

Harley
Wylde

DIXIE REAPERS MC #18

PYTHON

Changeling Press

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**PYTHON (DIXIE REAPERS MC
18)**

A Dixie Reapers Bad Boys Romance

Harley Wylde

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Harley Wylde

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A Dixie Reapers Bad Boys Romance

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Galina — All my life I've been taught to obey men without question, but when I find out my father has offered my hand in marriage to Dima, a man who's already killed two women, I know I've had enough. The Vor offers me a chance to run, and I take it. Living with the Dixie Reapers MC was supposed to be temporary. When I see one of the club girls harassing Python, I step in. Maybe I shouldn't have. I never thought something so simple would become a complicated situation.

Python — All I wanted was to enjoy the single life forever. Didn't matter if the pretty little Russian caught my eye. I wasn't the type to settle down. Then she went and claimed me in front of a club girl. The officers in my club are having far too much fun with this. I'd planned to keep her at arm's length — until I found out she was in danger. With trouble breathing down her neck, I don't have a choice. I'll make her mine in every way that matters. Anyone dares to touch her, even the Bratva, and I'll bury them.

PROLOGUE

Lina

A cabinet door slammed, then another. It wouldn't surprise me if he'd broken them again. I heard my father's steps as he stomped his way around the house. The crash of a vase. The rattle of the silverware drawer. More glass breaking that made me wonder if he'd just smashed the family pictures. It wouldn't be the first time. The steps drew closer, and he pounded his fist on my bedroom door.

“Galina, open the door.”

No matter how scared I was of my father, there was someone I feared more. The Vor. He'd promised he'd get me out of here. I knew of my father's plans. He wanted a connection to the Belov family and planned to use me to do it. I'd been raised to obey without question. I'd have done it this time too, except the Vor had come to me. The Belovs only had one son — Dima. He looked perfect on the outside. Inside lay a monster. The whispers among the women in the Bratva said he'd killed more than one whore, and even a girlfriend or two.

My father didn't care what happened to me. As long as he could line his pockets, nothing else mattered. If he knew Vadim Ivanov had contacted me with a way out of this nightmare, he'd have forced me to be with Belov even sooner. Instead, he'd arranged for an engagement ceremony to take place in one week.

Our family was much lower in rank than the others. In

fact, my father was nearly at the very bottom. Our home was a modest size and couldn't compare to the mansions the higher-ups lived in. I knew it was my father's dream to climb his way to the top. It was a pity he only had one child. Me. Once I escaped, he'd lose his bargaining chip.

The door rattled on the hinges as he banged on it again. "You little slut, open the fucking door."

I pressed my lips together and remained silent, refusing to engage with him. Easing my phone from my pocket, I texted Vadim. *I need help immediately.*

The message showed he'd read it. He wouldn't risk texting me back and my phone making any sort of noise. The man was too smart for that. No, he'd send someone to extract me from the house. I had faith in him. The Vor would make sure it was handled silently.

More glass broke from somewhere in the house. My father continued to curse and yell, until everything went quiet. I didn't dare move. It could have been a trap to lure me out. A gentler knock sounded at the door.

"Miss Kuzmin? My name is Artem. The Vor sent me."

Did I dare believe him? "Where's my father?"

"He's alive, but unconscious. Please open the door, Miss Kuzmin. We need to get you to safety as quickly as possible."

I stood and crept closer, pressing my ear to the door. I had no way of knowing if he spoke the truth. Wait. The Vor! I text him again. *Did you send someone named Artem to get me?*

It only took him a moment to answer. *Da. Go with him.*

Opening the door, I stared at the young man on the other side. He didn't seem much older than me. He tipped his head toward my room. "You should pack anything you don't want to leave behind. You won't be returning here."

It didn't take me long to pack a bag with the only picture I had of my mother, a few precious items she'd given me before her death, and some clothes. Everything else could stay for all I cared. As long as I was free of my father, and preferably the Bratva, then nothing else mattered. The Vor hadn't said where he'd send me, but it had to be better than here.

"I'm ready."

He took the bag from me and led the way to a blacked-out car in the driveway. He helped me into the back seat, then climbed into the passenger side up front. The driver's gaze met mine in the rearview mirror and the emptiness sent a chill down my spine. If ever there was someone with a killer's eyes, it was this man. For a brief moment, I wondered if I'd made a mistake. Had I put my trust in the wrong person? The Vor seemed genuine when he'd said he'd help me escape my father and the Bratva. I didn't understand why he'd made the offer. What if I'd just put my life in the wrong hands?

"We'll be on the road for quite a while. Did the Vor tell you where you'll be going?" Artem asked.

"Nyet."

He gave me a slight nod and flashed a smile. I had a

feeling he was trying to set me at ease. It worked, slightly. The man at least seemed human compared to the driver. I wasn't sure the other man felt anything at all.

“Alabama and a group called the Dixie Reapers. They weren't expecting you quite so soon, but I know they'll find a place for you. It's the only way to keep you out of your father's hands, and Belov's.”

“I appreciate everything you're doing for me.”

Maybe this would be okay. At least I now knew where they were taking me, as long as they hadn't lied. With no one to contact, I had no choice but to put my life in their hands. Thanks to my father, the only friends I had were ones he'd handpicked. If I talked to any of them, they'd only tell him where to find me.

Crap! I pulled my phone from my pocket and tapped Artem on the shoulder. “Um, should I have left this behind?”

He saw the device in my hand and let out a muffled curse before taking it from me. He popped out the battery and sim card before tossing the phone out the window. I was going to take that to mean I'd fucked up. We hadn't been on the road for very long, so it wasn't likely my father had tried to track me. He might not even be awake yet, depending on how Artem knocked him out.

“How will I contact the Bratva?” I asked.

“You won't,” Artem said. “This is a new start for you, Galina. A new life. Once we leave you with the Dixie Reapers, the Bratva will be a thing of your past.”

“The Vor is really going to let me leave like this?” I asked. “There’s no catch?”

“Only a select few people know of this. The Vor isn’t happy with the way things have been run, the way fathers use their daughters. It hasn’t been long since things changed. You have Viktor and his wife to thank for this.”

I knew of Viktor but hadn’t met him before. He was too high up for me to have ever moved in the same circles as him or his wife. I didn’t understand what he had to do with any of this, but I wasn’t sure Artem would answer if I asked. If he’d planned to tell me more, he’d have given me a better explanation already.

I sat back and watched the scenery pass, wondering what this new life of mine would look like.

CHAPTER ONE

Python

I didn't know what the hell the club officers were thinking. Yeah, I knew the club had agreed to work with the Bratva when it came to helping women in distress. I got it. They had my support one hundred percent. But I'd thought we'd give them money, a new identity, and move them along. So, why was this girl still here? In the past year, none of the women had stayed longer than a night or two.

“What crawled up your ass?” Sticks asked.

We'd both patched in at the same time and had started prospecting together as well. It had taken both of us a week or two to stop using our real names around each other. There were times I still thought of him as Will.

I pointed to the Russian girl. “Why is she still here?”

“You'd have to ask Grimm, or more accurately, his wife. Oksana took a liking to Galina. It's why she's over there so much.”

“Isn't this just asking for trouble? It's no secret Oksana is here, or that we know where her mother and sister are located. What if someone in the Bratva comes nosing around? Oksana might be protected, but Galina isn't.”

Sticks smacked me on the back. “Well, unless you're volunteering...”

Hell no. The last thing I needed was a woman. My

gaze strayed to her again. I had to admit she was pretty. Not gorgeous or even what I would call beautiful. For some reason, there was still an innocence to her. How the hell she'd grown up around the Bratva and not come out the other side jaded was beyond me.

“Don't let Wire and Lavender see you eying her like that,” Sticks said. “You know what happens when they even get a whiff of interest from one of us.”

I nearly shuddered. Yeah, that was the last thing I wanted to happen. I tore my gaze away from Galina and went into the clubhouse. A cold beer was exactly what I needed.

In the past year or two, a lot of changes had occurred not only here, but with other clubs we called family or friends. Most had done away with the club whores or set up a separate building for family events since so many brothers were settling down. It made sense. If I did have a wife and kid, I wouldn't want them in the same space those dumb bitches spread their legs.

As for the Dixie Reapers, this building was the one place you could still find a woman. At least, after Wire and Lavender vetted them. Anyone wanting to hang with us went through a background check these days. Too many little ones running around to risk letting the wrong sort of person in. It had happened too often already.

I grabbed a cold bottle of my favorite beer from behind the bar and sat at a nearby table. Only two women were here at the moment, and I didn't want anything to do with either of them. Anna was the least clingy of the two. Once I'd told her I

wasn't interested, she'd mostly left me alone. Unless she thought I was drunk enough to give her a shot. The other... Penny was a menace. The woman always latched on and wouldn't let go.

I'd no sooner thought her name than she spotted me and headed over. If I wasn't trying to keep away from Galina outside, I'd have left the building like my ass was on fire. Anything to avoid the bitch who wanted a property cut. And yeah, we all knew what her end game was, even if she denied it. We could see it in her eyes.

"Did you come here to see me?" she asked, leaning toward me. The woman practically shoved her tits in my face, and I barely dodged.

"Nope. Wanted a beer."

She batted her eyes. "You could have had one of those at home. You know you don't have to be shy. I'll give you anything you want."

I'd bet she would, and probably something else I most certainly didn't want or need right now. A baby in her belly. Bitch was crazy as fuck, and I wouldn't put it past her to get pregnant on purpose. I finished my beer and got up to use the bathroom, hoping she'd be gone when I got back. No such luck. She'd not only made herself comfortable, but she'd gotten two beers. The way she licked at one of them told me it was hers. And if it hadn't been, it was now.

I stared at the open bottles. We always cautioned women not to accept open containers. Someone at the Hades Abyss had learned not too long ago men needed to be wary

too. Cotton had gotten screwed over and still hadn't recovered from what happened.

"I didn't spit in it," she said, rolling her eyes.

"Wasn't my concern."

She huffed and took the bottle. After swallowing a mouthful, she handed it back to me. "Not poisoned either."

Fine. I might very well regret this later, but I didn't want to make a big deal out of it. Slayer and Royal were both across the room. Last thing I needed was them calling me a little bitch or some shit. I drank the beer quickly, then stood.

"I'm afraid I'm not good company today." I made my way to the front door. Partway there, the room started to tilt and spin. *What the fuck?*

I stumbled out onto the porch and down the steps. The entire world looked like I'd entered a funhouse tunnel. Shaking my head, I tried to make sense of where I was. The line of bikes blurred and I couldn't tell one from another.

A small hand gripped mine and I started to shake it off, until I heard the soft Russian accent.

"Let me help you."

Galina. I let her lead me away, but we didn't make it far before I heard Penny yelling out my name.

"Wait for me, Python!"

Galina put her lips near my ear and spoke in a low voice. "Do you want to wait for her?"

"No."

She gave a nod and helped me walk a little farther. I hadn't realized it before, but the car the club had given her sat at the end of the row of bikes. I didn't know why she'd parked there, but right now I was grateful.

"Hey, bitch! Where are you taking my man?" Penny screamed.

Galina stopped and I felt her turn. She didn't release me. Only switched to her other hand, as if she worried I might fall. She wasn't wrong. At any moment I could land on my ass. Although, I didn't think the pint-size woman was going to be able to hold me up.

"Your man?" she asked. She spit out a string of Russian that sounded like she was cussing the woman out and I couldn't hold back my smile. Even though I felt like shit, I had to admit I liked seeing this side of Galina. "He's not yours. He'll *never* be yours."

Penny sputtered, and it sounded like she was coming closer. Galina managed to get me to her car and into the passenger seat. She slammed the door about the time Penny stopped beside her. I couldn't hear what Galina was saying, but I could tell from the tone she was pissed. She lit into Penny, and if I hadn't thought I might pass out or throw up, I'd have found it hysterical. She'd done the one thing I hadn't been able to. Mostly because I'd have felt like shit. Although, now that I was certain the bitch had drugged me, I wouldn't hold back. In fact, once this passed, I was going to talk to the Pres and get that woman booted permanently.

Galina got into the car and backed up. Penny ran

around to put herself in front, and Galina revved the engine. I heard the tires spin right before the car shot forward. My eyes felt so heavy they slid shut, and I missed the look on Penny's face. Galina didn't slow for a few minutes. My house was toward the back of the compound, and the moment she came to a stop, I knew she'd brought me home.

She shut off the car and I heard her get out. She opened my door and placed her hand on my arm.

"Can you stand?" she asked. "Should I get help?"

Oh fuck no. "My brothers will laugh if they know about this."

Shit. That's right. If I told the Pres, then... I'd have to think about it tomorrow. Right now, I wasn't sure how much longer I'd stay coherent, or able to stand. Galina helped me from the car, and we walked up to my door. I couldn't seem to get my keys out of my pocket.

I felt her hand slide in and grasp the keyring, but it wasn't all she touched. Groaning as my cock went rock-hard, I wondered if I'd just been dumped straight into hell. She froze and I could feel her staring at me, even if I couldn't manage to open my eyes.

"Sorry," I muttered.

She pulled out my keys and got the door open. I tripped over the threshold and barely stayed upright. Her small hand grasped mine tightly as she led the way through my home. It was almost as if she knew exactly where she was going. When we reached my bedroom, I sank onto the side of

the bed, and she kneeled at my feet. Fuck if that didn't screw with my drug-addled brain.

She set my boots beside the nightstand, then helped me get my cut off. I tried to watch her, but the world was spinning too much. Closing my eyes, I fell back on the mattress. My legs still hung off the side, but I didn't care.

“Python, what happened? Should I get someone?”

“Drugged.” At least, I tried to say it. Not sure how it sounded to her. I could tell my words slurred and my tongue felt heavy. What the hell had Penny planned to accomplish with me in this state? Then again, I'd gotten hard when Galina brushed against my cock. It seemed that part of me worked, even if the rest didn't.

She did her best to get me all the way onto the bed, and I heard her panting for breath when she'd finished. I didn't know what Penny had dosed me with, so I had no clue how long this would last. The thought of lying here alone, unable to even get up if I needed to puke or take a piss, bothered me. That bitch was going to pay when I got through this.

“Stay,” I said, or tried to. Galina seemed to understand. I felt the bed dip as she sat beside me.

My movements were clumsy, but I managed to pull her down beside me. I attempted to wrap my arm around her, to hold her closer, but failed miserably. She sighed and inched closer.

“When I thought of my first time in bed with a man, this wasn't what I had in mind,” she said.

My head felt too foggy for her words to really sink in. First time? Wait. “Virgin?”

She buried her face against my side. “Stop. Don’t make fun of me.”

Before I could say anything else, the darkness started to pull me under.

* * *

My mouth felt like someone had stuffed it full of cotton. Hammers pounded against the inside of my skull. I tried to shift, but I couldn’t. Prying my eyes opened, I winced and slammed them shut again. It took a few tries before I could stand the daylight pouring in through the windows. At least I’d survived the night.

Looking down my body, I realized why I couldn’t move. Galina curled against me, her leg thrown over my thigh and her head on my shoulder. She’d put her hand over my heart. I watched her sleep and wondered how the hell we’d ended up like this. I could only remember bits and pieces from last night. Not much past getting into her car after that bitch, Penny, drugged me.

Her clothes, and mine, were intact so at least nothing had happened between us. The fact my cock was hard as fuck and trying to escape my pants was enough to make me move. I eased out from under Galina and managed to get out of bed. My legs weren’t quite steady as I went into the bathroom and shut the door. It wasn’t until after I’d taken a piss I realized I wasn’t getting my jeans back on. Not in my current condition. Morning wood was bad enough for most people, but they

called me Python for a reason. I rubbed my hand up and down the back of my head as I stared at my dick and wondered what the hell I was supposed to do. It wasn't like I could go out there in my underwear, or naked. Not with Galina in my bed.

“Shower,” I mumbled to myself. By the time I finished, surely she'd be awake and have left.

I started the water and once it was hot enough, I stripped out of my clothes and stepped under the spray. It didn't take long to wash. I pressed my hands to the shower wall and hung my head, letting the water pound against my neck and shoulders. While I still didn't remember everything from last night, my head was slowly clearing. It wasn't until the water began to cool that I got out and dried off. Wrapping the towel around my waist, I stepped out into the bedroom and froze, eyes going wide.

“What the fuck?” I asked.

“That's what we'd like to know,” Grimm said. He folded his arms and gave a pointed look from Galina to me. Shit. I knew what he thought.

“I didn't touch her,” I said. “I had too much to drink last night, and she gave me a ride home so I wouldn't crash my bike.” I should have talked to Galina about this shit before now. What would happen if she told them I'd been drugged? The last thing I wanted was to come across as weak. Although, I knew they needed to know about Penny... just not right this moment.

And what I said wasn't entirely a lie. I eyed Galina and she gave me a soft smile. Maybe she'd caught on that I didn't

want to say anything right now. The moment Oksana saw it, her eyebrows lifted. Great. If they blabbed, this wouldn't end well. I had to figure out how to keep them quiet.

“We're here because Penny was in the clubhouse going off about how no one told her you'd been taken already,” Grimm said. “She mentioned a little Russian bitch. Since I knew it wasn't Oksana, that only left Galina.”

“Penny saw me leave with Galina,” I said. “That's all there is to it.”

Galina's cheeks flushed and she looked away. Or maybe not. What the fuck had she said to Penny? I remembered her going off in Russian. Of course, Penny didn't know a damn word that wasn't English, and even then I sometimes had my doubts about how much she understood. Clearly “no” wasn't in her vocabulary.

“She was being pushy and made me angry,” Galina said. “The way she spoke about you wasn't right.”

“Galina, what did you tell her?” Oksana asked.

“That he couldn't be hers because he was mine.” Her cheeks went even more scarlet. “I didn't think she'd tell everyone. I only wanted her to leave Python alone. It was clear he didn't want anything to do with her, and she was following him out of the clubhouse. I only meant to help.”

Grimm rolled his lips in and I knew he was biting down on them to keep from laughing. I could see the humor in his eyes and his shoulders shook a little. Asshole. She'd gone and claimed me in front of a mouthy fucking whore, and now I

knew I'd end up paying the price for it. Unless Savior gave us some slack since Galina had no idea what she'd done.

“So, you claimed him?” Grimm asked. “Seems like I've heard of that happening once before. Who was it? Oh, right. Ridley laid claim to Venom, in the middle of Church no less.”

“Fuck me,” I muttered. Or maybe he wasn't going to let it slide. This was seriously fucked up. Galina didn't deserve this shit, and I'd make sure they knew it. “Do they know?”

“I think everyone does,” Oksana said. “Penny wasn't exactly quiet this morning. Even Tempest had to come out and handle the situation.”

I rubbed my hand down my face and wondered how bad this was going to be. Galina hadn't meant anything by it. At least, I didn't think so. I honestly thought she'd only been trying to help me, and now this might come back to bite both of us in the ass.

“Do I need to go talk to Savior?” I asked. “She has no idea what she's done. Galina is still learning what it's like to live here. Does it really sound fair to screw up her life because she was attempting to be nice?”

“Actually, he'll be here in a few minutes. Might want to put on some pants first or he'll definitely get the wrong idea.” Grimm looked over at Galina again. “I'm still not sure I believe all this is entirely innocent, so I know he won't. You may be new here, but did you really think nothing would happen if you said Python was yours?”

Galina paled and looked away. Shit. The woman looked terrified. I wasn't sure if she was worried about being in trouble or scared of being mine. It could go either way.

“Great.” I grabbed a pair of underwear out of the dresser and some jeans from the closet. Heading back into the bathroom, I quickly pulled them on before I opened the door again. Savior stood in my bedroom, along with Saint, Tempest, Royal, Viking, and Prophet. Well, all the officers were here. This didn't bode well. “How fucked am I?”

Savior didn't look amused. In fact, none of them did. Viking's jaw clenched, and I had a feeling he'd take a swing at me if I said the wrong thing. I'd noticed the way he watched Galina when he thought no one was paying attention. It was obvious she intrigued him. If he thought for one second I'd wronged her or taken advantage, I knew he'd do his best to put me on my ass.

“Penny has told everyone you have an old lady now,” Tempest said. “Or rather, she told anyone at the clubhouse, and it spread like fucking wildfire because no one had heard a damn thing about it until now. I got stopped multiple times by brothers asking when you'd gotten an old lady.”

Motherfucker! I wanted to gut Penny right about now. Not only had the bitch drugged me, but she'd run her fucking mouth and caused all sorts of trouble. Galina looked like she might hit the floor at any moment, and I could tell she was terrified. I also knew if I stopped to reassure her, everyone in this room would take it as a sign we were meant to be together. The fucking club was worse than a bunch of old women when

it came to this shit. Especially Wire and Lavender. I hoped like hell no one had told the two of them yet!

“Galina just drove me home. I wasn’t able to ride my bike because I was too fucked up and stumbling all over the damn parking lot. That’s all there is to it,” I said. “Penny was bugging the shit out of me and followed me out. I guess once Galina got me into her car, Penny must have said something that upset her, so she told Penny that we were a thing. She had no idea what she was doing.”

“Then why is she still here and you’re half dressed?” Savior asked.

And that’s when I knew things weren’t going to go my way.

CHAPTER TWO

Lina

No matter how stressed Python appeared right now, I didn't regret what I'd done. Well, maybe the things I'd said, but Penny had made me so angry. Back home, I never would have said anything. I'd have meekly hung my head and gotten out of her way. Since coming to the Dixie Reapers, I'd become a bit bolder. I liked this new version of myself, but I didn't think Python felt the same right now.

"I worried he'd get sick during the night," I said. "I stayed to make sure he would be okay."

It wasn't entirely a lie. Omitting the part where he'd tried to pull me into his arms was probably for the best. The panic in his eyes told me he didn't like any of this. I didn't understand where the conversation was going, or what the issue was. Whatever was going on, Python wasn't the least bit confused. Only upset. Exactly what problem had I caused?

"Galina, the club promised to protect you and help you start a new life," Savior said. "The fact you're here in the house of a single man, and he's half dressed, doesn't paint the best picture."

I still didn't get it. Were they unaware of the things that happened in the Bratva? At least Python hadn't touched me. If I'd done this same thing with anyone back home, the results would have been vastly different. They'd have taken advantage. The only way it would have ended in marriage is if

they were higher up than my father, and he'd wanted the connection. Otherwise, I'd have been used as a whore to advance his career. Or he'd have outright sold me.

"Why am I still here?" I asked. "I've enjoyed getting to know everyone, and I appreciate the fact you've given me a safe place to hide from my family."

"But?" Savior asked.

"Well, I've heard the whispers when people see me. They all want to know why I haven't left yet. You've helped others escape the Bratva, haven't you?" He nodded. Just as I'd thought. "And they didn't stay here as long as I have, right?"

"They didn't," Savior agreed.

So... why me? I didn't know why things were different from the other times. There wasn't anything special about me. Or did they think I couldn't survive on my own? I'd never know if I didn't try. While it was true I'd never lived alone, I thought I could handle it. At least, as long as my father couldn't find me.

Python shook his head and gave a humorless laugh. "I get it. I'd wondered the same thing. Didn't put two and two together until now. It's because of Viking, right?"

"What?" I glanced at the big man they called Viking. He held my gaze a moment before looking away. I didn't know what he had to do with anything. Was he supposed to find the place where I'd go from here? Had there been an issue? "I don't understand."

"He likes you," Python said. "Looked pissed as hell

when he came and saw us. So, why haven't you manned the fuck up and asked her out, Viking? Far as I know, you haven't given a shit about women. Treat them with respect, but you might as well be dead below the waist. Haven't even seen you with the damn whores who swarm this place."

"That's enough," Savior said. "Back off, Python."

He lifted his hands and took a step back. "Fine. But tell me I'm wrong."

Savior sighed. "I was giving him time to make a decision. He didn't ask for it."

"You like me?" I asked the big man. He gave a brisk nod but wouldn't hold my gaze. I wasn't sure what to think of the situation. He seemed nice, and I hadn't had any issues with him. At the same time, his size was a bit off-putting for me. If I had to name my ideal body type, it would be Python's. He wasn't overly large, even though his muscles were defined. Being close to him didn't scare me, or make me worry he might break me in half.

"You're going to force her to be with me, aren't you?" Python asked. "All because things didn't go your way. Never mind what Galina wants. She's right. She should have been out of here long ago. If anyone is to blame for this situation, it's you, Pres, and you damn well know it."

The way he narrowed his eyes and glared at Python made me flinch. Perhaps he shouldn't have blamed the man for what happened. In all honesty, something bothered me about last night. The way Penny chased after Python and his condition... had she put something in his drink?

Python held my gaze, and I knew he didn't want me to say anything. I had no idea why, though. Did he worry the men would hurt Penny? Or was he concerned how they might view *him*? I knew my father would never admit a woman had gotten the best of him. Did Python share that trait with him? I wasn't sure how I felt about it. Thinking this man could have anything in common with a monster made me feel unsettled.

“What if... I mean, could we date?” I asked. “Even if it's just for a week or two. It might make the gossip die down, and then it wouldn't be obvious to Penny I lied to her. I said Python was mine, but does it have to mean... whatever that phrase means here?”

Viking sighed and folded his arms. “It's not an awful idea. Galina is still new enough we could pass it off as a communication issue. Of course, then Penny will be after Python again.”

“I'll deal with Penny,” Python said. “Don't punish Galina. Being with me would be a fate worse than death for any woman.”

I didn't know why he felt that way. He didn't seem like a bad man. I'd met my share of those. After living my entire life with the Bratva, and my rotten bastard of a father, the biker was more like Prince Charming. Although, the way he was talking, I didn't think he'd appreciate the comparison.

“When you say deal with her...” Savior eyed Python. “Something else we need to know?”

Python ran a hand down his face. As much as he seemed to want to remain silent, I thought it best to say

something. Maybe it would defuse this entire situation.

“I don’t think he was drunk last night.” Python’s head jerked my way and his jaw went tight. Yeah, I’d just pissed him off. Too bad. “The way Penny chased him, it was like she expected something to happen with Python.”

Viking’s gaze sharpened on me, and so did the other men’s. “You saying she drugged him?”

“Yes! Damn it. I didn’t want to say anything yet, but yes, the fucking bitch must have slipped something in my drink when I went to take a piss. Go ahead. I know you want to make fun of me for letting a stupid fucking whore get the best of me,” Python said, his face turning red. I’d watched him off and on since coming here, but I’d never seen him this angry before.

Savior held up a hand. “First off, we’d never make light of something like that happening. If you really think she dosed you with something, then we need to handle it. Bitch needs to go. Second, you should have fucking led with that shit.”

“So, Galina was really just trying to help you?” Viking asked.

I swallowed hard and took a step back, putting Python between me and the other men. The last thing I wanted to do was cause more trouble, but if Viking asked me out, I’d have to turn him down. I wasn’t sure how he’d take it, or the rest of the club for that matter. I reached out and put my fingers through Python’s beltloop and held on.

“Um, if everyone thinks Python and I are together, I still think pretending to date for a week or two would be a good idea.” I knew I was grasping at straws. Now that they knew what Penny had done, they’d explain the situation to everyone else. Then the rumors would die down and things would go back to normal.

Viking’s gaze landed on my hand, the one now attached to Python’s jeans. It was a shitty way to tell him I wasn’t interested, but I still wasn’t used to confrontation. After doing what I’d been told all my life, the freedom to be myself and say what I wanted was still new to me.

Python glanced down at me before focusing on the others again. “Her idea seems to be the easiest. I can take her on a few dates, invite her over, and as far as anyone will know we’re a legitimate couple. Just keep Wire and Lavender from doing that shit where they marry people without asking.”

Wait. What? How was that even a thing? Now didn’t seem like the time to ask. I watched the others, waiting to see if they’d agree. Viking seemed resigned to the fact I wasn’t interested in him. The others... I couldn’t tell what they were thinking or feeling right now.

“Fine. Penny will be handled now and not later,” Savior said. “I can’t have her doing that shit to anyone else. She’s clearly lost her fucking mind.”

Tempest slapped him on the back. “I’ll take care of it, Pres. Not sure your wife will like you getting your hands dirty with this one. Not to mention, you have enough to deal with already.”

Savior sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “No shit. Ares is going to make me switch from beer to tequila at this rate.”

“So, we’re dating?” I asked. “Or rather, pretending to?”

“Yeah. You can hang out here a little longer today, and I’ll make sure people see us going to lunch together,” Python said. “You sure you’re fine with this?”

“Of course. I wouldn’t have offered otherwise. Besides, I assume the club needs time to get everything in order before I can leave, right?” I asked. Since I wouldn’t be going out with Viking and my relationship with Python wasn’t real, there wasn’t any reason for me to stick around. It was past time for me to start my new life. I had to admit I’d miss the few friends I’d made since I’d been here.

“Oksana and I will go talk to Wire and Lavender. They’ll need to know this isn’t real so they won’t meddle,” Grimm said. “I’d say give it two weeks. Savior will have time to get Penny out of here, and then you can make a big production of breaking up. Something loud and with lots of witnesses.”

Oksana studied me, and I hoped she couldn’t see through me. I’d done my best to hide the fact I liked Python. He hadn’t interacted with me much since I’d been here, but the few times we’d spoken, he’d been nice. I had a feeling she saw more than I wanted her to. Python had already made it clear he didn’t want a woman in his life. The last thing he needed was to have the club force him to keep me.

“If everyone could leave, I think Galina and I need to come up with a plan,” Python said. “But thanks for busting into my house and shitting all over my day.”

Tempest took a step forward and got right in Python’s face. “I get that you’re pissed about this situation, but you put yourself in it to begin with. Had you just told Grimm Penny had drugged you, the rest of us wouldn’t be here. The issue would have been over before it even started. But you decided to be a little bitch and hide it so you wouldn’t appear weak, am I right? So fuck you, Python.”

I felt him tense and I leaned into him, hoping it would be enough to keep him from taking a swing at Tempest. I’d watched men fight enough times to know what was coming. At least, unless we could calm them down first.

“Get out,” Python said. “This is as nicely as I can say it right now, but I don’t want Galina getting mixed up in a fight.”

“He’s right,” Grimm said. “Oksana doesn’t need to be here for that shit either. I get where he’s coming from. And I’m sure if he was drugged, his head is probably killing him. All this tension isn’t helping anything.”

Python reached down and pried my hand loose from his pants, then started shoving the men from our room. Grimm followed behind them, but Oksana lingered. The look in her eyes was a mix of pity and understanding.

“These men, they’re different from what we’re used to,” she said. “It’s easy to fall for them.”

“I don’t know him well enough for that,” I said.

“But he makes you feel safe?”

“*Da*. You’re right when you say they’re not like the men we’ve known. I know he’s strong. He wouldn’t be here otherwise. But his strength, it doesn’t frighten me. No matter how angry he gets, I don’t think he’d hurt me.”

“He wouldn’t,” Oksana agreed. “Your father can’t get to you here, Galina. These men will defend you. The women will be your friends if you let them. And Python... maybe over the next two weeks, he’ll see how amazing you are.”

I shook my head. “No. He doesn’t want a woman in his life, and I have to respect his wishes. I’ll make some memories with him, and then I’ll move on when it’s time.”

Oksana gave me a nod and left the bedroom. When Python came in a moment later, I wondered if he’d heard everything. The assessing way he gazed at me made me a little uncomfortable.

He walked over to the dresser and pulled out a shirt, then tugged it over his head. Leaning against the dresser, he looked like he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. He gripped the wood and stared at the floor.

“You heard me, didn’t you?” I asked softly. He gave a brief nod, and my heart sank. This was why I hadn’t wanted him to know I found him attractive. Now things would be awkward during the weeks we had to pretend to be a couple. “I meant what I said. When it’s time for us to break up, I’ll leave. Assuming they’ve set up my new identity and have a place for me to go. Either way, I’ll make sure I stay out of your way.”

He still didn't respond or look up. I swallowed hard and realized I'd messed up even worse than I had when I'd mouthed off to Penny. Maybe being strong and independent wasn't in the cards for me. I should have stayed with the Bratva and done as my father wanted. He'd said we'd make plans, but it seemed that wasn't going to happen now. I rushed past him and didn't stop until I was not only out of his house, but in my car and driving away.

"Perfect, Galina," I muttered to myself. "Now he knows you like him, and you've screwed up your chance at a new life."

Instead of going to the home where I'd been staying, I kept driving and left the compound. I didn't have a direction in mind. Before I'd realized it, I'd left town and was heading down the highway. Should I keep going? I wasn't sure I could ever face Python again. Not after I'd made a fool of myself.

Blue light flashed in my rearview mirror, and I cursed as I pulled onto the shoulder. The car stopped behind me, and a man walked up to my window in a Sheriff's uniform. Rolling down the window, I looked over at the passenger seat to grab my purse and realized I didn't have it with me. I'd left it at Python's house!

"Ma'am, do you know why I pulled you over?"

"*Nyet.*"

He stared at me and glanced into the vehicle. "Can I see your license and registration, please?"

"I don't have my license. I was upset and forgot my

purse, but the registration is in the console.”

He sighed and took a step back. “Get out of the car, please.”

I did as he said, and my heart raced as I wondered if I was about to go to jail. Was that something he could do simply because I’d forgotten my license? I answered all his questions and thought I might pass out when he put me in the back of his car.

No one had any idea where I was. What if I couldn’t prove my identity? Even worse, it was possible my father would find me now. How had everything gone so horribly wrong? All I’d done last night was try to help Python. Now I was on my way to the Sheriff’s Department, and I had a feeling I was in far more trouble than I realized.

CHAPTER THREE

Python

What the fuck just happened? Galina liked me? Had she volunteered to be my pretend girlfriend in the hopes it would become real? It felt like everything was spinning. I'd never wanted to settle down. Especially after the fiasco with Savior's daughter, Ares. She'd had a crush on me, and I'd talked to her through text for a bit. Then the Pres found out and got pissed about it. Although, he'd technically given me permission to keep texting her, as long as I didn't do anything else until she turned eighteen.

I'd have been happy to do that. Ares had always been a good kid, and I'd honestly been flattered she liked me. Didn't mean I wanted to keep her forever. When Prophet made his move, I'd been only too happy to step aside. Of course, Ares was still underage so nothing had happened between the two of them. I wasn't sure if he was going to claim her or not. Only time would tell.

I knew I needed to clear things up with Galina. The way she'd run out of here, she'd either been embarrassed or terrified of my reaction. She couldn't help how she felt, and I didn't want her walking on eggshells around me. I'd just swung my leg over my motorcycle when one of the Prospects rolled up.

“Did Galina say where she was going?” he asked.

I froze and slowly turned my head toward him. “What?”

Are you saying she left?"

He nodded. "Took off toward the highway. I heard the two of you were together, but it looked like she was crying. Thought I should come talk to you."

"Thanks." Where the hell could she have gone? On the off chance she hadn't gotten very far, maybe I could catch up to her. I backed the bike out of the driveway and drove to the gate. The second it was opened, I pulled through and hung a right.

I watched for her car not only in the traffic ahead of me, but also in those passing on the opposite side. The more miles between me and the compound, the more anxious I became. Had she pulled off somewhere? What if something happened to her car? I'd been on the road for about a half hour when I saw her vehicle on the shoulder. I stopped behind it and got out to see if she was all right.

The moment I realized it was empty, my heart nearly stopped. I scanned the highway, checking to see if she might be on foot. If she had been, she was long gone now, or someone had picked her up. What if her father had found her?

I pulled my phone from my pocket and called Savior. He answered almost immediately.

"This better be important," he said.

"Hello to you too, Pres, and yeah, it's pretty fucking important. Galina left. She had a head start and by the time I caught up to her... All I can find is her car, Savior. It's on the side of the highway and I don't see her."

He started cussing, and I heard a door slam. “What the fuck happened?”

“She was talking to Oksana and I overheard them. Galina likes me. I didn’t know what to say or how to process what I’d heard, and I guess she took it hard. She left the compound. I wouldn’t have even known if Sam hadn’t stopped by to tell me.”

“Does she have her purse with her?” he asked.

“I didn’t see it in the car.”

“She doesn’t know, but Wire has a tracker in it. I’ll ask him to pinpoint her location. Give me a few minutes and I’ll text or call back.”

“Thanks, Pres. I need to make sure she’s safe.”

Within ten minutes, I received the text. *Purse is at the compound.*

Fucking hell. If she didn’t have it with her, there was no way for me to find her. I couldn’t help but think of all the things that could go horribly wrong. A tow truck slowed as it passed me, then pulled over in front of Galina’s car. The driver backed up, then got out.

“I’m going to need you to step away from the vehicle,” the driver said.

“And I’m going to need *you* to answer some questions. Like why the hell my woman’s car is about to be towed. Where the fuck is Galina?”

He paused. “All I know is I got a call from the

Sheriff's Department to tow it to the impound lot. Sounds to me like your woman got arrested.”

Seriously? Little Galina? I couldn't imagine what she could have possibly done. Then I remembered Savior said her purse was at the compound, which meant she didn't have her license. *Shit*. I checked my phone for the nearest Sheriff's office and decided to go straight there. Even if that wasn't where they'd taken Galina, I could at least get more information.

I got on my bike and found the place after two wrong turns. Parking out front, I shut off the engine. I couldn't remember a time I'd ever volunteered to walk into a place like this. One look at my cut, and they might very well put me in the cell next to hers. I walked up the steps and into the building. The woman at the front desk eyed me, and not in a pleasant way.

“I'm looking for Galina Kuzmin. I think she may have been brought in for driving without a license,” I said.

“I can't just give that information to anyone,” she said.

“I'm her boyfriend. Found her car on the side of the road around the time the tow truck arrived. He told me the Sheriff's Department called him, so here I am. Scared the shit out of me when I realized the car was empty and I didn't see her anywhere.”

One of the deputies approached, his jaw tensed and his shoulders pushed back. “Did you say you were looking for Galina Kuzmin?”

“Yeah. Is she here? Can I see her?” I asked.

“She is, and no you may not. Caught her driving without a license.”

Uh-huh. I knew she didn't have it with her. Didn't explain *why* he'd pulled her over. Had he even explained it to her? I took out my phone and texted Wire. *Can you hack a body cam?*

He answered right away. *If you give me more details than that.*

I sent him the deputy's name, his badge number, and the county I was in. I had a feeling, he'd fucked up. Worked in my favor because it would mean Galina would be released. In the meantime, I'd just park my ass here and wait.

“Why did you pull her over?” I asked.

“I don't have to tell you shit. I suggest you get your ass out of here before I decide to lock you up too.”

I hated men like him. Power trip from hell. He might be a deputy, but it didn't mean he could ignore the law, or bend it to suit him. If he wanted to be an outlaw, then he should ditch the badge.

My phone buzzed with an incoming text and I saw it was from Lavender. *She'll be released soon.*

I wasn't sure what that meant, exactly, but I'd take it. Getting her car from impound wouldn't be fun. I didn't like having to pay for someone else's fuckup, but I knew she'd need transportation. Of course, I could always get her something else. The one she had now was something cheap the

club gave her. It hadn't been intended for long-term use.

“Think I'll wait. She should be coming out soon,” I said.

“Look, asshole, that woman isn't leaving here. She's locked up, and that's where she'll stay until the judge sees her.”

I smirked. “You sure about that?”

Another man opened a door along the far wall and Galina stepped through. The moment she saw me, tears filled her eyes and she rushed over, throwing her arms around my waist. I held her close and grinned at the deputy.

“See? Told you she'd be out soon.”

He turned and growled, stomping over to the man who'd released Galina. “What the fuck is going on? I arrested her for a reason.”

“Sheriff said to let her go. Something about you not following procedure and pissing off the wrong people.” He glanced my way for a second. “Sheriff wants to see you. He seems furious.”

The deputy pushed his way through the door and disappeared from sight. I gave the other one a nod and led Galina to the counter.

“We need whatever personal belongings were confiscated,” I said.

The woman pursed her lips like she'd sucked on a sour lemon. It took a few minutes for someone to bring the

envelope with Galina's keys. I pocketed them, knowing she wouldn't need them right now. Even if we drove to the impound lot, we wouldn't get her car. Not until the paperwork had been processed.

"You'll have to ride back home with me," I said. "We'll sort things out with the car tomorrow."

"I'm sorry," she said, sniffing a little. "I screwed up."

"Hey." I lightly touched her chin and she looked up at me. "None of this is your fault, all right? I should have stopped you before you left the house. I'm sorry for not reacting better. Let's go home and talk."

"You aren't mad at me?" she asked.

"Of course not, Lina." Her eyes widened and her gaze softened. "Come on, beautiful. Time to get out of this place."

I took her by the hand and led her out to my bike. After I got on, I helped her onto the back, and made sure she held on tight. Having her pressed up against me didn't feel as awkward as I'd thought it would. It wasn't like I'd never had anyone ride on my bike. Although, I couldn't remember how it had felt. I only knew this was different.

I placed my hand on her thigh and gave it a squeeze. "You need to stop for any reason before we get to the house, you tap my chest and I'll pull over."

"I'll be okay," she said.

I walked the bike out of the parking space and then pulled out of the lot and onto the street. By the time we got back to town, we'd need to eat lunch. Even though I'd said we

were going home, I wondered if I shouldn't stop somewhere for food first. Best to do it back in my own territory. For one, if we were going to make people think we were dating, we needed the locals to see us. Didn't do us much good out here.

When we got back to town, I passed the compound and went down Main Street. As much as I wanted to take her somewhere better than the diner, I knew our chances of being seen by the club would be better there. It was one of the more inexpensive options in town, and the food always filled us up. It probably clogged our arteries too, but I'd worry about that later. I wasn't quite thirty yet and refused to not live life to the fullest.

I parked and helped Galina off my bike, then held her hand as we went inside.

"Thought you might be hungry," I said.

She nodded. "*Da.*"

"You don't speak Russian often. It's something I've noticed. Unless you're upset."

"Even though I was raised in the Bratva, I was born here in the US. My family spoke Russian at home, but I grew up learning both my parents' native language and English."

A waitress came over and greeted us with a smile. "Table for two?"

"Something by the window if possible," I said.

"Follow me." She led us to a nearby booth and placed two menus and two sets of silverware on the table. "Do you know what you'd like to drink?"

“Do you have lemonade?” Galina asked.

“I do.” The waitress turned to me. “And for you?”

“Coffee and water.”

“I’ll be back in a few minutes. Special for today is meatloaf and the desserts are apple pie and peach cobbler.” She took off, leaving us to peruse the menus.

“Get whatever you want, Lina. I know today was stressful for you.” And I was at fault for some of it. I could admit as much. Never claimed to be perfect or all knowing. I was only human and I’d fuck up from time to time. This happened to be one of them.

The woman came back with our drinks and we placed our orders. After she left again, I reached across the table to take Galina’s hand.

“Why do you call me Lina?” she asked.

“You don’t like it?”

Her cheeks flushed. “No, I do. I’m just confused.”

“About what?”

“When I left, I thought you’d never want to see me again. I know how you feel about being tied down. You don’t want anything long-term, and I…” She bit her lip.

“One day at a time, Lina. The Pres gave us permission to date for a bit and make sure this is what you want. He may have made it seem like we’re just putting on a show for everyone, but I know my club better than that. Those busybodies are hoping we’ll end up together. I know things are

very different from what you're used to, and there's still the issue of your father. I have no idea if he'll come looking for you."

"It's possible he now knows I'm in Alabama," she said. "He has connections with law enforcement. Since the deputy arrested me, it will show in the system, won't it?"

"Did they fingerprint you and process you all the way through?" I asked.

She nodded. "I was in a holding cell while they found clothes for me and figured out where to place me."

"Shit. Then yeah, it's possible he could find out. Since that town wasn't too far from here, it wouldn't take much for them to locate you. We'll need to be careful, and I'll ask Wire and Lavender to monitor your dad. If he makes a move, we'll know."

"Why would you do that for me?" she asked.

I tightened my hold on her hand. Two of the club whores came into the diner. Although, I barely recognized them without their make-up on and wearing more clothing. I winked at Galina. "Because you're mine. That's reason enough."

She sucked in a breath, and I worried I'd just given her hope. Then she saw the women walk by us and seemed to catch on. She gave me a slight smile. Yeah, I'd just dug my hole deeper. She'd play along, but at what cost? I felt like a dick knowing this would hurt her.

"When we get back, I think you should move your

stuff into my place.” She tugged her hand from mine. Yep. I’d definitely fucked up. “I want to make sure you’re safe, Lina. If your father is going to come looking for you, I don’t want to wonder if you’re at your place or out somewhere.”

“That’s not a good enough reason to move in together.”

It seemed she was going to be stubborn about this. I didn’t want to do the caveman thing, but maybe I should. I leaned in closer and lowered my voice. “I can’t protect you if you aren’t with me. I’m not asking, Lina. I’m telling you to get your shit and move it to my house when we get back, and since you don’t have a car right now, I’ll have one of the Prospects come over with a truck.”

She pursed her lips. “I don’t have enough to warrant a truck.”

Her accent became thicker, which confirmed it. I’d pissed her off. I’d know for sure if she went off on me in Russian. Either way, I was doing this for her own good. Whether she liked it or not.

“Still can’t haul any bags on my bike. Unless you can carry it on your back,” I said. “Stop being so fucking stubborn, Lina.”

“I don’t...” She shook her head and sighed. “If I move in with you, I may not want to leave.”

It was a gamble I’d have to take. For one, it would make our story more plausible. And for another... well, waking up to her in my house hadn’t been completely terrible. Didn’t mean I wanted it to be every day for the rest of my life,

but I could handle it for a little while.

I lowered my voice so no one else could hear us. “You can sleep in the spare room. I can’t exactly set up a bed in there, but we could figure something out. Air mattress or futon. Something I could either smuggle in easily or explain as being for something other than sleeping.”

“Fine. I don’t think this is a good idea, but I’m clearly not winning this argument.”

Our food arrived, and I steered the conversation to safer topics. The rest of our meal passed pleasantly enough, then it was time to go home. As I got on my bike and helped Galina onto the back, I noticed the club whores watching us through the window. Wouldn’t take long for this news to spread, much like the rumor this morning. I only hoped this didn’t blow up in our faces.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lina

I'd lost my mind. The moment he said I was going to move in with him, I should have fought harder. Being with Python every day would make it more difficult to leave. Instead, he'd helped me pack my meager belongings and haul everything to his house. I still didn't understand what happened today. The deputy never said why he'd pulled me over. The moment I'd spoken, he'd placed me under arrest for driving without a license. Since I technically had one, I'd hoped I would only get a fine.

Wire and Lavender sat at the table. Python poured two cups of coffee, one for him and one for Wire, before handing Lavender a soda. I already had a bottle of water. I'd met both of them before, but we hadn't really spoken much. I wasn't sure why they were here.

“How did you get Lina released so quickly?” Python asked.

Good question. I hadn't realized they'd had anything to do with it. No one had told me much of anything while I'd been there.

“The body cam footage proved he never explained why she'd been pulled over, and when he arrested her, he didn't utter so much as one word of the Miranda rights. It was an unlawful arrest that violated her rights as a US citizen.” Wire took a swallow of his coffee and sighed. “That particular

deputy was already on thin ice. He doesn't like people he considers foreigners. The moment he heard her Russian accent, even though it's faint, things went downhill. He's been in trouble multiple times for harassing people who aren't white."

"So, he's an asshole," Python said. "Already figured that part out."

"We alerted the sheriff about the issue with Galina's arrest, and he immediately released her. The deputy is getting fired. Like Wire said, it wasn't his first offense," Lavender said.

"Any idea why he pulled me over to begin with?" I asked.

"No. We may never know. The important thing is the situation was handled. However, we got a hit in the last twenty minutes. We think the Bratva knows you're here, or at least your father may be aware you were arrested in that town. It's possible he'll be on his way, or send someone for you," Wire said.

Since the Vor sent me here, I knew some people in the Bravta were already aware of my location. But that was different from my father or Dima finding me. The two shared a look. Python tensed. What was going on? I felt like I was missing something.

"We know the two of you are seeing each other," Lavender said. "The news is all over the place. There's only one way to protect Galina. As of right now, if someone were to snatch her, she'd be a missing person, but it could be argued

she'd simply gone home with her father.”

“Wait.” Python held up a hand. “Didn’t Oksana and Grimm talk to you about the two of us?”

“Were they supposed to?” Wire asked.

So it seemed they hadn’t kept their word. I didn’t know if something happened to distract them, or if they’d done it on purpose. Oksana knew I liked Python. Had it been her way of trying to help me? Except I didn’t want to trick him into keeping me around.

“Then what’s the guaranteed way to keep me safe?” I asked.

“You already publicly claimed Python. Why not make it official and get married?” Lavender asked.

“Um, what?” I asked. “You can’t be serious. I only moved in here because he didn’t give me a choice. We barely know one another.”

“But you’re a couple,” Lavender said. “You don’t expect us to believe you haven’t slept together, do you? If you were together long enough for you to claim him in front of Penny, I don’t see how you can consider yourselves strangers.”

I glanced at Python. Was it okay to tell them?

“We haven’t slept together,” Python said. “We’re dating, but that’s all. You know I don’t plan to settle down and start a family. Lina will be moving on sooner or later, starting her new life. We’re just spending time together until then.”

So, we were going with the partial truth. I could live

with that. As long as it got these two to back off. The last thing I wanted was for Python to be stuck with me. He'd be miserable, and so would I. Of course, I actually liked him, but I knew he didn't feel the same. I refused to use him to save myself. There had to be another way to keep away from my father.

"I think we're missing something," Lavender said. "The two of you are all anyone is talking about. We were all shocked to hear Python had an old lady, and now you're saying none of it is true? Why haven't you stopped the rumors?"

"The officers know," Python said. "Savior said he'd handle it."

"This is about more than the two of you, isn't it?" Wire asked. "It has something to do with Penny. Savior asked me to run all kinds of shit on her, then told me to make her disappear in a way that wouldn't seem suspicious. So I left a paper trail of her leaving town and heading north."

"What happened?" Lavender asked.

"Lina saved me," Python said. "Penny dosed my drink and followed me to the parking lot of the clubhouse. Think she planned to take advantage and possibly get knocked up."

"Jesus," Wire muttered. "And we aren't telling everyone because why?"

"Would you want to be seen as the weak little bitch who got drugged by a whore?" Python asked. "Because I sure the hell don't."

“I brought him home and watched over him. Nothing else happened,” I said. “But Penny wouldn’t leave him alone, so I told her he was mine. I didn’t know what would happen. I only wanted her to back off and leave him alone. It was clear she’d hurt him in some way. At the time, I hadn’t realized he’d been drugged. I thought he was drunk the way he was stumbling around.”

Lavender smiled faintly. “You know, it’s always the men around here saving the women. Nice to see the reverse happen.”

“Are the two of you really dating?” Wire asked. “Or is that just part of the story you want everyone to believe?”

“We’re faking it,” I said. If he’d told them about Penny, there was no reason to hide the rest.

“Are you sure?” Lavender asked. “Can you both honestly say you’re both good enough actors to fool everyone this well? Or could there be some feelings neither of you wants to admit you have?”

Python stood and glared at her. “Enough of this bullshit. Stop trying to force everyone into relationships. It may have worked for you and Wire, and possibly for the others, but that doesn’t mean it’s the right thing to do. One of these days you’re going to meddle in the wrong person’s life, and it’s going to come back to bite you in the ass.”

Wire shoved his chair back and rose slowly to his feet. “I may be getting older, but I can still put you on your ass. Talk to Lavender like that again, I’ll knock your fucking teeth down your throat, then I’ll wipe out your entire existence. Do

you understand?”

“Then stop fucking with people’s lives. This isn’t a game. People can get hurt, and you won’t be the ones to deal with that pain.” Python pointed to the kitchen doorway. “I want the two of you to leave. If you even think of hacking into the county records and marrying us, you’d better hit the pause button. I don’t want a wife. Don’t need one. And you sure the fuck won’t be doing Galina any favors.”

He was back to using my full name. Great. I wasn’t sure if he was so opposed to getting married to anyone, or if it was me in particular. It seemed as if he hated the idea regardless of who his wife might be. It made me wonder why he felt so strongly about it. Wire and Lavender left, slamming the door behind them. Python drank another cup of coffee, and I stayed in my seat.

“Can I ask you something?” I asked.

“What?”

“Why do you hate the idea of being married? And I don’t mean to me. It seems as if you abhor the thought entirely, regardless of who your bride would be.”

He sighed and closed his eyes a moment. “You’re not wrong, and I do have my reasons.”

“Too personal?”

“I’ve been a Prospect for this club since I was twenty-one. I haven’t shared much about my past with anyone, and for good reason.” He took another swallow of his drink. “In high school, I accidentally got my best friend pregnant.”

“Um... I’m assuming your best friend was a girl.”

He smiled faintly. “Yeah. We decided to get drunk off our asses when we were sixteen. Ended up sleeping together. When she told me she was pregnant, I freaked the fuck out. At first.”

“And then later?” I asked.

“I didn’t mind the idea of having of a kid with her. Got permission to marry her. I wanted our baby to have my last name.” The smile slipped from his face, and his eyes darkened with the deepest sorrow I’d ever seen. “She died during delivery. Both of them.”

“Wire and Lavender never discovered your previous marriage?” I asked. “If they’re hackers, wouldn’t they have run across something like that?”

He shrugged a shoulder. “Might have... if I still went by that name.”

“Whoa. What’s that supposed to mean?”

“All records pertaining to Dylan Harmon are fake. Really good ones, thanks to the government. I had to go into Witness Protection when I was seventeen.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Jenny’s father lost it when his daughter died. Tried to kill me. Since Jenny’s mom talked him into allowing the marriage, he shot her. I think he planned to end all our lives that day, but I managed to escape. Unfortunately, so did he.”

“So there’s someone out there who wants you dead?”

“Not anymore. Got a call from an agent when I was twenty. They found his body in the river. If it had just been him, then things would have most likely gone back to normal. Except Jenny’s dad wasn’t exactly law-abiding.”

“Did you know that beforehand?” I asked.

“No. Neither did Jenny, or her mom. Found out when they arrested him that he was part of a gang. They weren’t just local but had a nationwide reach... except for in a few states. Alabama being one of them.”

I leaned closer. “So who were you before?”

“Dyson Hinley. Dylan Harmon was close enough to my real name to make it easy for me to answer to it.”

At least I now understood why he didn’t want to get married. He’d already taken that path before and it had destroyed his life. I didn’t blame him for wanting to avoid marriage in the future.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” I asked. “If they knew, I’m sure they wouldn’t have pushed so hard.”

He shook his head. “You don’t know those two. They’ll decide I just need to give someone a chance to heal my broken heart. I loved Jenny, but I wasn’t *in* love with her, if you know what I mean. The fact she died haunts me. I feel responsible. It doesn’t seem right for me to get the opportunity to have a family when she can’t.”

I didn’t know Jenny, and I barely knew Python. Just the same, I didn’t think she’d want him to suffer the rest of his life. What happened was a tragic accident. It wasn’t as if he’d

gotten her pregnant on purpose, and neither of them could have known she'd die while giving birth. I hated that he felt like he shouldn't be happy because of what happened.

The fact Lavender even mentioned us getting married must have been painful. He'd tried to do the right thing before and it hadn't ended well. My heart hurt for him. I wished I could make them understand, but I wouldn't break his trust in me. If he'd wanted them to know, he'd have told them.

“Are you sure you want me here?” I asked. “It's not too late for me to go back.”

“I'm sure. I think not knowing you're safe would drive me crazy. You really did save me from Penny. It's only right for me to return the favor.”

Now it was payback and nothing more. Every word from his lips felt like a blow to my heart. It was too soon to say I loved him, but I did feel something for Python. He'd fascinated me since the first time I saw him. The feelings only got stronger the longer I remained here. If I didn't move on soon, it might be too late. Then Python wouldn't be the only broken one.

I stood and shoved my hands into my pockets. “I should unpack my things.”

“Put them in my room,” he said. “You can use the bed. I'll sleep on the couch.”

“I'm not kicking you out of your room.” I hesitated a moment. What I was about to say would only end up hurting me more. And yet... “We can share the bed, like last night.

You're not attracted to me, so there's no reason we can't sleep beside one another. Besides, it would make the entire dating thing more believable."

"Fine." He cleared his throat. "But for the record, I never said I didn't think you were pretty. If I weren't unavailable, things might be different."

"Right. But they aren't because you'll always be Jenny's. She has a hold on you no one will ever be able to break. It's fine, Python. A week or two and maybe Savior will have things in place for my new life."

Then I'd leave and never look back. It was the only way.

CHAPTER FIVE

Python

Idiot. Stupid fucking moron.

I knew I'd hurt her. I'd seen it clearly stamped on her face. Would it have been better if I'd never said anything about Jenny? At the time, she'd seemed to genuinely want to hear what I had to say, and I'd thought maybe it would clear things up between us. Instead, I only ended up causing her more pain. This was yet another reason I never needed to get married. I didn't know how to communicate with women. The club whores were easy since they were only a place to stick your dick and get off. It wasn't like I needed to maintain a relationship with them.

The only reason I'd flirted with Ares about a year ago was because I knew she was too young for things to get serious. She'd wanted someone to make her feel like a woman. I hadn't seen the harm in it. I'd have dated her when she got older, as long as she understood it wasn't going to be a forever kind of deal. Savior had put me on the spot about it, and I'd said I'd take responsibility for my actions, but I knew it would only have made the both of us miserable. Ares deserved better. Truthfully, when Prophet stepped in and made sure we all knew he wanted Ares, I'd been relieved.

I'd done my best to project my happiness at being single. No one needed to know the reason why I didn't want a woman living in my house. Although, now I had Galina here.

It wasn't the same, though. With her, things were different. I knew she needed me, and for some reason, I wanted to protect her. Every time I saw her, I felt the urge to be her shield. I'd felt that way about Jenny and look how it turned out. The best thing I could do for Galina was keep her safe while she was here, then send her on her way.

If only Penny hadn't pulled that bullshit at the clubhouse... We were only in this mess because of her. No matter how many times we stressed the fact they were only here for a good time and we weren't going to claim them, someone always caused problems. They always wanted more than what we were willing to give. I'd heard the Hades Abyss in Mississippi tossed their club whores. None were allowed at the compound anymore. I had to wonder if they weren't on to something.

There were days I didn't even want to see a woman. Caused too much trouble. Of course, I didn't think that applied to Galina. From what little I knew of her, she was sweet. Others would have taken advantage of the situation. Instead, she'd fought to keep things fair. Even though she liked me, she hadn't jumped at the chance to be mine. It would have been easy enough to tell Wire to go ahead and marry us. Instead, she'd tried to understand why I didn't want a family.

Now we were going to share the bed. Probably not the best idea. I had a feeling this wasn't going to go according to plan. Then again, nothing ever did. If I'd thought my world was fucked up and twisted, it was even more so for Galina. The Bratva didn't give a shit about their women. Not usually. Galina would be used by her father to further his career, and

abused by her husband simply because he could. Animals were treated better. I'd do whatever it took to keep her from going back there.

Which was how I found myself in this predicament. I refused to let Wire and Lavender play God and marry the two of us. It wouldn't end well. Didn't mean I wouldn't find another way to keep Galina safe. I had no idea how she'd held onto her sweetness and innocence in that brutal world. The fact she'd come out unscathed was a miracle.

Even though I knew Wire was pissed at me, I picked up the phone and called him.

“What the fuck do you want?” he asked, not even bothering to say a simple *hello*.

“I need to know the plan for getting Lina out of here. She was never meant to linger this long at the compound. Savior only dragged his feet because he knew Viking liked her, but she doesn't return those feelings. If her father has any idea she's here, then she's in danger.”

“You think I'm not aware? It's why Lavender wanted the two of you to get married. As of right now, if they come for her, we're going to be protecting a stranger. At least in their eyes. She's not related to anyone here, not dating one of us, and not an old lady or wife. If she's married to someone here, then she's Dixie Reapers' property. Those men might think twice about trying to snatch her.”

I snorted. “Have you lost your fucking mind? Do you really think they'll give a shit? No. They'll come here and try to take what they want, which in this case is Lina. Those men

won't care if she's married or not. The only thing it would accomplish is pissing them off even more. Haven't you learned anything from dealing with the Bratva in the past?"

I heard the rustle of papers, the low murmur of Lavender's voice, and then it went silent. I knew I'd made them mad earlier, but someone needed to call them on their shit. Not all marriages ended in happily ever after. It didn't seem realistic to expect a fairy tale to happen every time they paired people up. Had it worked so far? Sure. Even I could admit their success rate was rather shocking. It was like they had the magic touch.

"We haven't been wrong so far," Wire said. "Lavender wants to talk to you."

Great. If I made her cry or upset her again, Wire really would come over here and kick my ass. Or worse, empty my bank account.

"I understand now," she said softly. "Why didn't you tell anyone?"

Fuck. Me. "You went digging, didn't you? Couldn't just leave things alone."

"Pretending the past didn't happen doesn't make it go away, Python. You could have told us. Do you think the club would have cared? Even if you had your reservations while you were a Prospect, you've been a patched member for six months. You didn't think any of us deserved to know the truth?" she asked.

"You going to tell everyone?"

“It’s not my story. It’s yours. Does Galina know why you’re keeping her at a distance?” she asked.

“Yeah. I told Galina. She knows who I really am, and why I don’t want a family. It seemed like the right thing to do. I know she likes me, but I’m no good for her or any other woman.”

“Python...” Her voice sounded husky. Christ. Was she about to cry? “Do you think Jenny would want you to be miserable all these years later? She wouldn’t have wanted her death to ruin your life.”

“Too fucking late, and don’t you dare say her name ever again.”

“Am I allowed to say your son’s name? If he’d lived, would it have given you the strength to move on? Think of your boy, Python. Sweet little Rhett.”

Hearing that name nearly gutted me. It had been Jenny’s choice. She’d always loved *Gone with the Wind*. Scarlett and Rhett were her two favorite characters of all time. I’d always thought Rhett was kind of an asshole, but she’d thought he was romantic. When we’d found out we were having a boy, I’d let her choose the name.

“Shut up, Lavender.” I gripped the phone so tight I thought I might break it. “He’s dead. They’re both dead, and neither are ever coming back. Do you understand?”

It was quiet. When the line disconnected, I wondered if I’d pushed too hard. Was Wire on his way over? Or worse, would the two of them go blabbing to the club officers? I may

have been patched in, but they'd done it based on lies. None of them knew who I truly was. Well, Lavender did now, and I assumed she'd tell Wire if she hadn't already.

I heard a knock at the door and knew it had to be one or both of them. I opened it, bracing myself for a fist to my face. Instead, they both appeared to be anxious as fuck.

“Guess you can come in,” I said.

“We need to tell you something.” Lavender handed me some papers. “Jenny may have died giving birth... but your son is alive, Python.”

It felt like the ground fell away and I staggered, falling into the wall. “What? What the fuck are you saying right now?”

“Your father-in-law had connections. They bribed the hospital. Made it seem like Rhett died. He didn't.” She tapped on another piece of paper. His birth certificate. Not the one they'd given for a stillborn baby, but one showing he'd been alive. Still was according to Lavender. “Rhett Hinley is alive and in foster care. He lives two towns over and is now eleven years old. Best we can figure, he wanted you to suffer before he ended your life. I don't think he'd have killed you right off.”

“The way things played out, and how quickly, I think he had a contingency plan in place,” Wire said. “A way to fuck with you if things went south. Of course, we can't say for sure. It's also possible they'd planned to get both Jenny and Rhett away from you, until she'd died. Without asking someone involved, all we can do is speculate.”

My son hadn't died? I couldn't wrap my brain around it. All this time, why hadn't anyone said anything? Wouldn't the government officials have known? When they put me in Witness Protection and gave me a new name, wouldn't they have checked the hospital for Jenny and Rhett's bodies? I hadn't even been able to attend the funerals. Now I knew there'd only been one.

"We can get him for you," Wire said. "Bring him here. Change his last name to match yours. Maybe if you try to explain things..."

I'd missed eleven years of my child's life. He had to hate me. I knew if I were in his shoes, I wouldn't want anything to do with my dad. Unless someone told him he'd been stolen from me, which was doubtful, he had to think he'd been abandoned. Hell, I'd probably want to kill the bastard calling himself my dad if I were in Rhett's shoes. Lavender handed me another page. This one a photo. Jesus. He had my features and Jenny's coloring. A perfect mini version of the two of us.

"I admit I shouldn't have pushed so hard to marry you off to Galina," Lavender said. "I can't fix what I said or tried to do, but I *can* do this. Let me bring your son home."

"I don't know anything about raising a child," I said.

"I do. At least a little." I turned to find Lina standing a few feet behind me. Tears filled her eyes and spilled down her cheeks. So she'd heard everything it seemed. "Let me help. I'm not asking to marry you or stay here forever. You offered me your home as a place to stay while I hid from my father.

The least I can do is help with your son.”

“Fine.” I stared at Lavender and Wire. “Bring Rhett here. He may hate me, but it doesn’t change the fact he’s mine and I love him. Never even got to see him except on an ultrasound, but he’s part of Jenny and I can’t let our kid be raised in the system.”

“I checked and he hasn’t been harmed,” Lavender said. “He’s been with an older couple the last two years, and before that he bounced around a bit. Couldn’t find anything about bruising, missing school, or any other red flags.”

“Just get him here. I’ll prepare a room for him.” I paused. “Any way to find out what size clothes and shoes he wears or what types of things he likes?”

“I’ll text everything to you within the hour,” Lavender said.

“And I’ll head over to Savior’s and tell him what we’ve found. I know you should be the one to explain your situation, and I also know you aren’t up for it right now. Can’t promise he’ll give you space.” Wire put his arm around Lavender. “You need anything, let us know.”

Galina placed her hand in the middle of my back. I shut the door behind Wire and Lavender, then turned to face her. “You sure about this?”

She nodded. “Should we start with clearing the room he’ll use?”

I took her hand and led her to the spare bedroom with the least amount of crap in it. I’d never thought I’d need either

bedroom for anything, so I'd mostly been using them as storage. It wouldn't take much to move everything to one room or the other. I really needed to dig through all the shit and toss out things I didn't need.

The house had a split plan, so the master bedroom was in a different hall from the other two. It would allow Rhett a sense of privacy while he adjusted to his new home, and later when he became a teenager he'd appreciate the space. Galina helped me move everything to the back bedroom after we decided to give Rhett the one closest to the living room. The walls were plain beige, and I hadn't bought curtains. Then again, I didn't have any in the entire house.

"Where can we get a twin bed and dresser?" Galina asked.

"There's a discount furniture store down the highway. They usually have stuff in stock, and even put entire sets on clearance. It's where I got the stuff in the living room. It matches because the store sells it that way."

"Then should we start there? Or do you want to paint the room?" she asked.

Fuck. This was more difficult than I'd thought. My phone rang and I saw Savior's name. Looked like Wire had literally gone straight there and spilled everything. I'd thought maybe I'd have a little more time.

"Hello," I said when the call connected.

"You and I need to have a chat at some point, but I'm guessing now isn't the time," Savior said. "What do you need

from the club?”

It felt like a weight had been lifted off me. “Lina mentioned painting Rhett’s room, and we’ll need furniture. After that, we’ll have to fill in everything else. Bedding, clothes, shoes, toys or whatever he’s into.”

“I understand your aversion to getting married, but I need you to think about something. Galina needs protection, which marriage to someone in this club could offer her. Your boy will also need a mother. I’m not saying rush into anything. I’m only suggesting you keep an open mind,” Savior said.

“Fine. I’ll try,” I said. “If it was for Rhett, I could do most anything. We’d just have to set some ground rules. Plenty of people get married without being in love.”

“I’ll send Sam over to paint the room. Sticks and Slayer will follow you to the furniture store in one of the club trucks. They’ll haul back whatever you buy and get it put together, that way you and Galina can focus on the other things. But you can’t shop while riding your bike.”

“Her car is at an impound,” I said.

“I’m aware. Borrow Emmie’s SUV for today. We’ll work on getting another vehicle for you. I’ll call Tank when we hang up, so he’ll know to expect you,” Savior said.

“Thanks, Pres.”

I ended the call and eyed Galina. While I might not understand why she wanted to help me, I was grateful just the same. I knew I couldn’t do this on my own. I told her what Savior said, and we decided to walk over to Tank’s house. He

was standing out front waiting for us when we arrived.

“Use it for as long as you need to,” he said, handing me the keys. “With the girls all grown up and driving their own cars, might be time to downsize a bit. Can’t have anything too small or I won’t fit, but we don’t really need a third row anymore.”

“Anything wrong with it?” I asked, nodding my head toward the SUV.

“Nope. In fact, just put new tires and brakes on it about a month ago. Why? You want it?”

“Let me know how much. I may just buy it from you. Saves me from having to shop for something. Might tell Savior, though. He mentioned something about finding another vehicle for me now that I’ll have Rhett.”

“It’s a bit big for only you and one kid,” Tank said. “Eats a shit ton of gas too. Drive it for today and then make a decision. I really don’t think you’ll want it. There’s about a half tank of gas.”

“I’ll return it on a half, unless I decide to keep it,” I said.

He smirked. “Sure. Why don’t you try filling it up? That alone will make you give it back.”

Jesus. How much gas could the damn thing take? I helped Galina into the huge vehicle and we drove over to the furniture store. They had quite a few options for twin bedroom sets. Since Galina was willing to help with Rhett, I also asked for her input when picking out items for him. We chose a

walnut set with a nightstand and dresser. After I paid, I made sure they would allow Slayer and Sticks to load it up and haul it to my house, then left with Galina.

Lavender had already texted a list of things Rhett liked, as well as his sizes. Being in the foster system, I doubted he'd had many nice things. There was a chance he'd never even had the chance to wear anything brand new that was only his. I knew a lot of those families couldn't afford much. While there were people who did it for the money, others simply wanted to offer their homes to children who had nowhere else to go.

We spent the next several hours picking out everything Rhett would need, as well as things we'd thought he'd want. By the time we'd loaded the SUV and stopped for gas, I understood why Tank had said I wouldn't want it. I couldn't remember ever spending over one hundred dollars to fill a car with gas. Fucking ridiculous!

I only hoped I was doing the right thing for Rhett. I hadn't stopped to consider he might be happy where he was. What if this blew up in my face?

CHAPTER SIX

Lina

As the night settled over us, I found myself lying in bed next to Python. The tension in the air was palpable, our proximity a constant reminder of our complicated situation. I tried to steal glances at him, searching for any sign he might be feeling the same pull between us that I felt. But he remained stoic, his gaze fixed on the ceiling.

Yeah. Nothing had changed. Even though we'd had a great day getting things for Rhett, I was still nothing more than an unwanted guest in his home. Finding out he had a son, when he'd thought he'd lost both Jenny and Rhett, couldn't be easy. I wished he'd share his thoughts and feelings with me.

I couldn't help but wonder what it would take to break down the walls he had built around himself. Every time I took a step forward, Python seemed to take two steps back. It hurt to know that he saw me as an obligation rather than someone he genuinely desired. But I wasn't ready to give up just yet. He'd need me now that his son was coming to live with him.

"You know," I said softly, breaking the heavy silence, "I understand why you feel the way you do about relationships. But not all love stories end in tragedy."

He turned his head slightly to look at me, his eyes searching mine. "Never said they do. Plenty of happy couples around here."

"But you don't think that will ever be you?" I asked.

He shook his head. “No. Things are going to be different anyway. I’ll have my hands full with Rhett. I imagine he’ll be angry. No telling what he was told all this time. That I didn’t want him. Left him and his mom. I don’t know what I’ll be facing when he comes here.”

“You don’t think he’ll see the time and effort you put into his room and realize how much you want him in your life?” I asked.

“Lina, I had no idea he hadn’t died with Jenny. They lied to me. If they gave me a falsified certificate of stillbirth, then it wouldn’t be unreasonable to assume they lied to Rhett too. He had to have asked about his parents.”

I leaned up on my elbow and looked down at him. “Did Lavender say when he went into foster care? If he’s been in there from the beginning, it’s possible no one has told him anything.”

He ran a hand over his face. “You’re right. I’m only speculating until I actually meet my son in person.”

“What are you going to tell him about us? He’s bound to wonder who I am to you and why we’re sharing a room. It might have been better to clear out both the spare bedrooms so I could use the other one.” I wondered if he’d thought that far. An eleven-year-old wouldn’t hesitate to speak his mind. At least, the boys I’d known were like that. Then again, they’d been raised in the Bratva. Perhaps Rhett had a gentler upbringing.

“I don’t even know when he’s coming here,” Python said. “Lavender and Wire were going to get everything in

order. It could take a day, several, or even a week or more. The waiting is going to drive me crazy. He's so close yet so far away."

"You've gone eleven years thinking he'd died, Python. A little more time won't make much difference," I said.

"You're right." He sighed. "We should get some sleep. In the morning, I'll place a grocery order for pick up and ask one of the Prospects to bring it to us. I want to make sure the kitchen is well-stocked, so we're ready whenever Rhett arrives."

I reached over and took his hand. Python tensed, and I worried he might pull away. After a moment, he relaxed and held my gaze.

"You're not alone. I'm here to help however I can, and you have the club. I can tell they'd do anything for you. There's no reason to be nervous, Python. You have far more help than you realize." I licked my lips. "These people are your family. Do you have any idea how lucky you are to have their support?"

"Right. I *am* lucky. I only wish you'd had people you could rely on. If you had, then maybe you wouldn't be in this situation right now. What confuses me is why the Vor sent you here. Couldn't he have just stopped your father? There had to be a reason he got you out of there instead."

I'd wondered the same thing. The Bratva might not be law-abiding, but they did obey their own rules. If my father hadn't done anything wrong in their eyes, then the Vor's hands would have been tied. It wasn't unheard of for a father to use

his daughter to further his career. The fact Dima only had rumors about him and no hard evidence he'd killed those women complicated things. For the Vor to step in, he'd have needed proof of wrongdoing. Without it, it wouldn't have taken long for people to turn on him.

“I don't know all the facts. I can only assume my father didn't break any of the Bratva's rules, so the Vor couldn't officially do anything. Instead, he managed to sneak me out and sent me to the Dixie Reapers. It was probably the best he could do at the time.”

“Is there a reason you never tried to escape?” he asked.

“I knew without the proper resources, my father would easily catch me. Running would only have resulted in a harsh punishment, or he may have even beaten me to death. Kind of defeats the purpose of getting away. When the Vor gave me a chance to escape, I took it. He promised there would be people to help me start over. Of course, I didn't realize I'd be here for so long.”

“Wasn't the plan,” he said. “Until Viking took notice of you. Sorry about that. Then Penny had to go and fuck with my life. You happened to find me at the wrong time. Maybe you should have kept walking.”

I tightened my hold on his hand. “If I had, then Penny would have taken advantage of you and things would be even more screwed up. Besides, if you hadn't refused to let Lavender marry us, you might have never known about Rhett. She wouldn't have had a reason to dig into your past.”

Honestly, I didn't want to think of what might have

happened if I hadn't been in the right place at the right time. Despite what he'd said, I thought it was a blessing I'd found him when I did. If he thought Penny had been trying to get pregnant on purpose, it wouldn't have ended well for any of them. She didn't seem like the motherly type, and I knew Python would have resented her. No child should have to live in a home with two parents who hated each other.

I felt a bit nervous over meeting Rhett for the first time. He might not want me here. Even if he hadn't met his mother, what if he felt like I was trying to take her place? All I wanted was to help him settle in and assist Python in any way I could. Others might not see it the same, though. I'd claimed him in front of Penny, and the rumors around the club has us together as a couple. Only the officers, Wire, and Lavender knew the truth. Something told me this was going to be even more complicated after Rhett joined us.

“What are you going to tell your club?” I asked. “Us dating without a commitment was one thing when it was only us involved, but now your son will be here. Won't they try pushing for us to make things official?”

“They might, but since Savior knows the score, he'll hold them off. At least, I'm counting on him to do that.”

I hoped he was right. I released his hand and put some space between us. He didn't even acknowledge that I'd moved away. I didn't know how this was going to work. It would probably be best if I left the Dixie Reapers sooner rather than later. I'd lend a hand with Rhett for as long as I could, but I needed to speak to Savior about lining up my next home and

my new identity as quickly as possible. If for no other reason that the longer I remained here, the harder I'd end up falling for Python. I already found him fascinating and wanted to know everything about him. How much worse would it be in a few weeks or months?

His breathing evened out and I was thankful he'd fallen asleep. I watched him in the darkness. If Jenny had lived, would they have had a happy marriage? Would they still be together all these years later? There was no way of knowing. He'd said he hadn't been in love with her. There was a chance they either would have grown closer together or fallen for other people. I hated that he'd experienced such heartbreak. Not once had he mentioned his family. What had they thought of all this?

"Are there parts of you that are still Dyson, or are you only Python now?" I whispered. "I'd say I wished I'd met you before your world fell apart, but I was only a child then. If you were seventeen when Rhett was born, and he's eleven now, then you're twenty-eight. There's nearly a decade between us."

It didn't matter to me. I might be nineteen, and maybe there was a lot I didn't know, but there was one thing I was certain about. I'd never meet another man like Python. Even though he'd been deeply wounded, he still put one foot in front of the other and faced each new day. In his place, I might have given up when Jenny died. What would I do if Python were to die tomorrow? It was a morbid thought, and I could acknowledge it as such, but it did make me wonder. Was I only staying here because he'd told me to? Or was I secretly hoping

for something more?

“I wish you’d see me,” I whispered. “No one ever has. I’ve only been a tool to be used. One day, I want someone to look at me and want me. Not because I can advance their career or because our children will have the right bloodline. Is it wrong to want something just for myself?”

“No, it’s not,” he said. I jolted, not having realized he was actually awake. He rolled to his side to face me. “You can do better than me, Lina. I’m so fucked up it’s not even funny. Doesn’t mean I don’t see you, though. I do. Don’t ever feel invisible.”

“I know you don’t really want me here, Python. I appreciate the fact you want to keep me safe, and that you weren’t going to make me sleep on the couch, but how far are you going to take this? I wasn’t kidding when I said Rhett would be confused. I’m an adult and even I can’t make sense of all this.”

“Maybe sometimes there are things that don’t *have* to make sense, Lina. I never wanted a woman in my house, not after Jenny. Having you here isn’t as awful as I thought it would be. In fact, when I woke up with you next to me the first time, I didn’t exactly hate it.”

“What are you trying to say?” I asked.

“Not sure. Just... can we take things one day at a time? I’m not looking for a wife or a family, but now my son is coming home, a boy I thought had died before he’d even been born. Having Rhett in my life is going to change everything I thought I knew or how I felt.”

“Are you saying all that because you think he needs a mom?” I asked.

“Not exactly. I mean, you’re not wrong. He could use a woman’s influence. I don’t know what he’s been through or how he’s been raised all these years. He might very well walk through the door and hate both of us right off. I guess what I’m trying to say is that I’m not ready to be alone with him. I need someone to hold my hand, like you were earlier.”

“How much did it cost you to admit that?” I asked, smiling a little.

“More than you could ever know,” he mumbled. “But hey, I already told the officers about Penny and how she nearly trapped me. What could be worse than that?”

“It doesn’t make you weak, Python. She took advantage.”

“I know. Logically, I get it. At the same time, I guess I was always taught men need to be tough. Invincible. Being vulnerable makes you a weak-ass little bitch.”

“You don’t talk about your family. What were they doing while you dealt with Jenny and the pregnancy?” I asked.

“I got emancipated when I was sixteen. My dad was an alcoholic and my mom was never around. I pretty much raised myself anyway.” He reached out to tuck my hair behind my ear. “Taking on a wife and kid wasn’t as big a deal as it would have been to someone who relied on their family.”

“Has anyone ever told you how amazing you are?” I asked.

“Can’t say they have.”

“Then everyone is blind. The moment you heard Rhett was alive, you made a place for him at the house. You spent the day getting things he’d like so he’d feel welcome, and you’ve lain awake in bed worrying about what he’ll think of you. You may not have met your son yet, Python, but you’re already a great dad.”

He flicked my nose. “Call me Dylan. But only when the club isn’t around.”

My cheeks warmed. I knew what it meant to have permission to use his real name. I felt like we’d just taken a step in the right direction. Maybe my worries about where I’d go or how long I’d be here were all for nothing. Was there a chance he might open up to me? I’d learned so much about him in the last twenty-four hours. More than he’d apparently shared with his club. I felt... special.

“Have you ever dated before?” he asked.

“No. Even though we’re fake dating, you’re still my first boyfriend. My dad kept me home. Since I was a chess piece for him to move around the board, he didn’t want me being with the wrong sort of people or falling in love and messing up his plans.”

“Tomorrow we’ll go out for breakfast. There’s a café near the main strip I’ve heard is really good. Some of the ladies here like to eat there.” He laced our fingers together. “I guess we both need to get on the same page. Create a united front. Us against everyone else.”

“Why does it sound like we’re going to war?” I asked.

“We kind of are. War against your family, my meddling club, and whatever else comes our way.”

I wasn’t sure what to make of his sudden change, but I was going to embrace it. Mostly because he was saying everything I wanted to hear. I’d trust him, and if it backfired, then I’d end up with a broken heart. It was a risk I’d have to take. It seemed like everyone in his life had either turned their backs on him, or not bothered getting to know the real Python. I didn’t want to be like everyone else.

Because for me... he mattered.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Python

I couldn't remember a time I'd ever stayed up all night talking to a woman, especially in bed. Lina set me at ease, and I could tell she actually listened to me. Most women told me what I wanted to hear, or what they *thought* I wanted to hear. They either only cared about what was in my wallet or in my pants. The second one had never been an issue. I'd had fun with plenty of women since Jenny. At first, I'd felt guilty about it. Later, I'd realized I couldn't live the rest of my life like a monk. As for the ones who were interested in my bank account... Well, the only time I willingly gave up cash for someone was with Lina, or when we shopped for Rhett. I hadn't spent a dime on a woman other than her and didn't plan to start now.

The water heated and I stepped under the shower spray. I'd left her sleeping and decided to get ready before I woke her. I had to admit I was looking forward to eating breakfast with her. I bowed my head and let the water pound my neck and the back of my head. The past two days had been hell. One surprise after another. Although, discovering Rhett was still alive fell into the category of things I wanted to know. Being drugged by Penny was definitely not the highlight of my life. I wondered what Savior had done to her. If Wire had been asked to make it look like she'd willingly left, I had a feeling the bitch was dead. Wouldn't be the first time the club had bloodied their hands and wouldn't be the last.

I heard the door open and tensed, turning my head in that direction. Galina stumbled into the bathroom, her eyes not even all the way open. Hell, I wasn't sure they were open at all. She held her hands out, feeling her way over to the toilet. I bit my lip so I wouldn't laugh at the ridiculous situation I found myself in, and turned away from her, giving her as much privacy as I could. How the fuck had she not realized the shower was going?

The toilet flushed a moment later, and I gave her time to leave. Instead, I felt a cool breeze down my back. Turning, my eyes went wide when I realized she was getting in with me. Except... Shit. Was she doing all this in her damn sleep?

“Um, Lina?”

She staggered a little and shut the shower door behind her. With her hands outstretched, she came closer, and I backed as far to the wall as I could. The moment the water hit her skin, she stepped under the spray.

I could honestly say I'd never experienced anything like this before. What the hell was I supposed to do? Once she woke up enough to realize we were in the shower together, she'd most likely freak the fuck out. Couldn't blame her. I did my damndest to keep my eyes on her face. Didn't mean I succeeded. The woman might be on the tiny side, but she had curves in all the right places. Her breasts were the perfect size to fill my hands, and my fingers itched to see if she felt as soft as she looked.

“Lina. Are you awake yet?” I asked.

She sighed and reached a hand toward me. I grabbed it,

not sure what she wanted. The second she plastered herself to me, I knew I'd fucked up. My cock had already been semi-hard. Not anymore. It turned to steel and was more than ready for some action. *Fuck my life.*

"Best dream," she murmured, rubbing her cheek against my chest.

So she was still asleep, or mostly. And it seemed she thought she was dreaming she was showering with me. Was this something she'd dreamed of before? I knew she liked me, but I hadn't realized it went this far. I wasn't sure how I felt about it. Well, a certain part of me was liking it just fine. My brain, on the other hand, was telling me how wrong all this was.

"Lina. Honey, this isn't a dream," I said.

She tensed and her eyes slowly opened. I knew the moment she fully woke. Her cheeks turned scarlet. Her lips parted, and a dazed expression entered her eyes. Yep, she'd really thought she was dreaming. I didn't know what to make of it all. Had to say this was a first for me.

"Wh-what... where... Um." She had a deer in the headlights expression and seemed incapable of moving. As much as I wanted to put more space between us, I also didn't want to startle her. She could easily slip and fall in here.

"Think you came into the bathroom while you were still mostly asleep. Got in the shower with me. I tried to wake you up," I said. And technically, I had. Maybe not as well as I should have. Couldn't lie even to myself. I'd enjoyed this too much. No matter how much I wanted to keep my distance, it

got harder and harder to do. All the reasons I'd told myself I'd remain single didn't seem quite so important anymore. For one, Rhett was actually alive. And Lina was right. Jenny wouldn't want me to be alone forever. It was mostly guilt driving me to keep my life the way it had always been. I didn't feel like I deserved to be happy.

She covered her face with her hands. "I can't believe I did this. I'm so sorry, Python. I know you don't want me like this. I'll, um... I should get out."

Jesus Christ. How blind could she be? Or did she equate sex with a forever kind of relationship? I tensed. Fucking hell. Was she a virgin?

"Lina, have you ever seen a naked man before?"

She gasped and, even hidden behind her hands, I could see her face turn even redder. "Of course not!"

"So you're a virgin?"

She peeked at me between her fingers. "Do I come across as someone who sleeps around? I told you I hadn't dated. Who was I going to do that with?"

"Dating and sex don't always go hand in hand," I said. "I didn't date any of the women at the clubhouse, but I've fucked them before."

I winced. Probably should have found a better way to make my point. All I'd done was paint myself in a bad light. Besides, now that I was a father, I'd need to clean up my act a bit. I'd have to set a good example for Rhett.

"I'm not those women," she muttered.

“I’m aware. I didn’t mean anything by it, Lina. Guess I find it hard to believe someone as pretty as you hasn’t ever been with a man before. Just so we’re clear, I’m clean. Even though I’ve slept around, I’ve always gotten tested. It’s been a while since I was last with anyone. It’s not like I’m over at the clubhouse balls-deep in a club whore every night.”

Shit. I really was an eloquent bastard, wasn’t I? It was amazing she hadn’t run from me already. What the hell was I thinking? Wouldn’t it better if she did?

Her hands fell from her face. “You really think I’m pretty?”

That’s what she got out everything I’d said? “I’d have to be blind not to notice. And I already told you once before. You didn’t believe me?”

Her gaze skimmed over me and when she got to my cock, she gasped and covered her face again. *Too damn cute!* “Does that happen all the time?”

“You mean me being hard?” She nodded. “Well, morning wood is a thing, but I wasn’t in quite this state until you pressed against me. Have to admit I find you rather tempting.”

“Really?” She peeked at me again. “You’re not just saying that?”

Before I could think better of it, I reached out and grabbed her hand, then placed it on my cock. “Does it feel like I’m bullshitting you?”

“I... I... Uh...” Her eyes nearly bugged out as she

stared at me. “My hand is on your... your...”

“Cock,” I said.

“Yes, that. Why is my hand here?”

I noticed she wasn't exactly pulling away. My dick throbbed, and no matter bad of an idea this was, I had to admit I was enjoying it. I loved the flustered look on her face, and the way she stammered. Hadn't been with anyone like her before. Even Jenny had been bolder.

“You can move anytime you want. Not stopping you.” Probably should have chosen a different phrase. Instead of taking her hand away, she gripped me a little tighter and slid her hand down my shaft. My balls drew up and I fought back a groan. Fuck but that felt good. “Wasn't what I had in mind, Lina. You keep doing that and I'm going to come all over your hand.”

Her gaze held mine, and hell if she didn't keep stroking me. I'd been wrong when I thought she wasn't bold. For a virgin, she was far more daring than I'd thought she'd be. I wondered where she saw this going. I braced a hand on the wall and watched the various emotions play across her face. The fact this turned her on was a given. I'd noticed the way she squeezed her thighs together.

“Have you ever made yourself come?” She shook her head. So, she didn't know what an orgasm felt like. Was it due to lack of curiosity? Considering our current predicament, I didn't think so. “Do you want to?”

“What do you mean? Touch myself like I'm doing to

you?” she asked.

“No. We might be playing with fire a bit, but...” I pulled her hand from my cock and spun her around. Pressing my palm to her spine, I forced her to bend over a little. “Put your hands on the wall.”

She did as I said without question. I nudged her feet apart, then slid my cock between her thighs. I rubbed against her pussy, the head of my dick brushing her clit with every thrust. It wasn't going to take much to get me off, and the way she was squirming told me she might already be close.

I braced one hand on her hip and palmed her breast with the other. Her nipple hardened and she pushed her hips back. Looked like little Lina was sensitive. It made me wish we could take things even further. I wanted to see her fall apart.

“Come for me, Lina. Give me your first orgasm.”

Her fingers curled against the shower wall and I heard her breath hitch. She gave a soft cry as her body tensed and she threw her head back. I could feel the heat of her release and thrust faster. I didn't stop until I came, my cum splattering the wall and quite possibly Lina as well.

Once we caught our breath, I turned her to face me. I could see the remnants of what we'd done clinging to the curls between her legs. *Shit*. I had to hope none made it inside her. Although, a virgin pregnancy would be an interesting story around here. Probably a first.

“You okay?” I asked. She nodded and her cheeks

turned pink again. “Maybe I shouldn’t have done that. I took things too far.”

“I liked it,” she murmured. She shifted from foot to foot, and I angled the showerhead so I could wash her off. Or more accurately, get the rest of my cum off her. I ran my hand over her pussy to make sure I’d got it all, and she shivered, parting her legs a little more.

“Damn, Lina. You still want more?”

“Is that bad?” she asked. “I still feel all achy, and...”

“And what?”

“I liked how it felt. I want to do it again and again.”

I could think of worse ways to spend a day than making a woman come for hours. Not the best idea for the two of us. Still... I worked my thigh between hers and rubbed it against her. She hesitantly jerked her hips. “That’s it. Go ahead and ride me. Get yourself off.”

“Is that something people do?” she asked.

“My sweet, innocent Lina. Stick around and I’ll completely corrupt you. To answer your question, yes. I want to watch you get yourself off. Show me how pretty you are when you come.”

It took her a few tries before she found the right rhythm. She’d no sooner come than she started moving again. By the third time, I knew I needed a different plan. Looked like Lina was the type to be addicted to sex. Couldn’t blame her. Orgasms felt amazing.

“Is it time to stop?” she asked.

“Not exactly. I think you can keep going, but we’re going to do things a little differently. You still want to come once we’re out of the shower and back in the bedroom, then I’ll show you other things we can do — without taking your virginity.”

She gave me a bashful smile. “I wouldn’t mind losing it to someone like you, Python. I know it isn’t what *you* want, though.”

She wasn’t wrong, and yet she was. After feeling her come on my cock, I had to admit I didn’t like the idea of another man being intimate with her. I might not deserve her, but I also couldn’t think of a single guy who did. What if she left here and got hurt by someone? As easily as she trusted me, she could end up falling for a complete asshole who’d take advantage, then dump her.

We made our way back to the bedroom, and I kept asking myself if I really wanted to go down this path. I had a feeling it would be a game changer for both of us. I had no idea how we’d come back from this. She wasn’t the type to see it as nothing more than having fun. Hell, I wasn’t sure even I saw it that way right now.

She lay back on the bed, staring at me with trusting eyes. I hoped like fuck I didn’t end up breaking her heart. I didn’t think I’d ever forgive myself.

“Are you sure?” I asked. “I know the orgasms felt really good, but you can get yourself off. Even if you haven’t done it before, there’s no reason you can’t start now.”

“Is it wrong that I want it to be with you?” she asked. “Maybe the reason it feels so good and I never want it to stop has more to do with you than the act itself.”

It felt like she'd just driven another nail in my coffin. At this rate, I'd be hers before the end of the day. She looked beautiful. Her hair splayed across the pillows, and she'd crooked her knee slightly and had it leaning across her other leg. I knew she hadn't posed on purpose. She probably wouldn't have a clue how to act sexy. It just came naturally to her.

I ran my fingers up her leg, stopping at her knee. “What if this changes things between us?”

“I've already made it clear I like you, Dylan.” Her cheeks flushed again. I liked the way her eyes brightened when she said my name. “Do you really think I'd be upset if you decided to give us a chance?”

Fuck. I knew I was on the road to my destruction, and yet I couldn't seem to stop myself. I joined her on the bed, and wondered if maybe she was a devil disguised as an angel... because I was gladly going to follow her, even if she took me straight to hell.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Lina

My heart hammered against my ribs, and I wondered if he could hear it. Never in a million years did I think we'd end up like this. I might have hoped we would, but he'd been so resistant I'd thought it would never happen. I didn't know if he had a magic touch, or if there was something wrong with me. This couldn't be normal, right? If women were this into sex, nothing would ever get done.

“What is it?” he asked, hovering over me.

“Is something wrong with me?”

“I'm not sure I follow.”

I swallowed hard. This was difficult for me. I'd never discussed sex with anyone before, much less someone who was lying in bed with me — naked. “You seemed surprised at how much I liked what we did in the shower. Am I... abnormal?”

He pressed his lips together, but I felt his body shaking in silent laughter. He pressed his forehead against my shoulder. I didn't understand what was so funny about my question, or this situation.

“Lina, any man with a woman as responsive as you would be thanking every god known.” He lifted his head and stared down at me. “The fact you come so easily, and want to do it often, makes me feel like I won the lottery. I don't know

any man who wouldn't love having a woman like you.”

“You're going to confuse me,” I said. “I know this isn't anything permanent and you didn't intend to ever be intimate with me. Then you go and say something like that...”

He rolled away from me, lying on his back. He flung an arm across his eyes and sighed. Great. There went my orgasms. Even worse, I may have just screwed up everything. Things would be awkward between us now.

His phone rang and Python got up to answer it. I only halfway paid attention to what he was saying, until I caught the name Rhett. Sitting up, I focused on him. Python ran a hand through his hair.

“You couldn't have given us a little more notice?” he asked. “Fine. Stall for about ten minutes if you can.”

He ended the call and faced me. “Rhett is already here. Wire and Lavender will bring him here in the next ten minutes.”

I got out of bed. “Then we should get ready.”

We managed to get dressed with a few minutes to spare. I checked on Rhett's room, then double-checked the items in the kitchen. Python must have placed an order when I wasn't looking because a Prospect had delivered a bunch of stuff earlier. I didn't know what a little boy might like to eat or drink. Hopefully, we'd stocked the right things.

The bell rang and Python ran his hands over his clothes before opening the door. A miniature version of him walked inside, with Wire and Lavender right behind him. Even if I'd

met this boy elsewhere, I'd have known he was related to Python. Rhett came farther into the house, looking around.

“Rhett, this is your dad,” Wire said.

I gave Python a nudge and he dropped to one knee in front of his son. It put Rhett slightly taller than him, and the boy seemed to relax a little.

“I'm glad I finally get to meet you,” Python said. “I only wish your mom could have been here too.”

The little boy glanced at me. “She's not my mom?”

“I'm a friend of your dad's,” I said.

“His girlfriend,” Wire said. “You know what that is, right?”

Rhett rolled his eyes. “I'm not stupid. I'm eleven. Of course, I know what a girlfriend is.”

I wasn't sure if we should be lying to Rhett. Python and I weren't really dating. How would the boy feel when it was time for me to leave? He'd already been uprooted several times. What would happen if he grew attached to me? It would be better if I kept my distance, and yet... how could I possibly do that when he looked just like Python?

“Do you live here too?” Rhett asked.

“Um, I do. If it makes you uncomfortable, I can move out.”

Python stood. “No, she can't. This is Lina. Her father is a bad man and he's trying to find her. Think you can help me keep her safe?”

Rhett nodded. He looked at each adult in the room before focusing on his dad again. “What do I call everyone?”

“Um. Well, I’m your dad, but I know we’ve just met. You can call me Python like everyone else does, until you’re more comfortable with me.” Python looked at the rest of us. “Actually, you can just call everyone by their name.”

It might have been subtle, but I caught the flicker in Rhett’s eyes. I knew Python’s words had come across as cold, even if he hadn’t intended it that way. I reached out my hand to Rhett. “Would you like to see your room? Your dad wanted to make it perfect for you.”

He grasped my hand, and I led him from the room, shooting Python a quick glance. He needed to fix this, and I hoped he knew it. I let Rhett enter his new room ahead of me, and I waited in the doorway as he checked things out.

“You know, your dad means well,” I said. “He’s new to all this and he’s going to struggle a bit. It doesn’t mean he isn’t happy you’re here. You should have seen him when he found out you were still alive.”

Ah, I had Rhett’s attention now. “He really didn’t know about me?”

“He really and truly didn’t. Your mom died when you were born, and they told your dad you’d passed with her. Then some bad things happened. Your dad had a hard time. What I can say for sure is that he loves you, Rhett. You were always important to him, from the moment he found out your mom was pregnant.”

He looked around the room again. "I've never had a home before. Everyone was nice to me in their own way. I know some kids are worse off than me. I guess when they told me I was going to live with my dad, I thought..."

"You were worried they were wrong and you'd end moving homes again and again?" I asked. He nodded. "That's not going to happen, Rhett. Your dad found out as much about you as he could to make sure this place was just right. He picked out everything here himself."

"Only him?" Rhett asked.

"Well, mostly him. I did help." I smiled at him. "Your dad picked the color and his club painted the room for you and brought the furniture here while we got everything else."

Rhett went to sit on his bed. I picked up the handheld game system Python bought for him, as well as the three games. Giving them to Rhett, I waited to see if there was anything else he needed to say or ask. He remained quiet, staring at the items in his hands.

"You good here for a bit? Did you have breakfast?" I asked.

He glanced up. "Like a meal we cook here?"

I nodded. "Exactly like that. Your dad and I haven't eaten yet, but if you're not up for breakfast food we can make something else. Today is your day, Rhett. You tell us what you'd like to do, and we'll do it."

He smiled a little. "Breakfast sounds good."

"All right. I'll call you when it's ready." I ruffled his

hair and left the room. Wire and Lavender were still with Python.

“Everything okay?” Lavender asked. “He seemed tense on the way here.”

“He’s good. In fact, he’s hungry. Thought we could make breakfast and eat together.”

Lavender grinned and tugged on Wire’s arm. “That’s our cue. Time to head home to our own kids and leave these two with their boy.”

I opened my mouth to correct her, but Python reached down to take my hand. The other two left and Python led me to the kitchen. He pulled eggs, milk, biscuits, and bacon from the fridge. I wasn’t sure what sorts of things Rhett would like to eat, but I wanted today to be extra special.

“Should I make pancakes too?” I asked. “Or maybe mini waffles?”

“You just want an excuse to use the waffle maker you got yesterday,” he said.

He wasn’t entirely wrong. “Maybe. Doesn’t mean Rhett wouldn’t enjoy them too, though. I even got the waffle maker with the changeable plates with the different cartoon characters.”

“Fine. Make the waffles while I handle the rest. I’m sure Rhett will love it.”

I had to admit I liked making breakfast with him. Even though our morning had quickly unraveled, it felt like things might be back on track. At the very least, there wasn’t the

dreaded awkwardness between us. I really liked Rhett, and I wasn't looking forward to the day I'd have to leave this place. He seemed like a sweet kid.

By the time we'd finished making everything, and I'd set the table, I was anxious to see what Rhett thought about our breakfast. I went to get him and discovered him playing a video game while stretched out on his bed. He'd taken off his shoes and made himself at home.

“Ready to eat?” I asked.

He set the game system down and leaped off the bed. “Are we all eating together?”

“Of course. I've already set the table.”

He grinned and followed me to the kitchen. He picked the place where he wanted to sit, then I filled a plate for him, giving him a waffle on the side. I placed the syrup in the middle of the table and checked to make sure he didn't need anything else. Once Python and I had made our plates, we joined him.

I nudged Python with my foot under the table, hoping he'd talk to his son. At the rate the two of them were going, Rhett might graduate from high school before they got to know one another.

“Do you enjoy school?” Python asked.

“I guess so. Do I have to change to a different one again?”

“How many times have you had to move to a new school?” Python asked.

“A few. I don’t have many friends, so it’s okay if I need to do it again. I don’t mind.” He twirled his fork in his hand. “That man, Wire, said there are other kids here. Are there any my age?”

“Tate and Theo are your age. There are quite a few who are a year or two older than you, and some who are younger.” Python studied his son. “Theo is Sarge’s son. He’s similar to you in the fact his dad didn’t know about him. Although, Sarge didn’t even realize Theo’s mother had been pregnant, so I guess you aren’t quite the same.”

“You said the other boy’s name is Tate?” Rhett asked.

“Yes. He’s Saint’s son. Saint is the Vice President for this club. Tate’s a good kid.”

“Would you like to meet the two of them? I’m sure we could set something up for later today or tomorrow,” I said. It would be good for him to get out of the house and see the compound, not to mention he really needed friends his age. It sounded like he hadn’t had a support system all this time. I didn’t want him to feel rushed, or overly stimulated, but I also worried he’d feel like he had more freedom if he saw more of his new home than the literal house he’d be staying in.

“Can I?” Rhett asked.

Python nodded. “Sure. There’s a playground here at the compound. I can ask their parents to meet us there. Want to go after lunch today?”

“Yeah!” Rhett grinned and dug into his food. It was nice to see him so happy.

“Do you like your room? Anything else you need?” Python asked.

“I haven’t checked everything out yet, but I like the games you got me,” Rhett said.

“We weren’t sure what types of books you might like,” I said. “If you want to make a list of your favorites, or ones you’d like to read, we can get them for you.”

“But I don’t have a bookshelf,” he said.

“Easy enough to fix. If you enjoy reading, I’ll get a bookshelf and you can get as many books as you want.” Python hesitantly reached over and placed his hand on Rhett’s head for a brief moment. “I want you to be happy here, Rhett. If I’d known about you sooner, you’d have been here from the beginning. You were always wanted by both me and your mom.”

I might have been wrong, but I thought Rhett was taking things a little too well. He’d been uprooted multiple times, and then discovered his father had been alive all this time, and actually wanted him. I couldn’t imagine how he felt, or what he was thinking. I’d keep an eye on him today and speak with Python when I had a chance. If Rhett had been moved around so much, he might be used to putting on a happy face and pretending everything was fine, even if it wasn’t. We needed to make sure he knew he was safe here, and that this was his home forever.

After we finished eating, I stood and shooed them from the room. “The two of you should go watch a movie together, or play ball or something. Go do whatever boys do while I get

the dishes cleared.”

“I don’t mind helping,” Python said.

I shook my head. “Go! You need this time with your son. It will be good for the both of you. When I’m done in here, I’m going to go soak in the tub, so take your time.”

Python looked slightly panicked at the idea of being alone with Rhett, but I knew he’d figure things out. The thought he’d put into everything he’d bought for Rhett said plenty. He loved the boy. I also knew actions spoke louder than words, and while the room showed he’d prepared for Rhett to move here, spending time with him today would be the best way to prove Python wanted him.

“Go on. I’ve got this,” I said. “Isn’t there a football in Rhett’s room? Maybe the two of you can toss the ball, or whatever you want to call it.”

“I’ve never played with a football before,” Rhett said.

“Want to learn how to throw one?” Python asked.

“Yeah! Sounds fun.” Rhett ran off. Python lingered a moment.

“The two of you need to bond,” I said. “You’re his father and I know you love him. Now it’s time to show him. Some quality time will go a long way in building a relationship with him.”

“Fine. Just don’t overdo it, all right? All this stuff can wait.”

“I don’t think dishes will exhaust me.”

He left and a minute or two later, I heard the front door open and shut. I cleared the table, rinsed the dishes, and loaded the dishwasher. It took a little extra time to clean the waffle iron before I could put it away. Once I'd wiped down the table and counters, I went to run the water for my bath.

I'd soak until the water was too cold, and then I'd check on Python and Rhett. If it seemed like they needed more time alone, then I'd hide in the bedroom for a bit. I wouldn't say no to a nap. After all the orgasms he'd given me this morning, I felt more tired than usual. I wondered if that was normal, but I wasn't about to ask him. I still felt mortified over my earlier question, the one that nearly ruined everything.

For now, Python thought he needed me. When the day came for me to leave, I didn't want to have any regrets. I would do my best to pretend this morning didn't happen. I'd keep to my side of the bed, and...

You're a dummy. You're already falling for him.

Actually, I was pretty sure within a week I'd love both of them. Rhett was an adorable little boy, who looked just like his daddy. How could I not adore him?

I was in so much trouble.

CHAPTER NINE

Python

I knew Galina had given me space with Rhett so we could bond. I got it. Didn't mean I liked it. It felt wrong to exclude her. She'd helped prepare for his arrival just as much as I had. I might have paid for everything, but she'd picked things out or given her input when I couldn't decide on something. It looked like Rhett had taken to her already as well.

After being intimate with her, the lines between fake and real were starting to blur. I hadn't planned on settling down. Of course, I also hadn't realized Rhett was still alive. Having my son back in my life changed things. I didn't want Galina to feel like I only wanted her here because of Rhett. At the same time, I could tell she'd be good for him. He needed stability and a mother figure.

If the two continued to grow close to one another, would it be fair to send her away? She'd been planning to move on all this time.

Deep down, I knew Galina deserved better than the life I could offer her. Secrecy, danger, the possibility I wouldn't come home. Not to mention I wasn't sure I was capable of loving her. It had always been the plan for her to start a new life somewhere, but now, with Rhett in the picture, everything was more complicated.

Galina watched Rhett with a tenderness in her eyes. At

breakfast, I'd noticed she had a way with him, a natural instinct that made it clear she was meant to be a mother. It tore at my heart to think of taking that away from both of them. At the same time, I wasn't sure I was ready for a family. Although, having Rhett changed everything. The life I'd planned had been turned upside down. I didn't regret it. Finding out he was alive was the best thing to ever happen to me.

As the days passed, I knew the bond between Rhett and Lina would only grow stronger. And if I managed to convince her things were fine between us, I knew we'd have more mornings like this one. I'd enjoyed that closeness with her. Knowing I was the first man to bring her pleasure had been more satisfying than I'd thought it would be. I also wanted more. Watching her as she came had turned me on more than porn or any other woman ever had.

Even now, I found myself craving her touch, and seeing that vulnerable side of her. If we were alone, I'd have been tempted to drag her to the bedroom and pick up where we'd left off. Until the moment she'd said if we kept going she'd grow even more attached to me, I'd felt better than I had in a long time. Almost as if I were whole and no longer missing part of myself.

I knew I had to make a decision, and it wasn't going to be an easy one. On one hand, I wanted to protect Galina from the dangerous world I lived in. She'd run from the Bratva and had every right to live a normal, happy life. While the Dixie Reapers weren't as wild as they'd once been, we didn't exactly go hand in hand with the words *law abiding*. She deserved a

fresh start, far away from the ugliness of the world. But on the other hand, I couldn't deny the growing connection between us, and the undeniable bond she seemed to be forming with Rhett. As much as it hurt to admit it, he seemed to like her more than me.

Until this morning, I'd been able to deny the fact I wanted to keep Galina in my life. When she'd talked about how I didn't want an actual relationship with her, it had made me pause. Actually, it felt like a mule had kicked me right between the eyes. I'd been lying to myself all along. How could I possibly resist her? She was everything I never realized I needed or wanted. After losing Jenny and Rhett, I'd closed myself off. Finding out Rhett was alive, and having Galina in my house, was making me rethink a lot of decisions I'd made recently. Mostly the things I'd said to Galina.

I'd hurt her by pushing her away. Then I'd probably confused the hell out of her this morning. But now, after watching her with Rhett, I knew I needed to fix things between us. Spending time with him on my own gave me a glimpse of what the future looked like without Galina in it. It had felt like something was missing, and I thought Rhett might have felt the same. Even though we were both strangers to him, I could tell he liked Galina and trusted her.

I couldn't stand the thought of sending her away. Not only because Rhett needed her, but so did I. Maybe it was time I faced my fears head-on and allowed myself to open up to the possibility of a future with Galina.

We'd decided to go ahead and introduce Rhett to Tate

and Theo. The boys were playing and seemed to be getting along. Sarge and Saint stood off to the side, watching the kids and also giving me and Galina a little space. I slowly reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze.

“Lina, there’s something I need to say.”

“Everything okay?” she asked, turning to face me.

“I... I want you to stay, to be a part of my life and Rhett’s.”

Her eyes widened and her lips parted slightly. “What?”

I took a deep breath, gathering my thoughts. “I’ve been a fool. I was so wrapped up in the past and what I thought my future should look like that I’ve never given anyone a chance. I’ve been pushing you away because I thought it was for your own good, and that it was also what I needed, but seeing you with Rhett... it made me realize we need you.”

“Are you only saying this because of your son?” she asked.

“No, although he did point out I’ve been an idiot. This morning, I didn’t turn away from you because I wanted to put space between us. It felt like you’d smacked me over the head. Hearing you say that I didn’t want you in my life permanently was painful, and I hated myself for hurting you.”

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Let’s keep dating for a week or two. The club thinks that’s what we’re doing anyway. It will give Rhett time to settle in more and adjust to both of us and give us the chance to explore if this is what we really want.”

She nodded. “All right. Does that mean we can have more time together like this morning?”

I leaned in closer and lowered my voice so only she could hear me. “Is this your way of saying you need more orgasms?”

Her cheeks flushed and she didn’t respond, but I saw the heat in her eyes. “It hasn’t even been a full day. You may decide you don’t need me. Rhett should be your priority.”

“He is,” I said. “You both are. I can’t be concerned about both of you?”

“I’m worried about Rhett.”

I looked over to watch him playing with the other two boys. “He seems fine to me.”

“That’s my point. He’s *too* fine. Having his life turned upside down is normal for him. It has to be tough for him to pick up and move so much, not to mention changing schools and feeling as if it’s not safe to make friends because he’ll have to leave them behind. It’s too much for an eleven-year-old little boy to handle, and yet he’s smiling and acts like life is perfect. You don’t find it odd?” she asked.

Since she’d pointed it out, he did seem more adjusted than I’d expected. I’d only thought he was being mature for his age. It never occurred to me he could be showing us a mask. If the boy was hurting, I wanted to know, even if I was the one responsible for causing him pain.

As Galina voiced her concerns about Rhett’s seemingly perfect facade, a pang of guilt washed over me. She was right.

I had been so focused on my own desires and fears I hadn't taken the time to truly understand what Rhett was going through. I turned my gaze back to the boys, watching them as they played, their laughter filling the air.

He seemed genuinely happy right now, and he probably was having a good time. But the rest of the morning, had he only been putting on an act?

"You're right, Lina," I admitted. "I've been blind to what Rhett might be feeling. It's clear he's been through a lot and has learned to cope by putting on a brave face."

Galina's eyes softened as she looked at me, her concern mirrored in her expression. "We need to be there for him. He deserves to feel safe and loved. I'm sure the people in his life up to this point did the best they could, but he wasn't their son. They probably had a lot of children in their homes. I don't think he's ever been anyone's priority."

I nodded, feeling a renewed determination to be the father Rhett needed. "You're absolutely right. I'm only sorry I wasn't the one who saw it. See? You're already proving how much we both need you. He needs a mom who will love him, and I need you to knock me upside my head when I'm being an idiot."

Galina smiled softly, her hand reaching up to cup my cheek. "I'll knock you upside the head as many times as it takes, Python. But I also need you to promise me something."

I furrowed my brow, curious about what she was about to ask of me. "What is it?"

“I want you to let go of your guilt,” she said, her eyes searching mine. “You couldn’t have known what Rhett was going through before, and you’re doing everything you can now to make it right. Blaming yourself won’t do anyone any good. You accepted their lies about his death, and it’s understandable. You’d just lost Jenny and her father wanted to kill you. No one could ever blame you for what happened.”

Her words hit me hard, and I realized she was right. Holding onto my guilt wasn’t going to change the past or help Rhett moving forward. It would only hinder our ability to create a better future for him. I needed to focus on Rhett and building a relationship not only with him, but also one with Galina. I had a feeling she was going to be an important part of our family.

Rhett came running over. “Tate and Theo need to leave.”

“Did you have fun?” Galina asked.

Rhett nodded. “Can I play with them again sometime?”

“We live at the same compound. You’ll have plenty of chances to play with them and to meet the other kids,” I said. “As for your concern earlier about changing schools, you don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“Theo and Tate said they ride to school together sometimes,” Rhett said.

“They do. A lot of the kids here carpool. So if you want to move to the same school as them, we can take care of that Monday morning. Since it’s the weekend, you’ll have

more time to get to know everyone here,” I said.

“Why don’t we head home for now?” Galina asked.
“You can take a bath while your dad and I figure out dinner.”

Rhett nodded eagerly, his eyes shining with excitement. “Yeah, that sounds good. Can we have pizza for dinner?”

I chuckled and ruffled his hair affectionately. “Pizza it is. Homemade or delivery?”

His eyes went wide. “You mean we can have something other than the frozen ones?”

It hurt, knowing he’d been deprived of the simple things. “Yeah. Just pick what you want, and I’ll make it happen.”

Galina elbowed me. “Your dad means we’ll make it together, unless you want him to order one. We’re fine with whichever you prefer.”

“You can really make one?” he asked.

“Galina bought all the ingredients we’d need. I haven’t made one from scratch before. If we mess it up, we’ll get one delivered. How’s that sound?” I asked.

“Good.”

As we walked back to the house, Galina slipped her hand into mine, intertwining our fingers. It felt natural and right. The warmth of her touch spread through me, melting away the last remnants of doubt and fear. Now that I’d told her I wanted her to stay, I needed to show her what life would be

like with me and Rhett. We could figure out how to be a family together.

Once we arrived home, Rhett eagerly ran to take a bath while Galina and I prepared dinner in the kitchen. I still worried about how happy he seemed. Although, to be fair, the boy had just discovered he had a dad who wanted him. If our roles were reversed, I probably would have been thrilled. We'd keep an eye on him and make sure he was okay. If need be, we could always find a therapist for him.

It wasn't long before the scent of tomato sauce and melting cheese filled the air. Thankfully she'd bought a premade crust, and she'd looked up a sauce recipe online. It hadn't taken long to put the pizza together, and soon it would be ready. Hopefully Rhett would be done with his bath by then.

"He should have a bedtime, right?" I asked. I didn't know a damn thing about kids.

"Yes. I was an only child, so I don't know anything about raising kids based off experience, but I did often listen to the conversations around me. I know the mothers always set a bedtime for the kids, made sure they brushed their teeth before bed, and had a bath after they came in from playing."

"Well, one of those is handled," I said. "What's a good bedtime for an eleven-year-old?"

She shrugged. "It's a Friday so there's no school tomorrow. Maybe nine or nine-thirty for Friday and Saturday nights? Eight-thirty for school nights?"

“Let’s start with that and see how it goes,” I said. “I should have asked Sarge or Saint about this kind of stuff. Theo is Saint’s second child, so he’s been through this twice already. Theo is Sarge’s oldest. Well, technically Pepper is but she’s an adult and has a family of her own.”

Her jaw dropped a little. “Wait, he has an adult daughter *and* a son who’s the same age as Rhett?”

“Yep. He didn’t know about Pepper until she showed up at the gates one day. Didn’t know about Theo either, now that I think about it.”

Her eyebrows lifted nearly to her hairline. “So he makes it a habit of knocking up a woman and taking off before she can even say she’s pregnant?”

“It’s a long story. I’m sure the women will tell you about it sometime. I’m going to check on Rhett. The pizza should be done soon.”

He was already out of the bath and putting on his pajamas when I knocked on the door. He opened it a crack and peeked through.

“Ready to eat?” I asked.

“Yeah! Did you really make the pizza yourself? You and Galina?” he asked.

“Yep. Although Lina did most of the work. Let’s eat, then we can watch a movie until it’s time for you to go to bed.”

Our first family dinner went over well. Rhett loved the pizza, and he told us all about his time with Theo and Tate. It

was nice to see him relaxed and content. I only hoped the rest of our days would go half as well.

CHAPTER TEN

Lina

Rhett had been an amazing buffer. Now that he was in bed, it left me alone with Python. We'd talked about making the dating thing real and giving a relationship a chance. This morning had been spontaneous, but tonight... if anything happened between us now, it was going to be somewhat planned and an acceptance that things were changing between us. I wasn't sure how I felt. Excited? Terrified? Perhaps a bit of both.

The door opened and Python stepped inside the room. He stared at me, and I could feel the tension in the air. Was he feeling every bit as conflicted as me? I knew he had more experience with women and sex. I'd never even seen a naked man until him.

"Are you sure about this?" he asked. "If we take things all the way, then you're mine. There's no second-guessing yourself later, or deciding you want to leave. So I need you to be certain before things progress too far. Doesn't mean I can't still give you orgasms like this morning. But if we go a step farther, then it changes everything."

"I understand, and I can't say for sure if I'm ready for us to have actual sex. What we did this morning was okay. I think I do want more of that, and to explore things between us. I already adore Rhett, and I've enjoyed my time with you. I just don't want to do anything that could wreck one or all of

our lives.”

He nodded. “I get it. If you want to just sleep tonight, then that’s what we’ll do. No pressure. I enjoyed this morning every bit as much as you did. Saying that, I’m not expecting us to do that sort of thing all the time. Although, if you decide to stay forever, then I can’t promise I’ll be able to keep my hands off you.”

My cheeks warmed. “You make it sound like a bad thing.”

“You’ll think it is after the first time we have sex. You’re a virgin and have no idea what you’re getting into. I’m surprised the size of my cock didn’t scare you. Most women can’t handle it.”

My brow furrowed. “I don’t understand. Is there something wrong with your size?”

“Are you being serious right now? I know you said you hadn’t seen a naked man before, but you don’t really think my cock is normal, do you?”

I shrugged a shoulder. I had no idea what to think. It wasn’t like I had anything to compare him to.

“They call me python because of my dick,” he said. “It’s ten inches, which is not the biggest by far, but it’s quite a bit larger than the average — which is around five inches in case you were wondering. Mine is bigger than that when it’s *not* hard.”

“Are you trying to tell me it won’t fit?” I asked. All he’d done was make me want to test the theory. The fact he

had a son told me some women could handle it just fine. Clearly Jenny had been one of them.

“I’m saying you’re a virgin, which means your first time might hurt even with someone much smaller than me. It won’t matter how much I try to prepare you. It’s going to hurt, and there’s not a damn thing I can do about it. You’re built to stretch, but even then some women can’t handle a dick over seven inches. Not to mention I’m pretty thick too.”

“If this is your way of saying you’d rather not touch me, then it’s fine. We can just go to sleep.”

He tipped his head back and growled. “Damnit, Lina. That’s not even close to what I’m saying. I’m... I want to fuck you, okay? Touching you and making you come is fun, and I enjoyed the hell out of our time this morning, but I want more than that. The problem is I can’t have more until you’re sure this is the life you want. I’m not wearing a condom. I’ll come inside you, fill you up until you’re overflowing, and make you mine.”

“You just got Rhett back after thinking he was dead. Your plan sounds like an excellent way to get me pregnant. Do you really think, even if I did say I wanted to be with you forever, that a baby would be a good idea right now?” I asked.

“Maybe not. But I’d rather leave it up to fate. If we’re meant to have a baby now, then we will. Something to keep in mind.”

“If you aren’t ever going to use a condom, and I’m assuming you have an aversion to me using birth control as well, do you plan to have twenty kids?”

“I’d want at least one child that’s part you and part me. I love Rhett, and I can tell how much you already care about him too. Having another child won’t take away from that. I’d be lying if I said the thought of you giving birth didn’t scare the shit out of me. Jenny died and there wasn’t anything I could do about it. But I said I wasn’t going to live in fear anymore, and that includes having a child with you.”

It felt like he’d gone from *I’m going to be alone forever* to moving at warp speed and wanting to knock me up. I wasn’t sure how to feel about it. Was he worried if we didn’t jump in with both feet right away he might change his mind?

“Aren’t you worried Rhett might need us in the middle of the night? It’s his first time in a new place,” I said. “What if we’re naked and he comes into the room?”

Python pointed to the knob. “It has a lock. No reason we can’t use it.”

“But he could hear us if he’s outside the door.”

“Lina, if you don’t want to do anything, just say so. I’m fine with it. Making excuses isn’t going to change anything. You’re either in the mood to do something, or you aren’t. But if you’re genuinely worried about Rhett hearing us, then it means we’d never have sex until he’s out of the house and living his own life.”

I chewed on my bottom lip, glancing at the door. He wasn’t wrong. I knew parents had sex with their kids in the house all the time. If they didn’t, everyone would only have one.

“Could we do it in the shower again like this morning? I think I’d feel more comfortable with the sound of the water muffling any noises we’d make. At least this first time. I can’t help being nervous.”

“I’m fine with that. I’ll still lock the door just to be safe. I need to pick something up real quick, and I’ll check on Rhett again before I come to the bedroom. Wait about fifteen minutes and start the water. If Rhett’s asleep when I come back, then I’ll join you in the shower. If he’s not, then it’s a great time for you to explore your body and figure out how to make yourself come.”

I felt my cheeks heat and knew I had to be bright red. The thought of touching myself like that... I couldn’t say I was entirely opposed to it. Would he enjoy watching me? I’d heard some people were into that sort of thing. Or rather, I’d eavesdropped on some of the conversations at Bratva events. Then again, there were plenty of things I’d heard the men say that I either hadn’t understood or didn’t ever want to try.

He left the bedroom, and I heard the front door open and shut. The sound of his motorcycle starting made me wonder where he needed to be at this time of night. It didn’t seem like he was planning to be gone for very long. I stared up at the ceiling, listening intently for any little sound in the house. I couldn’t hear anything, so I assumed Rhett was either asleep or at least being quiet in his room. Python said he’d check on him, but I needed to see for myself.

I got up and quietly walked to Rhett’s room. The door stood partially open, and I peeked inside. He’d already fallen

asleep, one foot sticking out from under the covers, his arm up over his head and the other across his belly. I smiled, thinking he looked rather cute. Backing away, I paused in the living room and parted the blinds so I could peer outside. In the darkness, I couldn't see much of anything. I also didn't hear a single motorcycle.

Python had said to give him fifteen minutes, but I felt restless. I wasn't sure what to do with myself while I waited. Heading into the kitchen, I made sure I'd put the clean dishes away. With nothing left to do, I decided to go ahead and start the shower. He'd either get back and join me before the water ran cold, or he wouldn't.

I shut the bedroom door, then froze. *Crap*. I couldn't very well lock it while Python wasn't home, or he couldn't get in the room. If I left it unlocked, Rhett could wake up and wander in here. Although, I didn't think he'd be so bold as to come into the bathroom when the shower was running. I deliberated for another minute or two before deciding I'd take the chance.

Making sure the bathroom door had shut all the way, I started the water and stripped out of my clothes. While I waited for it to warm, I brushed my teeth and ran a brush through my hair. I tested the water, then stepped under the spray. Tipping my head back, I closed my eyes and did my best to relax. Steam began to fill the space and I breathed it in, taking long slow breaths.

The bedroom door opened and shut, making me tense again. When Python came into the bathroom, I let out a sigh of

relief. “I thought you were Rhett.”

“He’s sound asleep.” He placed a bag on the counter. “I locked the bedroom door. Still want me to join you?”

I eyed the sack. “I guess it depends on what you brought home.”

He grinned. “I’ll show you if you’re brave enough to move things to the bedroom when we’re done in here. Otherwise, you’ll have to wait.”

Well, that sounded... intriguing. I watched as he undressed and joined me. I took a few steps back, giving him some space and letting him under the spray. The water cascaded over his shoulders and down his chest.

I couldn’t help myself. I reached out to run my fingers over the hard muscles. If I were an artist, I’d have loved to draw him. Sadly, I couldn’t even make a stick person. Well, not a very good one at any rate.

“Last chance to back out,” he said.

“No. I’m ready. You said earlier you couldn’t keep living in fear. I need to be stronger and braver. You aren’t the only one who has something to overcome.”

“Why don’t you start by washing?”

“Are you trying to say I stink?” I asked, smiling a little.

“No. I want you to move slow, taking your time soaping every inch of yourself.” He leaned in closer and lowered his voice. “And I’m going to watch.”

I sucked in a breath, heat flaring inside me. It looked

like I'd found something that turned me on, other than him touching me. The mere thought of him watching me shower changed something mundane into an erotic experience. It was my first time considering such a thing.

I got some shower gel and rubbed it between my hands before starting to lather my neck and shoulders. I washed each arm, then slid my hands under my breasts. His eyes darkened and I saw his cock getting hard. I cupped the mounds and then... I wasn't sure what to do. Normally, I've have quickly soaped them along with the rest of me, then rinsed and gotten out.

"Don't forget to wash your nipples," he said. He reached out and lightly ran a finger over one. It hardened under his touch and my clit pulsed with need. "Unless you want me to do it for you?"

Oh. Oh! Yes, I very much wanted that. I nodded and let my hands drop back to my sides. Python moved in closer, crowding me against the shower wall. He rasped his palms over my nipples, teasing them in circles. The roughness of his skin scraped against them in the most delicious way.

"How does that feel?" he asked, his voice low and husky.

"Good. Really good," I murmured.

"Give me more than that. Do you ache anywhere?" I nodded. "Tell me. Use your words, Lina. Where does it hurt? Where do you need me to touch you?"

I couldn't bring myself to say it. Instead, I took his

hand and placed it between my legs. “Here. I want you to touch me here.”

He used his finger to part the lips of my pussy, and he stroked my clit. His slippery, soapy fingers slid over the hardened bud, driving me crazy. I parted my thighs a little more and arched into his touch. He lightly pinched my nipple, and I nearly came. When he did it again, and put a little more pressure on my clit, I fell headfirst into my first orgasm for the night.

“Look at you. I love how responsive you are,” he said. “Want more?”

“Yes!”

“Hmm. Then I guess you better rinse and give me a second to get cleaned up. If you want to come again, we’re going to the bedroom.”

I wanted to say I’d changed my mind, but I couldn’t. I did as he said and dried off while he washed and rinsed. Not knowing what else to do, I went into the bedroom and sat on the bed while I waited. He came in a few minutes later, with the bag he’d brought home.

“Are you going to tell me what’s in there now?” I asked.

“How about I show you?” He took two items out of the bag, and some batteries. Wait. Had he gone to a store and bought vibrators? He held up a strange U-shaped thing that looked like it was made of silicone. “I’m going to charge this one so we’ll use the smaller one first. There’s one more, but

we'll see how you like these first.”

I watched as he plugged it in, then added a battery to the other one. It looked like it was close to the size of a tube of lipstick. What exactly was he going to do with it?

“Lie back and spread your legs,” he said.

I knew he wouldn't hurt me, so I did as he said. Although, I did still find it a little embarrassing to lie like this while he stared at me. I felt like I needed to cover myself. He turned it on, and it made a loud buzzing sound. The moment he placed it on my clit, I nearly lifted off the bed.

“Holy crap!” I sucked in a breath, my eyes going wide. “That's... It's...”

He circled the toy over my clit. “Come for me, Lina. Show me how pretty you are when you're coming apart.”

His words triggered my orgasm, and I bit my lip so I wouldn't cry out. He teased and tormented me for what felt like forever. I came so much I could feel the bed getting soaked beneath me. He took the other one off the charger and held it up for me to see.

“This part goes over your clit and the other end slips inside you. It might burn a bit since you're a virgin.” I eyed it and then his cock. Yeah, maybe it would, but it was way smaller than his cock. “Want to give it a try?”

“I do, but you aren't getting anything out of this.”

“How bold are you feeling?” he asked.

“Um. I don't know. What did you have in mind?”

“I won’t fit in your mouth, but it doesn’t mean you can’t stroke me like you did before. Maybe lick it a little, if you’re up for it.”

Oh wow. Was I? I wouldn’t know unless I tried.
“Okay.”

He turned on the toy and eased it into place. I winced at the stretch I felt as the fatter part slid inside me. Once he had it in position, I nearly bit my tongue. The vibrations over my clit were amazing, but it was also hitting a spot inside me that had me whimpering and coming almost instantly.

“That’s my girl,” he murmured. “Fuck but you’re gorgeous!”

He managed to flip me onto my hands and knees. My thighs trembled as the toy buzzed mercilessly, making my orgasm seem endless. He stroked his cock, and I saw a bead of moisture on the tip. Without consciously thinking about it, I flicked my tongue out and licked it off. A salty taste burst in my mouth.

“Holy shit! Do that again,” he begged.

I licked the head again, then the shaft of his cock. I wrapped my fingers around the bottom half, sliding them up and down. I fitted my lips around the head and took as much of him into my mouth as I could. Shifting into a more comfortable position, the toy pressed tighter against my clit and my eyes nearly crossed. I came so hard I screamed around my mouthful of cock. My entire body shook from the force of my release.

“Jesus. I can’t take it.” He tossed me onto my back and pulled the toy from inside me. He threw it to the other side of the bed, and I felt his cock slide against my pussy. He rocked against me until the heat of his release sprayed across my belly and breasts. “I think you just reduced me to a teenage boy who can’t control himself.”

“That was...”

“Fun?” He smiled and winked at me. “Want to keep going? I might need about twenty minutes, but I can make you come all night long.”

“Not sure I can handle that.” But on the other hand, it might be enjoyable to give it a try.

“I’ll clean you up while you decide.” He leaned down and pressed his lips to mine. It was my very first kiss and I reached up to place my hand on the back of his neck. I held him in place, making his mouth linger on mine. “Then again...”

He eased down my body, shoving my thighs even wider apart. Before I could process what he was doing, I felt his tongue against my clit. I squealed and tried to close my legs, but he held me open.

“Just enjoy it,” he said before lapping at me again. The crazy man made me come twice more before he went to get a washcloth to clean the cum off my body.

My heart raced and I felt a little dizzy. I also felt happier than I’d ever been before. It didn’t matter how much time he gave me. I’d already decided. I wanted to be his. Any

man who would pay so much attention to my needs without asking for more was a keeper. Or so I'd heard.

Yeah. I was going to hold onto this one. He was exactly what I'd been missing in my life.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Python

I couldn't remember a time I'd ever moved so slowly with a woman. Then again, I hadn't dated one since high school. Jenny had been my best friend, and our one night had been a mistake. I didn't regret marrying her, or the fact we had Rhett. It had changed me, and not necessarily in a good way. After her death, I'd not wanted another relationship. One-night stands or easy pussy at the clubhouse were all I'd known since then. None of the things I would have said or done in those situations would work with Galina.

I'd spent the night wearing her out. She slept like the dead at the moment, and I couldn't help but smile. She looked pretty damn cute with her tangled hair in disarray, her lips slightly parted, and a soft snore escaping her every now and then. For someone who had worried so much about Rhett walking in on us, she'd finally let go and enjoyed herself. By the end, she'd even been screaming as she came.

Knowing she worried about Rhett, I'd gone to check on him once she'd fallen asleep. He hadn't woken up regardless of how loud Lina had been. Either the day had been exhausting for him, or he took after his mother. I'd always joked and said Jenny would sleep through an earthquake.

Lounging in the bed, I watched her as the sun came up, filtering through the blinds. I'd let her sleep as long as she wanted. Things had been changing between us ever since

she'd rescued me from Penny's clutches, but it felt like we'd covered a lot of relationship miles in the past twenty-four hours. To some, we were probably going too fast. Those people hadn't met the members of my club. Preacher knocked up Kayla the night they met. Bull claimed Darian within a day of meeting her, and quite a few others had done the same with their women.

They'd always said I would know when I found the woman meant for me. At the time, I'd had to refrain from telling them about Jenny, and I'd blown off their words as a bunch of bullshit since I'd planned to stay single. Looked like the joke was on me.

I heard movement in the house and figured Rhett was up. I got out of bed and made my way to the front part of the house. Rhett stood in the living room, rubbing sleep from his eyes. He yawned widely and jolted a little when he saw me watching him.

"Morning. You sleep okay?" I asked.

"Good morning. I woke up because I was thirsty."

"Come on. Let's get you a drink. If you're still tired, you can go back to bed. Or if you're hungry, I'll make something for you."

He nodded and followed me. I poured him a glass of apple juice and handed it to him. He drank a few sips before sitting at the table. After I got the coffee brewing, I sat across from him.

"So, yesterday was a busy day. You found out about

me, met Lina and several other people, and were basically dropped into an entirely different world. It's a lot for an adult, much less a kid."

"I'm okay," he said, not even hesitating.

"Uh-huh. I guess what I'm saying is that most people *wouldn't* be, and that's fine." I studied him while he drank more of his juice. "I'm new to this parenting thing, but there's one thing I know for sure. I will love you regardless of what you say or do. If you're hurting and need to cry, then that's what I want you to do. If you're confused and have questions, then ask them. This is a safe place for you, Rhett. It's your home."

"I've had those before," he mumbled. "They never last."

"Those weren't your home," I said. "Those people were paid to take care of you. I'm not saying none of them cared."

"But they weren't my real family?" he asked.

"Exactly! If they were, then you wouldn't have been moved around so much. You're my son, Rhett. If someone hadn't told me you died, then you'd have been with me all this time."

"What was my mom like?" he asked softly.

"Jenny was my best friend. She could be funny and sweet, unless you got on her bad side. It took a lot for her to get mad, but once she did you'd better be able to outrun her." I smiled at the memories flooding in as I thought about her. "We

were in high school when we got married. Your mom was so excited to welcome you into the world.”

“But she died?” he asked.

“Yeah, she did. You know what, though? She’d have been so happy you made it. She was always reading to you, singing songs, or just holding her hand over her belly so she could feel you move. A light entered her eyes every time she thought of you and the life the three of us could have together.” I didn’t even have a picture of Jenny I could show him. Everything from that part of my life was long gone.

He remained quiet, staring at his now empty glass. I knew he probably had more questions, doubts, and even some fear. What I didn’t know was how to get the kid to open up to me.

“I’m not sure when Lina will be up. If you’re not sleepy anymore, want me to make some breakfast?” I asked.

“Do you think she likes me?” Rhett mumbled.

“Lina? Of course, she does.”

He looked away, his lower lip protruding a little. “But she’s not my mom.”

“Well, there are different kinds of families, Rhett. For instance, this club is my family. The two men you met yesterday, Sarge and Saint, are my brothers. We aren’t related by blood, but it doesn’t make a difference. Even though Lina didn’t give birth to you, she can still love you.”

“The kids at school always had a mom and dad, or at least a mom. I never had either.”

“Now you have a dad,” I said.

“I want a mom,” he said. I noticed tears gathering in his eyes. It didn’t take long before the first one spilled down his cheek. It was like a floodgate opened. Once he started crying, he couldn’t stop. I pulled him into my arms and held him.

I caught movement from the corner of my eye and saw Galina in the doorway. She pressed her lips together and looked like she might join Rhett’s sob fest at any moment. I held out a hand to her and she joined us.

“Look. Lina is awake,” I said. Rhett sniffled and looked at her. “Was there something you wanted to ask her?”

“Can I... can I call you Mom?” Rhett asked.

Lina bit her lip. “I’d really love that, Rhett.”

“If you’re going to call her Mom, does that mean you’ll call me Dad?” I asked.

He nodded. I hugged him again, then handed him to Lina. She cuddled him closer and kissed the top of his head. When her gaze met and held mine, I knew I needed to make a call, or at least send a text. Because as of now, Lina was my woman. I didn’t have to worry about her leaving or changing her mind about us. She’d told Rhett he could call her Mom, and I knew she’d never do anything to hurt him. If she left now, it would tear his heart in two.

I went to the bedroom to get my phone and shot off a text to Savior. *Lina is mine. Make it official.*

It didn’t take long for him to respond, despite how

early it was on a Saturday. *Official as in property cut only, or want me to let Wire and Lavender do their thing?*

I didn't even have to think about it. *I want her to be my wife. She needs the same last name as me and Rhett.*

I saw he'd read the message even if he didn't respond again. Good enough for me. Now I just needed to get Lina a ring. I wondered if Rhett would want to help pick one out.

"I was about to make breakfast, but I have a better idea. Why don't we all get ready and eat out somewhere? Then Rhett and I have something we need to do," I said.

Lina narrowed her eyes at me. "He just asked to call me Mom and now you're leaving me out?"

"It's a surprise *for you*. So while we run our errand, you can browse some of the shops on Main Street. It shouldn't take more than a half hour. Go shower first while I talk to Rhett."

She rolled her eyes and walked off. It was the first time I'd seen her do such a thing, and I had to shake my head. It looked like the ice had finally broken and I was going to see the real Lina. Not that I thought she'd been hiding or anything. She seemed more relaxed, more certain of her place here.

I whispered to Rhett in case she lingered nearby and could hear us. "Now that Lina is going to be your mom, I need to get her a ring. I want you to help me pick it out. What do you think?"

He tipped his head slightly, as if thinking about it. "She seemed sad to be left alone. Maybe I should stay with her

while you get it.”

Hmm. I could work with that. “Then what color stone should I get in the ring? Here, we’ll look up a few rings and you can show me the type you think she’d like. I can try to find one similar.”

His eyes lit up as I pulled up a Google search for wedding sets. It didn’t take him long to narrow down the choices to either an emerald or amethyst, and he thought she’d like a square cut stone. I was certain I could find something in town close enough to the ones he’d chosen. Just to be safe, I took a screenshot of them so I could show the jeweler.

“You had a bath before bed, so all you need to do is brush your teeth, wash your face, and get dressed.” I shoed him off to his room. “Wait in the living room for us when you’re done.”

I heard the shower running when I got to the bedroom. Lina had already placed a change of clothes on the bed. Now that she was officially mine, I needed to get her more things. She’d made do so far, but what she had wasn’t nearly enough. Besides, she’d need clothes appropriate for riding on the back of my bike as well.

We still had Tank’s SUV out front. The one Wire tried to get for us had fallen through, and he was searching for something else. We didn’t want one that was too large, yet big enough I wouldn’t feel cramped in it. Also needed good safety features.

I put my own clothes out on the bed and went to join Lina in the shower. Except, when I got in there, I decided I

should wait. If I got my hands on her right now, I wasn't sure I could hold back. We'd made it this long only playing around. When I finally took her virginity, I wanted it to be after I had a ring on her finger and we had a marriage certificate. Those things hadn't been important to me before, but I wanted to prove to Galina that she was different from anyone I'd ever been with.

She got out and I handed her a towel. Even now, her cheeks turned pink when she noticed the way I eyed her. How could I have not realized sooner how tempting she was? Ignoring the fact my cock was now hard as a rock, I got into the shower and washed up quickly. By the time I'd finished and dressed, both Lina and Rhett were waiting for me in the living room.

“Ready to go?” I asked.

We loaded up into the SUV and headed for the main part of town. I hadn't bothered asking where they wanted breakfast. The diner seemed like the perfect choice. There were a lot of places for Rhett and Lina to shop while I got her ring. It was our first outing as a family, and I couldn't remember a time I'd felt more at peace than I did right now.

My phone buzzed and I checked the screen. I opened the text from Wire. *Congrats you're now married. Should have just let me do it earlier.*

Fucker. He just had to make a comment about that, didn't he? *I'm sorry if you thought I was being a dick before. Not all of us move at warp speed like you.*

I saw he read the message and he responded almost

immediately. *While I appreciate the SciFi reference, please don't do that again. It's weird coming from you.*

There was no pleasing him. I could admit I'd probably not handled the situation better before. I knew Lavender and Wire meant well, even when they meddled in people's lives. While they *did* need to hear what I'd had to say, I could have said it a little nicer. They'd just pissed me off so much at the time.

“Order anything you want, Rhett,” I said. “Today is a special day.”

Lina smiled at me. I knew she thought I meant because of our talk this morning. I'd tell her we were married once I had her ring. I wanted to do this the right way. Well, as much as I could. It wasn't like anyone in my damn club did anything the normal way. Even Torch. He might have had an actual wedding, but he'd married a stranger who wasn't even an adult yet, all to offer her his name as protection. Took him and Isabella years to get on the same page, and now they were a solid couple who clearly adored each other.

After we ate, I'd get Lina's ring, then take the two of them to the local park. There was a pretty gazebo in the center. I thought it would be the perfect location to give the ring to her and tell her we were married.

Things were falling into place.

* * *

Lina

Breakfast had gone well, and now I found myself alone with Rhett. I hadn't explored the town much, so I wasn't sure what types of stores were in this area. I walked down the sidewalk, Rhett's hand clutched in mine. We passed a storefront with Legos in the window and I paused.

"Would you like to go inside?" I asked.

"Are you sure it's okay?"

"Of course! Your dad gave me some money." I had no idea how much the Legos would cost. Surely it wouldn't be too expensive for small plastic blocks.

We went inside and Rhett looked at every single item. I noticed a few things he'd circle back to and check out a second or third time. Picking up one of the sets, I nearly dropped it when I saw it was over one hundred dollars. They had to be joking, right?

He'd given me a few hundred dollars, but I hadn't thought I'd end up using it nearly all on one item. But if it's what Rhett really wanted, then I'd get it for him. It wasn't like he'd be spoiled all the time. There were so many things he'd need over the next few weeks.

"Is this the one you want?" I asked, holding it up.

"Um. I do, but I think I like this one better. I can make anything with it."

I went to see what he'd found. It was a large plastic tub of the different blocks. It also cost roughly half what the other set had. I carried it to the register and paid, then handed the bag to Rhett. It was nice seeing him smile. While I'd thought

he was forcing it yesterday, today I could tell he was genuinely happy.

“Well, well. And here I thought we’d have a hard time finding the little bitch.” The Russian accent not only caught my attention, but the man’s words also sent a chill down my spine. I slowly turned to face him. No, *them*. Three large men stood only a few feet from us. “Dima will be pleased. Time to go home to your master.”

My master? “No. I don’t belong to Dima. Never have and I never will.”

I pushed Rhett behind me, wanting to shield him from these monsters. The men circled us, and I worried Rhett was going to get hurt.

“Grab the boy too,” one of the men said. “I’m sure Dima will find a use for him.”

“No! You can’t touch Rhett!” I gave him a push past the men. “Run, Rhett! Go find your dad.”

He didn’t even make it three steps before they snagged him. One of the others grabbed my arm and wrenched it behind my back, twisting it at an angle that made it feel like it might break at any moment. I had no choice but to go with them. I looked around, hoping someone would step in and do something. The few people on the sidewalk all looked the other way.

As they forced us down the sidewalk and past the diner, I glanced inside. Our waitress saw me and her eyes went wide. I mouthed the words *help us*. She ran to the back, and I

hoped she was going to call the police.

The men shoved us into a blacked-out car and slammed the door shut. One rode on the other side in the back seat while the other two got up front. I looked out the window, hoping and praying for a miracle.

I saw Python and began beating on the window and screaming for him. He glanced up, scanning the area. The moment he saw the car, the blood drained from his face and he rushed toward us. But it was too late... The car sped up, took the next right, and didn't stop until we needed gas what felt like an hour or more later.

Please find us, Python.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Python

What the fuck just happened? I stared at the car racing away and ran to the SUV. By the time I followed them around the corner, the vehicle was long gone. I pulled to the side of the road and called Wire.

“How’s married life?” Wire asked instead of saying the typical hello.

“I need you to hack the traffic cameras around town. Someone just took Lina and Rhett,” I said.

“Wait. What?”

“They were in the back of a blacked-out Lincoln. Turned the corner at Main Street and Pine. I lost them after that. I don’t know who has them, but I’m going to assume Lina’s father found her.”

Wire cleared his throat. “Savior was supposed to tell you. Her dad is dead. We got news last night his body was found floating in a river. So if the Bratva did snatch them, it’s probably Dima Belov.”

“I need everything you have on him, but first find Lina! There’s no time to waste.”

“Already on it.” I heard the keys clicking in the background. “I’m getting off the phone to work on this, and I’ll ask Lavender to find everything she can on Dima Belov, including his current location. Call Savior and tell him what’s

going on, then come back to the compound. We'll find them, Python, but we can't have you running around trying to track them like a damn bloodhound."

"Fine. Just... help me get my family back." As badly as I wanted to race after Lina and Rhett, I knew Wire was right. I went back to the compound and called Savior on the way. The phone only rang twice before one of the little kids answered.

"Hewwo."

"Judd, can you please give the phone to your daddy?"

I heard him running through the house, then the murmur of Savior's voice as he got onto him for not walking.

"Hello," he said as he came on the line.

"It's Python. I called Wire first and he and Lavender are already working on the issue, but... someone kidnapped Lina and Rhett while we were in town."

My hands shook no matter how hard I gripped the steering wheel. What the hell was happening to them right now? Where had they been taken? I needed to get them back.

"Holy fuck, are you serious?" Savior asked.

"I left them alone long enough to go into the jewelry store. I wanted Lina to have a ring. When I came out, they were in the back of a car. I heard her beating on the window and screaming my name."

"Hang on." I heard more voices in the background. "Viking is here. The waitress at the diner called him. She saw

three men grab Lina and Rhett.”

I didn't even want to know why the waitress had his number. The fact she'd called someone in the club was enough for now. I also didn't want the police involved. There was no way they could handle this matter, especially if the Bratva had taken them. Since I hadn't pissed anyone off lately, and neither had the club — that I knew of — it only left the Bratva.

With Lina's father out of the picture, like Wire said, the only other person who could possibly want to kidnap Lina was Dima Belov. He'd thought he was going to marry her, and it had to hurt his pride knowing she'd run from him. I had to hope Rhett had only been snatched because he'd been with Lina. As monstrous as Dima seemed, he could easily hurt my son, or worse.

Please hold on. I'm coming for both of you.

Whatever it took, I'd get them back. I pulled through the gates at the compound and went straight to Wire's house. Knocking seemed pointless since they were both supposedly working. I entered the house and checked the kitchen first. It didn't surprise me to see not only Lavender and Wire there, both with their laptops, but also Atlas. The boy couldn't do what his parents could — yet — but he was just as smart when it came to computers. They'd most likely given him a small task to do, so he'd feel like he was helping.

“What do we know so far?” I asked.

Neither Lavender nor Wire looked up from their screens. Atlas, who was only about a year older than Rhett, shoved a stack of papers over to me. “They printed these off a

minute ago.”

I flipped through them and froze. The traffic cameras had managed to catch the car, but it was on the way out of town. From the direction, I'd say they were taking her back home. I went through more and paused when I saw footage from a gas station.

“Are they really this close?” I asked.

“Yes and no,” Wire said. “Check the time stamp.”

I looked and saw it was from ten minutes ago. They most likely weren't obeying the speed limit, which meant they had a good head start on me. I checked the location and knew what I needed to do.

“I need a vehicle big enough for me, Lina, and Rhett, and fast enough to overtake their car.” Lavender had paused her typing and I held her gaze. “Whatever it takes, find it for me and I needed it ten minutes ago.”

Her fingers flew over the keys, and within five minutes, she was grinning. “Police impound has a Dodge Challenger. Hellcat model. I'm going to set up the paperwork for them to release the car to you. Start driving over there now.”

I stood and only made it to the doorway before Wire stopped me. “Python, use the red key.”

“What?” I had no idea what that meant.

“Hellcat has two keys. Red one is the one you want. You need to catch up to that car? Then that's how you do it. We'll do our best to keep any cops out of your way.”

I pulled the keys from my pocket and went out to the borrowed SUV. It took fifteen minutes to reach the police impound lot. When I got there, I showed them my ID and signed the papers for the car. They handed me the keys and pointed out the direction I needed to take. The moment I saw the vehicle I let out a low whistle. What a beauty!

I eyed the keys and saw there were really two, and one was red. I didn't know how powerful the vehicle would feel with the regular key, so I decided to start with that one. True to his word, Wire kept the cops away. By the time I reached the edge of town, I was ready to change keys. I shut off the car and took a breath before using the red one.

Revvng the engine, I steeled myself for how fast the car would go. I floored it, and the car shot off down the highway. Zero to sixty in less than four seconds. The car topped out at two hundred three miles per hour, and I gripped the wheel tight. I'd never felt so much power before and knew it would be addicting.

The vehicle the Bratva used to kidnap Lina and Rhett had been a Lincoln Continental. Far as I knew, those didn't go nearly as fast. Without stopping to check the information on the car, I was going to assume they wouldn't go faster than a little over one hundred miles per hour. Maybe one-fifty at the most. They could easily be one hundred miles from town, but at my speed, I'd be to their current location within thirty minutes. As long as I didn't run out of gas, I thought I could catch up to them within roughly an hour.

The car ate up the miles, and I knew Wire had to still

be helping because I didn't see a single law enforcement vehicle. I flew past any cars traveling the same way and didn't even slow down. Not until I saw a blacked-out car ahead. I glanced at the clock and realized I'd been close. It had been nearly an hour since I left town, and I knew in my gut that was the same car. Now how the fuck did I get them to pull over?

I gave my phone the command to call Wire and put the call on speaker.

"Did you find them?" he asked.

"I see what I believe is their car. Now how do I get them to stop without causing a wreck and possibly injuring both Lina and Rhett?"

"You don't. Stay far enough behind they won't realize you're following them. I'm going to text you the address of Dima's home. There's no doubt in my mind that's where they're headed."

"And when I get there?" I asked. Even I didn't want to try taking on the Bratva by myself.

"I'll have reinforcements ready for you."

Vague as fuck, but I'd take it. I ended the call and kept the car in my sight. When they stopped for gas, so did I. Except I chose a different gas station. I could still watch them, but hoped it was less obvious I was tailing them.

As Wire predicted, they entered Bratva territory and went to the address he'd texted me. The place wasn't quite the fortress I'd expected. I did see a few men wandering around outside, most likely armed. The car pulled up to the house and

all three men got out, pulling Lina and Rhett out of the back seat. I parked the car and shut off the engine. Until Wire made good on his promise to send help, I'd sit and observe. All I could do right now was wait.

My phone vibrated and I checked the message. *On your six.*

Checking the rearview mirror, I saw two vehicles pull up behind me. Four men got out of each and approached my car. Since it seemed Wire knew them, I got out.

“Wire said these assholes have your wife and son,” one of them said. “My name’s Trick. Just tell me what you need from us.”

“We have to get into the house and find Lina and Rhett, unless there’s surveillance inside that Wire can hack. And that Dima asshole is mine. I don’t care who else you kill, but hands off that bastard.”

Trick nodded. “We’re on it. Give us about twenty minutes to come up with a game plan and get into position. We’ll get them back.”

It felt like all I’d done since seeing Lina in the back of the car was hurry up and wait. My patience was about gone. I had no idea if they’d hurt Lina and Rhett. The glimpse I’d caught of them getting out of the car hadn’t been enough. Not to mention, what the hell could Dima do to them in the twenty minutes it took these guys to get ready for an extraction?

The minutes passed slowly and when Trick and his team were finally ready, I followed them into the house. Two

of his men took out the guards out front, while another two went around the back. Trick opened the front door. Two men inside drew their guns, but he was faster. He shot one between the eyes, and before the second man could get off a shot, Trick took a knife and stabbed him in the throat.

He handed the knife to me. “Figured you might be unarmed. Wire said you didn’t seem to be thinking straight. Want this?”

“Yeah. All I could focus on was getting to Lina and Rhett. Now I need to find them.”

“Our intel from Wire said this place has a basement. My money is on them being down there. Can’t promise I’m right, though. I did place a call to Wire while we were planning. If this place has cameras, he couldn’t hack into them. Only the exterior ones.”

“I take it he pulled up the plans since you know there’s a basement?” I asked.

“Yep. Now go find your family. We’ll get rid of as much vermin as we can to clear the way for you.”

I found the stairs that led down to the basement and crept as quietly as possible. The dim lighting didn’t help matters. When I cleared the last step, I stopped and listened for signs of life. A scrape along the floor caught my attention, and I eased closer to it, clinging to the shadows.

The glow of a cigarette shone brightly. Not caring who it was, only certain it wasn’t Lina, I rushed forward and plunged my knife into their chest. The man’s eyes went wide

and blood trickled from the corner of his mouth as he fell to the ground. I had no idea if there were more men down here or not.

It took me an entire lap around the area before I found the hidden door. Pushing it open, I found another set of stairs. How many levels did this place have? As I descended into the depths, I prayed to any god who would listen, asking for my family to be all right. If I didn't find them soon, I worried that none of us would make it out of here. How long could Lina and Rhett survive in a place like this, trapped with a madman who murdered people because he found it to be fun?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Lina

The only thing I could think of the entire time was how much I needed to protect Rhett. I knew exactly what sorts of monsters had taken us. The Bratva would do whatever the hell they pleased and could easily kill us without losing the teensiest bit of sleep. For that matter, Dima would get off on it, or so I'd heard.

Dima watched me, like a predator eyeing his prey. His gaze flicked over to Rhett and my stomach dropped. I knew Rhett hadn't been part of his plan. If he saw him as disposable, I wasn't sure how to keep the child alive.

"What to do with the little one," he muttered. "Who is Galina to you?"

Rhett pressed closer to me. "She's my mom."

Dima snorted. "Not hardly. She'd have been a child when you were born."

"He may not be mine biologically, but it doesn't mean I'm not his mother," I said.

"She's married to my dad," Rhett said. I winced, knowing Dima wouldn't like hearing those words. Rhett was probably trying to help me, or maybe he just really wanted me and his dad together. Either way, it was the wrong thing to say to Dima. I'd have to play along for now, though. I didn't need Rhett getting any more upset than he already was. If he needed

the three of us to officially be a family to get through this, then that's what we'd be.

“Married?” His gaze narrowed on me. His next words came out in rapid-fire Russian. “What’s he babbling about, Galina? You’re mine, you fucking whore. How could you go and spread your legs for someone else?”

“I didn’t agree to marry you. My father was forcing me into the marriage. Can you blame me for running?”

He smiled. “So, you do have some spirit. Good. I’ll enjoy breaking you of it.”

My heart hammered against my ribs. With Dima, I knew he meant it literally. Would there be anything left of me when Python found me? I had to hope I could find a way to stall him. I knew someone would be searching for me. Possibly the entire club, especially since the idiots had grabbed Rhett as well. Did they not realize they’d most likely signed their death sentence with that one act? There was no way Python would let anyone take his son away now that he’d finally discovered he was alive.

“I’d thought the boy would be good for business. I’m sure I could earn a lot off him.” He eyed Rhett again. “But instead, I think he has a better use. For now, at any rate.”

“What are you going to do?” I asked.

“Oh, it’s not what I’ll do. It’s the fact you’re going to agree to anything I demand because if you don’t, I’ll take it out on the child.” He leaned in closer, placing his lips near my ear. “So if I decide I want to fuck you, and you deny me, then

maybe I'll make you watch as he takes your place.”

Bile rose up in my throat and I couldn't hold it back. Turning my head, I threw up all over the floor. I'd never met anyone as disgusting as Dima.

“Oh my. It seems you have a weak stomach,” Dima said. “Your father didn't train you as well as he claimed.”

“If you hurt Rhett in any way, you're going to regret it,” I said.

“And why is that?”

“Because Python and the Dixie Reapers are going to kill you and every other person in this house, as well as anyone involved in the plan and kidnapping of the two of us.”

He threw his head back and laughed. “And why would that filthy biker care about the two of you?”

“Did you think we were lying? I really am married to Rhett's dad... who happens to be a Dixie Reaper. They're going to come for us, and I hope they send you straight to hell.” Honestly, Python would come for me just because he was a decent man. That and because his son was here with me.

He hauled back his hand and slapped me across the face. Fire bloomed in my cheek and my eye throbbed. My teeth had cut the inside of my mouth and I tasted blood.

“It looks like I need to begin disciplining you immediately.” He grabbed my arm and yanked me across the room. Shoving me at a padded table that was as high as my waist he pointed to it. “You either pull your pants down and bend over that, or I'll make you.”

“Please. Don’t make Rhett watch this. He’s just a little boy,” I begged. I hated asking anything of this sadistic bastard, but I wanted to spare Rhett as much suffering as I could.

“Face the wall, boy. Close your eyes and cover your ears if you must. By all means, protect your innocence while you still can.” Dima smirked at me. “There. See? I can be a reasonable man.”

My hands shook as I complied with his demand. Tears gathered in my eyes. Terror and humiliation filled me as I leaned over the table, my bare ass on display. I gripped the edge of the table and braced myself for whatever was going to happen. I felt the heat of his body as he came closer, then the fabric of his clothes brushing against my skin. He leaned over me, whispering in my ear.

“For every question you don’t answer, I’m going to use my belt to add a stripe to your ass cheeks. Do you understand?”

“Y-Yes.”

“I want to know just how much of a whore you’ve been. How many dicks have you had in your mouth?”

“One,” I said.

“Hmm.” I felt his hands working his belt free, then the brush of the leather against my thigh. “And how many in your cunt?”

I nearly swallowed my tongue. I couldn’t believe he was asking me such questions. “None.”

“You’re married and I’m to believe he hasn’t fucked

you? Or does he prefer your ass? How many dicks have you had there?”

“N-None. We were just married. We haven’t had sex yet.”

“I’ll have to punish you for sucking his cock, but I’ll go easy on you since you’re still a virgin. You were meant to be the perfect broodmare. Prove to me you’re worth the trouble, and I won’t hand you off to my men.”

He stepped away from me and I nearly screamed as the belt landed against my ass cheeks. He swung the leather again and again, each strike hurting more than the last. My skin felt like it was on fire, and I wondered if he’d hit me hard enough I might be bleeding.

“When I’m done, you’re going to strip all the way down. I’ll be nice enough to use a bed for your first time, but I’m going to fuck you for hours. Next time you sit down, the stripes on your ass won’t be the only reason you wince.” He growled as he hit me twice more with the belt. “Fuck, but I’m getting hard just thinking of pinning you down and shoving my dick inside you.”

“Please let Rhett go,” I pleaded.

“Don’t worry. I have the perfect cage for him.” I heard a pop and then another. Dima cursed. “What are those idiots doing up there?”

I hoped he’d go check it out and leave me alone. He wandered off, and I thought I’d gotten a reprieve, until he returned less than a minute later. Thankfully, I hadn’t dared to

move. If I had, something told me I'd be hurting far more than I was at the moment.

Dima grabbed my arm and hauled me into another room. I struggled to keep up and not trip over my pants, which had fallen to my ankles. I tried not to think of the horrors that may have happened within the walls of what appeared to be some sort of torture chamber. A bed took up a corner with handcuffs hanging from both the headboard and footboard. A tripod was on the other side of the space with a camera. As my gaze scanned the area, the other items in the room nearly had me ready to faint.

“Strip and lie face down on the bed,” he said.

I tried to stifle my sobs as I obeyed him. I crawled onto the mattress. Dima locked the cuffs around my wrists, then spread my legs and did the same to my ankles. I couldn't stop crying. If it weren't for Rhett, I'd have done my best to fight him off. But I wasn't going to do anything that might put that sweet boy at risk. As long as I gave Dima what he wanted, I hoped he'd leave Rhett alone.

Dima unzipped his pants and I felt the bed dip. “Going to mark you as mine, then I need to take care of some business.”

I didn't understand what he meant, until I heard him grunting and then felt the heat of his cum as it splattered over my lower back and the top of my ass cheeks. I shuddered, and knew I'd temporarily dodged a bullet. I stared at the opposite wall, wondering if I would ever get out of this house. Did he plan to keep me here in this room? He'd said something about

breeding me. Was I to be locked up here like a caged beast?

“Be a good girl and I’ll return soon,” Dima said. “Cause any trouble and I’ll make you watch as I hurt the boy.”

“I’ll be good,” I whispered. Anything to keep Rhett safe.

I heard the door shut behind him, and I waited for what felt like ages. So many sounds filled the house. Shouts. More of the popping sounds that I now thought might be gunfire. The stomping of feet as if people were running in multiple directions. The door slammed into the wall and I jolted. Dima sprawled on the floor and my breath caught when I saw why. Python stalked him, entering the small space. The moment he saw me on the bed, the devastation on his face made my stomach drop. I knew what he had to be thinking.

“So, you’ve found your little whore,” Dima said. “Don’t worry. I’ve been showing her what it’s like to be with a real man. Not some pussy like you.”

“You kidnapped my wife and son, dared to put your hands on them, and you still have the balls to taunt me? If it’s your way of asking for a quick death, request denied.”

“See, Galina. He’s no better than me or your father. This man is every bit as savage.” Dima grinned, and Python hauled back his fist, nailing him right in the mouth. Dima spat out blood and a few teeth, but the arrogance didn’t leave his face. I hoped Python destroyed him. Even if my new husband didn’t want anything to do with me after this, just knowing he’d made Dima suffer would be enough to keep me going.

“Make him hurt,” I said.

“Oh, I’m going to, Lina. You might want to close your eyes.”

I shook my head. “No. I want to watch everything you do to him.”

Perhaps it would be enough to keep the nightmares away. Once I left this place, I’d do my best to put this incident behind me. But something told me it wouldn’t be quite so easy.

* * *

Python

I couldn’t think about Lina right now. If I did, I was going to completely lose my shit. I’d taken my time with her, easing her into things, and now he’d... I didn’t even want to complete the thought.

“You’re lucky it looks like you only smacked my son a time or two. Or was it your goons who did it? Either way, none of you are leaving this place alive.”

Dima laughed. “Only for now. I had plans for that one. After using him to control Galina, I was going to break him a little at a time. It would have been fun to make her watch.”

“Sick assholes like you are what’s wrong with this fucked-up world. I’m going to make you suffer, and if you pass the hell out, I’ll wait until you’re awake to start again.”

“You good in here?” Trick asked, entering the room.

I whirled to face him. “Get the fuck out!”

His eyebrows shot up, the moment he saw Galina on the bed, understanding lit his eyes. He covered them with his hand and held the other one out palm up. “Get me the key. I’ll release her.”

“Where is the key?” I asked Dima.

He pulled it from his pocket, gave a bark of laughter, then tossed the damn thing into his mouth and swallowed. “Now you’ll have to break her wrists or cut her hands off to get her out of here.”

I wanted to beat the hell out of him, rip him open, and take the key out. I held up the knife. “Guess I’ll have to go in after it.”

“Not to stop your bit of fun,” Trick said, “but it’s not going to reach a spot anytime soon where you could cut it out, assuming that’s what you meant. I’ll pick the locks on the handcuffs. I won’t look anywhere other than at her wrists and ankles. All right?”

“Fine. Get her and Rhett out of this house, Trick. Take them to my car and have someone guard them. I’ll be there as soon as I’m done here.”

“I swear I didn’t look. Once I realized what was going on, I shut my eyes when you told me to leave. But... I did see enough to know she’s not going to sit in a car comfortably. I don’t think she’s able to lay in the back seat of that Challenger either.”

“I’ll do it,” Galina said. “Whatever it takes to go home,

just please get me out of here. Assuming he still wants me to go home.”

I froze and slowly turned to face her. I’d done my best not to. Seeing what the bastard had done made me want to throw up. I’d failed to protect her. “Why wouldn’t I want you to go home with us? We’re a family, Lina.”

Tears fell from her eyes. “Because of what he’s done to me. He wanted to make sure you see a filthy whore when you look at me.”

I closed my eyes and took a breath, trying to calm myself. “I don’t think that at all, Lina. Trick will get you and Rhett safely out of the house. Once Dima is dead, I’ll take the two of you home.”

Trick moved closer and knelt at her feet. He touched the cuffs, then pulled something from his back pocket. I snorted when I realized what it was.

“You always keep a lockpick with you?” I asked.

“Never know when you’ll need it. Like now.” It didn’t take Trick long to free Lina. He wrapped her in a blanket and got her out of the room. I heard them speaking to Rhett and waited another few minutes.

“Now it’s just us.” I faced Dima and gripped the knife a little tighter. “You realize fighting is pointless, right? No matter how much you struggle, you aren’t getting out of here.”

“This is all her fault, you know? If she hadn’t run off, then your boy wouldn’t have been caught up in this.”

“Lina still would have been hurt. Someone like you

doesn't know how to treat a woman.”

Dima smiled. “I'd have given her everything she wanted, as long as she gave me sons.”

“And if she didn't or couldn't have kids?” I asked.

He shrugged. “Then I'd have let my men have her. I don't like useless things.”

“Useless.” I turned the knife in my hand, twisting the handle. “Right. Like you. I can't think of a single reason for a piece of shit like you to stay alive. Besides, you swallowed the key I needed. I might as well help retrieve it.”

That had his attention. I saw the flash of fear in his eyes as he tried to bolt past me. I slammed my fist into his temple. Once. Twice. The third time, he fell to the floor. Dragging him toward the bed, I used the handcuffs to secure one of his wrists. At least he wouldn't be going anywhere now, unless he took the bed with him.

“Now. Let's have a little fun. You enjoyed playing with Lina, right? Now I get to play with *you*.” I cut his shirt from his body, then trailed the knife down the center of his chest. A trail of blood beaded on the skin. I dug it in a little deeper. Not enough to completely slice him open, but he knew I meant business. “Since my wife and son are waiting for me, let's get this over with.”

I slammed the blade into his gut. He screamed and cursed at me. Dima grew silent as I carved a jagged line across his abdomen. He'd paled and looked like he might be seconds from passing out. Reaching into the hole I'd made, I removed

some of his organs, leaving them on the floor beside him. It didn't take long for him to breathe his last. Once I knew he'd never hurt anyone ever again, I got up and found a bathroom. I wasn't about to go out to Lina and Rhett looking like this. I cleaned myself up, then decided to let Trick and his crew handle the rest.

“You done?” he asked when I got to the car.

“Yeah. He's dead. Made a mess, though.”

“We'll get it cleaned up. Get your family home safely.”

I thanked him again and got into the Challenger. Rhett sat in the front seat, his eyes fearfully watching Galina. Thankfully, the blanket covered everything. When we got home, I'd need someone to watch Rhett so I could take care of her. But I didn't want him to be scared or feel like we were leaving him out.

“Rhett, I have a favor to ask.”

“What is it, Dad?” he asked.

“Lina needs my help when we get home, and I'm not sure she'll like that you saw her like this. Would you be okay going to either Tate's or Theo's house for a little bit? Not overnight, unless you want to stay until morning. I need an hour or two with Lina.”

“Okay.” He eyed her again. “I love you, Mom.”

Whatever hell she'd been through, now that she knew she was safe, she'd fallen asleep. I didn't know what sorts of nightmares she'd have after this. Whatever it took, I'd make sure she knew I loved her.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Python

I dropped Rhett off at Saint's house. Sofia got a bath ready for him and loaned him some of Tate's pajamas. When I got to the house, I lifted Lina from the back seat and carried her inside. I'd burn the fucking blanket tomorrow. We went straight to the master bathroom. I turned on the shower and somehow managed to strip out of my clothes without letting Lina fall. She'd woken up but seemed to be dazed.

I carried her into the shower and shut the door behind us. As gently as I could, I washed her. I could feel her body shaking as she silently cried. There wasn't a single thing I could think of to say to her. What could ever make this right?

"If you want to talk, I'll listen," I said. "But I'm not going to force you to tell me what happened."

"He didn't... didn't..." She buried her face against me.

"Are you trying to say he didn't rape you?" She nodded. Relief flooded me. At least she'd been spared that much. "But he beat you?"

"Used his belt on me," she said softly. "Then he cuffed me to the bed and came on me. He'd planned to do more, but you got there before anything else happened."

"You're going to hurt for a while," I said. "We'll treat your wounds when we get out. Rhett can stay the night at Saint's house. I'd told him he could come home tonight if

that's what he wanted, but I'll message Saint and see if his kids can convince him to stay until morning. I think you need a quiet evening."

"Is he going to be okay?" Lina asked. "I tried to protect him as much as I could, but I don't know what he managed to hear or see while we were there."

"He's mostly worried about you, I think. I'll get someone to take a look at him tomorrow. There's a psychiatrist the club has used several times over the years. It wouldn't hurt for both of you to speak with him."

"Him?" she asked.

"Yes, it's a man. He happens to be gay, so I can promise you're not in any danger. But if you want me to stay with you the entire time, then that's what I'll do." I kissed the top of her head. "It scared the fuck out of me when I realized you and Rhett were being kidnapped."

"I told him to run. I tried really hard to keep him away from those men, but they decided he'd be worth something. Dima only wanted to use him as a way to control me. It's why I gave in to all his demands. As long as I did that, then Rhett wouldn't be hurt."

I held her tight, wishing like fuck I could erase everything that happened to the both of them. If we could have a do-over for the day, I never would have taken them into town. I'd have gone to get her ring by myself, and we'd have celebrated here. Of course, without knowing danger was lurking in town, we'd have eventually left the compound and she'd have still been a target. At least this way, I'd been able

to witness the two of them being kidnapped, and I'd called Wire fast enough for him to track them.

"I shouldn't have left you alone," I said.

"You said you had an errand to run. It seemed important. Besides, how could you have known what would happen? This isn't your fault."

How the hell could she be trying to comfort me at a time like this? After what she'd endured, she should be screaming at me. They had to have been waiting for the three of us to split up, or for me to be distracted long enough for them to snatch her.

"Wait here for just one second. I'm coming right back." I got out of the shower and wrapped a towel around my waist. When we'd gotten home, I'd noticed the SUV was in the driveway, which meant someone retrieved it for me. Good thing, since I'd left the ring in there. I got it out of the passenger seat, then went back to Lina.

She wasn't looking my way. Her eyes were closed, with her head bowed. I hoped like hell she wasn't still crying, but it was understandable if she was. The woman had been through hell today. I took the ring from the box, dropped my towel, and got back into the shower. Taking her left hand in mine, I slid the ring onto her finger.

Lina gasped and looked up at me with wide eyes. "Dylan? What's... Why did you get this ring? Is that where you went earlier?"

"Yeah. Rhett knew about it. I'd wanted him to help

pick it out, but he chose to stay with you. For what it's worth, I couldn't get anything like the ones he showed me on the phone, but the amethyst stone was of his choosing, and so is the cut." I pressed my forehead to hers. "I wanted him to feel like part of the family. He's my son, and now he's yours as well. I'd planned to have this elaborate dinner or something, but... I had Wire marry us, Lina. You're officially my wife if anyone were to go digging in the vital records. I'm sure Wire can get us a copy of the marriage certificate if you want one."

Her lower lip trembled. "We're really married? He wasn't just saying that to Dima?"

"Wait, Rhett already said we're married? That little snot." I smiled. "I wanted to be the one to share the news."

"I'd thought he was just saying it to either protect me or because it's what he really wanted. I didn't think we were actually married." She gave me a slight smile. "Are you sure about this, Dylan? After today... I'd understand if you didn't want to be married to me, or if you wanted me to leave."

I cupped her cheek, my heart shattering at her words. "Hey. None of this was your fault, Lina. That asshole was a sadistic fuck who thought he owned you. He didn't have a soul, or a heart. I saw the pure evil in his eyes, even as he was dying. He's the one to blame for everything. So no, I don't want you to leave, and I'm not changing my mind. We'll get through this together, as a family."

She started crying again, and I held her against my chest. I didn't know what else to say or do. I'd give her anything she needed or wanted. We'd only been together a

short time, and she already had my heart. Maybe what she really needed was to hear the words from me.

“When you first came here, you caught my attention. I thought you were beautiful, and probably a fuck ton of trouble. I wanted you gone because the last thing I thought I needed was someone as tempting as you right under my nose. But the joke’s on me because you’re precisely what was missing from my life.”

“You really think so?” she asked.

“I know so. Lina, I fought so hard because I didn’t think I deserved to be happy. I’d failed Jenny and Rhett, and I thought I’d lost them both. It wasn’t until Wire and Lavender found my son that I realized everything I thought I knew had been wrong. And if I was wrong about that, then it meant I wasn’t right about anything else. Well, not relationship stuff anyway.”

I wasn’t good with words. There was so much more I needed to say, and I worried it wouldn’t come out right. Giving her a ring and saying she was my wife was one thing. Explaining why I actually *wanted* her was another matter.

“I didn’t want to ruin your life. You saved me the night you brought me home from the clubhouse and sent Penny on her way. Waking up next to you that next morning wasn’t as awful feeling as I’d thought it would be. In fact, I kind of liked it. Scared the shit out of me, then the club burst in and everything went to hell. I know I hurt you with my words and actions, and I’m sorry.”

“I understood why you were pushing me away,” she

said. “Especially after you told me about Jenny. It wasn’t your fault I had feelings for you. If my heart got broken, that was my own choice. I’m the one who put myself into a position where it could get battered and bruised.”

“There hasn’t been a day I didn’t want you. I just couldn’t admit it, not even to myself. Then once I finally owned up to the fact I wanted you and needed you in my life, I wanted us to have a real chance.”

“What exactly are you trying to say?” she asked.

“I love you, Lina. I think I fell for you the night you saved me. If not then, definitely the next morning.”

“I love you too,” she said “And Rhett. I know he’s not my biological son, but I don’t care. I love him so much.”

“He feels the same about you. He never got to meet Jenny, and doesn’t know anything about her, other than the little bits I’ve shared with him recently. For him, you *are* his mother and always will be. You’re the only one he’s known. Blood doesn’t always determine our families, Lina. Take this club for example.”

“Does this mean I’m getting one of those property cuts like Lavender was wearing?” she asked.

“Yeah, you will. To be clear, it doesn’t mean I think I own you in the way Dima thought you were his possession. We’re equal partners in this family, all right?”

“What happened to Dima?”

“Are you sure you want to know? He’s dead, I can promise you that. Is it important how he died?”

“A little,” she said. “He hurt me, terrified me, and the things he said he would do to me and Rhett... I threw up after I heard some of it.”

I drew back and stared down at her. “What the fuck did he say he would do to Rhett?”

She glanced away, apparently unable to hold to my gaze. “He said if I refused to let him do whatever he wanted to me, then he’d force me to watch as he did them to Rhett instead. He mentioned a boy like Rhett earning a lot of money for him.”

Now I wished I hadn’t let the bastard off so easy. No, even if I’d heard this beforehand, I still wouldn’t have dragged things out. Lina had been hurt and I knew I needed to get her home. I’d done the right thing.

“I cut him open and removed some of his organs,” I admitted. “I only stayed long enough to see the light in his eyes go out. If I’d had more time, I’d have made him suffer for a while. You and Rhett were more important than my revenge.”

“As long as he can’t hurt anyone else, that’s what counts,” she said.

“Turn around and let me see how much damage he did,” I said. “I promise I’ll be gentle.”

She hesitated only for a moment. Slowly, she turned and bent over a little. The welts on her ass had broken open and bled. The water might have washed away the dried blood, but I still saw the raw areas that would eventually scab over.

“I’m going to get out for just a minute. I have some antibacterial soap under the sink. I keep it on hand for whenever I have wounds. I’ll use it to wash you today. It doesn’t smell awesome, but it will keep these from getting infected.”

She waited while I got out and back in as quickly as I could. I lathered my hands and gently washed her ass cheeks, trying to keep my touch as light as possible as I cleansed the welts. I should have taken his belt and beaten him with it before I killed him.

“You’re sure he didn’t... I mean, he only came on you, right?” I asked. “You can tell me the truth, Lina. If he did more than that, I can go with you to the doctor. Make sure he didn’t give you any diseases or hurt you inside.”

She faced me and reached up to cup my cheek. “I promise he didn’t get that far. I told you that you came in time to stop him, and I meant it. I wasn’t just saying it to make you feel better. He wanted to breed me, then give me to his men once I’d served my purpose. But you killed him, and he’ll never get the chance to do those things now.”

“I want to touch you, but I’m worried I’d only hurt you more. You can’t even lie on your back right now.”

“You said you’d bought some other types of toys. Is there anything we could use in here where I wouldn’t have to lie on the bed?”

I shook my head. “No, Lina. We’re not doing that right now. You need to rest.”

“What I need is to feel complete,” she said, her voice breaking as more tears slipped down her cheeks. “He took so much from me, Dylan. When he told me to pull down my pants and bend over, I thought he was going to rape me. Then he handcuffed me to the bed. I couldn’t escape. Whatever he wanted to do, I had no choice but to lie there and take it. He could have murdered me and I’d not have been able to fight back.”

“What do you need, Lina? Tell me and I’ll make it happen.”

She gave me a tremulous smile. “Make me feel good like before. Show me that you don’t see me differently because of what happened.”

“The toys are waterproof, but what if we moved to the bed and you were on your hands and knees? Or...” I swallowed hard hoping I wasn’t about to fuck up. “What if you leaned over the bathroom counter? You’d be able to see us in the mirror, so you’d know it was me behind you. Putting you in the same position Dima forced you into might help ease some of your fear.”

“Okay. We can try that, but can we start in here? This is our space. It’s where we were intimate for the first time, and again after Rhett came to live with us. I feel safe in here with you, and while it’s just a shower, it still holds good memories for me.”

“Then wait here. I’ll bring everything to the bathroom.”

I got out and went to retrieve the bag of toys. I opened

it and looked inside, thinking of the one item we hadn't used yet. An extremely small vibrator. Well, tiny compared to my dick at any rate. I'd planned to use it on her a few times before taking her virginity, knowing I was large enough to hurt her if she wasn't used to having anything inside her.

I didn't know when she'd be ready for us to take things all the way, but I would give her as much time as she needed. The fact she still wanted me to share this much with her was a miracle as far as I was concerned.

I got into the shower again, with the toy we'd used before. The shower was pretty big, and I had an idea I wanted to try. Taking her by the hand, I kneeled down and brought her with me, then leaned against the shower wall, stretching my legs out, then patted my thighs.

"Straddle me, then lean forward." She did as I said, bracing her hands on my shoulders. I turned on the toy and teased her clit with it. "Let's get you warmed up."

Her nipples hardened and her eyes darkened. I slid the toy along the lips of her pussy several times before fitting it into place. Once I had the piece over her clit in place, I pressed the heel of my hand to it. She gasped, then moaned.

My cock grew so damn hard it hurt. She rocked against my hand, and I wished like fuck I was inside her while she moved like that. I'd be willing to bet it would feel amazing. "That's it, Lina. Get yourself off. Come all over my hand."

She tipped her head back and thrust her breasts out. Her nipples dragged across me as she kept rocking. Fuck, but she was driving me crazy! I pressed the heel of my hand

tighter against the toy, then eased the tip of one finger inside her pussy. Pushing the inside piece against her G-spot, she came instantly, screaming out her release. As she twitched and moaned with every pulse of pleasure, I worked my finger in and out of her. Feeling how tight her pussy was nearly made me come.

Her orgasm seemed never-ending. I continued to tease and torment her, feeling her cream coat my finger. She squirted twice as she peaked and I thought I might die before she decided she'd had enough.

“More,” she murmured. “I want to do more.”

Jesus fucking Christ. I'd give her whatever she wanted and more... but I might end up with the worst case of blue balls ever before we were finished.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Lina

I felt like the wanton whore Dima had thought me to be. I didn't know what it was about Python, but his touch was addicting. Despite the pain in my ass cheeks, I didn't want him to stop. In fact... I wanted all of him. I didn't want to be a virgin anymore. We were husband and wife, so I wanted to feel like I truly belonged to him.

“He came on me to mark me as his,” I said. Python stiffened under me.

“Excuse me?”

“He said he was marking me as his. He asked if I'd ever had a cock in my mouth, my cunt, or my ass.” My cheeks burned when I said the C word. “I'd had you in my mouth, so... he punished me for the betrayal, then said he'd fill me full of his cum.”

“Why are you telling me this?” he asked.

I squirmed and pressed against his hand. “I want everything from you, Dylan. He tried to make me his. I need you to prove to everyone I belong to you and only you.”

He closed his eyes and groaned. “Lina, I'm not fucking your ass. I'm too damn big.”

“Then improvise. I want to do everything. Don't hold back anymore.”

“You'll get hurt. We need to wait until you've healed.”

I shook my head. “No. Now, Dylan. Please. I need this, and I think you do too.”

“Then we’re getting out.”

He helped me stand, but I noticed he didn’t remove the toy. He didn’t even bother to dry either of us. After he turned off the shower, he led me to the bathroom counter, and had me lean over it. I braced my hands and stared at him in the mirror. He looked around the bathroom and retrieved two footstools from the corner. I’d wondered why he had more than one. He lifted first one of my feet, then the other, placing a stool under each. The rubber tops kept me from slipping, which I appreciated. I noticed the height put my pussy in full view of the mirror. Had that been his intention?

“You’re too short.” He grinned so I knew he didn’t mean it in a bad way. He took another toy from the bag and showed me the slender vibrator. Python twisted the end, and I heard it turn on. “You ready for all kinds of firsts?”

“Yes.”

“Watch.” He slid the toy between my thighs. I saw it peek out from between my legs, then he eased it back and slowly pushed it inside me. It pressed against the other toy, and I sucked in a breath at how much fuller I felt. Twice as wide as his finger had been, it felt both good and a bit intense. “Don’t look away.”

He pulled the toy out to the tip before pushing it back in. As he fucked me with it, I found myself mesmerized by the sight. He removed the toy and eased it between my ass cheeks. I tensed for a moment as I felt it press against me. Python

thrust his cock between my legs, letting it slide against the toy inside my pussy.

“Focus on my cock. The asshole said he’d take your ass? Then I’ll claim you there, just like you wanted. I’m going to fuck you with the toy, make you come and beg for more. Only then will I give you my cum.”

“How? You said you were too big,” I said.

“It’s going to be tight, and it’s going to hurt.” He leaned in, placing his lips near my ear right as he eased the toy into my ass, slick from where it had been inside me. “I’ll push the head in and make you come again. You won’t be able to help but to fuck yourself on my dick. I’ll fill your ass with my cum, and when you’re ready for more, I’ll fuck your pussy too.”

My heart felt like it was going to beat out of my chest it was pounding so hard. My body felt hot and achy just from hearing his words alone. How could such a thing turn me on like this?

Every time he drew his hips back, he pulled the toy nearly all the way out of my ass. When he thrust forward, he plunged the toy inside me again. I stared at his cock, watching as it seemed to swell and the head became darker.

“Fuck, Lina. I’m so close to coming,” he said. “Come for me. Please come. I need to be inside you so bad.”

I reached down and felt his cock sliding against me. As I touched him, I pressed the toy tighter against my clit, and I came, screaming his name. He abruptly removed the one in

my ass and pressed his cock there instead. I heard a popping sound and realized he'd grabbed a bottle of lube from somewhere, and the ice-cold liquid slid down the crack of my ass. He worked his cock into me, and I thought I might die it burned so much. Despite the pain, knowing it was Python had me holding still and taking whatever he gave me.

He pressed his hand between my legs once more. I rocked against him, shallow movements, until my clit was aching. When I couldn't hold back, my hips seemed to move without my permission, taking his cock inside me as I also got myself off using the toy. As I came, I felt him thrusting inside me, then the heat of his release.

“Fuck, baby! You only have two inches of my dick in you, but it's a beautiful sight.” He pulled free and I felt the trickle of his cum sliding out of me. “Don't move.”

He cleaned himself up in the sink, then took my hand and led me to the bedroom. Python stretched out on the bed and helped me straddle his waist. Even though he'd just come, his cock still seemed hard to me.

“Do whatever you want to make yourself come. When you're ready, take my cock and slide down on as much of it as you can take. I'm going to let you have control so I don't hurt you.”

“But...” I touched the toy between my legs. He flashed me a smile. Shit. So he wanted it to remain inside me. I wondered if I could handle him.

Python reached up and cupped my breasts in his hands, running a thumb over one of my nipples. He twisted the peak

and pinched down. A shudder of pleasure went through me, and I found myself moving before I'd consciously thought about it. When I was close to coming, I lifted up and reached between us, gripping his cock. I placed it against my pussy and braced myself as I tried to take him inside me. I couldn't hold back the whimper of pain as he stretched me. I didn't think I'd taken very much. The pressure against the toy increased and I straddled a fine line between pleasure and pain.

“That's it, beautiful. Show me how much you want this. Only way you're getting my cum is if you fuck me.”

Leaning forward, I placed my hands on either side of his head and felt my nipples scrape against his chest. The friction felt so incredibly good. I realized the more of him I took inside me, the easier it was to rub my pussy against his body. The pressure against the toy gave me enough stimulation I had a small orgasm, and he slid in a little farther.

“Come for me, Lina.”

I rode him, pushing both of us closer to the breaking point. The next time I came, I felt his cock swell inside me. He gripped my hips and thrust into me twice before he came. His release spilled from around his cock and ran down my thighs.

“When you're all healed, we're going to explore a bit more. I want to know everything you like to do in the bedroom,” he said. “And I may have to visit that adult store again. I think we need a few more things.”

I collapsed on top of him, completely exhausted. Every part of me ached, and all I wanted to do was sleep. He'd been right about me needing rest, but this had been important too.

* * *

Python

As much as I'd enjoyed what we'd done, I still thought we should have waited. But I'd promised to give her what she wanted and needed, so I'd given in. Now she slept soundly in the bed beside me. I called Saint to see how Rhett was doing, keeping my voice low so I wouldn't wake up Lina.

"Hello," Saint said as the call connected.

"Just checking on Rhett. He doing okay?"

"Yeah. Sofia gave him a bath, fed him, then he and Tate played for a bit. They're both asleep in the living room. The boys wanted to camp out and watch TV."

"Whenever he wants to come home in the morning, I'd appreciate it if one of you could drop him off. I don't want to leave Lina alone, and I don't think she'll be walking around much for a day or two. Fucker used a belt on her ass and she has welts."

"He's dead, right?" Saint asked.

"I gutted him. Someone Wire sent to help said they'd take care of the cleanup."

"Good. If y'all need anything, give any of us a shout. The entire club is aware of what happened, to some extent. No one expects you to do a damn thing right now except take care of your family. And if Rhett gets to be too much for Lina while she's healing, he's welcome here any time. I know he

liked playing with Theo too. I'm sure Sarge would be okay with a sleepover at his place as well."

"Thanks, Saint. I appreciate it." I wanted to see my son and hold him. Much like I'd done with Lina, I'd try to give him whatever he needed. At eleven, he'd most likely do his best to act tough. I'd have to watch for signs he wasn't doing as okay as he pretended.

"I'm going to probably ask Lina to stay in bed tomorrow. It's not like she can sit down anywhere at the moment. Probably going to be a few days. Do you think Doctor Myron would make a house call and bring his partner with him?"

"You know he would," Saint said. "I'll give him a call in the morning and send the two of them your way. Even if Rhett wants to go home, I'll try to stall him until the doctor is leaving or nearly ready to go. I'm sure Lina would prefer some privacy during the visit."

"If he wants to call when he wakes up, I'm sure Lina would like to hear his voice. We both would, actually."

"Consider it done. Take care of your woman. Don't worry about anything else."

I ended the call and got up to get a drink. While I was in the kitchen, I found the bottle of naproxen and carried it to the bedroom with a bottle of water. Whenever Lina woke up, I'd get her to take them. I also fetched the triple antibiotic from the bathroom, and doing my best to not wake her up, I slathered the wounds in the ointment. She whimpered in her sleep, but otherwise it didn't seem to bother her.

I stretched out beside her and read on my phone, glancing her way every few minutes. I wasn't sure I'd want her out of my sight anytime soon. Even knowing the men responsible were dead, I still felt an anxiousness over knowing she'd been taken from me so easily. What if someone else in the Bratva decided to come for her? I couldn't think of anyone else who would, but... it didn't stop me from worrying.

I shot off a quick text to Wire, hoping he could find out if the Bratva planned to retaliate in any way. It only took him a few minutes to respond.

We received a message from them before you even got home. You're in the clear.

What the fuck? Why hadn't he said something before now? *You're an asshole for not telling me sooner.*

Wire called and I answered before the ringing could wake up Lina. "You're a dick."

He snorted. "Fuck you, too. I didn't realize you'd be thinking about the Bratva right this minute. Galina and Rhett both doing okay?"

"Rhett is with Saint. I've been assured he's fine and is currently asleep. Lina seems okay, but she's been injured. Saint was going to send Doctor Myron and his partner over tomorrow morning."

"Listen, Dima wasn't very high up in the Bratva, but he was significantly more important than Galina's father. That being said, the Vor transferred half of Dima's money to us. I've placed it into a holding account for now. When Lina is in

a better frame of mind, we can either give it to her, or she can tell us what she'd like done with it. The Bratva is, of course, keeping all his properties, the other half of the money, and whatever other assets he had."

"I don't think any of us give a shit," I said. "What about her dad's assets?"

"It's a quarter million dollars. That's more than enough to send Rhett to college, if he decides to go. You can buy a new car for Lina, get one for Rhett when he's old enough, and still have money in the bank for emergencies. So like I said. Take some time to think about it. And honestly, it's Lina's decision, not yours." He paused. "As for her father, the Bratva already took over anything he owned. It wasn't nearly as much as Dima."

"Fine. Just don't tell her for a few days. Let her have some time to find her footing again."

"Consider it done. Lavender said to let her know when Lina is up for some company. She wants to drop by and visit for a bit. I'm sure Ridley and the others will be dropping off food for you. It's not like Lina will be up for cooking, and if you feed your family they may die."

"Hey! Asshole, I'm not that bad of a cook."

"Keep telling yourself that," Wire said.

I hung up on him and kept watch over Lina until the sun rose. She'd quickly become my everything, and I didn't want to even contemplate life without her. If I'd gotten there too late, or found her body because the insane bastard decided

to kill her, I'd have completely lost myself. Not only would I have slaughtered Dima, but I'd most likely have taken my own life. I wasn't even sure Rhett would have been enough to keep me sane enough to leave that place if Lina hadn't made it.

“You have my heart, Lina. I've never given it to anyone before. Knowing it's you, I'm not scared. I know you'll take care of it.” I lifted her hand and kissed it.

When I finally managed to fall asleep, I did so with our fingers entwined.

EPILOGUE

Lina

It had been four months since the kidnapping, and I felt whole again. Thanks to Saint sending over Doctor Myron and Doctor Sykes, I'd not only been physically healed, but I'd also been going to therapy once a week. I hadn't realized how much I needed to unpack from both my childhood and the incident with Dima. Rhett had been seeing Doctor Sykes as well, and I could tell he was a much better adjusted little boy than before. He smiled freely, but he also cried when he felt the need. Our son didn't put on a show and pretend he was fine when he wasn't. He now felt safe enough to truly be himself.

I stared at the stick in my hand. Python had mentioned wanting a child with me. A boy or girl who was half of each of us. I hoped this news was going to make him happy. Of course, I'd need to set an appointment with Doctor Myron to make sure it wasn't a false positive, but I didn't think that was the case. I'd noticed my breasts were more tender, my moods were... well, Jekyll and Hyde had nothing on me these days. From what I'd been reading online, all signs pointed to me being pregnant.

Rhett was currently off with Tate and Theo. They liked to ride their bikes all over the compound, and only go to one of their houses when one of them was thirsty, hungry, or needed a bathroom. Since they'd been here an hour ago, I figured we had a little time before Rhett came home again.

I leaned against the doorway to the living room and watched Python. He'd put on a movie and was doing his best to relax. It had taken a lot for me to get him to sit still ever since he'd come to rescue me and Rhett. If I wasn't right beside him, insisting he stay with me, then he was on the phone, in the kitchen, or trying to find some item or other to make our lives easier. Much like the small SUV in our driveway that he'd bought me a month ago. Wire had insisted he keep the Challenger he'd used to drive into Bratva territory, so we now had those two vehicles plus his motorcycle.

"Dylan, can I talk to you for a minute?" I asked.

He looked up and smiled. "You need something? I can make lemonade if we're out. Or do I need to head to the bakery for those cookies you like?"

I shook my head. "All I need you to do is stay right there and listen to what I have to say."

His brow furrowed. "Not if it's bad news."

"Well... I guess that depends on you."

He leaned forward. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"How do you feel about shopping and spending tons of money, and renovating one of the rooms in the house?" I asked.

"Do you want a craft room or library or something?"

"No. I was thinking more along the lines of... a nursery." I showed him the stick I'd hidden behind my back. "It's positive."

He sat completely still for a minute or more. When he stood and came over, I saw the tears in his eyes. Gently, he wrapped his arms around me and hugged me. “I’m so fucking happy, Lina. I have everything I never thought I wanted. A beautiful wife, a smart son, and now another baby on the way. I can’t think of anything else I could ever want or need.”

“Think Rhett will be happy about this?” I asked.

“Yeah, especially if we give him a little sister who looks just like his mom.”

“If someone asked me five months ago if I thought we’d ever be together, I’d have told them no. I’m glad I’ve been proven wrong. I love you so much, Dylan. You and Rhett both. Coming to the Dixie Reapers was the best thing that ever happened to me. I might have been running from my father and an unwanted marriage, but by coming here I gained everything I never had. Love, acceptance, and family.”

He kissed me, slow and deep. My toes curled and I clung to him. For such a big brute, he could be incredibly gentle at times. And sexy as hell. I was lucky to have him in my life, and I knew it.

“Let’s go tell everyone,” he said.

“Shouldn’t we talk to Rhett first?”

“Fine. We’ll tell Rhett, and then we’ll tell everyone else. I want the entire world to know we’re having a baby.”

I rolled my eyes. “In a few months I’ll start showing. Then the entire world will know because they’ll see me coming. My stomach will arrive in a room several seconds

before the rest of me.”

“You’re going to be cute with a baby belly.” He kissed me again. “Thank you for being mine, Lina... for saving me that night, and not giving up on me. There’s no one in this world more perfect for me than you.”

“That’s because we’re meant to be.” I smiled and hugged him. “Come on, my big, sexy biker. Let’s find our son before you burst from not being able to tell everyone we’re having a baby. God forbid you have to wait an hour or three.”

“Nope. Two seconds is too long, much less two hours.”

I really did love the man, and by some miracle, he loved me too.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

Thank you for purchasing a copy of *Python (Dixie Reapers MC 18)*. I hope you enjoyed the story! This one wasn't quite as easy for me to write. I struggled a few times, but I think it came together nicely. Whether you loved it or hated it, I'd really appreciate it if you left a rating or review at the bookseller of your choice or over at Goodreads or BookBub. Not only does it let readers know what you loved or disliked about it, but I do go through and read the reviews to see what everyone thought of the story.

For those wondering if the scene with Python chasing the kidnappers could actually happen... Well, first they'd need a Wire to make sure no cops pulled them over. But yes, the Dodge Challenger Hellcat really can go 203 mph, and using the formula $t=d/r$ it's quite possible he'd have been able to catch up to the other car. Yes, I like math. Yes, I know a lot of people think that makes me weird. Fun little fact about me, physics was my favorite (and best) subject in school. No, I won't say how very long ago that was.

The Dixie Reapers started my journey with MC romances, so they'll always have a special place in my heart. While I love writing in this world, it also can be difficult at times. I'm so worried I won't do the characters justice, or that I'll forget something I wrote into the series years ago, that I tend to second-guess myself frequently. The guys and gals are special to me, and I hope you like them as much as I do.

Thank you for choosing to read one of my books. It really does mean a lot to me.

Until next time...

~ *Harley*

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I think I have to dedicate this one to my dad, who not only gave me a love of horses and motorcycles, but also a love of fast cars. And thanks to him, I actually know how to fix the basic things that break and sometimes troubleshoot the harder ones. Sadly, he'll never see this because he doesn't read my books. Wait. That might be a good thing. I'm not sure I want him to know how far in the gutter my mind can go.

* * *

The Beta Team — Dawn, Jen, Lisa, and Tami — thank you for all the feedback, and for dealing with my frantic schedule when things don't go according to plan, which to be honest seems to happen with every damn book. Sorry!

The ARC team — I hope you guys love this one. I think I literally put part of my soul into it, so if I seem like a soulless creature whenever you see me at a signing, you'll know who to blame — Python!

The Wyldlings — my cheerleaders! You guys keep me motivated when I'm at my lowest point. Thank you so much for your support and kind words. You have no idea how much it means to me.

Big thanks to Alana and Ashley, two fabulous nurses who answered my medical questions. Although, one of them is my cousin and I'll refrain from sharing what she said when I asked about swallowing a handcuff key. My family already

knew I wasn't normal. Now they have proof.

Crystal — I need to plan a trip to Canada and take you shopping for books. I think I probably owe you an entire store by now. Sorry for making your life more difficult, but thanks for being so patient!

Bryan — you always give me the covers I need, even when I don't realize it. Thanks for doing such a fabulous job with the Dixie Reapers.

To M, the formatters, line editors, and everyone else who had a hand in creating the finished product of Python's story — THANK YOU!! It really does take a village, and I'm happy to say I'm part of the best one around. All of you are amazing.

And last but not least — thank you to everyone who kept telling me I could finish this book, that I'm amazing at writing, and giving me that extra push I needed. Love all of you. (For the record, sometimes my husband is included in that, and some days he's the distraction that has me narrowing my eyes and contemplating where the nearest pig farm is located — Lisa, you didn't see that! — unless you know where the pig farm is).

[HARLEY WYLDE](#)

Harley Wylde is an accomplished author known for her captivating MC Romances. With an unwavering commitment to sensual storytelling, Wylde immerses her readers in an exciting world of fierce men and irresistible women. Her works exude passion, danger, and gritty realism, while still managing to end on a satisfying note each time.

When not crafting her tales, Wylde spends her time brainstorming new plotlines, indulging in a hot cup of Starbucks, or delving into a good book. She has a particular affinity for supernatural horror literature and movies. Visit Wylde's website to learn more about her works and upcoming events, and don't forget to sign up for her newsletter to receive exclusive discounts and other exciting perks.

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