What trouble?”

“That guy who was looking for her the other day, you remember? It’s her stalker from back home. He’s not just some rando but a cop with some law enforcement connections. He thinks he’s untouchable. When she tried to tell her family about what he was doing, they thought she was just being stubborn about not going out with him. He’s a psycho. He showed up in town looking for her, so he hasn’t given up on finding her.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah.”

“The Kings could probably help you with that problem too,” Remy says.

“Reece is keeping me up to date on his location. I called him again to talk about making a plan to handle Eric, but he hasn’t gotten back with me yet. I don’t want to ask more of them, you understand?”

“They could do more.”

“I’m sure they could, but...”

“The club has connections, federal connections. How do you think I met Avery?”

“What?” I ask in confusion.

“Never mind,” he says quickly, as if he didn’t mean to bring his woman up. “The feds wouldn’t look the other way if a local cop is being a creep.”

“It’s more than just following her. He put a guy she was dating in prison for years after he planted drugs in his car. And the night Celeste ran, he had a gun to his head, basically threatening to kill himself if she didn’t fuck him, marry him, give her life to him.”

“Goddamn. He’s using emotional blackmail and shit.”

“And he knows her family won’t protect her from him. Nobody will help her back in her hometown. They all think she should give in and be with the son of a bitch.”

“That’s fucked-up.”

“I know she can’t run from him forever. Eventually, he’s going to find her here.”

“And you plan to what? Kill him?”

“Yeah.”

“If he’s got cop buddies, then they’ll be all over your ass like white on rice.”

“Then I’ll have to make sure I hide the evidence.”

“Dude, you’re talking about planning a first-degree murder with a security camera running behind you. All they have to do is take the time to rewind and watch it, and they’ll have all the evidence they need to throw your ass in prison for life.”

“Maybe that’s what I deserve for what I did to my dad.”

“Fuck that. You know that’s not what you deserve. I’m sure you had a good reason for sending your old man away. You were probably protecting your mom, your baby sister.”

“I was.”

“And who is going to be here to protect Celeste after you kill the fucker and have to leave her on her own for the rest of her life?”

“Shit.”

“Trust me. Killing sounds like the easy way out, but he still wins even from his grave if he comes between you and her.”

“Yeah, I guess he would.”

“Don’t let him win, Greer. Play this smart, get him away from Celeste, then make him suffer for a long damn time behind bars. You know inmates love giving cops hell when they end up on the inside with the same people they arrested.”

It’s definitely something to think about, not that I’ll admit that to Remy.



Later that night, after my phone rings for the third consecutive time with an unknown number, I decide to answer it. “Hello?”

“Who you planning to murder?” a somewhat familiar voice asks. He sounds so amused it takes me a moment to figure out who is speaking.

“Reece?”

“You think you can take him out yourself?” he asks.

“I guess you’ve been watching or listening to my security cameras. Why bother asking me like this? You know who I want to end.”

“No shit. You’re about to drag the MC into a shitstorm. I thought it might be wise to warn you not to go off half-cocked on some weak-ass plan. Bring it to the table. Talk to Torin Fury. That’s what I plan to do, which is why I am only now returning your call. Look, this cop is dirty, which is a situation we’re not unfamiliar with. It’ll be a piece of cake for the club to put him away. All you have to do is say the word. You’re a member now. We protect our own.”

“I’ll think about it,” I tell him. Prison would be the best option, but there’s no guarantee he’ll be in there forever. I mean, what can they prove he’s done? Stalked a woman who shot him? Even if all of that can be proven and Celeste is absolved of any wrongdoing, how much time does that buy her? In five or ten years, he’ll be released and come after Celeste again. I don’t know if I can handle having the threat of him hanging over our heads like that.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Celeste

After our disagreement earlier, Greer had gone back down to the bar and left me alone upstairs. I was too anxious to concentrate on watching television or even reading, so I put on my pajamas and crawled into bed, intending to take a short nap. Instead, I'm jolted awake only a few minutes later by Greer sitting on the edge of the mattress.

"Whoa, hello." I grin in surprise as the dip in the mattress rolls me toward him. "You caught me napping again."

"Napping? I just closed the bar, woman. You were asleep, as in out for the night."

"Huh. I think you're right," I agree with a yawn. I manage to disentangle myself from the sheets and get into the bathroom while Greer is still trying to get his boots off on the edge of the bed. I quickly rinse my mouth out and use the toilet. After washing up, I check on Greer.

He's already sprawled out in the bed, fighting with the snarl of blankets I left behind in my wake. "Come help me fix this," he finally snorts as he gets back up and pulls the sheets from the bed.

"I must have been having a nightmare or something," I say in apology.

"I know, you thrash around in your sleep a lot. I don't mind," he adds quickly. "I just worry about you...you know? I

hate that this guy is always on your mind, living in the back of your head. That shit isn't healthy, and it's why I didn't want you to risk exposing yourself."

"If you can worry and try to help me out so much, I can do the same for you," I rebut him immediately, just as he raises a hand and pats at the air, a gesture I find particularly irritating.

"Wait, wait," Greer says. "That's the same argument from before, and we both know where we stand. Let me finish first, please?" I nod reluctantly, and he continues on. "I just wanted to add that I talked to the Savage Kings tonight and some of my own buddies here to try to cook up some plans that didn't involve dragging you into this just yet. If you want to help me out, I mean sincerely want to help me, then trust me to help you deal with Eric, then we can do anything you like with the bar, or go anywhere else, together. Let's get him done first, though. Agreed?"

"Yes, I can agree on that," I tell him. We get the sheets tucked back onto the mattress correctly, and then I lean over to steal a kiss. "So, what did you and your Kings cook up to help with Eric? Any ideas so far?"

"Not just yet." Greer crashes the hope that had briefly swelled in my chest as we both crawl back into bed. "But don't worry," he tries to reassure me as he notices me stiffen up at his words. "No matter what the Kings can or can't do, I'll be here to help you get through this, you hear me?" He kisses the top of my head before settling down beside me so that our heads are close to touching on the pillow.

Instead of replying with words, I lean in closer to him, snuggling down. Then, we help ease each other into a peaceful night's rest for both of our anxious minds.



Greer

“So, any other business we need to discuss?” Remy asks the table during my first Savage Kings meeting the next afternoon. When I don’t speak up, he puts me on the spot. “No? How about you, Greer?”

“Me?”

“Yeah, don’t you want to tell the guys about your problems?”

“What problems?” Barrett asks.

“It’s nothing,” I begin to hedge automatically, still uncertain how to discuss it with these guys.

“It must be something for Remy to bring it up,” RJ remarks.

I glare at our president, also my prospect sponsor, before reluctantly filling them in. “So, Celeste is on the run from a stalker. He’s a detective with the San Francisco Police Department, and he’s crazy as fuck. He doesn’t know she’s here in town, and I’ve got to figure out what to do with him before he realizes where she’s at.”

“Can’t she just go to the local police and see if they’ll arrest him?” Hugo asks.

“No. It’s not that easy. Since he’s a cop, he’s got connections.” I clear my throat and add, “It doesn’t help that he has a warrant for Celeste. She shot him in the leg to get away the night she left town. He had her charged with attempted murder on a law enforcement officer.”

“Goddamn,” Thane mutters.

“Yeah, it’s fucking complicated. Celeste doesn’t want me to get involved...”

“Why not?” Colt demands.

“She wants to spend the rest of her life on the run?” Barrett asks.

“The last guy she had just started dating, the detective found out and didn’t take it well. He planted a shitload of

drugs on him. Now the guy is sitting in prison, doing time for a crime he didn't commit."

"Shit," Colt murmurs. "That's insane."

"That's what I'm saying. He is insane. There's nothing he won't do to get to Celeste. I don't think he would actually let her go to prison for the shooting. He would probably get the DA to dismiss the charges once she's with him. But she doesn't want anything to do with him, obviously. He didn't hurt her before, but she's been gone for months. His patience is wearing thin. The last time she saw him, before she shot him in the leg, he held his gun to his head and threatened to pull the trigger if she refused to be with him. So, between the psychological manipulation, the physical threat, and legal shit hanging over her head, Celeste has been lying low here in Rockland. She was living out of her car when she showed up asking for a job."

"I'm sorry I turned her away when she first came to the motel," Remy says.

"It's fine. I'm glad you did! I wouldn't have hired her, and we wouldn't have ended up together if you hadn't sent her on down the road."

"So, what are we going to do about the detective that's after her?" RJ asks.

"We? No, you all aren't doing shit. I'll handle this."

"On your own? I don't think so," Remy huffs. "Admit it. You need our help, with this problem and the other."

"What's the other problem?" demands Hugo.

"The other problem is none of anyone's business," I grit out while scowling at our president.

"You've all probably seen the For Sale sign in front of the bar. Greer's going to be out of business unless he can buy up the place."

"That's not...I didn't say I wanted to buy the building and shit," I tell him.

“Then what’s the other option?” Remy stares at me while I stay silent. “That’s what I thought. You need to come up with the cash or a loan to buy the damn building and land once and for all.”

“Whatever I need to do, it doesn’t have anything to do with the club,” I assure the men at the table.

“Why not? It’s like our official hangout when we’re not meeting,” RJ states. “Where else will we all go to drink and hang out?”

“I don’t know. Remy’s house?” I offer.

Our president flips me off for even suggesting everyone pile in on his and Avery’s little love nest.

“I’ll figure something out with the bar,” I assure them. “But with the detective...I may need some of the MC’s contacts. Reece seems to think the original Kings would help if I – we – asked.”

“Of course they would,” Remy says. “They love helping damsels in distress.”

“They can’t save them all,” I remark.

“No, but they will do whatever it takes to save the ones of their patched members. Tonight, we’ll give Torin Fury a call, see what his men have up their sleeves.”

When I don’t respond, Remy adds, “It’s okay to ask your friends for help now and then. That’s what the club is for, after all. We have each other’s backs no matter what.”

“Fine,” I reluctantly agree. It’s not like I have any better ideas.



After everyone else leaves the meeting, Remy makes the call to the original Savage Kings’ president. I listen to the ringing through the speaker on his phone. I was hoping the man wouldn’t answer, but he does.

“Torin, hey, it’s Remy up in Virginia.”

“How are you doing, man? Things still working out for you and your DEA agent?”

“*DEA agent?*” I can’t help but repeat the words, wondering what the hell they’re talking about. There’s only one person it could be. “Avery?”

“Ah, Torin, I’ve got you on speakerphone. Greer is here with me. And now he knows Avery was a former agent.”

“Sorry about that. But didn’t you use his bar for the drug sting?”

“You used the bar for a drug sting?” I say in disbelief. I never asked what Remy needed the place for one night for a few hours. I knew shit had gone down, but I never thought it was a bust. “Wow.”

“Now that Greer is all caught up,” Remy says with a sigh, “the reason I called is we were wondering if the Kings would be interested in buying a bar. I know you just helped Bear with the nonprofit and all, but Greer’s in a tight spot.”

“He was leasing, right?” the president of the original Savage Kings asks, obviously up to date thanks to their IT man.

“Yes. Now the bitch who owns it insists on selling it out from under me because I stopped fucking her.”

“Damn,” Torin says. “Can you send us the profit and loss statements for the past three years?”

“Ah, yeah, sure. It brings in decent money, but, ah, I have a lot of expenses.”

“He pays his sister’s car payment and all his mother’s bills since his dad died in prison,” Remy shares my business with the man.

“Shit. That’s sucks, man. Sorry to hear that.”

“It’s not a big deal,” I say while scowling at Remy for running his mouth. “I just can’t get a business loan big enough

to buy the place. Even if I could, I don't think the owner would sell to me out of spite."

"Email the figures, and we'll see what we can do."

"Thanks," I tell him. "If it's a lost cause, then so be it. I can figure something else out."

"He might be able to figure something else out," Remy remarks, "but Greer's is the only bar in the city, so the rest of us will be fucked."

"Understood. I'll be in touch soon," Torin says, then waits silently. "Is there anything else you need?"

"Nope."

"You aren't going to ask for help stopping the detective stalking your girl?"

"I guess Reece brought you up to speed on everything," I mutter.

"Let me reach out to the local US attorney, see what they think is the best plan of attack."

"Only if you don't give them her real name. She's got warrants out on her. If they come after her..."

"We'll talk in hypotheticals only. This isn't our first rodeo," Torin says.

"Okay. Thanks," I say right before he ends the call without another word.

"Thanks for telling everyone my business," I grumble to Remy.

"Reece probably already knew most of that anyway. Now Torin does. It's important that he knows you aren't a shitty businessman. I mean, who can't make a profit on a bar?"

"Whatever. If the Kings can help me keep the bar and keep Celeste safe, then I guess the humiliation will be worth it."

"Humiliation? Greer, you're sacrificing to help out your mom and sister. Nobody would hold that against you."

"If you say so..."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Celeste

“Well, fuck,” Greer huffs as he slumps down onto a barstool with his phone in his hand.

“What’s up?” I ask, knowing he just ended a call with someone about the bar.

“The Kings put in an offer to buy the bar.”

“That’s great!”

“No, it’s not. Suzanne repeatedly turned down their offers, even after they offered ten thousand more than her asking price.”

“What the hell? Why would she do that if she’s so determined to sell the place?” I ask.

“She must have figured out it was the club, even though they were using a dummy corporation to hide the fact.”

“Shit. I’m sorry. What a bitch.”

“I just need to let the bar go. It’s a hellhole that’s not worth what she wants for it anyway. I would’ve hated letting the club hold it over my head.”

“You think they would’ve done that if they bought it?”

“No. Fuck. I don’t know.” He tosses the phone down onto the bar and runs his fingers through his hair. “That’s how it would’ve felt to me.”

“Greer, I know you don’t like it, but I can buy it.”

“You? No. You can barely afford to feed yourself.”

“For now, yes. But I have money. I’ve refused to touch any of it because I knew he would be able to trace it back to where I am, so...”

“No, Celeste. I’m not letting you buy this shitty place either. It’s not worth it.”

“What if I added in a kitchen in the storage room? Now that it’s organized, there’s room. Then I could cook...”

“You said you had a fancy restaurant in San Francisco. There’s no way you would be happy doing what, slinging burgers and fries here?”

Spinning his stool around, I step between his legs and wind my arms around his neck. “I would be happy shoveling shit as long as I get to be with you, jackass.”

That at least gets half a smile out of him. “Thanks for the offer, but no. I don’t want you to do that, to have regrets...”

“Well, too bad! I’m doing it, and I won’t regret it. This is what people want to do for someone they love. They help them.”

Greer considers that for a moment and says, “Is that so?”

“Yes!”

“Then you have to let me help you. There was some good news from the Kings,” he says, eyeing me warily.

“Yeah? What’s that?”

“We’re working on a plan for how to take down Eric.”

“What? What kind of plan?”

“It won’t put me or anyone else in danger.”

“You know that’s impossible, Greer! I don’t want you to put yourself at risk...”

“Too bad. That’s what people do for someone they love, right?”

I open my mouth and then shut it.

“Got you there, don’t I, Daisy?” he asks with a smirk. “If you say no, then you can’t try to help me with the bar. If you say yes, then you have to let me give this plan a shot.”

“You are such a pain in my ass!” Placing a kiss on his lips, I tell him, “Please promise me that you’ll be careful? That you won’t let him have a chance to kill you or set you up?”

“He won’t hurt me. I promise, okay?”

“Okay,” I reluctantly agree, hoping I’m not making the biggest mistake of my life.

But fair is fair. Giving in to his plan means I’ll have a chance to finally repay Greer for taking a chance on me, helping me when no one else would.



A quick search on Greer’s laptop, and I have her address. I’m not all that surprised when an older, stuffy-looking man in a suit answers the door to the mansion instead of her. He’s probably the hired help.

“Hi, I’m looking for Suzanne Maslow?”

“May I tell her your name?”

“Celeste.” When I don’t give him a last name, he waits a moment longer but then nods.

“Let me see if she’s busy.”

“You can tell her I’m here about purchasing one of her properties.”

“Oh. Well, you should probably go through the Realtor...”

“No. I need to speak to Suzanne about this one personally.”

“Okay. Just a moment,” he agrees before closing the door in my face.

The next time it opens, the prissy blonde woman I first saw bent over dusty cases of beer appears. Her shoulder-length hair is sleek and perfect, as is her white pantsuit, even though it's hot as hell today. And of course, she looks down her nose at me standing on her million-dollar property in cutoff shorts, tank top, and dollar flip-flops.

"Are you Suzanne?" I ask, just to make sure.

"Yes. And you are?"

"I'm the person you're going to sell 808 Shorelake Drive to."

She blinks at me in annoyance. "You need to contact my Realtor. I can give you one of her cards, or you can find the number on the For Sale sign."

"No, I really don't think you want me telling your Realtor about how you're only selling the place now because Greer refused to keep fucking you."

The woman visibly flinches at my use of the f-word, as if she's too good to use it but didn't mind letting Greer do that to her. I think I heard her chastise him for his dirty mouth too.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Her cheeks are bright red when she tries to close the door on me. I throw my hand out on it and put my foot on the heavy door to stop it.

"Oh, I'm sure that you do know what I'm talking about. There's proof, you know. Videos of you two."

"You're lying."

"You never noticed the security cameras all over Greer's bar? There's even one in the storage room where he bent you over." That last part is a bluff. One I'm hoping she'll buy. If nothing else, there are videos of her coming and going early in the mornings once a month.

Now the blush in her cheeks fades, her entire face going pale as if she hadn't considered that there were cameras.

"So, unless you want everyone to see those videos of you screaming your head off, then I suggest you accept my offer to buy the building and land at your current asking price. I know

you won't sell it to the Savage Kings. You figured out it was them using a shell corporation, right? Yeah, well, you *are* going to sell it to me. Not only will I share the video, but I happen to know someone who can change the dates, set them to before your husband died. I bet his kids would just love to be able to rip their inheritance away from you."

"How dare you? That's blackmail! You can't blackmail me!"

"Want to bet?" I ask with a smile. "You see, I'm already wanted for attempted murder. What's a little time for blackmail when I'm already going to be sitting in a jail cell for years? Taking you down first would make me ridiculously happy."

"Get off my property! Now!"

"Sure. Think it over tonight. Take a few weeks," I add since I have to give Greer time to do whatever he wants to do with Eric first. "I'm sure you'll see it's a reasonable offer when you consider the alternative. Until I call the Realtor, you won't accept an offer from anyone else. Only me, Cera Bradford. Don't forget my fucking name, Suzanne."

Now I move my hand and foot out of the way, and the door slams shut in my smiling face.

"Bitch."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Greer

One second, Celeste was here, cleaning the front of the bar, and the next, she's gone.

Her slightly newer used car is gone too.

She just left without leaving a fucking note!

I'm not sure why I decided to call Remy. Maybe because calling Reece to ask him to find her is going too far when she has only been missing for about fifteen minutes. Still, I need to do something, to talk to someone.

"What's up?" Remy asks.

"Have you...have you seen Celeste?"

"Ah, no. Why?"

"She's gone."

"Gone?"

"I went upstairs to shower, and when I came back down, her car was gone. She didn't leave a note or anything!"

"Okay, well, maybe she just went to the grocery store."

"No. She wouldn't go anywhere that public."

"Then maybe she went to the beach or out for a drive. Did you have another argument?"

Did we? I rack my brain, trying to recall anything offhand I might have said or done to piss her off. God knows I can be grumpy before my shower. “No. No, everything is great. Or at least I thought it was...”

“Do you want me to go check the beach?” Remy asks.

I’m about to say yes when the door opens. A bright ray of sunlight proceeds her. “Never mind,” I say in relief. “She’s back. Sorry to bother you.”

“No problem,” he replies with a chuckle, as if he thinks my paranoia concerning this woman is hilarious.

“Where have you been? I thought – I thought you had run off.”

“Greer, really? I wouldn’t leave without telling you,” she says with a warm smile. “And hopefully, I’ll never have to if the plan you all have works, right?”

“Right,” I agree. “So where did you go? You hate leaving, being out in public.”

Now, her smile turns into a wince. “Promise you won’t get mad.”

“Oh, shit. What did you do, Celeste?”

“Promise,” she repeats.

Crossing my arms over my chest, I tell her the truth. “You know I can’t do that.”

“Fine. Just...try not to flip out? Remember that I’m not happy about what you’re doing to try and catch Eric.”

“Yeah, now I’m *really* worried.”

She shrugs and hops up onto a stool on the other side of the bar from me. “It’s not a big deal. I just went to talk to Suzanne, woman to woman.”

“You did what?” I grit out.

“I went to her house. She’s a real bitch, but I think she’s going to sell the bar to me. Yay!”

“Back up. What the fuck did you do?”

Pointing a finger at the camera, Celeste says, “I just sort of threatened to show videos of you two hooking up if she didn’t sell to me at her asking price.”

“But...there aren’t any videos of us hooking up. There’s not a camera in the storage room, so the only video is when she comes and goes.”

Now she grins like the cat who ate the canary. “Oh, I know that. She doesn’t.”

“So...you went to see Suzanne and bluffed a blackmail?”

“Yes. I’m not entirely sure if it worked or not. We’ll find out when I put in an offer. I told her not to accept any until she got mine.”

“Holy shit. She could have you arrested, Celeste!” I exclaim. “That’s the opposite of laying low!”

“So? What else is new? I already have a warrant for attempted murder. Blackmail is nothing compared to that.”

“This isn’t something to joke about, Celeste!”

“You said she refused to let the Kings buy the place out of spite. That was wrong of her. She’s a rich bitch with so much money nothing would make her back down. Well, nothing except a little blackmail. She looked extremely worried about what was on the videos.”

“I can’t believe you...” I huff as I turn around to grab a bottle of Jack from the shelf. Unscrewing the lid, I guzzle the amber liquid down, even though it’s not even noon yet.

“This is your bar, Greer. Nobody is going to take that from you, especially not that cunt. You need the income to keep helping your mom and sister. And I...I want to be here with you. I can’t imagine us anywhere else.”

Setting the bottle down, I hang my head, keeping my back turned to her. “Now you’re going to make me feel guilty for being upset with you? I had no idea you could be so manipulative.”

“Sure, you did. I’ve been manipulating you since the moment we met.”

A bark of laughter escapes me. “That’s true enough.” Blowing out a breath, I go around the bar to throw my arms around her. “I love you. Even if you manipulate me for the rest of my life.”

“I love you too,” she replies softly as she holds on to me just as tightly. “That’s why you better make sure the plan for Eric is foolproof. If he hurts you...I’ll kill him myself.”

“It’s not going to come to that.” I place a kiss in her hair. “If I can try to trust you, then you have to try and trust me a little too.”

“Deal.”

I squeeze her tighter for a moment before finally letting her go. “Do you really have that much money?”

“I will once I sell my house and restaurant in San Francisco.”

“Celeste, no! I’m not letting you sell your restaurant or house –”

She slaps her palm over my mouth to shush me. “It’s my restaurant. My house. I’ll do what I want with them. And right now, I want to sell them to move here with you, permanently. California doesn’t feel like my home anymore. I don’t want to go back.”

“You’re sure?” I ask, the words muffled by her palm.

“Yes.” She drops her hand from my mouth. “I’m one hundred percent certain.”

“I know it’s your decision, Daisy. I just don’t want you to think you have to do this for me.”

“Greer, you gave me a job, a place to stay, and so much more when I needed it, even though you couldn’t afford to help me. Let me return the favor. Please? This will still be your bar. All I ask is that you let me keep working here and sleeping in the loft with you.”

“That’s all, huh?” I snort and shake my head.

“If I could cook for you, for your customers, that would make me happy too.”

“This place, this town, it’s nothing like you’re used to,” I remind her. “Are you sure you’ll be happy here? Once Eric’s dealt with, you’ll be free...”

“I already feel free here with you. Yes, I’ll be glad when it’s official, but I would be happy here, even if I had to hide in your loft and never come down again for the rest of my life.”

Well, fuck. How can I argue with that?

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Celeste

“Hey,” I say to Greer when he slips into bed late one night.

“Hey. You’re still awake.”

“It’s harder to fall asleep when you’re not lying here beside me,” I tell him when I curl up to his chest and he wraps me in his arms. “Any updates?” It’s the same question I’ve been asking him for over a week now.

“Nobody has seen Eric recently,” he says, which is a relief. “And the Kings and I are still working on a plan for him.”

“Sorry. I know it takes time...”

“It does,” he agrees. “The agent mentioned needing a written statement from you, if you’re willing to give them a sworn statement?”

“Yeah, sure. If you say we can trust them, then I’ll tell them everything.”

“Okay, good,” Greer says with a sigh of relief. “We can see if they can come tomorrow early, because, well, until they have a plan ready to grab the bastard, I don’t think it’s safe for you to stay here.”

Pulling back from his embrace, I ask for clarification. “Here as in the bar or here as in Rockland?”

“Both. It’s probably best if we get you out of Virginia since you’ve been here more than a month.”

“You want me to leave the state?”

“Yes, but not alone.” He reaches for me in the dark, brushing my hair back from the side of my face. “I can see if Hollis can run the bar so I can go with you. In fact, I already have a place in mind...”

“Where?” I ask, glad to hear he wants to come with me. I’m surprised he would leave the bar in someone else’s hands too.

“My mom lives in New Jersey. My sister will be home from college this weekend. We could stay, visit with them.”

“I don’t know, Greer.”

“You think it’s too early to meet my family?”

“No. I don’t know. Mostly, I’m worried. What if he finds us there? I don’t want to put them in danger.”

“And that’s why I love you,” he says, brushing a kiss on my lips. “But they won’t be in danger. We’ll borrow someone’s car, fill up the gas tank, and try not to make any stops. We’ll be fine if we stay inside, and it’s just for the weekend.”

“And after the weekend?”

“Then we come back here and hopefully settle shit with Eric once and for all.”

“You make it sound so easy.”

“It will be because we’ll have a plan all worked out. He’ll never know what hit him.”

“Are you sure your mom won’t mind us dropping in on her?”

“I already called tonight. She wants to meet you.”

“I thought...I thought you avoided your family, that you thought they were still angry at you?”

“Maybe it’s time for me to try and put that shit aside once and for all by talking to them.”

“You want me to come along while you work out this huge issue with your family?”

“Yes. I’m not sure if I could do it without you.”

“Of course you could.”

“Well, I still want you to be there with me. Please? Nobody will be in danger. I promise.”

“If you’re sure they won’t mind me tagging along.”

“I’m sure.”

“Then, yes, I’ll go visit your family with you this weekend.”

“Thank you. I’ll feel better with you out of town. You’ll be safer than you’ve been in a long time.”

He pulls me to him again, and I easily go. Being enveloped by his warm strength is how I’ve slept more this week than I did for probably an entire month.

But I can’t help but wonder why Greer wants to settle things with his family now of all times.

Does he think dealing with Eric will be so dangerous that he may not survive, that he may not get another chance to see his mom and sister?

That worries me more than anything, that he’s downplaying this all to make me think it’s no big deal.

All I can do is trust him, though. Trust that he wouldn’t do anything foolish to try and protect me.

The visit with his family may be what he needs to remind him that there are people who are more important to him than me.



Two days later, we hit the road as soon as my interview with the FBI agent is finished, stopping just once at a rest area on

the four-hour trip. Even then, I put on sunglasses and stuff all my hair up in a baseball cap, just in case.

The more populated, busier streets in Newark make me nervous. There are so many people who could see me, remember me, even just passing in a car.

When we finally arrive, my anxiety is peaking. The agents don't know where Eric is at the moment. I doubt he followed us here, but it's hard to let go of the paranoia. I suck in too much air too fast as we walk up to the front porch of the small, one-story home, so I force myself to calm down before I hyperventilate as Greer raises a hand to the door.

Before we even knock, the door swings open.

"Greer!" the short, motherly woman with auburn hair says before she throws her arms around his neck. "It's been too long!"

"Hi, Mom."

"Greer!"

"I know," he agrees as he hugs her back. "I was telling Celeste that I can't even remember the last time I came home."

"It was probably four years ago when the furnace went out," she replies.

He pulls away and slips his arm around my shoulders. "Anyway, Mom, this is my girlfriend, Celeste. Celeste, meet my mother, Teresa Maxwell."

"It's so nice to meet you," the older woman says as she proceeds to wrap me in a tight, unexpected hug.

"Ah, it's nice to meet you too," I tell her. "Thank you for letting me come visit with Greer."

"Anytime," she says, releasing me to stare up at my face with a smile. "Come in and let me fix you both some dinner."

"You don't have to cook for us, Mom. We could order in," Greer assures her.

"Nonsense! Your sister will be home soon, and I can't remember the last time all three of us sat down for a meal

together.” She heads inside the house with us following her. “You and Celeste can come keep me company in the kitchen. I want to know everything, starting with how the two of you met.”

Behind her back, Greer and I share a smile and a silent agreement that we won’t be telling her that story.

“Celeste applied for a job at the bar. I hired her. That’s pretty much it,” he says, giving her the shorter, cleaner version of the story when we arrive in the crowded kitchen.

“Love at first sight, huh?” she asks before moving to turn on the sink faucet to scrub her hands.

I try not to laugh as I remember the first time we laid eyes on each other.

“Something like that,” Greer agrees with his own smirk rather than admit or deny it.

“So, Celeste, where are you from?”

I look to Greer, who subtly shakes his head while she’s not looking. I agree. It’s best if his mom and sister don’t know anything about me.

“Clayton. It’s a small town near Rockland, but I love the beach and the close-knit community,” I lie.

“I haven’t ever had a chance to visit,” she says, which is a surprise since I know Greer’s been living there for years.

“Oh, that’s too bad.”

“I told you there’s no room in my loft, and I don’t think you would like the motel,” Greer explains.

To me, she says, “He thinks I need a queen’s accommodations, but I grew up in a two-bedroom apartment in the city, sharing a bed with my sister and brother until we got older and kicked my brother to the floor.”

“Fine,” Greer replies with a huff. “Maybe you can come visit later this year, after the busy tourist season is over.”

“That would be wonderful! I can see about Gina’s schedule in the fall, see if we can both come at the same time.”

“Mom, I seriously doubt Gina will want to make the trip after school starts.”

“Well, we can ask her and see. She gets a fall break each year.”

I get the impression that he doesn't want his mom and sister to visit him, but I'm not sure why. After all the work I've put into cleaning the bar, it's a nice place now.

“I'm gonna grab our things from the car,” Greer says.

“I'll come help,” I offer, even though we only have one shared duffle bag. “Unless you need me to help with dinner?”

“Oh, no. You two had a long drive, so just make yourselves comfortable. I can handle dinner.”

Greer and I go back to the front door, where I actually wait for him to return. “This way,” he says, showing me to the first bedroom off the living room hallway.

With a twin bed surrounded by motorcycle and sports car pictures with half-naked women on them, it's like going back in time to get a peek into teenage Greer's mind.

“Looks like you were always a boob man, huh?” I tease him.

Greer tosses the bag on the bed. Hands on his hips, he stares at the walls. “I can't believe she kept all this shit. She hasn't touched a single thing since I left.” When his gaze returns to his childhood bed with the blue-and-gray-striped comforter, he says, “I forgot how damn small the bed was in here.”

“We'll make it work,” I assure him as I flop down on it. “But you may have to sleep on top of me.”

Sighing, he says, “If I have to, then I guess I can manage it.”

“Did you ever have sex in this bed?”

“A few times.”

“A few times?” I try to imagine the types of girls he brought home.

“When I was a teenager, yeah. I’m pretty sure the sheets have been washed since then.”

“I should hope so.”

Grinning at me, he says, “Why? Are you jealous?”

“I don’t want to think about you with anyone else, even when you were a horny teenager. I don’t like the women on these posters either.”

“You’re cute when you’re jealous,” he says as he stands in front of me. Cupping the side of my face in his palm, he brushes his thumb over my lips. “I never thought I would be lucky enough to be with a woman as sexy as you.”

“Liar.” I bite down on the tip of his thumb.

“I’ll take the posters down and hang up ones of you cleaning the bar’s floors in your panties. My teenage dick would’ve exploded from the sight.”

“Is your thirty-something dick going to be exploding in me tonight?”

“Only if you can be quiet.”

“I can try.”

Leaning down, he kisses me, thrusting his tongue against mine, making me moan in anticipation of more to come. But then he pulls away. “Later, Daisy. I better get back to the kitchen before my mom comes looking for us. You can stay here, take a nap if you want.”

It sounds like he wants time alone to talk to his mother, so I nod. “Okay. Love you.”

“Love you too,” he replies, giving me another teasing kiss before he walks out the door, shutting it closed behind him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Greer

Hearing my footsteps returning to the kitchen, my mom starts talking without even turning to look at me. She's stirring a pot of what smells like beef stew, an odd choice in summer. "Will you two have enough room on the twin bed? I could pull out the couch..."

"The bed in my room is fine," I assure her.

Glancing over her shoulder at me, she smiles. "You look so much like your father. I always forget..."

"No, I don't," I disagree as I take a seat at the four-person dining table against the wall.

"Sure, you do. You have his dark hair and eyes. He never shaved but once a week..."

"That makes me want to go find a razor and shave twice a day to keep my face clean. I don't want to be anything like that bastard."

Huffing, she turns back to her pot. "Why do you always do that?"

"Do what?"

"Whenever I mention your father, you always have to bad-mouth him."

"I don't know, Mom. Probably because all I have are bad memories of that son of a bitch."

“He loved you...”

“And he used his fists to show me? I don’t think so. He loved his booze, nothing else.”

“He loved us both. Once he sobered up in prison, he was like a different man.”

“And he would’ve been right back to his old self just as soon as they released him.”

“We’ll never know now, will we?”

Getting to my feet, I erupt, unable to hold in the anger I tried so hard to bury. “What the fuck do you want me to say, Mom? That I’m sorry for locking him up? I’m not. I’d had enough. Gina was a baby, and he could’ve killed her in an instant during one of his fits!”

“I wouldn’t have let him hurt her.”

“Oh, but it was fine for him to hurt me? Fuck you.”

“Greer!” she exclaims. “Now you sound just like him!”

“Except I’m completely sober when I said it. I mean it too, Mom. Fuck you for not leaving him when I was a baby so I could’ve avoided sixteen years of pain!”

“You have no idea how much I hate myself for not keeping you away from him.”

“Bullshit. You still haven’t forgiven me for putting him away. I know you blame me for him dying in there, ‘locked away from his family.’ You remember saying that shit?”

Now, she turns around to finally face me, leaving the giant spoon in the pot. “Is that what you think?”

“Yes. Admit it.”

“You’re wrong. I don’t hate you. I could never hate you, Greer. I hate myself for not being stronger. If I had been strong enough to leave him, then he wouldn’t have ruined our family, but then I wouldn’t have had Gina.”

“I find that hard to believe. You loved him. More than you ever loved us.”

“No, I felt sorry for him. When he was sober, he was a good man.”

“Too bad he only got sober once in a blue moon. He was never sober long enough to get or keep a job. And because you were always working, I was stuck at home with his drunk ass.”

“He felt bad for what he did when he was drunk.”

“Yeah, well, feeling bad doesn’t change a damn thing, does it? Neither does apologizing when he kept doing it over and over again.”

“You’re right. I shouldn’t have kept giving him chances. But when you love someone, it’s hard to walk away...”

“You chose him over me and Gina.”

“And I regret it every single day of my life!”

“Regret doesn’t make anything better either, Mom.”

“Then what will, Greer? I don’t know why you came home this weekend, but I know it wasn’t to forgive me. Was it just to yell at me? To remind me that I was a bad mother? Trust me, I never forget it.”

“I came home because I wanted you to meet Celeste. She means a lot to me, so I thought she should meet my family since she doesn’t have one of her own that’s worth a shit.”

“She’s a lovely girl. And she’s lucky to have you too.”

“I thought this weekend might be long enough to convince you that I did the right thing with Dad, but I don’t think a hundred years would be enough time to change your mind.”

“I know you did the right thing, Greer! Is that what you want to hear? You were a better parent to Gina than me or your father. You protected her when I couldn’t.”

Her words, they are the ones I needed to hear, even if they don’t change anything.

“But you’ve never told Gina that, have you? You let her think I’m the bad guy for taking her father from her, a father she never got a chance to know.”

“That’s not what Gina thinks at all! She missed you when you left, not her father. You up and left us both after the funeral when we needed you most. Sending us money for twenty years doesn’t make up for you not being here.”

“I didn’t think either of you wanted me around.”

“Well, we did!”

“Maybe I didn’t want to be around the two of you, knowing you both blamed me for everything that happened.”

“I never blamed you. I hated that I put you in that position where you felt you had to get rid of your father to keep us safe. And I hated the men who beat your father to death in prison because they thought he was a snitch. But I could never hate you, Greer. Neither could Gina.”

I’ll never be convinced that’s true, no matter how many times she says it.

“We love you and miss you. I would love for you to come home more often.”

“If you really want me to, I guess...I guess I could try to visit more. It’s just been hard to leave the bar.”

“Good. That would be really good,” she says with a smile.



When I peek my head into my old bedroom, I find Celeste curled up on the bed, facing the door.

“Hey, dinner’s ready, and Gina just got here.”

“Is everything okay?” she asks, pushing herself up into a sitting position. “I heard you and your mom...”

“It was tense for a while. I finally got some things off my chest,” I admit.

“Do you feel better?”

“I guess so. I’m an asshole for yelling at her like that.”

“No, you’re not.” Getting up from the bed, Celeste comes over and winds her arms around my waist, pressing her face to my chest. “You said what you needed to say. The truth hurts sometimes.”

“Yeah,” I agree as I hold her to me. “I’m glad you’re here. If you hadn’t been, I might’ve just walked out the door and left to avoid it all again...”

“I’m glad I’m here too, but if you want to leave, we can leave.”

“No, I think we’re okay now. Come eat with us?”

“Sure,” she easily agrees.

Taking her hand, I lead the way back to the kitchen, where my mom and Gina are both already sitting at the dining table, which has been set for the four of us.

“Gina, this is Celeste. Celeste, my little sister, Gina.”

“It’s so nice to meet you!” Gina says, pushing her chair back to come give Celeste a bear hug, just like Mom. In fact, I hadn’t noticed how much my sister favors our mom. She’s lucky she didn’t take after our father like I did. “Greer never brings home girls!” my sister adds when she retakes her seat.

“Thankfully, you were too young to remember his high school days,” Mom says. “I couldn’t keep track of the girls coming and going at night.”

“It wasn’t that many, just the same ones multiple times.”

“Uh-huh,” Mom says with a roll of her eyes.

The truth was, with my dad in prison, I had to babysit Gina while our mom worked the second shift in a textile factory. So, by the time Gina would go down for the night, I needed some stress release. I lost my virginity as soon as the last of the bruises healed and never looked back.

Before I take my seat at the table, I fill up Celeste’s bowl of stew and grab us sodas from the fridge.

“Well, Celeste,” Gina starts, flashing me a mischievous smile, “I need to know how you managed to whip my brother.”

“I’m not whipped,” I mutter indignantly.

“And what’s with the leather jacket?”

“You didn’t tell them?” Celeste asks in surprise.

“Tell us what?” Now, my mother is curious as well.

“I just patched into a motorcycle club,” I tell them.

“A motorcycle club? Wow!” Gina glances between me and Celeste. “Is that where you two met?”

“No, she was his employee first,” our mother informs her.

“Ohhh.”

Tired of having the spotlight on me, I decide to turn it around on my sister. “Could we talk about something else, like your love life, Gina? Are you dating anyone?”

“Not at the moment.”

“That’s good,” I tell her. “School comes first. Besides, nobody’s good enough for you.”

“I know school comes first. The rest will happen eventually.”



The rest of the dinner conversation is making small talk. Once we clear the table, Gina and I volunteer to do the dishes while my mom hauls Celeste off in search of old photo albums.

“I still can’t believe you have a girlfriend. But I like her already.”

“Celeste is great. Now that I’ve found her, I don’t know what I would do without her.”

“Well, I don’t think you’ll have to worry about losing her. She doesn’t look like she’s going anywhere without you.”

“She’s had to deal with a lot of shit with her own family. It’s not easy for her to feel safe.”

“But you gave her a safe, happy place to call home, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Good. I’m glad you found someone. You seem like a good match.”

“We are, I think. Honestly, I don’t really know what I’m doing. It’s not like I grew up seeing what a healthy relationship looks like.”

“I didn’t either, but I think it’s pretty simple – take care of each other. Don’t hurt her. Oh, and obviously don’t cheat on her.”

“Never.”

“Then you’ve got this.”

“Thanks, sis. I keep forgetting that you’re all grown up and adulting now.”

“I try,” she says with a smile. “I’m just glad you finally came home.”

“Are you really?”

“What do mean?”

“Are you actually glad I’m home?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You grew up without a father because of me. Then I left you with mom...”

“You have always been a great big brother. If you had to leave, then I knew it was for a good reason. I still missed you every day.”

“I thought Mom blamed me for Dad’s death and passed on her feelings to you.”

“She doesn’t blame you – at least, she’s never said anything like that to me. I know she still misses him or at least parts of him.”

“Yeah, she’s got selective memory when it comes to that asshole. All she can recall is the few good times, not all the

rest. The things that happened while she was at work, I was never sure she believed me when I told her, or she would laugh it off as ‘just playing.’ I couldn’t stand to see how bad his death hurt her when his life had tormented me.”

“You leaving right after he died hurt her. Hurt us both. I can only imagine how bad you were hurt too at the time. Why don’t you ever come around now, though, even after all these years?”

“I didn’t want to face what I had done. It was easier to pretend that as long as I sent you money, you couldn’t completely despise me.”

“Neither of us needs your money, Greer.” I give her a look that says I know she’s full of shit.

“Yes, it helps, but Mom and I can take care of ourselves now. She may have struggled the first few years, but she has her shit together now. Has for a while now.” She balls her sudsy fist and punches me in the shoulder. “If you had bothered to call or visit, you could’ve seen that for yourself.”

“I’m sorry. For everything.”

“You don’t owe anyone an apology. You’re my big brother. I know you’ll always be there when I need you, financially and otherwise. I prefer the otherwise.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m just glad you’re here now and found someone who makes you happy. But why did you come home now?”

“Because of Celeste. I think I needed to fight the demons of my past before I could settle down. I’ve been running from it for so long, mostly because I always worried that I would turn out like him...”

“From what I’ve heard about Dad, he never would’ve been willing to sacrifice as much as you have for our sake. He put himself first, always. But it’s okay for you to come first sometimes too, you know? Let Mom and I return the favor and help you. I’m not sure what we could do other than help plan the wedding...”

“What wedding?” I ask in confusion before it hits me. “It’s a little early to be talking about marriage.”

“You’ve thought about it already, though, haven’t you?”

“Maybe.”

“Well, we’re here, whenever you need us, for anything.”

“I’m about to lose the bar,” I admit to her.

“What? Why?”

“Long story, but, ah, Celeste offered to buy the place from the current owner. I just don’t know...”

“You know how you feel about sending us money every month? That you do it out of love, not obligation? I’m sure it’s the same for her, so don’t dismiss the offer out of some stupid sense of pride. Helping the people you love feels good. It’s not about holding it over their heads, right? So don’t take that opportunity from her.”

“I hadn’t thought about it like that,” I admit. “Maybe I have been a little stubborn.”

“A little?” Gina huffs and then flicks suds at my face.

“Fine. I’ve been stupidly stubborn. She offered to do it for us, not to make me feel guilty for not being able to do it on my own.”

“Exactly! I’m sure that you bend over backward to help her however you can too, right?”

“Right.”

I don’t tell my little sister that what I’m planning to do for Celeste will be dangerous. The risks don’t matter to me because I’ll do whatever it takes to keep her safe.

Even risk my own life.

Celeste has been afraid for too long, waiting for someone to believe her, to make him stay away. She deserves better than to spend her days and nights living in fear of him.

And later that night, when I climb into my childhood bed and hold her in my arms, I know she’s worth it.

This trip home was to make amends but also to reassure myself that my mom and sister can make it without me if things go badly.

I'll hope for the best, but in the meantime, I'm also preparing for the worst.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Celeste

The visit to see Greer's family in New Jersey was fun and enlightening. I spent time with his sister while Greer helped his mother with some outstanding repairs around the house. Then in the afternoons and evenings, the family made a big presentation of preparing dinner and hanging out together on the porch. It was one thing to hear him talk about them but another to see his love and worry for them. And how much they love him too, despite the horrible things he tried to tell himself to the contrary.

And I'm not all that surprised that the Monday after we get back to Rockland, Greer drops the bomb I've been dreading on me right after we finish eating breakfast in the loft.

Reaching across the table, he takes my hand and intertwines our fingers. It's a sweet gesture, especially for Greer, which is worrisome since I have no idea what he's about to say.

"So, I know you don't like going out or talking to people, but I hope you'll agree to a girls' day tomorrow."

"Girls' day?"

"Yeah, and possibly a little into the night. All you have to do is get to know the wives and girlfriends of the other Savage Kings."

"Why?"

“Because you can’t be here for what’s planned for Eric.”

“You mean...it’s going down *tomorrow*? For certain?”

“Nothing is certain, but if everything goes according to the plan...” He trails off and pulls his hand back.

“And you don’t want me here for that?”

“No. And I didn’t think you would want to chance seeing him either. Right?”

“I don’t.”

“Will you be okay meeting the women? If all goes well, it’s okay for you to start getting to know people, making friends.”

“I already met Remy’s girlfriend at the motel, and she seemed nice.”

“They all are, and they’ll love you.”

“And you’ll be dealing with Eric?”

“Yes. With the rest of the Kings and law enforcement making sure we catch or kill the son of a bitch.”

“Are you sure it’s safe, Greer? If something happened to you or your friends...”

“Nothing is going to happen to me or my friends.”

“Promise?”

“I promise, Daisy. And hopefully, by tomorrow night, this nightmare of yours will be finally over.”

I give him as much of a smile as I can. “It’s hard to believe that I’m actually going to get my life back. For a while, I wasn’t sure...”

Getting up from his chair, Greer comes over and crouches down to clasp my face, kissing me a kiss on the lips. “I want you to have your life back and for you to live it however you want. Just know that you always have a place here with me, okay?”

“Good, because I wasn’t planning on leaving anytime soon,” I tell him honestly. “Rockland feels like my home now.”

You feel like my home.”

“You feel like my home too,” he says with a grin. “I can’t imagine the bar without you in it, but if you ever change your mind, you’re free to leave. I would beg you to stay but never manipulate you or threaten you.”

“I know you wouldn’t because you’re nothing like him. I like when you hold me close. In fact, it’s my favorite thing in the world. And tomorrow can’t come soon enough, even if it’s a little terrifying.”



I don’t sleep a wink that night. Not just because of my worry for what the next day would bring, but because Greer and I couldn’t keep our hands off each other. After the bar closed, he made me scream, made me beg, and made love to me like we were the only two people in the world.

It was an amazing night, exactly what I needed going into what felt like judgment day. The last day living in fear and the first of a happy future with the man who loves me with all his heart and soul.

But after Greer dropped me off at his friend’s house, time seemed to stand still without him there to distract me from the second he rode off on his motorcycle.

“Hi, Celeste!” the pretty blonde holding open the front door says in greeting. “I’m Everly, and it’s so nice to finally meet you. I’m so sorry about what that awful man has been doing to you.”

“Thank you,” I say, offering her a smile since she seems so sweet and sincere.

“Come on inside. Everyone is out on the porch. Most of the other girlfriends and wives of the Savage Kings are new to town too, so you’re definitely not alone,” Everly informs me.

“That’s good to know.”

She leads me through the house, where toys are scattered about, making me assume she has kids. A group of women are sitting around on the screened-in porch in wicker chairs and sofas, jutting out into the backyard surrounded by a privacy fence.

“Everyone, this is Celeste, Greer’s girlfriend. Celeste, meet Avery, Remy’s wife. Josie, who is Colt’s wife and the prospect Jordan’s mother. Lyla is Barrett’s fiancée, and I am, well, I’m Hugo’s significant other.”

“Hi, Celeste. It’s nice to see you again,” Avery, the tall blonde woman I met at the motel, says when she stands up to shake my hand. “Come sit and gossip with us. Tell us what our men are all up to tonight.”

“Yes, and tell us why we haven’t seen you around before now,” the redhead adds.

“She’s been working for Greer during the daytime and hiding out in her motel room at night,” the oldest lady of the group explains before giving me a wave. “Hi, I’m Josie. I clean the motel rooms and caught a glimpse of you a few times.”

“Oh, right. I wasn’t avoiding everyone to be rude or anything,” I assure them.

“Of course not,” Josie replies. “We all understand needing some space of our own now and then, don’t we ladies?”

“Definitely,” the redhead agrees.

“So, how long have you been in town?” Everly asks as she tucks her long, colorful maxi dress under her to take a seat.

“Ah, just a little over a month.”

“A month!” she exclaims. “How did you stay a secret in this town for a month?”

“Well, I’ve been running across the country from a psycho stalker who is convinced I’m going to be his wife forever and ever, so I had to keep a low profile.”

“No shit?” Avery asks. “The cop who came to the motel right after you left asking about you? He had a picture of you

as a blonde.”

“Yep, that’s him.”

“Remy and I both told him we hadn’t seen anyone who looked like you.”

“Thanks. Greer said that everyone in town lied to him for me. I appreciate that. Back home, my own family would’ve not only told him where to find me but given him handwritten directions.”

“Jeez. That’s awful,” the redhead says. Lyla, I think was her name. “You know, I had a crazy man after me, too, a few months back.”

“Really?”

“Yes, but he was my biological father, who...it’s a long story,” she says with a wave of her hand. “Bear, my father, and the Kings took care of him.”

“Took care of him? Like, killed him?”

“Uh-huh,” she says before she takes a sip of green slush that looks like a margarita. “But he had it coming. He was a convicted rapist. Bear didn’t get charged for it or anything. Self-defense, you know? He had a gun to my head and had knocked out Bear’s brother, RJ.”

“Wow. So, you all are familiar with violence and crazy people.”

“It sort of comes with the territory,” Avery says. “I used to be on the other side of the law until I met Remy.”

“We had no idea they were faking their relationship,” Avery remarks. “Although, I think Remy and Avery forgot they were supposed to be pretending too.”

“He was impossible to resist, smoke cloud following him around and all,” she says with a sigh as she stares out at the colorful bounce house in the yard, where a little girl or boy is quietly jumping.

“What about the rest of you? How did you meet your Savage King?” I ask the other women.

“Well, Colt wanted my son, Jordan, to be his prospect,” Josie explains. “He was also insistent that I sleep with him. I eventually caved.”

The women laugh, and then Lyla says, “Barrett was married to my sister first.”

“Wow.”

“It was years ago, and she’s a horrible person who cheated on him while he was in the army. When he showed up at her wedding for ‘closure,’ we ran into each other. It was a bumpy road, but everything worked out. I met him first, anyway.”

We all turn to Everly, who looks like the shyest of the group. “Oh, do I have to share?”

“Yes,” Avery tells her.

“Fine. Hugo came to town to see if my niece Harley was his daughter and started dating me to be around her. She’s actually his best friend Abel’s daughter. You’ll see him around now and then since he alternates between the Myrtle Beach chapter and the Rockland one with his boyfriend and girlfriend. My sister is a slutty stripper, so she wasn’t sure who Harley’s father was until we did the paternity tests.”

“That...that’s a lot to unpack there, Everly.”

“It wasn’t as dramatic as it all sounds.”

“Sure,” I say since I find that hard to believe.

“Enough about the past,” Avery says. “The most recent drama is the Savage Kings patching over the Devil Hounds, more than doubling their numbers. Lyla’s dad was the former president, and he knocked up her best friend, who just had a baby boy!”

“Oh, wow. Congratulations on being a big sister?” I hesitantly say to the redhead.

“Thank you. Ethan is adorable, even if it is a little weird that my best friend is his mother and now my stepmother.”

“Ah, yeah. I bet so. Glad to know I’m not the only one with a lot of drama.”

“A little drama keeps life fun,” Avery says with a smile.
“And what else is there to do in this town but gossip, drink,
and go to the beach?”

“True enough,” Josie agrees.

“Now, Celeste, can I get you a margarita?” Everly offers.

“They’re delicious,” Lyla announces.

“Then, sure, why not?” I agree, thinking I could see myself
becoming friends with these wonderful ladies.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Greer

After Celeste gave her sworn statement to the feds, the plan to catch Eric coalesced quickly over the weekend while Celeste and I were visiting my mom. It was mostly thanks to the federal connections the Kings had recently been cultivating. A few days after the local FBI agents put their heads together with ones from San Francisco, it was all planned out and started with the arrival of a group of four agents from California at the bar.

Torin Fury had texted me personally earlier this morning, letting me know the feds would handle everything, but I was still caught off guard when they swept inside like they owned the place.

As soon as I dropped Celeste off at Hugo and Everly's, Remy and the rest of the guys came over to hunker down and be ready if shit went sideways. From the scowls on their stern faces directed at the men in leather, I get the feeling the agents aren't happy with the club's presence.

"Are you the owner of this establishment, Greer Maxwell?" a young blond agent with short-cropped hair and a lot of muscles stretching out his button-down asks me while the others fan out in the bar like drug hounds on the hunt.

"That's me," I confirm.

He produces his badge and flashes it to me. “My name is Aaron Sizemore. I’m the lead agent for this operation. We’ve been investigating the activities of San Francisco detective Eric Ryans. He’s spent the last several days out here on the East Coast pursuing a suspect outside of his jurisdiction, as you are already aware. Interviews we have conducted in the last few weeks have led us to question Ryans’ version of some recent events before your people reached out to us providing your friend’s statement. We were planning to just bring him in for questioning. Now we have a warrant for his arrest to execute. Did your people bring you up to speed on what we’re planning?”

“They only said to expect you guys sometime today and that you would handle everything.” I walk back behind the counter of the bar, still eyeing the other agents warily as they move around the place. They look like they’re measuring something and pointing out sight lines to each other around the room.

“Detective Ryans is on his way here now. Our office contacted his dispatcher in San Francisco, whom Ryans had been pumping for information while he has been on his extended ‘vacation.’ She was more than happy to help us steer the detective back to Rockland as part of this investigation into his extracurricular activities. We anticipate his arrival in the next few hours, so we’re going to add a few of our cameras to your existing security system, place some microphones, and then be on standby for when he arrives.”

“Is there anything you need me to do?”

“Act normal and confirm that you have seen the suspect, Cera, and that she is staying locally. He was told that she had been through this area and that she was seen specifically at this bar. I would prefer one of my agents tend the bar until he arrives in case there are any complications taking him into custody, but...”

“The fuck they will,” I grumble.

Agent Sizemore snorts. “I was just going to say, I was told you would likely be belligerent to the idea, and since we

understand that Detective Ryans has seen you here before and expects you to be the bartender, it'll help catch him off guard. If you can engage him in conversation, we will move in and take him before he realizes he's been played. The more you get him to talk, the stronger our case will be. If you want a bulletproof vest..."

"No vest," I say. "It would be too suspicious. I'll do whatever you need me to, talk as long as I need to talk, in order to get this guy off Celeste...Cera's back," I correct myself.

"Good," he says as he slaps a hand down on the bar. "In that case, lock back up and let us get set up. We're expecting him to arrive before 5:00 p.m. to avoid as many customers as possible."

"Sure thing, but the Kings are going to stay," I tell him.

He glances around at Remy, Colt, Barrett, RJ, Thane, and Hugo, sitting at their normal tables playing cards and pretending not to be eavesdropping.

The agent huffs. "Fine. They can stay." Louder, he tells the room, "But nobody makes a move before my team."

The guys nod their heads in agreement.

I don't know if the agents had surveillance on the detective constantly or precisely how they tracked him almost down to the moment, but an hour and a half later, the blond muscle-neck, Sizemore, makes a gesture to his team that sends them scattering into the loft. They arrived in a nondescript sedan to blend in with the motorcycles in the parking lot.

I unlock the front door, then go back behind the bar to wipe glasses, as if I don't have a care in the world. The Kings all do the same, laughing and giving each other shit.

Detective Ryans enters not five minutes later, making a beeline for me at the bar without barely sparing a glance around the room. He's gotten careless in his relentless pursuit, which will hopefully work against him.

"Gritty Greer," he greets me jovially. "I got the message you left with my office regarding my wife?"

It takes a great deal of restraint not to punch him in the face just for referring to Celeste as his wife.

“Oh, yeah. You’re Detective Ryans, right?” I ask him for the sake of the agents listening and recording our interaction.

“That’s right. You called my office and said you had information for me?”

“Yes.” I nod to him, drawing out the moment. “I saw that blonde you were looking for just a little bit ago, but she wasn’t blonde.”

“A ‘little bit ago,’” the son of a bitch repeats, mimicking my drawl. “Well, Mr. Gritty Greer, could you be a bit more precise? When was ‘a little bit ago’? Did you speak to her?”

“Oh yeah, I spoke to her a bit. In fact, I got her number, even asked her to come on back over. She’s on her way now.”

“Is she really?” the detective asks, leaning back and taking his hands off the bar. His excitement has changed to something very different, his thrill turning to nervousness and fear.

“Yeah. She can’t wait to see you.”

He goes still, face blanking. “You told her I was here?”

“Why wouldn’t I? She’s your *wife*, right?”

“Right,” he says. “But I wanted it to be a surprise.”

“Too bad. I wanted to do this my way.”

“Your way? What are you talking about?”

“Cera told me all about you, Eric. I know everything. How you stalked her, how you put an innocent man in prison because he was in your way. I also know that she shot you to run away from you. How’s the leg?”

“I don’t know what Cera told you, but she has a tendency to exaggerate things.”

“No, I don’t think so. In fact, I believe every word she said. You know why? Because I love her, and she loves me, without the need for intimidation or manipulation.”

“That’s bullshit!” His fists are both clenched at his sides. He’s backed away far enough that I can see his hands, which I watch carefully because I know the psycho must be armed.

“Is it, though? She’s been working for me for over a month. I’ve had my hands and mouth on every inch of her. You can’t even imagine how good she feels, can you? Because she’s never willingly let you lay a hand on her without your fear tactics.”

“She doesn’t know how to keep her fucking legs closed!” Eric suddenly spits, just as I knew he would. Jealousy and rage guide men like Eric. Men like my father.

“Why do you say that? Because she doesn’t want you anywhere near her legs, much less between them?” I ask, twisting the knife.

“Fuck you! You don’t know what you’re talking about. She’s mine, and if you touched her...”

“Oh, I did more than touch her. I have a video of me going down on her on top of this very bar if you want to see it? Is that the kind of evidence you’ll believe, Detective?”

“I will rip you apart!” he roars, face now bloodred.

“Hey, man. You need to calm the fuck down,” Remy says when he starts to stand up from his chair. I give a small shake of my head to discourage him from interfering. After a second, he sits back down.

“You don’t look much like an upstanding officer of the law now, do you?” I taunt the cop, begging him to lose his cool, just a bit further.

“You’re a dead man. Your biker buddies can’t save your ass now.”

“I thought you preferred to lock up your competition like you did to that Justin guy when you planted drugs in his car and had your buddy pull him over.”

“He was a loser, some worthless waiter at her restaurant. My Cera could do so much better than a wimp like him. I had to get him away from her.”

Again, his possessiveness over her makes me nearly homicidal. Since I don't want to go to prison for killing him, I push down the rage.

“But you see, who she dates isn't your decision to make, Eric. It's hers. So, while you may think you're the only man she should be with, you would be wrong. You never had a chance with Cera. You're not her type. She prefers bad boys, not self-entitled cops.”

“I. Will. End. You.”

“Yeah, you keep saying that bullshit. But if you kill me, and in front of witnesses, you'll have to start your search for her all over again. She'll run from you, just like before.”

“I will find her. I'll do whatever it takes.”

“You're never gonna give up coming after my girl, are you?”

“Cera is *mine!*”

“She's not yours. She doesn't want to be yours. That's not even the name she goes by anymore, thanks to you. *Celeste* loves me and only me. It's time for you to let her go.”

“Never! I will never let her go. She's going to marry me, and we're going to spend the rest of our lives together one way or another!”

“How do you figure that? You gonna drag her by her hair down the aisle, pay some minister to look the other way while she begs someone to save her from you? Yeah, only in your dreams, psycho.”

He finally pulls out the gun from his shoulder holster, then cocks it before pointing it at me. I'm actually surprised it took him this long to brandish the weapon. Around the room, six guns are out and pointed at his back.

Again, the asshole side-eyes the men but says, “I'm not stupid. I know they won't take a shot at me when it could hit you. The only way you can keep breathing is if you convince Cera to get her ass over here and leave with me right now!”

“So I'm dead if I don't convince her to go with you?”

“That’s right. The only way you get to live is if you give her to me.”

“No.”

“Then I’ll kill you now. I tracked her down once, I can find her again.”

“It’ll be hard for you to find her when you’re full of bullet holes or, better yet, when your ass is behind bars.”

“That’ll never happen.”

“Sure, it will. These guys aren’t the only witnesses in the bar. The feds have been listening and watching our entire conversation. They’ve got you confessing to stalking Cera across state lines, threatening to kill me, confessing to setting up an innocent man. The list goes on and on. I hope you can afford a good attorney, one to maybe keep you in solitary so the other inmates won’t tear your stupid, corrupt ass apart, limb from limb.”

“No,” he says, shaking his head adamantly, even though his eyes try to cut around the room to reassess more closely. “You’re full of shit. The feds aren’t listening. It’s just you and your biker gang trying to intimidate me.”

“You’re not going to walk out the door as a free man ever again, and you will *never* see Cera again.”

Lifting his gun, he fires off a shot at me, making shit even worse for himself. I throw myself down behind the bar, glass and vodka raining down on me as several bullets shatter bottles. Before my head can even bounce off the floor, the doors to my loft and the front and back doors all explode open, agents swarming into the room, roaring commands, telling everyone to put down their guns.

For a brief moment, I kind of hope the fucker refuses so they have to kill him, then Celeste won’t ever have to worry about him bothering her again.

But I don’t hear any other gunshots, unfortunately. Just the sounds of a struggle as they take him to the ground and cuff him. It’s for the best since I’m glad the Kings are all safe.

Maybe one of the Kings winged him. And hopefully, he won't make it out of prison alive, just like my father.

Thanks to Celeste, I can finally accept that I did what I had to do to keep the people I love safe. I would do it all over again, even knowing the consequences, because once my father stepped foot in that house again, we would've been right back where we started. And then I would've been locked up for murder after he touched Gina or my mom again.

He made the decision to beat us. He made whatever decision it was on the inside to turn the gang against him. He did all of that, not me.

Just like Eric here who made his bed, and now he's going to have to lie in it.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Celeste

“**W**hat’s taking so long?” I ask as I pace along the backyard of Hugo and Everly’s house. I’ve had three margaritas, which were delicious, but not even the buzz from the alcohol or the fun “girl talk” I’ve missed can keep my mind off Greer for long.

“Remy said it could take a few hours,” Avery reminds me from her seat on the porch. “I’m sure they’re fine.”

I glance over and see the worry on the blonde’s face, then the same look on all of the other women’s faces now that the conversation has trailed off. Josie is sitting in her chair so still I’m not sure if she’s even breathing. Lyla is biting off all of her fingernails. And Everly is checking her phone every five seconds.

“I shouldn’t have let them do this,” I mutter. “All of your men could be in danger.”

“They love it,” Everly says. “They’re like Harley, the – more dangerous, more trouble they can get into, the better.”

The energetic little girl is squealing and jumping around inside the nearby swaying bouncy house, talking to an imaginary dog named Rocky, completely oblivious to us all worrying ourselves to death nearby.

“Just think,” Lyla says. “In a few hours, your nightmare could be over because of our men.”

“That’s true. God, I don’t even know what I would do if I were finally free of that lunatic...”

“Marry Greer?” Josie asks, a small smile on her still mostly frozen face. “Have his babies?”

When I remember that the woman is not just Colt’s wife but Jordan’s mother, I can’t help but feel even more sympathy for her because two men she loves could be in danger.

“I’m so sorry, Josie. They wouldn’t let Jordan anywhere near this, would they?”

“Colt probably gave him some small job miles away as a lookout or something,” she says. “But still...”

“I know.”

I pace for a few more minutes as the yard remains quiet other than a few crickets and Harley’s happy squeals and barks.

Needing to do something, I ask the women, “Are any of you hungry? You have to be getting hungry by now, right?”

“Ugh, I feel so sick I don’t think I can eat anything right now or ever again,” Avery says, pressing her hand to her stomach. She didn’t have a single margarita, so it’s not the alcohol making her nauseous.

“Avery!” Josie gasps. “Are you...”

“No!” the blonde immediately responds before the other woman can finish her question.

“You are!”

Avery scrubs her palms over her face, then drops them. “Fine. Yes. I’m pregnant.”

“Oh, wow!” I exclaim along with the other women, who surround her, hugging her and shouting more questions at her.

“How far along?” Lyla asks.

“Only about ten weeks. We were waiting to tell everyone when we got to the second trimester.”

“That’s so exciting!” Everly says.

“I’m sorry I blurted it out before you were ready,” Josie tells her with a wince.

“No, it’s fine. Remy’s probably already told the guys anyway.”

“How does he feel about being a dad?” Josie asks. “Oh, and Colt, RJ, and Barrett are going to be uncles!”

“Yay!” Lyla says, then laughs. “I’m gonna be an aunt! Your son or daughter can grow up with my brother.”

“Remy has been trying to get me pregnant since the moment we said our wedding vows, so he was ridiculously happy,” Avery tells us with a huge smile.

“That’s great,” I tell her, along with all the other women.

After we talk babies for at least an hour, I’m still antsy. “The pregnant lady needs to eat, even if she doesn’t want to eat. How about I cook something for you all and the men to have when they get back?”

“Sure. I’ll help,” Josie says as she gets to her feet. “I need to do something to pass the time.”

“Everly, do you mind if we use your kitchen?”

“Go for it. If you cook, I’ll clean.”

“I’ll help Ev clean since I’m not a great cook,” Lyla offers.

“And I’ll sit out here and try not to barf and ruin dinner for everyone,” Avery tells us.

“Great. Let’s go see what we can whip up.”



While Everly’s kitchen wasn’t what I would call well stocked, it did have everything I needed to whip up breakfast for dinner. With the number of mouths to feed, I needed something buffet-style to feed an army. The only things they had in abundance were eggs and bacon, but once I found the flour and sugar, we were in business.

I directed Josie to start running bacon through the air fryer while I began scrambling a dozen eggs at a time in the skillet. Everly pulled out an electric griddle tucked away under a counter, and soon, we were producing stacks of half a dozen pancakes every few minutes.

I'm just getting ready to dip the battered pan I was using to make eggs into the sink to let it soak when several of the ladies' phones buzz to life. My heart jumps into my throat, expecting to hear the worst. Everly thankfully shows me her phone since I laid mine down somewhere.

The message says, *We're fine, feds rounded up that dude Eric. We're on the way back.*

"Oh, thank God," I gush, leaning on the sink as my knees suddenly go weak under me. I didn't realize how much anxiety I was holding in or that I was running off the energy it was giving me after getting no sleep last night. Once I let it out on a long, shuddering breath, I nearly collapse.

Everly helps me to a nearby chair and then hands me a dry dishrag, just as I realize tears are running down each of my cheeks. "Thank you," I manage to sniff. She gives me a one-armed hug, like we're actually friends instead of two people who just met a few hours ago before going back over to the griddle to flip her pancakes.

"It doesn't get easier," she says softly. "But you did great today. Greer is lucky to have found someone who cares enough to worry about him."

"Thank you all for helping me...helping each other, through all this," I reply. "The eggs are all done, so I'm going to pop into the bathroom for a moment and try to put my face together before they get here," I add as I leave the kitchen.

I lock myself in the bathroom and then put the lid down so I can sit down on the toilet. I lean over, clutching my stomach, and let the relief wash over me, a wave of emotions so intense that I can't make the tears stop leaking from my eyes. My hands are shaking as I dab at damp cheeks. When they begin to slow, I try to cool myself with a cold, wet rag.

I lose track of time waiting for my body to stop reacting, just running water and dabbing at my neck and face until a knock at the door startles me. “Cer...Celeste, you okay in there?” Greer calls through the door.

Tossing the rag down in the sink, I unlock the door and open it, inviting him in. He squeezes into the bathroom with me. I barely give him time to shut the door before I throw my arms around him.

“Ohthankgod,” I blurt out in one hot breath as I clutch him to me. I take a deep breath, inhaling his familiar smell of leather, and almost immediately reel back, gasping for breath at the other scent covering him.

“You’re wet, and you smell like you bathed in booze!” I blurt as my hands roam over his chest, underneath his leather cut that is stained and damp. “Are you okay?”

“Oh yeah, fucking Eric took a shot at me,” Greer says. I must have gone pale because he quickly adds, “He missed, obviously. He did hit a few bottles behind the bar. I’m glad you don’t smoke. There’s enough whiskey to light me right up.”

“Get undressed so we can dry you off,” I demand.

“Oh, yes, ma’am,” Greer replies, complying immediately, peeling off his cut and hanging it from a hook on the back of the door, then pulling the alcohol-soaked T-shirt off over his head.

I take it from him and throw it into the sink where it lands with a wet splat that makes me burst into giggles. While Greer is also chuckling, I lean down and lick a line up his tight, ridged stomach. The whiskey still beading on his skin burns slightly on my tongue before my mouth finds Greer’s and our tongues merge.

“Looks like you’re finally getting your body shot licked off of you tonight,” I tell him with a smile as I reach for his belt buckle to undo it.

“Then I am one lucky son of a bitch,” he replies with a grin. “All I have is one question for you.”

My fingers still. “What’s that?”

“Which name should I shout when I come? You haven’t told me if you want to go by Celeste or Cera?”

“Neither,” I tell him with a big grin.

“Neither?”

“To you, I always just want to be Daisy.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Reaching for the side of my face, he brushes his lips over mine. “Now, tell me more about that body shot plan of yours, Daisy.”

EPILOGUE

Greer

One year later...

“Good morning, Mrs. Maxwell.”

“Good morning, Mr. Maxwell. I think I like my new name even more than I like Daisy,” Celeste replies with a big smile. With her head still resting on my bare chest, she holds out her left hand so the light peeking into the suite from the crack in the curtains hits the diamond. It’s a nice ring, but I’m partial to the new platinum wedding band I put on her finger when I made her my wife. “I still can’t believe we’re married,” she says.

“Believe it, baby. Although, there’s probably still time for an annulment if you’ve changed your mind.”

She scoffs at that. “No way you’re getting rid of me that easily!”

My arm tightens around her even more. “Good.”

“I sort of hate that we have to fly home today.”

“Me too. Do you want to stay a few more days? We don’t have to take the chartered plane back with the others today. We could book a flight in a few days.”

The Kings paid for all of us to fly out and home as our wedding present, which was ridiculous but better than being cramped in coach.

“No. That’s okay,” my wife says with a sigh. “The private plane is too awesome to pass up. And we’ll still be married in Rockland.”

“We will. There’s house hunting to look forward to next week,” I remind her. The loft is fine for a quickie when we’re working, but I want my wife to have a real home for if or when we decide to start a family.

Hollis has been running the bar this week, opting out of the City of Sin, so I grab my phone from the nightstand to see if he’s tried to reach me. Not only did Celeste and I get married, but we’ve also been celebrating a certain former detective’s sentencing. I didn’t even read the final summary of all the shit the jury convicted that lunatic with; I just know he was found guilty on all counts. It will be at least a decade before he walks free, which gives us plenty of time to make any necessary future arrangements.

There are no new calls or texts waiting for me on my phone, but there is an unexpected email from our contractor. “Oh, shit.”

“What’s up?” Celeste peeks over my shoulder to read it for herself.

“The contractor says the work is all done on the kitchen. They got the new stove and deep fryer installed, the ventilation is up to code, all of it’s wrapped up.”

“Now, that is enough to get me up and moving. I can’t wait to see our new kitchen!” She squeals in her excitement as she untangles her legs from the sheets and gets up to grab her suitcase from the closet. “We can get a new menu together on the flight home! What do you think would do best?”

“Daisy, you know you can cook any fucking thing you want,” I promise her.

Celeste is still making a list on the hotel’s stationery when we reach the steps of the plane an hour later. I hand off our luggage to the attendant and tell her, “Let’s get the seats in the very back. You know, near the bathroom so we can...”

Climbing the steps, she gives me a coy smile, “Yes, Greer, I know.”

Inside, Celeste goes left only to stop short. “Well, shit.”

“What?” I ask, glancing around her. In the sideways leather sofa against the back wall is Jordan. He’s knocked out, snoring with his head lying in the lap of a young lady whom I have never seen before. The girl smiles up at me innocently as if she has every right to be on our private plane. And she doesn’t seem to mind that our dumbass newbie is snoring and drooling on her. I go over and give the kid’s shoulder a shake, planning to pull rank and tell him they have to move.

“Ah, Jordan. Wake up, kid,” I say while towering over the young King. When our newly patched member doesn’t wake up, I give his shoulders a shake. “Jordan!”

“What?” he asks when he finally lifts his tousled head of brown hair from the girl’s lap.

“How much did you drink last night, pros...kid?” I barely catch myself before calling him prospect.

“A lot,” he replies as he swipes the back of his hand across his mouth. Noticing the woman he was just drooling on, he gives her a goofy grin and says, “Hi. I’m Jordan.”

“Hi, I know,” she replies sweetly.

His red eyes squint at her, leaning in closer. “You look familiar.”

“I should hope so,” she laughs. “I’m your wife.”

“My wife?” the prospect exclaims, wide eyes staring at her, then up at me, as if I’m in on the fucking joke.

The girl who doesn’t look much older than him holds up her left hand to show off the wedding band on it, so similar to Celeste’s, before lifting Jordan’s own hand. “We got married last night. You don’t remember?”

“Fuck no I don’t remember,” he mumbles while staring at the wedding band he’s way too young to be wearing, even if he actually knew the girl he married. “There’s no way. Why? Why would someone like you marry me?”

She grabs the back of his neck to kiss him smack-dab on the lips. Jordan's eyes widen in surprise at first, but then he's on board, kissing her back so hard he's about to crawl on top of her right then and there.

"Great," I mutter.

Celeste laughs while grabbing my arm to pull me away from the single coveted sofa near the bathroom. Now we'll have to sit in separate seats. "Let's leave the newlyweds alone."

"Fine," I grumble. As I turn away, I spot Colt and Josie coming up the steps. "Can't wait to tell your mama your happy news, Jordan."

That has him coming up for air, getting to his feet in a hurry. "No, Greer! Wait!"

"Josie!" I call out. Colt's wife points a finger at her chest like she's not sure if I'm talking to her or not. We've barely spoken before other than when she orders a drink in the bar. "Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Really, Greer?" Celeste tries to pull me down the aisle by my arm, but I resist. "Such a shit stirrer."

"Josie, did you know that your son got married last night?"

"Jordan!" she screeches before she rushes past me to get to the kid.

"Asshole," Jordan murmurs as she grabs his left hand and gasps.

"Oh my god! What did you do? Who is she?" Josie demands. "Get your asses outside now!"

Once the sofa is quickly vacated, thanks to the angry mother, I take Celeste's hand to go flop down and claim it.

"My husband is so vicious when it comes to seating arrangements," she whispers as she puts her notepad and pen in her purse and leans her head against my shoulder. I can see

from the glint in her eyes that she is almost tearful from laughing.

“Just a little,” I tell her. “Josie was going to find out anyway. I just sped things along. And now, we’re closer to the bathroom, where I intend for us to join the mile-high club. More than once.”

“Ooh. Smart of you to think ahead. One of the many reasons why I love you,” she says, giving me a kiss on the lips.

“You didn’t think I could actually wait six hours to fuck my beautiful wife again, did you?”

“Absolutely not.”

The End

AFTERWORD

Thank you so much for reading *Greer*!

While we will be taking a break from the Savage Kings MC series for a while, you may get to see Jordan and some of the other guys in our new mafia romance series!

In the meantime, shop our store to read more of our books!

www.authorlanehart.com

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

New York Times bestselling author Lane Hart and husband D.B. West were both born and raised in North Carolina. They still live in the south with their two daughters and enjoy spending the summers on the beach and watching football in the fall.

Connect with D.B.:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/AuthorDBWest>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/authordbwest/>

Website: <http://www.dbwestbooks.com>

Email: dbwestauthor@outlook.com

Connect with Lane:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/WritingfromHart>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/lanehartbooks>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/authorlanehart/>

Website: <http://www.lanehartbooks.com>

Email: lane.hart@hotmail.com

Join Lane's Facebook group to read books before they're released, help choose covers, character names, and titles of books!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/bookboyfriendswanted/>



Find all of Lane's books on her Amazon author page!
Sign up for Lane and DB's newsletter to get updates on new releases and freebies!