



KIERSTINE

EST. 1985



BOOK TWO

RENEE ALAN

KIERSTIE

Knights Wrath, Book 2

Renee Alan

Renee Alan Books

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Digital work and formatting by Sweet 15 Designs

Professionally edited by Mary Kern @ Ms K. Edits

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents. My mom is the one who gave me my love of reading. She always had a book with her and I've never known her to not be in the middle of one. She took me countless times to the library as a kid and taught me to enjoy getting lost in a story. My dad is the one who taught me to always keep learning. He stressed that we only grow as individuals if we always continue to expand our knowledge. Both of them instilled in me that family is everything, and family is who you choose it to be. It can be family by blood or by friendship. They are the reason that family is the core of any story I write. My parents also taught me to always try and see the humor in things. Most of my fondest memories growing up include laughter. There have been no better moments in my life than when I've been laughing so hard there were tears in my eyes. Whoever said laughter is the best medicine was completely accurate.

Thank you to my readers. Thank you for taking a chance on a new author. Your response to Jane has been amazing and I can only hope you enjoy Kierstie.

BOOKS BY RENEE ALAN:

Jane: Knights Wrath MC, Book One

Kierstie: Knights Wrath MC, Book Two

BLURB

Her family sees her as the one with the temper. She sees herself as average. Middle of the road. Average height, weight, and job. Hell, she's even the middle child.

One night, she makes a decision to be anything but average. It leads to the hottest night of her life. One she planned to keep all to herself till those two pink lines showed up.

Finding the father is nearly impossible till it isn't and he's staring at her in the last place she expected to find him.

If they can maneuver through the drama and pitfalls of everyone finding out about that night and their relationship since, they just might have their happily ever after. That is, until a branch of the family tree threatens not only their happiness but also their lives.

Join Kierstie and the rest of the Weston family in this second installment of the Knights Wrath MC series.

Prologue

Kierstie

Well, shit. Pa always told me my mouth would get me into trouble, though I don't think this is what he was thinking when he said that. Yet, here I am, walking with a stranger to his hotel room. To fuck. A fine ass stranger. He's got to be one of the sexiest men I've ever seen in real life. How did I end up walking down the block to head to his hotel room, on this Friday night? My mouth, of course. As in, I don't know when to shut up.

Tonight started out the same as all the others when my coworkers have successfully talked me into going out. I go out once a month with them for drinks at a local bar. It's not that they don't invite me more often, it's just that, most weekends, I find myself hurrying to head home every Friday after work. Yes, even though I've lived here for a while now, I still consider my hometown home. This is just where I live.

But back to me and my big mouth. I'm blaming the two Dirty Shirley Temples I had that helped loosen my tongue. I'm not drunk or anything, just a little less tense than normal when I'm around people I don't know.

I've been here over an hour and so far have spent the whole time listening to my coworkers, Katie and Marnie, rate the men at the bar, and if they could guess if they're single or not. It's not the worst game they've ever played, but if they think a ring is the only sign that a man is taken, they're completely oblivious.

While looking around the bar, I see a man walk up and order a bottle of beer. He appears to be alone, and I have to wipe the drool off my chin. He's tall, has broad shoulders, and dark brown hair pulled back from his face, not in a ponytail, but tucked behind his ears. It's probably around shoulder length—more like he hasn't had a hair cut in a while than anything else. He's got a short beard, close to his chiseled face. He makes me wish wall sex was a reality instead of just something I've read about.

I grab my empty glass and headed over to the bar after seeing there's an open spot next to him. The bartender is the same one who's always here when I come. He's friendly, but not overly chatty. He just gave the sexy stranger another beer and me my third and final Dirty Shirley Temple. I'm getting an Uber back, having taken one here, but I still like to be in control when I don't know people that well.

"That looks like the drink my little cousin used to get, but I'm guessing it ain't a Shirley Temple?" Holy shit, he's got a voice that could read a phone book and I'd listen to him for hours.

"Actually, you're not far off. It's a Dirty Shirley Temple. It's that drink your cousin drank, but with vodka in it."

I could get lost in this man's eyes, and at the same time, I feel like he's seeing through me.

"So, you like things dirty, do you?" His half-grin makes him sexier than any man has a right to be.

"Oh, I can be as dirty as they come, given the right situation." Holy shit, this guy is giving off major wall-sex vibes. Like, he's the kind that if you were the woman he was into, he'd pull over and take you in the cab of his truck right there, right then. I've never wished to be that woman more in my life.

The band that's playing tonight switches things up and starts playing a slow song.

Mister-sex-on-a-stick speaks up. "How about a dance, gorgeous?"

Grinning at him, I nod a yes. "As long as you don't step on my toes too many times, handsome."

Him

This woman has to be the sexiest woman I've ever seen. You can tell she doesn't think so, and she doesn't dress to flaunt it. She's just in jeans, boots, and a top that shows just a touch of cleavage that I'm dying to lick. Her hair is a mass of curls, and it's all I can do to stop myself from grabbing it to control her. *What the fuck?* I've never had the desire to control a woman, but she's bringing it out in me. I don't even know her name.

What I do know is she feels amazing in my arms on the dance floor. I know I can't think past tonight, as I'm not there in my life, but the desire, no, need, to have her come back to my room to be inside of her is almost overwhelming. We've barely said anything to each other past hello and a couple of lines, yet I can't think of more to talk about before I invite her back to my room. Fuck it. We only live once.

"How'd you feel about going back to my room with me? I'm staying across the street. Are you feeling the heat like I am, gorgeous?"

Kierstie

Nodding at him, I agree with him about the heat between us.

"I'm gonna need the words."

"Yes, I'll go with you to your room. I'm just hoping you've got more than your stare goin' for ya."

He actually growls and tells me he might just fuck the curls out of my hair.

I might have whimpered out, "Yes please, now."

That's how my mouth got me to this moment in time. We walk up to his room, on the first floor of the travel lodge that's across the street. He takes the key card out and opens the door. Like the idiot I am, I follow him into the room. As soon as I'm in the room, I'm pushed up against the door and he's kissing me like I'm a glass of water and he's dying of thirst. Holy shit, he can kiss. Without thought, I try to undress him as I'm definitely dying to see what he looks like without clothes on. He breaks the kiss, grabs my hands, and puts them above my head.

"Gorgeous, that's not how this is going to work. I'm going to get my fill of you before I slide into you. You going to be a good girl and let me?"

Fuck me, why did that one question turn me on more than anything I've ever heard? Unable to utter any words, I nod at him while looking into his deep blue eyes.

"Glad to hear it. Now let me undress my present so I can see the amazing fucking body I know you've got hidden under all these clothes." His lips crash back into mine and within seconds, he's got me down to my bra and panties. Thank the lord I didn't wear any granny panties tonight. That would have put a damper on this whole thing.

"Fuck me, darlin', you're even better like this." He lets my hands go free and I want to get him naked as fast as possible. Before I can move my hands to take his shirt off, he lifts me up in his arms. My legs wrap around him without even thinking about it. He moves a few steps into the room and I can tell he must reach the bed. With an agility that I could only have in my dreams, he lays us both down on the bed. He pushes back up and takes off his shirt, revealing a tattooed, broad chest and that happy trail I've read about but never seen in person. I suddenly have the urge to lick it. *What the fuck is he doing to me?* We haven't even done more than kiss and he's got me more turned on than I think I've ever been. Not that there's been a lot to compare to. I'm brought back out of my head by a ripping sound. He's just torn my panties off. He's looking at my pussy like it's his next five-star meal. The man moves with a speed that makes me think he's possibly as

turned on as I am. He bends down and takes a lick all the way up my slit, stopping at my clit. His moan against my clit along with his tongue has me edging close to a climax. Just as I'm getting used to his rhythm, he adds a finger to the mix and sends me over the edge, my whole body shaking as the orgasm washes over me.

"You are fucking beautiful when you come. I can't wait any longer to feel you squeeze my cock like you just did my finger." I watch him undo his jeans and take them off while grabbing a condom from the pocket. He puts it on quickly and enters me in one swift move. In unison, we both exclaim, "Fuck!" He fills me so completely. I don't think any of my exes have ever felt like this. Neither one of them.

"Fuck me, you're tight, hugging my cock like a vise."

For the next few minutes, there is nothing but groans, moans, and the sounds that can only describe two people fucking. He moves my legs so that my feet are almost resting on my shoulders, making me more flexible than I've ever been. This isn't making love or anything with roses and romantic gestures. This is two people so lost in the physical sensation that words aren't found. Another orgasm builds and I just manage to get the words out. "So close."

He must be close cause he doubles down and pistons in and out of me, sending me into the biggest orgasm of my life, including those given to me by my BOB. I don't know if I actually say any words or just scream through the wave of the orgasm that hits me and has me shaking all over.

Him

"Fuuucckkk!" Holy shit, I've never come so hard in my life. I see stars as I come. She's something else. I pull out and take care of the condom in the trash can next to the bed. As I try to catch my breath, I look over at the gorgeous stranger in my bed. She turns her head toward me and gives me a stunning smile, causing me to lose the words I was going to say.

“Sexy, I hope you recover quickly, cause we need to do that again before I take off.” She’s a pistol, this one.

“Beautiful, give me a minute and we’re doing this at least a couple more times, cause that was fucking amazing.” She nods in agreement. This is definitely the best Friday I’ve had in a while.

Kierstie

So it wasn’t my finest moment. After the fourth round of mind-blowing sex, we both must have passed out. I woke up around four a.m. Realizing what I’d done and the fact that I had no idea what his name was had me freaking the fuck out. I ordered a ride on the app, snuck into the bathroom with my clothes, minus the panties he’d ripped earlier in the evening. I got myself dressed and, as quietly as someone like me can, I went outside and got in my ride as soon as it showed up.

I got home and tossed and turned the last couple of hours. That was the craziest thing I’ve ever done, and I can’t even tell anyone. Mads wouldn’t understand. She’d just yell at me about putting myself in a potentially dangerous situation. She’s the one I share almost everything with, but this is gonna be just mine. It’ll be the main replay in my finger vault for years to come.

CHAPTER 1

Almost two months later.

Kierstie

I packed up the last box just in time to run to the bathroom for one last visit to pray to the porcelain god of my apartment. The ten sticks confirming my situation no longer adorn the counter in the bathroom, but the answer they gave me is making itself known this morning.

Yep, I'm pregnant and I don't know the name of the father. It's not like I sleep around and have so many to choose from. I've slept with four guys in my entire life. It's an average number for someone like me... someone who's so completely average it's not even funny. I'm not talking badly about myself, only factually. I'm the very middle child of my family, with three older and three younger siblings. I'm five-six and carry an extra ten to twenty pounds, depending on the month. I'm a solid B-cup and wear size eight shoes. See? Average. The only two things not average about me are my temper and my hair. My temper, like my hair, is hard to contain and you never know when it might explode. I blame the Weston genes for that. Oh, that's right. I'm also the only one of my siblings related by blood to Ma and Pa. Technically, I'm only genetically related to Pa. See, they adopted me from when I was a small baby. My birth dad is Pa's brother. My birth mom was a young girl who wasn't ready to be a mom. The only smart thing she ever did was decide to give me to Ma and Pa. I don't have any memories of her but the pictures I've seen of her, she was a beauty, reminding me kind of Emma Watson. She died of an overdose before I was five.

I've met my biological father a few times. He's always decided drugs and being in and out of prison are more important than growing up and getting to know me.

But back to my current situation. When Pa had his hip surgery and subsequent stroke, I had decided enough was enough and I was gonna move back home and take the job that Jon's always bugged me to take at the shop. I hated getting the call about Pa

and having to drive three hours to see him at the hospital. I want to be closer to my family. They may drive me nuts, but they also feed my soul in a way nobody else can. I found a place just down the street from Mads and not far from everyone else. Luckily, it's a two-bedroom, since it would seem I'm going to be needing that in a few months. Have I told anyone I'm pregnant? That'd be a big fuck no. How can I when one of the first questions will be who's the dad and I can't even give them a fucking name? I could be crass and tell them that I don't know, and that this baby is a result of the hottest, most erotic night of my life. Yeah, somehow I don't think even with my attitude that would fly.

I think Ry might suspect something is going on. He's come to help me take a few loads over to my new place and has seen me run to the bathroom a few times. I probably could confide in him, 'cause lord knows he's got his own secrets he's keeping. I think the last one was named Brian. I'm not judging. I just want my brother happy, but he's got to decide to share that part of himself.

See how distracted I can get? Back to the matter at hand. If I knew his name, I would definitely tell him. I'm not one of those women who would lord this over some guy, but it would be fair for him to choose if he wanted to be a part of his kid's life. As it stands, I can't exactly do a Google search for the hot guy I met in a bar, now can I? I know I can't hide it much longer. I'll be starting to show soon. I know my family will be supportive. I'm just not sure how to deal with the baby daddy question. All I keep thinking of is Pa's advice... *You should always tell the truth, but you needn't always be telling it.* I know some people won't need to know and it's none of their business, but Ma, Pa, my brothers, and Mads are gonna demand to know.

Fuck this. I'm gonna pull a Scarlett O'Hara and think about it tomorrow so I can get moved in. I'm going to the family barbecue tomorrow and will be ready to start work on Monday. Then I'll tackle this one who's causing me to lose my stomach every day.

Him

Thankfully, Pres doesn't always hold church on the weekends that we have a family barbecue. It gives me the entire weekend to go hunting. I know, some people might say spending almost every weekend for over two years searching for someone is futile and I should give up. Logically, I know that, but how can I give up on him like that? He's my little brother. Sure, he's in his twenties and an adult, but when I came back after getting out of the Army and found out that he was out on the streets, I felt like I failed him. Like maybe if I hadn't re-upped the second time, he wouldn't have fallen in with the wrong people and wouldn't have ended up addicted to drugs. I know Pres is getting tired of me leaving just about every weekend we don't have church. I know he wants us all at the family days and I get it, but how can I leave my brother out there and not try to find him and get him help? Uncle Grant reminds me that maybe he doesn't want to be found and isn't ready to accept help. He's probably right and, at some point, I might decide to stop looking, but today's not the day.

I don't ride my bike when I go out looking 'cause it's too noisy and runs off the people I need to talk with. I always get a few yes replies when I ask if they've seen him, but not one person can tell me where he stays or anything useful. I pull onto the highway to make the almost three-hour drive to our hometown where he supposedly still lives. My playlist starts and the first song that comes on is the Tom Walker hit "*Leave a Light On.*" Yeah, that about sums up my life. I know if I had more going on, I'd probably listen to everyone, but fuck, I don't see that happening anytime soon. Tyson needs help, and I'm not going to fail him again.

CHAPTER 2

Kierstie

Thank the gods this morning I haven't had any morning sickness. I'm beyond tired, but I think that has more to do with the fact that I'm drinking fucking decaf coffee at seven-thirty in the morning than anything else. I find my jeans in a box and one of my many shirts that have *Weston and Sons Repair and Restoration* on it. Luckily, the shirts are baggy so they can be worn even when I start showing. I put my hair back in a quick braid and get my ass moving to my car. I know I'm working for my family, but I also know that office work ain't a strong suit of Jon's. I can only imagine the mess I'm going to be walking into. If his desk growing up is any indication, I'll be busy for months.

I stop at Sooner or Later and get a decaf mocha, a muffin, and a fruit cup. I'm gonna take advantage of not feeling sick this morning and eat. I hope it stays gone all day, as I'm sure Jane is gonna be bringing over some treats at some point. I know that she and my brothers aren't out publicly just yet since she's still working for Pa, but they picked a great woman. She even reads smut like Mads and I do. She hasn't read Mirrah McGee yet, so we've got her started on them. I had to warn her against Mars, just like I had to make sure I didn't have to fight her for Kale. I'm not afraid to fucking fight for the men I've claimed as my book boyfriends.

She does make me almost gag though when she starts talkin' about how hot my brothers are. Just ew. I love my brothers, all of them, but fuck if any of them are good looking. Just no. They're still the guys who pulled my ponytail and gave wet willies whenever they could. They smell. No, they aren't hot. Not like Mr. Sex-on-a-stick-whose-name-I-don't-know. He's the hottest man I've ever seen in person since I've never gotten to meet Chris Hemsworth in the flesh. His eyes are soul piercing, and he's the only man who I've ever wanted to obey and want to have him call me a good girl. Since that night, if I think about it, my BOB gets attention for longer than is probably healthy. *Focus, Kierstie.*

I make the short drive from the coffee place to the shop. I pull into the parking lot and I see my brothers' bikes, along with a few others I recognize. There are some I don't know, but I know they have some prospects and even a few members that I haven't met or seen in years.

Coming home was the right thing. I know some may look at it as weak or pathetic, but those people can fuck right off. Shit. I've got to start watching my swearing, or this kid is going to come out with their first word being fuck and their second being shit.

I grab my stuff and head into the front of the shop where the offices are. I know I'll be mainly working at the front desk and organizing things from there. I almost get to the door when I realize I have to go back to the car because I forgot my phone. I'm not a scattered-brained person, but I swear I lose my phone at least seventeen times a day. Let's try this again.

As I reach for the door a second time, it opens and Jon steps out.

"Hey, Sis, so glad you decided to come home. I'm not meant for fucking paperwork. I know you'll get this place cleaned up and running better in a heartbeat, especially our schedule of upcoming projects. Once word is out that Ror is home, that will take off even more." He's not telling me anything I don't already know.

"Brother, I've worked in the shop before. I can handle it." He acts like I'm still a teenager sometimes.

He holds his hands up in surrender. Someone is learning from being in a relationship with a strong woman.

"I know you can, Sis. Come on. We're about to have our Monday morning meeting and you can meet some of the guys I think are new since the last time you stopped by. You can catch up with what the guys are working on right now."

We both head inside. Juan and Ror greet me as I'm setting my stuff at the desk that is also the front counter. I put my purse under the desk and open one of the drawers to grab a pad of paper and pen because inevitably someone is going to mention

something they need ordered or need in general. I know I won't remember the name of any parts. As my life goes lately, I promptly drop the pen under the desk. I almost crawl under the desk to get it and hear more guys coming into the office. As I stand up and turn around to greet them, my world tips on its axis.

Holy motherfucking shit. Cuntcakes on a cracker. This could only happen to me.

It's him.

He's in the club. He's friends with my brothers. He lives here. *Fuck my life.* He's talking to Jameson and Juan about something, but I see the moment he looks over at me.

Shane

Fuck me.

She's the new girl who's going to be running the front office? She's one of Pres's sisters?

I'm a dead man.

When Jon, Ror, and Juan find out, they're going to take their time killing me. I can tell she's shocked at my being here. If I'm gonna die, she and I are going to need a few more rounds to make my death worthwhile.

Jon starts to speak and I watch her school her features. Seeing her in the daylight, I still think she's one of the most stunning women I've seen—her little speckling of freckles, her expressive eyes, and the mass of curls in her hair. All I can think of is grabbing her hair from behind again and hearing those noises come from her when I hit the right spot. I realize I haven't been paying attention 'cause Pres is looking at me, waiting for a reply. "Sorry, Pres, I haven't had any coffee yet. What was the question?" He looks at me like he's not sure he believes me but repeats his question.

"You got anything you know you need to order for the car you're starting on today?"

I shake my head. "Not that I know of yet. I've got to get it in and on the lift to start to diagnose what's wrong with it. Might

just need a tune-up.”

“Well, if you do, or anyone does, from now on, see Kierstie about it. I’m gonna get my office organized and then get my hands dirty for a while. I know y’all like to not stop what you’re doing to order a part or tool, so I’m going to start a group chat. You can text Kierstie in addition to coming in here. That may also save us from witnessing Kierstie’s anger as often.”

If looks could kill, Jon would be dead. She’s definitely not intimidated by him.

“I can keep my temper in the workplace, *Jon*,” she shares as she continues to stare daggers at him. Jon finishes up with the updates on what’s planned for the week and tells us to all get to work. Not wanting to draw attention to the fact that Kierstie and I know each other, specifically in the biblical sense, I head into the shop and over to the bay I work in. I have the prospect, Mario, bring in the vehicle that we’re going to work on. It’s for a repeat customer who wants to get this car up to snuff for their kid to drive.

I hear my phone go off as I open my toolbox. Taking it out of my pocket to put in my toolbox, I see I have three text messages. One is the group chat Jon started for all of us. I save it in my phone and go to the next one. It’s from my uncle Grant reminding me that I told him I would stop by to help move his new couch with Saxon and Samson. I tell him I’ll be there. The last is from a number I don’t recognize.

Unknown: I know you recognized me this morning. I had no idea who you were before. Did you know who I was?

This has to be Kierstie.

Me: If this is who I think it is textin’ me, then no, I had no idea. It’s been at least ten years, if not more, since I’d seen you. I didn’t recognize you at all.

I add her number into my phone because I plan on using it before her brothers kill me.

Kierstie: Okay then, ’cause I think I’d have a problem if you’d fucked me to get in with my brothers. We do need to talk at

some point.

Me: Fuck no, I didn't get with you 'cause of your brothers. I'm likely to die when they find out. Still wouldn't change me from doin' what we did, though, gorgeous. We can talk whenever, just let me know. I gotta work or Pres is gonna come see what I'm doin'.

Kierstie: K

I get to work on the Civic that Mario brought into the bay. He's helping me and two other brothers since it seems our other prospect, Cain, ain't in today. Before I realize it, a few hours have passed and it's time for lunch. I clean up, grab my phone and head into the office to see if she wants to grab lunch together.

What I run into is that hang around, Kathleen, throwing herself at Pres and making a scene in the office. Jameson and I quickly grab her and take her outside. She's fighting us the entire time.

Jameson speaks before I can. "You need to get it through your head that Pres doesn't want you. Doesn't matter if he's seeing anyone or not. You're not what he wants and I can just about guarantee now that no brother is gonna want you."

I agree with him. "Fuck no, we aren't. Get gone and remember you're banned."

Shockingly, she gets in her car and takes off. Maybe we actually got through to her, but I doubt it. She's been a pain for as long as I've been part of the club.

Walking back into the office, I notice Kierstie isn't at her desk. I head to Jon's office to see if everything's alright since we had to de-skank his office. "You good, Pres?"

He looks up from his desk. "Yeah, that bitch just can't take no for an answer. We're lucky Kierstie had an appointment to go to or she would've beaten her ass, or at least dragged her outta here."

I chuckle at his expression.

“I was gonna see if she wanted me to pick her up something for lunch since I figured she was knee-deep in your paperwork.”

Shaking his head, he says, “Nah, she mentioned the appointment to me this weekend and said she had to take what she could get, having just moved back and all. I’d kill for a burger and fries, though.”

After getting his order, I take off for lunch, the woman who’s been on my mind for months back in the forefront. I hope everything’s okay. I decide to pick up an extra sandwich and fries to give to her if she’s there when I get back. If she’s not, one of the guys will eat it without a doubt.

I’m sitting down to eat when someone sits down across from me. Looking up, I see it’s either Samson or Saxon.

“What’s up, cuz? Aren’t you supposed to be hard at work on a computer or something?” He glares at me in a way I know it’s Samson and not Saxon. The two fuckers are almost identical, but having known them my whole life, I’ve learned some of their tells.

“If I fuckin still worked there, I would. They said they had to downsize due to budget issues but only laid off me and the other two employees who aren’t related to them. I can’t wait for them to realize that the three of us they let go did ninety percent of the work.”

“What are ya gonna do for work? Did you want to come work at the shop?”

The waitress walks up and takes our orders, and I add the two to-go orders to it.

“Nah, that’s more your scene and not where my talent lies. I’m actually going to see about starting up our own business in the security sector. I know Ry was looking at leaving his job and the other two guys I worked with are interested in joining us.”

“Well, it looks like you got it all planned out there. You goin’ to your dad’s tonight to help move the furniture he just bought?”

The waitress brings over our food and drinks. We both thank her and of course he asks for a side of ranch. I think he eats fucking everything drenched in the stuff.

“Yeah, I can’t believe he’s finally getting a new couch. I think he’s had that one since before she left.”

“It’s been more than twenty years since she left. She stayed in contact for a lot of them and you still won’t call her mom or by her name?” Samson gives me a glare that would intimidate a lot of people but does nothing to me.

“Fuck no. Yeah, she didn’t completely disappear, but a mom she wasn’t. Dad’s the only parent we had and he did great. Besides, I don’t see you calling yours dad, or by his name.”

Glaring back at him, I take a bite of my burger. “First off, that fucker isn’t my father. He was an abusive alcoholic asshole to boot. Not that I think my biological dad might be any better. Mom had shit taste in men.” Samson agrees and we both get to eatin’ since I only have a short lunch break.

I pull into the parking lot of the shop after lunch and realize I don’t know what kind of car she drives. I pull into my spot and grab both takeout containers and head to the office.

When I walk in, I can see Kierstie’s back. She’s busy with a customer, so I take both lunches to Pres’s office, letting him know one is for her or if she’s eaten, any of the brothers can have it. I get my ass back into the shop so I can get this car taken care of and off my rack today, hopefully. I know we’ve got appointments lined up for a while. Working in a shop with such a good reputation means I’ll always be busy. Just how I like it.

Kierstie

He brought me lunch. That was really thoughtful of him. It was a club sandwich. I can’t really have that right now according to the baby book I’m reading, so I told Jon I had something on my way back to work, but would eat the fries. Juan came in to talk about something, so he ate the sandwich. He did raise his eyebrows a bit when he heard that Shane had brought it for me. Jon waved it off as being nice to me, so I

always remember to order the parts he needs. Gotta love my brother. He's smart and observant about a lot of shit, but which guys are interested in me or Mads has never been a strong suit of his. If it was, he would've already beaten Mick to a pulp. One of these days, my sweet sister needs to put her big girl panties on and make a move on him.

Back at my desk, I get back into the mess of paperwork in front of me. Luckily, it's not as bad as Jon thought it was. He may hate doing paperwork, but he kept it up a lot better than I expected. This means I can do some basic filing this afternoon and let my mind wander to my appointment earlier.

The doctor confirmed what all the sticks said. I am for sure pregnant. She said things looked good. She even gave me a reason to not feel so bad about not sharing the news yet. She said many people wait till the end of the first trimester to tell people, as miscarriages before then are common. That gives me almost a month to figure out how to tell people, though I should really start with its daddy. He doesn't have the slightest clue that I'm about to change his world. If he wants to be a part of it, that is. Fuck, I'm gonna have to keep all my brothers and Pa from killing him. This means I'm gonna have to tell Ma. This is a whole lotta shit to think about. I'm gonna think about it tomorrow.

CHAPTER 3

Shane

Pulling up to my uncle's house, I realize that most of my best memories of my mom are when we came to visit here. It's when she wasn't distracted by whichever destructive man was in her life at the time. Most of the time, it was my stepdad, who was a complete asshole on a good day. Grant would always open his doors for us to come visit, even if sometimes that meant he had to deal with my stepdad. He, like me at the time, thought he was my dad and, of course, Tyson's dad. It wasn't until Mom passed and I was going through all her paperwork that I found out a few bombshells. One, she had never actually married him and they only lived as common law spouses. Tyson's birth certificate did list him as the father, and from her papers, it looks like he is the biological dad. Probably some genetic reason then why it's been so easy for him to turn to drugs since my stepdad was a functioning alcoholic for the last half of his life. My birth certificate is blank for the father's name, but I remember thinking that Grant might know him. Maybe I can find something in my storage if he doesn't.

Getting off my bike, I see that Samson's already here, and I can hear Saxon coming down the road now. I wait for him to pull up next to me, greeting him with a chin lift.

Before he can say anything, Samson's yelling, "You two get your asses in here so we can move the shit and have a beer!"

Saxon yells at him, "Hold your horses there, Delilah. We're coming." The nickname Samson has hated since we were kids has him staring down his twin as we walk up the driveway toward Grant's truck.

Knowing that this could end up in the two of them tussling on the ground, I ask Samson, "So what all do we have to move?"

Grant steps out onto the porch. "The old couch needs to be taken out, along with the love seat. I got a bigger couch and the two sides have recliners."

“Let’s get this shit done then. I don’t know about y’all but I’m hungry for dinner and beer,” Samson declares as he turns to head into the house. We all follow him.

Thirty minutes later, the new couch is positioned and we’re all grabbing a beer in the kitchen. Looking at Grant, I swear something is different with him.

“So, what made you decide to finally get rid of that old couch? You seein’ someone new who refuses to sit on it?” Samson looks at his dad, waiting for an answer, while Saxon brings in the pizza.

“Please tell me it’s not that lady from the farmers’ market again. She was nuttier than a fruitcake,” Samson throws in.

“Or that last guy you were seein’. He was our age and wanted to call you daddy all the time. Just no, Dad.” Grant glares at them like he’s planning a double murder.

“No, I’m not datin’ anyone at the moment. If we’re bringing up questionable exes, you two both have lists longer than my arm, so watch what your sayin’, sons.”

A chorus of “Sorry, Dad” is mumbled around the pizza being eaten. We all grab a seat at the table and I put a few pieces on the paper plate in front of me.

After a few minutes of us eating in silence, Grant speaks up. “Erik was over last weekend to watch the game. He kind of sunk into the couch. The side he was sitting on finally gave out.” I try to hide my chuckle.

“Did he get stuck... Wait, he was here on a night other than Monday night?” Saxon chimes in with surprise.

“How’d he manage that with ET?” Samson asks, using one of the long-standing nicknames for Erik’s horrific wife. If she ever knew it stands for emotional terrorist, she would lose her shit on us.

Grant shocks us when he says, “He just decided to come. I guess both Leif and Jeremiah came to talk to him separately about leaving Celeste. They both just want him to be happy and they know their mom is horrible to him. He’s mulling it over, which you know is a huge step.”

Samson says what we're all thinking. "It's a big step that we've all been waiting for since we were kids. He's a good man, and she's sucking the life from him."

Grant looks at us. "Until you boys become fathers, you'll never understand the sacrifices you're willing to make for your kids. He's a good man and knows he has my support, whatever he decides. He also knows he's got a place to crash if needed, but every man has to take their own journey in life. He's in the process of deciding what he wants to do. Let him work through it and just be there if he needs a hand." He says it in a way that closes the subject.

Kierstie

Last night, I almost broke. Mads called and said she was coming over and wanted to know why I went to the doctor during the day. Luckily, she got distracted by Mick needing help over at his moms. I know that luck won't last, but he needs to be the first one I tell. It's only right.

This morning I got into work first, on purpose. I wanted to get my bearings in case my little surprise decided to make my stomach do somersaults again. So far so good this morning. I've got my breakfast in the bag on my desk and I'm trying something new to drink—ginger tea. I can't say I'm loving it, but it's not the worst thing I've ever drank. I spent last night looking up all sorts of things to help with morning sickness, 'cause I tell you, this shit is for the birds. Yes, I'm fully aware that I'm probably making it worse by not telling anyone, but I'm working on it damn it.

I fire up the computer and grab my phone to send a text that fills me with anxiety.

Me: We need to have a conversation. You free after work?

Shane: Yeah. What were ya thinkin', gorgeous?

Shit, I swear when he calls me that I lose every brain cell in my body.

Me: Wanna have a beer at my place? I can't guarantee a home-cooked dinner 'cause I'm not totally moved in yet, but we can order in.

Shane: Works for me. Just shoot me your address. I gotta clean up a few minutes after quitting time.

I send him my address so doesn't have to follow me home. I don't want to deal with people wondering why he's coming over just yet. Gotta drop the fucking bomb on him first. But that's tonight's worry. Gotta whole workday to get through first.

The day flies past with me only having to run to the toilet twice. I can't tell if that was morning sickness or the fact that I have to tell Shane in less than an hour. Fuck me.

Time to put my big girl pants on and do this. I'm an adult, damn it, and I'm going to be a mom before I know it. I better get used to having to be the grown-up in the room. This baby is going to have love like I did growing up. He or she is going to have so many uncles dotting on them. Unless they all go away for killing its father. I really can't do anything the easy way, can I?

I must be deep in thought, 'cause I jump in surprise when Ror and Juan both lean against my desk. I hadn't heard them come into the room.

Ror tilts his head as he looks at me and takes my finger out of my hair. "What's got you so deep in thought, Sis?"

Looking at him, I give him the same answer I've been giving Mads the last few days. "Just tired. Still unpacking all my stuff and getting things where I want them."

Juan chimes in cause he's always gotta say something. "Nah, that's not it. You're twirling your hair on your finger, and that's a tell you've always had. Means something or someone is on your mind." He's such a nosey and observant fucker.

"Whatever. I was just thinking about what I needed to get done tonight. I'm still trying to decide if I want to paint or not."

Ror, always the big brother, asks, "You need help? You know we'll always help you with stuff, Sis."

"Once I figure out what I want, I'll let ya know. I definitely want your help." I can tell that must satisfy their nosey asses 'cause they both tell me they're headed home and say their

goodbyes. I look at the time, shut off my computer, and get my stuff together to head home. It's time to face the music.

Shane

I was walking down the hallway when I caught the conversation between Kierstie and her brothers. Why does it touch something inside of me to think that she was thinking about me? *What the fuck?* That's not what this is. Right? Fuck me. Why was I slightly disappointed that she didn't want to go to dinner? I must have a death wish. That's the only way to explain this.

I finish putting all my tools away and get cleaned up. I look at the address that Kierstie sent to me, get on my bike, and head in that direction. The main thing I want to know is, does she actually want to talk or does she want to "talk" like we did last time? That was the hottest night of my life. She's the sexiest woman I've been with and the only one I've ever felt the need to take control over. That she let me was just a whole fucking other level. I still can't figure out why I'm okay with us actually talking or going straight to fucking. Yep, I've got a death wish for sure.

Her brothers are going to be creative in my death when they find out. Maybe she'll say good things about me after my death.

I arrive at the address according to the GPS. I check the text to make sure I'm at the right place and pull up the driveway. I turn off my bike and hear the door open. I can see her standing in the doorway, waiting... at least it looks like she's waiting for me. Fuck me, she's like a temptress reeling me in, even in just a t-shirt and leggings.

Getting off my bike, I walk over to her with more purpose than I mean to. I do what I've been thinking of doing since I saw her standing in the office yesterday. I kiss her with every ounce of my desire that she's brought up from the depths. She melts into my arms.

Conscious of the fact that we're outside, I move us through the doorway and into her house. Color me shocked when after I kick the door closed, she turns us and pushes me up against it.

She kisses me back with the same level of need, our tongues dancing with each other.

Kierstie

This was not my plan for the night, but what the fuck was I supposed to do when he came at me with those eyes, like he wanted to eat me as his next meal. I would gladly be this man's next meal, the one after that too. When he kissed me, I felt consumed. Like he entered my soul and took me with him. When he kicked the door closed, I turned us and pushed him up against the door, taking a moment of control. He doesn't let me stay in control for long. We kiss for a few more minutes, then he pushes away from the door and lifts me up, my legs going around his waist. He breaks the kiss long enough to ask, "Where's the bedroom, gorgeous?"

"End of the hallway, last door." I move to kiss his neck and up to his ear as he moves to the bedroom. This must turn him on more 'cause he does something he didn't do last time. He growls like I've read about but never heard in real life. Holy shit, that growl makes me even wetter than I already am. He sets me down on the bed with a gentleness that wasn't there last time.

"Remember what I said last time, gorgeous? You gonna listen like a good girl and do what I say?"

Fuck me. I start to nod but remember he needs words so I tell him, "Yes." He stands back up and looks at me, still fully clothed.

"Fuck me, gorgeous. I could undress this present every day for a year and still not get tired of it." He takes my leggings off. He looks at me and lifts an eyebrow.

"No panties? Think I'm a sure thing, baby?"

Shaking my head, I say, "No, I had just gotten out of the shower. I heard your bike down the street, so I just threw these on."

"Well, now I gotta see." He takes my shirt and lifts it over my head. "Sweet Jesus, you answered the door practically naked, and I'm the lucky bastard who gets to see you like this." He

takes his shirt and jeans off with a speed that tells me he's as turned on as I am.

"I've got to have a taste first. I haven't been able to get it off my mind since the last time." He dives between my legs and his tongue moves up my slit and stops at my clit. He flicks it in a way that I'm on the verge of coming within seconds.

"So close!" I yell. He stops right before I go over the edge of no return. "No!"

He's on top of me in a flash and has my hands out to my side and holds them down.

"I want us to come together this time, gorgeous. Last time, watching you come apart like that without me, had me almost coming in my boxers like a teenager. I won't be able to hold back this time."

I swear if he doesn't get in me in two se—

"Yes!" He slams into me in one stroke, filling me completely. He starts a slow and methodical pace, making me wonder how close he is to coming. He keeps hitting that spot that makes me see stars.

"Faster, please! I'm so close!" He grins at me.

"Love it that you said please, gorgeous. I haven't seen you ride yet. I'll let you go as fast as you want while I get to see an amazing show." He rolls us over in a swift motion. Even though I'm now on top and I sit up on him to ride, I can tell he's definitely still in charge and that's more of a fucking turn-on than I ever thought it could be. Looking down at him, as I feel his cock slowly moving inside of me, I feel like this time, it's something more than hot, erotic fucking. This feels more emotionally connected. Before I can think anything more, my body gets hit with an intense orgasm—running from my clit throughout my body, having me shout out. I might have said words but not sure they were in English if I did. I barely realize that he's shouting almost at the exact same time.

"Fuck! Goddamn, you just got even tighter!"

I collapse on top of him, feeling his heart beat hard in his rock-hard, sexy-as-sin, tattooed chest. I start to move off his chest

but his hands go to my waist and he holds me in place.

“Don’t move. I like you there.” I look at him and find his piercing eyes gazing deep into me. We must look at each other without saying anything for at least a minute till he speaks.

“You’re feelin’ it too, aren’t you, gorgeous? This thing between us is more than sex.” I nod slightly, realizing I still need to tell him about the elephant in the room.

“I’ve not really done this before, but I wanna get to know you. Like date you, see where this can go.” *Fuck me. I can’t wait any longer to tell him.* I try to move off him but he continues to hold me in place.

“Look at me, gorgeous. Do you not want the same thing?”

I gaze at him and realize I want to tell him everything. There’s this pull I feel toward him.

“I do, but I need to tell you something first, and it’s kind of big. I don’t want to hide it or for you to go into this without all the information.” He looks a little confused.

“Okay, just tell me whatever it is. I’m sure I can handle it.”

Shit. I never realized how hard it is to put my big girl panties on when I’m lying on top of a man, completely naked. *Focus, Kierstie.* I know I’m in trouble. I could easily get lost in his eyes for a long time. Shit. “Okay, first, I need to tell you that what we did that first time... I’ve never done that before.”

He looks at me like I’m nuts. “You were a *virgin*?”

Oh, not that. Shaking my head, I say, “No, that’s not what I meant. I mean, I’ve never met someone at the bar and gone with them. I mean, I’ve had sex before, but the last time was probably, like, maybe three or four years ago.” He moves me to his side so he can turn and look at me more eye to eye.

“You’re saying you haven’t dated or had sex in that long? How is it no one has swept you up already?”

“I dunno. I mean, I dated here and there, but no one I felt a connection with, or my temper might have gotten in the way, or they were too intimidated to meet my family.”

He shakes his head.

“I can see the last one. In fact, I know they’re gonna be the death of me.” *Here goes nothing.*

“Yeah, about that. I think I have something that might make them hurt you but will stop them from killing you.” I take a deep breath, as if that’s gonna give me more guts and a backbone.

“We did more than just have incredible sex that night.” I make sure to look him in the eye in case this is the last time I’ll ever see him.

Dramatic much there, Kierstie?

“I’m pregnant. I confirmed it with the doctor yesterday. Everything looks good. You can be as involved as you want. I know we used protection, but I guess it wasn’t enough. If you don’t want to see where things could go with us now, I’ll understand. I know this might not be welcome news, but it’s something I could never keep from you. If you need time to —” My mouth stops moving as he put his hand over my mouth to shut me up.

Shane

Holy Shit. She’s pregnant, and it’s mine. I’m gonna be a dad. She would probably still be talking if I hadn’t covered her mouth. I should be freaking out. I mean, I’m having a baby with a woman I had one incredible night with and who I recently asked out on a date. A woman who’s three older brothers are my pres and two VPs. This all should be freaking me the fuck out, but I feel a calm in me, like this is supposed to happen, and happen with her. I’m still in my head about things when she tries to talk with my hand still on her mouth. Mumbling behind my hand, she gets me out of my head.

“Please say something, anything.” I look her in the eyes and realize they are glassed over in tears, worried about my reaction.

I sit up in bed quickly, realizing just how much I don’t like to see her crying, and I definitely don’t like being the cause of it. I gently grab her and set her on my lap.

“Gorgeous, look at me.” She does, and I wipe away the two tears that are starting to fall on her beautifully freckled cheeks.

“Don’t be scared. I’m surprised, I won’t argue that, but something inside feels right. One, I know I will be involved with everything. I will be here to help you during the pregnancy and you better believe I’m going to be a present dad. My stepdad wasn’t a good example, but between doing the opposite of what he did and watching my uncle Grant as I got older, I’m gonna do my best by my kid and by you, no matter what that ends up looking like. I know this baby is going to have lots of love and family and that’s what matters. I also know I do still want to date each other, and I want us to be serious about it. I’m going to be there when you tell your family. I know they may hate me for a while, but I’m not going to let you do that shit on your own. I—” She stops my talking by kissing me briefly, but with passion and giving me a great smile that lights up her face.

“I’m so glad you aren’t freaking out and I don’t have a you-sized hole in my door as you ran out of here. Honestly, that was one of my biggest fears. I know this isn’t traditional, but maybe that’s okay for us, for our baby. Now, when I went to the doctor yesterday, she said a lot of people wait until the end of their first trimester to tell people in case of a miscarriage. We’ve got almost a month or so till then. If you’re okay with it, I think we should wait to tell everyone. That also gives us time to get used to it and to get to know each other more.”

I get this feeling that I’m gonna be willing to go to the ends of the earth for her and be more than happy to do so.

“I can work with that plan. Now, I know what we just did wasn’t planned on both our parts, but I plan to do that again and very soon. However, I also just realized that it’s getting late and I need to feed the two of you. Is there anything you want to eat?”

“Well, I haven’t been to the store yet for a big shopping trip to get a bunch of staples. I have pasta, I think I could whip up or I could order something. I might have some leftovers from this weekend that was supposed to be dinner last night, but I didn’t eat it.”

“What sounds good to you right now? Like, what’s the first thing that comes to mind?” She grins.

“I really want one of those burgers you brought my brother yesterday. The smell of it had my mouth watering for hours, long after I ate the fries. Oh! Maybe some onion rings too.” I grab my phone. I put in our order through the local delivery company and throw in a milkshake for her too.

“Did he give you the sandwich yesterday?” Now I’m even more glad I brought her lunch, and I think that might become a regular thing. Gotta keep my family fed.

“No. Not that I didn’t want it, but I’ve been reading the pregnancy books and they said I shouldn’t eat lunch meat while pregnant, and that club had turkey and ham lunch meat. But the fries were amazing. That was really sweet of you to think of me.” Hearing her, I realize just how much I don’t know about babies and women having them.

“I think I’m gonna need to get those books too, ’cause I don’t want to give you something you can’t eat. I need to learn so I can ask the right questions at your doctor appointments.”

She gets up and puts her shirt and leggings on.

“You wanna come to my appointments with me too?” This woman. She needs to get that I’m all in and not going anywhere. I grab my jeans and throw them on, leaving them undone for now, and I sit back down on the edge of the bed.

“Come here, gorgeous.” She walks over to me, and I pull her in between my knees.

“Kierstie, look at me.” She turns to me with those light eyes, a few of her curls hanging down in front of her face.

“I meant what I said. I’m gonna be there for everything. Doctor appointments, cravings, putting together the furniture, all of it. If you want to take a class or something, I’ll be there for that. I know we’ve technically known each other for years, but you and I never really ever hung out when we were kids. I hung out with the boys when we’d come to visit in the summer and you were hanging with your sister and the other girls. I

want us to get to know each other as we get ready to be the best parents we can for this little one.”

Kierstie

I think I just fell in love with him a little. He says those words and caps it off by kissing my stomach and talking to our baby, telling it he needs to get us fed and taken care of. I mean, I knew my brothers wouldn't let an asshole into the club. After learning who he was, I know Grant wouldn't stand for his nephew to not be a stand-up guy, but him wanting more is making my heart pitter-patter.

We head back to the living room just as the doorbell rings and our food arrives. We eat and talk for at least a couple of hours. I think he's not used to sharing with a lot of people. He seemed a bit surprised that I actually listened to what he said when I asked him something. What kind of women has he been with before? Like, who wouldn't listen to someone they're supposed to be getting to know? People, especially shallow people, bug me. Like why bother asking a question you don't want an answer to?

I must yawn a few times, 'cause he gets up and tells me to go to bed and get some rest. He kisses me goodnight. Lord, he can kiss me whenever he wants to. That man is just yummy.

“Gorgeous, lock the door behind me.” I follow him to the door, get one more kiss. I know he's gonna be like my brothers and not start his bike till he hears the lock. I go to bed realizing that one big worry of mine is lessened. Now to get to know each other better and figure out how to tell the family and not get him killed. Yeah, that's not gonna be tricky or anything.

CHAPTER 4

Kierstie

The next few weeks go by quickly and are not super eventful. Shane's been over almost every night, either bringing food, or helping me cook dinner. We've spent so much time talking and getting to know each other, it makes him even sexier than before. He does little things without much thought that make me see he really is a good and caring guy. He won't drink caffeine around me 'cause he knows how much I miss it. He makes sure we have vegetables with every dinner cause the baby needs to be healthy. He's spent time reading all the baby and pregnancy books I've gotten and has made a list of questions that he's either gone online to look up the answers or will ask the doctor at our next appointment.

He doesn't even seem fazed when my temper rears its head. I admit to having a few meltdowns regarding what I can and can't eat, and there might have been a pretty large one when I realized I couldn't have lox on my bagels. I blame that one on hormones and the lack of caffeine in my system. Most guys I've dated before have told me to calm down, shut up, or that I overreact to things. Not Shane. He said he understood my feelings and promptly went and got me my second favorite breakfast of waffles and hash browns. He told me my temper only comes out when I'm passionate about something or when it involves family. He said that when it involves my family, it's my love showing. He swears that just means I'm gonna be a great mom who fights for my kid. He told me he read about the food meltdowns and that means I'm a normal pregnant woman. See, he's so sweet, trying to make me feel normal.

He talks to the baby most nights he's come over for dinner. Even if he doesn't spend the night, he insists on lying on the couch with his head in my lap, talking to our little one. He talks about all sorts of things. Sometimes, I listen. Other times, I read and give him his time. At the end, he always sings the same song. He said he didn't know any lullabies or kid songs, but the one he chose says the words perfectly. Wouldn't you tear up every time you heard the man you are quickly falling

in love with sing the John Hiatt song “Have a Little Faith in Me” to you and your unborn child? Yep, I’m in serious fucking trouble.

I think Mads knows I’m seeing someone. I don’t think she’s figured out I’m pregnant, but I think she might be on to me having someone over a lot. The only reason she hasn’t given me the third degree about it yet is that whenever she’s started to bring it up, I bring up whatever is between her and Mick. She’s completely into him but thinks he sees her as just a friend. My poor, blind, gullible sister couldn’t be more wrong. Anyone who watches Mick watch her when she’s not looking can tell he’s gone for her. I know the reason he’s not made a move is because he’s worried she’s still not over what happened to her back in college. He needs to decide to make a move or my sister is gonna end up being the oldest virgin in the state, I swear.

Tonight, I’m going over to Ma and Pa’s for a birthday dinner for Jane. Shane’s going over to his uncle’s place to watch football. Next Sunday, we’re all going to be at Sunday dinner and that’s when we’re going to drop the bomb... we’re together and having a baby.

Well, everyone but Ma.

Earlier this week

On Monday, I wasn’t feeling great and had some serious morning sickness, so I called and told my brothers I was taking a day off to feel better. By late morning, I was feeling better and did some things around the house.

I’m not a baker or anything close to it. I can make dinner perfectly fine, even lefse I can handle alright, but baking and I have never mixed. I think it’s having to be exact in measurements. Life is too fucking short to have to be exact. However, I’ve been wanting to have challah ever since I started reading Mirrah McGee’s books. The thought of the delicious soft bread with some marionberry jam has my mouth watering. I could have just bought it at the store, but I thought it couldn’t be that hard and I like the idea of someday making my kid homemade bread. The last time I was at the store, I

bought everything to make it. I should've bought it already made. Over two hours later and I've got flour all over the place and four different bowls of dough. Two haven't risen at all and two seem to have exploded. My attempt to braid them has failed as they just keep getting bigger. I have no idea what the fuck I've done and my kitchen is a disaster. I'm sitting on the floor, working myself into a good self-pitying cry when there's a knock on my door. It opens and Ma walks through, shouting out her greeting. "Kierstie! Where you at, sweet girl?"

I answer her as I start to get my ass off the floor. "In the kitchen, Ma!" I'm just standing up as she walks into the kitchen and sets a couple of bags on the table. I can see the confusion on her face as she looks at the mess in my kitchen.

"What in the hell is going on here? I came over 'cause I heard you weren't feeling well and stayed home from work." She looks me up and down as she grabs a paper towel and starts to dampen it.

"I know something's up with you lately. I figured after you moved back and got settled, you'd come talk to me, but I've hardly seen you. I know you're all grown up and don't need a mom anymore, but we've always shared things." She takes the paper towel and wipes my face clean, like she did a million times when I was a kid. She's still taller than me and holds my face as she looks me in my eyes.

"I don't demand a lot from my kids. Love and respect being the two things. We are going to sit down and you're gonna tell me what's going on and why your kitchen looks like a bomb went off in it. You know I won't judge, but I hate when my kids keep things from me." Realizing I've hurt Ma by not telling her, I fight back the tears. I sit with her at the table and ready myself to spill the life-altering news. I look at her and realize I could've told her as soon as I found out and she would've kept my secret.

"Okay, I'll tell ya, Ma, but please don't tell anyone, not even Pa. We plan to tell everyone. Not this Sunday, but at the next Sunday family dinner."

“You know I can keep a secret. The only time I won’t agree to keep something from your Pa is if I think you’re in danger. I think you know that. Why do I feel this is more about you figuring things out and less about keeping it a secret?”

“Cause you’re a smart woman.”

I start by telling Ma about the night that started all of this. I manage to sneak in the fact that I’ve never had a one-night stand before and that this was *not* normal behavior for me, and as I’ve since learned, him either. I tell her about my freakout about seeing the positive tests and not knowing the name of the guy who’d knocked me up. I told her about the first day at work and both mine and Shane’s surprise at seeing each other. I told her about his reaction to my being pregnant and him wanting to date and see if there was more even before I dropped the bomb on him. I talk about the last few weeks and us getting to know each other as adults and the little things he does. I spilled everything before I let her get a word in edge-wise. When I finally stop to take a breath, she grabs my hand in hers and looks at me with glassy eyes.

“My baby girl is going to have a baby. I can see why you’ve gone through the roller coaster of emotions, but I think you know how much love there’s going to be for you and this little one.”

“That’s not worrying me. I know even if this is surprising and not expected, I know ya’ll would support me and love this baby. What worries me is that Jon, Juan, Ror, Ry, and maybe even Pa will go all mister alpha on Shane. They’ll turn it into a he-did-them-wrong thing, which he abso-fucking-lutely did not. When we met that night, he had no clue who I was and he still treated me right. I most definitely didn’t recognize him, that’s for sure. Since I’ve been back, he’s been amazing about this whole baby thing. It wasn’t his idea to wait. It was mine, partly because of the first trimester thing and also I was still getting used to the idea. But, Ma, I won’t have them hurt him. I can’t stand by and let that happen.”

Ma tilts her head a little, like she always does when she’s putting the pieces of something together. She grins and asks me, “You’re in love with him, aren’t you?”

“What? No. I mean, yeah, we have amazing sex and he’s amazing, but just no. I mean I can’t be. This isn’t how love is supposed to go. I mean, you’re supposed to meet someone, get to know them, spend a good amount of time with them, then fall in love, get married, and then have kids.” Ma looks at me like I’ve seen her look at my brothers when they say something stupid or ask a dumb question.

“Kierstie.” She says my name as only a mom can.

“I know I didn’t raise ya that way. Love is love. It doesn’t matter how it starts or how it evolves, it just is. I remember reading something once about love. There is never a time or place for true love. It happens accidentally, in a heartbeat, in a single flashing, throbbing moment. So what if you met and had a physical connection first? Your bodies obviously knew what your hearts had to learn.” These hormones are making me cry all the time, I swear.

“I think I really do. I mean, he sings to our baby, Ma. How could I not love someone who does that. He voluntarily gives up caffeine around me just to be supportive?”

Maybe it’s not the hormones, ’cause Ma is tearing up too. She scooches her chair over and gives me a big hug.

“Oh, baby, this is wonderful news. I think you’re Pa will be alright with everything once he sees the two of you together. Your brothers are going to be another story. First, they’ll be mad ’cause someone touched their sister. Then it will be because he’s a club member and friend. Somehow, I think you’ll find a way to handle them. I also think Jane will step in and remind them you’re an adult, and Shane’s a good man and they know that deep down.”

“I hope so. If nothing else, they would want my baby to know its father, after all, right?”

Ma chuckles at me.

“See, my dear, I think you’ll handle them just fin. But just in case, me and your Pa will be there. I’ll have Grant come too, just so Shane knows he’s got another person on his side.”

“Thanks, Ma. I knew I should’ve told you already, but you know how I get in my head.”

She nods at me knowingly.

“You either go into your head or yell the rafters down. That’s my girl. Now, tell me what in the hell you were trying to make in the kitchen?” I explain to her what I was tryin’ to do and why. Within a couple of hours, my kitchen is clean and I’ve got two decent loaves of challah in my kitchen. Ma helped me but fuck, if I try it again. I may love the women in that series, but I ain’t gonna be baking like them anytime soon.

Shane

After Kierstie told me her mom knew and about what transpired, I asked her if she minded if I told my uncle tonight. I know he’s coming over for family dinner next week. If nothing else, I want him to protect Kierstie if her brothers come for me, which, honestly, I’m expecting them to. I just don’t want her pushed in their anger to get to me. I’m expecting a beatdown, but neither she nor the baby can get hurt in the process. She swears she’s thinking of something so they don’t come after me, but I know I’ve gone against them and I’m willing to pay for it. I’m *not* willing to give her or my baby up. In these last few weeks, she’s firmly planted herself in my heart in a way I don’t think I could ever just co-parent with her. Even her outbursts of anger don’t bother me. If you really look at them, they’re never about something pertaining to her. It’s usually about someone she cares about and it’s her way of expressing it. I think most of the time, it’s actually really sweet, even when it’s directed at me. Her meltdowns regarding food are definitely pregnancy related. I’ve seen the woman have morning sickness for hours then cry that she was out of Red Hots and Lemonheads. I keep extras of both in my toolbox at work, in the glove compartment of my truck, and in the drawer she gave me at her place. It’s the weirdest combination, but if it makes my woman happy, then that’s all that matters. I pull up in front of Grant’s house. As soon as I shut off my bike, I hear my phone chime with an incoming text.

Kierstie: Good luck with your chat. Have fun watching the game. Btw, you can ask him about being godfather if you want... I think it's only right.

Me: Thanks, gorgeous. I'll talk to him about all of it. Have fun at dinner. Remember, you got me and lil' one in your corner.

Kierstie: I don't want this to come off as needy, but are you coming over after the game?

Me: What have I told you? You need me, I'm there, baby. I'll see you tonight.

Kierstie: K.

The amount of emojis she uses borders on excessive but at least I know that means she's happy.

I put my phone away as I walk up to the porch to knock on the door. It opens as I start up the steps.

"You look like you got a lot on your mind there, boy. Is this about Tyson again?" I'm not surprised that he asked that, since our last few serious conversations revolved around Tyson and my trying to find him. I shake my head as I walk through the door, take the beer he's offering, and follow him into the kitchen.

"No, it's actually nothin' to do with him. I haven't gone looking for him these last few weeks. Might go every once in a while but he can't be my full focus anymore, especially 'cause I think you're right. He doesn't want me to find him and he ain't ready for help yet." Grant turns and looks at me in surprise and relief.

"Thank fuck for that. He's my nephew and I love him too, but there comes a time when if someone is that far gone and doesn't want help, it doesn't matter how many times you find them and try to get them into rehab. It won't take if they don't want to get clean. We can still hope someday he asks for it. He knows where we're at."

"Yeah, he does." I grab a seat at the table while he works on forming the hamburgers to grill for dinner. We'll eat while watching the game. It's not football season, so we usually find

a baseball or basketball game to watch. Grant finishes the last of the patties, washes his hands, then leans against the counter.

“So, what’s with the change? I’ve been telling you this same thing for the last year or so. Did you have an epiphany or something?”

Shaking my head, I start peeling the label on my beer.

“No, but I’ve got some life-altering news. You might want to sit for this.” I don’t think his eyebrows could go any higher.

“Before you tell me, do I need to hire a good defense lawyer for you?” Chuckling at his question, I say, “No, but I might need you to save my life.” I tell him all of it, from the first night to the first day Kierstie started working at the shop to her telling me she’s pregnant. I tell him about spending most evenings with her, and even her most recent cravings. When I stop talking, he leans back in his chair and takes a long drink of his beer.

“Boy, you’ve really gone and done it now. You two going to be co-parents or be together? You gotta plan on how to tell her pa and brothers. Ya know, *your* pres and VPs?”

“Fuck no we aren’t going to co-parent. She’s mine. We’re together. If I have any say in it, that’s how we’ll stay. She’s... passionate and kind and just... she’s gorgeous inside and out.” He cocks his head to the side as he studies me.

“Fuck me. You’re gone for her, ain’t ya?”

Grinning, I tell the man who’s been the closest thing I’ve ever had to a dad,

“Yep. She’s got a plan brewing. Wants us to tell everyone next Sunday at family dinner. She told Ma a couple of days ago and we agreed I’d tell you. She thinks I might need someone on my side when they all lose their shit. There are two reasons I wanted to tell you. One, I want you to watch out for her. I worry in their anger and coming after me, which I know I deserve, she might try to step in and end up inadvertently getting hurt. I can’t have her or our baby possibly getting injured. The second reason is you’re the closest thing I’ve had to a parent since Mom died and the only real dad I’ve ever

had. The first person I wanted to tell was you.” I think I might’ve shocked him into silence, so I figure I’ll throw the last bit of news out before he finds his voice again.

“I also figured as the baby’s godfather, you’d have an added reason to protect them.”

He tries to take another long sip of beer, but it’s empty. He gets up, goes to the fridge, gets another out, opens it, and takes a sip.

“Well, shit, Shane, I don’t quite know what to say. First of all, those three will probably lose their shit in some capacity so I’ll make sure to have my first aid kit stocked up. I don’t think they’d hurt their sister, but I’ll be on the lookout just in case. Second, I don’t think Jonah will lose it like them. He’s gonna watch his little girl’s face. If she looks half as gone as you did when you were talkin’ about her, he’ll know she’s a goner for you and accept it. Begrudgingly, but he will. Third, are you sure you want me as godfather? I’m honored and just kind of in shock you two would pick me.”

“Yep, without a doubt. I know you’d never consider yourself their grandpa, so this is as close as I could get. Kierstie suggested it while I was thinking of how to bring it up to her that it’s what I wanted. She commented that almost all of my good childhood memories, especially those like learning engines, sports, fishing, and hunting, all included you. Whether you realized it or not, you always included me and Tyson when you could. That wasn’t something you had to do. I mean, you were a single dad for a long time, but you still helped Mom with us as often as you could. It meant a lot.”

“Well when you say it like that, I guess you and I are more alike than I realized. We both spent years trying to help siblings that weren’t ready to accept it.” Well, shit, he’s right. Mom wasn’t addicted to drugs, just horrible men, and bad decisions.

Chuckling at that realization, I also make another one. “You know, as a kid, all I wanted Mom to do, well, besides divorcing the asshole, was to move back here so we could live near y’all. Now, I realize if that had happened, I would have

been put firmly in the like-a-brother zone by my woman, just like Samson and Saxon are.” That makes Grant laugh.

“Well, I guess it’s like that song about unanswered prayers. Sometimes, the gods have a plan and we’ve just gotta have faith. Other times, things just don’t work out and there ain’t a fucking plan.” Looking at him, I get the sense that there’s more behind that last bit, but also know he won’t say anything till he’s ready.

“Now get your ass up and come help me cook the burgers and dogs for dinner.” I get up and help him take everything out to the grill. About ten minutes later, Samson and Saxon stroll in. We’ve got all the food cooked and have just brought it all to the table so we can make our plates and watch a game, when the front door opens and to our surprise, Erik walks in. Saxon, never one to hold his tongue, asks what we all wanna know.

“How the fuck did you manage to get out on a Sunday? I thought the wite—er, Celeste kept you home every Sunday.”

Before Erik can respond, Grant chimes in. “If you’d pay attention, Son, I knew he was coming. That’s why there are five plates in the stack on the table.”

Erik speaks for the first time. “She’s left for a conference in Seattle, for the week. I’ve got a meeting with a lawyer on Tuesday. Let’s get our fucking food and find a game on.” I can tell even Grant’s surprised by that. We all get our food and find a seat, while we find a Mariner’s game on television.

CHAPTER 5

Kierstie

Jane's birthday dinner was fun, and even though it gives me the ick, I'm happy my brothers have found love and a great woman. During dinner and all the lively conversation, all I could think of was how much better it would've been if Shane was there next to me. Shit. When did I get all mushy like that? Must be the pregnancy, 'cause I've even been crying when I'm reading, and that's usually a Mads thing. Other than Ma, it's been hard to keep this from her. I'm gonna have to explain it all to her at some point.

Why are Monday mornings the day I seem to have the worst nausea? Probably because for the next few months, I can't have my wonderful elixir that is caffeinated coffee. I'm not even having decaf thanks to my stomach. I've been rotating between ginger and mint tea. I drag my ass to work and get settled into the day. Something's in the air and it's got Juan all jittery. He's been in here three times already, asking about nonsense. I just sent off a happy customer with a repaired car and a lower-than-expected bill. When I hear Jon's office door slam open and shouting out in the bays, I go to see what's going on. I see all three of my brothers running to either the trucks or their bikes. The only people left in the shop with me are Mayson and Micah.

"What the fuck is going on? I heard yelling." Mayson walks toward me, and Micah is closing the bay doors.

"I'm not sure, but Shane called Pres 'cause someone attacked the guys watching Jane's house. Some of them were going to make sure she was still at their place. I think Mario's gonna be fine. Not sure about Tim," Micah chimes in.

"We're gonna close so we can go help them with what they need. Do we have more appointments coming in today?"

I shake my head.

"No, I keep Mondays open for drop-ins and cars that were brought in over the weekend. There are only two cars still left

untouched from the weekend so I can call them and tell them we can get to them first thing tomorrow. Everything else should be fine till then. You said Shane called. Are he and Jameson okay?" My heart drops to my stomach with worry.

Mayson answers me. "They're the ones who found the scene, but they weren't there when it happened. I think they're fine." Before Micah can add anything, the phone in my hand rings. It's the business phone so I answer it and take care of business. I grab my cell phone out of my pocket and see I've got three texts—two from Shane and one from Mads.

Shane: I'm fine. I want you to go to the club please. I need to know you're safe so I can help.

Shane: Let me know when you're there, gorgeous.

Mads: Jane's been taken. Max is going to get Ma and bring her to the clubhouse. We need to get there. Need a ride from the shop?

I respond to both of them, lock up the front of the shop, and head out to my car. Mayson is waiting by his bike to follow me.

"You know my mom would kick my ass if I let anything happen to ya, Kierstie. Let's go so I can help with whatever's needed." Even I know this is not the time to be argumentative. I really hope they find Jane soon and that she's not hurt. My brothers might not know, but I have a feeling from last night that I'm not the only one who's got a bun in the oven.

We pull into the clubhouse's parking lot right behind Max's truck. Mads is just parking as we park next to her. I can see the worry on her face and even a little on Ma's before she schools her face into the pillar of strength we all know her to be.

"Girls, let's go in there, get the coffee going, and see what we can do to help. We might need to make food, and I might need to send some of it to the hospital. But before we get into all that, let's see what we need to do first."

The next couple of hours are full of tension, fear, and relief, as they find Jane and take her to the hospital. She's hurt, but not too bad and is going to be able to go home tomorrow. We all

end up at the hospital and wait to see her and Mario, because that's what you do for family. Ma, Mads, Max, Nicky, and I all walk into the hospital waiting room to wait for news. Nicky doesn't sit down with us, instead going up to Ror and the Js to see how Jane really is.

Well, thank fuck. Ry finally found someone worth outing himself for. He didn't even think about where he was when he pulled Nicky into an embrace. I think he's more shocked that all of us basically knew already. I'll be giving him shit for hiding it at some point and, yes, the irony is not lost on me. However, in my defense, Ry's been keeping his secret for years and I've kept mine barely over a month or so. Not the same thing, really. *Oh, alright, I won't give him that much shit. You happy now?* Great. I'm arguing with myself again, 'cause that's healthy.

Within an hour or so, the nurse comes in and lets my brothers back to see their woman. Ma goes with Anna and Ben to check on Mario, the prospect. Mads, Nicky, and Ry go and get real coffee, leaving me alone for a few minutes with Pa. I bring him a cup of the waiting-room coffee and sit next to him while checking my phone. Shane texted me that he's safe and will be here as soon as he finishes with some club business.

Pa sighs after taking a sip of coffee. That sigh means he's getting ready to say something, and something I need to listen to.

"You know you can tell your old pa anything, don't ya, my girl?"

Leaning my head against his shoulder like I've done so many times in life, I say, "I know, Pa."

"I know you got something brewin' in that beautiful head of yours. Just wanted to remind ya that I'm here whenever you're ready to share, my girl."

"I know and I will, soon." We sit there for a few minutes and a question I've been thinking about comes to mind. "Pa, what was my birth mother like? Was she on drugs when she was pregnant with me?" He shifts in his seat slightly.

“She was young, like eighteen, nineteen, young. She had been sweet-talked by my brother, and they went out for a few months. She didn’t know till she was almost four months along that she was pregnant. By then, he was back in jail, facing a few years in prison. She wasn’t on drugs at the time, but was working a minimum-wage job. She told us when she was more than seven months along that she was pregnant. Ma and I went shopping and got all the baby stuff she would need. We were young but not that young. In fact, I think Ma was just about your age at the time. I knew my brother, at that point, even if he was out of jail, wasn’t going to do anything to help her or you. Her apartment was small, but she was excited to be a mom. She didn’t have any family that she was still in contact with, having aged out of the system like us. She wanted to have that family with you. We saw her as much as we could, and Ma helped her with appointments and birthing classes. We were excited to be your aunt and uncle. I remember the day you were born. We got a call from her at the hospital. She was scared and alone. We went up there, and Ma was in the room with you when you came into this world. I got to hold you, my girl, within the first hour of your life. You were so small and perfect, but even just that first day your lungs were strong.” Pa chuckles.

“Yeah, yeah. I know, my mouth has always been my problem.” He shakes his head.

“Not a problem, my girl. People always know where they stand with you. That ain’t a bad thing. Anyway, after that day, we would see you at least a couple of times a week so she could go shopping, get a nap in, or even a quick shower. We didn’t live far, so it was easy for her to come over or for us to go over there. This worked for the first two, almost three months. I remember the exact day. She came over and announced that her mom had gotten in touch with her and she was going to take you for a visit. We couldn’t tell her no, but I know both Ma and I thought it was a bad idea. Her mom had lost all rights to her years before because of drug abuse among other things. She promised us it would just be for a couple of her days off and she would be back by her next workday. She didn’t come back. For weeks, Ma and I tried to find her but

had no luck. She got evicted from her apartment. Luckily, her landlord was kind enough to let us in and get your stuff. He saw that we were trying to find you. As a grandpa himself, he let us in with no questions asked. Two days after getting all your stuff moved into our place, there was a knock at our door, late at night. I opened it and about keeled over in shock. There she stood on our porch, at least fifty pounds lighter. She looked like a completely different person. She came in and told us that her mom had all these plans for them and how she wanted to be with her mom, but that she couldn't do that and have you. You could see she was coming down from a high. From what, I still don't know. She said she wanted you to stay with us, that we were the most stable people she knew. Ma told her if she did that, she would have to be willing to sign papers and make it legal. Ma wasn't going to have you bounced from home to home. She agreed and within a year, you were legally and completely ours. She never came back after that night. Not once. The drugs were too strong a pull for her. When you were about four, we saw in the paper that she'd passed. She overdosed and crashed her car. We paid to have her buried, as her mom was just going to let the state take care of things. When I told Abel about her death and that you were with us now, well, let's just say his response is one of the reasons I no longer consider him my brother."

"I don't think he's changed in the couple times he came around, but I think I got the best deal out of it all. I got you and Ma." He moves his arm around me, hugs me to him, and kisses my head.

"Oh, my girl, you were a gift from the gods. After you, they kept on giving. I don't think Ma and I could have dreamed up the family we ended up getting, but I wouldn't trade a one of you for anything in the world." My eyes tear up. I want nothing more to tell Pa what's goin' on. The universe must know, because as soon as I sit up, Ma, Anna, and Ben come back into the waiting room from one direction, and Shane is with them. From the other door walks in Mads, Nicky, Ry, and Mick is with them. I'm still wiping my eyes when they all walk up and I can tell the second Shane notices my tears.

Ma must see it too and asks, “Everything okay, you two?” I nod at her while looking at Shane.

“Yeah, just reminiscing, and Pa was being sweet.” Pa pretends to glare at me.

“Don’t know about all that sweet bullshit, but yeah, we were just talkin’, me and my girl.”

Ma gives us an update on Mario. He’s about to be discharged and Anna is taking him to their place so she can make sure he recovers fine. Everyone is about to sit back down to wait when Jon comes out and updates us on Jane. She’s gotta stay the night but should be released in the morning. Ma goes into delegating mode. Both Mads and I agree to help her in the morning to get food and stuff over to the guys’ house so Jane can relax and recover there. Shane, Mick, and Ben offer to help clean up the place and then go over to Jane’s and clean up there. That will be more involved from the sounds of it. We’re all getting ready to go home, except for Ry, who’s gonna stay and wait for Nicky to go back for a bit. Mick offers me a ride home since he’s giving Mads a ride to her place. Before I can think of a reason to turn him down, Shane throws in that he was going to take me back to my car so he can check on the shop since it was closed up so fast.

As soon as we get in his truck, Shane grabs my hand and squeezes it. Looking over at him, I can see he’s worried.

“What’s wrong?” He looks out the windshield.

“I just never want to be in the position your brothers were in today. I can’t imagine anything happening to you, gorgeous.” I squeeze his hand.

“Pa would tell you to not borrow trouble and don’t put that out into the world. I don’t have a stalker and you know everyone who wants to join the club from now on will have a *very* thorough background check done. Both Jon and Juan will make sure as shit on that.” He starts the truck and puts it in gear. We head out of the hospital parking lot and I realize he hasn’t turned toward the shop, but toward my place.

“We’re not going to get my car?”

“Nope. We’ll stop by before the shop opens to grab it on our way to the guys’ place. I just need to get you home, feed all of us, and spend the evening on the couch with you two.” This is the first time I think he’s told me something he needs, and it’s a simple request.

“Sounds like the perfect evening to me.”

CHAPTER 6

Shane

Since Monday, I've barely left Kierstie's side. At work, I know she's safe in the office and I've left just about the same time as her at the end of the day so I know she's not home alone for long. I know my fear is unfounded and the threat is gone, but I think the world not knowing that she's mine is getting to me. I'm actually thankful that today's the day. I know they won't actually kill me...well, they probably won't.

I spent the night last night and we're going to go over together in my truck—Kierstie's idea. Kind of a united front, plus she said that she can drive me home if needed. It wouldn't be quite as blatant as if I rode up on my bike with her on the back of it. I don't know what her plan is, but she swears she's got one.

She's lucky that she's irresistible, otherwise, her plan to keep me preoccupied most of the day, by distracting me with her body and sex wouldn't have worked. But as a man who might be facing death later, I wasn't going to argue with her. I'm not a complete idiot, after all.

We pull up to her parents' house and I park behind Grant's bike. Good to know my backup is already here. I walk around the truck and open the door for Kierstie. She smiles at me and I'm reminded again why I'm willing to go head-to-head with her brothers—my pres and VPs for this. She's it for me. That smile reminds me that she's my home. She and our baby are everything. I love our club and would die for all my brothers, but if I was told it was her or them, it would be her. *Holy shit. It really would.*

Kierstie helps so much by patting my face and reminds me, "Don't worry. Remember, I've got a plan and I know their weaknesses. We can do this." She points to herself, our little one, and me. She knows I needed to hear that before going inside. I nod and follow her in, the itch to grab her hand so strong that I put it in my pocket to keep myself from doing it. We get to the door just as Ry is pulling up with Nicky on his bike. Guess once he outed himself, he decided to really out

himself to the whole world. Good for them. Kierstie yells her hello to them and waits for them to catch up. We all walk inside together. She wraps her arm around Nicky's elbow.

"You know, since you've sunken to datin' Ry here, and you're Jane's BFF, we're gonna have to hang out and get to know each other." Nicky gives her a smile and looks at Ry.

"I would love that, darlin'. Maybe you and Mads need to join me and Jane at our next brunch. It's always a gabfest with great food." Ry shakes his head, but still smiles.

"I might live to regret you gettin' close to my sisters, but I know better than to stop it." Kierstie glares at him.

Deciding to stop this before the real bickering starts, I chime in, "Looks like everyone is out back. Should we join 'em?" Ry looks at me in a way that makes me think he might be questioning things, like why we came together. Luckily for me, as soon as we're in the back, he's distracted by everyone greeting all of us. I can see everyone is here and relaxing on the back patio.

Ma walks up and greets us, hugging Ry and Nicky first. She then gives me a hug and whispers in my ear, "You've got this. They may be mad, but I ain't gonna let them kill ya. You've given me my first grandbaby and you're a good boy. That's more than enough for me." She squeezes my arm and hugs my woman before heading back to sit next to Pa.

Kierstie looks around after hugging her mom and points to the picnic table bench that's empty.

"Let's go sit there and then I'll drop the bomb." She says it quietly but I can tell Nicky caught what she said as his eyes go big. He doesn't say anything. Maybe there's another person on my side.

Kierstie

I have us sit on the picnic bench 'cause I think it's the best spot to be able to defend Shane from. This is it. Right here, right now. It's time to lay all the cards out there.

"I've got somethin' to tell ya'll." I must not say it loud enough 'cause no one seems to stop their conversations, but Pa heard

me. He gets everyone to pay attention.

“Hey! My girl has somethin’ to tell us. Let’s listen up ’cause you know Ma won’t feed us till we do.” Everyone looks at me, and Pa winks. I grab what I’ve got hidden in my pocket and keep it in my hand at the ready if needed.

“I’ve got a lot to say, so let me get everything out before any questions or anything, okay?” I take a fortifying breath and feel Shane’s hand on my back in support. I start at the beginning, with my innocent night at the bar, and give an abridged version of what transpired, including me leaving while the mystery man was asleep. I tell them about the different pregnancy tests all being positive. I can see the eyebrows rising at that. Mads mouth hasn’t been able to close since I started the story. Then I start with my first day working at the shop, running into Shane, and us both realizing who each other was. This I can tell is getting a reaction from all three of my older brothers. Jon is just staring at Shane. I don’t stop ’cause I need to get this all out. Plus, I think once they hear everything, we have a better chance of them not committing murder on Ma’s patio. I tell them about us getting to know each other better and how we are both going to be very active parents, and also in a relationship with each other.

“I hope you realize that Shane makes me happy. It wasn’t his decision to wait to tell you all. It was mine. Well, mine and what my doctor said most people do.” I finish talking and I swear you could hear a pin drop. Not one person says a fucking thing.

I start to turn to look at Shane when Juan speaks up. Of course he’s got something to say and gets louder as he talks. “I get the whole out-of-town thing. What I don’t get is you sneaking the fuck around for the last month here. What the fuck?”

Jon slowly and deliberately stands up to his full height. The fucker is taller than necessary.

“So, you lie to us for weeks, then you fucking get my sister fucking knocked up, out of wedlock?”

Jane pipes up and kicks him in the shin from where she’s sitting. “Hey! You three did the same fucking thing to me, and

don't even act like it's any different." I knew I loved that gal for a reason.

Jon looks at her. "Babygirl, there's a big difference there. We're in fucking love with you, and he's just playing with her."

Oh, he fucking didn't go there. I stand up and yell at my brother who's currently wearing the crown of the king of the assholes. "Hey!"

Ror decides to weigh in to this shit. "Now, Sis, what he means is that we're committed to Jane and—"

Shane stands and speaks for the first time. "And I'm fucking committed to her. She's it for me. No one else could ever compare. She's an amazing person, inside and out. It's a bonus that she's the sexiest woman I've ever laid eyes on."

Ry, the ass, makes a gagging sound at his last confession. I can see out of the corner of my eye Nicky smacking him in the stomach.

King of the assholes would have steam coming from his ears if people could actually do that. He starts moving toward us and I move in front of Shane. Before he can do anything, I grab what I have in my pocket and aim it at Jon. I don't get the chance to say anything. Grant is in front of me, trying to move me out of the way, but I get around him.

Pa stops the movement of everyone by yelling, "Stop!" He hasn't even gotten out of his chair, but everyone listens.

"Everyone, sit the fuck down right now, and I mean everyone." He's got the cane he still uses occasionally in his hand and is staring down all three of my older brothers.

Juan, the one who loves to stick his foot in his mouth, has the nerve to speak. "Doesn't some of this fall under club fucking business and should be taken care of with just the club?" Oh, he did *not* just try and cut me out of this.

"Fuck that shit. This involves me, *your sister*. You're not going to come after Shane when I'm not around. You wouldn't let Jane and I have it out without you there, would you? While we're at it, dear brothers of mine, if you so much as come to

hurt a hair on his fine-ass body, then I will not hesitate to use these.” I pull out the tweezers and flash them toward my three stooges of assholes. I can tell Ror is trying not to laugh when he asks.

“Just what are ya threatening to do, dear Sis?”

I give him my most psychotic smile and inform him, “Well, you see, I can’t possibly beat you enough to show you how in the wrong you are. But I can make you tear up by promising to pluck a hair from each nostril before I give these to your woman and have her pluck a hair from each of your balls, which, after your out-of-wedlock comment, I think she’d be more than happy to do.”

Nicky chimes in, “I’ll get Ry’s for ya, girl!” Yup, he’s awesomeness right there.

I watch my brothers all squirm the second Jane chimes in. “Abso-fucking-lutely, I will gladly do that.” She’s currently staring daggers at Jon. I feel Shane at my back.

“Gorgeous, as much as I love that you want to stand up for me, if it’s deemed I deserve a punishment in the club, I’ll take it. It wouldn’t have changed anything, ’cause I would never go back and do anything differently if it put me ending up with you in jeopardy.”

Pa decides to wade back into things. “Boys. The lot of you all sit down for real this time. My girl, you sit too.” He waits till we all sit.

“Now, sons, I know I ain’t your pres anymore, but I’m still your father and in this instance, more importantly, I’m hers too. Now, I get your anger at being kept in the dark for a bit and about one of your club brothers seeing your sister behind your back but take a second. Think about what they’ve both said here. Those are two people in love. You know that look you three get on your face when you look at Jane? He’s got that same look when he looks at Kierstie. I bet you anything, he’d do just about anything for her.” Jon decides to ask a question, still sporting that glare on his face.

“If that’s true, have you told her why you’re always gone on the weekends?” Seriously? Does he think we don’t talk? Shane answers him. “Yeah, she knows. She also knows I haven’t gone since I found out she’s pregnant. That’s why I’ve made the last few family barbecue days at the clubhouse. I’ve been here for her and our baby. I may go and look still on occasion, but most likely just a day here or there. I’m not going to be away from my family. I won’t give them up for anything or anyone.” He feels that strongly?

Rory, the calmest one of the stooges, asks Shane the next question.

“You’re really in love with her?” Shane looks at me, and I swear everyone else disappears.

“I’m not just in love with her. I’m completely lost in her. I love her smile, her laughter, her passion, even what people see as a temper, but it’s really passion about people she cares about. If I could, I’d marry her tomorrow to tie her to me forever, but I know she deserves a proper proposal and wedding. If I have my way, I will marry her before we become parents.”

I can’t stop myself from standing up and walking in front of him. He grabs me and sits me on his leg.

“You wanna marry me? Like for real?”

He leans his forehead to touch mine and gazes into my eyes.

“Gorgeous, you gotta know I love you. Yes, I want to marry you. I want to have more kids like we’ve talked about. I want to spend the rest of my life making you smile.”

Mads finds her voice. “Well, it looks like we’re getting another brother here soon. I, for one, think it’s great.” I turn on Shane’s lap to look at my sister. She continues, “I know you, brothers of ours, want to protect us and can’t see us as being actual adults who can handle things, but we can. Also, she fell in love with someone you already consider a brother and friend. Doesn’t that mean that you already know he’s a good guy and worthy of Kierstie? You’ve known Shane since you came to Ma and Pa’s. He was basically raised by Grant. *You know him.* Like Pa says, just fucking look. Do you really wanna do

something that not only would break her heart but also harm the father of your niece or nephew?”

I think that’s more words Mads has said in this big of a group in years.

Jon must find the non-asshole part of his personality.

“Well, shit. Leave it to lil’ one to put it into perspective like that.”

Ry decides to join in the conversation. “You know she has obsessions and watches the same thing over and over again?”

I can feel Shane chuckle.

“Yeah, I know. I think I’m up to four times for *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and five or six for *Grease 2*. I’m well aware that it is far superior over the first one. I also know that if you put ketchup on the fries and not dip them in it, you’re a sociopath.”

Pa stands up.

“Now that we’ve worked through all the surprises, let’s get dinner on the table. We’ve got two grandbabies on the way and they need some of Ma’s good cooking. You boys all okay with things now?”

Looking over at Ror and the Js, I can see them all nodding at him.

Jane must have seen it too.

“Good, ‘cause I know all three of you don’t want to sleep alone tonight. You were headin’ that way. Now, help me up so I can go give each of them a hug and celebrate that our kid is going to have a cousin that’s close in age to play with and grow up with.” I see the moment that part dawns on all of my brothers, Ry included. They all get grins on their faces.

Ry thinks he’s a comedian.

“Let’s get the gremlin growers fed!” He walks up and smacks Shane on the back. He gives me a hug, whispering in my ear, “Sis, if he makes you happy, that’s all that matters. The stooges will accept it, eventually.” I get hugs after Ry from

Jane, Nicky, Grant, and Juan. Jon walks up and stares at me for a second.

“You remember what you said to me when I first came to Ma and Pa’s?” Huh? I shake my head at him.

Jon grins at me.

“You and all of your five-year-old self told me that once you stay here once, even for a little bit, that makes you family and that family is there for each other no matter what. Well, I may not be happy about the way ya’ll went about it, but we’re family and we accept each other.” He turns to Shane.

“Brother, I get why you did things the way you did. I ain’t lovin’ it but I get it. As much as it hurts me to say, I can see how much you love her. I ain’t gonna kill ya, and I’ll work on being happy about this shit. Maybe naming the baby Jon if it’s a boy is a start.”

Shane

Kierstie smacks Pres for that comment, but he smiles at her and gives me a one-armed hug. He whispers in my ear so she can’t hear, “I know the brotherhood is a family, but she’s my sister. Just remember, you hurt my family, and I’ll release the wrath of Valhalla on you, club brother or not.”

I move to look him in the eyes.

“I wouldn’t expect any less, Pres, and would never do anything to hurt her.” This must be the right answer for him ’cause he moves to let Ror hug Kierstie and nods at me. Max walks up to us, and I realize he hasn’t said anything this whole time. Before I can say anything, I’m surprised by the fist that meets my face.

I take a couple steps back as Kierstie yells, “Max! What the fuck was that?” Ror moves to get in between us, but Max doesn’t make a move to hit me again, and I have no intention of swinging back.

“That’s for not telling us sooner and to make sure you keep your word about cutting down on huntin’ for Tyson. You know he was one of my best friends, but he doesn’t want help, man. I just don’t want you to hurt what you got here for him. I love

him like a brother, but, man, he's not wantin' to be found by any of us. Last time I saw him a year ago, he told me to forget about him 'cause that's what he's done with all of us."

Well, shit.

"I get it. I ain't goin' all over, looking for him, but I'm still gonna try from time to time. Somewhere in that drug-addicted mind of his is my little brother, and that's who I'm leaving an olive branch for. You're right though. I ain't gonna jeopardize this here for anything."

Seemingly satisfied with my answer, he nods at me and declares to the few of us still left on the patio, "Let's go get food before Ry eats all of it!" Everyone but Kierstie follows him into the house. She brings her hand up to my face and gently touches my cheek.

"I dunno when he actually learned to throw a punch, but he did a decent job. Not great, but it'll leave a mark." I grab her hand on my cheek and move it to my mouth to kiss it.

"You okay with how everything went, gorgeous?" She gives me that smile that lights up her face and my world.

"Yep, and if any of them decides to be an ass, I'm gonna keep my tweezers on me. Those things will bring any of those fuckers down, I tell ya." Chuckling at her seriousness with those things, I realize I need this moment with her to make sure she gets it.

"You know I was serious, right? You're it for me, gorgeous. You're stuck with me for the duration." She bites her lips and looks into my soul.

"That's a good thing, 'cause you're stuck with me, and this one too." She puts my hand on her stomach and I can't do anything else in this moment but kiss her. There aren't any more words to convey what I feel.

Ma

Watching out the window over the kitchen sink, I watch the moment between my girl and her forever. It brings a tear to my eyes, to see my girl so happy. He's a good one. I can feel when Jonah comes up behind me and puts his arms around me.

“My love, are those tears buildin’ in your eyes? You tearin’ up watching our girl?”

“Just a little. Who’d ever thought on that day we went to the hospital to watch her be born that we’d end up here with a home full of our own kids, who are settling down and starting to give us grandkids?” He squeezes me.

“The gods have a way of giving us blessings even when we were too afraid to wish for them. Look at our girl. He sees all of her heart and mind. That’s the one you want to fall in love with your kids. The one who sees everything and still looks at them with that amount of love in their eyes. The boys have that with Jane, and our girl has it with Shane.” I smile, thinking of all our kids.

“I think Ry might have it with Nicky. You and I both know who Mads looks at like that. Just our wanderer, Max, who’s not settled. I think he’s gonna find his one when he’s not looking.” Before he can respond, Grant walks into the kitchen, smiling at us.

“Told ya I’d be related to ya someday, Linnea. Just had to wait a few decades.” The front door opens and I can tell who it is by the look on Grant’s face. He goes off to greet the new arrival.

I whisper to Jonah what I’ve suspected for quite a few years now. “You know that look we were just talkin’ about, Pa? I think Grant’s just walked in.” Pa grabs the salad bowl and leans in for a quick kiss.

“My love, I think you couldn’t be more perceptive if you tried. Maybe someday, they’ll realize it too. You’re never too old to find your heart and soul.”

CHAPTER 7

Shane

The rest of the night is uneventful and full of laughter. This time. I take Kierstie back to my place for the night. I show her the room I was thinking of for the nursery and another that was kind of a home office. I told her I thought a library might fit better. Her excitement for that led to a very enthusiastic blow job for me. I'm a fucking lucky man.

Today we're taking a long lunch. Kierstie has a doctor's appointment and from what I've read, we should be able to find out what we're having. I don't really feel one way or another. I just want a healthy baby and mama.

The gossip train has moved fast overnight. I woke up to no less than twenty texts from various brothers, all asking the same question in different ways. They all wanna know how long I've been with Kierstie and how I escaped death or dismemberment at the hands of the Js and Rory. I responded to all of them, to mind their own fucking business and that we're happy, together, and gonna be parents soon. Samson and Saxon both said they're coming over tonight—nosey bastards. I told them about the appointment and agreed to meet for dinner tonight since she's got a girls' night planned.

I finish up the car on my lift just as I hear the door from the office open up.

"You about ready to go? Our appointment is in twenty-five minutes."

I nod at my woman. "Yep, I just need to wash up and I'll be ready."

Juan saunters over to my bay while I wash up at the sink.

"Going to the doctor? Anything wrong or just a checkup?" Kierstie sighs. I can tell she thinks he's fishing and, I mean, she ain't wrong. I'd put ten on the thought that he spread our news as much as anyone else. He's a gossipy biddy that one.

“Just a checkup. If we’re lucky, we might get to find out if it’s a boy or a girl,” Kierstie tells him. I dry my hands and grab the keys to my truck, having been the one to drive us to work today.

Juan gets a shit-eaten’ grin on his face that tells me he’s about to say something to irritate his sister.

“Remember, Juan is the best name for a boy. Juanita if you have a girl.” I see Kierstie and half the guys in the shop roll their eyes at him.

“Brother, your woman is having a baby, too. You name it whatever you want. Ours won’t be Juan or Juanita. Sorry to disappoint ya,” Kierstie informs him. He pouts like a goober.

“It’s fine. I’ll just settle for the favorite uncle.” I hear Ror in the background, arguing that the title is going to be his.

“Let’s get out of here while the gettin’s good, gorgeous.” We head out and within ten minutes, we’re walking into the doctor’s office. For some reason, I’ve got a gut full of nerves. Not sure if it’s ’cause this is the first appointment I’ve been to, or I’m just worried till I hear the doctor say the baby and mama are both doing fine. We sit and wait for her name to be called. I look at the waiting room and see women in varying stages of pregnancy. It hits me just how much I can’t wait for my woman to start showing. I’m sure there’s some Freudian reason for that, but I’m just gonna roll with it.

Kierstie finishes filling out the paperwork and comes back to sit next to me and wait. She puts her hand in mine and my gut calms slightly.

“Kierstie Weston?” a nurse calls out. We stand up and I follow Kierstie over to the nurse. We all exchange pleasantries and she leads us to a room, to wait for the doctor to come in. She gets Kierstie situated on the table-bed thing, points me to a chair next to it, and says the doctor should be in shortly.

“You look deep in thought over there, mister. Something on your mind?” Kierstie asks me, with an upturned eyebrow that she gets when she’s trying to figure me out.

“Just that I really want to change your last name sooner rather than later, gorgeous, and am working on a plan.” I kiss the hand that I’m holding, needing to touch her.

She smiles at me, but the door opens before she can say anything. Dr. Hargrave walks in and closes the door behind her. She smiles at us and looks at the chart for a moment. She looks to be in her thirties, maybe early forties, and has what can only be described as kind eyes.

“Well, Kierstie, I see you brought someone with you this time. Is this the dad?”

Smiling at her, Kierstie confirms I am and makes the introductions.

“Well, let’s see how your little one is doing and maybe if they’re not shy, we can see what you’re having. My nurse will be in afterward to get some blood for the tests we discussed last time.” She looks at me and adds, “It’s routine for this point in the pregnancy. We want to make sure everything is good and stays that way.”

She then gets to work and turns on the machine that sits next to the table. She moves Kierstie’s shirt and pants a bit and squirts a liquid on her stomach.

“Let’s see if we can find the little one.” Dr. Hargrave starts pushing the wand-thingy on her stomach. After less than a minute of looking, she turns a button and a thumping sound is heard. Kierstie squeezes my hand.

“That’s the heartbeat. Nice and strong.” Holy shit. That’s our baby.

Kierstie

Looking at Shane, his eyes are glassy. He’s holding back tears. Hearing our little one makes this whole thing so much more real. Dr. Hargrave turns the machine toward us and a video shows our baby.

“Well, it looks like she’s cooperating today.” Wait. What did she say?

“She? We’re having a girl?”

Dr. Hargrave looks at me with a smile. “Yes. You two are having a girl.”

I look over at Shane and see tears coming down his face. He looks at me and smiles the biggest smile I’ve ever seen.

“We’re having a little girl. A little you.” He leans in and gives me the gentlest kiss. If I didn’t believe he was all into this before, his raw emotions right now just sealed it.

Dr. Hargrave finishes getting measurements and prints out two sets of pictures for us. She tells us she’ll see us in a month and the nurse will be back in a few minutes for the blood draw.

I look back at Shane as I start to sit up and fix my clothes. He’s still got the biggest grin on his face. I reach out to him and he stands up, moving in front of me.

“We’re having a girl, babe. What do you think of that?” He kisses my forehead before touching his lips to mine and placing his hands on my stomach.

“Gorgeous, I couldn’t be happier. I hope she’s got your smile, your eyes, and your passion for your friends and family. She’s gonna be strong because look at the women she’s gonna have around her. She’s gonna have so many uncles and a grandpa wrapped around her little finger from the moment she’s born. Thank you for giving me the family I was too scared to even wish for. I was planning something more spectacular, but I have to admit, I ain’t a romantic guy. I can’t wait anymore after this.”

Wait, what is he doing?

“Gorgeous, I love you with every ounce of me. I will love you till there’s no more breath in my lungs and my heart gives its last beat. Will you make me the luckiest man ever and agree to marry me? I have a ring at home for you.”

Unable to stop the stream of tears from falling, I realize in this moment how perfect his proposal really is. It’s right. It’s just us in this moment in time. Through all of our getting to know each other and finally sharing our news with everyone, the heart of it is just us—one boy and one girl.

“Yes! Yes, though I think I’m the lucky one getting to marry you and be your wife. You’re already spoiling me and taking such good care of us. I want to spend all of my tomorrows with you. I love you with all that I am.”

Shane kisses me and I feel all of his love in the kiss. We break apart as we both hear the nurse outside and take a second to wipe our tears.

The nurse comes in and gets the blood she needs and sets up our next appointment. As we walk back toward the truck, Shane suggests we pick up lunch on the way back to work. He knows my brothers won’t care if I eat at my desk. The man is smart. He stops at the mini mart on the way back that has the good chicken strips and Jojos, the world’s best battered potato wedges. He grabs a side salad to go with it and enough fry sauce and ranch to adequately dip each bite like I require. He even picks up more Lemonheads and Red Hots. This lunch will make his daughter very very happy. Okay, me too. I don’t wait and eat a piping hot Jojo as we make the quick trip back to the shop.

As soon as Shane parks the truck, we both get out, him insisting on grabbing the food to bring in. When I open the door to the shop, I see it looks like a full house, but not of customers. It’s every single member of my family, and Shane’s too.

Ma is the first one to speak.

“Well, did you find out what you’re having?”

I look at Shane and he smiles and nods at me, giving me the go.

“We’re having a girl! And we’re getting married!”

Cheers go up in the room. Ma comes up to us and gives Shane a hug, then hugs me and tells me we need to do a girls’ day soon so we can start planning the wedding and the nursery. I can hear Shane getting a bunch of those one-armed man hugs from a bunch of the brothers. Then, I’m enveloped in a hug from Pa.

“My girl is gonna give me a granddaughter just like her and let me walk her down the aisle. It does this old man’s heart good to see my girl so happy. Love you, darlin’”. I squeeze him back.

“Love you too, Pa.”

I get a few more hugs from my brothers and club brothers. I realize we’re just getting more behind because of this.

“Alright, everybody, it’s still a fucking workday. We can celebrate more later, but we all got work to do, and I got lunch to eat.” With that, everyone goes back to the shop. Ma, Pa, Ry, and Max head out with everyone else. The only ones left in the shop with me are Shane and Mads. Shane grabs his sandwich and drink, gives me a quick kiss, and heads out to the shop. Mads looks at me with teary eyes.

“A baby, and a boyfriend... no, fiancé. That’s a lot to unpack, Sis. Well, at least for me since I didn’t know one fucking bit about it.”

“Mads, I wanted to tell you a million times, but before I knew it was Shane, I didn’t know how to admit to you what I did. I mean, I went and had a one-night stand with a guy whose name I didn’t even know! I didn’t want you to remind me of just how dangerous that could’ve been. I knew it was reckless, but not for one second did he ever make me feel dirty or unsafe.”

Mads wipes the tears away.

“I just feel like you hid things ’cause you’re outgrowing me. That everyone is moving on with their lives, finding good jobs, and relationships with great people and here I am, the one who’s stuck. People think I haven’t gotten over what happened, but I have. I hate that people treat me like I’m fragile and can’t handle knowing shit.”

“I don’t think you’re fragile at all, Mads. In fact, you’re one of the strongest people I know. I think some people might think you still aren’t over it ’cause you don’t go out, you still dress in the baggie clothes, and you haven’t made a move on Mick. I know you’re over it. I also know that no matter how many

times you tell me you're not, you *are* heads over heels for that guy. But not strong? No, I know you're strong. I wouldn't be making you my child's godmother if I thought you weren't strong." Damn it. Between her tears and my hormones, my eyes are leaking something fierce.

Through her tears, Mads smiles at me.

"You want me to be her godmother? Me?" Who the fuck else does she think I'd pick?

"There was never any question. You're not just my sister. You're my best friend, Mads. You know that. Someday we'll both be married with kids and you're still gonna be my best friend. Ain't ever gonna lose that." She crashes into me and hugs me fiercely. We must make a racket 'cause we're interrupted by Jon stomping into the front office and looking at both of us crying. He frowns and has his hands on his hips.

"What the fuck is going on? Did someone hurt you two?"

Mads wipes her tears while rolling her eyes at our grumpiest brother.

"No one did anything. We were just having a conversation, and this one is full of pregnancy hormones. You should get used to it, 'cause there's gonna be more tears from her and from your woman while they're both preggo."

Um, what?

"Preggo?"

She shrugs her shoulders.

"I thought it sounded better than batter bakers which is what Ry was callin' you two earlier. Anyway, I gotta run. I've got laundry to finish up at the clubhouse. Are we still on for dinner tonight?"

"Yep, come over any time after five. We can order Mexican food and talk." Mads heads out and Jon heads back to his office, grumbling about crying women and his nerves. I swear he can grump about almost anything.

The rest of the day goes by quickly. Shane drives us to my place then grabs his bike to go out to dinner with his cousins

and some of the other brothers. I go inside and start to get plates and silverware out. Within a few minutes, I hear a knock on the door then it opens.

“Bitch, I’m here and I brought the good shit!”

Mads sets the bags on the table and starts opening things. She got chips, salsa, *queso fundido*, street tacos, beans, and rice. The last container holds the best thing ever—homemade churros. The cinnamon-sugary deliciousness can’t be beat.

We eat in silence for the first few minutes then Mads speaks up. “How can I get people to see I’m not stuck in the past? How do I get Mick to notice me as more than a friend?” She really doesn’t get that he already does.

“Mads, first of all, what you wear, I know you wear it ’cause it’s comfy and works for when you’re cleaning and all, but you wear it all the time. You wear it to family dinners and the club barbecues. You used to wear more fun stuff. Jeans, cute tops, that sort of thing. Now, you only wear the shirts that are three sizes too big. You wear sweats or super baggy pants and your hair in a ponytail every day. Sis, you’ve got a killer body and are gorgeous.” She eats a couple of chips and pushes her glasses up, a telltale sign she’s thinking hard about something.

“Also, I know you don’t see it, but Mick is all about you. I think he’s so afraid of trying and sending you back to a mentally bad place that he’s waiting for a sign from you. Have you told him you want something more than friendship?”

“Well, in my head I have, but fuck no, not out loud. Ma wants to do a girls’ night Saturday when the guys have church. Will you go shopping with me before that and maybe with Ma, Jane, Anna, and your help, I can figure out a look I like and am comfy in?” I think sometimes she feels like a burden, but I don’t know why.

“Of course. I wanna stop and get some bridal magazines and stuff too, so you can help me start planning. I think Hanna’s gonna be back, so she’ll be there.”

A couple of hours later, after watching a few episodes of *Say Yes To The Dress*, Mads gets up to head home.

“Thanks for having dinner with me. I’ve missed us.”

“I’m sorry, Sis. I think we’ve got to keep our weekly sister dinners, ’cause I have missed you too.” We hug and she leaves. I head to bed. This day has been awesome but fuck if I can keep my eyes open any longer.

CHAPTER 8

Shane

The last couple of months have gone by fast in a whirl of work, wedding planning, getting the nursery ready, and Kierstie moved into my place. She agreed since I owned it and it's a much bigger house that it made sense to move into mine. That wasn't much of a battle. Getting her to let me and her brothers paint the nursery without her so she didn't have to smell the fumes was. I finally called for help and had Pa explain my reasoning to her. She agreed and we planned it on the day she was out dress shopping so she wouldn't try to sneak in and help. Yes, people, my woman is that stubborn.

She's got the cutest baby bump, and it only makes me want to keep her pregnant as often as she'll let me. She's felt our little one move quite often, but I haven't gotten that lucky. I can't wait for the moment that I do. I think I've done well and have been fine with all the wedding plans. I can't wait for next weekend when I get to make her permanently mine in front of our friends and family.

I might have had one mini freakout, though not about our wedding. I was in the nursery this morning and looking at the furniture I needed to put together. I understood most of them—the crib, the dresser, the bassinet and the changing table. That's when it hit me. I have no idea how to change a fucking diaper. I'm gonna be a dad soon and I don't even fucking know how to take care of my daughter and everything she'll need. I may have started losing my shit. Kierstie's over at the club having her wedding shower with all the women in the club, so she's not here to help me. I call Grant in a panic. I tell him what I'm freaking out about and the asshole has the nerve to bust out laughing. Once he stops laughing and can catch his breath, he tells me to grab a pack of diapers and come over. He'll help me. Luckily we have a closet full of diapers so I grab a pack that reads *four* on them. What that means, I have no idea. Just another fucking thing I don't know. I know I'm upgrading Kierstie's car to an SUV and making sure we have a car seat for each vehicle. Safety's important. She might have

had to talk me down a few days ago when I was going around the house and making a list of what I needed to do to baby-proof the house. Kierstie reminded me that she won't even be able to hold up her head when she's first born, let alone be able to get into cabinets. I've got a bit more time.

I pull up in front of Grant's and realize he's got quite a few people here. I grab the diapers and head inside. As soon as I walk in, I see a sight I can't quite figure out. Besides Grant, there's Pa, Jackson, Wyatt, Jon, Rory, and Juan. On the dining room table there are what looks like four dolls. Grant walks over and takes the pack of diapers from me.

"When you called freaking the fuck out about not knowing how to change a diaper, I was having a beer with Jonah. We realized this was the perfect teaching moment. The four of you are about to become dads here shortly and I think there are a few things you probably need a little learnin' on." Jackson moves to the other side of the table and adds in, "They gave me and Wyatt a call. We knew where Hanna's old dolls were so we brought them over. Y'all are about to have a crash course in changing diapers."

Pa looks at Ror and the Js.

"You three are going to be even busier since Jane's got twins coming. That's double the diapers and double the blowouts. If you think you're not going to change a diaper, you've got another thing coming."

"I need to know. Kierstie's further along and I want to be there to help with everything that I can. I've never even tried to change a diaper before." I look at the dolls lined up, all without diapers on them.

Grant grabs the one closest to us and tells me and the others to get a diaper. I take one, open it, and move it under the babydoll as Grant instructs. Within a couple of minutes, I hold up the doll with the diaper intact.

"I did it! I mean, this is right, right?" I look over at Grant and Wyatt. Both are grinning.

Jackson chimes in from the other side of the table, “Shane and Ror got it. I don’t know what the fuck Jon and Juan did. Good thing they got some more months to practice. They might have to practice on their niece.”

“Hey, my daughter is not going to be a practice doll for you guys. She’s gonna be your niece.”

Grant glares at the guys and pipes in, “My goddaughter is not a test subject.”

Pa stops the stare down. “Alright, sons, you two try the diaper again. Rory, you and Shane move on to putting on a onesie and swaddling. After that, we’ll discuss burping the baby.”
Was that English?

Jon asks literally just what I was thinking. “What was that, English, Pa? Onesie? What the hell is swaddling?”

All the older men chuckle.

Wyatt informs us, “A onesie is a thing babies wear, both boys and girls. They’re gonna be a savior for you. They’re easy to use once you know how and swaddling is for when they’re really young. It’s a way to wrap them in a baby blanket to keep them warm.”

Grant interrupts Wyatt and surprises all of us when he puts a bag on the table.

“I picked up a few things for her to have here if needed, so we can use them to teach you boys. Can’t have our new generation having a bunch of dads who don’t know what they’re doing.” Well, shit. I think he’s taking to the title of godfather pretty well.

We spend the next half hour learning how to put on a onesie and swaddle.

Just as we all have successfully diapered, dressed, and swaddled the baby dolls, the door opens and Samson, Saxon, Jameson, and Mick walk in. They stop and look at the four of us all holding babydolls, and of fucking course, Saxon starts laughing his ass off at the sight. The other three are trying to stifle their laughter without much luck.

Jameson collects himself enough to ask, “What in the fuck are y’all doin’?”

Glaring at my cousins and supposed friends, I say, “Listen, I’m about to be a fucking dad here soon and I realized I’ve never held a baby, let alone changed a diaper or dressed one.”

Grant throws into the conversation, “So he came for help ’cause he’s man enough to know when he needs it. He’s now ready and can help Kierstie out instead of adding to the stress when they bring the little one home.”

“Well, shit, as her god-uncles, we better learn, too,” Saxon throws in.

“God-uncles?” Jackson asks just as I wonder the same thing myself. Saxon looks at us all like the answer is obvious.

“If Dad’s gonna be her godfather, which is kinda like another grandpa like Pa, then Delilah and I are gonna be god-uncles. We gotta be prepared in case we need to help watch her sometime.” Well I’ll be a monkey’s uncle. He still surprises me sometimes. Samson glares at him for the nickname but picks up a doll and starts to figure out how to do it as well.

Mick looks at the dolls and barely above a whisper comments, “I’d give anything to have to learn how to change a diaper.” The man is so far gone for my soon-to-be sister-in-law, it ain’t even funny. I can tell Pa heard Mick as well, and he just shakes his head.

About thirty minutes later, we all head over to the clubhouse for the barbecue that’s serving as a joint bachelor/bachelorette party for me and Kierstie. Neither of us wanted a traditional one with strippers and all, and since Kierstie can’t drink right now, we agreed to this and a bonfire. It’s really more our speed anyway. I don’t like spending a whole night away from her if I can help it.

We pull up to the clubhouse and park along all the cars that are already there. I can see that all the women have made their way outside and are enjoying the afternoon sun around a fire that the prospects must’ve got going. It’s sunny out, but not that warm—a typical fall day in the PNW. I’m happy it’s not

raining. All of us get off our bikes, and Pa gets off his new trike.

We all head over to the women and I hear Jameson and Saxon at the same time ask, “Who the hell is that?” Both of them are looking over to the women and the mysterious gal standing next to Kierstie in boots, tight jeans, and a hoodie. She has long brown hair cascading down her back. Even I can notice a good-looking woman, but she doesn’t hold a candle to my woman. Pa calls out a greeting and the women all turn to look at him. Holy shit. The gal talkin’ to Kierstie is Mads.

Jameson lets out what I’m sure most of the guys are thinking. “Holy fuck. Is that Mads?”

Mick growls next to him.

“She ain’t fucking available for any of you. She’s *mine*.”

Saxon, ever the shit stirrer, walks past him and pats him on the shoulder.

“Might want to run that past her, brother. She’s looking single and ready to mingle.”

I leave them to their shit as I have the need to touch my woman. I walk up behind her and slide my arms around her, resting them on our daughter. I kiss under her ear and ask her, “Have a good time, gorgeous?”

I can tell she smiles, then turns her head for a kiss, which I of course provide.

“I did, yeah. I’m even better now that you’re here.” I squeeze her. I can tell she’s about to ask me something when raised voices interrupt us.

“I’m wearing what I want to wear! I’m not dressed like a whore or anything! I’m single and I can talk to anyone who I want. It’s not like you’ve shown any interest besides being my friend!” Mads shouts at Mick and storms into the clubhouse. Mick looks beyond pissed off.

Kierstie whispers she’s going to go after her and heads inside.

Mick is yanking at his hair and looks like he’s about two seconds from storming into the clubhouse.

“How the fuck can she say I’ve not shown any interest? I’m with her all the time!” His mom, Romona, walks up to him and smacks him on the arm. “Ow, Mom. What the hell?”

She shakes her head at him. “Son, I love you, but sometimes you’re not any smarter than a box of rocks. Use your head for a second. Have you actually asked her out on a date, *ever*?”

“Well, I... but I... well, fuck. I haven’t specifically said it was for a romantic type date before. But I mean, wouldn’t she know—”

Pa interrupts Mick. “Son. My girls are both smart as whips. They have brains and looks, but they’re like their Ma and can’t grasp the idea that a guy would actually flirt with them. It’s great once they’re yours ’cause they’ll never catch on if someone else tries to flirt with them. I’ll give you the same advice I gave my boys when they were tryin’ to start things with Jane. Open your mouth and say the exact words. No flirtin’ or suggesting. Tell her you want to date, tell her you want her to be yours. Use your grown-up words. Everyone and their mother can see you two have feelings for each other, but it looks like she’s decided to get herself back. Don’t lose her ’cause you were bein’ too subtle.”

I’m once again thankful that I straight up asked Kierstie that first night to come back to my room. I didn’t know it would lead to me standing here a week before my wedding, but I thank the gods every day that it has.

Kierstie

I walk into the clubhouse and head to the kitchen, thinking that’s where Mads went. I hear pans crashing together so I must be right. I’m about to walk into the kitchen when I hear another voice in the kitchen. I lean against the opposite wall to listen. Maybe someone else can get these two on the same path.

“Hey, hey. What’s wrong? I’ve never seen you upset like this before. What’s the matter?”

Mads answers the voice. “I just don’t get why he’s so upset. I dressed this way ’cause I finally feel like myself and want to

dress like it. I bought these clothes over a month ago and finally felt ready to wear them. I wasn't flirting with Jameson or anything. I was just saying hi. It's not like he wants to date me or anything. I'm a great wing woman, that's it."

"Listen, I know I've only been here a couple of months, but, sweetheart, that couldn't be further from the truth," Logan states. Oh, maybe he can get through to her since he's new around here.

"He's all about you. When you walk in here, he watches wherever you go. He's very interested in you. He ain't the only one either."

What? I know I should either give them their privacy or interrupt, but I can't help but continue to be a fly on the wall.

"What do you mean he's that interested? What do you mean he ain't the only one either?"

"I mean, I bet you he comes through those doors any second and makes things crystal clear for you. I also mean I've seen how some of the hang arounds look at you, even a couple of brothers, too. If he's not what you want, I'm more than positive you could get a date with a handful of guys without blinking an eye." Mads must be thinking this over for a minute.

"It doesn't matter if anyone else is fucking interested or not." How the hell did I miss Mick going into the kitchen? I'm too busy trying to hear them that I'm surprised when Logan walks out and sees me. He half-grins and shrugs his shoulders at me. Makes me wonder if he wanted to go out with Mads.

"Were you speakin' about yourself in there?" He shakes his head.

"Nah. I'm not sayin' she ain't beautiful, but I could tell from the minute I came around that they were dancin' around each other. Sometimes people just need a nudge to realize what's right in front of them." He walks off down the hallway, leaving me with that.

Oh, now I need to know who he's interested in. No one says something like that if they ain't pining for someone.

My desire to get back to Shane has me giving up on spying on Mads, plus, it's gone quiet in the kitchen. She'll tell me whatever happens when she's ready. I owe her that much after keeping secrets from her.

I walk out the doors and am greeted by my man. He leans down and gives me a kiss. Have I said how much I love kissing him? He's just delicious.

"Everything okay in there?"

"I dunno, but they're in the kitchen talking, I think. How was your day? What did you guys end up doing?" My face must give away that I already know what they were doing. He glares down at me and I can't hide my smile.

"What do you know, woman?" I can't help but laugh a little.

"Just what was on the video that Jackson sent Anna. I can see Juan needs some extra practice. What brought that whole thing on?"

Shane looks almost embarrassed to tell me, so I bump his arm.

"Hey. We're getting married in a week. You know you can tell me anything, babe."

He sighs like this might actually hurt.

"I was in the nursery looking at the furniture I needed to put together. Staring at the changing table, I realized I didn't have a clue how to change a diaper. I mean, I don't think I've ever even held a baby. So, I might have started panicking a little and called Grant. He told me to come over and bring a pack of diapers. I guess he called Wyatt and Jackson and they knew where Hanna's old dolls were. Pa was already over there and called your brothers, figuring we all would need to know how. You're now looking at someone who will be able to diaper, dress and swaddle our daughter when she arrives. He also told me the best ways to burp her. I want to be able to help you, gorgeous, not cause you more work." This man... he's more than I could've ever have asked for. I can't help but kiss the socks off him.

"I love you and can't wait to be your wife." He gives me that smile that I love and shows off his dimple.

“Love you too, gorgeous. Let’s get some of your Ma’s food before the hoard eats it all.”

“Okay, and Jane saved you some of the stuff she made for today. She even made a cupcake with frosting and topped it with Red Hots and Lemonheads just for me.” He makes the same face as he does every time I mention that delicious combination, but he gets it for me anytime I mention it.

“Those are all for you, love. I’ll stick with the traditional flavors that she made for everyone else.”

I give him one more kiss just ’cause I can. That’s when Ry, my dear brother, makes his appearance known.

“Ewwww. Why is it that both of the Minion Marinators feel the need for public displays of affection around family? Just no.”

Nicky smacks his head.

Ry doesn’t see that Jon walked up right behind him. Jon uses his tone that immediately threatens bodily harm with just the octave he uses.

“What did you just call my woman *and* our sister?”

I haven’t seen Ry jump that high in surprise in years. The laughter dies down after maybe five or ten minutes with a grumbling Ry going to get a beer and saying that we weren’t laughing with him but at him. Nicky’s following him, trying to stop laughing enough to console him.

We spend the rest of the evening hanging with our whole family and having a good time. I can tell something happened between Mads and Mick, but I’ll let her come to me about it.

Just after midnight, I let Shane take me to bed in his room. He’s not drunk but says he’s not driving, and I’m too tired to. We get in the room and I realize I forgot my special pillow in the car and my water bottle. He tells me to do my thing and he’ll go get my stuff for me.

Shane

I leave her to get settled in our room and go get her beloved pregnancy pillow that I grabbed from home just in case we

ended up spending the night. The thing has become essential to her getting any sleep the last couple of weeks.

I'm on my way back to our room when I hear something further down the hallway but the lights are turned off.

"Come on, you know you want this as much as I do." I think that might be Asher talking, but I'm not sure since the voice is muffled.

"That's not the fucking problem and you know it. It's when you sober up, freak the fuck out, and run again. I can't take that." *Holy fuck, is that who I think it is?*

"I haven't had a drink since dinner."

I realize that Kierstie and I have revealed what we were keeping hidden, but it sounds like more than a few in this club are holding secrets of their own.

I'm not about to confront anyone about this. Each person has to figure shit out on their own. Am I gonna go tell my woman this? Nope, 'cause the more pregnant she gets, the nosier she gets. Time to snuggle up to my woman and hope maybe tonight's the night I feel our daughter.

CHAPTER 9

Shane

Today's the day. I get to marry the woman who has become my reason for everything. Today, she becomes my wife and we will soon welcome our daughter. If you had asked me while I was in the service if I could have ever seen myself married and a dad, I would've told you no. Not because I didn't want it, but because I was too afraid to wish for it. I never wanted to hope for a good relationship in fear I would end up like my stepdad and just angry all the time. Or end up like my mom and picking partners who were never a good fit. Who would've guessed I had to go a couple hours away to fall for the girl next door.

When I asked Samson and Saxon to stand up with me as joint best men, they seemed surprised. I don't know why, since we grew up thick as thieves and I still consider them my two closest friends. I also asked Max to stand up with me. He was shocked, but I told him even though he was my brother's best friend, I considered him like another younger brother. His response?

"Fuck. Now you almost make me feel bad for hittin' ya. Almost." Kierstie, of course, has Mads standing up with her as her maid of honor. She also chose Hanna. Her last choice kinda surprised me. She asked my cousin, Kinsley. She's Samson and Saxon's half-sister. Growing up, she got to spend summers and a lot of weekends at Grant's. She says she's going to live here when she finishes graduate school. I hadn't realized in the time I was gone that they had become good friends. Meant a lot more than I realized it would when she said she wanted to include my family.

Pres is going to marry us, having gone online and getting ordained just for this. Rory is going to read a passage we picked out, well, Kierstie did. I just nodded as it was important to her. She was determined to have all her brothers involved so, leave it to her to find the perfect job for Juan and Ry.

My only ask for this whole thing was to not have to wear a suit. Kierstie agreed, even though she'd said I would look "hotter than a leather car seat in summer." Mads stated I couldn't wear jeans though. She actually hauled me along with Samson, Saxon, and Max to the store together. We're all to wear black slacks and dress shirts. She said we could roll up the sleeves and didn't have to wear a tie, so at least she gave us something. I'm brought out of my thoughts by a knock on the door.

"Come in!" Grant, Samson, Sax, and Max walk in the door. Behind them is Jonah.

Grant walks up to me and looks me up and down. "Well, son, you do clean up alright. I'll give you that." He opens the container he brought in with him and starts to pin the flower on my chest.

"Your mom would be real proud of you, son. Not just for today, but for everything. She would have been most proud of the fact that you found your happiness. That was the thing she was always searching for. She never found it, but you did what any parent wants, to have their kid succeed where they couldn't."

Shit, I ain't gonna cry. Nope.

"I don't have a ring of your mom's or anything, but I do have this. Remember it?"

He hands me the coin. It's the kind you put a penny in a machine and it comes out smashed and has a logo of wherever you're visiting. This one was from the one time we went on a trip to Seaside. It was just me, Mom, and Tyson. It was the best weekend I had as a kid. I remember Mom laughing and seeming to be free of worry and concern for once. We had ice cream for dinner and played on the beach.

"How did you get this? I don't think I ever saw this after that weekend."

"Your mom gave it to me the last time I saw her. She told me to give it to you and that I'd know the right time to do it. I thought today would be a good day to have a little part of your

mom with you. I know she failed in a lot of ways, but she loved you and your brother with every part of her being. I think once my goddaughter is born, you'll understand that even more."

Trying to keep control of my emotions, I just nod at him in understanding.

Samson, always the one to keep on time, slaps me on the shoulder and proclaims to the group, "Let's get going. We can't keep a pregnant woman waiting, and a pregnant Kierstie scares me even more." I can't wait till he meets his woman. That's gonna be fun to watch him work through that.

Max glares at Samson.

"I want to say hey and be annoyed by it, but fuck if my sister and her pregnancy hormones don't scare me just a little." I look at both of the assholes.

"That's my woman, about to be my wife. She's not scary. She's passionate."

Sax slaps my other shoulder.

"Tell yourself what you've gotta, cuz. Let's go."

Time to get married.

Pa

My girl is getting married. She's getting married and having a little girl. She may be my middle child chronologically, but she's the one who first made me a dad. She's the one who I held the day she was born. She's the only tie to my brother I have. She thinks she looks like her birth mother, only I can see she's the spitting image of my mama.

I only have one picture of her, and it's from right before she left this earth. I can remember her clearly from my childhood. I don't need pictures. My girl brings her to life. Now I have to let her go and let someone else be the most important man in her life. I know he's a good man and I can see he's completely in love with her and will be a good husband. I know I get to move into the role of Pawpaw and I can't wait to see my girl

be an amazing mother. Still, there's a feeling of sadness today too.

I feel an arm go around my waist and know it's my heart.

"You standing out here tryin' to stop time, Jonah?" I shake my head.

"No, just realizin' that after today, my girl doesn't need me anymore." My love smacks my arm.

"You stop that. She will always need her pa. You may not be the number one man in her life anymore, but she will always need you. It's like that one country song said, you loved her first. She knows that and she loves you beyond words. Her marryin' Shane doesn't change her love for you. We taught our kids that love expands and that includes when they meet their one. You gonna be this way when the boys marry Jane?"

"No. This is different. I'll probably feel this whenever Mads gets married too. I love my boys with all of my heart, but my girls, Linnea, they're both special and both came to us in ways that from so early on, I was the only man for them. I'm just gonna miss that." She kisses my hand she's holding.

"I get that. It's time to get in there and see our girl. You ready, my love?"

I stiffen my back, get control of my emotions, and nod.

"Let's get my girl married, Linnea. Before I lose it."

Kierstie

There's a knock at the door and Mads goes to open the door. Ma and Pa both walk in. Looking at the two people whose opinion means the most to me, besides Shane's, I ask them, "How do I look? Do I look like a horribly pregnant woman having a shotgun wedding?"

"Abso-fucking-lutely not, my girl. You look gorgeous. This dress looks like it was made just for you." Pa knows just what to say.

"Thanks, Pa. I think we all turned out okay with our dress choices." Pa looks around at Mads, Hanna, and Kinsley.

“You ladies all look amazing. Even more beautiful than the time you all dressed up as princesses for that birthday party one year. How all my little girls grew up without my noticin’, I’ll never know.” Pa, ever the charmer, gets a smile from everyone with that. I can tell Ma is tryin’ to hold back tears. I’m not sure I’m going to make it through this without them, and honestly, I can’t even blame my hormones today.

Mads walks up to me with panic in her eyes.

“What is it? Is something wrong?”

“Don’t hate me, Sis, but I’ve been so busy planning everything that I forgot about the whole something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue thing!” I can tell she’s freaking out that she let me down. Ma steps up and puts an arm around her.

“Oh, my sweet girl, we’ve got you. Girls, should we show her what we got?”

What’s goin’ on here?

Kinsley comes up and hands me a box. In it is a beautiful bracelet.

“This is from your new family. Grant, Samson, Sax, and I picked this out for you to wear today. We wanted you to know you’ve always been family, but now you’re really stuck with us and we couldn’t be happier about it.” I try to keep the tears from falling as I look at the beautiful gift she just gave me.

Hanna comes up to me and reaches out for my hand. In it she puts a blue ribbon. “This is your something blue. It’s also old. You gave me this ribbon on my sixth birthday. You told me that it was the same color as my eyes and so that even when I couldn’t see anymore, I could remember this ribbon and know what the color blue was. I figured you could put it around your bouquet.” The tears start to fall. Ma comes up to me next.

“These, my girl, are the earrings I wore on the day I married your Pa. They were a gift from your grandma, Pa’s ma. She had saved all her tips for over three months to get these for me. I’m gonna let you borrow them to wear them today. That

covers all of it, I think.” Thank the gods for waterproof mascara, otherwise I’d look like a wet raccoon.

Mads looks at me and smiles.

“I might have forgotten that stuff, but I got you these.” She hands me handkerchiefs with my soon-to-be initials on them.

A clap of hands gets our attention. It’s Pa.

“Alright, ladies. It’s showtime. Your man might start losing his shit if we don’t start this thing in the next few minutes.”

We all spend a couple of minutes fixing our makeup and making sure we’re all good to go. Looking at myself in the mirror one last time, I realize how much I love the empire waist of this dress. It shows off just a little of our baby girl, but not everything. The way it flows down to the ground makes me feel just a little like a princess. I have my hair down with just a few strands pulled back in a broach-like barrette with baby’s breath in my hair. All I can think about though is seeing Shane waiting for me at the end of the aisle. The way his hair falls slightly in his eyes and his close-shaven beard just highlights his smile. I still can’t believe I get to be the one to wake up next to him for the rest of my life.

“Alright, Pa. I’m ready. Let’s go get me married.”

Ma and the girls all lead the way out to the area where we’re having the ceremony. Grant greets us as he’s going to escort Ma down the aisle.

“I do believe my nephew is going to lose his shit when he sees you, beautiful.” He kisses my cheek and then looks at Ma.

“I finally get my chance to walk down the aisle with you, Linnea. Let’s go.”

I hear Pa growl.

“Brother, she ain’t ever gonna be yours.” This has us all chuckling.

Ma and Grant start down the aisle when the music starts playing. Kinsley, Hannah, and Mads follow them down the aisle.

Juan and Ry walk up with fanny packs on and both smiling ear to ear.

“Sis, you look beautiful. We’re gonna make the path to your man worthy of ya.” They both open their fanny packs and head down the aisle, embracing their rolls as flower boys, tossing rose petals along the aisle. Laughter fills the room as both Juan and Ry dramatically dance down the aisle. I can’t help but giggle at both of them.

Pa and I are about to step through the door when he speaks up.

“My girl, I just want you to know I couldn’t be prouder of you. I know you didn’t settle and you love that man with all of you, just as he loves you. You’re going to be a great mom and have a great life. I just want you to know what a privilege it’s been that the gods chose me to be your pa. Now, let’s go before I make us both cry.”

I can only nod because if I speak, I’m gonna be a blubbering mess.

The doors open again and we start down the aisle. I look up and see Shane. He looks amazing in his dress shirt and pants. The moment he looks me in the eyes, I can see his love. His eyes are glassy and it feels like it takes forever to get down the aisle to him. When we get to the end of the aisle, Pa leans in and gives me a kiss on the cheek. He shakes Shane’s hand and gives him the one-armed hug guys do. I think he says something to him before he goes to sit down next to Ma. Shane takes my hands, brings them up to his lips, and gives them a kiss.

“You look amazing, gorgeous.”

“So do you, handsome.” My brother clearing his throat reminds us both that we’re standing in front of a bunch of people.

“Sister, I know you love him, but maybe we should get to the part where I actually marry you?” The crowd chuckles.

I glare at Jon as he grins at me.

Shane answers him. “We’re more than ready, Pres.”

Jon nods at him and starts the ceremony. He's put together some beautiful words, and I know Jane must've helped him.

"Now, before we do the exchange of the vows and rings, the bride and groom have asked Rory to come up and say a few words."

Shane

Rory walks up to the front. I expect him to read the passage that Kierstie asked him to but fuck if he doesn't surprise us.

"Now, these two asked me to read a passage on love from a great author, and I was prepared to do that until last night. I watched these two and was inspired to share about them instead."

He's gonna do what? As long as he doesn't upset my woman he can do whatever he wants.

He continues to speak, "I remember the first time I met Kierstie. I had just arrived at Ma and Pa's with Ry and we were just happy to be placed together. It was a weekday and about half an hour after our caseworker dropped us off, the door opened and a bunch of kids piled into the house after getting off the school bus. The last one through the door was this little girl with big eyes and curls all over the place. She walked right up to me and my brother and told us. 'I'm Kierstie. I'm six and you're now family. Even if you're only going to stay here a short time, you stay family forever. We look out for family here.' She then bounced off to who knows where. That little girl became a beautiful woman with the same convictions. To her, family is everything. Just look at who's here today. So many of us spent at least some of our childhood at Ma and Pa's either as a foster kid or a friend. How many of you heard the same thing from Kierstie at some point?" Dozens of hands go up.

"That just shows me how much and how strongly she loves and believes that statement. Now, we also know just how much of a temper my sister has." A few chuckles spatter the audience, but I'm wondering if I'm gonna have to deck her brother. I let him continue for now.

“Leave it to the man who’s going to marry her to point out the obvious to us all. She was getting upset about something the other day and I made a comment to him about getting stuck with dealing with her temper. He told me she doesn’t have a temper like we all say she does. He told me to think about it. When she’s gotten that way, what’s the common denominator? Family. Family is always at the center of it, and she’s usually upset on behalf of someone she considers family. You see, he sees her. He sees all of her. What we have called a temper, he more accurately calls passion. Passion and love for who and what she holds most dear. Leave it to the man who’s meant to be hers to describe her best.” Well, fuck me. He doesn’t need to be hurt after all.

“Now to the groom. I’ve known Shane since I first came to the family. We’d see him in the summers when he came to town to visit and sometimes throughout the year. I got to know him a bit when he prospected before he joined the military. Since I’ve been back, we’ve gotten to know each other as men. He has the same strong beliefs about family. He would go to the ends of the earth for someone he considers family. He’s the kind of man that never gives up hope for someone. He might not have experienced the best childhood, but he’s become a very good man. One that I’ve been proud to call a brother in my MC for years and now even prouder to call him a true brother.”

Well shit. He’s good with words, that one.

“With two people who both have such strong beliefs in family, I have no doubts that they will have a happy and love filled marriage. They truly are two examples of family being what you make it to be. Here’s hoping that my sister doesn’t kill me after the ceremony for going off script.”

Ror goes to sit down and I look back at my woman who has unshed tears in her eyes.

Jon starts up again.

“I’m not quite sure how to follow that, so let’s go straight to the vows and the rings.”

We go through the traditional vows and exchange of rings. I originally liked the idea of us writing our own vows, but when I saw how much she was stressing over it, we agreed to drop that idea.

As I place the ring on her finger and she puts one on mine, I can't help but feel like the luckiest man on earth. I get to call this woman my wife and be by her side until I take my last breath.

“... I now pronounce you husband and wife. As much as it kills me to say, you may kiss your bride.”

Grabbing her face in my hands, I kiss her once, then twice. I look at her and smile.

“Wife.” She gives me that smile that makes my world stop.

“Husband.”

I kiss her again before we head back down the aisle. We did it. We're married. We're married and soon we'll have a daughter. Feeling the coin in my pocket, I know Mom is with me today.

We walk over to the reception area after taking the obligatory pictures.

Kierstie stops walking and halts me by pulling on my hand.

“What is it, gorgeous?” She moves my hand to her stomach.

“Feel her.” I put both my hands on her stomach and stand as still as I can. I stand and wait as patiently as I can. Fuck knows I would've waited forever for this. Then I feel it, just a light tap.

“That's her! That's our girl. She wanted to be part of our day.”

I can't help but kiss my wife who's given me everything.

Kierstie

Dinner and cake is over. Samson and Saxon make a toast and have Mads say a few words with them. I'm surprised they kept to the basics. I think Mads might have had a hand in that, maybe Grant too.

Music starts to play and Shane looks over at me as he stands up and holds out his hand.

“Will my wife dance with me?”

“I’ll dance with you anytime.” He leads me to the dance floor and as we start to sway, I listen to the words of the song he chose as our first song.

“...you stole my heart and changed it... Took all of my plans and rearranged them... I finally know what amazing grace is.”

I move my head back and look him in the eyes. “Where did you find this song? I love it.”

“I heard it when I went for a drive after our first big argument. I realized in that moment that I wanted all my future—the good, the great, the hard and the ugly, all of it—I wanted you to be in it. I realized in that moment while listening to this song that I wanted to grow old with you.”

“That’s a good thing since you’re stuck with me. You not only wear my ring, but you have my whole heart and soul. I don’t think I could love you more.”

He touches his forehead to mine.

“You have mine, gorgeous. I’d do anything for you.” He kisses me and we finish dancing to the song. I’m about to walk back to our table when Shane stops me.

“You’ve got one more dance you gotta do, love.”

The song starts playing and I look around till I see Pa walking toward me. “My girl” by the Temptations plays but it’s slowed down.

Pa and I meet in the middle of the dance floor.

“I couldn’t not dance with my girl on her wedding day.”

“Pa, you wore your dancing shoes just for today.” He smiles at me.

“My girl, I’m always wearing them, you know this.” He twirls me around for the rest of the song just like he did when I was a kid. After the song ends, he gives me a hug and whispers in

my ear, “My girl, go and be happy, have love and never forget how special you are. I think your husband is waiting for you.”

I turn and see Shane standing at the edge of the dance floor, waiting for me.

I walk over to him and take his outstretched hand.

“It’s time to make our exit, gorgeous. I need to be alone with my wife.”

“I need you too, husband.” Shane sweeps me up in a bridal hold and cheers go up around the room.

“Night y’all! Mr. and Mrs. Brock are out of here!”

Shane walks us out of the room and to the parking lot. We aren’t having a big honeymoon or anything, but he did get us a cabin for a few days so we can be alone. He hasn’t told me anything about the cabin, only to not expect to get out of bed much.

He carries me to the SUV he recently bought us. He told me he needed to know his girls were safe in any weather. How the fuck am I supposed to argue with something that sweet?

“Is the cabin close or do we have a long drive?”

“It’s just up in Kid Valley so only about thirty minutes or so. I knew I wasn’t gonna be able to handle a long drive without needing you since I was forced to sleep away from you yesterday.”

“Ma insisted on it. She said it was one of the few traditions we needed to keep, for good luck.”

He lets out a huff.

“I know, both Grant and Pa knew I’d try and sneak over to you last night. They stood guard and blocked me at every chance. It’s not like we were virgins or anything. My daughter kicked my hand today for fuck’s sake.”

Reaching over the console, I grab his hand and pat it.

“That’s over now. We don’t have to be separated again, love. I have to admit that you havin’ that reaction is hot.” That earns me a grin.

“You think your husband is hot, do ya, gorgeous?” I let go of his hand and smack his chest.

“You know I think you’re the sexiest man I’ve seen in real life. I mean, I’ve never met Chris Evans in person, so I can’t really compare.”

“Love, I’ve told you this before. I’m the only superhero for you. I don’t care if he was standing next to me, you’re mine. That goes for all the Avengers you love so much.” He is so easy to rile up sometimes. Before I know it, we’re pulling up to a beautiful cabin that looks like it was recently restored. I must stare at it longer than I realize ‘cause I open the door to get out and Shane’s right there. He doesn’t even let me get out, picking me up bridal style again.

“This is a tradition I’m fine with, gorgeous. I need to get you inside and unwrap my present.” Huh?

“Your present? What ya talkin’ about?”

He stops at the door to the cabin, unlocks it quickly, and opens the door, walking through it all in the same motion.

“You in that dress... you’re my present. I need to unwrap my wife.” *Ohhhh.*

He keeps carrying me into what looks like the bedroom.

“Would it help you to know I don’t have a bra under this?” He lets out *that* growl. The kind I only thought existed in books. I’ve only heard it from him a couple of times. With a gentleness that I didn’t know he could possess, he lays me down on the bed. He kisses me and I can feel every ounce of love coming from him.

When he breaks the kiss, he looks me in the eye, and in the softest voice I think I’ve ever heard from him he tells me, “I’m going to make love to my wife, to my forever. You okay with that, Mrs. Brock?” Unable to speak without crying, I nod at him.

He proceeds to sit me up. He turns to my back and begins unlacing the dress, slowly kissing my shoulder as he pushes down the strap of my dress. He does the same to the other side.

“Stand up my love and let the dress fall.” I do as he tells me to. His voice is a mixture of love and authority. I don’t know if I’ve felt this turned on and loved at the same time before. As the dress falls, I turn to him.

“Fuck me, I’m a lucky son of a bitch. Lie down so I can worship you, baby.”

I lie down, and he bends down and kisses me. I get lost in his kiss. His hands explore my breasts. He breaks the kiss and sucks on my nipple while his hand is still on the other. He knows just how sensitive and responsive they are now.

“I can’t wait. I need a taste now. It’s been almost forty-eight hours without you on my tongue.” I am so alright with his oral obsession.

His fingers grab my panties and move them out of the way, then his tongue goes all the way up my slit and he just barely brush it against my clit. He works slowly, getting into a gentle back-and-forth rhythm. It’s such a slow pace I’m caught completely off guard when an orgasm screams forward and rolls through my body. Shane moves and lies down next to me.

“I want a show, gorgeous. Would you be a good girl and do what I want? Climb on top for a ride? I want to watch my wife on top.” He knows when he calls me a good girl, he’s gonna get what he wants. He helps me climb on top, as I’m not as graceful as I usually am right now. I reach for his hard cock and move it to my slit. I will never get tired of feeling him fill me so completely. I start to move slowly, not able to take my eyes off him. In this moment, it’s just us. No one else, no distractions, just my soul feeling his. This isn’t fucking or having sex. There are no other words to describe it but our two bodies making love. I don’t know how long I keep up this slow pace, but after a bit, I start to move only ever so slightly quicker. Within seconds, I feel the orgasm building and he’s right there too.

“So close, gorgeous. So fucking close.” Just seconds after that, we’re both shouting out our orgasms and I fall to my side next to him.

He turns and kisses me.

“Don’t expect to get out of bed much, gorgeous. I plan to memorize every inch of my wife’s body over the next few days.”

He does exactly what he said he would do.

CHAPTER 10

Shane

Thankfully, it's Friday. It's been almost two weeks since our wedding and I swear since we got back, we haven't had a moment to ourselves. Well, tonight that changes. Tonight, it's going to be just us. I know we can't get away with that the whole weekend since tomorrow is church, but damn it, I need some time with my wife. I'm finishing up on the car I'm working on when I hear someone walk up. Looking up, I'm surprised to see it's none other than my mother-in-law.

"Ma, what's going on? If you're looking for Kierstie, she finished up early and was talkin' about going home to take a nap."

She shakes her head.

"I'm not looking for her. I'm looking for my new son who's already messin' up." *Wait. What?*

"What do ya mean? How am I messing up? I haven't missed any appointments. I get all her cravings, and I make sure to rub her feet every night. What am I missing?"

"What has she asked you to do for months now? What has she wanted you to share with her since before everyone knew? I know you're smart. Think about it for a minute. It's the reason my Jon wasn't thrilled with you for a bit."

Ohhhh.

"You mean going with me to look for Tyson?"

"Ding, ding, ding! He gets it. She thinks you're hiding part of yourself from her. Now I know most of that is her pregnancy hormones, but underneath it lies some truth. She feels hurt that you don't want to share that with her."

"But it's nothin' like that. When I go looking for Tyson, I go to homeless camps and back alleys looking for him. That's not safe for her when she's pregnant. I don't want to put her and the baby in any sort of danger. I couldn't handle it if she

slipped and fell or something worse.” She looks at me like I’ve seen her look at Juan and her boys a hundred times.

“So make it so you can ensure her safety. Take her there, drive her around, show her where you look, but stay in the car. I get that you want to protect her and I love that you love her so much, but this way, she feels you’re sharing everything *and* you can keep her safe. This way she won’t come to me again, thinking her husband doesn’t want to share his whole life with her. Just be thankful she came to me and not her brothers or Pa. You know how they like to solve problems with their fists. Though if this happens again, don’t think I won’t use my lefse stick on you, son. Just ask my boys how much that hurts. Now, I’m off to the store and you best be off to take care of your wife. Kiss my cheek and go clean up.” My mama didn’t raise a fool so I do as she says and kiss her cheek, walk her to her car, and get cleaned up. It seems my woman and I have a drive to make tonight.

As soon as I get home, I can tell she must be taking a nap because not every light in the house is on. I walk toward our bedroom and see her curled up around her pregnancy pillow that she loves so much. She’s got her tablet in front of her and she’s reading. I walk over to the bed and crouch down in front of her.

“So I hear I’m being a bad husband already.” I watch as her eyes go big in surprise.

“No, I-I mean, that’s not what I meant. I just—” I put my hand over her mouth to stop her from stumbling over her words.

“Gorgeous, I get it. I wasn’t tryin’ to hide any part of me. I just wasn’t taking you yet ’cause the places I have gone aren’t the safest and I can’t bring myself to put you two in any sort of situation where you could get hurt.” I can see that idea never even dawned on her. I continue with my idea.

“But Ma gave me a solution to my worries. What do you say to you and I driving up there and I can show you where I look? We can look from the car but not get out. I can show you where I go and maybe even talk to a couple of people.”

She moves to sit up. I offer my hand as I know with each day her balance is getting more and more off.

“Really, you wanna go tonight?” I nod and stand up to help her up.

“Yeah, I can’t tomorrow ’cause we’ve got church. We can pick up dinner, get on the road, get out there, and we can go around and come back. If we get going, it won’t even be that late of a night.”

“I’m sorry for not telling you how I was feeling and going to Ma. I was having a meltdown about a few things when she stopped by to drop off some more baby stuff. She ended up borrowing my big plastic bowl.”

“What was the meltdown about? I mean, besides what I already know?”

“It’s dumb, but it started when I couldn’t get my tennis shoes tied. That started the tears. Then I felt like a bad mom complaining about that when it means that she’s growing and is healthy. That morphed into me standing and looking in the freezer and realizing I have no lefse and all I really wanted was some warmed up lefse with butter, cinnamon and sugar. That’s where Ma found me. It all kind of spilled out of me when she asked. So she did what she does. She dried my tears, tied my shoes, calmed me down about you, and told me she was taking my bowl, going to the store, and was going to make up some lefse tomorrow to stock our freezer with.”

Oh these pregnancy hormones are most definitely becoming more and more of a roller coaster every day. But that’s a thought I’ll be keeping in my head because I like my balls where they’re at.

“Well, gorgeous, maybe we need to break out those lined clogs someone got you so you don’t have to try to tie your shoes. You are an amazing mom already. Our daughter couldn’t have a better mom taking care of her.” This earns me one of her amazing smiles.

“Wait, I thought you guys only made lefse once a year, and it takes all day and like a hundred pounds of potatoes?” She

gives me the look that Ma gave me just twenty minutes ago.

“When we do lefse day, we’re making like twenty or more batches of the recipe, so everyone gets some to freeze to have for the holidays. That day is months away still. Ma loves me and our daughter so she’s going to make one, maybe two batches, just for me. She gets my cravings and there’s no substitute for it. She also gets there’s no fucking way I can wait that long to have some.”

“Well, I’m glad she’s taking care of that for ya. I will do anything to help with your cravings but making that is beyond my limited cooking knowledge. Let’s get going and get you some dinner and hit the road.”

“Can we stop for some more Red Hots and Lemonheads?”
Does she not know I keep stock of both?

“Baby, I already have a container of each in the SUV. I never let us run out of either.”

Kierstie

We just got off the highway and are heading into the part of town that I used to avoid when I lived here. Okay, maybe I do get why he hadn’t brought me up here before. But still, I’m his wife, and this is about his brother. I don’t think I was wrong in at least wanting to see what he did to look for Tyson. I mean, after all, the man is my brother now too.

Shane makes a turn and drives down a street with a few older homes and duplexes. He slows down in front of a small home. You can tell it once was nice and would’ve been welcoming. He pulls over to the curb. He sighs and shares more than I think he’s ever done before.

“This is the house I grew up in. Tyson and I used to sit on that porch sometimes when we heard my mom and dad arguing. It was covered so we could hang out and not get wet. When I was about twelve, maybe thirteen, things got worse with his drinking and the fighting increased. It got so frequent that I kept a box of snacks and stuff under the bench outside so if dinner time came, we’d at least have something to eat. I was actually thankful when my dad didn’t wake up that one day

when I was fourteen. He'd just started to grab my mom when he was drunk. Before that it was always just throwing things around. The last time he grabbed at her, I stepped in and he shoved me through the front door. Tyson and I went to stay at Grant's for a week after that. I think Grant gave Mom a talk and told her things had gone too far. From her journal, I think she was thinking about leaving when his body gave out from all the alcohol. She followed him just five years later when she dropped from a heart attack. That's when I had to go through all her stuff. I discovered the box of papers that said he wasn't my dad. Tyson's birth certificate had his name on it but mine didn't. I found out my legal last name was her maiden name. In her journal, she mentioned a guy that sounds like he was actually my father. This all happened when I was nineteen and Tyson was almost eighteen. He graduated school, and we moved out of the house and into Grant's. I was a prospect then. I had already signed up for the Army before Mom passed, so I was heading out to boot camp. I saw Tyson on every leave I got and we emailed back and forth. For a few years he seemed to be doing fine. He even moved out and got his own place up here 'cause he'd gotten a great job or so he said. I re-upped again so I could take time to decide if I wanted to make the Army my career. Halfway through that time, I lost all contact with Tyson. When I came home on leave, I went to his apartment and then the job he told me had. He'd been evicted from the apartment months before. The manager said he hadn't seen him for months before that. The job he was so excited about? He deserted it after only a couple of months. The number I had for him had been disconnected. I looked for him that entire leave. Max, Grant, Saxon, and Samson helped. I returned to where I was stationed and I spent all my off time for the last six months I was there calling anyone and anywhere I could think of. Since I've been back, I've gone out at least a couple times a month searching. I've never talked to him, but I know he's around somewhere. I think I saw him a couple of times but he took off before I could talk to him. He's an addict. I know he's not ready for help, but I feel like I failed him. Like this is all my fault."

Oh, my sweet, sweet man. I can't help the tears that fall down my face, but he needs to realize this shit. I squeeze the hand

I'm holding.

"Look at me."

He looks at me with the saddest face I've ever seen him have.

"You have to know this is not your fault. You were a kid yourself. From everything I've heard from you, your cousins, and Grant, *you* were more a parent to him than your parents were. He was an adult when you went away. You can't control what another adult does."

He looks at me for a minute and lets go of my hand to wipe my tears away.

"I've been working on realizing that these last few months. When I found out you were pregnant, it shifted somethin'. It made what Grant and Pres kept tellin' me finally make sense. You can't help someone who doesn't want the help. He knows where Grant is. He's got my number 'cause it's never been changed. He knows he could go to the club and find any of us who would help him. He knows and doesn't want it." He moves his hand to his head.

"I know that and I know that it's not my fault here, but here, I don't think I'm ever going to completely believe it." He moves his hand to his heart.

"That's 'cause you're a good man with an amazing heart, my love."

"I dunno about all that. I just know that the minute I found out it was you and then that you were pregnant, you two became my whole world. Our little nuclear family is everything to me." He puts the SUV into gear.

"You wanna drive over to the couple of encampments I usually check out?" Looking at him as he asks me, I realize that just these last few minutes gave me all I needed to know.

"We can go home. I don't need to see it."

He shakes his head at me.

"We drove all the way up here. Let's just drive over there. We won't get out or anything. I wanna stop and get a couple of

burgers for a couple of vets who stay out there but don't want help. They always take the food I give them, though."

"You're a good man, Mr. Brock. I'm the luckiest woman to be able to call you mine." He chuckles.

"Gorgeous, I don't know what those pregnancy hormones are doin' to ya, but I'll let you live in your delusion tonight."

After we pick up the food Shane wanted to get, we drive for about ten minutes over to an area of a few abandoned warehouses—the kind that the roofs came down a decade or so ago and most of the structure is long gone. In its place are tents, many made out of a combination of tarps and broken apart vehicles. Shane slows down and stops in front of a barrel that has a fire in it and it looks like maybe four or five people around it. He rolls down the window and sticks his head out of it.

"Sergeant Booker! It's Corporal Brock!" One of the men around the fire walks over to our SUV. When he gets close, it looks like he's maybe in his forties or early fifties.

"Haven't seen you around in a good while, Brock. You haven't found your brother, have you?" Shane talks to the one he called Booker for a few minutes as I look over the scene and the people around. There are some who are definitely high on drugs of some kind, and there are some that look to be talking to people that only exist in their minds. Then there are two by the fire that this Booker just left that look completely out of place here, but also look really familiar. I wait till there's a break in the conversation.

I look at Booker as Shane hands him a couple of the bags.

"Are those two usually here? They look young, but I swear they look familiar too."

Booker looks at me to answer and his eyes get big.

"Yeah, they're young but legal adults. They're just down on their luck so me and George over there told them to stay near us so they don't find themselves in trouble. Say, you got any more burgers you can spare for them? I know they'll both be hungry."

Shane tells them yes and while Booker goes to get the girls, he looks over at me.

“Do you think you might know them, gorgeous?” I shrug my shoulders.

“I don’t know what it is. I just feel like they look like I should know them or somethin’.”

Booker must convince them ’cause both of them start walking over to us. When they get close, both of them take off the hoods of their hoodies. I hear Shane suck in a breath.

“Holy shit.” He looks at me and looks back at them. He moves slightly so I can see them and it’s like I’m looking at myself from ten years ago. I can see their eyes get big when they see me.

“What are your names?”

The one who is closest to the SUV speaks. “I’m Shandy and this is my twin sister Brandy. We’re nineteen. We aged out of the system last year and just haven’t been able to financially get things in order. We had a car but when we were at work one day, it was impounded. We couldn’t afford to get it out. We’re working to get a down payment saved for an apartment, but with no credit history, it’s not easy.”

Shane speaks up with a good question I hadn’t thought of just yet. Pregnancy brain is real, people.

“Were you ever foster kids at the Weston house? It’s about three or so hours south of here.” When he said Weston, their eyes got big. Oh. *Ohhhh*.

“Who’s your dad? I mean, your biological dad?”

This time Brandy speaks up, but she doesn’t take her eyes off mine.

“We never knew him, but when we aged out, we were given our birth certificates. They listed our father’s name as Abel Weston.” *Holy Shit*.

Shane speaks when I can’t seem to.

“Fuck me. Gorgeous, isn’t that your bio father’s name? Pa’s brother?”

Booker stops eating his burger as he’s listens in to what I think we’re all coming to realize. He keeps looking at me and back at the twins. *Shit. Focus, Kierstie.* These two are most likely my biological half-sisters.

“My biological father was Abel Weston, too. Did you look into him?”

Shandy speaks up this time from under her blue hoodie she put back on her head.

“Yeah, we can see he was already back in prison when we were born. He got out here and there, but always ended up going back. Last I looked, he was out, but I couldn’t find any more information. Our mom died when we were six, so we were never able to really ask her about him. Our grandma only knew that they only dated briefly before she got pregnant.”

“We need to get you two off the street. My ma and pa who adopted me are biologically your aunt and uncle. Between us and all my siblings, we can offer you jobs and help get you on your feet. Plus, we can get to know each other, which I would love. You don’t have to come, but we can get you some place warm and help you out.” I realized I just said all this without checking with Shane or letting Ma and Pa know.

Brandy speaks up. “Do you mind if I talk to my sister for a few minutes to decide?”

Shane answers her. “Sure, sweetheart. Also know this ain’t a onetime offer. If you decide not to come this time but change your mind, that’s okay too. We can always give you our numbers.” They both walk away to talk, and Booker grabs another couple of bags and heads over to the fire. I look at Shane and ask him the first question on my mind.

“Did I overstep? Are you okay if they say yes to taking them back with us?” Shane grabs my hand and shakes it to stop me from rambling.

“Gorgeous, they *have* to be related to you. You three look like triplets. I mean, you’re in a league above them, but that’s

probably because I'm hopelessly in love with you. But, no, you didn't overstep. They're family. Enough said. However, you best call Ma and Pa. I love you, woman, but I really don't wanna experience how Ma's lefse stick feels." Laughing at his fear of her stick, I grab my phone and make a call. Ma answers on the second ring and I put it on speaker.

"My girl, did your husband not come home and have a conversation with you? Do I need to come over there?" Seeing Shane's eyes get big at that almost threat makes me snicker.

"No, he's a man of his word. We're actually up where he looks for Tyson now. That's why I'm calling you."

"Did you find him? Are you bringing him home? Does he need a doctor? Do—"

I interrupt her twenty questions.

"Ma! No, we didn't find Tyson, but we did find a huge surprise. Is Pa near you?"

"Yeah, he's just in the other room. Grant's over and they're visitin'."

"Well, he can hear this too. Put me on speaker with you and them please."

A couple of seconds later, I hear Ma fussing with the phone.

"Okay, my girl, Pa's on the phone with me now."

I can hear them rustling and Pa speaks up.

"What's goin' on, my girl?"

"Well, Shane took me up to where he usually looks for Tyson, and before you ask, no we didn't find him. But we did find someone. Two someones, actually. Two barely legal girls, twins, who're nineteen and say their birth certificates list their father as Abel Weston. We also look alike."

Shane adds to the conversation, "They don't just look alike. They're spittin' images of each other, to the point it's kinda scary."

I can hear Pa in the background.

“That motherfucker has more kids and probably never seen them either. What the fuck went wrong in his head?”

“Okay, maybe we do look a lot alike, but more to the point of my call. We met them when we stopped at the first encampment Shane usually goes to. They’re homeless ’cause when they aged out, they didn’t have any help. They had a car they were living in while trying to save money, but it got impounded, and well, you know how things go. I kinda spoke without checking with ya, but I offered for them to come back with us and we can get them jobs and a place to stay until they get on their feet. That way we can also get to know them. I was thinking if they say yes that we’ll bring them over to your house. What do you guys think? If not, Shane and I can move them in till we figure something out.”

Pa answers, which means he and Ma just did that silent communicating with their eyes thing they’ve always done.

“Bring the girls here if they decide to come. We’ve still got a couple of rooms made up and they can get to know everyone. I know you need help in the shop ’cause you’ll need someone when the baby comes. I know the diner always needs help. Shit, we’ll have a few options lined up. What are their names?”

Shane answers as the girls start to come back this way.

“Shandy and Brandy. They’re coming back now. Hold on a sec.”

He has me leave them on speaker phone so they can hear.

Shandy speaks up as soon as they get to Shane’s side of the SUV.

“We’d like to go with you. We don’t want to freeload, so we’ll definitely be interested in any *legitimate* job offers you have. We both would like the chance to meet some family and get to know you. The last family we had besides each other was our grandma and she passed when we were ten. That’s when we got put in the system.”

Ma chimes in, “Well, ladies, watch out, ’cause you have family now. I’m your aunt Linnea but everyone calls me Ma.

We've got a room for each of you and I'll have some food ready for you when you get here." They both give a slight smile at that.

I tell Ma we'll see them in a couple of hours. Luckily, since we left right after work, it won't be too late when we get back. Shane tells the girls to go get whatever stuff they have and we can load it up in the back. They each come back with a couple of duffle bags.

Shane gets them loaded up and opens the back doors for them. He grabs the last couple of bags of burgers he bought and takes them over to Booker. I can see him handing them over while they talk. They shake hands and he heads back toward the SUV.

Brandy speaks up before Shane gets back to the SUV. "We're gonna be safe with you, right? My sister says her gut is telling her yes, but I've got to ask."

"Yes, you're safe. If you come with us and decide you want to come back at any time, we can do that. You aren't hostages. You're grown-ass adults who can do what they want. You're gonna meet a whole lot of extended family here in the next few days. I'm the only other one we know of that Abel fathered. I was adopted when I was a few months old. Pa is Abel's biological brother. He and Ma adopted me and then were foster parents to many while I was growing up. Over the years, they ended up adopting six of the kids who had come to us as fosters. I'm the middle of seven siblings. They're gonna all end up claiming you as siblings too."

Shane gets in and starts to make the way back home. He mentions the MC and describes what they are and what they do. I can see both the girls' eyes get a little big at that.

Shandy's next question tells me we're going to get along just fine.

"Are you guys like the *Mayans*? We've seen some episodes of that, but I read a lot. Brandy too." I can tell Shane is physically restraining himself from rolling his eyes.

“Oh, we’re gonna get along just fine. My sister and my soon-to-be sister-in-law all read. We read a lot, and most of it is MC. Mads is really into shifter and paranormal lately though.” Brandy lights up at that.

“Oh, I love shifter romances, especially reverse harem ones!”

Shane chuckles at that. I may or may not glare at him for a second.

“Well then that makes things easier about explaining my older brothers’ relationship.” I go on and explain to them about Jane’s relationship with Jon, Juan, and Rory. I think they’re both surprised that this is happening in real life.

Brandy asks the questions that any of us *real* readers would ask.

“Wait, she’s really with three guys? Do the swords cross? Are there more relationships like that?”

Shane spits out the water he was drinking when she asks about the swords crossing. He chokes and laughs at the same time.

“Oh gods, I’ve got to tell them about that at church. That’s fucking awesome.”

I glare at Shane and then look at the back seat.

“No, they’re brothers. Adopted but they consider themselves actual brothers. They don’t swing that way. My younger brother, Ry, does and his boyfriend Nicky is pretty fucking awesome.”

We make small talk the rest of the ride, with me telling them about the businesses and possible jobs they could have, what the family is like, and similar things. Before I realize just how far we’ve driven, Shane is taking the exit for our town.

Shane speaks up for the first time in a while, probably figuring he couldn’t add to the book conversation, even though I’ve caught him reading both *Jupiter* and *Boss* before. I’ll keep that secret in my arsenal for now.

“We’re about ten minutes from Ma and Pa’s place. We live about ten minutes from them and the clubhouse is about

fifteen minutes outside of town on some property the club owns.”

Shandy pipes in, asking Shane, “Does everyone really call them Ma and Pa, not just their kids?”

He nods and adds, “Yep. The only times you really hear anyone say their names are when it’s someone of their generation, like my uncle Grant or Ma’s brother Erik. Otherwise, all the club brothers all call them that. They want us to. It’s kinda part of the MC. It was started to do good in the community, but also to give people whose biological family either wasn’t around or on the toxic side. Most of us have issues with at least part, if not all, of our family. Ma and Pa become family to just about anyone who needs or wants love.”

I can hear Shandy whisper under her breath, “That’s so cool.”

Maybe they’ve found their place.

CHAPTER 11

Shane

Last night was nuts. Between finding the twins and realizing who they are and introducing them to Ma and Pa, we didn't get home till late. Kierstie held off everyone else from descending on the twins. She made them all agree to wait and meet at the diner for brunch today. Both Shandy and Brandy seemed alright when we left and were getting settled into their rooms before I finally dragged my exhausted wife home. She fell asleep on the ride home, so I got her into the house and into bed.

Her finding biological family she didn't know existed reminds me I need to talk to Grant at some point about who my biological dad may be. From Mom's journal, I can't tell if he knew she was pregnant with me. Just another puzzle piece to try and figure out.

I walk from the bedroom to the kitchen and put the tea kettle on. Kierstie's been drinking this mint tea every morning. She swears it has helped her keep some of her morning sickness at bay. I know this shit does nothing to help her wake up, but if she wants it, she gets it. I'm dying for a cup of coffee but have to resist until breakfast. I told her I wouldn't drink any at home while she can't. My body has been cussing me out every morning since then. Luckily, we're getting close to the end of the second trimester. I can't wait to meet our little girl.

I grab my cell out of my pocket to check for any messages and see I have a few. The first one is from Pres reminding everyone about tonight's church and that apparently Ma and Jane declared that we're having a family barbecue tonight after church. I have a feeling this is to introduce the girls to the whole club after breakfast with the family. I've got a text each from Samson and Sax in a group message asking about why there's a last-minute dinner happening. Nosey nellys the two of them. The last text is from Grant.

Grant: I know you're doin' breakfast this mornin' with the new family and we've got church tonight, but on your way

home after breakfast, can ya come over? I found some more of your mom's stuff we packed away in the attic from before you went to boot camp. I think some of your baby stuff is in there and your woman would probably love that.

Me: Shit, yeah. She'll love that. Expect tears if there is that stuff. They seem to flow all the time the last few days.

Grant: Just wait. You've got more emotional waves to ride there. You better buckle up, this being your first rodeo, and who you picked as your wife lol. Fucker sends me GIFs of laughter. I send him a few emojis of giving him the bird before I set my phone down. I grab the tea that's ready and head back to the bedroom. As I walk in, I can hear Kierstie talking quietly. I stop at the door and lean against the wall as I want to watch. Kierstie is sitting up in bed but holding her bump and talking to our daughter.

“You see, your Amma and Pawpaw have so much love to give that the gods saw to it that their home would always be a welcome place for forgotten children. Society may not call them that, but most kids in foster care would call themselves that. Ma and Pa gave them all a place to be found. They found me right before I was lost. Your mama ain't quite as saintly as them, but your dad and I plan to help some lost kids at some point. You, my girl, have never been lost, but you're the one who found our family. You uncovered your daddy for me. He's the one my soul had been waiting for. You just had to go about a different way 'cause let's be honest, your mama is stubborn and would've ignored the signs otherwise. You and he are the best gifts the gods could have ever given me. Now, if he would stop standing at the door and bring me my tea, that would make him even better.” She looks up at me and gives me a bit of an accusatory look. I move toward her to give her the cup of tea, stealing a morning kiss before I do.

“Mornin', gorgeous. I wasn't tryin' to intrude. I just love listening to you talk to her. Nothin' you said was a surprise, though. I know we'll be having more than just our girl here. How that's gonna happen, only the gods know.”

She sips her tea for a moment.

“You’re right. I gotta get up and get ready for breakfast. Can you grab a couple of my hoodies from the closet? I told Shandy and Brandy they could use them. Oh! Can you also grab from the top drawer the two tablets I have in there? They can use my old ones to read till they can get new ones.”

“Yep, you get ready, love, and I’ll get that stuff. Oh, Grant says he wants us to stop by after breakfast. He found some boxes to go through.”

I hear her acknowledge me as the shower starts.

Kierstie

Shane pulls up to the diner and parks just as Jon’s truck pulls in next to us. I can tell Pa, Ma, and the girls are already here. Shane’s helping me out and I see Max pull up with Ry and Nicky in his truck with him. Walking around the truck, Juan helps Jane out. She’s got longer to go, but she’s carrying twins. Thank goodness Shane gave me one at a time.

My dear dumbass, Ry, walks around the truck and yells at us. “Come on, people, let’s get the semen simmerers inside so they can eat, and we can meet our newest sisters.” *Semen simmerers?*

Juan smacks Ry upside his head, and Rory and Nicky both smack their foreheads in disgust. Jon and Shane look borderline pissed off and Jane looks ready for battle. She’s the first to say something.

“Nicky, Kierstie, let’s go in. Maybe these guys can talk some sense into Ry about why you don’t want to piss off a couple of pregnant women. At the same time, we can find you a man with a few more functioning brain cells.” She loops her arms around mine and Nicky’s and leads us to the doors to the diner. I look back and see my husband and brothers all encircling Ry with Rory taking the lead on this one.

“Little R, I know you’re trying to be funny with your dumbass comments, but a pregnant woman is not someone to be trifled with. You saw Jane. If there wasn’t food waiting on the other side of the door, she’d be tryin’ to kick your ass. I’m sure Sis would be helping her. My woman is getting more and more

uncomfortable every day, so take this as a piece of advice, a threat, a promise, whatever the fuck you want to call it. You piss her off again and I'm gonna remind you why I went to prison. I think at least I'll have Shane helping."

"Abso-fucking-lutely. I know you're joking, but if you bring my wife to tears, we're gonna need more than Ma's lefse stick to get between us."

Being nosey, I stayed by the door to listen. What? Can you blame me?

Ry nods. "Yeah, you know me. I was just tryin' to lighten things up since I could tell y'all were nervous about this breakfast. I'll stick with picking on you idiots instead." Ry gives them all a shit-eatin' grin and heads my way. Max just shakes his head at him.

"He's gonna end up getting himself in trouble one of these days with that mouth of his, and I ain't gonna be able to get him out of it. I need coffee and some food."

Ry walks up to the door as I'm opening it to go inside.

"You know I didn't mean anything bad by what I said, right, Sis? I couldn't be happier that you're giving me a niece to spoil." I look up at him.

"I know, but you piss off Jane enough and your man may cut off sexy time. You know how he is about her." I can see the moment that thought dawns on him as we walk to the table. As I get to the table, I can tell the guys must be right behind me 'cause I see both Shandy and Brandy's eyes get big. I don't see who asks it, but I can see all the guys smile at it.

"Holy shit, these are the brothers? I wonder what the MC brothers we aren't related to look like."

Nicky who's already sitting at the table chimes in, "Oh, honey, they're all tall drinks of water. Most of them are single too."

Pa speaks up, "Sons, don't forget your manners and introduce yourselves." Introductions go all around and the waitress brings over menus for everyone. Jane asks for a couple of orders of pancakes for the table. Those sound so good. The

waitress asks who wants coffee and everyone but Jane, the girls, and me say yes.

Mads is sitting next to Shandy and asks a question of utmost importance here in the PNW. “Do you two drink coffee?”

Brandy answers, “We do, but not like regular coffee. I like mochas and Shandy likes caramel macchiatos.” This is Mads kind of drink so she starts talking about that fancy coffee stuff. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy that shit too, but give me a strong cup of coffee with a little cream and a good amount of sugar, and I’m a happy gal. It’s something I currently miss very much. I must be daydreaming about my morning cup of coffee longer than I realize, ’cause I’m startled when Shane puts his arm around the back of my chair and pulls me to him slightly, kissing my forehead.

“You thinkin’ hard there, gorgeous. You okay?” I look over at him. His little grin makes him the sexiest man, giving me thoughts I should not be having at a family table. Juan is sitting directly across from me and can never keep his mouth shut, I swear.

“Dude. I know you’re married and all, but that’s still my little sister and I don’t need to see that shit.” Fucktard. What is it with my brothers today?

“You mean like I’ve had to watch you and Jane at just about every family dinner lately? You think you’re sly but when you have to wipe drool and obviously adjust yourself, you ain’t slick, brother. You’re also wrong. He was just askin’ about what I was thinking and I was dreaming about that first cup of coffee.” I was probably about to go on a rant, ’cause it’s always easy to get mad at him, but Pa interrupts.

“That’s why your pa’s always got you, my girl. I just ordered all the young ladies at the table Millie’s hot chocolate. I’ve always got all my girls.” He looks at the two sitting near him, our most recent additions to our family.

“You’ll learn you can count on any of us at this table. My boys may be hardheaded and put their foot in their mouths sometimes, some more often than others, but they’ll always have your back. Family is family. We’re there for each other.

Now, like I told you two last night, my brother is another story. He's burned enough bridges over the years that we don't speak, but I wouldn't stop you from tryin' to find him if you wanted to."

Brandy waits till the waitress delivers drinks and gets everyone's orders. As soon as the waitress leaves, she responds to what Pa put out there.

"We haven't decided one way or another about trying to find him. We didn't even know our legal last name was Weston till we aged out and got all our paperwork. I think we might have met him once before Mom died, but we were young. I just remember some guy who looked a little like you came over one day and said something about being out. At the time, we didn't understand what that meant. He and Mom argued, and I remembered her telling him to leave 'cause she got the two only good things he'd ever done."

Shandy must be remembering that as well. She nods then adds in, "I remember what he said when he was leaving. After she told him that bit about getting the two good things he'd ever done, he said that they're hardly the only two. Do you think he just meant Kierstie, or could we have more half-siblings?" Well shit, I hadn't really thought about that. Pa takes a sip of his coffee and leans back, in thought.

"Well, I rightly don't know. We honestly only knew about my girl, Kierstie, here, 'cause he was living near us and had only gone to jail at that time. He hadn't served any serious time yet. We still talked then and when he went away for his first sentence, her birth mom knew us and is the one that told us about her. With as much as he's been in and out of prison, it's possible, though I highly doubt he's got a relationship with any of 'em. My brother's a cold, dark soul. The last time we had a conversation, let's just say he said some things that can't be unsaid or forgotten. That was close to twenty years ago." I can tell the girls are deep in thought. Jane must be too and realizes the conversation has gotten a little deep for breakfast.

"So, ladies, I know you read 'cause Kierstie messaged me, all excited about that, but what else do you like to do? Were you interested in any of the jobs she mentioned?"

Brandy chimes in first. I think she's the more naturally outspoken one of the two.

"I always liked cooking and baking with our grandma. In high school, I worked at a deli and really liked it." Millie walks up to deliver a bunch of our food and hears this.

"Well, shit, girl, you wanna job? I need someone to help me. It would be a little waitressing, cooking, baking, and learning what all I do so I don't have to be here every day. I've got girls who are great at the waitressing part, but they can't cook to save their lives." I can tell Brandy's trying to play it cool but failing miserably.

"Seriously? But you don't know anything about me. You sure you wanna offer me the job?"

Millie looks at her and lifts an eyebrow.

"You're eatin' with two of the best people to walk on this earth. Between that and your enthusiasm about cooking, well, that's enough for me. We can get to know each other. If for some reason it don't work out, no harm, no foul. Whatcha say? Wanna start Monday morning at seven?" I think Brandy might have gone supersonic with her squeal. In her excitement, she jumps up and hugs Millie. They talk for a few minutes while we all start eating.

I notice Ror is looking at Shandy and assessing her. Maybe his quieter soul notices hers?

After a few minutes, he speaks up. "What about you, Shandy? What do you find the most interesting or like to do?" She looks over at him after taking a drink of water.

"Well, besides reading, I love to draw but that's just for fun. At the jobs I've liked, I liked filing, billing, and I know I'm weird but I've always liked taking inventory. It's like a calming thing to me to feel like I've taken stock and know that everything's in its place."

I watch as Jon and Rory are doing that communicating without talking thing that they do.

Jon speaks up, "What about a job that's mostly the filing, numbers, and inventory you like with some drawing thrown in

as well?” She looks confused, but hopeful.

She twirls her hair around her fingers and asks him, “What do you mean? How can a job have both? You’re not playin’ with me, are ya?”

That brings a chuckle out of a few of my brothers, with Max chiming in, “Some of my brothers joke around and put their feet in their mouths a lot, but Jon and Ror aren’t the ones who do that much. Jon definitely wouldn’t just create a job just ’cause. If he’s offering you one, it’s ’cause he’s thought about it.” She’s got one curl of her hair she’s winding and unwinding around her finger. Shit, that’s what everyone says I do when I’m thinking.

Jon starts telling her about the job he’s offering.

“Kierstie’s gonna need help, especially when she’s gone on maternity leave so that’s the front desk and ordering. It also includes inventory and making sure the billing is done. The other part of the idea is that we’ve done some special projects for customers—some being bikes or older cars they’ve personalized and want something designed on them. Right now, that’s not a service we can offer and our repeat customers have to go elsewhere. None of us can draw very well. Well, that’s not true. Most of us can’t draw worth crap, but the one who can doesn’t want to do that work right now. What do ya think? You can work the front desk, help Kierstie, and once we look at your drawings, we could add that to your job if we think it’s a good fit.”

Who the fuck are they talkin’ about? Maybe Shane knows. I need to remember to ask him later. I can tell Shandy is thinking.

“So, would this job be temporary and when Kierstie comes back after maternity leave, I’ll have to find something else?”

I decide to spring my decision on everyone now. “Nope. I’m not looking to come back full time at all. I’d like to work one, maybe two days a week, max. That way Ma can have her grandbaby days and I can be around adults. I don’t want our daughter in daycare, so the job would be yours. I can be flexible and even just come and work when you need a day or

two to draw. We can work out the details later, but no, this job wouldn't be temporary. It would be yours as long as you want it to be." She looks at Brandy and they do the communicating thing. I swear everyone around me can communicate without using words, Me, I just use all of them.

Shandy agrees to take the job. Conversation around the table continues as everyone finishes their food. Ma brings up the barbecue we're having this evening after the guys have church. She and Jane start discussing what they're gonna bring. I volunteer to bring my Caesar salad, as it's really the only thing that I cook that goes with the menu tonight. I look over at everyone and I can see Brandy chewing on her lip, like she wants to add to the conversation, but is a little hesitant to jump in. We do have some big voices in the family.

Before I can say anything, Ma speaks up. "Will all you hush for a second? Dear Brandy looks like she's been tryin' to say something for five minutes. She's gonna learn, in time, to just talk over y'all but we gotta give her some time for that. What were ya wanting to say, my dear?"

"Well, I was just gonna see if you guys needed help. I can help make stuff. I haven't baked anything in a long time but I can help." I can tell this makes Jane excited to have someone else to bake with. She starts talking a mile a minute about what she's thinking of baking. Brandy must be her kind of person 'cause she starts matching her with her level of excitement and speed of her words. Jon rub his temples.

"Gods help me. Not only does my woman go manic with her words at a level only dogs should be able to hear, but now I got a sister that does the same thing." I know it's a complaint coming from his mouth, but I can see the effect it has on Shandy, him calling Brandy a sister. She has a small smile on her face, like being included in that complaint showed her that they really are accepted. I don't think they really believed us when we told them our family accepts people quickly. It's hard to really comprehend that level of acceptance if you were a system kid for so long. I remember quite a few of my siblings mentioning that over the years.

We all finish up and plan to go our separate ways till tonight at the clubhouse. Jon settles the bill, not letting anyone else chip in, saying that he wanted to pay for this meal since our entire family was together for the first time. I swear he's the most sentimental yet grumpiest man ever.

Shane

Breakfast with the Westons is always entertaining, and now that I'm officially part of them, it did not disappoint. We're all about to head our separate ways and I'm helping Kierstie into the SUV when I feel a tap on my shoulder. I turn around and both Brandy and Shandy are there.

"We wanted to thank you for everything. We also wanted to tell you that after talking some with Ma and Pa, we think we've seen your brother Tyson before. We don't know where he stays or anything but have seen him around in the last couple of months. We wanted you to know that. We also wanted you to know that if you decide to go looking for him, we'd like to help since we know some of the people out there and might get more answers than you." Wow, I think my surprise is all over my face.

Shandy, finding her voice, comments, "What? You're our sister's husband. Using Weston logic, that makes both you and him our brothers, and we want you both to be happy since you brought us our family when we thought we only had each other. Seriously, Shane, we're never gonna feel like we can pay you back for that. You ever need something, your annoying younger twin sisters are here for you." I'm surprised when both of them, at the same time, give me a hug then run off to Pa's truck.

I get into the driver's seat and get us heading over to Grant's place. Kierstie reaches over to grab my hand.

"What did Grant want to show you?"

"He said he found some more of my mom's boxes we put in the attic after she passed and before I went to basic. He said he thinks it might have some of my baby stuff in there that you might wanna use."

“Hell yeah, I’d love that. Even if there isn’t but there’s stuff from when you were a kid, I’d love to see it. I really hope our baby gets your dimples and smile.” I glance over at her in disbelief.

“Gorgeous, I want her to have your smile. Your smile lights up a room and is the most beautiful one I’ve ever seen.”

“Well, maybe we’ll have to have another at some point so we can both get our way.” I squeeze her hand as I make the turn onto Grant’s street.

“Love, you know my thoughts on that. I’ll give you as many kids as you want. Let’s go see what he’s got.” I park and get out. I help my woman out of the vehicle and we walk up to the front door. I knock and open the door, calling out, “Hey, Grant! We’re here. Where you at?”

I hear rustling and the sound of voices in the kitchen. He yells back,

“In the kitchen! The boxes are in the living room. I’ll be right there!” I look over at Kierstie and I can tell she heard someone else in the kitchen too. We walk into the living room and I swear I hear the back door open and close. Less than a minute later, Grant walks into the room just as we’re sitting down on the couch. I don’t ask anything but my face must show my questioning ’cause he slightly shakes his head in the universal “don’t want to talk about it” way.

“Hey, you two. I found all these up in the attic yesterday. I went up there looking for something and had forgotten we’d put these up there. I didn’t dig too much into them, but I figured we could see if there’s stuff you want to keep.”

“Well, let’s see what’s in them. I forgot we saved some stuff. Maybe her journal is in here. I wanted to ask you about the guy I think might be my biological dad. From what I can remember, it sounded like you knew him at one point.” Grant’s eyebrows go up in surprise at that thought. We each open a box and start pulling out stuff. Kierstie gets all teary-eyed when she finds my baby blanket and my first Christmas ornament. She puts them in a pile that’s going home with us. I start a box of Tyson’s things to keep for him. There’s some

stuff that I'm not sure why we saved it and it goes in a trash pile. Grant is almost at the bottom of his box when he finds a shoebox. When he opens it, it looks like letters and papers.

"Maybe this will have the stuff you were wondering about. It's her handwriting, that much I know. Do you want to take some and we can both look at them?"

"Sure, you may be triggered to remember stuff I don't even know. I'd just kinda like to find out who my biological father is out of curiosity. Maybe 'cause Tom was such an asshole and I want to confirm everything I've found that I really don't share genes with him."

Grant tilts his head in thought while looking at me.

"You know, it doesn't really matter if you do or not. You're nothing like him. You're a good man. That's who you are at your core, no matter your genetic makeup. Your grandmother was a fucking nightmare of a person, but thankfully your grandpa showed me and your mom enough goodness, we didn't turn out horribly. Yeah, we might have had horrible tastes in partners, but I'd like to think I learned from my experiences in that arena. I also know Kierstie wouldn't have married you if she didn't believe you were a good man."

She squeezes my thigh.

"He's right. I mean, I might have gotten knocked up by someone who I didn't know their character and who they were as a person, but I damn sure wouldn't have married you if I didn't know to the depths of my soul how good a man you are." She leans and gives me a peck of a kiss and smiles at me as she gets back to going through the boxes.

Grant and I are about halfway through the letters, notes, and journals in the box when he stops.

"Holy shit. What was Gretta thinkin'?" I haven't heard him call my mom by her name in a long time.

"What did ya find? Is it something helpful?"

"Fuck yeah. I think I know who your dad is, but you're going to want to talk to Mike and Ben about him." Huh?

“Mike, you mean Jane’s dad?” He nods at me.

“Yeah. If it’s who I think it is from what Gretta wrote here, it’s someone who prospected for us, then all of a sudden, one day, just quit and left town. I remember hearing a few years after that, he joined the same MC they were in. Let me read a bit further, but I think she fucking slept with him. I also have this gut feeling that she didn’t tell him about you. If it’s who I think it is, he was a decent guy and wouldn’t have run from taking care of a kid. She met Tom during this time too, so who knows what she was thinkin’.” Kierstie pipes in with her guess. “I bet she was pregnant and scared. She probably looked at the guy who got her pregnant and the guy she thought would make her happy for a lifetime and was in love with that idea and went that way. Was it right? No. I think she must’ve known that deep down ’cause she didn’t put your stepdad’s name on your birth certificate. She could’ve completed the lie by doin’ that and given you his last name. Maybe even she couldn’t lie that much. She would’ve also known you would find her journal and letters. Sometimes we make the decisions that turn out to be a mistake, but at the time seemed like the best option. We can’t look at the past and judge someone’s decisions with hindsight. They had to make that decision with the information they had at the time. Maybe she thought Tom was the better choice at the time. You’ve said your stepdad didn’t start seriously drinking till you were about five or so, right?”

“Yeah. I guess that makes sense. Makes me even happier that you didn’t keep her from me, gorgeous.”

“It never even dawned on me. I knew you had to have the option of being in her life, even if nothing came of us. Every person has a right to decide if they are going to be a parent. If this guy is your dad and Mike and Ben know him, are you going to get in touch with him?”

“Maybe. I mean, it probably depends on what the guys say. If he’s a horrible person, I don’t want someone like that in our lives or near our daughter. If he’s still alive and a stand-up guy, then I think yeah, I wanna get in touch with him. Like you said, he may not have been given the option to be in my life at

all. If that's the case and he wants to talk, I'd be open to it. Like your pa says, you can always add more to your family. They don't replace those relationships you already have but they create their own little spot in your world."

Grant chooses this moment to chime in. "Well, look at that. You do listen to shit we say sometimes."

Rolling my eyes at him, I say, "I do when you have something important to say. Now how about we finish this stuff. We have to go to the store and I know Kierstie's gonna wanna nap before we head to the club for church." I get smacked in the arm for this.

"Hey! It's your daughter that's making me tired all the time and playing soccer with my insides."

I know better than to say anything back. We finish up the last couple of boxes and Grant tells me he'll bring my mom's journal to church tonight to see if Mike or Ben know about the man who is most likely my father. I get Kierstie home and within ten minutes, she's asleep on the couch.

A few hours later, Jon's about to wrap up church. He always opens it up at the end to anyone in the club needing to talk about things. Sometimes, someone just needs to throw some business ideas around or get feedback on an idea for something, even a new charity event or what have you. I'm ready to finish this up and go out and make sure my woman is fed and get some grub for myself. Jon, in his predictability, throws it out to anyone the same way he always does.

"That's all I got. Anyone have anything to bring to the table?"

Jackson brings up an idea to add to the Holiday Bazaar we have every year. Everyone agrees it's a good one and Jon tells Jackson to get who he needs to make it happen.

I can see he's about to adjourn the meeting when Grant speaks up. "I got somethin'. Shane and I were going through Gretta's stuff earlier and we were readin' her journal. You older guys remember that prospect we had back then? The one who up

and quit and left town without ever telling us the fuck why? I think my sister might have had something to do with it.”

Pa, Wyatt, Jackson, and Erik all mumble something about vaguely remembering him.

Rory interrupts their recollections. “Not that we don’t all love a trip down memory lane, but why does this need to be discussed in church?”

I decide to jump into the discussion since it’s about me after all.

“Cause it looks like that guy is my father. Grant also thinks that the guy might have a connection to Mike and Ben.” I can see both their eyebrows go up in surprise.

Mike asks the question that probably the whole table wants to know.

“How the fuck do we have anything to do with a former prospect of yours from like thirty years ago?”

Grant answers him, “Cause last I remember, he had become a member of your old club. You remember a member whose real name was Tripp?” I can see the second Grant says his name that both Ben and Mike’s eyes get big. I can’t control my next question.

“You did know him. Is he still alive? What kind of man was or is he? Do you think he knew about me?”

Mike stops my rapid-fire questions by putting his hand up.

“Yeah, he’s still alive. He was forcibly retired from the club around the same time we were. He’s deadly when needed, but he babysat Jane on occasion when she was little if that tells you anything about the man he is,” Ben adds to the conversation. He’s sounding like a decent guy.

“I wonder if your mom is why he’s not taken us up on our offer to come visit. Last time I talked to him, he said this place had a lot of living ghosts for him. I had no idea what he meant, but he’s the kind of guy that when he wants to share, he will and not a minute sooner.”

“Do you think he’d want to know about me or talk to me?” I feel like I’m back to being that ten-year-old, hoping he wants to know me.

Mike looks at me and something passes through his mind.

“I dunno, brother, but give Ben and I a few days to feel him out and talk to him about shit. We’ll let you know as soon as we know something.”

Jon must be getting hangry.

“That a good enough answer for now, Shane? I dunno know about you, but I can smell the food and I’m ready to eat. Anybody have anything else?”

No one says anything.

“Alright, let’s go join the rest of the family and eat. I’m fucking starvin’.” Most of the club brothers leave the room. I stay sitting, still trying to absorb everything. It only makes me wish even more that Mom was still around so I could ask her so many questions. The biggest one at the moment is why. Why did she not put his name or my stepdad’s name on the birth certificate? Why did I get her last name? Why did she not tell him about me? Because it looks like from the evidence I’ve seen, that’s exactly what she did.

I must be deep in thought cause a chair scraping next to me pulls me from my thoughts. I look up from my hands and see Ben sitting next to me. I look over at him and wait for him to say whatever it is he’s thinking. I may not know him as well as some of my other brothers, but I do know he’s like Pa and that you can’t rush him to say what’s on his mind. But when he does speak, it’s usually worth listening to.

“Mike and I both know Tripp, but he and I were closer. He didn’t mention his past much, but I can tell you right now, if he knew about you, you’d have known him. He’s a stand-up guy. Last time I talked to him, he was down near the Rogue River area. I’m thinking of taking a ride down there in the next few days and I’ll talk to him. I think this kind of shit should be talked about in person. I’ll keep you in the loop and let you

know what I find out. I have a feeling he's gonna be angry. Not at you, but your mom."

"Yeah, well, I really wish I would've known before she passed 'cause I would have asked her a lot of questions. I don't hold anything against him 'cause from everything I read, he had no idea. I can't imagine that. I would be heartbroken and on the warpath if Kierstie hadn't told me about our baby."

Ben nods and reminds me he'll keep me in the loop. He stands up and rests a hand on my shoulder.

"Let's get out there and get some food before those jackasses eat it all."

Kierstie

I see most of the guys come out of church, but Shane's not with them. I found a comfortable chair when we got here and to be honest, I don't think I can get out of it on my own. I watch most of the brothers go into the room next to the kitchen which is where we always set up the buffet when the weather doesn't let us be outside. Let's be honest, that's a good chunk of the year here in the PNW. I see everyone coming out with plates and sitting at the tables, digging into their food. I'm in the middle of trying to psych myself up to try and get out of the chair when I see Jane walk into the room with a plate. She stops and looks at me, slightly tilting her head to the side, assessing my current situation. I can tell the moment that everything clicks in her head, and her fiery side is about to be unleashed. Thank fuck not at me.

"What in the fuck is going on here? I know Ma raised all of you better than this. Bunch of heathens in this place tonight." She starts her waddle-walk over to me. Does she think she's gonna be able to help me up? That won't end well. Juan walks out of the kitchen. He must've heard Jane and now her continued mumbling.

"Fucking oblivious men here tonight. The lot of them, not one..." She keeps mumbling, but I can't make out what she's saying.

“Baby, what’s going on? Do you need something?” Jane spins around to face Juan faster than I think she could currently move.

“What I need is for just one of the men in this building to take their heads out of their asses and pay attention to things around them!” My dear brother looks like a cross between confused and a deer in the headlights.

“What are you talking about, baby?”

“I’m talking about all of you men going to get food and not noticing anything around you. How about I had to get out of my chair by myself, and the only reason I could was it was a dining chair. But, if it wasn’t bad enough that y’all walked past me, you walked past *your* sister, who any idiot would see can’t get out of that chair. Instead of helping her up, you all just worried about your own fucking stomachs and got your plates and started eating.” While she’s ranting at Juan and the others, Shane comes from down the hallway and walks up to me. Kneeling in front of me, he quietly asks, “What’s goin’ on, gorgeous? Wanna get up and go to the table? I’ll get you a plate of food.” I nod and he helps me up out of the chair.

“She’s all worked up ’cause no one came over to ask if I needed help up. I would have said something if I did. I was just waiting for you.” He looks at me like he doesn’t believe I’d ask for help. I would... okay... maybe I would. We walk over to the table where Jane’s still losing it, though now all three of my brothers are standing there, looking like deer in the headlights. I sit down in an empty chair across from Mads who looks like she’s about to burst out laughing. Shane kisses my head and tells me he’s going to get me a plate of food. I can hear Ror trying to calm Jane down. Out of the three of them, he’s the most likely to succeed.

“My love, you know if we went over there and assumed she couldn’t get up, she’d get all pissed off at us. We’re more than willing to help at any time, but we’re walking a tightrope between knowing when to ask and not assuming shit. I was planning to ask her if she wanted help after I set my plate down. I also know that Shane was still in church and she

might've been waiting for him." I can tell that last bit causes Jane to pause and bite her lip.

"Well, I just... I mean, it seemed like you all were just focused on yourselves and when I see that, I start to worry about you ignoring your sons and niece when they get here. I can't handle thinking that might happen." I see Jon grab Jane in a hug and roll his eyes at her change in emotion. She's got all the feelings right now. Luckily, I haven't been that bad. Shut up, I might be bad, but not quite on her level. I'm not. Might be 'cause she's got two in there and I just have my little girl. I can hear Jon soothing Jane about her fears and emotions. Juan comes back with a plate for her, and Ror pulls the chair out for her. I'm so glad they found her. She really does keep their asses in line.

Shane comes back with two plates. He's got both loaded with baked ziti, salad, and bread. He's also got some pasta with meatballs on his. He remembered that me and ground meat are not friends right now. I normally like it fine, but right now that's a big fat fuck no. It's just a congealed mound of nope. He gives me a bottle of water to have with dinner. Taking the seat next to me, he sits down, and leans over to me, kissing me on the cheek.

"You need anything, gorgeous?" Smiling at him, I shake my head as we dig into dinner and enjoy the rest of the evening with the family.

CHAPTER 12

Shane

All week I've been anxiously waiting to hear from Ben. I've tried not to focus on it too much, but I'm not sure how successful I've been. Ben ended up not being able to get down to visit Tripp when he thought he would. First, Tripp was out of town and then Ben had some club business to deal with. I'm trying to concentrate on this alternator I'm working on, but I've repeated the same step three times. Fuck it, I'll take a break and try this shit again. As I'm wiping my hands, I hear my phone go off with a text.

Ben: I just had a long talk with Tripp. He thinks he might be your dad, too. He's taking some time to absorb this news and is gonna reach out to you when he's ready. He's gonna plan a trip up that way in a couple of weeks. He wants to meet you in person and talk to your uncle and Jonah about some things from the past.

Me: Thank you for havin' that conversation. I'll wait for his call. Let me know when you know he's gonna come up here.

Ben: Will do, brother. Just a heads-up, he's got a lot of anger brewing right now toward your mom, and I don't see that changing anytime soon.

Me: I don't blame him and wouldn't.

It sounds like I'll get to know him a little. Even if we aren't ever close, I would just like to know who he is. Feeling a little more settled about things, I get back to work so I can finish this and start the weekend.

Kierstie

It's been almost a month since Brandy and Shandy came to live here. Brandy's definitely Millie's shadow and learning everything she can over at the diner. Shandy's been doing great over at the shop with me. She's got everything more organized than I thought it could ever be. She's got things so handled that I've cut back to three days a week the last couple

of weeks and plan to stop working completely after next week. Our little girl will be here before we know it.

It's almost quitting time and I'm getting the last of the orders in for the parts place to deliver on Monday. Shandy's working on an art piece at the table next to me. The door chime announces someone coming into the front of the shop. I look up to greet the customer who comes in when I'm rendered speechless as to who just walked in. I haven't seen him since I was eleven I think, and that time did not go well. I shoot off an emergency text to the family chat. He either hasn't seen me or doesn't recognize me yet. He's looking at the pictures of the custom jobs they've done. The shop phone rings and I answer it as calmly as I can.

"Weston and Sons Repair and Restoration, how can I help you?"

Pa's voice comes over, with a calm that I know is hiding his anger. "Has he recognized you or Shandy, my girl?"

I respond in a way so as to try and not make Abel realize I know who he is.

"No, we don't keep that part on hand. We can probably get it by next week for you." Pa is a smart man and knows what I'm trying to say.

"I'm on my way, my girl. Ry is driving like a bat out of hell and he's calling Jon to put him and the guys in the shop on alert. I don't know what his angle is, so I don't want Shane bursting in like I know he's going to want to. Just try and act like he's a normal customer and be careful."

I answer him with a customer service voice, "Well, call us back if you want us to get the part in for you." I put the phone down and I look over at Shandy. She's seen some pictures of Abel from decades ago since being here, and I can see the moment it clicks for her that she understands who's in the room with us. Neither of us saying anything is starting to border on suspicious. *Put your big girl pants on Kierstie for fuck's sake.*

"Can I help you with something, sir?"

He turns to look at me. He's about three inches shorter than Pa and much thinner, probably from years of drug use in between prison sentences. He's got an unkempt, graying beard and his hair looks like it's a few weeks overdue for a haircut. He gives me a smile that sends chills down my back.

"Why, yes. I'm here to take what's rightfully mine. I'm gonna get what I deserve. One way or another, I'm gonna get paid." He holds up a gun toward me, then he moves it toward Shandy.

"Go stand next to your sister." I can see the surprised expression on her face, and it probably mirrors mine. He follows her steps with the gun till she's standing next to me.

"Just 'cause I didn't want none of ya, doesn't mean I don't fucking know about all three of you. Why do you think the other one is currently tied up in my van outside for insurance?" Shandy takes a breath.

"That's right. I know my brother is probably on his way over here with the rest of his fucking club, all those fucking do-gooders. I had to have that insurance to make sure I get out of here alive. The one in the van does that just in case you two don't." He's insane, completely off his rocker.

I can't help the next question that comes out of my mouth.

"What the fuck do you think is here that's rightfully yours?"

He looks at me like I'm dense.

"You said it when you answered the phone. It's Weston *and* Sons. My dad started this and passed it down to both of us. I've seen how well this has done over the years and I've come for my half of the money. I deserve it, and I'm not going to let Jonah have everything that should've been fucking mine since the beginning. Since we were kids, he always got everything, and I was always left out. I deserve it all."

"Every time I see you Abel, you're more and more delusional. Dad may have started this place, but it wasn't worth anything when he signed it over to me. Me and me alone." Pa slowly but purposefully walks into the office from the shop, without his cane. I can tell he's got some of the brothers behind him. I

can't see if Shane's one of them. Abel starts shaking his head and moving the gun back and forth between me and Shandy. I can tell Pa is thinking of ways to get him to aim it at him.

"No! It was left to both of us. That's what he always said. Said that's why he put sons in the name. He never said he wouldn't give me my half. I need my half, damn it. That's the plan. I need my half for the plan. Give me my fucking half!"

Pa's studying Abel the whole time he's talking. I can also see out of the corner of my eye that Juan and Jon are both right outside the door, looking for a shot or a way to get us out.

"Fuck, Abel. Have the drugs really killed that many of your brain cells over the years? He told us that when we were kids, not even teenagers. He told us that during one of the few brief times he was sober and actually coming back home to Mom. If you want half of what I paid him for the business, I can give you five bucks. Hell, I'll give you the whole ten dollars I paid him. He was in massive debt when I took this over."

Abel starts shouting "You're a liar! This was Dad's plan, and like everything else in my life, you're ruining it!"

"You've ruined all my plans over the years! You interrupted my first plan all those years ago and ever since then, all you do is try to ruin everything I do! This is the plan. There is nothing without *the* plan. It's all about the plan."

I watch the moment that things go from bad to worse, and it dawns on him that he's got nothing to lose now. He just brought a second gun out and is moving closer to me and Shandy. Somewhere in all of this, she grabbed my hand. We both squeeze at the same time. I have a gut feeling that this might not end well for all of us, and that scares the shit out of me. I never understood the saying "trembling with fear" till this exact moment in time.

Abel

Fuck Jonah. *Fuck him.* He's been ruining my plans since we were kids. The do-gooder. The fucker even claimed three of my kids as his. They're my DNA, even if I didn't want a one of them. Stupid women not protecting themselves like they

should. They didn't go along with the plan. That's why I had to give the first one's mom those tainted drugs. She'd hidden the pregnancy from me and was trying to trap me and not let me go ahead with the plan that would've put me on easy street. Fuckin' cunt.

I was supposed to come in, wave the gun at two of my kids, get the money and go. I can't believe that our dad did me like that. Fuck him. Jonah was always his and everyone's favorite. Time for a new plan. I've got both guns pointing at the girls. The van is in the parking lot with the kid in the driver's seat. All I had to do was promise him a week's worth of his drug of choice and he was a willing driver. The other girl is in the back, tied up and probably still unconscious.

"You two are going to come outside with me. If I can't get my money one way, I'm gonna get it another." Jonah starts to move forward to me.

"Don't or I'll shoot one of them. I know your righteous self will try and get me to shoot you instead. As much pleasure as that would give me, dear brother, it's not gonna bring me any money. I need the money to keep with the plan. This is the best one I've thought of yet." I wave the gun between them.

"See, this might even be better. I can get a lot for these two on the market. Hell of a lot. One is part of a set of very young, but legal twins, and the other is obviously able to be bred and that's a whole different financial level. Yes, they can definitely get me the money I'm owed. I need the money I deserve."

Jonah, like the fucker he is, interrupts me. "Abel, you are certifiable. Nobody owes you money. I would've loved for you to run this place next to me. Instead, you chose drugs and being in and out of prison. You always choose the way with the least amount of work. Instead of earning something, you just took. You don't *deserve* shit, except maybe a return trip to prison. There's no one to blame for that but you. Now you're going to let these girls go and be on your way before someone gets hurt."

Kierstie

Watching Pa talk to Abel, I can see the moment that he's made a decision and I know I'm not going to like it. I just hope Shandy and I make it out of this alive and in one piece.

"Fuck that. I'm not leaving here empty-handed." Abel moves toward me and Shandy, keeping both guns trained on us.

"You two are going to start walking to the door and head outside. I'm going with you. No one's going to shoot me 'cause if they do, I could shoot one or both of you." Shandy and I are slowly moving to the other side of the counter. As much as I want to yell and scream at him, I know that would make things worse. I have to do whatever I can to get both Shandy and my little one to safety. Brandy too if she's actually in his van.

Shandy gets around to the front before I do and he moves the gun to the back of her head. As soon as I'm in front, he does the same to me. *Fuck*. He did it. Even if any of the guys had a shot, they wouldn't be able to take it now.

"Both of you start walking. The twin one, open the door and hold it as we all go out together. Preggo, you need to keep up with us." I can feel the barrel of the gun on the back of my head, pushing in harder than it was a moment ago. When we step outside, I can hear all the guys from the shop. Jon and Juan must have seen what was going on through the windows 'cause they have the guys pushed back a bit. I can kind of look over that way and I can see Shane. He's got his hands in his hair and is looking down. I must slow my walking 'cause Abel strongly taps me on the head with the gun.

"I told you to keep up, preggo. Get those feet moving." Shane's head pops up and I can see his glossy eyes. I mouth *I love you* to him. I really hope this isn't the last time I see him.

Shane

When I see her tell me she loves me, I lose it. I start yelling, "Kierstie, fuck! Let her go! Kierstie!" I think I yell as loudly as my voice lets me. I must have started for the van because all of a sudden, I'm being held back by a pair of arms on both sides.

Pres, from one side of me, speaks up. “Stop, brother. You rush the van and that psycho’s likely to shoot her. She wouldn’t survive a shot like that. We’ve got to go after her when there’s not a fucking gun to the back of her head.” I know he’s right, but I can’t help but feel like I’m watching my entire world, my entire reason for living, being yanked away from me. Neither Jon nor Juan let go of my arms. They’re holding me back when I see the fucker push Kierstie into the back of the van.

Juan speaks this time. “Steady, brother. We’re going to get them back.” All I can do is watch as the doors to the van close and it starts to back up. This is the first time I get a good look at the driver in the van. *What in the fuck?*

“Tyson!” I fight to be let go, needing to get in front of the van and stop them.

“That’s Tyson driving the van!” It must click for a bunch of the brothers what I’m sayin’ ’cause I start to hear a chorus of them calling out to him to stop the van. He looks over and I make eye contact with him. Maybe it’s just wishful thinking, but I think he looked conflicted when he saw me starting to chase after the van. I chase till the end of the road, knowing I can’t run and keep up with a moving vehicle. Screeching tires behind me have me moving out of the way. I see trucks and bikes all heading this way. Ry’s driving Pa’s truck.

Pa yells as the truck slows down, just enough to let me in. “Get the fuck in right now, Shane. We got to go get them!”

“Go! If we get close enough, get over to the driver’s side. Let me yell and get Tyson’s attention. I don’t think he would hurt anyone on purpose. I need to fucking try something. I can’t let her go to who knows where, to have who knows what the fuck done to her.”

Within a couple of minutes, we catch up to the van. I can tell that Tyson’s heading to the logging road that locals take to avoid going through the middle of town. It’s also not paved so he can’t go as fast as he is right now. My breath catches as I start watching the van start to swerve back and forth. He seems to correct it and gets back to driving straight for a

couple of blocks but then it gets even more violent with the swerving, as if someone is fighting the driver.

Ry voices the biggest worry at the moment. “They’re gonna fucking roll the van!”

All I can do is watch in horror as the van swerves a couple more times before barely making the turn onto the logging road. The van overcorrects on the gravel road and skids off the road, hitting the edge of the ditch, and flipping onto its roof. It skids on its roof till the front end hits a tree. I don’t even think I wait for the truck to stop before I’m out and running to the van. I hear all sorts of voices around me. Someone shouts to call an ambulance. I’m first to the back doors and I yank them open. All of them in the back are unconscious. I feel Kierstie’s neck and I can tell she’s breathing, but at a strange angle in the back of the van, half on top of one of the twins. Ry and Logan are both next to me within seconds and check both Shandy and Brandy. They’re both breathing. I go to pull Kierstie out but Logan stops me.

“We don’t know the extent of her injuries. Moving her could hurt her worse. If any of them have potential spinal injuries, we could do permanent damage. We need to wait to move any of them till the paramedics get here.” I know he has medical knowledge, but I just want her out. Jon walks around from the front of the van.

“Abel’s dead. I think Tyson shot him. Tyson’s breathing but I think he’s hurt pretty bad. How many ambulances did we call for?”

Someone answers him, but I can’t concentrate on anything but Kierstie, willing her to be okay, our little one too. This can’t be the end of our story. It’s barely just begun.

In what has to be just a few minutes later but feels like an eternity, I hear a chorus of sirens heading in our direction. Within a minute, multiple ambulances and police vehicles show up on scene. Logan takes the lead, talking to the paramedics about his initial assessment of all the individuals involved. One set of paramedics come up to me.

“This your wife, sir?” I nod and inform him of how far along she is with her pregnancy. They make quick work of putting a collar on her and getting her out of the van. When they get her on the stretcher, I see the blood. She’s bleeding vaginally. Both paramedics see this and move even faster if it’s possible. I tell them I’m going with them. Neither of them argue about that, and that worries me even more.

We take off toward the hospital with the sirens blaring. The paramedic who’s back here working on her tells me to talk to her, let her know I’m there. I bend over to get closer to her face.

“Gorgeous, I’m right here. I’m gonna be by your side till you come home. You need to wake up and be okay. I need to see your eyes, your smile and feel your kiss. Love, you’re my world and I need my world to come back to me. I love you and will love you till I take my last breath.” I kiss her hand I’m holding and each of the fingers individually. We pull into the hospital parking lot and a flurry of nurses and doctors come out and whisk her into the emergency room, with me trying to follow. A nurse who reminds me of Pres stops me.

“Sir, you can’t go back there just yet.”

I look at him and beg my case.

“That’s my wife, and she’s pregnant with our baby. She’s alone and—”

“I didn’t say you couldn’t go back there in a few minutes. Give the doctors a chance for the initial assessment of her and the baby. As soon as they do that, I promise I will come get you and bring you back to her.” I nod and go over to the chairs and take a seat. Looking at my hands, I try to scrape some of the dried blood off them. I’m not sure what made me look up, but I see the whole family walking through the doors. I see Pa going up to the desk, most likely to ask about everyone. I try to distract myself with my hands again when someone sits down next to me. I look over and see it’s Grant.

“She’s gonna be okay. She’s too stubborn not to be. I heard Tyson was the driver.” I nod my head.

“Also heard they think he shot Abel. Makes you wonder if when he realized who was in the van, his conscience got the better of him. Heard he’s pretty banged up.”

“I honestly don’t have a clue. I’ve been focused on Kierstie and the baby. As soon as I see the nurse again, he’s gonna let me back with her.”

Grant gives me a one-armed hug.

“You worry about her, and I’ll check on Tyson.” We wait for what feels like forever, but probably is only about twenty minutes. I see the nurse I spoke with earlier come out from the doors to the ER. I stand up and go over to him.

“Can I go see my wife now?” He shakes his head but puts his hand up as I’m about to start talking.

“She’s awake but her water broke and the baby is in some distress. We’re taking her up to have a C-section as we speak. You need to get up to the fourth floor. Go to the desk, tell them who you are. They’ll get you outfitted and take you into the surgery room as soon as they can so you can be with your wife as your baby is born.” I look over at the family and know she’d want her parents up there, if not in the room too. Ma comes over and hugs me.

“You go, son. We’ll be up to that waiting room just as soon as we find out about everyone else. Go make me an Amma.”

I take off in the direction of the elevators. Thankfully, one is open when I get there. I get in and will the thing to move as fast as possible. As soon as it opens on the floor, I get out and practically run to the desk area. An older nurse looks up at me with a kind smile.

“How can I help you, young man?”

“I was told to come up here from the ER ’cause my wife is about to go into an emergency C-section. Her name’s Kierstie Brock.” I see the nurse’s eyes go up at her name and she quickly gets up and comes around the desk.

“Let’s get you dressed and ready. They should be ready for surgery in just a few minutes.” I follow her and she grabs everything I need and tells me what to do and that she’ll come

get me in a minute. I also tell her that our family should be up soon and she informs me that they've got a good-sized waiting room. I quickly put on the scrubs, bootie things, face mask, and cap thing they gave me. I stand there waiting, almost not breathing, needing to see my heart. My whole world is in that room. I keep trying to tell myself that she's okay, and the baby is going to be okay. My whole body feels completely unsettled. It feels like forever until the nurse comes back in.

"Let's get you to your wife. You two are about to become parents. They're going to have you sit on her left side. They think her right wrist was broken in the accident but aren't going to do x-rays until after the C-section. Listen to the nurses and you'll do just fine, son." She leads me to a door and takes me inside. She points to a stool that's up near Kierstie's head.

"Go sit there and hold your wife's hand. You can touch her head or her forehead too but nothing else." I nod and move to the stool in barely a couple of steps.

I grab her hand and find my voice.

"Hey, gorgeous." She turns her head and looks at me. My soul settles a little with the smile she gives me.

I squeeze her hand as she speaks, her voice washing over me.

"Hey, you. Guess we're about to become parents in the next few minutes."

"Looks like it, gorgeous. No time like the present, right?" I can't help but hold her hand with both of mine, using it like an anchor to keep me from losing my shit. The nurses are moving around, getting things ready. The door opens and a scrubbed-up Dr. Hargrave comes in.

"Well, hello, you two. I know this wasn't the way we planned to meet your daughter, but we are going to take care of her and you, Mom. Dad, just so you know, when we get your daughter out, she's going to be moved over to the bed over there. We have a neonatologist coming in here in just a moment. He's going to examine her to make sure everything's good since her arrival is a bit unexpected and was brought on by some

traumatic events. Once she's out and everything looks good for her and Mom, we're going to take Mom over to x-ray to confirm a broken hand and get that taken care of. They may not cast it right then since she's gonna still be coming out of recovery, but let's deal with the most important thing right now. Let's get your daughter out of distress and into this world." I look at Kierstie and she nods at me.

"Let's do this, Doc. I'm ready to be able to hold both my girls."

She tells me I can look at a certain point, but I elect to stay next to my woman and see everything from there. I think I might have enough scars from today. Seeing her organs and insides will be too much. I'm man enough to admit that, at least to myself, if not out loud.

Dr. Hargrave starts doing things on the other side of the curtain. Within a couple of minutes, she asks Kierstie if she can feel a couple of different things. When Kierstie tells her no every time, the doctor tells the room that it's go time. I can hear the doctor and her nurses talking, most of it in jargon that I won't even try to understand. I look at my woman and brush her hair out of her face so she can see everything when the moment comes.

Just a minute later, I hear Dr. Hargrave say, "Here she comes, family. Your daughter is here."

I look over the top of the fabric they have between Kierstie's head and the rest of her body. She lifts my little girl up. In this very second, my being comes into focus. This. This family is my lottery. This family is my meaning. I lean in and kiss Kierstie through the mask. The nurse brings our girl around so Kierstie can see her. As she does, our girl lets us know she's got some lungs on her and starts crying, very loudly. I am man enough to admit that the tears flow freely at that moment. Looking at my wife, I can't help but state the obvious.

"Well, she's got your lungs, Mama." Kierstie's crying but laughing through it as she nods at my observation.

My woman then speaks up through her tears. "Are we still good with the name? The way I suggested it?" I look back at

her after looking over at what they're doing to my daughter.

"If you're sure you want it that way, I'm fine with either way, my love."

"I want it that way. Someone is going to name a boy after him and I don't want her teased about it. I think this is supposed to be her name." I kiss her hands, again through the mask.

She then gives me an order, probably the first of countless. "Go with her, Shane. I'm good and she needs someone to watch out for her. I'll be in recovery in a while." One of the nurses comes up and agrees with my woman. I squeeze her hand one more time and tell her I love her. I follow the nurse and wipe the tears from my face as she leads me over to my daughter.

My daughter. I still can't believe it. The doctor who's with her looks up when the nurse introduces us.

"Your daughter is strong. She's wasn't born what I would consider to be very early which is a big plus for her. Her lungs look good and I can't see any injuries that she has from the accident. We'll get her cleaned up and ready for you, and then we can get you settled in with her in the nursery. If you want to go tell your family and come back in about five minutes, we'll be ready to take you both to the nursery." The same nurse who led me to the room is right outside when I come out. She has me take off the scrub things I wore into the room, telling me I probably won't need them in the part of the nursery she'll be going to.

"You've got a room full of people waitin' on news, young man. Here's a card with all her information so you can tell them. You have a name picked out so I can tell the nurse who's getting her spot ready?" I share her name and head out to the family, *our* family.

Walking through the doors to the waiting room, I see not just Ma and Pa, but Grant, Mads, Jon, Rory, Juan, Jane, and a few other brothers and family. Ma sees me first and hops up from her chair.

“How’s my girl? How’s the baby?” I smile at her excitement. My girls are both so loved already.

“Mama and baby are both doing well. The surgery went well. They’re taking Kierstie to x-ray on the way to recovery as they think her wrist is broken, but everything else looks good. They’re probably both going to stay in the hospital a couple of days to make sure no problems come up. Baby girl is seven pounds even and nineteen inches long. Her lungs are already powerful and she’s got a good cry like her mama.” I pause to look at the two men who’ve had the greatest impact on our lives.

“We named her after two very important people, her papa and her godfather. Her name is Grace Jona.”

I’m immediately engulfed in a hug from Pa.

“I knew you were right for my girl a long time ago. You honor me, son.” He slaps me on the back and I can tell he’s being elbowed to move.

“Let me in, you hog!” Grant envelops me in a bear hug. He tells me in a voice low enough that no one else can hear, “Your mom would be proud of you. I’m proud of you and honored you included me at all in this. Love you, boy.” He gives me another hug while trying to get his emotions in check. Ma comes up and hugs me, and I see the nurse nod so I ask her to come with me. With tears in her eyes, she grabs my arm.

“Take me to my grandbaby.” We both follow the nurse through the doors that lead to the nursery and my Gracie girl.

The nurse speaks up when we get close. “I’ve checked with the doctor and he’s given the clear for her to be held with no problems. So, Dad, when you get in there, take off your shirt so she can feel you skin to skin.” I nod, remembering I read that in a couple of the baby books. I can’t believe I’m about to hold my daughter. I never even imagined I would have a family of my own, and now I’ve got the most amazing wife and the most perfect little girl. If you had told the me who struggled through boot camp and never quite found my place in the military that all I ever wanted was just here the whole

time, I would've called you fucking certifiable and probably a few other choice phrases.

The nurse leads Ma and I through the nursery, passing numerous bassinets, some with babies but many empty. She leads us over to a bassinet that has a rocking chair next to it. The nurse tells me to take my shirt off and have a seat. She adds, "Once your wife is out of recovery, we'll bring Grace in her bassinet down to her room so you two can have some family time and bring in some other family to meet her."

She reaches into the bassinet and carefully picks up my girl. She comes over to me and ever so gently places Grace into my arms. The moment I look into her eyes, I'm gone. She's got eyes just like her mama and is the most beautiful baby in the world. I try to contain my tears, only so they don't fall on her. I look over her, touching each tiny finger, till she grabs onto my finger with her tiny little hand. I quietly make my promise to her. "I'll always be there for you. I'll be there in the good times and the times that are hard. You'll never question my love." I look over every inch of her face and continue, "You can be whatever you want and that the only expectation I'll ever put on you is that you try and do the right thing as much as possible and find your joy in life, whatever that is." She starts to fuss a little, so while supporting her head like I've been told, I move her to lay against my chest and slowly rub her back.

Sniffles get my attention and I look up at Ma. She's been recording and taking pics probably the whole time. She gives me a teary-eyed smile.

"Kierstie told me that you've been singing to her since you found out she was pregnant. Sing that same song to her. They say that babies can hear while in the womb." So I do, but I'm not sure if she really recognizes my voice. She does stop fussing. I'm not really sure why I started singing the old John Waite song the first time, but since then, it's been kind of a promise to her that if she has faith in me, I'll be there. I'm gonna have a learning curve at this whole dad thing, but I'll put everything into it.

I don't know how long I sit with her on my chest, but after a while, the nurse comes in and lets us know that Kierstie is getting into her own room shortly and we can go down there. Ma says she'll hold Grace after her mama does. The nurse has me put Grace back in the bassinet, citing hospital policy, and tells us she'll bring her down in just a few minutes. She gives us Kierstie's room number. I get my shirt back on, kiss Grace on the forehead, and go with Ma to find Kierstie's room.

CHAPTER 13

Kierstie

I start coming out of this groggy-feeling state and the first thing I remember is our little girl is here. I remember the doctor saying she looks healthy and doesn't seem to have any injuries or anything from the crash. I also feel my right arm is heavy and I see they put a cast on it, confirming that it's broken. I can't believe everything that's happened in the last few hours. I don't even know how everyone else is after the crash.

Ma interrupts my thoughts. "There's my beautiful girl." She comes over to one side of the bed and gives me a kiss on the cheek and starts fussing with my hair, the pillows, and the blankets on the bed, trying to get things just right for me. I look at the door and the sexiest man is leaning against the doorframe. He's got a huge smile on his face. He moves toward the bed.

"Hey, gorgeous. How are you feeling?" He leans down and gives me a soft and tender kiss, that's full of love.

"I'm doing better than I was. Where's our girl? Did you hold her?"

He kisses my forehead and answers, "The nurse is going to bring her here in just a minute. I did hold her for a while. Gorgeous, she's got your eyes, and the tiniest fingers I've ever seen. She's perfect." As he's describing her, I can't help but start crying. They're happy tears, I think. I just can't believe she's here already. Wiping my tears away, I look over and a nurse is pushing a bassinet into the room. This is it. I've waited forever for this moment. My path to becoming a mom might not have been the way I thought it was going to be, but I wouldn't have changed it for the world, well, except for the hour before she was born. That I could've fucking done without. The nurse picks up Grace with delicate care.

"Alright, Mama, it's your turn to hold your beautiful girl." She places her in my arms and when I move the blanket to see her face, my purpose is staring back at me. She's the reason I was

put on this earth, just so I could be her mama. I don't know how long I spend looking at her and talking to her. I can't help but sing a little to her as I rock her in my arms. I start to sing the only song that comes to mind.

"Someday I'll wish upon a star..." She's gonna have a love of musicals from the start. This girl is going to understand the reason why there was trouble in River City, and why there ain't nothin' like a dame. She's gonna get why Sandra Dee was Hopelessly Devoted and the reason Michelle Pfeiffer singing a Cool Rider is the best song ever.

She starts to fuss after a bit, and both the nurse and Ma help me get her in a position to try to breastfeed. With my cast, it's a bit tricky, but luckily, my Grace is amazing and starts latching on right away. When she seems to be done, Ma offers to burp her since I'm still trying to figure shit-er stuff out with my arm. I look over and see Ma and how she's already an amazing Amma. I turn my head and realize Shane's not in the room.

"Where'd Shane go?" Ma looks up from Grace.

"My girl, he told you when he left. He went to go find out about everyone else that was in the accident. He'll be back in just a couple of minutes. He knew you'd ask about everyone as soon as you settled. He left once you handed her over. I think he didn't want to miss a second of you with her for anything."

"He's amazing. He's been there every step of the way. He got me all of my cravings, went to every appointment, and read every book."

Ma sets a sleeping Grace down in her bassinet and comes over to the side of my bed. She adjusts my pillows and looks at me.

"I can remember the day you were born. You looked at me that first time and I knew that I was meant to be in your life. You're the one who made me a mom and to think, I get to see you adapt to being a mom. You love so fiercely and completely, my girl. Grace is going to grow up with so much love and support. She's gonna do great." I nod in agreement.

“Yeah and we’ve already talked about it and I hope to have more eventually and—” Before I can finish my sentence this wave of emotion, full of doubt and fear, hits me and the tears start pouring out.

“How am I going to keep him and be a good wife when I can’t do anything with a broken arm, and I’m going to have a huge scar? I can’t even take care of our daughter alone right now. He’s gonna leave me!” I’m surprised Ma isn’t looking at me like I’m off my rocker ’cause that’s what it feels like. I can’t stop the words that spew out as another wave of tears fall down my face.

“Shane’s gonna take Grace and leave me to be a sad pathetic crying mess that’ll end up an old, withered lady with thirty-five cats! He’s gonna see the crazy in me and run for the hills!” Ma grabs me to her chest, wrapping me in her arms. I put my head on her shoulder, where my tears start to land. I don’t know how long I cry or continue to mumble completely outlandish, but very real fears. I know at one point I said I was worried that my kids would hate me for having ugly handwriting. I mean, I know deep down that’s ridiculous, but it’s in the list of fears I currently have running rampant in my head. Ma must have decided she’s let me cry and carry on for long enough, because she pulls me from her chest and bends to look me in the eye, very closely, and kind of shakes me out of my rant.

“Kierstie. Look at me. Now.” Ma uses the voice that you know means something serious. I look at her through my tears.

“Your body has just been through two different traumatic experiences. The first being kidnapped by your sperm donor and in a bad car accident. Then less than an hour later, your body was cut open, organs moved around and your daughter was pulled from your body. All of that has your hormones all out of whack. That’s to be expected. You’re going to have emotions that hit you out of nowhere, but you need to try and remember underneath all of that, me and the rest of your family are here for you. That boy you married would do *anything* for you. He’s gonna drive you crazy on occasion, but he loves you and Grace more than life itself. He’s gonna freak

out the first time you lose your shit like you just did, so I'll expect a call from him about that. You are going to get through this and he's gonna be there every step of the way. Your pa and I will be back up for any help either of you need."

I lean back and wipe the last of my tears away. I must have been distracted by Ma cause I didn't hear anyone coming into the room.

"Gorgeous, what's going on? You okay? Is Grace? I was tryin' to be back faster than this but got held up by a doctor." He moves over to my side, opposite of Ma, and looks at me with a worried look. Gotta love this man.

"I'm okay. I was just having a good cry. Ma says it's normal, but I had my first post-baby meltdown." Shane kisses my forehead and looks at me for a second, like he's trying to read if I'm really okay. At this moment, I am. I'm not stupid enough to say anything about the next moment at this point.

"Did you find out about everyone else? How bad were they all hurt?" Ma asks Shane the question I want the answer to as well.

"Brandy's got a concussion, though they think that might be from when Abel grabbed her from the parking lot of the diner and threw her into the van. She's also got a broken femur, which is going to take a long time to heal. She's in surgery right now, but most likely will have to have at least one or two more to make sure it's healing correctly. She's gonna be down for months with it. Millie said she's going to help her and Jameson is waitin' with his mom for her to get out of surgery.

"Shandy's got a couple of cracked ribs. She's got a compound fracture in one wrist and the other has a sprain, but should heal quickly. She just got out of surgery for the fracture and Anna is in there with her along with a couple of brothers so she's not alone when she wakes up."

I ask him who's in the room besides Anna.

"Saxon and Samson both insisted on watching over her." I must raise my eyebrows at that 'cause Shane shrugs his shoulders at my reaction. *Interesting.*

Ma interrupts my thinking by asking Shane, “What about Tyson?”

“Well, he’s got broken ribs, a broken foot and is starting to detox. He’s not doing great at the moment. I think he’s looking at either doin’ some time for his part in the kidnapping or he’s going to have to agree to an extensive stint in an in-patient rehab facility. Grant and I were in there when the doctors came to talk to him. Grant and Pa were in there when I left.”

He’s mentioned everyone but the man whose action has everyone in the hospital.

“What about Abel?”

Pa walks in, using his cane and answers me with anger in his voice. “My fucking idiot of a brother is no longer alive. He’s started his time with Hel and she’s gonna be the longest relationship he ever managed.” He comes over and gives me a kiss on the cheek.

“You aren’t sad that he’s gone, Pa?” Pa sits in the chair that Shane brought over for him, noticing he was leaning on his cane a bit more than usual.

“Fuck no. The brother I knew and loved was gone long ago. The man I saw today? That’s years of drug use and mental unbalance. There wasn’t any coming back from that. Plus, he tried to harm you and my grandbaby and nieces. For that reason alone, he needed to meet Hel.”

I tell them what I remember once we were all in the van. I tell them about Tyson asking who I was to Shane and his surprise when I said his wife and that I was pregnant with his daughter.

“It was like something clicked in him. He told Abel that this wasn’t what he signed up for and he wasn’t gonna hurt his brother. That’s when he told Abel he was gonna pull over and let me out. Abel started yelling and fighting with him, trying to grab the wheel. I know they were fighting for a few minutes, and the last thing I remember is a gunshot going off as we rolled.”

Shane speaks up for the first time in a bit. Looking in his eyes, I realize just how scared he was when we were in that van.

“We had no clue what was going on. Every swerve, every turn, it was like my heart stopped, knowing you and Grace were in danger and there was nothing I could do about it. It’s a good thing he’s dead, ’cause if he wasn’t, I would have sent him to meet Hel, very, very slowly.”

I think that’s enough rehashing, plus I feel if we talk about it anymore, my tears are gonna come back and I don’t feel like crying again just yet. I hear my girl Gracie starting to stir a little.

“Pa, your granddaughter is waitin’ to meet you. Wanna hold her?” I see Ma over at the bassinet and watch her pick her up to bring her to Pa. Something settles in me and reminds me that just because I found love in a roundabout way, doesn’t mean it wasn’t the way I was supposed to all along. I think there’s some circularity to my being the one to make Ma and Pa parents for the first time and my little girl being the first to make them a Papa and Amma.

“Linnea, bring me my Grace.” I can see Ma smiling at Pa as she bends down to hand her over.

“My dear, you have the same eyes as your mama did the day she was born. That tells me you’re going to be a beautiful soul. They also tell me that me and your dad are gonna have our hands full.” We all chuckle at that with Shane starting to say she’s not going to date till she’s thirty or some such nonsense.

“Thirty? She’ll be lucky if it’s that early. She’s gonna have to bring any boy who’s interested to meet her god-uncles before anything can happen,” Saxon declares as he walks into the room followed by Shane, Grant, Mads, and all of my brothers.

Kierstie looks at Saxon questioningly. “What the fuck do you mean god-uncles?” Saxon looks around like it should be obvious to all of us.

“Well, Dad is her godfather. That makes us more than just cousins, so it’s like uncles, but god-uncles.” He’s getting weird looks from everyone. I look at Mads and she must’ve thought of somethin’ ’cause she’s got a grin she’s trying to hide.

Looking at Saxon, she corrects him. “Well, technically since he’s Grace’s godfather, that makes you more like god-brothers than anything else, but that’s not really a thing. You’re her first cousin once removed, technically.” Saxon starts arguing with Mads. Most people would look at that and be annoyed, but I see it as Mads fully coming back to herself, a little bit more every day. Juan pushes past them and goes over to Pa.

“Hey, Pa, you’re hoggin’ her. Let me hold her. She’s gotta get introduced to her favorite uncle.” Pa looks at Juan like he’s nuts.

“Son, you ain’t touching her till you wash your hands and I know they’re clean.” Juan goes to the sink to wash his hands, and Rory comes up and gives me a hug and bumps his forehead to mine like we did as kids. He looks down at me, ’cause the ass is too tall for his own good. Only Pa and Jon are taller.

“You did good, Sis. She’s beautiful. Really glad you’re okay. I think we would’ve had to hog tie your man there if you hadn’t been.”

“You mean like how you were when Jane was kidnapped?” He shrugs as if not wanting to admit just how right I am. Jon elbows in next to him to give me a hug and he gives me a kiss on the cheek.

“We all just wanted to come see you and Grace before visiting hours are over. We’ve got someone staying all night with Brandy and Shandy. There are officers with Tyson. They won’t let anyone stay overnight. I’m gonna go over to your place in the morning with Ma and Mads to make sure things are ready for you guys to bring my niece home since you weren’t quite expecting her arrival today. When we come back tomorrow, I’m gonna get my chance to hold her. So, Pa, get your time in now.” Jon squeezes my good hand and tells everyone it’s time to leave us alone. Everyone says their goodbyes and all that are left are Ma, Pa, Mads, and Grant.

Mads is next to Pa and looking at Grace. She adjusts the blanket that she’s wrapped in and walks over to me.

“I’m off, but after I get to your place in the morning to get everything situated, I’m gonna spend the day with Shandy and Brandy. I’m gonna grab their Kindles and load them up with audible books so they can zone but have something to listen to. Ma and I will bring you all some real food tomorrow.” She gives me and Shane a hug goodbye. He looked surprised when she went over to him and hugged him. She must’ve said something to him ’cause he gave her a hug and said somethin’ quietly back. I love how he’s embraced her as a sister and has gotten used to her stopping by all the time.

Grant gets up and walks over to Pa, standing in front of him with his hands on his hips.

“I know you damn well saw my old ass go and wash my hands, so you best share her with me, brother.” Pa grumbles under his breath a little, but hands her over. Ma and Pa then take their leave, promising to be back tomorrow to check in on everyone.

“You two have done good. She’s amazing.” Grant stands up and brings her over to me.

“I’ll be back sometime tomorrow and, Shane, I’ll bring you some clothes. You, little one, get to spend some time with your mommy and daddy. Just know, my door will always be open for you, so when you get mad at them and want to run away, you come to me. I have a feeling you’re going to have your mom’s passion and your dad’s stubbornness all wrapped up into a beautiful little package. You have a strong name and I’m sure you’ll wear it well, little one.”

He puts her into my arms, squeezes my arm, and nods to Shane in goodbye. Once he’s out of the room, I look at my husband and I can’t help but smile. He comes over to my side and gives me a kiss and touches his forehead to mine, looking down at our little one.

“This is our family, gorgeous. You, me, and our little girl. This is everything.” I move to kiss him, wanting that connection again.

“It is everything.” Grace decides to go from sleeping to wailing in point-two milliseconds. Shane helps me to move

her in a way that I can breastfeed her. She latches on right away and starts nursing. I lean my head against Shane's chest. This feeling of peace comes over me. I know I need to appreciate this, 'cause it won't last long. Not with a little one with my lungs. Heaven help my ears.

It's hard to believe it's been twenty-four hours since Shane and I began our first night as parents. Since then, Grace has shown us at least five or six different levels of fits, and I think I've lost it at least that many times. Who am I kidding? It's more like double that. Shane and Ma have both been amazing and beyond helpful since I'm trying to basically do everything one-handed. My cast is on my dominant hand and using it is a challenge to put it mildly.

The doctors are saying that Grace and I will get to go home in the morning. I'm ready to be home. I may not be moving great, but I want to be out of this hospital, and I want our girl home too. She's currently in the nursery as I just got back from getting some tests done. I had Shane go with her so she wasn't alone. The nurse who came back with me told me she'd let them know I was back in my room. Grace was supposed to have a few last tests run as well. The doctor wants to confirm nothing came up since she was born under duress, and he didn't want to miss any injuries or issues that might not have shown at her birth.

This is the first moment I've been all alone since before she was born. Silence is an amazing thing. Sitting here, enjoying the quiet that I know is soon to disappear, I hear familiar voices in the hall outside my room. I hear an angry voice ask someone a question.

"Why the fuck did you take his card and say you'll call him? He was askin' you out. What the fuck is *that* about?"

"It's about me not bein' someone's dirty little secret. I deserve more than that. As much as it hurts, I realize I don't think you can or are ready to give me more." *Ohhhh. Is that who I think it is?*

“Fuck that. *You are mine*. I’m not going to stand aside as Mister-tall-dark-and-nursey gets to see what’s mine. I’ll tell my—” My eavesdropping is interrupted by my phone ringing.

Ma asks me what I want for dinner and which clothes to come home in. By the time we’re off the phone, I can’t hear anyone outside the room, but holy crap! If that other voice is who I think it is, that’s a shock, but it’s awesome.

Shane comes walking in the door a few minutes later, but without Grace.

“The nurse was doing her last checks and going to bring her back here in just a couple of minutes. I wanted to check on you too, gorgeous.”

“All my tests came back fine. I’m good to go home in the morning as of now.” He kisses my cheek as the door opens all the way and the nurse brings Grace back to us. She’s sound asleep, so the nurse sets her in her bassinet and quietly leaves the room. Shane’s lying down on the cot he kind of slept in last night.

We must both doze off for a bit ’cause I’m woken up by a light knock on the door. I see Logan standing in the doorway.

“Hey, umm, Pres asked me to look at everyone’s chart to make sure I don’t think more tests need to be done or that there’s something they haven’t explained to you. I want my patch as much as the next guy, but I’m not gonna invade your privacy without asking. I just came from the girls’ rooms.” I can tell he’s not that comfortable asking me this. I smile at him and wave him into the room.

“That’s fine, I don’t have anything to hide and I would be happy for you to make sure you don’t think they’ve missed anything.” He checks over my chart and says everything looks just like it should.

“Well, I’m off to check one more chart then I gotta get to Jane’s ’cause apparently I’m withering away without cookies. She’s demanding to feed me. I don’t tend to argue with my sister much, and I definitely don’t when she’s pregnant. See y’all later. Call if you need something.”

Shane surprises me by being awake. He starts talking quietly while lying face down on his pillow.

“That’s a guy with a troubled heart.” *Does he know?*

“Do you know something? What made you say that?” He sits up and looks at me.

“What do you know?” Oh no, I’m not going to give in with what I know first.

“I might know something, but it might be nothing.” I look at him as he tilts his head at me.

“Is what you know, which I think I might know, involve someone we’ve both known for decades?” Oh, I think he might know, maybe.

“You do know! You know, Mister, we’re married. I think that means you’re contractually obligated to tell me what you know. You know, the whole ‘no secrets’ thing.” He looks at me with that look that tells me he knows I’m stretching things.

“Gorgeous, I love you with all that I am, but that line is a crock of horse shit and you know it. Even if we both know what we think we know, everyone has to deal with things in their own way and in their own time. It’s not our place to share someone else’s issues of the heart.”

“Well, damn. I don’t know how to handle you being all reasonable and logical like that.” He chuckles.

“I don’t have many answers about life, my love, but the one thing I know is real love is very complicated until you figure out that the person is really yours. Once you do, it’s simple. It’s in that complication that you realize that love is a verb and not a noun. In order to let it grow, you have to work at it, and once you do, you love that person with all that you have and are, for the rest of your life.” I look at him, all disheveled and still sexy as sin.

“Babe, you may say you’re bad with words, but you are a lot wiser than you know.” Instead of an answer, light snoring fills the air. Only my man would say something so philosophical one moment and be asleep the next second. I guess maybe I

should try to nap since they say I should try to nap when Grace does if possible.

CHAPTER 14

Shane

We've been home from the hospital for almost three weeks now. Thankfully, after the first week, Grace decided that being up all hours of the night was for the birds and she's slept at least four hours in a row every night since. She's good to her daddy. I need all the sleep I can get to try and maneuver the hormonal up and downs that Kierstie's been having. I don't hold them against her at all since I know her body's been through the ringer. I just wish there was a manual to help me know what to say or do at any given moment.

Yesterday, for example, I went and got her the food from the diner she wanted and when I walked in the door and said hi, she burst out crying saying she was asking too much of me. Pa, Grant, Wyatt, and Jackson all have told me I just gotta ride it out and be there for her as much as I can. Ma assured me that this doesn't last forever and that each day should get a little easier. I'm glad to see she's physically feeling a bit better and moving around more. Her cast doesn't seem to stop her from doing things either. Right now, she's taking a nap while my Gracie and I are doing our daily ritual of laundry, folding clothes, and having a cup of coffee and bottle on the back porch. It's our time to chat and discuss world affairs. Kierstie pumps often so I can get up and do some of the nighttime feedings and let her sleep. Luckily, our girl isn't fussy about whether her meal comes from her mom or a bottle.

I'm about to take her out of her bouncy seat to go out to the porch and sit in the rocking chair, where we discuss the most important things, when my phone dings with an incoming text.

Pres: I know you've missed the last few weeks of church and that's fine, but you need to come tonight. Before you argue, I've got Ma, Mads, Nicky, and Jane coming over with dinner and to visit.

Fucker knew I would argue about leaving Kierstie alone that long.

Me: Fine, but you get to tell her that. She might react better to you sayin' it today. I said hi yesterday and it brought out the tears.

Pres: LOL! Are you scared of my sister?

Me: With her hormonal surges going on? Abso-fucking-lutely I am. You just wait, my friend. Your time is coming up almost any day now.

Pres: I know it and can't wait. Fine. I'll text her and tell her Ma is bringing some of Anna's lasagna and garlic bread. Before you ask, she's made some for us after church too.

Me: You must want every brother there if you're pulling out the big guns of her lasagna.

Pres: For once, she offered and I'm smart enough to never turn that shit down.

Me: LOL, you can be smart like that sometimes. See you tonight.

Pres: Yep

I put my phone in my pocket, pour my coffee, and grab Grace's bottle out of the warmer. Fuck, I'm still not great at remembering I've only got two hands and am not going to carry Grace in the same hand as my cup of coffee. Looking outside, I see it's about to storm so she shouldn't be outside anyway. I put my coffee and her bottle on the coffee table in the living room before I get her out of her bouncy chair. I get her out and situated on my lap with her bottle.

“Now, my Gracie girl, I know this isn't our normal afternoon spot, but needs must, so we'll just chat here today on the couch. You see this couch we're sitting on? It's comfortable and a great napping couch. I thought so when I bought it. It's been a good couch, but like the rest of this place, it never quite felt like home. Then when your mama moved in, she added these blankets and other little things around the house that made it a home. She did that. Your mama is an amazing woman, and she loves us both which makes us both so very lucky. Hopefully, someday, we can expand that love with a brother or sister for you, but for now, you'll rule the roost.

Now, I was tryin' to decide what today's topic would be, but I was thinking I would tell you a little about your grandma Gretta. She may not have been the best mom, but I know she tried her best. Hell, maybe that was the greatest lesson she taught me. Always try your best. You might not win or be the best, but if you tried your hardest, you can be proud of what you did. I think your grandma Gretta wanted to give us more, but looking back, I think she was trapped by some lies she told and didn't know how to undo them. It really makes what my grandpa said ring true. He said that you should always tell the truth, but you needn't always be telling it. That means you shouldn't lie, but also that sometimes, you don't share everything you know. I know your mama gets that too." I add that part in since I can tell she's standing in the doorway. I move Grace to burp her as she just finished her bottle.

"It's a good thing I love you and that you're the sexiest man when you're taking care of our girl, otherwise, I might be pissed at your insinuation." She walks over, gives me a kiss, and grabs the empty bottle and my mug to take to the kitchen.

"I hear we don't have to worry about dinner tonight and that you've been summoned to church. I think being with Jane has made my brother a little smarter. He led with the food and people coming over and then told me he was taking you away for the night."

Grace lets out a good burp and once again I'm thankful Ma insisted we have a crap ton of burp cloths. Kierstie comes and gets her from me.

"It's not the whole night, gorgeous. I plan to be back shortly after church is over." She looks at me over Grace's head.

"No. You're going to have a few beers and enjoy dinner and the evening with your brothers 'cause we're going to be watching a girls' movie here and figuring out a plan for Brandy's homecoming. Ma is going to get Shandy to come with her so she can join in. Her ribs are still hurting, but we're hoping she can come for at least a little bit."

I kiss Grace's head. "When Mama speaks, we listen, right, my girl?" Kierstie rolls her eyes at me and heads into the nursery

to change our girl's diaper.

The storm cleared, so I was able to ride my bike to church tonight. It's a cold ride, but I know in the next month or so I'll be lucky to be able to ride at all with the weather. I take the long way to church to enjoy just a couple of minutes to myself. I can't wait to get Kierstie on the back of my bike. Maybe on our first date night I can get her to come out on.

I pull into the parking lot and park next to the row of bikes already lined up. I can see it looks like a good chunk of the brothers are already here. I head on into the clubhouse. Maybe I can snag a beer before church starts.

I walk inside and am greeted by a good amount of brothers scattered around the room. At the bar, already with a beer in their hands as I walk up, are Jameson, Saxon, Juan, Asher, and Ry. Behind the bar is Mayson, who's a prospect, serving the beers. Before I can ask, he's opening one and handing it over. I nod my thanks and lean against the bar.

I look around and I notice Jameson looking all grumpy at the end of the bar, peeling the label off his beer.

"What's got that look on your face, brother?" He sighs like the world is on his shoulders.

"Mom kicked me out of Brandy's hospital room. Told me I needed to go to church and stop sitting there brooding. I wasn't fucking brooding. I'm just worried that she's not healing well and that she's the only one still stuck in the hospital. Hell, even your brother is out. I mean, he's currently in county lockup, but he's out of the hospital."

Logan, who must have come in from gate duty to help Mayson with the bar, speaks up. "She was the one with the worst of the injuries too. A femur break takes a long time to heal and get over. It takes a long time of immobility for it to heal properly." Since when is he that concerned about her? Is he feeling somethin' more for her?

Juan, the nosey fucker, jumps into the conversation.

“Is she having more pain or something? I was there earlier with Jane and she didn’t mention anything.”

Jameson shakes his head. “No, she’s not. I can just tell that this long of a stay in the hospital is gettin’ to her. Mom kicked me out and said I couldn’t come back till tomorrow sometime ’cause she was going to do a girls’ night with Brandy. Said they were gonna video chat with the other gals at some point so that she could be included.”

I can see Juan is about to ask the same question I want the answer to when we’re both interrupted by Jon yelling out, “Church! Get your asses in here, brothers!”

We all pile into the room, taking our usual seats. It looks like an almost full house, except for a couple of brothers who are out of town for a variety of reasons.

We go through the usual business that happens in every church. Jackson updates us all on the harvest festival plans. With only a week away, there’s a lot to do. Luckily, we’ve got a lot of volunteers who help with it every year. I know Kierstie hasn’t decided yet if she wants to bring Grace out for that yet.

Jon brings up that Ma is going to plan Christmas dinner this year with Anna, Millie, Hanna, and Mads help since Kierstie and Jane are a bit busy, but plans to hand it off to them for next year. It looks like church is wrapping up. Wyatt lets everyone know that dinner will be here in about half an hour. Jon bangs the gavel ending church.

“Shane, Grant, Mike, Jackson, Wyatt, and Pa, can you stay back for a minute?” We all stay seated, but why, I don’t have a clue.

Jon starts to speak again, “I know most of you want to know why the fuck I asked you to stay back. Well, Shane, you remember what you and Grant brought up at the last church you were at?”

“You mean about my mom’s stuff and thinking Tripp was probably my dad?”

Mike joins in on the conversation. “Yeah. I know you were in contact with Ben when he went down there and that Tripp was

open to coming up for a visit at some point, but also wanted to talk to Grant and Jonah too.” I nod for him to keep going.

“Well, I know these last few weeks have been a whirlwind for you so Ben hadn’t let you know a time or anything. He’s been talking to Tripp about things since then.” I watch him get up and go to the door. He opens it and Ben comes in. He’s followed by a man I don’t know, but I swear looks just like me but older.

Ben speaks up, “Shane, this is Tripp. Tripp, meet Shane. You already know everyone else here.” Tripp comes into the room and takes the empty seat right across from me. He looks at me for a moment before he speaks.

“I’ve read the copies of Gretta’s journal that Ben brought me. I think your assumption is right. I think you are my son.”

Jackson interrupts him, “No shit. He’s like a carbon copy of you. I never thought about it ’cause I didn’t know you and Gretta were together at all. There ain’t no denying those genes.” Tripp nods in agreement with him.

“It also fits in with the lie she told me. I want you to know I didn’t know about you. The last time I talked to Gretta, she told me that she was marrying Tom, and they were going to have a family and the perfect life she had planned. She never said she was pregnant. Fuck, if she had even hinted at it, I would have questioned her about it. She told me that she was marrying him right after the last time we were together. I was in love with her. That’s why I took off like I did. I couldn’t be around, watching her be happy with the asshole who had been a pain in my ass all through high school. There was more to that conversation she and I had, but you can believe that her being pregnant was not part of it. I know she passed away a while ago, but I would have loved to ask her straight up about all of this.” Well, shit.

“Me too, ’cause Tom was not the catch she thought he was. Fucker didn’t croak soon enough for me.”

Grant joins the conversation. “I didn’t know any of this shit till after Gretta died and we found her journals. I know I couldn’t have changed her decision about marrying Tom, but fuck, if I

had known there was a chance you were his dad, I would have made her contact you. I know you don't want to go into it now 'cause bottom line, it doesn't matter for you gettin' to know Shane, but we need to have a discussion about why you took off without so much as a word to us." Tripp nods at Grant.

"Yeah, we can have that talk. I'm gonna be around. I know I can't make up for time lost, nor can I just jump into your life, but I'd like to get to know you if you're open to that."

I can't help but smile at him.

"Yeah, I'm good with that. You'll have to come around to meet my little girl." He smiles at me.

Before he can answer, Mike interrupts, "Fuck me. You two have the same shit-eatin' grin. There's no doubting it. Maybe you need to think about stayin' up here more permanent-like."

Pa speaks up at this. "You know, back then, you were about to be voted in. If you do decide to come back and stay here, I think we might have a spot available for you. We know what happened with you and the Sangre Devils. We've welcomed Mike and Ben into the brotherhood. Invitation is yours if you want it."

"Well, between Shane being here, the two brothers I was closest to are here, and little Janey too, I'll seriously consider it."

Jon stands up and remarks, "I'm sure she would love to see you while you're here. Nothin' needs to be decided tonight. What I do know is that dinner has arrived and I'm starving. Let's go eat."

All the guys start heading out to the main room, the smell of the delicious lasagna making us all salivate in anticipation. I get to the door to leave but I'm stopped by Tripp. He looks like he's about to say something, but trying to come up with the words as he rubs his neck with his hand for a second.

"Listen, I'm not trying to come and uproot your world. That's the last thing I want to do. I know I missed close to thirty years of your life. Ben's filled me in on your time in the service and

the shit you've dealt with, with your brother. It's obvious you don't need a dad, but—"

I can't help but interrupt him, "I may not need one, but I'd like to get to know mine. My wife is really smart about this sort of thing. She told me that you're never too old to need your dad, and a person's heart always has room to expand and include more people. Why don't we go have dinner now and maybe, if you would like, you could come over tomorrow sometime for a cup of coffee, meet my woman and our little girl, your granddaughter." I'm engulfed in a bear hug and something settles inside of me. I know I'm still mad at my mom for this, but part of me realizes I might not be where I am right now if things didn't happen the way they did. He smacks my back and steps back.

"Let's go get some grub."

"Hell yeah. Anna's lasagna isn't to be missed. It's a food group all on its own." We both go and get in line behind the last of the brothers. After piling our plates high, we each grab a beer and find a seat at one of the tables. Grant's across from me with Ben and Mike next to him. After a few minutes of stuffing our faces with the cheesiest, meatiest, sauciest lasagna you can imagine, Tripp asks a question.

"So, like I said, Ben's filled me in on quite a lot, but one thing I was curious about was I know she didn't give you his last name, but what did she give you for your middle name?"

"She said she named me just 'cause she liked the names together, but my middle name is Hunter." As soon as I say that, I can see his eyebrows go up in surprise.

"That's my middle name. She knew that too." Erik's sitting right behind us. He turns around and starts to speak.

"You know, I knew Gretta pretty well over the years. She had a lot of positive traits, and she had some ones that were on the self-destructive side. One of those was her stubborn streak. Once she made a decision, that was it. Even if later she realized she was wrong, there was no going back. Maybe she even knew soon after that Tom was the wrong choice, but she just couldn't admit it to anyone, even herself. This was her

way of giving you two a connection. We, of course, can't ask her. You add to that the fact that her and Tom never actually got married speaks pretty loudly, don't it?" His observation leaves us in thought for a few minutes before Juan gets all our attention by yelling out that Jane's going into labor.

Jon, Rory, and Mike all follow him, hurrying out the door. We all look at Pa who's still eating dinner. He finally notices all eyes are on him.

"Ma messaged me. She's just starting labor. We've got time. I'm gonna finish this, have myself some dessert, and give my woman a call to see if it's time to head to the hospital yet. These things are a marathon most of the time." As everyone finishes eating, my phone pings with an incoming text.

It's my woman asking me to get home so she can go to the hospital since she doesn't want Grace back there with all the germs. I see the prospects and a few of the brothers are cleaning everything up. Pa finishes his coffee and looks over at Ry and Max.

"Sons, let's go. It's time to bring a couple more Westons into the world." You heard the man. Let's go welcome some more babies.

EPILOGUE

Shane

Five years later

"Gorgeous! You ready to go?" Kierstie comes out of our bathroom looking like the goddess she is in tight jeans and her leather jacket. Her boots are in her hand.

"I'm almost ready. Hold your horses."

"I'm just excited for you to get on the back of my bike again, love. It seems like forever since we've been for a ride." She gives me that look that says she's not amused.

"It's your fault I haven't been riding in a long time. You keep knocking me up every chance you get. I still need to make an appointment for you to get snipped, Mister."

Okay, so maybe we have three kids who are five and under, but if you saw how hot my wife is pregnant and how great a mom she is, you'd do the same thing. I bend down to kiss her as she sits up after putting her boots on.

"I told you I would if you're really ready to be done havin' kids, gorgeous. I'll do it if you want me to."

"I'll let you know when I decide. Let's get goin' while we can." We walk out to the garage, with the house being eerily silent.

"The house is too quiet without all the chaos." I get on the bike and wait as Kierstie gets on behind me and adjusts.

"That chaos has a name since it's your boy. He's our own Tasmanian devil, and he's only three and a half. I think he might just talk Tripp's ear off tonight since he just learned that you and Tripp have his name as your middle name. Before you argue, there's a reason both Grant and Tripp are watchin' him tonight. He wears both of them out before his bedtime."

"They both love it though. They're gonna bring him back here for bedtime after their adventures. Ma's got the baby and Tyson's gonna bring Gracie home after the movies and their diner-dinner date. Grace told him just 'cause he's got a girlfriend now, he can't skip their dates." She chuckles as our Grace isn't one to let somethin' like that slide.

"I'm just glad he's gotten control of his life and has been able to be a part of her life for as long as she can remember. She did go up to his girl the other day when she met her and told her that we're knights and maidens in shining armor till someone hurts our family, then we release the wrath of Valhalla on those who dare to do us harm. I'm gonna kill Juan for teaching her that already. For fuck's sake."

Trying to stifle my chuckle, I remind her, "Our kids have more family and love than I ever imagined possible. We do too. I still thank the gods every day for you ordering that Dirty Shirley Temple that night." She kisses my back as she holds on, ready to go.

"Me too. Now let's ride."

“As you wish, my love.”

THE END

COMING SOON:

BOOK THREE OF THE KNIGHTS WRATH MC

Thank you to Cee Bowerman and Mirrah McGee for letting me mention some of your beloved characters' names. I love them all and had to include them. If you haven't read them, I suggest you check them out!

About the Author

Renee Alan is a lifelong reader. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband and an ever-growing herd of farm animals. Her boxer Zoe rules the house and will let everyone who comes over know. One of these days she'll convince her husband that a mini cow is a necessary pet.

She's been an avid reader for years, never thinking about writing until recently. The idea came to her for this story and it wasn't one she could ignore. With the support of her husband and author friends she decided to give it a go. She hopes you fall in love with these characters as much as she has.

Follow her on Facebook for updates on upcoming books.