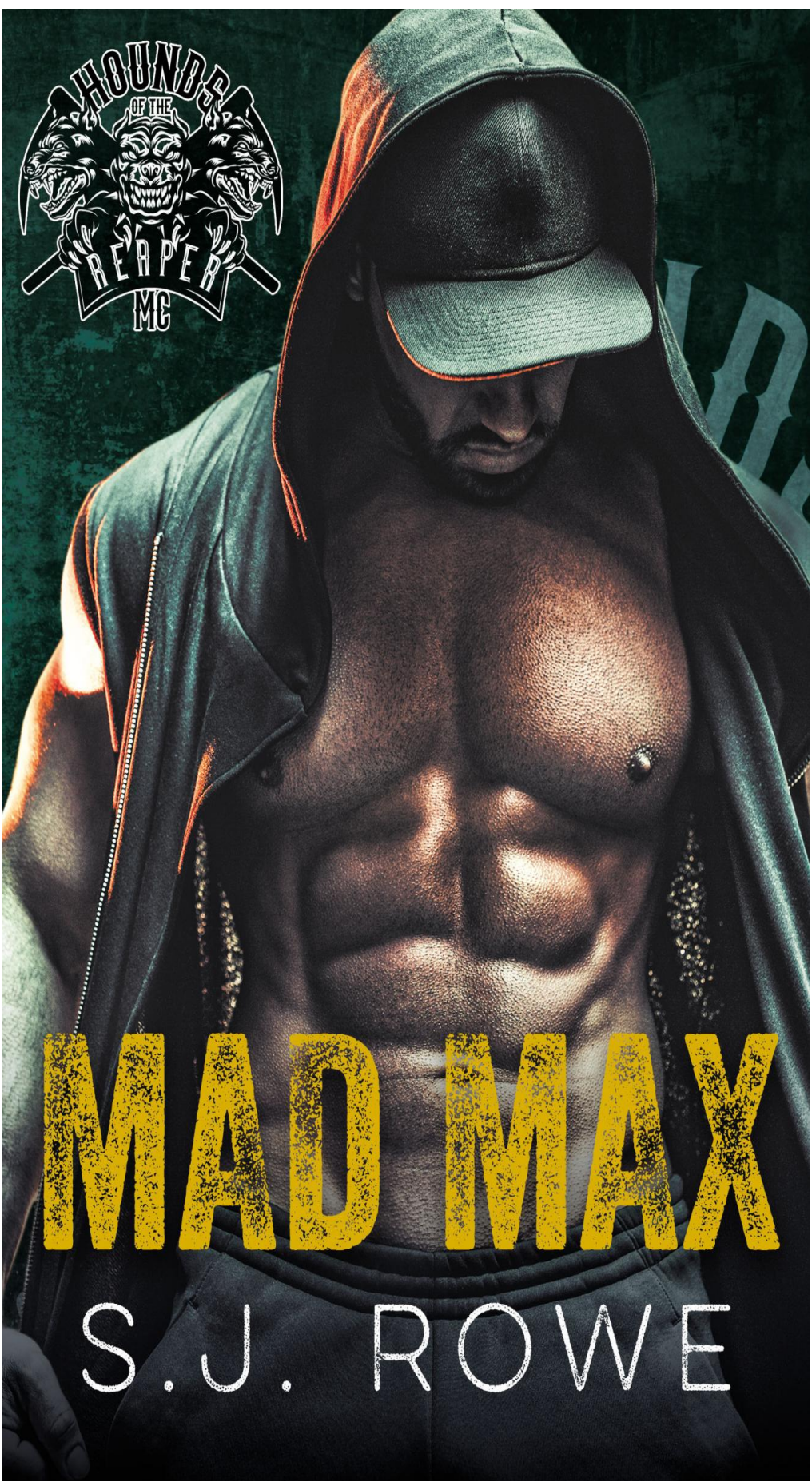




MAD MAX

S. J. ROWE



MAD MAX

S. J. ROWE



Mad Max

Hounds of the Reaper MC

S.J. Rowe

Copyright © 2023 S.J. Rowe

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

Cover Design: Frauke Spanuth

Editor: Hot Tree Editing

First printing: October 2023

www.sjrowe.com

This is a work of fiction. All characters, names, events, incidents, and places are of the author's imagination and not to be confused with fact. Any resemblance to living persons or events is merely a coincidence.

Get a Free Book

To sign up for the monthly newsletter and get a copy of LAW, a free novella, click here:

[Get My Free Book Now!](#)

If you aren't at least a little crazy, can you even say you're
having fun?

To Rodeo, there's nothing I love more than you not letting
me give up.

That, and when you bring me a cup of coffee.

And as always: Cin-Cin-ohh-La-La!

Cheyenne —

I don't have friends. And I'm not crazy, my mother had me tested. I have my uncle, but he's in prison. While I'm not great with social cues, I do know it's not a good dinner topic to bring up I'm related to someone charged for treason. But that doesn't seem to bother *him*. A beast of a man who takes me for what I am and doesn't question. Or at least not till his club thinks I'm the enemy.

Mad Max —

When I got out of jail, I swore I'd never go back. The freedom to do what I want and have my club brothers beside me again is all I need to keep me on the law's good side. Or, just not to get caught like last time. But when I left, I never expected I'd be pulled toward someone with ties to those still inside. To a man I've grown close to that made me question if I could have loyalty to both the Hounds and him.

My club doesn't trust her and wants me to stay away. Her uncle made me promise to protect her. When lines get crossed, and she makes a decision that affects the lives of the innocent, I don't know if I can hold up my end of the deal. Just not sure if I'm breaking my promise to her uncle... or my club.

Trigger Warning: This book contains swearing, violence, and scenes that some readers may find uncomfortable. And lots of fun times between the sheets.

Chapter 1 – Cheyanne

Do you think anyone would notice if I left? Does anyone even know I'm here? Would it be rude to ask for the taller people to stand by the walls and the shorter ones in the middle? Maybe I should just get a chair to stand on to find him.

I shake my head, clearing out my thoughts. I don't know if I really want to leave, nor do I know if I want to stay. This isn't what I was expecting when I said I would go out with Benny. Not that I've seen him much since he brought me to this party. At least that's what I'm calling it. Haven't really been to one before. I've seen them from the outside, but never actually went in.

"Cheyanne? Girl, I haven't seen you in forever! What are you doing here?"

I turn at my name and do a double take. I didn't expect to know someone here, and she's the *last* person I thought would ever be here. But I bet she's thinking the same thing about me. I'm not one for running with this crowd, whatever type it may be. Didn't see a sign on the way in. But if "an abandoned house filled with bikers, rough people, and girls not covered at all" was a business name, this would be the place.

"Izzy?" I blink a few times, trying to find the words that are probably expected of me in this party atmosphere. "Oh wow, I didn't think I would know anyone here. I love your jacket. Are you with the Hounds now?" I read off the name of the club I've seen around town on the patch on her left shoulder as I look around to see if I find any other people wearing the same jacket. The Hounds of the Reaper aren't a group I spend time with, but I'm also not blind and notice them around. Kind of hard not to, even for a person like me that rarely notices things outside of my own interests.

Her blush makes me smile. Not sure why, but I enjoy it. From the books I've read about the hidden language of emotions, a person blushes for only a few reasons. She doesn't seem embarrassed, so it must be one of the other common reasons.

"Yeah, I'm sort of seeing one of them."

"Blushing could be a sign of emotional connection with another." Ding, ding, ding! We got a winner.

I don't know how many other people pat themselves on the back when they're able to quote a line from a book they read to help them figure out a situation. But I sure do, and it looks like our Izzy girl is in love.

"Hey, Lady."

My eyebrows rise as Izzy raises her hand and waves. "Lady?"

"Yeah...."

Before she can start trying to feel self-conscious, I jump in. No need for that blush to go the other way. I've felt that kind of blush before, the embarrassed kind. Didn't even know what it was when I felt it, but I knew I didn't like it, and there's no reason to get someone else to feel it.

"I love it." She visibly relaxes, so I chance my luck and continue talking, grabbing at things I've heard others say from movies and what just feels right. Might not be a party girl, but I can't mess this up too much. At least I hope not. "And you look great. There's this glow about you that I've never seen before. You're rocking this. I need to meet the one who swept you off your feet and totally congratulate him on getting the best girl out there."

Happiness floats inside my stomach when I see her tension ease even more at my words. *Yesss! Twice that I'm right.* I don't always get these correct. Google says it has something to do with me growing up too fast and not learning social cues since my parents pushed me through school so quickly. I was doing calculus in the third grade and focusing on

learning my seventh language, not how to tell when to keep things to myself if I see someone is sad or mad.

I've worked hard to figure out these cues that most people learn when they're kids.

"Actually, my guy is over there. Let me introduce you, unless you're waiting for someone."

"Well... I came with Benny, but he went to get drinks. I, ah... I think that way?" I point in the direction I think he went, and Izzy looks behind her before turning back with a smile.

"New guy?"

I shrug. He's just a date and gives me nothing like the glow that Izzy—I mean Lady is working with.

She gets it, her smile lessening a bit, and says nothing more on the matter.

I opt to change the subject, just to avoid the inevitable blush of embarrassment myself. "Sure, let's meet your new boy toy."

She laughs hard but turns, and I follow her. "Hardly," she shouts back over her shoulder as we keep walking single file through the partygoers.

The group she leads me to should probably intimidate me. Guess it's a good thing I never figured out social cues.

"Hey, guys, this is a colleague of mine, Cheyanne. Cheyanne, meet the Hounds. This is Law, Flint, Casper, Mad Max, and my guy, Bulldog."

I wave to the group. "Hi, nice to meet you all." Then I turn to the couple. "Bulldog and Lady? Sounds like a story to me. And I've just got to say, whatever voodoo you worked on my girl, keep doing it. It's good to see her smiling."

"I will," he all but growls, then pulls her down on his lap and starts sucking on her neck. I'm completely ignored as she giggles and turns into him.

"Have a seat, sweetheart. Take a load off."

I smile at the one who spoke, noting the president patch on his vest as I slide onto the couch next to a guy who seems to take up two-thirds of it. “Is this your, um, place?”

He chuckles a bit as the others smirk. “Nah, just rented it. Rather have people wreck this place than ours, if you know what I mean.”

I nod along but really have no idea. No one comes over to my place, so I’m not sure if I would be up for throwing a party or not. It seems like the smart choice. People come into my office and move things around all the time for no reason other than just to fidget. If they do that at a place of work, then who knows what they’d do to a person’s home.

“You work in CPS with Lady?” he asks as he drinks from his beer.

“Sort of. More like her people know some people who I work with. We do a few interviews together sometimes. No biggie.” I look around and try to figure it out on my own, but I can’t, so I ask. “So... she interviewed one of you lot, or was it just a happy coincidence how those two lovebirds met?” I nod to the two who can’t keep their hands, or mouths, off each other.

“More like she put him under investigation,” a guy mumbles as he drinks his beer, but he has a smile, and I see the name Flint on his vest. I note that all of them are wearing vests, but the one next to me on the couch? On him, I notice something else.

“How long you been out?” I smile wide, sensing that everyone is now looking at me. I’m not taking my eyes off the beast on my left, who finally turns away from the crowd he’s been watching to acknowledge me.

“What?” he somehow growls and snarls at the same time, so deep that it’s almost unintelligible.

“The tat on your hand. Four dots around one in the middle. Prison, right? Must have been in a while if you got

that inked, and I'm guessing it was while you were in, as the dots look a bit shaky."

"You got something to say, sweetheart?" Their prez is no longer a friendly host, speaking in a clipped tone.

I turn my attention to him as I smile brightly. "My family always said the tats in prison hurt more than the ones done outside. Mostly because they had to go over the spot a few more times than normal, since it was by hand and no tattoo guns were available. But if you got the time, what else is there, right?"

"You got family in lockup?" This from the Flint guy.

"Yeah, down at El Dorado."

"How much longer they got?"

"Well, it was just a count of life, but after the last assault against a guard, I think they raised it to two life sentences."

"Don't think that's how it works," the beast huffs as he turns back to look at the crowd.

"It does when your name is Jimmy Travis."

The whip around almost has his shoulder-length wavy dark brown hair hitting my eyes.

I smile. I *love* when I get shit right. And I know I got *this* shit right.

"Thought I recognized you. I haven't seen you in a while. It's good to see you out. I'm happy for you." I squeeze his knee and then put my hand on my lap as I lean back on the couch. Everyone's staring like I have three heads, but I don't care. It's a normal look most people give me.

"You're related to Jimmy Travis?" The prez eyes me skeptically.

I nod, but I don't think he believes me. Probably why he keeps pushing the topic.

“The guy who went down for treason? But since no one can really say that, they just arrested him for killing his handler who went rogue from the agency and killed three girls after raping them?”

I’m not surprised he’s familiar with the story. Everyone knows about him. Though I’m mildly surprised that he put so much detail into his little speech. Almost as if he expects me to flinch or something.

Not me. Not for something regarding the only living family member I have left.

“Yeah, that’s him. My uncle. And this mega man was one of his inside guards when I came in to see him. Or that’s what I thought. But I’m guessing it was more to keep an eye on things and not necessarily Jimmy, huh?”

“Hired bulk, baby,” Flint chuckles.

“Well, he sure has it. I doubt you’re working out as much as you used to, but make sure you don’t go completely cold turkey and then try to start up again. It’s really not good for you. I knew a guy who was a bodybuilder all his life, then got dumped by his boyfriend and went on a food binge for six months. When he went back to the gym, he broke his wrists. Just completely went limp wrist when trying to pick up a dumbbell.”

The beast just blinks, and I scan the faces of the others. They’re either confused by me or openly laughing. I guess I said something funny. Not sure what, but I know I did something wrong.

I stare down at my hands and review what I said. It takes time, and all I can come up with is “limp wrist” for a gay guy is funny. I’m not going to ask if that was it. I used to ask, but that got me more odd looks, so I stopped.

Instead, I just smile and look up, faking it all the way. But only one person is still paying me attention—the beast. I think they called him Mad Max, and since he’s the only one without

a name tag on, I'm making this decision without any doubts for once.

I kind of get lost in his eyes for a bit. He isn't laughing at me. He's just staring, and his dark brown eyes, which match the mocha of his hair, seem to swirl a bit. I don't know if it's the lights or not, but it's almost hypnotic and makes my lips dry.

I clear my throat, more to force myself to focus on something else. This guy is intense. I feel it radiating off him, and I'm like a freaking moth just wanting to get closer to the flame. I've reacted to guys before—I'm not a blushing virgin—but this one is different. I know it's impossible to feel a zap for another, but I swear the couch is connected to hot wires. It's the only explanation for the zing of electricity I have going on right now, just from feeling so much intensity rolling off him and focused solely on me.

"I think I'll go find my date. Maybe he got us those drinks. Only been twenty minutes now." I laugh it off, but no one even cracks a smile. *Tough crowd.*

I wave as I leave, though no idea why. It's just my thing, I guess—always a wave goodbye and a friendly hello, no matter who it is.

The house isn't very big, but it's pretty packed. At least it is in the main living space and kitchen. I head to the back, where I know a second door is; I saw one when we drove around this place, looking for a parking spot. We're out in the middle of nowhere, and the entire yard is one big parking lot outside.

I turn down a hallway, expecting to find only the door leading outside, but it's being blocked. The image in front of me has me pulling up short and then grunting as someone stumbles into me. I barely take a step forward from the impact before strong fingers dig deep into my arm and halt my movement a second before they leave my skin.

I glance back and see the beast. He just glares. I'm assuming he's mad that I stopped, but in my defense, I had no clue anyone was behind me, especially so close that my sudden lack of walking would affect anyone but me. Yet I still feel an urge to explain.

"I found Benny."

Mad Max tilts his head to me, and his hair falls over one eye. I clench my hands at my sides, forcing myself to remain still and not push the strand behind his ear. Guess my explanation gives nothing away because he looks at me to say more.

I glance back at what stopped me, and I feel Mad Max's eyes stop looking at me and follow my lead. "That's Benny. My date."

I'm not whispering, nor am I yelling. I'm not really even sure how I should feel. This probably happens all the time, and maybe for bikers it's as normal as breathing. I just never thought I would see someone I know having sex. Or whatever they're trying to do, as Benny is all tongue and mouth on some blonde who's not that much better off in the coordination department. The kisses look sloppy as hell from here, but their hands are all over each other and seem to be doing just fine.

"Huh, I didn't know he knew that move." I'm more enthralled than anything, almost like I'm in a trance as I watch Benny try to lift the girl up. It doesn't work. He's not strong enough, and she isn't a spring chicken. Not that I'm dissing her, but the girl's got so much junk in her trunk that someone would need a crane to lift it. Instead they teeter but, despite the laws of physics, don't fall.

"You guys together?"

The deep voice next to me sends shivers through me, and the sex in the air probably explains why I feel the need to squeeze my thighs together.

I spare Benny another glance before I look at the beast who makes me feel about eighteen times more than what I feel for the one dipping his dick in God only knows who. I *just* met this one.

“Not anymore.”

He grunts and then steps in front of me. I try to look over his shoulder, but the guy is the size of a house. I can't even attempt to see what's going on, even if my five-one ass jumps up.

“Get out,” Mad Max snarls.

“Wait, what? You can't kick us out,” Benny says, startled at first till he gets defensive. His voice sounds so weak compared to Mad Max's.

“I can and I am. I don't want to see you anywhere near this place or any Hounds of the Reaper territory.”

“Oh come on, baby, he's just a kid. Let me finish him off, and then I'll come find you, Maxy.” The girl's voice gives me an instant headache with the high pitchiness of it.

“That goes for you, too, Shelia. You're done.”

“You can't do that!” she screams, but Mad Max doesn't even move a muscle. Trust me, I've got an amazing view of his back, and I'm watching. His shirt is like a second skin on him, and I see all the well-defined yumminess being covered up by black cotton.

“It's already done.”

I jump as I hear the door slam shut a second before the beast turns back to me. No one else came in, and even though I was blocked from most of it, I felt like I was a part of it.

“You, um, you didn't have do that. I mean, for me.”

He takes a step toward me, and I counter, dancing in a circle as I pivot away from the hallway I was standing in.

“But thanks. Not many people stand up for me like that,” I confess.

Another step and I continue to dance backward till I hit a wall. The same one the former lovers were all over, next to the back door.

“You love him?”

I blink a few times, trying to understand his words. I know he’s speaking English, but his growl is so deep, it’s almost like he’s speaking a different dialect. I love listening to it, but it takes time for my mind to switch from being turned on by his voice to making sure I understand the words.

“Um... no?”

He glares again, which only has my eyes widening.

“I mean, I didn’t know him long. We might have dated a bit, but there wasn’t a connection. I’m actually not all that upset about finding him like that, which should probably tell you more than you wanted to know.”

I run my hand through my hair in an attempt to show normalcy, plastering a smile on my face at the end.

Did he just purr?

The thought filters through my head a second before “Good” comes out of his mouth. Then he’s on me, and I’m not stopping it.

I’m actually not doing anything. A beast is kissing me, and all I can think about is if he’s part lion based on the sound that rumbled from his chest after I spoke.

Chapter 2 – Mad Max

A hundred and thirty-seven days. I've done a lot in that time since I got out. Did a lot before I went in too. But I've never wanted to kiss anyone more than I do this chick.

I've been big all my life. My size intimidates, and I use it 'cause I like to keep people away. Nothing happened to me as a kid that some shrink would want to analyze me for. I just don't like people. I don't like nosy fuckers either. I'm used to not getting eyes on me. I like it that way.

But she ain't like the others. She's not after my dick, which is usually the only reason chicks seek me out. I'm big. No hiding it. If a woman wants to climb me, I rarely turn it down. Being a member of the club always has the women coming around for a simple taste of the bad that's connected with us.

But this one didn't do the normal eye banter. She didn't slide her way onto my lap like she thought she belonged there. So many others think if they sit on something, it's a claim. Usually it just gets them bumped to the ground. If I don't ask for a chick, I don't want one. Sure, they can show they're willing, but till I nod for them to continue, they need to keep the claiming shit nonexistent.

She touched my knee. Just a squeeze, then let go. It was an unrequested touch, and I didn't want her to move her hand away. The warmth of it stayed with me long after she'd moved on to the next subject.

She might have seen me while I was locked up, but I never saw her visit the prison. That fact alone throws me. I make a point to know who's in the room and where the exits are. That's my job for the club. After my one mistake of not checking the room before I beat the shit out of some child rapist, I got sentenced to three and a half years.

That alone makes me want to get to know her. I have an urge to see if she's lying. Not many can say they've gone unnoticed by me. But the fact that she did *and* noticed *me*? I'm hard for the girl. Her looks don't hinder it, with her midnight hair that seems to have glints of blue in the light as it falls around her, almost like a cloak. Her skin is flawless and the color of my coffee, half cream and a shit ton of caramel.

But she looked at me. She saw me. She focused on me. Her eyes held expression, not practiced coyness or ditz training. She felt like the others were laughing at her when she went on her rant about working out, but I saw it for what it was: a middle ground she was offering me to be on her level, or her to be on mine. I connected with her on that level. I might have friends who fit in, but I never felt like I did. And I doubt this girl feels a connection right now, but she's trying, and I can appreciate that.

Probably why I stepped in and kicked her boyfriend out. I usually make it a point to not get involved unless the club tells me to. Last time I did, I got locked up. I don't make mistakes a second time. But I couldn't just let her watch. My mom got cheated on numerous times when I was a kid. She said it didn't bother her, that she was strong enough to take it, but the walls weren't thick, and I heard the tears she cried at night. Not sure if this chick is the crying sort, but I don't want that on my conscience.

Her not even seeming sad about it was what pushed me past any hesitation to take what I wanted. A hundred and thirty-seven days of freedom so far, and I plan to continue to take what I want 'cause I can. Not that I would force the chick, but the way her mouth is opening and she pulls on my shirt urges me onward.

She might not have known what to do when I pushed her against the same wall she'd just watched someone else have sex on, but she seems to know now.

I only came this way to take a breather from the crowd. Been out a bit now, but crowds still have me on edge. You

come out of prison, especially when you're in general population with a target on your back every day simply because you're a big fucker and some asshole wants to make a name for themselves, and then you can talk to me about crowds.

This was unplanned, but I'm okay with taking an opportunity that's offered up on a platter. If this chick wants me to stop, I will. But if she ain't crying after the punk I tossed out, and her hands ain't pushing me away, I'll take this for what it is: a welcome invitation to keep fucking going.

Her hands move up and pull at my hair in her need to grab my shoulder, and it brings a growl to my lips. I don't know if she did it on purpose, but I hate that shit, so I pull on *her* hair hard and push her head back, making it hit the wall. Her moan has me only seeing the red of her lips, and I dive in for more of a taste, nipping at her skin as she does mine.

This fucking woman is just over five feet. She's tiny, short in frame and thin. I bet a steady breeze would blow her down. She's smart; I can see it in her eyes and the way she assesses things. She isn't overly emotional and doesn't seem to give a fuck about what others think. If she did, no way would she let an ex-con have his hands on her flawless Native American skin.

Instead of running away or screaming for help, she goads me on to give her one hell of a ride. With another small moan from her lips, she clutches at my shoulder, pulling me down to meet her need once more.

I growl deep in my throat as I grab the backs of her knees and bring her up the wall to my level. My neck gets a second of ease from being bent down so low only to be squeezed tight as her arms wrap around it. She doesn't even break stride from kissing me, and I groan into her as I push more of my weight against her. Her legs can't wrap around me—I'm too wide—but boy, does she try. And her tiny skirt rolls back, allowing me access to get to the heat between her thighs.

I know what I want. I wonder how far she'll let this go. Do I dare press my luck and kick this up a notch?

Fuck yeah I do.

I told myself once I got out of prison that I would take every opportunity to seek pleasure. It was withheld from me for so long. The simple things, like cooking my own damn food, are a damn luxury nowadays. And this pixie against me is one of the finest delicacies I've had in longer than I can remember.

Her outfit isn't revealing, not like the others I saw tonight, but it teased me from the start. The short, pleated skirt that was decent enough to go to her thighs but rode up a bit when she sat beside me. And her shirt is nothing revealing, no deep plunge or off-the-shoulder shit. It's just a regular shirt, but it stops right at the waistband of her skirt, and parts of her stomach played peekaboo as she walked. Nothing clung to her, and yet I'm a drooling mess over her body.

All black clothes, like her hair, and she doesn't look goth even as she wears a long necklace that dips below a pair of nice tits. It's a cross, but I got a feeling this is just costume jewelry on her and not a religious thing. I obviously don't really know her, but girls don't have family in lockup and talk so freely about it if they're the religious type. They especially don't let an ex-con biker get to first base thirty seconds after meeting them. At least not any religious type I know.

Moving one hand away from the back of her thighs—after a good squeeze, 'cause why the fuck not—I slide it up over her hip and under her shirt till I reach her tit. Fuck, it's a thin-as-shit bra, and I feel her nipple beading easily. I pinch it, and she bucks in shock, but then she continues to grind on me, like she's used to it now that she knows what I'm doing. But I'm just getting started, and I don't stick to the same routine. I push her shirt up and pull her cup down a second before I wrap my mouth around that perfect tip.

Real breasts taste different. Others might not think there's a difference, but I can tell you there sure as hell is. I've been

out of prison for a hundred-plus days now. I've tasted my fair share of tits since then, and I know which are fake just from looking. But I like to get my mouth on things like these beauties before me, and I ain't disappointed. Not like I was with the last ones I had. The feel of her in my mouth just does something for me, and I can't even think about how to describe it. I suck on her nipple, then bite it and suck hard again before popping it out and going back to her mouth. My hand takes its place and gives her nipple the same torture as my mouth did, rougher even, and this chick still ain't telling me to stop.

She's actually pushing her chest into the pain, and the way she's moaning lets me know I'm doing this right. Not that I thought I was doing it wrong, but you never know what a girl is into until you get to sucking and biting. Some shy away from that shit quick; others ask for more and harder. This girl just encourages me, and fuck if that doesn't turn me on. No one telling me what to do, just letting me do what I want and showing she's into it too.

I can hear the party still going on behind us. I might be into this chick, and my dick might be an iron hammer behind my jeans, but I ain't lost enough to ignore what's at my back. Nothing will ever take me so out of my element that I'll let that happen again. We've been lucky that no one has come close to us, and I ain't one for sharing. I might do things in front of others—prison threw the whole modesty shit out the window—but I ain't fucked-up enough to want someone to step up and ask to join. Some others might like that shit, but not me. If I want something, I want it all. Don't care what happens to the thing after I let it go, but once I have it, it's all mine.

I let my hand fall and unzip my pants, palming my dick twice, squeezing the tip a bit to add a bit of my own pain to the mix and push off the need to rut into her for a second. I glide my hand under her skirt that's barely covering shit now and push her panties to the side as I run my finger up and down her. She's fucking soaked.

Even though it seems impossible, I move even closer and grab my dick to replace my fingers, moving it between her lips, wetting the tip before I break the kiss to look at her. I don't force shit, but I ain't a mind reader either. I wait her out, watching intently as her eyes flutter open and she breathes deep as if it's the first real breath she's gotten since we started. It takes her a second before she meets my eyes. Lust and desire cloud around the edges, but she ain't too far gone not to understand what's going on. She's still in there to make up her mind enough to not claim she was in some lust fog later when she looks back on this moment.

She doesn't speak. Neither do I. Her head tilts a bit as she tries to read what's in my eyes. God only knows what she sees. I ain't going to ask if I can go bareback; it's a forgone conclusion, as my dick is primed and ready to enter her. I ain't got a condom on me, and I'm not about to stop and ask for a brother to give me one. It's a risk, but I'm taking it.

I follow her tongue as it darts out and moistens her lips before retreating again. Her lips are parted, and I feel her breath against my face before she bites her bottom lip and cants her hips toward me. It's a small movement, mostly because I'm holding her how I want her and there ain't a ton of space between the wall and me, but I felt it. My *dick* sure as hell felt it, and I don't wait any longer.

I sink the full length of my cock into her and watch as she gasps for breath. Her eyebrows dart together as if she's in pain, but she continues to breathe through it, and her arms tighten around me as her head rolls back.

I take her then, fast and hard and everything like I want. Her walls squeeze me for all I'm worth, and I swear she has the tightest cunt I've ever been in before. It's a tight fit but a fucking fantastic one. Each time I pull out, a part of me is screaming to return to her. To never leave the warmth we've found.

The size difference between us is outlandish. It's even more so when you see that my entire hand can hold her

breast, and they ain't itty-bitty titties either. My dick is thick, and I swear to Christ it's bigger than her damn wrist right now as I continue to jackknife into her. The sight of it slipping under her skirt and then coming back with more of her juices on it sets me on a new mission.

I want her to come. I want it more than anything. Usually I don't care about that shit, but with her, I want to see how much of it will slick up my dick. I double the pace as she pulls her head back to just feel me as I let her have every part of me. I give her my all. I can't decide what I like better to watch: my dick getting wet or the look of bliss on her face.

She takes matters into her own hands at the last moment, digging her nails deep into my neck as she pulls me to her lips and screams her orgasm into my mouth while our tongues dance together. I feel her tighten, and I last one more thrust before I'm groaning too.

We cling to each other as we shudder through the aftershocks, our foreheads connecting as we breathe each other's air and try to calm down from the storm we just rode out together.

"Yo, Mad Max. Casper's looking for you."

I feel her pussy clench as our bubble is popped and reality steps back in.

I look over my shoulder and nod to Flint. "Comin'."

The huff of air has my eyes going back to her cinnamon-brown eyes. I swear copper is sketched into them, too, as I watch her laugh at me.

"I hope so. Otherwise, you're doing it wrong," Flint comments before leaving. I know he has no idea who's beneath me—I'm covering all but her legs and arms—but a fool would be blind to not know what we were doing.

She wiggles in my arms, and after I'm satisfied that Flint's gone, I step back and let my dick pop out of her honeypot before letting her slide down the wall to stand on her own feet. She wobbles a bit, and I don't reach out to steady her,

too busy tucking my dick in, but she gets herself righted quickly enough. Not sure if it's the ankle boots or our fucking that's got her unsteady.

"Bathroom?" she rasps and then clears her throat as she pulls her top and skirt down.

I nod to the right. "Second door down the hall."

She smiles and heads off, only to stop short and turn back. "Oh, um, thanks."

I just raise an eyebrow.

"For the bathroom directions."

I say nothing and watch her squirm for a second.

"And, um... that." She moves her hands up and does a twisty thing like it might somehow represent us fucking.

I just look at her like she's crazy. 'Cause the only hand signal for fucking I've seen is a fist on one hand while sliding a finger from the other into it, indicating a dick sliding into a pussy.

"Right, I'm going to go now. Bye."

Fucking cute how she actually waves.

I wait half a beat to make sure she went into the right door before I turn to find my club brother waiting. He has his back to us, giving us a bit of privacy and watching my back all in one.

Fucking love my club.

Chapter 3 – Cheyanne

kay, so that just happened. It happened, and I was there. I was there, and it happened.

And yet, even as I clean off the cum that leaked out of me as I walked to the bathroom, I'm still having a hard time grasping what just happened.

I had sex.

Not that it was my first time. I've had loads of sex. Okay, not that much. I'm not a seasoned girl by any means, but I'm not shy about liking sex and even craving it now and then. Nevertheless, I've never done that—the whole “fucked like a whore against a wall with a party going on” thing. It wasn't like it was dark either. It was kitchen lighting. *Bad* kitchen lighting, leaving nothing to the imagination. I might not have seen anyone but the beast between my legs, but who the hell knows if anyone saw me?

Mad Max. If you fuck a guy, use his name, silly girl. Or at least what they call him.

Even as I berate myself, I don't really feel bad for calling him a beast. He totally is. I saw *Beauty and the Beast* over a hundred times when I was a little girl. I know what a beast looks like, and he's every meaning of the word. Except less hairy and no tail. Or at least I don't think he has a tail. Never did get to see very much of him except his dick. And that thing was a monster in its own right. My homegirl between my legs is still quivering over the feel of that stretch.

I'm as clean as I'm going to get without taking a shower. I look myself over in the mirror. My makeup is minimal, and I'm happy not to see any smears and that my hair is still straight. I half expected it to be in a ball from how often I rubbed my head on the wall trying to ease the pain he was causing or to keep from begging for more. I'm still not sure which. All I know is that the sex was good. Really good.

And I'm not like the usual girls. Been told that all my life. While I might be chanting in my head about what happened, I'm not freaking out. I'm more like telling myself it happened and that I didn't imagine it. Not like the throb still coming from my core could really hide that fact.

I had sex with someone who was in prison, who I just met at a house party. And it was amazing. No shame in that unless it sucked. Then I would be finding the nearest exit and running away. But I have no shame in saying I enjoyed it. Not that I would. Apparently, that's not a good idea. Or that's what my last two boyfriends told me. Commenting about how the sex being good, or bad, is just not something you do and keep a boyfriend, I guess. I should have figured that out after the first one, but sometimes I'm not that smart.

A knock on the door, followed by some chick yelling that I'm hogging the bathroom, has me heading out, waving as I go. I walk back into the main room, and before I can process things, Izzy snags my hand.

"Hey, want to play pool with us? We need another player now that Flint's got to get back to his girl."

"Sure." I love pool. So much math in it, and yet I suck at it. It's a challenge that I love to try every time, even though I know how the angles work and everything. I should be amazing at this game, but I'm not. And I love that.

Being perfect at almost everything is tiring. I like when I'm not so I can challenge myself. Sort of like social settings. I force myself into them, as I never know if I'll come out of it with a smile or make someone cry. Which also happens a lot, and I still don't know how it does.

"Great. You can be on Mad Max's team. We're playing doubles."

If the seas could part, then God, or whoever is in charge up there, can make a path in the packed house to show the man in question as he stands beside Bulldog. Holding a pool cue in his hand, he just glares in my direction. I look behind

me, then do a mini circle to see what the problem is, but I have no clue, so I just shrug, get my cue, and start chalking it up.

As Bulldog breaks, I stand by my partner and watch the game unfold. He doesn't turn to me, but I'm not deterred. It happens a lot around me, whether I fuck the guy or not. "You any good?" I ask.

He grunts. I'm taking that as a yes.

"Cool. I play a bit too. Signed up for a league downtown last year. It was fun, but they asked me not to come back after the second meeting. I think they said they had too many players or something. Who knows. Anyhow, you want to go first or me?"

He casts his eyes my way, and there doesn't seem to be any obvious emotion in them as he slowly lifts his chin for me to go first. I just smile as I line up for my shot.

"Ow! What the fuck, man?"

"Oops, sorry about that." I smile as I move around the table and grab the cue ball off the ground, right next to the guy I hit in the leg with it. He looks pretty unhappy but says nothing else. Not sure if it's due to my charming smile or the people I'm playing pool with.

After three games, not many people are close to the pool table like they were when we started. I only scratched five more times and only three hit other people. It's a new personal record for me. At one point, Izzy began to stand behind her man, who seemed to have traveled as far away as possible from the table when it was my turn. But Mad Max never moved. Sure, he physically moved—he wasn't a statue—but he never seemed to be too far from the table. And he was even nice enough not to ask for a new partner when *several* girls came up to graciously offer to let me sit out.

Once again, I'm not sure if it was because of my pool skills or if they just wanted to be close to him. I understand the reason for both. I especially get wanting to climb him like a

monkey, 'cause even though we already did that song and dance a few hours earlier, I still have a very substantial urge to do it again. I know how the sex will be, so that probably helps. That and the fact that he just stands there, eyes seeming to be on everything around him, yet I still feel like he's only looking at me, even if I never see him do it.

"Thanks again for letting me play. This was fun. We should do it again sometime." I lean in and give Izzy a hug before I smile at her man. Something tells me touching him would not be good. The guy has been all over his girl this whole time, and her no different. I don't think she's the "scratch your eyes out" jealous type, but I think he is. Or whatever it's called when he glares at a woman touching him who isn't the he's with. Saw a few girls try that tonight, and either they ran off scared or started crying.

"Sounds great, Cheyanne. It was great seeing you again. Keep in touch, will you?"

I nod enthusiastically. I don't get to spend much time with Izzy outside the work moments we have together, but I love it when I do. She doesn't look at me like I'm crazy—well, not a lot, anyway. That or she hides it better than most.

"You got a ride?" Bulldog barks because the music is really loud.

"Oh yeah, where's Benny, your date? I would really like to meet him." Izzy starts to look around for some guy who should be waiting for me.

"I, ah..." My eyes travel to the beast behind the couple. He hasn't really said much all night, at least not to me. A few words to Bulldog and a few of the other club members who have come up to him, but nothing lengthy. I don't know what I expect him to say. When he remains stoic, I just shrug. "I think he already left. Going to Uber it. You guys have a great night. Bye."

I wave before I make my way through the crowd to the front door and onto the porch. I take a few extra steps off it

before I pull my phone out, since it's almost as crowded as it was inside. I'm half surprised I didn't lose it when I was getting screwed against the wall, but the pockets in my skater skirt are really deep. I'll need to write a review on it and show my appreciation. Maybe not put the tagline as "great pockets let you not drop phone while getting screwed."

"Let's go." The deep growl sends a shiver through me out of remembrance more than fear as it's whispered into my ear a second before Mad Max passes me. He doesn't look back as he strides to a motorcycle that I can only assume is his, since he gets on it.

Of course, I look around. He could have been talking to anyone, but I'm the only one out here, not realizing I moved a few yards from the house as I was looking at my phone, so I just follow. If I'm wrong, then he can always tell me to go away. Again, not the first time that's happened to me. I know how to walk away and call an Uber.

He tilts his chin a bit, and I know he can see me as he shouts above the sound his pipes make. "Get on."

"Got a helmet?" I shout back.

From the look he gives me, he thinks it's a dumb question. Probably is since I don't really see any in his hands or attached to his bike. But a girl's got to ask these things and not assume. Assuming is bad, sometimes... I think. I still get confused on that part 'cause people say it makes me an ass when I do, but I don't get how it does.

I feel myself nod more than realize I'm doing it. Guess my body is already on board with things and it's only my head that needs to catch up. I place my hand on his shoulder, and he surprises me when the hand of the same arm I'm touching grabs my elbow as I place my foot on the open peg and heave myself onto his bike. The fact that he paid even that small attention to me so I wouldn't fall on my ass has me thinking he might be a bit more interested in me than his stoic personality is showing. Well, that, and he's taking me home.

“Direction?”

I’m sure others would be over his grunts and one- or two-word speeches by now, but I kind of like it. He’s direct. If he’s talking, there’s a point to it. He isn’t one to just fill the silence, and I’m not afraid of the quiet like others always seem to be.

I rattle off my apartment address and then get comfy. He might be going slow to get out of the self-made parking lot to this place, but he doesn’t seem the type to just go the normal speed limit. And as soon as we hit the open road, he proves me right.

Holding on to him isn’t a hard thing to do, considering there’s a lot of him to grab. It’s not even uncomfortable with how wide my arms have to go to wrap around him. I can’t interlock my fingers, so I settle for grabbing his shirt and feeling his body beneath my grip.

Being this close to him has me tingling all over. His smell, which I can’t describe other than just beastly, engulfs me. It’s a heady scent, and I don’t think he’s the type to wear cologne. His own aroma is just amazing, and since I’m fond of calling him a beast, it just fits.

I close my eyes and just let myself sink into his back. I have total trust in him knowing where we need to go and that he isn’t a psycho killer leading me to my death. My hair whips around my face, and I’m sure it hits him, too, mixing with his own hair as the wind swirls it around us. My girl between my legs is just humming in tune to the vibration beneath her. She might have been a bit upset about the dick beating she got earlier because he was the biggest she’s ever had, but this seems to pacify her for now.

I frown as he slows, and I know my ride is over. I blink my eyes open as we roll into a parking spot and then curse.

“What?” he growls.

“Benny. He’s in my apartment.” I can see him plain as day in my home, since he’s pulled the curtains back and is just

staring out the window. He has enough of the lights on to make me worry about my electric bill.

“He lives with you?”

I move off his back as I shake my head. “No. He’s the landlord’s son, so he has a key. Thanks for the ride.” I make my way to my place and turn back when I don’t hear his bike taking off. He’s getting off it instead of leaving, and I raise my eyebrows as I watch him follow me.

He says nothing, so I just shrug. Maybe he lives here, too, or is visiting a friend.

I go up the stairs and don’t even bother using my key as I open the door.

“Hey, Benny.”

“Oh thank God you’re all right. I was so worried about you. Some asshole threw me out of the party, and I couldn’t find you.”

I push out of the hug he throws on me as I enter my place and check to make sure everything is where I left it. Something about having a person in my home when I’m not has me checking things. Not that I’m OCD about where I put things in my house and all.

“Um, did you try calling me?” I say as I’m looking around, not even paying attention to what’s coming out of my mouth.

“I didn’t. I should have, I get that, but I was just worried someone was going to jump me or something, so I just left.”

His words confuse me as I look over at him. I’m deeper into my apartment, and now I’m the one farthest from the door while Benny is standing with his back to it. I should tell him to close it, but just as the thought crosses my mind, the doorframe is filled with a giant.

“Thought I told you not to come around Hounds territory.”

The way he growls gets me wet, and I think it does the same thing to Benny. But more in a “pee his pants” sort of

way as he turns and literally shrinks back a bit in fear.

“But... wait, what? Why are you here? Do you know this guy, Cheyenne? Whatever he told you about me is a lie.”

My eyebrows climb to the top of my forehead. *Is Benny really going to pretend that nothing got him kicked out of the party?* I know he didn't see me watching him with that chick, but he should have the decency to not try and claim someone is lying about things that might or might not have happened.

“What do you think he told me?” I cock my head to the side, curious to see if he would outright lie to my face. Benny and I might not be in love, but I thought we were friends of a sort. Not close, but we've been out a few times. That should at least warrant some truth, right?

I've never seen someone sweat from a conversation, but the way Benny keeps swinging his head from me to Mad Max makes for an interesting observation.

“Ah, nothing.” Whatever scare he initially had when he saw Mad Max is gone, and I see his posture change, almost he's come to a resolution on what he plans to do next as he steps toward me and takes my hand. “I was worried about you. Are you okay? I'm sorry I left you like that. It won't happen again.”

I pull my hand from his, rubbing it against my skirt, my palm all sweaty from his clammy hands. “Look, Benny, I appreciate your concern, but I'm fine. And I don't think I like you using your dad's key to get into my place.”

“I didn't think you would mind since we're dating. It's not a big deal. You can have one to mine.”

“I don't like repeating myself. Get the fuck out and don't come back. Leave her damn key on the table before you go.” I hear the difference in Mad Max's tone. He's done being nice... if he ever really was.

Before Benny can decide on his own what to do, Mad Max grabs him by the neck and drags him out of my place, going as far as holding him off the ground a few feet as he digs through

Benny's pockets for the spare key. When he finds it, he holds it up to me, and I just nod that it looks like mine. He tosses it on the table, where it lands perfectly with no hop, and then shoves Benny out, slamming the door in his face.

"Bye, Benny." I wave again, but he can't see me through the door.

Chapter 4 – Mad Max

lock her door and go to her curtains, shutting those too. Don't need that prick looking in on this place like the perv he is.

“Stay here.” I don't wait for a response before I check her place, confirming every window is locked and that there are no cameras or listening devices. Never know how much of a sick fuck any guy is these days. He might look like a normal jackass, but I've been locked up with some crazy motherfuckers who appeared “normal” but had been in jail for a reason.

Once I'm satisfied, I head back to her living and kitchen area and open the fridge. I look at her, and she only shrugs. Probably used to the look when people see her fridge is filled with three rows deep of Kool-Aid squeeze drinks for kid. I grab a blue one, because why the fuck not, and twist the top off before I go sit on her couch and turn the TV on with her remote.

Got to give it to the girl. She lets me flip through my fair share of shows before I finally settle on the local sports network. Only then does she perch her cute ass on the seat next to me before grilling me.

“Um, what's going on?”

At least she's not trying to play this off as some cool everyday shit. Kind of like that about her. Straight to the point and also not just screaming at me to get out. It's a nice middle ground.

“Ain't leaving.”

“Okay... and why is that?”

I give her a look that should explain it, but she just waits for more. I release a heavy sigh, as I hate talking when a look

can be read instead. Any brother would know what that look meant.

“Dipshit had a key to your place. Who the fuck knows if he has more? Ain’t leaving till the morning to make sure he isn’t going to come back.”

“Come back? You think he would?”

Another look. This one she gets. She just disagrees with it and shakes her head. “No, Benny might be a cheater and overstay his welcome, but I don’t think he’s the ‘harm a girl in the middle of the night while she’s sleeping’ type.”

I roll my head away from the TV and look at her full-on, not just the side glance I’ve been giving her. “What type of look would that be? Someone like me?”

I smirk as her face turns blank before she gets off the couch, putting some distance between us as she takes her phone out. I grunt and roll my eyes as I pull my feet off the coffee table I’ve been propping them up on. I know where this is going. Not staying around for cops to try and put shit on me that ain’t true.

“Hey, Izzy, it’s me.”

My eyes shoot to my forehead as the name of a club brother’s old lady rolls off her tongue.

“Sorry to bug you,” she continues, “but I just wanted to know if Mad Max is a psycho killer who I should be worried about or not.”

She’s watching me as she chews on her lip. I can hear the shocked laughter from Lady and give the pixie fairy a smile that most would find evil. I think it’s my “ha, got you” face. Of course, the chick surprises me more as she pulls the phone away from her ear and puts it on speaker. Not sure why, but maybe she just wants to hear it as she gets her own Kool-Aid. That or she sees no reason to hide shit when I can hear Izzy easily enough without it on speaker. No secret phone call happening in front of me unless she goes into the other room. I have amazing hearing. Helps me in more ways than one.

“Um... no. He might look big and scary and just got out of prison, but the Hounds don't really let that type of psycho into the club. They more take the psychos who fight for you and not against you, if that makes sense.”

I grunt at the way she talks about the club. Not a bad definition, but I doubt many of the brothers would like to be described that way.

“So you're saying I *shouldn't* take my Remington out of the closet and shoot him.”

I lock eyes with her. She just said one of the sexiest things I've ever heard, and I'm hard as hell right away. Something about her threatening me, even indirectly, is hot.

“Wait, he's at your place?”

We both glance at the phone before looking back at each other. I'm not sure what she's going to say. I'm not hiding that I'm here, but I didn't tell anyone I was taking her home either.

“Yeah... he gave me a lift. Figured he was cheaper than an Uber. Besides, he got rid of a pest problem. I just wanted to make sure I could close my eyes and not worry about him wearing my skin or anything when I wake up.”

This has me chuckling as I lean back on the comfy-as-shit couch and drink my kid drink. This night is not turning out like I thought it would when the club set up the sham of a “welcome back” party for me. The fact that 90 percent of the people there had no idea who I am is beside the point. I'm not sure if Law got what he wanted tonight, but I sure as hell got more than I thought I would.

As I watch the fairy from across the small apartment, I fully take her in. She glides over the ground almost as if she has wings. She's a funny type of girl, not like the ones I'm used to. Vamps are the only type I've been around in a long while, even before prison. I scare off the decent folk; they just assume I'm going to start shit. But not her. Not Cheyanne.

I realize it's the first time I've said her name, even if it's only in my mind. I taste it on my tongue as I think it twice

more before forming the word on my lips, but I make no sound. It fits her. *Foreign speaker*, or at least that's how a book I read on Native American names defined hers. Prison gives you tons of time to read, but the library sort of sucks on what's available. You take what's given to pass the time, and I must have recalled enough of it to remember that.

Not sure if she's bilingual, but she sure does move to a different beat. Maybe that's what it means. She can blend into all societies and not isolate herself with just one. Don't know any other chick willing to talk to an ex-con who looks like me, even if her uncle is in prison. Though her having family on the inside probably helps her see past a few issues I usually get called out for.

"You should be okay," Lady tells her. "I don't know him personally, but my man trusts him, and I trust my man. But if you need anything, just call me, okay? Bulldog and I can come over."

No she won't. As she said, my VP trusts me. He knows I'm not about to do shit that will get me locked away again. This fairy is probably safest with me versus the other Hounds.

Well, not her virtue. I took that shit earlier, and it was good enough that I want to do it again.

"No worries. Talk to you later." She hangs up and then comes back to sit by me. "So, you're not going to kill me." It's a statement, not a question, but I follow it up with one of my own.

"Was that really on the table?"

She shrugs again, like she has several times tonight. Each time she does, her shirt rises a bit and her belly button says hi. It also has her tits bouncing in a bra I know to be flimsy and probably beautiful, not a granny look-alike at all.

I turn the TV off and throw my drink away before I move down the hall.

"Where you going?" she shouts at my back.

I turn on the bedroom light as I step in, then take a seat on her mattress while I unlace my shoes. “Going to bed.”

I smile as I hear her practically run into her room. “The couch is that way, beast man.” She tosses a thumb over her shoulder.

I love the fact that she’s not protesting about me spending the night. She must have realized I was going to stay like I said I was. Doubt she expected this initially, but she ain’t throwing me out, just out of her bedroom.

“Ain’t sleeping on a damn couch.” I rise and pull my shirt over my head.

She’s not saying anything to stop me, and when I look over at her, I smirk. Girl’s locked on my chest and not blinking, just staring. It has me wanting to see what will happen if I take off my pants.

And I do because I’m a grown-ass man and I do whatever I fucking want. She’s seen it before—probably all she saw of me earlier. My pants slide off easily, and my dick springs forward. Yeah, underwear isn’t really my thing anymore. After so many years confined in prison, I prefer nothing confining me at all, including my twig and berries.

I’m semihard already, and as she just stares at my cock, I grow. Her eyes grow, too, but that’s the only expression on her that shows she’s affected by my looks. I pull half of the made-up sheets back and slide in. Only when I’m mostly covered by them does the fairy blink and shake her head as if coming out of a trance.

“But it’s longer than my bed. You won’t fit here,” she says, going straight back to her earlier conversation as if the last few moments didn’t happen.

I just cock an eyebrow at her. Her words need to catch up to what’s she’s seeing, ’cause I clearly do fucking fit on this soft-as-shit bed.

Fuck. Everything here is comfy as hell. Either I’m dog-ass tired and just finding comfort wherever I go, or her place is

fucking amazing. Kind of makes me think she might be too.

“Right.” She nods and then mutters to herself, soft enough that I can’t make it out, as she goes to the dresser and pulls some clothes out before she leaves the room and I hear a door close. I know she’s not leaving her home, and as I hear the sink running, I settle in.

I’m actually fighting getting pulled under by Mr. Sandman when she walks back in wearing only a long T-shirt that goes to her upper thighs. It’s damn short but covers everything. She’s a walking tease and doesn’t even seem to know it.

“Okay, you take the bed, and I’ll take the couch.”

I might be big, but I’m agile, and I easily spring out of bed and snag her wrists as she turns to leave. I wrap my other arm around her middle and drag her into the bed. Not one sound of protest as I maneuver her to sleep on her side as I continue to hold her against my chest.

We lie in silence for a beat before she wiggles into a comfortable spot with my arms wrapped around her. I push my hips back to not jab her with my dick once she finally settles. I mean, I will if she wants me to, but she ain’t exactly begging for it right now.

“You could have asked me to stay. No need to pick me up and just move me where you want me,” she huffs as she folds her arms.

I squeeze her tighter, forcing a squeak out of her. This chick has made me smile more in one night than I have in a very long-ass time. “But it’s so much easier than talking.”

She grunts in response, identical to my usual one, and I chuckle at her back.

We lie there and I just enjoy the softness under me and in my arms. It’s been a while since I had both at once. The beds at the clubhouse ain’t exactly quality. They do the damn job, but not like this one. I swear it’s made of feathers, which sort of fits the fairy’s personality.

“Fine.”

My eyes open and I stare at her head, trying to figure out if I fell asleep while she was talking to me or if she’s just talking to herself. Girl might be the one who’s crazy. Maybe *I* should have called a friend to vouch for *her*.

She looks over her shoulder at me, and again I notice how much cinnamon is in her eyes. “If you’re going to keep poking me with the stick between your legs, you might as well get me off with it too.”

It takes an embarrassing length of time for me to figure out what the fuck she’s talking about. I guess I didn’t even realize I was dry humping her with how relaxed I’d been a few moments ago with her in my arms.

She doesn’t seem deterred, or even disgusted by it, just grabs my hand and laces our fingers together as she pulls them down her body. Her other hand pulls her shirt up, and as she puts my fingers on her flesh, I notice she’s commando too.

She presses down on my middle finger so it slides over her clit and then down between her nether lips. She moans at the touch, and I just sink into the feeling of her using me as her own personal sex toy to get off. She rocks back into me as she rubs my finger on her clit. Her ass is at a perfect angle, and my dick slides between her globes now that her shirt is up above her hip. I groan at the feel of her perky ass, and the image of me taking this peach has me bucking into her.

She reaches back with her other hand and finds my rod, grasping it hard and stroking it a handful of times before moving it between her legs. She tries to thrust back on it, but she’s not at the right angle. Not like me. I push her hand away as I grab her hip, pulling her leg up. Like before, I’m the one thrusting into her, but this time from behind.

We both groan out loud. Neither of us needs to hide the way the other makes us feel right now. We don’t have to worry about someone coming up on us like before. We’re

alone and can enjoy the fuck out of this. I can take my goddamn time if I want.

But Cheyanne has a different idea. She slides my fingers over her slit and clit repeatedly as she moves her other hand to her tit and pinches hard. It throws her over the edge, and I launch onto her neck, biting and sucking it like I want to do her nipples. It sends another shiver through her, and I pump my hips faster, chasing my own end.

I keep sucking and biting, no longer allowing her to guide me on her pussy as I take over and really start to play with her clit. Pinching it hard at the same time I bite down on her shoulder throws her into another orgasm that has me racing to finish with her.

My fingers strum her a few more moments as she comes down from the explosion, and I lick at her neck and shoulder blade, kissing each indent of my teeth softly when I'm done. She sighs and wraps her arms around mine above the hand that's still petting her pretty cunt and falls asleep.

Doesn't even seem to care my dick is still softening inside her, or that we've made a mess of her sheets. One hundred percent trust in that moment. And it makes me freak the fuck out. No one's done that before, even the brothers. No one gives me their full trust in a matter of hours, and I didn't have to prove shit.

I don't know how to react. I just wrap my arms tighter around her as I stare into the darkness.

This fairy really does have some magic, it seems. 'Cause she's wielded something over me, and I'm not sure what to do about it.

Chapter 5 – Cheyanne

bolt upright in my bed and look around the room. I have no idea what woke me, and I'm disoriented, as if I've slept harder than I ever have before.

A noise followed by a voice does the opposite of what it should do, I bet. It makes me curious and not afraid. But I'm not stupid—Mom had me tested, several times. Turns out I'm a genius but lack social norms. Probably why I grab the shotgun out of the closet and not my pants or phone as I head to my front door.

“Yeah, just finishing up. Should be another fifteen minutes, and then I'll make it back in time for Church. Yeah, see you then.”

I stare at the vest on the back of the guy who's kneeling on my floor as he ends his call and grabs a screwdriver out of the bag beside him. The door's wide open, and he's messing with the lock. The patch on the back of his vest reads Hounds of the Reaper with a three-headed dog over two scythes, and I find the design oddly appealing.

“Don't shoot the messenger, will you?”

“Huh?”

He looks over at me and nods to my gun. One I might be holding but won't be shooting. His eyes linger on my legs a second longer than some would say is appropriate before he gives me a chin lift and goes back to work.

“Mad Max let me in. Told me to set you up with new locks. Should be another few minutes, and then I'll be done.”

I'm not the swooning type. Not even the type to *use* the word. But there's definitely a reaction happening inside me upon hearing he set me up with a new way to keep certain people out.

Who knew a beast could be sweet?

“Want something to drink?” I offer.

“Sure.”

I probably should have something else but Kool-Aid, but it’s my house, and I’ve honestly had more people over in the past twelve hours than the past three years. I grab him a blue one, since I just don’t see him liking grape for some reason and hand it over. He gives me a curious glance before he takes it and drinks it all in one go. I do the same with my red one. Love this drink. Beats coffee any day of the week in my book. Okay, anything beats coffee. That stuff is just gross. *Yuck.*

A few minutes more and the guy—who I think is Casper, if my memory works; well, that and the patch with his name on it—leaves. He gives me some speech about what type of lock it is and the bells and whistles, as it’s not just one you use with a single key. It’s got automatic locks, timers, and I swear some sort of radio. Or at least that’s what I heard. All I care about is that I just use it like any other door lock, and I don’t have to give a spare key to my landlord. I can now unlock the door for him from my phone when he calls and notifies me that he needs to come in for maintenance or something. Okay, so that part was cool to hear. The rest I didn’t really get or even care about.

After I put Remmi away—no reason not to name the gun I own; it makes sense to me since she’s my PIC, or partner in crime—I grab my laptop and plop myself on my couch. I wiggle a bit, half wondering if there’s an indent in it from the beast who last sat here, but soon ignore it as I start looking at my work emails.

Most people hate working long hours on Fridays, but with my job, I work when I need to. I don’t follow a typical schedule; if an email comes in that needs my attention, I reach out to the client and start working, even on weekends. *Woohoo to running my own consulting firm.* Consulting is a bit of a stretch from the truth of running polygraphs on those who need to know if someone is lying, but I like the ring of it. Also helps that no one works for me to contradict my title, so

it's a party of one I have to deal with. Only part that sucks is once a year when I have to pretend to be human resources and fill out so many damn reports about the company and set up the benefits. It's good, but the paperwork is just a pain.

I've been working with one of my repeat clients on and off for the last six months. They have another person they want me to vet out the truth about. They have someone every few days, so I know the routine. They never tell me exactly what's going on, but based on the questions they want me to ask, it's obvious: human trafficking. But if the clients want to do the whole "pretend you don't know what's going on because we never said it out loud" thing, it's fine. It's their money. I get paid either way. Despite the number of people they send me, I never get all the answers they want. Not sure if the case is local or not. This client deals on a national level and usually just shows up for the appointments with people at my office. No clue if they flew in or drove across town. Not my job to know; I just ask questions and report the answers, and they take what they want from it. And the fact that they keep using me lets me know they aren't discouraged with the results. They might not know who's taking people, but now at least they know who's *not* involved.

I jump into the prep for my newest interviewee and confirm the date and time the client is available. I get consumed by the details, and without even noticing I'm doing it, I find myself going over past interviews to find a connection. I'm not emotionally involved with what's going on, probably half the reason the client keeps using me. My reputation is for being icelike. It's not that I don't care, but if it's not affecting me directly, there's no reason to get emotional over things outside my control. Even then, there isn't a real reason to lose your head. Emotions do nothing but cloud judgment, and others see it and use it to control you.

My uncle taught me that. My parents pushed me as a kid, probably more than parents should, but it's done now and there's nothing to change. They were harsh to the point of being cruel with how they wanted me to know it all. They

learned early that I was gifted, and my parents exploited that to their benefit. They were both smart in their own right, but I think half of it was jealousy too. No way should a child the age of ten be correcting them. They sent me off to boarding school, where more testing and instruction just distanced me from my peers even more.

When they died in a house fire because of bad wiring, my uncle was the only family I had left. To avoid going into the system, since I was only fourteen, I went to him. We established our routines pretty early. He was already thoroughly involved with the government then, and I was more like a house sitter than him watching over me. Which I preferred, since I had already graduated from college and was trying to find my way outside the academic world.

He didn't coddle me, nor did he push me to be more than I already was. What he did do was challenge me. Or, more accurately, he showed me how to challenge myself. Schooling was easy—everything else was hard. His first challenge was to push out all emotions. Most of them weren't hard to do, as I had no love for my parents. But anger was a bit difficult. I wasn't mad that they left me, just mad at myself for not leaving *them* sooner. It was the toughest lesson he taught me, but one that's served me well. Push the emotion out and see the bigger picture. Anger gave me nothing, but because my parents pushed me, I now own a successful international business, all before I'm twenty-five.

The bigger picture I'm looking at in front of me now has four specific areas to focus on. Not sure if the client is seeing the trend, but there are subtle differences that make them different. Seven interviews came from the East Coast and six from the West, four from the north border, and so far, only two from the south. Each person has some sort of connection with international borders, be it a crossing location or a port. The client might see this as one issue, but I see each as a separate entity that has a singular focus. Not a shared boss but a common result: the kidnapping and transportation of individuals out of the country.

I'm sure some victims are being taken to others inside this trafficking organization as well. But if the drop-off points occur at the exit points of the country, then keeping ties within the US should be a little easier to contain. Seems logical, at least to me, but I realize that sometimes even the client has become emotionally involved.

The ding of a new email notification pulls my attention away from me making plot points, hoping to use geographical location to narrow a higher target location the client can focus on. But the email isn't from a client. It isn't even on my work or personal accounts. It's on my uncle's.

I've monitored his account since before he got locked up. I stumbled upon it when I was living in his home those first few months after my parents' deaths. He walked in on me using his computer, which he said I could, but I don't think he was expecting to receive any work emails while I was on it. That's the only reason I knew about his dark web account. He never seemed nervous about me knowing things. I think it was his own challenge to see what would happen.

But when he was arrested, and I was questioned about what I knew, I never spoke about this, nor did he. He encrypted and cleared out the emails each time he used it, so I never really studied them. I don't know why I keep the link open. Since he was caught and tried for treason, nothing has come from him. Not till now.

:\the Candy is gone\:

I find myself biting my lip, not sure if I should reply or not. I still remember the messages I saw that first day. The back chatter was still visible, and no encryption was used. Jimmy didn't start the encryption and deletion till after that, probably to save me from knowing more than I should but not hiding what he was doing. Showing he trusted me on some level, as he never took the computer away or told me to forget what I saw. But he was also not trusting me, or maybe just protecting me from getting more involved than I was. Which I was fine with. Still am.

But this one's not encrypted. And I know the encryption setup works on both sides. The person sending it must know it's me they're reaching and not my uncle and didn't code it on purpose.

My curiosity gets the better of me, and I deduce that Candy is a person, as it's the only thing capitalized. I decide to send a response.

://How long has the store been without//: I figure that sounds encrypted enough to not alert anyone who might be monitoring this channel. Just in case Jimmy's secret email account actually has been compromised.

:\a week. can Uncle bring some to the shop?\":

Okay, so they want Jimmy to help. But how? He's in jail. Everyone in the world knows that. Or at least anyone who watched TV four years ago. Not many could avoid getting bombarded by the US having a person on trial for treason. I'm sure Jimmy had that set up, too, 'cause I doubt anyone would have leaked it if they weren't benefiting from it. And the fact that they televised it brought more eyes on him. The agency he was working for figured out pretty quick that more eyes meant more digging. And more digging would prove more scandal with the agency, so they sentenced him quickly and sent him to prison. I'm sure they would have preferred to just drop him off a cliff or whatever the agency does, but Jimmy was too "famous" by then. He needed to be sent to a prison that the press can go to every now and again when they want to bring up some random topic that involves terrorism and use his face as the focal point.

://Uncle is on vacation//:

:\send Auntie instead. Order will be sent in advance.\:

The connection ends a second after a file is sent. I take a breath, pushing out any possibility of emotion before I open it. I watch as the files are downloaded and decrypted before me. Some are videos, some are what appear to be cargo logs, and others are just random names and numbers. I have no

idea what I'm looking at, but whoever is running this shop knew one thing about me: puzzles are my weakness. And this? This is one giant-ass puzzle to dive into and see where the parts fit. I've got a suspicion that they might fit into the other puzzle I'm working on for my client.

Over the next several hours, I pore over these new files. I'm getting some answers and also guessing and pulling other things together. I did pretty well in school when I took a few courses in theory and cryptoanalysis in college. I can guess with the best of them, and I'm usually right.

From what I can gather, my original theory is correct. There are four separate groups, each focusing on one territory of the US. They seem to have an international partnership, but I keep my focus on the local, since it affects what I get paid to do and this Candy person. The video I received is of a person being taken outside a literal candy shop, ironic unless her name isn't Candy. Which is probably the case, but since I have no other name to go off, I continue to call her that in my head and in the notes I'm taking.

East, West, and North—the names I've given the three groups that seem a bit more established. They share about the same information my client has already provided. Obviously, my current information exceeds what I was initially given, but it matches the reason why certain people were referred to me for questioning. Each person who I've talked to has been a part of this trafficking, most unknowingly, with one or two knowing a bit more but nothing about the other trafficking areas they were pulled from. Nothing was even hinted at by the client's people, suggesting more than one large organization. But this new information makes it clear that there are four separate groups.

As for the South, this one seems to be new, though I'm not sure whether they're new to the operation or just new in ownership. While my client doesn't have much on them, Store Owner has quite a bit. I have no idea who anyone is, and calling those who reached out "Store Owner" seems like a

good way to refer to them in my notes to help me figure all this out.

They probably did their own digging, since Candy was in Texas when she got taken. They even put a star next to their theory on the main base of operation for each group. I actually snorted when I saw that Kansas is considered a possible operational point for the South. While Kansas is middle road, I guess it falls under the South group, as the Store Owner even provides an estimated outline of the four quadrants.

The part I didn't find funny is the link to names they associated with possible ownership of the South. Uncle Jimmy is on their list. No wonder they're reaching out. Not sure if I agree with the tactic, though. Does anyone just say, "Oh yeah, I got your girl. You caught me"?

Or... maybe they know he isn't involved but think he might know who is.

Or maybe he *was* involved.

There's no way to know, not unless I ask. Which is probably Store Owner's goal all along. Do I play into their hand?

As soon as the thought crosses my mind, I shrug it off. If I do, then I do. Emotions won't help, and worrying or being afraid are just unwanted emotions that make things complicated when they don't need to be.

It's only after I decide to visit my uncle in prison that I think about the beast who just got out of it.

I look at my door and find myself smiling. He's an odd bird, kind of like me, which I like. We had great sex twice, and now I have a new lock.

A girl could do worse.

Chapter 6 – Mad Max

I'm the first to arrive at Church. Don't care if I'm thirty minutes early or not. Today I get my colors back, and until I'm officially back in the club, only a few positions at the table are reserved. Everything else is first come, first served, and I ain't putting my back to the door if I can help it, so I arrive early and secure my seat, close to the table. I'm not an officer and sit on the outskirts of the room, with the wall at my back and a clear view of those in front of me and the door leading out. If shit goes wrong, yes, I'll be the last one out, but that way I can guarantee everyone else gets out safely. Not because I'm a coward or any shit but 'cause I got the club's back, even *at* the back.

No one says shit to me for being early when they arrive. They nod acknowledgments while I just take them in. Only a select few get a chin lift back. Not because I don't care about the others, but only a few deserve the respect of one. The others know where I stand with them, so no need to do that with extra movements if I can help it.

I ain't a statue, despite the brothers liking to tease me about it. I find staying still helps me blend in a bit more. Fear can shadow the look a brother gives me if they know shit about me, like a few of them do. They got patched in while I was locked up; they know me by reputation, and they're happy to have me on their side, but they still keep their distance. I don't hold a grudge—no use in that. They're their own people, and nothing I can say will change their thinking. Learned that a long time ago.

"All right, assholes, settle down." Law bangs his scythe gavel on the table. No one but the two of us knows it was me who made it. I carved it out of an old oak tree that used to sit out back by his old lady's favorite spot. Special K never shied away from me, and there was a special bond I had with her from the beginning. She was the one who brought me into the club, having found me on the streets after being kicked

out of another kitchen job. I suck at doing dishes, but it was the only job that people always seemed to need. I'd just gotten over a growth spurt and was still learning my strength. My stepdad had kicked me out at seventeen as soon as my mom passed from cancer.

Special K took one look at me sitting on the curb and just told me to get in her car. She drove me to the club, and I've been here ever since. When she passed away from cancer like my mom, I took to spending time in her spot to just find a sense of peace. Being angry is easy; finding peace is hard. She always tried to help me get my anger out, as I usually held it in and didn't say shit. Till I wanted to, and then I talked with my fists. But when I sat on her bench, for the first time I didn't want to hit something. I wanted to make something with my hands. A fallen branch caught my eye, and I just started carving away at it. It turned into something pretty awesome if anyone asked me. But they didn't. No one expected something that delicate to come from me. So when I gave it to Law, he took it and made it part of Church. It was a way to bring Special K into this sacred place after her passing.

"Point of order. First Bulldog will give us a rundown on the brewery, and then Flint and Casper will share what they found out last night. You're up, VP."

Bulldog doesn't rise—no need to when all eyes move to him after the prez calls his name. "Club's been talking, as you all know. We've done the research and can now produce enough beer locally to move to two more brewery locations. We're using the other chapters to test locations and have narrowed it down to one in North Carolina, as we all agreed on before, and the second will be in Washington state. Bass, Gator, and our prospect are up there already to train the new recruits willing to join the other new adventures the club's looking into. They've provided blueprints for a building their chapter owns that will outfit the third brewery. Once we have those up and running, I think we can move internationally like we've planned."

“And when we go international, it’ll help provide additional cover for some of the other reasons the club’s been going overseas lately,” Chains, the former VP, chimes in.

The brothers at the table nod, as do I.

I might have been locked away for a bit, but I ain’t mad at the direction the club’s going. The beer business is a guaranteed success, and we won’t be running out of cash flow from that anytime soon. Not sure what Bulldog does to make it taste so damn good, but the guy’s got the smarts and know-how to make it work, and the club offers him the manpower and the backing to do it. And once cash won’t be a question for us, we can focus on the second new avenue the club’s gone into: mercenaries.

Sure, most of the brothers call it “search and rescue,” but I like Flint’s term for it: paid manpower to get the job done. Only difference between us and the others out there is the man in charge. Law—and by proxy Flint, since he came from the intel world—chooses what cases we take and what we don’t. And if anyone fucks with us, we fuck right back. So far, no one has, but we’ve got a plan in place in case they do. We’ve run five ops since the club voted in this new line of work. We bring in more chapters and manpower as needed and seek the best in the entire club for specialties when warranted. We might not use everyone who signs up, but we now have a backlist a mile long for every possible needed expertise and at least two backups for each.

“Which brings up to the next part of business. Boys, what did you learn from Mad Max’s impromptu welcome back shindig?”

Casper answers Law’s question while regarding each of us in the room. “As you all know, the party was a ploy to see if anyone was talking. Before it happened, we put out feelers that the club was looking to get into the skin trade.” We all know this, but still a few grumbles go up about it. No one in the club is interested in that shit. We actually respect women—when they deserve it. When they don’t, well, fuck them.

“Settle,” Law growls as he bangs the hammer. We all know this is a necessary evil to get to the endgame.

“We also set up the party to get Gideon to come,” Casper continues. “He doesn’t show much and tries to stay out of shit where he can, but it was a ploy on all fronts. With Gideon present, it showed that the Hounds are serious about moving to this avenue.”

I watch as the brothers who grumbled all reluctantly nod in agreement. Gideon is like a ghost for the club. Some have seen him, others only heard about him. He likes to float in and then move out. Rumor is he helped the club get out of a jam even before Law was here, but no one talks about it. All anyone knows is that Gideon always knows more than he says. He has connections to both sides and only plays along with one side when he wants something. Not sure what he wants from the Hounds, but I bet it’ll come at a hefty price once he tells Law.

“While I didn’t make contact with Gideon last night, he did call me today.”

We all look to Law at that. Even Casper looks a bit taken back, as if hearing the news for the first time. Which he might be, since Law is never known to blabber one-on-one if he can just say it to the group once.

“He didn’t make the party, but he had another there in his place. His man on the ground did make contact with someone who might have connections to a person in the operation. Actually, he said he saw two people with the same connection.” Law turns and looks at me, and I just raise an eyebrow.

“Jimmy Travis seems to be a name people are circling around.”

I feel the other brothers’ eyes on me, but I keep mine locked with my prez’s as I tilt my head. I know he ain’t saying I’m involved. We all know I don’t do the skin trade. Got locked away after fucking up some asshole I didn’t even know for

roughing up a girl I knew even less. If that doesn't prove I'm against that shit, I don't know what does. But I know who he's thinking is the other connection: Jimmy's niece, the fairy.

"Tomorrow, we'll make a trip out there and see what he knows. Till then, you all know your job, so get to it."

Bulldog coughs a second before the prez can hit the gavel to end Church. He glances at me and then back to the prez, who only looks mildly miffed at being interrupted. But if he wasn't going to say shit, I was going to. My knee bounces, the only indication that I'm itching for what's to come next.

"Oh, right. Flint, you got something to welcome back our brother?" Law says it so casually, as if it means nothing, when getting my colors back means the world to me.

"Fuck yeah I do." I didn't even notice Flint carrying anything in till he stands and walks over to me, handing me the same cut I gave to him the day before I got locked up. "Welcome home, brother."

I swallow hard as I stand and put the leather on. It feels like the closest thing to a home a guy like me can get. My brothers shout their welcomes as Flint pulls me in for a hug and a smack on my back, below the club's logo.

"Church dismissed." Law bangs the gavel, but I stay, as does he, the VP, and a few of the others at the table. The door closes on the six of us remaining.

Takes a minute before someone talks, long enough for me to sit back down, and I ain't surprised when it's Bulldog. "Lady said you went to the niece's place last night."

I nod.

"You also had Casper set up a new lock system for her this morning."

Both I and the man who did the labor nod.

"Any reason?"

I shrug, not feeling any hostility from my brothers, knowing they just want the story behind it. Damn coincidental that the same two people who have a name floating around with the skin trade were together last night. “She came with a date to the party. She caught him fucking the vamp Shelia, and I kicked them both out. Didn’t think she needed to see that, and Shelia’s just fucking annoying.” The boys grunt in agreement. “When she left, I gave her a ride, since she didn’t have one anymore. When I dropped her off, the date had broken into her place. Kicked him out, stuck around till morning, then had Casper install the locks.”

No one questions why. They all get it. No one at the table, or in the club, would have done anything different. They might not have fucked her like I did, but they would have done the same otherwise. No woman should feel like her place isn’t safe.

“Think she’s involved?” Bulldog continues.

I shrug again. I might know what causes her breath to hitch when I do a certain hip move, and I like her at face value, but I don’t know her more than that. She intrigues me, but I’m not dumb enough to let that make me look past the possibility that she could be a potential threat. Pretty faces are only that and don’t get special treatment in my book.

“Nothing in her place screamed threat. Not sure if she would have that lying around even if she was involved, though.”

I nod at Casper’s assessment.

The boys mull it over while I replay every single fucking thing we did in my head. The way Izzy brought her over to meet us. Whose idea was it? No way could she have planned for me to follow her and catch her date fucking around on her. I didn’t even know I’d followed her till she backed up into me. I don’t make a habit of looking down, and she’s fucking small as hell.

The sex, both times, was my idea, mostly. The first one was because I wanted it, and the second I didn't even know I was doing it. Both had her being the willing partner, not the instigator. Sure, she basically ordered me the second time, but my dick was already molesting her. She really didn't have a choice but to hop on the train or get run over by one.

The only one throughout the night who seemed off to me was Benny. But I tend not to like cheating assholes who break into a girl's place. Not that either would have known that about me.

I don't think I'm the one being played here, nor is the club. Not from the way I see it.

But it's damn coincidental, and that shit usually means something.

Law bangs on the table with his fist as he stands. It's more for support than to get our attention, I surmise, as he doesn't seem put off that I'm the only one looking at him as he rises.

"No use sitting on our asses, wondering. We'll ask Travis tomorrow. In the meantime, Flint, dig up what you can on the niece. She might be innocent, she might not. Either way, let's do our own recon. Ain't about to let shit get pulled over the club's head just 'cause someone *looks* innocent. Been down that road before."

Collectively, we look to Chains, who just growls. Ain't a secret he got screwed, twice, by a chick no one saw as a threat. Got him his own cell too. But from what I've gathered since being back, his fucking past worked out for his future. At least he doesn't seem to complain all that much while he dotes on his old lady who's about to pop with his kid any day now. Might not know a ton of shit about babies, but I know a walking house when I see one, and Chains' old lady is just that. Sure, she's all glowy and shit, but she's still the size of a fucking house in the belly area.

"I'll get started right after I get Kitten from practice." Flint stands next and heads for the door. We're all invested in

bringing down whatever we *think* we know is going on, but no one more than him. His old lady got tangled in this from the beginning, and he's got a grudge a mile long to kill Duke, the VP of a rival club, Devils Damned.

Our clubs don't mix, but we usually have an understanding of sorts. Either the understanding is broken, or Duke's gone rogue from his own club's rule. While the Devils Damned president is a fucking bastard in his own right, Psy ain't into the skin trade. Only thing he ain't willing to sell. He does the prostitution route, but not buying and selling off the unwilling. Guess that's the guy's only fucking standard, from what I can tell.

Doesn't seem to be true for his VP, who's been hanging out at a northern chapter of theirs in Oklahoma. Devils Damned have tried for years to get into our territory, but the Hounds of the Reaper have claimed the middle of the fucking road. We control the midway points from east to west and north to south. Our sister chapters vary, but we've got enough out there that we make a solid dent in territory throughout the US and a few overseas. Each club is run in their own way, but they all follow us, the mother chapter.

And we all follow when a brother seeks revenge on anyone doing harm to their old lady.

Kitten might be fine now, but she'll always have a target on her back till this is over. Never thought I would see the day that Flint would fall for a woman, but I can't say I blame the guy for the one he did. Of course, she fell first—got the scar to prove it.

Law waves him off. "No rush. I don't think you'll find much. Gut's telling me to look elsewhere, but I'd rather know for sure. When are the Misfits putting on a new show? She's been upping the practice lately, hasn't she?"

"In two weeks. I hate that she wants another brother to watch her when she practices—says she wants to surprise me and all that shit. But each time she comes home in one of her outfits, I ain't that disappointed."

“What’s the show about this time?” Casper pipes up, as the club has taken to going to the shows each time. It’s become an unofficial club event. Each time we go, the show has never disappointed us. Sure, none of us may watch the movie that plays in the background, but we can all appreciate the hard work Kitten and her team put into doing the dances and scenes. And yeah, there are some hot-as-fuck numbers in skimpy outfits who wiggle on the stage.

“Burlesque.”

I grunt, the equivalent of a bark of laughter from me, as I follow my brothers out. Yeah, the club’s not going to have a problem going to another song and dance show at all. Just hope we can be done with some of this shit beforehand to actually enjoy it and not let our problems ruin a good night out.

Chapter 7 – Cheyanne

it here. He'll be out shortly.”

“S I smile at the guard, who doesn't even look at my face after he shows me to the round table in the common room with all the other visiting families. I settle in, knowing the routine, and actually find myself smiling when I hear my uncle cursing at a guard. Who knows what set him off this time, but he always seems to go after one guard or another.

Before prison, he was reserved. Never raised his voice, never spoke without thinking. I don't think I ever heard him utter a single bad word till he got here. And I know it's not because he didn't know them. Sure, he showed me a different side than he showed the world when he was home on leave from the agency. But in here, half of what he does I fully believe is just an act. He's playing a part. The media portrayed him as a traitor, even though he'd dedicated his life to serving his country. So that's the part he plays.

Guards and onlookers see a person who doesn't give a shit about the law or that he's stuck behind these walls. But those who are close, those who really know, see what he's doing. He might be stuck in this place, but that doesn't mean he isn't still playing a game on the outside. And until yesterday, I thought the game was just to get information to certain people. To provide a bit of relief to the families connected to those on the inside or to the victims he went to prison for saving.

No one but me sees the surprise on his face as he comes into the room and realizes who's come to visit him. Not sure if the guards do it with everyone or just him, but he's never told who's here, just that he has a visitor. When I come, it's always the third weekend of the month. I shouldn't be here for another week.

I wave, per my usual, and he just rolls his eyes, per *his* usual. He always thinks I'm too friendly, that I should put up more of a guard, but I like waving. It's my way of opening the conversation and closing it at the end. I had that issue as a child. Never knew when the moment was over, or I left before it even began. If I wave, most people understand when I want to start or when I'm done. And if they just walk away after I wave my hello, I just wave my goodbye at their back and walk away myself. No emotions, just results.

"Someone die?" he sneers as he takes a seat. The guards are still too close for him to drop whatever act he's portraying. I think it's also his way of protecting me. If he shows he doesn't care, then I'm not someone to be looked into, just a wayward niece with no family left but him.

"Yes." He pauses, and it's the only sign that I've shocked him. "People die every day, so I'm sure someone did. I don't know any of them, but it's the circle of life."

He huffs as he shakes his head, and I find myself tilting mine. I said something that wasn't right. He never laughs, but he does this when I mess up. "Semantics, Boo."

Ah, got it. I smile instead of feeling embarrassed that I got his question wrong. The fact that he called me Boo is a semantic in itself and lets me know we can talk freely. He only refers to me that way once it's clear.

I take a moment to notice the others in the room. No beast standing guard like those few times I came to visit last year. Not even the usual guards, but I think that's my fault. I came on a different day, so nothing could be planned. Despite what Jimmy says, the men in here respect him and actually *want* to protect him in their own way. That's why certain guards usually bring him to our chats and why the usual inmates who get visitors seem to have roaming eyes looking for threats, not just visiting.

But not today. Today, everyone is for themselves. I see, as well as feel, a few glances my way. Jimmy might have given me all clear, but he isn't as relaxed as he usually is. There's no

smile—not that he smiles often, but there’s definitely more of a sneer on his lip than not. I need to be careful with what I say in here, more so than usual. I have no idea if the person sitting beside us can hear and is part of what I discovered or not.

“I got a letter yesterday,” I start.

“Good for you.”

I don’t feel deterred at his bark as he adjusts in his seat and just looks pissed to be here. “It came in a very pretty black design, and I had to trace the company that made the envelopes on the web. I didn’t realize you had an account with the company.”

I pique his interest as he realizes I’m referring to his old email. “You buy anything off it?”

“No, just looked at the envelopes. Wanted to see if I could find that one only.”

“You find it?”

I’m not used to talking in code, and I’m not really sure if what I’m saying is getting to him, so I try to put things in the right way to make him understand. “I had to ask the store owner. They said the specific envelope type is named candy and that it’s been... misplaced for several days now.”

He pulls back slowly as if I struck him. I think the move is more reflex than anything else. I doubt I could ever truly shock my uncle.

He eyes me, then looks around before finally shaking his head and cursing. “Fucking hell.” He runs his hand through his hair, and I just sit and wait. This reaction from him is equivalent to others screaming and shouting. He never curses in front of me, not when we’re alone like this.

“Is... is candy something you’ve purchased before? Is the store owner reputable?” I really wish I didn’t have to speak in code. I just want to know who this person is. It’s a piece of the

puzzle that I don't understand. How is Candy, or the group I'm calling Store Owner, connected to my uncle?

"A few times I've *bought* from them, but usually it's just letterhead. They have good penmanship." He eyes me at the last word. He wants me to understand, and I think I do. This group only gave him intel before. Words for him to use when and where he wants to.

"I haven't reached out to them in a long time. How did you hear about them?"

"Like I said, *I* got the letter. I think it was meant for you, but there was no direct name on it, just the addresses."

He nods in understanding that I was just as surprised to be contacted by them as he is. "I don't think you'll get another letter from them. They must realize I'm no longer interested in their products."

"They, um... they signed me up to receive their promotions. I might go back once the candy has been restocked, I think. They *asked* for me to check back in on the website in a few days if it's not restocked."

He presses his lips together firmly, forcing them out a bit and reminding me of a duck. He doesn't like me being involved in whatever this is, but I see the wheels turning as he just sits there and thinks through what I said while looking me over. He knows me. Knows I can't resist a puzzle, not really.

"Don't you have your *own* office supplies? Wouldn't they prefer you stuck to their brand of *white* envelopes?"

"They actually started making black ones on their own. They're okay, but not as good quality as the other ones." I really hope he gets what I'm saying. My client is already involved in what appears to be the same issue as the other group, but they lack the finer details.

"I see."

God, I really hope so. This whole cryptic spy talk is harder than it looks on TV. Everything has too many different

meanings.

He sits back in his chair and rubs his hand over his chin, gliding his fingers back and forth until they almost feel hypnotic.

I take the time to go over what I found out last night in my head. I'm more convinced than ever that these are from the same human trafficking ring. Each might have a different leader for their region, but they all have a connection to the buyers. I've dug through the intel, and it proves that the purchase locations are the borders, but the victims are picked up within each quadrant of the inner cities. Small towns get a few, but it's the bigger cities that get the majority. Candy was taken from Oklahoma City.

I already know what Jimmy's going to say. He's going to warn me off this, as any regular uncle should do. Keep the harm away from their only niece. But I don't want to stop. I might not be up to doing all the undercover spy things he did, but I want to be more involved than just doing the interviews. I got a taste for digging. It's an emotion that's new to me. The thought of it even has me licking my lips.

"How much digging did you do on this company?"

His words pull me back to him, and I see him studying me. I wonder how long he was watching me. Bet it was long enough to know what's going on in my head. I might be a clinical genius, but nothing ever got past my uncle.

"A bit."

"You going to reach out to other websites asking about these envelopes?"

I hesitate, not sure if I understand what he's asking. I won't be using the dark web, as I don't really know how. I'm just sort of stumbling along.

"No." He nods in agreement. "But"—he eyes me skeptically—"I will ask the store owner about them, and I might go looking for some in town." Not going to lie to my

uncle. He might not like what I do, but he deserves more than me hiding the truth.

“I never bought envelopes.” He looks me dead in the face, his eyes devoid of the little emotion he usually shows me. “Never wanted them, nor did I have anyone I worked with who did.” I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding. “But I heard of some who did.”

I nibble on my lip. I don’t think there’s a code for how to ask the next question without just asking outright. “Do you recommend one to talk to over another?”

Commotion behind me draws Jimmy’s gaze. I turn as well and find myself waving awkwardly.

“Friends of yours?”

I look back to my uncle, who has a raised eyebrow and a smirk on his lips. I sheepishly shrug, not denying it but also not fully admitting it. This is literally the first time a guy I slept with is in the same room as Jimmy. I guess this is as close to my parents meeting a suitor as it’ll get. Not awkward, just different.

Mad Max glares at me as he moves to the empty table next to us with two others. His president sits next to me as the other guy, Casper, sits by the beast.

Another inmate comes, not one I know, and no one talks to him as he takes a seat at the table with Mad Max and Casper. No one seems to notice him, but I get the feeling he’s just a prop to let more Hounds in this place. Surprised the warden let the president sit at our table; even if the limit is two people per inmate, we were already in a meeting.

He lifts his chin at Jimmy. “Travis.”

“Law.”

I watch the exchange as they size each other up, and I swear the room quiets for a second, like everyone is waiting for a fight to break out, but I’ve never known my uncle to hold a grudge against the Hounds. And last I checked, Mad Max

was a guard for Jimmy at some point, so unless something happened recently, I'm not sure what the tension is.

"There a reason why my *niece* is waving at you lot?"

Oh.

"She's a friendly girl."

"Not that friendly."

"Met her the other night. One of my guys dealt with a problem she had."

This has Jimmy moving forward and resting his arms on the table, all but ignoring me. "Dealt how?" The growl in his voice makes me push back from the table in surprise. Never heard menace like that from him before.

"He won't be a problem."

All eyes turn to Mad Max. His table buddies are sitting like a triangle, the inmate with his back to us and the two Hounds on the opposite side facing us, watching us talk. There's enough space between the tables to have privacy, but Mad Max's voice travels to our group.

"You sure?" Jimmy asks.

"Benny's not a problem." I feel the need to step in and prove I wasn't an idiot. I still stand by my thoughts. Benny might be a guy who has no clue what loyalty is, but he isn't a threat.

"Personal guarantee." Neither table spares me a glance, and I huff as I fold my arms across my body. They all nod in some sort of agreement with what Mad Max said.

"What brings you lot to my neck of the woods? Might not mind the company, but I didn't expect to see *you* back here in a long-ass time." Jimmy talks to Law till the end, and then he makes a point to look over at Mad Max.

"We're here as a courtesy, nothing more," Law says for the Hounds.

“About what?”

“Perhaps we should wait for innocent ears to leave... unless they’re tangled as well?”

“No.”

The one word from my uncle earns a quick follow-up response from Law. “Good.”

Both men look to me, and I just stare wide-eyed at everyone. “Right. So, I guess this is the part where I leave. Bye, Uncle Jimmy. See you soon.” I stand, waving my goodbyes, focusing only on my uncle, as he’s the man I came to see and the only one I can guarantee will return my ending of the conversation.

But before he waves, he stops me from walking away.

“See you soon, Boo. Stop by the shop on Fifth and ask for Lou. He’ll be able to help you with the stationery.”

I nod and do my damndest to act cool as I leave. But my eyes betray me at the last minute, wandering to the beast as I pass. A shiver rakes through me as I find him already watching me, and we share a look before I pass him and continue on my way.

The Hounds might want me to stay away from whatever they’re here for—which, if I were a betting woman, would be for the same reason I was. But while they might be warning me off, Jimmy gives me a bigger surprise. I know exactly who Lou is on Fifth, but most call him Louie *the* Fifth. And he isn’t a nice man.

Which is fine, ’cause I know how to deal with men like that: show no emotion and bring a wad of cash. One I have, and the other I just need to stop at the bank for. Luckily, it’s on the way home and next to the only grocery store in town that sells my favorite drink.

Seems like fate to me.

Chapter 8 – Mad Max

stay seated, even as I feel every fiber in my body demanding I get up. I honestly don't know which of the three reasons is pushing me more.

It wasn't too long ago that I sat at these very same tables but on the opposite side. There's a distinct itch to get the fuck out of here so they don't find a reason to make me a permanent resident again.

There's also another part of me that wants to get my ass up and move to sit at the table with my president. Never was the club's enforcer, but I always had Law's back when shit like this went down. He's the one man who I protect over everyone else while Casper cares for the rest of the brothers. Not sure if that's why I got chosen to come here over the VP. It sure as shit wasn't because I have friends in this place who can help us out. I survived, like every man here, and I kept the enemy list low.

That's about as poetic as it got around here. And the man across from my president was never an enemy of mine, but he's not a friend either. We had an understanding—some was club mandated, and some was just between me and him. I can respect the man and still not trust him at the same time. He might have said his niece wasn't involved in anything shady, but I also know how he gives out information. And that last bit was filled with it, even if I don't know what it was about yet.

Cheyenne, the fairy. There's a strong urge—might be stronger than the others and that's why I'm pushing it so far down—to go after her. She's a grown-ass woman, been coming to see her uncle like clockwork. She knows how things work around here, and no one bothers her, but I don't like it. Not sure when I decided to care what a woman did; ain't about to figure it out now. Just know I'd rather she wasn't

alone. I took care of one of her problems, but my gut is telling me she's got a few more.

"You must have friends in some pretty high places, Law."

With Cheyanne gone, the man I know comes to life. Jimmy Travis might put on a front when his only niece is around, but he's a cold-ass bastard. He might have done something noble to get locked up, but he's got too many fingers in some shitty baskets that keep him here under the disguise of a minor infraction. Everyone who knows the man knows his trial was a charade, and even if he got a "possibility for parole," it'll never happen.

Law shrugs. "Helped the warden out on a few parking tickets before he got stationed over here."

Travis huffs a laugh. Law hasn't practiced law in years, but when he did, he did more than parking tickets. He was a shark in the courtroom and researched the shit out of things to find loopholes. If the warden is still granting Law access to shit, like joining a meeting of an inmate already being visited, then it was a pretty big help.

"Ask what you want. My time is limited, and bingo starts soon."

"A mutual friend said we should pay you a visit."

"How mutual?"

"Gideon." This draws Travis's attention. He raises a single eyebrow, a trait he does when he wants others to continue to talk. Which Law knows. "Said you might know what Duke's into."

"Name ain't ringing a bell." He responds too quickly. Another tell that he knows more shit than he's letting on.

"Said if you don't know, maybe she does." I pull the attention my way, and Travis's nostrils flare at my words as he keeps his anger in check. Just barely.

"Boo's got nothing to do with this, and you know it." He holds my gaze across the two tables. Not sure if he's using his

endearment for Cheyanne to speak to me directly or not. Not many know that name for her, only the select guards Travis permitted on her visits. While I might not have noticed her when she visited, the name, and that she wasn't a threat, was what I did know.

But I also have no idea if he knows I fucked her or not. No clue what was said before we got here. She could have come running to her uncle *because* we had sex. Chicks are weird like that. They're all for it during, but then they regret shit after. Never made sense to me. The deed is done; no need to regret anything if everyone got off. But the fairy doesn't seem like normal a chick, so who the hell knows if she told him or not? She doesn't seem the type to hide what we did, but I wonder if she would share it.

I grind my teeth, forcing discomfort to my brain. *Why the fuck do I care?* Never did before, so what's the fucking big deal? I might not regret sleeping with this chick, but I fucking hate how I'm thinking about her more than I have any others. It's different, and I ain't a fan of different when I don't know if it's good or bad for the club.

"Maybe you should tell us who *does* have something to do with this, and we can make sure she's protected and kept far away." Law throws the offer on the table as if it means nothing. But it does. Club protection isn't given to just anyone, and Travis knows it.

"She doesn't need your protection because she ain't involved. And before you ask again, I don't know a Duke." He gives me a side-eye before continuing. Not sure what it means, but my brothers see it as well. "Doesn't mean I've never heard the name."

"Ain't that the same thing?" Casper chimes in, and Travis just looks at him like he's a child.

"Not a damn thing is the same about that boy. Rumors spread faster than wildfire, especially here. You can hear a name but not know the man attached or what makes them tick."

Before Casper can open his mouth and possibly get Travis pissed enough to end this little meeting, Law brings the conversation back to him again. “What you hear?”

“Probably same as you. Guy’s tired of not being king of the castle, you know. Wants more.”

“More what?”

Travis shrugs as if it’s obvious. “Money, power. You name it, he wants it. The second string is done for him. His king sent him north more as a punishment than a promotion. Guy resents it and is branching out.”

“Into what?”

Travis spares a subtle glance around, but it’s only me and Casper listening to him and Law talk. Even the inmate at the table knows not to listen. He might not be club, but I told the guys to pick him when we came up this way, knowing we all wouldn’t be able to sit at the same table. The guy uses a hearing aid, so he turns it off when he needs to. Like now.

“The kind of thing his king wouldn’t be a part of.”

“Does his king know?”

“Don’t know. Like I said, rumors don’t make a man. If someone thinks they know someone, they can easily dismiss what they hear till they see it with their own eyes. Why you asking all this? Someone get *involved* from your side?”

Law shakes his head quickly. Club might be involved in shit, but it ain’t deep enough that someone we know has been taken. *Yet*.

“No. An old lady got singed by some side fires that were set, but no further involvement. Planning to stop this before it gets further than that.”

Casper huffs a laugh, but only I hear it. Law is using all his fancy wording in this place, and it’s kind of funny to hear. Kitten got more than singed. Her work was aflame, and she almost burned with it. But sure, I guess in this coded meeting

with eyes on us, probably inside this room and through the cameras, we can go with singing.

“Club usually get involved in shit that don’t really fuck with them?”

“We do if we think a target is still on one of our own backs.” Law chances a glance at Casper and me before he looks back to Travis. “We also started our own little *involvement*, but we keep it to the willing.”

A slow smile spreads across Travis’s lips. “You hear things, you know. Even in a place like this, word spreads fast.”

“Well, now you *know*. Club’s taken an interest in a few new areas. Spread the word, would ya? Club’s willing to look at any job that comes our way, but if it ain’t in line, we look elsewhere.”

“And where is that line, exactly?” Travis smirks as if he thinks our talk is just that. But it ain’t. We ain’t going to be like other clubs that just say one thing but do something else. Even if times get rough, which won’t happen, we ain’t crossing into an area we can’t live with. Club decided from the start that on this mercenary route, it’s a club rule and not a single person’s, or president’s, say. Hell, we even threw in anonymous voting for intense cases we had to call on. The club thought it through all the way and didn’t just come up with a half-baked idea.

“Same line you were willing to cross. We just make sure no one will get locked up for it.”

I watch something close to respect cross the eyes of my former cellmate. He did some shitty things, but he only got locked up for doing the *right* thing. No one really knows a man like Jimmy Travis, not even his niece. But I think I got to know him well enough when I was here to know we just got his stamp of approval.

Travis nods once. “You sound like friends of mine.”

“Yeah? Who might they be?”

“Crazy Eights.”

Law throws a look at Casper, and I just glare in confusion at Travis’s words.

“And who are they?”

Casper gets tense, and I get the feeling Law is asking a question he might already know the answer to. Or maybe not, but my prez sure as shit has heard of this group if Casper is no longer acting like just a travel buddy but a full-on enforcer now, his posture going from slouching over to ramrod straight.

“If you ain’t heard of them, you will. They like to poke their noses into things. Won’t be surprised if they don’t already have a few fingers in this mess.”

“With Duke?”

“Duke is a small business getting into a corporate gig, if you get me. Crazy Eights might know him as a player, but unless he’s got something they want, they go for the top. They don’t start in the mailroom. The kid might want to own the tower someday, but there’s a laundry list of others who can get there faster than him.”

“This tower, it local?”

“International, last I heard. They got four branches local, matching directions.” He looks to me, and I nod, understanding that code for one branch in each area of the compass: north, south, east, west. He’s used it before when he would give directions to his men in here on how he wanted them placed when a planned fight would break out so he could slip stuff to others. Or just kill a person. It happens when the shit is needed. Sometimes you have to take the law into your own hands when they sentence a child molester to just eighteen months.

“Duke got a mentor?” Law asks.

“Doubtful. Mentors don’t stick around; they get fired if they bring in a referral. They might get a bonus for selling more product, but they like to keep most of the hiring

internal. Only way to get in is if you bring your own clients with you. Not many have enough to make it profitable, but Duke's trying to gain a spot, like I said. Might even be vying for a direction since the lower area is out a boss right now, I hear."

I haven't been out of jail long enough not to read between the lines. Not sure how much Law and Casper are picking up on this, but I can explain it to them later. After all, it was the reason they brought me here. Not only because of my connection with Travis, hoping he would talk to me if he denied Law a meeting before we realized he already had a visitor, but 'cause I speak the language of those inside and know how to communicate back. Law is good with the bullshit of it all—he came several times to visit me—but only those who lived it fully comprehend.

"Thanks, the club appreciates it."

Travis nods and rises, showing to the guard he's done, no matter if we had any other questions or not. Before he walks out, he pauses at my table, not long enough to piss off the guard but enough to pass on his own request.

"Keep Boo out of it."

I feel Casper's and Law's eyes on me but stay focused on a man who, locked in prison or not, can get his own form of revenge if he wants it. And I'm not sure if he wants me to protect her from being involved or if he knows what we did and the threat is against me and the club. Travis might be cordial with us now, but he ain't a team player. No CIA spook is. They prefer solo missions for a reason. No one can stab you in the back if you're working alone. Or at least the number is lower if you don't have to worry about betrayal. Probably doesn't help that one of the few times Travis teamed up, he was fucked over.

Unlike the bastards at *his* back, I know the club is solid behind me. I'd rather have a hundred brothers at my back any day of the week than walk this shit alone. I went it alone, and

it got me locked up. Travis and I have the exact opposite circumstances.

It's not till we're outside and checking the cage for bugs, clearing it and then driving back that we speak about what happened. We chose the cage over the bikes 'cause we can't wear our colors while visiting an inmate, and this is neutral territory. And no fucking way would I leave my ride unattended for any asshole to fuck with just 'cause they know who it belongs to. The club learned that the hard way a few years back when a rival club came up to visit their own brothers in this place.

"So, what do we think?" Casper is the one to broach the question as he navigates through the traffic.

I look out the passenger window as I give my two cents. "If Duke is involved in trafficking, he's just starting out. And if there's a play to take over the south quadrant and be one of the top four in the nation, he'd go for it. Especially if the position is now vacant."

"You think he's the one who killed the last guy in charge?"

Casper's question pulls my gaze away from the passing trees, and I shrug.

"Not sure. Doesn't really matter even if he did. As Travis said, they don't take on outsiders, and Duke would be starting from scratch, since his own president isn't willing to get involved. If he is making a play for it, then he's bringing in his own to sell."

Casper chances a glance in the review mirror to look at Law, who's just listening to us spitball ideas. "Flint's girl said the files she found were bookkeeping, right? You think he's already selling or just keeping tabs on what he *plans* to sell?"

"Don't know, but I will soon."

I look back and see Law sending a text off, presumably to the man in question. We might want Flint's woman to look at things, but not even the prez asks an old lady for something

without clearing it with her old man first. It's a respect thing that each brother follows.

Whatever happens next, one thing is clear.

The fairy and I aren't done.

Chapter 9 – Cheyanne

inding Lou was harder than I thought. Not that I didn't know where he was, just that the little sucker kept avoiding me. Not sure if Jimmy alerted him or what, but he knew I was coming. And he knew who sent me.

He also didn't like it one bit. Unfortunately for him, I didn't care. Not sure Jimmy meant for his tip to push me more than it did, but I've become addicted to this case. Each interview I conduct for my paying client is another lead I can use in my own investigation. I ask the questions the client wants me to, but then I add a few of my own. Since no one ever monitors what I ask, only the transcript of the questions and answers they want, I have free rein to add more questions. It was something I had written into the contract from the start. My clients might think they know what to ask, but not everyone answers something when questioned directly. Sometimes you have to go around it.

Sure, some would say that's leading a witness or whatever jargon the lawyers want to call it. But there's a reason I'm a contractor—I can get away with things the client can't. Again, another reason why I'm on their retainer. I get the results they want, and they don't really give a damn how I do it. Once a person admits something, and they realize it, they tend to just keep admitting it to others, thinking we're all the same team. Only the client and I know I'm the third party in the interview.

Lou didn't give me much, just a name, a direction, and a promise to keep his mouth shut about who asked for it. Not sure if the fear of my uncle is the reason he quickly agreed or the knife I held at his neck when I cornered him in the back room of the bar he owns.

No one expects someone like me to know how to handle knives, but I do. My parents didn't allow me to watch TV as a kid, only wanted me to study. So of course, when they fell asleep, I would sneak into the living room and watch what

was on. They didn't have cable, only local channels, and every Tuesday they had Bruce Lee kung fu movies that played all night. I don't know why, but the throwing stars fascinated me. I used to make mine out of paper, but they never stuck to anything. It wasn't until after my parents' funeral that Jimmy found me making them. I would lose myself making hundreds of them, intricate origami paper stars, and I would just ignore everything else in life. The day after he saw me, I woke to two gifts: one set of stars and a set of knives. All for throwing.

He never asked me why I liked them, and I didn't ask why he bought them for me. But he showed me how to throw both. I got good. *Really* good. To this day, I can always expect a new set of throwing knives from my uncle on the anniversary of my parents' death. I guess it sort of goes along with the "no emotion, only action" game plan. A knife is a reminder that death is just an object if you let it be and not an omen for bad things. Well, that's how I see it, at least. Not that anyone ever asks for my opinion. Then again, no one but Lou has ever seen me hold a knife besides Jimmy.

Lou's help led me to where I am today—after a week of digging, of course. But I didn't show up blind to this. I came expecting things. The worst of things. Jimmy might have tried to keep me out of certain areas of his life, but I saw things. Like where he kept his gear and how the feds never confiscated what he kept hidden under the third floorboard in the house he owned. Before we sold it, I took what was in it and moved it to a storage unit, just in case. He'll probably never get out for good behavior, but who knows? I'd rather have it than not if a miracle happens and he's released one day.

I also keep my extra knives in that same unit. I don't think I realized how many I have till I had to pick only a few to bring with me each time I come here. I know I'm playing a game. I'm just learning the basics, and it might not be something I *should* be doing at all. But I'm here, and I'm not quitting till Candy comes home. Till they all get home, however many that is. I haven't figured that part out yet. And while I'm not

emotionally involved in a person being stolen from their home, I'm invested in a person not being forced into something they don't want. Like I was.

I shake off the thought. Not that I think it will bring me emotions, but I just need my head in the game.

I've watched this building for four nights now in this same seat, looking out the same window. This coffee shop is down the street from where I think I need to watch. It gives the perfect view of the back door to the building I think is involved with trafficking people. I know what's going on in the front, a secondhand shop. I don't care who comes in—I'm interested in what's taken out.

Lou gave me a street name, not a person. Ford Street has many businesses on it, and most are clean. At first, I thought the place I needed to watch over was the laundromat, but after a few hours of seeing nothing other than kids sneaking in to smoke and shake the machines down for coins, I realized it was too cliché. The restaurants at the end of the street gave me nothing to work with, so that left the six retail stores.

Two are high-end. So high that *no one* ever goes in. It won't be surprising if they go out of business soon. Three others have pretty high traffic, but they seem to cater to family units, and I have yet to see someone enter who doesn't have another person or two with them.

The only one left is the secondhand shop. I didn't notice it at first, but after a week of counting every person who went into a building on Ford, it's the only one that doesn't have people exiting in the same number. I don't know why I started counting heads at first. Probably just boredom since not one store has a neon sign saying "shady deal going on inside."

Honestly, the name and slogan alone are a dead giveaway. "T to T: Trash to Treasures, where one man's throwaways are another's desires." Either the place is just irony at its best or the owner is a sicko and gets a kick out of the play on words if he's thinking a person is equivalent to a throwaway pair of jeans.

Once I figured out the place, I sat and watched. I've spent more hours than I care to at this coffee place. The only thing they have on the menu that *isn't* coffee is tea, which is worse than coffee, and hot chocolate. I don't think a person has drunk this many cups of cocoa in one week in the middle of summer before. And it's not like they even do anything fancy to make it. I swear it's just the instant type that they add hot water to.

Even if the hot chocolate isn't great, the staff is at least ambivalent, and they don't bother me or care that I keep coming back. Which is perfect, since I hate making small talk with strangers, and I need the time to research.

So far, I've learned that the store recently moved to new management earlier this year. I can't find anything on the last owner. The name on the bill of sale three years ago led me to a dead end. I might not consider myself a hacker, but I know how to decipher a few codes and get past some firewalls. Nothing on a grand scale, but enough to find things out.

The transfer of sale lists Fisher and Mitchells, an accounting firm, but not the name of the new owner. I've looked into them, and besides an office fire that took the manager's life and his clients' who were trapped inside a few months back, I don't see a connection. Well, except that the reports were a bad attempt at covering something up. I guess they weren't *that* bad—I still can't figure out the truth—but it's obvious, at least to me, a girl who looks at reports daily, to see that the arson investigator and police detectives did the minimal amount of paperwork to get the whole thing overlooked by anyone checking. Which kind of pisses me off. I don't like when I can't figure things out, no matter how much I dig. Jimmy calls it pride; I just call it an unattainable challenge that festers in the brain.

A chair screeching across the tile has me jumping and spilling my lukewarm cocoa on my lap. I brush the liquid from my suit pants, not caring if it stains. I'm rocking my power

suit, all business and black. Hides stains well, and I look the part I'm going for: a badass who knows how to talk the talk and walk the walk if needed.

Napkins are forced into my hand, and only then do I look up and see my beast.

My?

I question myself for half a second before I shrug it off and dab at the liquid so it doesn't look like I peed myself. Might hide that it's a chocolate stain, but a wet mark is a wet mark. No hiding that, and I don't want anyone to think I'm nervous in *that* way.

I'm okay with calling him mine, for the simple matter that I have no other beast in my life. None before him and I doubt ever again. And we had sex. Twice. That has to count for a bit of allowed ownership in one's mind, I think.

I toss the soiled napkins on the table and lean back in my chair. He's sitting next to me and is now wearing a similar vest to his club brothers. I haven't seen him since that little awkward moment with my uncle, but I don't know if he's following me or if this is just a coincidence and he regularly visits this coffee shop. But coincidence or not, the man didn't order a coffee that I can see, and he has one helluva mean mug aimed at me.

"What?" I ask.

"What are you doing here?"

That voice of his really can make me shiver, but I hold it in. I can't afford to be distracted.

"Taking a break from work." Sort of. Kind of. I mean, it's a break from the traditional job, but I'm on a self-imposed gig.

He continues to glare, not liking my answer. Too bad for him, I'm not one of those girls who just lays out everything they plan to do the second a man stops by.

"You need to stop this."

“Stop what?”

He just shakes his head at my terrible attempt to be innocent. “Your uncle doesn’t want this. No way would he want you close to any of this. Stay away.”

I snort, and he only raises his eyebrow. Guy seriously has no clue what Jimmy wants. I doubt my uncle thought I would go this far, but he *did* know I would do something with the information he gave me. And if I was a betting woman—which I’m not, ’cause I did the math and know the house rigs it for them to win—I know Mad Max is following the same lead I got. I’m not fool enough to think his club didn’t hear Jimmy tell me to see Lou when I left, just surprised it took them so long.

And that isn’t pride talking at all. I’ve been watching this street for days. I know who’s here and who isn’t. I’ve counted heads, memorized addresses. Looked up people on social media when I got a ping that someone notified the world that they checked into a store or anything else on Ford Street. And I especially noticed that not one Hound of the Reaper has been here all week. Sure, they could have gone undercover, but again, I would have noticed someone watching.

“Don’t let that old man fool you. He might act one way with you and another with me, but only he knows what he wants. The rest of us are just guessing. I gave up trying to figure him out a long time ago and just accept what he gives me,” I say with a shrug.

“What’s that?” He tilts his head a bit, and the way he speaks, I almost feel like he’s fishing for information. Like he thinks I’m involved more than just looking into what’s going on.

We hardly know each other, and I’m not upset that he doesn’t trust me. I don’t know if I even trust *him* at this point in our “getting to know each other” relationship. Sure, we know we work in the biblical sense, but the matters of the mind are much more complex than those of the body. Our bodies do what feels good, damn the consequences. Our

heads are the ones left to figure out what it all means and how we feel about it after.

I answer truthfully. "A family that accepts me for me."

I didn't say it to shock him, even though it's clear I did as he leans back into the chair. "You didn't get that from your parents?"

"No."

"You're young. You got time for that shit. Do as they do in the movies and talk shit out. You want things to change, you got to speak up." He's kind of philosophical when he stops grunting and actually talks.

"Don't have a problem speaking up."

"Then what's the problem?"

"No one is there to listen. They died when I was a kid."

His eyebrows draw together till they part in understanding. "My parents are dead too. Mom before I got locked up, and no idea who my pops is. Rather think of him as dead than think of him at all."

Wow. Shit got deep real quick.

"Parents suck," I deadpanned.

He only waits half a beat before he smiles and chuckles a bit. And man, does the guy have a killer smile. If I were standing, I'm almost positive my legs would have given out. Think this is the first time I've ever seen him do it.

And the chuckle? *Fuuuuck*. Talk about honey spreading all over my body, turning me to goo.

I'm glad I can make him laugh, even if it's 'cause he's laughing at me. He went deep, and I just made it comical.

I really am bad at talking to others.

"Yeah, basically."

Now I'm the one smiling. He accepted my response and just rolled with it. He could have said I was shit at emotional

talk, or that I needed to learn to read the room—two comments I hear more than most, I'm sure. But he didn't, and it makes me want to talk to him more. Which is odd, since talking is usually not my best feature, and I tend to stay away from it unless I have a script, like with my interviews. Having planned-out conversations saves me from random things coming out of my mouth that aren't always socially acceptable to say.

My attention is pulled from this moment as a white van drives down the road and turns into the secondhand shop's back parking lot.

"I'll see you around, Beast."

I catch his raised eyebrows for a second as he watches me stand quickly and all but flee the scene. Not sure if it's from my immediate exit or that I called him Beast to his face. Didn't mean to do that.

I move quickly, going through back streets and looking over my shoulder often to make sure I'm not being followed. I wouldn't put it past him to do that, but I don't think having a Hound at my back will help if that van is what I think it is.

Sure, it could just be an inventory drop-off or something. The back lot *is* for dropping off bulk items, but I've never seen anyone use it before. Most come in the front door, some even toting garbage bags of clothes to sell.

My palms sweat as I move closer and hear the van doors shut. I have no clue what I'm going to find on the other side of this thing, but I've got a plan. Sure, it might be shitty, but it's a plan at least. A script on how to get to the next step.

"Afternoon, gentlemen." My voice is strong as fuck, even if I don't feel it.

All three of them jump and turn to see me coming from the back of the vehicle. Not sure what they see when they look at me, but no one is drawing a weapon. Either they don't think I'm a threat, or they have nothing to hide.

“This area is off-limits. If you’re looking to buy or sell, go around front and the kid in the shop will help you out,” the bigger of three guys says for the group. It’s with a bit of a bark but not on the completely rude scale. Not yet anyway. The two skinny dudes, who look more strung out than anything, just stare at me with bug eyes.

“Doubt the inventory I’m looking for is in the store. Might be in the van, though,” I say, nodding toward said van and really hoping the late-night kung fu movies I watched recently are giving me the correct wording to use. Of course, with those, the dialogue is the last thing anyone put much effort into. Maybe I should have researched some of the more recent movies to get this right.

The skinny guys share a look, but the bigger one just keeps eye contact with me till he looks me up and down. I dressed like a businesswoman, my look inspired by the old mob movies where they dressed in suits all the time, straightening their ties after killing a guy.

“What type of inventory is that?”

Now this is the part I worked at nightly. How to convey what I’m interested in but also *not* say it out loud to sound like I’m a cop or something. “The kind that has a return on investment.” I hand him my card, which just has a burner number on it and my first name. No need to give these guys more info on me. Only enough to get me through the door. “Have your boss call me when he’s ready to bring in investors.”

I take the risk and walk away. It’s a bold move to show my back to them, but my hand is close to the knives under my jacket just in case. I’m able to make it to my car and drive aimlessly for an hour before I get a text from an unknown number.

Boss is willing to talk about investment.

Chapter 10 – Mad Max

ettle your asses down.” Law bangs the scythe like a hammer on the table and the room quiets. For only an hour’s notice, Church is pretty packed. “Flint, start talking.”

“Picked up some chatter. Might be nothing.”

“If it’s nothing, then why are we here? No offense, fellas, but I got a pretty face waiting on me, and I’d rather she sucks my cock than any of you.” Domino is starting to act like Bass now that he’s gone. Never knows when to keep his trap shut.

“I said might. As in it could go either way. There’s a meet happening. The jargon I found spoke about an investor. Either Duke is getting a shipment in or he’s looking to offload some.”

“How sure are you on this chatter? Any possibility it’s a setup so we tip our hand that we’re on to him?”

Bulldog is always the one to question if it’s a trap. Been down that road too many times not to at this point. I appreciate that in the VP. Especially since I think the same, and a few others do too, based on the nods going around the table.

“I’m not. Like I said, it’s chatter. Could be something, could be nothing. Could be a setup. That’s why we call it chatter. It goes either way.”

“Gut reaction?” Law asks, and we all listen. Flint knows his shit. And he knows when it’s more than just idle chitchat he’s stumbled across. If he’s bringing this to the table, then he’s got to know it’s something more.

“I say we take a drive and see where it leads. No harm in doing a bit of recon. If it’s nothing, then I’ll know and can adjust my way of tracking shit. But if it’s more, I’d rather not be fooled again.”

The club might be invested, but it's Flint who's got more skin in the game right now. He almost lost his old lady before he even got her. Twice.

"Agree. Pick your team." Law smacks the gavel, and the meeting ends.

Most of the boys usher out, but a few, like me, stay back once again. We all know who Flint wants on the team. No need to waste his breath asking.

"Bulldog, Chains, with all due respect, I'm benching both of you. You got your own families, and if this goes south, I don't want to deal with either of your old ladies bitching at me," Flint says.

"Guess that means you're out, too, now, huh?" Bulldog smirks and Chains chuckles as they both take their leave. Both can fight like the best, but the club doesn't mess with families when we can help it. If either had a skill set we needed, they would still be in the room. But there really isn't anything that Casper, Domino, Kooper, and I can't do that they can.

"What's the plan?" Casper takes point, which is a given. Guy's got more military time than the lot of us and is also a club officer. We might look like a bunch of random shitheads holed up in a clubhouse to the outside eye, but we get shit organized and locked down when needed. Like now.

"I'll track you from the sky and keep comms with you the whole way while still looking for chatter. There's still a good bet this is nothing, or a trap. Only way I can guarantee the intel is good the entire time is if I stay here."

Flint's past with bad intel goes unspoken. We all know he still deals with the nightmares of getting his team killed 'cause someone dropped the ball and told him false information that he relied on. Since then, the guy's got to have eyes on things for him to deal. No leaving it to another. Every time he does, shit goes south, like with Chains' old lady, and it eats at him.

Boys and I got no problem with him staying behind and watching our six. Guy knows his shit. Despite him not trusting

the others to watch the intel feeds, we don't hold that shit against him and trust him enough for us all.

"Where we headed?" Domino asks.

Like with Flint's history, no one comments that Domino is sticking around and not getting with the chick he bragged about. Who the fuck even knows if he was serious or was just trying to lighten the mood. He's one of our more laid-back brothers and one helluva tattoo artist, like Jumper. He's also a mean motherfucker who knows how to deal out shit if backed into a corner. We call him Domino not 'cause he falls but 'cause his actions force a reaction, and most go down when they go against him. On more than one occasion, he's knocked out two guys in one punch. Impressive as shit.

"An old silo factory outside the city. I'll text you the coordinates. I've mapped the area, and about half a mile past the turnoff is a shady place to hide the bikes while you go in on foot. So far, I've seen two cars in the vicinity, but no one we know is popping on facial recognition. Take a few mini cams with you. I'll try and capture everyone on the live feed and run it to see who the players are. Might get lucky, you never know."



It takes us about two hours to load up and have a game plan for almost every scenario. We don't just ride in and see what happens. Not with Casper in charge. Damn sniper likes to have a plan for everything, and then a contingency for when *that* plan fails.

Flint's got enough eyes on us that we make it without running into anyone. One of the shitty parts about Kansas is there aren't many major highways. Most areas only have one-lane roads that make it really easy to see when someone's coming up behind you.

When we get close, we turn off the lights for the bikes. They might still hear us but won't be able to see who we are if

they're looking. Once we reach the spot Flint found, we park our bikes and go the rest of the way on foot. Though it might be overkill, since not only is the covered spot half a mile from the turnoff but it's still another two miles to the silo. The Hounds keep in shape, but damn. Running in leather ain't the most fun thing I've done since being out, but man, do I love having my colors back on.

We count four cars, but there's no way to see who's inside. They got the shit locked up and windows blocked.

"Get down," Kooper grunts a second before headlights shine on the building.

I don't recognize the car—something nondescript, and a sedan at that. Doubt they got any bodies for selling in there, so I bet we're looking at another player. I make sure to turn my body so the mini cam on my vest can pick up the person who opens the door and steps out.

"What the fuck is she doing here?" Flint echoes my thought in my ear.

I want to know the same damn thing but keep my mouth shut and just glare at the fairy who teeters in heels that will probably kill her on normal concrete, much less gravel.

The bay doors roll up as she shuts the car door and strolls inside like she owns the place. And for all I know about her, maybe she does.

"What the fuck is Travis's niece doing here?" Casper looks at me, and I just shrug. No one knows we had sex, but everyone knows her uncle and I are acquainted.

"You think she's coming on behalf of Travis or just in way over her head and following that lead he gave her?"

If that's the case, then she wasn't randomly sitting at that coffee shop. I didn't share that with my brothers, but I thought nothing of it. Till now, when I see her in the same damn suit she was in two days ago.

Casper's the one who answers Flint's musing. "Maybe. Either way, this shit doesn't make her look that innocent. Especially if she feels comfortable enough to give Duke a hug."

Not sure what's making me grind my teeth more: that my fairy could be the enemy or that she's letting the enemy touch her.

I've never been a fan of the Devils Damned VP, but I especially started to hate him once I learned he went after Flint's old lady and breached our territory. Chains' suspicion about his involvement in Mama Bear's kidnapping might be correct, and it wouldn't be surprising. The guy is a bottom dweller who I would have enjoyed shanking in prison, if given the opportunity.

Looks like I'll just have to do it on the outside and make sure not to get caught. Which I doubt my brothers will let me. Hell, they'd be the ones covering my ass the entire time, making it a clean kill with no blowback on the club or me.

"Can anyone get closer to get me some audio?"

Kooper snorts his amusement at Flint's request. "Sure. Right after I put on a dress and dance the hula. Wouldn't want them to miss me or anything."

"Shut up. I can make out some of it. He's asking her about... inventing? Could be investing. Can't tell without my scope," Casper says softly.

"Shit, man. You can read lips?"

We all turn and glare at Domino, as he wasn't quiet at all and apparently has no clue.

"Yeah, dipshit. Now why don't you read mine and shut the fuck up. You're going to get us caught if you keep talking so loud. Damn, you're worse than Bass."

Casper turns back to watch the exchange, and I fight a grin as I hear a mumbled "I am not" from Domino followed by a quick "Yeah you are" from Kooper.

Boys. That's what we are. Boys dressed up to look badass but boys nonetheless. And brothers at that. The best fucking brothers.

"Shut it," I growl. My need to know what's going on has me craving the quietness in the hope that I can hear what's being said.

Both stop, and we all turn our attention to the group in front of us. Four guys inside that we can see, and the fairy standing in the middle of it all. Duke we know, but I got no clue on the others. One looks to have a bit of muscle, and two others are string beans. No one's wearing a vest—not even Duke's got his colors on right now. Not sure if he's hiding it on account of him doing this without club approval or if he's projecting some sort of image with his new *investor*.

"He's wanting to know if she's buying or selling. Says he can't talk price till he sees what she brings in or till she tells him what she likes," Casper shares.

"Fuck, I'm going to be sick. Why the fuck do they always make it sound like they're selling horses?" Domino whines.

"'Cause both can buck you off and fight for freedom till they get broken. Then they don't fight at all."

I feel everyone look at me. First time I've spoken since we got here, I think.

Domino sucks his teeth. "Shit, man, never thought of it like that. That's deep, man. Real deep."

"And morbid as shit," Kooper adds. "Even if this girl looks innocent, this shit right here proves she's not."

"We don't know that." Not sure why I'm sticking up for this chick. She was a good lay, but it's not like she's my old lady. Don't even know what she does for a living.

"Don't we? She was at the party we threw to attract a certain clientele. What if she was exactly that type but we overlooked her 'cause she looks like she could fit in my pocket? Her uncle has his own reputation. Who's to say she

isn't working with him or even took over for him, huh? I'm just asking, has anyone even done a check on this broad?" Kooper is making sense, for once in his life. And I hate the fuck out of it.

"Initial sweep showed nothing, but you're right, Koop. And no, I won't ever repeat that shit. I didn't dive into her 'cause she looked clean and Lady vouched for her," Flint chimes in, hearing everything we're saying.

"Don't let Bulldog hear you blame his old lady on this," Casper says offhandedly as he keeps his eyes on the players.

"Shit, man, you're right. I fucked up again. Fuck!" I lock down my body to keep from flinching, as Flint must have thrown something that the mics pick up, making them squeal in our ears.

"Ain't on you. The whole club was at that party, and we've all been read in on this. We all saw her as a non-threat. The club didn't look into her, not just our one solo guy in the tech booth. Chill out, man." For all his faults, Domino's got some pretty good moments too.

Comms go silent for a bit as we just watch the characters inside talk. Casper's staring like he can levitate them all off the ground if he thinks long enough, but he ain't repeating what they're saying anymore. Either he can't see it or is just keeping it to himself till we get out of this place.

"Eyes up, everyone. You've got incoming."

We all turn at Flint's warning to track the two SUVs driving toward the building.

"This can't be good," Domino comments as we crouch down in the field we've all been using as cover. There are pros and cons to Kansas. A pro is there's almost always a cornfield to use for hiding. Con? We ain't the only ones who use this to our advantage.

Two four-men teams in tactical gear get out and spread out around the front of the building. They get close but don't notice us. None of us speak, just wait for Flint to do his thing.

“License plates are blacked out, but I’m getting a few hits on some of them with facial recognition. One of them has connections with a club out of Arizona, Vultures MC. Seems they like running prostitution rings. Guess they want in on the human trafficking bit. We keep low and out of this. No need to alert another club that we’re on to them. If we’re lucky, they’ll take out Duke for us.”

I barely contain my snort of laughter. *Luck*. That shit’s funny. I’ve never seemed to have any, and with the way this is about to play out, I don’t think the fairy’s got much either. Especially not when Duke’s men, more than what we initially saw, pour out of the factory and start firing without aiming at anyone in particular.

Wonder if the fairy can fly. ‘Cause that’s about the only way she’s going to get out of this without getting shot herself.

Not without help, that is.

I look to Casper, who catches my line of sight and nods once before we make our move.

Chapter 11 – Cheyanne

Several minutes before

ou've got this. You're a badass bitch. You've got this.

Y No matter how much I give myself this pep talk, it does nothing to calm my nerves. I might not be emotional about this whole situation, but I'm not numb enough not to worry about what can happen if things go south.

Texting is one thing. It's easy to come across like I want to with a tool that allows a person to double- and triple-check what you want to say. Being badass in person is tougher. I need my A game the whole way through this.

I park and take my first initial steps on the gravel. Christian Louboutins might not have been the best shoes to wear to this meeting, but they speak of money, the exact look I'm going for. I'm also hoping it attracts more attention than the chocolate stain still on my suit pants. Apparently, that shit is a bitch to get out, and taking it to a dry cleaner would have taken too much time.

The bay door lifts, and I stride toward it with a clear determination in my step. Heels might seem ridiculous in this place, but I can run in these if I need to. I've learned to love these things for my job since I wear them more often than not.

"Cheyanne."

I nod to the guy who speaks my name and react on instinct when he holds his hand out, grabbing it to shake. He pulls quick and gives me no time to adjust before I realize he's hugging me. I swallow the bile in my mouth as I attempt to keep my face neutral. The guy smells worse than five-day-old fish dropped in cat shit.

"Duke, I presume."

I try to pull away, but his touch lingers, and I want to skin myself alive. I don't like to be touched unless I initiate it. And he has harassment written all over his face. Not that anyone would say that to his face without getting a bullet to their head, I'm sure. Especially since this is his way of doing a pat-down. He told me to come unarmed, even though I knew he wouldn't be. It's a form of trust I'm showing. Thankfully, he doesn't check my ankles or under my belt. Pretty sure he wouldn't like seeing the number of weapons I have in both locations. Small, discreet, but lethal when I throw them.

"Presume away," he says with one last squeeze on my hip before he drops his hands.

I take a step back and look at the man who's trying to become the south's main distributor for human trafficking. He doesn't look like much. Greasy hair, smells bad, and not much bulk to him. If I passed him on the street, I would keep walking, not out of fear but disgust. And yet there's a strange look in his eyes. Madness, if I had to name it.

"Clint tells me you're looking to invest." He nods to the man on his left, the one I gave my card to. I see only the two lanky guys who were with him before, but I can hear the murmurings of others nearby. Can't tell how many, but enough to know Duke is more than a one-man operation.

We've been over this before. I'm sure he's vetted my answers a thousand ways from Sunday. Just like I did before replying to each encrypted text he sent over the last two days. I know he has to be careful, but I'm tired of this same song and dance. And I use that.

"We've already talked about this. Either you weren't the one I was talking to earlier or you're playing games. In either scenario, I'm not interested."

I can feel the smile slip from his face, even if it stays physically. The tension is clear now, while before we both used pretense.

"Let's skip with the pleasantries, then. Buying or selling?"

“Buying. I have investors who are willing to take a sampling of those I bring to see how well the product is maintained. If they like what they see, as do I, we can negotiate with those who are looking to trade in their current model or just sell unused ones. What’s the price for a four-pack?”

He finally drops the smile and the act, and I see his true greedy self come out to play. “Price isn’t determined in advance but at the time of sale. As you say, negotiations can be taken into consideration. Same with a sale. Until the product is viewed, it’s impossible for me to determine a number.”

I bite my tongue in frustration. I know I’ll need to actually purchase someone, but till he gives me a number, I’m limited in my options. I can take a certain amount of money out without my bank calling the feds on me, I’m sure. But if I need to go above that number, with Jimmy’s history, I’m sure my bank accounts are already being monitored routinely. My accounts will undoubtedly be frozen quickly without question if I draw too much attention. If that’s the case, things are going to get a bit tricky.

“Got a ballpark number I can take to my clients?”

He shrugs. “Give me specifics. We talking a specialty item or generic?”

“Generic. A newer model with no damage.” God, I really hope I sound like I know what I’m talking about. There really wasn’t a ton that Google could offer me on how to speak human trafficking if working undercover. Really hope if the police *are* monitoring my web history that they at least think I’m writing a book or something cool like that.

“Thirty grand to start. Specific color could be an upcharge.”

I really do try to keep my face neutral, but fuck. All a person’s worth is thirty grand? So fucking sad. But I can’t show any emotion. He needs to see me as a go-between—not

the buyer or the seller but a broker who brings in the clients. Someone who can be trusted to look at the cargo and pick. I need to see all he has to offer and hope I can find Candy and then alert the feds.

Reminder to self: ask the creepy people on the dark web what Candy looks like. I might not have the best of luck, but I'm not *unlucky* either. Doubt she'll be the first girl offered to me, but I need to be prepared if she is.

"So... we going to deal or what?" he asks with a grunt of annoyance that I didn't jump right on board at his price.

Tires on gravel have me turning my head to see two sets of headlights coming to a stop. They keep the high beams on, so I can't see anything, but I can hear doors opening and people getting out.

It takes me a second longer than anyone else to realize this is a threat. Duke's already screaming, and so many people start coming from all directions, but they seem to stop short once they take a step on the gravel, dropping dead in a line as more come to replace them.

I don't think about where the bullets are coming from or what they're aiming at. I tuck tail and run toward the back of the factory as everyone runs to the front, pushing my way past the men who keep coming out. Seriously, this guy is fucking prepared even if he's the worst kind of human on the planet.

I know I said I can run in high heels, but I never actually expected I *would* be. The shoes are holding up, and I'm not out of shape, but I feel jittery and a bit clumsy, even if I'm not falling down.

I keep looking over my shoulder as I take a few turns, but I don't see anyone behind me. I turn back around and scream into the hand that covers my mouth a second before I can make a noise.

It takes a moment for my eyes to focus on the glaring beast before me. I don't take the time to feel at ease with this

as I'm dragged down another hall and pushed against the wall.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" he growls.

I react like I always do when I feel trapped—I push that shit back on them. "Me? What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Saving your ass, it looks like," says another voice behind Mad Max.

Only then do I notice the three others with him. I recognize the one who spoke from the club's visit with my uncle and when he installed my new lock, but I can't remember his name. I have no clue who the other two are. Must be others in the club, if I were in the habit of making assumptions, which I have been lately. Can't be sure since none of them have a vest on. Not sure if that means they knew what to expect and how this would go down or if *they're* the ones who started shooting.

I look them over, but other than a handgun in each of their hands, they have nothing on them that makes them a threat. Then again, a gun is a gun. Be it military grade or a small peashooter, bullets still come out and can kill a person.

"Relax, Fairy. We didn't start this."

Now I'm the one going bug-eyed at his nickname for me. It's almost comical, and I'm sure I mirror his reaction to me calling him Beast the other day.

"I'm supposed to trust that?"

"Sure. Just like we're expected to believe you're innocent in all of this, like your uncle says," the one from the jail quips before he starts talking to someone else. "Flint, give me eyes."

"Rear side of the factory, facing east," says another one with a faux hawk, but I have no clue what he means.

"Negative, got one casualty." This again from the first guy.

I can't take it anymore. Any other night, I would be happy to sit here and figure this shit out on my own, but not now. I

just want answers. “Who are you talking to?”

“Flint, our tech guy. He’s got eyes in the sky,” Mad Max supplies as he taps his ear.

I lean to the side and get a very nice view of an expensive-as-hell earpiece. Trust me, I know. Uncle Jimmy had a pair just like it that were sent to him as a gift. And of course I opened the package since he was in jail and looked them up to see what they were. Not sure who would send that as a present, but he has some pretty rich friends, apparently.

“And when you say ‘eyes in the sky’...?”

“Drones,” the last one replies, speaking for the first time.

I really want an introduction, but I doubt I’ll get one at the moment. To calm myself, I just give them all nicknames. Jock is the last one, ’cause I swear he looks like every typical football player on the magazines at the grocery checkout line. Short hair but physically lean and fit. The one giving out directions is Punk Rocker. He’s got to be in a band or something with the way his hair is styled. And the other one, well, he didn’t say much the first time I saw him, but I have a feeling he’s more of the leader type than the follower, so Captain it is.

Punk Rocker grunts. At first I think it’s because I missed the obvious answer, but he’s leaning against the wall across from me and holding his leg.

“Is he going to make it?”

Punk Rocker’s eyes spring to mine, and he just glares as Jock answers. “Probably. It’s too soon to tell. Might have to just leave him.”

My eyes go wide till I look at Mad Max, who’s rolling his eyes and shaking his head.

“Fuck you, too, Kooper.”

Ah, so Jock has a name, and Punk Rocker doesn’t find him funny.

“All right, let’s go,” Captain says quietly, but we all seem to listen.

I shake out my legs, but I swear they’re being stabbed with pins. I speak up, only to give myself a minute before I try to walk and fall flat on my face. “And where are we going, fearless Captain?”

“We won’t make it around to our bikes without drawing attention to ourselves. Don’t want any of them to know the Hounds are here. Flint’s cleared us a path. Follow me and keep your heads down.”

I shouldn’t have worried about my legs working. They do, but it doesn’t seem to stop Mad Max from dragging me with him. It doesn’t hurt how he holds my arm and guides me through this place and out the door. It’s a welcome relief to have someone else do the deciding on if we go left or right.

That’s till we hit the fields out back.

“Wait.” I pull from his grasp, and the rest of them stop as well.

“What the fuck for?” Kooper hammers at me before he takes a considerable breath and bends at the knees. Since we got into the cornfields, we’ve been in almost a full-on run for what’s felt like twenty minutes. I might be in shape, but I’m not *that* in shape when faced with pushing through cornstalks or whatever this shit around us is.

Especially not in heels.

I take them off and hold them to my chest. Might not want to wear them and have the heels stick in the ground anymore, but I’m not about to throw \$800 shoes away.

“Just needed a minute for a fashion change. We can go now.”

“You can’t run without shoes,” Kooper says with a glare, and Mad Max snorts. I think I might love him for that.

“Yeah I can. Might even be faster. Not sure if you noticed the heels on these things. Trust me, it’s better to run barefoot

and worry about what I step on later than fall and twist an ankle and you lot have to carry me.”

“Well, I ain’t carrying you.” And I really don’t want him to. If someone *has* to carry me, I only have one request.

“Think you can carry me instead?” Punk Rocker groans a second before he stumbles but doesn’t fall. Mad Max and Kooper catch him in time.

“Shit. Check his leg,” Captain barks.

Kooper bends down, forcing Mad Max to take all the weight, and turns on his cell phone’s flashlight. Even from standing over here, I know it’s bad.

“He’s losing a hell of a lot of blood. Think the bullet nicked an artery or something. We need to get him some help and quick, or he could bleed out, I think.”

“Fuck. Flint, did you get that?”

While Captain tries to figure shit out, Kooper takes off his belt and wraps it around Punk Rocker’s leg. Not sure if it’ll help, but I understand the concept of trying to cut off the blood circulation to the area.

“Tell me you got good news. Shit, how far out are they? Damn, doubt they’ll find us in this maze by then. Anything close by? Yeah, okay.” Captain looks to us, or I guess more to Mad Max. “Carry him.”

With one command, my beast picks up Punk Rocker and drapes him over his shoulder like a freaking throw cover. The guy doesn’t seem to be bothered by the extra weight at all.

That sight alone has my girl bits dancing. Images of all the things he could do to me with that much strength play across my brain, and I miss whatever is said. But thankfully my body is still on board enough to know to follow them as they all turn and start sprinting left. I have no idea where the fuck we’re going, but I hope one of them does.

While I might not have the best sense of direction, I sort of feel like we’re headed back to where Punk Rocker got the

bullet. Not sure my opinion would be welcome here or not, but they've got to know this is bad. Like really bad.

Running *away* from bullets is good. Running back to them? Not good. Not good at all.

Chapter 12 – Mad Max

only look back a few times, just to make sure she's still there. If she wanted to, this would be the time to run away from us. Since she's not, it makes me think there's some truth to what Travis said about her. That she's not part of this. Of course, her actions earlier and the fact that she's here at all tell a different story.

Flint rerouted us to the only place that was close that could help Domino. It took us way too close to the shootout that was still happening, but no one was noticed or got hit. Both wins in my world.

"There it is," Casper declares for the rest of us as he points.

Without being told, we all push harder and race to what we hope is a safe haven. We've got brothers on the way, but they're too far out yet. We still don't want anyone to know we're here, so they're being forced to take extra time to go around the whole mess to avoid being spotted.

Casper bangs on the door, then does it again three seconds later when it's not immediately opened. We see the light in the front room turn on a second before the door is opened, and we all push through.

"You the vet?" Casper demands of the woman who looks more lost than anything else.

"You're not the pizza guy."

"No shit, sweetheart," Kooper grunts as I lower my cargo to the couch.

"Hey. I asked you a question." Casper grabs the woman as she tries to turn around, and I grind my teeth at the way he pulls his gun out. He doesn't point it at anyone, just uses it for intimidation. Not that it seems to work on her, as she only blinks at it for a second, then looks away.

“She’s not.”

The voice behind us draws our eyes to a blonde bombshell in scrubs, but she honestly does nothing for me. Not like the fairy with a few cornstalks in her hair, mud all over pants, and shoes held tight to her chest. I might not trust the woman, but damn, do I like how she looks.

“But I am,” she finishes.

I don’t miss the wave the fairy gives her, but I might be the only one.

Casper releases the other woman and steps closer to the newcomer. “Our friend got hurt and needs medical attention.”

“Then take him to a hospital. This is a place for animals.”

“We don’t have the time to get him there. Dogs, cats, humans—it’s all the same when dealing with sewing up a hole in the skin. You either help him, or you and your friend sit and watch me and the boys figure it out. Can’t be sure you’ll like how we leave the place. Might need to try everything in here to see what works since none of us are doctors, Doc.” He moves closer to her with each step till he’s inches from her face, tilting his head at the end of his threat.

We might play nice with civilians most of the time, but this ain’t one of them. We’ve got a possible threat in our group, a wounded brother, and we’re not in a secure place with an unknown enemy who’s still out there. When shit goes down, our manners go out the window.

“Sister, not friend. Get your guy up. He’s bleeding on my couch. And follow me, my clinic is in the back.” She forges ahead with Casper hot on her heels, her sister trailing them both.

Got a feeling it ain’t all because of her being an unknown that Casper is so quick to follow. The vet is a knockout, even if I’m not interested. And I saw the clear glint in Casper’s eye when she stood up to him. Not many go against the sniper. Hell, against a Hound. But we aren’t boasting our colors right now, so she doesn’t know shit about who we are.

She's trusting us just like we're trusting her. To a point.

I grab under Domino's arm and haul him up. He grunts and groans but doesn't speak beyond that. He might bitch about some things, but he knows when to man the fuck up.

Looking back at Kooper and Cheyanne, I eye her slowly. She doesn't look like she's going to run. I see she's shaking now that she's had a moment to catch her breath and her body is finally crashing from the adrenaline.

"Bring her."

Kooper must realize what I see because he takes a softer approach with Fairy by guiding her to follow with a hand at her back. I help Domino to the back and through an open door that leads to a pretty vast room. There are a few more doors leading off it, I'm assuming to other vet rooms or maybe even a reception desk if this place does well in the day. We didn't come in the main entrance but through the back, which must be used as their home.

I place Domino on the table, which the vet pushes another table against so he can lie down. I take a step back as she goes about cutting his pants open. I've seen a lot of blood before, so I'm not squeamish, but damn. That's *a lot* of blood oozing out of his leg.

"You guys get into an argument or something?" the vet asks.

I meet Casper's eyes, throwing my support to him to take the lead.

"More like wrong place, wrong time," he replies.

As the vet starts to look Domino over, I go to grab a rolling chair, only to stop short. The sister sits her ass in it and spins around, not caring that I'm glaring or that Casper still has a gun out. This chick is definitely touched in the head or something. And I don't miss the way the vet keeps looking at her as if she's trying to keep an eye out for her like big sisters do.

With the chair not available, I do the next best thing, grabbing Fairy's hips and lifting her to sit on one of the counters. She doesn't make a sound, just places her hands, shoes and all, on my shoulders to keep herself steady. I take the shoes away and place them on a counter before a nudge hits my leg.

The sister has lowered the chair till it's almost on the ground and is rolling from one place to the next. But when she comes to me, she hands me a blanket. I take it with a raised eyebrow, and she just rolls away to be by the vet, who looks up to face Casper once more.

"Well, it looks like the bullet went through all the way but did some damage. I'm going to have to open the wound to see what's causing all the blood. Pretty sure he didn't get hit in the femoral artery."

"How do you know that?" Kooper asks as he leans against another cabinet on the other side of the room.

"You'd have gone to the morgue before now if that was the case." She grabs a scalpel off a tray.

Her dry humor makes Casper chuckle, and I know I've pegged him right for wanting this woman.

"Fuuuck! You got any meds for this shit, Doc? That fucking hurts," Domino howls as the blade begins slicing his leg open.

"Stop bitching, and don't call me 'Doc.' 'Vet' is fine. As I previously mentioned, this is a vet clinic, not a hospital. I don't want to use the shit I use on my patients till it's absolutely necessary. Last thing I want to worry about is you having a reaction that causes heart failure on my table. Pretty sure your friend over there will just think I tried to kill you on purpose or something."

"No"—Casper puts the gun behind his back in his jeans—"I won't."

Vet looks him over for a second longer than is normal before nodding. "Penny, get me some xylazine, and wash up. I need you to help me on this."

“Think that’s a good idea?” Casper eyes the sister, like we all do. Something’s off about her, but I got no clue what it is. It’s like she’s a child but quiet and missing a few screws.

“Penny usually assists me in surgeries. If you don’t want her to help, then I’m out too. Pick your poison.”

I wrap the blanket around Cheyanne and rub her arms. The shakes are coursing through her body, and I hear the distinct sound of teeth chattering even as she tries to keep her lips closed.

“Did you know it’s harder to become a vet than a doctor? While some might think doctors have the hardest schooling, it’s vets who have to pass three tests with high scores while doctors only have to take one. Some might even say vets are superior to regular doctors.”

I find it hard to keep a straight face as Fairy babbles away. Not sure if the silence from the others is because they don’t really know what to do with the random bit of trivia she just gave us or if no one even heard her and they’re doing their own thing. I’ve only got eyes on her, my back to the rest of the room as I try to warm her up.

Casper coughs a second before talking. “Whatever. Just help him. Our normal doc is out of town, and he wouldn’t make it if we tried to take him on the bikes.”

Vet shakes her head. “Definitely don’t recommend riding like this. Clamps, Penny.”

I look over my shoulder then to see the vet in full gear doing whatever shit she needs to do to help my brother out. Her sister Penny looks funny as hell in gloves clear up to her shoulders. Think those are the type generally reserved for dealing with horse births or some shit. The vet doesn’t have them, so I think it’s just Penny being... well, Penny.

“You got a name, Vet?” Casper asks.

“Yup.”

I snort as I turn back to see Fairy watching the chatter between the club's enforcer and the woman who's running the show. I chance a glance at Kooper to see if he's also amused by this, but the bastard looks asleep: head tilted back on the wall, eyes closed, mouth even partially open. Wouldn't be surprised if he starts snoring soon with how his chest is moving.

"You going to share it?"

"You first. I'm not the one who barged in and demanded medical treatment at one in the morning. You threatened me and my sister and didn't even bother to ask to see what we would say."

"You really expect me to believe you would have just done all this if I'd asked nicely?" Casper says with clear annoyance.

"Guess we'll never know now, will we?" Her voice travels around the room, but her tone never changes. She's probably elbows-deep in Domino's leg, but she doesn't seem to have a problem holding her own against Casper.

Penny starts to laugh and doesn't stop for a good five minutes as the rest of us just watch them work on Domino. Not sure if he's even mentally here, as his eyes are open and staring at the ceiling. Whatever they gave him must be working, 'cause he ain't moving much.

Fairy adjusts, and it takes me a second to figure out why till she leans into my chest and rests the side of her face on my pecs. I move closer to ease the pressure on her neck as I hold her.

I swear to Christ, I can feel Casper's eyes on me, but he stays quiet.

I don't know what I'm doing, so even if he asked, I couldn't tell him. Part of me feels a need to protect this fairy. Not sure if it's because of the sex or my connection to her uncle. I was in prison for a long-ass time. My loyalty to the Hounds never wavered, but it widened to allow a few others in. One being Jimmy Travis.

He didn't have many rules, but one was always known: don't fuck with his niece. When she came in, everyone knew who she was, even if no one laid eyes on her. We did that out of respect for Travis. No one could use her against him if we didn't recognize her. He claimed she was innocent last we spoke, but the guy has been locked up for a long time. Who knows if he knows her at all anymore.

Once we get back to the club, Flint will have a full dossier on her. Wouldn't be surprised if that's why he's quiet now, too busy tracking down each lead to figure out the players tonight. Her being one of the many.

"I'm Casper. Guy you're working on is Domino. Kooper's the asshole sleeping, and Mad Max is over there. We're with the Hounds of the Reaper MC."

"And the girl?"

"Cheyanne." Fairy speaks for herself but doesn't lift her head from my chest.

"You need anything, Cheyanne? You look a bit rough around the edges. Want me to call you a cab or something?"

Damn, the vet's got balls. Point-blank offering an unknown woman a way out even though there are three brothers still standing. Kooper might be asleep, but given a shout from either me or Casper, that man will be ready to start shooting at a moment's notice. Not that the vet knows or seems to care. She's just doing the typical women-against-men bullshit.

I look at Fairy. Her eyes are closed, but she's smiling as she shakes her head. It feels more like she's trying to burrow into my chest like a kitten than saying no.

"Nah, I'm good. The boys will give me a lift home, I'm sure."

"Hmm" is all the vet gives us, and I know it's eating at Casper. As a sniper, he likes to keep a part of himself unknown as long as possible. His way of being able to sneak in unnoticed. Not that the vet is giving him much to go on. She's

been running this show since we showed up, and it's kind of impressive.

I've never been one of those who thinks a man should run everything. My mom took care of me just fine on her own, even if she sucked at taking care of herself. A woman can do almost as much as a man, maybe more. We just don't usually see a civilian act this way to a brother. Maybe an old lady, but usually only after she's been tagged as one. Not before. Or at least *I* haven't seen it. Wasn't around for Chains' and Bulldog's early days before their claiming. Only know their women now, and neither are ones I want to go up against alone if I don't have to.

"I'm Wendi. And I know who you are, even if I don't know you specifically. Ran into a few of your boys a couple months back when my sister and I helped one of yours who got run off the road."

"You're *that* vet?" Casper asks with a bit of respect in his voice, something he usually only reserves for our prez.

She shrugs. "Guess so. All right, all done. I still recommend taking him to a hospital, though. They can do a scan on his thigh to make sure it's a 100 percent. Just don't tell them I was the one doing the work. Don't need my license revoked for this."

Casper nods a second before Flint breaks radio silence. "Boys are five minutes out with two SUVs. Got another group getting your bikes. Law wants you all back here ASAP. Bring the girl."

I lean back enough to force Cheyanne to lift her head and look at me. Fear is nowhere in her eyes, and that should scare me. She's not afraid of me or of those in the room. She should be, though. I got no idea what's about to go down, but the Hounds don't like to be betrayed. And what she did, unless she tells us something different from what we think, feels an awful like betrayal.

"We need to talk," I state as plain as day.

Her whispered response gives nothing away.

“I know.”

Chapter 13 – Cheyanne

I guess I shouldn't be surprised that I'm the only one who waves as we exit Wendi and Penny's home. The others are carrying Domino out, which fits him better than Punk Rocker. And Casper—not Captain—is still glaring at the vet. But I also notice his tented pants.

What? I'm a woman. I look. Don't let anyone tell you that they don't notice those things on guys. It's just like all guys notice when a girl's nipples are poking out to say hi.

I didn't miss that he gave her his number and told her to call him if anyone else showed up on her doorstep tonight either. Or that he told one of the many brothers who arrived to escort us back to stay behind instead.

I'm not in the habit of judging people or making assumptions about someone's actions—mostly because I hate when people do it to me—but if all his brothers are ribbing him that he's got a thing for the vet, is it really judging or just going along with the group's combined conclusion?

"You sure you don't want to stay and have the vet check you for fleas?"

"Shut it, Jumper. Just drive the cage," Casper hisses, but his eyes remain on the vet's house till it's out of sight.

I'm stuck in the back with Mad Max and Kooper. Domino left before us in the other SUV. He wasn't talking, but he was coherent enough to nod to a question or two asked his way.

The ride is quiet, which I'm fine with. I know what to expect next, even if I didn't know it before I left my house this evening. I should have, but I didn't. Would make sense that the Hounds figured all of this out, though I doubt they know my role. *I* don't even fully understand it.

I just hope my chance of getting Candy out isn't dead in the water after this. I might not like Duke, but he's the closest

I have to get to those who might know where she is. If he got killed tonight, I'm back to square one, and I have zero clue where that starting line is.

The clubhouse isn't what I expected when we're allowed through the gates. I might know of the Hounds, but I didn't do enough research on them to know more than that they're a motorcycle club, the mother chapter is here in town, and they've got hot guys as members.

The compound is pretty large, encompassing a mechanic's garage that's closed at this hour. I see a few sheds in the dark lot and one giant-ass L-shaped building that we stop right in front of. Mad Max grabs my wrists and forces me out his side of the car as he guides me through the place. Others might think he's dragging me, but my feet are moving of their own accord, and my stride is even with his. His hand might be on mine, but there's no bruising grip. I'm not fighting this. It seems logical that I would be questioned for my part in all this.

I'm just not sure how much I want to or *should* tell them.

I follow Mad Max to the back and then don't question things as I'm led down some stairs. We're in Kansas, after all—basements are the number one thing required since *The Wizard of Oz* came out. Of course, most are brightly lit and seem almost homey. The room I'm led into is a far cry from comfort. I think the prison cell my uncle is in would be considered a five-star hotel compared to this place.

I get what they're trying to do: intimidate. With any other person, I'm sure it would work. But I'm not coming in with emotions. I have no fear of the situation. If I die, I die. That's life. Jimmy would be pissed, and I guess I would be a bit angry, too, since I left the puzzle unsolved in regard to Candy. But there are six of them and only one of me. Even if I do start throwing my knives, someone is bound to get a shot off before I take everyone else out. I might be able to take down three, maybe four, but that's pushing it.

I walk to the only chair in the room, in the middle by a drain. I glance at the red stain around it and then look up to confirm my suspicions as I see chains hanging low. I sit and put my shoes on. No one has taken them from me, and while my feet might ache, I'd rather deal with the pain than step in someone's blood.

"So... you going to talk first, or do you want me to? And if you want me to, do you have a particular question or just a general thing?"

I look around the room, but no one is speaking up and most have their arms crossed. I recognize Law, plus everyone from the vet's place except for Domino. Also helps that almost everyone but the beast has a vest on now. He hasn't really been given a potty break since we got here, much less a wardrobe change. The last two I remember from the party.

"Flint, Bulldog, nice to see both of you again. How's Izzy?"

All I get is a grunt. Wonder if he's upset that I didn't call her Lady. Why else would he be so hostile?

"I'm *hostile* because you're a threat who knows my woman, and I won't let a goddamn thing happen to her. So start talking or don't. Either way, you ain't walking out of here alive to speak to her again."

I move my head back like I smell something foul. "Seems a bit extreme." I'm not surprised I spoke out loud earlier and not in my head. I have a habit of doing it, so I just accept that part of myself.

"Depends. From the way we see it, you're a girl with connections to the underground. You got bored and thought buying people to make some extra cash seemed like a good idea. Figured no one would be on to you with the innocent act you portray and your uncle's reputation keeping others at bay. How am I doing?"

Law is looking at his nails, picking at them with his knife. It's nothing special, but it's got me itching to bring out the ones I still have on under my belt. I want to compare who can

clean their nails better. I sort of have a competitive side that I don't let out much.

"I guess from your point of view, I'd say you're doing okay."

He raises his eyebrow, and I just shrug. "It's not the truth, but I don't know if that's what you want to hear. He at least doesn't." I point to Bulldog as I speak. "He'd be happy to just slit my throat and call it a day. But if he did that, he might miss an opportunity."

"And what's the opportunity?" Casper speaks for the group.

I notice Mad Max is just leaning against the wall to my right. He's the only one close to me, but I don't think he's taking my side. Probably just there in case I do something stupid, like try to run. Even if I did manage to evade the six men in the room, I didn't miss that the bar we walked through was pretty full. Nor the other brothers just relaxing outside, smoking. Nah, I'm not stupid—even got the certification about how *not* stupid I am. I might not be smart in the social cues department, but everything else I get.

"To save more than one life, obviously."

"And that's what you were doing? Saving people?" Mad Max growls, but it's only deep because of how he talks. I don't feel any animosity coming off him, just a general curiosity of why I was there.

"I was. I was hoping I could make it look like I represented a few big spenders. Do a few small deals and then try to become an investor who he trusted so I could pick and choose. Figured it was the only way to see how many girls or guys he really has."

"Flint?" Law looks to the man the others say is good with tech. No clue how good, but I bet I'm about to find out.

"Cheyanne Travis is a certified genius. Parents pushed her at a young age to excel, keeping her from social interaction for most of her formative years. Both died when she was fourteen, and her sole guardianship went to Jimmy Travis. He

allowed her to continue in school, but by then she was on her second master's degree." Kooper whistles at that, but the others remain stoic. "Three years ago, she went and got a job doing polygraphs for anyone who calls. Mostly cheating spouses and the like. No red flags popping, but that in itself *is* the flag. No one can be this clean with ties to an uncle who was deep in the CIA, especially one who was made into a scapegoat for the agency when his handler went south. Wouldn't be too hard for her to stumble into what he was doing and just continue the family business. Hell, who's to say her uncle is the innocent one he claims to be? Maybe he was the one raping girls he planned to sell and has been using his niece as his 'investor,' as she claims."

"You got it all wrong."

"Which part?" Flint snorts, like he doesn't for one second think I'm half as smart as him.

"First, it was my second PhD, not master's. And my uncle would never do that to any person, no matter how much they pissed him off. He taught me young that emotions just get in the way. Raping a person is nothing more than emotion overrun. Plus, he likes shooting people in the head more than touching anyone. If you don't believe me, ask him."

I nod to the beast, and he waits a beat before nodding in return.

"It's a phobia, I think," I continue. "Never really dove in to find out. The guy might have raised me since I was fourteen, but he was never home. And when we did see each other, I can't think of a single time he touched me, even a hug or a handshake. Not even at my parents' funeral."

I take a deep breath and decide to just get this over with, like ripping off a dirty Band-Aid. One swipe and deal with the pain after.

"Also, I didn't contact anyone. I was *contacted*. I might not have been involved in anything my uncle did, but I do monitor his stuff just in case he needs something. He's the only family

I've got. Even if he never showed me any kind of warmth, he made me feel like a person and not just a brain to be used to get money, like my parents. They contacted me and told me a girl named Candy was missing. I don't know why I decided to help, but I did. Jimmy gave me a name, and that guy gave me a street. I found the location Duke was using as a front for his operation and made a move. Tonight was our first meeting."

Law grabs a chair I didn't see from one of the dark corners of the room and places it in front of me before sitting in it. "If that's the truth, you won't mind some follow-up questions."

"I'm not going anywhere." I chuckle, but no one gets my joke, so I just roll my eyes at the boring crowd. But by doing that, I get a sight of Mad Max smirking.

Okay, maybe one of them gets me, at least.

"Who was the person who contacted you?"

"Don't know. I refer to them as Store Owner since they never told me. They were looking for my uncle, but when I said he was on vacation, they asked me. I didn't think they really meant me till I got a package with intel on Candy from Oklahoma."

"You'll share that package with us." Not an ask but a demand. I just shrug my compliance.

"The name your uncle gave you was Lou the Fifth?" Mad Max asks.

I smile and nod. "Knew you would figure it out when he said it in front of you lot. Figured that was why you were at the coffee shop, that he must have given you Ford Street to look at too."

"Care to elaborate there, Max?" Law asks in a very nice way, but even I can hear the threat in his voice.

"Not much to report other than what I said before. Lou ain't talking. Or he didn't talk to me, at least. Not sure what you said to him, Fairy, but he was quiet when I got to him. The coffee shop was just me jonesing for a caffeine high and

seeing you sitting inside. You looked up to no good, only reason why I went over. Travis told us to 'keep Boo out of it,' so that's what I thought I was doing. So, what shop were you watching?"

"The secondhand shop, Trash to Treasures." Kooper snorts, and I nod along with him. "Horrible name, right? I mean, it's obvious and not at the same time. I watched that street for six days, and it was the only one that didn't have the same number of people going out as it did going in."

"What, you counted?" Flint grunts as he types on his tablet that he must have had this whole time.

"Yes. Of the 378 who entered, only 369 left. Of those who didn't come out, they were all alone, and no one else had entered till at least two hours later. All were young and seemed to be selling clothes, not buying, if I'm going by the trash bags they carried. Three were male, the rest female, and they all looked different, so it wasn't a certain type thing. More like convenience."

"They could have gone out the back," Casper muses.

I shrug again. "Sure, but there's only one way to leave from that back door, and I was watching it as well."

"And you got a meeting with Duke how?" Kooper asks, his voice laced with skepticism.

"Went and asked for a meeting. The first time I saw a van go to the back, I made my move. Came across three guys, one by the name of Clint. Don't know about the other two, but they looked like they were strung out. I told them I wanted to become an investor and gave them my card. An hour went by, and I got a text. From there, it was a trial of how to phrase the right word with the right question before I was granted a meeting with Duke."

"And that's why you got so chummy with him and gave him a hug, huh? Just friends and all that?" Kooper's words are snarled, and I squint in confusion.

“No, we aren’t friends. I’m similar to my uncle. I don’t like to be touched by most people.”

“Then why the lasting hug?”

I shake my head. “I don’t know. Thought it was to check me for a gun, as he told me to come unarmed. That or he’s just a creep like the people he hangs out with. I didn’t even know I was hugging him till he forced me into his arms. He does get off on selling people, so who the fuck knows why he hugged me? I just know I went along with it because it’s what I had to do to get details on what he needed so I can move on with the plan.”

“And that plan would that be?” Law inquires.

“To save Candy, and whoever else needs it when I’m looking for her, obviously.”

I swear these guys aren’t that bright. Pretty, sure, but definitely not above average on the IQ chart.

Chapter 14 – Mad Max

ince I went to prison, my life has been relatively simple.

S Did jack shit in lockup, obviously. When I got out, the simplicity continued. Eat what I want. Fuck what I want.

Do what I want. Being a Hound has let me accomplish this simple life plan of mine. Now it's fucking anything but that.

The fairy complicates shit.

I don't know if I trust her. Don't know if I *should* trust her. There are too many inconsistencies in her stories, and some just add up too nicely for my liking. The club's unofficial motto is that nothing is a coincidence. The same day I talk to Lou is the same day I run into her at the coffee shop, minutes before she randomly interacts with the ones running the business? I don't like it. Smells like a setup.

And if it's not, then I'm losing my touch. I should be able to sniff out when shit's about to go down. Should have seen her monitoring a building and noticed the way she went. Fuck, should have tailed her. Done something other than sit there and just shake my head at her as I admired her fine ass walking away.

That, and she called me Beast the second before she left me sitting there. She slipped, I know she did. That wasn't a play on words or a power play in her plan. I watched her too closely to not see the split second she realized she'd said it out loud. And for once, that name wasn't said to me in disgust or as an insult. It was a fucking term of endearment. Just like when I call her Fairy.

And fuck if that doesn't screw things up.

In my world, names have meanings. Not the ones we're given at birth but those we give to each other. Nicknames, unique terms that no one else uses, mean something. She ain't my old lady, and I sure as hell ain't her old man. But the

names we place on another, even if it's only in our heads, prove we want to be more than whatever the fuck we are now.

Can a fuck buddy be defined by two fucks in one night, or is that more like a one-night stand? 'Cause there's nothing about her that makes me *not* want to go back for seconds and thirds.

But I guess you have to be a buddy before you become a fuck buddy, and I know we aren't that. The question is if I want to be.

Or do I want more?

"Church!" Bulldog yells across the bar, and the boys and I get up and make our way in. We all got the text two hours ago that it was going down, so not a one of us is surprised.

I take my normal spot in the back of the room, sinking down in the chair that's unanimously known as mine, and look at my hands. This chick is messing with my brain, and I know she's going to be a part of the conversation. I need to do something she said, something her uncle preached to me several times in lockup: Shut my emotions down. Lock that shit up. Emotions in this room will not help anyone. I might not know what I'm feeling, but I know I'm feeling *something*. And something other than a clear determination to seek and destroy is not what the club needs right now. I don't know if I even want to be that person for the club anymore, but now is not the time for revelations.

"All right, boys. Most of you already know what went down last night. For those who don't, here's the quick and dirty. It wasn't just chatter but good intel Flint found. He's going to continue to monitor those dark sites and keep us looped in. If more chatter comes in on the same frequency, we'll move. That's the good news. Bad news is that Jimmy Travis's niece, Cheyanne, was the contact Duke was meeting with."

A chorus of profanity litters the room, and Law gives it a moment before he continues.

“We still don’t know the full extent of her involvement. While they were there, a few Vultures also showed and tried to take everyone out. Our boys got out with the girl. Domino got hit, but he’s doing fine thanks to a nice vet.”

“Maybe a little too nice, right, Casper?”

“Shut it, Kooper,” Casper growls as the other man chuckles but goes back to paying attention.

“When the cleanup boys arrived, we only found a few Vultures dead and some men we think were on Duke’s payroll. No big players were popped, or if they were, they were taken away. No one saw that we were there. From what Cheyanne tells us, with the headlights from the SUVs they rolled up in, it was hard as shit to see who was shooting at them.” Law takes a breath, and I look up. I know what he’s about to say, and I know, like him, how the boys will react.

“Cheyanne is now a guest here.”

As predicted, this news gets the boys more riled up than the first time she was mentioned.

“Shut the fuck up, all of you, and listen for one goddamn minute. Jimmy Travis is not an enemy we want. He expects us to watch her, to keep her safe. He knows we’re connected with her since we showed up and started asking questions. Even if we aren’t the ones who attempted to hurt her, he’ll expect us to be the ones to pay for it.”

“He’s in jail. What the fuck can he do from there?” Kooper barks, and it’s my turn to speak.

“Kill your family and drain every cent you own.” The group looks to me, and I continue. “It’s not him you need to worry about but those who owe him a favor. Guy’s been collecting for a while. By watching the girl, he owes *us*. We’d be stupid not to take that opportunity.”

“Exactly,” Law takes over after a nod in my direction. “Flint’s run the girl through the loop. She’s clean, but she’s got a case of wanting to play the hero right now. She told us she was contacted to find a girl. Only reason she got pulled in was because they were looking for her uncle and found her. She was intrigued and just kept running shit to ground, so she says.”

“So she says? That mean we don’t trust her?” This from Atom. Don’t know much about the kid, but I like that he’s picking up on shit that the boss is glossing over.

“Too early to tell. Right now, she’ll remain in Hounds territory, where we can keep eyes on her. Either she slips up or we find something. Rather have the devil in my house than out there hiding among the people.”

The boys and I nod to that.

“What’s the plan, then?” Atom asks, and a few of us look at Bulldog.

He grinds his teeth, clearly not liking the idea, but he couldn’t offer up a better one when we spoke about it earlier.

“Going to have a family day,” Law replies. “Bring in the old ladies and see if they can get something out of her. See if she slips or something. Lady was the one who brought Cheyanne to us the night we held Mad Max’s welcome back party. We still don’t know if she was the contact we were looking for or not. It’s not lost on any of us how all this shit started the moment she showed up.”

Got to hand it to the guy—the prez knows how to keep his emotions out of shit. Especially after telling the boys we’re bringing family in close to a possible threat.

“Told you before, Law, I don’t like using my woman as bait,” Bulldog growls, and Chains nods along.

“Don’t care what you like. You got a better idea?” Neither says anything, but I know their dental bill is going to rise soon with all the grinding they’re doing. “Then shut the fuck up and fall in line. I ain’t asking for anyone to be left alone with

her. Hell, she'd probably notice something is up if we do that. Girl's smart, even if she seems dumb at times."

I force myself not to react to that, but I want to. She doesn't act dumb; she just speaks her mind. She doesn't hide shit and pretend to be something she's not or say something just to get someone to like her. Sure, her timing is off, and her humor isn't for everyone, but there's nothing dumb about her.

"If we aren't getting her alone, then how do we know she'll talk?" Atom asks the same question I want to know.

"Going to have Ruby ask a few questions."

"Fuuuck," Kooper groans, but the other boys know to keep their traps shut about the prez's daughter.

"Got something to say about my kid?" Law growls low to Koop.

"Boss, you know I respect you. Even respect your old lady, Special K, God rest her soul. But you've got to admit, Ruby ain't exactly subtle when it comes to this shit. How do we know she won't just blurt out what we're wanting to know?"

Law shrugs it off. "So what if she does? This chick has been one step ahead of us each turn we make. What better way to know whose side she's on than to ask her? My girl knows when to play the game and when to show her hand. I know you two get along like cats and dogs, but trust me, she's got this."

Only thing Kooper can do is nod. You only get to dispute the prez once; then you shut up and do what he says. Anything else would be a sign of not trusting our leader. Kid's smart enough to not pick this fight, even if he really wants to.

"With that, Church is over." Law bangs the gavel to make his point. "Get with Flint to see what each of you needs to do to get this family thing going. Want us to be in full-on party mode in four hours."

The boys file out, and I wait, per my usual, to clear the room.

“We going to have a problem?”

I look to Law, seeing he waited till the others exited before he turned and shut the door on just us two.

I answer as honestly as I can. “Don’t know. But I’ll follow an order if that’s what you’re asking.”

He looks at me, and I look back. Not sure what he sees. The guy has had my back since I started coming to the club. I trust him with my life. I only ended up in jail because I made a choice outside the club. If I’d gone to him, he wouldn’t have stopped me, just would have made sure I was protected the whole time. I’ve always followed his ruling, and I always will.

I don’t know what I feel for this chick. I want to call her something, though I’m not sure what that is, but know I shouldn’t. Too many unknowns to make any kind of commitment. Even if I did make some sort of claim on her, Law would always get the final ruling on how the club deals with her. Then her uncle would make the call on how to deal with *me*.

Not sure who would win in a knock-down, drag-out fight. Travis has years of prison under his belt, but Law ain’t no slouch. He doesn’t work out daily to get the vamps to cozy up against him on the weekends. I actually don’t think he’s gotten laid since his old lady passed a few years back. He keeps in shape for one reason: to keep up with the boys and not be dead weight when the time comes. He might not go on the black ops work the club has started, but he can both take and give one helluva right hook.

“Ain’t asking you to choose. Not yet. There might be a time you’ll have to. I appreciate what you’ve done for the club. We all do. Know it wasn’t easy going in for that long and being forced to deal with some of the shit that most of the boys will never have to deal with. To connect yourself to others you might not normally deal with if you were out. It’s

not easy having to watch your back and play the game to keep others at bay all the time. But you did it. Even got the club an ally in the form of Jimmy Travis. I know that was hard to do, to put yourself out there and learn to trust another and find a way to split your loyalty to the club and to him at the same time. The task he gave you when you last saw him would be hard for anyone to keep. But especially for one who's involved with her."

My eyes go wide at his last comment. "How did you...?"

He just grins, and I shut my trap.

"You think you're the only one to fall under the spell of a beautiful woman from the moment you laid eyes on her? I might have done the deed in the bathroom, beyond prying eyes, but you didn't seem to have a problem using the kitchen wall."

I raise my eyebrows, full-on shocked that anyone, much less the boss, knows who I was fucking that night. I'm not hiding it, but I sure as shit ain't one to advertise who I hook with.

"Don't worry, I ain't going to gossip about what I saw. Know when to keep things to myself and when the club really needs to know something. You just got to figure out if the girl is worth more than a first-night hookup."

He turns to leave, but I stop him as he opens the door.

"What did you do with yours?"

"Married her the first chance I got."

I huff out a laugh as he leaves grinning. Should have known he was talking about Special K. Rumor mill says he took one look at the former president's niece and claimed her on the spot. No clue how much of that's true, and I ain't about to ask. No one's brave enough, really. Man likes to keep moments about his old lady to himself, and I don't begrudge him for that. The love they had is what each of us strives to have.

But again, not saying I'm claiming the fairy or anything like that. Just don't know shit, and till I do, I guess sticking closer to her to figure it out is better than staying away. Did that already. All it gave me was a massive case of blue balls, a sore hand from jacking it so much, and more dirty thoughts of her than a person should have after knowing someone for such a short amount of time.

And then there's the threat of her uncle, who's willing to do almost anything to make sure she stays happy. If I trust him, then I trust that he knows enough about the daily functions of his niece. If he says she's innocent, then maybe she is.

I scrub my face in frustration. I keep going around in circles. And that's probably the answer I'm not wanting to acknowledge. I'm forcing myself to see her in one light. No matter what the facts say and what I've seen with my own eyes, I keep wanting to believe her.

I've made my decision, it seems. I want her. I'm willing to overlook almost everything. Explain it away.

But my next move?

No fucking idea.

Chapter 15 – Cheyanne

ute top.”

“C “Thanks.” I give Maddy a tight-lipped smile, hoping it’ll help keep me from saying more. Doubt anyone really wants to hear about how I was given seven minutes to pack anything of importance in my place with zero notice of how long I would be gone for, and I chose it at random.

Okay, Mad Max gave me ten minutes, but three were spent packing up my laptop and making sure I had all my work stuff with me to do my job. Perks of being an independent contractor, I can work anywhere as long as I get a decent Wi-Fi signal.

While I understand the Hounds’ need to watch my every move, I don’t see why I need to move into the clubhouse. But when I voiced it, no one said anything, so I just kept packing. It’s a miracle I even have this off-the-shoulder purple tank. I was just throwing handfuls of things into a bag as the timer clicked away on me.

I’m not even sure why I’m here. This is a family thing, as so many have told me. I don’t even like parties, but this is my second one in two weeks, and I can’t recall one I went to in the two years before that. I don’t ignore the invites, but I usually don’t get the initial invite at all. Only reason I was at the last one was because Benny, my date, wanted to go. And we all know why he did.

I know I’m just here for them to keep their eye on me. Not that anyone has said that, but it’s the most obvious thing. The fact that no brothers are directly nearby as I sit with the old ladies is the surprising factor. Never expected Bulldog to let me get so close to his girl after what he said to me in the basement.

I don't miss the glare he keeps on his face as he and a group of them sit on the other side of the bar. Close, but not able to hear anything. Maybe they do trust me after all. Or at least enough not to hurt any of the women they love.

"Hi, I'm Ruby, Law's kid. Who do you belong to?" Maybe the sexiest woman I've ever seen sits opposite me, throwing her purse on the table as she goes, acting like she owns the place. Guess she kind of does, in a way.

I do my wave that gets a raised eyebrow from her in return. "No one. I got an uncle in prison if that's what you're asking."

"He try to hurt you?" Maddy inquires, followed quickly by Izzy asking, "Was he after you for something?"

"Um, no. To both questions. And, Izzy, you were there the last time I talked about my uncle."

She looks at me like I lost my mind, but for once, I'm not imagining things. "The night of that house party? I was there with Benny, and you introduced me to your man? I came over and started to talk to Mad Max about seeing him again. Any of this ringing a bell?"

"Girl, you already gave the clue that explains so much. She was there with her old man. The moment those two get together, nothing else exists. They're almost as bad as Mama Bear and her man," Ruby says with a sort of laugh.

"Hey! Me and Chains don't do that," Maddy protests Ruby's claim, and I just watch the show play out.

"Right. Tell me again, when was the last time you saw me?"

She rolls her eyes as if it's obvious. "Three nights ago, when I picked up Teddy and Grace at your place."

"Nope." I love how she pops the *P*, and I lean in on the table to watch this woman. She's fucking amazing with the black-and-pink braided hair that swings to her ass. Izzy has this whole upper-class blonde corporate look going for her,

with a pink bra showing under her white tank. Maddy's got this intricate messy braid that looks effortless and cute Daisy Dukes on. Both girls alone turn heads, but Ruby's got that whole other aura about her. I want to be her. She's sex walking and badass bitch all rolled into one. "It was yesterday when I came in to talk to Pops about next semester's classes. We had a whole conversation, but it was in between you sucking face with that hubby of yours."

A blush stains Maddy's cheeks, but she doesn't deny it, and I find myself smiling at the action.

"So, you got an uncle in jail and know Mad Max. You his?"

Guess I'm back to being Ruby's main focus. Not that I mind. I've been sitting here with Maddy and Izzy for about an hour, and it's been mostly just them talking. Not that I was left out, but this is really the first time I've been asked more than what I want to drink.

"Don't think so," I answer honestly. Never been one to hide things from others; never seen the need for it. Unless I'm pretending to be someone I'm not, and that's just to find Candy. But I'm not working that job tonight, so I can just be me. Honest me.

"That sounds like you don't know, not that you don't want to. What's holding you back? Him being in the club? Your uncle? Your job? Don't know if he wants you?"

I shrug. "Sure."

"Which one?" Izzy asks as she starts nibbling on the plate of chips in front of Maddy, who just glares at her. I don't want to assume anything, but I think Maddy's pregnant. No one's talking about it, and I'm not going to ask. Seen too many bad memes about people asking when the baby is due only to find out the girl was never pregnant. I'm already a guest in this house—even if it is by force. No need to start insulting the members.

"All of them, I guess."

“The club shouldn’t be a problem,” Ruby tosses out like it’s a done deal.

I shrug. “Don’t think they trust me.”

The girls exchange a look, and Ruby is now the one to shrug it off. “You’re here, ain’t you? They trust you more than a vamp if they’re letting you in on a family day. Boys get protective with family. They don’t let anyone close unless they trust them a little.”

“Why don’t you think they trust you?” Maddy chimes in as she munches on her chips, moving the plate closer to herself and glaring again at Izzy, who just rolls her eyes at her antics.

“They think I’m part of a human trafficking ring.” Maddy starts coughing and grabs her water, but I just continue since no one tells me to stop. “I’m not, but they think I am ’cause I met with a guy and asked him how much a girl would cost. I wasn’t going to buy them. Okay, I was, but only to get them away or till they helped me find someone.”

“Who you looking for?” Ruby seems to believe me, at least. The other two are just staring wide-eyed at me.

“Don’t really know. Got a name but no description. Someone reached out asking for me to help, so that’s what I’m doing.”

“Do you know them?”

“No,” I say with a shake of my head.

“Then why help?” She seems to be generally curious as she tilts her head at me.

“Why not? If I were taken from my home, I would hope people would be looking for me. But since I usually keep to myself or others stay away because of my awkwardness in social gatherings or because of who my uncle is, I doubt many would look. I would need to rely on strangers to want to help. Who knows who this girl has on her side? I’m just doing what any person would do.”

“Riiight.” Still not sure if Maddy and Izzy believe me, as they share another glance before Ruby continues. “So, what about your uncle? He a factor?”

I’m confused by her change in topic. “I don’t think so. He didn’t even know I was looking for Candy till I told him. Even then, he tried to tell me to just forget about it, but he knows me. Once I’m given a challenge, I don’t stop till I solve it, no matter what it costs me. I once lost the puppy he gave me ’cause I read that a dog found its owners after a hurricane, and it had traveled five states over to find them. I wanted to test it, so I took the dog and dropped him off a few towns away, but he never came home. My uncle was the one who found out he was picked up by animal control and then adopted by a family of twin girls. I like to think I solved that riddle, just didn’t get the results I wanted. Worked out better for the dog, I think. I didn’t really understand it.”

“It’s a dog. What’s there to understand?” Izzy asks, sounding more confused than me most days.

I shrug. I don’t know how to explain it. She shifts her eyes to Ruby and takes a long swig of her beer.

Ruby shakes her head. “Not asking about your uncle and the whole buying women thing. Meant how is your uncle a problem where Mad Max is concerned?”

“He knows him.”

“Annnnd? You really aren’t giving me a lot to go on when I want the details, but then you go off on random shit when I don’t. Not sure if I want to strangle you or laugh at it and buy you another drink ’cause I secretly love how your mind works.”

This has me straightening in my chair, beaming almost. I ignore her first part and focus on the second. She likes me. Don’t think anyone has ever said that to me.

“Well, you’re awesome, too, so ignore the other idiots,” Ruby says before taking a long drag off her longneck.

I smile, seeing I slipped up and spoke out loud again. “When someone knows my uncle, they see me, but they *don’t* see me. Uncle Jimmy has a way for people to both know to protect me but also keep me far from their mind. Doubt he would do anything to Mad Max, just don’t know if he’ll ever see me beyond being Jimmy’s niece.”

“Damn, do I get that. Most of the time I’m not Ruby, just the Hounds of the Reaper’s prez’s daughter. Never to be touched. I tried at college to be someone else—you know, just Ruby for once. Lasted about a day. I like my family, and I love my dad, but I kind of just want people to like me for me and not ‘cause they want something from the club.”

“Oh, sweets, you know we do.” Izzy motions to her and Maddy. She reaches out to squeeze Ruby’s hand, and her eyes water a bit. Till Maddy starts talking.

“Your dad would skin us alive if we didn’t.”

Ruby bursts out laughing, and Maddy gives her a wink before going back to her almost-empty chip plate.

“Sup, sluts,” another woman with long brown hair and a cute round face says as she joins our table.

Ruby nods at her. “Hey, Kitten. Meet... wait, what’s your name?” She raises a brow at me.

“Cheyanne.”

“Got a nickname?”

“Ah, no. Why?”

Ruby shrugs. “No reason. Anyhow, Kitten is Flint’s old lady. You can also call her Jules. And we’re talking about how to get this girl and Mad Max together.”

Jules turns around and looks over at the group of guys still sitting across the room. Almost every person connected to this table in some way is over there, including the beast.

“I can see the appeal. He’s got this tall tree thing going, and you only come up to his hip.” She turns back and gives me

a saucy look. "Want to climb that fucker, don't you?"

"He *is* very climbable," I say on a sigh as I watch him across the room. He's not looking at me, so I can just remember our time together without worrying that he knows what I'm thinking.

"Wait. Shut the fuck up. You already slept with him?" Ruby's demanding, glaring at me, but I don't know why.

"Yeah." I keep my answers short and brief, not sure what she wants from me.

"Then what's the problem? You already got the guy. Why are we even talking about this?"

"Maybe she wants advice on how to become more than a fuck buddy," Izzy states.

"Or how old lady status really works," Maddy says, but she looks at the others and not me when she does it.

"Or how to get him to fuck her again if she isn't getting any more." Jules ignores the slaps on her hands as she reaches for the last of the chips on Maddy's plate.

"Well, that's easy. Just take your clothes off in front of him. Never seems to be a problem for me when I do that." Ruby shrugs, and I swear I hear extra cursing behind her, but I'm not sure who or where it came from. "Or hell, just get on your knees and give him a blow job. Never known a man to turn one of those down."

"I would love to suck my old man's cock, but he won't let me." Izzy pouts as she drains the rest of her beer.

"And why the fuck is Bulldog holding out? You guys get in a fight or some shit?"

Thank God Ruby's here. She asks all the questions I want to know.

"Oh, don't let her fool you. He ain't holding out. She's just upset that he won't let her go down on him as much as she likes. He prefers to be in control, and apparently when she's

sucking his cock, he basically gives up all control. But at least she's getting some," Maddy says with a pout of her own.

"Wow, I feel like we're at a sex anonymous counseling thing. What's Chains' doing—or not doing—to you?" Jules asks, all giddy as she sips her Diet Coke through a straw.

"Sex. Thinks the baby will feel it or some shit. Not saying he's gone cold turkey, but he has only one position he prefers. Somehow thinks it's better for the kid."

I can't hold back my question. "What position?"

"Doggy style. And don't get me wrong, I get off on it, well, because Chains is there, so I always get off. Guy is good like that. All I want, though, is to do something not on my hands and knees. Is it too much to ask for cowgirl every now and again? Don't answer that. I know that isn't an option either. It might be my favorite, but I know I'll be all in my head the whole time thinking he's looking at a whale above him with how big I've gotten these last few weeks." Her eyes widen. "God, maybe that's it."

"What's it?" Izzy asks for us.

"I weigh too much. He doesn't want me to crush him."

"Ah, I don't think you can crush him. He's sitting by Bulldog over there, right?" She nods as she looks over in the direction I point. "Statistically, you need over five hundred pounds to crush a person's head, and some say that one cubic inch of bone can take over nineteen thousand pounds. I don't know what you weigh, but proportion-wise, you don't fit into that category."

"Thanks... I think."

Ruby turns to Jules with a grin. "So, what about you? Got a complaint about your old man? He holding out in any way? Not letting you suck his cock?"

"It's fine." Jules waves it off quickly, and that only gets an eyebrow raise from Ruby and the rest of us.

“Fine? That’s not a good word people use to describe their sex life. This is a safe zone, so speak, girl. Give us the deets. He make you do any weird shit while sucking it?”

“No, he doesn’t ask.” She takes a long sip of her Diet Coke before she continues. “I’ve never given head, actually. I might have, but I don’t recall it, so I’m saying I haven’t. I got most of the memory back, but parts are still fuzzy.”

“What do you mean, you never gave a blow job? Flint is basically known for demanding it on the spot. I’ve almost had to burn my eyes out from how many times I saw him getting head around here before you showed up. The guy practically sings about how he loves a chick’s lip wrapped around his dick,” Ruby yells in exasperation.

Jules shrugs as she looks down at her drink, not making eye contact with any of us. “Well, he isn’t asking me to do it. Either he doesn’t want me to tarnish the memories he has of others, or he’s just getting them on the side and not telling me. I like to live in a world of ignorant bliss, and I can live with that. Either way, I prefer to stay in the dark. No news is good news.”

Chapter 16 – Mad Max

“That’s fucking bullshit!” Flint’s roar echoes across the room, drawing all eyes. Bulldog and Chains are no match to keep him back. Not when his old lady thinks he’s cheating on her.

“Let him go,” Law says, but it’s not needed. Flint already broke free from their grasp and is marching toward his woman. Most of us follow, leaving Law at the table alone till Kooper comes over and gives him company.

“Do you really fucking think I’m stepping out on you, Kitten? Jesus fucking Christ.”

“Wait, you heard that?”

I’ll give it to her, she doesn’t show an ounce of fear as she spins in her chair to confront her man. Kitten must know, like the rest of us, that Flint might yell and shout, but he would never hurt his old lady.

“Yeah, I heard it. And now you’re going to hear this.” He leans in, caging her in her chair as he puts both hands on the table behind her. “Did you ever for one fucking second think that maybe I can’t get enough of you? That when you get your hands on me, I can’t think straight except to get you naked? Once I kiss you, I can’t imagine anything better till I get my hands on you. But then all I think is how good your pussy feels around my cock. Do I want a blow job from my old lady? Fuck yeah. But I’m addicted to being inside you and can’t think of a better way to do it. So no, I ain’t fucking doing a highlight reel in my head or going someplace else. I want you, Kitten. I would love for you to go down on me, but I just love that tight pussy so much that I never even think about anything but that. Hell, if I know your mouth, it’ll have me coming in like five seconds. I’m already pushing it with the fifteen seconds it seems to take from your cunt, baby. Don’t make this harder on me.”

“How about we aim for seven? Two seconds in my mouth and five in my pussy. That should work, right?”

We all laugh at the things coming out of Kitten. She’s got a way with words.

“Fucking hell, Kitten,” Flint groans. “Don’t know how many times you need me to say it, but you’re stuck with me. So get your ass up and follow me so I can show you just how much you’re mine.”

“Damn.”

I nod in agreement with Ruby as Kitten launches herself onto her man. He catches her easily, grabbing her ass with both hands while they make out.

I watch, like most of the club, as they stagger to the back, not coming up for air once. It’s impressive as hell that they can do that and not fall over or run into a wall. Probably helps that everyone got out of their way. I also don’t miss that Fairy is waving at them as they go—not that they see.

“Lady.”

Bulldog’s growl has me turning back to the table. Lady looks up, almost horrified. Doubt she hears that tone from her man much. Not like the rest of the club does when he goes full VP mode on someone who does something stupid.

“Thought we talked about this, but looks like you’re going to make me repeat myself. And in front of my brothers at that. What we got going on in the bedroom only works if you communicate. I watch you; I know what you like. But I also know you keep shit locked up tight if you think it’ll cause problems. I ain’t no mind reader. I might get nine out of ten things right, but it’s that fucking last one you got to speak up about.”

“Okay,” she squeaks, and I share a smirk with the fairy. Think we all know what type of relationship they share. Not judging, just didn’t know. I might have heard rumors about Bulldog’s ball gag collection, but I never knew Lady was the

submissive type. Guess you can't really tell who a person is based on a dossier of their past.

I hold in my internal grunt at my own epiphany. Now isn't the time to be having philosophical thoughts about how shit should go down with Cheyanne. Not sure when the right time is, but probably not when the VP is talking about getting laid.

"Got no problem with you sucking my cock," Bulldog continues. "Do it every fucking day if you want. Don't like that you would rather talk to your girls than me, but you got one thing right: I don't like losing my mind when it comes to you. Can't give you what you need if I'm the one out of it. Rather stave off my own enjoyment while getting you there. 'Cause, baby? That's the best fucking part, seeing you explode."

He leans in low, brushing the hair behind her ear, but speaks for everyone to hear. Not ashamed in the slightest, and he shouldn't be. We've all got our kinks. No one gives a shit what they do as long as it's all consensual.

"Now be a good girl and say goodbye to your friends. Ma came and got Princess for the night. I ain't going to lose another moment with these dicks when I can be spanking your ass red for not speaking up sooner. If you're good, I'll let you suck my cock before I fuck you with it. Now get your ass up and get to our room. You got twenty seconds, and I'm counting now."

Her eyes go wide for a second before she's out of her chair and running to the room the VP has reserved at the club. Most officers have a place here, though not many use them, as they all got their own places elsewhere.

He chuckles as he follows, even waving back to Fairy as he goes. He counts loud enough for his woman to hear, winking to the rest of the ladies at the table as he does.

Chains closes in on the table and looks his old lady in the eye. "Guess that just leaves you and me, Mama Bear."

"Can you at least remember that I said some good things too?"

“Probably not.” At least he’s smiling as he says it, causing his woman to groan and smash her head to the table.

He leans down, rubbing her back as he speaks to her, forcing a moan of pleasure from her lips as he digs his kneading fingers in deep on her lower back. “I ain’t scared to fuck you, woman. Don’t give a fuck if the kid can feel it. He’s going to know soon enough that I love his mama and she’s it for me. That I love her body and the feel of it beneath my hands. That making her scream my name and keeping everyone awake at night is my only goal in life. I bend you over ’cause I love seeing your tits wiggle with each pound I give you from behind. And don’t even get me started on how I like seeing your ass jiggle.” He pinches her ass and catches her as she jumps up, cradling her protectively while still kneeling at her side.

“I love you, woman. Don’t care what you think, I love you and find your body sexy as hell. If you want to ride me, then fuck yeah, that’s what we’re going to do. If there’s one thing I promised never to do, it’s to leave my wife unsatisfied.”

“You didn’t say that in the vows.”

“It was implied.”

She snorts. “When?”

“When I said ‘I do.’” He goes in for the kill, sealing her lips with a kiss before breaking it. Unlike Flint, he needs his eyes. Always cautious of how he cares for his woman and soon-to-be son, he scoops both up in his arms and carries them away bridal style.

Mama Bear smiles up at him like the hero she worships him to be, waving back to Cheyanne as they go.

“Well, that killed the party like nothing ever would. Not sure if I should be mad or not. Got a major case of jealous blue balls. But—” Ruby looks at her wrist and grins wide upon reading the time. “—looks like luck is on my side. If I leave now, I can make the kegger being thrown in the dorm across

the street from my building. Might even get real lucky, if you catch my drift. Later, new girl.”

They both wave as Ruby starts to leave.

“Ruby!” Kooper yells, and I notice Law is no longer at the table. “You still got babysitting duty tonight.”

“Fuck off, Kooper. I’m getting laid. You watch the brats.” She flips him off as she exits.

He curses his ass off as he marches past me and out the door she just left through.

“So...”

I take a good look at Fairy and notice she doesn’t seem any different from any other time I’ve seen her. Think little bugs her, and I kind of like that about her. It also has me wanting to try things just to see if *that* would set her off. But I’ve had that shit happen to me most my life and hated it. Bet she does too. I’m stoic most of the time, just like her. Might be the perfect match—if I believed in that shit.

She knows.

It’s all I can think right now. She knows we were listening in. She doesn’t know how, but she knows. She’s smart. Wicked smart. Even if Flint hadn’t told me about her past, I would have known that. She sees things that others don’t.

Even that first night, she noticed something on me that most people overlook as a random pattern of freckles and not a prison tattoo. I had it placed to look random, not to draw eyes to it. It’s a tat for me, not for the world. A reminder of where I was and how I got there. A way to keep me from punching any other asshole too many times. Figured if I got it on my hand, I would see it more when I’m holding a guy up and need to stop. Tested it a few times in lockup, and it worked like a charm to keep me on this side of “good behavior.”

Fun fact: Wardens don’t mind overlooking a fight or two depending on whose ass you’re kicking. They sometimes

enjoy that certain criminals get knocked down a few more pegs for a crime they did but didn't get the sentence they deserved for it.

I don't know why a bit of me feels guilty about this. I agreed to the plan when Flint mentioned it. We all did. But sitting there, hearing it all play out? That shit was rough.

Law was right, Ruby played the part perfectly. She didn't let shit go, and all we told her was to talk to Cheyanne and see if she's a problem. She went in blind and acted like her normal self, not even flinching when Cheyanne laid out the buying people part.

Got to admit, I didn't like being the main topic that led them down the road of relationship issues for everyone to hear. Ain't ashamed of shit, but I don't like people knowing every part of my life. Prison was like that. Literally couldn't take a shit without fifty guys knowing about it. I liked that the fairy and me had something no one else knew about.

But now they *all* know. Each gave me a side look, and I stared the brothers back down. Not one of them can judge me, since I slept with her before all this went down. There's not a single part of me that went against the club, or Law. Spoke the truth to him before this. He says jump, I'm all in. But I don't think he'll make that call. Not after what we heard.

Fairy wasn't trying to pump the old ladies for information on the club like a normal person. She wasn't even looking for a way to gain old lady status like so many before her. She was just trying to fit in, have a normal conversation with some other people. Well, normal for her. Don't think anyone ever talked about the amount of weight it takes to crush a person over chips and Diet Coke.

Flint was the one to suggest we bug the conversation, but after tonight, I'm pretty sure that'll be banned, either by him or the two others who got old ladies. No one expected that shit to go down. How could we? They're women. Who the fuck thought they spoke about that shit? Vamps? Sure. But

old ladies? Never thought I would know so much in such a short time.

The conversation was a hot topic, but it was difficult to get hard when you could hear such despair in each of their voices. No one was putting on a front, just having a normal gab session and sharing their problems. Once the night wears off—after each gets their brain fucked out, no doubt—I wonder how long they'll hold a grudge against their men and the club.

The club is meant to trust them, to have their backs at all times. This is pushing the envelope, even if we didn't mean for them to be implicated in this. Each of those brothers has done their fair share of groveling to get their woman, but I think it'll be the club that has to pay the price for this one. We all agreed. Not one of us thought it could go south.

And it did.

Some will probably argue it worked out for the better. Everyone will have an opinion on the matter, since we weren't the only ones listening. Atom and Jumper, who were covering Flint's office, will know. And the other brothers, like Kooper and Casper, sitting close to our table would have heard. And about every damn person stopped to listen when Flint went off on his girl for thinking he was cheating.

Yeah, everyone will have their own opinion. But the truth is, we fucked up. Should never have used the old ladies. I should never have let it get this far. Fairy ain't the deceiving type. I get that we all got pasts that shape how we see things, but there's nothing on her that's bad. She might say the wrong thing at the wrong time, even make a fucked-up a decision like going to buy girls from an unknown person without backup or a gun, but she ain't evil. You got to be a low level of scum to think selling a person to another isn't a problem.

"Was it on the table or on one of the girls?" She doesn't even bother to ask how we knew, just wants to know the location of the listening device.

“Ruby had it in her purse.”

She nods as she looks to where it had been in the center of the table the whole time she sat across from her. “I’m guessing they didn’t know.”

I shake my head, then give it an extra shake to the left to push my hair back. It’s not too long, but I don’t want it covering my eyes as I look down at her. She’s hot as fuck in her off-the-shoulder purple shirt. Don’t think she’s wearing a bra. She’s got her long black hair parted and flowing down the front of her shirt to cover her tits, but I swear to Christ, I can see her nipples pointing through.

Fuck, I got it bad for this chick. Each moment I’m with her, I see how fucked I really am. Right now, and all I can think is how fucking perfect she looks sitting at the old ladies’ table. How she got along with them, and they didn’t even seem to bat an eye at her odd ways of trying to help ease Mama Bear’s insecurities with the pregnancy weight. Don’t know what she’s complaining about—she still looks sexy as fuck. Not that I’m dumb enough to voice that out loud. Don’t need my throat slit by a brother. And she might be hot, but she doesn’t do it for me. Not like the fairy.

“So now what?”

Ain’t that the million-dollar question.

Chapter 17 – Cheyanne

Hurt. I think I feel hurt. I keep pushing whatever it is out of my mind to stay emotionally free, but my stomach is still the one acting up. I don't feel like I can catch my breath. A part of me is sinking, and I feel hollow inside. I don't get hurt—my feelings, anyway—very often. People try, but it doesn't bother me 'cause I expect it.

I even expected this, though not this whole setup. I knew the club still didn't trust me. Even agreed that what I presented to them would look sketchy to most. Guess I didn't realize till just now that I put the beast above that "most" category.

"Did I at least pass whatever test you were trying for tonight?" I make no move to get up. I'm comfy, and no one has told me to leave. And I still have my drink to finish.

I really had fun tonight, beyond the constant death glares from more than half the club who probably knew everything. Well, everything the others told them, painting me in a bad light, I'm sure. The other half just pretended I wasn't there, which I'm used to.

But the women? The old ladies? They treated me better than most. Sure, all we did was sit and chat, but I was included. No one spoke over me or tried to make me feel bad about myself or who I was related to. They even asked questions and tried to help me solve a problem. A problem I didn't even know I had till I voiced it.

Seeing Mad Max, being around him, makes things complicated. And that's the issue. I like things clear. Black and white. When there's gray, I work it out till I can separate the two colors. Finding Candy is easy—I know where to go, who to talk to. The gray is how to say the right word to get things moving so I can help her back home. Mad Max is all gray.

Family shouldn't mean anything to me, not with how my parents treated me. I should shun everything and everyone related, but I cling to my uncle in my own way. He makes me want to stay even though he does nothing much, just accepts me. Never asks me to change.

Like the beast. Not once has he told me to be something I'm not. Sure, he forced a few things on me, like getting new locks. Or told me to do or not do something, like at the coffee shop when he said to stop whatever I was doing before he even knew what I was involved in. But he's never told me to stop being me. To stop acting a certain way or talking like I do. I know both have pissed off others in the past. And he's never said I was odd or weird—two words used to describe me all the time, and the two words I hate most in the entire universe.

I have feelings for Mad Max. Never had that before. I've slept with people, had fun with others. But what I feel right now is different. I was hurt when I realized he doesn't trust me. It took me a while, but waking to my lock being fixed because the beast demanded it made me feel taken care of it. Not even my uncle makes me feel that. Sure, he provides for me, and I never worried if I would get hurt, but he also taught me to take care of things for myself. Explained that no one was going to do something for you, and you had to put hard work and time into something to get it done. Nothing was a given.

But with Mad Max, he makes me feel like I don't have to have all the answers. That I don't need to be the smartest person in the room. That for once, there's someone to lean on who will take some of that burden. I know no one asks me to do it, but I will always feel like I have to be perfect. Trauma my parents inflicted on me that I don't think any person, even a shrink, could fix. But the beast does. A part of me knows—or maybe just wants—him to be the one to catch me if I stumble and fall through something I don't entirely get. Which is more than people might assume about me.

“You passed the Ruby test, and that’s about as high a marker as you can get in this place. Girl’s got a knack for reading people. She might not have known everything when we sent her over here, but she knew her dad wanted her opinion, and thus the club.” He shrugs as if it explains everything. It doesn’t.

If they heard the whole conversation, then he must know it started because of him. Before I even knew it was about him, Ruby zoned in on it. I want him. I want him more than a one-night stand. He makes me feel safe in a way I didn’t know a person could feel. And he accepts me like my uncle. But more than that, I feel like I can take on the world because of him. When it gets cruel and spits me out, I feel like he’ll catch me, dust me off, and then lead me back into the fray, hand in hand.

It’s odd to take on so many emotions all at once as we stare across the table at each other. He’s still standing, a reminder of how much bigger he is than me. How easily he lifted me to the kitchen wall that first time flitters across my mind. We shouldn’t fit, but we did then. And again in my bedroom that night. Everything about us screams opposites, unsuitable, but that’s all wrong. The proportions are perfect for us. Odd for others, but that seems like our thing too. He doesn’t talk a lot, like me. And when we do, we don’t hold back. Short and straight-to-the point answers. He gets my way of thinking, and I get his.

“And yours? Did I pass *your* test?” Not sure why I asked. Not even sure if he *had* a test for me. I feel like I’m back trying to speak in code about black markets and human trafficking.

He holds my eyes for longer than most would before he speaks. “Come on. Party’s over. I’ll walk you to the room we have for you.”

He didn’t answer the question, so I drop it. Maybe he didn’t get what I was asking. I could only figure out half of it myself. I think I was asking if he trusts me. Maybe it was if he liked me? Who knows?

I've confused myself enough, so I just get up and follow him to the back where the other couples went. Guess they have rooms back here. I changed in a bathroom when I was told to get ready for the party. Don't even know where my bags are now; I came out of the restroom and was sent to help Izzy clean up out back to make sure all the beer cans were picked up before the kids arrived. But as soon as we finished, I got ushered inside. At the time, I thought nothing of it, but now I know it was just to get me talking where the club could hear me.

Neither of us speaks, and when we turn the corner, the noise is instantly reduced. You can still hear the beating of the music through the walls, but the conversation is just a dull drone. It's also darker back here. The clubhouse doesn't use hydrogen lights or anything to brighten it up. There's a much higher brightness level in the main room compared to the hallway with just one bulb lighting up the long pathway. It gives enough light that you can see others with you, but there are still dark spots that remain hidden.

Not everything is clouded by shadows. And definitely not the people down the corridor, which has Mad Max stopping and me following as I look to him and then back at the couple.

"Is that...?"

"Yup."

I didn't even know I'd taken a step forward as I watch them till an arm wraps around my waist, anchoring me to the spot in front of him.

I'm too fascinated to look away. I've never seen porn before. I saw Benny and that girl, but I'm not sure what they were doing, as it looked awkward as fuck. But there's nothing awkward about the way Flint's pushing his woman to her knees as he pulls his dick out and guides it into her mouth.

They don't notice us, or if they do, they don't care. What they're sharing is something that has them only focused on each other and no one else. She takes him in with one

swallow, and his groan of pleasure has him tilting his head back. The sight has me shivering in response.

I'm breathing hard. I feel parts of me pulsating. Flint's got a grip on his old lady's hair that looks so tight, but it seems as if it's just to hang on and not to guide her. She's moaning around him and squirming on her knees. I know she's wet. I am too.

We don't move. We don't leave. We don't look away. Not till my beast starts rubbing his thumb over my shirt, forcing it up till he's touching my skin. Such a light touch, yet I'm shivering all over again as I lean back into him. My knees feel weak as he takes my weight easily.

"Please."

It's all I can say. I don't even know what I'm trying to ask for, but Mad Max's movements betray the stoic presence he's been keeping with me of late.

He moves us back to the wall, nothing more than a step or two but enough to put us in our own little darkened alcove. I whisper my moan as he drags his teeth over my bare shoulder blade.

It's not lost on me that the last time we were in a similar situation, I was wearing this same skirt. This might be my favorite piece of clothing I own as he hikes it up with his other hand and guides his thick fingers to where I need him the most.

He pushes my panties to the side and gives me no warning before he glides two fingers into me. I climb to my tiptoes and grab both his wrists to hold on. He gives me zero mercy and pumps into me several times before he pulls out and rubs my own juices over my clit. I'm shaking so much, knees buckling. I keep my bottom lip tight between my teeth as I try to hold back my cries of pleasure, but whimpers break free.

"Easy, Fairy. We don't want anyone to hear you, do we? You might not get to see how the show ends." He licks my

earlobe, and I would outright fall if he didn't have such a tight grip on me.

I roll both of my lips between my teeth, crushing them together to keep all sounds quiet. I can only hear my breath, and it's so loud in my ears.

He moves his fingers slowly, never pushing me over the edge, just having me hang there. His left hand between my legs is doing all the work hidden beneath my skirt while his right is holding me up, just lazily rubbing on my skin. If Flint or Jules looks over at us, they might not even see that I'm getting finger-fucked while she's giving a blow job. Sure, they'll see us standing and watching like creepers, but I doubt they'd care. If they do, then they can move to one of the many rooms behind the many doors that line this hallway. I'm more surprised by the fact that I'm not even worried if someone walks up and sees *me*.

Well, duh! You had sex at a random house party in the kitchen. Riding a Hound's finger in a dark corner of their clubhouse doesn't seem so unexpected.

I move my hips, trying to get him to go a little faster or just hit that one spot he's ghost touching. He smacks my pussy twice in quick succession, causing me to gasp till I groan.

"Not yet, Fairy. You don't get to make the call here. Your beast does, and he says you can't come till *he* does."

I know exactly who *he* is, as I can't keep my eyes off the couple down the hall. Every other part of me might be hyper-focused on Mad Max, but my eyes are paying attention to them. I hear their moans, but I half think they're my own. Or from my beast.

I fucking love that he's calling me his fairy and not shying away from my slipup at the coffee shop. 'Cause that's what we are—Cheyanne and Mad Max, but also Fairy and Beast. We're two parts: the part we share with others and the parts we share with *each* other.

I know neither of us expected there to be an *us*. I know no one else did. But it's there. We fit; we mesh. We bring each other out of the dark in our own way.

"Oh fuck, Kitten."

That's the only warning I get before Mad Max becomes the beast I know him to be. He pushes a finger inside me, curving it to hit that perfect spot, and rubs circles on my clit that have me seeing stars. His other hand travels under my shirt and pinches my nipple hard as he bites my neck. I open my mouth to scream, though nothing comes out but heavy panting. I'm shivering, shaking in his arms as he continues his onslaught while I watch Flint reacting the same way as his woman drinks his seed down.

I miss the rest of their show as my beast pulls free and spins me so quickly into the room we were standing next to. I get zero warning, which I'm completely okay with, before he pushes me face down over the bed that's just a few feet inside the room. I have no idea where we are—no lights are on, and the only reason I know it's a bed is because of the soft mattress.

My skirt lifts over my ass a second before my panties are again pushed to the side as he fits his cock between my legs and drives home. He doesn't stop, and I don't want him to. One orgasm isn't enough, just like one night with him wasn't. I need more of him on both levels.

He grabs both of my arms and pulls back, using them as leverage to pound into me harder, faster. My face rises a few inches off the mattress, and the sounds coming out of me aren't intelligible. I think I'm speaking but also moaning and screaming too. He's hitting a spot inside me that no one has ever hit before. I think it's the G-spot, but fuck the name. I just don't want him to stop.

I have zero leverage to push back, to move other than how he wants me to. He pulls my arms back, jostling my body on his dick as he plows into me from behind.

“Fucking hell, Fairy,” he growls, then explodes inside me, and it sets me off again. The heaven I’m floating in isn’t as grand as the one before in the hall, but it’s more powerful. That’s the first time someone’s orgasm triggered my own. It’s a first for me, and I’m one of those who treasures each first. Especially since I can remember almost all of them down to the date, some even the time.

He gently lets go of my arms so I land softly on the mattress. I just stay like that, trying to breathe. Only then do I take a moment to realize that I’m smelling him because it’s *his* bed I’m on, not that I gained super smelling abilities after our little sexcapade.

He grunts as he pulls out, and I take that as what I’m sure he means it to be: “*Get the fuck out, I’m done with you.*”

Only one minor problem.

“Sorry.” I take another breath and just lie there. “I’ll move as soon as I can feel my arms and legs.”

“Did I hurt you?”

I smile, though I’m not sure if he can see it as the lights are still off. “Nah, just got the life fucked out of me. It’s going to take me at least ten minutes to regain the power to move my limbs. Promise I’ll get up soon, just give me a second.”

He chuckles in that deep tone that’s distinctly his. Every guy in this place has a deep voice, but his is a deep baritone while the others are more like a growl. Oh, my beast is still all growly, just in a lower, more pussy-rippling way.

I hear him move, and then a light turns on behind me, but not in the room. I assume it’s a bathroom, as I hear the faucet running. I continue not to move, because I wasn’t kidding, my limbs are a bit liquid right now.

I scan the half of the room I can see. It’s not overly messy but lived-in. An armchair in the corner with some shirts on it. A dresser with a few drawers not fully closed. Even a bookcase that’s covered in more than just books, though it’s too dark to make out what lines the shelves.

The floor creaks a second before a warm, wet cloth glides up one leg. I shiver at the touch as he cleans my pussy and then my other leg. Another first, and I'm not a person to be embarrassed by such intimacy. But even I know that isn't what's expected of a biker after a quick fuck in his room.

He turns me and then undresses me. I tilt my head and just watch, not doing much to help.

I'm confused by him. He doesn't trust me, but he takes great care with things like this. I know he's not deceiving me, not trying to make me believe something that isn't there.

If he isn't shying away from whatever this is, do I have a reason to stay back? I don't understand the way people do things most of the time, but I'm starting to understand him. And when he gets me naked, then himself, I don't refuse his unspoken demand to stay.

Gripping under my arms, he lifts me easily and tosses me back against his pillows. I crawl under the covers as he walks to the side of the bed and climbs in. I don't hesitate, and neither does he. He lies on his back, and I just crawl over him, using him as my pillow. He lowers his arm around me, and I know he's accepting me as his blanket. Then we both sleep.

No words are needed. We've already said so much without them.

Just not sure what it'll mean in the morning.

Chapter 18 – Mad Max

on't think you understand the point, son. Once they
“D release you from this place, you don't come back.”

I ignore the raised eyebrow Travis gives me a second before he takes the seat opposite me. His eyes wander the visitor's room of the prison, and I'm sure he sees what isn't there—the Hounds of the Reaper. I didn't come with a single brother. Ain't hiding it. Know Flint could track my phone if he wants, but this isn't club related. This is about me, and about a promise I made to a man that I can no longer keep.

“Must have missed the memo.”

He grunts but then just waits. He owes me nothing. No small-talk bullshit. He's smart, so he knows there's only a handful of reasons why I would be here. Even less for why I'm here solo. But he keeps what little power he has in this place, making me be the one to break first.

“We got a problem.”

He stiffens as he leans in. “Boo covered?”

“Yeah, moved her to Hounds territory.”

“How deep she in?”

I huff at that. Of course he knew she would go digging. That she wouldn't stop when he gave her that name. Any normal civilian would have run to the cops. But not her. She just walks in, says weird shit, and makes herself at home. And I don't hate that about her, not at all. Kind of like it, actually. Just wish it didn't put her on the target list.

“Guess it depends. How deep was she in before you got locked up?” I keep my eyes on him. I need to gauge his reaction.

Jimmy Travis might have worked for an alphabet agency and been trained to lie, but I've been studying this man's body

language for two years. I learned to react at the barest movement from him, but in those days, it was to protect. Never once did I accuse him of shit. We might not be friends, but we established an allegiance of sorts in here together. The club has no beef with him, and he has no issues with who I'm connected to. We got along simply 'cause we both took out rapists and got fucked by the system for protecting a person it should have protected but instead let the bastards walk. Thanks to us, neither of them is walking around anymore. I might not have killed my guy like Travis, but he's paralyzed from the neck down, and I got no regrets about that.

"You asking which side she's on or how deep she's in?"

"Is there a difference?"

"Yes."

I didn't expect his question, or the response to the one I asked. But I'm intrigued, that's for damn sure. "What can you tell me?"

He looks at me for a long while, and I just sit there. I'm not an open book, but just like I've watched his mannerisms for years, I know he's watched mine.

"There's a price."

"Always is," I say with a roll of my eyes.

Nothing's ever free with Travis. Not even when we came last time. The info he gave was at the cost of protection for Boo. An agreement I made on behalf of the club, but no one dismissed me when I agreed to his terms. Even if we didn't talk about price from the start, like we're doing now, Law expected there to be a fee. But none of us expected it to potentially cost us getting to Duke when we could have. We had the perfect opportunity the other night, but instead of going after him and finishing this, we made sure the fairy was okay.

"What is it?"

"To be determined after our chat. You game?"

It's risky to go in blind like this. Club went in blind last time, but that was all of us. This is just me. There could be a chance I can't pay up.

Do I risk it?

Is *she* worth the risk?

Fuck yeah.

I barely recognize my heart speaking, as it's always been a silent asshole that just sits and beats in my chest. But ever since she showed up, it's been beating a bit differently. Still keeping me alive and all that, but I swear it has its own tempo when she's around or I'm thinking about her. Which is almost all the time lately.

I go with the bastard, giving it one chance. If this blows up in my fucking face, I'll never trust the damn organ again.

"I'm in. Now tell me everything."

He smiles, and it crinkles his eyes at the corners. "Think this is the first time you've spoken so much in one sitting before. Either the club broke you or someone else did."

I don't answer that. My relationship with the fairy is not up for debate. I already know he'll be against it, so I'm not bringing it up unless I absolutely have to. Not hiding it, just not volunteering shit that can hurt her. The only family she has left is the man across from me. And there's one thing I've learned that's 100 percent true: that girl loves her uncle. He was the first person to accept her for who she is and not what she can do for him. Might be the only person who can say that. Even the club and I want something from her, and accepting her quirks to get the information we want is our price. Not much of the remorseful type, but I'm feeling that right now as I realize just how much I've used this woman without knowing it.

First time was just to get out of dealing with the bullshit at the club. The next time was to get a feeling that I've never had before, forcing her to take it, even if she liked it. The third is

keeping her at the club against her will. She didn't fight it, but no one likes to be caged. Trust me.

He just hums at my lack of response before he gives up what I want to know.

"The agency recruited her two years before I got locked up."

I thought nothing could surprise me, but boy, was I fucking wrong. "The...?"

He nods, filling in what I ain't saying out loud. "Yeah, same one I was with."

She fucking works for the CIA? What the fuck? I know they lock their shit down, but fuck. This might explain why Flint didn't find much on her. They clean their shit like the best of them.

"She still in?"

"No. Once I got arrested, we all made a deal. Boo wasn't to be touched, and she would find other employment. Nothing would go on her record, and the entire thing would be swept under the rug. But..."

Fucking knew it wasn't that simple. Leaving the agency never is, or so I've been told.

"But what? She didn't want to go? They changed their mind?"

He snickers as he leans back, interlacing his fingers before resting them on his stomach. "You've gotten antsy since you left here."

"Ain't antsy, just want to know what the fuck is going on."

"She left. She didn't have a feeling on whether or not she should stay. She's not one to let emotion drive her."

"Yeah, I know," I grunt but wish I hadn't.

Travis glares for a second, and I feel the tension radiating off him. His jaw is set, and I know the cogs are turning in his

head as he tries to figure out just how well I know his niece. He doesn't ask, though, just continues on as if I said nothing.

"While they might have been the ones to let her go, it was also them who reached out again in the end, wanting her to do some consulting for them."

"Consult how?"

He leans back in, getting as close as he can without the guards saying we need to separate. I lean in as well, not wanting to miss anything.

"Your club run a check on her?"

I nod. I don't hate that we did it—it's how we operate. Always need to check out anyone we bring into the club, especially someone who was attempting to buy a person a few hours before.

"You guys know what she does for a living?"

"Runs lie detectors. Finds cheating spouses and shit like that."

He shakes his head, but at least he ain't laughing at what we found.

"She doesn't run them. She is one."

I give it a second but still don't get it, and I shake my head to show I'm misunderstanding what he's trying to tell me.

"Girl might be running the machines, but I've never known anyone to be able to tell a person is lying like she can. The machines are the front. She's the actual one measuring the outcomes of a person's answers."

I'm just not getting it. "You telling me she knows when I lie?"

"More than that. The girl can sniff out a liar from twenty feet away. She's got this gift. She might not know what they're lying *about*, but she knows they are. She started the polygraph company to ask straight-to-the-point questions. As I'm sure you know, my niece doesn't do subtle very well. Ain't

mad about that, as it lets me know what she's really thinking, and I don't have to guess like I do with others in this world. She realized that once she knew a person was lying, she just couldn't let it go, so she set up the storefront so she can be as obvious with the questions as she wants. Everyone thinks they're trying to beat a machine and not her. In the end, she doesn't have to solve a puzzle of what a person was lying about through all the other bullshit that was thrown her way. Polygraphs are strictly yes-or-no questions. No other bull to muddle through."

I let it sink in as I mumble through my thoughts out loud. "She's meeting with the buyer to catch them in a lie."

His eyes widen a fraction. "Boo's doing field work? The agency wouldn't have cleared her for that."

Now it's my turn to give him a look. One I hope conveys that I think he's an idiot for not seeing what I do about a person he claims to know well. "You really think she's asking for permission?"

It doesn't even take him a full second before he's looking down and shaking his head in defeat. "Shit. No, she's out there doing it to solve a stupid puzzle. Someone wiggles a carrot in front of her and the girl doesn't know how to let a mystery go unsolved. Been like that since she was a kid. I'll bet my entire life in this place that the person who reached out knew that about her."

"Could it have been the agency? Using her without paying, in a way?"

He shakes his head easily, but I can see him grinding his teeth about his former employer. "Nah, not with her. Anyone else, I would believe it, but they need her too damn much. They bring almost every person they can to her. They know her skill level and keep her in business as much as possible. They wouldn't risk her 'cause there's no one else like her."

Don't I know it. Thank fuck I'm able to keep my thoughts to myself.

“From what she told me the last time she was here, the agency is aware of the *situation* but has shit leads to go on. Boo is smart and probably took what I gave her, the agency’s info, and what the contact sent over and worked shit out on her own. If she’s meeting with people, she’s confident that she’s talking to the right person. But, son....”

He waits a beat, and I feel the importance of what he’s about to say before he says it.

“She’s badass in her own right, but she won’t make it when she gets caught. And before you try to argue, know it’s always a ‘when’ and not an ‘if.’ I did the business for over twenty years, got caught more than I can say, but I had a team that backed me. A fucked-up team that eventually sent me here, but they covered me and supplied what I needed when I was their golden boy. She’s got no one, and she ain’t the best at blending in.”

“She’s got us.” I don’t even blink as I say it. I know this hasn’t been brought to the table. I know several of my brothers still don’t trust her. But I also believe without a doubt that when shit goes down, the club will stand with her and not apart.

He sinks back in his chair as he lets the weight of my words pass between us, softly drumming his fingers on the metal table. I feel anything but relaxed, while he looks like he just ate Thanksgiving dinner and is enjoying life.

“Time to pay up.”

“What do you want?”

“Everything.” The twinkle in his eye has me glaring. “Tell me everything.”

My heart stops beating for fifteen solid seconds. I can’t betray the club. Telling him everything will strip me of my very soul, for that’s what being a Hound of the Reaper means to me.

“What are you and Boo up to?”

I swallow hard. I think I'd rather betray the club than talk about me and my fairy. But the price needs to be paid. And out of everything he could have asked for, he wants to know this. *This*. Something he can simply kill me for, and I wouldn't blame him.

At least the club would be spared. It's my only reprieve before I start talking.

"We've...." I search for the right words. *Hooking up* or *fucking* doesn't seem right. Not because I'm talking to her uncle about this but because each time meant more, even if I wasn't expecting it to. "Gotten to know one another," I finish.

"Interesting. Go on."

I breathe hard as I try to say this right. Has nothing to do with not wanting to be crass, but I'm muddling through my own thoughts and feelings as I'm talking it out. It's the first time I've allowed myself to put words to what's going on inside me, being with her.

"I didn't even know who she was even though I watched over her a hundred times while in this place. She saw my tat and then said she was glad I was out. She noticed me before I could even connect the dots, and I got to say, that's a first for me. I don't think I meant for it to happen, but it did. Her date was an ass, and I enjoyed putting him in his place, but I think I enjoyed the fact that she wasn't with him anymore. Another first, as I ain't the jealous type. When I saw that the asshole had a key to her place, I didn't even think twice about getting the locks switched to keep her safe. I decided to stay away. But then I saw her here, and at a coffee joint. Each time she left, I wanted to follow, but I didn't. When we saw her at the buy, I hated not knowing more about her. Not knowing if I could trust or her not. But once the bullets started flying, all I could think of was getting to her and making sure she was safe. I have no clue that I'm staring at her half the time until she looks at me."

I'm staring at my hands. I wasn't expecting to say half that shit, but I guess I needed to talk it out to someone. Someone

who wouldn't judge. Not that my brothers would, but they would still question it. And I've got enough rattling around in my brain, still trying to deal with whether *I* can trust her or not.

I look up and see a smug smile on Travis's face. And I just want to roll my eyes. He couldn't have possibly known I was in so deep with his niece, but that's what his look is giving off.

"When you going to tell her?"

I furrow my brow. "Tell her what?"

"That she means something to you. That you love her."

Chapter 19 – Cheyanne

It's only happened twice, but I think I'm used to waking up alone after a night of sex with Mad Max. I know I didn't dream the amazing sex. Hell, as I wiggle out of the covers, I can still feel a bit of him running down my leg that he missed during cleanup.

The bathroom is my first stop. I borrow his toothbrush, not caring if a clean mouth and no morning breath gets me into trouble with him. Hygiene is very important, and I'm pretty sure you can't get an STD from using another person's toothbrush. I might have to look that one up. Never had to google that one before. Guess it shouldn't matter, since we've already had sex a few times anyway.

I gather my clothes, the ones I had on when I came in here. I don't see my packed bag anywhere, so still no clue where that is. I opt out of panties, mostly because I can't find where he flung them at some point, and who knows how wet they are from yesterday anyway. The skirt works, but it's too cold to wear the off-the-shoulder number this early. I always get cold in the morning, no matter the temp. It's weird, I know.

I have zero shame as I go through his drawers. There isn't much that won't make me feel like I'm swimming. I settle on a wife beater that I knot in the back and a zipped-up black hoodie. It still covers most of me, but at least it looks more like a long jacket than oversized men's clothes on me. Okay, it looks like that, too, but I'm not trying to impress anyone. Well, not anyone who didn't have his dick inside me less than ten hours ago. And from what little I know about him, my lack of fashion sense is not why he keeps putting his hands on me.

His room is the first one down the hall, so it takes me no time to get back to the main bar. I don't see anyone, but noise is coming from behind the bar. I pass through swinging doors and ignore those in the room going silent as I open the

industrial-size fridge and look for breakfast. It's pretty stocked, but I'm not in the cooking mood. Actually, I'm never in that mood. I prefer the type of food that takes very little effort and is almost impossible to ruin. I might be a certified genius, but a cook I am not.

I poke my head out and look around, grinning when I find what I'm looking for. I grab the milk, search for half a minute for a bowl and spoon, and then grab the Cocoa Puffs off the open pantry shelf. I might not mind being the center of attention, but there isn't a place to sit in here, so I take it all back out to the bar and pour myself a very large bowl of yummy goodness.

"Think Kooper's going to shit a brick when he sees you eating his food."

I shrug as Casper sits beside me. "Shouldn't have left it out if he didn't want to share."

"Never thought we needed to tell someone not to take another's food before."

I look at him, spoon halfway to my mouth as I tilt my head, trying to read him. I get that he still doesn't trust me. Probably trying to put me in my place or something. Not really sure, but I get that he's trying for intimidation. Too bad it isn't going to work.

"Pretty sure that's Roommate 101." He raises an eyebrow for me to continue. I roll my eyes as I stuff my face, munching around my words as I go. "Label your stuff so people don't steal your things."

I see the smirk on his lips out of the corner of my eye but say nothing more as I continue eating. I glance at him as I pour a second bowl, but he just shakes his head as he plays some game on his phone.

I'm not trying to start a fight, just hungry. All there was to eat at the family event was seven different types of chips and dip. Don't think they planned very well, but despite all my family's faults, they raised me to keep my mouth shut when

something isn't on the table and you want it. My parents didn't withhold food, per se, but they didn't add things I asked for unless it was something they'd already planned. The whole "you get what you get and don't throw a fit" was a staple in our house. As for my uncle, his philosophy was "if you want something, take it." As long as it was in the house, it was free rein. So that's what I'm doing here. I'm not stealing anything, just having breakfast.

I'm half surprised that Casper doesn't follow me back into the kitchen when I put my stuff away and clean up. What does surprise me is my cell phone on the bar next to him when I get back. I haven't seen it since I got here. They took it and the burner cell I had with me the other night almost immediately. I know I've told the truth since I've been here, but unless something happened that I don't know about, I'm not sure why they're giving it to me.

But as I grab the phone and turn it on, I understand what I was missing a second ago.

"Funny."

"I thought so."

He shut off the Wi-Fi and did something to my phone so I can't access my data. I'm literally stuck to only what's downloaded. It's worse than Airplane Mode, I swear. I don't even know where my laptop is, but at least I synced everything to a private drive before I came here. Even if they do manage to swipe my laptop, I'd still have a way to get to my backup drives. Thankfully, my paranoid uncle taught me that little trick at an early age. Then again, the guy's stuff was confiscated, and he was forced into jail, so maybe *paranoid* isn't the right word. Maybe *psychic*.

I huff. It's about all I can do. Doubt throwing a tantrum will do much but give me a headache, and I was never one to cry anyway. Even as a child, my parents boasted that I rarely made a noise. Never saw the good it did.

Think the fact that I just started playing my own game on my phone and not saying anything really throws him.

He chuckles. "Fuck, you're not like the others."

I don't look up from my game. "Keep a lot of people locked up in here with no one to contact?"

"A few." Now it's me who chuckles. Glad to know he isn't lying, at least. "Never had one just roll with it, though."

This time I do look over at him, and he meets my stare head-on. "Maybe they weren't telling the truth and were worried you would find it. I have nothing to hide. I told you all that I know. A few hours away from my email won't hurt me. And the only person who would care enough about me to do anything can't because he's locked up."

"Maybe," he concedes with a nod.

"Any idea where Mad Max is?"

"Nope."

I breathe through my dislike of his answer and push the emotion out. He's not lying. Wish he was. Would be easier to figure out than the fuzzies going on in my belly when I think about the beast.

Sleeping in his arms all night did nothing to clear my head. I have no simple answers, just more confusion. I guess I could just ask him. But he would need to be around for that to happen, and apparently no one has any idea where he is. Or at least my babysitter doesn't.

I'm not sure how long we sit there playing our phone games. Neither of us really talks, and only a few people walk by us.

Only when a bag of groceries is set in front of me do I look up. Curiosity is my weakness, and I don't even bother turning around to see who set it down before I'm digging through it. I find two things: a toothbrush and grape Kool-Aid squeeze bottles.

I spin around so fast, I would have fallen if Mad Max hadn't put out a hand to stop me. I'm not sure what others see when they're looking at me, and I know they are. I can feel it. But I only have eyes for one beast. And he just stares back at me with the same intensity.

No one, not even my uncle, has bought me a gift outside my birthday and the anniversary of my parents' death, which was like a second birth for me. It's just a drink, but I know they don't sell these at every corner store. You have to search for them, even harder if you want grape. I swear he just handed me the equivalent of a super rare baseball card.

"Thank you," I whisper. Not sure if it was loud enough for him to hear me or if he just read it on my lips, but he nods in return.

I swallow the emotions that are attacking me, almost suffocating me. I've never experienced this. Ever since I sat beside him on the couch those many weeks ago, I've been feeling things.

Can a person have three birthdays? 'Cause I want to add one more to my list—the day he walked into my life and I started to feel.

I know how to have feelings, but they're small. Easy to push down and feel nothing. Some have called me cold or robotic; I just see it as me being able to compartmentalize and deal with what's needed. If that meant I lost or didn't get something I wanted in the end, then that's what was meant to be.

You get what you get. Whether or not my parents wanted me to live it all my life, it dawns on me that it's the single motto I've really stuck with. Guess that was why it was so easy to push the emotions away before. Your wants and desires don't really get a say when something is handed to you. You just deal with it, and it's better to do that with a clear head than an emotional one.

Until now.

I spin back in my chair and just look at the drinks as I try to grasp the wave of emotions fighting for control. I should be able to push them down, but I can't. Not right now. Not when I know it's his hands that grab the pack of six drinks, making them look so small as he peels off the plastic, unscrews the lid, and passes me one before taking one for himself.

I take a much-needed sip. Only after I let the cool liquid slide down my throat do I hear the noise around me. Like coming out of a tunnel, I can suddenly hear everything. More people are here now; not sure when they got to the club. Casper is talking with Mad Max, but I still can't focus enough to catch what they're saying.

Unlike the emotional onslaught I have raging inside me, I know I've done this bit before. I get so focused that I just block everyone out, focusing on the buzzing in my ears and not those around me. Might not be the smartest thing to do in a place that doesn't trust me, but there's a part of me, a part I'm trying to understand, that knows I'm safe here. And I don't have to search too hard to know it's because of the beast—*my* beast. He makes me feel safe, even when he's not here, like no one would dare touch what's his, and I *like* that feeling. I like it a lot.

"How long did you drive for?"

"A few hours. There wasn't much traffic on the way back from El Dorado."

My ears perk up, and I turn enough to have both men in my periphery. Guess I'm not the only one shocked to know that Mad Max went to the prison today, as Casper's eyebrows are nearly at the top of his head.

"Yup. Give her the Wi-Fi password. Doubt the agency will want her offline for long."

He drops my client's name as if it's nothing, but Casper is sputtering, and all I do is grin.

Jimmy told him. He must like the guy more than he lets on. Only a handful of people know about my work with them. I

have a lot of clients, but they're the ones who keep a steady stream of business coming through my door.

"How's he doing?" I pipe up.

Mad Max looks to me and nods. "He's good. Says hi."

Now I know he's lying, and I just smile wider. "Liar." My uncle is many things, but being a person who says hi is not one of them.

I love that the beast just smiles back. It feels like we're sharing a private joke, and maybe we are. Not many people can say they're close to Jimmy Travis, but I guess he and I can.

It takes a bit of time, but I eventually find myself in a corner booth with access to my laptop and phone. Even got my burner phone back. All fully working with access to the outside world. I'm left alone to answer emails and make calls, but I'm never out of sight of the club. Or Mad Max.

I'm curious about his name. He doesn't really seem like the mad type, nor does he look like the guy on the movie posters. Yeah, I looked up the name to see if I could understand it myself. It's just another puzzle I want to solve. But unless they somehow decide I can have access to their personal records, the only way I'll find out that mystery is if I ask.

Do they keep records of everyone's name? Just another thing to ask, I guess. Would make sense to me if they did. How else would they remember all their nickname origin stories and make sure they don't use someone else's from another chapter?

Yeah, I also googled the club a bit. I don't know much, but I know they have a few chapters. Having that many members must require some kind of system to keep all the names straight. Wonder if they have to register the name in a database or something.

"Need anything?"

His deep rumble sends shivers down my spine before I even look at him. Seeing him tower over me only reminds me of the way he maneuvered my body for his benefit last night. Or was it mine? I got off, too, so it wasn't like he was alone in that matter.

I tilt my head. "Does anyone ever have the same code name?"

"Code name?"

"Yeah, like Casper, Mad Max, and Kooper. Code names."

He sits with a grin. "Road names, baby, not code. Club *road* names."

"Oh. Well, does anyone have the same as someone else?"

He shrugs. "Don't know. Maybe, but I don't think so."

"How do you get one?"

"Usually got to do something stupid that people remember. Knew a guy who we all called Next Stop because when we asked if he wanted to stop, since a vamp was passed out on the back of his ride, he just said, 'Next stop.' Guy cared about making good time and not if the chick behind him was okay. Like I said, stupid shit that people remember."

"So, what did you do to get yours?"

He shrugs, a deep shoulder movement. "Got mad, I guess."

I squint. "That it?"

"Guess so."

"You got mad, and now they call you Mad Max, like the movie guy?"

"Nah, name's really Max. They just put the Mad in front of it."

I grab my squeeze pouch. Yeah, I've been loving the pack he bought me. On the last one already. I suck down the Kool-Aid goodness as I think over what he said.

“I think you need a committee,” I say finally.

“A committee?”

“Yeah, someone to vet these road names. Not saying yours is bad, but I think they could have come up with something better.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Maybe Hammer ’cause you don’t move unless you need to. Or Inside Man, since you were, you know, inside.” He laughs, and I just roll my eyes. “Obviously I wouldn’t be part of it. If I was, you’d get a name like—”

“Beast?” He says it with a rasp in his voice and somehow sucks out all the air in the room in one.

I nod. “Yeah, something like that.”

We lock eyes, and I feel the air between us charge. We’re two seconds away from causing an epic explosion.

But a bomb goes off in front of us instead. My burner phone suddenly rings on the table, the ID screen showing the caller’s name.

Duke.

Chapter 20 – Mad Max

uck, I hate this part.”

“F I agree, but for a whole other reason than Domino. While he might hate not knowing what’s going on, I do know, and I hate it even more.

Casper catches my eye from across the room we use for Church. A group of us came in here to wait it out. Seemed like the only place large enough without pulling in the whole damn club.

And where we can talk freely.

“You hear it?” Casper asks.

“Was there when it happened,” I say with a nod.

“It legit?”

I turn to Kooper. Not sure what he’s looking at, but it ain’t me, as he has his head down.

I nod for the rest of the boys and supply an answer for him. “Yeah.”

He finally looks up, and I’m not sure what emotion I see on his face before he asks, “Can we trust her?”

The doors open before I can reply, and I’m shocked at what I see, just like the rest of the brothers in the room. Law and Flint walk in first, Bulldog closing the door behind them as he comes in last. But the one between them all, that’s the shocker.

There’s an unspoken rule that chicks don’t come into Church. And maybe since Church was never officially called, it’s cool for the fairy to be in here. Never seen it before. Don’t think anyone else has either, all of us staring wide-eyed as she looks for a seat. Not many are open, with most of the officers in here and the rest of us feeling a bit invested with how we’ve been connected to this from the start.

Casper kicks a chair out for her, the place Bass would have sat if he wasn't still out of state. Seems like a decade ago that he and the two prospects went to work with the other chapters on our black ops gig and we were making plans to go international in the beer business. Who the fuck knew we'd be doing this shit on our own soil, in our own backyard? I'm sure there's a bit of irony there, but I ain't got the time to figure it out. Just like a few other things going on in the club right now, I'm pushing it to the side to deal with later.

"What're we dealing with?"

Casper knows his place, but he also knows when to ask questions. And now is the time, after our prez and VP listened to the recording Flint had of Cheyanne's phone call.

I was there when it happened. She even put it on speaker for me to hear, trusting me without a second thought. Once the call ended, Flint was pulling her in with the other two officers. I know the boys messed with her phone; it's what we do to protect the club. She didn't even fight when he came and got her, already predicting that her calls were being monitored, I'm sure.

A few of the boys heard bits at the end, which is why Domino and Jumper are in here. Atom, Casper, and Kooper noticed her being taken away. And Chains was just coming in with Bulldog from the garage when he was pulled away by Flint. We all got pieces to work with, but only a few got the full story. I knew most of it till I was told to wait outside. The unknown part is what was said *after* they all heard the recorded call.

"Flint?" Law looks to our tech man, and everyone else does the same. All but me and the fairy. She's tracing the veins of wood on the table, and I'm just watching her. Don't need to look at a brother to hear him.

"Call came in just under forty minutes ago. Wasn't able to trace it 'cause it's a burner phone and the call didn't last very long. Duke has decided it's time to get paid. He's asked Cheyanne to bring the money, and he'll supply the girls. Says

he got a nice crop, and to provide some good faith that what happened last time won't happen again, she actually gets to pick from the group."

"How many do we expect he has?" Jumper asks, but it's not Flint who speaks first, and I think he's more shocked than anyone else in the room. No one talks for him. He hates it. But he also knows when he might not be the one with all the info, so he lets the fairy explain.

"He didn't say. When I met with him last time, he said I wasn't allowed to pick, that I had to give him criteria and he would supply it. Didn't think I would have this chance so soon. I expected it to be at least a few buys, maybe a year or so."

"You were willing to play this role for a year?" It's Domino who's asking this time. He might not have been in the hole with us when we brought her in that first night and asked her questions, but he knows it all, just like the rest of the boys in the club. The entire group is trusted, and we don't keep secrets from our brothers. Not when there's a potential threat and we need all eyes on the lookout for things that don't fit.

How the fuck has it only been two days since she came here? Has it really only been a few weeks, two months tops, since the party? It can't be. No fucking way has time slowed and everything I'm thinking about has only happened in such a short time. Shorter if I only count the handful of times I've actually seen her.

This shouldn't be happening. Not like this. Not so soon.

But it did and it is. And there ain't no going back to what was. Not anymore. Not with her.

She shrugs. "If that's what it took. I had no plans on time, just to find Candy."

"We think he's low on cash or worried he's going to lose his investor, and that's why he gave an incentive to get Cheyanne to the meet. Either way, he's giving us an opportunity. He set up a meeting tomorrow night at a stockade a few hours south. Different direction than the last

but still close enough not to be an inconvenience for her,” Law supplies.

“And we can trust this? How do we know this isn’t a trap? A setup? How do we know she didn’t have this already planned out?” Kooper voices what I’m sure is in the hearts of the rest of the boys. I notice Chains nodding, along with Atom. Bulldog has on his scowl that says he doesn’t believe her. Be it because of his old lady or what, he just doesn’t like her.

“I trust her.”

Heads swivel to me quickly, and I meet the eye of each brother. Even see the smirk on my prez’s for a second before he hides it.

Two things I don’t do much of: I don’t talk a lot, and I don’t trust often. Law has my trust. And through him, the club as an extension. Not all the brothers, but a few. I trust who leads the club and what the club is about. Might have some unresolved issues from not knowing my dad and my mom’s bad judgment in men when I was growing up. However you want to shrink-wrap it, it takes a lot for me to trust someone. And when I do? I’m loyal to a fault.

Hell, a day ago, I would have tossed her out if Law asked me to. But not anymore. Maybe not ever. Who knows what would have happened? I just know now that what I feel for the fairy is strong, and I trust her. And I know she knows I’m not lying. I’m not just saying this to get in her pants or to get something out of her. I’m giving her my trust with zero strings attached, just like she does with me. Girl’s been showing me her trust from that first night she fell asleep in my arms without a second thought.

After she confirmed I wasn’t a serial killer.

I still find it funny that she called and just asked. I should probably tell her that most people don’t know who’s a serial killer. Even though she called someone connected with the

club to verify me, there was still a good chance I was one and no one knew.

“Fuck, not another one,” Domino groans. “This is fucking spreading. Law, you got to do something about it.”

“What exactly you want me to do, Domino?” Law says with the voice of a dad talking to a child that’s complaining life isn’t fair.

“I don’t know, get us all vaccinated or some shit? With the way things are going, we’re all going to be chained up by the end of next year,” Domino vents as he gestures to the rest of the brothers at the table currently unchained to a woman.

Bulldog grunts. “Having an old lady ain’t so bad.”

“Pretty sure you were singing a different tune six months ago.” Chains smirks at Bulldog, who just rolls it off his shoulder.

“What can I say? I’m a changed man. Got myself a Lady now.” Bulldog grins with pride.

The boys chuckle, and I just keep watching my fairy. She might not know what’s going on, but the boys do. By saying I trust her, I’ve put a claim on her. Not sure if her uncle’s going to kill me for this or not. He didn’t seem too bothered by the idea that I had feelings for his niece earlier today, but I know he was just teasing me at the end, asking if I loved her and shit. Not sure what love is, but I know I trust her. Never trusted a woman before, not ever. If only one woman earns it, then she’s it for me.

“Wait, how do we know it’s that serious? Could just be a fling, right? Mad Max, tell me it’s a fling. Tell me the sex is what’s warping your mind and you ain’t tying yourself up. Us single Hounds got to stick together, man. Don’t leave me hanging.” Domino looks to me and then to Cheyanne. “You don’t want him, right? I mean, he’s twice your size and can crush you. Don’t you want someone nice and safe, like a banker or some shit? Someone out of the club?”

He's pleading for her to agree, and she just gives him a look that says she's confused, and I kind of am as well.

Why the fuck would he be pushing my woman on another? Kid's looking for a beatdown.

"Domino." He stops his rant to look over at me. "Leave my fairy alone," I growl, keeping my anger in my words, enjoying watching his eyes pop.

"Ah fuck, he's gone and done it. He named it."

His whispered words, spoken in fear, have me huffing a laugh. Kid's legit worried about going committal on a woman. If he only knew it's not something you can hide from. I never expected this. Never thought it was an option. Wasn't looking for it, but one touch and I was hers. And she was mine.

"Looks like it's fucking official now," Kooper says, but he catches my eye before he looks at her and winks. If I trust her, then so does the club. That conversation is now dead in the water, and the boys do what's right and move the fuck on.

"Yeah, congrats and all that, but let's get to a fucking plan already. I don't want to be waiting till the last minute to figure this shit out."

Got to love how the VP keeps us on track.



This is taking a lot longer than any of us expected. Especially me. I've never had to split loyalty before. And the first day I say out loud that I trust more than one person in Church is the day my allegiance is challenged.

Worst of it is that they're both on the same side. It's me who doesn't like it. I can appreciate that they both see what's needed and have thought it through, just fucking hate the outcome.

"I don't like it."

“You keep saying that, but you aren’t giving us anything else to work with.”

God, how I both love and hate how my fairy is taking this. She’s all business. She’s hot as hell, but I also want to strangle her. She’s not getting what I don’t like about it.

“And I’ll keep saying it till we figure out another plan.”

“Ugh, I need a beer and food. Tell me when the lovers’ quarrel is over.” Domino grunts as he pushes off the table and limp-walks out. His leg isn’t in a cast, but he still keeps most of his weight off it like our doctor told him.

He leaves the door open, and a few of the brothers follow. We’ve been at this for five hours, and I’m the only one still arguing about the plan. But that’s just the way of it. Till Law tells me to fall in line, I can say whatever the fuck I want and the club’s got to listen. We decided long ago that there will never be a time that a voice that isn’t the majority isn’t heard. If one person says it’s a fucked-up plan, then we look for ways to work around it together. Enough of us have been fucked over by a majority vote outside the club that we make sure it ain’t the same inside.

I, for one, question every single juror who thought I was the guilty party. Did I fuck up a guy’s life? Yes. Did he deserve it? That and more. But apparently the justice system doesn’t see it that way.

“You might not like it, son, but it’s the way it’s got to be. She’s the only one with the connection and no ties to us that Duke can find. It would look suspicious if she doesn’t go or if we send someone in her place. Even if Duke is running this under the nose of his own club, I know he’s probably got enough resources to know who’s working with us and who ain’t. He might not trust your fairy, but she’s got a link to her uncle that gives her a voucher of legitimacy that Flint can never fake with all the hacking and fake IDs he makes.”

I grind my teeth as I bear the weight of Law’s words and the hard pat on my back as he follows the others out of the

room.

Now it's just me and the fairy. I sink into the nearest chair and look over the intel on the table. Maps, computers, blueprints of surrounding buildings. We're going in as smart as we can. But I still don't like it.

"It's a good plan."

Her soft words have me breathing deep, taking a moment before I give in to the inevitable.

"I know. I just..." I blow out another breath, making my cheeks look the size of a chipmuck who's stuffed them full of nuts.

"Just what?"

I slowly look away from the work on the table till I'm staring at her. My fairy. She's fierce. Not sure if the boys recognized that she's wearing my clothes or not, but I did as soon as I came into the place. Nothing shouted that they were mine, but I knew it. And when I got closer? I smelled myself on her, and it took every ounce of control I had not to fuck her where she sat at the bar with Casper.

I'm not sure why I stopped and got her favorite drink. It just made sense after I saw her uncle. Fucking love that she ain't interrogating me on what we talked about or why I went. Not sure what I would say if she asked, but I'm betting it would be close to the truth. Not because I now know she can catch me in a lie but because I want to. I want to tell her how I feel, even if I'm still figuring it out.

At least I know she's mine. Even if she doesn't get it. Even if this plan goes to crap and one of us, or both, don't make it back. She's mine. That's all that matters.

And I'm hers, whether she knows it or not.

Chapter 21 – Cheyanne

don't think I've ever had this much sex before. I mean
“I with the same person.”

I know I've caught him off guard as he stumbles, literally, into the bathroom. Could be from what I said or probably the pants he's putting on. Yeah, it's the pants. Maybe.

He comes back in, pulling a black shirt over the yumminess of his stomach as he does. I mentally flash back to an hour ago, when I had him on his back and he let me drag my tongue from the curve of the V pointing down and going in the opposite directions. I remember the feel of his flat stomach constricting as I moved my head like a snake over it till I reached his nipple and circled it with my tongue. Before I could even bite it—softly, of course—he dragged me up and kissed me as he rolled us till I was flat on my back. With a few simple hip movements, he was inside me again.

I shudder at the memory that was live action just hours before. I don't think I'm overly sexual, but something about Mad Max, or maybe it's the club, has me wanting to jump his bones every chance I get.

“Why's that?”

I blink a few times to see if maybe I spoke out loud again. I chance it and go with the answer to my first statement 'cause I don't have a great answer for the second. “Not sure. They all seem to have left after a while. Don't think I did anything wrong. It's not like you can be bad at sex, right? Just insert the boy part into the girl part and do what feels good. Can you do it wrong?”

He chuckles, and I just love when he does that. It's a soft, rich sound that makes my bones quake in a good way. He doesn't do it often with the others, but he does it with me. And I know he's not laughing at me, he's just happy.

“Yeah, babe, you can get it wrong. You don’t, though, so just keep being you.” He grabs the back of my neck, pulling me in for what I bet was meant to be a quick kiss. But it isn’t. And I’m not fighting him as his tongue caresses mine and his fingers tighten a bit on my flesh. I almost wish they would leave marks, bruises I can wear with pride that say I’m able to bring this beast of a man this much passion. “I like it. I like what you do and that no one else gets to see that you only get better and better each time.”

If that doesn’t make me fall in love with him, not sure what will. No one has ever said they like me or what I do. Not really. And they definitely don’t allude to the fact that they want to stick around. That *never* happens.

“Now get dressed. You’ve got girls to buy, and I’ve got to make sure the boys have everything we need to keep you safe the whole time you go in.”

“Yeah, pretty sure Jimmy would be pissed if something happens to me.” I turn and roll off the bed, going to my bags in the corner, which had miraculously shown up in Mad Max’s room when we came in here after dinner. Not sure where they were or who brought them in, but he didn’t question it, just like I didn’t question that I would be staying with him and not in my own room.

“And me.”

“Huh?” I turn and tilt my head, asking him to explain without saying anything.

“I would be mad, too, if something happens to you. More than mad. Devastated.”

I feel my eyebrows hit my hairline, and it takes me a minute before I just nod. Not sure what I’m nodding at, but there’s so much intensity coming off him, I can feel it across the room. He just nods once and then leaves.

I dress quickly, going with a business suit but opting out of the heels and pairing it with some ankle boots that the pants hide easily. They look fancy enough and also feel about ten

times better than the last pair of shoes I wore to one of these things. Then, I wasn't expecting something bad to happen—now I am. I want to be ready to run when the time comes. If I prepare for it, it won't happen. That's how it's always been in the past. I expect one outcome, and another occurs. You'd think for a certified genius that I'd be accurate in my guesses more times than not, but no. Guess I never figure in the human factor as much as I should. The other person usually makes the outcome different, not me.

I walk into the main club room and see everything organized and not one glare thrown my way. I'm taken aback by this, as it's different. I've always had someone glare at me, either because they think I'm trying to take a man who isn't mine because I look hot—and yes, I know I do, so it's a fact and not a personal self-image thing—or they hate that I know more than them.

But none of that seems to be called into question today. Even odder since 98 percent of these people didn't trust me yesterday.

“Wow, when one person says they believe in a person, you all really band together,” I say to myself as I walk to the bar.

I grab a Kool-Aid squeeze pouch from the drinks set out on the bar. And yeah, I totally have butterflies in my stomach that they have these available right now since I drank all that Mad Max brought me the day before. Either he bought more than he told me or someone went out and got more. Either way, it makes me feel kind of special and like I fit in. A new feeling for sure.

“It's not about what was said but who said it,” Kooper tells me, coming from behind me as he grabs his own Kool-Aid. He catches my eye, the ones that are glaring at him as he drinks the good stuff. He winks as he smirks before chugging half of it. “Figured I owed you for eating my cereal.”

“And I think I need to grab a pen and start writing my name on these.”

He snorts when I search the bar top for a marker, then shakes his head as he pulls a marker out of his pocket and starts writing on the drinks. I glare, half thinking he's writing his own name as I cross my arms and drink what could be my very last Kool-Aid for a while. I know it's just a name, but I believe in rules. Sort of. Okay, I believe in *that* rule. I catch liars for a living, so I make a point to not lie. Lying, stealing, and cheating all mean the same thing in my book.

"Mad Max might be with the club, but he doesn't trust all of us."

This takes my attention away from the drinks. Kooper continues to move his way through labeling the squeeze pouches, never looking up at me, just going on as if he's having a normal conversation. But nothing he's saying is normal.

"What? Of course he does. You're club."

"Fuck, the fact that you get that just makes what he said all the more clear. You understand that trust and the club go hand in hand. Only works if there's a single driver who we all fall in line behind. For Mad Max, it's Law and then the club. Since Law makes the Hounds operate the way it does, he does, in a way, trust us all. But one-on-one, outside the club? Not sure if he'd stand behind every brother's back solo if you catch my drift."

I guess I can see that. People on their own do shady shit. Who knows what a person is really like when they don't have to answer to a boss man of sorts? We all answer to one, in one way or another. Even me, but my boss is an uncle who I just don't want to let down. That's what keeps me out of jail, since I know he'd kill me if I ever got locked away like him. He even told me so, explained how he would get a knife to a person on the inside and slit my throat. He was very detailed about it, and that keeps me in line. Well, that and I don't think I'm cut out for jail life. I'm more of a winter than a spring. Orange isn't my color.

“We all know this, and we all get it. But since he only trusts Law completely, and now you—” He pauses to make eye contact. “—it means something. Something more than if the rest of us say it.”

I swallow as I try to process it all. “And the fact that he has a name for me other than my real name?”

“Yeah, that means something too. But I ain’t the one to answer what that is.” He gives me a chin lift and saunters away.

I follow his movements, more processing his words than looking at him. He joins Mad Max and a few others across the room.

My beast has been watching me since I came in. I didn’t know where he stood before then, but I felt his eyes on me. And it wasn’t uncomfortable—the opposite, really. Knowing a person was watching, not to see if I did something that would make them laugh but just to keep tabs on me, is nice.

I wave, ’cause it’s what I do, and notice his lips rise a bit in a smile. It’s his own wave of sorts before he turns back to talk to the others. I give him my back as I sit on the bar stool and pull my phone out. Out of habit, I reach for a new drink and pause as I see the name written in blue permanent marker down the side.

Fairy.

I check the rest, and they all say the same thing. Guess the name means something to Mad Max *and* the club.

I bite my lip as I look around at the people inside the club as they gear up for tonight.

Does that mean I mean something to all of them too?



“Are you ready for this?” Mad Max asks.

Of course not. “Yeah, I got this.”

“Liar.”

I don't like lying, and I don't think this is. More like me wanting to be something I'm not. And feeling okay about this is definitely not something that comes naturally to me.

I still smile at his words because it's true, and I know he can't see me. He can only hear me, but it makes me feel safe in a way I've never felt before. Not sure when we decided to play this lie-no-lie game, but it seems to fit for us. I know he knows what I do now is no secret—not that it ever was. He accepts me for who I am, truth-saying and all.

The plan is actually simple, all things considered. I'm supposed to go in alone, and they're to hang back. Half the club is here, the other half just waiting to be called in. We don't really know what to expect other than there will be multiple girls here and we plan to get as many out safely as possible. The club hasn't let me know whether or not that means taking out Duke.

As I make my way up the drive of the address Duke sent, I realize I have absolutely no idea what I'm doing. For one, I really thought the stockade was going to be, you know, the ones where they used to throw fruit at people. I know it's not common practice now, but I just assumed there would be one out here in middle-of-nowhere Kansas. Maybe I'm not as smart as I think I am.

Instead, I come face-to-face with a run-down barnlike building with horse troughs on the outside. Not sure this is what he was referring to or if everyone just calls these buildings stockades. It looks just like a horse barn to me. Then again, I never studied farming and architecture, so what do I know?

“You'll be fine. Just try not to touch your ear.”

“Why my ears?” Seems like an odd thing for Law to say at a time like this.

I hear the boys chuckle, but it's my beast's voice that rings clear among them. “Because it's a dead giveaway that you

have an earpiece. If no one brings attention to your ears, then you're free and clear and he has no idea we're here."

"Oh." *Well, that makes sense. Why didn't Law just say that?*

"What're we looking at?" This time it's Casper. Flint might be manning the comms back at the clubhouse, but he can't get eyes in here. At least not yet. He's got a few drones in the sky, but they're too far away to see anything.

"I don't really see much, but I can hear a few things. I think there're people inside the horse barn thingy or whatever this place is called."

"How many you thinking?" Law asks.

We all agreed that every girl saved is a win. We might not get them all out tonight, but we'll take as many as we can. The goal is to make sure we get enough. Each Hound is prepared to go down fighting for those waiting to be sold. Me, too, if anyone had bothered asking me.

"I don't know, but it sounds like more than a few."

"I count seven heat signatures in the building in front of you and another dozen in the one on the right," Flint confirms for the group from the safety of his command center at the club.

I look over, seeing nothing in the darkness till something reflects. I make out a shape, which I guess is a home or something. This place is pitch-black except for the few lights illuminating the front of the building before me.

"I don't like this."

I agree with Mad Max but say nothing. Duke either brought more girls than I expected him to or he brought a lot of manpower, expecting something, and is waiting to spring a trap.

"Relax. I got this. It's just another day. No biggie."

I hear him curse, but I shut down the emotions I get when he talks to me. The warm fuzzies that make my tummy seem like it's floating.

It's strange, actually. I always thought that once I got feelings for someone, it would overtake my life, but it's quite the opposite. Since meeting Mad Max, I always feel more in control of everything than I was before. Tuns out emotions are something I still do, but I don't have to push them as far back as I used to. I don't mind continuing to be my stone-cold self, as others have often referred to me. But with my beast at my back, I feel like I could take on more than I ever could before. Guess I just needed someone to help me manage my feelings.

I knock on the door because why the fuck not? Not really sure how else to get into this place. I'm sure if a Hound were in my place, they would have just kicked the door in, but that's not my style. I'm also supposed to be here as an investor and not a kickass chick.

The barn door slides open, revealing four girls on their knees crying to the left. But they're not the ones who draw my eye. No, it's the two men standing in the middle, one with a smirking grin and the other with a wandering eye as he looks me over. Both give me the creeps, but the smirking one is the one I lock eyes with as I walk into the room and the door shuts behind me.

It's showtime.

Chapter 22 – Mad Max

uck, this isn't good."

"F I agree with Kooper but keep my trap shut. Right now, I'm fighting the urge to go against my prez. Hell, this might be the first time that I'm actually wanting to disregard a direct order from him. Last time, it was merely implied not to get in trouble. He knew I was searching for the asshole who raped that girl. Don't think he—or any of us, really—knew what would happen till I found him, but we all knew it was going to be bad. Law had only implied to not do something stupid. This time, before we even rode out from the clubhouse, he pulled me aside and told me not to fuck this up. To not just rush in if things don't go according to plan but wait shit out before we go in.

Easy for him to say. Easy for them *all* to say. They don't have someone on the inside who's starting to mean a hell of a lot to them. Someone I'm willing to claim in front of all that I know. Someone I'm even willing to go back to prison for.

That last one is the deal breaker. Not even Law is someone I would go back for. But her? My Fairy? Fuck yeah.

Flint killed the comms link once Fairy got inside the building. We can still hear what's going on, but she can't hear us. It's better this way, as we need her to appear innocent in all aspects to not draw attention. If she hears us saying we're going to breach, even if she were a trained operative, she'd still react. It's human nature to do something. I just hope she knows to get down and stay down when the time comes.

I want eyes on my woman at all times, but I guess Duke isn't taking any chances with another surprise attack. Looks like option A is out for us. We didn't put a ton of thought into it, but the Vultures did have surprise on their side. It wasn't a bad plan; they just didn't expect the amount of firepower Duke had. We're prepared for it. We also got skin in the game and need to be careful not to harm her. The Vultures didn't

care who got hurt in their little drive-up shooting, but I do. I care a lot.

“Cheyanne, what a pleasure to see you again.”

I lock down my emotions, taking a cue from my girl. I stare at the building but see nothing as I listen to that slimy asshole talk to my woman. I can hear the lust in his voice from out here.

“Isn’t it, though?”

The boys chuckle at her response, probably in disbelief she would say that. I just smile internally, knowing that’s my girl. Never one to avoid stating the obvious, even without trying to.

“I expect that you’re nervous after our last meeting, thinking I would find another seller,” she continues. “Are these the girls?”

I can only assume she’s motioning to the ones we got a glance of before the door was shut. I hate not knowing where she is, if she’s moving around the room or just standing where she went in.

“I thought you said I would have a selection to choose from. My buyers wanted four to start, or did you forget?”

“Your woman’s got quite a mouth on her.”

I grunt in both agreement and frustration at Flint’s words. Really wish she was a bit timid, but that wouldn’t be her. She speaks her mind, asks questions to get to the truth. Her way might piss me off with how it puts her close to danger, but I’m not about to hold her back. From what little she’s told me, her family forced her into things. I think it pushed her further away from knowing love than how I grew up in a household where my mom went out looking for it every night and came home alone most times.

“Didn’t forget, just didn’t know what you liked,” Duke replies. “This is a sample size. With it, you can tell me what

you like and what you don't. I can then see if we have something to fit."

"So, when you said I get to choose, you had no real intention of me choosing for myself, did you?" Fairy says with a chuckle that no one on my side finds funny.

"Some cards need to be held close, don't you think?"

"Hmm."

She waits for a beat, and I wonder what she's thinking. I wish I could see her, see what she's seeing. I know she's pushing emotions aside right now. But I've watched her. Ever since I learned that I missed seeing her when she noticed me in prison, I keep tabs on her every chance I get. When she walks into a room, my eyes are glued to her. I get close to hear what she says but also to see how she reacts. It's subtle, but I know when she's worried others are laughing at her. I know when she feels out of place and when she's winging it and hoping no one catches her faking it till she makes it.

She tsks. "I don't think you trust me. Which is interesting considering I'm the one who keeps coming to you, unarmed at your request. I should be looking to the east, maybe even the north for a supplier after our last little meeting. I'm taking all the risks, it seems."

"How do you figure?" I grind my teeth as I hear the anger rise in his voice, cursing at not being closer to her as she plays this game.

"Other than the armed men you have here, and I'm sure close by, guarding the other product? Maybe because I don't think you can guarantee a safe place. After last time, how am I to know that another group won't show up at any moment to take you out and me along with you?"

"I've dealt with those who interrupted us. It won't happen again." His irritation is evident—and growing.

"What about others? What about the Hounds? Don't they run this area? How can you be sure they won't come in and take over?"

I feel the boys tense around me. No one expected Fairy to mention us, and I see a few of them shift, their trust in her wavering, while mine is only solidifying. I know what she's doing, and I get it. She's fishing for intel, and God, I want to kiss her *and* smack her ass for it all at the same time.

"Don't you worry about the Hounds. I got enough eyes on their women to make sure they ain't a threat."

"Their women?" Fairy doesn't even hesitate, asking the tough questions without even blinking, I bet.

We all wait with bated breath for more details. Unlike me, the others are under the illusion that their women are safe from harm. None of them put up much of a fight when we sent Cheyanne in there, but I know not one of them would place their woman in there if roles were reversed. Guess the boys didn't think how serious I was about this one. The fact that I put my trust in her should be all they need. But they're also right. We didn't have any better options.

"Yeah, they're all alike. Just like their prez. They get an old lady and they put that bitch on a pedestal. No offense, of course."

"Of course." I just know she's rolling her eyes at him. Fairy is many things, but understanding of chauvinistic pigs ain't one of them. "And you keep tabs on them? Why?"

"Easiest way to see a Hound weep is to take a woman away."

"You sound like you've done it before."

"A few times."

I look to Law, who just shakes his head for me to keep my mouth shut. I got questions, but now ain't the time to ask. Then again, why ask when my woman can for me?

"None of them seem unhappy, based off the word on the street. You sure you're taking the ones they care about and not just toss-aways?"

“Don’t you worry. I take them when I want them, when they got a use, and then send them packing. But if I need them, they’re under my watch. Even now, I know exactly where each one is. They all think they’re safe in their homes, playing house with the kids, or dancing on fucking tables. Even got eyes on the prez’s daughter. And it’s obvious he doesn’t; otherwise, I doubt he’d let her out of his sight if he knew what she was up to each night at college.”

“Boss....”

The growl comes from Bulldog. Both he and Chains are here tonight, and while Flint is safe at the clubhouse, his woman ain’t with him. Duke put enough detail in his boastful speech to have the boys twitching to leave and check on their hearts. ‘Cause that’s what each woman is to them.

“Flint, how many do we have on the women?”

I glance at the prez as he snarls out the command. He hasn’t been this mad in a while. Not since Ruby stole his good liquor and used it to make shitty girly drinks that no one liked and had to be thrown out.

“We don’t. We pulled each brother in for this. They’re on their fucking own, without backup. Jesus motherfucking Christ. He can take any one of them, maybe already has, and we got no eyes on anybody.”

I can hear the stress in his voice. I know how he feels—I felt it the moment I let Fairy walk into this place alone. We might be able to hear what’s going on, but that doesn’t mean she’s safe. Not by a long shot.

Flint continues on his rant before anyone talks again. “And before you ask, yeah, he said enough to get me believing he’s got eyes on them. Kitten’s at another Misfits practice, and both Lady and Mama Bear are home, last I knew. You know where Ruby’s at.”

Fuuuuck.

I don’t say it out loud even if we’re all thinking it. I don’t envy the prez right now. No one wants to make this call. But

how does a man choose his own people over strangers? Do we stay and help or protect our own?

“Chains, Bulldog, grab a few brothers on the way out and secure your women. If you see someone out of the norm, take them out. No need to keep the fuckers to ask questions. Flint, get Domino on the comms, then get to yours as well. Take General with you. Bring them all back to the compound.”

Might be the only time the club's happy to have another brother wounded and forced to stay behind with our team's doctor. None of us but Flint, and maybe the prospect we sent with Bass up north, know half the shit Flint does on his computer. But we all know enough, including Domino, to work what we need to in order to keep communications open between the groups.

“What about Ruby?” Kooper asks.

Ruby is the only woman the prez will lay down his life for now that his Special K is gone. If he leaves, I won't hold it against him. Each member of this club is strong; we can get shit done if the boss is here or not. To make matters worse, she isn't even local tonight. Doing a college thing out of town. Not sure if Duke's men would have followed her or not. If it was me, I would have.

He waits a beat to answer, probably warring with himself the whole way. “Go. Take a few other brothers.”

Kooper nods and follows the path the current and former VP took to get to their women.

“And Koop?” The guy doesn't turn back, but we all know he can still hear us with the comms link still open. “Don't care what you have to do, just bring my daughter back home. Kicking and screaming if you have to.”

“Affirmative.”

Not sure when Kooper became the single person responsible for Ruby's safety, but no one seems to question the dynamic. Kooper and Ruby can't stand each other, probably half the reason Law keeps tagging him with

babysitting duty. There's no temptation to go against the prez's rule that no Hound can touch his Ruby.

As the rest of us stay hidden in the cornstalks surrounding the barns, I can't help thinking this is a trap. That Duke baited us with detail on the girls, and not one brother can dispute it till we get eyes on them. Splitting up makes us vulnerable for a larger attack now that our group is smaller. I don't think he knows we're here, but I know he doesn't trust Fairy. Guy just said he uses women for what he wants. And a woman walking in, giving him orders on what she wants and possibly taking away the money he sees as his to go to another trafficker? Yeah, I can see how well he's probably taking it. Don't know much about Duke, but from his willingness to kill Kitten, probably being involved in Mama Bear's kidnapping, too, with the way he's talking, and now the skin trade? Yeah, this guy seriously sees women as disposable and there for his own personal use.

Like I said before, I really don't like this.

"I see. Well then, let's stop wasting everyone's time and get to it." There's a pause, and I breathe through my anger of not knowing what Fairy is doing as she takes more time to talk. "You've brought me three blondes and a brunette. Is red not an option?"

I'm assuming she's close to the girls now. They were down on their knees on the right when she walked in. I make note of it, like the rest of my team. I feel the energy buzzing between us. We won't be waiting much longer to go in. Not till we know the other old ladies are safe. We just have to wait for Flint to confirm no eyes are on his woman, and then we're in the clear. Then we can breach.

But if he finds someone watching Kitten? Then we'll need Fairy to stall a lot longer than she expected when she first walked into this place. Even I know we'll have to secure the other families before we can make a move.

I just hope to God that Fairy doesn't do something stupid to draw too much attention to herself. I might like her mouth,

how she thinks, and the way she talks, but I know not many others get it, and it bugs the shit out of them.

“That’s a specialty and comes at an additional cost. As do younger models if your client is so inclined.”

I want to vomit at the idea of kids being involved in this, even though I’m old enough to know it’s a big part of the skin trade. I can’t wait to kill every single motherfucker involved. Not sure Law expected the club to get this deep, but after this meeting? Doubt a single brother listening ain’t thinking the same thing I am: we’re in for the long haul.

“I see. Well, let me keep the Asian, and I would like one with brown eyes, another with green eyes, and the last with long hair if you’ve got it.”

“Excellent choice. I’ll get those wrapped up for you.”

We hear screams a second before three of the women are pulled out of the barn and walked toward the other facility.

This is our chance. In the middle of the swap, we should take them out.

One small problem, though, and it comes over the comms link from Flint.

“Hold position. I repeat, hold. Just took down two who were watching Kitten. Going to drop her off at the compound, then head over to Mama Bear’s to help with her lot. No clue how many are on the rest.”

“Motherfucker,” Bulldog growls as Chains also curses over the comm links.

The only one who’s silent is Kooper, and we know why. He’s the farthest out from his target, and it’s the one who could bring the club to its knees if he can’t get to the prez’s daughter in time.

We all know this, so we hold. We’ll wait till Law has to choose who to save, because he might not get to save everyone.

And right now, Ruby's the one who's going to lose the battle.

Chapter 23 – Cheyanne

I'm not sure what the Hounds are doing, but I wish they'd hurry. I don't think I've ever felt physically sick from my own words before. I've swallowed down the vomit that pushed up the second I said I wanted different girls. They've kept their heads down most of the time I've been here, but when I went over to inspect them, I raised their chins.

I saw so much in their eyes: sorrow, loss, fear. But the kicker was in the last girl, the one who reminded me of Mulan with her short, perfect black hair. I wanted her to be a warrior, but instead I only saw defeat in her eyes. She'd already given up, unlike the others.

That's the reason why I kept her and sent the others away. I'm hoping I can get all of them out, but if I can't, I want to take those who've already given up. The ones who have no more reason to fight what's coming. They won't be able to take care of themselves like the others. At least that's how I'm rationalizing this. There's no good reason to send the others away, but I need to see what he has. I need to know if it's just women or also men. Adults or children. He mentioned a few things, so I'm not sure what he'll bring me. I kept my wants gender neutral as much as possible, hoping he shows me more options.

Before we left the clubhouse and came this way, I was able to connect with Shop Owner and got a few details about Candy. The real kicker? She's a redhead.

"If my client did have a specific model in mind, how long would delivery time be?" I ask Duke, trying to look like I'm in business mode and not the beginnings of a panic attack from all of this.

"Depends if we got something in stock or not. If we do, a day or two. If not, I say a week. You already have something in mind, or you just fishing for details for the next visit?"

“Redhead, about five feet. Some tattoos would be good too.”

“That’s... awfully specific.”

Crap, did I say too much? I bite my tongue to keep from biting my lip. I really hate this whole cloak-and-dagger shit.

“Breathe, Fairy.”

The soft words in my ear are all the encouragement I need. I’m not alone, even if I am the only one on my side standing here. I thought they would have closed the communications link between us—that’s what they said they’d do when we were planning this thing. Kind of glad they didn’t, or maybe mine was just turned back on.

I shrug, hoping it shows my nonchalance as I push down the emotions again. They keep bubbling to the surface lately. Guess I’m not as immune to everything as I thought I was before I met Mad Max. Or maybe I *was* immune and he’s just the one to start my own heart pumping for something that matters. Because *he* matters.

Max, and all his madness, matters to me. More than anyone ever has before. Even more than my uncle. I don’t know if I ever loved Jimmy. Respected? Of course. Trusted? Always. But love? Don’t think I knew the meaning of the word. I’ve never felt it before, rarely saw it. But I saw it with the Hounds and their old ladies. They’d rather keep their women happy than continue the farce of pretending not to listen to our conversation. I see it in how they take control of their women. It was love in their eyes. And I know without a doubt that they each heard what Duke said about them. I won’t hold it against them if every single Hound left, even my beast.

Kooper said Mad Max only trusts Law—and now me, apparently. But he just met me. And while he might matter to me, I’m not sure how much I matter to him. He might be right outside the doors or a hundred miles away already. He’s a good man, and I don’t care that he went to prison. Yeah, I

looked up the reason for it. Every crime has two sides: the justification and the result. Everyone has a reason for why they did what they did to get locked up. Not saying I agree, I just know he's a good man. He did his time, and he's out. He's entitled to do whatever the hell he wants to do now. And if that means backing me up but being safe from harm, then I'm fully okay with it.

"Client likes what he likes. I'm not in a position to judge, just to get what he requests. If you can't provide it, I will need to look elsewhere. Full disclosure: I am willing to seek out other investment opportunities. It's not about the money, I just want to make sure my clients get what they ask for. You understand, I'm sure." I really hated his comment about women earlier, so I try to put some extra spice in my last sentence, knowing he'll hate it, being a little sweeter and more flippant at the same time. I don't usually try to agitate people, but this guy is different. He's scum, and honestly, he deserves to come down a few hundred pegs. He probably thinks he's the best thing walking. Probably never got a woman off, just makes sure *he* does when he gets in bed with one. Doubt if any were even willing.

He squints at me for a second before he clears his face of emotion and starts aimlessly pacing. It's almost as if he's taking a stroll through a park with how random he turns this way and that through the open barn area we're in. Two guards left with the three women, and the other girl continues to kneel and say nothing. I think she's on drugs. She's swaying a bit, but other than that, she stays where she is and doesn't look up from the dirt beneath her knees.

"You might not know this, but I'm part of a club myself. Half the reason why I don't worry about those Hounds. They play at club life compared to what me and my boys do. But even then, my club hasn't seen the benefit of this market like you and I have. There's profit and very little drawback. At first, I just used the girls already on my payroll. They're used to being on their backs, so I didn't see it as an issue. But as I'm sure your clients can tell you, there's something missing when

you can't break them in yourself, a certain thrill. That's when we started looking for... specific types. We hadn't even gotten more than one or two loads in before you showed up. Had me thinking you were a fed or something, but then I looked you up. First glance, thought you were just a nosy bitch who needed to learn her place: under my dick. Then I saw who your uncle is. Even thought you were trying to take over or some shit. But you wouldn't do that, would you?" He looks at me with the fakest smile I've ever seen, and it's creepy as all get-out.

I speak the truth and nothing but. "Hell no. The paperwork alone is probably a nightmare." There's always paperwork, no matter what the job is. I keep to myself the fact that I find selling people sick, but there's a part of me that understands the profit margin involved. Like I said, two reasons why people do what they do. Not saying money is justification, but it *is* a reason for the result.

He chuckles at that and nods. "Yes, it really is. And I might be considered the new kid on the block, but I've learned a lot already. Want to know what my biggest lesson was?"

I don't feel like I have an option to say no. And I'm also a bit curious to know more. It's a bit sick how I need to know the answers to all the questions on this topic. I should just cut my losses and move on. Candy isn't here; otherwise, he'd be jumping at making a deal if money isn't an object, as I mentioned before. But he's baiting me, filling time. Not sure if it's to get the other girls or what. But it sure as hell is taking them a long-ass time to bring in the new crop. Has me curious is if he even plans to.

If he doesn't, then what the hell am I still doing here?

He smirks. "If you want something, take it."

Hands grab me from behind. I twist on instinct, already knowing it isn't a Hound at my back from the way Duke is smiling.

“And I want you. You might not bring in much, but you’ll give me your contacts, and I’ll deal with them directly. No need to keep a middleman—or, in your case, woman—between us.”

I struggle more against the guard, one I’d missed when I looked around earlier, as Duke takes a few steps closer, only stilling as he raises his hand to graze my cheek. “Yeah, I’m going to have a lot of fun getting that info out of you. Breaking you will be my pleasure. Over and over again.”

A shiver racks my body before I can shut it down. My mind isn’t screaming in fear—it’s literally repulsed by the man before me.

“You touch me and you die.”

He laughs at me, and I shrug in what little give the guy holding me provides. “It’s your funeral. You’d be an idiot to think my uncle won’t come looking for me. He might be locked up, but he’s got more eyes than you. And he’ll teach you a lesson you won’t forget.”

I’ve never been smacked before. You’d think I’d have, especially since people don’t always get me, but not even my parents believed in corporal punishment. I’m surprised at the amount of ringing in my ears from the backhand he gave me, but it’s soon replaced with my need to just get a breath as he grabs my shoulder and punches me in the stomach.

Pain radiates through me as he tosses my bent body on the floor. Not sure when the other guy released me. Don’t even know what he looks like or where he came from. My focus was always on Duke, but I should have been watching my back. My own life lesson that I’m now getting as I’m kicked hard in the back, my body spasming before a kick to the chin sends me rolling over a few times.

I just focus on breathing; it’s the only thing that makes sense. I don’t call out to the Hounds, more because I don’t want Duke to hear me, and the ringing is still going on in my ears. I have no idea how loud I would be even if I whispered.

My whimpers alone hurt my head. But I know this is going sideways, and I'm not dumb enough to think I can do this on my own.

"Please." It's all I can say, all I can ask for. *Please help me. Please stop.* I don't care who hears me, just as long as one of them does.

"Oh, I love it when they beg."

I swallow through the pain as I adjust till my fingers find my belt. Might look like I'm trying to push up, but all I'm doing is grabbing one of my knives. The Hounds never knew my knives were in my belt, and I almost jumped up and spun in circles when I found them untouched when I was getting ready earlier this morning.

Duke grabs the back of my hair and pulls my face up to his as he crouches over me. "You'll be begging a lot more before I'm through with you."

"You first." Then I roll into him and swing wide with my knife, knowing I've cut him by the way he jumps back.

I don't think, just react, only taking half a second to locate the other person in the room. Clint. I don't even have to focus that much before I throw my knife at him, knocking him back dead the second it impales his forehead.

I grab the second knife from under my belt and then feel the earth shake.

"What the fuck is that?"

I shrug, even though I have no clue if Duke's question was directed at me or not. I'm assuming he's referring to the ground moving and not me throwing knives. That seems a bit obvious to me.

"Earthquakes aren't common in this area. Usually happens every forty years or so."

He looks at me like I've grown a third eye, but facts are facts. As I watch him from my position on the floor, I think he's reacting to my talking as if I didn't just kill a man even though

I'd been threatened. Guess not many people do that. Oh well, you get what you get. And he gets me and all my crazy ways, as they're often referred to.

The screams and gunfire filling the air make the girl on the floor on the other side of the barn start to cry as she hunkers down. Duke pulls a gun from behind him, the one I noticed he had tucked in the back of his pants when he was pacing.

He points it at me, and I just react, throwing my knife and slicing his hand. He instantly drops the gun and shouts, "Bitch!" But he doesn't move as I grab another knife from my belt. I don't have my full stash with me, but I'll use everything I have if I need to. And I need Duke alive. He might know where Candy is, and that's the person I'm after.

"We're coming in, Fairy. You left or right of the door?" is whispered through my ear.

I'm more than half surprised I still have the earpiece in with everything that's happened. The movies always show that thing falling out of a person's ear right when they need to communicate with someone. Guess the Hounds buy the good brand and not the movie props.

"Right." I don't care that Duke can hear me talking to the Hounds anymore. He already knows I'm not alone. Might not know who's on the other side of the door, but his men aren't firing at nothing.

"What the fuck do you mean, right? I ain't moving for you, bitch. You think you can come here and take over *my* business? I will gut you clean through before I give anything over to a woman."

"Up or down, Fairy?"

"Floor."

"Fuck you." Duke spits in my direction, and I flinch even if I know he can't reach me. Just the thought of anything from him getting close is revolting. "I ain't doing shit. You think you got me? You think you can just take what I built? Fuck that and fuck you. I ain't getting on the floor other than to fuck

you into submission. Call off your people before I get pissed off and kill you.”

I giggle. I know I shouldn't, but I think it's kind of funny. He has no gun. No backup seems to be knocking at the door to get in. He's just standing there, blood dripping from his hand and chest where I cut him. He's nothing but an easy target I could hit blindfolded. And I've practiced that 'cause it was a challenge, and I love challenges. But there's no challenge here. He's lost; he just doesn't get it. So I laugh, since all he has are words to throw, and I find that hilarious.

He doesn't like that, and he roars at me before charging.

He doesn't get far before the door explodes and sends him crashing into the wall on the far side of the barn as the Hounds breach the building.

I, of course, wave in greeting as they arrive.

Chapter 24 – Mad Max

make sure I'm the first in after Jumper blows the door. I don't give it half a thought as I rush to the right and find Fairy on the ground, holding a knife. She looks rough, a fucking mess, but beautiful at the same time.

And fucking hell, she's waving.

I give in and wave back. She smiles, and I feel like I'm taking my first free breath like I did the day I got out of lockup. Who knew being on the outside, like I was the last hour, would have me wishing to be locked up in here with her?

I sink to my knees as I grab her head gently. She's banged up, something I could hear but not see on the comms.

"I'm okay."

I didn't ask, but I know she's not. "Liar."

She at least nods in agreement as I run my fingers over her. I know my brothers will secure the rest of the area, so I take my time. She winces when I touch her face and her ribs, but nothing feels broken. Going to need General to check her out fully, but she feels good enough that I help her stand. Taking most of her weight as she straightens, I tuck her into my arms, kissing her forehead and enjoying the moan of pleasure from her as I do.

"This area's clear." I nod to Jumper, acknowledging that I trust he did his job. "Duke must have taken off as we entered. Got the brothers searching. We'll find him."

"What happened?" Her voice is strong even as she burrows into me a bit more, and I'm only too happy to hold her tighter to me.

"Domino loaned Jumper some of his explosives. Boys got antsy and started blowing shit up."

Jumper doesn't disagree, just shrugs while he looks around.

“Is everyone okay?”

Her concern for the others over herself has me smiling down at her as Jumper fills her in.

“Yeah, we got word five minutes ago that the boys secured their old ladies. Law made the call to breach both buildings at the same time, but we had to wait when we saw that other guy sneak back into this one.”

“Sorry, Fairy. Didn’t mean to take so long.” Brushing the tip of my finger along the bruise forming on her cheek, I swallow down my fury because that isn’t what she needs right now. She’s calm because I’m calm, so I keep at it, even if I’m raging on the inside to seek and destroy.

“I’m still here, so no worries.” The way she looks up at me has me believing that she only sees me in this moment.

We just stare at each other till Jumper kicks some of the wood that broke off from the door he blew when we came in. She looks over at him and then around the immediate area. “What about the girls? Were you able to get them?”

“Yeah, we got them.” I nod toward the Asian girl, who’s crying into a brother’s shoulder as she’s moved from the building. “Some are pretty beat-up, so we’re taking the lot to the hospital. General won’t be able to treat them all if we take them to the clubhouse.”

“What about the old ladies? Duke said people were watching them. Did any of them get hurt?”

“Half the reason we waited so long. Didn’t know if he had a way to communicate with them. Flint got to Kitten first and confirmed the threat was real. Once Bulldog and Chains secured their tribes, we came in.”

“And Ruby?”

My girl misses nothing. Not even what Jumper tried to skip. He and I share a look, and it’s me who answers.

“No word yet. She wasn’t at her dorm but another college for a school thing, and the drive to that place takes longer

than the rest. Kooper's on it. He'll get in touch when he has her."

I can't even imagine what the prez is feeling right now. We held as long as we could, but we all knew we couldn't wait forever. And he trusts that the Hounds have his back and will do anything to keep his property safe, just like he does for all of ours.

"Come on, let's get out of here." I squeeze her in tight before I turn us to the door.

I hold most of her weight as we go, not even realizing I'm doing it till she giggles. I just grunt before I pick her up completely and carry her in my arms.

Only then do I notice the knife in her hand. I take a second to look back at the body on the ground I saw when we walked in, finally noticing that the handle of the knife poking out of his head looks exactly like the one she's holding.

I raise an eyebrow, and she just smiles with a shrug. I open my mouth to ask the obvious question, but a noise has me looking at the door.

A man who isn't a brother raises a gun, but before it gets higher than his hip, a knife is embedded in his skull.

"Holy shit."

I say nothing as Jumper starts hooting and hollering, just stare down at my fairy, who's biting her lip. She knows me well enough to realize I don't need to say much, or anything, to get her talking the way I want.

"My uncle gave me those the year before he went to prison as an anniversary gift for the day I came to live with him. I've got a few more of them. He taught me how to throw them when I was a kid. A way to do something with my hands when I can't figure something out. Throwing a few always seems to clear my head a bit."

I grunt at her explanation. "How's your head now?"

She grins wide, and my lips twitch as she pulls another knife from under her belt. “Better. Much better.”

I huff out a laugh as I step over the body blocking the exit, not worried in the slightest about running into any of Duke’s men who the brothers haven’t gotten. I’ve got my own little ninja keeping me safe. Guess my fairy’s got skills I’ve yet to learn. And I can’t wait to fucking figure them all out.

I think Jumper and I are the last to arrive at our SUVs—didn’t see a need for the bikes when we were planning on carrying so many brothers and expecting to bring back a few more people than we came with. We’re down the vehicle Bulldog and Chains took when they went to secure their lot. Kooper must have hitched a ride till he was able to find his own way out of town to get Ruby.

But there’s still enough room for all of us, even if we’ve got to pack people in like sardines. Feels a bit like prison, but I don’t think I’ll mind it as much if Fairy’s the one sitting on my lap. She’s got a way of keeping my mind focused on her and not what’s around me.

Sure, every other brother I know would see that as a problem. Would find a way to run far and wide from her. But I ain’t like the others. I’m not an idiot—not anymore, at least. Several years in prison have a way of making you see what you want and what you don’t want. Single life? Ain’t that grand. In prison or out of it, alone is alone. And trust me, it fucking sucks to be alone for too long. Brothers help, but family? Family gets you through shit. Saw it more times than I could count while I was locked up. Men with families, something to focus on, did better than those who only had themselves.

The club is like a family, but they all know I don’t trust enough of them to make it count. Loyalty keeps me warm, but a family, someone I can claim as my own? That’ll make me feel warm my entire life. Cold won’t ever touch my soul again.

I’m not going to run from Fairy. She claimed me the second she touched me without looking for anything but to

offer me a bit of comfort. Not many do that unless they want something. And she wanted nothing. Knew that then, know that now. I'll probably piss her off one of these days, but as long as I give her more good days than bad, she won't leave. And I sure as hell know I ain't going anywhere. She has an amazing pussy that my cock loves being home in. Her uncle's a scary bastard who I respect. And she gets me on a level that no other person I know ever has.

She's it for me. Just got to convince her that I'm it for her.

"Load up. Leaving in five."

I nod to Law as I put Fairy in the front passenger seat of an already loaded-up SUV. "We find Duke?"

"Nah. The guy's a fucking weasel, but he's slippery as hell and knows how to get out of more than one mess. He must have had a ride close by that we didn't see when Flint ran his aerial. Only way to explain why he ain't here now."

"And Ruby?"

Law clenches his jaw and shakes his head. I feel that. On so many levels. Not knowing is the killer. I might have had ears on Fairy, but I didn't get to see shit. That drove me nuts, especially when I heard her whimpers of pain from when he must have hit her. Law doesn't even get that. I felt about one-eighth of what he's feeling now, and it almost fucking killed me. I think Flint and Chains had this feeling at one time with their old ladies, but Ruby's his kid. The only link to his old lady Law's got left.

"Domino's still watching comms. He's tracking Kooper as he goes. He's still fifteen miles out from her place."

"Why isn't Flint back to the clubhouse yet and running shit? Kitten get hurt or something?"

"Not Kitten. And not hurt in the way you're thinking. Chains was able to take out the two watching his place, but they must have gotten word or something because they were already in the house. Mama Bear had her cubs in the panic room they've got under the kitchen, but the stress sent her

into labor. Flint's taken his old lady to the hospital, just like Bulldog and his lady. Since we need this lot looked over, figured we'd head that same direction. Your girl okay?"

I look over at her and see she's unashamedly listening in. Even waves at Law when he glances her way. Makes me happy to see my prez just smile and wave back, accepting her little quirk.

"Yeah. Bit banged up, but don't think it's anything to worry about. Wouldn't mind her being looked over as well if we're going. Figured I'd have General do it, but now that we're all going, that works too."

"Sounds good, brother. Let's get going. If Chains is anything like me when my kid was born, he's going to be a mess. And that Mama Bear went into labor early probably ain't helping."

I nod at the boss before I pull Fairy out. Keeping her in my arms as if she's a rag doll 'cause she weighs nothing, I get in without letting her feet touch the ground. It's a tight fit, but there's more leg room up here than anywhere else, and I'm the biggest brother here. Might be why Fairy calls me Beast, 'cause I'm the size of one.

Jumper hops into the driver's seat, and I nod at him before he takes off. The back is already full of brothers and half the girls we saved. I chance a glance back and see most have a far-off look in their eyes. I'm betting it's drugs since they aren't screaming at us. They don't look too bad, but I'm not sure how fucked-up in the head they are. Who knows how long Duke had them and what he did to them? We won't know that till we get a chance to talk to them once they're lucid enough to tell us their own names, much less what happened after they were taken.

The ride to the hospital is pretty quiet. Jumper turns on some Zeppelin, and it mellows us all out.

We did good today. We protected our own, got others out, and learned something important: we ain't in the clear of this

shit yet. If Duke had eyes on us before, he sure as shit is going to do it again. We didn't wear our cuts tonight so these fuckers would think it was Vultures again. No harm in using another club as the fall guy, especially one like the Vultures. But we took out almost every person involved. Duke got away, maybe a few others, but none would have seen who we are unless they got close. And we made sure to kill every fucker we made eye contact with.

"Thanks for coming."

I pull Fairy closer—not that she ain't already close. Not much room in here, but I sure as hell ain't complaining and having her sit someplace else.

"Anytime, Fairy. Anytime."

And I mean it. I will come for her anytime she needs me to. She won't call me unless she really does need me. Not even for silly bullshit like some other chicks might do. She ain't one to start drama just to get her way or some shit either.

She's old lady material. And just like the rest, she's one to go down fighting. When I fuck up—'cause it's definitely a "when," not an "if"—she'll let me know I'm being an idiot. I won't do half the shit the other brothers did to piss off their old ladies, but I'm sure I'll do something stupid. I'm a guy. It's a fucking guarantee.

"Boss."

We all listen in as Domino talks over the comms. Even Fairy can hear all of us now.

"Yeah," Prez responds. He's in another SUV and we can't see him, but his hesitating voice shakes as everyone waits to hear the worst.

"Kooper's got her. Took out three who were trying to get her in a car."

"She all right?" No hesitation from Law this time, but we all still hold our breath.

“Koop says she got a cut on her head that’s pretty deep. He’s taking her to the local hospital first to get it patched up before he heads back here with her. Doesn’t want to chance her falling off his ride if he comes back now.”

“Why ain’t he telling me this?” Anger pours from our prez, but we know it’s out of concern and frustration at not being there more than anything else.

“He took a few hits and his earpiece got broken along with his cell phone. He called the club from a phone that belongs to one of the guys he took out. He’s going to bring back what he can, but he had to leave the scene pretty quick. Someone must have called the cops or some shit.”

“Ruby’s going to be pissed.” Fairy says it to me, but it’s Jumper who looks over at her and asks why. She wasn’t talking to the group, just us in the car. “Don’t think she likes Kooper very much, and now she owes him for saving her.”

Jumper cackles, and I shake my fairy as I chuckle along with my brother. My girl’s right. Ruby’s bound to be fucking livid, and I doubt Kooper will let her forget it. The guy’s got a death wish if I ever saw one.

Chapter 25 – Cheyanne

don't have anything against hospitals, I just don't usually go to them. When my parents died, it was straight to the morgue with them, which was on the hospital grounds but not connected to it. It was a fire, and the arson investigator wanted the full autopsy done to go in his report. No one asked me if it was okay, though I'm not sure if they ask next of kin that question or not. I know I wouldn't. Not because it's a hard question, but I doubt anyone would be okay if a family member was cut down the middle mere hours after they died.

Not sure who called the hospital before we arrived, but no one seemed to bat an eye at a bunch of big guys carrying in women who look barely conscious. As each girl is deposited into a chair and wheeled out, the brother gets his vest. Guess someone brought them, or maybe they had them in the SUVs the whole time. All I know is my beast won't let me go. And I'm completely fine with it.

"Sir, you need to release her. We need to look her over. I can't do that with you holding her." The nurse, who's probably my age, looks at me with pleading eyes to say something.

I just shrug. She's done a great job of commanding the chaos we brought into her emergency waiting room, but I'm not going to argue with Mad Max. He isn't the type to just agree to something because I ask. He might like me, maybe more than that. He trusts me, and he gets me. But I'm not about to change his mind on things. And honestly? I like where I am. It's comfy.

"Save your breath, Diana. I've got this one."

A guy walks through the swinging double doors that lead back to the staff-only area. He looks familiar, but I can't place him. Not with the whole suit and lab coat he's wearing.

"Thought you were with Chains' old lady."

I look to Mad Max, then back at the doctor. Then it clicks. He was at the family event. But not like this—he was scruffier and wore a vest. No clue on his name.

And now I see why the vests are so important. Helps a hell of a lot to know who you're talking to with the name tag thingy on them.

“Nah, got better people working on her. Don't worry, I got my ear to the ground, and I know what's going on. Mama Bear is trying to do it the old-fashioned way, and Chains is asking for the drugs. Last I saw, both were still screaming at each other as they worked through the contractions. Now, you going to set her down if I agree to let you push the wheelchair?”

Mad Max just shakes his head. I snuggle in more 'cause why not?

The doctor smirks. “Fine by me. Let's go.”

No one seems to care that I'm carried back. Guess this guy has a lot of pull around here, 'cause I doubt any of this is allowed. Then again, with the size of my beast, I don't think anyone is willing to go head-to-head with him. Especially since we haven't met a single person as tall, or as wide, as him yet.

“Set her on the bed and move back so I can do my job.”

I'm half surprised my guy listens to the doctor, but he just grunts and does what he's told, sitting in the single chair across from the bed. “Do your thing, but know I'll gut you if you cause her any more pain, General.”

Ah, General. Makes sense now.

Mad Max threatens the guy with ease as he pulls his vest on now that he's got two free hands. I think someone gave it to us as we passed by some of the other brothers, but I wasn't really paying attention. Just enjoying my ride in my guy's arms more than caring about what was happening around me.

For his part, General doesn't even seem fazed by the comment. I wonder if it happens a lot with the Hounds.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Heard it all before. Now tell me what I don’t know.”

As I get examined, Mad Max tells General everything that happened. I knew some of it. Most, really. The rest I process quickly to try and solve the puzzle inside my head.

“You all busy?”

The words come a second before the knock, but Law wasn’t really asking as he and Bulldog come into my exam room and post up against one of the walls.

“Ruby here yet?” General asks as he pokes my face with a gauze he says has something on it to numb the pain. But I’ve got a feeling he’s lying. I swear I see a gleam of joy in his eye each time I flinch.

“Not yet. My girl needs a few stitches before they’ll let her go.”

General stops poking and looks at his prez. “I’ll check her when she gets here.”

Law nods in agreement, and I glance at Mad Max, who nods too. Guess they have issues with the doctors up north. Or maybe Law just needs a man who he trusts a bit more to look over his little girl.

“They say anything yet?”

I could kiss my beast for asking the single question I want to know but can’t voice with how much prodding General is back to doing. Of course, I could probably kiss him anytime if given the opportunity. But he’s too far away, and I really want to know what Law has to say.

“A bit. Most were working girls for Duke before he pulled them in for this. A few got sold off earlier, but they don’t know to who. Most of the time, one of the girls is just picked out and pulled away. Some said their pictures were taken; others just say they’ve seen nothing but the room we found them in.”

“So Duke wasn’t lying.” The group looks to me, and I continue talking through my thoughts since no one is stopping me. “He said he only just now started taking people. He needed willing people before, and it would be easy to use a prostitute—they don’t really ask many questions, just show up where you tell them. Probably wasn’t that difficult to get them there. If any of them used drugs before, I’d bet it was even easier to control them. Were any of them redheads, by chance?”

“No. Why?” Bulldog answers.

I shrug as if it’s obvious, but then I remember they didn’t read over my shoulder when I talked to Store Owner like I thought they would have. Guess when Mad Max says he trusts me, the entire club really does.

“Candy’s a redhead, around five feet, and has a few tattoos on her arms. If Duke doesn’t have her, then who would?”

“Who says he doesn’t?”

I tilt my head and stare at Mad Max, confused by his words.

He leans forward and puts his elbows on his knees, lacing his fingers together as they hang between them. “Just ‘cause she wasn’t there doesn’t mean he doesn’t have her. If this ‘Store Owner’ thinks she was taken by him, that she was living on the south side when it happened, he might still have her. We have no intel that it was Duke’s main operation we just crashed. Who’s to say it was more than a holding cell? If he plans to take over the south like we think, then he’s going to have more than one. You’ve done the research. Are the four corners known for crossing over into another territory to get new people?”

I shake my head. “No.”

“Then he’s got her. We just don’t know where yet. After tonight, he’ll be on the lookout for new product and quick. If we can monitor the missing persons a bit more, we might get

lucky. Either way, the Hounds are involved now. We got skin and now blood in the game, and we've seen what Duke's capable of. We're in this. Right, boss?" Mad Max turns his attention to the man by the door.

"Damn straight. Motherfucker made my little girl bleed. I'm going to take everything he has, and then I'm going to gut the asshole with a dull spoon."

I feel like I'm the only one gasping like an idiot. I knew my beast was awesome, but come on! Did no one just see that? He literally spoke more in the past ten minutes than in all the time I've known him. The fact that no one is questioning him has me thinking this is why they keep him around. That Law and Bulldog sought him out tonight for this very reason. He sees things others don't. He's even got me seeing things I didn't before.

I think I'm falling in love.

No, that's not right. I *am* in love.

The more I sort my feelings out, the more I understand them. The fact that I *have* feelings for Mad Max should have been all that was needed for my brain to figure it out. But I've never felt this, never had to understand it before. Any time feelings started becoming involved in any type of connection with another, that person would leave.

I don't think he'll leave, though. He hasn't yet, and he's had the time to do so. Whatever he promised my uncle has been paid.

I'm not an idiot. I know Jimmy must have told him to watch out for me. He always does. Doubt he meant for such proximity, but you get what you get.

"Paging Dr. Trooper. Dr. Trooper."

General exits, and I look to Mad Max once more.

"His real name is Sam Trooper. We call him General for Surgeon General," he explains.

“Yeah, that makes sense. But you should change his name to Storm.”

I get a funny look from Mad Max, but Bulldog starts barking with laughter.

“Oh my God, how did we not see that?” The other two men look at him like he’s crazy while I just nod in agreement with him. “Stormtrooper. Would have been fucking fantastic. Man, Flint’s going to shit a brick when he learns he passed up on the opportunity to give him that road name.”

“So there *is* a person who keeps track of all the road names?”

“Sure, honey. How else do you expect us not to all have the same name, like Bear or Ryder? Or some other shit names that seem to be the same in all other clubs?”

I cut my eyes from Law to my beast and just glare as his lip goes up in a side smile. He knew and pretended he didn’t. *Bastard*. I still love him, but he’s still a bastard.

“We got a problem,” General says as he comes back, but I’ve got a feeling he doesn’t want to be here. He’s quick with putting some gauze on my chin to finish me up. When I got kicked in the face, it didn’t split my skin open, but it did leave a very large abrasion that was filled with dirt from the boot Duke was wearing. General had told me I’d be getting this to keep it clean while it heals. I can already tell I don’t like it after thirty seconds of having it on. It itches like hell.

“What’s up?” Bulldog speaks for the group, and I see him bulk up as he takes a power stance. Even Mad Max rises from the chair he was sitting in.

“Mama Bear is losing too much blood, and the doc can’t figure out where it’s coming from. They’re pulling her in for surgery now to do an emergency C-section to get the kid out before they try and stop the bleeding. But that’s not the worst of it.”

“What is?” Law asks.

“She’s O-negative. We have some on hand, but I’m not sure how low we are. We just got hit with a few bad cases this month. It’s going to be tight if we just have enough and tough as hell to get a donor this late.”

“Any of the boys able?” Law asks.

“No, already checked.”

“I am.” I just look back at them as they stare me down. “I can help.”

“You sure? You just went through some shit yourself,” General questions.

“Why not? Don’t think I’ll be leaving the hospital anytime soon as it is. Might as well use me while you have me.”

Law is decent enough to cough to cover his laugh. Bulldog just laughs outright while General continues to stare as if he’s trying to determine if I’m serious or not. Mad Max is the only one just smiling, ’cause he probably already knows I won’t back out of this now that I said it. It’s just blood. I don’t need all of it to heal.

“All right, I’ll be back in a second with everything. Get comfy, you’re going to be here for a while.” General leaves the room, and Bulldog is quick to follow his lead.

“Going to check on Chains. Guy’s probably freaking, and I doubt the kids are doing well.”

“Right, I’ll be there soon to help,” Law says.

Bulldog nods and heads out as Law turns to me. “You did good, honey. Real good. Just want you to know that. The club appreciates what you’re doing now too. You need something, just ask. I’m proud of you.”

I swallow the golf-ball-sized lump of emotion in my throat and nod as Law squeezes my ankle before leaving. I blink rapidly, not wanting to cry. Not even sure why I would. Maybe it’s ’cause other than my uncle, no one has ever said I did good before. And not even he ever told me he was proud of me. Even though I feel that with him, he never has to say it. I

know what I mean to Jimmy. I'm the only one he loves, the only one he fights for. I accept that and repay it tenfold in my own ways by making sure he never feels too alone in prison. I do what I can to keep things going on the outside for him and be there for him when I can. He knows this; I know he does.

And with thoughts of him settling inside me, it lets me take the calming breath I need before looking back over at the only person left in the room.

"So..." I let my words trail off, not sure what to say.

My beast just stares at me, not saying much with words but saying a lot with everything else. He ain't leaving. He's beside me the whole way. We've got something between us, and we're going to make it work for both of us after we get out of here.

Or... I've interpreted it wrong, and he just thinks I'm odd for crying. It happens. But I don't think I'm wrong on this one.

"You think they got squeeze pouches here?" I give him half a smile, one he doesn't return.

"Nope. But I've already got a prospect out buying you some."

Yeah, this is love. I'm totally, completely, truly, madly in love. Because that is by far the sexiest thing any man has ever said to me before.

Chapter 26 – Mad Max

gh, I feel like I could sleep for a week.”

“U I grunt in agreement as I lock Fairy’s door behind me. She pushed herself today. Not only with what went down with Duke and the kidnapped girls but also giving blood. General was forced to take more than he probably should have.

Mama Bear was in bad shape. I don’t understand the medical jargon General told me and the boys as we waited for news. None of us were willing to leave till we knew everyone was okay. It took several hours, long into the night, before we got the all clear. Life will be a bit difficult for Mama Bear after the surgery and now taking care of a newborn. But she’s a badass woman—if anyone can handle that, *and* keep Chains in line, it’s her.

I look over Fairy’s place. It’s been a while since we’ve been back here even though we did have the boys watching this place. Fairy moved in here under the agency’s guidance after her uncle was locked up; they covered her tracks and kept her away from prying eyes like the media. Both the agency and Travis knew people would be after her because of him, and this was the setup they put in place. Not even Duke could find it, since her listed address still shows a house Travis owns.

Feeling good that nothing happened while she was away and that no agency listening devices magically appeared, I open the curtain and nod to the brother outside. She might trust the agency, but I don’t. After Duke said he had eyes on the women, the club ain’t taking any more chances. Security will be tight for a while. Might even pull in a few sister chapters to help keep us from being spread too thin with all the other projects we’ve got going on right now. We don’t want to risk anyone attached to the club, but we also don’t want to lose ground on things that have taken a while to get started. I, for one, don’t want us to give up on the side gig of

being mercenaries or the beer business. It might be Bulldog's baby, but the club is all in for helping it go international. Might even open a few doors for us regarding the other business ventures. Having a reason to go overseas won't draw too many eyes, as opposed to us just going on vacation every few months in some remote locations.

I find Fairy in the bathroom, picking at the tape holding the gauze to her chin.

"Thought General told you to leave that on for a while."

She does a cute shrug thing that has her shoulders halfway up to her ears. "It's been a while. And he didn't technically say I *couldn't* take it off, just advised against it. It itches like crazy, so it's coming off now."

I huff as I move in front of her, blocking her view of the mirror. She makes a sound of surprise when I pick her up and twist her to sit on the counter, giving me better access to help remove the gauze for her.

She whimpers a bit as I try to remove it slowly. I hate causing her pain, but the sounds she makes is kind of cute. It's almost the same one she makes when I hold off on giving her my cock after I've worked her up so much.

Fuck. It's been too long since I've been in her.

I throw the bandage in the trash behind me, next to the toilet, and then pull her shirt off, followed by her bra. She lost her suit jacket the second she got home, tossing it over the couch. She opens her mouth to protest, but I silence it when I pull off my cut, hanging it on the towel hook before taking my shirt off too.

I enjoy her eyes roaming over my skin like a secondhand touch. I let her look her fill till I'm too hot to think, then turn around and get the shower running, setting the temperature I want before going back to her.

Her shoes go next. I don't think she knows how much I enjoy having her in my hands. Probably as much as she's loving it when I apply pressure to the sole of each foot with

my thumbs before giving them the rubdown they deserve. Her moans filter through the bathroom that's starting to steam up from the shower.

I slide her off the counter and make quick work of removing her pants and sexy-as-fuck thong—I get a glorious view of it thanks to the mirror behind her before I pull it down her legs. I kick out of my shoes and toe off my socks as I unbuckle and push my own pants down and off.

I fucking love that she doesn't protest when I pick her up. She just secures her legs and arms around me as I walk us both into the shower. I don't want to put her down, so I don't, just I guide us under the spray and enjoy her in my arms as the warm water washes away the past couple of hours.

Once I'm satisfied that she's wet enough, I move till her back rests against the wall and grab the shampoo. Her legs hold tight around my waist, and my dick is her fucking chair. I'm hard as hell for her, but I also have a need to take care of her. I get that it doesn't happen a lot for her, so I push my own desires down and focus on what she needs instead.

I take my time massaging the shampoo into her hair. She gives me total access, becoming like a doll, moving her head only when I move it. When I go to rinse her, I notice the showerhead detaches, so I bring it to her. She leans forward and rests her forehead on my chest as I run the water and my fingers through her hair till the shampoo is gone.

I then move to the conditioner and repeat the process. She's putty in my hands, and I enjoy the trust she's giving me to take care of her like this. It settles a part of me I didn't even know I had. Never was the nurturing type, but for *her*, I am. Hell, I'm downright pussy-pedestalling her, and I fucking love it. She's worth it.

When I get to soaping her body, I start on her back, then push her to the wall and arch back to get the rest of her. She stays with her shoulder blades anchored to the tile as I clean her body, gently caressing around every bruise I see. I have plans to kiss each and every one that I'm memorizing as I go.

When I bring the showerhead down on her this last time, I run it over her slowly, letting all the soap glide off her body in silky rivers. At the apex of her thighs, I see the shudder rack her body as the water flows over her pussy. I can't tell if it's the spray or her that's making my stomach all wet, but I don't move the showerhead away from her.

I push the button that changes the spray from a gentle rainstorm to a full-on torrential downpour. Pressing my hips closer to her, I balance more of her weight and hold her against the wall to keep her from falling with the way she bucks instantly.

I use my free hand to spread her pussy, giving it the full onslaught of pressure. Those whimpers are back, making my cock impossibly hard. It takes everything I have not to move a bit and sink into her loving folds.

Her breath hitches, and then she lets out a silent scream as she comes. I watch everything play across her face, mesmerized by how amazing she looks when she's coming. I change the spray level back the second I see it's too much for her, then rinse her once more before shutting off the water.

She's jelly in my arms as we move out of the shower. I set a towel on the sink and place her on it. Stepping back, I get another towel and dry her off completely before using the same one to dry myself. I wrap it around my waist as I look through her drawers before finding the blow-dryer. Not one word of protest as I dry her hair, combing out the knots as I go.

Once I'm done, I toss the towel on the ground and pick up my girl. 'Cause that's what she is: *mine*. I bring her to the bed and set her down gently. She deserves so much, probably more than I can give. But I'll start here, kissing every mark on her skin till they're gone and my own are in their place.

"I got scared today." I kiss her feet. No marks on them, but I bet they hurt a bit from the heels.

"Why?"

“Cause I didn’t know what was happening to you.” I look up at her, hoping she can see what I’m feeling. That I’ve never felt that in my life before today. That the unknown of what she was dealing with got to me more than anything ever has.

I continue to move up her legs, kissing freckles and bruises I see and any part that just calls for me to lay my lips against her skin.

“Never been scared before,” I continue. “Not even when I got locked up.”

Her hands brushes through my wet hair and pushes it off my face. “I’m okay.”

I find it strange that she knows what I need to hear even before I do. But those two words finally let the fear release its hold, and I sink my head to her thighs. She continues to run her hands through my hair, not caring that it’s still a bit damp. I breathe deep and let the worry of the day finally drain from my body. I might have known she was safe for a while, but the fear was still clinging to me like a second skin. I don’t like the feeling.

Guess it helps that I know she can take care of herself, though. Images of her throwing that knife swarm through my mind and make me smile as I kiss her leg. She’s badass in her own right.

I nuzzle my nose against her till it reaches the trimmed curls between her thighs, then lick through them to feel her folds. Having her on my tongue is amazing. Not ‘cause she tastes good, but because I *can* taste her, touch her, feel her beneath me. Everything is twice as good now that I have her in my arms. I’m not about to forget that there was a possibility that she could have been taken from me. That the last time we were together *could* have been the last time. I vow to myself that I won’t let a day go by where I don’t worship this body. That I don’t pay homage to it and taste all it has to offer. Never know what the day will bring, but I don’t want to regret not enjoying each moment I have with her. When the time comes for us to part, I want the memories to

keep us warm at night. Be it me alone without her or her surviving after I'm gone, we'll always be together in memory.

The feel of her gripping my hair, pulling at it slightly as she arches into me, is more than I can take. I pull off her pretty little pussy, kissing it one last time before I start moving back up her body, continuing my kissing path as I go.

"I don't trust well. Haven't since I was kid and learned that when people say things, it doesn't mean they'll follow through." I lick around her belly button. "Mom raised me the best she could, but she knew I never trusted her. Wasn't till I met Special K and Law one day that things changed." I nibble up each side of her ribs, kissing the bruises and trying to keep her from squirming too much. A few are bruised, but none are broken. I need to be careful, but that doesn't mean I need to stop playing. "He promised me a place in the club, a brotherhood that would have my back. Told me I didn't need to trust all of them, just him to lead us down the right path."

I reach her tits and just look at them for a second. They deserve so much more than just a little kiss, so I take one of her nipples in my mouth and suck hard. My eyes are open, and I watch as her head tilts back and her eyes close on a parted sigh. I use my tongue to flick the nipple up and down before biting down on it once more. I grab her other tit and push it toward me, closing the distance before putting my mouth on it and giving it the same treatment as the other. She writhes under me, absentmindedly pressing her womanhood against me. It has me groaning to feel this fairy under me all wiggly like.

With a parting kiss, I grab both breasts in my hands, pinching her nipples slightly with my thumbs and index fingers. Then I thrust against her waiting pussy without entering, sliding my dick between her folds as I push up till I'm face-to-face with her.

"Not sure if it's because of me knowing your uncle or just that you didn't seem to pull away from my prison tat, but I trust you. I trust that you won't harm me or my brothers. That

my life and those I'm close with are safe in your hands. And I trust that you know what you're doing, and now I know you can handle yourself if I'm not there. But...."

I take a moment to settle my weight a bit more on her to still her movements. This isn't about getting laid. It's more than that. *She's* more than that.

"I was willing to break protocol for you. Half the reason we blew the other place up was because I was already going against Law's orders to stand down the first time I heard you get hit. I defied my boss for you, and I'll do it again. I will break every rule, tear down every door, kill every person in my way to get to you." I swallow, knowing the next part is hard for me to say, but it's nothing but the truth, and she deserves to hear it. "I'd go back to prison for you."

Her eyes search mine as she takes in my words. I'm hoping she's seeing what I'm saying. I might not voice the three words, but I'm saying more than I love you. I'm giving her all that I am, laying it all out there for her. She's it for me, and I will do whatever I have to do to keep her safe.

"And I would change for you."

The air rushes from me like I've been sucker punched. I would *never* ask her to change for me. Never. Not her appearance, the way she dresses. Not her job or how she acts around others. I know that's been asked of her before; I can just tell her family and others tried to make her change. She's strong-willed, I know. And she doesn't do anything except for herself anymore. Not since her parents died. Her uncle spoke about her often enough that I might have fallen in love with her from his stories alone, and seeing her was just the icing on the cake.

Changing her is like a death sentence. Just like going back to prison is for me. But we each would do it for the other. We would end our lives, in a way, for the other to be happy.

If that's not love, I don't know what is, nor do I want to.

I seal my lips against hers, and she wraps her arms around my neck. I buck once, and she widens her legs even more so that on the next move, my dick slides right in. I never release her perfect lips as I begin to slowly fuck her.

Never made love before. Thought I'd fucked a girl every way there was, but I was wrong. Fairy makes me think everything before her was wrong and only she's right. My hands are still on her tits, and a few twists on her nipples have her arching even more into me, scraping my scalp with her nails as she clenches the sides of my head.

I pick up speed, and her mouth attacks mine in response. I give as good as I get, moving one hand to the back of her neck to not only angle her as I like but to also get a fucking hold on her. I can't get enough of her, and when I feel her crash over, I follow along like a willing victim.

When we slow, we don't break apart, just sink into lazy kisses that don't seem to end. And I don't want them to. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever.

Fairy's it for me. And I'm the beast for her.

Chapter 27 – Cheyanne

top trying to cover it up, Boo. Already seen it when I
“**S** came in and knew about it *before* y’all came in. Only thing I need from you is to tell me how you’re feeling.”
Jimmy continues to glare at me as he’s escorted to our visitor table.

I should have realized that he’d know what happened. He’s that kind of guy. He never tells me where he gets his information, but I have a feeling the agency still talks with him —unofficially, of course.

I wave to him as he sits, and then I put my hands on the table and stop trying to fix my hair to cover half my face. I put on makeup to hide the bruises, but not even the best concealer could help some of these. After a few days, my face showed the true impact of the backhand to the cheek and the kick to the chin. *Pretty* is not a word anyone would use to describe me right now.

Not that Mad Max seems to agree. Guy can’t take his eyes off me. And not in a creepy “can’t look away from the train wreck in front of me” kind of way.

That man’s got eyes on me ‘cause he wants them on me. Just like I’ve got eyes on him all the time. Ever since we told each other that we’d be willing to go against our nature for the other, things have changed for us. All for the better and all just small. Neither of us changed who we are, and neither wants us to.

“I’m okay.”

“That’s bullshit. How’s she really doing?”

I don’t hide my eye roll. Of course he wouldn’t trust me and defers to Mad Max. Jimmy always wants a second opinion when I get hurt, never trusting that I’ll tell him the truth.

I guess in a way he's right, though. I'm not fine. I'm sore, I ache, and sometimes it even hurts to breathe. But I'm also enjoying every second I get with my man and that group of his who have included me in everything. If I weigh the good and bad, I think saying, "I'm fine," is the most accurate middle ground.

"Had General send you the scans. You saw nothing was broken, just bruises. Been making sure she's taking it easy, and no heavy lifting."

I stare wide-eyed at Mad Max, having zero clue he sent my uncle information about me. I'm not mad, not in the slightest. Makes me happy to know he did it. That he knows that no matter what Jimmy did, no matter that he's locked up, I still want him in every part of my life I can get. If he was out of prison, no doubt he would have beaten us to the hospital if we'd called him. Hell, I half wonder if he wouldn't have forced himself into the club to keep tabs on me.

"Yeah, saw them. You guys get the fucker who did that to her yet?"

Nothing says thank you from my uncle like demanding more intel.

"Not yet. He went underground. Hounds are tracking. We know he hasn't gone back home yet. Had a call with his prez. That guy won't say shit to us other than his VP ain't there. We'll find him. Got half the club out searching even now. Hounds have a vested interest in this one. We won't rest till he's under one of our boots."

To say finding Duke is my beast's pet project is an understatement. I've gotten close to a few of the old ladies, including Kitten. She told me all about her run-in with Duke, and I now know that Flint is also majorly involved in finding him and inflicting pain. Lots and lots of pain is in store for that guy with the number of people he's pissed off in the club.

Law is also on that bandwagon. I think Ruby is too. Primarily 'cause she hates the new rule of forced proximity

she's getting from the club. Apparently, she had some sort of deal with her dad before all this. She was able to live a life away from the club, even if it was just a little. She felt a bit of freedom, but that's all gone now. I tried to tell her it wasn't that bad, that at least her dad's still letting her go to college. Having a security detail move in and follow her to all her classes isn't that big a deal.

Then again, at least with my uncle, he had his people pretend not to be there. So I didn't know till after the fact when he told me at my second college graduation. I've never had a normal life, so I guess I don't know what all the fuss is. Of course, I also completed college before I could learn to drive. Things are probably a bit different if you know what normal is and expect it.

"You need help?"

I raise my eyebrows at Jimmy. And I'm not the only one.

My uncle doesn't offer to help. He prefers for others to ask, and then he gets something in return for his efforts. He isn't the type to give things away for free. And him helping? That's about as free as it gets with him.

"Hush, Boo," he tells me.

"I didn't say anything."

He looks away with a shake of his head. "You didn't have to. I can read you like a book." He cuts his eyes back at us, nodding to Mad Max as he explains, "Hounds might have a claim on you now, but I claimed you long before they got here."

"Claim?" This is the part I don't get. I glance at my uncle with a tilt to my head, then turn to Mad Max. "Like property? What property do you share? Are you buying land or something?" I'm asking the guy next to me, but I look across the table to watch the other man in my life, wondering if there's more property in his name that I overlooked. I went through everything when he was locked up, liquidating things

he asked me to—and maybe hiding some others he didn't want the agency to find.

“Not that type of claim, Boo.”

I'm trying to figure it out on my own, but I ultimately just shake my head and shrug in defeat. I don't get it. I'll look it up when I get my phone that I left in the car. Maybe Google can explain it to me. Wouldn't be the first time I've consulted the internet to understand things others got that I didn't. One of the many side effects of being forced to learn everything at a young age just because I was good at it.

Laughter startles me out of my head. The fact that it comes from my uncle shocks me. In fact, the whole room goes dead silent. So many eyes are on us, I find myself waving to complete strangers. None of them return the wave, but few ever do, so I'm not put off by it.

“You didn't tell her, did you?” Jimmy's still laughing, but at least the others have ignored us again.

When I look to my beast, his face is pinched tight. In this lighting, I get why *Mad Max* is his name. His expression says he's about to rip this entire place to shreds. My uncle included.

“Told her everything she needs to know.”

“Relax, boy. I'm sure you *thought* you did.” Jimmy wipes his eyes, having laughed so hard, he teared up a bit. He talks as if I'm not there, but again, I'm used to it and not bothered by it. “But you've got to tell it to her in terms that are going to be used around her. She needs to know what she's walking into. You're obviously more than just someone watching over my niece, ain't cha?”

I'm not sure if my face is turning red. Still never looked in a mirror when I feel my cheeks get hot, I have no idea if others can tell when they do it or not. More than my cheeks are getting hot, though. Hell, it feels like a sauna in here, but I don't think anyone else is sweating. The couple visiting their son across from us are still in their jackets. I know they usually

run this place like an icebox, but I swear they put the heater on. At least over me. Two minutes ago.

“No. Not going to deny it. Not today, not tomorrow,” Mad Max growls as he sits up a bit straighter.

I lean forward in my chair, feeling like this is a pivotal moment, but I have no idea what’s going on as my uncle and my beast stare at each other for a very long time. Only till Jimmy smiles, and then Mad Max does too. I don’t know which one to look at, as both so rarely smile.

“What am I missing?”

“You going to tell her?” Jimmy says with a raised eyebrow but still doesn’t look at me.

“Go ahead.” Mad Max shrugs. “You tell her, I tell her, don’t matter in the end. She’s stuck with the outcome.”

I really have no idea who the man is who’s sitting across from me. If he chuckles any more, I’d swear the agency killed my uncle and replaced him with an actor.

Finally, Jimmy looks at me. “You’re his, Boo.”

“Yeah, I know. Wait, is that what this is about? Are you mad? Should I have told you? If it helps, he didn’t know who I was till I reminded him that I saw him here. I swear, we didn’t have sex right away. Okay, it *was* kind of right away, but that was only because Benny was screwing a girl against a wall. Then Mad Max came in and told him to go and asked if I was in love. I said no—”

A hand covers my mouth, and it’s only then that I see my uncle in shock. Think it was the first time I ever used sex in the active terminology and not just a word to describe something.

“He means you’re mine, Fairy. As in I’ve claimed you. No other Hound can have you, nor can anyone else for that matter.”

I pull his hand away from my mouth and look over at him, once again tilting my head in confusion. “Yeah, I know that.

I'm yours, just like you're mine. Does that mean I get to claim you too?"

His smile is small, but it's all I see. "Yeah, Fairy, it sure as hell does."

I smile big and lean in quick before I can think against it, kissing him for all he's worth till a throat clears and I remember where I am.

"Not allowed to touch in here."

I pull away and look over at my uncle. He's glaring with his arms crossed, not at all the laughing man from a few minutes ago.

"Thought that rule was for inmates and guests," I say. "Not for guests and *other* guests."

I know it's not possible, but he glares even more. "It applies to everyone, Boo. Keep your hands to yourself. Might be glad you're happy. Ain't seen you like this before, and I'm not talking about the bruises. You ain't changing, and he's accepting you like he did me. I've known this man for years. I know what's in his heart and his head. You've got yourself a good one. Might even approve of him. But don't for one fucking second think I'll ever be okay with you sucking face in front of me. You've had a dad, but the moment he left this world, you and I both know I became that for you. You're mine too. Don't forget that. You're the only family I've got left. The only family I ever *wanted*. You are *something*, and your parents were dicks for ever trying to make you something you ain't. But he doesn't do that. He doesn't try to make you more than just you. I can see that already with what I see of you two and what my contacts on the outside are saying. It's the only reason I'm not over this table and cutting out his tongue for touching you with it."

"Oh, Uncle Jimmy." *I think I'm going to cry.* He's never said so much to me before. It means more to me than him confessing he loves me. I know it. He knows it. No need to say

it. Just wasted words, as he's already said more than those three words could ever say.

The threat at the end lets me know more than anything. He was the one to teach me that emotions are weakness. To never let something surprise you enough to react. And he's reacting. I can see the restraint on his face. He's holding himself back, but just barely. Same look he had at his trial when the agency threw him under the bus.

He didn't think they would; they told him they'd get him out and the trial was just for show. But they screwed him over—kind of what they're known for, really, if you go by the movies. Unlike today, he wasn't able to hold it together back then, lunging at the so-called witness as he passed him. Jimmy got a few good hits in before they had enough security to pull him off the guy.

That was the only time I ever saw my uncle show more than the stoic face he gives to everyone else. Well, that time and now, of course.

"So." Jimmy looks at Mad Max, who grabs my hand and holds it. At least it's under the table—not that my uncle doesn't seem to notice based on the nostril flare he gives as he glances at what he can see of our arms touching. Mad Max might have a death wish, or else he just doesn't care about the threat Jimmy just gave.

Is it bad if I find that so hot?

He knows my uncle can kill him without touching him. Probably even in here. His reach is far and wide, and more people than not are on his payroll, which is still very active.

"You asking?" Jimmy says.

"Asking what?" Why do they have to keep talking in code? I thought we didn't have to do all this "talking but not really talking" thing since I'm no longer looking for "stationery." I'm still searching for Candy, but the Hounds are doing most of the work. We agreed that I need to stay on the research side of things and only be used when they have a lead. Apparently,

my skill for questioning people is about to be the club's favorite toy.

A few of the brothers thought Mad Max was blowing smoke when he mentioned I was known as a walking lie detector. Of course, a little demonstration was all that was needed to get just about everyone to shut up. And now half the club won't talk to me. Fear of me finding out a lie and telling the truth keeps them at bay.

It's not my fault. I just tell the truth. And apparently, I'm the only one who does that in the clubhouse outside Church. I might have started a few fights, and some people aren't talking to others, but that's not my fault. Not really. I don't think so, anyway. Maybe I should ask Mad Max after we leave. He was the one who made me stop last night when a few of the Hounds asked me to do a lie detector of sorts on them. If you call throwing me over his shoulder and walking out stopping me. Guess it worked.

"Yeah, I'm asking. You going to give it to me?" my beast says in that deep voice I love so much as he squeezes my hand tight under the table.

My uncle just smiles, which has me smiling right along with him. It's infectious.

Even if I'm not really sure what's being asked.

Chapter 28 – Mad Max

hut the hell up, all of you.” Law bangs the gravel a few
“S more times than usual. Can’t be helped; the entire club’s happy to finally get some of our brothers back.

Once we settle—as much as kids after having sugar can, ’cause that’s the vibe of this place—Church officially begins. “First, I want to say welcome back to Bass and our two prospects.”

The room erupts with hoots and hollers till Prez’s glare shuts us up again.

“Pretty damn obvious we missed you lot, in case you didn’t know. Been awfully quiet ’round here. Can’t figure out why for the life of me.”

The boys chuckle as Bass flips them off. *Loudmouth* was too much to put on a man’s vest, so we gave him the name Bass instead. He’s got a hell of a big mouth and can’t ever shut the hell up, just like the fish.

“Know you been itching to talk,” Law continued, “so why not use what God gave you and tell us how it went?”

“Missed you fuckers too. Now, before you all get weepy-eyed on me, let’s get to it. The boys in Washington are up and running. We even took care of a local job that Flint sent our way. The boys did pretty good. Got a few more lines on some other chapters that want to join in as well and be part of it. Next trip will be to North Dakota. Been talking to the VP up there, and they think they have a good location for a training facility. The prez up there’s got a large plot of family land that he ain’t using most of the time. Figured I take the prospect and we do measurements and get a price point. If it’s something we can manage, might think about charging each chapter a maintenance fee to keep it up if they send their teams there to train.”

“Damn, guy’s got a brain along with a mouth. Who knew?” Kooper grunts, and even the prez chuckles along with us.

Bass shrugs it off in his usual fashion. “Why you think I keep pulling the ladies away from you, man? Pussy knows a good thing walking when they see it.”

“Too bad neither of you sees anything but the women walking away from you.” Casper smirks as the room fills with “oohs.”

“Shut it. Sounds like a good deal. Which prospect you bringing?”

I ain’t the only one who sees the twinkle in Law’s eyes. We all know we only allowed one prospect into this meeting. The other is a brother, he just doesn’t know it yet. I know little about our latest prospect, just that Bulldog vouched for him a few months back when he helped him clear out a former prospect who was getting his dick wet and not watching over the VP’s princess.

As for the other guy in here, yeah, I know him. We all do. We wouldn’t allow a prospect into the club as a brother who we *didn’t* know. Guy’s proven himself to the club several times. Even took a bullet for Mama Bear. Kid has guts and brains too. He showed those when he had Flint’s old lady checked out even before anyone else knew who she was. Even before she herself knew.

“From what I saw over the last few weeks, we only got one.” Bass crosses his arms, and a persona takes over. He’s nothing like the jokester we all know but the man our enemy fears. We call him Bass because he’s loud. The enemy calls him that ‘cause after one hit, the guy’s lying on the ground, out cold like a dead fish. “Think we need to vote the other one out. He ain’t no prospect. Not anymore if I got a say.”

The brothers all nod in agreement, and I watch from my spot beside and a bit behind Law. I can see everything, and though I might look like I’m glazing over everyone, but I’m staring only at one man—the former prospect. He’s standing

next to the newest one, both closest to the door. Neither gets a seat, not till they're officially patched in. We're only letting these two prospects in Church because of what they did for us in Washington, showing them a bit of respect for representing the mother chapter. Might not seem like much to an outsider, but it means something in here.

And he looks pissed. Fucking livid. Once again, a normal man wouldn't see it. But I do, and I'm sure I'm not alone. His jaw is clenched tight, and his fists are balled up at his sides. He's either upset by the man standing by him, or he fucked up a bit in Washington, and Bass has been saying this shit for long enough that he knows he's on a hot brick.

"Is that right?" Law looks over at the two at the door, as we all do.

We're taking our time, assessing them. Even the new kid stands a bit taller. Not that either are kids. I'm like the rest of my brothers and don't pay much attention to a prospect unless he's here at least six months, sometimes nine. They come and go so much, it just ain't worth it. Nothing like hoping for someone to be your brother only to be disappointed when they fuck up, and then the prez has to tell you not to beat their asses up. Even if they deserve more than the one they already get before we kick them out. Doesn't happen all the time, but we're usually sending a prospect packing with a few broken ribs.

Guys come here looking for a cool color to wear and wanting to fuck a bunch of women with zero rules. They think they're someone, but they ain't. They're the same till we say otherwise. Then they have to earn being one of us, proving they know the difference between a weekend rider and a Hound of the Reaper. We demand a lot of our prospects, but the reward to become one of us is nothing they've ever had before. The brotherhood alone is what keeps all of us here. Well, the easy pussy helps.

Not that I care about that anymore. Sure, I still get easy pussy, but it ain't random and different every day. Not that I'm

complaining. Fairy keeps me plenty occupied, and I ain't looking for anything else in that department. She gets me, and I get her. Winners all around.

"I know you were hoping for someone to step in and help Flint, but I got to admit, the kid's not working as a prospect anymore."

If possible, the room grows quieter as it becomes clear who Bass is singling out. To the guy's credit, he's still standing tall and not saying shit, even though I know it's eating him alive. We've all been there for shit like this in one way or another. Too bad the fucker doesn't know we're just playing.

Till Domino breaks. Followed by Jumper and Law. All three crack smiles and start laughing lightly.

"Jesus, man," Bass complains. "What the fuck? I could have gone like ten more minutes."

"Pshhh, please. It's a miracle you lasted this long. Besides, you're always the one to crack first. About time one of us gets to be the saving grace." Domino shakes off Bass's death glare as the rest of the boys relax and chuckle a bit more.

He ain't wrong. Bass is usually the one to break face first. He doesn't do well at pretending to be mad.

"Relax, Prospect. We ain't kicking anyone out." Law waves at the other prospect who's only been here a few months, who just nods but still doesn't smile. Not sure if I've ever seen the guy do that, but I ain't been watching him like Bass has. "We're just welcoming our newest member to the brotherhood. Welcome to the Hounds of the Reaper, Gator."

The guy groans at his new club name but accepts the rest of us saying our congrats and his new rocker that makes him a fully patched member. I heard he hated that name, so I'm not sure why Law gave it to him. I'll have to ask him about it after this. Despite what I'm sure most civilians think, we don't usually give club names that brothers hate. We want them to actually *want* to be here. Being called a name that just

irritates the shit out of a person doesn't exactly make them loyal to something.

"All right, shut up and let's continue. We can celebrate after this shit is done. Prospect, you're only staying 'cause we're going to be doubling up on rounds, and I expect you to relay this shit to the other prospects. Don't be expecting this in the future."

The guy nods at Law in confirmation before the prez continues.

"Duke is still in the weeds. Fairy confirmed that she got a few slices in, but he was breathing before we breached the place."

"Still can't fucking believe how accurate she is with a knife," Jumper says with a shake of his head.

"Believe it. Her uncle's been giving her those since she moved in with him."

The boys turn my direction, and I see Law nod for me to continue. I followed Fairy to see Travis a few days back, not only to ask for his blessing to make her my old lady and for protection but to also come as a representative of the club. I've somehow become the unofficial appointed middleman. Not complaining if the guy is going to become family soon. Which he is. Just not now. Fairy and I will get together, in every sense of the way, but not yet. We ain't rushing things, and the topic isn't even on the table. But when it is, I already know my answer.

I'm all in. Anything and everything she wants. Kids? House with the white fence? Hell, even if it's a trailer park and my ring never goes on her finger, I'll take whatever she gives me like the whipped pussy I am. Which her uncle knew and had zero problem calling me out on.

I spent the entire visit with him, and the guy gave me zero feedback on my question. Just a crazy smile that had Fairy sharing one of her own. Took another few days before he sent me a text. Only four words, and I knew it was him even

though it was from an unknown number and I have zero clue how he got access to a phone: **Don't screw it up.**

And I won't.

"Travis is keeping his ear to the ground. He has the same intel as us: Duke's in the wind. He didn't go south to his prez. Travis believes, and I agree, that Duke's still keeping his extracurricular activities to himself."

Law nods in agreement of my assessment. "Most likely. Psy is many things, but the guy doesn't deal in skin trade, not like this. He prefers the willing and wants his cut up front. He's smart and knows too many eyes come with a position like this."

"Why can't we just call the fucker and tell him?"

I agree with Koop, but Law is already shaking his head.

"Already tried. Guy won't take my calls anymore. Not after I asked where Duke was the first time and he told me to fuck off. We've got too much bad blood between us that started before most of you joined. Hell, maybe before a few of you were born. Hounds and Devils have been enemies since I joined. Duke was a pain in our ass then, and he still is today. But he's got connections here, and that's why he's got a long-ass leash from his own president. Well, that and the guy can't stand him. But Psy knows it's better to have the guy on the payroll than playing against him."

The boys nod in agreement, though reluctantly like me. We get it. We don't *like* it, but we get it.

"Anything else?" Law looks toward me once more.

"Yeah, guy's offering us help."

This has the same effect on the club as it had on me when I heard it from the man himself: raised eyebrows and shock all around. While most of the brothers don't know Travis personally, they all know him by reputation. They also know he and I were close while I was locked up. We had a working

partnership for a while, but never once have the Hounds been gifted something like this.

“He give terms?” Flint inquires, probably already thinking about the debt we owe to the Crazy Eights.

“Nope. Doubt his offer is transferable,” I say with a shake of my head. I already had that thought to see if we could use his offer to pay off the Crazy Eights. After our first meeting with Travis, they looped me in on the bargain that was made to help Mama Bear and the kids after they were taken.

“And I’d rather not lose it so quickly. Having him in our back pocket is worth a lot more than what the Crazy Eights can demand,” Bulldog states as he crosses his arms.

Flint shakes his head in rebuttal. “Don’t think so. They haven’t given us a price for Mama Bear yet, and the more time that passes, the worse I think it’ll be, based on what I know of them. I’d rather have Travis deal with whatever shit it is and take our chances with no allies than to keep waiting out the unknown. Right now we have zero clue when they’ll demand we pay up. We’re strong right now, but we won’t be forever. Our resources are going to get pulled in too many directions, and I got a feeling that’s what half this meeting is about. We got Bass and his group dealing with the local and international mercenary shit. Mad Max and I are working on Duke. We’ve also learned from our recent outing that our people aren’t as safe as they used to be. We need to start running coverage on everyone who means something to us. If Duke and his crew got close, then any of our enemies can. And that doesn’t even cover the monetary aspects as we go international with Bulldog’s beer. We’re running thin. We take one problem off the table if we transfer Travis’s offer.”

“I get what you’re saying. And you’re right. Duke opened our eyes to a problem we didn’t even know we had. Never thought a person would go after the women and kids before, though I should have after what happened to Mama Bear and the cubs. We seem to be the only ones playing by the rules anymore. That’s about to change. No one makes my kid bleed

and lives to talk about it,” Law seethes. “We’re going to double rounds and keep more eyes on those we want to keep close. We’ve got enough boys to make it happen, and I ain’t got a problem calling in a few favors from some other chapters if we get pulled too thin. Each of those brothers started in this chapter before I sent them out and gave them my blessing to grow and expand. They might have their own boys, but their allegiance started here. They keep me in the loop enough that I know it’s still there in their hearts.”

We all grunt in agreement. Not everyone gets lucky enough to prospect in the mother chapter of the Hounds. But Law made it a point when he took over that if a brother wanted his own chapter, he needed to do a stint here first. Didn’t have to prospect but had to put in a few years to prove they knew the rules. The Hounds were created by his old lady’s family, and he takes it seriously to carry on the legacy that it is today.

He’d do nothing to tarnish his Special K’s memory. The other chapter presidents need to be just as strong to lead a group of Hounds. Never know when you’ll have to step in and fill the shoes of the main guy in charge. No one wants to think about a day when Law isn’t part of the club, but we ain’t immortals. We might walk around like we’re gods, but death calls all our numbers at one time or another.

“For now, let’s table this. We need to focus on getting protection in place for our people and covering our asses with going international. We got friends out there, so let’s use them for what they are. We’re being pulled thin as it is. Let’s see if the Crazy Eights pull their marker before we’re ready. If they do, we’ll deal like we always do. But if things get in place like I hope, we can revisit which devil we want to dance with: the one with the face we know or the one we don’t. Dismissed.”

He bangs the scythe gavel on the table, silencing any debate any brother may have. After all, what Law says is law, no matter if you agree or not.

Chapter 29 – Cheyanne

on't know what I expected for a family biker party, but this isn't it. Especially after the last one I went to. At least no one is forcing me away from people. Except for Mad Max. Apparently there's a whole group of brothers he would prefer I don't talk to or even get near.

I really need to see if there's a how-to guide or *Bikers for Dummies*. I'm not judgy, but a biker is harder to figure out than a normal person, which I guess they call civilians. Ruby's been trying to educate me on the terms. She's been working to do that with all of us old ladies.

Apparently, I'm part of *us* now. I don't care if I am or not, as long as I'm my beast's. Which I am. I know I am. We don't need to talk about it, it just is.

"Fuck. Will you quit smiling? You're just as bad as the rest of them," Ruby grumbles beside me. She still has the Band-Aid on her head, and she fucking hates it. Says it messes with her chi.

I tried to explain that chi wasn't affected by that, but she didn't want to hear it. And since I really like having people be my friend, I'm finding it easier to say my piece about the facts I know and just move on to the next topic. They seem to accept me for it and don't laugh too much. More *with* me and not *at* me.

"Bad as who?"

"The other old ladies. You guys get claimed, and then you get all gooey-eyed and crazy-smiled for no reason at all. It's a bit creepy since you usually all smile at the air. I get that you're just thinking about your guy, but it's fucking weird. You look like serial killers or the creepy clowns in those horror movies." She shudders in response to her words, and I tilt my head in response.

"You don't like horror movies?"

“No. And before you ask, ain’t into girly rom-coms either. I like action and anime all day, every day. Horror movies stick with you and usually come back to attack your mind the moment you get a break from other shit. I do *not* need a vision of being dragged into a basement to be chopped up by the cute neighbor who just moved in next door during a walk home from the library. No fucking thank you.”

“If you like action so much, maybe you should actually learn how to protect yourself for once. Can’t always expect Daddy to bail you out,” Kooper says.

My eyes go wide as he walks by the picnic table we’re at. Kitten, who’s sitting with us, grabs Ruby’s arm, holding her down in her seat. Pretty obvious murder is on the club princess’s mind with the look she gives the man who saved her life as he walks away.

“Don’t. You know he’s just looking for a fight. Guy’s pissed that your dad took him off rotation for a while because of the shoulder dislocation. We all know you weren’t the reason for what happened. He’s just bitter and would rather take it out on you than say what he means,” Kitten says quickly, trying harder to hold Ruby down.

“Oh yeah, and what could that asshole possibly mean?” Ruby steams, and I look to Kitten for an explanation. I know some things about Kooper, but it’s not like Mad Max and I talk about the brothers like gossiping biddies. Actually, we don’t do a lot of talking at all.

It’s not uncomfortable silence, but we never need to fill the space. At least I don’t. I might not know everything about my beast, but I feel comfortable in saying I know him enough that if he wanted to talk, he would. I’m sure others think I’m crazy to fall for a guy so fast, but there’s a saying I read once. It was simple: “if you know, you know.” That was it. I’ve never felt anything like I do for Mad Max. Nothing. He basically moved into my place the night we came back from the hospital, and I’m okay with it. There’s no rush to change things. We know we’re it for each other. That we’re each

other's future. I might not fully believe in the greater-good philosophy, but I do believe that if things need to change, they will. Till then, we're happy. That's all that matters.

"He likes you," Kitten says simply.

The laughter that bubbles out of Ruby has almost all the eyes in the room on us. It's deep and clearly bellyaching, as she's holding her stomach. It takes a good five minutes for her to stop laughing, wiping away the tears that flow from her eyes.

"Fuck, I needed that. Trust me, Koop doesn't. He tolerates me. He does as my dad asks, and the only reason why he's on 'Ruby duty' more than the others is because of his background in asset protection. My dad trusts that he can take me on the run and live if need be. That's it. He trusts the rest of the boys, too, but Koop's got a background my dad sees as useful in fulfilling his need to have me watched all the damn time."

I guess that makes sense. But as I look over at Kooper, I also see he's still staring at Ruby. Not sure protection detail is needed in the Hounds' compound, but what do I know? I might be able to tell when someone is lying, but that doesn't mean I can figure out if shady shit is going down or not. But I like these people. And they're home for Mad Max—and me, too, now, I guess.

I see nothing weird going on at the moment, but I make a note to keep an eye out. It wouldn't do any good to let my new home down now that I'm a part of it.

Not that they'll kick me out. At least I don't think so. I just don't want Mad Max to worry. He might not realize that I see it, but I know he does. There's something about him that makes me think he wants to make amends for something. Like he needs to prove himself. And if I can give him the information to do that, then I will. We're a team. Something I love thinking and saying, as I've never had that before.

“God, that was good. I need a beer after that. Thanks, Kitten.”

Ruby bolts, and I just look at Kitten, who shrugs before she leaves and goes to see the guest of the hour.

Mama Bear made a full recovery and is now enjoying the spoils of being a new mama—with zero sleep and all. She says she loves it, but I question that. I’d honestly pick sleep over a tiny human, but that’s just me.

“You give her your gift yet?”

I look up a second before my man takes his seat by me. *My man*. I’ve never squealed before, but I get an urge to do so every time I think about Mad Max in that aspect.

“I did. But then Chains asked me to give them some space.”

He huffs beside me before taking a sip of his beer. “Told you they might not appreciate the knife set. Give them a few years.”

I nod. We had this conversation before we left to come here, when he saw me wanting to put a gift in his saddlebag. I get that a set of throwing knives isn’t for everyone, and maybe not for any newborn, but the gift registry was already picked over, and I thought a personalized gift was better than nothing. I even had the club’s logo engraved on the hilts. And... I might have gifted myself a set too. What can I say? I really like knives.

Not sure if the best part of all of this is that I get a new knife set or that Mad Max didn’t even blink when I said I was gifting the new Hound sharp objects. He just said the kid wouldn’t be able to hold the weight for a bit. Nothing more.

Love him not judging me for anything. Just like I don’t judge that he got the kid a weight set. Okay, sure, they’re plush and able to be chewed on, but he got the kid weights to bulk up. Another gift that Chains didn’t really seem to appreciate at the moment, but I think he will later. I mean, before the kid gets to kindergarten, he’ll be able to lift

another kid if he wants to and also throw a knife and hit a target if needed.

“Gator, take a seat.” Mad Max nods at the guy walking by. I think he’s new. At least I’ve never met him. But I don’t think I’ve met everyone. He’s a new face for sure, and from what I’ve noticed, everyone seems to greet him like he’s been away.

“Thanks, man,” the guy—or kid, as he seems to be younger than most—says as he sits across from us. Maybe even younger than me, but I doubt they have an age requirement in this place. I think it’s more like experience and if they pass a year of bitch duty.

Yeah, been doing some reading up on club life, so sue me. While the club might accept me, quirks and all, I’d rather not say something stupid if I can help it. Not that my man will let anyone laugh at me. He’s already growled or given a few death stares when I’ve made comments that caused some brothers to chuckle.

“Fairy, meet Gator. He’s been out of town on business for the boys for a bit, but he’s back now.”

I take the guy in. Not because he’s got some incredible tats coming up his collar and covering all of his neck and the sides of his shaved head. Or that I know he’s probably got a ton more ink on him under his T-shirt, considering his fingers and arms also sport some cool designs. It’s more because he growls. Never seen anyone do that to my beast. The brothers who talk to him always do so with respect and even a bit of hesitation, it seems. Like they’re afraid he’ll go all *mad* on them.

I can’t keep my curiosity at bay even if I want to. Which I don’t, and Mad Max has never said I needed to, so I ask Gator the questions that come to mind.

“Are you growling because of me or about the business you did? Or even that you got back from it? Were you ordered back? Did something go wrong? Did you want to stay? Do you wish I wasn’t here? Did you want to talk without me listening?”

I can do that. Really good at that. And I'm not sure what happened, but if you're here and no one is glaring, I think whatever you did couldn't have been a bad thing. Or did you want some solo time with Beast? I got to say, he doesn't talk much, but he does with me. He also doesn't do much, but again, he does with me. So if you're wanting some dick, sorry, but I don't think he's the willing type. He'll do experimental things with me, but I think adding in another dick might be too much. Right?"

I look to my man and see his lip twitch as he nods at my question to him.

"Fuck me, she's just like the rest. I swear to Christ I've got no idea how you all get them." Gator groans with a headshake.

"Luck. Maybe a bit of faith. Mostly we don't let them leave when we get a taste." Mad Max winks at me before drinking his beer.

Gator snorts at my man's response. I only smile. Boy, is he right. One kiss and the next thing we know, we're living together. Okay, it didn't happen that fast, but I basically knew right away that he was different. And in my mind, different isn't all that bad. It's good. Especially when talking about my beast.

"To your question, Fairy, it's the name. No disrespect to the club, 'cause a club name is an honor to have. Just don't like how I got it."

I'm so intrigued, I'm surprised I don't jump over the table and grab his shirt, demanding he tell me everything. Probably helps that Mad Max has a hold on my leg. Has since he sat down. I love that he's always touching me when he gets close. Makes me feel like I'm a part of him. Not in a creepy "going to carry a lock of his hair in my pocket" sort of way, but in a comfortable "I belong with him" way.

"Beast already told me how he got his name. Nothing fancy about just getting mad. I sort of think they couldn't

think of anything on the spot and maybe were on a movie kick when they put his name together. So it can't be all that bad, right?"

"Beast, huh? I can see that. Too bad he doesn't refer to you as Beauty. Would make Princess and Grace happier than clams, I bet, knowing they got a real-life fairy tale at the club. But I see why he calls you Fairy too."

I tilt my head at my beast. I guess in a way we resemble the movie, if the girl had a fascination for throwing knives and the prince did time for attempted murder. I look back at our guest, and he answers the question I haven't voiced yet.

"Fairies have a habit of causing mischief, and from what the boys tell me, you have quite an interesting tale yourself for how you came into the club. As for being called Gator, I used to throw away the Gatorade drinks that Kitten placed as mile markers after I drank them when I was on gate duty as a prospect. The name stuck the instant she was hauled into Law's office for trespassing. Nothing like being known for bitch duty and an energy drink all in one."

Mad Max grunts at that. "That might have put the name in the boss's head, but that ain't it at all. Not from what he told me. You got a knack, kid. You see things, and you don't let them get by you. You might not know it all, but you sit and wait, seeing what happens. And while you wait, you watch, check shit out, and I bet your blood pumps to bite. And like the damn gator, I got no doubt you'll wrestle to the ground any prey that gets close."

The guy's face is full of shock, and he takes a minute to clear his throat a few times before he nods a bit. I think more for himself, as if accepting the new name, than anything else.

"Thanks, man." He coughs once more and takes a drink of his beer.

"Anytime. Now that you got the patch, when you going to get the old lady?" Mad Max wraps his arm around me, and I

just snuggle in deep. He smells amazing, and I like the warmth he offers.

For the first time since I met Gator, I see a spark of fire in his eye. “Already working on it, man. She just doesn’t know it yet.”

I shake from the rumble of laughter coming out of my beast at that.

“Good luck. If I can offer you a bit of advice, be prepared for anything. As Hounds, we already got a certain rep about us. Only the strong survive, and we only get with those willing to take on a fight with us. Make sure she’s worth it and willing.”

“Oh, she’s worth it all right. It’s the willing that I’m working on.”

“Then grab on tight, fucker. It’s going to be a long ride but worth it.” Mad Max turns his head to me and looks so deeply into my eyes, I think he’s speaking to my soul. “So worth it.”

I have no clue if Gator says anything after that, or even if a bomb is going off. All I know is the feel of my man’s lips on mine and the love in my heart for him. I’d do anything for him, even die. But he won’t let me, not my guy. I’m stuck with him, and I won’t have it any other way.

Epilogue – Mad Max

uck, it's good to have a reason to party again," Bass
“F says with a stretch, as if the idea of not having one has
exhausted him.

“Never thought you needed a reason, Bass.”

“Fuck you, Flint. I've been working my ass off. Haven't
stopped since I left.”

We just laugh, knowing Bass as well as we do. Only Flint's
willing to call bullshit on him. We all would, actually, but I
think the boys and I are giving him a few days to settle back
into routine before the ragging really begins. He was gone a
few months on club business; it gives him a pass for at least
two days. Three if we're really nice. Which most of us aren't.

“Bullshit. Hey, Gator, tell the truth, man. Did Bass really
have it hard up in Washington like he says, or is that all just
crap like we think?”

“Oh, he was hard all right. But not for the reasons you
think.”

We all laugh as Bass makes a move to dive for Gator, who
easily steps back. It's all in good fun, and no one really expects
a fight. But if there is one, it wouldn't be the first or last time
a brother got in a few hits for good fun. And that's all it is,
good fun.

Well, till they spill someone's drink or break shit. That's
just wasteful, and the club ain't about dishing out more
money if we don't have to. We do if necessary, but if it's over
brothers fighting? Fuck that. That shit comes out of their
pockets, and Law always tacks on a hefty interest fee that
fucking sucks.

“He did what?” The scream draws all our eyes across the
compound to Kitten. She was sitting with the other old ladies,
but she's now standing and looking ready to get her claws out.

“That motherfucker! I’m going to kill him. You stay right there. I’m on the way.”

She’s marching to the exit, and half the damn club is on her heels. Not much pisses off Kitten. At least I’ve never seen her mad. Maybe once when we ran out of Diet Coke, but nothing like this. I look to Flint, and even he seems alarmed.

“Kitten, what’s going on? Who we killing, and how many body bags we bringing?” Flint asks as he catches his girl and grabs her arm to spin her around and face him.

“You ain’t killing anyone. That asshole is all mine. Goddamn bastard left my girl on the side of the road ’cause she wouldn’t put out. Fuck that shit. Only reason why I’m the one killing him and not Bailey is ’cause I got a yard to bury the fucker in.”

“Wait, that was Bailey?” I turn to see Ruby marching up to Kitten and Flint, along with Fairy, Lady, and Mama Bear, baby in her arms and all.

“Yeah. That asshole she was seeing just proved that he really *is* an asshole and not just because I didn’t like how he saw the club.”

“Well, you ain’t doing it alone, girl. That bitch of yours is my kind of woman. You go, I go,” Ruby says with a nod.

“Might want to check the head wound. Doubt you’ll do much damage if you were even *given* a shot,” Kooper snipes from the edge of the group.

“Fuck you very much. I’ve been putting men in their place since I was fourteen and grew boobs. Didn’t need Daddy and the club to fuck them up when they got too handsy, and I sure as shit don’t need it now. Believe it or not, I know how to cut a man’s dick off and get away with it. It ain’t my first rodeo.”

“What?” Law growls as he pushes the brothers out of the way to get in front of his daughter. Kooper’s moving in close as well, I notice.

She rolls her eyes. “We’ll talk about it later. I handled it. Mom knew, even helped, so don’t get all protective over shit that’s in the past. Just know I ain’t as weak as you like to assume I am ’cause I only show you the side you want to see. The doting daughter and all that shit. But remember, I came from you and Mom. Special K had a special way she did shit, and she taught me well.”

“Fucking hell.” Prez grabs his daughter and pulls her in tight, blocking us from seeing the tears that were slipping when she spoke. Got half a mind to think this is something she’s been holding on to for a while. Not the part about cutting a dick off, which just makes me shudder, but telling her dad what she really is capable of and how she hides it because he might not show that he wants to see it.

“Where is she?” The cold tone out of Gator’s mouth has the group looking to him as we ignore the father-daughter moment before us.

Kitten swallows before she glances at her man, then back to Gator. “East of Topeka. At a nightclub. He dropped her off on I-70. Think she was walking for a while, ’cause she said she couldn’t get signal on her cell for a bit till she got to the bar. Or I think that’s what she said. The reception was spotty at best, but I know she’s stranded.”

“What’s the name?”

Kitten is wringing her hands, and I have half a mind to think this is the woman Gator’s got his eye on. Going off a gut feeling from the way he keeps demanding shit from Flint’s woman, and that Flint ain’t stepping in to tell him to back off. Brothers know when not to impede a claiming. You only do so if you’re also interested in the same woman, or you know something that would fuck that brother up. Flint’s smiling, so he must not have a problem with this shit.

“Tied Up and Tied Down.”

“Fuck,” Gator hisses as he spins on his heel and heads for his bike. Even I know what kind of club that is. Pretty fucking

obvious with that kinda name. No way would I want my woman in a place like that, at least not without me.

“Let’s go. I’ll drive.” Ruby pushes out of her father’s hands and grabs Kitten. “Last thing Bailey needs is an alpha male making shit worse after the night she had. Let’s go, ladies. You’re in this too.”

Lady kisses her man’s cheek as she walks by him, but he grabs her and spins her around for a more appropriate goodbye kiss.

“Take note of what you like, and if you’re good, we might go back,” he says as he slaps her ass and sends her on her way.

A blush stains her cheeks, but the girl knows not to be embarrassed that we could all hear Bulldog’s command. She holds her head high as she follows Kitten and Ruby.

“Here you go. The bottle is ready for him when he wakes up. Think you’ve got another thirty minutes before then.” Mama Bear passes her bundle of joy into the arms of her man, who looks shocked as hell.

“Wait, what? You can’t just go beat the shit out of someone. You’re a mom now,” Chains protests with a look of panic on his face as he cradles his son.

“Yeah, and you’re a dad. Meaning you’ve got to handle *this* shit when I go handle *Hounds* shit. Whether you like it or not, Ruby’s just as much in charge as Law is. She says to do shit, you do the shit. Not only that, but I also like Bailey, and I ain’t about to let her have a crappy night if I can help it. So kiss me goodbye, smack my ass like Bulldog did his woman, and get your daddy work on. And if you’re good, I’ll make it up to you when I get back.” She waggles her eyebrows a few times, and all Chains does is roll his eyes before he does as he’s told.

“You, too, Fairy. Might need your throwing arm,” Ruby throws over her shoulder.

My eyes go wide, and I turn to my woman, who looks around like she misheard what was said. Then she does this adorable thing and points to her chest, asking the group that's still standing with us, "Me?"

I smile as I close in on her, grabbing her up in my arms and kissing her neck. "Yeah, babe. Have fun. Try not to get blood on the new blades."

It takes half a second for her to realize she's being picked for something. Makes me curious to know if she was ever picked for anything as a kid. I doubt it from the way she told me a bit about her past. Fucking love that my club accepts her and wants her with them.

"See you soon." She kisses me briefly and then skips to the waiting SUV. I can't smile any wider as I watch her wave like crazy at me before she gets in and shuts the door a second before it starts to drive off.

"Boys." Law only has to say one word, not that it's needed. We already know.

"On it."

Flint, Bulldog, Bass, Kooper, and I mount our bikes. Not only do we have our women on their way to fuck shit up, which is hot as hell, but we never leave a brother out there alone. And especially not when he's probably about to put his foot in his mouth. We all do it when we're after the one we're claiming, even me. Ain't about to let him do it alone. Shit, might even make for a good story.

"Think he's got a chance?" Kooper looks to Bass, who just shakes his head with a smile.

"Not in a million years. Not that that'll stop him. Gator to the core, that one. He'll dig in and wait her out till she tires, and then he'll strike. And I don't know about you, but I can't wait to see the fucking fireworks this one throws at him. It's going to be epic."

C8

Connecting...

Confirming connection is secure

//: Target has been acquired. Connection established. P has begun.

Confirm origin of P. ...://

//: In processing.

Noted. ...://

//: Forget your code book again?

Fuck off. Any issues with neighbors? ...://

//: Negative. Had meet and greet but no blood was spilled.

Continue to phase two. Also, your package arrived. It wasn't what we ordered but still works. ...://

//: Good. We had some problems with delivery before. Glad to see it was received.

Should we be expecting any more? ...://

//: Anticipate two more with your original order as well.

We will be waiting. ...://

Connection terminated

Get a Free Book

Gator will be available April 2024

[BUY NOW!](#)

To sign up for the monthly newsletter and get a copy of LAW, a free novella, go to my website.

Go to **www.SJROWE.com** to get started!

Thanks for Reading

Thank you for reading *Mad Max: Hounds of the Reaper MC (Book 4)*. If you enjoyed this book and would like to give back to the author, please consider writing a review! Reviews are a tremendous help for authors. So if you were moved and enjoyed this book enough to write even one sentence of encouragement, it would be a huge boon.

[Review Here](#) or

Go to www.SJROWE.com to get started!

Also by S.J. Rowe

Titles in The Cain and Abel Series:

[Marked for Seduction](#)

[Marked for Deception](#)

[Marked for Protection](#)

Titles in The Hounds of the Reaper MC Series:

[Chains](#)

[Bulldog](#)

[Flint](#)

[Mad Max](#)

Coming Soon:

[Gator](#)

About the Author

After traveling the world as a child, S.J. Rowe has found a home in the southwest with her husband and two kids. She continues to visit exotic destinations around the world with her best friends, and when she is home, she splits her time between watching baseball and singing in the car. To unwind, she enjoys a good cup of coffee while curled up watching Star Wars.

Please enjoy the following excerpt from the first book in the Hounds of the Reaper Series: Chains

Chapter 1 - Maddy

Five weeks have passed since I became a single mom—of sorts—and things are finally getting into a routine. I didn't know how the kids would react to me. And let's be honest here, I was clueless about what I was doing. I still don't know.

Grace has been easy. The girl stole my heart immediately and had no problem letting me in. From her blue eyes looking into my soul with so much hope for a better life to the way her cornfield-blond hair curled into ringlets that bounced with each step she took. She's a genuine princess to the core, despite that she refuses to be called one, preferring to be known as Supergirl Grace, or Gigi for short. It doesn't make a lick of sense, but when I first called her that, she couldn't stop giggling. Even Teddy showed one of his rare smiles. She's still so young, which helps me on so many levels. I try not to think about how she has no mama anymore, but I don't think she remembers her much.

From the way Teddy speaks occasionally, even though Jennie died less than a year ago, I get the feeling she wasn't around a ton. It makes my heart ache to know they were alone so much. They had their grandma, at least. She might have forgotten things, but at least she was around. That had to count for something.

For today, Grace is all about superheroes. But with the way I keep showing them new things every day, I'm sure my little superhero will change into something else by the end of

the month. Heck, she was all about solving mysteries the first two weeks, and we watched nothing but *Scooby-Doo*.

It took some time, but she soon moved from clinging to her brother to me. Not sure what I did to deserve the love of the sweetest superhero ever, but I cherish each hug, each cuddle with my entire heart. It's made for some difficult times when she refuses to be out of my arms, proving more than once she has abandonment issues. On nights that the cling monster comes out, we usually order in, as there's no way I can cook with one hand. I'm not that talented yet. But I'm working on it.

I have no illusion that I can keep Teddy and Grace, but I willingly live in denial that the day won't come soon.

Teddy has been harder to get to warm up to me. He's a tough nut to crack, and I'm in no rush. He's been through hell. Might weigh the size of a peanut, but he seems to carry everything on his shoulders. Or at least he tries to. He watches over his sister more times than not, and he's started even watching over me. I can't tell if it's his concern for me or being wary of me.

Even without getting the dossier on him that Izzy sent over after the third day, there was sadness in his hazel eyes that no little boy should ever have. His hair matches his sister's in color, but he likes to keep it short. In his words, he wants to see what's coming at all times.

I will admit that I don't have a ton of experience on how to handle trauma kids. Google searches have helped a bit, but mostly they've made me think I've been screwing it all up with what I've been doing. Apparently buying everything the little boy wants, or what I think he wants, is a bad thing. Well, too damn bad. The boy needs happiness, and I'm trying to give it to him, even if that means I have to buy a new Lego set every day. The kid is wicked smart and able to build anything I put in front of him.

The routine is simple for us. Kids wake up at the ass crack of dawn, pulling me out of bed to turn on cartoons. They

enjoy a few snacks while watching silliness while I try to wake up after drinking a few cups of coffee. Then breakfast, followed by another cartoon or two, depending on the time. By ten, I usually have them outside. I have nothing really awesome in the backyard. The house is a fixer-upper, in and out. Most of the areas inside are decent enough, which is why we focus on the outside for an hour or two. I try to get them into planting flowers and mowing, which usually works for ten minutes, and then they're off exploring the area, which isn't that large but big enough for them based on the smiles they have. It's great watching them play together.

By half past eleven, we head inside to wash up and eat lunch. Gigi goes down for a nap, and Teddy, who constantly says he's too big for one, will look at one of his books before crashing out for at least an hour. I crash then, too, as the kids wear me out all the time. We typically fill the afternoons with Teddy building something. Gigi was off being a superhero that gave tea parties to all her stuffed animals. And yes, if I get Teddy a new Lego, Gigi gets a new stuffy. What can I say? I've already admitted I'm clueless. Who cares if the girl has about forty different stuffies already? If she spots another one, I know I'm going to buy it for her.

Dinner is early—well, for me anyhow. Before the kids showed, I usually worked on the house till well past eight before calling it quits, but I soon realized that one great asset the kids have is they love to sleep. Bedtime is at 7:30 p.m. for both, which is awesome, but makes dinner at six fun, especially since I have to wrap up my stuff at five. Who knew cooking for three took so much time?

I'd like to believe that once the kids go down, I live it up. That I'd focus on the house, get back on schedule to get things done in the timeframe I planned to sell the place in the next few months. But honestly? I usually spend way too much time googling how to cook something, or buying something new I think they would like. Even looking up ways to coax Teddy out of his shell a bit more. He's said little unless he's trying to protect his sister.

That first day was interesting. After our little coffee talk—always making sure I have one in hand to keep the smile on my face—we did breakfast, then went shopping. I asked them a million questions about what they liked, and they didn't answer, so I just chose what I thought looked good. When I piled up the baskets full of clothes at the first store and bought everything without blinking, they soon realized that if they wanted something, it was theirs. I'm not loaded, but a few delayed installments in my renovation were worth the smiles from Gigi. I even got one out of Teddy when I found his love for Legos while we took a turn around the toy aisle. Books were in the basket already, but kids have to have toys. It's a must.

I'm just cleaning up the cereal bowls as the kids finish the latest *Scooby-Doo* when I hear the grumble of bikes. Both kids notice as well and look at me in alarm. This isn't the first time we've heard the noise of a motorcycle going by. A few times we went into town, one would pass. Both kids freaked at the sound. Gigi usually gets over it quickly with a distraction, but Teddy remembers enough to have nightmares about them.

That's another routine we've gotten into. His nightmares are getting less frequent. Not nightly, like when he first showed up, but a few times a week. He wakes up screaming, and I run to his room asking what's wrong. He never tells me, so I just hold him and tell him it'll be okay. That's the only time he lets me hold him. The boy might pretend he's a man, but those nights, he needs a mama, and I'm always happy to oblige, for a little while at least. The only way for him to drift back to sleep is reading him *The Cat in the Hat*. I don't argue if he wants it nightly, or repeated three times before he sleeps. It's what he needs, and with all my Google searching, that's one thing I learned: do what they need to feel safe.

A quick glance out the front window shows five motorcycles pulling in. My heart's in my throat as I hear the pounding their engines made.

I smile at the kids, faking it so much my jaw aches. "Do me a favor and let me know who the shark ghost is. I'll be back

soon.”

Teddy does the cutest chin lift ever, saying he has my back without words.

Buddy boy, I got yours. Don't you worry about it.

Opening the hall closet, I angle my back to the TV so the kids don't see what I'm doing. I reach for the top shelf and pull down my Remington. Loading it quickly, I walk out the front door, pushing the screen door open with the barrel as I smile down at my guests, who parked in front of the porch.

“Good morning. Can I help you with anything?”

Not going to lie, I totally think I'm smug as shit when they all hesitate to get off their bikes.

Yeah, dumbasses, I ain't letting you take my kids.

Wait, “my kids”?

Shit, I'm already claiming them. That's one rule for being a foster parent: don't get too attached.

Too late, looks like I already am.

My smugness dies as the biggest of the bunch—and probably the sexiest man I have ever seen in my life—slides off his seat, as graceful as water rolling off rocks, and stalks toward me.

My mouth's drier than a dryer sheet and tastes fouler. The man has bulk from what I can see, and it's all in a yummy way. His sunglasses are the type that cost more than a reasonable person should pay, but damn, do they look good on him. I only notice he has no helmet, like the rest of them, because I'm drawn to his hair more than I should be. I have no idea if it's 'cause I'm turned on or just jealous as shit that his dirty-blond hair—emphasis more on dirty—is silky and has a wave to it as it drifts just past his shoulder blades. That and his full beard have me wondering if he's more lion than anything. I mean, it's a lot of hair in one area, like a mane. *Is this guy some kind of king of the pack?* He definitely has the alpha male thing going on. As well as the hunting prey part,

especially since he doesn't seem to stop or take his eyes off the house for a second, only halting when I cock the shotgun.

"Where are they?"

His growl sends a shiver over me. I hope he sees it as fear. I would rather him think I'm scared than the fact that his deep, husky voice has another effect on me.

"And who might that be?"

"Don't play dumb with me, bitch. I know they're here. I want to see my niece and nephew right goddamn now."

Yeah, fuck the lust. This guy is definitely on my shit list. I can just scroll the internet and find a Thor lookalike to cure whatever draw I had for him for a second. The second before he spoke, that is.

"First off, don't call me bitch. And second, I don't know who you are or who your niece and nephew are."

"Quit with the bull, honey. We know Teddy and Grace are here. If you know what's best for you, you'll let their uncle see them before we stop playing nice," one of the other bikers still on his ride jumps in, speaking for the group.

I spare the guy a look, not foolish enough to take my eyes off the man before me for more than a second. He wears the same glasses. Big fucker too. But while the god before me has more hair than I do—which is a fuck-ton—this one has his hair slicked back to show a widow's peak. Just enough 'stache and beard on him to be more than noticeable but less than using some special gels to maintain.

"Nice? Pretty sure I'm the one with the gun. Now tell me who the hell you are."

"Think that will stop him?" From my periphery, I see his head bob to the beast man before me, the one claiming to be the kids' uncle. "Don't think you want to try it."

I should stand my ground, but against my will, my eyes travel up and down the man who hasn't backed down. His fists are tight at his sides. Wonder if he's contemplating using

them against me. I might have the gun—well, the only one with it out, anyway. I’m not an idiot. These boys are packing. But despite my show—for really, it’s all show, because I can only get off one round, two if rushed—we all know they can overtake me.

“Doesn’t matter,” the beast growls in response to my question about who he is.

Is he seriously playing this stupid game with me over what his name is? I might be one against half a dozen, but I will shoot first.

From the clench in his jaw, he must realize I’m not backing down without knowing some idea of who he is.

“Chains.”

I barely control my eye roll. “Legal name, dumbass.”

“What the fuck did you say to me?” He takes a step forward, hands clenched even tighter, and the men get off their bikes as if in a dance sequence.

I don’t hesitate. Pulling the trigger, I fire into the dirt at his feet. He pauses and glares up at me as I cock my shotgun again and aim it at his center mass. “Damn right, I want a legal name. Only two people know who I have inside, me and my friend, and you don’t have tits. Now stop acting like a pussy and prove to me you’re their uncle. We’ll start off slow. Your name, asshole. What is it?”

Through clenched teeth, he snarls, “James Randall.”

“And what was your sister’s middle name?”

“Are you kidding me with this shit?”

I don’t hide my sarcasm. “Does it look like I’m kidding you?”

“Fine. It was Janet.”

“No, that was what was on paper. What did the family call her?”

Taking off his sunglasses, he tilts his head to the side as he pauses and looks me over slowly. "You knew Jennie?" His voice changes tone for a moment.

"The name." I hold firm. I'm not about to show I'm anything but badass, but come on. The guy did that slow look up and down on a girl. I'm practically a puddle of goo on the ground from that look. Especially from the intensity that his light brown eyes have right now. So light they're almost yellow. Not yellow like the sun, more like a metallic gold, ones I would have no problem looking at for a very long time.

If things were different, of course.

"Dammit. We called her Dammit Janet."

A twitch of a smile touches my lips. "She hated that movie."

"Who didn't?" He doesn't smile, but the intensity isn't rolling off him as much. I almost feel like I can breathe, as his anger had been choking me even with him off the front steps.

"We done?" His eyebrow quirks up. It's a neat trick, one I've always wished I possessed.

"One more. What was her favorite ice cream?"

He shakes his head before he even speaks. "Trick question. She didn't have one."

"Not as kids, but she did. What was it? If you are who you claim you are, then you know this."

I watch as his eyes draw together before he looks down and then back at his friends, who just shrug. I'm not trying to trick him, but I need to know if he's legit. Jennie may have been a lot of things, but getting tied to trouble was her well-known trait. And from what Izzy showed me of how she died, and what we knew of her activities prior to death, the kids weren't safe. That's why they're with me. The people she associated with were known for many things, but none for being a loving parent. More like stealing kids *from* loving parents.

“Vanilla.” He pauses, and I almost pull the trigger on him before turning it on his friends. “Two scoops of vanilla that she topped with a can of Diet Coke and five cherries on the stem and called a cherry float. Tasted like shit.”

“Don’t knock it. We trademarked it when we invented it.”

His eyes widen when he realizes who I am. I never met him, but Jennie and I were pretty close for a while. There was no doubt he would have heard about me and I him. I doubt he got my name, but that ice cream shit was something we created during a semester of community college finals when we were tired but needed the sugar to keep us up.

“Great. Now that we did *that* song and dance, let me see my family.”

“Not so fast, dumbass. I might agree you are who you say you are, but that doesn’t mean I’m letting you see my kids.”

“They aren’t yours, bi—” My head twitch has him changing his word. “—woman. They’re mine. Jennie always wanted her kids to be with family. With Gran dead, that leaves me. So get out of the way.”

“Again, not going to happen. And before you piss and moan any more, I’ll tell you why. First off, Jennie didn’t leave a will.”

“What?”

“Exactly, which means they belong to the state. Also, no way in hell will the state give custody of her kids, family or not, to a felon who just got out of jail. How long have you been out, anyway? Like a week or something?”

“Try three hours.”

My brows fly up my forehead. “You got out today? Are you fucking insane?”

“No, just want my family. You get it? *Mine*. Not yours. Don’t think I didn’t hear you claim them. They ain’t yours, so get that out of your head. They belong with me and are coming with me.”

Oh my God, I can't even believe this guy. He's a one-track-mind asshole. Did he even think this through? He's right that they aren't mine, but I'm not about to let someone, even if they are family, just take them from me without knowing they're safe. I wasn't instantly a queen at this whole parenting thing, but even I know the basics that are needed with kids. Does he? Ten to one, he has no fucking clue.

My anger at the audacity of this guy has me venting more than I probably should about the personality traits I've learned from the last few weeks of being Teddy and Grace's sole provider.

"Sure, and where will they stay, huh? You got a place? Or do you live with these guys? You got somewhere for them to sleep? 'Cause Grace and Teddy can't sleep in the same room. And Grace needs to have lullaby music to fall asleep to that you have to reset twice for her to stay asleep. Teddy, he might not need music, but he does need a night-light. And when he comes in your room at night, 'cause it will happen with the nightmares, you better not have anyone with you. The last thing that six-year-old boy needs is to see you finally getting your dick sucked by, I'm sure, the willing groupies you have around your place."

With the way his cheeks hollow, he must be biting them to keep from screaming at me, or just at his lack of planning. I know I won the bet. Wish I'd put money on it; could have used the extra cash. Seriously, did the guy really think he was just going to roll out of here with them?

"Besides, how the fuck are they supposed to come with you? Do you have car seats that strap to the backs of those bikes of yours?"

Breathing deep, I lower the gun, not putting it down completely. I'm not that stupid. But I have to see it from his side. They're his family, but he needs to know it all. Well, not all, but a little more, at least till I trust him completely.

"Besides, motorcycles terrify the kids."

“What the fuck?” This comes from the biker who spoke earlier.

I nod to the group, taking my time to look them over. They're in various leather, clean enough but definitely falling under the scruffy definition compared to clean-cut. “I don't know why. We've seen some in town. The noise bugs the shit out of them, but I usually can get them settled after a bit. But seeing one, that really sets them off. Grace ends up clinging to me like a monkey for hours, if not days. And Teddy shuts down completely, and his nightmares are the worst.” I shake my head and feel the pangs of sadness just thinking about the night I'm sure Teddy will have after this. “If you care for them, which I'm sure you do if you came here before thinking twice about getting laid first, like most people do after they get out of prison, then think this through. They don't know you—I mean, not really. You're a name, nothing more right now. Teddy recalls you from what Jennie has told him. Grace, well, she has a picture of you as a kid, but that's about it. Their lives have been shitty lately. I'm not saying I'm making it all sunshine and rainbows, but at least with me, they can count on someone who will have their back.”

“I'll have their back.” His growl is back again, but his glare isn't half as intense as the first time.

“I'm sure you will, just not right now. I'm not trying to replace you. I'm just saying think it through.”

“She's right, man,” the other one mutters.

Chains runs his hand through his hair. Why is that such a turn-on? “Shit. They're the only family I got left.” I can hear the exhaustion in his voice. I've known that type of exhaustion. The kind that eats at your soul, making you feel helpless but knowing you have to keep fighting even if it's taking more strength than you ever knew you had.

“And *you* are the only one they have left.” Fuck, I need to compromise on this. Not for me but for them. “Look, how about we plan for a dinner in a week? You come back in a

truck or something, spend some time getting to know them. We do that for a few months and see where it leads.”

He takes a moment to look at the ground before he raises his head and puts his sunglasses back on. Nodding once to me, he walks back to his bike, sliding his leg over it smoothly.

Wow, okay, didn't expect him to agree so easily. Guess this guy can see sense after all. Just have to break it down for the big ox.

“I'll be back tonight.”

He starts his engine just as I take a step off the porch. “Wait, what? Tonight? No, a week or something. Give them time.” Panic is setting in. I need time to prepare for this guy at my house. I know my body is sending me all the signals that it wouldn't take much for me to hump his leg. He's pretty with a capital *P*. I want him, and my body is saying it's *craving* him in such a short time of knowing him. But my head—thank God—knows it's beyond bad. I need more time in my head to get my body under control before I spend any length of time with this guy.

Even with his sunglasses on, I can feel his eyes lock with mine. “Tonight.”

As the group peels out of the drive, I really hope someone heard me scream that we eat at six. Otherwise, the guy's going to be extremely disappointed if he shows up after eight and we're all in bed.

Content

[Get a Free Book](#)

[Chapter 1 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 2 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 3 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 4 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 5 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 6 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 7 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 8 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 9 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 10 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 11 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 12 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 13 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 14 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 15 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 16 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 17 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 18 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 19 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 20 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 21 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 22 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 23 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 24 - Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 25 - Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 26 – Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 27 – Cheyanne](#)

[Chapter 28 – Mad Max](#)

[Chapter 29 – Cheyanne](#)

[Epilogue – Mad Max](#)

[C8](#)

[Get a Free Book](#)

[Thanks for Reading](#)

[Also by S.J. Rowe](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Chapter 1 - Maddy.](#)