



See Evil, Hear Evil, Become Evil, Purge Evil

# GRIMM'S HELL

ANDI RHODES & LACY ROSE

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*For all the people in the world who have been made to feel less than human because of circumstances beyond their control. We see you, and you matter!*

# CONTENTS

[A note from the authors](#)

[Seven Deadly Sins](#)

[Prologue](#)

1. [Violet](#)

2. [Grim](#)

3. [Violet](#)

4. [Grim](#)

5. [Violet](#)

6. [Grim](#)

7. [Violet](#)

8. [Grim](#)

9. [Violet](#)

10. [Grim](#)

11. [Violet](#)

12. [Grim](#)

13. [Violet](#)

14. [Grim](#)

15. [Violet](#)

16. [Grim](#)

17. [Brad](#)

18. [Violet](#)

19. [Grim](#)

20. [Violet](#)

21. [Grim](#)

22. [Violet](#)

23. [Grim](#)

24. [Violet](#)

25. [Grim](#)

26. [Violet](#)

27. [Grim](#)

28. [Violet](#)

29. [Grim](#)

30. [Violet](#)

31. [Grim](#)

32. [Violet](#)

33. [Grim](#)

34. [Violet](#)

35. [Grim](#)

36. [Violet](#)

37. [Grim](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Next in Saints Purgatory MC](#)

[Also by Andi Rhodes & Lacy Rose](#)

[About the Authors](#)

# A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

The Saints Purgatory MC is a work of fiction. It is not a commentary on our thoughts or beliefs about religion. Grim's Hell follows our beloved enforcer and deals with difficult topics which could be triggering for some.

If you would like more information regarding specific triggers, or if you'd like an idea of where the triggering topics occur so you can skip it, please feel free to reach out to either of us via email or social media. We're more than happy to discuss them further! And please note, if you do wish to skip those parts, it will not alter the story so much that you can't enjoy it.

Now, buckle up, buttercup. Things are about to get wild!

Much love,

Andi and Lacy



# SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Sloth

Pride

Lust

Greed

**Gluttony**

Wrath

Envy

**Gluttony is incessant greed or excessive eating.**

**Gluttony is cured by temperance.**

**Saint's Purgatory MC Motto:**

See Evil, Hear Evil, Become Evil, Purge Evil

# PROLOGUE

## GRIM

*Twenty-two years old...*

“YOU CAN’T DO THIS.”

I read the sinner’s lips, but I can’t hear his words. He doesn’t seem to realize that, though, and that fact makes my purging so much sweeter.

*This is what you get for stealing from a charity, you greedy bastard.*

I quickly glance at my cell when it vibrates and groan when I see the text.

Jezebel: Hurry up! We’re gonna be late.

*We’re gonna be late.*

Jezebel, a.k.a. Mary, has reminded me umpteen billion times about her twin brother, Matt’s, flight landing in Vegas today. Matt and Paul, my two best friends, have been in the military for the last four years, and I’m happy they’re coming home. But I’m also petrified. And I haven’t been scared of anything in a long goddamn time. While they’ve been running around the globe, defending our country, I’ve been slowly and methodically ridding the world of evil.

I’m not at all sure they’re going to like who I’ve become.

*Too fucking bad.*

Shoving my wayward thoughts aside, I focus all of my attention on the man swinging from the rafters of the old

abandoned barn. He's deathly pale from blood loss, yet he's still breathing, and we can't have that.

"Is it money? Is that what you want?"

Why does it always come down to money? Contrary to popular belief, money doesn't fix everything, and it's certainly not going to save this man's life.

Rather than respond, I flip him off as I lift my ax above my head. It took me a while to find a weapon I was comfortable with, but when I felt the power of the ax, I knew it was right. It's as silent as I am.

My prey opens his mouth wide, and I know he's screaming, begging, and pleading with a God who doesn't exist to grant him mercy and spare his life.

*God isn't who he has to worry about, and I don't grant mercy.*

When I swing the blade down and embed it in his skull, a euphoric feeling fills me up, and I close my eyes to savor the moment. My phone vibrates again, disrupting the one thing that makes me happy.

Opening my eyes, I pull my cell back out of my pocket and stare at the screen. This time, it isn't Jez who's texting.

Paul: You better be at the fucking airport!

I grin at the thought of Paul freaking the fuck out because I'm not responding to him. After the first few months and dozens of letters, I stopped communicating with Matt and Paul. It was too hard, and my anger was too raw. I know it isn't their fault that the military wouldn't take me because I'm deaf, but that didn't stop the bitterness that the two of them still left without me.

My phone vibrates yet again.

Jezebel: C'mon Grim Reaper... fucker's dead so get outta there.

Silently cursing the tiny camera pinned to my leather vest, I grab my ax and yank it out of the dead guy's head before wiping the blood off the blade on his soiled pants. I don't worry about leaving evidence behind because I know Jezebel will have a crew in here within minutes of my departure to clean up. I don't know how she does it, but the job is always done.

As I stride out of the barn toward my custom Harley, my thoughts shift from my completed task to the reunion ahead.

*What will Matt and Paul think of the man I've become?*

*Will I recognize them?*

*Will they recognize me?*

I'm not the same person who stayed behind while they ran from the destruction we caused. I'm bigger, meaner, and a helluva lot wiser.

The ride to the airport, where I'm meeting Jez, seems to stretch on forever. Several times, I think about heading in the opposite direction, but I don't. I'm not a runner. Never have been, never will be.

After parking next to Jez's car, I lower the kickstand and throw my leg over the bike to stand, all the while pretending that I don't see her stalking toward me with a scowl on her face.

"Took you long enough." Her hands fly as she signs, her movements stiff.

I roll my eyes. "I'm here, aren't I?"

Jez grabs my hand and practically drags me toward the entrance. Truth be told, she couldn't drag me anywhere, and she knows it. If I didn't want to go, I wouldn't.

It takes a few minutes to get to the gate, and when I see that Matt and Paul's plane doesn't land for another hour and a half, I spin Jez around to face me.

"What the fuck, Jez? We had plenty of time."

Her shoulders sag. “And you know as well as I do that if I’d told you the real time, we’d be late.”

Jez leans against the wall, and I move to relax next to her. As the minutes tick by, the space fills in with people who are here to greet their own friends and family, and Jez moves to stand in front of me.

She rests her head on my chest, and a pang of guilt slithers through me. Jez and I have spent the last three years traveling, living out of duffel bags in cheap motels. She bought a house two years ago, and every once in a while, we’ll stay there to catch up on some rest, but it doesn’t happen often. I’ve run her ragged, and it shows.

I don’t know how much time passes, but fast, heavy footsteps snag my attention, as well as Jez’s. We both lift our heads, and she steps to the side right before a large fist connects with my face.

“What the hell, Matt?” Jezebel screeches.

She turns and lifts her arm to inspect my chin, but I push her hand away and glare at Matt.

“That’s the one and only time you’ll get away with that.” My signing is stilted as fury burns me from the inside out.

Matt flexes his fists at his sides and narrows his eyes before glancing at his sister. “Why didn’t you tell me he was coming?” he demands. His ASL is as perfect as ever, and my heart warms slightly that it still seems as natural for him to sign now as it was the last time we saw each other.

Jez flits her gaze from me to Matt to Paul and then back to Matt. “I wasn’t aware I had to warn you that your best friend would be here,” she snaps. “Jesus, Matt. Why would you hit him?”

“He thought I was here with you,” I sign. When she appears confused, I continue. “Like, *with you* with you, Jez.”

“That’s ridiculous. Me and John?” She shakes her head. “I mean, we’ve shared a bed or two, but nothing has ever happened. He’s practically my brother.”

“Shared a bed or...” Matt steps closer to me, and I cross my arms over my chest, silently daring him to hit me again. “What the hell does that mean, shared a bed or two?”

Jezebel waves her hand dismissively. “Get your mind outta the gutter. John is always the perfect gentleman.”

“Still didn’t answer my question.”

I step in front of Jezebel as if to protect her from Matt. “Unlike you, she stuck around. We’ve worked on some things together while you two were out chasing down terrorists, and sometimes our work means staying in whatever motels we can find. Nothing happened. End of story.”

“John, you know why we couldn’t stick around.” Paul doesn’t speak out loud, instead relying on sign language to help keep our secrets.

I narrow my eyes on Paul, desperately wanting to argue but knowing it’s futile. Instead, I nod curtly. “I do. Doesn’t mean I like it.”

“Can we get outta here?” Jezebel asks as she glances around the airport at our surroundings. “Too many people.”

“This discussion isn’t over,” Matt insists.

“Keep on telling yourself that, brother of mine.” Jezebel smacks him playfully on the cheek.

As we walk through Harry Reid International, I watch my friends closely. They seem to be on high alert, every little noise garnering their attention. Tension rolls off both of them, and I hate that whatever they saw over in the desert seems to have followed them home.

*Home.*

It’s so fucking good to have all four of us in one place again, but I won’t admit that to them.

“So, where’s your car?” Paul asks.

Jezebel points across the parking lot. “Just up ahead.”

She pulls a set of keys out of her pockets and presses a button. The headlights on her vehicle flash, and we all pick up the pace.

“Damn,” Matt says when we get to Jez’s matte black Charger. Remembering the day she bought the car, I grin. “Nice ride, Mary.”

“Jezebel,” she snaps.

“Whatever.” He walks around the vehicle and when he reaches the passenger side, his lips purse, and I know he’s whistling. “Fuck, this is a nice bike.”

Paul joins him on the other side, and his eyes land on my black and chrome Harley. Appreciation crosses their features as they take in the skull painted on the gas tank and the words ‘Riding for Purgatory’ underneath.

“Wouldn’t want to fuck with whoever owns this beast,” Paul says.

I step up next to him and smirk. “No, you wouldn’t.”

“This is yours?”

“What of it?”

He shakes his head. “Nothing, man. It’s nice.”

“Nice?”

“Yeah, nice.”

I smack him upside the head, and instantly, his shoulders relax.

“It’s perfect, dipshit,” I tell him.

He shrugs. “Okay. Whatever.”

I smack him again. “Don’t poo-poo on what you don’t understand.”

“Poo-poo?” He arches a brow. “When did you turn into a granny?” I lift my hand to hit him again, but Paul blocks me this time. “You’re not the only one who doesn’t like to be hit.”

“Bout time.”



“What?”

“You’ve been sulking ever since you realized it was me standing next to Mary.”

“J-E-Z-E-B-E-L.” Matt’s twin stomps her foot as if to punctuate each letter.

Chagrined, I tug on my ear. “Sorry, Jez.”

“It’s fine. But don’t let it happen again.”

“Okay, so what else has changed since we’ve been gone?” Matt asks after they toss their duffels into the trunk of the Charger. “You have a new name and a badass car, and John’s apparently a biker who could snap the neck of the Devil.” He snaps his fingers. “Oh, and the two of you have *shared a bed or two* doing whatever work it is that you’ve been doing. Does that cover it, or are there more surprises awaiting us?”

Jezebel and I exchange a look. Then I lift my hands and forever change the course of their lives.

“How do you feel about the seven deadly sins?”

# CHAPTER 1

**VIOLET**

## PRESENT DAY...

“AMEN.”

The congregation speaks in unison with my father at the end of the day’s final prayer. I lift my bowed head and watch as the camera is pulled back from a close-up of my face. My cheeks heat with embarrassment, but I smile as expected. I’m starting my last year of college at Nevada State University in two weeks, and my father felt I could use the blessing of the church as I finish my Bachelor’s degree.

“Peace be with you.” My father’s voice booms from the speakers as he shouts into the microphone from the pulpit.

“And also with you.”

Now that the service is over, everyone moves to exit the auditorium. Hands shoot out, one after another, toward me, and I accept the heartfelt congratulations as I return all their handshakes before sitting back down. It’ll be another hour before my parents are ready to leave the church and go have our traditional Sunday afternoon brunch, so I kick off my heels and lean back, closing my eyes.

When I was sixteen, Dad led a small congregation at a little church on the outskirts of Las Vegas. All was normal until one Sunday, a member wasn’t able to attend due to being in the hospital. Nellie, the granddaughter of the member, asked if she could video the sermon and post it on her social media page for her grandma to watch. Dad agreed, and our lives seemed to change overnight.

Dad's sermon caught the attention of a couple of people at the hospital who were taking care of Nellie's grandma, and they shared the sermon on their social media accounts. Soon, the video garnered almost five hundred thousand views. Nellie continued to record the sermons every Sunday and eventually, the local public broadcasting channel came to speak to my dad about televising his sermons.

They wanted to test it out for three months to see if they'd be popular, and of course, Dad agreed. He wanted to spread the word of God to anyone and everyone he could. The three-month testing period went better than anyone expected, and within six months, a bigger network approached my parents, and now my father is one of the biggest televangelists on the West Coast.

I look around and take in how far my family has come in the last seven years.

*What will my future look like after graduation?*

Sure, I could teach at an elementary school, but my parents have been pushing me to take over the youth programs at the church. I know they're worried about their only child searching for a job. Working for the church would be an instant paycheck, but I want to prove that I can be an independent woman.

"Violet."

A deep voice shakes me from my daydream. I peek through my lashes to see Brad Coventry standing over me.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you." His voice could melt butter. It takes everything in me not to swoon at his feet.

Brad is one of the most attractive parishioners in my dad's fellowship. He's around six feet tall and has the boy-next-door look: blond hair, blue eyes, and a swimmer's build.

Rumor has it that Brad wants to become a pastor, so he's been working alongside the church elders to learn the ropes. According to his parents, he's a successful financial manager, but one night, the Lord spoke to him and told him that finances weren't his path and to turn to the church. He even went back

to school and completed his bachelor's degree in Christian Ministry.

“Hey B-B-Brad,” I stutter, and he smirks. I clear my throat and swing my legs over the arm of the chair. After sliding my feet back into my heels and standing, I still have to strain my neck to look up at him. At only four-eleven, heels only do so much. “Congratulations on your bachelor's degree. Do you know what you're going to do next?”

“Your dad is going to let me intern with him and take on more responsibilities around the church.” He gestures to the chair. “Until then, I will commute back and forth from my job to here. It's not too far.”

I sit down, and he takes a seat next to me. “That's great!” Clapping my hands in my lap, I do my best to keep from fidgeting. “I'm sorry you have to commute though. How long will you have to do that?”

“It's not so bad. Hard work never hurt anyone.” Brad smiles. “Are you ready to finish your degree?” he asks.

“As ready as I can be.”

“What do you want to do when you're finished?”

“I'm thinking about teaching elementary school, but I think my dad would like me to work for the church and take on the children's ministry and youth groups.”

“It would be cool to work with you,” he says.

Stunned, I stammer, “It... it would?”

I didn't know Brad really even knew I existed. Every Sunday, I dutifully come to church, and I attend most of the mandatory church activities, but other than that, my time is spent at school. I've always thought he was way out of my league.

“Actually, I've been working up the nerve to talk to you the last couple of weeks.” He leans closer to me. “I was hoping I could convince you to have dinner with me.”

“Me? You want to have dinner with me?” I shake my head in disbelief. “Why?”

“Violet, you’re smart, kind, and absolutely beautiful inside and out,” he explains as he takes my hand. “Why wouldn’t I want to have dinner with you?”

My brain screams at me to go for it, but my mouth doesn’t listen. “I’d love to, but I’m getting ready to head back to school in a couple days.”

*Dang it! Brad Coventry asks you out on a date, and you don’t accept?? Stupid, stupid Violet.*

“I understand,” Brad replies despondently. “I figured it was worth a shot.” His eyes lock on mine. “Is there anything I can do to change your mind?”

My cheeks heat, and my skin flushes. I’ve never been any good at hiding my emotions, and my porcelain skin doesn’t help matters. Brad chuckles but, fortunately, doesn’t comment.

“I-I-I’d love to have dinner with you.” A nervous giggle escapes past my lips.

“Do I make you nervous, Violet?”

“N-no, you just caught me off guard.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll be safe with me.” He crosses his heart like a boy scout. “Cross my heart and hope to die.”

I laugh. “I’m free Friday night after seven.”

“I’ll pick you up at seven-thirty,” he says. “Does that work for you?”

“Yes, I can be ready by then.” My mind is already racing about what to wear and where we might go.

“Do you like Italian?” he asks, breaking into my thoughts. “We can go to this little place I know. They have the best tiramisu.”

“Italian sounds great.”

“What are you kids up to?”

Both Brad and I turn toward the aisle, my mom and dad are standing there, holding hands.

“Pastor Simpson, Mrs. Simpson,” Brad greets them. “I was asking Violet if she’d like to have dinner with me.” He grins. “She put me out of my misery and agreed to go out with me Friday evening.”

“She did?” Mom questions incredulously, and I resist the urge to roll my eyes.

In her defense, I don’t normally date. I went on a few in high school, but the boys were only after sex or trying to prove that they could get the goody-goody Christian girl into trouble. And my parents raised me to have respect for myself and my future husband.

*You save yourself for the one you want to spend your life with.*

I have no idea how many times I heard that growing up, but it was enough to make it stick. My peers never understood and would torment me relentlessly, saying I thought I was too good for them. After that, I swore off boys until college. Things weren’t any better in college. The date with Brad will be the first one I’ve gone on in a year and a half.

Brad smiles. “Yes, ma’am, she did.”

“Make sure you have her home at a respectable hour, young man,” Dad scolds.

“Yes, sir, I will.”

“Dad, stop,” I chastise. “I’m twenty-three. I don’t have a curfew, and it’s a Friday night.”

“We know sweetheart, but a respectable gentleman still returns his date home at a decent time,” Mom chimes in.

“Okay, okay.” I stand quickly and usher my parents toward the exit and wave at Brad. “I’ll see you Friday night.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” Brad calls.





TURNING IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR, I TAKE IN THE PALE BLUE, spaghetti-strapped sundress that I paired with a white cardigan and matching sandals. I dab some tinted gloss to my lips and check my hair to make sure it looks perfect. I'm extremely nervous, and I don't know why.

*It's Brad Coventry. A handsome man raised with morals asked you out!*

When the doorbell rings, I groan and grab my purse. I hear my parents greet Brad as I rush out of my bedroom. Dad is shaking Brad's hand when I hit the last step.

Brad's gaze shifts to me. "Wow," he whispers and clears his throat. "You look stunning." He hands me a bouquet of beautiful white and red roses.

"Oh... um, thank you." I squirm at his praise, taking the flowers from his outstretched hand. I hate being the center of attention and right now, all eyes are on me.

My mom rushes forward and takes the flowers. "I'll put these in some water for you."

"Thank you, Mom." I shift from one foot to the other, unsure what to do.

As if he can sense my unease, Brad holds out his arm, and I link mine with his.

He turns to my parents. "I'm sorry to rush off, but we have reservations at eight," he apologizes.

"Don't worry about that, son." Dad pats him on the back. "You kids have fun, but not too much."

"Dad, stop." I roll my eyes. "I'll see you when I get home."

I wave over Brad's shoulder as he opens the car door for me. I slide into the soft buttery leather seat, and it feels luxurious, but it doesn't impress me. Brad seems to like the finer things in life, if the way he dresses and the car he drives is any indication. I couldn't care less about material things or how much money a person has. I want a man who's going to stand by my side, be my rock, and love me unconditionally,

not someone who is going to worry about appearances and what others think of us based on our possessions.

“You have a nice car,” I say as he drives down the road.

“Thanks, but it’s not my style.” His eyes dart to mine quickly before he looks back at the road. “In my current position, appearances are everything. To get ahead, you have to have the flashy car, designer clothes, and an impeccable home.”

“Oh.” I can’t think of anything else to say so I wait for him to continue.

“Can I be honest with you, Violet?”

I smile. “I actually prefer that.”

“I want a simpler life. That’s why I went back to school for my Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Ministry.” He pulls into the parking lot of the restaurant. “How about we go inside and finish our conversation?” I nod. “Wait there, I’ll get your door.”

After we’re shown to our table and our orders are taken, we sit back enjoying a glass of wine.

“So, you want a simpler life?” I ask quietly. “I mean, you don’t have to answer that. I’m sorry for asking such a personal question.”

“Violet, it’s okay. I said we would continue the conversation inside.” He reaches across the table and brushes his thumb over my hand that’s gripping a wine glass. “To answer your question, yes, I want a simpler life. I’m tired of the mentality that money equates to happiness and no matter how much you make, your company and friends want you to make more. I don’t like fake relationships and in my line of work that’s all there is: People pretending to be your friend to see what you can do for them.”

*Maybe I was wrong about him.*

“What do you want? Besides becoming a pastor?”

“I want a family someday. I want a wife who loves me for me and not for the money in my bank account. I want my

children to grow up with good morals and not become corrupt like most youths do in today's society." Brad's voice drops to barely above a whisper. "I want to be able to quit pretending I'm happy and actually *be* happy."

My vision blurs from the sincerity in his voice. I blink back tears before I make a fool out of myself and take a sip of my wine. My dad always says, 'Don't judge a book by its cover', and I did that to Brad.

I discreetly shake my head, dumping all the preconceived notions I had and put more effort into getting to know Brad.

The rest of the evening goes surprisingly well. Brad is not only handsome, but he's also charming and caring. As he drives back to my parent's house, I can't help but hope he asks me out again.

After Brad parks in the driveway, he once again instructs me to let him get the door for me. I'm not used to chivalry from men, and my heart swells at his thoughtfulness. He opens my door, pulls me out gently, and walks me to the front porch.

"Thank you for dinner," I say shyly. "I had a wonderful time."

"Me too." Brad leans forward and grazes my cheek with a soft kiss. "I hope that wasn't too bold." I shake my head, too speechless to speak, but my inner self is jumping up and down. "Can I take you out again next week?"

"I'd like that."

*This could be the love I've been searching for.*

# CHAPTER 2

# GRIM

*GO FORTH, SINNERS' SOULS, FROM THIS WORLD. MAY YOU suffer in darkness, may your home be in Hell, and may the Devil fuck you with his horns.*

Blood drips from my fingertips onto the floor of the Confessional. Soul and Malice are standing behind me, and I can feel their stares boring holes into my back. I know I went a little overboard with this particular sinner, but I couldn't help myself.

Slowly turning around, I face my brothers. My chest heaves from exertion, and my heart is thundering against my ribs.

I arch a brow. "What?"

Soul and Malice exchange a look before focusing their attention back on me, and it's Malice who responds.

"What did the bastard ever do to you?"

I shrug. "He was breathing."

"Well, he's not anymore," Soul adds.

"He molested seven children during Sunday school class," I remind them. "Did you really expect me to take it fucking easy on him?"

Malice's face hardens, and he's no doubt remembering his own suffering at the hands of a priest. "No, but you could've let me get a few hits in."

"You snooze, you lose."

“No one fucking snoozed,” Soul counters, his movements stilted. “You went ape shit.”

Instantly, I’m transported to another time, another place.

*“Craig, leave him alone.”*

*I stare at my mom’s lips, trying to figure out what she’s saying, while Dad grips the collar of my shirt in his fist. I’ve been deaf my entire life, and sign language is the norm in our house, but I’ve also started to teach myself how to read lips. I don’t think my parents realize I know how to do this, and it’s something I plan on keeping to myself for a while.*

*“He’s seven years old,” Mom says. “And he wasn’t ignoring you. He can’t hear you.”*

*With Dad at my back, I can’t see what he’s saying, but his hands are shaking so I know he’s angry. He’s always angry though. Unless we’re in public. When there are other people around, he could win an award for dad of the year.*

*“It’s gorillas, not apes.” Mom rests her hands on her hips and frowns. “And he’s your son, not an animal.”*

*Dad’s grip tightens, and he starts to drag me toward the door that leads to the backyard. I struggle against his hold, knowing he’s taking me to the shed, but my efforts are useless.*

A hand settles on my shoulder, and I’m startled from my thoughts. It’s been a long time since I’ve let my parents invade my mind and for good reason. Any time I think about them, I’m reminded of just how much hate I was surrounded by as a child.

Soul locks his gaze on mine, and chills skitter across my back. I hate when he stares at me because it’s like he can see all the way to the darkest parts of me.

“I’m not a fucking ape!” I shout, my words muffled.

I stalk past my Prez and VP and leave the Confessional. My shitty childhood is no secret, but I don’t like to talk about it. Especially since Malice had it so much worse.

Shadows dance on the walls, and I glance over my shoulder to see Malice following me.

“Would you stop?”

“Fifty bucks,” I counter.

He stretches his arm out and grabs ahold of my cut. “Maybe I’d sign if you’d slow the fuck down.”

“Hundred.”

I don’t give a damn how angry I am, I’ll never tire of making Malice pay for not signing around me. It brings me a level of joy that is indescribable.

When he scowls, I smirk.

Malice lifts his hands dramatically. “You’re enjoying this,” he accuses.

Nodding, I reply. “Three hours in the Confessional torturing and purging a child molester, followed by fining you for being an idiot? Yeah, I’m fucking enjoying it.”

Turning on my heel, I continue toward the elevator. Despite the adrenaline rush of the last few hours, bone-deep exhaustion starts to creep in, and I’m too slow to push the button before Soul and Malice join me.

“Love the enthusiasm, bro,” Soul begins, his eyes hard, cold. “But tone it down a notch before we reach the main level. It’s Harper’s nap time, and Cece will skin you alive if you wake her up.”

At the mention of Soul’s daughter, my entire body relaxes. When that little girl was born, I thought for sure life around the clubhouse would change. And I suppose it has, to a degree, but not so much that it bothers me.

“I thought Cece was working today and Harper was supposed to be with Jez?” Malice asks.

Soul’s shoulders sag with a sigh. “It seems my twin was too busy to watch her niece, so Cece has Trista and Laura covering Naughty/Nice.”

The elevator doors slide open, and we step into the main room, which is practically empty except for Mark, Malice’s

brother and a club prospect, and Rogue, our treasurer and my cousin.

“Damn, man,” Rogue signs with an arched brow. His lips purse, and I imagine he’s whistling. “You’re a bloody mess.”

I shrug off his words and stride toward the bar. A good, stiff drink sounds good right about now.

As I’m pouring myself a glass of scotch, Malice focuses his attention on his brother.

“Mark, there’s a mess to clean up downstairs,” he says, his movements choppy. “I wanna be able to eat off that floor.”

“On it,” Mark replies before rushing to the elevator, and Malice watches him with a dopey grin on his face.

“You really like having him around, don’t you?” I ask after setting my glass down.

“What?” Malice shakes his head. “No.”

He can deny it all he wants, but I see things. Being deaf has made me perceptive in a way I don’t think most people could comprehend, and even though he’s a gruff asshole to Mark, Malice is more than happy to have his brother back.

Between Mark and Apple, Malice’s old lady, my friend is complete in a way I don’t think he’s ever been.

“Keep telling yourself that.” I down the rest of my liquor and put the glass in the sink. “I’m gonna go wash the filth off.”

Without waiting for anyone to reply, I make my way to my room, and press my thumb into the scanner on the wall next to the door. When it opens, I move inside and begin stripping off my clothes, leaving a trail into the bathroom.

Once under the hot spray, I force my brain to shut down. People tend to think that being deaf means I live a quiet existence, but it’s anything but.

My mind never stops, my thoughts forever racing, and my life is loud as fuck.



# CHAPTER 3

**VIOLET**

## SIX MONTHS LATER...

“VIOLET, WILL YOU MARRY ME?”

It’s the six-month anniversary of our first date, and Brad brought me back to where our relationship started. He’s currently kneeling in front of me, holding an open blue Tiffany box that cradles one of the biggest diamond solitaire rings I’ve ever seen. When we finished our dinner, the waiter brought out tiramisu for dessert, and the box had been resting atop the deliciousness.

A gasp escapes before I can stop it.

*Oh my God! Is this really happening?*

“What?” I whisper.

“I love you, Violet.” Brad grabs my hand. “I want to spend forever with you. Would you do me the greatest honor on Earth and be my wife?”

Unable to get words out, I nod in response.

Brad stands and takes my left hand, gently sliding the ring on my finger. “Say yes, Violet,” he pleads. “I need to hear you *say* it.”

“Y-y-yes.” I clear my throat. “Yes, Brad, yes!”

Brad picks me up and spins me around with excitement. Laughing, he gently lowers me before cupping the back of my neck. His lips descend on mine, and his tongue swipes the seam of mine, demanding entry. I throw my arms around his neck and open up to him, putting all my love into the kiss.

Applause breaks out around us, reminding me of where we are and that we're not alone. Panting, we both step back from each other.

"Thank you." He smiles. "You've made me the happiest man. I'll be the best husband you deserve, and you'll never want for anything."

"I don't want anything but you," I say shyly.

"Let's finish our dessert and go back and tell your parents." He pulls out my chair and waits until I'm seated before sitting back down. "When do you want to get married?"

I scoop a spoonful of tiramisu, but my hand stops midway to my mouth. "We just got engaged, Brad," I answer. "I'm still in shock. I had no idea you were planning this. You surprised me."

"You're happy though, right?"

"Extremely happy."

"Good, I only want you to be happy, Violet. We can figure out the details later." He clasps my left hand, rubbing his thumb over the diamond. "We can still tell your parents tonight, can't we?"

I nod, finishing the bite in my mouth before I swallow. "That would be nice. I don't want to show up to church on Sunday wearing a ring and neither of them know."

After we finish our dessert, Brad pays the bill, and then he ushers me into his car. Twenty minutes later, we pull into my parent's driveway. Normally, during the school year, I don't come home until Sunday, so I know they won't be expecting me.

I use my house key to open the door, calling out to my parents as I enter. "Mom, Dad... Brad and I are here."

"Honey, what are you doing home?" Mom queries, pulling me in for a quick hug. "We weren't expecting you until Sunday morning." She smiles at my fiancé. "It's good to see you, Brad."

Brad tips his head in greeting. “Good evening, Mrs. Simpson.”

“Where’s Dad?” I ask.

“He’s in his study preparing for Sunday’s service.” Mom wrings her hands nervously. “Is everything okay? It’s not like you to drop by unexpectedly without calling.”

“Mrs. Simpson, everything is fine,” Brad reassures. “We went to the Italian restaurant that I took Violet to on our first date. Since we were close, we thought we’d drop by before I take her home for the night.”

“Oh, how lovely. I hope you had a nice time.”

“A fabulous time.” I reach back to take Brad’s hand in mine. “Can you go get Dad? Brad and I want to talk to you both about something.”

My mom’s eyebrows raise in suspicion, but she doesn’t ask any questions. “I’ll go get him. Why don’t you two go into the living room?”

Brad and I sit on the couch, and my knee bounces with nervous energy as we wait for my parents. Brad lays his hand on my thigh.

“Hey, it’s gonna be fine.”

“I know. I’m just excited to tell them.”

Ever since Brad and I started dating, my parents have told anyone and everyone who would listen about how happy they are that I met such an upstanding member of our church community, and they can’t imagine me with anyone else. And I’m pretty sure my mom has been secretly planning a wedding for the last three months.

The thought makes me chuckle.

“What’s so funny?” Brad asks as my parents enter the room.

“I’ll tell you later,” I whisper.

He smiles at me and stands up to greet my dad, shaking his hand.

“Sir,” Brad greets. “Sorry to intrude on you and Mrs. Simpson’s Friday night.”

Dad waves his hand dismissively and leans down to kiss my cheek. “Not an intrusion. Gives me time to step away from Sunday’s sermon and take a quick break. What brings you kids by tonight?”

I stand, and Brad intertwines his fingers with mine.

“Well, Sir...”

“We’re getting married!”

Brad and I both spit out our news at the same time.

“Eek!” Mom shrieks and claps her hands, while Dad clasps Brad on the back and winks.

“What was that about?” I ask Brad.

“What are you talking about?”

“Why did my dad just wink at you?”

Brad smirks. “You didn’t think I’d ask you to marry me without talking to your father first, did you?”

“You asked my dad for permission?”

“Absolutely.” He nods. “I’m a gentleman, after all.”

I pat his chest. “That was sweet of you.”

“Let me see the ring,” Mom demands. “When is the wedding date?”

“Whoa, Mom,” I chastise. “Slow down. We’ve only been engaged for thirty minutes. Can we enjoy the engagement for a little bit?”

“I’m sorry, honey.” A tear rolls down her cheek. “I’m just so happy for you both.”

“Don’t cry, Mom.” I leave Brad’s side to wrap my arms around her waist. “I didn’t mean to sound harsh. I was surprised by the proposal tonight, and I’m still a little shocked.”

“Oh sweetie, of course you are,” Mom gushes. “When do you think you’d like the wedding to be?”

“Ruth,” Dad admonishes. “Let the kids breathe for a minute.”

“Right, right.” Mom points to the couch. “Why don’t we sit down for a bit and chat?”

Brad and I return to our seats on the couch while Mom and Dad sit in the armchairs across from us.

“I’ve already spoken to Brad about my expectations before you marry, Violet,” Dad begins, leveling us both with a stare. “I expect you both to respect your mother’s and my wishes.”

“Of course, Dad.” I bow my head slightly and fold my hands on my lap to keep myself from fidgeting. Dad doesn’t appreciate it when someone can’t sit still while he’s talking.

“First, you will finish your degree, and second—”

“Dad, I was always going to finish my degree,” I insert.

“Violet, don’t interrupt your father,” Brad scolds. “It’s rude. Listen to what he has to say.”

“I... I’m sorry.” I stare at my hands. “I don’t want you to think that my education isn’t important to me just because I’m getting married.”

I make a mental note to talk to Brad about this more in private. I’m not my mom, while I think she did what she felt she needed to do with her life, I can’t see myself not working. I believe that you can still stand beside your husband and be a good mother without having to give up your career.

“It’s okay,” Brad whispers. He pulls my hand into his and lightly squeezes. “Listen to what he’s saying, and then we can talk about anything you disagree with.”

“As I was saying,” Dad continues. “You will finish your education, first and foremost. However, whether you use that degree will be between you and your husband. As you know, your mother has her degree but decided that being a wife and mother were more important.”

I take a deep breath while my dad continues. “Second, you are not allowed to move in with each other prior to the wedding. This will help ensure that you’ll remain virtuous. Sexual relations are meant to be between a husband and a wife, and Brad has already assured me that nothing has happened between the two of you.”

My face heats, and I shake my head quickly. I can’t believe he just said that out loud. My parents have always droned on about how virginity is a gift that is only meant to be given to your spouse, and I’ve always lived by that rule.

“Third, you will both attend marriage counseling for a minimum of three months. I can’t facilitate those sessions since I am the father of the bride.” Dad smiles. “But another assistant Pastor at the church can. Most importantly, while divorce is common, it isn’t something we want for our daughter. Marriage is for life. Both of you need to understand the commitment you are undertaking. That being said, we both think Brad is an upstanding man and will take good care of you and any children that you have together.” He pauses for a second. “You have our blessing.”

I can’t stop the tears that slip down my cheeks. My mom and dad are my world, and I know they approve of my relationship with Brad, but hearing my dad say we have their blessing makes my heart soar.

“Thank you, Dad.”

I untangle my hand from Brad’s, jump up from the couch, and hurry over to my dad. He stands and wraps me up in a hug.

“I’m going to excuse myself and get back to preparing for Sunday’s sermon. Brad, why don’t you join me while the ladies talk about the upcoming nuptials?” Dad suggests.

“Yes, Sir, Pastor Simpson.” Brad stands to follow Dad to his office.

“Son, we’re practically family now. Call us Mom and Dad,” Dad insists.

“Thank you... Dad.” Brad’s tone is thick with emotion.



Mom and I head to the kitchen to make some tea and talk about the wedding. As soon as the men are out of earshot, Mom pulls a binder out of the kitchen drawer. I giggle when I see it's full of wedding ideas. Based on its thickness, she's been planning this for a while.

We spend an hour oohing and aahing over all the possibilities. Mom really put in a lot of time and effort to put together ideas. She even has a wedding theme for each season.

"It's January now," she comments. "How do you feel about a spring wedding?" Mom asks, flipping through the pages.

"Mom, I don't graduate until May," I remind her. "I'd like to wait until after that. Besides, you heard Dad, I have to finish my education."

"I know, but I bet I could persuade him if you wanted to have a spring wedding."

"How about fall?" I tap my chin thoughtfully. "It would be cooler than spring, so we could have an outdoor wedding."

"What does Brad want?"

"I honestly don't know. We haven't had much of a chance to discuss it."

"Hmm, maybe you should discuss it first."

"Discuss what?" Dad asks, coming into the kitchen with Brad hot on his heels.

"A wedding date," I respond. "We haven't had a chance to sit down and talk about it."

"I think the weekend after you graduate would be nice," Brad inserts.

"After I graduate?" I ask incredulously.

"Why not?" Brad's eyes narrow, and his eyebrows pinch together. "I thought you wanted to get married?"

"I do, but wouldn't you rather have a fall wedding? We could have it outside because it will be cooler." I point at the binder my mom made. "Look at these beautiful colors we could incorporate."

“They’re nice, but I don’t want to wait too long for us to get married,” Brad gushes on. “I know I want you to be mine forever, and don’t want to wait longer than necessary to make you Mrs. Coventry.”

“Isn’t that sweet?” Mom whispers to Dad.

“Okay.” I take a deep breath. “I can’t wait to be married to you either.” I glance at my parents. “Do you think the church will be available the weekend after my graduation?”

Dad chuckles. “I think we can make that happen.”

“Looks like we have a wedding date.” I turn to Brad who is grinning from ear to ear.

“I need to get you home. It’s getting late.” Brad puts his hand out to shake Dad’s and then kisses Mom’s cheek. “We’ll see you both Sunday morning.”

Sunday morning comes before I know it. I spent all day Saturday walking around in a daze, still disbelieving that I’m engaged and getting married in May. It feels rushed, but I’m happy.

*I really am.*

It has to be normal to be nervous when things happen so quickly, right? I love Brad, and he loves me, so I don’t understand why I’m so nervous.

*Get a grip, Violet. You’re not the first bride with cold feet and won’t be the last.*

My dad’s booming voice knocks me back to the present. “Before we end today’s sermon, I have some exciting news I want to share with all of you.”

*Oh God, please no. No, no, no. He can’t, he wouldn’t.*

“I’m going to ask my lovely wife and daughter to join me up here.” My dad’s eyes find us right away since we’re in the same seats we’re always in. “Brad, would you accompany them?”

I can feel the entire congregation’s eyes on my back as we get up and walk toward the side of the stage. Brad grips my

elbow to guide me up the steps and leads me to my dad's side. As we wait for him to continue, sweat drips down my back, and I don't know if it's from my nerves or the heat of the lights.

It takes all my effort to hold my head up and not look down at my hands. I can't believe Dad called us up here. He knows how much I hate being on camera. Mom steps to his other side and is beaming from ear to ear. Brad remains a few feet behind us all.

"Brad, come closer."

My dad beckons Brad to stand right next to him. I shuffle over a little so Brad is next to the podium.

I clasp my hands behind my back, pinching myself repeatedly to keep from running off the stage. The smile on my face is a stark contrast to the internal screaming I'm doing at my dad.

Dad gently slaps Brad on the back. "As many of you know, Brad and my daughter have been dating these past few months. Well, on Friday evening, Brad proposed, and Violet accepted."

Cheers erupt throughout the church, and Brad reaches out his hand. I hesitate for a moment before I take it, wondering if I can still make a break for it, and Brad's head swivels toward me. He's smiling, but it doesn't reach his eyes like it normally does. I squeeze his hand reassuringly, and his mouth lifts more.

After the noise dies down, I spin on my heel to head off the stage, but I'm tugged back into Brad's side.

"He's not done," he whispers so only I can hear him.

"Violet and Brad's wedding will be televised live on May twenty-seventh, and you are all invited," Dad booms over the microphone.

I will the ground to open up and swallow me whole, but it doesn't. I keep the smile plastered on my face, all the while wishing I was anywhere but here.

*I can't believe Dad did this without asking me.*

“I'm also announcing my retirement, effective June first.” Dad's voice cracks with emotion before he clears his throat and continues. “Brad Coventry will be shadowing me until then, and he'll be ready to take on the duties as head pastor when I step down.”

*Wait... what??*

# CHAPTER 4

# GRIM

“LAST NIGHT WAS BRUTAL.”

I grin at Mark as he picks up a bottle of Tylenol and tries to open it. After watching him struggle with the childproof cap for a minute or two, I yank it out of his hand and do it for him.

“Thanks,” he signs with a nod.

“Little too much rum?”

“Rum, whiskey, beer, tequila... you name it, I had too much of it.”

*I remember those days.*

Shaking my head at the prospect, I turn my attention to the rest of the room. Abyss, Thorn, Spike, and Justin are all standing with their heads tipped back, each of them seemingly enthralled by what they’re watching.

When I slide my gaze to see what has them so intrigued, my eyes land on the television, and my muscles tense with rage.

*Since when do we watch televised church services?*

I stomp in their direction, coming to a stop when I’m standing in front of them.

“Turn that shit off.”

“Get out of the way,” Abyss demands before trying to shove me to the side.

I don’t budge. “Turn. It. Off.”

Thorn glares at me. “Bro, you’re blocking our fucking view.”

*Their view?*

Slowly, I turn to look at the TV again, and my blood instantly heats. On the screen is a tiny pixie of a woman. She’s so beautiful, I forget my name for a moment.

And she looks pissed.

The massive audience is transfixed on the pastor and his little family. I focus on the closed captioning that’s always on, and for some strange reason, the longer the pastor speaks, the more my gut tells me that whatever is going on is all wrong.

*Brad, come closer.*

The younger man moves to stand next to the holy man, and he’s grinning from ear to ear. The girl who caught my eye, on the other hand, has her hands clasped behind her back and appears as if one utter of the word ‘boo’ and she’d run screaming.

*As many of you know, Brad and my daughter have been dating these past few months. Well, on Friday evening, Brad proposed, and Violet accepted.*

Brad reaches for Violet’s—she even has a beautiful name—hand, and even though she hesitates, she links her fingers with his. And still, she looks ready to bolt.

Brad whispers, and the microphones don’t pick up his words, so I have no clue what he says, but her face pales slightly.

*Violet and Brad’s wedding will be televised live on May twenty-seventh, and you are all invited. I’m also announcing my retirement effective June first. Brad Coventry will be shadowing me until then and be ready to take on the duties as head pastor when I step down.*

Suddenly, the screen goes dark, and I whirl around to see Justin with the remote in his hand.

“What the hell are you doing?”

Thorn, the prick, smirks. “Aw, did the big guy see something he likes?”

Without thinking, I haul my arm back and land a right hook to his jaw. Thorn’s head whips to the side a second before his body twists, and he crumbles to the ground.

Abyss quickly drops to his knees next to him, making sure he’s okay. I want to demand that he ignore whatever injuries I may have inflicted, but Abyss is the club doc and not likely to listen.

“What the fuck was that for?” Spike demands.

“I didn’t like his tone.”

Spike arches a brow. “His tone or the fact that he was right?”

*Motherfucker.*

My shoulders tense, and I glare at my brother. “I don’t want to see that shit again, got it?”

Movement catches my attention, and I glance to my left to see Thorn getting to his feet. Abyss tries to help him, but all he gets for his effort is shrugged off.

“Next time you want to knock a man’s teeth down his throat,” Thorn begins, his movements sluggish. “Give him some warning.”

“Next time you want to spout off at the mouth... don’t,” I counter.

Storming away from them, I head to my room. Just once, I’d like to be able to slam the door behind me. Not for my benefit since I can’t hear the bang, but to prove a point to the others. But the stupid security measures prevent that from happening. Instead, it slides open after reading my fingerprint, and it’s extremely unsatisfying.

After stripping off my still-clean clothes, I stride to the bathroom and turn on the water. I don’t know how they missed the massive boner I’m sporting, but I’m grateful that my brothers didn’t pick up on exactly how affected I was by what I saw.



*Violet.*

As I step under the spray, I close my eyes and conjure up an image of the ethereal beauty. It's hard to tell on a TV screen how tall someone is, but she only came up to her father's shoulder, so I'm guessing she's pretty short.

*Perfect blow job height.*

My cock throbs as I wrap my hand around the thick length, and when I imagine Violet's lips replacing my fingers, it's all I can do not to paint the tile with my cum. Tugging on my dick, I brace myself against the wall with my free hand.

My entire body is on fire, and as much as I try to drag out my pleasure, it's impossible. It's been too long since I've had a woman, and I ache for release. I grunt with an intense orgasm that rips along my spine.

Once I'm finished, I quickly wash up and get out to dry off. Guilt settles between my shoulder blades, and it's a heavy burden. I try to convince myself that I have nothing to feel guilty about. Masturbating to thoughts of a woman I'll never meet isn't the worst thing in the world.

*But it makes you as much of a sinner as those you purge.*

Tossing my towel in the hamper, I strut into the bedroom and get dressed. If jacking off makes me a sinner, then I'm going straight to Hell.

*Do not pass Go. Do not collect two hundred dollars.*

# CHAPTER 5

# VIOLET

“DAD, WHAT’S GOING ON?”

When the service finally ended, it was another hour of accepting congratulations from most of the congregation before we were able to escape to my father’s office.

“Violet, you know I’m not getting any younger,” Dad huffs. “I’ve been in the spotlight long enough, and your mother and I are ready to travel as missionaries overseas before we can’t anymore. Now that you’re getting married, we know that you’ll be taken care of, and Brad has really expressed an interest in taking over the church so it will stay in the family.”

“I didn’t realize that you and Mom wanted to travel overseas. But you didn’t have to wait for me to get married to do that.” My head swivels to Brad before I continue. “I knew you were interested in becoming a pastor but had no idea that you wanted to take over my dad’s church.”

“Your dad and I talked about the possibility of me taking over when I asked him for your hand,” Brad explains. “We wanted to surprise you.”

“You managed to do that alright,” I say under my breath.

“What was that, honey?” Mom asks.

“Why didn’t anyone ask me if I wanted my wedding televised?” I give a pointed look at both of my parents. “You know how much I hate being in the spotlight.”

“Violet, it’s *our* wedding,” Brad says with an edge to his voice. “Besides, I thought it would be a great introduction to me taking over the reins. Your dad marrying us will be the last major ceremony he performs before I take the podium for the first time.”

“No one asked me,” I grit through my teeth.

My parents glance at each other quickly, but don’t respond. I know they’re surprised by my outburst, but before either of them can say anything Brad continues.

“We can talk about this later, in private. I think we should all go to brunch and finish celebrating our engagement and your father’s announcement.”

I nod with a sigh. This discussion is far from over, but Brad and I have never had an argument, and I don’t want the first one to be in front of my parents.

Brunch is a tense affair, at least for me. Dad and Brad have no issue discussing Dad’s retirement or the wedding being televised, totally disregarding what I said back at the church. Mom attempts to engage me in the conversation, but I refuse to contribute. Is it childish? Probably, but I don’t care. If Brad and I are going to get married, then I expect him to be a partner and not make decisions that affect me without consulting me first.

The car is silent when we drive back to my apartment. My mind races as I think about the best approach to discuss my feelings about becoming a public spectacle with Brad. I settle on explaining to him that I don’t like being in the limelight and that our wedding should be for close family and friends, not complete strangers. All I want is a small intimate affair. Surely, he’ll understand.

When we enter my apartment twenty minutes later, I’m ready to talk to him.

“Brad, I wan—”

“You what? Want to apologize to me for embarrassing me in front of your parents?” he asks.

“No.” I shake my head. “I mean, I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

“You didn’t mean to?” he snaps, his voice rising again. “You didn’t mean to?”

I take a deep breath before I respond. “No, I didn’t. I was taken by surprise with the wedding being televised and then with my dad announcing his retirement. I had no idea any of this was happening.”

“Your father and I decided that the day I asked him for your hand in marriage.”

“Exactly, you both decided.” I motion between us. “*We* should have decided that. Not you and my father.”

“Violet, you’re acting like a spoiled brat.”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re acting as if the world revolves around you and only what you want.” His voice gets louder with each word.

“I don’t think that the world revolves around me,” I yell. “I thought we could have a *mature* conversation, but I was wrong.”

I turn on my heel to head toward the kitchen and get a drink of water.

“Don’t turn your back on me,” Brad yells. “We aren’t done talking yet.”

Suddenly, I’m whipped around and slammed into the wall. I hit so hard that the wind is knocked out of me.

“Oomph.”

Tears pool in my eyes and trickle down my cheeks. I struggle to remain standing, and Brad scoops me up and carries me over to the couch, where he sets me down gently.

“Oh, baby. I’m so sorry,” he croons, rubbing my back soothingly. “I didn’t mean for you to hit the wall. I just wanted to finish talking.”

I take a couple of deep breaths. “I think you need to leave,” I whisper.

“It was an accident,” he insists. “Please forgive me.”

“It’s been a long day,” I say. “I think we both need some space.”

“I don’t want to leave you like this.”

“I’m fine.” I rub my head in an attempt to ward off the oncoming migraine. “I have some homework to finish, and I think it would be best if we talked when we’re both calmer.”

“Fine.” He stands and pulls me to my feet so he can hug me properly. “I’m so sorry, Violet. I love you. I never wanted you to get hurt.”

“I love you too, but I think we both need to regroup,” I reply.

“I’ll text you later.”

“Okay.”

After Brad leaves, I take a couple of ibuprofen before I settle down with my homework. I wasn’t lying when I said I had to get it done. Technically, it isn’t due until the end of the week, but I also needed time to think about what happened.

Brad has never given me any indication that he has a temper. We’ve been together for six months, and he’s never even raised his voice. Add to that that he didn’t put up a fight when I asked him to leave and was very remorseful, and I’m confused.

*Maybe it really was an accident. Tempers were high, and he’s a lot bigger. He probably didn’t realize his own strength.*

My phone pings, knocking me out of my stupor.

Brad: Are you okay?? I really am sorry. It was an accident.

Me: I’m fine. I’m gonna do some homework and call it a day.

Brad: Okay, call me if you need anything.

Brad: I love you

Me: Love you

Throughout the rest of the week, flowers are delivered daily after school with sincere apologies on every card. Our schedules are so hectic that we only exchange a few text messages, but we do make plans to have dinner at my house on Friday.

Brad arrives right on time, and he's holding the most gorgeous roses I've ever seen.

"Oh, wow!" I exclaim as I take them from him. "These are beautiful."

"I want you to know how sorry I am for hurting you," he states.

"I know you are, but you're going to go broke buying me flowers." I smile. "One bouquet would've been enough."

I close the door behind him and go to the kitchen to find another vase. Brad follows closely on my heels.

"Are you mocking me?" he asks.

"Why would I be mocking you?"

"*You're going to go broke buying me flowers,*" he repeats sarcastically. "*One bouquet would've been enough.*"

"I appreciate the flowers. They've all been beautiful." I shift on my feet. "I don't want you to feel like you have to keep buying them though just to say you're sorry."

"So, what?" he growls. "I have to keep apologizing over and over again instead? You want the words? Fine. I'm. Sorry."

"Brad, no." I shake my head. "I know you're sorry. All I meant was that you don't have to keep apologizing for last week. It's over. I'm not upset about it."

“I’m sorry,” he blows out. “It’s been a stressful week at work, and I’m taking it out on you. Forgive me?”

He wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me close. I search his eyes and see the sincerity in them. Rising to my tiptoes, I pull his head down and brush my lips against his. Brad cups my cheeks and kisses me until we’re both breathless. Then he steps away from me.

“Want to talk about it?” I ask.

“No.” His answer is firm. “I want to talk about the wedding.”

I blow out a breath. I thought about how this conversation could go all week and what I wanted to say.

“Why don’t we sit down?” I gesture over to the couch. Once we’re both sitting, I continue. “I don’t like the idea of the wedding being televised. I want it to be a private affair for only our family and friends.”

“Babe, the wedding *night* is a private affair,” he says crassly. “I want to show everyone how lucky I am to be marrying the most beautiful woman in the world.”

My skin tingles with goosebumps at his words, but I stand firm. “I hate being in the spotlight.”

“For last seven years you’ve been living in the spotlight,” he argues. “Now that we’re getting married, all the sudden you’re opposed to it.”

“Ask my parents. They know how much I hate being on camera.”

“Whatever, Violet,” he says dismissively. “We *are* televising the wedding. End of discussion.”

“It’s not the end of the discussion.” I cross my arms over my chest. “We’re supposed to be partners.”

“Ephesians,” he quotes. “*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. Wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*”



“Did you just quote the bible to me?” I ask incredulously. “I know what the bible says. It also says, ‘*Honor your wife. She is your equal partner.*’”

Brad surges to his feet and towers over me. His face is almost purple with anger, and his nostrils flare. I cringe and sink further into the couch. My heart hammers in my chest, and I’m shaking like a leaf.

“Don’t cower away from me,” he screams, and saliva flies out of his mouth and hits me in the face. I’m too terrified to move to wipe it off. “I didn’t hurt you.”

I make no attempt to answer him with words, instead, nodding in agreement while he continues.

“I expect my wife to love, honor, and *obey*,” he says as if this is a normal conversation. “You’re going to be the wife of the new pastor of a very prestigious church. The congregation is going to expect you to be seen with me. Together we will expand our viewership and bring the word of God to more people across the U.S. I can’t do that if my *wife* fights me at every turn.”

He starts pacing the length of my living room while I stay frozen in my spot. This is a side of Brad I never imagined existed. I don’t want a bully for a husband, but at this point, I don’t know what to do. I’m afraid he’ll escalate if I ask him to leave, so for the time being, I think the safest thing to do is placate him.

“Okay, Brad.” My voice is barely audible. “Why don’t we eat dinner now?”

“You’ll quit fighting me on every little thing?”

“Yes.”

Brad grins and rushes toward me. He pulls me off the couch, and before I have a chance to walk around him to the kitchen, his mouth is crashing down on mine. My back stiffens, and he pulls back abruptly.

“What’s the matter with you?” he questions. “We’re getting married, and I want to kiss my fiancé.”

“I... I... I need to pull dinner out of the oven before it burns.”

It's not a complete lie. I *do* have a casserole inside the oven, and while it would be fine for another five to ten minutes, I want an excuse to get away from him. Brad raises his eyebrows in question before stomping to the kitchen. He grabs the potholders off the counter and pulls the casserole out of the oven.

“Come here, Violet,” he orders.

I hesitate for a brief moment before hastily making my way over to him. Brad picks me up and places me on the counter, so we're eye level with one another, and he's no longer towering over me. I squirm, holding my breath as I wait to see what he's going to do next.

“Dinner is cooling down.” He smirks. “I'm guessing that's what you wanted... to give it time to cool down?”

“Y-y-yes,” I stammer.

“Good because I want to kiss my fiancé.”

I force my body to relax, so I don't anger him more than I already have. His hand snakes to the back of my neck, and he pulls my head closer to him. He forces my legs to open so he can step in between them, and I don't fight him. I let him assault my mouth with his, the whole time my mind racing with how to get out of this engagement.

While we're kissing, the hand he's resting on my hip glides up under my shirt. Brad and I have had makeout sessions before, but he's never gone under my top. I try to pull back, but he holds me still, moaning into my mouth. He squeezes my breast forcefully, causing me to yelp, but the involuntary protest doesn't seem to faze him. Eventually, he slowly pulls back, and rests his forehead against mine, his hand still massaging my breast.

“Brad, we should stop.” I peek through my lashes, hoping he takes my suggestion as being shy.

He leans forward to whisper in my ear. “I can't wait to fuck that virgin pussy.”

Brad's grip tightens on my boob one more time before he slowly rakes his nails down the front of my bra until his thumb and his finger tighten around my nipple, squeezing painfully.

I bite the inside of my cheek so hard that blood pools in my mouth, but I refuse to cry out in pain. Sick to my stomach, I swallow the vomit that's inching its way up my throat. He's never spoken to me that way, and the shock on my face must show because he laughs.

"I-I-I should get dinner served before it gets too cold."

I gently push him back and hop down from the counter. He yanks me back tight against his chest and leans close.

"You're mine, Violet," he says with a growl. "And as soon as you say *I do*, I will show you how much I own you... body and soul."

A shiver races down my spine, and he snickers. Brad releases me but not before he kisses my forehead. Once he's gone, I can call my parents and figure a way out of this mess. But first, I have to get through dinner.

The night comes to an end without any more incidents, and I thank God when he finally leaves. I immediately call my mom and without going into too much detail, I explain to her what happened last week and tonight. I don't even realize I'm crying until I taste the salty tears on my lips.

"Mom, what am I going to do?" I cry. "I can't go through with this wedding. He's not the man I thought he was."

"Violet, you'll be fine. I promise," Mom states confidently. "I do believe it was an accident that you hit the wall. He's much bigger than you, and you're so light that he probably didn't realize his own strength.

"But Mom, what abo—"

"Don't interrupt," she chastises. "I do agree that he shouldn't be discussing sex with you before the wedding night. I will speak to your father and have him talk to Brad. But honey, you do have to realize that Brad is a man and has needs. Your job as his wife is to make sure he is taken care of at home. It's okay to be shy and afraid. Unfortunately, he

didn't have the same upbringing as you, and he's more worldly."

I pull the phone away from my ear and stare at it. I must be in an alternate universe. That's the only explanation because there's no way my mom is defending his actions.

"Mom, stop," I practically shout. "I can't go through with this wedding."

"Violet Marie Simpson," Mom says sternly. "Stop it right now. The announcement has already been made, and the date is set. You will not embarrass us all because of your childish fears of marriage. I will talk to your father so he can have a conversation with Brad, but the wedding will happen. After your midterms, we will go dress shopping. Now, I have to go."

Before I can argue further, the call is disconnected. I try to wrap my brain around what just happened, but that's not at all how I thought that phone conversation would go.

I step into my bathroom and in front of the mirror, lift my shirt over my head, and unclasp my bra before lowering it down my arms. Bruises mar my breasts where Brad squeezed and pinched me.

*What the heck have I gotten myself into? How do I get out of this mess?*

# CHAPTER 6

# GRIM

“WHAT’S YOUR PROBLEM?”

I continue to towel dry my hair and stare at Jez. If Prez’s twin is going to ignore the fact that I’m in my birthday suit, so am I. Jez is glaring at me from her position in my doorway, and I make a mental note to talk to Soul about his sister still having admin access to all the security measures in the clubhouse.

Jez shoves off the door frame and strides toward me, lifting her hands. “Well?”

After a few more seconds of staring one another down, I toss my towel to the floor and move to my dresser. As I open the top drawer to grab a pair of boxer briefs, Jez’s small hand grips my bicep. She urges me to face her, so I do.

“I asked you a question.”

“What makes you think I have a problem?” I counter.

Jez reaches into her pocket and pulls out her cell to wave it in the air, forcing me to read her lips. “Because I’ve been texting you for almost three hours, and you haven’t even read them yet.”

I glance down at my nude body and back to her. “Maybe because I was in the shower.”

“For three hours, Grim? Three fucking hours?”

Reaching up and rubbing the back of my neck, guilt settles in my gut. I’ve never intentionally ignored Jez... until today.

“I was in the gym before that,” I admit.

“The gym?”

I pull on my underwear and dig through the drawers to find jeans and a t-shirt. Once I’m fully clothed, I face Jez again.

“What’s with all the questions?”

She arches a brow and begins to tap her foot. And that damn worry crease forms across her forehead.

*Well hell... I’ve pissed her off.*

“Grim, you’ve never not responded to my texts, let alone not read them.”

That’s not entirely true. There have been plenty of times I haven’t responded right away because I was focused on club business. But never for three hours.

“I’m so—”

“Don’t.” Jez takes a step toward me. “Don’t apologize. Just don’t let it happen again.”

Slowly, I nod. “What did you need?”

She rolls her eyes, but there’s no mistaking the hurt in them. “If you’d read your texts, you’d know it’s too late now.”

With that, she walks out of my room, disappearing into the hall. After my door slides shut, I stride to my nightstand and take my cell off the charger. I pull up the texting app, and my heart sinks as I read the messages I ignored.

Jez: Hey Grim Reaper... I need you

Jez: Grim??

Jez: Why aren’t you reading my texts? Are you okay?

Jez: Grim, you’re scaring me. Please just let me know you’re okay...

Jez: Now you’re just starting to piss me off

Jez: Seriously, dude, why are you ignoring me?

Jez: I NEED YOU!

Jez: I can't handle this sinner on my own, Grim...  
c'mon!

Jez: OK... if you don't respond within the next  
five minutes, I'm calling Soul

I smile at the threat, confident that she didn't call Soul at all. She wouldn't because then she'd likely have to answer a million questions, none of which she's willing to answer.

Jez: Dammit, Grim!!! What about our pinkie  
promise?!?!?

And just like that, I'm transported back in time as memories assault me from what seems to be every direction.

*The lights in my tiny efficiency apartment flicker, and I glare at the door, annoyed at whoever dares to come over uninvited. When the flickering continues, I stand from the futon and stomp to the door to yank it open.*

*My jaw drops when I see Mary, Matt's twin sister, standing on the other side.*

*Before I can even lift my hands to ask her what the hell she's doing here, Mary pushes her way inside. When I turn to face her, she's already signing.*

*"... so, you can't be ignoring me!"*

*"I'm not ignoring you."*

*Mary scans my room and stalks to the bed, where she picks up my cell phone. After tapping the screen a few times, she stomps back toward me and flips the device so I can see all the missed texts.*

*"You are." Her shoulders deflate, and she looks at me with a suspicious sheen in her eyes. "You're all I have left, John Dunn." She pauses her signing and sweeps her hand around the room. "And what the fuck are you doing in this dump?"*



*Anger surges through me, and I narrow my eyes. “Dump? Where the hell do you get off calling this place a dump? I don’t know where you thought I’d go after the church fire, but it certainly wasn’t home!”*

*“I thought we’d stick together,” she counters, her movements sluggish, as if she’s exhausted.*

*My fury subsides. “I’m sorry, Mary. After your brother and Paul left, I didn’t know what to do.”*

*“It’s Jezebel.”*

*“What?”*

*“My name.” She squares her shoulders. “I’ve decided to go by my hacker name instead of Mary.”*

*“Since when are you a hacker?”*

*“If you’d read your damn texts, you’d know.”*

*“Ma—” I hesitate when she glares at me. “Jezebel,” I correct. “What have you gotten yourself into?”*

*“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”*

*“Bullshit.”*

*She takes a deep breath and locks her eyes on mine. “Since the night of the fire, I’ve been putting my...” Her hands freeze midair for a moment before she continues. “... talents to use.”*

*I arch a brow. “How?”*

*Jezebel’s forehead wrinkles, and I know she’s close to shutting down. “Well...”*

*Closing the distance between us, I settle my hands on her shoulders and mouth, “How are you using your talents?”*

*She averts her gaze before settling it back on me. “If I tell you, you have to promise not to tell Matt.”*

*“Fine.”*

*“And you have to promise never to ignore me again? If I let you in on this, I need to know I can count on you.”*

*Something tells me I'm going to regret this, but I nod anyway.*

*“Promise?”*

*I nod.*

*She extends her pinky, and I link mine with it, effectively changing the course of my life forever.*

# CHAPTER 7

# VIOLET

“ARE YOU READY TO GO DRESS SHOPPING TOMORROW WITH our mothers?” Brad asks before taking a bite of pot roast.

I stare at him, sure that he’s here for more than just dinner. He’s eaten here the last several nights, and I can’t help but worry about when the mind games are going to start.

True to her word, my mother had my dad talk to Brad about his behavior. Of course, Dad made me seem more unschooled and shy about sex and explained to Brad that he would have to ‘slowly break me in *after* we’re married’.

Mom told me that Brad apologized to my father for his behavior, but he has yet to say he’s sorry to me. Things got better for a couple days, but then he started criticizing me for every little thing I did or said.

A loud crack on the dining room table startles me out of my trance, and I look up from my fork to see Brad’s fist next to his plate.

“I’m talking to you!” he yells.

“I-I-I’m sorry,” I stammer. “I was thinking about how much closer we are to the wedding date, and my mind wandered.” My answer must satisfy him because he smiles and repeats his question. “Oh yes, I think we’re leaving around ten in the morning.”

“I told my mother I don’t want you getting a dress in Vegas.”

“Why?”

“Because I won’t have my future wife dressing like a damn whore at our wedding,” he shouts before taking a deep breath, seemingly to calm himself. “You’ll find a nice respectable wedding dress. I’ve already prescreened locations you can go to. One that is very promising is in Boulder City. I called ahead and had the owner pull a couple of selections.”

“Brad, the wedding dress is supposed to be a surprise.” I wiggle nervously in my chair. “I’m sure we can find something local, so we don’t have to drive so far.”

“I said no!” he yells with finality. “I spoke to both of our mothers, and they agree.”

“What?” I ask. “When did you talk to my mom about this?”

Brad smirks. “I talk to your parents all the time. I’ve discussed our relationship in detail with them. They both agree with me on the modesty of the dress. Of course, you will get to pick the one you want from my selections. I won’t know which one you pick until the day of the wedding. Personally, I can’t wait to peel it off you.”

I take a couple of deep breaths to steady my racing heart. For some reason, my parents aren’t helping me get out of this, so it’s up to me. I need to tell him we aren’t right for each other.

“I’m sorry,” I begin. “I can’t do this anymore. It’s time for you to leave.”

“I’m not done eating,” he says dismissively.

“Brad!” I shout to gain his attention, and his eyes fix on mine.

*Finally, we’re getting somewhere.*

“I’m done. We’re not getting married. I don’t love you anymore. You’re not the man I thought you were. We’re both obviously looking for different things in a partner.” I pause for a brief moment before I continue. “I think you should go now.”

I take off my engagement ring and place it on the table to emphasize my point. Glancing at Brad, I see the shock written on his face. His mouth is set in the shape of an ‘O’, and his eyes are wide.

The shock lasts only seconds before his expression morphs into one of murderous rage. Without warning, he lunges across the table and grabs my hair, yanking me close to his chest. I cry out in pain as he twists his grip.

“We’re *not* done,” he snarls. “You *will* be my wife.”

“Let go of me!”

I pummel his chest until he releases me, but before I have time to run, Brad backhands me. The slap sends me crumbling to the floor, and I grasp my cheek.

*I can’t believe he hit me.*

“I told your father you need a firm hand to bring you to heel,” Brad sneers. “You’ve had too much freedom.” He marches toward me. “Don’t worry, I won’t hit your face again. Wouldn’t want to bruise all that beauty.”

The first kick to my ribs is a shock. I howl in pain and curl up in a ball, trying to protect myself as best as I can. He delivers two more kicks to my back before stopping and leaving me in a crying heap on the floor while he sits back down and finishes his dinner as if nothing happened.

I lay on the floor until the chair legs scrape on the hardwood as he moves away from the table. I scramble to my knees and crawl to lean against the wall, my body screaming in agony. Brad approaches me slowly, then he holds his hand out as if to help me up.

Frozen, I don’t know what to do. I’m terrified to accept his help and equally afraid not to. Fear of the punishment for not taking his assistance wins out, and I place my hand in his. Surprisingly, he’s gentle as he pulls me to my feet.

“I wish I didn’t have to do that, Violet,” he admonishes. “You left me no choice.”

Brad pushes my hair away from my face and cups my cheek. I hold my breath in anticipation and try not to pull away from his touch, unsure of what he's capable of. After he pushed me into the wall a few weeks ago, I never dreamed he'd do it again. He was so apologetic.

I was wrong... so very wrong.

"You're mine," he continues. "And I don't want to hurt you. We can be so happy together if you'd just submit to me and accept the love I'm offering."

*He's insane!*

I stare at him incredulously. There's no way we'll be together after my parents find out about this.

"Brad, you hurt me," I whisper, wrapping my arms around my waist. "Not just emotionally but physically."

"Baby, you pushed me."

"What?!" I shriek.

"Don't raise your voice," he snaps, his anger rising to the surface again.

"What do you mean *I pushed you?*"

"You contradicted my orders," he states matter-of-factly. "When I explain to you how I want something done, I expect you to do it without question. Now, are we going to have any more problems?"

*Yes! One thousand percent yes.*

"No," I answer hastily.

"Good. I'm going to leave so you can get your rest for your big day of shopping tomorrow. But before I go, let me get you an ice pack for your back."

*Why the heck does he care all of a sudden?*

"We don't want you to bruise too badly," he says, almost as if he read my thoughts. "Your skin is so fine that it's going to bruise no matter what, but ice will help lessen it."

Brad moves to the refrigerator, pulls out a tray of ice, and dumps it into a baggie. When he returns to my side, he leads me to the couch, and he applies it to my aching back.

The ice helps to numb the pain, but I refuse to admit that out loud. He leaves me leaning against the ice, and moments later I hear him rummaging in my bathroom. Brad reappears and hands me two pain relievers and a glass of water.

I swallow both dutifully and silently wish for him to leave.

“I’m going to go now.”

“Okay.”

“Remember what I said about the dress.”

I nod but say nothing. The sooner he leaves, the better. Before I can react, his mouth crashes down on mine in a punishing manner. He keeps me pinned against the couch, both of his arms caging me in, so I have no means of escape. I kiss him back with less enthusiasm, but he doesn’t seem to mind.

After a few agonizing moments, Brad pushes away from me and grins.

“You’re gonna be so lovely on your knees.”

*What the heck does he mean by that?*

It doesn’t matter because I plan on calling my parents as soon as he’s out of the parking lot. They won’t allow this to happen. They won’t allow this to happen now that Brad’s continuing and escalating in his abuse.

“Oh, and Violet?” he says with his hand on the doorknob.

“Yes?”

“Don’t even think about telling your parents what happened,” he says haughtily. “You won’t like the consequences. I’d hate to have to hurt *them* to keep you in line. Be a good girl tomorrow.”





“YOU’RE NOT RESCHEDULING.”

I rub the back of my neck as I head for the door, my cell tucked against my ear. Calling Brad and asking him to reschedule with his mom was obviously a mistake, but I had to try. The Epsom salt bath I took last night and Tylenol are doing nothing to ease the pain from his rage, and trying on dresses doesn’t sound appealing at all.

“But the brui—”

“You’ll be fine.”

*I should’ve called my parents.*

After Brad left last night, I sat on my bed and debated about calling them, but ultimately, I chose not to. My fiancé’s threat weighed too heavily on my mind.

“I’ve already spoken to my mother about our little *mishap* yesterday,” Brad continues. “She’ll help you get in and out of the dresses. Not only will that keep your *injuries* hidden, but it’ll allow you to surprise your mother with each new dress. You want that, don’t you?”

His tone leaves no room for argument so I say the only thing I can.

“Sure, Brad.”

The words leave a bitter taste in my mouth. I consider myself a good person, but I’d give anything to be strong enough to pummel him. I’m gonna bide my time until a solution presents itself, but I’ll be damned if I’m going to walk down the aisle and tie myself to this man for the rest of my life.

“Have a great day shopping. Remember, no price is too high for my new wife,” he says before ending the call.

The woman at the first shop has five options pulled for me to try on. As if on cue, Mrs. Coventry steps up and offers to be the one to help me. Once we're in the dressing room, she faces me.

"Put a smile on your face," she scolds in a commanding tone. "You're a bride, smile and act like one. I'd hate to give Brad a bad report of your behavior."

"I'm doing the best I can," I counter.

"Let me give you some advice," she says a little gentler. "Brad is a very determined young man. He always gets what he wants no matter the cost. His father is the same way. Be a good girl and do what he expects, and you will have no cause for worry."

Sadness fills her eyes, but she quickly masks it. I wonder how long it was before she found out Mr. Coventry was a monster.

The day drags on and by the fourth dress shop, I'm ready to throw my hands in the air and call it a day. Every dress Brad chose has been old-fashioned and downright ugly. He picked the brightest white he could, each with tons of lace and material that weighs down my short stature. The white makes my skin look sickly and translucent. I really should have an off-white or cream-colored dress.

I attempt to convince Mom, but she insists that Brad's selections are lovely. Mom and Mrs. Coventry 'ooh' and 'ahh' over every dress I try on, but I manage to convince them I haven't found one that screams *This is the one!*

*How can any of them be 'the one' when I don't want to go through with this marriage?*

"Can we go to that wedding boutique in Boulder City?" I ask as we leave shop number four. "Brad told me he thought they had some I'd really love."

"That's a good idea," Mrs. Coventry agrees. "That's the final boutique he gave me so hopefully you'll find what you're looking for."

I silently pray on our way to Boulder City for God to help me out of this situation. I thought I loved Brad but was fooled by his charm. I know I won't survive if I tie myself to him, and divorce is prohibited in our church. My parents are dismissive of my concerns, so I'm at a loss on how to get out of this mess.

My thoughts are interrupted when Mom announces that we've arrived. I was so engrossed I didn't even realize the car had stopped. When we walk into the shop, we're immediately greeted by an over enthusiastic employee.

"Good afternoon," she says, bouncing from one foot to the other. "How can I help you today?"

"My son, Brad Coventry, called and asked for a few dresses to be set aside for Violet Simpson," Mrs. Coventry explains.

"Oh, my goodness, yes. I'm Laura." She holds her hand out to me. "You must be Violet. Pleasure to meet you."

I shake her hand and briefly glance around. I have to admit, there are a lot of beautiful dresses. One in particular catches my eye. It's a beautiful champagne mermaid gown with off-the-shoulder draped lace cap sleeves.

Laura hones in on what caught my attention. "Would you like to add that one to the four your fiancé picked out?" she asks.

Before I can respond, Mrs. Coventry speaks up. "That won't be necessary. I'm sure the ones that Brad picked will be more than acceptable."

I start fidgeting with the hem of my shirt before Mom discreetly pokes me in the side, causing me to yelp. Pain immediately engulfs my side, and it takes all my strength not to bend over and cradle my ribs.

"Ow... I mean, no, but thank you." I smile, hoping no one notices.

"Oh... okay, well, why don't we head into the dressing room, Violet?" Laura grips my elbow firmly but gently to guide me, her friendly demeanor slipping. "Why don't you

ladies go over there and have a seat in the viewing area? We'll be right back."

Mom heads over to the veil section and starts shuffling through them.

"I think Violet will prefer it if I help her." Mrs. Coventry steps in front of us. "She's very shy and isn't used to anyone but family seeing her naked," she whispers to Laura so Mom can't hear. She forces a smile. "Plus, we like to guess how her mom will react."

"I'm sorry, but that's not possible. We don't allow family members into the rooms with the brides. Our inventory is quite expensive, and we don't want to risk any damage. Store policy... I'm sure you understand," Laura states.

"Well, that's unacceptable," Mrs. Coventry sputters. "I'd like to speak to the manager."

"Ma'am, I am the manager." Laura smirks. "You're more than welcome to try another shop if you don't want our assistance."

"I'll be fine." I don't know where my braveness came from all of a sudden, but my gut is telling me to stand my ground. "I have a feeling the dress that's meant for me is in this shop."

"If that's what you want dear." Mrs. Coventry narrows her eyes before turning on her heel and heading to the cushioned chairs set up around the viewing platform.

"My assistant will be over in a moment with some refreshments." Laura leads me to the dressing room mumbling about rude mothers of the bride.

I chuckle as she closes the door behind us because I couldn't agree more. Now that we're alone in the dressing room, I start to panic. My hands are clammy, and sweat trickles down my back.

*What will she do when she sees the bruises? How do I explain them? Think Violet, think!*

"Are you okay?"

That one question does me in. My breath hitches, and my eyes unleash the tears that I've been holding in the past few months. Once I start, I can't stop, and it's like a dam burst open. Laura hands me some tissues and rushes to reassure me.

"Ohmigosh! It will be okay. A lot of brides get nervous when they haven't found the right dress." Laura pats my back soothingly.

I jerk away from her touch with a hiss. I didn't mean to, but the pain has gotten to be too much with all the movement from today, trying on dress after dress.

"May I?" she asks, gently pointing to my shirt.

I should say no, but I nod involuntarily. She slowly lifts up my shirt and gasps.

"Mother fucker," she growls. "I'm so sorry."

"It wasn't your fault," I mumble. "I guess we better try on the first dress."

"Did someone hurt you?"

"I-I-I..."

"These bruises are bad, Violet. If you're in danger, I can help."

"How can you help me?" I whisper. "No one can."

"That's not true. If you truly want help, just say the word, and I will get you out of here," Laura says with determination.

Desperation forces me to believe her. That, and there's something in her voice that has me thinking about the chance she's giving me. This could be the answer to my prayers.

"I need help. It's my fiancé," I explain. "He, um... He's violent sometimes. I don't know how to get away."

Laura looks around and sees my purse which I dropped on the chair. She picks it up and hands it to me.

"Go out and take a right," she says, pointing to a door. "You'll go through a long hallway and at the end of it is the back door. The code to get out is three-three-seven-four. That

will disarm the alarm. Once you're out the door you'll be in an alley. Head to the end of the alley and turn left, and on the corner, you'll see another store called Naughty/Nice. Go in there and ask for Cece. Tell her what you told me." She takes a breath before continuing. "I'll tell your jailers that you had to use the bathroom and it will be just a few minutes. That should buy you enough time to get there."

"Why would she help me?" My skin tingles in anticipation. I can't believe I'm even considering this.

"Trust me, Cece and her *friends* are your best hope." Laura squeezes my hand. "Go, I'll stall."

I slip out the door and follow her instructions to get out of the building. Once I'm outside, the severity of what I'm doing hits me. It's an emotional punch to the gut as I lean against the wall and argue with myself for being selfish. My parents could possibly suffer because of my actions.

*Maybe Cece and her friends can help them too.*

Making up my mind, I head toward what I hope is my salvation.

# CHAPTER 8

# GRIM

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?”

I glance around Sinful Wheels and take note of the multiple bikes being worked on. Abyss is replacing the brake line on a custom Harley Fat Boy, and Asher is swapping out the gas tank on a Softail. When I return my attention to Spike, he’s staring at me as if I have two heads.

“What?”

Spike shakes his head. “Nothing. Just don’t see you down here all that often.”

“Soul and Malice are out of town so I’m doing the rounds.”

“Yeah, but...”

I narrow my eyes. “But what?”

“It’s...” He sighs. “They’ve been out of town before, and you haven’t done rounds.”

*I haven’t had a reason to get the fuck out of the clubhouse before.*

“I was bored.”

He stares at me for a moment, his eyes assessing. “Fine. Follow me to the office, and I’ll go over the same shit with you that I do with Soul.”

Spike turns and walks toward the small room that houses his desk and all things business-related. An hour later, I’m



striding out the door. The ride to Persuasion Ink is short, and I mentally prepare myself for similar questions from Possum.

Fortunately, when I enter, my brother is busy working on a full back piece for some dude and barely has time to spare for me.

“Can you come back later?” he asks, forcing me to read his lips.

I could easily fine him for not using sign language, but his hands are busy, and I know I can't punish him for doing his job.

“Sure.”

Before I even make it out the door, my cell vibrates against my side. I reach into my cut and pull it out. Adrenaline surges through me as I stare at the screen.

Cece: Need you at NN now!

As I race to my Harley, I quickly text her back and let her know I'm on my way. It takes me less than ten minutes to get to Naughty/Nice. The entire ride, all I can think about is my death if I let something happen to Soul's Old Lady or her store.

When I reach the boutique, I notice that the 'closed' sign is hanging in the window, and my gut tightens. If Cece shuts down her business, this must be bad.

I scan the area in front of the store, searching for a threat. Noticing nothing out of the ordinary, I stride toward the door, and it swings open.

Cece's expression is stern as she reaches across the threshold and grabs my arm to drag me inside. She leans forward to glance in both directions before slamming it shut and flipping the lock.

The queen of Saints Purgatory faces me, and my stomach drops.

“What happened?” I take a step toward her, my eyes silently perusing her body to look for wounds. “Are you

okay?”

Cece smiles fondly. The moment she walked into Soul’s life, she became family, and the thought that she could be hurt has me shook.

“I’m fine, Grim,” she replies, settling her hand on my arm for a second while she pauses. “But we do have a problem.”

I arch a brow as she turns around and motions for someone I can’t see to come forward. My gaze follows hers, and my heart skips a beat when a slip of a woman steps out of the shadows.

*Is this some sort of sick joke?*

Grabbing Cece’s arm, I spin her back around and glare. “What the fuck is this?”

Her expression darkens, but before she can lift her hands, Violet Simpson, televangelist’s daughter and the person gracing ninety-nine percent of my thoughts, does.

“This was a bad idea,” she signs, fear written across her features, and then she moves toward the door.

I don’t know what comes over me, but I move to block Violet’s path. Her eyes widen as she halts in her tracks.

“You know sign language?” I ask, unable to form another coherent thought.

It’s been a while since I first saw Violet on TV, and numerous cold showers. She’s haunted my dreams and dominated my fantasies. And my imagination didn’t do her an ounce of justice.

*She’s fucking stunning.*

Violet nods, and it takes me a moment to remember my question. I’m about to ask her where she learned, but Cece shifts to stand next to her.

“Violet, this is Grim,” she signs, and her lips move so I know she’s also speaking out loud. “Grim, this is Violet.”

“I know who she is, but what I want to know is why she’s here.”

“How do you know me?” Violet asks.

I stare at her incredulously. “You’re on TV.”

Violet moves her eyes from my face, down my body, and back up again. “You watch my father?”

“Hell no,” I reply without thinking.

She looks from me to Cece. They converse, but neither sign so I don’t know what they’re saying. After a few minutes, Violet’s shoulders sag, and Cece wraps an arm around her to tuck the tiny sprite into her side.

*Tiny sprite? Dammit, my man card is in serious jeopardy.*

“Grim, Violet was sent by Laura,” Cece explains. “She was helping her try on dresses, and she...” Her gaze trails to Violet, and there’s empathy in her expression. “She saw something she didn’t like.”

Instantly, I stiffen. Not only does the image of Violet in a wedding dress have me mentally drooling, but the thought that Laura sent her to us for help makes my insides burn with rage. Much like I did with Cece when I first arrived, I scan Violet for injuries, ignoring the way my cock grows with each delicious inch of her.

Locking eyes with her, I motion for Violet to come closer to me. When she doesn’t, I reach out and brush a finger along her cheek to coax her away from Cece.

*Soft... I’m gonna go soft for this girl. I can feel it in my soul.*

Violet flinches, and I remove my touch.

“Why did Laura send you here?”

Deep in my gut, I know the answer, but I need her to tell me. With my Prez and VP away, it falls to me to make sure things are done right.

“I...” She shakes her head. “I shouldn’t be here.”

“If you need help, we can help you,” I tell her. “But I need to know what happened.”

“Why?”

I arch a brow. “Why what?”

“Why would you help me?”

I shrug. “Because it’s what we do.”

“You keep saying ‘we’.”

“My club.”

“Club?”

Before things go any further, I have to speak to Cece alone. If I don’t, she’s likely to have me revealing things that have no business out in the light.

“Are you hungry?” I ask her.

Violet rests her hand on her stomach and nods. “So horny.”

My throat vibrates with laughter, and Violet’s lips pinch into a thin line.

“What’s so funny?”

I shift my focus to Cece. “Tell her,” I command.

Cece rolls her eyes, and her lips move as she explains to Violet that she mixed up ‘hungry’ and ‘horny’. Her cheeks flush a pretty shade of pink, and she drops her chin.

*Well, hell. We can’t have that.*

Reaching out, I tilt her chin and force her to look at me. Then I patiently show her the two different words and how to sign them. Once she has them both mastered, she smiles shyly.

“I am...” Violet swallows. “Hungry.”

“Cece, do you have anything in your break room she could eat while we talk?”

Cece nods and leads Violet away.

As soon as they’re out of sight, my entire being protests. I want Violet close. We just met, and she represents everything I despise, but I want her anyway.

*Fuck!*

# CHAPTER 9

# VIOLET

“HERE YOU GO.” CECE HANDS ME AN APPLE AND A PROTEIN bar. “There’s a variety of drinks in the fridge, too. Help yourself. I’m gonna go talk to Grim for a minute, but I’ll be right back.”

“Thank you for all your hospitality, but maybe I should go.”

I open the protein bar and take a bite. My stomach is a ball of nerves, and I know I need to eat something to try and settle it. I don’t know what I was thinking coming here.

*Help, you need help.*

“Please don’t go,” Cece pleads. “I know Grim looks a little rough. Hell, all of them do, but they are *good* men. Give us a chance to come up with a plan.”

*All of them?*

I don’t respond but nod as I take another bite while she heads out of the breakroom. After finishing my snack, I wash my hands at the sink and then pull a bottle of water out of the fridge. When I sit back down at the small table, my thoughts drift.

My mom and Mrs. Coventry have to be going crazy trying to find me right now. It’s been almost thirty minutes since I arrived at Cece’s store. My phone pings, and I dig through my purse to find it. There are several missed text messages, but, thankfully, they’re all from my mother.

Mom: Are you okay?

Mom: How much longer are you going to be?

Mom: Violet Marie Simpson where are you??

Mom: You're embarrassing me. Wait until I tell your father about your behavior.

*What am I going to say to them? How do I explain my absence from the boutique?*

My brain constantly turns with unanswered questions, but before I can dive too far down the rabbit hole, Cece calls my name. I race out of the breakroom, ignoring my sore muscles, and come to a halt when I reach the front of the store.

Grim has his arms crossed against his massive chest and a scowl on his face. He darts his eyes back and forth continuously as if looking for trouble to come his way any second.

"I know Laura sent you to me, but can you tell us more?" Cece asks.

"I can't." My voice wobbles, and my hands are shaky as I sign. I should've known I would chicken out, but I can't risk my parent's safety to save my own skin. I'll just have to come up with another way to get free from Brad.

A deep growl from Grim has me taking a step backward, and Cece smacks his arm.

"Stop that," she chastises. "How are we going to get her to trust us if you growl at her?"

"I'm sorry I wasted everyone's time," I say, looking down at my feet.

As if an invisible tether is being pulled, my head snaps up toward the front window. Mom and Mrs. Coventry are across the street looking up and down the sidewalk. My mom lifts her phone and looks right at Naughty/Nice. When she points at me, panic begins to rise.

I have to get out of here quickly before they realize what I've done... or almost done. As it stands, I haven't had a

chance to tell Cece or Grim my reason for wanting help. I pray Laura doesn't tell them either.

"I've gotta go."

I rush past both of them to head off my mom and Mrs. Coventry before they reach the storefront, but Cece grabs my arm to stop me.

She pulls her cell phone out of her back pocket. "If anything, you look like you could use a friend. Can I get your number? I'll text you so you'll have mine too."

I rattle off my phone number as I fumble with the lock and then scramble out the door.



A FEW DAYS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE INCIDENT IN BOULDER City. To say my mom was upset with me is an understatement. Of course, both she and Mrs. Coventry demanded to know why I disappeared to a store down the street. They told me that Laura said my stomach was upset, and I went to the bathroom. When I didn't return, Mom went looking for me, only to find the restroom empty.

I repeated Laura's story about me not feeling well, and I explained that I was overwhelmed with not being able to decide on a dress, so I went for a walk and wandered around the quaint town to clear my head.

*"Honey, I know it's a big decision, but surely there's something that catches your eye," Mom encourages.*

*"I don't want to disappoint Brad, and this is a big decision," I lie. "The wedding will be televised, and I want to make you all proud."*

*"He's going to be disappointed you didn't pick a dress," Mrs. Coventry states matter-of-factly. "Now our appointment is over, and that woman refuses to give us more time."*



*I hang my head. "I'm sorry. It's my fault. I'll call later and see if there's a slot available for next Saturday," I promise. "Will you be available to accompany us, Mrs. Coventry?"*

I strum my fingers across my keyboard, but a blank screen taunts me as I recount the events that happened instead of doing my homework. Both of them agreed to come with me the following Saturday. I have to come up with a plan before then, but I've been distracted ever since I met tall, dark, and mysterious.

Grim's eyes haunt my dreams, and he's all I've been able to think about for the past week. Meeting Grim and Cece gave me confidence that I don't have to do this alone, that there are still good people in the world who willingly help strangers.

"Violet!"

Yelling and pounding at the door knocks me out of my stupor. I take a few breaths to steady myself for the onslaught of questions and plaster a fake smile on my face before answering it.

"I'm sorry, Brad," I gush. "I was doing homework and lost in thought."

He brushes past me roughly, and I shut the door before following him back to the living room. "How was your tr—"

Brad grabs my arms, hauling me to him and brutally kissing me. He forces my mouth open with his tongue. I don't fight him because it's not worth it.

As soon as he has his fill, he lets me go.

"Now that that's out of the way, care to explain to me what happened when you went shopping?" he asks.

He's calm, too calm. I try and explain to him that I couldn't find a dress worthy of our wedding.

"I'm sorry I didn't find one yet, but I asked your mother to co—"

Before I even realize what's happening, Brad backhands me across the face. Staggering, I manage to stay on my feet. I

should've known how this would go, but like an idiot, I thought I could reason with him.

"I talked to my mother," he sneers. "You ran out of the last appointment!"

"Brad, please. I needed some air to think," I push out, holding my hands up in surrender. "I was getting very overwhelmed."

"You made me look like an idiot!"

"I swear, I didn't do it on purpose," I cry. "It won't happen again."

Brad's scowl turns into a sinister grin, and his eyes flash with glee as he takes a step toward me. "No, it won't."

That's the only warning I get before Brad lunges, and I find myself lifted off my feet by the neck. He squeezes tightly, and I claw at his hands as my vision starts to blur. I kick my legs out which only makes him angrier.

"You stupid bitch!"

He throws me against the wall and tightens his grip for a moment before letting me fall limply to the floor.

I rub my neck and gasp for breath as I hurry to get up before he can kick me like he did last time. It doesn't matter, because as soon as I'm upright, his fist hits me directly in the cheek, knocking me sideways. I trip over my feet and land on top of my glass coffee table, shattering it.

Jagged glass shards dig into my hands and arms as I struggle to right myself. My hair is ripped out of my skull as I'm yanked up from the remnants of the table.

"Help!" I scream, not that I expect anyone to come to my aid. No one has before... "Please stop. I'm sorry!"

"Shut the fuck up!" Brad yells in my face. "No one makes a fool out of me."

Thankfully, the next punch to my gut sends me spiraling away from the glass. I try to brace myself for the fall, but my wrist snaps, sending agony buzzing over my nerve endings.

Kick after kick to my already bruised ribs has me screaming in pain, but he doesn't stop. It's like he's possessed by an evil deep down to his core.

Brad seems to tire of kicking me, and he starts delivering punishing blows to my face. The tangy taste of copper coats my tongue as blood fills my mouth, but I ignore it and, between hits, continue to plead with him to stop.

Finally, the violence ends. I'm curled up in a fetal position, unable to move or open one of my eyes. I want to assess the damage, but I'm afraid to draw attention to myself.

The front door slams, but despite my efforts, I can't lift my head to verify that Brad's really gone. My left arm hangs at a weird angle, and my fingers won't move. I open my mouth to yell for help again, but no sound comes out, only a groan. Slowly, I reach my good arm around my back to snag my cell phone out of my pocket... if it's still there.

It feels like an eternity passes, but I manage to grab the device, and hope spreads.

*Help... if I can just get some help, I might be okay.*

Every movement causes new tears to fall, and each breath is an excruciating intake of air. Blood pours from a wound, and a puddle forms under my face. But I can't dwell on that... I need help.

The screen of my cell is shattered, but it's still powered on. I open my text messages to the last message I received. I do my best to type a text, but my vision is hazy, and I have no idea what buttons I'm actually hitting. As soon as I think I'm done, I hit send and silently pray that it goes through.

The screen goes black, and all hope dies. Closing my good eye, I welcome death to take me.

# CHAPTER 10

# GRIM

*I'VE GOTTA GO.*

For most, those three words are simply that... three words. They're a quick goodbye, a short farewell as two or more people part ways. But for someone like me, someone who can't hear the tone of a person's voice or the words themselves, they can be so much more.

Being different isn't always a bad thing, and I've learned to embrace it, especially when my difference allows me to see things others might normally miss. I don't know if Cece picked up on Violet's fear when her mom showed up at Naughty/Nice, but I sure did. Between that and the way her entire demeanor shifted, it was easy to tell that she needed our help more than she realized.

I have been able to think of little else since watching her walk out that door. Cece and I didn't have time to get information out of her, and Laura hasn't been talking. I've lost count of the number of times I've asked Laura to tell me the trouble Violet's in, but she's refused, saying that it's Violet's story, not hers.

While I admire her loyalty, it's annoying as fuck.

I regret not giving Violet my phone number, but at least she has Cece's.

*If she needs help, she'll reach out.*

My cell phone practically burns a hole in my pocket as my mind wanders. We may not have exchanged contact info, but I

have my ways. Despite her irritation with me lately, Jez was able to track down Violet's number fairly easily.

*Text her. Maybe if you get a reply, you'll quit worrying.*

Giving into the impulse, I pull my cell out of my cut. But before I can tap on the newly entered number, Cece comes running into the common area, her face pinched with concern.

Instantly, my brain conjures up images of Soul lying in a ditch, bleeding and alone.

"Here," Cece signs after shoving her own cell against my chest. "Something's wrong."

I take the phone and turn it so I can look at the screen. Relief washes over me that it's

not Soul in trouble, but it's short-lived when I see Violet's name at the top of the message.

Violet: hlpme922

Several replies go unanswered.

Cece: What?

Cece: Violet, are you okay?

Cece: Violet???

Cece: VIOLET?!?

"What the hell is this?"

"I don't know, Grim," Cece admits. "But I tried calling her, and she's not answering." She chews on her bottom lip. "I'm worried."

Rather than console her, I immediately text Jez.

Me: I need you to get me Violet's address

Like the faithful friend she is, Jez texts back within seconds.

Jez: On it

Next, I tap out a message to Abyss.

Me: Meet me in garage w med bag

Taking a deep breath, I turn my attention back to Cece. I've never been more grateful than I am at this moment that she learned sign language. I'd lose my mind if I had to take the time to text her too.

"What are you going to do?" Cece chews her bottom lip.

"I'm gonna go get her."

She nods. "Good. That's good." Cece shrugs. "Maybe it's nothing, and this is just a fluke butt dial or something."

Scowling, I tilt my head. "When is it ever nothing?"

She glowers at me but nods. "Good point."

I stalk toward the elevator, effectively dismissing Cece. Trusting that she'll call Soul and Malice, who are on their way back from a job in Massachusetts, I slap my hand on the biometric reader and wait for the door to slide open. Once I step inside, I turn around, and right before the door closes, Abyss slides through the narrow opening, medical bag in hand.

"What the hell is going on?"

"Someone's in trouble?"

With his hand full, he doesn't sign, but I don't have the energy to fine him for it. Instead, I keep my eyes on his lips.

"Who?"

"Violet Simpson."

He scrunches his nose as if thinking, and then his eyes widen. "The chick from that church show?"

I nod absently. All of my thoughts are on Violet and what I might find when I reach her. Despite it being seconds, it feels like hours before we reach the garage, but when we do, I head straight for the van. I want to ride my Harley, but don't want to get stuck with no way to transport her if she's hurt.

My cell vibrates, and I show Abyss the address Jez sent.

“Fucking drive!”

And he does.

It takes longer than I'd like to reach Violet's apartment building in Henderson, but as soon as he slows the van to pull into a parking spot close to the entrance, I throw open the door and take off running.

When I get to apartment 27A, I pound on the door. After several seconds and no answer, I grab the knob and twist, surprised to find it unlocked. It briefly crosses my mind that others would see me as a creeper breaking in, but I don't give a shit. Let someone call the cops on me... it won't end well for them.

As soon as I step inside, the scent of blood invades my nostrils, and my muscles tense. The living room is in chaos. Broken glass is scattered on the floor, and I cautiously move forward to inspect the scene.

My heart thunders against my ribs as I step around the couch, terrified of what I'll find.

*It's been so long since I've felt fear... real fucking fear.*

Violet is in a crumpled heap, and she appears even smaller than I remember. I rush to her side and drop to my knees, not giving a damn about the glass digging through my jeans and piercing my skin.

Tentatively, *reverently*, I reach out and touch her cheek... her impossibly swollen cheek. Her eyes are closed, and she's so damn still, I can't help but wonder if she's even alive.

*Who the fuck did this?*

Abyss drops down on Violet's opposite side and waves a hand to get my attention. When I lift my gaze to him, he lifts his hands.

“We need to get her back to the clubhouse.”

*No shit!*



He grabs Violet's wrist and checks for a pulse, and I mentally berate myself for not doing it already. His shoulders sag with relief so I know he found one. Abyss's fingers begin to move swiftly, but I don't catch a word.

I stare at him, unable to comprehend what's happening. The fact that there's evil in the world is not a shocker, but that it would touch someone as sweet and as innocent as Violet... that has me embroiled with rage.

*You don't even know her.*

And yet, it doesn't seem to matter. Every single protective instinct I have flares to life, and I know there isn't a person or thing in this world who can get to her from this point on. They'll have to go through the Grim Reaper first.

*And that's not fucking happening.*

A bitch slap to the face pulls me out of my stupor, and I glare at Abyss.

He smirks. "Wouldn't have had to do that if you were paying attention."

Without responding, I shift to my feet and lift Violet gently in my arms. I have no fucking clue what her injuries are, but I know that we can't stay here if Abyss has a chance in hell of making her better.

"Be careful with her," my brother mouths.

Carrying Violet to the van, my mind wanders to finding and purging the person who did this to her. A feeling of calm washes over me when I imagine my hands around her attacker's throat, my ax slicing through their flesh and slicing them into smithereens.

Abyss hurries behind me, and I know he's calling for a backup team to come to the apartment and look for clues and cleanup. It's protocol, and he doesn't need to be ordered to do it.

The entire way to the van, Violet remains unconscious. Fortunately, we don't run into any other residents because I'd hate to have to explain her injuries... not that I could.

After loading Violet into the back, I climb in to sit next to her, and Abyss returns to the driver's seat. He races back to the clubhouse, but he's careful not to do too much to jostle our patient.

The entire ride, I stare at Violet and contemplate how we're going to explain her whereabouts when she wakes up.

*If she wakes up.*

I dismiss that thought completely. She *will* wake up. I'll make sure of it.

Abyss parks in the garage twenty-two minutes later, and we both rush to get Violet to the medical wing. As I lay her down on the bed, she begins to stir and moan, but still doesn't wake up.

I glance at Abyss, who's bouncing from one cupboard to the next, gathering medical supplies. He quickly inserts an IV and pushes pain medication, and then he retrieves the portable x-ray machine and drags it to the side of the bed.

"Grim, you've gotta let me work," he signs when I don't move.

"I'm not leaving her."

"You don't have to leave, brother, but you do need to move."

"I'm not fucking leaving," I repeat, and lift Violet's hand in mine.

Abyss narrows his eyes but nods curtly. He shifts to the other side of the bed, taking the machine with him. Once he has it set up, he grabs two lead aprons, tossing one to me.

"If you insist on staying, put this on."

Grudgingly, I do as he says, annoyed as fuck that I have to let go of her hand to do so.

"Better?" I sign one-handed.

He rolls his eyes. "A little bit, yeah."

"Just fix her."

“I’m going to try.”

“No.” My movements are jerky. “There is no fucking try! Fix. Her.”

We stare each other down for a moment, and he’s the first one to break when he glances away for a brief moment.

“I need to do the x-rays.”

# CHAPTER 11

# VIOLET

“I NEED TO DO THE X-RAYS.”

*Am I dead? No, there's no pain in heaven, and all I feel is pain. Maybe this is Hell.*

“It'll be quick. She won't hurt anymore once I'm done.”

*No... no... no. Brad's back to finish the job. Wake up!*

My eye inches open, but my vision is blurry. I try to rub it but can't move my arm. The other one won't budge either. In fact, every command I give my body is ignored, and my limbs refuse to cooperate.

“Aargh.” Turning my head to the side, I can just make out the silhouette of a person.

“No, don't try to move,” a deep baritone commands.

*That's not Brad.*

*Despite realizing my fiancé isn't here, my body still responds to that tone by jerking backward. Every fiber in my being seizes in agony. There's no way I'll survive any more punishments. My extremities are on fire, but the worst is in my left arm. When I try to take a deep breath, it's like a million jagged pieces of glass are piercing my lungs.*

*How much more suffering do I need to endure before it's all over?*

I blink rapidly until my eye focuses. Looking around, I don't recognize any of my surroundings. There's a big machine next to my bed, and it's being operated by a huge

man I've never seen before in my life. His scowl is enough to make my heart stop, but I can't inch away, can't run, can't move at all. What I *can* do is groan, but I don't want to draw any attention to myself. Maybe he'll go away if he thinks I'm dead.

*Think Violet. Where's your phone? Oh yeah, it's broken. This is the end. Welcome death with open arms... It'll be more peaceful.*

As much as I want to play dead, I'll watch this man end my suffering. I will haunt his every waking memory for the rest of his life.

A million stabbing needles pierce my chest as I inhale, and this time, I can't hold back the groan.

"You're awake," the man says. "I'm sorry this is gonna be painful, but I promise to make it go away as soon as I'm done."

"N-n-n-n-ooo," I gurgle and shrink back, causing another wave of excruciating pain to wrack my body.

"Please stay still. I swear I'm not gonna hurt you." He puts his hands up in surrender. "I'm trying to help. I need to do x-rays to assess your injuries."

*I don't understand what's happening and have no idea where I am. If he's a doctor or this is a hospital, wouldn't there be nurses and other people everywhere? We're alone so I'm not safe.*

Finally, my broken body responds to my silent pleas, and I shift slightly, away from the unknown guy. It's not much but enough to hopefully give him the hint to stay back.

"She won't ho—"

All of a sudden, the man disappears as if an invisible force yanked him away, and a loud crash resonates within the room.

"Asshole!"

A face appears, and a pair of piercing ice-blue eyes stare back at me.

*Grim? It can't be. Oh no!! Brad must've hired him. He's here to finish me off.*

A firm but gentle hand brushes the hair away from my face. Grim signs something, but my vision is becoming hazy again, and I'm unable to make out what he's saying.

*I'd rather not know what he's about to do anyway. There's no fight left in me.*

Mobility in my right arm returns, and I swat him away, but I might as well be a butterfly going up against a million hornets.

*I'll go down fighting though.*

Grim holds my arm down so I can't swing at him again and brings a cell phone into focus.

*Oh God, he's probably calling for reinforcements.*

I groan again, and moisture slides down my cheek. Grim shakes his head and wipes my face with a soft cloth.

Nothing makes any sense as I lie here fighting against him and my body. But, blessedly, a burst of energy hits me from outta nowhere, and I hiss through my teeth as I struggle to sit up.

"Sorry darlin'. You need to lay flat." The other man is back and lightly pushing on my shoulders. "I really need you to stay still."

My heart races, causing machines to go wild in the background, and Grim snarls.

*Where am I? What's happening to me?*

Another face appears, and bright red hair fills the space.

*Cece? Thank God! Maybe she can get me out of here.*

"Oh, hun." She squeezes my hand. "What happened to you?"

"H...h... heelp me," I gargle, barely above a whisper.

"We're going to help you, I promise." She nods at the man wanting me to remain still, and a warm tingling sensation

wraps around me.

My eyelid starts to sag against my will. “No... help,” I moan a split-second before I sink into darkness.



# CHAPTER 12

# GRIM

*SHE'S GONNA BE OKAY, MAN.*

Violet has been lying in this damn bed for less than twenty-four hours, and I can't bring myself to leave her side. Abyss has assured me, over and over, that she's going to recover, but I'll believe it when I see it. Right this minute, she's battered and bruised and so very still.

I stare at the machines monitoring her heartbeat, and for once, I wish I could hear. The vertical zig zagging of the lines is hypnotizing as they move across the screen, but I want nothing more than to hear the beeps that go along with it.

When Abyss completed the x-rays, he determined that Violet's in pretty bad shape.

*Didn't need a goddamn machine to tell me that.*

She has a fractured arm, several broken ribs, a cracked eye socket, strangulation marks, numerous bruises, and internal bleeding. *Pretty bad shape* doesn't begin to cover her injuries.

*She's lucky to be alive.*

As I focus on the rise and fall of Violet's chest, I mentally circle back to another time, another woman.

*The small hand that falls onto my shoulder startles me, reminding me that I'm not alone. I glance up and see Jezebel watching me, tears in her eyes. When she texted me two days ago and said she had a new job for us, I had no clue how personal it was going to get.*

*“I’m so sorry,” she mouths, that damn worry crease prominent on her brow.*

*Shaking my head, I return my gaze to my mom. She’s got a gash across her cheek, and her lip is so swollen she looks like she underwent the worst Botox injection in history.*

*When Jez’s touch disappears, I rise from the chair next to the bed and turn around to face her.*

*“It’s not your fault,” I tell her, letting my arms fall to my side when I’m done.*

*She chews her bottom lip. “But you asked me to—”*

*I arch a brow as I grab her hands. Jez stares at me for a moment before her shoulders slump, and I let her go.*

*“You did what I asked,” I assure her and nod toward my mom. “This is on me. I should’ve taken care of my father as soon as I moved out.”*

A shadow falls across the bed, pulling me from my memories. I glance to my right and Malice is standing there with his arms crossed over his chest.

“What?”

“Are you coming to church?” he asks.

Ignoring his question, I return my attention to Violet, which earns me a smack upside the back of my head.

Rising to my feet, I glare at my VP. “What the fuck was that for?”

“Let me rephrase... Get your ass to church before Soul decides to punish your ass.”

“I’m not leaving her.”

“Dude, she’s not going anywhere. She’s sedated. And right now, you need to come explain why the hell Soul and I came home last night to a guest in our medical wing.”

When they returned to the clubhouse yesterday, it was late, and Soul was so focused on Cece and Harper that I got a reprieve. And Apple distracted Malice, so other than what

Cece had already told them via phone calls, they have no clue what's going on.

With one last worried glance at Violet, I move away from the bed and start toward the door. Malice grabs my arm to stop me.

“She'll be alive when you get back,” he insists calmly.

I hate that he can read me that easily, but I'm also grateful for it. If it weren't for Malice and Soul, I don't know where I'd be today.

Two minutes later, I stride into church, and all eyes zero in on me.

Stalking to my chair, I try to shake off the guilt about potentially bringing unknown trouble to our door. As soon as I sit down, Soul wastes no time getting things started.

“As you're all aware, we have a female patient in the clubhouse medical wing,” he begins. “I wanted to take today to go over how the Massachusetts job went, but that's taking a back seat for now.” He faces me fully. “Grim, what the hell happened while Malice and I were gone?”

One thing I should point out about Soul is that he always knows what's going on in his club. *Always*. If one of the brothers doesn't tell him, Cece or Jez will.

“I was asked for help, and I gave it.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch movement, and I turn to see Abyss waving his hand to get my attention.

“That's a fucking understatement, and you know it,” he signs, agitated.

“I don't know what to tell you.”

“How about you start at the beginning?”

That's exactly what I do. I explain about Laura sending Violet to Naughty/Nice from the bridal boutique, and I make sure to point out that, other than the obvious fear and nervousness radiating off of Violet, we don't know any specifics.

Then I go on to tell them about the text Cece received and what Violet's apartment looked like when Abyss and I arrived. The longer my story goes, the angrier my brothers appear. They might not be thrilled with me handling this essentially on my own, but there's no way in hell any of them would ever be okay with what happened to Violet.

"And you have no idea who beat her like that?"

*I have an idea, but...*

"No."

Malice nods toward Possum, and I shift my gaze to that end of the table.

"Why didn't you just take her to the hospital?" he asks me.

My frustration grows with each new question. Since when is it a crime to help someone in need?

"Because we have no fucking clue who did this to her." I arch a brow. "Was I supposed to just dump her at the ER and *pray* that her attacker didn't show up?" Turning to Soul, I glare. "Can I get back to her now?"

"Grim, we need to take a vote."

I narrow my eyes. "About what?"

"Whether or not Violet stays."

"She stays." When he lifts his hands, I glare at him until he drops them. "Cece stayed. Apple stayed. Violet is fucking staying."

"You're seriously comparing a stranger to our ol' ladies?" Malice asks.

*Am I?*

Yeah, I am. Violet needs the club, and from the moment I saw her on the television screen, I needed... her.

*But I can't admit that.*

"She's injured," I remind them. "And let's not forget she's sedated. How the hell am I supposed to kick her out now?"

Soul tilts his head and scowls. “Do you really think so little of us that you believe we’d boot her ass the second the vote is over? C’mon, brother, give us more credit than that.”

He’s right, they wouldn’t. And I know that. But until I know Violet will be safe above ground among the rest of society, I don’t want her going anywhere.

*And now you sound like a damn creeper.*

“Fine, let’s vote,” I acquiesce.

“All those in favor of letting Violet remain here while she recuperates, raise your hand.”

All hands go up, and I exhale a sigh of relief.

“All those in favor of having Jez and Fort do some digging into her past to see if we can’t figure this shit out, raise your hand.”

Again, all hands go up. Soul tips his head, and I follow the direction he’s indicating.

Fort, our resident tech guru, is holding a cell phone in his hand, but he slides it across the table to me. “I tried to salvage Violet’s cell, but there was no saving it. I did manage to clone it, so she’ll have a new one. And I put a tiny tracker in the battery in case she decides to take off as soon as she’s physically able.”

What they don’t know is that a tracker won’t be necessary. I’m not letting Violet out of my sight, at the clubhouse or anywhere else, until I know she’s no longer in danger.

*Consequences be damned.*

“Fort, get with Jez and start diving into this chick’s life. I want to know everything about her,” Soul instructs. “As for the rest of you... I’m not thrilled about how this all came about, but Violet’s here now, and I expect her to be made to feel welcome. Any questions?”

“Can I go now?” I demand.

Soul rolls his eyes but nods.

Like a shot, I'm out of the room and making my way through the clubhouse to the med wing. As soon as I enter Violet's room, my nerves settle. There are only two things in this world that have had this effect on me: riding my Harley and purging.

Now there are three, and I'm not entirely sure how I feel about it.

# CHAPTER 13



# VIOLET

*I WANDER OVER TO THE WINDOW FOR A BRIEF MOMENT OF PEACE and remember a book I read when I was a child. A shy, beautiful princess was locked in a tower by a tyrant, and every escape attempt she made was thwarted. In the story, the princess is rescued by a devilishly handsome prince, and the villain is never heard from again.*

*Too bad it's not my story... My attempts to flee end in bloody torture.*

*A meaty hand grabs me by the hair and drags me from the tranquility of the window and my daydream. I'm thrown to the ground before a kick to my ribs has me pleading for mercy.*

With a jolt, I wake up, but the nightmare lingers, playing over and over again in my head. I glance around, and nothing looks familiar.

*Where the hell am I?*

Medical equipment surrounds one side of the bed, and the steady beep of a heart monitor fills the air. My head swivels away from the rhythmic sounds of the machine, and my gaze lands on *him*.

Grim's sitting next to the bed, and his eyes bore into mine. I shrink back into the pillows, but he grabs my hand.

*Why is Grim here? Wherever here is.*

"It's okay," he signs slowly. "You're safe."

"Where am I?" My voice is raspy, and I don't sound like myself at all.

My left arm is in a cast and elevated on a pillow. I attempt to sign with my right hand, but Grim shakes his head.

“I can read lips,” he explains. “You’re at our clubhouse.”

*Why can't I open my other eye, and what the heck happened to my arm?*

“What happened?” I want to go back to sleep, but I force my eye to stay open.

“We were hoping you could tell us that,” a deep baritone answers, drawing my attention to the door. A man I don’t recognize strides toward the machines, presumably to check my vitals. “Are you in any pain, Violet?”

I nod. “A little. Who are you?”

The man grins. “I’m Abyss.”

A fog has settled in my brain, and I can’t remember anything past my awkward escape attempt where I met Cece and Grim while dress shopping in Boulder City.

*Was there an accident? Is my mother okay?*

My blood runs cold, and my heart races, causing one of the machines to beep excessively. I try to take a deep breath but can only gasp for air. Darkness creeps into my peripheral.

Suddenly, Abyss cups my face. “Violet, I need you to calm down,” he instructs. “You’re having a panic attack.” He starts taking deep breaths through his nose and exhales out of his mouth. “Do what I’m doing... that’s it,” he encourages.

I focus on him, so lost in mimicking him that I forget we aren’t alone until a deep growl pulls me out of my trance. Abyss smirks and removes his hands from my face before taking a step back. Grim sneers in his direction before turning his attention to me.

“You okay?”

I nod in response and am grateful that I’m able to keep my breaths steady.

“Do you remember anything?” Abyss asks. When I shake my head, he exchanges a glance with Grim, and Grim gives a

curt nod. “Cece got a weird text from you and got worried. Grim and I came to check on you, but when we got to your apartment, you were... unconscious.”

As soon as Abyss mentions my apartment, memories assault me, flooding my mind from all directions. Visions of Brad beating me have me choking back a sob and forcing myself to focus on what Abyss is saying.

“I’m a medic for the club,” he continues. “When we found you, we didn’t know who attacked you, so we figured you’d be better off coming with us than going to a hospital. But your injuries are pretty extensive.”

“My injuries?” I’m having trouble concentrating because my only thought is what Brad will do when he finds me missing.

“Yeah,” he confirms. “Your arm is fractured, and you’ve got several broken ribs, a cracked eye socket, internal bleeding, and numerous bruises all over, including strangulation marks on your neck. You’re pretty lucky to be alive, all things considered.”

“Right, lucky me,” I mumble.

Grim and Abyss share a look but don’t comment. I ignore them and take a moment to think about how I’m going to get out of here. Grim must sense what I’m thinking because he waves his hands in front of my face to get my attention.

“You’re not going anywhere.” He signs with sharp movements, and his brows furrow, causing a vein to pop out on his forehead.

Without thinking, I flinch from his rapid movement, cowering further away from him. He jerks back in surprise.

Abyss pushes Grim aside. “I think what Grim is trying to say, is that your recovery should be monitored. We thought we were gonna lose you. It’s best if you heal up before you go.”

*Best for who? Me, them, my parents... Brad?*

*Despite the voice screaming in my head that I need to get home,* I nod. Grim’s shoulders slump, and he dips his chin

before cautiously lifting his hands again.

“I’d never fucking hurt you or force you to do something you don’t want.” He pauses for a brief moment, and I stare at his throat, unable to make eye contact. His Adam’s apple bobs slowly as if he is having trouble swallowing, and his expression looks pained. “I’m sorry for scaring you, but Abyss is right... You need time to heal.”

Abyss’s booming laugh distracts me from Grim’s apology. “Holy Shit,” he wheezes. “Grim apologized. Never thought I’d see the day.”

Abyss’s laughter is infectious, and I can’t help but giggle. The corners of Grim’s mouth lift, but his stoic posture returns.

“Violet, who did this to you?” he asks.

My spine stiffens, and I grimace. My head pounds, and I swallow the bile inching its way up my throat as I vigorously shake my head.

“I c-c-can’t... I d-d-don’t know,” I stammer.

Grim scowls. “You can’t, or you don’t know?”

“I don’t know.” Rather than a confident statement, my response comes out more like a question.

Abyss arches a brow but says nothing.

“I’m gonna go, but I’ll be back to check on you later.” Abyss points to a device by my arm. “That’s a morphine drip. If you start to feel pain in between the doses I administer, you can push that button, and you’ll get a small dose until your next full one.”

“Thank you for all your help,” I tell him.

“No problem, darlin’.” He steps away from the bed and walks toward the door, which slides open, allowing him to leave the room.

Alone with Grim, butterflies start flitting about in my stomach. Between my nerves, my injuries, and ridiculous attraction to the man, I’m a wreck.

“Who did this to you?” Grim asks again.

“I told you, I don’t know.” I shiver, and Grim grabs another blanket.

“I think you’re lying,” Grim insists after covering me up. “Tell me.”

“How long have I been here?” I counter, hoping he’ll latch on to the change in subject.

“Over twenty-four hours.”

*That’s too long!*

How do I explain my absence? My poor parents must be worried sick. I need to let them know I’m okay. They have no idea how far Brad will go to keep me.

*My phone! I’ll text them to let them know I’m okay, that I’ll be home soon.*

“I need my phone. I have people who will be worried about me. Do you know where it is?”

“Yeah.” Grim reaches behind his back and pulls out a cell phone. “Here you go.”

He pulls a cell out of his pocket and hands it to me.

“This isn’t mine.”

I try to hand it back to him, but he doesn’t take it.

“Your phone’s broken. Fort tried to fix it, but he couldn’t.”

*Fort? What is with the names around here?*

Grim takes another cell from his pocket and starts texting. As soon as he’s done, the phone in my hand pings.

Grim: I had him set up a new phone for you with all your old contacts. It’s the same number & all your apps & messages were retrieved. We can text until you’re a little more healed

Grateful to have a phone in my hand, I scroll through and notice that not one person has messaged me about my absence. This time, I don’t fight back the tears. A group of strangers have come to my aid and helped me without question or

without wanting something in return, but not one person who claims to love me has even noticed I'm missing.

*Who did this to you?*

Grim's question plays on repeat in my mind, but I know I can't risk telling him who the guilty party is until I know my parents are okay.

He gently wipes the salty wetness off my face. I peek through my eyelashes and see his ice-blue eyes blazing. With what, I'm not sure, but they are hypnotic.

*I could get lost in those eyes.*

Grim: Who did it?

That breaks the spell I'm under. I rush to respond to him before he can read my face.

Grim seems to have a sixth sense at reading emotions, especially mine.

Me: I don't know

Grim: I'll find out

Me: I appreciate your help but let it go. I'm sure the police will handle it

Grim: You could've died.

I lower my head in shame. I *wish* I could tell him, but I can't risk his and his friend's safety. With no way of knowing just how far Brad is willing to go, I decide to take Abyss's advice to rest and heal. Maybe it'll give me the time I need to come up with a plan.

Me: I'm tired. Gonna go to sleep

Grim: I'll be right here. NO ONE will touch you again.

I'm desperate to believe him, but I'm not getting my hopes up. If he ever figures out it was Brad and that my fiancé is preparing to be the next big televangelist, Grim will run screaming for the hills, leaving me to deal with Brad... alone... again.

True to his word, Grim doesn't leave, and his presence is surprisingly calming.

I don't know why, but for the first time in a *long* time, I don't dream.

# CHAPTER 14



# GRIM

*WHAT THE FUCK IS TAKING HER SO LONG?*

I've been standing on Jez's porch for five solid minutes, banging on the door and not so patiently waiting for her to answer. Leaving Violet back at the clubhouse was hard enough, but Fort isn't finding shit on who the bad guy is, so our only hope is my Prez's twin.

Getting more annoyed by the second, I pound on the door again. I know Jez is home because her car is in the driveway, along with one I don't recognize, so why the hell is she not coming?

As I reach into my pocket to take out my key, the door swings open so fast it hits the wall. Jez's hair is a mess, and she's pulling on a pair of sweatpants. The oversized tee she's wearing hangs off her shoulder, and her cheeks are flushed.

"What, you don't text first anymore?" she asks.

"You're lucky you're not subject to fines."

She rolls her eyes. "You can read my lips just fine, so don't be a dick. What do you want?"

"Are you gonna let me in?"

Leaning against the doorframe, she crosses her arms over her chest. "What. Do. You. Want?"

Rather than stand here and argue with her, I shove my hands under her armpits and easily pick her up to move her out of my way. Once I set her on her feet, I close the door and flip

the lock. By the time I look at her again, she's glaring at me, and her face is red with indignation.

"What took you so long to answer the door?"

"I was..." She quickly darts her gaze over her shoulder. "... in the shower."

"Liar."

"I'm not—"

Jez whips around, and I follow her line of sight, curious as to what seems to have startled her. Color me not even a little surprised when a strange man comes strutting through the living room naked as the day he was born.

The two begin conversing as if his junk isn't shriveled between his legs, and I move to stand where I can see their lips.

"You said you were single," the man says.

"I am."

"Then who the fuck is this?" he demands, pointing at me.

Jez's brows dip, anger filling her expression. "He's a friend, not that it's any of your business."

"The second I buried my cock in your pussy," he says, grabbing himself. "It became my business."

*Nope. Can't just stand here.*

Striding toward him, I grab his arm and drag him to the door where I promptly unlock and open it to throw him out on his ass. After slamming the door, I stomp back to Jez.

"What the hell was that?" she asks.

"He doesn't get to talk to you like that."

As angry and flustered as she is, Jez throws herself at me, jumping to wrap her arms around my neck.

After a minute, she kisses my cheek, and I set her on her feet.

"What was that for?" I ask.

Jez grins, and her entire demeanor changes. “For not judging the situation you found yourself in... And for not letting that douchebag treat me like trash.”

I shrug. “You’re a big girl who can fuck whoever she wants.” Narrowing my eyes, I smirk. “But no one gets to talk to you that way.”

“And that’s what makes you so wonderful.”

*Wonderful?*

I’m pretty sure Jez is the only person on the planet who would categorize me that way. And I’m good with that. I like who I am, wonderful or not.

“So, was there a reason you stopped by, or did you just intuitively know I was with a jackass?”

Scratching my head, I try to come up with a way to explain why I’m here without sounding like an idiot. Jez patiently waits me out like only she can do.

Finally, I respond. “I need you to do a deep dive into someone for me.”

“And you couldn’t go to Fort for this?”

I shake my head.

She grins. “Ah, so this is about that chick who’s staying at the clubhouse.”

My muscles tense at her description of Violet as ‘that chick’, but I ignore it. Jez doesn’t mean any disrespect.

“She refuses to tell me who assaulted her.”

Jez’s expression softens with sympathy. “Grim, Soul already has me trying to find whatever information I can. You know this.”

“Yeah, I know, but...”

“But you can’t let it go.”

I shake my head.

She eyes me suspiciously. “You like her.”

“Violet’s nice, yeah, but she’s also a job,” I lie.

“No, Grim, she’s not. You made the decision to bring her to the clubhouse without a club vote. She may have *become* a job, but she wasn’t to begin with.” She smiles sadly. “She’s not your mother, ya know?”

“I know.”

“Do you? Because from where I’m standing, it doesn’t seem like you do.”

I’m beginning to regret working with Jez those years Soul and Malice were gone. She sees too much, knows too much.

Rather than argue with her, I decide on a different tactic.

“What have you learned about Violet so far?”

Jez shoves a hand through her hair. “Not much more than what any Joe Shmo can learn by watching her family on TV. She’s an only child, in college, engaged to Brad Coventry. No reports of domestic violence, and all the videos I can find where they’re together, things appear to be good.”

“Any shady fucks in her life? Maybe another student or member of the church?”

“Well, we both know the church members are all probably a tinge unhinged, but nothing and no one stands out.”

“What can you tell me about Brad Coventry?”

“Not much. Soul didn’t ask me to dig into him.”

I arch a brow. “Since when do you follow your brother’s instructions to the letter?”

“Touché.” Jez moves toward the hall but turns to face me so I can see her hands. “Let me change, and then we’ll go into my dungeon.”

Her dungeon is her basement, her safe haven. It’s full of all things tech, and it’s where she does her best hacking work... among other things.

“No,” I blurt, no doubt sounding hoarse and weird.

Jez’s brow rises in surprise. I don’t speak... ever.

“No?”

“I can’t stay. I need...” I rub the back of my neck under my long hair. “I’ve got shit to do.”

“In other words, you need to get back to Violet.”

I don’t confirm or deny her statement. She’s not stupid.

“Fine. I’ll break out the big guns and really dig, not that I expect to find anything.”

“Just see what you can do. I have a bad feeling about all of this.”

“Okay.”

“Thanks, Jez.”

“Don’t thank me yet,” she counters. “You know as well as I do that what I find could open up a can of worms that you’re not prepared to deal with.”

“Since when am I ever not prepared?”

Jez throws her head back, and I know by her grin that she’s laughing. When she sobers, she shakes her head.

“If you’re so worried about her, why didn’t you just text me? Why’d you leave and drive all the way to Boulder City to ask for this... favor?”

Because as much as I don’t want Violet out of my sight, I needed to get away. I needed to put some distance between us, even if only for a short time, so that I could force my brain to think a little more clearly about this whole situation.

*Too bad it didn’t work.*

I’m still half in love with a woman I don’t know, a woman who isn’t available, and I have no fucking clue what to do about it.

# CHAPTER 15

**VIOLET**

## ONE WEEK LATER...

“KNOCK KNOCK.”

The door to my room is open, and Cece strides in, carrying multiple bags. “I’ve come to spring you outta this joint.”

“Huh?”

“You need to get out of this room.” She sets the bags down at the foot of the bed. “I talked to Abyss, and he wants you up and walking around. It’ll help the healing process.”

“It will?” I smirk knowing exactly what she is up to. After spending the last week in the clubhouse infirmary, it was easy to see how much the men adore Cece by the way they let her pretty much do or say whatever makes her happy.

*Total change from what I’m used to.*

“Okay... so he didn’t say that exactly. You do need to *rest*, but come on, staying here is depressing.” Cece wrinkles her nose in disgust. “Let’s go hang out in the common room. There are couches where you’ll be comfortable, and you can meet more of the club.”

Excited to get out of this room, I drag my legs over the side of the bed and carefully stand before slowly walking to the bathroom. “I’ll be right back!”

Abyss had me up and walking around after a couple of days in bed so I wouldn’t get too stiff, but I can’t go too far without my energy depleting or getting winded. And deep breaths are still bothersome due to the broken ribs.



After I finish my business and wash my hands, I take a moment to stare at my reflection in the mirror above the sink. I can almost open my left eye again, and the deep purple bruises that mar my skin are now turning a gross yellow-greenish color. Thinking about my last week of healing, I know I've been a great patient. Abyss even said he's impressed with how well I comply with his orders.

*That's because you're deathly afraid he'll beat the snot out of you if you don't. He's bigger than Brad and look what he did.*

Glancing away from the evidence of my terror, I glance longingly at the shower. Cece has helped me with sponge baths, but it's nothing like standing under a hot spray to work out the knots.

As if on cue, Cece pushes her way through the bathroom door, and I raise my eyebrows.

"What? I heard you washing your hands and figured you were done." She winks and opens the box in her hands. "This is a waterproof cast cover. I thought you might want a shower. I know I would."

"Ohmigosh!" I blurt. "Yes, please."

The see-through glove unfolds to reveal an arm-length cover. It has a blue rubber seal that suctions around the arm to protect the cast from getting wet. Very carefully, Cece wiggles it up my arm. Because of my ribs, it's nearly impossible to lift my arms up too much without searing pain radiating through my chest, but she manages to make it as painless as possible.

"Do you need help in the shower?" she asks after it's secure.

"I think I can wash myself with my good arm, but if you could help me wash my hair, I'd really appreciate it."

"Yes, ma'am." She curtsies with a grin. "Let's get this gown off of you and wrap a towel around your body. Then I can get the shower ready. Luckily, there's a detachable shower head and a steam feature to keep you warm."

An hour later, I feel like a brand-new woman. Instead of a bra, Cece found a lined tank top and paired it with a button-down flannel shirt and black leggings. After she braids my hair, we walk with our arms intertwined to the hub of the clubhouse. Entering the room, I get my first look at the inner workings of Saints Purgatory.

There's a bar, pool table, several tables and chairs, and a couple of couches. So far, no one seems to notice that we've walked in which gives me a minute to get my bearings.

And like a moth to a flame, I search *him* out. Grim is talking to someone I haven't met yet over at the bar. Every inch of exposed skin on the other man is covered in tattoos.

Soul waves and heads in our direction. When he reaches us, he pulls Cece into his arms and kisses her with so much passion, it's almost indecent. I'm happy for them because they clearly love each other immensely, but I'm also jealous.

*I wish I had a love like that.*

Cece breaks away from Soul, and they face me.

"Hey, Violet." Soul smiles, but there's a wariness in his eyes as if he doesn't know whether or not he can trust me.

"Hi." I take the tiniest step back and lower my gaze. "Thank you for letting me stay here. I'll be out of your hair soon."

"No rush. Any friend of Cece's is a friend of the club," he replies. "It's good to see you up and around."

"Thanks."

"Are you feeling up to having a drink at the bar before we get you settled on the couch?" Cece asks.

"No alcohol, Cece," Abyss admonishes from behind. "She's still on pain meds."

She rolls her eyes, and as she leads me away, Soul smacks her on the rear. I jerk in response, but Cece's giggles have me rethinking my reaction.

*I hope no one noticed.*

The weight of *his* stare bores down on me.

*Nope, not so lucky.*

At some point during our interaction with Soul, Grim must've swiveled around on his bar stool because he's watching our every move. I stop dead in my tracks, jolting Cece in the process. She raises a brow in question, but she doesn't speak. Instead, she follows my line of sight and smirks before encouraging me forward to make our way to the bar.

"Well, well... who do we have here?" the man with tattoos covering his arms and neck asks.

"Animal, this is Violet, our *guest*," Cece explains. "Violet, this is Animal."

Animal looks me up and down, making me slightly uncomfortable. "Beautiful name for a beautiful woman." He pulls my hand up and lightly kisses it.

Grim growls, and Animal drops my hand before I have a chance to pull it away. I give a quick, shy wave and glance at Cece.

"Cece, maybe this isn't a good idea," I whisper. "I should go back to my room."

She faces me. "Sorry, but no. You need to get out of that room. All these guys are harmless... protective and flirtatious, as you can see, but harmless."

As soon as the word 'flirtatious' falls from her lips, a heavy muscular arm drapes around my shoulder. My spine stiffens, and sweat immediately gathers on my forehead. I'm frozen, unable to shake the offending arm off me. Before a full-blown panic attack has a chance to take hold, the arm is yanked away, and the man's face is smashed down on the bar.

I breathe a sigh of relief but jump back when I realize it's Grim who came to my rescue. And the look on his face is murderous.

Cece gently touches Grim's forearm until his focus shifts to her. "It's okay, big guy," she signs. "Thorn was attempting to flirt. He went about it the wrong way."

Grim releases Thorn, who pushes off the bar and rubs the side of his head where a goose egg is already forming.

“What the fuck, Grim?” Thorn asks, puffing out his chest and stepping into Grim’s personal space.

“Keep your hands to yourself.” Grim’s movements are fierce.

“I was trying to introduce myself.”

“Try it without touching,” Cece intercedes.

The room goes silent and, unfortunately, we’ve gained the attention of everyone. Embarrassment burns my skin. The last thing I want is for Grim and his friends to fight, but I’m too afraid to say anything. All of these men are *massive* and could no doubt do some damage.

Soul pushes between them and puts Cece and me behind him. “Two-hundred dollar fine for both of you!”

“Worth it.” Grim smirks before sitting back down on his stool.

“What the fuck am I being fined for?” Thorn asks. “He fucking attacked me.”

“Grim, go play pool with Abyss before I kick your ass,” Soul commands.

Grim stands, flips off Thorn, and stalks over to the pool table.

“Thorn, make it three hundred.” Soul raises his hand and beckons Thorn to keep going, but Thorn wisely keeps his mouth shut. “First, we don’t touch women who haven’t asked to be touched or those who are off-limits. Second, don’t question me about being fined.”

*Off-limits? What the heck does that mean?*

All I can think of is the fact that I’m engaged. Doesn’t take a genius to figure that out with the gaudy diamond ring I’m wearing.

Cece and I share a look, but she shrugs and asks the man behind the bar for a margarita. He’s got the same leather vest

as the others, but his patch reads ‘prospect’.

“What can I get you, sweetheart?” he politely asks me after taking Cece’s order. “I’m Asher, by the way.”

“Violet,” I say shyly. “Can I have a Coke, please?”

“Sure thing.”

Within moments, he’s setting our drinks on the bar in front of us.

“What do you want to do?” Cece asks before taking a giant sip of her beverage.

“Can we go sit down?” The couches are calling my name.

“Oh shit, I’m sorry,” she gushes, but before we can head toward them, Thorn approaches.

“Violet, I’m really sorry.” He hangs his head and peeks through his lashes, his bottom lip sticking out. “Can you forgive me?”

“Yes.” I give him a tiny smile. “I’m sorry you got fined.”

Thorn chuckles and calls Asher over and asks for a beer. “It’s okay. Wasn’t the first time, won’t be the last.”

A loud cracking sound reverberates through the space, and we all turn toward the pool table. Abyss is trying to talk to Grim, but Grim just keeps shaking his head and glares at us while balls fly into pockets. I dart my gaze away before I’m caught gawking. I’m a guest here and have no right to eavesdrop.

We inch slowly toward the seating area, and Cece introduces me to other members of the club. I’m glad almost everyone has a patch with their name, or I’d be lost. So far, they’re all nice, but the sympathy on their faces has me wanting to crawl back to my room and not leave again until I’m healed.

Lock and Fort are arguing over what to watch on TV, and Lock has Fort in a headlock. Fort is still operating the remote control while everyone around them is placing bets on who will win.

Grinning at the scene in front of me, I glance up in time to see a live news conference before the channel is changed again.

*Wait... was that my parents? No way. It couldn't be... could it?*

“Go back!” I shout without thinking. Everyone freezes, and I take a deep breath. “Please... can you change the channel back?” I ask softly.

“Sure thing, sweetness.” Fort winks as he returns to the news.

*Crap.*

I wasn't imagining it. My parents are standing there, front and center, with *Brad* right behind them. My breath catches, and I dig my fingernails into my palms to keep from crying.

“She's been missing for over a week,” Dad says into the microphone. “Her car was discovered totaled on the side of the road, just a few miles from her apartment, but she was nowhere to be found. The local hospitals have no records or reports of my daughter, or anyone listed as Jane Doe.”

“We just need to know that she's okay,” Mom cries. “She's my baby!”

Brad hugs my mom as she sobs, and he leans forward to speak. “If anyone has any information, please come forward. We're supposed to get married next month, and I-I-I want her to come back to me,” he pleads.

The Police Chief steps up to the podium. “If anyone has any information, please contact us immediately.”

This can't be happening.

“Sorry to interrupt your fun, Fort,” I say, trying to distract them from what they just saw. “I thought it was something else.”

No one says anything about the news broadcast, thank God. I'm sure they've got a lot of questions. *I have a lot of questions.* I know Cece and Grim know who my parents are, and I'm pretty confident the rest of the club does too. It's hard

to be anonymous when I'm paraded around as the good pastor's daughter.

Luckily, everyone has avoided that topic. Grim still questions me daily about what happened to me, and who did it, but I won't budge. His club has done enough to help me, and I won't let Brad destroy them like he has me.

My shoulders sag in defeat, and my heart plummets to my stomach. Keeping a small smile on my face to hide my inner turmoil, I slowly lower onto the couch and try to drown out the noise of the clubhouse.

The more I think about it, the more hurt I feel. And Brad standing with *my parents*, pretending to be a loving fiancé... that's laughable.

I don't understand anything my parents said. My car was found totaled? They think I was in a car accident? But yet, they haven't sent one text to me. If they thought their only child was hurt or lost, why wouldn't they try to reach me on my phone first? Even the devil himself hasn't messaged me about where I am. Nothing makes any sense.

Cece sits next to me, pulling me out of my thoughts.

"Violet, you okay?" she asks.

"I'm good," I lie and nod at Lock and Fort, who've resumed their struggle over the remote. "So, who do you think will win?"

# CHAPTER 16



**GRIM**

## FOUR MINUTES EARLIER...

ABYSS CONTINUES TO SIGN DRAMATICALLY, BUT I'M NOT really paying attention to what he's saying. Instead, I'm hyper-focused on the heat-seeking missile directed at my back from Violet's stare.

But then he freezes mid-sentence, and his eyes dart toward the couches. I turn around and see everyone's attention on Violet for a moment before it shifts to the TV. On the screen is a live news conference featuring none other than Violet's parents and fiancé.

Rather than try to read their lips, my eyes dip to the bottom of the picture where the closed captions are scrolling.

*"She's been missing for over a week. Her car was discovered totaled on the side of the road, just a few miles from her apartment, but she was nowhere to be found. The local hospitals have no records or reports of my daughter, or anyone listed as Jane Doe."*

*"We just need to know that she's okay. She's my baby!"*

There's a pause in the captions, and I watch as Brad Coventry hugs Mrs. Simpson while also leaning forward to speak.

*"If anyone has any information, please come forward. We're supposed to get married next month, and I want her to come back to me."*

My gaze darts to Violet, and she's standing frozen, her entire body stiff, and she's clenching her good hand, no doubt digging her fingernails into her palm. I want to go to her, to

wrap my arms around her and offer comfort, but I have no fucking clue how to do that.

*And she's engaged.*

Unable to stop myself, I start to walk toward her, but then she turns to face Cece, and I get a good look at her face.

*Huh?*

Rather than angry, all I see is sadness and pain. The pain makes sense, but the sadness? I don't understand that.

A tap on my shoulder elicits a groan, and I swivel to see Malice, who I didn't even realize had come into the common room. His expression bleeds concern, and that feeds my confusion.

“What's wrong, brother?”

*What's wrong? Every fucking thing.*

“Nothing.”

“Bullshit.” He darts his eyes to Violet and back again. “You're obsessing over her.”

“I'm working a job,” I counter. “Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Again, bullshit.”

Abyss steps up next to Malice and smirks.

“Might as well give up, Malice. The big man isn't going to be honest with you.” He narrows his eyes at me. “Hell, he can't even be honest with himself.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Grim, dude, you've somehow gone and fallen for a girl you don't even know,” he explains, his movements relaxed. “Within seconds of meeting her, you somehow named yourself as her protector. Shit, you don't even know what or who you're protecting her from.”

My muscles tense, and anger surges to the surface. “I'm protecting her from whoever tried to fucking kill her!”

“And we don't know who that is,” Malice inserts.

“Don’t we?” I look over my shoulder at Violet, who appears lost and alone. That only fuels my frustration. When I face Malice and Abyss again, they’re both smirking. “You saw that news conference. It was full of goddamn lies. If that doesn’t scream guilt, I don’t know what does.”

“And until she confirms our suspicions or Jez and Fort come up with actionable intel, we have to wait.”

I glare at my VP. “She could be dead before that happens!”

“Grim, you’ve gotta reign it in,” he instructs. “All you’re gonna do is add to the poor girl’s fear.”

*And that’s the last thing I want to do.*

I want to make Violet feel safe. I want to keep her with me and ensure she’s never hurt again. I want to make her smile, and I want to be the reason she’s happy.

I want, I want, I want...

*What about what she wants?*

Beyond pissed at myself, my brothers, and the entire fucking situation, I shove myself between the two men, my giant stature almost knocking them to their asses. They attempt to grab my arms and stop me, but they fail miserably.

Stalking through the clubhouse, I head to the gym. That’s the one place I don’t have to worry about anything other than working up a sweat.

After entering the gym, I immediately stride toward the punching bag and launch my fist into the hanging leather. As I take out my rage on the equipment, my mind reels with ideas, worries, and memories.

*“I can’t, son.”*

*I stare at my mom incredulously. Returning to the house I grew up in was not what I wanted to do, but my father’s increasingly disturbing texts forced my hand. My mom is in trouble, and it’s up to me to get her out of it.*

*“He’s hurting you.” I point to the fading bruise on her wrist, and she pulls down her sleeve to cover the evidence.*

*“Why won’t you let me help?”*

*“Because my place is here with my husband.” Mom steps forward and reaches up to cup my cheeks. “I love you, John, but you’re an adult now. Surely, you can understand that I’m only doing what God wants me to do.”*

*What God wants doesn’t mean shit to me. God ceased to be the good, benevolent being I was taught about when he let my friend get hurt. Fuck God.*

*“I can’t stay here to protect you.” I try to talk sense into her. “Dad’s unhinged, and you’re gonna wind up dead.”*

*“Stop it. Stop all this nonsense right now.” Mom moves to the kitchen table and pulls out a chair. “I’d like you to leave, John. If you can’t show your father the respect he deserves...”*

*“He doesn’t deserve respect any more than you deserve his fists on your body.”*

Pain radiates through my hand, yanking me back to the present. Blood drips from my knuckles, and I realize I’ve punched the bag so hard, and for so long, that I’ve split the skin.

I’ve gotta stop thinking about my mom. She’s dead and gone, and I can’t do anything for her anymore. But I can do something for Violet.

*I just have to figure out what that something is.*

# CHAPTER 17

# BRAD

“WHAT MORE CAN WE DO?”

I stare at the people who gave life to my fiancé, and my hatred for them grows. When I set out to take over the church, I had no idea how much trouble would be brought into my life. But I can't stop now, not when I'm so close.

“You can find her!” I shout.

“Brad, we've tried,” Mrs. Simpson insists, twisting her hands nervously. “But Violet is a grown woman who cle—”

“She's a goddamned spoiled brat,” I snap. “And if she's not at the altar, I'm taking her absence out of your hides.”

“How do you suggest we find her?” Mr. Simpson asks. “The police have no leads, and they're the experts.”

It enrages me that the police had to get involved, but after I returned to Violet's apartment and found her missing, there was no other option. Of course, I had to play the worried and grieving fiancé, which made me want to vomit, but I pulled it off beautifully.

“If you can't find her via the obvious channels, I suggest you start thinking outside the box.”

“Outside the box?” Mrs. Simpson repeats.

“Yes, outside the damn box,” I snap.

“I'm not sure how we're supposed to do that.”

I heave a sigh. Ruth and George Simpson are not this stupid. Anyone who manages to amass the empire they've got

has to have at least one brain cell between them.

*Maybe the cell is on vacation.*

Fortunately, all of mine are intact, which means I *will* achieve my goal.

I take a deep breath before spelling it out for them.

“If the good guys can’t get the job done, maybe try finding some bad guys who can.”



# CHAPTER 18

# VIOLET

AS SOON AS FORT CHANGED THE CHANNEL AND STARTED taunting Lock again, Cece and I sat down to watch the show. The entire time, I could feel split seconds where Grim's scrutinizing gaze seared a hole into my flesh.

Watching Grim storm out of the room, practically knocking over Abyss and Malice in the process, was more painful than I could have anticipated. I don't know what made him so angry, but facial expressions don't lie. He was royally pissed.

*He knows you're trouble, that you're going to get him and his friends hurt. It's time to go home and pay the piper.*

"Cece, can you take me back?"

"Why do you want to go back?" Cece asks, confused. "You haven't even been out of your room for an hour yet. Are you getting sore?"

I nod but keep silent. Cece stands from her perch on Soul's lap and leans back down so he can take her mouth.

"Be right back, babe," she promises after breaking the kiss.

As we walk down the hallway, my mind races with different scenarios I can use to possibly explain my absence to my parents, but nothing I come up with will work. I don't know how to explain how my car was wrecked, how I got all my injuries, or why I haven't reached out to them.

*I need to go home. That's the only solution.*

Luckily, I don't have anything to pack. I just need my phone and a ride.

*Maybe Cece can drop me off somewhere close to my apartment, and I can play the amnesia card?*

My head drops in defeat. No matter what excuse I give, the fallout is going to be so incredibly painful. I said 'yes' to Satan himself, so this is the price I'll pay to keep my parents safe.

I stop in the middle of the hall. "Cece, I need you to take me home."

Her mouth drops open, and she blinks rapidly. "Wait... What did you say? I don't think I heard you right."

"I need to go home. I can't stay here anymore."

"Why the hell not?" She crosses her arms over her chest. "I was there when Grim and Abyss brought you in. I have a good idea of who hurt you, but I've tried to respect your privacy and haven't pushed for information. What are you thinking?! Why would you want to go back to him?"

"You don't understand."

"Then explain it."

"I can't, Cece," I insist. "I can't let anyone get caught up in my problems. It's better if I go home and face it head-on."

"Bullshit!" she yells. Panicking, I search the corridor to make sure no one can hear us, and Cece continues. "You're not playing the martyr. I don't know what the hell is going on, but I'll be damned if I'm driving you back home. You almost died."

"I'm grateful to all of you, and always will be, but trust me when I say, this isn't a war you want to get involved in."

Cece's brows narrow in frustration. "I'm not taking you anywhere, and no one else will either until you talk to Grim." She smiles, but it doesn't reach her eyes. It's as if she knows something I don't. "I betcha anything he's beating the shit out of a punching bag in the gym."

I picture Grim's bulging muscles as he hits a bag over and over again, and my knees begin to shake. First, butterflies in my stomach, and now, shaky knees. I've never had such a visceral reaction to a man before, not even Brad.

*Even more reason to keep him out of this. I'd die if Grim or anyone else was hurt because of me.*

"I don't want to talk to Grim," I state firmly. "Please, Cece, take me home. Everyone is looking for me now... You saw the broadcast. I'm the only one who can stop this."

"So, text them and tell them you're okay. That solves *that* problem."

Cece's right. I can solve all this with a text and try to buy myself some time, but would it work?

"What if it doesn't solve anything?"

"Then you're no worse off than you are now. Go talk to Grim," she encourages. "I think you two need to talk. See what he thinks you should do." She pauses, smirking. "Or I could go get Soul and the rest of the club."

*And just like that, she makes the decision for me.*

"Fine... you win," I concede, and she grins.

*Why do I get the feeling Cece knew exactly what she was doing just then?*

Cece walks me to the gym and squeezes my hand in support before she gently pushes me inside. Standing next to the doorframe, I take in my surroundings. There are loose weights, benches, treadmills, elliptical machines, a boxing ring, and different sizes and shapes of punching bags.

*Thump... thump... thump.*

A steady rhythm of fists punching something reaches my ears. I peer around a pillar and see Grim pummeling a black leather bag hanging from the ceiling. Mirrors line the wall behind him, so I get a full view.

Sweat drips down his bare chest, and the definition in his muscles is easier to see now that he's shirtless. The veins in his

arm bulge, and the concentration on his face keeps me from running across the room to get his attention.

Instead, I take advantage of his obliviousness about my presence and study his movements. Each strike is coordinated and precise. Grim hauls back one arm and hits the bag one last time with all his strength. He grabs it before pulling it close to his chest and resting his head against it. His back heaves as if he is trying to catch his breath.

*Now or never Violet.*

I slowly walk over so I don't disturb him, but I don't make it far before his head snaps up, and his eyes focus on mine through the mirror.

*So much for him being oblivious.*

He locks his eyes on my reflection. "What are you doing down here?" he signs, and I notice his knuckles are bleeding.

After closing the distance between us, I reach for Grim's hand and am surprised when he lets me touch him. For the last week, he's always been close, but never this close.

*It's... nice.*

I spot a small bar area with drinks on the opposite side of the room. Keeping his hand in mine, I march us over to the sink and turn on the water so I can wash the blood off him. Above the sink is a first aid kit, and I point to it since I'm so short. Even if my ribs weren't broken, I'd never be able to reach it. Grim grabs the kit and pulls it off the high shelf. Then I dab his hands dry with the towel on the counter, and I take my time applying antibacterial ointment to them.

He must get sick of me avoiding his question because he tips my chin up once his knuckles are bandaged.

"Thanks. Now, what are you doing down here?"

Suddenly, I'm not feeling brave. I fidget with my hands in front of me, shuffle my feet, and my heart hammers in my chest. Steadying myself, I slowly untwine my fingers, taking a deep breath before I respond.

"I asked Cece to take me home."

“What?”

“I saw you storm away pissed.” I hesitate. “I don’t want you to hate me for bringing trouble to your club.”

“I could never hate you.”

“You know who I am and who my parents are. You saw the news.”

“I did, which raises more fucking questions than answers. What kind of trouble are you in?” He holds up his hand before I can answer and levels me with his gaze. “Time for the truth Sprite. Who hurt you? Because I’ll be damned if I let you walk out of here and straight into your death.”

I shake my head in denial, but he doesn’t let me retreat. He folds his arms over his chest and stares into my eyes. I can’t look away, but it’s like all my secrets are being exposed, and he can see into the depths of my soul. I’m exposed and can’t cover myself or hide anymore.

*He sees me. He’s not looking through me but looking into me.*

A sense of calm and rightness surrounds me. I don’t know what possesses me to take the chance, but I spill my guts.

I tell Grim everything about my whirlwind romance with Brad, how I thought he loved me, but found out too late that it was all just a lie. I explain about the first time Brad pushed me and insisted it was an accident, and instead of listening to my gut, I accepted his apology and still stayed.

Grim remains stoic while I detail my meager existence... until now.

“Do your parents know?”

“They know about the first time, not the rest.”

Grim’s nostrils flare. “They fucking knew and didn’t let you call it off?”

I nod slowly and continue. “My dad talked to him and then assured me that everything would be fine.”

“And the day we pulled you out of your apartment?”

A tremor racks my body as I recall the events of that day. Part of me wishes that the memories hadn't surfaced, but the bigger part of me, the wiser part of me, knows I needed to remember.

My movements are robotic as I explain what happened. I'm so lost in the retelling, I don't realize Grim has walked around me until I hear glass shattering fills the room. The mirror is now in thousands of pieces on the floor, and a hole the size of a dumbbell is in the wall where the reflective glass used to be. Grim's chest heaves as he swings back around to face me.

"I will fucking end him." His fingers move jerkily.

"No, please Grim," I beg. "I don't want you to get hurt or go to jail."

"You need to tell your parents the truth."

"I can't. Brad threatened to hurt them if I did." My eyes fill up and tears fall, but I don't even attempt to wipe them away. I'm purging my soul, and even though I can't leave Brad, at least one person will know my story.

*At least one person will know who to blame if I turn up dead.*

"The fuck you can't. You're not marrying that asshole."

"I don't have a choice, Grim."

"There's always a choice."

"I can't be selfish and let my parents suffer his wrath."

Grim growls. "So he can beat the shit out of you, and then what? You bring kids into the world for him to beat on too? You divorce him? What happens?"

I drop my head in shame. He's right. It would be a vicious cycle just like Brad's parents. When would it end?

"Divorce isn't possible in my world. Until death do us part aren't words we say for fun."

Grim doesn't sign anything else. The conversation is over.

I need to find Cece and have her take me home, but first, I need him to know something.

“You and Cece gave me hope that there’s still good in the world. You willingly helped a stranger when you didn’t have to. You saved my life, and I will be eternally grateful.” Taking a deep breath, I continue on. “I’m glad Cece made me come and talk to you before I left. Bye, Grim.”

I turn on my heel and head for the door. I don’t stop or look over my shoulder because I know if I do, I won’t want to leave. Grim sparked something deep within me that I haven’t felt for a long time... if ever. I can’t explain it, but I feel whole around him. A missing piece of me is finally there, and my heart cracks the farther I move away from him.

Suddenly, I’m lifted off the ground and carried over to a bench where I’m gently lowered. Grim’s jaw is set in determination, and he cups my face before leaning down to press his lips softly against mine. Electric tingles shoot down my legs and back up my body. I know it’s a sin to kiss him back when I’m engaged to another man, but I can’t help myself.

Grim feels like home.

*Stop! You can’t do this.*

I jerk away from him. “Grim, I’m sorry. I sho—”

“Marry me.”

*I’m sorry...what?*



# CHAPTER 19

# GRIM

*MARRY ME?*

Those two words leapt from my tongue, and given the look on Violet's face, I'd do anything to call them back.

*What the fuck was I thinking?*

Not only have I suggested an insane idea, but I did it with my stupid fucking voice.

*Idiot!*

"Did you just..."

Violet's hands fall to her lap, and she quickly glances away. I don't know if she's more shocked at what I asked or the fact that I spoke, but I know I need to fix this.

I grab her chin and force her to look at me. "I'm sorry."

She scrunches her nose in confusion. "For?"

"I shouldn't have blurted that out the way I did."

"You spoke."

I heave a sigh. So, the shock is from my voice, not my question. Feeling vulnerable in a way I never have before, I decide to put some distance between us without giving her any actual space. I grab my cell out of my back pocket and type out a quick text.

Me: Is that a yes?

Violet's eyes widen, and she pulls her cell from the pocket of her flannel shirt. When she looks at the screen, she frowns and starts tapping away.

Violet: What?

Me: I asked you to marry me

Violet: You didn't ask

I think back and realize she's right. I didn't so much ask as demand.

Me: Will you marry me?

Rather than respond by text, Violet sets her phone on the bench and reaches for my hand. She tugs me to sit next to her and begins to sign.

"Why'd you switch to your cell?"

"Seemed easier." I thrust a hand through my hair before continuing. "Besides, this is an important conversation. Wouldn't want any wrong sign language to fuck it up."

Violet's lips tip up in a small smile. "Have I messed anything up since I came in here?"

"No," I admit.

"I had to take a foreign language class when I started college, and I chose American Sign Language. That gave me the basics. Cece's also been working with me, and I've been watching a lot of online tutorials."

Warmth fills my chest, and it's an unfamiliar sensation. But I don't hate it. I'm not sure I trust it, but definitely not the worst feeling.

"Why?"

She tilts her head. "Seems like I was going to be spending a lot of time with you while I was here." Violet shrugs. "Figured I should be able to communicate on a level beyond basics."

“But you’ve got a cast.”

Again, she shrugs. “Hasn’t seemed to be a problem.”

Recognizing that we’re getting way off-topic, I do my best to reign it back in. As awkward as my question might be, as completely insane as it might seem, it sort of makes sense.

*Sure, to you. But you have to make it make sense to her.*

“You still haven’t answered my question,” I remind her.

Rather than answer, she holds up her hand and that ugly fucking diamond taunts me from her finger.

“I’m engaged, Grim.”

Stiffening, I roll my eyes. “No shit. But I think you’re the only one taking that seriously.”

Violet flinches as if I struck her. I know my words are harsh, but they’re the truth. I may not have confirmation, but I have zero doubt that her *fiancé* is responsible for all her pain.

I force a smile, hoping that by softening my expression, she’ll realize I’m not trying to hurt her. I’m simply speaking the truth.

“Why would I marry you? What could you possibly think that would solve?”

“It would solve a lot.”

“Like?”

“You’d be safe. If you marry me, Brad Coventry couldn’t hurt you. Shit, he wouldn’t even be able to find you if you don’t want him to. You’d have me and the club at your back.”

At the mention of safety, Violet’s eyes sparkle with hope. Which is great because the more this idea settles in my head, the more it starts to take root in my heart.

I want to marry Violet. No, I *need* to marry her.

*Desperately. Inexplicably.*

I can save her.

“C’mon, Sprite, whaddya say? Will you marry me and let me take care of you?”

“But why?”

“I told you why. Isn’t your life worth it?”

“Marriage is forever, Grim.” She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. “I told you, until death do us part means something to me. Marrying you would be...”

“Would be what?”

“Well, it wouldn’t be forever.” She wrinkles her forehead. “Would it?”

That’s a helluva question. It’s not like I’ve given this idea a lot of thought, and I definitely haven’t thought about anything beyond the immediate solution of Violet having the full weight of the club behind her if she’s my ol’ lady.

“It can be whatever you want it to be.” Maybe giving her some control over this will help. “If you want it to be a marriage in name only, okay. If you want it to be the real deal, that’s okay, too. And if you want to be tied to me until death do us part, I’m in.”

*I’m nothing if not flexible.*

Violet appears to consider my offer. She rises from the bench and begins to pace, numerous emotions playing out in her expression: fear, hope, sadness, determination. It’s all there on display for me to witness.

*Fuck, she’s beautiful. A man could do far worse. Hell, a man couldn’t possibly do better.*

I could continue to argue my case, but I don’t. Most look at me and see the muscle, the long hair, and the tattoos and make a snap judgment that I’m dumb. But they’re wrong. And I may not be the brother with the most luck with the ladies, but I witnessed enough shit in my young life to know what *not* to do.

Making a woman feel like she doesn’t have a choice is certainly something not to do.

After several minutes, Violet comes to a stop in front of me. She's wringing her hands, and her eyes are focused everywhere but on me.

"Okay."

*Wait... what?*

I shoot to my feet and grip her shoulders, certain I read her lips wrong. When she finally locks her gaze on mine, I know I wasn't mistaken.

"Say it again."

Her chest rises with a deep breath. "Okay, I'll marry you."

"You will?"

She nods. "I can't explain it, but I feel safe with you. After everything I've been through, I'm realizing that feeling safe is just as important as love. Maybe, in time, we'll learn to love each other. And if not, at least I'll be alive."

Unable to contain myself, I lift Violet into my arms and spin her around, careful of her broken ribs. I can't hear it, but I can feel the vibrations in her chest as she laughs. After a few seconds, she hugs me back, wrapping her arms around my neck. I carry her over to the sink and set her on her feet.

"There's just one thing I have to do, and then we'll head to Vegas."

She eyes me skeptically. "Vegas?"

"I know it's not ideal, but it's fast. We can have a real wedding later if that's what you want. I'll give you whatever makes you happy." Suddenly shy, I let my hair fall over my face, concealing myself from her view. "This might not be the marriage you always dreamed of, but I'll do everything in my power to make sure you don't regret it."

"I... Okay. What do you have to do first?"

Without pausing to consider how she might react, I grab her hand and tug off her engagement ring. Her eyes widen in surprise, but when I toss it down the drain, making sure it goes out of sight, she grins.

Violet lifts her arm and twists and turns her hand in front of her face as if looking at it for the first time. Her gorgeous smile never leaves her face.

“That feels really good, like a giant boulder has been lifted off my shoulders.”

“Well, it was a rock.”

She throws her head back and laughs, and my heart skips a beat. I’d give anything to be able to hear that sound. I have no doubt it would sound like the most perfect harmony.

Not wanting to waste any more time, I grab her hand and practically drag her out of the gym and toward my room so I can shower and change. Thirty minutes later, we’re in the garage and we managed to get there without any questions about where we’re going.

If my brothers knew what I was doing, they’d do everything in their power to stop me. And, honestly, I don’t know that I’d blame them. It’s a crazy idea. But it’s a crazy idea that will work.

I start to head for my Harley, but quickly shift directions and go to my truck. With Violet’s arm still in a cast, I don’t want to take any chances that she couldn’t hold on properly. After helping her into the passenger side, I pull my cell from my pocket and search for wedding chapels in Vegas. Once I find an address for one, I send a quick text to Jez.

Me: Meet me at 1301 S Las Vegas Blvd in two hours

Before I can even climb into the driver’s side, my phone vibrates with a response.

Jez: I’ve got a date in an hour

Me: It’s an emergency

Jez: Fine, but you’ll owe me... see you there

I could've told Jez the truth, that I need her to be a witness at my wedding, but she's just like Soul. She'd try to talk me out of it. She still might do just that, but it'll be harder to do if we're in public versus at her house.

The ride to Vegas is tense. Violet stares out the window the entire time, and I absently drum my fingers on the steering wheel as I navigate traffic.

Before we head to the Little White Wedding Chapel, we stop at the Marriage License Bureau. There's a line, so it takes longer than I'd like to be on the road again, but I park a block away from the chapel with five minutes to spare.

I turn to face Violet and reach for her hand to give it a reassuring squeeze. She lets me hold it for a moment before pulling it away so she can sign.

"This is nuts."

"Maybe. But based on the way I found you in your apartment, I think it's a matter of life and death."

She gives a curt nod and then opens the door to step out onto the sidewalk. I exit the truck and hurry around to escort her down the block. Jez is standing right outside the entrance, a scowl on her face.

"What the fuck, Grim?" Her hand movements are stilted. "You're getting married?"

"Looks that way."

Jez darts her eyes from me to Violet. "Is he forcing you to do this?" she asks her.

"I can read lips, Jez," I remind my friend.

"I know, big guy. But I need to hear Violet say she's here of her own free will because this is fucking insane."

"It's the only way to keep her safe. There was a news conference, and Brad is looking for her."

"Yeah, I saw it. But, Grim, I haven't been able to find any dirt on him. I mean, has the club even given their approval of this?"



I stiffen. “I don’t need the goddamn club’s approval to get married. But I do need you to be a witness, so will you do it or not?”

Jez is about to argue, I can see it in her eyes, but Violet steps between us. Once she’s satisfied that she has our attention, she shifts so she can sign for me but speak to Jez.

“I’m here because I want to be.” She swallows, the slender column of her throat bobbing. “Grim can keep me safe, right?” Jez nods, although she appears like she wants to dispute that fact. “Right now, my biggest concern is my safety. I’m the one that will have to live with the consequences of this decision, Jez. Not you. So, please, be a witness for us.”

*Consequences?*

Am I that bad of a catch?

Jez heaves a sigh. “Fine. I’ll do this. But don’t come running to me when it all falls apart.”

It’s not the best endorsement, but I’ll take it. At least I can follow through with this plan and make sure Violet stays alive for a very long time.

An hour later, and with very little fanfare, I’m a married man.

# CHAPTER 20

# VIOLET

“WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN?”

Soul and the rest of the club are standing in the common room waiting when we arrive at the clubhouse. Jez sashays up to the bar as if she doesn't have a care in the world. She might not have been on board at first, but she obviously will do anything for Grim. As for the club...They might convince him I'm not worth it and force him to choose: me or the club. It wouldn't take any deliberation on my part. He's known me for a couple of weeks. This club is his life. I won't let him sacrifice himself for me.

I'm terrified of what they'll do when they find out that Grim put his life in danger to save mine. After all, I'm no one of importance.

Grim pulls me behind him, but I peek around his arm and can still see what he's signing. “We got married.”

Soul's eyes go round as saucers, but before he can speak again, Malice steps forward. “Who got married?”

Grim glances down at me and smiles before answering. “Me and Violet.”

“The fuck?” Rogue snaps.

Shocked curses fill the room. My legs tremble as Soul marches forward and stabs a finger into Grim's chest.

“You got fucking married without talking to us? Who witnessed this shitstorm?” He points to me and sneers. “We

don't know what kind of fucking trouble is coming our way or who the fuck she *really* is."

The trembling in my legs travels all the way up my body, and I know by the grip I have on Grim's arm that he can feel my fear.

"Back the fuck up." Grim snarls. "And you owe Rogue fifty bucks."

*I knew this was a bad idea. What was I thinking? They're going to kick him out of the club, and who knows what they'll do to you.*

"Calm down," Jez demands, walking into the fray. "I witnessed the marriage. It was actually a pretty nice ceremony with Elvis facilitating and everything."

Someone snorts, but I'm not sure who's brave enough to do that with a very angry President standing here.

"For the love of all that's unholy." Soul rubs his temple.

I squeeze Grim's arm, and when he looks at me, I slightly jerk my head toward the hallway behind us. He must understand what I'm trying to tell him, because his eyes soften, and he nods.

As I quietly retreat, the last thing I see is Soul pointing at Jez.

"I'll deal with you later," Soul promises. "Church. Right. Fucking. Now!" His voice echoes through the room.

I scurry down the hall as fast as I can without hurting my ribs. I should rest, but I'm too scared to. There's no way I can let my guard down now. Grim and I might need to make a quick getaway.

*You're forgetting one small detail. You're married now. For better or worse, in sickness and in health... 'til death do us part.*

Not sure where to go, I head to the medical ward. It's familiar and feels safe.

*For the moment.*

Fate can be so cruel sometimes. I found who I thought was the love of my life only to discover he's a monster. Then I met Grim, and now circumstances beyond my control might rip him from me before we even have a real chance to get to know each other.

I pace the floor over and over. Tilting my face up to the ceiling, I cry out, "Why... Why are you doing this to me?"

Instead of a response, the door slides open revealing Cece, Apple, and Heather. I met Heather, Frenzy's 'ol lady, a couple of days ago when she came to introduce herself. Cece is leading the pack and waltzes right up to me.

"Married, huh?" she asks with a smirk.

There's no use denying it since Grim announced it to everyone in the common room.

"Yep."

"You know this isn't exactly what I meant when I said to talk to him." Cece's eyes sparkle with mischief.

I duck my head. "I know. I should've never le—"

Heather lifts my chin. "Hey, none of that. I've known Grim a long time. Hell, all of them really. Let me explain something to you... No one can tell these men to do something they don't already have their minds set to do."

"Violet, Cece and I came into the club in less than conventional ways," Apple explains. "Mark's my best friend, and that's how I met Malice."

"I was friends with Jez before Soul weaseled his way into my heart," Cece says lovingly.

"But you all knew them for a while before you agreed to marry them," I counter.

"True, I won't lie. The men we love are hard men. We've all had demons we've fought and won," Cece says cryptically. "But they are good men. And Grim? He's got a heart of gold and is one of the best men I know."

“Grim is one of a kind,” Heather agrees. “I knew when he fell, he’d fall hard. He just needed the right woman to knock him on his ass.”

Grim *is* one of a kind. What they don’t know is, he didn’t fall, and neither did I. We took a leap without thinking about the consequences. I pray he can make the rest of the club see that he was only trying to help me and that I don’t want to bring danger to the club. I’m thankful that he made such a huge sacrifice to save me once again, but I won’t jeopardize his happiness.

As if Apple senses where my mind has wandered, she leans close and whispers, “We all have a story, Violet.” She squeezes my hand in solidarity and speaks a little louder. “Grim wouldn’t have married you if he didn’t want to.”

“No one makes these men do what they don’t want to do,” Heather agrees. “Stubborn asses, all of them. But I wouldn’t trade them for anything in this world.”

“Soul was so angry,” I say, rehashing his reaction in my mind.

“Soul’s always angry. He’s the president, and it’s his job to make sure everyone is safe. “They were caught off guard. They’ll get over it.” Cece winks. “You’ll see... Everything will work out.”

I sit on the bed while Heather bustles around the room, gathering chairs. “It’s gossip time, bitches,” she announces as she places the last chair next to the bed.

For the first time in a long time, I have hope.

# CHAPTER 21

# GRIM

PACING THE LENGTH OF THE SANCTUARY, I INCONSPICUOUSLY watch as my brothers argue about me. Sure, I can't hear a fucking word they're saying, but with all the red faces, waving hands, and the fact that they haven't made a single effort to include me in the conversation... Doesn't take hearing to figure out I'm the hot topic.

*Me and Violet.*

As I turn on my heel and face the room, I notice the arguing has ceased, and they're all staring at me.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" Soul demands, his movement jerky.

"I was thinking that Violet was sent to us for help, and I'm helping her."

"Marriage, Grim?" Malice questions. "Are you insane?"

"Ask me that in front of Apple," I taunt.

"It's not the same, and you know it!"

I glare at Soul. "Are you gonna fine him, or should I?"

Soul scowls. "Give Rogue fifty bucks, VP."

"This is bullshit! He goes off and gets married, and I'm the one being fined?"

"Make it a hundred."

"Motherfucker!"

"Hundred and fifty."



Watching my two best friends go back and forth is comical. Or it would be if the situation weren't so serious.

"Before you go broke," I sign to Malice. "Why don't you quit being a dick and lift your damn hands?"

With exaggeration, Malice raises his hands. "Why'd you go off and get married?"

"I told you... Violet needed help."

Fort moves into my line of sight. "Brother, there's gotta be more to it than that. Soul has Jez and I digging into the fiancé, and Vio—"

Like lightning, I reach out and grab Fort's head, slamming it against the table. Hands grab at me, trying to get me to stop, but I'm too strong. It doesn't hurt that fury inhabits every cell of my body, and adrenaline is rushing through my veins.

When Fort starts to struggle, I let him up.

"Violet is my wife," I remind them all. "If I ever hear anyone refer to that douchebag Brad as her fiancé again, I'll take them to the Confessional."

"Chill the hell out," Soul demands. "He didn't mean anything by it."

Thrusting a hand through my hair, I take several deep breaths. Soul's right. It's not like they've had time to get used to the idea that I'm married.

*Fuck, I haven't had time to get used to the idea.*

After rubbing his head, Fort glares at me. "Clearly, I hit a nerve. Sorry, man. But I still think there's way more to this than what you're letting on."

*Of course, there is!*

Soul scrubs his hands over his face before softening his expression. "I think it's time to come clean, G."

There's no need for him to specify what he's referring to. There's only one secret I have, and I was hoping to take it to my grave. But that's not possible after today.

“You should probably all sit the fuck down and get comfy,” I sign to my club.

No one listens.

“Sit. The. Fuck. Down.” Soul reiterates, and within seconds, they’ve all got their asses in chairs. He focuses on me. “Go ahead.”

I nod, but it takes me several minutes to dig deep enough to work up the courage. There isn’t much that scares me in this life, but having my brothers, my *family*, look at me differently is pretty high on that very short list.

“My father was a jerk,” I begin, my hands moving fluidly, as if they’re detached from the emotion of my story. “He hated that I was deaf, thought it made him less than somehow. I endured years of name-calling, but nothing compared to how he treated my mom because she birthed an ape.”

Bitterness washes over me, and the sympathetic looks from the guys doesn’t help.

“Bastard,” Possum signs. “Where’s he at now? We can purge him if you want.” He smirks, and there’s an evilness to it.

“You’ll find him in Hell.” I grin. “I purged him already.”

“Damn, bro.” Frenzy’s lips pucker, and I know he’s whistling. “What’d he do?”

I take a deep breath. “He beat my mother to death.”

Thorn jumps up from his chair. “Wait a second. Are you telling us that you married some chick because she reminded you of your mother?”

Before I have a chance to launch myself at him, Abyss grabs my arm.

“Sorry,” Thorn says. “Meant no disrespect.”

“Her name is Violet,” I remind him. “Or my ol’ lady will work too.”

“I don’t know about anyone else,” Rogue signs. “But I’m not as upset about the whole wedding thing as I am about the

fact that this is the first time we're hearing about Grim killing his dad. I mean, now the quickie ceremony makes sense. But secrets?" He shakes his head. "Those never make sense here." He glares at me. "I'm your cousin, dude. You really felt you couldn't tell me?"

"We all have pasts," Soul says. Malice signs for my benefit so that Soul can focus on everyone else. "There isn't a person in this room who doesn't have a closet full of skeletons. How each man chooses to reveal those skeletons is up to him, as long as it doesn't affect the club."

Animal shoots to his feet. "This does affect the club. Because of Grim's secret, we have a new resident."

"Look, I'm not going to debate this with you," Soul counters. "I'm not thrilled about Grim getting married, but he's the one who has to live with the consequences of that."

Soul's defense of me is surprising considering his initial reaction. But then again, he's one of my best friends, and he always has my back. *Always*. And maybe, just maybe, now that he recognizes my motives, he's going to be more forgiving.

"What we need to figure out now is how we're going to handle the shitstorm that will no doubt come our way in search of Grim's ol' lady."

*My ol' lady. Fuck, that sounds good.*

Brother after brother rises to their feet, and the arguing resumes. I'm about to pound the table to shut them all up when the emergency light flashes red.

"Jesus, what now?" Soul throws his hands in the air.

The button to turn on that red light is not to be pressed unless it's a true emergency. And there's only one person who violates that rule, Soul's wrath be damned: *Jez*.

I start toward the door, but a hand falls on my shoulder, jerking me to a stop. I look behind me to see Malice shaking his head.

"There's protocol for a reason."

I stomp back to the table and reach underneath to snatch the only weapon permitted in the sanctuary. Wrapping my fingers around the gun, I carry it to the door and stand to the side before nodding at Soul.

When the door slides open, Jez steps inside as if she doesn't have a care in the world. She glances around the room, and when her gaze lands on Soul, she rolls her eyes.

“Seriously, dude. Use the damn cameras.”

“Seriously, *Mary*, stop interrupting church!”

She lifts the laptop she's holding. “I'll stop interrupting when shit stops being important.” Jez stalks to the table and sets her laptop down. “Now, you've gotta see this.”

# CHAPTER 22

# VIOLET

“I’M TELLING YOU, THAT MAN IS HORNIER NOW THAN HE WAS before Harper was born.”

Heather and Apple erupt into giggles while Cece goes on to explain her latest sexual encounter with Soul.

“I had spit up on my shirt, my hair was in knots, and I was wearing sweatpants and one of his shirts. He ripped the pants right off me, thanked me for not wearing a bra, and dove right in.”

I squirm on the bed and keep my face neutral. It’s uncomfortable hearing them talk so openly about sex, but at the same time, it’s mind-boggling. Some of the positions they describe are impossible for me to imagine, and I can’t help but wonder if they’re even possible. Sex wasn’t a topic freely discussed in my house growing up. In fact, it wasn’t mentioned at all except when I was told my husband would teach me everything I’d need to know.

*And Grim is my husband.*

“That’s nothing,” Apple begins. “Try being away from your man for weeks at a time. When you do finally get home, he keeps you locked up for hours trying to make up for lost time.” She fans her face. “I swear my pussy needs a vacation by the time he’s done with me.”

“Oh stop.” Heather puts her finger in her mouth like she’s gagging. “First, I don’t want to hear about you both humping like rabbits, and second, you know you love it, so quit bitching.”

“Yes, yes I do,” Apple agrees. “The things Malice can do with his tongue...”

Cece shoves her fingers in her ears. “La, la, la, la, la.”

Apple sticks her tongue out, and Cece flips her off, causing another round of giggles.

“Grow up you two,” Heather admonishes. “I love it when Frenzy pushes me up against the wall and we don’t even have time to rip our clothes off. Right. Up. Against. The. Wall.”

“Oh yeah.”

“You know that’s right.”

Apple and Cece speak simultaneously.

The three of them go back and forth a few more minutes, retelling sexcapades, as Heather calls them. Then Cece’s gaze narrows on me. I lower my eyes, and my cheeks burn as if I just got caught watching a dirty movie. As I concentrate on the pattern of the blanket on the bed, sweat builds on the back of my neck. Cece clears her throat to get my attention.

I slowly raise my head. “Yes?”

“So, are you going to spill?”

“Spill what?” I ask, confused.

“Your guts.”

I swallow... hard. “My guts?”

“Yeah, about how Grim is in bed?” Apple clarifies.

“Oh, um...” Now my back is drenched. I don’t know what to say. My whole body is on fire, and my skin reddens, giving away my embarrassment.

*Traitor! Now they’re gonna know.*

Cece opens her mouth, but Heather speaks before she can.

“Wait a minute. Violet, have you and Grim slept together yet?”

“Well, he’s been sleeping in that chair.” I gesture to the one Apple is currently occupying. “And I sleep right here.”

“Oh, not so fast missy.” Cece leans forward in her chair and levels me with a look. “Have you two had sex yet?”

The scrutiny of all three of them is what I imagine a bug feels like under a microscope. They’re watching every move I make. Maybe if I answer their questions, we can move past all this sex talk. But it’s embarrassing to admit you’re twenty-three years old and a virgin. Not only does it usually send guys screaming for the hills, but when women find out, they become cruel and judgmental. It can be as bad as admitting you’ve slept with a dozen men.

“It’s okay, Violet,” Apple assures me. “You’re with friends, and we’re not going to judge. I’m sure we all had sex with our husbands before we got married.”

Heather snorts. “That’s how Frenzy convinced me to marry him. Fucked me into saying yes.”

Apple chuckles.

“So how is he?” Cece inquires.

“I-I-I didn’t,” I stammer. “W-w-we haven’t.”

“Hold up.” Cece shares a look with Apple. “You haven’t had sex before, or you haven’t with Grim?”

I bury my face in my hands, and the bed dips from the weight. Apple pries my hands apart and wipes away the tear that escaped.

“We are so sorry.” She cups my cheek. “There is absolutely nothing to be embarrassed about.”

“It’s not something I go around announcing,” I groan.

“Who cares if you never had sex before,” Heather chimes in. “I bet Grim will be one helluva teacher.”

That breaks the tension in the room, and even I laugh. Unfortunately, it raises more questions in my mind. Will Grim want to have sex? We didn’t talk about that when we rushed to the altar to get married. There were a lot of things we didn’t discuss before we said, ‘I do’.

*Crap! I don’t know the first thing about sex.*



“Are there any questions we can answer for you?” Cece asks.

I hate that my face is so easy to read but grateful I didn’t have to be the one to bring it up. “I understand the mechanics of it.”

“Have you ever had an orgasm?” Apple asks. “By yourself or with a boyfriend?”

“No,” I answer honestly. “That’s considered a sin in my church.”

“Let’s start at the beginning,” Cece suggests. “What *do* you know?”

I shrug. “Not much. I know how it works, how a woman gets pregnant, but they don’t exactly explain how to make it feel good. In fact, when I was younger, my mom told me how bad it hurts.” I recall the conversation. “Looking back, I think she told me that to scare me into *not* doing it.”

“You need to know what makes you feel good,” Cece begins. “If you don’t, you’ll never know how to steer your partner to the sweet spot?”

My forehead wrinkles in confusion. “The sweet spot?”

“She means your G-spot,” Apple contributes.

“G-spot?”

“Yep, that magical little spot that makes your eyes roll to the back of your head and scream for more.” Heather sighs. “Once they find it, they’re determined to hit it every single time. And a good lover will make sure you come before he does. If all he cares about is getting his own jollies off, then he isn’t worth your time.”

I have no idea what she’s talking about, but it sounds amazing. My mind wanders to Grim, and how it would feel to be with him like that.

“Oral sex is out of this world too.” Apple grins wickedly. “The first time Grim goes down on you, I bet you’ll see stars.”

“I never liked sucking dick as much as I do with Soul.” Cece’s eyes gloss over, and she licks her lips.

I shift nervously but keep my mouth shut.

“Have you ever seen a cock?” Heather inquires.

I shake my head so hard I give myself whiplash. “No, absolutely not.”

“Hold that thought!” Cece jumps up from her seat and runs out the door.

“Where’s she going?” I ask, watching her disappear.

“I bet I know,” Heather says under her breath.

“Violet, we’re joking around. Well, sort of.” Apple grins. “But seriously, if you ever have any questions, you can always come to us,” she says sincerely.

“Thanks.”

I appreciate that more than she’ll ever know. I’ve never had this much fun with other women, and this conversation gives a whole new meaning to ‘girl talk’. It’s certainly been educational.

Cece comes running back into the room with her hands full. She doesn’t stop until she reaches my bed and drops her armload by my feet. I sit up straighter so I can get a good look at what she brought, and I’m afraid to ask what I’m looking at.

There’s a hard rubber thing that’s seven to eight inches long with what looks like veins on it and a bright pink rose with an oval-shaped attachment. Curious, I stare.

Cece holds up the hard rubber thing. Upon closer inspection, it looks like there’s a lopsided peach attached to it, but it’s a weird beige color.

“This is a dick,” she announces proudly.

“What?” I screech and scoot away from the offending object.

“This, my dear friend, is what a penis looks like.” Heather shakes her head and snickers. “Well, all the good ones

anyway.”

I point at the rose. “What’s that?”

“This is something you never want to leave home without.” Cece picks it up and places it in my hands. “See that flap in the middle of it?”

I nod as I study the rose. It’s hard but soft at the same time. It’s lightweight and not too big, and it fits right in my hand. All of a sudden, the middle flap starts moving back and forth, and the attachment stretches and contracts.

I drop it as if it burst into flames. “What the heck is that for?”

Cece laughs and picks it up for Apple to see. “This is what I was talking about. The bud stimulates the clit, and with the combination of the vibrator, words can’t even describe.” She sighs. “Soul loves to tease me with this.”

“Ooh, that’s going on my Amazon wish list.” Apple pulls out her phone.

“Put your phone away,” Cece says. “I stock them at Naughty/Nice now.”

“I’ll stop by this week.” Apple wiggles her brows at her.

My curiosity gets the best of me, and I poke the ‘penis’ that’s still laying by my feet. It’s firm, yet silky. I can’t imagine something that big or thick fitting inside a person, especially someone as small as me.

*Oh God! Grim is huge... What if it’s huge? He’ll break me in half.*

“It’ll fit,” Heather says reassuringly.

“Did I say that out loud?” I ask, embarrassed.

“No, but the look on your face says it all.” She pats my leg. “Pick it up and get a feel for it. Don’t be afraid of it, it’s just a silicone cock.”

My hand shakes as I gingerly grip the toy. I test the weight and find it heavier than I thought. My fingers can’t even wrap

all the way around it because it's so wide. I stroke it up and down, lost in my own world.

“Keep doing it like that, and you'll have Grim begging for mercy,” Apple says, knocking me out of my reverie.

I giggle at the thought. All of a sudden, the thing jumps in my hand and starts wiggling.

“Ohmigosh!” I yell. I'm holding on for dear life, afraid that I'm going to drop it. “What's happening?”

All three ladies double over laughing.

“It's a vibrator,” one of them says between breaths.

Before I can ask how to turn the stupid thing off, the door slides open, and Grim walks in.

*Oh, crap.*

# CHAPTER 23

# GRIM

I HAVE NEVER WANTED TO LAUGH AT SOMEONE AS MUCH AS I do right now. Violet is sitting in the middle of the mattress, a vibrating dildo in her hand, and the look of horror on her face at being caught with it is the most comical thing I've ever seen.

At the moment, the tension that tightened my muscles during church dissipates.

Tilting my head, I smirk and lift my hands. "If you wanted cock, Sprite, all you had to do was say so."

"And that's our cue to leave," Cece signs while hopping to her feet.

She winks at me as she struts past, the other women following hot on her heels.

I lock eyes with Violet, and the flush creeping up her cheeks deepens as she shoves the sex toy behind her back as if I'll forget what I saw.

"So, um..." She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. "How was your meeting?"

"Church," I correct her.

"What?"

"I was in church."

Violet scrunches her nose as she looks me up and down. "You go to church?"

This time, I don't even try to hide my chuckle. "Fuck no, I don't go to church. Last time I stepped inside one, it burnt to the ground." Unable to believe I told her that, I pause and put my hair into a ponytail. "But I do go to *church*, which is the equivalent of a club meeting."

"That's what I said... a meeting."

"Yeah, but... Never mind."

She ducks her head for a moment before taking a deep breath and locking her eyes on mine. "I'm sorry. I'll try to get the lingo right."

"You have nothing to be sorry for."

Annoyed with myself for making her feel bad, I decide to have a little fun. I stalk the rest of the way to the bed and rest my knees on the mattress. Leaning forward, I reach around her and grab the vibrator she stashed in an attempt to save face.

When I straighten, I hold the toy in between us and revel at the way her blush returns. Dammit, Violet's stunning. I can't wait to be her husband in every single way.

She tries to look away, but I grip her chin. "No," I push out.

Her eyes widen at my voice, but I don't care. I need her to know how important this is.

I take her hand and wrap her fingers around the dildo, forcing it down to rest in her lap so I can sign.

"Don't hide from me."

Violet blinks several times. "I'm not."

"You were," I insist. "And I get it, but I'm your husband. If you want to play, I'm game."

She rears back. "We can't play. That would be..."

"A sin?" I supply.

"Well, yes."

"Like I said, I'm your husband. If we wanna fuck, there's no sin or shame in that." Smiling, I add, "But something tells

me you're not ready for that."

She lifts the vibrator. "If this is what awaits me, I don't think I'll ever be ready. You'll never fit."

I watch her lips, the beautiful bow of them tantalizing.

"Oh, I'll fit, Sprite. I promise you that."

Violet's eyes go round. "But you're so big."

I grin. "I am. And you'll love every inch of me as I slide into your pussy. You'll be begging for it by the time I'm done."

When Violet scrambles around me and off the bed, I know I've gone too far.

*Note to self... take things nice and slow with my wife.*

As she starts to pace, the vibrator still in her grasp, Violet takes her phone out of her pocket. She stabs a finger at the screen, and her lips begin to move. Ten seconds later, my cell vibrates in my pocket. I grab it and glance at the notification of a text from her.

Violet: Can we please stop talking about this?

I want to honor her request, but something in me aches to keep the conversation going.

Me: Why?? I like talking dirty to you

Violet's lips move again, but then she shakes her head and taps the screen several times. It's a full two minutes before another text comes through.

Violet: I feel like you're making fun of me.

*Not what I was expecting.*

Me: I'm not. Promise. I want you to feel comfortable around me... safe

Violet: I do feel safe. Comfortable might take a while. We're different.



Violet stops pacing to stand in front of me and points to her lips.

“Tell me about your meet—” She presses her mouth closed for a second. “Tell me about church.”

*Okay, so we’re definitely done talking about anything fun.*

“No.”

“No?”

“No, I won’t tell you about church.”

“But I’m your wife.”

“Yes, you’re my ol’ lady, but club business is club business.”

Anger flares in her lilac-colored irises, swirling around like the eye of a hurricane. She throws the vibrator onto the bed and turns to walk away, but I lunge to my feet and grab her good arm to spin her around.

“Let go,” she demands, her anger morphing into fear.

I do, but only because I don’t want her to be afraid of me. I’d never hurt her. I’m not Brad.

“I need you to understand something,” I begin. “Club business is club business. I’m not allowed to talk about it. The other women deal with it, and so will you.” When she opens her mouth to argue, I arch a brow. “It’s for your safety. The more you know, the more danger you’re in.”

She wrinkles her forehead as if considering my words, then nods curtly. “I can deal with that on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“I can handle being kept safe. I mean, that’s why I agreed to all this.” She sweeps her arm to indicate the room, although I know she means so much more than our surroundings. “Safe, yes, but in the dark?” Violet shakes her head. “If it’s information that has to do with me, I need to know.”

“What makes you think I have information about you?”

“Soul ordered all the guys to church immediately after you announced that we were married.” She shrugs. “Doesn’t take a genius to figure it out.”

She’s not wrong. Not only was the topic of conversation about us, but once Jez barged in, things quickly turned to Violet’s safety.

And that’s exactly why I came in here to begin with. If it hadn’t been for that damn vibrator, I’d have already told her about her parents.

*No time like the present.*

“Okay. There is something I need to tell you, but you’re not gonna fucking like it.”

Violet narrows her eyes. “What is it? What happened?”

I motion to one of the chairs. “You might want to sit.” She walks slowly before lowering herself down and focusing on me. I try to come up with a way to be gentle with the information, but it’s impossible. “Jez found a post on the dark web that she traced back to your parents.”

Violet stiffens. “What do you mean?”

“It seems they’re not happy with what the police are doing to try and find you.”

“I’m not following.”

“Violet, they posted in a forum on the dark web looking for someone to help locate you.”

“But isn’t the dark web a bad thing? Like full of criminals and stuff?”

“Or MCs who aren’t afraid to do whatever it takes, legal or otherwise, to make the world a better place.”

“Wait.” Her pink tongue darts out to lick her lips. “You guys work on the dark web?”

“We also own a bar, motorcycle shop, tattoo parlor, and hold interest in Cece’s boutique and Apple’s studio.”

“But you do... illegal things?”

“We do,” I admit. “But only when it’s absolutely necessary. And besides, we’re talking about your parents, not my club’s activities.”

Violet sucks her bottom lip between her teeth. She quickly glances away, and when she faces me again, there are tears in her eyes. I reach forward and brush away one that spills over her lashes.

“No one will ever hurt you again,” I vow. “They don’t call me the Grim Reaper for nothing.”

More tears slide down her cheeks, and she swipes at them, but it doesn’t stem the flow. She grabs her cell again and types away on that.

When my phone vibrates, I look at the screen.

Violet: I’m really tired & sore. It’s been a long day. I think I’d like to take **some pain meds and go to bed.**

*In other words, I’m done talking, and I’m gonna shut down now.*

Me: Okay. I’ll get you a glass of water to wash down the pills.

I stride to the bathroom and fill a small glass that’s sitting on the sink. After I carry it back to her, she tosses two pain pills into her mouth and washes them down.

“Good night,” she mouths before scooting to the opposite side of the bed and laying on her side with her back to me.

Standing there, I debate on whether to climb in behind her or go to my room on the other side of the clubhouse. When I see her shoulders shake with sobs, the choice becomes easy.

Violet is my wife, and I’m not leaving her, no matter what.

# CHAPTER 24

# VIOLET

## *WHO TURNED UP THE HEAT?*

My eyes flutter open, and I attempt to sit up, but something heavy weighs me down. Lifting the blanket, I see a muscular arm draped across my stomach. I fell asleep in my leggings and a t-shirt, but the shirt has ridden up to settle under my boobs. In my sleepy state, it takes a few minutes for my brain to register who the arm belongs to.

*Grim.*

Twisting around takes some effort, but once I'm situated, I take a moment to study my husband.

*Husband... That's going to take some getting used to.*

Grim's forehead isn't marred with worry lines when he's sleeping. He has a subtle snore, but it doesn't bother me. Instead, it's comforting.

I used to think I wanted a strait-laced man, but now I know better. Something deep within my soul resonates when Grim is near. I lift my hand to caress his face when two piercing ice-blue eyes pop open and stare into mine.

Dropping my hand, I mutter, "Good morning."

He pulls his arm off me and sighs, "Morning. Sorry... You were shaking last night, and I didn't want to leave you."

"I don't mind. Thanks for being so considerate."

I'm hurt that my parents seem to have taken Brad's side when it comes to finding me. Above anyone else, they're

supposed to protect me. I'm thankful Grim offered me comfort last night. Subconsciously, I must've known he stayed because I slept peacefully. No nightmares or anything.

The whole situation between Grim and me is awkward. We're married, but it seems neither of us have any idea how to act or what to say.

Grim jumps out of bed and pulls a t-shirt over his head. Before he tugs it down over his taut stomach, my eyes wander down to his gray sweatpants where a huge bulge has caught my attention. My mouth drops open, and my heart rate spikes.

Grim clears his throat and breaks the spell I'm currently under.

"My eyes are up here." He smirks and then turns on his heel to head into the bathroom.

I bury my head in the blanket and groan, thankful he's giving me a moment to collect myself.

*I was ogling Grim.*

Yes, he's my husband but in name only. It's a marriage of convenience, although I'm not sure what he's getting out of the deal. I'm getting protected from a psycho by a gorgeous lumberjack of a man with a heart as big as the moon, and he's stuck with the pint-size daughter of a pastor. We haven't kissed since we said 'I do' at the wedding chapel, and there's been no pressure from him to have sex. Not at all what I was expecting... He's been the perfect gentleman.

*That's because I want more, and he's not interested in that with me.*

The sound of running water shakes me out of my melancholy mood. After climbing out of bed, I hurry to grab some clothes. When I open the bag and take in the contents, I frown. I desperately need to buy more clothes, but my purse is still at my apartment... along with my computer and everything else I own.

A tap on my shoulder causes a shriek to escape my mouth, and my body jerks as if I'm being electrocuted. For such a big guy, he moves like a ninja.

“Didn’t mean to scare you.” His brows knit in concern. “Wanna get outta here for a while?”

“You scared the crap out of me!” I smack his chest playfully but whip my arm back when I realize what I’ve done.

Shrinking back instinctively, I squeeze my eyes closed and wait for the onslaught. But when nothing happens, I slowly open one eye and then the other. Grim’s mouth hangs open as he stares at me. Then he snaps out of it and lifts his arms slowly.

“We need to get something straight right now,” he begins. I don’t dare interrupt because that’s never ended well for me. “I will never hurt you.”

“I’m sorry, it’s an ingrained reaction. I don’t mean to do it.”

He shakes his head. “I scared you, you reacted. End of story.”

Embarrassed and wanting to change the subject I ask, “Where’re we going?”

He gives me a lopsided grin. “I know what you’re doing, but to answer your question, it’s a surprise.”

“Give me thirty minutes?”

“I’ll meet you in the common room.”

After Grim leaves, I rush to get ready, thankful that Cece got me a cover for my cast so I can shower. With my arm in the cast, I can’t do much with my hair, so I leave it down. I put on the last of the clean clothes I have, making a mental note to ask Grim where the washer and dryer are so I can wash them. I slip on my sneakers and make it to Grim with five minutes to spare.

The drive to Boulder City is quiet but nice. The city itself is quaint, but it has everything you could possibly need. I love the small-town feel. I’ve always hated living in the big city, preferring less hustle and bustle. Living here will be a nice change of pace.

Once we reach our surprise location, Grim parks and comes around to the passenger side to help me out of the giant truck. He escorts me inside, his hand on the small of my back, and I freeze when I realize where we are.

“What are we doing here?”

I definitely wasn't expecting him to bring me to a jewelry store.

Grim rolls his eyes. “Did you really think I wouldn't get you a ring?”

I hold up my hand. “We have rings.”

Granted, they're the plain gold bands that were included in the price of the wedding, but I don't need anything else. Obviously, Grim thinks we do.

A friendly saleswoman steps forward to greet us. “Can I help you?”

“Oh, no, thank you.” I pull Grim's hand to leave, but he's firmly planted his feet. He frowns, and I shake my head. “I don't want another flashy ring. These are fine. You've done enough for me, and I'm forever indebted to you, but I refuse to let you spend your hard-earned money on this.”

For once, I'm grateful we can have a silent conversation that the saleswoman can't hear or understand.

“Are you Violet?” she asks before I can pull on his arm again.

I let go of his hand and glance nervously around for any sign of Brad. “How'd you know my name?”

“A woman named Jez called. She told me to be on the lookout for a small blonde woman and extremely large man who is deaf,” she explains. “She said you would try to leave, and not to let you until you picked out a ring.”

“Jez.” I mutter her name like a curse word and tap my foot.

Grim folds his arms and raises an eyebrow as if to say, ‘Are we gonna argue anymore, or can we get this done?’

I toss my good arm in the air. “Fine, you win.”



I'm rewarded with one of his mega-watt smiles. When he does that, I don't think I could ever deny him anything. He rarely smiles, but when he does, it makes me melt.

"I'm Val, the owner." She sticks her hand out, and we both shake it. "Let me show you what we have."

We take our time perusing the cases of rings when one catches Grim's attention. He points at the glass, and Val takes it out. I gasp as he slips it on my finger. It's beautiful, yet subtle, and everything I imagined my wedding ring would look like. A half-carat pear-shaped diamond sits in the center with smaller diamonds intertwined in a white gold setting.

"It's beautiful," I tell him.

"Beautiful ring for my beautiful wife."

Heat rises up my neck, and I want nothing more than to throw my arms around his neck and kiss him senseless, but I also don't want to read too much into his words. After all, we have an audience, and we have to play the loving wife and husband to convince everyone this is real.

I give him a shy smile and return the ring to Val so she can size it. "Do you have a matching ring for my husband?"

*My husband... it sounds so weird to say it out loud. It does have a nice ring to it though.*

She pulls out another white gold band with small diamonds. "What do you think about this?"

I take the ring before grabbing Grim's hand. I try to slip the ring on his finger, but his hand is so big I can't get it past the first knuckle. He chuckles and removes it before handing it back to Val.

"Can it be sized to fit him?" I ask.

"Sure, but it might cost a little extra because we'll need to add more gold."

"That's okay. How much will it be?" I mentally slap myself when I remember I don't have my purse or wallet. "I don't have my credit card, but if you could hold it for me, as soon as I have it, I can call with the number."

“Oh, that’s not a pro—”

Grim slams his card down on the counter. Val doesn’t look surprised so much as amused. I cross my arms and stare at him.

“I want to buy your ring,” I say, knowing damn well he can read my lips.

He shakes his head, and Val takes his card to process the sale.

“They should be ready in a week.” She hands him a receipt, and thanks us for our business.

Not wanting to cause a scene in front of a stranger, I storm out of the jewelry store with Grim hot on my heels. I whip around to face him, and he doesn’t have time to stop. He rams into me, but instead of me falling to the ground, I’m scooped into his strong arms. His chest heaves, and his eyes are full of concern.

“You okay?” he signs after setting me on my feet.

“Yeah, thanks for catching me.” I sigh. “Grim, thank you for buying me a ring. It’s gorgeous, but I want to buy your ring. I need to... You saved me. Not once, but twice, and it’ll make me feel better to do something nice to repay you somehow.”

“First, you don’t owe me shit. And second, what’s mine is yours.” His face softens. “We’re married now.”

“I get that, but you have to let me be an equal member of this marriage,” I explain.

His back straightens, and he nods, understanding in his gaze. I won’t be dictated to ever again. It’s equal partners or nothing at all.

“You can buy lunch,” he suggests.

*Me and my big mouth.*

“I don’t have my purse.” I fidget with my hands, and instead of signing, I speak. “Everything I own is at my apartment.”

“We’ll go get lunch and then go to your stuff.”

While I’m excited about getting my things, I’m freaking out on the inside. Not wanting Grim to go back on his word because of my fears, I smile and hug him. He doesn’t hesitate to wrap his arms around me before helping me back into the truck.

He walks around the front of the vehicle but pauses to pull out his cell and type a quick message, and then he hurries to get in the cab.

We have a fantastic lunch at a quant diner down the road from the club’s bar, Purgatory. When we arrived in town, Grim pointed out all the businesses they own and which club member runs each one.

With lunch complete, there’s one final stop: my apartment. As we get closer to our destination, goosebumps erupt down my arms. My stomach plummets, and all the food I consumed threatens to make a reappearance. Fortunately, it isn’t long before we’re standing in front of my complex.

My legs buckle, but Grim’s strong arms catch me before I can crumble to the ground. He tucks me into his side and swivels his head back and forth, constantly watching for any threat. I breathe in his scent, leather and musk, and it grounds me. With Grim at my side, I know I can face anything.

Once we reach the door, it dawns on me that I don’t have my keys. I go to stop Grim and tell him we have to go to the apartment manager to let us in, but he pulls out a lockset. My brows arch in question, and he shrugs.

He fiddles with the lock for a few seconds before the door swings open, and he ushers me through.

*What the heck?*

For a brief second, I wonder if we’re in the wrong apartment, until I see my couch. The broken coffee table is nowhere to be seen. The blood and glass are gone. I was sure there’d be a mess.

My brain registers the scene in front of me. “What... how?”

*Brad. It's the only explanation. He cleaned up to cover his tracks.*

I spin to face Grim, the blood draining from my face. Shaking hard, I can't steady my hands enough to sign. "We have to get out of here, now."

Grim crushes me to his chest and rubs soothing circles on my back. The dam breaks, and the past few months of torment spill out. Hiccupping on a sob, I grip his shirt as I cry, staining it with my tears. At some point, we make it into my bedroom where he holds me in his lap on my bed. He gives me time to settle down and wipes my face with his thumbs.

Grim's brows crease with worry, but his eyes burn with anger. Grim sets me on the edge of the mattress, and then he stalks to the window and opens the curtains. He motions for me to come and look outside. Slowly, I walk over to him and peer around his massive frame. Glancing at the street, I see Justin sitting on a motorcycle. Grim points the other direction, and there's Rogue on his bike. Both of them are watching the apartment and wave when they see me. I give them a small wave back and step away.

"Never again," Grim signs. "You're family, and we always protect our family."

Warmth overtakes me, and a sense of calm rolls over my entire body. I'm still uncertain about how Grim feels, but I lose a little piece of my heart to him. I've been trying to protect it from him, but somehow, he got past my defenses. I pull on his shirt, so he has no choice but to lower his head. I wrap my arms around his neck and place a quick kiss to his lips. He pulls me closer and licks the seam of my mouth.

Ping. Ping. Ping.

Grim groans and takes a deep breath before leaning back from me. He pulls out his cell and starts hammering away. Leaving him to deal with his texts, I head to my closet and pull down my clothes, shoving them into my suitcase. Next, I clean out my dresser. Then I grab all my make-up and toiletry items from the bathroom. Grim must've gone back to the living room because when I finally zip up my bags, I notice I'm

alone. He appears a minute later holding my backpack and purse, Justin trailing behind him.

“Oh, hey, Justin.” I offer a small wave.

“Hi, Violet.” Justin smiles and grabs my luggage, leaving Grim and me standing in my bedroom.

“You ready?” Grim asks. “I have to get back to the clubhouse. I have shit that needs to be dealt with.”

I want to ask what he needs to do, but I remain silent. “Yes.”

He takes my hand, and as we stroll out the door, I soak up all his strength.

I don't look back. I won't. Instead, I look toward the future.

# CHAPTER 25

# GRIM

“IT’S NICE TO MEET YOU.”

I focus on Thorn, who’s translating for Violet’s parents. The two people who raised her are sitting across the table from me, Thorn, Soul, Abyss, Spike, and Fort. We set this meeting in the hopes of them engaging the club’s *services* to find Violet. Judging by the way they’re wrinkling up their noses at their surroundings in Purgatory, they’re not fond of what I’m sure they consider a criminal element.

I eye them skeptically. Mr. Simpson is dressed in a charcoal gray three-piece suit, crisp white dress shirt, and a red tie. His wife is wearing a dark green dress with a strand of pearls and hat to match. They stick out like sore thumbs here.

“Let’s dispense with the formalities, Mrs. Simpson,” Soul says. “We agreed to this meeting to see if there’s anything we can do to help find your daughter. Why don’t you start by telling us what you know?”

Every fiber of my being wants to demand why they let their daughter be hurt, why they did nothing, but I don’t. Instead, I fidget with the cheap gold band that I’m continuing to wear until my real wedding ring is sized.

Violet’s mother darts her eyes to her husband and then back to Soul. “Well, that’s the thing. We don’t exactly want help finding her.”

Anger surges through me, and I jump to my feet, not giving a damn if I draw attention to us or not.

“What the fuck is wrong with you people?” I demand. “Your child is missing, and you don’t even care?”

Mr. Simpson rapidly shakes his head, and Spike grabs my arm to tug me back into my chair.

“We do want to find Violet,” Mr. Simpson insists. “We really do. But first, we need another problem dealt with.”

I narrow my eyes with suspicion. “What could be more important than finding her?”

Her mother dabs at her eyes. “Making sure it’s safe enough for her to come home.”

*Wait... what?*

“Explain,” Spike demands.

Her eyes well with tears, and her shoulders rise quickly as if she’s sniffing. “Her fiancé, Brad, has been thre—”

I pound my fists onto the table. “He’s not her goddamn fiancé. Violet’s already married.”

“And there goes any chance we had at subterfuge,” Abyss mutters.

“M-m-married?” Mrs. Simpson asks. “You know our daughter? You know Violet?”

“Before we tell you what we know, you’re gonna need to talk to us about that douchebag she was engaged to,” Soul explains. “Your post said you needed help with one thing, and you come in here with a completely different agenda. Forgive us if we’re not jumping at the chance to serve you.”

“You see, the man our daughter was engaged to is a violent psychopath. He insinuated himself into our lives, our church, and put on a very good show,” Mr. Simpson explains. “We are all too aware of how he’s treated Violet, but unfortunately, he’s blackmailing us to keep our mouths shut.”

I sit up a little straighter at this new bit of information, as do my brothers. Most might have the notion that a pastor and his wife would have nothing that could be used against him, but we know better.



*Oh, do we fucking know better.*

“Blackmailing you how?” I ask. “What have you done?”

Mr. Simpson bristles. “What makes you think we’ve done anything wrong?”

I arch a brow. “Are you serious?” When he nods, I scowl. “For starters, a person couldn’t blackmail you if you’re squeaky clean. And then there’s the fact that you let your daughter suffer at the hands of pure evil.” I shrug. “Doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that the two of you are the very sinners you preach to your congregation about.”

The two of them exchange a look, and my hackles rise. There was a lot of information in that one look. Way more than I think they realize.

*Pissing off the Grim Reaper is not going to end well for them.*

“We, um...” Mr. Simpson straightens his already perfect tie. “We’ve built a very successful church over the years, and Brad wants a piece of it.

“Try again.”

Mrs. Simpson’s shoulders slump. “We’ve been stealing money from our parishioners in order to maintain our lavish lifestyle,” she blurts.

“Ruth,” Violet’s father admonishes. “We agreed never to speak of that.”

“And our daughter is missing, George,” she retorts. “Until today, we weren’t even sure she was still alive.”

I snap my fingers to get their attention. “Focus,” I order.

“Right.” Mr. Simpson nods. “Brad somehow found out what we were doing, and he’s using it to control our every move.”

“In other words, your secret is more important than your daughter’s life,” Fort says.

“No, no, you don’t understand.” Ruth smiles sadly. “We were doing this to give her the life she deserved.”

“Bullshit,” I sign. “I get that you’re both too busy telling yourselves what you must to feel better about your gluttonous ways, but at what expense? Because Violet didn’t get a better life because of it.”

“Until she married you, that is,” Abyss tacks on.

I glare at him. “Shut it.”

“You’re Violet’s husband?” Mr. Simpson asks, his eyes narrow.

I square my shoulders. “Is that a problem?”

Ruth rests her hand on top of George’s and shakes her head. “No, no problem. Why would that be a problem?”

“I’m not exactly who I imagine you wanted for Violet.”

“Are you a good man?” she asks.

“He’s the best,” Soul responds for me. “And he won’t try to kill her.”

“Look, we just want help putting a stop to Brad’s reign of terror,” Mr. Simpson says. “Is that something you can do?”

“Of course, it is,” Spike says. “But give us one good reason why we shouldn’t take you out and then go after him alone?”

Mrs. Simpson levels her gaze on me. “Because we’re Violet’s parents.”

“I’ve killed people who were far more important than you,” I admit.

Their eyes widen, but neither of them comments.

“If we help you take down Brad, you’re going to have to play your part,” Soul tells them. “Can you do that? Can you lie to him and make him believe that you’re still on his side?”

“We’ve been lying to our followers for years,” Mr. Simpson says. “I think we can handle it.”

Over the next hour, we come up with a plan. I don’t know if we can trust my wife’s parents, but at the moment, we don’t

have a choice. Jez and Fort haven't been able to come up with shit on Brad, which tells me he's smarter than we realize.

*Or he's got his own dark web crew helping him out.*

Once the details are worked out, we all stand.

"Would we be able to see Violet?" Mrs. Simpson asks as she threads her arm through her husband's. "We miss her terribly and would love to speak to her."

A growl barrels up the back of my throat. "Absolutely fucking not."

Soul presses his arm to my chest as if to say, 'back off'. "Seeing Violet right now isn't wise," he says to them. "Brad will clearly go to any lengths to get his hands on her, and if he finds out you've been in contact with her, that puts you and her in danger. He needs to believe you're still cooperating with him. Besides, the less Violet knows the better. She's been through enough shit already, don't ya think?"

Mr. Simpson nods curtly, but frowns. "I don't like it, but I do understand."

Too bad if they didn't because they'd get within a thousand feet of their daughter over my goddamn dead body.

# CHAPTER 26

# VIOLET

“WHAT DOES EVERYONE WANT TO DO TONIGHT?” CECE ASKS all of us.

Grim deposited me at the clubhouse bar with Cece, Heather, and Apple before joining Soul and his brothers. A couple of prospects are manning the bar while we try and figure out how to keep ourselves occupied.

“We can watch a movie,” Apple suggests.

“Boring.” Cece points toward the sound system. “I have an idea though.”

“Yes!” Heather cries.

Apple shakes her head. “No, no, no. Come on... There has to be something else we can do.”

“Nope, this will be fun,” Cece insists.

Totally clueless, I ask, “What are we doing?”

“Karaoke,” Heather answers.

I might be shy, but I can sing. I don’t know if I’m very good, but I always sang in the church choir growing up. “Sounds fun. Who’s going first?”

“Apple!” Heather and Cece scream at the same time.

Heather hands Apple a microphone as music fills the room. As she sings, her voice is familiar, but I can’t place it. When she starts the second song, *Malicious Intentions*, I’m stunned.

*It can't be. No freaking way!*

We all cheer and applaud when she lays down the microphone and takes a slight bow.

Apple saunters back to our group, and I squeal. “Ohmigosh!! You're Apple Caldwell!”

Apple cocks her head to the side. “I thought you knew.”

“I had no idea... I mean, how many Apples are there, really? Oh, wow! It's you!”

The globes of Apple's cheeks redden. “Did you really not know?”

“Not at all. I thought you were Apple Grandon.”

“I am. I took Malice's last name,” she explains. “Most people still recognize me, but I really thought it would help me live a normal life incognito.”

“I'm sorry I didn't put two and two together.”

She offers me a small smile, but it doesn't reach her eyes. “You've had a lot going on.”

I put my hand out. “I'm Violet Simpson and a huge fan, pleasure to meet you.”

She takes my hand and pulls me into a hug. “Pleasure is all mine.”

“Awe, isn't that so sweet,” Cece coos as she and Heather dab their eyes dramatically. Our moment is ruined by a loud group of women whom I've never met strutting into the room without a care in the world. A couple of them wave, but the one in the middle narrows her gaze on me and scowls.

“Oh, lovely.” Heather turns toward the bar and orders a shot of whiskey.

“Who are they?” I whisper and try not to stare at the scantily dressed women.

Cece rolls her eyes. “Bunnies.”

“Bunnies? They're not dressed like bunnies.”

She snickers, and Apple jumps into the conversation. “Not that kind of bunny. They’re here to service the single men.”

Blinking rapidly, my brain tries to latch on to what Apple is telling me. My mouth pops open, but no sound comes out.

“I think you broke her,” Cece teases.

Once my brain starts firing on all cylinders again, I whisper to Apple. “Prostitutes?”

Apple shakes her head, giggling. “No, not prostitutes. They fuck the single guys and are allowed to stay here. Their rooms are on the other side of the clubhouse.” She points down a hall I haven’t explored yet. “I think Soul warned them to stay away while you were here, at least until Grim told you about them. I’m guessing by your reaction he didn’t do that.”

My eyes narrow. “No, he most certainly did not.” I sigh. “Do they only sleep with the single guys? Do they really enjoy it that much? They aren’t forced, are they?” I rapid-fire questions at her.

“Who the fuck are you?” The one with blonde hair that obviously came from a box steps forward.

“V-V-Violet,” I stutter.

“Well, V-V-Violet,” she mocks. “I’m Candy, and we’re the main entertainment around here. And to answer your questions, we really enjoy fucking the hell out of these sexy ass men. As for sleeping with only the single guys, I don’t discriminate.”

“If you value your life, you won’t be fucking any of the married men either,” Heather sneers.

Cece chuckles. “We don’t have to worry about our men. They don’t want their dicks chopped off.”

As soon as Candy approached us, the women she was with put distance between themselves and her. They’re currently talking to Justin at the bar, casting glances over their shoulders with worried expressions on their faces.

Candy ignores Cece and Heather. “Soul and Malice are taken, but there are plenty of other beds to warm,” she says

slyly. “Stay the fuck away from Grim. He’s mine, and your little innocent girl routine won’t work on him.”

*Oh no, she didn’t!*

I puff out my chest, purse my lips, and draw out a long whistle. “Yeah, that’s not going to work for me.”

*Where the heck did this Violet come from?*

Candy puts her hands on her hips. “Excuse me?”

I wave my hand in her face showing off the gold band. “I’m Grim’s wife,” I say smugly.

Candy’s eyes shoot daggers at me, and if looks could kill, I’d be dead. “Grim isn’t married.”

“He is now,” Heather interjects.

“Doesn’t matter.” A small evil smile spreads across Candy’s face. “Eventually, he’ll get tired of playing with Virgin Mary and beg me to ride his cock just the way he likes it. After all, we all know missionary isn’t in Grim’s vocabulary.”

My chest deflates, and all the confidence I had disappeared.

*Grim slept with her? There’s no way I can compete. He’ll probably seek her out tonight.*

“You bitch!” Cece scrambles after Candy, but Mark hooks his arm around her waist.

“Cece, please,” Mark pleads. “Soul will kill me if you get into a fight.”

“What?” Candy tosses her hair over her shoulder. “She can’t fucking touch me.”

Mark passes Cece, who’s still fighting to get free, over to Asher. The other two women who walked in with Candy attempt to pull her toward the pool tables. They don’t get far before Mark reaches out for Candy and shakes her. He doesn’t hurt her, but her bully routine fades fast, and her eyes widen in surprise.



“Cece is the fucking queen,” he snarls. “You’ll do good to remember that. Now fucking apologize to her and to Violet before I call Soul or Grim.”

Candy trembles, and she bows her head. “Sorry.”

Her apology isn’t sincere, but it’s probably the best we’re going to get.

“Stay the fuck away from us,” Cece growls. “Next time, the prospects won’t save your ass.”

She nods and scurries away with the other two bunnies.

“Don’t listen to her, Violet,” Apple encourages. “She’s jealous that you’re an ‘ol lady.”

“I’m not old.”

Apple shakes her head. “Not old... ‘ol. It’s a term of endearment. Grim is dedicated to you and will do anything for you. You’re off limits to any other man, and he’s off limits to any other woman. In their world, being an ‘ol lady is even more sacred than being married.”

“Oh.” I had no idea. I really need to learn the ins and outs of a motorcycle club. There’s so much I don’t know or understand.

Still, the seed has been planted. Grim and I aren’t having sex which means he’s probably having sex with someone. His comments when he caught me holding the dildo solidify that he’s a man who knows what he wants. And like a stupid little girl, I blushed and changed the subject because I’m too embarrassed to talk about sex with my own husband.

I drag Cece and Apple to the bar with me. “Can I have a margarita please?” I ask Justin.

Apple’s head swings to me. “Violet, you can’t drink. You’re still on pain medication.”

“I haven’t had any since last night,” I refute. “I’ll be fine.”

Cece and Apple share a look, but neither argue with me. Asher has a pained expression on his face like he doesn’t

know what to do. Thankfully, Cece makes the decision for him.

“You heard the lady. Margaritas all around and extra shots of tequila.” She winks at me.

As soon as we all have our drinks, we put the nasty Candy business behind us and head back toward the television. Cece grabs the microphone and belts out a rendition of *It's My Party*. Laughing at her antics earns us all glares from Candy, but we ignore her.

Eventually, she's roped into playing a game of pool with Nikki and Bunny. According to Heather, they're both sweet girls who never cause drama. Candy is new, and if she doesn't learn her place, Cece will have her thrown out on her ass.

Cece waves Asher over every once in a while to refill our glasses. I'm a slow drinker so I've only had a couple. My body sways with the music, and the heaviness in my chest has left. Feeling light, I take the microphone from Heather after she sings *Before He Cheats*. I whisper in Apple's ear, and she claps enthusiastically before finding the song I requested.

My eyes drift closed, and I let the melody flow through me. I lift up the microphone and sing in sync with Rachel Patton's *Fight Song*. The common room is quiet when I finish. I peek through my lashes, and stunned expressions stare back at me. I set the microphone down as applause and cheers erupt all around me.

Apple grabs my hand. “I had no idea you could sing like that.”

I tuck a stray hair behind my ear. “I've been singing in the church choir since I was five.”

“Wow, Violet.” Asher carries another round of drinks over to us. “That was great.”

I dip my head while rocking back and forth on my feet. “Who's next?”

“No one can possibly top that,” Cece says. “But I'll try.”

“Oh no,” Heather groans.

“What’s wrong?” I ask, confused.

“You’ll see.”

*Ice Ice Baby* fills the air, and I swear there’s nothing more comical than watching Cece rap. She waves us all up to join her, and we spend the rest of the evening joking, dancing, and singing.

Of course, the more I drink, the more off-key I get. The margaritas give me liquid courage, and at some point, I start asking for shots. I lose track of how many I do. My movements are sluggish, but I’m still standing.

A sharp cry has us all stopping and looking around for its source.

“Shit.” Cece grabs the baby monitor. “Harper’s awake. I think she’s teething. I gotta go. Later, bitches.” She flips us off as she runs out of the room.

“I’m calling it a night too,” Apple announces. “Mark and I have to be at the studio early to record a new song. Violet, you should come over sometime. I’d love to record you.”

“Suuure thang,” I salute, not recognizing my own voice. “That’s fun time it’d be.”

Apple laughs, but her eyebrows are pinched. “Maybe I shouldn’t leave you until Grim gets back.”

“I’ve got her.” Heather puts her arm around my waist and holds me up. “I’m waiting for Frenzy anyway. She can keep me company until the men are back.”

“Okay, well ‘night ladies.” Apple blows kisses our way.

“C’mon, drunkie.” Heather pulls me toward the bar. “Sit down.”

It takes Asher and Heather to get me up onto a bar stool, and once I’m steady, Heather asks Asher to get me some water.

“Drink up.” Asher uncaps a bottle of water before handing it to me. I gulp it down greedily.

“Asher, watch her for a minute,” Heather instructs. “I’m gonna run to the bathroom.”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” I pout.

“Yeah, you do.” She laughs as she walks away.

I sip on my water while Asher collects our dirty cups by the karaoke machine.

“Well, well, well. All alone, little girl?” a nasally voice says behind me.

I whirl around but have to grab onto the bar stool beside me to keep from falling. My vision is blurry, but once the room stops spinning, I notice Candy standing there.

“What do you want?”

“Grim doesn’t do good girls,” she says haughtily. “He wants a real woman who can take everything he gives. He likes his girls dirty and bad.”

“How do you know?” I don’t know what possesses me to ask, but I need to know the truth, no matter how much it hurts.

“Because I’ve fucked him more times than I can count.”

Unable to prevent it, whether from the alcohol or anger, I double over. Falling off the chair, I catch myself before I nosedive to the ground. As I pull myself back up and lean against the bar, I’m laughing so hard my stomach hurts.

“You fucking bitch!” Candy screams.

She pulls her arm back, but I’m too drunk to block her attack. My head whips around from the force of her blow, and I crash to the floor. Before I can push myself to my feet, a roar vibrates through the room.

# CHAPTER 27

# GRIM

HANDS GRAB FOR ME AS I LUNGE TOWARD CANDY. WHEN WE stepped off the elevator in the common room, it was just in time to see the club bunny strike my ol' lady.

“Get off me!” I roar, unable to sign or even think about it with the rage burning through my system.

Violet's eyes fly to mine from her position on the floor, shock mixing with the pain Candy's caused her.

My brothers are able to slow me down, so I see Violet rise to her feet by grabbing the stool and pulling herself up. Candy, despite my outraged shout, grabs her by the neck of her shirt and tries to throw her back to the floor.

That's all it takes for me to be released, and I rush to Violet's side. Asher launches himself over the bar to take care of Candy, but Violet grabs her ankle before he can get to the bitch.

Candy bangs her chin on the floor, and my wife shakes away from me to crawl toward her. I can't see her face, so I don't know if she says anything, but Candy's eyes widen as blood seeps from a gash.

Frozen, mesmerized by the display of fury, I sit back and watch the show. Unfortunately, Soul grabs Violet and lifts her up while Asher drags Candy several feet away.

“Get her the fuck out of here,” Soul orders the prospect. “I swear on all that's unholy, you crazy bitch, you'll pay if you ever set foot near this club or any of its family again.” He

turns to Fort, who's standing a few feet away. "You've got an hour to scrub her from the system."

Fort nods before heading out of the common room, and Soul faces Violet.

"You okay?" he asks her.

She gingerly touches her cheek, and her shoulders slump. "I just got rid of bruises, and that bitch had to give me more."

Violet turns to face me, and she wobbles to the point where Soul has to hold her upright. I close the distance between us and shove Soul away so I can take his place.

"How much have you had to drink tonight, Sprite?" I ask, doing my best not to chuckle at her obvious inebriation.

My cock is rock hard from the sight of her trying to take on Candy, and I shift to adjust myself as best I can.

She frowns. "Some."

"Okay, time to get you to bed."

I lift her into my arms, and in her current state, she curls into my chest. Out of habit, I start toward the medical wing, but quickly change course and head to my room. We're married now, and it's about time she officially moves in with me.

Violet is so tiny that when I reach my door, it's easy to settle my hand on the sensor so it opens. Once inside, it slides closed behind us, and I move toward the bathroom.

After meeting with my in-laws, the need to wash the insanity off me, and it wouldn't hurt to clean the smell of booze from her.

When I set her down on the closed toilet seat, she lifts her eyes to mine and smiles sadly.

"You really like her, don't you?"

Confused, I narrow my eyes. "Who?"

"Candy."

"That cunt?"

Violet wrinkles her nose at my choice of words. “I bet she does all the things you like. She even said so.”

Wishing I’d have let the Grim Reaper out to play and handle the club bunny, I crouch down so I’m more at eye level with Violet. She tries to look away, but I grip her chin and force her to face me.

“Candy was just spouting off at the mouth because she’s jealous of you.”

Her eyes widen, and she shakes her head. “Why would she be jealous of me? I’m a boring nobody, as she so kindly pointed out.”

Annoyance rears its ugly head. “You are not a fucking nobody, Violet. You’re perfect and all mine.”

“But you’ll seek her out,” she insists. “Why wouldn’t you when I’m not giving you what you need?”

“All I need is you, dammit.”

Knowing I’m not going to get through to her while she’s drunk, I straighten and take off my shirt. The quicker I shower, the quicker I can get her to bed so she can sleep off this funk.

“What are you doing?”

“We’re getting in that shower,” I sign and then point to the tiled stall. “And then we’re going to bed.”

She doesn’t argue or fight me when I reach down to grip the hem of her shirt and pull it over her head. As much as I want to strip her naked, I decide against it because I don’t want to scare her.

*And she’s drunk.*

After I’ve divested her of everything but her panties and bra, I turn the shower on and wait for the water to heat while I take off the rest of my clothes. When the water is warm, I lift Violet back into my arms and step under the spray before setting her back on her feet.

I gently wash her face, careful of the new forming bruise, and silently vow to hunt Candy down and purge her for doing



this to my ol' lady. No one hurts my family and gets away with it.

The entire time we're in the shower, Violet avoids my gaze, but it doesn't matter. I'm on the ragged edge as it is, and if I see the desire I know is lurking in her eyes, I'm not sure I'll be able to stop myself from showing her exactly what she does to me.

Assured that we're both clean, I lift her out of the shower before grabbing a towel to wrap around my waist. Next, I dry her off and then lead her into the bedroom where I take a pair of sweats and a t-shirt out of my dresser and hand them to her.

"I can help you change if you want."

She shakes her head. "I can do it."

A minute later, she's standing next to the bed, my clothes practically drowning her. She shifts nervously from one foot to the other, and it's adorable.

*How the fuck did I get so lucky?*

I stride toward her, and she lowers her head to stare at the floor. Rather than touch her, I reach around to tug the blanket down.

"Get in," I instruct.

Violet hesitates for a moment, but then she turns and scrambles onto the bed. She settles on her side with her back to me, and I heave a sigh. After climbing in behind her, I urge her to roll over and face me.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Bullshit."

She swallows hard. "You can go to Candy if you want."

I stiffen.

*Why is she so fixated on this? What the fuck did Candy say to her?*

"Violet, I need you to understand something, okay?"

My wife nods.

“I’m only going to say this once, and then I’ll spend the rest of my life proving it.” I brush my hair over my shoulder before continuing. “I have never, nor will I ever, fuck Candy. Not only that, but I won’t touch any woman but you for the rest of my life. We’re married. I don’t cheat. End of story.”

“But she sa—”

I settle a hand over her mouth and shake my head. When I feel her lips close against my palm, I remove it.

“I don’t give a rat’s ass what she said,” I insist. “What I care about is what I say, what you believe. I will never cheat. You’re my wife, ‘til death do us part.”

Her eyes glaze over, and she twists to face the other side of the bed. Rather than trying to flip her back around, I wrap my arm around her waist and pull her against me. She might want to run from me, but I refuse to let her.

We’re in this life together... forever.

# CHAPTER 28

**VIOLET**

## FOUR WEEKS LATER...

“READY?”

Abyss is examining the cast on my arm. He’s holding a small electric saw, waiting on my approval to get started.

“Absolutely!” I grin. “I can’t wait to use my arm again. I mean, I know I could use it, but it’s harder when it’s in a cast.”

*Shut up, Violet!*

I can’t contain my excitement as Abyss turns on the saw and carefully starts grinding into the plaster. After a few seconds, the saw stops.

“Um... Violet, you need to sit still,” Abyss says with a grin.

I immediately stop squirming and duck my head. “Sorry.”

“No big deal, sweetheart. I’d be excited, too.” Abyss pats my knee. “I don’t think the big guy would like it if I nicked you with the blade though.”

Grim growls, and Abyss snickers. I chuckle but don’t move an inch. Grim’s just as protective today as he was on day one.

A lot has happened in the past few weeks. After we went to my apartment, I was able to get my computer and switch to online classes. I need to catch up on a lot of schoolwork, but since I have nothing else going on, it gives me something to devote my time to.

As for our relationship... We spend all our time together when Grim's not working or engaged in 'club business'. We hang out with other members of the club too, but he insists we eat dinner alone as often as we can. I love it because we've had a lot of time to get to know each other better.

*Well, he's gotten to know me.*

Every time I ask him about his parents or childhood, he clams up tight. Grim is good at changing the subject and shifting the focus back to me. I don't mind too much because I had a pretty good childhood. Everything was as it should be until my father became a televised pastor, and I agreed to that date with Brad. Then my world twisted into something I no longer recognized.

The saw comes to a grinding halt. Abyss grabs the forceps from the tray and pries the cast open. He gingerly lifts my arm out of it and sets it on my thigh.

"Okay, Violet. Lift your arm up and slowly twist your wrist in a circular motion," he instructs as he demonstrates with his own wrist. He moves it around clockwise and then stops and rotates it counterclockwise. "How does that feel? Any soreness?"

"No soreness, but it feels weird," I admit.

"It will for a while. Take it easy and let me know if you feel any pain."

"I can't wait to use my arm without that stupid thing."

Abyss chuckles. "No, more restrictions. At least now you two won't have to be careful when you're fucking like rabbits." He winks at Grim. "You can break out the handcuffs now."

*Handcuffs? Why would Grim want handcuffs?*

Realization dawns on me, and my heartbeat thumps in my ears. A sharp intake of breath catches my attention, and I peek through my lashes to stare into Grim's ice-blue eyes. I grip the sheet on the gurney with clammy hands, and blood rushes to my cheeks. His gaze is locked on mine, his nostrils flaring. His arm darts out and smacks Abyss upside the head.

“Ow!” Abyss rubs the back of his head. “What the fuck, man?”

Grim doesn't respond to Abyss's question but crosses his arm over his chest with his brow raised.

“Fifty dollars,” I automatically respond and slap my hand over my mouth.

Grim howls with laughter, and Abyss's mouth drops open. Once Grim gains his composure, he addresses me.

“Thanks for defending my honor, Sprite, but only members can issue a fine.” He winks at me and turns to Abyss. “Fifty dollars and another fifty for embarrassing my wife.”

*Damn, my alabaster skin.*

Hopping off the gurney, I take Grim's hand and lead him toward the door. “Uh... Thanks, Abyss,” I call over my shoulder.

Once we've cleared the medical ward, Grim tugs me to a stop. I raise my brow and wait. He smiles sheepishly as he pulls his hair back in a ponytail. My mouth waters, but I keep my hands firmly by my sides and resist the urge to reach out and wrap my arms around his neck.

“Do you have any plans today?” he asks once he's done.

I raise my now unconfined arm up. “Not really. Think I might test out my newfound freedom.”

Grim smirks, and once again, I wish the ground would swallow me up. I'm not used to double entendres, but living in a biker's clubhouse has been very educational. Anything innocent can be perceived as a reference to sex.

“How about a ride?”

I shrug. “Sure.”

*It'll be nice to get out of here for a while.*

He looks me up and down. “Go put on a long-sleeved shirt and some boots. I'll meet you in the garage.”

It's a strange request, but I hustle to our room, slip into a different shirt, and pull on my boots. I take the elevator to the garage, the whole time fidgeting with my hands. I'm a ball of nervous energy. Now that I'm healed, Grim might be ready to go our separate ways.

*He swore he'd never cheat. Doesn't mean he couldn't have changed his mind.*

Despite being married, neither of us has tried to take our relationship past the friend stage. There've been some innocent touches here and there and a few pecks on the mouth but nothing more. And even though Candy's gone, her words still haunt me. I head to Grim's truck, but he's not standing there so I look around and spot him leaning up against his bike typing on his cell. Not wanting to startle him, I slowly approach, but it doesn't matter. As if there's an invisible thread tying us together to let us know when the other is near, Grim's head snaps up, and the corner of his mouth lifts.

He hands me a leather jacket that I slip over my arms. The oil and leather scent invades my nose, and I breathe it in.

"Ready?" he asks.

I nod and spin on my heel to return to the truck. Suddenly, I'm lifted off my feet and placed on the seat of Grim's motorcycle.

I shake my head vigorously. "No, no, nope."

Grim raises a brow and frowns. "I want to take you for a ride."

I swallow the lump in my throat and try to climb off the bike. Grim plants his hand firmly on my thigh and raises my chin.

"I've never been on a motorcycle before," I admit.

He sighs and moves his hands. "I won't let anything happen. You'll fucking love it, trust me."

I *do* trust him, but riding fast on a death machine doesn't sound appealing. And at the same time, he's done so much for me that I want to do something for him.



“Fine but go slow.”

His eyes light up, and he begins showing me everything that I need to do. Once he runs through the parts of the Harley, where to put my feet, and how to get his attention if I want to stop, he straps a helmet on my head.

Grim swings his leg over to straddle the seat in front of me. Once he's situated, I limply place my arms around his waist as he instructed. He shakes his head and grips both of my arms and tightens them around his ripped stomach, causing me to scoot forward and plaster my chest to his back. I take a few deep breaths and count to five.

*You can do this! Grim won't let anything happen to you.*

Grim starts the bike, and my body shakes from the vibrations. He lifts his feet up and slowly rides out of the garage. I hold on so tight that it's entirely possible I could squeeze him to death. Grim pats my hands reassuringly and slightly increases the speed.

After a few minutes, the tension in my back eases, and I start to enjoy the ride. Unhooking my fingers, I tap his thigh, and we go a little faster. It's freeing being out on the open road with Grim. We ride around for quite a while before he turns off the main road to a secluded area around some boulders and brings the bike to a stop.

Climbing off the motorcycle, my legs wobble as if they are made of Jell-o. I tip forward and grab Grim's forearms for support.

I let go once I'm confident I won't fall. “Whoa.”

“It takes some getting used to.” Grim moves around me to grab a blanket out of his saddlebags and lays it out on the ground.

After we get situated, he hands me a sandwich and a bottle of water, which I greedily drink down.

I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand. “You were right, that was fun.”

He grins. “Glad you liked it.”

We sit in silence as we eat our food. I take time to enjoy the beauty of the desert surrounding us. The sun has lowered and has a serene hue about it. It's calming and quiet. Grim lifts his hands as if he's about to say something but lowers them quickly. I shift my eyes away and doubts creep in.

*Did he bring me out here to tell me this isn't working for him anymore?*

Suddenly, the sandwich doesn't taste so good. Knots form in my stomach as I watch Grim focus on the scenery around us. He doesn't look at me, and it becomes clear what I have to do.

*I have to release him from this obligation.*

I poke his arm, and his eyes flash to mine. Sighing, I pick up my hands. A tiny crack settles in my heart, but I school my features and push forward.

"I can't do this to you anymore," I begin. "I think it's best if I find another place to stay."

His eyes darken. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Unable to do this while looking him in the eyes, I dip my head. I can't let him see me crumble, or he'll want to keep up the charade. It's gone on long enough. Time to pull up my big girl pants and set him free. I know *I* can't divorce him, but he's not bound to the church.

An idea starts to form, a way to let him off the hook.

"You're gorgeous, Grim. You have so much to offer. I'm just me... nothing exciting." Blinking back the tears that threaten to spill over, I continue. "We've been married for over a month now, and it's obvious you're only wanting friendship. It's not fair to you to keep you locked in a marriage because you feel sorry for me. We never consummated the marriage so really, it would be an annulment."

The world comes to a grinding halt. I tilt my head back, expecting him to find him relieved. Instead, he's as still as a statue, his teeth clenched.

After several tense minutes, he springs to his feet, yanking me up with him. Grim stuffs the blanket back into his saddle bags and puts the helmet securely on my head.

*I guess we're done talking.*

# CHAPTER 29

# GRIM

*YOU'RE GORGEOUS, GRIM.*

*We never consummated the marriage so really, it would be an annulment.*

Violet's words plague my thoughts the entire ride back to the clubhouse. Her small arms are wrapped around me tightly, no doubt out of fear that she'll fall off the back of my Harley because of how fast I'm going.

*Too bad. I love having her this close.*

For a month now, I've bided my time. It's taken many cold showers and sleepless nights, but I've managed to keep my hands to myself for the most part. And that ends today.

If Violet seriously thinks I don't want her, or worse, that I want an easy way out of this marriage, I'm doing something wrong. It's not that surprising, considering I didn't have the best role models growing up, but I have watched my brothers with their ol' ladies, and that should've been more than enough.

As soon as I park my bike in the garage, I'm on my feet in a flash and lifting her to throw her over my shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

*A very sexy sack of potatoes.*

My dick strains against my jeans, begging to be buried in her pussy. I carry her to the elevator, ignore her fists hammering against my back as we ride down to the common room, and shove past anyone who dares to get in my way.

Once we're in our room, I toss her onto the bed, enjoying the way her tight little body bounces slightly. Her nostrils flare as she scoots away from me. I'd worry if I saw fear in her eyes, but all I observe is a desire as intense as what I'm feeling.

"What are you doing?"

I smirk. "Proving to you just how fucked up your suggestion is."

Reaching out, I grab her ankles and tug her toward me. Then I slide my hands up her legs, marveling at the tremble my touch elicits. It's been way too long since I've been with a woman, and I'm not the least bit upset that Violet's who gets to break my dry spell.

She might think she's not good enough, but I sure as fuck do.

"Grim, I'm not..." She clamps her mouth shut, and I nod for her to continue. "I'm a virgin."

That fact shouldn't surprise me, but it does. Not many people make it to her age untouched. And women as gorgeous as she is certainly don't lack opportunity.

I grin. "Does that mean mine is the only cock you'll ever have?"

Her cheeks flush as she shrugs, causing me to growl.

"You plan on having another man's dick inside you?"

"No, of course not."

"Then the appropriate response would've been 'Yes, Grim, yours is the only cock I'll ever have'."

"I can't say that," she replies.

"Sure, you can." I grab her hands and put them in position to sign. "Repeat after me." She nods. "Yes."

"Yes."

"Grim."

"Grim."

“Yours is the only...”

“Yours is the only...”

“Cock I’ll ever have.”

Violet hesitates for a moment before mimicking my movements.

“Cock I’ll ever have.”

“See, that wasn’t so hard.”

“It’s embarrassing.”

I tilt my head and study her. “Why?”

“Because I’ve never...” She swallows. “I don’t know what I’m doing, Grim.”

“That’s okay, Sprite. I’ll teach you everything you need to know.”

Before she can argue, I slide my hands under her shirt, up her abdomen, only to stop beneath her tits. Her body tenses, so I remain still, letting her adjust to me being so close. Once Violet relaxes, I palm her breasts and trail my fingers beneath the black lace.

Violet’s breath skates across my skin as she pants greedily at the sensation of her nipples being teased.

“Grim, I...”

I arch a brow.

“It’s too much.”

Shaking my head, I remove my hands from her body. “I promise you, it’s not.”

She sucks her bottom lip between her teeth, and my cock jerks in response.

“Do you want me to stop?” I ask.

“No.”

I grin. “Good.”

Ever so slowly, I begin to peel Violet's clothes off of her. She tries to cover her most private parts, but I move her hands out of the way and pin them above her head. She squirms beneath me, spurring me on, and only when she stills do I release her so I can strip.

Violet's eyes dart to my thick shaft, and her mouth forms a perfect 'O'. I can't help but wonder if she's thinking about that dildo I caught her with and comparing its size to mine.

*I've got that stupid toy beat.*

I straddle her hips, letting my bare ass rest on her thighs without putting any actual weight on her. As I lean down to capture her lips, her eyes widen, but she immediately melts against me.

She tastes like sin, and kisses like an angel. If this is what inexperience feels like, I'm all in, I'm not so sure I should corrupt her.

My cock jerks at the thought, and I know I'm going to corrupt the hell out of my innocent Sprite.

I slip my tongue past the seam of her lips and drag my fingertips along her side. She wiggles, and the vibration of her moan fuels the fire within me. Several minutes pass before I break the kiss and move my mouth to her collarbone.

Licking a path across her skin, I work my way down until I'm able to suck a nipple between my lips. I swirl my tongue around the taut bud, and Violet writhes.

*Fucking hell, she's delicious.*

Not for the first time, I wish I could hear her. Never in my life have I wanted to change the way I was born as much as I do with Violet.

She slides her hands through my hair, gripping tight when I begin to move further down. She's no match for my strength though. If I thought she really wanted me to stop, I would, but the scent of her arousal fills my nostrils, telling me she wants this more than she knows.



Before I latch on to her clit, I straighten and tap her on the side, so she'll open her eyes and look at me.

“Do you trust me?”

She nods.

“I'm gonna make you love sinning.”

Without missing a beat, I lean down and take her clit into my mouth. Her hips buck, and I alternate between fast swipes and languid circles. It doesn't take long before she's quivering, and I slip a finger inside her pulsing pussy as she comes.

I work her until her body relaxes into the mattress, and only then do I remove my finger and release her swollen nub. Settling between her thighs, I reach between us and line my cock up with her entrance. When the tip touches her flesh, her eyes fly open, the lavender hue darkening.

Kissing her tenderly, I ease my way inside, and her tight channel clenches around me. I meet resistance and hesitate, hating that I'm going to have to hurt her to make her soar again. Before I break her barrier, I pull my head back and lock eyes with her, silently asking for permission.

As if she can read my mind, she bites her lip and nods.

I thrust forward, and Violet throws her head back as she tenses. Freezing, I remain painfully still until she relaxes, throbbing inside of her body. After what feels like a millennium, we both start to move.

Initially, Violet's awkward, but no less incredible. She finds her rhythm, matching it to mine, and we fuck in perfect synchronicity.

*For the love of all things unholy...*

My cock slides in and out of her, in and out, but I'm careful not to be too brutal with it being her first time. I want her to want me again, after all.

I'm so close to exploding that I slow down because there's no way I'm coming until she does again. I roll my hips as I thrust, making sure to graze her clit each time. She begins to

pulse around me, and then, with one simple movement, she alters my brain chemistry.

Violet grabs my hand and presses it to her throat. For a split-second, I think she wants me to choke her, but then she stares into my eyes and vibrations tickle my palm as she moans out her release. I might not be able to hear her ecstasy, but I can feel it, and that sends me flying over the edge and into the most intense oblivion.

Stars dance behind my tightly closed eyes, and I focus on the reverberations of her throat, which are sending tiny pinpricks of pleasure to each and every one of my nerve endings.

My breath catches, and Violet's body collapses as we float back down from our cloud of sin. So as not to crush her, I roll to the side and pull her along with me until she rests her head on my shoulder. There's no denying that I had *expectations* of how having sex with my wife would be, but I never expected *that*.

If that's the only time we're ever together, I'd still die a happy man just for having experienced it once.

Violet taps me on my pec, and I twist to face her.

"Is that how it always is?" she asks.

I chuckle and shake my head. "No, Sprite. It's definitely not. But with you, I have a feeling it will be."

She smiles sleepily. "Good."

# CHAPTER 30

# VIOLET

“MMM.” I SNUGGLE CLOSER TO GRIM’S WARMTH.

Gentle shaking stirs me fully awake. Basking in the flow of our lovemaking, I kiss his chest. I had no idea how strong our connection would be. The first orgasm I had, I saw stars. The second one was an out-of-body experience.

*I can’t wait to do that again... and again.*

I peek up to see a soft smile on Grim’s face as he watches me. Freeing my hands from my sides, I push back slightly so I can sign.

“That was amazing. Thank you.”

His eyes soften. “You never have to thank me for that.”

Grim was so gentle that the last brick fell from the wall I’d built around my heart. As scary as it might be, my heart is his. I think it’s been his since the moment he asked me to marry him, but I refused to admit it.

*I love him.*

Feeling brazen, I wiggle my brows and ask, “When do we get to do that again?”

Grim chuckles. “Whenever we want, although we should probably shower. But first...”

He rolls over top of me, keeping all his weight on his elbows, and devours my mouth. I open up to him, and our tongues duel for dominance. Something hard pokes me in the thigh, and Grim rests his forehead against mine.

He pushes off the mattress and stands, holding his hand out to help me to my feet. I link my fingers with his, taking a moment to admire his cock and all its glory.

*I still can't believe that thing fit.*

Grim waves his hands in front of my face. "My eyes are up here." He smirks.

My cheeks heat, but he doesn't say anything else. Grim leads me to the bathroom and turns on the shower. Once he feels it's warm enough, he settles his hand on the small of my back and urges me into the stall. He steps in behind me, and all a sudden, the huge shower feels very small.

I had sex with my husband, and now I have no idea what to do or how to act. Grim gently guides me under the spray before getting some shampoo and massaging it into my scalp. Once he rinses out the suds, he grabs the body soap and squirts some onto a washcloth. Slowly, he works down my body in circular motions, being especially careful between my legs. I appreciate it because I'm sore. But it's a good kind of sore.

After he has me all clean, he uses the removable shower head to rinse me off. He aims the stream of water at the juncture of my thighs, and I jump. Grim's eyes heat with lust, and he slides his free hand down my chest and tugs on my nipple. The sensation of the water pulsating on my clit and Grim's ministrations on my breast have me screaming out another orgasm. My legs shake which prompts him to abandon my chest and snake his arm around my waist. He pulls me closer and smashes his mouth to mine.

We break apart, both of us trying to catch our breath.

"Wow."

Grim washes his hair and reaches for the soap. Not wanting to be selfish, I take it and lather the washcloth. Mimicking Grim, I slowly work down his body in a circular motion. I take my time scrubbing his chest, and when I reach his waist, he grabs my wrist.

"I want to wash you," I tell him.

He releases me and lets me continue exploring. I bypass his cock and wash his legs and feet. Then I peek up at Grim, and his eyes are on me like a lion stalking its prey. When I finish his feet, I slowly rake my fingernails up his legs to his waist. I toss the washcloth in the corner and grab the soap again. He raises an eyebrow in question.

My finger skims the topside of his dick. It jumps under my touch, and I glance up at Grim, who nods, encouraging me to continue. I wrap my small hand around his length and slowly start stroking, drawing a hiss from him. The more I stroke, the longer it seems to get.

“You can squeeze harder.” Grim cups his hand around mine and squeezes.

I tighten my grip. “Like this?”

Grim’s hand slips from mine, and he tilts his head back with a groan.

I continue to slide my hands across his hard, silky flesh, making sure my movements are fluid. Grim’s breathing turns ragged, which spurs me on to move faster, and a moment later Grim erupts all over my hand.

Grim shudders and opens his eyes. “That was the best hand job I’ve ever had.”

I giggle. “Glad I could be of service.”

We quickly rewash ourselves before Grim turns the water off. He steps out of the shower first and tightly wraps a towel around his waist. Then he carefully dries me off with another one.

Satisfied that I’m as dry as I’m going to get, he leads me back out to his bedroom. No, *our* bedroom. He pulls on a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt while I shimmy into a pair of panties and a tank.

I reach for a pair of yoga pants, but Grim yanks them out of my hands. He lowers himself to the floor and helps me put them on. All the while, his fingers skim my flesh, and my core tightens.

Having him take care of me ignites a fire in my soul. I can't hold back anymore. I won't. I have to tell him how I feel.

Grim peers up at me and gives me that megawatt smile. My heart pitter-patters in my chest, and the words tumble freely from my mouth.

“I love you.”

# CHAPTER 31



# GRIM

*I LOVE YOU.*

*She loves me.*

Violet stares at me expectantly, no doubt waiting for me to say it back. I want to. I really fucking want to. But something in my soul stops me.

*Fear.*

Don't get me wrong... I've been half in love with her since the second I saw her on the TV screen and completely in love with her since the moment I rescued her from her apartment. But...

*What if she's only saying it because of what we just did or because she feels like she has to?*

I've seen too many women fancy themselves in love with a man simply because they slept together. Violet's my wife, and I want her to love me regardless of the physical shit. And then there's the fact that I watched my mom tell my dad she loved him, day after day, time after time, when she only stayed because she believed she had no choice.

When I fail to return the sentiment, she seems to shrink in on herself, the bright light in her eyes distinguished.

"It's okay," she begins. "Really. I, um..."

I grab her hand and tug her into my chest so I can guide her to the bed. After urging her to sit, I make myself comfortable by leaning against the headboard. Violet looks at me with anguish and embarrassment, and I lift my hands.

“Come here,” I instruct and then crook my finger.

Violet hesitates but scoots closer. “Seriously, Grim, if you don’t love me, it’s okay.”

Taking a deep breath, I shove down the words she wants to hear.

“I really haven’t told you anything about my childhood or life before you.”

Surprise registers in her expression. “No, you haven’t.”

Not knowing where to start, I dive deep. “I was born deaf. My mother loved me, but my father...” Hatred enters my heart. “He thought I was defective.”

“Defective?”

I point to my ears.

“That’s ridiculous,” she insists.

“I agree, but Craig Dunn was a hard man, and the fact that I was his son didn’t mean a damn thing to him.” Violet frowns but lowers her hands into her lap. “Anyway, they raised me in the Catholic faith, much like they were brought up. And they blindly followed the religion.”

“That’s called having faith,” she tells me. “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“Even when having that faith is at the expense of others?”

Violet sits back and scrunches her nose. “Well, I never really thought about it like that.”

I smile ruefully. “Most people don’t unless they’re forced to.”

“And you were forced to?”

“You could say that.”

“What happened?”

“A lot of the details aren’t my story to tell,” I reply honestly. If Malice wants anyone to know, he can divulge what Father Brine and Deacon Block did to him. As far as the rest... “When I was little, we joined a church, and some shit went

down. It resulted in Soul and Malice joining the military while I remained behind and started taking all my anger out on sinners of the world.”

“What does that even mean?”

“I’ll get there. But first, a little more about my parents. Around age four, my father insisted I get hearing aids. I was fitted for them, but the first time I heard sound, it freaked me the hell out. It was beyond my understanding, my comprehension. So, my mom never made me wear them.”

“I’m guessing your dad wasn’t happy about that.”

“That’s putting it mildly. He became enraged and mean. Every awful thing he felt about me, he took out on her. And she stayed because the church taught her that she was supposed to. ‘Til death do us part, and all that.” Her eyes cloud over, and I cup her cheek for a moment before continuing. “I’m happy with our vows, Violet. But you need to know all of this to understand me.”

“Okay.”

“Anyway, I was so happy to get out of that house, even though the circumstances that forced that to happen were horrific. I spent my time purging, while my mom remained at the violent end of my father’s fists.”

“Purging, as in eating disorder?”

I chuckle and glance down at myself. “Do I look like I have an eating disorder?”

She smiles shyly and tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. “Not at all.”

“Purging, as in killing,” I admit, carefully watching her reaction.

Her eyes become saucers, and she darts her gaze toward the door. I grab her arm before she can bolt from the bed.

“I don’t even know you,” she cries, setting sparks of anger to ignite.

“Yes, you do. I’m the man who saved your life. I’m the man you married. I’m the fucking man you love!” I take a deep breath and school my features. “I’ve never claimed to be someone I’m not so don’t pretend I’ve misled you.”

“But you were never one hundred percent honest, were you?”

I think about her words, try to see this from her perspective, and it galls me that she’s right. In an effort to protect her from the darkness inside of me, I’ve kept a lot hidden, buried so deep she’d never reach it.

“I’m sorry.” Two words that I rarely say make my fingers cramp. “I’m sorry I kept parts of myself from you. But I’m not sorry for doing what I thought was the right thing to protect you.”

Violet shakes her head. “Don’t split hairs, Grim. You lied.”

“I did. And I’ll probably do it again. But I swear to you, I will never lie about who I am or how I feel. I will never fucking lie about us.”

She stares at me for a moment, and I don’t know if she’s seeing me or the Grim Reaper. Not that it matters. We’re one and the same when it comes right down to it. Then she tilts her head, and my gut clenches.

“I remind you of your mom, don’t I?”

“Yes.”

“Do you love me?” she asks.

“I...”

“It’s an easy question, Grim. Do you love me? Yes or no?”

Not two minutes ago, I promised never to lie about how I feel, yet here I am, remaining silent, breaking that promise.

# CHAPTER 32

# VIOLET

*HE DOESN'T LOVE YOU.*

I need to get out of here.

“Why don't I go hang out at Jez's house?” I suggest.

Grim shakes his head, anguish etched on his face. My heart aches for the pain and torment he felt as a child. Watching your mother live through physical violence is not a burden any child should bear. I want to reach out to him, comfort him, but he's shut down.

The best thing for both of us right now is probably space. Well, *I* need space. I wanted him to open up, but I had no idea how deep the secrets he kept really were. Grim found me in the exact situation he tried to save his mom from. He couldn't save her, and I'm the do-over, Grim's second chance at redemption. I feel so stupid for confessing my love to him.

*He doesn't love me. All he sees is a victim of domestic abuse.*

I huff out a breath and try a different tactic. “It's claustrophobic sitting here all day, every day. I'm going stir crazy.”

Grim squares his jaw. “No, and not because I want to control you,” he tacks on when my eyes narrow.

“Then why not?”

“There are things you don't know.”

“Tell me.”

He dips his chin and sighs. “We met with your parents.”

I blink rapidly. “Who’s we? Why?” Standing, I start to pace.

Grim grabs my hand and tries to get me to sit back down, but I shake him off before waving my hand for him to continue.

“Me and some of my brothers.” I gasp in shock. “You know how your parents went to the dark web to find you?”

I nod. “Yeah.”

“Well, turns out they had ulterior motives.” I start to ask a question, but he presses a finger to my lips. “They needed a reason to reach out for help without drawing attention to themselves. It seems that your parents were looking to find someone to take out that fucker, Brad. Not only to save you, but to save themselves.”

My head spins.

*How did everything get so twisted?*

“I only stayed engaged to Brad to save them!” I shriek, no longer signing.

“Don’t.” Grim growls as he signs. “I don’t wanna see his fucking name cross your lips again.” His expression softens into a look of sympathy. “Your parents aren’t as squeaky clean as they want people to believe. They admitted that for years, they’ve been stealing money from your dad’s parishioners. Brad found out and blackmailed them for your hand in marriage. Once they figured out what a rotten bastard he truly is, you’d already disappeared. Your parents are using this distraction to take him out, and the club is working with them.” Grim pauses, watching me. “We’ve been searching but can’t find him. Your parents haven’t seen him either.”

I don’t speak. I *can’t*. On the outside, I’m calm, but on the inside, I’m churning with fury. My stomach somersaults as everything hits me like a freight train.

This past year has been one *fucking* lie after another.

First, Brad convinces me to go out on a date with him. I fall in love and accept his marriage proposal, only to find out I'm engaged to a raving lunatic. As if that isn't a bitter pill to swallow, I'm left for dead, and Mr. Hulk here rescues me. He nurses me back to health and marries me to save me from a fate worse than death.

Now, I find out my parents used me as a sacrificial lamb to save their own skin. Sure, they reached out to the club for help, but it was a long time *after* I pleaded with them to call off the engagement. I swore after Brad I wouldn't give my heart away so easily, if at all.

It was supposed to be a marriage of convenience, in name only, but Grim tore through my defenses. And unlike with Brad, the sting of his betrayal is worse than Brad's fist beating the shit out of me.

Unable to stay quiet any longer, I speak. "You met with my parents and have been working with them *behind* my back?" It feels wrong not to sign, but I can't make my hands cooperate.

Grim rakes his hands through his hair, and I want nothing more than to feel that connection with him again. It was as if our souls called to each other when we made love. No, not love. He doesn't love me, it was just another *fucking* lie. It was sex. Nothing more, nothing less.

I snatch my purse off the chair and slip on a pair of shoes. I glance at Grim one more time, but he's only staring at me like I'm about to crack. Hell, maybe I am. I want him to admit he doesn't love me, that he's only with me because I remind him of his mom.

Despite everything, I was the dumb one... again. I fell in love, and he didn't.

Those haunting ice-blue eyes bore into mine. and I turn away before I cave and seek his comfort. I look over my shoulder, making sure he can see my lips.

"I hope it was worth it."

I open the door and run.



“Stop!” Grim bellows. He’s using his voice, but I can’t let that deter me from my mission. I need to get out of here and think.

I barrel into the common room and run face-first into Thorn’s chest.

*Ow! That might leave a mark.*

He grabs my shoulders to steady me. “Where’s the fire, sweetheart?”

Rubbing my nose, I remember what Grim just confessed. They were all in on the deception. I’m sure they all got a good laugh about Grim marrying the poor preacher’s daughter when they found out his real motive.

*You remind him of his mom. You’re a charity case, someone he needed to save to feel vindicated.*

“Sorry, Thorn.” I peek around him and see the one person who can get me out of here. “Jez!” I call out just as Grim stomps into the room. I try to duck around Thorn, but Grim grabs my arm and twirls me around. “Let. Go. Of. Me.” I punctuate every word.

He immediately drops my arm. Everyone is staring at us, but I don’t care. I’m tired of always doing what’s right only to keep getting shit on.

Jez pops up next to me, her eyes darting back and forth between me and Grim. “What’s going on?”

“I need to get out of here. Can I come stay at your place?”

Grim’s eyes go round. “You can’t fucking leave.” His movements are jerky. “We need to finish talking.”

“The time to talk was weeks ago. I’m showing you the same courtesy you showed me.” I look over at Jez. “Please, Jez,” I beg.

“I don’t know what the hell is going on, but yeah. Meet me in the garage. Dodge Charger, matte black, purple racing stripes,” she says and tosses me the keys.

Grim goes to grab me again, but Jez puts her hand on his chest to stop him.

*Doesn't feel so good having the rug ripped out from under you, does it?*

“No, Grim. Leave her alone.” I see Jez sign as I wait for the elevator. “Don't worry, I got this. I won't fail her like I did your mom.”

*What the hell?*

# CHAPTER 33

# GRIM

“WHAT THE FUCK DID SHE MEAN, BROTHER?”

As Jez walked away, Soul moved in front of me, confusion and animosity lighting his glare. I don't know if Jez intended for anyone else to see her sign, but her twin did, and now I've gotta figure out how to deal with it.

“Grim, start explaining,” Soul demands when I don't reply.

The other brothers in the room pick up on his angst and begin to form a line of solidarity behind him.

“Maybe we should go to the sanctuary,” I suggest.

I don't wait for him to call church before I'm storming out of the room. Based on the shadows on the wall, they're all following me. When I reach the sanctuary, I stride in and take my seat.

As the others file in, one by one they stand behind their chairs as if needing to be ready to strike. I rise to my feet and follow suit.

*I'll be damned if I'm caught off guard by anyone... even if that someone is a brother.*

“What did Jez mean when she won't fail Violet like she did your mom?” Soul asks, and Malice signs for him.

Before I can respond, Rogue angrily leans over the table. “So many secrets, cuz.”

It's been years since Rogue referred to me that way. Ever since I brought him into Saints Purgatory, I've been 'brother'.

It hurts to think that he might not regard me as such right now.

*Seems I'm getting really good at hurting people, and not in the way that brings me joy.*

“How did Jez fail Aunt Diane?” Rogue asks.

“She didn’t!” I shout as all my indignation recedes. Taking several deep breaths, I try to come up with a way to explain that won’t end with Soul hating his sister. “Back when you two,” I begin, pointing at my prez and VP. “Back when you went into the military, I went my own way. I was angry, bitter, full of so much hate that I knew I couldn’t be near anyone I gave a damn about.”

“You never said anything,” Malice accuses, but his expression conveys more sadness than frustration.

I narrow my eyes. “When was I supposed to say something, Mal? You and Soul were off playing hero, and I wasn’t about to distract you.” I shake my head. “No, I didn’t say anything. Forgive me if I wanted the two of the most important people in my life to focus on staying alive.”

“Okay, calm down,” Abyss chimes in. “Nothing good comes from an angry Grim.”

“And I want to know what my sister has to do with any of this fucker’s bullshit.”

Malice steps next to Soul and rests his hand on his shoulder. “Brother, I know you’re pissed, but it’s Grim. Give him the benefit of the doubt.”

Soul glares at Malice, and then he nods curtly before facing me again. “You better start explaining before I forget that Malice has a goddamn point.”

“Look, this isn’t easy for me,” I tell him. “Jez and I made a pact that the events of those four years are to stay between us, no matter what. If I spill the beans now, what kind of man does that make me?”

“It makes you a man who gets to continue breathing,” he seethes.

I start to pace, attempting to buy myself time. Jez will kill me if I tell Soul. And honestly, I wouldn't blame her. As I turn on my heel, my cell vibrates, and I groan at the realization that I forgot to take it out of my pocket upon entering the sanctuary.

*They're already pissed at you... Might as well make sure it's not Violet.*

I take my phone out of my cut and glance at the screen.

Jez: Tell them. It's okay.

Me: How did u know?

Jez: Cameras

*Fuck.*

My phone is yanked out of my grasp, and I whip my head up to see Soul reading the texts. When he looks at me, he smirks.

“See, you have her blessing. Now talk.”

And I do. I tell them all about how Jez tracked me down and wanted to work together. I explain just how deep her hacking goes, how involved she was in the purging of sinners back then.

“Mary killed people?” Soul asks.

I shake my head. “She never actually stole their last heartbeat. But they'd be alive if it wasn't for her.” Smirking, I try to lighten the mood. “And don't let her hear you call her Mary. She's liable to send the Reaper to your door.” When Soul doesn't smile, I continue. “When we reconnected, I asked Jez to keep her nose to the ground for any information on my parents. By then, my father was beating my mother on the reg, and she wouldn't leave, despite all my begging.”

“Let me guess,” Thorn says. “Jez sniffed something out for you?”

I nod as I recall the email I got from her all those years ago.

**JD,**

**Did what you asked. Things aren't good. Diane was taken to the ER earlier this week. Refused to press charges. Was treated, released, and she returned home. Not sure how much more she can take. Don't know exactly where you are or when you'll see this, but you need to get home ASAP.**

**~Jez**

**P.S. - Sorry I didn't notify you sooner. My equipment got compromised and had to set up all new.**

“Ever since then, Jez has blamed herself for my mother's death.”

Fort holds his hand up. “Wait a sec... How did Jez's equipment get compromised?”

“She was keeping an eye on a senator who was involved in a human trafficking ring. Turns out, the senator had a hacker on his payroll who was equally as brilliant as Jez.” I shrug. “After all was said and done with my mom, I took care of the hacker and the senator.”

“Are you talking about Jay Wilson?” Spike asks. “I remember when he died. Media said it was a suicide.”

“That was you?” Abyss asks.

I nod. “When I arrived at my parent's house, five days had passed since her ER visit. I happened to walk in when my dad was beating my mom, and it was the most violent I'd ever seen him get.” I take a deep breath. “I killed him that day. Mom refused to go to the hospital, so Jez and I took her to a motel so she could heal.”

“But Aunt Diane didn't heal,” Rogue comments.

“No, she didn’t. I’ve told Jez a million times that it’s not her fault, but she swears if she’d had better security on her system, she’d have gotten the hospital alert in time to save my mom. That’s crap, but that doesn’t seem to matter.”

“So, what you’re telling us is that Jez has been a part of the purging even before Saints Purgatory MC existed?” Soul demands.

“Yes.”

“She could’ve been killed!”

“Hate to break it to you, Prez, but she’s far better at playing the badass than you give her credit for.”

Rather than respond, Soul grabs the chair he’s standing behind and throws it at the wall. Then he storms toward the door and marches out the moment it slides open.

“Guess church is over,” Animal signs.

The guys begin to file out of the room, but Malice remains behind.

“He’ll cool off,” he tells me.

“Fifty bucks.”

“Dude, I’m talking to you as your friend, not your club brother. Cut me some slack on the fines.”

“Yeah, okay.”

“Are you sure about Jez?”

I narrow my eyes at him. “What do you mean?”

“Is she really as badass as you say?”

“Yes, why?”

“Because your ol’ lady just left the safest place on the planet with her.”



# CHAPTER 34

# VIOLET

“WHAT’S GOING ON WITH YOU TWO?”

Jez waited a whole fifteen minutes to start questioning me. At first, she was focused on her cell, darting her eyes back and forth between it and the road. But she just shoved it into her pocket and my reprieve is over.

Rubbing my temples, I sigh. “Grim told me about my parents posting on the dark web about hiring someone to find me.”

“Okay, so why are you pissed at Grim for your parent’s post?”

“I’m not mad at him for that.” I take a deep breath. “Grim and the club have been working with my parents to find Brad. *He* didn’t feel I needed to know that information until today. And the only reason I found out was because I asked to leave the clubhouse.”

Jez looks away sheepishly and tightly grips the steering wheel. “Sounds like he was trying to protect you.”

“It’s been one lie after another lately.” I pick at the lint on my pants. “Can I ask you something?”

“Sure,” she says, uncertainty in her tone.

“Grim listens to you more than anyone else, sometimes even more than Soul.”

“Sometimes.” She shrugs. “Is that what you wanted to ask me?”

“Why does Grim trust you so much?”

Jez blinks rapidly and clicks her tongue. She doesn't answer me right away, almost as if she's trying to find an answer that will satisfy me. “You know that we grew up together, right?” I nod. “After Soul and Malice left for the Military, Grim and I were on our own. We had to navigate the world without my brother and our other friend.”

*This day keeps getting better and better. Jez and Grim dated. No wonder they're so close.*

“So, you and Grim were alone together?”

“Yep.” She taps her fingers on the steering wheel.

“How long?”

“Four years until Soul and Malice came back.”

The green monster rears its ugly head. No wonder Grim can't tell me he loves me. He's in love with Jez. Everything makes sense now. I can't believe I didn't see it before.

*So fucking stupid, Violet!*

“Why did you two break up?” I don't really want to know, but I need to know.

Jez swings her head, her brows drawn up in confusion. “We didn't break up. We never dated. He's my best friend.”

“Yeah... okay.” I look out the window. “Grim only married me because when he looks at me, he sees the one person he couldn't save... his mom.”

“Bullshit!” Jez slams her fist down on the console, causing me to jump. “It's not Grim's fault he couldn't save his mom, it's mine.”

Now I'm really confused. “What are you talking about?”

Tears slide down Jez's cheeks, and she wipes them away hastily. “I'm good with computers. After Grim left home, he asked me to monitor his parents,” she says cryptically. “It was my job to keep an eye on things. Unfortunately, I found out too late how bad they were. The last time Grim saw his mom,

she was lying in a bed, beaten, bloody, and dying. I fucked up, and Grim could've saved her."

I hang my head in shame. Grim didn't mention Jez's part in his story when he told me about his parents. It was never my intention to cause her pain.

"You love him," I state matter-of-factly.

"Of course, I love him... He's my best friend, another big brother," she confirms. "I'm the annoying little sister he never had. But we were never more than that, Violet."

"Did you know he *kills people*?"

"He told you?"

"You knew!" I shriek.

"Yes," she says calmly, like we're talking about the latest episode of *New Girl*.

"And you're okay with it?"

She blows out a long breath. "Look Violet, there's a lot of damn evil in this world. Grim does his part to rid the world of that evil. There are some things the justice system just can't fix."

"It's not right," I point out.

"No, I suppose you wouldn't think it is." She pauses. "Let me ask you something. If you had a daughter and she was killed by a drunk driver, the same drunk driver that had been convicted time and time again but never saw the inside of a jail cell because of who his father was, what would you do?"

I don't even hesitate. "I'd kill him."

Murder is a sin, but I know with all my heart I would do it.

She raises her brow as I let her question and my answer sink in.

"Grim helps those people get justice." She hammers her point home.

I don't necessarily agree with her, but I have a better understanding of what he was trying to explain earlier.

“What happened to his dad?” Deep down, I’m pretty sure I know the answer.

“He killed him.”

“At least he got justice for his mom.” I stare back out the window so she can’t see the tears in my eyes.

“Grim loves you.”

“No, he doesn’t,” I choke out. “Grim wanted someone to rescue. I fit the bill.”

“Why the hell do you think that?”

“I told Grim I loved him,” I admit. “He didn’t say it back, even after he told me about his mom.”

“Violet,” she says softly. “Grim loves you.”

I shake my head in denial. “No, he do—”

“Stop!” she demands. “Violet, you don’t know what you’re talking about. Grim has been pining after you since he saw you on TV.”

My jaw drops. “What?”

“He doesn’t think I know, but I’m sneaky.” She wiggles her brows. “One look at you, and he was a goner. Grim hates church, with good reason, but he always found time to watch a portion of your dad’s sermon just to catch a brief glimpse of you.”

“N-no, it can’t be.”

“Yes, it sure as hell can.”

“Why didn’t he tell me?” I wonder aloud.

Jez snorts. “Probably because he didn’t want to come off like a demented stalker.”

Giggling, the weight of the day breaks free. Before I know it, I’m full-on belly laughing, and Jez side-eyes me like I’ve lost my marbles. After a minute, I sober up.

“I still remind him of his mom.”

Jez reaches over and grabs my hand. “No, you don’t.” I start to argue, but she shushes me. “Listen, you might have *officially* met under some really shitty circumstances, but Grim already had his sights set on you. He never would’ve pursued you because you were gonna marry another guy. Unfortunately, the way you two met brought to the surface how close he came to almost losing you before even knowing you.”

“Oh.”

“Grim is complicated. He loves you, Violet. Men aren’t always the best at communicating it with words.”

I reflect on what she says. True, Grim hasn’t said the words, but he’s *shown* me time and time again. He was there all throughout my recovery, hardly leaving my side, and he’s been my strength, my protector.

“He loves me,” I whisper, more to myself than to Jez.

“You bet your ass he does.”

“I need to talk to him.”

“You do, but how about we make him sweat for a little bit?” She winks.

I chuckle. “You’re evil.”

“There’s always been a little devil on my shoulder.” Jez glances in her rearview mirror. “What the fu—?”

The Charger surges forward as it’s struck from behind.

“What’s happening?” I yell over the roar of Jez’s engine.

Jez fights for control of the car, which is currently fishtailing on the highway.

Jez peeks at her rearview mirror again and hits a button on her steering wheel. “Call S—”.

Metal grinds against metal as we’re hit again. The seatbelt strains against my skin as we take flight in the air. I brace my arm above my head as the car flips around and around. I scream and close my eyes, unable to determine if we’re right

side up or not. My head bounces back and forth against the headrest until finally, the car comes to a rolling stop.

“J-J-Jez... Jez,” I croak, but she doesn’t respond. I move my neck slowly, trying to take stock of my injuries.

Jez is eerily quiet... too quiet. Blood slides down Jez’s face, and a piece of metal sticks out of her chest.

“Jez!” I scream over and over again.

*You need to call Grim!*

The windshield is cracked, reminding me of a spiderweb, and glass shards puncture my arms and parts of my neck and face. I’m able to wiggle my fingers and toes so I don’t think anything is broken, but I can’t pull myself free because the dashboard is crushing my legs.

I feel around for my purse, but it’s gone. I twist in my seat and see that it landed on the floor of the backseat. After flicking the switch to unlock the door, I grip the handle and pull, but nothing happens. I toss my body against the door but still nothing.

Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.

Footsteps approach slowly, and my pulse quickens.

“Jez... Jez, please be okay. Please wake up,” I plead.

My door is wrenched open, and I’m briefly blinded by the sun. I raise my hand to block it only to be greeted by the last human in the world I ever wanted to see again.

“Hello, Violet,” Brad sneers as he leans in close to my face. “I’ve been looking for you for a long time.”

I flinch back into the seat. I can’t afford to break down, Jez needs help. “Brad, call for help. Jez is hurt. She needs help.”

Brad pulls away from me and pounds on the roof of the car. “No, no, no!” he screams. “She helped keep you from me. I hope the bitch dies.” He pokes his head back inside the vehicle to stare at the pair of us, and then he smirks. “Looks like she’s almost dead anyway.”

“Brad, no. Please, call an ambulance.” I have nothing to bargain with but me. “I’ll come with you.”

“You’re in no position to negotiate.” He reaches around my waist and unbuckles my belt.

“Jez!” I scream one last time.

Brad grips me under my armpits and tugs me out of the car, causing my legs to be caught on the dash.

I cry out in pain, but Brad doesn’t stop. As soon as he has my legs free, he throws me over his shoulder and jogs back to his car.

Pummeling his back with my fists doesn’t even phase him. He yanks me down and thrusts me into the passenger seat of his car. He pulls out a gun and aims it directly at my head.

“Don’t even think about moving,” he snarls. “After I shoot you, I’ll go finish your friend.”

I shrink into my seat as Brad moves to the driver’s side. My eyelids droop as I send up a small prayer.

*Please let Jez be okay. Grim, I love you.*



JOSTLED FROM SLEEP, MY EYES FLUTTER OPEN. BEFORE I’M able to determine the source of the jostling, my head pounds behind my eyes. I squeeze them closed again.

“Come on,” a deep voice commands, pulling on my arm.

“Grim,” I groan.

“Who the fuck is Grim?”

My eyes snap open. “Brad, what are you doing here?” My thoughts are fuzzy, and I don’t resist when Brad takes my hand and tugs me out of the car.

The wind hits my legs, and I hiss in pain. I look down to see my yoga pants are torn and gash marks are peaking



through on my skin.

*The car accident. Jez!*

I struggle to break free, but Brad scoops me up bridal style and walks toward a building. It looks familiar, but my mind isn't cooperating to figure out why. We're moving so fast, the world spins. My stomach revolts, and bile spews from my mouth and down Brad's shirt. I'd laugh if I didn't think it would cause more pain.

"What the fuck?" He pulls me away from his chest. "You're lucky I'm not wearing this for much longer," he says with disgust.

Brad unlocks a door, and he sets me down over the threshold. I slowly turn and realize we're in my apartment, but my furniture is gone. I gasp as I slap a hand over my mouth.

*What. In. The. Hell?*

"I knew you'd love it," Brad whispers in my ear. "You said you didn't want a televised wedding, baby. I listened." He walks around me, pointing to everything. "I built this arch with my bare hands. All of our daughters will get married under it, just like their beautiful mother." He places his hand on my flat stomach. I move out of reach as he keeps droning on.

I stare at the white arch, which is sitting in the middle of the living room. It's covered in vine garland and wilted red roses weave throughout. Chairs are set up in front of it. There are two on each side, and they're divided by a white silk aisle. It reminds me of...

*A wedding venue!*

I shake my head. Stunned doesn't even begin to describe what I feel. Blood drains from my head all the way down to my toes. I shiver, and my teeth chatter.

Stepping back toward the front door, I feel for the knob. Once I have it in my grip, I whip around to pull the door open. Brad's arms cage me in, and he leans close.

“I’ve been waiting for you to get back from your trip.” He licks the side of my cheek, and I cringe. “I wanted everything to be perfect.”

“Brad, sto—”

I’m flipped around, and Brad crashes his mouth onto mine.

I push his shoulders, breaking the kiss. Instead of being angry, he smiles. It’s the smile he first used on me when we were dating. I used to think it was sweet. And then I found out how insane he is.

“You’re right,” He squeezes my hand. “We’ll have plenty of time for that later. I have another surprise for you.”

He leads me down the hall, and when we stop at my bedroom, I dig in my heels. It doesn’t deter him, and I’m afraid that he’ll pop my arm out of its socket with the way he’s dragging me.

Sounds of crying reach my ears.

*Who else is here?*

When Brad pushes the bedroom door open, my stomach drops. My parents are tied up on the bed, and tears stream down my mom’s cheeks. My dad is doing his best to try and comfort her, but it’s made difficult because they’re both gagged. When they see me, they shout through the rags. I try to run toward them, only to be scooped up by Brad.

“None of that,” he admonishes. “We have to get ready.”

“Get ready for what?”

Rather than respond, he heads into my closet. My eyes find my parents once again, and that’s when I notice their clothing. My dad is in a wrinkled tuxedo, and my mom is in an ugly beige dress. I scan the room and see a third person tied up. In a chair next to the window is Assistant Pastor Turner.

My brain finally catches up, and Brad confirms it when returns to my side with a huge monstrosity of a dress. It’s bright white, with so much lace and tulle that I’ll buckle under the weight of it.

*Brad's lost his fucking mind.*

“Violet, sweetheart,” he says lovingly. “It’s time to get married.”

I hold up my hand, flashing the gold band on my finger. “I’m already married, asshole.”

Brad’s head snaps back as if I slapped him. “What did you say to me?”

I swallow hard. I’m not backing down. Brad almost killed me once, but at least if he succeeds this time, it’ll be on my terms. Grim’s name will be the last thing echoed from my lips.

Brad steps closer, but I refuse to cower. I steel my spine and stand my ground.

“I’m married.”

Brad raises his arm and backhands me across the face, sending me flying to the floor. I cup my cheek just as the door slams open.

Justin rushes and tackles Brad to the floor, his knuckles hitting every part of Brad’s face. I’m about to yell at him to stop when another hulking figure pushes his way in.

“Grim!”

# CHAPTER 35

**GRIM**

## ONE HOUR EARLIER...

STARING DOWN INTO MY DRINK, I TRY TO IGNORE THE PANG IN my chest. Violet is gone, and Soul hates me.

*Life's a fucking son of a whore.*

As soon as I lift the glass to my lips, my Prez runs into the common room, catching my attention. His face is ashen, and his eyes are full of fear.

“Club’s on lockdown!” he shouts.

He also signs, so I guess I should be grateful he’s not completely writing me off.

Abandoning my whiskey, I get to my feet and stride toward him. Malice abandons his pool game and joins us.

“What’s going on?” he asks Soul.

Soul holds his cell in his hand and shakes it. “Just got a call from Justin. After church ended, I sent them to keep an eye on Jez and Violet, but they were too late.”

My shoulders tense, and I narrow my eyes. “Too late for what?”

“There was an accident.” His face hardens. “They found Jez’s Charger smashed on the side of the road, and she was alone and unresponsive.”

My heart shatters into a million pieces at the thought of a world without Jez, but then all of his words sink in. “She was alone?”

He nods.

“Where the fuck was Violet?” I demand.

“I...” He shakes his head as if to dispel all negative thoughts. “I don’t know, brother. I ordered Asher to stay with Jez until the ambulance got there, and Justin is searching for Violet. Until we know what the fuck happened, the club is on lockdown.”

Reaching behind my back, I pull out my gun and double-check that it’s loaded. Satisfied that it is, I return it to my waistband.

“I’m going to find Violet,” I sign.

“No, Grim, you—” His phone lights up, and he answers it. I focus on his lips. “Stay with her... Yes, I’m on my way.” He glances at me, scowling. “Yeah, yeah, he is too. Malice will be here to monitor lockdown.” He nods. “Tell her I love her and keep me posted.” When he disconnects the call, he begins to sign again. “I’ve gotta go to the hospital. I don’t know if...” He swallows, his Adam’s apple bobbing with emotion. “I gotta get the fuck on the road.”

He races to the elevator, and I’m right behind him. Malice remains behind, now in charge of all things at the clubhouse. Because of the lockdown, we won’t have any contact until, or if, we all return.

*Don’t think like that.*

When we reach the garage, we each race for our Harley’s. I pull out my cell and send a quick text to Violet with the hope that I’ll get a response.

*This has to be a giant clusterfuck of a misunderstanding.*

Me: You okay?

Knowing I’ll feel my phone vibrate, I don’t wait for a response. As I tuck the device back into my cut, Soul tears out of the garage, surging through the desert. Less than a minute later, I do the same.

*Where are you? Where do I go?*

Violet could be anywhere. Hell, she could have been thrown from Jez's car and just hasn't been found yet.

*No. Justin and Asher would have searched for her.*

Maybe she's just fine and went to get help.

*Yeah, yeah, that's it.*

Even as I think it, my gut tells me I'm wrong. So very wrong.

But I've gotta start somewhere, and her apartment is as good a place as any. Pointing my Harley in that direction, the seconds and miles tick by agonizingly slow. I've always lived life to the fullest, pushed past the boundaries of what's considered normal, but the thought of losing Violet and Jez... I'll give it all up just for them to be okay.

When I reach Violet's apartment in Henderson, I spot Justin's Harley Sportster parked at the curb. I glance at the building entrance and see the back of his cut as he barrels through the door at a run. I don't know how we both arrived so closely, but I don't have time to dwell on that.

I hop off my bike and dash inside. There's a young couple standing at the elevator, and they look at me nervously as I dart toward the stairs. Taking them two at a time, I reach Violet's floor.

Her door is wide open which is good because I'd have broken it down if it wasn't. Fuck the damage. As soon as I step inside, my stomach clenches.

The white arch taunts me from its position in the living room. The scene reminds me of the chapel where Violet and I got married, and rage burns through me.

*Oh, fuck this!*

The floor shakes beneath my feet, and I whip around toward the hall. I run to her bedroom and get there in time to see Justin launch himself at Brad.

*Well, we found him.*



My eyes dart to Violet, who's lying on the floor with her hand cupping her cheek. Her pants are torn and stained with blood, and her arms and face are cut up.

I see red.

“Grim!”

I take two steps and drop to her side. “Did he hit you?”

Tears gather in her eyes, and she nods. I shoot to my feet and whirl around, only to freeze. I don't know how I missed it, but Violet's parents are tied up on the bed in what appears to be wedding attire, and there's a man in the corner, tied to a chair.

*What the actual fuck?*

Putting them all out of my mind, I glance at Violet and see her injuries again. That ignites a fire in me, and I move to grab Justin and pull him off of Brad.

Justin crashes to the floor, and I take his place, pummeling Brad. My knuckles burn, but I ignore it. Adrenaline courses through my veins, fueling me.

Suddenly, I'm grabbed from behind and yanked away from Brad. Twisting, my arm raised to strike, I halt when I see Justin with his hands up in surrender.

“You can't kill him here,” he signs.

“I can kill him wherever I fucking want to, prospect.”

He tilts his head. “Pretty sure you'd enjoy it more in the Confessional. And...” He nods at Violet, whose wide eyes take in the scene before her. “You've got more important things to deal with right now.”

I take several deep breaths, letting his words register. With a last glance at Brad, who's out cold, I move to Violet and help her to her feet. She sways, and I scoop her into my arms before she can collapse.

Desperate to get the fuck outta here, I turn to Justin again, but can't sign, which frustrates the hell out of me.

“It’s okay,” he signs, seeing the obvious distress in my expression. “Fucker’s car is out front. I can load him in the trunk and these three,” he says, nodding at Violet’s parents and the other man. “They can ride with me back to the clubhouse. Just get your ol’ lady outta here.”

It dawns on me that he’s handling this like a Saints Purgatory brother should, and I make a mental note to bring up his patch at the next church. Dude is earning it today.

“Thanks,” I croak, and his eyes widen right before he grins.

“No problem, Grim.”

“Brother,” I correct.

“No problem, brother.”

I carry Violet out of the room, confident that Justin can handle the scene. With the club on lockdown, we can’t get any help until we get back to the clubhouse because of the communication blackout, but something tells me that’s okay.

When I step outside, the sun has begun to set, which is good. The darker it is, the less people will see. At least, that’s what I tell myself.

I set Violet down, and once I’m satisfied that she’s not going to fall over, I take a step back.

“Are you okay?”

Tears well in her eyes. “I think so.”

“I need to get you back to the clubhouse so Abyss can check you over. Do you think you can ride behind me?”

She nods. I help her onto my bike, and my stomach clenches each time she winces in pain.

*I’m going to enjoy making Brad suffer, stealing his last breath as I purge him from this world.*

“I’ll go as slow as I can,” I tell her before getting on in front of her.

As hard as it is to watch my speed, I manage to keep it within ten miles per hour of the speed limit. All I want to do is get her home so Abyss can do his thing.

The bumpiest part of the ride is over the desert sand, and her arms tighten with each bump and jostle. It breaks my heart that I'm causing her distress, but it can't be helped.

Grateful to reach the garage, I pull in and park. I lift Violet off the bike and into my arms. Then I carry her to the elevator, where I enter the security code to allow us entry during lockdown.

We reach the common room, and I swivel my head back and forth to look for Abyss. Malice rushes forward as soon as he spots us.

“What the fuck happened?” he demands.

I can't sign, so Violet answers, but I'm unable to read her lips so I don't catch what she says.

“Abyss is waiting in the medical wing, no doubt wearing a hole in the fucking floor,” Malice says. “Go ahead and take her back. I'll stay here and wait for Justin to arrive with the others.”

I nod and then carry the love of my life to be treated by the good doctor... again.

# CHAPTER 36

# VIOLET

“GRIM, PUT ME DOWN. I CAN WALK.”

Ever since he scooped me up at my apartment he hasn't let go, other than to get us home. And even then, he never stopped touching me. He shakes his head vehemently.

I sigh, wrap my arms tighter around his neck, and breathe in his scent.

*Oil and leather... Home.*

If Justin hadn't busted into the bedroom back at my apartment when he did, I'm not so sure I'd be alive, let alone in Grim's embrace right now.

When we reach the common room, Malice rushes forward.

“What the fuck happened?” he demands.

Grim can't sign because he's carrying me, so I give Malice a quick rundown.

“Abyss is waiting in the medical wing, no doubt wearing a hole in the fucking floor,” Malice says. “Go ahead and take her back. I'll stay here and wait for Justin to arrive with the others.”

Abyss *is* pacing back and forth in the medical wing when we arrive. Worry etched in his expression. He straightens when he sees us and ushers us over to a gurney. Grim gently puts me down but doesn't step away. I grab his hand and hang on, knowing how close I came to almost losing him. There's no one else in the wing but the three of us.

Abyss pulls on his gloves and steps close to me.

“Jez,” I whisper to myself before I start screaming, my arms flailing. “Where’s Jez? Did you find Jez?”

*Why isn’t she here? Where is she?*

Grim holds me down so I don’t fall off the bed. Abyss’s shoulders droop, and he lifts his watery eyes to stare into mine. “We don’t know anything. Soul got a call that she was unresponsive and being taken to the hospital.” He picks up the small forceps and starts picking glass out of my arm.

“Unresponsive?” My voice is barely above a whisper. Abyss and Grim both nod.

“The metal sticking out... There’s no way... No, she can’t.” I’m talking in circles now.

The blood drains from Grim’s face, and Abyss’s head snaps up. “What did you say?”

“The a-a-accident,” I stammer, tears streaming down my face. “A piece of metal sticking out of her chest. There was so much blood.”

Abyss and Grim exchange a look I can’t decipher. Abyss takes a couple of deep breaths and returns his focus to digging glass out of my body and cleaning out the cuts and scrapes.

A few minutes have passed when the door slides open, and my parents come hobbling in. They’re leaning on each other for support, and Malice trails behind them.

“Violet!”

Mom scurries to my side and hugs me tight. I wince but manage to use one arm to hug her back. Dad squeezes my shoulder but says nothing.

Grim dislodges her and scowls. “Violet was in a car accident. She’s sore.”

Abyss translates when they simply stare at my husband in confusion. Then he points to two other beds. “You two go sit over there, and I’ll check you out next.”

Malice lifts his chin and addresses me. “You good?”

“I’m good.”

Malice quits talking and sticks to signing with a smirk on his face. “Douchebag is in the Confessional.”

Grim’s lips turn upward, and he looks... creepy. “We’ll head down as soon as Violet is done.”

“You can go. She’s ready.” Abyss moves aside so Grim can help me down.

I open my mouth to ask a question, but Malice puts his hand up to stop me and signs again. “This isn’t a conversation your parents need to hear.” I nod my head in understanding.

My parents swing their heads back and forth between all of us.

“What’s going on?” my dad asks.

“None of your fucking business!” Abyss yells.

“I have a right to know what’s going on with our daughter.” Dad’s voice quivers.

“You lost that fucking right when you sold her soul to Brad to save your own fucking ass,” Malice grits through his teeth. “She’s *our* family now.”

“Ours to protect,” Abyss adds.

My heart weeps with joy knowing that Abyss and Malice consider me family. Grim wraps his arm around my shoulders, leads me out of the room, and we walk back to the elevator.

“Where are we going?” I ask once we stop.

“You’ll see.”

We go down to a lower level, and I’m surprised. I didn’t know there was more to the clubhouse than what I’ve seen. When we step off the elevator, we walk down a long corridor before coming to a stop in front of a huge metal door. Grim takes several deep breaths and looks back and forth between me and the elevator as if trying to decide what to do.

I keep hold of his hand and squeeze it in encouragement. He lifts his hand and presses it against a sensor, and the door

slides open. I'm too busy glancing around the room to notice the bloody heap on the floor until we're standing over it.

Justin leans against a table and plays with a lighter, completely unfazed by the scene.

Brad's out cold on the floor, his face almost unrecognizable, and chains are wrapped around his wrists. Grim bends over and picks him up like he weighs nothing and motions to Justin. I snap my head up when a grinding noise fills the room, and I watch with weird fascination as a large hook descends from the ceiling. Once it stops, Grim loops the chain around the hook and lets him hang.

Brad jolts awake once his arms are stretched above his head, and his feet are barely touching the floor. "What the fuck is going on?" he shouts. Then he spots me. "Violet, tell him to let me go. *Now!*"

I have no words.

*What is even happening right now?*

As Brad dangles from the ceiling, Grim crosses his arms over his massive chest and stares, almost as if he's studying him.

And that's when the puzzle pieces start to click together. I step closer to Grim and gently touch his back.

"What're you gonna do?"



# CHAPTER 37

# GRIM

## *WHAT'RE YOU GONNA DO?*

I've never wanted to ignore a question more than I do right now. But that's an impossibility. I wanted her in the Confessional with me for a reason. Violet is my ol' lady and deserves to see and know all parts of me, no matter how dark and deranged.

"I'm going to do what I do best."

I grin in Brad's direction and almost burst into laughter at the way he swings from the ceiling. Violet grabs my arm and pulls me to the side of the room. Her new injuries are glaring under the harsh light in the room, and it's all I can do not to pick up my ax and chop Brad's head off.

But first things first.

"I'm gonna need you to translate for me, Sprite," I sign. "Can you do that?"

She glances over her shoulder at her ex-fiancé, and I follow her gaze. He's clearly screaming something because his mouth is moving, and his face is red from more than just blood.

When she faces me again, her lavender eyes are dark, reminding me of the hazy swirl of an imperfect amethyst. Nothing about Violet is imperfect though. From the hair on her head to the tips of her toes, she's everything I could ever need and want in a tight little package of perfection.

“Violet, can you do that?” I ask again when she doesn’t reply. Hesitantly, she nods, and I slide a finger across her cheek before continuing. “It’ll be okay, I promise. The Grim Reaper just needs to play a little.”

“He’s begging you to not do this,” she tells me. “Screaming for you to stop.”

I grin, and wicked joy curls through me. “I know.”

“How?”

I shrug. “They all beg for mercy. Every last piece of shit I purge begs until they can’t beg anymore.”

“Oh.”

Doubt begins to creep in. Maybe I shouldn’t make her watch this. Maybe it’s better if she doesn’t know the real me.

*No. If she’s gonna spend the rest of her life loving you, she needs to know the real you.*

I stalk closer to my prey, and Violet follows.

Then, I begin.

“Do you know why you’re here?” I sign, and her lips move as she reiterates my words to Brad.

“No.”

I arch a brow. “Seriously? I didn’t think you were that goddamn stupid.”

Brad’s arms strain above his head, and he tries to swing his legs out to kick me. I expect him to put up a bit of a fight, but what I don’t expect is my wife to step between us and take the kick herself.

I grab her arms and move her to the side before spinning her around to face me. “What the hell are you doing?”

“I won’t let him hurt you.”

“Ah, Sprite. It’s my job to protect you, not the other way around.”

“And it’s my job to be your equal partner.” She smirks. “It’s that or nothing, Grim. Take it or leave it.”

*Well, damn.*

I press a kiss to her lips. “I’ll take it. But in here, I’m in charge. Not because you can’t handle it or take care of yourself but because that’s the rule. This is my domain, my kingdom. Understood?”

She doesn’t respond right away, but when she does, her eyes sparkle with mischief. “Understood.”

Violet might be a preacher’s daughter, but there’s more darkness in her than she realizes. And I can’t wait to spend the rest of our lives teasing and tempting it out of her.

I return my focus to Brad, confident she’ll continue to interpret.

“Do that again, and I’ll drag this out until you’re pleading for death.” I’m going to do that anyway, but he doesn’t know that. “Now, let’s get down to business.”

I stride over to the wall and lift one of my many axes. I walk back to them and press the blade against Brad’s cheek to slice it open.

“You tried to take my wife from me.”

“She was mine first.”

Violet’s eyes narrow with indignation. “I don’t belong to anyone.”

“You belong to me,” Brad insists.

I swing the back of the ax blade into his kneecap, fed up with his possessive nature. His head falls back, and his mouth opens as he no doubt howls in agony.

“Violet is wearing my ring. She married me. End of story.”

I give him a moment to collect himself, needing him to be fully aware of what’s going on. I won’t be able to enjoy it otherwise.

“What were you hoping to gain by blackmailing her parents?” I ask.

Brad licks his lips with a smirk. “Now who’s the dumb fuck?”

“Answer me.”

“The same thing you got by marrying her.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Money. I get all the money and power I want if I attach myself to her and that godforsaken church. Not that I’m all that upset about getting the gorgeous, dutiful Simpson daughter.” He tilts his head until it’s resting on his stretched arm. “And George and Diane made things so easy, what with already being corrupt and all.”

Before I can respond, Violet lunges at him. I reach out and grab her by the waist to swing her away. She struggles against me, rage and adrenaline dulling her aches and pains. After several moments, she ceases, and I let her go.

“You can’t be doing that, Sprite. Your soul doesn’t get to be tainted like mine.”

“There is nothing tainted about you,” she insists.

“You’re wrong, but I appreciate the thought.”

“I’m not...”

Violet lowers her arms and slowly turns to face Brad. I dart my eyes back and forth between them as they shout at each other. I don’t catch what they’re saying until she lifts her hands again.

“What did you just say, you gluttonous piece of crap?”

“Gluttonous? How the hell am I gluttonous?”

She tilts her head. “Gluttony is defined as incessant greed or excessive eating.” Violet eyes him up and down. “Clearly, you don’t eat excessively, but the greed? You have that in spades, and you won’t stop until you get what you want no matter who you have to hurt in the process.”

“I could give you a good life.”

“No, asshole, you couldn’t.”

Brad looks from her to me and back again. “He’s no better than me, you know? He’ll do anything to get what he wants. Look how far he’s willing to go to keep you.”

Tired of the back and forth, and maybe a little afraid that Violet will recognize that Brad isn’t wrong, I raise the ax above my head and bring it down to lodge in his skull. Blood spatters both me and my ol’ lady.

“Go forth, sinners’ souls, from this world. May you suffer in darkness, may your home be in Hell, and may the Devil fuck you with his horns.”

After I finish, I turn to Violet and am surprised she hasn’t run from the room screaming. Instead, she closes the distance between us and rises to her tiptoes.

Her lips are silky soft, and she tastes like copper.

*So fucking sweet.*

When she steps back, I arch a brow.

“What was that for?” I ask, and she smiles.

“I don’t ever have to worry about the Devil again because I’ve got my very own Reaper.”

Warmth settles in my chest at her words. How could I ever have kept my true feelings from her? What the fuck was I thinking.

I pull her close and press my forehead to hers.

“I love you, Sprite.”

# EPILOGUE

## VIOLET

*Four months later...*

“I THINK YOU’RE ABOUT DONE.”

Cece puts the final touches on my makeup while Heather curls my hair.

*I can’t believe I’m getting married!*

Technically, this is our second wedding. When Grim and I first got married, he said we could do it again the way I wanted, when the time was right. The timing couldn’t be more perfect.

My eyes wander over to Jez who’s watching everything with a smirk. “You think you’ll do this someday?” I ask.

“Hell, no.” She snorts. “I’m never tying myself down to one man. I don’t think there’s a cock in this world that can tame me.”

We all burst out laughing, and it takes a minute for us to collect ourselves. My heart is full knowing that everyone that matters will be here today. The last couple of months haunt my dreams, but Grim is always there to fight the demons away.

After Brad was purged, Grim got a text from Soul letting him know that Jez was in pretty bad shape. We all rushed to the hospital, only to be told that she had a punctured lung, concussion, and deep cuts on her head that required stitches. The first twenty-four hours were critical, but somehow, she pulled through. The brothers and ol’ ladies took turns spending time with her in the hospital while she recovered.



“How are things with Soul?” I ask as Cece slides my dress into place. The club president has been pretty bitter since her secrets were revealed. “You guys make up yet?”

Jez blows out a breath. “Not yet. He’s still pissed at me. I kept a lot from him.”

“He’ll come around,” Cece says from behind me. “He was scared to death, Jez. I don’t know what he woulda done if you’d have died.”

“I know.” Jez dips her head. “But when he and Malice left, I was lost. They did what they had to do, and I did what I had to do.”

“Damn stubborn men,” Heather inserts. “Want me to kick his ass?”

That sends us into another fit of giggles. A knock at the door kicks Cece into gear, and she finishes zipping up my dress. Heather lets Abyss into the room, and he whistles loudly.

“Wow, you look amazing,” he says.

A blush creeps across my chest and face.

“Now you’re perfect,” Cece says, hugging me.

After everything Abyss has done for me, I asked him to give me away. Besides, I didn’t want my parents here. This is about me and Grim and starting our lives together with a clean slate. I can’t let them ruin what should be the happiest day of my life.

It took some convincing to keep my parents from going to the Confessional. I don’t blame Grim for wanting to purge them. They *are* sinners, after all. They may be my parents, but the pain they caused will never be forgiven or forgotten.

Instead, Jez worked her magic. My parents are now broke and living overseas doing missionary work. Grim makes sure they have just enough money so as not to starve, but that’s it. As for the money they took from parishioners... A lot of it was recovered and returned to the church. The club is watching closely to make sure it’s never mismanaged again.

Even though my parents stole money, there was still a lot of good the church did, and I didn't want to see that destroyed.

"M'lady." Abyss bows and pulls my hand into the crook of his arm. "Ready to go marry your man?"

"No. I already married the man." I shake my head and smile. "This time, I'm marrying the Reaper."



## Grim

"BROTHER, YOU BETTER HURRY."

I stare at my reflection in the mirror and watch Soul walk across the room toward me. In the four months since everything with Brad went down, Soul has changed. He's still one of my best friends, and I love him, but he's more guarded now, more aware of what the people he loves are doing at all times.

It's understandable but fucking annoying. Hell, there are times I can't even fuck my wife without him questioning my every move.

"Up or down?" I ask.

He arches a brow.

"Hair... up or down?"

"What would Violet prefer?"

I grin. "Well, she likes to tug on it while I'm buried de—"

Soul smacks my hands, and I lower them to my sides.

"Wear it down. There's no time for you to do anything different."

I nod, give myself one final glance, and then proceed him out of the room. As we walk down the hall toward the common room, I shove my hand in my pocket and wrap my fingers around the ring I bought for Violet. We have the ones

we picked out when we went shopping after our Vegas wedding, but I wanted something extra special today.

Soul is at my side, and Malice joins us at the end of the hall. I shift my gaze to the other side of the large space, trying to catch a glimpse of my bride. Of course, she's not there. Jez is, though, and I feel Soul tense beside me.

"Dude, you need to get a grip," I tell him.

"She's my sister, Grim. Stay out of it."

I shake my head. "I don't think so. Jez is family to all of us. Maybe not by blood, but family, nonetheless. And you don't shut out family just because you're pissed at them."

"Seriously? After the secrets you kept, the way you shut all of us out, that's your argument?"

"I didn't keep secrets or shut you out because I was pissed at you or anyone else in the club. I did it because Jez is family, and she asked me to keep my mouth shut. I don't get why you can't see the difference."

Soul glances away from me to look at his sister. I watch him closely, and hope fills my chest when his face softens.

"I miss her," he admits.

"No shit."

"Maybe I should talk to her."

"Look, today is a day for new beginnings," I sign. "Might as well take the bull by the horns and fix this."

Soul rolls his eyes. "When did you get so soft?"

I throw my head back and laugh. "Brother, I got soft the moment I laid eyes on my wife." Malice taps me on the shoulder and points to the speakers to let me know the music has started. "Now, can we please go so I can marry her all over again?"

The ceremony goes off without a hitch. Frenzy officiates, as he did for Soul and Cece, and when he tells me to kiss the bride, I don't waste a single second.

I press my lips to hers and devour the sinful taste of her. When I step away, the wedding party walks down the aisle ahead of us. Soul, Malice, and Rogue stood up for me, and Jez, Cece, Apple, and Heather stood up for Violet.

Oh, right... Zippy also stood at my side. Zippy, aka Justin, was patched into Saints Purgatory as a full-fledged brother following all the Brad bullshit. He earned that patch, and I was glad to make sure he got it. Initially, he balked at his road name, but it's hard to argue about it when he was playing with that damn Zippo during his entire patching ceremony.

We reach the hall, and I lead Violet to our room. Both of us decided we'd change before we start the reception, but there's something else I have to do first.

I shut the door behind us and spin her around. Pushing her against the wall, I use my pelvis to hold her in place.

“I love you, Mrs. Dunn.”

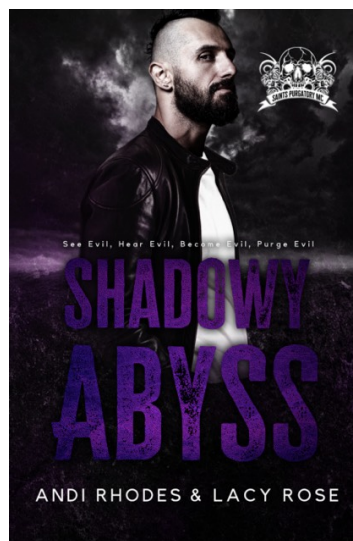
She kisses me soundly.

“I love you, too, Mr. Dunn.”

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***\*\*If you or someone you know is the victim of domestic violence, you can call the national domestic violence hotline at 800-799-7233.\*\****

# NEXT IN SAINTS PURGATORY MC



## Shadowy Abyss

### Book 4

**There isn't a person in the world who hasn't committed a sin. Some sins are worse than others, but seven of them are deadly. But those seven worst of the worst? They're what drive Saints Purgatory MC to keep fighting.**

**Abyss...**

I spent a good chunk of my life working toward a career I never wanted. Then a moral dilemma caused havoc, and it made walking away so much easier. Now I'm living the dream, riding for Saints Purgatory. I'm still able to put my medical skills to use for the MC, but I spend the majority of my time as a grease monkey and the club's secretary.

Not only am I good with bikes, injuries, and illness, but I'm also a pro with the ladies. They love me, and I love them. Unfortunately, the one woman my body wants more than anything has been told to stay away. However, when trouble comes knocking on her door, I'll show her and all the doubters that she's mine.

### **Carmella...**

When I left my hometown to practice law in the big city, my dreams seemed to finally be coming true. The only thing missing was my best friend and a man. Climbing the corporate ladder and becoming a partner in a prestigious law firm is next on my agenda. I finally see the light at the end of the tunnel for all my hard work.

I'm undefeated in the courtroom, but I'm about to meet my match. If I win this case, the partnership is mine for the taking. But circumstances beyond my control have me running and seeking solace from my best friend. That's where I meet *him*. He's everything I want in a man wrapped up in a sexy bow. Unfortunately, I'm told he isn't the one for me. When the enemy comes knocking at my door, do I face it alone, or trust the one man I shouldn't to help?

**He is Saints Purgatory, and he's a sinner who takes out the sinful.**

# ALSO BY

ANDI RHODES & LACY ROSE

## **Saints Purgatory MC**

[Unholy Soul](#)

[Wrathful Malice](#)

[Grim's Hell](#)

Shadowy Abyss

Rogue's Cross

Thorned Vengeance

Spike's Perdition

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Andi Rhodes** is an author whose passion is creating romance from chaos in all her books! She writes MC (motorcycle club) romance with a generous helping of suspense and doesn't shy away from the more difficult topics. Her books can be triggering for some so consider yourself warned. Andi also ensures each book ends with the couple getting their HEA! Most importantly, Andi is living her real life HEA with her husband and their boxers.

For access to release info, updates, and exclusive content, be sure to sign up for Andi's blog at [andirhodes.com](http://andirhodes.com).

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