

HALLOWEEN AT THE CLUBHOUSE



J. E. DAELMAN

SATAN'S GUARDIANS MC



Book Eleven

Halloween at the Clubhouse

Novella

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Note](#)

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[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Books by J.E Daelman](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS](#)

[You can find me here](#)

CHAPTER 1

-:- CRANK -:-

I'm bored. It's alright getting old, but you get left out of all the good shit, 'cause you gotta be careful now you're older. What the fuck, I'm old, not dead!

Walking through the commons I look at Sniper, Thunder, and Glide, who are all lounging around watching the TV. They look as bored as I feel.

Today we have none of the babies around, so we sit twiddling our thumbs, wondering what we can do. I'm sick of this, and need something to do, goddammit!

Mary walks out of the kitchen and gives me a smile, which I can't help but return. She's a great woman, and Dollar made sure he got to her before any of the other brothers showed an interest.

"Can you give me a hand, Crank?" Mary is looking at me eagerly.

"Sure. What do you need me to do?"

Placing her hand on my forearm, she grins, and I lift an eyebrow, surprised as she's got a damn twinkle of mischief in her eyes.

"Well, it's going to be Halloween soon, so we need to get everything set up for the kids to enjoy. Cameron and Tyler will particularly love it, and I think we could build a grotto in the compound." I follow Mary as she leads me through the kitchen, out to the front of the clubhouse, to her truck. The one Dollar gave her, as hers was such a beat-up piece of crap, it hardly started.

"I've got nearly everything for the clubhouse, but we need the things for the grotto. It'll be so much fun for the kids. Dressing up, having treats, and I'll make a whole range of things to eat.

What about Halloween Party games?” Mary is ranting on, but it’s with excitement, and I can’t help but feel the urge to have some fun, too.

My mind is ticking over to what we can do, Jack-o’-lanterns, costumes, trick-or-treat, and even scary stories. Yeah, rubbing my hands together, I can get into this. Pumpkin pie, pumpkin bread, caramel apples, candy apples, apple bread, Reese’s cups, M&M’s, and Skittles... oh yes, and my stomach rumbles loud and clear, earning me a giggle from Mary.

Side-eying her, I give a grin and a wink. “Don’t you worry yourself, Mary, you do the treats, and I’ll organize the grotto and decorations.” Picking up the first of the boxes, I haul ass into the clubhouse. “*Brothers! We’ve got work to do,*” I shout, and smirk when Sniper, Glide, and Thunder walk over to find out what I’m doing.

“Grab boxes from Mary’s vehicle, we’re gonna do some decoratin’.”

None of them ask what’s going on, because they’re as bored as I am, if they tell the truth. Sniper is better as he has Olivia and goes home to her at night. Lucky fucker, but then saying that, I never wanted to settle down with anyone, and I’ve always been happy with my life. My only regret is losing my daughter and her death plays heavy on me even after all these years.

Rip appears with a box and a huge grin on his face. “I’m in.”

“In what?” I ask, trying to look innocent.

“With whatever mischief you’re thinking of doin’, I’m in.” Continuing past, Rip drops his box next to one of the dining tables and jogs back outside to get another one.

Yeah, he’s one of us for sure, and his training is coming along nicely. I’ll be able to rest, knowing he’s taken over my spot. I think he could even be a little crazier than I am!

Boxes are all in and lined up ready to be emptied, and I can’t wait to get my hands in to find out what Mary bought. I look over and see Brand heading our way, and I give a roll of my

eyes because he'll be going to give us another lecture, and the threat of punishment and pink aprons, I'm sure.

"Okay, what are you up to? Mary asked permission to dress up the clubhouse for the kids, but you are not kids." Brand is pointing from one of us to another, and we're all giving him our innocent-as-all-hell look.

Rip is standing with a half-ass smirk, and when he notices me scowling at him, it drops off his face fast. Giving a 'who me' kind of look instead.

"Fuck's sake, just behave," Brand snaps out at us, then turns and stomps away. I look at Thunder, who gives me a shit-eating grin, and we dig into the boxes.

Decorations include black cats, skeletons, skulls, cauldrons, spiders, cobweb-making gear, and clowns with red eyes. Yeah, this is gonna be fun.

"Hey look, Crank." Rip hands me a bunch of church candles, signs that have 'Boo!' 'Not all witches live in Salem', 'Haunted House', and other decorations.

"Yeah, we can put some of them around for sure, I pass him one that has 'Haunted House,' and a spider stuck to it.

Pip walks through from the kitchen and digs around in a box. "Oh, do you think you could do up the restaurant, too? I could organize a Halloween menu."

"Yeah, we can do that. You buy the stuff and we'll put it up." Smiling at her, and nod as I drag out a skeleton from one of the boxes that had been in front of me on a dining table.

Coal appears from nowhere, bites down on the skeleton's leg, and pulls hard. The fuckin' leg snaps off and he runs off with the shinbone and the foot attached. Fuck me. "GET BACK HERE COAL!" I bellow, but that fuckin' dog has run into the kitchen, heading for the compound I'm sure.

Pip is laughing her ass off, but she's not attempting to go catch the fucker. What sort of start is this? I'm thinking this better not be a bad omen.

“Momma.” Turning, I see Gage waddling over as fast as his little legs will carry him, and he’s covered in some nasty stuff or other, as usual. I’ve never known a kid to get in so much crap as he can. Well, thinking about it, maybe Shades’ son, Tyler, was as bad!

“What’s up, jellybean?” Pip asks as she picks him up, but when she wrinkles her nose, we know he’s been into something not just dirty, but stinky too.

“Hungry,” Gage says, blinking his large innocent eyes at her.

“Come on, we best clean you up before I find you some lunch.” Turning and walking away with Gage on her hip, Pip turns and states firmly, “Remember, I want my place done. Go shopping and get the stuff and I’ll pay you for it all. I don’t have time Crank, so please do this.”

Sighing, I give her a chin lift and turn to look at Thunder, who is grinning. “I’m gonna get shit for Storm and do up their place.”

Christ, this is gonna turn out to be a real farce. I can see it happening, as I see Sniper and Glide nodding at Thunder.

“Rip, go get my shinbone back from Coal, before the fucker buries it in the yard.” Watching Rip run toward the kitchen, I carry on taking gear out of the boxes, but in my mind, I’m planning what I can do at June’s place for May.

CHAPTER 2

-:- THUNDER -:-

If Crank thinks he's gonna get one over on us, he's got another thing comin'. Before making my way over to Annie's place, AKA Harper, Nash's Ol' Lady, I run into town and shop for everything I think I need.

It doesn't take me long, as I pretty much take one of everything, except lights. Those I take at least two of everything. This is going to cost me a fuckin' fortune, but I don't care. Crank's not having a better-looking yard and house than we are.

Annie is not going to work today at the Guardians Rest Motel and I'm sure she'll be up for us coming out of this best. Stomping up to the front door, I open it without knocking and bellow. "ANNIE, WE'VE GOT WORK TO DO!"

"What's going on?" Annie asks as I step into the kitchen, and I can't help but hold my hands out for her to pass me Storm.

"Come to Grandpappy." I throw Storm into the air and catch him, much to his delight. He loves rough and tumble and I'm always up for playing with the little fella. "We're goin' to decorate for Halloween, and girl, you best be up for beating Crank and the other fuckers. I've got a load of stuff to be brought in and unpacked, then we can make a start.

"Give me ten minutes and I'll take Storm across the road to Mrs. Martin and she'll watch him I'm sure, while we get started here." Annie is grabbing things for Storm as she speaks and I can't help but love her. She may not be my blood, but she's so like me she may as well be. When I claimed her as my daughter it was one of the best things I've ever done.

Once Storm is settled with Mrs. Martin, we sort the decorations into an inside and outside pile. There's so much outside stuff we have to put boxes out front. As soon as it's

organized, we place individual decorations where we think they'll be best suited. Having a good many that are triggered with motion sensors, we put them along the side of the path to the front door. On the front porch, we place the ones that move the fastest.

At the start of the path, we place a dragon, which looks like it's rising out of the lawn. As you pass it, it roars, snorts smoke from its nose and its mouth lights up.

Then you see two of the light-up ghosts. Right after that, a witch on a broomstick cackles at you as you pass. The one I like best comes next, and it's a large effigy of the Grim Reaper. It stands over five feet tall, with a large scythe in one hand, and it leans forward toward the path, with the scythe's head twirling and its eyes glowing.

Just before you step onto the porch, there's a mat on the step and it gives off loud witches' screams, with smoke flowing across the porch floor where a smoke machine sits to one side.

Stepping onto the porch itself, there's a prisoner in an electric chair to the right by the door. On your left, a zombie rises through the smoke, reaching toward you.

If you've lasted this long and you press the doorbell, the prisoner in the chair has its hands and head light up, just as though they are on fire, and he screams.

When you turn to leave the porch, a huge hairy spider drops from the porch roof with moving legs and eight glowing eyes. I'm sure this will scare the daylight outta the Ol' Ladies.

Annie and I are both happy that everything is at its best, and we put fake spider webs across the lawn and porch, hiding strings of lights and more smoke machines.

As soon as the outside is completed, we get to work on the inside. Stringing lights wherever we can, placing a few smaller animated scary things around, including a Chucky doll on a bike, a flying witch that cackles as she flies in circles from the ceiling light fixture, and my favorite, a replica hand from the Addams family that scurries out from under the couch.

I can't wait to scare the shit outta people with this stuff. It's gonna be freaking awesome.

"Right then, Pops, time to test it all out," grins Annie.

"Ok, let's get all the lights lit up, and the smoke machines going. Then we can walk the path of doom." I rub my hands together in anticipation.

Looking at all the lights and the smoke, it looks eerie enough. The lights highlight spiders, centipedes, and other creepy crawlies under the webbing, and of course, the smoke creeping across the lawn. We have bats on the porch and at night, when it darkens, they're going to look great.

As we walk to the path, the dragon roars. Hmm, it's a bit on the puny side, but he's only a little dragon. His smoke and fiery-looking mouth aren't bad. The light-up ghosts are more cartoon style, but again they light up nice and colorful.

The witch on the broomstick is next and when she cackles, it must be the same decibel level as a heavy metal concert. She is so loud she makes me jump back in surprise, which Annie is delighted with.

The Grim Reaper is quite intimidating with his size and scythe. His features are realistic too, almost movie prop quality. Before the witch has stopped screaming the Grim Reaper leans forward with his scythe turning in his hand. Now I say he leans forward, but in reality, he shoots forward as though he's gonna headbutt the pair of us, and his scythe spins so fast it looks more like the propeller of a drone. His eyes are like the main beam on my hog and getting brighter by the second.

Suddenly, his eyes burst with a loud bang. He jerks back and forth like a dog dry-humping a pillow, and the scythe is spinning so fast that you can barely see it.

There's an almighty bang, and suddenly everything goes off. We see smoke from the house and I rush in to see what's happened.

The smell of burning as I open the door and the smoke from the fuse box has me rushing to it in the utility room. The smoke is pouring out. I run over and slam the switch off.

As I turn back to the door Annie is laughing her head off, for fuck's sake. She looks me in the eye and says in her sweetest voice, "If you can't fix this before Nash gets home, he's gonna rig you to that electric chair out there, and light you up, well and truly."

I place a call to Brand and ask him to get me an electrician from the construction crew over here ASAP. No matter how much I try to bullshit him, eventually, I have to come clean and tell him what's happened.

An hour later I can still hear his laughter ringing in my ears as he hung up. I stay by the utility room door when the electrician gets here and try to understand the problem.

Only fifteen minutes pass, and I've been asking a multitude of questions, and the electrician turns to me, "Why don't you fuck off outside and let me crack on, old-timer. I've got better things to do than explain, diplomatically, that you've overloaded the circuits, blown the main fuse box, and could've burned the fuckin' house down just to scare the bejeezus out of a few kids one night in the year! Just leave me the fuck alone, pretty please."

"I'll give you fuckin' 'old timer'! I can take you on any time, SONNY!"

"Thunder, you need to give me a hand with Storm. Right away," Annie calls through from the kitchen.

Heading to the kitchen, I mumble to myself, "Old timer. I'll give you old timer. Cheeky fuckin' kids these days. Parents to fuckin' blame, I say."

Annie is waiting for me as I step inside the kitchen and points to the front door. "Either you look after Storm while I accept a delivery for Whisky, or you accept the delivery. What's it to be?"

"What's the delivery?"

“I think it’s his Halloween stuff, you know, decorations and stuff.”

“OK. You watch Storm, and I’ll do the heavy lifting. I’ll show the fucker what an old timer is capable of.”

Annie gives me a strange look, but she’s used to me by now, so she doesn’t ask any questions, just smiles and heads off to the kitchen with Storm.

An hour later and all Whisky’s stuff is stored in the garage. I go back to Annie’s where the electrician has upgraded the fuse box and told her that, “the ‘old timer’ can play with as many toys as he likes now.” Cheeky fucker.

Annie asks what’s taken me so long at Whisky’s, as the delivery driver left forty-five minutes ago. I smile and tell her it took a while to get it sorted, then kiss her and Storm goodbye so I can get back to the clubhouse.

I head back through town so I can pick up a replacement Grim Reaper and maybe a couple of other things if anything catches my eye.

CHAPTER 3

-:- SNIPER -:-

Decorating the house has me frustrated. Olivia keeps changing her mind about where she wants things placed. I'm hot and tired, and this is not my type of fun.

"Sniper, can you help me outside now?" Olivia gives me the sweetest of smiles. How the fuck can I tell her to do it herself. Oh well, let me get this done and finished with.

Three hours later, I'm sitting on the patio with a cold beer in one hand, and a cheese toastie in the other. I've also got the largest bowl of apple pie and ice cream in front of me as a treat for helping without 'moaning too much'. Yeah, that's exactly what Olivia said.

Taking out my phone, I search the internet for fancy dress costumes, because you can bet your life on the fact we'll be dressing up. Saf volunteered to watch Tyler and Cameron, and that saved me as Pip wanted me to have the fuckers... That leaves Emma and Liza available to help organize the food for the evening's Halloween Party.

Liza and Pip are rebuilding their friendship, and it's nice to see they are more relaxed around each other. I'm not sure it'll ever be as good as it once was, but it is better than when the friendship bust open.

Shades and Brand came head-to-head at one point, and we all expected it as Shades was sniping at Pip whenever he got the chance. Now, because Shades got Tyler free and clear from his mother, because of the help Pip gave him, he should have been calming the situation between Liza and Pip and not fanning the flames. Well, Brand put that flame out when he beat Shades' ass black and blue, and under threat, if he continued with his disrespect of the First Lady of the club, he'd call church to have him removed from the club once and for all.

I shake my head to clear it of distracting thoughts and get back to ordering costumes for all four of us, and grin when I see a Frankenstein one and I'm sure I know who'll want that.

"What are you doing now?" Olivia asks, and has me looking up as she takes a patio seat next to me.

"I'm ordering our costumes, then I've got to take some decorations from the clubhouse to the restaurant for Pip," I reply, wiping my hands on the paper napkin, before screwing it into a ball and placing it on my plate.

"I'll come to the clubhouse with you, as I want to speak with Mary about a Halloween cake recipe I found."

"Okay, babe, let's move it."

Walking into the clubhouse, I wave at Glide, who is talking to Shadow in the commons next to the dining area. Giving me a nod in return, he walks over. "What's up?"

"I've got to take some decorations to Pip's. Do you know where they are?"

"Yeah, we put them in the garage around back so we can load them on the truck."

Crank walks over from where he's been watching the TV, some stupid old-time movie he's found. "I'm bored."

Chuckling because although Crank is getting on in years, he's as healthy as a horse and gets bored way too easily. "Okay, you wanna come with us to Pip's and take these decorations?"

"Why not? It's better than sitting here acting like a fuckin' mummy."

Round the back of the clubhouse, in the small garage where we do small repairs on our hogs, we load up the boxes of decorations, and Crank jumps into the passenger side of the truck. I look at Glide and he's shaking his head as we both know Crank would sulk if he had to sit in the back seat of the truck.

A skeleton's head falls out of a box and before any of us have a chance of stopping him, Coal appears from nowhere, grabs the skull, and runs off with it. I look at Glide, then Crank and all three of us shrug our shoulders because none of us wants to chase after the little fucker.

Arriving at the Guardians' Rest Restaurant, we park around the back, next to the kitchen door where Pip rushes out smiling like a fool.

"This is so exciting. I came over to help you unload. I'm going to decorate once the restaurant is closed. Did you see Coal? Was he okay?" Pip asks and as usual, she talks that fast. She doesn't wait for you to answer the first question or comment, before she's thrown the next one at you.

"Coal is fine. He's running off with every bone he can get his teeth around." Sighing as I grab the first box and walk through the kitchen to the office where I lay the box in a corner.

It doesn't take long to unload and we hightail it out of there before Pip ropes us into doing other stuff for her.

On the way back to the clubhouse, my phone rings and I pass it to Crank, who's in the passenger seat once more. "Yeah, oh yeah, sure."

That's all I hear, and when he passes the phone back, I lift an eyebrow. "Oh, Thunder wants us to stop off at Harper's place."

"What for?" Glide asks.

"No idea, I didn't ask." Crank grunts.

Fuck me, we're going to have to detour now to see what the fuck he wants. Spinning the truck around, I head to Nash's place and can't help the grin that forms, hoping that Storm will be there and not at the nursery with May.

Now that the kids are two years old, they are far more interesting. Storm calls me Unc Per, as he can't say Uncle Sniper yet. But it's cute as fuck and he's a real boy, getting

into everything he can and throwing tantrums when you stop him, much to Harper's dismay, and Nash's amusement.

Tyler and Cameron have just finished 1st Grade Elementary and are into the 2nd grade. We are all so proud of them, and take turns dropping them off and picking them up. We have to do it in a cage, mind you, but we'll get them on our hogs when they're a little older.

We are delighted that Halloween has fallen on a Saturday this year, and we can go all out with our celebrations. The kids are getting to a fun age. Well, Tyler and Cameron are, at least. Those two are hilarious together, but Cameron is the one that cools Tyler down as he's a fuckin' hothead, worse than Brand, and he was a terror when he was growing up. I remember his pop giving him a good ass paddling now and again. It's a wonder he could ever sit down.

Pulling up at Harper's, we're met with Thunder running down the path toward us. Yanking open the passenger door, Crank nearly falls the fuck out.

"What the fuck, Thunder? You nearly had me out on my ass." Crank snaps.

"Come on, we gotta be fast before Brooklyn comes home." Thunder grabs Crank and pulls him out of the truck, which causes a push off from Crank and a grab and pull up the path from Thunder. They're gonna end up fighting in a minute, I'm thinking.

"Stop that, Thunder!" we hear snapped out, and looking up, Harper is standing with her hands on her hips, giving Thunder one of her stern looks.

Glide is chuckling and I'm just thinking, 'What the everlovin' fuck is goin' on?'

"Aww, come on Annie, I wanna do it before Brooklyn gets home." Thunder bats his eyelashes at her, and my eyes snap to Harper to see what she's gonna do.

“Come on and be quiet. We need to do this fast. I’ve got the decorations for Whisky and Brooklyn in my trunk, so let’s haul them into the garage and then do our thing.” Harper has a toothy grin on her face, and as she’s got a flush on her cheeks, I know she’s up to no good, because she always blushes when she’s doing something she shouldn’t.

“I’ve made a start, but we need to get in and out before anyone finds out what we’ve been up to.” Thunder chuckles.

In the garage, my eyes bog when I see the number of decorations sitting in here, and we’ve got the ones in Harper’s trunk. “Do you think they need more decorations?” I ask, because where the fuck are they going to put all this lot? It’s craziness, I’m thinking, and we hold the trophy on crazy.

Harper giggles. “I know, right? Brooklyn wanted to make a witch’s grotto and have witches everywhere, but I think we should make sure the witches are noticeable.”

Thirty minutes later, we all sneak out of the garage and into Harper’s where she hands us all a beer and, after tapping the bottles together, we smirk as we drink.

“I was hoping Storm would be here today, but I suppose, as I’ve not seen him, he’s at the nursery?” I ask Harper, and she sighs.

“Yeah, he is. I miss him when he’s not here, but he needs to mix with other kids. I think the idea of the nursery and medical place at the clubhouse is going to fall through. It’s too much and the brothers that patched from Tracker are talking about opening a new chapter,” Harper responds, picking up her cookie tin and offers us all a cookie or two.

“I heard that too. They were speaking with Brand and Shadow the other day. But the clubhouse is finished finally, and with all the extra rooms they may change their minds now they are comfortable and out of the trailers.” Glide states as he grabs the tin and takes another cookie.

“Not a bad idea. We’re getting to be a large MC now, and how much work can this area give us? We could dry up our

business options, and you know, those brothers have learned a lot since they came to us. I would vote for them to open a new chapter, and we have the finances to set that up. The cash Georgie gave the club has never been touched, so why not use it to help these brothers if they want to forge a new chapter?" Crank is the voice of reason at times, and although he's an asshole and an idiot, he'll always do what's best for the club and brothers.

"Yeah, I have to agree. The club has gotten big, and I think they are good brothers and will be solid with a chapter. I'd vote for it." I head for the door. "Come on, I need to get back and pick up Olivia."

After saying 'bye' to Harper and heading to the truck, we all grin when we look across at Whisky's and know the mess we've left behind for him to clean up.

CHAPTER 4

-:- THUNDER -:-

I look over at Sniper, who has answered his phone while we are on our way back to the clubhouse. My ears prick when I hear him say. “What...the...fuck... Who did that?” Sniper pauses while Olivia must be speaking. “On our way,” he responds, slamming his phone back into his kutte pocket.

“Glide, back to my place. Some little fucker has run off with our witch and cauldron.” Sniper is furious and I can’t help the chuckle that escapes, and when he gives me a filthy look, I just have to respond.

“Witch thief, eh!” Chuckling again, “who would have thought it?”

Crank cackles like a witch and looks over his shoulder from where he’s sitting in the passenger seat. “We’ll have to catch the fuckers and get the witch back.”

I just shake my head, then grin, because I can feel an adventure coming on, and it may end up with pink aprons. Who knows?

Pulling up outside Sniper’s house, we all watch as Olivia storms up the path and slams her fists on her hips. I stay behind Sniper as we climb out of the vehicle, ‘cause if anyone’s gonna get into trouble, it isn’t going to be me.

“Some kids ran into the garden, grabbed the witch and cauldron, and took off with them. I couldn’t catch them, and I’ve not seen them before. They are not cheap, Sniper, you needed to stick them down better than you did.” Olivia is giving Sniper that hardest of looks, but we can all see she’s a little glassy-eyed, and could throw out a few tears any minute.

Sniper pulls Olivia into his body, kisses her forehead, and whispers something into her ear. After giving him a nod, she looks at the rest of us and gives a weak, watery smile before

turning and walking up the path and through the front door, closing it quietly behind her. We three turn to Sniper and wait for his input.

“Olivia said two teenage boys ran into the garden, one grabbed the witch, and the other grabbed the cauldron, then ran like stink. She had no chance of catching them. But you know Olivia, she would have been happy to give them away, rather than them being stolen.” Sniper looks well and truly pissed off, but I can understand why.

My phone vibrates in the back pocket of my jeans, and taking it out, I see a message from Harper, aka Annie, who is my chosen daughter.

Annie: Some kids stole the dragon.

Thunder: WTF!

Annie: Two kids ran off with it. I nearly caught them. But didn't want to leave Storm in the house on his own so stopped chasing.

Thunder: On our way.

Turning, I look at Sniper, Glide, and Crank. “The fuckers just hit Annie’s place and ran off with the dragon.”

Heading back to Annie’s, we leave Sniper at home with Olivia, and this is now a matter of importance. No one takes the piss outta us by stealing our Halloween gear.

Annie greets us with a frustrated look on her face, but she isn’t showing anger or upset. “Do you know who they are?” I ask as I walk over and hug her.

“No, I don’t know who they are. But they stole the dragon. Godammit, I loved that dragon, Pops.” Annie gives me a squeeze around the middle, then smiles brightly at Crank and Glide.

“Leave it with me, and I’ll look into what the fuck is goin’ on. I’m heading back to the clubhouse as I’ve decoratin’ to do there yet. Then, of course, we have to go help at Pip’s place.

Yeah, the restaurant and her house,” I confirm, making sure Annie knows I’ve got a lot to do over the next few days.

Back at the clubhouse, we are met by Brand in the commons, arms folded over his chest, and a large frown on his face. “When are you all gonna get down to decorating here, the restaurant, and my house?”

“We’ll get to it as soon as we can. We are old men you know. We’re not as fuckin’ fast as we used to be.” Crank states and both me and Glide look at him like he’s lost his mind. Since when the fuck does he ever admit he’s getting on in years?

“Well, we need it done so the kids can enjoy it, too. Mary is baking and I’m sure Georgie will do some great treats for us all.” Brand grins, and he’s got that look on his face that we see kids have when they are waiting for a birthday or Christmas to arrive.

Glide growls, which has me looking at him, but when he points to a huge stack of boxes against the wall my eyes pop wide open. “What the fuck!” I snarl, turning to look at Brand.

“That’s what is for here, indoors, there is more, out in the garage. All that outside is for the compound, you can get brothers to help as they have the time.” Brand winks, turns, and walks away whistling the tune from the Addams Family.

“Come on, let’s look at what we have here,” Crank moans, then whines like a little bitch about his bad back, bad knees, and all his body hurting.

“Yeah, yeah, but it doesn’t stop you from playing games with Kennedy,” Glide snaps, picking up a box and throwing it onto one of the dining tables before we open it to look inside.

WHISKY

What the fuck is going on here? Brooklyn is sitting on the garage floor untangling one of the piles of tangled lights. There are three sets of lights and two sets of bunting. They are

all tangled so badly it's goin' to take forever to get it all undone.

"Who has been here? Was it Thunder and the other assholes?" I ask.

Brooklyn grins. "You guessed it."

"For fuck's sake, as if we have time to do this."

"Come on, let's just get it done," Brooklyn giggles, "but let's think about what our revenge is going to be?"

"You go get some coffee for us both, and I'll carry on here. I need a caffeine boost if they've done this to every box." I settle on the garage floor and make a start on untangling the mess they've left.

Brooklyn returns with two steaming cups of coffee, and sits on the floor opposite me. "You know that we're gonna have to be creative to get our revenge, don't you?" She points out, while taking up a string of lights and concentrating on trying to untangle them from the ones I'm working with.

We are both trying to unravel three different strings, one being bats that Brooklyn is concentrating on, while I'm working on untangling cauldrons and color-changing LEDs. All three are well and truly mixed up.

"We could get them into town, or the mall, with the kids on some crap errand, and while they're in a store, we could steal the wheels off the strollers. You know, leave the strollers on bricks like they do with cars?" I look at Brooklyn to see what she thinks of my idea.

"Won't work. They'll have a prospect, or newly appointed brother with them to watch the strollers. They wouldn't leave them unattended." She tries to shoot that idea out of the sky straight away with her logical thinking.

"Oh, I think it'll work. We need to make sure we intercept the prospect, or brother on duty at the time." I chuckle. "We may just owe them one later."

Taking a mouthful of my coffee, I untangle another foot or so of lights. This is going to be a long job I think to myself.

“Hey, Whisky. How did Bruce Wayne know when it was time to eat?” Brooklyn looks at me, head on one side, with a truly perplexed look on her face, while holding up half her string of untangled bats.

“What? I don’t know. Where the hell did that come from?” I’m baffled by this random thought.

“Alfred, the butler, used to shout, ‘Dinner, dinner, dinner, dinner, BATMAN!’” She howls with laughter and rolls on the floor. I can’t help but laugh at her. Obviously, too much caffeine, I’m thinking. But I do laugh along with her.

We take an hour to untangle the three sets of lights, and when we check the other boxes, we find more skullduggery! Our skeleton has his head on back to front. Our witch for the roof is fitted to her support pole upside down and is riding her broom backward. There’s a string of fifty lanterns and all the little shades have been taken off. The list is endless.

After another two hours of slaving away with the decorations, we think we’ve undone all the dirty deeds. I guess we’ll never be sure until we get to put them all up, though.

CHAPTER 5

-:- GLIDE -:-

“Glide, would you watch Gage, Ty, and Cameron for us, please?” Pip asks, giving me that sweet and helpless look she uses on me regularly to get what she wants.

“Yeah, why? What are you gonna be doin’?”

“Well, Emma, Mary, and I are going to go over to work alongside Georgie, as she has a few recipes she wants to try out for Halloween. So, we said we’d go help her, and of course, do some taste testing. Do you want me to bring you some back to taste test?” Pip grins, knowing that I’ll want to try anything they all make.

“Yeah, I want what you make. You know I’m the best tester you could have.”

“Good. If you take the boys over to the restaurant, they can burn off some energy by helping put up some of the decorations at the front of the main doors. I want it to look cool as I’m going to do a Halloween menu for a week. It’ll be fun, but we need the right atmosphere.” Pip doesn’t even wait for me to respond. She’s off in the direction of Brand’s office. Hm, I wonder if I’ve been had here, and she just wants time with her ol’ man?

“CAMERON, TY, GAGE, COME ON BOYS!” I bellow, and I don’t give a fuck who hears me.

The three of them come tearing up from where they’d been playing, and as it’s Saturday, they won’t need to be in bed too early. Looking around, I don’t see Crank or Thunder, so I think they may be off doing something they shouldn’t without telling me. Well fuck that, they can kiss my hairy ass from now on.

“Where we goin’, Uncle Glide?” Ty asks, and I ruffle his hair, much to his dislike, earning himself a chuckle from me.

“We’re going to the restaurant and we’re going to put up some decorations in the front yard, so let’s make a move.”

“Do you need another body to help?” Rip asks as he walks over from the kitchen.

“Yeah, that would be good, ‘cause this little fella will need a close watching.” I pick Gage up, who’s much younger than the other two, and hand him to Rip, who tickles him and has him laughing loudly in no time.

While Rip plays with Gage, I collect the keys for one of the club SUVs and gather up Cameron and Ty. It’s not a long journey to the restaurant. However, the gentle movement of the SUV soon has Gage falling asleep. Haha, I think to myself. That’s one less to monitor.

As we pull into the parking lot, I see Sandy is still living in Pip’s old trailer, probably working on the books for the business. I scoop up Gage from his seat and gently carry him to the trailer.

“Hi, Sandy. Could I leave this precious little package with you for a while? Just while we get some decorations up for Pip?” Giving her one of my best smiles, and ‘soft pussycat eyes’ looks, that have her grinning and rolling her eyes at me.

“Sure thing, Glide. But you know I’ll be hollering for you as soon as he wakes up. I’m not a kid person when it all boils down. I don’t do diapers and shit.” She gives me the stink eye and I grin.

Ty, Cameron, Rip, and I grab the boxes. Although both the boys struggle a bit, we unpack them so that we can see what we’ve got to work with.

Rip puts them in order of lights, ornaments, and animatronics. The lights we arrange around the door frame and Ty keeps switching them on and off as we’re doing it. He thinks it’s highly amusing that either Rip or me gets blinded each time.

Cameron, the calmer of the two, finds a motion-activated cackling witch laugh machine. He plants it by the door at the bottom of the ladder we’re using for the lights. Poor Rip

nearly has a fuckin' heart attack when he takes a string of lights to go across the top of the door and it goes off with its cackling laughter. By the time the lights are up to his satisfaction, Rip's forgotten the cackle, and it gets him again on the way down, ending up on his ass, which I find exceptionally funny, and so do the boys. Rip is not so impressed, and chases Cameron through the doors and into the restaurant.

I grab Ty and we follow them inside. This is as good a time as any to see what we can do to grab a free bite and a drink, I think to myself.

Wandering through to the kitchen, I find it's busy with everything being prepped for opening time. We scrounge up some sandwiches from one of the chefs, and of course, when it's a chef, it's more like a piece of art. Despite looking too good to eat, all four of us eat our food as though we've never been fed before, and drink our soda in record time. Ty lets forth the biggest and loudest belch that has the chef bowing and proclaiming that he's never had such a loud appreciation of his work. The rest of the kitchen staff applaud and then get back to their chores.

We head back to the entrance and start work on making a pathway to the doors. We make it so that only two customers, side by side, can approach the doors between the decorations.

We mix static ornaments with animatronics so that you can't tell if something's going to move or scream at you as you approach. We leave Ty's cackling witch by the door, and he thinks this is fantastic.

Just as I come back for the ladder, and Rip is taking the boys to the restroom, I see two kids grabbing the first ornaments from the far end of the walkway.

"Come here, you thieving little bastards," I yell and they take off like a couple of jackrabbits. Running after them, they outdistance me in no time, and even with their awkward loads, they soon get a distance between us I'm never going to close.

Puffing and wheezing, I head back to the restaurant where Rip gets his own back by teasing me about being a ‘too slow, old man’ and ‘not the man I thought I was’.

These torments get him a ‘fuck off boy before I show you what an old man can do to a cocky youngster,’ comment.

Before things get a bit out of hand, there’s an almighty shriek from the trailer that has all four of us stop dead in our tracks. I look straight at Ty. “What have you done to Sandy’s trailer?”

“I ain’t done nothing, honest I ain’t,” he stutters and looks at me with the most innocent face I think I’ve ever seen on him.

“Cameron?” I cast my glare at him, and he splutters his innocence, too.

As I head over to the trailer wondering what the fuck has Sandy screeching my name, and screaming blue murder all at the same time, she walks out the trailer with a scarf over her mouth, holding Gage out in front of her like he’s radioactive or something.

“Glide, never leave this thing with me again. It ain’t fuckin’ natural for something so small and cute to stink this fuckin’ foul. I don’t know if it’s shit itself or just farted, but whatever it was, it was loud and foul. My trailer is going to stink for the next month. Jesus Christ, what are you feeding this thing? Don’t stand there staring, take it away and do something with it.” She stands there glaring at me and wagging Gage at me as though it will make me grab him faster.

“‘IT’ is a boy, not an it, and he is Gage. Remember that in the future.” As soon as I take possession of him, Sandy turns and stalks off to the trailer, muttering stuff all the way.

“Nothing human smells that bad unless it’s been dead in a fuckin’ swamp for a thousand years, chewed by gators, spit out again, and re-chewed for another thousand fuckin’ years. Jesus Christ and all that’s holy couldn’t make me look after something that gross ever again in my lifetime or the next. For...Fuck’s...Sake...” With that the trailer door slams shut. Two seconds later, and the doors wide open again and all the

trailer windows start opening one by one as though by magic. Even the roof vents pop open.

“C’mon, Gage. Let’s get you checked out and taken home.” With that, we scoop everyone up and head for the SUV. Finding nothing wrong in Gage’s pants, we fasten the boys in their seats and head back to the clubhouse.

We’ve only been on the road five minutes before we all scream and wind the windows down as fast as we can. Gage strikes again!!

I need to speak to Pip about what she’s feeding her son, For... Fuck’s...Sake!!

CHAPTER 6

-:- BRAND -:-

Walking into church, I give the brothers a chin lift as I take my seat, pick up the gavel, and open the meeting.

“Brothers, I’ve called church to cover the topic of Halloween. Now, I know some of you...” giving the old boys a stern look, “are rather excited about this, but I don’t want any kind of trouble happening.”

Brothers chuckle whilst their eyes turn to Crank, Thunder, Glide, and Sniper. Shrugging, Crank shows he doesn’t give a fuck what anyone thinks, and I suppose, when we all get to his age, we’ll not give much of a fuck either.

Continuing, I look from one brother to another. “We have various things goin’ down for Halloween. Pip is talking about having a family week, where they pay \$20 for a family of four and get the Halloween menu. That money Pip will donate to any charity of our choice. We all know Pip loves supporting charities, particularly veterans, but I’m not sure we should do the same as we have been. We need to give some other causes the opportunity.”

Shadow taps his knuckles on the table and has everyone looking at him. “Georgie has been making some Halloween cupcakes and is going to bake other stuff, but she’s wanting to donate the proceeds along with Pip’s.”

The room shows appreciation of the two Ol’ Ladies, and with ‘Yeah’, ‘Great’, and ‘Awesome’ comments, I know they’ll support whatever we decide to do.

“What about we do a bonfire? Let the kids have a good time. I know that Gage, May, and Storm are young, but Cameron and Tyler would enjoy it,” Dollar suggests. “I’m sure Mary will do something food-wise for the little fuckers.”

“Are you gonna claim Mary now, Dollar? It’s about time you made an honest woman outta her,” Glide snips and we all turn to look at Dollar, who is grinning like a fool.

“Oh, yeah, I finally got her to say she would last night, so let’s get to the votes, Pres, because I want this done and finished with.”

“Okay, Dollar wants Mary as his Ol’ Lady. I need unanimous votes, and remember, if you say ‘Nay’, I’m gonna tell her, so you get no more decent meals. Unlike the rest of us, who’ll continue eating Mary’s great steak, pot pies, and ribs,” I add, stirring trouble a little.

Everyone yells ‘Aye’, and I turn to Dollar smirking, “You got yourself an Ol’ Lady, Dollar.”

Eagle, our secretary, jumps out of his seat, and out the door without a word. A minute later, he comes back in carrying a box, tossing it to Dollar. “Mary’s kutte. I’ve had it ready for weeks now. You can thank me later.”

Dollar grins, “Thanks Eagle. I meant to mention it a few times, but kept getting distracted. Yeah, I’ll have her property patch on her back before she can say ‘pumpkin pie’.”

The room chuckles at his sheer delight, and I can see some of the brothers are rather envious. I know it’s hard to not have your own woman, but it’s something you have to just wait for. It’ll happen when it happens, and often at the least expected time.

Tapping the table, I regain the brothers’ attention. “Back to the bonfire. Are you all in favor?”

Head nods, and ‘ayes’, fly around the room. I turn to look at Shadow. “You in charge of that, Shadow?”

“Yeah, I can do that. I’ll set out a safe area in the compound away from any buildings or combustible materials. Crank, I’ll need some input from you, if that’s okay?” Shadow raises his eyebrows to Crank.

Crank side eyes Shadow and gives a gruff, “Yeah, okay” in response.

“What are we doing about these thieving kids? I’ve had some more of my Halloween gear go missing from my front yard.” Whisky glares at the Old Boys as if they are to blame.

Glide stares back at Whisky, stands up, and puffs himself out like a rooster, about to go into battle. “Do we look like fuckin’ kids? I chased them off from Pip’s restaurant, but couldn’t catch the little fuckers. We need to do something about them, ‘cause we’re gonna lose everything at this rate. What do they even want the stuff for? I’ve ridden around town, and not seen them being used anywhere else.” Glide sits back down, and when he out-stares Whisky, he seems satisfied that he’s won.

“What’s this about stuff getting stolen? Why am I just hearing about it?” I’m not happy that the brothers are having someone in their front yards and stealing their gear. I’m not happy that Pip’s got stuff stolen from her restaurant, and she’s not said anything to me.

“File, get me a list of everything that’s gone missing, when and where it went from. This needs addressing. We earn our green like everyone else, and I’m not sitting back while some fucker just walks off with our property. From now on I want to know as soon as anything happens. Got it?” Who the fuck would want to go around stealing from bikers, for fuck’s sake? Someone with a death wish, maybe?

“Pres, I have some spare CCTV cameras. I could hook a few up at Whisky’s place? They seem to hit him regularly, well, twice anyway,” Chips throws into the conversation.

“I’ve got a better idea if anyone’s interested?” Sniper chimes in.

“Let’s hear it then. This better be good, and not some dumb-ass scheme.” I’m not in the mood for some stupid idea. I’m pissed that we’re having our stuff stolen, and I want it stopped, and whoever is doing it caught.

“If they’re targeting Whisky as an easy steal, let’s give them something to steal. I got a Frankenstein costume for Halloween and I gotta say, it’s the dog’s doodads. It’s realistic, and we could get someone wearing it to just stand in Whisky’s front yard. No chasing or cameras required. When they come to grab Frankenstein, Frankenstein grabs them. Couldn’t be simpler.”

I slam my hand on the table, followed by an ‘Aye’.

“That’s a fuckin’ outstanding idea, Sniper. Glide, you’re up for the first watch on this. You missed ‘em at Pip’s restaurant, you get a second chance. Don’t miss this time. Hour on, hour off between the four of you. Whisky, any idea what time they’ve been hitting you?”

“I think it’s just after school time,” Whisky tells us.

“Right. Glide, you need to be suited up and in place before the end of school. Make sure you’re prepared for an hour standing still. Make sure you’re hydrated, and you’ve had a piss beforehand. You are not to move while staking this out. If you have to swap over after the hour, two of you pick him up, and take him into the garage so you’re out of sight. You carry Frankenstein number two back out and make it look like you’ve just done a repair or maintenance on him. There’ll only be one shot at this, so nobody fuck it up.” This is a good idea for catching these little thieves and I want to know why they’ve been targeting us.

Church closes with Glide getting taunts of Frankie, and comments about proposing this as his new road name at the next church. As we leave, I overhear Shadow whispering to Crank and Rip.

That’s not good, and I don’t want to even think about what this could lead to. Whispering is never good, I’ve found.

CHAPTER 7

-:- THUNDER -:-

Glide is not impressed that he got chosen for this ‘mission’. He thinks he looks stupid, and we’ve all told him he looks fine. Myself, Sniper, and Crank have taken a lot of photos on our phones, and when we get back to the clubhouse, we’ll be seeing Spider to get some printed off and used as Halloween decorations. That should get the party off to a roaring start when Glide sees himself plastered all over the commons.

He’s been on Whisky’s front lawn about fifteen minutes so far. He did nothing but complain the whole time he was getting ready, especially about having to stand all that time, and not be able to have a piss.

I’ve got to say none of us have noticed, but apparently, he says he goes every hour like clockwork. Well, we’ll soon see, won’t we?

Sniper is next door at Whisky’s. He’s hiding out in the garage with the door ajar. Just enough that he can charge out if necessary.

I’m so hyped up, nobody would understand. When those kids go to grab Frankenstein and Glide grabs them, they’re gonna piss their pants. I can’t wait.

School kids are wandering past now, so hopefully it shouldn’t be too long before we see some action.

My phone buzzes and I see it’s a call from Sniper.

“What’s up?” I ask, as I keep my voice low.

“I don’t know about Glide, but I’m fuckin’ bored already.” Sniper replies.

“Do you think he’s pissed himself yet?” Chuckling.

“I’ve never noticed him running for a piss every hour. I think that was bullshit to get out of being Frankenstein.”

“I can’t wait for these kids to try to grab Frankie.” I’m hoping Glide can stay still long enough for this to happen.

“They won’t know what’s happening, as long as Glide hasn’t fallen asleep on his feet.”

“If he doesn’t grab them, Brand will go crazy.” I reply.

“I know. He wasn’t happy that someone was targeting our stuff.” Sniper sighs.

“I don’t think it was ‘ours’ he was so concerned about. I think it was Pip’s stuff that tipped him over the edge.”

“Yeah, if she got pissed with us, that would be his ‘leisure time’ out the window.”

“Heads up, Sniper. We’ve got a bite.”

As I watch from behind the drapes, two kids are at the top of Whisky’s yard. They are looking over the decorations and figures. I hope to goodness they decide on Frankie. I can only imagine the sight of Glide lumbering down the road after them if they grab anything but him. He’ll give the other kids, on their way home, heart failure.

Sure enough, the two boys start down the yard. As I watch, I get the impression that they’re not going for Frankie. They stop, one on either side of Glide, and have a quick look around. One bends down and goes for some light-up ghosts. The other is going for a bubbling cauldron.

As soon as they bend down, Glide’s hands shoot out and grabs them both by their collars. They both look up and when they realize what has hold of them, they scream blue murder.

The tallest looks like he’s rooted to the spot, and about to pass out. The smaller one slips out of his jacket and takes off down the road like his ass is on fire.

Now being able to use his free hand, Glide latches onto the remaining lad even more firmly. Still terrified, he cries. I move my ass and as I leave the front door; I see Sniper appear from the garage and get ahold of the boy. Glide slips off the head

and then glares and snarls “Now you thievin’ little fucker, you’ve got a lot of explaining to do, and I need a piss.”

Glide heads into Whisky’s house via the open garage door and we hold on to our prisoner while we wait for him. Once Glide is back, we make sure everywhere is secure and head for the SUV. The kid kicks off as we near it, and we stop for a minute ‘til he calms down.

“Listen, kid, I’m only gonna say this once. We’re a motorcycle club. We have a President who runs the club. That President wants to ask you some questions. When you’ve answered him, we’ll drop you off home. End of story. You’re not going to be hurt. You’re not being kidnapped, but we want some answers. It’s that simple,” I say as calmly as I can.

When I look at him, I think to myself, ‘If I were in his shoes at his age, would I believe me?’ Not a fuckin’ chance.

Sniper drives, Glide next to him in the passenger seat, and I sit in the rear with the kid. At least he’s stopped sniveling. That’s a start. He looks thin for his age, and his clothes aren’t new for this semester. Not from a well-heeled family then, I guess.

“What’s your name, kid? I’m Thunder, the guy driving is Sniper, and the Frankenstein monster that grabbed you is actually called Glide. We’re all brothers in Satan’s Guardians Motorcycle Club. That’s who you’ve been stealing from. Our Pres’ Ol’ Lady, Pip, owns the restaurant you’ve been stealing from, too.”

“My name’s Kirk, James T,” the kid says and looks back out the window.

“Well, James T, looks like we’re on first-name terms now then, eh?”

Glide looks over his shoulder at me and shakes his head. “You sure are one dumb motherfucker, Thunder. The kid’s takin’ the piss outta you. James T. Kirk is the captain of the Starship Enterprise in Star Trek. Well, kid, I taught Spock how to do the Vulcan mind meld, so don’t fuck with me.”

“You little fucker.” That kills the conversation dead and I don’t try again.

Once we’re in the compound, we head to Brand’s office. Sniper called ahead to let him know we’d be bringing in our thief, so he’s already in his office when we knock.

Stepping inside, we take positions to the side of Brand’s desk, and wait for what’s about to happen. Now we know that Brand, or any of us, wouldn’t hurt a kid, and although we’ve told him this, the kid looks petrified.

“Right kid, I want no bullshit outta you.” Brand is settled behind his desk and has his arms crossed, looking relaxed. “I want your name and why you’re stealin’ from people’s homes and businesses.”

The kid looks from one of us to another. He’s clenching his hands in his lap and looking pretty uncomfortable, but he decides to open up, which is seen in his expression. “My name is Konrad Gibson. I’m thirteen and I’ve been taking things to sell so I could help my da. My mom died two years ago, and my da has been looking after me and my sister. He lost his job nine months ago, and can’t get another. He’s struggling to pay the mortgage, buy us clothes, and put food on the table. So, I’ve been stealing, and then selling the things to buy food.”

I rub the back of my neck because this was not what I was expecting to hear. It seems the family has fallen onto hard times, and we’ve all been at the bottom of the dirt pile at one time or another in our lives.

Glancing over at Brand, I can see the kid’s story has affected him, as it has the rest of us. I look from Glide to Crank, Sniper, Shadow, Torch, and Patch, who are all looking and feeling the same as myself, and that’s for us to start helping this family.

Brand turns to Patch. “Get this checked out, ask Spider or Ace, and tell them pronto. I need the answer now.”

Patch gives a chin lift and rushes out of the office. We all maintain our position and remain quiet.

“Do you need anything to eat or drink?” Brand asks, and Konrad shakes his head no. He’s keeping his head down and we can all see the flush of embarrassment and fear coloring his face.

It’s only around ten minutes before Patch steps back into the office, giving Brand a head nod.

Knowing the kid is telling the truth, we all see Brand take a deep breath. “Okay, this is what’s gonna happen, kid. We’re gonna get your da here, fill him in on what you’ve been doing. In the meantime, my officers and I will decide what we’re gonna do about this, because you can’t walk away without some form of punishment.”

Konrad looks like he wants to piss his pants, but he keeps himself still, and remains calm. I’m more than a little impressed by how he’s holding himself together. But we’ll have to see what happens when his father turns up.

CHAPTER 8

-:- BRAND -:-

Konrad's father cannot be found at the moment, but Shadow is waiting outside the house for him to return home. One way or another, we'll find out all the details of what's goin' on with the family.

Turning to Torch, I give him a firm look. "What's your gut tellin' you?"

"That he's tellin' the truth. I think they've fallen on hard times and he was willin' to do anything that would help. Spider has verified the father lost his job, his wife died, and he has a daughter. They are behind on their mortgage payments."

"Call officers to church. Let's discuss this situation before the father arrives. Shadow will have to be brought up to spec when he gets back." I look at Konrad, who still looks like he wants to piss his pants. "You'll go with these fuckers, be quiet, and behave. We'll decide what's gonna happen once we've spoken to your father.

"You four watch him, give him a drink and something to eat. I'll call you all back here when I have answers."

Thunder steps toward the door. "Come on, kid, let's get you sorted out and settled while we wait for your father."

I watch Thunder, Glide, Crank, and Sniper leave the office. Torch, and Patch follow me out of the office and to church, where we're going to have to work out what to do with this mess.

"Get Ace onto this as well as Spider. I want everything here with me in church in ten minutes." I look at Torch, who gives me a nod and makes his way out, leaving me looking at my officers taking their seats ready for church to begin.

Spider walks in, followed by Torch, a good ten minutes later. Handing me a folder, I flick it open and scan the pages. Looking up at Spider, who gives me a serious nod, I know this information is accurate.

Torch, Patch, Tyre, Dollar, Eagle, Doc and Spider have all taken seats. The only one missing is my VP, Shadow, and the quicker he gets here, the better. But it seems Mr. Gibson isn't home, and the waiting is longer than we hoped.

"I've called this meeting as we know what's happening with the stealing of the Halloween decorations." I begin, and filling the brothers in on what information we have so far.

"It's a crock isn't it, when life kicks you in the balls. This man's lost his wife, job and struggling to make ends meet. Konrad is old enough to know what's happening, and from what I've found, this kid is trying to help feed the three of them while every cent is going on trying to keep the mortgage paid to date." Spider fills in more information to the brothers.

Tyre, our Road Captain, is rubbing his neck. "How about we do the fundraising for this family?"

Nods, grunts, and 'ayes' of agreement are quickly heard, and I grin as they've come to the same conclusion as I had.

"That's what I was goin' to suggest. We've done a lot of fundraising for the charities in town, and we've done a fair amount for veterans in our area. Let's do something for this family to make their lives that much easier. Give me unanimous, brothers!" Being president of this club is immensely satisfying when I see this happening, because we get such a lot of bad press, that doing good always has us feeling great about ourselves.

Knocking on the door before it opens has Shadow walking inside with Mr. Gibson behind him. Who, I have to say, looks like he wants to crap himself.

"Ah, Mr. Gibson, come in, take a seat. My name's Brand and I'm the President of Satan's Guardians MC. We want to discuss something with you." I keep it polite and friendly

because I think this man has the weight of the world on his shoulders right now.

“Call me Gibbs, everybody does. Is there a problem? Has Konrad done something wrong?” Gibbs asks, but he’s got a firm voice, no sign of the worry he must have.

“Yes, and no. Please take a seat and I can fill you in on why you are here.” I point to a chair on one side of the table, and he warily takes a seat.

“Konrad is currently with a couple of our brothers. They’re getting him something to eat and drink. Just so you know, he’s okay and not hurt or in any danger.” Gibbs has a relieved look on his face following this information, and I can see some of the tension ease in his stance.

“Konrad has been trying to supplement your cash flow, he tells us. Were you aware of that?” Looking him square in the eyes, I want to know if there’s any sign of deceit when he answers.

“Well, yes. He’s a good kid and has been going around the neighborhood doing odd jobs for people. I know he’s cut a couple of lawns and he’s washed a few driveways with my old power washer. He’s been pretty lucky with how much cash he’s made, I have to say.” Gibbs looks very proud of his son. I don’t get the feeling that he knows anything about the thefts.

“Well, he’s been doing a bit more than you’re aware of to get his cash. He’s been stealing people’s Halloween garden decorations and then selling them. He wasn’t alone in this either, though we didn’t catch the kid that was with him. You might be able to solve that and maybe speak to his parents if you know them. If not, when you find a name, give it to me and I’ll speak to the parents, no problem.”

I watch him closely and his pride is rapidly turning to disappointment, though I don’t see any anger there. This tells me a lot about this family and the morals that they live by. It seems the father is a parent that guides and leads by example rather than wielding a belt or a hand. I like the look of this guy, I think to myself.

“What Konrad has been doing has hurt no one. On the other hand, it is still stealing. If I leave it in your hands, what would you do to punish him?” My eyebrows raise as I wait for a response.

“Honestly, I don’t have an answer to that right now. I’ve never had to punish my children for something as serious as this. They’ve always been such great kids that my wife and I never had to ground them or ban them from their tech stuff. Nothing like that. I’ll make sure that from now on, I walk him to school every day and be there every afternoon when he leaves. He’ll never have the opportunity to steal another thing.” Gibbs looks like another weight has just been added to his burden and I watch his shoulders slump that bit lower.

“How is that going to work for you if you get a job? That will significantly affect your work availability, won’t it? And yes, I’ve done my homework before getting you here. I may have a solution to Konrad’s punishment if you’re willing to hear me out?” Again, I watch for any reaction.

“What do you have in mind? Though I’ll tell you now, if it involves anything physical, you’ll have to go through me first. I won’t stand for that, no matter what, or who, he’s stolen from.” Gibbs stands up and eyeballs every one of us. We make a formidable sight, yet he doesn’t flinch as he looks us all in the eye and there’s not an ounce of fear in him.

“Sit down, Gibbs. We’re not about to hurt Konrad. What I’d like to do is get him off the streets after school and possibly part of the weekend, too. I suggest that he come here after school each day and we give him some chores to do. We can hand him over to Mary. She’s our head housekeeper and organizes all our cleaning, laundry, and most of the cooking. What are your thoughts on that?” Leaning back in my chair, I steeple my fingers and wait for his reaction.

“I think it’s a good idea, in principle, but my son isn’t going to become a slave. He has school projects and stuff to complete. His education is important and if being here has a negative impact on that, I’ll pull him out immediately. I want the best

for him in the future. I don't want him to be like me. I've worked hard all my life and lost virtually everything in just a few months.

“Losing my wife was out of my hands. Her illness was hereditary, and we didn't know about it until it was too late. Her fuckin' family knew about it and didn't say a word. We could have had it diagnosed earlier and she would have had a fighting chance. I haven't spoken to her family since we first found out they knew. My wife said from day one that she was done with them, and they could kiss her ass. They sentenced her to die by knowingly keeping quiet.

“Anyway, besides that, my son is not going to be grubbing about on his hands and knees in the dirt like I was. I was a landscape gardener for years, working long hours for someone that I thought was a friend. Then he retired and without giving me the option to take over the business, he just shut it down and fucked off. I got to work to find the place shut down, and that was that.”

He stopped for breath, and you could tell that he was hurting. He was letting emotions out that he has probably been bottling up for some time for the sake of his kids. It must be hard to lose so much in so short a time.

“There's something else we'd like to offer you. We've been planning a fundraiser but haven't been able to decide on a cause for the money to go to. After hearing your recent history from Konrad, we as a club all came to the same decision. We'd like you to be our cause. We want to help you get back on your feet.”

Gibbs gets back on his feet and leans on the table, almost nose to nose. I stand slowly and lean into him. Torch and Patch have moved to either side of him, just in case. I gently shake my head and they take no action but just stand there, ready to move at a moment's notice.

“I don't need your fuckin' charity. I'll get by one way or another, but I don't need money from people I don't fuckin'

know.” He’s shaking pretty badly by this time, and I thought I was going to have to put him down if he’d tried anything.

“You’re Gibbs, I’m Brand. We’ve known each other for a short while now. I’ve already helped you by not taking your son to the sheriff’s office. I’ve already helped you by feeding your son as we speak. I’m offering you help for your family. You may need nothing and might be able to cope with all the trouble you’ve got going on, but your family needs help, not charity.

“Your son has become a thief at thirteen trying to help you. What’s next? Liquor stores at fourteen, truck stops at fifteen? Calm your ass down and think about it. I haven’t had you brought here to get myself a fuckin’ Nobel Peace Prize for Humanitarian Services to a fuckin’ gardener.” My voice is calm, but every other part of me is raging right now at his outburst.

Gibbs squints even harder and we maintain the stare.

CHAPTER 9

-:- PIP -:-

Walking into the kitchen to ask Mary if she needs any help, I notice a teenager eating a sandwich and drinking a soda. I look at Mary and she shrugs, so me being nosey, I wander over and smile at the kid.

“Hi, I’m Pip, what’s your name?” Keeping my question cheerful, mind you, as he looks like he’s about ready to bolt out of the back door.

“Hm, I’m Konrad.”

“What are you doing here, Konrad?” I ask, taking a cookie from the tray in front of the kid.

“I...I was caught stealing and brought here. My Da is here now in that room with the other m...men from here.”

Now he’s scared, he’s stuttering now and again, although I can see he’s trying hard not to show it. I need to know what the heck is going on because he has to have a reason for what he was doing.

I can see the old boys’ watching from across the kitchen and Mary scoots them out, to which they grumble and curse. But it’s not helping this kid with them watching him closely.

“Okay, Konrad, you tell me why you were stealing and everything you need to, and I’ll make sure you will be dealt with fairly.” I pat his shoulder, giving it a little squeeze.

For the next ten minutes, I listen to Konrad and know his family is in distress. They need help, and by all that’s holy, we are going to give it. Looking up, I notice Liza is standing close by listening and she has tears in her eyes, the same as me. I give her a little nod before taking a deep breath. “I’m going to sort this. Liza, will you stay with Konrad, please?”

“I will, don’t worry.”

As I reach church, the door opens and Spider steps out. Oh yeah, you can bet Ace saw me storming over here. I'm going to get the ladies to help me disable them because it's like being spied on.

"Get out of my way, Spider. Right this instant."

Spider glances into the room at Brand, but I charge into the room and give them all a dirty look, and that's putting it mildly.

"That young boy out there has been going through hell, and the old boys are scaring him half to death. Thunder keeps trying to make friends with a thirteen-year-old that's never seen a biker, never mind been to a clubhouse. He'll probably have nightmares about Thunder for the rest of his life.

"You've got his father in here, and they haven't even seen each other since they got here. What the fuck are you men thinking?"

"And why are you two assholes nose to nose across the table? I want answers, and I want them now! You, the father. Why are you nose to nose with my Ol' Man when, however misguided he may be, he's trying to help?" I slam my hands on my hips and watch both Brand and Gibbs sit down.

Luckily, Spider gives a gentle cough and explains to me what Brand is doing. Once I've heard him out, I point to Konrad's father and say in a slow voice "You, come with me now and see your son. You need to take some time out to think about how you can benefit from the help we're offering. It's not charity. We'll get you both home. I will go with you and so will another of the Ol' Ladies, Liza. While at your house, we will make sure your daughter is ok. She's ten years old Konrad tells me, and her name is Eleanor? Now that's settled let's get moving as we don't have all day."

Walking into Konrad's house with Liza behind me, and Gibbs looking sheepish, I check out the downstairs rooms. Now, they are not bad, but they need a good clean.

Turning to Gibbs I can see he's a little embarrassed. "Okay, let's meet your daughter. She can't be at school at this time of day."

Konrad walks away and climbs the staircase, and I turn to look around once more. "Liza, call in the ladies. We need to get this place sorted out."

"I can't afford to pay for cleaners. I try my best to keep on top of everything, but when it comes down to spending time with my kids or dusting, my kids will come first every time." Gibbs looks crestfallen that I'm calling him out, as it were, about the state of his house.

"Gibbs. I'm not trying to make you feel bad. I've been to houses where there were couples with kids and their homes were horrendous. That was with a wife at home all day and the kids at school.

"You're doing the best you can and we can all see that. Hence why we're willing to help you. The ladies I'm talking about are the club Ol' Ladies. We're in a relationship with a brother, akin to wives in the outside world, if you like. It's 'help' that we're willing to give, not 'charity'." Looking him in the eye, I can see him relenting.

"Thank you, Pip. I appreciate that you're trying to help. It's just difficult for me to accept it. I've been struggling for months now without a light at the end of the tunnel. I've never asked for help in my life." Gibbs looks at his feet as though he's a naughty boy in class.

"You haven't asked for help. We're offering it, freely, to someone that could just do with a helping hand." Before I can say anymore, Konrad comes down the stairs with his sister.

She is such a little beauty and I give her a beaming smile. I call Liza to come to meet this little angel. Squatting in front of her, I hold out my hand. "Hi, Eleanor. My name's Pip. I'm so pleased to meet you."

She looks me right in the eye and replies, "I'm Ellie. I'm ten years old. I'm not a little girl and my da is not available, so

you're wasting your time! You might as well leave now," She holds my gaze, and I burst out laughing and fall backward onto my ass as Liza walks in.

"Well, that told you, Pip," and she's grinning from ear to ear.

Gibbs grabs Ellie into his arms and scolds her for her comment, but I tell him it's fine, that she's only looking out for him.

Liza tells me that Georgie, Brooklyn and Harper are free today and will soon be on their way over. It's only a couple of minutes away, and they're grabbing some cleaning stuff and loading an SUV. I bet Brand sends a brother or two with them. Sometimes these bikers can stifle with their protective instincts.

"Okay, Gibbs. Let's have a look in the kitchen," I say as I head that way.

"Been there, Pip. Not much to do in there, but Old Mother Hubbard would be proud. When the Ol' Ladies get here, you, me, and Gibbs can head off to the grocery store and remedy that issue. He needs all the staples and then some. We could get him a slow cooker, that's an outstanding idea! My God, I amaze myself sometimes." She turns to Gibbs.

"I'll teach you how to use a slow cooker. They're an awesome piece of kit for the kitchen, and will save you a ton of time. I bet we could get Konrad in on this, too. He'll be a chef in no time." She beams at all of us and her enthusiasm is infectious.

"I've always enjoyed cooking. My momma used to show me things all the time. I bet I can slice stuff faster than you can. I'm dead fast with things like onions and mushrooms. Momma used to flinch and cover her eyes 'cause she thought I was going to lose a finger or two I was that fast. Remember, Da?" Konrad looks at his da, and we can all see Gibbs welling up with his memory.

There's a knock on the door and when Gibbs turns to answer it, it flies open and Harper is the first to barge inside.

Konrad is smitten as soon as he sees her. I watch as he blushes from his head to his toes. His mouth is gaping open and his eyes are wider than an owl's. Oh...My...God... If that is not love at first sight, I don't know what is. Brooklyn and Harper join us and Liza gives them the rundown of what we're doing to help.

I grab Liza when she's explained everything, and then I grab Konrad.

"Gibbs, you stay here with the ladies and you and Ellie can be supervisors. Show them what not to touch and stuff. Konrad, you can go with us and be our bodyguard. How's that, young man?"

I loop my arm through his so there's no way he can back out, and I head for the door. Harper laughs and tells us, "Good luck with that, Pip."

Before I can reply I'm out the door, and there, as large as life, are Thunder and Sniper.

They see us heading out the front door, and Thunder opens the SUV door. Sniper heads into the house to watch out for those ladies, no doubt. As if Harper couldn't look after them all on her own.

"Your chariot awaits," giving me and Liza a beaming smile but scowling at Konrad. "Bit of a comedown from the Enterprise, eh, James T?"

Before I can ask what's going on, Thunder has us bundled into the backseats, and as soon as we're on the road he tells me the story of the James T joke.

We all, including Thunder, laugh so hard our sides ache. Konrad eventually joins in but keeps saying, "Sorry, Thunder!"

CHAPTER 10

-:- CRANK -:-

“Crank, get your ass in the office,” Brand shouts before walking back to his office, and expecting me to follow. I look at Thunder and roll my eyes before following Brand.

Walking into the office, I close the door behind me and take a stand in front of his desk. The only time I’m called into the office is when Brand has something in mind for me to do for him, or the club. So, I patiently wait for him to fill me in on what’s going on.

“We are having Halloween functions as fundraisers. I don’t have time to follow this through. You and the others have time on your hands, so this is what’s gonna happen.

“You have the compound to decorate, create an area for the kids to play. The bonfire, check in with Shadow, make sure it’s fuckin’ safe, and I want no accidents. Pip, Liza, and Georgie are all pitching in to help with the fundraising effort. You need to liaise with them and help in any way you can. I want this to be big enough to pay off the \$70,000 that’s left on Gibb’s mortgage. That will make sure those kids always have a roof over their heads.

“If you have any other ideas for fundraising, you come to me first, you do not go off on a tangent and do anything without my permission. You’ll be wearing more than pink fuckin’ aprons if you mess this up, you hear me?” Brand is a little hot under the collar so I give him a nod and my most serious look to reassure him, but hey, I am who I am, and I can’t promise everything will run smoothly.

“Okay, I’ll get the boys motivated, but we’ve got to go into town to do a few things, too. Maybe we can take the kids with us and give them a treat.”

“Cameron and Tyler are in school, but you can take the others for me, but check with Pip, Harper, and June first. Don’t just fuck off with them,” Brand snaps, giving me a frown at the same time.

“Okay, don’t lose your hair. I’ll let them know.” Turning, I stomp out of the office, mumbling under my breath. Not sure if he thinks we’re idiots. We didn’t get to this age by sheer dumb luck! Well, maybe we did, but hey, who cares.

Walking back into the commons, I head over to our corner and look at Glide and Thunder. Sniper hasn’t arrived yet, so he’s more than likely loving it up with Olivia. Anyone would think they were teenagers the way they go at it. I know Sniper’s trying to get as much use out of his man parts before he says, I quote ‘It stops working’.

“Okay, you both up for a trip to the store? I need to get some decorations and pick up the outfits I ordered for the trick-or-treating.”

“I’m comin’, bored out of my head here.” Thunder is eagerly on his feet and looks at Glide questioningly.

“Okay, I’ll come. I’ll bring the little stinker along too.” Glide smirks, and by that he means Gage.

Once I’ve caught up with June, and Thunder has had the all-clear from Harper, we gather up May and Storm. Sniper appears and we load up two SUVs and travel over to the mall. We have more decorations for the compound to buy, and we need to pick up the outfits that have been ordered, which are ready for collection.

Once at the mall and parked up in the mother and baby parking bays, we open up the three strollers. As we’re doing this, some young smart-ass walks by muttering about us being ‘some ugly mothers’ and his friends think this is highly amusing. Sniper starts to react and I stop him in his tracks. “They’re not worth it, brother. Let it slide.”

Once in the mall we have a steady walk around and look at the kids’ toy stores. As usual, when we’re out with the little

monsters, we buy something for each of them. They are so spoiled, it's unbelievable.

Collecting the outfits only takes a minute, as the order is paid for already. Before going any further, we volunteer Sniper to take everything we have so far back to the SUVs and arrange to meet him at our next stop-off, the Halloween decorations.

We leave the strollers outside and each of us carries our respective little monster. We take our time deciding what we need for the compound and place an order for delivery to the clubhouse. No way are we going to be able to get everything we've bought into the two SUVs.

We take what we think we can carry and that's the lighter, smaller packaged stuff. Mainly skeletons, witches, and ghosts to be hung from the trees and other decorations out in the compound.

Brand is going to flip when he sees how much we've spent. Serves him right for sending us out unsupervised. He should know better. Glide comes back from his second visit to the store's customer toilets since we got here. Not sure if he needed to go, or if he's still playing the part to get out of future chores, the crafty old git.

As we leave the store, we see Sniper getting into a ruckus with the young guy and his friends from earlier.

"I don't wanna hear your bullshit. I want the fuckers back right now." Sniper is speaking slowly and carefully to him and this is not a good sign.

Thunder calls over to him, asking what's going on. We can't charge over there to help him as we're holding the kids. I offer to take Storm and as Thunder passes him over, Sniper points to the strollers we'd left outside the store. The three of us turn as one and we explode at the same time.

What...The...Everlovin'... Fuck! All three strollers have bricks under the axles and all the wheels are missing. They look like cars that have been jacked in a ghetto somewhere. No wonder Sniper is going insane at these guys.

Thunder turns and marches over to Sniper, but without stopping, he grabs the smart-ass youth by his jacket and starts shaking him. It's a wonder the guy's head doesn't fall off. He's grabbing at Thunder's arms, desperately trying to get loose, but Thunder's having none of it.

“Where's the fuckin' wheels, smart-ass? Not so mouthy now, are you? Where's...The...Fuckin'...Wheels...Dumb...Fuck?” Thunder mouths this slowly at him.

One of the guy's friends is trying to convince Sniper they had nothing to do with it. “Honestly, it wasn't us. There were a couple of guys doing it as we came by and we stopped to watch. It was funny as hell, and that's why we were standing here laughing when you came out. We don't have your wheels.” The guy looks pleadingly at Sniper.

Me and Glide put the kids into their strollers, and Glide heads over to start more trouble when a security guard comes rushing over, carrying his fuckin' shopping bags, shouting to everyone to calm down. He grabs at Thunder and pushes himself between him and the smart-ass.

“Whoa guys, chill out. There're women and kids around. What's the problem here?” The security guard looks from one to the other and raises his eyebrows, still with a hand on Thunder's chest. Correctly assuming that he's the biggest threat here!

“This asshole and his friends thought they'd be clever and steal the wheels from our kids' strollers. Thought they could get one over on some old guys. Only they hung around instead of making a clean getaway,” Thunder firmly states.

“These wheels?” He says this while holding up his shopping bags. “Two guys wearing jackets like yours dropped 'em off at the office a half hour ago and told us to bring them to this store in thirty minutes. I was just heading here when you got upset. I don't know who these youngsters are, but they haven't got your wheels. We've had them the whole time.” The security guard looks pretty frustrated at Thunder's attitude.

Sniper glares at the kids. “Why didn’t you say that at the start?”

The kid that had been trying to talk to Sniper chimes in. “You never gave us a chance. I tried to explain and then this gorilla grabbed him and started shakin’ the fuck outta him. He couldn’t speak. These other two were getting ready to do a runner. You weren’t listening to me.”

“If he hadn’t been such a smart mouth earlier, you wouldn’t have been the prime suspects, would you?” Sniper looks at the smart-ass. I don’t think his brains stopped rattling around his skull yet. His eyes still looked glazed over. For fuck’s sake, he could’ve given him permanent brain damage the way he was shakin’ him.

Glide grabs the bags and makes his way back to me and the strollers. We make a start, getting them replaced, and the guard comes over with Sniper and Thunder.

“I thought you were gonna shake his head clean off his shoulders as I was running up. I kept expecting it to fall off and roll across the ground. You were pretty near the escalators, and all I could imagine was the damn thing bouncing down the up escalator from the floor below and people screamin’ and trying to run back down, trying to get away from it. I’ll have something to tell the wife tonight, that’s for sure. Put those bricks in the empty bags and I’ll get rid of them in the dumpster.”

Once we’ve got the wheels back on the strollers, we head back to the SUVs, glad that’s over. The guard told us that one of the guys that gave them the wheels had a jacket like ours. He means our kutte, I think to myself, and it had a patch on it that said ‘Whisky’.

On the way home, we stop off at the club businesses and see what ideas they have to help with the fundraising.

Pip has already started preparations for her Halloween menu at the restaurant and is trying to think of anything else she can do. The motel is offering raffle tickets for a free three-night

stay over the Christmas holidays. The bakery is selling Halloween-themed cookies and cakes and donating the proceeds, and Georgie is baking up a storm with all her ideas.

By the time we've dropped the kids back at their respective homes, I have to say I'm worn out. As soon as we pull up in the compound, Glide is out like a jackrabbit and heads for another piss. He went while at Harper's, for fuck's sake, and that wasn't an hour ago. We're going to have to go with him and see if he's pissing this much. If he is, we'll hogtie him and take him to the emergency room.

I pass boxes to Sniper and Thunder from the trunk of the first SUV. Thunder is still muttering about the smart-ass and drops the first box. A couple of life-size skeletons crash to the ground and break apart. A dark flash appears from nowhere and the next thing we see is Coal racing up the compound with a skeleton's leg dangling from his mouth. We're all too tired to be bothered to chase him. Fuck him, let him have it, I think to myself.

Thunder shoves the broken skeleton to one side and dumps the good one back in the box. Charlie, Chip the prospect's dog, has been sitting watching us. He looks up the compound at Coal's disappearing ass and then looks at the broken skeleton. We all watch, as we can see where this is going, but it takes Charlie a couple of minutes to decide. He gets up, has a shake, then wanders over to the pile of bones. He has a good look, a good sniff, and decides on an arm. He gives it an exploratory lick before picking it up gently and casually strolling off up the compound after Coal.

We watch him trotting away and we all burst out laughing. That dog couldn't get into a rush if his life depended on it. I think he's got bloodhound DNA in him somewhere 'cause he'd lay on a porch all day if he could.

After reporting to Brand on what we know fundraising-wise, we go over to our corner to work out what revenge we are going to get on Whisky, and whoever was his partner. Yeah, maybe that was Nash, little fucker!

CHAPTER 11

-:- PIP -:-

Organizing every one of the ladies to do something for Gibbs and his family was fairly simple. They all are such good women; they'd help anyone in need.

Liza has helped me at the restaurant by helping to organize a Halloween menu and decorations for indoors. The menu we've made where families will pay \$20 for two adults and two children. The menu is set with three options, and if they want to mix and match, I don't have a problem with that.

I'm more than happy to financially support this venture, and families have a great night out whilst supporting the fundraiser.

Liza and I are gradually patching our friendship back together, but it hasn't been easy. The good thing is we both want to become friends once more, although it will never be quite the same.

Harper and Lanie went to the supermarket and purchased enough groceries to last the family two months. The freezer is now stocked, and the fridge is bursting. They even filled two fruit bowls to the top with a selection of apples, oranges, bananas, and kiwis.

Ivy, Georgie, and Olivia have been at the house cleaning every room again from top to bottom. They were all laughing with Ellie and Konrad as they worked, and I didn't miss Gibbs smiling at his kids a time or two, which warmed my heart.

Liza and I are at the house teaching Gibbs, Ellie, and Konrad how to prepare meals in the slow cooker which June brought around. It's a nice-sized one too and will have enough room to make hearty stews and the like.

"No, don't put that in like that Gibbs, slice it or dice it. Carrots don't go in whole like that, when they are that size." I give

him a wide look of disbelief that he didn't know that.

Cringing Gibbs responds. "I've never done this sort of cooking. I usually go to the bakery, buy what I need and stick it in the microwave. That's it, I don't do vegetables."

Georgie laughs, "I thought I recognized you, well, it's okay buying my pot pies, but you could have potatoes and vegetables with them."

Konrad laughs at the look on his father's face, then looks to Harper, who is getting ready to leave now she has all the groceries put away. "I'll look on my phone for some recipes that I can do."

Harper gives him a sweet smile, ruffles his hair, and kisses the top of his head before winking at me as she has clocked the fact that Konrad has a crush on her. "You'll be a good man, Konrad. Cooking isn't just a woman's job, neither is cleaning. It's about caring for what you have and looking after what you work hard to get."

Konrad gives Harper a serious nod of the head and has stars twinkling in his eyes too.

Kennedy couldn't get away from the gym as she had a full book of clients for two weeks, but she offered to help in an evening if needed. I told her it was okay to do her job and make sure Odds behaved himself.

I'm sure once Konrad meets Kennedy his eyes will be sparkling for her too. She's a dynamo and has many giving her a second look.

Feeling the vibration from my pants pocket, I take it out and check who's messaging, and seeing Emma's name, I smile. She's such a sweetheart, and she's giving Patch a run for his money. He wants to make her his Ol' Lady, but she's resisting since she had a bad experience with her ex-husband, Cameron's father. It's going to be interesting to see them eventually get together.

Emma: I've made a batch of cookies and cupcakes for the family. Can anyone pick them up for me, please?

Pip: Oh, TY, is Glide or one of them around that can drop them off?

Emma: I think they are outside checking the compound, but I'll ask.

Pip: If not, let me know and I'll come for them.

Emma: Thank you

Turning, I smile at Ellie, who is standing next to me. “Emma made cookies and cupcakes for you all. I’ll make sure they get here. Maybe you could come to the clubhouse sometime and Emma, Mary, and Saf could teach you how to bake. Liza and Georgie would too, if you are interested.”

Georgie, who is packing up alongside Ivy and Olivia, smiles. “You could come to the bakery and learn, too. If you came on a Saturday when you are not at school.”

Ellie is blushing with all the attention, and I can see Gibbs is fairly emotional with all the help we are giving, and the interest in his kids. “I would love to learn, thank you,” Ellie replies shyly, and we all clap our hands excitedly at the prospect.

After all the ladies leave, I turn to Liza and smile. “I think we are done here for now. Do you want to give a quick check around the house in case we missed anything?” I make my eyes large and round, trying to have her understand I want a word with Gibbs. When she suddenly realizes she smirks. “Come on, kids, let’s do a house check before Pip and I leave.”

Turning to Gibbs as soon as they have left the kitchen, I squint at him, letting him know this is serious. “Okay, listen here. We are doing this fundraiser, whether you like it or not. It’s not charity, it’s called helping someone in need. Now, we are a large family at the club and I’m sure your kids are going to get pulled into that family because we all have taken them under our wings already.

“You need to get off your dignity bench and get with the program. You can do a lot to help with this fundraising too,

and I'm sure something will come up for you, and I mean a job.

“Now, tell me what I want to hear, which is, you are onboard with the fundraising, and I'll get this organized with Brand.” Turning and not leaving him time to splutter and respond, I turn my head and give him the best shit-eating grin I can manage just as Liza and the kids walk through the door. “Oh, your da and you are our benefactors for the fundraising, so you have to do well at school. Keep the place here clean and make sure you eat three meals a day. We will check to make sure, and Konrad no more of you know what.”

Leaving the house, I can't help the satisfied smile on my face. I didn't allow Gibbs to decline, and I could see him opening and closing his mouth to respond, he doesn't know me yet, but he will.

Thunder and Glide park the SUV in front of Liza and me, and I give them both a smile. “Thanks for bringing them for me. I didn't want to drive over to the clubhouse and then back again.”

“No problem, Pip.” Thunder mumbles, and looking at him closely, I can see he has frosting on his beard.

“Oh, no, you didn't eat their cookies, did you?” I try to grab one of the cake boxes he has in his hand, but he shuffles past, giving me a light push with his shoulder.

“Glide, you better not have let him eat the damn cookies.” Turning my look his way, he too shuffles past, and that's when I notice he too has frosting on him.

“You'll not stop them, Pip. Let's get back to the clubhouse.” Liza laughs, and I know she's right, so I let out a sigh and head for our SUV.

“I need to call at the store. I want some bread and cheese for home.” I say as I climb into the driver's seat.

Liza stops from climbing into the vehicle. “Okay, you go to the store, and I'll hitch a ride back with the two troublemakers.

I need to get back for Ty, as I have to take him to the dentist for a checkup.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll see you later.”

Once Liza has closed the door I make my way to the store where I usually shop. It’s smaller than the supermarket and the staff are wonderful. We have to support our smaller stores, or we’ll only ever have the impersonal service we get at the larger ones.

Parking outside the store, I know that I’m only two stores away from Alice’s hairdressing business. We all avoid her the best we can. She’s not a nice person anymore, and we were all relieved when Tyre removed her from his life. He’s too nice a person to be with someone like Alice.

Hearing raised voices as I climb out of the SUV, I notice Brooklyn standing arguing with Alice. Think of her and she appears, crossed my mind.

Walking over quickly and standing next to Brooklyn, I ignore Alice and ask. “What’s going on?”

Brooklyn looks like she wants to slap Alice silly, and that’s not like her, so I know whatever has happened has rattled her cage badly.

“This little bitch told me to take down the poster outside her shop. Now we have permission from the town council to post these, so she has no right to take them down.” Brooklyn leans into Alice with a nasty look on her face, shocking the actual hell out of me. “You take that down and I’ll rearrange your face.”

“How dare you? You are a piece of filth,” Alice shrieks.

“I’ll give you filth!” Brooklyn snaps and launches herself forward. I grab her around the waist and stop her from hitting Alice. Not because I want to, but because I know the bitch will report Brooklyn for assault.

I whisper in Brooklyn’s ear, calming her down, and pulling her away from Alice and toward my SUV. Pushing her back to the

driver's door, I look her in the eye. "She's provoking you on purpose. Don't give her what she wants. Take deep breaths and let it go."

Brooklyn takes a minute to calm down and is looking at me rather than at Alice, who is trying to make a spectacle of us. I grin and move Brooklyn from the driver's door. "Get in and wait."

I send a message to Whisky to come and collect Brooklyn. I know he'll get here as fast as he can because I didn't explain what was going on. I just said '*Get here or she'll be arrested for assault*'.

A small crowd has converged around Alice and she's trying to look the victim, but she's known in town for being a gossip and a nasty piece of work. Let's see if I can turn this around on its head.

Calmly walking over, I stand next to the poster and point to it. I watch as everyone's head and eyes follow my hand as I highlight the poster. "This is a poster for a fundraiser the MC is holding over the Halloween period. The funds are going to a local family that needs help." I look from one of the crowd to another, and when I see they understand that Alice has been playing one of her games again, I see faces set. "Now, Alice wants the poster here, and others taken down. Why? Because she is a nasty, mean-spirited individual. The town council has given us the go-ahead to post as many as we need, so if anyone sees Alice remove the poster please report it to the town council or the Sheriff. Thank you."

Everyone, by this time, has turned to give Alice a dirty look. Some shake their heads at her and tell her to mind her own business for once in her life.

Whisky has arrived and is bustling Brooklyn back to the veterinary practice and gives me a chin lift of thanks. Looking up when I hear bikes getting closer, I smile when I see Brand, Shadow, and Tyre arriving.

Alice, seeing Tyre, looks a little green, but if she'd kept out of our business, she'd be able to stay off his radar. He dislikes her badly now, and none of us know what he had to put up with, as he kept things close to his chest. We know it left a nasty taste in his mouth and he's not been interested in any woman since.

Brand walks over and throws his arm around my shoulder before pulling me into his body and kissing me soundly, not giving an everlovin' fuck about who is watching.

"You okay? What's goin' on?" Brand is eyeing Alice and everyone standing around.

Shadow is firmly next to me on the other side, keeping me between himself and Brand. He's such a good VP and takes it seriously. He knows if anything happens to Brand, he'll be the President until Gage comes of age.

Before I can say a word, Tyre is in Alice's face, snarling at her to mind her own business. When he continues we all watch with maximum interest, I have to say. "If you spend more time doin' hair instead of gossiping, you may keep your fuckin' customers. But no, you're such a spiteful bitch you talk about everyone behind their backs, and when they go to Wendy's salon you don't like it. Well, let me tell you, Wendy's salon is doing a roaring trade, and that's because she knows how to keep her fuckin' mouth shut."

When some of the bystander's chuckle and giggle at Tyre's tirade, Alice screeches and storms into the salon, slamming the door behind her. But, much to everyone's delight, she slammed it so hard she shatters the glass in it.

CHAPTER 12

-:- BRAND -:-

So far, the old fuckers are behaving themselves. I've got brothers watching them closely when they have the opportunity. Not sure what the punishment could be this time because, let's be honest, they don't give a fuck about wearing pink aprons. Thunder and Crank even drew tits on their apron tops.

The door of my office bursts open and Pip walks in, giving me a bright smile before walking around the desk and kissing me gently. Climbing onto my lap, Pip kisses me a few more times, and I've got to say, I'm not averse to her coming in here for this reason.

"What have you been doing?" I ask after giving her a peck on the nose, and wrapping my arms around her waist more tightly.

"Well, as you know, Brooklyn had a run-in with Alice. She's not quite right in the head, if you ask me. She's so full of gossip and nastiness. Was she ever a sweet person?"

"When Tyre made her his Ol' Lady, she was fairly nice. She was always nosey, but it wasn't as she is now. She worked hard getting the hair salon running, and Tyre put the green up to make that happen. They were a happy enough couple, and we all thought he'd get her in hand about listening to conversations and wanting to know too much. But it gradually got worse until, as you know, the run-in where Liza caught her listening to church. That was a huge violation to the club, brothers, and her Ol' Man. That's when Tyre finally had enough. She's been gunnin' for the club ever since."

"This was so petty. It just made little sense that she wanted posters taken down about a fundraiser." Shaking her head with more than a little confusion in her expression.

I kiss her nose, but before I can escalate the kissing, the door is opened and Shadow walks in. Seeing Pip in my lap, Shadow smirks and holds his hands up in defeat. "I'll come back in a while."

"No, it's okay. I've got to go do some chores. Oh, I got Gibbs to agree to the fundraiser, by the way. He's up for it now, but under threat, I have to admit." Pip laughs, and I look at Shadow, who is smirking along with me, because we both know what Pip is like when she puts you under threat. Climbing from my lap, Pip gives me another quick kiss before sauntering past Shadow with a grin on her face.

"You have your work cut out with that one, Pres." Shadow chuckles as he takes a seat in front of my desk.

"I know, but she's well worth it." I can't help the smile that forms. "What can I do for you?"

Shadow sits forward in his seat and leans his elbows on his knees, clasping his hands together. "I've been thinking about this crap with Alice. It makes little sense why she is so focused on causing us trouble. Tyre ditched her. We all know that, and we all know why. She knows that she caused that split, not Tyre. Do you think she has another reason to dislike the club and cause issues?"

"No, she's just vindictive, I think. It's maybe time we put some pressure on people not using her salon anymore, and once that's done gently run her out of town?"

The door opens, and Tyre walks into the office. "Hi, Pres. I want to talk to you about Alice and the trouble she's causing if you have time."

"We were just talking about her. We wonder if she has any other issue with us apart from you and her break-up?" Shadow says, and I look at Tyre to see what his reply will be.

Taking a seat next to Shadow, Tyre rubs his chin with his thumb and forefinger. "She was never happy about not being the top bitch here. I often thought she had designs on you, Brand. She more than once commented that Road Captain

wasn't high enough in the pecking order, and I needed to grow some to become VP, then President.

“You know me well enough, as my President and friend, that I have never had ambition to be more than I am. I enjoy being a Road Captain. It suits me well enough. But I think we may have to do something about Alice. She's not stopping with her vitriol against us, even though I made sure she was taken care of at the time we separated.”

Nodding, I run my hand down the back of my neck, and know we're going to have to do something soon if this keeps happening. Because we all know the Ol' Ladies are not going to back down where Alice is concerned, and I don't want Brooklyn's veterinary business affected by any of this chaos.

Picking up my phone, I send a message to all officers calling them to my office now, and that includes Spider or Ace, depending on who is on duty in the tech office.

After waiting only a few minutes, Torch, Patch, Dollar, Eagle, Doc, and Spider walk into the office, taking a seat or standing quietly waiting for the reason I called them all into here.

The first thing I cover is the incident in town with Alice and Brooklyn. I can see them looking at Tyre, who has a tick on his cheek beating soundly. “I fuckin' told her to keep her mouth shut and her head down. I warned her we would take steps to put her out of business and run her out of town. She's been told more than twice. I think it's about time we did that. I let it be known to bystanders that she is a back-biting gossip, and you know what it's like in town, this will have done the rounds already. Alice will find some of her regulars canceling appointments. But we need to be ready for the backlash because there will be one.” Tyre looks around at all of us. “I'm sorry to have brought Alice here and started all this madness.”

Spider grunts. “Not your fault. She's a bitch on steroids.”

Dollar laughs at the comment and adds, “Yeah, I agree. She turned out to be a real trouble-causer. That's not on you, brother.”

More brothers agree and put Tyre at ease. None of us hold him responsible for what the crazy bitch gets up to. But none of us will stand for this sort of trouble happening, either.

“I want word spreading that people stop using her salon. Use the fact she gossips and back talks, don’t have any lies go around. You know the, she-said-he-said, bullshit. Just that she has no confidentiality. That should do it, and we’ll see who continues using the salon and who bails.” I give my feral grin while rubbing my hands. “Then we’ll run her outta Dodge. We’ll make sure she has enough green to set up a new salon somewhere else, although I’m not sure she deserves that.”

With everyone’s nods of agreement, I want to move on to other topics. I ask Dollar what he predicts the Halloween decorations, etc, will cost the club and when he gives a substantial figure, I can’t help wondering if we should do it at all. But, knowing Pip and the other Ol’ Ladies, we’d not get away with that.

“Shadow, get Shades on speaker. We need his input on my next topic to be covered.”

Once we are all ready, I open the next conversation we need. “Shades, Gibbs has agreed to be our fundraising recipient, which is great. I’m hoping we can raise enough, or most of what is outstanding on his mortgage. But that’s not a long-standing solution to his job problem. Now, it turns out he is a landscape gardener...” Before I can continue, Shades speaks.

“Hey, that would be good to have him on the construction team. He could fancy up the dwellings as we move from job to job, and he could sort out the motel, ‘cause Pres, it looks disgusting garden-wise.” Shades chuckles. “I watched Cory try to do some gardening, and fuck me, he made more mess than good and when he’d finished, it was just bare earth.”

“I agree, and if we have nothing for him to do in a garden, he can help with construction. Either way, he’ll have a job and it’ll help rebuild his family. They’ve had it hard, losing their wife and mother. But he’s kept the kids the best he can, and I’ll

tell you he was not happy about Konrad stealing,” I add, feeling fairly happy with this solution.

“I’m good with that, Pres,” Shades says, and the nods and ayes from around the office confirm.

“Okay, you contact him, Shades. Don’t let him have any wiggle room, he has a chip on his shoulder about being a charity case.”

“No problem, Pres, I’ll deal with it. Spider, send me all the details I’ll need before I speak to him.”

“Will do. As soon as I go back to the tech room,” Spider responds.

“Oh, and get him on the motel first thing because that place is desperate for a makeover outdoors,” Torch adds, and we all turn to look at him because who would have guessed he would even notice?

“What? Lanie said it was ugly last week when she drove past,” Torch indignantly adds, which has us all nodding as now we know why he’s thrown the comment out.

“Okay, let’s leave it at that. We know what we have to do, so let’s get on it.” I stand and follow my officers out of my office. I want to check on the old fuckers. I’m doing my best to keep them out of trouble.

“Coal, get your ass back here!” Crank shouts as he’s fast walking to catch up with the dog, but he’s no chance.

“What’s wrong?” Torch asks, and Dollar laughs at the look of frustration on Crank’s face.

“The fuckin’ dog has run off with another set of bones. We’ll have no skeletons left if he keeps this up. I’ve already got one with three legs instead of two legs, and an arm, because we have to stick on whatever limbs we have to make full skeletons. We’d have skeletons with missing limbs everywhere if it’s left to him.” Crank snarls, obviously not taking it well that Coal loves his bones.

Thunder and Glide walk over carrying a skeleton each. “Charlie just took another skull. We’ve gotta find where those two are burying the bones, then we can dig ‘em up and rebuild the damn things. Look here, this poor fucker has no arm.”

I can’t help the chuckle that escapes because I know from home that Coal likes his bones, and Pip gets nice large knuckle bones from the butcher for him to chew on. But these can’t have any smell on them to entice him to run off with them.

Torch looks at his phone then hightails it out of the clubhouse, and I follow him to the main door where I watch him storm to the gate.

Shadow stands next to me, frowning. “That’s the sheriff and his deputy. What the fuck do they want?”

“No idea, but it looks like we’re gonna find out.”

When the gate is opened, the Sheriff and his deputy walk into the compound, directly toward us. I step away from the front door and meet him a few feet from the clubhouse.

“What’s goin’ on?” I ask.

“We have reports you are burying bodies in the compound. I have to check it out, and if we find any, we have to report it further. You know the score Brand.”

Now the Sheriff looks embarrassed as he knows us all well, and he also knows we’d not be stupid enough to bury bodies here if we were even burying any in the first place.

I throw my head back laughing, then give him my steely-eyed look that had more than one of my fellow veterans pissing their pants. “You go right ahead and do your search. All you have is a pitiful complaint from I guess...” pretending to think by putting my forefinger on my temple. “Alice, right?”

The Sheriff shuffles a little and is growing even redder in the face. I’m not sure if that is embarrassment or anger, but I don’t care either.

“You do your search and when you’re done it better all be back as it should be. Then I’ll get our lawyer to come to you

for compensation. You have no evidence whatsoever of us burying jack shit, because we haven't and we have no qualms about letting you look."

Before I can continue, fucking Coal and Charlie trot past, each with a bone in their mouths. I side-eye Shadow, who throws his head back laughing.

The rest of the day, we watch the Sheriff, deputy, and four other men he calls to the compound, dig here and there. Finding bones, and a nice pile is being collected. We all know they are not real bones, but not sure the idiots that are digging do.

Turning to Shadow, I lift an eyebrow. "Get the old fuckers out here with their skeletons and make a show of finding arms, legs, and heads to complete them. I want a whole show of it."

Chuckling, Shadow walks away, and five minutes later, four old men walk out of the clubhouse with boxes in their arms. Giving me a nod as they pass. The fun begins.

CHAPTER 13

-:- CRANK -:-

The sheriff, along with his men, are digging in the compound. It's a lovely warm day, and I'm enjoying being outdoors while I watch the piles of dug-up earth growing. They are working further from the clubhouse, and each pile of bones they find they bring back near us. Coal is finding this great fun. He grabs a bone they drop, then runs up the compound with it clasped in his jaws to rebury it somewhere else.

Charlie has been lounging quietly, watching Coal do his thing. This dog is so laid back it's a wonder he ever stands on all four paws. The stash that was buried must be nearly dug up now.

I call Charlie over to me and give him a bone, sending him off to bury it somewhere. He only gets so far before Coal is coming back for another bone. Charlie drops the bone and trots back to me while Coal snatches it up and runs off with it.

This turns into a relay between the two dogs, and they soon catch up with the men. The best we can, we try laying the skeletons out as though they were genuine bodies. I can't believe that not one of these so-called law enforcement officers has realized that the bones they keep digging up, and carrying are made of some kind of plastic.

How they get out of bed and dressed on their own every morning amazes me. They must have help or they wouldn't find their way from the bathroom to the kitchen, for fuck's sake.

I call Rip over and send him to the area around the shed, where I've been teaching him my bomb-making trade. Rip keeps a good distance away from the sheriff and his men and picks at the ground with his shovel. Every second or third hole he digs, he shouts over to me. "Nothing over here, Crank." Or "Wasting our time in this direction, Crank. Make no bones about it!!"

Watching Thunder out of the corner of my eye walking towards the top of the compound, I see he has a couple of shovels with him. Two seconds later, I see Glide heading that way too, only he has a large carryall with him. I'm wondering what they're up to, just as one of the officers walks over holding a bone out in front of him as though it was radioactive or something.

"What's up? What you got there, youngster?" After all, every fucker's a youngster compared to me in my eighties.

"This one has teeth marks in it," he states as he gets closer to where they're stacking them up.

"Teeth marks, you say. What could've made them?"

"Wild animal I guess." And I swear he's going green at the gills.

"Well, that's right unusual, youngster. You seen any coyotes around here? I haven't seen no wolves in this area for decades now. I suppose it could be a mountain lion, but you'd think we were a mite too close to town for that." I look at him thoughtfully as he inspects the marks.

Standing near him, I look at the bone he's holding. Suddenly taking a large inhale of breath and step back from him, trying to look scared and shocked at the same time. "I think they're HUMAN teeth marks. I think we got someone eating people. Do you think we've got a cannibal in the area?" I give him my most serious stare, eyes wide, eyebrows raised. "I'm goin' to sleep with my gun under my pillow from now on. Don't want no cannibal taking a chunk out of me at night."

"Cannibals?" He whispers to himself and I can see the color draining from his face.

"Holy Mother of God. Night time! Do you think it could be vampires? They'd have the teeth to mark bones, surely," I say this as though I'm thinking out loud, giving my chin a rub as I try to give a *'I'm seriously thinking,'* pose.

Sniper is sitting on a chair watching all this going down. Suddenly he jumps up and says to us both, "Stay here, I'll be

right back.” He runs into the clubhouse, and a couple of minutes later, he comes back looking like he’s solved a serious problem.

Sniper tells the officer to hold out his hands and when he does, he dumps some garlic bulbs and some butchers string from the kitchen into them. Sniper, using the items in the officer’s hands, attaches the garlic onto a length of string and puts it around his neck, followed by one for me, and one for our now petrified young officer.

“Crank,” he mutters, “where can we get silver from in town? We need to make silver bullets and we need to make stakes to drive through their hearts.” He looks so convincing I almost believe him myself!

“S-s-s-silver b-b-bullets? I thought they were f-f-for werewolves?” I swear to God he’s gonna piss his pants in a minute.

Sniper glares at him like he’s a complete moron. “Of course they are. You never get one without the other. Have you ever seen a vampire movie without werewolves rearing their ugly heads?”

Officer ‘Youngster’, gives a strangled gasp and runs off to the front of the clubhouse. The next thing we hear is one of the police cruisers beeping at the gate to be let out. As soon as it’s out, its tires screech on the tarmac, and lights and sirens are tearing toward the center of town.

I look at Sniper, and he looks back. We bust out laughing and tears are streaming down our faces.

Shadow comes over from where he’s been sitting, watching the sheriff and his diggers, to see what we’re laughing at. Neither of us can speak a word at this point. It must be five minutes before I can explain what happened, and only then because I sent Sniper to the clubhouse. Every time we looked at each other, we were off laughing hysterically again.

I tell Shadow that I’d seen Thunder and Glide sneaking up the compound, which has him looking rather worried, “Oh fuck,”

and promptly marches off after them.

It takes a while but I get myself back into some kind of normal. Well, normal for me that is, then grab four bottles of water from the cooler we'd brought out earlier, and hand one out to each of the diggers. As I hand the sheriff his bottle, I tell him that one of his guys had to head off because of some unexpected emergency. How I keep a straight face, I'll never know.

Shadow calls me over as he's heading back to where we were stacking the bones and the chair he was lazing in earlier. "You won't believe what those two were doing. They've got a box of skeletons from the pile of clubhouse decorations and they've broken them in two. They have one part as head, arms, and ribs. The other is the pelvis and legs. They're hanging the upper part back in the trees with a noose around its neck, and the bottom part under it, with a huge rock tied to it. It looks like somebody was fastened to the rock first and then to a branch that had been pulled down. When the branch was released, it clearly shows they were ripped in two. They got some other ideas too, but I didn't want to hear them, so I got out of there fast."

"Got out of where?" A voice interrupts, and we both cringe as we realize it's Brand. "And why are these idiots still digging up the compound? I know I said to make a show of it, but not for the entire day. We got other things to be doing than babysitting all this lot."

"The idiots are still here because they haven't realized that they're digging up plastic bones. They haven't noticed that their pile of bones hasn't got any bigger either. They are clueless. It's gone unnoticed that the dogs are running back and forth with bones and skulls. You couldn't write this stuff for an episode of the fuckin' Simpsons!" Looking at Shadow as I say the last bit 'cause I know he's secretly a big fan of The Simpsons.

Shadow looks at Brand and then around the compound. "Do you want me to wrap this up, Pres?"

“No. I’ll do it myself.” And with that, he looks around ‘til he spots the sheriff. “Yo, Sheriff. Get over here and bring those Muppets with you.” As the sheriff calls to his team and waves them over, Pres gives me a hard stare. “Get back to the clubhouse, lock those two mutts up, and then get the place tidy. And grab the others to help wherever they may be.”

“If I head back to the clubhouse, Shadow, can you get Thunder and Glide for me?” raising my eyebrows at Shadow, he turns to head for the woods after giving me a chin lift.

“Oh, no you don’t. I’ll go with you, Shadow, when I’ve dealt with the sheriff.” Brand looks us both up and down, making us both squirm under his gaze.

As I walk away the sheriff and his ‘Muppets’ arrive. I can still hear Pres berating them as I’m almost back at the clubhouse. His voice carries very well when he’s in the mood to rip someone a new one.

Me and Rip have got most of the tidying up finished by the time Pres walks back down the compound. He doesn’t look too thrilled, I must say.

“Crank, did you know what those two were up to in the woods?” He looks like he’s ready to commit murder, or burst out laughing. I can’t tell which, and that’s a worry.

“No, Pres. Only what Shadow told me about the rocks and trees. I didn’t know what they were up to.” I look him in the eye and I don’t flinch. I didn’t know what they were up to, just that it wasn’t going to be good. The four of us get bored easily and need something to excite us now and again.

“Apart from the trees and rocks, they got ratchet straps on two tree trunks opposite each other. They tied them around skeletons and then ripped them apart by tightening them up. Leaving all the bits where they fell to make it look realistic. THEN, they poured tomato ketchup all over the bones to ‘make it look like there’s blood’.” Pres looks fit to burst. At this point, the ‘heroes’ of the tale turn up.

“Blood. I tell you. Blood. In all, that’s holy. Blood!” At this point, he loses it completely. “Blood? FROM GODAMN SKELETON BONES. Is anyone seriously so stupid to believe skeletons shed blood?” He heads inside the clubhouse, laughing his head off. Wait until he hears about the vampires and werewolves in town.

Leaning against the door frame, I fold my arms over my chest and take a lungful of air. Well, that was exciting for a while. Maybe we can do even more mischief-making while it’s Halloween, because let’s face it, it’s the time of trick-or-treat after all!

CHAPTER 14

-:- BRAND -:-

I have a busy day in front of me today, a lot of loose ends to tie up and checks to complete before tonight's Trick-or-Treat with the kids, and the Halloween party here in the compound.

I put Shadow in charge of the bonfire as I felt he was the safest person to give the responsibility to, and then, in one of those moments of madness, I involved Crank with the organization of said bonfire. What the fuck was I thinking? Though he'll know how to keep everyone and everything safe. I'm hoping that was what Shadow, Crank, and Rip were whispering about after church the other day.

First of all, I need to round up a crew to take a ride out with me this morning. Shadow will need to come, Tyre can come along for the ride and we can pick up Shades on the way. I need to speak to Dollar as well. I need some information from him, and he has been pre-warned, so I only have to poke my head into his office to collect it.

Taking my phone from my kutte pocket, I send a message to Shadow and Tyre, telling them to meet me at their hogs in five minutes. I grab a bottle of water from the kitchen and finish it in one. Dumping the bottle in the trash can by the door as I grab my lid and head outside. It's not bad weather, the sun's bright, and it has a nice bit of heat to it. A damn good day for a ride.

"Hey, Pres. Where're we going?" Tyre calls as he almost jumps onto his hog. Seems he's excited to get out of the clubhouse and compound for a while, too.

"First stop. The home of that nasty bitch, Alice. Yes, I said 'home', because this is a conversation that is not for the townsfolk's ears. Tyre, you lead. Let's go."

Tyre doesn't look so thrilled at taking a ride anymore, but this is something that is well overdue. Halloween seems a very appropriate time to rid the MC, and the town, of its resident evil witch. He must want this over with damn quick 'cause he's not wasting any time getting there. The hogs are roaring loudly as we ride along at just over the legal limit.

Pulling up outside Alice's house, we see the curtains in an upstairs window twitching. We get off our hogs and leave our lids on the handlebars.

"Shadow, watch the hogs and deter any neighbors from developing an interest in what we're here for. We don't want anyone overhearing a word." Shadow gives me a chin lift and sets himself squarely at the side of our hogs.

Knocking loudly, we wait a few seconds for Alice to answer the door. When we get no response I knock once more, but this time with my shoulder. Leaning in hard, the door pops open, and I walk in.

Alice is halfway down the stairs with her phone in her hand. I take the first two steps in one stride, taking her phone from her. Looking at the screen, I see she's talking to the sheriff's office.

"Hello, this is Brand, President of Satan's Guardians MC. There's been a 'misunderstanding', and I'll be at the Sheriff's office in a few minutes to clear matters up.

"Please tell the Sheriff to wait for me there. I wouldn't want this 'misunderstanding' to escalate into more than it is. Thank you, and I'll be there shortly." All this is in my best patient and professional voice, which disappears the moment I end the call.

"Alice, get your skanky ass onto that couch right now. Don't say a fuckin' word. This is going to be a one-way conversation." She scoots by me and flinches, although I never moved a muscle. Once her ass is sat down, I look long and hard at her. "You could've had a good life with Tyre and the MC, but you blew it. You couldn't be satisfied with sorting

your own business out, you had to get involved with everyone else's. Why you couldn't be satisfied that your man had an officer's position I'll never know, but it doesn't matter any longer. Well, guess what? He's excellent at what he does and, more importantly, he fuckin' enjoys what he does. Few people can say that."

She tries to speak, but I shut her down quickly.

"Now this is what's going to happen. You are going to call the clubhouse and speak to Dollar. You will give him your bank details, and he will transfer the value of this house and the value of your business into your bank account. You will sign these documents before I leave here, and then you will pack your belongings and be out of town by sundown.

"If you're still in town after that, Tyre will find you and remove you, permanently. If you refuse this generous offer, you will disappear and never be heard of again. I suggest you call Dollar, sign these legal documents, and then pack as if your life depended on it, which it does." I pass her the phone, and she looks pleadingly at Tyre.

Tyre shakes his head slowly and folds his arms across his chest. She calls Dollar, and I see her eyes widen at the amount that is transferred. It's probably more than she ever thought she'd have in one go, but it's the bottom dollar for her house and the absolute lowest value of her salon.

The house we can flip and make a profit on. The business I'm not sure we want. We should be able to give it a lick of paint and make some green on it. If not, we might be able to donate it to the local college. They could do discount hair dos while the students gain some real-life experience. I astound myself sometimes with my genius.

Once she's signed the papers and I've reminded her to be gone by sundown, we head outside to the hogs and Shadow. As we leave the house, there's quite a crowd around Shadow. Thinking the worst, we stomp over and suddenly see him throw a kiddie onto the seat of his hog. There are dads all around our hogs, while the wives and kids are at Shadow's.

Moms are ogling Shadow and he's ignoring them and having fun with their kids. The dads are ogling our hogs, and no one's been stupid enough to sit on one yet.

Not a single person asks if Alice is alright and did we hurt her. It shows how little people have friended her and she's lived here all her life. It's a sad thing, but she's done it all herself.

We give the dads a quick talk over the hogs' specs and then make our escape. Shadow leads to our next stop. The sheriff's office.

CHAPTER 15

-:- BRAND -:-

As soon as we arrive at the sheriff's office, I notice the sheriff's cruiser is in its usual spot. Parking our hogs on either side of the cruiser and one across the back of it. He won't be leaving before I've done with him.

Once inside, I make my way to the reception desk. The desk officer, I note, is a sergeant and watches me approach. "Hello there. You must be Brant from the biker club." I'm surprised when he offers to shake my hand.

"The name's BRAND, and yes, I'm the President of the Satan's Guardians MC. If I reach out to shake your hand, you gonna try to slap cuffs on me?"

He looks at me for a moment and then laughs a loud and deep belly laugh. "No siree, I ain't. But if I wanted you in cuffs, you'd be in 'em. We might both be busted up some, but you'd sure be in 'em."

Shadow leans forward and quietly states, "Don't be too sure, Sergeant."

The sergeant looks over at all three of us. "Now you gents don't seem like the type to spoil a one-on-one fair fight. I wouldn't be arresting anyone without either good reason or to keep them from harm. Think about that for the future. If I was to arrest your president he'd be safe in my custody and you gents could watch over us both. If we were to have us a ruckus over it, someone could get hurt or even killed. That would be a bad thing.

"I hear you've come to speak to our sheriff? Good luck with that. I got an empty coffee cup that would give you a more interesting conversation, but you do what you've a mind to do. This way, gents." He leads us through to an office at the back,

and we see the sheriff looking very uncomfortable as he watches us approach.

Watching the sheriff as we get closer, I wonder if he's ever been any good at his job, but I highly doubt it. We enter the office and Shadow stands outside by the door. No one else is getting in, that's for sure, not with him standing guard.

"Sergeant, you seem to be a straight-up kind'a guy. I think you should be part of this conversation." I sit down opposite the sheriff and the sergeant pulls a chair over. "Right, Sheriff, first things first. Yesterday, you and four others spent most of the day digging up my compound looking for alleged murder victims. And why was that?"

"He told us they'd been on a training course. How to search a crime scene or some such shit. They couldn't even get it together when they came back. Their stories didn't match. You're such a shmuck." The sergeant grins at the sheriff and shakes his head, showing no respect for the man at all, but I don't have to wonder why.

"Tell me, Sheriff, who made the allegation?" I pause a moment for effect before continuing. "We know already of course, but want you to confirm it in front of your sergeant. We want to know why you would even consider taking her seriously. She's a nasty, lying dirty skank." I want this sorted once and for all.

"She's my woman. I'm filing for divorce and when it comes through, we're going to move away and get married. Alice and I are goin' to make a new life together. It was an easy mistake to make. The bones looked real, for Christ's sake."

Smirking to myself as the sheriff looks like a lovesick puppy. He has to be at least twice Alice's age and he certainly isn't fit enough to keep up with her in the bedroom department, if you get my drift. She'll eat him alive. I look at the sergeant again, he looks astonished, turning to look from me to the sheriff, and then to Tyre.

Taking us by surprise, the sergeant snarls. "What a fuckin' mess! Sheriff, you need to quit. When this gets out you're

gonna be crucified. I suggest you put your resignation in immediately and get the fuck out of town. Your wife's going to take you for everything, and the mayor is going to have your balls in a sling. These guys have done a lot for the town, and you go over there and spend the day digging up their compound. Then claim expenses for you and five others for a training course. You're fucked."

The sergeant can't seem to get his head around this and keeps looking at Tyre. "Didn't she used to be with you? A while back I know, but..."

"It's nothing to me, Sarge. I got rid of the nasty bitch as soon as I found out just how low she could go. I've been far happier single than I ever was with her." Tyre looks at the sheriff with pity.

Hearing this is too much for the sheriff, and he lunges out of his chair at Tyre. He's only halfway out of his chair when my fist hits his chin, and he flops back into his chair. He's out cold before he lands, and this is going to slow us down a bit.

"Sergeant, what's the chance of a coffee while we wait for this dick to come round? You said you had an empty cup, if I remember rightly." If he doesn't come round soon, we'll take him to the gent's restroom and find somewhere to stick his head underwater. The sergeant picks up the telephone on the desk and presses a button.

"Four coffees and all the trimmings for the sheriff's office, please," he requests. Replacing the receiver, he looks at us. "Won't be long, as we keep a pot ready for any emergency. I guess I owe you a thank you, as I'll probably get his job. There's no one else with my experience, and unless they go out of town, no one here is interested.

"He's made his job title so unappealing there isn't a man in the department that wants to take it on. We've needed someone to take the department by the balls and I'm sure I can do it. It needs a short sharp shock and then to get rid of the dead wood. New broom sweeps clean, you know what I mean." The

sergeant looks around the room and shakes his head at the state it's in.

I follow his gaze, and it looks pretty dated and shoddy. I wouldn't want to be working in here, that's for sure. Turning to the sergeant, I give him a chin lift before saying, "My MC has done a lot of good around town, even if I say so myself. If you get the sheriff's position, we could be helpful to each other. We get information that you don't and we could pass it on. You may not be able to 'take action' that we could if there were to be no repercussions.

"The town is a lot cleaner and safer than it ever was, and I'm sure you know that isn't because of any action from the dumbass there. I'm not suggesting anything illegal here, you understand, but it could be a good working relationship."

The sergeant stands up as the coffee arrives and clears a space on the desk, simply by sweeping his arm across it and throwing it all to the floor. The woman with the tray looks at him, then the sheriff slumped in his chair and simply tilts her head. Once the tray is on the desk, she turns and walks out. She is, without a doubt, a stunning-looking woman. She looks just shy of 6' tall, but she's wearing some damn high heels. Sexy in her secretary's attire, and her body looks fit and toned. What amuses me is she gives Tyre a beaming smile as she passes, looks over the top of her glasses, and openly looks him up and down.

Once the doors closed, Tyre looks at us both. "Well, I haven't ever felt so naked while being fully dressed before."

The sergeant smiles. "You do not know how many men have tried to date that woman. Valentine's Day, every year, and this place looks like a garden center. There are more flowers here than any florist in the country. She gets everything from single red roses to bouquets and damn near entire rainforests delivered to her. She takes 'em all to patients at the hospital. Never keeps one for herself." He pauses and looks Tyre up and down himself. "Let me tell you, in the time she's been here, you're the first man I have *EVER* seen her take an interest in.

She's never looked at a man the way she just looked at you. Mister, if she's taken a fancy to you and you're single, you ain't gonna be for long."

I laugh at the look on Tyre's face. There's a mixture of interest, lust, and fear, all rolled into one.

"We came here to sort something out, Sergeant. The sheriff isn't going to be much of a problem in the future, but just so that you know my position. He's been a pain in the ass and now we know he's mixed up with Alice, we understand why. Tyre dumped her. She was a gossip and stuck her nose into things that didn't concern her. Reporting to the sheriff that in the compound, we were burying the bodies of victims that we had murdered. Do we appear we'd murder anyone? Would we be stupid enough to bury such a person in our own backyard if we did?"

"My Ol' Lady has a big German Shepherd, and he loves to bury stuff. As we were getting decorations for Halloween, the damn dog took a fancy to the skeletons we bought and he's been pulling them to bits and taking them off into the compound.

"The sheriff and his crew spent most of yesterday digging them up. The dog thought this was a great game and kept grabbing everything they dug up and reburying it. This literally went on all day, and without a warrant, I may add. Not one of the idiots realized what was going on."

"That makes sense with the young officer, then. He came charging in here yesterday afternoon, ranting about vampires and werewolves, cannibals, and silver bullets. Left his cruiser outside the main doors, engine running, lights and siren blazing. Grabbed the keys to his personal vehicle and went home.

"I called his home and his wife said he'd grabbed her silver jewelry and a couple of her silver trophies from when she was a cheerleader and locked himself in his workshop. I bet that was something to do with your compound visit then, huh?"
The sergeant shakes his head and sighs.

“I make no apologies for the mental state of your officers, Sergeant. If they can’t tell the difference between real bones and plastic ones at a supposed crime scene, they deserve everything they get. We need to get out of here, as we’ve got another stop to make. Oh, we’re having a Halloween party at the compound. Bring the wife and kids, girlfriend, friend with benefits. Whatever you have, you’ll be made welcome.”

“I will drop by with the ‘wife and kids’. Thank you.”

We head back to our hogs, and as Shadow and I reach for our helmets from the handlebars we’d left them on, we realize Tyre isn’t with us. Looking back through the main doors, we see Tyre pushed up against the wall in the lobby and the secretary from earlier is kissing the ever-lovin’ hell out of him. As she pulls away, we see him grab her, spin her, push her against the wall, and kiss her back. By the time he’s done, he’s practically holding her up. She staggers back into the office and he swaggers out to us. Without a word, he slips his lid on and asks, “Where next, Pres?”

I take my cell from my kutte pocket and text Shades to meet me right away at Gibbs’ home. Still not getting any comment from Tyre, we head over to Gibbs’ home. This time I lead.

CHAPTER 16

-:- BRAND -:-

When we pull up outside Gibbs' house, instead of the usual nosey neighbors twitching curtains, we get people waving at us, and some even call 'Hi', and 'Hello'. This is very new to me, as it's not the way I'm normally greeted when I roll up on my Harley with a couple of brothers.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Shadow waving back and even giving a thumbs-up to some kids playing soccer. Tyre looks as bewildered as I am, but Shadow seems to lap it up.

Shades we see driving down the road toward us, and parks his hog next to mine. I frown at him and he looks over his shoulder to see what I'm frowning at. Seeing nothing, he asks me what's wrong.

"Never let me catch you riding without a brain box again. I'll put you in the hospital myself. Understand?" I turn and stalk off, heading for Gibbs' front door.

Once there, I give a loud knock and Konrad opens the door.

"Hi, Pres. Come in. This is a surprise. What can we do for you?" Konrad says.

"Is Gibbs home? I've someone here that needs to meet him." Trying to have a sly look around the room, I see it looks clean, but I'm not as sly as I thought.

"The ladies did a great job, didn't they? It was never dirty, but it needed a woman's touch. Harper worked especially hard. She was everywhere." Konrad seems to swell up in pride as he praises Harper. Pip told me about the crush he has for Harper, and it shows when he speaks about her.

Holding back a smirk, I tell him I'll recognize her contribution the first chance I get. Not sure what I can do for this, but that

he thinks he's got her some credit makes him puff up even more.

As I'm about to ask where Gibbs is, a young girl walks into the room. She looks me up and down before wrinkling her nose at me, as though I smell. "You're the president of the club that's helping us, aren't you? Well, Mr. President, you may be the boss in your clubhouse, but my da is the boss in his. Got it?"

Before I can respond, Konrad grabs his sister's hand and pulls her to one side. "Ellie, what are you thinking, talking to him like that? He's helped us so much already. Stop this rudeness at once. It's not like you."

Ellie gives him the stink-eye look and tells him that Pip has told her to be assertive and confident in what she says to people, and how she projects herself. Konrad kneels down to her level and agrees that Pip said that, but it was when they were talking about bullies at school. You don't talk to people who are friends with us that way.

Konrad tells her to fetch da from the yard and turns to me all apologetic.

"Don't worry about it. Maybe I'll call her 'Mini-Pip' from now on?" I see Konrad relax at this quip, and then Gibbs walks in.

"Hello, Brand. To what do we owe the pleasure? You're welcome anytime, of course. I didn't mean that you need to have an appointment or anything." Gibbs looks tongue-tied and Konrad rolls his eyes at him.

"What is wrong with my family today? You'd think Momma never taught us how to speak proper to guests, for goodness' sake." He turns and walks away, leaving Gibbs staring after him.

"Sorry, Brand. We're not used to visitors anymore. It's been a while."

"No problem, Gibbs. There's someone I want you to meet. Shades, Gibbs. Gibbs, Shades. Shades, he's all yours."

Shades holds his hand out and Gibbs gives him a firm shake. Shades talks about the construction business and then gets to the nitty gritty.

“We have all the expertise we need for design and build. What we lack is the groundwork after. We leave everything ‘nice and tidy’, when what we want to do is leave it with a ‘wow’ curb appeal. Back yard we want saying ‘come and enjoy me’. What we want is a landscape gardener with the knowledge and expertise to make the finished job sing like a cabaret showstopper, not just hum a lullaby. We think you could be it, but what do you say?” Shades looks at him expectantly, while Gibbs looks dumbstruck.

“It’s a job offer, Gibbs. Plain and simple. We have a motel that needs the outside brought up to the same standard as the building. I’ll give you three months to plan, cost, and execute the job. You’ll report directly to me and I’ll approve any budget. If it’s as good a job as we think you’re capable of, that will be your trial period done.” Shades genuinely sounds keen on this idea and I can see it would be good for the business’s reputation, and for the club’s, too.

“This is not a charity thing, is it?” Gibbs blurts out.

Shades glares at him and I thought he was going to put him on his ass. “It’s a job offer, for Christ’s sake. You make the grade or you’re out. There’s no room to carry people in construction work. If there’s no gardening to do, then you’re a laborer for the construction crew. Yes or no, it’s that simple, man.” Shades looks about as angry as I’ve seen him in a while.

“I can lay flooring and I’m damn good at tiling too, if that helps.” Gibbs snaps back at Shades.

“You’re hired. Report to the clubhouse, seven am tomorrow.” Shades grins at him.

“I need a day or two to organize my kids’ school runs and stuff. I can’t just abandon them.”

This is where I jump in. “Bring the kids to the clubhouse with you, and I’ll make sure someone feeds and waters them, and

gets them to school on time. That's sorted for now, then. See you in the morning, Gibbs."

That's my 'To Do' list done for now, I think to myself. Time to get back to the clubhouse, and get some lunch and a drink. My stomach thinks my throat's been cut.

CHAPTER 17

-:- PIP -:-

Everyone is running around like maniacs here at the clubhouse, and considering it's a bikers' club, the excitement of going Trick-or-Treating is ridiculous. In all fairness, I can't say it's just the men. We women are just as bad, if not worse.

The Old Boys keep whispering and then disappearing. They are up to no good. We all know it, but we just can't get a handle on what it is they're up to this time. Brand is worried sick they'll do something stupid or dangerous at the bonfire. I know he'll be glad when it's all over.

Brand has called a meeting so we can find out how much we've made from all the individual efforts, and our running total for the fundraiser. The Ol' Ladies have had a quick fashion change after the meeting so as not to spoil the surprise of our costumes.

The house decorations for the brothers who live off the compound went wild. They must have spent thousands of dollars between them. Whisky and Nash, living next door to each other, certainly went crazy to outdo the other.

The stores have been ringing the Club Brothers if they've got new or special stuff in stock. The houses all look amazing though, and are standing out on how to go overboard with decorations.

Brand calls the meeting and we all head that way. I'm one of the first there, as I can't wait to see everyone turning up in costumes. Glide arrives in his infamous Frankenstein costume. He looks awesome, and no wonder he scared the hell out of Konrad. Sniper looks like a zombie, and he's carrying a leg in one hand, and a head hanging by its hair in the other. Crank is Count Dracula and is very realistic. He has had his make-up applied by an expert, and I think I see June's handiwork in this. She is a killer at make-up and always looks amazing

when she's going out for a night on the town. It isn't perfect as he has that white beard these days.

OMG! Thunder, it can only be Thunder making up the foursome, who walks in as a werewolf. He has a huge head with gaping jaws, massive claws, and glowing red eyes. He must be boiling in that suit. They have put in a lot of effort because all four look outstanding.

The room fills and apart from a couple of officers that are on duty, everyone is dressed up in some Halloween fashion. Brand walks in last and everyone stares at him as he walks over to his chair and declares the meeting open.

Dressed as Chucky, the killer doll, he looks very scary, even though he isn't wearing the face mask yet.

“What are you all staring at? You've all got costumes. My Ol' Lady tells me she has a killer costume. Why shouldn't I? Right, let's get to business. Dollar, let's have the figures for the fundraising so far.”

Dollar pops open his laptop and reads off some figures. “Georgie and her ‘cookies and cakes’ sales came to \$1000. That's some going for cookies and cakes, guys.” The brothers clap and stomp. A good start to the pot, “Okay. Next up is the motel. They sold raffle tickets with a prize of 3 nights, Christmas Eve, Christmas night, and the night after that. They raised, wait for it, \$4000.” Another round of table slapping and stomping echoes around the room. “Next up, Guardian's Rest Restaurant. The lovely Pip, over there. Pip devised a Halloween menu at a reduced rate of \$20 for a family of 2 adults and 2 children. She raised \$8400.” Everyone bangs the table and stomps. There's even a ‘way to go, Pip’.

Brand slaps the table and everyone quiets down.

Dollar coughs to get the attention back on him and carries on. “Although the restaurant raised \$8400, Pip has generously boosted that to a total of \$10,000. Thank you, Pip. That is very generous.”

The room erupts and I blush furiously as I get hugs and kisses from everyone in the room. Brand remains in his seat until everyone has thanked me and then he pulls me to his lap, jealously. “You are a truly wonderful person, and all mine.” He kisses me passionately to make his point in front of everybody in the room.

“By far the biggest donation to date has come from everyone in the MC. Donations from officers, brothers, and prospects come to...” Dollar performs a drum roll... ”\$25,000! You may all give yourselves a pat on the back.”

Brand claps his hands loudly and slowly. When he has everyone’s attention, yet again, he stands and looks at each person in the room.

“I want to say how proud I am to be the president of this MC. You have all gone above and beyond with your time and effort for the fundraiser, and now you’ve donated from your pocket as well. Thank you, each, and every one of you.

“We’re all carrying donation buckets tonight while we’re Trick-or-Treating, so once we’re back from that, I’ll total up and update you at the bonfire party. Thanks once again.”

At this point, I jump in. “Well done, everyone. That’s quite a total so far. By my reckoning, we’ve raised \$40,000 for the Gibson family with the rest of tonight to go. We’ve opened the bonfire party to the townsfolk, so can expect a bit of a donation boost there. While we’re out tonight, push for a donation with those buckets, and let’s monitor the children with us. You can never be too careful, especially with all the distractions of the costumes and decorations. Most of all, let’s have some fun and a good night.”

Everyone files out, and there’s a real buzz in the air. Comments about the Old Boys’ costumes are top of the agenda. I think there could be some competition for them, though.

Brand calls to Tyre to stay behind a moment. Before Brand speaks, Tyre beats him to it.

“She’s gone. I went by Alice’s place less than an hour ago. Her stuff has gone, her car’s gone, no sign of her. Neighbors say she left not long after our visit, even left her front door open as she left in such a hurry.”

Tyre grins and Brand can’t cover his smile either. “Looks like we dealt with that well, then. One problem dealt with.”

“There was one thing, though. The neighbors said that the sheriff had been around almost hourly. He’s been in the house every time and then screams away in his cruiser. Poor guy must be distraught. I guess Alice wasn’t so hot to be a retired sheriff’s wife, after all.”

Tyre shakes his head and heads out after the others. I kiss Brand and tell him I’ll only be a few minutes getting changed, and I’ll meet him in the commons. Almost skipping, I head off to get changed, and as I get to our room, I hear the other ladies giggling as they wait.

Entering the room, I gasp as I see the ladies in their costumes. We should raise some donations tonight.

I’m going to be dressed as the Red Devil, with red fishnets and thigh-high plastic boots.

Kennedy is Jessica Rabbit, with long hair and a long flowing dress cut to the top of her thigh.

Harper has chosen a sexy nurse outfit, with blood splatter across the front.

Liza has become the wicked queen from Disney movies. I’m sure Disney wouldn’t be allowed to dress their queens like this, though. She looks so hot.

June does the Morticia Addams look and has nailed it. Right down to the pale complexion.

Georgie has gone so far out from her normal self by becoming a goth dark angel.

Brooklyn is in Harley Quinn mode. Absolutely amazing.

Mary didn't just dress as a nun but took being a sexy nun to the next level.

Lanie is a very sexy vampire. If her outfit had any less material to it, she'd be in just a bra and panties. I'm not sure Torch is going to like that much. You can bet he's going to be standing in front of her all night.

Rose, with her fabulous tattoos, has a black and red goth cocktail dress. It has a corset top, and she has the most amazing boots that look so big and heavy she shouldn't be able to walk.

Olivia is the oldest of us Ol' Ladies, but you would never be able to tell tonight. She has taken witch and given it a whole new meaning. I hope Sniper won't have a heart attack!

Ivy is in leather as Catwoman. Once again, I have to say, she has become the character of choice.

We all have a long cape with a hood. All you can see is our footwear.

"Right, ladies. Let's show our men what they could get later, if they raise enough cash for the fundraiser, of course. Hoods up and let's make an entrance."

We head off to the common room, heads down and marching in single file. Once we're all in, keeping my hood over my face, I call all the men to attention.

"Right, brothers. Step back against the wall and give us some room."

As they've all been waiting for us, there are a couple of 'hurry ups' and 'now what' comments. I soon stifle that. Pulling my hood away, but staying cloaked, I begin my performance.

"You will not make such comments to the First Lady of the MC. I will not tolerate such insolence. Any such behavior will be punished in any fitting way my character for the evening sees fit."

At this point, I rip away my cloak and reveal my Red Devil persona. There is complete silence as they all ogle me. I take a

step forward, turn, and wriggle a long devil's tail. Brand is the first to come to his senses.

He lets out a howl that would have wolves running for their lives and takes a step toward me. I push my trident to his chest, stopping him in his tracks.

“You don't get to touch this unless we Ol' Ladies think you've raised over 5000 dollars tonight. Boys, you have your work cut out tonight. And no cheating. You don't get to put cash in those buckets. Your donations are in and counted. This has to be raised legitimately from the townsfolk, and not out of your own pockets.”

Brand looks like he's going to grab me any moment, so I walk slowly forward, placing one foot in front of the other catwalk style and trying to look as sexy as all hell. Once I've pushed him back in line with the other brothers, I turn and sashay back to my place in the line swishing my tail as I walk.

“Men of the club. May I present to you, for one night only, **THE LADIES OF THE CLUB!**” I shout the last part, and all the ladies reveal themselves in one swoop of cloaks. There are two seconds of silence and then a voice, recognizable as Frank, who is usually silent and unassuming, yells, “Fuck me. I gotta get me one of those.”

That sets off hollering, stomping, hooting, and every other kind of noise and mayhem you can think of. The Ol' Ladies don't let their men touch them, just as I did. They hold them back, although Torch, as suspected, has planted himself in front of Lanie.

We all head out to town, leaving a few disgruntled guys with Tyre in charge to watch the clubhouse and finish any preparations. When we hit the town, we certainly make an entrance. People come out of bars to see the spectacle we're creating. While we ladies ham it up being sexy, our men collect cash in the buckets. Some are so busy ogling the women that they don't realize how much they're donating.

Once we're in the residential area, we have people coming out of their houses to take pictures and videos on their phones. I hear Brand's voice calling out. "Five bucks for photos and ten bucks for videos."

You've got to love the power of a promise in bringing forth innovation in a man. I laugh loudly as we continue through the neighborhood and the ladies are all having a great time.

As we're going from street to street, the mood is full of excitement and as high as you could get without adding alcohol to the mix. No one has had a bad word the whole time we've been knocking on doors and ringing doorbells.

Suddenly, though, there is a commotion at one of the houses. We see a werewolf holding a man by the throat and growling at him. Frankenstein and Count Dracula are screaming at the man and the zombie is trying to get the werewolf to let the man go. Some of the brothers, with Brand leading, head over to sort out the situation.

Before they get there, the man's family rushes out of the house. The woman is screaming at both the man and the werewolf. There's a son of about five and he kicks the crap out of one of werewolf's legs. Another son grabs the wrist of the werewolf holding his father's throat and two girls are screaming their heads off, damn near shattering every window for miles around.

As I catch up, Brand tells the werewolf to let the man go. Werewolf lets him go, and he falls to the floor, gasping for breath and his family jumps on him hugging and kissing him and asking if he's ok.

"What the hell happened here? How did we end up with this shitshow?" Brand demands. All four of the Old Boys talk at once and Brand shouts at them to shut the hell up. I think he's being very well-behaved and not swearing, as there are kids around. The neighbors are out with their kids now, enjoying the show.

“Sniper and Thunder knocked on the door. The guy answered it. He looked at them and then ran back down his hallway. We thought he’d gone for some candy or his kids or something.” Glide tells us all, looking around the crowd that’s now gathered. “Next thing we know, he comes back to the door and waves a fucking .45 in our faces. Sniper grabbed the gun and Thunder grabbed his throat. It all happened so fast. What the fuck was he thinking?”

Crank steps forward and looks at the man staring up from the ground. “Sniper, it’s our fault. This is the dumbass from the compound. This is the idiot with the plastic bones with teeth marks.” Looking down at the man on the ground, Crank growls.

“You are a dumbass son of a bitch. We were having a bit of fun with you in the compound about vampires and stuff, and you nearly blow our heads off? Sniper, give me that .45.” Sniper hands it over, and Crank drops the magazine out of it. Handing it to Brand, he starts a new rant.

“You made silver bullets? Honestly. How could anyone be that stupid? I’ve got a good mind to shoot you with the fuckers myself. Sorry, kids.”

The wife looks from her husband to Crank and back to her husband. Suddenly, she starts to slap and punch him.

“You’ve had all of us scared out of our wits over a joke you’re too stupid to understand? You melted my jewelry and my trophies to make BULLETS? Give me the gun. I’ll shoot the fucker myself. Kids get in the house, now! You don’t need to see what’s going to happen next. IN, NOW!”

The children rush into the house with the girls screaming once again. The woman jumps to her feet and proceeds berating him and kicks him in turn.

Brand takes the .45 from Crank and drops the magazine in one pocket of his costume and the gun in the other. “Let’s get the rest of this area done and get the hell home.”

Once we're back at the compound Dollar and Tyre take the buckets into his office, and they count the cash. It doesn't take the two of them long and they call us all to the commons.

“Ladies, gentlemen, witches, and warlocks. Due, I'm sure, to the ladies putting their men on a promise for achieving targets, I have great pleasure in announcing that not only did you achieve the target of \$5000, but your overall achievement was just over \$7500. Well done!!” Dollar stomps his feet, and the room goes wild.

Tyre steps up and announces loudly and clearly, “Ladies of the club as your men *overachieved* so highly, I sincerely hope this will be reflected in their rewards!” He stomps his feet and once again the room erupts even louder, if possible.

Brand steps up, pulling me with him. “As I understand the maths of our fundraiser, we are still short of the \$70,000 I was hoping for. I suggest for now, but it will need to go through church that we sell the newly gained hairdressing salon and add the proceeds to the pot.”

While the commons is shaking with excitement, I take Brand's hand and pull him away to his office. I think my man has done enough that I can start his reward early.

CHAPTER 18

-:- BRAND -:-

Having been locked in my office with Pip for the last thirty minutes, thirty very enjoyable minutes, we head back to the commons and see what everyone else is doing. As we walk through to the compound, Olivia and Sniper walk in from the kitchen, both looking a little disheveled.

“Olivia, honestly. Just look at the state of you.” Pip squeals with delight. “And in the kitchen! Anyone could have walked in.”

There are brothers and their Ol’ Ladies appearing from all directions, all grinning like mad.

“Okay, let’s get this Halloween party started,” I say and as one, we all amble into the compound. Rather than getting it started, we just join in as it’s already in full swing, and I can see quite a few townsfolk here, too. Couples and families look like they’re having a good time.

Ice and Bomber are organizing a group of kids playing musical chairs. The kids are loving it, and their squeals and screams testify to that. Looks as though Ice and Bomber are having as much fun as the kids. Spooky music is playing, the theme from Addams Family ends and the kids dash to chairs. One poor little girl is upset she didn’t get a chair and bursts into tears. Music starts again, and it’s the old classic Monster Mash.

Looking around, I see Rip and Shadow by the bonfire. This has been a worry for me with having the townsfolk and their kids in the compound. Walking over to them, holding hands with my red devil, I see they are staking out a fenced area so no one can get within 13 feet of the fire.

Shadow calls over to me when he sees me. “Hi, Pres. We got this. Two fences, one at 13 feet to keep the audience at a safe

distance. We're having another at 10 feet to allow a walk space for a Marshall to patrol in. I know how concerned you were, so we've planned the best we can for safety. We have two hoses ready, buckets of sand, fire extinguishers, and fire blankets. We also have first aid kits at three points around the fence.

"We've got an area with two brothers toasting marshmallows as well, so no one else has to get too close. Anything you think we've missed?" He looks at me expectantly.

"Yeah. One very important point," I say as I give him a stern look. He looks at his preparations and counts things off on his fingers. Pip has got it in one. I can tell by the way she's side-eyeing me and trying not to blurt it out.

"I don't see it, Pres. Me, Crank, and Rip thought we covered everything." Shadow is looking concerned and calls to Rip to come over. "Pres thinks we've missed something, but I don't know what?" Shadow goes over everything he has told me with Rip and I see the cogs turning slowly in their heads. Rip grins at me, and then Shadow.

"You get your hot chocolate from a table by the marshmallows, Pres." Rip looks at me with a huge grin and slaps Shadow on the back, laughing.

"Guess you got it covered, then. Well done. We'll get one now." We head over for a hot chocolate and a marshmallow, still holding hands and enjoying people-watching as we go. We're just walking away with our drinks when a voice booms out of nowhere.

"Good evening, Brant. Quite a shindig you've put on. My kids are loving it. One of them won a prize on the musical chairs."

Before I have time to correct the sergeant about my name, yet again, I see the huge smirk on his face. "Sorry, just couldn't resist. It'll be Brand from now on." He introduces his wife and kids, and I introduce Pip. I notice his wife has her arm through his and I like the look of that. It's even more intimate than

holding hands and it clearly states they belong to each other. Yeah, I'm goin' to be doin' some of that, I think.

“Grab some of that hot chocolate, Sergeant. There's an adult version too, if you've a mind to it. I suggest you let your good wife drive home, though, if you have some. It's not for the faint-hearted.”

Walking further on, we see a kids scavenger hunt getting ready to start with Crank and Glide organizing it. I grab Tank and send him to find the sergeant and get his kids over here pronto. They'll love this, I'm sure.

Once the kids are on the hunt, I ask the sergeant what's happening with the sheriff.

“Well, so far, the mayor's dealing with it. I know he's spent some time in the sheriff's office and they've had some heated arguments. They went at it this morning and the mayor was heard to 'say' that the sheriff will resign, or he will be sacked, before the end of next week.” The sergeant grins at me. “Those conversations were held in the office to be confidential, but I swear to God, if you'd had your office window open, you'd have heard it plain as day.”

“Well, Darrel, has anyone approached you for the position?” I see the surprised look on his face at my use of his given name. “It's on your shirt badge, but I wasn't goin' to use it unless you used my name correctly.” We both laugh, and he holds his hand up for a high five.

“The mayor has said it's mine if I want it, and we discussed what my first actions would be. I was straight with him. Told him I wanted to get the department in order first and get me some deputies that were worth a damn. Pretty much what we discussed.

“I told him that all the resident criminals and known repeat offenders were gonna be put on notice to clean up or get out. I may need a bit of help with that if any of your guys are up for a bit of rough and tumble. There's time to talk about that later.”

“I’m sure my guys will be more than happy to oblige. Good luck though, Darrel, seriously. I think you’d make a good sheriff and one that we would be happy to support.” I look him in the eye and this time I high-five him, which has him laughing.

Pip gives me a nudge, and when I look at her, she wrinkles her nose and says, “Enough of the work talk. This is playtime, remember?”

Darrel’s wife joins in, saying, “He’s had his playtime. Every time we have playtime, we get another child out of it. He needs to do something about his swimmers if he wants me to dress up like you are now.”

We all burst out laughing at Darrel’s face. “Woman,” he says, “If you’re gonna start dressing like these ladies tonight, I’ll tie them tubes myself.” After another bout of hysterical laughter, we leave Darrel and his family and head off to see what else the brothers have going on.

Seeing a crowd a few feet further on, we sidestep them and go around to where my brothers, Cali, and Sparks, are overseeing the Apple Bobbing competition. Everyone’s having a great time and getting seriously wet. The ‘barrels’ are topped up with water after each turn. There’s so much splashing going on. I see Cali and Sparks frown at each other and then call for the next two contestants on their list.

When we hear Thunder and Whisky’s names being called, I can’t help the ‘Oh Fuck’ that slips out. Pip asks what’s wrong, I remind her of all the trouble over the decorations with these two and the strollers having their wheels stolen.

We watch as they approach their barrels and they give each other such evil looks I dread to think about what’s going to happen next. Cali speaks quietly to both of them and I catch snippets like ‘families’, ‘kids’, and even ‘Pres’. Thunder looks over at me and gives me a chin lift. Whisky, standing behind Thunder, shrugs his shoulders at me and has a tick going at the corner of his mouth.

When Sparks shouts “GO!” Thunder dives his head into the barrel and tries to grab an apple with his teeth. There’s water splashing everywhere. Whisky grabs something from his pocket and dumps it into Thunder’s barrel, then dunks his head into his barrel, wets his hair, and then stands there. He calmly puts his hand into the barrel, grabs an apple, and starts to eat.

As the crowd begins to boo Whisky, he raises one hand, and the other he places a finger over his lips to shush them. He points to Thunder, still thrashing about in the barrel, and again puts his finger to his lips.

It only takes a couple of minutes and Thunder appears from his barrel with an apple in his mouth. Whisky stands there with no apple because he ate the darn thing. The crowd is silent for a moment and then erupts in cheers and laughter. Whisky graciously accepts defeat and applauds Thunder, slapping him on the back and holding Thunder’s arm in the air like a winning boxer. With the crowd going mad with excitement, Thunder raises his hands and laps up the attention.

All this time not knowing his whole head and any other part of him that got wet is now a fluorescent glowing GREEN! I hope that fuckin’ washes off as Thunder is going to murder Whisky, and I’m not sure any of us will be able to stop him!

Pip is laughing so hard she’s leaning on me to stop herself from falling to the ground. I scoop her up bridal style and, making sure her ass is covered in that tiny skirt, we head away from the apple bobbing quickly.

My eyes round when I see Saf chasing Ty and Cameron coming our way fast. Saf looks frazzled, I have to admit, and I look at Pip, who’s got a look on her face that looks like horror. That has me looking back to see what I missed.

Ty comes to a halt in front of me, but before he can say anything, the smell hits and I can’t hold back the heave from the smell. I step back, pulling Pip with me, away from the smelly little fucker.

Saf slaps her hand over Ty's mouth, stopping him before he can say anything but she's doing it at the length of her arms. Looking down at his legs, is when I see what looks like brown sludge that is slowly running running down.

"I'm sorry, Pres. It seems Ty has been sneaking into all the Trick-or-Treat things they collected, and I think the sugar overload has gone right through his system." Saf keeps giving small heaves, which has me wanting to do it with her.

Christ, the smell is putrid, and that's when I realize it's not sludge, it's shit sliding down Ty's legs. My eyes flick over to Cameron, and he's clean, you wouldn't know he's been running around with Tyler for the last four hours. No shit on him, thankfully, but Cameron places his hands over his nose and takes a few steps away from Ty. Who can blame him as I take another step back too?

Pip is still laughing, and she has tears rolling down her cheeks. She keeps trying to say something, but it just comes out as a screech as she sets off into another round of hysterical laughter.

Saf starts to pull Ty away with her, but I can't help but notice the little fucker has taken Jolly Ranchers out of his pocket. As they are walking away Saf is trying to get Cameron to follow and he's following but at a great distance.

It's getting late now, so we head to the bonfire. Brothers are walking around the compound, diverting everyone to that area, telling them they don't want to miss the finale. Holy fuck, I think to myself. I'm not aware of any finale. We agreed on a bonfire. What finale is after the bonfire?

Once the crowd is all gathered, Sniper and a very green, and angry, Thunder, rock up on their bikes and head down the compound. Crank and Rip walk up the compound, too. Now I'm seriously worried. Looking around, I see Glide watching me. He's obviously the lookout, I think to myself. Pip has her hand through my arm and is hanging on for dear life. I look down at her and ask, "Is this something I should be worried about?"

Looking up at me with the most innocent eyes in the universe, she replies, “Darling, I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Pip, you have the most gorgeous, beautiful, sexy, *lying*, eyes I have ever seen.” I kiss her forehead, then her nose, and finally her lips.

There’s suddenly a loud whoosh and a scream as something shoots up into the heavens from up the compound. Seconds later, a huge bang echoes across the sky and there’s a gold flash like an enormous mushroom with silver trails falling toward the earth.

For the next twenty minutes, the sky is filled with fireworks. Everyone is fixed looking into the sky. Just as everyone thinks it’s over, we hear motorcycle engines roaring down the compound towards us.

Sniper is coming down the compound on one side and a very green Thunder on the other. As they approach, a huge frame rears up from the compound floor. As it reaches its full height, the bikes stop and they have wires attached that have pulled the frame. Looking behind it, I can see other wires that appear to be anchoring it from going too far over.

Within seconds, more fireworks attached to the frame go off. Shining in the middle of the frame for all to see are the words, **HAPPY HALLOWEEN!!**



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